

Walkable Community Workshop



September 2006

SPONSORED BY WILMAPCO,
DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
& THE SOUTHBRIDGE CIVIC ASSOCIATION

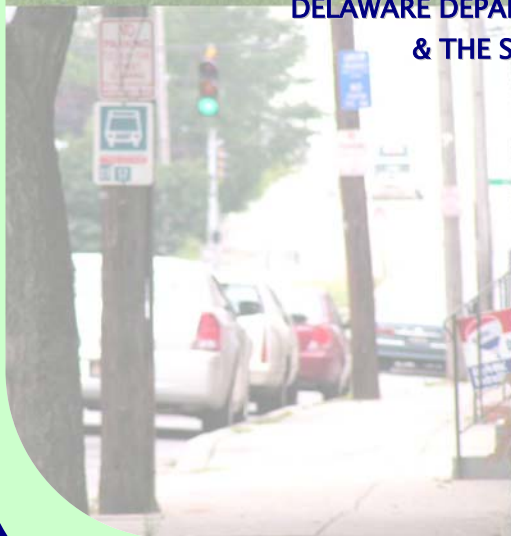


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Introduction

WILMAPCO was selected for the 2005 Walkable Community Workshops (WCW) program—part of the National Center for Bicycling & Walking effort to work directly with communities. WCWs are interactive events that bring together residents, elected officials, advocates, public agency staff, health practitioners, educators, planners and engineers to make our communities safer and easier to walk in. This first round of workshops, held in Brandywine Hundred, City of New Castle, and Edgemoor Gardens provided information on how we can turn our communities into the kind of pedestrian-friendly places we all like to experience. A second round of evening workshops were conducted during 2006 in Newark and Southbridge, Wilmington.

Who is WILMAPCO

The Wilmington Area Planning Council (WILMAPCO) is the bi-state Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) serving New Castle County, DE and Cecil County, MD. Our policy-making body, the WILMAPCO Council, consists of state, county and municipal representatives. We have the important role of educating and involving the public and local agencies in the transportation decision-making and funding process. Our *Regional Transportation Plan* calls for **improving our quality of life** by protecting public health and supporting our communities, **efficiently transporting people** by providing transportation choices including safe, convenient and attractive facilities for bicycling and walking, and **supporting economic activity, growth and goods movements** by making our region an attractive place to live and work. Making our communities more walkable achieves all these goals, and more.

Why are walkable communities important

We are all pedestrians. Whether we think of ourselves as one or not, we are pedestrians. We may walk to work, walk for exercise, walk to do errands or simply walk from where we park the car to the neighborhood store; we all need safe facilities for walking.

Walking is crucial to giving those who don't drive a travel choice. Many in our region are too young to drive, have a permanent or temporary disability which prevents their driving, have no access to a car, or choose not to drive. In New Castle County, Delaware, 25 percent of the population is under 18, 12 percent is over 65 (and this number will grow rapidly in the years to come), 16 percent have a disability and 9 percent of households have no available vehicle¹. In Cecil County, Maryland, 28 percent of the population is under 18, 11 percent are over 65, 19 percent have a disability, and 6 percent of households have no available vehicle¹. Many in these population groups need to walk in order to lead active and independent lives.

Walkable communities are healthier communities. American's waistlines keep getting bigger, along with a rise in related illnesses including heart disease and diabetes. In Maryland and Delaware respectively, 19 and 22 percent of adult are obese according to the CDC. Only 65 percent of adolescents engage in the recommended amount of physical activity. Adults have a worse track record, with only 26 percent getting the

recommended amount of physical activity; in Delaware, 27 percent of adults engage in no leisure-time physical activity while 23 percent in Maryland report no activity. Yet we know that pedestrian-friendly communities make it easier for people to integrate physical activity into their daily lives. Indeed, those who report having access to sidewalks are 27 percent more likely to be physically active.

The estimated annual cost of obesity and overweight in the United States is approximately \$117 billion. The potential savings, if all inactive American adults became physically active could be \$76.6 billion per year.

Everyone benefits from walkable communities. Even if you don't personally enjoy walking, you still benefit from living in a walkable community. Approximately 40 percent of all trips are less than two miles – an easy walk or bike ride in an area with safe pedestrian and bicycling facilities. More people walking and bicycling can help reduce overall levels of congestion, benefiting drivers too. Less driving can also help reduce air pollution caused by motor vehicles. There are economic benefits as well, with higher property values and greater sales in commercial areas.

