

ASTORIA TRAFFIC SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Astoria City Hall
March 26, 2013

CALL TO ORDER:

President Innes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: President McLaren Innes, Vice-President Mark Cary, Thor Norgaard, David Pearson, and Zetty Nemlowill

Commissioners Excused: Al Tollefson and Annie Oliver.

Staff Present: Community Development Director / Assistant City Manager Brett Estes, Planner Rosemary Johnson, City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard, Police Sergeant Brian Aydt and Assistant City Engineer Nathan Crater.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS – ITEM 3(a):

In accordance with Sections 1.110 and 1.115 of the Astoria Development Code, the TSC needs to elect officers for 2013. The 2012 officers were President Zetty Nemlowill, Vice President Mark Cary, and Secretary Sherri Williams.

Commissioner Cary moved that the Traffic Safety Committee (TSC) officers for 2013 be President McLaren Innes, Vice-President Mark Cary and Secretary Sherri Williams; seconded by Commissioner Norgaard. Motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Item 4(a): January 22, 2013 Joint TSC/City Council Meeting

Item 4(b): January 22, 2013 TSC Meeting

President Innes noted a minor correction on Page 3 of the Joint TSC/City Council meeting. The name Pamela Mass McDonald should be changed to Pamela Mattson McDonald.

Commissioner Cary moved to approve the Joint TSC/City Council Meeting minutes as corrected and the TSC meeting minutes as presented; seconded by Commissioner Norgaard Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS – ITEM 5(a): Stop Sign at Duane and 17th Streets

Assistant City Engineer Crater stated that a stop sign at the intersection of Duane and 17th Streets has been proposed due to high traffic volumes when Bowpicker Fish and Chips is operational. Staff has reviewed the proposal and recommends the installation of a stop sign and stop bar at the intersection. The stop bar is not shown on the diagram of the Staff report. Trees may also be trimmed to provide a clear sight path to the stop sign. Staff is also going to consider removing one parking stall to increase visibility.

Commissioner Norgaard asked about who has right-of-way at this intersection. Engineer Crater explained that the through street at a T intersection and has the right-of-way, which would be 17th Street. Several four-way and T intersections throughout the city do not have stop signs. Stop signs are preferred near the downtown core area because of higher traffic volumes and higher use.

Traffic Safety Committee recommended that a stop sign be installed at Duane and 17th Streets. President Innes commented that she hoped the tree would not have to come down.

OLD BUSINESS – ITEM 6(a): Pedestrian Safety Update

Assistant City Engineer Crater presented a brief update via PowerPoint on the traffic safety efforts that Staff has been working on to increase pedestrian safety with these key comments and responses to Committee questions:

