

City of Takoma Park Safe Roadways Committee
Monthly Meeting, May 8, 2014

MINUTES

1. The meeting convened at 7:42pm with the following committee members in attendance: Kacy Kostiuk; Joe Edgell; Liz Cattaneo; Scott Williams; Sylvia Borenstein; Ryan Morden.
2. The committee invited Terry Seamens, councilmember for Ward 4, to speak about transportation-related issues.
 - a. Terry noted that Ward 4 consists primarily of people who live in apartment buildings along Maple Avenue, as well as residents living in single-family homes on the other streets in his ward.
 - b. Terry discussed the top transportation issue of interest to his residents – the crosswalk crossing Piney Branch Road at Richie Ave. There’s a lot of pedestrian traffic with people walking to the schools, to downtown Silver Spring, and bus stops. He said drivers often ignore the crosswalk, and it’s a special concern with the school nearby. The crossing guards ask the students to cross by the school, but many go down further and cross in this location.
 - i. The community has concluded that putting in a stoplight at this location would not be beneficial because SHA advised that it would increase car traffic on Richie Ave, as it would make it easier for cars to cross. One option would be a pedestrian cross light – either with a stoplight or with lights in the crosswalk itself. SHA said they did a survey a few years ago, and it did not warrant a stoplight at that time. Terry has asked SHA to do another study. SHA has not moved forward quickly on this.
 - ii. Ryan asked whether SHA has a set of plans or rules for how to handle crosswalks and crossing safety in locations near schools. Terry said that he is not aware of anything like this.
 - iii. Ryan noted that there isn’t a sidewalk on Piney Branch between the middle school and Philadelphia Avenue. Terry said it has been discussed but has not moved forward. It would be a major project because there are geographic concerns due to the hill and grade of the location.
 - b. Another major issue that Terry said he hears about from residents is the access restrictions on the Sligo Hills neighborhood, with signs preventing cars from cutting through the neighborhood during rush hour. This was put in by the county. Terry said the council also put in access restrictions on Richie Ave and Hilltop Road so that traffic was not diverted there. They installed traffic-calming bump-outs on those streets and posted restriction signs, and then it was agreed to remove the restriction signs. The signs have been removed, and the traffic situation appears fine on those streets.
 - i. Joe asked whether Terry had a view on how effective the bump-outs were. He said he expected them to be effective because he knows that when a lot of cars park on Richie Ave for school events, it slows cars down. He was a little surprised by the design and locations, as it seemed like it adversely affected

some neighbors. He feels the bump-outs take up a lot of car-parking space, and in some cases they are not spaced close enough or far enough from driveways to leave a nearby parking space. He thinks it might have been better to have a smaller bump-out.

- ii. The issue is that a number of people are dissatisfied that there are still restriction access signs on Hilltop Road for the Sligo Hills neighborhood (which is not in Ward 4 or in the city borders). The reason the sign is there is because there is no convenient place for the county to put the sign up on county-only land. The city agreed to put the sign where it is posted. The people who use the daycare on Geneva Avenue have a hard time accessing it because of this sign. This is the second largest complaint he gets regarding traffic in his ward.
 - iii. Scott said that he has seen city police enforcing the access restrictions at those spots. Terry noted that there was an agreement with the previous police chief not to enforce restricted access for people using the daycare there. The new police chief has not agreed to this and has posted police officers at the location to give out tickets.
- c. The next issue that Terry discussed was the issue of the crosswalks on Maple Ave. They used to be painted by the city, but now they are made of “thermoplast,” which is supposed to last for the life of the road. The city installed these about 5-6 years ago, but the crosswalks are already fading and hard to see. Terry has asked the city manager to address this issue, but there has not been fast progress because the city needs to negotiate with the original contractor who installed the thermoplast and guaranteed it to last longer.
- i. Terry noted that in the previous census, Ward 4 had the lowest ownership rates of cars in the city and the most use of public transportation. Many of the residents are very dependent on bus service and use the crosswalks frequently.
 - ii. Terry said that people sometimes request a stop sign at Maple Ave and Lee Ave because there is a lot of foot traffic for the elementary schools. People have suggested a stop sign at Lee Ave or Grant Ave to make it easier for kids to cross.
 1. Joe asked whether greater enforcement would help. Terry said it can be challenging if cars are not stopping for the crosswalk. He thinks this is an area to think about. He doesn’t hear a lot of talk about it but it does come up.
- d. Regarding pedestrian routes, Terry said there is a path that cuts through the valley next to Ed Wilhelm Field, from Richie Apartments on Maple Ave and up to the middle school. It is used frequently by the middle school students. No one maintains the path at the moment because different locations of the path have different owners: the city owns it on the Maple Ave end, Park & Planning owns it by the park, and Montgomery County Public Schools owns it by the school. Any work on the path has been complicated as a result. He doesn’t feel it needs to be more than just a useful, nice path, but it’s important to note it as a pedestrian route. He recalled that the Takoma Park Master Plan identifies this as a pedestrian route. Terry said he was on the advisory committee for the county on the master plan in the late 1990s.

