

International Falls Area Transportation Plan
Steering Committee Meeting #1
September 22, 2020, 2:00 p.m.
Zoom Video/Audio Conference

SUMMARY

Introductions

Attendees: Bryan Anderson (MnDOT District 1), Ken Anderson (City of International Falls), Tara Besch (Koochiching County Public Health), Kelly Franz (Eleven Seventy-One Boutique), Sherril Gautreaux (City of Ranier), Kevin Grover (International Falls School District), Katrina Heibel (Eleven Seventy-One Boutique), Tricia Heibel (International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce), Tony Jackson (U.S. Customs), Lori Lyman (PCA), Seth Nelson (Voyageurs National Park), Alex Peritz (MnDOT District 1), Dave Reimer (Koochiching County Highway Department)

Project Technical Team: Russell Habermann (ARDC Planning), Andy Hubley (ARDC Planning), CJ Fernandez (Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects), Jason Aune (Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects), Kellen Kirchberg (Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects)

Project Overview

Russell Habermann, Senior Planner with ARDC Planning, shared the two goals of the project: 1) to develop a vision for Hwy 11 in International Falls for MnDOT's scheduled 2027 project (focus segment outlined in pink to the right, but additional areas of interest may be considered based on steering committee interest), and 2) identify transportation goals in northeast Koochiching County (zip codes 56649 and 56668, outlined in second map).



He then shared the expected outline of the projects process:

- **September:** Meeting 1
 - Plan overview, desired public input methods, inventory of transportation system and existing planning documents, mapping exercise, opportunities and barriers, next steps
- **January 2021:** Meeting 2
 - Identification of plan goals, review of draft designs/plan for Hwy 11, guidance for public review process
- **February 2021:** Public Review
- **March 2021:** Meeting 3
 - Finalize plan
- **April 30, 2021:** Contract Expiration

Habermann shared that the steering committee's role in this process is to be experts about the International Falls area and to provide guidance to ARDC Planning and Aune Fernandez Landscape

Architects during the planning process. Eventually, the process will result in a planning document outlining desired transportation projects in the International Falls area and concept designs for the Hwy 11 segment scheduled for MnDOT work in 2027.

Inventory of Existing System/Plan Documents

Habermann shared that ARDC Planning and MnDOT have been collecting data during the summer in anticipation of the planning process. He told the steering committee that they have the following data currently on file:

- Highways/roads/streets (by functional classification)
- Right-of-way ownership
- Speed limits
- Annual average daily traffic (AADT)
- Bridges
- Intersections (by type)
- Transit services
- On-street parking locations
- Public off-street parking lots
- Streetlights (along MnDOT project corridor)
- Road entrances/driveways (along MnDOT project corridor)
- Medians (along MnDOT project corridor)
- Population density

Habermann asked what additional data the committee thinks may be helpful. Steering committee members offered the following:

- Sidewalk/trail data
- Directional signage (especially for visitors using 53 and 11/71)
- Rail intersections
- Pedestrian/bicycle counts

Habermann then shared that ARDC Planning has been collecting published planning documents that can inform this planning process. He told the steering committee that they have the following plans currently on file:

- City of International Falls Comprehensive Plan (2020)
- International Falls Area Gateway Corridor Design Plan (2008)
- International Falls Area Gateway Corridor Plan (2007)
- International Falls Safe Routes to School Plan (2008)
- International Falls Safe Routes to School Plan (2016)
- Greater International Falls Transportation Study (2004)
- St. Louis County and Northeast Koochiching County Trails Plan (2018)
- Waters of the Dancing Sky Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan (2013)

Habermann asked what plan document may be missing from the list. Steering committee members offered the following:

- Landscape architect visual quality manual for 53 project

- Ranier Community Plan
- Documents from Tricia Heibel (Sustainability plan, retail trade and marketing analysis)
- GSA Environmental impact statement for Border facilities

Desired Public Input Methods

Sharing that ARDC Planning will need to collect public input about International Falls area transportation issues this fall, Habermann asked the steering committee to share what strategies and outreach methods may work well, noting that face-to-face engagement is not a possibility at this time. The steering committee offered the following:

- Before the public can weigh in, they will need to know what this plan and the Hwy 11 project is for. (Response provided by Bryan Anderson, MnDOT: The Hwy 11 project is scheduled to address pavement issues, and looking at the area transportation system as a whole can help plan what changes to the Hwy 11 corridor can be made and position the community for scheduling and getting funding for future projects.)
- There are road projects currently happening, so any public input requests will need to be careful about not soliciting input on those ongoing projects.
- There are a lot of surveys going around lately, but surveys are an effective way to collect information from the public.
- Launching something like a survey would be most effective if using multiple outlets (i.e. local newspaper, community Facebook Groups, local radio, presenting to city councils and county board).
- Outreach directly to community groups via video conference may be helpful.

Habermann proposed that ARDC Planning would develop a survey and work with the steering committee to beta test it in October. The survey would launch with a multi-faceted media approach in November. Scheduling focus group-style input sessions with community groups to promote the survey and collect additional input may be part of this public input process.

Mapping Exercise – Transportation Opportunities and Barriers

CJ Fernandez, Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects, provided some background about his firm’s previous work and introduced that they will work with the steering committee to take a concentrated look at the Hwy 11 corridor project portion of this planning process. He guided the steering committee through an exercise to record some initial thoughts about the corridor that will be undergoing MnDOT work in 2027. The steering committee provided the following pieces of input:

- There are new sidewalks on the south side of Keenan Drive.
- People don’t like sidewalks because they are responsible for shoveling them.
- There are drainage concerns at the intersection of 332/Hwy 11.
- People biking into International Falls on Hwy 11 are routed to the Blue Ox Trail via 332 and run into flooding, forcing them to turn around.
- Wider shoulders are desired along the rural section of Hwy 11.
- Chamber of Commerce 5ks utilize the Hwy 11 and Keenan Drive corridors.
- Trails from 332 to the city walking loop are desired.
- There is a desire to make the Blue Ox Trail (currently gravel) better for biking.
- Work is needed on crossings of Hwy 11 on the north end of the 2027 project: near Super One, at 9th Avenue – some pedestrian crossings are unmarked in this area.

- The marked City Loop for walking and biking doesn't have sidewalks or trails along the whole loop, but infrastructure is desired. There is a suggestion to make Hwy 11 like the new Hwy 53 design, where there's a bituminous trail on one side and a concrete sidewalk on the other.
- Hwy 11 trail (heading east from downtown International Falls) shares roadway in sections, and a trail fully separated from roadways is desired.
- Snowmobile connections have been talked about, particularly connecting into International Falls on Highway 11 and on Highway 53. Conversations to implement a route along Keenan Drive is currently underway.
- Three intersections for pedestrian crossing safety along Hwy 11 should also be addressed: Keenan Drive, Shorewood Drive, and 11th Street.
- 11th Street could perhaps be rerouted away from the high school, through the green space across the street and squared up with Hwy 11.
- Smokey Bear Park is used for community gatherings (i.e. 4th of July, parade line-ups, Labor Day picnic, concerts in the park), and people park a block or so away and walk there; this higher foot traffic should be considered for crossings leading to the park.
- If a trail is constructed along Highway 11, Smokey Bear Park would be a natural place where the trail would terminate.
- There is a snow storage issue near the cinema.
- Backus Community Center is hoping to put in 30 units of affordable housing.
- There are conversations to extend International Falls city limits down to the intersection of 332/Hwy 11 because of city utilities serving the corridor.
- There is a desire to keep freight traffic out of downtown International Falls, meaning that traffic would need to route along 332 to Hwy 53 instead of up Hwy 11. This reroute would help with people walking and biking in the Hwy 11 corridor.
- Speeding along the Hwy 11 corridor is the most frequent complaint MnDOT hears.

Next Steps

Habermann shared that ARDC Planning will prepare meeting notes and start work on survey development. Fernandez will begin design work with the Highway 11 corridor. The next meeting is expected to be held in January.



The International Falls Area Transportation Plan project is being facilitated by ARDC Planning, a division of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC).

Please direct any questions to:

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