1. 2000 US Census

What is a Walkable Community Workshop

Most simply, a WCW is a four-hour session that includes an educational presentation on what makes a community walkable, a walking audit of a specific area, and a mapping session, putting pencils to paper brainstorming solutions. Some communities opt for a shorter format, replacing the mapping session with group discussion. Focusing on a particular area, participants study it in terms of walkability: sidewalks, pathways, inviting streetscape, crosswalks, destinations, etc. The process gives everyone the tools for making a community walkable and realistic next steps participants can take to achieve their ideas.

Three parts of the workshops



Part 1 - The presentation talks about sidewalk design, crosswalks, traffic calming, community design and other tools communities need to create walkable communities.

Part 2 – The walking audit gives participants a chance to walk through the area, identifying issues and thinking about applying what they have learned from the presentation. Getting out and walking is key to illustrating the challenges that people face when pedestrian facilities are not available.



Part 3 – During the mapping exercise people put down on paper their vision and realistic actions for improving the study area. Participants end the session by committing to specific next steps to continue the process started at the workshop.

During the shorter format workshops, the mapping exercise is replaced with group discussion.

Southbridge

Area Background

Southbridge is an historic community located south of the Christina River in Wilmington. The community has developed the South Wilmington Neighborhood Plan to address environmental issues, community revitalization, transportation and future development. Along A Street and Heald Street, the community working towards developing a walkable “Main Street” to serve as an economic center. The community is also working to balance the needs of local residents with through traffic by seeking to slow speeding traffic along Heald Street and New Castle Avenue. Better pedestrian facilities will be an important part of realizing the community’s goals by providing improved recreational facilities, local transportation choices, and better connections with the riverfront and downtown Wilmington.

Issues and Potential Solutions Identified

Issue:

- **Sidewalk Condition.** Many sidewalks in Southbridge are in a disrepair, causing a safety risk, an barrier to ADA accessibility, and a visual eyesore. Some locations of sidewalk are missing, creating gaps in the travel network.



Solutions:

The City of Wilmington Charter mandates that the City Department of Public Works shall design, construct, repair and maintain city streets (Article V, Chapter 4, Section 5-400). The Charter goes on to say that this responsibility shall include footways.

- ❑ Contact the City Public Works Department to develop a program to assess the physical condition of sidewalks and develop a funding program to repair substandard facilities. They can be reached at (302) 576-3086.

The assessment and repair program should address raised sidewalk areas, holes, wide cracks and concrete separations, spalled/chipped concrete, sunken sidewalks, driveway approaches not meeting ADA specifications and unused driveway approaches, and root damage. Funding through the Transportation Enhancement, Municipal Street Aid, or Community Transportation programs should be sought to complete missing sidewalks.

- ❑ Monitor efforts to amend this section of the Charter. The 2004 Supreme Court of Delaware decision in *Schadt vs. Latchford* invalidated the City sidewalk maintenance ordinance (City Code Section 42-42) which requires landowners to share in the duty to maintain and repair abutting sidewalks, footways and curbs. This decision relived landowners of the burden of having to maintain sidewalks and shifted the liability of failing to do so to the entire community which benefits from the public walkways

Following the Court decision, the City requested that the Delaware General Assembly amend the City Charter; this legislation way introduced but was not acted upon. This report recommends that any such amendment be accompanied with funding grants for low-income property owners to comply.

Southbridge Study Area



Issue:

- **Curb Ramps.** Numerous curb ramps throughout study area are not ADA accessible. These also pose a tripping hazard to all pedestrians. Curb ramps allow wheelchairs and baby carriages to comfortably access crosswalk.

