

DRAFT MINUTES
6-15-2023



WALKABLE NOVI COMMITTEE MINUTES

CITY OF NOVI

June 15, 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, Edward Roney, Joe Tolkacz

Absent: Justin Fischer

Staff Present: Barbara McBeth, City Planner, Community Development
Lindsay Bell, Senior Planner, Community Development
James Hill, Planner, 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 June 15, 2023, Walkable Novi Committee Agenda made by Member Casey and seconded by Member Dooley. Motion carried 5-0.

MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

A. ENGINEERING UPDATE

a. Current Projects

Rebecca Runkel relayed she went over the current construction projects in detail at the last meeting and provided some updates.

The Ten Mile Road project between Haggerty and Meadowbrook is ahead of schedule, the road is expected to fully reopen mid-August.

The Novi Road rehab from Nine Mile Road to Ten Mile Road has moved on to the sidewalk and road construction and will probably be another three months before that road opens.

Taft Road construction from Nine Mile Road to Ten Mile Road will start Monday and is expected to be completed by Labor Day weekend.

The Northwest Park Trails may get constructed this summer. Scheduling is being worked out with the contractor.

Some projects in design are Nine Mile Road rehabilitation from Meadowbrook Road to Haggerty Road. This project has just started design and is a simple rehab. There is not a lot of sidewalk work there as of now. Wixom Road rehab will be next year. That will fill in some sidewalk gaps on the east side between the school and Target. Beck Road widening from Eleven Mile Road to Grand

River, possible 2025 construction, will also fill in sidewalk gaps. The RCOC Twelve Mile widening project is not expected until 2025 or 2026.

b. Sidewalk Repair Program

Ms. Runkel asked the Committee for any thoughts on the neighborhood sidewalk repair program that was previously discussed at the last meeting.

Lindsay Bell relayed that in the packet is an email correspondence from a resident in Royal Crown subdivision wondering when their subdivision sidewalks might be repaired as they are in pretty bad shape. The email is a little unclear whether the resident is referring to the road or the sidewalk, but when Ms. Bell spoke with him on the phone, he was referring to the sidewalk.

Ms. Runkel relayed that Matt Wiktorowski, the Roads and Drains Manager, had previously suggested focus on Willowbrook, Bristol Corners, and Chase Farms subdivisions next mainly because residents there were requesting sidewalk replacement as well as the number of street trees along the sidewalks in those subdivisions.

Member Roney inquired if complete subdivisions are the target or if individual homeowners could request replacement. Ms. Runkel replied that individual sidewalks might get hard to track with the contractor needing to mobilize repeatedly, so right now the plan is to stick to some general areas and look for complete subdivisions for better contractor pricing and scheduling. However, if the committee feels money would be better spent going to many areas, that can be reviewed.

Member Becker inquired if Ms. Runkel was referring to repairing sidewalks in just one, two, or all three of the subdivisions previously mentioned. Ms. Runkel responded all three subdivisions would have sidewalk repairs done. As an alternative, Member Fisher suggested at the last meeting that instead of focusing inside subdivisions, higher traffic sidewalks on boundaries of neighborhoods along some of the more local major roads are looked at, for example sidewalks along Nine Mile Road by Chase Farms.

Member Becker inquired if it's been identified what constitutes a higher traffic sidewalk. Ms. Runkel responded that higher traffic sidewalks are Mile Roads, and roads such as Meadowbrook Road, Novi Road and Taft Road, and usage would be considered to some extent.

Ms. Bell inquired to confirm that only sidewalk repairs are being done at this time, not filling gaps. Ms. Runkel responded that is correct.

Member Roney inquired as to whether someone from DPW could drive the machine used to clean sidewalks in the winter around the throughways to identify sidewalks needing repair. Ms. Runkel responded that this could be done.

Member Becker relayed he drove around Willowbrook and Chase Farms subdivisions. Visually there does not appear to be as much need as there was in Meadowbrook Glens.

