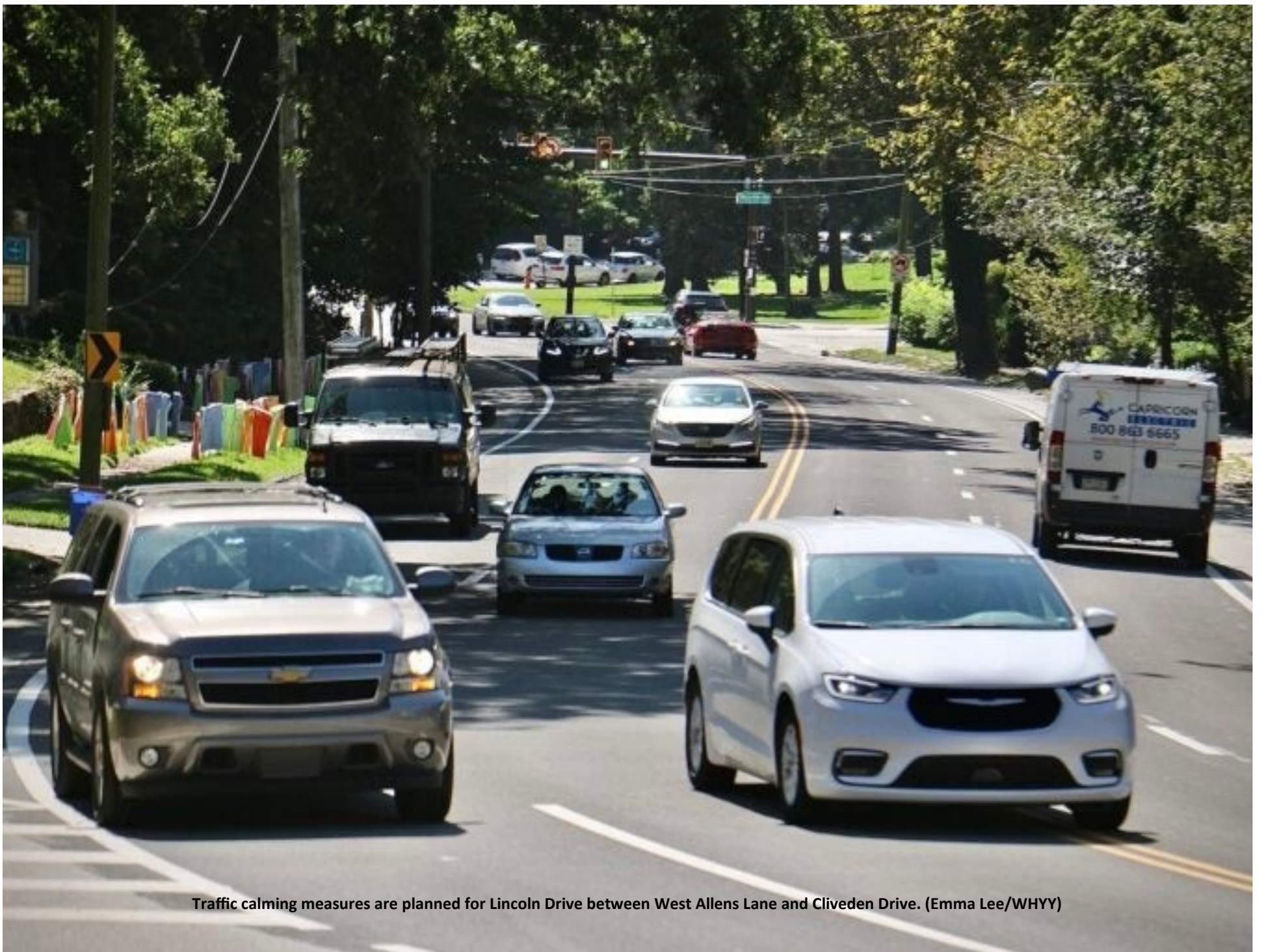


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OCT 2023

PHILLY'S LINCOLN DRIVE IS THE LATEST CITY ROADWAY TO RECEIVE TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES



Traffic calming measures are planned for Lincoln Drive between West Allens Lane and Cliveden Drive. (Emma Lee/WHYY)

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Germantown Church of the Brethren (GCOB) located in Mt. Airy hosted its first ever community event—Carnival 300



By Shelly Shell
Urban X-Pressions News

As the summer winded down, Germantown Church of the Brethren (GCOB) located in Mt. Airy hosted its first ever community event—Carnival 300, which celebrated the 300th church anniversary. Under the leadership of Pastor Richard Kyrematen, GCOB held a party that spanned four city blocks.

