

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 13, 2016

8:00 AM

2nd floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Linda Rubin, Chair
Christopher Brehme, Vice Chair
Charles (Chuck) Redfern (via phone)
Thom Little
Don Hayes (left at 9:00 AM)

Staff Present:

Andrew Bohannon, Parks & Recreation
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works

Members Not Present:

Emily Coey
Ed Guyot

Chair Rubin called the meeting to order at 8:07 AM and noted that Mr. Redfern is attending, and is part of the quorum, via cell phone.

1) Roll Call

Roll call was conducted.

2) Accept March 9, 2016 Minutes

Mr. Little stated that each month's agenda packet has two attachments: the project status sheet, and the assessment tool. He continued that if the BPPAC or staff makes corrections to either of those documents, he requests that the documents get corrected and included in the next agenda packet, along with the new/updated status project sheet. This might be an item for "New Business." Chair Rubin replied that she agrees and they can talk about it under "New Business."

Mr. Little made a motion to approve the minutes of March 9, 2016, which was seconded by Mr. Brehme. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Chair Rubin stated that she agrees with Mr. Little – when she receives the meeting minutes she looks through them to see what the BPPAC needs in order to conduct business at the next meeting. She continued that she has eight items that were supposed to be corrected, changed, added, etc., or that staff was going to get back to them about, that they do not have for today's meeting. Mr. Little replied yes, they did not receive the information they were supposed to receive two weeks ago in order to prepare for today's meeting. Discussion ensued. Chair Rubin asked if she can suggest that staff come back with a plan for improving the system. Mr. Bohannon replied that he and other staff

members will have a conversation and address the issue. He continued that the committee is supposed to receive the previous month's meeting minutes and agenda packet one week prior to the meeting. He will also discuss Mr. Little's concerns with staff and address that.

Mr. Little stated that staff did not take him up on his previous offer to help with creation of the project descriptions, and suggested again that he and other BPPAC members could help with certain tasks so the workload is not all on staff. He only knows what 12 of the 20 projects are. Discussion continued about the need to have the projects defined before the BPPAC can prioritize them. Mr. Bohannon thanked Mr. Little for offering to help and stated that he will follow up.

3) Project Updates

a) Projects in Attached Table

Chair Rubin asked if they should go through each one or just accept the project updates document that was sent. Mr. Blomquist stated that the only update he has is that the City Council removed the funding for the Jonathan Daniels Phase II study. Mr. Little replied that in that case, that project should be added to the long-term project list.

Mr. Little stated that South Bridge's finish date should say "10/28/16." Comments should say construction started on the 11th. He continued that what was previously agreed to, but not added to the document, is a footnote that says "Status of 'even' means 'within budget.'"

Chair Rubin asked if there is anything else. Mr. Blomquist replied no.

Mr. Redfern reported that Pathways for Keene (PFK) is attempting to get money for South Bridge to have solar lighting. Mr. Blomquist replied that at this point is not part of the construction project. If they do lights it will be at a later date. Mr. Redfern replied yes, it could be done at a later time. That is when funding would most likely be available, too. He thinks solar lights are not as expensive as he would have thought.

Mr. Little stated that the trail lighting project was added to the long-term projects list. He thought the first step was to come up with what a general approach was to lighting and then see how it was implemented for each project. He was originally thinking of putting lights on South Bridge and that seems, based on staff input, like not a good idea. He was thinking there would be two tall towers on either side of the highway, further away from South Bridge, with greater coverage in both directions. Mr. Blomquist replied that could provide area lighting, but the question is what they are doing and why. If they only light the bridge and not down the trail, it sort of does not make sense. He knows there have been discussions with Keene State College (KSC) because of the nearby athletic fields. The BPPAC has been discussing what the vision should be. They probably will not light rural trails where the residents would not want it, but maybe they would have lighting in more urban areas. He continued that he does not think KSC would want 40- to 50-foot lighting towers. This is something to investigate.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he is currently investigating solar lighting for the trail system. He is seeking a grant to accomplish that. He does not have all the details. He understands what Mr. Little is trying to accomplish and he understands what Mr. Blomquist is saying. They are trying to find a balance. It is probably the inner core trail system that they want to make sure is lit. He has questions about how long solar lights last, how bright they are, etc., and whether they are worth it.

