

WGNA and the Road Diet

Some number of years ago, I was President of WGNA -- the Willow Glen Neighborhood Association. Back then, the membership reached a peak of somewhat over 600 dues-paying households. While that's an impressive number, it was still just a small fraction of the tens of thousands of households in the greater Willow Glen area. When WGNA took positions, we would first gather our membership's opinions, publicly discuss the issues, and then officially state our positions -- recognizing that, as per our bylaws, we only represented our membership and should not claim to speak on behalf of all of Willow Glen.

Now, the fate of the Lincoln Avenue Road Diet has been put in WGNA hands: the City Staff (Planning and the Dept. of Transportation) and Council say that the Lincoln Avenue Road Diet program will continue only if WGNA gives its endorsement. This is hardly fair to WGNA or to the community. WGNA has been somewhat disorganized lately and the membership is only a small fraction of the peak. And the Lincoln Avenue Road Diet affects everyone in Willow Glen, WGNA member or not, and also the residents in a number of nearby neighborhoods -- Canoas Gardens, Robertsville, Midtown, and Almaden Valley.

The current WGNA Bylaws state that the Board is not to take a position on "divisive issues" -- they've been asked if they can even weigh in on the Diet. But the intent of that clause is to codify WGNA's policy against becoming involved in issues outside the purview of the Association, such as, say, immigration or abortion. The stated purpose of WGNA has been to "focus and take appropriate action on such matters as land use, planning, traffic, safety, open space, parks, and recreation", so it should be quite appropriate for it to weigh in on a "traffic" and "safety" issue like the Road Diet. However, as noted above, the Road Diet affects many more than the couple dozen members of WGNA.

I appreciate the work done by the City Staff in Planning and the Department of Transportation. They have collected a quite significant amount of data, both before and after implementation, which will allow for data-driven discussions rather than observations of individual events. And they have been responsive: they heard that there was a problem turning into the BofA parking lot and they quickly restriped the road; they were informed that northbound traffic was backing up because there was no room for those turning right and they red-curbed a section to make room; they noted that drivers at Coe were getting confused and they added some guiding painted lines. But I don't think it's right for the City to put WGNA in the position where it effectively has a veto.

WGNA can serve a purpose: it can help survey the residents of Willow Glen using various social media, host public meetings, and facilitate the interaction between City Planners and the local community: it can collect public comment and forward it to the Council and Staff. But Council and Staff should consider the input from everyone and not just those few who are dues-paying members of WGNA: the decision on the Road Diet should not be contingent upon WGNA's approval.

I encourage everyone to offer their opinions of the Road Diet. Give them verbally at the June 18th meeting and/or put them in writing and send them to LincolnRoadDiet@gmail.com. I encourage you also copy the Councilmember at pierluigi.oliverio@sanjoseca.gov and the Director of the Dept. of Transportation at jim.ortbal@sanjoseca.gov. (As a retired aerospace engineer, I've already submitted 8 pages of diagrams and technical details (!) -- see <http://wgbackfence.net/observations.htm>.)

The Community Meeting on the Willow Glen Road Diet Trial is Thursday, June 18th, 6:30 PM, at the Willow Glen High School Cafeteria. I hope that everyone will write and/or attend!

~Larry Ames, past WGNA President