

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, November 9, 2016

8:00 AM

2nd floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Linda Rubin, Chair
Charles (Chuck) Redfern
Thom Little
Emily Coey
Don Hayes (arrived at 8:38 AM)

Staff Present:

William Schoefmann, Planning
Andrew Bohannon, Parks & Recreation
(arrived at 8:49 AM)
Kurt Blomquist, Public Works (arrived at 8:22 AM)

Members Not Present:

Christopher Brehme, Vice Chair
Ed Guyot

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Rubin called the meeting to order at 8:14 AM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Accept October 12, 2016 Minutes

Mr. Little made a motion to approve the minutes of October 12, 2016, with the following amendments: Page 2, first paragraph, change “Have not ranked yet” to “Have not rated yet.” Page 8, paragraph 3, change “Ron Grandmaison” to “Ronald Grandmaison.”

Mr. Redfern seconded the motion and asked for another change - third paragraph, page 2, “Chair Redfern” should be “Mr. Redfern.”

The motion to approve the minutes as amended passed by unanimous vote.

3) BPPAC Master Plan – Priorities Discussion and Exercise

Mr. Little noted that there was a change to BE5 in last month’s meeting that did not get changed on the document – the reference to Swanzey Factory Rd. should be deleted from the description in BE5, since they made it a separate project. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he can do that.

BE29 - Amenities

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he combined the items into one, with the exception of trail lighting, as discussed. He read aloud the project description. Chair Rubin replied that there is a lot in there. She asked if they talked about an assessment to get the baseline. Mr. Schoefmann replied that that will be part of it. He continued that he and the Parks & Recreation Department have

been working on trying to get kiosks donated. They have a number of new trailheads as part of the TAP project and those might be good spots for the kiosks. They are in the works. There are several trailheads downtown around the Railroad Square area and across the street - a possible downtown centralized trailhead area that they are looking at improving. There is a trailhead at Eastern Ave. They are starting by looking at enhancing the existing, informal trailheads. The larger plan will be to figure out where to co-locate some of these other items. Maybe they can be explicit in the BPPAC Master Plan about those locations.

Chair Rubin replied that it is great that some things are in the works, but she is trying to think about this in a consistent way. If they need to do the baseline assessment and develop a plan for enhancing the amenities throughout the system, that makes sense as a project. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he thinks that is all part of it; that is how he understands the project description. Mr. Little replied that the product is a plan. Chair Rubin replied yes, except it does not say that. She asked if they can have consistent language. Mr. Little replied that it needs the word "plan." Mr. Schoefmann replied that he can add that. He asked if they want any other changes to that description. He continued that aside from the amenities discussed, part of this will also be the public art component. That is his understanding, from having combined everything.

Mr. Redfern stated that he would rate this "high," because there is already money in the bank; they have already acquired three kiosks that are waiting for sites, and they have over \$30,000 (Pathways for Keene) to put towards some of these items. It should be "high" so staff has validity to move forward on their plans.

Mr. Little stated that this is phase I and they are rating based on the criteria the BPPAC has established. He asked how this relates to safety and the other criteria. He continued that he rated it "low," based on their criteria. Mr. Schoefmann replied that it relates to accessibility, availability and connectivity. He continued that if they have good-looking, well established trailheads and amenities, like potable water and tune-up stations, certainly that increases accessibility and connectivity. Mr. Redfern stated that Keene is lacking adequate trailhead facilities, compared to other communities, like Winchendon. The usage of their trails is pretty substantial. Mr. Little replied that they are up to Phase III of the Ashuelot Rail Trail and that will include a more exotic trailhead to solve that issue. Mr. Schoefmann replied that that is one trail. He continued that they are talking about the entire system, which is pretty devoid of trailheads. Eastern Ave's trailhead is probably the most well-established but it does not have much. There is not much orientating other than a sign saying the trail you are getting on. Mr. Little stated that this would not improve availability to the trail system. Mr. Redfern disagreed. Mr. Schoefmann stated that there is a dirt parking lot with no established transition zones, parking spaces, or sidewalk.

Public Works Director Kurt Blomquist spoke about having spaces for emergency services, a sign saying where a person is at in case they need to call for help, etc. - those fall under safety. They have quite a bit of trail system. The Police Department says they cannot easily access it if they need to do patrols. They could make a strong case for trailheads being a safety issue. Having access to water is a safety issue, to prevent dehydration, for example. This encourages increased pedestrian use. Tune-up stations are debatable. But he leans towards what Mr. Schoefmann is saying - they have done a great job with trails but not amenities.

