



## **TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE.**

Arlington Planning Department,  
730 Mass Ave, Arlington MA

Date: April 10, 2024  
To: Select Board  
From: Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)  
Subject: Recommended Regulatory Speed Limit Changes

### **Memorandum**

This memorandum summarizes TAC's recommendations related to Speed Limits above the Townwide 25 MPH Speed Limit. The suggested action by the board is to:

1. Rescind all Special Speed Regulations (SSRs) above the Statutory Townwide 25 MPH Speed Limit.
2. Adopt a staged approach, starting with Broadway and Park Ave. Once those are complete, a prioritized plan will be presented for rescission of the SSRs at the remaining locations.
3. Continue the TAC working group to study and make a recommendation on the following:
  - Retaining Speed Limit signage on streets that are equal to the Townwide 25 MPH limit
  - Establishing an approach for Arlington to use 20 MPH Safety Zones similar to our surrounding municipalities

This recommendation was passed by TAC with a vote of xx-yy (yes-no).

### **1 Overview**

In January, the Select Board referred to the Town Manager a request from the Broadway Neighbors Coalition to take down all 30 MPH Speed Limit signs on Broadway and Warren Street. The goal of this request was to have the Town-wide default Speed Limit of 25 MPH prevail on the roadway. A review by Town Staff determined that in order to enforce a 25 MPH Speed Limit, this would require rescinding the existing MassDOT Special Speed Regulation of 30 MPH. Since the Transportation Advisory Committee previously advised the Select Board on the 25 MPH Town-wide default Speed Limit, the Town Manager felt that this request should also be reviewed by the committee. The scope of the original request was also expanded to review all Speed Limits in Arlington that exceed the Statutory Townwide 25 MPH Speed Limit. Every one of the Speed Limits are covered by Special Speed Regulations (SSRs).

TAC established a Working Group to review the request and with the following high level considerations in mind:

- TAC performed a detailed review of all of the SSRs in force in Arlington with the overarching question of “Why should this street have a Speed Limit different than the Townwide Speed Limit”.
- Arlington adopted a Townwide 25 MPH Speed Limit in 2017.
- The major, high volume of traffic routes into Arlington have multiple Speed Limits, many of which are above 25 MPH (for example, Summer St has 6 different Speed Limits). Multiple limits set confusing expectations for the majority of drivers entering Arlington which are in direct contradiction of the Townwide 25 Limit.

Given that Arlington has already adopted the Townwide 25 Speed Limit, rescinding all Speed Limits over 25 MPH is in alignment with that decision and helps simplify both signage and driver expectations across Arlington.

Overall, Town Staff will be responsible for managing implementation of this task. They will be responsible to:

1. Work with the Select Board to draft a letter requesting rescission of the SSRs on Broadway and Park Ave
2. Work with MassDOT to obtain approval from them for the rescission
3. Work with MassDOT to streamline the rescission process in anticipation of continuation of the process with the remaining streets
4. Conduct a “before” speed study on both Park Ave and Broadway
5. Work with Town Staff to specify the following:
  - Location of all signs to be removed
  - Procurement / production of Thickly Settled 25 MPH District signs
  - Scheduling of signage changes (removal and installation) to align with timing of MassDOT approval
  - Changes to the Arlington Traffic Rules and Orders if needed
6. Summarize the process used to rescind the SSRs for Park and Broadway
7. Conduct an “after” speed study on both Park Ave and Broadway
8. Discuss findings with TAC
9. Report back to Town Manager and Select Board on the results of the rescind process and provide a prioritized list for remaining streets for rescission

## **2 Background**

In 2016, legislation was passed allowing a municipality to reduce the statutory Speed Limit from 30 MPH to 25 MPH on locally owned roadways within a thickly settled or business district. This change in the statutory Speed Limit did not apply to roads that have special speed regulations.

In 2017, at TAC's recommendation, the Select Board adopted a Townwide statutory Speed Limit of 25 MPH. Of note is that all of the abutting communities to Arlington have also adopted the Town/Citywide 25 MPH Speed Limits as of 2019.

In January 2024, TAC was asked by the Town Manager and Select Board (Attachment A) to review the streets with special speed regulations where regulatory Speed Limits exceed the 25 MPH statutory Speed Limit.

