

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

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 (zoom)

Staff Present:

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

Members Not Present:

Councilor Andrew Madison

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Bryenton called the meeting to order at 8:17 AM. Mr. Mike Kowalczyk and Mr. Charles Redfern joined by zoom. Roll call and introductions provided for new members.

2) Approval of Minutes – December 14, 2022

A motion to approve the minutes from December 14, 2022 was provided by Mr. Dillon Benik. Dr. Rowland Russell seconded the motion. Minutes were approved by unanimous roll call approval.

3) Elections – Chair and Vice Chair

The committee discussed options for Chair and Vice Chair. Dr. Rowland Russell nominated Mr. Drew Bryenton for Chair and Todd Horner for Vice Chair, this was Seconded by Ms. Manwaring. Nominations were approved with a majority vote. The committee discussed board membership and that Chair Bryenton and Vice Chair Horner would be terming out at the end of 2024. Mr. Schoefmann stated he was working with the Clerk's to find out if Vice Chair Horner's first term as partial counted. The committee agreed they needed to fill all five (5) alternate slots.

4) **Downtown Infrastructure Project Update**

Chair Bryenton shared that he walked around at the beginning of the Downtown Infrastructure meeting and heard numerous comments regarding community members questioning numbers of cyclists. He reiterated to the BPPAC group the need to have data in order to counter that stance.

Dr. Russell added that he spent his time around the cluster around Central Square and the engineering cluster. He attended the first grouping of Central Square meeting and reported that it was very lively and contentious. He stated that Ms. Dorrie Masten spoke explaining that 300 people reside in her building and how she believes this proposed design would lengthen fire response time resulting in greater damage and a potential loss of life. Dr. Russell reported that the City engineer responded to Ms. Masten explaining the fire trucks would indeed be able to get through with no greater time.

Dr. Russell added that the loss of parking spots seems to be a concern for not only business owners, but also patrons. Safety concerns were another topic often brought up, according to Dr. Russell. He noted that numerous studies have proven that they are safe and that car/bike interactions go way down with focused bike lanes. Dr. Russell focused a lot on flood water management with the engineers and he found them to be very open to ecoengineering ideas like rain gardens, bioswales, tree wells, planting beddings being sunken- things that leave more water in the ground and less going into the system.

Mr. Andy Bohannon added that he attended at the Railroad Square and Gilbo Avenue. Many people had positive feedback about the connections and trails coming up. Some were concerned about elevation related to the bike lanes and where they would be placed, whether street or sidewalk level. He received positive comments around the fact that Cheshire rail trail was out of railroad square and put on edge allowing for a plaza area for larger events. The other comment that he got was from a woman who had lived in NY City around how bicyclists do not follow traffic laws and run rampant. Mr. Bohannon addressed the concern and tried to reassure that the majority of the cyclists in Keene are respectful and adhere to the laws. Other than those particular comments, it seemed positive. The only other thing that came up in his section was traffic flow and parking in Gilbo Avenue.

Mr. Dillon Benik responded to the point about safety and cyclists not following the rule, the lack of traffic safety enforcement and education does not mean you do not improve traffic infrastructure. They are two different things.

Mr. Bohannon shared that he drives up Washington Street three to four times a day and constantly sees people using the wrong lane. He believes there needs to be increased education so that individuals do not follow the path of least resistance as traditionally done. The Kiwanis Bike rodeo is in May and currently, that is the only education done in the City. Expanding the education and finding collaboration might be a good focus for this group.

Mr. Kowalczyk shared that the Swanzy Rail Trail advisory committee wrote a letter with their recommendation in support of the expanded square area. The letter is with the select board for approval and they will be discussing it in their meeting scheduled for this evening. At minimum,

it will get to the City of Keene from the Swanzey Rail Trail group. The best scenario is it gets to Keene from the town of Swanzey.

Mr. Kurt Blomquist said he floated around different areas during the meeting. The majority of people being vocal are people who have issues with the project in general. He agreed with Mr. Bohannon that some of the other vocal individuals are folks new to the area or folks who had a bad experience. Unfortunately, many of the folks who do use it are not the ones speaking up. He expressed the need for the committee to spread the word in an effort to get those folks to speak up and share their voices. He noted that there would be a public input session at Keene High School of February 21 following a 15-20 presentation. He encouraged the committee to continue their comments regarding the economic side, future, and safety. After this, it will go to the full council to begin their process.

Mr. Kowalczyk shared that he is working with the Chamber. At present, work has started to have a bike event in the fall and current thought is to start in railroad, out to the top of the Andy Brown trail and then turn around and come back. If that happens, it would be a great opportunity for bike education.

Mr. Bohannon pointed out that Keene is silver level league of bicyclists. Keene is the only silver one in NH. He wondered given that the group has looked at creating a master plan, whether this infrastructure will raise the level to a gold standard and if there are things that they could offer us concerning language for public engagement and advocacy.

Mr. William Schoefmann said that he will be reaching out to them, as the City needs to reapply to maintain status and will include those questions in his outreach.

