

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

Summary of outreach activities conducted, and community questions asked, in support of the local street speed limit reduction project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**DIRECTION**

Staff is seeking direction from Council to return with an ordinance that will lower the speed limit on most local streets from 25 mph to 20 mph.

RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to prepare ordinance that will change Bellevue City Code 11.32 Speed to lower the default speed on most local streets from 25 mph to 20 mph.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

In February 2024, Council directed staff to begin community outreach and prepare a draft ordinance to be brought back later in 2024 to lower local street speed limits to 20 mph. The goals of the outreach were to inform, educate and understand the community's questions about what a lower local street speed limit means for Bellevue. Since March, staff has conducted substantial outreach activities and was able to understand many community perspectives on the proposal. Staff will share the findings of the outreach and respond to the questions submitted by the community.

This project to lower the speed limit on most local streets is in response to the top concern heard from residents regarding traffic safety in Bellevue: people drive too fast. To respond to community concerns about speeding, staff employ countermeasures from a robust toolkit (e.g. speed humps, radar feedback signs, traffic circles) to bring down vehicle speeds; staff frequently investigate new/emerging interventions to be considered as part of the traffic calming toolkit.

A lower local street speed limit builds on the positive results of 20 mph speed limits implemented in three Bellevue neighborhoods (Surrey Downs, along the East Bellevue Greenway and in Eastgate) between 2020-2022, all of which lowered high-end speeding. High-end speeding is directly correlated to the chance of surviving a vehicle crash is exponentially higher if hit by vehicle traveling 20 mph compared to 30 or 40 mph. As such, a lower speed limit will help to make streets safer and more comfortable for people walking and biking in the neighborhood. A lower speed limit supports the City's Vision Zero effort and represents a culture shift for residents in how speeds are managed on local streets: *safety starts on your street*.

Implementing a citywide local speed limit reduction will include:

- replacement of all existing 25 mph (~300) speed limit signs on most local streets with 20 mph

- speed limit sign along with replacing sign posts that do not meet City design standards (~150);
- installation of additional 20 mph speed limit signs, as funds allow, on corridors where additional reinforcement of the speed limit is warranted;
- replacement of existing “25 MPH” pavement marking legends—made of plastic and burned into asphalt roadways—with “20 MPH” pavement marking legends;
- outreach and engagement;
- evaluation of effectiveness.

While lowering the speed limit alone will not automatically encourage all motorists to drive the speed limit, a lower speed limit represents a shift in our traffic safety culture in Bellevue. A lower speed limit communicates to people driving that lower speeds are vital to support safe streets and that it takes collective action and personal responsibility to meet our goal of eliminating serious injuries and fatalities on city streets by 2030. If approved, staff anticipate that speed limit signs in Bellevue will change in fall 2025 or spring 2026.



Outreach activities

The goals of outreach for this project includes informing, educating, and understanding questions the community has about a lower default speed limit on local streets. Outreach activities included in-person events attended by hundreds of participants, neighborhood association briefings, robust and multilingual communications, and leave-behinds at events where staff could not attend.

To share information about the project, staff attended many City events that had a high number of attendees. These events attracted thousands of people and created opportunity to hand out project information and also engage in conversations with community members. These events included EarthFest at the Botanical Gardens, the 2 Line opening, farmers markets (both Crossroads and Bellevue), Bellevue Family 4th, Welcoming Week and others. When staff could not be in attendance—such as Experience Bellevue, Washington state Beijing Tongxianghui Association’s cultural festival, Kin On Seniors Day and others—a flier with project information was provided. Staff briefed many community associations and networks including the Eastside Easy Rider Collective, Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network, Woodridge Community Association, Bellevue Essentials Alumni, Lochleven Neighborhood BeSafe group and others. Finally, stories and posts in *It’s Your City*, NextDoor and other social media along posts delivered through listservs were shared with tens of thousands of people.

