

## ***Memorial Elementary School Walk Audit*** **West Springfield, MA**

November 21, 2017

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Division of Community Health/Community Transformation Grant

Mass in Motion, an initiative of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health

### **MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE**

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4. Parked cars and trucks block some of the existing sidewalks and force people to walk in the street. Many service docks and truck parking areas serve the industrial uses in the neighborhood. Some of the apartment buildings and multi-family housing units have parking areas without delineated curb cuts or walking paths. Town staff and permit-issuing bodies need to uphold the walkability-focused site design guidelines that are in place to ensure a safe walking environment in the neighborhood.
5. There are few street trees in the neighborhood. Trees provide shade, slow down traffic, reduce noise, absorb storm water, and increase property values. They also make a neighborhood feel more inviting. Tree planting should continue to be promoted in this neighborhood even though it is planned to become more industrial over time.
6. The Memorial Elementary School neighborhood is shifting from a historically residential area to a mixed-use business/light industrial district. These land uses can have competing interests, which will require an elevated level of attention when reviewing new development proposals in order to ensure a walkable environment for residents and workers.

## School Profile

According to the work completed by Westfield State students and the West Springfield Wellness Leadership Team, there are approximately 236 students enrolled at Memorial School in grades 1 through 5. Over 35% of the students do not consider English their first language, and over 65% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged. Memorial School serves students from multiple neighborhoods. Students who live north of the CSX rail line have yellow bus service, while those students living within .5 miles of the school are considered walkers.

In a “raise-your-hand” survey of Memorial School students conducted by Westfield State, 44% of the students are driven to school in a car (94 kids), 38% of students ride a yellow bus (83 kids), and 14% walk to school (31 kids). It is likely that many of the students that live within walking distance are driven to school. The primary physical barriers reported to discourage walking to school include truck traffic within the neighborhood, high (or perceived to be high) traffic speeds, and parking on the sidewalks, which forces students into the street. Walk audit participants confirmed that these barriers exist and witnessed some of them during the walk.



*Truck parked on the sidewalk along Cold Spring Avenue.*



*Memorial Elementary School front lawn.*

## Prioritized Recommendations for Infrastructure Fixes

Overall, the pedestrian infrastructure (crossings, sidewalks, etc.) is in good condition. Recently installed concrete sidewalks along Heywood Avenue, Norman Street, Baldwin Street, Bosworth Street, and Windsor Street provide smooth walking surfaces along these mixed residential/commercial corridors. Most intersections have curb ramps, detectable warning panels and well-marked ladder design crosswalks. However, there are some missing sidewalk links that, if improved, could help to encourage more students to walk to school.



Well-marked, ladder crosswalks are at both major intersections near Memorial Elementary School.



Sidewalk network and crosswalks in the study area.

||||| crosswalk  
 — sidewalk

***Priority #1 – Install a stop sign at the Norman Street/Cold Spring Avenue intersection***

There is no stop sign at the corner of the Norman Street/Cold Spring Avenue intersection for southwest-bound traffic traveling on Cold Spring Avenue. All other approaches to this intersection have stop signs. There is a stop line and pedestrian warning signage. We recommend that a stop sign be installed at this location.



*Missing stop sign at the intersection of Norman Street and Cold Spring Avenue.*

***Priority #2 – Install sidewalk along the southern side of Norman Street to facilitate student arrival/dismissal zone***

Two crosswalks leading from school property to the south side of Norman Street end in a driveway and a neighbor's lawn. A third crosswalk further west on Norman Street leading to the playground and ball field behind the school also ends in a driveway. These conditions are not acceptable and could be remedied with the installation of a sidewalk along the south side of Norman Street. While many of the residential streets in the neighborhood can be reasonably served with just one sidewalk, this section of Norman Street sees higher pedestrian and car volumes especially during school arrival and dismissal.

***Priority #3 – Study the impacts of converting Norman Street to a one-way street with traffic flowing from Cold Spring Avenue to River Street during student arrival and dismissal.***

The current school arrival and dismissal patterns allow two-way car traffic along Norman Street where parents



*Crosswalk on Norman Street that leads to grass rather than a sidewalk.*

drop off and pick up students on both sides of the street. Children cross between cars, (often urged to do so by their parents), drivers park their cars on the crosswalks, and traffic can back up into the crosswalks at the Cold Spring/Norman Street intersection. If traffic flowed in only one direction from Cold Spring to River Street, there is room for a drop off lane and a travel lane, while also providing adequate width for a sidewalk on the south side of Norman Street. Children could load and unload on the school side of the street. Buses could arrive and drop off in a bus only drop off/loading zone (currently marked with signs). This change would discourage children from walking between cars by providing an easier drop-off and pick-up scenario.