Mr. Little replied that he suggested having a public phone and people laughed, saying that everyone has cell phones. He continued that if their conclusion is that everyone has a mobile phone, they would not bother hanging a map up on a board. They would make sure the map is available to the phones. Mr. Blomquist replied that they can do both. He continued that many places now have charging stations. Mr. Little replied that he agrees that they need both.

Chair Rubin stated that she would like to see changes with regards to creating a safety assessment to see which trails are highest in need of safety improvements, like trailheads or phones or whatever the amenities are. She could get more on board with rating this higher than “low” if it was really focused on safety. Mr. Little stated that he could go with “medium.” Chair Rubin replied that it is “low” for her unless it is focused on safety. Safety has to be the priority. When they improve a trail, why are safety amenities not part of the project? Mr. Redfern replied that they would get less of a trail, through grant money, if the project included safety amenities. Mr. Schoefmann replied that the method in the past has been to get as much mileage as possible.

Ms. Coey stated that she thinks they can rate the amenities separately. She continued that she is in favor of the kiosks. Initially she was not thinking that potable water was that high but she thinks Mr. Blomquist makes a good point about dehydration. Because there is so much included in the project she rates it “medium.” Kiosks are important but she thinks a lot of the other amenities listed are a lot to ask for at this time. Mr. Little stated that he could go with “medium.” Mr. Redfern agreed.

Mr. Schoefmann asked if they are looking for a “safety analysis” or “safety assessment.” Chair Rubin replied yes, to determine which ones are most in need of trailheads, potable water, and other safety amenities. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he will include “safety assessment” in the description somewhere.

BE31 - Regional Connectivity

Mr. Schoefmann stated that this is a secondary goal to the completion of the system city-wide. He continued that there are some barriers to establishing regional connectivity: some rail corridors Keene is improving go to other towns and it depends on what kind of motivation and encouragement those towns have for developing their rail corridors. That is how he rated this “low” from staff’s perspective. It is out of the municipality’s realm to encourage development in another town. But regional connectivity is important. Mr. Little asked where they draw the line. Where does BPPAC involvement end? They have always been focused on inside the city limits. They have had visitors at meetings who got upset about the BPPAC not entering into detailed discussions of trails in other towns. That is not what the BPPAC was set up to do.

Don Hayes arrived at 8:38 AM.

Mr. Schoefmann replied he understands the BPPAC’s role, but they are creating a City document. The Ashuelot Rail Trail is a portion of a bigger system. It is about recognizing that in the plan somehow and seeing if there is anything they can do. He is not sure either. Mr. Redfern replied that it could be as simple as alerting a town via phone call about a grant opportunity. He continued that he could see the Cheshire Rail Trail over by Rt. 101 heading into

Swanzy being a potential possibility for grants. Mr. Schoefmann replied that the last sentence of the project description is about this type of outreach to towns. Mr. Little stated that he thinks it needs to define the constraints. He continued that they could spend all of their energy on dealing with other communities. Mr. Schoefmann replied that realistically that will not happen. He continued that the Monadnock Alliance for Sustainable Transportation (MAST) focuses on a bunch of different towns. If there is an opportunity to participate in, say, a bicycle education program they have, he would say that is a good thing to participate in.

Mr. Little suggested having BPPAC members be liaisons to other towns. Chair Rubin stated that this might be about openness to opportunities, more than a project. Mr. Little stated that when something is listed as a project he thinks about what the product is. Mr. Schoefmann stated that liaising with other communities would be a lot of work. Chair Rubin replied that it could be “explore interest” of towns in connecting to the Keene trail system. Mr. Schoefmann replied that they could talk more about what this means. Mr. Little suggested merging this with BE1, which is an overall plan for what they are trying to do. That could include liaising with other communities. Chair Rubin replied that it is implied that you have to be talking with others and looking for opportunities.

Ms. Coey asked whether they are waiting for other towns to initiate these conversations and respond to requests for resource-sharing or ideas, or if the BPPAC would be proactive in reaching out. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he has never seen BPPAC members taking the time to talk with towns individually, like having one BPPAC member ask Surrey about their trail plans and another talks to Chesterfield, etc. Mr. Hayes replied that that is asking a lot of BPPAC members. They have enough work to do here in Keene. Chair Rubin stated that she thinks this is implied in BE1. Mr. Little stated that he remembers a person from Westmoreland who had a problem with a trail in her town and she got very upset with the BPPAC for not helping her. She did not understand what the BPPAC does.

