



## **Sector 4 Public Safety Walk Assessment Chelsea, MA**

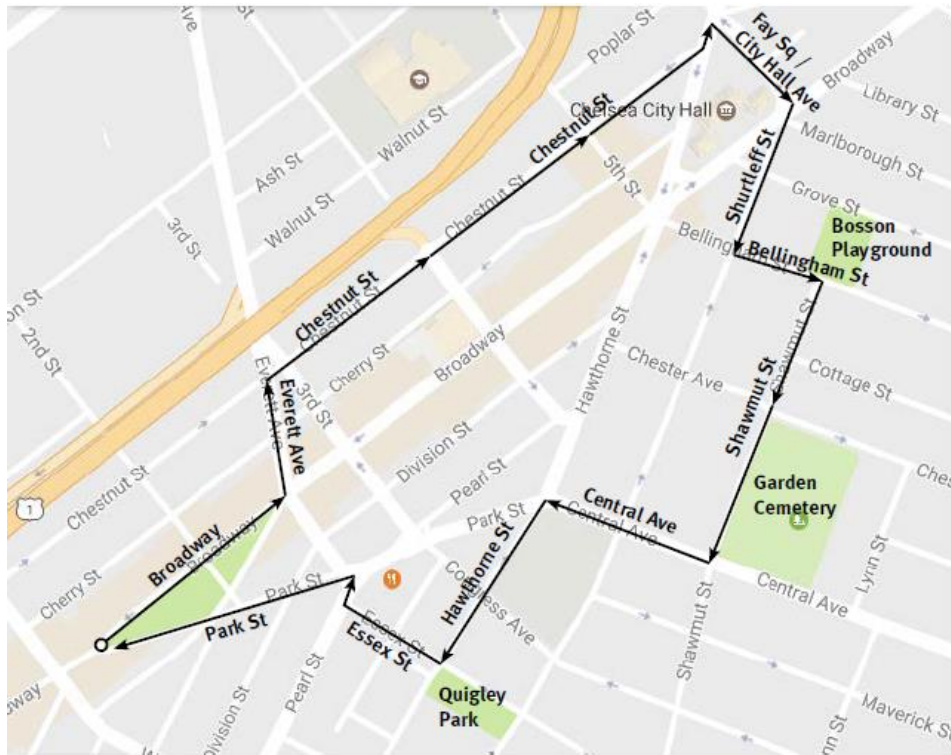
May 31, 2017

*Sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Mass in Motion Program*

## Walk Assessment Overview

On May 31, 2017, WalkBoston conducted a walk assessment in the Sector 4 area of downtown Chelsea, with support from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Mass in Motion program. Chelsea is undergoing a wave of urban revitalization, yet long-standing community concerns about crime and public safety persist, and many poorly designed intersections create dangerous conditions for people walking, biking, taking transit, and driving. The goals of the walk assessment were to examine these issues related to public and traffic safety and to recommend improvements to the local built environment that create safer walking conditions for everyone. Participants included staff from WalkBoston and The Neighborhood Developers, Chelsea Police officers, and members of the Sector 4 Community Action Team and the Youth Opportunity Task Force.

The walk assessment complemented several ongoing revitalization initiatives in the City of Chelsea. The City is currently leading a Re-imagining Broadway effort “to develop strategies to improve access and mobility for all users to downtown” (see <https://www.reimaginingbroadway.net> for details). Since downtown Chelsea’s main thoroughfare of Broadway is receiving significant attention through this project, the walk assessment focused on many of the streets surrounding Broadway to address broader safety and connectivity issues. In addition, the walk assessment’s goal of addressing perceptions of public safety was closely aligned with the City’s new Downtown Taskforce objective of “seek[ing] to better coordinate the resources of downtown stakeholders to remove persistent public safety and health concerns in our downtown area.” Finally, the City’s economic development initiative Chelsea Prospers recently completed a survey of areas in downtown Chelsea where street lighting can be improved, which again relates to neighborhood concerns about safety. Coordination between all these efforts will create a better walking environment for all Chelsea residents.



