



WalkBoston®

Blandford Village Center Walk Audit Report

June 17, 2021

About this Project

The Hilltowns CDC, together with Healthy Hampshire and WalkBoston, are leading a 5-year grant project to promote Age-Friendly Walkability in the Hilltowns Village Centers. In partnership with community residents and leaders, the team will be conducting a series of walk audits in partnering Hilltowns villages. The goal of these walk audits is to identify infrastructure improvements and policy changes to make village-center walking safe and enjoyable for people of all ages in the Hilltowns. The town of Blandford is one of the partnering communities in this grant project.

Background

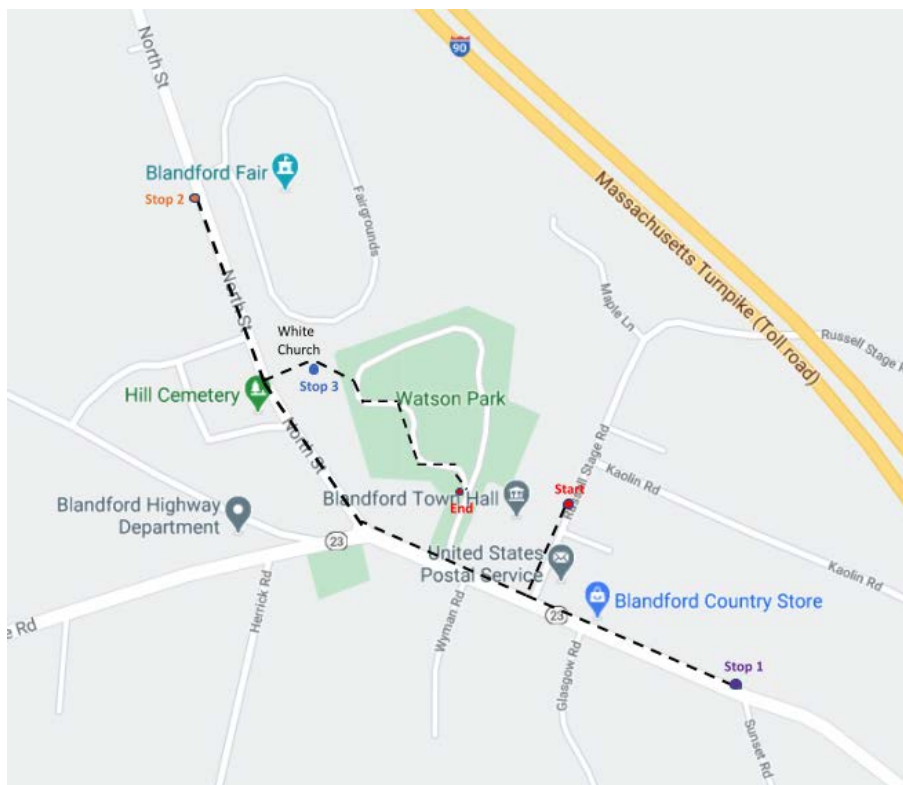
Blandford is currently receiving technical assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to complete a [Resilient Master Plan](#) and an Open Space and Recreation Plan. These planning processes are happening synchronously with resident workgroups established around the community's identified improvement priorities. One area that has been identified as a community priority is village center walkability. Specifically, residents are interested in improved walking connections between key destinations in the village center - including the library, the Country Store, and Town Offices - with Watson Park, the White Church, and the Town Common. As part of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, the community is interested in envisioning Watson Park and its connection to the White Church. A redesign planning process for the Town Common is also currently underway with GZA. There is also an interest in expanding Veteran's Memorial Park, which is the host of the town's annual Memorial Day celebration. Current ideas include expanding Veteran's Memorial Park through a redesign of the intersection of Otis Stage Road and North Blandford Road that would include closure of North Blandford Road to better connect to the Town Common.



Images of the walk audit participants observing conditions along the walking route.

Walk Audit Process

WalkBoston led an in-person walk audit on Friday, Apr 30 from 11 am to 12:30 pm under gray skies and windy conditions with temperatures in the 40s. The roadways and pathways were wet from earlier rains. Fifteen participants gathered at the Town Office Building and walked the route. A list of participants can be found in *Appendix A*.



Walk audit route

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time of the audit, WalkBoston conducted a presentation of walkability concepts and the walk audit process via Zoom on Wednesday, April 28 at 6 pm. The majority of in-person walk audit participants attended the Zoom session and were prepared for the walk and well versed in traffic calming concepts and walking infrastructure elements that promote safe and enjoyable walking.

Key Concerns and Recommendations:

Reduce traffic speeds on Route 23 through the Blandford village center.

- Consider low cost, short-term engineering measures to reduce speeds on Route 23 such as reducing lane widths, installing a speed table at the village center crosswalk, and/or implementing gateway treatments . (See *FHWA guide in appendix*).
- Continue use of speed feedback signs along Route 23 and in new locations in the town to reduce driving speeds.
- Review established (accurate) speed limit on Route 23. Speed limit signs along Route 23 are not consistent (some say 35 mph, others say 25 mph).



Improve safety and visibility of existing pedestrian crossings within the village center.

- Ensure adequate visibility at the two midblock crosswalks in the village center
 - Consider installing a pedestrian-activated Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) at the crosswalk that connects the library with the general store.
 - Repair curb ramp and detectable warning panel (north side ramp) to meet ADA requirements.
 - Consider addition of advance pedestrian crossing signage to better alert drivers to possibility of people crossing in the mid-block crosswalks.

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

- Adjust existing signage at the church crosswalk to point directly at crossing on both sides of the road.
- Repaint crosswalks with continental stripe pattern to enhance visibility.



Crosswalk between library and general store



RRFB installation in West Springfield (model)

- Evaluate safety of existing crosswalk at the intersection of Sunset Road and Rt. 23.
 - Built to provide safe, walkable route from the Sunset Road neighborhood to school building that now functions as the town office building.
 - Few people use this crossing. Residents/drivers do not expect people to cross here which may increase the potential danger of crossing at this location.
 - Assuming crossing remains, install advanced crosswalk signage to alert drivers to its presence and repaint the crosswalk with the continental stripe pattern. Move the existing crosswalk sign with an arrow on the eastbound side of Rt. 23 to point directly to the crossing at Sunset Road.



Existing crosswalk at Route 23 and Sunset Road.

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

Add protected crossings on North Street to improve safety of village center walking loops.

- Consider redesign of the North Street/Rt 23 intersection to a T intersection to provide a safe crossing for people moving between the Historical Society building and the parking area (*Long-term improvement*). The crossing would also provide safe passage to Veteran’s Memorial Park and connect up to the planned Town Common walking path.
 - Many people cross North Street to attend night meetings at the Historical Society building. While people would need to walk outside the obvious desire line, a crossing connecting the existing parking lot and building is not safe due to compromised sight lines.
 - Consider expanding GZA’s project boundaries to include a conceptual redesign on the North Street/Rt 23 intersection to include a marked crossing.



Existing North Street/Rt. 23 intersection has no marked crosswalk. A reconfiguration of the intersection could provide a protected crossing for people walking from the parking area to the Historical Society building.

- Identify a safe crossing location across North Street to connect the White Church to the Hill Cemetery and Town Common. (*Long-term improvement*).
 - In the warmer months, this section of North Street hosts multiple public events where people cross to reach parking lots and other destinations. There is currently no protected crossing, so people stream or run across at will. A marked crossing along the walking path loop route would help promote the route as well as provide a defined crossing for public events.

