

Town of Brattleboro

Street and Sidewalk Safety Policy

May 3, 2016

STREET AND SIDEWALK SAFETY POLICY

INTRODUCTION

As Brattleboro continues to grow into a bustling community, it is our goal to embrace the arts, education, cultural resources, business both large and small, but still remember to support and protect our citizens, for without them, we could not be what we have become.

Unfortunately, a series of serious pedestrian vs. vehicle accidents has brought attention to our need to improve our overall safety.

One of the ways that we propose to safeguard our families is through a Street and Sidewalk Safety Policy. The purpose of this Policy is to define methods to maintain vehicular traffic speed at the posted limit and improve everyone's safety by various devices and procedures.

This document serves as a method to standardize the way in which the Town addresses specific concerns brought forth by the public.

This Policy reduces the negative impacts of vehicular traffic and improve our community members' overall quality of life. It is our goal to not only keep our residents safe, but to make our whole Town attractive to future residents as well as tourists and the patrons of our local businesses.

GOALS FOR THE STREET AND SIDEWALK SAFETY POLICY

The initial implementation of this Policy will create a process for addressing Street and Sidewalk Safety Action Requests.

In an effort to stay current with national trends, the Town of Brattleboro would not only rely on physical instrumentation to impact traffic, but enact community wide educational efforts and increased enforcement in high risk areas to raise awareness of the Policy. Goals of this document are to address the following issues:

- A process for evaluating Safety Action Requests for traffic calming
- A process for public involvement
- Reviewing and refining a traffic calming device inventory or toolbox
- A funding strategy to implement the policy
- A methodology for evaluating impacts and traffic diversion thresholds
- A process for monitoring and evaluating the results of the installation of traffic calming devices
- An inventory of primary routes for emergency services to maintain response time
- A functional classification of Town streets with information about appropriate devices
- A process for active interdepartmental communication and education
- A process for developing public commitment by participants to follow through to implementation
- A strategy for enforcement of the Policy

BACKGROUND

What we now call Traffic Calming measures began as neighborhood initiatives in the city of Delft, The Netherlands in the 1960's. The city began developing "Woonerven", which loosely translates to "living street". The city constructed community areas that encroached upon the streets, essentially creating an "obstacle course" in an effort to slow traffic down or discourage cut across traffic all together. Not only was this measure effective in changing traffic patterns, but also expanded the space available for the community to utilize for recreation. In 1976, the Dutch government began to officially endorse the Woonerven and their popularity spread like wildfire around the world.

The construction of Woonerven soon became too costly to implement across the city and they decided to fall back on less expensive traffic calming devices that essentially serve the same purpose. Berkeley, California and Seattle, Washington were probably the first municipalities in the United States that adopted Traffic Calming Programs or street and sidewalk safety policies. Due to the success of those and the lessons learned during their implementations, cities across the nation from Oregon to Florida followed suit.

References:

Town of Northampton Traffic Calming Program
Town of Greenwich Neighborhood Traffic Calming Plan
Town of Burlington, Vermont Neighborhood Enhancements
"Traffic Calming: State of the Practice," ITE/FHWA, August 1999

STAFFING AND AUTHORITY

One of the primary purposes of this Policy is to provide a coherent method for addressing pedestrian, bicycle and traffic safety concerns in a timely manner using existing staff, routine procedures, cost effective traffic calming devices, infrastructure changes, and enforcement.

This Policy provides a method for the Town to prioritize issues for effective management and allocation of resources to address areas with the greatest needs. All requests for traffic calming measures shall be submitted to the Director of Public Works on the Street and Sidewalk Safety Action Request Form provided with the Policy.

DEFINITION OF ROLES

Public: The Public serves to initiate projects by filling out the Street and Sidewalk Safety Action Request Form
(included).

Traffic Safety Committee: The Traffic Safety Committee reviews the Safety Action requests submitted to the Town by the Public and recommends solutions to the Selectboard. The Traffic Safety Committee is a group formed from representatives from the school system, Public Works, the Police Department, the Fire Department, the Planning Department, the Town Manager's Office, a Selectboard representative, a Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce representative, and a citizen representative.

