



City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING AGENDA

Wednesday, October 10, 2018

8:15 AM

City Hall, Second Floor
Conference Room

Members:

Linda Rubin, Chair	Charles Redfern
Dillon Benik, Vice Chair	Ed Guyot
Christopher Brehme	Drew Bryenton
Thom Little	David Souther, Alternate

- 1) Roll Call
- 2) September 12, 2018 Minutes
- 3) Project Updates
(Note: BPPAC Master Plan Documents available to committee members on google drive)
- 4) “Emerald Star” Concept
- 5) Old Business
 - Project Priorities
 - Bike Racks
 - Public Outreach and Events
- 6) New Business
 - Items to be included for next meeting
- 7) Adjournment

Next meeting date –November 14, 2018

BICYCLE, PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 12, 2018

8:15 AM

**City Hall, Second Floor Conference
Room**

Members Present:

Linda Rubin, Chair
Dylan Benik, Vice Chair
Thom Little, Member
Charles Redfern, Member
Chris Brehme, Member
Drew Bryenton, Member

Staff Present:

Will Schoefmann, City Staff

Members Not Present:

Ed Guyot, Member
David Souther, Alternate

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Rubin called meeting to order at 8:15 am and roll call was conducted.

2) August 8, 2018 Minutes

Mr. Little moved to accept August 8, 2018 minutes with amendments, Vice Chair Benik seconded and motion was passed unanimously.

Revisions are as follows:

Page 2, TAP Project- Cheshire Rail Trail- PARK Avenue Loop, change "NH DOT Federal Highway" to NH DOT

Page 5, paragraph 2, change: "State DOT" to "NH DOT"

Page 5, paragraph 3, change: "HDS" to "Home Healthcare, Hospice and Community Services (HCS)"

Page 5, paragraph 4, change: "DOT" to "NH DOT"

3) **Project Updates**

-Cheshire Rail Trail-Park Ave. Loop (current TAP project)

Mr. Schoefmann announced that preliminary engineering for the project was submitted about two months ago and the update will come from the Engineering department whom he will contact. He said he has seen some reimbursement requests from the work the consultant has been doing. He stated that the project is still moving forward and the goal is it to start construction in spring 2019. They plan to do in-street facilities first and then Amy Brown road and rail trail improvements. Those details will be fleshed out once design construct and other details are put together.

-Complete Streets grant (MAST)

Mr. Schoefmann stated that the City will not know if the City was selected for the grant until after November when MAST's first Board meeting takes place. He said that the grant was intended for improvement of the nodes for the Marlborough Street project area which includes Grove Street and the Baker Street and for some pedestrian improvements as well.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that the Complete Streets grant from last year has been wrapped up so there will be no more updates on that. He said the symbols and bike boxes are now part of their striping contract and bike boxes have held up pretty well this year so far. He said they have some redistribution of bikes on the move and some downtown flyer activities that they still have to do but otherwise that project is wrapped up.

-Master Plan Projects

(Note: BPPAC Master Plan Documents available to committee members on google drive)

-Access Point and Connectivity Analysis

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he has Keene State College (KSC) students working on the assessments and hopefully they will be building on some of the wayfinding work that the KSC the Geography students worked on last year. He said he will roll the analysis into the report card he will obtain from them. Mr. Schoefmann said the students' work will focus on gateway, bicycle and slow streets because those streets have the most Complete Street elements and are representative of how the City is doing in terms of implementation of the design guide. He said he met with four students who are currently writing a literature review and will be focusing on the project all semester with the aim of wrapping it up project before Christmas break.

-West Street Bike Counts

Mr. Schoefmann said they will be wrapping up bike counts for this year this week.

