

INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: February 20, 2025, at 5:15 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

Members Present: Chad Henke, Michael Martens, Tom Neal, Sarah Watson

Also Present: Eric Lindman, Andrew Lynch, Jillian Kurtzhals, Dustin Kraege, Lori Wunsch

In compliance with Chapter 19, Wisconsin Statutes, notice of this meeting was posted and received by the *Wausau Daily Herald* in the proper manner.

Noting the presence of a quorum, at approximately 5:15 p.m. Chair Henke called the meeting to order.

Discussion and possible action on detour route for 28th Avenue between Madonna Drive and West Wausau Avenue

Henke asked for this special meeting because Aspirus approached him wanting to discuss the detour further.

Paul David, Assistant General Counsel with Aspirus and Barbara Burnette, Director of System Facility Planning and Construction Management for Aspirus appeared asking for reconsideration of the detour for 28th Ave. The detour was originally established away from Pine Ridge Boulevard and west of their campus versus onto their campus. Since the detour was changed, they have noticed the traffic flow has increased substantially. At the same time the detour was changed, they also brought thousands more staff onto the campus. Their second building at corporate has been activated. At shift change there are about 4,000 people coming off the site. A lot of times the employees at corporate services need to go back and forth through the pedestrian walkways. They have noticed an increase in speeding. There has been a recent change where the ambulances go straight down Bridge Street into the emergency department area. They have seen an increase in stop signs being blown. It is not a very good situation since this is emergency traffic and it is close to the helicopter landing.

David stated Aspirus has experienced quite a bit of growth over the years. One of the results of that is a campus-type feeling and how they operate is a campus setting. Activities they engage in are causing congestion. Construction is planned for additional bed space. Detouring all this traffic through what is essentially acting as a campus is causing safety concerns and it is likely to become more significant. Helicopter and ambulance access and patient wayfinding is being interfered by turning this into a much more congested area. Part of the planning Aspirus did and worked into their future plans was based on expectations about how traffic on 28th Ave was going to continue or to be detoured. Aspirus had been provided plans in the past about an intended remodel of 28th Ave that would have it swinging over to the south and up the hill. That was taken into consideration, and they had a reliance on how that road was going to be. It allowed Aspirus to make plans to develop a campus in a way that they would be able to control some of the flow of traffic and key activities they engage in such as ambulances, the helicopter, and further construction of facilities. They do not want these things to be interfered with as it is important growth for the community. They would like to believe that growth can continue to take place. When things like this are thrown into the mix, it is a curve ball that they must take into consideration. He is hoping for reconsideration of how this is being diverted and what the long-term plans are for the road.

George Mosher, 710 N 32nd Ave, stated that when the detour was set up and went down West Wausau to 32nd Ave, traffic was horrendous. One could hardly cross the street. There is still some traffic, but it is better. Most of the traffic going down 32nd, down Westwood, or down Bridge Street is going to the Aspirus campus. When traffic was detoured down 32nd Ave, it made it difficult and there were a lot of complaints. 32nd Ave is a residential area with kids and buses.

Mary Hallgren lives on 27th Ave. She has been there 4 years. She understands there was a 28th Ave corridor mapped in 2003-2004. She works on 28th Avenue in the area of Menards. West Wausau Avenue is a nightmare. She has 2 dogs and cannot walk them on certain nights. 28th Avenue had more traffic than people thought. When it was first detoured to 32nd Ave, people would whip over on MaryAnne Lane and go up 27th Ave fast because they were angry. She is disappointed that we are avoiding the white elephant of 28th Ave. It is critical and it would be good to get some better viable options.

Bill Panzigrau, 2708 West Wausau Ave, asked what the long-term plans are for 28th Ave. After last fall's meeting it was decided nothing would be done temporarily. He has heard nothing about the long-term plans. Most of the people at a prior meeting wanted 28th Ave fixed and redone as is. It makes a lot of sense because one can take Hwy R past Menards up the hill to Hwy U. In his opinion, the best thing would be to fix it. He added that it does not need to be 4 lanes but does need ditches.

Hanke stated the plan for 28th Ave is still getting budgeted for a 2026 reconstruction project. He believes the committee will be deciding in June or July. Engineering will bring recommendations to the committee to decide what direction to go. As far as the old plan for 28th Avenue, it was supposed to be a partnership with the County. Lindman further explained that some property was purchased with the intention to veer 28th Ave to the west and then back to the north, extending into the Village of Maine. The primary reason is the DOT wanted a bypass in case the highway was closed for an emergency. The County was going to do this in partnership with the City. Four to five years ago the County decided they were no longer going to do this, and the bypass was no longer needed. Now that the Village of Maine is incorporated, they do not want the road extended to the village. The City had been deferring maintenance with the thought that the County plan was coming soon. The road has now failed in one section. The City has to take on the burden on our own. There are a few options that will be brought back to this committee with cost estimates. This is expected either late spring or early summer. The Council will make the final decision. Residents will be informed ahead of time as to when reconstruction options will be discussed.

David asked if one of the options includes reconstruction of 28th Ave and Lindman confirmed. Henke added that the options are reconstructing 28th Ave, going with the County plan of four lanes, and 2 different ways to close 28th Ave and install cul-de-sacs.

Since the meeting two weeks ago, Henke asked the Chief of Police for increased patrols in the area. There have been 19 stops in the last week and a half, which were mainly speeding and stop sign violations.

