

MINUTES
PRINCETON TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
January 13, 2014
Meeting Room A
Witherspoon Municipal Building

Present: Robert Altman, Kristin Appelget (Princeton University liaison), Murali Balasubramanian, Sam Bunting, Jo Butler (Council liaison), Pamela Hersh, Robert Kiser (staff liaison), Anton Lahnston (Chair), Surinder Sharma, Deanna Stockton (engineering staff), Jack West (staff liaison), and Ralph Widner. **Absent:** Sgt. Tom Murray (police department liaison). **Guests:** Carolyn Barnshaw (Terhune Road resident), Michael and Unia Oliver (owners of Skillman Furniture), and Daniel Rappaport.

Chairman Anton Lahnston convened the meeting at 5:15 p.m.

1. New Committee Member

Anton Lahnston introduced Sam Bunting, newly appointed to the committee by Mayor Lempert. He will also serve as liaison with the Pedestrian and Bicycle Committee. A native of Belfast, Ireland and educated at Oxford and Cambridge, Sam explained that he has a long-standing interest in and commitment to citizen-based decision-making and looks forward to working with the committee.

2. Approval of December 9, 2013 Minutes.

Robert Altman moved approval of the December 9, 2013 committee meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

3. Police Report

Sgt. Tom Murray was unable to attend the meeting because of a death in his family. The police report was postponed to the February meeting.

4. Review of Speed Limits on Terhune Road

Anton Lahnston summarized a report concerning speed limits on Terhune Road prepared by Sgt. Murray. The report is attached to and made a part of these minutes. A speed study was undertaken in response to requests from Mrs. Carolyn Barnshaw and some neighbors who have been concerned for some time about speeding on Terhune Road and requested that the speed limit in their neighborhood be lowered to 25 mph.

An independent study by Atlantic Traffic and Design Engineers found that the average percentile speed on the road was 39.6 mph which, based on Federal and state procedures, indicates that the appropriate speed limit for the road is 35 mph. The speed limit on the section of Terhune Road along which Mrs. Branshaw and neighbors live is set at 30 mph.

Sgt. Murray recommended that the speed limit be kept at 30 mph, but that enforcement be stepped up and that a 35 mph speed limit sign currently located just east of Meadowbrook Road be relocated further east in order to reduce confusion.

Mrs. Barnshaw then submitted a detailed response and set of requests to the committee urging that the speed limit be lowered to 25 mph on the section of Terhune Road where she and her neighbors live. Her request is attached to and made a part of these minutes. She pointed out that on many residential streets in Princeton, the speed limit is 25 mph and that Terhune Road deserves similar treatment.

The Traffic and Transportation subcommittee recommended that the full committee adopt the recommendations in Sgt. Murray's report.

Ralph Widner asked whether there is a residual inconsistency in speed limits between residential streets in the former borough and township. Robert Kiser responded that the ordinances were effectively reconciled. Sam Bunting said that when residents call attention to a problem, we should pay special heed and that perhaps narrowing lanes would lead drivers to reduce their speed when traveling through this neighborhood. Jo Butler added that we should be as responsive as possible when residents living daily with a problem call attention to it. Pam Hersh urged that we consider a more "holistic" approach and look at speed limit practices in the community as a whole. Robert Altman suggested that a community-wide study of potentials for traffic calming might be warranted. Robert Kiser pointed out that until this study was done, police had not focused enforcement efforts on Terhune and now they will do so. Chairman Lahnston then called for a vote.

Robert Altman moved, and Murali Balasubramanian seconded, a motion to approve the recommendations in Sgt. Murray's report. The motion was approved by an affirmative vote of 5, one against, and one abstention.

Anton Lahnston informed Mrs. Barnshaw that she could appeal the decision and take her request to Council if she wished.

5. Bus Shelters

Pam Hersh reported that in about two weeks, the trustees of the \$500,000 Transit Trust Fund established under the Memorandum of Understanding between Princeton University and the community will issue an invitation for proposals for initiatives to meet transit needs in the community. She said that, in response, she and Robert Kiser will prepare a proposal to fund a competition in which architects would come up with designs for bus shelters. Marvin Reed asked whether architects would be given specifications that allow for the posting of schedules and other information. The bus shelters provided by New Jersey Transit at various locations in the community have

no such capability. Jo Butler asked Pam Hersh whether she has spoken with anyone about Plainsboro's bus shelters, which she finds quite attractive. Pam Hersh responded that she is "not a fan" of those shelters.

6. Arts and Transit Update

Kristin Appelget said that the new rotary at University Place/Alexander Road will be open to traffic (weather permitting) January 26 or 27th, well ahead of schedule.

The new electronic parking meters for the pilot test in the parking lot will be installed two weeks after Council authorizes them, presumably at its meeting on January 27.

