

Traffic Committee

MINUTES

July 9, 2010

Committee Members

Present:

Mayor Pro-Tem Hazel Tyndall, Council Liaison; Susan Ruinen, Chair; Clyde Smith, Co-Chair; Karen Hanner, Secretary; Randy Edwards; Bob Ferrell; David McGehee; Rosemary Wilson; Sandy Paavel; Jay Daniels; Larry Yon; Rosemarie Nuzzo; Dan Walker

Attending:

Britt Poole, Mayor Randy Halfacre, Danny Frazier, Stuart Ford, Johnny Jeffcoat, Terrence Green

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 AM in the Eli Mack Room by Chair Susan Ruinen.

Update:

Susan Ruinen reminded those attending that at the last meeting it was agreed that a Traffic Committee meeting would be called in July if there was progress on current issues.

She stated SCDOT had been asked to look at two specific issues regarding the Phase I Traffic Plan; 1) U-turns with possible signalization and 2) breaks in the concrete medians. SCDOT responded that U-turns would not be signalized or have signage but they would not be disallowed and that it was not a good idea to have any median breaks.

Hazel Tyndall commented that she was aware of the rumor mill and wanted to clarify that there was no "secret meeting". There was a breakfast meeting between Mayor Halfacre, Danny Frazier, John Hardy, John Walsh (SCDOT) and Ted Stambolitis shortly after the June Traffic Committee meeting. Susan Ruinen stated that Hazel should have been included in any meeting about the Phase I Traffic Plan.

Susan reported that she attended a meeting on Wednesday, July 7, 2010 with Randy, Hazel, Britt, Kati Holland and Randy Young. SCDOT produced a revised plan for Phase I that showed painted medians on US 378. The only raised concrete medians in the plan were the triangle in front of Walgreen's and near the triangle along West Main Street. Susan said she has not received any documentation regarding the change from SCDOT.

Susan added that the initial proposed plan from 2007 did not show a raised concrete median on 378. After the design field review, where the project planners actually visited the site, a concrete median was recommended.

Danny Frazier commented that between the time that the recommended design plan was presented and the current revised plan, John Walsh came in at SCDOT.

Susan Ruinen referred to the Access Management Guide of SCDOT and SCDOT's statement that raised concrete medians could increase capacity by 30% and decrease delays by 30%.

Bob Ferrell commented that he had discussed this issue with John Walsh. The modifications to the plan had multiple considerations in addition to the issues that were raised such as the costs involved in construction of the concrete median and the possibility of damage claims from businesses.

Hazel Tyndall responded that she was having research collected on lawsuits against SCDOT claiming damages to businesses from road improvements.

Terrence Green reported that it is illegal to cross a double yellow line and it is very difficult to enforce.

Randy Edwards stated there is a valid concern regarding a perception of community pressure rendering the Town incapable of making a hard decision. He asked how they could go ahead with the even greater changes involved in Phase II and III of this Traffic Plan.

Randy Halfacre recalled that when the Traffic Improvement Plan was first proposed, he was a leader in the Town of Lexington and he supported the plan. He caught a “lot of heat” but “didn’t fold”.

Susan Ruinen stated that by taking out the concrete medians that were designed by engineers to best improve traffic flow, he was backing down.

Hazel Tyndall commented that SCDOT came to the Town with their people and presented their best plan. Politics cast doubt on that plan. The engineers initially designed a plan to provide the safest maximum results and stated they wouldn’t change it. In a few months, it has been changed. She stated she wanted to know how the change to the plan is explained. She requested a meeting with the same engineers to explain how they came up with this new plan.

Randy Halfacre stated that when SCDOT presented their plan, Ted Stambolitis and a number of other business owners were concerned about how it would affect them so SCDOT was asked to take another look at it. When they presented this plan, he was surprised. He said there would be a meeting with John Walsh.

Danny Frazier stated he proposed a cut through the concrete median as a compromise. He supported the Traffic Improvement Plan from the beginning. He went to Beaufort to meet Lautenberg with the Transportation Appropriations Committee with the five thousand in contributions from members of Lexington’s business community and got the initial five million. With Johnny Jeffcoat, John Hardy and the COG, he met with Henry Taylor to negotiate for eight million to the Town of Lexington. He was at the Traffic Committee meeting where thirty people who had lived their whole lives in this community told how the plan with concrete medians bothered them. John Walsh took over at SCDOT and agreed to take another look at it.

