

Safer school routes receive council blessing

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Members approve grant application for \$560,000+

Many students trudge to and from school in city streets, over broken sidewalks and through heavily traveled intersections.

For those reason and more, the Gothenburg City Council gave the go-ahead for a group of citizens to apply for a Safe Routes to School grant.

At their Dec. 17 meeting, members unanimously agreed that the Gothenburg Improvement Company's Way of Life Committee apply for \$560,466 in federal funds.

The committee and school and city officials have worked together on safe walking and bicycling for students K-8 to and from school.

Council members learned more about the project during a 20-minute public hearing and later approved a resolution to apply for funds.

Even though GIC is spearheading the project, cities must apply for the grant.

If the money is awarded, the project calls for 9 blocks of new sidewalks, 58 curb cuts for handicap ramps, 11 blocks of repair of existing sidewalk and 19 traffic control signs—all during phase one of the project.

Research for the grant revealed that 500 students, K-8, live within two miles of campus.

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“We want to improve the lives of people in Gothenburg and attract new business,” said GIC committee member Shane Maxwell about the new committee and the grant. “This initiative is a community-wide effort to promote safe walking and biking routes for the community.”

Maxwell said the committee walked different routes around the school to determine what needed to be fixed.

School officials sent out surveys to parents of children K-8 asking questions about what was needed for safer routes and received a 90% response rate.

Of those who responded:

73% said addressing the safety of intersections and crossing them would help their willingness to allow their children to walk or bike to school.

68% said better sidewalks or pathways are needed.

65% said there was a need to address traffic speed along routes.

Parents also revealed that 80% drive or carpool to school and 64% drive or carpool back home.

When asked what affects their decision about their children walking or biking to school, 55% indicated concerns about crossing intersections and 46% were concerned about speed or traffic along the route.

Part of the grant, according to Gothenburg police chief Randy Olson, is about education and

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enforcement such as teaching motorists they need to stop when pedestrians are in crosswalks.

Before settling on safer school routes, GIC committee member Verlin Janssen said the Way of Life committee discussed the need for a recreational trail around the perimeter of Gothenburg.

Hiking and biking trails connecting routes within the city will be addressed at a later date.

Earlier this month, the District 20 school board passed a resolution supporting the grant application.

In other business, the council:

chose a low bid of \$22,995 from Pony Express Chevrolet for a 2014 Chevy Impala to replace a 2009 cruiser in the police department.

Other bids were from Platte Valley Auto, \$25,133, for a 2014 Ford police interceptor sedan; and from the state for a 2014 Chevy Impala Limited for \$23,908 plus a \$378 delivery charge from Lincoln.

increased animal boarding fees at Eastside Animal Center, the city's pound for lost or stray animals.

Impound fees will increase 50 cents per animal plus an additional \$5.15 for flea treatment.

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