

Meeting Minutes – Approved
Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission

Date: Tuesday August, 15, 2006

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: City Council Chambers, City of Urbana, 400 S. Vine Street, Urbana, IL

Members Present: Brandon Bowersox, Gary Engelgau, Susan Jones, Rick Bernotas, Sheldon Katz, Dana Mancuso, Gary Biehl, Gary Cziko, Bruce Meissner

Staff Members Present: Bill Gray, Jennifer Selby

Others: Susan Chavarria, Champaign County Regional Planning

Absent: Audrey Ishii, Alexander Herder, Barak Rosenshine

MINUTES

I. Call to Order

Brandon Bowersox called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Roll call was taken by verbal record and a quorum was present.

III. Approval of Minutes

Motion was made by Gary Cziko and seconded by Susan Jones to approve the July 18, 2006 minutes. Upon voice vote the motion carried unanimously.

IV. Presentation of Champaign County Greenway and Trails Plan by Susan Chavarria, Transportation Planner Champaign County Regional Planning Commission

The current G&T Plan is an updated plan from the 1999 Naturesway (Natureways?) Bikeways and Trails Plan. It is a plan for greenways and trails, which includes shared paths and bicycles trails as well as other types of facilities that will be developed in Champaign County over the next 20 years.

The Greenways and Trails Committee brings together a variety of interest groups at the Regional level. There are 14 different agencies that participate in the group. The purpose of the G&T plan is to foster interagency cooperation, to identify needs, issues, and opportunities for the greenways and trails in our area. The G&T Committee looks at the local greenways and trails as a whole system rather than individual pieces. The goal theme is connectivity – the committee sees a lot of missing links and one of the main goals is to fill those gaps.

In order for the committee to prioritize projects, each contributing agency will submit a list of projects that they believe could be implemented over the next 20 years. CCRPC staff develops the project prioritization checklist that highlights each project's ability to fulfill the greenways and trails plans goals and objectives.

The Urbana Park District submitted ten projects and the City of Urbana submitted twenty-one projects, for a total of thirty-one projects in Urbana. The projects proposed about 28 miles of path – 9 miles within or connecting to Urbana parks and about 19 miles that would be shared use paths or bike paths along roadway or in subdivisions. Implementation is considered successful if all of the goals and objectives and projects outlined in the plan are completed within the next 20 years.

The committee has maps as an important aspect of the plan. The maps help educate residents and coordinate efforts and to give visualization techniques so that people can see what needs to be implemented and what is available in the existing system.

There is currently no consistent funding for implementation of construction and also for the conceptual side of the plan. Member agencies contribute to keep the plan moving forward. The next steps include: 1) seek funding for implementation; 2) continue completing short-term benchmarks outlined in the plan; and 3) continue printing and updating the folding maps for distribution. 3,500 maps were printed this year and all but 1,000 of them have been distributed since June.

The committee has encountered a few issues with the Greenways and Trails Plan, including the fact that some participating agencies might not want to continue to financially participate in the implementation. Secondly, there is no funding specifically set aside for constructing bike and shared use facilities in our communities.

The Urbana Bicyclist and Pedestrian Advisory Commission is setting an example as it is the first one in the area. The City of Urbana is a force as being a leader in setting an example in implementing new path mileage from the Greenways and Trails plan.

For further information please go to: Greenways and Trails Website:
<http://www.ccrpc.org> *under Planning>Transportation>Greenways*

Brandon Bowersox opened the floor for questions. Gary Cziko asked Susan Chavarria for the definition of a greenway and a trail. Susan Chavarria said this is a broad term the committee uses for shared use paths, nature and hiking trails. A greenway is considered an open piece of land like parks.

