

Charleston Green Team Meeting

Wednesday, August 17, 2022

12:00 – 1:30 pm

In-person meeting (may bring lunch)

AV Room, 3rd Floor, City Hall

The public may view by Zoom at the following link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85390276058?pwd=WlRGdjNJcTNNa3NhSGx2UG9JUjVZz09>

Passcode: 173739

Phone: 929-436-2866 or 301-715-8592

Webinar ID: 853 9027 6058

1. Welcome
2. Adopting the minutes from meeting on July 19, 2022
3. Appointment of Advisory Members to Green Team
4. Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program - Information from Dennis Strawn
5. Updates:
 - A. City Council Environment & Recycling Committee – Chair, Caitlin Cook
 - B. Roll-out of Recycling Bins - Director Brent Webster
 - C. Communications – Linda Frame & Patti Hamilton
 - D. Designation of Tree City USA / WV Tree Minders Information
 - F. Gorilla Proposal Status
 - G. Other
6. Announcements
7. Next meeting: (3rd Wednesday is Sept. 21 - in person or virtual?)
8. Adjourn

Green Team Meeting Minutes

July 19, 2022

Attendees: Patti Hamilton, Linda Frame, James Young, Quenton King, Tina Stinson, Rod Watkins, Justin Marlowe, Ted Armbrecht, Emmett Pepper, Brent Webster, Nikki Smith, and Sargent Oldham. Dennis Strawn in attendance.

Patti called the meeting to order at 12:01. Quorum established.

Patty introduced the newest member of the Green Team, Quenton King.

The June 21, 2022 meeting minutes were approved. Justin moved to approve, Quenton seconded. Unanimous.

Patti introduced Tina and asked her to describe what she does in communications for the City and how we can help. Tina can help create educational materials and push them out through city channels. For press releases, we can work together and they will be topic-dependent on how they are handled. Patti and Linda will set up an in-person meeting with Tina. An initial focus can be education on the new bins and what materials are allowed by producing videos and other visuals. Final approval would come from Tina. Tree City USA is another example of where we could use some help.

Patti introduced Sargent Oldham with the Charleston Police Department for a discussion on pedestrian safety. He provided materials on fatalities and sections of code that mention pedestrian safety. All three recent fatalities could have been preventable if the person had crossed in a marked cross walk. There might be an educational opportunity for the public and how to cross safely. Ted asked about rules for scooters. They are still currently still illegal in the City. New bill would say they cannot be on the sidewalk and need to follow traffic laws. Justin asked if there are some ways to put up signs.

Councilmember Pepper asked if it is the affirmative duty that pedestrians have to check the cross walk and does their right-of-way only apply if they are far enough into the intersection. Sargent Oldham replied that pedestrians have the right-of-way and read the code. Need to educate pedestrians as well as drivers. Enforcement needed but hard to do. The Sargent handed out materials.

Updates

Recycling: Councilmember Pepper said that the Environment and Recycling committee met last week to hear from Gorilla and discuss their proposal which is under consideration by the City. Locations are being researched. The new site would take glass. Charleston would be the first of these new facilities to be launched by Gorilla. Under Gorilla, tipping fees would be under \$45/ton versus \$175/ton to haul materials to Beckley.

Director Webster said there are recycling bins available for city events. There are always more opportunities available for education. The City is also working with some schools. Ted recommended reaching out to the school board. The City will be looking at how the new bins increase amount of recycling collected and will eventually be using a special truck to lift the totes. Once things get rolling then can reach out to more schools. To date, 3,600 have been handed out and there are 1,400 left. Green Team members can reach out directly to Director Webster if they hear of someone needing a bin via email or by calling 304-348-6831. Justin will reach out to neighborhood associations. Bags no longer needed. Gorilla will be able to recycle 17 items so will be expanding plastics that are accepted. Need to look into safety issues if glass is accepted.

Communications: Patti and Linda will meet with Tina.

