

Haven Avenue Bike Path Progresses

By Ann Richardson

Staff Writer

Ocean City—With city council’s expected blessing on Thursday evening, a long-awaited plan to make Haven Avenue more bike and pedestrian friendly will come to fruition.

“The support has been amazing,” said Drew Fasy, Chairman of the Mayors Advisory Council on Physical Fitness (MACPF). “People are coming out of the woodwork to say how much they support it. Everyone is positive, it’s kind of cool.

“I’m excited about it,” he said. “It gives us a great north/south corridor and we are looking for ways to run an east/west corridor to get a feed to the Boardwalk and downtown. We do not have the proper infrastructure for biking right now; this will really open things up. Our hope is that it will be a big boost to the whole city.”

There have been five different attempts to make Haven Avenue the main bike artery through town, in a complicated patchwork of one or two block stretches over many years. Municipal planning—complicated by a multiplicity of red tape and differing opinions and priorities—precludes expediency. Fasy said he was glad the MACPF was able to cut through the red tape.

“The issue is safety,” he said. “To make Ocean City a more bikeable community makes a lot of sense. I can’t find a negative thing about it. There is no downside. We are creating a bike friendly community. Council members are able to see what is going on in the rest of the world. It’s a movement, and as a small town we should be leading the rest of the world. If Manhattan can create 250 miles of bike path, we ought to be able to do even more than this. Other communities understand the value of getting people out of cars and onto bikes.”

The two-phase plan involves designating Haven Avenue a bike path from Battersea Road to 34th Street. Council approved on first reading the first phase of the plan, from Ninth Street to 34th Street.

The new bridge rising high across the bay from Ninth Street will, when completed in 2012, boast a 10-foot wide bike and pedestrian pathway along the Route 52 causeway. The pathway will offer more than just a beautiful vista.

The bike path will allow bicyclists to travel from anywhere on the island to Haven Avenue, across the bridge and causeway, through Somers Point, Linwood and Northfield bike paths and eventually all the way to Mays Landing.

“This is a phenomenal plan,” Fasy said. “You’ll go under the trolley bridge in Somers Point when you get off the bridge and take the bike path. You won’t have to go into the traffic at all.”

Allowing pedestrians and bicyclists a safe haven north and south, four way stop signs will be placed at all intersections along Haven Avenue, including the cross-streets that presently allow easy flow east and west for vehicular traffic, at 10th, 14th, 18th, 24th, and 29th streets.

Motorists will have to watch for newly minted stop signs on these cross-streets.

The speed limit will also be lowered to 15mph along Haven Avenue in the designated area.

“The stop signs and the reduced speed will virtually eliminate automobile traffic along Haven Avenue,” said Fasy. “No one is going to want to drive along there unless they live there. This will dissuade auto traffic.”

Since the plan passed unanimously on first reading, Fasy said MACPF expect easy passage of the plan on second reading. City council members, he said, were “tremendously supportive.”

“We had a number of community meetings, we talked to all kinds of groups, from the environmental commission to the 16-34 Civic Association.” He said. “We laid it all out. There was no opposition. Everyone thought it was a great idea. Councilman Jack Thomas hosted a meeting to gauge support. The entire room, a packed house, said they supported it. If you live on Haven Avenue, wouldn’t you welcome this plan to virtually eliminate through traffic?”

Fasy said he hopes the plan helps entice Asbury Avenue merchants to join in. With professional planners helping residents and merchants create a “vision” for our downtown, Fasy said he was happy that biking was included in the thought process.

“Every bike is one less car,” he said. “Everyone thinks Asbury Avenue is bike friendly, it’s not. Last week, a fair amount of time was spent with the planner on bike-friendly infrastructure. They realize that they need this. I was surprised at how much time and energy was spent discussing this. It was really neat.”

The best part of the plan, said Fasy, is the cost – or lack thereof.

“This can be done very inexpensively,” he said. “All that is needed is signage and paint. It’s not a cost factor. It’s low cost and simple. You will see signs indicating that it is a bike path. Motorists will be advised that there are four-way stops and reduced speed limits.”

The Haven Avenue plan, when completed to Battersea Road, would run past two of the three schools; the primary and intermediate schools. Ocean City High School is just a few short blocks away, across the corridor of open space from the bay to the ocean between Fifth and Sixth Streets.

“If you ever go over to Somers Point and Linwood, you’ll see children going to school on that bike path,” said Fasy. “It’s really neat. The bike rack over there is loaded with bikes. They have this program where every Friday they have a “walking school bus” where adults walk along with the kids and take them to school. They walk the bike path. It’s a timed route led by adults. There are a lot of federal grants for programs like this through the Safe Routes To School program. Getting kids to walk or bike to school is a good thing.”

“The Community Center and Aquatic and Fitness Center are on Haven Avenue, and there are a number of public parks along the route,” Fasy added. “It’s a natural place for it.”

Members of the MACPF and city council are also working on public awareness that cars, by law, are supposed to yield to pedestrians, recommending that the city put up “Share The Road” signs to create public awareness.

Not willing to rest on their laurels, Fasy said the MACPF was also looking to create 1,000 new bike parking spots on racks throughout the city.

“We’re looking at the bulkheads at the beach, on city owned property, downtown, everywhere,” he said. “We did a survey, and found that we could use 3,500 spots. We are going to try for 1,000 and we are asking merchants to match it.”

A bike path Web site has been created, <http://www.bikeocnj.org/>, to bolster public interest.

“The goal is to promote the health and safety of Ocean City by creating a more bike friendly community,” Fasy said.

Touting cars as the alternative transportation, Fasy said his group dreams of the day when people can effortlessly bicycle through town without fear for their safety.

“When this day arrives, we will live in a special place, where we are healthier, breathe less carbon emissions, drive on less crowded streets, easily find a parking place and more fully enjoy the Shore lifestyle. We believe that this day does not have to be far off,” he said.