

TRAFFIC & SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, January 27, 2009

PRESENT: Aids. Jay, Maher, McBride, Meaux, Stepaniak - 5

ALSO W. Kappel, Dir. of Public Works; A. Kesner, City Atty.; K. Rusch, Admin. Intern
PRESENT: J. Archambo, City Admin.; Aids. Purins, Nikceвич; Mayor Didier

Ald. Meaux as Chair called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Report on Snow and Ice Control Operations

Mr. Kappel reviewed his January 20, 2009 memo responding to questions raised by Thomas Pluster in a letter to Mayor Didier. Mr. Pluster's also outlined his concerns at the previous meeting.

Mr. Kappel explained that, although roadways are made safe for vehicular traffic, the City does not necessarily plow curb to curb after every snow. On the question of safety and liability, he cited state statutes that absolve municipalities for a period of at least three weeks after snow removal operations. Regarding complaints about snow removal during the Christmas holiday period, he pointed out that there were several back-to-back storms and snow had accumulated to the point that plowed snow was falling down from snow banks back underneath the wheels of plows. Mr. Kappel explained the use of salt trucks with underbody or "belly" blades, which help push snow to the side so that the salt can best act. When doing that, there may be places with a 4-inch buildup at the curb. When buildup impacts transportation and mail delivery, full curb-to-curb plowing may be done, but not necessarily after every storm.

Referring to the 2005 operational handbook that Mr. Pluster viewed, Mr. Kappel indicated that it does need updating, especially relative to changes effective this year. Staff was fully briefed on those changes, and the City has started to reduce the amount of salt used for smaller storms. There is no change in handling of main streets, hills, and school areas, but salting has been cut back to just intersections on residential streets. This does leave some snow on the streets, but it becomes somewhat of an abrasive to help vehicles stop.

Mr. Kappel emphasized that procedures vary from storm to storm. Two situations are never identical. He reiterated that the City does not have a bare pavement policy but does try to retain main streets to bare pavement as soon as possible after storms.

Tom Pluster, 2853 N. 122nd Street, owner of business at 2954 N. 117th Street, felt there have been fundamental changes in acceptable snow removal. His concerns centered on streets not being plowed to the curb, making roadways safe for pedestrians in areas where there are no sidewalks. He reported that in his neighborhood there is solid ice 1-2 inches thick and 5-6 feet off each curb, making it necessary for pedestrians to walk in traffic lanes. Two cars cannot pass on dry pavement simultaneously. Mr. Pluster was also concerned that storm sewers are still snow covered and ice packed and questioned what will happen with the next big rain. He asked how sump pump discharges into streets can be considered safety hazards while the

condition around storm sewers is not. He disagreed that last winter and this winter are not typical inasmuch as we have had 40-50 inches of snow in three out of the last nine winters.

Mr. Pluster concluded that the City has an unsafe snow removal policy and an inconsistent level of service that has declined over the past few years. He encouraged revisiting current policies.

Ald. Purins, 7th District, said he has lived in areas of the city without sidewalks for the past 30 years. He was concerned about pedestrian travel and a statement that plowing is done for vehicles, not pedestrians.

In response to questions from Ald. McBride, Mr. Kappel explained considerations for plowing the streets in the area of 70th and Cedar, including use of salt and the role that traffic plays in pushing snow to the side. Ald. McBride commented that he assumes the responsibility for trying to keep the sewers at his corner open.

Ald. Stepaniak asked about the magnitude of making changes in areas without sidewalks. Mr. Kappel explained efforts to clear routes to school and encourage students to use streets with lower volumes of traffic. He said that, generally speaking, residential streets will have a car width or better of snow at the curb, but he felt that pedestrians should be able to walk through two inches of snow in that area.

Ald. Jay pointed out that the freezing weather over the past 20 days or so has prevented streets from heating up and melting the snow as would normally occur.

Mr. Kappel said that the City is notified by the fire department if they feel there is a dangerous situation. The City relies on the eyes of residents and public safety officers in that regard. Around schools, some streets were widened after Christmas to ensure safe conditions.

Ald. Stepaniak commented that it would be good to have a year's experience on the decreased salt usage policy but said he would like to have staff look at and report back on pedestrian use of roadways on the west and north sides where there are few sidewalks. He would be interested in more in-depth discussion if current policy is resulting in some difficult situations, determining if modifications are needed and what they might be.

The Chair requested a report in one month regarding pedestrian issues and a follow-up report at the end of the season regarding the salt policy.

Parking Restrictions on South Side of W. North Avenue, N. 69th to N. 70th Streets

Mr. Kappel reported that changes to parking regulations on the south side of W. North Avenue between N. 69th and N. 70th Streets have been requested by a business owner whose patrons have been ticketed for exceeding the one-hour limitation. A letter and a petition signed by 14 other business owners in opposition to a change was also received and included in the file. Mr. Kappel suggested making a change from one-hour to two-hour parking by resolution rather than as a 90-day trial. This would be an interim measure pending an overall study of North Avenue that would include review of parking regulations and should be completed by late summer or early fall.

George Grbich, owner of Walter's, 6930 W. North Avenue, said that the customers of his tenants, who operate the bike shop, soccer shop, and a tax business, need short-term parking. The owners are worried that they will lose business if parking spaces are unavailable for extended periods.

