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Neighborhood Works Together to Curb Speeders

By Cathy Tyson

It all started because residents were sick and tired of drivers taking a short cut through their newly-paved residential neighborhood to shave a couple of minutes off their commutes. The hilly, narrow Reliez Station Road has blind turns punctuated by driveways, leaving "a very little strip of roadway to walk safely on," said Christy Joe who spearheaded the traffic calming project, adding that there have been a number of close calls over the years. Neighbors speculated that students heading to Acalanes, along with moms dropping off and picking up kids, were the main culprits. After many meetings and phone calls, her concern has borne fruit - or rather three sets of speed humps, striping and fourteen signs telling drivers to slow down. Over \$5,000 was raised in necessary matching funds to get the Reliez Station Traffic Calming Project off the ground. One generous fellow even offered to kick in extra if the minimum matching amount wasn't met.

The process started in 2006 with a petition; then in 2008 Joe walked the neighborhood with another petition. Ultimately, of the 91 homes in the area, 69% were in favor of traffic calming, and 51 homeowners donated \$100 each to make it happen.

Many neighborhoods may wish for speed humps, but not many actually garner the necessary support and cash to make it happen. "Christy Joe was the main one who stayed with it all along," said Neighborhood Action Team colleague and neighbor Roy Powell.

A coalition came together on proposing a sidewalk when the street was repaved, but they later learned it would be prohibitively expensive. However they did have a general consensus on speeders careening down their slender street.

"We just wanted something that would work. Because the neighborhood was so big, a contribution of roughly \$100 per household was enough to make the \$4,800 requirement," commented Powell. Actually \$5,100 was collected on the first attempt from supportive residents. This represents a 70/30 cost sharing of the estimated \$16,000 total project expense.

Back in September of 2002 the City Council adopted a traffic calming program that builds upon Lafayette's long tradition of citizen volunteerism and community participation. Available online is the free Traffic Calming Guidebook, which spells out exact steps to take for Level 1, 2 or 3 projects. In order to acquire Level 3 traffic calming, like the Reliez Station neighborhood is getting, two-thirds approval from all property owners immediately abutting the physical feature is required. The next step is Circulation Commission and City Council approval. The guide can be found on the city website, go to www.lovelafayette.org and type in Traffic Calming in the Search box.

"The City was very helpful," said Powell, adding, "Everyone (in the neighborhood) benefits - but some will benefit more."

"Yes, it was worth it," said Joe, who would recommend it to other neighborhoods although she cautions that the City only takes on one of these projects a year. This spring Reliez Station residents will finally get the stripes, humps and signs they collectively want.

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