

MINUTES
Eveleth City Council Workshop
December 18, 2012
Council Chambers, City Hall, Eveleth, MN
5:30 p.m.

Councilor Beth Peterson, Present
Councilor Brad Hadrava, Present
Councilor Brian Hoag, Present
Councilor Joseph Koivunen, Present
Mayor Robert Vlaisavljevich, Present

Also present: City Clerk/Administrator Jackie Monahan-Junek; Deputy City Clerk Stephanie Friebe; Chief of Police Timothy Koivunen; Director of Public Works Michael Wiskow; Eric Fallstrom, Benchmark Engineering

Robert Ege and Duane Hill, MNDot

1. Meeting with MNDot regarding Hat Trick Ave./Hwy. 53 intersection

Rob Ege and Duane Hill of MNDot met with the Council regarding the intersection at Hat Trick Avenue and Highway 53. Based on the last fatal accident and the latest review of the intersection, Ege informed the Council that MNDot recommends removing the crossover completely and installing a reduced conflict intersection.

Ege explained certain criteria that are considered to include population, traffic flow, and general speed limit of the area. He said the average speed near the intersection was 62 to 64 mph.

Mayor Vlaisavljevich remarked on the age demographics of the drivers involved in accidents to be either the young or the elderly. Ege said that those demographics are not considered in their analysis of the intersection.

Chief of Police Koivunen referred to a previous meeting with MNDot where discussion was held on the last two fatalities at the intersection. Both fatal accidents were the result of the drivers attempting to make a 90 degree turn. Koivunen said that a J-turn would still allow for driver decision with the potential of a head on collision. A stop light would eliminate the decision as the driver would rely on the green light to okay crossing at the intersection.

MNDot said they reviewed the intersection in June and November of 2011. The cross traffic did not increase when school was in session. The overall numbers from either June or November did not meet the warrants for a stoplight signal.

Councilor Koivunen reiterated that even if the City was willing to pay for the stoplight, MNDot would still not allow it. Koivunen said that lives were lost, and when people find out we are not getting lights, you will need to deal with them.

Ege said that MNDot was asked to eliminate the fatalities in that area. He said the reduced conflict intersections have brought down accidents throughout Minnesota by at least 85 percent. The right angle crashes have been reduced by 100 percent.

Mayor Vlaisavljevich reminded Ege that ATVs are also crossing the highway at that intersection. Ege said that he cannot guarantee that that a stop light will stop all crashes. He referred to the intersection in the City of Virginia that has had just those types of fatal crashes.

Councilor Hadrava stated that the recommendation is not a problem for MNDot because they do not care about the economy of a small town. Hadrava said they have to look at stopping deaths as the number one concern; however, a J-turn will eliminate business in the area. He said snowmobiles and ATVs are crossing the intersection. The best of both worlds would be a stoplight.

Ege said it would be a reduced conflict intersection (not a J-turn) and there have been businesses in other cities that have not closed shop. He referred to an article from the West Central Tribune out of Willmar, Minnesota.

Councilor Koivunen said he thought they could get more business if a stoplight was in place.

Councilor Peterson acknowledged concern for existing businesses to include Goodfellas, Subway and the Rustic Rock.

Chief Koivunen asked if a semaphore would work with this intersection. Ege said the traffic would be stopped up. Councilor Hoag said the setup would be no different than the stoplight at the intersection of Highway 169 and Highway 7 in Mt. Iron.

Representative Jason Metsa said if the City of Eveleth does not want a J-turn; they won't get one. He will work down in the Cities through legislation to fight for a stoplight.

Duane Hill, MNDot, said they were not here to convince the City, but to give information on the reduced conflict intersection which will reduce crashes by 85 percent and fatalities by 100 percent.

Ege said he is not picking on Eveleth, but every place thinks they are something special. He just wants to see something safe.

Mayor Vlaisavljevich said the college has grown to about three or four times its original size since the crossing was put in.

Hill said MNDot is looking for City support, but it would not be the first time a municipality has gone through a political route. Hill said their job is to provide a safe resolution for the intersection. He said that the City of Cotton is a true J-turn, while Eveleth would be a reduced conflict intersection.

Chief Koivunen said that while statistics are good, they do not stop fatalities. A semaphore would take driver judgment out of the equation.

Ege said that red light running happens every day.

Bill Aho, Super 8 owner and EDA Board Member, commented that he understands there is no 100 percent guarantee either way. He asked, "Why won't they let the City pay for the light?"

Ege said they are looking from an engineer's perspective and would expect a 100 percent decrease in right angle crashes from a reduced conflict intersection.

Aho said that hotel clientele would be extremely frustrated by not being able to cross the highway. He asked, "You don't want to put up a light because of the cost?"

Ege said that cost is not the issue, and that other communities have not had problems with this type of intersection.

Councilor Hadrava questioned the safety for pedestrians who would cross the intersection. Councilor Koivunen said the area is a designated snowmobile crossing. Mayor Vlaisavljevich again questioned demographics. Ege asked how to measure demographics when they are constantly changing.

Hill said MNDot would be willing to present at a public meeting to talk about their proposal.

Representative Metsa said he is at a loss as to when a community wants an option, why the State will not allow it.

Hill responded to Metsa by saying their research indicates a reduced conflict intersection would produce superior safety performance compared to a traffic light. He said their decision will not change unless the City goes a different route (political).

2. 2013 Budget

3. Agenda Q&A

Discussion took place on delinquent taxes based off of the request for a liquor license from Goodfellas. Councilor Koivunen asked how Tuna's Bar could have been allowed to accumulate \$2,000 in delinquent utilities.