7. Alexander/University Place Task Force

Anton Lahnston asked Robert Kiser and Jack West for an update on the work of the ASUP Task Force. They said that the Task Force is still at work and has several months to go before its work is completed. Anton Lahnston asked if the Traffic and Transportation Committee should be taking any actions in connection with this work. They responded not at this point. Marvin Reed said that the summary of the work provided by Kevin Wilkes at the last meeting of the Planning Board opened up many questions about changing traffic flows and traffic forecasts.

8. Traffic and Transportation Subcommittee

- Jack West reported that, starting with downtown and working outward, the inventory and analysis of street signage is now underway.
- Anton Lahnston said that he has been unable to undertake the assessment of lighting at critical crosswalks, but will get to it as his and Robert Kiser's schedule permit.
- Robert Kiser and Jack West reported that the feasibility of a left turn from Bayard (US 206) onto Robeson is on hold because NJDOT wants a Council resolution to ensure that the town will provide 25 percent of funding for any light change should a study find such a change feasible. In response to a question from Anton Lahnston, he said the same would apply for a left turn signal from Robeson onto Bayard. Jo Butler asked where requests for such changes came from and Jack West said from residents in the Hodge/Westcott/Cleveland neighborhood.
- Deanna Stockton said that she will study the desirability/feasibility of a traffic light at Mountain Ave./ Great Road. She will confer with Mercer County officials, since a county highway is involved.
- Anton Lahnston said that Bob McQueen, on the town staff, is working on an app by means of which residents will be able to inform town

officials quickly of any problems they spot. Murali Balasubramanian cited an app used in Boston as a good example.

9. Priority 2013 Traffic and Transportation Goals of Mayor and Council

Anton Lahnston reported that he found eight priority traffic and transportation goals for 2013 set by the Mayor and Council. Some have been addressed. Some are quite general. He asked Sam Bunting to review them and report back with recommendations, including how they relate to Complete Streets and the Circulation Element in the Master Plan.

10. Action Register

Surinder Sharma passed around the currently revised version of the Action Register. It is appended to and made a part of these minutes. Anton Lahnston asked members to send any changes to Surinder by close of business on Friday, January 17th.

11. Future Meeting Dates

The committee will meet on February 10, March 10, April 21, May 12, and June 9.

The meeting adjourned at 7 p.m.

Attachment --



Princeton Police Department

1 Valley Road

Princeton, NJ 08540

609-921-2100 Ext 1879

609-924-8197 Fax

Email: tmurray@princetonnj.gov

<http://www.princetonnj.gov>

Sergeant Thomas R. Murray III

Traffic Safety Bureau Supervisor

11/22

/13

To the members of the Traffic and Transportation Committee,

The following information is in reference to the continued expressed requests made by Mrs. Carolyn Barnshaw and some neighbors for lowering the speed limit on Terhune Road between Harrison Street and Meadowbrook Road from the current posted 30 MPH limit down to a posted 25 MPH limit.

Changes to posted speed limits are often considered as a cure for a community's traffic safety concerns. Citizens frequently request speed limit reductions as a means of providing a fix to complicated traffic problems (which are most usually the result of volume based issues). Research has shown that the majority of drivers operate their vehicles at speeds which they feel are reasonable for the surrounding conditions. Research has also shown that emotionally or politically motivated

changes in the posted speed limit actually have little to no impact upon the actual operating speeds of the motoring public.

Within the State of New Jersey, the ultimate authority to determine speed limits on all roads is the Commissioner of Transportation. R.S. 39:4-8 provides that “No ordinance...shall be of any force or effect unless it is approved by the Commissioner of Transportation.” Changes to this law over the years have resulted in local authorities having greater say regarding speed limits on their roadways but the Commissioner still has the ability and right to reject speeds that are not established in accordance with reasonable standards (R.S. 39:4-8b). The statute also provides, “The Commissioner shall not be required to approve any such ordinance, resolution or regulation, unless, after investigation by him, the same shall appear to be in the best interest of safety and expedition of traffic on the public highways.” The Commissioner’s designee for this approval authority is the Manager of the Bureau of Traffic Engineering and Safety Programs. Please note the words, “Expedition of traffic” as the goal of traffic safety is to move the motoring public as safely AND efficiently as possible because creating undue delay eventually results in contributing to aggressive driving habits which eventually leads to a conflict in the form of a motor vehicle accident.