Brandon Bowersox asked Susan Chavarria what the plans are for the Goodwin Street path and the signs. Susan Chavarria said that one of the committee's tasks is to develop a standard signing and marking system for Champaign County so that the City of Urbana and other agencies can purchase and erect those signs. Brandon Bowersox suggested that Gary Cziko give some creative suggestions for the paths that are commuter bike paths. It may be possible to mark the commuter routes differently on the map (either color coding or signing) so that people that just want commuter routes can look at the map and quickly identify the path they want. Susan Jones added that the signage and communication is the key. She added that there has to be a creative way to communicate the routes to the users and to the public. Further, the map idea is important for the potential user to see the different routes. Planning is important and so is connectivity.

Rick Bernotas asked about the funding coming in from the Federal Government that Susan Chavarria had mentioned. He does not know the numbers, but thought the expectation for federal grants are expected to be a considerable portion of the development of these plans. He wondered how that affects the designs and the types of rules that we come up with locally. Do the federal dollars affect the design and implementation of the trails and will this diminish our input? Susan Chavarria said the federal funding is filtered thru the State. Funds that come through the State have to follow the design manual of IDOT and that puts things up to almost highway specifications in terms of surface material and widths. It can make things more expensive rather than if it was locally funded. The vast majority of the funding comes thru non-local sources for the paths. Rick then asked if there was more funding coming from local sources would that substantially increase our control over on how these things are implemented. Bill Gray said probably not. When these projects are getting done we will get at least 50% or sometimes 80% non-local, non-city funding. That is the driver that allows us to put the miles of paths in that we are doing. If this was 100% of local funding there would be far less bike paths or multi-use/shared use paths being built. Bill Gray mentioned if we received \$1.00 and 99 cents of that was federal funding we would have to go with federal specifications.

V. Safe School Walking Route Maps

Susan Chavarria presented a slide show about the safe school walking route maps. These maps provide safety based on transportation infrastructure availability for Champaign-Urbana schools. The maps were created by transportation engineers and planners and have been around for 10-15 years. They were put together with input from crossing guards, PTA members and police representatives. In 2003 they created a new methodology for determining the safety of sidewalks and ways to schools. These routes are safer in terms of the transportation infrastructure. These maps are used to educate children about safe travel and to suggest ways to parents and teachers to help travel safely. The considerations taken into account include: traffic control devices, sidewalk availability, crosswalks, pedestrian signage, and adult crossing guards at the intersections, traffic volumes and posted speed limits.

One issue with this program is lack of interest from the schools. There is no student participation in making the maps so the schools don't really have a vested interest in the program. Ideally CUUATS would like the students to make their own maps and walk with their parents to determine the safest route from their house to their location. Another issue is that with all of the other materials to cover in class, there is not a lot of time in the school day to discuss this item.

The next step would be to have CUUATS make changes as requested by public works department, schools and school districts. CUUATS would like to do a comprehensive review about every two years and try to get the students involved.

Gary Cziko asked about safe bike routes. Susan Chavarria said that students who ride bikes to school tend to use sidewalks. (After the meeting, BPAC staff investigated children riding bikes on sidewalks. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration states that "Children less than 10 years old are not mature enough to make the decisions necessary to safely ride in the street. Children less than 10 years old are better off riding on the sidewalk." Furthermore, per the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center "Because kid's cognitive abilities – skills necessary to safely handle complex traffic situations – are still developing, children ages 5-8 are advised not to bicycle on busy streets or major arterials. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that children in this age group stick to cycling on the sidewalk only.")

Dana Mancuso suggested asking the PTAs to distribute the maps. Susan Chavarria said the Urbana PTA did the footwork and the inventory of all the streets, but that CUUATS did not use the PTAs for distribution of the maps. Susan did agree that it was a good idea. Brandon Bowersox wondered if we could go to a higher level within the school districts and perhaps have the safe routes as part of an in-service day where they would be focusing on the importance of this issue. Gary Engelgau wondered if the schools had drop off programs in the school districts and the committee agreed that they do. He believes with that system in place we are already promoting the idea of dropping the students off via car rather than promoting the idea of walking to school.

