

## CITY COUNCIL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MINUTES

May 19, 2011

The City Council Oversight Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met at 5:43 p.m. in the City Council Conference Room on the 19th day of May, 2011, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted in the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Atkins, Griffith, Kovach, and Chairman Dillingham

ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Ms. Jeanette Coker, Interested citizen  
Ms. Brenda Kimmel, Interested citizen  
Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works  
Mr. Mike Rayburn, Staff Engineer  
Mr. Dave Spaulding, Councilmember-Elect Ward Five  
Ms. Syndi Runyon, Administrative Assistant IV

DISCUSSION REGARDING TRAFFIC CALMING PROPOSED FOR THE AREA ADJACENT TO JEFFERSON AND LONGFELLOW SCHOOLS (ALONG GRAY STREET, PONCA AVENUE, AND COCKREL AVENUE) IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT RECEIVED BY THE CITY OF NORMAN.

Chairman Dillingham said the City of Norman had competed for and received a Safe Routes to School Grant (SRTS); however, one requirement of the grant is the installation of eleven speed humps along Gray Street, Ponca Avenue, and Cockrel Avenue to reduce speeding around Jefferson and Longfellow Schools. She said although the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT), the grantor, believes speed tables solve the speeding problems, speed tables have recently become very controversial in Norman.

Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works, provided a brief overview of the SRTS Program. He said SRTS is a 100% reimbursable federally funded program to encourage school children from Kindergarten through 8th grade to walk or bike to school. He said the program was formed in an attempt to address obesity issues and is administered through ODOT. He said the grant had two components consisting of non-infrastructure (school activities) and infrastructure (sidewalks, ramps, traffic calming, etc.). He said Jefferson, Longfellow, and Truman Schools had co-applied for the grant in 2008 and Jefferson and Longfellow were approved while Truman was denied.

Mr. O'Leary said the grant totaled \$248,900 with \$5,000 for non-infrastructure and \$198,900 for infrastructure. He said Rudy Construction Company was the lowest bidder at \$183,517.06 and the contract is on the Council's agenda for May 24, 2011. He said the City of Norman and ODOT are sponsors for the project and have coordinated and managed all design activities with the City fronting the costs to be reimbursed by ODOT.

Mr. O'Leary said, during the application process, there had been a very active Steering Committee consisting of representatives from Norman Public Schools, Norman Regional Hospital, Norman Police Department, City of Norman Public Works Department, and City of Norman Planning Department. He said the application process is very elaborate and time consuming. He said the schools were required to conduct written surveys of parents and students; determine distances kids lived from the school; how kids were getting to and from school; and why kids were not walking or biking to school. Schools also had to complete an assessment survey identifying barriers such as convenience to the parents; speeding vehicles on corridors leading to schools; inadequate sidewalks/ramps; and safety and stranger danger issues.

Mr. O'Leary highlighted the timeline of the grant beginning with application in July 2007, and said the construction must be completed by September 2011. He said speed tables were at the height of popularity in 2008, when the project was designed and the application submitted so the City did not go through the petition process required for construction of speed tables. Chairman Dillingham said the application process had included huge information gathering from the schools and parents. Mr. O'Leary said, at that time, the schools were trying to determine what they needed to help children get on their bikes and get on their feet.

Mr. O'Leary said the SRTS Project infrastructure consists of new or replaced sidewalks; American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant wheel chair ramps; "SCHOOL" pavement markings; mast arm flashers (two on Porter Avenue and two on Classen Boulevard); eleven traffic calming speed tables on Gray, Findlay, and Ponca; in-pavement lighted crosswalk on Main Street at Cockrel Avenue; and bike racks at Longfellow.

Mr. O'Leary provided an overview of the process of acquiring speed tables in a neighborhood. He said one requirement is the speed tables must be supported by 60% of the neighborhood in order to qualify, but that did not happen during the grant application process. He said speed tables are currently very unpopular and, in hindsight, the City should have distributed a petition. Councilmember Atkins asked if SRTS is federally funded and speed tables are a requirement of the program, does the citizen driven process still apply. Mr. O'Leary said that would be Council's decision to make. Councilmember Kovach said there is a difference between a federal mandate and a program the City is voluntarily participating in. Chairman Dillingham said Council can certainly make a policy decision; however, since speed tables are controversial she would like more citizen input. Councilmember Atkins asked if the neighborhoods rejected speed tables through a petition process, would the City have to opt out of the SRTS Program. Mr. O'Leary said that is the crux of tonight's meeting. He said if the project does not go forward the non-reimbursable expenses the City has already expended are approximately \$31,000. Chairman Dillingham said she would hate to lose a \$200,000 grant. Mr. O'Leary said a public meeting was held on May 5, 2011, regarding the speed table portion of the grant and only two citizens attended that meeting. He said the two citizens did take petitions to distribute throughout the three impacted streets.

Mr. O'Leary said construction time is 90 days and if construction began June 1, 2011, it could be completed by September 1, 2011, meeting the project deadline so he felt it is important to award the contract on May 24th. He said the City could move forward with construction of sidewalks, which is the largest portion of the project, and find another speed calming solution that would meet ODOT's approval. He said changes to the current contract would require approval by ODOT prior to Council approval. He said Council has three options, 1) award the contract, as bid, 2) award the contract on condition that an alternative speed calming solution will be submitted by change order, or 3) postpone the contract and risk losing the grant and withdrawal of the contractor.

