Dedham, MA:Workshop Summary

Prepared for: Dedham, Massachusetts
Prepared by: R. Mark Fenton, public health, planning, and transportation consultant and Peter Weafer
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Recommendations Supporting Healthy Community Design & Development

On April 27th community leaders, staff, and residents in Dedham, Massachusetts took part in a series of healthy community design activities facilitated by Mark Fenton including a training session for walk audit facilitators, as well as an actual walk audit and work session in the Dedham Square area. People of varied backgrounds joined the training, walk audit, and work session to develop specific recommendations intended to increase public health, safety, and economic vibrancy in Dedham.

During the training and walk audit Mark summarized an overview of the key research into factors that create more robust and livable communities generally, and settings that specifically encourage increased walking, bicycling, and transit use. This included exploring growing evidence that these factors not only support public health through increased physical activity, but also economic energy, environmental sustainability, and quality of life. Mark summarized four characteristics of a thriving community that are seen in the research, as follows:

A. Mixed land use patterns: Compact development with different land uses and activities intermingled and close together, allowing for varied types of destinations within walking, cycling, and transit distance, while preserving open land and agricultural space.

B. Active transportation facilities: A comprehensive and connected network of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities, such as sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and non-motorized pathways, as well as frequent, affordable, quality transit service appropriate to the community scale, from dial-a-ride and fixed route buses to commuter rail.

C. Functional site designs: Destinations are designed to reward, not punish, those who arrive on foot, by bike and transit, such as buildings at the sidewalk, with parking on-street (including reverse diagonal parking) or behind buildings, and elements such as trees, landscaping, benches, shade structures or awnings, human scale lighting, and quality bicycle parking for more welcoming and functional settings for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users throughout the community.

D. Safety and access for people of all ages, incomes, physical abilities and disabilities, including quality street crossings (e.g. highly visible markings, countdown timers on pedestrian signals), full ADA-compliant design, and appropriately applied state of the art traffic calming such as curb extensions, median islands, roundabouts, and lane narrowing and road diets.

Recommendations and priorities

At the end of this summary is a grid and a rudimentary design map with specific recommendations for actions that were generated during our working sessions. They are broken into the three Ps: programs (e.g. events, outreach, education, and promotional activities), projects (physical changes to infrastructure and the built environment), and policies (e.g. rules, ordinances, guidelines, practices, and procedures). And they are listed as short-term ideas that could be executed on the order of weeks to months, and long-term initiatives estimated to take months to years. This makes clear that there are certainly some low cost, near term actions that can be pursued quickly to build interest and momentum going forward.

Dedham Square has several areas in which simple, low cost applications can greatly impact the health and vitality of the community. The following is a summary of the major areas of focus that are recommended for the most immediate impact.

1. Community Commitment to Active Transportation Improvements

Key stakeholders including town boards and staff, business leaders, health and community advocates, and residents in general must come together over a vision for the well being of the community that guides all decision-making to support active transportation throughout Dedham Square specifically, and the town more generally. Walking, bicycling, and transit should be embraced as priorities for the economic, environmental, and public health of the entire community.

- **Community Walk Audits:** Hold a series of scheduled community walk and bike audits led by the newly trained facilitators. Invite mixed groups—residents, advocates, professionals, elected officials—to share the experience, and then discuss possible treatments and improvements. Use this as a way to educate residents and solicit feedback on large undertakings such as converting the Route 1 and Washington Street intersection to a proper roundabout. But also gather suggestions on simpler ideas such as spots for signs, benches, trash cans, and bike racks. The goal for each must be to develop at least one idea for a *low-cost trial or demonstration installation* (pop-up bicycle lane or curb extensions, community painted crosswalk, etc.)

- **Stakeholder Commitments:** Mandate that community stakeholders identify and commit to proposed programs, projects, and policies (e.g. Town Hall commits to benches, planters, and other improvements along the public plaza; a High School or community group commits to brush clearing; businesses take on an alleyway clean up and enhancement program). This is facilitated by these steps:

    - Continued community conversations to develop a broad and uniform agenda for action to support a healthy community, for example in neighborhood gatherings, and in discussions following walk audits.

- Publish widely and clearly what the community is doing and why – make clear the motivation and the tremendous opportunity. Have a concerted media and social media campaign to build awareness. For example, create an ongoing forum on this topic on the Dedham Square Circle site.

- Specifically set balanced and active transportation as a goal—walking, bicycling, and transit—in Dedham Square, especially from designated parking areas, and throughout the community at large. Explicitly emphasize this goal in all visioning and planning documents as they are created and updated, such as the community Master Plan and Dedham Square design guidelines (which can, for example, require bicycle parking and provide sidewalk guidelines).

- Identify the stakeholder groups who can benefit from supporting and committing to the implementation of specific programs, projects, and policies (e.g. Department of Public Works commits to facilitating traffic calming demonstrations; youth programs design and build simple street furnishings; businesses support way-finding signs and an on-line parking and way-finding tool).

2. Inventory key destinations, parking, and way-finding.

Generally parking in the Dedham Square area is seen as a problem, yet there are multiple parking lots within walking distance of the square that may be underutilized or unknown to visitors. By conducting a parking and key destination inventory (based on actual usage observations, as well as community walk and bike audits), the community can develop a plan for priority pedestrian and bike routes and improvements, along with necessary street furnishings and way-finding. An explicit goal must be to make it easier to walk, bike, and take transit to and throughout the square so that fewer people choose to drive. Specific steps:

- **Key destination inventory.** In general the entire Dedham Square is a key destination. But it is well worth identifying specific destinations such as shopping and key public services. In particular destinations with a high percentage of non-driving visitors (younger, older, those with disabilities or of lower income) should be identified, such as the library, schools, parks and playgrounds, social services, and medical facilities.

- **Create a parking inventory**, through a collaborative group which identifies all available parking spaces around the Dedham Square area and key destinations (e.g. Town Hall, Dedham Community Theater, ballfields), and include the identification of key walking connections on roads and alleyways to the square business district.

- **Way-finding and Signage:** A simple first step is the installation of way-finding signs to direct pedestrians and bicyclists to key destinations such as schools, parks, shopping districts, and businesses. Signs should indicate walk and bike times to destinations (based on 3 mph walking speed, and 10 mph for bicycling), and this can be tried inexpensively by making signs through the *WalkYourCity.com* website.

- Develop a Dedham Square online way-finding tool; which can help visitors find available parking and the best walking route to their destinations.

- Launch a safety campaign. Initiate a full-fledged awareness campaign focused on reducing texting and distracted driving, including social media and other methods, coupled with an strong enforcement effort.

- **Street Furnishing:** By incorporating street furnishings such as benches, shade trees and structures (e.g. gazebo, pergolas, bus shelters), bike parking, trash receptacles, signs for both way-finding and safety throughout, there will be increased appeal and safety within essential business and recreational areas for residents and visitors accessing these areas on foot and by bicycle.

3. Under bridge design charrette

Throughout town it is important to identify specific areas that should be protected from development to both preserve open space, but also to direct economic activity back into the city's core. Also explore areas in core districts that are underutilized, with the goal of creating mixed use redevelopment. Short term these can be flexible-use public space to encourage local business pop-ups and temporary installations. A great first opportunity is to focus on the underpass area at the intersection of Harris and High Street, and it is ideal space to host a community design workshop (called a charrette).

- **Flexible Public Use Space:** Create a flexible public use space on the corner of Harris and High Street by adding moveable design furnishings, such as seating, tables, local food trucks/vendors, even a stage and lights for events.

  - Schedule community events on off-peak business days (e.g. Monday through Wednesday) to encourage community members to visit, and to stimulate businesses beyond typical hours.

  - Include bicycle parking, or a community bike share or "lending library."

  - Encourage and support local businesses to hold events and openings in the space (e.g. if a restaurant opens a food truck; local bike shop donates bicycles for bike share program; art openings, musical or dramatic performances).

4. Pedestrian Improvements and Roadway Design Elements

There is a current and immediate need to improve pedestrian walkways and bicycle lanes, most notably in the areas of Washington, Worthington, and Town Hall as well as the areas that link public parking to the square center. Encouraging pedestrians and bicyclists, both residents and visitors, to safely access the key destinations and resources around Dedham Square by making necessary roadway improvements and calming traffic will increase the economic vibrancy of the square. These improvements could incorporate the following:

- **Updated walking and bike trail network:** Use feedback gathered from community walk audits and way-finding exercises as well as existing resources (e.g. traffic and collision data, existing plans) to complete a comprehensive sidewalk and pathway network allowing pedestrian access to all areas of the square.

- **Roadway design elements:** Use trials and low cost demonstrations to lead to permanent infrastructure improvements. Initially these could be paint and simple treatments such as temporary curb extensions and/or median islands created with planters, vertical delineators, or other removable structures.

  - Long term - Redesign of the Washington, Worthington, Spruce intersection, and create a protected pedestrian crossing on the north leg (Worthington) of that crossing.

  - Create a wall or low barrier with seating, and planters on top to further define the public plaza in front of the new Town Hall and to buffer pedestrians from the roadway.

  - Create a well defined and protected safe walkway from the sidewalk back to the Town Hall from the Worthington side of the building.

- **Painting Crosswalks:** To calm traffic and enhance safety for pedestrians. Engage students in the community to paint crosswalks at the most heavily trafficked areas (e.g. Eastern Ave and Bryant Street).

  - Improve the sidewalk and the visibility of the crosswalk at the back entrance to the CVS. Initially at least add a sign and paint to warn exiting drivers that it is a pedestrian crossing.

- **Parklets:** Create low-impact, moveable pop-up small parks throughout walking and bicycling routes, such as on parking spaces, in alleyways, and on empty lots. Engage students for the design and creation of these (e.g. covered benches, seating for restaurants, community pop-up garden structures, bike racks).

- **Bike Accommodations:** Add bike racks throughout Dedham Square and at locations including the Town Hall, Community Theater, library, schools, neighborhood parks, bus and commuter rail stops, and other areas of development mentioned throughout this summary. These will not only encourage less vehicle traffic, but also enhance bicycling between neighborhoods and key destinations.

Bike rack in N. Adams MA (NAMA)

“Buy a Bench” sponsorship, Brockport NY

5. Major safety improvements along Boston - Providence Highway (Route 1)

The Boston - Providence Highway (Route 1) creates major vehicle congestion and pedestrian safety concerns, so improving roadway infrastructure and crossings is a high priority. It is especially critical to connect Dedham Square to the retail, services, and increasingly dense housing to the east of Route 1. To address these areas, several phases of action are recommended. Short term solutions such as creating higher visibility and safer crosswalks are an exceptionally high priority. Longer term solutions could involve first testing temporary mini-circles and roundabouts at key intersections, with the goal of redesigning these for permanent roundabouts. In the United States roundabouts decrease mean crashes resulting in injury by more that 50% (Federal Highway Administration) while maintaining traffic flows and reducing long term maintenance costs; roundabouts also still function when there is no electrical power. The oversized and complex intersection on Route 1 at Washington Street would easily accommodate a modern roundabout design, and be a tremendous improvement for both pedestrians and motorists.

- **Phase 1:** Short term, lower cost pedestrian crossing improvements to Route 1 intersections at Eastern Avenue and Elm Street:
  - Higher visibility crosswalk painting such as ladder style, or faux-brick or other artistic treatment.
  - Improved median islands with refuge space, using inexpensive vertical delineators to create a “nose” on those median islands to protect pedestrians who have only crossed half of the roadway.
  - Wherever possible create low-cost curb extensions with paint and vertical delineators to protect crossing pedestrians, increase visibility, and shorten crossing distances.
  - As soon as possible include pedestrian countdown timers and auditory signals at Route 1 crosswalks.
  - Alter signal timing to include a leading pedestrian interval (LPI), which gives pedestrians a walk signal two to four seconds before traffic receives a concurrent (same direction) green light. This lets pedestrians begin crossing before cars start moving, making the pedestrians more visible.

- **Phase 2:** Demonstrations and pop-ups (painted medians, vertical delineators, mini circles) wherever reasonable to explore more substantial improvements:
  - Mini-circle (small roundabout) trial or demonstration at Harris and East Street for example using cones, hay bales, other temporary materials, paint, and signs. Also possible trial at High Street and Harvard.
  - Trial of a full roundabout at Route 1 and Washington Street during a period of low traffic volume (off peak hours): temporarily close the central portion of the existing roadway and utilize the existing circle configuration, with appropriate temporary signs and cones, to create a roundabout.

- **Phase 3:** Major redesigns:
  - Safety improvements at Route 1 and Eastern and Elm street crossings: more substantial median islands with refuge space, and/or curb extensions.
  - Washington Street and Route 1 redesign to a full-sized roundabout.
  - Permanent small roundabout at the Harris, East, and High Street intersections.
  - Road Diet on Washington. A lane reduction from four lanes to three (one in each direction, plus center turn lane) on Washington Street south of the square is safer for turning traffic, provides space for bicycle lanes, and allows for median islands at mid-block pedestrian crosswalks.

Recommendations grid:

	Short Term	Long Term
Programs (e.g. events, outreach, education, promotions)	• Brush cutting and clean-up. High School or other community groups launch service day(s) for brush cutting & trash pick-up along primary walking routes; students volunteer to do work for seniors, others who might need assistance. • Under-bridge design charrette. Hold a planning session for the space under the Route 1 bridge, to develop possible art installations or other ideas; could be facilitated jointly by Dedham Square Circle and school art & music depts. • Community walk audit series. Hold a formalized and heavily promoted series of walk audits around town, e.g. one in each precinct. A select board member and at least one town staff person could commit to join each walk, led by newly trained facilitators. • Clean and open Dedham Square alleyways. Explore clearing some of the simple spaces between buildings (e.g. next to the theater, Catholic Church) to create active alleyways with murals, lighting, benches, other public space and connections.	• Launch safety campaign. Launch a full-fledged awareness campaign focused on texting & driving, including social media and other methods, coupled with a strong enforcement effort. • Way-finding system, signs and on-line social marketing tools, to help people find activities and destinations within walking distance and time. • Longer term “under bridge” efforts might include protected bicycle parking, skate park, performance space, or a community bike share or bicycle “lending library.” • Create a parking inventory and collaborative group which identifies all available parking spaces around the Dedham Square area and other key destinations, including identifying key walking connections on roads & alleyways to the square business district. • This could be woven into the Dedham Square on-line way-finding tool; help visitors find available parking and the best walking route to destinations.

