

WEST WINDSOR & PLAINSBORO NEWS

Traffic Calming for Clarksville Road?

February 9, 2008

A presentation on a recent report by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission identifying necessary roadway and pedestrian improvements on Clarksville Road is set to be heard by the Township Council at its meeting on Monday, February 11. And the West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance is scheduled to have its own annual meeting a week later, on Monday, February 21.

The DVRPC released a report entitled “Taming Traffic” this fall, which includes a case study on Clarksville Road in the township. The report, which examines the role that streets and roads play in “enhancing communities and natural environments,” looks at ways to balance the needs of all of the modes of transportation to make them safe for all users.

The report concluded that there are at least seven important problems associated with Clarksville Road, including five sites that are in need of specific improvements.

The study area consisted of a two-mile long section of Clarksville Road including the site of the Jewish Community Center — about 500 feet west of the road’s intersection with Meadow Road — northeast to Princeton-Hightstown Road.

“One of the greatest concerns was the behavior and speed of the traffic and the potential for conflicts with pedestrians, especially school students,” the report stated.

As part of the case study outlined in the report, a crash analysis was performed using state Department of Transportation numbers from the years 2003 to 2005. During that time, the report stated, there were 143 crashes on that 2.5-mile study area, 56 percent of which occurred at an intersection. “This is a fairly significant crash total for a county route,” the report stated. Thirty-three percent of the crashes were rear-end crashes, while 24 percent were crashes involving fixed objects. One pedestrian crash occurred, and no bicycle crashes were identified. There were no fatal crashes, 30 injury crashes, and 113 crashes only involving property damage.

Still, 48 crashes occurred in the vicinity of Meadow Road, and with development along that road continuing, “it is reasonable to expect that crash problems at this location will remain constant, or increase, as traffic volumes increase,” the report stated. Other troublesome intersections included Penn Lyle Road, North Post Road, and Heather Drive.

Some of the existing conditions pointed out by the study included that sidewalks along the entire study area were not continuous, “ending at certain points, then continuing farther along the corridor,” and that there are currently no bike lanes or other bicycling amenities, such as bicycle racks.

“The current design of Clarksville Road may not be appropriate for a corridor with residential uses and community facilities, such as schools,” the report stated. “When fully implemented, the new and proposed developments will likely result in additional residents and increased traffic volume within the study area.”

Specifically, there were six problems identified by the report. Posted and observed speeds were inappropriate for the context, as the speed limit for much of the road remains at 45 miles per hour; there is inconsistency when it comes to the roadway width; the corridor lacks a sense of place; there is inadequate and infrequent pedestrian crossings; lane configuration is confusing and potentially dangerous; the roadway does not adequately accommodate bicyclists; and some sections of Clarksville Road are lacking sidewalks or pedestrian amenities, it stated.

With regard to corridor-wide improvements, the study suggests creating a five-foot wide bike lane in both travel directions along the entire corridor, and that in places where that is not possible, that highly-visible “Share the Road” signs should be posted. It also suggests replacing existing standard crosswalks with textured and colored crosswalks using material such as brick or synthetic paving treatment; creating a sense of place and identity using pedestrian-scale

lighting, sidewalk and crosswalk colors and materials, decorative banners, and landscaping; and adjusting the geometry of major roadway intersections “to create squared perpendicular intersections.”

With regard to specific sites, a slew of planted median islands, left-turn lanes, colored and textured crosswalks, and intersection reconfigurations were suggested for areas including the Village Square Shopping Center, and the intersections with Post, Penn Lyle, and Princeton-Hightstown roads. Narrowing of the roadway and defining the character of Clarksville Road should be created, along with “Gateway to West Windsor” signage, the report stated.

Ken Carlson, president of the West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance, who also served on the advisory committee, said he helped put ideas forward for consideration, like other advisory members, but that he was acting more as a catalyst to make sure the findings from the study were available. He said he is pleased that the presentation, which will be made by the members of the DVRPC, is heading to the council.

“It is a really important study because it is a major roadway,” he said. “It goes by two large schools - High School South and Maurice Hawk Elementary.”

