

ASTORIA TRAFFIC SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Astoria City Hall

June 25, 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, Al Tollefson, David Pearson, and Zetty Nemlowill

Commissioners Excused: Kera Huber

Commissioners Absent: Thor Norgaard

Staff Present: Community Development Director Brett Estes, Planner Rosemary Johnson, Police Sergeant Brian Aydt, City Engineer Jeff Harrington, City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard, and Engineer Technician Steve Ruggles. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner Nemlowill moved to approve the May 28, 2013, seconded by Commissioner Cary. Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS:

Item 4(a): Pedestrian Safety Update

Item 4(b): Pedestrian Safety Flag Request for Recommendation to City Council

Director Estes explained that Engineer Harrington would be discussing Items 4(a) and 4(b) together and would focus on issues discussed at the May 28, 2013 meeting.

Engineer Harrington reviewed the information in the memorandum included in the meeting packet as follows:

- Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) volunteered to video pedestrian flag use and 23 hours of video was analyzed for flags used, yielding or failure to yield by vehicles, jaywalking, and crossing with no traffic. The subject recording occurred in the daytime when a cruise ship was in town, which reflected tourist activity.
 - The flag use data was the highest priority. The video analysis revealed an average 6% to 8% compliance rate of flag use with 10th Street and Commercial at 10% and 10th Street and Marine at 4% compliance. Staff is not sure why the intersections had varying use rates. Based on previous conversations with ODOT, the City had hoped to see a 40% to 50% compliance rate of flag use.
- A federal study conducted in 2006 references programs in Salt Lake City, Utah and Kirkland, Washington, which had moderate success of a 46% to 79% compliance rate, with an average of 65%. Several cities participating in the study used florescent orange flags carried by crossing pedestrians. The study's research team found no formal studies in the literature regarding the effectiveness of crossing flags, however anecdotal information has indicated that these crossing flags are effective at improving driver yielding behaviors so, the flags do have a positive effect when used. The flags draw additional attention to drivers looking toward pedestrians, but are ineffective with drivers not looking out the front windshield or with irresponsible pedestrians.
- The flag program in Sisters, Oregon has revealed success and is still active. A volunteer school group recently updated their flags. A staff report from September 2012 revealed the City of Sisters was reluctant to take over the program, which was being sponsored by a book club, because the City did not have adequate staff to fully implement the program.

- The pilot project in Astoria used an hour of Staff's time each morning.
- He concluded that while the flags do provide some benefit, he questioned whether the flags benefitted Astoria. An ODOT traffic engineer from Salem, who is knowledgeable about the flag program, said that ODOT is not seeing a statewide benefit in the use of flags. The benefit may increase if the program was implemented statewide so that pedestrians and drivers saw the flags throughout the state.

Engineer Harrington added that Staff had a successful meeting with ODOT about adjusting parking at intersections. Since the State implemented the 20-foot setback of parking spaces from crosswalks, very few cities have been able to comply with the law. The law results in the loss of a large amount of parking in downtown districts. He explained to ODOT Astoria's plan to comply with the law as restriping is conducted, block by block. He also mentioned that Astoria has a program, based on a traffic study that restricts vehicle height at corners. ODOT believed Astoria is on the right track with this program.

Commissioner Nemlowill asked if the use of the Transportation System Plan (TSP) as a vehicle for long-term pedestrian safety solutions was discussed at the ODOT meeting. Engineer Harrington answered yes, and recalled his presentation at the May 28, 2013 Traffic Safety Committee meeting. The City's top priority is working with the TSP consultants to keep them up to date on all the programs the City is currently working on. The consultants are considering how the City's concepts and ideas can be incorporated into projects.

- For example, Astoria may need ODOT grant funding to implement Rapid Flashing Beacons (RFBs) at the six intersections that have been identified as appropriate for RFBs. The RFBs will be identified and prioritized in the TSP. If funding becomes available for RFBs, the City will be able to apply for the funding. Prioritized projects in the TSP do not necessarily need to be done first.

