

Bicycle & Pedestrian Safety Committee Meeting
October 29, 2021

Attendees: (*in-person*) Edie Dondero (Chair), Dennis Roberts, Kathy Wood, Glenn Tom, Bob Shields, Chief Lovins; (*on phone*) Beth Rosso, Andrea Sokoloff, Dick Oliver

Edie Dondero started the meeting at 10:04 AM. We were unable to approve minutes of previous meeting due to lack of quorum. She reviewed today's agenda and stated that she had received information from DELDOT on two topics:

- The observed data collection by engineers at our crosswalks over the Summer. Engineers were doing data collection on the effectiveness of newly installed flashing yellow lights at intersections in South Bethany. Results showed a 30% to 39% improvement in compliance.
- Potential installation of some red flashing lights at crosswalks like the one in Rehoboth as opposed to all yellow flashing lights. The DELDOT answer was that we did not have the pedestrian density to warrant such an installation and one could cause significant traffic backups in South Bethany.

Chief Lovins then provided a briefing which described some facts about pedestrian safety and vehicle speed in Delaware. Highlights included:

- Fact that Delaware had already (by end of October) exceeded 2020 pedestrian fatalities. Majority were 55 years of age or older.
- Delaware had a long history of being high in per capita pedestrian fatalities
- From 6/1/19 to 10/29/21, South Bethany had 29 vehicle collisions with two fatalities. Six had injuries, three were with bicycles. Twenty of the accidents were on Route One and eight were on residential streets. Primary cause was inattentive drivers. Speed was not listed as a factor in any.
- During above period, SB Police had issued 3,102 citations of which 3,097 were on Route One. Only five were issued on residential streets.
- Black Gum and Bayshore were the streets causing the most citizen complaints, but responding officers were unable to verify the incidents.
- Charts from a database larger than Delaware showed that injuries and deaths increase significantly with speed. 20 MPH appeared to be an inflection point above which injuries and deaths increased more rapidly.

Speed Limits. A discussion amongst committee members followed. Chief Lovins – in response to a question – mentioned that the Town Council was considering a recommendation to reduce speed on Route One from 35 to 30 MPH. He strongly stated that – contrary to media reports – this was not being considered for financial reasons but was being driven by safety concerns. He

pointed out that the request to reduce the speed limit was originated by Bethany Beach, and they have asked South Bethany, Middlesex and Sea Colony to support their petition to DelDOT. The Town Council response was to ask if this could be considered a year-round modification rather than seasonal to reduce motorist confusion. No decision by the SB Council has yet been made.

Glenn Tom pointed out that Dewey Beach had gone to a 25MPH speed limit. The Chief – having served in that town – said they have a unique situation due to pedestrian density and alcohol abuse. Glenn also noted that the crossings in South Bethany on Route One were a particular problem. Edie said we would cover those in a future meeting. The Chief was still researching any evidence from surrounding towns that had lowered their speed limits to 15MPH on residential streets. Dick Oliver did not think reducing speeds on Route One would have much impact but thought that reductions on residential streets (Black Gum in particular) would be beneficial. Chief Lovins concurred that a speed reduction on Route One would not make much difference to overall safety. Kathy Wood asked if traffic engineers had been consulted. It is unknown whether Bethany Beach had done so before making the request to lower the speed limit.

Edie pointed out that we should focus on residential speed limits as the Town Council is working the Route One issue. Dick Oliver restated his view that Cat Hill (by which he meant Evergreen through Black Gum) particularly required a speed reduction. Edie supported that with her own observations. Andrea Sokoloff added that she had seen people flying through Black Gum – particularly in the afternoon as people got out of work. Discussion then shifted to Ocean Drive where it was pointed out that – in season – it is difficult to exceed the speed limit due to pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Bob Shields added that Sea Side Drive in Sandpiper Village should be included in discussions about Ocean Drive as the same type of driving pattern existed there. Both areas were very congested in summer months, but often higher speeds existed after hours and in the off season. He also mentioned enforcement problems – in that reducing speed limits would have no meaning unless enforcement efforts were increased. Dennis Roberts said we should defer to Chief Lovins' views on speed limits. He added that the briefing showed that people think they can get away with a 5 to 10MPH increase over posted speed limits so we need to take that into account on any recommendation. Kathy Wood indicated that driving at a sustained 15 MPH is difficult. It is natural for drivers to creep up to 20 MPH. She also thought adding signs stating that speed limits are “strictly enforced” could be useful. Glenn Tom added that he is a cycling enthusiast and has much experience riding through South Bethany. He said Evergreen and Canal are a major problem. Beth Rosso pointed out that – as the Chief's briefing showed distracted drivers are major problem – we should investigate getting more digital signs to alert drivers of their speed. Later, it was recommended to add a flashing light to those displays when the driver is exceeding the speed limit. A consensus was forming in the Committee to make a recommendation to the Town Council to reduce speed limits to 15 MPH throughout South Bethany because doing it in selected locations only would add to the confusion. Aids like additional digital signage also appeared to be potential solution.

We decided to wait before making a final recommendation until we heard back from Chief Lovins about the impact of speed limit reductions in neighboring towns.

Pedestrian Activity. Dick Oliver said that regardless about what we do on speed limits, we would have to do something to impact pedestrian behavior to have a good impact. Various people commented on the poor performance of pedestrians – particularly in the summer months ---of walking in the center of roads often four or five persons abreast with no regard for vehicles. He stated we also need to reinforce the idea that it is essential for pedestrians to face oncoming traffic. Edie Dondero showed pictures of signs and pavement stencils in Fenwick which appeared to raise pedestrian safety consciousness. Apparently, stencils had been considered by the Town Council, and an effort made to see if we could borrow Fenwick's stencils. However, they were too large for some of South Bethany's streets. After several minutes of discussion in which all Committee members agreed that this approach made sense, a vote was taken and unanimously passed (7-0) on forwarding the following recommendation to Town Council:

The Bicycle & Pedestrian Safety Ad Hoc Committee recommends that the Town Council consider the improvement and expansion of roadway stencils and the installation of cyclist and pedestrian safety signage.

Edie Dondero indicated she would hold on that recommendation until we decided on a speed limit recommendation for the town at our next meeting. She also indicated that we would also address methods to improve pedestrian understanding of the crosswalk yellow flashing lights at next scheduled meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 11:15AM.