

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ROADWAY SAFETY PLAN COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, August 26, 2024

4:00 PM

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

Members Present:

J.B. Mack, Chair
Councilor Laura Tobin, Vice Chair
Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
Erin Roark
Ockle Johnson
Debra Bowie
Frank Linnenbringer

Staff Present:

Don Lussier, Public Works Director
Brett Rusnock, Project Manager
Rebecca Landry, Deputy City Manager

Members Not Present:

Autumn DelaCroix
Fred Roberge
William Lambert

1) Call to Order

Chair Mack called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

Consultants present: Phil Goff & Frank Koczalka of VHB, and Paul Maloney of the Federal Highway Administration (took over for Michelle Marshall).

2) Roll Call

Mr. Rusnock called roll.

3) Approval of Minutes – May 20, 2024

Revisions: Line 143, change “thde” to “the.” Line 306, change “lower likelihood” to “higher likelihood.” Mrs. Roark requested to be identified as Mrs. instead of Ms. throughout the document.

A motion by Mr. Johnson to adopt the May 20, 2024 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Ms. Dragon. The motion carried unanimously.

4) Discuss Action Plan Comments

Mr. Rusnock shared the draft Roadway Safety Action Plan with the Committee via email in advance of this meeting, and the purpose of this meeting was to review it and the project recommendations. He recalled a suggestion that this Committee should have more input in how projects are developed and scored. To begin, the Committee asked City staff to review the timeline for this process—as the original timeline had already been surpassed—in addition to the scoring methodology. The remaining timeline would be largely dependent upon the Committee’s availability to review Plan revisions before submitting a recommendation to the City Council; the Plan would then be vetted by the City Council’s Municipal Services, Facilities, & Infrastructure Standing Committee before the Council adopts it. The consultants had suggested at least one more meeting after this one to review a final version, though two more meetings were plausible to review revisions and make a final recommendation. Mr. Lussier noted that the City missed an August grant submission deadline that staff were pushing hard to meet, which would have made the City eligible for a demonstration or additional study grant. Despite missing that grant because the Plan was incomplete, Mr. Lussier felt that the City would have a better Plan as a result. The next grant submission would be April/May 2025.

Next, the Committee proceeded discussing the Action Plan comment scoring criteria. Mr. Goff began by reviewing the individual project recommendations that are distinct from policies and programs, which were still evolving, and the Committee would review those separately. Recommendations from the community via the online survey and input map were incorporated with comments from this Steering Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee. There were over 1,000 individual community comments. The consultants reviewed those comments to extract approximately 200 logical project recommendations based on context from this Steering Committee and experience in the community over the past 6 months. Additionally, the consultants will provide recommendations to help the City understand how to prioritize and phase those projects, in addition to developing the methodologies based on the goals of those projects.

The consultants proceeded guiding the Steering Committee through the evaluation criteria. They recalled that they assessed KAB crashes: K = fatality, A = major injury, B = minor injury. Instances of only property damage, for example, were not included in this evaluation. Using a Geographic Information System (GIS) model, the consultants were able to determine the project recommendations that were within 150 feet of the KAB high injury network (a map presented to the Committee at prior meetings). Additional emphasis areas identified were mapped as well depending on how crashes were clustered (e.g., at intersections or involving motorcycles). The consultants pointed out designated “crash reduction factors,” which indicate how a recommendation (e.g., a sidewalk or flashing beacon) could reduce crashes. Some recommendations were more quantitative (i.e., based on a literal number of crashes) while others were more subjective; if recommendations were within ¼-mile of a healthcare facility or school, for example, they were scored specifically. The consultants briefly gave further examples of how project recommendations were scored. They noted that some recommendations received 0

community comments, while others received 15–20, for example. Very high-level cost range estimates were provided.

Next, Mr. Goff described a two-part ease of implementation, qualitative assessment of political will and fundraising opportunities available for implementing these projects. This also included an assessment of City staff's capacity to actually implement these recommendations over a certain number of years; City staff completed this scoring on a 75-point matrix.

Mr. Goff described the project recommendation scoring criteria and weighting, noting that some were double weighted depending on what the consultants understood to be the highest priorities from the City and this Steering Committee. He showed an example of the scoring rubric for each criterion (0–5 points). For each 500-foot segment of roadway, if there was less than ½ of a crash per segment on average, it received 1 point; if there were two or more crashes per segment on average, it received 5 points. If there was even 1 fatality within a 150-foot segment, it received 1 extra point.

Vice Chair Tobin referred to the key City destinations reviewed and asked if confounding factors were considered. For example, if there was a school and a senior living facility within the same area. Mr. Goff replied that if there was a school, a rec center, and a park—three destinations—within ¼-mile, the roadway segment would have received the full 5 points. They would not cancel each other out.

Chair Mack asked if there were any instances in which the consultants could not apply the crash modification factor. Mr. Goff replied that the crash modification factor did not exist for every single project simply because some of the recommendations needed further study because they were more open ended. For instance, improving the ability for left turning at a particular intersection.

Next, the consultants reviewed the draft roadway safety project suggestions matrix, which included all of the individual criteria scores categorized (i.e., roadway project, crosswalk, intersection, etc.), subcategorized (i.e., new crosswalk, left turn challenges, etc.), organized by City districts (i.e., Downtown, East Side, etc.), whether a primary or secondary street, and if a State road or City right-of-way. The highest score was 70 and the lowest was in the 20s. Some of the project recommendations—including about half of the top 25—were already a part of the forthcoming downtown infrastructure improvement project, so those were moved into a separate list. With those downtown projects removed, approximately 170 projects remained, which were prioritized, and all categories were fully scored.

Mr. Rusnock reviewed the project ease of implementation scores, meaning the likelihood to implement those projects through political will, fundraising opportunities, and staff capacity. Overall, addition of the ease of implementation scores could have potentially increased any one project's overall score by 10 points. No project received an implementation score of 0. Some projects received a staff capacity score of 5 because it would be easy and relatively inexpensive.

Whereas something that is potentially controversial like removing parking or implementing safety improvements were scored slightly lower in the political will category. Projects with known funding, like the Downtown project or West Street project, scored higher for funding. Mr. Goff noted that some things had changed slightly since the files were shared with the Steering Committee a few weeks prior. Mr. Koczalka added that the matrix spreadsheet would be available as a living document along with the Plan, and Mr. Goff said that each project would be available as its own GIS layer.

Vice Chair Tobin referred to the Transportation-disadvantaged census tract and asked how it was scored for ease of implementation. Mr. Rusnock noted that there is community interest in the East Side of the City, including the Safe Streets for All program. Transportation-disadvantaged areas are considered higher priority for funding. Mr. Rusnock wanted to review that data again to ensure the scoring is accurate. He also reminded the Committee that the City would not be completing the list of projects in the scoring matrix in the order listed; it is more of a framework and guide, though some will certainly be easier to implement sooner. Mr. Lussier added that if several projects could be grouped together—like funding to build 10 new crosswalks—the City would likely pursue those opportunities. Mr. Goff agreed and said the matrix informs project prioritization but does not dictate it. Mr. Rusnock added that Federal funding opportunities could change the order in which these projects are grouped and implemented.

Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager, referred to page 27 of the report, which talked about restricting right turns on red, with the example of West Street. She quoted, “near Keene State College and along West Street would create disincentive for drivers to roll through red lights when turning right.” The City Manager referred to the NH Route 9/10/12 northbound off ramp at West Street , noting that there is already a pedestrian beacon that stops traffic when someone is crossing. However, she said the activity there is not high, so if right turns were restricted there, she thought it could create traffic concerns. Mr. Goff said that is an NH Department of Transportation (DOT) intersection. Chair Mack noted that his wife was hit at one of those intersections when there was a red light because he said people do not pay attention on red or look for pedestrians. He said the bike path leads cyclists directly to that intersection. He added that the intersection next to the bike path seemed to be a good candidate for no right on red. Mr. Goff said they would look into it since there is good data there because of the connection to the Cheshire Rail Trail.

The City Manager referred to page 28, which listed a “rapid response team” and a “community ambassador.” Mr. Koczalka said that in some other communities, when there is a crash with a fatality, they have a team that responds to assess the location. For example, the Rhode Island DOT sends a team of 4 to 5 engineers to assess a crash scene. The City Manager said the City has an Accident Reconstruction Team. Mr. Lussier added that the Police Department has an Accident Investigation Team, which has specialized training to investigate the causes of crashes, with more of a focus on litigation and liability; still, he thought they collected a lot of data that this Committee would be interested in. For example, they have a device that measures friction on the surface of the roadway. Discussion ensued briefly about the value of an internal staff review of these instances. For example, the Engineering Division works with the Police Department to

create a physical survey of the scenes of fatal crashes. Mr. Koczalka referred to the Safe Systems Approach, which is about more than just preventing crashes (no longer called *accidents*), but about acknowledging that crashes will happen, so the goal is to make roads safer to reduce fatalities.

