

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, July 26, 2017

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

Members Present:

Janis O. Manwaring, Chair
Randy L. Filiault, Vice-Chair
Stephen L. Hooper
Gary P. Lamoureux

Staff Present:

Medard Kopczynski, City Manager
Thomas Mullins, City Attorney
Don Lussier, City Engineer
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works Director
Steve Russo, Police Chief

Members Not Present:

Robert J. O'Connor

Chair Manwaring called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM, welcomed the public, and explained the rules of procedure.

1) James Griffin – Speeding Concerns – Key Road

Chair Manwaring recognized James Griffin, 195 Key Road. Mr. Griffin explained he has lived at this location for a year and a half and has seen a continuous speeding problem, drag racing, etc. Along with the residents, business owners have expressed serious concern and upset. Most of Key Road is not residential, with the exception of residences at the dead end. The residents are mostly elderly and disabled, there are no sidewalks, it is poorly lit, and there are some dangerous blind curves. Last week there was so much smoke from vehicles doing donuts that he could not see across the street. He has also seen drug deals occurring. Neighbors that have lived there for many years say it has always been a problem; the police do their best but cannot be there all night. The neighbors feel that speed humps along Key Road could help deter this problem and he requests that the City consider this possibility.

The Police Chief Steven Russo said preliminary statistics in the week since this request came forward, show no calls for service and no complaints, but that does not mean it is not happening. In the last year there has been one ticket and one DWI issued on this road. He would like to place radar devices there to obtain accurate speed and vehicle counts, along with directed patrol for several weeks at specific times. He requested more time to obtain accurate statistics needed to further address possible solutions.

Councilor Lamoureux made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Filiault.

On a vote of 4-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee recommends more time to allow staff to investigate and prepare a recommendation for the Key Road speeding request.

Mr. Griffin added that it may be helpful if the Public Works Department were to place more “No Outlet” signs along the road because he sees many cars turn around daily that think Key Road connects to Route 9; the only one there now is not visible.

2) Joan Roelofs – Speeding Concerns – Beaver Street

Chair Manwaring recognized Joan Roelofs, 69 Beaver Street. Ms. Roelofs said she has lived in this location for 38 years and she believes the speeding problem has worsened in recent years. Cars speed and inadequate mufflers on trucks and motorcycles are very noisy, disturbing neighbors. She said this dangerous activity destroys the quality of life on Beaver Street. There is also expressed concern from Social Services about mental health based on the noise. She is unsure if speed humps should be installed or if the speed limit should be lowered but asks that the City addresses this concern.

Chair Manwaring recognized April Weed, 28 Damon Court. Ms. Weed agreed with Ms. Roelofs and said she thinks the problem occurs because Beaver Street is a primary connecting street between the Lincoln Street area and Main Street. She just saw a truck and motorcycle drag racing the other day; she feels that Beaver Street invites these activities. She said that either a speed hump or more frequent stop signs could slow people down and that more frequent police monitoring could help as well. She thinks that summer time may be worse than in the winter but her primary concern is for kids walking to and from school; the crossing guards have expressed the danger and concerns as well.

The City Manager, Medard Kopczynski, asked what times of day seem to be the worst. Ms. Weed said she notices it in the morning but also in the evenings during the summer. Chair Manwaring recognized Harry Bove, 69 Beaver Street. Mr. Bove said there is a speeding problem and occasional racing problems, but never when police are around; there are also a lot of motors/mufflers in poor condition in the neighborhood and unfortunately, motorcycles are built that way.

The Police Chief, Steven Russo, stated that the City speed limit is 30mph, unless otherwise posted. He continued providing activity statistics for Beaver Street:

- Since July 1, 2017:
 - Five directed police patrols (on the roll-call sheet for officers during their patrol)
 - The Keene Police Department (KPD) is currently understaffed, so this ability is resource driven
 - No motor vehicle stops
- Since January 1, 2016:
 - 21 motor vehicle stops
 - 19 warnings
 - 2 summonses

