

**CITY OF PARK RAPIDS
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
JANUARY 14, 2014, 5:00 PM
Park Rapids Public Library-Lower Level
Park Rapids, Minnesota**

1. CALL TO ORDER: Mayor Pat Mikesh called the City Council Workshop for January 14th, 2014 to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL: Present: Mayor Pat Mikesh, Councilmembers Dave Konshok, Rod Nordberg, Erika Randall, and Paul Utke. Absent: None. Staff Present: Administrator John McKinney, Planner Dan Walker, Public Facilities Maintenance Superintendent Chris Fieldsend, and Clerk Margie Vik. Others Present: Kurt Wayne from Headwater Regional Development Commission, Apex Engineer Jon Olson, Nels Peterson, Dick Rutherford, and Anna Erickson from the Enterprise. Patrick Hollister arrived at 5:50 p.m.

3. PRESENTATION:

A. Complete Streets Policy: Planner Dan Walker stated I will give you a basic overview of what the Complete Streets Policy (CSP) is and what it might mean for the City of Park Rapids and to see if the Council has any interest in pursuing the policy and going forward. I'll be presenting most of the information and we're waiting for Patrick Hollister from Partnership for Health. He'll be adding on his information. He presented at the Statewide Planning Conference in Rochester this year. I thought that he made some interesting points. He works in Clay, Becker, Wilkin, and Ottertail Counties. He's been instrumental in getting CSP implemented in a lot of the smaller towns in that region. It was interesting to me that smaller cities are interested in getting Complete Streets. I thought that it would be something that we could benefit from here in Park Rapids.

Walker stated Kurt Wayne is here from the Headwaters Regional Development Commission (HRDC). He's been helping us work with that and doing some other community work with the Bicycle Friendly Communities and some other initiatives. Wayne stated I work on transportation by partnering with MN DOT. I also do planning and development work for active transportation. That is the idea of integrating health into our daily needs of getting around. A lot of that turns into how do we improve biking and walking conditions in some of our towns. What's the best way to do that, how do people in the communities want to do that, and how does it work best for the communities.

Walker stated there's a lot of information on Complete Streets that is available online if you want to get into the statistics. For this I will give you a broad overview of what the program is. There are a number of definitions of what CSP is. The Minnesota Complete Streets Coalition says, Complete Streets is designed and operated to be safe and accessible for pedestrians, transit riders, bicyclists, and drivers, all users, regardless of age or ability. They make streets that are not only designed for cars but are also designed for the people that live in the neighborhoods and work in the commercial districts.

Walker stated some of the benefits of Complete Streets are safety by creating streets that are safer for humans. They also have a public health component where they encourage people to use different modes of transportation rather than just hoping in your car every time, maybe for shorter trips looking at walking and biking more often. Part of that is creating the linkages that allow for that through sidewalks and bike lanes. There's also an economic development component. Through economic development Complete Streets creates places that people want to come to, a draw. When there are nice places that are aesthetically pleasing people are more likely to be drawn to them. They also improve the quality of neighborhoods by allowing more interaction between neighbors, and it goes with those other benefits. They are very inter-related. Complete Streets are also cost effective and affordable. They create alternatives that allow people that don't have cars to navigate on a more affordable level. There's also environmental benefits and they encourage sustainable design.

Walker stated Complete Streets Policies are meant to be incremental and gradual. They create a complete transportation network over time. They are generally not done all at once. The city would implement them over time and use that to complete the network over a very long period of time. They are intended to create long term results. They are designed to create a more human scale street with equal consideration given to all transportation. They take on many different forms depending on the neighborhood, the predominate land use, and the road classification. It's not a one size fit all package. You look at the type of street, a collector road or a residential area, and then you design the elements to that. They are intended to make roads and streets safer and accessible. They improve health and trip options, and improve the character of neighborhoods. On major highways the street is going to look a lot different than in residential neighborhoods.

Walker stated a typical cross section includes the roadway, bicycle paths, a green amenity zone where you'd have trees and the boulevard. You'd have a pedestrian zone and the development zone, where the private property starts. On the commercial side, it's a mirror to that. One thing about the cross section is that you can vary the different components to a width to what your desired outcome is.

Walker stated Complete Streets are not mandatory on all projects. Projects are evaluated against need, criteria, and planning documents to gauge appropriateness, feasibility, and your return on your investment. If you were to implement a Complete Streets Policy, most of them are designed so you are not pigeonholed to say you're going to do everything on every single project. If it's not feasible, or cost effective, or you're not going to get your return on your investment, then it's not something that you'll be stuck with. The CSP is not intended to create more process. They're intended to implement a better process. That would include input from all stakeholders, planning, public safety, engineering, public works, and the community. Complete Streets are generally not more expensive to construct. Part of the intention of having a policy and going through that process is to see if there are opportunities to save money and to find a better design. Lastly, Complete Streets are not only for big cities.

