



**TRAFFIC AND SAFETY COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES**

**CITY OF ALBANY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
1000 SAN PABLO AVENUE
CITY OF ALBANY
March 27, 2008**

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m. by Lubov Mazur, Chair.

2. Roll Call

Members present: Ray Anderson, Lubov Mazur, David Madson, Richard Treat, and Marsha Atkinson

3. Consent Calendar

Treat called attention to the minutes stating that he was present at the February meeting. He requested changing the minutes reflecting his absence. Anderson moved/Matson seconded to approve the February 28, 2008 minutes with the change. The motion was passed as written.

4. Public Comment

Nick Pilch of the Albany Strollers and Rollers referred to a letter that they sent to the Commission requesting consideration of an ex-officio position on the Traffic and Safety Commission for bicycle and pedestrian advocacy. He said that other cities have formalized similar positions on their City Councils or commissions. Mazur suggested putting this issue in a future agenda

5. Discussion and possible action on matters related to the following items:

5-1 Public Hearing on draft Traffic Calming Plan adjacent to El Cerrito Plaza

Chaney provided background on this proposal and said that the possible recommendations to City Council in addition to forwarding the Traffic Calming Study conducted by Fehr and Peers are:

Pursuing the implementation of traffic calming measures as recommended in the Fehr and Peers study. This might likely require a Categorical Exemption or a Negative Declaration

Another alternative that could be part of all recommendations is the negotiation with the City of El Cerrito to improve circulation within the plaza and to discourage truck traffic from using Albany residential streets.

The other alternative is closing Talbot, Evelyn and Cornell Avenues leading to the Plaza, leaving Kains open; and partially close Kains Avenue south of Brighton.

Another alternative is closing all the streets leading to the Plaza. This would require a more extensive environmental review.

Any of these alternatives would require an amendment to the General Plan. Chaney suggested drafting a resolution to be considered at the next meeting in order to formalize the recommendation to the City Council.

Treat asked if the City would be required to test the project first and then evaluate it to consider next steps. Chaney said that it usually takes a year to monitor a project, as it was the case of Marin Avenue.

Sam Tabibnia of Fehr and Peers presented the findings of the draft report through a Power Point presentation. He said that it was essentially the same presentation used last month, but with some refinements.

Treat asked where the vehicles were coming from on Brighton Avenue.

Tabibnia said that approximately 60% come from the east and 40% from the west.

Madson asked if it would be necessary to remove parking when installing the traffic circles and pointed that parking is very limited in that area.

Tabibnia said that it would depend on how the circles are designed.

Atkinson asked if there would be stop signs on all four approaches to the circle. Tabibnia said that his recommendation would be to have yield signs on all the circle approaches.

Mazur referred to the impacts on Kains Avenue if it would be the only street left open under the partial closure option. She said that it would triple the volume of cars on Kains and it seemed excessive. The discussion was open to the public.

Kains Avenue resident said that he gets all the truck and vehicular traffic going or coming to/from the Plaza. He cannot imagine the amount of traffic if Kains is the only street left open to access the Plaza. He also thinks that the traffic circles would create a problem at school bell times because it gets very congested on the streets around the middle school.

Michael Greene said that it is really important not to funnel a lot of traffic onto one street. He asked that the Commission make a decision that is equitable.

Gene Hellwig of 1201 Brighton at Cornell said that having a circle is not a good idea because it would take all the limited parking available. In addition, the traffic calming option would not reduce the traffic volume on the streets. He supports total closure of the streets leading to the Plaza. This is how it was when he first moved to Albany in 1956.

Wengen said that he favors closing all the streets.

Lucile Miller resident at 636 Cornell Avenue called attention to the increased crime on the streets that are open to the Plaza. According to the Journal articles and police reports, ½ of the total crimes occurring in the cluster south of El Cerrito Plaza are committed in the 400 blocks of the streets accessing the Plaza. Stannage Ave. is closed to the Plaza and there had not been crime incidents on that street.

