

Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, 10 September 2008
Boards and Commissions Room, City Hall
6:00pm - 8:00pm

SPAB Members Present: Chris Tachibana, Secretary; Jon Morgan; Kristen Lohse; Tom Williams; Celeste Gilman, Chair; Howard Wu

Also present: Jim Curtin (SDOT liaison); Doug Beeman; Jacob Struiksma; Mike Ramey; Mark Trotsall; Brian Dougherty, SDOT; Chris Leman

Presenters: Marshall Foster, OPM

Absent: T. Frick McNamara, Randy Earle, Ben Smith, Mark Bandy, Paul Niebanck

1. Introductions and July meeting minute approval (6:05)

2. Public Comment (6:08)

Jacob was in Denver and liked their 16th street pedestrian mall with 15-foot sidewalks. He contrasted this with Seattle's unrepaired sidewalks, construction blockage and other pedestrian unfriendly features.

Doug Beman commented on a flyer sent out by Pemco with pedestrian safety information. One noteworthy fact was that in the week that daylight savings ends, pedestrian risk triples. He also received information on the upcoming Nickerson street road diet.

Chris Leman, a social scientist concerned with pedestrian issues, talked about the sidewalk cafe legislation. He SPAB said must advocate for pedestrian safety, and for our right to comment on legislation. He feels the sidewalk cafe legislation comment period is rushed. He is especially opposed to elimination of review by the Dept of Planning. He doesn't believe SDOT is the proper organization for this review and feels they will not give it careful consideration. The proposed legislation does not emphasize pedestrian convenience over that of businesses and allows them to use public land for a fee of only \$1.56 per square foot per year. He interpreted the legislation to mean that only six feet of passageway must be maintained downtown. He asked SPAB to ask for evidence of the "eyes on the street" safety benefits of sidewalk cafes, and weigh that with the obstacles made by permanent barriers put up around cafes. He is concerned about crowding at bus stops and does not feel enough space is required for them. He does not believe pedestrian safety and convenience is addressed in this legislation and it needs to be improved.

3. Sidewalk Cafe Ordinance and Director's Rule (6:20)

Marshall Foster listed the policy goals of the proposed ordinance. Motivation came from the Pedestrian Master Plan and SDOT and DPD discussions on adding vitality and "eyes on the street". A best practices review of other cities found that our permits cost five-times more and the process takes longer. The goal is to reduce cost to about \$250 and improve turnaround time on applications from months to 10 days.

Currently, DPD and SDOT both review applications. Permits are administrative only and public comments are not considered. Changing this is one goal. Another is improving design standards to add an enforceable minimum path of travel greater than the ADA minimum. Since DPD was not doing an extensive review, and to reduce permitting time, only SDOT will do the review. SDOT would also have an enforcement team.

Tom asked how the enforcement would work with other agencies who deal with noise and other complaints. Marshall said the team would be active 24-hours a day, so there is someone to take complaints as they happen. This fall, legislation will be proposed to allow SDOT to issue citations.

The proposed ordinance would set design standards for clear path of travel and sidewalk features like bike racks and curb ramps. Fencing for sidewalk cafes could be temporary instead of fixed so it could be removed in months when the sidewalk cafe isn't used. Current state liquor policy requires fixed fencing. Sidewalk cafe platforms will be ADA-compliant. Fire exits, and exits from fenced areas would be addressed. Other fencing issues addressed would be transparency and height. On some streets (e.g. Occidental), curb-side cafes would be allowed. No amplified sounds would be permitted and operation would be only during general business hours according to the restaurant permit.

Mark said DPD will review permits when there is a special safety and occupancy issues.

Marshall said that on 5 August, an open house generated comments that resulted in amendments, such as larger setbacks from some residential areas and wider pedestrian passageways.

Jon asked about minimum passageways in other cities. Marshall said six feet was common, but Jon thought this wasn't enough. Celeste asked how many people are predicted to use these areas and how much space they'll take. Mark used Portland as an example where sidewalk cafes are popular but don't comply with city standards. Marshall said this is why it has been discussed as a zoning issue and in general, is difficult because there are so many variations in sidewalks.

Celeste suggested removing parking to provide places for cafes, as long as it doesn't interfere with the transportation function of the street. Marshall said this is why curbside cafes might help.

Howard asked how this ordinance would be affected if the PMP changes the ROW manual. Mark and Marshall said these design standards would go into the ROW manual. Mark said the ordinance will have authority, as does the ROW manual.

Celeste brought up solid bases for fencing so they are detectable for the sight-impaired using canes. Marshall said that is part of the requirement.

Celeste asked about maintaining straight routes of travel. Mark said it won't be an outright requirement because of the fixed rail requirement. Marshall, Celeste and Tom discussed removal of fixed railings.

Celeste asked about the fees, since public land is being used. Marshall said the up front application cost is lowered. Our use fee is consistent with other cities, but some cities are discussing basing the use fee on the value of the property.

Councilmember Drago's office is managing this and would like to get comments. Public comment opportunities will follow. SPAB will get drafts. Tom asked for the best practices analyses.

