City of Stillwater

Bicycle Friendly Community Assesment Report

 – Made by The Bike Alliance of MN to the Stillwater City Council in 2014

Background: Stillwater's Downtown Revitalization Committee (DRC) invited the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota (BikeMN) to do a presentation on being more bicycle friendly and creating a bicycle culture downtown at its November 2012 meeting. The meeting also included a presentation from the DNR on the Brown's Creek State Trail. There was general agreement that this new trail, trail work to be done along with the new levee construction, the new Highway 36 bridge and reuse of the old bridge as a bicycle and pedestrian crossing will be valuable assets to the community. These changes will bring big changes and present a significant opportunity to attract more bicyclists and pedestrians to downtown Stillwater.

Dorian Grilley, executive director of BikeMN, explained during the meeting that BikeMN partners with the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) and uses the criteria set forth in the LAB's Bicycle Friendly America program when assessing and making recommendations to a community on how to be more bicycle friendly. To be ranked by LAB as a Bicycle Friendly Community the entire community needs to have made significant accomplishments in five areas referred to byLAB as the Five-E's: Engineering, Encouragement, Education, Enforcement and Evaluation and planning. He suggested that this comprehensive approach to making the whole community more bicycle friendly would be a good way to attract bicyclists to the community and both visitors and residents to downtown by bicycle. Making bicycling an easy choice for residents and visitors alike would help accomplish several community goals related to public health, tourism, economic development and general quality of life. This approach requires more partners than the City and DRC interests. The additional partners include would include public health, schools, community residents and others from throughout the community. There was general agreement at the meeting that focusing on the entire community would be a good approach and a list of specific partners was started.

It was also agreed that the DRC should continue working with BikeMN to provide a user-friendly analysis and feedback to make short term changes and evaluate long-term strategies so that Stillwater may become more bicycle friendly, resulting in more healthy, vibrant, livable community for both residents and tourists. This would also include a close look at the downtown changes and needs. DRC members reached out to other partners and early in 2013 an agreement to do the bicycle friendly assessment was reached with BikeMN. Shortly thereafter a steering committee (see Appendix A for members) was formed and BikeMN staff and committee members met with partners.

Approach:

BikeMN has undertaken a 6-step approach to evaluation & assessment

1. Forming a steering committee

2. Stakeholder kick-off meeting, presentation, discussion and feedback including the Are

You Bicycle Friendly quick scorecard from LAB, held October 28, 2013

3. Community facilities tour by BikeMN staff and community members

4. Meetings with city and school district staff and community and business leaders

5. Bicycle Friendly Community Application (from the League of American Bicyclists) questions and assessment, including planning/ policy document review

6. BikeMN will conclude this assessment with a final report and next steps meetings with key partner and stakeholder groups.

In addition to the six steps noted above, the DRC and BikeMN also hosted a meeting that focused on bike parking solutions and included a presentation from Dero Bike Racks, a Minneapolis based bike parking manufacturer. That meeting was very well attended.

Assessment summary: The city of Stillwater has taken many steps and has many assets that will help in moving towards becoming a nationally recognized Bicycle Friendly Community.

Stillwater already has implemented some best practice initiatives including a bike map and an extensive existing and planned off-road trail system. The community also has some significant Encouragement accomplishments including the PowerUp campaign, a High School Cycling League team and a major bike race event. BikeMN sees great potential in Stillwater to be one of the most bike friendly cities in the state and a destination for cycling tourism far beyond the state’s borders. However, Stillwater also has its share of challenges to overcome. Education and Enforcement initiatives are not well established in the community. A plan that looks at the community from a bicycling for transportation/on-road perspective has not been done or implemented. These things limit the resident's appreciation the city’s bikeability and have an impact on visitors. Stillwater will soon make great gains building on its exiting bikeway and trail network but needs to make plans to fill in more of the gaps, make connections to bike friendly roads and trails leading to and from the city and overcome barriers like Highway 36 to complete the system throughout the city including in and out of downtown.

