



WalkBoston

Walkability Assessment Report Galvin Middle School, Wakefield June 11, 2012

WalkBoston conducted a walkability assessment in the area of Wakefield, Massachusetts near the Galvin Middle School. After a brief discussion on pedestrian safety issues near the school and an explanation of how the assessment would be conducted, the group carried out an on-the-street audit of the pedestrian facilities in the area, with an emphasis on the routes students use to walk between the school grounds, downtown Wakefield, and popular pick-up and drop-off locations.

One WalkBoston staff member, three MassRides staff members, two parents of Galvin Middle School students, one Melrose resident, Wakefield's town planner, and Galvin Middle School's vice principal participated in the assessment. The event was organized by Melrose-Wakefield Mass in Motion coordinator Kara Showers, who also participated.

Galvin Middle School and Downtown Wakefield

Galvin Middle School is situated in the central part of Wakefield between a residential and commercial area. The school and Downtown Wakefield are within easy walking distance of one another. According to Galvin's vice principal, many of the older students at the school frequent the downtown area on foot. Parents and school staff have expressed some concern about safety and the pedestrian accommodations between the school and the downtown business district.

The areas assessed include the length of street that abuts the school grounds, and, to the west intersection at street, all the way to street. To the east of the school, we assessed the area of Main Street into Downtown Wakefield as well as Armory Street. Together with the aforementioned participants, we documented the following issues:

Overall Assessment:

The walking route from Dacey Field to the campus is reasonably walkable since there are sidewalks along the entire route and there are no wide roads that have heavy volumes of fast-moving traffic for pedestrians to cross. The sidewalks are an adequate width for a low-density suburban area, but there is (with few exceptions) no buffer between the sidewalk and vehicular travel lanes. Add to that, vehicles traveling along Lincoln Street have been observed by participants to regularly travel at speeds in excess of the 35 MPH speed limit.

1. Observation: Crosswalks along school grounds lead into driveways, missing ramps

Many of the crosswalks that connect the sidewalk on the east side of Main Street with the sidewalk adjacent to the school grounds on the west side of Main Street either lead into the school driveway, or they are missing curb ramps, or they are not aligned with existing curb ramps.

Recommendations:

- Short-term/small-investment: Reduce the effective width of the travel lanes, which are approximately 12 feet wide, by painting a white line at least 1 foot in from the curb, thus visually reducing the travel lanes to 11 feet (or less). This is nothing new: there is a hardly-visible, faded white line that once existed on this stretch of Lincoln Street. There currently exists a more recently painted white line on a small section of Lincoln Street near the campus.
- Long-term/large-investment: Rebuild a wider sidewalk between Dacey Field and the campus, with the walk zone separated from the roadway with a grass buffer. This buffer not only discourages walking close to the travel lanes; it would also keep plowed snow from being piled on the walk zone. According to the National Center for Safe Routes to Schools:



THE NARROW SIDEWALK ALONG LINCOLN STREET IS UNCOMFORTABLY CLOSE TO THE VEHICULAR TRAVEL LANE.

“Sidewalks with a width of eight to ten feet or more should be built where there is no sidewalk buffer along an arterial street and along roads adjacent to school grounds where large numbers of walkers are expected.”

2. Observation: Intersection of Winterberry Drive and Lincoln Street allows for fast turning movements.

The intersection of Winterberry Drive (a residential street) and Lincoln Street, has turning radii much in excess of what is needed on a residential two-lane street with limited local traffic.

Recommendations:

- Short-term/small-investment: Add a crosswalk and “Children Crossing” signage at this intersection to indicate to motorists that children use this route to get to and

from school. Also, “narrow” the width of Winterberry Drive by painting white lines a few feet in from each curb

- Medium-term/moderate-investment: Install planters or barrels at the corners to create a narrower turning radius on both sides of Winterberry Drive.
- Long-term/large-investment: Re-engineer the intersection with narrower turning radii.



WINTERBERRY DRIVE IS VERY WIDE, WHICH ALLOWS FAST TURNING MOVEMENTS.

3. Observation: Vehicles travel in excess of the posted speed limit on Lincoln Street

Recommendations:

- Short-term/Small-investment: Re-painted white fog lines (see Observation 1) will slow traffic somewhat by narrowing the travel lanes.
- Medium-term/moderate-investment: Electronic radar speed limit signs (also called changeable message signs or dynamic speed displays) that display vehicle speeds in real time have been proven to calm traffic by making drivers more aware of their speeds and making them think they’re being monitored.
- Long-term/large-investment: Add a grass buffer and plant trees. Vertical elements like trees help lower vehicle speeds.

4. Street furniture partially blocks sidewalks within the School Zone

Utility poles and mailboxes narrow the effective width of the sidewalk on Lincoln Street between the campus’ main entrance and the pedestrian entrance. These obstacles create potentially hazardous conditions, especially for those who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids. According to the US Department of Transportation’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Information Center:

“Sidewalks need to be kept clear of obstructions and should be promptly repaired when damaged. Wider sidewalks should be used closer to schools where larger groups of students are walking.”

Furthermore, mounting mailboxes in large wood-framed boxes (pictured) or large buckets filled with stones violates Chapter 125-4 of the Town of Franklin Code

§ 125-4. Obstructing streets and sidewalks. No person shall place any object in or upon any public street or sidewalk so as to obstruct travel thereon or to create a risk to public health or safety.

Recommendations:

- Short-term/small-investment: The Town of Franklin should work with residents whose mailboxes block the sidewalks to devise an alternative mailbox mounting technique that keeps the walk zone clear and eliminates the need for large weighted devices.
- Short-term/small-investment: Expand the sidewalk with asphalt around utility poles. This appears to have been done at one point along Lincoln Street (pictured).



EXPAND THE SIDEWALK WITH ASPHALT AROUND UTILITY POLES.



MAILBOXES SHOULD NOT OBSTRUCT THE SIDEWALK. THE TOWN SHOULD WORK WITH RESIDENTS TO FIND ANOTHER WAY TO MOUNT MAILBOXES THAT ALLOWS FOR SAFE PEDESTRIAN PASSAGE.