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Selectmen On Board with Complete Streets Group

by Elizabeth Regan

Now that the Board of Selectmen has authorized a policy to guide the creation of a safer and more accessible transportation network in town, the local Complete Streets Group is looking forward to putting the words into action.

Kathy Herron, chairwoman of the Portland Complete Streets Group, said one of the group's first priorities is to help the Board of Selectmen decide how to allocate \$1 million for sidewalk improvements approved by voters at referendum in November. The same vote authorized \$6 million for a large-scale recreation complex on Route 17 and \$2.5 for improvements to deteriorating roads like Brownstone Avenue.

The Complete Streets policy was unanimously approved by selectmen in October after months of review.

The procedure outlined in the document lists the steps that should be followed every time a transportation project is undertaken. According to the policy, selectmen should get input from the Complete Streets Group in addition to relevant town staff to identify ways to make sure everyone can share roads and walkways safely. The budget should then be developed through the land use, public works and finance departments.

The policy applies to all town-owned roads

and land within the public right-of-way. It also requires the town to apply Complete Streets principles when dealing with the state Department of Transportation on improvements to Routes 66, 17 and 17A.

Herron described the policy as a "statement of intent" by selectmen to consider "all users" in transportation projects.

The volunteer Complete Streets group branched off from the Air Line Trail steering committee in June 2014. It is part of a national organization that began in 2004.

The concept of "complete streets" involves forging paths that can be used safely by pedestrians, cyclists, people with mobility challenges, transit users and motorists. The goal, according to the national Complete Streets organization, is to become less dependent on automobile travel by investing in other forms of transportation so everyone can have full and equal access to jobs, health care, school, shopping and recreational opportunities.

The state DOT adopted its own Complete Streets policy in 2014.

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said she looks forward to working with the Complete Street Group on changes to the transportation infrastructure. She applauded the "committee of citizens" on its efforts to improve sidewalks

and streets and pointed to the policy as a sign of the Board of Selectmen's shared commitment.

Citing the policy as an important factor in helping to secure funding at the state, regional and local level, Bransfield said she recently applied for a federal grant through the regional council of governments to help improve sidewalks in town. Grant allocations to municipalities in the state have ranged from a few hundred thousand dollars to around a million dollars, according to Bransfield.

The road and sidewalk improvements described in the policy focus on the town's four school campuses and their environs. The priority area radiates out from Main Street, encompassing Rose Hill Road and Collins Hill Road, as well as Route 66 from the Arrigoni Bridge to the vicinity of Camp Ingersoll. Recommendations for possible bike or multi-use paths extend to the Glastonbury and East Hampton borders.

According to Herron, the document was based on policies from West Hartford, Connecticut and Natick, Massachusetts.

Selectmen in February appropriated \$8,000 to bring in a consultant from the architectural firm Kent + Frost to devise a "town-wide master plan" to guide planning, funding, construction and maintenance of a pedestrian and bi-

cycle system in town.

Herron said Tuesday it was subsequently determined the creation of a master plan was not within the \$8,000 budget.

"A master plan includes very specific info on what roads/streets/sidewalks will be renovated and how they will be renovated and include engineer specs," Herron said. "So a Complete Streets policy was created that will guide any work and plans in the future."

In addition to the policy, the firm created maps illustrating the priority area for road improvements as well as proposed sidewalks and bike paths.