Member Becker inquired regarding the City paying for replacement trees where they were taken out and whether it is up to the homeowner to request a replacement tree. Ms. Runkel responded that is correct and homeowners may choose from appropriate suggested trees identified by the City Forester. This is the next step for Meadowbrook Glens, as well as monitoring health for trees that might have been impacted by repairs.

Member Casey responded it is hard to make a decision without knowing what sidewalks we fix external to the neighborhoods. It's a comparison of a known quantity in three neighborhoods, and an unknown quantity of potential sidewalks. It could help to make a decision if recommendations for the external sidewalks can be provided, even if it is several different stretches or sections of the City are identified.

Member Becker inquired if there is a budget for these repairs for the rest of the calendar year. Ms. Runkel confirmed there is. Member Becker stated the Committee needs to know what the bang for the buck will be, whether it is to repair in the three subdivisions or look for how many of the alternatives can be addressed.

Member Roney relayed that the older the subdivision is, the more likely it will need repairs. An overall sidewalk analysis starting from older subdivisions with sidewalks and working toward the newer subdivisions would be helpful.

Member Dooley inquired whether there are plans to have a crosswalk where the sidewalk ends on the south side of Ten Mile Road west of Beck Road. On the north side of Ten Mile Road, the sidewalk continues all the way to ITC so a crosswalk would provide safety for those who want to cross and walk to ITC. Ms. Runkel responded there are no plans at this time but that would be a good location for a crosswalk.

Ms. Runkel relayed she will take the comments back to Staff for discussion and to come up with a plan.

Member Becker inquired whether the plan is for the City to pay for sidewalk repairs and not to have the prior proposed shared expense with homeowners. Ms. Runkel confirmed that the plan is for the City to pay.

B. ACTIVE MOBILITY PLAN

a. Framework Overview

Norm Cox relayed it is good to be back and he has an update as to the progress of where the Active Mobility Plan stands and where it is going.

Mr. Cox referenced the presentation in the Committee packet, starting with the Superhero Showcase event. The kids loved the stickers suggested by Carolyn. The input received really echoed what we have been hearing to date, but it was nice to hear from the general public, non-bike people, that we are going in the right direction.

One of the challenges whenever a plan is done is how it gets communicated. For example, the old map that had been done had way too much information on the poster for anyone to really take in. In the intervening years, we've tried to simplify things to determine what the focus should be on. What is the ten-year window of energy of trying to establish some things? It's not only the crosswalks at the dead-end sidewalks that were just discussed, those are things that will be addressed in the plan as well.

The focus is to capitalize on the existing facilities to try to create a functional citywide network to key destinations. It really has three elements, the Community Greenway Network, preparing for transit, which is an exciting development coming down the pike, and then with all the commercial development over the years, improved access to shopping and dining.

b. Network Recommendations

Mr. Cox referred to the map in the packet which showed a kind of network of trails shown in yellow lines, transit routes shown in broken yellow lines, the roadway connections shown in blue lines and circles showing some of the key destinations.

The first element, this Community Greenway Network, was talked about a lot at the last meeting. We talked about the general direction of creating safe and inviting routes both on-road and off-road. These are to be really attractive landscapes with rain gardens, periodic rest areas with benches and gardens, and pedestrian scale lighting. This could be a place where we could start doing historic interpretive signage or natural system signage, and put community art. We want to link up to all these parks and public buildings so people have rest stops along the way and maybe this will have more enhanced year-round maintenance.

If you look at this network, a lot of these are roads that people are walking already. These are, with a few exceptions, the lower speed, lower volume two lane roads that you'll see people out walking on a nice evening.

The challenge where this doesn't work is in dealing with getting over the freeway. There have been a lot of lines drawn on maps trying to get across the freeway and link the different parts of

the city. That was a big discussion last time we did the plan. Things did not pan out with going underneath using the CSX ROW, so we looked at trying to fix Beck.

