

Cespedes, Christopher

From: City of Ann Arbor Transportation Commission
Sent: Wednesday, February 19, 2025 12:55 PM
To: Cespedes, Christopher
Subject: FW: Harding and Wallingford Road Reconfiguration Proposal

From: Tori Langland <xxxxxx@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 16, 2025 8:28 PM
To: Briggs, Erica <xxxxxx@a2gov.org>
Cc: Akmon, Dharma <xxxxxx@a2gov.org>; City of Ann Arbor Transportation Commission <xxxxxx@a2gov.org>; City Council xxxxxx [@a2gov.org](mailto:xxxxxx@a2gov.org); Dohoney Jr., Milton xxxxxx [@a2gov.org](mailto:xxxxxx@a2gov.org); Roberts, Jordan xxxxxx@a2gov.org
Subject: Re: Harding and Wallingford Road Reconfiguration Proposal

Dear Dharma and Erica:

Thank you both so much for your thoughtful responses.

Rest assured that I am not critiquing the existence of Resolution R-23-330 (assuming that is the policy/process you're referring to). I agree that it makes a lot of sense to not rely only on the petition process to identify areas of need, but also to evaluate opportunities to do so when undertaking capital projects. I can see why the council approved this. But the resolution also wisely says simply to evaluate these opportunities, and to do so where the record suggests that there is a need. It does not say that we should implement changes whether they are needed or not, and whether they are a good idea or not. So what I am critiquing is not the council's decision to sign this resolution, or the Council's focus on improving safety overall, but rather the proposal to implement a redesign at this particular intersection. I do not know who ultimately makes the final decision on this, but I was writing in order to entreat the Council to decide against this instance.

I also agree that, if all things were equal, then taking steps to improve safety might seem justified even in the absence of a record of accidents. But in practice all things are not equal. We have finite resources and so any action in one area means a lack of action in another. More importantly, each project has its own context, with its own implications and effects. And in this case, while the possible safety benefit would be purely theoretical, the effect on historic preservation, on the neighborhood landscape, and on community satisfaction, are absolutely real.

Where I do respectfully disagree is with the idea that the intersection in question is "primed for disaster." That strikes me as inconsistent with the data, and at odds with the goal of using a data-driven approach where we ought to pay heed to the actual safety record and the current speed and volume of traffic. And just as the data shows that there is no safety concern, evidence also shows us that people recognize and appreciate the historic character of these 100-year-old designs, and that an important part of our heritage will be lost if we destroy them.

While I believe the project is misguided, if you are not sure, or if you have only considered this through the lens of theoretical safety improvements so far, then perhaps you could reach out to your colleagues on the Historic Preservation Commission to seek their opinion, or charge the public engagement

specialist at the upcoming meeting on this project to ask people to address what the neighborhood means to them, so that you could better evaluate what else is at stake in this decision. You could also look at your cue of traffic calming requests to see what else might be funded with this same amount of money and staff time, and then make an actual comparison about which project is more worthy of funding. In other words, once you bring this decision out of the realm of the abstract, and bring it into its specific context, with the very real implications that come with any decision, then I think you will be better positioned to see why this is not worthy of your support.

In sum, the overall policy makes sense, and I fully appreciate your concern for safety as well as the excellent work the engineering team has devoted to trying to redesign the intersection. But I believe that redesigning this particular intersection will permanently and unnecessarily harm our city, and I hope that the Council will agree with me.

Many thanks for reading a second long-winded email from me!

All best,
Victoria

On Sun, Feb 16, 2025 at 11:57 AM Briggs, Erica <xxxxxx@a2gov.org> wrote:

Ms. Langland,

Thank you for writing. And I truly appreciate you sharing your thoughts and some of the history surrounding the design of the neighborhood.

As the former liaison to the Transportation Commission and someone who worked extensively with staff as we sought to reframe our neighborhood traffic calming program, I fully concur with CM Akmon's summary and wanted to add a few additional points around why Council unanimously voted to shift this process.

The only way we can improve the safety and livability of neighborhoods all across the city is to ensure that the work is incorporated into the regular course of business, not just by special request, and not with lengthy and expensive public engagement processes. We don't want to wait for a runner to be hit at night or a child to be injured on their walk to school. We want to make appropriate safety improvements each time we touch a street.

We maintained the neighborhood traffic calming program - which is more expensive and costly - because it's not reasonable to ask residents to wait for decades for changes to happen as a part of the regular course of business. The neighborhood traffic calming program expedites requests, but should not be the only mechanism by which traffic calming improvements are made.