	Short Term	Long Term
Projects (e.g. changes to physical infrastructure & the built environment)	• Temporary median at Washington and Worthington and Spruce for a safe pedestrian crossing. Start with paint and simple treatments (planters, vertical delineators). • Possible low buffer wall with seating, and planters on top along the public plaza in front of the new Town Hall. • Protected safe walkway to connect the sidewalk to the senior center from the Worthington side of the building. • Short term/low cost improvements to Rt 1 intersections at Eastern Avenue and Elm Street: higher visibility crosswalk painting, curb extensions and/or improved median islands with refuge space (using inexpensive vertical delineators to create a “nose” on those median islands to protect pedestrians who have only made it halfway across). • On Bryant: Improve the sidewalk and the visibility of the crossing of the sidewalk at the back entrance to the CVS. Initially simply add a sign and paint to warn drivers of the crossing.	• Redesign of the Washington, Worthington, Spruce intersection, and create a protected pedestrian crossing on the north leg (Worthington) of that crossing. • Create a road diet on the four-lane section of Washington (south of the Dedham Square area). • Permanent crosswalk visibility and safety improvements along Providence Highway: high visibility ladder style and/or artistic crosswalk paint, enhanced signage, curb extensions and/or median islands, and a leading pedestrian interval (walk signal 2-3 seconds before the concurrent green light for traffic) on the pedestrian signals. • Convert the High Street, East Street, Harris Street intersection into a small roundabout (or mini-circle). • Convert the Washington Street - Providence Highway intersection into a full-sized high volume round-about. The goal should be a single lane roundabout, but may require a second lane on some portions, (e.g. where the outer lane is separated and departs at the first exit).

Policy (e.g. rules, ordinances, guidelines, practices, & procedures)	• Continued community conversations to develop a broad and uniform agenda for action to support a healthy community. • Consider pedestrian exclusive) (or "pedestrian scramble") timing for the Dedham Square center stoplight. This means include a phase in which all vehicle directions are stopped, and pedestrians can cross in any direction. Note that such timing can be changed at different times, to accommodate congestion, special events, etc. • Reduce speed on Washington and in the square, to accompany infrastructure changes. This will be most effective if Washington undergoes a road diet (lane reduction) in the long-term project category. • Evaluate in detail current parking demand in Dedham Square and nearby areas to determine timing and amount of peak usage, and the distances users are walking to destinations.	• Specifically set balanced and active transportation as a goal – walking, bicycling, and transit —to and from and throughout Dedham square, and especially from designated parking areas. • Launch a coherent parking strategy for square and immediate surrounds. Over time as active transportation (walk, bike, transit) facilities and options are improved, initiate policies that uses time limits and parking fees to reduce and redirect parking demand, such as a tiered parking pricing approach (e.g. cheaper further from the square; more expensive as you get closer). • Institute a snow clearing policy for the square area; this can include creation of a Snow Clearing District to which area property owners contribute, so that all sidewalks in the area are cleared uniformly. • Update zoning to encourage compact mixed-use redevelopment of traditional mall and "big box" retail. E.g. reduce and share parking, encourage offices and housing above retail, require pedestrian and bicycle facilities, bring buildings out to front the sidewalks. • Require consistent sidewalk designs and inclusion and placement of furnishings (e.g. benches, bike racks, street trees, potted plants, sandwich boards, cafe seating, etc.)

Potential design map:

References and resources:

- Better Block: educates, equips, and empowers communities and their leaders to reshape and reactivate built environments to promote the growth of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods: www.betterblock.org
- Dedham Postcard image. Retrieved From: www.google.com/search?q=dedham
- Dedham Square Circle local website: http://www.dedhamsquarecircle.org/*;* Great resource for public parking and community events and information.
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Roundabouts: An Informational Guide. Retrieved From https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/00067/000675.pdf
- Trailnet: *Slow Your Street: A How-To Guide for Pop-up Traffic Calming*. Excellent practical guidance for neighborhood traffic calming demonstrations. https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bwr2hdQQsTewQ2hVMWJfeEpDaE0/view?pref=2&pli=1
- Walk [Your City]: Provides a tool in which you can calculate and plan your pedestrian network and create low cost way-finding signs: www.walkyourcity.org