



Memorandum

To: The Honorable Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive and
The Honorable Members of the Whatcom County Council

Through: Elizabeth Kosa, Director *EaK*

From: Douglas W. Ranney II, P.E., County Engineer *DR* Acting County Engineer

Date: June 16, 2025

Re: **Ordinance Amending Whatcom County Code 10.04.095 to Establish 20 MPH School Speed Zones on Bennett Drive and Alderwood Avenue for Alderwood Elementary School**

Requested Action

Public Works respectfully requests that the County Council adopt the proposed ordinance to establish School Speed Zones on Bennett Drive from 300 feet north of Alderwood Avenue to 300 feet south of Alderwood Avenue, and on Alderwood Avenue from Bennett Drive to Hollywood Avenue.

Background and Purpose

In collaboration with the Bellingham School District and Whatcom County Sheriff's Office Traffic Sergeant, Whatcom County Public Works is proposing to establish "20 Miles Per Hour, When Children are Present" School Speed Zones on Bennett Drive and Alderwood Avenue. The establishment of these school speed zones, where children walk or bike to school, would allow for safer travel for both the students and the traveling public. These low cost improvements are part of a wider partnership with the Bellingham School District to improve students travel under the Safe Routes to Schools program within the normal one mile radius walk/bike zone. Letters of support have been provided by: Superintendent of Bellingham Public Schools, Greg Baker; Sgt. Anthony Paz, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office Traffic Sergeant; and the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

Information

This ordinance will allow for the installation of school zone speed limit signs and is necessary to comply with RCW 46.61.440 to establish school speed zones on certain County roads.

Please contact Ryan Morrison, P.E., Engineering Services Manager – Traffic at extension 5904 with any questions regarding this ordinance.

News Flash

Public Works communications staff published a [News Flash](#) on this ordinance on June 16th and July 7th, in advance of the public hearing to be held on July 22nd, 2025.

Enclosure: Bellingham School District Letter of Support
WCSO Letter of Support
BPAC Letter of Support – Alderwood School Zones



April 29, 2025

Whatcom County Council
311 Grand Ave., Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

Whatcom County Council members,

As you likely know, Alderwood Elementary School is one of three Bellingham Public Schools (BPS) schools that lie outside of the City of Bellingham and within the jurisdiction of Whatcom County. Bellingham Public Schools is grateful to our city and county partners for consistent support of safe and active routes to school.

We understand that low-cost improvements have been proposed prior to the beginning of the 2025-26 school year for the area serving Alderwood Elementary School. We thank you for addressing needs related to Alderwood Elementary while you continue to consider additional projects for enhanced safety, as proposed in our March 2025 letter.

Specifically, we understand the county is considering:

1. Sign upgrades, retroreflective post wraps and crosswalk marking refresh in the vicinity of the two school crosswalks – Alderwood Ave. at Willowwood Ave. and Alderwood Ave. at Bennett Dr.
2. Adding a new school zone and 20 MPH school speed limit when children are present on Bennett Dr. from 300 ft north of Alderwood Ave. to 300 ft south of Alderwood Ave.
3. Adding a new school zone and 20 MPH school speed limit when children are present on Alderwood Ave. from Bennett Dr. to Hollywood Ave.

Bellingham Public Schools is in support of these proposed improvements, which we anticipate will improve student safety and increase the Alderwood community's confidence that their children can safely travel the route to and from school.

Sincerely,

Greg Baker, Superintendent

**WHATCOM COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**
DONNELL "TANK" TANKSLEY
SHERIFF



PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING
311 Grand Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-6600

May, 19th 2025

Anthony Paz
Traffic Sergeant

To the Whatcom County Council,

As the Traffic Sergeant with the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office, I am writing to express my strong support for the expansion of the school speed restriction zone surrounding Alderwood Elementary School.

School zones are established to protect our youngest and most vulnerable road users, children. The importance of expanding this zone cannot be overstated, especially given the increasing volume of vehicle and pedestrian traffic near Alderwood during school hours.