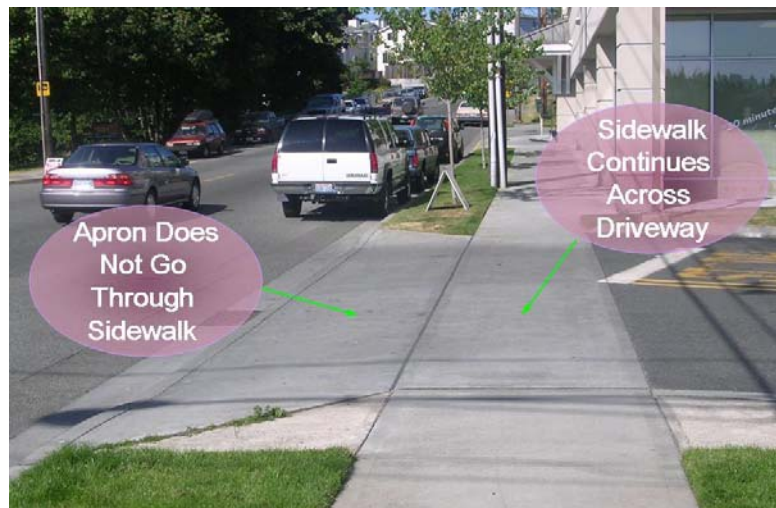


Lack of curb ramp hinders travel by persons with disabilities, parents with strollers, children and the elderly.



This well-designed intersection has two curb ramps direct pedestrians in the direction of travel for each crosswalk. Different colored/textured pavement help those with sight impairments.

Similarly, with new development, driveway ramps should remain flat across the sidewalk to all for easier travel.



Solutions:

Curb ramps should be installed at all intersections within the study area, according to DeIDOT design guidance which specifies desirable slope, location and the inclusion of detectable warnings for the vision impaired. The City of Wilmington has been implementing the Wilmington Signals Improvement Project which includes the retrofit of curb ramps to meet ADA requirements. Phase 2 of the project includes signal improvements in Southbridge but does not include curb ramp improvements.

- ❑ Contact the City of Wilmington to request that curb ramps in the study area be included in future phases of the Signals Improvement Project. They can be reached at (302) 576-3086.
- ❑ Curb ramps can also be implemented by DeIDOT. DeIDOT routinely incorporates curb ramps into paving and rehabilitation projects. For completion of curb ramps as a stand alone project, Transportation Enhancement, Community Transportation, or CMAQ funding may be used. Contact DeIDOT at (302)-760-2509 to discuss funding options.

Issue:

- **Street lighting.** Some street lights were not lit. When properly designed, street lights serve to enhance safety of all roadway users, particularly pedestrians, enhance commercial districts and improve nighttime security. Street lights are necessary for pedestrians to feel comfortable walking at night and be visible to traffic. According to the National Crime Prevention Council, studies have shown that crime can be reduced by about 20 percent with improved street lighting.

The “cobra head” street lights within the study area do serve to light the roadway, but detract from the historic character of the community. Specialty pedestrian-level lighting would be more appropriate for the community, placed over the sidewalks to improve pedestrian comfort, security, and safety.

Solution:

- Contact the City of Wilmington to report street light outages at (302) 576-3086.
- Also, work with City officials to identify areas that would benefit from improved lighting, such as the park at New Castle and A Streets. City officials can also assist in applying for Transportation Enhancement or other funding to retrofit cobra head lights to pedestrian scale lighting (e.g., shorter light poles and/or lower light fixtures that are designed to be effective in illuminating the pedestrian travel way). Harsh, too bright lighting should be avoided. Sufficient street lighting is critical at all crosswalks, commercial areas and areas where people gather.



*Cobra head
street light*

*Pedestrian
scale light*



Issue:

- **Safe pedestrian crosswalks.** The safety of pedestrians is most vulnerable at intersections and mid-block street crossings. Often, crossings are designed with the needs of motor vehicles coming before the needs of people walking.

Pedestrian crossing sign.
The fluorescent yellow/green (FYG) shown here is more noticeable than traditional yellow crosswalk signs.



Intersections that function well for pedestrians are typically compact, require vehicles to slow down or stop, have crosswalks in all directions, and allow drivers a clear line of sight to spot people crossing. .

Heald Street and New Castle Avenue have been identified as areas for safety improvements through the Highway Safety Improvement Program. Recommended improvements include installing pedestrian crosswalks at all signalized pedestrian crossings and replacing all existing, faded crosswalks.

Crosswalks.
Zebra striping or wide stripes in reflective paint are most noticeable to drivers.



