

Duluth-Superior Metro Pedestrian Plan Advisory Committee Meeting #3

Meeting Summary

Friday, June 19, 2020

10:30am-11:30am (online and by phone)

Meeting Participants

Name	Representing
Broc Allen	MIC Policy Board
Carol Andrews	St. Louis County Engineering
Chris Belden	DTA Staff
Brian Bluhm	St. Louis Co Public Health
Amy Demmer	Zeitgeist
Judy Gibbs	Resident
James Gittemeier	MIC Staff / Presenter
Ed Gleeson	Business Owner/Resident
Susie Green	Community Action Duluth
Russell Habermann	SRTS / ARDC Regional Planning
Holly Kostrenski	Toward Zero Deaths
Kris Liljeblad	City of Duluth Planning
Ben Margeson	CHUM
Shawna Mullen	Resident
Nancy Nelson	Resident
Theresa O'Halloran-Johnson	Resident
Dena Ryan	WisDOT
Ricky Sarran	MIC Staff
Tom Szukis	DTA Board/Resident
Doug Stevens	Skyline Preservation Alliance
Rachel Thapa	Lincoln Park Middle School
Alice Tibbetts	We Walk in Duluth
Rondi Watson	MIC Staff
Maren Webb	MnDOT District One Planning

1. Welcome and Introduction: James began by asking participants to sign in using the “chat” feature on Microsoft Teams and invited them to ask questions that way during the course of the presentation. He reviewed the items for discussion during this meeting.

2. Plan Timeline: James reviewed the upcoming tasks to be accomplished by this group on a month-by-month basis:

June: Ped Plan committee survey results/issue identification

July: Public survey and group discussion of results

August: Development of goals and strategies

September: Development of action steps and priorities

October: Review and comment on the Draft Plan (by the PPAC, BPAC, MIC, TAC and general public)

3. Aspiration – Walkability Vision Survey Discussion

James presented the results of the group survey in a word cloud format, and asked the group to consider the aspirational words or concepts they wanted to add, or expand upon, that described the features that make an enjoyable walking environment.

Missing words include:

- Safety
- Clean, free of litter
- Well maintained
- Chance encounters
- Talking to other people, social interaction, opportunities to connect
- Pleasant
- Sense of ownership
- Sense of community
- Dignity and respect
- Gathering places
- Places to sit
- Waste receptacles

Comments/Discussion

- This is related to equity considerations. Who is impacted the most financially and ability-wise? How do we create spaces that work for all people
- One thing that makes for an unpleasant walkable environment is garbage –litter, furniture, mattresses, needles – when it’s unpleasant or uncomfortable to be outside, that will reduce time people spend outside.
- It comes down to respect; why would you clean up if no one else does?
- Renters and people who come from marginalized communities – what can they ask of their landlords; it’s not necessarily the residents but the land owners who do or don’t take care of places.
- It’s about the experience as you walk. The features that we respond to include a sense of ownership and community connections.
- A “clean safe pleasant environment” is distinct from streetscaping elements. Walkable places are well maintained, free from dog poop, untrimmed trees and bushes along sidewalks, sand.
- Lack of refuse/garbage, unpleasant to see litter, furniture, mattresses, needles – when it’s unpleasant or uncomfortable to be outside, that will reduce time people spend outside.
- Access management - lots of vehicle accesses make it harder on pedestrians.

4. **Mapping Exercise:** James asked the group about street segments that are particularly enjoyable for walking in the Duluth-Superior area. He asked people to consider certain distinct areas, and to identify their associated high-level features:

Business District/Commercial areas

- West Duluth – Central Ave and Grand Ave
- 4th Street

Hiking Trails/Natural Areas - what are the defining features of those that make them great walkable environments?

- Off-street trails provide well defined, easily accessible, high quality natural environmental areas, with high density surrounding them and separated from vehicular
- Community standard established for trails – on both public and private property, vast amount of green space, every neighborhood has a trail, community members have great and easy access and have developed a community ownership over it.

