

Meeting Minutes for Neighbors in South Roanoke

Organizational Meeting

Wednesday 16 June 2004 at Crystal Spring Elementary School Gymnasium
City of Roanoke, VA

The meeting was opened at 7:05 pm with all four officers of the Association present along with fifty-six members and guests in attendance.

President Frank N Smith, II welcomed all to the meeting and advised of purpose of the meeting, which was to discuss transportation issues. Smith advised all to keep updated on organizational activities and agendas per the website; www.soroneighbors.com. The next organizational meeting is to be scheduled in September 2004. By that time the organization's official by-laws will be posted on the website and he requested assistance from the membership in retaining legal council to assist in making Neighbors in South Roanoke an official 501-C3 non-profit organization.

Secretary Keith Bohon and Treasurer Curt Davis gave brief reports on membership, communications and finances respectively.

Vice-President Bill Thomasson reminded the membership that as traffic was one of, if not the greatest neighborhood concerns in our surveys that this particular issue was to be the order of business for the evening. Traffic on Avenham Avenue being the greatest single traffic concern, this was to be the focus of the evening's discussion, and he turned the meeting over to our guest speaker Mr. Mark Jamison, City of Roanoke Traffic Engineer.

Mr. Jamison employed aerial photography both to highlight problems on Avenham, as well as to illustrate potential engineering solutions.

Reviews were made of the traffic count on Avenham Avenue at different increments and averaged 4,000 to 6,000 vehicles per day. It was determined that 85% of all vehicles average at least 37 mph, the majority at a much higher speed. As traffic and speeding are a nationwide concern, Mr. Jamison was able to substantiate the theory that some form of traffic calming needs to be implemented at 500-foot intervals in order to calm traffic.

The specific plans he illustrated per use of his visual aids were first, to sever the exit from Franklin Road to Avenham Avenue exiting right off Franklin Road just past Willow oak Road. Vehicles come onto Avenham at extremely high speed and this would make an immediate impact. Vehicles would enter a right turn lane on Franklin Road and then make a 90 degree turn on to the curved entrance to Avenham which is presently being used by southbound Franklin Road traffic reversing on to Avenham. This widened and improved exit would allow easy access to Avenham, but would definitely slow traffic. The specific traffic-calming items, to be placed incrementally every 200 to 300 yards will be a combination of "chokers" and "splitters." Chokers he explained as short expansions of the curbs into the street that will on average narrow the pavement from the present forty feet to a narrower pavement of twenty-two feet. This will require slowing down to negotiate the narrower roadway. Splitters will be sequenced with the chokers at the same increments. Splitters he describe and illustrated, are narrow traffic islands set in the middle of the pavement along the dividing yellow lines. They are to be cultivated and planted with grass and trees that grow as vertically as possible, so the branches do not hang out over into the road and creating hazards. Splitters will provide the same slowing benefits as the chokers while at the same time adding a potentially visually appealing and attractive traffic-calming structure. A specific item introduced for consideration is the possible placement of a circular traffic island or "roundabout"

at the intersection of 26th St and Avenham Avenue thus creating a unique and potentially appealing traffic-calming agent at the mid-point of Avenham, one of its busiest intersections. Another possible consideration, not specifically illustrated was the building of “chicanes,” which are slight directional changes with very minimal curves in the road.

All of these matters must be thoroughly researched so the placement of the traffic-calming structures will cause as little inconvenience as possible to residents and not interfere with residents who require on-street parking, and to assure that it does not interfere with access to driveways and other off-street parking.

Mr. Jamison then availed himself to questions from the neighbors.

Q Why not more stop signs?

A People will ignore them. Also the increased braking and acceleration could serve to worsen the speeding problem.

Q Is the double yellow line still practical?

A Yes, it has served its purpose over years past.

Q What about biker lanes?

A They are not yet under consideration.

Q Will the traffic calming structures worsen the situation with snow and ice?

A Reduced speeds should reduce all accident occurrences, regardless of weather.

Q What about leaf and refuse collection?

A It needs further consideration.

Q What can be done to slow or reduce traffic on 26th St? More stop signs?

A This is a separate issue. As 26th is the only relatively flat thoroughfare between Jefferson Street and Avenham, and with few houses fronting it, accounts for its high traffic flow.

Another possibility is restricting truck traffic to Avenham to those with specific business, but enforcement would present problems.

Q How can Franklin Road be made more advantageous to traffic, thereby relieving Avenham?

A Not much more can be altered on Franklin Road. Best bet is to alter Avenham’s perception of convenience, per the new access exit and traffic-calming structures.

Q What about closing off Avenham to the Fire Department as it used as a shortcut going towards Tanglewood Mall?

A No improvements can be implemented that interfere with Emergency Vehicles in any way.

Q What are the actual benefits of the aforementioned traffic circle or “roundabout” at 26th and Avenham?

A It would slow traffic to an average of 15-20 mph and reduce potential accidents to mostly side-swiping versus speedy and therefore more deadly impact.

Q How much land must be taken to do this?

A Fairly minimal. Right-of-ways needed to alter the path of the road would be purchased from the owners.

Williamson Road has landscaped island or “splitter” project; the progress of which is constantly being reviewed. Jamison Avenue (Rt 24 going toward Vinton) is also to undergo a similar project, with both chokers and splitters involved.

Q Per Bill Thomasson, Association Vice-President. With at least 200 new jobs at Carillion and the opening of the new Biomedical facility, what is the expected resultant traffic increase?

A With three shifts, the increase is not expected to be overwhelming. Also the patient load has become more regional, with majority of patients residing outside of Roanoke City, so this is also expected to not become an untenable problem.

Q What about the impact of the pending Interstate 73?

A A VDOT review expects I-73 to accommodate far more regional than local traffic and should therefore cause minimal shift in local traffic patterns.

Q What about bus traffic on Avenham? How will the roundabout and other structures affect this?

A None of the improvements will be implemented in any manner that precludes bus traffic.

Q What about speed bumps?

A In Roanoke City there is currently only one speed bump on a public road. They present problems for school buses and emergency vehicles and would not be practical.

Q How can traffic be slowed from Broadway entering Avenham at the north end? Speeding entering traffic creates hazard.

A Would need further research. The known traffic-calming structures should slow entering traffic.

Q Rosalind Avenue as it meets West Ridge has some similar problems. Can they be addressed?

A They can be examined, but first priorities must be met.

In summary, Mr. Jamison said that Avenham Avenue can be made into a “signature street;” one that while busy, can be made even more attractive, safer and slower, as many Roanokers view Avenham as one of Roanoke’s showcases.

Vice-President Bill Thomasson thanked all members and visitors for their attendance and input, stressing that there is no easy solution to this problem. There are trade-offs, potential inconveniences and possible sacrifices to be made in achieving a desired solution. Decisions have yet to be made and there is a lot to consider. He advises all in attendance to continue to discuss this with their neighbors and continue with their input, as this is the first step before taking this issue to the next level.

President Smith complimented Mr. Jamison for his excellent research and visual aids that clearly address the problem from a viewpoint embracing safety and beauty, with both given equal consideration.

Meeting adjourned at 8:17pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

J Keith Bohon, Jr
Secretary