

Safe Routes to School Travel Plan Task Force – Meeting Minutes: 31 January 2012 (Page 1)

In attendance: Tracy Bull (Chair), Bill Cummings, Joanne DiGangi, Principal John Fabrizio, Peter Flood, Mary Frazzetta, Rick Greenier, Officer Rob Kelleher, Jean Mazzearella, Principal Marsha McGill, Leslie Rothman, Sarah Ruffell, Matt Waitkins (NRPC)

The meeting was called to order by committee Chair Tracy Bull at 3:35pm. She welcomed the committee membership and introductions were made around the table.

Mrs. Bull described the New Hampshire Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School (SRTS) grant funding program, designed to encourage students in Grades K-8 to seek non-motorized means of travel to and from school, and to promote health and fitness. Three levels of funding exist under the SRTS program:

1. Start up costs, allowing up to \$4999 of reimbursement for organizational meetings, etc.
2. Travel plan development costs, affording up to \$15,000 in reimbursement for master plan design work, consulting, etc.
3. The general grant which affords up to \$250,000 in reimbursement for actual infrastructure improvements and/or educational elements if a travel plan has been developed first, otherwise up to \$100,000 in reimbursement.

She explained that the first level of funding was not necessary to pursue for this committee's purpose since groundwork was laid during Merrimack's iTrac project and subsequent report in 2009, the Merrimack Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan. She described that this committee would be addressing the second tier of funding in order to develop a comprehensive travel plan relating to the Mastricola Complex, and that the grant application had been completed and forwarded to Concord on January 27th, 2012. She further explained that the development of a comprehensive travel plan would then afford the possibility of applying for the larger, third tier reimbursement sum of up to \$250,000 at a future date.

Mrs. Bull provided the committee with a background history of the proposed project.

In 2008, the Town Council authorized the Economic Development Citizen's Advisory Committee (EDCAC) to formulate a subcommittee to work with the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) on an iTrac project for the Town Center. The Town Center can be identified as the corridor along Daniel Webster Highway from approximately the Rite Aid Plaza to the south, north up to The Commons area, as well as areas in the center encompassing Town Hall and the Merrimack District Court, west along Baboosic Lake Road to O'Gara Drive, therefore inclusive of the Mastricola Complex and Merrimack High School, down to the Souhegan River, plus Merrill's Marauder's Bridge and trail, as well as Wildcat Falls. Mr. Flood demonstrated these areas on the large maps developed by the NRPC.

The net result of the iTrac subcommittee's work became the Merrimack Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan, accepted by the Town Council in late 2009. Mrs. Bull circulated a copy of this report, indicating that she would email this committee's membership the PDF file of the same following the meeting. The Town Center Committee (TCC) was then formulated as an independent committee charged with overseeing the execution of the projects enumerated within that report. Given TCC awareness of the SRTS funding program, permission was

requested to partner anew with the NRPC in order to write for the travel plan grant with specific consideration to sidewalk projects from the report: Item #4--O'Gara Drive and Item #6--Woodbury Drive. With the assistance of the NRPC, this committee will also study the following, as outlined in the grant application: the portion of Baboosic Lake Road within the town center, School St., Bishop St. and McElwain St. The Merrimack School District is serving as the grant applicant.

Mrs. Bull explained that it will require some time for the NH DOT to process the travel plan grant application (2-3 months). Formulation of this committee was a requirement of the grant application. Coupled with the assistance of the NRPC and information derived from the Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan in composing the application, confidence is high that it will be accepted. She indicated that she would also forward the PDF file of the grant application to all committee members following the meeting.

Matt Waitkins (NRPC) distributed copies of the Scope of Work from Attachment A of the grant application. He described that once the grant is approved and NHDOT gives an official notice to proceed with the project, the process will include the gathering of data, the identification of barriers to walking and biking, and the devising of solutions to overcome those issues. A travel/action plan would then be formulated, including the development of recommendations followed by their implementation. He provided background on how SRTS funding is derived, explaining that the NH DOT receives its SRTS funding through federal highway legislation.