All of the streets that have Speed Limits that exceed the Townwide 25 limit are covered by 10 different Special Speed Regulations (SSRs - Attachment B). Those regulations were created in the mid-1970s and covered 26 roads and 96 separate road segments establishing regulatory Speed Limits from 20 to 40 MPH.

### **3 Approach**

While the initial request focused specifically on Speed Limits that were over 25 MPH, TAC adopted an approach to thoroughly analyze and make a recommendation on all roads and road segments covered by the 50+ year old SSRs. All recommendations fall into these categories:

1. Rescind
2. Keep
3. Defer

Both Massachusetts law and MassDOT process / recommendations were used to shape the working group's recommendations.

The basic approach adopted during the discussions was "Why should this road segment be any Speed Limit other than the Townwide 25 limit?" The answer almost invariably came back "There is no reason".

### **4 Detailed Recommendations**

At a high level, the recommendations are as follows:

1. Rescind the SSRs on most streets that have Speed Limits ranging from 25 to 35 MPH (detailed in Table 1 below). This would have the effect of changing the Speed Limit on these streets to a uniform 25 MPH.
  - Includes all Speed Limits > 25 MPH, except for Frontage Road since this is a MassDOT-owned roadway.
  - Includes all road segments for a road irrespective of Speed Limit per segment (MassDOT indicated that we could not rescind one specific road segment within a road)
  - Includes roads marked 20 MPH which are now covered by a marked School Zone
2. Keep
  - Frontage Road is MassDOT owned, and the Town therefore cannot rescind this SSR.

3. Defer

- All 20 MPH road segments (except for the ones covered by a current School Zones in the rescind list below)
- All roads where the SSR established an entire road as at 25 MPH

**4.1 Recommendations by Category / Street**

The recommendations for Arlington’s 26 streets and 96 segments covered by SSRs are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 - Recommendations by Street**

<b>Rescind 12 streets / 54 segments</b>	<b>Out of Scope 1 street / 7 segments</b>	<b>Defer 13 streets / 35 segments 20 mph and 25mph</b>
Broadway	Rt 2 - Frontage Road	Appleton St
Gray St		Bow St
Lake St		Dow Ave
Mountain St (Stratton School Zone)		Eastern Ave / Spring St
North Union St (Thompson School Zone)		Forest St
Park Ave / Park Ave Extension		Gardner St
Pheasant Ave (Stratton School Zone)		Hamlet St
River St		Highland Ave
Rt 2A - Summer St		Jason St
Rt 3 - Mystic St		Medford St
Rt 60 - Pleasant St / Chestnut St / Medford St		Oak Hill Drive
Wachusett Ave		Paul Revere Rd
		Ridge St

**4.2 Recommendations - Next Steps**

**4.2.1 Rescind**

Once approved, Arlington will need to follow the MassDOT Procedure for Rescinding Speed Regulations (Section 8 – Attachment C) in the 2021 version of Procedures for Speed Zoning on State Highways and Municipal Roads.

The working group recommends starting with Park Ave and Broadway since they prompted this activity and using them as the learning case for how to work with MassDOT to rescind the Special Speed Regulations. Following that, Arlington can plan out a priority order for the remaining roads/segments that are being rescinded.

For the road segments in the rescind list that have a 25 MPH Speed Limit, the working group agreed that it would be desirable to maintain 25 MPH signage that is currently in place on each of those road segments. To comply with the 2021 MassDOT Procedures for Speed Zoning, Section 10e, the current white on black Speed Limit signs will be replaced with the signs below (MA-W13-4):