Children are unpredictable and often unaware of traffic dangers. They can suddenly enter the roadway without warning, leaving drivers with only moments to respond. Lower speed limits in school zones provide critical reaction time and significantly increase the likelihood of a driver stopping in time to prevent a tragedy.

Research consistently shows that reduced speed equals reduced severity of injury. A pedestrian struck by a vehicle at 20 mph has a far higher chance of survival than at 30 or 40 mph. Beth Ebel, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Washington School of Medicine, says in a recent study that, "In addition to the safety benefits, slowing down car traffic encourages kids to walk, bike or bus to school, which have been shown to improve child health and concentration."¹

Additionally, the presence of reduced speed limits, signage, and crossing guards not only

1. Dr. Beth EBEL. "New Study: Photo Enforcement Slows School Zone Speeders - Harborview Injury Prevention & Research Center." Seattle, WA. October 3, 2018. <https://hiprc.org/blog/new-study-photo-enforcement-slows-school-zone-speeders/>.

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enhances driver awareness, but also teaches caution. These measures help foster a safer, more respectful environment where children and families feel secure traveling to and from school.

Whatcom County is traditionally characterized as a rural setting. However, the housing dynamics surrounding Alderwood Elementary school is more of a suburban "city like" setting, which is densely populated amongst family residences and multiple apartment complexes. Alderwood Elementary experiences high pedestrian activity during drop-off and pick-up hours, with many students walking, biking, or being transported by parents. Expanding the speed restriction zone would provide safer buffer areas and promote active transportation in line with public health goals.

I urge the Whatcom County Council to prioritize child safety and public health by approving the expansion of the Alderwood Elementary School zone. This is an opportunity to prevent avoidable tragedies before they occur.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Anthony Paz

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony Paz", written over a horizontal line.

Traffic Sergeant

Whatcom County Sheriff's Office



May 8, 2025

Whatcom County Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Ryan Corley - Chairperson

To the Honorable Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive and the Honorable Members of the Whatcom County Council –

I am writing to express the Committee's strong support for the expansion of the school speed limit zones around Alderwood Elementary School.

Existing school zones on Redwood Avenue and Hollywood Avenue do not fully cover the school walk routes to Alderwood Elementary School that are designated by the Bellingham School District. Alderwood Avenue and Bennett Drive are both classified as Urban Major Collector roadways and carry high volumes of traffic, especially during school drop-off and pick-up times. The additional school zones proposed on these roads are a good first step in keeping children safe as they walk, bike and roll to school and utilize existing school crosswalks.

Recent data from the CDC reports that 1 in 5 people who died in crashes in 2022 were pedestrians. In 2019, the California Office of Traffic Safety reported a 40% risk of death for pedestrians hit by vehicles travelling at 30 MPH and that that risk was lowered to 10% for pedestrians hit by vehicles travelling at 20 MPH.

School zones are established to help protect children who may make unexpected incursions into roadways, as they are not as cognizant of traffic threats, leaving drivers with little time to react. Lower speed limits provide crucial extra time for drivers to prevent potential catastrophes.

In addition to safety, these school zones will encourage active transportation, reduce the reliance on vehicles to get students to school, promote healthy lifestyles and potentially reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

We hope to see future collaborations between the Whatcom County Public Works Department and the Bellingham School District in this area that would further enhance the safety of students and the general public.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ryan Corley

Whatcom County Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Patrick Alesse, Kelly Kendall, John Upston, Dan Kostozewski, Charlie Heggem, Patrick Bush, Gervasio Tirigall, Payton Waldo

WHATCOM COUNTY
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

ELIZABETH KOSA
Director



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DOUGLAS W. RANNEY II, P.E.
County Engineer
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Vicinity Map: Bennett Dr & Alderwood Ave School Speed Zones



1 Existing school crosswalk Alderwood Ave at Willowwood Ave

2 Existing school crosswalk Alderwood Ave at Bennett Dr

Existing 20 MPH School Speed Zones on Hollywood Ave
& Redwood Ave

New 20 MPH School Speed Limit Zones