Lisa Schneider, 500 block of Stannage Avenue pointed out some issues that the Fehr and Peers report failed to analyze. For instance, she said that it does not address the impacts of the Plaza traffic on school zones. The report also failed to address the two child pedestrian collisions occurring in 2005. In addition, there is no mention of the volume of children walking or bicycling to school who currently use the streets south of the Plaza and the fact that they have to face the commercial traffic on their way to school. The conclusion of the report rests on the reduction of speeds rather than volume. She would like to see full closure proposed for the area.

Nick Pilch resident of Pierce Street urged the Commission to refer to Preston Jordan's letter supporting closing all the streets leading to the Plaza. He said that traffic calming would not reduce the volume of cars on the impacted streets. One thing to consider is that El Cerrito is receiving revenue from this project while Albany streets are being negatively impacted.

Noel Plummer, 400 block of Talbot said that she was surprised to learn that there is little correlation between volume and quality of life. She said that her street is completely different on Sunday than it is on Saturday. She thinks that converting Evelyn and Talbot to two-way streets without closure would create the same situation that already exists on Cornell.

Catherine Mattson, 400 block of Cornell Avenue represents the condo association. She supports full closure because people heading to the plaza usually drive large sport utility vehicles on very narrow streets.

Maureen Sandidge, 500 block of Kains thinks that the estimated amount of traffic on Kains is totally unacceptable if it is the only street left open. She supports having all streets close or all of them open.

Sol Strand resident of Pierce Street suggests implementing speed bumps similar to those built in the parking lot of Ranch 99. He said that big trucks slow down when passing on those sharp bumps.

Mike Young of 600 block of Cornell Avenue said that the streets adjacent to El Cerrito Plaza are not designed to be feeders for commercial areas. He supports closing all the streets leading to the Plaza. However, if traffic calming were implemented, he suggested extending the measures to the blocks further south of the area because cars speed once they pass the calming devices.

Lydia Chou of 500 block of Kains asked the consultant to explain in more detail the full closure option. Tabibnia provided explanation on the proposal.

Jason Foster of 400 block of Talbot referred to his email regarding speed and volume on residential streets. He said that full closure would not have much of an effect on the distance a person has to drive to access the Plaza. Foster asked the consultant about the study from the City of Pleasanton and the reason the report had not considered the Level of Service (LOS) guidelines included in the Pleasanton report for the analysis in Albany.

Tabibnia responded that the Fehr and Peers report is guided by established guidelines for LOS that are based on scientific research and it is what the transportation industry use to analyze traffic impacts of different projects. The City of Pleasanton report is based on staff's own perception of traffic and it seems that they used the thresholds to rank the streets that needed traffic calming. In addition, Tabibnia added, the main difference is that Pleasanton is a suburban area with a different street network that includes cul-de-sacs and arterials that connect to collectors, whereas in Albany the street network is urban in character.

A member of the audience asked how would the project be funded in case the traffic calming option was implemented.

Chaney said that there was no specific source of funds identified for this proposal. There are sources of funding the City receives in an annual basis, such as the Gas Tax or non-discretionary Measure B, which could be used for this purpose, or the City could call upon the City of El Cerrito for financial cooperation. Chaney stated that the City would seek all the sources of funding available to implement any proposal that is approved.

A member of the audience asked about similar examples. Tabibnia said that he had looked for similar examples, but he could not find anything like the Plaza's situation. Ranch 99 was the closest example, with one residential street leading to the mall.

Another member of the audience said that if all the streets were closed, there would not be traffic on Brighton because all the vehicles on Brighton access the Plaza via the residential streets.

A member of the audience suggested that the City of El Cerrito pay for the implementation of the project because it is due to their poor planning that Albany is facing increased traffic on its residential streets.

Jason Foster said that he had heard that Joanne Fabrics will be coming to the Plaza and this would generate more traffic.