The Steering Committee briefly discussed some challenges expressed by the community, such as people driving too slowly, particularly when they want to turn left, like on West Street. Other challenges were mentioned like drivers weaving in and out of traffic around slower drivers. Mr. Lussier noted how the Plan describes engineering designs (e.g., narrower lanes) that could be implemented to calm traffic. He thought such designs would be better applicable on a roadway like Marlboro Street as opposed to West Street. Mr. Rusnock noted that of the 198 projects listed by the community, 24 included West Street, so it was well represented. However, Mr. Johnson pointed out that none of those West Street projects were in the top 25 prioritized projects.

Mr. Johnson referred to streets marked blue on the high injury network map, noting that he did not see those streets indicated as problem areas. Mr. Goff showed a different, internal map that tracked the individual project recommendations throughout the City, color coded by motor vehicle, pedestrian, or bike incidents. He identified those recommendations on State highways. Mr. Rusnock thought an important next step would be to overlay this map of project recommendations onto the high injury network map. Mr. Goff added that a nice addition to the Action Plan would be a map identifying the 25 highest scoring projects (minus the downtown project). Mr. Johnson noted that one recommendation was already completed (stop sign at Water and Grove Street/Community Way).

All Steering Committee members had reviewed the RSAP to different levels and most needed more time review it in more detail, so members mentioned parts of the Plan they had comments prepared for, beginning with some housekeeping items. Ms. Landry, Deputy City Manager, offered to proofread the whole Plan if needed:

- Page 5, Social Services: Susan Ashworth is now with Home Healthcare, Hospice, and Community Services; Keith Thibault is with Southwestern Community Services
- Page 5, edit the verb “evaluated”
- Page 28, change “School Street” to “West Street”

The Steering Committee continued discussing bigger picture comments on the Plan.

Mr. Linnenbringer posed some questions about the statistics listed in the Plan, noting that the way some sentences were worded changed the meaning and made them more complicated to read. He referred to 25% of all accidents being tied to older users; he compared it to other percentages listed of 23% and 24%, and said they seemed consistent across crashes. Mr. Koczalka said to keep in mind that once the report is finalized, the graphics and text would be improved in InDesign, so things like this percentage would stand out better and the report would be more readable overall for the community.

Vice Chair Tobin asked how new projects would be added to the matrix over time. Mr. Lussier said that the City now had the scoring rubric and had already implemented the scoring process with a City neighborhood for a crosswalk on Park Avenue. So, the project could be added and scored quickly. Mr. Goff noted that using GIS, project pins could be used in different ways to track projects as they are in-progress or completed, and to notify the public over time of the City's progress on these roadway improvements. Vice Chair Tobin hoped to see SeeClickFix integrated in some way over time.

Brief discussion ensued about some projects that scored very low that had been removed from the project list in the previous week since it was sent to the Committee because it had taken time to process it all. For example, Concord Road and Upper Knight Street.

Mr. Johnson referred to the table on page 29 and asked who the audience is, noting that even some on this Committee likely would not know some of the terms listed, such as a "bump out." Mr. Lussier said the Plan could include a list of mitigation measures with a graphic for each. Mr. Johnson said it was a matter of audience; if the Plan is meant for bureaucrats or experts, then he said it is fine as is, but if it is meant for the general public, then he agreed that a glossary would be helpful. Mr. Koczalka said that would be no problem as the Federal Highway Administration has some images of these countermeasures. Ms. Bowie suggested including the photos within the text of the Plan.

Mr. Johnson referred to Transit Stop Placement on page 24 and asked if that referred to stops for the City Bus, etc. The consultants replied yes. Chair Mack thought the City lacked sufficient official transit stops; there are only two official stops, and the others are in shopping plazas or just stopping on the street. If the City is considering improving roadways, he suggested considering more strategic stops like those by the Library and Central Square Terrace. Chair Mack agreed to consider some ideal locations and share those with the consultants.

