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Immediate solutions sought to combat speeding drivers on dangerous Lafayette road

By Pippa Fisher



A Lafayette police officer monitors traffic with a radar gun on a straight stretch of Reliez Valley Road where motorists pick up speed. Photo Pippa Fisher

What to do about the Reliez Valley Road traffic? Either reckless drivers are endangering life by speeding or, during peak rush hours, the road resembles a parking lot and driver tensions run high. City officials continue to ponder the question but push for improvements on the safety issue right now, saying that it is only a question of time until there is a fatality.

Concerned members of the Reliez Valley Road corridor community met with city council members Cam Burks and Ivor Samson and the chief of police on Nov. 6 in an unprecedented emergency meeting of the public safety subcommittee in order to expedite tangible action.

"The circumstances in my opinion are exigent in nature, compelling us to move quickly and perhaps around some of the standard city processes in an effort to protect the public by engaging and executing quickly," said Burks, who called the emergency meeting. "My primary goal here is life safety, period - and we need to engage and execute action in a substantive way right now."

The problem on Reliez Valley Road is two-fold: safety and congestion during peak hours. But it was the question of safety that prompted the city council to instruct Lafayette Police Chief Eric Christensen to begin a directed enforcement campaign along the stretch of Reliez Valley Road from Withers Avenue to Pleasant Hill Road, following the many residents who spoke of their concerns for safety at the Oct. 23 city council meeting.

Christensen explained to the residents that there are two areas of concern: the route itself and driver behavior.

As expected Christensen found drivers indeed behaving badly, clocking speeds significantly over the 30 mph speed limit, including one motorcyclist recorded at 65 mph. Another officer wrote a ticket for a teenager doing 53 mph.

Additionally, officers have been writing tickets for rolling through the stop signs and for attempting to get around school buses on the route. Roughly 85 percent of all the tickets written have been to residents of the area. Of the 264 traffic stops within Lafayette during the Oct. 25 to Nov. 5 timeframe, 161 were made on Reliez Valley Road.

Christensen explained the one thing the police cannot enforce is courtesy and that is something that is in short supply, with the peak hour congestion adding to driver frustration and road rage, which in turn prompts risky driving behavior such as using the left turn lane at the Pleasant Hill intersection to in fact turn right onto southbound Pleasant Hill Road.

Regarding what actions could feasibly be taken immediately, Christensen recommended painting "30 mph" by existing speed signs and painting a "no left turn" sign at the Pleasant Hill Road intersection, as well as creating two more stop signs at Fairholm Road and My Road in order to prevent long straight strips where drivers pick up speed. He further recommended painting a crosswalk at Green Valley Drive.

More than a dozen residents also gave their opinions on the solutions proposed with not all agreeing about more stop signs and crosswalks. Several appeared in favor of speed bumps, but Christensen pointed out that speed bumps would take more time to implement.

This meeting however was about immediate action and, as a result, Burks and Samson agreed that the matter should come back before the Nov. 13 city council meeting for its approval on the painting of crosswalks and speed limits, bypassing the circulation committee and to further examine the possibility of temporary speed bumps and electric speed warning signs.

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