



## CITY OF WAUWATOSA

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### TRAFFIC & SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING Tuesday, May 11, 2004

PRESENT: Alds. Becker, Herzog, Krol, McCarthy -4

EXCUSED: Ald. Maher

ALSO

PRESENT: W. Kappel, Public Works Director; Chief B. Weber, Police Dept.

Ald. Becker as Chair called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

#### **Request for stop signs on Woodland Avenue between Underwood Avenue and N. 83rd Street**

Mr. Kappel reported on information requested by the committee at the previous meeting. The recent accident referenced by several residents involved a southbound vehicle on Forest Street that was struck by an eastbound vehicle on Woodland Avenue. The southbound driver was cited for failure to yield the right of way. The accident report did not mention excessive speeds or weather conditions as factors.

Traffic volume data was gathered between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. on weekdays and for some shorter periods on a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday with results typical of patterns in city neighborhoods. On Saturdays there are spikes in early morning and later afternoon, and there is traffic throughout the day on Sunday. There are two spikes on weekdays, between 7 and 9 a.m. and 3 and 6 p.m. Statistics show much the same volume on weekends as weekdays, indicating that the vehicles probably represent neighborhood traffic.

The police department's speed monitoring device gathered data on Friday through Sunday, April 23-25, and Friday through Tuesday, April 30-May 4. Mr. Kappel reported that the 85th percentile, or average, speed was 25 mph. Twenty percent of the cars were within 5 miles over the speed limit of 25 mph, 3% exceeded the speed limit by 10 mph, and less than 1% exceeded the speed limit by 15 mph. Generally, the top speed on any given day was 38-40 mph, although there was one record of 60 mph. Mr. Kappel emphasized that stop signs do not address speeding. With the addition of stop signs, drivers will still try to negotiate a street in the same amount of time.

Pete Ensich, 1908 Forest Street, asked about data on how visible speed detectors effect speeds. Mr. Kappel said there are no studies but the devices do have a traffic calming effect and are used for that purpose as they are moved around to different neighborhoods.

Don Miesbauer, 8157 Woodland Avenue, felt that the existing stop sign for 81st Street traffic should be changed to control Woodland traffic, since visibility for drivers on Woodland is restricted at the southwest and northwest corners there.

Ellen Ensich, 1908 Forest Street, asked if the cost of stop signs is not a concern and a stop sign would make residents feel safer, what is the issue? She felt that the speed study should not determine whether or not residents get a stop sign. She commented on the lack of understanding of laws on yielding and speeding and said that, even when doing a rolling stop, drivers are at least looking at their surroundings.

Peter Muller, 8120 Woodland Avenue, opposed installation of a stop sign, feeling that it might reduce the risk slightly at a particular intersection but would also create other risks when people ignore the sign. A stop sign on Woodland at Forest Street would leave Pleasant Street as the only uncontrolled intersection. Drivers who see that 81st Street and Forest Street traffic must stop might also assume that Pleasant Street traffic also must stop, thereby creating a greater risk. The vast majority of drivers are very careful now because they know there are no stop signs on these side streets.

Carrie Sgarlata, 1934 Forest Street, said she favors a stop sign because of the risk to the 23 children on her block. She mentioned the recent accident and cited high school students as presenting another potential accident problem. She provided a petition from 36 residents requesting installation of stop signs on Woodland Avenue at Forest Street.

Judy Persin, 2000 Forest Street, said the speed monitoring device could be seen from blocks away and should have been positioned toward 83rd Street to get a truer reading. She related her observations of high speeds and said that they have not been satisfied when they have called the police. There should be a stop sign on Woodland somewhere between Underwood and 83rd Street, she felt.

Dave Jansen, 8125 Woodland Avenue, said this is a safety issue. He listed six schools in the neighborhood and said the risk is larger than what some residents may be reducing it to.

Peter Ortiz, 8126 Woodland Avenue, said there is a stop sign at every other intersection in the area bounded by Center, North, 92nd and 80th, and there are four-way stops around the schools. It is easy to become complacent and make assumptions in such areas, and he felt that could happen on Woodland if only one cross street were left without a stop sign. If the sign for 81st Street traffic was changed to Woodland, that would leave a four-block unsigned stretch of 81st Street where speeds would increase.

