

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER

2022 finds WalkBoston poised to begin two major new projects in the City of Boston and thrilled to continue our Age-Friendly walking work across Massachusetts. We have partnered with GreenRoots — an environmental justice organization working in Chelsea and East Boston — to work with residents to make walking routes to several of East Boston's parks safer and more attractive. And, as part of a 5-year research project, WalkBoston is working with Boston Medical Center to study the impact of signed walking routes and printed maps on residents' decisions around physical activity. Through walking advocacy workshops, we will support the residents as they identify and work to get sidewalks fixed and crosswalks painted around their developments. Our Age-Friendly walking work will continue with a new focus on working with disability professionals — those who train people with disabilities to use public transit and those who provide care to older adults. Look for updates in our e-news and blog posts highlighting our work on these projects throughout the year.

To get all this new work done, we now have two amazing Program Managers, Miranda Briseño and Ayesha Mehrotra. Miranda is a Tufts Urban and Environmental Planning program (UEP) grad and comes to us from the Planning Department at the City of Medford. Ayesha is a Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) grad who started as an intern with us in 2019, and thankfully, is now on staff full time.

After 21 months of being a fully virtual organization, we are now back in Boston sharing space with our transportation advocacy friends — just down the street from our old office space on School Street. It's a place to come, meet, and reconnect with people we have not seen in person since all this began. We, like many with office jobs, are trying to figure out what a hybrid office environment looks like for WalkBoston. We'll keep you posted and would love to hear how all of you are managing new commuting patterns and navigating new office policies.

We look forward to hosting our 32nd Annual Celebration on March 30, 2022, which will be our third virtual celebration. While we wish we could all come together in person, we have gotten pretty good at putting on a virtual show! I hope to see you all there. Until then, stay safe and shovel your sidewalk! Thank you for your walking advocacy and your ongoing support.



Stacey Beuttell, Executive Director

**Boston**

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**CONTACTS/COMMITTEES**

- executive director**  
Stacey Beuttell
- staff**  
Miranda Briseño  
Brendan Kearney  
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BY AYESHA MEHROTRA / WALKBOSTON PROGRAM MANAGER

**Building Social Infrastructure in the Gateway Cities**

From September 2020 to August 2021, WalkBoston and MassINC conducted virtual walk audits in five Gateway City downtowns: Springfield, Fitchburg, Brockton, Haverhill, and Fall River. Our teams worked alongside residents, municipal officials, and other community leaders to not only improve pedestrian safety and access, but also to consider the quality of each downtown's social infrastructure — the physical infrastructure that fosters community connections and a sense of belonging, like seating, plazas, parks, stoops, libraries, and recreational facilities.

People in communities across the Commonwealth have shifted the way they spend their time since the pandemic began. The Gateway Cities are no different. Our walk audit participants often told us that they were eager to be a part of this process because their experiences during the pandemic had made them realize how important it was to have streets on which they could safely and comfortably go for walks, access rich and plentiful outdoor public spaces, find family friendly activities closer to home, and support beloved local businesses struggling to stay open.

Yet, their downtowns mostly lacked enough activity and inviting, pedestrian-oriented spaces to make them destinations. Too much paved space allocated for car parking coupled with inadequate tree cover also meant

downtowns are uncomfortably hot and barren for a large portion of the year. Despite this bleak picture, many of these downtowns have the bones of great walkability. They have small parks and plazas scattered throughout that could become wonderful community spaces with some investment and maintenance.

Several small business owners also participated and were excited to establish pop-up venues in empty ground-floor retail locations or weekend stalls in vacant plazas. And we know that there is immense desire for these types of rich public spaces in all five communities. Time and again, walk audit participants expressed eagerness to see multi-purpose community gathering spaces that could be used for farmers markets, seasonal arts and music events, and recreation.

