

Open Work Session
Traffic Signs on County Roads
October 30, 2018

Mr. Paul Wilber, County Attorney, and Mr. Weston Young, Deputy Director of Administration, came before Council. Mr. Wilber reported, since they last visited this topic, Mr. Roscoe Leslie did statutory research and found provisions from the six Counties with elected Executives. He said five of the statutory provisions make it a function of the Public Works Department, and one speaks in terms of the County Executive overseeing the Public Works Department. He said there is a Federal book of how, when, and where traffic signals and signs are to be placed, and the whole idea behind that is to keep public traffic movement safe, to which Mr. Joe Holloway added, and to make it uniform. Mr. Wilber said, obviously, there is a liability aspect if they do not follow the guidelines and someone has an accident, and then a plaintiff's attorney will ask why they did not follow State or Federal guidelines. He said his recommendation is that they pass a Legislative Bill making this a duty of the Public Works Department, and add it to the Public Works section of the Code saying something like what Harford County says, which is that it has to be consistent with the authority granted to the County by the State. Mr. Joe Holloway said he thought that is what they already do, to which Mr. Wilber responded, yes, Public Works currently takes care of this as part of their duties. He clarified, if they want to be more formal, they can add it as a duty in the Code, to which Mr. Dodd responded, the issue is that it is not formalized.

Mr. Kilmer said he thinks there is some confusion with the public thinking Council still does this, which stems from when they did not have an Executive, but Council has approved No Parking signs, so there are some instances. Mr. Young said, when Mr. Dallas Baker, Director of Public Works, was before Council at the last meeting, he told them that No Parking signs were subjective. He clarified, parking signs are not in the Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), which is about stop signs, how many cones are needed when doing road work, the need to notify people, and things of that nature. He said allowing parking or not is more subjective, and that is where he thinks getting the Executive and Council on board makes sense, to which Mr. Kilmer responded, as long as the division of where that comes in is clear. He said Harford County has one line that would clarify it, and seems perfectly consistent.

Mr. Matt Holloway said most of these look like they are for traffic control type signs, but some of the people they heard from were talking about the naming of roads, to which Mr. Joe Holloway responded, that is a whole different issue. Mr. Cannon said that got sidetracked when, in reviewing the naming of roads, they realized there was not a sound policy for this. Mr. Kilmer clarified, actually, it was the placement of a stop sign that brought this to his attention, and then it was asked whether Council has the authority to put up stop signs, or whether it is Public Works, it was found that there is no statutory basis to figure out who does it. Mr. Wilber said he does not think the Executive or Council want to be in charge of placing stop signs as that is traffic engineering, and they should keep that in Public Works.

Mr. Joe Holloway asked where they stand with signs such as Children at Play, Horse Crossing, or Do Not Litter, to which Mr. Young responded, those are warning signs and fall under MUTCD so, if it is here or in another State, they are consistent. He said, basically, if a railroad is up ahead, there is a specific sign used, or if a Deaf Child sign is requested, there is a specific sign, but, if that family moves or the child graduates and is no longer there, that requires communication. He said he believes there is a turtle sign on Beaglin by the Firehouse and the Ward Museum. Mr. Joe Holloway said he suggests they stock up on deer crossing signs, to which Mr. Young responded, there are areas where it is highly prevalent that deer are crossing, which they see more on Interstates where they have non-State drivers going through and

not realizing it is a high-traffic deer migratory area. Mr. Matt Holloway asked if the communication for signs should be from the constituent to Public Works, to which Mr. Young responded, correct.

Mr. Dallas Baker then came before Council and said, if he remembers correctly, it is nine deer strikes within five miles that generates a sign, to which Mr. Joe Holloway responded, that could be anywhere. Mr. Baker said they look at the crash history to see how many strikes have happened over a certain distance. He said the Deaf Child sign is actually not allowed for the exact reason Mr. Young described. He explained, the signs were put up, but then no one ever notified Public Works when they moved away, so the signs faded and became invalid. Mr. Matt Holloway said the Children at Play signs are still out there, to which Mr. Baker responded, Children at Play is actually not allowed by MUTCD anymore, but they are installed in communities who do it on their own outside the public right of way, and they understand they have to pay for them. He explained, those signs present a false sense of security because people think since there is a sign there, their kids can go play in the yard or in the street, which is why they were found to be ineffective. Mr. Dodd asked whether they are allowed in communities, to which Mr. Baker responded, not in the sense of MUTCD, but on private roads they can put up any sign they want. He clarified, they can put up an 80-mile speed limit sign on a driveway if they want. Mr. Young said it is like a private parking lot where sometimes they see different stop signs in different sizes. Mr. Dodd asked how they would know if it is a private, County, City, or State road, to which Mr. Young responded, if the road has a number, it is a State road, but sometimes where a City annexation takes place, the portion of the road goes with it, so they have to figure out where the dividing line is. He explained, sometimes they look at the seam in the pavement to see that it was paved up to a certain point before the City or State takes it. Mr. Dodd said private roads are usually in new communities, and then they are turned over to the County at some point, to which Mr. Young responded, if they wish to make it a public road. He clarified, if they want to have a gated community, they can keep it private, but the County does not have public roads with gates. Mr. Baker said a good rule of thumb is, if they see a green sign with white lettering, it is the City, if they see a white sign with black lettering, it is the County, and if they see a brown sign with white lettering, it is private. He said that has been fairly consistent, and, again, that is something that the manual helps with. He said, when Public Works gets a request for a sign, the first thing they look at is whose road it is, where it is located, and where the dividing line is.

