

City of Bath Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee

ANNUAL REPORT (June 2012)

I. Status and legislative charge

By order, the City Council of Bath established the Bath Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee at its regular monthly meeting on May 5, 2011. At the same time it appointed seven members to the committee and tasked it with the following:

- 1) overseeing the implementation of the 2011 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan;
- 2) updating the plan as needed;
- 3) advising the Public Works, Planning, Police, and Recreation Departments
- 4) recommending capital improvement projects to be submitted to the City Manager for possible inclusion in the City's Annual Capital Improvement Plan
- 5) advising the Planning Board, as appropriate on Comprehensive Plan revisions and on their reviews of development projects
- 6) working with representatives of Regional School Unit 1 to accomplish the goal of developing a healthy lifestyle for RSU 1 students
- 7) working with other communities and municipalities to pursue regional bicycling and walking goals
- 8) identifying and pursuing outside funding activities to meet the priorities stated in the Plan
- 9) undertaking community outreach and education

The current committee includes:

Regular Voting Members

Ex Officio Members

Robert McChesney	term expiring May 5, 2014	Andy Deci, Planning
Kevin Shute	term expiring May 5, 2014	Steve Balboni, Parks and Recreation
Sharon Wilbraham	term expiring May 5, 2014	Peter Owen, Public Works
Phyllis Wolfe	term expiring May 5, 2013 (resigned in 2012)	Sarah Bingham, RSU1 Health Coordinator
Rebecca Farnham	term expiring May 5, 2013	Jim Gillies, VIPS, Bath Police Department
John Swenson	term expiring May 5, 2012 (reappointed for	Mari Eosco and Meadow Merrill, Council liaisons

	3 years)	
Nancy Perkins	term expiring May 5, 2012 (reappointed for 3 years)	

II. *Executive summary of accomplishments June 2011-June 2012*

In the twelve months of its existence, the Committee is pleased to report the bicycling and pedestrian activities that have been completed, or on which substantial progress has been made. Details are provided below but to sum up:

The first priority of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan was the formation of a bicycle-pedestrian committee which was accomplished by City Council order on May 5, 2011. The committee has held regular monthly meetings at the Recreation Department since May 2011 and its members have been active between meetings on committee-related work. The committee has worked closely with the Recreation Department and the Public Works Department 1) to install six bike racks purchased by Kennebec Estuary Land Trust through a local campaign and 2) to install some twenty directional signs for the East Coast Greenway bicycle route that passes through Bath.

In August, in conjunction with Scott Davis, Code Enforcement Officer, members of the committee surveyed ADA compliance in the downtown in response to complaints raised by members of the public who find accessing the downtown stores and services difficult if not impossible for people with disabilities. This led to the committee's inviting a representative of Maine DOT to address one of its meetings and as a result of that to the city's application (reportedly successful) for funds to remediate the obstacles to ADA compliance.

Another subcommittee surveyed and recommended the designation of principal bicycle routes through Bath and convinced the council to budget for signage and striping of streets on designated routes.

At the regional level, the committee has reached out to cyclist and walkers in Arrowsic who are concerned with pedestrian and bicycle safety along SR 127. Through a bicycling advocate in Woolwich our committee received some free ECG signage. Ties have been established with the Brunswick Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee and the very active Merrymeeting Wheelers Bicycle Club (three of the committee members are also club members).

Committee members have also forged closer ties with state and national bicycle-pedestrian organizations. One of the committee members has been appointed a "Community Spoke" by the Bicycle Coalition of Maine to advocate for improved infrastructure for safe walking and bicycling in the lower Kennebec region. Another member is certified by the national League of American Bicyclists as a League Cycling Instructor, an important resource for educating children and adults on bicycling responsibilities and rules of the road as well as how to properly ride and maintain a bicycle. In addition, committee members have written on numerous occasions to our federal representatives urging Congress to pass the federal transportation bill (now extended umpteenth times because of the

House of Representatives inability to act) with dedicated funding for pedestrian and biking infrastructure and activities.

