

The Bridgton Walkability Study



Acknowledgements

Prepared For:

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Introduction - Why Does Walkability Matter?

For the last fifty years, pedestrian needs have been an afterthought in the engineering and design of neighborhoods. Both residential and commercial development have been designed around the automobile, resulting in Americans driving more and walking less. Consequently, it is not a coincidence we have developed an obesity epidemic over the same fifty years.

In addition to the countless health benefits of walking and biking, there are both environmental benefits and economic development opportunities related to improving pedestrian infrastructure. Creating a more walkable community can increase opportunities for physical fitness, increase public safety, reduce traffic congestion, and save money on infrastructure maintenance. Recognizing there is a connection between our health and our built environment, many communities are engaging in a variety of local planning initiatives focused on improving pedestrian and bicycle access in downtown and village centers.

In terms of pedestrian access, Bridgton is better off than most communities. As with many communities built in the 19th and early 20th centuries, sidewalks line Bridgton's Main Street and several residential neighborhoods are a short walk from town. In recent years, with the addition of Pondicherry Park and the Stevens Brook Trail, Bridgton has developed an extensive trail network located

within close proximity to downtown. This makes Bridgton unique among Lakes Region towns. However, Bridgton also faces many challenges. Many of its current sidewalks are too narrow, and in need of repairs or total replacement. Several obstacles like telephone poles positioned in the center of the sidewalk, large cracks, or steep grades make them unsafe for many users. There are also multiple downtown locations where segments of sidewalks are missing and entire streets where there is no sidewalk at all. A few crosswalks are in need of relocation and all are faded and difficult for vehicular traffic to see. The Bridgton Public Works Department must repaint all the crosswalks annually because they fade through the winter months.

The purpose of this walkability audit is to provide the Town of Bridgton with a strategy to maintain, improve and eventually expand its pedestrian access among its downtown, major landmarks, institutions, and recreation facilities. This report includes an inventory and map of Bridgton's existing sidewalks; including location, condition (poor, fair, good, excellent), material (asphalt or concrete), width and approximate length of sidewalk segments (feet and miles). A list of priority recommendations for infrastructure improvements, and an implementation strategy are also outlined. The recommendations in this report were developed through a collaborative effort among Greater Portland Council of Governments, Bridgton town officials, the Bridgton Comprehensive Plan Update Committee, local business owners and residents.

Town Characteristics

According to the 2000 census, the population of Bridgton was calculated at 4,883 residents. 12.4% were over 65 years old, and the median annual income (in 1999 dollars) was listed as \$36,722. 9.3% of the population was listed as living below the poverty level. Although much of the statistical information from the 2010 census is not yet available, results from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey are available. The 2005-2009 American Community Survey is also created by the US Census Bureau but bases its results on a survey of only a 1% sampling of the population. This survey recorded the population of Bridgton at a slightly higher number (5,374), with 20.6% of the population over 65 years old. The median annual income is projected at \$44,306, with 9.8% of residents living below the poverty level. A 2008 population growth estimate calculated by the Greater Portland Council of Governments, estimated the projected population in 2025 will grow to 6,818. This estimate is based on the town's share of the county's growth over the last three decades. Based on this data, a conclusion is easily made that Bridgton's population is growing at a slow, but steady rate.

Census Designated Place (CDP) 2010 data is also available for Bridgton. This level of data refers only to the village or downtown neighborhoods of Bridgton, but the numbers are useful when compared to CDP 2000 census data. The 2010 CDP data lists the population for Bridgton center at 2,071, compared with the CDP population data from 2000 of 2,359. Also according to this data comparison, the median age for Bridgton center rose from 37.3 to 46.2 between 2000 and 2010, and the number of people 65 and over grew from 15.9 to 19.3% of the population. This data both reflects a slight reduction in the population of Bridgton's downtown neighborhoods and indicates that the average age of

downtown neighborhood residents is increasing, and the portion of the population over 65 years old living in the downtown is growing. Housing and population density maps from the 2000 census are located in Appendix D of this report.