Mr. Joe Holloway asked how they gather the information regarding deer strikes. He said he has done some work with citizens at the Walston Switch and Mt. Hermon intersection, and depending on how the accident happened, the County investigates it, or the State investigates it, so if they call to get that information, nobody knows. He then asked how they find out there have been five deer strikes within so many miles, to which Mr. Baker responded, they are reported. He explained, if someone has a deer strike and calls the police, they fill out a form and that goes into the database. He said the challenge becomes when people hit a deer and do not say anything. He said it is always good to report an accident because the more data they have, the better. Mr. Joe Holloway said his neighbor had his arm stuck out towards his mailbox to get his mail and a deer ran into the side of his car, so the data is not completely accurate, to which Mr. Baker responded, by no means is it fully encompassing because it happens all the time. He said people will get in some minor accident, and nobody is around so they drive off.

Mr. Cannon said this is an Open Work Session, which may be for informational purposes only, but is there some direction Mr. Wilber feels they need to take as a Body, to which Mr. Wilber responded, he recommends, to bring clarity, amending the Public Works section of the Code to put in a duty of Public Works related to these traffic control signs. Mr. Cannon asked Mr. Wilber if he will prepare that for Mrs. Hurley so she can prepare something for Council, to which Mr. Wilber responded, yes.

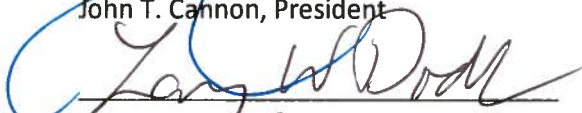
Mrs. Hurley said her only question is in reference to Mr. Young talking about the subjective signs. She said the language for Harford County says the full authority to erect traffic control devices. She then asked if that would be all signs. Mr. Young then asked Mr. Baker if a parking spot is considered traffic control, to which Mr. Baker responded, technically, it is all traffic control. However, on something that political, personally, he would be reaching out to County leadership to tell them he has a request for something that could generate some negative feedback, and he is looking for guidance on something like that. He said they are, technically, considered guide signs, but he would have to go into the manual and look to see if there is anything specific as to when they are established. He said he knows there are instances where there is a sight distance issue. He explained, for example, if they have a crash pattern at a particular intersection, and they look at it and see there is on-street parking creating a sight distance issue, that becomes a little more scientific. He said, however, if they have folks parking on property owner's grass, and they say they want no parking signs placed there to keep people from parking there during an event, which typically happens around stadiums and things like that, then it becomes a little more political. He said a lot of times they will refer to what MUTCD calls engineering judgement.

Mr. Joe Holloway said, back in 2008, there was a neighborhood on the Westside off Route 50 that had trucks parking along the street all night, and they came forward with a No Parking request, to which Mr. Davis responded, it was Stanton Avenue. Mr. Baker said there have been issues in Fruitland with trucks parking by the roundabout, and they dealt with that issue with the State.


Mr. Wilber said he will draw up something and bring it back for discussion. There was no further discussion.



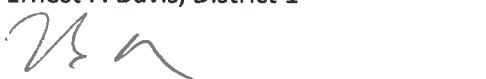
John T. Cannon, President



Larry W. Dodd, Vice President, District 3



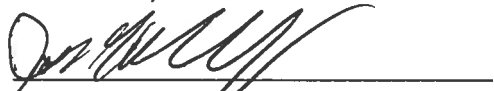
Ernest F. Davis, District 1



Marc Kilmer, District 2

absent

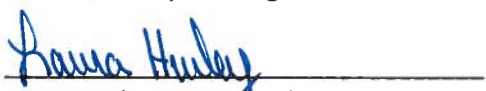
John B. Hall, District 4



Joe Holloway, District 5



Matt Holloway, At-Large



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator