

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 9, 2021

8:15 AM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Dillon Benik, Chair (until 9:00 AM)
Drew Bryenton, Vice Chair
Brad Dufresne
Michael Davern
Todd Horner
Dr. Rowland Russell
Dr. Chris Brehme, Alternate
Charles Redfern, Alternate

Staff Present:

William Schoefmann, GIS Technician
Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and
Facilities Director

Members Not Present:

Councilor Jan Manwaring

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Benik called the meeting to order at 8:18 AM. Roll call was conducted.

2) May 12, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Dr. Russell made a motion to accept the meeting minutes as submitted of May 12, 2021. Mr. Horner seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Schoefmann invited guest Alex Lacey, Antioch graduate, to introduce herself. Ms. Lacey stated that she is interested in safer bike pathways. She continued that she loves cycling around Keene and is curious to know where everything is going. She comes from northeast MA.

3) Old Business

a) Public Surveys: Wayfinding Needs, Amenities, Wayfinding Design (if necessary)

Mr. Schoefmann stated that they are working to integrate this with the UNH Downtown Trails work. He continued that he and Mr. Bohannon were on a Zoom on Monday with Henry Underwood at Southwest [Regional Planning Commission?]. The wayfinding needs, amenities, and design all play a role, to a degree, in the MAST grant they received for improvements to a number of intersection nodes. Those locations are School St. and Gilbo Ave., the intersection of

the Ashuelot Rail Trail and Emerald St., and West St.'s intersection with Island St. Those are the infrastructure improvement nodes but they also had a component for a wayfinding pilot, but the company they were going with, Walk Your City, is now defunct. They were going to use the Walk Your City model to conduct some public information gathering on wayfinding and possibly roll out some signs. Surveys that a working group were putting together were going to hopefully fill that public information-gathering component instead of rolling out the Walk Your City model. Mr. Bohannon suggested that they could use the UNH Downtown Trails opportunity to leverage that to do some information gathering for that component of the grant they received. He and Mr. Bohannon are due to have that conversation with the coordinator of the UNH Downtown Trails group. Last time they spoke, they were trying to figure out if they could do some legwork, and how much of it would be helpful for the UNH Downtown Trails stuff. Mr. Underwood talked about maybe scaling down the pilot signage and looking at a local vendor to come up with these plastic signs that Walk Your City was going to give them. It would be a like for like substitution, not necessarily just the surveys. That will probably get teased out more once they talk with the UNH Downtown Trails folks.

Dr. Russell stated that he, Mr. Redfern, and Mr. Horner were part of the South Cheshire Rail Trail planning meeting through the SWRPC, and regarding the State trail system, they said anything done along the trails, including any kind of signage, had to be run through them first. Would that include the kind of signage Mr. Schoefmann is talking about within the city limits along the rail trails?

Mr. Horner replied that he cannot say for all the trails, but his understanding is that at least for some of the rail trail segments within the city, the City has an MOU with either the Bureau of Trails or the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) directly that grants them authority to manage the trails, and he believes that includes signage. He continued that the Bureau of Trails staff person that was on the phone call was speaking more generally about the rail trail system, and in most cases, the Bureau of Trails is charged with stewarding the trail system. He thinks in the city limits it might be a bit different, at least for certain trail segments. That would have to be confirmed with Mr. Bohannon.

Dr. Russell replied that that is helpful. He continued that the example that was brought up was the signage Michael Kowalczyk had been championing through the Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative (MRRTC). They had to renegotiate that because the new organization does not have an MOU yet.

Mr. Schoefmann asked Mr. Bohannon if he had anything to add. Mr. Bohannon replied no.

Chair Benik asked if Mr. Schoefmann knows of a local vendor who could make some plastic signs to take over for the Walk Your City ones they had planned on. Mr. Schoefmann replied that Gemini on Marlborough Street will do signs. He continued that there are some other options, like Beeze Tees or Bulldog.

Mr. Dufresne asked if there is a City approval process, in terms of locations, hanging, and upkeep, that the BPPAC should keep in mind. Mr. Bohannon replied that the signs will be on the rail trails within the city limits, and they should be fine on that front. The Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Department maintains the trails.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that one of the next steps is for him to contact a few of these places and see what they can get. He continued that they only have \$1,000 to do the signs, because Walk Your City's model was pretty affordable. He does not think that hits the threshold of having to do an RFQ. They should be able to just expend the money out of the grant, if it is something that is affordable locally. Otherwise, they will have to try and make a proposal for something else to Southwest and MAST regarding that portion of the grant. Luckily, it is not a massive component financially. He hopes to have an update for the BPPAC next month.

Mr. Horner suggested Mr. Schoefmann show the print shops they are reaching out to the Walk Your City example and see how they would approach replicating something like that. He continued that it looks like they could probably get four Walk Your City signs out of one standard, political advertising sign. Discussion continued about printing methods, both local and online. Mr. Schoefmann asked people to send him information about online printing options they come across. Others mentioned Keene Sign Works.

4) Wayfinding: UNH Downtown Trails, MRRTC, MAST Grant

Mr. Schoefmann stated that they already touched on wayfinding. He continued that they have a couple MRRTC signs up on the Swanzey border, on the Cheshire Rail Trail headed south. Mr. Bohannon stated that is correct. Committee members gave positive feedback about the signs.

Amenities: Other

Dr. Russell stated that he thought one of the advance things they could do would be inventory the current amenities. He continued that that sets them up so that if part of the UNH work is determining what people are desiring, they would be able to see what currently exists. They could ask, what else do we need, and where do we need it? Developing this baseline could be something they do in the interim until the UNH project starts.

Mr. Redfern stated that he is not sure where to bring up the discussion for signage for the two bridges that have about 20,000 vehicles pass under them daily. He continued that nobody knows what those bridges really are. Some assume they are road bridges, and others assume they are pedestrian bridges. People who are not local do not know they are part of a rail trail system. They should figure out a way to get signage on those two bridges, now known as North Bridge and South Bridge. If [the City] is going to change the name of the bridge, they could put the new name on there and also "Cheshire Rail Trail North" and in the case of South Bridge it would be the "Ashuelot Rail Trail." This might fit in the amenities category because it is sort of wayfinding and amenities.

Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, they can talk about it here. He continued that in 2019 someone, maybe Mr. Redfern, approached the NHDOT and got the ball rolling for some signs that would say what trail it was. He continued that he is not sure where that ended up. He thinks Kürt Blomquist, Public Works Director had submitted the “okay” that they required. He is not sure where that ended up at the NHDOT. Mr. Redfern replied that it ended up in COVID-19. He continued that regarding the people who were working on the signs, the Bureau was working from home, unless it was emergency work. Mr. Schoefmann asked if he remembers who that was. Mr. Redfern replied that he could probably research it in his computer and find out, and bring it up again. He continued that now the NHDOT is saying they do not have money, in response to him (Mr. Redfern) asking if they could get started on this when COVID-19 cleared up. It is typical for the State to tell municipalities what they cannot do or must do and also say they have no money or staff to help. Discussion ensued and committee members talked about getting a quote to see how much it would cost.

Dr. Russell stated that since the Transportation Heritage Trail will have a third bridge, the impetus for signage, that would be a time, perhaps, to look at doing all three around the same time as part of that larger project.

Dr. Brehme stated that he thinks this is another opportunity where they could involve artists and think about promoting Keene as a whole, with a theme around recreation. He continued that they had talked about a brown or green sign that names the trail, but if you think about how much traffic is going through there, it might also be an opportunity to involve artists in some sort of promotional display. Discussion ensued and others named Peter Poanessa and Friends of Public Art as potential resources/contacts. Dr. Russell stated that he is chair of the Friends of Public Art’s board. He continued that they have had proposals over the years, nothing solid, regarding murals along the abutments of those bridges, which would be another possibility. For the sign itself there is not a lot of creative opportunity, but they could look at something like themed murals along the abutments.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the signage that goes on the bridge structure itself, because North Bridge was built with some NHDOT funds and South Bridge is probably the same, requires the standard, green sign with white lettering that meets all of the standards of the Federal Highway Administration. They do not have any leeway there. He continued that the City owns the North Bridge but not the South Bridge. To bring in Dr. Brehme’s and Dr. Russell’s thought concept, he thinks it would be great to have some type of mural on the abutments that represents Keene. It would probably also prevent a lot of graffiti, which City staff goes out and cleans up on a regular basis. Others agreed.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that regarding the South Bridge, the NHDOT saw the design of North Bridge and asked the City if they could adjust the design. He continued that you never know, the NHDOT might see the City doing murals on the North Bridge and ask for murals on the South Bridge, too.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he will ask Mr. Blomquist where things left off and who the contact is at the NHDOT for the signs. Dr. Russell stated that he will talk with Georgia Cassimatis and some other people in the arts world. He continued that he thinks there was an idea for a wrap-around mural on the ramp going up to the bridge, for one part of it, with the other part of it facing the highway. He thinks there is a good opportunity to do something cool along that stretch.

Sidewalks: Proposed Budget Acceleration

Mr. Horner stated that about a week ago there was an article in the Keene Sentinel about how Councilor Raleigh Ormerod presented at the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee about perhaps augmenting the budget allocation for sidewalk maintenance. He continued that Councilor Ormerod talked about how we have to consider how we maintain our roads, but sidewalks are another important piece of our transportation infrastructure that we should be not scrimping on. He (Mr. Horner) reached out to Chair Benik, Mr. Schoefmann, and Vice Chair Bryenton about sending a note to Councilor Ormerod to remind him about this committee and how the BPPAC can act as a resource for discussions like this. He thinks this committee would be interested in a discussion about the City's Sidewalk Asset Management Plan, which, from the article, sounds like is under development. That is what this committee is for. The note invites Councilor Ormerod to reach out and be in discussion with this committee on the topic. He sent the note yesterday, thus, he has not heard back yet. He made it clear that he was speaking for himself, but that he suspected that most, if not all of this committee's members would be interested in having the opportunity to weigh in on that discussion as it progresses. Others agreed and thanked Mr. Horner.

Mr. Horner stated that he thinks it would be helpful if Councilor Ormerod and City staff joined a future BPPAC meeting to talk about this Sidewalk Asset Management Plan so the BPPAC can better understand what the conversation has been to date. Then they can determine how the BPPAC could help in that process moving forward.

Mr. Bohannon stated that tonight's MSFI Committee agenda includes the Sidewalk Asset Management Plan. He continued that the BPPAC can look at it in the agenda packet, and/or tune into the MSFI Committee meeting, and/or look at the meeting minutes afterward. Don Lussier, City Engineer, has been spearheading the initiative. They could invite him to the next meeting to talk about it. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he is not sure how much of the work he (Mr. Schoefmann) has been doing is integrated into that, but there are some scorings for certain sidewalk elements that are currently in the GIS layers used in the Asset Management Program that are from a program that was run a couple years ago. There was a Public Works employee going around with an iPad and looking at cracking and other things that were going on. He has been in the process of correlating Complete Streets designations with the sidewalks in the city. That is what is going on from a data management side. That is some of what will be addressed at the MSFI Committee meeting tonight. He will get the agenda packet out to everyone.

Chair Benik asked if they should invite Councilor Ormerod to the next meeting. He asked how the BPPAC should assert themselves further, in terms of making sure they stay in the loop. Mr. Schoefmann replied that Mr. Bohannon suggested inviting Mr. Lussier. He continued that he can see if Mr. Lussier is available. Mr. Redfern stated that he thinks Councilor Jan Manwaring is chair of the MSFI Committee. He continued that she is a member of this committee, too, so that is a natural connection there. They could invite Councilor Ormerod, too, since this is a subject near and dear to his heart. Others agreed.

Ms. Lacey asked what it is about the sidewalks that the BPPAC wants to change or happen. Mr. Schoefmann replied that West St. is a good example. Chair Benik agreed and stated that it has “all of the bad things you could imagine” in a sidewalk – they are too narrow, have utility poles in the center of areas, are broken up, incomplete, and so on and so forth. He continued that it is a big project with so many moving parts – the utility companies would be involved, and the sidewalk expansion would involve taking land from business owners, and there is a huge amount of traffic on the road. There needs to be better disability access on West St. That is a big social justice issue there. Other sidewalks around town, too, are falling behind, in his opinion, in upkeep and repair. The goal is to get the discussion going and see the different Councilors have in mind.

Mr. Horner asked Mr. Schoefmann, regarding West St., if the counting they have done is in a place where they can at least present some amount of it to Councilor Ormerod to show that there are data sets on utilization of certain sidewalks. Mr. Schoefmann replied probably; he will have to look into that.

Dr. Russell stated that getting those people in the room with the BPPAC is also a good opportunity to bring up some of the safety crossing issues that have been on their mind. He continued that it is about accessibility, quality, and safety.

Mr. Redfern asked if the next meeting will be in-person or hybrid. Mr. Schoefmann replied that the current scenario is hybrid mode. He continued that they are still offering virtual participation, but the rules for that will be slightly different. Members participating remotely cannot fulfill the quorum requirement or vote. Mr. Bohannon replied that Mr. Schoefmann is correct, but he believes the voting piece may have changed. He continued that a quorum of the body needs to be present in the room, and then others can be virtual. If a quorum is not physically present, the meeting cannot be held, as the Emergency Order expires. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he can find out about the voting. Mr. Redfern replied that he thinks the City Attorney addressed that, so he might have a quick answer for Mr. Schoefmann.

At 9:00 AM, Chair Benik stated that he needs to leave. He continued that Vice Chair Bryenton can facilitate the rest of the meeting.

Bike/Pedestrian Counts: EcoCounter Grant

Mr. Davern stated that after the last meeting he submitted the grant application and he thanks them for all the letter of support. He continued that he has not heard back one way or the other that the grant had been awarded. He is not on the grant committee. He reached out this morning to see when they expect to make the announcement and has not heard back yet. He will update the group separately when he knows more. Mr. Schoefmann thanked Mr. Davern for taking the lead on that.

Big E Expo Presence

Mr. Redfern stated that he has questions and answers that he submitted to the Granite State Ambassadors, and they responded to that. He continued that they are asking him to hold the information until July's meeting. He can disseminate it in print to Mr. Schoefmann and then Mr. Schoefmann can disseminate it to the committee members before the July meeting, if that is okay with Mr. Schoefmann and the chair. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes and asked Mr. Redfern to send him that note. Mr. Redfern added that it goes into detail, and there is a dress code of green polo shirt and khaki shorts or pants. NH has a theme color they want to maintain.

5) Regular Project Updates

Cheshire Rail Trail – Park Avenue Loop

Mr. Schoefmann stated that Park Ave. re-paving has happened, but he is not sure when the re-striping will happen. He continued that it is probably part of the re-striping contract in town. He will get an update on that from Mr. Lussier or Mr. Byrne. Committee members asked if that will include sharrows (shared lane markings) on Park Ave., and when construction begins on the trail. Mr. Schoefmann replied that there are full-blown bike lanes, with sharrows at certain pinch points. He continued that Mr. Lussier would be the one to give an update on when trail construction starts. He continued that the City Council approved the difference in the project costs and he believes it has been awarded but is not positive. He has to get that affirmative from Mr. Lussier. Mr. Redfern asked if Mr. Schoefmann wants him to contact Mr. Lussier and then send out an email. Mr. Schoefmann replied that it is probably easier for him to call Mr. Lussier himself and then he will update the committee.

Arts and Culture Corridor

Mr. Schoefmann stated that this project is stalled. He continued that there are some alternative plans coming into play, potentially. He asked if Dr. Russell had anything to share on this. Dr. Russell replied that he has talked with a couple people involved in the arts. He continued that the new owner of the building where the St. James thrift shop used to be asked Georgia Cassimatis to run an art center there. There will be studio space and the upstairs will be live/work space for area artists. There are not a lot of other concrete things. People may have

seen the Keene Sentinel article about there being an arts market near the farmer's market. There is still a lot of interest from people he has talked with about a covered pavilion area, next to the skate park or maybe another location, with electrical hook-up and possibly a restroom. It would be where the farmer's market and arts market is. He has not heard any updates on the transportation center idea, but there was a desire for there to be restrooms. If any of that starts getting under way, he could see the BPPAC becoming an advocate and speaking in support. The BPPAC has talked about having public facilities available. There would be a water station, perhaps, if there were a restroom as part of it. There could be a covered rest/stopping area. As this progresses, he suggests the BPPAC keep on top of it and be open to collaborating with some of the other arts groups. He asked if Mr. Bohannon had anything to add.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the whole space is owned by Keene State College (KSC) and MGM, and they are under contract. He continued that they are not interested in talking to any other groups. He continued, they were open to the Arts Corridor but not alternatives at this point. Mr. Bohannon replied no, they are no longer open to any conversation. From the communication he has had with them, it was clear that the Arts & Culture Corridor was never really part of a conversation. Mr. Russell replied that that means that whatever happens with the skate park will happen on the current location. Mr. Bohannon replied yes. Committee members expressed disappointment and stated that those with personal connections to KSC or MGM should privately lobby for this. Mr. Bohannon replied that it is not KSC; Dr. Melinda Treadwell was very supportive, but MGM is not.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that regarding other projects, they are waiting to see where the chips fall on the TAP application for the Cheshire Rail Trail Phase 4, the Eastern Ave. to NH Rt. 101 segment of trail. Those are all the regular updates he has.

Vice Chair Bryenton asked if he knows when they might hear something. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he assumes fall, based on previous TAP grant rounds and the amount of time it takes for them to meet and sort through and rank. He continued that he can find out if Mr. Lussier has heard anything about when the anticipated announcement date might be. Dr. Russell stated that obviously that section of trail needs a lot of work. He asked if the grant would be to hire contractors to do that work, or if there would be volunteer opportunities. He would be willing to get out there with tools. Mr. Schoefmann replied that it is more of a design bid like you would traditionally see, but they will see what sort of opportunities there might be for local volunteers. He will let Mr. Lussier know that there is interest.

Mr. Redfern stated that Mr. Bohannon sent him and a few others a link to an overview of the bridges. He asked if that can be shared with the committee, or if Mr. Bohannon needs to share it with the City Council first. Mr. Bohannon replied that he shared it with Mr. Redfern because Pathways for Keene (PFK) invested money into the project. He continued that it is nothing to hide. The contractor they hired for the conceptual design of the Prowse Bridge and Stone Arch Bridge and the Heritage Trail created a website that still needs a lot of editing. They are about 80% done. When that page is live PFK can promote it and use it for fundraising purposes. It

will be a community page that will highlight the project. They can share it with the committee but it is not yet ready to be fully public, as there are errors to correct. Staff will get it out to the BPPAC members before the next meeting.

Vice Chair Bryenton asked, regarding the Arts & Culture Corridor project, if this is a time to try and leverage anything they have to try and encourage that to develop with rail trail visibility in mind, or if it is just dead in the water and they need to move on. Mr. Schoefmann replied that the major property owner is just not interested in playing ball, so he does not know what anyone could do about that. Dr. Russell replied that they might want to connect with the group that is doing the skate park rebuild, as they get their funding. The BPPAC might be able to advocate for something like a water station as part of that, and maybe a bike repair station. Discussion continued about the possibility of some sort of Arts Corridor taking shape without the MGM property. Dr. Russell stated that Arts Alive received a grant recently from the Citizens Institute on Rural Design to do further design work and community engagement around the Arts & Culture Corridor. It might look different from the original concept but that does not mean that nothing is going to happen. Vice Chair Bryenton asked for it to stay on the project update list. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, there is a pivoting happening around it; it is not necessarily going away.

6) New Business

Vice Chair Bryenton stated that they have already mentioned many things for the next meeting. Mr. Schoefmann replied that it sounds like sidewalks are a priority. He continued that he will see what Mr. Lussier's and Councilor Ormerod's availability might be, to see if they could attend the next BPPAC meeting. They should have news on most of the topics under "old business."

Dr. Russell stated that between now and the next meeting he will reach out to arts contacts about both the potential for murals on the North Bridge abutment and about interfacing with whatever Arts Alive might be doing, and some of the other arts organizations. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he will try and make note of that specifically and re-shuffle how things fall in the agenda so they can be sure to talk about State signage on the bridges and the potential for the murals.

Vice Chair Bryenton stated that at the next meeting they will be halfway through the year, so when they go through project updates, maybe they can touch upon the top five, to make sure they have continued visibility. They spent a lot of time ranking and choosing the ones they wanted. Mr. Schoefmann agreed. Vice Chair Bryenton asked if anyone else had anything to add for next month.

Mr. Horner replied that he was thinking about amenities, although it could spin off into a different conversation – with the intense heat lately, he has been thinking that they should talk about shade and street trees. He cannot remember whether he, Dr. Russel, Mr. Redfern, and Dr. Brehme talked about that in their subcommittee conversation on amenities. Maybe they could dedicate some time to this, although it does not have to be at the next meeting. It could be part

of the amenities conversation, or separate. Mr. Schoefmann replied that it could be a “more time” section, depending on how quick they get through the July meeting. Then it could be a reminder for the August meeting.

Vice Chair Bryenton stated that Mr. Davern [stated in the chatbox that he] just heard back from NEMBA that they are excited to move forward with the Eco-Counter grant. That sounds promising. Mr. Davern stated that he will share more information when he gets it.

7) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Vice Chair Bryenton adjourned the meeting at 9:21 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Will Schoefmann, Community Development Staff