He said the most important aspect of the study is the measures suggested for traffic calming, but also that it promotes bicycle and pedestrian safety. “The road is really poorly designed for pedestrians. There are very few crosswalks, and it’s not at all designed for bicyclists,” Carlson said. “You have students bicycling everyday to High School South. People are at risk.”

In particular, Carlson pointed to the bridge that crosses over the Northeast Corridor Line. “You can’t walk or bike over it without putting your life at risk,” he said. “We have to do something about this bridge and do it quickly.”

He said he hopes the township will adopt the recommendations as part of its Master Plan. However, “the most important aspect is how do we fund these recommendations?” he said. “How do we make the blueprint into a reality?”

“The sooner we enact the recommendations, the better residents will be in terms of their safety, whether you’re driving in a car, walking, or biking,” he added.

He said, though, that he feels “we’re slowly starting to see improvements in West Windsor in terms of bicycle and pedestrian mobility and safety, and automobile safety.”

That seemed to be supported by Carlson’s report to the council during its January 14 meeting. Residents who attempt to walk or bike across the intersection of Route 571 and Wallace and Cranbury Roads — deemed by the West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance as “the most dangerous intersection in the township, bar-none, for pedestrians and cyclists” — may see some relief soon. Carlson reported that the state Department of Transportation has agreed to make improvements at the intersection as a result of the alliance’s recommendations. The intersection is heavily traveled by pedestrians to get to the Princeton Junction train station.

The alliance held a walk in October at the intersection to observe the movements of people for two hours as they came off the train and proceeded through the intersection. They interviewed the commuters, witnessed two near-missed where a pedestrian was almost struck by a car, and saw various other serious flaws. From the study, the alliance determined that about 60 to 80 people cross the intersection twice a day during rush hour.

Recommendations included adding additional crosswalks, improving the existing crosswalk on the south side of Route 571, cutting back the brush along the bridge to give drivers better sight of pedestrians, adding bright yellow pedestrian crossing signs, placing curb cuts to make the crossings accessible for wheelchairs, installing other signage, and placing temporary sidewalks on the road until the county improves it, which is still three years away.

Carlson said the county relayed the recommendations to the state, and the state agreed to make the improvements. “They’re going to be putting crosswalks in at every crossing with pedestrian-activated signaling and signage,” and they will also be removing some of the brush obstructing the drivers, Carlson told the council. “I think it just shows what can be done when you’re putting the right people together. And we look forward to additional improvements to get pedestrians more safely to the train station.”

Carlson also reported during the meeting that about three weeks ago, the county installed a crosswalk across Clarksville Road at Norchester Drive, after negotiations the alliance had with both the county and the township. He said a child who was riding his bicycle on Clarksville near Norchester in the fall had been struck and injured by a motorist, but later recovered. Since its installation, Carlson said one school adviser told him that “the crosswalk has been used everyday now by High School South students getting to school.”

He called on township officials, however, “to finish the job now, and put a crosswalk across Norchester Drive.” Norchester itself does not have a crosswalk, and in order to get to the crosswalk going across Clarksville Road, they need to cross it, he said.

Carlson also told the council that the alliance would be working on developing an entire inventory of crosswalks in the township as part of its 2008 goals. The alliance’s annual meeting will be held Monday, February 21, at 7:30 p.m. at the senior center, where it will discuss those goals, along with its annual report.

That report highlights the group’s accomplishments in 2007, including the creation of a bilingual bicycle and pedestrian map of West Windsor, supporting actions to improve the design of the Alexander Road S-curve, and the accomplishments Carlson reported to council in January. “One of our strengths as been to bring together local residents, elected officials, and government staff to find solutions to what were thought to be intractable bicycle and pedestrian problems,” Carlson stated in the report, which also mentions the ongoing series of “West Windsor Walks” the alliance has been hosting to bring residents and officials together to “address problem areas in town.”

The group has also recommended specific bicycle and pedestrian projects to the council for inclusion in its 2008 Township Capital Improvement budget. The alliance has seen a 140 percent increase in its membership this past year, the report stated.

Carlson said he is encouraging as many members of the public as possible to attend the annual meeting.