

On Thursday, October 19, Bike Walk Knoxville was proud to be joined by neighbors from across Knoxville for a Walk with Elected Officials in West Hills. Two members of City Council walked with us, Vice Mayor Andrew Roberto (Second District) and Seema Singh (Third District), as well as two candidates for City Council, Debbie Helsley (running for City Council At-Large Seat B) and R. Bentley Marlow (running for City Council At-Large Seat B). We were also joined by Knox County Board of Education member Katherine Bike (Fourth District), and Bearden Middle School Executive Principal Michael Toth and West Hills Elementary Principal Dr. Kristen Jackson. Lastly, we would like to recognize all the members of staff from the City of Knoxville and Knox County who came out to walk with us to share their expertise and listen to community concerns.

The walk started at Bearden Middle School, where we looked at the intersection of Middlebrook Pike and West Hills Road that many students rely on for walking to the school. The speed limit on that section of Middlebrook Pike is 45 mph, with flashing signals indicating a school zone speed limit of 25 mph during school drop-off and pick-up times. However, the length of the crossing and the speed of vehicle traffic make it perilous for students and community members walking there, even with the assistance of the crossing guard positioned there during drop-off and pick-up to help folks navigate the intersection safely. The group discussed potential opportunities to address these concerns, such as adding flashing lights to help make the crossing more visible to drivers and slowing speeds on Middlebrook Pike.

The walk continued down Middlebrook Pike, stopping at the intersection with Francis Road/Vanosdale Road. The Bike Walk Knoxville team is thankful to the City of Knoxville Department of Engineering for recently increasing the length of the pedestrian signal at this intersection, allowing ample time for folks to make the crossing. Four-way signalized intersections often come with concerns for left- and right-hook crashes involving pedestrians, as drivers may focus on signals and other vehicles rather than being aware of people making their way through the intersection on foot. A Leading Pedestrian Interval (LPI) can improve safety at these intersections, giving pedestrians a few seconds of a head start when entering the intersection with a corresponding green signal in the same direction of travel. [According to NACTO, LPIs enhance the visibility of pedestrians in the intersection and reinforce their right-of-way over turning vehicles, especially in locations with a history of conflict.](#) The pedestrian signals at this intersection also present ADA concerns due to a lack of easy accessibility due to ground cover, bushes, and placement of the signal button as far as height, orientation, and distance from the sidewalk.

The group turned down Vanosdale Road and walked to Bennington Drive, a street neighbors feel is in desperate need of a sidewalk. While traffic calming measures have been implemented, speeds remain a concern that prevent families and friends from feeling empowered to walk in their community. City Council member Andrew Roberto shared that plans for a sidewalk on Bennington Drive have moved into the design phase, which is an exciting first step towards accomplishing this community goal! The tour also highlighted some other opportunities to bring down speeds on Bennington Drive, such as narrowing vehicle lane width by adding bicycle facilities or removing the painted double yellow lines to increase driver awareness.

After turning onto Sheffield Drive and then back up Vanosdale Road, the tour stopped in front of West Hills Elementary to highlight concerns for students walking to school there. The intersection of Vanosdale Road and Westridge Drive features a crosswalk that is used by students walking to school, but also by folks accessing the Jean Teague Greenway. There is a crossing guard stationed there during school drop-off and pick-up to assist cyclists and pedestrians with the crossing, but at other times, folks are left having to put themselves into the crosswalk hoping that cars will see them and stop or slow down to allow them to cross. Discussion highlighted ways that flashing lights and other design measures can help improve the visibility of the crosswalk and pedestrians and cyclists using it, as well as lowering speeds to improve driver awareness and ability to react.

The tour continued up Vanosdale Road and then back along Middlebrook Pike, stopping again to highlight an upcoming sidewalk project being done in collaboration between the City of Knoxville and Knox County. The proposed sidewalk will run along the southside of Middlebrook Pike from West Hills Road to Vanosdale Road, helping to improve safety and connectivity in the area. The project is expected to move to construction in the Spring of 2024. Bike Walk Knoxville is grateful to the City of Knoxville and Knox County for this important work to benefit walkability for students and neighbors in this area!

The tour concluded back at Bearden Middle School. Bike Walk Knoxville would like to thank all of the elected officials and candidates who walked with us, as well as the principals of Bearden Middle School and West Hills Elementary and all the members of City of Knoxville and Knox County staff who joined us. Lastly, we would like to thank all the neighbors, students and parents, community advocates, and others who joined us to share their thoughts, concerns, and hopes for walkability in West Hills!