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September Meeting Minutes

September 15, 2016

Attending were Mark Deshon (chair and resident), Karl Hassler (resident), Susan Grasso (resident), Karen Rosenberg (resident), Al Porach (resident), Barb Hughes (resident), Sean Watson (resident), Brian Bahnson (resident), Lauri Webber (resident), Ban Phommachanh (University of Delaware Parking), Mike Fortner (Newark Department of Planning), Heather Dunigan (WILMAPCO and Newark Bike Project), John Bare (Bike Delaware), and Joe Spadafino (Newark Department of Parks & Recreation).

Regrets: Christine Schultz (resident), Taras Gerasimov (Newark Police), Joel Schwaber (non-resident), Paul Moser (DelDOT), Tom Coleman (Newark Department of Public Works and Water Resources), and James Wilson (Bike Delaware)

- *Discussion to determine the organizational future of our committee*

Committee Chair Mark Deshon presented some introductory comments to help everyone understand why we needed to have this particular discussion. He said that we need to decide if the committee would like to become an official committee of the City of Newark or remain independent. (Functionally, we've been operating as a "private"—in a legal sense—group.) He explained that he would allow each person to share his/her thoughts, and then he'd read the thoughts of a couple committee members who couldn't be present but had sent him an email on the subject.

Karl Hassler:

Karl admitted that he tends to approach choices like this from an analytical point of view but lacks the information he might need to make a definitive choice. But he did say that he thinks the salient question is: What organizational entity will be most beneficial to our purpose and strategic objectives?

Susan Grasso:

Susan said she loves our independence and how we set a collaborative tone. She worries about what might happen should we be under City of Newark control. She says we are perceived as valued now and thinks being a city committee could affect how we would be perceived in the future. She also wondered about whether we'd have the freedom to

engage in some of the innovative campaigns and events we'd be and are currently initiating. Mike Fortner said that if we were reporting (accountable) to City Council, than it can either approve or veto ideas or projects.

Barb Hughes:

Barb said that her inclination is to remain independent, insisting she feels we'll be stronger as an independent group. She feels that becoming a city committee might change the balance, saying that it's very egalitarian now. She also wonders whether current members would feel as comfortable working on a committee whose membership is either partially or totally appointed.

Brian Bahnson:

Brian has observed that the Newark Bicycle Committee has morphed into something much larger (i.e., broader) in scope. It is powerful because it is driven by citizens, people who are there because they want to be, not because they have to be.

Lauri Webber:

Lauri wondered whether we'd have more or less autonomy if we chose to become a City of Newark entity. Mike Fortner said he thought that we would still be fairly autonomous but with City Council appointment and being directly reportable to City Council.

Karen Rosenberg:

Karen voiced that she sees becoming a city committee disadvantageous and asked the rhetorical question: Would [the City] take us any more seriously if we were an official city committee?

Al Porach:

Al asked, "Why don't we just become the 'University of Delaware Bike Club'?" Mark Deshon then asked, "Why would we want to do that?" Al replied that he views what we do as mostly benefitting the University of Delaware community. This opinion was not shared by anyone else in the meeting, though Heather Dunigan added that we might be able to aid in starting such a club but that it would be a student organization.

Ban Phommachanh:

Ban said he thinks we are collectively pretty much an interest group but would continue being part of the committee as a representative of UD Parking whatever is decided.

Heather Dunigan:

Heather sees this group not as a specific interest group as much as a coalition and cited our defined make-up and mission—"A partnership of interested cyclists and agencies working to improve bicycling in Newark, Delaware." Currently, resident and non-resident members partner with the University of Delaware, DelDOT, Newark Bike Project, WILMAPCO, and Bike Delaware. She made the point that our group is inclusive and one of the most productive groups with which she's worked.

Sean Watson:

Sean basically said that what Susan and Heather had said resonated with him, adding that as an independent group, we can move rather nimbly.

Mike Fortner:

Mike clarified that if NBC became a city committee, it would have to post agendas and minutes publicly and would take its advice directly to City Council. He feels that we'd have appointed membership to a certain degree. Dealing with funding and expenses might become an issue [that we're not dealing with now]. Mike and Joe Spadafino were asked how it is that they [and Tom Coleman] have been and are being encouraged to be involved with NBC. Mike said that it's basically considered public outreach.

Joe Spadafino:

Joe says that his department (Parks & Recreation) has a vested interest in this committee's work. He says he's been on other committees for years, and this committee actually gets things done.