Department of Public Works: The Brattleboro DPW is the agency charged with the primary response, research, and implementation of any Street and Sidewalk Safety Action requests.

Brattleboro Police Department: It is the responsibility of the Brattleboro Police Department to focus enforcement operations in areas in which the Town has received complaints.

Emergency Services: Emergency services serves as an advisory role in the procedure to ensure that no traffic calming devices shall negatively impact the response to any area.

Selectboard: The Town of Brattleboro Selectboard is the final authority in approving or denying Street and Sidewalk Safety Action requests recommended by the Traffic Safety Committee for traffic calming measures.

BUDGET

At this time, annual funding to implement the Street and Sidewalk Safety Policy is through the operating budget, capital budget, or through specific grants. There is currently a \$5,000 line item in the operating budget for the implementation of smaller scale traffic calming devices or projects.

PROCEDURE

The Town employs a series of steps to allow a member of the community to submit their concerns and have them evaluated in a consistent manner. All Street and Sidewalk Safety Action Requests shall follow the procedure outlined below:

1. A petitioner may submit a Street and Sidewalk Safety Action Request Form online through the Town's website or request a hard copy from the Town Manager's Office or to the Director of Public Works. Hard copies may be returned to those locations. Please be sure to be as detailed as possible and include all of the required information.
2. The Street and Sidewalk Safety Action Request Form shall be forwarded to the Town Manager's office for the purpose of being included on the agenda for the next Traffic Safety Committee meeting.
3. Town staff review and evaluate the request to determine if it is simple and can be handled with existing information or 'larger' requiring a Needs Assessment
4. Needs Assessment is carried out and put on the agenda of an upcoming Traffic Safety and Control Committee meeting.

5. The petitioner is informed of the upcoming Traffic Safety and Control Committee meeting and be encouraged to speak to their concern.
6. Committee reviews Traffic needs evaluation and votes on recommending the project to be added to the Priority List of Traffic Calming Projects.
7. Projects on the above list are prioritized according to Priority section of this document.

EVALUATION OF STREET AND SIDEWALK SAFETY ACTION REQUESTS

Upon receipt of a Street and Sidewalk Safety Action request, Town staff review and evaluate the request to determine the level of follow-up required. If the request is, straightforward, safe, compliant with current standards and practices, and benefits the community, it may be implemented if sufficient funds are available and can be spent within staff's authority.

Requests implemented in this manner are communicated directly to the petitioner and also reported on at a subsequent Traffic Safety Committee meeting.

If Town staff determines that a request is more complicated in nature (e.g..involving policy-decisions, ordinance changes, or capital investments), Town staff will perform a Needs Assessment for submission to the Traffic Safety Committee which will contain such information as the following:

1. Physical Description (width, grade and alignment, number of lanes and width, pavement condition, parking, sidewalks, crosswalks, school crossings, bike lanes, and any other relevant descriptors)
2. Posted speed limits or other regulatory signage or traffic controls
3. Proximity to community facilities, schools, parks, and commercial areas
4. Usage by pedestrians, bicyclists, disabled people
5. Traffic volume
6. Traffic speeds (average and 85th percentile)
7. Crash and enforcement data
8. Pictures

When the Needs Assessment is completed, the item will be placed on the agenda of a subsequent TSC meeting. Town staff will notify the petitioner when that item will be considered by the TSC. Following discussion and public comment, the TSC will make a determination as to whether or not the request merits further consideration or specific action.

REVIEW OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND FINAL RECOMMENDATION

Staff will present the findings and recommendations of its Needs Assessment to the Traffic Safety Committee.

In making determinations, the TSC will consider the availability of Town funding and resources and give priority to addressing traffic and safety concerns in the following areas:

1. Streets that provide access to a public school, or that represent major walk-to-school routes;
2. Streets that are or could be heavily traveled by pedestrians or bicyclists seeking access to a public park, senior center, government/public building, downtown or commercial area, or a private facility (i.e. college, hospital, etc.); and
3. Streets that have been programmed for the Department of Public Works reconstruction in the near future and thereby represent opportunities to realize cost savings by undertaking traffic calming installation simultaneously.