Walker stated in Park Rapids there have been projects that included certain elements of a complete streets design. Whether it was done intentionally or not, some of them were. The Highway 34 complete reconstruction was considered a complete streets project, which included the streets, bike lane, sidewalks, and the amenities. Pleasant Avenue has elements of complete streets, and also the reconstruction of Main Avenue. Some of the planning documents that we have in place also either mention in concept or

toward specific projects for complete streets. There are complete streets listed in the RDG Downtown Park Rapids Plan. We have a comprehensive sidewalk and trails plan. Complete streets elements exist in our special assessment policy. The city's Comprehensive Plan also lists multi-use systems as part of our transportation goals. A Complete Streets Policy compliments other groups and provides opportunities for recognition and possible funding. It creates another tool for our tool box. Having a Complete Streets Policy helps us to say we are committed to the concept and that it's part of our city's long term planning.

Walker stated our comprehensive plan map shows the existing sidewalk network that we have within the city. Most of it is centered toward the core of the city and some of the really old portions of the city. The yellow denotes the existing trails in the city. The green is for the proposed sidewalks and trails throughout the city. You can see where the holes exist within the system. That's something that we should continue to work with on future projects. That should be a core element to those.

Walker stated when it comes to adoption of the Complete Streets Policy you can either adopt an ordinance, which would make it into law. The majority are adopted by resolution. That would not commit you to anything. A resolution would give support to the Complete Streets Policy. That is generally the first step to take. You can do a number of things above and beyond that, but a lot of the cities do it by resolution because then they are not mandated to do anything.

Walker stated the most common process in Minnesota is to create the case for Complete Streets. The second would be a work group drafts a resolution of support. The third step would be to get the City Council to approve a resolution. The fourth would be to create a work group and create a full policy. The fifth step would be for the Council to approve the policy. The sixth step would be to implement and report on the progress of the policy.

Walker stated when I was thinking about why we would need a Complete Streets Policy in the City of Park Rapids the main reason would be that we have a number of projects over the next five years that are long term utility improvement projects. That would provide us with the opportunity to build a quality, cohesive, multi-transportation system as part of those projects. It seems like now would be a great opportunity, and the most cost-effective time to look at Complete Streets as part of those projects to see if there's opportunities for us to compete our grid and work out our transportation system. The second one is concerning the neighborhoods and projected future land use and right sizing the streets for the neighborhood and road classifications. In Park Rapids we are blessed with really large street right of ways where we got a lot of land. On some of our streets they are actually pavement to pavement in some of the residential neighborhoods there is forty feet or so. I think it would be an opportunity to look at possibly adjusting the size of those streets to create a better residential neighborhood, if possible. The third is the savings in street pavement that can help pay for the other improvements. It can also help reduce assessments and some of the long term maintenance costs.

Walker stated there are other communities that have implemented a Complete Streets Policy in Minnesota. There are a number of metro communities and some in southern Minnesota. In the northwest corner, those are all policies that Patrick Hollister helped to implement. He's been instrumental in getting the Complete Streets Policy in Western Minnesota. He has Dilworth, Breckenridge, Fergus Falls, Battle Lake, Frazee, and Fargo-Moorhead. Kurt Wayne stated in addition to that there are a couple of communities

in our region included in that, Baudette is one of them. They have active living resolutions. The Council has resolved that they want to promote active living and physical activity and do so in some of their new construction and street projects. There are more than just those on your map.

Walker stated we've come to give the Council information and to see if there is support going forward for a Complete Streets Policy. I've included a sample resolution that was done for the City of Battle Lake. That is the resolution that Hollister uses in most of the communities. It is generally broad enough where it does not necessarily commit you specifically to anything but it would give support to Complete Streets in Park Rapids and help achieve some of those goals that way.

Konshok questioned what is MN DOT's take on this? Walker stated MN DOT has adopted their own policy. I don't know if they use it in all communities and on all projects that they would recommend doing a Complete Streets treatment, but I understand that if you ask MN DOT to include Complete Streets elements they are required by state statutes to do that. Wayne stated that is a fairly recent development. It's a statewide policy that just came out last year to do this Complete Streets resolution on all MN DOT maintained roads. Now it comes down to the individual MN DOT district and how well each district implements it. It might take a little more time for each district to get the feel of it, but that shouldn't take too much time I don't think. Walker stated I provided a link to the MN DOT website where you can read their resolution and the statute.

