

November 2, 2011

Council Members:

This is a letter in support of the roadway and pedestrian improvements ("Complete Streets") proposal for Raymond Avenue between University and Hampden Avenues.

We live at 895 Raymond with our 4- and 8-year-old children and moved in to our home nearly 10 years ago. We walk, bike, bus and drive along Raymond Avenue. We first became interested in safety on Raymond about 8 years ago when we stood on our doorstep with our infant son in a carrier preparing to leave by car. Our car was parked in front of our home on Raymond about 15 feet away from us as we watched a southbound car travelling too fast lose control around the turn and strike our parked vehicle. There were no severe injuries to the driver or passengers of the other vehicle. We exchanged insurance information with them and ultimately required frame repairs to our car. This inconvenience paled in comparison to the thought that had we been 30 or so seconds sooner, we would have been securing our son in the car at the time of the collision. We wondered if our family and others were in danger when using Raymond Avenue or if this was an isolated incident.

We began asking our neighbors and others about this and learned that our property and that of the house to the north of ours had been struck by cars several times. Cars had struck retaining walls, fences and trees and run onto the boulevard with some frequency in recent years. We learned that common wisdom was that cars drove faster than posted speeds on Raymond and that one should advise visitors not park in front of our home or the homes just to the north of 895 Raymond. We learned that there were others in the neighborhood with similar concerns and experiences and that there had been an earlier iteration of a group who sought to improve auto traffic conditions on Raymond Ave.

With the assistance of the District Council, in June 2006 an initial group of 20 residents with concerns about traffic on Raymond Avenue began regularly meeting and discussing an approach to improving safety for all users of the corridor. We identified ourselves as the 'Raymond Avenue Traffic Calming Taskforce' and reported to the District Council by working with District Council staff and reporting through the Council's Environment Committee. We learned of the work of the previous group of neighbors with the same concerns. We ranked areas of most concern: the top three were Raymond at Gordon; Raymond at Hampden and Raymond at Bradford/Ellis.

The taskforce began meeting with professional traffic engineers from Saint Paul Public Works who assembled traffic counts and speed studies. We pressed for some measures that these experts advised would likely work for only a short period of time, but nonetheless helped us implement. These included a variable speed sign which appeared to slow motorists for about two weeks and was moved to another Saint Paul neighborhood after a few months; a Saint Paul Police officer in a marked squad car who monitored speeders for a shift or two; a pedestrian crossing sign at Hampden Ave. that was promptly run over and removed.

The taskforce learned about the CIB process and began developing a proposal for streetscape alterations that would serve to permanently provide improved access for all users of the corridor and reduce automobile speeds in the neighborhood. We developed draft plans that were posted at popular neighborhood meeting places and held community meetings that were publicized on our area listserv, in the community newspaper and by posting fliers at residences and businesses. Dozens of people

attended the first large working session where some concepts for streetscape improvements were shown and discussed and ideas and feedback incorporated into the work of the taskforce. Other public sessions and meetings have been held at important junctures during the project's progress.

The taskforce met with then-Councilmember Benanav who was very responsive to the issues the taskforce raised and committed funds from his office's budget to add a median/pedestrian refuge at Gordon (at a popular school crossing just south of Como and the area the taskforce identified as the top concern) in the next construction season. The same day we submitted a CIB request for Raymond Avenue improvements from University to Hampden, a woman and child in a stroller were struck by an automobile crossing Raymond at Gordon ["Communities Seek More Ways to Put a Stop to Speeding," *Star Tribune*, Feb. 4, 2007]. Thankfully, injuries were minor. The next construction season, a median was added as Councilmember Benanav had committed. There have been no similar reported incidents at the crossing since.

We continued to work with Public Works professionals on the other priority areas and learned that automobile traffic at the 85th percentile was travelling at 35 mph – 17% faster than the posted speed of 30 mph in this area. Public Works professionals identified federal funding that could be used to support the Raymond project, prepared an application and won a grant.

We are thankful that the CIB committee, after an evaluation and city-wide tour of submitted proposals, ranked the Raymond project favorably and that it is now before you today. We are thankful that St. Anthony Park is being considered for improvements akin to those in neighborhoods such as Merriam Park and Macalaster-Groveland and on Rice Street. We are thankful to the Public Works professionals who have spent many, many hours drafting and redrafting plans and have not been dismissive of neighbors' ideas (such as a roundabout, pedestrian bridge or sharrows) but have taken the time to explore them and then explain why – in their professional estimate – those ideas are either not practical, affordable or the best reasonable option. We are also thankful that federal funds can be applied to the reconstruction about 1.25 lane miles of an 88-year-old roadway that first was paved during the Harding presidency and subsequently resurfaced during the Eisenhower, Reagan and Clinton eras. We're thankful that this funding can help provide new curbs, gutters and lighting here in St. Paul instead of, say, Baltimore, St. Louis, Pittsburgh or Milwaukee.

We live in a mixed neighborhood along Raymond Avenue in South St. Anthony Park. There are residents in homes, apartments and public housing. There are two parks, a recreation center and places of worship. There are businesses that mostly serve those who live or work nearby (such as the Hampden Park Co-op) and there are businesses that draw clients from all over the Twin Cities and even beyond (such as Keys Restaurant and Salon George). Raymond Ave. is also an important north-south through corridor virtually on the border of Minneapolis and St. Paul that serves those travelling to major destinations and connectors such as the U of M campuses and sports facilities, University Ave. and the Midway area, Rosedale and the retail area surrounding it, I-94 and the State Fair.

As a member of the taskforce who has served and engaged with these issues for nearly six years (John), I believe that this proposed project has done a respectable and forthright job of achieving balance in the corridor for all users. It improves pedestrian connections within our neighborhood and between neighborhoods by providing more crossings and shortening long crossings with addition of bump-outs and medians. More walkers and those using mobility devices will have improved access between homes, businesses, parks, transit and other destinations. The project will improve conditions year-round for bicyclists travelling Raymond (which has seen a notable increase in bicycle use over recent

years) by connecting a gap in striped bikeways of about 1/10 of a mile on Raymond between Long and Ellis/Bradford. It will reduce ambiguity and uncertainty for motorists – particularly at Long and Ellis/Bradford, intersections with expansive areas of asphalt and no clear designators for lane or vehicle movement. It will slow vehicles making their movement more safe and predictable. It will add street lighting – a safety and security improvement for residents, businesses and travelers. It will make the corridor more pleasant to travel by completely replacing the roadway surface and crumbling curbs and gutters and will also add green space to the neighborhood.

Some parking is lost for businesses and residents, but in my observation the number of actual spaces lost will be well below the hypothetical number of inventoried spaces based on assumed orderly and adjacent parking practices. During the project evaluation, businesses asked to restore parking which had been removed in an earlier iteration of the plan between Territorial and Bradford/Ellis – it was restored. Businesses and neighbors asked for parking on the east instead of west side of Raymond between Long and Bradford/Ellis, the taskforce agreed and Public Works staff developed a new plan. Business owners challenged Public Works officials to find a way to allow for construction in the 2013 season instead of 2012. The result is the plan in front of you today. I believe Public Works staff and the taskforce have done a commendable job trying to both effect compromise and also foster an environment for compromise on a Complete Streets project that will provide a net benefit to all users of the corridor for decades.

Our estimated assessment for the project at 895 Raymond Avenue will be in excess in \$2,600. We believe this expense is a long-term value for us as homeowners and more so as a family.

Thank you for considering this proposed project.

Sincerely,

John Siqveland

Elizabeth Siqveland