Planning Initiatives

Recent Initiatives

The Town of Bridgton serves as a major retail and business hub for the Lakes Region. Although Bridgton does not currently have a Zoning Ordinance, the Town has a Site Plan Review Ordinance, as well as Subdivision Rules and Regulations. Section 7.3 and 7.4 of the Site Plan Review Ordinance addresses the concept of reducing the number of curb cuts, and incorporating shared driveways to reduce safety concerns for pedestrians. A curb cut is a driveway or ramp constructed along a sidewalk curb to allow vehicle access to a driveway or parking lot of a site. The ordinance reads:

3. Vehicular Access: The proposed layout shall ensure that vehicular and pedestrian traffic conditions shall not exceed reasonable limits for the neighborhood. Special consideration shall be given to the location, number and control of access points, adequacy of adjacent streets, traffic flow, sight distances, turning lanes, and existing or proposed traffic signalization and pedestrian-vehicular contacts. Applicants shall make all reasonable efforts to incorporate shared driveways, providing primary access to adjacent properties, reducing curb cuts on the main road.

Section 7.4 of the Site Plan Ordinance addresses the design and coordination of pedestrian and vehicular infrastructure on the site:

4. Parking and Circulation: The design of vehicular and pedestrian circulation areas including walkways, interior drives and parking areas shall be safe and convenient and promote clearly delineated traffic patterns for pedestrian, private vehicle and service use.

In the Bridgton Subdivision Rules and Regulations, Article XIII Design Standards, Section 5, Sidewalk Construction Guidelines are outlined using the following language:

Sidewalks may be required to be installed at the expense of the subdivider where the subdivision abuts or fronts onto a major street, and at such other locations as the Board may deem necessary.

There are no other requirements relating to sidewalks in this document other than the minimum width requirement of 4 feet, and the construction material requirement of either concrete or asphalt. Although these requirements address vehicle/pedestrian circulation issues, they can and should contain more explicit and extensive language regarding design standards. Updating town ordinances to require the construction of appropriate pedestrian infrastructure as part of the permitting process is an effective and systematic way to insure the pedestrian-friendly environment is improved with each new development. However, ultimately it is the responsibility of Town officials and residents to enforce these policies.

Currently a major planning initiative is underway to update Bridgton's Comprehensive Plan and create a more attractive and pedestrian-friendly streetscape along the Portland Road/Route 302 Corridor. A committee of residents and business owners meets weekly designing a framework for the public process to update the existing comprehensive plan. They are also exploring the potential for the adoption of zoning and design requirements for the downtown and Portland Road. These land use tools are effective ways to insure that appropriate infrastructure is designed as a site is constructed, rather than leaving such upgrades to be constructed at a later date, and a greater expense,

by the Town. The Town of Bridgton is currently requesting funding for new and upgraded sidewalks along Portland Road from Maine DOT.

Past Planning

The Kent Plan was an economic development and revitalization plan for downtown Bridgton developed by Kent Associates in 2004. The plan examines strategies to revitalize the downtown corridor, specifically focusing on traffic and parking, historic preservation and reuse of historic structures, streetscape improvements, marketing opportunities and business development. This plan focused mostly on land use and economic development recommendations. Aside from the need to safely connect parking opportunities with downtown commercial development, pedestrian access and connectivity was not expressly examined in this plan.

Bridgton's Town Layout

Portland Road (Route 302) is the gateway to Bridgton and a busy east-west corridor connecting Maine's Lakes Region and the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Portland Road and Main Street make up the central business district in Bridgton. Portland Road intersects with Main Street to create a busy intersection on the eastern end of downtown Bridgton. Main Street continues through downtown Bridgton and creates a rotary at its west end where it intersects with High Street. Bridgton Hospital, a major medical facility for the Lakes Region, is located on South High Street. North High continues as Route 302 to Fryeburg and eventually New Hampshire.

The downtown district located along Main Street has sidewalks (constructed in 1989) on both sides of the roadway, and in excellent condition. Unfortunately, over the past several decades, much of the commercial development has occurred away from Main Street - and the traditional downtown - toward the outer edge of town along Portland Road to better accommodate automobile parking. For example, the Hannaford Supermarket was built on Portland Road several miles south of Main Street four years ago. Despite the fact that many pedestrians access the site, there is no pedestrian infrastructure on the site nor on the adjacent roads.

