

### City stalls for time on Ridge project

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The city will turn to local legislators for help to persuade the Illinois Department of Transportation to back off on a new traffic light plan for Ridge Avenue that has sparked strong protest from residents in the area.

Alderman Steven J. Bernstein, whose 4th Ward includes much of the Ridge Historic District, moved to hold over action on the issue at Monday night's City Council meeting.

Bernstein said he hopes his action will give local legislators more time to convince IDOT to grant the city a waiver against installing the larger double-mast traffic light system, as opposed to the current post-top signals embraced by residents.

"I think we need time to let them work behind the scenes," he said.

Aldermen backed the holdover move, but several expressed concern they didn't want to jeopardize the funding the city would receive on the mostly federal funded \$1.86 million project, citing the city's budget woes.

Neighbors have also received backing on the project from U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-9th, whose house is located along Ridge Avenue.

"Jan wants to make sure we don't lose federal funding but that we don't compromise the integrity of the historic district," said Ra Joy, Schakowsky's suburban director, addressing council members Monday night.

IDOT official James Skvarla said the office hears waiver requests on a "case-by-case" basis.

Residents argued that the state mandate for the larger lights is more applicable to highways, not Ridge, a "very narrow street," said Stephen Patton, a resident and attorney, addressing the council Monday night.

Ridge Avenue is "no wider than a lot of two-lane streets with traffic on either side," Patton said.

The current lights, he said, are "very, very visible - you can't miss them."

He charged that Public Works Director David Jennings had not informed IDOT that the project would take place in a historic preservation district, marking the information box on that point as "non-applicable." IDOT officials have termed the omission a "miscommunication."

In addition, he said the city gave a misleading impression as to the level of community involvement, informing state officials in the application that "informal meetings" had been held on the issue.

Jennings said Tuesday that officials had not listed historic district as a matter of practice on a previous application for a signal project in another area. He said the city will include such information in the future.

He said the signal plan had been included among the projects in the overall capital improvement plan, which the council discussed in at least four public meetings.

Alderman Ann Rainey, 8th Ward, argued, that aldermen were "doing a disservice to staff" and that aldermen knew they were voting on a brand new signaling system, rather than repairs to the existing one, as some have indicated.

The proposed plan offers "the best of both worlds," she said, allowing the city to put in a brand new, state-of-the-art traffic light system that it could not have afforded if it had to pay itself.

Further, she argued that the new system would not detract from the appearance of Ridge and would be synchronized, so as to move traffic better.

Alderman Arthur B. Newman, 1st, argued, though, that aldermen weren't in possession of all the information when they voted on the capital improvement plan.

"I had no knowledge about the mast-arm (system). I don't think any council member who voted had knowledge of what's going to be done.

"I just feel we made a mistake here and we ought to do what we can to rectify it," Newman said.