

Downtown Haverhill Walk Audit - Memo Report

Background

The Downtown Haverhill Virtual Walk Audit is the fourth 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, Haverhill residents and other community members who work in Haverhill were invited to join WalkBoston for two online conversations (via Zoom video conference) and to take a self-led walk or join a WalkBoston-led group 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/haverhill>

After this process was completed, MassINC and WalkBoston hosted another information gathering session with members of Haverhill's Latino Coalition as well as other community members who were not able to attend the rest of the walk audit process. The findings from the first two Zoom sessions, the focus group, and participants' written and visual observations were synthesized to create this recommendations memo.

Walk Audit Route

The walk audit route details and pedestrian crash data for the surrounding area can be found at this link:

https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1YahBtC7G6n-P_U9BWT3JATz4KZYzHa5P&usp=sharing

Walk Audit Findings and Recommendations

Overall, participants emphasized a desire to have a downtown that feels like the center of a community, where friends and families can meet on evenings and weekends to frequent local businesses, find opportunities for informal recreation, and build community with their neighbors.

General themes from the recommendations include the need for:

- More and better open spaces and destinations to draw people to the downtown area and incentivize them to want to spend a full afternoon there;
- The revitalization of building facades and storefronts to create a more welcoming streetscape for walkers as well as more pedestrian-oriented businesses;
- More street trees and other green infrastructure that prepares the city for increasingly frequent unpredictable climate events;
- Better lighting, seating, and trash maintenance;
- Added buffers between walkers and moving traffic;
- Safer intersections and more visible crosswalks; and
- Coordinated planning efforts for the area surrounding Downtown Haverhill so that ongoing investments in this area are aligned with a cohesive vision for an active and inclusive downtown.

A summary of the participants' walk audit findings and corresponding recommendations is provided in the tables below. For the slideshow version of these recommendations, which includes photos of the findings, please see the following link:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1QeVEhPnGsrS4ZGOK3Rx8NgCLJstBXvwdo48aolzVks/edit#slide=id.ge618112698_0_242

SECTION 1

Participants walked from the intersection of Washington Avenue and Washington Street towards Merrimack Street, up West Street to Bailey Street.

GENERAL

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
<p>Lack of public events and activities.</p> <p>Lack of activities and spaces for young people.</p>	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Partner with the Haverhill Arts Association, Creative Haverhill and other arts groups to host art exhibitions, music performances, etc in the downtown area.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Work with the Boys and Girls Club to engage youth on the types of amenities they'd like to see downtown and consider locations to build youth-friendly spaces within walking distance of the Boys and Girls Club.</p>
<p>Need more green space and better utilization of what exists.</p>	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Maintain upkeep of landscaping in existing green spaces and add recreational equipment and dog-friendly areas where space permits.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> As new developments are proposed downtown, require publicly accessible green space where possible.</p>
<p>Need stronger connections between the more active streets like Washington and Merrimack Streets and the places people are coming from further north, namely Winter Street and the Acre.</p>	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Conduct trash and vegetation clean ups along the ladder streets connecting Winter Street and the Acre to downtown, and continue regular maintenance of these areas.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Begin making the streetscape improvements outlined in the rest of this report to improve the walking experience along common routes leading downtown, so that residents feel safe, comfortable and excited to walk and spend time downtown.</p>
<p>Litter and lack of trash receptacles.</p>	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Add trash receptacles at greater frequency throughout the downtown area and increase trash collection from receptacles to ensure that people have adequate opportunities to properly dispose of garbage and that bins are never overflowing.</p>