John Bare:

Representing Bike Delaware, John shared an email from Bike Delaware's executive director and committee member James Wilson. In it, James said that Bike Delaware is currently offering chapter memberships, which would come with protection under its 501 (c)(3) status, although it currently has no such chapter affiliates. James indicated that, should we opt to stay independent, "we want you" as a Bike Delaware chapter. John went on to say that no local groups statewide have the history and momentum that NBC does. When asked about flexibility, John offered that he suspects there would be a way to structure things flexibly, but didn't specify.

Heather noted that if we opted to become a chapter of Bike Delaware, she would not be able to continue on the committee; she thinks that WILMAPCO would not be able to be involved (because of Bike Delaware's legislative lobbying advocacy).

Note from Tom Coleman:

Mark read portions of an email from Tom Coleman (City of Newark Director of Public Works and Water Resources). In it, Tom said that, whatever we decide, it's most critical that city staff still be able to attend to provide information and feedback on proposals while they are in the development stage. He felt that becoming a city committee might necessitate curtailing some of our current subcommittee structure, saying that each of them would also have to post agendas and meeting minutes, give public notice, etc. He noted there were some benefits, such as access to city staff for taking meeting minutes, producing agendas, etc. He wonders how potential updates to the Newark Bike Plan will be directed and supposes that, if we remain independent, they would simply go through the Traffic Committee.

Note from Paul Moser:

In his absence, DelDOT's Paul Moser had sent Mark an email in which he stated that he'd remain a liaison member of the committee regardless of what we decide. Here were his main thoughts:

- Becoming an entity of the city will add an external level of supervision and oversight that could make advocating for politically sensitive issues difficult. Without the influence of appointed positions and pressure from other political entities, he thinks NBC will retain its ability to advocate for its own interests despite the political climate of certain issues. Becoming an official entity of the city further binds the NBC to the political tides of the city.
- Many of the non-government projects we have taken on may not have a place in a city committee.
- As a state employee, it is refreshing to see individuals organize outside of the typical channels of the state to promote what they care about. Being an independent organization of residents sends a *powerful* message to both the city and city residents about who you all are, what you stand for, and how you can serve them.

Paul said he believes retaining as much sovereignty as possible will give the NBC the most capacity and creativity to make Newark a better place to live. However, remaining independent will require persistent dedication from not just our current roster, but whoever will take the reins in the future. Being recognized by the city will give us a defined role, in which individuals may be able to excel, but it will not allow the freedom and creativity to expand the role of leadership necessary to address wicked problems as they *actually* exist. He believes the ability to step out of the typical boundaries of advocacy to build partnerships, ask different questions, and find creative ways to solve problems are how you actually get stuff done.

Mark Deshon:

Without repeating much of what had already been said, Mark said he's leaning toward NBC remaining an independent body, more than anything for the flexibility and nimbleness on which we're constantly drawing in order to move things forward to better bicycling in Newark.

He then thanked everyone for sharing their thoughts and opinions and asked for a show of hands as to how many members (i.e., excluding liaison members) prefer that NBC remain independent. Eight of nine members raised their hands.

So, the group consensus is that NBC remain independent, regardless of what the City of Newark decides.

There will have to be some consideration for how we best organize going forward, particularly in order to protect our individual members in a legal sense. We will address this in upcoming meetings. Mark said that before the next meeting, he'd look into the insurance benefits of a possible affiliation with the League of American Bicyclists.

- *One talking point to feed Mayor Sierer for October City Council meeting*

First Friday Rides was the item that we felt Mayor Sierer ought to highlight at an October City Council meeting (see Education/Encouragement subcommittee minutes below).

- *Events this month in which NBC is involved*

- Community Day – Sept. 18, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., on The Green

Mike reminded everyone to stay tuned to the weather hotline (302-366-7147) for any updates relevant to Sunday's event. Making coloring books available for the kids was thought to be a good addition. Heather provided Mike with new posters for issue/information/feedback boards. Mark provided a small number of our bicycle-commuting brochures. Susan said she'd arrange to get the box of other materials, including our banner, to Mike before the event.

- "SafetyFest" – Sept. 27, 5–7 p.m. on the Perkins Student Center patio (facing Harrington Beach)

Ban reiterated that this event is for freshman at UD. There will be bicycle safety checks, lights, literature on bicycle safety, and quizzes that if completed will make students eligible for a prize drawing. Mark told Ban he'd try to be there.

- *Update on progress on application submission for "The Big Jump" grant*

Susan reported that the City Council will be deciding on whether or not the city is "all in" with respect to applying for this grant. In the meantime, Heather, Susan, and Mark are helping Megan McNerney, whom City Manager Carol Houck has designated to be the project lead for the City, prepare the application, which is due Oct. 28. Susan and Mark are also helping the city form a diverse project team and identify those persons and organizations who will provide accompanying letters of support for the project.

