

**City of Takoma Park Safe Roadways Committee**  
**Monthly Meeting, June 12, 2014**

**MINUTES**

1. The meeting convened at 7:33pm with the following members in attendance: present in person were Kacy Kostiuk; Joe Edgell; and Scott Williams; present via phone were Liz Cattaneo and Ryan Morden.
2. Housekeeping:
  - a. Scott moved to approve the May meeting minutes; Kacy seconded the motion. All present voted to approve the minutes.
  - b. Scott suggested updating the meeting agenda so that Lucy Neher spoke before Fred Schultz because Lucy was present at the meeting and Fred had not yet arrived. Everyone agreed to this change.
3. Lucy Neher, director of Takoma Park's Safe Routes to School Program, was invited to speak.
  - a. Lucy said that the Safe Routes to School Program was born out of the Safe Roadways Committee itself when the committee asked the city council to apply for a grant that started the program in 2006.
  - b. Lucy has been working on the program for the past 7 years. She feels the program has grown into something that addresses necessary issues in the city. She said she has tried new things and made changes as needed.
  - c. Lucy discussed the progress on a contraflow bike lane on Grant Avenue. She said that the Safe Routes Program constructed the berm at this location in the past year because the area was an ongoing concern for safety and appearance issues. A few things have not been done yet, but it is mostly finished.
    - i. The traffic pattern is greatly improved from the past. Arrival and departure has greatly improved. The berm still needs to be landscaped; the original funds and plan called for plants that were not easily available and were costly, so they will change the plan.
    - ii. The contraflow bike lane is "in operation" even though it hasn't been painted yet. Lucy said that people are using it, and the police knows there is a contraflow lane there, so there is no enforcement of ticketing for cyclists going against traffic. She reported that it has been difficult to find a contractor to paint the contraflow lane in thermoplastic because it is a very small area; Daryl Braithwaite has had trouble finding a contractor to do this because they typically want bigger jobs. However, many people are using the lane already.
  - d. Lucy also discussed the survey that the Safe Routes to School Program conducts each year. Twice every year, as part of grant compliance, the program distributes the same survey to households. The survey is written by the organization in North Carolina, so Lucy has limited input on creating questions.
    - i. Lucy said she has moved from doing the survey on paper to doing it entirely online. The teachers still fill out a tally sheet on paper.

- ii. There haven't been as many responses online as on paper in the past, but Lucy expects the rate to go up in the future.
- iii. The question have been the same for the past 7 years, so Lucy said it's possible some parents have filled out the same survey 14 times (twice each year). This is annoying, but it's necessary for the grant. The Takoma Park program is one of the few programs in the country that has completed the survey every time.
- iv. The survey is not particularly useful to Lucy because she cannot use it to compare the first year and this past year to show an accurate representation of how the program has helped or made changes. She said she does not believe the survey gives her a good representation that allows her to see how the program is affecting safety. It might be possible to compare a beginning-of-the-year and end-of-the-year survey, but she has not found this particularly useful either.
- v. The response rate varies year to year. It's probably about 10-25% on average.
- vi. One question is about issues that cause parents to not allow children to walk or bike to school. Lucy noted that up to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, many parents walk with their kids. In middle school, it seems like parents do not walk with their kids as often, but the number of parents reporting that they don't want their children walking alone increases.
- vii. The comments section of the survey has been useful to Lucy.
  - 1. There are a lot of comments related to the crossing guards – almost entirely positive. Parents have expressed appreciation for having crossing guards at the Takoma Junction location since these were added recently.
  - 2. Some parents complain about the late starting time of schools; if they have to be at work earlier, they don't walk their kids to school.
  - 3. People ask for a light and crossing guard at various locations where they do not currently exist. She noted that the intersection of Lincoln and Carroll Ave is the one she hears the most about on Carroll Ave.
- viii. Many people want a walking school bus, and Lucy supports this, but it has been difficult to get started. A walking school bus is a system where a group of parents works together so that there is always one parent walking a group of kids to school but parents rotate so that no one does it every day. Many informal walking school bus systems are happening organically, but Lucy said she has not been able to successfully start up a more formal system. However, the most recently survey requested this a fair bit. There are online sites to help parents coordinate with each other to create walking school buses; one of these is "School Pool." Lucy said this seems like a useful system but hasn't been used much by parents in Takoma Park. Trust seems to be a feature of informally created groups because parents know each other and trust each other; they may be more hesitant getting a list online.
- ix. Lucy will leave a copy of the survey for the committee to review. If the committee is interested in comparing results from multiple surveys, she can create a report.

