

MEETING MINUTES
PUBLIC SERVICES COUNCIL COMMITTEE
Monday, October 9th, 2023
City of West Des Moines Training Room

In Attendance:

Council Member – Matthew McKinney	City Engineer – Brian Hemesath
Council Member – Kevin Trevillyan	Public Services Superintendent – Gary Rank
Deputy City Manager – Jamie Letzring	Deputy Public Services Director – Joe Cory
Assistant City Attorney – Greta Truman	Principal Engineer – Jason Schlickbernd
Finance Director – Tim Stiles	Principal Engineer – Ben McAlister
Community & Economic Development Director – Ryan Moffatt	Principal Engineer – Nick Rentel
Parks & Recreation Director – Ryan Penning	Principal Traffic Engineer – Eric Petersen
	Park Superintendent – Marco Alvarez

Guests in Attendance:

1. Patrick Davis 1284 S Cape Point, West Des Moines, IA

Meeting was called to order at 11:34 AM by City Engineer, Brian Hemesath.

1. Railroad Quiet Zones (ERP)

Issue Summary:

Recently, staff has received several requests from residents to establish a “quiet zone” for the Iowa Interstate Railroad line in the vicinity of Raccoon River Park and crossings farther to the west. Two trains commonly use this track during night hours, with one train recently observed between 2:30-3:30 AM, and another one between 5:00-7:30 AM. For the safety of drivers and pedestrians crossing the tracks, train horns are required by law to be sounded at all public grade crossings unless certain improvements are in place.

Mr. Petersen stated that the majority of residents that have contacted the City with requests for a quiet zone live on the north side of Grand Avenue across from Raccoon River Park. There have been other concerns from residents elsewhere in the City and noted that the City will likely continue to receive these type of complaints and requests for quiet zones as West Des Moines continues to grow to the west and south.

He discussed the two other train lines that run through West Des Moines – the Union Pacific line which goes through the heart of West Des Moines and out to Waukee and the Iowa Interstate Railroad spur which goes through the northeast corner of West Des Moines, Windsor Heights and Urbandale. The Union Pacific line has the most street crossings within West Des Moines but is typically low volume. That train has recently been entering West Des Moines from the east between 7:00-8:00 PM, travels west to Waukee, then comes back through before leaving West Des Moines heading east around 10:00-10:30 PM. The line that runs through Windsor Heights and Urbandale is mostly used by daytime trains, so Staff hasn't heard many concerns from residents along that rail line.

Mr. Petersen reiterated that it is a requirement by federal law that trains sound their horns at all public crossing unless a quiet zone is in place. He added that the horn must be sounded 15-20 seconds before a train gets to a crossing, and the sound from the horns can travel a long distance. Mr. Petersen noted that a quiet zone could be established if certain crossing improvements are in place, but there would still be the sound from the bells at the crossing as well as the sound of the train itself.

Mr. Petersen explained that one of the requirements for a quiet zone is gates at crossings, and the majority of the crossings in West Des Moines do not have gates. The crossing located at Raccoon River Park does have gates and is a lower volume road. He added that this makes the possibility of a quiet zone at Raccoon River Park potentially more affordable when compared to other crossings where the same train crosses but there are currently no gates. Costs to upgrade to gates at train crossings could range between \$350,000 to \$400,000 for each crossing to meet the quiet zone requirements.

Mr. Petersen stated that there are no state or federal grants specifically to create a quiet zone. However, grants may be awarded to add gates at a crossing if there are traffic safety concerns on a busy road. For example, the City was able to secure grant funding to install gates due to traffic safety concerns at S 88th Street and Raccoon River Drive. Although this could help reduce the cost of the improvements when pursuing a quiet zone, Mr. Petersen mentioned the grants will not cover upgrading tracks, modernizing the gates, or adding other requirements that may be needed for a quiet zone.

