

City of Keene
New Hampshire

BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN PATH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, March 13, 2019

8:15 AM

2nd Floor Conference Room, City Hall

Members Present:

Dillon Benik, Chair
Drew Bryenton, Vice Chair
Charles Redfern
Todd Horner
David Souther, Alternate
Thom Little, Alternate

Staff Present:

Will Schoefmann, Community Dev
Kurt Blomquist, Public Works
Andy Bohannon, Parks and Rec

Members Not Present:

Linda Rubin
Brad Dufresne
Christopher Brehme

1) **Roll Call**

Chair Benik called meeting to order at 8:20 am.

2) **February 13, 2019 Minutes**

Mr. Little moved to accept the February 13, 2019 minutes with minor revisions, Mr. Souther seconded and motion passed unanimously.

Revisions are as follows:

Page 3, paragraph 1, change "he himself thinks" to "he thinks."

Page 4, paragraph 1, change "a 4B project" to "a \$4B project."

Page 6, paragraph 3, change "written a until" to "written until."

3) **Old Business**

a) **Downtown Bike Racks: Discussion**

Mr. Kurt Blomquist and Mr. Andy Bohannon were present to discuss downtown bike racks. Chair Benik stated that there was an obvious lack of bike racks in town last year so he talked to Ms. Rubin and they decided together to address the issue of the whereabouts of bike racks. Mr. Blomquist stated that bike racks are handled between Mr. Bohannon and himself. He said he manages the downtown area which from the maintenance perspective of Department of Public Works (DPW) generally runs from Vernon Street to Water Street, however, they are now doing more below Water Street and they anticipate more maintenance around pedestrian crossings down by Elliot Street. He said on the east side they go to Well Street and on the west side they

go into the Gilbo Avenue lot and down Roxbury Street to the Roxbury Plaza. Mr. Blomquist said they have a variety of donated and purchased bike racks. He said the Keene downtown was built in 1988 and designed for commercial activity and not for the usage people are looking for today as it lacks space for bicycle and pedestrian facilities. He stated that the downtown traditionally place benches in the cutout areas and bike racks in Railroad Square and they have placed combo bench bike racks in high business areas as that is where people have a tendency to stop. He said they intersperse bike racks where they do not put benches, for example, in the slots near the Corner News and across the street from the old Keene Sentinel Building. Mr. Blomquist stated that they do move them around a bit because they move the benches around. He said there is a bench that they place in front of Margaritas Restaurant, however, the last couple of years they put a bike rack there for patrons of the outdoor seating area. He stated that the other issue they have encountered with bike racks is the residents living in the apartments in downtown leave their bikes in the racks for days and business owners complain about there being too many bikes. However, more businesses want outdoor seating and that also impedes the placement of bike racks as they interfere with pedestrian traffic in the area. Mr. Blomquist stated that they typically place the racks out in April after snow ends and they bring them in just before Thanksgiving when the chance for snow is higher. He said depending on how much snow they get, some of the racks stay out and may get buried. He said they placed bike racks by the Wells Street parking area for commuters to have a space to park their bikes out of the general weather and they were used for a number of years and then not used again so they rotated them out.

He said this is their general method of moving bike racks around and their main objective is finding spots to place racks where they can avoid complaints from business owners. He said they have single racks on parking meters, however, Parking Enforcement complains that people do not pay meters due to bike being there. He said he is open to working with BPPAC to identify spaces in which to put racks and as they progress with the redesign of the downtown starting in fiscal year 2020. He said that will involve a significant amount of underground utility work that needs to be done and they are looking for feedback from the community about what they want the streets to look like and he is hoping bicycle facilities will be taken into account this time. However, it is challenging as there are multiple interest groups and they are not always tolerant of changes. He said Railroad Square is one of the only open spaces currently and there are limited spots where bike facilities can be placed and not impede upon other activities. He said outside of downtown there are a few locations in the right of way where they will put a bike rack or two up on Court Street, Washington Street and Roxbury Street, however, from their experience only the Roxbury Street racks get good use. He said they aim to gauge the usage of bike racks in certain spots and reassess their placement from that information. .