During the outreach activities, there was broad consensus from the community that people drive too quickly in Bellevue neighborhoods. During virtual and in-person engagement, there were five recurring questions that arose. Staff will share these questions along with responses at tonight’s meeting.

1. Will the speed limit be effective?
2. Will the speed limit be enforced?
3. Will there be improved safety outcomes?
4. Will speeds be reduced on arterials?
5. Will there be traffic calming?
6. Will trips take longer?

If approved, outreach and engagement will continue to be a critical aspect of this project to ensure that the entire Bellevue community is aware and prepared for this change. Finally, the project will be studied from an efficacy perspective as well as measuring community sentiment.

Streets changing to 20 mph

Local streets in Bellevue comprise approximately 64% of the street network. Currently, speed limits posted on local streets are 20 mph, 25 mph, or 30 mph with the vast majority of streets posted at 25 mph. As part of this proposal, most streets currently posted at 25 mph will move to a 20 mph speed limit. Based on additional engineering review, there are twelve streets that will remain at 25 mph and all five existing 30 mph local streets will remain at 30 mph (see Attachment A). The streets remaining at 25 mph were identified to retain their existing speed limit based on the lack of modal mixing (e.g. between people driving and walking) and that they generally connect to higher-order roadways (e.g. major arterials). As such, a 25 mph speed limit is more appropriate and better aligned with community expectations regarding what the speed limit should be. The streets remaining at 30 mph will be reviewed as part of the body of work to review speed limits 30+ mph roadways; that work is expected to commence in 2025.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

In 2015, Council adopted Resolution No. 9035 recognizing Vision Zero and that death and serious injury on City streets is unacceptable and preventable. Building on the framework provided in the Resolution, in 2016 Council passed Ordinance No. 6334 adopting three Vision Zero amendments into the City's Comprehensive Plan, including:

- TR-61.2: Develop a programmatic approach to Vision Zero that integrates components of Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engineering, Equity and Evaluation.

Since being incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan, there has been substantial involvement from the Transportation Commission and Council, including the June 2020 approval of Resolution No. 9769 which adopted a Safe Systems approach to move Bellevue towards Vision Zero. This holistic-based approach to road safety bundles strategies focused on safe people, safe streets, safe speeds and safe vehicles—as well as the supporting elements of leadership, culture, partnerships and data. A lower speed limit helps to deliver on the City's commitment to Vision Zero and is a cornerstone of the safe speeds approach.

A Vision Zero Strategic Plan was approved in 2020 by the City Manager, further directing staff to create annual Vision Zero Action Plans (VZAP). The 2024 VZAP includes an action to “Advance citywide efforts to implement a local street speed limit reduction policy reducing speed limits on local streets to 20 mph.”

Advancing a lower speed limit on local streets is consistent with the following policy in the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan:

- TR-153: Employ traffic calming measures to slow vehicular travel speed along residential streets and to reduce the volume of cut-through traffic.

State code allows local agencies to lower the speed limit without an engineering study. The primary mechanism to alter City speed limits is via ordinance to change BCC 11.32 Speed. If approved, 11.32 Speed will change slightly to set a default street speed limit to 20 mph (except as otherwise listed).

Fiscal Impact

If Council approves the speed limit reduction on local streets, design and implementation will be paid for out of the safety allocation of the Neighborhood Safety and Connectivity portion of levy approved by voters in 2016 (CIP Plan No. PW-R-199) and through the Neighborhood Traffic Safety Program (CIP Plan No. PW-M-7). Sufficient funding for these projects exists in the 2023-2029 General Capital Investment Program (CIP).

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to prepare ordinance that will change Bellevue City Code 11.32 Speed to lower the default speed on most local streets from 25 mph to 20 mph.
2. Provide alternative direction to staff

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Map of future speed limits for local streets
- B. CIP Project Description (PW-R-199)
- C. CIP Project Description (PW-M-7)
- D. Proposed amendments to Chapter 11.32 of the Bellevue City Code

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A