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October 4, 2004

Mr. Donald Reeb  
President, McKownville Improvement Association  
5 Norwood St  
McKownville, NY 12203

RE: Intersection of Fuller Road and Elmwood Street

Dear Mr. Reeb,

In your August 9, 2004, letter to Legislator Frank Commisso, you suggested solutions to several problems near the intersection of Fuller Road (CR 156) and Elmwood Avenue. These problems are cut-through traffic on Elmwood, and pedestrian accessibility and safety near that intersection.

We agree that pedestrian improvements are needed on Fuller Road. In the short term however, the existing right-of-way is not wide enough to add sidewalks on the east side of Fuller Road. We do intend to add sidewalks in a reconstruction project in the future.

When used incorrectly, traffic signals have drawbacks that outweigh the benefits. That is why Volume 17B of the New York Code of Rules and Regulations contains warrants for signal installation. These warrants help choose locations where the benefits to road users exceed the costs to taxpayers. Signal costs can be substantial. Traffic signals can cost upwards of \$100,000 to install, plus several thousand dollars per year for power and maintenance.

We observed traffic on Elmwood Avenue on several occasions during noon and evening peak hours. The intersection of Fuller Road and Elmwood Avenue is far from meeting any warrants. This indicates that the costs (more rear-end crashes and delays on Fuller Road and resultant injuries, air pollution and noise) would exceed the benefits. While a sizable portion of the traffic using Elmwood does cut through, the fact remains that this is only a few vehicles per hour.

Additionally, a signal would invite cut-through traffic. Now, northbound cut-through traffic is gambling that they will get a gap in traffic on Fuller Road. A signal would guarantee gaps. Also, a signal would not deter left turns by southbound traffic. It would actually make it easier. This is because of the way closely spaced signals work. In each phase, the traffic between the Elmwood and Executive Park would be allowed to clear to prevent gridlock. This would create large gaps for southbound left turns. Rather than reducing cut-through traffic, the result would probably be more.

There is no evidence of a substantive safety problem in our records. We have reports of two crashes at the intersection of Elmwood and Fuller, neither of which would be correctable by a signal. For these reasons, we have concluded that a signal is not appropriate at this location.

There are solutions other than signalization that could be used to slow or discourage cut through traffic. These include:

- Traffic calming, such as choke points or speed humps. If the majority of residents agree, a petition for traffic calming should be presented to the Town. The support of a majority of the residents is a vital ingredient.
- Close one end of Elmwood, making it a dead-end street. This would eliminate cut-through traffic.
- The entire road could be restricted to one way southbound traffic.
- Partial closure – Narrow one end of Elmwood to a single lane, with one-way traffic. For example, the south end of Elmwood could be configured for rights only onto westbound Route 20.

Unlike a signal, these options all share some key advantages: they are relatively low cost, and can be easily modified or reversed if needed. In our opinion, they are also more likely to succeed.

Although we cannot accede to a signal, we are willing to work with the Town of Guilderland and NYSDOT to keep traffic off the side street and on the arterials where it belongs. It might be worthwhile to ask NYSDOT whether the signal timing at US 20 and Fuller has been adjusted lately. Reducing delays at that intersection may reduce the desire to avoid the signal.

Sincerely,



James J. Mearkle. P.E.  
Traffic Engineer

CC: Hon. Frank Commisso, Legislator, County of Albany  
William Logan, P.E., Regional Traffic Engineer, NYSDOT  
Ken Runion, Supervisor, Town of Guilderland