Chair Rubin stated that if the BPPAC prioritizes a trail lighting plan, and it seems like there is growing interest and momentum for that, with possible funding from PFK, they should take that into consideration when they prioritize these projects. Mr. Little stated that he thinks everyone will want the trail lit all the way to the athletic field. The current underpass that people use is lit very brightly, because it is the location with the most personal attacks of any location in Keene, according to the Keene Police Department (KPD). This underpass will be shut down when South Bridge is implemented; thus, there will be a strong desire to have that section of trail lit.

Mr. Bohannon replied that that is a college issue. Is the college at the table supporting and funding this? Chair Rubin asked if the college has been invited. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, they certainly have. He continued that he respects Mr. Little's perspective, but they are talking about the whole trail system and making sure they do not overcompensate for one section. He understands that the college wants safe travel to and from the field, but he does not know if KSC will participate in funding this. The focus needs to be on more of the trail than just that one section.

Mr. Blomquist stated that what Mr. Bohannon is talking about is that the City is responsible for the general support for the populace. He continued that if a specific user group has a need the City approaches that user group to talk about what happens. He will talk with the Police Chief to see if that is the area with the most assaults. Neither the City, nor KSC, nor the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) admits to being responsible for that underpass, and everyone is looking for a better way to get across. KSC has an interest here. They cannot speculate on lights going on or off. Probably the BPPAC should bring someone from the KPD in to talk about security. Sometimes lighting places encourages more after-dark use of them, and more people hanging out in them, which you may not want. There would be an increased demand for resources, which are limited. They could talk about something like timers for lights, but this conversation is premature.

Chair Rubin stated that they could look at whether trails' usage is low, medium, or high, like they do for streets, and fold into the discussion whatever Mr. Bohannon finds in his research about lighting, and then decide criteria for what needs lighting and what does not. She continued that at that point, they could see where the partners are and seek their support, financial or otherwise.

Mr. Bohannon stated that for the next meeting, he will provide a written, preliminary report, although he cannot be present at the meeting. He continued that hopefully in June

he will have a more robust plan. BPPAC members can give him their thoughts and ideas. Mr. Little replied, if there is something anyone here can help with, feel free to ask.

Mr. Brehme stated that looking at student safety on campus would be a great student project. He continued that he will look into whether that would be possible for the fall, and report back at the next meeting. Mr. Bohannon replied that there is a good chance they would have grants in place by the fall, for lighting.

b) MAST Bike to Work Day Event

Chair Rubin asked if anyone has information about this. Discussion ensued. The group agreed that it is probably in mid-May but no one present knows details. Mr. Blomquist stated that Mr. Schoefmann would have a better handle on this.

c) Roundhouse T Safety Report

Chair Rubin asked about this report. Mr. Little stated that he went on Saturday and the one item that troubles him is the diagonal cable, which could hurt a bicyclist. Mr. Blomquist replied that the City was working with Eversource on this. Changing that is an Eversource decision process. Chair Rubin stated that last month's minutes say that Mr. Lussier was compiling a safety report that would be given to the BPPAC and Eversource. She continued that there must have been an update or Mr. Schoefmann would not have put this on the agenda. Mr. Bohannon replied that next week they have a meeting with Laurel Boivin of Eversource, so he will follow up with Mr. Lussier. Discussion continued about ways to make the cable safer, such as a different bright color, or a fence.

4) BPPAC Master Plan

a) Priorities Tool Matrix Update

b) Priorities Discussion and Exercise

Chair Rubin stated that the BPPAC does not have what they need today; in order to do the priorities exercise. She asked if anyone disagrees or has other thoughts. Mr. Hayes stated that they need the information about of time, not at the last minute. Discussion ensued. Chair Rubin stated that they need the project descriptions. Mr. Little suggested that they do that work today. Chair Rubin questioned whether that is the committee's charge. She continued that staff should be able to do that, just one or two sentences about each. Mr. Little has been involved with this for a long time and only knows 12, so they need staff's help with this. Mr. Blomquist replied that this is not a productive use of their time today. Chair Rubin stated that if they can get the descriptions in two weeks, that is her recommendation, so they can be prepared for the next meeting. Others agreed.

