



(Sandra J. Milburn/The Hutchinson News) Jennifer Randall uses one of the bike racks along Main Street near Avenue B Monday afternoon to show where the "Public Bike Project" bikes will be parked for people to use downtown.

Community effort steering downtown bicycle project

By Edie Ross - The Hutchinson News - eross@hutchnews.com

Downtown Hutchinson is about to gain a few more residents.

Not business or people-type residents - but brightly colored bicycles that will be available for community use and sharing.

Jennifer Randall, who is helping with what has been called the Public Bike Project, will make the first three bikes available to the public during this week's Third Thursday event.

"I have three tuned up and ready to go," Randall said. "But this isn't my project. This is Hutchinson's public bike project. I just gave it a kick in the booty."

The idea behind it is to make available to the community around 10 bicycles that can be ridden from business to business in the downtown area and left in bike racks for the next person to use.

Be advised, however, they cannot be ridden on downtown sidewalks. City code prohibits bicycles, skateboards and in-line skates "upon a sidewalk within the business district or anyplace within Avenue A Park."

"It's not an original idea," Randall said of the community bikes. "There are other communities that have implemented something like this. It basically just encourages people to bike and also encourages a sense of community in the sense that these aren't any one person's bike - they belong to all of us."

Randall added that she's hopeful that if the project is popular, it also will spur the city to put more bike racks downtown.

The bikes have been painted by local artists so there will be no confusion about whether they belong to someone else or are part of the public bike project.

A laminated "manifesto" - or a disclosure - will be attached to each bike basically alerting riders that they are riding at their own risk and that the bike is community property that should be treated with respect and left in the condition in which it was found.

Randall said she's talked to the city and Jim Seitnater, downtown development coordinator, about the project and hasn't heard any concerns about the logistics of it.

"The main thing people say is that the bikes will get stolen," she said. "And if they do, they do. If someone needs one that bad, OK. We'll replace it and keep trying."

Seitnater said he looks forward to seeing how the project plays out.

"I don't think anyone quite knows how it will work," he said. "We are hopeful that everyone will use them as planned and replace them in the bike racks. I'm sure we'll evaluate the program as it goes on."

The bikes, and the maintenance and artwork on them, have all been donated by various people and businesses, Randall said.

"It's just a fun idea," she said. "No one really wants to be directly responsible for it - it's more a communal thing where everyone steps up to donate what they can. No one is necessarily sponsoring the project. It's just everyone chipping in."

Jade Piros, a member of the Reno County Growth Coalition's vitality committee, called the project an "absolutely great idea."

"Anything that will foster a greater wellness in the community is a good thing," she said. "By providing an avenue for people to come together and kind of encourage each other to be more fit or do more activities outside will make for a healthier community."