

1 **Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan Focus Group One: Safe Routes to School, Youth & Families**

2 **Tuesday, October 6, 4:30pm-6pm**

3 **Meeting Summary**

4 Focus Group Participants:

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6 Any Aviles, Parent  
7 Becky Johnston, Sentara RMH Safe Routes to School Coordinator  
8 Teresa Hulleman, Parent  
9 Craig Mackail, Harrisonburg City Public Schools  
10 Ben Sandel, Parent  
11 Adam Shank, Harrisonburg City Public Schools – Smithland ES  
12 Stefanie Warlick, Parent

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14 City Department Participants:

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16 Ian Bennett, Harrisonburg Fire Department  
17 Aaron Dove, Harrisonburg Police Department  
18 Adam Fletcher, Planning & Community Development Department  
19 Matt Little, Parks & Recreation Department  
20 Brad Reed, Public Works Department  
21 Tom Hartman, Public Works Department  
22 Jim Baker, Public Works Department  
23 Chris Rush, Harrisonburg Police Department  
24 James Winniger, Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation

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26 Other Participants:

27  
28 Moderator: Thanh Dang, Public Works Department  
29 Notetaker: Zach Nagourney, Public Works Department  
30 Interpreter: Silvia Beitzel

31 *At this meeting, participants were told that their comments would be anonymous.*

- 32 1) Thanh welcomed the group, described the purpose, and guidelines for this meeting.  
33  
34 2) Introductions  
35 a) Participant 1 – Lives on E. Wolfe Street, children bike & walk to school, son attends out  
36 of district school at Waterman ES.  
37 b) Participant 2 – Works with Harrisonburg City Public Schools, lives near Thomas  
38 Harrison Middle School and sees kids walking and biking to school every day.  
39 c) Participant 3 – Lives near Stuart St. Has 3 kids that ride bikes to school  
40 d) Participant 4 – Works with Sentara RMH and promotes active lifestyles to youth around  
41 the community working with schools.  
42 e) Participant 5 – Has 5 kids, the younger children bike or walk. High school student can't  
43 bike but would like to.

- 44 f) Participant 6 – Works with Smithland ES Spanish speaking families and would like to see  
45 more access for those families.
- 46 g) Participant 7 – Has 3 kids and lives in Spotswood Mobile Home Park off Country Club  
47 Rd, a busy street with dangerous biking and walking conditions.  
48
- 49 3) Question #1: What influences your decision to walk, bike, take the bus, or drive?
- 50 a) Biking and walking is good to promote a healthy lifestyle.
- 51 b) Biking and walking is easy in neighborhoods surrounding and areas within the small  
52 downtown area. Kids could bike to library downtown. But now kids are getting older and  
53 they want to go to places farther away (Barnes & Noble, etc.) and now they must drive  
54 because they aren't comfortable allowing kids to bike that far away and on roads in that  
55 area.
- 56 c) Finding the “path of least resistance” and planning ahead is a big influence.
- 57 i) Example is their family planned a safe route to bike from home the Montessori on  
58 Port Republic Rd. from downtown area.
- 59 d) Has a large family and having the kids bike to school helps organize the schedule and  
60 frees up more of her time, and her decisions to allow her kids to bike is based on safe and  
61 accessible routes.
- 62 i) Kids would be able to bike/ walk to afterschool activities on their own.
- 63 ii) Older kids bike less now because the high school is far away and there isn't an  
64 accessible & safe route.
- 65 iii) Would like to see widening of Erikson Ave between Route 42 to Garbers Church  
66 Road to include bike lanes so kids can bike safer to school.
- 67 (1) Brad and Tom mentioned there is a plan for that project and meetings like this  
68 will help bring funding to make that project possible.
- 69 e) Parents often walk from trailer park on Country Club to Smithland ES because they can't  
70 afford transportation (a car) but there aren't sidewalks.
- 71 i) Thanh – Are there school buses available?
- 72 (1) For kids, yes. But only to and from school during regular hours. Parents must  
73 walk to attend afterschool meetings, pick their kids up, etc.
- 74 f) There is no transportation given to afterschool programs therefore families must provide  
75 their own transportation.
- 76 i) Some students take transit because they don't have transportation available.
- 77 g) Providing easy routes is a difficult task for some schools like Skyline MS & Smithland  
78 ES.
- 79 h) Will there be infrastructure built into new elementary school's plans?
- 80 (1) It all depends on funding, but there are plans for safe infrastructure on the school  
81 property, new shared use path along Garbers Church Road in front of the school.
- 82 (2) Craig and Tom added that conversations between the Harrisonburg Schools and  
83 City are happening to help get funding to build safe infrastructure, which may be  
84 a new shared use path to connect Hillandale Park to Garbers Church Road.  
85
- 86 4) Question 2: What can be done in addition to infrastructure?
- 87 a) “Thank you to the city” for new infrastructure added over the years, feels great about  
88 existing infrastructure but there needs to be more enforcement around school areas  
89 because enforcement in these areas made the areas feel safer.

