

City of Takoma Park Safe Roadways Committee
Monthly Meeting, February 20, 2014

MINUTES

1. The meeting convened at 7:30pm with the following committee members in attendance: Kacy Kostiuk; Sheryl Gross-Glaser; Scott Williams; Joe Edgell; and Ryan Morden.
2. The committee reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting. Ryan moved to approve the minutes. Scott seconded that motion. The committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes.
3. There were no public comments, as there was no one present from the public.
4. The committee discussed the topic of making roads and sidewalks safer and more accessible for bikes and pedestrians after snowstorms.
 - a. Joe asked the other committee members about their impressions of the sidewalks after the recent snowstorm. Ryan said that he went to the post office as the snow was coming down and the sidewalk was not cleared.
 - b. Joe showed a series of pictures he had taken of the sidewalks after the snowstorm.
 - i. One picture showed a shoveled sidewalk on private property next to a sidewalk covered in snow, located on public property.
 - ii. Another picture showed a sidewalk that had been cleared but the sidewalk ramps for wheelchair-users were covered in snow that plows had pushed to the side of the road. Kacy noted that these ramps were not useable even about a week after the snowstorm as a result of the snow piled up on the side of the road and that they were difficult for pedestrians to cross even if not disabled.
 - c. Joe suggested that the committee consider writing a second position paper related to clearing the streets in a better and safer way for bikes and pedestrians. He noted three main issues: ADA access, ensuring that the sidewalks on public property are cleared, and clearing some key roadways in a way that makes them safe for bikes as well as cars. He said that he had tried to bike to work a few days after the snowstorm and that the roads were still not safe for bikes.
 - d. Sheryl said that there appears to be no enforcement of the requirements to shovel the sidewalk on your property. It doesn't seem like anyone in the city is monitoring this. She also felt there might be a need for a pot of money to assist those who can't physically clear their own sidewalks but can't afford to pay someone else to do it.
 - e. Ryan asked if anyone knew the amount of time allowed before a sidewalk has to be cleared. Joe said he thought it was approximately 24 hours after the snowfall. Ryan said that one problem is that people may be out of town during a snowstorm and not there to clear the sidewalks. He also said he wasn't sure what "reasonable expectations" were for the city in terms of rapid and thorough snow clearing.
 - f. Joe said that he felt the city is prioritizing driving by clearing the roads in the way they currently do, making it difficult to walk or bike and hence encouraging people to drive rather than use other modes of transportation. He suggested that some of the money for snow removal could possibly be used to purchase equipment meant to clear snow off sidewalks. He also felt that the public employees who plow could be directed not to pile snow in front of sidewalk ramps.
 - g. Sheryl noted that a few years ago during "Snowmageddon," the plows would push snow from the streets onto the sidewalks, so people had to clear their sidewalks multiple times to keep the snow off of them.

