

## Charlottesville Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee

June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016

5:00 PM – 7:00 PM

NDS Conference Room, 2nd floor City Hall

### Meeting Participants

Brian Carr

Scott Bandy

Claudia Elzey

Jake Fox

Alex Ikefuna

Peter Krebs

Peter Ohlms

Scott Paisley

Amanda Poncy

Carl Schwarz

Lena Seville

Ruth Stornetta

### Items for Action or Follow-up

- Scott Paisley will draft a statement giving BPAC's position on the question of which uses (jogging, biking, dog-walking) to allow in the Ragged Mountain Natural Area. Committee members will weigh in via email.
- Claudia Elzey and Peter Krebs will update the BPAC website to reflect committee members' suggestions. Further discussion about BPAC's online presence and generating greater website traffic will be scheduled for the July meeting.
- Amanda Poncy will invite Steve Upman to a future BPAC meeting to discuss the Charlottesville Police Department's response to pedestrian and bike accidents and incident reporting. The new traffic engineer, Rashad Hanbali, will also be invited to a future meeting to discuss further measures to protect pedestrians from car collisions.
- The report on Bike Month activities by Scott Paisley and Chris Gist is postponed to the July meeting.
- A future agenda item will be to clarify BPAC members' responsibilities as representatives to other bodies.

### Meeting Agenda

*5:00pm Code Audit Topics : Sidewalk Widths & Bicycle Parking*

#### Sidewalk Widths

Peter Ohlms presented the topic of sidewalk widths in the city code. He noted that in a 2014 city white paper, staff comments on this topic dealt with connectivity and sight lines, rather than the actual character of the sidewalk space. Mr. Ohlms identified the following goals for this important public right-of-way:

- To provide accessible throughways for all pedestrians
- To accommodate both existing and anticipated volumes and varieties of pedestrian traffic

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- To buffer pedestrians from vehicle traffic
- To serve as a frontage zone and a place for curbside furniture, street trees, and other amenities
- To provide a safe and fun way to get around

Peter Ohlms said that he likes the policies and goals already included in the Streets that Work Guidelines and would simply like to see them translated into code. Lena Seville commented that in the Guidelines, there is very little variation in recommended width for different street typologies. Mr. Ohlms felt that while the clear walk zone should be consistent across contexts, the sidewalk buffer zone should indeed increase as street use becomes more intense, and additional pedestrian amenities become desirable. Ms. Seville suggested that zero feet is never a good option for buffers. Carl Schwarz said that many of Charlottesville's existing neighborhood streets have sidewalks directly adjacent to travel lanes. Mr. Ohlms said that while this was true, the code should enforce desirable, rather than acceptable, conditions. He asked what the purpose of the code was, as vis-à-vis the Guidelines. Amanda Poncy clarified that the Streets that Work Guidelines serve as a basis for changes to the city code and zoning ordinance. City code will be enforced both for street design retrofits and newly constructed roads.

Peter Krebs showed the committee an image of a narrow Charlottesville street where the sidewalk did not have any buffer. He said that sometimes there is no room for a buffer. Mr. Ohlms responded that the city should ask for an ideal design; it can always grant exceptions when necessary. Jake Fox agreed, saying that developers tend to provide the minimum that is required, and therefore the minimum should be rigorous.

Mr. Ohlms asked how the City adjudicates situations when a sidewalk buffer is desired, but there is a conflict with a retaining wall or other obstacle. Ms. Poncy replied that such conflicts are usually resolved in the site review process; there is no separate technical advisory committee tasked with these decisions. She emphasized that BPAC is called to focus on big-picture issues, and to set goals for pedestrian and bicycle mobility, not to wordsmith code.

Carl Schwarz said that there had been considerable debate regarding the proper width of planting strips for street trees. Brian Carr said that on West Main Street, the wheel of his wheelchair often get mired in the street trees' planting soil, since not all the trees have grates. The sidewalk would be wide enough for him if the trees were removed. He asked whether this issue is being taken into consideration now that West Main streetscape project is moving forward. Jake Fox confirmed that it was; the sidewalks will be widened by several feet.

Mr. Carr said that city sidewalks remain too narrow in some places, especially on residential side streets. He asked what code dictates sidewalk widths and whether it is uniform across all zoning areas. Ms. Poncy said that NACTO requires a minimum of five feet everywhere, but that many older sidewalks are nonconforming. If a new project is built on a property with too-narrow sidewalks, the City typically asks the developer to bring them into compliance. Peter Ohlms remarked that encroachments like bushes can render even five-foot sidewalks inaccessible, and that such issues were regulated by a different City department, Property Maintenance.

Mr. Ohlms said that other localities have simply set six-foot minimums rather than regulate planting zone widths and other dimensions. As the Streets that Work Guidelines are now, the sidewalk design process is complex and involve negotiation. Lena Seville added that frontage and setback regulations tie into the issue.

### Bicycle Parking

A second code audit topic was bicycle parking requirements. Susan Elliott volunteered to take on this topic, but was not present. Jake Fox gave a brief introduction, saying that key issues included spacing, location, and minimum number of bike racks required.

