

August 30, 2011
CITY OF WINDSOR HEIGHTS STUDY SESSION MINUTES
4:00 pm City Hall
Unabridged version

Mayor Jerry Sullivan called meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. Council present: Steve Peterson, Diana Willits, Charlene Butz, David Jenison and Betty Glover. Staff present: City Administrator Marketa George Oliver, Police Chief Dennis McDaniel, Public Works Director Jason VanAusdall, Community Services Director Josh Heggen, Chief Financial Officer Carrie Kruse and Fire Chief Christopher Cross.

Police Chief McDaniel discussed with the council the possibility of installing speed cameras on I-235 and a mobile speed camera that could be used throughout the city to help improve traffic safety. Chief Daniels introduced Andrew Noble, President of Gatso, USA. McDaniel showed a brief video, showing that speeding can be as dangerous as drunk driving. Speeding kills more people than drunk driving. McDaniel said there are three E's of traffic safety: education, engineering and enforcement. The most effective means to influence traffic safety is to reduce incidents of impaired driving, get people to wear seatbelts, and ensure motorists obey the posted speed limit. The Windsor Heights Police Department began studying the feasibility of introducing an automated speed enforcement program in October, 2010. Top priority was given to evaluating a fixed enforcement system on I-235 with the secondary goal of a mobile enforcement unit. The purpose of the study was to address the primary concerns of :

1. I-235 has the highest frequency and most violent crashed on any roadway in the City.
2. The Police Department has limited ability to constantly patrol.
3. Windsor Heights had the highest rate of crashers per million vehicle miles traveled along I-235. Windsor Heights borders the highest frequency crash area (between 73rd and 86th Streets.) Windsor Heights also borders the second highest composite ranked stretch of dangerous roadway (56th to 63rd Streets.) I-235 sees 100,000 vehicles per day. Highway 28-18,804, Highway 6-20,478. McDaniel handed out a map showing crash severity and crash density from 2001 to 2010. The most frequent crashes are at I-235 and 63rd and 73rd Streets. Westbound accidents are greater than eastbound. McDaniel said the department answers 8,000 calls for service each year, with 3,000 of these being traffic stops. They are very proactive. Additionally, they investigate an average of 100 cases per month. The majority of this work is accomplished by eight patrol officers and two supervisors. Typically two officers work per shift and there are three shifts per day. This leads to limited ability to allocate personnel resources to take enforcement action in problem areas due to multiple factors.

Interstate speed enforcement efforts on high speed roadways require an extension of time and distance to catch up to violators. This results in officers potentially being away from jurisdiction by the time the speeder is caught. Also, Windsor Heights does not work from the same communications center as the neighboring communities. Butz asked how often that happens. McDaniel said it was difficult to say, but he would ballpark it at 25%.

There are dangers of response to I-235 the way it is presently engineered. The Iowa Department of Transportation has been studying the congestion issues in Windsor Heights of westbound 235 from 63rd to 73rd Streets and plans to add a lane of travel. However, the project has been pushed back due to budgetary priorities. The estimate for reconstruction may not be until 2016.

McDaniel provided pictures showing a vehicle pulled over and where the officer would be if that car were pulled over. The officer is in the roadway if he approaches from the driver side and it is much less safe if he is approaching from the passenger side. If speed were run from the inside lane, the officer would be up next to a concrete barrier. If he approaches from the passenger side, the officer is in the roadway where the speed limit is 65 miles per hour. McDaniel said with the problems identified, automated enforcement became the obvious solution to addressing these concerns. Through researching automated enforcement, McDaniel looked at several companies and Gatso would best fit the City's needs.

August 30, 2011

Council Study Session Minutes – Unabridged Version

2 | Page

Andrew Noble said Gatso is a photo enforcement company. They specialize in photo enforcement. They work in Iowa. They run programs in Muscatine, Cedar Rapids and in Des Moines. In the last 50 years, GATSO has delivered and installed more than 45,000 installations to more than 60 countries throughout the world. The GATSO founder also invented the first red light camera. In the United States, GATSO not only provides the equipment but operates the program.

Noble wants to debunk a few myths. First, the camera takes pictures automatically yet three independent people review each and every violation image-set before a citation is mailed. The cameras is not taking photos and mailing citations automatically. The second myth is that you are assumed guilty. A citation means your vehicle was seen to be doing something it should not have done and you have several opportunities to redress the evidence before any judgment is finalized. Noble explained that GATSO makes its own cameras because taking the image is very important. They encrypt the information and they have never lost a court case.