There's room up on the deck, but maybe make that the focus to try to get that working. West Park and a little section of Twelve Mile are not low speed roads, but they are our connections. We have a lot more right of way and could probably get a little more buffer between the pedestrians, and bicycles, and the higher speed roadway.

If a contiguous line were made around the entire loop (granted, the sidewalks on different sides of the street are not shown), the yellow sections shown on the map would be the fewest bits of gaps that fill in a complete side path system to get around the whole loop. It is kind of a concentration of where side paths will be put in to try to create that system.

Sometimes, such as at Nine Mile, it may be necessary to cross the road only to cross back. Eventually the goal is to get paths on both sides of the road and contiguous, but this would be the shortest way to guide people. The goal is to try to make the trails and the road systems work as one contiguous system.

In looking at the things being linked to, we try to get to the destinations on either side, and also try to get direct access to the higher density neighborhoods and apartment complexes. The equity aspect was considered to allow for someone who may not have access to a vehicle to get to this system. There are a lot of parks and schools linking to the High School and the Civic Center. It is interesting that it really crosses over right where the whole City West district and the hospital are, which is an anchor point.

The policies and programs to support the network should provide for a uniform wayfinding system where there is clear signage showing, for example, a person can get to the library in 15 minutes biking.

The network can be promoted through events, group rides, and maps, and really support the local bike clubs. Mr. Cox has a client in Springboro, Ohio where the city leads bike tours about four times a month.

In the past there has been discussion of improving the safety of the neighborhood entrances. There is a great grant program for entryway beautification, which takes into account sight lines. There are some new standards where the crossing of the side paths can be made more visible with greater awareness.

Existing facilities can be upgraded to current best practices. In talking about pavement just a while ago, we need to make sure if there are trails that there are not hairpin turns and the radiuses are good.

Adopting a Greenway network parklet program will help keep up the high level of maintenance required for rain gardens that look more park-like.

Automatic counters can be used to evaluate use and satisfaction as well as yearly surveys.

The transit routes, the other element of this, look at what is coming down the pike for Twelve Mile Road and Grand River. The end point destinations tend to be the Meijer parking lot and the park and ride lot on Twelve Mile. Again, looking at areas of higher density housing, can the gaps be filled in for access to this network?

Grand River has fewer sidewalk gaps, but there is a need for more crosswalks. Anytime there is going to be a bus stop, there must be a safe way to cross the five-lane road. A person will not get off the bus and walk a quarter mile to a light to cross.

Twelve Mile is much more challenging, there are a lot more gaps along the road to fill in the sidewalk. It's again a much higher speed roadway but a lot of path has been identified there. People are going to be accessing this especially in the commercial areas, getting off the bus and across to work and shop.

Another element looked at here is to try to make these transit stops have a nice bus stop shelter with the pads going right through to the bus stop. One of the things heard from other transit operators is, if you have a nicer facility, you have a bigger draw area. People will begin to bike into these. Can we work with some adjacent businesses, such as a coffee shop or café to have a screen up in their cafe with real time bus information.

Micro mobility hubs can be established at transit stops with wayfinding kiosks showing walking and biking routes. This could be a hub place for e-bike rental and charging, as well as short-term and secure long-term bike parking.

Security cameras and lighting are needed for people to feel comfortable waiting in the area.

When it comes to improving access to the major shopping and dining, there are a lot of cases where the city has done its part. There is a shared use path along the primary road but no way to get into the shopping except for walking down the roadways. There needs to be access from the public pathway and the bike lanes to the front doors of the businesses. The City West district is a potential model of how to do this and kind of really integrating the bicycle/pedestrian into this. We have been hearing about people in the hotels that want to go shopping or to a restaurant and don't have a way to get to a sidewalk to businesses that are a stone's throw away.