Carl Schwarz said he wished the new bicycle parking requirements for West Main Street applied to whole city. Amanda Poncy said that the code currently singles out fraternities/sororities, dormitories, and multi-family developments for bike parking (See Charlottesville Code [Section 34-881](#)). Depending on the use type, space requirements are based on number of dwelling units or square footage. Jake Fox asked if there was a way to regulate bike parking specifically for student housing. Ruth Stornetta said that student housing is distinguished from multi-family housing because it is rented out by room. Therefore, the West Main Street regulations that apply to the Flats could conceivably be extended to student apartment buildings on 14<sup>th</sup> St and 15<sup>th</sup> St. Mr. Schwarz pointed out that applying the standard city-wide would place no burden on single-family homeowners or builders. Lena Seville said the only undesirable burden might be for senior or disabled persons' housing, and that the code should include an exception for them.

Amanda Poncy raised another issue, telling to the committee that the city currently requires either bike lockers (defined as a locked storage space reserved for bikes) or bike racks. But it is unclear if a developer wants to provide storage space within an individual unit, whether that satisfies the requirement. Ms. Stornetta said that the fire code for dormitories can make it difficult to store bikes in rooms. She regularly hear complaints from the UVa bike team. Members own \$6,000 bikes that they don't want to put leave on racks out of doors. A locked storage room on the ground floor would be preferable. Mr. Schwarz said that bike rooms will be built at Market Plaza and The UnCommon. Mr. Ohlms asked whether it would be useful to define three categories: covered bike parking (e.g. in a parking garage), outdoor racks, and bike room. Ms. Poncy said that the West Main Street zoning code uses the categories long-term and short-term bike parking.

### *5:50pm Bike & Ped Counters Update*

Claudia Elzey and Amanda Poncy gave a brief update on bike count data collected January through May on the Amtrak Bridge (West Main Street), which gives us a full year of data since installment. Counts have been down due to rainy weather; one of the counters also appears to be under-reporting. New pedestrian and bicycle counters have been delivered; next they will be installed at test locations. Lena Seville suggested posting QR codes on them so passers-by can access the data the counters produce. Jake Fox asked what the usefulness of the data would be. Amanda Poncy said that she had talked with Will Cockrell, a planner for the Thomas Jefferson District Planning Commission. A faculty member at Virginia Tech is investigating how this kind of data can generate a model for pedestrian travel demand.

### *5:30pm BPAC's Online Presence*

The committee discussed ways to make the Charlottesville bicycle and pedestrian website more functional, attractive, and accessible. Suggestions included:

- Providing a link to Chris Gist's bicycle blog:  
[www.safecyclingcharlottesville.wordpress.com](http://www.safecyclingcharlottesville.wordpress.com)
- Changing the subpage titled "directory" to "resources" and making sure that links are listed alphabetically
- Adding link connections on the page—not just in the side bar
- Advertising the link to [www.charlottesville.org/bikeped](http://www.charlottesville.org/bikeped) via stickers posted on bus stops and bicycle racks around town
- Providing a functional "Just Report It" link for accident reporting and right-of-way maintenance issues (<https://my.vdot.virginia.gov/>)
- Providing a link to rackspotter, a crowd-sourced bike rack map (<http://www.rackspotter.com/>)
- Moving the 1400 Rugby webpage so that it is listed with other transportation projects
- Adding colorful photos, a prominent "Get Involved" button, and a description of the benefits of participation, to attract new BPAC members

Jake Fox mentioned a time when he had been hit by a vehicle as a pedestrian. He reported the accident at the scene, but the threshold for filing a report was \$1500 in property damage or a hospital visit. Thus, there is no record that the collision occurred and no official reason to look for a solution. Amanda Poncy suggested invitation Charlottesville police officer Steve Upman back to a BPAC meeting to answer questions about the Charlottesville Police Department's accident reporting process. Mr. Schwarz remarked that it seemed as if respect for pedestrian crossings is decreasing. He has found himself waiting longer at crosswalks and having to dodge more cars. Mr. Carr seconded his observation, saying that he has noticed a huge change in drivers' attention as texting and other distractions have increased.

Scott Paisley asked whether it was true that in-road pedestrian flashers are no longer in favor. Amanda Poncy replied that yes, the University of Virginia has exchanged all of its in-road flashers to pedestrian-activated rapid-flashing beacons on installed on poles. The City followed suit on McIntire Road. In her experience, at that location, the beacons are proving much more effective. Lena Seville asked when the beacons are recommended. Ms. Poncy said that for now, the City abides by VDOT's recommendations, especially since beacons are more durable and economical. However, the City is still determining where around Downtown and elsewhere they are going to be installed. Committee members discussed other tools to make pedestrians safe, such as curb extensions, hourly "no turn on red" signs, targeted police enforcement for motorists failing to yield to pedestrians, and discontinuing slip lanes.

Brian Carr, who also sits on the ADA Advisory Committee, suggested that the two committees have some overlap and that it might be interesting to exchange opinions and thoughts. He asked for an annual or biennial joint meeting. Amanda Poncy said that this should be coordinated with Jim Herndon, especially since the ADA Advisory Committee meets during the daytime.

