

A bike path to RWU?



RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.

Bristol resident Chris Menton, who teaches at Roger Williams University, bikes to and from work almost every day — as he's done most of his adult life. He wants to make bike travel realistic (and safe) for students or anyone going to and from the campus.

Biking advocate, expert and Roger Williams University professor envisions a bike path connecting the campus to the rest of Bristol

BY KRISTEN RAY

kray@eastbaynewspapers.com

The New England winter may have settled in, but the harsh weather does nothing to faze Chris Menton. All year long, the Criminal Justice professor at Roger Williams University can be found navigating the streets of Bristol by bike, expertly riding the 11 miles it takes to travel from his home in northern Bristol to the campus and back again. By this point, Mr. Menton knows the route like the back of his hand, and he also knows he has to be careful around motorists along Route 136 and its neighboring side streets.

Now the bicycling enthusiast wants to

make it safer for even more people to travel to and from the university by bike, with his proposal to develop a new bike path that would connect Roger Williams to downtown Bristol and its waterfront.

Why now?

For Mr. Menton, biking is not only a passion — it is hardwired into his DNA. Growing up during the '60s and '70s, when being more environmentally conscious was a part of the national conversation, he had always been attracted to biking, but it was not until he began his career as a prison guard in his twenties that the alternative method of transportation truly began to take hold. After selling what he calls his gremlin of a car, Mr. Menton would trek the 32 miles daily aboard his Italian racing bike in order to get to and from where the prison was located just outside of Boston — regardless of the conditions outside.

"I arrived more than once with a half-

inch of snow on my chest," he said.

In an environment where being physically fit and appearing tough was not only beneficial but critical, biking offered Mr. Menton the solution he needed to accomplish both. It was not uncommon for him by the end of the day, after completing all of his errands or visiting with family, to have ridden upwards of 60 miles. The strength he built served him well, not only in his career but in competition too, winning the (since-dissolved) third annual Boston Commuter Marathon alongside Walter McNeil in 1981.

A few decades and a career change later, Mr. Menton is still enjoying the health benefits of biking, but on a more recreational scale. With his wife of 37 years, Judy — between the two of them, they own 11 bicycles — the pair have traveled all over

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Progressives take charge of town committee

Bristol Democrats elect new slate of officers, with Progressives at the top

BY CHRISTY NADALIN

cnadalin@eastbaynewspapers.com

The Bristol Democratic Town Committee held its biennial reorganizational meeting and election of officers on Tuesday, and when the dust had settled, activist Erich Haslehurst was elected chairman; the previous recording secretary (and current chairman of the Rhode Island Democratic Party Women's Caucus) Tracy Ramos was elected vice chairman; Bethany Foster was named treasurer; MaryKae Wright the corresponding secretary; and Clara Read the recording secretary.

Mr. Haslehurst replaces Tony Rego in the role of chairman of the committee.

"Tony Rego has always been a consummate gentleman, and I am grateful for his service to this committee," said Mr. Haslehurst, according to a statement released by the committee.

"Democracy functions best when more people participate," he said in the statement. "We have experienced remarkable growth in membership, expanding from 75 to 107 members in the last election. This new energy gives us great momentum and will allow us to connect with our community in new ways. I look forward to continuing to work with our committee and our local and state elected officials."

That growth did not come without some pain to longstanding members of the committee.

A contentious meeting last June at the election filing deadline came to a head as the "moderates" pressed to keep the committee numbers lower, but they were overwhelmingly voted down by voices that identify more with what's become known as the "progressive" wing of the party.

At the time, Mr. Rego adamantly opposed the idea of labeling members of the local party as moderates, or progres-

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A chair that does it all
A local inventor has designed a chair that lets you sit, stand, lean, pivot, etc.

EAST BAY LIFE



BIKE PATH: Professor maps a new route, but needs help making it a reality

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the country and in parts of Europe by bike, participating in bike share programs in cities from all over. When the Uber-owned JUMP bike share program reached Providence this past September, Mr. Menton — a nationally certified bike safety instructor — assisted with training. In the months since, he has seen their signature red bikes traveling down the East Bay Bike Path, reaching even as far as Bristol. He knows it is only a matter of time before they begin making their way to Roger Williams.

"It's just going to happen, whether or not we make it a safe way to get there," Mr. Menton said.

As it stands now, anyone attempting to cycle from the existing bike path or from the center of town is putting themselves at great risk. With the university sandwiched between major roadways, accessing it any way other than motor vehicle is nearly impossible. Mr. Menton knows he is one of the very few who braves the commute by bicycle every day.

"Many people living within a mile of the university won't ride their bikes because it's clearly not a safe thing to do," he said.

Implementing a new bike path, Mr. Menton feels, could alleviate that concern, providing students, faculty and the general public an alternative option to reach campus safely.

The proposed plan

The conversation for an additional bike path began two years ago, after Mr. Menton had just participated in a pedestrian and bike safety audit in town. The Director of Parks and Recreation at the time, Walter



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Chris Menton, shown on the East Bay Bike Path along Bristol Harbor, bikes to Roger Williams University almost every day.

Burke, had approached Mr. Menton, asking him why there was not yet a bike path extending to the university. To that, Mr. Menton replied, "because you and I haven't mapped one out yet."

With the help of the Roger Williams Engineering department, the two drafted a preliminary circuit route — not unlike the one Mr. Menton has been traveling already for a decade — that would allow bikers and walkers coming from campus to safely access the center of town and the waterfront. The route, distinguished by either a painted, approximately 15-foot-wide path or bike share road symbol, would snake its way through several of the town's more suburban side streets, including Franklin, Constitution, and High streets, as well as DeWolf and Griswold avenues, while also crossing

busy Metacom Avenue.

While many portions of their plan would require little more than a bit of street painting, Mr. Menton knows that other aspects of the proposal could draw criticism. The current neighborhood parking situation on Franklin Street would need to be addressed, as would the potential implications of installing a pressure plate traffic signal at the intersection of Woodlawn and Metacom avenues.

"This would not be without its controversies and bumps," he said.

Because the proposal is still in such an early phase of development, though, Mr. Menton is not married to any of its specific details, as long as safety is maintained as the number one priority in the final outcome.

"That's what governs and guides me," he

said.

Next steps

Since its creation, progress on the proposal has ebbed and flowed, and Mr. Burke, now retired, is no longer involved. However, it has circulated among executive staff members of the university, town and state planners, as well as impacted neighbors and abutters. Recently, Mr. Menton reached out to state planners about the process of installing a pressure plate traffic signal, and soon he will meet with Vice President for Student Life at Roger Williams, John King, about next steps, both short- and long-term.

Part of that will involve reaching out to stakeholders, which will include re-involving the Recreation Department, as well as other groups, such as the Rhode Island Bicycle Coalition. Other aspects will include distinguishing ways to promote bike safety on campus itself, educating students how to ride responsibly.

"One of the things about bikes is, if you ride a bike, you become aware very quickly that you're invisible," Mr. Menton said.

If his plan were to be adopted, Mr. Menton feels that the new bike path could serve as an asset for both Roger Williams and the town, attracting prospective students and increasing bike tourism within the community. For now, though, he simply wants to get the conversation going.

"I just want students to be safe and for the public to be able to access the beauty of the campus," Mr. Menton said.

As he moves forward, Mr. Menton welcomes feedback about the proposal and encourages residents to reach out to him at pmenton@rwu.edu. In the meantime, he will continue to ride just as he always does — rain, snow or shine.

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Chris Menton's proposed path for traveling from the campus to the downtown district (green line) crosses Metacom Avenue at a new Woodlawn Avenue stoplight and then utilizes DeWolf Avenue and Franklin Street to reach the East Bay Bike Path. The route back to campus has "Option A" (red line) that passes by Bristol's wastewater treatment plant or an "Option B" (yellow line) that goes onto Ferry Road and then Griswold Avenue. He knows there will be some objections and there are obstacles to clear, but he's hoping to start a high-level conversation about the possibilities.