The goal of this event was not only to celebrate the church's milestone but to provide community resources, social services, and fun activities for the entire family. From drill teams to music ministries, face painting, moon bounces, water slides, and book bag giveaways provided by Supreme Gospel Entertainment the community give back outreach proved to be a hit.

For years, Pastor Richard desired to coordinate a block party in which the city streets in front of the church buildings would be free of traffic and safe for families to play and have wholesome fun. His desire became a reality as his members worked seamlessly with other organizations to ensure everyone enjoyed their time.

GCOB's worship team started things off after a lovely prayer by one of its ministers then independent artists Brennen Pritchett, Aaron Hill, Essence, and rapper Scenario kept the music coming. The audience began to swell as some

the artists sang familiar tunes including "He Looked Beyond My Faults" to their original songs.

While the performance stage was active, the kids' zone was equally as active. The water slides and moon bounces provided hours of endless fun and the snack station was filled with soft pretzels, water ice and ice cream. Magic Music Group's drill team came ready to go and gave everyone a presentation to remember. The deejay featured tons of hit songs in between sets and had the crowd dancing literally in the streets. Clothing vendors

of to authors and everything in between supported this community event and offered discounts on items. Additionally, there were resources for children to sign up for reading programs and after school mentoring camps provided by Lafiya Family Services, Supreme Gospel Entertainment, X-pressions, Inc. The event ended with a stirring prayer by one GCOB's ministers who prayed over the youth and the city. He decreed and declared that our children will be safe and the violence throughout Philadelphia and beyond will cease. The attendees rejoiced and then headed to pick up their school supplies.

Pastor Richard believes with the right partnerships, next year's event will be more spectacular, and more resources will become available to assist residents. Carnival 300—celebrating 300 years of God's faithfulness to Germantown Church of the Brethren made history!

Follow us on social media for updates! Facebook: Supreme Gospel Ent. | Instagram and TikTok: @sherrisupremegospel — until the next column, remain encouraged!

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Philly Youth Selfie Project Transforms Germantown Neighborhood with Vibrant Mural of Empowerment



By Maleka Fruean
Germantown Info Hub

Right after acquiring and repurposing the historic Swain Building as the Germantown ArtHaus, Keisha “I Make Everything Beautiful” Whatley initiated the Philly Youth Selfie Project. After two years, the ArtHaus will reveal a mural featuring self-portraits created by young people and a few adults, paying homage to youth empowerment, community development, and literacy.

The Philly Youth Selfie Project was designed as an extension of the ArtHaus’ mission around youth em-

powerment, Whatley explains. “We started discussing what if we created a mural because we knew the whole building was going to be covered in murals. [What] if we create this mural that is youth-focused and, empowering and fun? So, we came up with the Youth Selfie Project so that young people could paint themselves, but then those paintings be installed on the building,” Whatley says. ArtHaus intends this mural to be here for years. “So the thing that we’re most excited about is these young people riding the bus or going by the building 10-20 years from now and seeing their painting

on the wall,” says Whatley.

Whatley and the ArtHaus hosted seventeen workshops where local artists guided youth through a lesson plan with their respective spins to help young people paint self-interpretations. “These young people had a mirror there,” Whatley says, describing the process. “So they weren’t just doing it from memory. They were really looking at themselves.” But the young minds weren’t limited to having to put a face to their self-interpretation. Some of the paintings feature protective masks people use to avoid getting

COVID-19. “I think it was the first workshop; one of the young people did a painting of themselves with a mask on. And we’re like, ‘Oh, why are you doing that?’ And he was like, ‘Well, I want to remember what was going on.’” Whatley says it was also a reminder that many people were wearing hypothetical masks. Some young people also created trees, leaves, and birds instead of self-portraits.

