

# No Standing News

Since we have no standing, we stand with those left standing.

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## DEATH BY SCHWINN?

Six members of the Rolla City Council, encouraged by Steve Hargis, the Rolla Public Works Director, surprised no one by refusing to spend \$50 to \$70 each on a few "Slow, Children Playing" signs and a lower speed limit in a neighborhood where children live and play with no neighborhood park and with sidewalks on only part of their streets. How did we wind up with such a mean-spirited city government; a council that doesn't hesitate to hand over \$21,666 to the Chamber of Commerce for new Christmas ornaments to decorate light poles but doesn't want to "set a precedent" by spending a few dollars for warning signs that might save a child's life?

Is anyone surprised? This is, after all, the city government that passed an ordinance to arrest kids who roller skate or skateboard on sidewalks, so to obey that law the kids have to skate in the streets, so when the cops catch them skating in the streets they make them get back on the sidewalk so then they can be arrested for violating the law. This is the same city government that arrogantly demanded that a youth skateboard organization "prove themselves" by raising their own money for a skateboard park while they are spending \$11.7 million on a recreation center designed primarily for adults. This is the city that sells children's parks just because they want the money. By their own actions city officials repeatedly prove themselves to be insensitive jerks with a bad attitude

toward kids. They were all kids themselves and almost all of them have kids; what is it about getting elected to these insignificant small-town positions that makes them forget what it's like to be on the other side of the fence?

Hargis pointed out that the City of San Antonio doesn't use these signs (anyone can find another 100 examples of cities that do use them); the federal highway department says they don't work and examples of the signs aren't even in his sign manual. Wow. How do the feds know the signs don't work? Even the federal government can't prove what prevented events that did not happen. If Hargis and the federal highway department are correct and signs similar to the ones the parents requested do not cause motorists to be more cautious, then we should immediately dismantle all school crossing zones and pedestrian crosswalks before they "do more harm than good." Is it possible that all these years, drivers have been stopping or slowing at school crossing zones and pedestrian crosswalks only because they didn't know that the federal government had decided those signs don't work? Neither Hargis nor the council had anything to say when one of the petitioners pointed out that in Rolla, trailer parks have 15-mph limits and the council recently lowered the cemetery speed limit to 10-mph.

Hargis and several council members then dispensed much unsolicited advice to the parents about teaching their children not to play in the street. In looking for a way out, they had all decided, without evidence, that the problem was negligent parents; it's a popular and handy place to lay blame these days. The fact that 29 households signed a petition and

appeared at a city council meeting for help in protecting their children seems to be compelling evidence to the contrary. It was so obvious that "blame the negligent parents" was the excuse the council was using that even Mayor Morgan - usually sensitive to nothing that's going on - squirmed a little when he tried to disclaim the council's use of the negligent parent theme. Lou Magdits and Judy Jepsen, the two representatives of Ward 4 (and the petitioners), were weak advocates for their constituents. Instead of taking the initiative by introducing the subject and presenting reasons supporting the request, both council members sat while Hargis first poisoned the water with reasons why the council should not grant the request. Jepsen's contribution was a lame compromise suggestion that speeders be reported to the police in a "complaint-driven process," thus demonstrating her ignorance of how the city prosecutor routinely ignores such complaints. Councilman Magdits gave his constituents no word of support through the entire 35-minute discussion, but finally roused himself to snap, "Spend the \$75, give them the signs, and let's get on with it." Lou Magdits, the council honcho who has gotten his way on every issue when spending recreation millions, couldn't do better for his own constituents than, "Just do it and move on"? With such enthusiastic support from the Ward Four representatives, the motion for the signs died by a vote of 4-6.

During the council's meandering discussion and all their irrelevant anecdotal "evidence" on why "Slow - Children Playing" signs will not work, Hargis and several council members did mention that the lack of sidewalks on

both sides of residential streets might be part of the problem. Realizing where that line of thought might lead they quickly returned to hectoring the parents. Carefully, no one brought up the subject of the lack of a neighborhood park in a neighborhood with about 40 children under age 12 that clearly needs one. The residents in the Winchester area should look into whether Debbie Castle, their subdivision developer, gave land for a park or cash-in-lieu of a neighborhood park as required by city ordinance Section 42-26, and why there aren't sidewalks on both sides of the street in every residential area. We would all like to know why deer, trailer parks and people in cemeteries have low speed limits and protective signs, but areas where children live don't.

**The 10-MPH Twilight Zone.** If it hadn't been for the refusal to spend a few dollars on protective signs for children we might not have noticed the irony of the explosion of signs on the nearby Acorn Trail. There are signs restricting speeds to 5, 10, and 20 miles per hour. Aside from the hypocrisy of spending money for bike speed limit signs but not on signs to protect children, isn't it just a little bit anal to put speed limit signs on a nature trail? If the speed limits are meant for bike riders - why are they? Does the federal highway department also have statistics on "by-hicular" homicide that we haven't been told about? If not, we must immediately have a federal highway department study on this or check with San Antonio. Speed limit signs on the Acorn Trail raise a number of questions that the city didn't think of when they were put up - assuming anyone was actually engaged in thinking at the time.

· How are the cops going to ticket violators? There is no city ordinance making it a crime to do 12-mph in a 10-mph zone on a nature trail. Do the speed limits apply to only bicycles or also to joggers and runners? To parents pushing strollers? The signs don't say. Will enforcement be a "complaint-driven process"?

· Won't speed limit signs also "do more harm than good"? According to the Hargis/Highway Department theory, such signs will not cause people to be more cautious and may "lull" others into thinking that it is safe to use the path. Do they do this in San Antonio?

· If you slow down to look at nature on the nature trail will you get a ticket for going too slow?

· What is the blood alcohol content limit for two wheelers? Will cops have to fill out profile reports on speeders?

Route 66 Bicycles gave the Rolla Police Department some bikes this summer. We thought it was to work off donuts or for neighborhood patrol. Please tell us the police department isn't really going to patrol the bike paths hunting bikers exceeding the 10-mph limit? Won't they need tiny little bike-sized radar guns to clock speeds that slow? Has "death by Schwinn" been a public safety problem in Rolla?

You can see there are a lot of fuzzy public safety questions here that simply scream to be clarified in an ordinance. If you don't think the council will do anything so foolish you just haven't been paying attention. In June, the council almost made it a crime to leave your garbage can out too long. They thought it would be a good idea to have the sanitation department kidnap tardy garbage cans and hold them for ransom. Fortunately, they were unable to arrive at a decision on how much ransom to demand.

There are three lessons to be learned from the sign controversy:

1. Parents and other citizens with serious concerns should avoid asking for help from their own government until they can elect ward representatives who will energetically help them solve their problems instead of backing down because of specious federal opinions

cited by a city engineer who doesn't live in the city he engineers.

2. Sometimes a small request like this points up a lack of clear public policy and a need for wider community discussion. In this case, meetings can be held with or without the city council. If a public consensus emerges that taxpayers do want their tax money spent on signage, sidewalks and neighborhood parks, who is the city to say they shouldn't have what they want? Whose tail wags this dog anyway?

**And the final lesson is:**

3. All of us should drive carefully through every residential area because kids will be kids, no matter how carefully they are taught. Because Rolla's city government doesn't approve of neighborhood warning signs, both children and drivers are at risk - deer however, are quite safe.

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