

Can Red Bank Become a Bicycle Town?

BY EDWARD VAN EMBDEN

The seeds have been planted. As part of Red Bank's new master plan, an emphasis has been put on transportation and safety, specifically when it comes to the bicycle. Already, sharrows – designated bike routes with appropriate painted-signage – have popped up on a couple of downtown streets with the purpose of making regular biking a more attractive option for residents.



A recent visit from non-profit group dedicated to bringing bike sharing programs to New Jersey prompts discussion about whether the borough fits the bill as a bike town.

Now there's a push to take it one step further. Nora Shepard, a member of the non-profit organization Meadowlink, presented borough council with a plan to develop a

bike sharing program right here in Red Bank, one that's similar to a program recently employed in New York City and one that's been an established success in foreign, bike-heavy cities like Paris.

So, it's clear that scale may be an issue. As Red Bank Mayor Pat Menna brought up, the borough and its more than 12,000 people and less than two square miles might not be the best fit, especially when you factor in the time dedication and resources needed to get the program up and running. Grant funding is available, though to move forward Red Bank would have to pony up some of its own cash.

Shepard said she believes Red Bank makes perfect sense for bike sharing.

"The reason for (choosing) Red Bank is that we think this is a model a lot of shore towns can use," she said. "And, Red Bank has shown a dedication to bike safety."

The way bike sharing works is simple enough. A participant who signs up with the program would have access to bikes located at various kiosks around town. You borrow the bike to travel around and eventually you bring it back to its stall. The key, Shepard said, is finding a way to make it self-sustaining. Technicians would have to be employed to help run the kiosks or tend to problems, but the program works, she said, if there are enough sign-ups.

There's also help from the government in the way of federal grants. Funding is available from the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement, or CMAQ,

program for up to \$100,000 for three years. If Red Bank were to apply for and receive the grant, it would have to match 25 percent.

Currently, there are no significant bike sharing programs in New Jersey, Shepard said. Her group is currently in discussion with Rutgers Newark, where she believes a bike share would be up and running in just six months.

Just how bike-friendly Red Bank is or is willing to become is unknown. Though the master plan calls for safe routes to be established, there are plenty of areas of the borough where riding a bike can be a hazard, like down the narrow streets of the borough's downtown. If Red Bank is committed, Shepard said, than this thing can work.

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