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The median on Mississippi Drive was designed to allow vehicles to drive over the curb in the event that emergency vehicles needed to pass a stop motorist in their direction of travel.



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RULES OF THE ROAD – PULL TO THE RIGHT AND STOP

Questions on the redesigned Mississippi Drive and emergency vehicles

MUSCATINE, Iowa – Imagine, if you will, that you are driving on Mississippi Drive with the windows up, heater going full blast (at least at this time of year), and the radio on. You are the quintessential driver ... both hands on the wheel, speed limit observed, cell phone put away, eyes on the road ahead, and dutifully checking the rear view mirror just as you were taught during driver's education.

All seems well as you head west away from downtown, or head east into the downtown area. All is well until you notice the red and blue emergency vehicle lights flashing behind you. And they are getting closer.

What do you do?

- A: Move as far right as you can and stop to let the vehicle(s) pass?
- B: Speed up and move to the safest area ahead of you to pull over?
- C: Move left onto the median and let the emergency vehicles pass on the right?
- D: Panic and remain undecided what to do?

Believe it or not, the designers for the Mississippi Drive reconstruction project looked at traffic flow and responding emergency vehicles along many other situations when the new roadway was developed. Dropping the roadway from four lanes to two, the construction of medians, back-in angle parking, and vehicle and pedestrian safety were among the concerns that went



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into designing a roadway that would function as the perfect bridge between the riverfront and downtown Muscatine.

Back-in angled parking has been in place since Mississippi Drive reopened in December and, for the most part, drivers have found that it is easier and safer than front-in angled parking or parallel parking.

Now the discussion turns to what do drivers do, especially near the bluffs, when an emergency vehicle approaches.

“We discussed this at the last Traffic Committee meeting,” Brian Stineman, director of the Department of Public Works, said.

Iowa Code states that drivers must yield the right-of-way to a police vehicle, fire engine, ambulance, or other emergency vehicle using a siren or air horn, and a red or blue flashing light by pulling over to the right edge of the road, or as near to the right as possible, when they see or hear an emergency vehicle approaching from any direction. Most sections of the redesigned Mississippi Drive have ample room for a driver to move to the right.

“One of the important design features of Mississippi Drive is the fact that the medians are sloped to allow vehicles to drive over them,” Stineman said.

In this case, the emergency vehicle would move left onto the median to bypass the driver who moved to the right and stopped.

“If an emergency vehicle needs to pass, the other cars should get over to the right as far as possible, the same way they would on any other roadway,” Stineman said. “The emergency vehicle will then be able to pass on the left-hand side by going over the median if necessary.”



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Muscatine Assistant Fire Chief Michael Hartman said pulling to the right is the correct message.

“Our most dangerous time is when people pull to the left,” Hartman said. “We teach our people to always pass on the left but it doesn’t always work that way. The curb is designed to be smooth for a reason.”

Muscatine Police Chief Brett Talkington noted that Muscatine police officers are trained to pass on the left when going around vehicles to calls.

“This can be challenging at best, sometimes even in the best road environment, because people generally panic when we come up behind them with lights and sirens,” Talkington said.

The proper procedure, then, is not any different than on any other city street or highway ... you see an emergency vehicle approaching with lights on, move as far right as possible and stop to let the emergency vehicle drive by. It is the responsibility of the emergency vehicle driver to move to the left around you, and proceed on to the call.

“It is a challenge for our officers to go around on the left since we would probably be driving over the median,” Talkington said. “We, as a police force, will make it work one way or another.”

Iowa Code does not stipulate that both sides of a street separated by a median need to stop but it is good advice that if the emergency vehicle is on the other side of the median, pull over to the right and stop anyway.

“In most areas there is plenty of room for an emergency vehicle to drive up onto the median and around a vehicle pulled over in their direction of travel,” Kevin Jenison, communication manager for the City of Muscatine, said. “It is a good idea to let emergency vehicles have plenty of room



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in responding to calls even if that means pulling off to the right and stopping in the opposite lane of travel that is separated by a median."

So the answer to the question of what to do on Mississippi Drive when an emergency vehicle approaches is not any different than on any other city street or highway. Pull as far right as is safely possible, and stop to let the emergency vehicle drive around you.

"We have good people behind the wheel of these emergency vehicles," Gregg Mandsager, city administrator said. "They practice all the time driving on the streets."

If you have questions, download the [Iowa Driver's Manual](#) or contact the Muscatine Police Department at 563-263-9922.

Just don't panic.