-Project Priority List

Mr. Little inquired about the committee's previous discussion about adding a column indicating the high priority projects and moving those to the top of the list. He said there is no indication of that change on the list. Secondly, he stated that there is nothing in the project updates about the Cheshire Rail Trail-Phase 4 project. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he did not have a chance to add the project to the list and he felt it is was more important to discuss

the current TAP grant. Mr. Little expressed that he was confused because the committee had voted that as a very high priority project. Mr. Schoefmann suggested that they move into item 4 on the agenda that discusses grant opportunities. Mr. Schoefmann said line item 4 addresses all of the grant opportunities the City has been working on so he can more easily answer Mr. Little's question.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he did not have a chance to prioritize the Project Updates list, however, some of the priorities listed at the top are not prioritized on the Master Plan. He said he could indicate which items are priorities on the Master Plan but those are highlighted on the bottom section under Master Plan priorities. Mr. Schoefmann suggested the committee go through the priority list and rank the items. Mr. Little agreed that it is very important to have a relative priority list and if committee determines items of high importance are not in the Master Plan they can recommend that those projects are included in the Master Plan.

Chair Rubin stated that Mr. Schoefmann's list on the back is fine, however, she agrees with Mr. Little that there may be items on the front page that are in the Master Plan and if any of the items were in the Master Plan but not part of the top five, there can be an indication of that. Mr. Schoefmann said if BPPAC has priorities for the projects they themselves need to rank them.

Mr. Little said that the Cheshire Rail Trail-Phase 4 was one of the top ranking projects agreed to by BPPAC and he does not believe it is in the Master Plan. Mr. Schoefmann replied that that the project is in fact in the Master Plan. Chair Rubin said she does not recall what the committee did after the top five and there may have been ten to fifteen other projects they had ranked and it would be beneficial to know which projects are being worked on. Mr. Schoefmann emphasized that a lot of those projects were on the cue before BPPAC developed their Master Plan. He said the lighting project is still on the list because Pathways for Keene is thinking of expanding that operation, NH Pass Signage might have updates but is not on the Master Plan and bike racks would fall under amenities. He said he can attempt to associate projects with items in the Master Plan but it is difficult as there are Master Plan projects that do not necessarily jive with the ones in the cue.

Mr. Benik asked if the ranking the committee did before he joined was numbered or more detailed than high, medium and low. Chair Rubin agreed that is was just a descriptive ranking and not more detailed than that. Mr. Little stated that the intent was to capture the intent of the committee, for example, projects 3 and 5 were important and they can identify which projects the committee thinks are high and assign each project a number between one and fifteen to indicate importance. Chair Rubin stated it is fine to keep the list the way that it is but perhaps they could add more of the Master Plan top ranked projects. Mr. Schoefmann stated that a couple of the projects may not have scored high but they were important to the group. He suggested the committee reevaluate those project priorities again in December or January. Vice Chair Benik said West Street is an example of that priority disconnect between organizational support column and the committee's priority list.

Mr. Little apologized for the confusion but he believes the Cheshire Rail Trail-Phase 4 project was supposed to be included in the TAP application currently being submitted and he does not see it included in the packet. Mr. Schoefmann said he would address that in item 4. He asked if there is explicit direction on how to proceed with the project prioritization. Chair Rubin suggested they leave it the way it is and at the October or November meeting they can add it to the agenda and decide if they want to make changes. Mr. Little stated that the ranking will be an iterative process and will need to be refined over time but will be to

everyone's benefit. He said if Mr. Schoefmann needs assistance from the committee he should not hesitate to ask. Mr. Schoefmann agreed. Chair Rubin asked Mr. Schoefmann for a copy of the priority project rankings and Vice Chair Benik replied the list is on the Google Drive. Vice Chair Benik instructed Mr. Redfern on how to access the Google Drive from Mr. Schoefmann's email link.

4) **Grant Opportunities Update 2018**

Mr. Schoefmann stated in the last meeting BPPAC expressed support for the Cheshire Rail Trail- Phase 4 project which would complete trail redevelopment and remediation from Eastern Ave out to 101. At a mandatory NH DOT meeting attended by Mr. Lindquist and Ms. Brunner, NH DOT pointed out that the City could only apply for one project--they could not put in two applications and hope for the best. Mr. Schoefmann explained that City management and grant writers had a meeting and essentially it was determined that the City was far more financially ready to pursue the Marlborough Street project over the Cheshire Rail Trail-Phase 4 project. He explained that they already have a CIP set up for Marlborough Street; therefore, in conjunction with the grant monies they elected to move forward with the Marlborough Street project.

