

THE TWO RIVER TIMES™

Fair Haven Mayor Upset About Cyclists' Lanes

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Fair Haven Mayor Ben Lucarelli. Photo by Tina Colella

FREEHOLD – Fair Haven Mayor Benjamin Lucarelli is frustrated over his attempts to get a designated bike path throughout most of the Two River area.

Lucarelli has been in discussions with the county Board of Chosen Freeholders—the most recent being on April 22—for his proposal to establish designated bike lanes along county-owned and maintained roadways throughout much of the Two River area. But he says he's getting mixed messages from county government and is frustrated by the lack of progress in the nearly year's time since he's first floated this proposal.

“I'm totally at wit's end,” he said dealing with county officials—especially the county engineering department, which Lucarelli said appears resistant to the idea of installing the lanes, causing Lucarelli and supporters to attend the freeholders workshop meeting last Thursday afternoon to reiterate their belief that this is will be a benefit to the area if it comes to pass.

He's gotten the support of just about all of the members of the Two River Council of Mayors—a coalition of area elected officials who meet regularly to discuss issues of common interest—and for those municipalities to pass supporting resolutions, which the freeholders had asked for, according Lucarelli.

Monmouth County Engineer Joseph Ettore sees it differently. “We want to make sure any bike lanes installed are installed after they've been properly designed,” Ettore countered, “to make sure they're safe and to make sure we comply with current design standards before they're implemented in the field. That is our concern.”

Lucarelli, along with Rumson Mayor John Ekdahl met on Wednesday, April 22, with Freeholders Thomas Arnone and Serena DiMaso to discuss the proposal.

DiMaso and Arnone had previously seemed supportive of the plan “and when we reconvene it's no, no, no,” was Lucarelli's description. “There's always a new issue,” with county officials expressing concern over cost and liability issues, according to the mayor.

DiMaso, on the other hand, maintained “We had a good meeting,” and the freeholders would take the information back to the full freeholder board to eventually formulate a comprehensive plan and go from there. The freeholders and engineering department are using the Ocean County plan as a potential template, DiMaso added.

“It's not just somebody saying make the lanes 11 feet wide, draw some white paint on the ground,” DiMaso said. “That's really where our concerns come from.”

Arnone said last week that the issue is more involved than just painting lanes because it involves on-street parking, trash pick up and leaves and brush pick up as well.

Lucarelli last spring first floated an idea of establishing a connected network of bike lanes largely along county roads, running east from Red Bank, through Fair Haven and Rumson, into Sea Bright, along Ocean Avenue to Monmouth Beach and Oceanport, bordering Long Branch, making its way back to Red Bank.

Lucarelli and other proponents believe that designated lanes offer additional protection to cyclists and pedestrians. One of the events that spurred this effort was a vehicle had struck and killed Fair Haven Borough Councilman Jerome Koch last fall as he was out riding his bike. The area has had an increase in bicycling, for recreation and transportation and this may encourage more, getting people out of their cars—offering a healthy and environmental benefit, Lucarelli and others have argued.

“The safety factor goes up dramatically when you separate bicycles from car traffic,” said Cyndi Steiner, executive director of the New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition, a statewide advocacy organization. Studies have shown that simply by having designated bike lanes, vehicular traffic slows down, making the roadways inherently safer, this week said Steiner, who accompanied Lucarelli to the freeholder workshop last week to voice her support for lanes.

“At the end of the day what it does,” Lucarelli said of the bike lanes, “is it makes it more comfortable for the moms and kids to ride on the side of the road.”

The county is currently finishing up its repaving and milling work on Rumson Road, but will only put the center stripe at this time, holding off on other striping until a plan can be drafted and discussions continue. Work on Ridge Road, another county thoroughfare, will be put off until the fall, to give local and county officials a chance to formulate a plan, according to Ettore and DiMaso.

The cost to install the designated bike path is approximately \$15,000 per mile, based upon county engineering estimates, according to DiMaso.

Lucarelli disputed that cost, saying, “The people I’ve spoken to upfront have said that’s a totally false number.

“All you’re really doing is moving a white stripe over and maybe adding an extra sign,” he countered.

The final cost, whatever the price, would likely have to fall to the municipalities,

DiMaso acknowledged. “At this point in time it wouldn’t be the county,” she said. “We don’t have that in our budget.”

Lucarelli plans to continue to advocate for the proposal, hoping to win the support of the freeholders and work on finding sources to help pay for it, he said.