

TRAFFIC CONTROL BOARD MINUTES

August 27, 2013

MEMBERS PRESENT: Gene Wade, Walt Willett, Lt. Cady (for Capt. R D Harper)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Todd Cormier, Trina White, Sondra Baker,

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

GUESTS: None

BUSINESS MEETING:

Call to order: Gene Wade called the meeting to order at 12:20 pm in the conference room of the Public Works Building, 2224 Montana Avenue.

Minutes: Motion for approval of the July minutes by Walt Willett, seconded by Lt. Cady. Motion carried on a voice vote.

OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT: None

STAFF REPORTS: Terry showed the board a picture of a wind powered school flasher that was recently installed on 32nd St W just south of Monad Rd. This system replaced a school flasher connected into the Northwestern Energy system for power. The unit is a demonstration project for use of windpower. Because the other school flasher at this location is still connected to Northwestern Energy for power, the City will be able to calculate the savings on the monthly power bill by use of the wind powered unit. The system relies on a solar panel for backup energy.

BOARD REPORTS:

Planning Board: The City's planning, code enforcement, and building staff recently moved to the Miller building on 3rd Ave N and N 29th St. The Transportation Plan Update is still progressing and the first public meeting is going to be held September 12th, from 5:30pm to 7:00pm. It is an open house style meeting with staff and the consultant present to answer questions. Lora received the draft for the Hospitality Corridor Plan and there is a website where that can be viewed. There are three projects being submitted for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) which is the replacement for the CTEP program. The three projects are:

- Laurel Rd from King Ave overpass to 6th St W overpass (bike & pedestrian improvements)
- Broadwater from 32nd St W to Shiloh Rd (multi-use trail)
- Highway 3 on top of the rims west of N 27th St (extend ADA accessible trail)

Three projects are being submitted in hopes of getting one. The School District is also submitting one. These projects are competing statewide for funding instead of just county-wide. There are three pools of funding: communities less than 5,000, communities more than 5,000 and an "anything goes" pool.

OLD BUSINESS: The edge-lit flashing signs on N 22nd St and 2nd Ave N have been installed and are working properly. The signs seem to be effective. Walt inquired about the speed limit signs on Grand Ave west of 32nd St W. Terry said that he and Street Traffic haven't determined where the change in speed limit should occur—at 32nd or at Zimmerman.

NEW BUSINESS:

Complete Streets: Terry Smith gave a presentation on the Complete Streets Benchmark report. He noted many cities have adopted complete streets policies; however, none have really gone to the next step of trying to measure the effectiveness of the policy. Most of the same group that drafted the complete streets policy carried over to complete the benchmark report. Most of the members working on the benchmark report are either from Riverstone Health or the City of Billings. Riverstone Health is involved in drafting and promoting the policy as a way to encourage people to be more healthy and active. Terry reviewed the types of information incorporated into the benchmark report and distributed a copy of the executive summary for the report.

Typical Neighborhood Issues: Terry shared with the Board several typical requests that staff receives about signing in neighborhoods. Some typical requests are: “install a stop sign or 4 way stop to slow traffic down”, post speed limit signs, post 15 MPH signs, post children at play signs. Both State Law and City Ordinance provide the speed limit on a city street is “25 MPH unless otherwise posted.”

The City only posts speed limit signing if a local street gives the appearance of being a “major” street. This includes if it’s a wide street or has a painted centerline. The City installs reminder signs on arterial and collector streets near major intersections to remind drivers of the speed limit when they are turning off of another major street.

The City does not post “Children at Play” signs on public streets. The possibility of a child running into the street should be expected in any residential neighborhood. There are no practical criteria to say a “Children at Play” sign should be posted on one street versus another. Lastly generic warning signs such as “Children at Play” or “Slow” have not been found to have any significant effect on driver behavior.

The *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD) is a Federal publication intended to promote uniformity in traffic control devices from state to state and city to city. In general it doesn’t dictate when you must install a signal or specific sign, but rather how it should be applied if you do. It also gives requirements on size, color, shape and location of signs and signals. The MUTCD indicates stop signs are appropriate where a lesser important road intersects a more important road or where there is a sight distance issue. Terry mentioned the rule-of-thumb has traditionally been to consider intersection control (stop or yield signs) when the total entering traffic reaches 1500 vehicles per day. The 2009 MUTCD has a paragraph that provides 2000 vehicles per day as the threshold. There is specific language in the MUTCD that says stop signs shall not be used for speed control. Stop signs slow traffic down near the sign; however, they often don’t slow drivers down mid-block. Most drivers set their speed based on what they see on or along the roadway: how wide it is, if there is a center line, if there are children playing in front yards, etc. When a complaint is received staff always conducts a field review of sight distance and reviews traffic accident records. Speed and volume data may or may not be collected.

Terry discussed several locations where speed data was collected over the last couple of months in response to citizen concerns about speeding in residential neighborhoods. In all cases vehicle count and speed data showed that traffic was traveling at an 85%-ile speed of 25MPH or less. Josephine Crossing Subdivision is an excellent example of traffic calming at work. It has corner bulb-outs at intersections, and narrower streets in general. The 85%-ile speeds in Josephine Crossing are between 16.7 and 19.3 MPH depending on the street.

Downtown Railroad Crossings: Terry distributed a recent article from the Billings Gazette. The article reported the County Commissioners took Planning staff to task because “none of the recommendations in the 2004 study” to address impacts of the downtown railroad crossings had been implemented, other than the quiet zone. Terry reviewed the actual short term alternatives listed in the S.E.H. report and their current status.

- Advance signing for railroad crossing occupied - **Completed**
- Left turn arrow on 27th St at Montana Ave - **Requires State approval**
- Upgrade traffic signal controllers - **Requires State approval**
- Upgrade RR signal circuitry – **Completed**
- Quiet zone - **Completed**
- Modify Railroad switching operations – **outside of City control**

Three out of the six recommendations have been implemented. The left turn arrow on 27th and the upgrade to the downtown signal controllers are tied together. If we upgrade the signal controller to provide a left turn arrow at Montana Avenue, we would lose communications with the other signals in the downtown system. Because both 27th Street and Montana Avenue are State maintained routes any change in signal operation requires MDT concurrence. A State project to update their downtown traffic signal controllers is in the early planning stages.

Rimrock Road Project. Walt asked if the Rimrock Road project was on schedule. Erin reported that it was and work was expected to be complete by the end of October or early November.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 1:35 pm.