

# Bicyclist protection laws seen going unobserved

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The usefulness of traffic circles in slowing down vehicles, a need for better bus service and the importance of improving traffic flow along 25th and 36th streets were all topics of discussion Aug. 14 at a public forum on Bellevue's Complete Streets program.

But what really got the wheels spinning was concern that motorists in Bellevue are not observing laws that protect bicyclists.

Lynn Rollins, a member of the City of Bellevue's Complete Streets Committee, moderated the meeting that was held at Nebraska Medicine-Bellevue and drew about 20 participants.

In response to complaints that laws were not being enforced, Rollins cited the existence of a "three-foot rule," which is a state law that requires motorists passing a bicyclist to maintain a distance of three feet from the bicyclist.

"Virtually nobody has heard of it, but it's been the law for the past three years," he said.

Tom Richards, who represents Bellevue on the Sarpy County Board of

Commissioners and sits on the governing board of the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency, said demand for bicycle safety and access to bicycle-friendly streets is growing.

"There is a real yearning, especially among young professionals," he said. "This is an important component of what they want when they move to a city."

Bellevue established its Complete Streets program in 2010 and was the first city in the state to join a national push to design streets that accommodate forms of transportation other than automobiles.

The goal of Complete Streets is to build streets that support bicycles, pedestrians and such public transportation options as trolleys and even light rail.

Rollins said many of these design features are becoming more common as developers and cities adjust to demand.

Traffic circles, or "roundabouts" are increasingly common, he said, not just because they are relatively inexpensive traffic control devices but also because they slow traffic without resort to

speed bumps.

Overpasses and underpasses are also in demand, he said.

Such devices can be used by pedestrians to cross busy streets or by bicyclists to avoid highways by riding beneath them.

A good example of the latter, Rollins said, is the bicycle trail that passes under Highway 370 from the Twin Creek shopping district.

It travels south under Highway 370 roughly from the China Road restaurant and emerges in the Quail Creek neighborhood.

The plight of pedestrians and bicyclists using 25th Street and 36th Street, where bicycle lanes and sidewalks do not exist, drew concern.

Bellevue City Councilman Don Preister, a founding member of Green Bellevue, said pedestrian and bicycle-friendly features are much more expensive to install after roads and subdivisions are complete.

He called for a proactive approach where such standards are built into city design standards and are installed at the time of construction.

## The three-foot rule

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A detail emerged from a recent meeting called to discuss Bellevue's Complete Streets program.

That detail was a relatively new state law that requires motorists to maintain a three-foot space when passing a bicyclist.

It is apparently a little-known law.

It is nonetheless a sensible law, and we hope readers of our newspaper will now consider themselves informed about it.