Ms. Bowie asked if there had been a discussion with the bus drivers as a part of this project. Chair Mack imagined that the drivers would prefer to not have to stop in the middle of the street because it slows down their route times. Going into the shopping plazas also slows them down when there is demand for more stops elsewhere in the City, such as the new medical center on Maple Avenue that wants the bus to go to the very back to the building for pick-up, adding 5 minutes, but they agreed for the public good. Mr. Goff asked if there is a fee for that service. Chair Mack said there is a \$1 fare and a contribution from the City and other resources; he confirmed that private entities do not pay into a fund. Ms. Bowie suggested speaking directly with the bus drivers about their experiences and challenges. The City Manager said there had been one meeting with City Express but not with drivers, but recommendations from drivers were shared for pull-off areas outside of traffic.

The City Manager left at 5:10 PM.

Mr. Johnson said he was surprised to see reference to teen drivers under age 18. Mr. Koczalka thought it referred to high school age. Ms. Landry thought it might be tied to rules for the number of months past age 16 for which there are legal penalties if you receive a speeding ticket, compared to getting points against your license if you are over age 18. Discussion ensued briefly on the standards that apply for different ages. Mr. Rusnock thought this pointed out the potential need for better definitions in the Plan and that “teen drivers” might not be specific enough.

Discussion ensued about briefly about a suite of improvement projects related to south Main Street between Rt-101 and the Winchester Street/Marlboro Street roundabout. Some of these projects scored higher and some lower. It was reiterated that these projects might not be implemented in the order that they were prioritized.

Mr. Linnenbringer cautioned against stating in the Plan that the projects will not be implemented as prioritized and that they would be chosen as the City staff decides because it would seem to him that while they were ranked based on safety criteria, the staff would be choosing, which defeats the purpose of ranking. Mr. Lussier said it was not completely arbitrary but also not set in stone. The scoring will inform but not dictate priorities. Mr. Rusnock said that there are 24 project recommendations for West Street with varying scores, but most would be incorporated into that major project plan, for example.

Chair Mack asked why the West Street projects were not pulled from this list like the downtown projects. Mr. Lussier said he asked for downtown to be separated because it is in the final design phase, whereas the West Street project is still years away. Mr. Goff added that the Plan does clarify in the notes what projects recommendations are tied to these major upcoming projects. He would add a column to the matrix identifying projects that are already programmed in the City’s Capital Improvement Plan, like pedestrian bridge decking over the Ashuelot River. Discussion ensued briefly about a staff-known problem with icing between bridge boards when they swell that staff are unsure how to solve; they might have to cut small gaps.

5) New Business

None presented.

6) Next Meeting: September 23, 2024

The Committee discussed next steps. They decided that they needed at least two more meetings, one to review revisions and one to review the final product and make a recommendation to City Council. Discussion ensued on how the Committee should submit comments and copy edits to City staff and the consultants:

- The consultants would send the Action Plan to the Committee by end-of-day August 27.
 - The consultants will include notes indicating how they addressed (or could not) the various feedback from this meeting, section-by-section.

- If there is conflicting feedback, the consultants will bring that to staff and if it still cannot be resolved, bring it to the Committee.
- Steering Committee members should submit feedback via track changes in Microsoft Word to Brett Rusnock (brusnock@keenenh.gov) by end-of-day on September 5.
- Consultants will provide a revised draft to the Committee by September 16 and Committee members should bring comments to the meeting on September 23.
 - When reviewing the next draft, for efficiency, the Steering Committee will strive to provide comments section-by-section.
- At the September 23 meeting, the Steering Committee will decide whether to adopt the Roadway Safety Action Plan or if it needs another revision, and whether to schedule an October meeting to adopt the Plan.

Mr. Rusnock asked whether the Plan would be completed in InDesign by the September meeting, and Mr. Koczalka said no. Mr. Rusnock said it would be the Committee's discretion whether to adopt the Plan without full graphics at the next meeting if they feel its otherwise complete.

Mr. Koczalka mentioned that the final Plan will include a section on next steps for implementing and using the plan long-term.

The next meeting is September 23, 2024 at 4:00 PM.

7) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Mack adjourned the meeting at 5:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
September 3, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,
Brett Rusnock, P.E., Infrastructure Project Manager