Sheldon Katz then told the committee about International Walk to School Day to be held on October 4, 2006. He distributed flyers that discuss what the day promotes, such as physical activity, teaching safe walking skills to children and where improvements can be made. Sheldon posed the question if this commission would be willing to co-sponsor this event – which means lending our name as a group who thinks that Walk to School Day is an important event in our community and something that we would like to encourage by putting our name as a sponsor. The group can invest whatever energies we care to in the project. Susan Chavarria said the program depends a lot on people going to the schools that day and walking with the kids and getting important faces out there to make the kids feel like they are really participating in something that is great and something they will do on a daily basis. Brandon mentioned that he helped out last year and had a lot of fun. He was able to talk to some parents and kids. Brandon really encouraged the commission to get involved. Gary Cziko commented that he has read that in Davis, California there are no buses for the schools. The reason, he said was because all the students are walking and biking because of the nice facilities they have there. Rick Bernotas added that Walk to School Day is an important event at it has a high impact in getting kids involved. He said

growing up in the Chicago area, they had bike rodeos where for a whole day the organizations would have competitions and information that went on the whole day about riding your bike safely and how you would ride your bike to school. He thought the competitive aspect when he was a kid made a big impression on him and wondered if this was something we could work on completing with the school district. Brandon Bowersox asked Bill Gray what we can do as a city to make this work on a bigger scale. Bill Gray said he visualizes it as something that we do with recycling awareness in the classroom environment. We do have staff that can make brief presentations to tie into bicycle safety - there are experts on this commission that could be part of that too. The school district has been supportive with presentations in the past. Sheldon Katz asked to move this body to go on record as being a co-sponsor of the C-U Walk to School day; Susan Jones seconded the motion. Brandon Bowersox added the comment that we should absolutely help. He would like to have Sheldon Katz keep us involved in knowing what is needed from the commission – i.e. contact the schools, pass out flyers, etc.

VI. Bicycle Safety Flyer

A copy of the flyer was included in the packet of information. Bill Gray thought it was appropriate to add this to the agenda as it was last updated in 2000 and it needs to be updated again with this commission. We would like to convey the message of traveling safely with your bicycle, where to park it and how to get through downtown safely. Susan Jones suggested that on the flyer we say “bicycle riding is only permitted on the streets in this area” to go before the idea of “bicyclist are asked to walk their bicycles on the sidewalk in downtown.” Gary Cziko suggested we have signs in the street saying to motorists “share the road with bicyclists” or “bicyclists are welcome.” Sheldon Katz asked Bill Gray about diagonal crossing that was discussed on the flyer. He mentioned at Green Street and Wright Street you are forced to go diagonally; there is not enough time to cross correctly. Gary Biehl said this was a matter of education. The CATS group is trying to make some improvements to make campus safety –one is the “All Stop at Green Street and Wright Street”. Not everyone understands that you can’t cross diagonally. Bill Gray said that with this intersection being the exception, we want people to not cross diagonally. Dana Mancuso suggested for distribution purposes for the flyer she mentioned UPTV, and to read the flyer on radio station AM-530.

VII. Downtown Bike Riding Signage

Bill Gray gave a brief history of this topic. In the past there have been bicyclist and pedestrian accidents that have occurred. A few years ago a lady was stepping out of a business and had her arm or hand broken when a bicyclist hit her. At that time there was a large push to sign the sidewalks downtown. Public Works’ first step was to stencil “Walk Your Bikes” on the sidewalks at the ramps/intersection. When the crews began to paint the words on the ramps, the City received phone calls that said it looked bad and wondered what we were doing. At that point, the project was immediately halted and never resumed.

Meanwhile, the issue of the problem is still there. We have heard from a business owner downtown that she witnesses several near misses on a daily basis. Bill Gray explained that we do not need to pass an ordinance prohibiting riding bikes on downtown sidewalks - there is already one in place, Sec 23-144. We have done a poor job communicating to bicyclists that they should not be riding their bicycle on the sidewalks downtown.

