

Downtown Brockton Walk Audit - Memo Report

Background

The Downtown Brockton Virtual Walk Audit is the third walk audit in a statewide project that examines the connections between social infrastructure, neighborhood walkability and transit access. Neighborhood data and resident perspectives will be captured in virtual conversations and self-led walk audits in a total of 5 Gateway Cities in Massachusetts. The two main goals of this project are to effect change at the local level to work towards safer, more enjoyable streets and to inform state policy and legislation to prioritize budgetary investment in Gateway Cities. This project is co-hosted by WalkBoston and MassINC, with support from the Solomon Foundation.

Process overview

For the virtual walk audit process, Brockton residents and other community members were invited to join WalkBoston and MassINC for 2 online conversations (via Zoom video conference) and to take a self-led walk in the downtown area. Prior to their walk audits, participants were led through a Ped101 workshop to learn more about the elements of walkability and to learn how to conduct a self-led walk audit. During their self-led walk audit, participants were asked to make written and photo/video observations to share back with the group. For recordings of this process and a presentation summarizing the residents' walk audit findings and improvement recommendations please visit the website that was created to organize the virtual walk audit process: <https://sites.google.com/walkboston.org/walkboston-brockton>

Walk Audit Route

The walk audit route details, pedestrian crash data, and parking lot footprint data for the downtown area can be found at this link:

https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1EFrEJxDggcDE_TXxoh3uKhoz8ees2a17&ll=42.08051812673716%2C-71.0139267642676&z=14

Walk Audit Findings and Recommendations

Overall, participants emphasized a desire to have a downtown that cultivated a sense of community and civic space, celebrated Brockton's rich history and diversity, and supported local businesses that reinvest in the community. General themes from the recommendations include the need for:

- More open spaces and destinations to rest and spend time for people traveling through the downtown area on foot;

- The revitalization of building facades and storefronts to create a more welcoming streetscape for walkers;
- More signage about nearby amenities and points of interest;
- More street trees, better lighting, and trash maintenance;
- Added buffers between walkers and moving traffic; and
- A communications campaign about what supportive services are available to members of the community who are unhoused and/or experiencing challenges with mental health or substance abuse.

A summary of the participants' walk audit findings and corresponding recommendations is provided in the tables below. For photos of the findings, please see [the slides](#) on the Homepage of the website linked above.

SECTION 1

Participants walked from the City Hall Plaza on School Street to Montello Street, down Centre Street until Commercial Street, then turned back down Centre Street ending at the Neighborhood Health Center.

GENERAL

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This section was mostly comfortable and inviting to walk through, and has a lot of potential to foster a thriving downtown. • There are historical and other important landmarks worth pointing out via signage. • Crosswalks were present where needed. 	
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
There are few destinations, especially for pedestrians.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add wayfinding signage and historical markers through the downtown area so that people learn about destinations they may visit.
Lack of wayfinding signage, historical markers, or banners outside of the MBTA + BAT stations and around City Hall.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add welcoming banners and signage around City Hall Plaza to invite people to spend time and linger downtown.
Need more green space, landscaping, and space for walking, sitting, and activities, especially around City Hall, Montello Street, and the train tracks.	<u>Short-term</u> : Maintain and, where possible, increase the amount of green space and plantings along this route. Add more seating in existing open spaces.
Need more resources for people who are unhoused.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Design a public awareness campaign about existing health and shelter resources for people who are unhoused that reaches people who need this assistance and spend time downtown.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Provide more opportunities for individuals to seek short- and long-term shelter in Brockton.</p>
Excessive space given to parking, which is currently underutilized.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Undertake a parking study to assess and re-evaluate the amount of space dedicated to parking downtown.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Work with small business owners, Downtown Brockton Association, and private parking lot owners to create short-term</p>

	pop-ups in under-used parking space and consider replacing perpetually unused parking space with other, people-focused uses, such as seating or play spaces.
Some sidewalks are broken and/or uneven.	<u>Short-term</u> : Conduct a sidewalk inventory and make needed repairs.

