

183rd Street 'diet' traffic plan is first action step

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The next step in Homewood's efforts to improve safety on 183rd Street is about to begin, and if the prevailing views during a recent public meeting are an indication, the effort should simultaneously be bold but with caution.

Public Works Director John Schaefer said a traffic diet pilot project will take place in May. Residents and motorists on 183rd Street won't be able to miss it.

The "diet" in this case is not a reduction in calories but a reduction in traffic lanes. Crews will use barrels to reconfigure 183rd Street from Riegel Road east to Morgan Street. Instead of four traffic lanes, there will be two traffic lanes, two bike lanes and one center turn lane.

The pilot project, announced at the March 22 village board meeting, is one of four parts in the first phase of the village's efforts to make changes residents have been requesting in recent years.

Other 183rd Street projects starting soon include engineering work for a stop light at Center Avenue, reconfiguring traffic flow at Gottschalk Avenue and adding traffic delineators at Park Avenue.

The traffic diet got most of the attention at the board meeting.

The discussion started with Village Clerk Marilyn Thomas reading aloud seven letters from residents weighing in on the 183rd Street situation. Most of the letters supported the traffic diet plan and most noted the barrier the street presents for residents.

"You take your life into your hands any time you attempt to access, cross, drive or walk" along 183rd, one writer said.

Several members of the audience echoed the concern with safety and how chronic



Eric Crump/H-F Chronicle

Southbound drivers entering 183rd Street from Gottschalk Avenue have limited visibility because of a hill to the east and a fence on the corner. Homewood officials are proposing two options — making Gottschalk one-way northbound or a dead end at 183rd.

vehicle speeding impedes pedestrian and cycling access to the whole village because 183rd Street stretches from Homewood's east border to its west border.

Several parents noted they fear allowing their children to walk or bike anywhere near the street. And one woman who lives on 183rd said the danger is very real.

"My house has been hit twice. My neighbor's house has been hit twice," she said. "One car bounced off their house and hit our house."

Although one resident expressed concern that the traffic diet would cause congestion, most who wrote or spoke were in favor of it. Angela Thomas, who lives on 183rd Street, said some congestion might not be a bad thing.

"At least they're not speeding," she said.

Schaefer said the village is tackling the problem, but he explained the necessity for caution as solutions are tried.

"This is the first phase. We're not stopping here. If it works well this could be continued farther to the west, possibly up to Dixie Highway," he said. "We want to see if it's really going to work. I would hate to spend a lot of money restriping everything, changing the configuration and find out it's a disaster. We want to make this workable for everybody -- for traffic and for the residents that live there, and for the residents that use the road and how that affects the neighborhood."

Schaefer said there are a number of factors to consider, including the effect the restructuring has on traffic flow; whether restricted flow increases traffic on adjacent streets, including Ridge Road and 187th Street; whether residents find it more difficult to leave their driveways; and whether motorists start using the center turn lane as a passing lane.

He also answered residents' questions

about the location of the pilot project. The stretch of road from Riegel to Morgan is more densely populated with homes typically nearer the roadway than the portion of the street west of Dixie Highway.

One local businessman, Josh Klein, general manager of GoodSpeed Cycle on 183rd Street, questioned the method of the pilot project. In an email to village officials that he shared with the Chronicle, Klein questioned the use of barrels to mark the temporary lane changes, noting that they might remind motorists of construction zones and thereby skew the results.

Schaefer said the plan to use barrels was created in consultation with the engineering firm that conducted the traffic study last year.

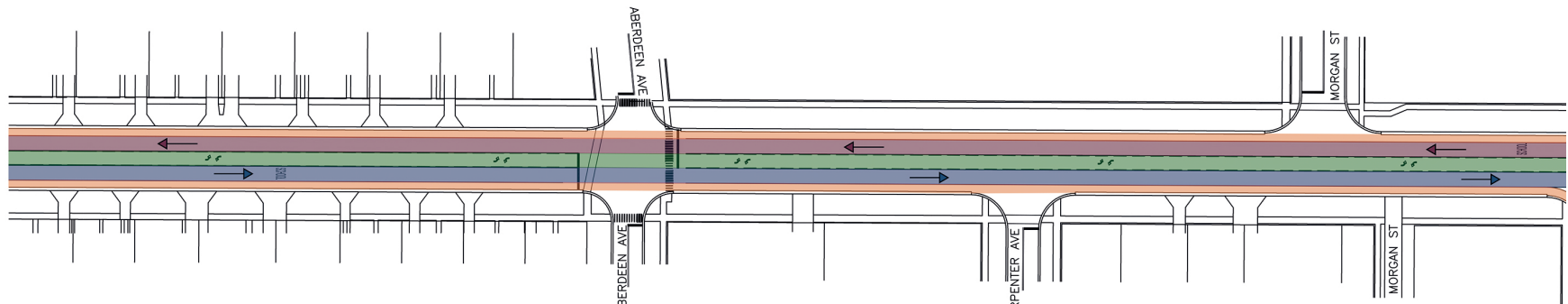
Bob Griffith, who lives on Center Avenue a few blocks south of 183rd Street, said he understood the prudence of Schaefer's approach, but he urged the village to also think big as the long-term project unfolds.

"Think boldly," he said. "Having lived overseas, like in Holland and other places, they boldly transformed their streets so that they aren't car-centric. That's what I would hope for, not just a highway through Homewood but a way to travel in Homewood, walk in Homewood, bike in Homewood."

Local businesswoman Rachael Shores agreed with Griffith's suggestion to rethink the role 183rd Street plays.

"As the world moves forward and we're trying to use less gasoline and be more sustainable, this should be a cycling and walking community," she said. "We like to talk about how this is a great family community. This is the piece that is missing -- getting around town."

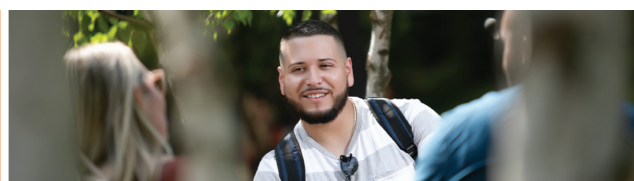
Trustees all expressed support for the plan and for residents' fears and hopes.



Provided photo

In May, the village is planning to test a "traffic diet" concept along the east portion of 183rd Street for a two-week period reducing four lanes to two. Peach represents bike lanes; mauve shows westbound traffic; blue shows eastbound traffic; green shows a center turn lane.

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