

MEMORANDUM

TO: Timothy J. Baroody, City Manager
FROM: Mike Craig, Senior Planner
DATE: May 3, 2022 for the May 10 Council Meeting
RE: Reducing the Speed Limit within the Downtown Business District

Issue

The existing speed limit on major Downtown streets should be reduced from 25 to 20 MPH.

Recommendation

Review the proposed ordinance and map in anticipation of taking action on an ordinance reducing the speed limit at the Council's May 10 meeting.

Background

The City Government is focused on enhancing the pedestrian safety throughout the City. One way to reduce conflict between cars and pedestrians is by lowering speed limits where warranted and legally permissible. The City's Downtown Core is a walkable activity center with a high pedestrian volume throughout the year. The concentration of attractions such as the thriving business district, historic architecture, and newly opened Riverfront Park create a walkable environment even for those who come to town for a visit by train or in their automobile.

Virginia State Code authorizes the local governing body to reduce the speed limit to 20 MPH in a "business district". The state code definition of a business district is an area of the City where 75 percent or more of the property abutting a street, on either side of the street, for a distance of 300 feet or more is used for actual business purposes.

The City Manager's office, Attorney's office, Police, Transportation, Public Works, and Planning Departments convened to identify the areas within the Downtown Core where the State Code permitted the reduction of the speed limit. Based on the review, this group recommends the City Council reduce the speed limit on the following road segments from 25 to 20 MPH:

1. *Sophia Street between Lafayette Boulevard and Amelia Street;*
2. *Caroline Street between Lafayette Boulevard and Lewis Street;*
3. *William Street between Washington Avenue and Sophia Street; and*
4. *Lafayette Street between Sophia Street and Prince Edward Street.*

City Council Discussion on April 26 and Public Comment

Transmittal of this item on April 26 produced questions from the both the Council and general public. The questions generally related to two items:

1. What is the origin of the proposed change in speed limit?

The City's Parks, Recreation and Events Department worked with Main Street to attract a grant in 2018. With 200+ events annually this planning just made sense. This grant was used in part to develop plans and shape polices to better manage Downtown as a quickly emerging venue. With the development of Riverfront Park, and the rebuild of the Chatham Bridge with enhanced pedestrian trail connectivity, the timing was perfect. Fredericksburg's historic Downtown is buzzing with new investment and activity, and the City wishes to proactively maintain safety.

2. A broader safety program is desirable. How does this change fit into a broader safety program?

The proposed ordinance is just one measure to increase pedestrian safety – not the first and not the last. It follows new traffic signalization, the crosswalk bollards, installation of traffic calming measures, and increased traffic enforcement measures for pedestrian and motor vehicle safety throughout the City.

The downtown "business district" pedestrian/motor vehicle conflicts are especially acute, due to the high traffic volume of each, the presence of parked cars, the number of businesses on either side of the street (i.e. draws for pedestrians, bicyclists, and automobiles). Reducing the speed limit in this district could have an immediate impact on pedestrian safety.

Physical traffic calming is the other major leg of the strategy in areas with a high level of pedestrian activity. A significant investment in traffic calming is on-going and in conformance with the City's Small Area Plan, such as:

- *Bump out crossings have been installed at the Lewis Street Bicycle Boulevard's intersection with Caroline and Princess Anne Streets within the last few years.*
- *The conversion of the one way traffic pair consisting of Washington Avenue, Fall Hill Avenue, and Maury Street north of the canal is included in the FY 23 Capital Improvements Plan. The City Council will consider second read on the Capital Improvements Plan at their meeting on May 10. Physical construction of this improvement will occur in FY 23.*
- *The Downtown Engineering Study is included in the FY 23 Capital Improvements Plan. The Downtown Engineering Study will evaluate concepts include:*
 - *Conversion of the following one way traffic pairs to two way: Princess Anne Street and Caroline Street north of William Street, Princess Anne Street and Caroline Street south of Lafayette Boulevard, and William Street and Amelia Street.*
 - *Engineering of on-street bicycle boulevards including: an on-street facility from the Bankside Trail north to the Virginia Heritage Trail, an on-street facility from the Train Station south along Caroline Street as part of the Dixon Park Connector, and an on-street facility connecting the Heritage Trail and the VCR Trail along Prince Edward Street.*
 - *Evaluation of other traffic calming concepts and / or speed limit reductions.*

The City's concern with pedestrian safety is not limited to the "business district" area; this is simply one step that the Manager is recommending that the City Council should take to continue to protect public safety.

Fiscal Impact

The speed limit change will require changes in street signage.

Attachments:

1. Draft ordinance reducing the speed limit on the major business district streets and map.

Downtown Business Area Speed Limit Reduction from 25 to 20 M.P.H.

 Street segments where Speed Limit to be reduced from 25 to 20 M.P.H.

 T-5 Urban Core Transect (Downtown)

 "Business Area" (defined by Va. State Code §46.2-100)





May 10, 2022
Regular Meeting
Ordinance No. 22-__

MOTION:

SECOND:

RE: Reducing the Speed Limit from 25 Miles Per Hour to 20 Miles Per Hour in the Downtown Business District

ACTION: APPROVED: Ayes: 0; Nays: 0

FIRST READ: _____ **SECOND READ:** _____

Sec. I. Introduction.

Virginia Code §46.2-1300 authorizes a local governing body to reduce the speed limit to less than 25 miles per hour, but no less than 15 miles per hour, on any highway within its boundaries that is located in a business district, provided that such reduced speed limit is indicated by lawfully placed signs. A “business district” is defined as the territory contiguous to a highway where 75 percent or more of the property contiguous to a highway, on either side of the highway, for a distance of 300 feet or more along the highway, is occupied by land and buildings actually in use for business purposes.

The City Manager has presented a map of downtown Fredericksburg showing those streets that meet the definition of a “business district,” with a recommendation to reduce the speed limit on these streets from 25 miles per hour to 20 miles per hour, in the interest of public safety, including motor vehicle and pedestrian safety. After considering this recommendation, the City Council concludes that the proposed reduction of the speed limit is in the public interest.

Sec. II. City Code amendment.

The City Code is amended by adding a new section 58-133 “Reduced speed limit in the Downtown Business District,” as follows:

§58-133. Reduced speed limit in the Downtown Business District.

- A. For purposes of the reduced speed limit in this section, the Downtown Business District *is comprised of the following streets:*

1. *Sophia Street between Lafayette Boulevard and Amelia Street;*
 2. *Caroline Street between Lafayette Boulevard and Lewis Street;*
 3. *William Street between Washington Avenue and Sophia Street; and*
 4. *Lafayette Street between Sophia Street and Prince Edward Street.*
- B. *The maximum speed limit on streets in the Downtown Business District shall be 20 miles per hour.*
- C. *The City Manager shall place signs indicating the reduced maximum speed limit on these streets.*

Sec. III. Effective date.

This ordinance becomes effective on July 1, 2022.

Votes:

Ayes:

Nays:

Absent from Vote:

Absent from Meeting:

Approved as to form:

Kathleen Dooley, City Attorney

Clerk's Certificate

I, the undersigned, certify that I am Clerk of Council of the City of Fredericksburg, Virginia, and that the foregoing is a true copy of Ordinance No. 22-__ duly adopted at a meeting of the City Council meeting held May 10, 2022 at which a quorum was present and voted.

***Tonya B. Lacey, MMC
Clerk of Council***