



City of Somerville

Traffic Calming Program



What is traffic calming?

Traffic Calming is a way to reduce motor vehicle speeds and improve the safety and livability of residential streets. Traffic calming can be achieved in a variety of ways, but is usually done by making physical changes to the streetscape. These changes intentionally force drivers to slow down.

Our streets should be designed to make it uncomfortable to drive faster than the speed limit, which is 25 mph unless otherwise posted. Implementing traffic calming treatments will allow everyone to feel safer on Somerville's streets.



Is traffic calming right for my street?

There are a few important questions that you should think about before filling out a traffic calming petition:

- Do I feel unsafe while walking or biking down my street?
- Do my neighbors think that traffic is causing a safety concern?
- Is my street primarily residential?
- Is there a school or park on my street?
- Is there, at most, one lane of vehicle travel in each direction?
- Does my street have fairly low traffic volumes, or is it a main travel corridor?
- Would I be willing to give up on-street parking spaces to allow for the installation of a traffic calming device?

If the answer to any or all of these questions is yes, traffic calming could be a viable option.



What does traffic calming look like?

Below is a list of interventions that have been installed as part of traffic calming efforts across the country. It is important to understand that a treatment that works well on one street may cause issues on another. That is why each street must be studied first to determine which interventions are appropriate in the context of that particular street.

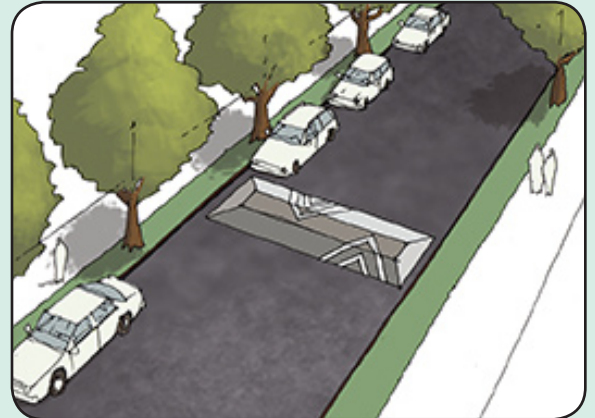


Speed Humps

Speed humps are one of the more recognizable traffic calming devices. They are also an effective option when it comes to reducing speeds. As with all traffic calming devices, however, special considerations must be made to ensure that cyclists, snow plows, and emergency vehicles can still use the street without being hindered.

Raised Crosswalks & Speed Tables

In locations where there is high pedestrian traffic, a raised crosswalk could be appropriate. This treatment is essentially a raised table in the street that allows pedestrians to cross at the same level as the sidewalk, slowing motorists while alerting them that this is an area of frequent crossing.



On-Street Parking

Parked cars are another great way to slow down moving vehicles. They narrow the street and force drivers to be more cautious. Many residential streets in Somerville already have some degree of traffic calming in place due to the presence of on-street parking.



Street Trees & Planters

Trees in urban areas provide many benefits, but one that isn't mentioned often is that they can act as traffic calming devices. Similar to parked cars, properly placed trees can narrow the street (visually or literally) and cause drivers to instinctively slow down.



Neckdowns & Pinch Points

Neckdowns are curb extensions at intersections, which serve to shorten the crossing distance for pedestrians while slowing turning vehicles. Pinch points are curb extensions at a midblock location, as seen in the graphic to the right.



Chicanes

Chicanes are alternating curb extensions that force drivers to make an "S" movement to navigate a section of the street. This treatment typically requires some on-street parking removal, but may also provide an opportunity to create green space.

Two-Way Conversion

Changing a one-way street to a two-way street can result in a less confusing street network and lower vehicle speeds. This treatment can be particularly effective in Somerville, where an already narrow one-way street would become a very narrow two-way.



Markings & Signage

A cheaper alternative to an asphalt or concrete intervention includes putting down paint or improving signage along a street. There are many possibilities, some of which are striping a bike lane, painting a curb extension, putting in a new crosswalk, or installing speed limit signs. It is common for more cost-effective measures like these to be put in place before moving to a solution that involves construction.

How do I apply?

To have your street considered for traffic calming, fill out the [petition form](#) (found at [parksomerville.com](#)) and return it to the Traffic Commission Administrator at LAccaputo@somervillema.gov. Your street will be put onto our traffic calming request list, and the City will perform an evaluation of your street. Streets are then prioritized based on factors such as crash rates, the extent of speeding, and proximity to schools, parks, and playgrounds. Due to the volume of requests, it can be expected that the process will take a year or more from the time the petition is submitted to the time a recommendation is made. Streets at the top of the prioritization list will be more likely to receive funding and will be treated first.

Additional Programs

Neighborways

Neighborways are residential streets designed for slow, low-volume auto traffic, where children can play and bicycles and pedestrians are given priority. If you think this sounds similar to traffic calming, you're right. The City of Somerville is hoping to integrate these programs, applying the iconic neighborways paint treatment in some locations and providing more permanent features in other locations. To find out more, check out [somervillestreets.com](#).

Safe Routes to School

SRTS is a MassDOT program that encourages children to walk and bike to school. Visit massdot.state.ma.us/saferoutestoschool to learn more.

Shape Up Somerville

City planners are also working with [Shape Up Somerville](#) to implement programming related to safer streets. Shape Up strives to build healthy, equitable communities in Somerville through partnerships, programming, and policies related to food systems and active living, and believes that safer streets lead to healthier, more active communities.



Questions? Need more information?

Visit Somerville's Traffic and Parking Department website, [parksomerville.com](#). Or, contact Adam Polinski in the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development at APolinski@somervillema.gov.