Upon review and discussion of the item, the TSC will vote to either 'Recommend' or 'Not Recommend' that the project be considered for implementation either to the Town Manager or Selectboard.

In the event that the Committee does not have sufficient information to make a final recommendation, a vote on the matter may be tabled until such information is presented.

Traffic calming requests that receive a 'Not Recommend' vote must wait one (1) year before they can be resubmitted for consideration.

PRIORITY

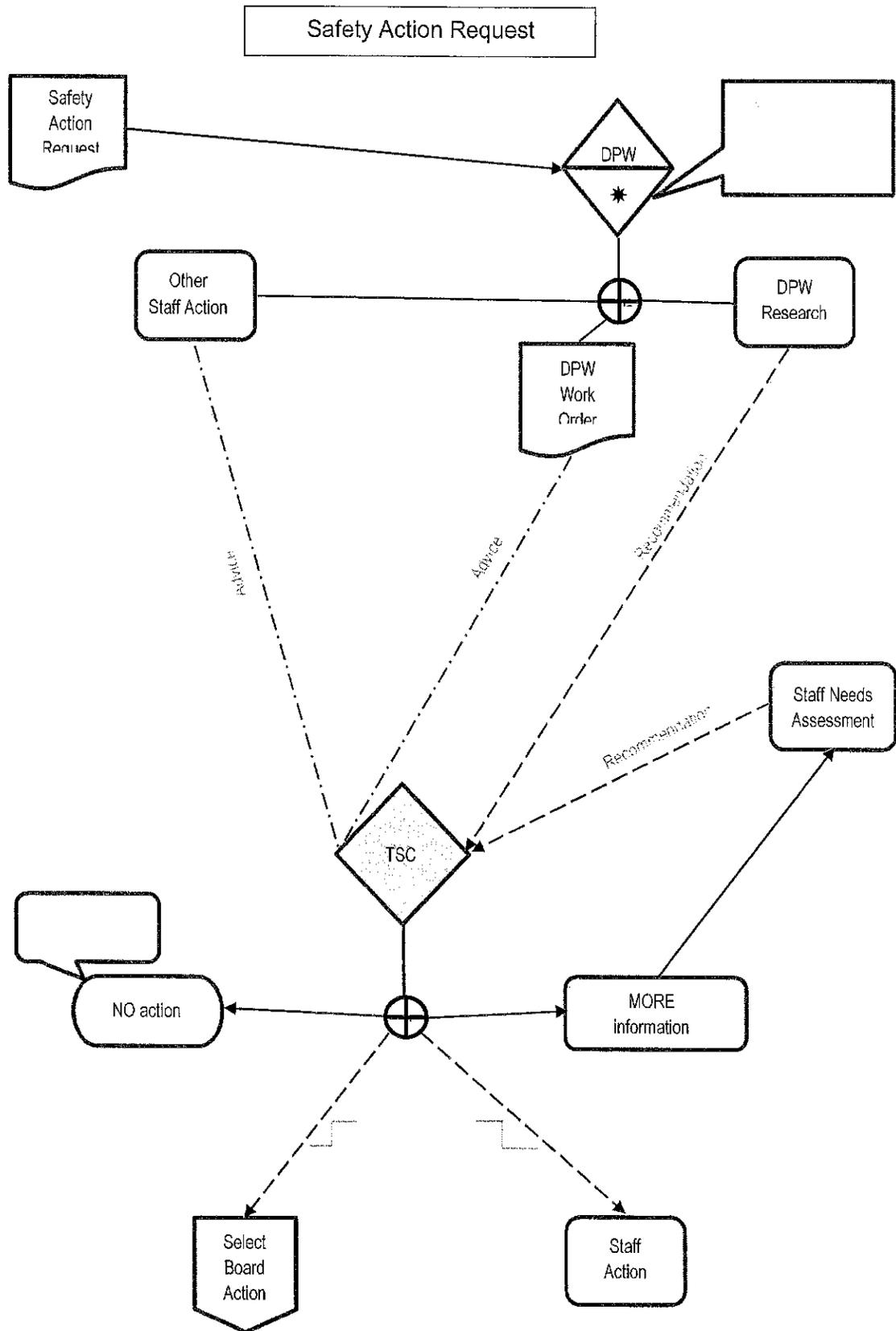
- In making decisions about how to prioritize recommended traffic calming projects, the Town maintains a "Priority List of Traffic Calming Projects". The Traffic Safety Committee will evaluate the following: vehicle volumes
 - pedestrian volumes
 - bicyclist activity
 - speed data
 - crashes
 - lack of sidewalks
 - available alternative funding
 - neighborhood support
 - concurrence with planned DPW road work or a scheduled Capital Improvement Project
- whether a project will bring a particular location into compliance with Federal, State or Town regulations.

