



# MasterLink

The Magazine of the Bicycle Touring Club of North Jersey



If it's April...It's Cherry Blossom  
Time. — page 7

It's also Time to Ride

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# MasterLink

## April 2026

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# CLIP NOTES

By Olivia Sharp, President BTCNJ



There's a moment every year when cycling season officially feels back.

The days are longer, the weather is (mostly) cooperating, and suddenly bikes are back on the road, parking lots are filling up, and riders are rolling out together again after months apart—the familiar question returning: "So... how was your winter?"

In other words, BTCNJ is rolling again.

Spring is our reset. Whether you rode all winter or are just getting back into it, this is when we rebuild our miles, reconnect with the group, and settle back into the rhythm of riding together. Early-season rides are about finding your legs again, settling into the group, and building momentum for the months ahead.

For many of us, the Cherry Blossom rides are the unofficial kickoff to the season—and a reminder that some of the best days on the bike aren't about speed or distance, but just being out there. They're the rides where the club comes back together—and where the season really begins.

As we get back into it, this is the time to set yourself up for a strong season.

In this issue, you'll find an article on stretching to help you stay comfortable and avoid early-season injuries. If your bike hasn't had much attention since the fall, our April maintenance clinic is a great opportunity to get it dialed in and learn a few basics that will make your season smoother.

You'll also find a refresher on safe group riding. It's been a long winter, and a quick reset on communication, predictability, and riding etiquette goes a long way as the roads—and group rides—get busier.

Looking ahead, the calendar is filling up quickly. We'll kick things off with a Happy Hour in April, followed by our Members Appreciation Ride in May and the Club Picnic in June.

And then there's the Ramapo Rally.

Registration is open, and now's the time to commit. If you're planning to ride, now's the time to register—the Rally is one of the highlights of the season, and you won't want to miss it.

Just as important: we need volunteers. The Rally only happens because of the members who step up to make it run. There are plenty of ways to help, both before the event and on Rally day—and many members choose to do both.

Head to the website for everything you need—routes, details, registration, and volunteer sign-ups.

However you get involved, you're part of what makes the Rally possible.

Whether you're easing into the season or jumping right back in, you're part of what makes this club special.

Rides are already on the calendar—sign up, show up, and get that first ride of the season under your belt.

Let's get rolling.

# CLUB EVENT CALENDAR



**BIKE MAINTENANCE CLINIC**

● LEARN BASIC BIKE REPAIRS  
● FIX A FLAT TIRE  
● KEEP YOUR BIKE IN TOP SHAPE!

**SIGN UP NOW - SPACE IS LIMITED**

The graphic features a red road bike on a blue repair stand, surrounded by various tools like a wrench, screwdriver, and a flat tire. The background is blue with gear icons.

BTCNJ is hosting a Bicycle Maintenance Clinic for members on **April 30 at 7:00 PM** at the Ridgewood Public Library—led by longtime member and all-around bike whisperer, Rich DeMair.

Rich has been part of BTCNJ since 1996 and has ridden in countless club events. What started as a hobby of building his own bikes turned into something much bigger—he’s refurbished and donated over 5,300 bicycles to 15 charities and people in need. (Yes, really.)

Whether you’re new to cycling or just tired of being “that person” with the mechanical, this clinic will give you the confidence to handle the basics and keep your ride rolling. We’ll cover flat repair, brake and derailleur adjustments, cleaning and lubrication, bike part identification, what to carry in your seat pack, and more—plus plenty of time for questions.

Spots are limited to just 15 participants—sign up on the BTCNJ website to reserve your spot before it fills up.



**HAPPY HOUR!**

**APRIL 9TH  
7PM - 10PM**

The graphic shows two glasses of beer on a table with bicycles in the background under a cherry blossom tree.