*Traffic patterns on Norman Avenue at dismissal on a day when many children had left early after a schoolwide luncheon.*

#### ***Priority #4 – Complete sidewalk network on Cold Spring Avenue***

Cold Spring Avenue is a critical walking route for students walking from the housing development southwest of Memorial Elementary. While some of the low-volume, narrow residential streets in this neighborhood can get away with a sidewalk on just one side of the street, Cold Spring Avenue carries more traffic, including many 18-wheeler trucks. We recommend that the Town complete the sidewalk on the east side of Cold Spring Avenue between York Street and Colony Road (approx. 185') and for four blocks on the west side of Cold Spring between Norman Street and Colony Road (approx. 985').

Several business owners allow their staff to park on or near sidewalks along Cold Spring Avenue, the most egregious being on the west side of Cold Spring Avenue between Norman Street and Allston Avenue. The Town should continue to work with those business owners to balance the need for parking with safe walkways.



*Cold Spring Avenue is a key walking route for children attending Memorial Elementary School. New sidewalks should be installed to complete the missing links. Norman Street holds higher volumes of cars and people during arrival and dismissal and needs a sidewalk on the south side.*

#### ***Priority #5 – Complete sidewalks on the southern side of Allston Avenue***

Allston Avenue is the only secondary street in the neighborhood without a sidewalk on at least one side of the street. While much of the road's land uses have switched from residential to office/light industry, there are several residences on the east side of Cold Spring Avenue that do not have a sidewalk. The sidewalk from River Street along Allston Avenue ends before reaching Cold Spring Avenue. We recommend that a concrete sidewalk be installed along the south side of Allston Street between Cold Spring Avenue and the end of the road leading to almost Exposition Avenue (approx. 575') and completed from Cold Spring Avenue west to River Street (approx. 370').



*Parking in front of the apartment complex on Baldwin Avenue.*

#### ***Priority #6 Define walkway/build sidewalk in front of apartment complex across from Memorial Elementary on Baldwin Street***

After crossing Cold Spring Avenue, people walking along the north side of Baldwin Street must walk through a parking lot in front of an apartment building to access the sidewalk on the far side of the building. There appears to be enough space to install a concrete sidewalk while also maintaining the resident parking spaces. Ideally, the curb cuts would be narrowed, but this would require the removal of several parking spaces.

The Town and the property owner will need to balance the needs of the apartment residents and people walking to and from Memorial Elementary. Furthermore, if a concrete sidewalk is installed, the construction detail should anticipate cars frequently

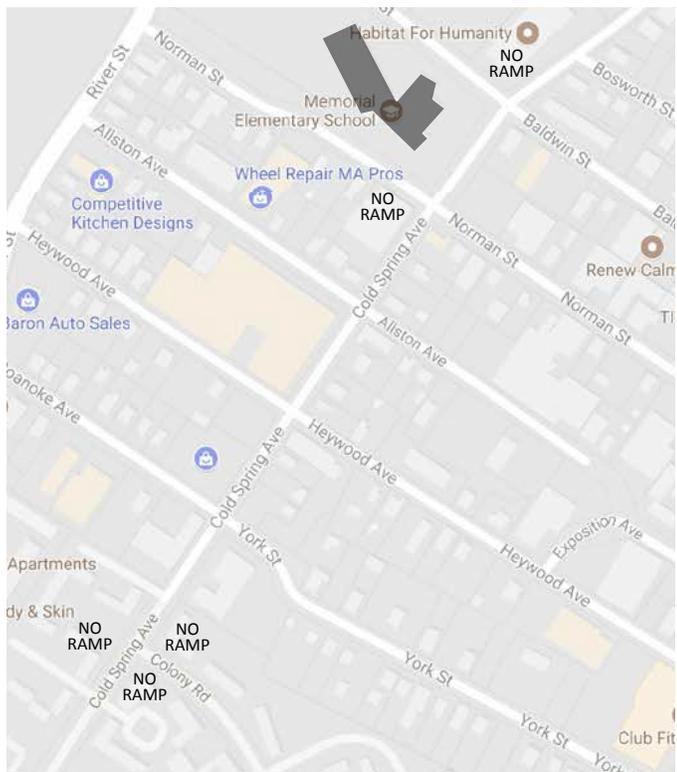
driving over the sidewalk and include a sub-base that can accommodate heavy loads. If a concrete sidewalk is not possible, pavement markings that delineate a walking path would help make drivers more aware of pedestrians and provide people walking with a defined space in which to walk.

**Priority #7 — Paint crosswalks to connect newly installed sidewalks across Cold Spring Road**

Several intersections along Cold Spring Road do not have crosswalks across all approaches because there are either no sidewalks or sidewalks on one side of the street. Once sidewalks are installed along Cold Spring Road and extended to meet Cold Spring Road, ladder crosswalks should be painted across and along Cold Spring Road.

**Priority #8 — Repair/Replace/Install curb ramps that meet standards including detectable warning strips**

Five intersections in the study area either have no curb ramps or the existing ramps do not have all the required components. To ensure that people of all abilities have access to the sidewalks, it is critical that these intersections be brought up to code.



