

Item 23-0115: Status Update - College Avenue Lane Reconfiguration

Municipal Services Committee

Mon, Feb 06, 2023 4:30PM

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 08:39

All right. Hot Topic of the night. Who wants to get it started? Mr. Lom or Director Block?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 08:52

I can give a general DPW update.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 08:56

And then I think we want to hear from police and fire. All right, Aldersperson Van Zeeland has a question.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 09:03

Thank you, chair. I was hoping that we could touch on how this came about. It seems the general public isn't aware of the task force for noise and the issues that were going on downtown. And I was hoping someone could touch on that please.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 09:19

Sure. I can start off that question and as colleagues, you know, provide their answers they can provide further details on previous years as well. This project and this concept came about in regards to citizen feedback, business owner feedback, and inter departmental feedback on College Avenue corridor complaints whether that be related to traffic noise, experience as you're a pedestrian walking or sitting on the amenity strip, the differential in speeds along College Avenue, and the types of driving behavior we were experiencing. So, It's really more of a complaint driven process as I understand it.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 10:06

Thank you.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 10:07

Okay. You want to start?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 10:14

Sure. Included in the packet, I provided a just a really brief update on the materials that were posted to the website, trying to provide in one easy access point for the previous presentation that was given on the 23rd to Municipal Services, the videos, and the simulations. In addition to that, we gathered case studies and some pretty good fact sheets, myth busters, common questions for people to go there and read and see other cases across the country as well as in Wisconsin.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 10:52

So, with that, we have other departments here today. If there are questions related to police, fire, emergency response, and of course, traffic questions, we can also handle.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 11:05

Okay. Mr. Lom, do you have any comments?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 11:13

For those who weren't here last week or last meeting, rather, we did put on—I think our presentation lasted the better part of 45 minutes. We went through a pretty wide breadth of information ranging from what the goals of the project were, what the origin of the project was, the pros and cons, a lot of the model output, and just kind of an overview of the project as well. And so I think what happened at the end of that meeting is it was just about time for all the questions and the school bell rang. So I think where we're here tonight is to really kind of pick up where we left off, and try to answer as many questions as we possibly can.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 11:59

Okay. I know at our last meeting, there was interest in hearing from the police and fire. So, if we can get these gentlemen. What Mic, are you? Okay, introduce yourself. So, we all know who you are.

Captain Gary Lewis (Police) 12:25

Captain Jerry Lewis, here for Assistant Chief Todd Freeman and Chief Poly Olson. Police department standpoint is we're supportive of this project. We believe there's some enhancement to pedestrian safety. We are not going to police our way out of some of the downtown problems. The noise problems that are related to vehicle traffic and just general driver behavior, we think can be mitigated by this project. Secondly, the use of scooters downtown and bikes on the sidewalks, it's difficult for us to enforce something when we're asking people to go into traffic with vehicles driving right next to them. With a bike lane put into place, it would be much easier and tolerable to be able to then start issuing those types of citations and enforcing that ordinance because we know there's a safer place for them to be on because we've established that route of travel for them. So, we're supportive of it.

Captain Gary Lewis (Police) 13:25

We know the question has come up as to where are we going to park our vehicles and emergency response? Our answers, this is probably even better, because we can park in that middle lane. Otherwise, we block a lane of traffic anyways, and effectively we turn it into a two-way street with one lane of travel in either east or west. So, we are supportive. So, any other questions you have I can try to answer?

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 13:50

All right. Alderson Hartzheim.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 13:54

Thank you, Chair. Some constituents in my district were curious about—and I saw this as well, feedback from folks online where articles were posted in this regard. Claiming BS about drag racing. So, do we have from a APD or anywhere, do we have any kind of details about how often that occurs, when we try to stop that, what affect that really—is there a quantifiable way to say that that effect really does occur?

Captain Gary Lewis (Police) 14:30

I can say that four lanes of travel provides the opportunity. I individual case study myself stopped two guys at 9am roughly last week. We were doing 40 down College and I stopped them at Division. It was in the morning. They decided that they wanted to see who could be faster off the line at College and Durkee and then we just kind of progressed down the street. That becomes much more difficult when the car in front of you is going 25 miles an hour. I would also attest that pavement markings at intersections would indicate that vehicles are squealing their tires and are revving them, which would be identifiable evidence that that that is occurring. So, it happens.

