

Walkway project to beautify Bancroft

By Jody Didier

The BBIA is looking for volunteer groups and individuals to champion the various components of its walkways project. More and more people are interested in living a walkable lifestyle whether it be for health, socioeconomic or environmental reasons. Today, people want to be within safe and comfortable walking of the places that meet their day-to-day needs. This is quite a change from the latter half of the last century. Then, towns developed around the convenience of automobile travel and use-based zoning ordinances identified the need for large parking lots, gas stations and repair shops rather than focusing upon the pedestrian. Walking benefits us through gas savings, decreasing the automobile footprint in the environment and reducing emissions that contribute to poor air quality and global climate change. Today, a surprising number of people walk to the local gas station convenience store. Ultimately, every person who shops gets there on foot (with the exception of Internet shopping and drive through windows).

The physical activity of walking is known to help prevent chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, depression and osteoporosis. Walking improves cardiovascular functioning. Walkable (and rollable) environments generally lead to higher economic productivity. Passersby are more likely to stop at several businesses when they're walking, rather than driving past. In turn, this creates a healthier marketplace, sustainable businesses with a better variety and the economic gains stay in the local economy. Interesting specialty shops open up and people tend to linger longer.

The cornerstone of efficient ground transportation, walking remains the most economical means for people to get around. Walkable surfaces improve mobility for people with walkers, wheelchairs, canes and other devices. When getting around town is primarily car-centric, you limit those who do not drive for physical, developmental and age-related reasons. Walking creates social interaction and the sense of overall well-being, so walkable communities experience fewer crimes and negative social issues.

Beyond conditions, it is important to consider connectivity, greenery and art when looking to improve the walking experience.

At an open meeting on Jan. 23, the BBIA shared their vision to improve walk-ability in the core of Bancroft. Proposed as a community project, the BBIA vision includes gardens, art and other enhancements, while prioritizing comfort and safety.

A long-term plan, suggestions include highlighting the surfaces of both official and courtesy crosswalks, creating shaded picnic areas near the Bancroft cenotaph, planting native species that attract butterflies and birds, freshening up the town kiosks, creating a footpath along the west side of the York River and lighting both the Millennium Park bridge and west riverside walkways. A copy of the full vision plan is available on the BBIA website (www.bancroftbia.com) under the ?About Us? tab at the top of the page.

Interested parties are asked to contact the BBIA by email at bancroftbia@gmail.com.