

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 9, 2023

8:15 AM

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

Members Present:

Todd Horner, Vice Chair
Dillon Benik
Jan Manwaring
Dr. Rowland Russell
Councilor Andrew Madison
Dr. Chris Brehme, Alternate
Charles Redfern, Alternate
Janelle Sartorio, Alternate
Samantha Jackson, Alternate
Autumn DelaCroix, Alternate

Staff Present:

William Schoefmann, GIS Technician
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works
Director/Emergency Management
Director/Assistant City Manager

Members Not Present:

Drew Bryenton, Chair
Michael Davern

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Vice Chair Todd Horner called the meeting to order at 8:14 AM.

2) Approval of Minutes

Given technical issues and minutes being received late, minutes approval was tabled for next month.

3) Downtown Infrastructure Updates

Dr. Rowland Russell shared that he has had conversations with two city Councilors that approached him, and one also approached Mr. Charles Redfern. Their message was the same in saying to keep the pressure on, keep advocating and keep educating, especially around bike safety. Planning a safety program and promoting and/or offering education around that are things the group can work on. He noted there are still several individuals who are anti-bike lanes and quite vocal about it. He stated the committee needs to keep getting their message out, continue to attend meetings and continue to be public with their support.

Mr. Charles Redfern pointed out that election season is approaching. There are a few Councilors up for reelection and a new mayor coming in. He thinks it is fair for people to know where their Councilors stand on this topic and suggested being direct and getting a clear answer from them.

Mr. Kürt Blomquist said he concurred with the comments already made. He reiterated that this committee's role is to continue to provide the input on multimodal transportation. The lower Winchester Street project is going to be coming up to Council. It has gone through a steering committee process. There are additional multimodal facilities as part of that project. He believed this has brought out a continued disconnect between people in support and the senior leadership on the City Council.

A general message got through but believes that this is an issue that is not going away. He explained that all five at large's are up for reelection and there are five ward Councilors that are not up for reelection at this time. He named Councilor Roberts, Councilor Workman, Councilor Greenwald, Councilor Madison, and Councilor Jones and explained that the majority of those were not in support of multimodal transportation.

He shared that Councilor Remy and Councilor Giacomo have said they are not running. There are several other ones he believed to be on the fence leaning towards not running. He explained that you will see a substantial shift on the Council for a new facility. He is interested to see what reasons they are doing as they come aboard.

The Council has chosen to continue with Gilbo Avenue, Railroad Street treatment with a two-way on Gilbo Avenue at this point. They chose to proceed with a two-lane North/South Cross section. They also chose the lighted intersection and then Central Square is staying in its traffic flow pattern as it exists today.

They will be looking at some possible road widening to see what they can do to make it a little more pedestrian friendly. At this point, they will not be coming back in again until sometimes after the first of the new year, probably February or March, with an update to Council.

He explained that now, staff are going to be sitting down with the consultant to go over what work was accomplished per the scope of the contract and what work was not. He said there was quite a bit of diversion from the original scope with all the extra public meetings and such. There are some things that did not get done as part of this contract that will have to roll into the next contract. The next public interaction will be February or March of 2024.

Councilor Madison said it will be hard to say what the Council will look like given that it will be a new Council. He is encouraging some individuals to run for Council. He encouraged those on the committee without cars and use pedestrian and bicycles as their primary means of transportation to be very vocal about that. One of the things he brought up was this sense among some of the Councilors and among the more vocal opponents of multimodal transportation that those who don't own cars are almost seen as second-class citizens. He believed they should

advocate to have equal access to city resources to come to the downtown and to have the same opportunities as those who own cars.

Vice Chair Horner asked about trees and explained it came up last meeting and there seems to be this idea that the bikes lanes are going to destroy the trees downtown.

Councilor Madison explained there has been a lot of misinformation that has been spread by some vocal opponents. The city has done a good job at countering and correcting the misinformation. He shared there are some trees, most of them sick, that are going to be removed. They will be replaced. He believed the net loss of trees to be minimal.

Mr. Blomquist could not specify the net loss as they have not gone through the next level of design. He explained that what people are missing is that most of the trees coming down are the result of the infrastructure work. They will be trenching on both sides of the trees, in some cases on three sides and that never works well for trees. There are also several trees that are infected with the emerald ash borer. If the top of the ash tree has no leaves, that is sign that the tree is infected and likely will only have a few more years of life.

He thought using the multimodal bikes lanes as a reason for the trees coming down was a bit disingenuous because most of the trees are being impacted because of the utility work.

Vice Chair Horner said it also seems that the fact that they are being replanted is also missing in the general community discussion. He supported having better clarity on what the net loss will be after the whole project.

Mr. Redfern said Mr. Blomquist's message about the trees is very important in that some of the trees are going to be because of the infrastructure work. He explained one candidate running indicated there is a concern about the trees and how the bike lanes may affect it. He believes this person needs to be informed of the net loss of trees and what is due to the underground infrastructure.

Mr. Blomquist explained most of that information is already publicly available and he could direct him to the specific slides that have all that information. While they don't have the specific net loss numbers (mainly because he does not know how many trees are going back in), he can tell you what trees are coming down and for what reasons.

Mr. Blomquist explained this is not a lack of information, it is a choice not to look at or find the information.

Vice Chair Horner wondered if a possible action item for the committee might be to develop a letter adopting a position that they are both pro bike lane and pro tree and pushing back against this notion that these are mutually exclusive options. He suggested referencing some of the work Mr. Blomquist mentioned to push back against the inaccuracies that are out there in the public discourse.

Dr. Chris Brehme added that people do not do well with uncertainty. He wondered if it would be possible to include the parameters by which the new trees are decided upon.

Mr. Blomquist explained that these sorts of things will be the next level of discussion. Part of the challenge is making these spaces unitarian because it is not known what businesses will be in these buildings and what kind of need there will be.

Dr. Brehme said the main point is providing a level of reassurance. This letter and other communication really need to be able to reassure that the city of Keene has the citizens best interested in mind.

Vice Chair Horner said a letter could be important to provide some push back. This committee has really focused on protected bike lanes, but he does not want the perception to be that they are for bike lanes at all costs.

Dr. Russell suggested thinking about what they, as a committee, can and cannot communicate versus what they can do as individuals. He believed it was important to think about this as a broader communication plan. The letter should include emphasis on those aspects of the plan that the committee wants to see and promote pedestrian safety as well. Letters can be written by the committee members as individuals and/or as a committee. One aspect he wanted to emphasize that he thought the committee can communicate and is important is around the safety planning and wondered whether that could be mentioned in the letter.

He shared that he had a conversation with a colleague of his from the Los Angeles Antioch campus who did his PhD here on biking and how pedestrian access transforms the culture of the city. As part of his studies, he got training on how to be a safety educator in an urban bicycling community. His colleague said there are websites you can look at to find the nearest training and even offered to lead a safety workshop on one of his return visits to the area. Dr. Russell said this might be an opportunity for a sub-committee that is able to dive into and work on a plan for safety. He believed this was work this committee could do and helps to address some of the concerns while also showing that that the committee is not just reactive to the vocal opposition, but proactive about how to make this operational.

Mr. Redfern suggested the letter be somewhat introductory as to who this committee is and what they do, while maintaining a positive view. Vice Chair Horner suggested that since this will come back before the Council in the new year that he and Chair Bryenton work on drafting something that they can bring to the group next month. Committee members agreed.

Mr. Redfern suggested it be sent to every new declared Councilor and every elected official. Vice Chair Horner believed the first step was to get buy-in from the committee before disseminating it to Councilors or public.

Dr. Russell suggested sending a version of it to the paper as well. Vice Chair Horner shared that he discovered the paper has a 400-word limit for letters to the editors. Members suggested talking to the editor and seeing if it could be posted as an opinion editorial.

Vice Chair Horner wanted to pause and have everyone recognize that he thinks their work had an impact and that they should sell it. He believed they should take a moment to celebrate.

Dr. Russell said everyone from the committee that spoke at the MSFI meeting were just brilliant and really reinforced each other's ideas. He believed it would make a huge impact on those that attended.