Mr. Bohannon stated that Southwest Regional Planning Commission implemented a bike rack initiative and bought a number of racks and the surplus is stored at DPW. He said due to what Mr. Blomquist already described, they are not able to place all of the racks out due to the complaints they receive from businesses. He said finding space is difficult in general. Mr. Bohannon stated that there are bike racks in all parks and facilities, however, people do not use the racks like they used to. He said they have racks in the back of City Hall that were well-used and they can also consider putting more in Railroad Square, the skate park and the Gilbo Avenue area. He said it is hard to find the right balance between those who want the bike racks and those who find them a nuisance.

Mr. Blomquist said they do have general areas where they place racks based on feedback from BPPAC in the past, for example, Railroad Square, Gilbo Avenue, Eagle Square and Cypress and City Hall. He said those have become established points, however, additional areas are a challenge. Mr. Schoefmann said from the perspective of having downtown as a place for cyclists, BPPAC wants to promote the trails and if there is not a consistent spot for people to park that is an issue for the past 2-3 years. He said is there is a serious amount of constraint on where they can be placed they should be able to narrow down where there is that problem. Mr. Blomquist said most racks they have are the small racks that fit 4-8 bikes, however, Railroad Square, the Wells Street lot and Gilbo Avenue are the only mass collection points he can think of. He said most of the other spaces are only 6 feet wide and can only accommodate a bike on one side. Mr. Schoefmann said they can employ an urban siting guide to see where downtown racks could fit. Mr. Blomquist replied that the Keene downtown guide will not accommodate Keene. He reiterated that when he receives complaints from business owners stating the racks are impeding their business he will rotate the racks. He said they have been placing the donated combination bike rack and benches that are not that efficient in Railroad Square. Chair Benik stated that BPPAC is trying to promote a bike community and bike tourism, for example, when the Wall Dogs come in they would like to have a City location for solid dependable bike parking for cycling tourists and pedestrians. He said maybe there is an opportunity to build in a location for bike parking in the redesign of downtown. Mr. Schoefmann replied at the same time they have to find a solution in the interim. Mr. Blomquist replied that right now mass bike path parking is limited to Railroad Square, the Wells Street parking garage and perhaps some space along Gilbo Avenue.

Mr. Redfern asked Mr. Blomquist his thoughts on placing a few racks in the Commercial Street parking lot as it is used by much of the community for parking and is central to downtown. Mr. Blomquist said that is a wonderful idea but that is a revenue issue for Parking Enforcement. He stated that people wanted benches on Commercial Street; however, they can take the benches out and put bicycle racks out. Chair Benik asked if there is information available about bench usage. Mr. Blomquist replied that when they take a bench out, they receive thirty phone calls with people complaining. Mr. Schoefmann suggested that they rotate the benches and bike racks all summer and Mr. Blomquist said that is what he already does. Chair Benik asked if there is bike parking in the Wells Street lot and Mr. Blomquist replied no but they can put them back in there. Mr. Bohannon stated that when the Wall Dogs come there will be an uptick in pedestrian and cyclist traffic and they will need to make an effort to accommodate that increase in volume. He said that Keene is a running and bike town, and Mr. Blomquist can come back to BPPAC to identify where to put the racks and have them potentially installed within a couple of weeks after the meeting.

Mr. Blomquist stated that the committee also needs to be aware that this is a multi-interest area and the idea behind of Rack Up program is that businesses were supposed to buy them and put them in their areas. Mr. Schoefmann said if they can do an inventory of what they have down there. Mr. Blomquist said between Mr. Bohannon and he, they have enough racks, what they need to do is get businesses involved and agree to place bike long term racks for residents and then identify placement for short term racks. Mr. Schoefmann said on either side of Main Street along the Cheshire Rail Trail, they can expect locating larger bike racks, and maybe a smattering of smaller racks from north to south although that is more of a contentious issue. He said he can talk to Ms. Wendy Walker, the head of Parking Enforcement, and see if she will allow space or two on either side. He said so instead of under the stairwell, if she is willing to set aside a space.

Mr. Blomquist said Wells Street has many reserved spots. Chair Benik asked about the Monadnock Co Op and Mr. Blomquist stated that they are looking for extra car parking and eliminated some of their bike rack space to accommodate cars. Mr. Blomquist stated that they need to encourage the businesses to tolerate racks so he does not have to appease them.

