Written by Carol Pomeday
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STANDING ON THE NARROW shoulder of Sauk Trail Road, Joe Sopko had his dog Remo sit until a vehicle passed. He wants the 55 mph speed limit reduced to 35 mph. Town officials are considering dropping it to 45 mph. *Photo by Sam Arendt*

Town's plan to reduce limit to 45 mph doesn'tgo far enough, some say

The Town of Belgium appears poised to lower the speed limit on Sauk Trail Road from 55 mph to 45 mph due to the residential nature of the area, but at least one resident doesn't believe that's enough to change people's habits.

While residents welcome any change that would slow down traffic along the road that has narrow shoulders, Joe Sopko, 176 Twin Valley Tr., predicted 45 mph won't have much effect.

He would like to see the speed limit reduced to 35 mph, noting no other residential area in the township allows traffic to go 55 mph.

"In the summer, you have kids on the road all the time with bicycles and there are so many bicycle events going up and down that road," said Sopko, a former Ozaukee County supervisor and Town of Belgium plan commission member.

"I always maintained that the bike bridge (on the Ozaukee Interurban trail that crosses I-43) was a waste of money. I wanted them to put bicycle lanes on Sauk Trail so people can ride safely and get to the bike trail."

Sopko, who walks his dog along Sauk Trail Road, said he steps to the side of the road with his

dog when a vehicle approaches, noting 80% of vehicles slow down, but the remaining 20% speed past.

“I’ve been run into the ditch,” he said. “The worst time is 7 to 8:30 in the morning when high school kids are going to school and trucks are heading to work.”

Hannelore Bruhn, who lives in a subdivision along the road, agreed, noting that’s also when older students are standing along Sauk Trail waiting for their school bus.

She used to jog with her sons in a jogging stroller when they were babies. Now that they’re 3 and 7, she won’t let them on the road unless she or husband Dan are next to them.

“Even then, I’m nervous,” Bruhn said. “They have to stay in the subdivision. I think it’s wonderful that there is a possibility they could reduce the speed limit to 45 mph just because of all the children and wildlife in the area.

“It’s best for the people and the drivers. There are so many little hills that you can’t see what’s ahead. I think it’s a start to have it reduced.”

Town Zoning Administrator Charles Parks, who also lives on Sauk Trail Road, said the town’s highest density residential districts are along Sauk Trail Road.

Many seasonal homes along Lake Michigan have been converted to year-round residences, he noted, and four of the town’s five subdivisions are off Sauk Trail, making it a principle route to I-43 for many people.

The west side of Sauk Trail is zoned agricultural and farmed fairly intensively, he said.

“Besides the deer problem, the pedestrian traffic, the joggers, the horseback riders and the many bike riders who like the scenic route, there are a number of farmers using the road to access their fields, pulling implements behind tractors,” Parks said.

“Any of this can occur at the same time many people are commuting to or from their destinations at 55-plus mph.

“This makes it a land-use issue that the town, in the interest of good stewardship, should take up again.”

The speed limit was on Monday’s Town Board agenda, but Janice Poss, who lives along the road and requested the limit be reduced in January, was unable to attend the meeting.

It will be discussed at the April 4 meeting, Chairman Francis Kleckner said.