

Belchertown Regulatory Assessment for Healthy Community Design

Prepared by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, 2015
With funding support from the
Massachusetts Department of Public Health



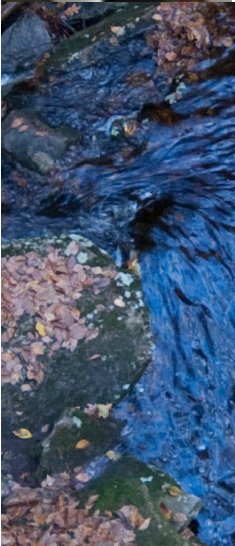
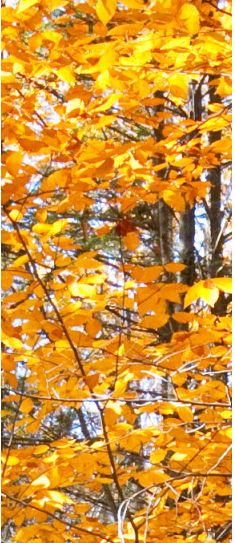


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Disclaimer:

The conclusions of this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of or endorsement by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Project Background

Operationalizing the Massachusetts Healthy Community Design Toolkit: Regulatory Assessment of Bylaws, Policies, Plans, and Programs in Belchertown, MA

In 2015, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) launched a competitive round of funding available to Mass in Motion communities for the purpose of assessing a community's regulations, plans, policies and programs with respect to facilitating residents access to healthy food and physical activity in their daily lives. The purpose of the program is to advance Mass in Motion communities' policy and regulatory work to improve community health and well-being, as well as to refine the "Healthy Community Design Toolkit" and improve its ease of use by a wider audience. In 2013 MDPH engaged staff from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to develop the Massachusetts Healthy Community Design Toolkit "to provide health advocates with a concrete path forward to improve community health." The Toolkit identifies key "leverage points" in local community design, planning and development to facilitate the complicated process of making Massachusetts communities healthier.

You can access the toolkit at: http://www.pvpc.org/sites/default/files/HCDT_2ndEdition_140903.pdf

The Town of Belchertown was one of three communities across the Commonwealth selected for this project. The other



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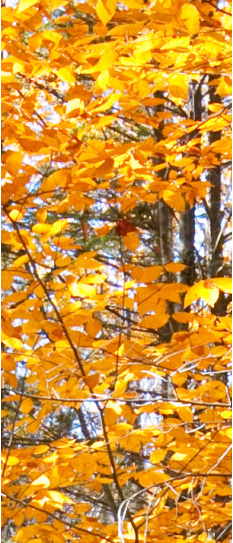


communities selected were Greenfield and Weymouth.

This summary represents the findings of both the initial investigation of Belchertown's relevant documents and follow-up discussion with Belchertown staff, as well as research on priority issues selected by the Belchertown staff, including Doug Albertson, Town Planner. The accompanying Excel spreadsheet organizes strategies within different "Leverage Points" (essentially, municipal planning documents, regulations, policies, programs and services) highlighted in the Toolkit. It documents the current status of "Leverage Points" in Belchertown, and makes recommendations for improvements.



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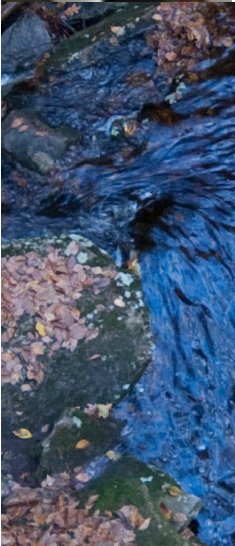
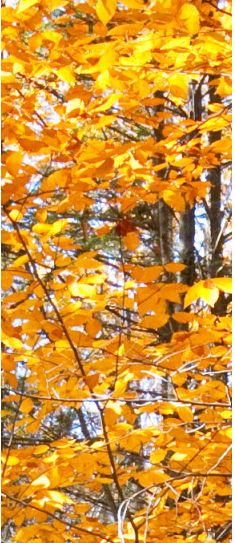


Summary

Image courtesy of Meng He (via Flickr)

Belchertown is a town in transition from small rural community to growing “suburban” bedroom community. Most of its residents work out of town, and rural roads are increasingly becoming developed with approval-not-required (ANR) single-family residences. The town has a historic center, but most of its commercial activity is located on the outskirts of town on Route 9. Route 9 is also on the UMass bus route. Walkability in Belchertown is best in the downtown/historic area, where there are sidewalks to and amid surrounding neighborhoods, and the state school property, which is being redeveloped into an assisted living facility with long-range plans for other uses. Healthy food is available through a farmer’s market as well as the New England Small Farm Institute site (NESFI). There is a community garden at the NESFI site, but there are no town-run community gardens.

Belchertown’s community plan is oriented towards protecting the town’s rural character, and health concerns related to the built environment are not explicitly expressed. This is not unusual. A 2011 American Planning Association study found that only a small percentage of community plans explicitly address health. However, including health in comprehensive plans is a best practice that is increasingly being implemented. Zoning is updated incrementally and periodically; a Business Neighborhood Center District was recently adopted for the state school property that allows for mixed-use. In general the main areas of improvement



that could help better facilitate increased physical activity in the near-term include reduced and more flexible off-street parking requirements (to allow for more closely spaced development and more welcoming streetscapes); incorporation of pedestrian facilities into road reconstruction and maintenance (such as through a complete streets policy); facilitating the establishment of community gardens; reduction of the number of curb cuts; and more accessible and better connected open spaces. Above and beyond these incremental steps, Belchertown should aim toward developing complete neighborhoods with a variety of housing types within walking distance of goods, services, and green space. Zoning revisions that encourage greater density of buildings and a mix of land uses in key activity nodes throughout town will set the long-term conditions for people to carry out day to day trips by foot or bike, which leads to better health outcomes. These complete neighborhoods also need complete streets with safe, convenient and enjoyable sidewalks and bike facilities (including bike lanes, bike paths, sharrows, cycle tracks, etc.)