*The walking route for the Sector 4 walk assessment, which focused on streets surrounding Broadway in downtown Chelsea.*

Over the course of the walk assessment, which started and ended at the Chelsea Police Department on Park Street, participating stakeholders identified a number of community concerns. These included the lack of lighting on streets and in parks, litter and lack of trash pickup, and wide intersections with inadequate pedestrian crossings and high traffic speeds. Key recommendations that emerged from the discussion, which are described more at length in subsequent sections of this report, included the following:

- Create a comprehensive local pilot focused on street lighting, neighborhood beautification and traffic calming
- Improve street lighting along key pedestrian corridors and at recreational areas
- Explore strategies for safer pedestrian crossings and traffic calming at key intersections

### **Create a comprehensive local pilot focused on street lighting, neighborhood beautification and traffic calming**

The Chelsea Downtown Taskforce brings together the City's police, inspectional services, public works and economic development departments on a weekly basis to respond to quality of life concerns highlighted by local residents and business owners. This initiative has been successful in focusing attention on downtown Chelsea as a whole. Walk assessment participants suggested that it would also be helpful to focus on a clearly defined, small-scale pilot area (potentially a block or several blocks in a more residential neighborhood) to address community concerns in a comprehensive fashion and to provide a replicable model that can then be applied in other parts of the City. Potential pilot participants include the aforementioned city departments, as well as youth collaboratives, neighborhood groups, and the City's beautification committee. The pilot would address the following:



*Residential areas of Chelsea near the downtown present opportunities for pilot programs to address street lighting, neighborhood beautification and traffic calming.*

Street lighting in public and private spaces: The lack of adequate street lighting was one of the top safety concerns raised by walk assessment participants. In some instances existing street lights are obstructed by trees, broken or turned off, or too dim to provide sufficient lighting. In other instances, there are no street lights present whatsoever. Lights are typically mounted on public city street poles or on public and private buildings, so improving street lighting overall will require coordination between both public and private stakeholders. More specific recommendations on street lighting are included later in this report.

Beautification through trash clean-up and addition of street trees: Walk assessment participants noted that the cleanliness of city streets was highly variable. Providing additional trash receptacles in places with a lot of litter will help beautify the neighborhood and improve perceptions of safety by conveying

that the community cares for the area. The City should also consider fining landlords who do not take adequate measures to keep their properties clean.

Provision of street trees and planters is another important beautification consideration. Empty and uneven tree pits accumulate trash and present tripping hazards for pedestrians, whereas street trees provide attractive green canopy cover that also protects against the strong urban heat island effects in Chelsea. Empty tree pits can also be filled with materials like mulch or permeable pavers to create a more even and attractive sidewalk environment. Planters can help achieve these objectives as well.

Traffic calming and pedestrian safety: Many intersections in Chelsea are very wide with confusing traffic patterns, and fast-moving motor vehicles and inadequate street crossings create safety hazards for people walking. In many instances crosswalks and WALK signals are poorly marked and timed or non-existent. More specific recommendations on traffic calming and pedestrian safety are included later in this report. Low-cost and easily implementable strategies to improve pedestrian safety and slow traffic down include the following:

- Using paint, plastic flex posts and/or planters to take away excess roadway space from motor vehicles, to reduce speeding and pedestrian crossing distances, and to provide pedestrian refuge islands
- Adding lane markings and fog lines on the pavement to more clearly delineate vehicular movements and to narrow travel lanes
- Restriping and adding crosswalks with highly visible ladder designs and installing in-street pedestrian crossing signs at crosswalks
- Adding and retiming WALK signals to provide sufficient pedestrian crossing time
- Restricting parking next to crosswalks to improve driver and pedestrian sightlines

