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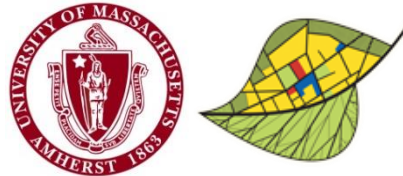
# Main Street Design Workshop: Westminster, Massachusetts

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April 28, 2014

**Presented to:**  
Board of Selectmen  
Westminster, Massachusetts

**Presented by:**  
Center for Economic Development  
Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning  
University of Massachusetts Amherst

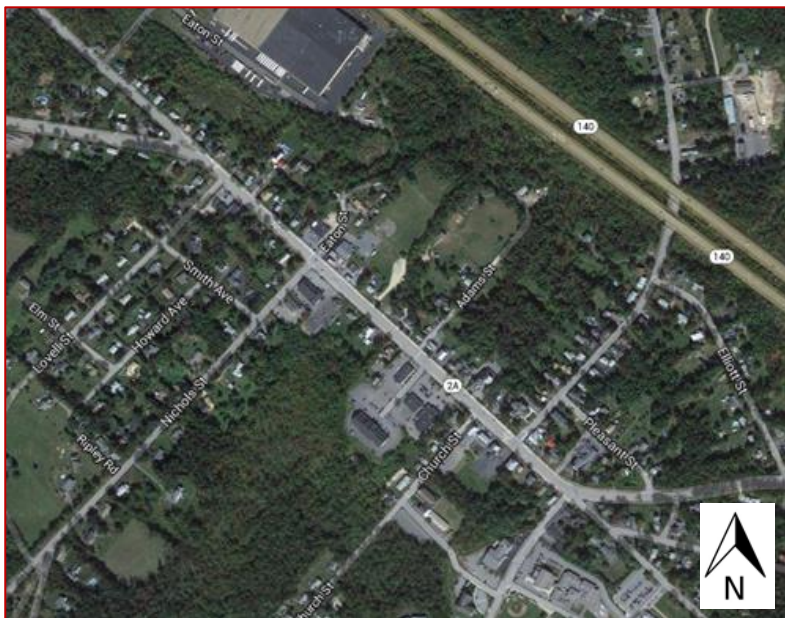


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## Introduction

The town of Westminster is a quaint New England-style village town located in North Central Massachusetts. In the heart of the community is a downtown district located on Main Street between the intersection of Route 2A and West Main



**Figure 1: Downtown Westminster**

Street to the north and South Street and Route 2A in the south. The Westminster Master Plan Committee identified the Town Center as a community asset with locally owned businesses, restaurants, community structures, and numerous buildings of historical significance. Westminster is home to the famous Oyster Cracker Factory, the Forbush Memorial Library, the notable Old Town Hall, and the historic Upton Building. Local village residents are keen to preserve these attractions that resonate with the charm of a typical New England-style community. However, current zoning regulations do not favor building forms that embrace a quintessential New England-style village. Current zoning requires buildings to be set back from Main Street. The design and layout of these structures

encourages development of large parking lots for vehicles in front of buildings and creates an uninviting environment for pedestrians.

On April 12, 2014 members of the Master Plan Committee, graduate students from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and Town Planner, Stephen Wallace, hosted a Main Street Design Workshop. The goal of the workshop was to gather

input from community stakeholders regarding their vision for Main Street. Their recommendations will ultimately craft future zoning regulations and design guidelines. Approximately 20 residents, divided into three groups, participated in the event consisting of three exercises. The first exercise was a walking tour that began at the Forbush Memorial Library on Main Street. Graduate students from UMass were responsible for facilitating discussion amongst workshop participants during the tour. Students helped participants point out specific areas that inhibited the walkability of Main Street such as lack of crosswalks and sidewalks, too many curb cuts, and various design elements including street lighting, landscaping and trees, utilities, signage, building setbacks, and parking.

After the walking tour, participants reconvened at the library and were asked to remain in the same groups. The second exercise consisted of a round table discussion focusing on critical design elements that they would like to see in the future. Each group assigned a facilitator and a scribe, none of which were a member of the UMass team, Master Plan Committee, or Town staff. Facilitators were responsible for keeping the discussion on track while the scribe wrote down notes and main topics of concern on a large flip chart. Each group also had a large scale map of Main Street and was asked to illustrate where they would like to see future improvements. Following the discussion, the third exercise was a dot preference exercise. Each group attached their summary of ideas to the wall and participants were asked to attach four red adhesive dots on other group's ideas around the room. Their stickers signified the top four priorities most important to them with the limitation that they could not place a red dot on their own idea.

