



ULI TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

NORTH WEYMOUTH, MA

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NOVEMBER 14, 2019



**Urban Land
Institute**

Boston/New England

URBAN LAND INSTITUTE (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. The mission of ULI is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to help sustain and create thriving communities. Founded in 1936, the institute now has nearly 40,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service, including developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, and economic development professionals, among others.

The Boston/New England District Council of ULI serves the six New England states and has over 1,300 members. As a preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum,

ULI Boston/New England facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, and regional leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

The Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) works with communities to create innovative policy and financing solutions that provide affordable homes and better lives for the people of Massachusetts. A statewide public non-profit affordable housing organization, MHP works in concert with the Governor, the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the state's other quasi-public housing organizations. MHP was established in 1985 to increase the state's overall rate of housing production and work with cities and towns to demonstrate new and better ways of meeting our need for affordable housing.

ABOUT ULI BOSTON

ULI Boston/New England is a District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), a non-profit education and research organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the Institute today has more than 42,000 members worldwide. ULI members represent the full spectrum of land use planning and real estate development disciplines working in the private, public, and non-profit sectors.

The ULI Boston/New England District Council is committed to advancing ULI's Mission to "provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities" through its evolving platform as the leading real estate organization for convening and sharing best practices in our region. Our community outreach programs enables local ULI leaders to identify challenges to better development, feature best practices from across the country and devise new solutions to improve land use patterns.

ABOUT THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL (TAP) PROGRAM

ULI Boston's Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program provides expert, multidisciplinary, and non-partisan advice on land use and real estate issues facing public agencies and nonprofit organizations in Boston and New England. Drawing from its extensive membership base, ULI Boston conducts panels offering objective and pragmatic advice to local decision makers on a variety of land use and real estate issues, ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The TAP Program is intentionally flexible to provide a customized approach to specific land use and real estate issues.

The ULI Boston/New England Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges who benefit from planning and development professionals providing pro bono recommendations.

At the TAP, a group of diverse professionals specially assembled with expertise in the issues posed spend one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.

Learn more at: <https://boston.uli.org>

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Executive Summary

The Weymouth Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) convened on November 14, 2019, at the John F. McCulloch Building in Weymouth, under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's Boston/New England Chapter. Over the course of the day, six ULI members met with local business owners, residents and non-profit organizations from Weymouth and the South Shore Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of the TAP was to provide guidance to the Town on ways to encourage redevelopment and revitalize the existing commercial corridor along the Bridge Street section of Route 3A. The TAP presented their findings and recommendations to the public later that evening in the Council Chamber of the Weymouth Town Hall. The presentation was broadcast the following day on Weymouth Community Access television.

Chapter 1: ULI and the TAP Process.

Provides an overview of the Urban Land Institute's Boston/New England District Council and its Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) as well as a list of the panel members and stakeholders who took part. The chapter also highlights key elements of the study area for the TAP, and describes the process undertaken by the panelists and stakeholders to arrive at the recommendations presented.

Chapter 2: Background and History.

Gives a brief overview of the issues that the TAP was asked to assess and includes the questions that the Town posed to the panel. It also provides key population and demographic information and a brief overview of the study area.

Chapter 3: Assets and Opportunities.

Identifies the strengths of the Bridge Street commercial district. These include an engaged community and government entities; a strong level of commitment from local banks; an

abundance of outdoor amenities, including parks and the waterfront; interconnected public transportation options; the potential for a walkable business district; and an existing base of neighborhood businesses, restaurants and retail.

Chapter 4: Challenges. Examines the obstacles to transforming the Bridge Street corridor into a more vibrant commercial district. These include a high volume of traffic traversing the residential/retail district at peak commute times; a lack of on-street or municipal parking; a number of vacant or underutilized buildings and smaller lots in prime locations; and a substandard pedestrian experience.

Chapter 5: Recommendations. Proposes a number of actions that Weymouth can implement to achieve its goal of creating a more vibrant commercial corridor as well as a more walkable, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood. Key recommendations include: Implementing recommendations from the 2016 MassDOT Road Safety Audit; conducting a traffic study to evaluate the viability of changing roadway traffic on 3A; making pedestrian scale improvements along the corridor; increasing parking options; and developing design guidelines for new construction and redevelopment of commercial and residential zones.

Chapter 6: Funding Sources/Resources.

Provides a list of potential funding sources through federal and state agencies, as well as an appendix of articles and papers that could be used for modeling some of the recommended actions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion. Offers a final assessment of the redevelopment possibilities for the revitalization of the Bridge Street commercial corridor.

The TAP Process

Panel Members

ULI Boston/New England convened a volunteer panel of experts whose members represent the range of disciplines necessary to analyze the challenges and opportunities facing Weymouth, specifically the Bridge Street commercial corridor. Practice areas included architects, developers, designers, planners, and asset managers. The following is a list of panelists:

Co-Chairs

Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, associate and director of planning, Harriman

Nyal McDonough, senior asset manager, Taurus Investment Holdings

Panel

Steven Burke, sustainability manager, Consigli Construction Company

Patrick Campbell, principal, Commonwealth Development Consulting

Luke Mitchell, senior urban planner/designer, VHB

Deborah Myers, principal, Deborah Myers Landscape Architecture

Panelists have donated their time.

ULI Staff

Manikka Bowman, director, policy & outreach

Sara Marsh, manager, Boston/New England District Council

John Wilson, ULI associate

TAP Writer

Mike Hoban, principal, Hoban Communications

Stakeholders

The TAP benefited from the participation of the diverse group of stakeholders – local business representatives and owners, members of the South Shore and Weymouth Chambers of Commerce, representatives from non-profits, and neighborhood residents.

The following is a list of stakeholders:

Richard Beal, president, AW Perry; chair, South Shore Economic Development Committee (SSEDC)

Steve Bergfors, Weymouth resident; president, Bergfors Insurance Agency

Joe Campbell, owner, True North Restaurant

Danielle Desilets, area resident; landscape architect, Kyle Zick Landscape Architecture, Inc.

Brandon Diem, area resident; principal of architecture firm 1 Plus 1 Design Inc.

James Dunphy, president & CEO, South Shore Bank

Tom Fleming, owner and operator of Got Pawz, 204 Bridge St., Weymouth

Donald Gill, president and CEO, Coastal Heritage Bank

Steve Fiander, philanthropy officer, South Shore Health Systems, Weymouth Chamber

Steve Gilman, commercial real estate broker, Jay Nuss Realty

Joe Gratta, developer; CEO, Atlantic Mechanical Contractors

Karen Grey, president and executive director, Wildlands Trust

Dennis Keohane, co-president of Keohane McDonald Funeral Home; Weymouth Chamber

Bill Kingdon, commercial real estate advisor,

Ellis Realty Advisors; Weymouth Chamber

Owen MacDonald, traffic engineer, Town of Weymouth

Marlene O'Connor, general manager, Republic's Collection

Tom Osuch, VP, commercial lending officer, South Shore Bank; Weymouth Chamber

Donna O'Sullivan, area resident; former Metropolitan Area Planning Council member

Geoff Potter, president, North Weymouth Civic Association

Frank Singleton, area resident; Conservation Commission member

Bill Scully, VP, municipal transportation & infrastructure services, Green International Affiliates

Robert W. Terravecchia, Jr., vice chair, COO, Coastal Heritage Bank

The TAP Process

The Weymouth TAP was held on November 14, 2019. Panelists from the ULI Boston/New England District Council were greeted at the John F. McCulloch Building in Weymouth by director of planning and development Robert Luongo, principal planner Eric Schneider and assistant planner Monica Kennedy from the Town of Weymouth; Weymouth Chamber of Commerce members Dennis Keohane, co-president of Keohane McDonald Funeral Home (chair), Steve Fiander of South Shore Health Systems, and Bill Kingdon, commercial real estate advisor with Ellis Realty Advisors; and Eric Dykeman of the South Shore Chamber of Commerce. Following introductions, the panelists were taken by two vans on a tour of the study area, which extended from the intersection of North Street and Bridge Street (Route 3A) to the Fore River Bridge, a distance of approximately one mile.

Panelists first observed the North Branch Library at 220 North St., a single-story structure that may be included in redevelopment plans for the study area once the new Tufts Library is completed in 2020. The tour traveled north onto Bridge Street., the southern boundary

of the study area. At the intersection of North and Bridge is an 11,450 square foot used car lot which has been vacant for approximately one year, located across the street from a dry cleaning chain with an abundance of parking. Further down, panelists observed a number of former residential properties that had been converted into suboptimal retail, a number of businesses, including nail salons and auto uses, some multifamily and single homes as well as a few unoccupied buildings. The tour entered a more vibrant retail section that includes a thriving ice cream shop/restaurant (Michele's) and a successful kitchen and bath supply store (Republic's Collection) that had relocated to the newly renovated location approximately one year ago. The tour stopped at a lot across from Republic's Collection (on the same side of Bridge Street) that features a pair of architecturally appealing buildings that will be the new home to Bridge-Wey Tailors, who will be relocating from a nearby Bridge Street location when renovations are complete.