- e. Fred Schultz asked Lucy what the overall goal of the Safe Routes to School Program is: to encourage walking over automobile transportation? Lucy said the program aimed to increase walking or biking rather than being driven or riding the bus. He also asked if both parents and/or children are the ones who are fearful of walking to school; Lucy said it's usually the parents. Lucy suggested they are probably concerned about "predators" and being hit by a car.
  - f. Lucy said that if people aren't walking, they may complain that they do not have sidewalks. Joe asked if anyone has said "we don't need sidewalks." Lucy said she has not heard this, but there are reasons that people oppose sidewalks, including not wanting to maintain them if they are on their property and fearing an increase in crime due to more foot traffic in the area.
  - g. Kacy asked if the children themselves are surveyed in addition to the parents. Lucy said that the children are not formally surveyed but that she interacts with them a lot and gets feedback in this way. The kids seem to be very eager to learn and seem to know a lot about road safety. What she hears from the kids is that they want to walk to school – even if their parents aren't able to walk with them. Sometimes she encourages kids to share what they learn with their parents so that the parents can be educated about safety as well (i.e. crossing at a crosswalk, etc.).
    - i. Joe asked whether Lucy has asked if most kids ride on the sidewalks or on the streets. She has discussed this with the police and has had questions from parents. She does not discourage kids from riding on the sidewalk because it seems safer for them at young ages. The police have said they don't usually enforce this law for children.
  - h. Joe asked whether Lucy has approached the national program to see if they would allow for the addition of local questions to the survey so that Lucy could add questions she is interested in. She said she spoke with them about it once a few years ago but could ask again. Joe noted that if she collected useful data that we could use, this would also help the committee make recommendations. Lucy said she is happy to partner with the committee if desired.
4. Fred Schultz, councilmember for Ward 6, spoke to the committee.
- a. Fred said that creation of new sidewalks has been an issue in his ward but that the "controversy" seems to have simmered down over the past year. He thinks it got to be a hot topic because there was uncertainty of how the locations for sidewalks were going to be selected and in what order. There was actually no policy in the past because until 2009, the city didn't have the funds to build new sidewalks except in small bits. The ADA access law has resulted in increased funds for converting existing sidewalks to ADA-accessible sidewalks. Monies from speed camera tickets have also increased the capacity to build more sidewalks.
    - i. The city council realized that there was controversy related to this. This is when the policy was adopted (in 2010 or 2011). The first part of the city to get new sidewalks from the speed camera funds was Ward 6. In summer 2012, the majority of those sidewalks were built.
    - ii. Joe noted that there was a spot where no sidewalk was installed for a portion of land. Fred said that this empty spot will be filled with sidewalk but is empty

because the city is going to use flexipave, a new product designed to be porous, so that it will protect the nearby trees at this location. It's durable and allows for rain drainage. Now there is a gap in the sidewalk where it will be put. Kacy asked if this was the same material used on Niagara Court off of Carroll Ave; Fred said he thinks it is a different material designed specifically for foot-traffic and trees rather than cars, but he does not know for sure.

- iii. Joe asked about the sidewalk policy and whether the committee might be able to encourage the council to make the policy broader and more holistic. Fred said the policy has been in place for a few years and that all sidewalks built since that time has been following the new policy very carefully. He thinks things have calmed down a little and that the Safe Roadways Committee would be a good place for an evaluation of the policy to see if it's too cumbersome. At the time of its creation, the council was trying to mollify people on both sides of the debate.
  - iv. Fred said that in the past, the city hired a consultant to look at every street in the city to see whether sidewalks were appropriate and where they should be built from an engineering point of view (i.e. land width and grade of the land), and they rank ordered different locations as priority and lesser priority areas. When the survey was finished, there would be discontinuous construction where a long street would be high priority in some parts and low priority in other parts, which does not work because sidewalks need to be contiguous. From an engineering point of view, this may be logical, but it doesn't say much about demand for sidewalks. This forced the city council and public works department to set aside the study and make the overriding consideration be where the demand and need are for sidewalks. Joe pointed out that it might be "chicken or the egg" because it's possible there isn't pedestrian traffic if there aren't sidewalks.
  - v. The selection of locations was made "demand-driven" and a policy was derived based on this. The city council felt that it was necessary to have the city staff or residents initiate a request for a sidewalk and then go through two votes so that the residents had a large say in what happened.
- b. Fred discussed speed bumps next. He is concerned about these because there seems to be a lot of discrepancy in how they are built around the city. Fred believes there is a wide range of different heights, widths, and slopes for speed bumps throughout the city. Some speed bumps are painful on people's backs, and others are so low that they have no effect at all because you don't need to slow down for them.
- i. The Montgomery County Pedestrian Safety Committee has advocated and recommended to the county use of the "split speed bump" which allows two tracks in the middle for emergency vehicles. Fred very strongly encouraged the committee to make this a recommendation to the city council. The recommendation to the county has not made an impact, it seems. Arlington County has installed this type of speed bump. In addition to being good for emergency vehicles, it also helps for cyclists.

- ii. Fred said the speed bumps on Sligo Creek Parkway seem to be about perfect – they slow people down to the speed limit but don't create too much of a bump.
    - iii. Joe noted that speed bumps seem to be popular in the city because they are cheap and can be seen as "doing something," even if ineffective.
  - c. Fred noted that some residents have requested the addition of a left turn signal at the stoplight at the New Hampshire Ave intersection with Erskine and Glenside. Some residents think this will be necessary after the New Hampshire Ave bridge is finished. Fred said he's not a traffic engineer and does not know if this would make the intersection safer/better, or not.
- 5. Scott needed to leave the meeting at 8:30pm, after Fred finished speaking.
- 6. Kacy briefly reported on the condition of the sidewalks on Carroll Ave near Washington Adventist University. She said she will check with Daryl Braithwaite to find out which sidewalks the state and city have planned to repair/replace when they do construction on the bridge.
- 7. Ryan reported that he heard the presentation about the bridge construction by the State Highway Association at the recent council meeting. Joe recommended that committee members watch the video of this portion of the council meeting.
- 8. Liz left the meeting at this point. A quorum was lost at 8:45pm. No official votes were taken after this point in the meeting.
- 9. Joe reported on committee reapplications. Kacy submitted an application for a 2-year term. Ryan and Joe one more year left in their terms. Ryan noted that Liz was going to ask Erkin to reach out to people who attended the bike meeting and encourage them consider applying for the committee.
- 10. Ryan suggested that it might be helpful to have "interim" meetings one other time per month – only for one hour or so and to focus on housekeeping like setting goals and focusing on future priorities. Joe said that the final two councilmembers will be speaking at the July meeting and that it would be good to have this strategic discussion during the committee's August meeting.
- 11. Ryan said has a list of notes from his meeting with the Montgomery County Bikeshare program and will e-mail these to the committee members.
- 12. The meeting adjourned at 9pm.