

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May 11, 2016

8:00 AM

2nd floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Christopher Brehme, Vice Chair
Charles (Chuck) Redfern
Thom Little
Emily Coey

Staff Present:

William Schoefmann, Planning
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works (arrived at 8:28 AM)

Members Not Present:

Linda Rubin, Chair
Don Hayes
Ed Guyot

Vice Chair Brehme called the meeting to order at 8:07 AM.

1) Roll Call

Roll Call was conducted.

2) Accept Minutes of April 13, 2016

Mr. Little made a motion to approve the minutes of April 13, 2016.

Mr. Little stated that during the course of a BPPAC meeting, the Project Update sheet gets updated, but the updated document is never filed along with the meeting minutes and the committee had agreed that it should be. Mr. Schoefmann replied that meeting minutes are just a transcript of what was said at a meeting, so what Mr. Little is asking is not something that would typically be in the minutes, so he cannot say yes or no right now. He continued that he will check with the City Clerk's Office. Mr. Little stated that also, the word "moderate" in the matrix needs to be changed to "medium."

Discussion continued about whether/how to include the updated Project Updates document with or in the minutes. Vice Chair Brehme noted that the minutes include people's comments during the meeting about Project Updates, comments, changes of dates, and so on and so forth.

Mr. Redfern seconded the motion to approve the minutes of April 13, 2016, and Vice Chair Brehme stated that the minutes are approved.

Councilor Jay Kahn was recognized by Chair Brehme. Mr. Redfern asked Councilor Jay Kahn if he is the BPPAC's City Council liaison. Councilor Kahn replied that he does not think so. Mr. Redfern asked if he is interested in being the liaison. Councilor Kahn replied possibly. He continued that he would like some time on the agenda today to talk about an issue. Mr. Schoefmann suggested he speak now, instead of during "New Business," and Vice Chair Brehme agreed.

Councilor Kahn stated that in March the City Council completed the decision-making process for the CIP for the next fiscal year. He continued that to him it seems like a huge oversight that there is no funding for sidewalks that will provide paths to locations pedestrians need access to. He thinks there needs to be some link up between what the City's concept of Complete Streets is, which ought to include alternative transportation and recreation, and the safety of people who want to walk, bike, and run parallel to a street. People need safe havens along those pathways. One high priority item is an area of Rt. 12A. He runs there regularly and sees that runners or bicyclists have to bail off the side of the road into the culvert if vehicles are coming. It is not safe.

Councilor Kahn continued that he suggests defining "bike path" and "sidewalk" differently. Even just two feet on either side of the road would be sufficient for bicyclists and pedestrians to find safety. This has worked in other cities and could work for Keene. As he has expressed at Council meetings, they need a set of criteria against a list of projects that includes these sidewalk projects and others that other groups want to introduce, and there needs to be some public airing, based on these criteria, so the Council can evaluate people's ideas as they come forward. Then they need regular funding for projects that pass the test or rise to the highest level of need and allow those to bounce off the communities and see what participation they can get from citizens.

Councilor Kahn continued that these are his thoughts on how to make the city a more pedestrian-friendly, non-vehicular place. He hopes that as the BPPAC creates a plan they would develop this set of criteria, and start to get out there early, before the next CIP, inviting communities on a regular basis to come in and advocate for why these projects are important.

Mr. Redfern thanked Councilor Kahn for his insights and agreed that there has not been enough public input in the process. He continued that what complicates what they do and how they order their priorities is that their priorities might suddenly shift when federal funding comes along unexpectedly. Generally, sidewalks are frowned upon for federal funding because they are looked at as the responsibility of the municipality, but they can get attractive offers for 6 to 8 foot trails with 80% federal funding. Keene has a reputation of coming up with their local share of the funding and successfully completing projects, which helps them get federal funding as it becomes available. As much as the BPPAC and the City tries to prepare, opportunities emerge, such as grants or a private enterprise willing to fund some major segment.

Mr. Little replied that he agrees with Mr. Redfern 100%. He continued that that is how South Bridge is being built now, with federal funds that were available sooner than

anticipated. They never know when federal funds will show up. For example, a study needs to be done of potential routes for the Jonathan Daniels Trail Phase II in order for it to qualify for a grant from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT). It will be a missed opportunity if the funds are available but the required study has not been done. Councilor Kahn replied that he understands the need to be shovel-ready.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that Councilor Kahn is trying to focus on pedestrian access and use of the sidewalk network as it relates to the CIP. He continued that today the BPPAC can go over the priorities and see how far they can get with ranking them. They are interested in making sure the City looks at sidewalks and connectivity and in-street facilities. Another project is access point analysis of the trail system and how it connects to sidewalks. They are trying to move in the right direction with the plan outlining some of these ways the City can look at what Councilor Kahn is talking about.