Commissioner Nemlowill recalled the consultant noted many innovative solutions at the joint work session with Council, but none were incorporated in the first presentation of the TSP. She asked if Staff is considering any of the solutions suggested by the consultant, which appeared to be good ideas. She understood the consensus at the work session was to consider these ideas during the TSP approval process. Director Estes explained that the RFBs, bulb outs, curb extensions and several other concepts are included in the TSP. Some of the ideas included in the TSP were discussed at public community meetings, including road diets and the installation of pedestrian islands.

Commissioner Nemlowill asked if crosswalk enhancements in the downtown area are included in the TSP. Director Estes replied the Public Works Department has already talked with ODOT and is working to proceed with crosswalk enhancements separate from and in advance of the TSP.

- Engineer Harrington added that the techniques presented at the joint work session were not applied to any specific part of town at that point in the TSP process. As the City analyses problem areas, those solutions are incorporated into the TSP. For example, residents along Bond Street are concerned about a road diet on Highway 30. The consultant suggested implementing traffic calming, perhaps up to a year in advance of the road diet to ensure that it works. He has been involved in many TSPs and is impressed with this process.
- Director Estes said the TSP consultants have been discussing projected traffic volumes 20 years from now, which do not reveal many failures in the traffic system. Many of the issues being considered are livability issues rather than traffic system failure issues. Public meetings over the last few months have targeted specific areas of the city where concerns have been identified. The next set of public meetings will probably include more discussion about the pedestrian improvements and other specific within the TSP.

Commissioner Nemlowill confirmed that even if the Traffic Safety Committee recommends that City Council abandon the crosswalk flag pilot program, the Committee could be confident that other pedestrian safety enhancement plans are being considered. The flag program is not the only recommended solution.

Engineer Harrington updated the Committee about the City's discussions with ODOT about the City's pedestrian safety issues as follows:

- The TSP consultants are very involved with the adjustment of parking at intersections, sign colors, and size enhancements of signs. Staff is waiting to hear back from ODOT on sign color and size enhancements. The Oregon Traffic Control Device Committee (OTCDC) is currently developing a statewide standard to provide consistency throughout the state. Bright yellow green is being reserved for school crossings, which are different from regular crosswalk signs. The school crossing sign shows children with an adult.

- The League of Oregon Cities is very involved and contributing to the process of developing a statewide standard. Public Works Director Cook will contact the local representative to voice the City's interest in expediting the process.
- Crosswalk markings were discussed with the consultants due to concerns with Continental crosswalks. If crosswalks were implemented on a statewide basis, being consistent with ODOT's direction would be best.
 - ODOT has said that traditional crosswalk stripes are mandatory at signalized intersections because the stripes serve as a stop bar. Continental crosswalks do not have this stop bar. A separate stop bar is set back from the crosswalk markings when a controlled stop location is desired. This will not work in downtown Astoria because it takes up too much length.
 - The City has developed a map of all of the crosswalks on Highway 202 and Highway 30 using a list provided by ODOT. The City discovered that several crosswalks are being allowed to fade away because they were never approved by the State Transportation Engineer and therefore are not legal. The City's consultant is currently working to obtain approval from the State for all of Astoria's crosswalks, both existing and previously existing. Staff is confident that all of the crosswalks will be approved unless there is strong opposition by the State Transportation Engineer.
- ODOT Traffic Engineers tend to recommend fewer rather than more crosswalks; for example, 17th and 18th Streets were discussed because ODOT is concerned about having two crosswalks so close together.
 - A study in the 1970s, conducted in San Diego, California, indicated that nearly six times as many crashes occur in marked crosswalks than unmarked crosswalks. The Highway Safety Research Center did a more extensive study in 2002 that included 1,000 different locations in six different states. This study revealed 3.6 times more accidents occur in marked crosswalks than in unmarked crosswalks.
 - These statistics could have to do with pedestrians having a false sense of security within marked crosswalks. Pedestrians have the right of way, which also leads to a false sense of security. Pedestrians do not feel as secure in an unmarked crosswalk and tend to take more responsibility.
 - Good crosswalks must also be placed in the right location. The crosswalk at the hospital was moved because pedestrians were crossing in the middle of the block, rather than at the intersection where the crosswalk was originally located.
- ODOT is still seeking funding for RFBs, which is a technique proven to work. There could be some danger to the pedestrian if the pedestrian fails to activate the lights. The pedestrian is still responsible to make sure the intersection is clear. A pedestrian is less likely to be hit if they dress brightly and make eye contact with drivers prior to crossing the street.
- ODOT is still studying the feasibility of signal modifications. The impact on traffic congestion was a concern also discussed by the TSP group. Signal modification involves giving the pedestrian a few seconds to enter the crosswalk prior to allowing traffic to proceed through the intersection. ODOT questioned whether this would work well for Astoria due to the sequencing of lights; however, the countdown style lights would be an improvement that ODOT is considering.
- ODOT acknowledged Astoria's issues and provided good feedback.

