

September 30, 2015

ANN ARBOR
CITY CLERK

OCT 12 15

TIME: _____

Ann Arbor City Council

All members

Fax: 734.332.5966

Fax: 734.994.8297

Re: Sidewalk waiver for Racquet Club on Geddes Ave

Members of the City Council:

I would like the opportunity to either read these comments into the record or have these written comments entered into the record at the next meeting of the City Council at which the request for a waiver of the sidewalk at the Racquet Club is addressed.

I have resisted the impulse to weigh in on this since May, 2015 telling myself that it is “not my issue.”

I can't shake the need to share my concerns over the proposed waiver of the sidewalk requirement on Geddes Ave in the twin interests of safety and seeing the goals of the complete non-motorized transportation plan implemented.

The potential of serious injury from the lack of a sidewalk is a great one. The neighborhood will never forget the death of 5 year old Anna Schwalb, who died after being hit by a car crossing Geddes Ave near Onondaga while with her parents in October 2014.

I was troubled by the sight this summer--- after I had initially decided this was “not my issue”-- of watching two pre-teen boys with tennis racquets trying to ride their bikes over the grass along Geddes Ave as they rode to connect to the former “on ramp”—now bike/pedestrian access to Huron Pkwy going south. One could reasonably speculate that they were “Racquet Club Raccoons.”

The sidewalk should be required and the request for a waiver denied for the following reasons:

1. **Best practices.** Sidewalks and bicycle lanes are inextricably imbedded in the City's non-motorized transportation plans. It is contrary to City policies and procedures to exempt out this portion of sidewalk while it is a key policy and design feature of the Geddes Ave improvement project currently underway. On the City's own website, it prides itself on serving its cycling and walking communities with infrastructure improvements geared towards cyclists and pedestrians, and by promoting awareness of cycling and walking opportunities and resources in the Ann Arbor area. <http://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/Transportation/Pages/Bike.aspx> The City of Ann Arbor Non-motorized Transportation Plan Update 2013 provides the following rational for bike and pedestrian infrastructure:

<http://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/Transportation/Pages/2010ActiveTransportation.aspx>

- Providing viable transportation alternatives for individuals who are capable of independent travel yet do not hold driver's license or have access to a motor vehicle at all times.
 - Improving safety, especially for the young and old who are at most risk due to their dependence on non-motorized facilities and their physical abilities.
 - Improving access for the 20% of all Americans who have some type of disability and the 10% of all Americans who have a serious disability.
 - Improving the economic viability of a community by making it an attractive place to locate a business while simultaneously reducing public and private health care costs associated with inactivity.
 - Encouraging healthy lifestyles by promoting active living.
 - Reducing the water, air, and noise pollution associated with automobile use by shifting local trips from automobiles to walking or bicycling.
 - Improving the aesthetics of the roadway and community by adding landscaping and medians that improve the pedestrian environment and safety.
 - Providing more transportation choices that respect an individual's religious beliefs, environmental ethic, and/or uneasiness in operating a vehicle.
 - Reducing the need for downtown parking spaces and parking decks.
 - Creating a stronger social fabric by fostering the personal interaction that takes place while on foot or on bicycle.
 - Reducing dependence on and use of fossil fuel with the resulting positive impact on climate change.
2. **Inherent danger of road.** This stretch of Geddes Ave—even with the improvements-- is inherently dangerous to ALL users because of the curve under the Huron Pkwy bridge, the visibility challenge created by the mass of the bridge, the change in speed limit and save speed for decelerating from Huron Pkwy to Geddes Ave, the narrowing of the berm beside the train tracks, the additional steep curve, and substantial change in elevation at Geddes hill, the twin pedestrian crossing walks with their flashers, congruence of the non-motorized entrances to Gallop Park and the new Geddes Height's private road intersection. This is an inherently chaotic stretch of road. There are a lot of challenging and distracting road conditions at this location for all users: cars, bicycles and pedestrians. The inherent danger of the road at this point, begs for every safety intervention reasonable and available as a risk management measure; hence the sidewalk.

3. **High non-local commuter traffic.** Geddes Ave has always been a major thoroughfare for commuters leaving Ann Arbor and exiting to the US 23 and I- 94 freeways via the Washtenaw or Geddes Road access ramps. These commuters can add to the danger of this stretch by being rushed or distracted, more so that locals whose kids are in the neighborhood and who have personal interests in driving very carefully on the road because “our kids really do live here.”
4. **“Attractive nuisance” of Gallup Park and Huron Pkwy.** A desired effect of the Geddes Ave road project is to connect Geddes Ave to the Huron Pkwy and Gallup Park non-motorized infrastructure—with their connected biking and walking paths. An intended effect is to increase bicycle and pedestrian use of these corridors. Common sense and research studies show that the installation of bike lanes increases their use by cyclists and decreases their crash rate. Similarly, the installation of sidewalks increases their use, increases the buffer between cars and pedestrians and keeps cyclists off sidewalks and wheelchairs or other mobility devices out of roads or bike paths. On a “build it and they will come” theory, more non-motorized users are intended and expected, increasing risk. Risk can be ameliorated or managed by a sidewalk.
5. **“Attractive nuisance” of the Racquet Club.** Many people currently access the Racquet Club from the neighborhood and around Ann Arbor by bike or on foot. With the new sidewalk and bike lanes down Geddes Ave, the opportunities to access the Racquet Club by bike or on foot may be expected to increase. One might reasonably assume that it would be in the self interest of the Racquet Club, on behalf of its members and their families, to create the safest environment for this access. I am thinking of my kids biking to the Racquet Club in the 25 years that we were members and the two boys that I saw struggling with their bikes on the grass this summer. If I were still a member, I would support the sidewalk even in the face of an additional assessment.
6. **Danger of creating and additional crosswalk.** Even with flashers, crosswalks are inherently dangerous as they necessarily interject pedestrians or wheelchair users into zones used by cars. There is a former access ramp to southbound Huron Pkwy that has been converted into a non-motorized access point. If there is an interruption in the continuity of the side walk on the south side of Geddes Ave, people using the south side sidewalks will need a crosswalk to get to the north side and people using the north side will need to get to the non-motorized access ramp to access southbound Huron Pkwy. Adding additional crosswalks to accommodate the break in the sidewalk on the southside of Geddes Ave further increases risk of injury at this chaotic location.

That cost of a sidewalk along Geddes Ave is significant is an understatement. Cost, however, is a poor reason for waiving the sidewalk requirement in this dangerous and tricky location. It is hoped that the parties could work together and with the utilities to find alternative funding sources and/or to arrange for payment options that could be spread out the cost over time.

My final comment is an observation that a reason why this issue has been on the table so long, is that the resolution of the sidewalk issue is so obviously in favor of requiring the installation of the sidewalk and denying the request for a waiver, that is almost embarrassing to think of another result. This is a non-partisan no-brainer based on the health, safety and welfare of the residents of Ann Arbor and on the achievement of the City's own "best practice" non-motorized transportation plan. I hope that the substantial financial impact of installing the sidewalk can be addressed in the manner most favorable to the Racquet Club and its members with the help of the City and the utility companies. Our family was happily a member of the Club for 25 years and many of our friends and neighbors who are members will be financially affected by this decision. I do, however, think that there will be great regret and perhaps even liability if the waiver is granted and someone is inevitably injured or killed. That guilt will be much tougher to live with than the expense. This is a safety issue pure and simple.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Susan Patton
510 Huntington Drive
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
ciaosusan@gmail.com
(734) 665-7282