



City of Helena

Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program

I. Introduction

The City of Helena has developed the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP) to provide residents with the opportunity to raise neighborhood traffic concerns and to participate in the selection of strategies that promote safe and pleasant conditions for residents, pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists in City neighborhoods.

The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) defines traffic calming as “the combination of mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior, and improve conditions for non-motorized street users.” In simple terms, traffic calming techniques are typically aimed at lowering vehicle speeds, decreasing truck volumes, and/or reducing the amount of cut-through traffic in a given area.

The City receives numerous requests, complaints and suggestions from residents about traffic related issues. In many cases, driver behavior, in the form of speeding or cut-through traffic, is the root cause of these complaints. The nature of the problems should drive the approach as well as the solution. The program outlined here summarizes the process the City will use to address neighborhood traffic concerns.

A. Purpose

The NTCP is designed to provide consistent, citywide policies to neighborhood traffic management and to ensure equitable and effective solutions to a variety of traffic concerns expressed by local residents. The program intent is to treat similar traffic problems equally, while recognizing the differences in individual resident levels of concern and traffic tolerances.

The purpose of the NTCP is to implement traffic calming techniques, where appropriate, in response to neighborhood requests for assistance with traffic concerns. The NTCP is designed to provide guidelines and methods of evaluation to systematically address neighborhood traffic problems. Under this program, staff will work with residents to identify traffic issues and seek appropriate solutions.

B. Goals

The goals of the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP) are as follows:

- Promote safe and pleasant conditions for residents, pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists on neighborhood streets, while preserving access for emergency vehicles, buses and other users.

- Improve neighborhood livability by reducing the speeds and impact of vehicular traffic on residential streets, while providing for the safe, efficient and economical movement of persons and goods through the City.
- Keep neighborhood street use, to the greatest extent possible, within the classifications defined in the Greater Helena Area Transportation Plan (i.e. local, collector, minor arterial, major arterial).
- Foster a collaborative working relationship between City staff and neighborhood residents in the development of traffic calming measures.
- Provide a process that will equitably address requests for action by neighborhood residents, while balancing resident needs with all users of City streets.

II. Application and Review Process

The following is a three phase procedure for implementing traffic calming measures on existing facilities.

A. Phase I – Identification and Verification

In the first phase, the residents are responsible for contacting the City, identifying their concerns, and submitting a project application. At this point, the City will make initial contacts with the residents, and conduct informal meetings to better understand the nature of the problem. The City will then perform preliminary studies to validate the perceived problem, and determine whether or not the process should advance.

- Step 1:** A Citizen contacts the City Engineering Division about a traffic problem. The City responds by sending the Citizen information about the Traffic Calming Program and an Application Form.
- Step 2:** The Citizen completes the Application Form and returns it to the City Engineer. The form should include a description of the problem and location, as well as the signatures of 10 other neighborhood residents from separate households who agree that the problem exists. A Neighborhood Contact is also identified on the form. After receipt of the form, the City contacts neighborhood residents to discuss the nature of the perceived problem. The information gathered in this step helps to determine which study should be performed to assess the problem.
- Step 3:** The City conducts a field review of the location, and collects the appropriate data in order to determine whether or not the perceived problem actually exists. In most cases, accident records should be reviewed, and traffic volumes measured. Depending upon the nature of the complaint, a speed study, truck count, or cut-through study may also be appropriate. In order to be considered for a traffic calming project, the location must have traffic volumes of at least eight hundred

(800) vehicles per day. It must also meet at least one of the following criteria: three (3) or more accidents in a twelve (12) month period; an eighty-fifth (85th) percentile speed that is at least five (5) miles per hour over the posted speed limit; or truck volumes exceeding ten (10) percent of the total traffic volume.

After the field data is collected and reviewed, the City informs the Neighborhood Contact of the results. If the location does not meet the above criteria, the City meets with neighborhood residents to review the study results and discuss other options. At this point, the Traffic Calming Program is concluded. If the problem location meets the required criteria, the City reviews the Phase II process with the Neighborhood Contact.

B. Phase II – Education and Enforcement

During Phase II, the City will facilitate a neighborhood meeting at which a range of appropriate educational activities and enforcement alternatives will be discussed. The City will work with the neighborhood residents to identify a preferred solution. The residents will then be responsible for circulating a petition and fostering support for the identified solution.

- Step 4:** The City determines the boundaries of the affected neighborhood. The City schedules a neighborhood meeting to discuss possible Phase II solutions to the problem. The City gives the Neighborhood Contact a map of the designated boundaries so he/she can inform area residents of the meeting. At the meeting, the City presents a range of appropriate measures. Potential Phase II measures will emphasize the least intrusive measures, consisting of enforcement, educational activities, and/or minor physical changes (brush trimming, and sign or pavement marking installation).
- Step 5:** The Neighborhood Contact circulates a Phase II Petition within the defined boundaries. The petition identifies the proposed education and enforcement techniques, and asks residents to indicate their approval. If the petition is not signed by forty (40) percent of the property owners within the defined neighborhood, the process is terminated. If the petition is signed by at least forty (40) percent of the property owners, the City and/or Neighborhood will then implement the Phase II measures.
- Step 6:** Approximately ninety (90) days after implementation of the Phase II measures, the City repeats the data collection efforts. This ninety (90) day period may be modified by the City to accommodate seasonal conditions and other factors. If the problem has been resolved, the education and enforcement activities can be tapered off and the process concluded. If the situation arises again at a later date, as confirmed by data, the process can begin again at Step 6. If the traffic problem still exists after the trial of education and enforcement, the Phase III process would be initiated.

