

Project Calgary: Neighbourhoods embrace traffic calming

Advocates say it fosters sense of community

BY EVA FERGUSON, CALGARY HERALD OCTOBER 18, 2011 7:17 AM



Marc Doll of the South Calgary Community Association says traffic circles and other traffic-calming measures have worked for Garrison Woods.

Photograph by: Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald

CALGARY — A stroll through Garrison Woods will take you through winding, narrow, tree-lined streets.

Kids might be playing street hockey, skateboarding or trying a new trike while their parents finish dinner and sip wine on the front porch.

In a city full of complaints about traffic congestion and speeding shortcutters, this southwest community built on a former land for military staff housing has managed to escape the traffic headaches of other communities with a simple design.

While **Garrison Woods** may be a poster child for the idea of using street design to slow and redirect traffic, the idea remains controversial. Traffic calming has been embraced in some communities, clamoured for in others, and dismissed as insufficient elsewhere, but there are few communities where it isn't at least a discussion point.

Marc Doll, president of the **South Calgary Community Association**, says the crux of Garrison

Woods' success in keeping traffic slow on neighbourhood streets lies in a sense of community fostered by design.

Most homes have front porches, many with small setbacks only a few feet from the curb. Fewer garages mean more on-street parking on narrower streets. What results is a community often bustling with residents, creating a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere that discourages speeders.

"If you come through our community going any faster than 30 kilometres, you're going to hear about it," Doll says. "It's the culture here that really is about knowing your neighbour, about sharing a glass of wine on the front step."

Thanks to open green spaces, parks, pedestrian-friendly cafes and shopping, Doll says he rarely has to leave the community in a car to get anything. And despite its proximity to downtown, short-cutting through the community is uncommon.

In fact, if anyone isn't a resident, they're often winding through trying to get to the nearby Flames Community Arenas but often end up getting lost in one of the community's dead-end streets.

"That's when they get frustrated, and then sometimes they do speed," Doll says.

In other parts of the city, many communities are still choosing to construct change within their neighbourhood's landscape, adding myriad initiatives from traffic circles to four-way stops to speed humps, bumps, cushions and cables.

Transportation planner Bruce McDougall says initiatives across the city have worked well to reduce speeds, particularly in areas with schools or playgrounds.

Over the past three years, the city spent about \$1 million annually on traffic calming initiatives.

But some communities argue efforts to construct traffic-calming changes in their community haven't done nearly enough.

One of Calgary's oldest and wealthiest communities, Mount Royal, has seen its share of traffic calming since 1972.

But Bob Weaver, director of traffic safety for the **Mount Royal Community Association**, says the challenges haven't waned and a new study with further requests for change is expected to come before city traffic officials by next month.

"As the city grows, as inner-city development grows, it all continues to impact us, and our problems just won't go away."

Mount Royal boasts a series of well-landscaped traffic circles, raised and treed to provide the look of a dead-end, encouraging drivers to slow down.

Expanded medians, four-way stops and speed bumps, particularly around community schools, also serve to slow traffic.

And short-cutting is supposed to be mitigated with a series of turn restrictions, disallowing drivers along 14th Street S.W. from turning into the community during morning rush hour.

But Weaver says in spite of all the efforts, traffic calming is only about one-third of the way complete in the community.

He says that traffic counts on residential streets shouldn't be more than 1,500 vehicles per day.

"But on 8th Street, we're at 6,000 cars a day, and Royal Avenue is at 5,000 per day . . . we're still struggling with a lot of problems."

City traffic planners say its full steam-ahead with further construction to mitigate speeding and shortcutting in a variety of different communities. But some council members want to move away from expensive change.

"In terms of all the bumps, humps and wiggles I'm not sure I've seen the best results," says **Ald. Gian-Carlo Carra**, well-known for his work in urban design before entering politics.

"Traffic circles don't always work. And they're not that pedestrian-friendly."

Carra says what is safer for communities and friendlier to pedestrians are narrower streets, bike lanes and better investment in transit.

Ald. Brian Pincott agrees, adding that being creative with traffic calming can often be cheaper and more successful at the same time.

The community of Southwood discovered a great way to calm traffic this past summer by spending only a few dollars on cans of coloured paint through their **Paint the Pavement** event in August.

Kids painted rainbows, ladybugs and stick figures on the road at the T-intersection of Sackville Drive S.W.

Rob Dickinson, director of programs for Southwood, said when people drive through the area, the intersection says in no uncertain terms that kids live here.

"The painting, which is very much a kid-like drawing, says you're in a community with children, schools, and playgrounds," Dickinson says.

"It's made the streets safer but it also brought our community together."

Pincott, who introduced the idea at a community meeting, says bringing neighbours together at community function is one of the best ways to control traffic.

"If you get to know your neighbour, you care more about them, their kids and your community.

"And because of that, you'll be more careful driving through your community."

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