- h. Joe said he knows the city staff works very hard and might feel frustrated by the committee's requests to make changes to snow removal, but he doesn't think it would be unreasonable to ask them to change how they are doing the work (i.e. not piling snow in front of sidewalk ramps) and to focus more on pedestrian and bike access than they currently are. He said he recognizes that initial snow removal efforts may focus on roads but that after these initial efforts are completed, the city should turn their focus to issues related to pedestrians and bicyclists.
 - i. Joe noted that there are snow emergency routes and requirements not to park on certain streets during those times. The Committee believes that Maple Ave is an emergency route with those rules. Joe suggested possibly having a similar arrangement for bicycles, such as a few streets specifically cleared to safe biking standards, even if all streets are not cleared for bikes. This would allow the city to focus on these areas and bikers to know which streets they could use after a snowfall.
 - j. Sheryl mentioned that the Easter Seals has some material related to ADA issues and that the committee could look at these materials as a resource and perhaps pass some of it onto the city council with the position paper.
 - k. Joe said the committee could also print the photos he took and include those with the paper.
 - l. Ryan suggested that he would like to see more encouragement of citizens to do their part in clearing the snow. He said that his councilmember sent out an e-mail asking people to clear their sidewalks and encouraging them to consider helping by clearing sidewalks by the local us stop. He felt that maybe encouraging citizens to do more could help alleviate some of the stress on the city.
 - m. Joe said he supports more citizen involvement but feels the committee should emphasize the city's role and efforts because citizens alone are not responsible for doing this job.
 - n. Sheryl said she feels that it's important for both the city and citizens to do their parts and be involved. She felt that more enforcement of regulations about clearing sidewalks and other issues might cause citizens to do their part more.
 - o. Joe showed a picture of the sidewalk in front of one of the apartment buildings on Maple Avenue, where the company that cleared the parking lot had dumped all of the snow onto the sidewalk. He noted that this is an issue of lack of code enforcement.
 - p. Kacy said that safe and comfortable passage on sidewalks seems to be a general problem throughout the year. She said that she often sees overgrowth of shrubbery or other plants that narrow the sidewalk or hang too low overhead, and there is a problem with the placement of garbage cans during garbage pick-up on streets such as Lincoln Avenue. She said that because the garbage cans are placed in the sidewalk and often thrown by the garbage-truck operators into the middle of the sidewalk without concern for blocking it, it becomes impossible for wheelchairs, strollers, or even walkers to get past. Joe suggested taking pictures of the garbage-can issue and sending these to the city to ask for help in enforcing ADA regulations and making sidewalks passable.
 - q. Ryan said that now seems like a good time to focus on the snow issues and address other issues in the future.
 - r. Joe asked if anyone wanted to volunteer to write the first draft of a position paper on snow removal, but if the Committee wanted him to, he was willing to do the first draft since he raised the issue. Joe noted that he will send the first draft to the committee for edits. He said he thinks it would be good to aim to send out this position paper within the next couple of weeks while the issue of snow is fresh in the Council member minds.
5. The committee discussed the Takoma Junction bus stop, which councilmember Tim Male has proposed eliminating due to traffic issues.
- a. Joe said that there used to be a bus bay at the bus stop (which is on Ethan Allen Avenue going in the direction of the Takoma Metro station) and that this allowed buses to pull to

the side so that cars could go by while passengers got on and off. The Takoma Junction Task Force suggested removing the bump-out in front of the bus bay so that buses could go straight through the intersection because bus drivers were complaining that they could not pull out into the lane after they pulled over because cars did not let them in. Joe said that instead of removing the bump-out, the city filled in the bus bay so that now buses cannot pull over and cars cannot get around the buses. As a result, many cars unsafely pass the bus by driving into the lane of oncoming traffic.

- b. Joe noted that Tim believes the only way to solve the safety issue is to eliminate the bus stop at this intersection. However, this would mean a long walk to the next bus stop, which is located across from the Takoma Park Fire Station. He said that many passengers use the stop proposed for removal to transfer from the DC Metro buses headed to Silver Spring to the RideOn buses headed to the Takoma Metro.
 - c. Joe said that some people have suggested relocating the bus stop to the area in front of the gas station, located after the intersection where it currently is. This would mean a shorter walk than eliminating the stop altogether and would enable bus drivers to pull to the side of the road and cars to go around because there are two lanes of traffic at that part of the road.
 - d. Ryan said that the president of RideOn is scheduled to come to a Takoma Park City Council meeting in the near future. He did not remember the exact date. Joe asked him to look into this and e-mail the committee with this information so that members could attend at that time if they are available.
 - e. Scott said that he believes it is important to have a bus stop at the Takoma Junction because there is a busy food store and a struggling commerce area there.
 - f. Ryan mentioned that in Washington state, there is a law that cars must yield to buses if they have their blinkers on. He thought this may be a recommendation for the county or state to consider.
 - g. Joe said that Tim has been circulating a petition to eliminate the bus stop and said that if Tim presents this petition to the city council, the Safe Roadways Committee could ask the council to refer the issue to this committee for study and review.
 - h. Scott said he wondered if Metro and RideOn have good data on the number of people get on and off at each stop. Joe said that he believes Metro does have a lot of data but is not sure about RideOn.
6. The four subcommittees reported on their progress and work since the last meeting.
- a. Pedestrian and bike subcommittee:
 - i. Ryan said that the subcommittee has not been very active and that he thinks these issues may be more appropriate as general at-large committee issues, rather than a subcommittee.
 - b. Outreach subcommittee:
 - i. Scott said that he started reaching out to other bike and pedestrian safety committees or subcommittees in the area. Joe said that there is a bike and pedestrian subcommittee in the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, although he said he thinks this is not a citizen's committee. He said that Montgomery County also has a similar committee.
 - ii. Ryan said he found a website for the Montgomery County Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee but did not see updated meeting times. Joe asked if the outreach subcommittee could try to find out when this group meets and try to get a 10-15 minutes on their agenda, with the idea that any committee members who are available could attend. Scott said that he will work on this.
 - iii. Joe said that the city has created an e-mail address for the Safe Roadways Committee, saferoadways@takomaparkmd.gov. Joe will send the log-in

