

Reference Document Note: This document was drafted by Walk to School Day event community volunteer William Schroeer and distributed to officials attending this meeting. This document has not been approved as official record by meeting participants but is rather one perspective shared. Mr. Schroeer also serves as a Northfield Planning Commissioner.

SAFETY FOR PEOPLE USING LINCOLN PARKWAY

Including Children going to and from Greenvale Elementary and the Northfield Community Education Center

This memo:

- Reports on two community meetings on this subject held Oct. 2.
- Makes recommendations based on those meetings.

1. Background and Purpose

In late September, Principal Sam Richardson, CEC Director Erin Bailey, City Public Works Director Dave Bennett, Betsey Buckheit, and Will Schroeer met to talk about safety on Lincoln Parkway.

- All agreed that a good next step would be a small meeting with parents.
 - Participants recognized Walk to School Day on October 6, and wanted to take advantage of that. Principal Richardson invited parents to participate in a conversation.
 - Others joined through word of mouth and by walking by.
- Josh Ramaker, Rice County SHIP Coordinator, 3rd Ward Councilmember George Zuccolotto and City staff were also invited.

Two meetings were then held on October 2. The goals were to learn more about the challenges that parents and children experience in getting to the schools and the playing fields and playgrounds around the schools; and after that to explore some possible approaches to addressing those challenges, as input to next steps.

2. Meetings and Participants

- Ten Greenvale Park families – including children – attended and contributed.
 - Some joined through word of mouth. Others joined as they walked by.
 - City staff and Councilor Zuccolotto were invited and Principal Richardson attended the 1-2 pm session.
 - Will Schroeer and Betsey Buckheit facilitated.

We met to begin on the boulevard in front of Greenvale, where we were able to look at various aspects of traffic operations while we were discussing them. Later we moved to the playground in back so the children could play.¹

3. Summary

Parents, children, and Principal Richardson discussed a wide variety of physical and operational aspects of Lincoln Parkway and the two schools that make it challenging and often dangerous to walk and bike to the schools and surrounding area.

Overall, parents and children expressed deep frustration and fear about the situation.²

Parents often said “*terrifying*” and “*terrified*” as they described:

- Drivers ignoring crossing guards,
- Drivers driving through crosswalks while children were in the crosswalk.

Parents described two crashes in the last week-and-a-half:

- a serious rear-end crash in front of Greenvale,
- a three-car crash at the multi-way intersection of Lincoln Parkway, Spring St., Linden St., and Dresden Ave. Parents described the three-car crash as narrowly avoiding a family on bicycles.
- Parents:
 - “If drivers can’t see a car in front of them, how can they see a child?”
 - The situation is also dangerous and frightening for them when driving.

Participants pointed to a variety of factors creating the unsafe situation, including:

- Drivers driving too fast.
 - Lincoln Parkway is wide and the block is long; both visual cues lead to speeding.
 - Both Spring Street and Lincoln St. connect to Lincoln Parkway with smooth curves and without stop signs, so that drivers can maintain higher speeds around the corners, but without being able to see people crossing on Lincoln Parkway, especially at the crosswalk at Linden.
- Morning and afternoon sun reduces drivers’ visibility.
- The location of old and new crosswalks, when crossing guards are and are not present, and the difficulty of crossing from some neighborhoods, was the topic of many conversations.

¹ Best practices in public involvement include
i) meeting near the place being discussed, and
ii) helping families to be present, including bringing children.

² Not all participants shared all views here.

In short, children cross (or would like to cross) at many locations, at many times of the day.

- On-street parking near crosswalks reduces drivers' ability to see children crossing.
- Especially during morning and afternoon rush, the combination of buses and cars entering and exiting, cars just stopping to drop off/pickup, and people walking and biking, creates a situation that is at best hard to read and navigate. Turning movements in particular are dangerous, with drivers quickly accelerating to use a gap in car traffic.

Overall:

- Lincoln Parkway is not an accident waiting to happen; accidents are regularly happening.
- Families who do walk and bike to school do so with concern.
- Others do not walk or bike (at times or at all) given safety concerns.

The facilitators will deliver a memo with a fuller list of the problems discussed. The goal of this memo is to highlight *immediate* threats to safety.

4. Proposal for immediate action and demonstration project

Understanding and improving the problems along Lincoln between Lincoln St. N. and Spring St. will require more conversation and planning.

And: ***the current situation is placing residents – including children – in immediate danger.*** This is the first school year that the new Greenvale School and the new CEC are operating with majority in-person attendance. The record of crashes so far is telling us that it doesn't work.

The majority of both meetings was spent documenting problems. Both meetings then turned to possible solutions. No single step will solve the full set of problems.

One action that *will* reduce the severity of problems is reducing vehicle speed. The City may not be able to prevent crashes, but it can reduce vehicle speeds so that crashes cause fewer injuries and deaths.

So, this memo proposes that the Public Works Department:

1. Install demonstration curb extensions at the three crosswalks on Lincoln Parkway.

Curb extensions have been implemented in several locations in Northfield. Each time, they have reduced vehicle speeds and improved driver yielding to people crossing the street.

- Demonstration curb extensions were installed on Washington as a trial. The trial was successful, and extensions were installed, with success.
- Curb extensions were installed at Water and 7th. Monitoring by the City showed that speeds became safer.

The same should be done on Lincoln Parkway. They can be installed immediately and at very little cost with plastic delineators, as was done on Washington. The delineators should be installed to create the necessary no parking zone to create visibility for people crossing.

2. *Place a speed sensor with flashing blue and white warnings for violations on Lincoln Parkway, on Spring Street, and on Lincoln Ave. N.*

Parents noted that

- the City has set a 10-mph speed limit on St. Olaf Ave.
- placed this sensor there,
- which works to slow drivers.

The City can and should do the same for children waking to Greenvale.

5. Conclusion

Lincoln Parkway is unsafe.

The City, which owns the unsafe roads, should take immediate action to improve the safety of its roads.

The City, the school district, parents, and other affected residents need to continue to develop solutions to the problems on Lincoln Parkway that now place people in danger.

While they do that, the City can immediately install demonstration curb extensions that will improve safety for all. Rice County SHIP has offered to pay for these.

Recognizing the urgency, this memo does not take the time to link to City policies that call for Safe Routes to School and the ability to move around Northfield safely in general. We hope you agree that city policy calls for making Lincoln Parkway safer for everyone.