The group then embarked on a walking tour that stopped first at the former Panda Rug, a 12,000 square foot, single-story retail building with a loading dock that has sat vacant for a number of years, but does not appear to be for sale or lease. Continuing across Birchbrow Ave.,



A vacant building on Route 3A, 250 Bridge Street.

panelists observed a retail plaza with a large laundromat, bar and convenience store, as well as a vacant 4,500 square foot retail building that is for sale. Across Bridge Street, there is a mixed collection of retail and businesses including nail salons, auto repair shops and gas stations as well as a convenience store chain, an H&R Block and a Chinese restaurant. Traveling north towards the bridge, there are a series of successful businesses, including a dog grooming and boarding business, a bottle redemption location with ample parking, and a Dunkin' Donuts, with a drive-through which panelists observed causing traffic congestion even after peak commute times. Panelists also noted that the concentrated retail area directly abuts a residential area comprised mostly of

a single family homes on both sides of Bridge Street.

The groups then boarded the vans and proceeded over the Fore River Bridge, around a rotary that headed back over the bridge to tour the opposite side of Bridge Street. Panelists were informed that the maneuver was the only practical way to safely access the opposite side of Bridge Street. The vans stopped at True North Kitchen + Bar, a thriving and more upscale restaurant than was previously occupied by neighborhood seafood restaurant Kelly's Landing for 38 years. Across the street from the restaurant is It's a Pet's World, a single-story pet store adorned with undersea murals that provides visual character to the neighborhood.

The group then proceeded back up Bridge Street towards North Street and walked through Beals Park, a recreational space with hilly topography and in need of improvements (removal and replacement of trees, paving, upgrades to equipment, etc.) as has been done with a number of parks in Weymouth in recent years. The park borders Bicknell Square, which is home to a number of small businesses, a U.S. Post Office, and a pizza parlor, as well as the historic Pilgrim Congregational Church (which also affords daycare) and the Unitarian Universalist church.

The tour then proceeded to the Wessagusset Beach area. Panelists were informed of potential plans for a pedestrian walkway between George Lane Beach and Wessagusset Beach that would double the length of accessible open space between the two beaches and enhance opportunities for passive recreation along the Town's historic waterfront.

The group returned to the McCulloch Building, where the ULI panel interviewed stakeholders, listed in the previous sub-section, in two separate panel discussions for the remainder of the morning. The panelists then engaged in an intensive charrette to develop recommendations based on the input from the stakeholders as well as background information provided by the briefing book compiled by the Town. The analysis and recommendations were then shared in an open public forum at the Council Chamber of the Weymouth Town Hall that evening, and broadcast the following day on Weymouth Community Access television.

Pilgrim
Congregational
Church.



Wessagusset Beach.

Background and History

The Town of Weymouth sought the help of the ULI TAP to provide guidance on ways to enhance the potential of the Bridge Street corridor, which has a shortage of vibrant retail. The study area is an approximately one-mile stretch of Route 3A, primarily comprised of retail and business uses that traverses a residential section of North Weymouth. This heavily-trafficked four-lane undivided state highway is a major artery for commuter traffic (35,000 cars per day), used primarily as a pass-through for cars and trucks traveling to and from the cities of Boston and Quincy, with high traffic volume during commuting hours. There are virtually no separate turn lanes on Bridge Street, which adds to congestion. The roadway has no legal on-street or municipal parking, with businesses providing their own. The district is essentially unwalkable according to stakeholders, with inadequate sidewalks and hazardous pedestrian crossings, and bicycle travel is virtually impossible.

Questions to be addressed by the TAP panelists:

1. What zoning and design guideline changes could be made to encourage redevelopment projects along the corridor while protecting established nearby residential developments?
2. What public investments could be made by the Town to stimulate interest in the corridor? Park improvements, landscaping projects, public art installations?
3. What marketing and/or branding programs should be implemented to encourage new business within the corridor?

The Town of Weymouth

Although Weymouth is a technically a city with a city form of government, it is known as the Town of Weymouth. The Town is in growth mode and the community appears invested in seeing that growth continue, as evidenced by the public investment in open space, libraries, and schools. The Town has renovated many of its recreation spaces, including Legion Field, Libby Field, Lovell Field & Weston Park, as well as passive recreation parks such as King Oak Park and Osprey Overlook. Many of these projects were financed or supported by state grants, Community Preservation funds, meals tax revenue, and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program. The historic Fogg Library was renovated and reopened and the Tufts Library was demolished and is being replaced with a state-of-the-art facility slated to be complete in June 2020. In 2017, the Town secured a \$12 million grant through the Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program (MPLCP) to design and build the New Tufts Library and the Town Council authorized borrowing \$33 million for the total project cost.

The Town also recently voted to demolish the Chapman Middle School and replace it with a state of the art facility.

Population/Demographics

According to 2017 estimates from the American Community Survey, Weymouth has a population of 55,890 with a median household income of \$75,892. One of the South Shore's more affordable communities, the median home value is \$413,400 as of November of 2019, according to Zillow, with home values up 2.5% from 2018. Owner-

occupied units make up 66.5 percent of Weymouth households, with 33.5 percent renting.

The Study Area

The Bridge Street Corridor is a segment of Route 3A that extends from North Street to the Fore River Bridge, and passes through Bicknell Square, one of the Town's four village centers. Weymouth has no formal downtown center, but each of the four villages features its own blend of historic buildings, land uses, and public space. A new zoning district, the Commercial Corridor Overlay District, which includes the southern end of Bridge Street, was put into place to promote economic development and encourage reuse and redevelopment of existing buildings. The study area has different physical characteristics from the rest of district and requires a different solution. A Billboard Relocation Overlay District was also established to provide for the removal and relocation of pre-existing, legally established billboards to new locations while achieving an overall reduction in the number of billboards throughout the Town.

As panelists observed, there are a number of vacant lots and commercial buildings within the study area, with a high concentration of nail salons and auto uses (gas stations, repair shops), which is reflective of the fact that the corridor is not suitable for most retail uses – for a variety of reasons. The corridor currently has an average daily traffic (ADT) of approximately 35,000 vehicles per day (Crexi.com), up from 27,000 in 2016 (MassDOT). Over the last three years, asking rents for commercial space has been in the mid-twenties range, with a high of \$60 per square foot for premium retail space, according to CoStar leasing data. There are a handful of properties for sale or lease along Bridge Street, some with ample parking, including the former Sunrise Auto Gallery at 352-360 Bridge St., a 34,000 square foot lot with two existing retail buildings (3,984 and 2,192 square feet) for sale, which is zoned B-2 (retail, restaurant, fast food); and a 4,500 square foot building located in a retail plaza at 216 Bridge St. that is for sale. There is also the former Panda Rug, a 12,000 square foot, single-story retail building with a loading dock that has sat vacant for a number of years, but does not appear to be for sale or lease.

Assets and Opportunities

Committed Citizenry, Government and Chambers of Commerce – The Weymouth community, including residents, Town government, and the Weymouth Chamber of Commerce and South Shore Economic Development Corp., are committed to the improvement of the Bridge Street corridor, as was clearly demonstrated by the active participation of those parties in the TAP stakeholder meetings.

Base of Established, Thriving Businesses – There are a number of long term businesses and restaurants that continue to thrive along Bridge Street, with some (including Republic's Collection and Bridge-Wey Tailors) demonstrating a recommitment to the area by recently relocating within the district and investing in extensive renovations to their properties.

Community Bank Commitment – During the stakeholder meetings, the South Shore Bank and Coastal Heritage Bank indicated their willingness to invest in the corridor by providing funding for building purchases and improvements. Additionally, South Shore Bank stated that they would make no-to-low cost loans for property improvements (signage, re-paving, façade improvements, etc.) to Bridge Street businesses.

Generational Neighborhood Connections – On both sides of 3A, the corridor directly abuts the residential neighborhood, which is largely comprised of single-family homes that have been occupied long-term by families. Residents have a vested interest in seeing infrastructure improvements to the area in terms of sidewalks, open space, and amenities.

Open Space, Parks and Waterfront – North Weymouth is blessed with excellent access

to and views of Boston Harbor. The Town has made significant investments in its parks and open space in recent years, resulting in greater utilization, but panelists noted that both Beals Park and the waterfront may still be underutilized assets, and could provide opportunities for greater benefits with further investment.

Abundant Through Traffic – As currently configured, the volume of traffic often results in congestion during peak commuting times. However, the daily traffic count could potentially be harnessed to create a larger consumer base for Bridge Street businesses and restaurants.

Public Transit Access Connecting to Major Hubs – The Bridge Street corridor is well connected to the area's public transportation modes traveling to the City of Boston, including the Red Line MBTA in Quincy, the Greenbush Commuter Rail (with two Weymouth stations and one in Quincy) and the MBTA Hingham Ferry. Bridge Street is also served by the MBTA's 222 bus to Quincy Center, which makes over a half-dozen stops within the corridor.

Historic District and Buildings – A portion of the study area encompasses a section of the Sea Street Historic District, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2009. The district includes a circa 1810 Federal period house at 180 North St./555 Bridge St., the oldest structure in the district, the Bicknell House at 55 Sea St. (a 1650 Cape-style house), as well as the Pilgrim Congregational Church, located next to Beals Park on Athens Street, just off Bridge Street.

Challenges

After reviewing background information provided by the Town, interviewing stakeholders, and making a tour of the study area, it was clear to panelists that there are a number of obstacles to be overcome to achieve the goal of a more vibrant business district.

Route 3A Divides the Community – Bridge Street divides the neighborhood – to the detriment of the community. During stakeholder meetings, participants stated that crossing the street, even at signalized intersections, was not deemed safe due to the speed and volume of traffic. During the tour, panelists noted that they were driven over the Fore River Bridge and around a rotary to come back up the other side Bridge Street rather than crossing the street.

Vacant/Underutilized Buildings and Lots in Prominent Locations – There are several empty buildings and vacant lots on Bridge Street, beginning at the southern boundary of the study area (North Street & Bridge Street), where the former Murphy Brothers, Inc. used car lot is located. Other notable buildings include the 34,000 square foot former Sunrise Auto Gallery used car lot (352-360 Bridge St.), the 4,500 square foot building located in a retail plaza at 216 Bridge St., and the 12,000 square foot former Panda Rug retail building at 250 Bridge St.

Through Traffic on 3A Limits Neighborhood Uses

- Lack of municipal and on-street parking
- Pedestrian/bicycle/vehicular access and safety issues
- Heavy congestion during peak commute hours and summer weekends

Lack of Visual Cohesiveness – The mix of uses and building types (commercial, retail, some residential) feels completely random rather than having a well-thought out commercial/retail strategy. Poor sidewalk conditions, a lack of trees and pedestrian-scale lighting and signage, and varying setbacks from the public right-of-way contribute to the lack of visual organization.

Land Use Limitations – The relatively short length of blocks, the shallow depth of commercial lots, and the close proximity of the abutting single family residences severely limit the options available for future development, particularly in terms of increasing density.

Substandard Pedestrian Experience – According to stakeholders, the condition of the sidewalks has deteriorated in recent years. There is a lack of shade trees, virtually no places to stop and sit along the corridor, and the volume of traffic creates dust and poor air quality. Stakeholders also cited a decline in destinations worthy of walking to in recent years. The amount of asphalt from Bridge Street/3A, sidewalks, and parking contributes to an uncomfortable heat island effect.

Lack of Wayfinding Signage – It was noted by panelists that there was little in the way of identifying or welcoming signage, or signs alerting or directing motorists to businesses, restaurants, the parks or the waterfront.

Lack of Clarity Around Intentions by Ownership of Vacant Commercial Buildings – Of the three largest vacant commercial properties, two are for sale (the former Sunrise Auto Gallery at 352-360 Bridge St., and the 4,500 square foot building in the retail plaza at 216 Bridge St.) Attempts to contact the owner

of Panda Rug by the Town regarding intentions have been unsuccessful.

Underutilized and Hard to Access

Community Amenities – Beals Park, while well-located and with adequate side street parking, is in a state of disrepair (unusable basketball court, multiple dead or dying trees, overall poor maintenance) and not used by residents to its full potential. Panelists were also informed that the nearby waterfront (Wessagusset Beach area) is not the draw that it potentially could be.

Redundant Retail Uses/Competition from

Stronger Retail Locations – Bridge Street has an abundance of auto uses and nail salons, but lacks retail diversity. The lack of parking and inability of cars to make left hand turns during periods of high traffic volume has allowed for significant retail leakage to other area locations in recent years.

Market Disconnect on Rent and Property

Values – According to real estate professionals attending the stakeholder meetings, many of the property owners have held their properties for the long term, have no mortgage, and tend to overestimate the rental or sale rates, making it difficult for businesses to lease or buy property along Bridge Street. There are also perceived tax disincentives for long term holders of properties who may want to avoid paying the capital gains tax on a property sale.



Route 3A



Beals Park.

Recommendations

Panelists were able to come up with very specific recommendations for much of the corridor, but it may be helpful to begin with some general recommendations for the entirety of the study area.

Increase Connectivity – Route 3A effectively bisects the neighborhood, which has a detrimental effect on the quality of life in the community, beginning with a lack of mobility due to hazardous street crossings. Increasing connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists throughout North Weymouth to the waterfront, parks, and the retail/restaurant options should be a larger goal of the Town.

