

Safe Roadways Committee

Minutes, June 20, 2017

The meeting convened at 7:33. Attending were Kacy Kostiuk (chair, Ward 3), Mike Moore (Ward 6), Frank Demarais (Ward 5), Kate Phillips (Ward 4), Stephanie Kaufman (Ward 3), and Mark Sherman (Ward 3, taking minutes).

Also attending was Public Works Director Daryl Braithwaite, as a guest of the committee, and Ian Barclay, as a member of the public.

AGENDA ITEM 3: Daryl Braithwaite

Kostiuk invited Braithwaite to share her thoughts on how the committee can better work with her agency, including whether to go directly to her on certain matters rather than go to the council.

Braithwaite said she would welcome a little more interaction with the committee, and that the involvement of staff in such bodies tends to ebb and flow. Sometimes, staff are heavily involved, but there also have been times when the council has directed staff not to be involved, so as to preserve an independent, outside voice.

Nonetheless, she said, we would “both benefit from having a closer relationship.”

The agency’s activities, she said, are largely driven by the budget process. For example, she is currently supervising the alteration of sidewalks on city streets to make them ADA-compliant, and after that will work with the State Highway Administration to make similar changes on state highways.

Street resurfacing is also coming up, based on a seven-year inventory process, pavement conditions having last been assessed two years ago.

In addition, she is working on converting lights on wooden poles to LEDs as well as a plan to convert 26 of the historic lights in Old Town to LEDs as well.

New sidewalks are being put in on Lincoln from Jackson to Elm, using Safe Routes to School funds. Two other new sidewalks also are in process, including on Glenside. There also is a traffic-calming request pending on Kansas Ave.

Braithwaite then described the breadth of the department’s portfolio, comprising several divisions, including a division that handles 85 percent of repairs to city vehicles; the Right of Way Division, which handles city parks, among other duties; and sanitation.

Key staff include the City Engineer, the Special Projects Manager, the Construction Manager, and the Sustainability Manager, and the Urban Forest Manager, formerly known as the city arborist.

The new Urban Forest Manager, Jan Van Zutphen, began work a week before the hail storm a couple months ago that took down a lot of trees and spurred requests to take down even more. Permit requests are currently triple their usual level, Braithwaite said.

The tree ordinance was recently amended, she said, to give people pre-planting credit if they know in, say, five years, they will want to remove a tree.

Her department works closely with the city planning department. Changes in the Takoma Gateway area, for example, at Ethan Allen and New Hampshire, began in the planning department and then wrapped in her agency. The two agencies meet quarterly to dovetail their projects.

Sustainability projects include a sustainability catalog, matters related to energy efficiency and green homes, and a forthcoming car-free challenge.

Certain parks in the city are operated by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, she said, including Opal Daniels, where a trail to Lincoln Avenue is being upgraded. Other such parks include Silver Spring Intermediate Neighborhood Park, Hillwood Manor, and the Gazebo on Carroll Avenue and the adjoining Takoma Urban Park.

MNCPPC also is creating new playgrounds at Sligo Mill Overlook Park and at the Colby Avenue Playground.

Kostiuk asked about relations with SHA and how best to connect with that agency. Braithwaite said her approach is “any and all,” meaning whoever can form a relationship with someone there, by all means, go ahead and try to do that.

Sherman asked about sidewalk quality, including the rapid deterioration of new sidewalks in many locations.

Braithwaite said there is a 1-year warranty on sidewalks — any problems are likely to show up within the first year. However, the problems with the durability of new sidewalks seem to be statewide— something just isn’t working the way it should.

As a partial measure, the city is no longer laying in new sidewalks after October, so the material has time to cure before a freeze. In addition, a hydroponic coating is being applied, a sealant, in hopes of getting more longevity.

Phillips said the problem seems to stem in part from the use of aggregate with flat, hard edges. Barclay echoed that comment, saying contractors are using crushed rock rather than stream-bed material.

Sherman asked if there was an opportunity to bring Braithwaite or a surrogate to committee meetings more often, say, quarterly. Braithwaite said she would be happy to do that— sending, for example, the construction manager.

Barclay asked about the new, very bright light at Takoma and Philadelphia avenues, including the fact that it is on 24/7. Braithwaite agreed the light was too bright. It’s not a PEPCO light, she said. It was not clear from the discussion what if anything could be done about it—it sits on top of a traffic signal and apparently belongs to SHA.

The light on Veterans Park also is on 24/7, Barclay said, perhaps because the photocell is covered by vegetation.

AGENDA ITEM 1: Housekeeping

The agenda was approved without dissent and the minutes for April and May were approved without dissent.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Public comment

Barclay said it's important to allow bikes on sidewalks so that cyclists who are hit in crosswalks have the possibility of recovery. However, he said, he doesn't appreciate it when cyclists whiz past him on the sidewalk at 30 mph. He recommended signage to the effect of: Be attentive to pedestrians.

