



Staff Report

PEDESTRIAN FLAG PROGRAM UPDATE

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

Summary

This report provides City Council with information on Pedestrian Flag programs implemented by other cities.

Background

City Council expressed concerns regarding the installation of in-pavement crosswalk flashers within the portion of Ralston Avenue that has been designated as a scenic corridor. It was the opinion of the Council that the devices compromised the General Plan's designation of a scenic corridor.

City Council was concerned about the safety of pedestrians crossing Ralston Avenue at Notre Dame and Chula Vista. Council requested staff to review the use of pedestrian flags that other communities have implemented.

A pedestrian flag program will require the installation of two poles on either side of a marked crosswalk. Each pole has a conical shaped "flower" holder for the pedestrian flags. A pedestrian crossing the street will remove a cloth flag attached to a wooden stick and then use it to cross the street. The pedestrian places the flag in the "flower" holder on the other side of the street. It is assumed that pedestrians will be a direction balance of crossing so that the flags will be always available on each side of the street.

Discussion

City staff conducted a database search for any studies that provided statistical data on the safety of pedestrian flag programs. There are no studies that document any increase or decrease of safety as the result of implementing a pedestrian flag program. All of the information is antidotal. The success of the programs throughout the United States have had mixed results.

Staff surveyed the Cities of San Carlos, Menlo Park, Berkeley and Port Townsend, Washington as to their pedestrian flag programs. The following provides a discussion of these four cities experiences:

San Carlos

Implemented flag program at one intersection on San Carlos Avenue in response to a fatal pedestrian collision. It is a low pedestrian volume location. Observations from staff indicate that pedestrians with the flag still do not take due caution when crossing the street and step out in front of traffic before it comes to a stop. They are removing the flags and replacing with flashing beacons.

Menlo Park

Implemented flag program at two intersections that had high rates of pedestrian collisions. One was installed in 2002 and the second installed in the Spring, 2005. The pedestrian collision rates decreased after the installation of the flags. The City still gets complaints about the locations and is considering the installation of in-pavement crosswalk flashers at one of the locations. The flag program appears to be working if used by the pedestrians. Observations are that many pedestrians do not use the flags or appeared to be embarrassed to use them. One of the locations is within one half mile of the high school. This location loses approximately six flags per week. The second location is near a supermarket in a mostly adult neighborhood. They lose two flags a month at this location. No additional locations are planned at this time.

Port Townsend, Washington

Implemented a flag program in conjunction with the in-pavement crosswalk flashers. The flags appear to work better during the day and the in-pavement flashers work better at night. They have had to replace only two flags in the last year. No new installations are planned at this time.

Berkeley

Implemented flag program at seven locations for three years. Two were located at mid-block crosswalks, two at uncontrolled crosswalks, two at signalized intersections and one at an all-way stop. Surveys by City staff indicated the flags were used as intended by only two percent of the pedestrians and the use of the flags did not have a noticeable effect upon driver behavior. Many of those who picked up the flags used them for purposes other than for which they were intended. The time taken by pedestrians to cross the street was approximately the same before and after the flags were installed. The City terminated the program based upon the observations that the flag program did not appear to have a significant effect on pedestrian safety.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact as the result of this information report. It is estimated the installation of poles, signs, flag holders, and the flags will cost approximately \$1,000 per crosswalk. It is anticipated there will be on-going maintenance costs replacing flags as they are lost or stolen.

Public Notice

The Council agenda was posted.

Recommendation

It is recommended City Council discuss and provide direction as to whether or not a pedestrian flag program should be implemented.

Alternatives

1. Refer back to staff for additional information.

Attachments

None

Respectfully Submitted,

Raymond E. Davis III, PE, PTOE
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