

AD HOC PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE MASTER PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

City of Alexandria | Department of Transportation & Environmental Services

Wednesday, June 25th, 2014 | 7:00-9:00 pm

Alexandria City Hall, Room 1101 (Sister Cities) | 301 King Street

Participants

- Ad Hoc Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) Members:
 - Jennifer Hovis, Committee Chair, Community Representative
 - Carol Abrams, Community Representative
 - Scott Anderson, Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) Representative
 - Mollie Danforth, Commission on Persons with Disabilities
 - John Fennell, Design Professional Representative
 - Dr. Ayne Furman, Community Representative
 - Dr. Dan Kulund, Commission on Aging
 - Kevin Posey, Transportation Commission designee
 - William Schuyler, Traffic and Parking Board
 - Pablo Torres, Community Representative
 - Stephen Wenderoth, Community Representative

- City of Alexandria:
 - Richard Baier, Transportation and Environmental Services
 - Steve Sindiong, Transportation and Environmental Services
 - Carrie Sanders, Transportation and Environmental Services
 - Carrie Beach, Planning and Zoning
 - Dana Wedeles, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities

- Consultant Team:
 - RJ Eldridge, Toole Design Group
 - Jennifer Toole, Toole Design Group
 - Alia Anderson, Toole Design Group
 - Iain Banks, Nelson\Nygaard

- Members of the public

Welcome and Introductions

- During Advisory Committee member introductions, members shared reasons for participating:
 - Improve access for older people
 - Provide safe and comfortable access to the streets
 - Increase facility safety
 - Improve safety for children
 - Improve sidewalks safety for pedestrians
 - Ensure ongoing welfare of the community
 - Improve conditions for people with all types of disabilities

- The Advisory Committee submitted comments about priorities for the plan process.

- Ground Rules were presented. The goal is to maintain a high level of respectful discourse. Members were asked to always silence cell phones.
- An overview/introduction to the project was provided:
 - Council has recently approved several projects that reaffirm their support for bicycle and pedestrian issues
 - Prioritization of projects is very important, as is getting clarity on design approaches
 - The City had a Transportation Master Plan in 1980s, amended in 1999, significantly revised in 2008. This project will build on those and other past efforts.

Project Background

- Health and transportation patterns have changed significantly over the past 15-20 years; Average driving (vehicle miles traveled) peaked in 2007.
- Millennials (persons aged 16-34) are driving much less and taking transit, bicycling and walking more.
- People over age 65 increasingly want to live in walkable areas with transportation options
- Pedestrians want continuous routes, slower speeds and separation from traffic. Crossings and access to destinations are important.
 - A comment was made that the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act requires at least 5 foot sidewalks. Some people (including disabled people) won't ever walk anywhere – there is a need to include options to drive and access for motorized wheelchairs.
- There are a range types of bicyclists, from “strong and fearless” to “interested but concerned.” Different types of facilities appeal to different types of riders. The goal is to create a range of facility types, so that there is something for everyone.
 - A comment was made that there is a need to work with Alexandria Public Schools and private schools, such as St. Stephens to help reduce parent driving to drop off / pick up their students at school.
 - A comment was made that concerns about kidnapping have risen, causing people to not want their kids to walk to school.

Project Vision / Objectives

- The Pedestrian/Bicycle Master Plan Process will include policies, programs, infrastructure, and implementation elements.
- The Complete Streets Design Guidelines will have a focus on safety for all users. Guidelines will incorporate the City's green streets policy, which focuses on maximizing water/runoff retention.
- The 2008 Pedestrian and Bicycle Mobility Plan was very data-intensive and resulted in a comprehensive list of recommendations. This updated plan will build off of that effort. It was recommended that the committee should familiarize themselves with the 2008 Ped/Bike Mobility Plan, the Complete Streets Policy and the City Comprehensive Master Plan.

Project Scope of Work

- This project has two parallel efforts: Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, and the Complete Streets Design Guidelines. The public will provide input primarily for the Master Plan but that input will also inform the Complete Streets Design Guidelines. The Complete Streets Design Guidelines will be more staff-driven because it is primarily a

technical, working document; however, the consultants will provide updates to the Advisory Committee as the Guidelines are developed.

- Examples of Complete Streets Design Guidelines from Boston and St. Paul, as well as a national example, were distributed.
- A comment was made asking whether there was research on crash data impacts of various design treatments on pedestrian and bicyclist accidents and injuries. There was a request that national research on safety be distributed. It was noted that the City has a real-time system for tracking accidents but that improvements could be made. It was also noted that accident rates are important but that many factors need to be considered when planning and selecting designs for pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- A comment was made that personal safety, particularly on trails and particularly for women, is important and needs to be incorporated in this plan.

Draft Civic Engagement Plan

- Civic Engagement is an extremely important part of this project.
- The City adopted a Civic Engagement Framework (What's Next Alexandria?) and Handbook; This project will incorporate by the principles of that Handbook.
- Everyone was asked to complete a meeting evaluation form at the end of this meeting – these will be part of every meeting.
- The location of Advisory Committee meetings will move throughout the City. In some cases, meetings may include an optional walking tour with the Committee and the public (held before the meeting).
- A comment was made that bus service after 8pm is infrequent and thus, some meeting locations would be difficult to reach. The City agreed and mentioned that this would be taken into consideration – transit access is important for these meetings.
- There will be an online interactive map as part of this project – the public will be invited to provide comments on places they walk/ride, want to walk/ride, issues/barriers, etc. The map will be available for two months, aiming to launch toward late July.
- A comment was made that alot of committees are on break over August.
- A question was made asking whether you can screen interactive map users from other states (e.g. hackers). The response was yes –those comments can be screened.
- A question was raised about the ability to make the online map usable by people with visual disabilities. The City will look into this issue further to consider potential ways to address outreach to those with visual disabilities.
- The plan may also include a “Better Block” event. These are designed to test new facility types or new street designs on a short-term basis in an area with a lot of potential. These events allow people to experience a design in a “pilot” mode – to test is and feel it out.
- A comment was made in support of the walkabouts before Advisory Committee meetings, suggesting the Van Dorn metro station area.
- A comment was also made that using the City website, eNews, and Twitter feed may not take full advantage of internet outreach. Condo associations, organized bike groups, neighborhood association and listserves should all be used. It was noted that private condo buildings don't typically allow the City to post fliers, post to the listserves, etc.
- A comment was made that the outreach needs to be decentralized and the Advisory Committee plays a strong role to spread the word, post to various blogs, and “make it viral.”
- A comment was made that this committee needs geographic distribution/diversity.

- A comment was made that the City needs to reach out to National Parks as part of this project, specifically related to the Mt. Vernon Trail and Washington Street.
- A comment was made that the committee was not consulted about a recent project that was halted without input from this committee. A response was provided that the project (Royal Street bicycle facility) is not going to advance as a standalone project; however, if that project gets elevated by this committee or through the course of this project, it potentially could be explored further.
- A comment was made that an additional role of the committee is to help improve public understanding of specific ped/bike projects and dispel misinformation.
- A comment was made that the minority representation on the Committee appears to be minimal. Lower income communities and minority communities need targeted engagement. A response was provided that all materials would be translated in Spanish, moving meeting locations would help with involvement from different neighborhoods, and that transit centers and schools are places to reach broad cross-section of the community. For the Transportation Master Plan, the City went to several churches, farmers markets and moved meetings around to target various groups.
- A comment was made about interaction between this project and other, ongoing City projects. How can this project coordinate with other projects like the West End Transitway Project? The response was that, in the case of the West End Transit Project, the Complete Streets Design Guidelines will provide a framework for specific design treatments that would apply to the West End Transit right-of-way.

Project Schedule

- The project is anticipated to be approximately 19-months
- Tentative date for next Advisory Committee meeting: September 25 (*Due to the Rosh Hashanah holiday , alternate dates, including October 1 and 8 were discussed)
- Tentative date for first public meeting: September 23

General Discussion (Advisory Committee)

- What is the most important thing that you want to accomplish through this project?
 - Lay the framework for future decisions so that each individual project is not having the same challenges each time.
 - Develop concrete recommendations for specific places.
 - Address the worst places in the city for pedestrians.
 - Develop/plan facilities that people will actually use. If you build a system that people don't want, they won't use it.
 - Demonstrate concrete evidence of decreased driving and increased walking/biking.
 - Include exceptions for vehicle use for people with disabilities, improve conditions for motorized wheelchairs, and address bikes on the sidewalk and conflicts at right turns. Fundamentally, need to remember and address the needs of all users.
 - Improve accessibility to the Van Dorn metrorail station for pedestrians and bicycles. Plan for all the residential growth coming to the West End. If the Landmark Mall site redevelops in the future, will we be able to walk and bike to that site? Improve connectivity between the West End and Old Town.
 - Improve active transportation connections beyond the city borders.
 - Connect people to transit and improve safety for people in wheelchairs. At a higher level, catch up with demographic changes that are already happening in the city.

- Make the sidewalk safe. Conflicts between pedestrians and bicyclists on sidewalks is an issue.
- Generate specific recommendations for specific locations. Reach consensus on a few project priorities.
- Link the parks, following the Olmstead Emerald Necklace concept, promote Safe Routes to Parks. Remember that “paint is cheap” – consider painting the streets green.

General Discussion (Public)

- A lot of minorities use bicycles and walk, even in busy areas and under poor street conditions, and it works fine. Commuter cyclists riding through these areas quickly create a safety hazard. In some places, people are already walking and riding a lot, even under unideal conditions.
- Need to separate through-traffic bicycle riders on the Mt. Vernon trail and rethink how Washington Avenue can service the traffic in that area. There are signs asking people not to ride on boardwalks but people don’t comply. There are lots of trail users who have strollers, walk dogs, and more development is coming in the area east of Washington Street on the Mt. Vernon Trail. There are lots of conflicts between users.
- This committee and the community need to agree on a set of measurements to track progress objectively over time. Need a road map to get to the platinum-level for League of American Bicyclists Bicycle-Friendly Community Status. Need a road map for progress on specific improvements.
- The Advisory Committee needs parameters for going forward related to “hot spots” and fixing the bad places. This is very important and should be the priority of this process – fix the worst places rather than re-doing planning processes. Need to work with schools to develop routes for children to walk to school. This can change behavior and perspective on how you move around a community. There are many nonprofit organizations that would be willing to share their listserves with this process, to help get the word out about this process.

Wrap Up and Next Steps, Vice Chair

- Consultant team will be looking at crash data, existing plans, identifying focus groups and planning public outreach activities. A request was made for Advisory Committee members to email Committee Chair Jennifer Hovis with recommended focus groups.
- The Advisory Committee was asked to think about Hot Button issues and key focus areas.
- At the next meeting, the Advisory Committee will elect a Vice Chair. A request was made for members to submit their names or nominate others via email to Chair Jennifer Hovis.
- October 1st or 8th were suggested as preferred dates for the next Advisory Committee meeting.
- Due to Sunshine Laws, no more than two committee members can meet at once, or discuss issues via email, without public notice. The relevant law was provided in the Committee binders.