GATSO can do speed detection by a number of different ways. Single camera, mobile speed enforcement or section control are all possible. GATSO is a technology and service provider, but the City makes the decision on the parameters of the program. The flashes on their cameras are infrared so they can take photos continuously so that it does not have a strobe effect. The mobile unit, however, does not have infrared flashes, but the strobing likelihood is not as great on a mobile unit because they are not in such busy areas.

GATSO did a speed study in Windsor Heights. They left a car on the interstate in Windsor Heights and 217 people going over 70 in the 15 hours. Once a camera takes a picture of a violation, they run it through a data base to determine who the registered owner is and then match the owner with the car. The violation is then sent to the local police department who decides whether or not a citation should be issued. If the local police department says yes, GATSO sends the violation to the address of the registered owner. If the police department says they do not wish to have a citation issued, the violation does not proceed. Enforcement and business rules are set by the City. Programmed revenue is sent two times per month. The money is initially received by GATSO and then is put into an account that is specific for the City. Glover asked if GATSO had an in-house collections agency and Noble said they worked with an agency that was preferred by the City and if the City did not have one, they could recommend a few who are strong in the area. GATSO's cameras can also detect specific license plates that are wanted for example for an AMBER alert. The camera will then send an email to the Chief within about 15 seconds of the car passing by the camera showing when it went through the camera and what direction it was traveling.

Willits asked how many people contest. Noble said typically once 6 months into a program, the contest rate hovers around 4 to 6 percent. The first month can be as high as 15%. Jenison asked how long the assignment of blame takes. Noble said it was about 30 days. Jenison asked if people try to assign false blame. Noble said not very often. Sullivan asked what costs would be associated to the City. Noble said there are no startup costs to the City. GATSO charges \$25 per paid citation. Noble said the average violator is still doing about 12 miles over the limit. Noble said the City would set the parameters as to when a citation would be issued.

Willits asked if Clive still had a red light program. McDaniel said yes. Willits asked how successful it has been and McDaniel said it has been successful in reducing their crashes.

McDaniel presented recommendations that include:

1. Move forward with westbound I-235 section control implementation and incorporate live video feed.
2. Postpone eastbound automated speed enforcement until after the legislature addresses these efforts in the next session and we can study the impact of the Des Moines Police Department's efforts.
3. Add mobile speed unit to Phase 1 implementation schedule to police interior roadways and answer to residential concerns.
4. Hold a town hall meeting to specifically address the need for this program, to solicit citizen input and to educate. Oliver noted that the speeding fine amounts on the sheet that McDaniel distributed did not include the additional fees that are tacked on to a ticket if the violator were pulled over by a police officer. McDaniel said there was about a 35% surcharge on the State Code fine amounts. McDaniel said decisions would have to be made about program parameters and revenues. At minimum, they would need a part-time person to administer the program, which would be offset by the revenues generated from the program.

August 30, 2011

Council Study Session Minutes – Unabridged Version

3 | Page

McDaniel said the council needs to decide:

- Are we willing to commit to moving forward and the scrutiny that will come with it? IF so, do you want a separate town hall meeting in mid to late October?
- Do you want a mobile speed unit included?
- Are you ready to have the city attorney begin evaluating a contract with GATSO and model ordinances?

Glover thinks the first thing that should be done is a town hall meeting. Butz agrees. Windsor Heights still has a reputation of being Radar Heights. Glover thinks the average person on the streets realizes how many accidents there are between 63rd and 73rd. Willits said anything that would do AMBER alerts would be good. She knows we are known as radar heights, but our residents appreciate that. Butz thinks the mobile unit is the answer to citizen comments about the issues on a lot of streets. Jenison said the mobile unit would have been helpful with College Avenue situation during bridge construction.

Sullivan asked if West Des Moines is looking at this and Noble said no. Glover asked how many town meetings a city of our size would need. Noble said one. It is more important how the meeting is organized. He said it is a safety program and it has the by-product of generating violator revenues. McDaniel said we are going after flagrant violators, not someone 1 or 2 miles over the speed limit. The benefit of safer transportation corridors and officer safety far outweighs any criticism the program would receive.

Peterson suggested a compilation of our speeding tickets issued in house and for how much over. VanAusdall said that so many times from his office, he hears the near misses. Willits said 73rd Street is the worst bottle neck. Cross said each time we see a crash on the DOT map, he sees people; at a minimum 2 police officers, an engine company of 6, an ambulance company of two. If we can get people to slow down, we can make our people safer.

