

City Council of the City of New Castle
Special City Council Meeting
Town Hall, 201 Delaware Street, New Castle
Thursday, April 27, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.

Call to order: 7:00 pm

Roll Call:

Councilperson Valarie W. Leary
Councilperson Michael J. Quaranta
Council President Linda Ratchford
Councilperson Michael M. Platt
Councilperson John A. Di Mondì

Also present:

William Barthel, City Administrator
Janet Carlin, City Treasurer
Jamie Rogers, Police Chief
Daniel Losco, City Solicitor

Presenters:

Peter Haag, Delaware Department of Transportation
Chris Sylvester, Engineer Consultant for Delaware
Department of Transportation

Council President Ratchford welcomed everyone and held a moment of silence for Corporal Stephen Ballard of the Delaware State Police, who was shot and killed on April 26, 2017 near Bear, Delaware and to pray for his friends, family, and the Police Department.

DelDOT presenters presented their findings from the traffic study that was conducted at 6th and Delaware Streets. There was one change to the agenda: namely, that there is no executive session after the Special Meeting.

Mr. Peter Haag and Mr. Peter Sylvester had presented the findings from the traffic study that took place at 6th and Delaware Streets. Mr. Haag explained that, before DelDOT made any improvements, what would be necessary is the rebuilding and reconstruction of the signal. DelDOT made an assessment to determine whether the device is the appropriate device for the intersection. In completing their study, DelDOT found out that the signal went in in 1981, and they conducted a crash analysis, operational analysis, and a review of traffic patterns. Mr. Haag reported on the evaluation that took place where his organization counted motor vehicles at the intersection to see if it would meet Federal and State of Delaware standards. There are many evaluations that were conducted, such as hourly traffic volumes, crash data, delays, proximity of railroads, and many more studies, from which it was concluded that the existing conditions of daily vehicular volumes did not meet national standards or those of the State of Delaware.

Mr. Haag discussed how he had looked at statistical crash data to determine whether that traffic signal corrected susceptible crashes, that angle right and left, turning right angle crashes at the intersection. He continued to discuss how, according to the evaluation conducted, there had been around 12 crashes within one tenth of a mile in the last few years: seven were at the intersection, and three of them were related to a side-swipe type of crash. He explained that either two vehicles that are going in the same direction impacting each other and somebody bypassing, also striking into each other. He stated that during the study, he noticed that there was a bypass issue; the only viable thing that was noticed was opposite traffic colliding at the intersection. From a traffic-signaling perspective, he observed that, if the lights were all green, a crash could not be deterred - the red light would be the one that corrects this. He stated that DeIDOT observed the operation of the existing signal, and discussed the delay, meaning the level of service. The level of service is good, but Mr. Haag felt as though some improvement could be made, while providing a safer environment for drivers. The next perspective that was discussed was that of safety, and crashes: with an All-way stop, if one were to drive through 6th Street, the conflict point would be significantly diminished. He discussed the calming scenario of an All-way stop, which requires that every single person that travels through the intersection stop completely, also come to some form of stop instead of having a potentially-green indication for that approach throughout the day. Lastly, there is more information about the traffic study in the booklets and handouts that he provided for the City Council and the public.

Mr. Haag stated that they came to the meeting to ask the City of New Castle to accept the traffic light study and move forward with the signal-removal process. They explained that the process could take up to one year, and it is up to the City Council how they want DeIDOT to evaluate the project. The evaluation would concern sight-distance issues with the approaching signs while the implementation of projects is taking place. DeIDOT would have a certain threshold and/or certain time-markers to survey crash data. He informed the City Council that, after three months, six months, and one year, changes could be implemented to the schedule whenever needed.

Mr. Chris Sylvester stated that he completed the traffic study for the intersection, and that he thought Mr. Haag had done a good overview of the study. He recommended to the City Council that the signal should be replaced with an All-way stop condition; to do this, DeIDOT has to move into the signal-deactivation phase. The end result of the signal-deactivation process - if no crash concerns, safety concerns, or concerns from the public were to arise - would be that DeIDOT would remove the actual signal equipment. Once the equipment was removed, the traffic signs would continue to operate as they had for the six-month and one-year process.

The City Council questioned Mr. Haag and Mr. Sylvester about the removal process.

City Council President Ratchford asked Mr. Sylvester about the fact that it would take a year for him to finish the next phase of the completed study. Mr. Sylvester replied that Mr. Haag had discussed how the schedule would be followed. This process would take up to one year, and the six-month period is when the equipment would be taken away and adjustments could be made, depending upon events and other time-frames that DeIDOT felt they should take into consideration.

