MINUTES
City Council Public Safety Committee

Tuesday, April 2, 2024 – 3:30 PM
City Hall Administration Conference Room

Members Present:	Aaron Baker, Chair, Council Member Mac Morrow, Vice-Chair, Council Member Kevin Gallo, Citizen Member Mayor Mauren Copelof, Ex-Officio Member
Staff Present	Wilson Hooper, City Manager Tom Jordan, Police Chief Bobby Cooper, Fire Chief Alex Shepherd, Assistant to the City Manager Becky McCann, Communications Coordinator
Guests:	Linda Gallo, Monica Driscoll, Billy Parrish, Dawn Altman, Carolyn Brewer, Debbie English

A. Welcome & Call to Order

Committee Chair Aaron Baker welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:34 PM.

B. Certification of Quorum

Assistant to the City Manager Alex Shepherd certified that a quorum was present.

C. **Approval of Agenda**

Motion by Mr. Morrow, seconded by Mr. Gallo to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

D. Approval of Minutes

1. **January 22, 2024**

2. **February 26, 2024**

Mr. Cooper and Mr. Gallo provided minor revisions to the minutes. Motion by Mr. Morrow, seconded by Mr. Gallo to approve the minutes from January 22, 2024 and February 26, 2024 as revised. The motion passed unanimously.

E. Update on Transportation Working Group

Mr. Hooper mentioned that in following up on a request from the Mayor to install a speed capture sign on Parkview Dr, we were initially reluctant because it's a State road. However, Ms. Eastland from the RPO assured us that NCDOT does not have a problem with law enforcement agencies putting up signs because we are responsible for patrolling it. He said that we are waiting for verification from an NCDOT official to ensure we can post our speed capture sign. Mr. Hooper mentioned that Ms. Eastland informed him that it would be a good idea to start collecting data from Parkview Dr for two reasons. The first reason is that it was previously included in an STIP but was removed due to funding reductions. By obtaining up-to-date data, it may have the opportunity to qualify for State funding again. He said the second reason is to see if the new three-way stop at Parkview Dr and E French Broad has had any effect on speeds.

Mr. Baker asked if the State accepts data that we have obtained. That seems unusual for the State.

Mr. Hooper said they probably wouldn't accept it, but if they saw something interesting, they would collect their own data.

Mr. Gallo asked if Mr. Hooper knew what was recommended in the original STIP.

Mr. Hooper said he did not and asked Mr. Morrow if he knew.

Mr. Morrow mentioned he believed it was the intersection at Park Ave/Parkview Ave/Morningside Dr.

Mr. Hooper said it probably also includes sidewalks in that area as well because there are certain stretches where there are none at the moment. He said next we discussed the Greenville Hwy/Main St/Wilson Rd intersection. Both Ms. Eastland and Ms. Staudt think that if we can collect more data on pedestrians and traffic speeds, it might get picked up by the State. He said the State's funding is shifting away from large projects to smaller maintenance projects, and since this is a smaller project, its chances of being picked up have increased. Lastly, we discussed how we could approach the State to make improvements to R-5800 as a trail segment by widening the sidewalk. He said it is currently not too late to improve some minor items that make it more accommodating. However, it is not finalized, and we are probably going to have to hire Traffic Planning and Design to design some of these improvements. Mr. Hooper said one thing we discussed was that the ADA warning pads were only about four feet wide, but the sidewalk was about ten feet wide at the crosswalk, so why not make the warning pads larger.

Mr. Cooper mentioned that those pads are for the visually impaired.

Ms. McCann said the reason why it may not be as wide is that the visually impaired individual can use it to see where they are supposed to go and guide them in the middle of the crosswalk.

Mr. Baker asked if there is any kind of official Council action that would give that request more weight.

Mr. Gallo asked if it's a candidate for the flashing warning signs.

Mr. Morrow said you cannot put that in front of the gas station due to ingress and egress.

Mr. Baker mentioned that it's important that we are currently using this section as a trail, and it's not as if we are taking a non-existent trail section and then trying to fit a trail.

Mr. Hooper informed the committee that the only way for it to carry more weight is to present it in a way that is acceptable to them.

Mr. Morrow asked what percentage of the design has been done for R-5800.

Mr. Hooper said probably 90%.

Mr. Baker asked was there a reason that NCDOT, in their design process, didn't figure out that our trail crosses the road, and was there a reason that it wasn't part of their design.