Member Tolkacz relayed that there isn't a good way to get from Town Center to Twelve Oaks or Fountain Walk. He has seen people walking along Novi Road and has wondered if there is more that can be done to connect up the shopping centers.

Mr. Cox relayed the pedestrian overpass was done along Novi Road, but where it falls short is on the northwest quadrant where there are some gaps. The multi lane crossings coming out of Fountain Walk and that whole area have been identified as gap areas that need to be completed.

Member Tolkacz referred to Mr. Cox's point about bikes and would not personally feel comfortable riding a bike along Novi Road from the Town Center to Twelve Mile, but a path might help.

Mr. Cox relayed he frequently bikes and a road like Novi Road with the interchange and all the driveways is a really intimidating landscape.

To support access to shopping and dining, a bicycle friendly business program could be established. The City could provide grants to retrofit existing developments with a high-quality connection, not just the bare bones, accepting that it is going to be 15-20 years before this development comes to the planning department for a site plan update where there is leverage to ask for these things. How do we solve that in the meantime?

When they do come, provide a site plan approval checklist to make sure that all the requirements are getting completed.

Do we look at subsidizing bike racks and existing developments? Again, if we want people to bike there, these hoops are not that expensive, and racks can be branded with the city's logo.

For those who have not been to Carmel, Indiana, Mr. Cox would suggest going there. It was a trail focused district by working with developers and this could be part of an economic development strategy.

We met with the Technical Advisory Committee a few days ago and did a lot of coordination with the CIP, trying to understand where sidewalks and pathways are being incorporated right now and which projects are far enough down the road where we could scope these things and look at mid-block crossings and pathways and get them into the budget.

Before Mr. Cox gets into more specifics, he opened the floor for comments and questions about the approach of how this comes together.

Member Tolkacz relayed he is a little confused about the new transit routes. Are those things that are coming and being tied into or are they being proposed to create?

Mr. Cox relayed these are proposed general SMART routes in Novi. There is a whole other level of coordination coming down the pike as to where these stops are going to be, to get ready and make sure the crosswalks and the bus stops all work together. The main part is making sure we're serving the underserved neighborhoods and getting them out to the transit routes.

Mr. Cox moved the discussion to one of the things that has been heard about South Lake Drive. There have been some improvements since the last time, but we're still hearing that people say it's not what they want it to be. Looking at South Lake Drive, kind of the more western element, there is not a ton of traffic, it is 25 miles per hour, two lanes. There is just a narrow bike lane on one side. The little green trail coming into the park that was recently constructed, basically the right of way is a foot off that pavement, you're kind of bumping into the telephone poles. What are the options? It was proposed to put some ideas out there and let the community decide if this makes sense to them.

One of the things I've noticed biking around South Lake Drive is that there are probably two or three times the number of walkers in the bike lanes than bicycles. You see a lot of people, two people, three people walking sometimes side by side with strollers. Bikers are constantly going out onto the roadway, not to blame the pedestrians, because that's all the space there is.

Do we think about these shoulders as a shared space, and do we look at maybe narrowing the lanes as much as we can? While six feet is not in anyone's idea a shared pathway, it's better than what we have. Then follow the model that was done in the park, paint it green, maybe put some bollards at the intersecting roadways to stop people from encroaching into the shared lane.

Traffic calming can be employed with speed tables, not little bumps, but something that has a gradual six-foot rise, to four inches high, and a big flat 10 foot top and down, something that someone could drive and not feel like they're giving themselves whiplash but slows people down. It is a method of speed management, of designing the road the way you want people to drive it.

We have no room to work with. It's not standard. This is not something you're going to see in any book, but it's one of the things we thought that we could propose and see if the Committee is comfortable taking this forward to the public to get feedback as to whether keep it the way it is or try something like this.

Member Casey relayed she thinks we need to do something, to share something because we get a lot of complaints from residents on the north side, and it is dangerous.