Mr. Little stated that he recommends merging BE31 with BE1. Mr. Hayes, Ms. Coey, and Chair Rubin agreed. Mr. Schoefmann asked if this is rated “high.” Mr. Redfern replied yes.

Chair Rubin asked for Mr. Schoefmann’s thoughts on where to go from here. Mr. Schoefmann replied that they have had discussions about “rank” versus “rate.” He continued that he thinks that between the organizational support component that he places down and the BPPAC’s ratings, he will list these in descending order based on a value that he is able to ascertain from a 1, 2, 3 scale for each. “Low” will be 1, “medium” will be 2, and “high” will be 3. They can look at the next meeting at how the projects sort themselves out and see what they think about that. He will have a combined score for both categories, as the score for the project, and place them on a sheet for the BPPAC to review and see if it is reflective on what the BPPAC thinks.

Mr. Hayes asked how it would work if staff rates a project “medium” and the BPPAC rates it “high.” Mr. Schoefmann replied that based on his concept for scoring, it would be a 5. He continued that a project rated “high” (3) by both the BPPAC and staff would be a 6, and a project rated “low” by one (1) and “medium” (2) by another would be 3.

Mr. Little asked what the objective is. Mr. Schoefmann replied that they have been talking of ranking versus rating. They need a score to see how they fall in a hierarchy. Chair Rubin stated that it is a good exercise to do.

Chair Rubin stated that she thinks the weight of the BPPAC's ratings should be higher than the ratings of the City, since they are the advisory committee. She continued that she wants to see what it would look like if the BPPAC's ratings on the community objectives/criteria have more weight than the staff's ability and readiness to take these on. Mr. Little replied that they are talking about rating and they constantly said, they are not concerned with this, this, or this, they are only talking about certain criteria. When you talk about ranking, you talk about availability of money, when it will come up, what they see the projected uses as for this project versus that project, and so on and so forth. He thinks a starting point would be for each member to take this list and come into the next meeting with the top five projects they think should be done first. Chair Rubin replied yes, a sticky dot method would be another way to do this.

Mr. Redfern asked about staff. Mr. Schoefmann replied that such an exercise would be for the committee, not staff. Mr. Little asked about money. Chair Rubin replied that that would not be a part of it. She continued that if the committee says, these are the top five projects, that must have weight, when they are looking for opportunities for grants, or looking at PFK for sharing project costs. Mr. Hayes replied that they should be looking without a price tag. Others agreed. Mr. Bohannon agreed and replied that staff would go after grants, fundraising, and so on and so forth to make the "#1 project" happen.

Chair Rubin stated that she thinks they should determine the top five together as a group at the next meeting. Mr. Little stated that he does not think it is that difficult. He continued that if there is a "high-high" project, that is on the list, right? Chair Rubin replied that they will look at how BPPAC rated projects, and rank them based on the BPPAC's five criteria, not taking staff's ratings into account. Chair Rubin stated that they have about 15 projects rated "high" and that is too many to focus on all at once; having a top five would be a good way to go. Mr. Redfern stated that he does not think they should totally ignore the organizational support column. They are putting themselves in a vacuum. If staff says something is low because they do not have the resources or capacity, they should consider that. Mr. Hayes replied that he thinks they should choose their five and let staff figure it out. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, they should not worry about staff's ratings.

Ms. Coey asked if the BPPAC will rank their top 5 and have staff rank their top 5, too, or put this whole thing in descending order. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he could do that exercise. Ms. Coey replied that they can then compare the two lists. Chair Rubin replied that they could have that data there as they go through the further prioritization of the 15 they have rated "high." She asked if Mr. Schoefmann can take just the "high"s from the committee and how staff rated them and put them in order. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he will probably do the whole thing. Mr. Redfern stated that it was once A-1, A2, etc., then B-1, B-2. Chair Rubin replied that she does not see them losing any projects from the plan. They are just talking about pulling out the top 5.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that Chair Rubin has a presentation to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee tonight. He continued that every commission and committee gives

