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Close to Home: Bicycle and pedestrian routes proposed

A meeting to discuss transportation alternatives will be held Thursday at the Union Town Hall.

By DEBORAH SAYER Staff Writer April 22, 2009



Photo courtesy Jane Lafleur
Signs define similar bicycle and pedestrian routes already established in the Camden-Rockport area.

Friends of Midcoast Maine exists to preserve the scenic character of the region's towns while promoting the local economy and healthy practices that cultivate a sense of community.

Since January 2008, the group has been helping communities adopt alternative forms of transportation, working with the Midcoast Regional Planning Commission of Rockland and the

Maine Department of Transportation to help area residents establish a network of bicycle and pedestrian paths leading to key destinations for services and resources.

A workshop on and how residents can get involved is planned for 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Union Town Hall.

"There are many reasons why towns should plan for bike and pedestrian routes," said Jane Lafleur, Friends executive director. "(Our agency's) goal is to help residents make decisions about planning, growth and development issues that make their communities stronger.

"We are in favor of new development, but we also want to prevent sprawl. Many towns allow growth to occur anywhere, but the question is, where does that make the most sense?"

Eric Galant, director of the Mid-Coast Regional Planning Commission of Rockland, works with Knox and Waldo county residents and businesses on land use ordinances and comprehensive plans to develop public documents for future town development.

Galant said the public document is not an ordinance to be voted on but a list of resident recommendations that is recognized by the state and adopted by voters to reflect their choices for their community.

"Our goal is to help educate towns about opportunities not just for recreation and health but to improve their quality of life," said Galant.

Geoff Scott, chairman of the Camden-Rockport Pedestrian Bicycle Pathways Committee, has been an advocate of such projects for seven years, submitting a master plan for a Camden project and is just completing one for Rockport.

"There are some towns that have done some incredible work with this," said Scott. "We're trying to include awareness (about) being safe, enjoying the scenery and getting in touch with your neighbors.

"That's what community is all about -- those moments of connecting with others. That's what pathways do. Maine has one of the larger elder communities in the country. Establishing these pathways gives them a chance to get around and meet others while engaged in their daily routine."

Interested residents are asked to bring in maps of their communities to help identify "traffic generators," frequented by many people, such as school, bank and businesses zones or recreation areas..."places people go to or come from," said Lafleur. "When you start putting those on a map, it makes sense to connect them with a more visible route."

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