The workshops had two primary rules, or actually three, though Whatley humorously admits she couldn’t recall the third. The first rule was to rinse brushes not in use but still coated with paint in water as a cleaning practice. The second rule was to keep criticisms to oneself but to be vocal about all forms of praise.

“It became kind of like an inside joke,” recalls Whatley with a smile, explaining the rationale behind the second rule. “We had to remind some of the parents of that over time. [We wanted] it to be a safe space for kids to create. That’s really the purpose of the project – to really give kids a space to express themselves because we see kids a lot, [and] we don’t want to hear from them. So my goal is always give them a place where they can be heard.” Collaboration, extending beyond the creative process, was pivotal in the project’s evolution. Early support from local organizations like Jumpstart Philadelphia and the Germantown United CDC helped to launch the workshops and keep them going.

The most recent collabora-

tion with Mural Arts Philadelphia, known for its impact art projects, came when it needed a home for its We Will Write The World literacy-based mural. Whatley has partnered with Mural Arts on billboards and other projects, so she was confident about meeting their respective needs. She also says that ArtHaus’ mission to educate blends easily with the We Will Write The World mission to encourage dialogue and interactions between grown-ups and children through large-scale public art pieces.

“I said let’s take a look at your designs because it might be a match-up with the Selfie Project,” says Whatley, detailing the exchange. “I met with the artist and began working with Khalid Dennis to essentially mash up his mural design with the Selfie Project.”

She emphasizes that much of the collaborative effort revolved around “coming up with ways to keep the integrity of [Dennis’] original mural design and keeping the integrity of the selfies so that those two ideas could come together in a way that makes sense.”

She says the collaboration was smooth. The only detail that needed exploring was fitting all the selfies in the mural, even though they needed a half or quarter of a selfie in some spots. “To keep the integrity of all of our original selfies that were produced by other people, we created some dummy selfies, and we cut them up. So it’s really important that people understand that we did not cut anybody’s self-

portrait up.” Continuing their dedication to literacy and youth empowerment, Whatley says, “We’re going to have two of those newspaper boxes that are now like lending libraries. We’re going to have one that’s for books and one that’s for art supplies.” This commitment to providing resources and fostering creativity is a testament to the Germantown ArHaus’ overarching vision.

Collective ownership and community support were paramount for the success of this project. Whatley expressed her gratitude, saying, “Every single person, whether they gave one dollar, two dollars, or one hundred dollars.” To Whatley, fiscal support not only meant involvement but was a testament to the impact this project has had on the community.

She continues: “I knew trying to do something way larger than myself,

more than I could do by myself. I know every step of this project was going to require that the community take ownership of it because this project is for the community. So when the community says, on, this is really for me, and then they take that on, it’s more than validation. It’s just amazing to witness because I know there are a lot of people struggling right now.”

Whatley suggests the mural has transformed the neighborhood.

“Everything in this area is gray, tan, black, or dark. There’s very little color. So when we painted that background color, which we named ‘Storybook Blue,’ it was as if people were stopping in their tracks, asking, ‘What is this?’ The vibrant colors of the project have truly illuminated the neighborhood.”

ArtHaus team member

Thomas Walsh echoes Whatley’s sentiments. “It’s very approachable. When I get off the bus and I walk up from Cheltenham, it’s like the house on the top of the hill. It draws you in, and you realize that it has to do with youth and expression,” he says. All these details and processes will culminate at the mural’s dedication event in a few weeks. Whatley anticipates that attendees can enjoy music, face painting, giveaways,

refreshments, a lively atmosphere, and an opportunity to engage with the mural’s contents.

“One of our goals at the dedication is to potentially have a station where kids can draw or write their own story being inspired by the mural,” says Whatley. “There’s a book on the mural that Khalid did with a father and son reading together on one side, and it says Once Upon a Time in Germantown. And

on the other side, it has prompts about if you were going to make your own story about your selfie.” The Philly Youth Selfie Project, integrated with the We Will Write The World mural, will come to life on Saturday, October 28, at the Germantown ArtHaus at 6228 Germantown Avenue. The dedication event will run from 4-6 p.m. To learn more and register for the event, check out their Eventbrite page.



