

Session 13-04, a Regular Meeting of the Transportation Advisory Committee was called to order by Chair Roberts at 5:36 p.m. on November 14, 2013 at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Highland, Roberts, Smith, Venuti, Walker

STAFF: Public Works Director Meyer
Planning Technician Engebretsen
Deputy City Clerk Jacobsen

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Roberts asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

HIGHLAND/VENUTI SO MOVED.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT

Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS REGARDING ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

None

RECONSIDERATION

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting Synopsis of August 20, 2013.

Chair Roberts asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

HIGHLAND/SMITH SO MOVED

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT

Motion carried.

VISITORS/PRESENTATIONS

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A. Shelly Erickson – Opposition of Roundabout

Shelly Erickson, owner of Homer Tours and Home Run Oil, is involved in transportation around Homer in a couple different areas. She expressed her opposition for a roundabout the state is considering at Main Street and the bypass, explaining that she has spent a lot of time researching and talking to people. This greatly concerns her because of its effect on Homer if we end up with a roundabout. On behalf of the Homer Voice for Business, which has over 70 members, Mrs. Erickson explained the group agrees that a roundabout is not good for Homer at the particular intersection for the following reasons:

- Impacts to the flow of traffic on the bypass. In the summer, left hand turns are difficult along the bypass from either side of the road. A traffic light in sync with the one at Lake Street and the bypass would help. A continuous traffic flow would also create a dangerous situation for pedestrians trying to cross the bypass.
- Fragile segment of Homer. Homer has a larger retirement community and putting a roundabout at a major intersection does not help these drivers. The confusion in driving in a new situation, compounded by pedestrians, RV's, and vehicles pulling trailers will put people at risk.
- Economic Ramifications. We need to make sure there is unrestricted access on our main roads where goods and services are being moved. Daily there are trucks pulling doubles with large, heavy loads of goods to and from the community which should cause great concern for the safety of people. Sideswiping of vehicles are common accidents in a roundabout. Large trucks will choose the road of least resistance in and out of Homer and drivers should not be subjected to unsafe driving conditions. The more obstacles the City puts in place for people trying to service Homer, the more we will see businesses leave.
- Concern about the "Gateway" for people coming to Homer. A roundabout sends a message that we are closed and don't want you here. They realize a stoplight may not be aesthetically pleasing to some, but it is a practical and easy to navigate for vehicles and pedestrians.
- Impacts to Area Businesses. This is somewhat undefinable at this point, but some would have to shut down to move if they are bought out. If they move outside the city, there will be a loss of sales tax. Construction will cause disruption to businesses that are already in competitive markets.
- Cost. Estimated cost is \$1.5 million to install a stoplight versus \$3 to 5 million to install a roundabout. It would take 100 years to recoup the cost of maintenance and installation of a roundabout.

In closing, Mrs. Erickson said the business community proposes a stop light be installed at the corner of Main Street and the bypass. In the winter months it could flash yellow on the Sterling Highway and red on Main Street. Hopefully it would be operational by May. Turning lanes are already present on the Sterling Highway, and pedestrian crossing signs would be helpful.

She provided a written copy of her comments for the record.

Mr. Walker expressed his opposing opinion. As a bicyclist and pedestrian he has found that when at the designated crosswalk people will stop about half the time people, and about half the time they don't. He believes it is a matter of public education and better signage. He acknowledged some design challenges at the intersection, but feels that if the roundabouts are designed properly they can be effective.

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Mrs. Venuti commented they have responsibility to listen to the businesses in the community and be business friendly. If we don't listen to the 70 businesses that are talking about this, we aren't doing our job. In response to earlier comment made by Mrs. Erickson regarding the roundabout in Anchorage on Dowling adversely affecting businesses, Mrs. Venuti recognized that Dowling is dead and it may be because people are avoiding the roundabout section.

Mr. Smith expressed a different take on the Dowling issue. He was involved in a project up there before the roundabout was there and it was a nightmare of backed up traffic from the light. Since the roundabout was put in, he has noticed there are no more traffic backups. He is going to withhold his judgment about a roundabout at Main Street and Sterling Highway until the state says whether or not it's even feasible there. He would like to have more information before expressing an opinion. He added that this committee discussed roundabouts, before any of the current group, in the 20 year transportation plan. Representatives from the Traffic Section of DOT as well as engineers gave presentations that included incredibly enlightening statistical information about roundabouts, and one statistic was it reduces the number of accidents, as well as the severity of the accident. T-bone accidents in a lighted intersection are death accidents, and they didn't have recorded death accidents in a roundabout. There were also statistics about how much fuel was being burned waiting for lights as compared to working through a roundabout with no stops, people being able to get across roundabouts, people needing to slow down to enter a roundabout and decreases the length between cars to get into lane. They explained the 35 mph speed limit on the bypass allows for a certain distance to safely get out from a side street, and at 25 it drastically reduces the distance, and in a roundabout it reduces it even more. Mr. Smith added that it isn't free to operate and maintain stop lights.

Ms. Roberts asked if the Homer Voice for Business had any input regarding a one way plan at Heath and Main Street relating to limitations to their businesses. Mrs. Erickson said they haven't had an opportunity to discuss it, but the concept was addressed at the planning commission. She will bring back information.

Ms. Highland recognized that there are good points on both sides and it is a difficult choice.

Mrs. Erickson noted that extending the road by Save U More to Pioneer, it would take a lot of pressure off the bypass. There are probably some simpler fixes than spending millions on a roundabout. Chair Roberts noted that Council recognized those improvements would be helpful in the CIP process.

STAFF & COUNCIL REPORT/COMMITTEE REPORTS/BOROUGH REPORTS

Public Works Director Meyer gave the Committee an update on the work on the Homer Spit Trail, paving at the Deep Water Dock and End of the Road Park, drainage improvements, timber overlooks, and retaining walls to prepare for paving the trail. He is looking forward to its completion in the spring because it will be a really nice facility.

Planning Technician Engebretsen commented that at the last Planning Commission worksession, City Manager Wrede talked to them about the safe streets idea. The end result is the Planning Commission will work with the TAC to come up with a list of criteria and options that neighborhoods would have to increase pedestrian safety and street safety.

PUBLIC HEARING

None

PENDING BUSINESS

A. HART Policy Annual Review and Recommendations

Planning Technician Engebretsen reviewed her staff report.

Mr. Smith questioned how to access the 10% trail money. Planning Technician Engebretsen explained that City Council can authorize the funds relating to trails. A petition could be done for a neighborhood trail, but that hasn't been done yet, nor has a developer asked for funds to cost share trails in a subdivision development. In her opinion these funds might be able to be used for some of the safe street improvements as well.

There was discussion of appropriate ways for using funds. Improvements to Greatland St. for the culvert and trail, as an example, could be addressed through trail monies. Neighborhood roads like Mattox are traveled roads that would come out of the roads portion of HART funds.

Planning Technician Engebretsen explained that Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission, and sometimes the TAC, makes a recommendation to Council for 3 to 5 trail projects. They try to recommend trails that are ready to go. The Council approves them through the budget process, and the money is available for 3 years. Money approved from last year includes fixing the stretch of Greatland, work on a section of Fairview, and a section crossing Woodard Creek into Hornaday Park. An issue is the projects aren't big enough to go out to bid, and qualified city staff is stretched thin. The trails portion of the program is new for the City and there are some growing pains. She doesn't have any recommendations for 2014 projects or for amendments to the policy at this time.

Planning Technician Engebretsen reviewed the improvements in Old Town, some of which included road and trail funds. Charles Way will be constructed as a through trail, providing an off the road way of getting down Main Street, down Charles Way to the beach. Lanes were narrowed and shoulder paved along Bunnell, crosswalks have been painted, signage installed, and paved parking at Bishop's Beach.

Discussion ensued regarding safe streets in relation to Mattox. Mr. Smith commented that the neighborhood groups traffic calming ideas that Mattox residents showed pictures of involved curb and gutter. He recommended they start a Special Assessment District (SAD) because those are road improvements, and have their designer work with the City for traffic calming designs. He also recommended the group discuss the design criteria manual because it is very specific and has no traffic calming diagrams. Mrs. Engebretsen said her idea for the safe streets discussion is something like the Trails Criteria Manual that includes levels of improvements; something smaller that gives options for traffic calming on paved or unpaved roads. Public Works Director Meyer added that the Council adopted an ordinance that requires pedestrian amenities when doing an SAD.

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They briefly discussed the general process for road assessment districts and improvements. Commissioner Highland raised her concern about Mattox Street relating to life, safety, and traffic flow, apparently there is still no way for the city to correct any of their issues, unless there is a buy in and money from the residents. Chair Roberts commented that Planning Technician Engebretsen noted there may be neighborhoods with similar issues and when the safe streets plan is complete, it might address some of the issues.

Mrs. Venuti commented about a call she received about the plants that block the view at Sveldund turning on to Pioneer. She wonders what policy addresses that safety issue. Planning Technician Engebretsen commented the intersection at Pioneer and the Sterling Highway is the same situation that wasn't planned very well, and hopefully doesn't happen again when new intersections are designed.

The Committee had no recommendations for changes to the HART Policy.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Design Criteria Manual in Relation to Mattox Street Issues

Mr. Smith commented there is a list of special conditions on packet page 26, and it a place they could include "pedestrian safety" which would open the manual to traffic calming specifics.

SMITH/VENUTI MOVED TO ADD PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ISSUES TO THE LIST OF SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR STREET DESIGNS.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT

Motion carried.

Mr. Walker commented that this discussion could tie in with the complete streets manual concepts for improvements.

Ms. Highland commented that this will take some time to go through. She noted, for example, there will be some new definitions that have come up since 1987 when the manual was done. She suggested item H. Drainage on page 55, in relation to Mattox representatives saying there needs to be a curb and drainage, and that it is a huge and expensive project. She wonders if H is a way to help their situation without so much cost. Mr. Smith commented that in a 60 foot right of way it is impractical to detach the sidewalk, Pioneer Avenue being a good example. Anywhere it's detached it would require an easement. He reiterated that the traffic calming ideas brought forward for Mattox include curb and paving for their mechanisms to work. The road would have to be reconstructed.