Captain Gary Lewis (Police) 15:16

Our issue is when you get volumes of traffic, it becomes difficult to make those types of stops. And so, we won't necessarily have measurable data that says we're doing X number of reckless driving stops down there because it's just it's difficult to get down there to do it. This lane reconfiguration would truly minimize that, because the vehicles aren't set up that way.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 15:43

So, so really, it's just, at this point, there isn't evidence, nor can we get it. I get it. Thank you.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 15:55

Could you share your mic too?

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 15:59

Thank you, Chair. I know that the business community has some concerns regarding the parallel parking, as well as the congestion when there are large events at the PAC. Is there a way that we could utilize the software that was used in the presentation and add in the sequences showing parallel parking prior? Before and after? As well as how the new software of the spotlights may help that as well?

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 16:27

Again, the model that you use is fantastic. But some of the things weren't in there that are still of concern. Could we help by really digging in? Again, the fear exists—we clearly don't want to be losing any business downtown. But we clearly want a safe, enjoyable downtown. I think we all agree. But we have to somehow factually get rid of some of these fears. And utilizing everything we can to demonstrate the concerns on parking and congestion would perhaps go a long ways.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 16:58

Mr. Lom.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 17:00

So, there was some discussion last week, regarding on-street parking. I think it's a really fair and astute question that we're getting from the public on that. And we've put a lot of thought into how that might affect things. So just to touch first on the modeling part of it. There's really two sides to our modeling software. And I'll tell you, it's the visual side and the not so visual side. And on the not so visual side,

we are trying to account for parking movements. We've worked with the software manufacturer to help us understand how we can tweak some of the driver behavior variables in there to account for that. But it is not capable of showing it graphically.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 17:51

Now, that being said, I think an important aspect of this is what is that parking actually going to look like? Because I've taken a few calls from people who have this vision that someone's going to drive up in the park—in the one driving lane, they're going to stop, and everyone's just going to politely stay behind them while this whole thing happens. And what really—we've got if you look at how the how it's designed, you've got a six foot bike lane next to the parking lane. Your average sedan is six and a half feet from mirror to mirror. So if you pull up and you're next to a parked car, you're getting ready to do your parallel parking maneuver, you're a couple of feet away from that car. You're only hanging over into the adjacent traffic lane by two or three feet. Most of your car is in the bike lane. And so, at that point, there's still eight feet left of the adjacent thru-lane which you can squeeze through without even having to cross into the center lane. But we all know I think intuitively that people are just going to kind of scoot around.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 18:55

So I think in the end this is—the feeling is that most of this is going to happen in the bike lane. And what's left of it is going to happen on the left side of the thru-lane. And people aren't really just going to sit there and wait for people to park. They're gonna go around them. So as we sit and we think about how we want to tweak those driver behavior factors in the model, be honest with you, we don't really know but we we're trying to as with, as we have with many of the other things, we're trying to be conservative in our assumptions. And so we are kind of assuming that people are going to hang back some percentage of the time and not go around that driver.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 19:45

If—stick with the police. You have a question of the captain?

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 19:51

No, I was just gonna follow up with Mr. Lom.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 19:55

Okay, do the follow up.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 19:57

Thank you. So, you mentioned a lot of this will be a lot of this maneuvering will be going out on the bike lane. Do we have evidence from adding bike lanes to any of the other major thoroughfares in Appleton, that would tell people—because they also, you know, everything is the unknown and everyone's concerned about it. The unknown is "Well, now there's going to be people just randomly taken bicyclists out all over the city." Well, that's a little bit of hyperbole, but do we have some evidence that shows that adding bicycle lanes to some major roads in Appleton has not drastically increased bicycle/vehicle incidents and accidents.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 20:40

I can't tell you that I have numbers prepared off the top of my head. Anecdotally, I would say that the safety benefits that we expected to get from bike lanes has materialized. And we know without getting too deep into the weeds that that, you know, the types of bike lanes that we're talking about here—unprotected bike lanes—offer some safety benefit, not as much as like a protected bike lane would, but we very much view the addition of bike lanes here as a positive. And, you know, we may have a couple more bike related crashes related to this, but it might be because more because there's more bikes than because it's less safe. So, I guess that's the best I can give you on that.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 21:30

Is there a way to gather some of that data perhaps that we could, again, allay some fears of folks that are very concerned about "Well, now every time I opened my car door, I'm going to hit somebody on a bike" or that kind of thing.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 21:42

It's relatively straightforward, actually. The state DOT database, flags, crashes that are involve bicycles. And so we could cross reference to those to places where we have bicycles. And maybe—you know, not that I'd want to do every bike lane in the city, because it'd be pretty time consuming, but we could pick a few locations that seem like...