New members: Quenton King was appointed at the City Council meeting on 7.18.2022. Still need an advisory member. Nikki will check to see the appointment process for advisory members. Emmett welcomed Quenton and highlighted his experience with environmental justice, in particular. All names under consideration would be good for advisory members.

Tree City USA designation: no update on letter that has gone to Mayor and Jonathan Storage. Emmett offered to introduce resolution if needed. Justin needs to be sure we have numbers for tree budget. Patti will also follow up.

Gorilla proposal: Rod has met with people looking at various sites. Site is undetermined at this point but things are going smoothly.

Other business: Linda brought up expanding green space and attracting grocery store ideas discussed with Quenton.

Dennis Strawn explained a DOT program to reconnect communities that have been divided, a federal program that is seeking proposals by October 13. It would fund the planning process for ideas such as connecting areas impacted by interstates or rail lines. He will email link to full document. Patti will check in with Jonathan Storage. There would be follow-up grants to implement the plans that are created. Emmett suggested adding it to the Green Team's August agenda and sending letter to the City. Dennis could draft.

Next meeting is Wednesday, August 17 in person or virtual at noon. Ted asked that the meetings remain in person. Ted moved we adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 1:21PM.

Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program (Charleston WV – Interstate designs barriers)

Summary: Charleston is blessed with having 3 federal interstate systems routed within its boundaries (I64, I77 and I79). This has brought many benefits over the years with the increased mobility options for motorized traffic. But it has also brought one glaring problem – the movement of non-motorized traffic, mainly pedestrians and bicyclists.

Unfortunately, 50 years ago highway planners didn't think much about access for or the safety of pedestrians and bicycles. Terms like complete streets, walkability and livability were not in the lexicon.

As an example, consider the multiple lanes for motorized vehicles on Pennsylvania Avenue, North and South, along a 7-block stretch of the west side from the Boulevard to Washington St. This entire area was reconfigured in the late 1970's to coincide with the building of the interstate. Before the interstate the area had grid streets and sidewalks similar to the remaining streets in the area. The interstate and related streets that were impacted, unfortunately, used a design standard for the movement of motor vehicles through this area for maximum efficiency. This includes rounded corners for continuous vehicle flows.

Jump to the near present and efforts have been made to allow pedestrians to cross Pennsylvania Ave with the installation of pedestrian signals and defined cross walks. This has helped but will never be completely effective as a friendly place to walk or bike due to the existing built infrastructure.

Federally recognized issue

Talk of alleviating the effects of old national highway designs have gained an increased recognition and appreciation in recent years; with words like social justice, human equity and complete streets; to right the wrongs with these poor designs. It came to fruition with the Community Connectivity Pilot Program as part of the America's Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019 and then expanded greatly with the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) passed this past November.

Some recent articles outlining this issue and proposals to fix and or minimize these highways that have effectively cut cities in two.

<https://aashtojournal.org/2021/04/30/transportation-equity-focus-of-proposed-highway-legislation/>

<https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/2019/08/13/federal-infrastructure-bills-introduce-highways-boulevards-pilots>

<https://www.sir.advancedleadership.harvard.edu/articles/reconnecting-what-freeways-severed-addressing-the-historical-toll-on-communities-split-by-highways>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/06/30/buttigieg-reconnecting-communities/>

As stated, the primary goal of the RCP Program is to reconnect communities harmed by transportation infrastructure, using capital construction projects that are championed by those communities. The RCP Program aligns with Biden-Harris Administration policies and priorities, including the DOT Strategic Plan goals of Safety Economic Strength, Equity, Climate and Sustainability, Transformation, and Organizational Excellence.

In addition, a key component of the RCP program is USDOT's Equity Strategic Goal to reduce inequities across our transportation systems and the communities they effect. The RCP Program seeks to redress the legacy of harm caused by transportation infrastructure, including barriers to opportunity, displacement, damage to the environment and public health, limited access, and other hardships. In pursuit of this goal, the program will support and engage economically disadvantaged communities to increase affordable, accessible, and multimodal access to daily destinations like jobs, healthcare, grocery stores, schools, places of worship, recreation, and park space.

