

Downtown Fall River Walk Audit - Memo Report

Background

The Downtown Fall River Walk Audit is the fifth and final walk audit in a statewide project that examines the connections between social infrastructure, neighborhood walkability and transit access. Neighborhood data and resident perspectives were captured in virtual conversations and in-person walking assessments in a total of 5 Gateway Cities in Massachusetts: Springfield, Fitchburg, Brockton, Haverhill and Fall River. The two main goals of this project are to effect change at the local level to work towards safer, more enjoyable streets and to inform state policy and legislation to prioritize budgetary investment in Gateway Cities. This project is co-hosted by WalkBoston and MassINC, with support from the Solomon Foundation.

Process overview

For the walk audit process, Fall River residents and other community members who work in Fall River were invited to join WalkBoston for two online conversations (via Zoom video conference) and to take a self-led walk or join a WalkBoston-led group walk in the downtown area. Prior to their walk audits, participants were led through a Ped101 workshop to learn more about the elements of walkability and to learn how to conduct a walk audit. During their self-led walk audit, participants were asked to make written and photo/video observations to share back with the group. For recordings of this process and a presentation summarizing the residents' walk audit findings and improvement recommendations please visit the website that was created to organize the virtual walk audit process: <https://sites.google.com/walkboston.org/fallriver>

Walk Audit Route

The walk audit route details and pedestrian crash data for the surrounding area can be found at this link: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=11X1kOH3rc6GHwyaOWjl-YbdCKAbMiiZj&usp=sharing>

Walk Audit Findings and Recommendations

Overall, participants emphasized a desire to have a downtown that connects people to the city's many assets, where people can feel safe and comfortable walking or biking to destinations, and where friends and families can meet on evenings and weekends to frequent local businesses, find opportunities for informal recreation, and build community with their neighbors. General themes from the recommendations include the need for:

- More and better open spaces and destinations to draw people downtown and incentivize them to want to spend time there, especially in the evenings;
- Better lighting, seating, and trash maintenance;

- Added buffers between walkers and moving traffic;
- Safer intersections and more visible crosswalks;
- More infrastructure for cycling, such as bike lanes and bike parking;
- More diverse representation of the community - particularly the city's Black residents - on signage, historical markers, City publications and efforts to commemorate Fall River's history and celebrate its culture;
- Better coordination between various planning and improvement efforts for the area surrounding Downtown Fall River so that ongoing investments in this area are aligned with a cohesive vision for an active and inclusive downtown and redundant efforts are not undertaken; and
- Further action to improve walking conditions on the streets surrounding those covered by this walk audit. This walking route was limited to a distance that was feasible to cover in reasonable time, and therefore could not cover all of the streets that the community sought to comment on. Mill Street and Central Street were two such examples. There is a great desire for the walking conditions and placemaking potential on these streets to see greater investment and future work should expand upon the efforts initiated through this walk audit.

A summary of the participants' walk audit findings and corresponding recommendations is provided in the tables below. For the slideshow version of these recommendations, which includes photos of the findings, please see the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ZtEhGRxsTGZzqXYUAQvk36EWu7wclYodyD8BdaLgiY/edit?usp=sharing>

SECTION 1

Participants walked from the intersection of Pocasset Street and South Main Street down South Main Street towards Columbia Street, and then down Columbia Street until they reached Ponta Delgada Boulevard.

GENERAL

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of potential to become a great street for pedestrians. • Architectural and historical character. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where there is shade, people are gathering and socializing.
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Litter along sidewalks and in drains.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Conduct regular clean ups to keep sidewalks and drains free of debris. Partner with local businesses to maintain the sidewalk in front of their properties. If planters or other containers are not being used for their intended purpose, remove them so that they do not get used for litter.</p> <p><u>Short-term:</u> Provide more trash receptacles where needed and provide regular clearance schedules.</p>
Cracked and uneven sidewalks and bricks/cobblestone.	<u>Short-term:</u> Create a sidewalk inventory of Downtown Fall River and begin repairing and replacing damaged sidewalks.
Overgrown vegetation and weeds.	<u>Short-term:</u> Conduct regular maintenance of vegetation on City-owned land and work with private property owners to ensure plantings do not extend onto the sidewalk.
Lack of evening activity.	<u>Short-term:</u> Partner with property owners to create short-term programming in under-used lots and in vacant properties and consider programming that keeps the space active through the evening. Hosting evening performing arts events, dance nights, music performances and recreational days are all ways to draw activity in so that people feel safe and comfortable walking through this area in the evening knowing that there are many other people doing the same.

