



WalkBoston

## Walking Audit Summary Davis Thayer Elementary & Oak Street Elementary, Franklin November 22, 2011

WalkBoston conducted a walk audit in the vicinity of the Davis Thayer Elementary School and Oak Street Elementary School in Franklin, Massachusetts. After a brief discussion about what makes for a walkable community and what kind of elements we would be looking for on the street, the group set out to assess the walking conditions near the school. The audit covered a 1.8-mile loop along public streets.

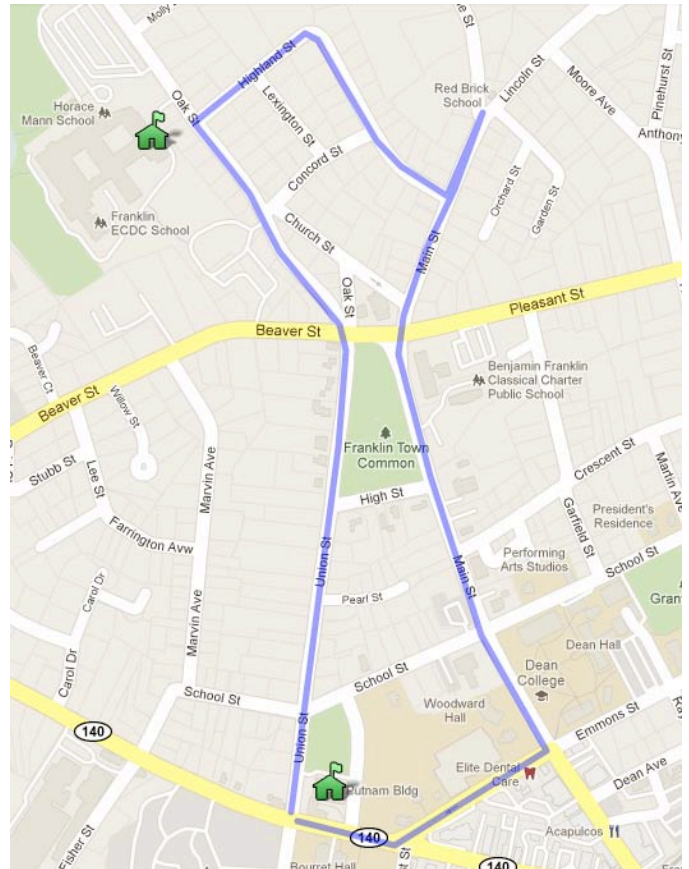
The walking audit was organized by the Hockomock YMCA in conjunction with Davis Thayer Elementary and Oak Street Elementary as part of a grant from the MetroWest Community Health Foundation. Participants included one WalkBoston staff member and a Hockomock YMCA staff member, three faculty members from Davis Thayer Elementary and one faculty member from Oak Street Elementary.

### Davis Thayer to Oak Street

The walking audit route began at the intersection of West Central Street and Union Street near the main entrance to Davis Thayer Elementary School. The route went north through the campus of Dean College, northwest to Oak Street Elementary School, and back south to Davis Thayer using a network of collector roads and local residential streets. The posted speed limits along the route varied; many sections of the route are designated as school zones.

### Overall Assessment:

The route between the Davis Thayer and Oak Street schools is mostly very walkable since there are sidewalks along the entire route (except for one small section) and there are no wide or particularly dangerous roadways for pedestrians to cross. While the environment is very attractive for pedestrians (adequately wide sidewalks, a charming town common, many crosswalks, etc.) there are some challenges. There are a few areas where badly damaged sidewalk surfaces can create a substantial hazard for



The walking route from Davis Thayer Elementary (bottom center) to Oak Street Elementary (top left) and back to Davis Thayer.

pedestrians. Also, there is a broken pedestrian signal at one of the busiest intersections traversed during the audit.

### 1. Observation: Cracked, highlighted sidewalks along West Central Street

The sidewalk along the south side of West Central Street is badly cracked and uneven. It appears someone is paying attention to this as the cracks have been highlighted with neon pink spray paint. Whether this is to identify areas in need of repair or if the paint serves to call attention to tripping hazards is unknown.



#### Recommendations:

- Repair or replace the broken sections of sidewalk.

Large cracks in the sidewalk on West Central Street have been highlighted with paint, but not fixed.

### 2. Observation: Complicated intersection at West Central/Emmons/West

The intersection of West Central and Emmons is complicated. Westbound traffic is forced to turn right onto Emmons, and southbound traffic on Emmons is forced to turn right onto West Central. The existing crosswalks do not reflect desire lines. It features a “porkchop” island and another refuge island trisected by a trio of crosswalks. In order to walk north at this intersection from the south side of West Central using crosswalks, the audit team would have to cross West, then West Central and then cross Emmons. A similar, complicated path would need to be taken to cross from the same spot to the northeastern corner of Emmons and West Central.



The intersection at West Central and Emmons requires pedestrians to cross multiple travel lanes and doesn't adequately slow traffic entering the school zone near Davis Thayer Elementary.

Also, the wide, gradual turn from Emmons southwest onto West Central has only a YIELD sign. This arrangement does not adequately slow vehicles entering a school zone.

### **Recommendations:**

- Short-term/small-investment: Add crosswalks on West Central on the eastern and western edges of the intersection and also north of the intersection on Emmons.
- Short-term/small-investment: Replace the YIELD sign at Emmons and West Central with a STOP sign.
- Mid-term/moderate-investment: Add button-activated pedestrian crossing signals at this intersection
- Long-term/large-investment: Convert all streets to two-way and re-engineer the intersection into a) a more traditional signalized 4-way intersection or b) a roundabout.

### **3. Observation: Some crosswalks are missing curb ramps**

The crosswalk that crosses Church Street where it intersects with Main Street connects two solid curbs with no accessible ramps. This is especially problematic, not only because it's within Davis Thayer's walk zone, but also because of its proximity to a church and the Benjamin Franklin Charter School.

Also, the crosswalk on Oak Street, just south of the entrance for Oak Street Elementary (near the intersection with Highland Street) is missing curb ramps.



The crosswalk at Main and Church lacks accessible curb ramps.

### **Recommendations:**

- Short-term/Small-investment: Create curb ramps by building a ramp with asphalt to provide access from the street to the sidewalk.
- Mid-term/moderate-investment: Remove the granite curb at the corners and build ADA compliant access ramps.

#### 4. Sidewalk along northern section of Main Street is damaged and ends suddenly

The sidewalk along the west side of Main Street north of Highland Street has a large hole and also ends suddenly. There is also a crosswalk at the intersection of Main Street and Maple Street that leads not to a sidewalk, but instead into a fire hydrant and an unpaved shoulder. Also, the sidewalk is narrow, missing curbs, and is flush with the street surface for much of its length from Church Street to Maple Street.



The crosswalk at Main and Maple leads into a hydrant and an unpaved shoulder.

#### Recommendations:

- Short-term/small-investment: Fill in the hole with asphalt and extend the sidewalk using asphalt from its terminus to Maple Street.
- Mid-term/moderate-investment: Replace the damaged concrete slab and extend the sidewalk to Maple Street with concrete (the existing sidewalk is concrete), which lasts longer and provides a better walking surface.
- Long-term/large-investment: Rebuild a wider sidewalk with solid curbs from Church Street to Maple Street.

#### 5. Crossing signal at Beaver Street and Daniel McCahill Way needs repair

The button that changes the pedestrian signal to cross Beaver Street from north to south is disabled. The post on which it is mounted seems to be damaged; its base is wrapped in electrical tape. The other walk button activates all of the pedestrian signals at this intersection, but the wait for a walk signal is approximately two minutes. According to the US Department of Transportation's Bicycle and Pedestrian Information Center:

*"Signal cycles should be kept short (ideally 90 seconds maximum) to reduce pedestrian delay. Pedestrians are very sensitive to delays."*

#### Recommendations:

- Short-term/small-investment: Update the signal timing on the walk button that currently works
- Long-term/large-investment: Replace the damaged pedestrian signal and button, and update the signal timing