Mr. Blomquist arrived at 8:28 AM.

Mr. Schoefmann continued that overall connectivity might not happen this year, but as the plan gets out there, the plan is to have the City Council review and approve it. Councilor Kahn replied that it will happen this year; neighborhood groups will be active with communicating with the City Council and will probably be angry if they do not have a process. He understands what Mr. Little says about how opportunity strikes and changes priorities, and that money follows money. What he is saying is that if the city has some systems and attractions they need to spend a little more to connect them, or else they will not be fully accessible. These are wise investments. They need to look at the definition of a pedestrian path. Do two 3-foot paths equal one 6-foot one to qualify for funding? In his view, having two feet on either side of the road provides safety.

Mr. Redfern stated that there is a state-level group seeking to give all state highways 2- to 3-foot shoulders, paved and striped. Mr. Blomquist replied that it depends on the speed of the facility, but yes, there is a group seeking that sort of distance. He continued that no one would declare that safe or adequate but it is a space that is not there today.

Councilor Kahn replied that he gives Mr. Blomquist credit for starting a good set of criteria for sidewalks. He continued that that has no funding. He knows at least one neighborhood that has been waiting 12 years. Mr. Blomquist replied that that is a 20-year-list, and part of any future discussion will be to re-look at the list and go back through the criteria and do a broader review. The other challenge the City always has is gaining property to create the sidewalks –people want sidewalks but not on their side of the street. In one case, the City spent five years trying to negotiate for two feet of property to create a sidewalk. Mr. Kahn replied that creating two-foot lanes would maybe not be the safest, but would help. Mr. Blomquist replied yes, as they re-do streets, they are mostly reducing to 10-foot travel lanes to create wider shoulders.

Vice Chair Brehme thanked Councilor Kahn for his thoughts. He continued that the BPPAC members all walk and bike in these areas and think about these issues. Mr.

Redfern asked if Councilor Kahn is interested in joining the BPPAC's email list. Councilor Kahn replied yes.

3) Project Updates

a) See Attached Table

Mr. Little stated that the first two items on the table (Roundhouse T Phase II and Cheshire Rail Trail Phase II) can be deleted because they are complete. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, now that safety concerns have been addressed on Roundhouse T Phase II.

Jonathan Daniels Trail

Mr. Schoefmann reported that there is no status change. They are waiting on figures from Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Director Andy Bohannon.

Jonathan Daniels Trail Phase II

Mr. Schoefmann stated that as Mr. Little mentioned earlier, the Jonathan Daniels Phase II study has been removed from the CIP. They will seek alternatives for that or maybe they can bring it to the committee to have a discussion next month or another month. Mr. Little stated that he suggested adding this as item #35 on the projects list.

Cheshire Rail Trail – Park Ave. Loop

Mr. Schoefmann reported that the RFQ process was approved by the State. He continued that they have approval by the City Council to begin scope and fee negotiations. Those will be underway with Clough Harbor Associates (CHA) this week. There are many steps to go through, based on the State guidelines. Mr. Blomquist added information and stated that it will be about four weeks until they have a contract for CHA to begin the design process. They should be underway by the first week or two of June.

South Bridge

Mr. Schoefmann reported that construction is in process. Mr. Little stated that he asked NHDOT if they had anything to announce for this meeting and they said no.

Mr. Little stated that he thought the ramps would be asphalt-covered, but no, they will be stone dust. He continued that he asked NHDOT why and the reply was timing - asphalt that would require an environmental impact study of introducing asphalt into the area and they did not have time to complete the project if they did that.

Mr. Little stated that he thinks they need a project/plan for the trail section from Winchester Street to the KSC Athletic Fields. Mr. Blomquist replied that the section basically from Emerald Street to the Swanzey town line is owned by NHDOT and managed by the NH Department of Resources and Economic Development (NHDRED). Discussion ensued. Mr. Little stated that he was trying to capture what he thought were the important things that needed to be addressed, like a lighting plan. This is a special case due to its location and what it is connecting. He thought South Bridge would have asphalt ramps. North Bridge was designed to never carry snowmobiles. If they ever allow snowmobiles there they will have to put pads down, because it is a wood deck and asphalt ramps. Mr. Blomquist replied that there is a difference between what a structure

is designed for and what is best for maintenance. He continued that North Bridge was designed to have snowmobiles on it and what Mr. Little is saying is more of a maintenance and longevity issue. Technically snowmobiles are not allowed on North Bridge because one side is owned by the City and the other is owned by the State and it may not be reasonable for snowmobiles to be on the bridge if they cannot continue on the path that it leads to.

