

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, November 8, 2023

8:15 AM

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

Members Present:

Drew Bryenton, Chair
Todd Horner, Vice Chair
Dillon Benik
Michael Davern
Councilor Andrew Madison
Rowland Russell, Alternate
Charles Redfern, Alternate
Janelle Sartorio, Alternate
Samantha Jackson, Alternate
Autumn DelaCroix, Alternate

Staff Present:

William Schoefmann, GIS Technician

Members Not Present:

Jan Manwaring
Dr. Chris Brehme, Alternate

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Bryenton called the meeting to order at 8:15 AM. Roll call attendance was taken.

2) Minutes Approval

October 11th minutes were sent out prior to the meeting. Minutes approvals were tabled and will be approved in the December meeting.

3) Mountain Biking Economic Impact Updates

Mr. Andy Bohannon shared that he has been working this semester with Ethan O'Leary and Maddie Smith from UNH. They have been looking at area mountain biking and the economic impact that it has. Mr. O'Leary and Ms. Smith have been looking at the trail heads and doing an overall assessment and survey. Mr. Bohannon wanted to give them an opportunity to have a preliminary discussion with the BPPAC group and then they will come back in December to give their full report.

He shared that they have been doing some great stuff and have had some great conversations. Their visit to Keene was very plentiful.

Mr. Bohannon gave the floor to Mr. O'Leary and Ms. Smith.

Ms. Smith introduced herself and shared that she is a PhD student at UNH, but she was previously the coordinator of a program called Outdoor Adventures housed in Campus recreation that aimed at putting together introductory trips for college students. Mr. O'Leary was a former employee of hers and is still employed with them.

Prior to coming together on this project, Mr. O'Leary had gone to Ms. Smith as a student and talked about wanting to bring intro and mountain biking as an outdoor adventures trip. She explained they are just big fans of mountain biking in general and they are both very excited to come on for this opportunity. For this project, they took a three-pronged approach to it. One part was trailhead assessment and looking at the characteristics of the trailheads. They looked at the downtown trails study of Keene and did some background research to put together 12 characteristics that they thought were ideal ones for bike trail heads and with that information, put together a survey. Then plan to start also looking at some trail count data.

Mr. O'Leary introduced himself as an undergraduate student at UNH and is planning to start his master's program next semester. As part of their visit to Keene, they visited several trailheads. They shared that they received the trailhead information from Mr. Bohannon and asked him what the key parts (in terms of mountain biking) of Keene were to visit. Mr. O'Leary shared that they had heard murmurings of a cool mountain bike park with a pump track and said it was very cool to see that spot in Wheelock Park. They also stopped by other places like Water Street, Eastern Ave, Krif Road (stops along the rail trail) and then went on to East Surry, Goose Pond, and Drummer Hill, which are more of the mountain bike side of things. When they went to the sites, they brought their list of trailhead assessment characteristics.

Ms. Smith presented the twelve characteristics: trailhead kiosk, parking, wayfinding to downtown businesses, public restrooms, waste and recycling, water filling station, bike repair station, bike wash station, trail map with trail difficulty. She explained that as they did their tour of Keene, they went to each stop and looked at what was there and took photographs. They used their list to check off the available amenities and took some notes as they went around. She shared that they really enjoyed being in Keene and seeing what the BPPAC has already been doing. Some of the notes they made were around which parks had ample parking, which ones had room to grow versus which ones were limited in those areas.

They started with Patricia Russel Park and noted the ample parking. The park also has public restrooms (with electronic locks), water and recycling, as well as water fountains for both people and pets as bikers, they would be happy starting from that park.

The Water Street parking was near Patricia Russell Park. Mr. O'Leary stated he believed that if most people were going to start a ride, they would start at Patricia Russell rather than the Water Street area due to the confusing parking area at Water Street. There were a few trash cans at Water Street, but all in all, there were limited characteristics for Water Street.

Ms. Smith explained that from there they went on to Eastern Avenue, which is more of a rail trail spot. It had several of the characteristics they were looking for such as a kiosk, ample parking, wayfinding, waste and water recycling, and a bike repair station. She explained that as outsiders, it was easy to figure out how to get downtown if they wanted a snack or a beer. They were impressed to see the bike repair station. The only issue with it was the pump tube was stuck inside the station and they were not able to pull it out. Something they did not see was a trail map with difficulty, which would be an area to improve.

