



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY # _____

MEETING DATE: August 2, 2022

ITEM TITLE: Certification of Municipal Declaration to Repeal Speed Limits and Request Concurrence

ITEM SUMMARY: In May of 2021, the Town Council discussed and considered a request for a lower speed limit on NC 12 through Southern Shores. As part of that discussion, a traffic study was requested of NCDOT to receive a recommendation based on data so as to have a basis for establishing the appropriate speed limit. In some cases, a municipality will request a specific speed limit for NCDOT to consider. The results of the study in that case will either confirm or contradict the request as the appropriate speed. The Town requested a study to determine what the recommended speed limit for NC 12 should be. The study considers several variables other than speed.

Roadways are initially designed to accommodate certain speeds. If requested for a State Highway System Road, a traffic engineer will perform an engineering and traffic investigation to determine the appropriate speed limit. These investigations examine:

- Road surface characteristics, shoulder conditions, roadway alignment and sight distance.
- Commercial and residential development, and roadside friction (number of driveways, parking, pedestrians, etc.).
- Safe speed for curves and other locations along the section of road being studied.
- Frequency and severity of crashes.
- 85th percentile speed —the speed at or below which 85 percent of the traffic is moving.

At present, the speed limit on NC 12 in Southern Shores is 45 mph except during May 15 to September 15 when the speed limit drops to 35 mph from the southern town line to Trout Run. The results of the study indicate that the present speed limits are consistent with the 85th percentile speed. Motorists traveling above the 85th percentile speed are considered to be exceeding the safe and reasonable speed for road and traffic conditions. The 85th percentile speed should be taken from speed data collected during a 24-hour weekday period. Data for this study was collected during all four seasons in the year.

USLIMITS2 is a web-based tool designed to help practitioners set reasonable, safe, and consistent speed limits for specific segments of roads. For experienced engineers like those in our Division, USLIMITS2 can provide an objective second opinion and increase confidence in speed limit setting decisions. The USLIMITS2 recommendation is 40 mph.

Based upon all the criteria and data evaluated, the report's recommendation is to lower the speed limit the entire stretch of NC 12 through Southern Shores from 45 mph to 35 mph during the full year.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The NC General Statutes are written to give "local authorities" the authority upon the bases of an engineering and traffic investigation to set speed limits on state roads through their locality. Setting the speed limit at a consistent rate through town would be less confusing to all motorists. The lower speeds during the summer months were determined to be appropriate. The recommendation from the study performed by professional traffic engineers recommends the speed limit be 35 mph through town the entire year. Staff recommends that the Town Council concur with this recommendation. Shoulder seasons are reaching well beyond September and traffic remains heavy during a larger portion of the year. This increase in traffic will likely continue to make the case for the lower speed limit. The Council should be aware that the lower speed limit will permit LSV (low speed vehicles) to travel all of NC 12 year-round.

REQUESTED ACTION: A motion to repeal the present speed limits on NC 12 through Southern Shores and concur with the recommendation to set the speed limit to 35 mph during the full year.

ATTACHMENTS:

- 1- Traffic study report to determine appropriate speed for NC 12 through Southern Shores
- 2- NC DOT brochure on determining speed limits
- 3- North Carolina General Statute 20-141. Speed restrictions.