

Peer Review of Complete Streets Prioritization Plan Project List

WalkBoston conducted a peer review of the Town of Belmont's Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (CSPP) Project List at the request of the Town Administrator's Office. This memorandum summarizes our understanding of the goals of the project list, describes our project review methodology, and summarizes our findings and recommendations from our site walks.

Background on the Project Selection Process for the CSPP project List

The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program provides construction funding through a competitive application process to communities who have adopted complete streets policies and have an approved Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (CSPP). The Plan identifies proposed projects that work to improve walking and biking conditions in that city or town for a five-year period. The Town of Belmont has hired VHB to assist them in the completion of the CSPP.

WalkBoston staff spoke with Laura Castelli of VHB and discussed the process that was used to identify projects for the CSPP project list. To help determine what projects should appear on the CSPP, VHB solicited comments from Belmont residents through an online website and at public meetings. The most frequent comments were about sidewalks, crosswalks and traffic calming. The projects on the CSPP list include projects that address these issues, and, according to VHB, focus on those areas where improvements will help to complete connections to schools, main street shopping areas, and transit.

Given the relatively limited money available through the MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program (max. \$400,000) to fund the design and construction of projects, Belmont chose to focus on relatively low cost, short-term projects that require little or no design services and can be implemented relatively quickly. The Town would also prefer to include projects where Town matching funds would not be required. Finally, there was also a desire to include projects from as many neighborhoods as possible to ensure that people throughout the town would benefit from complete streets funding.

Project Site Review Methodology

On Wednesday, July 24, 2019, between 10:00 am and 1:00 pm, WalkBoston staff walked to each proposed project site. We reviewed the proposed recommendations, observed pedestrian and vehicular traffic patterns, and noted any possible additional fixes that could be made to further improve the walking environment. We walked along a number of the identified Residential Snow Removal Bylaw Enforcement Roads, which reflect the more popular walking routes that students use to reach their schools. The blue lines on the map referenced below trace the walking routes we took to look at the proposed CSPP projects. As shown, we did not walk all of the snow removal routes.

Map: <https://drive.google.com/BelmontCSPPListPeerReview>

Each WalkBoston group reviewing the project sites received the following instructions:

1. *Walk between as many assigned project locations as possible.*

2. *Stay along identified snow removal routes/school walking routes when possible.*
3. *Keep track of where you walked - draw lines on your map.*
4. *Take photographs of each project location you are evaluating.*

Project Evaluation Questions:

Does the proposed enhancement meet the goal of improved pedestrian safety?

Are there other short-term, low-cost enhancements you would suggest that are not mentioned?

Does the project need bigger \$\$ to fix properly? If so, note what you would like to see even if it is outside the realm of complete streets funding.

Are there other locations along your walk where short-term, low-cost fixes could improve pedestrian safety? If so, please note the location, take a photograph, and propose a recommendation.

Take note of any suggestions you have for making it safer to walk in Belmont. We may include a list of recommendations for Belmont to consider that could be funded through other means than the MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program.

At the conclusion of our project site review, we met to discuss overall trends and issues at specific locations. Below is a summary of the general trends and detailed comments on specific locations.

General Findings and Specific Recommendations

As a statewide pedestrian advocacy organization, we always look for ways to improve the safety and experience of people walking **first**. Given that pedestrians are the most vulnerable road users, we believe that designing streets, sidewalks and intersections that are safe for pedestrians inherently makes the road or space safer for all users. That said, our recommendations may be complicated by other constraints such as funding, significant negative impacts on other road users, or public opinion.

In general, WalkBoston found that the project list identified some, but not all locations that merit short-term, low-cost improvements to walking conditions. The identification of priority pedestrian safety issues varied significantly between different neighborhoods. In some cases, particularly on Grove Street, the recommended enhancements did not fully address the issues we identified as the primary need to improve pedestrian safety. Conversely, in the Wellington School/Chenery School and Winn Brook School neighborhoods, the recommended enhancements did address the primary needs of pedestrians.

The attached spreadsheet has a column with WalkBoston's comments, questions, and recommendations. The highlighted cells include those locations that WalkBoston did not review. These locations were not reviewed because they were straightforward repair of curb ramps and addition of detectable warning panels, or were distant from schools. Listed on the second tab within the spreadsheet are additional locations we recommend be considered for safety

improvements either with Complete Streets or other funding sources. We organized them based on the original school district categories listed in the worksheet supplied to us.

Grove Street

Of all the streets we walked in the study area, Grove Street stood out as the major safety concern for people walking and biking. The other projects on the CSPP project list provide needed enhancements to the walking environment, but none of them rose to the level of concern felt on Grove Street.

Vehicular speed is the significant threat on Grove Street and crossing it on foot, even at a crosswalk, feels uncomfortable. With only two crosswalks (neither of them very comfortable) south of the Huron Avenue intersection that connect people to the park, we observed people crossing away from the crosswalks and where drivers do not expect them. Lowering vehicle speeds on this road is a high priority. While the CSPP project list does have two projects aimed at reducing traffic speeds, we would recommend that more be done to address this issue.

We believe the recommended enhancements for the Grove Street/Huron Avenue intersection will not do enough to slow traffic and improve the walking conditions. In particular, the crossing of Huron Ave is the one targeted for improvement, but it is actually the crossing of Grove Street that is of higher priority for pedestrian safety. As described on the attached spreadsheet, we recommend considering a neighborhood traffic circle like the circle nearby at Grove, Blanchard and Washington to simplify intersection operations to one lane in each direction (eliminating turn lanes), and reduce speeds on Grove Street. A project of this scale may exceed the Complete Streets Funding limit, but we feel the dangers presented here require a more comprehensive approach.