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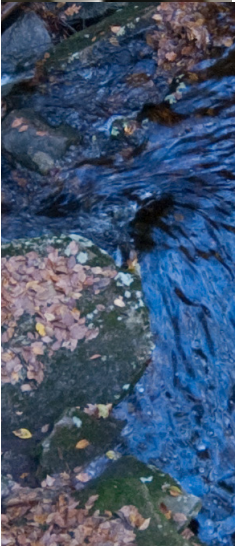
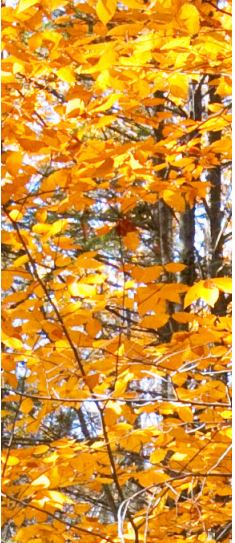


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Areas of Success

Areas of Success:

- Business Neighborhood Center District encourages mixed uses and states that “pedestrian accommodations shall take precedence over vehicular accommodations,” encourages shared parking, and allows for a variety of housing types in state school area.
- Large expanses of protected open space with potential for connection.
- Partnership with Mass in Motion and completion of walk audit
- Existing trail system on NESFI property and cooperative relationship with NESFI
- Schools located in central area of town with existing or potential connections to surrounding neighborhoods
- Downtown area has sidewalks and small commercial area within walking distance of surrounding neighborhoods
- Community Plan is relatively recent, very thorough, and engagingly articulate about the desires of the community, which include siting denser development in the downtown and state school areas.

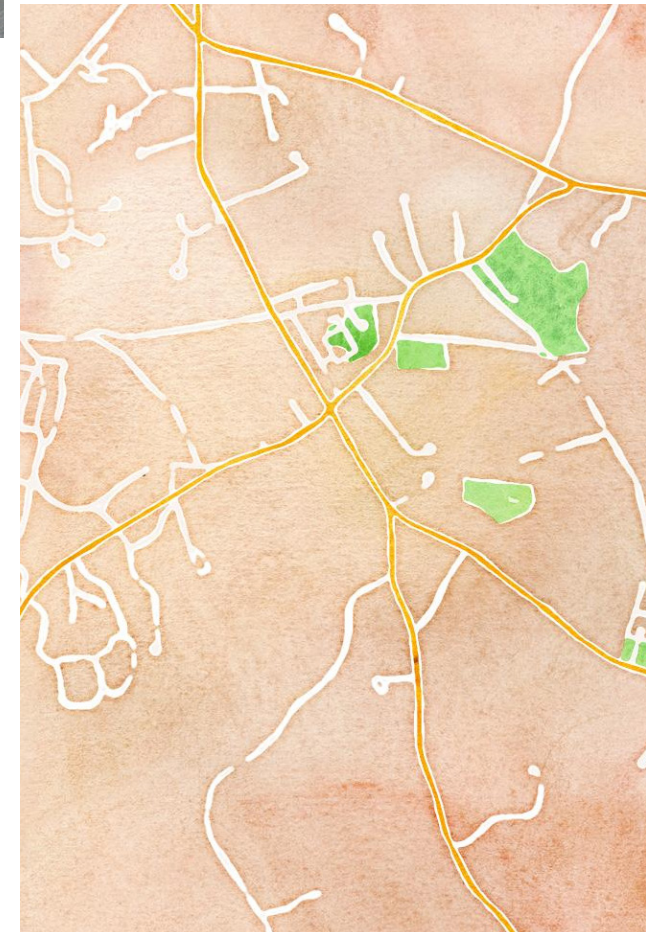


Image courtesy of Stamen Maps



Areas for Improvement

Areas for Improvement and of Opportunity:

- Intersection safety, an expansion of the sidewalk and bicycle network, and better transit for certain groups (elderly, students) is called for in the community plan. Walkability is not specifically addressed in the community plan, but the clustering of development is to protect open space. Curb cuts are also not regulated in the parking requirements. These issues could be addressed through a town-wide complete streets policy that elevates consideration of pedestrian and bicycle accommodations with road needs, making for more walkable/bikeable roads and neighborhoods, with development that takes advantage of this quality.
 - » Adopt a Complete Streets policy, with identification of priority streets to create town-wide bike network with incorporation of major town destinations
- Off-street parking requirements are onerous. Excess parking requirements limits density, preventing the creation of complete walkable neighborhoods. Large parking lots are unpleasant to walk by, and can contribute to heat island effects—further damaging the walkability of an area. Also, shared parking lots are not allowed (except in the new district in the state school area), which eliminates the potential to reduce parking lot sizes. Parking requirements should be revised to be more flexible, and take peak demand into account.

Community Plan

Off-street Parking



Revising parking regulations would allow development to be placed closer together, allowing more space for tax-generating uses and the ability to comfortably walk from one use to another. Reduced parking in certain areas would also facilitate the increased use of transit or other alternative modes of transportation (such as biking).

- » Reduce parking ratios in all zones to promote walkability and enhance economic development by allowing more space for buildings instead of parking. Consider converting to parking maximums, or area-wide caps.
 - » Allow utilization of on-street parking, particularly for residential units in mixed-use areas
 - » Give planning board flexibility to reduce parking requirements when reduced parking need can be demonstrated through peak-demand study
 - » Consider adopting an fee-in-lieu parking program to contribute to development of municipal parking lots
 - » Incentivize reduced and innovative parking solutions
 - » Install parking caps in certain areas (such as downtown)
- Site plan criteria could be further clarified and strengthened to address safety of pedestrian circulation and connectivity. The Business Neighborhood Center overlay does a good job of this through stating that pedestrian circulation is more important than vehicle circulation.
 - » Include integration of pedestrian/bicycle accommodations (including bike paths, connecting paths to other areas) into surrounding network and community as one of the criteria (enforced as applicable)
 - » Consider adding criteria for increasing vehicle efficiency / reducing the need to drive at the site
 - » Create performance standards (such as increasing walkability; connecting to surrounding communities; etc.)
 - » Note that strict off-street loading requirements in areas where density is desired can put negative and sometimes

Site Plan Review



unnecessary constraints on the types of developments that can be built; consider allowing flexibility in off-street loading requirement

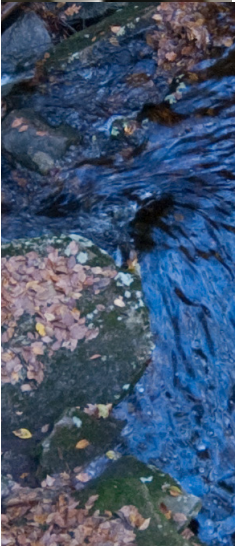
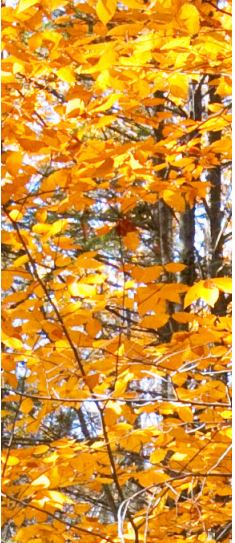
- Subdivision and regular road standards could be reduced to accommodate lower speeds through design
 - » MassDOT Complete Streets eligibility requires application of a municipal Complete Streets policy to private development in the community
 - » Consider reducing ROW from 40' to 33-36'
 - » For other areas of town, such as Rte 202 near the schools, reduce speeds to a consistent 20 mph zone
- Updated road design standards and road reconstruction projects are needed
 - » Develop as part of a Complete Streets policy
 - » Existing wide roads provide opportunity to develop bicycle lanes and wider sidewalks; identify and prioritize streets for bike lanes as part of Complete streets policy and in CIP
- No full assessment of sidewalk needs, and sidewalks are not generally required
 - » Address sidewalk development and maintenance in part through Complete Streets policy
 - » Identify areas in town where sidewalks would be most appropriate to promote walking and connectivity, and where the network can be expanded
 - » Adopt an in-lieu fee for all developments so that sidewalks can be built/maintained in most appropriate areas of town
- Multi-family is not allowed in any zones except where it already exists, hindering potential walkable access to community services/healthy food and expanding the amount of land consumed for residential purposes
 - » Foster retention and re-development of existing multi-family residential areas by reducing parking

Subdivision Regulations

Road Design

Sidewalks

Multi-family Housing

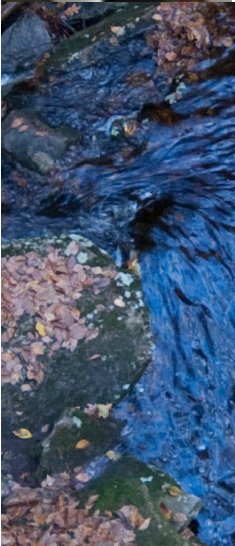
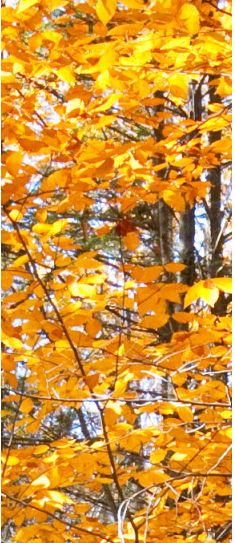


requirements and updating site plan review for these areas to incorporate pedestrian accommodations

- » Allow multi-family residential development in key nodes such as along Rte 9 (see next point). Consider use of form-based codes to ensure appropriate character of sites and buildings.
- A better connection between zoning and transit is needed
 - » Focus on downtown and the Rte 9 corridor where there is existing bus service
 - » Incorporate consideration of bus transit users in Complete Streets policy
 - » Consider creating a new consolidated “mixed use” district along Rte 9 or downtown that includes minimum building heights, maximum front setbacks, sidewalk requirements, revised parking requirements, and appropriate building types. A form-based code in this area could ensure that future development creates a unique sense of place that is in keeping with Belchertown’s desired character by addressing streetscape, site design, and building form, not just uses and square footage. Alternatively, consider creating design guidelines and a design review process for this corridor that incorporates performance standards and incentives.
- Community gardens generally not promoted
 - » Consider adopting community garden policy or ordinance similar to one developed in Palmer
 - » Consider utilizing public land for community gardens (including schools, libraries, parks, etc.)

Transit

Community Gardens



- Large front setback requirements
 - » Simply reduce front setback requirements in areas where the Town wishes to activate more walking/biking/street activity and expects to see significant new development
 - » Allow front setback-averaging in transition areas to bring new buildings closer to the street (ideally in areas with potential for future bike lanes/wider sidewalks)
- Open space areas are sometimes inaccessible (no parking, signage) or are unknown by residents
 - » Utilize existing open space areas by creating parking/signage and increasing access to nearby neighborhoods when possible through easements
 - » Work with NESFI to formalize trails on that site and connect to state school area
 - » Conduct a greenway assessment to see what open space areas can be incorporated into a town-wide trail/sidewalk system, and where additional greenspace is needed



Design of the Public Realm

Open Space

Prioritized Next Steps

Prioritized Next Steps

1

Adopt a Complete Streets Policy, which will ensure eligibility for the MassDOT Complete Streets funding (projected to be available in late Summer 2015).

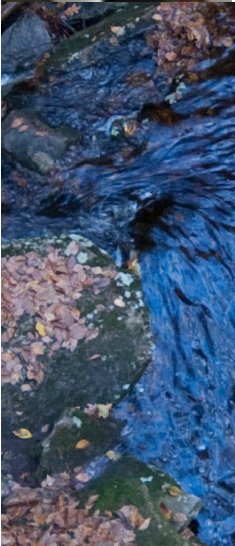
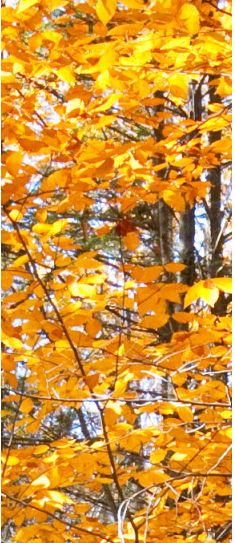
2

Revise Off-street Parking Requirements and Site Plan Review Criteria: Conduct a parking study. Use results to reduce off-street parking requirements in all zones and create more flexibility and incentives to allow for parking solutions that don't require large amounts of new surface lots. Develop site plan review criteria that establish the importance of integrating developments into the pedestrian/bicycle network, reduce the number and width of curb cuts, ensure direct paths from sidewalks to building entrances and safe pedestrian and bicycle circulation on all sites, design sites to create attractive streetscapes, and reduce the need to drive whenever possible (performance-based standards). Add a fee-in-lieu sidewalk requirement to target sidewalk improvements in the places where they are most needed.

3

Develop Mixed-Use / Performance-Based Incentive Zoning: Adopt a simple form-based code for Route 9 and/or downtown area that brings buildings closer to the street (maximum setbacks); reduces parking requirements; and has appropriate building form standards (minimum and maximum building heights, building types, etc) to create a walkable and more transit-friendly places. Or, develop design standards for an overlay district that incorporates basic form-based principles. Develop performance criteria for the area to match community vision. Consider only minimally prescribing uses or allowing more flexibility in uses.





4

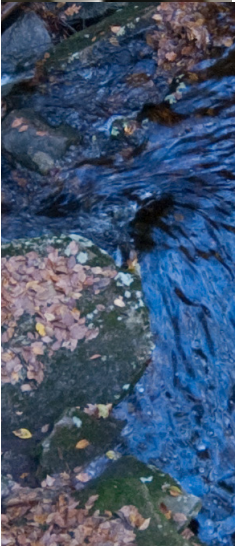
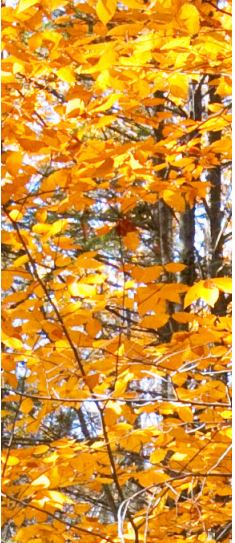
Facilitate the Establishment of Community Gardens: Adopt a procedure (possibly policy) that facilitates the use of municipally-owned, vacant, or un-developed lots for use by residents/ community groups for urban agriculture/community gardens.

5

Conduct a Greenway Assessment: Build on work previously accomplished by Mass in Motion to identify potential linkages between neighborhoods and open space areas. Identify a potential trail system that connects open spaces and destinations throughout town, particularly in outlying areas where there are no sidewalks. Also look for opportunities to connect trail system with sidewalks (such as Piper Farm, in order to facilitate use of trails for walking to school).



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MA Complete Streets Funding Eligibility, Program Description, and Guidelines

Complete Streets: “Roadways that are safe, comfortable, and accessible for users of all ages, abilities, and income, regardless of how one travels.”

In 2014 the MA Legislature authorized \$50 million for a “Complete Streets Program,” which would be administered by the MassDOT. Funds are not yet allocated and MassDOT staff and various advocacy and advisory entities have been working for the last 10 months to launch a pilot version of the program.

Program Objectives

- a. Improve pedestrian, bicycle, and transit travel for all users by establishing Complete Streets (CS) guidelines for municipalities
- b. Provide targeted funding for municipalities to improve their pedestrian, bicycle and transit infrastructure
- c. Provide the framework to municipalities throughout the Commonwealth for adoption of a CS policy
- d. Encourage municipalities to promote a CS approach in construction and maintenance of transportation facilities
- e. Address the needs of environmental justice communities to improve accessibility and mobility
- f. Support smart growth objectives and increase the share of walking, bicycling, and transit consistent with the Commonwealth’s mode shift goals
- g. Assure underserved municipalities and municipalities that lack resources are served equitably by the program

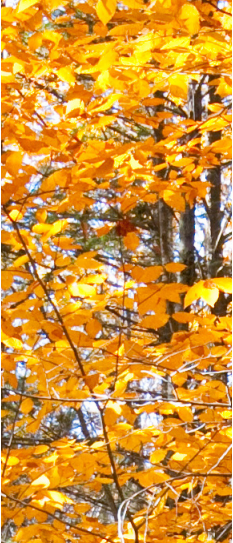
Program Structure & Administration (two required stages):

1. Community becomes eligible by meeting criteria and completing application process

I. Complete Streets



Image courtesy of Rob (via Flickr)



2. Community submits CS Project specific application process and scoring

Applicability of Funds:

Funding is for an approved list of eligible/ineligible project types:

- Tier 1 Projects--have the highest potential to increase long-term alternative mode use:
 - * New accommodation for bicycles, pedestrians, transit vehicles, or users
 - * Safety improvements or significantly improve network connectivity for non-auto modes
 - * ADA improvements
 - * Safe routes to transit projects
- Tier 2 Projects--will provide an increase in the utility of existing accommodations for alternative modes
 - * Smaller, incremental enhancements to the transportation network for alternative modes
 - * Context sensitive solution options to a transportation need
- Supporting Elements--other ancillary components of projects that encourage travel via alternative modes or enhance the experience of the users of alternative mode transportation facilities (only eligible as part of a Tier 1 or Tier 2 project)

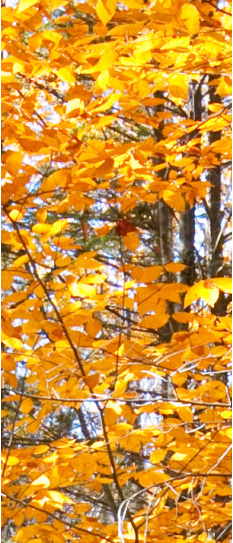
Equity: The Legislation that created the program mandates that “not less than 33% of grants awarded shall be to cities and towns with a median household income below the average of the Commonwealth.”

Process, Eligibility Criteria and Scoring (as cited in MGL Ch90-I, Section 1 (c) (ii))

1. File an Application with MassDOT
2. Adopt a Complete Streets (CS) Policy--may be a by-law, ordinance or administrative policy, in a manner which shall include at least 1 public hearing; provided, however, that the by-law, ordinance or administrative policy shall identify the body, individual or entity responsible for carrying out the CS program
3. Coordinate with MassDOT to confirm baseline inventory of



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pedestrian and bicycle accommodations to identify priority projects. MassDOT interprets this as, “demonstrate need for additional connections in municipal pedestrian and bicycle network ...via a number of options: visual representation-e.g. marked up maps showing missing connection or through study.”

4. Develop procedures to follow when conducting municipal road repairs, upgrades or expansion projects to incorporate CS elements
5. Incorporate CS into your existing municipal process for Private Development
6. Set a 5-year municipal mode shift goal, AND/OR (yet to be determined) a project specific mode shift goal
7. Submit annual progress reports

Review Process

- Interdisciplinary MassDOT membership
- Two Committees (Community Eligibility and Project Selection)

Communities must meet all the criteria in some fashion, but once basic eligibility has been affirmed, then each application will be scored and ranked accordingly. For example, a community that has adopted CS as an ordinance/by-law will receive more points than one that adopted CS as a resolution because an ordinance/by-law is agreed to be more powerful and stronger than a resolution.

“There must be a statement of commitment to CS that will be rated based on level of commitment, documented through policy, procedures and practices. This rating will have a bearing on a municipalities eligibility for funding of a project.”

Project Selection Criteria:

- demonstrated commitment to CS by municipality
- demonstrated project need
- project effectiveness in shifting modes to walk, bike, or transit
- anticipated benefits to hierarchy of vulnerable road users

Special Considerations:

- environmental justice areas
- geographic distribution



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- community type (rural v. urban)
- No municipality may receive funding for a project in two consecutive years
- Project readiness

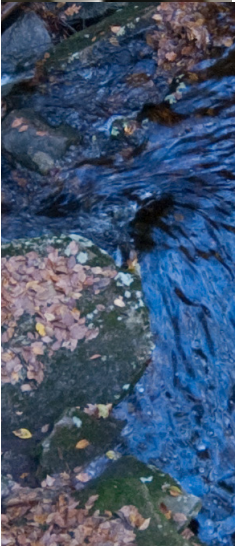
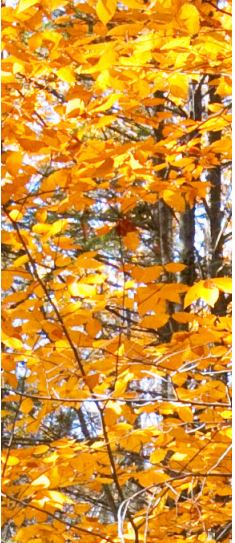
Dissemination of Funds

- Reimbursement-based
- NOT for design, policy, planning or reporting

Example Policy (Littleton, MA): <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/policy/cs-ma-littleton-policy.pdf>



Image courtesy of Doug Kerr (via Flickr)



2: Parking Reductions

How to Achieve Parking Reductions

Belchertown could add flexibility into their parking requirements and incentives and trade-offs. A recommended first step would be to conduct a parking study for the town or certain areas of the town that documents existing parking demand, recommends appropriate parking requirements based on local conditions, recommends opportunities for shared parking, and/or municipal parking, and addresses parking pricing and permitting if needed.

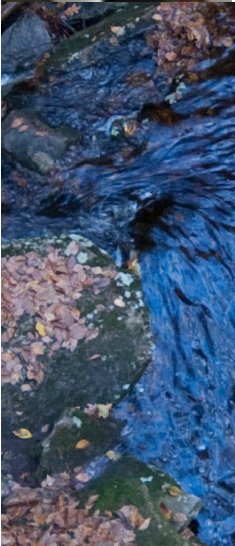
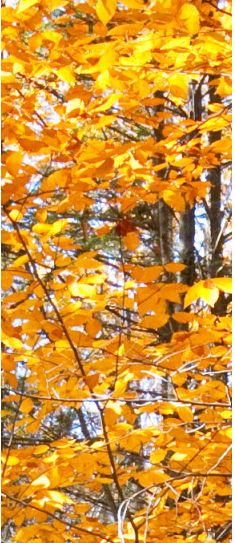
To provide ample parking without creating an unfriendly environment for pedestrians, municipal parking ratios should be based on peak demand for the uses (refer to municipally funded studies to determine appropriate numbers), not just simple square footage and the like. Incorporate more flexibility and incentives for developments to reduce off-street parking through other means as well, such as shared parking, utilization of street or municipal parking, TDM, or demand studies.

Providing more public parking areas would lessen need for developers/businesses to have to provide off-street parking, lead to more uniform utilization of parking spaces, and thus provide more room for other revenue-generating land uses. The town could also lease spaces owned by the town to businesses to help meet parking requirements. Consider creating a fee in-lieu of parking option. Fee in-lieu of parking was used successfully by Northampton to help fund municipal parking lots.

Adopt parking maximums or area-wide caps, either by site or by district, in areas near public transportation (such as Route 9/downtown; this would require some study). This allows developers to come up with



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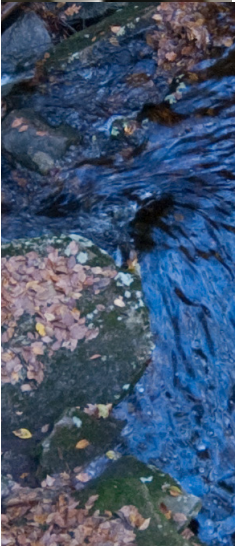
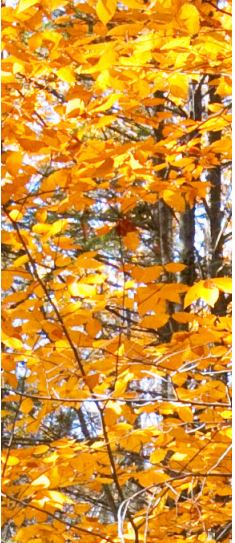
more creative solutions and sharing arrangements, and build only what their developments actually need. These are progressive concepts; try them first in areas where Belchertown is seeing most rapid growth, or would like to direct more growth.

One very useful resource on parking reductions: http://contextsensitivesolutions.org/content/reading/parking_md/resources/parking_paper_md/

Background studies on overbuilding of parking caps and parking supply:

From Minimum to Maximum: The Impact of Parking Standard Reform on Residential Parking Supply in London from 2004-2010 [results show that only 68% of parking maximums and 52% of previous minimums were constructed after reform was implemented]:
<http://docs.trb.org/prp/13-2904.pdf>

Parking In Mixed-Use U.S. Districts: Oversupplied No Matter How You Slice the Pie (2014): http://nelsonnygaard.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Oversupplied-Parking_RW_JKR.pdf



Develop Mixed-Use Zoning Districts:

Two areas to address to increase health outcomes in Belchertown include making better linkages between housing and community destinations and transit, and creating more walkable environments. While Belchertown is a rural area in transition, and would like to protect its rural character, there are some areas of town (aside from the state school) where existing development patterns and transit routes can be capitalized upon to create complete neighborhoods where daily trips can be taking by walking or biking thereby increasing physical activity and access to goods and services. Key areas to consider include Route 9 and the downtown area.

Assuming that a complete re-write of the Town's zoning code is politically unfeasible at this time, Belchertown may consider developing new districts or overlay districts for these key areas. The new districts can either use form-based code methods, or include design standards and a design review process to achieve similar aims. In either case, the goal would be to ensure that all municipal regulations and policies are aimed toward a unified, holistic, and specific vision of the future of the area that includes streetscape, site and basic building design. Mixed-use districts would need to incorporate some form of residential development to work and take advantage of nearby transit. The most important principles to include are maximum setbacks, minimum building heights, building orientation, and parking requirements/ location, and streetscape standards. Qualities such as these can also be incentivized through methods, or encouraged through non-binding design reviews, but the outcomes would be less predictable.

