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Sidewalk study shows Potsdam as tops in traversability

By W.T. ECKERT

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A student uses the crosswalk to traverse Pierrepoint Avenue in Potsdam Thursday. There are three crosswalks in a 1,000-foot section in front of SUNY Potsdam. Christopher Lenney/Watertown Daily Times

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POTSDAM — Village Board members were met with praise and insight regarding the overall findings of a Clarkson University study of the condition of the village's sidewalks and other pedestrian-used structures.

During a Monday night power point presentation, Erik C. Backus, director of the Construction Engineering Management Group at Clarkson University, and William Olsen, an instructor and geographic information system coordinator at the school, talked about the data collection of the process and the findings that followed.

The study, titled Sidewalk Inventory and Analysis for the Village's Complete Streets Policy, was conducted by the Clarkson University Construction Engineering Management Consulting Group, with a goal of creating an inventory of the existing pedestrian structures within the village, including sidewalks, crosswalks, curb ramps, benches, streetlights and signal lights and buttons with a goal to support the village's making the streets and sidewalks accommodating for all users.

Mr. Olsen said the findings determined that 75 percent of the sidewalks were in excellent condition, in part because of all the replacement of curb ramps throughout the village as well as newly marked crosswalks.

"It's a really good number," Mr. Olsen said. "It beats almost all the other villages we worked with over the past couple of summers."

"This is cultural center for the north country and that doesn't happen without good street scape," Mr. Backus said.

There were proposals to have sidewalks installed on Gilmore Street, a portion of May Road and on Maple Street across the street from Stewart's at 26 Maple St.

Additionally, the presentation displayed maps that were created with layers for each pedestrian feature with 41 of the 196 crosswalks suggested as needing replacement.

St. Lawrence Health Initiative Community Coordinator Karen Bage said when the village passed a Complete Streets Policy several years ago, it allowed her organization to work with the community in funding projects including \$36,000 in grant money last summer that helped in sidewalk improvements and in obtaining the mobile traffic signal as well as a fixed speed radar unit.

Funding from the St. Lawrence County health Initiative's Creating Healthy Schools and Communities Program through the state Department of Health was also used for a Sidewalk Inventory and Analysis for the village's Complete Streets Policy.

“There are 26 of these grants across the state and once a year each project is asked to submit a success story,” Ms. Bage said. “This year’s success story from the St. Lawrence Health Initiative was about the pedestrian improvements in Potsdam.”

Following the collection of the data, Mr. Backus and Mr. Olsen told board members there will be an upload of the findings to the Development Authority of the North Country through an Internet Mapping Application. They will assist in a development of a sidewalk improvement plan and they will be doing a presentation during a Nov. 19 North Country Active & Healthy Transportation Network workshop.

The workshop will be held at Clarkson University’s Cheel Campus Center Barben Rooms with a lunch and speakers will range from nationally-renowned active transportation experts and state Department of Transportation officials.

The workshop is free and open to anyone interested in active transportation across the north country. For more information, contact Ms. Bage at (315) 261-4760 x.228 or email her at karen@gethealthyslc.org.

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