

DRAFT MINUTES
10-19-23



WALKABLE NOVI COMMITTEE MINUTES

CITY OF NOVI
October 19, 2023 6:00 PM

Council Conference Room
45175 Ten Mile Road, Novi, MI 48375
(248) 347-0475

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm.

ROLL CALL

Present: Gary Becker, Laura Marie Casey, Jay Dooley, Justin Fisher, Joe Tolkacz

Absent: Edward Roney

Staff Present: Barbara McBeth, City Planner, Community Development
Lindsay Bell, Senior Planner, Community Development
Diana Shanahan, Planning Assistant, Community Development
Jeff Muck, Director of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
Rebecca Runkel, Plan Review Engineer

Consultants Present: Norm Cox, The Greenway Collaborative
Carolyn Prudhomme, The Greenway Collaborative (via remote)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion to approve the October 19, 2023, Walkable Novi Committee Agenda made by Member Dooley and seconded by Member Tolkacz. Motion carried 5-0.

MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

A. Active Mobility Plan

Senior Planner Lindsay Bell stated that Norm Cox with Greenway Collaborative will go over the findings and key recommendations of the final draft of the active mobility plan document.

a. Presentation of [AMP Draft](#) and [AMP Map](#)

Norm Cox noted that his colleague Carolyn Prudhomme is joining virtually. Mr. Cox stated that he would walk through a few of the highlights of the plan and provide a quick overview.

This is an update of the 2011 Non-Motorized Plan with the new name Active Mobility Plan, developed from the idea of trying to integrate physical activity into everyday transportation, which provides a wealth of benefits not just to the individual but the community. A chart in the document shows the different benefits.

In the past 12 years, as mentioned before, when it comes to non-motorized transportation the world has changed dramatically as far as guidelines, standards, where communities are going, and this is an attempt to show what the current best practices are.

The plan is in the refinement stage. The goal after meeting with the Walkable Novi Committee tonight and the Parks Recreation and Cultural Services (PRCS) Commission

following at 7:00pm, is to update the plan based on comments from Staff and committee members, then post the final draft on the City of Novi website for the community to review. The community has seen the preliminary plan, and the subsequent progress, and due diligence was done in meeting with the community for engagement, from crowdsourcing maps to taking part in existing events and Open Houses.

The document summarizes the key findings, with background details in an appendix. A visual glossary has pictures that depict what the purposes are of things like a bike lane, since if you asked ten people what a bike lane is, you may have ten different definitions. There is a link to Federal Highway proven safety countermeasures.

New design guidelines and regional, state, and federal resources are covered to provide information on all the great guidelines that have been published, some just very recently.

The Plan classifies major corridors into three types – crosstown corridors which are the most pedestrian friendly, suburban corridors which take you to neighborhood commercial, and multi-modal throughfares which are more of the four or five lane roads to major destinations – these are shown on the major corridor classification map. This is not an exact match with national functional classifications of roadways; but how the Technical Advisory Committee sees roads actually working in the community today, and this is a very similar breakdown to what was seen in 2011. Some of the Beck Road changes that are going to be happening are reflected in the classifications there.

An overlay of the new transit service routes was placed on the major corridor classification map to determine what these roads should look like. Current conditions and proposed conditions with some desired traits are shown in a chart categorized by pedestrian facilities, bicycle and micromobility, and other key elements. This can be used as a reference when a road is coming up for reconstruction, this is a baseline of design or a checklist to look at. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) came out with an excellent guide on intersections and some graphics from that are used. It's one of the best resources seen in a while. Throughout the plan are policies, programs, and metrics, that support and reinforce what is coming out of those different guidelines.

The Long-Term network is basically a recommendation for a road-by-road approach consisting of five main components - sidewalks and side paths, mid-block crossings, bike lanes, greenways, and local road routes. This is an overview which encapsulates the City's aspirations for the next two decades and beyond. Each component is broken down into further detail.

The Near-Term network is kind of the meat of this plan: what the focus should be for the foreseeable future, consisting of three main components – the Neighborhood Greenway Network, Connecting to Transit, and Improved Access to Shopping and Dining. The Near-Term network map is the backbone system to create a fully functioning system with more minor investments. It would take you across town to most of the key destinations. The Near-Term Infrastructure Projects focus on completing key sidewalk and pathway gaps and crosswalks in access to transit, a little over 3 miles of sidewalks, a little over 5 miles of shared use pathways and 17 crosswalk improvements.

The Neighborhood Greenway Network is a continuous non-motorized network, side paths plus amenities that are upgraded to be a very nice, family-friendly way to get around. Considerations are landscaping, art and signage, having rest stops along the way and access to public restrooms, pedestrian scale lighting, and a wayfinding system that integrates with surrounding communities.