Heggen asked if we have ever had a city vehicle hit on the interstate. McDaniel said we have a medical retirement from a police officer who was hit on the interstate and we have had a worker's comp claim as well. Cross said they have near misses all the time. Jenison said by slowing down we could save our own personnel but the public could also save themselves. Noble said there were 9 deaths on the stretch of interstate in Cedar Rapids the year before and in the year of automated enforcement, there have been no deaths.

Willits asked what we would need to budget if this was put in place for a part or full-time person. McDaniel said he would estimate high and say a full-time person. We could start with a part-time person and then go to full-time if needed. Glover asked if GATSO would provide the brochure. Noble said yes. Typically there is a letter from the police chief or mayor and frequently asked questions about the program. Peterson asked McDaniel where they would put the person. McDaniel said with the basement project they will move file storage to the basement and make the current storage into a small workspace. McDaniel is looking for guidance to see if council is in support enough to hold a town hall meeting. Glover said she thinks we should have the town hall meeting. Willits agreed. Peterson said full speed ahead. There was consensus to hold a town hall meeting.

Willits asked Noble what the big negative is; meaning what is the biggest problem they have experienced. Noble said they do a lot of training with city staff, they run mock hearings for the hearing officer. It is all about education. Holding a 30-day warning period is recommended. Sullivan thanked the police chief and Mr. Noble.

Chief McDaniel and Public Works Director VanAusdall discussed traffic safety on College Avenue and what actions have been taken thus far. McDaniel said they have lines painted. The feedback they have received is that the lines are helpful. The speeds have reduced when they do random spot checks. Oliver said she had received an email from the City Manager of Clive saying that one or more lanes on the bridge should be open by September 12th. VanAusdall said the pedestrian signs should be here within two weeks. Willits said the neighbors are still upset and feel penalized because of Clive's actions. Willits asked if the stop sign at Luin Lane was going to happen. McDaniel said the risk reward from the potential liability from that action makes it not advisable. Willits said what if it were just a temporary sign. McDaniel said if we want a temporary sign, the Council could direct that, but we should check with the city attorney first. VanAusdall said we are in the home stretch and University should be open soon. McDaniel will call the city attorney tomorrow about temporary signs.

August 30, 2011

Council Study Session Minutes – Unabridged Version

4 | Page

Peterson said it is a dangerous time of year with the location of the sun. It is in drivers' eyes. Jenison said we used to have a stop sign on wheels at 73rd and College and asked what happened to it. McDaniel clarified that both locations will be reviewed for signage.

City Administrator Oliver and Director VanAusdall updated the council on the sewer lining project. VanAusdall noted that point repairs will be made in the Fall with the sliplining project happening in the spring/summer. He also noted that around 30 residents have to repair their lines before the slipling project can happen. Oliver said the financial assistance program through the Neighborhood Finance Corporation starts on September 1st and those who need to repair their lines will be referred to the NFC for financing.

Heggen said the City is working with the schools to submit a Safe Routes to Schools Grant. This is a grant to help pay for that or pay for it entirely. Oliver and Heggen have met with Cowles and Windsor principals to do the school piece of it. We are also working with the county engineering to get a really good estimate.

Heggen said that last year the Council approved the Hickman Road Streetscaping plan. There are grants available that we can apply for. STP-TE; these are federal funds that the state administers. The grant is due October 1st. There is a 30% match requirement on that grant. Heggen has been in contact with Confluence for costs to implement the first phase. The cost estimate is \$456,000. At a 30% match, that would put us on the hook for \$137,000. If we were to get funded, the funds would be available October for 2012. Willits asked if it is our money first. Kruse said we pay everything and then are reimbursed the 70%. Heggen said if the council wants to apply for that, we would need a resolution on the next council agenda. The other STP-TE grant we would not have funds until October 2016. On that one, we would need to have a higher match. We have the master plan, so we have the drawings and estimates from that which is helpful to our application. This is not currently in the capital improvement plan, so it would need to be budgeted. Heggen asked for direction to see if we wanted to apply for funds. Willits said if we apply for them, and then decide not to do the project, we can turn the funds down. Heggen said correct. Willits said if we have developer by then, we could have them help with the cost. Heggen said you could use the developer money as the match. Willits said we should go for it. Butz said we should not put anything on the corner until we know who is going there. However, if we can turn it down, then it would be no harm.

Peterson said he and Jenison talked about Code Enforcement action. They developed a new form for code enforcement. We would like to ask council members and mayor to email Marketa with violations and she will forward it to rental or city inspector.

The meeting ended at 6:20 p.m.

Jerry Sullivan, Mayor

ATTEST:

Marketa George Oliver, City Administrator/Clerk