The State of New Jersey, along with all of the other states, bases its speed regulations on what is referred to as the Basic Speed Law. This law provides that “No person shall drive a vehicle...at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent...and in no event at a speed which endangers the safety of persons or property.” In addition, R.S. 39:4-98 provides for Statutory Speed Limits (ie, 25 MPH for business or residential districts, 35 MPH for suburban residential districts, 50 MPH in rural areas). It further provides that “Whenever it shall be determined upon the basis of an engineering and traffic investigation that any speed hereinbefore set forth is greater or less than is reasonable or safe under the

conditions found to exist ..the Commissioner of Transportation..County or Municipal Authority..(may) designate a reasonable and safe speed limit. Please keep in mind that although we are granted the right to recommend and/or eventually designate this limit (w/ approval of NJDOT) it must not only be based upon factual engineering and traffic studies (i.e, formal speed counts and NJTR-1 investigation studies) but also be 'reasonable' in nature.

Engineering surveys to determine appropriate speeds include an analysis of roadway conditions, accident history records and a sampling of the prevailing speed of traffic. The industry accepted standard is to set the speed based on the speed at or below which 85% of the free flow of traffic is traveling. Posting of appropriate speed limits not only eliminates undue delay but also assists law enforcement agencies when it comes to enforcement itself. Blatant speeders are easily spotted, safe drivers are not unduly penalized with increased traffic time (and for being required to travel at a speed which is less than reasonable), and the law enforcement agency is not put in the untenable position of having to enforce and defend a law which is unrealistic and arbitrary (and, more importantly, not based upon the aforementioned engineering and traffic studies).

A previous study completed for the Federal Highway Administration, "Effects of Raising and Lowering Speed Limits on Selected Roadway Sections", which included several sections of roadways within New Jersey, revealed that neither raising nor lowering the posted speed limit had much effect on actual vehicle speeds. Two key indicators of speed, mean speed and 85th percentile speed, did not change more than 1 to 2 miles per hour, even for a speed limit changes of up to 15 MPH. Once again, this tells us that the majority of the motoring public will continue to travel at speeds which they believe are reasonable.

The key to successful speed zoning is compromise. It must be remembered that the most vocal group(s) when it comes to expressed speeding concerns will be the residents of the area themselves while the unrepresented majority are the roadway users. It is the balance of the ideas that this roadway is my front yard and where my reality meets the rest of the world, and the roadway serving a part of a larger transportation network that provides mobility and access to an area or region. Given the projected volume studies that have recently been published in regard to the traffic volume doubling within Princeton within the next 15 years, it is our duty to help keep traffic flowing as safely AND efficiently as possible. This is the balance that must be achieved in order to gain compliance from the motoring public when it comes to speeding concerns.

Throughout the years, the Bureau of Traffic Engineering and Safety Programs' philosophy on speed zoning has changed. When the function was in the Division of Motor Vehicles, up until 1969, the standard was to determine the 85th percentile speed and then round up to the next 5 MPH increment to establish the posted speed. When the function was later transferred to the Department of Transportation, this position was softened and the 85th percentile speeds were rounded down. Time has tempered this stance even further and an additional 5 MPH reduction is, in certain instances, applied when it is determined to be appropriate because of surrounding conditions or roadway features (i.e, lack of sidewalk system in an area, sight distance concerns, established motor vehicle accident history w/ speeding as the primary contributing factor, ...etc).

According to the results submitted by Atlantic Traffic Engineering on 11/5/13, the documented 85th percentile speed was determined to be 39.6 MPH (which was within plus/minus 1.6 MPH of the results of my informal study conducted just months prior which revealed an estimated 85th percentile speed of 38 MPH). Given the information in the previous paragraph, this would set the correct limit (at least

in the eyes of the NJDOT) at 35 MPH. Given the above mentioned allowance for an additional 5 MPH, this would allow for a posted speed limit of 30 MPH which is the current posted speed limit in the area. Given the results of the study conducted by Atlantic Traffic and Design Engineers, coupled with our knowledge of the Motor Vehicle Accident history in the area, I recommend that we keep the current posted speed limit at 30 MPH.

Now that the aforementioned speed and volume study has been completed, the Princeton Police Department will once again focus on speed enforcement in this area via the use of decoy car and speed trailer deployments in concurrence with increased selective Police enforcement details in order to address the speeding concerns brought to the attention of the Traffic and Transportation Committee by Mrs Barnshaw and neighbors.

On a final note, after a re-evaluation of the location(s) of the respective posted speed limit signs in this area, I also recommend that the current 35 MPH Speed Limit sign currently located just east of Meadowbrook Road (denoting the beginning of the 35 MPH speed limit zone on Terhune/VanDyke Road from Meadowbrook Rd to Snowden Lane) be relocated further east on Terhune Road in order to avoid any potential confusion as to exactly what the posted speed limit is within the area located between North Harrison Street and Meadowbrook Road. Although we are legally bound to place this sign in close proximity to the beginning of an increased speed zone, I feel that there is some flexibility when it comes to the effective placement of this sign and that its relocation further east may help with speed control within the posted 30 MPH area.

Respectfully submitted,

Sgt. Thomas R. Murray III
Traffic Safety Officer
Princeton Police Department