

City of Oneida Walkability Survey

Executive Report



April 2012
Madison County Community Economic Development Team



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Introduction

The Community Economic Development Team*, led by the Madison County Department of Health, and including representation from the City of Oneida Planning Department, organized a walkability survey of the City of Oneida in September and October 2011.

The purpose of the survey was to:

- Assess how safe and appealing routes that connect destinations within the city are for pedestrians, and
- Provide guidance to local city officials as they strive to revitalize and reestablish the downtown Oneida business district.

The *City of Oneida Walkability Survey Report* represents one of two reports prepared by the Community Economic Development Team for the City of Oneida. The *Aging*

Friendly Community Survey report, provided under separate cover, compliments and works in concert with this report and is meant to inform City leadership as they prepare to update their City's comprehensive plan.

Walkable communities are desirable places to live, work, learn, worship and play, and represent a key component of **smart growth (Appendix A-1)**. Their desirability comes from two factors.

First, walkable communities locate within an easy and safe walk to goods (such as housing, offices, and retail) and services (such as transportation, schools, libraries) that a community resident or employee needs on a regular basis. Second, by definition, walkable communities make pedestrian activity possible, thus expanding



*The Community Economic Development Team is represented by Madison County Planning Department, City of Oneida Planning Department, Madison County Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Cazenovia College, Morrisville State College, Madison County Office for the Aging Inc., YMCA of the Greater Tri-Valley, Inc., New York State Tobacco Control Program, a Community Resident/Consultant, and Madison County Department of Health.

transportation options, and creating a streetscape that better serves a range of users – pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and automobiles. To foster walkability, communities must mix land uses and build compactly, and ensure safe and inviting pedestrian corridors.

Improved walkability leads to **health benefits** from increased physical activity, increased social interaction and community cohesion, as well as to environmental and economic benefits. These benefits are realized as areas become more pedestrian and business-friendly. More businesses lead to destination hot spots to lure people downtown to live, work, shop, and enjoy.

Factors influencing walkability include the presence or absence and quality of sidewalks or other pedestrian right-of-ways, traffic and road conditions, land use patterns, building accessibility, and safety, among others. The survey included the following five sections: crossing the street (intersections), sidewalks, driver behavior, safety, comfort and appeal.

The survey assessed the walkability of the City of Oneida, especially the downtown area, along four routes ranging in distance of a half-mile to under two miles (**Appendix, A-2**). The *AARP Sidewalks and Streets Survey* tool was used to conduct the survey (**Appendix, A-3**). Routes were selected to include destinations to: medical facilities, restaurants, businesses, shopping areas, farmers' market, senior housing, library, parks, and schools.

Four teams of community members were recruited and led by Madison County Department of Health and Madison County

Planning Department staff. Each team was comprised of five to six individuals of various ages and walking abilities. One team included an individual who used a power scooter and another team included an individual who walked with the assistance of a cane.

The report contains a high-level summary of observations followed by recommendations for improvements to create a city that is more walkable and appealing for shoppers, residents and tourists.

Summary of Observations

Summary

Crossing the street (intersections)

Overall, few intersections or street crossings provided a visual signal for pedestrians to cross safely. Although crosswalks were identified by signage or painted lines in the street, many street crossings in the City were not marked, were poorly marked, or had poor curb cuts for handicap access. Surveyors crossing at an intersection with an unmarked crosswalk reported that they did not feel as safe.

Sidewalks

The majority of the City had sidewalks or hard surface areas for Surveyors to walk on. However, many sidewalks required repair. Sidewalks along Broad Street by Allen Park (**Image 1**) and along Seneca Street by the Oneida High School (**Image 2**) were new or in excellent condition and contained adequate curb cuts.

However, it was more common to see a lack of sidewalks particularly in paved/

blacktopped areas doubling as parking lots for local businesses. A lack of sidewalks and a lack of maintenance are all factors that may discourage people from walking regularly in some areas of the City.

Driver Behavior

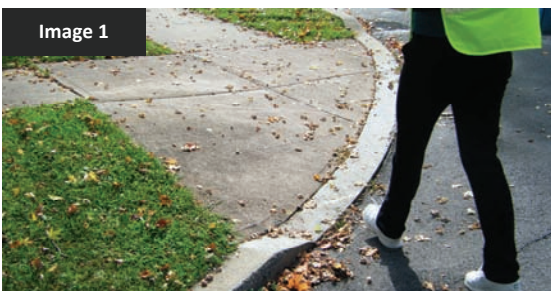
Overall, surveys reported a few distracted drivers (eating, drinking, or using a cell phone) with the majority of downtown drivers yielding to pedestrians. However, along Genesee Street from Price Chopper to AmeriCu Credit Union, more difficulty crossing streets/intersections was reported as vehicles often did not yield to Surveyors.