Mr. O'Leary shared that Krif road lacked many of their listed characteristics but did have ample parking. He believed this would be a great spot to add more amenities to such as adding a bathroom, maps, trailheads. Mr. Bohannon had suggested they go to Kiff Road, but they said when they put it in Google Maps, it tried to send them down a blockaded footbridge. They were able to find it eventually, but it was quite confusing and that might be a deterrent for some. Ms. Smith said their next stop was Whitcomb, which was a great spot with trailhead kiosks, parking, wayfinding, waste, and recycling. There was a trail map, but it was faded in some spots. There was no public restroom or bike repair station, but said they really liked the spot and that it would be a great place to start a ride given the ample parking.

Mr. O'Leary explained that on previous trails they had trail maps with trail difficulty as blazes, but at Whitcomb, they had the blazes, but lacked the explanation or key explaining what they meant. They did discuss that with Andy as an area for improvement.

Mr. O'Leary said Summit Ridge had good parking, but it took a few minutes for them to figure out how to get to the actual start of the rail trail. More signage might be useful at the start of the trail. It would also be an area primed for future development as it is right next to CNS.

The Goose Pond trailhead was the first spot that had a Nimba map. The parking was ample. They missed the turn at first and went to the hiking spot due to limited signage. Delineation between the hiking versus mountain parking might be useful as would adding bathrooms. They had heard from Mr. Bohannon that Drummer Hill was where many people start their ride, which made sense to them as it was on the Southern end of the mountain bike trail. This was another spot where they saw a good Nimba map. Parking was limited, so increasing that would be positive, if possible. They did see waste and recycling, but there was no public restroom. If there was enough room there, adding those would be positive additions.

The last stop they made was at Wheelock Park. They both stated that they had fun in that area and that the city had done a great job with this area. It had great signage, very easy parking, public restrooms, waste recycling and trail maps.

Mr. O'Leary had noticed a spigot on the side of the park at Wheelock, but he was not sure if that was for a bike wash or water filling so signage would be useful there.

Ms. Smith explained that their survey is out right now and showed a graph of some of their preliminary findings from the survey data. One of the questions they ask in the survey is which three trailhead amenities are the most important. They had 73 responses. Trail maps lead the way at 86.3% with 63 respondents in support, bathrooms following close behind at 56.2% with 41 respondents in support and water fill stations coming in third at 39.7% with 29 respondents.

There were several options with only one response and that was because they listed another option where people could write something in. Some of the items written in were benches along the way, trash cans, adequate parking, a safe, clean place to hang.

Ms. Smith said one of the other questions in the survey asked where people came from and how long they planned to stay in Keene. In the preliminary results, 56.8% of the respondents are Keene residents. 37.8% are from out of town and responded that they were staying less than 1 one or just for the day. This highlights the need to think about who the audience is and how each audiences' needs will vary in terms of what they are looking for in amenities for trailheads and whether the city wants to look to develop Keene as a mountain biking area.

In terms of next steps right now, the survey is still out, still alive and will be running through Veterans Day weekend. Once it closes, they will take a closer look at all the data. Ms. Smith explained they are a few more questions on there including asking folks how much they spend on groceries or where you do eat when coming to Keene for mountain biking to get a better idea of how they are contributing to the local economy during their biking trips.

Mr. O'Leary shared that they have 7,980 respondents. They are going to make a final push to see if they can get a few more responses, but so far are pleased with the numbers.

They are excited and curious to see where and what folks are doing besides mountain biking when they are in Keene and looking at how many people are mountain biking in Keene. They will be getting that information from trail count data that Mr. Bohannon is helping them get ahead of. With Keene's central location, it makes for a doable location for outdoor recreation for day trips, overnight trips and they are thinking about ways to put it in people's minds that Keene is a great place to come.

Mr. Horner asked if the plan was to inform Mr. Bohannon's department specifically, or if this information was going to come before the council at any point. Mr. Bohannon said this was for his department especially in terms of Nimba and helping find ways to highlight the opportunity in Keene for the mountain bike community and how or ways to help the outdoor economy to flourish here.