- North Street is a state-owned road and therefore any and all modifications to the roadway must be approved and completed in partnership with MassDOT District 1.
- Typically, new marked crosswalks must be connected via ADA-approved curb ramps to sidewalks on either end of the crosswalk. Currently, there are no sidewalks on either side of North Street beyond its intersection with Route 23. Furthermore, North Street was recently resurfaced (within the last 5 years), which means that further improvements to this roadway may take years to complete. We recommend reaching out to MassDOT District 1 to determine the feasibility and timeline of crosswalk and sidewalk installation along North Street.



Walk audit participants cross North Street from the Town Common to the White Church.

Extend a walking path along North Street to connect the Village Center to the destinations on North Street including the White Church, Fairgrounds, Town Common and Hill Cemetery.

- Sidewalk installation on North Street could take many years to complete. As a short-term alternative, consider installing a pathway outside the MassDOT Right of Way (ROW). This would require agreement (potentially an easement) from the landowners along North Street, which include the Blandford Historical Society, Union Agricultural Society, Town of Blandford, and a private landowner.
- Measure the number of people walking along this corridor to help justify installation of a permanent sidewalk along North Street.



A sidewalk along North Street would better connect the destinations along the walking route and provide better pedestrian safety for event crowds and everyday walking.

Consider pedestrian wayfinding signage along walking route(s) to advertise their existence and promote walking in the village center.

- Build on the success of the walking path maps and install pedestrian wayfinding signage along the two routes in the walk audit study area (Hill Cemetery & Church Loop; Kaolin Rd Loop).
- Signage can be simple trailblazer signs that act as route markers, or more detailed with placards indicating walking times between destinations.



Directional signage in Lexington, MA



WalkBoston wayfinding signs in Fall River, MA

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

Ensure that the walking route, village center and Bicentennial Park are well maintained.

- Consider relocating the dumpster near the Post Office to a less prominent location that still meets service needs.
- Establish a maintenance plan for Bicentennial Park (could be addressed in upcoming Open Space and Recreation Plan).

Policy considerations:

In addition to the infrastructure improvements listed above, the Town of Blandford can enact and review town policies to promote walkability. We recommend the following policy considerations.

- Enact a Complete Street Policy to become eligible for MassDOT state funding to implement walking and biking improvements on locally-owned roads.
<https://www.mass.gov/complete-streets-funding-program>
- Ensure that the new Resilient Master Plan addresses town-wide walkability goals.
- Ensure that the new Open Space and Recreation Plan includes broad walkability goals that extend beyond walking/hiking trails to include sidewalks and connections within the village center and through Watson Park.

Appendix A. Walk Audit Participants

George	Reichert	resident
Joshua	Garcia	Blandford Town Administrator
Joann	Martin	Blandford Select Board Administrator
Rene	Senecal	Blandford DPW Director
Andrew	McCall	PVPC
Ira	Brezinsky	PVPC
Ken	Comia	PVPC
Kristen	Whitmore	Healthy Hampshire
Paula	Bilodeau	Hilltown CDC/resident
Kate	Bavelock	Hilltown CDC
Tammy	Weidhaas	Blandford Police Dept.
Jennifer	Girard	Blandford Board of Health
John	Piper	resident
Stacey	Beuttell	WalkBoston
Brendan	Kearney	WalkBoston

Appendix B. Resources

Walkable Hilltowns: Funding Opportunities

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DPVIHE3MejslkhW99DD_cLI39VkvTKtuUgMoHyjDb0/edit?usp=sharing

WalkBoston Rural Walking Guide:

<https://walkboston.org/sites/default/files/WalkBoston%20Rural%20Walking.%20Tool%20Kit%202013.pdf>

Urban, Rural and Suburban Complete Streets Design Manual:

https://www.northamptonma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6668/Hampshire-County-Complete-Streets-Design-Manual_1-4-2017-FINAL?bidId=

Speed Management: A Manual for Local Rural Road Owners p. 15-22

https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/local_rural/training/fhwasa010413spmgmt/speedmanagementguide.pdf

Blandford Walk Walking Map:

<https://westernmasshilltownhikers.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Blandford-Walks-Brochure.pdf>