[We know](#) that across the City we have a problem with streets that were designed for a different era. The design of an intersection like the one at Wallingford and Harding is primed for disaster - because [vehicles](#), driving behavior, and culture has shifted. What worked a 100 years ago does not always work today. In fact, it presents risks for engaging in all of the activities that residents want to do in the neighborhoods and you fondly noted such as walking, biking, and running.

I've attached a screenshot that contains a partial view of the intersection in question- it clearly shows that the ADA crosswalk directs pedestrians into the center of the road, rather than to the receiving crosswalk. This alone suggests the current intersection design is inaccessible and in need of reconfiguration so that it is safer for all users. A narrower intersection would further reduce conflicts and encourage safer turning movements.

I'm grateful that our staff has identified this intersection as problematic and is integrating in cost effective improvements in the course of regularly scheduled road work. This is what we directed them to do and they deserve kudos for doing this tough work.

Appreciatively,
Erica

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Erica Briggs, PhD

5th Ward Council Member

Cell: 734-355-xxxx

Visit www.ericafora2.com to sign-up for my Ward newsletter and/or find out about upcoming Ward meetings.

From: Akmon, Dharma <xxxxxx@a2gov.org>

Sent: Sunday, February 16, 2025 10:42 AM

To: Tori Langland <xxxxxx@gmail.com>; City of Ann Arbor Transportation Commission <xxxxxx@a2gov.org>; City Council <xxxxxx@a2gov.org>

Subject: Re: Harding and Wallingford Road Reconfiguration Proposal

Hi Victoria,

Thanks for your thoughtful email about the Harding & Wallingford intersection project.

I want to explain the policy behind using planned construction projects, like this one, as opportunities to implement safer street design. Previously, traffic calming was only added through petition, which created several problems:

- It privileged neighborhoods familiar with the petition process and that had time to engage with it
- It required extensive staff time for paying for public engagement that could—in the end—yield nothing as final designs needed 50%+ neighborhood support to move forward

- It meant telling residents during construction projects that safety concerns couldn't be addressed until after completion and through an uncertain petition process

Given the city's goals to increase safety for all users and encourage non motorized transit where possible, these practices were inconsistent with those goals, wasteful of resources (why design a road twice?), and made very little sense to residents when faced with this process. The current approach aligns with [nationally established, evidence-based design guidelines used across North America to build safe, multimodal streets](#).

I understand your concern about prioritizing resources, especially given our backlog of traffic calming projects. However, I don't believe we should wait for crashes or injuries before addressing design elements that can lead to unsafe conditions. Making these improvements during already-planned construction is both cost-effective and consistent with our transportation goals.

Best,
Dharma

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Dharma Akmon
Councilmember, Ward 4

View and sign up for my newsletter at <https://www.dharmafora2.com/news>

From: Tori Langland <vlangland@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, February 14, 2025 9:49 AM

To: City of Ann Arbor Transportation Commission <TransportationCommission@a2gov.org>; City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>

Subject: Harding and Wallingford Road Reconfiguration Proposal

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Dear Council Members and Members of the Transportation Commission:

I write with serious concerns about the proposal to change the intersection between Harding & Wallingford Roads. As you are undoubtedly aware, the city needs to install a new water main and sewer on Harding Road and so will be disturbing a portion of that road. The current proposal is that, following this work, Harding would not be restored to its current design but instead the intersection between Harding and Wallingford would be permanently changed so as to implement traffic calming measures. The final design itself has not yet been announced. While the changes to the water and sewer lines sound reasonable, I entreat you to halt the part of the plan that includes designing or implementing a reconfiguration of the intersection afterward, and redirect staff efforts toward other projects. As I will explain below, I believe the proposed reconfiguration is unnecessary, would irreparably diminish the character and historic design of the neighborhood where it is located, and is a poor use of city resources, especially in today's context of many other documented areas of need and of federal funding insecurity. Below I briefly explain my three main concerns.