Mr. Redfern stated that Mr. Little's research into the project is not for naught as staff has to put the project into the CIP program proposal for City Manager to review and approve. Mr. Little said he spent some time looking at the application and on page 11 of 13, the bottom has been terminated. Mr. Schoefmann explained that the page cut-off is just a printing error and encouraged Mr. Little to look at the PDF electronic version. Mr. Little said he would look into the PDF instead. He said the TAP projects usually involve money spent on preliminary work to put application together and that is part of the delay. Mr. Little said that if they compare the stated estimate in the City Manager's letter to what the City has allocated and what they are asking for there is a residual of \$76,400 on the City's side. Mr. Schoefmann explained that those are non-participating funds because they already have a contract open with an engineering firm that can do the design work. They have a CIP that they are proposing to spend money for improvements on Marlborough Street. Mr. Little encouraged Mr. Schoefmann to look at the City Manager's letter and proposed that the excess funds can be allocated to the Cheshire Rail Trail Phase 4 project. Mr. Schoefmann said that is highly unlikely however, the goal is to set Phase 4 up for success by creating a CIP through sending a revised letter of interest with an estimate for installation. He recommended creating a two-part project (Phase 1 and 2) as one of the barriers is getting people safely across the trail system: the Stone Arch Bridge and 101 are safety barriers to the project. He said historic grant work has been done to repair deterioration between the blocks but there are no railings and that is an issue if they are directing people to it. Furthermore, the original bridge design had another tier of blocks that functioned as a barrier but those were removed when they expanded the trains and railroads.

Mr. Schoefmann proposed lining all of these factors up for a successful and safe overall project is important and the City Engineer and the Department of Community Development they are assembling the pieces for a longer range financial plan through the CIP for these improvements. He said Swanzey submitted for improvements along Joslin Station Road all the way to the Marlborough line, so if they do not get the grant a Swanzey-Keene partnership

could potentially be another avenue towards getting them across Swanzev Factory Road. However, in the short-term, there is no CIP for the project and he is not sure what the City would have done to reallocate funding for the Cheshire Rail Trail-Phase 4 project. Mr. Little suggested that for Phase 1 of the Phase 4 project, instead of a bridge perhaps they should consider a pedestrian controlled light as the volume of pedestrian traffic using the crossing each hour differentiates the possible solutions. He encouraged that the engineering analysis that goes into Phase 4, Phase 1 consider that. Mr. Schoefmann said if they improve the trail there will most likely be a correlative increase in pedestrian traffic so perhaps doing some pedestrian counts in preparation for another TAP round in two years would be beneficial. Mr. Redfern added that a signal crossing at 101 is not safe because of the speed of the cars and curvature of the road. He said no count was done on South and North Bridge due to the same conditions and he does not see any need to put a signalized surface there as it would be unsafe. Mr. Little replied that the difference between the third bridge and North Bridge projects was the expected growth on North side of the bridge through commercial growth and an apartment complex in the planning stages—he said these factors are not in effect in the location in question. He stated that the Cheshire Rail Trail may not have appropriate volume and asked what can be done on other side of other side of Stone Arch Bridge to drive usage up, such as a recreational area. Chair Rubin suggested Mr. Redfern and Mr. Little go for coffee to discuss these topics.

Chair Rubin announced that she would like to go on the record stating that there was a missed opportunity to collect feedback from the BPPAC as an advisory committee about the decision to pursue the Marlborough Street project instead of the Cheshire Rail Trail project. Mr. Schoefmann proposed that BPPAC develop a grant together themselves in the future to get their buy in ahead of the time. Chair Rubin stated that an email communication could have been provided ahead of time as BPPAC is an advisory committee, however, she does not feel that they are always utilized as an advisory committee and the opportunity to acquire advice was missed. Vice Chair Benik stated that Marlborough Street gets a lot of public relations attention and perhaps that decision was pre-established for Marlborough Street. Mr. Schoefmann clarified that the larger community has poured a lot of attention into Marlborough Street and he does not make the calls but this attention placed it ahead of other projects.