Mr. Little stated that the difference with South Bridge is that the City Council said it is being put up with the idea that there will be snowmobiles on it. Mr. Blomquist replied that the City Council agreed with the style of the bridge, because that is what NHDOT asked for, but the City Council never voted to prohibit or allow snowmobiles because they do not have the authority to. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Little clarified that his intent was to capture, in a new project at the end of the projects list, a project regarding this particular trail section because it is a special case and important to the city. He was trying to capture the aspects of such a project, such as lighting, and snowmobile use. He wanted the project defined on the list so they can establish a priority for it so they know when it can be dealt with.

Bike Racks

Mr. Blomquist reported that bike racks are ongoing.

Complete Streets

Mr. Blomquist reported that the Complete Streets resolution was adopted and got an award from the NH Planning Association. Mari Brunner from Southwest Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC) got an individual award for it, too.

Lighting

Mr. Schoefmann stated that Mr. Bohannon is still working on details of a lighting proposal. He is waiting for some information and will update the BPPAC when he can.

Vice Chair Brehme reported that Mr. Bohannon did hire a KSC geography department student to help with the data collection. Mr. Little asked questions about the lights. Mr. Blomquist replied that those answers will be part of Mr. Bohannon's updates and part of the BPPAC's discussion going forward.

b) MAST Bike to Work Day Event

Mr. Schoefmann reported that the event is Friday, May 20. He listed the schedule of events and the groups that are involved. He asked people to spread the word and encouraged participation.

4) BPPAC Master Plan

a) Priorities Tool Matrix Update

b) Priorities Discussion and Exercise

Mr. Schoefmann asked if the committee wanted to review Mr. Little's comments on the projects, which he had passed out. He continued that Mr. Little had suggestions on how to organize the list.

Mr. Little stated that he was trying to understand the list. Some of it he was not familiar with. He gave a suggested wording change for the BE1 project description. He suggested changing BE3 to say that the sidewalks will be 8 feet wide. Mr. Blomquist replied that a width of 6 feet met the grant requirements, and they cannot go to 8 feet without taking property. Discussion ensued. Mr. Schoefmann stated that he understands that Mr. Little is saying that 8 feet was the intent.

Mr. Schoefmann asked if Mr. Little needed clarification about what project BE2 is. He continued that he can clarify on the chart that it is an actual trail construction project in an area where there is currently no trail.

Mr. Little gave suggestions for BE5, arguing against the necessity of two bridges as it currently states. Discussion ensued. Mr. Blomquist stated that the BPPAC should focus on what the projects are trying to accomplish, instead of attempting to come up with the actual solutions/details/designs right now. Let project scoping happen later. Mr. Little asked for the comment about two bridges to be taken out. Mr. Schoefmann agreed.

Vice Chair Brehme asked if they should start the process of going through each project and ranking them on the matrix, or finish addressing all of Mr. Little's written comments first. Discussion ensued. The group decided to go through the ranking exercise and address Mr. Little's comments as they come up.

Mr. Little replied that he will gladly vote today and if there are any projects he does not understand he will just vote "low priority." Mr. Blomquist explained that the BPPAC's task is to decide whether or not a project is important, and decide how important each one is. He continued that their task in prioritizing these projects based on importance does not involve figuring out the details of *how* the projects should be done. Vice Chair Brehme agreed that they should not wander too far into the weeds. Discussion continued about how to go about the prioritization exercise.

BE1 - "Overall Rail Trail Completion City Limits"

Vice Chair Brehme asked how people rank project BE1. Mr. Little and Mr. Redfern replied "high." Vice Chair Brehme voted "medium." Mr. Blomquist asked them to explain why they chose those rankings.

Mr. Little replied that to him, this project is what they are all about. Mr. Redfern agreed. Mr. Redfern stated that the rail trail is existing rail bed that has been abandoned, and if they do not preserve and improve it, it will be reclaimed by nature and/or claimed by abutters using it for brush or trash storage. The BPPAC needs to help the intent of the State, to preserve the rail trails for public use, not as places for wilderness or trash. That is why he votes "high." Also, the money is there.

