

The accident last week on 5th Street involving 8 year old Haiden Quillen has focused attention again on pedestrian safety in Rapid City. I was here 2 years ago to address pedestrian safety needs in Rapid City and at that time I made several suggestions about ways to increase safety for walkers in our city. Only one of those, changing some of the crosswalk signage to neon green, was adopted by that council.

I had asked at that time, “What will it take for this to be taken seriously?” Now, a child fights for his life, his family struggles to cope, and the driver deals with every driver’s worst fear. So, I am here again to ask **“What does it take for pedestrian safety to become a priority in Rapid City?”**

Let me outline why this is an important issue to the community as a whole. The ability to safely walk in a community is a large part of that city’s “livability” factor. That livability rating is part of what attracts and keeps businesses; thus pedestrian safety has an economic impact on Rapid City.

The Centers for Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics have both identified childhood obesity as a major health problem in the United States. Both organizations stress that physical exercise habits form as children. The CDC adds that 85% of children are currently driven to school instead of walking. The primary reason parents give for driving their children is safety concerns. The CDC maintains that walking is a fundamental component of childhood physical fitness. The costs of kids **not** walking will mount over time as the obesity epidemic impacts communities on a physical and economic basis. The costs of obesity will rise and will be paid by society, including local governments.

There is a glaring difference between a child pedestrian and an adult pedestrian. Because of their size, children that are hit by a car that is going 20 mph have a 5% chance of death. At 30mph that chance increases to 40%. At 40mph there is an 80% chance the child will die. The size of a child gives no leeway for vehicle speed error, and indeed a “slow” speed of 30mph can be devastating to a small body. Size, however, is only the tip of this iceberg.

Before the age of 10 a child does not have the ability to assess the speed of oncoming vehicles accurately, nor do they have the ability to guess

how fast they themselves can cross a street. They do not possess the ability to accurately gauge their ability to cross safely.

In 1999, 25% of all children ages 5-9 who were killed in traffic crashes were pedestrians. 42% of those fatalities occurred between 3-4 p.m., and 80% occurred where there was not a designated crosswalk. Places like 5th and Franklin.

Nationwide, traffic pedestrian deaths have been decreasing as communities become more proactive in pedestrian safety concerns. The 4 tenets of prevention in those cities are:

- Engineering interventions to pace traffic (speed bumps, roundabouts, traffic lights, lighted crosswalks, flashing crosswalk signs)
- Traffic calming via engineering and education
- Enforcement of local laws that creates behavioral/cultural change
- Education of both pedestrians and drivers

These are the challenges we face as a community. We cannot afford to Continue to take the risks associated with kids crossing busy streets totally unprotected by the City. We cannot afford to put drivers on the road without any warning that they are near a place where children may be on the road.

We must educate drivers about the risks of traveling at “normal” speeds when children are present. The lack of reduced speed limits at school or pedestrian crossings sends the message that normal speeds are acceptable in those areas. And “normal” speeds are dangerous to a child.

Speed limits should be lowered to 15mph in any school zone or school cross walk. If this were consistently done, the chance of a child dying in a crosswalk in Rapid City would be reduced to less than 5%. Those speed limits should be stringently enforced and the fines for traffic violations that occur in a school zone or a school crosswalk should be tripled.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration survey of speeding behavior across the nation found that, regardless of the posted speed limit, one third of drivers go greater than or equal to 30 mph. 7% routinely travel at ≥ 40 mph, regardless of the posted limit. 65% routinely exceed whatever speed limit is posted.

Let's apply those statistics to 5th street. There are currently 17,950 vehicles per day that cross the SDDOT permanent counting station at 5th and St. Cloud. The Rapid City MPO traffic count is 25,204 vehicles per day on 5th street. Average those and you get about 21,547 vehicles per day going through the intersection of 5th and Franklin. If we assume that 65% of those are speeding, that means 14,023 vehicles per day are going at speeds that will cause a 50-80% chance of death should they hit a child. The number of vehicles will surely increase as the extension of 5th street to Catron Blvd opens up.

What should be done?

- A crosswalk needs to be installed immediately at 5th and Franklin. This will serve to assist all pedestrians crossing 5th to do so safely, and will also be a warning to drivers that pedestrian traffic should be expected in that area.
- City-wide laws should be changed to make the speed limit 15mph in any school crosswalk "when children are present." Children in crosswalks deserve the same protection that is afforded to children in school zones.
- Fines for traffic violations in school zones OR school crosswalks should be tripled.
- The city engineer should study the impact of opening up 5th to Catron, if that has not already been done, and install a traffic light at 5th and Franklin if needed, to break up the flow of traffic on 5th Street. Currently it is difficult to find any break in the flow for a car to cross 5th, much less a pedestrian.
- I would challenge each councilman, the Mayor, and the traffic engineer to go to 5th and Franklin at 3 p.m. and try to cross 5th on foot.
- Enforcement of traffic laws should be aggressive and consistent. I have heard people say "I speed, but not toward the end of the month, cause that's when the cops are out." While the police dept has increased the number of tickets given out over the past years, the fact remains that about 65% of drivers are speeding, gunning through yellow lights, or flat out running red lights.
- Money needs to be budgeted for safety improvement and/or accident prevention. In checking the rcgov.org website I noted that for 2004-2006 the total amount of money budgeted for

safety improvements was \$128,000 and that came from state and federal funds. No local money has been budgeted for safety or prevention through 2006. This is not defensible when we have a child struggling to live simply because he was trying to cross a street.

- The Mayor and council should instruct the PATH committee to pursue Pedestrian Friendly status for Rapid City.

The City of Rapid City itself is at a crossroad with regard to Pedestrian safety. You, as a council, have the power to take definitive action, or the City can continue to place its child pedestrians **and drivers** at very real risk for permanent harm. The choice is yours. I urge you to do the right thing. And start at 5th and Franklin.

Thank you.