5) Old Business

Mr. Redfern asked about the kiosks. Mr. Bohannon replied that he is working with PFK and working with Benson Wood to create a couple kiosks on the trails. He continued that they have some that were completed by the Eagle Scout project. These ones would be different. He drew on the whiteboard to show what they would look like. He can send the diagram to the committee. PFK is looking to donate a couple of them. Benson Wood is designing them and doing the materials and then the City has installation to accomplish. They look good and he thinks they will be well-received. Chair Rubin

asked what kind of information will be on them. Mr. Bohannon replied trail maps, and points of reference information like “You are here; it is one mile to downtown Keene.” There is also a downtown map put together by Keene Downtown group. It is not the wayfinding signage that will eventually come. There will be lights at the station. It is a little bit covered so people could get out of the rain for a few minutes.

Chair Rubin stated that the Monadnock Conservancy has expanded their scope of work to include how to get people to use trails and natural lands for education, appreciation of natural resources, and so on and so forth. She does not know if they have been thinking about activities or education regarding the trails. It might be worth checking in with them to see if there is some little pilot or something with them, for these kiosks. Mr. Bohannon replied that he has started conversation with them for a couple different things, like creating a like program like what the City has in the summer for youth, for older individuals, for the trails program. They briefly have had the conversation about connecting the trails and the bigger picture. As their properties grow around Keene it will be important to highlight that for people. He has not spoken with them for a couple months and should get in touch with them again. Chair Rubin encouraged that.

Chair Rubin asked if there is a report on the status of the RFQ process for the Park Ave. loop trail. Mr. Blomquist replied that the City completed consultant interviews, ranked each, and notified NHDOT. He continued that he thinks they intend to go to the Finance, Organization, and Personnel (FOP) Committee this week to seek authorization to negotiate with the preferred vendor. This is moving along. Mr. Redfern replied yes, it is on Thursday’s FOP Committee agenda.

Chair Rubin stated that something else the BPPAC was supposed to get from Mr. Schoefmann is a link to the packet on the website for the Mayor’s Challenge, an update on what this means and if there are any next steps, etc. Mr. Bohannon and Mr. Blomquist replied that they will follow up.

Mr. Bohannon reported that the date for the BPPAC’s report to the City Council (subcommittee) is May 25, 2016. Mr. Hayes asked for more information about it. Mr. Bohannon replied that last year each City committee and commission reported to the City Council about their activities. This year the City Council wants reports about how each group’s work is tied in to the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP). The BPPAC’s work is directly related to the CMP and what the BPPAC is doing is right on track. The City Council likes to hear that reminder and it is good for the City Council to be reminded. Mr. Blomquist added that it allows the committees to have some interaction with the City Council, too. It is an opportunity for them to make sure they are going in the right direction. He has been here 20 years and the past two years was the first time he has seen the City Council really start understanding the committees and what they are doing.

Mr. Little stated that he was surprised by the City Council’s conversation about Jonathan Daniels Trail Phase II. He asked if the City Council talked with people at all before making negative comments about the project, and if they know that the study is critical in order to be eligible for federal funding. Mr. Bohannon replied that the City Council

asked him what the study would entail, and he told them that it would assess the three different possible routes to get the Jonathan Daniels Trail as it is today up to Maple Ave. He explained those three routes to them, and the City Council asked if the Cheshire Rail Trail Phase III project addresses one of those routes, from Wheelock Park, up Park Ave., to Maple Ave. The answer was yes. The City Council's response seemed to be that since one of the three routes would be completed with that project, they want to see how that works, and then go back and talk about the Jonathan Daniels Trail Phase II project again. The City Council is looking to take advantage of any opportunity to reduce the City's budget/debt load/tax impact.

Mr. Little expressed concerns about children's safety. He stated that he thought the point of the Jonathan Daniels Phase II project would be having a route from the schools to Wheelock Park without needing to be in the street. Mr. Blomquist replied that the City Council has a bigger view. Mr. Little is right that the City Council is very supportive of Complete Streets concepts. In his view, the City Council sees this project currently as duplication, but it does not mean the project is unwarranted or dead. As they complete Cheshire Rail Trail Phase III things will be clearer and it will help flush out other projects. Part of it is education. The BPPAC chair will present to the City Council and talk about the BPPAC's Master Plan. They should keep in mind how to communicate how everything fits together. A lot of great work has been completed and now there is a need, as new members come on the City Council, for a re-education process. Now the Jonathan Daniels Phase II project goes back on the BPPAC's list as something that needs to be discussed and will continue to be pursued.