Chaney brought up the Kimley-Horn report findings of 2005. That report analyzed the full closure effects on San Pablo Avenue, which dropped its LOS at the Carlson intersection from C to E in the PM peak, and from C to F on Saturdays. The Brighton intersection would drop from B to F in the PM and from B to D on Saturdays. The partial closure scenario where Kains becomes two way street and is left open to the Plaza has less severe impacts on San Pablo Avenue. She asked the consultant if full closure were to occur, what would the likelihood be that people coming from east of Key Route take Brighton to San Pablo to access the Plaza.

Tabibnia said that traffic on Brighton might decrease because people would take Fairmont as the preferable access route. However, he recommended that this be analyzed because he was only guessing.

Mazur is concerned about what would happen if a crime perpetrator trying to evade police takes one of the closed streets, making it easier to evade police.

Mazur closed the public session and open it for discussion among Commission members.

Treat said that based on the analysis by Kimley-Horn, the Commission recommended full closure. Partial closure is going to impact Kains Ave. and the fact that the volume of vehicles on Brighton coming from the east side of Albany is larger than that of vehicles coming from the west side of Albany confirms that San Pablo would not be adversely affected. Based on these findings, he keeps the original recommendation of closing all the streets leading to the Plaza.

Madson concurred with Treat about closing all the streets or leaving all open. He also suggested Sol Strand's recommendation of implementing speed humps at the City limit in case partial closure is implemented. He also said that El Cerrito has to come up with an equitable revenue sharing with the City of Albany and this compensation would be used to mitigate the impacts of this project on the residents of Kains Avenue.

Atkinson opposes the full closure proposal because Berkeley and Albany residents have a right to access the Plaza in a convenient and efficient fashion. She supports traffic calming measures along with signage forbidding access to truck traffic through Albany streets. She also added that police enforcement would be necessary to stop this behavior.

Anderson said that when the middle school was built, El Cerrito requested that Behrens Street be closed to avoid negative impacts on its residents due to increased traffic that the school would generate. The City of Albany accommodated this. He supports closing all the streets.

Mazur asked Sam how it is possible for a narrow street like Kains to absorb that much traffic without total breakdown and how is it possible that this small street could save San Pablo Avenue from further deteriorating its LOS.

Tabibnia explained that there are several issues. Kains would be used as a shortcut to get to and from the Plaza. But the reality is that there would be heavy traffic on Kains.

Treat asked how many seconds per car to get through the intersection of Brighton/Kains.

Mazur recommended that the partial closure option be eliminated from the list of possible recommendations to City Council. She asked if the streets were closed, would it affect the decision to build the proposed condominium. Chaney said that they would have to alter the Plaza's internal circulation plan.

Atkinson asked what would the City of Albany do if the total closure proposal does not pass the Environmental Impact Report. She suggested that the Commission think of an alternative that would maintain the quality of life on these streets.

Chaney explained that the challenge is whether or not the impacts of the full closure can be mitigated.

Mazur asked if people coming from the east to the Plaza would take other residential streets to access the Plaza.

Tabibnia said that most likely, people coming from the east would use Key Route Boulevard and traffic on Garfield and Washington would increase, but he emphasized that this requires an analysis.

Anderson suggested that walking and bicycling to the Plaza be encouraged.

Atkinson said that for most senior citizens, bicycling, walking or taking transit is not an option.

Mazur moved that staff work on a draft resolution justifying the Traffic and Safety recommendation to the City Council. Anderson seconded, motion passed 4/1 abstained.

5-2 Request to install loading and unloading signs at existing parking spaces in the 1400 block of Solano Avenue

Chaney summarized the request from Mr. Daniel last month about his suggestion of decreasing the bus stop length to add a loading/unloading space.

Ron Kowalski, owner of the Laundromat on the 1400 block of Solano, said that he needs an additional 20-minute space on this block and he requested assigning 8 feet of curb space currently designated for the bus stop as another 20-minute parking space. He said that his customers park on the red zone and if they get a ticket, they would not be coming back to his business.

Chavez said that she had met with AC Transit staff and they videotaped a bus pulling into the stop. The video shows that the bus actually takes the available red curb for the stop when it pulls in. She said that two blocks west, the red curb for the bus stop is 34' but the effective length is 70' because the bus uses the space provided by a driveway to pull in.