Guiding Recommendation: Stillwater must invest and build on what are clearly great assets and strengths to make a vibrant, bikeable, livable city that enhances the quality of life for residents and adds to its attractiveness to new residents, businesses, and visitors. BikeMN believes that Stillwater should take some quick action steps, especially involving Engineering,

Enforcement, Education and Evaluation and planning, to round out its programs before applying for a League of American Bicyclists Bicycle Friendly Community award. Some of these steps would be easily accomplished in the next 12 months. Looking to the long term, Stillwater really needs to incorporate bicycling into its planning and evaluation and to encourage other government agencies, including the state and county, and the school district to also do so.

These plans need to address bike Education, Encouragement and Enforcement as well as community wide infrastructure issues. More staff time, a well-balanced bicycle advisory and/or advocacy group(s), and a bicycle plan that includes bicycle projects and priorities in Stillwater’s Comprehensive Plan will help create community that thrives on the economic development, health, and quality of life that come with being bicycle friendly.

Action Steps:

Top recommendations for each of the Five E’s; Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Evaluation & Planning. The League of American Bicyclists considers each of the E’s before designating a bicycle friendly community award. These E’s represent a broad, comprehensive look at a community’s efforts and priorities.

Overall:

1. Assign a city staff person the role of being the community bicycle/pedestrian coordinator.

2. Form a formal, recognized group whose main interest is increasing bicycling in Stillwater.

3. By the end of 2014 develop a plan and strategies for implementing a number of bike education programs for both adults and children.

4. Develop a plan to promote downtown Stillwater as a bicycling destination.

5. Develop a bicycle master plan for the community that outlines the bicycling infrastructure system and identifies strategies and lead agencies for actions related to the five E's.

Encouragement

1. Coordinate several events for National/ Minnesota Bike Month in May.

2. Work with the business community to increase awareness of and set goals for Bicycle Friendly Business recognition.

3. Include strategies for encouraging bicycling to community events and to downtown in the bicycle master or a stand alone plan.

4. Hold a community bicycling or Open Streets event with strategies for encouraging participation of both residents and visitors.

5. Continue to build community support and awareness of the new Minnesota High School Cycling League team.

6. Put bicycling information, including leveraging PedalMN.com, on the city’s website and affiliated/partner websites and publications.

7. Map and/or include links to maps of routes around the area on the city's web site.

8. Partner with PowerUp, Lakeview Hospital and public health programs to promote bicycling.

9. Develop a plan to promote downtown Stillwater as a bicycling destination and starting point when new facility construction, including downtown bike parking, is completed.

Education

1. Identify local candidate(s) to become a League Cycling Instructor(s) and get them trained in 2014 or 2015.

2. Continue and expand the community bike rodeos efforts to include more partners so that more children can be served.

3. Establish lead agency and maintain a web site and publications with information and a calendar of bike activities and education classes that are available for both children and adults.

4. Encourage the school district to adopt the new Walk! Bike! Fun! safety curriculum as part of elementary school physical education and health and to include bicycling in all grades as part of the Physical Education Program grant that emphasizes lifetime physical fitness and activity.

Evaluation/ Planning

1. Set a mode share goal to increase ridership. Current: 0.6% of work commuters according to the American Community Survey.

2. Continue to prioritize and seek funding for bicycle projects outlined in Stillwater’s current Comprehensive Plan and include funding strategies and an updated Bicycle Master Plan when an update of the Comprehensive Plan completed.

3. Pass a Complete Streets Policy.

Engineering

1. Evaluate policies, allocate funding for and establish a city bicycle parking program.

2. Add on road bikeway facilities on streets when possible during scheduled mill and overlay projects.

3. Hold a Bikeable Communities Workshop for city and county engineering, planning, and other staff.

4. Work with MnDOT and Washington County to establish safe crossings and routes along or parallel to major road corridors, especially Highways 36, 95 and 5.

Enforcement

1. Appoint a representative from the police department to the proposed bicycle advisory committee if and when one is created.

2. Expand the number of law enforcement officers doing regular and event patrols on bicycles.

3. Increase existing community police efforts with schools and bike rodeos.

4. Evaluate crash/safety data and set goals to reduce crashes and for an annual enforcement campaign.