The hope is to move the initiative a little further. With Granite Gorge coming on, you have a different experience. The experiences in Keene are unique to some of the larger resorts, but with a larger resort comes a higher cost. The balance in Keene is that there are volunteers maintaining many of these trails. The question is how to make sure those volunteers are not burned out and the trails are not overrun.

Mr. Rowland Russell asked if Mr. Bohannon planned to share it with the council. Mr. Bohannon responded that he certainly could. The survey will end on the 12th. He encouraged people to push the survey out and shared that there is a \$50.00 gift certificate to Alpine Biek works and a \$15 gift certificate to Prime Roast.

He explained that they had quite a few people take the survey and leave their e-mail as they wanted information on what would happen next. He said that will really be key to follow through on. Mr. Horner wondered, building on Mr. Russell's comment, if it is worth connecting with the project manager for the destination marketing that the Chamber is doing and it might be worth a conversation at least to see what collaboration might be possible.

Mr. Bohannon said the collaborative will be at the meeting in a couple of weeks. The other key piece to this is including places like Stonewall Farm. They are where mountain biking really started in Keene. While they have gone through several leadership changes, he wants to make sure they are at the table because they are literally connected to the rail trail.

Mr. Dillon Benik shared that they plan to loop Luca Paris in, as well as Monadnock Cycling Group, The Number Club, Stonewall Farm, Granite Gorge, the Chamber, Pathways for Keene. They have been trying to think of all the people that are either invested in this or could benefit or help in some way. The meeting will be at Granite Gorge on the 20th of November.

Dr. Russell asked if it had been shared through the BPPAC committee. Mr. Benik said he shared it through his Nimba channels as the interest is really around the outsiders who come to Keene and how and when they spend money.

Chair Bryenton praised the presentation and thanked everyone for coming.

4) Safety and Outreach Working Group

Chair Bryenton apologized as he did not get anything scheduled for the October session. He will get a doodle poll out for that last week in November to try and regroup. He asked if anyone knew if there was a report out at the October group and whether anyone had anything else further to report.

Dr. Russell shared that Bobby Williams reached out to him last week to try and get together as he had concerns that there might be some backsliding in support of the protected bike lanes. Mr. Williams had cited the letter to the editor and the Sentinel, which was the widespread

narrative. He wanted to encourage the BPPAC as citizens to write letters in response to that, but also to see what could be done to take control of that narrative.

Mr. Russell stated he knew the committee had talked about writing a letter highlighting what they wanted to support in general, but emphasizing that it is not bike lanes replacing trees. Mr. Schoefmann said they could also do an informational to the council to try and get a little more visibility and he honestly believed that is where it needs to be.

Dr Russell explained that the desire is to get in front of misinformation. In the safety group he is on, they had a communication track within that to try and get ahead of the narrative around safety, but also around why these things are needed.

Chair Bryenton said he believed Mrs. Jan Manwaring and Dr. Russell were going to spearhead that. He noted that timing as the new councilors are coming in January- Laura Tobin and Ed Haus.

Dr. Russell shared that he had sent out all their research regarding the benefits of bike lanes to Mr. Haus but said he could send it to Ms. Tobin as well.

Chair Bryenton asked for any thoughts on working on the narrative. Mr. Schoefmann said it would be a good topic of conversation for the report out for December from the working group. January would be the prime time to get some informational marketing submitted.

5) Stone Arch Bridge Safety Improvements

Mr. Charles Redfern was not sure if he had mentioned it last time, but he had spoken to a couple of important DOT folks. The proposal that he had heard about that he thought was a great idea was pairing the Route 101 safety improvements that are being made (the widening, improvements of the culverts, vision, etc.) with the cross bridge going over 101 between Optical Ave and Swanzey Factory Road. This would include improving the Swanzey Factory Road intersection as that is a danger point. He suggested the idea of pairing these together as it would be a “one and done” situation. They were receptive to it, but they did indicate that it was up to the City Council to support the concept. Last night, he talked to Kendall Lane, he expressed some skepticism about it being paired up. He had talked to Cynthia Wormington, executive council.

