

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, July 8, 2020

8:15 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Dillon Benik, Chair
Drew Bryenton, Vice Chair
Councilor Jan Manwaring
Michael Davern
Todd Horner
Dr. Chris Brehme, Alternate
Charles Redfern, Alternate

Staff Present:

William Schoefmann, Department of Community
Development
Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation and
Facilities

Members Not Present:

Aaron Shields
Brad Dufresne

1) **Call to Order and Roll Call**

Chair Benik called the meeting to order at 8:17 AM and read aloud the public Zoom meeting statement.

2) **June 10, 2020 Minutes**

Mr. Redfern moved to accept the June 10, 2020 minutes, Mr. Breynton seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously.

3) **Wayfinding**

Overall Program Concept (Mr. Andy Bohannon)- Mr. Bohannon announced that BPPAC and the City have been making good progress on wayfinding recently and he sees the wayfinding initiative as a big picture concept. He stated that Mr. Horner has been working on a program with Mr. Schoefmann and MAST on signage, and Dr. Brehme has also completed work with his students. Mr. Bohannon stated that they are in a good position to start moving forward fully and the next step will be to provide information on where individuals are on the trails.

Mr. Bohannon said that Mr. Schoefmann sent out a webinar link for the Downtown Trails Initiative by the UNH Extension which includes many elements that Keene is already doing; however, they are still lacking a few pieces and will need to go bigger than the small MAST initiative. He noted that he contacted Ms. Shannon from the UNH Extension, and they will speak together with Mr. Lamb this Thursday to discuss this new initiative. He said the program was highlighted first in Bristol where they looked at the economic impact of their trails program on their downtown area and connectivity. Mr. Bohannon stated that Keene has the right infrastructure to work cooperatively on this program and because UNH Extension is part of the university system the study would cost \$3K, instead of \$30K. He stated that UNH will

investigate whether the initiative is feasible for the City as they lack the right personnel to support a project like this in their Keene office right now, however, Mr. Bohannon informed them that the City already has enough support through BPPAC, the Community Development staff and other City personnel, Keene State College and other participants to perform the necessary surveys and work as they are already doing much of that ground work already. He added that the City is well-poised to take on this opportunity for a low-cost, and including the MAST grant, they can begin searching for a larger grant (\$80K-\$100K) to hire a firm to conduct a branding exercise and installation of a wayfinding system in Keene. He noted that this initiative could take a couple of years, but it will become a signature accomplishment for BPPAC. Mr. Bohannon stated that the committee is aligned perfectly for supporting the initiative as BPPAC members are very in tune with this type of project. He stated that Mr. Redfern has already begun looking for grants for the City, for example, he identified the Northern Borders grant which is a minimum project of \$100K. He said they can pursue this grant because every trailhead will cost a \$5K-\$10K minimum, the kiosks at each trailhead will cost \$4500 each, in addition to the cost of connecting the downtown signage to the outside trails. He stated that wayfinding is easily a \$100K project. Mr. Bohannon added that he would like to gauge interest and receive feedback from the committee on this idea before they move further along in the process.

Mr. Schoefmann encouraged BPPAC members to watch the webinar and he will resend the webinar link so they can discuss the idea more in August. Mr. Bohannon said there is a pamphlet of information on the UNH Extension website so members should visit their website for more information.

Mr. Russell asked Mr. Bohannon what the implications are for existing or newly planned kiosks or other signage with this new initiative. Mr. Bohannon said that infrastructure will stay and maybe receive an update as far as signage, however, there are two designs, one for trailhead kiosks which are more informational, and then using them as models to move forward. He said the Art Walk kiosk is a \$4500 custom-made kiosk, and once you add a bench and signage and make a true trailhead, it takes a lot of money, so they are well-positioned for this grant in any case. Mr. Schoefmann added that depending on how it shapes up with UNH Cooperative Extension, that they should expect an August update. Mr. Bohannon agreed and stated that he hopes this initiative will complement the MAST work and they can work collaboratively into the future.

Mr. Horner entered the meeting.

-MAST Grant 2020/<https://walkyourcity.org/>- Mr. Schoefmann stated that he and Ms. Brunner are working with Mr. Lucier on some additional items and their costs for the Complete Street grant. They are looking at a few intersection improvements, including restriping to accentuate the pedestrian crossings at West Street, between Island Street and the Ashuelot River Park, as well as adding cement pads to improve access at the School Street and Gilbo Street crossing where the Cheshire Rail Trail heads toward Emerald Street, which is mixed use. He said the crossing buttons are currently inaccessible to folks with mobility devices and limited access. They will also look into improved overhead lighting for the Emerald Street and Cheshire Rail Trail jumping off point for the Ashuelot Rail Trail. Mr. Schoefmann said these improvements will help connect this central corridor of rail trails with other trails, as well as tie in the wayfinding pilot with the Walk Your City program. He stated they will need a letter of support

from City Council to accompany the application in the second cycle this month (a memo citing the BPPAC June motion to have the City of Keene investigate and submit the grant application). He said that they are on track and opened the committee for questions.