Mr. Morrow mentioned that yes, they have gone back and forth several times trying to move the trail away from the intersection, and now they want to move it more towards the creek.

Mr. Hooper said as Ms. Eastland and I were looking at the trail crossing on the map, we said the trail crossing would have made much more sense at the roundabout near Allison Rd and Strauss Parkway. However, because of the cemetery, we are unable to.

Mr. Baker asked about parking on Railroad Ave.

Mr. Hooper said we discussed the sightlines and intersection, but I wanted to get clarification from you all first. He said the intersection is not appropriately constructed because the stop bar is so far back due to the trail crossing at this intersection. Mr. Hooper asked Mr. Baker if he was asking for parking along the street.

Mr. Baker said Railroad Ave has a wide spot, so I would like to see if we can implement parking in the section that is widest along Railroad Ave. He also

mentioned that we have a turning lane that could be removed because it is not a major intersection. Mr. Baker also mentioned that parallel-parked cars could act as a traffic calming measure as well.

Mr. Morrow mentioned the flashing signs that are at Whitmire and that those signs need to be moved because they are not supposed to be installed so close to the stop sign.

F. Probart St. Traffic Calming Final Report

Mr. Hooper informed the committee that the one piece of information not included in the report is that our traffic engineer recommended proceeding initially with only steps one and two (of three) because they prefer taking incremental steps and then evaluating their effects before taking drastic measures. However, staff were sensitive to the input received from the public and wanted to ensure that we weren't taking a half swing but rather a full swing at this, so we included step three to install speed cushions. Our proposal was based on data collected by us and the State, and we ran this through the guidelines published by the Federal Highway Administration on what kinds of traffic calming are appropriate for roads of that speed, volume, and width. The items recommended were signs and vertical deflections, of which speed cushions are a type. I cannot tell you where the speed cushions will go if Council approves their funding, but I can tell you that they will be placed around 500-600 feet apart, with the one near Railroad and Probart serving as the anchor and the first to be placed. They cannot be placed near an intersection or driveway because vehicles must be able to become fully square with the road upon exiting a side street. The speed cushion is made of a plastic composite material that doesn't blend into the road and would be accompanied by warning signs. They are temporary, but we shouldn't move them because they will damage the road and lead to its deterioration, but they can be removed if a snowstorm comes so our snowplows won't ruin them. I am asking for the committee to endorse the recommendation and refer it to Council and to approve the deviation from the traffic calming policy, sending it to Council during the budget workshop rather than the regular meeting. If approved by Council, it will require a change to the traffic schedule to add a three-way stop, and staff will make the appropriate hearings for that.

Mr. Morrow asked how long the traffic engineers would want to evaluate each step before installing speed cushions.

Mr. Hooper said he wasn't sure, but it would be within the next budget year, and we don't want to collect data right after each traffic calming step is installed because we want to give drivers enough time to adjust.

Mr. Gallo asked about the report and resolution, mentioning the beginning point mid-block between England St and Oaklawn St and terminating near Holcombe Rd. He agreed that it needs to go that far, but he knows there are concerns that it's not

City-maintained after around Hampton Cir. However, he recalled reading several comments specifically from the Director of the Mountain Sun Community School requesting that the cushion extend to the music center, as there are residents, including the music center, in the city limits, and the measures should at least extend down to Holcombe Rd.

Mr. Hooper said we can make that case to the State, but we must meet their standards before we can install them further down the road.

Mr. Gallo asked if the State would most likely not oppose it if the city was willing to pay for it.

Mr. Hooper stated I cannot say that for sure. Their standards for installing traffic calming measures are much higher than ours and require significant data, engineering, and a need.

Mr. Gallo said I would like to see all the traffic calming measures implemented as soon as possible. He said traffic speed slowed down when the monitoring devices were up, but as soon as they were removed, there was no stopping, as you can see from the mayor's email. He said short of having police there 24/7, which is unrealistic, the speed cushions are the only solution because signs are ignored. They will hopefully prevent motorists from jumping the curb and endangering pedestrians.

Ms. Altman added that with the music center opening for the summer and the kids walking from the center to town to do their laundry, there will be a lot more foot traffic in that section, and it would be horrible if someone had their kids here and they got injured.

Mr. Gallo mentioned that last year, foreign students were waiting to cross Rosenwald, and they were ready to walk into the road, and the sign says cars only have to stop if someone is in the crosswalk, and they have no concept that cars are not going to stop even if in the crosswalk.

