

Charlottesville Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee

February 4th, 2015

5:00 PM – 7:00 PM

NDS Conference Room, 2nd floor of City Hall

Meeting Participants

Claudia Elzey

Jake Fox

Chris Gist

Eberhard Jehle

Peter Ohlms

Scott Paisley

Amanda Poncy

Carl Schwarz

Lena Seville

Items for Further Action or Follow-Up

- Amanda Poncy will communicate BPAC's comments on Hillsdale Dr. to the project manager.
- Amanda Poncy will communicate BPAC's comments and concerns regarding snow removal to Public Works.
- BPAC members will write letters to City Councilors in support of West Main Street Option 1 (as outlined by Rhodeside + Harwell).
- The Co-chairs will create a Google Document for the BPAC code audit study and members will contribute to it with their research.

Meeting Agenda

5:00pm Snow Removal De-Briefing

Scott Paisley said that the report Lance Stewart gave City Council following the 15"-18" snowfall on January 22nd-23rd was the first apology Public Works had ever offered to bicyclists and pedestrians for failing to clear more sidewalks and bike lanes more quickly. Chris Gist agreed that the City's recent snow removal efforts had been much better than in previous years, but added that improvement in terms of piling snow in the bike lanes, on sidewalks, and in walkways is still be needed. On Monday and Tuesday, snow had actually been hauled off of West Main Street. Mr. Paisley said this approach should be encouraged. Amanda Poncy pointed out that this action was triggered by the declaration of a snow emergency.

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Eberhard Jehle said that University Avenue from Culbreth Road to Emmet Street was in bad condition and asked whether this fell within the City's maintenance jurisdiction. Other committee members reported that a few locations still seemed in very bad shape a week after the snow event, including 5th Street, Ridge Street, High Street, and others. Carl Schwarz said that the 8th Street underpass was eventually cleared, but that the sidewalks along Ridge-McIntire were still blocked on Sunday, January 31st. Mr. Jehle said that sidewalks along Preston Avenue had not been cleared, even abutting the County Office Building—only the parking lots were clear. Neither was the sidewalk in front of the Federal Courthouse shoveled. Peter Ohlms asked how streets are prioritized in a snow emergency; Mrs. Poncy replied that Water Street, West Main Street, High Street, and Market Street were top priorities. Mr. Ohlms agreed that clearing Water Street first made sense because of heavy transit use, but also said that West Main Street doesn't have garage parking, so perhaps it would make sense to clear that street first.

Chris Gist said that 90 citations were written for property owners who failed to shovel their sidewalks within 24 hours of the end of the snowfall. Lena Seville said that the number of citations was encouraging for pedestrian advocates. Amanda Poncy said that no citations were issued on Monday, January 25th, because City personnel were occupied with the collapse of a building on East Market Street, giving shovelers extra time. There is not a separate "warning" for snow violations. The citation is the warning - if the snow has still not been cleared after another 24 hours elapse, the cited person is fined.

Mr. Gist suggested that the process for reporting failure to shovel needs to be made simpler and more accessible; he could not easily find the form. However, once he had, the City's response was prompt. Mr. Gist also commented that major culprits were commercial establishments such as The Graduate Hotel, Starbucks, and Bank of America on the Corner. Mr. Schwarz agreed that the bigger the business, the slower it seemed to take action.

Other issues included Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT) personnel, who shoveled snow from the bus stops into the bike lane; the failure of multifamily housing developments to take responsibility for clearing their sidewalks; and the failure to shovel pedestrian areas at railroad surface crossings.

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Lena Seville said that on a neighborhood level, volunteer assistance to elderly or disabled residents who could not shovel their walks worked very well, but that there were fewer people to request help than anticipated. Mr. Gist suggested that neighborhood associations should compile lists of those in need of aid ahead of time. Scott Paisley proposed a volunteer shoveling corps of high school students looking to satisfy community service requirements.

Mr. Jehle offered a suggestion that BPAC push the School Board to develop alternate emergency bus routes that consolidate stops, avoid icy hills, and reinforce children's incentives to walk to school. This way, schools could be kept open with less danger, and parents could go to work.

5:30pm Review of the Safe Routes to School Activities and Programs Plan

Claudia Elzey presented the draft Activities and Programs Plan (APP), which aims to make walking and bicycling to school a safe and more appealing option for Charlottesville schoolchildren. She asked committee members to focus on the Recommendations chapter, which lists programs that the City plans to administer in the realms of education, encouragement, enforcement and evaluation.

Committee members agreed that the APP should include more motorist-focused enforcement and education programs. They pointed out that the Boys and Girls Club already has a fleet of children's bicycles (red) and the City schools have another fleet (blue). Scott Paisley offered to help train parent volunteers so that each school or neighborhood had an expert in bicycle maintenance, in addition to each school's P.E. teacher being trained to instruct children on bicycle riding and safety. An information session (with BPAC members present) could be held at each school to kick off this partnering process.

Jake Fox suggested that a street festival similar to Bike/Walk/Play JPA could be held in each school district, and feature attractions like professional BMX bicyclists jumping over cars. This would help excite children about bicycling to school. Holding smaller bicycle rodeos held at each school would be a possibility as well.

With regard to the APP's recommendation of a youth mentoring program, Mr. Paisley advised the City contact the Cutaway Boys and Girls Mountain Bike League. To educate motorists, on the other hand, a useful contact would be Professor Andrew Mondschein at the University of Virginia, who is working on a research project related to education.

