



CITY OF HARRISONBURG
**PUBLIC
WORKS**

320 EAST MOSBY ROAD, HARRISONBURG, VA 22801

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TO: Eric Campbell, City Manager
FROM: Thomas Hartman, PE, Director of Public Works
DATE: April 27, 2021
RE: Heatwole Road Closure to Vehicles between Sharon Street and Perry Street

Summary:

Consider approving closure of Heatwole Road, between Sharon Street and Perry Street, to motor vehicles.

Background:

In the summer of 2020, residents who lives immediately adjacent to Heatwole Road contacted Public Works regarding safety concerns on Heatwole Road. The residents said that vehicles were speeding and disregarding the stop sign, and that this was particularly unsafe due to the presence of people walking and biking on the road.

The conditions on Heatwole Road were evaluated and it was determined that Heatwole Road is not built to neighborhood street standards but rather it is designed more like an alley. The pavement width narrower than 15' at most locations is substandard for a neighborhood street. There are existing speed humps on Heatwole Road, but it is not known when they were installed.

Traffic counts were collected in July of 2020, which showed an average of over 100 vehicles per day driving on Heatwole Road. Around 80% of the traffic on Heatwole Road at Emery Street is going to or from the Harrisonburg Mennonite Church entrance. Google Maps showed Heatwole Road and the private street through the church property as the fastest way for some people in the neighborhood to reach High Street and some destinations. The traffic counts make clear that many people are using this route, despite Heatwole Road not being designed to accommodate such traffic. Additional vehicles using Heatwole Road include trash trucks, snowplows, and other service vehicles such as USPS delivery vehicles.

At the August 2020 Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission meeting, staff presented the concerns related to safety on Heatwole Road and the data that was collected. After alternatives were discussed, the Commission recommended that staff reach out to Harrisonburg Mennonite Church to ask if the church would be interested in restricting access at their entrance, as this would dramatically reduce the volume of traffic on Heatwole Road. If this was not desired by the church, the Commission recommended that staff pursue closing Heatwole Road between Sharon Street and Perry Street to vehicle traffic.

Harrisonburg Mennonite Church staff and leadership said that there are multiple reasons that the church is not interested in restricting access at the church entrance.

Closure of Heatwole Road to vehicles would be completed with collapsible bollards or a similar measure that allows for continued use of the road by people walking and biking as well as emergency vehicle access in emergency situations. Signs would be installed to identify the road as being for bicycle and pedestrian traffic only. Drivers currently using Heatwole Road would instead use Central Avenue to Pleasant Hill Road, South Avenue, or Maryland Avenue to reach their destination. These alternate routes are expected to have comparable travel times to the existing routes for neighborhood residents to get to most destinations. The segment of Heatwole Road between Perry Street and Emery Street will remain open to ensure continued safe access for service vehicles, such as trash trucks, given that neither Perry Street nor Emery Street has a cul-de-sac.



Figure 1: Aerial image of Heatwole Road and adjacent streets

Key Issues:

N/A

Environmental Impact:

N/A

Fiscal Impact:

N/A

Prior Actions:

N/A

Alternatives:

Consider additional traffic calming measures on Heatwole Road.

Take no action regarding concerns on Heatwole Road.

Community Engagement:

A letter was mailed to residents who live on Sharon Street and Middlebrook Street, as well as residents who live adjacent to Heatwole Road, regarding the proposal to close Heatwole Road between Sharon Street and Perry Street to vehicle traffic. The letter asked residents to contact staff with any concerns and staff received 5 responses to the mailing. Two respondents expressed approval for the proposed change, with one citing existing safety concerns when he walks on Heatwole Road. Two respondents expressed concerns or opposition to the change, and Public Works staff have talked to these residents about their concerns. Concerns include longer anticipated travel times with the alternate routes, potential impact to service vehicles, and increased traffic on Sharon Street east of Heatwole Road.

Recommendation:

Staff and the Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission recommend closing Heatwole Road, between Sharon Street and Perry Street, to motor vehicles.

Attachments:

1. Resolution
2. Presentation

Review: