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the federally designated
entity responsible for
transportation decision-
making for the 101 cities
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MassDOT Office of Planning and
Programming
City of Boston
City of Newton
City of Somerville
Town of Bedford
Town of Braintree
Town of Framingham
Town of Hopkinton
Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Massachusetts Bay Transportation
Authority Advisory Board
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Authority
MassDOT Highway Division
Massachusetts Port Authority
Regional Transportation Advisory
Council (nonvoting)
Federal Highway Administration
(nonvoting)
Federal Transit Administration
(nonvoting)

MEMORANDUM

DATE January 27, 2011
TO Transportation Planning and Programming Committee
FROM Cathy Ann Buckley, MPO Staff
RE Walkable Community Workshops Update

The last report on the Walkable Community Workshop Program covered workshops held in calendar year 2008. This report covers the 10 workshops held in calendar years 2009 and 2010. To date, there have been 43 workshops in the region, including the initial round of 8 given by national experts in 2003. As of October 1, 2010, Walkable Community Workshops became part of the Livable Communities Workshop program.

Marketing

As in the past, an article in *TRANSREPORT* and a notice sent out via MPOinfo, the MPO's listserve, offered the workshops to the communities in the region. Information also was distributed to the Regional Transportation Advisory Council and the MAPC subregions. In March 2010, staff sent a tweet, with a link to a description of the program on the MPO's website. After receiving a response from a community, staff followed up quickly to facilitate the local tasks and to plan a site visit.

Publicity

Once a workshop had been scheduled, it was publicized at the regional level through *TRANSREPORT*, when time permitted, and on the MPO's website. At the local level, MPO staff created flyers that the local coordinators posted in the host community and distributed to local officials and interest groups. MPO staff also provided press releases for the local coordinators to distribute to the media. Articles about the upcoming workshops appeared in the press in most communities that hosted workshops. Some communities also publicized the workshop on the local cable television channel.

Workshop Format

The workshop format consisted of introductions, a PowerPoint presentation, a walk around the area of interest, and a planning

session. The presentation included a discussion of overall best practices for pedestrian design and safety. Staff showed examples, good and bad, international and national, around our region and within the host community. The many reasons for providing a good walking environment were emphasized, including safety, mobility, health, and economic development. A handout included a list of resources for further information and a map of the community showing the locations of pedestrian and bicycle crashes.

The walk gave participants an opportunity to view a local area primarily from the point of view of pedestrians. The postwalk planning session allowed attendees to discuss possible changes to the location by incorporating new design elements. One of the most important aspects of the workshops was the opportunity it provided to discuss how to better incorporate pedestrian issues into the community's agenda.

Individual Workshops

Five workshops were held in 2009: in Chelsea, Stow, Wayland, Hopkinton, and Rockland. Five were held in 2010: in Bedford, Natick, Needham, Quincy, and Walpole. The workshops are listed below in the order in which they occurred, from the June 2009 Chelsea workshop to the one held in Natick in October 2010.

Chelsea: Tuesday, June 23, 2009, 4:30–6:30 PM

Williams Middle School Library, 180 Walnut Street

Local Coordinator: John DePriest, Director of Planning and Development.

Attendance: 7. City planning staff, safety officer, school officials, and residents.

Walk location: Between the school and downtown Chelsea.

Summary: The workshop was an offshoot of the work done in Chelsea as part of the MPO's *Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements in Urban Centers* study. Some of the recommendations of the study were presented. A myriad of problems in the area were highlighted, including the fire department's nixing of plans for pedestrian improvements at one location, sight distance issues, long crosswalks, and driver confusion regarding the one-way street patterns.

Post-workshop: Safe Routes to School funds are being used to make improvements near the Williams Middle School, on 5th, 6th, and Walnut Streets. Improvements include a corner extension, new crosswalks and bulb-outs. Chelsea is also working on a Healthy Chelsea Initiative with funds from a Massachusetts General Hospital grant to promote physical activity and pedestrian connections.

Stow: Monday, August 24, 2009, 3:30–5:30 PM

Town Building, 380 Great Road

Local Coordinator: Karen Kelleher, Planning Coordinator.

Attendance: 20. Three members of the Board of Selectmen, several Planning Board members, town planner, members of the conservation commission and the sidewalk committee, and residents.

Walk location: From the town building to the library.

Summary: A member of MAPC's Pedestrian Study Committee lived in Stow and requested the workshop. The major concern was the lack of sidewalks and the resulting isolation of

some residents, including the elderly. There were also a couple of people who thought there was simply no room for sidewalks and that they were not important. There was much interest in the presentation on roundabouts. It was a very good turnout for a community the size of Stow, and the discussion was animated.

