

ASTORIA TRAFFIC SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Astoria City Hall

April 23, 2013

CALL TO ORDER:

President Innes called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

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

Commissioners Excused: Al Tollefson, David Pearson and 1 Vacancy

Staff Present: Community Development Director / Assistant City Manager Brett Estes, Planner Rosemary Johnson, City Attorney Henningsgaard, City Engineer Harrington, Police Sergeant Brian Aydt and Engineer Technician Steve Ruggles.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – ITEM 3(a):

Commissioner Nemlowill clarified that, on Page 4 of the minutes, she was not trying to promote the idea of using paddles instead of flags, but was simply referencing ideas that a citizen mentioned at the work session. The use of paddles was not her idea or proposal.

Commissioner Norgaard moved to approve the March 26, 2013 minutes with corrections; seconded by Commissioner Nemlowill. Motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS/COMMISSIONERS:

Commissioner Nemlowill said she had met with the traffic engineer to discuss the Transportation System Plan (TSP), which involved some great ideas. She encouraged everyone to attend the public forum on Wednesday, April 24, 2013 to review the plans. There could be some big and very positive changes.

Community Development Director Estes added the TSP presentation will begin at 5:30 p.m. in the McTavish Room at the Liberty Theatre and last until about 6:00 p.m. The open house will last until 7:30 p.m.

President Innes reported that a business at the corner of 37th and Marine Drive/Lief Erikson, is enthusiastic about the Rapid Flashing Beacon (RFB) pedestrian crossing. They have witnessed a positive change in both motorist and pedestrian behaviors. The RFBs seem to be working correctly and do not appear to require much maintenance.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Drew Herzig, 628 Klaskanine Ave, Astoria, referenced an article published in *The Daily Astorian* on March 3, 2013. He stated the article seemed adversarial to the Traffic Safety Committee. The reporter was not present at the meeting. Mr. Herzig regrets that the article seemed inflammatory. He appreciates the good dialogue that occurs and does not want anyone to believe that this article reflects his opinions about the Traffic Safety Committee in any way.

Commissioner Nemlowill commended Mr. Herzig for participating in the democratic process by speaking at the Traffic Safety Committee meeting as a citizen, then running for City Council to continue working on issues at the City Council level. She has never felt that Mr. Herzig has been adversarial to the Committee.

City Engineer Harrington expressed his appreciation for the Committee's work and invited the Committee members to communicate with him directly about any issues. He briefly updated the Committee about some pedestrian safety issues as follows:

- Staff has determined that RFBs will be beneficial at five locations: Home Bakery on Marine Drive, 37th and Lief Erikson, Bay St. and West Marine Drive, the crosswalk at 21st St and Exchange St. at the hospital, and 6th St. and Marine Drive. Suggestions for other locations are welcome.
 - An RFB is currently in place at 37th and Leif Erikson. Newer model RFBs are now on the market; however, the RFB at this intersection will not be upgraded unless required by a grant due to the expense. The City is working with Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to obtain funding.
- ODOT has offered to add cameras to the intersections where pedestrian flags are being used which would enable the City to document behaviors. He reminded that the flags are visual aids; they do not relieve pedestrians or drivers of their responsibilities.
 - Making eye contact with drivers prior to stepping out into the intersection seems to be the most effective method of ensuring safety. Texting while crossing an intersection and while driving increases the chances that an accident with a pedestrian will occur. No signage would fix this issue.
- Research has been conducted on the City of Sisters, where a three-month trial using the pedestrian flags was conducted and the program was successful in this city. The only concern of the Public Works Director was that pedestrians get a false sense of security, which is also a concern of City Engineer Harrington. Using the flags increases visibility.
 - The City of Sisters did have some trouble maintaining their supply of flags at first. However, theft decreased over time.

Commissioner Nemlowill asked if it was necessary for ODOT to install cameras; has Staff made enough of their own observations to draw conclusions about the flags. She is concerned with the theft of the flags and the false sense of security the flags seem to give pedestrians. City Engineer Harrington stated he has seen pedestrians use the flags appropriately. Those pedestrians benefit from increased visibility, particularly when a pedestrian is wearing dark clothing at dusk and at night. A gentleman spoke to him about the intersection at 12th and Marine Drive, where a fatal accident occurred. He has spent extra time and crossed at that intersection. He believes he would have been in an accident had he been texting and not made eye contact with the driver. One issue is that drivers must stop where the two one-way streets meet, where turning left on a red light is allowed. The issue is that the driver is focusing on traffic approaching from the right rather than the pedestrian crosswalk to the left. Commissioner Nemlowill suggested making one of the streets a two-way street. City Engineer Harrington believes pedestrians making eye contact with drivers is the best way to handle this issue.

City Engineer Harrington continued with his updates as follows:

- Public education efforts have begun and the first flyer is being sent out in the next water billing cycle. The order in which the flyers will be sent has changed. The three-fold brochures are very expensive, so the City will use a bookmark style flyers with the same information that are less expensive.
 - Police Sergeant Aydt showed the Traffic Safety Committee two of the flyers, one of which could be sent out in the summer when there are more pedestrians or in the fall as originally planned. The second flyer discusses the topic of sharing the road. Some of the flyers are expensive. The City needs 3,800 of each, which can cost \$500, that is ODOT's budget allotted for the entire state. Some of the bookmark style flyers were sent to Police Sergeant Aydt as a PDF, which he forwarded to City Engineer Harrington. He reviewed the various topics addressed by each flyer. Some of the flyers are free.
 - City Engineer Harrington believes the bookmarks are more likely to be placed on someone's refrigerator than the three-fold brochures. The flyers will be sent out with the water bill over two billing cycles. He believes the City will begin to get feedback after the first few flyers have been received by citizens.
- Parking removal at intersections has been discussed. While this would improve visibility, it is not practical or realistic in the downtown area as parking is already limited. Each intersection would need up to eight parking stalls removed and this would need to be done at 55 intersections. One-way streets would not benefit from removing parking. He noted the Traffic engineers are doing further research and will address this issue in the TSP.
 - He does not believe a pilot study would reveal new information. The City plans to analyze each block as parking Ts and Ls, and marks that delineate parking spots are replenished. Engineering technicians will look for opportunities to decrease the size of parking stalls from 24 feet to 22 feet. Intersections with yellow painted curbs help mitigate traffic congestion by allowing large vehicles to park more easily. He hoped to gain visibility by adjusting the size of these areas without causing problems for large vehicles so the City does not lose parking.

Commissioner Nemlowill recalled comments at the work session about a potential State requirement to have 25 feet between the crosswalk and a parking stall. City Engineer Harrington replied it is a 20 foot requirement from

the crosswalk back to the first parking space. This is in the Oregon Revised Statutes. For some reason, many cities do not obey this law, and no exemption has yet been found; but Staff continues to research this. Crosswalk setback distances vary in Astoria; some intersections are at 20 feet, while others are not. He noted the Committee's prior discussion about limiting the height of vehicles parked at intersections and stated that a traffic study recommendation was to limit the height of vehicles in lieu of the parking space setback.

Commissioner Nemlowill asked if the intersections deemed appropriate for RFBs are in line with the enhanced crossings noted in the TSP. City Engineer Harrington stated those would be recommended in the TSP and they agree with that list of intersections. Including them in the TSP will make the City eligible to receive ODOT funding. Certain ODOT funding programs require that projects be identified in a TSP. The City received \$100,000 in Quick Fix funds to use for the concrete intersection at 8th Street and Commercial. The City would like to obtain more of these funds before they run out.

City Engineer Harrington continued with the updates as follows:

- The City is still waiting on ODOT to approve color and size enhancements for signs. Staff did decide to upgrade all school crosswalks to make them the double-sided signs, like the hospital crosswalk sign. The signs have been delivered and need to be installed.
- The cost of upgrading crosswalks to the Continental style could be as high as \$150,000.
 - He recalled discussion at the last Committee meeting about that style not being ideal; one philosophy is that without the two parallel lines, pedestrians do not feel safe in this type of crosswalk. Continental crosswalks are becoming standard in bigger cities like Boston and New York. The City will not proceed with this until funding has been obtained.
 - It might make sense to upgrade crosswalks while discussing parking Ts and Ls.
- The ladder style crosswalk is a combination of the Continental style crosswalk and standard crosswalk.
 - Public works departments like the Continental style because they last a long time when installed correctly. Ladder-style crosswalks have similar maintenance problems as standard crosswalks.

Police Sergeant Aydt announced that the Police Department has been awarded a Pedestrian Safety Grant to conduct crosswalk enforcement. The Police Department should be able to begin enforcement soon.

- He suggested the Committee endorse some intersection upgrades, but specifically at the intersection where Highway 202 and Alternate 101 split near the Bayshore Apartments. He talked to Julie Yip, a top pedestrian safety person in Salem, who shared that the City could probably force the issue with ODOT to install enhanced bright yellow signs and a crosswalk at that intersection. The City could contact the schools to get information about how many students would cross at the intersection. If the numbers are significant, the intersection could be designated as a school crossing which would warrant the installment of the enhanced signs.

Commissioner Norgaard asked if crosswalks would be installed across all four lanes. Police Sergeant Aydt explained that decision would need to be coordinated with ODOT. City Engineer Harrington noted that ODOT is already considering a project at that intersection. Public parking at the apartment complex has become an issue. ODOT would like to install a sidewalk and remove some of the paved area to prevent some parking. This would result in sidewalks on both sides of the road.

President Innes asked if this project would be included in the TSP. City Engineer Harrington explained that the TSP will include a project that addresses that intersection. Director Estes added that ODOT has proposed this pedestrian project in the interim separate from the TSP to address the current need. The TSP will further discuss the possibility of installing a roundabout at that intersection. City Engineer Harrington stated that when discussing funding, a multi-modal approach is key. Projects that score higher in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) will be projects that benefit all modes of transportation, which is good for Astoria because several TSP projects address multi-modal needs.

Police Sergeant Aydt offered to speak with Ms. Yip again to gather more information. She seems to be well informed, even about issues in Astoria.

Mr. Herzig recalled prior discussion about ODOT being able to change the lights at one-way street intersections to allow the pedestrian to cross before the traffic light changed. While eye contact is still critical, this would allow pedestrians to get out into a more visible area of the intersection.

- On one-way streets, only the two parking stalls on the oncoming side of the street would need to be removed because pedestrians on the far side of the street have plenty of visibility through the crosswalk. He believed the Ts and Ls are too large and could be reduced in size to free up the needed space.
- He has been reading that Continental style crosswalks are more effective in terms of visibility and maintenance. Public education would be necessary to make people aware that this is a type of crosswalk because he has driven over speed tables that were marked Continental that were not crosswalks. The bars in the Continental-style crosswalk at Fred Meyer in Warrenton are so far apart that a car can drive between them. The City should be consistent in the use of these crosswalks and inform the public that they are real crosswalks.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:33 p.m. to convene the Planning Commission meeting.

ATTEST:


Secretary

APPROVED:


Community Development Director /
Assistant City Manager