Mr. Breynton stated that there was an absence of consistent racks along Main Street last year and a collection spot, maybe with covered parking, on Gilbo Avenue would be a great place to park bikes to access downtown. He asked if Mr. Mitch Greenwald provides long-term parking and Mr. Schoefmann replied no, that most of the tenant blocks downtown do not provide parking as the Zoning District does not require it. Mr. Blomquist said Mr. Greenwald's rack was always full and his tenants were using the rack so he should be open to placing a long-term rack in the back of his business. Mr. Little asked if the City would provide the racks to business owners. Mr. Schoefmann and Mr. Blomquist replied that they might if it is part of the Rack Up initiative. Chair Benik asked if the Rack Up initiative was limited to Keene and Mr. Schoefmann replied that it was a regional effort. Mr. Bryenton stated that taking racks down because of over utilization does not seem like a very sound business strategy as cyclists increase foot traffic which is good for business. Mr. Blomquist stated that he agrees, however, in any case, he is required to address the complaints about racks. For this reason, he emphasizes the importance of educating business owners and mitigating the conflict between the multiple constituencies. He said the Corner News space is large enough space for one side of a twenty space rack that can be consistently placed as it is a high traffic area. Mr. Schoefmann suggested that he and Mr. Blomquist do the inventory together and then he can return to BPPAC and come up with a placement for racks at next month's meeting.

Mr. Redfern asked Mr. Blomquist about the status of Cheshire Park Avenue Loop and what is stalling that project. Mr. Blomquist replied that the Department of Transportation's (DOT) will take 6-8 weeks to do a review. He said they have not gotten the approvals for the preliminary engineering plans and as soon as they get that they can review and approve a change order.

b. West Street Bike Counting

Mr. Schoefmann stated that counting was slow this time of year, however, the bike counting schedule for May should be available soon on the National Bike Pedestrian Counting website and they can anticipate the same dates as last year. He said he will send out a sign-up for May's counting dates as soon as they become available. Chair Benik asked if there are weekend counting blocks available from last year's winter counts to compare to this year's counts. Mr. Schoefmann said there are no weekend counts available anywhere except for Ashuelot River Park. Chair Benik said maybe he can go out this Saturday as he would like to have one weekend block of data for this winter. Mr. Schoefmann encouraged members to invite friends to help out with counts to get more data. Mr. Horner said he sat out at Pearl Street this weekend and he noticed a lot of pedestrian crossings. Chair Benik stated that there was less of a turnout of pedestrians and cyclists than last year but it was warmer last year. Mr. Schoefmann said he will send out a schedule next week so they can plan ahead more accurately for gaps in gaps.

4) Project Updates

(Note: BPPAC Master Plan Documents available on google drive)

Mr. Schoefmann stated that he submits the project updates for things that have changed highlighted in yellow.

Bicycle Mayor- Mr. Schoefmann stated that the Bicycle Mayor is continuing her work for the Safe Routes to School initiative. She has created pocket maps that show sidewalk access, crosswalks and trails, including bike walk lanes and a City wide map that shows sidewalk, trails and walk sheds for every school for 1/2-1/4 mile. Mr. Little asked why they do not have a map accessible by phones as children today use phones regularly. He said in his experience the paper maps do not reflect the changes quickly enough. Mr. Schoefmann said the federal funds for the project called for the maps. He said the Bicycle Mayor will be doing bike education curriculum in school during Bike to Work Week. There will also be a remote location event they will need volunteers to monitor children along the way.

Cheshire Rail Trail-Park Ave Loop- Mr. Schoefmann stated that DOT and federal review of the submissions is what is holding the project up. He said much of the problem is that DOT is understaffed. Mr. Bryenton asked if the project is still slated for this summer. Mr. Schoefmann said they are still optimistic as there is not much for right of way work that needs to happen. He said there have been preliminary meetings so the major stakeholders understand the project, however, engineering cannot enter into right of any negotiations with those parties until that section of the project is given a go ahead.

Wayfinding Project- Mr. Schoefmann stated that wayfinding along the trail is something BPPAC can focus on at the same time as some of the other projects. Mr. Horner suggested using the opportunity to create wayfinding signage for bike racks to testing out locations for bike racks. Mr. Schoefmann agreed that laminated paper is not as expensive as a stainless steel sign and Mr. Horner agreed that it could assist them with testing the orientation, the scale and how well the signage works. Mr. Schoefmann stated once they get Mr. Blomquist to commit to a few locations they can perhaps pursue that option. Mr. Schoefmann said Parking Enforcement does weekly counts at all the parking spots so perhaps he can discuss the signage with Ms. Parker. Chair Benik said as far as the wayfinding signage downtown, the signage is not geared towards pedestrians as they are placed too high and into the roads and not visible to pedestrians and cyclists.