**April 9th — Happy Hour — Miller's Ale House  
(sign up on our website)**

**April 30th — Maintenance Clinic — 7:00pm  
Ridgewood Library (sign up on our website)**

**May 9th — Member Appreciation Day - rain date May 16th  
(more details to come on our website)**

**June 20th — BTCNJ Annual Picnic**

**August 30th — Ramapo Rally**



**RAMAPO RALLY**  
RAMAPORALLY.COM



6 Beautiful Routes,  
12, 25, 50, 62, 100 and 125 miles

- Customize Your Route With Short Cuts
- 4 Month BTCNJ Club Membership\*
- Fully Stocked Rest Stops
- Breakfast and Lunch
- GPS & Cue Sheets
- SAG Support
- \*Non Members Only



Rally preparations are in full swing!  
Even though spring is barely here, we are already working on multiple tasks to hold our 49th Ramapo Rally on August 30th.

Registration platforms are open. If you're going to ride the Rally this year, register now before the price goes up again in May.

Permits for Campgaw and rest stops are in place and many volunteer positions are starting to fill up.

Print media are in place including membership cards, two Rally cards, and a Rally poster. These will be distributed to bike shops, delis, bakeries, and other favorite stops. By the way, we could use several volunteers to help distribute cards over our cycling footprint.

Sponsorship efforts are starting to pay off with Vaccaro, LMNT, Athletic Brewing, Spine and Health all returning so far. Numerous mailings have targeted healthcare, finance, Subaru, and even Curly's ice cream! And look out for more info on the 'Give me 4 feet' jerseys that might be available at the Rally!

We've been busy! Help make this Rally a success! — *Chuck White*



# TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS

Henry Abderhalden	Kinnelon	NJ	Antonio Radhames	Paterson	NJ
Bill Berkowsky	Chappaqua	NY	Isabel Herrera	Fort Lee	NJ
Dery Estrada	Fairview	NJ	Kelvin Kim	Palisades	NJ
Otniel Fernandez	Paramus	NJ	Carl Nagy-Koechlin	Dorchester	MA
Hannah Frey	Ramsey	NJ	Ben Rush	Ridgewood	NJ
Diane Gorrens	Glen Ridge	NJ	Alexander Sanchez	Clifton	NJ
Justin Green	Boulder	CO	Mohan Sunkara	Rockaway	NJ
			Margaret White	Madison	NJ

# BTCNJ Tour Schedule

Tours are filling fast and several are already closed or waitlisted — see below for what's still available, then head to the website for full details and instructions on how to sign up.

Ride Name	2026 Dates	Tour Leader	Email	Cost*	Status
New Paltz Gravel	May 21-25	Lou Schleifer	<a href="mailto:Lou185bw@gmail.com">Lou185bw@gmail.com</a>	\$445	Open
20th Annual memorial Day W/E Tour	May 22-25	Linda Krauss	<a href="mailto:lkrauss@att.net">lkrauss@att.net</a>	\$565	Opening for one couple and a single female or male
Wonders of Eastern Pennsylvania (Philadelphia Tour)	June 5-7	Tom Wieser	<a href="mailto:tom.wieser@outlook.com">tom.wieser@outlook.com</a>	\$360	Three rooms free and space for a single female
Chamber Music, Charlemont, MA	July 30-Aug 2	Jane Porges Jerry Szubin	<a href="mailto:thejerry88@gmail.com">thejerry88@gmail.com</a>	\$200	Open
Pioneer Valley Tour Hadley, MA	Aug 21-23	Joan Brickman Don Schlenger	<a href="mailto:joanbbiking@gmail.com">joanbbiking@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:don.schlenger@gmail.com">don.schlenger@gmail.com</a>	\$330	Open
Amagansett, NY	Sep 18-20	Robert DeMair	<a href="mailto:robertdemair@gmail.com">robertdemair@gmail.com</a>	\$295	Opens for Email Sign-up at 8PM 4/6 - 4/8
Cape Cod - Boston (Point to Point)	Oct 3-11	Rich Brookler Debbie Ungerleider	rbrookler@yahoo.com dlynunger@yahoo.com	\$1,300	Waitlisted
XNHAT+ Bikepacking New Hampshire	Oct 5-9	Avrin Slatkin Jerry Szubin	aslatkin@hotmail.com thejerry88@gmail.com	\$550	Waitlisted
* All costs are PPDO			PPDO = Per Person Double Occupancy		<b>MasterLink</b> 6

