

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 11, 2021

8:15 AM

Council Chambers

Members Present:

Drew Bryenton, Vice Chair
Brad Dufresne
Todd Horner
Rowland Russell
Dr. Chris Brehme, Alternate
Charles Redfern, Alternate

Staff Present:

William Schoefmann, GIS Technician
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works Director
Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and
Facilities Director

Members Not Present:

Michael Davern
Councilor Jan Manwaring
Dillon Benik, Chair

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Vice Chair Bryenton called the meeting to order at 8:16 AM. Roll call was conducted. Mr. Schoefmann noted that Dr. Brehme and Mr. Redfern are voting members today.

2) July 14, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Russell noted a change to make to the July 14, 2021 minutes: in the North Bridge Naming section, in the long first paragraph toward the middle, he asked a question about the name of the "South Bridge." The minutes said it was near AUNE, but it should say Keene State College instead.

Mr. Dufresne made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of July 14, 2021. Mr. Redfern seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Walldogs – Potential for Additional Mural Along Trails

Mr. Russell stated that he is a board member at the Cheshire County Historical Society and has been in contact with their staff and with the Walldogs Executive Committee. He continued that Walldogs has about \$7,000 left over from the festival. There are potentially three historic murals. He gave information about the three, stating that one potential is for a mural related to

transportation heritage to be on the North Bridge abutments and maybe the ramp. They would have to talk about the three and what the priorities are. There is some money but not enough for all three; there is a need for fundraising. The Historical Society will have an auction in September, and auction items may include board members giving tours for small groups plus a dinner at a restaurant. There could also be fundraising tours for the mural itself, with the same group but with more people. The Walldogs Executive Committee and the Historical Society's board both have meetings next week. He will know more after those.

Mr. Redfern asked if a glaze could be put over a mural to make it vandalism-proof. Mr. Russell replied there is a glaze that protects the paint but nothing can be done to prevent vandalism with a certain kind of paint. He continued that other than a few small exceptions, none of the other murals have been vandalized. Murals tend to keep people from tagging.

4) **Old Business**

A) Wayfinding: UNH Downtown Trails, Needs and Design Surveys MRRTC, MAST Grant

Mr. Bohannon stated that he met with UNH before his vacation and they sent a one-sheet explanation, per his request. He will send it to Mr. Schoefmann, who will forward it to the BPPAC members. Mr. Bohannon continued that he will be looking to ramp this group up pretty quickly. The project is moving forward. He met with the increased team that UNH will bring, which is exciting. He gave more information about those people and their experience, stating that Shannon Rogers is the project leader. He continued that the one challenge will be that UNH has kind of hampered some of their staff going to meetings and is going back to remote, but they are confident that they will have a great product in the end. He will keep everyone posted.

He continued that at the last meeting Mr. Schoefmann had asked him to talk with the subcommittee about amenities. They said they will be able to combine those two surveys as long as the amenity survey is not like 25 questions. He assured Ms. Rogers it will only be 5 or 8 questions. They need the questions, so they can send them to Ms. Rogers can evaluate them and craft them into some of the other language.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that the group that was talking about wayfinding and amenities should set up a meeting in the next week or two. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, and he will be in contact with Mr. Schoefmann about this after this meeting.

Vice Chair Bryenton stated that in the July meeting minutes, Chair Benik asked about the steering committee. He continued that he wanted to know where that formation was. He asked what the "ECC" is. Mr. Schoefmann replied the Energy and Climate Committee. Mr. Bohannon stated that the steering committee is still being formed; they are working on it.

Vice Chair Bryenton asked about the idea of Keene State College (KSC) students helping. Is that still a viable option? Dr. Brehme replied that Sasha Davis is the person to reach out to. Mr. Bohannon stated that maybe he and Dr. Brehme could chat later about that.

Dr. Russell stated that if there is something written already about what they are hoping KSC students could do, someone can send it to him and he will get it to Antioch University of New England (AUNE)'s GIS people.

Dr. Brehme stated that Sasha Davis is actually on sabbatical, so he will rethink who the contact person should be. Brief discussion ensued about KSC faculty and staff. The group decided to have Mr. Schoefmann reach out to Professor Denise Burchsted. Dr. Russell asked to be copied on that email, since what Mr. Schoefmann sends to Denise will be what he needs to send to AUNE.

Vice Chair Bryenton asked if Mr. Schoefmann had anything about the MAST grant. Mr. Schoefmann replied that there were no bids on the construction.

Mr. Blomquist arrived.

Mr. Schoefmann continued that with Walk Your City going belly up and nobody wanting to build the small pieces of infrastructure they are asking for, he has a meeting with Mr. Bohannon and Don Lussier, City Engineer, for the end of this week to discuss the next steps. The grant was awarded last year and has to be spent by the end of this year. He will keep the BPPAC posted on what they think is possible.

A BPPAC member replied that Mr. Schoefmann was going to talk with Gemini. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he does not see that happening without any infrastructure being constructed. After the meeting with Mr. Bohannon and Mr. Lussier they will touch base with the Southwest Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC) and see what they say. Mr. Blomquist added that it was a \$137,000 project that no one bid on; it was not just a project the size of that grant. He continued that he hopes the SWRPC will say "Sure, keep it for re-bid next spring."

B) Amenities: Survey, Shade Trees

Mr. Schoefmann replied that he does not have anything on shade trees today, but they should keep it on the agenda as a discussion point. Mr. Horner stated that the action item is to include a question about shade trees on the amenities survey. Mr. Schoefmann asked Mr. Horner to remember that that when they pull the working group together

C) Sidewalks: Council Proposal

Mr. Blomquist reported that the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee reviewed and is excited about the sidewalk proposal. He continued that staff will

propose a program to the MSFI Committee as part of the upcoming FY23-30 CIP. Preliminarily, staff has identified about \$3.4 million worth of work on existing sidewalks. If \$100,000 was put in each year it would take 30 years to get through it; if \$200,000 was put in each year it would take 15 years. They will work with the City Manager to figure out what they think can be tolerated by the community for additional [funds]. He hopes recovery infrastructure funding will help. Currently a lot of money is being identified for water and sewer work; maybe some sidewalk repairs can happen as part of those projects. He concluded that it was a good discussion with the MSFI Committee and the City Council is definitely interested, but at the end of the day, it is about how to fit the jigsaw puzzle together. In addition, it is a 10- or 15-year commitment, which is always a challenge when your bosses have two-year terms.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he has been working with the Engineering Department. All of the sidewalk infrastructure that is tracked in the work order in the asset management system has a GIS component, and all of the sidewalks have now been tagged with their Complete Streets tag. They have the condition assessments from within the last two years. Now they will do a weighted score.

Mr. Blomquist stated that basically if a sidewalk is within a half mile of a school, recreational activity, or commercial area it gets scored a “5,” and if not, it gets scored a “1.” He continued that there are additional criteria to consider along with the condition, so ideally, this will place a higher priority on sidewalks that are higher in use. They do not have counts, which is why they consider proximity to schools, recreational activities, and commercial areas to determine which sidewalks are “heavily used.” Mr. Schoefmann is helping with that scoring and they will see how that helps the prioritization process. They will present the end results probably in February when the City Council is doing the CIP review. When they talk about priorities, people always ask, “Why there and not here?”, so staff is trying to give quantitative reasons why they are doing this versus that.

Vice Chair Bryenton stated that there are counts at least for West St. He continued that obviously they are really invested in sidewalks in the West St. area. Can they enrich that data? Mr. Schoefmann replied that regarding the metrics that Mr. Blomquist was talking about, like proximity to commercial spaces, there are plazas on one end of West St. and the downtown on the other end, he thinks that area will get some good hits anyway. They will see what they can do to factor in some of those pedestrian counts they have been working so hard on. That will factor in more for whatever input they can have when the State asks about the TIP project for West St.

Mr. Blomquist stated that the majority of the concrete sidewalks are in “C” condition, and most that are in poor condition are asphalt. He continued that the majority of West St. sidewalks are concrete. He is not expecting West St. to be anywhere in the next few years. He suspects that the southeast side of the city is where many of the 40s, 50s, and 60s asphalt sidewalks are. Whenever they re-do West St., the counts will be helpful.