Missing banners on light posts.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add in commemorative banners on lampposts where they are missing to create a continuous line of festive decoration.
No bike infrastructure.	<u>Long-term</u> : Add in bike lanes (and at minimum sharrows) where they are missing and provide bike parking at convenient locations throughout downtown.
Winter sidewalk maintenance.	<u>Short-term</u> : Work with businesses and property owners to clear sidewalks and crosswalks of snow and ice within 24 hours of snowfall.
Inconsistent design elements take away from the historical appeal of this area.	<u>Long-term</u> : Standardize streetscape elements like streetlight fixtures, curbstones and awnings.

SOUTH MAIN STREET

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide sidewalks. • Some stores with creative storefront appeal. • Outside the senior housing development, people gathered in the open space area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Viva Fall River mural is bright and inviting. • Gerald Lawton park has a lot of potential as a community gathering space.
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Many tripping hazards.	<u>Short-term</u> : Create a sidewalk inventory noting uneven and cracked sidewalks, metal post stumps, and loose pavers and use this inventory to begin replacing worn stretches of sidewalk and filing down stumps and other tripping hazards.
Lack of benches or other seating.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Add in seating along the sidewalk where space permits, especially near bus stops.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Add in flexible seating in Gerald Lawton park so that people can make use of this park and rest in the shade, and so that the park is better equipped to host small events that may require differing space and</p>

	seating options.
Trees are young and there are not many awnings to provide shade.	<u>Short-term:</u> During the summer months, provide shade canopies along heavily paved and poorly shaded sidewalks. This is also an opportunity to work with local artists to employ creative installations that provide protection from the sun and make for interesting and attractive displays that help draw people downtown.
Little storefront appeal because there are many empty storefronts and service-oriented businesses.	<u>Short-term:</u> Use placemaking strategies to enhance vacant storefronts. Install window art installations, historical photography, lighting, etc. to make the facades seem more welcoming to people walking. <u>Long-term:</u> Consider using empty ground floor retail spaces for business incubator programs so that aspiring entrepreneurs can pilot their business ideas downtown without having to commit to a long-term lease. Publicity about pop-up businesses running in these spaces may also help attract more foot traffic, which would serve all downtown businesses.
The old payphone booth is no longer operational and sometimes holds trash.	<u>Short-term:</u> Remove the defunct payphone booth or convert it into a flyering booth for public events and other announcements.
Loud traffic. Risky crossings between crosswalks.	<u>Short-term:</u> Add inexpensive buffers like large planters between the walking path and moving traffic to create a better sense of protection from the roadway. In the long run, add more trees where possible to support noise and physical buffering between walkers and vehicles. <u>Long-term:</u> Add traffic calming mechanisms like speed cushions/bumps, raised crossings, speed signage and pedestrian signage approaching crosswalks.

COLUMBIA STREET

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well lit at night. Cobblestones make the street special. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Church park is a large, shaded gathering space with a lot of potential.
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
The park/plaza needs renovation to be used as a community gathering space.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Work with the church that owns this plaza and other interested community partners to organize funding and make necessary repairs, including of the paving, vegetation and seating areas.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Seek permission to use this space to host public events (like music and theater performances, market days with local businesses, and other public forums). Creating programming for this space will help draw people there and foster a greater sense of activity and community.</p>
Overgrown weeds, litter.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Conduct regular maintenance of vegetation and litter on public lots, sidewalks, tree pits and drains. Encourage private property owners to keep the edges of their properties well-maintained as well.</p>
Sidewalks are narrow, especially on trash pickup day.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Keep the walking path as clear of obstructions as possible; for example, move trash receptacles to the edge of the sidewalk so that they do not constrain the walking path excessively. On trash day, encourage people to keep trash and recycling bins as close to the curb as possible.</p> <p><u>Long-term:</u> Where space permits, widen the sidewalk.</p>
Accessibility: obstructions at crosswalks and sidewalks; lack of curb ramps.	<p><u>Short-term:</u> Create a sidewalk and crosswalk inventory to note where sidewalk obstructions exist and where ADA compliant crossings are needed so that these changes can begin being made.</p>
No evening activity.	<p><u>Long-term:</u> Host year-round evening programming on Columbia Street as well as</p>

