

**VIA EMAIL**

Ann Arbor City Council  
City of Ann Arbor  
P.O. Box 8647  
Ann Arbor, MI 48107

RE: Neighborhood concerns regarding process for considering the  
"Waldenwood sidewalk gap construction agenda item"

Dear City Council Members:

We are contacting you to express our concerns regarding the process to date for considering the "Waldenwood sidewalk gap construction agenda item." This item will go before the City Council at its January 21, 2014 meeting. At the moment, this project is a "bridge to nowhere," a project that is unlikely to "cure" the safety problem it seeks to address, and that could actually decrease student safety and create confusion in a manner analogous to the City's pedestrian crosswalk ordinance. Based on the City's own data, approval of this item would be a serious error, and we strongly urge the Council to adhere to its promise of deliberate and thoughtful governance.

Obviously, no one would stand in the way of a project that improves student safety. Indeed, a number of our own children have served as student crossing guards in the very crosswalk at issue, and will likely do so in the future.<sup>1</sup> But in order to accomplish everyone's common goal, there needs to be a serious and careful analysis of any problems with the current crosswalk, a thoughtful consideration of all potential solutions (not simply one lay person's suggested remedy) and a determination about how this one project fits in a larger safety plan for this location.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The picture on an April 27, 2010 Ann Arbor News article available on the internet (<http://www.annarbor.com/news/ann-arbor-officials-looking-into-parents-concerns-about-safety-of-king-elementary-crosswalk/>) documents the van Nieuwstadt's middle daughter acting as a student crossing guard in the crosswalk in question, and their son was a student crossing guard in the same crosswalk this past fall.

<sup>2</sup> As Council member Lumm noted, the fact that this issue is being considered just a few months after the City completed repaving of Waldenwood reflects a piecemeal approach to traffic and safety management in the area that is not leading to optimal solutions. (<http://annarborchronicle.com/2013/08/11/street-closing-debate-extends-council-session/>)

To begin with, the justification for this project is based on little more than good-meaning opinions, rather than well-researched facts. The fact (as reflected in the City's own memorandum) is that as of June 25, 2010, "[i]n the last ten (10) years and within 500' of the existing mid-block crossing, there have been **zero reported pedestrian related accidents.**" (Ex. \_\_\_, City of Ann Arbor Memorandum.) We are not aware of any pedestrian related accidents since. In short, despite various claims of imminent peril, there has not been a single material incident with a pedestrian at the mid-block crossing in over 13 years.

This, of course, does not mean that there is not a safety issue. But that is beside the point. All pedestrian crossings involve safety issues. And, at best, the new sidewalk "may" provide a "marginal improvement." (Ex. \_\_\_, 6/28/10 Frasier email.) Shifting a seemingly dangerous mid-block crosswalk to an equally (if not more) dangerous four-way stop is the very definition of futility, waste, and bad governance. Notably, four-way intersections themselves are dangerous, and difficult even for adults to navigate. As Councilmember Briere recently noted, most pedestrian-vehicle accidents in downtown Ann Arbor are "at a stop light or stop sign" – *i.e.*, at four-way intersections.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, since some students and parents will undoubtedly continue to use the existing crosswalk rather than walk all the way to the end of the block, the proposed action will simply multiply, not cure, any danger.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, if safety is the true motivation for this project, it would make more sense to improve the existing crosswalk, not build another one. And yet, there is no evidence of anyone weighing the sidewalk proposal with other alternatives, for example, putting in a concrete median at the existing crosswalk, adding a rumble strip to the crosswalk or simply prohibiting cars from making a right turn into the King School driveway. Without choice and analysis, there is no deliberation, and without deliberation there cannot be good governance.<sup>5</sup>

Which points to a larger issue. The way this project has proceeded to Council itself is part of the problem. According to the Ann Arbor Chronicle, it seems that the item has arrived here not as part of a careful process, but rather because of the tireless effort of one well-meaning

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.annarbor.com/news/sabra-briere-dangerous-intersections-pedestrian-crashes/>.

Moreover, there has been an increasing trend of pedestrian accidents in intersections. (<http://annarborchronicle.com/2013/11/28/column-why-did-the-turkey-cross-the-road/>).

<sup>4</sup> Notably, the mid-block sidewalk is the shortest route for a large number of people. Common sense dictates that many of these people will not walk all the way down to the end of the street in order to use the crosswalk. There is, for example, another mid-block crosswalk further down Waldenwood, and despite the availability of an alternative crosswalk at a four-way stop nearby, many students and parents continue to use this mid-block crosswalk.

<sup>5</sup> There has been some attempt to portray this project as costless. City employees and engineers have already expended time and energy examining this issue, and as a consequence have not examined other safety issues that also are in need of their attention. Moreover, even assuming the construction estimate is accurate, an additional crosswalk will bring maintenance costs and inevitably bring calls for increased police enforcement (since crosswalks are not self-enforcing). These are public resources that will necessarily be diverted from elsewhere. In short, every decision this Council makes involves a cost, and any argument to the contrary is not credible.

individual, who has gone so far as to secure an anonymous donor to fund the project. But these efforts should be the beginning of the process, not an excuse to short-cut good governance and decision-making. The issue in question – the safety of elementary school students - demands this, including a consideration of whether other “dangerous” crosswalks like the nearby Glazier Way crosswalk (which is more heavily traveled and dangerous) should be a higher priority. We assume that the anonymous donor for the Waldenwood sidewalk is equally interested in student safety at the Glazier Way crosswalk and would channel funds there if the City determined that there is greater need for improvements for the benefit of student safety there.<sup>6</sup>

This Council has adopted a fact-based and analytical approach to pedestrian safety, an approach for which it should be lauded. Approving the current sidewalk proposal (based on the information currently available) would be inconsistent with this approach, and larger principles of responsible and good governance. We therefore urge the Council to delay any further action on the "Waldenwood sidewalk gap construction agenda item" until it is presented with sufficient information to make a meaningful decision. Short of such action, this Council risks simply rubberstamping a “sidewalk to nowhere.”

Thank you for your attention,  
van Nieuwstadt, Weismans

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<sup>6</sup> The Glazier Way mid-block crosswalk, for example, would seem to be a far more hazardous crosswalk (a stretch of road where cars regularly travel at speeds of 40 or 50 mph), that is used by far more students (it is the main thoroughfare for the entire neighborhood north of Glazier), that has well-documented safety issues, and that services the needs of a number of poorer and underprivileged families who do not have the financial means or connections to bring their issues before this Council, but that also deserve the right to be able to walk to school without being struck by a car.

<sup>7</sup> <http://annarborchronicle.com/2013/08/08/design-budget-for-sidewalk-near-king-school-okd/>  
<http://annarborchronicle.com/2010/04/25/investments-housing-bridges-transit/#crosswalks>