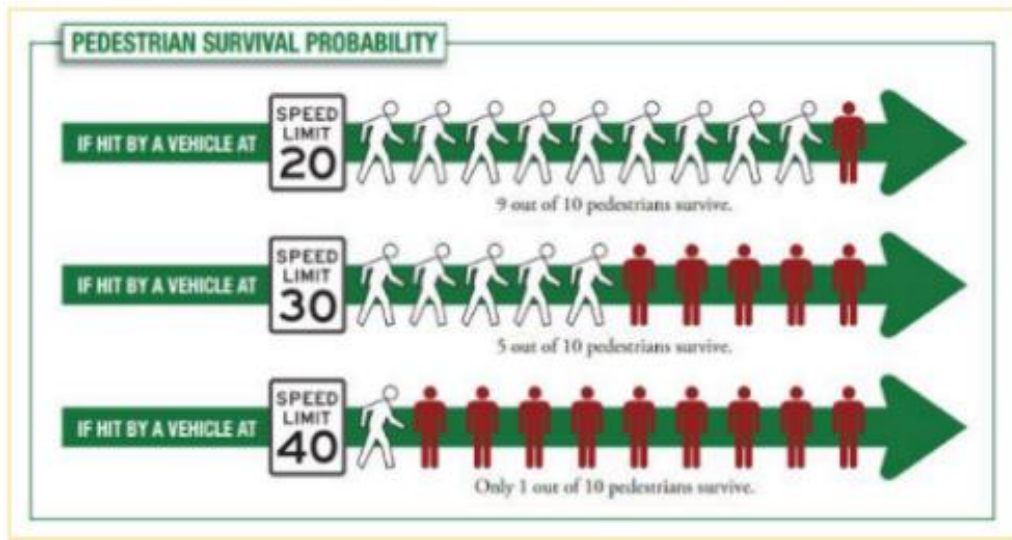


#### 4.2.2 Keep

No action needed.

#### 4.2.3 Defer

The Town is working to establish a Traffic Calming Guide and Program for Arlington. Developing a comprehensive plan to address speed management and safety is a key part of that approach. Vehicle speeds directly impact the likelihood of both fatalities and severe injury as shown below:



Graphic from the City of Somerville: <https://www.somervillema.gov/content/somerville-speed-limits-and-safety-zones>

To address the road segments in the defer category, TAC recommends that Arlington develop a consistent approach to both 25 MPH signage and 20 MPH Speed Limits, including safety zones. This encompasses the roads identified above and also sets a consistent approach, clearly setting driver expectations, that can be adopted across Arlington. This approach will be folded into the Traffic Calming Guide and Program. Addressing Speed Limits and signage is not the complete solution, but they are an important first step on the path towards Vision Zero as recommended in the Connect Arlington – Sustainable Transportation Plan.

For reference, Arlington is not alone in pursuing this path. Andover went to Townwide 25 Speed Limit in 2023 and also is systematically working through their SSRs. Arlington can leverage their experiences to make our transition easier. (<https://andoverma.gov/1118/Townwide-25-MPH-Speed-Limit>).

TAC recommends that the current working group continue, work closely with Town Staff, and prepare a recommendation for consideration by the Select Board and Town Staff.

#### 4.2.4 Defer - Details

There are two separate categories of road segments in the “defer” bucket:

- Segments at 25 MPH (25 segments)
- Segments at 20 MPH (12 segments)

#### 25 MPH Signage

The SSRs require that each segment be marked with a regulatory Speed Limit sign. Those signs will need to come down if the SSR is rescinded. Currently, Arlington does not have an approach that would allow us to consistently mark specific roadways if desired.

Considerations and issues:

- This is the Townwide Speed Limit
- Per MassDOT guidance, the Townwide Speed Limit is marked at our borders
- As recommended above, Arlington is allowed to post the MA-W13-4 signs
- An interesting and compelling example is provided by the city of Seattle where they posted signs every ¼ mile and achieved positive results in speed reduction and impressive results in crash reduction after adopting a Citywide 25 MPH
- Seattle:  
<https://www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/safety-first/vision-zero/speedlimits>

The working group plans to answer the question of how many signs Arlington would want to post and where, as well as establishing a process for adding / removing signage.

#### 20 MPH Zones

The SSRs were established 50+ years ago and the original motivation for these particular roads/segments is less clear today. The current approach to 20 MPH zones includes School Zone and Safety Zones.

