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FEATURED

Jacksonville traffic panel to examine proposed 20 mph citywide speed limit

By TONY BOOM for the Rogue Valley Times
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A pedestrian crosses Highway 238 in Jacksonville. The town has appointed a traffic ad hoc safety committee to study suggestions made by local residents concerned about traffic issues.

Jamie Lusch / Rogue Valley Time

An ad hoc Jacksonville city committee will look at traffic safety concerns raised by Citizens for a Safer Jacksonville and consider their recommendations.

Chat

Jacksonville Mayor Donna Bowen announced formation of the committee at the Sept. 5 City Council meeting and said it should start getting together in October. Bowen, City Councilor Andy Hellenthall and Cindy Rasmussen from the citizen's group are already on the committee, and two more members will be named.

“After discussion with many folks in town, including Cindy’s group, I’m appointing the traffic ad hoc safety committee,” said Bowen. “We will be able to coordinate all our efforts. We will find out which ideas will work and which won’t.”

Rasmussen and her supporters have been advocating for changes since the beginning of the year. In May, the group’s town hall meeting drew 50 people. She says the committee’s suggestions would not have a large financial impact on the city budget.

“At the last council meeting Tuesday they approved \$20,000 to fix up the pickleball courts,” said Rasmussen. “If they can come up with \$20 grand, they can come up with \$5,000 to make a huge difference in the safety of the community.”

Proposals on the recommendation list include one consistent speed limit for the town, using trained volunteers to operate radar guns and write parking citations, adding more signage and crosswalks, use of mobile speed humps, and banners at town entrances to increase traffic safety awareness.

Chat

A single speed limit for the entire town — 20 mph is suggested by the group — is the top issue for Rasmussen. Different speed limits in town can be confusing to motorists, she said. ODOT enacted rules in 2022 that enable cities to set their own speed limits.

“Towns are much more able to look at the speed limits rather than snarl up time in the state. I feel it could be the best thing we could do,” said Rasmussen. If the city were to seek a citywide speed limit, it would need to be studied and approved by a traffic engineer, she said.

Crosswalk markings are especially needed where Elm, Applegate and Sterling streets all come together, the group contends. Another location for a crosswalk would be at South Oregon and Applegate streets. Both intersections are close to the Britt Music Festival grounds and become busy with pedestrians and traffic before and after the concerts, she said.

More signage on Fifth Street, the main entrance from Medford, should be in place for pedestrians, said Rasmussen. Seniors live in the area, which is also close to Jacksonville Elementary School.

Speed humps are suggested for streets feeding into the city from hills above the south end of town. Traffic appears to be going faster coming down the hills when it enters city limits.

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Low-rise speed humps are suggested for four locations, and they would be installed on a trial basis of six to 12 months. The group recommends purchase of four sets for \$680. The humps come with spikes that need to be driven into the pavement to secure the 72-inch-long devices.

Suggested locations for speed humps include South Third Street near Andrews Place, Applegate Steet near Grant Steet, upper South Oregon Street and on G Street. In an earlier City Council meeting, City Administrator Jeff Alvis said that residents near the humps would need to be consulted.

Rasmussen said she'd also like to see the current parking ticket fee, now \$20 per violation, raised substantially. Trained volunteers could write tickets. She's particularly concerned about parking during Britt concerts, when people park on corners and in other illegal ways creating safety hazards.

Volunteers could also be trained to use radar guns to check on speeds. Violators could be sent warning letters, the group recommended. Trained volunteers could also assist the police with charging and moving the current "Your Speed Is" signs around town. The signs show drivers their current speed and are usually placed in residential areas.

The traffic safety group met Aug. 9 with Bowen, City Councilor Kenn Gregg and Alvis about their list of proposals. They had asked for a response by Sept. 15, but have no indication that one will be forthcoming.

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Also serving on the citizens group are Terry and Marjorie Donovan and Janie Tibbals. The Donovan's are interested in using volunteers to operate radar guns. Tibbals walks the town daily and is knowledgeable about signage and crosswalks, said Rasmussen.

A picture of a sign that someone sent her might be appropriate for the town, said Rasmussen. It read: "Drive slow and see our little town. Drive fast and see our little jail."

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