- After six weeks of using crosswalk flags, use of the flags has been minimal and about 245 flags have been lost to date. The flags are purchased in lots of 300 and cost 75 cents each, plus shipping. A second order has been placed.
 - Other cities have experienced similar results: minimal use and high flag loss. Studies conducted in other areas monitor intersections to determine the average rate of flag use. The actual rate of use has not been determined in Astoria.
- Several methods of public education and outreach have been implemented, including posting safety hints and tips and promoting the use of crosswalk flags on the Police Department Facebook page.
 - The six pamphlets included in the meeting packet have been made available at City Hall and will be included in utility bills at the rate of one pamphlet per billing cycle over six billing cycles. The pamphlets are free from ODOT and will cost about \$685 for all six billing cycles, which is reasonable. It will take one year to get all six pamphlets distributed through the utility bills.
 - The "*Be Visible: Dress to be Seen at Night*" pamphlet will be distributed in the September/October bill because daylight hours are shortening and school starts this time of year. The order in which the pamphlets are sent out is not critical, but Staff welcomed any suggestions from the Committee.
- Staff is researching parking removal at intersections, as suggested by City Council, with the intent of providing a better sight distance for pedestrians and drivers. This will require removal of on-street parking spaces. Removing buffers and making parking spots slightly smaller can mitigate parking loss; however, congestion will increase due to slower parallel parking.
 - This would not be implemented categorically. Staff may study one or two intersections over the summer to determine any benefits, issues to businesses, and impacts to parking.
- Already being implemented is the upsizing of the standard pedestrian sign from 30 inches by 30 inches to 36 inches by 36 inches. The pedestrian signs on both sides of the street at Columbia Memorial Hospital received a color upgrade and size enhancement. The color has been changed from the standard yellow to fluorescent green, which stands out more both day and night. The City has received positive feedback about installing the sign on both sides of the street..
 - Staff is considering installation of these sign enhancements on the ODOT right-of-way. ODOT does not allow fluorescent green as an outright use on their rights-of-way because the color is reserved for school zones. State traffic engineers are currently evaluating the City's request to be allowed to install these signs at some critical intersections, such as at 6th and Marine Drive and the midblock crossing at the Home Bakery. Staff anticipates a response soon. The City has the parts on hand, so this could be implemented immediately upon approval to install the signs on ODOT rights-of-way.
- Alternate crosswalk markings are being addressed, revising standard striped crosswalk markings in the downtown area to Continental style crosswalks, which have larger bars and have been shown to be more visible at night and in dark, rainy environments.
 - If the bars are placed properly between wheel tracks, there is less wear on the lines. The cost of this upgrade would be about \$2,500 per intersection.
 - The crosswalk at the hospital was unique so comparing the effectiveness of a standard crosswalk versus a Continental crosswalk with the neon signs at that location is difficult. The intersection at the hospital is a busy area that includes a lot of vegetation that blooms in the spring. The street is also narrow.
 - The crosswalk was moved from a corner intersection to its current location, making it a mid-block crosswalk. Mid-block crosswalks do require extra measures. The crosswalk was moved because people were crossing the road mid-block instead of walking to the intersection to use the existing crosswalk. This intersection has issues that do not exist in the downtown area.
 - The City is working with ODOT to pursue funding for rapid flashing beacons (RFB). The intersection of 37th and Marine currently has an RFB. If funding can be obtained, the City will consider installing an RFB under the bridge at Bay Street and West Marine Drive where slower, round beacons exist. RFBs have been shown to be more useful than the round beacons. Other locations being considered are at the 6th Street intersection and possibly at the Home Bakery crossing near the Mill Pond.
- Crosswalk signal modifications. The City is working with ODOT to determine if allowing pedestrian lead times at crosswalks would be appropriate. This involves leaving the traffic signals at red and allowing the walk signal to go to walk for three to five seconds to allow pedestrians to get further into the intersection and

help prevent them from being hidden behind cars or street posts. Crosswalk signal modifications could negatively affect traffic congestion downtown that may not be acceptable with ODOT rules.

- Existing pedestrian signal heads may be upgraded to countdown style signals. Seaside and Portland use these signals, which seem to provide the pedestrians with valuable information. Pedestrians can see how much time they have to cross the street.
- The existing pedestrian signal heads were just upgraded in 2007 right after the storm. ODOT typically does not upgrade signals until the signals are changed again; however, the City will pursue this option.

Sergeant Aydt added the City has reapplied for annual grant money to be used on crosswalk enforcement. This money will allow the Police Department to conduct three crosswalk enforcement events. Information collected by engineers, as well as direction from City Council, would be used to adjust the enforcement event times. The events must occur in good weather during daylight hours. The Police Department would like to do crosswalk enforcement during summer evenings, which seem to be peak times for issues.

President Innes believed that plan would work well in July/August considering the timeframe for installing the Continental crosswalks. In talking with others, she has found that many people are confused about crosswalks. She called for public comment.

Drew Herzig, 628 Klaskanine Ave, Astoria, felt the Continental crosswalk style was not perceived as a crosswalk to many people particularly when the bars are so far apart. The bars are spaced to allow cars to drive between them so that they are not worn down. At the existing Continental crosswalk, only three of the five stripes are visible. A lot of community education will be necessary to make people aware that Continental crosswalks are crosswalks. He does not feel protected in these crosswalks without a line delineating the boundary of the crosswalk.

- If the City chooses to spend money on these crosswalks, public education is critical prior to installing them. He also suggested that the crosswalk bars be measured to let traffic go through without degrading the bars while placing them close enough that people recognize it as a crosswalk.
- He understood the City was going to consider installing placards in crosswalks that state, "State law requires stopping for pedestrians" and asked why this was not included in the presentation. Assistant City Engineer Crater replied the placards were simply not part of the presentation; the concept had not been lost. Mr. Herzig stated he was still interested in having them installed because they will not be costly and can be moved around. He believed having the placards at the new Continental crosswalks is very important.
- He believes the City is slightly at fault for failing to obtain community involvement in implementing the crosswalk flags. There was no photo opportunity prior to installing the flags. The story with the photo was about the flags being stolen. Online comments included, "Shame on the City Council for wasting our money this way." The City needs to make such unveilings a public story so the community feels an investment in having it succeed, rather than citizens stating after the fact that it was another bad idea from Council.
- He suggested TSC recommendations to City Council could be publicized. The TSC was not at fault. He is frustrated that the City was not ahead of the curve on that story and realizing that these are public issues. The public needs leadership and City Council should be proactive. These important issues should not get negative publicity.

