

Item 23-0165: Status Update - College Avenue Lane Reconfiguration

Municipal Services Committee

Mon, Feb 20, 2023 4:30PM

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 29:31

We'll go to our information items, 23-0165 status update College Avenue Lane reconfiguration. And I guess who wants to start? Director Block.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 29:47

Thank you, Chair. Tonight. Again, we have the College Ave lane reconfiguration on for informational item only for discussion. I wanted to clarify (it was included in the materials for tonight's meeting) just the process timeline for this project proposal. So, you'll note on the first page of that memo, there would be an approval by Municipal Services Committee for the concept, the project concept, and then that move along to Council if approved. That would give staff the green light on working on the contract documents and sending it out for bid. Once we're ready to award the contract, it again would come back through municipal services committee for consideration, and then to Council if recommended for approval.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 30:36

So, there's two steps to this process. That was based on the feedback we heard from last committee meeting, also for meeting with stakeholders. So, I just wanted to clarify that. So that was part one of our updates here.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 30:50

We also have had stakeholder meetings since our last municipal services committee meeting. We've met with ADI, business owners, Lawrence University, and just been taking feedback here at the staff level. Where the concept of a pilot project has been asked and we've considered here, and staff is recommending an 18-month duration of a pilot project. So, if that is the desire of the committee, to move to a pilot project, I've listed here, some quantitative and qualitative metrics that would be used in order to gauge the success of the program after those 18 months.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 31:35

And we also heard during our engagement sessions that this desire for additional educational materials and marketing materials related to the concept, both to our business community and also just traveling public as they navigate College Avenue, which we have begun discussing internally and would be working on to roll this out.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 31:59

Does Mr. Lom have any comments?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 32:03

I think Director Block... **[note: the rest of his words were not picked up, but it seemed as if he was indicating he had nothing to add to what Director Block had said.]**

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 32:08

Before we go to the alderspersons in regards to questions or comments, we do have people in the audience. Anybody in the audience on this would like to speak to it? Okay, while we wait, Aldersperson Fenton? Six?

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 32:32

Thank you, Chair. My question is just if this is a pilot project, do we assume that the cost to revert back would be the same \$130,000 budgeted for the initial restriping and signal reconfiguration?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 32:56

So that cost--the short answer is no. The short--the that cost is really, the cost that you see right now of \$130,000 is about \$70,000 worth of pavement marking and the majority of the rest of it is signal improvements. If we needed to undo this, you would probably be looking at somewhere in the range of \$100,000, maybe a little bit less, because you would not have to re-spend the signal improvement money. But there would be more marking removal to do the second time around than the first time around.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 33:38

Thank you.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 33:40

All right. Now do we have somebody in the audience who would like to speak. State your name and address please.

Darrin Wasniewski (AARP Wisconsin) 33:48

Thank you, Darrin Wasniewski with AARP Wisconsin address 222 West Washington Avenue, Madison 53703.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 33:58

All right.

Darrin Wasniewski (AARP Wisconsin) 33:59

So, I appreciate the opportunity to come and make comments on the proposed College Avenue reconfiguration. And just want to say that on behalf of AARP Wisconsin's 16,000 members here in the city of Appleton, we're going to (and I have written comments for you all as well here) but we're proud to have this opportunity. Appleton joined AARP's network of age friendly communities in May of 2022. And it's in the spirit of that relationship that I'm here tonight to speak on behalf of this.

Darrin Wasniewski (AARP Wisconsin) 34:36

So, one of the things I want to note is that environmental psychology tells us that most drivers regulate their driving speed on what feels comfortable based on the street design. And this means that in wider, more open spaces, people tend to drive faster no matter posted speed limits. These faster travel speeds have a negative effect for people traveling by foot or mobility device. Not only do people feel less safe around cars traveling at higher speeds, Research al--research also shows they are less safe.

Darrin Wasniewski (AARP Wisconsin) 35:05

Here's some statistics to help frame the importance of designing roads for all people in Appleton. Wisconsin Department of Transportation estimates that at least 40% of the city's population are non-drivers. A typical person outlives their ability to drive by eight to 10 years. People over the age of 65 are disproportionately represented as victim of pedestrian auto crashes. And optimum speeds in a commercial district where high pedestrian and biking activity is desired is 25 miles an hour. At 35 miles an hour, there is an 85% chance that a person walking will be killed if hit by a motor vehicle.