A member of the public entered the room and asked if she could present something, on the topic of the Cheshire Rail Trail. Brief discussion ensued. Chair Rubin stated that yes, she can present during the "New Business/Other" agenda item.

Mr. Hayes left at 9:00 AM.

Chair Rubin returned the conversation to the upcoming report to the Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee. She asked how long it should be – about 15 minutes? Mr. Bohannon replied yes. Discussion continued about logistics. Mr. Bohannon encouraged other BPPAC members to attend in support. Chair Rubin stated that it is unfortunate that they will not be able to share their priorities with the City Council on this date.

Mr. Little stated that he was astonished that of all the projects the City Council could have chosen to object to, the Jonathan Daniels Phase II is the one they zeroed in on. He continued that if they had the study completed, they would then be ready to quickly take advantage of funding opportunities that may come along. Waiting to do the study means missing the windows.

Mr. Bohannon replied that the BPPAC then needs to determine if the Jonathan Daniels Phase II project is worthy of the study, and if so, push it through again. He continued that several City Council members said they felt staff did a great job with the Complete Streets policy, which had lots of community involvement, and involvement from Chair

Rubin and Healthy Monadnock 20/20, and they want projects related to that to go forward. Keene is only one of two or three communities in the state who have passed that policy and they want to see it in action more.

Mr. Blomquist stated that the City Council did not see a reason to *not* support the Jonathan Daniels Phase II study, it is just back to education. They want Complete Streets, yes, and the other aspect put out there was the possible duplicity. They did not see it as a strike down or failure or not being able to get federal funds in the future. There was just a desire to cut something and that seemed to be the right thing to cut.

Mr. Little stated that the BPPAC has been talking about the project updates list as separate from the long-term project list. He continued that he thinks they should be merged. There should be an “in progress” category. They could have just one list to focus on, with some projects underway, others for the future. He does not know how they would address questions of priorities otherwise. Some things on the current list have lower priority, in his opinion, than ones on the bigger list. Chair Rubin agreed. Discussion continued about the Jonathan Daniels Phase II study.

Chair Rubin asked if they should request to put off their report to the City Council until they have done the projects prioritization exercise. She continued that she would want to go in with that information. Mr. Bohannon replied that he thinks they could do that. Chair Rubin asked if she can use slides. Mr. Bohannon replied that most reports are just verbal, but if she wants, she can work with him and Mr. Schoefmann to come up with slides. Chair Rubin asked if she/the BPPAC can give the presentation to the full City Council. Mr. Blomquist replied that the City Council’s vision is for these reports to be to the relevant subcommittees, but maybe in the future they could do a presentation to the full City Council as part of the process of updating the Master Plan.

Chair Rubin stated that she wants to do five slides: the BPPAC’s purpose, members, historical context, accomplishments/contributions to CMP, and the future. Mr. Bohannon replied that they can put those slides into the PowerPoint and put it in all City Council members’ mailboxes. It will be in the PLD Committee agenda packet that they all get, but this could also be a side memorandum to them. Chair Rubin asked about pushing it to June. Mr. Bohannon replied that that would be fine. Mr. Brehme spoke in favor of pushing it to June. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will ask the City Clerk to do that.

Mr. Little asked if they could now discuss the project descriptions. Chair Rubin replied that they are going to ask staff to get this to them in a couple of weeks. Mr. Blomquist replied that the descriptions should not be too hard – they should be easily understandable and brief, relevant to not just the BPPAC, but the public, too. He gave some ideas off the top of his head.

6) New Business

Chair Rubin invited public comment.

Patricia Rodrigues introduced herself and asked members to introduce themselves, which they did. Ms. Rodrigues stated that she lives on the border of Westmoreland and Walpole, on the Cheshire Rail Trail. She continued that she understands that the plan is to hopefully connect the rail trail in Keene with the Connecticut River and make it a big draw for tourists and local folks. Where her property abuts the trail there are two pieces of infrastructure eligible for being on the National Registry for Historical Places. She described this infrastructure and how she envisions plaques to inform the public about them.