James Kolbeck, 8202 Woodland Avenue, thanked Chief Weber for the immediate police attention on Woodland following the previous meeting. Since a four-way stop at 81st Street would reportedly require an engineering study, he suggested instead changing it so that cars on Woodland rather than 81st would need to stop. Advance notice to area residents of any change would be appropriate, he felt, perhaps through the city newsletter, a paragraph in the Wauwatosa News Times, or a slide on cable channel 25.

Michael Kroll, 8127 Woodland Avenue, said he was one of those involved in the recent accident on Woodland. Had there been a stop sign on Woodland, he would have obeyed it and the accident wouldn't have happened. If a stop sign won't help, he questioned what would.

Ald. Krol said he knows this area well and believes the problem is somewhat compounded by the fact that these streets don't all go through, making symmetry in sign placement difficult. Moving the stop sign on 81st Street to Woodland Avenue may be worth a try but may not be the best solution since 81st Street would then have four blocks without a stop sign. Also, without a sign on Forest or Pleasant, people may have a false sense of security about stopping at one street and not another. Increased patrolling in the area during times of higher volume might also help address speeding.

Moved by Ald. Krol, seconded by Ald. McCarthy to approve a 90-day trial of changing the stop sign for 81st Street traffic to Woodland Avenue so that it controls east-west rather than north-south traffic –

Ald. McCarthy said he seconded the motion for discussion purposes, but he wondered if the change would create a problem on 81st Street. If the view holds that stop signs do reduce speeds, it would seem that speeds on 81st Street would increase. He noted that the five reported accidents at four different intersections over a four-year period is not a high volume. He felt that more discussion is needed on how this would enhance safety on 81st Street and effect traffic flow from Underwood to 81st Street.

Ald. Herzog said an "uncontrolled intersection" sign could be helpful if such a sign existed, or speed bumps could be effective were it not for snowplowing problems. The uniform traffic manual tells us how to use what is available, and the city could be liable if signs are used in the wrong places, he pointed out. The manual tells us that stop signs do not slow speeds. He said he would not ever favor removing a stop sign since there is no adequate way to notify people that it is gone. Personal observations confirm that drivers "gun it" between stop signs. If too many stop signs are erected, we reach a saturation point where no one will obey them.

Ald. Herzog questioned whether the speed limit is clearly marked on Woodland Avenue. Although so stated in the police department's report, residents in the audience said no signs are in place. On the effectiveness and appropriate use of yield signs, Mr. Kappel said they can be used to alert traffic on a minor road to yield to a major road. Uncontrolled intersections are the safest in the city, he said, because drivers must slow down to be sure it is safe to proceed. One reason people disregard stop signs here is the prolific number we have, and adding more will only compound that problem. Regarding no through traffic signs, he said they would be effective if there truly is no way through. If not, it only deters those who don't know the neighborhood.

Ald. Herzog pointed out that this is not the only neighborhood with uncontrolled intersections. He said he would not support switching the signs on 81st Street but would possibly support a 25 mph sign, if not already present, on each end of Woodland and would listen to any argument for putting yield signs on Pleasant and Forest but not necessarily on Woodland.

Ald. McCarthy called the question, but Ald. Krol objected.

Ald. Krol observed that, although 25 mph speed limit signs are posted on Milwaukee Avenue, where he lives, drivers seldom obey the posted limit. That street is heavily traveled and also does not have stop signs for quite a long stretch. He explained that he suggested a 90-day trial because the signs could be removed if they didn't appear to work during that period. People who live in the area would be aware of removal of the 81st Street signs and would have a tendency to slow down, he felt. He argued for doing something that may have a more positive impact rather than doing nothing.

Vote on the motion, Ayes: 2; Noes: 2 (McCarthy, Herzog)  
Motion fails.

The Chair suggested that area residents get together with their aldermen on this issue. He noted that both Forest Street and 81st Street have been discussed and it has been difficult to determine exactly where residents want stop signs.

Moved by Ald. McCarthy, seconded by Ald. Herzog to recommend to Council that this matter be placed on file. Ayes: 3; Noes: 1 (Krol)

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Carla A. Ledesma, City Clerk  
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

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