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 22:02

More of the major thoroughfares.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 22:03

...they're good comparisons. And take a look at that.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 22:08

That would be helpful, I think. Thank you.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 22:11

Any questions of the captain first? I just want to ask then our fire chief, his response to this.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 22:23

Thank you, chair. We've been involved in the conversation on the refig—or re-stripping of College Avenue since the very beginning. You know, even early 2022. We've had a lot of discussions within the fire department on this, and we haven't found any negatives. Nothing that would affect us operationally. Some of the positive things that we've addressed would be the center turn lane. If you ever drive down College Avenue when it is busy, you understand that if there is an emergency and we're running with a red lights and a big red fire truck, sometimes people don't always get out of the way. That center turn lane would provide us a safer method to get where we're going. Additionally, if we do have an emergency on College Avenue, I don't see any negative to us having to block a lane or shut down a lane or utilizing the bike lane as we park our apparatus. So the fire department in general is in support of this.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 23:27

Okay. Any questions of our fire chief? If not—Alderson Del Toro.

Alderson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 23:40

Just reflecting a couple of community constituent thoughts on this. One proposal or one suggestion that the community was wondering about is has there been consideration of having a sort of semi protected bike lane where the parking lane is closer to the middle of the road and the bike lane is closer to the sidewalk if that makes any sense? Again, not saying that this is a great idea or a bad idea, but just reflecting constituents thoughts.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 24:14

Well, let's get a response from Mr. Lom.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 24:17

Sure. So, we—that actually was looked at. The type of configuration that I think you're describing is called a floating parking configuration. Done fairly commonly in other big cities where, as you noted, the bike lane ends up against the curb, and then the row of parked cars ends up between the bike lane and the adjacent traffic lane. That is not easily done, in our case, ironically, because of the bump outs.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 24:50

So, one thing that we've learned over the years is that bump outs and bike lanes tend to have competing interests. So, this is one of those examples. So, if you can imagine if you—if we drew a stripe six feet off the face of the curb down one of the blocks, when you get to the end of the block, you would run into a bump out. And so, the, two things keep us from removing those bump outs. One is it would be extremely expensive. And the other is, it would take away a lot of the pros that come with the bump outs such as amenities strip, space, shorter crosswalks, and so on and so forth. So, we did look at that, and it would much more certainly be a better situation for the bicyclists but we're just not feasible with the scope of the project that we're looking at.

Alderson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 25:41

Thank you, chair.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 25:42

Anymore. Any more questions?

Alderson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 25:48

Last one for me. And this has to do with APD and what you had shared earlier. I live downtown, and there was a discussion back and forth regarding drag racing, whether it exists or not. First, just to clarify, for the redneck in me, drag racing is usually zero to 100 miles an hour, a lot of noise, a lot of smoke, a lot of people cheering. That's not really what we're describing in downtown Appleton. And I think we need to be careful of the term.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 26:12

Is there traffic that starts at a stoplight and chases each other down to the next block as fast as they can in downtown Appleton? The answer is, yes. They just may only reach a speed of 40. That doesn't mean they aren't drag racing. I live downtown. I hear the squealing of the tires. I hear the motors and the high RPMs some of which I enjoy. Most of which I don't want I'm trying to sleep or talk to someone.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 26:36

So I don't think there's any question as to whether the behavior exists. We can challenge the words that are used. And I would say if you live anywhere near downtown, you can attest to the noise, the speed, and the tandem racing that takes place. Thank you.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 26:55

Aldersperson Schultz.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 26:57

Thank you, Chair. Apologies. I'm a little late to this one. I missed the last meeting. I wasn't aware it was on the agenda. And then we had the issue of not being able to view it. So just catching up. And I maybe asking questions that were already answered or maybe presented at the last meeting. But just a couple of thoughts.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 27:14

