

TOWN of AMHERST

Highway Safety Committee Minutes

**September 2, 2021
Amherst Police Department**

Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 2:00 pm with all members present:

Mark O. Reams, Committee Chair, Chief of Police; John D'Angelo, Selectman; Matthew Conley, Fire Rescue Chief; Adam Steel, Superintendent of Schools; Eric Hahn, Director of Public Works; Eric Slosek, Assistant Director of Public Works (invited guest)

New Business

a. Speed limit designation for Pettingale Road

Resident complaints of speeding on Pettingale Road were brought to the attention of Chief Reams who collected traffic data using the Town's computerized radar/traffic counter over the course of two weeks. Pettingale Road has never had a posted speed limit, and Chief Reams reported that data collected through the traffic study, pursuant to NH RSA 265:63, supported a speed limit designation of 25 mph – e.g., the 85th percentile speed was 29 mph, with a pace speed of 20-29 mph. The Committee recognized that Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) recognizes these factors –along with substantial known pedestrian activity and limited sight distance on two road crests/curves- to support a designation of 25 mph for Pettingale Road. A motion to recommend to the Board of Selectmen that Pettingale Road be designated a 25 mph zone was made by Chief Conley, seconded by Selectman D'Angelo, and all voted in favor (5-0).

b. Traffic control for Walnut Hill Road near Walnut Hollow (equestrian) Farm

Pursuant to complaints of traffic safety issues from the residents of Walnut Hollow Farm and their patrons, the Committee discussed several options for improved traffic safety. Chief Reams reported that he had collected baseline traffic data over the course of two weeks which he reported to the Committee. The data showed an average traffic flow of 310 cars per day; an 85th percentile speed of 23 mph; an average speed of 20 mph; and that 95% of vehicles were traveling at a speed of 26 mph or less. Director Hahn pointed out that from a traffic volume standpoint, Walnut Hill Road is a very low volume road at 310 cars per day. The Committee reviewed a chart of comparable east/west roads in town -e.g., Camp Road, Spring Road, Merrimack Road, and Stearns Road- with 2,031, 1,653, 1,943, and 1,554 cars per day, respectively. Chief Reams reported that he had spoken with a resident of the Walnut Hollow Farm who said that traffic safety concerns were not due to speeding vehicles but due to the width of the road – i.e., that the road was too narrow to safely accommodate two vehicles passing by when walkers/horses were in the road.

Complainants had requested speed humps and/or rumble strips to help cars slow down. The Committee considered the following guidance from the recognized authority on these measures, the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE). Among other

considerations, speed humps are recommended on streets where the posted limit is 30 mph or less; that proper installation results in vehicles slowing to about 20 mph; and that they may be considered when the 85th percentile speed is between 25-30 mph. The Committee recognized that based on this guidance, speed humps were not recommended for Walnut Hill Road as the current average speed was already 20 mph, and the 85th percentile speed is below the recommended range, and that the pace speed for most cars is 14-23 mph. Chief Reams also pointed out that even in the event that the Board chose to place speed humps in this section against Committee recommendations, that there are tort liability and legal issues surrounding a municipality's installation of speed humps which need to be taken into consideration and are beyond the scope/knowledge of the Committee. With regard to discussion on possible rumble strip installation, Director Hahn pointed out that available guidance shows that the road is too narrow and that in all design applications, rumble strips are relegated strictly to roadways for which the posted speed limit is 40 mph or greater.

Chief Reams reported that collected data (just as in the aforementioned case for Pettingale Road) supported an official speed limit reduction for the portion of the roadway which encompasses the farm – i.e., the portion from Walnut Hill Road at the intersection with Old Quarry Lane which extends easterly to the intersection of Walnut Hill Road and Embankment Road. The committee recognized that official speed limit signs are a permanent structure which attract driver attention and provide enforceability. A motion was made by Chief Conley to designate this section of Walnut Hill Road a reduced speed zone of 25 mph which was seconded by Selectman D'Angelo. All voted in favor (5-0) to recommend this action to the Board for ordinance consideration.

The committee also expressed uniform consensus for improvement of advisory “winding road” signs on both east and west approaches to the farm, along with advisory “horse” livestock signs to further attract driver attention. The committee was also in consensus regarding the painting of “SLOW” on the pavement at points of direct approach to the farm from both east and west. Director Hahn stated that the letters would be of sufficient size to span across one entire lane of the road in each direction. Selectman D'Angelo mentioned that it appeared the Committee was doing everything they could to improve road safety without rebuilding the road itself. Director Hahn mentioned that the previous owner of the farm had declined an offer from the Town's previous DPW Director to widen the road in that area and setback/rebuild stone walls associated with the property during road resurfacing/rebuilding which was performed in 2013. Director Hahn mentioned that future roadwork would include a resurvey of the entire area with consideration for possible road widening, along with closer inspection of commercial driveway and parking lot access modifications which would be incumbent upon the business owner under state/local regulations.

Old Business

Motion to approve minutes from previous meeting made by Selectman D'Angelo, seconded by Superintendent Steel. All in favor (5-0)

Meeting adjourned at 2:50 pm.