

ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT STAFF RESPONSE
TO COMMENTS PRESENTED AT THE
JUNE 14, 2004 PUBLIC FORUM

Comment #1: The Town Transportation Board Chairman stated that the Board supports establishing policy and procedures for evaluating traffic calming requests.

He stated that the Board supports a procedure that would use neighborhood surveys prepared and distributed by Town staff instead of a procedure that would use petitions prepared and distributed by neighborhood residents, as recommended by the Manager. He suggested that the proposed process be revised so as to minimize the initial dedication of staff resources to projects which do not have a reasonable level of neighborhood support. He suggested that this could be accomplished by including an intermediate step using a preliminary neighborhood survey to determine the level of interest. Staff would not act on a project unless the above-mentioned survey form was completed and returned by at least a 40% of those receiving them, with at least a 50% project approval rate.

Staff Response: Based on our past experience with neighborhood surveys, we find them to be very staff-time intensive. When surveys for neighborhood projects are initiated by the Town, all questions and concerns are directed to Town staff. We believe that having surveys/petitions initiated by neighborhood representatives provides for more direct communication between neighbors; provides better opportunities for identifying compromises that the majority of residents can support; and minimizes the investment of staff time. We also note that meeting the minimum requirements suggested by the Board could signify as little as 20% overall support from residents within the service area.

We believe that the process described in Option #2, or a hybrid of it as suggested by the Transportation Board, would increase Town staff work significantly as a result of preparing and distributing survey forms, responding to residents' questions about the surveys, and meeting with neighborhood groups. We are concerned that the existing traffic engineering staff would be unable to manage this type of traffic calming process in addition to existing traffic engineering responsibilities.

Comment #2: A citizen expressed concerns that most traffic calming devices installed on the streets would increase gasoline consumption and resultant air pollution as a result of vehicles slowing and accelerating.

Staff Response: We agree. National studies indicate that we could expect some incremental increase in gasoline consumption and emissions from vehicles as a result of installing traffic calming devices such as speed humps and stop signs. However, we believe that these detrimental effects are reasonably offset by the benefits from traffic calming devices including reduced speeding, reduced cut-through traffic, and fewer accidents in residential neighborhoods.

Comment #3: A citizen spoke in opposition to assigning points for how long a petition is on the traffic calming priority list before action is taken. He suggested that this criterion be removed from the Ranking System.

Staff Response: The Council, at their traffic calming work session last year, suggested that we consider assigning points for how long a petition is on the priority list. We think that was a good suggestion, and we included in our ranking criteria to mitigate the possibility that some potential projects could remain on our list indefinitely without action.

Comment #4: A citizen expressed concern that some traffic calming measures, such as speed humps, are not effective for certain type of vehicles (such as sport utility vehicles) and that some of the measures could affect drivers with certain types of chronic health or physical problems.

Staff Response: Traffic calming devices are engineered with a design that is effective for all types of vehicles, regardless of wheelbase or weight. The traffic humps that we would install would be effective in slowing sport utility vehicles. We are not aware of any studies or data suggesting that traffic calming measures negatively affect drivers with chronic health or physical problems.

Comment #5: A citizen suggested that the Town should be careful in selecting the criteria for and the type of traffic calming devices used on public streets.

Staff Response: The proposed policy and procedures are a synthesis of Town staff experience with traffic calming requests in Chapel Hill and policies/procedures being utilized in other North Carolina communities. We believe that, if approved by the Council, the proposed policy and procedures would assure that traffic calming measures used in Chapel Hill are carefully considered and are consistent with generally accepted design principals and specifications.