

March 13, 2019

To: Mayor Tarter and Members of Falls Church City Council  
From: Citizens Advisory Committee on Transportation

**Subject: 20mph Speed Limits**

Dear Mayor Tarter and members of Council,

The Citizens Advisory Committee on Transportation (CACT) has discussed the idea of reducing speeds on residential streets to 20 mph at its January, February and March meetings this year. The CACT would like to relate the following thoughts and recommendations to Council:

- The CACT agrees that slowing speeds on City streets is desirable. Slower speeds help prevent crashes and reduce harm to people walking. A pedestrian's risk of dying rises dramatically as vehicle speeds increase.
- It is well established that drivers will drive at speeds that feel comfortable based on visual cues from the built environment around them. Physically changing the design of a street (through the installation of speed humps or the addition of bump outs or street trees, for example) is the best way to influence the rate of speed on a given street.
- Any reduction in speed limits should be applied to *all* residential streets. Applying a lower speed limit to some streets, but not others, would be confusing for drivers and unfair to residents. Why would some residential streets, but not others, be worthy of this lower limit?
- Drivers are unlikely to observe a 20mph limit if it "feels" too slow for the street. Any reduction in speed limits would need to be accompanied by enforcement in order to be effective. A broad public awareness campaign would also be needed.
- The Falls Church City Police Department does not have the staff to monitor speeds on all residential streets in the City. Asking the department to enforce 20mph limits on streets that do not currently have a speeding issue would divert resources from streets that *do* have problems with speeding.
- In a memo to staff (attached), Major Rick Campbell of the Falls Church City Police Department writes, "the public expectations [for the results of this change] will exceed the actual results achieved." Major Campbell recounts a test of a 15mph speed limit on Roosevelt Street by Oakwood Cemetery. It was found that hardly any vehicles observed the new lower limit; instead drivers drove the speed that was "comfortable." The speed limit on Roosevelt was returned to 25mph.
- The cost of fabricating and replacing a speed limit sign is roughly \$200. The CACT believes these funds would be better spent on improving sidewalks, crosswalks and bike facilities in the City in order to enhance walkability and bikeability.

**Recommendation:** The CACT does not recommend the City of Falls Church implement a 20mph speed limit on all or selected residential streets at this time.

However, the CACT would support a lower limit on Park Avenue between the Mary Riley Styles Library and the State Theater. The City's vision for turning Park Avenue into a "Great Street" would be supported by a lower speed limit. A lower limit would enhance the comfort of people on foot or bike who are drawn to Park Avenue's many civic and business uses.

Once the Founders Row project is complete, a lower limit at the other end of Park Avenue should also be considered.

The West Falls Church project may also benefit from streets designed for a 20mph speed limit, instead of the 25mph design speed currently proposed for Street A and Street B.

The City wants to encourage more people to walk and bike. Let's make it safer and more pleasant for them to do so in key areas where we already have (or hope to encourage) an even mix of people driving, people walking and people biking.

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