Safety

Along the Genesee Street corridor, traffic was fast moving and Surveyors did not feel safe crossing at intersections. In the Downtown area, there was less vehicle traffic and drivers were observed as being more considerate and careful of Surveyors, and also appeared to be traveling at posted limits.

Comfort and Appeal

The majority of places along routes did not provide benches, trash receptacles, green space, restrooms, shade trees, or landscaping such as flowers and shrubs. Pedestrians reacted positively to areas by the library, parks, school, and a handful of restaurants where two or more of the above amenities were present.



Strategies for Improvement

A Smart Growth approach to creating a walkable community can help achieve the vision for a thriving community by taking care of existing assets and investments such as downtowns, existing infrastructure, and places the community values. Making improvements to the visual appeal of an area and to the existing infrastructure of a community or neighborhood can help to strengthen, direct, and sustain positive growth and development.

Infrastructure

A pedestrian-friendly infrastructure that addresses such issues as safe, attractive sidewalks, well identified crosswalk areas, curb cuts to facilitate pedestrian activity can positively impact local businesses and services through increased foot traffic activity.

The following section describes survey observations in the City of Oneida specific to infrastructure (intersections, crossing the street, sidewalks, signage and safety).

- Currently, a person in a wheelchair must enter Broad Street at a curb cut that is some distance from the location they would need to cross to enter the curb cut to the sidewalk on Oneida Street. (**Image 3**).

Recommendation:

Adding a painted crosswalk with a curb cut on the West side of Broad Street crossing to Oneida Street would allow pedestrians, people with strollers and in wheelchairs to cross more safely.



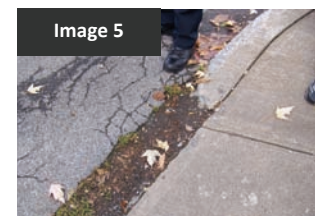
- Cracked or broken sidewalks are in need of repair on the north side of Cedar Street from Madison Street to Phelps Street (**Image 4**). Two other areas with sidewalks in very poor condition were also observed at the west side of Broad Street from Washington Street to Oneida Street and on the south side of Genesee Street (no photos shown).



Recommendation:

Encouraging sidewalk repair and maintenance will prevent future slips, trips, and fall hazards.

- Curb ramp is not textured, marked (noticeable grade change) for those with visual impairments at the corner of Washington Street and Broad Street (**Image 5**).



Recommendation:

Adding curb cuts with textured or tactile paving allows for improved detection by pedestrians under their feet and when using a cane. Tactile paving alerts people with vision impairments of their approach to streets and hazardous drop-offs. People with visual impairments do not use curb ramps in the same manner as people with mobility impairments. Although people with visual impairments can obtain helpful navigational cues from perpendicular curb ramps, they can learn the same information from the edge of the curb. If people with visual impairments are unable to detect a curb ramp (if ramp, depressed corners, or flare slopes are not steep enough relative to the grade), they will not know that they are moving into the street.

- Pooling water and leaf debris on the West side of Broad Street at Farrier Avenue presents a slip hazard when crossing the street (**Image 6**).

Recommendation:

Improve sidewalk cross slope to promote drainage. The accumulation of silt, debris, and precipitation can impede access or endanger the health, safety, and welfare of pedestrians. Poorly drained sidewalks can become icy in the winter and the accumulation of silt and debris may lead to slips and falls.



- Loose brick surrounding tree on the South side of Madison Street could be a trip hazard (**Image 7**).

Recommendation:

Repair bricks to make level with the surrounding sidewalk or remove bricks and fill-in with soil to prevent trip hazard.



- There are some locations where sidewalks do not exist, in some cases a business parking lot has been paved over where a sidewalk would be (**Image 8**). Also, when driveways are too wide and lack curbs or discernable boundaries, it may create confusion for motorists and very unsafe conditions for pedestrians.



Recommendation:

Denote a pedestrian walkway via painted lines or a continuation of sidewalks in areas that are combined with parking areas and add curb cuts. Consistency in design is provided for pedestrians and vehicles may proceed with increased caution and safety.

- The farmers' market, a downtown destination located on Lenox Avenue, does not have a sidewalk to



lead pedestrians to the market. The existing route could prove difficult to navigate for a person with an assistive device such as a cane or a wheelchair (**Image 9**).

The sidewalk on the east side of Broad Street ended at the BOCES building, leaving the remainder of Broad Street without a sidewalk to Genesee Street (**Image 10**).



Recommendation:

Add new sidewalks and/or improve on existing sidewalks to ensure access to pedestrians without having to walk along the street.

- Some crosswalks need to be repainted to more clearly indicate pedestrian crossings.