Burnette said Aspirus's bigger concern is the detour onto their campus. People are getting trained to go a certain way. After the detour goes away, people could potentially continue going onto their campus. If Aspirus decides to build the additional 72 beds, it would add another 6 to 7 cars per bed. This will also add to their supply going back and forth. Their central supply is across the street. They truck over to the hospital on a regular basis all day long. She is really concerned about pushing that traffic. People are speeding and blowing stop signs and doing it in front of ambulances trying to get into the emergency department. It is important to Aspirus to change the detour. Henke asked if Aspirus is working with the City. Burnette said they have been working with the City for about 6 months. They are looking at Pine Ridge and looking at changing the route onto Pine Ridge to make it a little more graceful onto Westwood. Henke said even if the detour is moved it may just be a Band-Aid. Burnette said the issue is people accessing the campus and getting trained to go onto their site. It is making Aspirus wonder if they should build the additional beds or take them somewhere else. It is a \$226 million project they are trying to bring plus another 400 jobs. The partnership with the City will help Aspirus make the decision. Henke noted that Aspirus is also adding traffic. Burnette said they can take the beds elsewhere, but the need is here in Wausau. They are at capacity every day trying to serve people.

Neal asked if we have isolated pinch points and if there has been talk about how we can mitigate issues with protected crosswalks. Lindman stated that over the past few years we have put up rapid flashing beacons on some crosswalks. Lindman feels that changing the detour will not do a whole lot. Traffic will find the way that is most convenient for them. Staff wants to put out traffic counters this spring and see what effects there are, which should help the committee make a decision on the design.

Neal said by the nature of the clientele, we are more apt to see people with mobility issues. He would like to look at more than flashing beacons, such as reasons to stop at key points along the route. If there are plans for growth, there will be more people. We should look at how we can make this corridor as safe as possible. He feels having people stop and go, stop and go is one way to do it. Any campus he has been on has that nature. This part of the route is designed for people to walk across the street. The residential route is not conducive to the kind of traffic we are talking about. We need to look at the eastern portion, so we have some element of control.

Henke asked if detour signs are needed. Lindman confirmed saying if a road is closed, signs are needed to direct people. Martens said the original detour was going up Madonna to 32nd to West Wausau, which was switched to Pine Ridge. He asked if there was just one detour or if there was a choice for drivers. Lindman explained the signs point to Pine Ridge to Westwood. Martens asked if the majority of the traffic is going that route instead of up 32nd Ave. Lindman said it is probably a split. Once a detour is set for a while, people find their most convenient way. When the detour first went up, people along 32nd Ave and the other side roads did not like the additional traffic.

David explained that on the campus there is a lot of pedestrian traffic. Aspirus is developing and has grown in the past. If there is further growth, Aspirus will grow in a manner that will increase pedestrian traffic around the campus and across these roads. An example is how Aspirus was able to refurbish the Liberty building, which resulted in a tremendous amount of people walking from those buildings to the hospital. People from the Medical College of Wisconsin walk across. There are parking lots where individuals walk across. The alternatives are limited, which probably means a response needs to be aggressive. We have to make it work in a way that is safe. We all benefit from that campus feel. Aspirus is growing in terms of pedestrians crossing roads, and David does not see that changing.

Henke asked if the road between the corporate building and hospital is a different road than the detour. David said it is a slightly different area. The idea is throughout the campus there is development occurring in a way that will continue to encourage people to cross these roads. Henke loves that Aspirus is growing, but if the detour is moved and traffic keeps increasing, just moving the detour is a bandage on a longer-term issue. David feels the best long-term result is for 28th Ave to be reconstructed or route 28th Ave as presented in the past. Lindman said the campus has come quite away. As streets were improved over the last several years, additional sidewalks were put in. There is a lot of pedestrian traffic, and he agrees it needs to be safe. We need to evolve as the campus evolves.

Watson asked if both options could be signed with the driver choosing their own adventure. In Lindman's experience, the more signs that are up giving more options causes confusion. Watson thought if there were 2 options it would thin out the traffic. Lindman would not recommend two detour routes as it would be confusing.

Neal moved to approve continuing to concentrate on the existing detour route not only as a detour in the short-term until 28th Avenue is done but also in anticipation of future growth, looking at the street design in terms of pinch points for pedestrians, and concentrate on looking at it not only as a temporary detour but also as a long-term corridor that will need attention. Seconded by Martens.

Martens is inclined to keep the detour on the same route using Pine Ridge Boulevard. He appreciates the concerns of Aspirus that this could cause people to be trained to go this way when the detour is gone. He wonders if there is any way we can address the pinch points of the detour better. Traffic enforcement is up, but he asked if we could add calming devices to get people to slow down or stop completely at the intersections. Lindman said we can look at different improvements as we move forward.

Once the snow disappears, Martens would like new traffic counts. He would like to see what the actual change is before deciding to reroute the detour. Instead of having people come down Bridge St to Pine Ridge, Watson asked if traffic could continue on Westwood to Pine Ridge to Plaza Drive. She wonders why Westwood ends and one cannot get onto Stewart Ave. Discussion followed.

Henke asked for continued enforcement in the area. Kurtzhals and Henke previously spoke about extra speed signs in the area. The Sign Department indicated it is well signed as far as speed limits signs. Kurtzhals does not know if there are other signs that could be put up warning people to slow down. The Police Department has been present in the area and stopping multiple cars. They intend to put speed signs out when winter is over. Watson asked about flashing speed signs. Lindman does not know if we have any solar signs, so we would have to get power to them.

There being a motion and a second, motion passed 4-0.

Adjourn

Watson moved to adjourn the meeting. Neal seconded and the motion carried 4-0. Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:00 p.m.