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MINUTES BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLAN ADVISORY GROUP July 26, 2023 – 3:45 p.m.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Advisory Group meeting was held on Monday, July 26, 2023. The meeting was called to order at 3:49 p.m. by Chairman Craig Niedermaier.

Members Present:

Craig Niedermaier
Steve Sanders
Peggy Reins
Brian Lee

Staff Present:

Andrew Vitale, Senior GIS Coordinator
Nathan Bruemmer, Staff Liaison
Tim O'Brien, Village Engineer
George Alexopoulos, Commander, Police Department
Bob Rado, Civil Engineer II

Also Present:

Ramon Prieto, Resident
Jack Mayer, Resident

Call to Order

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Niedermaier made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 26, 2023. Group Member Brian Lee seconded the motion. On voice vote all concurred.

New Business

I. Police Accidents Report

Village Planner Nathan Bruemmer stated that Commander Alexopoulos was unsure if he would be able to make the meeting, but that he had relayed that there have been no pedestrian or bicyclist involved accidents since the previous meeting.

II. Engineering Updates

Village Engineer Tim O'Brien provided the following updates on projects throughout the village: Gross Point and Touhy intersection improvements will hopefully start in August. Cleveland and Caldwell plans are 100%, AT&T is coming out to see if they have to do any relocations. If they don't, the project will go out to bid. IDOT is still reviewing Cleveland and Waukegan. The Bunker Hill Trail connection construction

is continuing until it's complete – there is just some sign and decorative stuff to complete. Oakton Stage 1 west of Lehigh - they said they will have the path all the way to Niles West done by the start of school which is late August. Chairman Niedermaier asked at Touhy and Gross Point, where are sidewalks going exactly? Mr. O'Brien said on the north side of Touhy between Caldwell and Gross Point we're doing a 10' mixed use path. Bob Rado, Civil Engineer II, added that the south side of the street will be sidewalk. Chairman Niedermaier noted that we're really eating into the Forest Preserve Triangle over there – is the Forest Preserve determined to keep what's left? Mr. O'Brien nodded. He asked when that project would be finished? Mr. O'Brien said that won't be finished until next year. Mr. Rado added that the Touhy bridge project will be done separately by IDOT, hopefully right after the Village's project is finished. There was some further talk about the status of the Waukegan and Cleveland project.

III. Shermer Outreach and Walk and Roll

Mr. Bruemmer said this agenda item is for open discussion regarding doing some outreach for the Shermer Road project at the upcoming Walk and Roll event. The Police Department has secured us a table. Mr. O'Brien shared some materials he made for the outreach. He has reserved a space at the Senior Center for September 6th for the official open house, and we can use the same materials at the Walk and Roll.

Niles Resident Jack Mayer asked if someone could give him a synopsis of what the proposed project is. Mr. O'Brien said that Shermer Road is in bad shape, and we got some funding from the Federal Government for safety improvements. The Village is looking to rehabilitate the roadway, and increase bicycle connectivity and pedestrian safety throughout town. The Village is proposing to add a landscaped median as well as add bike lanes down the street. Mr. Mayer asked how much would be taken and how much wider the street would be made. Mr. O'Brien said none of the diagonal parking will be taken. Chairman Niedermaier explained the background of the project further and the scope of the work. He highlighted the benefits of the median as far as beautification and explained how narrowing roads has been proven to make drivers slow down. Mr. Mayer asked how snow plows would be affected by a planter. Chairman Niedermaier pointed out that the same department designing the road is the one responsible for plowing it, so they will make sure the plows can fit. Mr. Mayer raised his concerns about backing out of the diagonal spaces on the street if there's a median that doesn't allow cars to veer out of the way. He doesn't think the area is big enough. Mr. O'Brien said we're in the preliminary design stage and the purpose of the open house is to facilitate feedback from the community. Mr. O'Brien said they also might considering routing the bike path onto the sidewalk for the diagonal parking portions.

Group Member Reins recommended that we have a poster about the Sep. 6 meeting at the Walk and Roll. The posters will have a QR code linking to the project website. Chairman Niedermaier also suggested showing real world examples of similar projects. Group Member Reins told Mr. Mayer we want to hear from residents and we want people to feel reassured their voices will be heard. Mr. Mayer said there are a lot of walkers in the area, but no real problems with people crossing the street. The group strategized what the approach would be for the open house. Mr. Bruemmer said he would have a table set up at the Walk and Roll and invited any other BPAG members to attend. Mr. O'Brien shared that we received some Invest in Cook funds for the design and engineering for this project.