# 50th Essex County Cherry Blossom Festival coming soon

by Robert DeMair

I have been a member of BTCNJ since 1993 and it is hard to believe that I first saw the cherry trees in Branch Brook park just two years ago. So, what do I know about Branch Brook Park or cherry trees? Absolutely nothing. That is why I had to refer myself to a couple of online articles to learn about the subject myself and hopefully allow the reader to get some new information about it.

Branch Brook park is an Essex County park located in the North ward of Newark. Before I get to writing about the cherry trees a little history is in order. The area was an army training ground during the Civil War. Frederick Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, the designers of Central Park proposed the northern area known as Old Blue Jay Swamp as the site for a park. However the New Jersey legislature did not approve funds for the project until 28 years later when only a third of the original acreage was available for twice the cost. The original park was only 60 acres and the swamp was converted into a lake. Due to the generosity of wealthy Newark families such as the Ballantines, the park reached its current size of 360 acres in the 1920's.

2,000 cherry trees were a gift in 1927 by Caroline Bamberger Fuld. The Park is now home to over 5,300 trees in 18 varieties of the Japanese flowering variety. This collection is the largest in the country. The first time I saw them I wondered if they bore fruit. The answer is no. Below I have a list of flowering and fruiting cherry trees. Currently the Kwanzan variety are in full bloom. The primary species in the park is the Sakura variety which is expected to bloom during April.

for more information about park activities including bicycle races, running events and family day select this link:

<https://branchbrookpark.org/cherryblossoms.html>



The Ballantine Gates on the East side

### Flowering

- Kwanzan
- Yoshino
- Sakura
- Okame
- Mount Fuji
- Tai-Haku
- Shiro-Fugen
- Autumnalis

### Fruiting

- Bing
- Ranier
- Montgomery
- Stella
- Black Tartarian
- Royal Ann
- Sweetheart
- Lambert

# Stretches for Cyclists\*

by Gail Bodin Giovanniello

Often, I hear cyclists often say, "I need to stretch more." As a Pilates instructor, my mind thinks, probably, but when and how you stretch is a key factor.

To begin, let's discuss the cycling position. Cyclists sit and move in the Sagittal plane for hours. The head is often pitched forward, flexing the neck and the spine is in flexion, so the shoulders are often elevated. The shoes aren't a picnic either, keeping the feet locked so the ankles and calves are tight because most likely, the foot is in a slight plantar flexion as well.

The stretches I have chosen to share are antagonists to cycling. Static stretching should be done when the muscles are warm so best after a ride or warming up the body with squats, jogging in place for a few minutes or the like. Hold the stretches for ten seconds and take at least one breath in each position.

**Full body stretch:** We do not do this enough! This stretch can also be done lying down. Ground the feet and reach up with the arms. Elongate the body in both directions and take a breath.

**Side reach:** Reach over as far as you can. This will stretch the lateral hip and lumbar as well as the shoulder girdle. Same as above. Elongate and take a breath. You can admit,



Full Body Stretch



Side Reach

\* Always consult a physician before starting any exercise program

# Stretches for Cyclists

**Open Leg Squat:** This stretch opens and releases the hip joints, stretches the adductors, knees and ankles. Press the thighs out a bit, release the heels back and sit in the position. If you cannot get all the way down, use the hands instead of the forearms.

Open Leg Squat



**Sphinx with bent knees:** Start with straight legs, press into the forearms while sending the breastbone up and forward. \*Keep the lowest rib on the floor to avoid shortening the low back. Pull the abdomen in and stretch the legs away. Bend the knees to add the quads! Keep the work as above. Bend and straighten a few times.

