

TRAFFIC COMMISSION MEETING

December 16, 2020

IN ATTENDANCE: Chair Elena Proakis Ellis, Councilor Jack Eccles, Commissioner Rossi, Commissioner Peart, Commissioner Parenti, Chief Mike Lyle, Commissioner Krechmer, Sgt. Jon Goc and Diane Ardizzoni – Clerk

I. Continued Business:

1. Approve minutes from September 16, 2020 meeting

Motion to approve minutes by Chief Lyle, seconded by Liz Peart. Elena called the roll, all in favor, minutes approved.

II. New Business:

2. Resident request for a crosswalk across Sylvan Street at Ryder Avenue

Elena gives the background on this item. As the commission may recall this item was before us a couple of years ago at the request of resident Richard Plati who lives on Ryder Avenue. At that time, we had an Intern in Engineering who did the sightlines at this location. There were two possible locations that he looked at, one immediately to the East of Ryder and the other between Ryder and Rockwood, and neither one met the sight distances. Mr. Plati volunteers in the Mayor's office answering phones and at that time would tell Elena that he doesn't believe that the information was correct. He recently asked if he could meet an Engineer out at the site again and Elena agreed and has gone out with two of our Engineers to double check the information with the wheel. What they found was there is one location, and one location only, where there appear to be adequate sight distances from both directions for a crosswalk. That location is immediately to the west on the corner of Ryder and Sylvan Street. The distances measured were 405 feet when driving east bound and approximately 300 feet when driving westbound. This is significantly more than the last time where one location was only 76 feet from one direction and the other location was only 85 feet and it is on a curve. If you stand at just the right spot, you can be seen from both directions on both sides of the road. Therefore, if a crosswalk is approved, it should be in that location.

Elena brings in Councilor Thomas and Councilor MacMaster so that they can speak for the proponent who stated he was not comfortable doing so via WebEx and therefore asked that the Councilors speak on his behalf.

Councilor Thomas, who represents Ward 7, reads a letter from Mr. Plati which echoed what Elena had referenced. Councilor Thomas is in favor of this crosswalk as he thinks we can all agree that there is no safe place to cross Sylvan Street along that stretch of road.

Elena now brings in Councilor MacMaster who represents Ward 5, which includes the west side of Ryder Avenue. Councilor MacMaster is also in favor of this crosswalk and would defer to the Commission's expertise and discretion on the proper location.

Elena states there are several residents in attendance, and if anyone wants to speak to please raise their virtual hand. Since there are no residents with comments, there is no need to open public comment. If Elena sees anyone raise their virtual hand she will let the Commission know.

Commissioner Parenti did visit the site and he thought the sight distances were close and has referenced his notes from the previous meeting from 2018 that was discussed and is confused on the differences of the sight distance measurements as they seem to be rather large.

Elena explains that because the location is on a curve when on the south side of the street waiting to cross, depending on where you are standing within that curve by Ryder Avenue, it can make a huge difference as to where someone could see you. She believes that when the request originally came in a few years ago, it was for a crosswalk somewhere in the vicinity of Ryder Avenue or Rockwood, and in an attempt to split the difference, based on documentation provided previously, that the locations the intern measured, one was to the east of Ryder and the other was closer to Rockwood in between the two. It is amazing standing out there how walking just 30-40 feet down you are in a blind spot of that curve. Comparison of the measurements last time were 250 feet in one direction and 76 feet in the other direction for one crosswalk and then 340 feet in one direction and 85 from the other. So in essence, the total sight lines were not that different, it's just that we now shifted to a place where it makes it a little more equal on either side.

Commissioner Parenti states that 85 feet doesn't get us very far, which he states is 20 mph, so if 85 is all we have from one direction that makes him nervous.

Elena explains that the new measurements from the different spot that she measured a few weeks ago and again today are 405 feet in one direction and 300 feet in the other direction.