information to Scott, who will create a new password and let all of the committee members know what it is and how to log-in.

1. Joe suggested that a committee member might want to check this e-mail account weekly. Scott offered to do this. Sheryl suggested that committee members could take turns monitoring the e-mail account so that no one had the responsibility all the time.
2. Joe said that he thinks it would be possible to set up automatic forwarding for e-mails sent to this account to be sent to the Google Group for the Safe Roadways Committee, which would enable all members to see the e-mails. He noted that it may also be possible to add the e-mail account as an “authorized person.”
3. Joe suggested setting up an auto-response from the e-mail account that lets people know that the e-mail has been received but that there might be a delay in hearing back from someone. Scott added that it would be helpful to include information about the committee’s meeting dates in the auto-response.

c. Data and reporting subcommittee:

- i. Kacy said that she contacted Lucy Neher, director of the Takoma Park Safe Routes to School program. Sheryl had also spoken with her and invited her to speak at an upcoming committee meeting. Lucy has agreed to speak at the April Safe Roadways Committee meeting. Kacy said that she also worked with Lucy regarding a problem with the Safe Routes to School program’s city e-mail address, which was not working properly.
- ii. Joe said that Sylvia (who could not attend the meeting) had been looking into types of data that the committee might be able to collect. Joe said that Sylvia has had trouble getting data from the police department and that the person in charge of that data told her obtaining some of the data may require a FOIA request. Joe said that the committee should be able to get the data if a request is sent to the city manager.
- iii. Joe said that Sylvia was hoping to get raw, un-interpreted data. But based upon her discussion with the police department data contact, the raw data is not in a standardized format. As a result, the Committee would need to work with the Police Department’s interpretations of the raw data, which may not present an unbiased or complete picture as would the raw data.
- iv. Scott said it would be helpful to have a representative from the Takoma Park Police Department attend and speak at one of the committee’s meetings. Other committee members agreed that this would be useful. Joe suggested inviting a representative to speak at the April meeting after Lucy Neher. The agendas for upcoming meetings are all very full, but the committee could devote more-or-less an entire meeting to hearing from Lucy and then the police department. Committee members felt that it was important to hear from the police soon, so it was decided to invite the police to the April meeting and devote that meeting primarily to hearing from Lucy and the police representative. Joe said that he will invite the police department.

d. Law and regulation subcommittee:

- i. Ryan said that the committee looked into the three-foot rule that states that cars must give bicycles at least three feet of clearance. He said there was a proposal to make this a rule of four feet but that it was not successful or widely supported. Joe noted that one argument against changing it to a four-foot rule was that people were already ignoring the three-foot rule, which he felt was not a good reason not to improve the law and enforcement of this.