Genesee Street at Seneca Street and Seneca Street at Genesee Street (**Image 11**).

Recommendation:

Paint and/or repaint crosswalks using horizontal lines or ladder design to provide a strong visual contrast to the street. This visual cue may also promote caution among drivers.



- An overgrown bush on the East side of

Broad Street at the intersection of Dodge Street blocks Surveyors' view, causing them to enter the roadway in order to check for oncoming traffic (**Image 12**).

Recommendation:

Encourage property and landscaping maintenance to ensure lines of sight for both pedestrians and drivers are maintained.



- Further south down Broad Street, the marked crosswalk does not lead a pedestrian to a curb cut or sidewalk on either side of Broad Street, making traveling difficult for a person with an assistive device, such as a wheelchair (**Images 13 and 14**).



Recommendation:

Add curb ramps absent in designated crosswalks to provide critical, safe access

between the sidewalk and the street.

- While there is a painted crosswalk on Genesee Street at Dream Catcher Plaza, there is no signal for pedestrians. This makes crossing safely in a high traffic area difficult. Pedestrians must pay attention to when vehicles moving east/west on Genesee Street have a red light and those turning in/out of the Plaza have a green light, and only then may pedestrians proceed with caution across Genesee Street to the Plaza (**Image 15**).

Recommendation:

Marked crosswalks might not be enough to ensure pedestrian safety. Without traffic signals in high traffic areas, drivers may not perceive a marked crosswalk quickly enough to react to pedestrians in the roadway.

An intersection that contains a raised tactile surface warning, a WALK signal light, and an audible pedestrian signal would be more accessible than an intersection that provides only a painted crosswalk.

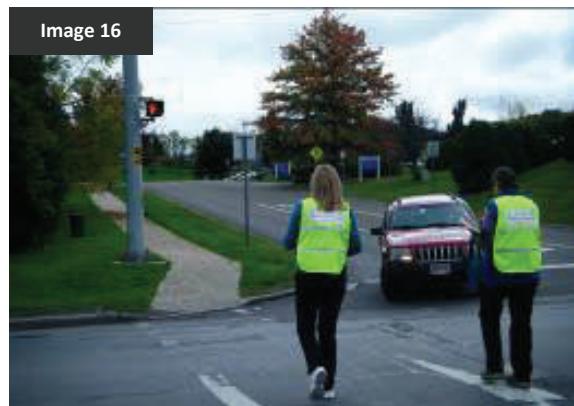
- The traffic signal to cross Genesee Street at Seneca Street was not long enough to allow Surveyors to cross before traffic begins to move (4-5 seconds). A push-to-walk signal is only



available on the North side of Genesee Street (**Image 16**).

Recommendation:

Pedestrians of all mobility levels need to cross intersections. To accommodate the slower walking speeds of some pedestrians, consider extending signal cycles or timing on a case-by-case basis.



Comfort and Appeal

The following section outlines observations on the comfort and appeal (driver behavior, amenities, landscaping, and destinations) along survey routes.

The downtown routes shared similarities and produced a more positive walking experience for pedestrians than the walk along Genesee Street. With the exception of Cedar Street, which had extensive broken sidewalks, vacant buildings, and some graffiti, the downtown streets and Broad Street near Allen Park were considered enjoyable places to walk. Drivers were considerate, careful, and quick to yield to pedestrians downtown. Genesee Street, however, was not listed as an enjoyable area to walk due to fast moving and very noisy traffic with drivers frequently not yielding to pedestrians. Minimal distracted driving such as eating, drinking, or talking on a cell phone was observed along all routes. Less traffic and more courteous drivers helped to produce a more pleasant walking environment downtown.

Amenities

Allen Park was the one area along the routes observed to have a drinking fountain, trash receptacles, benches, and a public restroom (**Image 17**). Higinbotham Park was the one downtown location with benches and a public restroom.

There were few to no trash receptacles observed



elsewhere in the City, and trash was observed along each of the routes (**Images 18 and 19**).



Recommendations:

Provide additional places for people to rest to add to the comfort and appeal of walking in the City, especially for those who are not able to walk long distances. Adding benches would also serve to increase visibility of the public transit system and provide safe waiting areas for transit patrons.

Adding trash receptacles in areas with high foot traffic could be one strategy to help keep streets and surrounding areas clean as well as reducing unpleasant odors and improve the attractiveness of areas.

Landscaping

Flowers, shrubs, grass, and trees that provide shade all contribute to the aesthetic appeal of a city. Broad and Seneca Streets were good examples of streets that provide trees for shade.

Some businesses took care in sprucing up their storefronts by providing seasonal decorations, flowers, shrubs, and outdoor seating (**Images 20 and 21**).



