

Flashing Stop Signs Debut Near Boyer Valley School in Dunlap

DUNLAP — The City of Dunlap secured grant funding to improve pedestrian safety near the school by upgrading portable stop signs with solar-powered flashing versions.

Portable stop signs have been utilized for years, before and after school hours at two crosswalks north of the school along Iowa Avenue, also known as Highway 37. School staff roll the portable signs into position to stop traffic while students cross before and after school.

City officials said concerns had been raised about motorists failing to stop, even when the signs were in place.

City Clerk Meredith Van Houten said she was contacted about the issue and began exploring ways to make the crosswalks more visible.

Van Houten applied for and secured funding through the Harrison County Community Foundation to purchase solar-lit flashing stop signs. City employees Ryan Donscheski, Matt Koski and Tony Warnock attached the new signs to portable bases they fabricated. The new signs were debuted on February 18.

Officials hope the enhanced visibility will encourage drivers to pay closer attention and respect the crosswalks.

Chaise Mefferd, who owns Mefferd's Milestones, a daycare directly across from the school, said safety concerns have been ongoing. Children from her daycare use one of the crosswalks daily.

"I opened my childcare business in May of 2022," Mefferd said. "That following fall, when school started, I began to notice how dangerous the crosswalk was in front of the school. I called City Hall to express my concerns, and Meredith was helpful in speaking with the police department about having officers more available around the beginning and end of the school day."

Mefferd described multiple close calls involving drivers who failed to stop.

"One day, the daycare children, several neighborhood kids, and I were standing at the crosswalk waiting to cross the street when a car sped through the stop sign and crosswalk while we were standing there in plain sight," she said. "In another separate incident, a semi-truck drove through, which really, really frustrated me."

Following those incidents, Mefferd said Van Houten worked to find a solution.

"I don't believe I'd be exaggerating when I say this happens on a daily basis," Mefferd said.

“We are fortunate that there has not been a fatality, but definitely a lot of close calls. I am so very grateful for Meredith’s help in this matter. I truly hope this helps. Parents also need to have serious conversations with their students and student drivers about the importance of safety. Just last week, a student almost ran over a middle schooler and his two younger siblings while they were in the crosswalk.”

Under Iowa law, pedestrians have the right-of-way at crosswalks, whether marked or unmarked, unless traffic is being directed by a signal or a police officer. When pedestrians have the right-of-way, drivers are required to yield.

The upgraded stop signs are part of a broader safety initiative by the city. Plans for this spring and summer include enhanced lighting with additional streetlights and replacement of two deteriorating pedestrian bridges. Both projects will improve safety for Dunlap pedestrians in general.

