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## Safe Routes to School traffic garden moves forward

By Audra Anderson • Daily News

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A traffic garden is an interactive safe space for children to learn the rules of the road and practice bike and walking safety. Courtesy MCS

The Breckenridge City Council unanimously approved a resolution supporting the Breckenridge School District's grant application for a traffic garden at their meeting Monday, Jan. 11, 2021. The council also appointed new Councilmember Scott Wermerskirchen as vice mayor of the Minnesota city.

Breckenridge Elementary School Principal Corinna Erickson, also an Active Living Committee member, said the committee has been working on the Safe Routes to School grant process for the past six years. Part of the process involved a study of the town, which determined the current status of bicycling safety, Erickson said.

The grant also involves an educational aspect, which is where the traffic garden comes into play, she said. A traffic garden is an interactive and safe space for children to learn the rules of the road, and practice bike and walking safety. To save money and use existing space, many traffic gardens are painted on old tennis or basketball courts.

“I’ve always been intrigued by that idea of pavement or a platform painted with street signs, markings and that kind of thing, either for our phy-ed (physical education) people to use to train when we use our bike fleet that we got through some resources, or the bike rodeo I think about being able to use this space,” Erickson said.

Through the committee, she heard of a \$10,000 grant they could potentially use to make the garden. In Rochester, Minnesota, a traffic garden was designed and crafted for around \$7,000, Erickson said.

She said the committee has considered several locations for the traffic garden. Erickson said it would be more convenient to place it near the schools since the garden would often be utilized during school hours or in certain classes.

“A lot of places, like Rochester, used an underutilized tennis court,” Erickson said.

Erickson first looked at the basketball court on the elementary school campus, but it seemed too small for a traffic garden. She next considered another basketball court in between the high school campus and the pool, but it was even smaller than the first. Finally, working together with City Administrator Renae Smith, Erickson found the Breckenridge tennis courts to be a viable option.

Mayor Russ Willson asked if they could still use the area for a tennis court. Wermerskirchen agreed he would like to keep it dual-purpose if possible.

“I hate to lose the tennis courts because we don’t really have any other tennis courts in town, and then it’s just another reason for people to go, ‘Well, I guess I’ll just go to Wahpeton for everything,’ and I don’t know that we want that,” Wermerskirchen said.

Erickson said she was already visualizing incorporating the lines on the court in the traffic garden. She said Rochester's traffic garden artist was happy to work around different kinds of parameters, like wanting to keep the original court's lines.

"Whether any of those places work is up in the air, and we're just looking to work together to find a surface whether it's those places or another," Erickson said.

The letter of intent to apply for the grant is due Jan. 22, and the grant is due in April, Erickson said.

Audra Anderson