1. The proposed changes are entirely unnecessary

According to the [Harding & Wallingford Road Improvements website](#), the goal of a reconfiguration is to “increase safety and slow traffic.” However, according to Interim Transportation Manager Luke Liu, in his comments at a November public information session about this proposal, the city has never recorded a single injury at the site, has documented zero safety concerns such as speeding or failing to obey the stop sign, and, in his words, after looking at the data, “there’s really not any recorded issue to fix.” The rationale is just “to make some improvement” given that “we do have disturbance to the street, and that’s exactly what the council resolution [R-23-330] is talking about.” “It’s more, I guess, to improve the service to pedestrians,” he said. It is hard to see how an intersection that has recorded zero pedestrian accidents merits “improved” service to pedestrians. How can we reduce pedestrian accidents to something below zero? This is also a very narrow definition of “service to pedestrians,” one that discounts other needs of pedestrians, such as the quality of life generated through free and public access to historic spaces.

2. The proposed changes would diminish the character and historic design of the neighborhood

This intersection is a historic space, a central feature of the Ives Woods neighborhood, and it is used and beloved by the public for this reason. The neighborhood was designed over 100 years ago by Marvin and Virginia Ives. In the original [plat map](#) from 1923, still available on city web sites, the long, curve of Wallingford Road, and its two wide intersections with Harding Road and Hermitage Road, form the defining features of the neighborhood’s design. In 2019, the *Detroit Free Press* specifically called out these curving roads in describing Ives Woods, saying it is a place where “the city’s usual tight platting grid is interrupted by a handful of vintage upscale houses on curving roads.” People from all over Ann Arbor come here to walk, run and bike, often with their canine companions, and local residents regularly maintain friendships with one another through extended interactions on the street.

The proposal to reduce the width of one of these intersections, however, would radically transform this space, constricting the open and spacious curve that was originally designed and replacing it with something wholly out of character and lacking in historic value. It would change the look and feel of the public space of the neighborhood, depriving users today and in the future of a key part of its charm and of our shared history. Around the world urban planners have sought to regenerate historic areas, as we know that attractive spaces improve the urban environment and promote interactions between people. Ann Arbor should not be taking the opposite step by seeking to diminish the character and historic design of this area, especially when it serves no public safety interest.

3) The proposed changes are a poor use of city resources

In the “Project Details” section of the Harding & Wallingford Road Improvements website, they write that “[w]ide road segments such as these have been identified in the city’s Vision Zero Transportation plan and Council Resolution R-23-330, as areas of focus to better the community’s all ages and abilities network as well as reduce vehicle speed to improve safety.” The city has indeed directed resources toward the Vision Zero Transportation plan, but it has said that these investments should “focus on corridors and intersections with the most serious crashes,” and that the overall goal of the plan is to reduce the speed of cars and to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries. Meanwhile, Council Resolution R-23-330, merely directs the City Administrator to *evaluate* opportunities to incorporate traffic calming elements into capital projects, and qualifies this by saying it should do so for projects “where a record of crashes, speeding, and/or resident complaints exists, or otherwise suggest a need for calming...” As noted earlier, the Harding-Wallingford intersection has not had *any* injury-resulting crashes, let alone fatalities, and no evidence of speeding. It has experienced no resident complaints, and Interim Transportation Manager Luke Liu has affirmed that there is no evidence of a need for calming.

Meanwhile, the city’s website lists six current traffic calming projects that are awaiting construction, three where engagement is ongoing, and a full 14 more where residents have submitted petitions for reconfigurations due to real concerns about speeding cars and pedestrian safety, and are waiting for them to be reviewed. Minutes from recent Transportation Commission meetings speak to the many areas of need for these funds, from the notice of three serious pedestrian accidents that recently occurred at Packard and Fernwood, to the many pleas for intervention expressed in emails or public comments. Clearly, there are multiple areas in need of traffic calming

intervention. According to the Project Manager, Tracy Anderson, the added cost to make these changes, rather than simply restoring the road to its original design is expected to be \$13,000, and she characterized this as not a large cost. But spending *any* amount of money at the Harding and Wallingford intersection, where such intervention is not needed and will additionally do real harm to current and future generations and their quality of life by diminishing the historic character of our public space, is a poor use of city resources. They should be directed to areas of actual need and to areas where they will not do harm. While this should always be the case, given the current insecurity around federal grant funding, especially the future status of Ann Arbor's 4-year grant from the US Department of Transportation Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Grant Program, city officials should prioritize the use of funds to address those areas with a record of safety concerns.

For all of the above reasons, I respectfully request that you call off this unnecessary, wasteful, and permanently damaging plan to reconfigure a historic intersection, and instead make plans to restore it to its original design upon completion of the water and sewer work.

Sincerely,

Victoria Langland
Ward 3 Resident