Chair Rubin clarified that her issue is not with Marlborough Street having been chosen, but instead with BPPAC not having been included in the decision-making process through committee feedback and consultation ahead of time. Mr. Little said it strikes him that the one that was chosen was the one that attracts businesses to the area. He said Pathways for Keene did not offer a letter of support and the description indicates there is a parallel paved crushed stone rail trail that hard to get to. He asked why the project did not include improving access to the rail trail. Mr. Schoefmann replied that the project proposal did include improvement of access through creation of a sidewalk past the Butterfly Park that will connect to a sidewalk at Department of Public Works and then will connect to a paved ramp. He said that access point is the only one the City owns and has control over and property acquisition would have dampened the whole process. Mr. Little said the project should be safe for a 6 year old and this new project is not. He said the industrial heritage trail is safe but they need to improve access to it. Mr. Schoefmann said improved sidewalks covers safety for six year olds, the improved bike lanes are improved for cyclers and commuters connecting to the rail trail.

Mr. Breynton asked if the Phase 4 CIP would be positioned for next year's TAP grant and asked if there is more than one TAP grant in a year. Mr. Schoefmann replied the TAP grants

cycle typically every two years. Mr. Bryenton stated that they then aim to position themselves for Phase 4 in two years. Mr. Schoefmann said it appears that way. Mr. Breynton said that improvement of the Public Works area will increase utilization of the industrial heritage trail and increase overall awareness of that part of the rail trail which will leverage them for the next cycle of the rail trail. He said baby steps make sense. Mr. Benik agreed that if the Marlborough Street economic development is successful it will be much easier to continue developing that leg out. Mr. Breynton said West Street is a comparative example to Marlborough Street and that even though there is a rail trail there they are still advocating for improvements there because of other users of the street.

Mr. Brehme said a partnership with Swanzey will make a stronger case for a TAP grant in two years. Mr. Schoefmann agreed and cautioned that the City may not even be awarded the grant and if they are not, partnering with Swanzey for the next round would make for a very strong application as partnerships between towns are rarely done but would gain more points. Mr. Bryenton asked Mr. Schoefmann if improvements and correlated with increased utilization and Mr. Schoefmann replied yes there is strong correlational evidence.

Mr. Schoefmann said he will add Phase 4 to the Project list after he gets some information from Mr. Lucier as he some ideas for the phases that he will be presenting to Pathways for Keene. He said if there is no update on Phase 4 for next month members should not be worried. Mr. Redfern suggested that Mr. Lucier present his ideas to BPPAC to garner committee members' support. Mr. Little asked about the timing for Cheshire Rail Trail Phase 4- Phase 1. Mr. Schoefmann stated that they should have a CIP drafted by the end of November for the next year's 2019 CIP so they can expect a draft in the December's meeting. He said they are conceiving of a three-part project including a trail out to 101, the \$1 bridge, and then remediation and safety concerns for the Stone Arch Bridge. He stated that there are many permits and reviews associated with the historic registry.

Vice Chair Benik asked if anyone has installed a \$1 bridge successfully and what is the cost. Mr. Schoefmann said there is a temporary bridge on Island Street but he could find out. Mr. Redfern said the Engineering assessment would look at the cost and feasibility. Mr. Brehme added that they will probably compare that cost to the cost of a new bridge as retrofitting might be more expensive. Mr. Redfern replied that it the bridge was disassembled in a way that it could be more easily reassembled. Mr. Schoefmann said the City Engineers are excited about the project.

5) **Old Business - West Street and Bicycle Pedestrian Counts - Public Outreach and Events**

Bicycle Counts- Mr. Schoefmann said bike counts are planned for this Tuesday and Friday and members can stick around after the meeting to plan their counts. He said this will be the last round of counts before they report to the national effort and he will ask Mr. Little to help with the spreadsheet.

Public Outreach and Events- Mr. Schoefmann announced that the New Hampshire Complete Streets Conference will take place in Concord at NH DOT on October 19 from 9:30 a-2:30 p with a free lunch included. He said he will send a flyer out as a schedule will be released soon. Ms. Brunner will be speaking about demonstration events. Mr. Redfern said the event last year was very good and he expects it to be even better organized this year.

6) **New Business - Items to be included for next meeting**

Mr. Schoefmann said he will add a column to the Projects list and Cheshire Rail Trail-Phase 4 to projects list.

Mr. Redfern asked Mr. Schoefmann why the bike racks downtown were not put out this season. Mr. Schoefmann said he did not know why and a letter of inquest from BPPAC would be a good idea for next season.

Mr. Little asked Mr. Schoefmann if the discussion about the third bridge will be covered by Cheshire Rail Trail- Phase 4- Phase 3. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes it will be included on the project list. Mr. Little asked what the status of the bridge is and Mr. Schoefmann said it is waiting in a sand pit until someone takes it. Mr. Little asked if the project cost and maintenance of the bridge will be added into the assessment. He said the self-rusting steel used in the North Bridge project means the maintenance costs for next 150 years is very low. He said he learned about another bridge in which they used stainless steel and concrete which is projected to extend the life of the structure to about 150 years. Mr. Schoefmann said once the bridge is approved, Engineering will have a lot more questions about the materials used.

- 7) **Adjournment**- Chair Rubin adjourned meeting at 9:15 am.

Next meeting date –October 10, 2018

BPPAC Project Updates 2018

OCTOBER

Project	PRIORITY	Status	Budget *		Schedule			Updates (change and relevant updates)
			Cost	Status	Start	Finish	Status	
Jonathan Daniels Trail		Planning	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Getting estimate for drainage and surfacing maintenance
Jonathan Daniels Trail Phase II		Planning	\$20K	Even	N/A	N/A	N/A	Removed from CIP. Seeking alternative funding sources for a study. Added to priorities under trail projects. On Priority List for Master Plan
Cheshire Rail Trail - Park Ave. Loop		Working	\$411,615.51	Even	Spring19	Fall 19	Behind	Engineering division of DPW is managing this project now. Preliminary Engineering Plans and Report submitted to NHDOT/FHWA for advice, comment and approval. Anticipated construction 2019.
Bike Racks		Working	Grant Funded/Fed+ SWRPC	N/A	ongoing	N/A	N/A	BPPAC to submit a letter to public works regarding a plan and locations for Downtown Bike Racks. Many bike racks not put out during 2018
Master Plan		Working	City Staff	N/A	Spring14	Fall 2018	Behind	Introduction and Background available for BPPAC Review, Trail Specific Maps and details regarding North Bridge inserted.
NH Pass Signage		Completed	City Staff	Over	ongoing	Apr-18	N/A	Total of 13 signs have been installed by the DPW sign shop manager. NHDOT approved all 13 sites in original encroachment agreement and signs will be installed once weather is allowable at the 13 locations
Lighting		Completed	City Staff	N/A	complete	N/A	On Schedule	Lumens for Less have installed the light posts and lights along selected stretches of the Cheshire Railtrail. This project is supported by the City but managed by PFK. Some complaints about positioning of some light poles.
Complete Street Grant 2018-19		Planning	\$45-50K	N/A	underway	Jun-17	On Schedule	The City of Keene has elected to apply for improvements along the Marlboro Street corridor as part of this round of funding. Pedestrian crossing, traffic calming and safety features will be installed at the Grove Street and Baker Street nodes.
Complete Street Grant 2017-18		Completed	\$10K	Even	complete	May-18	N/A	Lining has been redone as part of DPW's road striping budget. Project signage has been installed. PSA has been distributed and run in the Sentinel, secondary PSA to be released soon along with "Bike's on the Move in Downtown" flyer.
NHDOT TAP Grant 2018		Submitted	\$674K	N/A	Winter 2018	Summer 19	On Schedule	City of Keene has submitted a TAP grant application for Complete Street improvements to Marlboro Street that tie into other planned improvements, infrastructure and economic development goals
Bicycle Mayor		Working	Local Crowd	N/A	Fall 2017	Fall 2019	On Schedule	Will be working with the Planning Department to implement a walk/bike to school day event grant around the Middle School - Safe Routes to School grant funded, pending approval from KMS. Coordinated multiple Bike to Work Week events and has been
MASTER PLAN PROJECTS								