- 3 accidents
- *None of these citations or accidents were due to speed

The same radar equipment used to collect statistics can be used to show people their speed as they pass; they are usually left off when collecting data so that they can collect the most accurate data. Two of these devices were placed on Beaver Street for a one week period from July 19-27, 2017. These devices report for every hour of the day on how many cars passed and what speed they were traveling up to 100mph. He acknowledged this is just statistical data and the perception if you live there and experience dangerous activity may be different. To him, however, the statistics do not show a problem:

- West Bound Data:
 - Busiest times: 12:00 PM and 9:00 PM
 - 9,672 total cars in that week
 - 3.294% traveling 36-40mph
 - 19% traveling 31-35mph
 - 77% at or below the speed limit
- East Bound Data:
 - Busiest times: 1:00 PM and 5:00 PM
 - 8,555 cars in that week
 - Speeding statistics similar to west bound data

The Public Works Director, Kurt Blomquist said historically, data was collected on Beaver Street in 2013 and then 97% of vehicles were traveling at 30mph or less; the highest speed recorded at that time was 50mph at 9:00 PM (he acknowledged the fact that there will always be outliers – people who do not follow the rules.) Another study was conducted in 2012 in the spring and average speed at that point was 24 mph and 85% of vehicles were traveling 29mph. The data right now does not suggest that there is a speeding issue despite the fact that there will always be outliers. He thinks many of the other comments are regarding environmental issues such as noise, which are not necessarily speed related. Beaver Street is a collector street and sometimes has heavier truck movement; these are difficult issues to address. The Police Chief added that sometimes the sound of a particular vehicle can make it seem as though the vehicle is traveling at a much faster speed. Similar data was collected in August 2016 with similar results. The Public Works Director continued that per state law, 25 mph is the lowest possible speed to post in urban areas, which 55% of vehicles are currently traveling at or below.

The Public Works Director acknowledged a difference between different seasons and months. For example, the 2013 data was collected in September and showed 11,937 vehicles east bound, as opposed to the 8,555 in July 2017. Still, the statistical driving habits are very similar and most cars travel at or below the speed limit.

The City Manager asked if there is anything KPD can do to address these noise complaints. The Police Chief replied he does believe sound meters are used any more, per City ordinance. He and the City Manager will look into this.

Councilor Filiault noted that speed complaints come in from all over Keene and all residents wish for speed humps in their neighborhood. He added that while the radar devices are usually left off to collect data, it is good to turn them on occasionally because it can often lead people to slow down when they see their speed; Councilor Hooper agreed. Councilor Filiault questioned how many of these devices the City owns. The Police Chief replied six total – two permanently mounted in identified problem areas, two mobile held by KPD, and two mobile held by the Public Works Department. They have developed a rotation pattern to help people understand the speed they are going. He said a challenge is that even if people are going the speed limit, if someone is standing on the side of the road it will seem they are going much faster. The City Engineer is working to collect baseline data in different neighborhoods so the statistics are available when issues like this come up in the future. Councilor Filiault asked if having one actively displaying speed on Beaver Street is a possibility in the near future and The Public Works Director replied yes. The Police Chief said that all devices are always being utilized somewhere in the City, unless they are brought in to charge or for repair. The Public Works Director said the strategy is to put them out temporarily because most traffic is redundant and they lose their effectiveness when someone has driven past them multiple times.

Councilor Lamoureux addressed regulations on where stop signs can and cannot be placed. The Public Works Director said that stop and yield signs are controlled by the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices, which have a series of warrants or criteria for placing a stop sign. Critically, criteria say that stop signs are not to be used for speed control. People roll through stop signs if they are not where they are needed to control traffic, what they are intended to do. If one is placed and it is unwarranted, it is a liability, and it is proven they do little to control speed.

Ms. Roelofs said she spends a lot of time in her front yard gardening and observes the traffic. She notices the worst speeders are those going west, not east. She also consistently sees a red pick-up truck speeding. She said even if it is only 2-3% of vehicles, it is still destroying the neighborhood.

Chair Manwaring recognized Chuck Weed, 28 Damon Court. He said he has lived there since 1979. He suggested the City purchases portable speed humps, like those at the hospital. He thinks it would be a good City investment that could be used in many problem locations. He would like to see traffic calming wherever possible and this is one option. The Public Works Director said the City has looked at this possibility before but they are expensive at \$8,000-\$15,000 each; if that is something the City is interested in, it can be addressed in the budget process.