Pertaining to this committee's responsibilities, the NRPC will undertake much of the work, and the committee will then review the information to see what makes sense and help put it into context. The NRPC will identify and map a 2-mile radius from the Mastricola School Complex, as well as assist with the implementation of two sets of parent and student surveys.

The first set of surveys will use the National Center for Safe Routes to School format and will be implemented by staff at the elementary and upper elementary schools. *These two surveys will be implemented in advance of approval of the Travel Plan grant* and are technically not part of the grant. The Student Survey will be implemented across a few days in the late winter/early spring, whereby homeroom teachers will tally the means by which students have been travelling to and from school. The more in-depth Parent Survey about walking and biking to school will be implemented at the same time as the student surveys and will be sent home via students in the Mastricola Complex to elicit either written or online response.

The results of the student surveys will be entered into the national Safe Routes Center database by the Committee with the assistance of NRPC. Any parent surveys that are not filled out on line by parents will be entered into the database by committee with assistance by NRPC.

Once the grant application has been approved and the NHDOT gives an official notice to proceed with the project, additional student and parent surveys will be administered as part of the Travel Plan development process. Additionally, students will engage in a mapping exercise whereby they will draw the individual routes they take to and from school. The NRPC will assist in the analyzing of the data from these surveys.

Mr. Waitkins described that traffic counting machines would be employed across one week on the streets described in the grant application in order to gather traffic volume and speed data. Visual observations on these streets would also be made, particularly at school drop-off and pick-up times. The NRPC will also be instrumental in analyzing this data.

Mr. Waitkins explained that this task force committee would meet approximately 3 to 5 times across as many months in order to ensure the process was meeting the needs of the community. The NRPC will also meet with the parent/teacher groups at each school in the Mastricola Complex, which will help with input and create awareness. Data findings and comments will be incorporated into the final travel plan draft.

The travel plan process will allow this committee to identify why more students are not already walking or biking to school, or if that is even something desired by the families of the Mastricola Complex. Depending upon the results, the action plan could include educational and fitness elements such as pedometers, a biking rodeo event, etc. Once formulated, the plan will become available online and forwarded to the NH DOT in Concord.

Mr. Waitkins described that the budget outlined in the travel plan grant application is \$13,200. This amount would then cover the services of the NRPC, billable to the Merrimack School District, which would in turn invoice the NH DOT for reimbursement under the grant. He reiterated that the grant application would require a few months to process, but indicated that the NRPC has some funding available which would allow the undertaking some action, such as the National Center for Safe Routes surveys, in the interim.

Committee Chair Bull opened up the floor to comments and questions.

Principal Fabrizio inquired about how accurate information would be disseminated to Mastricola families and the community. Mrs. Bull explained that this committee's meetings are publicly posted both via the Town Hall and the Superintendent's Office. She described that the Town Center Committee meetings are public, and that on behalf of the TCC, she had already publicly presented on the SRTS program before the Town Council as well as the Merrimack School Board. Minutes from all these meetings are available online, and she will advise Administration at both the Mastricola schools (MES, JMUES) of any upcoming public presentations on the topic. She further indicated that this communication aspect would provide an excellent topic for an upcoming agenda.

Mrs. Bull described that examples of other SRTS projects supported by the NRPC were available online, and that she would provide links to that information as well as the NH DOT SRTS website to the committee membership.

Principal Fabrizio inquired whether funding under the large infrastructure grant could apply to parking. Mr. Waitkins explained that grant funding is targeted towards students in Grades K-8 making that atypical, however, depending upon circumstances and data, arguments have been made for a variety of accommodations under the program.

Safe Routes to School Travel Plan Task Force – Meeting Minutes: 31 January 2012 (Page 4)

Mrs. Bull requested that the committee consider dates for a subsequent meeting. It was agreed that the third Tuesday of the month from 3:30pm – 4:30pm worked well for the committee membership. The next meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, February 21st, 2012 at that time. Principal McGill indicated that she would reserve the meeting space again in Room #122 at James Mastriola Upper Elementary School (JMUES), and Mrs. Bull thanked her for doing so.

Mrs. Bull thanked the committee membership for their time, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:35pm.