Council President Ratchford stated to Mr. Sylvester that there were comments in the report about the view to the left, that currently there was inadequate visibility, and she asked him to respond. In response to the Council President's question, he stated that the evaluation is taking sight distance into consideration, restriction of available sight-distance: the motorist approaches the intersection, comes to a stop, and the available sight distance the driver has. The study evaluated traffic controls in cases of two-way stop control - where one is always stopping at the side-street approaches - versus an All-way stop control. When one stops at a two-way stop, there is a little more concern for the available sight distance. DeIDOT will implement an All-way stop control instead of a two-way stop.

Council President Ratchford expressed concern about summertime traffic on Fridays and how motorists drive through the City of New Castle, causing traffic backup. She told Mr. Haag that his study would run through the summer and that he would be monitoring some of the traffic volume to see if there are any notable issues. Mr. Haag stated that, if DeIDOT would like to have additional data collection done through the summer, if that is a major concern of the City Council, DeIDOT could add more observations during the summer.

Councilperson Michael Quaranta expressed several comments to the presenters about neighborhood responses, the busy intersection, and the fact that everyone shares a common view that the City wants the safest intersection possible. People traverse the intersection several times a day, there are people living in that area, and the Councilperson is concerned that his constituents' property and lives are at stake. Councilperson Quaranta paraphrased a comment of Chief Roger's to the effect that the Chief is for anything that calms down traffic, and that the Chief would want a situation where motorists would have to stop, and that would be great. Another concern expressed by the Councilperson was that people tend to speed up when they see a yellow-light in order to make it through the intersection, and if traffic slows down, people may view this as a less viable shortcut through the City during weekends - beach-time, for example. He conferred with Chief Rogers as to whether this was accurate, and the Police Chief agreed with him.

Councilperson Michael Quaranta questioned Mr. Sylvester about the fact that DeIDOT did not conduct any evaluations of the intersection on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Mr. Sylvester clarified that the reports were collected back in October 2016, and the engineering study was completed in December 2016. He said that it is typical by national standards to collect traffic during the work-week unless there is reason to perform the additional work of collecting weekend traffic data; however, the additional data might be something that the City would want to take into consideration.

Councilperson Michael Quaranta made the presenter aware of the fact that the volume of traffic peaks on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, that there are large public events in the city monthly, and we also have events taking place in October that create large volumes of traffic. The crash data does not account for the unreported incidents that go largely between two parties.

Councilperson Michael Quaranta wanted to know how the traffic light was chosen, out of the thousands of traffic lights in the State of Delaware. Mr. Haag stated that the traffic light was

brought to light because it was due for maintenance according to their computer system. The upgrade might cost up to \$300,000.00, which is not too expensive for such a project. Mr. Haag stated that the cost does not include utilities, and he acknowledges that there are going to be right-of-way issues, and that there is also the question of how DelDOT will rebuild it. Mr. Haag stated that he will work with the City Administrator to try to figure out what a viable option is, what light can DelDOT put a mast on. It goes into a significant period of design, and that it could take many years for it to be completed. He discussed other options for helping people, such as pavement markings. In addition, the crosswalks would be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act; this could be done as soon as possible.

Councilperson Di Mondri stated that he thought that maybe it was because DelDOT has figured out that New Castle is an escape-valve for Route 13. Secondly, he thought that maybe it is because of the cost of the light: \$300,000.00 - \$400,000.00. He told the presenter that the light is fine, and suggested that the light be left alone. Mr. Sylvester informed Councilperson Di Mondri that there are maintenance concerns, such as were listed in the handout about the traffic light. The presenters informed Councilperson Di Mondri that the traffic light has been there since December 1981, and does not meet current standards. Councilperson Di Mondri stated that the discussion is about money as a motivation. He expressed concerns about the safety of City residences, because when there are stop signs, people will be "playing chicken". He is concerned that some motorists are not going to wait their turn at the stop signs. Mr. Sylvester informed Councilperson Di Mondri that there are enforcement issues; Councilperson Di Mondri stated that the City cannot enforce what they have now, let alone have a cop sitting at 6th and Delaware through the entire day. He continues to express concern about the fact that money is involved. He informed the presenter that he has counted 390 cars that pass his house from 7am to 8am in one hour.

