

**Safe Bicycle and Pedestrian Transport Committee
Meeting Minutes
July 10, 2026 – 7:30 a.m.
Village Hall**

Present: Chairman Chris Bell, Councilmembers Mary Rensel and Ruth Cavanagh, Mayor Bill Koons, Chief Mike Rizzo, and resident Phyllis Marino.

Call to Order

Chairman Bell called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance. The committee began by reviewing the previous meeting with representatives from the Foundation for Geauga Parks and discussing potential next steps for advancing pedestrian and bicycle connectivity projects.

Foundation for Geauga Parks

The committee agreed that the presentation by the Foundation for Geauga Parks was extremely beneficial. Members were encouraged by the organization's willingness to assist with grant writing, identify funding opportunities, and provide guidance throughout the application process. The Foundation's experience managing grant-funded projects, including serving as the fiscal agent for nonprofit projects and navigating complex public-private partnerships, was viewed as a significant resource.

Committee members discussed the Foundation's successful work with municipalities and institutions, including University Hospitals, and noted their expertise in public engagement and education. There was general consensus that partnering with the Foundation could improve the Village's chances of securing outside funding while reducing the financial burden on residents.

Long-Term Trail Connectivity

Discussion turned to an earlier concept of connecting West Woods Park and Frohring Meadows through the existing FirstEnergy power line corridor. Chairman Bell recalled that previous planning efforts had identified the corridor as a potential regional connection but that homeowner association concerns had prevented the project from advancing.

Members discussed whether those previous obstacles might no longer exist and whether the concept should be revisited. The committee recognized that the project would require cooperation among multiple governmental agencies, Geauga Park District, FirstEnergy, and neighboring communities. Chief Rizzo noted that portions of the route could potentially be developed within existing Village park property before extending beyond Village-owned land. The committee agreed that further exploration was warranted before considering specific designs or surfaces.

Public Education and Community Engagement

The committee spent considerable time discussing the need for additional public education regarding the proposed Bell Road shared-use path. Members acknowledged that while the project has been discussed publicly for several years, many residents continue to express confusion about the proposal, funding, and project details.

Councilmember Rensel proposed developing an informational webpage that would include project history, current proposals, illustrations, frequently asked questions, and a Google Form allowing residents to submit comments electronically. The committee discussed using QR codes on Village signs, in parks, and through newsletters to direct residents to the information.

Members emphasized that the Village should continue communicating clearly and consistently, explaining what is currently proposed, what remains undecided, and how residents can provide feedback. Several members noted that previous community surveys demonstrated substantial support for pedestrian connectivity, even though opponents have generally been more vocal during public meetings.

Bell Road Shared-Use Path and Levy Discussion

The committee reviewed the proposed Bell Road shared-use path and discussed whether to pursue a ballot levy this November.

Several concerns were identified:

- Continued public confusion regarding the exact proposal.
- Questions about bicycle use on a five-foot shared-use path.
- Questions regarding the proposed location adjacent to Bell Road.
- Concerns about the project's estimated \$1.8 million cost.
- Desire to pursue grants and alternative funding before requesting voter approval.

Members also discussed concerns expressed by residents who believe the project would alter the rural character of South Russell, while others emphasized the increasing need for pedestrian safety due to distracted driving and changing traffic conditions.

After considerable discussion, committee members generally agreed that additional education and pursuit of outside funding should occur before asking residents to approve a levy. Members concluded that delaying a levy would not eliminate the project but would allow additional time to secure grants, improve public understanding, and potentially reduce local costs.

Interim Safety Improvements

Recognizing that construction of a shared-use path may require additional time, the committee discussed several short-term safety improvements for Bell Road.

Chief Rizzo explained that narrowing travel lanes through restriping ("road diet") could widen shoulder space without reconstructing the roadway. While members acknowledged the approach

would not provide complete separation between pedestrians and traffic, several agreed it could improve safety if the larger project is delayed.

The committee also discussed reducing the Bell Road speed limit from 35 mph to 30 mph between the Chagrin line and State Route 306. Chief Rizzo explained that an ordinance amendment may be required and agreed to discuss the legal process with the Village Solicitor.

The effectiveness of the Village's portable speed feedback signs ("speed boxes") was also reviewed. Chief Rizzo reported that traffic data shows the devices significantly reduce vehicle speeds and suggested purchasing two additional units this year, placing them along the Bell Road hill and near Daisy Lane to complement existing units near the park. Committee members supported exploring the purchase if funding is available.

Future Coordination

The committee agreed to continue discussions with the Foundation for Geauga Parks and invite representatives back for a future meeting to discuss grant opportunities and funding strategies in greater detail.

Councilmember Rensel volunteered to prepare draft educational materials for the proposed Village webpage, while Rizzo agreed to coordinate website development and communication efforts.

Chief Rizzo agreed to contact the Village Solicitor regarding potential speed limit reductions and report back to the committee. The committee also agreed to contact the Geauga Park District regarding possible collaboration on long-term park connectivity projects.

Action Items

- Recommend to Council that consideration of a ballot levy be postponed while additional public education and alternative funding opportunities are pursued.
- Develop a dedicated Village webpage explaining the Bell Road shared-use path proposal.
- Create informational materials, renderings, and a public comment form accessible through QR codes and the Village website.
- Contact the Geauga Park District to explore long-term connectivity between Village parks and regional trail systems.
- Invite representatives from the Foundation for Geauga Parks to attend a future committee meeting for additional funding discussions.
- Investigate reducing the Bell Road speed limit from 35 mph to 30 mph.
- Evaluate funding availability for the purchase of two additional speed feedback signs for Bell Road.

Motion to Adjourn