

## **I2 Walk Audit at Davis Street**

September 23, 2022, 12:00pm-1:30pm

**Attendees:** Greg Wirth (NMTAC member), Meghan Wirth (Neighbor), Heather Basinger (Neighbor), Brian Johnson (Neighbor), Laura Erikson (Neighbor), John Andrew (Neighbor), John Andrew (Neighbor and Helena Citizen's Council Representative), Sarah Sandau (Lewis and Clark Public Health and walk audit facilitator), Marty Beatty (Neighbor), Peggy Hollow- Phelps (Neighbor), Kris Larson (Neighbor), Margaret Godolphin (Neighbor), S.D. Godolphin (Neighbor), Pat Bik (Neighbor), Byron Deford (Neighbor), Monica Gomez (Neighbor), Chris Phelps (Neighbor), Nathan Korb (Neighbor), Drake Bartow (Neighbor), Kathy Lloyd (Neighbor), Mark Young (City of Helena), Kevin League (Neighbor), Wilbur Rehman (NMTAC Chair)

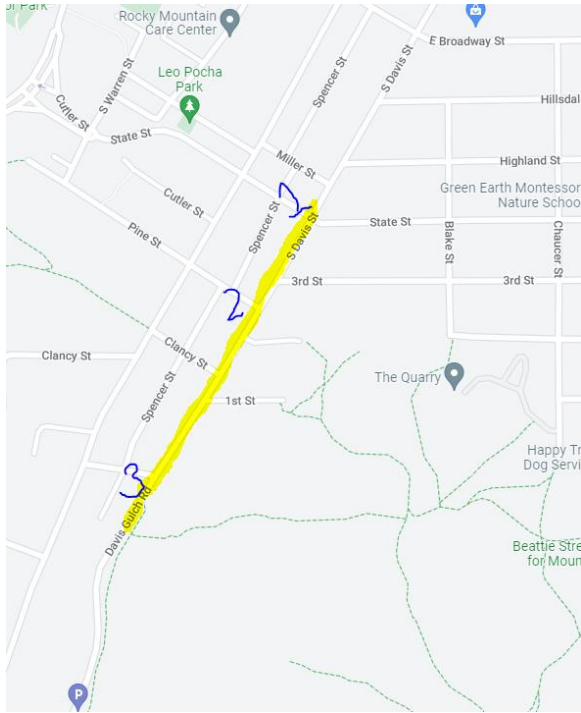
Provided virtual comments: James Szerwo (NMTAC member) and Rob and Norane Freistadt (Neighbor)

**Background:** The Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council (NMTAC) to the Helena City Commission requested that Lewis and Clark Public Health assist in coordinating an Inclusive Interdisciplinary Walk Audit (I2 Walk Audit) at and around Davis St. The route started at Davis/State intersection and moved to where the road turns to dirt. Concern regarding accessibility and safety was voiced by a community member via email to the committee. NMTAC responded to the email by organizing a community walk audit.

In that area of town, there are numerous houses, parks (2), access to trails, schools, a market, and connectivity to downtown. This route is owned by the City of Helena.

**Route:** The Walk Audit started at the intersection of Davis Street and State Street. The group walked south along Davis, stopping at the intersection of Pine/Davis, and then finished at where Davis turned into a dirt road.

The map of the route:



Observations, questions, and ideas from the I2 Walk Audit are as follows:

**Stop #1:** Intersection of Davis Street and State Street. At the first stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 6. Comments on the first leg of the walk are as follows:

*Positive aspects:* Sidewalks, trees, close to downtown, diversity in housing, diversity in landscaping, boulevard in areas, curve on state street, quiet, in the winter there is good shoveling, a diversity of modes of transportation (walkers, bikers, etc.), network of other facilities (parks, market, schools, etc.)

*Needs Improvement:* cars speed through the stop signs because it is hard to see, and cars are gaining speed as they go down Davis. Stop sign as well as mailboxes block the sidewalk making it inaccessible to wheelchairs and strollers.