Dr. Russell reached out to the administrator at Antioch currently tasked with coordinating and gathering information about the Antioch building project down by Keene State College. Dr. Russell encouraged him to share with the community and how important public bike lanes will be to them and their student body.

Dr. Russell also suggested any members who are Keene State Alum to reach out and encouraged members as a whole to reach out to business owners in the downtown area. There was discussion within the committee around encouraging a discussion between Keene State President, Melinda Treadwell and City Manager Elizabeth Dragon.

Ms. Manwaring stated that as a former city councilor, people come up to her all the time and share their opinions. She fields many questions. She works with a couple of sight challenged individuals and has learned that not all lights have audible alerts. She wondered whether the proposed design would include accommodations.

Mr. Blomquist responded that they are working to get audible alerts, but roundabouts generally do not have an all stop. While a complete stop is not out of question, it does defeat the point of a roundabout concerning the continuous flow of traffic. They are investigating options but have not come up with solutions.

Mr. Chris Brehme questioned whether Keene housing or Southwestern Community Services had taken a position on this. Two committee members agreed to reach out to them.

Chair Bryenton asked if any of the substantial design had changed. When he was shown the roundabout, it was told to him that bicyclists could just ride through without any yield. For him, that makes him uncomfortable not to have any sort of yield.

Mr. Blomquist responded that things are currently at a conceptual design point. He is trying to get a basic decision from the council on whether they want or do not want bicycle lanes. When he goes to the next level that will be where the details of what will work will be worked out. There are multiple ways to get through, but there has been no decisions made on which one is preferred.

Chair Bryenton suggested that as members, as long as they are comfortable, that they stand up and share at the upcoming meeting.

Mr. Kowalczyk suggested better signage for parking located off Main Street. He mentioned that he is a member of the Southwest Regional Transportation Advisory Committee and his objective is always to be looking at ways to provide infrastructure for bike and pedestrians.

Dr. Russell shared that the city chamber of commerce and downtown business group is having a meeting Friday in council chambers from 8:30-10 AM for brainstorming ways to support businesses during the construction time. He has been invited to attend and will be bringing up a number of arts related things, but the transportation related item is the idea of Bike Bombs (biking groups coordinate and all go to the same restaurants/store and share with the business that they biked there).

5) **BPPAC Website**

Mr. Schoefmann updated that including Jan's suggestions is on the list of things to do.

Ms. Manwaring added that she checked the website and dates listed are for 2021. She will continue to advocate for that to be updated.

6) **Old Business**

A) **Public Art and the Trails Update**

Dr. Russell said nothing new from Peter Ponessa. He expressed desire to connect with Mr. Bohannon regarding the mural at the bike path by Antioch that was taken down. It is currently in storage and they would like to discuss re-installing that.

B) **Volunteer Opportunities**

Nothing new. Dr. Russell asked if the committee wanted to have a table at the Earth Festival on April 22. The group expressed interest and it was suggested that they combine with Pathways to

have a shared table. Mr. Kowalczyk shared he had already reserved two tables and offered that it could be part of that or reserve a third table if need be.

Dr. Russell discussed Green Up Keene event, which will happen the same day and encouraged members to participate.

7) Regular Project Updates

Mr. Blomquist shared that the City had received a \$350,000 grant for doing an evaluation of the street network to identify improvements for multi-users and will be starting up process for that planning grant. Once planning is done, they will be eligible for an implementation grant sometime in 2024.

He shared that Cheshire Rail Trail phase 3 is complete. They still have some remaining signage to complete. There is a meeting today about Lower Winchester Street. There is also a scheduled meeting with the committee next month to go over the two input sessions (one in Keene and one in Swanzey).

The Transportation Heritage Trail (Eastern Avenue to Route 101) is in phase one, and just starting to work with Department of Transportation on the Congressionally Directed Spending allocation. The money has to be allocated by 2026 and executed by 2030.

Concerning the Marlboro Street project, the city engineer has to go to the state estimating committee as Marlboro Street has significantly increased in cost.

8) New Business-Items to be included for next meeting

Safe Streets For All grant award will be an item in the future.

9) More Time

A) Wayfinding/Amenities: North and South Bridge Signage

B) Bike/Pedestrian Counts

C) Kiosk Map Updates

10) Other

Mr. Bohannon added that tomorrow night they would have two different donations coming in. The first being from Pathways of Keene and other from Keene Rotary Club for up to \$35,000 for wayfinding.

Dr. Russell discussed the lack of Facebook presence for pedestrian groups in the area and wondered the possibility of creating one. He requested that if anyone is interested in assisting, to reach out to him.

The guests gave some information about their backgrounds and level of interest in the committee. All were locally raised and had experience and specific interests with walking and biking in both the town and region. Mr. Schoefmann said he would email the guests the weblink to volunteer for positions for boards and commissions after the meeting.

11) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Bryenton adjourned the meeting at 9:20 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Will Schoefmann, Community Development Staff