## Results

The walking tour lasted approximately one hour as each of the three groups headed in different directions. Each small crowd walked along both sides of Main Street from the intersection of Main Street and State Road West to the intersection of Main Street and Leominster Street. The suggestions, comments, and concerns were summarized into the following categories: sidewalks, the street, signage, and zoning. Currently, the road is under State jurisdiction which prevents the town from making any improvements. Participants were asked to keep in mind that the town has control of Main Street.

### Sidewalks

There was a consensus amongst all groups that the above ground power lines should be buried below the sidewalks, roads, and driveways. Participants also stressed the importance of replacing the utility poles with street trees and historically relevant street lamps. There was some debate about whether benches would be an appropriate furnishing on the sidewalks; residents were concerned that they may not receive much use. Participants also addressed the location of private property owner's location of mailboxes. Ubiquitous throughout downtown, mailboxes in buckets filled with cement were located along the roads and



**Figure 2: Mailboxes along Main Street**

sidewalks. Pedestrian safety is a major concern as well. All groups unanimously agreed that adding more sidewalks and crosswalks would improve public safety and accessibility to local stores and destination. Every group indicated that they would like to see sidewalks on both sides of Main Street, particularly on the south side of Main Street between Lovell Street and Nichols Street. Many participants also stressed the importance of having a sidewalk from Main Street all the way to the Senior Center to provide seniors with safe access to downtown and up to the Town Common. A few participants advocated that sidewalks should incorporate brick and a granite curb in the future.

### **The Street**

There was also group consensus to add a cross walk on Main Street in front of the Westminster Café, in front of Vincent's Plaza, and across Main Street at the intersection with South Street. Many participants also highlighted the importance of making all cross walks more visible by using traffic calming techniques such as alternative materials, bump outs, or paint. These techniques make drivers more aware of surrounding pedestrians or bicycles. A traffic signal or raised cross walk at the intersection of Main Street and Nichols Street was also brought to the attention of the workshop team. This technique would attempt to slow traffic even more within downtown. In addition to a stoplight or crosswalks, on street parking also has the potential to impede the flow of high speed traffic. This common idea was emphasized throughout the group. Parking along the street would make Main Street narrower; slowing down passing cars in order to

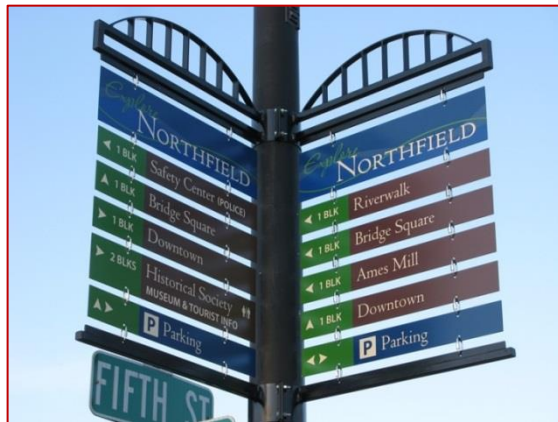


**Figure 3: Crosswalks lacking visibility**

create a safer environment for pedestrians was a common value. Participants also stressed a need for a downtown municipal parking lot and identified the area behind the First Baptist Church as an option. Numerous participants want to see more landscaping and signage on the street islands at both ends of downtown in order to increase aesthetics. The addition of green infrastructure (bioswales, trees, and plantings) reduces storm water runoff and enhances overall environmental quality. Storm water drainage was of concern for two of the groups particularly in front of the Cumberland Farms store and the Cracker Factory.

## Signage

Workshop participants articulated that they value high quality aesthetics for Main Street. During the walking tour and



**Figure 4: Way-finding Signage in Northfield, Texas**

discussion there were numerous instances where participants pointed out abandoned signs that should be taken down. Participants also recognized a preference for monument signs, post signs, flag signs, dimensional letters, and wall signs. There was a common distaste for free standing pole signs and temporary A-frame signs. Participants indicated the importance for way-finding signs that directed pedestrians and motorists to community resources such as the post office, town hall, library, elementary school, and the town common. There was also a strong interest in all groups for having a community event sign in downtown to display current events and flyers.