Councilperson Platt asked if there was a difference between 10 cars stopping at the light and letting three cars go, as ten on 6th Street, three going from Delaware Street versus the time difference between someone making a left-hand turn holding up eight cars, versus each car individually rotating around. He provided the example. Mr. Sylvester informed Councilperson Platt that DelDOT is looking at how many motorists are making left or right turn volumes, and all those issues come into consideration with their highway-capacity software that they completed for this intersection.

Mr. Haag stated that there is a common theme, and that is the overall safety of the Intersection.

Chief Rogers stated that he thinks that an automatic stop is always good because it slows down traffic. He stated that, if the public does not want a stop sign, then we do not need a stop sign.

Communications from the public

Council President Ratchford read an e-mail from a resident named Carolyn Travers from 6th Street. She expressed concern about keeping the two-way traffic light, rather than replacing it

with a two-way stop, rather than either replacing it with flashing lights or, worse, a four-way-stop.

She stated that she has lived in the area for 34 years, and she has noticed a continued increase in traffic, especially during the summertime. She feels as though four-way stops will create a lot of problems and safety concerns, with a potential for many car- and/or pedestrian accidents. Finally, she stated that for all concerned residents, visitors, children, firefighters, bus drivers, and for the reasons stated above, she hoped that DelDOT will keep the two-way traffic light. She stated that the light does not need to be removed.

Jackie Edison: She lives at 600 Delaware Street, right on the corner where the stoplight is located. She would like the presenters to come to her porch between 6:30 am and 8:00 am, and 4:30 pm and 6:30 pm. She encouraged the presenters to come out and view the volume of traffic that comes down that street. She expressed concern about the four stop-signs with the red blinking lights that would cause a lot of traffic problems and, overall, she is concerned about the safety of other people crossing that street.

Beverly Ross: She stated that she lives at 615 Delaware Street. She is concerned about the safety of people walking across the intersection. She expressed concern about the different angles at which the cars turn. She stated that every four-way, two-lane intersection has 32 potential vehicle-conflict points.

Russ Smith: He is from 219 Chestnut Street, and thinks that City residents lack information. He discussed how there is a lot of traffic in the summertime, how they have "Pokemon people"; he does not want traffic to be diverted to 3rd Street because the road is narrow and it is in the center of historic New Castle.

Pete Toner: He is from 6th and Delaware, and he thinks that the Police Chief and the City Administration are doing a great job. He asked a lot of questions about traffic diversion, and asked for the Council to change 6th Street into a one-way street, and whether the City has ever thought about stopping people from coming into town that way? He expressed that he agrees with Councilperson Di Mondri that the plans to change the traffic light are about money, and he thinks that the cost is a lot of money. It was \$300,000.00.

Councilperson Leary read a letter from Diane Hill. She stated that Diane Hill is on West 6th Street between South and Tremont. She stated that 6th Street has a lot of traffic and that she is opposed to the removal. She stated that it is hard for her to back out of her driveway, most people do not slow down, and she thinks that replacing the street light would only make matters worse.

Glenn Richardson: He now lives on East 9th Street. He acknowledged the presenters for doing their scientific study. He expressed concern about the flow of traffic in the City when there is an event, and how many cars are lined up. He expressed that he is against the stop signs and expecting everyone to stop. He feels as though a stop sign is like a landmark.

Marty Wright: He lives on 123 West 7th street and agrees with the principle that four-way stops cram the traffic on 6th Street traffic rather than using the green-light. He expressed that the studies from the presenters are inconclusive and insufficient, because they do not address the City's situation. There have been no recommendations for emergency services - they would need to be able to easily go through the City to help someone and/or to reach the scene of a crime. He asked the City Council to review the proposal for the all-way street.

Pill Gross: He feels as though crossing would be a risk if the City had only two crosswalks and not going the other way would be a disaster. He would like to know if there is any way of leaving the lights in their current condition and adding crosswalks for a four-way. He also asked whether the presenters absolutely say the lights are not in compliance, they must come down, and we must put something else there. He wonders if the lights and committing to it where it would be code.

Janet Carlin: She stated that she has lived at 530 Delaware Street for 40 years, as of September. She shared with the City Council that there have been many traffic accidents at that location, and she thinks that there should be studies done on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays; she also thinks that the time period has to be expanded.

The **Motion to adjourn** was made by Councilperson Leary, **seconded** by Councilperson Di Mondy and passed unanimously. Council adjourned at 9:02 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Brian G. Whitaker
City Clerk of New Castle, Delaware