

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, November 18, 2020

8:15 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation &
Facilities
Will Schoefmann, GIS Technician

Members Not Present:

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Benik called the meeting to order at 8:15 AM. Mr. Schoefmann read the Zoom platform guidelines aloud and roll call was conducted.

2) October 14, 2020 Minutes

Chair Benik moved to accept the October 14, 2020 minutes with amendements, the motion was seconded by Mr. Dufresne and the motion was passed unanimously.

Revisions are as follows:

Page 2, third line, edit “actually too” and change the typo in Mr. Bryenton’s name spelling.
Last page, change “Amy Brown’ room to “Ammi Brown” room.

3) A Plan for the Cheshire Rail Trail (SWRPC)

Mr. Schoefmann notified members of the committee that Southwest Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC) is moving forward with a similar process that they conducted with the Ashuelot Rail Trail in 2018. He stated that SWRPC had produced a plan that involved engagement with different stakeholders from a number of towns. He said Mr. Brehme and Mr. Russell had attended these meetings. Mr. Schoefmann stated that SWRPC will be conducting a similar process for the Cheshire Rail Trail and will begin reaching out soon to participants of the towns and City staff; he suggested that the City would like a member or two from BPPAC to be involved in the process. Mr. Russell informed Mr. Horner that he is interested in participating. Mr. Horner stated that in addition to convening that group to serve as advisory committee for the project, he has been also reaching out to towns on the southern segment of the Cheshire Rail Trail and will be meeting with the Town of Fitzwilliam on work they are doing on the southern segment of the trail. He said he is offering a similar opportunity to BPPAC towards dedicating a future agenda item to discussing the Cheshire Rail trail specifically and perhaps have Mr. Bohannon

and the City Engineer to attend the meeting to gather more input about the Keene segment of the trail. Mr. Schoefmann said that they will create an agenda item including Mr. Horner and hopefully the City Engineer to discuss that project.

4) Old Business

A. Wayfinding/ MAST Grant

Mr. Bohannon stated that he has been working with Mr. Redfern on reviewing various aspects of that project to review where they are at. He says they have a decent plan put together which will roll out after the MAST grant is available. He said they have a funding source they are targeting and will have a better report in December.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that the MAST grant was awarded to the City of Keene and some other towns for the full amount that they had requested somewhere around the amount of \$4000 for the initial wayfinding funding and then a bit more for the Complete Streets and improvements. He can provide the exact funding figure in a later meeting.

Mr. Davern stated that the Swanzey Rail Trail committee is also looking at signage and if there is some advantage to having synergy in the branding of that signage, they should discuss that now for the future. Mr. Schoefmann said there is a similar discussion for the Ashuelot Rail Trail. Mr. Davern said he can provide design examples for the signage in Swanzey, however, they have not made any decisions yet so there is still time to discuss that together. Mr. Bohannon said that he and Mr. Davern can discuss that.

B. Downtown Bike Racks and Emerald Street

Mr. Schoefmann stated that it is his priority to get down to the garage this month to take inventory of what racks are available. He said businesses are already interested so once he takes stock of what is available, he will share that information with the committee and begin a discussion with Mr. Blomquist about distribution of the racks.

5) Other Project Updates

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he has highlighted projects with major report-outs. He scrolled down to the Cheshire Rail Trail-Park Avenue Loop. He said the City put a bid out for the projects as they had to split the road and trail work into two separate projects per federal requirements. He said they received two bids that were exceedingly over budget. He stated the City Engineer rejected both and they have gone through the process of the bid and the project to evaluate what created the major gap of what they had allocated and what the bids actually came up for. Mr. Schoefmann stated that they will be putting out an adjusted budget per that analysis in the spring and he will share those bid changes as they arise.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that the City of Keene received funding for the Complete Streets grant they applied for to address pilot signage study and signage and for Complete Streets improvements along Gilbo and School Street, West Street and Island, and the mini trailhead at Emerald Street and the Ashuelot Rail Trail. He said improvements will include a combination of access to crosswalk buttons, lighting at the Ashuelot Rail Trail on Emerald Street and tip downs and pedestrian features at the crossing on West Street.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that West Street has a series of counts available and they are inputting those numbers into a spreadsheet and Engineering added West Street into the City's ten-year plan.

Mr. Bohannon stated that a business reached out to him in the summer looking for additional lights on the Ashuelot Rail Trail. He replied that the lights were donated, and he got some pricing from Hamlet, and it is unlikely to happen; however, there are people out there looking to make that donation and if he can make it happen, he will.

6) Reprioritization of Projects

Mr. Schoefmann stated that at the last meeting, they left off on the Wayfinding plan where they discussed combining wayfinding with the entire signage project. He said they can recap their process quickly; they are reframing the priority projects which relied on BPPAC for the importance level column. He said the organizational support formulas included Budget and Policy, other Master Plans, City Code, State Law and other program opportunities that Staff has comprised into the X column. He said Y is the column that the committee has their discussion on which involves community objectives around accessibility, sustainability and other Master Plan themes and components.

Mr. Schoefmann said the next project for discussion is the Southbridge-Ashuelot Rail Trail Gap. He stated that area of the trail where Southbridge was built involves a gap in terms of unimproved old rail corridor leading up to the bridge which this project addresses. This is fairly low priority on the City side of things; however, it is a trail gap. Chair Benik stated it is not a long stretch and he is not aware of the implications of poor drainage, but as a user of the trail he never has noticed the unfinished part of it. He stated it would be a low priority for him. Mr. Russell agreed with Chair Benik and said unless the bridge itself were a desired destination, there is no need to prioritize that stretch. Mr. Redfern stated that it is not a high priority for BPPAC, but Keene State College has expressed concern for improvements for parking lots in that area and they can perhaps tack that item on in the contracts they receive to improve that stretch at relatively little extra cost. He said it may be worth putting this idea out to the City-College Committee as a project for repaving that area to see if the contractor would not mind finishing off that section. He stated they may or may not be willing to do that based on their budget. Mr. Brehme said he is unaware of the status of that committee, but he can check into it. Members rated this project as a low priority.

Mr. Schoefmann said that the Ashuelot Green Space trailhead is the next item. Mr. Bohannon stated that this item is still on private property section and is not City-owned and he has not received any project updates on that for a while and they are not in any rush. He said they were pulling the pavement out or had planned to, however, he is unaware of how that goal panned out due to COVID-19. Chair Benik suggested this item as low priority for BPPAC as it is not City-owned. Mr. Bohannon said a quarter of that property is buildable, but it would involve a unique design. He said it is a matter of getting the three owners to agree on the plan and that is tricky as some of them have more means than others. Mr. Brehme said that he was involved in that project for a few years and the momentum in the project was lost. However, he would be happy to get involved again in the future and it is an item that BPPAC should be ready to pivot on, but he does not think it will happen anytime soon. Mr. Redfern said if received money for operating the hydro-dam they would give the City the property for running the park but once that fell through the property use fell through as well. Mr. Schoefmann and Chair Benik suggested keeping the item on the list as low priority for the future. Members agreed.

Mr. Schoefmann said Main Street is a complex issue when it comes to Downtown and the Department of Public Works (DPW) Revitalization project. He said he briefly mentioned the outreach for the pedestrian landscape that BPPAC expressed interest in; however, he is unsure where to place this as there is opportunity coming up to help out as a funded project. He said there was some initial outreach done in 2018 and revitalizing that initiative and moving forward would be a good fit for BPPAC. Mr. Blomquist said that the Downtown Revitalization project is tied to the Arts Corridor and with the changeover at MEDC, and their focus on another project at this point in time, there has not been any movement on the Arts Corridor. Over the winter, they will be discussing what they will need to move forward and go from there. He stated that the first round of concepts was not well-received by the public and that will be part of the discussion and right now there is an interest to leave things as is. Chair Benik asked what the other project is, and Mr. Blomquist responded that it is called the Business Hub. Mr. Schoefmann asked Mr. Blomquist if it would be accurate to put this item down to medium priority in terms of City staff energy on the project and Mr. Blomquist replied yes. Mr. Horner asked if there is any record of the concepts on file and Mr. Blomquist replied that there is a website that has the report and a copy is available on the L drive and he can send a note if the website is still active. Vice Chair Bryenton stated that he agrees with focusing on other projects, however, when it gets some more life than BPPAC should be involved and keep in on the radar. Chair Benik agreed with Vice Chair Bryenton's assessment of the P19 being kept at a medium propriety level. Mr. Horner also agreed with a medium priority level, however, long-term he sees this as a high priority and if they downgrade it now and revisit the document every year would be useful. Mr. Schoefmann stated that the concept and intent behind this project was to revisit it at least every couple of years because priorities and funding can change rapidly and having the City and community components in synchronicity is important.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that P20, the Emerald Street bike route and in street facilities, is comprised of shared lane markings and a side path. He said it is designated as a slow street in the Complete Streets guidelines, so they have some improved sidewalks installed that connect with the old Roundhouse T project off of School Street where it turns to the Ashuelot Rail Trail. He stated they have squeezed what they can out of that project already. Mr. Bohannon noted that Mr. Redfern shared a video from an organizational video clip of rail segments in Keene and when they came through this section, they went right through the parking lot over the Colony Mill and it is labeled as the Cheshire Rail Trail which shows an improvement in signage is needed. Mr. Russell stated that he used to walk that stretch every day to and from Antioch University and crossing the street into the Center of Keene and the backend where it lets out can be challenging crossing as cars are not paying attention. He suggested installation of flashing lights at Island Street because it is not a safe crossing there due to the traffic patterns. Chair Benik agreed with Mr. Russell's assessment of the connection from Emerald to Island in the Center of Keene property. Vice Chair Bryenton suggested they add this area to the Walk your City wayfinding plan which is part of the MAST grant. Mr. Redfern stated that is a great idea. Mr. Russell said they have installed a kiosk at that location with the regional map and perhaps designating to people that there is a map ahead could provide incentive to use the proper route.

Mr. Horner noted that the connection between Emerald and Island Street that is run by the utility company feels a lot safer when the vegetation is mowed down as it can get overgrown and, in the dark, it does not inspire confidence. However, when they mowed it there was more visibility. Mr. Russell said that Friends of Public Arts have suggested a mural in that location as well. Mr. Horner said the mowing probably had nothing to do with pedestrian comfort level., however, it did the job. Mr. Schoefmann asked if members want to roll this item into the Wayfinding project. Members agreed. Mr. Horner added that especially if the Walk your City project includes a QR code for that location, it could be a good way to gather public opinion on that location. Mr. Russell stated that accurate signage would also be useful to

integrate into that project. Chair Benik said it would be advantageous to roll this project into the Wayfinding project. Mr. Russell said within the Wayfinding project, they will probably list priority items as well.

Mr. Brehme asked if there is a separate item for the mini pocket park. He stated that it is a critical area and creates a lot of confusion for newcomers into the area because without signage there they get dumped into the Center of Keene. However, they still want to create a hub there so it can be tricky doing both. Mr. Russell said people who know that area do park at that end so they would want designate parking spots. Mr. Schoefmann said that area would not accommodate parking there, but they could park at the Center of Keene parking area. Mr. Brehme said Arcadia residents are allowed to park in those spots. Mr. Schoefmann asked if Mr. Brehme is suggesting prioritizing the pocket park and Mr. Brehme replied yes. Chair Benik suggested placing this item in New Business to discuss it more. Mr. Bohannon stated that Mr. Poanessa's kiosk is in there already and the trail has some amenities, however, there is not a lot of space for additional amenities. He said they do get rent for the spaces that the renter took over in that location. Mr. Russell said that is the also the location for the missing bike repair station that Mr. Russell and he had discussed. Mr. Bohannon said they can continue to discuss that as well.

Mr. Schoefmann said the next project is Complete Streets implementation. He stated there was a KSC Geography project that assessed bicycle slow streets and other designations which provided baseline documentation and grades on having Keene streets up to City guidelines. He stated that more work needs to be done on establishing the baseline and further implement some of these improvements. He said DPW looks at how they can incorporate Complete Streets elements within budget, which is a big challenge, however, he would like to know committee members' thoughts on this project. Vice Chair Bryenton replied that this is already part of the City's plan, so he is not sure how high on the committee's radar it needs to be. Mr. Redfern noted that at some point they had considered this project high for City staff but not numerically high for the top five projects for BPPAC. Vice Chair Bryenton suggested that if it is high priority for the staff then let that be, and BPPAC can track it. Mr. Schoefmann said Complete Streets is a long-term goal in any case. Mr. Russell agreed with Vice Chair Bryenton that this could be something they track as an influencer on their projects. Chair Benik suggested a medium priority classification for this project. All members agreed. Mr. Brehme cautioned against diluting the importance of the project. Mr. Schoefmann said in terms of Complete Streets guidelines it is a high priority and BPPAC is in agreement with that prioritization, however, it may not need to be a project on BPPAC's radar. Mr. Horner noted that the Complete Streets plan is a component of the bicycle and pedestrian Master Plan and that is how it is tied into their overall goal-setting, however, this may not be a project but more of a guiding document that informs larger project implementation and design. Mr. Schoefmann suggested noting this item as an overall strategy and not a specific project as it involves multiple moving parts to achieve. Mr. Horner noted that the maintenance portion makes sense, however, it has yet to be developed and because they already have a Complete Streets plan it is more of a tool to inform the process.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that P-22 includes sidewalk connectivity and access and is currently rated as high priority. He said it is a Complete Streets component as well and asked for member feedback. Councilor Manwaring noted that the concern about sidewalks came up with the City Council meeting and the conflict is that sidewalks involves a lot of money to fix and raising taxes. She said several years ago the decision was made to not rehabilitate sidewalks unless the streets are being redone. She stated that she does not see this perspective changing anytime soon within City Council. Mr. Russell said they may be able to identify other sources of revenue to fix a particular sidewalk, however, other than that they are waiting for street rehabilitation. Mr. Horner stated that the proposed project for P-22 is simply to

perform a condition assessment and inventory and not build anything new. He said he included a link for that information. Mr. Schoefmann said he will make a note that this item is more of a strategy and there is already a process of assessment and potential implementation and they can discuss those strategies in the Master Plan when it is written.

7) New Business- Items to be Included for Next Meeting

Chair Benik said they will discuss Emerald Street as a project as well as wrap up reprioritization. Mr. Redfern said the Transportation Heritage Trail projects are ranked high priority, and last time when they did Northbridge, they had an ad hoc committee formed for internal political support for the project. He asked if they could discuss a similar idea for the Transportation Heritage Trail. Mr. Schoefmann suggested he reach out to Mr. Lussier and Mr. Blomquist first to gather their thoughts. He said he could have a report-out on their feedback for the next meeting. Mr. Redfern clarified that the ad hoc committee would report back to BPPAC and will be composed of both BPPAC members and members of the public. Mr. Davern added the Marlboro Line Trail to the list as well.

8) Adjournment- Next Meeting Date- December 9, 2020

Chair Benik adjourned the meeting at 9:30 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Ayshah Kassamali-Fox, Minute Taker

Additional Edits by,
Will Schoefmann, Community Development Staff