C. Phase III – Physical Methods

Phase III responsibilities will be divided similarly to those in Phase II, although the solutions being discussed will be applicable physical devices. When a permanent solution is selected, the City will determine the appropriate funding sources based on the nature of the problem. Traffic calming projects will be financed on a case-by-case basis.

- Step 7:** If the traffic problem has not been resolved by the Phase II measures, the City conducts an engineering study to determine a range of appropriate physical improvements to the location.
- Step 8:** The City schedules a neighborhood meeting to review the Phase III improvement options. The Neighborhood Contact is responsible for notifying area residents about the meeting. The City facilitates the neighborhood meeting. Based on resident input, a preferred solution is selected from the range of possible solutions. If a temporary version of this traffic calming device is not practical, proceed to Step 11.
- Step 9:** If a temporary traffic calming device is suitable, the Neighborhood Contact circulates a Phase III Petition for Temporary Measures. The process ends if the petition is not signed by fifty (50) percent of the property owners within the defined boundaries. If at least fifty (50) percent of the property owners sign the petition, the City constructs a temporary version of the preferred traffic calming device.
- Step 10:** After one year, the City repeats the data collection process to determine whether or not the temporary device is effective. If it is found to not be effective, the City notifies the Neighborhood Contact, and the device is removed. The process can then be repeated from Step 7.
- Step 11:** If the temporary device is effective, the City develops a preliminary design and cost estimate for a permanent traffic calming device(s), and determines who will finance the permanent solution. The City then provides the Neighborhood Contact with this information and indicates that the area property owners are receptive to a Petition for Permanent Measures.
- Step 12:** The Neighborhood Contact circulates a Phase III Petition for Permanent Measures, which includes a copy of the preliminary design and cost estimate, as well as an explanation of financial responsibility. If the petition is not signed by sixty (60) percent of the area property owners, the process is terminated and any temporary devices removed. If at least sixty (60) percent of the property owners sign the petition, the City performs a final design, and constructs a permanent traffic calming device.

There are numerous points at which the traffic calming implementation process can be terminated due to lack of neighborhood support. Should neighborhood sentiment change at a later date, the process may be resumed at the same step where it left off.

III. Criteria for Selecting a Project

Implementing traffic calming measures is not a solution for all speeding and cut-through traffic issues. Each neighborhood may have its own unique set of problems that must be analyzed to identify the proper solutions. Before requesting assistance from the City, the neighborhood should clearly define what the traffic problems are and achieve neighborhood consensus on that definition.

For a neighborhood to qualify for NTCP assistance, the location must have traffic volumes of eight hundred (800) vehicles per day or greater. In addition, at least one of the following criteria thresholds must be met:

- Eighty-fifth (85th) percentile speed no less than five (5) mph above posted speed limit;
- Three or more accidents in a twelve (12) month period; or
- Truck volumes exceeding ten (10) percent of the total volume.

The street conditions must include a suitable grade and sight distance, and streets must have at least curbs and preferably sidewalks. Traffic calming devices should not adversely affect public transit. Traffic calming is most appropriately located on neighborhood streets. The City will determine if these conditions are met.

IV. Funding

Traffic problems on existing streets are usually caused by one of the following situations: poor initial street design, inadequacy of the major street network, or commercial and/or residential development adjacent to the neighborhood. The cost of financing traffic calming projects to resolve such problems should be distributed accordingly. As part of the initial investigation, the nature and cause of the traffic problem will be identified. The City will use this information to determine the appropriate division of project costs and identify who (the City, neighborhood residents, developers, other parties) may be involved in paying for the traffic calming measures.

The costs of Steps 1 through 11 will be borne by the City. Permanent Phase III construction (Step 12) may be financed by some combination of neighborhood contributions, development fees, and funds from other sources.

Funding for permanent installations will be primarily the responsibility of the requesting neighborhood. Means of funding may include the creation of a Special Improvement District (SID), grants acquired by the neighborhood, other neighborhood financing, contributions of materials, contributions of labor by licensed and bonded contractors, or other resources. If the proposed project meets the threshold for City participation, the City may provide excavation of pavement, relocation of storm drain structures, or similar work. The neighborhood will be responsible for the costs of final design, construction, signs, SID

administration, and maintenance of permanent installations, except that the City will maintain the concrete perimeter of traffic circles, signs, concrete curbing, and similar structural elements.

The City's participation from the city budget is dependent on the current year's funding availability, the current match guidelines, and the amount of funding requested by all traffic calming projects in the budget year.

If there are more traffic calming projects proposed than the City has resources to support, projects will be selected based on the importance or severity of the problem, level of support from the neighborhood, and available City resources.

V. Determination of Traffic Calming Techniques

There are many types of traffic calming that can be used; refer to the Greater Helena Area Transportation Plan for a list of traffic calming techniques. General criteria for all traffic calming techniques are as follows:

- Must be appropriate for the condition to be addressed;
- No device will be used when it results in traffic being diverted onto adjoining or nearby streets of equal or lower classification;
- Promote safe and pleasant conditions for all users;
- Must address real, rather than perceived, problems; and
- Show strong support by residents in the immediate area.

VI. Removal of Permanent Traffic Calming Devices

Although there are many policies and steps incorporated in the program to avoid the scenario whereby a neighborhood requests to have traffic calming devices removed, it is acknowledged that this may occur. In order for traffic calming devices to be removed from a neighborhood, the same process of neighborhood meetings and consensus should be met. A neighborhood meeting would be held to discuss the issues and the impacts of removing the permanent traffic calming device. A petition to garner sixty (60) percent approval from residents within the original neighborhood boundary that installed the traffic calming device would need to be submitted. The costs of removing traffic calming devices would be paid solely by the residents.