



Charlotte City Council  
Safe Communities Committee  
Meeting Summary  
October 19, 2021

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**COMMITTEE AGENDA TOPICS**

- I. Vision Zero and Traffic Safety – Informational

**COMMITTEE INFORMATION**

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**Committee Members Present:** Larken Egleston (Chair), Dimple Ajmera (Vice-Chair), Renee Johnson, Greg Phipps, Victoria Watlington

**Additional Council Members:** Braxton Winston

**Staff Resource:** Emily Kunze, Assistant to the City Manager

**Meeting Duration:** 11:30 a.m. – 12:39 p.m.

**ATTACHMENTS**

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1. Agenda
2. Traffic Safety Solutions for Charlotte Presentation

**DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS**

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The meeting was called to order at 11:30 a.m., by Chairperson Larken Egleston. The Chair explained that the meeting date was changed to allow staff additional time to prepare information based on the expanded scope of what Council wanted staff to cover and accomplish on issues related to Vision Zero and traffic safety.

Emily Kunze stated that during today's meeting the Safe Communities Committee would receive information and discuss the City's approach to maintaining traffic safety and determine what emerging practices in technology are available to further promote traffic safety. This is in response to a referral by the Mayor to the Safe Communities Committee. Ms. Kunze provided background information on the referral stating, "part of building and maintaining safe communities includes best practices to increase safety for multi-modal travel on City streets. City staff presented a Vision Zero Action Plan to City Council on March 4, 2019 and proclaimed Charlotte a Vision Zero City. Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate all traffic related deaths and severe injuries while increasing safety, health, and mobility for all. Over the course of time, new traffic safety measures and technologies are becoming available. As new best

practices emerge, the feasibility of implementing the methods to advance traffic safety in Charlotte should be explored.”

The Committee Charge is:

- 1) Determine what emergent traffic safety practices or technologies (to include street design) are being used in other Vision Zero cities that would benefit Charlotte and may be feasible to implement.
- 2) Provide an overview of findings and any other recommended options to the City Council in December 2021 for further consideration.

### **Vision Zero and Traffic Safety**

Charlotte Department of Transportation Director (CDOT) Liz Babson shared that the CDOT presentation related to the Vision Zero approach would include highlights of techniques and traffic control devices that have been implemented over the last several years to continue to make Charlotte’s streets safer. Ms. Babson introduced Debbie Smith, Deputy Director for the Charlotte Department of Transportation to provide the presentation; in addition, Major Dave Johnson with CMPD was present and serves as a strong supporter and partner in CDOT’s Vision Zero efforts. She noted that CDOT works very close with CMPD to deliver the Vision Zero Safety Program.

Ms. Smith stated that she was following up on the conversation from the October 4<sup>th</sup> Strategy Session. She shared how Charlotte is a transportation leader in transportation safety. Examples provided included the evolution of “Complete Streets” in Charlotte, as well as an emerging transformational signal system priority project where CDOT partnered with the Charlotte Fire Department and the Charlotte Area Transit System. She then demonstrated how CDOT tailored solutions to address specific safety situations.

Ms. Smith noted that Charlotte’s past development legacy focused on travel by car between 1950 to the mid 2000’s. There was a lack of sidewalks during that time, so pedestrians had a difficult time navigating very busy streets. Additionally, big box retail did not show consideration for bicyclists or pedestrians to get to their front door. She stated that building Complete Streets is about more than sidewalks, bike lanes or bus stops. It’s about creating great places. She stated that to create these great places they must talk about land-use, how different uses of streets coexist together, and how they build connectivity. She noted that Council’s actions policy recommendations such as adopting the Urban Street Design Guidelines in 2007, Charlotte Walks in 2014 and Charlotte Bikes in 2016 led to safer ways to travel. Ms. Smith also provided a snapshot of Transportation Capital Improvement Programs and Projects funded through Bonds.