4. Safe Routes to School (7:00)

Jim reported on the first year of the program, which started in 2007 and ultimately hopes to cover 43 schools. Walking routes have been improved at eight schools. Five major construction projects have been completed. He had pictures of a walkway improvement in front of Sanislo Elementary, where a standard sidewalk with proper drainage was put in. So far, there's been little increase in pedestrians. He counted 107 cars at pickup time recently, but has seen a small improvement in biking and a few people parking down the street and walking to the school. Another example was on Greenwood, where the low-cost solution was an extruded curb that will include protective landscaping.

Summit K-12 had drainage problems and no sidewalk but a lot of pedestrian crossings to the athletic fields at Nathan Hale High school. The corner of 31st and 110th and adjacent area was improved. The community would like to complete the sidewalk with Neighborhood Street funds.

Bailey Gatzert, in the Central District, is in an area that has sidewalks, but is close to arterials. The program worked with the school to change how buses enter the school and exit to 14th Ave S, and restricted parking to open sightlines.

A drainage project begun at Wing Luke in 2007 was finished. An Arbor Heights project to extend the sidewalk with asphalt was completed. Signage was improved at 76 public and private schools, bringing the total signage improvements to over 100 schools.

The education and encouragement phase is about to begin. In October, "walk to school" month, a two-day in-school training session will bring a mock intersection to the school to go over safety rules. Based on SPAB suggestions, kids will be taken out onto sidewalks, with adults. Jim and Brian had encouragement handouts for kids to fill out after walking four blocks, four times a week with their parents.

Celeste asked about middle- and high-school kids. Jim said funding is for younger children, to give them decision-making skills about walking they may not have yet.

Howard asked about adult crossing guards. Jim said they are funded by a levy and managed through the SPD.

Celeste suggested changing the handout, which puts bright-colored clothing at the top of the list. This puts the safety burden on the pedestrian and doesn't provide a teachable safety skill. Kristen said kids aren't aware of how hard they are to see. Jim said the instructional piece will reinforce this. Celeste stressed the importance of checking that the car see you as a pedestrian. Jim said language in the "fun booklet" for kids will address this. Other suggestions were from Jon, Jacob, Celeste and Kristen about listening as well as looking and doing testing with kids.

5. Round Robin (7:30)

Howard said the Safe Routes to Schools signage is working, because he saw signs in places he didn't even know had schools. He went to the Pro Walk Pro Bike conference. He summarized research being done to investigate the effectiveness of policies. On Lake City Way, in-street beacon signs are installed but beacons aren't. Chris and Kristen asked about the function and placement of the beacons. Howard said SBAB had a list of SDOT projects that will be funded in the future that SPAB should get. Jim will try to get some of the relevant lists. Tom and Jim stressed bringing attention to particular projects, and Howard will look into prioritizing.

Tom heard Tim Burgess talk about the budget. A contentious cycle is anticipated so we need to keep track of pedestrians projects. Burgess said there are efforts to get police out of cars and out walking and on bikes.

Celeste had a great trip to Europe and commented on Munich's wide sidewalks with room for cafes. Southern and Balkan Europe had harrowing pedestrian environments, especially Zagreb. She gained new appreciation for pedestrian features, master plans and ADA laws in the US. She was in Atlanta, where wide sidewalks were only right around the hotels. She went to the Pro Walk Pro Bike conference, which had 800 attendees. The Eco-Counter booth showed automatic counters for pedestrians and automatic pedestrian sensors for crosswalks that would eliminate activating buttons.

Jon counted streetlights from Pine from Broadway to 7th. Ten percent are out. One of the City Light managers wants to do the same tour with him. Jon thinks we should make written and/or spoken comments about the sidewalk cafe legislation. Car-free day (22 Sept) was discussed. Howard heard both positive and negative reviews of Seattle's car-free streets. People set up tables and football games in the street. Kristen's neighbor was impressed with the street use. She's experienced the same during block parties.

Kristen was also at Pro Walk Pro Bike. She announced the South Lake Union Trail meeting on Thursday 5:00-7:30 and solicited comments. Celeste asked about Cheshiahud pronunciation (it's "chesh-a-hood").

Chris asked for co-signers for a private citizen letter to SDOT about Nickerson crosswalk removal. Howard, Jon and Doug are interested. Chris will be gone for three months. Tom will take minutes.

6. Upcoming Agenda Items (including Pedestrian Master Plan) (7:50)

October: Bruce Harrell, PMP, sidewalk criteria

Upcoming: Tim Burgess

Suggestions: project list after Howard looks at it

The PMPAG has been on break while consultants work on the draft. Paul proposed a discussion on the practicalities of implementation and SPAB's role. He will join us for the October meeting.

7. Announcements (7:55)

Jim is now a Senior Traffic Planner at SDOT, so Brian will be the new liaison. Brian is now in charge of Safe Routes to Schools. He was SBAB chair so he has experience with advisory boards. Everyone thanked Jim for his time with SPAB.

8. Adjourn (8:00)