

## Walking and Biking in Saco Focus of New Committee

**“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”**

– Margaret Mead, American cultural anthropologist

In this case, “change the world” may be a stretch, but a group of Saco residents believes that it can further the cause of improving safety and visibility for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The group came together for the first time in October 2019, with more than a dozen attendees at a meeting in the Saco Amtrak station. All shared a passion for walking and bicycling and felt that safety and accessibility in Saco could be improved. They recognized that several other towns and cities in Maine are served by bike and ped advisory committees; why not Saco?

High on the list of priorities for the group was determining whether it should seek status as a municipally sanctioned committee, and function similarly to existing committees such as the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, and Age Friendly Saco. Attendees agreed that, for several reasons, recognition as a “creature of the City” would lend credibility to their efforts.

Outreach to the Mayor and City Council was rewarded with encouragement and positive responses. A letter requesting consideration by the Council resulted in two meetings in early January. On January 13, the Council voted unanimously to create the Saco Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC).

As found in its mission statement, the group’s purpose is “...to support and encourage a bicycle and walking friendly community, which provides for safe, convenient, and enjoyable active transportation for all ages and abilities.”

It will do so with the assistance of City Council liaison Lynn Copeland, and staff liaison Deputy Chief Corey Huntress. The BPAC will also work with the Department of Public Works, the Saco School Department, the Saco Conservation Commission, and the Department of Parks and Recreation, advocating for safe places to bike and walk in our City.

“We’d like to raise the profile of cyclists and pedestrians around town,” said Chris Nucci, a Saco resident for nearly five years who has lived in bike-friendly communities. “In addition to concrete things like sidewalks, bike lanes, signs, etc., we want to be a group that does things that actively encourage people to get out walking/running and biking because the more people do it the more it becomes part of the consciousness which in turn increases the safety.”

An early goal for the group will be identifying locations throughout Saco where signs could be installed, with the intention of alerting motorists that people on foot and on bicycles are liable to be sharing the road. City officials and committee members have met with the Bike and Ped

### Did You Know?

Vehicles on the road create more than 25% of air pollution nationwide.

18 bikes can be parked in the space of one car.

Coordinator for the Maine Department of Transportation, which will provide bicycle and pedestrian signage free of charge to communities that demonstrate the need.

“Many drivers are not aware of the three-foot law, which requires that drivers maintain a distance of at no less than three feet between their vehicle and a bicyclist,” said Bob Hamblen, a BPAC member. “We think, and MDOT agrees by providing signs to that effect, that reminders on Saco’s busier streets and roads will help create safer conditions for cyclists and for walkers, too.”

The committee’s mission statement recognizes that schoolchildren are a primary audience for the message that biking, and walking is important for all ages: “Children deserve safe places to walk and bike -- starting with the trip to school. Work with the School Department to consider the benefits of a “Walk to School Day” and a “Bike to School Day, a “walking school bus,” and other measures that would encourage a healthier start and end to the school day.”

With U.S. Route One, and state routes 112 and 5 crisscrossing Saco, in addition to local streets and roads that seem ever busier, Maine DOT data shows good reason for supporters of cyclists and pedestrians to become more active. According to MDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator Patrick Adams, Saco is one of 21 communities in the state with above average traffic incidents involving speed and alcohol. In fact, said Adams, Saco tops that list of 21 towns and cities.

A look at MDOT’s on-line tool for traffic accidents, the Maine Public Crash Query Tool -- <https://mdotapps.maine.gov/MaineCrashPublic/PublicQueryStats> -- reveals that, from 2018 to present, there were 16 bicycle-vehicle incidents in Saco. A dozen of these occurred on streets with a posted speed limit of 25 or 30 mph, so high speeds are not necessarily a factor in creating unsafe conditions for cyclists.

Over the same period of time, eight pedestrian-vehicle incidents occurred, with the most likely scenario taking place in late afternoon on a Saturday. All eight accidents involved drivers 25 years of age and older, and, once again, all took place where posted speed limits were 25 or 30 mph.

The Saco Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee meets monthly on the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m., in the auditorium at City Hall. All are welcome. New members are encouraged. If you like what you see and hear at a meeting, complete the Volunteer application on the City’s website and submit for consideration by the City Council.

Prepared by Bob Hamblen, committee member