	<p>through the rest of downtown: Columbia Street serves as an important connection from Main Street towards the waterfront. Consider pedestrianizing the street on some evenings so that it can host performances and night markets. While these events may be more attractive through the summer, winter night markets and festivals would bring welcome activity to the downtown area. Other recommended improvements, such as increasing crosswalk accessibility and plaza renovations, will support these efforts.</p>
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SECTION 2

Participants were asked to walk from Ponta Delgada Boulevard to Anawan Street and up Pocasset Street back to the starting point of Section 1.

GENERAL

Features that support walking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lots of destinations. ● Signage to advertise tourist destinations. ● Activities on Ponta Delgada. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Views of the pond. ● Biking infrastructure: signage and lanes. ● Repurposed mill buildings.
Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
<p>Safety: though there are many destinations for pedestrians, there are few clear ways to get to them safely.</p> <p>Need for more wayfinding signage so people know the nearby destinations they can reach. Without pedestrian wayfinding, pedestrians feel isolated and trapped in a web of highways.</p>	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Install low-cost buffers between walkers and fast traffic, including trash receptacles, bike parking, flower planters and other plantings. Also stripe traffic lanes to 10' or 11' where they are wider, as this helps to slow speeds.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Consider partnering with artists to paint interesting designs on the streets (for instance, painting fish swimming along the path to the Maritime Museum) leading to important destinations to help people navigate to these destinations and help the streets feel more human-scale, which encourages walkers and discourages drivers from speeding.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Build bump outs to reduce pedestrian crossing times at wide and fast-moving intersections. Also consider raised crosswalks to slow traffic speeds and increase pedestrian visibility.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Add in wayfinding signage alerting walkers to the museums, historical sites, scenic views, parks and other noteworthy destinations. Wayfinding signage should indicate distances in time to destination rather than mileage, as this is easier to interpret for most people.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Make the known underground</p>

	railway stops in Fall River marked points of interest with signage leading there and informative markers at each site. This not only has value in highlighting the many points of interest near Downtown Fall River, but also recognizes some of the history of the Black community in Fall River.
Apart from the Gates of the City, there are no comfortable places to sit.	<u>Short-term</u> : Add benches along the sidewalk where space permits and in open spaces so that there is some seating available for walkers to stop and rest.
Lack of bike parking.	<u>Long-term</u> : Add bike parking near the destinations along this route.

PONTA DELGADA BOULEVARD + WATER STREET

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Poison ivy overgrowing on the bridge.	<u>Short-term</u> : Remove all poison ivy from around the bridge and ensure that other vegetation continues to be maintained so as not to impede on the walking path.
Fast traffic with little protection makes this stretch uninviting for pedestrians. Dangerous crossing with Ferry Street: missing sidewalk with no crosswalk at the end on the bridge.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Add bollards or planters to make pedestrians feel better protected from moving traffic.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Install bike lanes on both sides of the street, as intended through the Shared Winter Streets & Spaces funding. Narrowing driving lanes to accommodate bike lanes will slow traffic and make this road safer for pedestrians as well.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Add signage to alert approaching drivers of pedestrians crossing on the bridge.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Add a crosswalk at the intersection with Ferry Street when the western side sidewalk comes to an end.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: As intended through the Shared Winter Streets & Spaces grant, T up the Ferry Street approach to improve sightlines and help drivers slow down to see approaching</p>

	cyclists and pedestrians.
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ANAWAN STREET