Ms. Smith stated that Charlotte is an industry leader with the Emergency Vehicle and Transit Signal Priority System. The communication technology allows the Fire Department and CATS to partner with CDOT, using a federally funded grant project that spans over a decade, for vehicles to talk to the Central Traffic System, enabling CDOT to change traffic lights to allow emergency vehicles to arrive as quickly as possible and buses that were delayed are assisted in getting back on schedule. The technology has shown measured success for saving lives.

Charlotte was the first city in North Carolina to implement a Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon. The Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon is installed in 34 locations in Charlotte. The traffic signal stays in dark mode until a pedestrian pushes the button, then the signal turns to a flashing yellow, solid yellow and finally a solid red. The pedestrian is then given the walk indication to safely cross the street. Data was provided showing a decrease in car and pedestrian crashes in high traffic areas pre and post the installation of the Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon. Ms. Smith also shared information on the Leading Pedestrian Interval technology that has been deployed in 248 locations. The Leading Pedestrian Interval provides the pedestrian a 3 second head start to enter the crosswalk. Total crashes stayed relatively the same, but pedestrian and angle-type crashes showed marked decreases.

Ms. Smith provided an overview of Charlotte's new crash analysis tool. The tool gives CDOT the opportunity to quickly look at crash diagrams, query data and conduct a benefit/cost analysis. They use the crash reports that CMPD writes to incorporate daily updates to the system. Having the information so quickly allows them to tailor a solution to specific crash sites.

Ms. Smith presented the following recommendations:

- Continue to build "complete streets"
- Target solutions that address Charlotte's top safety priorities
- Prepare annual safety reports and before/after studies
- Continually evaluate nationwide best practices

The Chair requested that staff follow up with each Committee member to determine availability on November 9<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>. He preferred to reschedule the November 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting to allow staff time to research the requested information, as well as prevent distraction on election day.

The committee feedback included:

1. Statistically identify areas adjacent to neighborhoods where people are driving excessively fast and pick the top 5 to look at road designs and address this in the next budget, if possible.
2. Work with the NC Department of Transportation to address speeding on Charlotte's streets.
3. Discuss how far does Council need to go to address pedestrian safety (streetlights, bike lanes, sidewalks)?
4. Prioritize projects that address multiple problems and check multiple boxes
5. Council has adopted regulations to produce the City-desired outcomes as it relates to sidewalks, curbs, and gutters; the City must continue to hold the private sector accountable by ensuring rezoning applications address pedestrian safety.
6. Strategize planning and design of transportation networks with an economic development and neighborhood building perspective using an investment or budget strategy that looks at it from an Economic Development, Transportation, Safe Communities and Planning lens. This will allow the City to put more resources behind infrastructure investments that are needed to optimize all of those areas at the same time.
7. Look at the Traffic Improvement Study from a cumulative impact effect or lower the numbers before we require developers to contribute to the problems in the City.

Additional information was requested on the following items:

1. How many requests do we have for bicycle, sidewalk, and pedestrian safety? How many of these requests will the 2022 Bond fill?
2. What is the amount of the Street Light grant CDOT is pursuing?
3. Provide the backlog of requests to address pedestrian safety (bike lanes, sidewalks, streetlights, etc.) and what it would take to address them.
4. Explain the formula/benchmarks for how intersections are rated to be placed on the list for streetlights?
5. A report of where the high crash intersections are placed on the priority list.
6. Provide the Vision Zero Policy that creates action for an improvement.
7. Provide the policy and details on enforcement for scooters, as well as the injury report.
8. Follow up on beacon signals on Sugar Creek.
9. Are there times when there is a situation where the person might have been undertaking activities that might have contributed to their being involved in a pedestrian accident? Do we have data about whether a fatality was caused by City infrastructure/equipment or car/person contribution?
10. In the backlog, are streetlights and sidewalks missing near major thoroughfares?
11. Are there correlations and tools to address the 95% rate of human error causing traffic accidents?

The meeting was adjourned at 12:39 p.m.