Mr. Petersen is still trying to obtain more details from the Iowa Interstate Railroad and Union Pacific Railroad on specific requirements for the Raccoon River Park entrance being designated a quiet zone. Mr. Petersen pointed out that the requirements could be fairly inexpensive, but there is potential that the railroad will require other improvements or changes to the track that could increase the cost significantly.

Mr. Petersen discussed partial quiet zones where trains would not sound their horn at night but are able to sound it during the daytime. However, after checking with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the requirements for a quiet zone would be the same whether it is a 24-hour quiet zone or a partial zone. The FRA does not recommend doing a partial quiet zone.

Council Member Kevin Trevillyan asked if they could possibly still sound their horns at a quiet zone crossing. Mr. Petersen responded that if train conductors feel the need they are able to sound the horn at their discretion. For example, the horns can still sound if there is an indication that the gates do not have power, or if vehicles, pedestrians, or animals are on the track.

Mr. Petersen further discussed that the FRA requirements are based on calculated risk. The FRA has a risk calculator which looks at the characteristics of each crossing, as well as the proposed improvements, and determines the calculated risk compared to a risk threshold. The Raccoon River Park crossing is currently below that risk threshold. However, he noted that the risk calculation or risk threshold could change in the future.

Council Member Trevillyan asked if a quiet zone could be revoked.

Mr. Petersen stated that it is a possibility and the quiet zone does have to be renewed periodically. Therefore an area could be designated a quiet zone for a few years and, upon renewal, the FRA could determine that a crossing rises above the risk threshold and require additional improvements to maintain the quiet zone designation.

Council Member Matthew McKinney inquired about other quiet zones within the metro.

Public Services Deputy Director Joe Cory mentioned the City of Ames may have quiet zones.

City Engineer Brian Hemesath elaborated on the quiet zones in Ames. He stated they are not actually quiet zones and they utilize directional horns that are located at the gates. The trains do not sound the horns but as the trains approach the gates, the horns sound to let people know a train is coming down that track. He added that the horns are very directional, so they do not disturb an entire area.

Mr. Petersen pointed out that the directional horns are not something that replaces a quiet zone, they are added along with any other requirements requested by the FRA as part of a quiet zone.

Council Member Trevillyan stated the topic of quiet zones has come up regularly throughout his tenure as a Council Member. He explained that he does not think quiet zones should be implemented and if the City were to start down that path residents in other neighborhoods may request quiet zones, and how would the City justify one crossing versus another.

Patrick Davis of 1284 S Cape Point, and his wife decided to move to West Des Moines approximately four years ago partially because of the Five Waters project and other amenities that the City had to offer. He discussed the neighborhood where they decided to build their home and the many families with young children that reside on his street. He explained that they aren't able to have their windows open at night especially with young children due to the horns waking them up.

Mr. Davis asked if the committee would look at what the exact costs would be before making a decision, and stated the possibility of him and his neighbors paying for the upgrades to the crossing at Raccoon River Park's entrance.

Council Member Matthew McKinney provided his perspective that if there were no City park at the location there would not be a need for a crossing at that location. He also suggested that since costs are a large factor the HOA could work with the City in finding a solution.

City Engineer Hemesath clarified that the City must view things from an equity lens and does not typically allow the residents to pay for these types of improvements. If the committee were to decide to move forward with the quiet zone designation, the City would have to come up with a funding source.

Council Member McKinney asked about public-private partnerships for things such as the Athene Pedestrian Bridge and the cost sharing for the Stormwater Assistance program.

Mr. Hemesath discussed the differences in those situations and in those instances, it is for the general good of the City overall as opposed to benefitting one specific area.

Council Member McKinney inquired about what the next steps would be if the committee decides to move forward with the quiet zone designation.