Developing the Plan

Municipal Coordination and Public Input

In the winter of 2010, the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) began working with the Economic Development Planner from the Town of Bridgton to create a sidewalk survey, or walkability study, examining pedestrian connectivity throughout Town. Soon after, field work was conducted by GPCOG to document the existing pedestrian infrastructure in downtown Bridgton and the adjacent commercial areas of Portland Road and South High Street. A Comprehensive Plan Update Committee consisting of residents, municipal officials, and local stakeholders was also convened with an official “kick off” meeting April 16, 2011. Although the focus of this committee was updating the Bridgton Comprehensive Plan, GPCOG saw this was an excellent opportunity to present the scope and initial survey findings of this study to the Bridgton citizens. A major focus for this committee is the sidewalks along Portland Road and there

was a clear opportunity for coordination between the two projects. Another public meeting to present the initial findings of the walkability study occurred on the evening of May 19th. At this meeting, GPCOG Planner Stephanie Carver and Bridgton's Economic Development Director Alan Manoian followed up from the April meeting and presented and discussed draft priority recommendations and a sidewalk inventory map. After a presentation outlining the project scope and progress to date, the public was asked to review the draft map and make suggestions and changes directly to large draft maps printed for the meeting. Those suggestions and comments were reviewed and incorporated into this report.

Community Surveys

As part of the public participation process, a brief survey circulated to municipal officials, stakeholders and residents. A paper version of the survey was made available for those who did not have regular access to the web. A copy of the survey summary report can be found in the appendix section of this report.

Although only 18 people filled out the survey, the majority of respondents were members of the Bridgton Comprehensive Planning Committee. According to the survey results, most respondents feel improving pedestrian access to the village center from adjacent residential neighborhoods should be a priority for the town. The survey also revealed that most people walk for fitness and recreation. People cited weather as a major reason they are not able to walk more often, and 33% stated there are either no sidewalks or unsafe sidewalks located near their home. 88% of respondents also felt that the Portland Road area around the

Hannaford supermarket was the area of town where sidewalk construction was most needed. 70% felt Bridgton Hospital should be a priority location for upgraded pedestrian infrastructure and 64% of respondents also felt Stevens Brook Elementary should receive similar consideration. The survey report summary is located in Appendix C of this report.

Existing Pedestrian Infrastructure

Sidewalks and Trails

There are many sidewalks throughout town; however their condition varies. According to the existing conditions inventory, Main Street has the largest length of continuous sidewalks at over 10,000 square feet. They are brick and concrete and in excellent condition located along both sides of Main Street. Conversely, a number of the existing sidewalks throughout town are in need of repair or replacement. As outlined in the chart below, at least 5% of the sidewalks documented were labeled in “poor” condition. Most of those in disrepair are made of asphalt, and lack any substantial curbing. 23% are in fair condition. Fortunately 72% are in “good” or “excellent” condition. A map and additional photos of the existing sidewalks, crosswalks, and trails can be found in Appendices B and D of this report.

Sidewalk Condition

Sidewalk Condition	Segments	Total Feet	Total Mile	% of Total
Excellent	12	6882	1.30	35%
Good	6	7341	1.39	37%
Fair	6	4510	0.85	23%
Poor	1	971	0.18	5%
Total	25	19703	3.73	100%

To complement the existing sidewalk network, Bridgton has an extensive network of recreational trails that are easily accessible, by automobile, from several locations throughout town. Unfortunately most trailheads are not connected to an existing sidewalk. In addition to providing a unique recreational amenity for both tourists and local residents, these trails could be connected to pedestrian infrastructure to provide an invaluable link among recreation areas, residential neighborhoods, commercial and institutional uses, and the downtown. Most of these trails meander through Pondicherry Park, 59 acres of undeveloped wooded land and trails recently acquired by the Town. The park is located between the Bridgton Community Center on Depot Street, South High Street and Willet Road. The Park includes a section of the Stevens Brook Trail. It was created from three separately owned private parcels purchased by the Town after an extensive fundraising effort. There are four main entrances to the park, one on Depot Road behind the Community Center, one just south of Church Street along South High Street, one across from the Bridgton Hospital along South High Street, and one with a parking area on Willet Road. Stevens Brook Trail follows along the Steven Brook and connects to both Depot Street and the Pondicherry Park trail network, and provides a recreation trail between Highland Lake and Long Lake.

Major Pedestrian Generators

The following is a list of significant pedestrian generators in Bridgton. Creating safe pedestrian access to these facilities should be a priority.

- Stevens Brook Elementary School averages about 300 students. This year, 2010-2011 school year with preschool the total enrollment was 330.
- Bridgton Hospital

- Steven Brook Trail/ Pondicherry Park
- Hannaford/ Dunkin Donuts/ McDonalds
- Pikes Farm Apartments - located on the corner of Willet and South High Street. Many of the residents of this affordable housing development do not own cars and use Willet Road to walk to the Hannaford Supermarket. There are no sidewalks along Willet Road.
- There are several other residential neighborhoods adjacent to town. One is situated south of Main Street and east of South High St. Many people in this neighborhood use Church Street to access South High Street. Another larger residential neighborhood is situated to the north of Main Street extending east past the Rt.302/117 intersection along Main Street.

Safe Routes to School Initiative

The Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), in partnership with the Bicycle Coalition of Maine, provides Safe Routes to School technical and program support to schools and communities. This federal, state and locally funded initiative promotes safe walking and bicycling for Maine's school children. Using the 5 E's, a variety of evaluation, education, encouragement, enforcement, and engineering strategies, the Safe Routes to School Program seeks to help local communities make walking and biking to school a safe and routine activity.

During the planning process for this study, GPCOG staff coordinated with Sarah Cushman, the Southern Maine Planner for the Maine Safe Routes to School Program. Since a large number of the pedestrians accessing the school are children, it made sense to evaluate the site within the five E's framework of the

Safe Routes Program. Walking and biking to school increases physical fitness, is more cost effective than busing, and reduces the traffic congestion and safety issues associated with parents driving their children to and from school.

As part of this process, Stevens Brook Elementary School families were encouraged to come to both the April 19th and May 19th public meetings. Additionally, an invitation for parents was sent home with each student for the May 19th meeting. A parent survey (24% response rate), and a three day in-class student travel mode survey were performed. According to the survey data, many children live more than two miles from school and because there are no sidewalks along many roads outside the downtown, they are bused or driven to school. For those within walking distance, vehicle speed and traffic, weather and climate conditions, lack of adequate or safe sidewalks, potential for violence and crime (“stranger danger”), and unsafe intersections were also cited by parents as major obstacles to allowing their children to walk or bike to school. Using the data acquired from these surveys, an assessment of barriers and potential solutions was developed. Suggested solutions and strategies to overcome these barriers are outlined in the Priority Recommendations section below and Appendix A.

Priority Recommendations

In addition to providing an inventory of the existing pedestrian infrastructure, an essential element of this study is to suggest recommendations to improve and expand the existing pedestrian infrastructure network. Ultimately, the goal is to increase pedestrian safety, create a more “walkable” community and connect

major destinations with the downtown and residential neighborhoods. Based on input from residents, municipal officials, and stakeholders, a list of priority recommendations has been created. The list is organized into specific locations for infrastructure creation or improvement, and general policy or public initiatives. A table outlining these recommendations is included in Appendix A of this report. A descriptive summary of these priorities follows:

Hannaford Supermarket/ Dunkin Donuts/ Portland Road

The Hannaford Supermarket site contains no pedestrian infrastructure. This area was cited in the resident survey as the highest priority. Most pedestrians access the store from the neighboring Chamber of Commerce and traverse over a brook and a berm (see picture in Appendix A) to access the site. After much observation and public feedback, it is evident that many residents do walk to Hannaford from nearby residential neighborhoods and it is clearly a safety issue that should be addressed. Additionally, there is no crosswalk providing access to the site from Portland Road or Willet Road for pedestrians to cross safely. The nearby Dunkin Donuts also lacks any pedestrian infrastructure.

