

Technical Assistance for Sustainable Communities: Building Blocks

Technical Assistance Tool: Complete Streets

Kenosha, Wisconsin

To: Violet Ricker, Downtown Kenosha
From: Jeff Riegner and Kristin Bennett, Smart Growth America
Date: June 10, 2014
Re: Suggested Next Steps for Kenosha

Background

In signing the Memorandum of Understanding for our technical assistance award with Downtown Kenosha, Smart Growth America committed to delivering a final report summarizing the workshop on Complete Streets and recommending specific strategies for implementation. The May 6 presentation was widely attended by both city officials and members of the public. The May 7 workshop was attended by elected officials, appointed officials at the local, county, and metropolitan planning organization level, and other stakeholders interested in the economic well-being of downtown Kenosha.

The workshop presented in Kenosha, “Complete Streets Policy Development,” provides an overview of what Complete Streets are and are not, how right-of-way width can be reallocated, and what current policies relate to Complete Streets. The bulk of the workshop focused on the ten elements of effective Complete Streets policies and how a new Kenosha policy can address them.

The intent of the workshop was neither for Smart Growth America to create a policy nor bind the community to any particular course of action, but rather to facilitate a discussion within the community about how best to establish a policy that will address the specific needs of Kenosha.

Purpose of this Memo

The workshop was designed to assemble a variety of diverse stakeholders that would kick off development of a comprehensive Complete Streets policy that integrates existing related policies and plans. The purpose of this memo is to summarize Smart Growth America’s recommendations on what action steps the City and other stakeholders might take to proceed with development of that policy.

Actions to Address Policies and Strategies

To date over 600 Complete Streets policies have been enacted throughout the United States, in a wide variety of forms and jurisdictions. Extensive research by the National Complete Streets

Coalition, a program of Smart Growth America, has identified ten elements of the nation's most successful Complete Streets policies. These ten elements formed the framework for discussions in Kenosha. Potential next actions for each are described below.

1. Create a vision.

Kenosha stakeholders identified a number of documents to guide the development of a Complete Streets vision, including the Downtown Strategic Redevelopment Plan, City comprehensive plan, City bicycle and pedestrian plan, and Official Map. The group's vision for completing the policy was invested in a Complete Streets Committee, potentially assisted by additional elected officials to ensure buy-in. All agreed that the policy should be a City-led initiative, with support from the County, and that it should apply to the entire City.

2. Ensure all users and modes are accommodated

Comprehensive inclusion of all users (by age and ability) and all modes of travel is central to the concept of Complete Streets. Workshop participants affirmed their commitment to that approach and suggested a number of categories of street users be considered:

- Transit riders and drivers
- Pedestrians
- Bicyclists
- People with disabilities
- A wide range of sidewalk users
- Children
- Seniors
- Drivers (with parking needs considered in addition to driving needs)
- Freight traffic
- Emergency responders
- Maintenance workers
- Visitors, including those who arrive in Kenosha by boat

Many jurisdictions establish "pedestrian first" or "transit first" policies (either City-wide or in specific districts); others state that modal priorities be balanced. The Kenosha workshop participants leaned toward the latter approach, so guidance should be provided for resolving conflicts where all modes cannot be incorporated to the satisfaction of stakeholders. Finally, as noted in section 8 below, continue to provide a robust public involvement process to customize street designs that benefit the communities they serve. Community input may dictate priorities on a project-by-project basis.

3. Integrate Complete Streets into all phases of all projects

Establish procedures/checklists to ensure during the scoping process of all projects that all users are accommodated. Kenoshans identified the specific types of projects to which these procedures and checklists must apply.

- New construction
- Reconstruction
- Rehabilitation
- Repair
- Repaving
- Major maintenance
- Operations

This inclusive approach is particularly important in Kenosha because there is limited funding for stand-alone Complete Streets projects. It is also critical to ensure that planning for Complete Streets starts even before specific projects are identified. Incorporation of Complete Streets into City (and potentially County) comprehensive plans will ensure that projects fit into a broader context.

4. Define exceptions

Capital requests must be made with a complete understanding of which street elements must be included in each project's scope. That way lack of funding won't be a cause for exceptions for most projects. Kenosha representatives concurred with best practices in Complete Streets policy development, allowing exceptions in only three cases: (a) where user groups are prohibited (i.e. along limited-access highways), (b) where cost is excessively disproportionate to need and use, and/or (c) where there is a documented absence of current and future need. Kenosha should review its current sidewalk policy and strengthen it as need. One example is in industrial areas where uses may change in the future.

A person or group independent from those scoping a project must approve all exceptions. For transparency, that person/group should annually track and publicize which exceptions are granted. For private projects, Council would typically receive an appeal from a developer. That appeal would be reviewed by the City's Plan Review Committee, who would prepare a recommendation. That recommendation would then be accepted or rejected by Council.