Mr. Petersen explained the process for quiet zone designations at the Raccoon River Park entrance. Currently he has contacted the railroads to obtain more specific information on what would be required at

the crossing. Once the railroad has provided the information on requirements Staff will come back to the committee to provide an update. If the committee would like to move forward with the quiet zone then Staff would file a notice with the railroad and of the property owners. He added that, with the potential for improvements and the amount of paperwork that needs to be filed, the quiet zone process is slow and could be as long as 12-24 months.

Council Member McKinney asked if Staff could include information on how many quiet zones have been declassified when this item is brought back to the committee.

Direction: Committee members were split. Council Member McKinney would like Staff to proceed with obtaining requirements, costs, and history of declassified quiet zones and bring that information back to the committee for further discussion. Council Member Trevillyan was not in favor of Staff looking into costs for a quiet zone at Raccoon River Park's entrance.

2. **Weekend Work Requests**

Contractors are requesting permission from the PSCC to work weekends on the following project:

- South Service Area Segment 4 & 10 Sewers (Minger Construction)

Direction: The committee approved the above weekend work on Saturdays and Sundays.

3. **Review of Items for Council Meeting (October 16, 2023)**

ENGINEERING COUNCIL AGENDA ITEMS:

CONSENT AGENDA

Resolution – Approving Purchase of Fire Training Tower \$1,652,133.50

- **SE Fire Training Facility**
(0510-026-2021) WHP Training Towers 500.000.000.5250.490 *General Obligation Bonds*

Resolution – Approving Change Order No. 6 \$118,975.42

- **2023 PCC Patching Program**
(0510-002-2023) Shekar Engineering 500.000.000.5250.490 *General Obligation Bonds and Road Use Tax*

Resolution – Approving Amendment No. 2 to Professional Services Agreement \$102,700.00

- **8th Street Reconstruction, I-235 to Clegg Road**
(0510-038-2020) SEH, Inc. 500.000.000.5250.495 *Midtown Urban Renewal Area TIF and/or General Obligation Bonds*

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Resolution – Awarding Contract \$879,405.70

- **Stagecoach Drive, South 78th Street to South 81st Street**
(0510-018-2023) All Star Concrete 500.000.000.5250.490 *South 81st Street Urban Renewal Area*

4. **Staff Updates:**

- Tim Stiles Finance Director discussed a broken light pole located in the City Hall parking lot. The light pole was hit by someone during the Valley Fest event over the weekend, he stated City Staff are working with the individual that did the damage to get the light pole repaired.
- Ryan Penning Parks & Recreation Director mentioned the Raccoon River Park Playground ribbon cutting which will be held Saturday, October 14th at 1:00 pm.
- Brian Hemesath City Engineer provided an update on the Hwy 28 flood gate that had been removed for restoration, the work is almost complete so the flood gate will be delivered and reinstalled this Sunday October 15th at 4:00 am.
- City Engineer Brian Hemesath also discussed the planned Ashworth Road restriping project. Work was supposed to begin today but has been delayed until Tuesday, he added that the restriping will be completed by the end of the week. Last week over 150 postcards were sent out to impacted residents. It was not mentioned during the meeting, but message boards were placed near 1st & Ashworth and 19th & Ashworth on October 4th and will remain in place for the duration of the restriping process.

The restriping from 4 lanes to 3 lanes will be evaluated for 9 months. Transportation Engineers Eric Petersen and Jim Dickinson collected a significant amount of data from the area prior to the restriping and they will collect similar data after restriping has been completed to be able to compare the data.

Mr. Petersen added that they collected the data prior to the closing of 8th Street and were able to utilize traffic cameras on Ashworth Road at 19th Street, 8th Street and 1st Street.

Principal Engineer Jason Schlickbernd noted that the weather may affect the contractor's ability to work Wednesday through Friday of this week, but the work will be completed over the weekend if necessary.

5. Other Matters:

None.

The meeting adjourned at 12:36 pm. The next Public Services Council Committee meeting is scheduled for October 23rd, 2023.

A recording was made. Respectfully submitted by Juanita Greer, Executive Assistant to Director.