



WALKABLE NOVI COMMITTEE

Discussion Notes

July 16, 2020 at 5:30 p.m.

Zoom Electronic Meeting Platform

(248) 347-0475

In accordance with Executive Order 2020-48, this meeting was held remotely.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 pm.

ROLL CALL

Present: Justin Fischer, Julie Maday, Andrew Mutch, Brian Smith

Absent: Brent Ferrell, Salene Riggins

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Member Fischer made a motion to approve the agenda. Member Mutch seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

- a. Discussion of Draft Top 20 segments for Annual Non-Motorized Prioritization Update

Planner Bell said as you all know I'm new to this position as the staff liaison for this Committee and I know some of you are new as well. We've had to cancel a couple meetings this year due to the current COVID situation and I'm sure everyone has realized how much more our sidewalks are getting used and the importance of them in this very unusual time. We know its important work that this committee does. Typically, there is an annual implementation status update that happens earlier in the year, but with our staffing and the inability to get all that together that won't be completed this year, so we thought we would move ahead with the annual prioritization of the sidewalk and pathway segments on major roads. There are some updates that we will go through on the engineering and planning side to talk about projects that were completed in the last year and how those feed into the prioritization for the coming year.

Planner Bell shared her screen to show the chart of completed segments last year:

- The City had about 13,000 linear feet of completed sidewalks completed; the major part of that was the ITC Pathway completion.
- Roughly 3,000 linear feet of sidewalks were completed by private developers.
- Almost 16,000 linear feet was completed last year between city projects and private development projects.
- We currently have about 8,500 linear feet planned for construction in the coming year and in terms of private development projects that number is about 5,150 linear feet. Some of these projects are under construction and we expect most of them to be completed in the next year, but with economic conditions it's possible that some may not be completed.

Planner Bell explained how the prioritization chart was completed.

- There were not a lot of changes from last year because of the nature of the priorities.
- In the second column, everything in green was on the list last year and just a couple moved up as a segment was built.
- I added new updates from the bicycle and pedestrian accident data we received from the police department.
- With the completion of the ITC Corridor, some segments might have moved up because of their proximity to that trail and that being a major asset to the community.
- There's a map that shows the Top 20 segments that came out of the prioritization.

Chair Maday said I want to add that last year one of the things we wanted to do was prioritize the ITC Trail. The Top 20 List is important to me, but the most important thing to me is what we did to rearrange that prioritization and make the ITC Trail accessible. I see that we've done that and I'm super happy about it. I do want to say how pleased I am about the memo we got from engineering about the ITC Trail. I can't tell you how amazing this is for our community. I've had so many people talk to me about it and I know COVID probably added to that, but I really think we need to keep working on connecting people to that trail as much as possible.

Planner Bell said we've gone through the Tier 1 ranking and with your approval of the Top 20 we would then complete the Tier 2 categories, which is based on how difficult it would be to construct and how much money is needed. It would probably mean most of the rankings would be similar, but we haven't updated the Tier 2 criteria at this point. The rankings before you are just for taking in account Tier 1 criteria.

Member Maday asked to reevaluate after approving the Top 20 and talk about it in the next meeting and Planner Bell confirmed.

Member Mutch said I wanted to thank you for the comments on the ITC Trail and I agree that that's something that's been a huge addition especially on the west side of the City where folks have direct access, but also to work on as much as we can do to make that accessible to the rest of the community. Whatever efforts we can make in that regard, I'm glad to see us pushing it forward. I don't have any specific comments on the Top 20 list, but as somebody's that's seen this process a number of times, I've been thinking about the amount of time it takes to update these lists and all the staff time involved. I'm wondering if we want to consider moving this to a two-year process in terms of the staff

time involved and in terms of the fact that the list doesn't change significantly year to year. For example, let's say we would approve the update this year and it would be in place for the next two years. Obviously if anything comes up that jumps out as something that needs to be addressed, that's something we can bring to the attention of the City Council or City Staff can highlight.

City Planner McBeth said the Planning, Engineering, and Parks Departments do put a lot of information together for these meetings especially for the two reports that are done every year. I would not object to doing this every two years and we can still provide the updates on which sidewalks are going to be completed and which ones we anticipate being completed and then we can shift to a two year time frame. We can see how that works and if there are some gaps or missing information, we could always go back to the every year basis if it's agreeable to the committee.

Chair Maday said I think that's a great idea. We will save on resources especially given next year is going to be tough.

Member Fischer said I have no objection to that. Obviously, efficiency is always a good thing and staff seems on board. What I would be interested in is understanding the process if there is some sort of major shift in that mid-cycle period. Would it come straight to this Committee or go to City Council? How would you evaluate what to bring to the table as opposed to things you would just say no were going to have to wait until the next year to bring it up?

City Planner McBeth said I was thinking about that. We could still have a couple of Walkable Novi Committee meetings per year and we would provide some updates if that would be helpful or we could just provide memos and send those to the Committee and see if there is any interest in talking about those things. We are open to either of those options or anything else.

Member Fischer said I think I would just like the opportunity to at least have the topic on the agenda. We could always provide information if anything has come up, but certainly not the scale of it. I had one question on the categorization and I'm looking at pages 6 and 7 of the packet. Have those criteria changed or are those new? The Tier 2 categories are rated 0-8 for the easement construction, is that how it's been evaluated in the past or is that process new?

Planner Bell said this how it's been done in the past. The rankings were allocated the same at this point. That's how it was done last year.

Parks and Recreation Director Jeff Muck said it was about two years ago we had a significant discussion about the ratings and that was when we were seeing the ITC Trail coming to completion. That's when we did some changes to the points.

Member Mutch said it was a reaction to the segments and them not necessarily aligning with what we were seeing as our priorities. We asked staff to give greater emphasis to one and give less emphasis to a couple others and we might have even pulled one out because we felt it was no longer relevant.

Parks and Recreation Director Jeff Muck said yes, we put a lot more emphasis on parks and connectivity to parks, specifically the ITC Trail.

Member Mutch said I think the one that got the big change to it was that we used to have a focus on connectivity to the Civic Center complex and we finally got to the point where pretty much every connection in the area had been completed so stopped giving points for that. It's one of those things where I think it's always open for conversation if we find that somethings not working.

Motion to approve the Top 20 Segment List for the Annual Non-Motorized Prioritization Update and also change the process to a two-year update instead of a one-year update made my Member Fischer and seconded by Member Mutch. Motion passes 4-0.

STAFF UPDATES

1. Planning Update

- a. Completed and Scheduled Projects
- b. 2019-20 Pedestrian/Bike Accidents in Novi

Planner Bell said the other item is the pedestrian and bike accidents. There were nine bicycle accidents in the past year and six pedestrian accidents. There didn't seem to be any clear clusters. There was a little bit more activity around the Novi Town Center and the Grand River and Twelve Oaks Mall area.

2. Engineering Update

- a. Active Non-Motorized Project Portfolio for Engineering Division

Staff Engineer Runkel gave an update on what public sidewalk projects are currently under design or under construction.

- The 2020 Pathway Gap and ADA Compliance Program, which was formally the 2019 pathways. You'll be seeing the construction on the July 27 City Council agenda. We'll be filling in a lot of small gaps with that.
- There are small segments on Wixom Road, Beck Road, Eleven Mile and Clark Street, and the Grand River segment east of Olde Orchard that a resident requested at one of our last meetings that are planned to be filled in.
- Willowbrook Drive will allow a better connection to the school nearby.
- Haggerty Road south of Eight to Nine Mile will be filled in and some ADA improvements will be put in there, as well as Grand River at Suburban Showplace at Taft Road. We're hoping to get that started in August and we may have to continue that into the spring of 2021 if it's not finished up by November.
- The next project is the MDOT project on the Novi Road Bridge. They are going to start the work this weekend so there's going to be ramp and lane closures for the next 3-6 weeks, but that will include the pathway construction, pedestrian signals, and lighting on the bridge.
- Gap fill on Meadowbrook that we combined with a streambank stabilization project. That one is being held up by some easements. We have a couple businesses that are not happy with the sidewalk on the property. Hopefully we can get that out to bid this summer.
- The north side of Ten Mile Road between Dinsler Drive and Woodham Road. It's an important ITC connection. We are getting easements for that right now. About half of the residents do not want the sidewalk so we have Beth Saarela ordering

the appraisals for that. We definitely want to get that constructed in September and finished before November.

- Next is Safe Routes to School. That received the \$1.2 million grant and involves 6 different campus, ADA crosswalks and ramps, striping, flashing beacon crossings on Eleven Mile near the school. OHM is working on the design right now and we expect construction to start on that in 2021.
- We also have that ITC Trail connection from Wildlife Woods getting started on design. That one was awarded the TAP grant, which will also be next construction season.
- RCOC has started plans for Ten Mile Road improvements, so that includes a turn lane as well as sidewalks on both sides to complete the gaps there. There is not a lot of right-of-way to work with for this project so the sidewalks will be fairly close to the road and we also have about six easements we have to get for that project.

Member Maday said could you clarify what grant the Wildlife Woods Park received.

Staff Engineer Runkel said it is the TAP Grant, which is the Transportation Alternatives Program through MDOT.

Member Mutch said I had a question about the boardwalk and sidewalk gap on Ten Mile Road west of Novi Road on the north side. It looks like it's mostly done, but there is still some work going on closer to Churchill Crossing. When is that expected to be finished and open for the public to use?

Staff Engineer Runkel said they have it started and we added that onto our boardwalk program. They put in the helical piles for that and they should be starting the boardwalk construction anytime now so I would say within the month.

Member Maday said does the Safe Route to Schools program have to be spent in 2021?

Staff Engineer Runkel said yes, I believe so.

Member Fisher said I remember at one point when this was originally proposed there was a sidewalk adjacent to Village Oaks and they ended up being taken out because they did not fit the criteria of the grant, but I think we still want to get those done. Can you give me an update on if that is proceeding and when we can expect that to be done?

Staff Engineer Runkel said we do have one of the segments there on our 2020 Pathway Program that just went out to bid. It's going to be starting construction soon. That is between Village Wood Drive and Guilford Road. There is a little segment where we're going to enclose the ditch and put a sidewalk in which will connect to the crosswalk going to the school and that's about all we could budget for this year.

3. Parks, Recreation and Cultural Service Update

Parks and Recreation Director Muck said I'll expand on some of the projects we've already been talking about.

- Starting with the Bosco Fields project at the corner of Beck and Eleven Mile Road, the sidewalks have been completed for quite some time now. The property is still a construction site in the regards to trying to establish the turf, we anticipate

opening that in spring of 2021. I'm at that property about once a week and every time I'm out there there's someone walking through there, so I think we're going to see a lot of use continuing on along throughout that property.

- Regarding the ITC Trail, we did a walk through with some of our engineers and consultants. Some boards needed to be replaced on the most recently constructed boardwalk, some screws and some bolts need to be tightened back down so that will be addressed by the contractor. If you follow the City on social media you may have seen we put something on about the ITC Trail to keep people safe on that and we wanted to observe that the hours are dawn to dusk and there's no motorized vehicles along there so that's the biggest thing is that we want to keep the dirt bikes and golf carts and ATV's off of it and encourage our residents if they see those to report it.
- Lakeshore is still heavily under construction. We did experience significant delays due to COVID in regard to the trails, but it's been a really positive thing with our Motor City Mountain Bike Association. We basically repurposed a lot of the dirt that had been excavated as part of the project and they've really made a lot of enhancements to the trail system: new berms and features so that did not go to waste, we would have had to haul that off-site so it's been very positive and they are supposed to begin starting some of the paving of the pathway and parking lot on Monday. That was supposed to happen last week.
- Finally, we have the new entranceway and parking lot in place at Wildlife Woods park off of Wixom Road. They also installed ramps up to the park shelter. We did have bid opening this week for pickle ball courts so hoping to take that to City Council in August.

