

BOARD MEETING:
2ND AND 4TH TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH

(410) 226-5122



101 Market Street
P.O. Box 339
Oxford, Maryland 21654

Commissioners of Oxford

February 7, 2023

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Senate Bill SB303: Talbot County - Speed Monitoring Systems - Intersection of Maryland Route 333 (Oxford Road) and Bonfield Avenue

Chairman Smith,

Please accept this letter as written testimony in favor of SB303, authorizing the placement and use of a speed monitoring system at the intersection of Maryland Route 333 (Oxford Road) and Bonfield Avenue in Oxford, Talbot County, Maryland. Given the nature of the Town of Oxford and the dangerous conditions upon entering the Town, as explained below, the placement and use of a speed monitoring system is necessary for the safety of town residents and visitors.

The Town of Oxford is a waterfront town in Talbot County with historic homes, tree-lined streets, picket fences, inns and taverns, a town beach, and water views in every direction. Oxford prides itself as being a walkable and bikeable community. The entire length of Oxford stretches just over 1 mile, which contributes to its walkability. Aside from St. Michaels, Oxford is the only town in Talbot County that offers a public beach and waterfront dining, bringing many visitors during warmer months.

Maryland Route 333 is a two-lane state highway that runs 9.79 miles from the Town of Easton to the Oxford Bellevue Ferry located at the end of Town. Route 333 is the only road access into Oxford and goes no further than Oxford, ending at the water. The speed limit on Maryland Route 333 changes from 50 mph to 35 mph one-third of a mile from the incorporated boundary of Oxford. The speed limit on Route 333 reduces further to 25 mph at the incorporated boundary. The Oxford Volunteer Fire Department and the Oxford Community Center, both of which are frequently accessed by pedestrians on foot or bicycle, are located on Route 333 three hundred and fifty (350) yards from the incorporated boundary. The Oxford Community Center houses the Oxford Kid's Camp during the summer with children traveling to and from that location daily on foot or bicycle.

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The entry to the Town via Maryland Route 333 is in a densely populated residential neighborhood, with porches a few feet from the road, children and adults walking and biking along the road, and tourists wandering the streets. Within a few hundred feet drivers entering Town go from a vast, open road, to a residential community. Entering the Town via a state highway causes many drivers to exceed speed limits as they fail to slow down upon entry.

In the summer of 2019, the Town experienced a tragedy when the President of the Oxford Voluntary Fire Company Auxiliary left her house on Bonfield Avenue, directly across the street from the firehouse, to cross Route 333 to the firehouse for an auxiliary meeting. Within seconds of stepping from her yard onto Route 333, the Auxiliary President was struck and killed by a vehicle entering town at a speed three times greater than the posted speed limit of 25 mph. Without a speed monitoring system incentivizing drivers to slow down, the Town fears a similar accident will occur again.

The Town has raised concerns over speeders on Route 333 for many years and although we have worked with the State Highway Administration on reducing speeds prior to the town limits and installing traffic calming processes, we are still experiencing the major issue of drivers approaching town at speeds that well exceed the posted limits. To help mitigate the problem, the Town installed a flashing “This is Your Speed” sign at the entrance to town a few years ago in hopes that over time drivers would adhere to the posted speed limit. However, recent data shows that the Town’s efforts have not solved the problem. In fact, during the recent six-month period from July to December 2022, 3,000 cars were clocked approaching the town over the speed of 45 mph in the 35 mph zone, with one third of these vehicles doing 50 to 75 mph.

Although the Town has a police department, given the size of the Town, it employs only three (3) officers at its maximum capacity, and schedules only one officer on duty at a time. With these limitations, it is virtually impossible to regulate speed at the entrance of Town in a deterring manner without causing safety concerns elsewhere. In addition, many Town residents and visitors recognize the limited size of the Department and are not deterred from speeding.

Based on the limited capacity of the Oxford Police Department, the reduction in speed from 50 mph to 25 mph, the change from the wide state highway road to a narrow town road, the residences surrounding Maryland Route 333, the amount of pedestrian traffic, and the location of the Oxford Volunteer Fire Department and Oxford Community Center, the Town believes an unduly hazardous condition exists, as evidenced by the tragic event in 2019. The Town believes that the addition of a speed camera will deter individuals from speeding until such time that the Town can develop and implement other effective means for reducing driving speed on Maryland Route 333.