Unfortunately, regardless of priority, Safety Action Requests may not always be addressed in order due to budgetary limitations. Also, there may be locations around Town that we are unable to bring into compliance or improve the safety of due to geographical and topographical limitations.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

New subdivisions in the Town of Brattleboro require approval by the Development Review Board. Proper planning, design and construction of subdivisions could avoid the need for future traffic calming and subsequent roadway modifications. The Planning Department and the Department of Public Works will work with subdivision applicants to create safe access to the development from the public way and also ensure safe roads within the development.

Street and Sidewalk Safety Policy Process Flowchart



TRAFFIC CALMING TOOLBOX

Increased Police Enforcement

Increased enforcement in a specific location as a response to a Safety Action Request is the first line of defense and research. Increased patrols and enforcement in a specific area are very effective means to changing driver behavior.

Portable Radar Units

These are portable signs that use radar to provide motorists with an instant message displayed on a changeable board which shows their current rate of speed. Portable radar units are very effective means of traffic control when installed as people are made immediately aware of their rate of travel. Unfortunately, these are not permanent installations and may only be productive when they are in use, they may not have any lingering effect on driver behavior.

Traffic Data Collection

Traffic Data Collection is an effective and inexpensive initial response to Safety Action Requests. The Town, in coordination with the Windham Regional Commission, can place collection devices at specific locations to gather data about traffic volume, speed, and vehicle type. These are not particularly effective on gravel roads due to the difference in road surface and may not provide accurate data.

Signing

The Town does not install signs that are in conflict with the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) as it has established laws that dictate signage. The MUTCD is a resource available to the general public online.

Although it is counterintuitive, many studies have shown that increased signage has little or no effect on driver behavior. Many neighborhoods have an overabundance of STOP signs that rather than reducing traffic speed and raising driver awareness, actually contribute to speeding. Most drivers do not slow down for series of STOP signs or travel more cautiously, but instead speed up and slam on their brakes. Not only does this contribute to noise and air pollution, but does nothing but decrease the safety factor in that stretch of road.

Pavement Markings

Some streets may qualify for new or altered pavement markings that comply with the MUTCD. Pavement marking changes and experimentation are a very cost effective way to manipulate traffic and alter driver behavior; However, its uses are limited as the Town must remain in compliance with traffic marking laws.

Median Islands

Median islands are raised islands placed in the middle of the road and serve the purpose of separating opposing traffic. They also effectively narrow the roadway both visually and

physically. Median islands cause traffic to displace laterally to the right which tends to slow it down. Median islands can be placed in intersections, midblock, or at the entrance to a neighborhood. They can be multiple shapes and have varying surfaces which can be applied to appeal to varying aesthetic preferences of the Town or petitioning neighborhood.

Median islands can also be very effective on wide streets where crossing pedestrians have a safe place to stop. While median islands are effective in slowing traffic speeds and in causing drivers to pay more attention, they are relatively expensive to install in a roadway. Projects should be evaluated to ensure that they do not negatively impact winter maintenance activities.

Changes in Surface Texture or Color

Various surface treatments which can be felt or heard by drivers can be very effective means of raising drivers' awareness. These treatments can range from scarifying existing surfaces to installing rumble strips to replacing pavement with bricks or cobbles at crosswalks (like the crosswalk at Green Street School, for example). While these methods are effective and can be very inexpensive, they do add to the noise pollution problems in the area as well as pose safety issues to motorcycles.

