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**The City of Vadnais Heights**  
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**MEETING OF THE VADNAIS HEIGHTS  
Koehler Road Task Force Committee  
September 9, 2019 – 6:30PM**

Dorie Olson - present  
Larrie Pittelko - present  
Charlie Evertz - present  
Michael Schmidt – present  
Kent Hokens (Parks, Recreation, and Trails Commission Alternate) - present  
Heidi Gunderson (Vadnais Heights Mayor) - present  
Farrell, Sandvik – City Staff – present  
Sara Svir, VHE Principal, ISD 624/Vadnais Heights Elementary School – present  
Ramsey County Public Works, Joe Lux – present

(non Task Force Members also present)

Sandra Long  
Dale and Nancy Engskov  
Judy Moll  
Randy and Linda Kulesa  
Wayne Vanalstine

Call to order – 6:30pm

Introduction – Mayor Gunderson welcomed the Committee back and asked that Committee members and guests introduce themselves. In addition to Task Force Members present, neighbors attending also included: Sandra Long , Dale and Nancy Engskov , Judy Moll, Randy and Linda Kulesa, and Wayne Vanalstine (name spelling not confirmed). Mayor Gunderson again thanked the Committee for convening and for their ongoing work. She provided a history including the established desire of increase pedestrian/bicycle safety (through years of conversation with neighbors and Council/staff), the process of creating the Koehler Road Task Force in late 2018, the first meeting in December of 2018, the production and review of the Alternatives Analysis in 2019, and the goals moving forward. It was stated that the goal of the 9.9.19 meeting was not to establish a formal plan as this is a long-term project. Immediate steps to address items like public safety can be addressed, but it is the goal of the Task Force to establish next steps in a long term planning process.

Mr. Sandvik reiterated Mayor Gunderson’s thanks to the Task Force for ongoing participation. He provided detailed dates of the process and reminded the Task Force that all information and documents created will be hosted on the City’s website on a page dedicated to the Koehler Road Task Force. He, again, reiterated Mayor Gunderson’s comments that tonight is a continuation of the discussion and no consensus will be established. Rather, the elected officials and staff would like considerations and recommendations for next steps. This can include establishing a preferred route, type of path, excluding previous considerations and much more. It is the goal to establish next steps in the long-term process and identify action items for the short term.

Mr. Farrell introduced the Alternatives Analysis produced by SEH, Inc. He noted that from an engineering perspective, it identifies a variety of considerations, but ultimately is a “30,000 foot view” of the project the Task Force is considering. While not geared to influence the decision making process, it can be used as a tool to identify challenges and opportunities and should ultimately be used as an item to host a conversation by the Task Force. He

also expressed that it is the desire of the City to hear from residents whether that is at a committee meeting, or outside of those occasions by contacting City staff.

Mr. Lux discussed the potential participation from Ramsey County. He stated that Ramsey County will solicit projects from all cities and these projects can include sidewalks and trails. A policy change from a handful of years ago shifted pedestrian/bicycle friendly facilities from a full burden on cities, to a cost-share model with the County. Every fall, a five year plan is established. He also noted the Vadnais Heights Public Works Director (Mr. Farrell) is familiar with this process as he has participated in this process in previous professional roles.

Mr. Lux and Mr. Farrell discussed that there may be some limitations on a project like this due to engineering concerns, policies established by Ramsey County, and rules/regulations that may need to be observed if it was completed as a State Aid project. In responding to questions from Committee Members, Mr. Lux noted that a restripe of the road (to gain additional shoulder space on one side) would not occur as pedestrians are encouraged to walk against traffic and bicyclist are encouraged to travel with traffic for safety concerns; restriping would eliminate this practice.

In responding to the Task Force's questions to address vehicular speeding concerns, Mr. Lux and Mr. Farrell agreed that temporary, dynamic speed signage that provides driver feedback could be considered in the short-term. It was noted the City is currently in the process of finalizing the 2020 budget and dynamic speed signs are being considered. Additionally, it would be possible to have Ramsey County Sheriff's Office provide the trailered, dynamic speed sign on Koehler intermittently in the future. Mr. Lux also noted speed samples observed little change and while narrower lanes may cause drivers to slow some, a (new) smooth surface may negate that effect. In the future, Ramsey County can submit to MNDot for a speed survey in the future.

