

TO:  
**Douglas City Council and  
City of Douglas Planning Commission**

FROM:  
**Ken Carls and Jim Schmiechen  
144 Water Street**

Date:  
**January 9, 2022**

RE:  
**Water Street Traffic Issues**

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We write, once again, to address safety -- and liveability -- issues regarding Water Street, specifically to address the safety of residents (and their property), pedestrians, and bicyclists by implementing controls to limit access to through traffic and reducing speed and constructing safe pedestrian walkways and bike lanes. We, along with our Water Street neighbors, have brought this topic before the Council and Planning Commission multiple times over a number of years. Our requests have always falling on deaf ears. What will be required to draw attention to this matter of public concern and to effect positive action to ameliorate what is becoming increasingly critical? Will it require trauma to a pedestrian or bicyclist or damage to private property at the hands of a reckless speeding driver? What will it require for the City to take action to avoid costly damage to the street surface from the unnecessary traffic of heavy trucks and construction equipment that use this residential street as a shortcut to or from the Blue Star?

Standing: Having owned property and lived at three different addresses along Water Street (254, 325, and currently 144) over a now 24-year period, we are uniquely qualified to speak to safety issues present along this busy residential street. During that period as more and more properties are developed out beyond the City and towards Fennville, we have watched the volume of traffic increase dramatically. Speeds are rarely monitored by local police.

Existing Problems: Relating to the safety and traffic issues, we know City Council has been made aware of some of the hazards as at least as long ago as 2017. We were present at a Council meeting where the owner of the third house north of Water and Randolph asked the Council to do something about speeding vehicles along Water Street. Since then, a number of times we have joined Water Street resident groups to plead with Council to act to limit traffic and mitigate safety hazards posed by vehicular traffic through our neighborhood.

Why Is the Volume of Traffic So High? We want to reiterate that Water Street between Center Street and Wiley Road is a primary thoroughfare from Douglas to all the houses in the growing subdivision adjacent to Schulz Park; Schulz Park itself with its sports fields, dog run, and boat launch; Newport; Peachtree Creek development; the increasing number of houses between 66th and 62nd Street between the river and M-89; and on out to Fennville. The high usage is especially noticeable in the early morning hours when dozens of residents east of Douglas and thundering trucks use Water Street as a shortcut to the Blue Star and come back again in the evening.

Re: Safety Issues: During our 20-year residency on Water Street, several different times people have missed the turn and smashed into the power pole or tree at the top of the hill. And anyone who has tried to walk into town or back and crossed over Tannery Creek has risked life and limb from the fast traffic negotiating the sharp blind corner and downhill turn, which is only exacerbated after dark.

That said, there are dozens of bicyclists that use that Water Street on a daily basis, going in both directions. Ditto, pedestrians, even though there are no sidewalks and no shoulder at the Tannery Creek crossing, which is the most critical danger point along Water Street.

Planning Priorities: Vehicular traffic aside, it is with reference to the cyclists, runners, and walkers that we address a further point: In 2010, Ryan Kilpatrick, the then Planning and Zoning Administrator for the City, organized an extensive 3-day city planning exercise in which he brought together a group of 40 local influencers of wide interests and expertise (including both of us), invited nationally known planning experts, representatives from M-DOT, representatives from the local police, etc., to conceptualize Douglas's future. The conclusions presented proposed future growth that emphasizes *traffic calming*, *walkability/pedestrian friendliness*, and *bike-ability* as a priority in the City. That was now 13 years ago. What has been done? Current and increasing levels of vehicular traffic contravene this priority by actually discouraging pedestrians and bicycles on this dangerous stretch of public thoroughfare.

**Conclusion: We join our neighbors in requesting that the City Council and Planning Commission act immediately to reduce pressure on this residential/neighborhood street and the already stressed traffic bottleneck across Tannery Creek by constructing a pedestrian/bicycle pathway along Water Street, reducing and monitoring in earnest the speed of vehicular traffic, and limiting access to Water Street by heavy trucks and construction equipment.**