



MOBILITY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

December 19, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

Activities Room

(248) 347-0475

CALL TO ORDER

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

ROLL CALL

Present: Brian Smith (Chair), Ericka Thomas, Gary Becker, Ed Roney, Joe Tolkacz

Absent: Justin Fischer and Jay Dooley (excused)

Staff Present: Rebecca Runkel, Project Engineer, DPW
Barb McBeth, City Planner, Community Development

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

There was a motion to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded and passed 5-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

There was a motion to approve the minutes from November 21, 2024. The motion was seconded and passed 5-0.

DISCUSSION

Chair Smith introduced the attendees from Northville, Nancy Darga, Barbara Morowski-Brown, Wendy Longpre, and John Roby. Nancy Darga introduced herself as the co-chair of the Mobility Network team, which grew out of the River Restoration Task Force. Ms. Darga introduced John as the guiding spirit of the team, who has spent countless hours developing the maps in the presentation. Ms. Morowski-Brown and Ms. Longpre introduced themselves as the Mayor Pro-Tem of the City of Northville, and the Director of Strategic Planning for the City of Northville, respectively. Both Ms. Morowski-Brown and Ms. Longpre are also on the River Restoration Task Force.

Ms. Darga continued her presentation noting that a similar presentation was made to the Walkable Novi Committee in 2022 which was received well. Ms. Darga pointed out that both Novi and Northville recently completed their non-motorized master plans, and Novi has been a leading example in terms of finding funding, making connections and working with other Cities. Ms. Darga mentioned some of the upcoming projects with opportunities for improvements to the non-motorized network – the Downs River Park Walkway, the Seven Mile pathway, the Road Commission of Oakland County (RCOC) Novi Rd project, and the Wayne County 8 Mile Rd project.

Ms. Darga requested the committee's help in creating a joint work group which would be comprised of people from the Mobility Committee, City staff and Northville's mobility team and staff. The joint work group would look at how both Cities can cooperate with planning and future funding, and look at expanding regional connections, especially the ITC Trail and other Trails going west. Also identifying strategies for implementing projects and identifying stakeholders, funding sources, and other groups that could join in. Ms. Darga continued that there's a lot of trails around us and SEMCOG pointed out that where the Walled Lake Branch of the Rouge River meets Johnson Creek in Northville serves as a hub for all the trails that circle it. So what SEMCOG wants is for Northville to take the river walk and bike way and go in all four directions to create networks. Ms. Darga said that is where we need Novi for the connections to work, along with Northville Township, to make these regional connections viable.

Ms. Darga then mentioned the Downs project and that they're working on developing the first leg of the river walk with the hope that it will eventually go all the way to Rotary Park in Novi. SEMCOG and Wayne County are interested in that connection and they've been talking with the Ralph Wilson Foundation as well. Ms. Darga continued that they're trying to create the Seven Mile connection and get all the way to Mayberry and Northville Township, so that's where their efforts are being focused right now. Ms. Darga said that it's key that this ends up being the hub for the whole regional system.

Ms. Darga then provided more details on the Downs project. The river was buried in 1962 in sewer pipe under the race track. Northville is day lighting the river and creating a 7-9 acre park, of which 2 acres is a detention pond. Right now they are digging the ripple pools with tree stumps that add to the environment of the ripple, which are called toe logs. The landscaping and final grading will be done in the spring and summer of 2025.

Ms. Darga said the RCOC had a public meeting in October 2024 and the people who live north of 8 Mile want to get to downtown Northville, specifically Mill Race and Parmenter's, and the people who live south of 8 Mile want to go north to Novi to get to Guernsey, Rotary Park, the 9 Mile bike trail and up Novi Rd to shopping and restaurants. Ms. Darga asked how do we connect all these sites and answered that they're all along the Walled Lake Branch of the Middle Rouge River, so there is potential to knit all these sites through the river walk all the way up to Rotary Park. Ms. Darga mentioned that there are a lot of challenges in getting to Novi, but there are already existing crossings at Novi St and Griswold. The Mobility task force has already studied all the options for getting into Novi. Mr. Roby mentioned the bike lanes Novi put in on Taft Road, which is a big part of getting connected to Novi. Mr. Roby then described the option of coming down Center St and doing a bike boulevard there, which is bikes mixed with cars on the street in peace, which is the purple line on the map. Mr. Roby continued that when you get to 8 Mile, when you go further than 8 Mile down Center St, we've got homework to do because it is no fun to walk or ride a bike down. Mr. Roby said that to the right is Novi St and that's where we join Novi Rd with the signal crossing.