	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Conduct clean ups in Downtown Haverhill to clear whatever litter collects on sidewalks, in gutters, and in other public spaces.</p>
<p>Crossings: need better signage, more appropriate crossings times and increased visibility.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Add in-street signage at unsignalized crosswalks to increase sidewalk visibility and remind drivers that pedestrians have the right of way.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Reevaluate crossing times at signalized crosswalks and increase walk times to give all pedestrians ample time to safely cross. Also consider extending the curb (first with paint and long-term with extended concrete curbs) at these intersections to reduce crossing distance.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Improve the safety of crosswalks along major roadways and intersections by ensuring that all crosswalks are enhanced by uniform visibility features including at-crosswalk signage and continental crosswalk paint patterns.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Consider using rectangular rapid flash beacons (RRFBs) or bump outs at well-used midblock crossings to enhance visibility obscured by cars parked close to the crosswalk.</p>
<p>Sidewalk paving and bricks need maintenance.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Conduct a sidewalk inventory of the downtown area to note what kinds of repairs need to be made and where; use this as a checklist to begin repairs and review as necessary to conduct ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the sidewalk infrastructure.</p>
<p>Poorly lit.</p>	<p><u>Long-term</u>: Add lampposts and other lighting at regular intervals along main streets as well as side streets to create a continuously well lit walking path. Ensure that lighting is well maintained and that lightbulbs are replaced when needed.</p>
<p>Boardwalk is incomplete.</p>	<p><u>Long-term</u>: Complete the boardwalk as planned.</p>

WASHINGTON STREET + MERRIMACK STREET

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Beautification improvements: flower boxes, freshly painted lamp posts, banners. ● Great restaurants and shops. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nice building stock and street scale. ● Views of the river. ● Washington Square has potential.
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Lighting: alleys and side streets aren't navigable at night.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Add decorative lighting in alleyways and narrower streets to temporarily improve visibility and to create a sense of activity and connection to the main streets.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Work with property and business owners to add permanent lighting along the sides and backs of buildings, and add better lighting on publicly owned lots and side streets to improve visibility and a sense of safety so that people feel comfortable using these side streets to get to the main downtown area at night.</p>
Daylighting: cars park right up to the crosswalk.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Paint daylighting stripes and, if necessary, add flexposts to prevent cars from parking too close to the crosswalk. Pushing parking back the length of one car greatly improves crosswalk visibility and pedestrian safety.</p>
Activity: not enough variety of businesses, lack of knowledge of existing businesses.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Work with owners of vacant ground floor properties to run pop-up businesses in these spaces. This would create more continuous attraction and activity along Washington and Merrimack Streets, and would allow small businesses to pilot storefront business ideas for short periods before committing to taking out a longer-term lease.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Add signage listing points of interest and public-facing businesses along this stretch so that visitors know what attractions are available to them.</p>
Pedestrians cross by Wingate parking lot without a crosswalk.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Paint a crosswalk leading to the parking lot and add in-street signage to alert</p>

	drivers to the new crosswalk.
Outdoor seating, though appreciated, has narrowed the sidewalk.	<u>Short-term</u> : Ensure that any elements added to the sidewalk keep a width of at least 5 uninterrupted feet for pedestrians to pass by. Narrower sidewalks are not safe and accessible particularly for people using mobility devices. This measurement of 5 feet should take into account not only outdoor seating but also lamp posts, signage posts, and other elements that obstruct the walking path. Rather than obstructing the sidewalk, the first choice for outdoor seating should be protected parklets in the parking lane.
Washington Square needs better maintenance and landscaping.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Fix uneven brickwork and paving, maintain existing landscaping and invest in added landscaping elements to improve the immediate usability of this plaza.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Have a mix of well positioned permanent and flexible seating so that the whole plaza could be used for seating or cleared of seating depending on what the occasion warrants (ex. for food-centered events and public meetings vs dancing nights and art exhibitions).</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Host programming like music performances and game nights for families could bring more activity to this space in the evenings and weekends.</p>

WEST STREET

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Needs landscaping and better sidewalks. Feels less like a street and more like a parking lot. Could build better connections to businesses on Merrimack Street.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Add trees to provide shade and create a sense of place. Interrupting the pavement with a line of trees will also remind drivers that they are on a street and not in a parking lot.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: At the corner of West Street and Bailey Boulevard, add wayfinding signage for landmarks and points of interest on Merrimack Street and Washington Street to</p>

	<p>guide people to attractions that may appeal to them.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Using publicly owned space on West Street and partnering with private property owners, create parklets on West Street using the unused parking space for recreational spaces and programming that people can use through the summer and fall.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Widen the existing sidewalk, fill in concrete sidewalk blocks where they are missing, and narrow driveway widths.</p>
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BAILEY BOULEVARD