Solutions:

- ❑ Marked crosswalks should be installed at all intersections. Work with City staff and DeIDOT to install crosswalks at locations not addressed through the Highway Safety Improvement Program projects.
- ❑ Install ADA accessible curb ramps at intersections.
- ❑ Work with City staff to determine if a signal is warranted at the intersection of Claymont and A Streets. This is an important pedestrian connector for children traveling between the School and community center.
- ❑ Consider fluorescent pedestrian crossing signs in areas where children cross.

Issue:

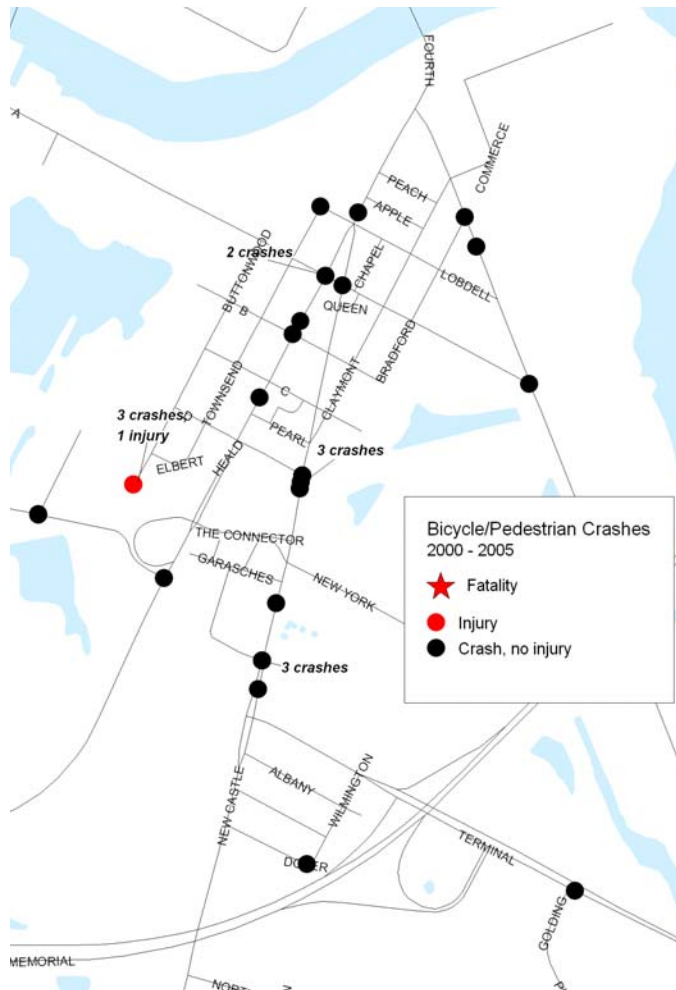
- Traffic speeds and driver behavior. Speeding traffic and illegal turns by drivers contribute to unsafe conditions for pedestrians.

Solutions:

- ❑ Traffic calming including engineering improvements and increased enforcement should be pursued to slow speeding traffic. Options include curb extensions which shorten crossing distance, make pedestrians more visible, and narrow the road to slow traffic are one option.
- ❑ Contact Michael Somers regarding the DeIDOT Traffic Calming Program at 302.659.2024. A copy of the Delaware Traffic Calming Guidelines is available on the DeIDOT web at www.deldot.net/static/pubs_forms/manuals/traffic_calming/DelDotFinal.pdf.
- ❑ Coordinate with DeIDOT on the implementation of Highway Safety Improvement Program projects on Heald Street and New Castle Avenue. Suggested improvements include better signage regarding traffic speeds, expanded use of red light cameras, additional "No left turn" signs, and better signs to transition drivers to one-way streets.



Curb extensions and other traffic calming help slow speeding traffic



A high rate of pedestrian crashes indicates both a large number of people walking and the need for safety improvements.

- Street trees, community “gateway” signage, murals and landscaping have also been shown to slow traffic. Work through the SAMP process to include additional streetscaping.

In addition to slowing traffic, street trees will provide a shaded, more pleasant walking environment and even help with drainage issues. Trees absorb the first 30% of most precipitation through their leaf system—thus this moisture never hits the ground. Another percentage (up to 30%) of precipitation is absorbed back into the ground and taken in and held onto by the root structure.

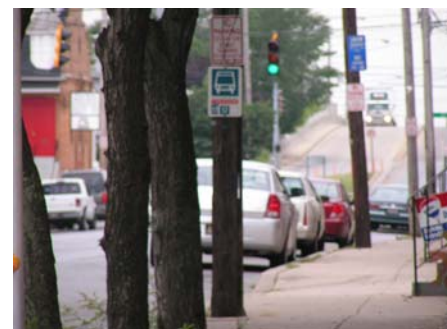
- Request that DelDOT examine the traffic impacts of converting the one-way streets to two-way streets. One way streets, given the additional width, often have higher traffic speeds than two-way routes with similar widths.

Issue:

- **Transit.** DART buses travel through the study area, yet there are few amenities for riders. Route 15 is one of the top five used transit routes in New Castle County. Transit riders are also pedestrians and appreciate a comfortable place to wait for the bus.

Solution:

- Work with Delaware Transit Corporation to pursue transit shelters. Contract DART at 302-577-DART.





Highlights from Our Walk



Starting out at the intersection of New Castle and B Street, we observed this intersection needs crosswalks painted and pedestrian signals.



The intersection of Heald and B Street has pedestrian signals but no painted crosswalks.



Heald Street has wide sidewalks but they are obstructed in places by signs, cellar doors and trash.



Along the island at Heald and Lobdell streets, the sidewalk comes to an abrupt end leaving only a drainage ditch to walk on.



The intersection of Lobdell Street and Chapel Street, by the Elbert-Palmer Intermediate School lacks crosswalks and ADA curb ramps.



Gap in sidewalk along Chapel Street.



The intersection of Chapel and A Streets is a T-intersection, encouraging people to jaywalk in this location



Many areas we walked provide an outstanding place to walk with attractive street trees, places to sit and friendly neighbors.

New Steps

There are a number of next steps the community can take to make Southbridge more walkable:

- ❑ Work with DelDOT's bicycle and pedestrian coordinator to identify funding sources and develop cost estimates for projects. Anthony Aglio can be contacted at (302)-760-2509 or anothony.aglio@state.de.us.

The DelDOT bicycle and pedestrian coordinator can also help you coordinate with other programs within DelDOT.

- ❑ Work with the City of Wilmington Dept. of Public Works, Transportation Division, (302) 576-3086. Public Works is responsible for street cleaning and related repairs, such as potholes on city-owned streets and highways. The Transportation Division is responsible for transportation policy and planning, the development and programming of transportation improvements, the installation of traffic signals and signs, the issuing of permits, and the operation of City streets, including street lights, parking meters, and line striping.
- ❑ Contact your elected officials to request **Community Transportation Funding** for pedestrian projects. This program provides a fixed amount of funds annually to each State Senator and House Representative to be used as they and their constituents believe is best for transportation improvements within their district.

Community Transportation Funds can also be used to match **Transportation Enhancement Funds** (TE), administered through DelDOT. TE funds can be used for pedestrian projects including new or reconstructed sidewalks, walkways, curb ramps; bike lane striping, bike parking, and off-road shared-use, non-motorized trails. Funds can also be used for landscaping along transportation facilities. The TE Program manager is Jeff Niezgoda and can be contacted at (302) 760-2178 or Jeff.Niezgoda@state.de.us.

- ❑ Work with Elbert Palmer Elementary School to develop a Safe Routes to School program The Safe Routes to School program is a community approach to encourage and enable more people to walk and bicycle to school safely. SRTS works with schools to identifying the safest routes from children's homes to their schools and identifies ways to improve school area safety. The program involves two steps: (1) plan development and (2) project implementation.. Funding and assistance is available to establish a program and implement its recommendations. The Delaware Safe Routes to School Coordinator, Sarah Coakley, may be reached at (302) 760-2236, or by email at sarah.coakley@state.de.us.
- ❑ Contact WILMAPCO if you have any questions or would like assistance moving forward with making Southbridge a better place to walk. Contact Heather Dunigan, Walkable Community Workshop Coordinator at (302) 737-6205 ext. 18, hdunigan@wilmapco.org or Dave Gula, SAMP Project Liaison at (302) 737-6205 ext. 22 or dgula@wilmapco.org.



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