Access Point & Connectivity Analysis		Planning	KSC Students	N/A	Fall 2018	Dec-18	On Schedule	Master Plan top 5 project. Staff is working with a Group of KSC Geography Seniors in the capstone seminar project to help analyze connectivity and develop a Complete Streets "report card"
Wayfinding		Planning	City Staff Unknown	N/A	Planning	N/A	On Schedule	BPPAC heard report from Keene State Geography Seminar group to will incorporate findings into BPPAC Master Plan. Downtown Wayfinding incorporated as part of the Downtown Revitalization CIP
Complete Streets Assessment		Planning	City Staff	N/A	Planning	N/A	N/A	Master Plan top 5 project. Planning Staff met for a kickoff meeting with KSC Geography Students to conduct an assessment of City Streets based on their Complete Street designations and current layouts. See "Access Point & Connectivity" also
Sidewalk/Pedestrian Connectivity		Planning	City Staff	N/A	Planning	N/A	N/A	The Engineering Division, Department of Public Works has an app available to them and have completed 65% of the condition assessment of all City Owned sidewalks for Spring 2017.
West Street - Complete Street		Planning	City Staff Unknown	N/A	Planning	N/A	N/A	Designated as a Gateway Street in the Complete Street Design Guide. BPPAC discussing interim and long range solutions for bike/ped facilities along the corridor. BPPAC began 2018 bike/ped counts for middle section of West Street in March, May 14-19 and currently in the middle of September counts.

*Budget - Even = "Within Budget"

ITEMS WITH UPDATES

BPPAC Project Updates 2018

SEPTEMBER

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Bike Racks	Working	Grant Funded/Fed+ SWRPC	N/A	ongoing	N/A	N/A	Some bike racks out, if BPPAC has comments on location provide them at meeting or via email to wschoefmann@ci.keene.nh.us
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ITEMS WITH UPDATES

HERMANN S. BOTZOW, JR.
107 C. L. LANE
SWANZEY, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03446

603 357-0796

September 4, 2018

Andy Bohannon, Director
Parks, Recreation and Facilities Department
City of Keene
312 Washington Street
Keene, NH 03431

Dear Andy,

Thank you for meeting briefly with me today to discuss the "Emerald Star" concept for improving Keene's bike trails and riverfront. Enclosed is a rough proposal for the "Emerald Star" which you may certainly share with the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board, the Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee and any other interested parties if you wish.

I will send a copy of the attached concept to Mayor Lane.

Thank you also for your continuing help in keeping the river free of obstructions for kayaks and canoes.

Sincerely,



cc: Hon. Kendall W. Lane
Enclosure (1)

I am writing this as a canoeist who paddles the Ashuelot River between the Brentwood golf course in Keene and the Cresson Bridge in Swanzey, and as a bicycle rider who uses the rail trails. On each venture along these routes, I come upon couples and families as well as individuals enjoying the wonderful outdoor experience that these facilities offer. The following paragraphs suggest that bringing together Keene's riverfront and bike trails under the aegis of a new outdoor information, recreation and interpretive center at Ashuelot Park could greatly enhance the outdoor options and experiences available to Keene residents.

Kayaking and Canoeing

When I first arrived here twelve years ago I could park my car in the parking lot behind the current fitness center adjoining Ashuelot Park on West Street, use the toilet located at the entrance to the parking lot, and put my canoe in the river a comfortable 50 feet from my car. Adjoining the main parking lot on West Street was a kayak and canoe rental and livery company. They would not only rent watercraft, but would also, when requested, transport customers to a suitable put in upstream and retrieve them at Ashuelot Park.

