

CLOQUET CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Tuesday, November 17, 2015, 5:30 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Present: Bjerkness, Kolodge, Langley, Maki, Rock, Wilkinson, Mayor Hallback

Absent: None

Staff: Fritsinger, Butcher, Cottingham, C. Peterson, Prusak

Other: Jamie Lund, Pine Journal, Bob Rogers, SEH

Highway 33 Corridor Study Presentation

Bob Rogers of SEH consulting engineers reviewed the recently completed draft of the Highway 33 Corridor Study and Access Management Plan. This study covers that stretch of Highway 33 from Interstate I-35, north to Cloquet Avenue.

- The City and MnDOT partnered to fund and complete the study.
- The purpose of the study was to identify potential future transportation improvements along the highway corridor, including the development of an access management plan, new frontage roads, additional traffic signals, improved pedestrian facilities and to address either existing or future safety concerns.
- D. Bjerkness questioned if there was a public meeting in addition to the recent meeting held by Mn/DOT regarding the I-35/Hwy 33 interchange. Mr. Rogers stated the Mn/DOT meeting did take place during the completion of the Corridor Study and that this particular problem-some intersection was a major topic of discussion for the Study Group. The overall Study, however, does address the entire highway corridor from this point north to Cloquet Avenue and it is anticipated another public meeting will be hosted by the City to share the findings and recommendations with the community within the next sixty days.
- The study looked at 20 years of historical traffic data along the corridor. The data included traffic counts, which showed slow but steady growth. It also forecasted traffic volumes out to year 2040. Specific traffic turning counts were collected at the three major intersections of Big Lake Road, Washington Avenue and the Wal-Mart traffic signal. In addition to traffic counts, there was a 5-year crash analysis completed along the entire corridor through year 2014.

- Pedestrian crossings and facilities along the entire corridor were also looked at as the lack of such safe facilities has been identified, particularly with the stretch from Big Lake Road, north to Cloquet Avenue.
- The Study Group included representatives and transportation officials from Mn/DOT, the City of Cloquet, Carlton County, Law Enforcement, the Fond du Lac Band and the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC).
- The concept design and analysis phase of the Study focused on 7 primary Sub-areas where the Study Group determined transportation improvements should be planned for future implementation. Mr. Rogers reviewed these 7 Sub-areas and the recommended alternatives. (Pages 28-34 of Report) The Sub-areas include:
 1. Hwy 33 and I-35 Ramp Terminal Intersection and West Frontage Road Extension;
 2. Tall Pine Lane Extension and New Intersection with Hwy 33 near current DNR/Wells Fargo access;
 3. Gillette Road Extension from current Wal-Mart signal access, northwesterly to Olympic Drive and the Pine Valley Recreation Complex area;
 4. Airport Road East-West Connection from Pinewood Drive to Pine Valley area;
 5. Avenue F and Selmsler Avenue Access Modifications;
 6. Hwy 33 and Cloquet Avenue Pedestrian Enhancements; and
 7. Pine Tree Plaza Mall Internal Circulation Improvements.

Further discussion took place regarding several of the sub-areas as follows:

- **Sub-Area 1, Hwy 33/I-35 Intersection** – The number and severity of recent accidents at this location has been a particular topic of conversation. Mr. Prusak explained that initially Mn/DOT had proposed closing the median crossing next summer for traffic entering or crossing Hwy 33 from the West Frontage Road. Access would be limited to a Right-in/Right-out Only from and to the southbound lane. As a result of negative comments received at their 09/22/15 public meeting, Mn/DOT has postponed closing this access until such time that a proposed frontage road along the west side can be extended north to the current DNR access.
- **Sub-Area 2, Upgraded Intersection with Hwy 33 near current DNR.** – Question if this intersection should be signalized? Mr. Prusak answered this intersection would likely be signalized only when and if the proposed retail development in this area and/or the extension of Tall Pine Lane were to happen. Currently there is not enough justification to fund a signal at this location.

Question on the reasoning for the proposed curve in the frontage road on the east side. – Mr. Rogers indicated the curve would have a 30 MPH design speed and that this section is driven by the potential of future retail development, which would generate significant volumes of cross traffic backed up waiting at the traffic signal, assuming the retail development were to occur.

D. Bjerkness asked if the cost estimates include utility extensions for future development. Mr. Prusak indicated they do not. The numbers are strictly for roadway improvements.

- **Sub-Area 3, Gillette Road Extension from Wal-Mart Signal to Pine Valley Recreation Complex Area.** – This proposal involves a “backage” road northwesterly to Olympic Drive instead of a frontage road continued north to the Brenny Dahl access. The study recognizes this proposal has impacts on private property and to the character of the Pine Valley area.