Sphinx with Bent Knees



**Hamstring & Calf:** I prefer this position for this stretch and I like to keep the opposing leg bent. It keeps the pelvis anchored into the mat, therefore, allowing the leg to be fully rooted into the hip joint. This may give a stretch to the surrounding pelvic muscles as well. (Bonus:) Reach strongly through the heel and pull all the toes back toward the knee. I recommend stretching with a strap, Yoga belt, or other taut item and not something that gives like a latex band.

Hamstring & Calf



**The Runner's Lunge:** Most people think Hip Flexor when doing this stretch but it is so much more. The medial Quad crosses the hip joint as well, so after sitting for a prolonged period of time, this stretch is key! You may also experience a stretch to the hamstrings, glutes, and back. Keep the front foot forward of the knee, the abdominals in, and lift the chest a bit.

Runners Lunge



Gail Giovannello Bodin has been teaching fitness and Pilates in NYC for over thirty years. She is the founder of Mind Your Body, an Upper East Side Pilates studio where she teaches over 15 clients weekly, offers group classes, and employs and trains 20 aspiring instructors. Mostly, this is why she is a Cycling Weekend Warrior. Happy Stretching!!



# CAPTAIN'S CORNER



As we head into spring, it's great to see the ride schedule filling up again. With warmer days and longer daylight, this is the time of year when we should start seeing a strong variety of rides led by multiple Ride Leaders.

As we get back into the swing of things, here are a few reminders when posting a ride:

- Be clear about pace. Please provide as much detail as possible about the expected pace. If the terrain is flat and you expect to average the flat pace for the category, be sure to mention that in your description.
- Match the category appropriately. If you expect the pace to exceed the posted category—and the route isn't flat—please list the ride in the next higher category. This helps set proper expectations for riders.
- Include key ride details. Let riders know where the stops are and approximately what mile they occur. Also, feel free to highlight anything interesting along the route—scenic views, landmarks, or notable challenges.

As a refresher, you can review the Ride Leader Certification video or the PowerPoint for the video at any time.

<https://vimeo.com/945865796>

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1yl1vdCynGZbqoaL1MO\\_nl95DYAPkPrYa/edit?slide=id.p1#slide=id.p1](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1yl1vdCynGZbqoaL1MO_nl95DYAPkPrYa/edit?slide=id.p1#slide=id.p1)

Finally, a note to our 200+ Ride Leaders: if you don't see the ride you'd like to do on the schedule, please add it yourself. The more variety we offer, the better the experience for everyone. Let's not rely on just a handful of leaders—our strength as a club comes from broad participation.

Looking forward to a great season ahead—see you out on the road... or, in my case, since I am temporarily sidelined at the coffee stop.





*By Amy Avitabile, Don Schlenger, and ChatGPT*

Riding a bicycle can be a great way to stay healthy and enjoy the outdoors, but it's important to take safety precautions to prevent accidents. Here are some tips to help keep you safe while riding your bike:

**Always wear a helmet\*:** A helmet is the most important piece of safety equipment you can wear while riding a bike. It can prevent serious head injuries in the event of an accident. If you are in an accident and have hit your head, you should replace your helmet before your next ride.

**Follow the rules of the road:** Bicycles are considered vehicles and must follow the same rules of the road as cars. This includes obeying traffic signals, stopping at stop signs, and riding with traffic.

**Stay visible:** Wear bright clothing to make sure

drivers can see you. Add extra visibility with neon socks, shoes, or gloves - any part of you that moves will enhance visibility with bright colors.

Use a white flashing light in the front of your bike and a red flashing light on the back at all times - day and night.

Use proper hand signals (the same ones you learned in Driver's Ed.): Signal your turns and stops so other drivers know what you're doing (check out the hand signals article.)