I think number one, there's a lot of pros to this. And very few cons at least from my perception. But one of the biggest things we're attempting to do is take this state highway and funnel it down to a county highway, in essence and create a situation where those people who maybe live in the downtown corridor and or downtown Appleton or Appleton writ large, but those people going from Grand Chute to Little Chute and are used to using this as their thoroughfare, they're going to find themselves coming into a new funnel. And I think that close community of downtown Appleton can accept the funnel and all of its benefits, but I think outside of that we're gonna have a challenge with the people who are used to using this to get through Appleton. And I'm curious to know, and I don't—again, I apologize may have been touched in the in the summaries and some of the material provided to the committee. But what has been done to study the people hit that funnel and decide that they either want to go north or south of it and how does that—are we, can. What are the studies and changes that we are, should be considering to make those traffic flows easier than they might be now, whether that's traffic lighting or timing, either on Fremont or I'm trying to think of the streets now. Lawrence would be one, but then north of that. Those couple of streets that gets you from here to the other side of College Avenue and across the bridge.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 28:34

I'm not sure that I've heard any of those conversations yet. But I would expect we would want to be looking at streamlining that traffic flow. And I know if I hit Lawrence street right now and I take a right it's a little bit funky. And I know there's going to be some straightening eventually. But I wouldn't necessarily think that's the way to get around College if I'm coming from the south of Appleton up to College Avenue and want to avoid College Avenue. So, if this is happening simultaneously, what are

we doing on Lawrence Street to streamline, left or right, or going east or west? And then on the opposite side of College Avenue? What are we doing to streamline those traffic flows on the north side?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 29:09

So, we did actually discuss that at last week's meeting a fair bit. The one thing that the model can't do is assess how much congestion is enough congestion to have a driver decide to change their route. Right? So we have to make professional judgments about what that might look like. And so, Mike Hardy, who did the modeling on his project (and he's here tonight if we need to have him answer some questions). He looks quite a bit at what would happen if—we took like a sensitivity analysis basically and said what happened if we take X number, if X number of drivers decided to start using Washington Street, or Franklin Street. And in the takeaway, I think—the main takeaway was very underutilized streets right now. Franklin Street, anybody that uses Franklin Street (and that's really your best continuous route to bypass downtown) is frankly, a ghost town. I mean, it runs at about 4,000 cars per day. Could handle four times that without much trouble. So, we did look at that in the modeling. And there were a couple of runs we did where we looked at how did that affect some of the intersections along that route? And really, were not able to identify any problems that would come from that. And just, I missed anything Mike? Yeah, I mean, that—what, you, you know, the interesting thing is, and I did one point of clarification is College Avenue isn't a state trunk highway in downtown. It is just a city street, but it certainly feels like state trunk highway. And fundamentally, the way the downtown operates is that everybody tries to go down on College Avenue and all the side streets are just pretty quiet. And as the city continues to expand off of College Avenue, I think we're going to continue to see more traffic using these side streets. But there's a lot of capacity on those side streets. So, we looked at intersections like Drew and Washington, Drew and Franklin, and expected to potentially see some issues there and really didn't.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 31:42

Okay. Just, I'm just going just a little bit further on that. I know, a lot of the intersections on Packard and Franklin are controlled. But as the further you go east, there's a lot of like, stop, wait, four way stops, or maybe it's a two way stop where that flow isn't natural. Is the thought that the current capacity for people to get back to College Avenue passed around Lawrence University, that those controlled intersections with stoplights will allow that flow or do we need to—are we looking at adding any additional traffic lights or...?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 32:16

At this point, our review did not indicate that any traffic signals need to be put in. Ironically (and I think this was talked about at the last meeting) there's a couple of traffic signals on Franklin Street that were removed as part of the mobility study that were really remnants of, you know, the 60s and 70s and were overkill for by today's standards. So, we're not projecting any additional need for traffic signals.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 32:45

Okay. Thank you.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 32:48

Before we go on, is there anybody in the audience who would like to ask some questions or make some comments? Sir, you want to step forward to the mic. And state your name and address.

Josh P. (Resident) 33:09

Josh P [address of residence]

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 33:12

All right.

Josh P. (Resident) 33:15

So, I'll just respond to a couple of the things that were brought up already regarding the publicity of this. I know somebody made a comment on that. I hadn't heard about this until a couple days ago. There was a post someone had on Facebook. That was the first time I'd ever heard of it. So, in my opinion, it doesn't seem like it's been widely publicized to residents in general, but maybe it has been.