Nordberg stated the main street project under consideration is Riverside. Can you give us a specific of what would happen on Riverside with Complete Streets that wouldn't happen otherwise? Walker stated I don't necessarily know that there's anything that wouldn't happen, but more or less the Complete Streets resolution is to give support that we are actively considering Complete Streets as part of all of our projects. If there are things that aren't feasible through the project we wouldn't include them. But what the Complete Streets does say is we would consider Complete Streets elements in our projects. It's already outlined in our special assessment policy that says we will consider that. This just strengthens that argument.

Nordberg questioned is there any money like there is for Safe Streets? River Heights, the apartment complex on Riverside Avenue, could use some special sidewalks and amenities for the people there that would not normally be included in a straight street project. Usually it's just sidewalk, curb, gutter, and boulevard. I'm wondering how that would be paid for and who gets assessed. Wayne stated this is a question that I've heard before. It's a tough question especially when you bring up the question of assessments. It might be something to do a little research on in terms of what some other communities have done to get around this. I do understand that this could be one of the bigger hurdles for Complete Streets, if Complete Streets is approving a crosswalk or access to sidewalk or completing a sidewalk. Homeowners aren't always happy with a re-assessment for that. There was a similar discussion in Beltrami County so I'd have to look that up and do some research for you on that.

Nordberg stated that's the one place that it would be beneficial. Especially for the people that live there. Many of them are in walkers, wheelchairs, little carts. Parking is an issue there. It's one of our densely populated areas in town where people do walk. They walk to Hugo's. It's something to consider. It would be good for us if it doesn't cost too much.

Wayne stated one of the questions had to do with funding as well. Depending on the size of the project, there's a federal program called the Transportational Alternatives Program. It's a competitive funding source but it can be used to fund things like new bike lanes or new trails. The way that the grant is set up it's generally not for small projects that would include a couple of blocks because you have to jump through too many hoops just to get 80% of the money that you need. But if you were talking about a longer street redo maybe along the entire length of Park Rapids that needed updated sidewalks or crossings that could be something. It depends on the size and the cost.

Mikesh stated I don't understand what you are getting to. We already have a policy for how we do streets. What are we getting with this? To add a bicycle lane? Is that what we're looking at? Walker stated Hollister implements a lot of the Complete Streets Policies. He has a lot more expertise. From what I understand, we don't need to do this. We have staff and policies in place. But it helps strengthen our commitment to actually look at this. Some of the work goes back to what Wayne does for Bicycle Friendly Communities or Healthy Initiatives. Having a Complete Streets Policy is going to help them succeed in some of their goals as well. Wayne stated I would see it that way. The main reason to do a Complete Streets resolution is that it doesn't necessarily corner you into having to put a bike lane on each street, but it says that the Council and the city staff will be considering all modes of transportation on your streets each time that you're doing a city construction project. It's saying we're already publically thinking of that and hold ourselves as accountable as we can to make sure these things come about.

Wayne stated I've worked at HRDC for over a year now with active transportation stuff. One of the things that I've worked on is helping communities with Bicycle Friendly Communities (BFC), the application and status. It's an award that's given out twice a year by the League of American Bicyclists. It's the national bicycling league. They give it out because they want to encourage as many communities across the nation as possible to start thinking about accommodating for bicyclists and pedestrians. If we can accommodate for bicyclists and pedestrians we're making it safer and more convenient for people to get additional exercise. We can fix a couple of things with this whole idea.

Wayne stated in 2013 I helped Park Rapids apply for a BFC status. This was a two part deal. Back in April of 2013 the HRDC hosted a meeting here in Park Rapids. We had a couple dozen citizens and local advocates attend. We talked about is the community bicycle friendly. It was our own self-assessment. We talked about is it convenient to bike around the community. We came up with a lot of good things happening already. That's encouragement to groups like Itascataur, which encourages people to bike more. There's education going on in the local schools. The police are on board too. They enforce good bicycle safety. We did find that some of the streets are pretty comfortable to bike on. We even had a bike ride during this kickoff event. A few roads were hard to bike on, particularly Highway 34, Highway 71, and Main Avenue. One of the big takeaways from this first meeting was there's a lot of encouragement and education going on in Park Rapids about getting healthier and being more active with our transportation, but is it safer to do so? The other thing was do we know enough or are we evaluating enough about safety when it comes to pedestrians and bicyclists. Those were the two big takeaways.