## Zoning

As noted earlier, participants recommended making Main Street more pedestrian friendly and safer. One method for engendering safe pedestrian activity is to use zoning bylaws to encourage parking on streets or behind buildings. Relocating parking behind the buildings and decreasing setback requirements enhances the safety and aesthetics of Main St, allowing the community to fully appreciate a downtown that



**Figure 6: Curb cuts in front of Vincent's**

resembles a classic New England-style village. Zoning regulations can also limit the amount of curb cuts. One of the most acknowledged elements for the future of Main Street was to decrease the number of curb cuts. Participants in each group pointed out the four curb cuts that allow cars in and out of Vincent's Plaza. They would like to see that number reduced to two; one curb cut for cars entering and other for cars exiting. The community also wants to see the town address the need for more empty nester housing. In doing so, the workshop insists the town update their current zoning bylaws to allow mixed use buildings and empty nester housing along Main Street. Participants also stressed the importance to redevelop the Old Town Hall and Cracker Factory while preserving the character of each building.



**Figure 5: Building setback too far**

## Conclusion

In the short-term, the data from this event will inform perspective illustrations, provided in Appendix B, of what Main St. could look like if workshop participants' ideas were implemented. In the long term, this data will inform future zoning regulations and design guidelines for Main Street. Tabulated results from the dot preference exercise are provided in Appendix A. The illustrations in Appendix B represent the most popular design elements mentioned by workshop participants including: street trees, raised crosswalks, a vegetative buffer along Main Street, brick sidewalks, underground power lines, a reduction of curb cuts, and colorful landscaping.



## Appendix A: Dot Preference Exercise Summary

Element	Red Dots
Create zoning for empty nester housing	6
Create mixed use zoning	6
Preserve cracker factory	6
Install traffic calming features at intersections	5
Place utilities underground	5
Reduce the amount of curb cuts	4
Encourage upscale housing, farmers market, arts, local food business, and commercial kitchen	4
Install way finding signs for community resources	4
Remove old/abandoned signs	3
Plant street trees	3
Incorporate sustainable landscape features	3
Create town parking lot	3
Create zoning for higher density	3
Create angled parking on Main St.	2
Install bike lanes	2
Disposition of old town hall	2
Extend anchor of village to Senior Center and Academy Hill	2
Construct sidewalk from Nichols St. to Westminster Café	2
Install signage and landscaping at entrances to downtown	2
Slow traffic	2
Install a community events signs	2
Construct brick sidewalks	1
Place buildings closer to the street and parking behind them	1
Implement classic New England design standards	1
Install granite curbs	1

Element	Red Dots
Construct green buffer strip along sidewalk	1
Implement guidelines for consistent business signage	1
Construct hardscape crosswalks	1
Take over Jurisdiction of main street	1
Advocate for MART bus route	1
Install crosswalks between Nichols St. and Lovell St.	1
Reduce spot zoning in downtown	1
Create on-street parking in selected areas	1
Remove mailboxes from sidewalks	1
Construct sidewalks on both sides of Main Street	1
Place public trash and recycling barrels on sidewalks	1
Widen sidewalks/narrow roads	1
Encourage more wood post and panel signs	1
Place benches along Main St.	0
Encourage design guidelines for fencing and signs	0
Eliminate future drive-thrus	0
Place gas lamp street lights with flags	0
Improve and increase the number of crosswalks	0
Improve drainage at Nichols St. Intersection with Main Street	0
Improve relationship with Wachuset mountain	0
Improve West Main St. intersection	0
Improve flow and safety at Cumberland farms intersection	0
Enhance landscaping for existing commercial properties	0
Prohibit larger vehicles	0
More visible historic building signage	0
Create off-street walking path from school area into town	0
Prohibit satellite dishes	0
There are too many white buildings	0
Create traffic signals at Nichols St.	0

## Appendix B: Perspective Illustrations

In front of First Congressional Church, looking west - Existing



In front of First Congressional Church, looking west – Illustration





In front of Vincent's Plaza, looking east - Existing





In front of Vincent's Plaza, looking east – Illustration





Intersection of Nichols Street and Main Street, looking east – Existing



Intersection of Nichols Street and Main Street, looking east – Illustration





Intersection of Nichols Street and Main Street, looking east – Illustration