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Maintenance: cracked sidewalks, weeds.	<u>Short-term</u> : Conduct a sidewalk inventory of Bailey Boulevard, noting where concrete sidewalk blocks are cracked, uneven, or broken and need to be replaced. Also consider where the sidewalk can be expanded along this road and use this inventory to inform future construction projects along this stretch.
Greenspace could be better used.	<u>Short-term</u> : Activate the greenspace at the intersection of Bailey Boulevard and Emerson Street, working with residents from the surrounding housing to add amenities and programming that they desire, such as added benches, recreational equipment, and/or a dog-friendly area. Include youth in this process with the goal of creating more spaces for young people to spend time downtown.
Crossing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pedestrian crossing button is too far back, ● Long wait time and short crossing time, ● Lots of fast, turning cars with poor sightlines. 	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Move the pedestrian crossing button closer to the corner of the intersection, where it is more visible and easier to locate, especially for people with vision loss.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Re-evaluate the signal timings of this intersection to add more crossing time that ensures that all pedestrians can comfortably and safely cross with the time permitted, and that walk signals occur</p>

frequently enough.

Short-term: Paint 10 foot driving lane widths on Bailey Boulevard and push the parking lane out to meet the edge of these narrower lanes on either side. In the short term, this will slow fast traffic and improve safety. In the long term, the space given back by reducing lane widths can be used to widen the sidewalk, add trees, or paint a protected bike lane.

Long-term: Consider extending the curb and tightening the curb radius. This will encourage drivers to turn slowly and allow them to more easily see pedestrians trying to cross. It will also reduce the crosswalk length for pedestrians so that they have less distance to traverse during the allotted walk time.

SECTION 2

Participants were asked to walk from the intersection of Bailey Boulevard and Emerson Street to Winter Street, and then down Winter Street, Essex Street and Moulton Way back to the starting point of Section 1.

GENERAL

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New businesses: some cafes and restaurants worth visiting. • Dining outside Olivia's is inviting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential pocket park at the Emerson and Winter Street intersection. • Columbus Park.
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Sidewalks: narrow or missing and in need of maintenance.	<u>Short-term</u> : Conduct a sidewalk inventory to determine where sidewalks need to be repaired, installed, and widened.
Not inviting: few destinations, abandoned properties, worn facades.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Commission local artists to paint murals on blank and worn facades, to add sculptures or other installments to smaller inactive areas, and create smaller temporary installations like sidewalk murals to make this stretch more engaging for those already walking here and to give more people a reason to walk here.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Use placemaking strategies to enhance vacant storefronts. Work with local artists to install window art installations, add lighting, post banners about upcoming public events, or showcase historical Haverhill photography to make the facades seem more welcoming to people walking.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: In areas where there are few attractions, add seating, landscaping, and shade devices (even if temporarily through the warm weather months) to create informal gathering spaces and opportunities for pedestrians to stop and take a break on their walk.</p>
Streetscape elements: lack of trees, seating, signage and trash receptacles.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add trees, seating, and trash receptacles at regular intervals throughout this route so that people can walk for long

	<p>stretches comfortably, knowing that there will be opportunities to rest, dispose of litter, and be protected from the sun throughout.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Add wayfinding signage along this route to orient walkers towards important destinations including parks, important businesses, the boardwalk, the MBTA station and other transit stops.</p>
Maintenance: litter and overgrown vegetation.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Conduct regular maintenance of trash and overgrown vegetation, including adding more trash receptacles where needed and increasing the frequency of trash collection. In addition, work with property owners to keep the sidewalks around their properties clear of debris and intrusive vegetation.</p>
Fast traffic and wide curb cuts/turning radii, and little protection for pedestrians.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Where possible, add striping to narrow driving lane widths to 10 feet to slow speeds.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> At intersections with wide turning radii that reduce visibility, paint sharper curbs. Curb radii closer to a 90 degree angle encourage drivers to slow speeds as they turn. Extending the curb out further also increases pedestrian's visibility as they can safely stand further into the intersection. Long term, make these changes permanent by casting them in concrete rather than paint.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> For crosswalks where pedestrian visibility is low, add bumpouts, which reduce crossing lengths and make it easier for pedestrians and drivers to see each other coming.</p>