Main Street-Complete Streets- Mr. Schoefmann stated that with the funding allocated for the Downtown Revitalization project's design plans, it is important that BPPAC enter into those discussions at some point.

5) **New Business- Items to be included for next meeting**

Mr. Little stated that he posed two questions in an email exchange with the Mr. Lussier, the City Engineer. The first question was centered on the DOT requirement of a 200 foot span for the Robert J. Kraus Memorial Bridge does not meet that requirement and the City Engineer replied that the size will be discussed in a future meeting with DOT. Mr. Little said the he second question that was raised was about the estimated cost of painting the bridge for the next 150 years and the City Engineer replied that the cost would be about \$300-\$400K so based on inflation that cost would be doubled or tripled. .

Mr. Little included a diagram of the bridge in question with the sizes included.

Mr. Little moved to include copies of the two emails from Mr. Lussier and Mr. Little along with the diagram of the Robert J. Memorial Bridge from Mr. Lussier into the minutes and that further

discussion of this potential solution be tabled until the City Engineer gets a response from NH DOT that it is an acceptable possibility, Mr. Souther seconded and motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Little stated that when North and South Bridge were put in, piles were driven down 150-200 feet into the bedrock. He wonders if construction of the bridge which is very close to the Stone Arch Bridge will negatively impact the Stone Arch Bridge. Mr. Schoefmann replied that engineering plans for adapting that bridge to that location would require a historic review based on the fact that the Stone Arch Bridge is on the National Historic Review. Mr. Little stated that he is happy with that as his concerns are now on record.

Mr. Little stated that at last month's meeting there was a question about the railroad spur on the Ashuelot Rail Trail and there was an abutting property owner. Mr. Toby Tousley, with interest identified. He said the property owner submitted a letter of interest in purchasing a portion of the property in questions to FOP. Mr. Little said the approach documented in Mr. Tousley's letter is consistent with maintaining the Ashuelot Rail Trail right of way which is what BPPAC recommended. Mr. Little moved to report to City Council that BPPAC finds no objection to his intended purchase if he agrees to maintain the Ashuelot Rail trail right of way. Mr. Schoefmann suggested tabling their comments until FOP requests BPPAC's advice or until the next meeting after they know more. Mr. Schoefmann stated that this request is for the other side of the trail. Chair Benik agreed that they have not been asked to weigh in on the matter yet so it is not in their purview. Mr. Redfern said BPPAC's responsibility is to advise City Council on matters pertaining to bicycle and pedestrian issues. Mr. Schoefmann stated that the issue is that this item is not on the agenda for BPPAC today. It is on FOP's agenda. He stated that he hesitates to make a motion from the committee today. Mr. Little said last meeting they felt it was urgent to take a position on the purchase. Chair Benik stated that he understands Mr. Redfern's point of view that BPPAC can weigh in on these matters as they see fit, however, he has not had a chance to review the matter. Mr. Little stated that they respond that they find no problem with it if they maintain the trail. Mr. Schoefmann said this matter was not agendized for today so they have to move to place it on the agenda for next meeting. Mr. Redfern moved to add the item to today's agenda. Chair Benik and Mr. Schoefmann stated that it is not consistent with the process from last month's agenda. Mr. Redfern withdrew his motion. Mr. Little stated that they add the item to next month as the motion has been withdrawn. Mr. Little said it is in FOP packet for tomorrow night's meeting and he thought it would be helpful if they had BPPAC's recommendation. Chair Benik repeated that they have not reviewed it yet. Mr. Little said their concern is to protect the Ashuelot Rail Trail right of way. Chair Benik said his concern is also to think over his opinions before giving them out.

Chair Benik moved to add this item to next month's agenda, Mr. Souther seconded the motion, Mr. Redfern opposed and motion passed with a 5 to 1 vote.

Chair Benik asked if there is a better map with trails on it and Mr. Schoefmann replied that he will provide that at next meeting. Mr. Little replied that a new map will not provide any more information as they need an engineer to look at it. He said the property owner will probably turn the property into a parking lot.

6) **Adjournment - Next meeting date is April 10, 2019**

Chair Benik adjourned the meeting at 9:34 am.

Respectfully submitted by,
Ayshah Kassmali-Fox, Minute Taker & Additional Edits by, Will Schoefmann