

Meeting Minutes

Salem Bicycling & Shared Path Advisory Committee

Wednesday, November 1, 2023 | 6:30 p.m.

City Hall Annex 1st Floor Meeting Room & Via Remote Participation

Members Present: John Wathne (Chair), Walter Morrell, Cat Seiferth, Annie Wolf, Josh Nagle, Charlie Heaps, Matt Caruso, Colleen Downie, Alex Maranto

Members Absent: Connor Ryan

Also Present: Tom Devine, Senior Planner

Call Meeting to Order

Wathne calls the meeting to order.

Public Comment

Wathne opens public comment and there are none.

Bikeshare Accessibility

Devine provides information in to follow up on this topic after a member of the public raised the issue at the previous meeting. One accessibility problem with both bike and scooter share programs is the sidewalk clutter they cause. Dockless programs, that are less common now, are more challenging in this respect. When Salem did a shared e-scooter program, much work went into using GPS controls to keep them at virtual docks, rather than cluttering sidewalks. Bluebikes is a docked system and every station is located and oriented to maintain adequate clearance so as not to impede anyone's mobility.

Prior to the pandemic, the City explored adding adaptive bikes to the previous Zagster program. Zagster could have added an adult tricycle to the system. But even then, their recommendation would have been to manage the adaptive bikes outside the regular bike share system.

In the summer of 2019 the Community Life Center hosted a public adaptive bike demonstration. It was eye opening in the way it showed the variety of types of adaptive bikes for riders of different needs. Also around that time, Devine met with the Salem Commission on Disabilities to discuss adaptive bikes.

The Bluebikes system doesn't have adaptive bikes. Hubway (Bluebikes' predecessor) had a single adult tricycle available, but it wasn't promoted or used. And Devine hasn't received any resolution to the question of what the City's legal obligation is. But there is interest in the City to make adaptive bikes available and is exploring a way to do it.

Wathne thinks that the solution may vary based on whether the purpose is simple transportation for which there are services like The Ride available or if it is for recreation. In the latter case, The Ride does not provide a recreation experience that compares to Bluebikes. Caruso thinks that people have both transportation and recreation needs that Bluebikes services.

Heaps did some research and couldn't find anything clear about the legal accessibility requirements. He did find that Portland is experimenting with it through local bike shops and working through various challenges.

Nagle wonders if there could be a voucher for people who need an adaptive bike to get one that suits their needs, rather than a one size fits all in the bike share program.

Wolf asks how the conversation started in the past about adaptive bikes. Devine remembers Mayor Driscoll being interested in it. Wolf also suggests consulting with bike advocates from neighboring communities. Heaps suggests looking for information through national groups.

Wolf states that the City should explore this. The group is supportive of that regardless of whether it is required or not. Devine will update the committee on progress with this.

Bike Parking Ordinance

Documents reviewed: City of Salem Bicycle Parking Guidelines, approved 12/18/2018.

Wolf says they are beginning to determine how to proceed. Caruso confirms that the Bike Parking Guidelines are currently in place, and the Cambridge example is just a suggestion, and we need to determine whether to have mandatory requirements.

Devine clarifies that the existing guidelines are used by the Planning Board to determine what bike parking to require for projects come before them. He states that the guidelines have a margin of error and can be applied case by case. An ordinance has to have a way to seek relief, such as through the Zoning Board of appeals, but a smartly crafted ordinance should not frequently require relief.

Caruso asks how many developments the guidelines have applied to. Devine says it has applied to all the projects that came to the Planning Board since 2018. Examples he can think of include vacant church buildings that are being redeveloped, the City's Crescent Lot Development, and the projects on Franklin and Canal Street.

Nagle asks about applying to three-family projects, which the guidelines exempt. Devine states that projects of that size also don't normally go through the planning board. Wathne asks about Building Department jurisdiction. Devine says the Building Department enforces zoning requirements and decisions. Heaps says he sees an

ordinance as more transparent. He says there is sensitivity about development in Salem and the process therefore should be transparent.

Wolf wonders if expanding the guidelines to make them more comprehensive could be an option too, considering the benefit of the guidelines' flexibility. Wathne notes that it is an intensive process to update and ordinance.

Seiferth says she would like a process like the sign program with a list of recommended vendors to make it easier for people. She also thinks non-residential bike parking minimums are very low. We subsidize car parking, including charging stations. Her shop would require 0.1 bike parking spaces, while she is required to have more car parking. This she sees as too much accommodation of cars and not enough for bikes.

Heaps asks if a good next step would be for the group to provide questions and comments by email. Wathne suggests editing a document on screen in real time at a meeting, as it has worked well when he has been involved in similar undertakings. Wolf does think the group should go through the existing guidelines. The group agrees to go through the first two sections of the document next time.

Bike Parking at Stores

Documents reviewed: Bike Parking for Store Customers and Employees, draft letter from Bicycling & Shared Path Advisory Committee, 11/1/2023.

Devine reports that he consulted with the Chamber of Commerce and they supported the Committee's approach. However, the Highland Ave. stores that lack bike parking that spurred this discussion are not Chamber members.

The group discusses the details of the letter. Devine will send a revised letter to the group for their feedback prior to the next meeting.

Bluebikes Bikeshare Program Data and Promotion

Documents reviewed: Salem Bluebikes Data through 10/29/2023

Heaps requests that at the next meeting Devine share information about the program's finances.

Devine shares data from October. It was the highest ridership month to date, with 3,207 rides through October 29 with peaks on two Saturdays. Ridership broken down by station follows typical patterns, but with surprisingly low ridership for the Salem State North Campus station. And activity remains low at the Community Life Center station.

Downie asks if Bluebikes surveys their riders. She is particularly interested in what tourists would do if they did not ride a bike to understand how they are using the bikes and what the impact is. Devine will seek this data.

Devine reports that he just submitted a grant application for replenishment of lost bikes and some portion of operations costs.

Outreach, Education, and Events

There is no update for this agenda item.

Staff Update

Devine states that all of the staff updates have been covered under other agenda items.

Commission Vacancy

Devine reports that Josh Gillis has resigned from the committee. Devine commends him for balancing his service to the committee with work, life, and family as long as he did. He suggests that members look out for potential applicants to fill the vacancy.

Meeting Minutes

Caruso motions, Wolf seconds, and all vote in favor to approve the 8/2/2023 minutes.

Adjourn

Caruso motions, Heaps seconds, and all vote in favor to adjourn at 7:57pm.

Approved by the Bicycling & Shared Path Advisory Committee on March 6, 2024.