Sergeant Goc was hoping for some clarification on how we got from 85 feet to 305 feet? Elena explains because they were measured at a slightly different location. He states that you mention "standing at just the right spot" and his comment is that drivers don't drive that way and they certainly don't pay attention to the road that way. He has concern about us flipping this opinion based on getting a new measurement that works for us because we might want a crosswalk there. Elena explains that the big distinction is that last time Elena visited this location by car and did not get out and measure anything or stand on the corners or have another employee stand on the corners, whereas the last two times that she went out there, this is what she did. She had one employee stand on the corner on either side of the street and she drove up and down the street, beyond the curves, and determined where she felt she could very safely see them, and she reiterates this was not done the last time this item came before us. Last time we had an intern, who did this for a lot of locations and did a terrific job, but he missed the mark on this one unfortunately. Elena admits that she did not go out and wheel-off anything the last time and trusted his measurements were correct. Sgt. Goc just wants to make sure that by putting a crosswalk there, we are essentially letting a pedestrian know that this is a perfectly good safe place to cross but half the operators on the road are not thinking that way, so that is his concern and obviously we didn't like this location the last time. Elena wants to clarify, and does not disagree, but the comment about "just the right spot" means that if there is a crosswalk at the location, you could stand at any spot within that crosswalk and be seen by at least these distances. She didn't mean to imply that you had to be waiting within an exact square foot of where we measured. If a crosswalk was painted at this spot, you could stand anywhere within it and be seen. Commissioner Parenti asks, "where is that spot?" Elena states it is to the west of Ryder Avenue, there is a curb ramp on the west side at Sylvan and Ryder, and if you were to cross directly across at that location, that is the spot. Commissioner Parenti mentions that there is also a driveway there, and we would either have to share the existing apex ramp or we would need to do some magic with the driveway as there is not that much room there. Elena thinks that we would keep the existing ramp, we might turn it a little bit toward Sylvan.

Commissioner Rossi talks about the fact that the decision we made before was based on information that was inaccurate, and the decision we made then was the best decision at that time. Now we have corrected information that appears to make this a different decision. Elena adds that the two crosswalk locations that he chose to measure from at that time, both had poor sight lines. She also was surprised herself walking back and forth across the street in that location at how safe it felt because viewing it from a car she didn't expect the visibility to be that good for both the driver and the pedestrian until she got out of the car and walked back and forth. She states that this is what Mr. Plati has repeatedly said to her each time he saw her over the years – that he crosses there every day and he can see everybody from both directions and people do stop for him. He doesn't feel that there is a sight line issue and she was surprised at how similarly she felt there.

Commissioner Peart asks if there is any thought as to the type of crosswalk markings in terms of signage and was thinking that within the City we do have the rectangular rapid flashing beacons and was wondering if this is part of the decision.

Elena states that in general when recommending these, there is not necessarily a dedicated funding source and obviously that drives the price up quite a bit, so that would not be an automatically included. The City has a list of locations where they have been requested and we have been chipping away at it as we have funding but certainly in terms of regular signage and the line striping, we've standardized on using the larger pedestrian signs with the arrows, we paint yield triangles and we do hatching in the crosswalks on major roads. So we would do that here since we're on a major road and that has become our standard. In terms of a rapid flashing beacon, the City cannot guarantee that would come along with the crosswalk. Commission Peart asks if there would be a ramp on the other side, adjacent to the cemetery. Elena states that yes, that this is standard when someone requests a crosswalk. When we approve them, we don't paint them until the compliant curb ramps have been installed.

Chief Lyle states that he discovered that the City only plows the cemetery side of the southern part of that roadway on the sidewalks, and the northern sidewalks do not get plowed. So it falls on the residents to clear the ramp on one side. He went there during the daylight hours, which is fine, but at approximately at 9:00 pm on Monday night after a meeting, he went and states it is difficult to see someone there. He states there is a utility pole there right at the curve, and if you are going to put the crosswalk on the west side of that, he is concerned about anyone driving westbound. He didn't catch any solar glare but is concerned about if the City plows the southern part, who is going to shovel

that ramp, and who is going to take care of it. Those are some concerns for him and he understands and he sympathizes with the resident and the two City Councilors because that is quite a stretch between Lebanon and Mt. Vernon for a crosswalk. But he is concerned that it will encourage more folks to cross there, and Sylvan Street is a commuter cut through to the Oak Grove train station.