Josh P. (Resident) 33:40

Um, and in regards to the whole drag racing thing. I mean, I'm downtime quite a bit. And I personally haven't seen it. That doesn't mean it doesn't happen, but I feel like if it is an issue, it's just going to happen later at night. I mean, there's still three lanes there, but that's, that's my opinion, not saying it will, but I don't think changing the number of lanes is going to eliminate that completely.

Josh P. (Resident) 34:04

But um, the main thing I wanted to read was from 2016 Mobility study. And essentially—I think this was kind of glossed over in the last meeting, but they essentially contract concluded the College Avenue [indecipherable] alternative was dropped from further consideration due to unacceptable traffic operations on College Avenue. So, it seems like it was kind of written off by the 2016 Mobility study. So, I'm wondering why—what the big push to do it now is.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 34:44

So, we did we did touch on that at the last meeting. Just to kind of recap that a little bit. The mobility study was a fairly large study that looked at the entire downtown. And the idea of taking a look at College Avenue for a three—er four to three lane conversion was an afterthought that I think came up during the public information meetings, possibly during the committee and Council meetings, and was tagged on as a sort of a cursory review as an addendum to the contract. So given that there was not a lot of money to do that, it was a rather cursory review.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 35:34

Now we did go back, and we looked at—we went through all the modeling files and everything that were used for that and were able to determine a few things. One was is that at that time, the study was—Appleton Street was still considered as a—or still showing as a one-way street. There are a number of other changes that have since been made in the downtown that do change that a little bit. But I think what has changed the most isn't the model output. It's the—sort of the equation, and the equation is the pros versus the cons. And at that time, we didn't really understand what all the pros

were. We didn't have scooters, yet. We didn't have a lot of the things happening downtown that are happening now. And so, what we were really just looking at was the cons at that point and saying, "Well, yeah, this adds congestion." And with not as big of a list to offset that, the decision, the Council decided not to pursue it.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 36:42

So it's—again, I think the big picture here is, is that we're trying to provide as much information as we can, as much, as many pros and cons as we can so that, you know, we can make a really—the community can make this decision of what's most important. Because if what's most important is to pump cars through downtown from Grand Chute to Little Chute, which certainly that is part of it, then we know what the answer is. But if some of these other things are what's most important to us, then it becomes more complicated.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 37:20

Any other questions or comments?

Josh P. (Resident) 37:23

Yes, another thing that I've kind of been reading about is a lot of cities, when you're going through the main stretch, whether it's their downtown or just another main thoroughfare, they have—their lights are all time, which not only saves time, it's better for the environment, but you also have less of that congestion. So, I guess this is—I mean, I guess this could probably be done, whether the project goes through or not. But I guess has any consideration given to that as an alternative or something in addition to this?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 37:54

So let me start by saying the lights are timed now.

Josh P. (Resident) 37:58

Oh, they are?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 37:58

It's extremely complicated with the pedestrian, all the pedestrian movements and the spacing of the lights. Very easy to create good flow in one direction. Exponentially more difficult to create it in two directions. Okay? So the software that we use, you know, we've basically optimized it as much as we can, given the current configuration. So what we talked about at the meeting a little bit last time was is that part of what we're talking about when we model this is not just changing the lane configuration but also re optimizing the operation of the traffic signals to take advantage of some of the things then that we can do once we have a center turn lane. So, in some cases, that means we add arrows and in other cases, it allows us to do different things. But it does—all the modeling does reflect a re optimization of everything downtown.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 39:03

And again, just to be clear, this fantasy that you see on TV where everyone gets green lights in every direction happens, usually only in the movies. But the way that you can do that is if you go down, you

know, on some really big street in Chicago, you can have extremely long cycle lengths to create lots of green lights for everybody. But what it creates a whole litany of other problems for other things. And so, it really just becomes like this very tenuous balancing act of trying to keep everybody happy.

Josh P. (Resident) 39:40

I just didn't realize they were timed because I feel like every time I drive down College Avenue I get stopped every second night. But I used to live in Detroit and the lights were timed very well. You could drive down 10-20 miles. It's—you could go from Detroit to Pontiac and not a single not a single red light.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 40:00

When you have signals every 300 feet and pedestrian crossings on all four legs of all those intersections, it gets a lot more complicated. But

Josh P. (Resident) 40:08

I don't doubt that.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 40:09

We wish we could make that better.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 40:14

Okay.

