

Safe Bicycle and Pedestrian Transport Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: June 5, 2026

Time: 7:30 a.m.

Location: Village Hall

Present:

- Chris Bell, Chairman
- Mary Rensel, Council Member
- Phyllis Marino, Citizen Representative
- Mike Rizzo, Police Chief

Absent:

- John Buda

Guests:

- Christina Davidson, Foundation for Geauga Parks (Trustee)
- Jessica Gift, Foundation for Geauga Parks / Grant Consultant
- Wendi Bomback, Bell Road Resident
- Ron Bomback, Bell Road Resident

1. Purpose of Meeting

The committee met to continue discussions regarding the proposed pedestrian and bicycle path along Bell Road and to gather information from the Foundation for Geauga Parks regarding potential funding opportunities, grant assistance, and lessons learned from similar trail projects. The meeting also provided an opportunity for residents to express concerns and ask questions about the project's potential impacts.

2. Presentation by the Foundation for Geauga Parks

Foundation Background

Christina Davidson explained that the Foundation for Geauga Parks is an independent nonprofit public charity separate from the Geauga Park District. Originally created to raise funds for park acquisition and development, the Foundation expanded its mission in 2015 to support broader conservation, trail, park, and nature education initiatives throughout Geauga County.

Key points included:

- Funding remains exclusively within Geauga County.
- The Foundation supports public projects that connect communities with nature.
- Current programs include Nature Scopes, which provides environmental education to all Geauga County fifth graders.
- The Foundation also awards scholarships to graduating seniors pursuing environmental studies.
- Since 2020, approximately \$29,000 has been awarded in scholarships.

Grant-Making Philosophy

Davidson reviewed the Foundation's revised grant-making framework, emphasizing that funding decisions must align with its charitable mission.

Projects the Foundation Will Support

- Publicly accessible parks and trails.
- Conservation and preservation efforts.
- Nature education initiatives.
- Projects demonstrating broad community benefit.

Projects the Foundation Will Not Support

- Private projects not accessible to the public.
- Salaries and regular operating expenses.
- Budget shortfalls.
- Routine maintenance.
- Political activities.
- Projects primarily benefiting private individuals or restricted groups.

Davidson cited the Foundation's funding of a trail on University Hospitals Geauga Medical Center property as an example of a private-property project that qualified because it serves the public and receives approximately 35,000 annual users.

3. Discussion of Potential Trail Funding

Foundation's Possible Role

The Foundation representatives explained that while they do not currently possess sufficient unrestricted funds to directly finance a project of this size, they may be able to:

- Assist in identifying grant opportunities.
- Connect the Village with funding partners.
- Serve as a nonprofit partner where required.
- Help coordinate fundraising efforts.
- Potentially act as a fiscal sponsor for certain grant applications.

Any participation would require approval by the Foundation's Board of Trustees.

Other Funding Sources Identified

Potential funding sources discussed included:

- NOACA transportation grants.
- Recreational Trails Program grants.
- Clean Ohio grants.
- Safe Routes to School funding.
- Burton D. Morgan Foundation.
- Lake-Geauga Fund of the Cleveland Foundation.

Committee members noted that some funding programs may require partnership with a 501(c)(3) organization.

4. Grant Application and Management Guidance

Jessica Gift shared extensive experience with grant writing and administration.

Recommendations for Future Applications

1. **Confirm Eligibility First**
 - Verify project eligibility before investing significant effort.
 - Understand right-of-way, easement, and engineering requirements before applying.
2. **Study Evaluation Criteria**
 - Focus applications on the scoring criteria.
 - Provide concise responses tailored to reviewers' expectations.
3. **Communicate with Grant Administrators**
 - Contact program staff before submitting applications.
 - Seek pre-application guidance whenever possible.
4. **Prepare for Post-Award Requirements**
 - Receiving a grant creates significant reporting obligations.
 - Financial tracking must be rigorous.
 - Contractors should understand grant compliance requirements.
 - Many grants operate on a reimbursement basis, requiring upfront expenditures by the recipient.

Gift noted that many organizations fail to pursue available funding because of the complexity and administrative burden involved in grant management.

5. Community Support and Public Engagement

Survey Results

Council Member Rensel reviewed previous community survey findings:

- 379 total responses were received.
- 333 responses came from South Russell residents.
- Many respondents expressed strong support for pedestrian connectivity.
- Positive comments focused on:
 - Walking safely to parks.
 - Walking children to school.
 - Reducing automobile dependence.
 - Improving recreation opportunities.