*Ideas:* traffic circle. speed bumps. Curb cuts/ADA ramps on all four corners. Narrow the size of the street. Crosswalk. More visible stop sign (and one that doesn't block the sidewalk).

**Stop #2:** Intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> street and Davis. At the second stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 3.5. Comments on the second leg of the walk are as follows:

*Positive aspects:* Open, green, sidewalks on the west, an engaging tree to play on for the kids, on-street parking.

*Needs Improvement:* Busy and quick moving street. Tree blocks visibility. Long crossing. Visibility bad for all when turning left onto Davis.

*Ideas:* sidewalks, bike lanes, a sign warning that a stop is coming up.

**Stop #3:** Davis Street where the road turns to dirt. At the third stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 4. Comments on the third leg of the walk are as follows:

*Positive aspects:* Quieter Street, open view, road narrows, trails, well plowed in the winter, diversity in houses.

*Needs Improvement:* Dust for the houses who live on the dirt (City used to do dust abatement twice a year, now the homeowners need to beg). Need for consistent, accessible sidewalks. Mailboxes blocking the sidewalk. Noxious weeds up Davis.

*Ideas:* MPH Feedback signs. Sidewalks. Bike lanes. Traffic calming request. Potentially an island near the Moab trailhead.

### **Emailed Input:**

*Rob and Norane Freistadt on 9/24/22:*

Having lived at the corner of Davis and First Street (501 1st) since 1996, and having just completed construction of our new home just behind that property (507 1st), retaining driveways that enter onto both First and Davis, we have had conversations with both the city and county officials regarding how this neighborhood might be improved as it relates to how South Davis is utilized.

Raising 3 children at 501 1st, we were concerned with the safety and speed at which traffic proceeds on Davis, as well as the air quality in this neighborhood. Towards that end, we successfully petitioned the city to reduce the speed limit on Davis south of our location to 15 mph, spray the gravel section annually with magnesium chloride (the same substance used by the Forest Service to mitigate dust and used by the city to melt ice at intersections) to what was signed as the southern boundary of the city limits, and create a trail alongside the gravel portion of Davis in order to create a safe corridor for walkers and bicyclists. These improvements were made during the late 1990's under Mayor Morrison's direction, and we greatly appreciated it. I subsequently contacted the county commissioners in order to get more of Davis Gulch south of the city limits sprayed with magnesium chloride, but was unsuccessful with this request.

Since then, the signs showing the southern city limits in Davis Gulch have been moved to near the intersection of Davis and Dry Gulches, the gravel portion of Davis Gulch has been widened, the 15 mph signs have been removed, recreational use in Davis Gulch has increased, as has the construction of houses south of Helena accessed by Davis Gulch. All of these changes over the past two decades have increased the quantity and speed of traffic on South Davis, as well as the amount of particulates in the air during summer evenings created by the gravel portion of Davis Gulch.

To address the speed problems on Davis, neighbors have unsuccessfully requested speed-calming dips over the years. I've spoken with the city to ask for a large dip where the pavement joins the gravel in order to slow traffic as well as provide an escape for gravel and dirt run-off

onto the pavement during heavy rains, to no avail; during these events, storm drains become clogged with debris and the pavement gets covered with mud and gravel.

As a former teacher, I'm aware of school children who've been hit by cars while riding their bicycles through the intersection of Davis and State over the years. The safety of that intersection is lacking due to the limited sight-distance to the west on State due to the proximity of the crest of the hill on State between Rodney and Davis.

Clearly, this neighborhood is in need of re-evaluation in order to address safety issues complicated by traffic speed, increased use, and air-borne dust (it would be interesting to determine particulates during summer months; I personally have a filtering HVAC system in my home and am astonished by the dust and dirt I collect on the filters during the summertime. There are plenty of summer evenings when we're driven indoors around dinner-time due to the amount of airborne dust from the gulch while paying taxes for paved roads.

