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AS I SEE IT

Make roads friendly to pedestrians

By MARK FORSYTHE
Special to The Star

Recently I attended a public meeting regarding the intersection at Wornall Road and Meyer Boulevard. The topic of the meeting was changing the intersection to make it safer.

About 35 of us from the surrounding neighborhoods showed up. Apparently our ideas of making it safer differed from those of the consultants and the city's traffic engineers. They were caught off-guard when we reacted very negatively to their idea of adding another left-hand turn lane on Meyer heading west to allow more cars through to get south on Wornall.

Not only were the neighbors opposed to this, we suggested solutions to restrict traffic flow, lower the speeds and give pedestrians a fighting chance to make it across the street in one piece.

For too long the traffic engineers in our city have pursued design standards meant to raise speeds and move higher volumes of cars more efficiently. The effect of these policies has encouraged commuters to zip through our neighborhoods on their way to and from the outer reaches of the metropolitan area. These same neighborhoods once boasted a safe pedestrian environment where children could actually walk to school, parents could navigate the area pushing strollers with small children in tow and seniors could easily make it to and from the store or the bus stop.

As people house hunt in the urban core, I hear comments about how beautiful the neighborhoods are and how impressed they are to see people out walking, working in their gardens, socializing, etc. It's this kind of activity that makes our neighborhoods so desirable and lures many suburbanites back into the city. Why else would people pay \$300,000 for an old house with faulty wiring, failing plumbing and no air conditioning?

It's time for our leadership to begin planning for a 21st-century community that will encourage the pedestrian environment. We should encourage an atmosphere that allows people to walk safely to their destination rather than jump in their car for a two-minute drive to the corner to buy a newspaper. The very things that give our neighborhoods their charm and desirability are being coopted in favor of wider streets, larger intersections and other design features meant to speed vehicles on their way. But at what cost? Our traffic engineers need to slow down and take time to smell the roses, before all the roses are paved over.

Mark Forsythe is the president of the Wornall Homestead Homes Association in Kansas City.