EMERSON STREET

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Car speeds are very high, making pedestrians feel unsafe as they walk along the sidewalk with no buffer.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Refresh striping on both sides of the street to narrow Emerson Street to 10 feet per lane and define a clear edge to the driving lane.</p>

Sign for Grand Avenue is on the wrong side of the street.	<u>Short-term</u> : Move the location of the Grand Avenue sign to the west side of Emerson Street where the turn off for Grand Avenue actually is to avoid confusion.
Vegetation overgrowth.	<u>Short-term</u> : Trim vegetation that impedes walkability along the sidewalk and work with property owners to ensure that vegetation on the edge of their property is regularly cut back.

WINTER STREET

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Car-centric: street and curb cuts are very wide.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Paint bike lanes along Winter Street to create safer opportunities to cycle, reduce lane widths and vehicle speeds, and create a buffer between moving vehicles and walkers.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Add trash receptacles, benches, and flower planters where the width of the sidewalk permits in order to make the walking experience feel more comfortable and protected.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Narrow driveway lengths to reduce interruptions to the sidewalk. This will make the sidewalk feel complete and protected.</p>
Excessive heat.	<u>Short-term</u> : There are scarcely any trees along this stretch of Winter Street. Adding street trees would provide crucial shade and protection from heat, and would provide walkers with a sense of protection from fast-moving traffic.
The Little River bridge should be easier to stop at and enjoy.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Clean up overgrown vegetation and trash near the sidewalk and bridge.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Add wayfinding signage to highlight the vista and encourage people to walk by and enjoy the view.</p>
Poorly lit under the MBTA bridge.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add lighting to increase visibility under the bridge. This is also an opportunity

	to work with local artists and lighting experts to add interesting and inviting lighting displays under and around the bridge to create more attractions along Winter Street.
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ESSEX STREET

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Lafayette Square should be a destination, but instead feels unsafe for walkers.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Using paint and flex posts, extend out the curbs at this intersection and tighten the curb radius to make pedestrians more visible and safer, slow drivers' turning speeds, and reduce the distance pedestrians must cross at each crosswalk. Long term, make these changes permanent by replacing the paint and flex posts with concrete curbs.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: On weekends and evenings, permit food trucks and other businesses to host pop-up events in the parking lots around Lafayette Square and in the corners of the intersection reclaimed per the previous recommendation.</p>
No crosswalks where needed.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Conduct a crosswalk inventory of Essex Street and paint crosswalks where most appropriate, including near the parking lot before the bridge - especially if this site may serve as the new location for the Farmer's Market.</p>
Poorly lit under the MBTA bridge and at night.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Work with local artists and lighting experts to add interesting and inviting light displays under and around the bridge.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Add lamp posts along Essex Street to increase nighttime visibility.</p>
Streetscape elements: trees, benches, and trash barrels are needed.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Without narrowing already minimal sidewalk space, plant trees to provide much needed shade and to create a buffer between walkers and moving traffic. Also install benches and trash barrels periodically where space permits.</p>
Where there is greenery, it obstructs walkers.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Maintain vegetation growth on City-owned lots and work with private</p>

	property owners to ensure that plantings do not obstruct the walking path.
Sidewalk merges into driveways and the road.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Add striping to the edge of the road to clearly define driving lanes.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Inform property owners that vehicles must be parked clear of the walking path.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Add curb stones and/or raise the sidewalk above the height of the roadway so it is clearly defined.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Work with property owners to define and narrow driveway widths.</p>

MOULTON WAY/GARDNER WAY/RAILROAD SQUARE

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Poor crosswalk visibility by the MRTA parking garage.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Add in-road signage to alert drivers to potential pedestrians crossing.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Paint a curb extension to the northern side of the Granite Street/Gardner Way intersection to tighten the curb and slow the speed at which drivers turn onto Gardner Way right before they reach the crosswalk.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Extend the curb at this intersection, making the short-term painted changes permanent.</p>
Missing sidewalk on the west side of Gardner Way/Railroad Square.	<p><u>Long-term</u>: Add a sidewalk on the west side of the street by narrowing the roadway or if walkers must cross onto the east side of the street, widen the sidewalk on the east side to make it more comfortable.</p>