The Town anticipates placing the speed monitoring system on Maryland Route 333 within the incorporated boundary of the town at a location that all drivers must pass. The use of a speed monitoring system in conjunction with a real-time speed awareness sign the Town utilizes upon the entry into Town is intended to educate drivers. The town currently has one

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permanently installed device at the entrance to town that posts real-time speeds approximately 250' prior to the proposed location of this unit. The existing post will support new signage indicating a speed monitoring system is in use. The town also has a similar device located on a portable trailer that posts real-time speeds, which can be used at an alternative location, and to which new signage indicating a speed monitoring system in use can also be attached.

The placement will sufficiently remind drivers that do exceed the posted speed limit and subsequently receive citations that the speed limit must be obeyed or citations will continue to be issued. The Town believes the speed monitoring system will effectively change driving behavior and reduce the number of speeders entering the Town as it will be open and obvious and a fine that drivers will not want to continuously pay.

The Commissioners of Oxford realize the volume of traffic coming into the town is not comparable to the locations where speed cameras have been installed on highways in larger cities and do not anticipate receiving any revenues from the speed camera. The Town's intention is to work with an authorized company to provide the speed cameras with no anticipated revenues funneling back to the Town. The Town understands that it may be necessary to actually subsidize the cost and believes that is a necessary expense for the safety of its citizens and tourists.

In the event that revenue is generated, the Town will work with MDOT to use the funds to further address the dangerous condition by implementing additional traffic calming mechanisms such as rumble strips or other pavement surface treatments and street trees to indicate to drivers that they have entered a residential area. As provided by the Maryland Code Ann., Transportation Article § 21-809, the Town will be required to introduce and pass a resolution or ordinance at a public hearing prior to placing the speed camera at the proposed location or issuing any citations. As part of that resolution or ordinance, the Town will receive public input and establish specific regulations for the handling of any revenue from the speed camera to specifically address the traffic concerns.

For further clarification, there are numerous additional opportunities, with varying costs, which cannot effectively address the issue of speeding on their own, but may increase the effectiveness if implemented in addition to the speed monitoring system. All opportunities are difficult on a small-town budget, but are being discussed in hopes of accomplishing them in the future, after placing the speed monitoring system.

In September of 2019 the Town held a well-attended community meeting regarding citizen concerns with this unduly hazardous condition. MDOT representatives and elected state officials were also in attendance, as Maryland Route 333 is a state highway. Numerous traffic calming projects, which will take significant funds and support from the State Highway Administration, were identified and discussed at this meeting including the following:

- Installation of electronic speed awareness signs (which we have done with financial assistance from a private memorial fund for this purpose)

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- Installation of a speed monitoring system which would issue citations (MDOT did not object to this, but did clarify legislative action would be required)
- Installation of faux brick crosswalks at areas of Maryland Route 333 within town that are locations of frequent pedestrian crossing to direct pedestrian traffic and serve to alert drivers that pedestrian crossing is anticipated due to the change in color and pattern in the roadway (we have discussed this with MDOT and have hopes of implementing in the near future)
- Installation of faux brick crosswalks on side roads to divert some pedestrian traffic off of the main road where possible
- Incorporation of painted treatments along the shoulders of the state road as the road enters town that will assist in visually narrowing the road for drivers (MDOT has placed some treatments within the last 30 days)
- Tree planting along the highway prior to entering town to alert drivers to the fact that they are entering a populated area
- Improved 25 MPH signage applied directly to the road throughout town, as the street signs can be lost in all of the other visually exciting elements
- In coordination with MDOT, the complete revamping of the entry utilizing a division or island for the purpose of slowing traffic down, streetscaping, including the addition of sidewalks to provide a change from the wide-open rural area entering into the residential community

Conclusion

The Town appreciates your consideration of this very narrow legislation permitting the Town of Oxford to address the very serious issue of drivers entering the town at excessive speeds. This has been an ongoing problem for many, many years. The Town strongly believes that SB303 will have a positive impact for the small town of Oxford without inconveniencing any other community or citizenry and we request your favorable recommendation and approval of SB303. Please let me know if you need any further information regarding our request.

On behalf the Commissioners of Oxford,



Cheryl Lewis, Town Administrator