

## Officials lay out plan for north end bike path

Written by Ann Richardson Monday, 07 November 2011 10:18

### **Path will cross Ninth Street using raised, painted crosswalk**

OCEAN CITY – Officials are not sure exactly how it will play out – with four-way stops, traffic diverters or slower speeds - but they said the Simpson Avenue portion of the island-long bike path will be safe and user-friendly.

About two dozen residents gathered at the Bayside Center on Tuesday evening to learn more about the bike path's extension from Battersea Road to Fifth Street along Simpson Avenue.

As part of the "Complete Streets" program - moving away from an "auto-centric" to "bike and pedestrian-centric" focus - Drew Fasy, president of the city's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness, said city streets were built to "move cars as quickly as possible" but the mindset is changing. Complete Streets, he said, provides a means "for us to take the streets back."

"Cars will still be allowed, we will just change the priority," said Tom Heist, IV, a member of the committee. "You can do simple things that have a dramatic impact on the quality of life."

Bike paths are known as "bike boulevards" or "greenways" on the West Coast, Heist said, and they're so popular that neighborhoods are "fighting for them."

A state study recommended the city use existing roadways to create a safe bike route from the Longport Bridge to the Corson's Inlet Bridge, connecting along Ninth Street to the new Rt. 52 Causeway where cyclists could pedal all the way to Mays Landing. Creating a safe bike route means creating obstacles for cars, controlling traffic and driver behavior, mostly by making driving less convenient.

The city has designated Haven Avenue from Ninth Street to 36th Street as a bike path, using a series of four-way stops, or "sharrows," signage painted on the street, traffic "quilts" at designated intersections and a reduced speed to protect cyclists. The bike path from 36th Street to 51st Street will run along a redesigned West Avenue.

Fasy said cyclists and pedestrians would use a raised and painted crosswalk to cross Ninth Street at Aldrich Avenue. Aldrich has been blocked for cars.

There will be a user-activated signal, timed with the lights at Bay and West Avenues. Fasy said it will flash, similar to a railroad crossing without the "bars," and motorists will have to yield. The walkway, raised four inches, will be a visibly noticeable traffic calming device and a "vital link" to the north end, he said.

"There's a lot of action along Ninth Street," said Heist, adding that people dart and run across the street, creating a dangerous situation.

From Aldrich Avenue at Ninth Street, the path travels to Eighth Street and then to Sixth Street along Haven Avenue to an upgraded path behind the primary school and then to Simpson Avenue at Fifth Street. At Simpson Road and Battersea Road, the path will go along Battersea to West Atlantic Blvd, to Bridge Blvd, where it will stretch to the bridge along the Gardens Parkway.

A “lot of ink and controversy” was sparked by the “missing link” from 36th to 51st Streets, but the critical issue was crossing Ninth Street safely, said Fasy. The stretch from Simpson Road at Battersea to Simpson Avenue at Fifth Street is next on the docket, Fasy said.

The city received a \$300,000 grant which will be utilized to pave Simpson in stages, starting along Simpson Road and ending on Simpson Avenue just past First Street next year, city engineer Arthur Chew said.

The next phase, from Battersea Road to the Longport Bridge, could include two “roundabouts,” small traffic circles. One could be located where West Inlet, West Atlantic Blvd., Crescent Road and West Surf Road meet; the second where West Atlantic Blvd and Bridge Blvd. meet. Roundabouts help slow traffic down, said Fasy.

It was the “diverter,” potentially planned for Second Street and Simpson Avenue, that caused the most controversy. The diverter would force both north and south bound traffic along Simpson to make a right-hand turn. The corners along Simpson would be “bumped out,” narrowing the opening of the intersections and slowly traffic down.

“We would not lose any parking,” Chew noted.

Heist said officials were looking for alternatives to the series of four-way stops along Haven Avenue. Bicyclists were “rolling through,” which was frustrating for cars and not safe, he said.

“We need traffic calming devices to keep cars off,” he said.

Landscaped medians similar to those along Haven at 20th Street are one example, he said, but they are costly. Traffic bumpers were less costly.

“Diverters sound like a drastic measure and in a way it is,” said Heist, adding that they create quiet neighborhoods.

“You can’t build up speed if you have to eventually turn right,” Chew said. “It won’t mess with parking and you can’t build a head of steam.”

Heist said the bike path was designed for the “casual user,” notably families as opposed to the “spandex crowd” that wants to peddle as fast as possible.

“This is designed for the leisure crowd,” he said, which is 80 to 90 percent of the cyclists.

Nothing that was discussed was “set in stone,” Chew said. Some ideas may be cost prohibitive and the city may do a trial run of a traffic diverter at Second Street, for example, using large barricades in the street to see how neighbors like them. Bikes could pass through but motorists would have to turn and that would keep traffic off of Simpson.

“Putting four-way stops in is not the best way to do it but it’s cheap,” said Heist.

Fasy said four-way stops elicit numerous complaints because so many cyclists ignore them.

“They breeze through,” said Chew.

Chew said the goal was to “keep people off of Simpson.”

“We don’t want cars driving on Simpson for more than one block,” he said, adding that Second Street was chosen as the “midpoint” of Simpson between Battersea and Fifth Street so cars couldn’t speed. Chew said most of the tickets issued along the existing bike path have been to people who live on the street.

Some in the audience noted that Simpson Avenue floods, so the diverter could be underwater. Chew said that would not be an issue.

Some asked why Haven Avenue wasn’t considered. Chew said the housing authority project blocked Haven from Fourth to Fifth Street and the residents have said they do not wish to be part of the bike path.

Resident Pat Flynn said he thought the bike path would enhance property values.

“Whatever you can do to slow down traffic would be greatly appreciated,” he said. Others said they did not want the diverter.

“If you love the street the way it is, then maybe it’s not for you,” said Heist.

Chew said Simpson Road, from Battersea to North Street would be paved first, then Simpson Avenue from North Street to just past First Street would be paved next. Eventually all of Simpson Avenue would be paved and the bike path would progress.

“The road is literally falling apart,” he said. “It’s one inch thick. The road is 50 years old.”

The bike path remains a work in progress but the repairs, Chew said, would happen regardless. The road from Battersea to Fifth Street, he said “is pretty bad. It all needs to be done.”