- e. Liz asked about issues regarding the RideOn app for real-time information for buses. She asked if there have been complaints from residents. Terry said many of the residents are not using Smartphones, but this is an issue. He has also heard complaints that the cars park so densely by the shops on Maple Ave that buses cannot put the wheelchair access ramp down at that location. Liz said the committee could mention this to the police department to follow up on.
 - f. Scott asked whether Terry had a sense of the use of the bikeshare station on Maple Ave. He said it seemed like it was used more when first installed. Now it seems like people use the bikes from the Metro station but not to the Metro station (probably because of the hill). Liz asked if there have been any outreach meetings in the apartment buildings regarding bikeshare. Terry was not aware of any but suggested there may be funding to do so.
 - g. Kacy asked whether there are general or transportation-specific concerns regarding use of English, since many of the residents in the apartment buildings are not native English speakers. Terry's wife Joyce Seamens, who was attending the meeting with him, said that she runs the food assistance program in this area and that people have not complained about this to her, but she doesn't expect they would complain even if there were an issue related to this. Each group seems to have a representative who speaks both languages, and they go together with this person when English is needed.
2. Joe noted that the meeting minutes had mistakenly included questions for Terry that had been previously on the agenda for Councilmember Seth Grimes and were not relevant to Terry's ward. He suggested striking these from the agenda. Scott moved to approve the meeting minutes with these items removed. Ryan seconded the motion. All voted to approve the minutes with a bullet points under Terry's section removed.
3. Craig Terrill, the city's media specialist, was invited to speak next.
- a. Joe said that it seems like there aren't easy ways for residents to report issues like potholes and other things. Craig said that the city is working on redoing the entire website, so the city is aware of this and knows it isn't easy to report at the moment.
 - b. Joe asked whether the city was looking at automated options and phone apps. Joe had e-mailed a list of possible apps to Craig. Craig said that the city had been looking into this and that he attended an informational meeting about the company SeeClickFix. He said he liked SeeClickFix because it seemed to have a good backend system for supporting data collection. He believes that if the city changes providers from GovQA, which is currently used, the switch should be to a company that can supply data that can be utilized by the city, city council, police department, and others. He said he's more concerned about collecting data for this purpose than the user-friendly "front end" of a program or app.
 - c. Craig suggested that the list Joe sent him should be shortened if the committee wanted to make a recommendation to the city in a more formal way. Joe noted that the list was just meant as a comprehensive list, not a final recommendation list. The main advantage for SeeClickFix, Craig said, is that it's used in DC, so it would be good for anyone who already uses it in DC. If there are any technical issues, there are people nearby who can help, whereas the others are located far away.

- d. Joe talked about how the backend is important but that if the city really wants people to use the app and report things, the app/website has to be easy to use and elegant-looking. He also noted that language barriers should be overcome if possible so that non-English speakers can report problems on it. Craig said that the city is seeking to improve access to speakers of other languages as they redesign the website, so this is something on their radar.
 - e. Joe asked by what date Craig would like to receive input from the committee. Craig said he has no deadline but would like feedback by the end of the summer.
 - f. Craig said that the analytics for the website has now been collected for a full quarter. He thinks the footprint for who is using it right now would probably be similar to who would use an app or site to report transportation-related issues. The mobile access right now is about 25 percent.
 - g. Craig pointed out that there might be strong institutional desire to keep the existing vendor, GovQA, because it is used extensively in other departments, like the housing department. He noted that the existing version on the website is 5-10 years old, so if something new were adopted even with the existing vendor, it would look different and would likely be improved.
 - h. Ryan asked if Craig knew how many people watch the city council meetings online. Craig said he was not sure offhand.
 - i. Sylvia asked if something like SeeClickFix could be used to easily extract data. Craig felt it was pretty well thought-out from a data-gathering standpoint.
4. Tim Male, councilmember for Ward 2, spoke regarding transportation issues and questions.
- a. Tim answered Ryan's earlier question about the number of people who watch the city council meetings online. He said about 100-150 on average access the video through the city website, but the total number might be higher if the city TV viewers were included.
 - b. Tim's first city activity was serving on the Safe Roadways Committee. He said he has generally tried to make transit issues a priority. He's lived in various locations in Takoma Park, including o Maple Ave, Carroll Ave, and now Woodland Ave.
 - c. Tim addressed the issue of the bus stop location across of the coop at the intersection of Carroll Ave and 410. He noted that the stop would not be built today if a new route were put it. It should be put after the light and not in a T intersection. It also causes large traffic backup.
 - i. Tim said that he feels really strongly about the need to move/eliminate this bus stop. The bus stopping there causes cars to zoom around, often when the light is red. The crossing guards and police have noted safety issues, and the hospital has agreed that this is a problem because it causes issues for ambulances accessing the hospital from this direction.
 - ii. Joe asked whether there have been accidents related to this issue. Tim said that he is not aware of any but would like to prevent them.
 - iii. The bus bay made it safer in the past, but it's gone. From what Tim can tell from the current bus guidelines, it appears there isn't a space large enough for the buses to pull over based on their regulations, so recreating a bus bay in that location does not seem like an option.

- iv. Tim noted that he's advocating for this personally not directly as a councilmember. He said there is a crosswalk planned from the coop to the gas station, so he believes a great relocation for the bus stop would be in front of the gas station.
 - v. Kacy asked if Tim was aware that the bus stop for traffic going in the opposite direction on Carroll Ave at the intersection in front of the firehouse had been moved from approximately the middle of the block to right at the crosswalk by the stoplight at that intersection. Tim was not aware of this but said he would check it out.
 - vi. Scott asked who makes the decisions about the bus stop locations. Tim said that there is a board of engineers for both RideOn and WMATA buses. Since that location is a stop for both buses, they can defer to each other, resulting in inaction. He noted that one option proposed was to move the bus stop back further, but there's no sidewalk or space at that location, so this does not seem feasible.
- d. Tim addressed the issue of sidewalks being built and ADA work on the sidewalks. He noted that the sidewalk on Carroll Ave from the hospital to the edge of Takoma Park is in bad shape. Because these are along state highways, the city has not prioritized repair or ADA-compliant improvements. The arrangement with SHA is that the city is responsible for maintaining those sidewalks (SHA builds new ones and expands existing ones). Tim feels these are highly used sidewalks and should be a priority. The city is on a five-year plan to replace almost all sidewalks for ADA compliance, but the sidewalks on SHA-controlled roads are not part of the plan.
- i. Tim said that sidewalks are also planned for several other locations in ward 2 that do not currently have them.
 - ii. He noted that it's a two-year process to get any sidewalks built. He feels it could be less work if there was a way to change to a compressed schedule. He thinks it would help to focus on quickly finishing one project rather than extending the schedule as it currently is.
 - iii. Joe asked if there's any interest in the city council in revisiting the policy for requests for sidewalks. Tim said he doesn't think there's much interest in changing it. The city's approach is to do the planning one year and the building the next year. They tend to get 70-90 percent support in surveys of residents of the block and adjacent blocks when conducting surveys prior to installing a sidewalk.
 - iv. Tim said some money from the Safe Routes to School has been used for some sidewalks.
- e. Tim said the MOU was finished last year clarifying what SHA and the city will do regarding maintenance and infrastructure on 410. He is concerned that there's more and more development on New Hampshire Ave and in Old Takoma, which he thinks will continue to stress 410 through the city. There will continue to be more and more cars.
- i. Joe asked about bike access on 410 or a bike lane. Historic Takoma opposed this due to concerns it would be converted into a car lane. Joe thinks there is higher chance that another car lane could be added if there isn't a bike lane.