Divide the Corridor into Zones Differentiated by Ground Floor Use – Because of the length of the study area (approximately one mile), it may also be helpful to think of Bridge Street as a series of zones that differ by usage, and to develop design guidelines to keep the

future development focus on the intended use for the zone. The zones would be as follows:

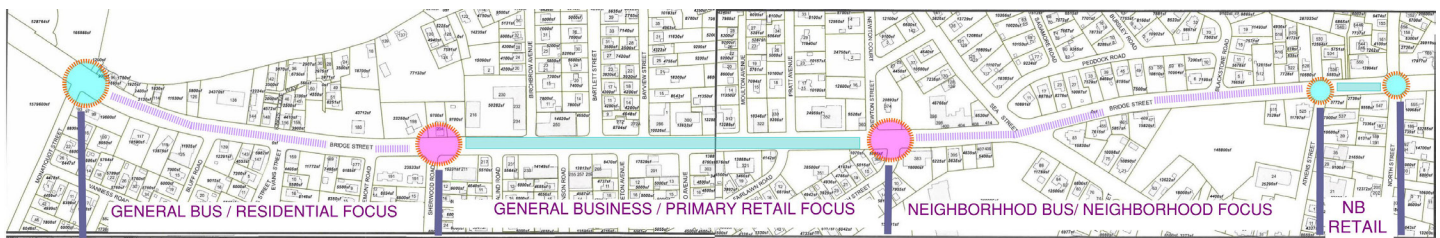
Fore River Bridge to Sherwood Drive: This section would remain zoned as General Business, but would allow residential on the ground floor and encourage small multifamily (six units; two- to three-story buildings) development.

Sherwood Drive to Newton Street: This section would also remain zoned as General Business, but would encourage ground-floor retail with office, residential, or both on the upper floors.

Newton Street to Athens Street: This section would remain zoned as Neighborhood Business and encourage neighborhood retail and services that complement the anchors of Beals Park, the Post Office, and the two churches.

Connections map.





Land use concentration map.

Athens Street to North Street: This small section would remain Neighborhood Business and focus on retail.

Traffic

Implement Recommendations from 2016

MassDOT Road Safety Audit – The audit, conducted by Green International Associates, provides a blueprint for addressing safety and accessibility issues along Route 3A as well as improving the pedestrian experience. Suggestions include making sidewalks ADA compliant; implementing bike lanes or wide bicycle-accommodating shoulders; improving wayfinding; and improving signalization at intersections.

Perform Traffic Study – A traffic study should be conducted to determine how to balance the needs of the Commonwealth vs. those of the Bridge Street Community/Town of Weymouth. Route 3A is a vital roadway for South Shore commuters, accommodating over 35,000 cars per day to and from Boston and the surrounding communities, and in order for 3A to accommodate this volume, the traffic needs to move at relatively high speeds. On the other hand, Bridge Street is a residential and commercial neighborhood, and the safety and overall well-being of its residents needs to be a priority as well. In order to best serve the needs of both communities, the study should assess the viability of the following, keeping in mind that not all ideas would be easily implementable:

Consider implementing one lane of traffic each way – Although this suggestion may appear to be extreme, the reality is that Bridge Street is often reduced to one lane of traffic in either direction by traffic emerging from non-signalized intersections and parking lots. As currently constructed, the right of way is essentially taken up by four lanes of traffic,



Flex lane, Washington Boulevard, Alexandria, VA.

with little accommodation for pedestrians or bicyclists.

Implement Reversible Flex-Lane Traffic During Rush Hour

– This reconfiguration would reduce the roadway to three lanes, with two lanes dedicated to traffic heading towards Boston during the morning commute. In the evening, the pattern would be reversed with two lanes dedicated to traffic heading away from Boston. This system has been implemented in many high traffic regions in the U.S. (including San Francisco, Salt Lake City, and Washington Blvd. in Arlington, VA, pictured). While a section of I-93 from Quincy to Savin Hill uses a concrete barrier system, this system can also be accomplished using signalization, a far more cost-effective solution.

Implement Reversible Bus Only-Lane Traffic During Rush Hour

– Similar to the Flex-Lane, this would allow for expedited public transit access from the towns on Route 3A to the Red Line.

Improve Intersections – As was stated in the 2016 MassDOT Road Safety Audit, signalized intersections along Bridge Street need to be upgraded. The panel recommends prioritizing the North Street and Sea Street intersections, as they are hubs of retail and commercial activity, and serve as community connection points.

