

Glencoe's Walkable Community Workshop: Results and Next Steps



Background

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) hosts Walkable Community Workshops (WCW) to support community efforts to become more walkable. In a walkable community, walking is a practical, safe, comfortable, and enjoyable mode of transportation. The workshops introduce core principles to support walkability and begin with a walk audit where community members evaluate the walking environment and identify issues that impact their comfort and safety. Following the walk audit, there is an action planning session. MDH provides post-workshop technical assistance and seed funding to jump-start implementation of ideas from the action planning session. MDH contracts with Alta Planning and Design to deliver the workshops.

MDH's local partner in hosting Glencoe's WCW was Glencoe in Motion, a group of physical activity community leaders supported by the City of Glencoe, Meeker-McLeod- Sibley Community Health Services, McLeod County Public Health and Glencoe Regional Health Services. To determine a geographic focus area for the WCW, the planning team reviewed upcoming street projects and connections between key destinations within Glencoe. The team selected Hennepin Ave due to its role as a major connector between Glencoe Regional Health and the businesses in downtown, and the planned 2024 reconstruction of the roadway north of 13th St E. Hennepin Avenue is a MnDOT roadway from 10th St E to 13th St E, and a McLeod County roadway north of 13th St E. While it



Figure 1: Group Walk Audit on Hennepin Ave

Key Takeaway

Community members, public agency staff, and key stakeholders identified a need for walking infrastructure improvements along Hennepin Ave. Next steps include engaging with McLeod County on the roadway's reconstruction, re-using bollards for a future demonstration project, and continuing to build community and political support for a walkable community.

was not ultimately selected as the focus of the workshop, the team identified connecting migrant worker housing to Kwik Trip and Coborn's Grocery as another important walkability concern.

The project team reached out to community members to encourage them to participate in a walk audit along Hennepin Ave from 10th St E to 18th St E. Participants chose either an independent in-person walk audit or a group in-person walk audit, which was held the evening before the workshop. During the group walk audit, participants had the opportunity to use disability simulation devices, including a wheelchair and low-vision goggles.

Walkability Needs on Hennepin Avenue

The project team held a Walkable Community Workshop in October 2021 to discuss the walk audit and brainstorm actions to improve walkability. 17 people brought their ideas and enthusiasm to the two-hour interactive workshop, including:

- City Council member Sue Olson
- Key agency staff: McLeod County Engineer, Glencoe City Administrator and Assistant City Administrator, McLeod County Parks and Recreation Manager, Glencoe Police Captain, Glencoe Public Works Director, Glencoe City Engineer
- Comprehensive plan consultant
- Local residents and business owners

Participants said that Hennepin Avenue needs **better lighting** for people walking, **wider and more even sidewalks** that are free of debris and obstructions, **curb ramps** at every intersection, **shorter crossing distances**, **separated bike lanes**, and **amenities** like wayfinding, benches and trash receptacles.

Participants were excited about several action steps for making walking better on Hennepin Ave, including **commenting on a MnDOT Open House** regarding the 2022 Hennepin Avenue Accessibility Project, **shaving sidewalk heaving**, **activating the food shelf parking lot**, **building political will** by emphasizing the financial benefits of walkability as well as holding a walk audit during a City Council study session, **implementing quick build improvements** to make changes in the short term, installing **public art**, identifying priority streets for **city snow removal** on sidewalks, installing a **bicycle facility**, and **rerouting trucks** away from downtown.

Testing a Solution

After the workshop, a subset of workshop attendees met to determine how to use \$5,000 of implementation funding and 100 hours of technical assistance from MDH. They decided to focus implementation efforts on a demonstration project along Hennepin Avenue from 13th St E to 18th St E, aligning with the planned 2024 reconstruction of the County's portion of the roadway. The team designed a temporary on-street trail on the west side of Hennepin Ave, repurposing a parking lane that is largely unutilized.



Figure 2: Demonstration Project Design

The goals of the demonstration project were:

- Build support and excitement for walking and biking improvements
- Help people envision what a trail for people walking and biking on Hennepin Ave could look like
- Engage with residents around a potential 2024 reconstruction of Hennepin Ave

The team sent a letter to all residents along Hennepin Ave from 13th St to 18th St informing them of the installation of a temporary lane, dates of the project, and where trash should be placed.

The City striped the outer line separating the on-street trail from the travel lane. A large group of community volunteers led by Alta Planning and Design installed the rest of the demonstration project over about six hours on September 15th, 2022. They laid down reflective removable tape, painted bike symbols, and secured flex posts to the pavement with butyl pads.

The demonstration trail remained in place for two weeks. During that time, Glencoe in Motion collected feedback via a survey and social media. Community feedback was mixed, with some people expressing support for biking and walking improvements, while others noted concerns with the loss of on-street parking directly in front of their houses and suggested that people biking should use parallel streets.

The team obtained before and after counts of people walking and biking on the corridor. Before the project, one person per day biked on Hennepin Ave. During the project, an average of four people per day biked.



Figure 3: Volunteer Installation Team



Figure 4: Installed Demonstration Project

Recommended Next Steps

The white bollards used in the demonstration project can be reused in a future demonstration or quick build project, such as curb extensions at an intersection. For a future project, the team would invest more time into in-person engagement with residents living near the project location, making sure to make the decision-making process behind the project clear to the public, and would also keep the project in place longer (at least a month).

Glencoe in Motion should build on the relationships they built with the County Engineer to proactively support the community engagement and street design process for the reconstruction of Hennepin Ave, bringing forward the ideas and concerns they heard from the community during the WCW.

Continuing to build community and political support will be key to improving conditions for walking in Glencoe. Glencoe in Motion should maintain connection with the community members who helped install the demonstration project and/or attended the workshop, and consider ways to engage council members, such as by conducting a walk audit with council members using disability simulation devices.