Connecting to Transit is probably one of the more expensive propositions in this plan. In looking at Twelve Mile, one of the key routes, there are a lot of missing gaps. There are a lot of those half signals where you have a light, not even a crosswalk, but there's nothing on the other side. There needs to be a safe way to get pedestrians all the way across the boulevard considering the presence of transit stops.

The purple dots on the Connecting to Transit map show isolated neighborhoods, especially those that are probably underserved, that would benefit from a connection to the transit system. This component shows policies and programs, things like how to coordinate the crosswalks with transit, or maybe by working with local businesses. Key shopping and dining areas are a part of this, including the City West district, and working with developers when they redevelop or put in a new development to make sure the connections work.

The section on how this plan coordinates with the Capital Improvement Projects shows a lot of these projects are under construction or planned. Rebecca Runkel has provided some good feedback; she has gone through this in detail.

Mr. Cox stated specific areas that hold significant potential for transformation were identified – East Lake Drive and South Lake Drive, City West, and Northville's Riverwalk Vision. In terms of South Lake Drive, the consultant team failed, fairly spectacularly, in their attempts to come up with a solution. They attended community meetings, and preliminary alternatives presented did not go over very well, but what was heard from the community and reflected in the text here is first, the priority is traffic speed and trying to discourage this as a cut through. This needs to be balanced with the fact that this is a road that's Federal Highway funding approved, it's a main road system. Some one-way connections were outlined, that seem to be as close to a consensus of what was heard from the community meetings. This is obviously something that's going to take some modeling to understand the impact to other roads. With the construction on the freeway, a lot of traffic kind of got pushed up to this area recently. From Mr. Cox's experience, he saw people passing at high speed over blind hills and double yellow lines while he was there. There's a solution there, it just needs a little bit more work and in-depth study.

In reference to City West and the design guidelines, a few recommendations were made for pedestrian circulation and bicycle amenities. There has been talk about overpasses from a developer. Those cost multi millions of dollars and for this type of scenario a better for the buck is having good mid-block crossings with islands. Even if an overpass is there, people don't use them because it's a lot of zigzagging to go up, and zigzagging going to go down. It fits into an upper story of a building or development that's a different story.

The consultant has also been working with Northville. Their Riverwalk vision is highlighted, and their plan just got approved. One primary objective is a connection between the Northville and Rotary Park in Novi.

The implementation framework section shows some things are fairly simple, such as revisiting the pavement marking plans and upgrading those as standards have changed over time. Some pavement markings are up to snuff, some have been remarked probably the same way for 10 years and needs improvement.

The funding strategies section covers programs and grants. A little more time needs to be spent on flushing this out and expanding on maintenance.

The "everything all at once" network map is normally a 30" by 40" map, not 11" by 17" map, it is a comprehensive visual depiction of the components of the plan. The map shown had key items highlighted.

Mr. Cox relayed he can answer any questions on the map, on any particular concerns, or any general observations the Committee would like to share.

Member Becker relayed this is interesting because he decided to go down Nine Mile Road to see where the new sidewalk was proposed and witnessed an almost accident in the roundabout at Nine Mile and Taft. He was thinking about crosswalks with islands, offset crosswalks and signage and remembers reading an article about what we're already trying to do for the aging driving population, like putting bigger signage on expressways with different colors, and that type of thing, because as drivers get older you want this to be more cognitive for them to look at. In looking at some of these examples, and maybe we won't use any of these, but some of the mid-block crosswalks may have people just stop because they're trying to read all those signs, there's a little sign in the road, there is the white sign here, there's a sign up on this one, there might be a signal above. Member Becker wondered if all of this has been vetted by people who look at how roads and signage are designed for an aging driving population.

Mr. Cox replied he has referenced proven safety countermeasures from the Federal Highway Administration that are tried and true, things like the crossing islands, the rectangular rapid flash beacons, and pedestrian hybrid beacons. If you look at the AARP website, they have a pretty extensive program trying to promote walkable communities for the people who are not driving. We try to make realistic expectations. If we want a car to stop for a pedestrian in a crosswalk, the driver should be able to see that pedestrian and know that's a place where pedestrians are going to cross. That is why there are a lot of whistles and bells, especially on those mid-block crossings. As you're going down the road it's pretty obvious there's something in the middle of the road or the lights have come on when a pedestrian is there to bring attention.

Mr. Cox added he will grant bike boxes at intersections are going to be like roundabouts. They're going to be something that takes a little getting used to. In Ann Arbor, Detroit, and Ferndale, many of these communities are building these facilities in, so it's becoming more and more commonplace. But he would think the first time someone comes up to a bike box where there's a bunch of green paint in front of the stop bar, there's unfamiliarity, so there needs to be education paired with that.

