

## Staff Memorandum

Council Work Session – 09/29/2021

Committing to Vision Zero as an organization will enhance collaboration among staff from across Town departments and external public agencies to work toward the goal of roadway safety. At this Council Work Session, staff will present a draft Vision Zero resolution and seek Council feedback.

**Background:** In April 2018 representatives from the Transportation and Connectivity Advisory Board and the Planning Commission presented a petition to Council requesting that it adopt a Vision Zero Policy. Council referred the petition to the Mayor and Town Manager and expressed concern about lack of resources to support the policy and uncertainty about what the policy entailed.

In fall of 2018, Chapel Hill was selected to participate in a pilot program through the National Safety Council (NSC) and AmericaWalks called Road to Zero. Staff participated in a series of workshops. With funding and support from the program, staff convened a Pedestrian Safety Task Force of representatives from public health, transit, police, injury prevention, eldercare, homeless services, youth services, emergency care, and more. The end-product of this Task Force was the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan, finalized in 2019. In 2020, Chapel Hill received a grant from the Governor's Highway Safety Program (GHSP) to hire a Complete Streets Specialist charged with implementing this Action Plan.

Over the last year the Complete Streets Specialist has created a robust pedestrian safety workplan, including projects such as:

- An analysis of traffic safety across the Town of Chapel Hill, analyzing street characteristics, crash characteristics and severities.
- An Annual Crash Report and online [dashboard<sup>1</sup>](#), which analyzes demographics and overlays the High Crash Street Network with a Communities of Concern map, highlighting disproportionate impacts of traffic crashes.
- Reconvened the Road to Zero Task Force, a coalition comprised of Town staff from different departments, staff from external agencies, and residents. The task force is charged with advising the equitable and sustainable implementation of the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan.
- Proposed pedestrian safety interventions along NCDOT-owned streets.

**Vision Zero:** Vision Zero is an international movement, through which communities make a firm commitment to eliminate traffic related fatalities and serious injuries. Some key strategies included in a Vision Zero commitment are:

- Building and sustaining leadership, collaboration, and accountability – especially among a diverse group of stakeholders to include transportation professionals, policymakers, public health officials, police, and community members;
- Collecting, analyzing, and using data to understand trends and potential disproportionate impacts of traffic deaths on certain populations;
- Prioritizing equity and community engagement;
- Managing speed to safe levels; and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://townofchapelhill.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/0db2ea11d5024b929fc763d168d678d3>

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- Setting a timeline to achieve zero traffic deaths and serious injuries, which brings urgency and accountability, and ensures transparency on progress and challenges<sup>2</sup>.

Town staff from Planning, Police, and Transit participated in a Vision Zero Leadership Institute that included other Vision Zero communities from across North Carolina, including Charlotte, Greensboro, Durham, Apex, Greenville, and Wilmington, and had guest speakers from Vision Zero cities across the country. The group of staff left this institute with the goal of recommending that Council adopt a policy to establish Chapel Hill as a Vision Zero community, for some of the reasons listed below:

- The Vision Zero resolution **establishes an organization-wide commitment to zero deaths and serious injuries on streets in Chapel Hill**. This resolution formalizes the commitment to data-driven, system-wide decision-making, but does not commit the Town to any specific programs, funding, or other obligations.
- Vision Zero **unites Town of Chapel Hill goals** around mobility, safety, equity and climate resilience under one structured Town-wide goal of eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries.
- The Vision Zero movement **emphasizes equitable investment**. Adopting a Vision Zero resolution is a statement to the community that Town leadership recognizes the power imbalance wielded historically in street design and the commitment to work toward more equitable streets.
- Through the work done for the Governors Highway Safety Program grant since September 2020 the Town has a one-year proof of concept of the efficacy of dedicating staff resources to this work, and a Vision Zero resolution from Town Council will **recognize and formalize this effort**.
- Restructuring under a Vision Zero umbrella **will provide guidance and structure** to the existing Town working groups and resources and will elevate organization-wide goals to keep all Chapel Hill street users safe.
- Establishing a Vision Zero Executive Committee, comprised of Town staff from different departments, will **position Town staff to work effectively toward this goal, and will prioritize safety** in their provision of direction, authority, resources. This group will provide regular updates and issue occasional recommendations to the Council and oversee the publication of the Annual Vision Zero Report, which will track the Town's progress on goals.
- Under Vision Zero, the reconvened **Road to Zero Task Force would continue to function as the community lever for Vision Zero planning**, with more formalized mechanisms of reporting and monitoring.
- Being an official Vision Zero Community could **open opportunities for future funding** through the INVEST in America Act and other state and federal resources.
- Having the **backing of the Town leadership will make Chapel Hill's commitment to eliminating road deaths more resonant**. Joining with other Vision Zero communities in North Carolina, we can wield a powerful voice to address some state-wide roadblocks toward reaching out local goals.

**Financial Impact:** This resolution comes with no financial commitment. The Complete Streets Specialist position has been fully funded by the Governors Highway Safety Program grant for FY22. The resolution would charge staff with updating the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan with recommended safety projects and cost estimates that would help the Town reach the goal of zero deaths and serious injuries by 2031.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero/>

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**Next Steps:** Staff will take feedback from the work session and modify the Vision Zero resolution and bring it back for adoption on October 13<sup>th</sup>. If Council adopts the resolution, staff will continue to work with the community and stakeholders to assess and address pedestrian safety, will work with the Vision Zero Network and NC Vision Zero to ensure Chapel Hill is included in state and national discourse, will begin the process of restructuring existing efforts under the Vision Zero umbrella, and will create proposed updates and recommendations in line with nationally accepted safety standards.