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## South Bethany Memorandum

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To: Town Council

From: Edie Dondero, Chair, Bicycle & Pedestrian Safety Committee (B&PSC)

Re: Workshop Agenda Item #5, B&PSC Recommendations

Date: December 16, 2021

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In June 2021, an ad-hoc committee was created to evaluate bicycle and pedestrian safety issues in South Bethany, make recommendations to address said issues, and educate property owners, residents, and visitors about safe biking and walking practices/etiquette. The Committee has held three meetings thus far and is proposing the following recommendations for the Council's consideration.

### **1. Install pedestrian warning signs at RRFBs on Coastal Highway.**

DelDOT analysis conducted in July 2021 shows that there has been a 30-39% increase in the number of vehicles stopping at the four crosswalks on Coastal Highway where Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) were recently installed. However, these lighted crossings can create a false sense of safety for pedestrians who assume that vehicles in all four lanes of traffic will stop to permit safe crossing. Some residents have complained that the RRFBs make crossing Coastal Highway *more* dangerous than before, and there is much anecdotal evidence of near misses of both vehicle-vehicle crashes (rear end collisions) and vehicle-pedestrian collisions. The Committee recommends that the Town install signage at each of the RFBs warning pedestrians to ensure vehicles in all lanes have stopped before stepping into the crosswalk. The wording is at the discretion of the Council and DelDOT but an example is shown in Photo 1 (Photo 2 shows the RRFBs as-is). {\*Note: DelDOT has indicated that it has no objection to such signage being installed by the Town.}

### **2. Improve the design and increase the number of pedestrian directional stencils (the “walking man”) and install signs advising pedestrians to walk facing traffic and cyclists to ride with the flow of traffic.**

Given that there are no sidewalks on the residential streets of South Bethany, there needs to be concerted effort to educate pedestrians on the protocol of walking while facing traffic, which is demonstrably safer as it provides a view of approaching vehicles. Several “walking man” figures (photo 3) were stenciled on the road surface along Black Gum Drive, but the lack of accompanying text or directional arrows make them ineffective. A better version used in Fenwick Island is pictured in photo 4. Supplemental signage used in Fenwick Island in addition to the on-street stencils is shown in photo 5. While the Committee acknowledges concerns about “sign pollution” and does not wish to contribute to this problem, it believes that signage can be placed on the posts of existing stop signs without negatively impacting aesthetics. Thus, it recommends both signage and improved on-street stencils in select locations including, at a minimum, all Cat Hill roads, Evergreen Road, and Sea Side and Anchorage Drives.

### **3. Lower the speed limit on all Town roads (excluding Coastal Highway and Kent Avenue) to 15mph.**

The Committee recognizes that expecting perfect behavior from drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists is unrealistic and that people will make mistakes. Therefore, speed limits should be set so that when someone errs, the result is not serious injury or loss of life.

If a driver crashes into a pedestrian at 30 mph, the person hit has a 20 percent chance of dying. At 20 mph, the risk of death falls to 7 percent. [See *Figures 1 and 2.*] And while lower speed limits will reduce crash fatality rates for everyone, this is especially true for seniors, who have the highest risk of death and injury on our roads. At 30 mph, 20 percent of people will die if they are struck, but 37% percent of those over 70 will die. This is an important consideration for South Bethany as 50% of our population is over the median age of 69 years.

It is also true that driving at higher speeds increases vehicle stopping distance (the time to react plus the time to brake), resulting in more crashes (*See Figure 3.*) At high speeds, crashes are also more severe, as the energy involved in stopping increases as speed rises. Once cars travel over 20 mph, they rapidly become more deadly.

While lowering speed limits by 5mph is not a guaranteed solution to road safety concerns and must be matched with enforcement, it is one simple and effective step the Town can take to enhance the safety of our residents and visitors. Chief Lovins has expressed his support for this change. And nearby towns—including Bethany Beach, Ocean View and Fenwick Island—all have a 15mph speed limit on at least some of their residential streets.

South Bethany's streets are narrow, lack sidewalks, and have ROWs that are mostly obstructed by trash cans, mailboxes, and/or other impediments, yet are heavily utilized by pedestrians and cyclists who, as a result, are forced to travel in the carriageway (i.e., on the pavement). There are limited alternative options available to the Town to rectify this problem. As such, the Committee recommends lowering the speed limit to 15mph on Town-owned roads.

As elected officials, we have a moral obligation to lead and follow through on important issues, especially as they relate to our highest priority— public safety. If we can save even one life by reducing speed limits, it will be worth it.



**Photo 1:**  
Example of crosswalk warning sign



**Photo 2:**  
Existing RRFB at Anchorage Drive





**Photo 3:**  
**Walking man stencil on Black Gum Drive**



**Photo 4:**  
**Fenwick Island on-street stencil**



**Photo 5:**  
**Fenwick Island road safety signage**

Figures 1 and 2.