SCHOOL STREET

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The area around City Hall Plaza holds a lot of potential for hosting programming and drawing people into the area for small and large gatherings. 	
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
<p>Need more seating and usable greenspace.</p> <p>Desire for more programming at City Hall Plaza or through the construction/addition of parklets.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Maintain landscaping and amenities (such as water fountains, trash receptacles, and public bathrooms) around City Hall Plaza so that the space is malleable for multiple uses, including play, informal gathering, and short-term programming.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Add more benches and other seating around City Hall Plaza.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Invite artists, small business owners and youth groups to create interactive installations and host food or game events, potentially in partnership with the Brockton Farmers' Market.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Allow for parklet permitting in downtown Brockton.</p>

MONTELLO STREET

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Vacant storefronts and blank brick facades.	<u>Short-term</u> : Working in partnership with property owners and the City Arts Initiative, consider adding murals, banners, and

	sculptural walls on blank facades, and add interactive and inviting displays to vacant storefront windows. For example, hire artists to design posters about Brockton’s history and nearby historical sites, or create PSAs about services and resources available to local residents.
<p>Safety concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No barriers between the sidewalk and fast traffic, • Many driveways and lots have long curb cuts, • Crosswalks need to be more visible and accessible. 	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Install plant boxes or bollards between the sidewalk and traffic lanes. The eastern sidewalk on Montello Street is narrow; flower boxes, bollards or other buffers should only be installed here if it can be done without further restricting space on the sidewalk.</p>
Need more street trees and better lighting.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Reassess signal interval timing at crosswalks along Montello Street. Providing 2.8ft/sec for crossing time allows seniors and people with mobility challenges adequate time to cross safely.</p>
Long wait times and short crossing times at crosswalks.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Conduct a crosswalk inventory and repaint faded crosswalks with ladder striping to increase visibility.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Where the sidewalk is wide enough, plant trees and install street lights to create a buffer between walkers and moving traffic and increase safety and comfort.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Narrow driveway widths to create fewer interruptions in the sidewalk.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Consider installing rectangular rapid flash beacons (RRFBs) and bump outs at crosswalks to increase their visibility.</p>
Overgrown vegetation extends onto the sidewalk.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Trim overgrown plants to keep the walking path clear.</p>

CENTRE STREET

Features that support walking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAT Center is well lit and welcoming, and has wide sidewalks. • The street is well lit and tree-lined, and the sidewalk feels protected. • The Neighborhood Health Center has lots of activity, trees, some seating, and feels inviting.

Opportunities for improving the walking environment

Issue	Recommendation
The area under the overpass needs more lighting and maintenance.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Partner with local artists and lighting experts to design creative lighting installments that make walking under the overpass more comfortable and inviting.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Ensure that the streetscape is regularly cleaned and litter removed. Maintenance should include routine hedge and tree trimming to ensure visibility and unobstructed walkways.</p>
There is litter and unmaintained landscaping around the overpass and tracks.	
Overgrown vegetation extends onto the sidewalk.	
Access to the commuter rail platform is not ADA compliant.	<p><u>Long-term:</u> Upgrade access to the MBTA platform to meet accessibility guidelines.</p>
Tree stumps and remnants of metal sign posts create tripping hazards.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Conduct a tree inventory to determine where missing trees need to be replaced and where stumps need to be filed down.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Remove any metal obstructions on the sidewalk that may cause injury.</p>
The intersection of Main Street and Centre Street (outside the Neighborhood Health Center) is unsafe, as there have been multiple car collisions here where cars crash onto the sidewalk and into the building.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Install large planters or other unhostile barriers at the corners of the intersection to tighten the corners for turning cars and protect walkers from moving traffic and cars that ride onto the sidewalk.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Re-evaluate traffic signal placement at this intersection to make the lights more visible to drivers (i.e. above the intersection rather than on the side).</p>

SECTION 2

Participants were asked to walk from the Neighborhood Health Center down Legion Parkway, up Warren Ave to Vicente's Supermarket, back down Warren to L Street, ending at the intersection of Frederick Douglass Avenue and Main Street.

