

**Wheeling Plan Commission
March 8, 2010
Special Workshop Discussion**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 18, 2010.

2. ROLL CALL

Present were Commissioners Dorband, Johnson, Maloney, Ruffatto and Steilen. Commissioner Didier was absent and had given prior notice. Also present were Andrew Jennings, Village Planner and Samantha Robinson, Associate Planner.

Present in the audience:

Steve Boime, Former Wheeling Plan Commissioner
Joe Beemster, Wheeling Wheelmen
Bob Dominski, Wheeling Wheelmen
Steve Powers, Wheeling Resident
Larry Raffel, Wheeling Park District
Jon Sfondilis, Village Manager
Dru Garcia, Business Development Coordinator
Kevin Gray, Village Engineer
Christine Bajor, Assistant Public Works Director
Tim Merrihew, Public Works, Capital Projects & Design Manager
Sean Won, Civil Engineer II
Lana Rudnik, PW Contract Assistant

Chairman Maloney requested introductions from the attendees.

Mr. Beemster stated that he rode approximately 3,700 miles last year. Most of his riding is done north or west of Wheeling.

Mr. Dominski indicated that he mostly heads east or north for his bike riding. He felt it would be nice to have bike routes or paths in Wheeling to get around town.

Mr. Powers stated he does a lot of bike riding on the weekends and mentioned that he doesn't do too much riding in Wheeling.

A) Introduction by Village Planner Andrew Jennings

Mr. Jennings announced the workshop would be an informal meeting. The Village was trying to begin a conversation on bicycling and pedestrian planning in Wheeling to try and get an idea of the interest. He hopes to create a bike and pedestrian planning task force from various members of Wheeling staff, departments, organizations, park district and anyone else interested. He explained the purpose of the workshop was to begin the process of updating Wheeling's bike route map. The focus will be more on biking than pedestrian.

Mr. Jennings reported that Staff had been working with both the Active Transportation Alliance and the Northwest Municipal Conference to try and get connected to the network of other municipalities.

Staff has learned the importance of bike planning and the importance of being plugged into the network of other towns that were doing similar efforts. Mr. Jennings explained it was a simple sounding idea but was extremely complicated to pull off and required a serious planning effort.

B) Overview of existing routes

Mr. Jennings noted that Wheeling had some unique characteristics that made it an extremely challenging environment for cyclists. He wanted to identify the problems and figure out how to develop a strategy to overcome the problems.

Mr. Jennings mentioned there were very few off-road trails of high quality and the ones that the Village has don't go anywhere. The Prospect Heights bike path at the south end of Wheeling comes up along the ComEd right-of-way next to the tracks and ends up toward Arlington Heights. There are some gaps for opportunities for other towns to continue on the path. The path does not connect to the rest of Wheeling and was somewhat limited. It is a path of convenience but can't go easily across the tracks. It runs into private property and a major transformer site for ComEd.

Mr. Jennings noted that Wheeling did have some sidewalks that were bikeable. Most cyclists would not recommend biking on a sidewalk since cars don't expect them and it isn't very comfortable. He mentioned that sidewalks were also problematic for funding purposes.

Mr. Jennings mentioned that Wheeling has few through streets. Wheeling has a series of loop streets, cul-de-sacs, and physical barriers that create the need for the loop streets and cul-de-sacs. There are only a couple of streets that cross over the river, the tracks and 294 and those streets do not lend themselves to biking.

Mr. Jennings provided a copy of the 2003 Comprehensive Plan Map. Mr. Jennings explained that Staff does not believe some of the routes on the map were realistic. It would take some massive property acquisition and/or major infrastructure needs. Some of the routes cross tracks in locations where you can't cross the tracks.

There have also been some infrastructure improvements (i.e., Hawthorne Bridge) completed since the 2003 Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Jennings explained the Comprehensive Plan map ends up being the defining document whereby other agencies view the Village. Other towns look at the map and think that Wheeling is realistically planning for the connection and then may plan their connections based on the information. If the connection is not realistic or being pursued by the Village, then the other towns would be wasting their money. Mr. Jennings wants to update the map in a way that's coordinated with the overall efforts of the other towns and agencies.

Mr. Jennings mentioned that he and Ms. Robinson met with some of the other municipalities to find out if their maps represented the current approach being pursued by the town.

Mr. Jennings referred to the Des Plaines River trail that potentially runs approximately 30 miles without many major physical barriers. The biggest barrier of the trail was the actual quality of the trail. He mentioned that serious commuter/road cyclists would never use the trail because their bikes aren't built for the terrain. He mentioned this allowed opportunities for every town along the area to lobby for improvements to the trail.

Mr. Beemster mentioned the bike path on the other side of the Edens (North Branch Trail) had

recently been repaved.

Mr. Jennings explained that serious cyclists who commute usually go out of their way to use a paved trail rather than having to bike on dangerous streets or cross major thoroughfares.

Mr. Dominski mentioned the Des Plaines River trail showed up as a bridal path along the Des Plaines River. Mr. Jennings confirmed that most of it was originally developed as an equestrian trail. Mr. Boime noted that the trail was much better north of Route 22.

Mr. Jennings explained Staff was trying to get a consensus on a new bike map that had both existing and proposed trails, on road, off road, existing and proposed on the same map. Staff was also trying to identify locations in Wheeling for “get to” destinations (i.e. schools, parks).

C) Brainstorming Session

1. Areas that need improved bicycle/pedestrian access
2. Prioritize missing links in the bicycle/pedestrian network
3. Challenges to providing improvements

Mr. Jennings wanted to get an idea on who was present and the interest of each group. He suggested including the following in the discussions:

- Token improvements that could be done easily and not too expensively;
- Put up signs for existing infrastructure (i.e. bridge to Childerey Park) for a small investment; and
- Coordinating with the Public Works Department on upcoming reconstruction projects (i.e. Lexington Drive).

Mr. Jennings suggested dividing into small groups to break out and review the map and discuss. He suggested the following discussions:

- Do you currently bike/walk?
- Where would you like to?
- Where is it difficult and/or unsafe?
- Where do kids go to bike/walk?

After the breakout sessions, the following was a recap of the discussions.

Wheeling Wheelmen Group

Mr. Beemster explained his route: follow Dennis to Route 83 to Fletcher to Anthony to Cambridge to University to Buffalo Grove Road/Windsor. Mr. Dominski mentioned a route that connected to Raupp Blvd and headed north to Checker Road, crossing Dundee and Lake Cook Road. Mr. Dominski had a hard time remembering the street names since the routes change names from town to town. Commissioner Boime felt signage was important because of the difficulty with the change in street names.

Mr. Powers mentioned a bike path at Checker and Arlington Heights Road and around the Buffalo Grove golf course. Mr. Boime mentioned you could cross Checker and Arlington Heights Roads and go to the Buffalo Creek Reservoir.

Mr. Jennings wants to know the routes around Wheeling that connect to features in the region.

Mr. Dominski mentioned heading east on Wheeling Road through the train station and then pick up Northgate Parkway and then Strong to Wolf Road to Milwaukee Avenue and somehow end up at Portwine.

Mr. Jennings reported Staff was working on having a trail head near the Westin Hotel where you could park, see a trail map, and access a walking loop trail that connects to the bridge over the Des Plaines and into the Forest Preserve trail going north and south. The trail would be a multi-use trail with a canoe launch to go north/south. The Village is waiting for funding.

Mr. Beemster suggested adding signage for immediate benefit that wouldn't cost very much. Mr. Jennings mentioned some of the signage could be done in-house.

Mr. Powers asked if there was a possibility for a bike lane on Wolf Road. Mr. Jennings questioned if there was a road profile of what it was going to look like. Mr. Merrihew confirmed there was one but mentioned it was old. Mr. Jennings indicated it was approved before the Complete Streets requirement. Mr. Merrihew did not think there was room for a bike lane. Mr. Dominski suggested marking it as a bike route. Mr. Merrihew questioned how much of Wolf Road was ideal for biking. Mr. Dominski mentioned he had biked Wolf Road from Palatine Road.

Mr. Merrihew referred to the path that goes south and west. Mr. Dominski mentioned going south from Hintz Road to Pleasant Run to Equestrian Way to Elmhurst Road and follow the roads to Lake Arlington or go south and pick up the bike path.

Mr. Powers mentioned going on Sherwood by the high school and taking it down to the bike path.

Mr. Dominski felt the bike path crossing at Route 83 and Wheeling Road was very dangerous. Mr. Merrihew mentioned there had been an accident with a bicyclist at the Wheeling Road crossing.

Commissioner Steilen questioned if the planned route along Wolf Road using the Wheeling drainage ditch area and through the airport was still feasible. Mr. Jennings explained there was an issue on how it crosses Milwaukee and the airport property, and then physically where you place a 10' or 12' wide path.

Mr. Jennings suggested identifying places where an existing sidewalk could be converted into a 10' path.

Plan Commission Group

Chairman Maloney explained the group looked at obstacles within the Village to get to places. He mentioned Heritage Park coming from the west. He referred to the path behind Twain School that could go up to the train station. They also looked at getting to the new park that will be built on Lake Cook Road. They also looked at Northgate Parkway to the Diversion Channel and going on the bank on the Diversion Channel or going into the neighborhoods and cutting through one of the streets to the end.

Mr. Jennings explained it was easier to get something done when there were fewer property owners.

Chairman Maloney mentioned they also discussed the problem of getting from one neighborhood to the other. He mentioned Edward and Vera streets that were dead-ends and could possibly have a bike path through them.

Commissioner Steilen questioned if it was possible to interconnect the Hollywood Ridge area and Arlington Club. He asked the status of Arlington Club's streets. He questioned if a bike path could be added to them. Mr. Gray confirmed the streets were dedicated roads and could be designated as a bike path.

Commissioner Dorband suggested better sidewalks to the library from different directions.

Commissioner Dorband suggested utilizing the bridge at Childerly Park.

Mr. Boime commented there were routes to use but no one knows about them. He suggested adding signage to the routes.

Public Works Group

Ms. Bajor explained their main concern was Wolf Road with the high traffic going north and south. She also mentioned the high cost of the proposal along the ComEd connection.

Mr. Jennings explained the ComEd connections were interesting because every now and then ComEd decides that they are willing to fund improvements. He suggested planning where the connections were wanted so the Village would be ready for a moment when ComEd decides to pay for paving. Mr. Jennings mentioned that the ComEd right-of-way in Wheeling switches sides of the tracks and that it was very difficult to get the railroad to allow a bike to cross the tracks.

Ms. Bajor reiterated her concern that Wolf Road was very narrow and too dangerous to use for biking. Mr. Jennings explained his reason for putting it on the plan was wishful thinking for the future because it was one of the few streets that goes a long way north and south. He was hoping to get other municipalities together for future reconstruction of Wolf Road to make it bike friendly since it has so much potential for long distance commuting and recreation. Mr. Dominski mentioned the Des Plaines bridal path parallels Wolf Road.

Mr. Jennings mentioned a group in Chicago was working on a path that connects a series of neighborhoods to the west of the city and was costing \$65 million for a 3 mile stretch (Bloomingdale Trail).

D) Opportunities to collaborate with other groups to create and implement plan

Mr. Jennings reported that Staff continues to meet with the Northwest Municipal Conference. They have spoken to the schools but have had no contact with the elementary school. They continue to meet with the Forest Preserve District and neighboring municipalities. Other possible groups to include in the future would be the railroad, ComEd, and IDOT. Commissioner Johnson suggested speaking with the Police Department Bike Unit. Mr. Raffel suggested contacting the Bike Security Staff for the Park District.

E) Goals

Mr. Jennings wanted to see if there was a consensus to form a group for those interested in meeting again. He suggested meeting four times a year. He questioned if there was a desire to come back in a few months in order to monitor the progress.

Chairman Maloney suggested sending any suggestions to Mr. Jennings.

Commissioner Steilen mentioned there were a lot of disjointed sidewalks in town. He questioned if it was possible to get an inventory of what streets/locations in town have missing sections of sidewalks. Mr. Gray stated that their GIS consultant had a pretty good sidewalk map and could take what was existing and fill in the gaps with the proposed sidewalks.

Commissioner Ruffatto felt one of the objectives should be how to connect to other bike paths and how to get around town. Mr. Jennings explained it was one of their goals when they started to draft the map. They want to make sure there was interconnectivity between the parks, schools, library, Village Hall, train station and the neighborhoods.

Mr. Jennings wanted the end result to be an actual plan and not just a map. Chairman Maloney suggested having the document part of the master plan. Mr. Jennings explained the trend in bike planning was having a separate and distinct plan with the graphic being inserted into the comprehensive plan.

Mr. Jennings explained bike route maps were usually planned for the casual adult rider since serious riders usually figure it out on their own.

Mr. Jennings suggested meeting every couple of months. Chairman Maloney questioned the interest from the attendees. Mr. Dominski indicated the Wheeling Wheelmen would be interested. Chairman Maloney suggested meeting once a quarter. Mr. Jennings suggested figuring out where the group wanted to be within 1 and 5 years. Mr. Jennings wants Staff to identify a couple of token projects for the next meeting and have them completed within a year.

Commissioner Steilen suggested starting to work on the money planning. Mr. Jennings explained that bike path/route funding requires that it be a true bike path and must connect to an existing bike route or path. He mentioned there were other ways to get improvements funded without using Village money. Mr. Jennings noted that it always helped to have it in a plan in order to get funding.

Commissioner Dorband expressed concern on how to keep the momentum going and to make sure it happens. Mr. Jennings suggested giving the project a name and getting the Village Board to acknowledge the task force and endorse it. Chairman Maloney suggested having a representative from the Village Board on the task force.

Commissioner Dorband suggested determining what needed to be done first by setting a priority list. Mr. Jennings suggested incorporating bicycles on Lexington Drive along with the road reconstruction project.

Mr. Jennings agreed to look at some of the streets that were being identified. He mentioned Sherwood which was already a safe street and didn't need bike lane stripes but could use bike route signage. Mr. Jennings wants to identify four token projects – one in each quadrant of the Village. Mr. Gray mentioned that Sherwood had on-street parking. He mentioned that some of the on-street parking would need to be removed around town in order to accommodate the bike routes.

He questioned if on-street parking and a bike path could be shared. Mr. Jennings explained it would depend on the nature of the street. Mr. Boime explained there was a difference between a bike lane and signing bike routes.

Chairman Maloney questioned the legality for putting up bike route signs. Mr. Jennings agreed to look into it.

Mr. Powers suggested having task force meetings quarterly and then having a public meeting every once in a while. Mr. Jennings explained tonight's meeting was a public meeting. He agreed to advertise future meetings better by using the Village's new sign and the web site.

Mr. Jennings announced Thursday, June 17th as the next task force meeting at 6:30 p.m. He suggested incorporating bike-to-work week in the advertising of the next meeting.

3. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Ruffatto moved, seconded by Commissioner Johnson to adjourn the meeting at 8:25p.m. All were in favor on a unanimous voice vote and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Ruffatto, Secretary
Wheeling Plan Commission /
Sign Code Board of Appeals

**MINUTES E-MAILED TO THE PC 4.19.2010
FOR APPROVAL AT THE PC MEETING 4.22.2010**