I believe there are several remedies for these concerns:

1. continue spraying Davis Gulch gravel road with magnesium chloride but extend it to the intersection of Davis and Dry Gulches to mitigate dust for both neighborhood residents and area recreationalists;
2. install a large dip where the gravel road meets paved Davis to mitigate the gravel and mud flowing onto paved Davis and perhaps calm traffic speeds;
3. install a long-overdue round-about at the intersection of Davis and State Streets to calm traffic speeds and provide a safe intersection for traffic traveling along Davis and State Streets.

My wife and I are interested in being included in any future discussions about this neighborhood and would appreciate notification of such, preferably with a reasonable amount of time to plan ahead.

Thanks so much for having this discussion and for considering our input.

*James Swerzo on 9/23/22:*

I won't be able to attend the walk audit today, but wanted to share my thoughts on the area. In general, the area does not promote the safety of non-motorized users.

- Davis and State street intersection
  - No curb cut on the North east corner
  - Only a 2 way stop with the east and westbound traffic free flowing. These vehicles have limited sight distance due to a curve and a hill.
  - I see a lot of pedestrians and cyclists here. Accommodations should be made to make it safer for them.
    - This is a key connection point to access downtown heading west, neighborhoods heading north, neighborhoods and trails heading east, and trails heading south.

- I frequently see north and southbound traffic not stopping at the stop signs.
- Install 4 way stop signs and raised bulb out crosswalks
- State and Rodney street intersection - not part of the audit, but should be addressed as many pedestrians and cyclists are coming from or going to this intersection
  - No curb cut on the south east corner.
  - Only a 2 way stop with north and southbound traffic free flowing. The design of Rodney street promotes high speeds, especially the northbound traffic coming down the hill.
  - The south side of the intersection has very limited visibility to the east. Again, high vehicle speeds cause conflict with pedestrians and cyclists trying to cross westbound.
  - Install 4 way stop signs and raised bulb out crosswalks.
- State street
  - Design promotes high speeds.
- Davis street
  - Design promotes high speeds. I almost always see vehicles traveling at what appears to be 40 mph on this street.
  - Sidewalk only on the west side of the street.
    - Large mailboxes obstruct the sidewalk just north of Flora St.
    - Large mailbox obstructs the sidewalk at 538 N Davis St.
    - Sidewalk ends and leaves no shoulder or crossing to get to the DeFord trail on the east side of the street where it becomes a gravel road.
      - Entrance to DeFord trail is not apparent as it is also the driveway for 585 N Davis St.
    - Homeowners frequently park on the trail on the east side of the street that heads south.
    - No crosswalk at the Little Moab Trail head.
  - Improved non-motorized facilities could reduce the number of vehicles driving up to the trailheads.
    - Install a southbound bike lane
    - Sidewalks on the east side of the street.
    - Bulbout crosswalks at the DeFord trail and Little Moab trail could help reduce vehicle speeds.

### **Summary suggestions:**

1. Traffic Circle at State Street/ Davis Street Intersection
2. East side protected bike/walking lane (saving room for parking, protected bike lane, and narrows the street)
3. Deford Dip- adding in a dip where the road turns back to cement to slow folks down
4. Speed Feedback Signs where the road turns to dirt coming down Davis

5. Island or curb bulb-outs near the Moab Trail
6. Designated cross walk at State Street/Davis Street once the traffic circle is installed
7. Dust mitigation on the dirt road
  - a. Extend it to the intersection of Davis and Dry Gulches to mitigate dust for both neighborhood residents and area recreationalists

**Next Steps:**

This summary account will be provided to all participants in addition to NMTAC. This will be discussed at the next NMTAC meeting on Tuesday, October 11<sup>th</sup> at 5:15pm via zoom. NMTAC will then decide on whether to make a recommendation to the City of Helena Commission.

Community members can always make requests to the City on their own through the My Helena App. Or, they can fill out a “Traffic Calming Application Form” that is attached to Sarah’s email. They can email Mark Young at [myoung@helenamt.gov](mailto:myoung@helenamt.gov) if they have questions.