Ms. Darga said the one of the easy things to achieve is to utilize the existing roadways to get over to Guernsey, but that doesn't help to get to the farmer's market or Mill Race, but it allows Northville to get into Novi. Ms. Darga said that thanks to Barbara's intervention, we now have put a little bit of pressure on the RCOC to create a connecting walkway from Allen St up to Galway, but I'm not walking all the way there to cross (Novi Rd). Ms. Darga said that she thinks we need to put a little pressure on RCOC to

visit that in terms of some way for people to cross either between the two roads, or we have two crossings, which is what John likes, but that she wants to bring it to our attention because we would have more influence on RCOC. Ms. Morowski-Brown added that the segment is not (being constructed) until calendar year 2026. Ms. Darga continued that they are still looking at ways to get a river walk completely along the river and then get across 8 Mile Rd, with all kinds of possibilities for doing it. Ms. Darga displayed a map showing different options, such as going under the overpass, where there is room to stay out of the CSX rail bed. Then we can come up to grade and we can get to Rotary Park by using the existing Brickscape sidewalk and then extending it all the way to the park. Ms. Darga said we also have an opportunity of going over to Chase (Farms) and using the Chase (Farms) subdivision entrance to get to Rotary Park. There is also an opportunity to come up to Northville Lumber, which just sold. We could talk to the new owner. Ms. Darga stated that the point is there's a lot of things we could do, but we need the work group to actually analyze what's the most reasonable for a long term solution and what is the most cost effective way to do it.

Ms. Morowski-Brown added that with Northville Lumber there's a large warehouse in the back. We don't know how it's going to be redeveloped yet, but we do know it's going to be redeveloped. So when those redevelopment plans are beginning to surface, if we think we want to do anything along that north border of the property, the time to do it is working with a developer to look at some opportunity. All of these things, as Nancy mentioned earlier are probably happening within the next year, where other people are making investments.

Ms. Darga commended Novi on some of the studies they've been working on, such as the 9 Mile Corridor. She continued that she thinks we need a multi path solution. You need to put a crossing where people are and you have to put a crossing where they want to go. Ms. Darga said they are suggesting to do quickly while Oakland County is working on Novi Road, is to come up with a beefed up crossing at 8 Mile Rd with bike signs and get them at least up to Novi. The RCOC has agreed to put in a sidewalk from Allen Rd up to Galway and put a HAWK light near Galway, I call that 'Route A', or easy to use existing infrastructure. Part of Route A is also for Northville and Wayne County to either widen the shoulder or use the existing shoulder, it's pretty wide already, and put signs and paintings on the sidewalk, use the shoulder to bring people up to Griswold, 8 Mile. There is an existing crossing there, but it needs a really strong striping on 8 Mile Rd because people don't know where to stop. Some are over and some are under it, and Living and Learning, which has 260 some autistic kids, many of them live in a complex here, and they offered us to tap into their bike trail from 8 Mile Rd and get people off of 8 Mile so that is an opportunity that will allow us to get into Chase Farms and then use Chase Farms to get into the entrance. Because we're using existing streets, we can minimize the improvement just to signs and beefing up the crossing. Ms. Darga pointed out that the other thing that's a real challenge is that the overpass disconnects Novi and Northville. Ms. Darga described the unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bikers along that stretch of 8 Mile Rd. Ms. Darga suggested that we put the road on a diet and garner one of the lanes on the south side and make it a full 10-foot bike path, then we have two lanes going west and one lane going east to get us through the overpass safely. Then we bring the people back onto the sidewalk that already exists on 8 Mile Rd and the bike path on Living and Learning, or we could just put in the sidewalk here all the way back to this crossing, we got the room there.

Ms. Darga described Route C as going underneath the overpass and coming back up using Brickscape, as it goes under the overpass. But we think the railroad will have some issues if we went on the Novi Rd side of the railroad. Ms. Darga said it might be more

feasible than the other option, but this gets us to the Rotary Park side of the railroad track. Whatever we do, we want to take people to Novi Rd. Ms. Darga said Novi already has an existing walkway there and if you widen that, just add another five-foot walk to it, then you have a bike way all the way to 9 Mile, and there is already a bike way along 9 Mile Rd that's heavily used. Ms. Darga concluded that she wants to ask that Novi and Northville join in terms of planning our future network connections. If you agree to set up a work group with us, we think this is the best solution. Ms. Darga described a grant that could have been pursued but was found about too late, but there's other opportunities out there. Ms. Darga mentioned SEMCOG is very interested in the 8 Mile crossing. Ms. Darga said ultimately the work group would come up with recommendations after analyzing our options and then look at where we can go for money, who should we be talking to, who are our elected officials, how important could we make this. Ms. Darga mentioned the Ralph Wilson Foundation that has a new regional trail fund and if we create a route that connects to a regional trail, we should be eligible for funding.