Post-workshop: Shortly after the workshop, the Planning Board formed a Pedestrian Walkway Planning Committee. The committee is working on Phase I engineering plans. This phase is short-term and focuses on connecting the existing walkways along the Route 117 corridor. The \$249,000 budget comes from contributions from developers who opted not to build walkways. Construction is anticipated to be completed by the end of 2011. Phase I includes improvements in the area of the workshop's walking audit. Phase II is longer-term, and will create a list of recommended projects with design, construction, and maintenance cost estimates.

Wayland: Wednesday, September 23, 2009, 4:00–6:00 PM

Wayland Town Building, 41 Cochituate Road

Local Coordinator: Mary Antes, Wayland League of Women Voters; workshop sponsored by the Wayland League of Women Voters.

Attendance: 20. Town planner, DPW staff member, conservation officer, member of the rail trail organization, officer of the business association, members of the League of Women Voters, and residents.

Walk location: From the Town Building to the library, following along Route 27, and back along the Central Mass railroad right-of-way.

Summary: Participants had concerns about large volumes of traffic and a lack of sidewalks in some parts of town. There was also discussion of continuing efforts within Wayland to utilize the railroad right-of-way as a trail. An informal committee was formed at the end of the meeting to follow up on walking issues.

Post-workshop: There were several follow-up meetings after the workshop.

Hopkinton: Saturday, October 3, 2009, 1:30–3:30 PM

Fire Station Meeting Room, 73 Main Street

Local Coordinator: Elaine Lazarus, Hopkinton Planning Director.

Attendance: 10. Planning Director, police officer, Planning Board member, business owner, town committee members, and residents.

Walk location: From the fire station, through the Main Street commercial center, and back.

Summary: Despite the rain, the walking audit was very informative. The focus was on physical improvements to the pedestrian environment as well as economic development of the center.

Post-workshop: The Town hired the Conway School of Design to create a plan to make the downtown safer and more pleasant for walking and driving, to attract more businesses, and to better serve as a center of community life. The report *Visions of Hopkinton – Steps Toward Downtown Revitalization* was completed in early 2010. Building on the workshop and the Conway report, the Town appropriated \$450,000 at the May 2010 annual town meeting for the design of infrastructure, streetscape, and pedestrian improvements in the downtown area. The Town appropriated \$10,000 at the May 2010 town meeting to purchase and install two pedestrian warning signals at the crosswalk across Main Street at Church Street.

Rockland: Thursday, October 22, 2009, 8:00–10:00 AM

Town Hall, 242 Union Street

Local Coordinator: Allan R. Chiocca, Town Administrator.

Attendance: 15. Member of the Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Chair and another member of the planning board, member of the Community Development Office, Open Space Committee member, Highway Superintendent, several business owners, and residents.

Walk location: Along Union Street, north to the library, and south past Water Street.

Summary: The Town's primary interest in having the workshop was economic development. Some storefronts were vacant. The town center has adequate pedestrian facilities and the potential for a very inviting walking environment.

Post-workshop: The Town received an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant, which funded a sidewalk replacement project on Union Street, including bump-outs, which are "universally praised by pedestrians (somewhat angering former speeders through downtown)."

Needham: Thursday, May 13, 2010, 4:00–6:15 PM

Needham Public Library, 1139 Highland Avenue

Local Coordinator: Tad Staley, member, Needham Bikes; workshop part of Needham in Motion initiative.

Attendance: 5. Members of the League of Women Voters and Green Needham.

Walk location: From the library to Needham Center, along Highland Avenue and Chapel Street, returning via Highland.

Summary: Due to a mix-up on the time the meeting room would be available, the walk happened first. The major issues were getting more attention paid to the pedestrian environment by the Town and improving conditions throughout Needham, including along Webster Street.

Post-workshop: The League of Women Voters formed a Walkable Community Task Force, which will submit a report to the Planning Board next spring. The task force plans to recommend the creation of an ongoing pedestrian committee. Work is underway on a map application that will allow residents to record issues, concerns, and priorities.

Bedford: Friday, May 14, 2010, 8:00–10:30 AM

Bedford Public Library, 7 Mudge Way

Local Coordinator: Margot Fleischman, Planning Board. Workshop sponsored by the Bedford Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, the Board of Health, the Transportation Advisory Committee, and the Bedford Chamber of Commerce. The workshop was initiated through contacts provided by a member of the Safe Routes to School staff.