- Community maintenance is an aspect of high-quality trails – not using trails when they are soft; also picking up litter
- Nice secluded safe areas for families and kids
- Comparatively clean and picked up
- Relatively clean, not a lot of garbage

Residential Districts

- Congdon historic walking tour area
- Lakeside historic walking tour area
- Residential neighborhood around the UWS campus
- Morgan Park
- Jackson Houses in Hermantown along Arrowhead Rd

Unique Places

- Long stretches of flat areas – Park Point, Skyline Drive, Barkers Island
- Seven Bridges Road
- Cemeteries – Forest Hill, Oneota
- Incline steps; viewsheds/vistas
- UWS campus in Superior
- Osaugie Trail
- Chester Park Drive

Comments/Discussion:

- We need community investment strategies for individual neighborhoods, city-wide. Identifying unique neighborhood commercial nodes as community investment areas is something that the city intends to do as part of its planning processes improve them. Key to community vitality.
- We're talking a lot about sidewalks, but sometimes adding sidewalks to a street can actually make walking along streets less comfortable if the street isn't designed with people in mind (promoting vehicular speeding by separating out modes and making the road feel free and clear for cars and that people walking are supposed to be on the sidewalk).
- Pick up dumped furniture program
- Need to have destination to walk to in neighborhood business districts
- Lack of community/public gathering places.
- What are the barriers to coordination? – meet with public works staff to learn
- We need to be intentional about what we call the neighborhoods; for example the “Medical/Hospital District” disregards the high-density of kids in the surrounding residential area.
- Neighborhood and residents often – usually? – shoot down walkability features based on the fact that they don't want to be assessed (an example was the reconstruction of Wallace Ave – the neighbors themselves didn't want the sidewalks added).
- Choosing between biking and walking improvements and infrastructure is a lose/lose approach. When you deny bike access you push too many novice cyclists onto sidewalks (Superior Street for example). We should never build shared bike/walk systems.
- From the perspective of the public works department, the desire to do lowest-cost maintenance often influences design, for example in the ease of plowing sidewalks. On Rice Lake Road they decided against boulevard design due to winter– they strongly prefer to use a plow wing to clear snow earlier, along with road plowing.
- In an urban environment it shouldn't be necessary to drive (i.e., own a car) to get where you need to go because it's challenging to get places on foot.

- What can we do to improve the pedestrian environment that is “low-hanging fruit?”
- Snow clearing is an example of how poverty impacts choices; for example the DTA clears selective areas, and those are often filled back in when roads are plowed by the City, County or State a short while later; better coordination is very much needed between jurisdictions.
- Assessments are a big picture issue – no one single person, property owner or business entity should be able to influence decisions that have broad public impacts – decisions really must be decided from a network perspective and made for the greater community good.
- A connected network is key. People can’t get to destinations if connectivity fails. It’s not just a coordinated effort that is needed, but community and jurisdictional buy-in that this is a priority.
- Parking is a topic that instantly can take the conversation off track
- We should use the oldest and youngest and least-able as the standard by which we build and make decisions. If people with vulnerabilities feel it’s safe and accessible, everyone feels the same way –
- Check out the 8-80 initiative as guidelines
- We need to expect more out of Duluth. We spend way too much time talking about things that can’t change because of the way things are and always have been, instead of being aspirational.
- Calvary Road rebuild should have had a sidewalk to serve the network and school but the residents were allowed to put the kabash on it. Being able to cite the MIC Ped Plan will help road authorities push for something when individuals oppose.
- Get the city to really engage and lead on Safe Routes to Schools instead of being a barrier. Lots of cities are doing innovative projects and bringing in money. Duluth is not. We need to SEE pedestrians and kids are great ambassadors. When parents walk their kids to school, they become advocates.
- Create more community initiatives like I have seen in the Twin Cities: Beautiful boulevard garden competitions, Best alley awards.
- Require REAL green space rules around parking lots. If the ordinance exists, it is absurd. Look at the pitiful, dying low bushes around CVS and Walgreens. Compare this to what the hospitals have done to beautify their parking lots.
- We need more street trees, which require boulevards. More 4 to 3 road conversions (road diets), which would dramatically improve snow storage issues. Look at Saint Paul's fabulous boulevards and trees and they don't have the snow storage problems.
- Historical equity would be nice addition. Locations that are significant for our indigenous community (pleased with the renaming of the Lakewalk gitche ode aking.
- At wide intersections like Haines and Maple Grove, the "walk" light does not give slow-moving people enough time to cross the four lanes of traffic. If there is an island in the middle of the road, it is more manageable, but the walk lights need to last longer.

5. Next Steps

- a. Focused Conversations – one-on-one discussions with targeted stakeholders
- b. General Public Survey

Next Advisory Committee meeting – Friday July 17 at 10:30am. James will send a calendar reminder and a link to log on