

TRAFFIC CONTROL BOARD MINUTES

July 23, 2013

MEMBERS PRESENT: Todd Cormier, Walt Willett, Sondra Baker, Capt. R D Harper

MEMBERS ABSENT: Gene Wade, Trina White

STAFF SUPPORT: Terry Smith, Erin Claunch, Zach Heid, Lora Mattox,

GUESTS: Abigail Feliciano, Anne O'Rourke, Major Keith Bottjen

BUSINESS MEETING:

Call to order: Todd Cormier called the meeting to order at 12:15 pm in the conference room of the Public Works Building, 2224 Montana Avenue.

Minutes: Motion for approval of the June minutes by Walt Willett, seconded by Sondra Baker. Motion carried on a voice vote.

OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT: None

STAFF REPORTS:

2nd Ave N & N 22nd St: Erin gave an update on the intersection of 2nd Ave N and N 22nd Street. The intersection has been the focus of several studies since 2nd Ave N was switched from a two way street to a one way street. Even after allowing time for drivers to adjust to the new traffic pattern, the incidence of wrong way travel is higher than desirable. Different alternatives were evaluated and ultimately installing signing with flashing LED's in the sign border was decided on. The signs are solar powered and will flash continuously. The signs should be installed early next week. Lora Mattox wondered if the lights on the sign will be too bright for residents. The lights are small LED's and should not be an issue.

BOARD REPORTS:

Planning Board. The consultant for the Transportation Plan Update is going to be in town next week meeting with MDT, MET and some of the local trucking firms. There is going to be a meeting with the consultant on Tuesday with the plan update steering committee. They have been interviewing MET and looking at some of the key state corridors for the transportation plan. They will also talk to local trucking firms to identify issues with freight movement in the area.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

6th Ave North Pedestrian Crossing: The Salvation Army has a summer program with 60 – 70 kids and also after school programs that involve taking kids across 6th Ave N to North Park. Major Keith Bottjen mentioned that they have wanted a crosswalk that would allow pedestrians to cross 6th Ave N for a long time. Anne O'Rourke noted that they have an after school youth program all year round, fall from September thru December and spring from January thru May. A HAWK signal near their building would greatly reduce the walking distance to safely cross 6th Ave North. Anne also mentioned that reducing the speed limit with flashers would help make 6th Ave N safer to cross and would help slow the traffic. Terry noted one of the questions in selecting a location is looking at spacing between crossing points in the entire segment between the existing traffic signals at N. 18th and N. 27th Streets. Todd asked about warrants are for a HAWK signal. Terry said that pedestrian volumes are significantly less than for a regular traffic signal. Walt asked if the length of crossing time would be long enough to safely cross a group of kids. Erin said that the times can be shortened or lengthened for specific locations.

Terry informed the board that ultimately a HAWK signal will be installed somewhere between N 20th St and N 22nd St on 6th Ave North. It will be at least 90% funded by BSEDA. The money from BSEDA is remaining from the 2nd Ave N and N 22nd St one-way to two-way conversion. If there is not enough money the City will kick in the rest. The two things that are uncertain are a timeframe for the project and the exact location of the HAWK signal. If the City needs to provide supplement funding, construction would be after July 1, 2014 to be into the next budget year. This HAWK might be placed mid-block which is the MUTCD recommended location, rather than at an intersection like the one at 4th & 20th.

Terry mentioned that North Park is not the only large park that is located on a major roadway. Other parks include Veterans Park on Poly Dr, Central Park on Central Ave, Centennial Park on 32nd St W and South Park. Although South Park is not on an arterial, it is similar due to S 28th Street carrying a high volume of traffic. The City has not had a statutory reduced speed limit for parks since about 1989. Implementing a reduced speed limit on 6th Ave N would not be consistent with how we have treated other parks in town. Also, flashers for a reduced speed limit that run for the majority of the day tend to become part of the background for drivers and are not as effective as regular school flashers that run for very limited amounts of time. Terry noted there is an existing "PARK" sign on 6th Ave N warning drivers of the park; but it has little effect on driver behavior. The City of Billings does not place "CHILDREN AT PLAY" signs on public streets. Much like the existing PARK warning sign, one would not be expected to have a significant effect on driver behavior.

Terry noted that most Billings parks do not have crosswalks leading into every corner of the park. A situation at South Park recently came up where there was a request for a crosswalk at one corner of the park. Part of staff's response was 'What do you do with the other 3 corners?' Terry noted that this doesn't mean there should or should not be more crosswalks around major parks, it is just to say that if additional crosswalks are desired at North Park then it should be based on some city developed warrant for volume of pedestrians and cars so that similar situations can be treated in a similar manner. Terry mentioned there is a philosophical issue with painting a crosswalk at only one of several cross streets abutting a park. This reinforces the idea that drivers don't have to stop at the other cross streets because there is not a painted crosswalk. We already see that issue in Billings, even though under state law there is a crosswalk at every intersection whether it is painted or not. RD Harper mentioned that the crosswalks with the signs do have better compliance.

Terry mentioned that staff did review the actual crossing distances at N 18th St and 6th Ave N and have adjusted the pedestrian signal timing to provide a slightly longer crossing time.

Walt asked if having several HAWK signals on one street would dilute the effectiveness of the signals. Terry said that in his vision, he was thinking more about the future if there were ever to be additional HAWK signals installed on 6th Ave N somewhere between N 22nd St and N 27th St. He said it would make sense to think about spacing so pedestrians could be served without having to detour significantly from where they want to cross. Anne asked in recapping, given the BSEDA funding is left from the project at N 22nd St & 2nd Ave N, if the next decision would be where to locate the HAWK signal? Terry said that the HAWK signal would be placed between N 20th St and N 22nd St., but the exact location does need to be determined. The HAWK signal project wouldn't need specific approval from City Council if the BSEDA funding is enough to cover the entire project. Anne was wondering if there was a way to reserve the money for this project. Erin said that his understanding is that BSEDA and EBURD are planning to fund the HAWK signal as one of their next projects. Anne asked if there would be a way to have the HAWK up by the end of the next school year? Terry said in an ideal world that would be the case. That will be dependent on bidding the project over the winter since there is a 3-4 month lead time on delivery of signal poles. Anne asked if there is a deadline for the grant funding from BSEDA to expire? Erin said that there is, however, it is approximately 3 years out.

Miscellaneous Board Inquiries. Walt asked if South Billings Boulevard was a city street. He has seen several close calls with cars turning into Riverfront Park. He thought a turn lane into the park would make that intersection safer. Terry said it is a State road and they would have the final say. There was a Blue Creek Transportation study done in 2009 and the need for a left turn lane at the entrance to Briarwood Subdivision was evaluated. Terry indicated there have been several MDT safety projects involving the Jellison Road intersection (road to the City landfill), but he was unsure if the State had ever looked at the Riverfront Park entrance.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 1:12 pm.