Wayne stated in the second step of the process as we got together with city staff and some advocates and we put together the application these questions and weaknesses came up. Do we have the right infrastructure to make it as safe as possible to walk or bike around the community? We filled out the application and the results came back that Park

Rapids received an honorable mention, which is a good first step. It's a nice recognition from a national agency to say this community is doing some really good things to promote walking and biking and healthy behaviors, but there's a ways to go. There's a bronze, silver, gold, or platinum status that you can achieve through BFC applications.

Wayne stated this re-prompted the idea that if the infrastructure of our city is one of the weaknesses when it comes to biking and walking then we could do more to promote that and evaluate that, and that maybe a Complete Streets resolution can really help that. When Walker came to me and said we want to look into adopting a CSP it is actually perfect for Park Rapids and how they stand right now. Because where it can go with that is if the city adopted a CSP it could actually help for engineering and public works thinking more with each new project, incrementally. How do we make it best here? How do we make it safe for our cars, bicyclists, pedestrians, and children to get to school, on this particular road or project?

Wayne stated the second point is with the HRDC I have a contract from the Department of Health to essentially help you with this. The contract is to help communities in our region implement active transportation. To impact that, it can mean a lot of different things. If the city decides to adopt a CSP resolution there's the question of what does this actually entail? I've heard those questions this evening. My role for HRDC is helping out with those questions and with the implementation role on a project by project basis. What it could hopefully be is with the knowledge that we already have by applying for a BFC and getting our advocates together we already know a lot of the conditions and a lot of what is working well and what is not. Hopefully, if a CSP is passed and a project is coming up for reconstruction we can say let's take a look at what people have seen before on this street or at this intersection. What do people like and what don't they like. What is the traffic like and what the real conflict points are and we can have a really holistic approach to fine tune Complete Streets so that it's not something that will necessarily break the bank in terms of installing bike lanes or sidewalks. But to find some good balance between safety and fiscal responsibility, to find something that works for everybody.

Wayne stated through the BFC application process, and through this Complete Streets resolution, I'm hopeful that we can develop a greater partnership between the HRDC and the City of Park Rapids to when a new project comes up we can say how are we going to be complete with the street and come to HRDC for assistance on that, and then if I don't know I can connect you to people in other communities that have done this before or to MN DOT that may have recommendations. Essentially try to put the pieces together for you guys. Every street is different, but I think I can help with that based on the planning that we've done in the past and the know how that we have at the HRDC. That's my two cents on how BFC and the HRDC fits into this and why it's important and how I can help.

Mikesh stated based on your map, a lot of the green areas are places that we don't even have tarred roads. Why would we want sidewalks there? We have already ended up with one trail that goes to nowhere that everybody paid for. I think there is more work that we need in town than to worry about these outskirts. Plus we have to get someone to pay for it. Walker stated part of the plan is that it's incremental and long range. These are not things that we are going to do over the next two years. It's something that we need to think about long range over a number of years so that as the city builds out, we know that these are areas that we want to try to address. But as far as stand-alone options, the farther you get out the less feasible it actually is because you're serving less area. This is a plan and if

development occurs in that area, like a subdivision, then we tell the developer that this is our plan and we need you to provide for that amenity because it's in our plan. That's the use of the long range plan.

Nels Peterson questioned what is the source of the Complete Streets? Where did it originate from and what was their premise? Patrick Hollister stated I work for Partnership for Health, the statewide health improvement program for Becker, Clay, Wilkin, and Ottertail Counties. I apologize for being late. The Complete Streets movement started nationally by a woman named Barbara McCann who was with the National Complete Streets Coalition. She originally coined the phrase Complete Streets. This went back about twelve years when she realized that in the post WWII era, about fifty years after the end of WWII, so many of our roads were built only for cars with no real thought to either pedestrians or bicycles. She wanted to do something about it and helped form an organization called the Complete Street Coalition which has now been incorporated into another organization called Smart Growth. That's how it got started. There are Complete Streets resolutions and policies being adopted by cities and counties all over the United States. I've been involved in the adoption of several of them in Becker, Clay, Ottertail, and Wilkin Counties.

Hollister stated I'm a planner by background. I was hired to promote biking and walking within our four counties both in terms of individual behavior and in terms of infrastructure. We're working hard with communities like Detroit Lakes, Perham, Breckenridge, Fergus Falls, Parkers Prairie, Fargo-Moorhead Area to better accommodate bicycles and pedestrians on our streets. That can be a project by project basis, it can be something that is funded by the local government. That can be something that we pursue through state or federal grants, DNR or MN DOT grants. We also want cities and counties within our four county area to incorporate Complete Streets principals within their Capital Improvement Plans, within their budget process, and their street reconstruction process. So I've been involved in the adoption of policies just like the one that Walker's been talking about in Breckenridge, Battle Lake, Parkers Prairie, Frazee, Fergus Falls, and Dilworth. On a county level we also had policies adopted by Wilkin, Clay, and Ottertail Counties. I've been all over the region for this type of thing.

