

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MINUTES

January 20, 2009

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in a study session at 5:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building Conference Room on the 20th day of January, 2009, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray, and the Norman Public Library at 225 North Webster 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Butler, Cubberley, Dillingham, Griffith, Kovach, Quinn, Thompson, Mayor Rosenthal

ABSENT: Councilmember Ezzell

DISCUSSION REGARDING THE CITY COUNCIL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE'S REVIEW AND PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE TRAFFIC CALMING PROGRAM.

Councilmember Thompson, Chair of the Oversight Committee, said the Traffic Calming Program has been very successful in many regards and most neighborhoods were pleased with the results even though some citizens raised issues about the number of traffic calming devices installed and the severity of graduation on the newer speed humps. He said the Committee and Staff examined the existing process and the neighborhoods that qualified for the program. He said the Committee discussed the relevant criteria as well as alternative types of traffic calming for neighborhoods that did not qualify for speed tables or speed humps.

Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works, said the Oversight Committee met on October 1, November 5, and November 19, 2008, to review the program and in doing so, took on a very difficult task because although the program is both successful and popular, it is also unpopular with many citizens. He said from his perspective, Norman's Traffic Calming Program is a cutting edge program as less than 5% of cities in the United States have a program and 50% would like to have one since every city deals with traffic, safety, and speeding. He says although the program began in 2003, it matured in 2008 when 22 traffic calming projects were completed, which resulted in 100 new speed tables installed within 60 days in all parts of the City, which gave the program a higher level of visibility. He said 19 neighborhoods were working through the petition process when the Oversight Committee began its review and since that time, six neighborhoods have been added. He said all 25 neighborhoods have qualified under the current criteria. He said 13 neighborhoods have met with Public Works Staff; however, two neighborhoods - Hoover Street and Walnut Road would like to consider other alternatives to speed humps. He said four neighborhoods have submitted completed petitions; seven neighborhoods have completed neighborhood meetings with City Staff and are waiting to continue with the petition process after the Oversight Committee completes their review.

Mr. O'Leary provided an overview of concerns and complaints received about the Traffic Calming Program. He said one of the more common complaints received is only the residents and/or owners of property on the street in question have an opportunity to sign the petition and other residents in the neighborhood who use the street every day are not provided the same opportunity. He said the highest rated project last year was along Boyd Street, Shiloh Drive, and Sunrise Street, which just so happened to be the first project to impact a CART bus route. He said CART ultimately changed the route because the buses are too low to maneuver over the new speed humps. Additionally, he said the devices installed along Carter Street generated reactions from emergency responders. He said the traffic studies indicate the placement of traffic calming devices have reduced speed and traffic in areas where they are installed, but some feel the traffic has simply been diverted to streets.

Mr. Angelo Lombardo, City Traffic Engineer, said the City continues to receive many complaints about speeders in neighborhoods. He said in 1999 the Institute of Traffic Engineers published "Traffic Calming: State of the Practice," which summarized the practice of traffic calming in the United States. In 2002, City Council voted to fund a Traffic Calming Program and in January 2003, Mr. Mike Rayburn was hired as the Traffic Calming Program Manager. He said in FYE 2003, Staff researched other communities, drafted a Traffic Calming Program policy document, and implemented a pilot project in Cambridge Addition, which included several types of traffic calming devices. In FYE 2004, projects were considered on a first come – first serve basis and the first three traffic circles were constructed. In FYE 2005, prototype speed tables were built near Truman Elementary School on Parkside Road followed by construction of the first speed tables in FYE 2006. He

said by FYE 2007, project requests were increasing to the point that projects had to be reviewed and prioritized. He said the program budget was \$100,000 each year from FYE 2003 to 2007. Council increased the budget to \$160,000 in FYE 2008 and subsequently approved a supplemental appropriation of \$385,000 to take advantage of a good bid price, which provided for the construction of 100 additional speed tables. He said the Committee asked Staff to provide an annual cost to administer the program and those costs are estimated at \$100,000. To date 157 speed tables and 15 traffic circles have been installed and Staff has received 66 new inquiries that have not submitted written requests. Additionally, 1,578 eligible citizens have signed petitions with 1,189 expressing support from all areas of the City. He said locations eligible for traffic calming devices are residential collectors and local streets that meet the program criteria and highlighted the current support petition eligibility requirements as follows:

- Residences fronting or otherwise touching the street being “calmed” are eligible to sign the support petition.
- For traffic circles, residences within a 300-foot radius will also be eligible to sign the support petition.
- The signature can be from the property owner or his/her agent.
- Renters can sign the petition with the understanding; the property owner may possibly reverse the tenant’s vote.
- Any official representative of a business, church, school, homeowners’ association clubhouse, etc., will be accepted for non-residential petitioners.
- 60% of eligible petitioners are needed to support a calming project.

