

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 14, 2022

8:15 AM

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

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

William Schoefmann, GIS Technician

Members Not Present:

All Present

1) Roll Call and Call to order

Chair Bryenton called the meeting to order at 8:16 AM. Panelist Michael Kowalczyk joined by zoom.

2) Approval of August Minutes

Dr. Rowland Russell noted a correction in the August minutes to his first name. Mr. William Schoefmann noted the correction and roll call vote approved the August minutes.

3) Downtown Infrastructure Project Follow Up

Mr. Dillon Benik went to the last meeting where the Engineer spoke and listened to the presentation. The meeting went through many slides with the first half focusing on the utility side before they moved on to the enhancement side during the second half. In their slides, they had some things/ideas he believed the group would have all really liked, but there were also some ideas that were not on the positive side. Mr. Mitchell Greenwald and Mr. Randy Filiault mentioned the idea of routing bikes outside the downtown. Mr. Benik read the BPPAC statement created last meeting to which Alec Doyle with the Colonial made a case as to why they needed to keep the bikes downtown. Mayor Hansel and Elizabeth Dragon both reiterated and voiced support of the importance of keeping the bikes as part of downtown. Mr. Benik mentioned that they do have a lot of work to do, especially right in front of city hall. While protected bike lanes, especially in the circle, is not likely for the near future, the city has

reassured there will eventually be infrastructure for bikes. The meeting on the 28th will likely provide a more solid idea of what their plans are.

Mr. Charles Redfern asked how the Cheshire Rail Trail blends into the engineers plan. Mr. Benik responded that the designers are trying to work seamlessly with other bike trails. Mr. Benik reiterated the importance of the trails and the need to integrate that. Mr. Benik also mentioned the need for parking downtown, which ruffled some feathers and created its own discussion. There is a lot of parking and in the study the engineers did, they found the overall utilization of downtown lots was forty-six percent utilization. During the day that drops to thirty to thirty-five percent. The busiest area is the block with the works and Thai Garden and those numbers are around eighty percent. Alec Doyle mentioned they should repeat the study this year because The Colonial Theater was not used at all last year when the study was completed.

Dr. Russell asked if there was a timeline for when the next public input session will be. Mr. Benik responded that information would be provided at the meeting on the 28th.

Mr. Michael Kowalczyk offered that if the regional collaborative can provide support or assistance in this in any way, please let them know.

Mr. Bryenton asked if there are any studies reinforcing the benefits of bikes having access to downtown. Mr. Schoefmann said there are multiple groups that produce data and that it was certainly possible to collect that.

Mr. Benik suggested continuing to send in letters of support. Mr. Redfern asked whom letters should be sent to. Mrs. Jan Manwaring responded that it should at least go to the Mayor and the City Council as an informational letter.

Mr. Kowalczyk asked if would be helpful to get letters from surrounding towns. Mr. Schoefmann responded he is on the fence and is not sure it would serve to move the needle, but Dr. Russell agreed that letters from the collaborative make sense.

Chair Bryenton welcomed Mr. Andy Bohannon. Mr. Bohannon mentioned that he is leaving at 9am to go to the Steering Committee.

Mr. Horner suggested coming up with a template e-mail to send to stakeholders. Other than those involved in downtown, he is not sure there is much public awareness in the community and this might be a way to address that.

Mr. Horner noted that business folks are so concerned with just making it through the other side of the construction. Those types of concerns make it difficult for people to be able to conceptualize the big pictures ideas. The downtown is beautiful and that can make it challenging for people to envision ways to make it better.

Dr. Russell seconded the creation of a template. Mr. Horner added that this construction will have an impact on the community and it is important to get the information to them and get input. Mr. Bryenton asked Mr. Horner to take a shot at creating the temple.

Mr. Redfern asked Mr. Bohannon if the Steering committee meetings were open to the public. Mr. Bohannon responded that it is just staff. He noted that there is a public group, but that meets at a different time.

Mr. Kowalczyk asked if someone had a form letter that he can start with. Mr. Schoefmann asked Mr. Bohannon if he knew if the presentation was done. Mr. Bohannon suggested he go through Kurt Blomquist.

4) NH Trails Plan

Mr. Schoefmann discussed how that State of NH released an inventory of trail's this last week. Included in it, there is a discussion on the economic impact of trails, some visually appealing updated maps and suggested members have a look at it. It was noted that Shannon Rogers was a big part of that and cited our study in that. Mr. Schoefmann pointed out that The City has the most miles compared to the rest of the state, estimated at around 85 miles. He pointed out that the advisory committee had some local input, which was great.

Mr. Kowalczyk noted some confusion around the definitions used. It defined an abandoned rail corridor as no plan to put a railway on it. They also list a definition of an out of service rail line as a corridor that could become an active rail line again. Mr. Kowalczyk said the state told him it is possible a train could come back; anything done has to be rail load ready.

He asked the group if anyone knows where he could get the list of the out of service rail lines.

The group asked if Mr. Kowalczyk knew about the iron rails book at the historical society. It was noted that those do a good job of identifying where the rails run that are abandoned.

Mr. Kowalczyk said he is looking more specifically for out of service rail lines because there is potential for service to be returned to those corridors. Multiple people in the group mentioned that if it even exists, the list would likely lie with the state.

Mr. Kowalczyk was asked by Dr. Russell that if he finds anything out to please share with the group.

5) BPPAC Website

The website was discussed last meeting but since Jan was not there, group put it back on the agenda for this month. Ms. Manwaring mentioned that she reviewed the website again this morning and noted how bad it is. She noted that the website initially provides a big long background, but noted that there are two places in which to look for more information. One of which is an exact reproduction of the background, just in a different format. She added that after going through the website, the only other contact was a 2019 safety study. There were not even any pictures of people on bikes and no addition of any work of the group.

Mr. Schoefmann noted that previously, there was a significant amount of qualified information on there. He also noted the City just migrated from an older platform to the new platform and the migration has not been seamless.

Ms. Manwaring suggested putting a link to Mr. Bohannon and the trails and offered to work to add that information with the website holder. She opened it up to the group as to what other resources could or should be included. Resources identified by Ms. Manwaring and Dr. Russell included links to trails, the Economic Impact Study, the bike counts and why, the Transportation Heritage Trail, the UNH study, the Monadnock Trail Collaborative, and Pathways to Keene.

Mr. Schoefmann suggested she put this together categorized by type along with whether these groups would be links, integrated info, etc.

Mr. Bohannon added that the City does not typically connect on the website with outside agencies for firewall security, but that they could include links for city purposes.

Ms. Manwaring offered to put it together and bring it back next meeting for review by the group.

Mr. Bryenton asked Mr. Redfern about the trail opening. Mr. Redfern said the opening is today at 11am for summit road parking lot. Mr. Bryenton asked if Mr. Redfern had any pictures from the openings and if they would be willing to share. Mr. Redfern agreed and Mr. Bryenton asked Mr. Schoefmann the best place to collect this information. Mr. Schoefmann offered to send out the BPPAC google docs link and to create a folder in the BPPAC google docs for this purpose.

Dr. Brehme asked if there was a committee page that could serve as a model. Mr. Bryenton said committee pages are generally boring and meant to serve as a place for agendas and minutes. It was asked if there is any precedent for creating a site for outside use. Mr. Schoefmann mentioned that Heritage has one, but they have a stable volunteer core that helps to maintain that.

Mr. Bryenton commented that there still is an opening for a full-time member and if anyone has ideas to put them forward before the year closes out.

6) Old Business

A) Wayfinding/Amenities: North and South Bridge Signage, Downtown Bike Racks

Mr. Bohannon discussed that the City is undergoing a branding exercise and are pretty close to a final product. Presented to council and they will return with drafts and edits. Met with them related to wayfinding and trail signs and coming up with a plan and are excited to see their ideas. The group will try to implement that next year through the Capital Improvement Planning process. The new design should lend itself really well to the trails.

Mr. Bryenton asked if there were any updates in North or South Bridge. Mr. Redfern asked with whom best to inquire. One member noted that he was aware that Kurt Blomquist had reached out to the state, but did not have anything.

Mr. Bryenton moved on to downtown bikes racks. Mr. Schoefmann suggested the group create a brief list of where things could go (gaps) as well as a map. Wants to make sure they have a good list of where they think things should go for next year, which would allow the group to formulate a coherent request.

B) Bike/Pedestrian Counts: 2022 plans

Mr. Schoefmann said there is the supplemental information from the Southwest counting plan. He will need to check in with Henry Underwood at Southwest Regional Planning Commission to see when they expect results.

There were a number of bike rack locations identified in a previous meeting and Mr. Bryenton asked if those particular locations had been installed. Mr. Schoefmann was not sure about Carpenter Street, but he believed the rail trail had been completed.

Mr. Schoefmann mentioned previous discussion of trail counters and said it is more likely a grant opportunity rather than a budget plug. He noted that the grant would likely be a more favorable alternative given the targeted count that can be annually pulled and welcomed any interested group members to investigate that and help put it together.

C) Public Art and the Trails Update

Dr. Russell, Mr. Redfern, met with Alan Rumrill and Peter Poanessa last week. They got a chance to see the rail trestle and mentioned that it still had the old infrastructure inside. They discussed about various things about where and how to situate it and what a budget or fundraising ideas might be for it. Mr.

Poanessa is going to check with two different auto shops for quotes on restoration. Dr. Russell is going to look at The Historical Society, Pathways of Keene and Friends of Public arts for funding opportunities.

Mr. Redfern had previously mentioned looking at this in conjunction with interpretation for heritage trail. Once restored, it will be a very striking, historically accurate feature. Mr. Poanessa had the idea of creating a window for people to be able to view in the internal infrastructure. They do not want people to have access it, but could take a good photo to be able to see the restored inside.

Dr. Russell mentioned that they might look at situating it perhaps on the grounds of where the Bruder house and Wyman tavern are and use that as a fundraising opportunity. They will have to work with the city on location. There is a lot of rationale for not having it right at the head of railroad square, but do still want it somewhere prominent.

Dr. Russell noted that Mr. Poanessa did not think it would be over three thousand dollars for the restoration.

Ms. Manwaring excused herself. Mr. Bryenton noted that Dr. Brehme became acting member of committee and thanked him.

D) Volunteer Opportunities

Mr. Schoefmann said the most important thing is shuffling things forward. Mr. Redfern said Pathways was able to weasel into The Monadnock Expo and they are expecting 2,500-3,000 people in the doors. The cost of a booth is normally around 750. They were able to get the cost waived because they are not selling or taking donations of any kind; just providing resources. They will be at the Cheshire Fairgrounds in a nice pavilion tent and this will serve as an outreach opportunity. Mr. Redfern noted that this committee needs to develop some promotional material showing what we do, what has been done and plans to help further our mission.

Mr. Schoefmann offered to bring an old pamphlet and Mr. Benik asked him to put that into the google drive. Dr. Russell asked and suggested we be part of the cleanup of the rail trails especially before winter and snow buries all the garbage. Cleanup radiating out from downtown would be good, especially early October in order to capitalize on tourist time. Dr. Russell will look in his calendar and then reach out to determine a best time. Dr. Brehme offered to reach out to ecology studies department at Keene State. Mr. Horner asked if volunteers bag the garbage, whether the City would pick it up. Mr. Schoefmann said not unless it is part of the Green Keene Day. Dr. Russell mentioned that he has previously put them in the trash barrels or next to it.

Mr. Schoefmann said if they have a system wide cleanup, he would like to include public works to be aware that there will be extra trash and can ensure that those spots are cleaned up as soon as possible to present the trash from sitting out there. Dr. Russell will let the group know when he lands on some dates.

E) Kiosk Map Updates

Mr. Schoefmann shared drafts with the group. He is still trying to figure out the best way to show the topography. Dr. Brehme suggested chopping out the part that is not part of the Rail Trail. Mr. Schoefmann and Mr. Benik responded that those areas having hiking opportunities, food and mountain biking opportunities. Mr. Schoefmann plans to add further amenities.

7) Regular Project Updates

Mr. Horner had to excuse himself. Mr. Redfern took over as active member.

Mr. Schoefmann said not too many updates, but that streets are being done. Bike lanes are looking more like bike lanes on Park Avenue. He believes one of the reason they installed the sharrows is because where Park Avenue begins, the shoulders do not meet specks for a real bike lane. One things that needs to be addresses is the situation with the bike boxes on Central Square. Contractor suggested they were to speck. Mr. Schoefmann disagreed and said they are safety concerns and trying to reiterate that to Department of Public Works (DPW). He also mentioned The Cheshire Rail Trail and Park Avenue loop opening today at 11am.

Mr. Kowalczyk asked a question about the sharrows (Shared Lane Markings) on Park Avenue and whether there was any talk of trying to widen the sidewalk along Park Ave, especially in the narrow area. Mr. Schoefmann responded that there was no real talk because sidewalks are so prohibitive and DPW now has a sidewalk ranking structure. He noted that sidewalks near schools are probably up high on that list.

Mr. Bryenton asked about any updates on Cheshire Transportation Heritage Trail and Mr. Schoefmann said no, but suggested checking in with Don Lussier, City Engineer. Mr. Redfern added that the City upper government has contacted the Cheshire County upper government about a very large grant that might get funding with new congress. Minimum on that grant is fifteen million with a maximum of twenty-five million. It is not funded yet, but discussions have started for doing the planning work for the entire region and that money could be used to fund the heritage work. Mr. Redfern mentioned Cheshire Transportation Heritage Trail will be included.

8) New Business

No new business noted.

9) Next Meeting Date and Upcoming Discussion Topics

Topics of discussion for next meeting include the website, region wide opportunities from the Collaborative side of things as well as Mr. Horner's letter to stakeholders that live in Keene.

Next meeting date – October 12, 2022

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Bryenton adjourned the meeting at 9:22 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Will Schoefmann, Community Development Staff