

Park Ridge Bike Task Force gets its wheels in motion

 chicagotribune.com/suburbs/park-ridge/news/ct-prh-bike-taskforce-tl-0922-20160920-story.html

Mario Bartoletti

9/20/2016

The [Park Ridge](#) Bike Task Force is looking at ways to improve biking and walking in Park Ridge, and the group got the wheels turning last week.

"The overarching goal is for the city to have a plan," said Jim O'Donnell who chaired the group's first meeting, which took place Sept. 14. "It's discouraging that we had a group that laid the groundwork for a bike plan (from 2005), and that work got stuck in a drawer. We can't have that. We need a living plan, so that someone steps up during (transportation) construction and says 'how does that fit with our bike plan?'"

[Park Ridge bicyclists call for improved, safer routes through city](#)

There are groups doing bike planning all over and organizations that help cities do that, O'Donnell said.

"I was encouraged by the variety of skill sets in our members," he said.

The group's members will have to educate themselves and coordinate with other municipalities and biking groups such as Ride

Illinois, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Active Transportation Alliance, O'Donnell said, as well as attending meetings such as a walk audit with public health, planning, and transportation consultant [Mark Fenton](#).

"We got him to agree to come to Park Ridge and do a two-hour walk audit with us," O'Donnell said.

Park Ridge 4th Ward Ald. Roger Shubert attended. Shubert said October will be a good month to get the task force really freewheeling, with the start of the strategic planning process in the city to specifics and incorporate those into the budget for 2018, starting in May.

Shubert, who is the Public Works committee chairman as well as an avid biker, said that Park Ridge has some wide streets that lend themselves well to biking, but there's no way to cleanly link the north side to the south side of town. In fact, one of the major recommendations from the prior bike task force was for expanded paths on the north-south Western Avenue and Busse Road, which is more east-west.

"That gives us some perspective and some plan of attack in connecting areas," he said. "We've seen a lot of support from commuters and residents, especially Melissa Hulting."

Hulting, who also is on the task force, started the Facebook group Bike and Walk Park Ridge.

[Members sought for new Park Ridge bike planning task force](#)

"Park Ridge is a typical inner ring suburb," she said. "Our land use is more dense than is typical of outer ring suburbs, so the bones are there for a bikeable place to live. We don't have a lot of the big four-lane, car-dominated roads, not a lot of big box retail development, spread out strip malls or industry. It's a more intimate commercial and retail environment, so it's more amenable to bikeability."



The city has had a lot of parking issues with new development in town, but the more people on bikes, the less need there will be for parking, Hulting said.

"What we need is to create a biking and walking culture," she said. "We might need changes in lanes and signage and more bike racks short term, but getting people biking again will ease some of the congestion problems and have a 'traffic calming' effect on people speeding."

Hulting said she bikes for her commute, but she wants to see more children biking more safely. That idea rode in tandem with a lot of residents' desires for a bike task force at the June 13 meeting of the City Council.

Resident Steven Schilling, who was at the bike task force meeting, said he lives close to the situation on Talcott Road where a video posted to YouTube showed a Maine South High School student nearly struck by a pickup truck in August.

"I would like my kids to bike to school," he said. "I try to ride to keep the weight off. So I'd like to see safer routes for kids and for everybody else, too."

Mario Bartoletti is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.