- ii. Ryan said that it seems like better citizen awareness of this rule would be helpful. There was a brief discussion about signs aimed at making drivers aware of this law. Kacy noted that there is a current campaign on some RideOn buses and bus stops that urges people to be careful in parking lots and perhaps this would be a location for signs about the three-foot rule.
 - iii. Joe discussed the timeline for bills in the state legislature. The deadline is very early, and the city council begins its discussions during the summer prior to this. Ryan suggested that the committee could make a deadline for itself of determining any recommendations to the city council by four months from this meeting.
 - iv. Sheryl said she wondered if Maryland had adopted a Complete Streets Policy, which is something many states have adopted. Kacy said that she looked into this in the past and believes that the state does have a Complete Streets Policy.
 - v. Joe said that he had sent an e-mail to the committee about the “Idaho stop” law, which requires bicyclists to stop at stop signs and stop lights unless there is no one at the intersection to yield to. There was a long discussion about different committee members’ opinions of this law. Joe supported the law and said that he had read research that said there had been no increase in accidents as a result of the law change in Idaho. Sheryl and Kacy did not support the idea of the law but were willing to read more about it and consider it. Joe committed to doing more research and forwarding that research to Committee members.
 - vi. Joe reported that Kay Daniels-Cohen, councilmember for Ward 3, has died. The committee members expressed condolences.
7. Ryan moved to extend the meeting from 9:00 p.m. to 9:10 p.m. so that he could give a report on the committee’s position paper on the bikeshare rack by the gazebo. Kacy seconded the motion. Committee members unanimously voted to extend the meeting by 10 minutes.
 - a. Ryan said that he had finalized the position paper with all the edits from committee members and that it was completed by February 1, but he was waiting to get confirmation from the mayor regarding the potential cost to move the bikeshare rack. He recently got confirmation, and the position paper is ready to be sent to the city council.
 - b. Ryan asked what the committee members thought about how to submit the position paper. Joe said that he thinks it would be best not to e-mail the entire city council but to e-mail the mayor directly, copying the city clerk, and ask the mayor to share with the councilmembers at the appropriate time.
 - c. Sheryl said she wondered if someone should notify Seth Grimes (councilmember for Ward 1) of the position paper, since he has supported moving the bikeshare rack. The committee discussed this and decided it wasn’t necessary.
 - d. All committee members present said they supported position paper in its final form, and all members had previously e-mailed affirmative votes of support. Joe said that he would submit the position paper.
8. Scott reported on his work regarding the improvement of bike routes to school, particularly a change in the one-way street next to the community center, which is currently not legal for bikes to ride up but is a natural and the safest path to the elementary and middle schools, since otherwise this route requires biking on busy Philadelphia Ave, which has no bike lanes. Scott said that he has not made much progress on this but plans to continue to work on it.
 - a. Joe said that he had previously talked with Erkin Ozberk, city planner for Takoma Park, about creating a bike lane that flowed counter to the path of car traffic on a different street. They had discussed installing flexible posts to delineate the lane. Joe said that it seemed like Erkin wanted to work on this project at the same time as the project on the one-way street by the schools, if this were something the city planned to pursue.
9. The committee members discussed plans for upcoming meetings.

- a. The March meeting will include both Seth Grimes and Tim Male, since Seth could not attend this meeting, which was rescheduled due to a snowstorm the week before. Kacy noted that this means there will be two meetings in a row (March and April) with two outside speakers. Scott suggested that the committee submit questions to the councilmembers before the meeting so that they can address issues of particular interest and reduce the overall time needed. Joe asked committee members to e-mail questions or topics for council members to him and said that he will share these with the council members prior to the next meeting.
 - b. The April meeting will include Lucy Neher from the Safe Routes to School program and a police department representative.
 - c. Joe asked committee members to think about and submit agenda items for the next meeting. He said that he would like to talk about intersection sight-line improvements (i.e. places where it is difficult or impossible to safely see to cross an intersection). Kacy noted that this is an issue related to sidewalks and overgrowth because at many intersections, it's very difficult to see past residents' trees or shrubs.
10. Scott moved to adjourn the meeting. Sheryl seconded the motion. All committee members voted in favor of adjourning the meeting.
 11. The meeting was adjourned at 9:08p.m.