

**Patrick Hollister, PartnerSHIP 4 Health**

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Good afternoon Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Patrick Hollister and I'm the Active Living Planner with Partnership 4 Health. Partnership 4 Health is a collaboration of organizations in Becker, Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin Counties dedicated to improving the health of residents of our four counties.

I'm here to talk with you today about a project in the City of Battle Lake in Otter Tail County to illustrate how safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is an important investment for small towns in Greater Minnesota. Battle Lake has a population of 875 people.

Battle Lake's main commercial street is State Trunk Highway 78. Highway 78 was scheduled for a resurfacing in 2013, including downtown Battle Lake. In early 2011, some Battle Lake area residents and I spoke to the Battle Lake Mayor and city staff and MnDOT District 4 officials about the possibility of upgrading the 2013 project from a mere resurfacing to a full reconstruction which would make downtown Battle Lake more pedestrian and bicycle friendly.

To their credit, MnDOT District 4 was willing to make this adjustment on a relatively short time frame and work with the City of Battle Lake on a redesign that would improve safety for people walking and biking downtown. Construction started in the fall of 2013 and finished in the spring of 2014. The project also included many improvements related to handicapped accessibility.

Through a combination of investment from MnDOT due to the state highway reconstruction and an investment by the City of Battle Lake, we have seen some dramatic and tangible benefits to the downtown and community overall.

The benefits are too numerous to list in the time allowed, so I will focus on economic development:

1. As a result of the downtown Battle Lake project and the new Glendalough Trail to nearby Glendalough State Park being completed in 2014, three new businesses have opened up in Battle Lake: a café, a bike rental shop, and a dollar store. For a city of 875 people, these three new businesses are a major economic boost for the community.

2. With the improved safety for walking and biking, we believe that the Downtown Battle Lake project will help attract and retain residents, which is critical to such a small community, especially one that had seen its school enrollment numbers drop in the recent past.
3. Battle Lake is in the heart of “lakes country” in West Central Minnesota. Battle Lake’s economy relies heavily on tourism and it’s important for downtown to be bicycle and pedestrian friendly so those tourists actually stop in town and don’t just drive through on the way to their cabins.

Other important benefits have been the improvement of safety by reducing the crossing distance for pedestrians across Highway 78 downtown, and the traffic calming effect that the wider sidewalks have on passing motorists. As I mentioned earlier, downtown has also become a lot more handicapped-accessible as a result of the reconstruction project.

In conclusion, safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is very important to small towns in rural Minnesota. For many small towns in rural Minnesota, without the state’s financial participation in these projects, the projects would not have been possible, and the small towns would not have received the benefits that these projects have bestowed upon them. Many of the small towns in the counties I work in do not have the resources available to support these strategies to make their communities more walkable and bikeable and the federal funds are inadequate to meet the need, so many of these communities in Greater MN do not reap the benefits of economic development and improved safety.

Thank you for your time.

## City of Battle Lake (population 875) in Otter Tail County, Minnesota

### 2013-2014 Downtown Battle Lake Bicycle and Pedestrian Project on Trunk Highway 78

Due to the state highway reconstruction through downtown Battle Lake, MnDOT paid for 90% of the infrastructure improvements, including the new expanded sidewalks. The City of Battle Lake paid for 10% of the infrastructure costs, including the sidewalks. **This Downtown Battle Lake project would not have been possible without a substantial financial contribution from the State of Minnesota!**

#### BEFORE (2013)



#### AFTER (2014)



#### Economic Development Benefits:

1. As a result of the Battle Lake project and the new Glendalough Trail, three new businesses have opened up in Battle Lake: a café, a bike rental shop, and a dollar store.
2. We believe that the Downtown Battle Lake project will help attract and retain residents, which is critical to such a small community, especially one that had seen its school enrollment numbers drop in the recent past.
3. Battle Lake's economy relies heavily on tourism and it's important for downtown to be bicycle and pedestrian friendly so those tourists actually stop in town and don't just drive through on the way to their cabins.

For more information contact:

Patrick Hollister  
PartnerSHIP 4 Health  
218-329-1809  
[patrick.hollister@co.clay.mn.us](mailto:patrick.hollister@co.clay.mn.us)