### **Improve street lighting along key pedestrian corridors and at recreational areas**

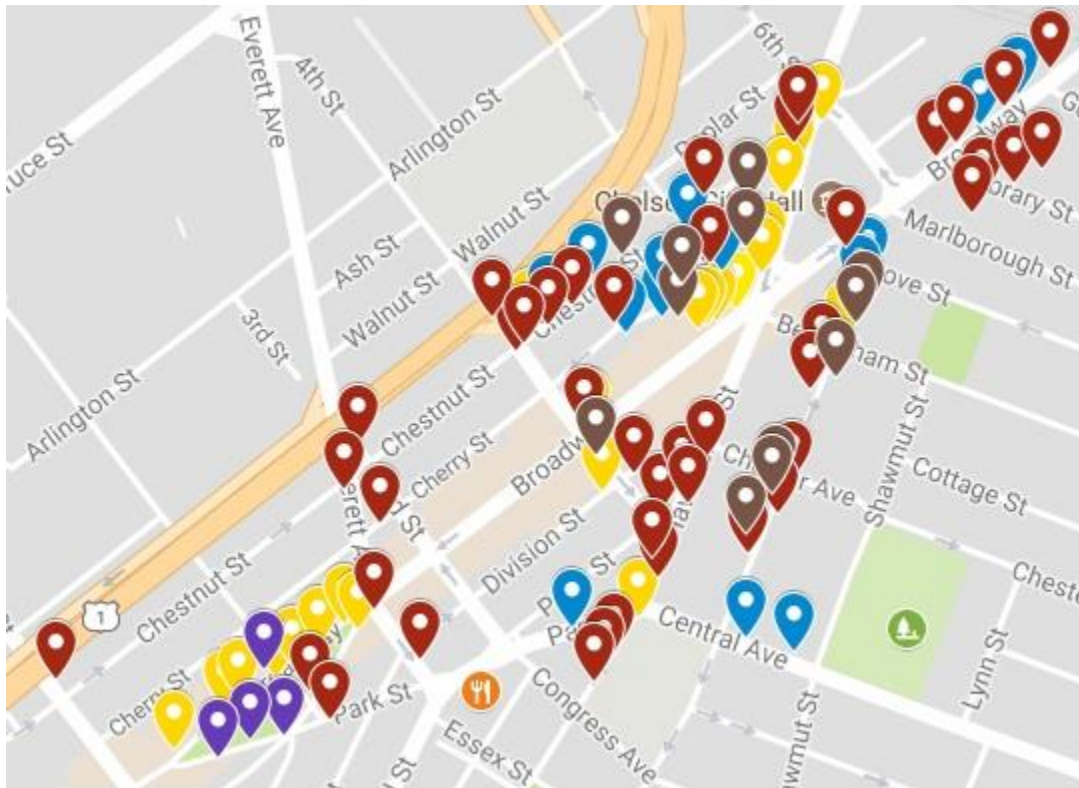
A lack of adequate street lighting contributes to widespread perceptions that the walking environment in Chelsea is unsafe at night. People engaged in illegal activities related to drugs and prostitution often congregate in poorly lit and unlit spaces in and near parking lots, parks, highway underpasses, alleyways and backyards. As mentioned earlier in this report, Chelsea Prospers has completed a lighting survey of downtown Chelsea. This provides a useful starting point to guide the City's efforts to improve street lighting in coordination with both public and private stakeholders, and the City might consider offering incentives to the latter group to achieve this goal. Dim lights should be upgraded to brighter LEDs where possible and street trees should be trimmed appropriately to



*Improving street lighting mounted on buildings and on street poles will help enhance public safety in Chelsea.*

ensure that they do not obstruct lights. All lighting should be pedestrian-scaled to adequately illuminate sidewalks as well as streets.

In addition to the locations highlighted by Chelsea Prospers, which are largely concentrated along Broadway, walk assessment participants recommended a number of additional locations where lighting should be improved. These include the areas in and around Bosson Playground, Quigley Park and Garden Cemetery, which all provide much-needed recreational amenities and green space in a heavily urbanized city. These areas are often underutilized by the community due to the lack of lighting and perceptions that they are unsafe. The municipal parking lot at the corner of Chestnut Street and Third Street, the highway underpasses under the Tobin Bridge, and the walkway behind the Chelsea Public Library were identified as priority areas for improved lighting as well.