The council will hold a work session on bikes-on-sidewalks on July 12.

Moore said the committee's position is that the city should default to county law, which permits bikes on sidewalks.

Sherman asked if pedestrians have the right of way vis-a-vis other sidewalk users, such as cyclists.

Phillips said they do, including on hiker-biker trails.

AGENDA ITEM 4: Carroll Avenue Bridge

Demarais reported that the bridge is fully reopened and the lights that served the detour at Maple and Sligo Creek Parkway have been removed. Meanwhile, the temporary stop signs at Maplewood and Maple and at Maplewood and Flower will become permanent. Some confusion caused, he said, by the removal of the stop sign at SLP and Old Carroll— drivers hesitant to blast through.

Braithwaite said, in response to a question, that there is a shared bikeway on the bridge, and in response to another question, that the Sunday closings will not resume until the contractors are completely done, perhaps in another month.

The bridge was finished ahead of schedule, Braithwaite said, generating a bonus for the contractor.

There was some discussion of the ongoing work to create a new bridge over Sligo Creek where the trail approaches Piney Branch from the south.

Sherman asked about the short-stature lights on the bridge, saying they seem too bright and too far to the blue end of the spectrum.

Braithwaite said the issues are Kelvin value and lumens. Notes are not clear on what if anything she said she could do on that.

Kostiuk said there are so many of the short-stature lights, spaced very close to each other. Braithwaite said her guess is that it was a matter of following state specifications, which may not have reflected the particular needs of this bridge. The lights are not for the roadway, she said—they're for pedestrians.

Sherman asked about the larger issue: Who decides what kind of lights go on state highways, such as the six in Takoma Park— do we have any leverage?

Braithwaite said we have no leverage and that the only reason SHA might consult with the city about what type of lights to install was if we had a light ordinance— not that that would trump SHA's authority, but at least they would probably consult the city.

Braithwaite added that as a consequence of the plans for converting to LEDs for the lights on wooden poles, she has an inventory, from PEPCO, showing each and every light the city is paying for, including not just electricity used but an operations and maintenance fee. It is, she said, the first time the city can see what it's paying for.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Bikes on sidewalks

Kostiuk said she is still working on a draft recommendation to the council and will circulate the draft for email vote later in the week. She is hoping to at least have more than the standard three minutes to present the committee's recommendations to the council on July 12.

Braithwaite said most sidewalks are 5 feet wide, but the question now arises, whether more than 5 feet is needed in some places.

Barclay discussed the issue of vegetation encroaching on sidewalk, and Sherman shared a picture of such a situation at 7136 Carroll, where between a utility pole and the spill-over vegetation from the property, which has no retaining wall, there is almost no room to pass.

Sherman asked who handles such matters. Braithwaite said enforcement of width clearance, as well as height clearance (7 feet), are the province of the Neighborhood Services Division, now housed within the police department, and that a request could be submitted to MYTKPK, the city's service-request app.

AGENDA ITEM 6: LED streetlights (minutes taken by Phillips)

Sherman has been discussing the conversion of ~1500 city streetlights and testified for the City Council last week against the conversion of the 26 downtown historical lamps with sodium vapor lamps.

A single sample lamp has been installed in the historic light on Columbia, near the bench adjacent to Long and Foster.

If the goal of maintaining the historic nature of the Downtown Area means maintains the look and feel of the historic times, then the lighting fixtures and lights during the day AND night must fit the tone of the light during the historic period of which they were installed.

New lighting technology with LED has surpassed Induction lighting, and due to the directionality of LED tech, we will no longer use 'Milk Glass' in the fixtures, and use clear globes instead. - Braithwaite

The council has approved the change in the historical lights, and ordered that the sample light be established. 2700K and 3000K lights are being reviewed. Lights are from Hadco/Philips, and are dimmable to 25%. The public has been invited to comment on the two lights; the 3000K light is the current light. The fixture is 65w, and set at default.

Sherman invited public works to post a sign in order to advise the public that this is sample light, and should be invited to comment. Daryl agreed to take this under advisement.

Sherman wished to address this as a pedestrian issue due to the perceived impact of the lighting and invited the SRC to investigate this aspect of the impact of the new lighting on the public.

Note by Sherman:

The existing sample has 10 field-adjustable wattage settings, ranging from 17.5 watts (Level 1) to 70.5 watts (Level 10). The factory setting is Level 10. The second sample will be installed across the street on Columbia in a few weeks.

AGENDA ITEM 7: Traffic calming

Kostiuk said she was disappointed at the council's reactions to the committee's traffic-calming recommendations. There was further discussion of this point, but the secretary has no further notes.

AGENDA ITEM 8: Next month's meeting

The secretary has no notes on what if anything was said regarding next month's meeting.