Atty. David Wanta representing Bartz's, 6931 W. North Avenue, said that his client's business also is premised on short visits and ample short-term parking. Don Bartz, owner of Bartz's, 6931 W. North Avenue, asked about use of the municipal parking lot where restrictions were recently eliminated and suggested that Il Mito could advise customers to use that lot or provide courtesy valet parking by means of their loading zone, which appears to be underused and possibly could otherwise be eliminated. Debbie Bartz, Bartz's, 6931 W. North

Avenue, said that most of their daytime customers shop with young children. She felt they would lose customers without short-term parking, which has worked well for over 30 years.

John Jensen, Johnson Cycle and Fitness, 6916 W. North Avenue, said that North Avenue businesses are thriving but parking is worth its weight in gold. Businesses rely on 15-20 minute in-and-out parking all day long. Customer flow has worked well with one-hour restrictions. Although the owner of Il Mito has complained of customers being ticketed, his check of public records indicates that only seven tickets were issued in the 6900-7000 block in December. Two of them were for parking during a snow emergency and one was for parking in a no parking any time zone, leaving four tickets in the one-hour zone.

Michael Feker, 2334 Met-to-Wee Lane, owner of Il Mito, 6913 W. North Avenue, questioned why two-hour parking would not benefit all the businesses, inasmuch as the success of one business feeds all the businesses. If the loading zone is an issue, he would be willing to give it up. He pointed out that patrons of other businesses could use the parking lot as well and parking is also available on the side streets. Cranky Al's at the east end of this block generates no parking between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. when they are closed. He appealed to the other business owners to work together for the mutual benefit of all.

Mayor Didier was hopeful that the upcoming North Avenue study would result in a plan that all can live with. She spoke of the need to be aware of the issues and realize that the dynamics of the community are changing. The expectation is that we will have to look for parking, both here and in the Village.

Ald. Nikcevich said that shifting the loading zone to the front of Bartz's might be an option. She would like to look for a compromise here with some give and take.

Ald. Stepaniak said that all here are interested in North Avenue being a very successful business district, but it seems there has not been a lot of communication among the parties involved. He suggested scheduling a meeting of business owners and alderpersons to try to craft a solution.

The Chair concurred, commenting that the merchants on the block are in the best position to arrive at a solution. He noted the need for a temporary solution until there is a master plan for parking in the area. Ald. McBride commented that whatever the businesses work out together will be better than what we impose from afar.

Ald. Stepaniak indicated that he would follow through on scheduling a meeting and getting the information out.

Zoo Interchange Project – Milwaukee Regional Medical Center Viewpoint

William Hatcher, Executive Director of the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center (MRMC) summarized MRMC's position on the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (DOT) most recent proposals on Zoo Interchange improvements, also contained in a written synopsis he provided.

Mr. Hatcher reported that the biggest concern is that modernization design alternatives M-1 and M-3 do not allow direct freeway access for traffic coming to MRMC from the east or west on I-94. They will continue to demand that north-south traffic on Hwy. 45 have direct access to the campus as well. MRMC generates 6 million trips per year, with almost 30% arriving from the east or west on I-94. Under either alternative, the only option from the west is to exit at Hwy. 100 and use Wisconsin Avenue or Watertown Plank Road. From the east, the only alternatives to Watertown Plank Road are 82nd Street, Glenview Avenue, and Wisconsin Avenue.

Mr. Hatcher applauded efforts to design in frontage roads between Wisconsin Avenue and Watertown Plank Road on both sides of the freeway, which provides opportunities for decelerated access points, and also

supported the concept of "Texas U-turns." Both of those improvements would provide good access to both the Research Park and MRMC.

The MRMR also supports extension of 92nd Street to the north from Watertown Plank Road to connect with Swan Boulevard and to the south from Wisconsin Avenue to connect with Blue Mound Road. This would provide extremely important access points into the future as well as during the five-year or longer construction period. Otherwise, the only alternatives will be Wisconsin Avenue and Watertown Plank Road to the east and possibly residential streets. The DOT will not intentionally shut down both Watertown Plank and Wisconsin Avenue at the same time. Any shutdown on one takes away 60-70% of MRMC access. The MRMC is very interested in moving forward on a traffic signal at Wisconsin Avenue and Hwy. 100, which is a major relief valve to the west.

A map attached to the written synopsis is a traffic master plan showing improvements on the MRMC campus to interface with the improved freeway, including new internal roads that will be needed if the campus grows as projected. Not everything shown, however, is reflected in the DOT design alternatives. Mr. Hatcher anticipated that there would be opportunities in the traffic impact analysis portion of the process to discuss ancillary roadway changes and determine who should pay for them.

Ald. McBride asked about MRMC's viewpoint on mass transit interfaces. Mr. Hatcher said that they welcome any connection they could possibly have with any form of transportation, particularly mass transit, although their regional status means they are bringing visitors in from beyond the area that mass transit would serve. Ald. McBride observed that many of the 6 million trips are generated by employees, indicating a need for local mass transit, which Mr. Hatcher said they are ready and willing to participate in and discuss.

Mr. Hatcher indicated that he is available to return for further discussion at a future meeting. Mr. Kappel will report on the first TIA meeting and potential mitigation at the next meeting. He will also have a report on the Milwaukee Connector, which directly relates to mass transit.

John Balzer, president of Froederdt/Community Health, stated that Mr. Hatcher is expressing the collective views of the members of the Regional Medical Center, who all feel very strongly about the key points that have to be implemented in order to continue what they are doing now and grow into the future.

The Chair asked Mr. Kappel to seek input from the Research Park and Milwaukee County regarding their thoughts and concerns. Mr. Kappel noted that he is aware that neither one sees a need for the proposed connection bridge between the Research Park and the medical campus. Mr. Hatcher concurred with that conclusion.

The meeting adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Carla A. Ledesma, City Clerk
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

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