



CITY OF FORT BRAGG

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COUNCIL COMMITTEE ITEM SUMMARY REPORT

MEETING DATE: February 18, 2020
TO: Public Safety Committee
FROM: Tom Z. Varga, Public Works Director
AGENDA ITEM TITLE: Review and Discuss Request for a Stop Sign at Chestnut Street and Dana Street

ISSUE

Superintendent Becky Walker of the Fort Unified School District (FBUSD) has requested that a Stop sign be placed on the eastern leg of the intersection of Chestnut Street and Dana Street.



BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW:

The intersection at Chestnut Street and Dana Street has an unusual layout and an atypical traffic pattern. The basic intersection is a "T". The top of the "T" is Chestnut Street running in an east-west direction. The leg is Dana Street running in a north-south direction.

Less than 100 feet to the west along Chestnut Street is a driveway serving Dana Gray School. Furthermore, the primary route of traffic is along Chestnut Street and Dana Street making a 90-degree turn at the intersection. A leg of Chestnut Street continues to the east of the intersection serving the Fort Bragg High School parking lot as well as several residences. Ms. Walker reported a concern that drivers, primarily students, are leaving the high school parking lot to drive into town and entering the intersection unsafely, but especially too fast.

A request has been made to stop traffic on the east leg of the intersection serving the High School parking lot. Adding a Stop sign at this spot is contrary to good traffic engineering practice because it would make the intersection more risky:

- With the requested stop sign, eastbound traffic would stop, but westbound traffic would not, including left turns from westbound Chestnut Street to northbound Dana Street. The newly stopped traffic on eastbound Chestnut Street would normally expect the traffic approaching them across the intersection, (including left turns), to stop, but they will not. This increases accident risk.
- Stop signs are not speed control devices. Sections 2B.05 through 2B.07 of the California Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (Cal-MUTCD) notes that Stop signs are not a cure-all for traffic control needs. Their primary use is to separate traffic conflicts or circumstances where vehicles are likely to collide into each other or where visibility at an intersection is limited. A review of recent accidents in or near the subject intersection involve vehicles running into parked cars or other fixed objects at the edge of the street. A Stop sign would not improve this problem.
- Limited visibility for vehicles stopped at Dana Street leg does not appear to be a significant risk. There is sufficient sight distance (about 140 feet) around the solar panels to allow for a safe stopping distance of 85 feet on Chestnut Street at the 25 MPH speed limit. There is an adequate safe stopping distance (136 feet) for speeds up to 35 MPH. Safe stopping distance calculation based on the Caltrans Highway Design Manual.
- Problem drivers currently entering the intersection exercise poor judgement and/or show a disregard for the law. Adding a Stop sign will not aid in better judgement or better compliance with the law. Rather, it will likely be just another thing to be ignored. This attitude increases the risks for pedestrians or cyclists using the intersection. These people will expect vehicles to stop at a new Stop sign. Increasing the ways a vehicle can enter the intersection unsafely will make the intersection more unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists.

The usual fix for this problem is to make the intersection an all-way stop with Stop signs on all the legs. This makes it more consistent with driver expectations. However, because Stop signs are not speed control devices, the increased risk to pedestrians and cyclists remains unchanged. Also, the location of the driveway to Dana Gray School is very close to the intersection. With a Stop sign on the west side of the intersection (as part of an all-way stop intersection), traffic backing up at a new Stop sign during the morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up will regularly block the Dana Gray driveway. A line as short of three cars would be long enough. Therefore, the addition of either one or two Stop signs to the intersection leads to greater risk and unwanted congestion.

The problem of unsafe driving through this intersection is nevertheless real and a problem that needs to be addressed. With the proximity of Dana Gray to this intersection, the use of crossing guards could help manage traffic during problematic times of day. Other communications channels within the High School can help reinforce a traffic safety message. The City may be able to provide assistance through its School Resource Officer (SRO) or short-term special enforcement efforts. These and other possible ideas should be further explored.

RECOMMENDATION:

Based on engineering judgement, the addition of a stop sign at the intersection of Chestnut Street and Dana Street would degrade the usability and safety of the intersection. A Stop sign is not an appropriate tool for improving the traffic control problem at this location.

As an alternative, the School District and City can consider other actions:

- Reinforce safe driving practices with High School students
- Use the new School Resource Officer to work with students
- Provide random, periodic special enforcement efforts, potentially with the addition of crossing guards.