Member Mutch said in terms of some resident feedback on the volume of parking over at Twelve ½ Mile Road and Dixon. Have we had anymore conversations about the possibility of having some kind of secondary parking area over there?

Parks and Recreation Director Muck said we've had really good communication with the Motor City Mountain Bike Association. They encourage their people to park at Pavilion Shore. Every time I see them post something about Dixon Road it's to remember that there's very limited parking and please be careful. The talks about that kind of shut down after COVID hit. We did do some initial cost estimates and had some initial conversations about splitting the cost that would be for some tree removal back there so I don't necessarily know if it's going to be needed after Lakeshore is open with the volume of parking we are going to have there so if we can get by the next few weeks hopefully we won't need to consider that. We will I monitor it and we can always bring it to City Council if we feel we need to add another small area in the back of Lakeshore.

Member Mutch said is the expectation that access to the trailhead and back parking area will be restored shortly?

Parks and Recreation Director Muck said as soon as the pathway to the trail can be reopened we will.

Member Mutch said so it is pretty short term then?

Parks and Recreation Director Muck said they told be in two weeks for that paving and then they'll be able to use that trail.

Member Mutch said totally different topic, but signage in terms of directing folks to the parks both for motorized and non-motorized traffic and directional signage in terms of on the main roads, there's some controversy about in the interior subdivisions, I can't remember who all was involved in the conversation but I know you were Jeff, so where is that?

Parks and Recreation Director Muck said so we did some mapping of the existing park signage and were looking at some additional ones like you mentioned. The brown and white ones and we started talking about that with our friends at DPW so it's something we will have to circle around back to now that were getting back to some sense of normal.

Member Mutch said we now have this great amenity of ITC Trail, which I hope more and more people are aware of, but getting folks to that amenity and some of the other parks in the City such as Rotary Park. Some folks are not aware that it's there so I'm just looking at as we are getting more of these on-line and connections in place that they know they could actually bike or walk to them; just making folks more aware that those are within walking or biking distance of their homes.

Parks and Recreation Director Muck said the connection at Ten Mile is the one I hear about all the time. I think will be such a benefit to so many people in this area of Novi. I heard Rebecca say that there's a little bit of opposition there but it's going to be such a benefit so we will definitely have to look into how that signage can work along Ten Mile as well.

Chair Maday said I have a quick question for Jeff. The Ten Mile connection to the ITC Trail would selfishly be amazing for me, but there are a lot of people who are my neighbors that it would be amazing for too as well. Do you recall when you guys were putting that trail in if ITC had some type of legal reason why we would not be allowed to put any benches on that trail?

Parks and Recreation Director Muck said ITC is a little hesitant on that. They are concerned with not only their vehicles coming through the corridor, but that it raises a lot of potential liability issues as well. Whether it is trash cans or dog waste stations or benches -- anything along that line they are very reluctant to put those in.

Member Maday said okay. For some people that is a long walk with no place to sit. I might have to work on the people I know at ITC to let us put a few benches in there.

Parks and Recreation Director Muck said just as a reminder we do have plans for a comfort station at Nine Mile. That is part of the Terra development that is still under construction. We were supposed to get a bike repair station and about six parking spots if I remember correctly as well as a small little gazebo there and that's going to be basically the midpoint of the trail so that will be a nice way station for walkers about half way if they decide to do the whole trail.

Member Maday said if by any crazy chance I could get ITC to let us put a couple benches in, would you be opposed to seeing if we could find a couple people who want to donate money and put their plaque on it.

Parks and Recreation Director Muck said no I would not be opposed. That could be a part of our commemorative bench program so we could definitely have that conversation with ITC.

Member Smith said I wanted to say the proposed Nine Mile pavement for sidewalk will help people get out there too. That is a nice way to head out to ITC.

