

CITY COUNCIL REGULAR SESSION

Ordinance relating to speed limits; amending Chapter 11.32 of the Bellevue City Code (BCC) to add a new Section 11.32.015 to establish a speed limit of 20 miles per hour (mph) on all streets in the Surrey Downs neighborhood.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In support of the City's Vision Zero effort and in response to community concerns about high vehicle speeds, this Ordinance will amend the BCC to adopt a new Section 11.32.015 establishing a 20 mph speed limit on all streets in the Surrey Downs neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATION

Move to adopt Ordinance No. 6529

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Residents in the Surrey Downs neighborhood have long cared about traffic safety in the neighborhood, as evidenced by multiple community concerns about high vehicle speeds and pedestrian safety communicated to Transportation Department staff over the years. The streets in the neighborhood, which currently have a 25 mph speed limit, are largely without sidewalks and are proximate to high pedestrian traffic areas including downtown, parks, schools and the future East Main light rail station.

The City's Neighborhood Traffic Safety Services (NTSS) group is charged with reviewing speeding and other traffic safety concerns on residential streets in Bellevue. As part of a yearly review process by NTSS to identify projects for funding, the Surrey Downs neighborhood was reviewed alongside more than 100 other locations throughout the City that have been flagged for traffic safety concerns by community members for project funding. The prioritization process considers vehicle speeds, traffic volumes, presence of pedestrian facilities, collisions, and proximity to pedestrian generators. The Surrey Downs neighborhood prioritized high due to moderate vehicle speeds, lack of sidewalks, and proximity to the Surrey Downs park, Bellevue High School and future East Main light rail station. After being selected for funding and reviewing context-appropriate measures to encourage people driving to slow down, it was determined that a lower speed limit on all Surrey Downs streets is aligned with goals of reducing vehicle speeds, improving pedestrian safety and supporting neighborhood livability.

If this Ordinance is approved, the speed limit of all streets within the Surrey Downs neighborhood will be reduced from 25 mph to 20 mph in fall 2020. While school zones in Bellevue are signed for 20 mph during certain school hours, this project will be the first in the City to feature a 20 mph speed limit for all

times of the day.

Lowering vehicle speeds helps to make streets safer and more comfortable for people walking in the neighborhood, a key strategy envisioned in the community-supported East Main (Light Rail) Station Area Plan. Further, lower speeds support the City's Vision Zero effort to eliminate serious injuries and fatalities on City streets by 2030. The authority for local municipalities to lower speed limits to 20 mph is codified in RCW 46.61.415 (When local authorities may establish or alter maximum limits).

The call for lowering speed limits on residential streets in Bellevue has been amplified in recent years by Bellevue residents. In a recent inquiry to staff about high vehicle speeds in Northeast Bellevue, one resident noted that "residential speed limits should be 20 mph in the City of Bellevue." In Surrey Downs, a community member noted that on "strictly neighborhood roads, the speed limit of 25 mph is too high" and that "anything over 20 mph is too fast for the conditions" given so many people walking and biking, especially children.

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. A lower speed limit will allow traffic enforcement officers in our Police Department to enforce a speed limit that is more contextually appropriate for the neighborhood. Finally, focused education and encouragement to drive the reduced speed limit is a goal of this project.

There is an increasing body of evidence, both at the national and local levels, signifying that lower vehicle speeds and lower speed limits support likelihood of crash survival and reduce the chance of serious injury. For instance, research from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) indicates that for each 5 mph increase on maximum speed limit, a commensurate 3 percent increase in fatalities was found on non-freeway roads. In Seattle, a recent project lowered the speed limit on a corridor from 30 mph to 25 mph. Absent any additional enforcement or engineering enhancements, vehicle speeds and the number of crashes decreased. Finally, national best practices, such as guidance from the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), of which Bellevue is an affiliate member, recommends a default 20 mph speed limit on streets that have one lane in each direction, volumes less than 6,000 vehicles per day, yield or stop control at multiple intersections and have few or no transit stops. The streets in Surrey Downs, and many other Bellevue neighborhoods, exemplify these characteristics.

Given that this will be the first 20 mph speed limit in Bellevue, the Transportation Department plans to learn how effective changing speed limit signs and neighborhood education can be in reducing vehicle speeds. Traffic studies collected before and after the speed limit reduction will help to determine effectiveness, along with community feedback. The lessons learned from this project may be applied to future efforts to reduce speed limits, however that work is not currently programmed or funded.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

Approving this Ordinance to lower the speed limit is consistent with the following policies 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.

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 directed staff to complete a Vision Zero Action Plan (VZAP). The VZAP is nearing completion in fall 2020 and includes 86 actions, including an action to “Develop a neighborhood slow zone program to slow the speed of people driving to 20 mph.”

Finally, Council approved the “Bellevue East Main Station Area Plan” in 2016. The Plan was recommended by the East Main Citizen Advisory Committee, which included representatives from the Surrey Downs neighborhood. In that plan, there are numerous strategies that support a roadway environment that slows or discourages vehicle traffic and is safer for people walking.

Fiscal Impact

If this Ordinance is approved, some minor sign and speed limit pavement marking legend changes will be required in the Surrey Downs neighborhood to reflect the new speed limit. There is sufficient budget in the Neighborhood Traffic Safety Program (CIP Plan No. PW-M-7) to fund this work. This work will be completed by existing on-call contracting and/or in-house services.

OPTIONS

1. Adopt the Ordinance relating to speed limits; amending Chapter 11.32 of the Bellevue City Code (BCC) to add a new Section 11.32.015 to establish a speed limit of 20 miles per hour (mph) on all streets in the Surrey Downs neighborhood.
2. Do not adopt the Ordinance and provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

- A. Vicinity map
- B. CIP Project Description (PW-M-7)
Proposed Ordinance No. 6529

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A