

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

09-0002R

RESOLUTION ORDERING THE PERMANENT CLOSURE OF THE SOUTH-BOUND LANE OF EKLUND AVENUE AT SWAN LAKE ROAD, IDEAL STREET WEST OF FOSTER STREET AND EASTBOUND MAPLE GROVE ROAD EAST OF JOSHUA AVENUE.

CITY PROPOSAL:

RESOLVED, that the city council directs the public works and utilities department to physically close the southbound lane of Eklund Avenue at Swan Lake Road, Ideal Street west of Foster Street and eastbound Maple Grove Road east of Joshua Avenue, the exact time and location to be determined by appropriate city personnel. Closures shall remain in effect until Joshua Avenue is extended from Maple Grove Road to Arrowhead Road. Upon completion of the new collector street the closures shall subsequently be removed. Improvements to be funded from the Permanent Improvement Fund 0411, with final approval of a construction contract therefor by resolution.

Approved:

Approved for presentation to council:

Department Director

Chief Administrative Officer

Approved as to form:

Approved:

Attorney

Auditor

ENG CJV:jh 12/17/2008

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: This resolution orders the existing temporary closure of Eklund Avenue at Swan Lake Road to become permanent. In addition, it orders the permanent closure of two other streets that are currently open: Ideal Street west of Foster Street and the eastbound lane of Maple Grove Road east of Joshua Avenue.

In late 2005, the metropolitan interstate council (MIC) was asked to study the problem of cut-through traffic in the Duluth Heights neighborhood, and to identify solutions to lessen the impact on the neighborhood. Their final report (Duluth Heights traffic circulation study) was published in August 2006 with several recommendations. The long-term recommendation was construction of the Duluth Heights connector (Joshua Avenue extension) between Maple Grove Road and Arrowhead Road, with an estimated implementation schedule of 2011 to 2016.

Until Joshua Avenue is extended, interim short-term traffic calming solutions are an option to prevent cut-through traffic. These options include a half closure at Eklund Avenue, a closure of eastbound Maple Grove Road east of Joshua Avenue, and a full closure at Ideal Street west of Foster Avenue. The temporary closure at Eklund Avenue was approved by previous city council Resolution 07-0214, and was installed during the spring of 2007. The concept was to install a temporary half closure at Eklund Avenue and to monitor its effectiveness prior to making permanent changes.

After new traffic patterns were established, traffic counts were taken and a resident survey was mailed in order to determine the effectiveness of the closure at Eklund. It was found that the traffic decreased at Eklund Avenue from 2,250 ADT (average daily traffic) to 1,320 ADT and increased on Maple Grove Road after the closure. Traffic on the minor streets showed only minor changes. Shortly after Joshua Avenue was extended to Maple Grove Road this fall, additional traffic counts were taken. Although there has not been enough time to reestablish traffic patterns, the traffic counts show a slight increase in vehicles using Maple Grove Road. If the closure at Maple Grove Road is not made, it is logical to assume that more drivers will use Maple Grove Road now that the Joshua Avenue connection to Highway 53 has been completed.

The resident survey had a 32 percent response rate and showed an almost evenly split opinion on the question "Are you in favor of keeping the half closure in place until the Duluth Heights Connector (an extension of Joshua Avenue from Central Entrance to Arrowhead Road) is built?" 45 percent said NO, and 46 percent indicated YES. This is a shift from the initial survey that was completed during the study, where 69 percent indicated they supported the use of traffic calming measures to alleviate cut-through traffic. Based on the survey results it appears that some residents believe the closure is a hindrance to their normal routes, while others enjoy the decrease in traffic volume. The survey was mailed to 875 residents in the surrounding neighborhoods. All households received both surveys.

Below are some advantages and disadvantages of the closures:

ADVANTAGES

- Drivers who do not live in the area are required to take alternate routes, and therefore reduce the volume of traffic to the neighborhood.
- Less volume gives pedestrians and bicyclists using the road an impression of feeling more "safe" with less traffic.

DISADVANTAGES

- Drivers are prevented from using "public" streets.
- Local residents are required to take longer alternate routes to reach their homes or destinations because a portion of the most direct route has been blocked.
- Construction costs for the closures will be substantially larger if DTA Route 14 needs to be maintained. In any case, it is money that could be used for other needs.
- There will be ongoing additional maintenance costs and snow removal costs.
- There will be ongoing additional staff costs, especially by the police department for enforcement.
- Although the intention is to remove the closures upon completion of the Joshua Avenue extension, the actual removal of these traffic calming devices could be met with opposition in the future.
- Closures will have no effect on reducing speed, a common concern of residents.