The committee has also been active on the education front. Two members organized and held a very successful six-week "Get Back on Your Bike" course for ten adults through the Bath Recreation Department and the Bath YMCA. It ran from late April until the end of May. On June 2nd, the committee organized, with the invaluable assistance of the Merrymeeting Wheelers, a bike rodeo held jointly with the VIPS's annual Bike Safety Day. It was the first such rodeo in Bath for at least a decade and is expected to be an annual event. And an *ex officio* member of the committee successfully applied for two "Safe Routes to Schools" mini-grants for spring and fall 2012 "Wednesday Walk and Bike to School" programs. We expect these and other educational programs will become permanent ways to encourage more children as well as adults to think of their feet (and their bicycles) as important parts of the transportation picture.

Facilities improvements for cyclists and pedestrians during 2011

1. Bicycle racks: During the summer and fall 2011, bicycle racks provided through a fundraising campaign of the Kennebec Estuary Land Trust were installed under committee aegis by the Recreation Department at the Universe Gym and Fitness Center, High Street (two racks); the Hampton Court Inn on Commercial Street (two racks); Rogers Ace Hardware (one rack); and Betsy's Salon (one rack). The Post Office, the Maine Maritime Museum, and Main Street Bath have also requested installation of racks which the Department of Public Works has promised to install. (as of August 30, those additional racks have now been installed.) Bike racks are important for two reasons. Bicycle theft is unfortunately all too common in Bath. Over the past two years an average of about 27 bicycles a year are stolen. And this only accounts for reported thefts. Few of the stolen bicycles are ever recovered. In large part theft is due to a failure on the part of the owners to properly secure their bicycles and in part it is due to the absence of proper facilities for securing them. A secondary purpose of installing the racks is to remind motorists that bicycles may be present.

2. East Coast Greenway signage: The East Coast Greenway is a bicycle route running from Calais, Maine to Key West, Florida. The plan is eventually to have the entire route on a traffic-free hard surface trail. Currently, however, 75% of the route is on roadways and will probably remain so for a long time to come. The route crosses the Kennebec River at Bath, winds through Bath, and enters West Bath on Old Bath-Brunswick Road. Until this year, there has been no signage to guide cyclists through Bath. Several times, bicyclists unfamiliar with the area found themselves reaching Five Corners if heading north or coming off the Sagadahoc Bridge when heading south and totally baffled as to what to do next. Gardeners at Druid Park sometimes found themselves directing bicyclists heading north as did the staff at the Information Center for riders going in the other direction. A member of the bike-ped committee, Kevin Shute, and a former member, John Mathieu, took the initiative to map where signs should be placed

and then, with a small anonymous grant, about twenty Greenway signs were purchased and installed with the help of the Public Works Department. Gaps in the signage have been recently filled thanks to a generous donation of signs by Mark Wheeler, a bicycling advocate in Woolwich who purchased and helped install signs in that municipality. He provided some extra signs to Bath and these will be installed in the three places where there are unmarked turnings.

3. Congress Avenue Shared Use Path: Although the committee was not directly involved in the planning and building of the paved path, which now connects Five Corners, the athletic fields, the housing along Congress Avenue and the Bath Shopping Center, it did advise on some changes especially where the path intersected with a street.

4. Bicycle Route designations (recommendations for): A subcommittee of three, following the guidelines and priorities set out in the *City of Bath, Maine: Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* of March 2011 recommended to the committee a series of routes to be designated "bicycle routes" and therefore to be given appropriate signage, roadway striping, and sharrows (painted logos reminding motorists of the possible presence of bicycle drivers in the roadway). The committee in turn recommended these routes be adopted by the Council in 2012. The council, consequently, added some modest funds in the 2013 budget to provide for striping (fog lines) and signage whether standing or in the form of sharrows on the principal bike routes through Bath. Although, it may not be possible to establish official "bike lanes" because of roadway width constraints, establishing uniform ten-foot lane widths (as they are now, for example, on North Street) with the addition of fog lines and signage will accomplish some of the same purposes as bike lanes: 1) providing a place where a bicyclist feels secure, 2) indicating to motorists the presence of bicyclists, and 3) helping keep traffic closer to posted speed limits, i.e. traffic calming.

5. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance improvements for the downtown: In response to citizen complaints about the difficulties of access to the downtown for individuals with disabilities, a member of the committee, John Swenson, in conjunction with the former planning officer, Jim Upham; the codes enforcement officer, Scott Davis; and the director of public works, Peter Owen, accompanied by concerned individuals, some in wheelchairs, examined the Front Street situation and as a result, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee recommended an item for the capital improvement budget for 2012-2013 to fund improvements in ramps and curb cuts and to move certain spaces reserved for handicapped parking away from interfering street signs or other impediments to unloading. In addition, for Heritage Days the municipal parking lot will be set aside for handicapped parking. More importantly, the walk audit, which led to a serious critique of ADA compliance in the downtown, serendipitously coincided with the announcement of a federally-funded program (requiring no local match), "New Freedom: Improve Access to Transit" for towns with a permanent transit system and the need to improve ADA compliance and make the transit system

more accessible. Thanks to two committee initiatives (see below for the second), and the hard work of Andrew Deci, planning director, and Peter Owen, director of public works, a major grant was applied for and approved at the state level. At this moment (June 22) the city is awaiting federal signoff on the grant.

Education and outreach

6. “Walk or Wheel Wednesdays” at Bath Middle School: The national program, Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS), funded in large part by the Federal transportation bill, encourages communities to promote walking and biking to school through such activities as “walking school buses” and “biking school buses” by providing small grants and sharing expertise. Pedestrian safety and improving the health of school-age children are both goals of the program.

One of the *ex officio* members of the committee, Sarah Bingham, Health Coordinator for Regional Schools Unit 1, successfully applied for two SRTS mini-grants to organize what she designated “Walk or Wheel Wednesdays” for the RSU 1 Bath Middle School.

With one of the grants from Maine's Safe Routes to Schools program, Bath Middle School started Walk or Wheel Wednesdays for the last six weeks of the school year. Since school starts an hour later on Wednesdays, students were encouraged to take the extra time to either walk or ride their bikes to school. Promotion of these Wednesdays took place at lunch, in newsletters, and the classroom. Parents dropping off their students by car in the morning were also given flyers to encourage participation. Then on Wednesday mornings, staff members stood outside to spot students walking or biking to school. Punch cards were given out and each time a student walked or biked, another day on their card was punched. Bus riders from surrounding towns were encouraged to walk in the gym before school started for the health benefits and were allowed to get their cards punched as well. Students accumulating at least four weeks of walking or biking could then chose among various prizes including reflectors, bike locks, stickers, t-shirts, and more. A few new helmets donated by the Bath PD were also distributed to students who needed them. Unfortunately, Wednesdays this spring have been marked until recently by inclement weather so the participation rate was not as high as the organizers had hoped. But the precedent was set and the program will be offered again in the fall under the second SRTS mini-grant.

7. Get Back on Your Bike Course: In conjunction with the Bath YMCA and the Bath Parks and Recreation Department, and the Bicycle Coalition of Maine, two members of the Committee, Robert McChesney and Sharon Wilbraham, a certified League Cycle Instructor, organized and led a six-session course (April-May 2012) for adults who know how to ride a bike but hadn't ridden in a long time and wanted to re-discover the pleasures and the health and economic benefits of cycling. The course was co-sponsored by the Bicycle Coalition of Maine and the Bath Cycle and Ski Shop along with the Y and the Rec Department. The committee envisioned this course as promoting not only individual health and

well-being but also the goals of the City Council which in August 2008 adopted the Energy Inventory and Climate Action Plan to reduce greenhouse gases in the city of Bath. Further, the city's own website contains a page on reducing transportation costs and although it focuses mostly on getting the most out of the automobile it makes the important point that Bath residents mostly live within two miles or less of Bath shops and services, an eminently bike-able distance. The course encouraged participants to think about the bicycle as a tool for doing errands and shopping; how much every errand undertaken by bike or on foot reduces your carbon footprint; and how much money one saves in addition! The course was over-subscribed (13 people applied for the 10 slots) and will be offered again in 2013. The survey response to the course was overwhelmingly positive but the organizers have decided on one or two changes, including reducing enrollment to 8 rather than 10 and spending more time on on-road training.

