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Speed limit could halt Skykomish Development



A map of the Skykomish area shows the current town in brown, the proposed development area in light green, and, in red, the section of highway on which residents and the developer hope to get a reduced speed limit of 35 mph.

By Chris Hendrickson, Special to the Monitor

Skykomish could double in size within the next couple of years, thanks to a proposed recreational condo development, but only if the town can get the speed limit reduced on U.S. 2.

A developer named Obsidian Finance Group LLC has proposed a residential development of 120 units on the north side of U.S. 2, to be called First Tracks. But the company will not proceed until the speed limit is lowered to 35 mph.

The specific section of U.S. Highway 2 up for reduction is the stretch between milepost 48.48 and milepost 49.21, which falls inside the Skykomish city limits. The Washington State Department of Transportation has agreed to lower the current speed limit from 60 mph to 50 mph, but so far does not see cause to lower it further to 35 mph, the speed limit proposed by the mayor of Skykomish, the town council members and Obsidian Finance Group.

Kevin Padrick, one of the senior principals of Obsidian, stresses the importance of the development being safe and pedestrian-friendly. "People need to be able to safely walk into town to go have dinner," he said.

Even with a lowered speed limit of 50 mph, the highway does not constitute conditions that are pedestrian-friendly, he believes.

Padrick stated, "Without a further reduction, we don't think it would be appropriate to move forward."

The speed limit reduction is supported within the community. It's felt that both entering and exiting town can be dangerous with the high rate of speed on U.S. 2, and this is often compounded by icy conditions on the roadway.

Having a speed limit lowered is not an uncomplicated task. Once the formal request is submitted, the department conducts a speed field study, along with a collision analysis of the area in question.

The goal of the speed field study is to determine how closely the current speed limit coincides with the 85th percentile speed, which is the speed that 85 out of 100 vehicles travel at or below. The data is taken during a one-month increment of time and then analyzed.

The rate of compliance to the 60 mph speed limit on this portion of U.S. 2 is considered high by the department, which is an outcome that supports maintaining the existing speed limit.

A collision analysis is performed in conjunction with the speed field study. The department evaluates a five-year period of time and looks at the number of collisions that occurred, how many were injury collisions and how many were fatalities.

The department determined that the collision rate for this area U.S. 2 is slightly higher than the statewide average, and the injury collision rate is significantly lower.

After all the data is examined, the department makes a determination. If a speed limit reduction is warranted, a town ordinance is required, and once that is in place, signage is updated and the new speed limit is enforced.

The department feels that at this time, decreasing the speed limit lower than 50 mph would only serve to increase vehicle speed variance, a situation they feel which would decrease the overall safety of that portion of the highway.

But both Kevin Padrick and Skykomish Mayor Tony Grider are optimistic, and have plans to continue working with the department in an effort to get the speed limit reduced further.

"They did go to 50 mph and they are open to further reductions if the town can show that it's warranted," said Padrick.

First Tracks would become the closest housing market to Steven Pass. The target is for 120 detached structures that would serve as residences, weekend getaway homes or rental properties, as current zoning accommodates. Within the town limits, the development would utilize the new community wastewater treatment system, which has been in place for over a year. Pricing of the homes would depend upon the market at the time of completion, but could be in the \$250,000 range.

The construction would likely occur in either two or three phases, starting in the lower areas and then moving up the hillside. The cluster-style development plans are conducive to preserving space. Goals for the development include an emphasis on being family-friendly, pedestrian-friendly and environmentally-friendly.

Obsidian owns 55 acres, 10 acres of which would be residences, and 15 acres would be roads and landscaping. Thirty acres would remain open and undeveloped. The developer's vision for First Tracks includes appealing homes with nice views in an environment that is aesthetically complimentary to the rustic mountain town.

The end of a years-long town clean-up is resulting in many Skykomish businesses going through renovations and preparing for new beginnings. The Chalet restaurant is currently undergoing refurbishment and the Maloney Store renovations are complete, with space ready to be leased by local merchants and other commercial entities. The town center is under construction, and there are plans for further development this year with the SkiRiver Inn. The Skykomish Environmental Center is going through renovations, as well.

"As the town of Skykomish enters a time of unparalleled development, we will continue to work with WSDOT officials to ensure the safety of our residents and drivers on this section of Highway 2," Grider said.

The First Tracks development has the potential to become more than just weekend homes.

"Skykomish is close enough to be commutable for people who work in Sultan and Monroe," said Henry Sladek, the owner of the Cascadia Inn and former interim mayor of Skykomish. "Monroe has grown so much, there is definitely a need."

The town ordinance supporting the speed limit reduction from 60 mph to 50 mph has been implemented, and Mark Leth, traffic engineer for the department, confirms that they will be performing a follow-up speed evaluation in May or June of this year.

"Skykomish is really going through a rebirth after the clean-up," stated Sladek. "We're ready to move into the 21st century."

2 Responses to *Speed limit could halt Skykomish Development*



Jim S

[Reply](#)

January 22, 2013 at 6:24 pm

Keep the current speed limit and let the developer put a pedestrian bridge over the highway.



Skykomish News

[Reply](#)

January 23, 2013 at 3:29 am

Jim,

You're right on. It's time to end socialism for the wealthy. While the developer should certainly fund a pedestrian overpass or tunnel, this is just the tip of a dark ugly iceberg that has little to do with pedestrian or speed limit issues or concerns. We'll be addressing these issues in detail in a feature article on our website. Your clarity and willingness to speak out are appreciated. Thanks!

Leave a Reply

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