



February 6, 2023

TO: Council President
City Council Members

FROM: Jeff Baumann, Public Works Director

CC: Council Appointees

THROUGH: Rob Hillard, City Manager

SUBJECT: Authorize ODOT to review and approve a posted speed limit of 30 MPH on SR511 between North Park St. and Cedar St.

Purpose and Recommendation

The next step in the process of enacting a proposed speed zone reduction along SR511 (Lorain St.) between North Park St. and Cedar St., from 35 miles per hour to 30 miles per hour, is City Council's adoption of legislation formally requesting ODOT to review and approve the speed limit change.

Background and Discussion

Ohio Revised Code 4511.21(B)(3) establishes a speed limit of "thirty-five miles per hour on all state routes or through highways within municipal corporations outside business districts except as provided in divisions (B)(4) and (6) of this section." *Notes: sub-sections (4) and (6) provide for higher (not lower) speed limits under appropriate circumstances; Lorain St. does not meet the definition of a business district; and school zone speed limits are not applicable to post-secondary institutions.*

Oberlin College's site development plan for the construction of its Science Center and re-development of Kettering Hall was widely anticipated to increase foot traffic across West Lorain St. between Professor and Woodland streets. The City Administration, Oberlin College and others have been concerned about the safety of pedestrians in this convenient and commonly used crossing area linking north and south campus. Various measures have been employed over the years to alert pedestrians to the potential hazard of crossing the state highway outside of a marked crosswalk.

In 2012, the City and the College jointly contracted with TMS Engineers for a traffic speed zone study along Lorain St., from Prospect St. to Berger Court in hopes that a reduction in the speed limit could be justified. Following the prescribed protocol in ODOT's Traffic Engineering Manual, TMS Engineers found that traffic and roadway data supported the posted speed limit of 35 mph required by the Ohio Revised Code.

It is widely accepted among traffic engineering professionals that the severity of traffic crashes increases with vehicle speed. When pedestrians are involved, speed greatly increases the risk of severe injury including death; the risk of a fatality at 35 mph is about double the risk at 30 mph. Staff is concerned that creating a mid-block crosswalk on the state highway in a 35 mph zone could, in fact, make crossing less safe. Vehicles, particularly out-of-town travelers unaccustomed to Oberlin's street use patterns, may not expect pedestrians crossing the state highway on the shortest path to their destination. Pedestrians may assume that they have unconditional right-of-way and are safe in a crosswalk. Ohio's laws at un-signalized crosswalks are described by City Engineer Randall Roberts as "mutual yield" – the vehicle has the right-of-way until the pedestrian is in the crosswalk and vice versa. This has led to many near misses but fortunately very few actual accidents. Safety is further compounded by "distracted" driving (and biking and walking).

In July, 2021, the criteria for speed zone evaluations was changed to provide for consideration of the "high presence of vulnerable road users" (pedestrians, cyclists, and Amish buggies are cited as examples). Randall noted this change and, with the support of City Manager Rob Hillard, Public Works contracted with the GPD Group to re-evaluate the speed limit along Lorain St. We established the study area from North Park St. on the east (as the primary access to the PK-5 elementary school) to Cedar St. (just west of the Oberlin College campus). GPD used radar recorders and tube recorders to collect data at (4) locations in the target area in mid-September after both the public schools and Oberlin College were back in session. We received their final report in November, 2022. After further review and discussion, sharing the information with Oberlin College and following Randall's presentation to City Council on December 5th, we authorized GPD to submit the study to ODOT.

In mid-December, Jeremy Adato, P.E., a traffic engineer with ODOT District 3 responded – first complementing GPD Group on the quality of their work and continuing "I understand the city is requesting a speed limit reduction to 25 mph, but I do not think we can justify that. However, we do feel that a speed limit reduction to 30 mph is justified and appropriate for the entire study section".

Before placing this item on City Council's agenda, Randall and I wanted to meet with Oberlin College Facilities and Construction staff to discuss the range of implications associated with the speed limit reduction. Graphic representations of these recommendations are attached.

- the construction of a mid-block crosswalk between Woodland and Professor streets and the additional recommended countermeasures
- de-commissioning the flashing signal system at Woodland St. and subsequent replacement countermeasures
- the impact of the proposed new dormitory on the west side of Woodland and our recommendation to re-configure the Wilder driveway to align with Woodland St. to allow crosswalks on both sides of the intersection
- design and construction responsibilities
- probable schedule

We met on January 27th with Joe Comar, OC Director of Capital Improvements & Deputy Chief Facilities Officer and Kyle Davis from the Facilities Planning & Construction office. They were very receptive to our recommendations – though unable to make an immediate financial commitment towards the mid-block crosswalk and its associated countermeasures or the re-

configuration of the Wilder driveway and parking/loading areas. Since the new crosswalk is in the immediate area of their Phase III Sustainable Infrastructure Project, they were cautiously optimistic that work could be incorporated into the Phase III SIP work.

With City Council's authorization, Public Works will complete the City's formal request to ODOT to review and approve the speed limit reduction from 35 mph to 30 mph. ODOT requires that our request be accompanied by concurrence from the enforcement authority, in our case the Oberlin Police Department. Police Chief Ryan Warfield has reviewed this information and signed the enforcement concurrence form. Once ODOT journalizes the new speed limit, our General Maintenance Division will replace the existing speed limit signs and add new signs as necessary. This should be accomplished early this spring.

We are optimistic that the mid-block crosswalk and de-commissioning the flashing signal system will be completed this summer before school is back in session. We are hopeful that the College will, in fact, re-configure the Wilder driveway and parking lot sooner rather than later. At a minimum, Public Works believes that this should be a requirement of site plan approval in association with the new dormitory planned for the west side of Woodland St.

Fiscal Impact

The City's cost to add new 30 mph signs and to replace existing signage is modest, no more than a few hundred dollars. Cost for the other improvements, bullet-pointed above, is currently unknown.

Consultation

This memorandum is based on City Engineer Randall Roberts' research, our work with the GPD Group, correspondence with ODOT, consultation with OMLPS and Planning Director Carrie Handy as well as our ongoing coordination with Oberlin College. The authorizing legislation has been reviewed and approved by Law Director Jon Clark.

Conclusion

The Public Works Department recommends that City Council consider passage on an emergency basis at its February 21, 2023 meeting ***“to expedite the review and approval of the proposed speed limit reduction on State Route 511 in the City of Oberlin to promote the public safety.”*** If there are any questions, please let me know.