Examples of signs were passed around to the group. Bill noted that there is a universal “Do Not Ride Your Bike” sign, however he did not think we want to convey that message. Instead, he thought it better to send a more proactive message to bicyclist stating it is okay to be here, but walk your bike while you are downtown and park your bike using one of the bike parking areas to go to a business. The example signs had two different messages – “Walk Your Bike” and “Walk Your Bike on Downtown Sidewalks”. Both signs were provided in black on white and white on black. The commission was asked to provide their opinion on the better sign message and better color combination.

The commission was also asked to provide an opinion about placement of the signs. Each member was given a color aerial photo that showed two different placement options. Option One showed the placement on the outer perimeter of downtown (Illinois/Vine/University/Cedar). Option Two showed the placement around the internal perimeter of downtown (Green/Vine/Griggs/Cedar).

Rick Bernotas said that bicyclist can ride their bikes downtown and then park it and then walk to their destination.

Gary Cziko wondered what the different criteria are for sidewalks where the City does not want bicycles and sidewalks where riding bicycles is encouraged. Bill Gray said it is the width of the sidewalk – it needs to be at least eight feet wide to be considered a shared-use path. The City is encouraging more outside seating downtown and that is occupying more of the sidewalks. As a general rule, the City encourages multi-modes if the sidewalk is greater than eight feet wide. However, the ability to ride a bike on the sidewalk is a function of volume and location.

Gary Biehl asked Bill Gray when the ordinance prohibiting bicycles on downtown sidewalks was passed and asked if there was a discussion on how the public would be educated and how (or if) enforcement would occur. The University has this problem on campus. UIUC has some streets the bicyclists should avoid, but UIUC does not have the manpower to enforce it. Bill Gray said the ordinance was passed a long time ago; it is logical that there is an education and enforcement to the rule. The enforcement component can be there, but without the signage to at least alert the bicyclists that you are not supposed to ride there, the meter or parking people are not going to be able to say something to them. Bill thinks enforcement will come from the signage. The education component is tricky. The City can alert people that continually ride bikes downtown possible using UPTV. Gary Biehl said the other problem they have on campus is roller blades and skateboards. It was decided that roller blades and skateboards, persons in wheelchairs and/or people using the shoes with wheels all fall under the umbrella of pedestrian and bicyclist and that we should include all of these modes in what we consider as we make recommendations.

Gary Engelgau thought we should go with placement Option Two. He also noted that the second point in the ordinance refers to the “central business district” and we talk about “Downtown Urbana”. It’s possible that some terminology might need to be changed to clarify the boundaries.

Brandon Bowersox likes placement Option 2 because these locations are closer to the places where the conflicts happen.

Rick Bernotas mentioned that the MTD buses have bike racks on them and thought it would be a good idea to put the signage where people are taking the bikes off the buses.

Susan Jones preferred the “Walk Your Bike on Downtown Sidewalks” sign. She liked the idea of having more information.

Sheldon Katz said that it might be harder to see the longer version with the white on black while traveling at a high rate of speed,. He thought the black on white would show up well though.

Gary Biehl prefers the black on white because that is typical of advisory signs in the MUTCD. He thinks the least amount of wording the better. He noted that sometimes you will see a symbol of a bicycle as well, but that it would probably increase the price of the sign.

Dana Mancuso wondered about colors - could a warning color be used?

Bill Gray said that the downtown theme is black and white and that is why that color scheme was chosen. He said the signs will be mounted in sidewalk areas, away from the streets. They will be angled so a bicyclist can see it on the sidewalk, near the intersection, fixed to street light pole.

This was the end of regular agenda items. Brandon Bowersox wanted to go over announcements.

VIII. Announcements

Gary Cziko distributed copies of portions of the AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities. The guide talks about problems with shared use paths that are along roads. Gary marked-up specific items of interest on the handout.

Brandon Bowersox circulated an information card from the Leagues of Illinois Bicyclists, the Illinois Bike Laws, the Illinois Bicycle Rules of the Road from the Secretary of States office, a Safe Bicycling in Illinois guide and a pamphlet on how to use cross walk signals safely.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Theresa Hoffman
Recording Secretary