

Council Member Romero introduced the following:

RESOLUTION NUMBER 15.22.22R

A RESOLUTION OF THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ALBANY RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF WALKABILITY THROUGHOUT THE CITY AND CALLING ON THE ALBANY POLICE DEPARTMENT’S TRAFFIC SAFETY DIVISION TO ADOPT A POLICY ENSURING THAT PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS ARE AUTOMATICALLY INCLUDED WHENEVER TRAFFIC SIGNALS ARE CHANGED, UPGRADED, OR INSTALLED.

WHEREAS, the City of Albany strives to protect all of its citizens, including vulnerable road users such as pedestrians; and

WHEREAS, the City of Albany recognizes the numerous benefits of walkability, including reduced carbon emissions, improved health, reduced congestion, reduced used of infrastructure, pedestrian safety, higher property values, lower crime rates, and better ability to attract and retain young people and families; and

WHEREAS, the City of Albany currently has installed pedestrian-actuated signals (colloquially known as “pedestrian push button”) at many intersections, requiring pedestrians to press a button before a pedestrian signal will activate; and

WHEREAS, these pedestrian-actuated signals reduce the overall frequency of pedestrian signals and increase – sometimes drastically – the wait times for pedestrians who wish to legally cross; and

WHEREAS, this infrastructure may inadvertently encourage jaywalking behavior or confusion among pedestrians and motorists alike; and

WHEREAS, these buttons have a legitimate purpose (in very low-traffic areas) of causing a traffic signal cycle to change when the signal would ordinarily never change; and

WHEREAS, in intersections with frequently cycling traffic signals, these buttons serve to prioritize vehicle traffic ahead of pedestrians by effectively turning off the pedestrian signals until the button is pressed; and

WHEREAS, it is fundamental to walkability that pedestrian signals should occur at least as often as signals for motor vehicles; and

WHEREAS, it is inherently inequitable to prioritize automobiles, which are unattainable for many low-income families, over pedestrians, many of whom are walking to public transit or walking long distances to work to support their families;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Common Council of the City of Albany calls on the Albany Police Department’s Division of Traffic Safety to enforce and

expand its a policy to ensure that pedestrian crossing signals are included as part of every traffic signal cycle in intersections where pedestrians can be expected to be present, regardless of whether a button is pressed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Common Council of the City of Albany calls on the Department of Police to ensure that when any signals are changed, upgraded, or installed, that pedestrian-actuated signals aligned with that policy are included.

To: Danielle Gillespie, City Clerk
From: Gabirella Romero, Council Member, 6th Ward
Re: Common Council Legislation
Supporting Memorandum
Date: January 27, 2022
Sponsor: Council Member Romero

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TITLE

A RESOLUTION OF THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ALBANY RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF WALKABILITY THROUGHOUT THE CITY AND CALLING ON THE ALBANY POLICE DEPARTMENT'S TRAFFIC SAFETY DIVISION TO ADOPT A POLICY ENSURING THAT PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS ARE AUTOMATICALLY INCLUDED WHENEVER TRAFFIC SIGNALS ARE CHANGED, UPGRADED, OR INSTALLED.

GENERAL PURPOSE OF LEGISLATION:

To urge the Police Department's Division of Traffic Safety to include pedestrian signaling regardless of whether or not a walk signal is requested at the intersection where a traffic signal (stop light) is present.

NECESSITY FOR LEGISLATION AND ANY CHANGE TO EXISTING LAW

There is an interest across the city in improving walkability. Albany is a beautiful city with a historic, walkable core, and transit-friendly outer neighborhoods but all neighborhoods across the city could be improved to make walking easier, safer and more useful. Many of Albany's newly designed intersections (and even more of the older ones) are being built with beg buttons (sometimes known as "actuated pedestrian signals") that require pedestrians to press a button to beg for a pedestrian signal, even if the signal is already changing for cars travelling in the same direction. As a result, those who wish to cross legally must often wait through an entire light cycle even though it is obviously safe to cross. Naturally, the overwhelming majority who are not content to wait two or three minutes at every corner cross anyway. In a system designed to prioritize cars and thwart pedestrians, otherwise law-abiding citizens begin to rationalize jaywalking.

Beg buttons are designed to prioritize car traffic. Even the National Association of City Traffic Engineers says that actuated signals are "generally not preferable," especially for urban areas. These buttons are deeply counterproductive in a city attempting to revitalize its downtown core. Walking is a popular, practical, and desirable way to get around town. It is also key to Albany's continued growth and vibrancy. According to a recent Urban Land Institute survey, 50% of people rank walkability as one of their top concerns when deciding where to live, while the Brookings Institute found that a whopping 63% of Millennials would prefer to live in an area

where they don't need to drive a car every day. Dense and walkable neighborhoods also generate much more revenue in property taxes per acre than expensive and hard-to-maintain suburban sprawl.

FISCAL IMPACT(S)

TBD