Stevens Brook Elementary

Stevens Brook Elementary School is located along Route 302/ Portland Road, north of Hannaford and close to the intersection of Portland Road and Main Street. Unfortunately, its direct frontage along the east side of Portland Road does not include a sidewalk. There is a narrow sidewalk located on the opposite side of Portland Road (west side of the road) which includes several obstacles such as telephone poles in the middle of the sidewalk, requiring a pedestrian to

possibly walk into the vehicular travel lane to avoid them. Additionally, there is a crosswalk located across the street from the school entrance leading the pedestrian into oncoming traffic exiting from the driveway of the neighboring drugstore. This is obviously a major safety issue for pedestrians, especially children using that crosswalk to walk to school.

Stevens Brook Elementary has the benefit of being within walking distance of many residential neighborhoods, as well as having a location adjacent to the Pondicherry Trail system. However, as noted in the Safe Routes parent surveys, many children live too far away to walk or bike to school without assistance. Fortunately, there are many programs that the school can implement to encourage some level of walking and biking. One such a program is the walking school bus. With parent volunteers, children can meet at a specific location closer to campus and walk the remaining distance to school together. Stevens Brook recently participated in such an event last May, with almost the entire school participating and much enthusiasm on the part of staff and parents. This approach can also be utilized for children located within walking distance of school. Parent volunteers can organize adult-led walking groups with rotating volunteer responsibilities.

Speed was also noted as one of the major obstacles affecting whether parents allow their children to walk or bike to school. This issue was also discussed in public meetings as major issue affecting pedestrian safety throughout town. Residents, municipal officials and school administrators should continue to work with law enforcement to address this problem. In addition to traffic calming

infrastructure improvements, progressive ticketing by police, Crossing Guides and speed trailers are effective ways to reduce traffic speed if used regularly.

Continuing to educate students, staff, parents, and the nearby community is another important role of the Safe Routes to School Program. It is recommended that the school convene a School Safe Routes Team with representatives from the above groups to continue to work with the Safe Routes Program.

Suggestions for the Team's work include:

- implementation of annual bicycle and pedestrian safety education
- walk and bike to school campaigns and development of neighborhood walking school buses
- adopting a best practices Walk & Bike to School Policy
- and working with the town Pedestrian Advisory Committee on this Plan's suggested pedestrian infrastructure improvements

all with the ultimate goal of encouraging students and staff to walk or bike to school, and creating a safer environment for this activity. This could also be a subcommittee of the Pedestrian Advisory Committee recommendation below.

South High Street/ Bridgton Hospital/ Willet Road/ Church Street

South High Street was originally considered the central thoroughfare through Bridgton. Many historic homes still stand representing several styles of Victorian revival architecture. Today, the Bridgton Hospital is a major destination for those in the Lakes Region needing medical care. South High Street currently has adequate sidewalks on the east side of the road until the sidewalk ends within a

few hundred yards of the entrance of the hospital, creating a safety issue for pedestrians trying to reach the hospital. There are no crosswalks on South High providing direct access to the site. The hospital site has virtually no pedestrian infrastructure whatsoever.

A common “cut through” for both pedestrians and vehicular traffic attempting to access South High Street or Bridgton Hospital is Willet Road, connecting Portland Road/ Route 302 with South High Street. Church Street also connects Main Street with South High Street. Both of these routes are used widely by pedestrians and vehicles. However, neither Church Street nor Willet Road has sidewalks.

Depot Road

Depot Road includes remnants of sidewalks, although they have not been maintained, are not an adequate width, and do not have adequate curbing. These sidewalks should be reconstructed at least on the east side of the road, if not both sides. It is an ideal location for sidewalks to connect downtown with the extensive trail network including Pondicherry Park, the Skateboard Park and the Bridgton Community Center.

