

Safer Skillman Ave. Coalition – Residents Call for Safety Improvements at 52nd & Skillman

On Friday, September 19, over 200 neighbors expressed their support for a plan to make the intersection of 52nd Street and Skillman Avenue safer. The plan would make it easier for drivers to see oncoming traffic by converting two or three parking spaces to sidewalk. This technique is already employed at several intersections around the neighborhood, including one half a block away at the corner of 52nd Street and 39th Drive.

On May 13, an eight-year-old girl crossing 52nd Street on her way to P.S. 11 was hit by an SUV and injured. Sharon Utakis was walking her son to school and saw the crash. "The driver rolled right through the stop sign and knocked the girl down," she said. "I don't think she was even looking for children crossing the street." The girl was taken to Elmhurst Hospital with minor injuries and released the same day.

In response to the crash, the Department of Transportation has installed a school crossing sign and painted warnings on the street, but it is still very difficult for motorists exiting 52nd Street to see traffic on Skillman Avenue, because their vision is blocked by parked cars. Many drivers are so focused on oncoming cars that they forget to look for people crossing. Jimmy Fox (NYPD, retired) lives on 52nd Street and drives through the intersection on a regular basis. "There isn't a time I come out of there that there isn't a problem," he said. Utakis agreed. "I see cars rolling through that crosswalk all the time without stopping or looking," she said.

The Safer Skillman Avenue Coalition, a group of concerned residents, has been asking the DOT to address the visibility issue. They

chose Park(ing) Day 2008, a nationwide event, to draw attention to the conditions at the corner of 52nd and Skillman. "Here in Woodside we have sidewalk space, but what we don't have is safety," said 52nd Street resident Abby Schoneboom, who organized the event on Skillman Avenue. To attract the attention of their neighbors, Schoneboom spread sod donated by Transportation Alternatives on one of the parking spaces, and 51st Street resident Angus Grieve-Smith distributed several pounds of pastries donated by La Marjolaine Bakery.

Many residents were thrilled to discover that something might one day be done about this dangerous intersection. The volunteers ran out of their flyers within a few hours.

There were several productive discussions about strategies to improve the intersection, and about other dangerous conditions at 51st and 50th Streets. By the end of the day, 201 neighbors and fourteen visitors had signed the petition.

The Coalition has sent the petition to the DOT, and on Thursday November 6 they plan to present it to Community Board 2 and ask the Board to sign on. "Several members of the Community Board have already indicated their support," says Coalition member David Rosasco, who has a daughter in second grade, "so we're pretty optimistic. We know how hard it is to find parking in this area, but most people agree that it's worth giving up a few spaces for our children's safety."