Unique issues with the Interstate in Charleston

The interstate, to put it bluntly, has been a barrier for non-motorized mobility between the west side and downtown. To some extent it has also been a barrier for growth on the west side. As outlined before it is metaphorically a wall for walking and bicycling. But for many it is not seen that way. Many seem perfectly happy zippy by in a car as they make their way to the interstate.

But city planners should be more in tuned to issues affecting all citizens not just the ones choosing to operate a motor vehicle. The last census stated 40% of households on the west side flats did not own a motorized vehicle.

The Charleston Main Street program has had this issue on their radar for years, trying to figure out how to safely allow pedestrians and bicyclists to navigate from downtown to the 'Elk City' area. The issue was mentioned in the latest revitalization plan for Charleston as well as the Bicycling and Pedestrian Plan for Charleston. This barrier was mentioned in past MPO plans relating to ped/bike improvements also.

This new federal grant allows Charleston the opportunity to address this situation and hopefully get solutions to this problem.

With enhanced mobility for this area the hope is safer and increased pedestrian use, safer and increased bicycling. In addition, as a more inviting area there is an opportunity for increased business activities.

Currently the Charleston Convention and Coliseum utilizes parking under the interstate during large crowd events. During these events the lack of clearly defined and easy to use pedestrian access is missing. This hinders the full enjoyment for citizens who have traveled to Charleston for a show as well as limits these citizens access to the "Elk City" area before or after for dinner or drink.

Solution to the Problem

To paraphrase the purpose of the RCP program, 'Its purpose is to reconnect communities by mitigating transportation facilities such as highways that create barriers to community connectivity including to mobility, access, or economic development'.

Currently the Federal Government is soliciting applications for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program grants up to the deadline of October 13, 2022. The white pages explaining the grant process and deadline can be found here:

https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-06/RCP_NOFO_FY22.pdf

This proposal, if the city wishes to proceed, is to ask for a Planning Grant to fund the study of mitigating the barrier effect the interstate has created and restore community connectivity. It is hoped the planning grant would address the lack of safe pedestrian and bicycling access in the built infrastructure and will propose solutions, with an overarching plan for improved pedestrian and bicycling access, with an emphasis on utilizing the riverbank for separated use.

With a clear and detailed plan, a capital grant will be asked for in the RCP program to proceed with actual construction.

Planning grants will be awarded from a national pot consisting of \$50M, with individual grants ranging from \$100,000 to \$2M in size.

Continuation of Ongoing Work

As state earlier, over the past few years community groups and the city have put an emphasis alleviating the non-motorized mobility with the interstate design. It's not a problem unique to Charleston, as the articles attached contest too. Let's build on the art work and skate park that have blessed this area. Let's also build on the convenient parking that is available by making it safer to cross the street.

Envision easy access for a pedestrian walking from the west side on Virginia St, Randolph/Quarrier St, Lee St or Washington St being able to safely navigate through the intersections of Pennsylvania Avenues. Envision these intersections clearly marked with motorized traffic completely stopped, envision the area well illuminated, clean and inviting. Hundreds of residents live within a mile radius of downtown and the west side. A mile is a 20-minute walk.

Envision easy access for a cyclist riding from the west side on Virginia St, Randolph/Quarrier St, Lee St or Washington St being able to safely navigate the streets in and around the intersections of Pennsylvania Avenues. Envision these intersections clearly marked for cyclists, co-existing with motorized traffic. Thousands of residents live within a 3 mile radius of downtown and the west side. This bike ride would take 15-minutes.

With dedicated federal funding available to address this issue now is the time to seize the opportunity. These are dollars that will be spent, either in Charleston or some other deserving town. Let's make the case for them to be spent here, enriching our community, and build on the current work the city is putting into enhancing non-motorized infrastructure.