IV. Cycling without Age

Group Member Steve Sanders shared that he has been in touch with the Buehler Foundation, who seem very positive towards funding the purchase of a Cycling without Age bike and repairs for permanent use by the Village. They asked Mr. Sanders to do some research to find a shop that can fix the bike, and send them a proposal with the full cost of the bike, shipping and how much repairs cost. They'd like the proposal to list out how the program would be staffed, and how to ensure it would stay operation should Steve not be involved. The Buehler Foundation is a family foundation that funds a lot of area projects that benefit senior citizens. The Cycling without Age program would be right up their alley.

Group Member Reins said one thing that would need to be answered would be the staffing and insurance question. Chairman Niedermaier felt that it could be folded under the Senior Center's insurance but he's not sure. Mr. Bruemmer said, assuming there is support from the BPAG for the program, the next steps would be to have a phone call with the Senior Center and other Village Staff to see if they are interested. Group Member Reins said it sounds like the foundation is interested in supporting the capital for the project, but it then would require an actual program. Organizing volunteers for a one week period is not difficult, but staffing and stewarding a full time program is a higher lift. Mr. Sanders said running it through the Senior Center is basically a prerequisite for getting the grant. Chairman Niedermaier said he could see applications for the bike at some of our Village events as well. He also suggested utilizing different routes to build out the program.

Mr. Sanders shared that he's doing a bicycle ride on August 12 at 9:00 AM, going from unincorporated Maine Township to the library.

V. Standing Meeting Time

Group Member Lee asked if there's any appetite to move the meetings to 4:00 PM as he's been struggling with it being in the business day at 3:00. Chairman Niedermaier said he's fine with 4:00 as long as he knows ahead of time. Group Member Sanders said Mondays are horrible for him right now but will be better once school starts. The group agreed they would try for 4:00 for the next meeting.

Comments from the Public

There were none.

Other Discussion

Group Member Reins shared that our friends at Active Transportation Alliance are seeking input from municipal staff about common barriers municipalities face when trying to advance walking, biking and transit projects.

Group Member Reins asked the BPAG to do whatever it is we can do to help our school partners with the Safe Routes to School grant program. She knows the Teen Center would like to have some way to improve safety for students walking to their new location. She said another thing that makes this an attractive opportunity is that there is no match requirement. The one thing that is difficult is they need the school to do all the administrative work associated with applying for the grant.

Chairman Niedermaier brought up that at the last Village Board meeting, the Board approved an agenda item allowing Andy Frain to take over the management of all crossing guard responsibilities. All current Niles crossing guards can re-apply through Andy Frain, and Andy Frain would prefer to have them back. This saves the Village a lot of money. Group Member Reins said there is some concern about it in the community, specifically the privatization of formerly public services, especially without full information disclosed to the public. She asked if the BPAG's charge is to improve the environment for walking and bicycling, how did this not come in front of our committee? Chairman Niedermaier said this went through the Public Safety Committee. He said he's been told there is no cut down in the number of crossing guards, and the cost saving is significant. Group Member Reins said that the minutes from the meeting say that Andy Frain will try to reduce the number of crossings. Reducing the number of crossings likely means the reduction of crossing guards, which is antithetical to safety.

Mr. Bruemmer asked how would this item get on the BPAG agenda in the first place unless someone who knows suggests we discuss it? Group Member Reins said we have a Police representative on this committee. She would like to have an increased level of participation from the Police on this committee. Chairman Niedermaier said it falls in this committee's purview as well as that of the Public Safety Committee. They need to understand that this falls in our purview - a lot. There was continued discussion about the crossing guard issue, outsourcing, and keeping the community and the committee involved in these discussions.

Mr. Bruemmer shared that a utility box on the North Branch Trail, just north of Harts Rd, has been painted with a mural, facilitated by the Arts and Culture Committee.

Resident Ramon Prieto talked about opportunities for residents to voice their concerns about how people traverse local neighborhoods, specifically to IDOT so they can hear from the citizenry. He also talked about changing the culture of how we engage with the Police Department. Chairman Niedermaier shared his take on how to approach IDOT, noting that we need to strategize what the right project when using political pressure. He feels IDOT also needs to understand that we as a Village are holding a big burden as far as having all of our major roads under someone else's jurisdiction.

Next Meeting

September 18, 2023

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Chairman Niedermaier, seconded by Group Member reins; all concurred and the meeting adjourned at 5:15 PM.

Nathan Bruemmer
Staff Liaison