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After a second attempted break-in, a restaurant owner seeks solutions



By Rasheed Ajamu
Germantown Info Hub

Kiya McNeil woke up to a knock on her door from the police. They told her that there was an attempted burglary at her restaurant, *Bistro on the Mall*, across the street from where she lives on Maplewood Mall. Police said someone threw a brick at the restaurant’s front door, which set off the alarm.

Luckily, the suspect wasn’t able to take off with anything. But that’s because McNeil had just upgraded the security after a successful break-in only two weeks before. “We had tempered glass,” McNeil said, describing the restaurant’s original front door. “They threw a brick through the glass door. And then they stepped through it, so they never physically opened

the door. So, they went in, opened the office drawer, and took the cash box.” The former security system was designed to go off only if someone physically opened the front door, so she didn’t receive an alert like she did the second time. The burglary happened in the late night/early morning hours of Friday, August 27. That morning, McNeil informed customers on the business’s *Instagram* account that they would close that day to clean up and reopen the next. She also launched a *GoFundMe* to help her pay for the same repairs that helped prevent the most recent break-in attempt. It raised over \$1K. McNeil says she has purchased a new laminated window, a gate, and a motion detector for the front door from the raised funds. She says that the Germantown community has ral-

lied around the restaurant.. “People would just stop by to check-in and say, “let me purchase something just so we can support,” because they want us to stay. There were quite a few people who came by that day to help clean up the glass. It was pretty cool,” McNeil says. One possible solution that McNeil identified to combat the increase of crimes is external cameras. She says that businesses may have their internal cameras and few that point directly outside of their businesses. But, if the entire strip had cameras pointing onto the outside, they could identify problems more easily. One of the owner’s primary concerns is the lack of police presence in the

mall. McNeil says foot traffic lessens after the restaurant closes at 8 pm, so fewer people are on the lookout. Initially, a meeting with officials like State Representative Darisha Parker was scheduled for Monday, September 20, to discuss possible solutions to the ongoing problems. The conference will be rescheduled to invite the police captain. McNeil revealed that they had requested police support. Still, because of heightened crime in the city and lack of coverage, police have not been able to do so. “We’re just asking for help. We just want to be protected,” she explains.

Philly's Lincoln Drive is the latest city roadway to receive traffic calming measures



Traffic calming measures are planned for Lincoln Drive between West Allens Lane and Cliveden Drive. (Emma Lee/WHYY)

By Aaron Moselle, WHYY

The work is part of a pilot program launched by PennDOT to address speeding on state highways.

A dangerous stretch of Lincoln Drive is getting a safety overhaul thanks to a partnership between the city and PennDOT.

A series of traffic calming measures will be installed along 1.5 miles of the state highway, between West Allens Lane and West Cliveden Street in West Mount Airy.

The upgrades will be installed over two phases as part of a pilot program, and include rumble strips and speed tables to slow down drivers, as well as traffic lane separators to stop them from using center turn lanes to pass other vehicles.

“Through all of these countermeasures, we’re trying to address those run-off-the-road crashes, as well as target that excessive speeding,” said Sharang Malaviya, a traffic safety supervisor with PennDOT District 6.

PennDOT crews are scheduled to start the first phase of the project next month with hopes of completing everything by Thanksgiving. Work on the second phase, when the city will install the speed tables, is expected to start sometime next year.

“Not all vertical deflection is the same,” said Malaviya. “We wanted to come up with an elongated table, which is a better design for a roadway like Lincoln Drive compared to maybe the speed cushions that we see on some of the smaller local roads.”

‘More and more’ Lincoln Drive will be just the latest roadway in Philadelphia with some form of vertical deflection, a category of devices designed to slow down drivers that includes speed humps, speed tables, and raised pedestrian crossings.