All of Arlington’s schools are marked as School Zones with a 20 MPH Speed Limit. There are currently one Safety Zone marked in Arlington on Herbert Road near Magnolia Field. Safety Zones are marked with sign MA-R2-8 as shown below:



Considerations and issues:

04/10/24 Final

- Massachusetts allows municipalities (without MassDOT approval) to establish Safety Zones that have a statutory 20 MPH Speed Limit
- Both Cambridge and Somerville have embraced Safety Zones for almost every local street – links:
  - Cambridge:  
<https://www.cambridgema.gov/StreetsAndTransportation/PoliciesOrdinancesAndPlans/VisionZero/SpeedLimitsInCambridge>
  - Somerville:  
<https://www.somervillema.gov/content/somerville-speed-limits-and-safety-zones>
- Lexington Center is a Safety Zone

The working group plans to systematically address whether Arlington wants to have Safety Zones and if so, how many and where they might be located.

## Attachment A – Initial Request to Expedite

### TAC Referral - Special Speed Regulations

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**Jim Feeney** <jfeeney@town.arlington.ma.us>

Tue, Jan 23, 2024 at 11:03 AM

To: "laura.swan.tac@gmail.com" <laura.swan.tac@gmail.com>

Cc: John Alessi <jalessi@town.arlington.ma.us>, Eric Helmuth <ehelmuth@town.arlington.ma.us>

Good morning Laura,

I hope you are well. If at all possible, I was hoping TAC would be able to prioritize taking up the attached matter at its upcoming February meeting.

In brief, Arlington has a number of regulatory speed limits that exceed the statutory speed limit in various parts of Town. Instead of approaching this matter in a piece-meal fashion per this specific request for Broadway, as well as last night's request for Park Ave., it seemed prudent to consider the merits of this measure as a whole. TAC previously made a recommendation to the Select Board about the town-wide speed limit. Attached is a compilation of the materials I have gathered.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns. So that you have it, my cell phone is (781) 858-8632.

Best,

Jim



**James Feeney**

Town Manager

Town of Arlington, MA

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## Attachment B – Special Speed Regulations

The following Special Speed Regulations (and the roads impacted) are in force in Arlington:

- 44-A
  - Summer St (partial - rest in 494-A)
- 494 / 494-A
  - Summer St (partial - rest in 44-A)
- 770
  - Park Ave – Park Ave Extension
  - Mystic St
  - Pleasant St - Chestnut St – Medford St
  - Forest St
- 793
  - Frontage Road
- 793-A
  - Frontage Road
- 903
  - Paul Revere Road
  - Jason St
  - Gray St
- 991
  - Medford St
  - Hamlet St
- 1055
  - North Union St
  - Highland Ave
  - Eastern Ave & Spring St
  - Pheasant Ave
  - Mountain Ave
- 2084
  - Bow St
  - River St
  - Gardner St
  - Ridge St
  - Dow Ave
  - Lake St
  - Broadway
- 5035
  - Appleton St
  - Oak Hill Dr
  - Wachusett Ave

## Attachment C – Rescinding Special Speed Regulations

### Part 8. Rescinding Special Speed Regulations

A municipality may decide to rescind an existing Special Speed Regulation on a municipal way. Doing so should only take place after careful consideration, as rescinding a Special Speed Regulation will change the speed laws, including enforcement methods, that govern the street will from MGL c. 90 § 18 to MGL c. 90 §§ 17 or 17C (as described in **Part 2**) and any regulatory speed limit signs will have to be removed.

If a city or town moves to rescind a Special Speed Regulation on a municipal way, it should specifically reference the regulation number and whether the rescission is for all or a portion of the regulation. If only a portion of the regulation is to be rescinded, it should clearly be noted in the action made by the body that governs the municipal traffic code. Upon approval by the municipality, a certified copy of the action shall be sent to:

State Traffic Engineer  
Attention: Regulations Engineer  
MassDOT Highway Division  
10 Park Plaza, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Boston, MA 02116

Upon notification of the recession, MassDOT will prepare a modified or rescinded Special Speed Regulation, depending upon the action taken by the municipality. Similar to the creation of a new Special Speed Regulation, this document will be signed by the Registrar of Motor Vehicles and the State Traffic Engineer, and copies will be supplied to the District Office and the municipality. At this time the municipality shall remove the regulatory speed limit signs and the speed enforcement of the road will revert to MGL c. 90 §§ 17 or 17C. Any new speed signage shall conform to the standards shown in **Part 10** and the MUTCD.