

Background

The Springfield Union Station Virtual Walk Audit served as a pilot for a statewide project that examines the connections between social infrastructure and neighborhood resiliency. Neighborhood data and resident perspectives will be captured in virtual conversations and self-led walk audits in 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.

The Springfield virtual walk audit pilot was completed through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Mass in Motion Program, which grants funding and provides technical assistance to support community-led healthy eating and active living initiatives.

Process overview

For the virtual walk audit process, Springfield residents were invited to join WalkBoston for 2 online conversations (via Zoom video conference) and to take a self-led walk in the Union Station 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.springfield/home>

Walk Audit Route

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

https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1ma4njwSHGwwof8ihLxLxliZh_F0-w0mi&usp=sharing

Walk Audit Findings and Recommendations

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 a set route along Dwight Street, Bridge Street, and Main Street (near Union Station).

GENERAL

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sidewalks: quality, width, unobstructed, mix of materials. ● Seating: available in many of the parks and squares. ● Trees: mature trees in the parks and presence of some street trees. ● Landscaping: hedges, colorful flowers. ● Many restaurants. ● Murals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gathering places: Stearns Square, Steiger/Center Square/Tower Square Park, Worthy Apartments, Duryea Plaza, Mocha Emporium. ● Inviting storefronts on Worthington and Main St. ● Cleanliness of some areas: Stearns Square, Center Square, Main Street side of Union Station.
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Wayfinding maps are difficult to read: need simple, clear, large print, directional signage to downtown and elsewhere to supplement and enhance the current map kiosks.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add wayfinding signage: supplement existing downtown maps with large print wayfinding signage for easy navigation between key Metro Center destinations. Wayfinding signs should provide destination names, directional arrows, and distance between destinations indicated in the number of walking minutes (rather than in miles). For additional guidance on wayfinding strategies, see WalkBoston’s Wayfinding Summary Report: HERE
Litter: garbage on sidewalks, alleys, storm drains.	<u>Short-term</u> : Remove and manage litter: work with the Springfield BID to identify areas that commonly have litter concerns and inquire about routine clean-up cycles. Support the BID by establishing a monthly Metro Center resident-led clean-up. Inventory existing trash cans to determine maintenance needs (to remove bins with rust) and to identify places where new bins are needed. Replacing wired bins with barrels could also create canvases for more public murals.
Many (fenced) surface parking lots.	<u>Short-term</u> : Inventory surface parking lots and assess feasibility of repurposing underutilized

	<p>lots. Assess ownership of existing parking lots (private vs. public) to determine the potential for temporary or permanent parking lot activation projects. Consider working with local/regional planning partners to conduct a parking utilization study. If parking supply exceeds demand post-COVID, work with partners on long-range planning for partial or full re-development to reclaim car-centric land uses for walking-friendly purposes.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Repurpose underutilized surface parking lots to active uses that are desired by the community (active parks, play equipment, performance space, outdoor street vending).</p>
<p>Lack of green space that is large enough for activities like recreational sports, farmer’s markets, and performances.</p>	<p><u>Long-term:</u> Activate open space: Consider strategies for converting some existing passive park space into active-use open spaces. Examples of activation strategies could include: installation of play equipment, sports courts/fields, or performance areas. Partnerships for programming with the Department of Parks & Recreation or local community-based organizations could draw in residents from across the city.</p>
<p>Trees: some empty tree-pits on Dwight and areas that lack street trees on Bridge and Main St.</p>	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Review street tree inventory and fill tree pits: Using Springfield’s existing inventory of missing street trees, work with the Springfield Forestry Department to determine areas where new shade trees could improve walking comfort (in the verge for separation from cars, around parking lots for heat mitigation, or in parklets or near bus stops for seating shade).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Where it is not feasible or practical to install new trees, consider repurposing these spots for other uses (like installing benches, trash receptacles, sculptural elements for shade, or colorful pavers as street art). <p><u>Long-term:</u> As a part of the tree inventory: In the long term, consider larger, co-befitting projects near the street (e.g. bioswales) or off-street on public property.</p>
<p>Bike share: placement, lack of bikes, signage.</p>	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Assess bike share locations:</p>

	<p>Include Valley Bike stations on wayfinding signage to help users find rental locations. Evaluate the need for additional stations in easy-to-find locations proximate to Union Station.</p>
<p>Lack of cultural programming such as live performances, festivals, and street vending.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Plan for cultural programming - consider partnering with Springfield Culture Partnership to plan events with resident input.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that municipal permitting processes are not prohibitive to this type of cultural activation (ex. cost/time prohibitive permitting processes for street vendors or performers; ease of permitting for temporary street closures to activate open space). • Create programming that appeals to residents of different ages, incomes, and abilities.