Councilor Thomas states that in talking with Mr. Plati, he states he would be happy to meet with any member of the Traffic Commission. If this cannot happen at this location, he would be understanding of that, but he would like to see the crosswalk somewhere nearby where it can be accessible to the folks from Edgemere, Gibbons, Montvale, etc., somewhere in that general vicinity. He defers the best location to the Traffic Commission.

Elena thinks that the last time we looked at this, what we learned from the measurements was when the crosswalk is a little bit east or a little bit west, both locations were worse. We did determine that a crosswalk at Linwood would have safe distances and we may have even taken a vote in favor, or deferred the vote or tabled it, because Mr. Plati had indicated at that meeting that he did not want that crosswalk, as it didn't really help him to have it at Linwood. Elena feels that if it is not this one spot at Ryder, then Linwood would be the next location that would potentially be safe. She is not sure there is another location that is safer.

Chief Lyle asks if it would be worth having the retained Engineering firm for the City come out and see if they can assist us with a safe location within that reasonable distance going towards Main Street. He isn't sure what the fees are. Elena explains that we do not have them as an on-call consultant, but we do have them under contract for a couple of specific projects so we could amend their contract to request that; she is not opposed to it, but at the same time she is not sure that they would do anything different than what she has done. She suggests perhaps one of the other traffic engineers on this call might be able to advise if they think they would provide additional value added. Commissioner Parenti agrees and does not want to over think this too much. He thinks when this first appeared on the agenda in 2018, at the time there was some question, and the information that has been presented tonight, he is satisfied with. There is a luminaire there, not sure if it's operational, but there is illumination at that location and there are lots of places in town where it is a little dark where we have existing crosswalks. So he is prepared to make a motion unless there is more discussion.

Motion made by Commissioner Parenti to install a crosswalk across Sylvan Street on the west side of the Ryder Street intersection, seconded by Commissioner Krechmer. Elena called the roll. Motion carries. Note for the record that Chief Lyle voted “no” on this motion. For those listening on this item, the Councilors note that again this is pending funding and is not something that will happen automatically. The City will try to work it into the next funding that we allocate for traffic calming type items. Also, it is definitely not work that would get done until the spring due to the temperature.

3. City request to place a stop sign and crosswalk on Prospect Street at Poplar Street

This location is where we just reconfigured the intersection. We teed it off and we made it so you could no longer drive straight from Poplar onto Prospect or Prospect onto Poplar. Before, the rest of Poplar Street down around the corner towards Maple seemed like it was a separate street, so with our paving Poplar as part of the paving program this year, the City reconfigured the streets so that Prospect is now clearly a separate street. The City had feedback from the residents during an early public meeting before National Grid’s gas main replacement work that people felt that the intersection could be made safer. Elena had also gotten calls periodically, when working in the Engineering Division, indicating it was unclear who had the right of way at that location because it was a ‘Y’ before with an island in the middle. So we eliminated one leg of that Y and we did our best to create more of a ‘T’ intersection. This is a big cut through area, and the City would like to put a stop sign on Prospect that would reinforce that Prospect is a separate street, teeing into Poplar. Also, we want to paint a crosswalk there now that we have compliant curb ramps. We would like to have that stop bar to further protect the pedestrians who would cross there.

Motion to open public comment made by Commission Rossi and seconded by Commissioner Eccles. Elena called the roll; all were in favor.

Resident Susan Murphy lives at 24 Poplar Street, which is the house that is at the intersection of Poplar and Prospect. Her front door is on Poplar and side yard is on Prospect. She wants to support this request and feels that it meets the needs of the neighborhood. She states that she has watched the cars approaching that intersection, most doing 25 mph, and she strongly encourages the city to approve this and if possible find funding for it ASAP. Elena clarifies the funding question. With a stop sign and a painted crosswalk where the ramps are already in, the funding is minimal, so that is something we would just do as soon as we have a day that was adequate weather for painting the stop bar and putting in the stop sign.

