



STAFF REPORT

Update and Discussion on Safe Routes to School Grant for In-pavement Flashers and Active School Zone Radar Signs.

Honorable Mayor and City Council:

Summary

The City of Belmont received a Safe Routes to School Grant for the installation of in-pavement flashers at various uncontrolled crosswalks throughout the City and active school zone radar signs in the area of Ralston Avenue Middle School and Notre Dame High School along Ralston Avenue. The purpose of the grant is to improve pedestrian safety at uncontrolled (no traffic control devices are present) crosswalks near or along the route to schools throughout the City.

This report presents the proposed locations and types of improvements for Council review prior to beginning the design process. Staff will incorporate Council direction into the package of improvements that are designed. Staff expects to return to Council at the August 10th meeting for authorization to go to bid on the project.

Background and Discussion

City staff in conjunction with the Belmont Redwood Shores and Sequoia Union High School Districts submitted an application to the Safe Routes to School Grant program for the installation of in-pavement flashers at various uncontrolled crosswalks throughout the City and active school zone radar signs in the area of Ralston Avenue Middle School and Notre Dame High School along Ralston Avenue in September, 2003. The attached map illustrates the proposed locations of the crosswalks and the active school zone radar signs.

In December, 2003, City staff advised the City Council in a weekly update that the City was one of 84 applicants out of 420 submitted statewide to receive a Safe Routes to School grant. Belmont was the only City in San Mateo County to receive a grant. The grant amount was for \$372,745. There is a 10 percent local match for the project.

Update on Safe Routes to School Grant

June 8, 2004

Page 2

The proposed locations of the in-pavement flashers and the schools that they will primarily serve are:

- Ralston Avenue and Elmer (Nesbit School)
- Ralston Avenue and Chula Vista (Notre Dame and Carlmont High Schools)
- Ralston Avenue and Notre Dame (Notre Dame and Carlmont High Schools)
- Ralston Avenue and Maywood Drive (Carlmont High School)
- Ralston Avenue and Villa (Carlmont High School and IHM)
- Ralston Avenue and Pullman (Carlmont High School, Merry Moppet, and Belmont Oaks)
- Alameda de las Pulgas at Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM)
- Alameda de las Pulgas and Garden Court (Carlmont High School)

These locations are on heavily traveled arterials along routes frequently traveled by students. There may be other locations in the City that may be served by in-pavement flashers that the City may apply for subsequent grant funding.

City staff proposes to install solar powered in-pavement flashers that are activated by depressing a pedestrian push button similar to what is found on a traffic signal.

The active school radar signs in the area of Notre Dame High School are proposed to be installed on Ralston Avenue in the westbound direction in advance to Chula Vista Drive and in the eastbound direction in advance to Notre Dame Avenue. The active school radar signs in the area of Ralston Middle School are proposed to be installed for the westbound direction on Ralston Avenue west of Davis Drive and for the eastbound direction at Tahoe Drive.

The active school radar signs will flash the speed at which vehicles are traveling to make drivers more aware of the speed at which they are traveling in a school zone. These devices are not much larger than a standard speed limit sign. The attached photograph shows an actual installation in the City of Palo Alto. They also can be controlled by a time clock if the City desires so that they will only display the speeds during certain hours.

City staff is prepared to begin the preparation of plans, specifications and estimates for this project. The final plans, specifications and cost estimates will be brought back to Council for authorization to go out to bid and award the project. The grant funds must be obligated (contract awarded to a contractor) by September 30, 2004 or we will lose the funding. Staff will return to Council at the August 10th meeting for authorization to go out to bid for the installation of these devices.

General Plan:

The Circulation Element Policies of the General Plan indicates several policies that may be relevant. They are:

- “7. New roads and improvement to existing roads should be designed to minimize visual and environmental impacts.”

- “10. New stop signs, traffic signals or other means of traffic control should be installed only where necessary to ensure safe use of a roadway or intersection by automobiles and pedestrians.”
- “12. Pedestrian and bicycle crossing should be designed at appropriate locations with adequate sight distance and clearly distinguished signs and lane markings.”

The policies in the Scenic Streets and Highways section of the General Plan indicates the City should establish design standards to “1(a) Control the siting, height and design for new structures within scenic corridors”. The remaining policies outlined in the Scenic Streets and Highways address grading, control removal of vegetation and trees, acquiring additional right-of-way or scenic areas, and undergrounding utilities.

The General Plan further reads “Ralston Avenue west of Alameda de las Pulgas is a county-designated scenic road. It is designated by Belmont as a scenic road throughout its length. The plan places high priority on protecting the scenic character of Ralston Avenue. Roadway intersection modifications are to be limited to those essential for traffic safety.

The proposed active school radar signs are no bigger than a standard speed limit sign. The review of the General Plan policies indicates that, in staff’s opinion, the proposed active school radar signs will not be in conflict with the General Plan.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact as the result of this staff report. There is a 10 percent local match of approximately \$37,000 required for this project. The matching funds will come from the City’s Measure A account..

Options

There are two components to the project; the installation of in-pavement flashers and the installation of active school zone radar signs. The grant funding is a reimbursement type of grant, and the City will be reimbursed 90 percent of the total project funds spent. The City may choose to install all or only some of the features, but will only be reimbursed for 90 percent of whatever is spent on the project.

The addition or changing of any locations for both the in-pavement flashers and the active school zone radar signs will require approval of the Caltrans Local Assistance Division. This would delay the design and make it extremely difficult for staff to prepare the plans, specifications and estimates in time to go out to bid and to award the project within the grant deadlines. The elimination of any the features will not cause any delays. Realistically, then, the City Council could direct staff to eliminate some of the project elements, and complete the reduced project. The addition or relocation of elements, however, would require a new project with separate funding.

Recommendation

It is recommended that City Council authorize City staff to proceed with the preparation of the plans, specifications and cost estimates for the in-pavement flashers and the active school zone radar signs project.

Alternatives

1. Deny request
2. Send back to staff for additional information

Attachments

1. Location Map
2. Active Speed Zone Radar Photo
3. In-pavement flasher illustration

Respectfully submitted,

Raymond E. Davis III, P.E., PTOE
Director of Public Works

Jere A. Kersnar
City Manager