Create Mid-block Crossings – With four lanes of traffic moving at high rates of speed, stakeholders stated that pedestrian/bicyclist crossings on Bridge Street are prohibitively hazardous, and implementing crosswalks at strategic locations (such as Blackstone Street) would help to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

Implement Dedicated Turning Lanes – Creating dedicated lanes for left hand turns would significantly ease traffic congestion.

Road Design

Improve Wayfinding – Installing signage that welcomes travelers to North Weymouth from the Fore River Bridge or to Bicknell Square is important for placemaking and creating an identity for the neighborhood. There should also be signage that directs people to businesses and neighborhood amenities such as parks and the waterfront, as well as for parking for those destinations.

Upgrade Bus Experience – As outlined in the Road Safety Audit, additional bus shelters should be installed and existing signage improved to clearly identify the stops for the 222 bus.

Reduce the Number of Curb Cuts on Bridge Street – To decrease congestion on Bridge Street, devise a rational plan for eliminating the number of curb cuts. One option may be to encourage adjacent businesses to share curb cuts.

Implement Pedestrian Scale Improvements – These include adding street trees and landscaping, improving street lighting, installing public art, adding identifying or celebratory street banners, benches, etc. to create a truly walkable environment. Where possible, landscape treatments could be integrated with stormwater management improvements.

Bicycle Improvements – If changes can be made to the existing right-of-way, create a dedicated bike lane.

Institute Traffic Calming Features – This can be achieved by reducing lane widths, installing electronic speed reminders, speed limit signs, and curb bump outs. These measures serve as reminders that Bridge Street is in fact a residential community and not just a commuter pass through.

Parking

Improving parking is one of the key components of the revitalization of the corridor. Currently there is little or no legal public parking on Bridge Street and side streets are limited. Business owners typically supply their own parking, which in many cases is insufficient. The Town should consider the following solutions:

Encourage Shared Parking – Reaching out to owners to develop shared parking arrangements could benefit the entire district and pave the way for future development.

Establish Municipal Lots – The Town should explore the viability of purchasing vacant lots from property owners with the intention of converting them into municipal lots, and should also explore additional parking options in the Sea Street neighborhood.

Landscape

Beals Park – This underutilized park has the potential to be a tremendous community asset if it can be redesigned to accommodate a wider variety of uses. The design should be mindful of how people circulate through the park, and given its unique topography, could be activated through a series of programmed seasonal events. These could include sledding and tobogganing during the winter months, Farmer's markets and art fairs during the warmer months, and events geared to holidays such as Memorial Day, the Fourth of July and Labor Day. The Town should also consider allowing for a community garden to increase utility and participation by the neighborhood. While there has been discussion of building a skate park at the location, the substantial amount of acreage within the park would still allow for other uses.

Built Environment

Develop Design Guidelines for Bridge

Street Corridor – It will be important for the revitalized Bridge Street corridor to develop its own sense of place, and design guidelines for new construction and redevelopment would establish standards to help achieve that vision. These design guidelines should apply to both the public and the private sector, encouraging a public realm that prioritizes a pleasant and safe walking experience for people of all ages and abilities.

Review Zoning – Restrict uses that may be incompatible going forward, such as ones that detract from a pedestrian-friendly environment or the overall safety of the area. Lot frontages for Bridge Street tend to be somewhat shallow, long and lean, so there does not need to be provisions to allow for high density development as with most village center or commercial district redevelopment trends. Given that the neighborhood opposes increased height (according to stakeholders) this also avoids potential permitting issues.

Allow for Small-Scale Multifamily

Development – Development would be limited to six-unit multifamily projects, with appropriate (2-3 stories) height restrictions. Multifamily developments would preferably be built on corner lots with frontage on Bridge Street, incorporating some type of shared parking arrangement within the district. Density, even without height, is essential to creating a walkable commercial/retail district.

Eliminate Drive-Through Service for Bridge

Street Businesses – Drive-through service often causes backups, effectively reducing Route 3A to one lane of traffic during morning commute times.

Create a ‘Retail Zone’ – Bridge Street is competing with other retail areas in Weymouth and surrounding communities, so concentrating the retail in a walkable, pedestrian-friendly zone will establish a sense of place and allow retailers to benefit from increased foot traffic. The panel recommends concentrating new retail development on the “middle third” of the corridor (where much of the successful retail already exists), and encouraging more residential development on either end of the one-mile stretch of the study area from North Street to the Fore River Bridge.