*A map prepared by Chelsea Prospers shows locations for street lighting improvements in and around downtown Chelsea. Blue pins indicate locations where lighting can be enhanced through tree trimming or LED upgrades, yellow pins indicate locations where public streetlights are out, maroon pins indicate locations where public lighting is needed, and brown pins indicate locations where private lighting is needed.*

### **Explore strategies for safer pedestrian crossings and traffic calming at key intersections**

Many streets and intersections along the walk assessment route and in Chelsea more broadly present significant safety hazards for people walking. Excessively wide streets and intersections cause traffic to move at high speeds and result in long pedestrian crossing distances, and a lack of adequate crosswalks and WALK signals creates unsafe conditions as well. In addition vehicular travel lanes are often poorly defined or unmarked, creating confusing and dangerous traffic patterns for all road users. As mentioned

earlier in this report, low-cost and quickly implementable strategies to create safer pedestrian crossings and slow traffic down include the following:

- Using paint, plastic flex posts and/or planters to take away excess roadway space from motor vehicles, to reduce speeding and pedestrian crossing distances, and to provide pedestrian refuge islands
- Adding lane markings and fog lines on the pavement to more clearly delineate vehicular movements and to narrow travel lanes
- Restriping and adding crosswalks with highly visible ladder designs and installing in-street pedestrian crossing signs at crosswalks
- Adding and retiming WALK signals to provide sufficient pedestrian crossing time
- Restricting parking next to crosswalks to improve driver and pedestrian sightlines

Additional pedestrian safety measures include audible crossing signals for the visually impaired, raised crosswalks that slow traffic down, and pedestrian refuge islands that provide protected waiting areas in the middle of wide street crossings. All the aforementioned strategies should be considered at intersections throughout Chelsea, including the following locations that walk assessment participants identified as high priorities for pedestrian improvements:

- Everett Avenue/Chestnut Street/Third Street
- Chestnut Street/Fourth Street/Route 1 off-ramp
- Fay Square (Washington Street/Sixth Street/Chestnut Street)
- Park Square (Park Street/Pearl Street/Congress Avenue/Cross Street)

Everett Avenue/Chestnut Street/Third Street: There is no crosswalk across Everett Street/Third Street for pedestrians going and coming to and from the heavily utilized bus stop on the northeast corner of the intersection. Illegal U-turn movements from Third Street onto Everett Avenue create additional safety hazards at this intersection. A highly visible crosswalk should be added at the bus stop and the current median island should be enhanced to better accommodate pedestrians. Signage, pavement markings, and plastic flex posts and/or planters should also be added to discourage and block the illegal U-turns.



*Wide travel lanes, nonexistent lane markings, and a missing crosswalk all present safety hazards at the intersection of Everett Avenue, Chestnut Street and Third Street.*

Chestnut Street/Fourth Street/Route 1 off-ramp: Traffic comes off Route 1 at high speeds into a dense residential area at Chestnut Street and Fourth Street. Fog lines and pavement markings should be painted along the off-ramp to significantly narrow the travel lane and thus reduce traffic speeds. Since Route 1 is a state highway, traffic calming measures here might require coordination with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

Fay Square (Washington Street/Sixth Street/Chestnut Street): Fay Square is an extremely wide intersection with no pavement markings to delineate travel lanes. Traffic moves at high speeds through this area and there is no crosswalk across Washington Avenue for pedestrians going and coming to and from the bus stop on the north side of the square. Walk assessment participants recommended a number of solutions here, including adding clear travel lane markings, installing a crosswalk at the bus stop, and using paint and plastic flex posts to create curb extensions/bump-outs that narrow wide vehicle turning radii, reduce pedestrian crossing distances, and slow traffic down. Longer-term redesigns could incorporate traffic signals and/or a roundabout at this location, which is receiving attention as part of the City's Reimagining Broadway Initiative.



Park Square (Park Street/Pearl Street/Congress Avenue/Cross Street): A lack of travel lane markings, wide streets and intersections, and poor sightlines between people walking and driving all create safety hazards in the Park Square area. Paint, plastic flex posts and/or planters should be used to clearly delineate the travel lanes, and to reduce long pedestrian crossing distances and the excessive roadway space currently allocated to motor vehicles. A forthcoming walk assessment in September 2017 with WalkBoston and the City of Chelsea, with support from the state's Executive Office of Public Safety, will provide more detailed recommendations for this area.

*Fay Square (above) and Park Square (below) both allocate excessive roadway space to motor vehicles, to the detriment of pedestrians. Adding clear travel lane markings and using paint, plastic flex posts and/or planters to reclaim space for pedestrians and slow traffic down will significantly improve walking safety in both these areas.*