D. Bjerkness inquired on the purpose of this extension other than opening up the park? Mr. Rogers indicated a northerly extension of Gillette Road along the west side of the highway from the Wal-Mart Signal to Brenny Dahl would have significant wetland impacts, which make such a proposal not feasible. The extension to Olympic Drive provides a more direct access to the Pine Valley Recreation Complex. It further provides for a potential future east/west roadway connection to Airport Road as detailed further in Sub-area 4.

- **Sub-Area 4, Airport Road East-West Connection from Pinewood Drive to Pine Valley Area.** – Question on the reason for this connection. Currently Big Lake Road serves as the only major traffic collector route to that portion of Cloquet, which lies west of Highway 33. Continued development in western Cloquet will only add to existing traffic and congestion along Big Lake Road, all leading to the signalized intersection at Highway 33. The intent of the Airport Road connection would be to relieve some of this pressure and at the same time provide a much needed alternate route to Big Lake Road.
- **Sub-Area 5, Avenue F and Selmser Avenue Access Modifications.** – This stretch of Highway 33 from Big Lake Road, north to Cloquet Avenue is just north of the section recently reconstructed by Mn/DOT during 2014. Previous to this study, the City Council had identified improved pedestrian facilities along the west side of the highway from Pinehurst Park to Big Lake Road as a high priority. Due to topography and right-of-way limitations, a retaining wall will be required just south of Pinehurst Park and the future highway cross-section may need to be narrowed. Both the Selmser Avenue and Avenue F connections are relatively low volume and it is proposed to restrict these to Right-in/Right-out Only. This would eliminate the need for the left-turn lanes from the southbound highway and would improve corridor safety and mobility. At the same time it would provide an opportunity to shift a future highway alignment slightly to the east, thereby providing additional room for the pedestrian way along the west side of the highway.

K. Kolodge asked if a storm sewer was considered along the west side of the highway in the proposed retaining wall area. Mr. Prusak indicated a storm sewer is being planned in this section to pick up runoff from the Geihan area. Mr. Rogers further added that the plan includes curb and gutter, a retaining wall approximately 5-6 foot in height and some sort of a paved trail. This past month the City made application to the State for funding assistance to construct at least the initial phase of this pedestrian way and additional survey work is currently taking place to get a better feel of the ultimate design for the improvements in this section.

- **Sub-Area 6, Hwy 33 and Cloquet Avenue Pedestrian Enhancements** – The recently completed Riverfront Park Master Plan identified a need for improved pedestrian roadway crossings in the area of Veteran’s Park. The plan includes some revisions and improvements to the Cloquet Avenue intersection, which most notable involves the elimination of the right-turn slip ramp for westbound Cloquet Avenue traffic entering onto northbound Highway 33.

D. Bjerkness asked if the number of traffic lanes on Cloquet Avenue in the area of the Post Office should be reduced from two to one in each direction? This would make for easier and safer pedestrian crossings on Cloquet Avenue in this area.

- **Sub-Area 7, Pine Tree Plaza Mall Internal Circulation Improvements.** – Back in 2013 in response to proposed additional developments in the mall area, the City undertook a study of conceptual layouts for a redesign of the internal circulation in and around Pine Tree Plaza. The Study Group revisited these concepts and had no further changes to the recommended improvements. The main purpose of these improvements is to better direct traffic to and through the Super One parking lot area.

The next step for the Study Group would be to hold a Public Open House meeting to present the draft plan to the community and to provide for public comments on the proposed improvements. It is anticipated this meeting will take place within the next 60 days. Following the Open House, the Corridor Study and Access Management Plan will be finalized and presented back to the City Council for formal approval in February or March of 2016.

As for priority projects, within the past month, the Mn/DOT District One office out of Duluth and the City have submitted a joint application for federal Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds to complete the proposed frontage road along the west side of Highway 33 as detailed in Sub-Area 1. Furthermore, the City submitted an application to the Transportation Alternatives Program (TED) for funding assistance to complete the proposed pedestrian way along the west side of the highway from Pinehurst Park to Big Lake Road as detailed in Sub-Area 5.

In summary, the intent of the Highway 33 Corridor Study & Access Management Plan has been to identify both short and long-term transportation investments along Highway 33 that will maximize transportation system performance and support the economic vitality of Cloquet. The Plan further assists with coordinating efforts with our various project partners to initiate the formal project development process and to successfully seek additional state and federal transportation improvement dollars.

Mr. Fritsinger asked Council to let him know their perspective/feedback on the study.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brian Fritsinger
City Administrator