an annual update to the City Council and tonight is the BPPAC's turn. They will give the MSFI Committee members a handout, the objectives and a list of sample projects under each, prioritized by the committee. The MSFI Committee will have this as a highlight of the work the BPPAC has been doing on the master planning process. Mr. Redfern stated that it is a great idea. He asked if it can be updated to reflect that the BPPAC has completed their ratings today. Chair Rubin replied that the committee has not yet prioritized a group of projects, so the way to represent the BPPAC's work is to give a sample of some of the projects from their prioritization process, intentionally not prioritizing them because they still have work to do. Mr. Schoefmann stated that the items on the sheet are not new, they are just samples that Chair Rubin is showing.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that at the next BPPAC meeting the group will figure out the top five so they can move on to other things. Mr. Bohannon asked the BPPAC to consider the financial pictures of projects as well, such as for maintenance plans – for example, he has one summer staff person, for just eight weeks per year, to do trail trimming and other tasks. They can have a plan, but there needs to be a way to support it financially. Chair Rubin replied that comments like that will be an important part of their discussion when they prioritize the five. She encourages Mr. Bohannon to come to the next meeting and give his input. Mr. Little stated that this is what he has been trying to say. When money magically shows up they end up doing something that is further down the priority list. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he will speak to some things but he does not think money should constrain how the BPPAC thinks of their top five projects. The BPPAC's role is to advise the City on what to do, and the City figures it out.

Mr. Bohannon replied that there is a big difference between a million dollar infrastructure project and a \$5,000 marketing flyer. Some of the lower priorities are obtainable because they do not require as much money or political will. Regarding the wayfinding signage, this group can really focus on the trails, no problem. But when he and Mr. Schoefmann bring the wayfinding signage to another group, it becomes a bigger picture, including topics such as downtown branding. That little simple project became huge. And the little piece they could accomplish does not happen because they have to get the bigger pieces done. Those are things that might not be addressed by the BPPAC. The hard part is the political will outside of this room.

Mr. Hayes replied that they have to also be realistic - they cannot do everything that they want to do. Mr. Little stated that maybe there are three groups for these projects and instead of talking about the relative priority of projects in each group, it is instead about what group they are in. So the focus would be on all projects rated "high." Chair Rubin replied that would be one way to go, or it could be about short-term and long-term projects. Mr. Little stated that all they really care about is: which is the group of projects they think are most important? Mr. Schoefmann replied that they will do that at the next meeting.

4) Project Updates

Mr. Schoefmann stated that per a number of suggestions last time, he highlighted the three projects with movement.

Cheshire Rail Trail – Park Ave. Loop

Mr. Schoefmann reported that planning is underway for the Cheshire Rail Trail Park Ave Loop. Initial survey work is being completed. The engineering study phase should be rescheduled for

late December or early January. He will keep them up to date when they have ideas on when the public meeting will be and what the materials will be.

South Bridge

Mr. Little stated that November 14, 2016 is when they thought the steel work problem with South Bridge would be solved, but not necessarily when the project will be done. He recommends that the end date be changed to “unknown.” He would change “grand opening” to “celebration,” which is consistent with last month’s discussion. They said it would probably happen in May and the bridge will probably be in use for 4 or 5 months before that happens. Regarding the project status, Mr. Grandmaison was on vacation, so he has not heard from him. He contacted Christopher Clement, previous Commissioner of NHDOT who made this project happen, with the pictures of South Bridge and his response was “beautiful.” Everything is done except for 340 feet of concrete deck and the approaches. He has not yet seen anything regarding the plan that showed fencing on the ramps going up to the bridge. There was a slight bog down for the 100-foot steel sections and now they do not really know any of the completion dates.

Lighting

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he is working with a Keene State College student to do an analysis on lighting. He continued that it is underway.

Public Outreach

Mr. Redfern stated that for the celebration to mark the completion of South Bridge, he recommends that this committee consider having some representation on a dedication committee that should be formed by the Mayor. He continued that Mr. Little has been working with Helen Mattson in the City Manager’s Office to come up with a list of people to invite. Mr. Little stated that they sent North Bridge invitations via postal mail and he hopes they can do this by email instead to reduce the cost. Mr. Redfern replied that that is something that would be addressed by a dedication committee. The Mayor said he is looking for input about who should be on the committee. He (Mr. Redfern) thinks Chair Rubin should solicit BPPAC members for this. PFK wants to have some members on it.

Chair Rubin asked who is interested in serving on a Mayor-appointed committee to help coordinate the celebration of South Bridge. Mr. Hayes replied that he is willing. Chair Rubin and Mr. Redfern replied that they would like to be on it, too. Mr. Redfern asked Mr. Bohannon. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will join if the Mayor wants him to. Chair Rubin asked if Mr. Redfern will give names of interested PFK members to the Mayor. Mr. Redfern replied yes. Mr. Little asked if he is on the list. Mr. Redfern replied yes.

5) New Business

None.

6) Adjournment

Chair Rubin adjourned the meeting at 9:22 AM.

Respectfully submitted by
Britta Reida, Minute-taker