Maday said yes, for sure. I don't like biking on that dirt. Again, I cannot tell you how much I appreciate all your hard work. All the stuff we do on this Committee and all the stuff that you guys do, ITC Trail is probably the single most, in my opinion, important thing that we have done as far as walkability in Novi. It's different than biking on a major road where every two seconds you have to turn to see if cars are coming so it's pretty remarkable in the middle of Novi.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Seeing no one in the audience wished to speak, Chair Maday closed the audience participation.

COMMUNICATIONS

Member Smith said I just have a question about maintenance. Is that reported directly to the City for issues on the sidewalks? I have been riding to work and I am up and down Meadowbrook Road all the time and the sidewalk right in front of the Meadowbrook Senior Center is getting beat up. Is that just a phone call to the City?

Planner Bell said you can call or email us, and we can pass it along to the proper staff that would be involved.

Member Mutch said I find that pictures are especially helpful for staff so it can give them an idea and gives them a heads up on what they might be running into.

Parks and Recreation Director Muck said on the front page of the City Website there is a button that lets you report an issue and it takes you right to a request assistance form. That kind of stuff is for pothole repair, sidewalk repair, anything along those lines. It's pretty easy.

Member Mutch asked when the next scheduled meeting was and Planner Bell said it is October 15th.

Member Mutch said just as a possible agenda/discussion item: City Council received a memo related to sidewalk repair and replacement and this is something that Justin had brought up during goal setting and City Staff went out and did some evaluation in one subdivision kind of assessing how much in terms of sidewalk repairs needs to be done and what that translates into dollars and what kind of criteria to have in place. It may be a good discussion topic for this group to be aware of. In the past we have not really got onto the maintenance side of conversation, but even knowing what those costs are would be helpful.

Member Fischer said is that something that memo could be shared with this group? I think that provides some good background as well from where we've come and what we can do and what were liable for.

Planner Bell said we will check into that and send it around.

Member Mutch said with all the increased usage going on, I'm curious on what kind of feedback the city staff is getting and seeing if we can solicit feedback from residents in terms of what are the challenges and what are the up and downsides they are seeing to being on the pathways.

Chair Maday said I'm not an expert but I can only tell you what people have told me and I have hardly heard any complaints even with 10 Mile Road, but I will say the one complaint that I have gotten is the fact there is nowhere to sit along ITC Trail, which is why I brought up the benches. I have not heard anything but good things about the pathways. I think because of COVID, people are home and realizing that we do have a lot of connectivity. There's a lot to go but we have done a lot so I haven't heard anything negative besides 10 Mile Road and somewhere to sit along the trail. I am not sure what the City has heard.

Staff Engineer Runkel said I've only heard complaints about gaps missing and sometimes residents are unhappy that they have to do sidewalk maintenance, they feel that the city should be doing that.

Chair Maday said Andrew, have you gotten any complaints. I'm just curious because you're very involved with the city.

Member Mutch said it does come back to gaps and conditions where their either in subdivisions or even on the same sidewalks where panels are heaved and people have actually tripped and fell. I've also been hearing a lot of positive feedback. We've gotten to the point where there's a lot of good connectivity especially in certain areas of the city like the north end and west side, where you can go multiple miles walking or biking without having to run into gaps and obviously Walled Lake and Pavilion Shore are such huge destinations and folks are using that as their starting point so that's getting a lot of usage too.

Member Fischer said that's why I brought up the maintenance during the goal setting. Five years ago I noticed a lot of the feedback shifted from gap type of discussions to complaints to more of the maintenance and heaving that's going on. I also want to mention anytime I get a complaint about gaps once you explain to residents the hard work that staff does to prioritize and the process that's being evaluated in this committee they are usually get pretty understanding and appreciative about the process. Of course, they want their gap done, but they understand that it is a very subjective thing.

ADJOURN

Member Smith made a motion to adjourn. Member Mutch seconded

The meeting was adjourned at 6:24 PM.