

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, October 12, 2022

8:15 AM

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

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Jesse Rounds,
Andy Bohannon

Members Not Present:

Drew Bryenton, Chair
Dillon Benik

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Mr. Todd Horner called the meeting to order at 8:15 AM. Roll call attendance. Mike Kowalczyk in attendance as a guest. Mr. Charles Redfern and Dr. Chris Brehme recognized as voting members due to absences.

2) Minutes Approval

Mr. Charles Redfern motioned to approve the minutes from September 14, 2022. Mr. Mike Davern seconded. Committee provided unanimous approval of minutes.

3) Downtown Infrastructure Report Out

Mr. Horner expressed disappointment that Mr. Dillon Benik was not present as he has been sitting on the Mayor's Ad Hoc committee. Mr. Horner asked the group if they had a chance to look at the various design concepts posted online and asked for anyone willing to share their opinions. Mr. Redfern added that there seemed to be something for everyone. He thought the bike lanes looked good. He mentioned that one design had the bike lane in the middle and while he liked the idea of a dedicated path, he does not know how bikes would get out of the lane in close to Central Square.

The Committee agreed and Dr. Rowland Russell mentioned how that particular design will limit and impact bike/pedestrian shopping.

Mr. Horner mentioned two of the design had bike paths and noted the major difference between the two options was one was not road grade. To him, the main difference is safety.

Mr. Davern and Ms. Jan Manwaring both agreed that they liked the raised road grade option.

Mr. Horner noted how the different options for Central Square were interesting, but shared that he did not know enough about any of the options to form an opinion.

Mr. Redfern mentioned that two councilors showed up at one of the Steering Committee meetings and he had heard they were going to push to make downtown bike free as they do not feel that bikes and cars are safe together.

Mr. Horner added that it is concerning that some of the local leaders do not see the benefit of bicyclists' downtown.

Dr. Russell spoke to how the economic impact of bicyclists' have been well-documented and how it may be important to lead with the advantages in any promotional discussions.

Mr. Horner pointed out that in Dillon's last report out, these perspectives were raised, but it seemed like they were well countered in the steering committees.

Mr. Andy Bohannon spoke to Dr. Russell's point that City council has already accepted a report on the economic impact of the bike path. While that report was mostly focused on the rail trail, it is fairly clear that the more access points you have, the easier it will be for people to filter off to restaurants and businesses, but with greater access, will come greater use. He suggested if the committee was going to push the economic development of downtown with the rail trail, it be made known that these connects are vital to the success and something for the committee to promote.

Mr. Bohannon noted that the Council accepted the report and they now have the opportunity to discuss. He suggested if the committee is looking at sustainability and 2050 in the ultimate goal, what and how do we get there?

Mr. Redfern added that one thing that will be a game changer as far as bike commuting is the growing popularity of e-bikes. He believes those are going to increase substantially and noted the importance of downtown being prepared to handle e-bikes. He added that bikes shops are reporting the sales are about 50/50 (man-powered to electric assist). It will be important to have a downtown that can handle that change.

Mr. Horner asked the group how they strategically play that up. He said he can see people being on either side of the fence with the e-bikes.

Mr. Redfern responded that they have to go somewhere. He noted the importance of the group thinking ahead regarding transportation into the future and not so distant future.

Ms. Manwaring discussed how she has seen pedestrians struggle to cross the roundabout on Winchester Street because no one will stop and how for that reason, she is against the roundabout downtown.

Mr. Horner agreed with Ms. Manwaring that people do not stop and does not know if there are specific design features that could address that issue. He mentioned that in Europe- they have come up with designs that are multimodal but does not know how sophisticated they are or the range of scenarios they are appropriate for.

Mr. Mike Kowalczyk said he believes it is crazy to try to limit bikes in downtown. Every city in the country are limiting traffic lanes to increase bike traffic. As far of center lane concept, similar to other group members, he did not care for it. He noted that from a bicyclist's perspective it is difficult to understand how one will get to it, in it and out of it. Being a biker himself, he added rather than try to navigate it, he would just stay on the street. He agreed with Mr. Redfern that e-bikes are going to increase. He added the E-bike industry is going to become a problem because of speed as there are e-bikes out right now that go up to 40mph with blinkers and everything. He believes there is going to be a re-categorization of vehicles because of all the electric assist improvements coming down the pike. Mr. Kowalczyk added a couple of other unrelated comments/suggestions starting with the suggestion to get rid of as many power lines as possible. His second suggestions was to try to promote non-motorized transportation as much as possible, i.e. things that encourage people not to use their cars. He added that he, personally, likes the roundabout and single lane Main Street design.

Dr. Russell said one thing that did not come up was the rail trail crossing from Main Street and raising that to curb level. He pointed out it has a traffic calming effect and how that could be useful on Main Street. Personally, he believes one lane on Main Street would be great, but in thinking about business needs he thinks two lanes is appropriate as well. He expressed concern of how one lane might bottle up too much with people pulling in and out.

Mr. Horner discussed the mini-roundabout with single lane versus signalized intersection designs. He noted how drivers speed until they get to the light, slow down as they approach the light and then speed again. A roundabout with other traffic calming features would be a more useful ideal to keep that start/stop at a minimum.

Dr. Russell added that it certainly keeps traffic slower. If the committee does their job well, more people will be able to use that and cross safely.

Mr. Horner wanted to make sure to include time to review the draft letter. He noted the intent of letter was to provide this group with a tool for outreach to stakeholders who care about bicycle and pedestrian issues and would like want to see bike/pedestrian infrastructure in downtown. He added that he is not sure how much awareness of this project has permeated. One goal is just getting awareness up among bike-pedestrian folks. His goal was to lay out reasons why the committee supports improved infrastructure and touch on issues that speak to different people. This serves to provide talking points to reach out to different people in various networks. He noted he did not say that this committee supports specific aspects. He intentionally tried to keep it fairly high level with scenarios that included widening sidewalks, creating space, maximizing safety, and calming motorized traffic.

Mr. Russel made one suggestion, which was to add “dedicated” to creating space.

Mr. Horner noted that it seemed as though most people in the committee were in favor of the bike lane options as opposed to the center lane path. He asked the group if they wanted to get more specific regarding using the terminology “protected bike lanes”, to which the Committee agreed.

Mr. Horner noted that Andy had already mentioned citing University of New Hampshire (UNH) study as evidence of economic impact and he agreed that would be a good idea.

Dr. Brehme had one suggestion to be added to last paragraph of the letter created by Mr. Horner, which was to somehow rephrase it making it clear that pedestrians and cyclists are patrons of these businesses as well.

Mr. Horner noted that he was hoping the group would discuss the letter and get to the pointer where they could take action endorsing the letter.

Mr. Redfern added equally important to the letter is the charter for this group to advise city council that can be used to create a letter to city council.

Ms. Manwaring wondered if the sentinel would publish it on the editorial page. The group liked that idea and Mr. Russel suggested also publish in the Monadnock Shopper. Mr. Redfern noted that typically if published in one, it is difficult to publish in the other. They are competitive that way unless the group was to pay for it to be in one or the other. It was noted that The Monadnock Shopper reads a larger audience, but many do not read it with the same intensity that people read The Keene Sentinel.

Ms. Manwaring added that the Sentinel also offers a digital version, which she believed to have a more far reaching effect for Cheshire County residents.

Dr. Russell pointed out that Mr. Horner does mention the UNH study in point 4, but also suggested mentioning it up front in point 1.

Mr. Horner clarified that point 4 is citing a different UNH study. While both studies are by the same PI, one solely looked at trust in neighborhood based on their walkability. He agreed to also cite the downtown trail study.

Dr. Brehme wanted to come back to Mr. Redfern's point about needing a letter. He questioned whether the letter should cherry pick from the different design options. Maybe we need time next month to go over the designs and choose which works best.

Mr. Redfern labeled the idea a tickle list and was in support. While it would require some homework in advance, it allows the group to identify the desired features, check the box and thoughtfully explain why.

Mr. Horner pointed out that this project is moving relatively quickly and believed it was important to get this in circulation with the public and a letter in front of the council in a timely manner.

Mr. Russel suggested that since committee members are all part of different groups, using a google doc to identify who is going to communicate with each respective group. He also suggested using a format suitable for easy distribution on social media.

Mr. Horner agreed and said that the letter is a digital pdf currently but can share it as a digital image.

Mr. Redfern asked if it was possible to get it posted on the city improvement site under public opinion. It is not an official city position, but noted how many people go to the website to look at the downtown improvement city. Mr. Bohannon believed there is an outside resources area that might be a great place to have it and shared that the Point of contact would be Department of Public Works or Kurt Blomquist.

Mr. Horner requested a motion to endorse the letter with suggested edits. Motion offered by Dr. Russell and seconded by Ms. Manwaring. Unanimous approval provided by the group.

4) Radically Rural – Walkability Audit Report

Mr. Horner discussed how he had helped organize some of the session and it involved bringing in Mark Fenton, an active transportation expert.

He noted the committee might want to consider engaging city councilors sometime in the future to go on a walk in a particular area with ward and at large councilors to really look at pedestrian infrastructure and whether it meets the needs of the people.

5) BPPAC Website

Ms. Manwaring had no updates, but suggested the topic be kept on the agenda for next month. She agreed to bring a bulleted list of potential content ideas for next month's meeting. Mr. Jesse Rounds noted that the City is in the process of rolling out the spruced up city website. As part of that, all the departments are working on updating and sprucing up their websites. If you have ideas, make note and it will be considered.

6) Old Business

A) Wayfinding/Amenities: North and South Bridge Signage

Mr. Redfern reported that he had called the Department of Transportation, Bill Lambert and Bill Watson and he had not received any return calls. Learning that unless you are well connected with those guys, they aren't going to return your calls unless you are a municipality. Turned to design charrettes with Stantec. Kurt Blomquist was there. We were waiting outside the door and walked up to him mentioning his intention to place stakes marking the locations where these were to go and take pictures for the proposed locations of those signs. Mr. Redfern thanked him. Dr. Brehme asked where the physical signs were going. Mr. Redfern responded they will be located at the roadway level. Department of Transportation made it clear they did not want anything attached to the bridge for integrity and safety. They will be placed as one would approach the abutments of the bridge. In Salem, they put the signs right after one passes the bridge. The aforementioned signs will be labeled from the North and the South.

Mr. Horner mentioned that Route 2 has one near Fitchburg that has a big beautiful sign. Dr. Brehme noted there is also one on the mass pike that highlights the Appalachian Trail and that the Friends of Art Committee maybe something more artistic down the road, if desired.

B) Bike/Pedestrian Counts

Mr. Horner mentioned that he is not sure where the discussion stands for the most recent bike/pedestrian counts. He suggested waiting until Mr. Schoefmann returns to update.

C) Public Art and the Trails Update

Mr. Russel had one comment looking ahead, once the cross bridge is up, there will be a need for a marker for that. He noted that the bridge is always referred to historically so he is not sure if that might need to be a historic marker instead. He added that he had a couple of follow-ups conversations since last month. He talked to Mr. Peter Poanessa, who had identified an auto body repair guy who agreed to do it, but Mr. Poanessa has not been able to get the guy to look at the rail signal to get a quote. He anticipates that it will be in the three thousand dollar range, but until they get that quote that cannot initiate any fundraising events.

He was also aware The Historical Society is going to publish a third volume of the rail trails. He plans to look at crowdfunding and get the full budget for restoration all the way through installation. If the turnaround had been quicker, they could have done the crowdfunding this fall,

but now they are looking at spring 2023. He still needs to sit down with Mr. Bohannon and decide a location for this. He added that he thinks either side of Main Street along the rail trail might make sense.

Mr. Bohannon suggested the committee keep in mind that the City is totally revitalizing Railroad Square and the other side recognizing that anything permanent that is placed may get moved in the future. Dr. Russell clarified that they are looking at temporary installation with potential for long-term sculpture exhibit in the future.

D) Volunteer Opportunities

Mr. Horner said one thing he would like to do is address the shopping cart in the Ashuelot River next to the bridge. He would like to create an opportunity to get that out and clean up that area. He noted it was located right next to the bridge on Cheshire Rail Trail as one heads towards Pearl Street. Dr. Russell added that is a heavy traffic corridor. Mr. Horner suggested that it is something the group should think about and suggested Rolland pick a day before snow and before weather makes the water too cold. It was agreed Dr. Russell would put out a poll to see what works for people.

E) Kiosk Map Updates

Mr. Schoefmann is away, but Dr. Brehme noted that he met with Mr. Schoefmann prior to his departure and added some edits to it. He will update further when Mr. Schoefmann returns.

7) Regular Project Updates

Mr. Horner mentioned there was a well-attended opening of the Amy Brown Trail. He also noticed that bike lanes along Park Avenue had been marked with bike lane symbols. Dr. Russell said his anecdotal counts say that they are being used more.

Mr. Redfern wanted to add a public outreach event. He mentioned the Monadnock Rail Trail Collaborative is going to have a booth set up at the Troy Depot Renovation Project. The event is the official unveiling of it to the public. While it is geared or targeted to railroad buffs, it would be an excellent opportunity for the Collaborative. Mr. Redfern plans to be there selling a few books (NH Rail Trail book written by Charles Martin). He suggested the group work on a brochure for the BPPAC that could be put out for events like this. A readily done rack card and possibly, brochure with maps to use at events like this.

Mr. Redfern asked if Mr. Kowalczyk had rack cards. He responded that he does not have rack cards, but they were talking about getting some as well as brochures made for the entire region. He does have a brochure and rack card for Town of Swanzey.

Related to marketing, Mr. Kowalczyk mentioned there is a gentleman named, Dick Richards, who posts a Facebook blog almost weekly about the history of rail trails in Cheshire County. He has been trying to get ahold of him, including through Facebook messenger, but has not been successful. He asked if anyone knew how to get ahold of him. Dr. Russell suggested he reach out to the Historical Society as they might have contact information for him.

Mr. Redfern added Mr. Richards might be at Troy this weekend.

8) New Business

Mr. Horner noted the group had already discussed particular features in Main Street redesign scenarios and reiterated the need to review them to come to consensus for the letter to city council.

Mr. Redfern offered to bring in samples of rack cards and brochures.

Dr. Russell suggested turning the design options into a doodle poll for this group to get the internal responses to. Mr. Horner offered to touch base with Drew Breynton and Mr. Schoefmann.

Mr. Horner said he would try to get the letter revised this week or next and share with the group so we can have a check in about outreach at the next meeting.

9) Adjournment

Next meeting date: November 9, 2022

There being no further business, Mr. Horner adjourned the meeting at 9:19 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Will Schoefmann, GIS Mapping Technician