Member Fisher relayed he has some concerns on the crossings, for example where we have our ITC path going over Ten Mile with the signal there. From an educational perspective Member Fisher is not sure that we have done enough to let pedestrians and motorists know who has the right of way. Member Fisher inquired what are thoughts regarding optimal signage to make sure it's clear what that device is supposed to do. It makes sense on Eleven Mile, when drivers are going 35 mph, but when drivers are going 52 mph and completely stop at the rectangular rapid flashing beacon to let pedestrians go through, they could be rear ended by drivers behind them.

Mr. Cox responded he would have to look at the specific recommendation for the Ten Mile crossing, but one of the things in the guidelines is rectangular rapid flash beacons cap out about 35 miles an hour. Above that, a pedestrian hybrid beacon is brought in, which will bring cars to a complete stop because once you get above 35 miles an hour it is asking a lot for pedestrians and bicyclists to deal with a rectangular rapid flash beacon. Mr. Cox stated he would look at upgrading the beacon in that area to a hybrid beacon.

Member Fisher inquired what more can be done as a community to educate pedestrians and drivers in an efficient way as to what the appropriate way to approach that intersection is.

Mr. Cox responded that it is complicated by Michigan's law. The way they have broken up crosswalks, there's two sets of rules in the state. One set applies across the entire state, and the other is some things that can be adopted or adapted by each community. Some communities require a full stop for a pedestrian lane across the crosswalk, for most it is only stopping for the pedestrian who is in the crosswalk, having one foot in there, and that's what you currently have. In functionality, they really operate the same.

This may be something to reinforce in the policies and programs where, for example, the flashing yellow alerts a driver to the presence of a pedestrian, and means the driver yields to a pedestrian in the crosswalk. From the pedestrian standpoint, don't push the yellow button and step in range of the crosswalk when there is no way for someone to have a safe stopping distance. There may be limited effectiveness with online and web-based education. A lot of times we found when something new goes in temporary yard signs with instructions are effective.

Member Fisher referred to a chart that showed different crossings, one that was a raised crosswalk and asked for definition of what that means. Mr. Cox stated that it is also known as a speed table, where the pavement is raised about four inches with a six-foot ramp that goes up and is flat at the top of the crosswalk. These are made to be taken no faster than 25 mph.

A real problem at intersections is that safety paths have been the antithesis of safety in many cases, especially at a subdivision entrance where there are signs and landscaping that block a driver's view.

MDOT best practices for side path, and in FHWA, when you have a side path crossing a minor stop roadway, there should be a speed table. It does a couple of things. One is when pulling out of a neighborhood, there are markings on the ramp, and it shows there is a crosswalk. When turning into a subdivision, it slows you down. If there did happen to be a crash, it's a lower injury crash than a more severe crash. It's the latest standard of how to safely treat pathways or side paths at these intersections.

Member Fisher inquired if the plan is approved would that mean that every entrance to a subdivision should now have a raised crosswalk. Mr. Cox responded yes, every entrance off a main road should have a raised crosswalk. Member Fisher stated that is a major change. When the City Council gives direction to staff, and then staff goes and engineers these types of things, we really need to have multiple discussions at the Parks and Rec table, the Roads Committee, and at the Council table before something like this gets approved.

Mr. Cox replied that in looking through the plan, it does come off as fairly aggressive because it is a quantum leap from where things are now to current guidelines. While the Greenway Collaborative has been advocating doing that for years, it has always been crying in the wilderness, but now this is what's coming out of MDOT, putting it in their side path guidelines, it is what's coming out of Federal Highway administration. If we want to do things right in the city, this is how it should be.

Member Fisher stated he appreciates that, though oftentimes when appointed people or elected people say this is how the Feds want us to do it, isn't really a winning argument with people who have lived in a community for 50 years. We just saw that on the roundabout. That almost didn't pass, it was a 4-3 vote, where someone could have flipped and killed it. We had millions of dollars coming in from the Feds that we were going to have to forgo even though people from the Feds and all down say this is the safer way, the way it should be engineered. It was quite the conversation.

If we say every time we redo every single entrance to a subdivision in the City of Novi, a raised crosswalk will be put in, Member Fisher can see how that conversation is going to go. So, it is melding what might be the right ultimate answer with the recognition that people have lived here a long time, and have felt that they've been safe, and that maybe something less intrusive might accomplish much of the mitigation that they're looking for. Member Fisher stated that is his feedback and he thinks more discussion is needed on some of these points.

Member Becker added that it may be viewed as we are making it easier for people passing by on a bike, but people who live there and aren't on a bike may view it as supposedly improving it for people who don't reside at that particular location. That will be an interesting discussion.

Member Tolkacz added that it may be that it could be sold as an enhancement to the community. He lives three houses from Ten Mile in a subdivision and people turn into the subdivision very quickly. He can see where the raised sidewalk would slow people down. More dialogue may be needed, but there could be a positive there too.

Member Fisher added that there may be certain areas where it makes more sense or less sense, but this plan is basically saying we are going to do it everywhere and he is not sure that is the right answer.