- ii. Tim said he thinks it looks unlikely that another lane would be added for cars. Male said he supports a bike lane on 410, but it's very difficult – the infrastructure exists but doesn't meet the needs of the area nowadays, and there are limited options for improving this.
- f. Joe asked if there are things Tim would like the committee to focus on. Tim said he wished that the city council and committees had a closer relationship and met each year with a targeted question for the committee and council to work on. He welcomes communication between the council and committee. He said he would like help with improving maintenance/repair of sidewalks along SHA highways. He thinks taking pictures of the problems and perhaps sending a position paper to the city council asking them to prioritize these sidewalks would be helpful. He also welcomes ideas the committee could share from other places that are progressive and trying new things. He noted that the challenge is finding things to do on streets that are not state highways, since so many of the city's main streets are SHA-owned.
 - i. Joe asked whether the city could request that these highways be reassigned as city streets rather than state highways. This has happened with Flower Ave, which was transferred to the city. He is not sure that other streets would be transferred by SHA, particularly not 410, but possibly Carroll Ave.
 - ii. Joe asked whether the recommendations the Safe Roadways Committee has made to the city council have been useful. Tim said the recommendations have been useful, but it's hard to put them into context and get follow-up in terms of adding future items to the agenda and moving forward with budget planning. He suggested that the committee follow up on its recommendations and seek ways to keep the topics active, possibly asking how these priorities have been reflected in the budget.
 - iii. Liz asked if Tim thinks there are alternative revenue streams to tap for sidewalk development. Tim said there is plenty of money in the city budget. It doesn't seem to be an issue of a tight budget. More of the speed camera money has been shifted to support police positions but used to be almost entirely for sidewalks; there's still a lot of funding available.
 - iv. Sylvia asked about the bus stop on 410 again. Tim noted that he's not sure that there is a lot of will to make the change. Historic Takoma supports removing the bus stop. WMATA and RideOn seem resistant to making changes.
 - 1. Joe asked whether Male's petition was to move the bus stop to be in front of the gas station or to eliminate it altogether. Tim said RideOn opposed moving in front of the gas station because drivers would have a hard time pulling out into traffic. It would be fine for the WMATA buses because they are turning right at the next intersection. He also noted that there's talk of redoing the entire intersection at the Takoma Junction, so that might be a time when more support would be present for a change in the bus stop location.
 - 2. Liz asked what the path forward would be if the committee wanted to support the movement of the bus stop. Joe said the committee would

make a recommendation to the city council, and Tim added that individuals could sign the petition separate from the committee.

5. At this point, the committee returned to its meeting business after hearing from the invited speakers. There were no members of the public present, so there were no public comments.
6. The meeting minutes for April were reviewed and finalized. Ryan moved to approve the minutes. Liz seconded the motion. All present voted to approve the minutes.
7. Ryan moved to extend the meeting by 5 minutes. Kacy seconded the motion. All present voted to extend the meeting.
8. Ryan reported briefly on his upcoming meeting with Sande, who works for the Montgomery County bikeshare program. He said he will bring ideas to share and would like to advocate for making Takoma Park a “lab” for testing out any new ideas they’d like to consider using in other places. Ryan said it would be nice to eventually write a position paper related to bikeshare in general. He asked to put this on the agenda for the next meeting.
9. Joe reminded the committee that the meeting dates have been changed starting in July and afterwards to be the second Tuesday of the month, rather than Thursday. The November meeting will be the second Thursday because of the Tuesday holiday.
 - a. Kacy noted that many of the committee members will have their terms expire at the end of June. The four who have only one-year terms are: Sylvia, Sheryl, Kacy, and Scott. Joe asked these members to think about whether they want to continue on the committee for a two-year term. He also asked one person to volunteer to change from a one-year to two-year term so that the number of members on each term schedule will be more balanced. Committee members will e-mail to resolve these logistical questions.
10. Joe asked about the progress of on the position paper regarding traffic-calming measures. There was a brief discussion about the e-mail exchange and plans for the paper. Liz said that she would send all members a copy of the most recent draft of the paper and ask for final input. She suggested aiming for no more than 10 days before finalizing and sending it.
11. The meeting agenda for the June meeting was briefly discussed. Ryan asked for some time to speak about bikeshare and his meeting with Sande. There will also be two invited speakers at the meeting.
12. The meeting was adjourned at 9:07pm.