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Not well lit at night.	<u>Long-term</u> : Add lamp posts along Anawan Street to improve evening visibility.
The brief 2-way portion of the street causes confusion.	<u>Short-term</u> : Repaint the striping on the 2-way portion of the road to make clear that there are two lanes there, one moving in each direction. <u>Long-term</u> : Consider making this block of Anawan Street 1-way as the rest of the street is. With only one 10' traffic lane, the rest of the roadway could be repurposed for parking or placemaking efforts outside the Narrows.
The intersection is dangerous: not enough crossing time, fast traffic.	<u>Short-term</u> : Re-evaluate crossing times and consider implementing leading pedestrian intervals so that pedestrians can begin crossing before cars start turning.
Tree stumps, overgrown vegetation and metal tripping hazards.	<u>Short-term</u> : Create a sidewalk inventory to list all metal post stumps, grates, tree stumps, and overgrown vegetation. Use this inventory to start trimming back vegetation and filing down stumps and other tripping hazards.
Buildings need to be repainted for wear.	<u>Short-term</u> : Encourage building owners to repaint facades or work with artists to create murals.
Anawan Street is uneventful, the side streets are underutilized and could be better used for activities.	<u>Long-term</u> : Explore turning cobblestoned side streets into pedestrianized streets to maximize the use of the space behind the mill complexes to create spaces for gathering and activity.

POCASSET STREET

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
Overgrown weeds, especially under the	<u>Short-term</u> : Conduct regular maintenance of

<p>overpass.</p>	<p>vegetation and ensure they do not impede the walking path.</p>
<p>Need benches, shade and other comfortable elements for this uphill trek.</p> <p>Few trees or buffers from traffic.</p>	<p><u>Long-term</u>: Add seating, trees, flower planters, trash receptacles and wayfinding signage throughout this stretch so that walkers have opportunities for rest and know how far they are from popular destinations as they walk.</p>

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

A few participants wished to extend the walk audit to Central Street and provide additional comments from their experience. This smaller group of walk audit participants walked from Water Street to Central Street and continued from Bedford Street back to the starting point of the walk on S Main Street. Their observations and accompanying recommendations are detailed below.

CENTRAL STREET

Opportunities for improving the walking environment	
Issue	Recommendation
The intersection of Central Street with Route 138 is wide, intimidating, and noisy for pedestrians. It feels dangerous to cross the street. Two highway overpasses loom above.	<p><u>Short-term</u>: Increase walk signal lengths to give pedestrians ample time to cross the intersection safely.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Paint a street mural or textured cross hatching on the intersection to indicate that it is a place of pedestrian priority.</p> <p><u>Short-term</u>: Work with artists and lighting experts to install creative lighting and public art, especially under the highway, which feels especially unsafe and uncomfortable to walk under.</p> <p><u>Long-term</u>: Narrow crossing distances at this intersection by extending the curb.</p>
Underutilized green space (owned by the Fall River Housing Authority) along an inactive and uninviting stretch of road that feels dangerous for pedestrians, especially children, older adults and people with disabilities. This area has a lot of potential, especially with its views of the Taunton River.	<u>Long-term</u> : Turn this space into a park with equipment for young people and seniors, and benches and tables for everyone to use. In addition to being a benefit for the entire city, the upgradation of this park would directly benefit the low-income housing residents next door. There is enough of a footprint here to both create a major new public park as well as some new development that could create more stewardship of the park and that stretch of Central Street.
Wide crossing at Green Street.	<u>Long-term</u> : Install bump outs to reduce the crossing length.
The sidewalk along Central Street from Green to Durfee is narrow.	<u>Long-term</u> : Consider widening the sidewalk to create enough space for pedestrians, especially those using mobility devices and strollers, to move comfortably.

The block of Bedford Street to Main Street has good street design but feels uninviting because of the lack of activity on the street and the low interactivity of the buildings.

Short-term: Utilize the plaza on the corner of Bedford and S Main Streets for public seating or small scale programming.