

# The Boston Globe

## Boston councilor wants to lower city speed limit



JASON DEAREN/AP

By **Meghan E. Irons** GLOBE STAFF APRIL 21, 2016

To the drivers zooming down Dorchester Avenue or other neighborhood streets: Be warned. The city is trying to slow you down.

City Councilor Frank Baker held a hearing Wednesday with city transportation specialists to discuss lowering the Boston speed limit to 20 miles per hour on city streets, a move aimed at taming drivers who zigzag down side roads, cut up main boulevards, and endanger lives.

“It’s the most common complaint in my district — speed,” said Baker, who represents a large swath of Dorchester, the city’s largest and most populous neighborhood. “Savin Hill Ave., Dorchester Ave., all through Uphams Corner — they are all driving too fast.”

The councilor said speeding in Boston has simply gotten out of hand. On a side street or in a congested neighborhood, driving 30 miles per hour — the current limit in residential areas — can be too fast, he said.

A 30-mile-per-hour speed limit might work in smaller towns, where the houses are spread out, Baker said, but not in a neighborhood such as the North End, where the streets are narrow, or throughout much of Dorchester.

“You can barely fit your car on those streets,” he said.

Baker said he is not worried people might think he’s going too far.

“We’ve gotten some complaints that, ‘We are going to be driving around like turtles here.’ Not the case,” he said.

Baker’s measure would decrease the speed limit from 30 miles per hour in residential areas and thickly populated business districts where there are no posted signs. In school zones, the speed limit would be lowered from 20 miles per hour to 15 miles per hour.

That proposal would first require a positive vote by the City Council and the signature of Mayor Martin J. Walsh. Because speed limits are set by state law, the change would also require the Legislature’s approval.

Walsh has supported lower speed limits but said he would have to review a final measure before deciding, a spokeswoman said.

The Legislature’s Joint Committee on Transportation is studying several bills related to the speed limit, and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation said it would be interested in reviewing ideas proposed by Boston’s City Council.

At the hearing Wednesday, councilors heard about the toll that speeding drivers exact on the elderly, the disabled, and people just waiting on a sidewalk.

Jackie DeWolfe choked back tears as she recalled her friend Jack Lanzillotti and his girlfriend, Jessica Campbell, who were struck and killed by a car as they stood on the sidewalk at Beacon and Fairfield streets in the Back Bay in June 2014.

“There are too many crashes, too many people who don’t feel comfortable on our streets,” said DeWolfe, executive director of the transit advocacy group LivableStreets Alliance. “I bike, I walk, and I drive across this city, and I don’t always feel” safe.

Mohamed Alfageeh pleaded guilty last year in Suffolk Superior Court to two counts of motor vehicle homicide stemming from the Back Bay crash. Prosecutors said Alfageeh sped through a red light, struck another vehicle, lost control, then struck Campbell and Lanzillotti.

Don Carlson, a Back Bay advocate, urged officials to lower speed limit, saying speeding has become all too common in his neighborhood.

“It will send a strong message to all drivers that there is something special about this area,” said Carlson, who chairs the public safety committee of the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay.

Chris Osgood, Boston’s chief of streets, also addressed the hearing and said afterward the city is committed to curbing traffic fatalities and serious crashes by 2030 through its Vision Zero Boston initiative. The effort includes reducing speeding, stopping distracted drivers, and getting the public’s input on improving road safety.

“We’ve been pushing very hard on eliminating roadway fatalities and serious injuries from our streets,” Osgood said.

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