Vice Chair Brehme stated that he chose “medium” because it speaks to how good of a job the City and BPPAC and PFK have done in improving the trails. To him it is almost a maintenance issue. What Mr. Redfern says sounds like a separate project. He thinks safety is a bigger priority than convenience and aesthetics. Mr. Redfern replied that saying that completing the rail trail is only a “medium” priority tells the City Council that it is not a high priority and that will lead to the City Council funding it accordingly.

Mr. Little stated that it is more than just the trail, it is also three bridges. They will start talking about the third bridge sometime in the future. This is talking about the overall strategy. At last month’s BPPAC meeting someone from another town spoke to them about her anger about the trail in her town being eaten up because the local government does not prioritize protecting it. That is happening in many places. They do not have that problem in Keene.

Mr. Blomquist stated that going back to Mr. Little’s first comment, BE1 is not a specific project; it is the overall goal of the committee to complete all the trail systems. He continued that he is not sure, then, how they can compare this goal to other specific projects like, for example, “Appel Way Assessment and Maintenance.” If this is an overall goal statement, to have a plan and completion for all trails, that is okay to have as a high priority, because it is not a specific project, it is big picture.

Discussion continued. Ms. Coey voted “high.” She stated that organization of the BPPAC’s goals would be high importance. Vice Chair Brehme stated that he changes his vote to “high,” too.

BE2 – CRT Eastern Ave – NH 101

Vice Chair Brehme asked if the completion of this trail section is necessary for a bridge over 101 or if there is another way to go down Eastern Ave. with a wider sidewalk or something like that. Mr. Blomquist replied that this project is from Eastern Ave. to NH 101 and would connect the trail system that goes south through Swanzey. He continued that the question is where this section fits into the overall priorities. It ends at NH 101. Would they want to lead people out to NH 101 now with nothing there? Mr. Schoefmann replied that the idea is to set up a pocket park, so it is not that the trail would lead to nothing.

Mr. Redfern chose “high.” He continued that this is the area where people are claiming the rail bed, starting to put up sheds, etc. If abutters continue to use this space it will lead to higher resistance from neighbors when the City gets around to doing this project.

Mr. Little stated that the location at NH 101 is a challenge. The other two bridges have a 200 foot span. That width is not available at that location. It was 200 feet because the assumption was the bridge would be there for 150 years. This was to allow for expansion of the highway without having to rebuild the bridge. South Bridge is exactly 200 feet like North Bridge for that very reason. This is quite a challenge. He votes “medium.” Mr. Schoefmann replied that this project is just for the trail segment, not the overpasses.

Vice Chair Brehme asked if he is saying that this trail segment is critical to any bridge that would go over NH 101. Mr. Redfern replied yes.

Discussion continued about bridge options and details. Mr. Blomquist stated that details about the bridge are not important right now. The question is whether or not this trail segment project is important to the BPPAC, or not.

Vice Chair Brehme voted “high.” He stated that it is critical to support an eventual bridge. Mr. Blomquist replied that to state it in even simpler terms, this project is important to linking the trail system from within Keene to the system outside of Keene. *How* the project is done is not important for this exercise.

Ms. Coey stated that she votes “high.” Mr. Little changed his vote to “high.”

Mr. Blomquist asked the BPPAC members to take their project lists home and rank the projects on their own, between now and the next meeting. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, they can all rank them on their own like Mr. Little did – that was the intention.

5) Old Business

Mr. Little showed photos of the guide wire cover on the Roundhouse T Phase II Trail. Mr. Schoefmann stated that an Eversource wire was very close to the trail. He continued that Eversource covered it and also completed the appropriately-angled wooden guardrail barriers. City Engineer Don Lussier did a great job assessing the area and relaying the information.

6) New Business

Mr. Redfern reported that PFK’s Four on the Fourth event is coming up and PFK is looking for volunteers, participants, and sponsors. He gave more information about it, such as a chance to win an eco-friendly car, and asked the group to spread the word.

Mr. Schoefmann asked who people should contact regarding volunteering or for more information. Mr. Redfern replied probably Ted McGreer. Mr. Schoefmann offered to spread the word via social media. Vice Chair Brehme asked for more information about how to win the cars and Mr. Redfern spoke a bit more.

Wink Faulkner introduced himself. He stated that he is interested in preserving things in the area like the Stone Arch Bridge. He encountered [Patricia Rodrigues], who came to last month’s meeting. He wants to help connect Walpole, Westmoreland, and Swanzey, going to Winchendon, and/or wherever they can. That is his goal. The BPPAC’s work is very important and their work is necessary to his goal.

7) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Vice Chair Brehme adjourned the meeting at 9:29 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Additional edits by,
Will Schoefmann, Planning Staff