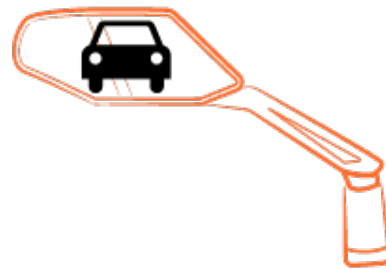
Constantly scan your surroundings for potential issues. Assume drivers don't see you, particularly if you don't see their eyes; even if you do make eye contact don't fall prey to "Looks but doesn't see."



Use a handlebar, glasses, or helmet mounted mirror to help you see the traffic behind you. Additionally, you can invest in a radar device, like the Garmin Varia, to alert you to traffic from behind.



Stay alert, always be aware of your surroundings, and watch for potential hazards like potholes, gravel, or parked cars that could open their doors.

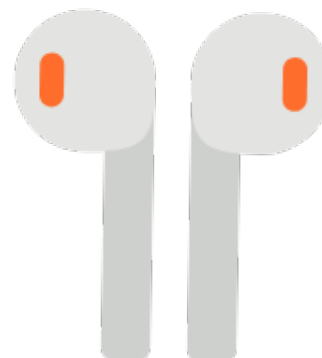


Don't be distracted: no texting, listening to music,\* or using anything that distracts you by taking your eyes, ears, or mind off the road and traffic. And never ride under the influence of drugs or alcohol.



Keep your bike in good condition: Regularly check your brakes, tires, and other parts of your bike to make sure they're in good working order.

Be cautious at intersections: Intersections are one of the most common places for accidents to occur. Make sure you're visible and follow traffic rules. Know where to position yourself and when to "take the lane" at intersections.



Consider taking a bike safety course. Many communities offer bike safety courses that can help you learn more about safe riding practices and rules of the road.

By following these tips, you can enjoy riding your bike while staying safe on the road.

\* BTCNJ ride requirement.



*By Amy Avitabile, Don Schlenger, and ChatGPT*

Keeping others safe while riding a bicycle is just as important as keeping yourself safe. Here are some tips to help you ensure everyone's safety while riding in a group:

**Ride predictably:** Avoid sudden movements or swerving. When you ride predictably, other road users can anticipate your movements and adjust their own behavior accordingly.

**Call out all obstacles in your path:** When riding in a group, ensure the entire group audibly ECHOS call outs from the front to the back and visually MIRRORS the warning to the last rider. When visually indicating obstacles, raise your arm high enough so your gesture is clearly seen by more than just the person behind you.

From the back of the group, verbally call out when cars are approaching by saying "Car back." ECHO "car back" from the last rider to

the front so all riders are aware.

**Use hand signals:** Signaling your turns and stops with hand signals lets other road users know what you're planning to do, and helps them anticipate your movements. (check out the hand signals article.)

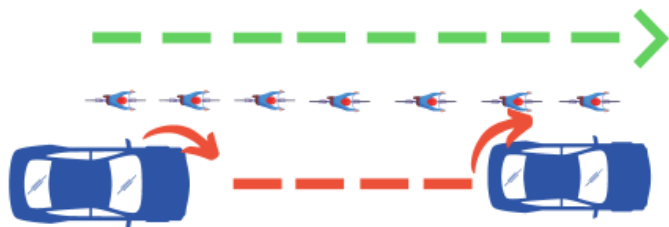
**Give warning when passing:** If you're passing a pedestrian or another cyclist, give them a clear warning by calling out "On your left" or ringing your bell. This will help prevent surprises and avoid collisions. Do not pass other cyclists on the right.

**Make sure drivers see you:** Don't fall prey to "Looks but doesn't see" - assume the driver does not see you. Be wary of tinted windows.

**Be cautious at intersections:** Intersections are one of the most common places for accidents to occur. Make sure you're visible and follow traffic rules.

Hold your line: Execute maneuvers smoothly. Scan first to ensure it is clear and safe before changing line of travel.