President Innes called for public feedback on pedestrian safety.

Drew Herzig, 628 Klaskanine Avenue, Astoria, stated he was under the impression the video of flag use would be analyzed for theft and vandalism in addition to flag usage. Most of the flags are missing now. He asked if any information was obtained about the loss of flags. Engineer Tech Ruggles said that he watched about 15 hours of video, including both daytime and nighttime footage. Of the video Staff did analyze, no instances of flag theft or vandalism were seen. Staff analyzed the video to figure out who was using the flags.

Mr. Herzig asked if Kirkland, Washington or Salt Lake City, Utah reported on theft or vandalism in that study. Engineer Harrington replied all of the cities experienced theft. Mr. Herzig said he was confident the City would abandon the program. Should the program be considered again in the future, theft and vandalism is an issue that would need to be addressed. The loss of flags was significant; more than 400 flags have been stolen or missing in only a few months. Unfortunately, this was the story published in the press. He also read a Coast Guard article in the newspaper about the City considering modifications to the intersection at 17th Street and Marine Drive. The Coast Guard is concerned that the two crosswalks on 17th and 18th Streets will be combined into one crosswalk. Engineer Tech Ruggles added there was more vandalism of the flags than theft. The video was grainy and Staff would not have been able to see a pedestrian breaking a flag. Engineer Harrington noted that trying the program revealed a lot of good information. He believes the program results are due to Astoria being different from other cities. Seattle spent a lot of money and conducted a lot of awareness, yet the program

did not work. The flag program does work in some cities. Sisters has different circumstances and only uses flags at certain locations; some flags are used only in locations with crossing guards; some are used only during the summer at certain locations, and some flags only during school months at certain locations. He suggested that flags in the downtown area might have been broken around 2:00 a.m. when the bars closed.

- Should the City decide to consider the program again in the future, a different, well-planned approach will be used. A lot of community involvement will be necessary. Some cities have neighborhood divisions or departments that are solely responsible for the flag program. The cities are bigger and have staff available to dedicate to the program. Astoria would need a lot of community involvement because Staff is limited.

Mr. Herzig agreed that community involvement would be critical, but it was not part of the program this time.

- Information is not getting out to the public. The community needs to hear what is being done so that they can feel like they are tracking the progress. He receives many comments that the City does nothing. The City is doing many things, but the public does not hear about it. He was unsure how to handle this and suggested that the Traffic Safety Committee make a recommendation to Staff to publish regular bulletins on projects being considered. The Combined Sewer Overflow project updates are being publicized.
- He thanked Staff and the Committee for spending so much time on the pedestrian safety issue, which is vital. A walkable city is the way of the future and Astoria must become more pedestrian friendly. He hopes the City can find solutions. Even without solutions, community involvement in the search for solutions is very important.

President Innes encouraged Mr. Herzig to inform the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee of any ideas on how to share information with the community. The minutes of the Committee meeting are published on Astoria's website. Director Estes added the City continues sending pedestrian safety brochures with the water bills, so those education efforts are ongoing.

Sergeant Aydt noted that pedestrian issues exist that are associated with the Sunday Market and the police department is trying to determine how to address the issues. Vendors at the market hope the department can provide education, which will be difficult because market attendees tend to be transient and may not return until the following year. Commercial Street is especially being monitored. On Sunday, June 23, a police officer watched traffic during the market and videotaped 125 pedestrian violations in a 20-minute period. Sergeant Aydt requested ideas from the Committee on how to mitigate these issues at the Sunday Market.