Attendance: 33. Two members of the Board of Selectmen, the DPW Director and two DPW engineers, the police chief, the planning director, the Board of Health director, the recreation director, the Safe Routes to School Coordinator, three members of the Planning Board, and members of the School Committee, Board of Health, Transportation Advisory Committee and Energy Task Force.

Walk location: The library to Concord Road, to Wilson Park, and north on Route 4/225 to a local ice cream stand, and back along Great Road.

Summary: Attendance was very high, especially for early on a Friday morning, and included many individuals in the community who are in a position to implement improvements for the walking environment. Participation was energetic and informed.

Post-workshop: The workshop was available on the local cable television network. The local contact wrote a summary of the workshop and distributed it widely in town. Based partly on the workshop and on other ongoing work, the selectmen agreed to change the focus of a consultant contract to pedestrian and bicycle issues in the same general area covered by the workshop. Staff was asked to attend the first public outreach meeting for that project, held December 2, 2010.

Walpole: Tuesday, June 29, 2010, 3:00-5:30 PM

Walpole Town Hall, 135 School Street

Local Coordinator: Stephanie Mercandetti, Walpole Economic Development Department

Attendance: 12. Economic Development Department staff member, several members of the Council on Aging, member of the Health Department, town planner, member of the Chamber of Commerce, and residents.

Walk location: Town Hall to Walpole Center via East Street, along Main Street, and back along Stone Street.

Summary: CTPS and MAPC did an analysis of Walpole Center under the MPO's Community Transportation Technical Assistance Program. When asked if the Town would like a workshop to follow up on that work, Walpole staff agreed. A chance meeting with a Council on Aging member at another event led to their involvement. Many of the attendees were elderly and brought up issues that made walking difficult for them, including snow and ice on sidewalks.

Post-workshop: Local staff met with downtown businesses to receive input on improvements that they would like to see. Town Officials want to fold traffic signalization and moving and re-striping of crosswalks into a larger infrastructure project which would include roadway and sidewalk improvements. The Town received an offer to install a midblock crosswalk detection system, compliments of a local company, and is determining costs of installation and the best location.

The Master Plan Implementation Committee (two of the members were at the workshop) has taken on a project that includes pedestrian access and walkability in the downtown. The Committee is seeking to create a pocket park on underutilized green space off of East Street near Town Hall (part of the walking tour), and is looking to relocate a portion of the Bay Circuit Trail in this green space. The Town submitted a Recreational Trails Grant in November for the project. This project resulted, in part, from the workshop.

Quincy: Thursday, July 12, 2010, 1:30-4:00 PM

Wollaston Public Library, 41 Beale Street

Local Coordinator: Kristina Johnson, Quincy Planning Department. Also sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce.

Attendance: 20. City Councilor, Planning Director and several staff members, Chamber of Commerce members, Chair of the Quincy Disability Commission, Quincy Traffic Engineer.

Walk location: Wollaston Center, from the library along Beale Street, south on Hancock Street, and return.

Summary: A very well-attended and spirited workshop. There was an emphasis on getting local business people to attend. The Wollaston Library quarters worked surprisingly well despite seemingly difficult conditions—not much space and not a separate room. The PowerPoint presentation was posted on the City’s website. Quincy Access Television filmed the workshop and aired it on their channel.

Post-workshop: The City installed audible signals on Beal Street at Hancock Street and at Newport Avenue. NSTAR replaced the streetlight pole on Newport Avenue near the Wollaston MBTA station, where the exposed foundation was pointed out as a hazard during the walking audit.

Natick: Friday, October 22, 2010, 8:00–10:30 AM

Town Hall, 345 Main Street

Local Coordinator: Charles Planck, Member of the Bicycle-Pedestrian Committee

Attendance: 4. Member of the Board of Selectmen, chair of the Open Space Committee, and the chair and a member of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

Walk location: Was to be downtown Natick. The attendees opted to discuss ongoing projects and strategies rather than do the walking audit.

Summary: Attendance was low, partially due to a town meeting that went late into the previous evening. The few in attendance were key participants in making Natick more walkable.

Post-workshop: The Board of Selectmen attendee developed an outline of a pedestrian plan which the Board of Selectmen has asked the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to develop further.

General Findings

As in years past, the workshops attracted many who walk a great deal and are dedicated to improving walking conditions. The discussions focused on how to make an area both safer and more enticing to pedestrians; the latter ties in to economic development and viability. More information was added to our presentation on the need for more exercise and the health benefits of walking.

Most of the local contacts did a good job in terms of getting the word out and setting up the logistics for the sessions—some did outstanding work. There was also much success in getting elected officials and staff members to attend. Media coverage was good. For the first time, the workshops were shown on local cable channels, in Bedford and Quincy.

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