Chair Smith said he was excited and made a comment that the Rotary Park trail system is on the west side of Chase Dr and Chase Woods is on the east side of Chase Dr and there are trails through there that the City has right-of-way to, but use of the entrance to those has petered off because you're basically walking through people's gardens. Ms. Darga said that there are several schools like that where there's a lot between two houses going to the football field. Ms. Darga mentioned some other communities where river walks added value to homes and businesses. Member Becker asked why Rotary Park is a destination we need to connect to. Ms. Darga replied because it's on the water and it's part of the water system, it's a respite, you feel like you're in the UP, it's beautiful, especially in the fall. Member Tolkacz commented that the wood chip trail is really nice, feels like you're up north. Mr. Roby mentioned photography and wildlife in the park, but we don't want to trash it, it probably not going to be huge traffic. You don't want it to be an intrusion but the whole idea it give people choices with different loops so it's a richer experience for everybody. Chair Smith commented that one little section (on 8 Mile) is the only section without sidewalk between Haggerty and Napier, so if we can get across the bridge somehow, that would be great. Chair Smith said he would love if we could get under the railroad tracks and establish if that is something that CSX could do.

Chair Smith stated he would talk to the Mayor about how we set up a joint task force between Northville and Novi. Ms. Morowski-Brown commented that it's good we both have updated non-motorized plans and they were done by the same contractor so the formatting and structure of the documents is similar. The committee spent the next several minutes summarizing what the task force has accomplished and what still needs to be done, along with clarifying the types and widths of paths and route options available. Member Becker mentioned the need for maintenance, who will maintain the paths and what will the liability look like. The committee continued to discuss details of different route options, including going under the bridge or utilizing the Living and Learning property. The importance of getting Wayne County on board was reiterated. The discussion ended with an emphasis on the importance of the smaller connecting pathways that get people to the larger trail systems, like the Airline Trail.

The Northville guests exited the meeting and Chair Smith directed the discussion to the next agenda topic. Engineer Runkel gave a brief update on the sidewalk repair program, stating there is about \$200,000 left in the budget which wouldn't allow us to tackle a whole other subdivision at this point. Engineer Runkel proposed using the funds to have

the City's consultant start working on a district map for the new program. Chair Smith asked about the program budget and if the map would need a motion and support. Engineer Runkel said no because the design will have to go to City Council, the district map will not, but it will be shared with the committee when it's available. Chair Smith said that sounds good and the meeting schedule for the next 6 months is on the agenda. Chair Smith said he would like to start digging into the Active Mobility Plan more, looking at the highlights of that, look at what's coming up in construction and see how we can merge that together. Engineer Runkel confirmed that she would send out the Active Mobility Plan and meeting dates to everyone.

Chair Smith brought up a communication from a resident on South Lake Dr about motorized bikes using the shared path on the south side of the road. Engineer Runkel said we can look at putting up signs for non-motorized only, we have those on the ITC Trail, but that brings up the question of do we need to put up signage on every shared path in the City? Or is it a broader communication issue that we need to get out to the public. Engineer Runkel said she is unsure if motorized bikes are considered motorized vehicles. Chair Smith answered that there are different classes of bikes based on maximum speed and if you have to be pedaling, some lowest classes are pedal assisted. Chair Smith said he was able to get one up to 30 mph, so it's maybe a 10 mile boost, and there are throttle-controlled ones that are more motorcycle like, but they're not quite motorcycles. Member Becker commented that if the speed limit on the road is 25 mph, then bikes shouldn't be able to go over that. The committee then discussed who uses the path, who determines what signage goes where, common courtesy from e-bike users, and enforcement.

Chair Smith then moved to action items, which include talking to Mayor Fischer, the City Manager, and the City Attorney about how to form a joint committee with Northville, researching classifications of motorized bikes, and talking with Walled Lake about what they allow on their paths around the lake. Chair Smith then made a motion to adjourn which was supported by Member Thomas and Member Becker.

REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

Action items were reviewed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made to adjourn. The motion was seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 pm.