

Memo

February 10, 2015

To: City and Borough of Sitka Assembly

Subject: 2016 Safe Streets - Focused Driver ordinance

In March of 2015 the Health Needs and Human Services Commission began discussing distracted driving, which is very common in Sitka. The group indicated this was a health issue and that the recommended best practice, which includes legislative action, could help prevent a tragedy. We have sensible guidelines and enforcement for speeding and drunk driving, but are severely lacking when it comes to distracted driving. In Alaska there is a State law prohibiting texting while driving but nothing to address all the other forms of distracted driving which are both common and problematic.

The Health Needs and Human Services Commission found a well thought out ordinance from Austin, Texas (which prohibits the use of hand held portable devices while driving or bicycling) and used that as a template to build our own local ordinance. Sitka's ordinance, like Austin's, focuses on the most common form of distracted driving: cell phone use.

According to the National Safety Council, in 2008, 28% of all crashes were attributed to cell phone use resulting in 1.6 million crashes and 645,000 injuries. Using a cell phone while driving increases the chance of a crash by 4 times according to the nonprofit Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Many local residents have shared stories of distracted driving contributing to collisions and hair raising close calls. The intent of the 2016 Safe Streets – Focused Drivers ordinance is to reduce Sitka's risk of experiencing crashes, injuries and even fatalities caused by distracted driving. Sitkans walk and bike at significantly higher rates than the national average, so we have a potentially deadly combination of having lots of vulnerable roadway users and lots of distracted motorists.

An observation survey of 265 motorists in Sitka from February of 2015, showed 21% of drivers clearly were multitasking and had one hand off the wheel and on something else, usually a cell phone. Talking on a hand-held cell phone while driving is banned in 46 countries plus 14 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and many municipalities. This is a positive trend that will save lives.

The overall goal of the ordinance and the accompanying injury prevention project; is to cut the number of distracted drivers in half (under 10%) as measured by the post project survey of Sitka drivers which is scheduled for March 2016. If this goal is achieved, Sitka will undoubtedly be a safer town for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.

On September 8th the Health Needs and Human Services Commission (HNHSC) voted unanimously to approve the Safe Streets – Focused Drivers draft ordinance. On September 23rd the Police and Fire Commission also reviewed, evaluated and voted to endorse this same ordinance. The ordinance went through the City's Legal Department where it was reviewed and was further refined. The final draft was unanimously passed at the Health Needs and Human Services Commission on Feb. 9. Now the ordinance

will go before the Assembly for consideration. Please feel free to contact any of us about this important public safety ordinance.

Thank you for your consideration and service,

Doug Osborne, Chair CBS Health Needs and Human Services Commission,

Loyd Platson, Vice Chair CBS Health Needs and Human Services Commission, and
Chair CBS Police and Fire Commission

Don Jones, Vice Chair CBS Police and Fire Commission