

HEAL newsletter article about Swanzey Complete Streets

Adopting a complete streets policy: Lessons learned from Swanzey

In October, the town of Swanzey became the fourth community in New Hampshire to adopt a Complete Streets policy. This small town of 7,300 is being held up as a model for other communities who are striving to provide planning guidelines that support roads designed for all modes of transportation, including bicyclists and pedestrians.

Sara Carbonneau, Swanzey's Director of Planning & Community Development, hopes that Swanzey becomes a model and inspiration for other small towns. Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) worked with both Keene and Swanzey to develop two different Complete Streets models that can be replicated by communities throughout the state.



On August 29, 2015, the Southwest Region Planning Commission and Town of Swanzey put on a "Complete Streets Demonstration" with temporary installations of signage, striping, and other Complete Street features.

Complete Streets are roads designed for safety with everyone in mind, no matter what age and how they want to get around their community. By considering Complete Streets early in the planning process, an existing transportation budget can often incorporate Complete Streets projects without requiring additional funding by re-prioritizing capital improvements and allocating funds to consider overall community mobility. Communities that have adopted Complete Streets report many benefits including more choices for residents to get to work, school, or local businesses; increased physical activity and independence; safer travel for bicyclists and pedestrians; and increased economic activity and a rise in property values.

Since adopting the policy in October, Sara has already heard great feedback from several communities saying: "If Swanzey can do it, we can do it!"

Many HEAL communities are interested in adopting Complete Streets policies, so we took a moment to speak with Sara to find out what helped make it work in Swanzey and what advice she might give to other communities. Here are a few of the highlights:

- **Look to regional planning commissions for resources.** The SWRPC provided funding and assistance throughout the Swanzey Complete Streets initiative, including presentations about Complete Streets, a demonstration, and helping to write the policy.
- **Form a committee that includes as many interested stakeholders as possible.** In

Swanzey, they formed a subcommittee of the Planning Board that also included the public works director and citizens who understood and used the existing sidewalk infrastructure.

- **Allow flexibility in the policy.** Swanzey adopted a voluntary policy that codified what they already wanted to do yet gave the town flexibility in how it allocated funds. This facilitated adoption of the policy by the town's selectmen.
- **Conduct a temporary installation to demonstrate what Complete Streets looks like.** While Sara does say it requires quite a bit of planning and work (which SWRPC helped provide), a demonstration is an excellent opportunity to show the community the benefits of Complete Streets and gain valuable support. Swanzey conducted the demonstration during a large community event, their town barbeque, to ensure good attendance. During their demonstration, they surveyed community members and distributed a petition that encouraged selectmen to adopt the policy.
- **Work with NH Department of Transportation (DOT).** Sara said that even though it is not required for the DOT to work with local municipalities on the design of state roads, they have been receptive to making changes at the local level.
- **Communicate the benefits with different audiences in mind.** The most often discussed benefits of Complete Streets are safety and public health. However, Sara explained that the economic benefits are equally important. For example, an unexpected champion of the Complete Streets policy adoption was a realtor who had seen studies that show that property values increase in communities that follow Complete Street guidelines.

Swanzey joins Concord, Dover, and Portsmouth in adopting a Complete Streets policy. Keene passed a resolution to adopt a policy in 2011, and is in the process of adopting one that was introduced earlier this fall. While several individual communities are conducting Complete Streets studies and initiatives, advocacy efforts have been underway for statewide adoption of a Complete Streets policy by the NHDOT. For more information about Swanzey's policy or the statewide initiative, contact Sara Carbonneau at scarbonneau@town.swanzey.nh.us.