## HOLD THE LINE



Focus on what is going on around you! Don't let your mind wander! Do NOT stare at the wheel in front of you.

Ride one full bike length behind the person in front of you.

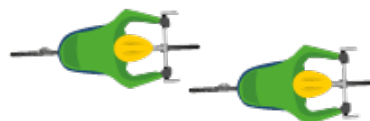
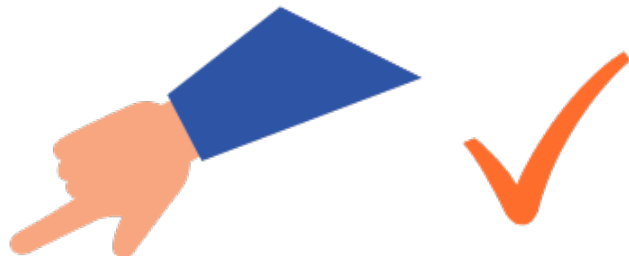
The best and safest place to ride is directly behind the person in front of you, not out to the right or left, which blocks other rider's visibility.

Look at the road 2-3 riders ahead.

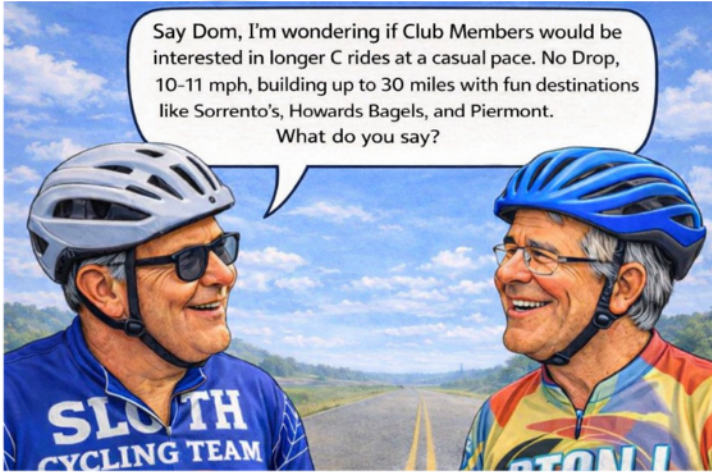
Never overlap your front wheel with the rear wheel of the rider in front.

Keep your bike in good condition: Regularly check your brakes, tires, and other parts of your bike to make sure they're in good working order. A well-maintained bike is less likely to cause an accident.

By following these tips, you can help ensure everyone's comfort and safety while riding your bike in a group. Remember to always be aware of your surroundings and watch for potential hazards.



# Ready For ExCCCelent C rides this summer?



Thanks for reading, We really enjoy our C rides and the people who make them so great. We want to hear your thoughts.



See you on the road,  
Steve and Dom

Dom: [djmancuso@hotmail.com](mailto:djmancuso@hotmail.com)  
Steve: [skfirth66@gmail.com](mailto:skfirth66@gmail.com)

## BTCNJ Executive Board Meeting

Date: March 2, 2026

The meeting, held virtually on Zoom, was called to order by Olivia Sharp at 7:00pm

### Present:

Olivia Sharp, President

David Goldstein, Past President

Avrin Slatkin, Vice President

Joyce Haddad, Secretary

Lou Schleifer, Tours

Sharon Hurwich, Publicity

Marc Soloff, Special Events

Keith Schlanger, Rides Captain

Chuck White, Rally Chair

Regina Bueno, Membership Chair

Robert DeMair, MasterLink Editor

David Pawlyk, WebMaster

Anastasia Conlon, Advocacy & Safety

### Absent:

Len Ruvolo, Treasurer

## Club Jerseys

Olivia began the meeting asking Lori Loebelsohn for an update on the ride leader jerseys. Pactimo is working on 2 designs, "Blue Smoke" and "Wave". Blue Smoke is ready for production. We are waiting for the final proof for Wave since there were some issues with the colors. Hopefully they will have the final by Wednesday and the jerseys ready by mid-April /early May. In the meantime, the club store will remain open until March 16th. They already have received 23 orders.