Gateway Treatments

A gateway is a physical landmark that indicates a change in environment from a major collector to a residential or business neighborhood. These are frequently devices that have a strong emphasis on visual appeal and are used to specifically identify a district or neighborhood and should be used in combination with other traffic calming devices. Gateways should somehow communicate to the traveling public the district they have reached and the desired speed.

Roundabouts/Roundabouts are raised circular islands constructed in the center of intersections which traffic proceeds around in a counter-clockwise direction. Roundabouts can be used for varying types of intersections and are beneficial as they encourage traffic to move continuously rather than stopping at lights or signs. When designed correctly they are proven to be safer than traditional intersections. Also, similar to medians, the center of the traffic circle can be landscaped for visual appeal. While roundabouts are very effective as a traffic calming device, they are very expensive measures to take as they require engineering, major reconstruction of intersections, and potential land acquisitions.

Curb Extensions

The purpose of curb extensions is to extend the curb line into the parking lane at crosswalk locations. Curb extensions serve the purpose of not only slowing traffic by narrowing the traveling lane width, but also increasing pedestrian safety as it improves pedestrian visibility to vehicular traffic at the crosswalk and minimizes the time the pedestrian is in the traveled way. While curb extensions are very effective traffic calming devices, they should be evaluated for impacts on winter maintenance activities.

Chicanes

Chicanes consist of a series of curb extensions on alternating sides of the street which create a series of S-curves, essentially creating an 'obstacle course' for vehicles causing them to slow and be more attentive. These are similar to the Woonerven that was created in the Netherlands and can be landscaped and used as community space just as effectively. Chicanes are an excellent way to 'green-up' our streets as they can be landscaped much like the traffic circles and median islands. Chicanes must be carefully designed to ensure that vehicles are staying in their respective lane of travel while negotiating the S-curves. While chicanes are effective means of traffic control, they do impose a substantial cost to the Town for both engineering and construction. Again, chicanes negatively impact winter maintenance activities.

Flashing Lights at Crosswalks

Flashing lights at crosswalks, such as Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) have proven effective in reducing the number of vehicle vs. pedestrian collisions in many areas, particularly mid-block crossings. They are most effective on arterials and collectors which have higher speed traffic than minor local roads.

Speed Tables

Speed tables are bumps in the road that extend transversely across the width of the road. Speed tables can be made of varying materials such as plastic, asphalt, and rubber. Speed tables, much like stop signs, can result in drivers decelerating and accelerating rapidly, rather than traveling slowly. Speed tables may impede winter maintenance activities but do so less than traditional speed humps did.

Temporary Devices

Temporary devices can be very cost efficient means of traffic control. Devices such as the temporary bollards or pedestrian crosswalk signs have proven to be very effective methods. However, because these types of devices are located in a roadway, they are seasonal, and can only be used from April to October.

TEMPORARY INSTALLATIONS

The Town may, upon review of the Safety Action Request and if the party who filed the petition prefers, install temporary devices to evaluate their effectiveness for a period of up to six (6) months prior to the approval of a permanent installation. The purpose of a temporary installation would be to evaluate the effectiveness of the device or to make sure that it does not interfere with any emergency vehicle response in that area.

EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW/FOLLOW UP

Within one year of the installation of the traffic calming device, the Town implements a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the device installed. The type of study to be conducted is determined by the Town. If the study uncovers any negative effects of the traffic calming device, approved corrective measures will be suggested to the Selectboard to improve the scenario.

REMOVAL OF TRAFFIC CALMING DEVICES

The Town reserves the right to remove any Traffic Calming Devices that it determines are unsafe, ineffective, or create a negative impact OR the “affected neighborhood” presents an adequate argument to the Town to advocate for the removal of the device. The final decision to remove the device shall be up to the Selectboard.

FUTURE UPDATES

At this time, the Town shall consider this a document that we seek to improve and allow to grow with the community. As new techniques and devices in traffic calming methods are developed, tested, and accepted for use they shall be included in the Policy. The Town also expects that as this is a new program, we shall be experiencing some trial and error that over time shall contribute to future revisions of the Street and Sidewalk Safety Policy.