Peter Ohlms asked if there weren't additional policies that discouraged children from walking or bicycling to school that are not reflected in the APP. Carl Schwarz said that one example would be policies that prevented children from entering the school earlier than the official arrival time. Mr. Ohlms also wanted to know whether Jackson-Via Elementary School's one-mile walk-to-school policy is actively enforced.

Scott Paisley said that the University of Virginia has a fitness program allowing employees to earn points for physical activity, as measured by a FitBit; he wondered whether a similar program for schoolchildren might be possible, especially if it were made part of the Presidential Fitness Program whose standards schools must work towards. Mr. Paisley also suggested motivated parents equipped with cameras and vests could photograph motorists speeding in the school zones as a kind of indirect, guerilla enforcement program. In general, more police enforcement and greater numbers of crossing guards were felt necessary in the school zones.

6:00pm Streets that Work/Code Audit Assignments

Lena Seville asked committee members to choose parts of the Charlottesville Code to study in preparation for the code audit that will be conducted after the Streets that Work Guidelines have been adopted. The goal is that BPAC will be able to ask intelligent questions and make recommendations when the code audit launches. Additional resources include the Toole Design Group recommendations for code changes necessary to implement Streets that Work and a document prepared by Neighborhood Development Services staff in 2014. Carl Schwarz and Lena Seville agreed to share the topic of site and building design; Scott Paisley volunteered to tackle green infrastructure; Peter Ohlms is interested in street design and parking, along with transit stops and amenities.

6:10pm Hillsdale Drive Extended

BPAC members looked at the site plans for the construction of Hillsdale Drive Extended, which runs between Whole Foods Market at Hydraulic Road and Greenbrier Drive, by way of the Seminole Square Shopping Center. Amanda Poncy explained that the design includes shared lane markings (sharrows) and an 8-10' asphalt multi-use path on one side. Jake Fox remarked that he was worried to see new roads continue to be built without bike lanes. Amanda explained that a Bike Lane Study was conducted as a result of community advocacy. Additional bike accommodations were added to the roadway through the use of sharrows and additional signage.

Peter Ohlms asked what party would be responsible for keeping the path clear of snow. Lena Seville asked whether sharrows would be safe or appropriate, given the volume and speed of traffic on Hillsdale—might it actually be safer to eliminate them, as well? Scott Paisley added that the predicted volume is way beyond the top threshold for sharrows. Carl Schwarz asked why there were crosswalks on only three legs of one of the intersections; Amanda Poncy explained that the fourth leg featured a free-flowing left turn lane which would make a crosswalk unsafe. Mr. Paisley asked that additional signage be added to tell motorists turning right to yield to bicyclists and pedestrians. Amanda Poncy said that the plans show around 140 new trees. Eberhard Jehle said that the trees were not situated to act as buffers for pedestrians, however. Peter Ohlms remarked that BPAC members ought to keep this road in mind for the code audit, so that in future road projects, the City would be required to provide a vegetated buffer between the curb and sidewalk wherever possible.

6:30pm West Main Street (Scott Paisley, West Main Street Steering Committee member)

Mr. Paisley reviewed the three concepts presented by Rhodeside + Harwell to the West Main Street Steering Committee on Thursday, January 14th. Option One includes a chicane and bike lanes on either side, along with retention of some of the existing on-street parking (60 of 85 spaces). The parking is reallocated to provide a better balance between the northern and southern sides of the street. The bike lanes allow room for cars to pull aside to make way for emergency response vehicles. However, this option provides the least improvement for pedestrian zone (only 9'-10' sidewalks) and finds a middle ground for bicyclists (6' lanes, versus the current 4-5' ones, and still located next to on-street parking). Option Two returns all the current parking but eliminates the chicaning and bike lanes. The sidewalk is widened in this concept to 12'. However, first responders noted that the narrow

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travel lane width minus the bike lanes would increase response times. Another drawback is that at the Amtrak bridge, bicyclists riding uphill in the shared lanes slow traffic flow. Option Three received no positive responses because it removes all on-street parking (Mr. Paisley described it as “off the table” without provisions for a parking garage). It would widen and buffer the bike lanes and widen the sidewalks.

Lena Seville proposed that BPAC vote in favor of Option One. The vote was deferred because committee members felt their vote would have a greater impact at another date, but Scott Paisley encouraged members to write to City Council in support of their preferred alternative.

Committee members expressed concern that C-Ville Weekly and other media have misrepresented the West Main streetscape design process as contentious and influenced by a secretive “bike lane lobby.” While the process has been messy, there has been considerable consensus as a result, which deserves recognition. Groups like BPAC have looked at the whole picture and made concessions in an effort to achieve the best result for the community, rather than pursue a special interest.

To conclude the meeting, Lena Seville and Jake Fox announced that on Tuesday, February 9th, BPAC would be recognized at the Annual Planning Commission Awards Ceremony.

Upcoming events

February 9 5:30PM: Annual Planning Awards Ceremony (Planning Commission, City Hall)

February 17 3-4PM: APBP Webinar, “Planning for Facility Maintenance and Management Costs”

February 18 10-12AM: Streets that Work Advisory Committee Meeting

March 3 5-7PM: Bike/Ped Advisory Committee Meeting

March 24 7-9PM: Streets that Work Open House (City Space)