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HEADLINE: Speeding fines could double; Madden bill to target residential areas

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BODY:

Fines for speeding in some Howard County neighborhoods could double under a bill Sen. Martin G. Madden, a Clarksville Republican, plans to introduce in the next General Assembly session.

Under the bill, county officials would have the power to designate the zones for the special fines. The areas would resemble highway work zones, where doubled fines are supposed to help protect work crews from the dangers of speeding motorists.

Key county officials, responding to long-standing complaints that speeders pose similar threats to pedestrians in some neighborhoods, support the idea.

"We'll give them another weapon in their arsenal to deal with the issue of speeding in our residential areas," Madden said of his bill.

Fines for speeding range from \$ 60 for going up to 9 mph over the speed limit, to \$ 515 for going 40 mph over the speed limit. More common are \$ 70 fines for going between 10 and 19 mph over the speed limit.

Sgt. Pete D'Antuono, chief of traffic enforcement for the Howard police, says the department receives complaints about speeders in residential neighborhoods more often than any other complaint.

"It's the number one priority here," he said.

But he questioned if simply doubling those fines would have an effect on speeding.

"My experience with fines is that threat doesn't have a deterrent effect," D'Antuono said, noting that it is education and enforcement that sometimes bring speeds in a neighborhood down.

But County Executive Charles I. Ecker, who declared a moratorium on one weapon against speeding -- building more new speed bumps -- last year, supports Madden's plan.

"It's one thing to exceed the speed limit by 10 miles [per hour] on Route 70," said Ecker, a Republican. "It's another thing to exceed the speed limit by 10 miles [per hour] on a residential road."

Council Chairman Dennis R. Schrader, a Republican, also favors higher fines for residential areas, but warns that not all neighbors will like the change.

"The flip side of that is the majority of speeders in an area are the residents," Schrader said. "There's a potential for the law of unintended consequences."

Madden's bill, like many of Howard's anti-speeding initiatives, grows from complaints from residents along Shaker Drive. The road through Columbia's Kings Contrivance village connects two major highways, U.S. 29 and Route 32.

County officials have spent \$ 60,000 turning a 3/4-mile stretch of the road into an obstacle course of traffic-calming devices, including four circles, two speed bumps and one "choker" -- a narrow spot intended to slow motorists.

Madden, whose district includes the area, got the idea for doubling fines in trouble spots from Shaker Drive resident Ross Kelley, who has daughters, ages 3 and 6.

Last year, Kelley used radar equipment provided by the police to measure the speed of motorists. Four traveled at 50 mph -- double the posted speed of 25 mph. A few months later, a truck speeding on Shaker Drive struck his dog, Angel, causing injuries that have partially blinded her and made eating difficult.

Kelley said the traffic circles and other devices have helped slow motorists, but some still drive as fast as ever: "People are still doing incredible rates of speed down the street," he said.

Some neighbors complain the traffic devices have actually caused more trouble. In July, there was a head-on collision at Shaker Drive's "choker." In August, a Ford Bronco flipped off one of the low concrete traffic circles into a tree.

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