

February 2, 2004

Honorable Mayor and Members of
The Hermosa Beach City Council

Regular meeting of
February 10, 2004

REPORT ON THE STRAND BY THE POLICE DEPARTMENT

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Council:

1. Receive and file this report.
2. Consider enactment of any of the proposed recommendations in this report.

BACKGROUND

The Strand is a wide sidewalk that affronts the beach the entire length of Hermosa Beach. The Strand is wide enough for two vehicles to pass one another in both directions. The Strand has many uses that includes walking, running, rollerblading, skateboarding, walking leashed dogs and bicycling. The Strand becomes very congested during warm days especially on warm weekends that can and do occur all year round. There has been concern expressed by members of the community regarding the variety of uses of the Strand and in particular, bicyclists that travel too fast on the Strand for conditions.

There are a variety of municipal code sections that regulate the uses of the Strand. In regards to wheeled vehicles, motorized bicycles and motor vehicles are prohibited on the Strand. (HBMC 12.20.220) Skateboards, rollerskates and pedal powered, non-motorized bicycles or tricycles are permitted on the Strand. (HBMC 12.20.224 and 12.20.230) There are subsections in 12.20.230 that deal with right of way, group and trick riding, speed and designated walk zones. Subsection (E) regulates dangerous speeds and designates a speed limit of 10 MPH on the Strand. Subsection (F) designates a "Walk Zone" for bicycles and skateboards from 10th Street to 15th Street on the Strand. The walk zone is activated when an automatic timer turns on the flashing red lights on the weekends.

ANALYSIS

The Police Department has conducted a study of Strand Activities for the past few months. This has included the use of our "Stealth Radar" machine and the random observation and enforcement of the Strand throughout the week. The Stealth Radar was deployed on October 2-4, 2003 at 8th and Strand. It was utilized two more times in December at 18th and Strand and 19th and Strand on December 5-7, 12-14, 2003. Unfortunately, this radar unit along with all handheld radar units can only register moving vehicles at 11 MPH and above. In these surveys of the Strand, the radar would record anything, including pedestrians, traveling at 11 MPH or higher. The October survey recorded a total of 1653 vehicles with an average speed of 13.37 MPH. The December survey captured a total of 731 vehicles with an average speed of 13.36 MPH. The third survey recorded 1121 vehicles with an average speed of 13.29 MPH. There were vehicles recorded travelling between 15 MPH and 25 MPH.

The police department has conducted more directed patrols of the Strand in the past few weeks. Officers have been assigned to work the Strand at random times to observe conditions generally and to warn and advise persons travelling too fast for conditions. Officers have also monitored the walk zone and one citation was issued to a violator who was warned three times to dismount in the walk zone. The traffic officers were given the assignment of conducting daily speed surveys during the Christmas holiday season using hand-held radar units. Generally, most people observed were traveling at leisurely speeds of 6-10 miles per hour. Those traveling over 10 MPH were recorded between 11-13 MPH at most of the locations monitored. The north end of the Strand (around 30th Street) saw average speeds of 13-16 MPH. The Strand seems to self regulate itself. When the Strand is crowded most people slow down and/or walk their bikes because of conditions. When the Strand is less crowded or open, people will travel faster.

The Fire Department compiled statistics over a five-year period (1998-2002) regarding accidents occurring on the Strand. (See attachment A) There were a total of 128 accidents during this period of time on the Strand that prompted a fire paramedic response. Of the 128 accidents, only 20 accidents or 15.6% involved a bicyclist or skater versus another bicyclist, pedestrian or skater. Most of the accidents that occurred on the Strand were solo accidents (84.3%). It is also interesting to note that the number of accidents on the Strand have steadily declined over this five year period. (33 accidents in 1998 to 21 accidents in 2002)

The Redondo and Manhattan Beach Police Departments were contacted regarding speed limits along the strands in their cities. The "bike path" in Redondo Beach south of the pier that affronts the beach (along the Esplanade) does not have a speed limit. There is a permanent walk zone through the Redondo Pier area but despite all of the signs and traffic calming measures, the zone still requires a great deal of enforcement. The Strand in Manhattan Beach does not have a speed limit and they do not have a walk zone as there is in Hermosa Beach. The police department does set up temporary "walk your bike" signs during busy beach days and special events at the Manhattan pierhead as needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the opinion of staff that the speeding on the Strand is not a major problem. While it certainly does occur, it does not occur to the extent that it might be perceived and has not resulted in numerous accidents and injuries. However, in reviewing the existing conditions on the Strand and the municipal code sections that regulate activities on the Strand, staff makes the following recommendations:

- Eliminate the 10 MPH speed limit language in section 12.20.230 (E) of the Hermosa Beach Municipal Code. This speed limit is very arbitrary. Based on experience and observations, there are times when 15 MPH would be safe and there are times when 8 MPH is too fast. There is very adequate language in Section 12.20.230 (E) to allow officers to cite violators that are traveling at unsafe speeds based upon existing conditions or for reckless and careless operation of any wheeled vehicle. Additionally, most officers are not equipped with radar. Radar is assigned to traffic officers who operate these units on public streets. Without a radar gun, an officer is left to his own observations and opinion as to what is over or under 10 MPH. This could prove difficult in court for an officer to testify as to an absolute speed. In the event that the Council does not wish to eliminate the speed limit, the signage along the Strand is very poor and needs to be improved for better visibility.

- Reduce the walk-zone from the current 10th and 15th Streets to 11th and 14th Streets. Staff feels that this walk zone is too large and unreasonable. The areas in front of Noble Park and the Seasprite Hotel should not be apart of the walk zone. Staff also feels that the signage and lighting for the walk zone is poor and needs to be re-engineered for better visibility. The walk zone also creates some confusion for bicyclists and skateboarders that can ride legally on Pier Plaza yet illegally as they cross onto the Strand into the walk zone area. If this recommendation is adopted by Council, it will require a modification to Section 12.20.230 (F) of the Municipal Code by changing the language designating 10th to 15th Streets as the walk zone to 11th to 14th Streets.
- Another alternative for the Council to consider is the total elimination of the walk zone from 11th to 15th Streets. The walk zone is difficult to enforce on a consistent basis. The police department does not have the resources to assign officers to this area on a regular basis. Fortunately, most people slow down and/or walk their bikes through this area when it is crowded. Thus the Strand is generally self regulating. The signage and lighting is confusing. While the locals might be familiar with the walk zone, people from out of town are completely confused. Additionally, as the red flashing lights are on a timer, the lights come on automatically even when the Strand is empty causing further confusion to users. Finally, there exists sufficient language in the Municipal Code to deal with speed issues along this area of the Strand. Section 12.20.230 (E) allows the police to cite violators observed anywhere on the Strand that are traveling either too fast for conditions or in a reckless and careless manner. Adoption of this recommendation will require the modification of Section 12.20.230 (F). If this option is chosen, It is further recommended that the main body of language in this section remain. Staff feels that it would be helpful for the Council to continue to designate temporary walk zones that could be useful in connection with certain events that take place along the Strand. The only language that would need to be eliminated is the last sentence of the section that designates the current walk zone (10th to 15th Streets).

Respectfully submitted,

Concur:

MICHAEL LAVIN, CHIEF OF POLICE
HERMOSA BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

STEPHEN BURRELL
CITY MANAGER