Mitigate Heat Island Effect – Bridge Street is very hot in the summer months due to the high percentage of impervious surfaces, the heat generated by steady stream of vehicles, and the lack of shaded areas. To create a more comfortable pedestrian environment, future development should include the use of shade trees and vegetation, minimizing the use of asphalt and using light colored pavement surfaces, increasing the amount of pervious surfaces, and installing benches and shaded bus stations.

Differentiate Crosswalks from Street –

Paving crosswalks with a material other than asphalt (brick pavers, textured concrete, etc.) sends a clear message to motorists that Bridge Street is a pedestrian realm and not just a commuter roadway.

Funding & Resources

Federal Grants

CDBG (Community Development Block Grants)

State Grants

MassDevelopment/Commonwealth

Places – A collaborative initiative between MassDevelopment and the crowdfunding platform Patronicity, Commonwealth Places provides a funding mechanism for community-driven placemaking projects throughout Massachusetts.

MassWorks – Provides grants to prepare communities for success with a particular emphasis on projects that support the production of multi-family housing in appropriately located walkable mixed-use districts, result in direct and immediate job creation, and/or support economic development in weak or distressed areas. Also helps to incentivize private investment.

Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD)/MA Downtown Initiative (MDI) – Offers a range of services and assistance to communities seeking help on how to revitalize their downtowns.

MassDOT

Chapter 90 Program – Provides funds for capital improvement such as highway construction, preservation and improvement projects.

Wildlands Trust – Works throughout Southeastern Massachusetts to conserve and permanently protect native habitats, farmland, and lands of high ecological and scenic value and has offered to provide help with grant writing.

CPA (Community Preservation Act) – Helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities.

Linkage to New Development Projects – Create bonus provisions within the zoning in exchange for improvements related to the public realm, including shaded seating, contributions to a wayfinding program, shared parking, and/or appropriate bicycle storage.

Federal/State Historic Tax Credits – May be available given that a portion of the study area is located in a section of the Sea Street Historic District.

Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC) – District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) – Provides technical assistance to communities for “any subject within regional planning expertise.”

Banks – The Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston, as well as community banks Coastal Heritage and the South Shore Bank can provide no-to-low interest loans for redevelopment.

Conclusion

With a four-lane state highway running directly through the heart of the North Weymouth commercial district, devising a plan to transform Bridge Street into a more vibrant, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood would appear to be a daunting task. Fortunately, there are a number of factors that make it much less so.

The first is the genuine desire on the part of the Town, its residents and the Weymouth and South Shore Chambers of Commerce to redevelop this corridor. The community banks also appear willing to fund projects or to provide low cost loans to businesses to upgrade their properties. And while the vacant buildings, lots and unleased properties do not reflect well on the current state of the commercial viability of the corridor, they also represent opportunities to transform the district.

Some of the recommendations presented by the TAP are more radical in nature – specifically any plan involving lane reduction – and represent long-range solutions that require the cooperation of state entities and significant capital outlay. But many of the suggestions by the panel and the earlier MassDOT study are more easily achieved.

Any successful reimagining of Bridge Street will have to include two components: Increasing parking options and creating a more walkable, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood experience. While a reduction in lanes would create a greater opportunity to expand sidewalks, implement tree and vegetation plantings, install bike lanes and bus shelters and add seating along the corridor, some of those elements can be achieved now. Upgrades to sidewalks and crosswalks, improved signalization, and traffic

calming measures can improve the pedestrian experience greatly with limited investment.

Devising a solution to the parking shortage, while more complex, is also achievable. Developing a program to create shared/alternative parking by enlisting the help of the Weymouth Chamber of Commerce would be a good start, following completion of a parking utilization study for the area. A bolder solution to the parking shortage would be for the Town to purchase properties to create municipal lots. There are currently two former used car lots at either end of the corridor, and there may be other off-market properties available along Bridge Street.

It was revealed during the stakeholder meetings that there are a number of long term property holders that are reluctant to sell because of capital gain tax implications. Educating these property owners on the benefits of 1031 exchange programs may be one way to encourage them to sell their properties while maintaining investment income.

What has been previously stated but needs to be re-iterated is that in the long term, the Town will have to decide how to balance the needs of the Commonwealth's use of 3A as a commuter roadway and the needs of the North Weymouth community. Studies have shown that reducing the number of lanes with thoughtful planning increases safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and greatly reduces rear-end automobile collisions without significantly impacting commute times. It also creates the infrastructure for creating a truly walkable/bikeable pedestrian experience, which is the cornerstone to revitalizing the Bridge Street corridor.



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