Task Force members asked about terminology, specifically a 'sidewalk' vs a 'trail', and what the difference is. Mr. Lux and Mr. Farrell defined that they are different in material and width noting that cost-wise, an 8 foot asphalt trail can be comparable to a 5 foot concrete sidewalk. Both have positives and negatives including sidewalks need to be no less than 5 feet, can be difficult to maintain (including plowing), and are often panels which some cyclists do not prefer. Asphalt trails may tend to crack quicker, may require more intermediate maintenance (beyond plowing), but can be easier to access with tools (including plows and other equipment). Ultimately, anything built would have to be maintained by the City.

Principal Svir shared a brief history of her 12 years as principal of Vadnais Heights Elementary. She noted that safety for kids remains a priority. Annually, if students express desire to bike to school, they need approval; any applicant requesting to bike along Koehler Road is denied as the school deems this passage not safe. In responding to Task Force questions as to potential pedestrians/bicyclists, the school can produce data as to those immediately adjacent to Koehler Road. Additionally, school staff has noticed an increase in bikes stationed in bike corals at after school activities (this does not require school approval).

Mayor Gunderson asked the question as to how those driving can increase safety including slowing in their vehicles. While addressing speeding vehicles is a short-term fix, all considerations are welcomed. Mr. Pittelko responded in agreement that safety is the top priority and speeding vehicles should be addressed. Ultimately, Mr. Pittelko stated a trail or sidewalk would be a best option in the long-term.

Task Force members and neighbors further discussed the idea of reducing vehicle speed having observed vehicles traveling at rates that appear to be above the speed limit. Mr. Farrell noted that as a part of current discussions regarding 2020 budget items, solar powered-dynamic speed signs are being considered. Mr. Lux added that these signs (or trailered, dynamic speed signs) that provide driver feedback, are effective when initially installed, but drivers can become accustomed to them. Having signage that provides feedback are good tools to place in areas for short terms (moving them around town, periodically).

The Task Force and members continued to discuss considerations including additional signage, stripping, and rumble strips. Staff noted no ideas are off the table and will further discuss with the Sheriff's Office.

In response to Task Force questions, Mayor Gunderson stated that cost of a project is not the top concern at this point of the planning process. While cost is always a concern, the City would like to consider all ideas to improve pedestrian safety and move forward to establish a plan for next steps which may include a formal survey of Koehler Road, identify funding sources (including cost sharing with Ramsey County and applying for grants), and ultimately better understanding costs that the City may have to plan for long-term.

Task Force members discussed that one of the six options may not ultimately be the best. Staff reminded them that the results of the Alternative Analysis are geared to facilitate a discussion with the Task Force and neighbors. Mr. Evertz stated that a "1.5" option (somewhere between options 1 and 2) could potentially be best.

Mr. Pittelko stated that 'side B' (south side of Koehler) is considerably more expensive than 'side A'; ultimately, it makes the most sense to facilitate on side A. However, Mr. Pittelko asked if a restriping could be incorporated to limit the amount of disruption a new trail would cause on the north (including facility considerations and right of way/easement considerations). Mr. Farrell agreed that the north side of the road made more sense, but a formal survey would be a good next step to best understand what real costs may be for a potential project.

The Task Force continued to have discussion on pros and cons for the north side vs south side including facilities, private property, grading, and unknown concerns. Mr. Pittelko asked if a needs assessment should be done and Mr. Hokens responded that this stretch of road has been long-identified by the Parks, Recreation and Trails Commission as a desired trail. Mr. Hokens went on to say that while a more complete trail system is desired by the Commission (understood through study, years of conversations with residents, and city-wide surveys), doing these projects incrementally can be a long-term approach to meet those goals. Mayor Gunderson stated that a survey, or other ongoing communication (with residents immediately adjacent and city-wide) will be very important in the process moving forward.

Finally, Mr. Lux noted he will share relevant information (including any potential existing survey work, information on the bidding process, and speed surveys) with City staff. Mr. Sandvik then confirmed with the Task Force that the Task Force is recommending for consideration: first – immediately address safety whether through signage or otherwise, and second – move forward with a formal survey. Mr. Sandvik stated that the public safety component will be brought to the attention of Ramsey County Sheriff's Office in the immediate future, dynamic signage would be included in 2020 City-budget discussions, and staff will request funds to conduct a formal survey in 2020.

The meeting adjourned at 8:03pm.