



BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

City of Billings & Yellowstone County
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 27, 2021 MEETING TIME: 11:30 am

Virtual Conference Format

Live Coverage was available here: <https://www.facebook.com/Billings-Planning-Community-Services-Department-1738982159659260/> Recording is also available on same Facebook page link.

DRAFT

Call to order: Scott Barber, BPAC Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:30 am

Members present: Anna O'Donnell, City; Ed Gulick, Planning Board; Liana Susott, County; Kristi Drake, City; Dorothy Dupree, County; Rose Cook, County.

Others present: Elyse Monat, Active Transportation Planner; Tammy Deines, Planning Clerk; Melissa Henderson, Healthy By Design.

Public Comment Period:

- a. **Comments on items not on the agenda and request to add items to future agendas –**
None
- b. **Online comments and comments received by the Active Transportation Planner –**
None

Motion. Approval of the meeting minutes of March 23, 2021 and February 23, 2021: Ed Gulick, BPAC member, motioned to approve the March minutes, Anna O'Donnell, BPAC Vice-Chair seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ed motioned to approve the February minutes. Rose Cook, BPAC member, seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

New Business:

Presentation. Healthy By Design Healthy Connections snow shoveling effort.

Melissa Henderson manages the Healthy By Design Coalition. They do everything collectively and oversee the statistically valid County Health Needs assessment every 3 years. From that data, they put together a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). Survey data shows that 7 in 10 community members never walk, bike, or use public transit for their commute. 9 in 10 community members believe they can make their community a better place. About 85% of people feel safe walking in their neighborhood.

The CHIP launched last summer is taking a more upstream approach to address making people feel safe in healthy neighborhoods, creating connections, and influencing where they invest (like long term investments in trails). They are also working on strengthening partnerships.

The group working on Healthy Connections noticed that individuals with special health care needs and senior citizens were being told to stay home during the pandemic even as restrictions loosened for others. They wanted to address how these groups could get around without risking the pandemic. They decide to do a “Be a good neighbor” campaign that promotes the value of snow shoveling for your neighbors. They want to pair people who want to help with those who need help. They are also working on a business challenge to celebrate businesses that do the right thing.

Anna asked if Melissa has a list of places that need to be shoveled. Melissa said they are trying to figure out if there is a platform where people could list their needs. Anna suggested using Next Door for communicating with people.

Dorothy Dupree, BPAC member, asked if HBD works with the most vulnerable groups. Melissa mentioned Streetwise which was like Yelp for community health to get data about specific locations. Healthy By Design will be working with a neighborhood each year on creating healthy neighborhoods. Dorothy asked about whether the survey collects demographic information and information about race. Melissa responded that in Yellowstone County, it is hard to be confident in the data based on race due to small groups of respondents. Dorothy mentioned that she and other Native Americans were advised to stay home at one point due to white supremacist activity and she wanted to know how Healthy By Design and other groups could do to address this. Melissa said that the “Be a Good Neighbor” helps to address some of these issues.

Melissa said she would be interested in hearing ideas about what the next “Be a Good Neighbor” campaign should be. Elyse Monat, Active Transportation Planner, will distribute her contact information to BPAC members.

Methods by which members of the public can share bicycle and pedestrian-related concerns.

Kristi Drake, BPAC member, hears from people, but she wants to make sure BPAC hears from people too. She is worried that the current comment form is a deterrent to residents wanting to submit comments because they have to sign in to submit a comment. Kristi showed the Boulder, CO website as an example of the type of comment form that she would like to see.

The group also suggested wanting to hear about near misses. Elyse will see what she can do on her own to make the form more user friendly or will reach out to IT for their help with this form.

Dorothy wants to have data and see if the issue in question is addressed to the resident’s satisfaction. She wants to put together a data group. Kristi would also join group.

BPAC members also mentioned offering times to have coffee with residents so they could share their concerns.

Old Business:

Debrief of Council Safe Routes to School/trails funding discussion.

City Council discussed funding for safe routes to school and trails. They decided to dedicate an additional \$250,000 towards funding new sidewalks. There were no additional decisions made as to new trail funding.

27th St. Railroad crossing

Ed gave a presentation related to walkability and specifically the 27th St. railroad crossing.

Much of the information relates to *Walkable City Rules* by Jeff Speck.

Walkscore.com offers walk and bike score that will tell how walkable an area is based on how close destinations are to each other. Billings' walk score is 35 and its bike score is 47.

Walkable communities have many benefits including increased property values, enhanced recruitment, cost efficiency, increased probability of healthy weight, equity, reduced environmental impacts, and more.

Walkability is the sum of every day decisions that are made about community design. Walkability might not be more expensive to build. The conversion of one-way to two-way streets downtown is an example of how Billings is becoming more walkable.

Downtown Billings does not have safe places to bike. Evidence shows having more bicyclists downtown brings more business downtown. A Rocky Mountain College created a map showing that there is 31 times more taxable income per acre downtown than in other areas of town.

Ed discussed the 27th St. crossing presentation that MDT and HDR gave previously. One aspect that the HDR presentation mentioned was the decreased downtown user experience due to delays due to trains, but Ed thinks that the proposed solution is worse than the current experience. An overpass would require demolishing buildings and create a visual barrier. It would also only serve motorized traffic. The tunnel option would cut off Minnesota Ave. and 2nd Ave. N motorized and pedestrian traffic. Ed mentioned "automobilism" which is what he described as when decisions about community form and function subordinate all other considerations to maximize vehicular travel. He suggested instead considering a variety of factors. He also said that free-flowing traffic can be in opposition of other community goals.

Around the country, cities are demolishing overpass structures. An overpass could prioritize automobile traffic over property values and tax base.

Ed suggested recommending a no-build option to City Council.

Ed moved that BPAC recommend to the City Council that MDT select the no build option for the 27th St. Railroad crossing. Rose seconded the motion.

Liana asked if this would mean suggesting MDT not make any changes. Ed responded that there are a couple of signal timing and turning modifications that they could still do.

Kristi wanted to know if MDT is still strongly considering an overpass or underpass option. Ed said the concern about this crossing came out of a statewide crossing study. When Kristi was introduced to the idea a few years ago, she said it was presented as sinking the railroad tracks.

Dorothy agreed with the recommendations. She stated that there will be a lot of money coming out from American Rescue Plan and she suggested trying to get some of this money for sinking the railroad.

Ed amended the motion to say that the options should be either a no build option or tunnel the railroad under the ground. Rose seconded. The motion as amended passed unanimously.

Future agenda items:

Annual presentation to governing bodies.

Other business:

None

Adjournment

Ed moved to adjourn, Dorothy seconded, all voted in favor.