8. Regional and state-wide outreach: The committee, in response to Council's charge to "work with other communities and municipalities to pursue regional bicycling and walking goals" has opened a dialogue with a concerned group in Arrowsic as well as interested parties in Georgetown and Woolwich who want to see roadway improvements to SR 127 to safely connect US Rte 1 to Reid State Park for bicyclists as well as provide safer conditions for pedestrians along the route. In addition, the committee is concerned about the appalling condition of SR 209 through Bath and will make it a high priority to advocate for a rebuild of the portion of the route from Court Street to Winnegance.

In March of 2012, the committee invited Dan Stewart, from the Maine Department of Transportation to address it. Mr. Stewart has the title "Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Quality Community Program Manager" in the Bureau of Transportation Systems Planning, Maine DOT and oversees the distribution of Transportation Enhancement (now called Transportation Alternatives) funds coming from the federal government. He spoke at the March 15th meeting on "Connecting People, Places, and Spaces for Bicyclists and Pedestrians" in the course of which he provided a good deal of information on resources for improving bicycling and pedestrian safety.

He came early to the meeting on March 15th for an inspection tour of SR 127 to see the problems. His visit coincided with the announcement of the "New Freedom-Improve Access to Transit" program, a recently-announced, federally-funded, state administered program for which Bath seemed eminently qualified (see above). His visit to address the committee was then extended to a consultation with the planning director and the director of public works and resulted in application for a \$160,000 grant which was approved by the state in early June and will bring all of Front Street into ADA compliance with curb cuts, bump-outs, parking spaces, and signage. The committee is proud of helping facilitate the grant.

9. Bike rodeo and Safety Day: On June 2nd, in conjunction with the Merrymeeting Wheelers Bicycle Club, and the Bath PD and VIPS Bike Safety

Day a bike rodeo was held in the parking lot behind St. Mary's Church. Although bike safety day is an annual event, no bike rodeo has been held for some time and the committee believed it is an important way to attract kids to the bike safety day and to promote bicycling as safe as well as fun transportation. June 2 was a day of unpromising weather but despite lowering skies and rain which began just as the rodeo ended more than 70 children registered for the event. Rebecca Farnham, a member of the committee, organized the rodeo and the MWBC laid out the course. The committee plans to make this an annual event.

Recommending Municipal Policies

10. Sidewalk snow clearing policy: In conjunction with the director of public works, the committee started work on developing a sidewalk snow clearing policy to try and address local complaints and establish a coherent and City Council-backed policy that the director of public works can follow. We expect to have a recommendation to the council well before the first snowfall of the 2012-2013 winter.

11. Sidewalk improvement priorities: Bath is a compact city well- if not perfectly-furnished with sidewalks. In recent years major sidewalk improvements have been made on Washington Street, Congress Avenue, Western Avenue, and at Waterfront Park. But much needs still to be done. Many older sidewalks (North Street, for example) are badly deteriorated and there are areas (High Street south of Marshall, e.g) where no sidewalks now exist and residents have asked for them to be built. In the coming year, the committee will be advising the director of public works or improvements and assisting him in developing a list of sidewalk priorities with the ultimate goal of making it possible to walk all of Bath, north to south and east to west on sidewalks or trails.

Future committee priorities

Other future priorities include: encouraging Council to adopt a "Complete Streets" policy; exploring the possibility of getting "Bike-Friendly City" designation for Bath from the League of American Bicyclists and "Walk-Friendly City" status from the Alliance for Walking and Biking

We believe the committee can play an active and positive role in enhancing Bath's claim to be a "Cool Little City" and can usefully assist the process of attracting business investment by foregrounding Bath's obvious advantages for getting around without being completely dependent on motorized transportation. We can do this through education and through improving the infrastructure.