On Zoom calls, participants exchanged contact information and made plans to join committees or build partnerships to start campaigns to celebrate the cultural fabric and history of their city through historical notices, wayfinding signage, and public art. At a point in time when people could not easily gather in person or meet new people in their neighborhoods, our walk audit conversations became spaces of connection where neighbors came together to set aspirations for their city and for the types of spaces they could share.

continued

# Celebrate with us!

**32nd Annual Celebration**  
**Wed., March 30, 2022**  
**Zoom: 5–6 pm**

**Speaker / Kyle Robidoux:** Speaking on the importance of accessibility, not just as an advocate but also as an individual who is legally blind.

**Golden Shoe Winners:**

- **Josh Ostroff:** For his unwavering commitment to walking advocacy in Natick and greater Metrowest.
- **Meg Robertson:** A champion for people with intellectual disabilities and vision and hearing impairments.
- **“Just Walk Boston”:** An organization fighting pandemic loneliness and segregated space through walking.

**Tickets:** \$30 (pay-as-you-can basis)  
 Registration is now open:  
[walkboston.org/register](http://walkboston.org/register)

# A Step in the Right Direction

Over the last year WalkBoston has been working with the Stepping Strong Center for Trauma Innovation at Brigham and Women’s Hospital on an innovative project to engage hospital injury prevention professionals (IPPs) in pedestrian advocacy. WalkBoston initiated this effort after learning that all Level 1 Trauma Hospitals are required to undertake community-facing injury prevention efforts, but that nowhere in the US have these programs focused on pedestrian safety improvements to the built environment. We believe that engaging with hospitals and bringing the voices of health care professionals into the pedestrian safety movement holds great potential to strengthen our effectiveness.

WalkBoston worked with staff at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston Medical Center, Boston Children’s Hospital, and Tufts Medical Center to set the stage for each hospital to develop pedestrian injury reduction projects as one

element of their overall injury prevention efforts. The primary component of the project was a workshop training course on pedestrian safety and injury prevention to provide the IPPs with the necessary information and tools to determine how such an effort would be incorporated into the hospital’s injury prevention programs. Our interaction with the IPPs identified what the key safety issues are that they might address and how they could work within their hospitals to develop support among hospital leadership and staff.

Based on the positive reception of the effort, WalkBoston and our Stepping Strong partners have joined forces to apply for funding to continue the effort and expand it to include partners in Chicago’s pedestrian advocacy and hospital communities. If successful, the grant would allow us to deepen the work with Boston hospitals, expand the program to the Chicago metro area, and lay the groundwork for a national effort. Stay tuned for more!

Annual Celebration 3.30.22  
 RSVP @ [walkboston.org/register](http://walkboston.org/register)

# 3.22 new outlooks

WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and vibrant communities.

## Mission

**walkboston**  
 405 Waltham Street, #309  
 Lexington, MA 02421  
 T: 617.367.9255  
[info@walkboston.org](mailto:info@walkboston.org)  
[www.walkboston.org](http://www.walkboston.org)

# thank you!

You can become a supporter today! [walkboston.org](http://walkboston.org)

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# Gateway Cities continued

So, what’s next for the Gateway Cities project? Our partners at MassINC are currently working on case studies of the five downtowns that participated in this project, conducting land use analyses for each to help answer the question: Why aren’t people walking and spending time here? The case studies evaluate how active a downtown’s streetscape is, how lack of tree cover and car-centric spaces make the environments less inviting to walk, and what types of policies and programs cities can use to create more active downtowns. The case studies will be presented to decision makers at the respective municipalities. We presented some of our project’s initial findings at MassDOT’s Moving Together Conference in December 2021 with Andre Leroux, our partner at MassINC.

We’ll also be taking the important lessons learned through these five case studies of the Gateway Cities and applying them to advocacy at the state level. Like all communities across the state, our mid-sized cities need funding that prioritizes quality public realms, from improved traffic safety to seasonal walkability to social infrastructure that fosters community ties. We hope to continue our work with these cities to support each community’s vision for creating streetscapes and public spaces that foster a lively, welcoming, and thriving downtown.