Chair Manwaring recognized Mr. Griffin who agreed with the Public Works Director that stop signs are useless to control speed. In response to the noise complaints, he suggested the City issue an ordinance that prohibits truck engine breaks within City limits because there is no real need for them at the City posted speed; many other cities have done this and it could help noise throughout the City.

Councilor Filiault encouraged using the lit radar devices on Beaver Street and the Public Works Director agreed to make that effort. Councilor Lamoureux asked if officers will continue to monitor Beaver Street. The Police Chief said it will remain on directed patrol for a few more weeks and when resources are available, it will be monitored as much as possible.

Councilor Filiault made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Lamoureux.

On a vote of 4-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee accepted the information from the Public Works Department and Police Chief as informational and referred the matter to staff to be handled administratively.

Chair Manwaring explained to the public that there is little the Committee can do at this time but it will be brought up in the budget process. She empathizes with their frustration.

3) Request for Stop Sign – Darling Road/Mountain View Road Intersection – Public Works Department

The City Engineer, Donald Lussier noted this request came to City Council in May 2017 and was investigated from the end of May until the first week of July using radar/traffic monitoring devices on both roads. Devices were placed away from the intersection to collect data on how traffic behaves approaching the intersection. Data showed:

- 423 trips per day on Mountain View Road
- 429 trips per day on Darling Road
- Average seven trips per home per day
- 85% of vehicles traveled at or below 19mph on Darling Road and 16mph on Mountain View Road
 - This suggests that vehicles likely do not come to a complete stop at the intersection, which is not always necessary

The City Engineer said a stop sign may be required where there is crash or excessive speed data; intersections where the normal rules of the road would not produce the desired driver behavior; those kinds of instances do not apply to Darling Road. Instead, the Public Works Department recommends, based on the behavior suggested by the petitioner (that people do not look to see incoming traffic in the right-of-way) and the likelihood that people do roll into that intersection, that an Ordinance be drafted for a yield sign. This does not require stopping but is an appropriate reminder that oncoming traffic has the right-of-way.

Councilor Filiault asked about documented accidents at that intersection. The City Engineer replied there have been none at the intersection itself in the last three years. The Public Works Department studied sight distances at the intersection, which was satisfactory in all directions.

Councilor Hooper asked the cost of the radar devices. The City Engineer replied \$5,000 each.

Chair Manwaring recognized John McGinnis, President of the Woodgate Views Association, which encompasses Mountain View Road planned unit development. They have their own set of bylaws, covenants, and private roads off Mountain View Road. He has lived there since 2010 and has seen no accidents at the intersection. As a 53-home community, they are more than willing to give the yield sign a place on their private property, but asked if that property is legally in the purview of the Keene Police Department in terms of ticketing and investigations. He added that a problem is weed-infested woods near this intersection, which make it difficult to see oncoming traffic in the right-of-way. He said the City cleared of one of these areas a few years back and if would help if the City continued that effort.

The City Engineer replied the yield sign will be placed on the Mountain View Road side of Darling Road very close to the intersection, which would be in the right-of-way, avoiding that legal complication mentioned by Mr. McGinnis. He said if the Association is interested in hosting a sign, it might be beneficial to have a "Yield Ahead" sign further from the intersection. Mr. McGinnis agreed that is a good idea and suggested the Association may be willing to sponsor that sign and cover its cost; the Public Works Director said that cost is approximately \$150.

In response to a question from Councilor Lamoureux, the Public Works Director recalled that the yield sign will be in the public right-of-way so the City is not regulating on any private streets. Nothing here is illegal as that intersection is patrolled as a part of the right-of-way. If the Association is willing to host an accompanying warning sign, there is no legal issue.

Chair Manwaring recognized Councilor Terry Clark who expressed he is happy to see the City thinking outside the box and finding a way to regulate this problem.

Councilor Hooper made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Lamoureux.

On a vote of 4-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee recommends that an ordinance be drafted to install a Yield Sign at the intersection of Mountain View Road with Darling Road.

4) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Manwaring adjourned the meeting at 6:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker