

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, November 26, 2002

PRESENT: Alds. Becker, Herzog, Matthews -3

EXCUSED: Ald. McCarthy

ABSENT: Ald. Krol

ALSO W. Kappel, Dir. of Public Works; Capt. J. Suttner, Police Dept.;
PRESENT: P. Coffaro, Asst. to Admin.; L. Faustmann, Exec. Asst.

Ald. Herzog in the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

School Crossing on W. North Avenue at N. 90th Street

Mr. Kappel reported that following the previous meeting on this issue, the engineering department gathered data on pedestrian and vehicular traffic and there were lengthy discussions about alternatives among the engineering and police departments and the city administrator. The conclusion was that there is not any engineering solution to make this intersection safer right now. The crossing guard that several residents had complained of has been removed from this location. If there are still concerns, Mr. Kappel recommended the immediate measure of moving the school crossing to Swan Boulevard by next Monday. Secondly, a longer term solution would include pavement markings between Swan Boulevard and Wauwatosa Avenue to turn that section into a one-lane roadway in each direction. This would, in essence, create something similar to North Avenue between Wauwatosa Avenue and 60th Street but without the pavement bump-outs. Mr. Kappel explained that the proposed pavement marking would not be done until a design is arrived at and temperatures are at the necessary levels. Also, some negotiation with the transit system will be needed regarding bus stop locations.

Captain Sutter indicated that the police department concurs with the recommendations. He indicated concern that some of the short-term solutions discussed previously would give pedestrians a false sense of security. He felt that a longer-term fix than merely using traffic cones is needed to address the problem.

Jean O'Brien, 9028 Stickney Avenue, indicated approval of the long-term solutions but was concerned about getting a five-year old to walk two more blocks if the crosswalk is moved. She said that it is important to encourage children to walk to school but felt that fewer children would cross at Swan Boulevard. She said that the new crossing guard at 90th Street is doing a good job and she feels safer.

Rosemary Wehnes, 7922 Jackson Park Boulevard, said that 12% of traffic fatalities in the U.S. are pedestrians; that percentage is the same in the Milwaukee metro area. Also, Wauwatosa probably has a larger percentage of pedestrians than other communities because of children walking to school and our greater elderly population. She favored consideration of installing bump-outs on this section of North Avenue, to make the street friendlier to pedestrians. An additional problem between Ludington and Wauwatosa Avenues, she said, is the lack of a place to cross with a light. She suggested looking into state funds or programs that may be available in connection with a new state pedestrian plan and also investigating any applicable federal programs. She said that painting the pavement to indicate where cars are not supposed to drive might be hard to enforce

without any other impediment to motorists. Reducing the roadway to two lanes would probably be advantageous not only to children but also to other pedestrians, she felt.

Mr. Kappel said that the police department has indicated that the proposed pavement marking would be enforceable. He described the striping and hash marks that would be used along with proper signage. West of Swan Boulevard, a sign would inform eastbound traffic of the single lane ahead. He indicated that he has not provided cost estimates since the installation has yet to be designed and he wanted to be sure of the direction the committee wishes to take before investing staff time. He said that parking probably would not have to change, but bus stops may have to be relocated midblock.

Ald. Matthews approved of moving the crossing guard to Swan Boulevard but reiterated her previous concern about guarantees in the contract that a problem guard would not be moved somewhere else in Wauwatosa. She said she has heard that an earlier guard at 90th Street was moved to another corner in the city.

Ms. Faustmann said the crossing guard supervisor has the ability to move the guard to a less demanding corner. She has never asked the supervisor to take the guard out of service entirely. A previous guard was removed because he wasn't complying with what he was instructed to do. The supervisor believed the manner in which the guard was crossing children was safe and felt he could be moved to a less demanding corner.

Mr. Coffaro said that the general manager of Twin City Security, the crossing guard company, doesn't want a problem guard working anywhere in Wauwatosa but gives a guard the benefit of the doubt. Moving a guard to an intersection that is fairly quiet can work out without any problems. When the contract was renegotiated a year and a half ago, an extra provision was not felt to be needed. In response to further questions, Mr. Coffaro indicated that guards are monitored more heavily after being relocated. He believed that one guard has been let go by the company.

Referring to comments made by residents at the previous meeting on this issue, Ald. Matthews said that many were performance related but some raised questions of mental capacity to handle the job at any intersection. She wanted assurance that problems are not being moved from one corner to another. Ms. Faustmann responded that she is comfortable with the situation.

