

Lowville, NY: Workshop Summary

Prepared for: Tug Hill Commission & Lowville NY officials, staff, & residents

Prepared by: R. Mark Fenton, public health, planning, and transportation consultant and Peter Weafer

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Recommendations Supporting Healthy Community Design

On December 5th community leaders, staff, and residents in Lewis County, New York took part in a healthy community design workshop sponsored by the Tug Hill Commission. A number of people of varied backgrounds from communities in the region joined facilitator Mark Fenton at the Lowville fire hall's meeting room for an opening presentation and discussion of the attributes of communities that encourage routine physical activity; a facilitated walk audit to experience this community engagement technique while exploring some typical conditions in Lowville on foot; and a work session in which participants developed specific recommendations for action.

During the workshop Mark summarized an overview of the key research into what creates a more livable community generally, and settings that specifically encourage increased walking, bicycling, and transit use. This included exploring the growing evidence that these factors not only support public health through increased physical activity, but also economic vibrancy, environmental sustainability, and quality of life. Four key characteristics of such thriving communities are as follows:

A. Mixed land use patterns: Compact development with different land uses and activities intermingled and close together, allowing for “live, work, shop, play, learn, and pray” destinations within walking, cycling, and transit distance, while reducing sprawl and preserving open space and agricultural land.

B. Active transportation facilities: A comprehensive and connected network of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities, such as sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and non-motorized pathways, as well as frequent, affordable, quality transit service appropriate to the community scale, from dial-a-ride to scheduled buses.

C. Functional site designs: Destinations are designed to reward, not punish, those who arrive on foot, by bike and transit, such as buildings at the sidewalk, with parking on-street (e.g. parallel or reverse diagonal parking), beside, or behind buildings; elements such as street trees, landscaping, benches, shade structures or awnings; human scale lighting; way-finding; and quality bicycle parking.

D. Safety and access for people of all ages, incomes, physical abilities and disabilities, including quality street crossings (e.g. highly visible markings, countdown timers on pedestrian signals), fully ADA-compliant design, and appropriately applied state of the art traffic calming such as curb extensions, median islands, roundabouts and mini-circles, and lane narrowing and road diets (four- or five-lane conversions to three lanes; one in each direction with a center turn lane).



Recommendations and priorities

At the end of this summary are rudimentary design maps and a grid with specific recommendations for actions that were generated during our working sessions. They are broken into the three Ps: programs (e.g. events, outreach, education, and promotional activities), projects (physical changes to infrastructure and the built environment), and policies (rules, ordinances, guidelines, practices, and procedures). And they are listed as short-term ideas that could be executed on the order of weeks to months, and long-term initiatives estimated to take months to years. This makes clear that there are certainly some low cost, near term actions that can be pursued quickly to build interest and momentum going forward.

Lowville has several areas in which simple, low cost treatments can greatly impact the safety and appeal of active transportation, and therefore the health and vitality of the community. The following is a summary of the major areas of focus that are recommended for the most immediate impact.

1. Formalize and standardize parking policies near schools and throughout the village.

Throughout Lowville there is a great deal of on-street parking; there are also numerous roadways identified as “bike routes” by green signs. Several steps could be taken to both improve bicycle and vehicle safety as well as the efficiency of downtown parking.

- Eliminate parking to create an uninterrupted eastbound bicycle lane on the south side of Bostwick Avenue. It might be possible to allow brief periods of parking during occasional special events (e.g. for five hours around home football games). The following steps might make this more reasonable:
 - Begin with a short term trial, not a permanent change in policy or roadway design.
 - Count the number of current *legal* on-street parking locations near the high school to make clear that fairly few will be eliminated by this change.
 - Measure the width of the existing shoulders, and width of travel lanes. Ideally it will eventually be possible to slightly widen the north side shoulder for a westbound bicycle lane (e.g. during a routine repaving or painting project). For example if the south side bicycle lane (currently a parking lane) could be reduced to five-foot width, and each travel lane could be reduced by one-half to one foot, then the north side shoulder might be expanded by that amount to become a full five-foot westbound bicycle lane.
- Consider restricting parking to one side of the street only on some narrower side streets near the schools (such as Shady Lane) to improve safety, while possibly allowing parking on both sides for occasional special events.
- Inventory and use paint to define legal parking stalls in the downtown business district. This also encourages using paint to define curb extensions, areas near intersections, fire hydrants, and other areas where parking is prohibited.

2. Sidewalk network completion campaign.

Participants identified filling in sidewalk gaps, repairing damage, and upgrading sidewalks to a five foot minimum width as community priorities, especially in the village and residential areas. The first step is to inventory sidewalks and gaps as well as important destinations and trip generators such as schools, parks and playgrounds, retail and business clusters, residential areas, and senior housing and services. To address this need, consider a variety of funding approaches such as:

- Sidewalk Improvement Districts (SIDs) - this would define an area in which all property owners choose to contribute to a collective fund for sidewalk repair and construction.
- Develop a general sidewalk improvement fund through a community referendum such as a 1/2% sales tax surcharge, small public utility fee, development impact fees, or other approaches.
- Pursue unique funding streams such as grants from historic preservation, environmental mitigation, economic development, community health, and other funding streams.
- Require property owners to repair or complete sidewalk gaps on their own property. The municipality can help facilitate this through coalescing projects and creating joint contracts to gain economies of scale and reduce costs for all; and providing low or no-interest loans to residents for construction.

3. Downtown traffic calming and business enhancement demonstration projects.

The need for improved pedestrian crossings and an overall more inviting pedestrian environment was expressed during the walk audit. For example curb extensions at intersections and mid-block crossings can shorten crossing distances, improve pedestrian visibility and motor vehicle sight lines, slow traffic, and preclude illegal parking too close to crossings. Also businesses are often interested in converting one or two parking spaces to public or restaurant seating, or social space which they will adopt and beautify.

- Demonstration curb extensions. Temporary materials such as paint, removable delineators, planters, removable curbing, and hay bales can be used to create curb extensions at pedestrian crossings (both at intersections and mid-block crossings). Depending on the size of the curb extension they can include bike parking, benches, cafe seating, public art, historical and way-finding information, and pop-up vending.
- Create temporary parklets in on-street parking places. One or two parking places can be converted to public seating or specific cafe seating for local businesses, bike parking, public art, and pop-up vending.
- Over time the successful curb extensions can be made permanent, and structured parklets can be constructed with wooden decking or other materials (Graham NC constructed a mobile parklet using a large unused, clean, low-sided dumpster), and made permanent or moved seasonally.
- Town green roundabout. Improve vehicle and pedestrian safety all around the town green between N. and W. State Streets (Number Three Rd.). Consider a full round-about (see Troy NH example, below).

4. Advance the rail to trail project.

The community has long considered the creation of a multi-use pathway along the abandoned rail corridor from behind the Kraft Food plant, north across the Mill Creek rail trestle to the fairgrounds, to Maple Ridge Farm, and eventually north to Carthage and West Carthage. This project has languished recently but there is renewed interest because of the recognized public health, environmental, and especially economic benefits to Lowville. Other communities and private entities are already expressing interest in using the rail corridor for recreation and non-motorized transportation, so the time is ideal to advance the construction of this multi-use path. Specific steps include the following:

- Inventory the route and its current conditions and possible street crossings, as well adjoining land uses. This could include walk audits along open and accessible sections of the corridor, and cataloguing how it is *already* being used.
- Convene as many leading supporters as possible in a multi-disciplinary working group, and begin immediately seeking financial and human resources for construction of the trail.
- Launch a comprehensive community campaign to gain support for the established benefits of trails, such as enhanced home values, improved safety along the corridor because of better surveillance, business recruitment opportunities, and environmental and health benefits. This can help preclude a small number of naysayers from using misleading or false information to undermine support and derail the project.
- Begin using at least low cost construction techniques (e.g. packed gravel) on high visibility, high use sections of the trail (for example from Walmart, behind the Kraft plant, across Mill Creek trestle to within a block of the schools, and on to the fairgrounds) to build support and momentum for more complete construction and longer sections.



5. Engage Lowville Middle and High School students in healthy design projects.

Students have often been proven to be outstanding partners and even leaders in community healthy design projects across the country. They can play an active roll in many of the above outlined recommendations. For example students can do the following:

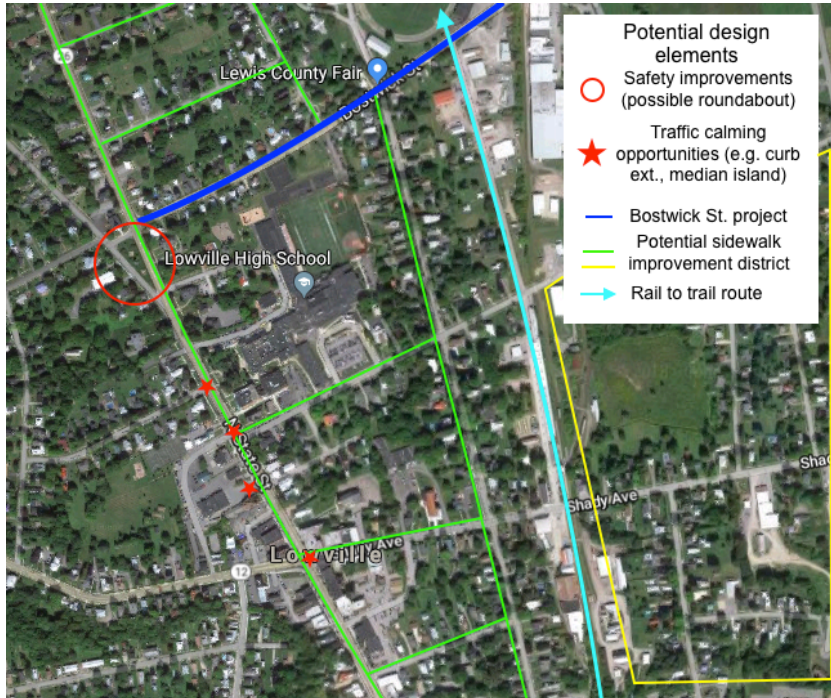
- Partner with seniors in the community to inventory current sidewalk conditions and gaps, and identify key pedestrian and bicycle destinations.
- Identify roadway crosswalks with heavy pedestrian traffic for the initial curb extension demonstration projects; assist in creating the curb extensions; and evaluate actual outcomes such as changes in vehicle speeds, vehicle and pedestrian yielding behavior, and pedestrian reactions (captured through brief intercept surveys with people after they cross).
- Survey local restaurants and businesses to determine their interest in hosting a parklet in front of their establishments. Then work on development and installation of appropriate features (e.g. planters, seating, tables, umbrellas, public art, etc.).
- Survey the rail trail route, identify and catalogue (e.g. with photos) existing activities and uses, both positive and negative, already occurring in the corridor. Also identify nearby destinations and residential clusters.
- Offer in-kind labor or community service on any of the above recommendations such as constructing or installing temporary parklets, curb extensions, benches and bike parking, and construction work on the actual trail itself (brush clearing, trash removal, installing signs, grading and gravel work).



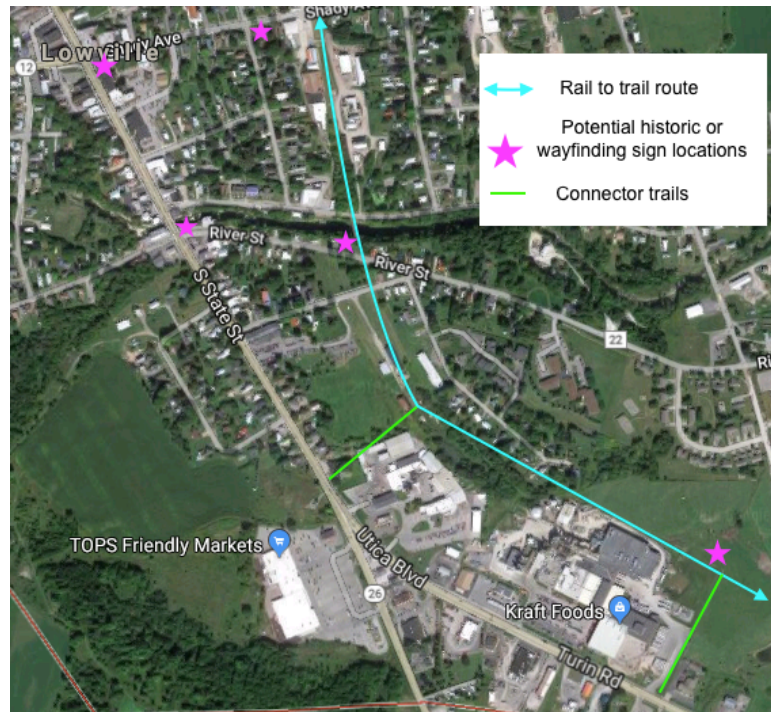
Left: A typical candidate location for a curb extension in Lowville, which can shorten the crossing distance, preclude illegal parking too close to the crosswalk, make pedestrians more visible to vehicles, and calm traffic through downtown. Below is an example from Brockport NY, on NYS Route 19.



Design Recommendation Maps:



Town green roundabout in Troy NH.
Possible for the Lowville 'triangle'?



Program, Project & Policy Recommendation

	Short Term	Long Term
Programs (e.g. events, outreach, education, promotions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form a compact (~10-person) interdisciplinary leadership group to advance this plan. Use temporary and pop-up installations to demonstrate traffic calming ideas such as curb extensions, median islands, and mini-roundabouts. Use paint, delineators, planters, temporary curbing material, even decorated hay bales. Develop temporary parklets to create seating, bike parking, pop-up vendor space, public art in existing parking spaces. Launch a school outreach and engagement program for Complete Streets. Engage youth, along with seniors and retirees, to identify critical locations for safety improvements & inventory sidewalk conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inventory and organize existing parking in downtown, by the schools, and nearby areas. Use this to inform where to make permanent the trial parklets and curb extensions. Launch a full Safe Routes to School program with Walk to School Day activities, walking school buses, and other education and promotions. Launch pedestrian and bicycle safety and skills education, perhaps through school physical education programs; partner with the League of American Bicyclists to engage league certified instructors (LCIs). Formally engage schools and students in complete streets development through math, science, and civics curricula.
Projects (e.g. changes to physical infrastructure & the built environment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study traffic patterns at the green (triangle) between N. State Street and Number Three Rd. Create images of possible solutions including a roundabout design. Create sidewalk improvement districts to fund repairs and filling in of gaps. Begin with an inventory of current conditions. Create bicycle parking at key locations (bus stops, schools, neighborhood shopping, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve and complete gaps in the Black River Canal trail system. Goal is contiguous trail from Rome, through Boonville, to Lyons Falls along towpath. Add way-finding signs, kiosks highlighting key destination; Make demonstration curb extensions permanent. Develop appealing pedestrian destinations at both ends of the village: art, seasonal, & historic installations, pop-up food.

	Short Term	Long Term
Policy (e.g. rules, ordinances, guidelines, practices, & procedures)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test a reconfiguration of Bostwick Street south side parking so that it is a full time bike lane, allowing only for short term special event car parking (e.g. during home football games). • Formally adopt a sidewalk funding policy (see above). • Re-evaluate neighborhood parking policies; consider eliminating parking on one side of the street near the schools (e.g. Shady Ave.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following test adopt long term policy regarding continuous bike lane along Bostwick. • Adopt school siting and reconstruction policies that <i>require</i> consideration of long term health and transportation costs. • Adopt formal Complete Streets policies at all levels: Lewis County, towns and villages. • Integrate multi-modal transportation analysis (MMTA) in the comprehensive plan and institutionalize in routine development requirements.

References and resources:

- Better Block: Educates, equips, and empowers communities and their leaders to reshape and reactivate built environments to promote the growth of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods: www.betterblock.org
- Complete Streets: National coalition working for streets that accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and drivers of all ages, incomes, and abilities: www.completestreets.org
- Safe Routes to School information: www.saferoutesinfo.org; www.saferoutespartnership.org
- Walk [Your City]: Helps you plan and sign your pedestrian network: www.walkyourcity.org
- *Small Town & Rural Multimodal Networks*. A comprehensive design guide for active transportation design and low cost approaches, especially (but not exclusively) useful in rural settings and small towns; from the Federal Highway Administration, 2016. <http://ruraldesignguide.com>
- *Slow Your Streets: A How-To Guide for Pop-Up Traffic Calming*. A terrific and practical guide from St. Louis-based Trailnet, to temporarily calm traffic on streets to gain community and stakeholder input, determine effectiveness, and plan permanent improvements. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bwr2hdQQsTewQ2hVMWJfeEpDaE0/view?pref=2&pli=1>