Mr. Cox relayed there's a real desire to loop through the lake. It's almost natural and as we talked about that park connection, this would solve one of the nastier spots right there.

Looking over to the other side, Mr. Cox complimented the City on the transitions from the pathway in the park to the bike lanes, which is not something that's often done as gracefully. The same thing, very similar conditions, but now we have bike lanes on both sides. This is where Mr. Cox saw even more people out walking.

There is a little bit more right of way, but there's a lot of assumed private ownership with cars sticking out into the right of way. We would have a little bit more room where you could have an 8-foot shared space with green paint. There could even be a painted buffer. As best we could tell there is an 8–9-foot existing right of way on either side. As we get into a more detailed survey, maybe this widens in some areas a little bit as whatever seems to make sense. Again, we need the traffic calming element in this.

Realistically we're not seeing walkers being accommodated and in the one-way bike lanes, people just are not walking opposite flow of bikes.

Mr. Cox inquired if the Committee is comfortable floating this for community feedback as we go out for a preliminary plan, and maybe target it to the neighborhood up there.

Member Becker inquired if it is even feasible to shift the road over and have a walking lane and a biking lane on one side instead of trying to have walkers and bikers on both sides.

Mr. Cox replied, physically, yes, politically, perhaps not. The reality is this was a small track serving a bunch of cottages years ago. As has been pointed out, cars are sticking out in the public right of way and the nose is right up against the house or the garage. The reality is, yes, we could take over that 8-9 feet and it's public right of way. We could put that suggestion out there. Maybe we need to think bolder than we're thinking now.

Member Tolkacz relayed he likes what Mr. Cox has here. He likes the idea of before showing it to people, listening to other ideas and then bouncing off those ideas with what we have here and tweaking it. Otherwise, there may be some resentment from residents who think they did not have any input but are presented with a plan to solve their problems.

Mr. Cox proposed to meet in person, perhaps at one of the parks, to have a very specific discussion of the options with the neighbors up there.

City Planner McBeth replied that is a possibility. It would have to be made clear that there's not necessarily a budget for this at the moment and it's really still early in the planning phases, but just thinking about ideas to improve the situation.

Mr. Cox relayed relating to road configuration issues is Novi Road south of Nine Mile. We're looking at the volumes in that road. It's a constantly changing configuration with bypass lanes. Mr. Cox suggests making it 3 lanes, make it consistent, it'll be a safer road.

As we have looked at all these different types of roads, and this is not an exact match of the National Functional classification of roads, but it's how we see things happening right now as far as number lanes and volumes. These are the busiest roads that need a buffer for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Mr. Cox requested feedback on bike route signage. The initial thought was to keep the bike route signage tied to the primary roads. Some concern has been expressed about signing these routes within the neighborhoods. Mr. Cox's understanding was people didn't want a sign in the front yard or didn't want people guided into their neighborhood on bikes.

Neighborhood signage has been done in other communities and was found to be very successful. There's always going to be someone who will complain about that new sign in their front yard that they feel is their yard and not the right of way.

Over the years, signs have been done a little bit differently. They could be branded with the Novi logo or could be stencils on the ground. Mr. Cox would like to see some method used to guide people. This could be destination oriented, such as to the library, Civic Center or to a park, or could be neighborhood wayfinding.

Member Tolkacz relayed personally he likes the idea of signage and would like to see options indicated on signs such as for nature trails or the next couple of destinations ahead.

Mr. Cox will revisit the signage issue, refine it, and will put together some ideas for what the signage would look like. He suggests taking the concept forward with a low-key approach in the neighborhoods to see to what degree the public is comfortable.

Mr. Cox relayed the next steps are to put some display boards together, sketch these ideas out with example images, and QR codes linking to some online input options. Mr. Cox will be looking at some in-person input opportunities at events, perhaps placing something along the ITC trail in one of the parks on a nice Saturday day and putting together a 15 minute roadshow presentation.