Chairman Dillingham said ODOT has stated they are not wild about speed feedback signs being used as traffic calming devices because they do not guarantee vehicles will slow down, but speed tables do guarantee vehicles will slow down or get damaged if not. Chairman Dillingham said constituents are not been happy about six speed tables being constructed on Gray Street. Councilmember Kovach said there is a dip on Gray Street near the school and placing a speed table near there would be redundant. He said another problem with Gray Street is that it is a major artery and constructing speed tables would only push the traffic to other neighborhoods. Councilmember Atkins felt speed tables would drive the traffic onto Main Street, only to turn right to get back onto Gray Street causing a queuing problem between Main and Gray Streets. Chairman Dillingham agreed and asked Staff if the City could use a combination of "traffic cushions" and speed feedback signs. She asked Mr. O'Leary to explain how the cushions work and he said speed cushions are similar to a speed table, but smaller in size allowing larger vehicles such as busses and fire trucks to get their wheel base around the cushion. Mr. O'Leary said a combination of calming devices would be approved by ODOT if speeding issues are truly addressed.

Councilmember Kovach asked how the petition process was coming along and Mr. O'Leary said the petitions are due Friday, but feedback from the neighborhoods have not been favorable.

Chairman Dillingham said she had been asked by constituents why more stop signs could not be installed as well as a traffic light at Porter Avenue and Acres Street to control speed. Mr. O'Leary said, according to Oklahoma law, stop signs must be warranted by specific volumes of traffic and he does not believe any of the intersections in the area would qualify. He said stop signs are not to be used a traffic calming devices and when there are a lot of stop signs, people tend to speed up between stop signs. He said speed tables are constructed five feet apart so it is more difficult to speed up between tables so speed is reduced. Mr. David Riesland said there was not enough money in the grant to pay for a traffic light on Porter. Chairman Dillingham agreed that children having to cross Porter to get to school is dangerous. Councilmember Kovach asked what the cost would be for a traffic light and Mr. O'Leary said approximately \$150,000, but there are usually other factors involved with traffic lights and it is not uncommon for costs to be as high as \$500,000.

Citizens at the meeting suggested installing a "walk only" signal on Porter and Chairman Dillingham asked Staff if it would be possible to get a button crossing with a wide, clearly marked crosswalk. Mr. O'Leary said this could be a possibility, but, historically, his experience has been that even though that type of signal seems safer, the actuality is that children do not feel safer, parents do not feel safer, and they do not get used. Councilmember Kovach asked about the cost of a button crossing and Mr. Riesland said approximately \$20,000. Chairman Dillingham and Councilmember Kovach felt the money could be found in the City budget and this issue should be taken up as a priority item. Chairman Dillingham explained to the citizens that a signal on Porter was not part of the SRTS grant. Mr. O'Leary said the focus of SRTS grants will always be the areas nearest the schools and a crossing at Porter Avenue was not a priority in surveys taken in 2007. Chairman Dillingham assured the citizens present that she would make a signal on Porter Avenue her top priority.

Councilmember Kovach asked how extensively the speed feedback signs could be used if petitions did not meet requirements for speed tables and Mr. O'Leary said ODOT feels that speed feedback signs are not effective in slowing speeders and anything the City proposes must be proven to slow down traffic, but said that is Council's decision if they want to submit speed feedback signs as an option to ODOT.

Chairman Dillingham asked what type of post-grant reporting must be done and Mr. Riesland said there is an after study that has to be prepared which would include any increase in the number of children walking or biking to school and reduction of obesity numbers.

Councilmember Atkins felt that cushions would be better received because busses could get around the cushions and Mr. O'Leary felt the cushions would be more acceptable to ODOT than speed feedback signs, but thought a combination of both might work. Chairman Dillingham said she did not believe there would enough support for speed tables on Gray Street and suggested installing three sets of cushions and three speed feedback signs.

City Council Oversight Committee Minutes

May 19, 2011

Page 4

Chairman Dillingham felt the consensus is no speed tables and asked Mr. O'Leary if Staff could put together some alternative options for the Committee's review. Mr. O'Leary said yes, and felt it was important to approve the contract in Council's meeting on Tuesday, May 24, 2011, in order to get construction started with the condition that alternative speed calming options be submitted at a later meeting. He said this would allow Staff time to redesign traffic calming concepts to bring back to the Oversight Committee in June prior to submission to ODOT or Council.

Councilmember Kovach asked when Staff would be able to provide a design and cost estimates for a crossing on Porter Avenue and Mr. O'Leary said a week or two. Councilmember Kovach felt that would be soon enough to amend the budget to include the project and other Councilmembers said they would be willing to give up projects in the budget to accommodate a signal.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation, "City Council Oversight Committee Meeting Safe Routes to School Project for Jefferson-Longfellow Schools," dated Wednesday, June 8, 2011

MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSION.

None

The meeting adjourned at 6:56 p.m.