

The 90% solution

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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Signature requirement for speed humps relaxed

Getting speed humps installed on your block just got a little easier – 10% easier, to be exact.

The issue bounced into the spotlight earlier this year when a handful of Mentmore residents who are tired of people speeding on Box Canyon Avenue asked the city council to revisit the 100% buy-in requirement for a block to get the humps. One resident on their block is a holdout.

The requirement, instituted years ago to keep neighborhood peace, meant hump advocates had to get signatures from all the other homeowners on a block before asking the city for humps.

Faced with a choice of leaving the signature requirement in place or reducing it, the council voted unanimously Oct. 11 to require signatures from 90% of homeowners on a block. An average block has 20 homes on it, so in that case 18 of the homeowners would have to agree.

The lower threshold comes with a new policy for when speed humps are appropriate. Many of the elements have already been in place as a practical matter. For example, for safety reasons humps can't be installed on streets where the grade is greater than 4%. Ditto for streets that don't have a straight sightline (no curves) approaching the humps.

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Eligible streets are fully paved residential streets only, no more than 32 feet and two traffic lanes wide; where there are more than 500 vehicle trips a day on the street; and where at least three-quarters of the traffic is exceeding 25 mph.

Snow routes, school routes, emergency access routes and arterials are not eligible for humps. Public Works staff can also veto a street if it has unique features that could “cause a performance effect.”

“I’m glad that this is [put in] writing,” Councilor Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, said. “Before, it was just a [former Public Works Director] Stan Henderson rule. We need to have these things in writing.”

She came out in favor of the 90% signature option. Councilor Sarah Piano, Dist. 3, was prepared to go further.

“I would not be opposed to 80%. You are going to make some people unhappy, of course,” Piano said. “Now we are making two people happy if they don’t want it and we’re making 80% unhappy. This way we can make 80% happy and 20% unhappy. Someone’s not going to be happy either way.”

The big tradeoff is that blocks with speed bumps don’t get street sweeping, or snowplows in the winter. The humps damage plow equipment, especially if the snow gets deep enough to hide the bumps. Employees dispatched to plow the snowy streets may not know which streets have humps.

The new policy will also add one more detail for staff to manage on streets where less than 100% of residents sign on.

“We’ve just got to be really cautious for the folks that don’t sign the petition, not to install it right in front of their home,” Public Works Director Robert Hamblen said. “Sometimes that may be difficult because there’s spacing requirements for speed humps.”

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To be clear, speed *bumps* are the narrow raised strips one encounters in commercial parking lots. Speed *humps* extend across a residential street and are 13 feet wide, Hamblen explained.

“That way it is a smoother transition getting over them. Otherwise, if you shorten ‘em up, they would be called speed bumps...they are a pretty hard hit to get over,” he said. “These just make it where you have to slow down to smoothly get over.”

Even then, it may not be smooth sailing. The cost for each hump comes out of that district’s discretionary budget of \$30,000 per year, so the councilor for the district has to sign off.

Asphalt speed humps cost about \$1,200 each to install – and that’s a big savings from the \$6,000 price tag for a concrete hump, which is what the city used to use.

There are also arguments as to whether speed bumps really help. They can push traffic onto hump-free streets, or motorists may slow down for the humps and then hit the gas when they’re clear.

Hamblen said his research shows that speed bumps bring down property values, because they announce that there’s a problem with speeding. There’s also increased noise and emissions associated with cars slowing down. Humps can increase emergency response times, a fact that led Roswell to eliminate humps, Hamblen said.

On the upside, they tend to reduce traffic speed by about 6 mph, they may discourage motorists from cutting through neighborhoods that have them, and unlike police patrols, they’re in place 24/7. Councilors said the safety improvement is worthwhile.

“I know it doesn’t fix all speeding issues, but a lot of people come to me,” Piano said. She said that the speed humps would make neighborhoods safer for the young kids and animals in the neighborhoods.

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