



Plainfield Walk Audit Report

August 11, 2022

About this Project

The Hilltown CDC, together with Healthy Hampshire and WalkBoston, are leading a 5-year grant project to promote Age-Friendly Walkability in the Hilltown Village Centers. In partnership with community residents and leaders, the team will be conducting a series of walk audits in partnering Hilltown 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 Plainfield is one of the partnering communities in this grant project.

Background

Plainfield has a strong sense of community, with the Plainfield Congregational Church serving as an important community gathering space for residents — the Church hosts concerts and other community activities throughout the year. Plainfield has no shortage of community members invested in making the town center more walkable and, in turn, a healthier and more age-friendly community.

The Town of Plainfield faces challenges to safe walking that are typical of many small rural towns in Massachusetts: fast-moving traffic along Route 116, heavy trucking, and a lack of a sidewalk network. There are currently no marked crosswalks across Route 116, but residents cross in several dangerous locations with compromised sight lines and fast-moving traffic. Despite the less than ideal walking conditions on Route 116, many residents still make the walk; exploring and implementing various pedestrian safety measures, then, becomes critical. Notably, the Town of Plainfield has support for improving pedestrian safety from important Town staff such as the Chief of Police and the Highway Department Supervisor.

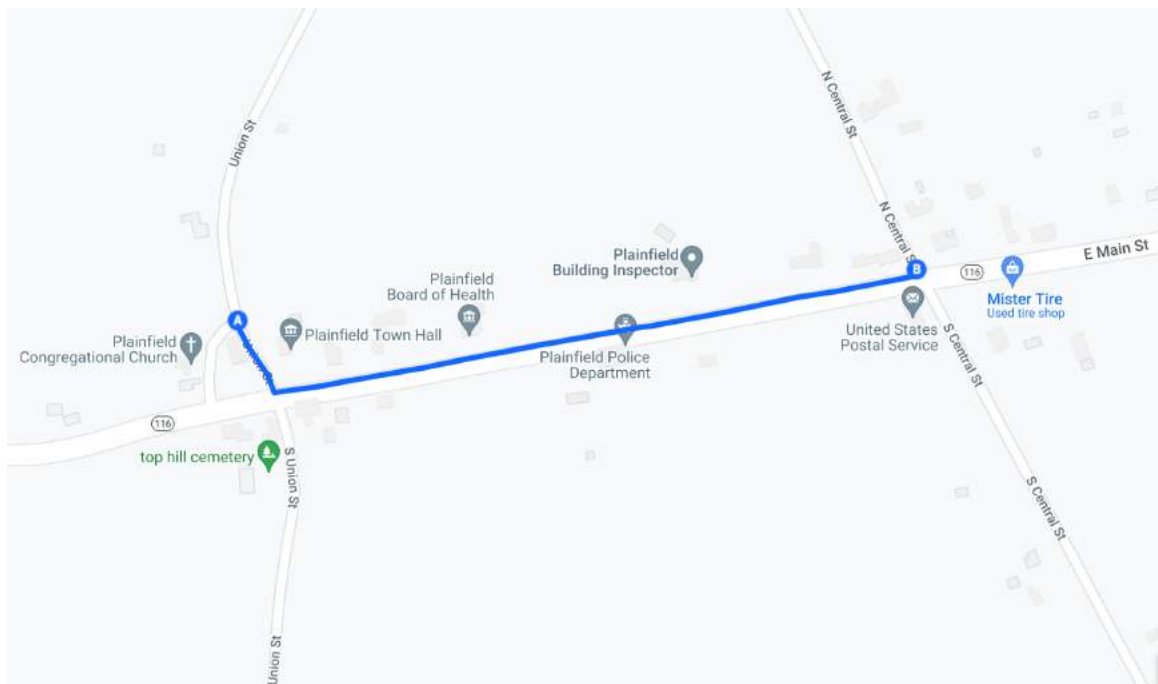
Plainfield has upcoming projects that will complement the recommendation in this report nicely. The Planning Board is in the process of a Village Green project plan to close part of Union Street to vehicular traffic and become a pedestrian only zone between the Church and Town Offices. This partnered with the Highway Department's grant application to fund speed bumps and other traffic calming measures in Town indicate a safer pedestrian experience in Plainfield is on the horizon.



Image of walk audit participants observing walking conditions along the walking route

Walk Audit Process

WalkBoston led an in-person walk audit on Tuesday, July 5, 2022, at 1 pm under gray skies with some intermittent sprinklings of rain and temperatures in the low 80s. Twelve participants gathered at the Plainfield Town Hall and walked the route.



Walk Audit Route

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

walkboston.org | 617.367.9255 | info@walkboston.org | facebook.com/walkboston | twitter.com/walkboston

Prior to the in-person portion of the walk audit, WalkBoston led participants through a presentation of walkability concepts and the walk audit process via Zoom on Monday, June 27, 2022, at 5:30 pm. Participants in both the Zoom session and in-person walk included a range of residents representing the Planning Board, Department of Public Works, the Police Department, and other community stakeholders. A list of participants for both activities can be found in *Appendix A*.

Key Concerns and Recommendations

Tighten curb radii and provide safe crossings at the intersection of Main Street and Central Street to help reduce speeds and increase pedestrian safety

South Central Street serves as a connector from neighboring towns to Route 116 and many drivers speed down South Central Street on their way to Plainfield. The large turning radius at the Central/Main Street intersection allows drivers to make higher speed turns and also increases the crossing distance for pedestrians. Additionally, the hill on East Main Street limits sight lines and makes crossing Main Street a dangerous game, especially for those who cannot easily hear oncoming traffic.