Engineer Harrington noted the fact that Astoria is a vacation town with many tourists was also discussed with ODOT. No matter how much public outreach is conducted, many tourists who visit in the future will not have been exposed to the public outreach when it originally occurred. Behaviors of tourists can be different from locals because they are just discovering Astoria for the first time. Education must be presented to tourists as they arrive and must grab their attention. He recalled City Councilor LaMear had suggested posting signs on each end of town saying Astoria is a pedestrian-friendly town.

Commissioner Nemlowill believed the Sunday Market had appointed a person to assist pedestrians crossing at 12th and Duane Streets for a while. She did not know about Commercial Street and was unsure if the Sunday Market would have any resources. Sergeant Aydt said he has talked to the Sunday Market and someone was assisting pedestrians at 12th and Duane in 2012. The Sunday Market has always depended on pedestrians to follow the rules on Commercial Street with the traffic signal, but it is obvious people are not following the rules. Commissioner Nemlowill recalled a pedestrian scramble was mentioned at the work session. A pedestrian scramble involves shutting down crosswalks for traffic in all directions allowing pedestrians to cross freely during a certain period. This seems to be already occurring without a formal pedestrian scramble. Sergeant Aydt explained that pedestrians were not crossing outside of the crosswalks, but are choosing to cross the intersection while the light is green for Commercial Street. Commissioner Nemlowill said she is shocked by risky pedestrian behavior she sees while driving. Sergeant Aydt added the police department does not strictly enforce jaywalking laws during the Sunday Market. People may cross in the middle of the intersection as long as they cross when they are supposed to cross, not when the light is green for vehicle traffic.

President Innes called for comments on making a recommendation to Council regarding the pilot flag program.

Vice-President Cary said he liked the idea of eliminating some crosswalks as more crosswalks create a false sense of security. The flags may also provide a false sense of security as they were positioned about one

intersection from a traffic signal. He believed the pedestrian safety flag program should be abandoned because it did not work.

Commissioner Tollefson agreed that the pedestrian safety flag program should be abandoned. His office is on 10th Street and he crosses the intersections three or four times each day. He has not seen anyone using the flags.

Commissioner Pearson believed the City expected a low usage rate when the program began, but actual usage rates are much lower than he expected. Based on Staff's extensive study of flag usage, he agreed to recommend discontinuing the flag program.

Commissioner Nemlowill agreed to discontinue the flag program as well.

Motion by Commissioner Cary, seconded by Commissioner Nemlowill that the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee recommend that City Council terminate the pedestrian flag safety program. Motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS/COMMISSIONERS:

Commissioner Nemlowill reported Councilor Arlene LaMear sent an email asking the Traffic Safety Committee to consider installing signs, similar to signs in Idaho that read, "Sandpoint is a walking town. Please stop for pedestrians." While Astoria has pedestrian problems, pedestrians make Astoria unique and different from other nearby communities. Part of the Committee's mission is to focus on having a walkable pedestrian-friendly town. She was not sure installing a few signs would provide enough emphasis on pedestrian safety. It would be great for City Council to discuss the Committee's mission from a policy standpoint. Director Estes stated Councilor LaMear presented her idea of the signs at the last City Council meeting and Public Works Director Ken Cook is looking into getting the signs installed. Commissioner Nemlowill said she would like to see the signs lead to a broader pedestrian culture in Astoria.

President Innes commented that the signs looked handmade rather than a standard ODOT sign; she was glad work was being done to install such signs.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Drew Herzig, 628 Klaskanine Avenue, Astoria, asked that the City to publish a proclamation in the newspaper prior to putting up the signs. The proclamation should state that City Council declares Astoria a pedestrian friendly city. Simply putting up the signs without public presentation or education is a recipe for failure. He suggested making an announcement and posing in front of the new sign. He begged the Committee not to make the same mistake that was made with the Pedestrian Flag Safety Program.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned to convene the Planning Commission Meeting at 7:43 p.m.

ATTEST:


Secretary

APPROVED:


Community Development Director /
Assistant City Manager