GENERAL

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Lack of gathering spaces, seating, and bus shelters.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Add shelters and seating at bus stops.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Add seating, landscaping, and protective buffers at existing open spaces.</p>
Vacant storefronts with unwelcoming facades.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Use placemaking strategies to enhance vacant storefronts. Install window art installations, historical Brockton photography and written descriptions, or creative lighting to make the facades seem more welcoming to people walking.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Work with the Downtown Brockton Association to encourage private property owners to remove fencing or choose less hostile alternatives.</p>
Desire for inviting decorative lighting, window art installations.	
Many lots are fenced off, making the area feel more restricted.	
Trash litters the street, and garbage receptacles are often overflowing.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Inventory existing trash cans to re-evaluate collection frequency and to identify places where new bins are needed.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Work with the Downtown Brockton Association to create friendly signage to remind people and businesses to keep the area free of litter.</p>
Need for clear communication of resources available to people experiencing issues with mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Work with public health officials and service providers to increase resources and create a public awareness campaign about existing resources available to members of the community facing issues with substance abuse, mental health, and homelessness. This campaign would pair well with other investments in downtown Brockton's built environment, reaching people where they are and notifying them of better,</p>

	safer resources for shelter and health assistance.
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LEGION PARKWAY

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide sidewalks and some street trees. • Lots of pedestrian activity. • Many local businesses to patronize. 	
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Infrastructure maintenance: trash clean up, tripping hazards, and uneven and cracked sidewalks.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Re-evaluate trash collection frequency and install more trash bins where needed.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Conduct a sidewalk inventory to determine where sidewalks need to be replaced and tripping hazards removed.</p>
Shuttered and unmaintained storefronts make the streetscape less appealing for walkers.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Work with property and business owners to make storefronts more inviting. For vacant properties, display historical or contemporary Brockton photography or trivia, or information about local assets. For operational businesses, encourage owners to create welcoming window displays to draw people in and make the streetscape more inviting.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Encourage property owners to remove hostile fencing, signage, etc. and add more friendly signage and art to their facades.</p>
Fencing, private property signage, metal grating and security cameras make the area feel unwelcoming and potentially unsafe.	
Excess parking: excessive pavement and car-centric land usage.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Use parking spaces outside restaurants for outdoor dining, and let other businesses temporarily spill out into some of this parking space, while leaving the sidewalk unobstructed for people walking and rolling.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Add benches and other seating on the median and (where space permits) on the sidewalk.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Expand the median to create</p>
Lack of programming and social spaces.	

	<p>more gathering space, add crosswalks to access the median from the sidewalk on either side, and install landscaping or other buffers between where people gather and moving traffic.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Allow food trucks or other activation of unused parking spaces (such as parklets).</p>
Lack of knowledge about operational businesses on Legion Parkway.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Add signage at either end of Legion Parkway listing operational businesses, and encourage business owners to clearly display their name and services on awnings and/or window displays.</p>

WARREN AVENUE

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green space by Vicente’s Supermarket has potential with more investment and upkeep. 	
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Safety concerns: fast traffic with wide driveways/curb cuts.	<p><u>Long-term:</u> Shorten driveway widths to limit interruptions to the sidewalk.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Consider a road diet for Warren Avenue to reduce speeds and make more space for planting street trees and widening the sidewalk.</p>
No pedestrian signal at intersection of Warren Avenue + Legion Parkway or Warren Avenue + Highland Street.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Paint ladder crosswalk markings at the intersection of Warren Avenue, Legion Parkway and Highland Street.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Add a pedestrian crossing signal across Warren Avenue at this intersection.</p>
Few pedestrian-friendly destinations.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Work with Vicente’s to make the green space by the parking lot more usable as a gathering space for shoppers and people spending time downtown by adding picnic benches, trees, and trash receptacles.</p>

L STREET + FREDERICK DOUGLASS AVENUE

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L Street has several spaces that could host programming, and lots of opportunities to invite artists to bring more life to the street and to currently blank facades. • Frederick Douglass Avenue may have more activity and appeal with the forthcoming development. 	
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Lack of destinations: predominantly parking and blank facades.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Work with property owners and artists through the City Arts Initiative to add murals or other design elements to building facades, add festive lighting along the street, and create short-term programming in under-used lots like hosting evening performing arts events, dance nights, and recreational days, as well as long-term features like seating, green space, and food trucks. Consider programming that keeps the space active through the evening.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Add street lamps to increase visibility after sunset.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> As the Redevelopment Authority continues to sell parcels along this stretch, prioritize land uses that will bring street-level activity and encourage people to spend time in the area. Also prioritize creating opportunities for small, local businesses that want to invest in fostering community and civic engagement to take root in this area.</p>
Poorly lit and uncomfortable to walk through after sunset.	
Frederick Douglass historical stop needs to be revived.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Add wayfinding signage for the historical site at the BAT center, City Hall Plaza, and other central locations.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Add informational placards about the historical site on Frederick Douglass Avenue.</p>