UNION STATION

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benches: People using benches outside the station. • Attractive parking garage with sculpture element on facade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor space: Bright, airy, modern ambiance; not alienating. • One welcoming exit at Lyman St. (avoid Main St and Liberty St). • Bus waiting area is well-lit.
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
<p>Bus terminal needs improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of ped signage at bus area • Lack of ped crossings • Lack of landscaping at bus terminal • Need more benches at bus waiting area 	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Improve comfort of the bus terminal by adding more seating and adding landscape and sculptural elements to the bus waiting area.</p>
<p>Lack of pedestrian crossings to the station.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Improve pedestrian safety and visibility by adding signage and painted crossings to signify walking paths on Peter Pan Way and in the bus terminal. At high-use crossings, consider the addition of rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs).</p>

	<u>Long-term</u> : Add a crosswalk from the Dwight side of the station to Frank B Murray and upgrade the outdated flashing yellow signal to a pedestrian hybrid beacon or RRFB.
No signage to the station on Main St. Placement of the bike share is hard to find.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add wayfinding signage to the station from Main Street and clear, large signage indicating the location of the bike share station.
Missing sidewalk connection on the north side of the street from the parking garage to Union Station.	<u>Long-term</u> : Continue the sidewalk from Main Street to Frank B Murray Street leading to Union Station so that walkers do not have to choose between walking on the grass or on the street once they turn onto Frank B Murray Street. Using an informal, unpaved path creates added challenges for walkers in the winter, especially for those with mobility challenges.
Limited station personnel or guards; often not very helpful when present.	<u>Long-term</u> : Consider adding a visitor information kiosk and staff at Union Station to create a welcoming and informative station experience for visitors.
Need accessible push-buttons on all doors.	<u>Short-term</u> : Assess station door accessibility to ensure that all doors have push buttons for mobility-inclusive access both indoors and outdoors.
Frank B. Murray: wide pavement, need to reclaim space for bikes or buses.	<u>Long-term</u> : Narrow Frank B. Murray by creating a protected bike lane or a dedicated bus/bike lane. Or, if feasible, consider closing this street to through-traffic to create a car-free plaza & green space.
Would like placemaking elements.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add placemaking elements to the station entrance to create a welcoming atmosphere. Elements can include lighting, flowers, planters along fencing, historical educational installations, and local art. <u>Short-term</u> : Activate the station space by issuing permits for vendors inside and outside the station and for performance areas outside the station. Ensure that the permitting process is not prohibitive to street vending in terms of permit cost and duration.
Small PVTA indoor waiting areas.	<u>Short-term</u> : Ensure adequate space in the indoor PVTA waiting areas.

DWIGHT STREET

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Need maintenance under the overpass.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Improve comfort under the overpass by (1) fixing broken lighting over the sidewalks, (2) maintaining a routine cleaning schedule to address issues of litter, accumulated bird droppings, and dripping walls, and (3) ensuring that sidewalks continue to be maintained and snow cleared through the winter. (4) add structural elements that prevent bird roosting in the overpass.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Replace low-illuminating light fixtures with improved lighting that provides adequate visibility to the sidewalks. Further enhance the art installations with bright-colored murals.</p>
Missing street-trees: some immature trees present, but many missing or cut to stump.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: In partnership with the Forestry Division, add street trees along Dwight Street to increase shade, comfort and safety. File down stumps and fill in pits from missing/cut trees, as these are tripping hazards for walkers.</p>
Lack of benches.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Add benches to increase comfort, especially for older residents and those with mobility challenges. Get resident and business-owner input about bench placement.</p>
No bus access.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Study the feasibility and demand to increase bus access along Dwight Street.</p>
No speed limit signage in the corridor. Loud vehicle and motorcycle traffic.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Add speed limit signage to remind drivers not to speed. Consider rotating placement of speed feedback signs in the Metro Center area, as moving these signs to new locations has been proven to reduce speeds. Traffic calming and speed reduction along Dwight Street may also help reduce noise pollution.</p>
Aesthetically uninviting buildings and	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Activate building facades and</p>