Walker stated the Mayor questioned why we need this when we have it listed in other city policies. What is the benefit of actually having a CSP? Hollister stated it's good for a city to institutionalize it and enshrine it in the form of a written policy because personnel and political turnover happens, but when you adopt a policy it endures all of those changes. It helps institutionalize the Complete Streets approach. It also gives all of your departments within the city a common place to work from and an understanding of what the goals are that you are trying to pursue. If you don't have that in writing then you're depending on the good will and intentions of various individuals. You think there is a verbal understanding of how the different departments work together but it's good to regularize it and institutionalize it in the form of a written policy.

Mikesh questioned when all of these grants dry up, then you're looking for the citizens to pay for it. Hollister stated your citizens walk and they ride bicycles. They deserve their equal portion of the right of way.

Dick Rutherford questioned you're all about these bicycles but none of them are paying taxes as far as licensing. Snowmobiles and cars pay taxes, but the bicycles don't. If you want all of this done, let's put a tax on the licensing for bicycles just like they do for cars and snowmobiles. Hollister stated there has been talk about some sort of bicycle tax,

perhaps even on the state level. There's also been talk about there being some type of bicycle user fee, possibly through the state DNR trail systems. There has been talk on a state level of is there some way to collect revenue from the biking public. Nobody really has put their finger on the magic solution for that. But I would also add, yes it's true, if I bike on your street I'm not paying a license tax in the same sense that motorists are. On the other hand I weight a lot less and I put less wear and tear on the road. So that's the other side of the coin. I take up less space when I park to patronize one of your businesses. The city is working hard on a bike trail connection between here and Itasca State Park. I think that will be a fantastic boon to your tourist economy. You want to make it safe, comfortable, convenient, and attractive for bicyclists to ride bikes to here from Itasca so they can spend some money downtown, but also you want your community to be bicycle friendly within the community. That's the way you're really going to maximize the economic benefits of a good bicycle connection to Itasca Park.

Walker stated if you do a CSP as I mentioned you look at some opportunities that you would have that when you do a reconstruction you don't need forty feet of driving lane. You can use the reduction in the size of that to help pay for some of the other amenities which allow people to have choices. Rutherford stated I'll agree with you to an extent. But you went by my place on Highway 34 and on both sides of the road you took about eight feet for bike lanes. Do you know how many bicycles go by my place? It doesn't need to be on both sides of the street. You don't need to take that. Somebody has to step up and say enough is enough. One side of the street is good, both sides of the street for bicycles? Walker stated that was a MN DOT Project. Rutherford stated it's still taxpayer money. Walker stated the goal of the highway project whether that's a Complete Streets or not, is to get people from here to there in their car as fast as they can.

Nels Peterson stated Highway 34 is no doubt an absolute failure when it comes to Complete Streets. There's no denying that. It was an awful situation, and to make out and they claim that it was partially Complete Streets, I don't know how that would come about. Regardless of that, being on the Planning Commission, I dug into it as deep as I could to know exactly what is Complete Streets. To me, from what I gathered, it is nothing more than revising, updating the design policies to be a little more aware of how to address these streets to make them friendly toward people. There is no threat. It's a good thing to bring this to our attention and to everybody's awareness and implement it in policy, so as we have turnover of staff, Planning Commissioners, planners, we have a policy on hand that is at least a guide. That's all it is, a guide. It's no more than that. For the cost to the city, it's zero. We have a community here that has the ability to form some pretty good committees as projects come forward, we have people here that can resolve the issues we need to, and to make it conform with our budgets. It's purely policy, and it's very subjective and nothing more than a design guidelines.

Mikesh stated has this been through the Planning Commission already? Walker stated no. Mikesh stated so this is informal right now, and you're not looking for anything else? Walker stated at this point we presented it to the City Council and for everybody here so you can be aware of what the Complete Streets Policy is and what it could mean. It's merely a guideline. If evaluating projects for sidewalks, bike lanes, is so radical and it's something we don't need, that's fine, but I would beg to differ. I think it's another tool in the toolbox for us to use going forward on our projects and other people can use it as well.

Mikesh stated I appreciate you coming and bringing this to us.

4. ADJOURNMENT: A motion was made by Utke, seconded by Nordberg, and unanimously carried to adjourn the special meeting at 5:55 p.m.

[seal]

Mayor Pat Mikesh

ATTEST:

Margie M. Vik
City Clerk