Mr. Bryenton asked if they are still looking at ordering the temporary Walk Your City signage as well as incorporating Mr. Bohannon's concept that he discussed earlier. Mr. Schoefmann replied that yes, the Walk Your City campaign will play a role and facilitate survey questions and public input on wayfinding that will then help inform and launch the bigger wayfinding campaign that Mr. Bohannon discussed.

4) **Old Business**

Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative- Chair Benik stated that last month they had Mr. Mike Kowalczyk talk about the Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative and they set aside time in the agenda today to discuss that initiative more. Mr. Schoefmann stated that Mr. Kowalczyk was looking for a statement of support from BPPAC as a starting point. Chair Benik replied that he is in support of the initiative and it would be great to have the whole region connected through the rail trail network. Mr. Schoefmann noted that there is a section on the website that lists the supporters of the initiative and BPPAC could be listed there as a supporter.

Councilor Manwaring moved to lend BPPAC's support to the Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative, Mr. Brehme seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously.

Downtown Bike Racks and Emerald Street- Chair Benik stated that the owner of Brewbaker's, Mr. Jeff Murphy, newly located on Emerald Street, expressed interest in having bike racks placed on Emerald Street for his business and the other local businesses located on that street. Chair Benik said he wrote a letter to BPPAC which is included in the packet. Mr. Bohannon noted that the letter ties into the wayfinding initiative entirely and confirms that this is the next step to making Keene bicycle-friendly and enticing outsiders to visit the community. Mr. Schoefmann added that there is a precedent being set for demand for bike racks from downtown business owners as Emerald Street is shaping up to be an extension of Downtown development. He said now with the new expanded sidewalk cafes, maybe it's a matter of communicating this letter to the Department of Public Works (DPW) to emphasize the demand as it demonstrates the precedent for the demand for bike racks. Chair Benik agreed that it would be more impactful for DPW to hear the requests from the business owners themselves rather than from BPPAC. Mr. Schoefmann said perhaps he and Chair Benik can reach out to DPW to inform them of this demand from business owners. Mr. Redfern asked if they could attach the email to the letter when they forward this along to DPW. Mr. Brehme asked if there is a connection to the need an interest for the MST grant, perhaps for covered bike racks. Mr. Bohannon said that tomorrow night they are going to FOP for donation of the kiosk and there is a potential for a bike rack at that location, however, further down Emerald Street there might be an opportunity within the Community Development department for the Emerald Street pocket park that they did a drawing for previously. He said Department of Parks and Recreation has a larger bike rack and some U bike racks, so there is no shortage of bike racks. Mr. Schoefmann said that with the new sidewalk installations on Emerald Street, it's a matter of finding spots where bike racks could be placed. He said he can pull up some aerial imagery from 2019 to identify some locations from DPW so

they are not asking them to solve the problem of placement and that can accompany the letter. He said he would look into that with his colleagues.

Mr. Russell stated that when they started Friends of Public Art, one of the first ideas they discussed was custom bike racks, for example, a cowcatcher design or Mount Monadnock design, and he is thinking that they might consider branding custom designs for bike racks so that they can become part of the branding. Mr. Bohannon said he agrees. Chair Benik stated that he and Mr. Schoefmann will put together a letter to Mr. Blomquist to advance this idea forward. Mr. Schoefmann said they can also copy Mr. Bohannon as he has racks that are available as well.

Mr. Horner stated that the rack request from Fire Dog Bread trailed off when it became unclear if bikes could be put on private property or if they need to be put in the public right of way. He said when Mr. Blomquist speaks about rack placement, he is very sensitive to complaints from business owners who are not as eager to have racks placed on their establishments. So perhaps placing racks by businesses who are proactively engaging the City on this issue. Mr. Bohannon stated that Mrs. Brunner spearheaded the Rack it Up program and those racks are all purchased and there are many of them, there needs to be a way for the City to sell them to local businesses at a minimal cost. He proposed that BPPAC sends a letter to Emerald Street businesses to begin a conversation about the availability of bike racks through the City. Mr. Schoefmann said that could be a conversation between himself, Chair Benik Mr. Bohannon and Mr. Blomquist. Ms. Manwaring and Mr. Davern left the meeting. Mr. Redfern was moved into an alternate voting role.

Bike Counts- Mr. Schoefmann announced that they were able to get bike counts through volunteers. He said that he will resend the Google Poll so members can see what they signed up for June-August. He said the bike counts will start July 18-25. He stated that if they plan to do fall bike counts, they might want to shift their focus out towards the Cheshire Rail trail Industrial Heritage section to get updated information for the Transportation Heritage project. Chair Benik stated that they are coming up on two years of counts.

Downtown Sidewalks- Mr. Horner stated that he would like to discuss how outdoor dining is going as it has been critical for restaurants to reopen and host diners at the moment. He said it does seem to be working reasonably well, however, it is pretty cramped in certain areas where it would be impossible to maintain social distancing between diners and pedestrians passing on the sidewalk. He said he is comparing what he is seeing in downtown Keene with other areas in the state, like Nashua. Where they closed down a lane of traffic in each direction to accommodate outdoor dining. There was some discussion about that in Keene, but that conversation has petered out a bit. Mr. Horner said he would be more amenable to dining in downtown if there was more space available. However, if the current situation is working for the restaurants maybe BPPAC should not intervene, but it does seem pretty cramped in some areas of downtown and there could be benefit for allowing for more space to spread out. Mr. Schoefmann said there is a letter coming out from either a business owner or resident about the sidewalk cafes; it is worth having a conversation to see what member thoughts are, but they will await what happens at Council Committee this week and he can forward that information the committee. Chair Benik said his family owns the Stage in Keene and they were grateful for expansion of sidewalk seating; he said Luca's shared the same sentiment. He said he is pro outdoor dining in general. However, there are some restaurant areas where it is a little cramped between diners and

pedestrians. He said they have spoken as a committee before about outdoor dining and the possibility of removing parking spaces to accommodate that. Mr. Horner clarified that he was raising this issue in an effort to ensure that restaurants and downtown businesses have the space that they need to survive during this time; for example, are they being afforded enough space to stay in business.

Mr. Brehme said this presents an opportunity to collect data and observe the current situation as far as how the businesses are using the space and the redesign of the streets in general. He said it reminds him of the Complete Streets, Marlborough Street experiment. Mr. Russell added that he does not always feel comfortable in downtown as they are cramped and many people are not wearing masks; he said one of the more intriguing examples is in NYC where they are using plastic barriers to separate tables from the streetscape and allow tables to be closer together by providing more of a barrier. He suggested BPPAC can look into the costs of those sorts of barriers to keep streets a little safer. Chair Benik said people are very attached to downtown parking spots, and during the pandemic many restaurants have reserved two spots for to-go orders; he said this is an experiment in taking two spots away from parking to use for non-parking activities. Mr. Bryenton stated that Machina Arts have installed buffers and have taken the parking in front of that establishment for outdoor dining. Mr. Brehme added that cities like Montreal extend their outdoor seating with heaters and screens to extend their seasons and perhaps there is funding available to experiment with these ideas. Mr. Schoefmann stated that the downtown re-opening group had an idea of a pedestrian only square and BPPAC can lend their support to City Council.

Mr. Horner suggested an action item of gathering information; for example. Mayor Hansel was having calls with businesses every Friday. He said they can dialogue with businesses about space and whether or not they are open to lending space from their parking and other concerns. Mr. Schoefmann suggested Chair Benik reach out to Mayor Hansel about pursuing this idea. Chair Benik said he will write that idea down as he has been thinking about these issues for the last six weeks.

5) Other Project Updates

Bike racks- Mr. Schoefmann stated they have an action plan for that.

Cheshire Rail Trail-Park Avenue Loop- Mr. Schoefmann stated that they are looking to get a construction contractor out to do that work the end of summer and into fall.

Wayfinding- Mr. Schoefmann stated that if they can secure the MAST funds as part of a Complete Streets grant the Walk your City proposal would be included.

Transportation Heritage Trail- Heritage Commission (HC)- Mr. Schoefmann stated that he would reach out to the HC about the status of that collaboration.

Mr. Redfern stated that he would reach out to Energy and Climate Committee (ECC) as that fits into their project goals. He said there was also somebody from BPPAC that expressed interest in sitting on HC. Chair Benik replied that he can try to, however, they do not meet very often but he can aim to become a liaison. Mr. Redfern asked if he has permission to be a liaison with the ECC and Chair Benik and Mr. Schoefmann agreed. Mr. Russell asked what kind of relationship

BPPAC would want with the Historical Society as he is on that committee. Mr. Schoefmann said that would be great and they can work together on putting together a presentation or materials that BPPAC members can leave with other committees they would like to liaison with. Mr. Russell proposed that they can also talk about the role that Antioch University New England (AUNE) and Keene State College (KSC) can play as well. Mr. Redfern stated that the Conservation Committee would also make a good liaison partner. Mr. Schoefmann agreed and said he will put together a list. Mr. Horner asked if the AUNE report is available. Mr. Russell stated that Mr. Jim Gruber might have access to it as he did a presentation with the Historical Society a couple of years ago and he will contact Mr. Gruber for more information.

6) New Business

Mr. Schoefmann identified wayfinding, the kiosk on Emerald Street, bike racks and downtown sidewalks for next month. Mr. Redfern suggested discussing the Arts Corridor as well. Mr. Redfern suggested asking Mr. Peter Poanessa to the meeting next month for updates.

7) Adjournment

Vice Chair Bryenton adjourned the meeting at 9:45 AM.

Next meeting date – August 12, 2020

Respectfully submitted by,
Ayshah Kassamali-Fox, Minute Taker

Additional edits by,
Will Schoefmann, GIS Technician
Community Development Department