

There is a lot of excitement in the bicycle community these days. The City of Warsaw has been awarded a \$50,000 grant by the Indiana Department of Health to create a master plan of bicycle and pedestrian pathways in Warsaw and Winona Lake. This grant is the result of much hard work by a local group of “bicycle crazies”! Past city councilman and “bicycle crazy” Fred Helfrich has led the charge for “Bicycle Friendly Community” status for Warsaw and Winona Lake.

BFC status is a national recognition by the League of American Bicyclists. State officials rewarded our community with the grant to pursue BFC status after being bowled over by the leadership and enthusiasm of the KC-Velo club efforts this past year.

The master plan will involve public input and a look at existing conditions to determine safe route selection. Preliminary engineering considerations will help develop cost estimates. The results will be a section by section blueprint of roadway markings, creation of new individual trails, intersection design, bridge-widening plans, and trailhead development. When finished, it will connect the existing west end Chinworth Bridge Greenway with the Winona Lake Heritage Trail Greenway, by creating a system of shared roadway routes and multi-use paths connecting neighborhoods, schools, and parks. Former Warsaw city planner Jeff Noffsinger started all this with a vision many years ago. He was also a “bicycle crazy.”

Besides the obvious recreation and health benefits of bicycle and pedestrian trails, many communities realize the transportation and quality of life benefits as well. A visit to the Monon Trail in Indianapolis is also a great example of another benefit of greenway development. Apartments, parks, specialty shops, and eateries line the busy trail through the heart of urban neighborhoods, bolstering economic development in selected areas.

An advisory group has been formed of city, town, county, and school officials, as well as some dedicated local cyclists. Staci Young of the Warsaw Parks Department will chair the group. They will oversee the planning process,

explore funding opportunities for the implementation of the plan, and focus on attaining “Bicycle Friendly Community “ status in Warsaw and Winona Lake.

One of the pillars of BFC is bicycle safety education. In my mind, it is the most critical function of the committee. Creating shared bicycle paths on existing roadways is necessary as routes wind through neighborhoods. Putting lines on existing streets is a simple way to expand connections throughout the city. It is easy and inexpensive. But cyclists, motorists, and pedestrians will all encounter uncertainty the first time they meet and negotiate shared roads. (Didn't this just happen here in Warsaw with the new roundabout ?)

Fred and I have discussed bicycle and pedestrian safety at length. As he explained to me, safety is the focus of Bicycle Friendly Community status. Master-planning insures that paths and shared bike lanes are engineered to traverse safer routes through neighborhoods, utilize more controlled intersections , and that connections between different sections are well-designed. Public safety programs and enforcement promote knowledge of safety rules and encourage compliance. Communities encourage safety by publishing bike maps, utilizing route signage, and creating trailheads that provide information and rest areas.

It is important for everyone to be involved with master planning public meetings. The planning sessions will be educational and give you a chance to be a part of this great project. You may also meet a few bicycle crazies along the way!