

Evendale, Princeton Schools collaborating on SRTS Plan

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(Photo: Sheila Vilvens/The Community Press)

Getting children to and from school safely is definitely a village effort in Evendale.

The Village of Evendale, (Recreation Department and Police) is collaborating with Princeton City Schools to develop a Safe Routes to School travel plan for Evendale Elementary School, Michele Gottschlich said.

Gottschlich is a pediatric health care specialist, Connecting Active Communities Coalition representative, Safe Routes to School co-leader and Evendale resident. The Safe Routes to School travel plan is a process designed to enhance the safety and health of school kids by encouraging active transportation, she said.

On the morning of Dec. 17, a group of volunteers and staff members from the Village of Evendale, Princeton City School District, the Ohio Department of Transportation and Hamilton County Planning and others conducted a walking audit of the area around Evendale Elementary School as part of the planning process.

The purpose of the audit is to identify obstacles preventing some students from walking to school and issues/obstacles for students who are walkers, Tom Arnold from ODOT said. The audit is one step in creating a SRTS travel plan, which is the focus of the community, he said. ODOT doesn't always participate in the process, but is always willing to be involved.

By establishing a travel plan, the group is also increasing its eligibility for funding opportunities from ODOT and Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments. There are two areas where funding is possible, infrastructure and non-infrastructure, Arnold said. Infrastructure grants provide funding for items including signage, bike racks, and sidewalks. Non-infrastructure grants are for items such as educational materials.

The SRTS initiative is part of the Princeton City School District's ongoing commitment to safety and security, Director of Security for Princeton City Schools Steve Castator said. The objective is for students to arrive to and from school safely.

"This district has made a strong commitment to safety in our facilities," he said. "This is an extension of that."

Woodlawn Elementary recently learned that it will receive \$431,000 from the ODOT Safe Routes to School Grant Program to develop sidewalks at the bottom of Riddle Road leading to the elementary school and Springfield Pike, Castator said. Glendale and Sharonville elementary schools are working on applications parallel to Evendale's effort, he said. The work being done at Evendale will serve as a template for Glendale and Sharonville, Castator said.

The impetus for the overall project is two-fold, Gottschlich said. First, Evendale's bike and pedestrian master plan described priority planning needs associated with key village destinations including the elementary school, she said. The master plan identified grants to support active transportation improvements such as SRTS grants.

Second, Evendale is active within Connecting Active Communities Coalition, a 10-community coalition that collaborates on active transportation/health initiatives, Gottschlich said. Last year the CACC worked with the University of Cincinnati on a transportation project from the SRTS perspective and found many opportunities/concerns that could be addressed by SRTS projects. This resulted in creation of a CACC Princeton SRTS subcommittee.

The evaluation and assessment process for the Evendale Elementary School SRTS plan will continue over the next couple of months with a goal of having a travel plan in place by the March 1 ODOT grant application deadline for STRS projects.

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