

Interim Report to City Council – Mayor’s Task Force on Pedestrian Safety

The Mayor’s Task Force on Pedestrian Safety was established by the City Council on May 18, 2015. Appointments to the Task Force were made by the Mayor at the June 1, 2015 Council meeting. Council Members Clyde Ruffin and Ian Thomas were named as co-chairs of the Task Force. The task force is composed of fifteen members, and is staffed by the Planning Division of the Department of Community Development.

As of the week of December 1, the Task Force had held six monthly meetings, with the first held on June 30. The initial five meetings were focused on information gathering, including presentations made by a number of stakeholders in regard to pedestrian safety. The Task Force also discussed the various components and issues that related to the problems involved with pedestrian-motor vehicle interactions. The presentations made at the initial five meetings were as follows:

June 30: Columbia Police Department presentation on pedestrian/auto crash incidents

July 21: Pedestrian design/facilities presentation by City of Columbia Public Works & MoDOT Central District Office

August 18: Presentations by University of Missouri Student Association, University of Missouri Police, and University of Missouri Parking Administration

September 15: Great Plains ADA Center presentation on pedestrian safety for senior citizens and persons with disabilities, Columbia Public Schools pedestrian safety presentation

October 20: Pednet Coalition presentation on the Vision Zero philosophy of roadway safety

The meeting presentations highlighted that pedestrian safety issues are comprised of a variety of components, including street and crosswalk design, sidewalk availability and condition, traffic signal timing and facilities/design, traffic regulations, and motorist and pedestrian behavior and attitudes. All of these issues must be addressed to improve pedestrian safety.

Vision Zero is a traffic safety concept/program that originated in Sweden, and is gaining widespread support across the U.S., with more than a dozen cities formally adopting a Vision Zero Program in the last 2 years. This comprehensive strategy takes a multi-faceted approach to addressing safety concerns, including engineering/street design, education/policy, and enforcement. Vision Zero operates from an ethical perspective that considers traffic deaths and injuries to be preventable and socially unacceptable. The program gives equitable consideration to all road users and values equally the needs of all types of non-motorized users as well as those of motorists. Particular attention is devoted to the needs of the most vulnerable road users, the non-motorists, given these users are most at risk for injuries and death on the road system. As its name implies, the goal of the campaign is to have zero traffic-related injuries and deaths.

Related to the Vision Zero topic, the local Pednet Coalition has been awarded a Missouri Foundation for Health grant for the purpose of conducting an advocacy campaign using the Vision Zero concept. Notification of the grant award was received on November 19. The grant proposal was to fund a Vision Zero safety campaign over a 2 ½ year timeframe. At this time the full details of the grant award are unknown, and modifications to project scope may be required. Partnerships with the Columbia Police Department, Columbia Public Works, and the City/County Public Health Department are anticipated.

The Pednet Coalition made a presentation at the October 20 Task Force meeting to give an overview of the Vision Zero program and their anticipated plan for the campaign.

The Task Force came to a consensus that breaking into subcommittees to study specific aspects of pedestrian safety would be the appropriate way to proceed after the initial full Task Force meetings had been held.

The subcommittees formed are Engineering, Enforcement, and Education, with each subcommittee focusing on pedestrian safety solutions from each of those perspectives. In addition, the Task Force Co-Chairs have appointed up to two additional citizen non Task Force members to sit in on each of the subcommittees to provide for additional input and community representation. Members of the public are also welcome to attend the subcommittee meetings in addition to the overall Task Force meetings.

The most recent Task Force meeting was held on November 17. The initial subcommittee meetings occupied the initial part of the meeting time, with the whole Task Force reconvening after an hour of subcommittee interactions. At the meeting of the entire group, each of the subcommittees gave a brief overview of their initial meetings as follows:

Education – the group noted that the GetAbout Columbia and the Pednet Coalition have conducted a number of programs related to pedestrian safety. They also stated that a variety of groups need to be educated on pedestrian safety, including pedestrians generally, bicyclists, motorists, students, voters, and visitors to Columbia.

Enforcement – this subcommittee believes that discussion is necessary on whether increasing the number of officers in the Police Department’s traffic unit will have a direct impact on reducing traffic accidents.

Engineering – this group suggested specifying recommendations for pedestrian facilities based on types/classifications of streets, with the recommendations varying depending on the street classification, traffic volumes, etc. Their opinion is that major improvements to safety can be made with an incremental approach, e.g. with pavement paint treatments.

Each of the subcommittees noted that they had discussed using the Vision Zero concept as the Task Force’s organizational framework for improving pedestrian safety in Columbia. Further discussion was held by the whole Task Force, after which a motion was passed unanimously to adopt Vision Zero as suggested. Ultimately, the Task Force likely will formally request that the City Council adopt this policy as the focal point/organizational structure for addressing the pedestrian safety issues facing Columbia.