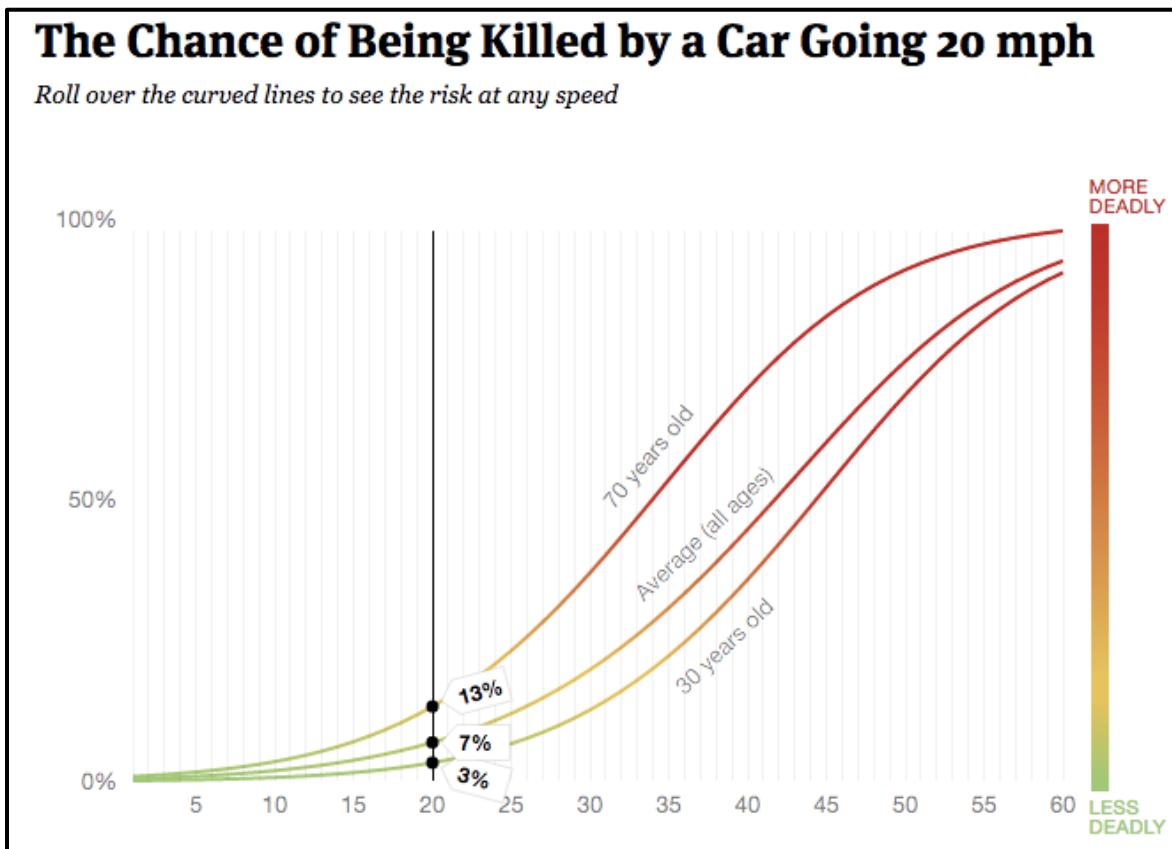
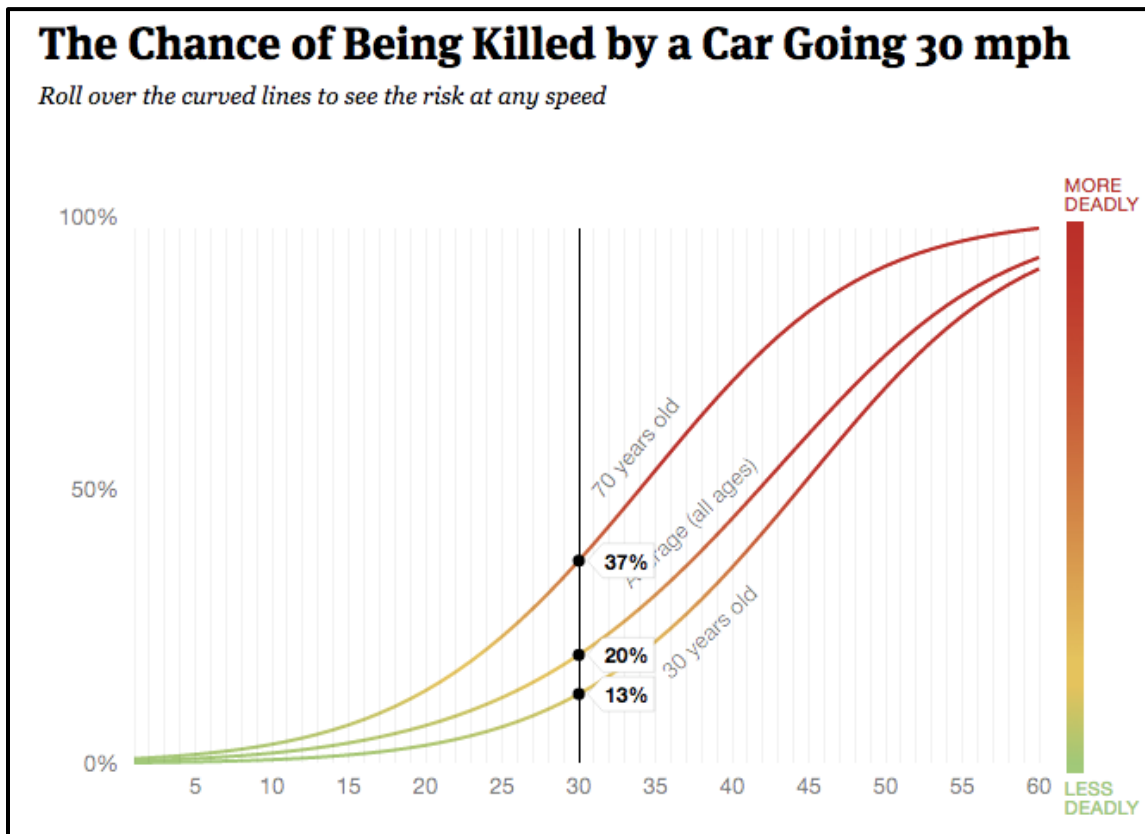


Figure 3. Average Vehicle Stopping Distances at Various Speeds