Mr. Lombardo said to qualify for the Traffic Calming Program, the 85th percentile speed must be greater than 7 miles per hour over the posted speed limit and the average daily traffic count must be a minimum of 500 vehicles per day. He said if more than five speed related accidents are reported within a three year period, that criterion can be substituted in lieu of speed or volume. He said Norman's criteria for qualification are some of the lowest in the nation, which was purposely established for greater inclusiveness to help as many neighborhoods as possible. Informational brochures are provided to interested citizens and if the criteria are met, a neighborhood meeting is coordinated. Citizens are notified by placing a flyer on their door advising them of the meeting place and time. City Staff makes the presentation and provides specific recommendations for the neighborhood.

Mr. Lombardo said representatives from CART submitted a statement to the City Council Transportation Committee indicating the speed tables were negatively affecting the condition of the buses and asked if CART could be included in the review process when a street is being considered for speed tables. He said CART provided a map of the bus routes and changed all the affected bus routes after the traffic calming devices were installed. He said there are requests that are in conflict with CART routes at this time and those making the requests have been so informed. Additionally, the Fire Department collected data regarding delay times on different roadways containing traffic calming devices and speed tables result in a delay of approximately 10 seconds per table. He said one alternative is a variation of the speed table called an “Offset (Divided) Speed Table” allowing emergency vehicles to maneuver around traffic calming devices. Staff has committed to Council and the Fire Department to look at the data and response time for each project requested to ensure it will not create an unmanageable situation. Mayor Rosenthal expressed concerns about the variation in delay times in different neighborhoods and Mr. Lombardo indicated the difference was due to the height of the speed bump/hump and said the second group of speed tables was installed one-quarter inch higher than the first group. He offered two suggestions, traffic calming devices not be placed on CART routes or emergency response routes where the installation would prohibit emergency responders from sustaining their optimum response time, which he hoped would reflect the Oversight Committee's recommendations. Moreover, he said only traffic circles and/or offset/divided speed tables will be used on main emergency routes to neighborhoods.

Furthermore, in an effort to address concerns about the number of qualifying requests and the diversion of traffic to other streets, Staff recommends the following changes to the program:

- Change qualifying 85th Percentile Speed criterion from 32 mph to 33 mph.
- Change qualifying Average Daily Traffic (ADT) criterion from 500 vehicles per day to 600 vehicles per day.
- Use enhanced enforcement by the Police Department and speed feedback radar trailers as first attempt calming efforts on a street before reevaluating and continuing the existing process to install permanent devices.
- Encourage the use of traffic circles, where possible, instead of speed tables.

Councilmember Dillingham said the Oversight Committee discussed allowing Staff the flexibility to consider projects which may not meet the criteria such as neighborhoods that did not have sidewalks, areas around neighborhood parks, and proximity to a school. Mayor Rosenthal felt the suggestions were relevant factors and should be added to the criteria. Councilmember Thompson said this was definitely a work in progress and Staff and the City Manager will look at all of the factors during the decision making process.

Councilmember Cubberley agreed if a neighborhood is experiencing a traffic problem, a Councilmember can request the Police Department provide additional patrol in the area, but said there are not enough police officers to take care of the problem permanently and the Traffic Calming Program is the only effective means to permanently address the problem. Councilmember Kovach said the Program Effectiveness Chart before and after installation of traffic calming devices indicates a large reduction of vehicles per day on the streets with devices, but he felt this was because the vehicles were using different routes.

Councilmember Cubberley said the issues should be looked at comprehensively and the whole neighborhood should be involved instead of looking at the problem one street at a time. He said as a whole the program had been successful because the Program Effectiveness Chart also indicates the cars using the streets are now driving the speed limit or lower. Mayor Rosenthal felt the design of the subdivision is vital in finding a comprehensive solution.

Mr. O'Leary provided the following changes to petition eligibility:

- Allow renters to sign support petitions only after reasonable efforts to contact owners have failed.
- For a well-defined neighborhood with sole ingress/egress, all residences will be eligible petitioners but only 50% support of petitioners will be necessary.
- All residences in a reasonable proximity that regularly use the street to be calmed are to be considered eligible petitioners including all residences in intersecting cul-de-sacs. 60% will continue to be the necessary level of support.

Councilmembers felt increasing the notification area to the entire neighborhood would be helpful and provide an opportunity for others who may not live on the street, but travel on the street to provide input. Mayor Rosenthal suggested notification of the entire neighborhood be discussed during the neighborhood meeting. Councilmember Quinn agreed and said it is important for everyone in the neighborhood to know how fast people are driving in their neighborhood and hear the concerns of their neighbors including the difference after speed tables installed.

Mr. Lombardo said the final recommendation will be to place more emphasis on inspection and tighter construction tolerances on the approaches of the speed tables. Mr. O'Leary said after construction, calming devices will be measured for accuracy.

Councilmember Kovach asked if the approaches of existing speed table could be adjusted to make them easier to maneuver and Mr. O'Leary said Staff will investigate that possibility.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "City of Norman Traffic Calming Program, Oversight Committee, Presentation to City Council, January 20, 2009"

The meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

ATTEST: