

On August 16, 2021, Bike Walk Knoxville staff and volunteers led a walking tour of North Knoxville for local elected officials. We were joined by several current members of City Council, including Charles Thomas (District 5), Janet Testerman (At Large Seat B), and Amelia Parker (At Large Seat C). Several candidates in the upcoming City Primary Election also attended, including Seema Singh (District 3), Lauren Rider (District 4), Jen McMahon (District 4), and Deidra Harper (District 6).

The walk started with crossing Central Avenue, where Bike Walk Knoxville President Dr. Caroline Cooley pointed out that a protected bike lane could have been installed, but instead planters were placed on the right side of the bike lane. However, the new streetscape has narrowed travel lanes, which helps to reduce speeds, and sidewalks have been widened. These features help make the roadway safer and more comfortable for walkers.

The tour continued into the Fourth and Gill neighborhood, which involved crossing Broadway at an intersection without a marked crosswalk. Legally speaking, every intersection is a crosswalk, but drivers often either do not know this or simply disregard it. Thus, crossing can feel very dangerous, especially when design features on the roadway make it easy to drive much faster than the speed limit. On Gill Avenue, Dr. Cooley highlighted pedestrian crossing signs that have been installed, bringing awareness to pedestrians and making navigating the neighborhood by foot much more enjoyable.

The group then experienced two vastly different intersections - one at Broadway, exiting Emory Place to cross to Tyson and the other at Broadway and Central. At the crossing to Tyson Street, there is no crosswalk, and the cars often travel at speeds higher than the 35 mph speed limit. These features make the crossing very intimidating, which might deter pedestrians from walking over to the historic cemetery and local businesses on the other side of the road. Contrastingly, the intersection at Central is well marked, with pedestrian signals and green directional paint for cyclists. The crossing is easy and comfortable, making it simple to get from one point to another.

The walk then concluded at Schulz Brau Brewing Company for a Pint Night benefit to raise funds for Bike Walk Knoxville. It also gave attendees a chance to talk about their hopes and concerns for walking in their communities. Bike Walk Knoxville staff and volunteers also highlighted how walkable communities tend to be more economically productive, and can greatly benefit small local businesses. Discussion focused around safety and connectivity, and how the City can use policy and funding to make Knoxville more walkable for people of all ages and abilities.