<p>landscaping.</p> <p>Excess parking lots (6 parking lots in one 3 block stretch).</p> <p>Vacant storefronts.</p> <p>Electrical boxes lack art (as seen in other areas of town).</p>	<p>parking surfaces with landscaping, public art, and interactive areas like parks and exhibits. Consider making temporary installations that can be reassessed post-COVID to determine whether prior supplies of parking were necessary or whether those spaces can be used for other purposes.</p>
<p>Outdated & missing pedestrian signals: no accessible features (audible, tactile); No push button at Lyman intersection.</p> <p>Crosswalks all in need of repainting, ramp assessment and signal placement. assessment needed, long wait times.</p> <p>Narrow sidewalk in places.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Inventory crosswalks and sidewalks along Dwight Street, taking note of where missing crosswalks must be painted, where pedestrian crossing signals, signal times, and ramps need to be updated for improved accessibility, and where sidewalks can be widened.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Update all signals to fully accessible pedestrian signals (both audible & tactile). Ensure that buttons are present at all intersection approaches and that all signals have countdowns. Ensure that signal timing allows for short wait times and adequate crossing times.</p>
<p>No mixed land-use: car-focused land use; mostly unwelcoming office buildings and empty storefronts - no residential use.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Activate abandoned storefronts with local art installations to create a welcoming walking environment.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Review zoning and land use regulations to ensure that the usage allows for a diversity of destinations to attract people to Dwight Street.</p>
<p>Excessive pavement width: 5 lanes, 2 for parking - which are normally empty.</p> <p>Lack of bike lanes.</p>	<p><u>Long-term</u>: Add protected bike lanes between the sidewalk and parking lanes on either side of the street to narrow the travel lanes and reduce speeds.</p>

BRIDGE STREET

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lighting: Wide, pleasant sidewalk with “historic” street lamps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Destinations: Granny’s Baking Table.
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation

<p>Lacking ground floor activity with a few exceptions: one community-based organization occupies many street-level windows.</p> <p>Uninviting buildings (AT&T, Verizon).</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Encourage pedestrian-friendly facades by incorporating features on buildings to add visual interest and character. Consider a downtown placemaking challenge to encourage businesses to improve their ground-level facades with art, lighting, shade features, and plantings. Abandoned storefronts can be activated with window art installations.</p>
<p>Unpleasant smells as you move towards Main St.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Establish routine storm drain clearance and sidewalk cleaning to mitigate trash and urine smells.</p>
<p>Failure to yield when making right on red from Bridge onto Main St.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Prohibit right on red from Bridge Street to Main Street to improve safety of people using the crosswalk at the intersection of Bridge and Main St.</p>
<p>Sidewalk in disrepair on Bridge Street west of Stearns Square.</p> <p>Mixed materials create an uneven path.</p>	<p><u>Long-term</u>: Inventory and repair sidewalk on Bridge Street to ensure accessibility and safety. Set a plan for replacing mixed-material areas with smooth, level concrete.</p>

WORTHINGTON STREET

<p style="text-align: center;">Features that support walking</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Landscaping: planters with colorful flowers. ● Safe crossing: bumpouts to make crossing easier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Placemaking: lights strung across the street.

MAIN STREET

<p style="text-align: center;">Features that support walking</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bike lane (unprotected and some areas are just sharrow). ● Crossing opportunities: midblock crosswalks. ● Bus access (but few shelters and benches at bus stops). ● On-street parking creates a buffer between walkers and road traffic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ADA compliant ped signs and ramps, countdown signals (but these end at Worthington). ● Well-painted crosswalks: zebra-pattern painted crosswalks. ● Storefronts are mostly full and inviting with some upper-level vacancy.

- Lighting: Sidewalks + underpass are well-lit (and no bird roosting areas).

- Trees: Main Street and on Taylor Street.

Opportunities for improving the walking environment

Issue	Recommendation
Underpass needs signage, color, art.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add art and signage under the overpass.
Trees are blocking signage.	<u>Short-term</u> : Trim trees blocking signage along Main Street.
Newspaper receptacles and trash receptacles need inventory and improvement. Unkempt sitting areas encourage further neglect.	<u>Short-term</u> : Maintain newspaper and trash receptacles, increasing the availability of trash receptacles as needed.
More crossing opportunities needed to reach amenities along Main St.	<u>Short-term</u> : Study opportunities for crosswalk additions to allow pedestrians to more easily reach destinations. In particular, consider how to create safe crossings to access Fort Street restaurants, at Prince Street, and between the overpass and Liberty Street.
Parking garage for Union Station needs better pedestrian signage and markings.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add signage by the Union Station garage to remind drivers to watch for pedestrians, and to indicate directions to the station.
Abandoned buildings: Hippodrome and 1665 Main St.	<u>Short-term</u> : Lead a community planning charrette exercise to re-envision the use of these spaces in a manner that the community desires. <u>Long-term</u> : Work with local and regional planning partners, Springfield Cultural Partnership, the economic development department, and with the private sector to assess the feasibility of redeveloping these spaces for community-envisioned uses.
The police kiosk is unstaffed.	<u>Short-term</u> : Evaluate the cause of unstaffed hours of the kiosk. Work with downtown community partners and residents to ensure that police presence at this kiosk is still warranted and welcomed. If welcomed, work with police partners to ensure staffing. If unwelcome, set a plan for removal of the

	kiosk.
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SECTION 2

Participants were asked to walk to destinations they typically walk to in Metro Center.

