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Take a closer look at the benefits of traffic calming

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I've read the many letters to the editor complaining about the traffic calming measures on Kimberly Avenue and realize that many people really don't understand what traffic calming is all about. Part of the problem stems from our lack of desire for change; part of the problem is because many of us are unaware of the needs of other roadway users and a lot has to do with the lack of education.

Traffic calming, although fairly new in Asheville, is not a new method for controlling traffic speeds. Many cities in the U.S. and Europe have used these measures for years and they work well. It is far less costly than hiring a traffic cop to sit on the street corner. The initial costs are great but they are there 24 hours a day.

The measures.

What are the measures on Kimberly all about and how do we use them? If you are traveling north, toward Beaverdam Road there is a climbing lane for bicycles.

The lane is there to protect the bicyclist because as they travel uphill they go much slower than the posted speed. To allow traffic to move smoothly they are given a place to ride which is out of the flow. Unfortunately, the lane stops partway up the hill. It should continue to the four-way stop at Griffing Boulevard.

Also, the bike lane has a dangerous ridge in it which the bicyclist will have to avoid because the road was not resurfaced before the bike lane was installed.

If you are traveling southeast toward Charlotte Street there are several islands that narrow the street. These serve several purposes: First, they narrow the road to reduce speed. Second, they delineate the on-street parking. Here is where the city should put "sharrows" (chevrons to show the bicyclist where to ride, as they've done on South French Broad). Many bicyclists will try to weave in and out of the on-street parking areas, which is dangerous behavior.

Because this is downhill the bicyclist can keep up with traffic speeds and should ride out into the lane. This is much safer since they will not have to ease back into traffic.

They will not restrict traffic while going downhill because they will be able to keep up with appropriate traffic speeds.

If a bicyclist is riding their brakes, as new and timid riders have a tendency to do, the motorist needs to treat them just as they do another motorist and wait until it is clear before passing.

Speed controls.

This brings me to the meaning of speed limits. Speed limit is not how fast traffic should travel. It means that traffic should not exceed that speed. A driver needs to continually evaluate conditions and reduce speed when warranted but not go any faster than the posted speed.

The islands in the middle of the road delineate the area and warn motorists they are coming into a traffic calming area. They should slow down and heighten their awareness.

What about roundabouts? Although there are none on Kimberly, there has been no education in Asheville on how to use them.

I believe most motorists are beginning to understand how they work; however for those who are still nervous, let me go over a few pointers.

First, the vehicle in the circle has the right of way whether they are motorist or bicyclist.

Second, it is considerate to use your turn signal if you are turning out so others will know what you are doing, and this will help keep traffic flowing.

Third when exiting the circle do watch for pedestrians because you must yield to them.

Roundabouts keep traffic moving, unlike traffic lights, and reduce pollution from idling. I am sure most of us dislike waiting for a light to change when there is no cross traffic.

Adapting to times.

When our city was first designed, automobiles were little used. After World War 11 money was more plentiful and the automobile became popular. Our city development began to sprawl.

Walking, biking and horseback riding became more difficult.

This past fall we all became keenly aware of the fuel crisis. In an effort to improve these problems we need to make our city roads safer for all modes of travel. Traffic calming is one method to make it safer. Therefore, I want to personally thank and commend the city for reinstating the traffic calming program. I encourage you to continue and expand it.

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