

Published February 16th, 2022

Orinda struggles to meet competing interests of pedestrian safety and safe fire access

By Sora O'Doherty



Speed Cushions Courtesy Staff Report

In the staff report, acting Public Works Director Scott Christie said that the MOFD has not objected to speed cushions in the past. TSAC had unanimously recommended that the city council direct staff to appeal the MOFD's rejection of speed cushions without a 20-foot offset. Other alternatives suggested were to accept the MOFD revision and move forward with installing the speed cushions with an offset of at least 20 feet or to advise TSAC that alternate traffic control measures should be considered for the location.

In public comments, TSAC chair Travis Miller said he was fully supportive of an appeal. "The process has been long and arduous," he said, and is not a technical issue.

Dana Wentworth spoke about working on speed cushions on Sleepy Hollow. "We want to put traffic calming measures in our neighborhood. There are 100 pedestrians getting out of school from November to May," she said, adding, "If you decide not to install speed cushions, you might as well dissolve TSAC."

Brandon Hedu, a new member of TSAC, recommended appealing the MOFD decision. "We shouldn't allow MOFD to trump a well thought out decision," he said. In his opinion, speed cushions are more important now than ever because a lot of people are working from home, which means more pedestrians are out on the streets.

During council discussion, Council Member Nick Kosla, while agreeing with comments from Council Member Amy Worth about the need for better pedestrian and bike access, concluded that if the city chose to appeal the fire chief's decision, they would lose.

Christy told the council that in the past the city has not submitted a formal document. Winnacker submitted both written correspondence in advance of the meeting and attended the meeting to explain his position, which was that the data required by the city itself was not presented to him, leaving him without a basis to approve the installation. Winnacker said, "Approving an obstruction of the sole evacuation route from a wildland urban interface fire area requires particular diligence in order to provide for public safety." He also debunked the notion that fire vehicles could use nearby private roads. They cannot, he said.

Worth opined that there has been a "huge national effort for pedestrians and biking. We have to provide for traffic calming in a big way." She suggested that, rather than pursuing a formal appeal, the city "find a way to figure out how to adjust or amend our policies to take what we have and put it together in a form that meets the needs of MOFD."

Kosla agreed. "Why not go with the practical approach and provide the chief with information to convince him that the neighborhood will be safe?" he suggested. Council Member Darlene Gee agreed with her colleagues. "We have demonstrated to chief Winnacker how deeply we care about fire safety," she noted, but added that "to hire a consultant to provide the quantitative study the chief is asking for would be an extraordinary waste of money. We don't have the money to conduct a study that would not provide the required numbers."

Although Winnacker pointed out that he was just asking for things explicitly provided for in the city's own policy, Worth said that things had changed and that the policy needs to be reexamined. "We've got to do everything we can," she said, "to slow down traffic, particularly where people are walking."

Vice Mayor Inga Miller spoke about the uptick in speeding traffic during the pandemic, coupled with more people wanting to get out and walk. "That is a terrible combination," she concluded. Mayor Dennis Fay agreed that the policy needs to be reviewed. "This is a complicated balancing act of safety concerns," he said. He does not believe that a full-blown traffic study is required on any residential road.

In the end, the council decided not to formally appeal the MOFD's decision yet, but to have staff put together a document explaining the city's decision that speed cushions are the right choice for Dalewood Drive. Winnacker agreed that the MOFD could be flexible about the time limits for appeal in order to allow the city to submit its documentation. That approach received unanimous approval from the council.

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA