



Town of Bethlehem
Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee
Meeting Minutes

January 26, 2021 - 6:30 PM

In Attendance

Committee Members: Henry Peyrebrune, Nate Owens, Sgt. Whiteley, Oliver Holmes, Laura DiBetta, Anne Benware, Constantine Kontogiannis, Kristin Ackerman, Erin Rightmeyer, Erin Svare

Public Comment

Members of the public were present but did not provide formal public comment.

Review/Approval of Meeting Minutes

Meeting minutes from December 2020 were approved.

Police Department Update

Sgt. Whiteley provided several updates. The Town was notified of another local agency that contracts out their crossing guards to a third party. The Department is looking into this.

There have been no bike accidents since the last meeting. There was one incident where a bicyclist hit some debris, but it did not involve a motor vehicle. Otherwise, the Department has been receiving the usual speed complaints on the roadways.

There was a question about the recent email from a resident about whether riding bicycles on sidewalks is legal. It was responded to by Commander Rexford that it is not illegal, so it comes down to being courteous.

Connie followed up on the crossing guard discussion, including urging the Department to continue to pursue allowing volunteers to sign up with a certified flagger requirement. Sgt. Whiteley did discuss this, however someone would have to be charged with overseeing this process. Also, if someone didn't volunteer for a day, an officer would be required to cover the slot and that is not something the Department has the resources to do at this time. The sense was this idea would not work, but the outsourcing idea seemed like a more viable option. It's not clear what kind of background check is done. Connie's idea is the only people who would have access to the SignUp Genius are already on an approved and vetted list. Case law may suggest that doing something is better than doing nothing.

There was a question about whether the July 5th accident on Feura Bush Road and most recent one are the result of yard debris inappropriately placed in the roadway. Sgt. Whitely does not believe that was the case for the recent one; it may have been after a storm. The Department and Town could do a social media push once spring comes, maybe put out flyers. Connie suggested it needs to be more direct. State law, town law and town code all cover this. The suggestion was to focus information and enforcement on high volume, painted roads.

Planning Department Update

Nate Owens provided the update for the Planning Department.

Planning staff are working on the Comprehensive Plan update supporting SWBR. They are pilot planning the community profile that will help form the solid basis for the plan and community outreach. Karen Shaw with the Town (open space) will be doing a social media push for this, a “did you know” factoid series. A few will likely be related to bike/ped issues.

Planning staff are also working hard on planning board reviews. They are closing out the street tree inventory and plan grant and looking toward implementation. Also, the sidewalk webpage is now live in the Highway Department section of the website, including committee priorities, how sidewalks are funded, etc.

Walk n Roll Fest

The 2020 Walk n Roll Fest was cancelled due to COVID. The committee discussed possible plans for hosting the event in 2021. The event has to be complete by the end of 2021 for the grant. Typically the event is the second or third weekend in May, the 15th or 22nd.

Discussion ensued. Sgt. Whitely is supportive of planning for the Spring event, before the cycling starts. The Department could likely get wipes and sanitizer from the County. Sgt. Whitely would like to reach out to Supervisor VanLuven to see if Town is comfortable. Then see how many volunteers we could get and match the plan with the resources available.

Skip, noting the crosswalks issue we have been discussing, suggested reimagining the event where it takes a portion of the rail trail and somehow combine the crosswalk and bicycle skills to accomplish both of those things. Sgt. Whitely is concerned about liability with interacting with real-time vehicles and possibility of creating a traffic hazard. A better solution discussed was to recreate it closer to 250 Delaware, maybe the dead end street there, and have a trained driver participating.

Erin S. suggested we reimagine the event for COVID and also based on lessons learned from last event. One issue was lack of volunteers, another was how spread out we were but that may be ok now due to COVID. It would be good to have high school or middle school volunteers. Helmit fitting is popular so would be good to keep it and just have the parents do it.

The consensus of the committee was to keep the event at 250 Delaware. We can reach out to Mark to liaise with the Legion again. There was also discussion of doing the event more as demonstration stations. For example, every half hour have a helmet fitting demonstration, etc.

Committee members expressed varying levels of comfort with working with the public right now and there is still much uncertainty with COVID and the vaccine rollout.

After much discussion, the committee consensus was to move the event to an early September date.

Nate will send out notes from the last event debrief. Sgt. Whitely will ask the Supervisor and 250 Delaware about September and also ask about May just to get a sense for what they are thinking.

CDTC Grant

Anne reviewed grant opportunity with CDTC that is due on Friday. Some members of the committee feel that we need to hear back from the Town on direction for this committee before putting energy into a grant. This was discussed more below.

Town Board Update

Henry received a response from Supervisor VanLuven on our letter. He shared the responses.

On the recommendation to form a coordinating committee for the school district, the Supervisor thought it was a great idea but BCSC would have to organize and lead with the town playing a supporting role. It sounds like the committee would have to put this proposal to the school Superintendent. Erin S. has talked with her and it sounds like she's willing to help in any way possible. The idea is for the school to lead and this committee to provide technical assistance. The district would likely want to include many people, including representatives from each school. Erin S. can reach out to Jody. It would be good to have this in place by the spring when kids are walking and biking to school again.

On the town leading a crosswalk safety campaign in the spring, the Supervisor responded that he likes the idea but the town cannot lead it. It would have to be our committee or a contractor, but we'd have to find money to fund the contractor. He asked about cost. Connie noted that the State Police gets money for this type of thing and feels the County Sheriff would support it, which would then likely encourage the Town to support it as well. Connie is willing to talk to the State Police. Nate noted when he talked with the internal staff group about this, the Police Department didn't say no and asked for the top three crosswalks with issues. Kenwood at the Rail Trail is a top one. Orchard and Elm was also noted, as it is used by Slingerlands Elementary students. The Town doesn't want to be lead or coordinator of overall campaign, not that they wouldn't participate or support the effort, but they don't have the resources to devote to a separate project at this time.

Some concern was expressed with going to the State Police and the County Sheriff's Department. There is agreement that what's needed is a public education campaign along with enforcement, but some members would like to try to continue to collaborate with the Town. The complaints Sgt. Whitely is hearing is that cars are not stopping for pedestrians waiting to cross but not in the crosswalk, which is not illegal. Sgt. Whitely said they'd be willing to sit at the crosswalks, etc.

Sgt. Whitely will look into whether the committee could collaborate more with the Department on the GTSC grant. Nate also noted that the Town is looking into reducing the Town speed limit to 25 from 30. This could be tied to a public education campaign/grant.

We can proceed with enforcement, but as an advisory group of volunteers, we don't have the time or the resources/funding to lead a public awareness campaign, which means we can't apply for the CDCT grant at this time. If the Safe Routes to School money got up and running again, that could be a good opportunity. Anne also volunteered to keep looking for crosswalk safety campaign materials and NYBC or other videos that could potentially be used by the Town/Committee.

The third item from our letter was to take 15 percent of highway capital funding for sidewalks. The Supervisor's response was discouraging, saying this is the call of the Highway Superintendent. But that takes the ability to set policy on sidewalks out of the hands of the Board or the Committee. Henry will respond and disagree – that this is a board responsibility. Sidewalk policy is integral to land use policy, etc. and the board should take a position. The Superintendent goes to the Board in May with the paving schedule. That could be the point when we review and make a counter recommendation that 15 percent go to sidewalks. Skip suggests going to board in April with the top 10 priority sidewalks that didn't get done and put that list back in front of them.

On the fourth item – does the Board want the committee to research funding options – the Supervisor said yes, please, and to reach out to the Comptroller. We need to then research what other towns are doing. Connie agreed to take the lead.

The last item in our letter was a recommendation to reconstitute the Highway Department as a Transportation Department or reintegrate it as a town function. The Supervisor responded that this was an intriguing suggestion, but he needed more research to understand the pros and cons.

Committee Vacancy

We've had five responses so far. Nate reached out to David to share with members of Police Reform Collaborative. There was a suggestion to try to get a user of public transportation, maybe post a flyer at a bus shelter.

Subcommittee Updates

- Sidewalk Subcommittee: no updates
- Outreach and Education: no updates
- Bike/Ped Network: Nate is looking into whether the Town Board needs to also approve the updated map. The subcommittee will meet soon to discuss.

DOT Response

DOT was looking for a list of locations with broken sensors, etc. Connie has a list and will resend it around. The other issue was mowing versus sweeping.

Other Business

A question was asked about planning board projects that might be useful for the Committee to comment on. Nate will review the list and send a new list to the group. Unrelated, Nate will circulate a note to the members of the committee that are up for re-nomination.

The committee noted a comment and suggestion from a member of the public in the chat: "This relates to the earlier conversation: I hear the problem with not having the event this spring. Would it be possible to have information regarding crosswalk safety, helmet fitting, safe walking; in the spring parks and rec mailing or the spring mailing of the town newsletter? It could have links to videos about helmet fitting, crosswalk safety and start advertising the event in September. This would keep the great work you do in the public eye and get some possible education out there. Btw- your presentation to the board was excellent and so well thought out. Thanks for allowing me to view your meetings. Would you want to extend the vacancy application to do more outreach - maybe reach out to the PTO's? Great work- it must be frustrating at times. I appreciate your work and I don't think enough people realize all you are doing."

Adjourned at 8:17pm.

Next Meeting: February 23, 2021

Chair: Laura DiBetta

Recorder: Oliver Holmes