



# CITY OF FALLS CHURCH

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**Date:** March 24, 2019  
**To:** Mayor Tarter and Members of Falls Church City Council  
**From:** Citizens Advisory Committee on Transportation  
**Subject:** 20mph Speed Limits

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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.
- 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.
- 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?
- 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 speed on Park Avenue between the Mary Riley Styles Library and the State Theater. Here, in the “Great Street” area envisioned by the City, the CACT believes the most effective way to slow automobiles and encourage walking and biking is to alter the geometry of the street rather than change speed limit signs.

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 can expect) an even mix of people driving, people walking and people biking.

See the following comments below from Major Rick Campbell: “I believe that the public expectations will exceed the actual results achieved. While reducing the speed limit may reduce the overall average speed for all traffic, it may actually increase the total number of violators. A number of years ago the City reduced the speed limit on Roosevelt Street by the Oakwood Cemetery from 25 mph to 15 mph. For a residential street there was a high volume of traffic with motorists trying to avoid the busier intersection at Seven Corners. Due to the 2 big curves in the road by the entrance to the cemetery, very few cars actually exceeded the 25 mph speed limit. Most of the traffic was at or slightly above the speed limit with a few violators traveling between 32 and 38 mph. Thirty days after the new speed limit signs

were up we began enforcement. Virtually every car that came into radar was traveling in excess of 15 mph. The average speed was just below 25 mph, but tickets were issued for cars going 28 mph or above. In the end, it was decided that the reduced speed limit did not achieve the desired results and the speed limit was returned to 25 mph. Stop signs were placed on Roosevelt Street at the entrance to the cemetery as a traffic calming measure with much better results.”