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Planners pitch Complete Streets project for Nashua

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NASHUA - City and regional community development coordinators met with the Nashua Planning Board on Thursday night to present their progress in the Complete Streets project - designed to make the city more friendly to pedestrians and bikers.

Sarah Marchant, the city's community development director, said Nashua is reviewing maps of streets and intersections - as well as data analysis - to develop a full guide that offers travelers more choices, while boosting healthier modes of transportation like bicycling.

"It really is kind of an educational piece, so everyone can understand where we're at and kind of analyze where we need to go," Marchant said. The Department of Public Works "is doing some really great things already, and we need to analyze what we're doing well and where we have holes."

Complete Streets is a planning and design process intended to promote safe roadway access for all modes of transportation and all users - regardless of age or ability.

Other New Hampshire communities, including Concord, Keene and Portsmouth, have moved forward with Complete Streets policies.

The Planning Board did not take action on the project, and Marchant said the meeting was a pre-step before implementing any policy. A more extensive information session about Complete Streets is scheduled for March 24 at City Hall.

Camille Patterson, planning manager with the Nashua Regional Planning Commission, said Complete Streets is part of the city's Plan4Health project, funded through a national collaboration between the American Planning Association and the American Public Health Association.

The two associations awarded grants to 18 communities nationwide, including Nashua, which are supported by the Centers for Disease Control. The 15-month program began last year with a national Plan4Health grant award of \$125,000 to support a healthy and economically vibrant community with safer roadways for all users.

To date, several streets in the city - Main Street sidewalks and new installations along Manchester Street in the North End - have been converted so they are more consistent with a Complete Streets framework, Patterson said.

"Especially in a city like Nashua, it's an old mill city where most of the intercity neighborhoods were actually designed prior the advent of cars. So the bones are there - great framework, you

could walk or bike to many places - and now we have an opportunity to enhance that," she said.

More than a dozen local agencies, including the Nashua Police Athletic League, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Nashua and Great American Downtown, have partnered with planning groups to collaborate on the project. The overall goal is to build in the multiagency efforts to support a healthier community, with the added benefit of less vehicular congestion in the downtown.

"We have an amazing parks network, and it's about connecting people who have limited ability to transport themselves by cars - who use our bus or who walk - and make sure that they can get to the park, making sure that there are safe connections from the schools to the park," Marchant said. "So it's really looking at those main origins and destinations where people want to go."

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