5. Provide for network connectivity

The new Complete Streets policy needs to provide an administrative mechanism to enforce connectivity, eliminating (or minimizing) any political process through which neighborhoods "veto" connections between neighborhoods. The City's Official Map can specify locations where these connections can be made through future development while avoiding significant constraints such as stream corridors, steep slopes, and other environmental resources.

6. Work across jurisdictions

Workshop participants expressed appreciation for the strong working relationship between City and County staff in strategic planning and implementation of specific projects. Project selection and prioritization is guided by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) regional plan, so coordination is required to ensure Complete Streets projects are

appropriately prioritized. In addition to County cooperation, coordination is needed with the Town of Somers, Town of Paris, Village of Bristol, and Village of Pleasant Prairie. There are also aspirations of better connecting the downtowns of Kenosha and Racine.

One common theme of the workshop is that stronger cooperation is needed with Wisconsin DOT and Federal partners. Either as part of the Complete Streets policy development or as a separate inter-municipal effort, Kenosha should seek technical assistance in working with state and Federal funding agencies. Smart Growth America's Multimodal Development and Delivery (M2D2) program may provide a vehicle for that work.

7. Incorporate flexible design guidance

Best practices in street design that serve users of all ages and abilities should be incorporated into City design guidance. The *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* and AASHTO's *A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets* (the "Green Book") are currently used; Kenosha should take full advantage of the flexibility offered by the Green Book, particularly for urban streets.

Additional recommended guides include:

- *Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach*, Institute of Transportation Engineers and Congress for the New Urbanism
- *Urban Street Design Guide*, National Association of City Transportation Officials
- *Urban Bikeway Design Guide*, National Association of City Transportation Officials
- *Complete Streets Complete Networks: A Manual for the Design of Active Transportation*, Active Transportation Alliance
- *Model Design Manual for Living Streets*, Los Angeles County (freely available for editing)

8. Ensure projects are sensitive to community context

Attendees reported that despite a general commitment to good public engagement, there is not one standard stakeholder involvement process for Kenosha's transportation projects. A good Complete Streets policy would incorporate early involvement in as many projects as possible so that Complete Streets scopes are established in time to inform project budgets. This early engagement would also help avoid discussing basic issues repeatedly on every project, allowing public input to focus on the issues and merits associated with the project instead.

9. Develop performance measures

A number of potential performance measures were discussed in two different segments of the workshop. Performance measures identified for consideration include:

- Number of pedestrians
- Traffic volume by mode
- Property values
- Cost effectiveness
- Reduced maintenance and operations costs

- Speed
- Delays
- Mode shift from survey data, including student access to and from school
- Transit ridership
- Transit rider satisfaction
- Number of bikes on buses
- Miles (or percentage) of sidewalks
- Miles (or percentage) of bicycle facilities
- Change in paratransit ridership
- Percentage of ADA-compliant curb ramps
- Crash rates
- Air quality
- Sales tax revenue
- Commercial vacancy rate
- Survey: percentage/number of visitors to farmers market, etc. who also visit downtown
- Tourism
- Public health measures (this is a special concern for Kenosha; in the short term, potentially survey physical activity)

Because Kenosha is embarking on new performance measures for the first time, it is best to identify a small number of these measures for initial consideration. Ideal performance measures are quantitative and objective, have a clear relationship to plans and priorities, are relatively easy to measure and interpret, and above all reflect community context. Most successful cities track their performance in each of their chosen measures on an annual basis, allowing for comparison against past performance and future goals.

10. *Plan for implementation*

See the section below for next steps regarding development of the policy.

To implement the adopted policy, Kenosha should prepare to update its policies and procedures to fully integrate Complete Streets. Design guidance should be updated as described in section 7 above. Training opportunities should be provided to transportation and public works staff, community leaders, and the general public. And finally, a mechanism must be established for selecting, quantifying, and tracking performance measures.

Action Steps

The following steps will be taken toward adoption of a Complete Streets policy.

- Smart Growth America will prepare a summary memorandum (this document) from the workshop.
- Downtown Kenosha will invite one or more Council members to join the Complete Streets Committee, preparing them to eventually sponsor the Complete Streets policy ordinance (as soon as possible).
- The Complete Streets Committee will prepare a first draft of the Complete Streets policy based on this workshop memorandum and templates offered by the National Complete Streets Coalition on www.completestreets.org. Some assistance may be needed from additional staff members for this effort (by July).
- The Plan Review Committee and other City staff, including the City attorney, will review and comment on the first draft (by August).
- The Complete Streets Committee will prepare a second draft based on those comments.
- The Complete Streets Committee will present the second draft at one or more public information meeting(s) to seek comment. This outreach opportunity will be announced in August and held in September.
- The Complete Streets Committee will prepare a final draft and present it to the Planning Commission (by September)
- Council adopts the Complete Streets policy as an ordinance (by October).