Walking and Walkability for Rural Communities
October 13, 2016
walkBoston
Walking and Walkability for Rural Communities

• Character, scale and language

• Rural walkway types

• Common issues around walking in rural communities

• Partnerships/Opportunities to use ROW differently

• Case studies: Belchertown and Williamsburg
Perceptions of Rural Character

Martha Levy, *Winter Scene* (1934)
Rural Walkways

- Hiking trails
- Regional multi-use trails
- Road shoulders
- Sidewalks with curbs
- Roadside path
- Meandering roadside path
- Village Center
Regional multi-use trails

Minuteman Regional Trail
Road shoulder

Taneytown Road – Gettysburg National Military Park
Sidewalk with curb

Gardner, MA

Belchertown, MA
Roadside path
Meandering roadside path

Lincoln, MA
Common issues around walking in rural towns and villages

- Crossings
- Connections to village centers
- Narrow Right-of-Way (ROW)
- Traffic speed
Focus areas in rural communities

- Village Centers
- Schools
- Areas with higher densities
- Areas of concern – high crash locations

Boxborough, MA
Partnerships/Opportunities

• Partners
  – Land Trusts
  – Private Developers (subdivision regulations)
  – Private utilities (access and lighting)
  – Government (municipal, state, federal)
Procure right-of-way: private

- Outright purchase
- Land donations
- Easements (permanent use of private land)
- Use of subdivision regulations
- Licenses (temporary use of private land)
Procure right-of-way: public
Implementation by town staff or local nonprofit organization

- Find precedents in other towns
- Apply for specialized grants
- Find and develop projects
- Fit projects into a larger context
- Assign responsibilities to specific individuals
- Help guide the entire project to completion
Engage your community
Case Studies: Belchertown, MA
Williamsburg, MA

- Village Centers
- Schools
- Areas with higher densities
- Areas of concern – high crash locations
Belchertown, MA
Route 202 Corridor

- Old State School property
- School complex
- Prime Ag and Rec land (NESFI)
- Senior Center
- Courthouse
- Town Hall Library
- Library
WalkBoston, sponsored by the state Department of Public Health, has been challenged to explore the possibilities of conditions for residents of the state's rural or semi-rural areas. To view and download the full tool kit click here. This means places with relatively low population densities - over half of the state’s municipalities, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, have already have sidewalks in their town centers, with rugged recreational trails in their conservation areas. Residents have to drive to a place where they can walk.

Interestingly, some communities have attempted to provide interconnected, town-wide networks of facilities that are near their homes, whether to school, to work, to shop or to find places for exercise. Our case studies focused on facilities from 13 Massachusetts towns from Salisbury in the north, Lenox in the west, Dudley on the south and Beverly on the east. Each of these towns, a pedestrian plan was being invented by local residents. In another two, roadside paths already formed networks for walking to school or exercising. One town extended paths to its beach and natural attraction. Providing sidewalks along all major roads was another’s goal, and implemented techniques to reduce vehicle speeds was happening in two more towns. Linking recreational paths was a major goal of another town. This diversity of approaches was funded by local developer agreements, public utility voluntary assistance and state agencies. Download.

A Long History of Walking in Massachusetts

For about two hundred years after Massachusetts was settled, residents relied on walking for daily transportation. Horses were expensive and not available to everyone. As a result, walking had a great influence on town form. For early settlers, the church was the focus of community life, with the church being located in the center of town. Since walking was the basic means to get to town activities, there were few activities that were not located within walking distance of homes. The unwritten standard was that a three-mile distance was normal. Americans have to be required to travel to church. As a result, many towns in Massachusetts have done about two hundred miles across, with the church at the town center and most of the town contained within about two hundred miles of the church in all directions.

Residents’ walking needs led communities to establish paths between residences and places of worship. Since the church and school were located, as well as to millers, smiths and retailers. These paths were called the streets, used not only for walking, but also for horseback trips and later for horse-drawn carriages.