

CITY OF NORTHAMPTON MASSACHUSETTS

In the City Council,

Upon the Recommendation of Councilors James Nash and Alex Jarrett.

17.420 AN ORDER

TO LOWER THE DEFAULT SPEED LIMIT TO 25 MPH IN CERTAIN DISTRICTS

Ordered, that

WHEREAS, “The Vision for the Walk/Bike Northampton Plan is to make Northampton one of the top leaders in walk and bike friendly streets of any small city in New England. Pedestrians and bicyclists will be integrated into the City’s projects, policies and programs. Planning, design and implementation of roadway, public works and transit projects will accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists of all abilities. The non-motorized transportation system in the City will encourage mode shift and improve safety, the environment, health, and quality of life for residents, visitors and businesses. A bicycle and pedestrian-friendly Northampton will be a more green, affordable and sustainable city with improved mobility and economic vitality¹”; and

WHEREAS, The relationship between travel speed and lethality for pedestrians hit by vehicles is incontrovertible, as data from the MassDOT Safe Speeds initiative indicates, pedestrian safety increases as vehicle travel speed decreases. 73% of pedestrians will die when struck by a vehicle traveling at 40 mph, 40% will die when the vehicle is traveling at 30 mph, and only 13% when the vehicle is traveling 20 mph. Lower travel speeds increase safety²; and

WHEREAS, Reduced travel speeds provide additional benefits, including reduced noise, greater neighborhood cohesiveness, increased physical activity and more equitable access to transportation (because people feel safer walking and bicycling), increased retail activity, and decreased costs from crashes³; and

WHEREAS, Even on roads where no speed limit sign is posted, Massachusetts General Law still provides for a statutory speed limit, which is 30 miles per hour in thickly settled residential and business districts; and

¹ [Sustainable Northampton Plan](#), Part 4, Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, VISION pg 226

² Learn About Speed Management, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/learn-about-speed-management>

³ Six reasons why: Compelling co-benefits of lowering speed on our streets, https://cdn.georgeinstitute.org/sites/default/files/documents/6-reasons-why_co-benefits-of-reducing-speeds-on-our-streets_policy-document.pdf

WHEREAS, Municipalities may opt in to MGL c. 90 § 17C to reduce the statutory speed limit from 30 mph to 25 miles per hour on any or all city roadways within a thickly settled residential or business district where a speed regulation has not already been posted; and

WHEREAS, MGL c. 90 § 1 defines a thickly settled or business district as, "the territory contiguous to any way which is built up with structures devoted to business, or the territory contiguous to any way where dwelling houses are situated at such distances as will average less than two hundred feet between them for a distance of a quarter of a mile or over;" and

WHEREAS, Opting in to these provisions will not affect the speed limit on any road where a speed regulation has been posted, unless a municipality chooses to lift a Regulatory Speed Limit and revert to the Statutory Speed Limit. Recent changes to MGL c. 90 § 18 now allow for changing speed limits on state highways through a request process with MassDOT; and

WHEREAS, Since 2016, 65 communities, including Chicopee, Greenfield, Holyoke, and Springfield, have lowered their statutory speed limits to 25 miles per hour on a citywide, townwide, or street-by-street basis; and

WHEREAS, Adopting this order would support the addition of a citywide speed plan to the Sustainable Northampton Plan, providing a framework to consider changes to design speed and speed limits on individual streets in relation to speed regulation across the entire city, similar to the design speed requirements laid out in our Subdivision Regulations⁴; and

WHEREAS, Physical design changes have proven more effective than enforcement throughout the city, including on Pleasant Street, Nonotuck Street, Jackson Street, Elm Street and King Street. Changing roadway design, with inexpensive methods such as paint and poles, or with more permanent changes such as roadway narrowing and raised crosswalks, provides a long-term benefit for a one-time cost, rather than the ongoing cost of enforcement; and

WHEREAS, Since introduction in 2017 by Councilors O'Donnell and Nash, and referred to the Transportation & Parking Commission, both the Commonwealth (Safe Speeds⁵) and Federal Government (Appropriate Speed Limits⁶) have changed course, now recommending communities establish lower, targeted speed limits for roadway design, thus changing acceptance of MGL c. 90 § 17C from an effort to encourage safer driving into practical roadway policy.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDERED

That the City Council accepts the provisions of MGL Chapter 90 § 17C, for all thickly settled

⁴ Northampton Subdivision Regulations, <https://northamptonma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5562/Northampton-Subdivision-Regulations?bidId=> (page 39)

⁵ Safe Speeds, <https://mass.gov/safe-speeds>

⁶ Appropriate Speed Limits for All Road Users, <https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/appropriate-speed-limits.cfm>

residential and business district roadways effective July 1st, 2023.