Tom Freel, 697 45th Street, Astoria, confirmed that the crosswalk flags are not reflective, noting that the pedestrian issues occur from dusk to dark. Non-reflective flags are an issue. It is appropriate to focus on where the flags are not working because the flags in these areas are not reflective either. The study that Assistant City Engineer Crater mentioned in his presentation did not use reflective flags. The City should focus on areas where the flags do work, like in Sisters, Oregon, where reflective flags are used and brought in at night, particularly during times of low traffic.

- He confirmed there were no pedestrian issues at the intersections on 10th Street, noting there have been issues on 6th Street, which is a wider, four-lane street. Reflective flags on 6th Street would get a driver's attention.
- He agreed with Mr. Herzig that the public should have been made aware of the flags prior to their implementation. The signage the City chose to install with the flags is complex. There are too many rules listed on the signs. He believed the flag program is misdirected, flags have not been placed at appropriate intersections, and there has not been adequate public attention.

Mr. Herzig added that no one is at fault as the community is collectively working to solve problems. He recalled the flag implementation was conducted in a noncontroversial and nonproblematic way to test the idea.

Unfortunately, this strategy of a minimal opening failed due to lack of fanfare. The City purchased the more economical flags, which may have been a mistake because they are not reflective. He has seen flags in other areas on a longer wand. The smaller hand-held flags the City purchased have lower visibility. Mr. Herzig explained that he is at higher risk when crossing with the flag because he does not have enough distance from the flag. He suggests the City consider making more of a community investment and buy high-end materials if possible. This is a learning experience and everyone is trying to make it work. He appreciates all the efforts being made.

President Innes noted she was uncomfortable using the flags and believes it was because the flags are too short.

Engineer Crater added the City appreciates Mr. Freel and Mr. Herzig's input, reminding that this is a pilot program. Staff implemented a program that was budget conscious, but still met the intent of pedestrian safety to see how the program would work. More durable and reflective flags could be purchased and placed in the same holders. This is a work in progress. Upgrading the flags is a good suggestion. The City could try a test batch of reflective flags, which would cost about \$4.00 each. This would increase financial loss to the City should they be lost at the same rate as the current flags.

- The cost of redesigning the flag signage is between \$100 and \$200. New rules can be posted over the existing rules. The City will use this feedback to improve the program. The better the program works, the less work the City has to do because pedestrians will be safe. He appreciated the suggestions.

Commissioner Nemlowill asked if Staff could research the findings Mr. Freel mentioned concerning the effectiveness of flags in Sisters, Oregon. She would like more information on the usage rate in Astoria as well. She has spoken with people who believe the flags are silly and are embarrassed to carry the flags. Director Estes responded that Public Works Director Cook has requested an ODOT camera so the City can track flag usage rates.

Commissioner Nemlowill added that if the program is effective, it makes sense to invest in implementing the program properly. If people will not take it seriously or if the materials are not adequate, the program should not be duplicated. It is good that the City is trying something. Some great recommendations came out of the work session regarding the Transportation System Plan (TSP), but the City needs to do something in the meantime. While the flag program could get expensive, a less expensive option exists involving paddles. More information will be beneficial.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS/COMMISSIONERS:

Commissioner Pearson asked how to properly signal in and out of a roundabout. Sergeant Aydt answered that drivers are supposed to signal when exiting the roundabout. In a two-lane roundabout, drivers using the outside lane that exits should be signaling to exit the roundabout. Entering the roundabout does not require a signal because entering the roundabout is the only option. All other drivers know drivers will be entering the roundabout as they approach.

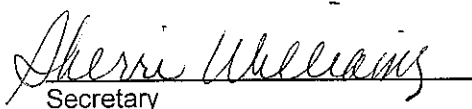
PUBLIC COMMENT:

Director Estes announced a public meeting will be held in the McTavish Room of the Liberty Theatre on Wednesday, April 24, 2013, to discuss the TSP update. The meeting is scheduled the day after the next Planning Commission meeting, April 24th. Meeting times will be announced next week.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned to convene the Planning Commission Meeting at 7:36 p.m.

ATTEST:


Secretary

APPROVED:


Community Development Director /
Assistant City Manager