Crews with the Streets Department have been installing vertical deflection measures across the city since 2015. To date, more than 350 blocks have them. And there’s an ongoing backlog of locations, in part because speed cushions are only installed one day a week — Saturdays, typically. “We’re looking to slow down the city all over,” said Richard Montanez, deputy commissioner of transportation. “You’re gonna see more and more of them out there.”

For the last several years, the city has added about 50 locations to the list annually, said Montanez. The process often starts with a resident submitting a request to Philly311, the

city’s customer service center for non-emergency inquiries. But residents can also contact the Streets Department directly or discuss the need with their district councilmember.

The Streets Department then conducts a two-week traffic study on the block, reviews crash data, and talks to neighbors to determine if the location meets its criteria for vertical deflection devices.

Generally, roadways must:
Not be a state road or an arterial route
Have a speeding problem
Not have uphill or downhill grades of 15% or more, or be a curving street
Be at least 1,000 feet long (typically two city blocks) between stop signs or traffic signals

Be at least 34 feet wide if it is a two-way street and 26 feet wide if it is a one-way street

A roadway has a speeding problem if 85% of vehicles are traveling 5 mph over the posted speed limit, said Montanez. For example, a residential street with a posted speed limit of 25 mph would have a speeding problem if 85% of vehicles are traveling at least 31 mph.

The Street Department receives hundreds of requests each year, but only about 60% of them lead to speed cushions being installed, said a department spokesperson.

It typically takes six months to a year for a block to receive speed cushions. And that timetable may get longer while the department prioritizes installing speed cushions near district schools.

The program started with 50 locations.

“I do realize some requests have been sitting there for a while, but we’re trying to

get to all of them,” said Montanez.

Worth the wait?

The work on Lincoln Drive follows a yearlong traffic study conducted by PennDOT. But neighbors had been pushing for traffic calming measures for well over a decade before the state agency publicly announced the projects earlier this month.

Those efforts intensified over the last year.

Longtime resident Anne Dicker, who heads the traffic calming committee of the West Mount Airy Neighbors, said there was a perception among neighbors that there were more car accidents along Lincoln Drive during the pandemic.

Stacked on top of a long history of speeding and crashes, the civic group decided to revive Dicker’s committee and take action. “Crashes have been happening three times a week for years — right in front of people’s yards, right inside of people’s yards, and even cars crashing into people’s houses. So it was just a matter of, you know, ‘We’re mad as hell and we’re not gonna take it anymore,’” said Dicker.

Between 2018 and 2022, there was an average of 13 crashes a year between West Allens Lane and Wayne Avenue, according to data provided by PennDOT. The highest total was recorded in 2018, when there were 16 crashes along that stretch.

It’s why Dicker was thrilled when she learned last week that the PennDOT pilot program would be coming to Lincoln Drive. Officials say the program could lead to more state roads becoming eligible for vertical deflection measures.

“The speed tables are key. And they were the thing I fought the hardest for to get into this plan,” Dicker said. “If it’s an extra 30 seconds

it takes me to drive down that segment of Lincoln Drive, it’s absolutely worth those extra 30 seconds to make sure that I’m not killing somebody,” she said.

Lincoln Drive will be the second state road to get vertical deflection devices through the PennDOT pilot. The state agency previously approved installing speed tables along a stretch of Cobbs Creek Parkway in West Philadelphia.

The community-led effort to bring traffic calming measures to the parkway became more concerted after a deadly hit-and-run in August 2020. That month, a driver struck and killed 25-year-old Avante Reynolds, the mother of a 2-month-old baby, while she was trying to cross the four-lane highway. Less than a month earlier, another incident on the parkway left two people dead.

“We always said ‘We need more safety precautions on these blocks, and can you please help us?’ And we feel as though finally our request was addressed, and we’re thankful for that,” said block captain Deborah Roebuck, who has lived on the parkway for decades. Asked if the speed tables have made a difference, Roebuck gave a mixed review. She does feel a bit better about crossing her section of the parkway, where there is no traffic light or stop sign. But she said there are plenty of drivers who only slow down some.

“I feel heard, but I think there’s more that needs to be done,” said Roebuck.

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