

Niles Draft Pedestrian, Bike Plan Discussed

By TOM ROBB Journal & Topics Reporter | Posted: Wednesday, January 15, 2014 3:23 pm

Niles village officials released draft recommendations yesterday (Tuesday) for a plan to make Niles more bike and pedestrian friendly.

Village planners and consultants who helped draft the plan will hold several “pop up community drop in” sessions where the public can review the plan recommendations.

Drop in sessions will be held: from 9 to 11 a.m. Monday, Jan. 20 at the Niles Fitness Center; from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 22 at Culver School in conjunction with a school student performance; and from 5 to 7 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 23 in the new main entrance of the Niles Public Library.

Village trustees are expected to review the plan at a village board meeting in February or March, Niles Senior Planner Bruce Sylvester said.

The 63-page draft plan makes recommendations in several key areas including improved mobility for bicyclists, pedestrians and those using public transit, amenities including design recommendations for sidewalks, increased landscaping and things like bike racks, Sylvester said.

New sidewalks are recommended with increased parkway green space between streets and sidewalks, Sylvester said.

The plan also calls for paved walkways from concrete pads at bus shelters to sidewalks. Some bus shelters have only green space between the shelter and the sidewalk making it difficult to get to sidewalks for some seniors and the disabled.

New bike routes are recommended in the plan. Unlike Chicago, where some bike routes are delineated with physical dividers in the street, Niles' bike routes would use signage.

Cyclists would be diverted away from some major streets, such as Oakton or Dempster, and sent to streets like Cleveland and Main.

In the southeast end of the village, bike routes would run along Milwaukee Avenue.

Reports say Chicago is attempting to install bike routes along Milwaukee Avenue in Jefferson Park and other far northwest side neighborhoods. Elston Avenue and Northwest Highway already have lanes in place.

Sylvester said one of the goals of the Niles plan is to link with other existing or planned bike routes adjacent to Niles.

Another area covered in the draft recommendations is “culture.” Sylvester said the plan recommends elected officials adopt a complete streets culture through policies and in village budgets.

He said if village officials adopt the plan, implementation would be a challenge.

There are areas where sidewalks do not exist or are narrow strips between parking lots and main streets.

Sylvester said if recommendations were adopted, many elements such as new sidewalks and parkway green spaces would need to be included in new developments as they take over older buildings and properties.

Consultants who helped draft the recommendations were paid directly by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

CMAP officials have also been involved in drafting recommendations so they meet their Complete Streets standards.