Committee members acknowledged that more recent public meetings have generated opposition from some residents, with concerns focused primarily on project cost and impacts to neighborhood character.

Lessons from Other Communities

The Foundation representatives discussed experiences from other trail projects, including:

- Initial opposition is common.
 - Concerns about crime and loitering frequently arise but often do not materialize.
 - Once completed, many trail projects become highly utilized and appreciated community assets.
 - Consistent communication and community engagement are essential for success.
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6. Trail Design and Engineering Discussion

The committee discussed unresolved design questions.

Shared-Use Path vs. Sidewalk

Questions remain regarding whether the project should be:

- A pedestrian-only path.
- A shared-use path accommodating both pedestrians and bicycles.

Committee members noted:

- ODOT standards may require wider facilities if bicycles are permitted.
- Width requirements vary based on anticipated traffic volumes and intended use.
- The current concept has generally been discussed as a 5-foot path due to right-of-way limitations.
- Some ODOT guidance suggests widths closer to 8–11 feet for shared-use facilities.

Materials

Potential surface materials discussed included:

- Asphalt
- Concrete
- Crushed stone

Committee members indicated that asphalt remains the preferred option due to:

- Lower cost.
- Easier maintenance.
- Better durability on Bell Road's slopes and drainage conditions.

Connectivity and GIS Analysis

Gift suggested conducting a GIS "walkshed" analysis to demonstrate:

- Population served.
- Connectivity to parks.
- Accessibility improvements.
- Potential grant-scoring advantages.

The committee discussed previous regional planning efforts and noted that past NOACA studies may already provide useful supporting documentation.

7. Traffic and Safety Discussion

Police Chief Rizzo addressed traffic concerns frequently raised by residents.

Key Observations

- Speed monitoring devices indicate average traffic speeds on Bell Road are approximately 35–36 mph.
 - Data does not suggest a widespread speeding problem.
 - Curved roads create a perception that vehicles are traveling faster than they actually are.
 - Speed display units have been effective in reducing speeds and collecting traffic data.
 - Additional traffic counts may be useful in determining trail design standards and future grant eligibility.
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8. Resident Concerns Regarding Bell Road Corridor

Wendi Bomback provided extensive comments regarding the proposed trail.

Preservation of Rural Character

Bomback emphasized that many residents moved to South Russell because of its rural atmosphere and natural environment.

Specific concerns included:

- Removal of mature trees.
- Loss of scenic views.
- Increased visibility of utility infrastructure.
- Changes to the visual character of Bell Road.

She expressed particular concern about family property that has been owned for over 55 years and contains significant wooded areas.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Bomback highlighted several historically significant features potentially affected by the project:

- The South Russell Cemetery.
- The Archibald Willard property.
- Underground Railroad history associated with the area.
- Other historically designated structures and landscapes.

She urged the committee to carefully evaluate impacts before seeking voter approval.

Need for Greater Specificity

Bomback stated that residents need detailed information before being asked to support the project, including:

- Exact trail location.
- Width and dimensions.
- Tree impacts.
- Potential retaining walls.
- Visual renderings.
- Historic preservation considerations.

She argued that voters should fully understand the project's appearance and consequences before any ballot measure is pursued.

9. Responses to Resident Concerns

Committee members and guests acknowledged the concerns raised.

Discussion points included:

- The project remains conceptual and many design details have not been finalized.
 - Historic designation may provide additional protections.
 - Future design efforts should prioritize preservation of trees and historic resources.
 - Environmental design firms may be better suited than traditional engineering firms for balancing infrastructure needs with preservation goals.
 - Conceptual drawings and visualizations could help residents better understand potential impacts before any future vote.
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10. Next Steps

The committee identified several actions for future meetings:

1. Invite representatives from Verdantas to present updated engineering information.
 2. Clarify right-of-way limitations and trail width requirements.
 3. Evaluate eligibility for additional grant programs.
 4. Explore GIS analysis and connectivity studies.
 5. Review historical designation issues and associated protections.
 6. Develop clearer visual concepts to assist public understanding.
 7. Continue discussions with the Foundation for Geauga Parks regarding potential partnership opportunities.
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Meeting Conclusion

The meeting concluded with appreciation for the Foundation for Geauga Parks representatives and residents who participated. Members agreed that additional engineering, historical, and design information is needed before major decisions can be made regarding the Bell Road trail proposal. There was consensus that future public engagement should focus on providing residents with clearer information about project impacts, funding opportunities, and potential benefits.

Meeting Adjourned.