Member Dooley added that he doesn't think raised crosswalks are something that need to be done in every neighborhood, but in some areas it makes sense. To Member Tolkacz's point, you can't control people who want to drive fast through neighborhoods.

Mr. Cox added that if you come off the freeway, you need to recalibrate your speed and mindset, or hopefully do so, to the surface roads. He looks at this, and other variations on this with the island that kind of splits the path, as a recalibration element to a neighborhood where kids biking are around, and people are walking. This is a guideline; these are the baseline improvements that we like to see. Maybe something that needs to be more explicit in here is this is a master plan level document. When this is implemented, that is when it is looked at and applied at a corridor specific level, looking at realities of right of way and the nuances of every different subdivision entrance.

Member Becker inquired about the equity focus map on page 39 of the plan and the red highlighted area on the northeast corner of the City. Mr. Cox replied that what went into this is broken down by the layers in the lower left-hand corner of that map. Poverty levels as shown on the census tract, a key element of households with no vehicles so their only option is walking, biking, or taking transit. Residential building type such as more apartments and townhomes, which this area is probably the biggest concentration or second biggest concentration in the City.

Carolyn Prudhomme added that the residential data came from SEMCOG data, there is some City data, and James Hill put together data from the environmental justice sensitivity using SEMCOG data that was more context sensitive to Novi.

Mr. Cox added that in looking at all these different factors, and the darker the red on the map, the more likely someone in that area does not have the option to have their own vehicle to take whenever or wherever they want. Lindsay Bell stated that Fox Run is up there, so maybe some of those residents may not have a car. There are a couple of different mobile home parks within that quarter.

Member Becker stated that this map seems to indicate that we should be looking at spending a lot of our active mobility expenditures here and he is trying to figure out why.

Mr. Cox stated that he does not think enough time or priority was given to this area of the City in the 2011 plan. If we start looking at the density of the developments, the apartments, and the manufactured housing, and everything that we're seeing from the census when it comes to households with fewer vehicles, this is the area that kept popping up. Households with no vehicle or fewer vehicles than workers is probably one of the stronger indicators that we work with.

Member Casey added residents in Fox Run may not be able to drive or are not super mobile. The red box looks enormous, but it feels like it is just a function of the map because there is not that much residential to make this box so prominent. The challenge is, and to Member Tolkacz's point, there's probably something in the way that the map is built and identified that it's taking population density and the fact that the census is saying that we have a higher population of people in the space that don't have a car and it's doing just something weird in how it's visualizing it.

Member Fisher inquired about the point of the map. It points to where nonmotorized travel is particularly vital, using census data, which may be the problem here, to illuminate zones requiring equitable transportation options. What does it really say about the northeast quadrant? Is the data driving any good decision making?

Mr. Cox stated that the point of the map and how it is used is that it shows where is nonmotorized transportation a priority for someone who doesn't have access to a motor vehicle, or maybe a one vehicle household. The reality is that Novi is a wealthy community and from an equity standpoint it is relative. When the numbers were crunched, this area seemed to rise to the top as an area of focus.

Member Fisher stated that maybe the algorithm of how it is applied to Novi needs to be looked at. Member Casey added that the area of Nine Mile and Haggerty should be looked at as well.

Member Casey stated that she thinks the plan has an awesome amount of information, it was great reading. She looks forward to this coming to the Roads Committee, hopefully in the next couple of months. Noting this is a master plan and not exactly how we will be doing things specifically, how do we prioritize elements to get it incorporated into the CIP?

Mr. Cox stated that if the hardest challenges existing out there now were not incorporated now, this would be obsolete very quickly. Look at how much has changed since 2011.

City Planner McBeth stated this was really good discussion and the team appreciates everyone's review and input. Norm and Carolyn are going to go back and revisit a few things and will keep the dialogue open.

Mr. Cox stated once we get it to a point where staff is happy, then we'll post it up to the website. There will be a lighter, quicker overview for the Parks and Rec meeting next.

City Planner McBeth added that after that, the plan will go to Planning Commission for their thoughts and at some point it will be wrapped up and brought to City Council for their consideration.

B. Minutes from June 15, 2023

Motion to approve the June 15, 2023 Walkable Novi Committee meeting minutes made by Member Casey and seconded by Member Dooley. Motion carried 5-0.

STAFF UPDATES

A. Engineering Update

Lindsay Bell stated there is an engineering update in the packet.

B. Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Update

Jeff Muck was not present to give an update.

C. Planning Update

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was no audience participation.

COMMUNICATIONS

Lindsay Bell stated that there are two items of communication in the packet.

ADJOURN

Motion to adjourn the October 19, 2023 Walkable Novi Committee made by Member Casey and seconded by Member Fischer. Motion carried 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at 7:56 PM.