4) Regular Project Updates

Mr. Blomquist updated on Marlboro Street Reconstruction and the connection to the Rail Trail. There is a final review under the Department of Transportation (DOT) that will be bid out after the first of the year with construction the next year. This includes road diet and some other safety improvements as well as bicycle facilities on and all the way down Marlboro Street. This connects to Main/ Marlboro/ Winchester, which is the base of downtown. Then there is the connection from Marlboro Street through the City complex, behind fleet up to theirs. That project should be under construction next season, so by the end of September of next year, Marlboro Street will be smooth again.

The Eastern Avenue, the Transportation Heritage Trail, Phase I Eastern Avenue to Route 101 have conducted consultant interviews and will be recommending a consultant at the next finance organizational personnel committee in late August. That design process should be starting sometime in late September, early October. The intent, he believed, is for that one to be designed through the winter construction next season in 2024.

Lower Winchester Street has had a steering committee working on it. It includes sidewalks and marked bike lanes in the street. That recommendation will be going to Council likely in late September. The Council will choose whatever it would like to do and choose their preferred option, which will start the next level of design probably sometime in late fall. The construction is scheduled to start in 2025.

Vice Chair Horner asked if the conceptual design was public yet and if there were two options. Mr. Blomquist said it is an intersection along with two lanes with a median. The other option was a roundabout at the intersections at Krif Road and at Matthews Road, Bradco Street on Winchester Street and will include center islands. He explained the steering committee, 3-2, is recommending the roundabout option, which will go to full Council sometime in September.

Ms. Jan Manwaring asked if anyone on the committee was part of that steering committee. Mr. Blomquist said no one was part of the steering committee and that it was all made up of residents and businesses from the corridor. She believed it would be a good goal for the committee to ensure that someone from BPPAC is on some of these committees. She asked Mr. Blomquist how they would go about doing that.

Mr. Blomquist said that something they can certainly discuss with the mayor. Typically, they follow the DOT process, which in general, the steering committee is usually made up of public and business entities in the affected area.

Vice Chair Horner asked Mr. Blomquist if he anticipated any project related steering committees being formed. Mr. Blomquist reminded that the city had received a safe street for all grant and are anticipating there will be a steering committee along with a technical committee that will

move through there because the goal of that program is to develop a road safety plan for the city. He said that will certainly involve the members of the BPPAC although he was unsure as to what level of involvement that will be. He explained that they are just finishing up the RFQ on that now. They are anticipating that being set up sometime in September/October and will be working for the next year and a half.

Vice Chair Horner voiced that he thought it would be great if someone from the BPPAC was on one of those project related committees. Mr. Blomquist said someone will probably need to be appointed prior to the turnover of Mayor and that he was not sure quite how that would work.

5) **Old Business**

A) **Volunteer Opportunities**

- i) *Trail clean ups (planned)*
- ii) *Bike Friendly Community*

Mr. Schoefmann stated that Mr. Bryenton had set up a meeting for next week to continue working on the City's Bicycle Friendly Community Application for renewal.

B) **NHDOT North/South Bridge Signs**

Mr. Redfern stated that he received word from Mr. Blomquist earlier that this was moving forward and appreciated the city's attention to this. Mr. Blomquist shared that manager had signed the MOA. It is going back up to DOT for signature by the commissioner. He is going to have his sign guys start making them. Once he gets the signed MOA back, he will have his guys go out and install them.

C) **Project Priorities**

Priorities were tabled until next month's meeting.

6) **New Business - Items to be Included for Next Meeting**

To be discussed at next meeting is the formation of safety subcommittee and identification of interested volunteers.

Another discussion topic is how to get the committee and the work out in the public more.

Mr. Redfern suggested having a guest come to educate and discuss e-bikes. It was suggested as a topic for November or December. Discussion continued about the role of education. Mr. Blomquist supported the group becoming the subject matter experts to then provide counsel to the Council.

7) **More Time**

A) **Kiosk Map Updates**

Mr. Schoefmann shared that they must make a couple more trailhead maps and they should probably add some URLs for organizations. It is formatted, but they just need to add in some distances as well.

- B) Public Art and the Trails**
- C) BPPAC Website**

Mr. Schoefmann reported that Rebecca Landry, the Communications Director, is working on it.

- D) Bike/Pedestrian Counts**
- 8) Next Meeting scheduled for September 13, 2023**
- 9) Adjournment**

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

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Will Schoefmann, Community Development Staff

Additional edits by,
Katryna Kibler, Clerk's Office