TAYLOR STREET

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Murals being painted along Duryea Way. 	
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
The fence is unwelcoming around Morgan Square park (SilverBrick Lofts).	<u>Short-term</u> : Unfence public space to create a more welcoming walking experience.

LIBERTY STREET

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wayfinders building has greenspace and benches for seating. 	
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Many parking lots and not much else.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Improve walking comfort by adding streets trees and by enhancing the areas around parking lots with plantings and lighting.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Conduct a parking utilization study to assess the feasibility of converting car-centric land uses to uses that enhance the walking environment.</p>
High volume, high speed traffic.	<u>Long-term</u> : Narrow vehicle travel lanes and support multimodal use through dedicated bike-bus lanes or protected bike lanes.
Intersection of Liberty and Dwight St: long crossing distance and lacks visibility (needed extension of refuge island).	<u>Long-term</u> : Create a safer crossing at Liberty and Dwight St by extending the existing median to create a pedestrian refuge island and shorten the long crossing distance at this

	intersection.
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CHESTNUT STREET

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pynchon park, once it is opened. • Museum has plans to activate the storefronts at Mattoon & Chestnut. • City converting Chestnut from one- to two-way. 	
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
<p>Untended plantings on the verge.</p> <p>Sidewalks: Bricks uneven and cracked, trees bulging.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Replace uneven and cracked bricks along the sidewalk and trim overgrown plantings on the verge so that they do not impede sidewalk access.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Replace brick with mobility-friendly alternatives the next time extensive road work or sidewalk repair work is being undertaken.</p>
<p>Unmarked, unlit access to Kimball Towers parking garage.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Improve lighting and signage approaching the Kimball Towers parking garage.</p>
<p>Intersection with Pearl - wide turning radius of Pearl St. makes pedestrian crossing difficult, especially with most cars taking right turns on red.</p>	<p><u>Long-term</u>: Evaluate options to make pedestrian crossings at the intersection with Pearl Street safer, including reducing the wide turning radius at Pearl Street and prohibiting right on red for traffic turning onto Pearl Street.</p>
<p>From east side to west side, no pedestrian friendly crossing. Long wait to cross the east side of Chestnut to Liberty.</p> <p>Difficulty crossing Liberty and Dwight because of the volume of turning vehicles.</p>	<p><u>Long-term</u>: Add more midblock crossings along Chestnut Street and reduce wait times to cross at the intersection of Chestnut Street and Liberty Street.</p>
<p>Large vacant area due to 2012 gas explosion.</p> <p>Vacant storefronts.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Lead a community planning charrette exercise to re-envision the use of vacant space in a manner that the community desires. Consider climate-resilient land uses. Activate abandoned storefronts with local art</p>

	<p>installations to provide facades that enhance the walking environment.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Work with local and regional planning partners, Springfield Cultural Partnership, the economic development department, and with the private sector to assess the feasibility of redeveloping vacant spaces for community-envisioned uses.</p>
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RESIDENTIAL STREETS

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lovely walking on residential streets with little traffic. • One-way traffic on Mattoon and turning restriction help reduce cut through traffic. 	
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Brick sidewalks and tree grates are in need of replacement and repair.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Storm drains and tree pits should be routinely cleaned and metal grates should be inspected and repaired to remove all tripping hazards.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Conduct residential street sidewalk inventory and repair to create smooth walkways. Cracked bricks and pavers should be repaired or replaced.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Replace materials with mobility-friendly alternatives that neighbors can agree upon.</p>
There is litter and untended landscaping at buildings and parks.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Encourage landscape beautification and maintenance through placemaking competitions.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Confirm 3-1-1 response process for hedge trimming in the case of impassible sidewalks.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Establish litter removal schedule for buildings and parks. Support this process through resident-led clean-ups.</p>

OTHER AREAS IN METRO CENTER

Features that support walking	
<p>Lyman Street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nice brick-border sidewalk. Nice building facades. Residential land use mixed-in. <p>Quadrangle near the museum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Island of peace and greenery in the city. 	<p>Market Street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corridor of restaurants, shops off of Main Street. <p>Great walking areas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Springfield Armory. Springfield Technical Community College <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wish signs of student life were more visible on the campus, even in pre-Covid times.
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Harrison Avenue at Main Street: Long crossing distance with no pedestrian island.	<u>Long-term</u> : Create a safer crossing by creating a pedestrian refuge island.
<p>Riverwalk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly hidden river and unpleasant backdrop, overgrown landscaping. Need safer, clearer access to the River Walk. 	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Riverwalk maintenance should include routine hedge and tree trimming to ensure visibility.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Improve access to the River Walk by creating a protected bike lane network to connect to the park. Safe walking access to the park should be provided with an uninterrupted sidewalk route with highly visible crosswalks in priority locations.</p>