

December 22, 2023

Dear Rockhill Neighbors:

RHA needs your help if we are to prevail in our continuing bike path issue. You should soon receive a postcard from the city alerting you to a meeting at **5:30 PM on January 4, 2024** at the Kauffman Foundation to “provide input on the Gillham Trolley Track Trail Connector Project.” We are asking you to please do two things for your neighborhood:

1. Show up at that meeting prepared to advocate for the plan that 109 of you, a large majority of Rockhill, supported by signing petitions in the spring of this year and that additional others supported by acclimation at our annual meeting earlier in the spring.

2. Send a personal note strongly stating your position to the city officials responsible for deciding where the connector bike path will ultimately be built. This would probably be most effective if sent shortly after the January 4 meeting. (Information on sending your personal note is provided at the end of this document.)

If you are unable to do both of these activities, please do one, as **we very likely have an uphill battle on our hands.**

I have been told many times to keep documents short and simple; however, I know that few of you are totally up to date on this issue. Consequently, if you wish to be updated, I have divided the issue into labeled sections so that you can directly skip to a topic that interests you.

What is the Gillham Trolley Track Trail Connector Project?

There are two established bicycle paths ending near the Rockhill neighborhood’s northeast and south boundaries. The Harry Wiggins Trolley Track Trail path on our south terminates at 51st Street and Brookside; the Gillham Road bike path terminates on our east side at Gillham and Brush Creek Blvd., where Gillham becomes Harrison. Consequently, there is a gap between the termini of these two bicycle paths. The city has decided to bridge this gap by constructing a connector bike path between them, thus the title of this project.

What is RHA’s position on the connector bike path?

Our position is that Cleaver Blvd. be reconfigured to combine both bike path and traffic-calming measures to slow automobile traffic. The original petition signed by most of you stated that the desired reconfiguration should be between Oak and Troost and further specified that the bike lanes be on the north side and that the previously removed automobile parking on the south side be restored. The RHA Board hasn’t voiced an opinion on a specific eastern boundary, although Harrison has often been mentioned, given that the Gillham bicycle path ends only one block north of Cleaver Blvd. at the start of Harrison.

Where are we now and how did we get here, i.e., history?

In July 2023, your signed petitions were presented to the Transportation, Infrastructure and Operations Committee of the City Council.

On August 3, 2023 the City Council approved Ordinance No. 230613, which states that **“collaboration with and support from neighborhood associations and residents is a critical step prior to the installation of mobility lanes,”** i.e., bike paths. It must be noted that the Rockhill Homes Association lies directly between the termini of the two bike paths to be connected. Thus,

according to the ordinance, our support is a **“critical step prior to the installation”** of any bike lanes.

On September 8, 2023, after a previous last-minute cancellation and rescheduling, city officials held an open house in Lens 2 of the Nelson-Atkins Museum. No formal presentations were made; instead, display boards showing numerous different alternatives for a connector bike path were spread around the room. There were many problems with this approach for gaining neighborhood feedback from attendees wandering randomly from one poster to another. Moreover, it should be remembered that the petitions submitted in July had already made our overwhelming opinion perfectly clear anyway. It was problematic that the presenters at some boards were not adequately prepared to accurately describe the connector path plan that had been assigned to them. Further, there was no method for quantifying the random oral feedback volunteered by attendees. Most troublesome, however, was the fact that many people there, perhaps even a majority, were not from Rockhill (see Ordinance No. 230613 above).

On Friday, October 6, 2023, without prior notice of any sort, the city began to lay down the lines for a connector bike path going from Gillham Road up to the top of Gillham Road West and turning south onto the east side of Rockhill Road, going down to and across Cleaver Blvd.

On October 9, 2023 Rockhill contacted multiple city officials demanding that the construction on Rockhill Road and Gillham West be first stopped and then explained. Construction was stopped the following day, but only after all the bike lane lines had been fully laid the entire way between Gillham Road and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., the exact connector plan proposed by the city. Construction has remained “paused” since then.

On October 10, 2023, city officials (Brian Platt, City Manager; Jason Waldron, Transportation Director and Eric Bunch, 4th District Councilmember and Co-founder of BikeWalkKC) met with the Rockhill Board and a few other interested Rockhill residents. The Board began by reiterating its strong support and the overwhelming RHA support for a Cleaver connector. Mr. Platt then apologized for the previous lack of communication, with each of the officials speaking in turn, never seriously acknowledging a Cleaver connector and never explaining why the city had chosen a Gillham West – Rockhill Road connector. After an hour of discussion, during which the Board stated why it was opposed to the West Gillham – Rockhill Road connector and was in favor of the Cleaver connector, the city officials left the meeting with Mr. Platt saying that he would get back to us with more ideas for Cleaver Blvd.

Between October 11 and November 14, 2023, Mr. Platt and the RHA president corresponded periodically, with the latter emphasizing the need for urgency, the current confusingly dangerous situation caused by the lines on Rockhill Road, and RHA’s overwhelming preference for a hybrid traffic-calming / bike path configuration on Cleaver. The former emphasized that the city was working on a solution. During this period, Mr. Waldron and Bunch were co-recipients of all communications, and Mayor Lucas was copied. Fourth District-at-Large Councilmember Crispin Rea, who was new on the City Council, was updated on this issue by the RHA president and began to be included on all communications. The last communication from Mr. Platt on Nov. 14 stated: “Our team had a productive meeting last week to align on which options work best to present to the community for both Cleaver and Rockhill/West Gillham. We will be refining and completing some revisions to these plans and planning a public meeting in the coming weeks to share with you and the broader neighborhood. Will follow up with potential meeting dates soon.” It should be noted that Rockhill, West Gillham and Cleaver were all mentioned by Mr. Platt.

On December 5, 2023 a bound booklet containing copies of the original petitions carefully vetted to eliminate any duplicates was presented at City Hall to the offices of Mr. Platt, Waldron, Bunch and Rea as well as Mayor Cleaver.

On December 8, 2023 an emailed Advocacy Alert from BikeWalkKC was forwarded to me by a Rockhill resident who had received it. This alert to members of that organization gave the date, time and location of the January 4 meeting and contained a hyperlink on how to effectively advocate for a cause. It also urged recipients to “encourage your friends to come to the meeting. Advocacy is a team sport!” (Again, please see Ordinance No. 230613 above.) Some of these individuals did, indeed, attend the first meeting on September 8. So, what is BikeWalkKC going to advocate for? This organization stands for building networks of bike paths; thus, it stands to reason that it would be a high priority for them get a connector built as soon as possible to fill the gap between the Gillham and Trolley Track paths. Even though it is questionable that a majority of their members would actually prefer the troublesome Gillham West – Rockhill Road connector over Cleaver, they may nevertheless advocate for the former solution just to get the gap filled as soon as possible. Their website does have a direct link to the city’s proposed plan for the Gillham West – Rockhill Road connector, but without specifically endorsing it. Ideally, the advocates from this organization would team with Rockhill residents to persuade the city to build the Cleaver connector as early as possible in 2024; however, we do not know what they will advocate.

On December 19, 2023 an emailed notice of the January 4, 2024 meeting was forwarded to me by another resident of Rockhill, who had apparently received it in employment context. This notice was from Bailey Waters, Chief Mobility Officer at KCMO. The recipients of the message were told that “Kansas City is hosting a second public meeting for the proposed Gillham Track and Trolley Track Trail Connector project. Our team took the feedback provided at the first meeting and need additional input for the Emanuel Cleaver Blvd II and Rockhill Road sections of the project. Please find attached a copy of the postcard that has been mailed for distribution to notify surrounding residents and businesses of the upcoming meeting.” You will note two troubling problems in Mr. Waters’ statement: 1) a lack of awareness of the multiple flaws in the first meeting that affected assessment of the quality and source of the feedback (see Sept. 8 above), and 2) the simultaneous inclusion of both Cleaver Blvd. and Rockhill Road. It apparently remains the city’s plan to surround Rockhill with bike paths to the north and west and the urgently needed traffic-calming measures to the south.

As of December 23, 2023 at 10:20 AM the president of RHA has still not been officially told about the January 4, 2024 meeting.

Why did I write that RHA very likely has an uphill battle on its hands?

The overwhelming support of our neighborhood for a Cleaver connector was ignored by the city while simultaneously ignoring Ordinance No. 230613 (see August 3 above) in the process.

The attitude of the city officials who met with the Board on October 10, although defensive, was extremely rigid in not giving a single reason for deciding why a Cleaver connector was inappropriate whereas a Rockhill Road connector was. Those puzzling mysteries remain to this very day.

There will likely be a significant number of advocates at the January meeting who do not reside in Rockhill, such as BikeWalkKC members, and thus may not represent Rockhill’s interests. Although advocates representing different areas and interests of the city are certainly appropriate, it is even more appropriate, based on Ordinance No. 230613, that the thoughts and concerns of RHA residents be given extra consideration, especially given that we are the only residential neighborhood between the termini of the two bicycle paths.

What should my personal letter emphasize?

Often when support letters are requested, a template is supplied and each sender signs the identical letter. I would rather not do that, as I think that doing so is really not significantly different than signing a petition, which you’ve already done. Besides, many of you wrote powerful and moving personal

stories when signing your electronic petitions. Such personal testimonies are of great persuasive value.

Most of the things that I am going to emphasize in my letter will be taken directly from this document:

The communication by the city has been dismal at best throughout this flawed process. On the front end there was no communication, and we were alerted to the connector path only by the sudden appearance of lines on Rockhill Road. On the back end going into the Jan. 4 feedback meeting, we were among the very last of the stakeholders to learn of it.

*Not only was there no prior communication from the city, Ordinance No. 230613 calls for **“collaboration with and support from neighborhood associations,”** neither of which has occurred at all.*

Based on Mr. Waters’ email, decisions were apparently made from feedback gained at the first meeting, which was too poorly organized to meaningfully gauge the quality of any feedback.

Every aspect of the city’s unilateral connector plan has been fatally flawed from the outset. It’s time to admit that, cut losses, start over, and build a Cleaver connector that would please both homeowners and bicyclists!

To whom should my letter be sent and how?

I recommend that your letter be sent to the officials who will be making the operating decision on location of the connector path, who include:

Brian Platt, City Manager brian.platt@kcmo.org

Bailey Waters, Chief Mobility Officer bailey.waters@kcmo.org

Jason Waldron, Transportation Director jason.waldron@kcmo.org

Eric Bunch, Fourth District Councilmember eric.bunch@kcmo.org

Crispin Rea, Fourth District-at-Large Councilmember crispin.rea@kcmo.org

Quinton Lucas, Mayor quinton.lucas@kcmo.org

If you would prefer to send a hard copy of a letter by USPS, that may certainly be done: Name of recipient; City Hall; 414 E. 12th Street; Kansas City, MO 64106.