

PO Box 973 Charleston, WV 25324

Happy New Year!! WVCC had a busy and productive 2014. Here is a summary of past activities and a glimpse of what we hope to accomplish in 2015.

As you all know, WVCC worked with several Delegates and Senators to update WV Cycling Code during the 2014 Session. Sadly, the majority of those delegates and senators were voted out of office last November. The 2015 Legislative Session begins on Wednesday, January 14th, with the largest freshman class in recent history. Leadership and staff have changed drastically. Your WVCC Legislative Committee has recommended that this session I dedicate my time to meeting the incoming Delegates and Senators and monitoring introduced legislation. I also plan to attend both Houses’ Transportation committee meetings. We will also coordinate with AARP, the WV Transit Authority and other groups working on transportation issues. WVCC’s goal continues to be to provide an active transportation system so people can walk or ride a bike where they want to go safely! WVCC would also like to see our state be a multi-day cycling and hiking destination (economic development).

In 2014, West Virginia was ranked the 2nd most obese and 4th most inactive state in the country. In addition, we were 50th in poor physical health days, 49th for premature death, 49th for diabetes, 47th for poor mental health days, 48th in cancer deaths, 50th for heart attacks, and 49th for premature death (in all of the above categories we ranked towards the bottom/meaning the worst). One of our board members, Christiaan Abildso, sent me a report from 2009 that estimates the cost of physical inactivity in WV. George A. Kelley, DA, FACSM and Kristi S. Kelley, MEd, both with the School of Medicine, Dept. of Community Medicine at WVU, found that in 2005 the total estimated annual cost associated with physical inactivity was $1,309,544,068 ($1,060,383,138 in lost worker productivity; $254,631,484 in medical care; $3,528,446 in workers’ compensation). Kelley and Kelley report that by increasing physical activity in adults by just 5%, annual costs would be reduced by $108,048,190 (that’s an 8% reduction)!

What is a relatively easy, inexpensive fix for reducing preventable deaths, heart disease, colon cancer, diabetes, anxiety and depression while increasing feelings of well-being and maintaining bone, muscle, and joint integrity and controlling weight? -- Physical Activity!! WVCC’s mission that the majority of West Virginians can safely walk or ride a bike to work, school, run errands, or for recreation would enable more adults to become physically active. Many of you are also aware of Secretary Foxx’s, U.S. Department of Transportation, efforts regarding walking and cycling. Secretary Foxx announced that “[s]afety is our [US DOT] highest priority and that commitment is the same regardless of which form of transportation people choose, including walking and biking,” He added, “This initiative [to enhance pedestrian and bicycling safety] is aimed at reversing the recent rise in deaths and injuries among the growing number of Americans who bicycle or walk to work, to reach public transportation and to other important destinations.” WVCC will be working closely with Tom Smith, Federal Highway Administration, WV Division, and the WV DOT on implementing the Initiative during 2015.

How do we as a state increase the number of adults that are physically active? WVCC has found that the number one reason for not walking and/or biking is that people do not feel safe walking and riding a bike on our roads (there is also research to support this). To address safety concerns, WVCC will continue to publicize the Give ‘Em 3 feet law. We have received funding from the Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation and the Orders Family Foundation (total grants received $22,000). The money will be used for a public awareness campaign for both drivers and cyclists on how to safely interact. WVCC will use social media to repeat the rules of the road when it comes to safe interaction as well as place several billboards, hold public meetings, and develop pamphlets. The billboards and meetings will be in the Kanawha Valley as stipulated by the grant money; however the pamphlets, social media, and public meetings can happen throughout the state. It is our goal to expand the public awareness efforts geographically to the entire state as well as to expand the message to drivers and pedestrians. Anyone have any funding sources to recommend??

The WVCC is a public policy organization so we always need to ask ourselves the following: What local and state policies need to be implemented, repealed and/or amended in order for West Virginia to be a safe cycling/walking state for its citizens and visitors? We learned a lot during our Fall Meeting in Lewisburg. We will continue to find ways to institutionalize and normalize cycling and pedestrian thinking, including facilities and funding, with the public, businesses, and government.

Other accomplishments in 2014:

* Great board members were lost and great board members were gained! Our current board of directors is as follows:
  + Dennis Strawn, President
  + Brendan Bell, Treasurer
  + Scott McMillian
  + Greg Garrett
  + Amanda Payne
  + Bill Wells
  + Brian Weber
  + Christiaan Abildso
  + Jing Zhang
* Legislative Bike Ride and Walk – Oct. 2014 – Delegate Danny Wells, Tom Smith with the Federal Highway Administration, and several Legislative staffers joined local cyclists for a guided bike ride around Charleston. Mary Beth Hoover, Charleston City Council, led a smaller group for a walk around Charleston’s East End.
* Worked with Tom Smith (FHA) on developing a steering committee to implement Secretary Foxx’s Safe Bicycling and Pedestrian Initiative
* The WV DMV updated their drivers’ education materials to include the updated bicycle safety law as well additional language on interacting safely with cyclists and pedestrians (Thanks to Natalie Holcomb, WV DMV)
* Increased social media presence – thanks to Maple Creative for our website, [www.wvconnectingcommunities.com](http://www.wvconnectingcommunities.com) and Scott McMillian for keeping our FB page more active.

Please mark your calendars for the following:

2015 Legislative Session – Wednesday, Jan. 14th through Saturday, March 14th – contact me if you want to meet with your delegate(s) and senator(s)

National Bike Summit – March 10-12 – Washington, DC (WVCC is the WV State Coordinator). WVCC will also be recruiting for participants to attend this year’s summit. Let’s see who we can get there.

WVCC Spring Meeting – April 10, 2015 – Parkersburg, WV

WVCC Fall Meeting – Oct, 2015 – Martinsburg, WV

Legislative Bike Ride and Walk – Oct. 2015, Charleston, WV

WVCC Spring Meeting – April 2016, Beckley, WV

I think 2015 is going to be an even more productive year than 2014. There is also talk of a bike ride between Huntington and Charleston with a festival-type event in Charleston at the end of the ride. I will keep you all updated as I learn more.

I always like to come back to the project idea below – do we have the resources to work on it during 2015?

Project Concept: Pick the five most pedestrian friendly (there are already a number of walkers, runner, cyclists) communities; Identify a walkable/bikeable pathway/route in each (or one that needs a little help getting completed); Create uniform signage for each trail; public relations campaign – use our website and FB page to identify and promote the five pathways; Determine why each walk/bike route was possible; Document the obstacles if we are not successful; Is it possible to link any of the above communities via a walking/biking pathway/route (to accomplish WVCC goal of being a multi-day cycling and hiking destination)?

Goals: Get Governor Tomblin to fill the complete streets advisory board. Identify the policies that enabled or prohibited the routes from being designated official bike/ped routes. Are there polices that need to be adopted to enable communities to have an official bike/walkway? We also need to identify the partners (there are many local and national groups working on increasing physical activity).

If any of the above projects or events sparks your interest, please email or call me. I hope that all of you will help the WVCC accomplish its mission!

Thanks for all your help, donations, and support during 2014.

Sincerely,

Kasey Russell, Executive Director

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