WEST WINDSOR: Advocates map safest bike routes

By Kristine Snodgrass, Staff Writer
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WEST WINDSOR — Pedestrians looking for a safe route to township schools, shops or the train station can consult an online interactive map designed by a community group.

The West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance rolled out its Safe Routes Inventory map to Township Council at its meeting last week. The nonprofit works to promote bicycle and pedestrian access, education, mobility and safety in West Windsor and surrounding communities.

The map, explained alliance First Vice President Chris Scherer, is a very valuable resource for residents.

Biking advocates have created online maps of West Windsor's safest routes for bicyclists and pedestrians.

"For people who are trying to identify safe routes, they can go to this and figure out how to get from point to point," he said.

Similar to Google Maps, the Web site has an interactive street map of the township. Users can enter an address to zoom into one location, and trace through the map to find a route. Each intersection can be selected to display detailed information on its infrastructure. In some cases, users can even look at a photograph of the intersection.

The presence of hiking trails, multiuse trails, walkways and sidewalks can also be identified on the map.

The map uses data collected last spring, when the alliance, a group of volunteers and township Mayor Shing-Fu Hsueh, walked the streets of the township, completing an inventory of all 199 of the township's intersections.

Information was collected on the deficiencies of the intersections, such as the presence of walk signals or curb cuts. Using this information, and taking into consideration the

proximity of the intersections to schools, transit or retail, the intersections were listed by priority for needed improvements.

The data collection, funded through a grant from McGraw-Hill Co., resulted in a list of the most dangerous intersections in the township, topped by the intersection of Cranbury Road and Princeton-Hightstown Road.

Apart from identifying safe routes in the township, the goal of the map was also to help officials prioritize when it allocates funding for improvements, Mr. Scherer said.

"So when the township wants to address intersections, this gives them an objective reason to focus on one intersection before another," he said.

During the presentation, Mr. Scherer asked the township to allocate funds to the improvement of these intersections.

Township Administrator Christopher Marion said the draft budget for 2009 calls for a six-year capital plan that would allocate $25,000 per year for an annual crosswalk improvement program.

It would fund improvements for engineering, inspection, signage, striping, concrete curbs, handicapped ramps and other improvements, he said.

"This project is in conjunction with other bicycle and pedestrian improvements to further encourage walking and bicycle as a viable form of transportation in the township," he said.

However, Mr. Scherer cited this figure as insufficient, pointing out that the amount doesn't go very far in construction costs.

Council members praised the hard work that went into the maps, which Mr. Scherer said accounted for a total of 1,200 hours of manpower.

"I'm impressed; it is impressive," Councilman Will Anklowitz said after the presentation.

The alliance is also applying for a grant through Google to work on a system that would automate how the information is added to the map, Mr. Scherer said.

Essentially, the system would automate the process that the alliance went through in creating the map, allowing any Web site user to edit the content, he said. A user could take a photograph of an intersection, upload it to the site, and add his own evaluation of the intersection, he said. "It would do all that stuff from beginning to end," he said.

The map can be found online at http://maps.gismap.us/wwbpa/.

The alliance will hold its annual organizational meeting at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in the Municipal Building.