Nicole Vinderman, who is a neighbor living at 11 Prospect Street, wants to thank everyone and mentions that the street looks wonderful. She is curious if it has been taken into consideration when one is coming up that very steep hill, which is Poplar Street, and taking a left onto Prospect, it is uncertain at this time that if you are taking a left onto Prospect and there is a car coming towards you on Prospect from the Fellsway. It is a very narrow intersection and was wondering if there was a way to widen that area or make it more obvious who has the right of way, but also the space to make that turn, she has found that difficult.

Motion to close public comment made by Commissioner Krechmer seconded by Commissioner Rossi. Elena called the roll, all in favor.

Commissioner Rossi comments that he is not quite sure where the stop sign is going and Elena mentions just stopping Prospect traffic, and Poplar remains as the through street. He states that he didn't get the chance to visit this location so would like Elena to briefly describe how the intersection is now more of a T. Elena states that they were able to make the curb line follow the curve of Poplar Street now, so rather than have it just be a wide open intersection with a triangle in the middle, now the curb line is basically following the parallel curb line across Poplar Street. When coming from Emerson, Poplar curves around to the left to Maple, and now Prospect comes in at more of a T. She does agree with the resident Nicole that the intersection, when someone is coming out from Prospect and someone is trying to turn into Prospect, is very narrow at that point. From a width prospective, she believes that it is 24 feet, but because of the curve in the road, it is a bit of a challenge. Elena states that she has driven through it numerous times because once we reconfigured it, she wanted to make sure we got it right and driven from all directions. Although she has never encountered a car coming out from Prospect when she is trying to turn in, she agrees that the natural course of what's going to end of happening is that one car is going to wait until the other goes. She does not think that someone is going to turn from Poplar into Prospect when a car is waiting at that stop sign, not because it's impossible, but because it's much more comfortable to do it that way. Tom Rossi states that he is not sure exactly when you say it is a T how much of it is totally a 90-degree angle now, as opposed to the Y. He asks if the triangle is gone all together. Elena states that the triangle is partially there, and that one edge was cut off and a big bump out was installed on the other side. Commissioner Rossi explains that it sounds like Prospect is now the stem of the T and Poplar is the top of the T. Commissioner Rossi comments that generally speaking, we don't put up stop signs at T intersections unless there is some overriding special case because it is already clear that

the traffic that is coming into the T on the stem don't legally have to stop, but they do have to legally yield. He recalls many years ago recommending that when we did put a stop sign, he thinks it was at the corner of Rockview Avenue and Mount Vernon Avenue, if it is really a T, he is curious whether it's really that unclear who is supposed to yield there. Elena states that in her mind, the reason why it is unclear is because of historic usage where Prospect used to be where people would just drive straight through onto Poplar. So it was previously unclear. But she would say that people on Prospect treated it as if they had the right of way because that was the straighter approach, so people are very use to cutting through from the Fellsway to Emerson, coming down Prospect, and shooting straight up Poplar, or making a right onto Poplar without stopping. So now what we have done is cut off the edge of the island, and we've maintained the curb line bumping out and then coming in. She wouldn't say that it is necessarily unclear, but historically we have also approved stop signs at T's where we felt people should be stopping but weren't stopping and there was no harm in installing one. At Spear and Meachem, we approved a similar stop sign where people use to come to the bottom of the T and routinely not stop, so we put the stop sign in just to reinforce the right of way. So when you come down Prospect, you are at a hill when you round the corner and come to the new crosswalk. There is now a sidewalk there and then grass and then the corner of the island has been cut off, and the remainder of the island is now part of the grass area.

Commissioner Parenti mentions that he has not seen the new intersection yet and is looking forward to seeing it. He will add to the debate on whether we put stop signs at the stem of a T. As the commissioners may recall, he is a big advocate for placing stop signs at the stem of the T and he knows that we disagree on that sometimes, but if we have a stop bar here we should have a stop sign. If we have a stop bar and no stop sign it looks like the stop sign is missing, and because this is a change as described, people are doing something entirely different before the change, and now we are asking them to do something that is new. So because it is new, he would be an even stronger advocate for a stop sign in this location.