He is not sure how it will pair up. He is not sure how they will reconcile those differences of opinion but plans to still with the campaign as best as he can. He suggested reaching out to city councilors to ask if they would support this letter. He welcomed any advice from Mr. Horner. Mr. Horner asked if the Stone Arch Bridge had funding or if it was in the CIP. Mr. Schoefmann explained that the phases were in there, but that is probably going to be updated in the CIP. Mr. Bohannon said the first phase was FY26 and the full bridge is in FY28.

The 101 funding for FY26 is secure. FY28 is unknown related to grants, but the project is scheduled for then.

Mr. Mike Kowalczyk said he is a member of the Transportation Advisory Committee for Southwest, and they held a meeting a couple of days ago on this, where this came up. Several committee members liked it and thought it was a good idea because there would only be one disruption to 101. There were a couple of objections as one person said they saw it as feature creep of the 101 improvements by adding things to that project. He did not think they said it as merging two projects.

Another thing driving people's concern was the 101-project cost estimate was from 6 million to 14 questioning where the money is going to come from.

He noted that one person from DOT that attended the meeting but could not remember their name. This individual made a comment that he was not for putting the bridge over Swanzey Factory Road at all because it would need to be elevated so much to get a truck under it. He believed BPPAC needs to counter that. He believed that if it could be communicated how the funding of the rail trail project was going to happen and that it was separate funding than the 101 project- it might garner support especially if it can be pointed out that pairing them would cause less disruption and completion would likely be faster.

Ms. Diana Duffy said that bridge has been an iconic symbol for this town for so long that she cannot imagine not doubling down on it. She can't imagine not embracing the opportunity to take the time to do the safety improvement at a time when we are trying to attract people to Keene.

Mr. Kowalczyk said someone at the meeting pointed out there at one point there were Granite sidings on the bridge, but the trains got so big that they knocked them off. There could be historic restoration to bring those back.

Mr. Schoefmann pointed out that the biggest issue is that the city does not own the bridge. DOT owns the bridge. There is not even an MOU for the bridge.

Mr. Kowalczyk asked who owns the bridge as it comes up quite often in meetings he attends. His understanding was that Keene owned up to Eastern Ave and from Eastern Ave going south, but that DOT still owns that property. Mr. Bohannon and Mr. Schoefmann confirmed that understanding.

Mr. Schoefmann clarified his previous statement that when the group considers the strategy, they need to consider how to try to either mitigate or make it attractive for the decision makers at City Council to see how it outweighs the current or other strategies.

Chair Bryenton asked Mr. Redfern to keep the group posted on how the pairing goes and if he needed support. Mr. Redfern to draft a letter of support and share with Chair Bryenton.

6) **Regular Project Updates**
A) **Master Plan**

They do have a CIP item but are waiting to see if that goes in as a supplement or gets funded. Also have more information from Southwest that Mr. Bohannon will try and do in December.

B) **Bike Racks**

Mr. Schoefmann got with Harry McKelvey head of highway, who was trying to find some bike racks for Patricia Russell Park. Mr. Bohannon shared that he had some and was planning to install. It, however, brought up the discussion of what is available and the need to get an inventory of what racks are where for the functionality of bike parking in the downtown footprint.

C) **NH Route 101 Improvement as related to transportation heritage.**

Various letters have gone out requesting the combination of those THT improvements.

7) **Volunteer Opportunities**
A) **Clean Up**

Clean up will be pushed to early December.

B) **Fall Fun Ride**

Mr. Horner shared that the fall fun ride was a couple of weeks ago, about 20ish people got together at the Coop and rode down to Frisky Cow gelato. It was a nice pilot for a regular group ride that they could consider holding monthly next year. It provided some nice viability that the town has cyclists that want to use the downtown. They did take pictures, so they are thinking about how to use those as outreach in the future. Pamela Bys played a key role in organizing this and wanted to make sure to mention her.

8) **Old Business**
A) **Bike Counts**

Will be rolled into next month's update. Mr. Bohannon wanted to suggest that the city consider year-round data. He suggested that since budget season is approaching, this would be the opportunity to push for it. Mr. Kowalczyk suggested that they share anything they are considering purchasing so that there is consistency around the region.

9) **New Business**

Mr. Schoefmann shared that they have an updated ranking packet that now has a map that corresponds with the different projects they discussed last time along with its ranking. He plans to host it in Google drive and share it with people.

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Bryenton adjourned the meeting at 9:15 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Will Schoefmann, Community Development Staff