Josh P. (Resident) 40:15

That's all I had. I drive down College Avenue quite a bit, but I've ended up taking Franklin most of the time, just because there's less lights total. So hopefully, there's not too many more people on that route now. I know you're talking about less congestion on College, but I'm curious to see how much more congested the side streets will be. What, I'm also—another thought that I had is, is there going to be a lot less traffic driving by all the businesses downtown now if people are taking those side streets, but I guess it's hard to tell before the project's done what people are going to do. If they're going to take alternate routes.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 40:53

Okay, thank you.

Josh P. (Resident) 40:55

That's all I had. Thank you.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 40:57

Anybody else in the audience like to speak?

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 41:04

Hello, I'm Jennifer Stephany. I'm the Executive Director of Appleton Downtown Incorporated, and a city resident as well. So obviously, we've been engaged in this conversation and have some concerns and

have some insight that we've collected from several of our business owners. We've had lots of conversation, some spirited, some encouraging, but always good dialogue. And the obvious concerns are, as they have been stated here tonight, congestion, especially on those nights when we have events. And I understand that you don't design communities, for special events—that the infrastructure has to carry us every single day. Although special events happen way more often in our downtown than not, whether that's a PAC show, an event at the Hilton, a special event within the community. It's a pretty frequent occurring event.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 42:03

There are some obvious pros pluses to this consideration, this reconfiguration. We are striving to be a more livable downtown. We have been saying that for years. We have seen the new development coming and continues to come, which is wonderful for downtown. We love that. So, we want to keep that in the discussion. We know that this is a balancing act, we get that, but we have to do is start talking about how this is good for business. And we need to start answering that question. How is this good for business? Will this divert traffic away from downtown and in essence, impact a business in a negative light? Will this be a positive for the downtown residents? Will this be good for traffic in terms of bike traffic? Is parallel parking using the bike lane going to be an issue? We have to start looking at some of those concerns. And I know we talked a little bit about that at the last meeting here. I know we have another meeting next Monday, and we'll talk some more about it there.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 43:11

I think the biggest concern that we've heard is that the decision has been made on this and the businesses feel like they didn't have a chance to talk about it. So, we're anxious for the opportunity next Monday. I know there are quite a few that are that are expecting to attend. We did receive a zoom link today as well, which we will be sending out. So, there will be some folks that will be able to listen in. I understand getting their feedback is going to be difficult. We'll do the best that we can to get some of that feedback ahead of time. I do have some of those listed. I plan to send those in a couple of days from what I have now. I'll send those to Dani. And if you can take a look at those. And we can start addressing some of those very specific concerns. A lot of which you we've, we've talked a little bit about here with committee. But I think really taking a look at how this could be good for business is it needs to be part of the discussion.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 44:07

Just for the record.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 44:08

I'm one of fifteen alderpersons. I'm going to speak for 14 alderpersons plus myself. I don't think one of us have made a decision on this. We're listening.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 44:08

Yeah.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 44:21

Okay. I guess I misunderstand the process then. And my apologies on that.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 44:28

I just wanted to make sure that everybody's aware that we're listening.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 44:32

Okay.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 44:32

We haven't made up our minds.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 44:34

Thank you. Could we talk through the process on this? I think that might be really helpful and be good to get on the record. Thank you.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 44:43

Director Block, you want to make a comment on that?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 44:45

Sure. I can help explain the process. On the presentation materials that are posted to the website, there is one slide dedicated to timeline and process mapping with general timeline parameters given but it does show the steps from back when, internally, we worked with our department's key stakeholders on developing this concept and talking through some of these issues related to special events. How is this good for businesses? How does this improve livability? And really starting to pull that from each department. That started while possibly as early as this time last year, and really ramped up fall of last year.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 45:29

With the beginning of this year, we've just started feedback from the public through municipal services committee. The formal approval or consideration by this by the Finance Committee and then Council will be in the form of the striping contract. So a restriping itself, we just gather feedback, but the actual contract when it goes to Finance Committee and then to Council would be the time to make that decision. And that would be after gathering this public input, working with our business owners. So that wouldn't occur until possibly March, bidding the contract. So, you're looking at spring, early summer for the decision process to be happening. So again, it's posted and people can review that and continue attending meetings and providing input back to us.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 46:25

If I can comment on just a couple other things. We have our folks from Community Development here. And I think it would be nice for a comment on livability and how this is good for businesses or how it's part of the overall downtown.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 46:47

Thank you, Director Block. Can you hear me?