Councilor Eccles states that the new configuration of the intersection is a little unclear, and he thinks that part of that is just how the intersection was historically used, as well as how the street signs were historically configured. He noted a lack of street signs there at the moment. Elena stated there used to be signs, but they might have been taken down during construction, and it's possible that we didn't get them back up. Elena will make a note to put in a work order for that. Councilor Eccles feels that historic users, including himself, knows which is Prospect and which is Poplar, but he thinks that a lot

of people have just treated it as one continuous street. As a result, especially people who have driven it a lot are confused about who has the right of way. He knows people still don't really use their blinkers as though it is an actual turn, so any infrastructure we can put in to clarify the fact that it is actually a T intersection make sense to install, including the proposed stop sign and crosswalk.

Chief Lyle asks if we have any traffic counts in that area at all, old data or new data. He understands the cut through part from Emerson to the Parkway, and that is a great short cut for a lot of drivers who have found it. It's a traffic calming measure in nature and may support the neighborhood, but he thinks that when the weather gets nice we are going to get phone calls to the Police Department in terms of people not stopping.

Motion made by Commissioner Krechmer to install a stop sign on Prospect Street at Poplar and provide crosswalk with locations specified by the Engineering Division, seconded by Commissioner Parenti. Elena calls the roll; the motion passes unanimously.

4. City request to place a stop sign on Dexter Road at Penney Road

Elena states that this is another location that the City has just recently reconfigured. We didn't make drastic changes here, but this is a location that is a Y, and it has always been unclear to Elena when she is driving there who has the right of way. She tends to just check Penney Road to make sure nobody is coming and then keeps going from Dexter Road. It is almost more of a merge situation the way it functions right now, but with the new sidewalk that was just added to Dexter Road, we wanted to add a stop sign and also a crosswalk to connect to the new sidewalk. We had proposed to put a crosswalk as well across Penney Road, and Elena believes that we put in curb ramps and a sidewalk that goes from where Penney and Dexter intersect down to Swains Pond Avenue. Elena states that Google Maps says that the portion between the proposed stop sign location and Swains Pond Ave. is Dexter Road rather than Penney Road, but the street signs show it as Penney Road.

Motion to open public comment by Commissioner Rossi and seconded by Commissioner Parenti. Elena calls the roll; all are in favor to open public comment.

Councilor Thomas wants to thank the DPW for all the work that has been going on up in that area of Dexter Road. The road is beautiful and extends all the way down to the end of Dexter and is such a great improvement. They did a great job putting in sidewalks and a curb [berm]. This is a great improvement to a long forgotten road at one of the

outmost points in Melrose. A beautiful retaining fence was installed last week and extended the sidewalk not only down Dexter but across Penney towards Swains Pond Avenue. The question he has is where exactly is the stop sign proposed to go. Elena states the stop sign would be right at the end of Dexter Road. and she shares her screen so the Commission can see exactly where, then shows where the crosswalk would go as she believes a curb ramp has been installed. Councilor Thomas states that it makes sense coming down Dexter Road that the stop sign be installed right where Dexter Road meets Penney Road, and he supports this wholeheartedly.

Since no one else raised their virtual hand, a motion was made to close public comment by Chief Lyle and seconded by Commissioner Rossi. Elena calls the roll; all are in favor and public comment is closed.

Councilor Eccles asks if we are voting on the crosswalk also. Elena states the agenda only specifies the stop sign but she will leave it up to the Commission if they want to vote on the crosswalk as well.

Chief Lyle would like to make an amendment to this motion that a crosswalk on Dexter Road at the Penney Road intersection be included, as described by Elena.

Commissioner Rossi states that Google is wrong and it is Penney Road that goes out to Swains Pond Avenue, as discussed earlier.

Motion made by Chief Lyle and seconded by Councilor Eccles to approve the request. Elena will calls the roll; all are in favor and the motion passes unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 6:37 pm. HAPPY HOLIDAYS !!