Freeport, Maine offers a good example for design guidelines that overlay a more traditional zoning district with rather prescriptive

3. Develop Mixed-Use Districts



Image Courtesy of Doug Kerr



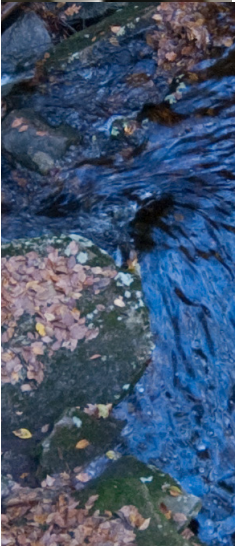
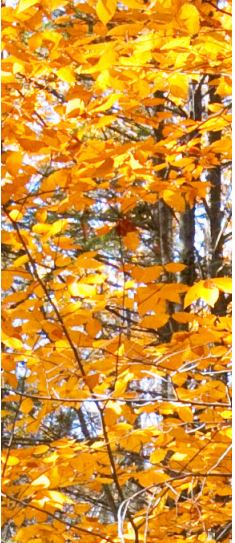
uses (see item #21 at: http://www.freeportmaine.com/page.php?page_id=103).

Beacon, New York inserted two new relatively simple form-based code districts into its conventional zoning—one related to a transitioning section of Main Street and the other related to a train station. Beacon provides an example of a relatively simple form-based code that focuses on the essentials of successful placemaking. Information on this and two other New York towns is found at: <http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us/CountyGov/Departments/Planning/planonit112013.pdf>.

Site plan criteria should also be revised to facilitate healthy community design as a whole through relevant consideration of building design, landscaping, and stormwater. Criteria should be tailored to a community's specific goals, but address all of these elements in some form or another - for that reason, there is no "shelf-ready" example to replicate exactly. Revised site plan criteria can list incentives and trade-offs available to developers to mitigate traffic impacts; expectations regarding provision and integration of bicycle/pedestrian facilities; and other features such as landscaping and streetscaping expectations in high-priority areas of town. Examples from two municipalities in Massachusetts and two from out-of-state accompany this document. In addition, PVPC has a model bylaw for sidewalk requirements that can be utilized either as stand-alone zoning sections or integrated into site plan review criteria.



Derby Street Shoppes, Hingham, MA: The architectural design, sidewalk treatment, benches and plantings shown in this image create a pedestrian-friendly environment within an otherwise an auto-oriented development.



4. Community Gardens

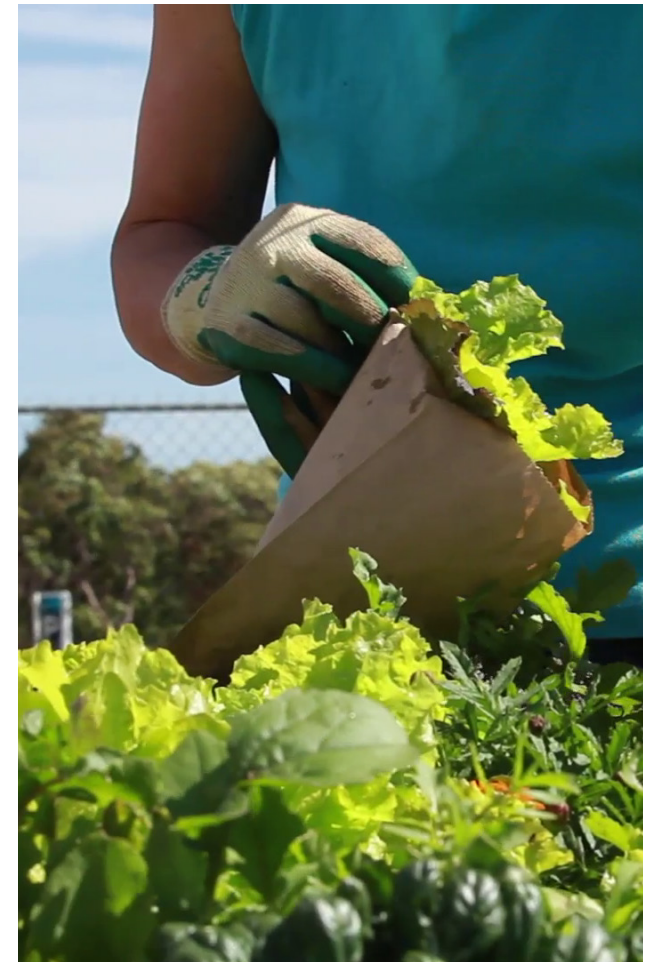
How to Facilitate the Development of Community Gardens:

Community garden projects improve a community's food security and increase access to healthy, affordable food to diverse residents. They allow residents who do not have appropriate garden space, to grow their own food and/or make it available to others. Community gardens can reduce food costs, and increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, which is a key determinant of positive health outcomes. Gardening itself provides physical activity that has direct health benefits. Community gardens also have social benefits. They can become social centers and can provide opportunities for seasonal employment and leadership development for both adults and youth. These social connections in turn improve health outcomes.

Because access to healthy and affordable food options is a key determinant of public health outcomes across the socio-economic spectrum, many cities and towns are taking it upon themselves to facilitate access to land for the development of community gardens.

The first step toward facilitating community gardens is to explicitly add them as an allowed use in all zoning districts (unless there is a particular reason that a community garden would be undesirable in a particular district).