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 46:50

Yes.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 46:52

So just a little bit of a perspective from community development. You know, Dave and I are both professional—professionally certified and trained planners. And the lane reconfiguration concept is something that I know I definitely learned about in school in planning school. And when you tie this into the goals and objectives of our College Avenue North neighborhood study, as well as the downtown mobility, study and overall goals of that and in the broader framework of our overall comprehensive plan, you know, to Director or to Traffic Engineer Lom's point, it's definitely a balancing act. We're really trying to hone in on what do we value as a community. And we're trying to balance the needs of the traveling motorist with the needs of our residents, our businesses, etc.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 47:45

Planning literature does show that lane reconfigurations—typically the rule of thumb is 20,000 vehicles per day or less which this is well under that—are a good thing. When you're trying to promote safety not just of motorists, but of pedestrians and other users it really can have great benefits to a business district and a neighborhood. Slowing down traffic can have positive attributes of not just racing through, but slowing down and taking it in. I think there are definitely concerns about that we're hearing from the business community about diversion of traffic. Intuitively, I think we all know a lot of the traveling public is just intending to get from one side of Appleton to the other side and not necessarily looking to stop. If they do divert, that may not be the worst thing. But for those still traveling through, slowing down, perception wise, could be a good thing. They'll take it in, they'll enjoy the district. And for those who are residents or shopping, it's going to be much easier and safer to get from one side of the Ave to the other. Dave, did you want to add anything?

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 49:04

Thank you. All right. Any comments or questions from the committee? Alderson Van Zeeland?

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 49:13

Thank you chair. I was hoping we could just clarify the timing of this project, why we're looking at doing it now? Could somebody just clarify for—based off the questions I saw from the public why we're looking to restripe it at this moment?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 49:36

I can add some context or try to provide some feedback on the timing. I believe the public comment and business owner comment related to the corridor. Also going through potential other solutions, enforcement perhaps not being the key, that we can't enforce our way out of this. If the problem is being elevated and continues to come into our office, this is our answer on a viable solution. So I think timing is probably driven by constituent feedback.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 50:15

I also think, as we look at potential solutions and maintenance of the College Ave corridor, the changing development along College Ave corridor with the new residential developments that are coming in, an

increased use of the bird scooter program (we'll be entering I believe it's the third year of the Bird scooter program) all kind of driving the timing of this project.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 50:46

I was the chair of the Safety and Licensing committee last year, and a lot of this started to come in front of my committee. I guess I just wanted to clarify for the public how I see this as coming before us. Things really came to a head post COVID. We had a decrease in overall traffic coming downtown, but according to Chief Thomas, we had a large increase in reckless driving, and that we weren't the only city that was seeing that. That we were seeing it in bigger cities like Milwaukee and Madison, where they have pedestrian deaths once a week from someone getting hit by a car and that was jarring. And then we started to hear from the alders bringing forth issues from the business community. And then we heard from someone in the business community who was extremely upset about the using the amenity strip and the people not being able to enjoy that and use the business outside. That's how that came before us.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 51:50

And at that time, I wasn't sure about these, you know, the issues of "drag racing", as we'll call it, or, you know, the bad behavior of certain vehicles down here. You know, we do have issues on the south side of town, they're just a little bit different. But I just did a search of some public Facebook pages, and there were pages out there of these groups that were doing this fully admitting that they do these things. So, it wasn't hidden. You know, that's where I saw the task the task force going.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 52:26

And then after that my constituents who were coming downtown started to say, I almost got run over by a scooter while trying to have dinner outside. You know, I started to hear from my own constituents on the other side of town. So I think we see that there's a problem, and I don't know if this is the answer. I mean, that's why we're here. But I think the denial of there being a problem should be erased, because it does exist. Just because you weren't seeing it, doesn't mean it doesn't exist, that we didn't have a task force for nothing. So I just wanted to kind of clarify that.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 53:02