- *Status/progress reports on/from*

- Cleveland Avenue project task force

Susan said she'd missed the last couple task force meetings. Work is underway to plan the next meeting to take place later this month. It will include a site visit. Subsequently, the task force will try to achieve consensus on recommendations to City Council.

- Delaware Avenue cycletrack project

Heather reported that the project advisory committee met on Sept. 9 to review DelDOT's traffic analysis. Most of the meeting was spent looking at the various bicycle-signal phases at intersections. The good news, Heather said excitedly, is that it works, though there are still three possible scenarios from which to pick—"protected," "permissive," and a hybrid of "protected/permissive." Mark asked her to explain in layman's terms what is meant by "protected" and "permissive." She said to think of it as level of protection for cyclists vs. cyclists yielding. She said that at the South College Avenue intersection, two of the three scenarios would mean a slightly lower level of service for bicyclists (i.e., more delay). In only one other case would one of the scenarios mean a slightly lower level of service.

- *Quick subcommittee updates*

- Communication subcommittee

Karen reported that the latest edition of *The Messenger Bag* newsletter was published and distributed electronically. Sean mentioned that the more we share articles, videos, etc. on social media, the better our reach will be as a committee. First Friday Rides is an example of how we're gaining new "likes."

- Education/Encouragement subcommittee

Susan reported that the subcommittee had met yesterday and made some plans for the year ahead. The next First Friday Ride will be on Nov. 7, and the après-ride venue will be Klondike Kates. Start time is 5:30 p.m. Beginning with the November ride, lights will be mandatory for participants. Susan said she's thinking about having a donation jar available to help with this event. There were 42 participants at the September event.

Susan also mentioned that they're thinking about a ride as a fundraiser in the spring or fall of 2017, possibly with optional 20-, 40-, and 60-mile courses. Susan said that some subcommittee members met with a team of UD's Visual Communications seniors to discuss a project involving a temporary "bicycle civility" art campaign for downtown Newark. She also mentioned that there will be a Safe Routes to School grant meeting on Sept. 26 at John R. Downes Elementary School.

Al asked if there might be a liability issue involved in taking in money. Lauri insisted that money could pass through her 501 (c) (3) organization. Mark said that this whole question of committee liability will have to be an issue to be discussed as an agenda item at the next NBC meeting.

- Safety and Enforcement subcommittee

Barb said there was nothing new to report.

- Engineering subcommittee

Mark reported that the subcommittee met with DelDOT's Mark Luszcz on Sept. 9 to talk a bit with him about possibilities for bike amenities in conjunction with some of our recent ideas for bikeways.

- We discussed what we're calling an "Old Newark" bikeway, involving five streets. Tom Coleman will be working on taking measurements for conceptual plans. ADA access to the Newark Train Station was also discussed; Tom indicated that there will be a presentation on this to City Council soon. Heather thought Community Day would be a good opportunity to see what a "bikeway" or "bike boulevard" might look like. She agreed to work up posters for the Newark Bicycle Committee booth.
- We talked at length about a UD right-of-way option for getting from Orchard Road north to North College Avenue. Mark said that he, Tom, and Susan met with UD

representatives Peter Krawchyk and Jeremy Sunkett to present this as a proposal for UD to consider, as this would help reroute some of the bicycle traffic away from the Trabant patio. We discussed some of the particulars with Mark Luszcz and obtained his feedback.

- We also discussed the tricky intersection movement as north-south or south-north bicycle traffic negotiates E. Main St. What the subcommittee proposes is adding a piece of protected contraflow bike lane on E. Main St. for southbound bicycle traffic coming from North College Ave. How cyclists would get through the “scramble” area at the intersection of North College Ave. and E. Main St. is still a question that needs a good answer.

Mark also said that Mark Luszcz implored NBC to send a letter to FHWA requesting permission for approved use of bike boxes, a device that could become a valuable tool for DelDOT here in Newark. He also said the City of Newark should make a likewise request.

- *Old or new business / announcements*

Heather mentioned that there would soon be a public workshop at Newark Charter High School on DelDOT’s Elkton Road project, which is slated to include a multi-use bike/ped pathway from Stonegate Apts. (just across the Maryland state line) to Gravenor Lane in Newark. She urged committee members to attend this public workshop.

Our next meeting will be on Thursday, October 20, at 4 p.m. at WILMAPCO.
Call-in #302-737-6205 x126.