Clyde Smith commented that when he got the call from Susan Ruinen he was not happy. He thought the change was all politics and a back room deal. He said he had a heated phone conversation with Randy Halfacre and he is not offering an apology. He said he felt the way it was handled showed poor judgment. He agreed that getting money for projects is very political. He proposed moving forward with what the engineers say should be done.

David McGehee reported that he felt the decision was pathetic and he smelled a big stinking rat somewhere. He stated he understood it is politics to get the money and it is politics that changed a plan. He recalled recent incidents on 378 where two lanes of traffic had stopped to allow a vehicle to make a left turn into a business. He stated that if this town council cannot stand up to the people that want to continuously make changes to the current traffic plan for their own benefit; they are as pathetic and weak as they say the past town councils have been on traffic issues.

Randy Edwards commented that his opinion is based on civil engineering experience. He observed that drivers are like cattle; they need to be herded to direct the flow of traffic. The most safe and efficient traffic flow occurs where lanes are divided.

Bob Ferrell stated that in his experience, it is not a perfect world. Engineers look at engineering perspectives while others are looking at a broader picture. He commented that this project has been shot in the foot repeatedly but he wants the project to move on. There are pros and cons both ways and being on the Traffic Committee is tough. He wants to support the best answer for everybody.

Susan Ruinen stated that there are various community representatives on the committee to ensure a variety of opinions. She believes it is a good representation of the Town of Lexington. She wants to see that what is done is the best for the Town. This committee does not make policy; it only offers a recommendation to Town Council.

Sandy Paavel said she had discussed the issue with neighbors. Most drivers have a destination in mind before leaving. She is interested in seeing progress in the movement of traffic but if it looks like a duck, it is a duck.

Jay Daniels stated that he had missed some meetings and has not been involved with the project from the beginning but he has seen instances of various entities taking sides against professionals on an issue. He said it would be foolish not to listen to those who are trained to do this. He has heard a lot regarding the plan and he would have a problem with it if that was the case. It would seem like a slap in the face to those who have put in their blood, sweat and tears on this project.

Rosemary Wilson said she was not an engineer but she lives in this community and is very analytical. She likes to see data. She heard Kati Holland very clearly say that this plan would not work without concrete medians. She said she supports making this the best it can be. She wants to know why the medians came out of the plan and how SCDOT can justify making that decision.

Bob Ferrell asked if this decision has been made and are there any caveats or money considerations.

Randy Halfacre replied that this plan came to them as “almost final” with the painted median. The “final plan” had included the concrete median and then issues were raised. There was a public hearing and SCDOT took another look. At the recent meeting, the latest plan showed the painted median. He stated that before he votes on this, he wants to be totally satisfied about it.

Hazel Tyndall commented that she would like to be included in any other meetings about the Traffic Plan.

Dan Walker made a motion that the committee request SCDOT staff appear and explain in detail the reasoning behind their decision to remove the concrete medians. Bob Ferrell seconded the motion.

Susan asked if Town Council would vote on the plan at the next meeting because there wouldn't be time to wait for SCDOT. Randy Halfacre said he would not put it on the agenda until he felt satisfied about the issues.

Members voting aye in support of the motion: Dan Walker, David McGehee, Bob Ferrell, Larry Yon, Jay Daniels, Susan Ruinen, Rosemary Wilson, Randy Edwards, Clyde Smith and Sandy Pavaal. There were no votes against the motion.

Jay Daniels commented that very often a lack of transparency around an issue fosters rumor and suspicion.

Randy Halfacre commented that we need to rely on facts. There are now two different plans on the table and either one could work. Until there is more information from SCDOT, he can't support a vote. He will work on a meeting with John Walsh.

Susan Ruinen stated that any information from SCDOT needs to be brought back to the Traffic Committee so it can make a recommendation. She would like to hear from Kati Holland.

Randy Edwards commented that most members of the committee heard the statement Kati Holland made: "without the median, the plan will not meet the purpose of the project." He found it difficult to defend her response and suspects it may have fueled some of the undercurrent and perceptions. Now the plan shows the medians removed and that "smells". He said he would not have presented it that way.

The meeting was adjourned on a motion by Clyde Smith, seconded by Dan Walker with unanimous approval by members present.

Respectfully submitted by Karen Hanner, Secretary.

Approved By:

Susan Ruinen, Chair