Atkinson commented that if the Commission provides a loading space for one block on Solano, it should be providing loading spaces for every block along Solano Avenue.

Mazur suggested designating one of the existing parking spaces as loading/unloading until 9:00 am. The space would be freed up after that time for general use.

Anderson made a motion to continue discussion on this issue next month. Treat seconded. Vote was 5/0

Madson excused himself and left the meeting at 9:32 pm.

6 Reports

6-1 Police Reports

Lt. Adams said that Lt. John Geissberger would be attending the Traffic and Safety Commission meetings as of next month. He reported that a total of 16 collisions had been reported between February 28, and March 27, 2008: 8 non-injury collisions and 4 injury collisions, none was major injury.

One of the injury collisions involved a bicyclist running into a car at the San Pablo/Castro intersection. The bicyclist was riding northbound on the sidewalk and rode onto the crosswalk striking a vehicle on the crosswalk when the car was turning left onto San Pablo Avenue. Bicyclist was at fault. Another injury collision was a hit and run. The victim suffered minor injuries.

There were a total of three collisions reported at Marin and San Pablo. Two of these involved people losing control of their vehicles by either stepping on the wrong pedal or stepping on both of them. However, there is no indication that either drug use or old age was a factor in these cases. The other injury collision involved two vehicles on Marin at San Pablo. One driver lost control of the vehicle and struck an AC Transit bus.

There was a DUI accident at the intersection of Kains and San Pablo. A vehicle struck a parked car and the driver was determined to be driving under the influence of alcohol.

Buchanan Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Project

Chavez reported that the kick off meeting was held on March 13. The meeting was very productive. The consultants suggested a third alternative, which aligns the path inside USDA property. USDA staff recommended a meeting with USDA director in order to pursue this because there are limitations due to new safety requirements. The meeting was scheduled for April 15.

6-3 Pedestrian Plan

Chavez reported that a walking audit was scheduled for Cornell Elementary at 8:00 am on Wednesday, April 2. Chavez stated that the walking audits conducted at Ocean View and Marin originated a list of pedestrian enhancements that were the subject of the Safe Routes to School grant applications.

7 Announcements and Communications

7-1 Email from AC Transit inviting to a Board Forum on April 18 about AC Transit plans that may affect our community

Chavez referred to the email included in the packet inviting members of the Commission to a breakfast to discuss AC Transit plans for the different communities it serves. Ray Anderson and Marsha Atkinson said they would be attending.

7-2 Letter from AC Transit requesting change of bus stop from the northeast side of the Buchanan/Jackson intersection to the northwest side

Chavez summarized AC Transit's request to the Commission.

Anderson asked if the bus stop would interfere with the proposed bicycle path and PG&E undergrounding. Chavez said that what is proposed for the north side of Buchanan is a Class II bike lane, which is just striping on the street. Regarding PG&E utility undergrounding, Chaney mentioned that the City has to reserve space and it might take about three years to accomplish.

Chavez mentioned to the Commission that the City had received a grant from the state Safe

Routes to School program for a\$293,400 for the implementation of a protected left turn, solar speed feedback signs, crosswalks and ramps at the Buchanan and Jackson intersection.

8. Future Agenda Items

8-1 Feasibility of AC Transit Shuttle in Albany

8-2 Measure F funding status and revised list of priorities for 2008

Chaney said that she would like to put this item on the next agenda or May agenda and walk the Commission through the available revenues.

8-3 San Pablo and Solano Avenue northbound AC Transit Bus Stop

It was recommended removing this item from the list because it is controversial.

8-5 Pierce Street Re-striping Status

Chaney said that she would like to report to the residents of the 500 hundred block of Pierce once she had a concrete idea of the Caltrans negotiations, perhaps it would go on the agenda in the next meeting or two.

8-4 Bus to Target

8-5 Ex-officio member

9 Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:27 pm. Next meeting is April 24, 2008.