Town Beach/ Highland Road

Highland Road intersects with Main Street at the west end of downtown. The sidewalk extends a few hundred feet but stops just short of the public beach. This is obviously a major destination for both pedestrians and vehicular traffic in the

summer. Extending the sidewalks and upgrading pedestrian access and safety is recommended.

Construction Costs and Funding Strategies

Sidewalk construction costs can vary greatly depending on the location of the sidewalk and whether it is constructed on its own or as part of a larger project. If constructed as part of a larger construction project the cost is far less expensive. In addition to commercial development projects, utility work provides an excellent opportunity for less expensive sidewalk work to be done. Grant funding opportunities for sidewalk construction or improvements often depend on several factors. Many communities use development regulations or design standards such as Site Plan Review, Subdivision Rules and Regulations, or Overlay Districts to require a developer to pay for upgrades to existing infrastructure to improve pedestrian access to and from the proposed site. The difficulty with this strategy is that it can lead to the “sidewalk to nowhere.” For this reason, having an updated sidewalk inventory, preferably in GIS, is essential. This piecemeal funding strategy requires patience and persistence to see results. Used in conjunction with other funding strategies, however, it can be a cost effective method and produce significant results over time.

- Although funding for sidewalk construction can come from a municipality’s capital budget, projects have also been funded through federal or state funds administered by Maine DOT. Communities should research and pursue a variety of local, state and federal funding for pedestrian infrastructure as it becomes available. Regional Planning Agencies such as Greater Portland Council of Governments can work with communities to pursue funding. Examples of such funding are: **MaineDOT’s Quality Community**

Program (QCP), which utilizes federal and state funding to pursue projects focused on improving community transportation-related facilities through bicycle and pedestrian, safety, environmental, scenic, historic, and other quality community improvements. Under the umbrella of the Maine Quality Community Program are two primary funding sources:

The Maine Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS) provides up to 100% potential funding for eligible projects for infrastructure improvements that will increase the number of students walking or bicycling to a school or to after-school activities - and provide greater safety for those already walking or bicycling. SRTS funding can be used for improvements along an existing road or for off-road projects (ie. pedestrian and bicycle paths that connect community destinations) and can only be used for projects within two miles of K-8 schools.

- Transportation Enhancements (TE) funding can be used for bicycle and pedestrian improvements, historic and environmental projects, and downtown revitalization initiatives, as well as other investments that create an enhanced transportation system. TE requires a minimum 20% local match. Project proposals must show a relationship to surface transportation.

- The Recreational Trails Program is a federal assistance program to help states provide and maintain recreational trails for both motorized and non-motorized use. It provides funds for a variety of trails including trails for walking, biking, in-line skating, water activities, equestrian use, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, off-road motorcycling, all-terrain vehicle use, four-wheel driving, and other off-road vehicle use. Administered at the federal level by the Federal Highway Administration and at the state level by the Maine Department of Conservation, Bureau of Parks and Lands, RTP grants can provide up to \$100,000 for certain motorized bridge work but limits most grants to up to \$35,000 of allowable costs.

Next Steps –Pedestrian Advisory Committee

The most challenging element of any plan is implementation. As previously stated, the primary goal of this plan is to create a more “walkable” Bridgton by improving the pedestrian connectivity among downtown, recreational activities, local institutions, and residential neighborhoods. Ultimately, public involvement is the most effective tool a community can use to insure its goals are achieved. The first step for any community should be to create a pedestrian advisory committee. The committee should be responsible for the following tasks:

- Establish a set of community goals, objectives and strategies (long-term, short-term) based on this report's recommended pedestrian infrastructure improvements and other priorities that arise in the future.
- Manage a marketing effort in the community to educate the public about the importance of providing safe and extensive infrastructure for pedestrians.
- Coordinate planning efforts in the community. This includes updating and advising the Planning Board and municipal officials about pedestrian needs. The committee should focus on both small projects and continuing to examine the overall pedestrian network in Bridgton. This could also include having the School Safe Routes Team as a subcommittee to this Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

Once this committee is assembled it should, using this plan as a tool, serve as an advisory committee to Town Officials, the Planning Board and generally oversee and ensure that the goal of improving pedestrian infrastructure is represented in the planning process.