

Safe Routes to School Plan Progress Outlined

Sheridan City Council was given an interim report on progress with the Sheridan Safe Routes to School Plan on Jan. 11.

The City of Sheridan was awarded a Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure Planning Grant in 2014, and partnered with Bicycle Colorado and the organization GP RED to:

“...educate and encourage students to participate in active transportation to/from school, organize walking/biking groups, increase enforcement, and secure additional infrastructure funds to ensure safe, bike and walk friendly connections around our schools.”

EDUCATION & ENCOURAGEMENT

After the new middle school construction was complete in December 2014, Bicycle Colorado along with Sheridan Police Officer **Keith Lane** went into two schools and provided bike education etiquette and safety workshops to students.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ASSESSMENT

GP RED worked with the City to outline specific policy recommendations to be integrated into the planning and transportation planning process, including research and language for a Complete Streets policy and procedures.

The Sheridan Comprehensive Plan was completed in 2015 and identifies specific recommendations for active transportation enhancements.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

GP RED and the project team worked with the Sheridan School District to engage 25 students to participate in PhotoVoice and Umap activities. During PhotoVoice, students were assigned a camera and received basic photography tips and skills from professional photographer **Mark Stevens** and took part in a facilitated walking audit within a half-mile radius of Fort Logan Northgate School.

Students documented barriers and opportunities to walking and biking to school, taking 30-50 photographs each. Students selected 2 photographs and worked with **Adrian Molina**, a professional performance poet, to develop a thoughtful narrative to describe their images. The ultimate goal of the exercise was to show City officials and the school district where improvements need to be made and lead to policy changes that will address the issues. The photos captured potholes, difficult streets to cross, stop signs tagged with graffiti but they also took photos of the beautiful parks in Sheridan, wide sidewalks in good repair, and flowers.

During the Umap activity, students used aerial maps of Sheridan to identify bicycle, pedestrian, and automobile

travel routes and places in the community they felt were safe to visit as well as places that were a cause for concern. The Umap data processing is in progress for a presentation at a later date.

In their evaluation of the PhotoVoice and Umap activities, students expressed the following:

“...the thing I liked best about this project is I had a chance to change something in our community.”

“...we had a lot of fun while also doing things to help our community.”

CANDO LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

GP RED and the City's Planning staff facilitated a four-hour Leadership Summit with members of the Sheridan CANDO group to evaluate active transportation options for Sheridan. Four students were on hand to present their photographs and narratives, and the group reviewed the students' UMap data. CANDO members also participated in a brief walking audit around the meeting site and brainstormed action steps to achieve improved active transportation opportunities.

Selected students presented their images and narratives at a CANDO Leadership Summit on Sept. 11, 2015, and all of the student images and narratives were on display at Sheridan Celebrates on Sept. 24, 2015. The City of Sheridan Planning staff credits the student's images as contributing to the successful bond issue which passed on Nov. 3 to fund street and sidewalk improvements.

Highlights from the day include the following recommendations for policy, infrastructure, and community engagement improvements:

- Complete a Bicycle/Pedestrian Transportation Plan
- Adopt a Complete Streets Resolution
- Become a Tree City
- Host a Community Ride Day to discover Sheridan by bicycle
- Implement Bicycle Trains to support students bicycling to school
- Conduct active transportation audits in each neighborhood

NEXT STEPS:

- Develop a CANDO focus on moving active transportation initiatives forward
- Identify 3 signature projects to accomplish in 2016

This is an incredibly opportune time to align the recommendations in Sheridan's Comprehensive Plan and the successful bond issue with the outcomes of the Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure Policy Grant for improved active transportation opportunities for all residents. With a commitment to educate youth on safe walking and bicycling habits, build infrastructure that supports healthy behaviors, and create a sustainable policy and regulatory environment that focuses on safe, active access to schools, recreation sites, and other community destinations, Sheridan residents and visitors will enjoy active transportation benefits for years to come.

— **Jennifer Henninger, Planner, City of Sheridan**