Darrin Wasniewski (AARP Wisconsin) 35:44

We would like to highlight some relevant information contained within AARP's publication "Road Diets, A Livability Factsheet", which we know that is linked within the supporting materials on the city's Project Information page. People often worry that road diets will divert traffic, but really research shows that people are going to go the shortest distance. They'll tolerate a certain level of inconvenience in order to go through. That's just human nature. They're not going to go a half hour out of their way to avoid the traffic there.

Darrin Wasniewski (AARP Wisconsin) 36:20

Also, some worry that road diets will decrease business. And again, research doesn't support this. In fact, it shows the customers are more comfortable parking on the street due to the slower speeds. But more importantly, some research also shows that people walking or riding bikes tend to spend more money locally than those who drive through in cars. And as a former business owner in a main street district in Ohio, I can attest to this. We definitely saw more from walk-in traffic in my district. And so, from a business standpoint, that's great.

Darrin Wasniewski (AARP Wisconsin) 36:53

So, you know, just some recommendations from us. We recommend that the city engage in a coordinated public engagement campaign to minimize anxiety of the change. It considers this as a pilot project, which we've heard discussed, and document change not only the traffic flow, but also the walking biking and retail activity during the pilot project timing period. So, with all of this, we thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 37:20

Thank you. Anybody else want to speak?

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 37:28

Just make a couple of follow up comments. Darren, you're much taller than I. There we go. Yep, Jennifer Stephany Appleton Downtown Incorporated. We're at 333, West College.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 37:40

So just a couple of comments. Obviously, we've had a great opportunity to discuss further with several departments regarding getting that input from our business owners. We had a little bit lower turnout than we had hoped. And we certainly have had a few follow up comments that have come our way since that meeting. I did forward some additional comments to Dani as well. And a lot of it is--what we continue to hear is that concern about congestion or concern about diverting traffic, concern about people parking. And it seems as though each time we have dialogue, each time we kind of dive into what this really looks like, there seems to be a better understanding and there seems to be more comfort. Does that mean that everybody feels great about this? No, that's not exactly what I'm saying. But we're happy that the process is continuing. I'm happy to hear that this remains as an informational item as we're working through some of that input in looking at how we begin to educate the business owners and downtown specifically because that's who I represent. But we also represent residents that are living in this district as well. So, making sure that we're reaching out to them. I would like to help with that process if I could. There is a very active resident Facebook page that we could certainly help to do some outreach with to get some of that feedback coming in and be part of this process. And certainly, we would offer our support in helping to create those baselines as we're setting those metrics and working on how we can make this a measurable pilot program. So, thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 39:19

Awesome. Thank you. Anybody else in the audience like to speak? Okay, I'll bring it back up here. Alderson Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 39:32

Thank you, chair. Piggybacking on what our two guests mentioned, is this informational campaign or this informing the public and making them less wary of change--I don't think we figured any of that into the \$130,000. That's on the table. And I'm a little bit concerned that we're putting the cart before the horse in that regard. And I'm wondering how we can (this is a very open-ended question) how we can determine how to make this happen. And what, if any, costs that entails as well.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 40:10

Who wants to take that on?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 40:16

Thank you, chair. Initially staff is going to work internally with our communications positions. Brianna from health department is helping out our comm, dev friends are helping out, and then DPW of course, using potential mailings, social media, our website. And then just some initial discussions today with Darren from AARP talked about leveraging just different relationships we have and ADI as well in getting these materials--consistent materials--out to the community to educate and to market this proposal.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 41:01

I think it's going to take time to develop. I'd like to see the process continue. And just know that we are working on developing those materials, taking video footage, you know, whether it's through video or print materials, and seeing how best we can leverage our marketing.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 41:27

Anybody else? Aldersperson Firkus.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 41:33

Thank you, chair. I just want to say I'm happy to see the inclusion of the metrics and the formalizing that this is in fact a pilot. I think this has a really good chance of being successful, and I'm really glad to see those inclusion so that when, if this does happen and is successful that we can say, "Look, we really did take our time. We did measure this," and we aren't just making that decision ahead of time that it was successful and not taking the community feedback into account. Thank you.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 42:04

I want to go on record and applaud staff in terms of responding to comments made from our last meeting. You did an excellent job. Any further comments? With that in mind, item number seven.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 42:22

Motion to adjourn.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 42:25

Second.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 42:25

Motion's been made and seconded to adjourn. All in favor signify by saying aye. All those opposed? Chair votes aye. Five zero. We're adjourned. Thank you, everybody.