- Tighten the curb radii and provide safe crossings through the following strategies:
 - *Short term*: Paint curb bump outs that narrow travel lanes and crosswalks to promote slower travel speeds and provide people walking with marked crossings.
 - *Long term*: Reduce width of the intersection by redesigning the street with narrower travel lanes and less asphalt, and Rectangular Rapid-Flashing Beacons (RRFB).



*(Left) Wide curb radii currently at the intersection
(Right): Reduced curb radii example from Safe Routes to School*

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

Note: The crossings will need to be far enough from the hill to give drivers ample time to stop for pedestrians. We predict that the safest crossing locations for this intersection will be the west side of Main Street and the south side of Central Street. These should be largely visible ladder crossings.



Proposed crosswalk locations at Main/Central Street

Explore options for making walking safer on Main Street between the intersection of Central Street and Union Street.

On Main Street between Central Street and Union Street, there is no sidewalk – forcing pedestrians to walk in the street where vehicles are often traveling at high speeds. The placement of mailboxes and bushes also make it difficult for pedestrians to walk on the side of the road without veering into the road.

- *Immediate:* Determine the legal right-of-way dimensions along this stretch of road to clarify ownership and actual road widths.
- *Short term:* Consider posting additional advisory signage indicating pedestrians are sharing the roadway.
- *Short term:* Consider using paint to alert drivers that people are walking/rolling along this stretch. The paint would make the driving lane narrower—encouraging drivers to slow down.
- *Long term:* Install a sidewalk along the stretch of road. The reduced lane width will slow traffic. Any crosswalks connected to the sidewalk should be lifted such that pedestrians don't need to change elevation as they walk/roll.
 - The Shaw House is a historical building at the intersection of Central Street and Main Street which will require special consideration. The stone wall in front of the house is very close to the road, therefore, the sidewalk will need to narrow slightly at that point. This process would require a variance from MassDOT.

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE



Walk audit participants moving along Route 116 (Main Street) where there is no sidewalk

Explore options for placemaking and increased pedestrian safety around the new village green project.

Using the new village green as an epicenter, Plainfield has an opportunity to implement changes which let drivers know that this is a pedestrian space.

The project will draw more traffic to this area of town—both pedestrians and cars. There is a field on Main Street, east of the future village green, which is often used as parking for large events at the Plainfield Congregational Church. Therefore, even those who drive in will have to cross Main Street.

- Install a crosswalk across Main Street near the field used for parking. This crosswalk should be raised such that it serves as a traffic calming device and pedestrians are prioritized.
- Post signage along Route 116 alerting drivers to the upcoming town center. These signs should signal that pedestrians are likely to be present and vehicles should slow as if they are driving through downtown.
- The new village green will replace the small portion of road between the Plainfield Congregational Church and Town Hall. Before that project goes underway, there is an opportunity to temporarily shut down the road on the other side of the Church for painting! Street art is an opportunity for community gathering and signaling to drivers that this is a pedestrian space. The painted road will complement the village green once it is built—extending the community space further than previously planned.

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE



Location of the street being replaced by the future village green and its potential painted counterpart

Update existing speed feedback signs to provide positive feedback.

There already exist speed feedback signs on Route 116 in Town. However, the signs only flash when one is speeding over the limit – creating confusion over whether the sign is in working order to those who are following the speed limit. Particularly, signs which project positive and negative responses depending on whether the driver is below or above the speed limit have proven to have a psychological impact on drivers, causing them to slow down.

- Investigate whether it is possible to update the feedback signs to provide positive feedback or negative feedback depending on the vehicle's speed.



Speed feedback sign heading Westbound towards the Town Center in the neighboring Town of Chesterfield

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

Evaluate and explore options to improve pedestrian access and safety along and across Route 116 to reach the Congregational Church, Post Office, and parking areas.

Given the high traffic speeds and volumes along Route 116, there are no easy solutions to providing safe pedestrian access to several destinations along the road. Simply painting crosswalks across Route 116 is not enough to make crossing safer, and it may give people walking a false sense of security. Route 116 is a town-owned road and any safety improvements will need to be handled locally.

- Engage with local traffic engineers to determine options for improving pedestrian safety along Route 116 including:
 - Enhanced crosswalk treatments with pedestrian-activated Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs), curb ramps and landings, highly reflective crosswalk markings, and advanced pedestrian warning signs.
 - Flex-post protected walkways along Route 116
- Explore collaboration and technical assistance opportunities with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission in evaluating various options for traffic calming along Route 116.



*(Left) Flex-post protected walkway in Natick, MA
(Right): Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) in Westborough, MA*

Policy Considerations

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

- Enact and adopt 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>

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

Appendix A. Ped 101 and Walk Audit Participants

Andrea	Lynes	Resident
Jerry	Little	Plainfield Planning Board
Duane	Meehan	Resident
Walter	Jennings	Highway Department Supervisor
Howard	Bronstein	Resident
Justin	Litchfield	Plainfield Police Department
Kare	Marshall	Resident
Dalila	Madison Almquist	Resident
Elaine	Holder	Resident
Darlene	Graham	Resident
Jeanne	Sargent	Resident
Bonnie Beth	Pierce	Resident
Anthony	Vona	MassDOT, District 1
Joan	Griswold	Hilltowns CDC
Keili	Tucker	WalkBoston
Miranda	Briseño	WalkBoston

Appendix B. Resources

Funding:

<https://walkboston.org/2022/07/27/funding-opportunities-for-mobility-improvements-2/>

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