- 90 i) Aaron – On Route 33, school zone was just added for Thomas Harrison Middle  
91 School.
- 92 ii) Brad – Explained how the process of adding a school zone works.
- 93 b) Would like to see all behaviors change.
- 94 i) Example – Madison, WI had an educational program to share rules of the road to all  
95 users – bikers, walkers, and drivers.
- 96 c) Distracted drivers and those cutting corners make bikers and walkers feel less safe.
- 97 d) Feeling unsafe crossing at intersections might be a right of way problem.
- 98 e) Drivers not stopping for school bus stop signs.
- 99 f) A need for a period of enforcement. A period of warnings by police would be a good  
100 start.
- 101 g) City schools are able to add enforcement in certain areas due to a grant received but  
102 funding was reduced this year. Thinks it is very helpful to have enforcement in those  
103 areas.
- 104 i) Chris – Statistics are staggering with distracted driving, but there aren't enough  
105 officers to enforce every school zone. Routes to and from schools are priorities but  
106 finding enough time and people is difficult.
- 107 h) Smithland ES faculty doesn't feel comfortable telling students to bike or walk to school  
108 due to safety.
- 109 i) 15 minute walk from Country Club to Smithland ES.
- 110
- 111 5) Question 3: There have been a number of community events that encourage walking and  
112 biking, as well as, educate people on how to walk, bike, and drive safely. What programs  
113 have you enjoyed? What programs do you wish to see more of?
- 114 a) Great job at Keister ES and Thomas Harrison MS with the walk and bike to school days.  
115 Those days really help spread the word about biking and walking. Those schools have  
116 safe routes.
- 117 b) Parks & Rec bike classes really help but are difficult to attend due to scheduling.
- 118 c) Bike to ice cream was a great idea.
- 119 d) Bike Month – A lot of the same people but when new people start to participate it is  
120 fantastic and adds to the bike-friendly nature of Harrisonburg.
- 121 e) Schools having bikes for students to use is also important.
- 122 i) Example: middle school gym class went to Hillandale Park and rode the trails, it got  
123 students more interested in biking.
- 124 f) Neighborhood is disjointed around Sterling St & Route 33, not sure if there is a program  
125 to get families to walk to school together.
- 126 i) Had trouble finding access to parents to get “walking school buses” started. There  
127 have only been little pockets of interest shown by parents but they are now looking  
128 for school staff volunteers to help. University Place Apartments is only a 5 minute  
129 walk to school, but nobody was walking until walking group was organized.  
130 (1) 15 kids waiting for bus when they could've already been at school.
- 131 ii) No good place to cross Route 33 at Sterling & Reservoir.
- 132 (1) Brad – Is it uncomfortable to cross at Sterling?
- 133 (a) For bikes, yes. Light doesn't change for bikers.
- 134 (b) Brad – should contact Public Works when lights not detecting bikers. Brad  
135 explained where a bicyclist should line up behind the stop bar in the middle of

136 the lane to be seen by the camera. Detection cameras are at all lights in the  
137 city, except in the downtown core.

138 (c) Also no sidewalk on Sterling St, and ends on the east side on Reservoir St  
139 makes for an awkward transition. Will many times walk through cemetery.

140 g) Thanh – What kinds of programs should Parks & Rec look for?

141 i) Matt – We could add more education classes on bike/ped safety and/or pass a  
142 pamphlet out to citizens. Information could be added to the Activity Guide.

143 (1) An extension of ideas we've had tonight in order to reach a broader audience.

144 (2) Can inform electronically through Bike Coalition.

145

146 6) Question 4: If you were given a list of new bike/ped projects and programs needed in the  
147 City, how would you prioritize which projects should be funded first? How would you decide  
148 what is the most important? What considerations would you make?

149 a) Areas around Smithland ES and Skyline MS are important – they don't have any  
150 infrastructure.

151 b) Prioritize based on high impact, lack of infrastructure.

152 i) Some areas with sidewalks still need improvements to be safer and more comfortable,  
153 but areas with no infrastructure higher priority.

154 c) Projects that get kids off the road, is we have the ability to build multi-use paths we  
155 should build them. More cost-effective & better for the environment.

156 i) In Cupertino, CA a kid was struck and killed by a truck while riding bike on road and  
157 everyone became a little more nervous and scared to ride on the road. It only takes  
158 one incident.

159 d) Paths between parks and schools are high priority because it eliminates danger by taking  
160 off road routes.

161 i) Example: Cale Trail

162 e) Sharrows help motorists become more aware of bicyclists.

163 f) Brad – Do you feel comfortable letting kids ride on skinnier sidewalks?

164 i) Wider sidewalks are needed on busier roads

165 ii) Skinnier sidewalk if buffer area between road and sidewalk is included.

166 g) Brad – Do you think it's better to ride on the sidewalk or road?

167 i) Safer biking on roads even if there was a sidewalk down all of Central Avenue.  
168 Drivers are looking at the road.

169 ii) Brad stated bikers are within drivers' "cone of vision".

170 iii) Safety of riding bike on a road or sidewalk depends on the street, commercial vs.  
171 residential, number of entrances, speeds of vehicles, etc.

172

173 7) Question 5: Is there anything missed?

174 a) On foggy days, some kids are very hard to see and we need to get students to wear more  
175 reflective clothing.

176 b) How do we do that?

177 i) Offer more strobe lights

178 ii) PTA buys armbands to pass out

179 iii) At Thomas Harrison ES, kids were spot checked for lights and then given lights if  
180 they didn't have one. Kids won't wear vests.

181 iv) Kids now wear helmets

- 182 v) Lights are a priority, given to citizens by fire and police departments in the past. From  
183 grant funding.
- 184 c) Keep putting in energy and continue to build upon what we're doing. New kids and  
185 families every year.
- 186 d) Adam – The Bike/Ped Plan is ahead of the Comprehensive Plan, please come and  
187 participate in Comprehensive Plan meetings beginning next year. Comprehensive Plan is  
188 about street network, zoning, land use, and more.
- 189 i) Thanh – how comfortable a street feels to walk or bike on is influenced by other  
190 elements of the surrounding environment that are addressed in the Comprehensive  
191 Plan.
- 192
- 193 8) Closing Remarks – see attached.

DRAFT