Municipalities can proactively develop community gardens on their land—including, parks, senior centers, schools, and libraries. Some municipalities choose to establish large community-wide gardens with hundreds of plots. Other municipalities



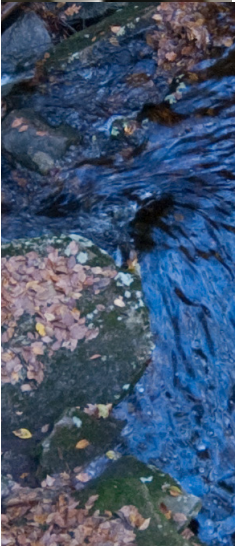
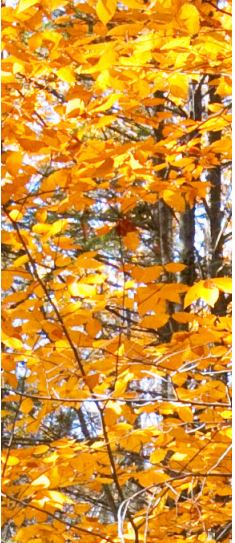


establish numerous dispersed small gardens that serve individual neighborhoods. The former benefit from economy of scale and are best located in areas with existing high quality soil. The latter are more convenient for residents and can facilitate walking or biking to the garden for additional exercise. Many municipalities opt to site community gardens at schools so that the garden can be incorporated into school curriculum. The NESFI property in vicinity to the state school redevelopment already has a community garden near a senior-citizen population, helping them have access to fresh healthy food and outdoor activity.

Municipalities can play a crucial role in supporting community groups that are attempting to develop community gardens on private land. Support can come in a wide range of forms including helping to map and document need, advocating on behalf of residents, site planning and design, providing a water hook up, providing meeting space, or assistance with grant applications.

Municipal support for community-led projects is particularly beneficial when there is a socioeconomic power difference between would-be gardeners and the owners of the desired land—for example in a large rental complex where the owners do not see an economic benefit for providing garden space. The Lord Jeff apartment complex may offer an opportunity to establish a community garden that also serves as a health-oriented community gathering space and marketable amenity for the landowners.

In some communities there is vacant or underutilized land that is appropriate for community gardens. While it is generally understood that municipalities are eager to develop land to “its best and highest use,” development takes time, which can leave empty lots vacant for years, creating space for dumping and other



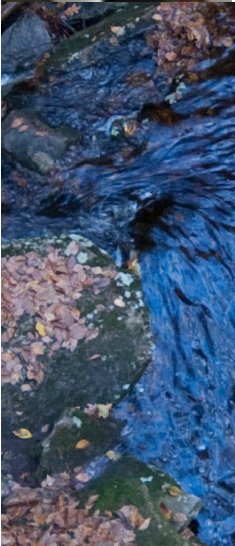
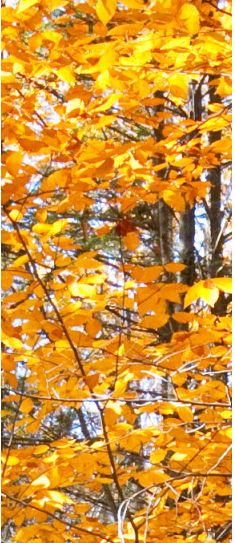
unpleasant, possibly illegal and most likely unsightly activity. Communities across the country have responded to this 21st century reality by adopting regulations that permit residents to temporarily use vacant land, with permission of the property owner, for community gardens.

See the appendix for an example community garden ordinance, using the Town of Palmer's ordinance as a jumping off point.

A fact sheet on community gardens from PVPC's Sustainability Toolkit is included in the appendix folder.



Farmer's Markets are nice too! Tuesday Market in Northampton. Image courtesy of MA Office of Tourism



Develop a Greenway Plan:

Mass in Motion has identified that many open space and greenway areas are not accessible in Belchertown—this can be due to a lack of parking, lack of signage, lack of obvious access points, unmaintained trails, or lack of awareness. Health can be increased when areas to “wander,” such as parks and open space areas, are located near where people live and work.

Open space areas—particularly the existing trail system on the NESFI site—offer an excellent opportunity to develop a ‘secondary’ circulatory system for the town, where residents can walk from one neighborhood to another using off-road trails that eventually connect to town destinations or sidewalk networks. In Belchertown, where there are long roads with no sidewalks, trails and greenways can provide additional opportunities to engage in physical activity.

Studying existing open space and greenway facilities in terms of their location, connectivity, and trail facilities or opportunities could augment the prioritization of sidewalk needs and opportunities to develop bike lanes and school connections as well. Other considerations should include connections to low-income or underserved areas, habitat connectivity, and whether areas designated for commercial or office development should be incentivized or required to build or connect to trail systems to promote employee health and to increase the town-wide trail system. A plan that shows town-wide connectivity opportunities including sidewalk and bicycle lane opportunities will help Belchertown prioritize land acquisition projects as well as streetscape and capital improvement upgrades.

5: Greenway Plan



Image courtesy of David Heyes (via Flickr)

Appendix Contents

Appendix:

The appendix is provided as a folder of digital files that includes the following resources:

Complete Streets

- Holyoke Complete Streets Ordinance
- Littleton Complete Streets Policy

Site Plan Review:

- PVPC model bylaw for Bike Parking (could be incorporated into SPR or elsewhere in zoning)
- PVPC model bylaw for Sidewalk Requirements (could be incorporated into SPR or elsewhere in zoning)
- Site Plan Review Section, Northampton, MA
- Site Plan Review, Portsmouth NH
- Design Recommendations for Better Commercial Strips

Community Gardens:

- Town of Palmer, Community Garden Ordinance
- PVPC fact sheet on Community Gardens from the Pioneer Valley Sustainability Toolkit