



City of Harrisonburg

City Hall
409 South Main Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Meeting Minutes - Final Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

8:30 AM

Virtual

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission met on April 14, 2021 at 8:30am using a GoToMeeting. The meeting was not held in person due to the state of emergency related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Commission members attended by calling in using a phone or joining by audio/video on a computer. Information allowing members of the public to watch the meeting live was provided in the agenda and posted on the City website in the week prior to the meeting. Members of the public were given the opportunity to provide comments on the items discussed by phone or e-mail prior to the meeting.

All attendees introduced themselves. Mr. zumFelde said that one public comment had been received regarding the Heatwole Rd vehicle restriction and that the public comment would be read when that agenda item is presented.

Commission members present: William Blessing, Marian Lebherz, Kyle Lawrence, Chance Ebersold, John Scherpereel, Erin Yancey (Public Works), Sgt. Wayne Westfall (Police Department)

Advisory members and guests: Jakob zumFelde (Public Works), Tom Hartman (Public Works), Matt Tobia (Fire Department), Paul Helmuth (Fire Department), Doug Stader (DMV Highway Safety)

2. Heatwole Rd Vehicle Restriction

Mr. zumFelde reminded the commissioners that concerns had been raised in the summer of 2020 about vehicles going unsafe speeds on Heatwole Rd. He provided information about the context of the road and said that over 100 vehicles use the road each day, on average. He said the majority of vehicles are going to or from the entrance to Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, where drivers use the private road to reach S. High St.

Mr. zumFelde said that staff have determined that the road design, which is narrow and much more like an alley, cannot safely handle the amount of traffic that is currently present. After discussion at the last TSAC meeting, staff asked Harrisonburg Mennonite Church if they would be interested in restricting access to the church entrance. The Church said that they were not interested in such a restriction. Mr. zumFelde said that staff think that the most appropriate option at this time is to close Heatwole Rd to vehicles between Sharon St and Perry St, with it remaining open to people walking and biking. He noted that Heatwole Rd will remain open between Emery St and Perry St to allow continued use by service vehicles, such as trash trucks and snowplows. Mr. zumFelde said that collapsible bollards, or a similar measure, would be used to make the change. This will allow continued use by people walking or biking, and also maintains access for emergency vehicles in emergency situations. Drivers currently using Heatwole Rd will instead use Central Ave to Pleasant Hill Rd, South Ave or Maryland Ave.

Mr. zumFelde said that staff mailed letters to more than 80 residents, asking for comments regarding any concerns that they have with the proposal. He said that two respondents expressed approval and two respondents expressed concerns. He said that staff had communicated with one couple, Mr. and Mrs. Bopp, who live on Sharon Street, regarding their concerns. He read a statement that was provided by them as a public comment to TSAC: "Hope Heatwole Rd isn't closed. City vehicles use it frequently, including community bus. Some traffic cuts through the church parking lot but much church parking cuts through neighborhood. Speed bumps keep speed down. Please keep this road open." Mr. zumFelde said that staff reached out to the

Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation (HDPT) regarding paratransit vehicles that may use this road. HDPT said that paratransit vehicles are routed using a software that is based on Google Maps, so they may have used this segment in the past but would not see any problems with using the available alternate routes. Mr. zumFelde said that based on staff communications with Harrisonburg Mennonite Church leadership, they are generally supportive of this change.

Mr. Blessing asked how the collapsible bollards work. Mr. zumFelde said it will restrict all vehicles, but those with the appropriate key (for emergency use) will be able to collapse the bollard. Chief Tobia asked if Google Maps would be updated to show when the segment of Heatwole Rd is closed. Mr. zumFelde said that staff now know the process for requesting that update, so he would anticipate that the change will be made in Google Maps soon after the potential closure is implemented. Mr. Scherpereel asked if any data had been collected since July 2020 to see if the removal of the private road from Google Maps reduced vehicle traffic on this segment. Mr. zumFelde said that staff suspect that the residents who use this connection likely now use it without looking at Google Maps, so he doesn't think that change would have had a notable impact on traffic volumes. Mr. Lawrence asked about the width of Heatwole Rd and how it compares to the width of alleys in the City. Mr. Hartman and Sgt. Westfall said that the alleys in the City vary considerably, but are often around 10 feet wide. Heatwole Rd is about 15 feet wide. Mr. zumFelde confirmed that the concern that is being addressed at this time is related to safety on Heatwole Rd. Sgt. Westfall said that once Heatwole Rd is closed, additional monitoring of Emery St may be done, in anticipation that some traffic may re-route to Emery St to continue using the private road to S. High St.

Mr. zumFelde said that it would be appropriate for TSAC to make an official recommendation to Council, if the Commission supports the proposal to close Heatwole Rd to vehicles between Sharon St and Perry St. Mr. Blessing made a motion to recommend that Council approve this change. Ms. Lebherz seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

also aware of the major corridors in the City that have a high number of crashes, and that high-level knowledge is used in addition to the PSI analysis when identifying locations to study or projects to fund.

Sgt. Westfall said that he is increasingly relying on the crash data to identify locations for deployment of traffic officers. Additionally, he is watching trends in causes of crashes and increasing education efforts, including by having traffic safety information posted on the Police Department Facebook page. He said that he also asks his officers to consider whether there are environmental or engineering changes that may address locations where they have responded to a considerable numbers of crashes.

4. Updates on Previous Agenda Items

Ms. Lebherz thanked Public Works for adding the overnight truck restriction, as well as the residential sign (on the speed limit sign), on Vine St.

Chief Tobia said that he has been working with Public Works staff on identifying improvements on Reservoir St near the Rescue Squad.

Mr. Lawrence asked for a recap on the Sunset Heights Traffic Calming Plan and any recent updates, given the recent installation of the test speed cushion in Hillandale Park. Mr. zumFelde said that one part of Phase I of the adopted Traffic Calming Plan could not be implemented, so after all other aspects of Phase I were complete and the traffic study was conducted, staff determined that re-evaluating Phase II would be necessary. Staff have been working with the neighborhood committee regarding this re-evaluation, which included a survey of the neighborhood last summer, and the next step of public outreach will be completed in the upcoming weeks. It was confirmed that the speed cushion in Hillandale Park will work for emergency vehicles, although Ms. Yancey pointed out that the height of the cushion is likely to be adjusted for use in the neighborhood. Mr. zumFelde reminded the commissioners that a TSAC meeting will be held in May so that staff can present the proposed measures for Phase II of the Traffic Calming Plan, following public outreach to the neighborhood.

5. Other Business/Announcements

There were no items discussed as announcements or other business.

Adjournment