D) Bike/Pedestrian Counts: EcoCounter Grant

Mr. Schoefmann stated that Mr. Davern emailed him an update yesterday. He continued that the EcoCounters were received and Mr. Davern installed them with the help of some EcoCounter techs. He gave him (Mr. Schoefmann) access. Other BPPAC members could access this livestream data if they want to, or he (Mr. Schoefmann) can email the BPPAC a weekly report. They have the EcoCounters through approximately October. They are already deployed and counting at Drummer/Green Acres Roads access/trailhead and Timberlane Drive gate access/trailhead at Old Gilsum Road.

Vice Chair Bryenton stated that he saw an SWRPC counter up on the rail trail by Hurricane Rd. He also asked Mr. Horner if SWRPC can tabulate that data in a digestible way, because it would be interesting to have that as a baseline to compare the EcoCounter data with. Mr. Horner replied they are in the process of consolidating all of the bike/ped data, and yes, that is the goal, to have it in one place so they can see over time how counts have changed. Once they have that information pulled together, he does not see an issue with sharing that with the BPPAC.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that two EcoCounters are installed in the Drummer Hill mountain bike area, and Mr. Davern will move them every two weeks or so to a different location to see what data they can get in two-week count periods. He will let Mr. Davern spearhead this. Brief discussion continued.

Dr. Brehme stated that he is thinking back to the “Strava” user data. He asked Mr. Schoefmann if there is anything he can say about that. Mr. Schoefmann replied that even the people who are big proponents of it used it as sort of a “litmus test” and they compared it with many other factors, like level of stress analysis done for many major cities. He had an intern fill out that information a long time ago and it was sucked into the black hole of research that happened. It is data they could use, but it is just a cross-section of users. They take it at face value for what it is worth.

Mr. Redfern asked Mr. Horner if he has a timeline for when the data from SWRPC, regarding the counts, might be available to the BPPAC. Mr. Horner replied no, because it is somewhat dependent on intern labor, which is in short supply right now. He has some counts put together that he could maybe share as they are available, instead of waiting for it all to be done. Mr. Redfern replied that would be great.

E) Big E Expo Presence

Mr. Redfern stated that in July the Granite State Ambassadors emailed to say they were ready to take names of groups that were going to be at the Big E from September 17 to (October) 3. He continued that one person from the 12-person group of volunteers responded. He will take on September 28, 29, and 30. About a million people are expected to come through the gates. Many people from the group dropped out due to COVID-19 concerns. They do not know what

will be happening with the pandemic in late September. He personally is willing to work a shift during those dates and he welcomes help if anyone else is able. He will forward the information about the shifts to Mr. Schoefmann to send to the BPPAC members. He shared a few details about the variety of shift lengths and the benefits one receives with certain shifts. He continued that the benefit to the BPPAC is to pass out rail trail information, both statewide and for the City of Keene. He has 5,000 rack cards printed of the Keene trail system, to be distributed. It is to promote use and awareness of “the best rail trail pathways in NH,” where the trails converge in Keene.

5) **Regular Project Updates**

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he does not have any new updates that have not already been shared. He asked Mr. Blomquist when striping is due for Park Ave. Mr. Blomquist replied that it is tied into the Cheshire Rail Trail Phase III project, which is tied up in the Railroad Bureau. Any time they do a project on a State facility they have to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the State’s Trails Bureau, which gives the City permission to do construction and turns over the maintenance and use to the City. They have about a half dozen of those MOUs, through the various projects they have done. The MOUs used to be 5-year agreements, theoretically renewed every 5 years. The State has never renewed them, so theoretically, Keene should have stopped using the trail systems, but people just continue, because they figure that unless either party says “stop,” they will assume everyone is going by the original MOUs. The Railroad Bureau’s idea was to consolidate all of those MOUs into one, with automatic renewal, which the City thought was great. However, the Railroad Bureau also wanted to give the City the trails the City has not done any work on yet, and the South Bridge. The City’s lawyer and insurance company are asking why, because that is a liability they have not earned yet. It makes perfect sense for the City to be liable after they do construction, but why would the City want to be liable for unbuilt sections of trails owned by the State? The City is pushing back, and they are still going back and forth about it. Thus, until they get agreement completed, they cannot award the Cheshire Rail Trail Phase III project.

Mr. Redfern asked if constituents can contact their District 10 Senator and make them aware of this problem/hang-up. Mr. Blomquist replied that he cannot stop anyone from contacting their Senator, but he does not know what the politics of this are. Brief discussion continued. Mr. Blomquist stated that he cannot say yes or no; he is just sharing this information about why they are stuck right now.

Mr. Redfern stated that last he heard of this project, it came out over budget and they were resubmitting bids. He asked if it is correct that those came back favorable, and if the only hold-up now is this issue with the State. Mr. Blomquist replied yes, as soon as this is resolved the City can award the contract and they can do something this year.

Vice Chair Bryenton asked if Mr. Schoefmann had any other project updates. Mr. Schoefmann replied no. Vice Chair Bryenton asked if anyone else had anything to add. Hearing none, he moved to the next agenda item.

6) New Business – Items to be Included for Next Meeting

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he thinks next month's agenda can be similar to this month's. He continued that there will probably be an update after the next City Council meeting regarding the naming of the "North Bridge." He has to look at the meeting minutes to see if that topic was sent to a City Council committee. He will keep the BPPAC updated. Mr. Blomquist stated that he thinks the MSFI Committee will end up with this topic.

Mr. Russell stated that he will have an update on the mural at the next meeting.

Vice Chair Bryenton stated that he saw something about a member of the public asking how to help. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, a member of the public wants to somehow volunteer for trail maintenance, such as brush clearing and trimming. He continued that he knows staff has not typically done this in the past, but it might be a good outreach opportunity and something for a subsection of the committee to help coordinate under some parameters Mr. Blomquist and Mr. Bohannon could provide.

Mr. Bohannon replied that he has worked with groups, which works well - typically four times a year a group goes out to do maintenance. However, if it were just an individual, the individual would have his (Mr. Bohannon's) time and be working directly with him, and that capacity is nil and void. He wishes not to do this. It is too time-consuming for him to work with individuals on this sort of thing.

Mr. Blomquist replied that he agrees with Mr. Bohannon that there is a difference. He continued that it would be much easier to coordinate with an individual who wants to do trash clean up, but brush-cutting and tree-clearing is different. Different users have different opinions on the appropriate amount and method of clearing – some users say a trail is, for instance, "too dark and scary," whereas others choose to walk trails because they like the overhanging trees and they like the feeling of being in the woods. He does not think one individual's opinion for how they want to do clearing would work out.

Mr. Schoefmann stated that the feedback from the public sessions regarding the Ammi Brown Rd. was indicative of what [Mr. Blomquist is saying]. Mr. Blomquist replied that it was similar with Eastern Ave. and Water St. Discussion continued. Someone suggested directing the interested individuals to the groups that already do organized work, such as the Monadnock Conservancy or the snowmobile clubs. Those cover a good amount of any of the trails that would need work. Mr. Schoefmann stated that there may be an opportunity to have people who are already doing something like trash clean up to fill out a form noting anything that they think needs maintenance, such as a tree that fell down. Mr. Blomquist replied that people can take a

photo of something and send it to him or Mr. Bohannon. Discussion continued. Mr. Blomquist stated that the Public Works Department's webpage has a way to contact the department about maintenance issues. Someone else suggested sharing contact information on the trails' kiosks. Can someone draft a flyer? Mr. Bohannon replied that his department has an in-house graphic designer who can do this.

Vice Chair Bryenton asked if Mr. Schoefmann will follow-up with the member of the public who asked the question about volunteering to do maintenance. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes.

Vice Chair Bryenton asked if anyone else had more to add to next month's agenda. Hearing no response, Vice Chair Bryenton adjourned the meeting at 9:09 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Will Schoefmann, Community Development Staff