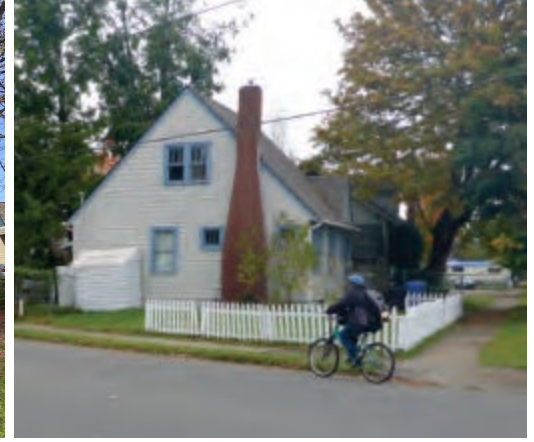




Safe
Routes
PARTNERSHIP

We Can Do Better: Advocating for Safer Streets on Salem's First Family-Friendly Neighborhood Greenway



The city of Salem, Oregon has increasingly recognized the important role of biking and walking as a way of getting around the city. The city's Transportation System Plan identifies several active transportation projects as high-priority projects to be completed in the next 10 years. One of the high-priority projects is the Winter-Maple Neighborhood Greenway, which aims to create a safe, comfortable, and convenient corridor, provide better bike and pedestrian connections between downtown Salem and local schools, business centers, and activities, and reduce motor vehicle volumes and speeds.

What makes the Winter-Maple Greenway particularly significant is the presence of three schools along the route, including the Oregon School for the Deaf (OSD) and two elementary schools. The presence of so many young children and the Deaf community is why advocates were committed to making the Greenway as safe as possible from the very beginning – and why they refused to back down when the first version of the plan didn't adequately address safety.

With support from Kaiser Permanente, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership has a regional policy manager, Becky Gilliam, working to advance

safe and equitable active transportation in the Salem and Eugene area. When Becky joined the National Partnership in early 2018, the Greenway project already had widespread community support thanks to the work of the Salem Bike Boulevard Advocates (SBBA), a grassroots group of bicyclists, parents, and residents that had been doing targeted outreach for a few years. Through their advocacy, they not only built support for the project, they also converted many community members into transportation advocates. They had also consistently stressed the need for adequate safety features along the route to protect students and the Deaf community.

Throughout the process, advocates heard a strong need and desire from the community for the inclusion of speed humps as an additional speed reduction component. While the plan already called for a reduced speed limit of 20 miles an hour, community members were concerned that without an enforcement component, the posted signs would not be effective enough at slowing drivers down. Speed humps would act as a self-enforcing safety component, and combined with the 20 mile per hour speed limit, would be more effective at slowing drivers down.

“My concern was that since our shared goal was to make the street a more prevalent greenway, and to invite and encourage more people to walk and bike there, we needed to be taking steps as early as possible to make it safe from the very beginning—especially for students at the schools,” said Becky.

Becky worked closely with both students and faculty at the Oregon School of the Deaf to talk through how students use the street, and why self-enforcing speed humps would provide the level of comfort and safety that is appropriate near a school and through neighborhoods.

“OSD is not a typical 8am-to-3pm school; many students live on campus full-time, and students range in age from elementary to middle to high school. Students aren’t just coming and going to attend classes; they are living in the community and trying to participate in their community,” said Becky. “They often walk or bike to the market to get a snack, go to movies downtown, go shopping, or do other activities in the area.” In speaking with the school director, Becky also learned about serious collisions and many close calls involving students on foot or bike.

But the proposal to add speed humps met resistance from city council and the Budget Committee. “There was definitely pushback. Some councilors didn’t understand why we needed both a speed limit reduction and speed humps,” said Becky. The Budget Committee chose not to include speed humps in the first budget cycle.