### *6:30pm Bike Access to the Ragged Mountain Natural Area*

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Peter Krebs, who had attended the recent meeting on visioning for the Ragged Mountain Natural Area (RMNA), summarized the alternatives proposed to the public. These alternatives will be vetted by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, then the Planning Commission, then City Council. The alternatives were to:

1. Remove all users from the park
2. Stick with the status quo: quiet enjoyment (no bikes or dogs. However, this option will likely expand to allow for joggers)
3. Allow bikes on the perimeter trail (This trail plan is now being revised by staff to allow more cross-contour trail opportunities)
4. Allow bikes on perimeter and dogs as well (whether dogs will be confined to the perimeter is uncertain)

Mr. Krebs said a significant problem is the lack of City/County coordination on access to a large new County park, Arrowhead Mills, which will feature a relatively permissive environment that allows for horses, dogs, bikes, and etc. Jake Fox commented that the list of options excludes a scenario in which everyone can go everywhere. Mr. Krebs said that this scenario is not on the table. Mr. Paisley suggested that BPAC should recommend one of the alternatives. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board meets June 15<sup>th</sup>, but BPAC can provide input later on to the Planning Commission. Mr. Paisley said that the argument for limiting access to the RMNA is to protect its serene natural character, but in fact, it is anything but a quiet, unadorned natural area. The park surrounds a manmade lake used for the City's water supply, and it borders Interstate 64. Visitors cannot even hear birds above the din of the interstate traffic.

Lena Seville asked, however, if the City had any other natural areas. Scott Paisley said no (\*note that Ivy Creek Natural Area is jointly owned by Charlottesville and Albemarle), but neither does it have any facilities for mountain bikers. While there are county parks with mountain bike trails, they cannot be accessed without a car.

Peter Krebs cautioned that compromise among stakeholders needs to be reached. Scott Paisley remarked that he has never heard of an accident at Walnut Creek in which bicyclists hurt pedestrians. Ruth Stornetta said, though, that she had heard of conflicts at Observatory Hill from both parties, due to its congested nature.

Lena Sevilla asked if grease from bike chains could have a negative environmental impact on the reservoir. Mr. Paisley replied that it was advisable not to ride when trails are wet. However, the grease that comes off bicycle chains is tiny compared to the emissions from the nearby highway, and even to dog droppings.

Peter Krebs proposed a possible compromise: bicyclists are allowed on the least-hiked trails (furthest from the access point), in addition to a trail circling the perimeter. Because it takes one hour to walk just a third of the way around the reservoir, there will be little bike-ped interaction if bikes are limited to the far side of the park.

Mr. Paisley liked the idea and proposed drafting a statement to that effect. Ms. Seville emphasized the need to be considerate of pedestrians. Ruth Stornetta asked that the statement highlight the benefits of “separate enjoyment,” i.e. dedicated trails for each user group. Jake Fox said that one problem with this compromise is that allowing any bicyclists, no matter where, will spook animals. Ms. Stornetta replied that citizens seeking a truly natural area will not find it at Ragged Mountain even today, when bikes are prohibited.

Lena Seville expressed discomfort with weighing in so late in the planning process. Ruth Stornetta said that she and Mr. Paisley have been following the issue, and that as BPAC represents the bicycling and pedestrian communities, it needs to find a compromise and take a strong stance. Ms. Seville suggested that BPAC has greater influence with the Planning Commission and aiming for a statement directed at that body would allow more time for drafting. Mr. Paisley volunteered to draft the statement, with input from the committee to be provided via email.

#### *6:45pm Update on Crosswalks and Paving Projects—Amanda Poncy*

Amanda Poncy gave a brief overview of the status of current crosswalk painting and paving priorities. Park Street, which has shared lane markings, is awaiting a re-paving, as are Sunset and Jefferson Streets. A new list of projects has not yet been provided for paving or crosswalk projects. The Public Works department has an ambitious program and is somewhat behind schedule. When the new list of paving projects is released, BPAC will review it and find opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian facilities improvement. Market Street is going to be repaved as well with extra money from a different fund, so Toole Design Group is drawing up plans for climbing lanes there.

#### *7:05pm Updates from Committee Members*

Amanda Poncy noted that the Planning Commission’s public hearing for Streets that Work is scheduled for June 14<sup>th</sup>. Lena Seville asked that BPAC discuss the responsibilities of its representatives to other committees and boards at a future meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 7:07pm.

### **Upcoming Events**

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| June 14, 5:30PM: | Streets that Work Guidelines Public Hearing, Planning Commission |
| June 15, 3-4PM:  | APBP Webinar—“Economic Impacts of Street Design Decisions”       |
| June 16, 2PM:    | America Walks Webinar—“Why Walk and Why Walkability?”            |
| July 14, 5-7PM:  | Bike/Ped Advisory Committee Meeting                              |
| July 20, 3-4PM:  | APBP Wbinar—“Performance Measures to Evaluate New Practices”     |