Ms. Highland talked about some easy inexpensive fixes with ropes and fishing floats, but was reminded that anything above the pavement is going to be a snow removal problem and would have to be pulled in the winter. It is also a summer maintenance problem when grading roads.

The Committee agreed to revisit this on the next agenda and discuss it parallel with the safe streets activity.

B. Complete Streets: Best Policy Implementation Practices Document for Review and Discussion

Planning Technician Engebretsen commented that she isn't sure where this document came from but it isn't something she would have given the group because it pertains to very urban areas. The Planning Commission asked for a clear process for people to use, and a clear idea of what options the City has available. It would be something like a menu of options if you have a paved street or a gravel street and may include costs and if the City would share in the costs for certain improvements. It would include things that have already been discussed and vetted with Public Safety and Public Works, also Commissions and Council.

Ms. Highland reported she brought up the Mattox issue with the Planning Commission and City Manager Wrede talked to them about safe streets. He brought up thoughts being considered like speed humps, narrower lanes, walking and biking lanes, lowering speed limits, and new signage. The Commission talked about creating a plan process for neighborhoods with a spreadsheet that would include different ideas. She said Charlie Davis questioned why we aren't getting out on all intersections with pavement, because they all need is to mark the lanes that make it obvious of where to be to make a turn. She read memo from Planning Technician Engebretsen summarizing an overview of the Commissions thoughts, which did bring up the idea of a joint discussion with the Planning Commission possibly at their second meeting in January.

Mr. Smith said it would be a good idea to put the turn lanes in at Heath and Poopdeck.

Public Works Director explained the difference between speed bumps and humps, and speed tables. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Everything he reads, you can't just put them anywhere. A community spent half a million dollars installing them, then the community was outraged, and they had to remove them all. They impact emergency vehicles, fire departments say they lose 10 seconds of response time for every speed hump or bump they encounter, and ambulances even more, especially when carrying patients. They have the potential to increase noise because there will be people who slow down, but the acceleration noise can be greater than people speeding by without bumps. In speaking with the equipment operators they object to the bump, but the more experienced operators thought they may be able to deal with humps. He thinks they can develop a manual to help define a process to have them installed. Based on the processes established in other communities, this isn't something that simply takes an hour of an engineer's time to evaluate. One thing that has to be evaluated is average daily traffic, and we don't have that information on most of our roads, but is a criteria you want to know before making decision.

Planning Technician Engebretsen added that in her experience reviewing traffic calming, there is a combination of things that will collectively solve the problem, not simply one fix. Also enforcement is another avenue. When people say there is a problem, and they aren't contacting the police, that is an issue. It isn't a problem if you can't document it and measure it. In relation to a safe streets manual she is looking at something like the trails criteria manual, and that it could take up to a year to have a final draft, by the time it goes through all the processes.

C. 2014 Meeting Schedule

SMITH/HIGHLAND MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2014 MEETING SCHEDULE AS IT IS.

Discussion ensued that the Committee would like to be included in the next CIP review to make recommendations regarding road projects. They recognized that a special meeting may be necessary based on the CIP schedule.

VOTE: NON OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT

Motion carried.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

None

AUDIENCE COMMENTS

None

COMMENTS OF THE STAFF

Public Works Director Meyer commented that there are many transportation related projects we are all aware of. Council set five priority projects, one of them being the modeled extensions and new roads, and that the new east west corridor, from Lake Street through Main Street, was a good place to start.

COMMENTS OF THE CHAIR

Chair Roberts commented that the Council changed their process this year, in the past they have recommended 15 items on the list that was sent to the legislature. This year they looked at 5 categories and transportation was one of them. She expects it will be the same process next year and urged the group to think about projects the Committee would like to recommend.

COMMENTS OF THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mr. Walker commented that in working on the Kachemak Drive path, it was found to be on state land. It is a state airport, but because the path group isn't a government agency they have question whether they can give a free permit to cross the property, even though it is going to the airport. They paid the \$100 fee; and they are working on a waiver so they won't have to pay a lease for the trail. He knows we bought property by the Greatland Street extension for the new restroom. If we build a road on Greatland wouldn't have to buy another piece of property.

Mrs. Venuti reminded the group as they are driving about think about one ways. It's inexpensive and may fix things for a while.

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Ms. Highland asked about having the Main Street / Sterling and roundabouts on the next agenda.

Chair Roberts reviewed her agenda list which includes the reviewing the design criteria manual in parallel with the safe streets project, roundabouts, and Main Street.

Mr. Smith said they talked about widening and putting in a turn lane at Heath and Poopdeck. He doesn't know if the committee needs to consent to that for the Council to act, but encouraged Chair Roberts to take that up with them. It's very doable for little money and HART funds could be used to do it. It would accomplish something that would solve a lot of problems that we talk about every time we are here. He would like it on the next agenda if necessary to take an action.

ADJOURN

There being no more business to come before the Committee the meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for February 18, 2014 at 5:30 p.m. in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers.

MELISSA JACOBSEN, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK

Approved: _____