Since that time, the parking lot has been closed, the bathroom has been locked and the put in area has been degraded. This latter event occurred when sharply edged rocks were dumped at the put in in a failed effort at erosion control. These rocks were subsequently thrown into the water, presenting sharp, unstable surfaces to the feet of boaters attempting to use the put in. And the kayak and canoe livery closed its doors. To launch my canoe to go upstream at Ashuelot Park it is now necessary to park my car in the lot adjacent to West Street and carry my canoe 200 yards to a point on the river embankment just past the current put in. With each negative event, the amount of recreational traffic on the river has declined.

I have paddled many rivers in the northeast and must say that the Ashuelot in Keene is one of the most beautiful. There are beavers, muskrats, great blue herons, Canada geese, wild ducks, giant turtles, and all manner of birds along the route. Its many curves beckon the paddler. Its minimum depth and close shores provide a very safe venue for kayaking or canoeing. And it is amazingly quiet and peaceful given its location in the center of the city. For these reasons I consider the river to be a sacred partner with our bike trails in offering an extraordinary outdoor experience to our area's residents.

Bike Trails

Today, clearly defined bike trails on former rail rights of way radiate out from the center of Keene to the south, east and west. A fourth follows the east shore of the Ashuelot River north to Rte. 9 where it crosses the river and connects to local streets. Current extension of the southerly rail trail to Hinsdale is under consideration. As with the Ashuelot River, these trails, with their forest canopy provide a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of the city. For the most part, the trails are well maintained and portions are used for crosscountry skiing or snowmobiling during the winter. The trails provide riders a convenient means of reaching the center of Keene

from surrounding towns. And, starting from the center of Keene, city residents can explore outlying areas without interference from vehicular traffic.

The Emerald Star

Encircling Cleveland, Ohio is a series of interconnected municipal parks designed by Frederick Law Olmstead and referred to as that city's *Emerald Necklace*. And justifiably so. The parklands offer numerous recreational opportunities including hiking and biking trails, some using abandoned railroads. There is kayaking and canoeing in adjoining rivers, interpretive nature museums, and liveries that rent bikes, kayaks and canoes. Many other cities around the country, both large and small, also have developed their riverfronts to afford their residents recreational activities that greatly enhance the city's attractiveness.

Perhaps we might view Keene's four main bike paths and the Ashuelot River as our own "Emerald Star". A current deficiency of Keene's trail and river system is its connectivity at its center. One idea might be to create this center at Ashuelot Park. A trailside/riverside pavilion housing a small museum and nature center, and ample parking could be created at the site of the closed parking lot with interpretive hikes such as those currently offered to Keene State College students. Summer classes exploring the area's flora and fauna and environmental programs could be staffed by a naturalist and volunteer guides. The center also could be used as a focal point for other park events such as the recent "Art in the Park."

Examples of modern interpretative centers abound such as the National Park Service facility at the base of Lake McDonald in Glacier Park, Montana. These structures provide ample parking while blending in with their natural surroundings. Maps could be made available at the center showing the various rail trails and the put ins to the river. Distances, points of interest, wildlife locations, and, for the bike trails, highway and river crossings could be shown. Safety tips on crossing active highways could be included.

Included in the project could be an extension of the existing bike trail northward along the west side of the river until it reaches the vicinity of the power line where it could cross the river and reach Court St. near the Old Stone Bridge. A branch from that extension to the Junior High School also might be explored. At the Ashuelot Park end, a new trail on the west side of the river might be constructed northward via the existing island opposite the closed parking lot. Access to the island could be provided by pedestrian/bike bridges at each end.

There could be an opportunity to hire summer students for the interpretive center, provide educational programs for school groups, and, perhaps in an adjoining facility, contract with a vendor to offer bike, kayak and canoe rentals and light snacks and refreshments. This would bring many more young families to the center of Keene and make our area even more attractive to young couples and others for entertainment and shopping needs as well as recreation. An investment equivalent to that for the recent pedestrian bridge across Route 12/101 would go a long way to underwrite this project. A first step might be a request for proposals for unifying the four main bike trails and the Ashuelot riverfront. If done well, I believe that the cost of creating our own "Emerald Star" will be more than returned to the City of Keene in a leap forward in the quality of life for all its residents.