Ald. Matthews suggested consideration of guards at critical corners with more traffic using whistles as is done in Milwaukee. She said she would support moving the guard to Swan Boulevard but would want a more comprehensive look at North Avenue traffic counts, parking, bus stops, and other issues prior to investing in restriping. She would also like to know what other projects may have to be deferred in order to do this work

Mr. Kappel said that the pavement marking would be done under next year's citywide contract, and he would try to do it within the budget already allotted to that work. He would return to the committee with a plan. He may initially propose doing the area from Swan to Ludington and then bring it back to committee if that is successful.

Ald. Becker said he would like to see what others think of moving the guard. He suggested holding the matter for a few weeks or more to allow for further input.

Ms. O'Brien said the majority of people using the 90th Street crossing live between the 8700 and 8900 blocks on Stickney and Jackson Park. She felt there may be less people crossing at Swan Boulevard. She said that a neighbor was struck there while crossing with the "walk" sign, so the traffic light does not guarantee safety.

In response to further questions about relocating the former 90th Street guards, Ms. Faustmann clarified that the first guard at 90th Street was let go for not placing the cones properly and refusing to follow directions. The second guard, she believed, is still working in Wauwatosa but at a less demanding corner.

Asked about installing a traffic light at 90th, Mr. Kappel estimated the cost at \$10,000 but said any kind of traffic signal, whether flashing yellow or fully functional, would be problematic due to proximity to other signalized intersections. It could not be done without a full traffic study by a consulting firm, as required by new warrants.

Ald. Matthews expressed uncertainty if holding the matter would change anything. She noted that a fairly low number of pedestrians currently cross at 90th Street. She felt that walking two extra blocks is not too much to ensure a child's safety, noting that pedestrians could use either the Ludington Avenue or Swan Boulevard crossing. She did not see 90th and North as a safe crossing guard location under current conditions and said she would feel safer if the crossing stayed at Swan but is open to other options as a way to move it back to 90th Street.

Moved by Ald. Matthews, seconded by Ald. Becker to concur with the Director of Public Works and temporarily move the crossing guard from 90th Street and W. North Avenue to Swan Boulevard and W. North Avenue and await a report from the engineering department about alternatives that would allow moving the guard back to 90th Street –

Mr. Kappel said he offered the alternative of moving the crossing if it was felt that changing the crossing guard at 90th Street has not been successful. When reviewing his notes and minutes of the previous meeting, he found that 90% of the complaints were directed at the crossing guard. Having the proper person there might provide a modicum of safety with which parents are comfortable. He indicated that the only cost in moving the crossing to Swan Boulevard would be in connection with the school crossing signage.

Questions and discussion of other related issues ensued. Mr. Kappel said that the proposed striping would not necessarily prohibit left turns at 90th Street since the few drivers turning left there are parents going to McKinley School. Prohibiting turns might create problems at another intersection. He indicated that stepped-up enforcement might be necessary to prevent use of the non-driving area to weave around a turning vehicle. He will look into the timing of the Swan Boulevard signals in connection with pedestrian crossings but said the concern would be with causing traffic to back up. Capt. Sutter said it would be possible to enforce a lower speed limit with a flashing yellow light, but Mr. Kappel reiterated his concerns about the proximity of other signals causing confusion.

The Chair raised the possibility of moving the guard at Ludington to 90th Street, which seems to be the funnel to McKinley School, in order to provide a second guard, one handling each direction of traffic. Anyone crossing at Ludington would still have the benefit of the traffic signals. Also, too many crossing guards in that one stretch may be confusing to drivers.

Mr. Kappel said that more children cross at Ludington than at 90th Street, and Ms. Faustmann indicated that the guard at Ludington has a different schedule in order to provide lunch-time coverage. Capt. Sutter said a second guard would seem to make sense but his concern, again, would be one of creating a false sense of security. If drivers don't see the guard with a stop sign now, would they see a second guard? Would the vision of drivers going around other vehicles still be blocked? Ms. Faustmann said the two guards at Wauwatosa and North Avenues stand kitty-corner from each other, and each takes students halfway across.

The Chair said he would rather try two guards at 90th Street than move the guard to Swan where there is a very short light and high traffic volumes. He would hate to spend the money to move the signs only to find that no one wants to make the two-block walk.

With consent of the second, Ald. Matthews withdrew the motion.

Moved by Ald. Matthews, seconded by Ald. Becker to hold the matter for two weeks so that those residents who attended the prior meeting on this issue can be informed and asked for input –

Mr. Kappel recommended contacting the school to inform parents of the recommendations. He could provide a communication for distribution to parents, asking them to call him or come to the meeting. Those residents who spoke at each meeting could also be notified. Ms. O'Brien noted that each child brings home a folder from the school once a week. The folders are stuffed on Monday and sent home on Tuesday.

With consent of the second, Ald. Matthews amended the motion to hold the matter until the meeting of January 14, 2003, so that parents can be notified and information can be gathered. Ayes: 3

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

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Carla A. Ledesma, City Clerk
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin