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Safe Routes to School project still several years from implementation

By Audra Anderson • Daily News

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Construction for Safe Routes to School is not expected to begin until 2022.

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Breckenridge Active Living Committee is moving forward with Safe Routes to School, a national initiative to create opportunities for students to walk or bike to school. The Breckenridge plan was released in 2017, and now the committee is looking to implement the plan.

Neil Crocker, director of Public Services for the city, said there are four engineering companies which are expected to submit bids on Friday, Nov. 18, to be the contractor for the project. The committee altered the plan slightly to be more accommodating for nearby residents, Crocker said.

“It’s really a matter of now getting the engineering group on board, getting them up to speed with what we are currently proposing, see if there’s any modifications or adjustments that need to be made to the plan, and get those plans solidified,” Crocker said.

Once the plan is finalized, the city will work with the Minnesota Department of Transportation to ensure the plan still falls within the original intent of the project, Crocker said. If it does, the city will move forward with Safe Routes to School.

Mallory Jarvi, a Minnesota GreenCorps member partnered with West Central Initiative, has been working on the implementation of the project. Jarvi said Naomi Schliesman, an artist from Fergus Falls, Minnesota, designed an animal footprints template that can be used with spray-on chalk to create a pathway on sidewalks for students in warmer weather.

Jarvi said during the winter, Breckenridge could implement a moveable bike sculpture table with surveys about Safe Routes to School for parents to fill out, and swag like bike lights and stickers for children.

A similar table was placed in a grocery store in Henning, Minnesota, and garnered a big response from the community. Committee President Shawn Krause-Roberts said because of the spike in COVID-19 cases, the idea may have to be put on hold, but they could consider it on a month-by-month basis.

Along with the sculpture, bike racks could be placed at schools to motivate children to bike to school rather than take the bus, be driven or drive themselves.

Neighboring towns are planning a Winter Walk to School Day on Feb. 5, 2021, Jarvi said. The activity could offer prizes and show students and parents that walking to school, even in the winter, is a safe and viable option. Krause-Roberts said the community tries to partake in the spring and fall Walk to School Days, and has looked at the winter one in the past, but weather can be a barrier.

“We’re Minnesotans, it’s OK to bundle up, especially if you don’t walk too far,” Jarvi said.

The unprecedented fall has West Central Initiative more focused on the Winter Walk to School Day, especially with COVID-19 cases climbing, Jarvi said. A Walk to School Day could get students off of crowded school buses, which are prime conditions for spreading the virus.

Safe Routes to School construction is expected to begin in 2022, and the projected completion date is in August 2022.

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