*Intersections where curb ramps are missing or are not in compliance with relevant codes*

**Priority #9 — Inventory existing street trees and propose strategy to plant trees along the neighborhood streets near Memorial School.**

The older, residential properties in the neighborhood have large, mature trees that provide shade, help to mitigate the effects of air pollution, and add to the overall aesthetics of the neighborhood. Some of the new businesses have also planted new trees that promise to provide these same benefits. Other than the park-like setting of the apartment style housing at the southern end of Cold Spring Road, the neighborhood feels very open and in need of more trees.

Cold Spring Avenue is the primary route for people walking to Memorial School and it is the only north/south road bisecting the neighborhood. A street tree planting strategy that focuses on Cold Spring would help to slow vehicular traffic, provide shade for walkers, and add aesthetic value to the entire neighborhood. As new businesses come to establish themselves, the Town should continue to encourage tree planting during the site plan review process.

**Policy/Program Recommendations to Promote Walking to School**

The safety of the walking environment is critical to protect those children currently walking to school, and to promote the idea of walking to school to those students who live within walking distance.

**Safe Routes to School Program**

In addition to making the infrastructure improvements, Memorial Elementary School should consider adopting the MA SRTS second grade pedestrian safety curriculum. The City of Springfield implemented the curriculum in 13 elementary schools in the 2016/2017 academic year as a pilot program with the intention of officially adopting it into the Springfield Public Schools wellness/physical education curriculum. The curriculum consists of 3 lesson plans that review the basics of crossing streets and walking in parking lots through active games and exercises. It can be found on the MA SRTS website.

The MA SRTS program also has materials and resources available to help promote walking to school as a healthy alternative to being driven to school. School-wide participation in “walk to school” days

can encourage more students to walk. The MA SRTS program can also help establish walking school bus routes for children who wish to or need to walk with other students and adults. Emily Budzynkiewicz, MA Safe Routes to School Outreach Coordinator, can provide more details on the SRTS programs.

### Speed enforcement

Enforcement is one of the 5 E's promoted by MassDOT and others to reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries. The school administration has a good relationship with the Town of West Springfield Police Department who will dispatch officers whenever the school requests assistance. Given the speeding concerns along Baldwin Street and Norman Street, the administration could ask the police to conduct regular enforcement activities to help discourage fast driving. If they have jurisdiction, the police could also help to enforce school arrival and dismissal policies to protect students during this most vulnerable time.

### Snow removal

The Town of West Springfield has a snow removal ordinance which states:

*The owner of any property abutting upon any street, lane, court or square within the town where there is a sidewalk which is or may hereafter be established or set apart by the town as such, shall, after the ceasing to fall of any snow thereon, within twenty-four (24) hours cause the same to be removed therefrom.*

*Removal of snow fallen from buildings and from plowing or shoveling and drifting snow. Whenever any snow shall be collected or deposited upon any sidewalk mentioned in the preceding section either by falling from an adjoining building or by being plowed or shoveled on to said sidewalk by any snow activity or by drifting upon said sidewalk, the owner of the property abutting upon said sidewalk shall, within twenty-four (24) hours after its being so collected or deposited, cause the same to be removed therefrom (Town Ordinance Section 9 - 500 Snow and Ice).*

Passing a snow ordinance is important because it holds property owners responsible for clearing sidewalks abutting their homes or businesses. Enforcement of the snow ordinance is critical to ensure that people shovel and provide a clear, accessible pathways for people walking.

In addition to the ordinance, West Springfield has also classified its streets as primary, secondary and tertiary priority for snow removal based on roadway classification, such as major thoroughfares, through streets, and cul-de-sacs. Within the study area, Norman Street and Baldwin Street are considered primary priority because they are major thoroughfares. Cold Spring Avenue is considered tertiary priority because it is a cul-de-sac.



*Memorial School neighborhood on the Snow Plow Priority Map (Town of West Springfield 12/23/2015).*

As drawn, the snow plow priority map does not prioritize walking routes around schools. Walk audit participants identified Cold Spring Avenue as the primary walking route for children walking to Memorial Elementary. Yet, it is considered a tertiary priority for snow removal.

WalkBoston recommends that the Town of West Springfield designate priority walking routes near all of its schools and prioritize these walkways as primary on the snow plow priority map.

## Appendix A. Walk Audit Participants

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Connor Knightly	Department of Public Works, Town of West Springfield
Allyson Manuel	Planner, Town of West Springfield
Sarah Szczebak	Community Development Office, Town of West Springfield
Emily Budzynkiewicz	MA Safe Routes to School Outreach Coordinator
Pat Kelsey	Outreach Supervisor, MA Safe Routes to School
Corrin Meise-Munns	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Dillon Sussman	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Stacey Beuttell	WalkBoston