

Cycling advocates hope to make Silverton bike-friendly



Colton Totland, Silverton Appeal Tribune 11:10 p.m. PST January 19, 2015



(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

Silverton could gain more bike trails, bike lanes, bike shops and cyclists in the coming years, and it would be due to the efforts of a citizen's committee spending long hours to make it happen.

Charles Baldwin and a group of avid cyclists spent 2014 compiling the Silverton Bicycle Report for the City Council, and during the Monday, Jan. 5, meeting presented 22 recommendations on how to make Silverton a destination for cycling activity. The goal: cash in on an estimated \$400 million in annual revenue that comes from cycling tourism, according to a 2013 report by Travel Oregon.

Silverton lies in the heart of the action, Baldwin said, citing that rural Willamette Valley communities south of Portland receive a healthy portion of that revenue. From accommodations to local restaurants — the Travel

Oregon report showed 58 percent of cyclists visited a local microbrewery during their trip — businesses stand to gain from improved cycling infrastructure.

So do Silverton residents, Baldwin said. Sitting in Gear Up Espresso, where he and the citizen's committee meet every month, he described in great detail trail projects that could connect the community and showcase the beauty in and outside the city. From an expansion of Steelhammer Road to the long-term "rail to trail" project on the city's railway, Baldwin said the opportunities to build a healthy cycling industry are here.

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Bicyclists meet for coffee and socializing at Gear-Up Espresso in Silverton on Saturday, Jan. 10, 2015. They have formed a citizen's committee with recommendations on how to make Silverton more bike-friendly.(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

And in the process of preparing the report, Baldwin said, he discovered dozens of local cycling enthusiasts already in the community. The committee's community outreach to gauge the interest in cycling projects was met with resounding approval.

"We put up a sign-up sheet in the cafe, down at Main Street Bistro and around town. Within 10 days we had 200 names," Baldwin said. "They wanted to see somebody doing something to facilitate biking in Silverton."

The challenge for cyclists, Baldwin said, is not finding people who agree trails are a good idea, but rather finding the funding. Trail projects cost money and require both assistance and approval from city, county and state officials.

"We need to have some sort of critical mass in order for the city to say yes," Baldwin said, noting that the bike improvements he has helped create in Silverton had garnered wide support from businesses and the cycling community.

"I can't say how much some of these projects are going to cost because it may be we can get many of them done just through cooperation," Baldwin added. "We have some assets in town that we don't even know we can employ yet."

Bob Ambrose is a cyclist in town who first heard about Baldwin's work at the Jan. 5 council meeting. He sat down with Baldwin on Thursday to discuss the bike committee's next steps following their presentation. Ambrose said the benefit of a trail system in Silverton goes beyond the cycling industry.

"It's not just a bike trail, it's a walking trail that connects the community and gives the residential community an outlet," Ambrose said. "Right now, I don't think our parks are well-used; if you go out for a walk, you go walk on a few streets around your house. It's boring."

"The value of these trails is that they can tie the community together," he added.

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From left, Michael Murphy, Ed Barraclough, and Charles Baldwin meet for coffee at Gear-Up Espresso in Silverton on Saturday, Jan. 10, 2015. They have formed a citizen's committee with recommendations on how to make Silverton more bike-friendly.*(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)*

Silverton now offers bike racks in downtown and at the Gear Up Espresso, and will see bike use allowed along the tram road connecting the Pettit property and the Oregon Garden — a decision made by the city council in December. Baldwin said he hopes to see a bike trail extend from a future public park on the Pettit property to the city's other parks.

In the bicycle report, the citizen's committee lists close to 40 organizations that could help fund cycling projects through grants or programs. In addition, Silverton could potentially tap into the Urban Renewal Fund or the Service Development Fund to fund projects that benefit community neighborhoods

And, Baldwin said, there are always other cyclists who might chip in.

"There is that population out there, many bicycle associations, and if we did something that's interesting to them they would want to support it," he said.

Baldwin and the citizen's committee will meet this month on Jan. 20 at 8:30 a.m. at Gear Up Espresso, located at 430 McClaine Street.

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