Ms. Rodrigues continued that there is something that has been going on for nearly three years. The whole trail was bought with federal funds mandating that it be non-motorized. The NHDOT makes agreements with nearby property owners to allow motorized uses, but she is trying to get a cease and desist because there is clear federal protocol for allowing exceptions and it was not followed. The rail trail is being abused and historical infrastructure is being made inaccessible to the public.

She continued that she has talked with many people about this, such as NHDOT Commissioners, but a big problem is that most people do not know what is going on – many people do not read the newspapers or go to meetings. Ms. Rodrigues explained her efforts to draw attention to these concerns. She stated that the trail is being used to create an 18-acre quarry with blasting and she objects to that, too, for many reasons, personal reasons as well as concerns for wildlife habitat and endangered species. She feels that no one is listening. People care about construction access, not the bigger picture. She is attending any meeting she can think of that is at all related to these topics, to see who cares and can help. She thought the vision was to increase people's access to trails that go to the river and to preserve natural resources.

Chair Rubin stated that she cannot say whether Ms. Rodrigues is right or wrong but the BPPAC appreciates her passion for the accessibility by the public to the places that are supposed to be for the public. She continued that this committee is focused very much on trails and Complete Streets in Keene but it is obviously connected to a larger system. It is not that the BPPAC would not care, but trails outside of Keene are not a main focus of this committee. She suggested Ms. Rodrigues try going through her town's Master Plan process. She could try using Keene's CMP to get some public support within her town. The City of Keene has prioritized the trail system.

Ms. Rodrigues replied that she has been trying to go through the normal, public process for three years. Her town's residents ask for a town vote, bulletin board, newsletter, etc., but it never happens. She continued that last year the town had a great Conservation Plan in its Master Plan. She spoke up and asked how the quarry, which flies in the face of the Conservation Plan, and which has illegal activity and false information on applications, fits within the Master Plan. After that, the Town decided to take the Conservation Plan out of the Master Plan. They put a tiny statement in to meet the legal requirements for having a conservation plan. She is fighting with the town administrator to keep the conservation plan up on the website. The Town people are all friends with the quarry

people and they want it because they want cheap gravel, too. Her town is in charge of 12 miles of river frontage trails and they are throwing conservation out the door.

Mr. Redfern stated that Ms. Rodrigues has done a significant amount of work in this regard. He continued that she has contacted virtually anyone who can help her in her endeavors through many sources from the federal government, public officials, towns and cities, etc., and she has followed the processes of Walpole and Westmoreland. Yes, it is a tight network in those towns that makes it virtually impossible to make headway and for them to respect the railway other than for snowmobiles. He is concerned that they put a major cut in the rail bed so they could put a street/driveway from Route 12 directly into their pit. They eliminated the functionality of the rail bed in that community. There is a question that makes sense to ask – what does the BPPAC have, in regards to being involved with Walpole and Westmoreland issues? Once they complete the trail to the city limit connecting to Westmoreland it would be reasonable for this committee to make Walpole and Westmoreland aware that they invested millions of dollars into Keene's trail system hoping it would be a hub and connect to other communities to have a vibrant, active transportation system. There will be a time to weigh in, but maybe not at this time, unless Ms. Rodrigues has a specific request of the BPPAC. The only weight the BPPAC has is speaking through the City Council, and the City Council might not want to weigh in until they complete Cheshire Rail Trail Phase III or IIII.

Ms. Rodrigues replied that part of the problem is that she does not know what she *can* ask, so she is focusing now on increasing awareness of the problem. She has photos for anyone who wants to see. Mr. Little suggested they go with Mr. Redfern's suggestion. He continued that once Keene completes the trail system to the city limits it will be natural to want to extend it. Ms. Rodrigues spoke more about her concerns, especially the fact that they have already begun work on the quarry and the longer they wait, the more and more costly it will be for anyone to fix it.

7) Adjournment

Chair Rubin adjourned the meeting at 9:33 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Additional Edits by,
Will Schoefmann, City Staff