Not satisfied with this outcome, Becky organized with community members and advocacy partners to go back to city council and request that they revisit speed humps during their final consideration of the recommended budget. Becky invited the Director of OSD to join her in meetings with city councilors prior to their final budget meeting, and worked with city council to prepare motions that included speed humps and lowered speeds, plus associated costs.



Community members and advocates organized worked with city staff and decision-makers to determine which features would make the greenway safe for people to bike and walk.

“Becky was a great ally in getting approval for the route’s calming devices located near the schools. She worked with both students and faculty at OSD and encouraged them to give testimony at crucial city council meetings, which helped build the case for city council members to approve the project with speed humps and the additional early implementation budget.”

- Sarah Rice, member of the Salem Bike Boulevard Advocates

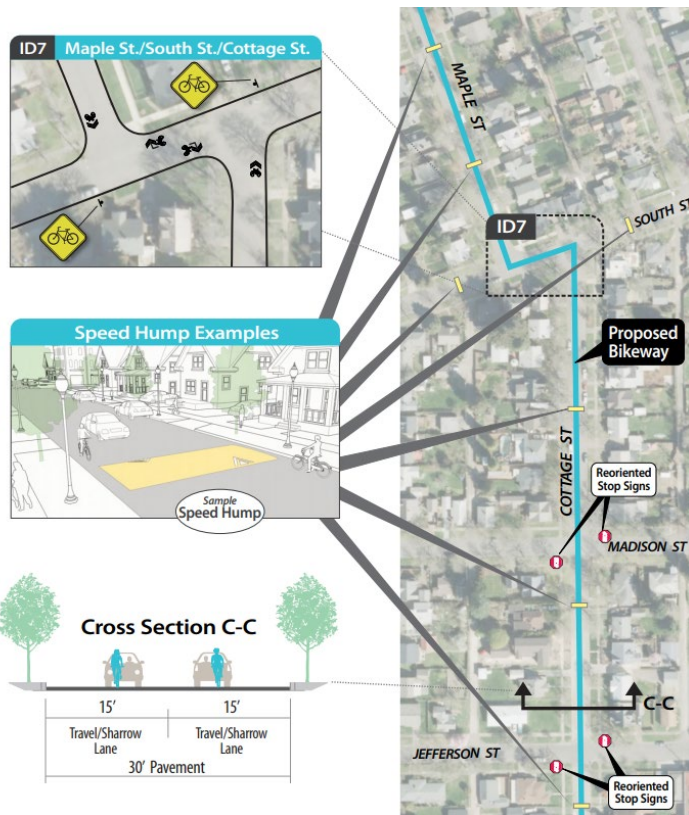
At the city council meeting, students from OSD testified about their experiences in the neighborhood and why they were fearful of walking and biking, especially at night or outside of standard school hours. Advocates also testified about the need for additional stop signs throughout the route.

The community’s dedication to advocating for a safer Winter-Maple Neighborhood Greenway paid off. At the next city council meeting, the council voted unanimously for an amendment to increase the budget by \$50,000 for installation of speed humps along the route.



As the project enters the next budget cycle, Becky continues to work with the SBBA and community members who have been instrumental in moving the plan forward. While the city conducted a traffic count before the project broke ground, they did not do a specific bicycle and pedestrian count. Becky organized volunteers to conduct an unofficial bike count last year, and is now working with the city to coordinate another volunteer-driven bike count that correlates with their methodology. Advocates expect this data to inform priorities in the next phase of the plan and better measure how the Greenway is serving people who walk and bike. Becky is also working with public works staff to make sure the infrastructure improvements are installed in a timely and appropriate manner.

“I think what made our advocacy especially successful was that we didn't approach people about supporting a series of engineering changes,” said Sarah Rice. “Instead, we came to people as neighbors, friends, and advocates for school children. We were asking people to support a community-building idea, where ideally even the most timid cyclist or pedestrian could feel safe - and I think it's hard to say no to that.”



The final approved version of the plan depicts locations where speed humps will be installed.