Mr. Baker said I am a little frustrated that we haven't already completed the first two steps because they seem very basic. He said the dollar amount of the speed cushions does not bother me, and they have an obvious need. However, he is not convinced that speed cushions are the correct measure, and he is more concerned with spending money on the wrong measure. He mentioned that horizontal deflection should really be looked at because that really slows people down.

Mr. Gallo said the speed cushions will be visible enough, and the warning signs will be in advance of them, so you'll see the sign of the next cushion as you go over the current one. He said it will be self-defeating for someone to speed and potentially damage their vehicle.

Mr. Baker mentioned that by possibly installing a chicane would probably slow cars down, but I am not even sure if those are allowed.

Mr. Hooper said our traffic engineer did not recommend those.

Mr. Baker asked Mr. Hooper if he could explain the next steps and that this is all contingent on the budget being available.

Mr. Hooper said next week, Council is having their budget workshop. He said he will bring a draft budget to Council that shows how much it will cost to continue services and then a menu of new money requests to accomplish our goals. It will then be up to the Council to decide which ones get funding, and this item will be on that menu. Then it will be presented to Council on May 6th, then a public hearing will be held on May 20th, and then hopefully the Council will approve it on June 3rd.

Mr. Baker asked is there any way to complete the first two steps this year.

Mr. Hooper said yes we can complete those with budget savings this year.

Mr. Gallo mentioned the only revision that I have is on the resolution at the second to the last whereas if it could be strengthened to say "sufficient".

At 4:29 PM, a motion was made by Mr. Gallo, seconded by Mr. Morrow to approve the resolution as revised. Mr. Baker asked if the city should install a smaller number before we go all in to install all eight. Mr. Hooper said eight is what we need to cover the area of concern. Mr. Parrish stated that I hope there was analysis conducted on the use of heavy trucks on Probart because a speed cushion that allows emergency vehicles to pass through will have the same effect on heavy trucks because of the similarity of wheelbase. Mr. Gallo suggested that if the heavy trucks are following vehicles, then by de facto they will have to slow down to avoid hitting the vehicle in front of them, but if there are no vehicles in front of them, then in theory, it won't slow them down. Mr. Parrish asked the cost of the speed cushions. Mr. Hooper said $30,000. Mr. Gallo stated that he has read through the comments and there are other parts of the City that need traffic calming and that this would be a good prototype and hopefully Council would establish funding in the future for traffic calming measures. Mr. Baker said that's my worry that it does set a precedent for future traffic calming. The motion passed unanimously.

G. Railroad Ave – Lighting

Mr. Hooper expressed the need for clarity from the committee regarding lighting on Railroad Ave due to physical constraints on this side of the trail and depot.

Mr. Morrow explained that additional lighting is essential for security, as people often park their cars there and return at night to find it very dark. He suggested row

lights along a bridge as a potential solution, emphasizing that it doesn't need to be as brightly lit as a soccer field.

Mayor Copelof mentioned receiving complaints about safety due to the darkness at night.

Mr. Baker suggested approaching the issue more broadly by establishing standards for trail lighting to ensure appropriateness.

Mr. Morrow agreed, emphasizing the need for trail standards.

Mr. Hooper noted that during the discussion of the Ecusta Trail with NCDOT the next day, they would inquire about any work done to identify appropriate trail lighting.

H. Public Comment

Ms. Brewster mentioned that last week a semi-truck came through her neighborhood and took down the power lines on Cherry St. She noted that this was the second time in about a year that poles were brought down, and residents had to intervene to prevent trucks from turning down their road. Despite a sign posted stating "no outlet," trucks often miss it until they've already committed to the turn. Apparently, it's challenging for trucks to reach Mountain Industries, and one truck driver was directed to turn down Cherry St.

Mr. Hooper acknowledged the issue and stated that they would assess the situation and consult with traffic engineers.

Mr. Gallo inquired about the possibility of contacting the administration of Mountain Industries.

Ms. Brewster mentioned that they had attempted to do so but encountered rudeness from them.

I. Set Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Safety Committee will be on Tuesday, April 22, 2024 at 3:30 pm at City Hall.

J. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:03 PM.

Minutes Approved: April 22, 2024

X _____
Aaron Baker
Chair, Council Member

X _____
Alex Shepherd,
Assistant to the City Manager