

This guest column was written by Bloomington resident Jan Sorby, who lives in the Bryan Park neighborhood, and is a response to James Haverstock's Nov. 12 Community Column: "Council members vote to ignore staff recommendations and law," and The Herald-Times editorial board's Nov. 14 related opinion piece: "And another thing: Lobbying can stop traffic."

Even before the new stop sign at **Henderson** and Allen streets was installed, there was heated discussion as to why it was necessary. For many years, citizens living in the Bryan Park neighborhood had sought a safe means to cross **Henderson** from the west, to enter the park or simply to use the sidewalk.

The east side of the park had a wonderful entry with multi-way stops, and a colored-textured pedestrian crosswalk for many years. Like the east side of the park, our similarly classified street on the west side had not met the "warrants" for a multi-way stop, and few, living on either side of the park, questioned the need for a new street crossing. This multi-way stop was the opportunity for the city to optimize traffic patterns and funnel pedestrian and bicycle traffic to one predictable crossing, making the street safer for all.

Some opponents of the stop sign characterized this sign as a liability issue. Not true. City attorneys stated that the city is not legally obligated to abide by a strict reading of the "Green Book," engineering guidelines drafted by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

The Green Book's provisions are just guidelines and are not mandatory.

Furthermore, broad community goals are present where government officials consciously weigh the policy of protecting pedestrian safety against the policy of encouraging fast driving.

The updated Green Book states that in designing local streets, the "overriding consideration is to foster a safe and pleasant environment and pedestrian safety whereas the convenience of the motorist is secondary."

Henderson Street by Bryan Park has been out of balance with its environment for years.

While some may resent taking a few extra seconds to slow their speeds as they pass by the largest park in Bloomington, a bustling elementary school and an activity-rich high school campus, the advantages are clear.

This strip of **Henderson**, characterized as "the last sprint before you hit town," is, in fact, an important byway of a core neighborhood and a school walk zone, not a marginalized outskirts or an off-ramp from the highway.

But context is everything, and here is the history:

During the post-World War II period, many roadways in America were retrofitted to improve speed, volume and ease of auto movement. Economic development was the prime motivator.

In the 1990s, communities began experiencing the negative impact transportation systems were having. A 1996 national conference "Thinking Beyond the Pavement: National Workshop on Integrating Highway Development with Communities and the Environment While Maintaining Safety and Performance" was convened. Tom Warne, former executive director of the Utah Department of Transportation, affirmed America's upcoming task: "In the beginning of the Interstate era, we built the greatest freeway system in the world; but aesthetics and preserving the environment weren't part of that mission. Now we need another transformation." The conference spawned a new way of thinking about how streets are designed: "context-sensitive solutions" (CSS).

Ten years later, examples of CSS are found on the world's safest streets — in England and the Netherlands; urban streets in these countries are extremely narrow, include parking and the majority having small roundabouts straddling each intersection. These streets look complex, and drivers innately understand the need for vigilance and careful driving.

Traffic accidents are the leading cause of death of Americans ages 5 to 34 years, and rank seventh for all age groups. As pedestrians, more than 50,000 children are injured yearly, approximately 1,800 die and 5,000 have significant long-term disabilities. In 2006, America experienced 43,443 traffic fatalities.

We are fortunate in Bloomington to have policy makers and engineers who are ahead of the learning curve. As we strive nationally to change our streets from being the most dangerous in the world, we may act locally by hanging up cell phones, putting down hamburgers, stubbing out cigarettes and slowing down and focusing on to the task at hand.

A trip along **Henderson** will take a few more seconds, but is a small price to pay to promote quality of life, civility and safety for ourselves and our cherished neighbors, young and old.

CITATION (AGLC STYLE)

Jan Sorby, 'Stop sign puts street, neighborhood in long-overdue balance', *Herald-Times* (online), 8 Dec 2008 <<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.monroe.lib.in.us/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/14449B889A5FF400>>

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