

MINUTES
12-15-2022



WALKABLE NOVI COMMITTEE

MINUTES

December 15, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.
Council Conference Room
45175 W. Ten Mile, 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 and Joe Tolkacz

Absent: Justin Fischer

Staff Present: Lindsay Bell, Senior Planner, Community Development
Barbara McBeth, City Planner, Community Development
James Hill, Planner, Community Development
Ben Peacock, 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 Zoom)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion to approve the December 15, 2022, Walkable Novi Committee Agenda made by Member Casey and seconded by Member Dooley. Motion carried 6-0.

MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Novi Non-Motorized Plan Update

Senior Planner Bell relayed this is the kickoff meeting for the non-motorized plan update. The Greenway Collaborative has been selected as the consultant. They are the same group that worked on the Non-motorized Master Plan in 2011. Norm Cox and Carolyn Prudhomme with The Greenway Collaborative introduced themselves.

2. Mr. Cox discussed scheduling meetings to synchronize with timing after public engagements to help set the course for the next element. The proposed tentative meeting dates were accepted by the committee.

- Thursday, March 16th from 6pm to 7pm
- Thursday, June 15th from 6pm to 7pm

3. Mr. Cox discussed the Inventory Analysis Working Document, which is a raw data collection of federal, state and regional sources as a starting point.

Council Member Casey noted a lot of equity related data and inquired how much that will be looked at in the process. Mr. Cox relayed that they will look at where there is demand of land use, such as proximity to traffic generators, and a demand of equity, such as access to a car and things of that nature. That can be contrasted with what is out there, and where the greatest disparity of the demand in equity issues and where there are facilities, the ability to walk or bike along the road, those are things that help prioritize.

4. Mr. Cox discussed setting project direction in terms hopes, concerns and specific places to address, and asked for round table input. Mr. Cox asked the committee to first address hopes.

Member Dooley relayed that he is fairly new to the project and is still in the learning mode. He deferred to the expertise in the room.

Member Becker relayed that he is a 47-year resident of Novi and has seen the city from dirt roads to present. He thinks it's a wonderful opportunity, no concerns or hopes at this point.

Member Casey relayed her hope is that the committee comes away with a very clear vision, strategy, and plan to improve non-motorized walkability/mobility in the city. We have big projects on our radar, we need to make sure this gets prioritized, and can plan out for the next 5-10 years to fully accomplish. On a different note, Member Casey is looking forward to seeing what gets built and recommended from an environmental and mobility perspective.

Mr. Cox added that in reference to Member Casey's time frame, things change so quickly, and inquired as to what the committee would like to see as a realistic time frame to put into planning and to project out for the plan. Member Casey relayed her original thought would be a 5-10 year duration, but would love to see less time, although the challenge could be funding.

Member Tolkacz dovetailed on to Member Casey's comments of walkability and mobility and would like to add connectivity. In 1992, when Member Tolkacz moved to Novi, moving from neighborhood to neighborhood was difficult, for example riding or biking between subs often hit dead ends. Although there has been huge progress since, Member Tolkacz would like to see what more we can do to create safe environments for walking and biking from neighborhoods to business areas and restaurants.

Member Roney relayed his hopes are aligned with what Member Casey and Member Tolkacz said and would like to add looking back to the late 1980's there was a greenway plan with the idea to get from Eight Mile all the way to Walled Lake. One of the best qualities of Novi is the number of parks we have, so a hope would be to connect the parks.

5. Mr. Cox relayed one of the key elements of public engagement is not only to determine the consensus of the community but to bring supporters to the table when it comes in front of City Council. Mr. Cox asked the group for concerns and challenges.

Member Becker added that recently a new neighborhood being planned had a number of residents who did not want a connecting sidewalk close behind their homes, so a challenge may be what looks good on paper may run afoul with residents.

Member Dooley relayed early on there was a discussion regarding Ten Mile, going east on Meadowbrook. On the south side of Ten Mile, we've seen a lot of mature trees get cut down. There are people who don't understand why the trees got cut down and losing the beautiful landscape due to the addition of the sidewalk.

Member Becker thinks there may a constituency within the city that says we need non-motorized trails, biking paths, walkways, and bridges yet when it comes to a particular place where it gets implemented the danger is the small group who is affected most, like those who have lost the trees, have the biggest voice.

Member Casey thinks the challenge is how we cleanly get a message out to people and have them understand what's being done, to hopefully get their buy in. The concept that the city is bringing in these trails and non-motorized walkways is seen as positive, until it becomes impactful to a resident near their block or yard.

Member Becker thinks bike paths, trails and connectivity will increase the value of property and should be posed as an opportunity to create a desired location for the real estate market.

Member Tolkacz, in hearing the committee talk, is struck by the terms balance and communication. In terms of balance, as he runs down Ten Mile and a lot of the time must run in the street, so he is appreciative of the new sidewalks. Conversely, he notices trees and fences being removed affecting the aesthetics of the neighborhoods, so the challenge is keeping the balance of competitive needs in place and minimizing the impact. In terms of communication, whatever we can do to get additional communication out via social media would be great.

Member Roney, relayed a different thought on challenges. The Planning Commission talks often about setting up buffers for a clean transition between properties, so the challenge is working harder to create a softer buffer to make non-motorized updates more acceptable.

Mr. Cox said communication has been talked about a lot. He posed the question to the committee of what are examples of great communication - what has been sent out regarding what is coming up, as every community is different, what works well in Novi?

Member Casey said she thinks we are actively connecting residents with different departments and are out in the community asking residents to come to meetings to voice concerns, challenges, and positivity. To stay ahead, we should overcommunicate, and get buy in from those affected most, for example residents on Ten Mile so they have voice and some ownership.

A member asked Mr. Cox his experience with using on HOAs as a first touch point, or thoughts on using the Novi magazine to communicate what is planned and why, recognizing not everyone reads physical papers these days. Mr. Cox relayed that he had a recent conversation with City Planner McBeth regarding this. City Planner McBeth relayed in the past, the HOA Presidents were invited to the Mayor's annual speech, and then had the opportunity to speak with Community Development staff in the atrium. This has not happened in the past couple of years, and it is not clear whether it will be held this year.

Members agreed that multiple communication methods are important. Most HOA neighborhood meetings have low attendance. The suggestion of the NextDoor app was discussed as many people post there regarding concerns. Mr. Cox relayed he is looking at all social media avenues, as well as web surveys and crowdsourcing maps. The Novi News and The Novi Notes was discussed as another means of communication, as is the importance of layering, utilizing multiple channels, as well as early and frequent communication to reach various groups.

Mr. Cox relayed in the past he would typically hold two public meetings for a project. This has evolved into more of a focus group approach, which has worked really well, either thematic, geographic, or going to an existing group's meeting gives a good cross section of the community. The committee discussed various community groups where time could be requested on meeting agendas to increase awareness, get feedback and/or conduct surveys such as HOA's, the Rotary, schools, the youth council, the library, and church groups. Mr. Cox asked that the committee continue to think of other existing groups and social networks that could be tapped into.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

None

COMMUNICATIONS

A communication was received from Glenn Jones who lives in Nottingham Woods subdivision regarding consideration of an alternate route for the pathway connector to the ITC trails passing through Robin Park.

ADJOURN

Motion to adjourn the December 15, 2022 Walkable Novi Committee made by Member Casey and seconded by Member Becker. Motion carried 6-0.