Mr. Cox thanked the Committee for their feedback, it is very helpful.

c. MINUTES FROM APRIL 20, 2023

Motion to approve the April 20, 2023 Walkable Novi Committee meeting minutes made by Member Casey and seconded by Member Tolkacz. Motion carried 5-0.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Dorothy Duchesneau relayed she lives on South Lake Drive. Regarding the speed bumps or levels, fire trucks and ambulances drive that route almost daily. Speed bumps have already been tried. Until the fire station ends up moving on the other side, where the apartments and the senior citizens are, that is their only main drag back and forth. They can't get from where the fire station is to the other side quickly, easily, and safely.

Ms. Duchesneau remembers back when South Lake Drive was gravel. That was the shortcut to get into Walled Lake if you wanted to find food when Twelve Oaks Mall was started.

The city owns more right of way than what the road is currently showing. The problem is there was pushback from people protecting their flower bed or pieces on the lake. That was the biggest mistake the City made was letting them get away with it. Now, those same people are wanting a wider bike path, and wanting a walking path.

Ms. Duchesneau does not think there will be as much resistance as anticipated if this is done right. People have realized their property values, their location to Lakeshore and Pavilion Shore Park, their location to get to other places has been improved.

Ms. Duchesneau has photos in front of her home showing four-foot sidewalks narrowing down to three feet. That is not safe.

The Lakes Area Homeowners Association is made up of every potential owner of property on the lake. These are the people that use East Lake Drive and South Lake Drive. Ms. Duchesneau requests the Committee to please reach out to them and have them work with you to get this news out and they can help support that because they're the ones that are using that loop.

Ms. Duchesneau referred to the previous conversation regarding the connector from South Lake Drive going around the west end of the lake where the dam is. They have been trying to work with Bristol Corners and the DNR. That's a conservation easement. However, what's happening is Walled Lake is bleeding into the Bristol Corners conservation easement which is solid mud. Whether you put a pl path or whether you build up a berm, work with the DNR, the City, with the Bristol Corners, then you can connect a whole bunch of those nice, expensive subdivision areas directly to the park, which is where these people are coming from.

Mr. Cox relayed he would make a concerted effort to do that at the meeting that we just talked about with the neighborhood around the lake.

Natalie Jocz, lives on Nine Mile Road. One of the reasons why she loves her house is it is on a nice lot. The hard part is the house is toward the front of the lot.

She noticed the plans to fill in sidewalk gaps in the City. She really doesn't want a sidewalk in front of her house because she likes it being a little bit more secluded. Although she has to deal with the road noise, there is not a ton of foot traffic with people through the front yard.

One of the things Ms. Jocz is concerned about if a sidewalk is put in is the rock wall that is in her front yard. It is 200 feet wide and goes that whole span. If the rock wall was moved to allow for a 6-foot sidewalk, she would lose all of the front trees.

Ms. Jocz invites people out to take a look at the area before sidewalks are determined, because it wouldn't be a small project by her home because of how high up her home is from the main road. The easement is also different because her house is so old, it is a cabin from the 1820s. They used the wood from the cabin to build it into a house in the 1920s. The property line goes from the middle of the road. It is a 33 foot easement, different from the other houses on Nine Mile.

Ms. Jocz really does not want to sidewalk but understands safety concerns for kids and for people going through. She asks that the City work with her as a resident to try and come up with a solution before all the trees or the rock wall are taken out.

Mr. Cox relayed some of the sidewalk gaps need further review, and they are gaps because they are not easy to solve. This area will have another look.

COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Bell relayed we have a couple pieces of correspondence. The email mentioned earlier and then one from Andrew Mutch specifically about more focus on crosswalks in key locations.

ADJOURN

Motion to adjourn the June 15, 2023 Walkable Novi Committee made by Member Casey and seconded by Member Dooley. Motion carried 6-0.

The meeting adjourned at 7:06 PM.