And then anecdotally say that when you talk about how it affects businesses, my family is a family that on the weekends, we go for bike rides, my husband and my son and I and we take the bike lanes on the southeast side of town, and we do not come downtown, because we don't feel safe, biking with my son without any bike lanes and without being able to use the sidewalk. Typically, we're a bike lane family. We go to Menasha, we go to Neenah. I would like to come down here. I would like to feel safe to drive my family down here, ride on a bike, and have food and, you know, sit at the candy store like we do sometimes after the farmers market. So, I don't have any data for that. But I would say that if it existed, my family would be one of those families that would come downtown. Thank you.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 53:55

I'm somewhat confused. Help me. We're discussing this. But at any time, is this committee going to vote on it?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 54:10

We talked about this internally. And the restriping itself would not come through Municipal Services for formal action. It goes through Finance Committee in the form of the restriping contract.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 54:23

So in all due respect, it's a done deal unless the Council would say we're not going to approve the contract.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 54:35

I believe that if there was enough—if there's sentiment to not move forward with the project, there would be no need to put it out for bid. That would not be a good time of our resources here in public works to put a project out for bid that wouldn't have support.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 54:53

I asked the question. I apologize for my comment. You know, I was mistaken. Okay, I regret that. I guess I'd like to see the Council have a say it before we all of a sudden are looking at a contract and that's what we're approving. Aldersperson Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 55:18

Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to clarify that in the initial presentation last meeting, it does state that the contract award process will go through the municipal services committee.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 55:29

Then I need to update that. I apologize.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 55:33

Okay, are we—we're getting close to 5:30 right? Any other comments or questions? Aldersperson Firkus.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 55:45

Thank you, chair. Assuming that this does come to fruition, what kind of metrics are we going to be measuring to determine whether or not these changes are successful or not?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 56:02

Specific metrics have not been identified at this time. Of course, we're always gathering data related to traffic speeds, crashes. We can gather bike counts as in the bike lanes. It's going to take time to gather that data and also refine the signal timing along the corridor. So, 12 to 18 months we would have some numbers built up in order to compare. But it—we could compare crashes over a number of years, things of that nature, of course, public feedback, user feedback, citizen feedback, committee and Council feedback during that time as well, would be used.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 56:52

All right. I mean, that does make sense that, I get that. I know, from my reading of other communities that have tried this, they've done (and I don't know if we have necessarily the leg power to do this) but

they've done measurements such as trying to gauge the impact on businesses and things like that, where I think it was one study in Boston, the streets that had bike lanes (I know, this isn't about bike lanes, but just as a proxy, since we are adding bike lanes here) streets with bike lanes ended up seeing increases in business on those streets compared to the streets that didn't have them. And usually around 90% of businesses saw a benefit to that change. Were some—there were some businesses that saw no benefit, but and there's just things like that, I wonder what our capability would be for measuring that. And maybe just that feedback from the public hearing, you know, comments, responses, things like that about what they're seeing that, you know, that people like or don't like, might be the most useful way to gather that information. But I think as long as we're just keeping some sort of record somewhere where we're saying, "All right, we're getting some temperature of the community of how this is going," that'd be helpful.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 58:03

Beyond that, I just want to say I think, the amount of work and time that's gone into this, I'm really excited about the possibility of this happening and this conversation going forward. And I think there's some really good potential here. I think this is a nice incremental step and definitely a thing that's very much worth taking a good hard look at.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 58:23

Alderson Van Zeeland.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 58:25

Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to say that I have some reservations about this being the committee where we discuss this and bring all the information yet this is not the committee that will approve this project. I think that if a project is being discussed here, because that's the forum where it belongs, then we should have something to vote on. And I'm going to look into that. Thank you.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 58:49

Questions, comments? I want to thank staff for their time and their comments, as well as my fellow Council members, for your comments and questions. Thank you. With that we're—Yes, Alderson not alderperson. Director Block.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 59:10

Oh, no. Director.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 59:13

No, no, no, no.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 59:15

I just want to clarify that we will provide a definitive answer at the next committee meeting on which committee the contract would go through. So whether pavement marking specifically goes through municipal services or finance, we will look back, make sure we're doing it correctly and give a final answer on that because there's probably some confusion related to that. And the presentation said one thing. I said a different thing tonight. And I want to be sure we have that right. So, I will get that answer.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 59:46

Okay. All right. Item seven people.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 59:52

Move for adjournment.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 59:52

Second.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 59:55

Motions been made and second to adjourn. All in favor signify by saying aye. All those opposed? Chair votes aye. Five zero. We're adjourned.