## Rides Captain's Report

Keith stated that there were only 9 rides in February and 6 virtual rides. The wintry weather impacted these numbers. Virtual rides can still be posted, but points are only rewarded from December to March.

## **Treasurer's Report**

For the two months ending February 28, 2026, the club realized a Net Operating Loss of \$14,224. This is a typical result for the early months of the year. In 2025, the club had a Net Loss of \$17,872 for the same period. These results are attributable to front-loaded expenses including all insurance premiums for the entire year. This year's two-month loss was lower than last year's due primarily to the receipt of a \$5,000 Rally sponsorship from the Steve Vaccaro law firm. Liquid assets totaled \$100,167 compared to \$95,538 for the same period last year.

## **Event Planning and Club Activities**

The group discussed planning for several upcoming events. They agreed to rename the New Member ride: "Member Appreciation" ride and scheduled it for May 9th (with a rain date of May 17th). The picnic will be held on June 20th at Pascack Brook Park. The permit application has already been accepted for that date. Marc Soloff presented some new ideas for the anniversary party. Olivia and Marc are exploring alternatives to the Indian Trail Club and brought up changing the theme of the prom and the dates. Avrin is coordinating the March 12th membership meeting with Ride with GPS. The meeting will start promptly at 7:00. After Dillon speaks there will be a Q and A and then Bruce White will speak. This meeting will be held live, virtual and open to non-members. The April Happy Hour will be held at Miller's on April 9th. They will be offering an assortment of appetizers. A decision hasn't yet been made as far as what the cover charge will be. The group decided not to hold general membership meetings in May or June due to existing club events. They also discussed plans for upcoming club activities, including a potential bike maintenance clinic.

## **E-Newsletter**

The team discussed the April (Master Link) E-Newsletter, with Olivia suggesting it focus on welcoming back members to cycling after the last few months of no riding and reinforcing safety practices. Gail Bodin will write an article about the importance of stretching. Information about the Branch Brook Cherry Blossom Festival will also be included since its celebrating its 50th anniversary from April 4-19.

## **Tours and Membership Outreach Planning**

The team discussed several topics related to tours and membership outreach. Lou will follow up on the Adirondack tour. Anastasia agreed to review and repurpose existing safety articles for the website. There was discussion about analyzing member survey data. Regina presented new postcards and email outreach materials for bike shops to attract new members. They will be sent to approximately 25-30 bike stores in the North Jersey area.

## **Publicity**

The team discussed publicity responsibilities with additional emphasis on social media. They discussed bringing in a volunteer to help with social media, though they noted the challenge of finding the right person. It was suggested that the volunteer may be more motivated if incentive

points were earned. The group also discussed creating written documentation for various roles and responsibilities, with Olivia suggesting this would help with knowledge transfer and contingency planning.

### **Rally Promotion and E-bike Advocacy**

Chuck presented the updated Rally postcards to be distributed to bike stores and related businesses. Its final design will be ready for production soon. He reported that pricing has been set and permits are in place. He will continually be seeking out new sponsors and urge members to do the same. Rally registration opened for members on March 1st and will open for non-members on March 15th. He informed the group that the volunteer sign up will be available on the club website by March 15th and emphasized the need to get more volunteers that are able to do heavier lifting. Lastly, the group discussed a potential advocacy effort led by David Schwartz to meet with representatives about e-bike legislation and some of the inequities in the law. Anastasia informed us that The New Jersey Bike/Walk Coalition (NJBWC) is having their summit on March 7 in Plainsboro Township. The new e-bike law is likely to be brought up, since they are lobbying to have it more e bike friendly.

The next board meeting is scheduled for April 6.

The meeting was adjourned by Olivia Sharp at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Haddad, Secretary