However, overall, there was visibly less trees and greenery downtown. Surveyors agreed that the look of the City would be improved if landscaping was added.



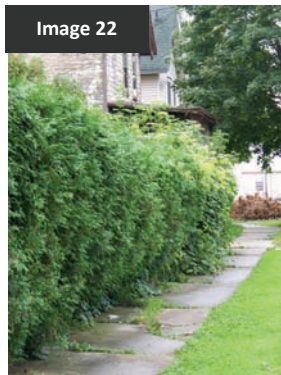
Recommendation:

Encourage businesses to provide visually pleasant landscaping to create an improved sense of comfort.

There were several vacant or neglected buildings, some with graffiti, downtown that were not visually appealing. Areas were also observed with shrubbery overgrown next to sidewalks (Image 22).

Recommendation:

Removing graffiti, mowing overgrown grass, and cutting back overgrown shrubbery lining the sidewalks could be a first step in improvement of visual appeal and make sidewalks more useable by pedestrians.



Destinations

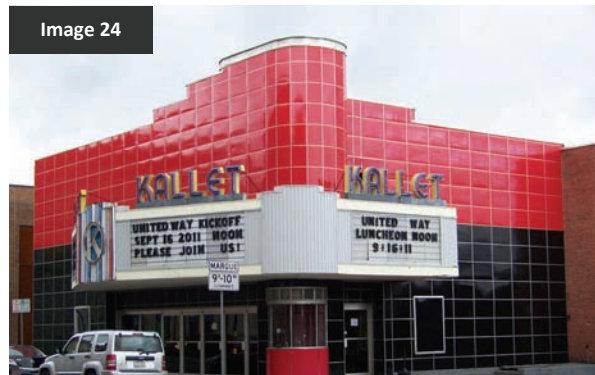
Walking routes were plotted with the intention of connecting to key destinations within the City. The library, two parks, three schools, farmers' market, city offices, recreation center,



senior housing, healthcare facilities, grocery and convenient stores, restaurants, and other businesses were all part of this pedestrian experience (Images 23 and 24). While these are favorable destinations in the City's center, the City could benefit from additional destinations that draw people downtown.

Recommendation:

Adding more variety of housing and stores that attract all ages and places for people to conduct business or receive services would help to create destination hot spots. For instance, restaurants, ice cream or coffee shops, deli, clothing, variety, hardware, and gift stores may all provide an attractive array of shopping options for any age.



Conclusion

Walkability, one of ten smart growth principles, is one important component of improving the “downtown experience” by creating a more pedestrian and business-friendly area.

The City has a vested interest in revitalizing its downtown. Incorporating smart growth principles (**Appendix A-1**) and healthy community design guidelines will help move the City of Oneida towards its vision of a healthier and more economically vibrant downtown.

Improving walkability is one way to help achieve the City’s vision for the future. The strategies identified through the Walkability Survey are

intended to help frame future changes to both the Comprehensive Plan and accompanying Zoning Ordinance updates. This report provides practical suggestions that can provide general guidance for the City.

By making small changes, the walkability of the City of Oneida and downtown area can enhance the overall quality of life and can become more pedestrian-friendly, attractive and inviting for residents, business owners, and visitors alike.

A rural community that uses **smart growth approaches** has a vibrant downtown, with historical buildings that have been preserved, a walkable Main Street or two, and compact neighborhoods surrounding the downtown.

It is a place with a smalltown feel and sense of community that develops when you know your neighbors.

Residents gather in town for important events, to shop, and to participate in civic activities.

~ICMA, *Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities*

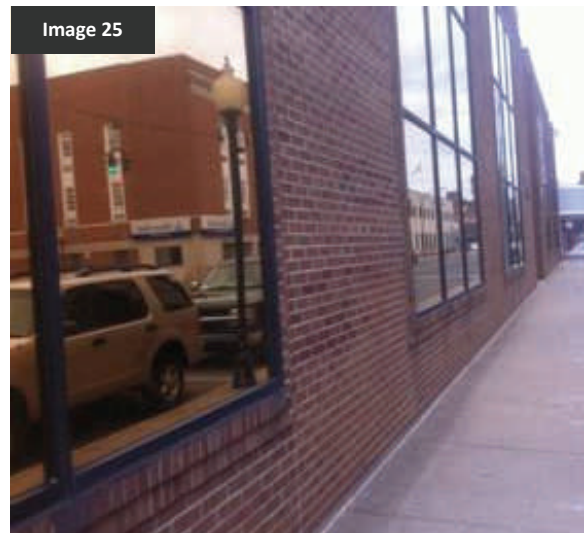
Additional Considerations for Community Design

The City of Oneida may consider the following additional recommendations provided by the Community Economic Development Team as part of this report, to further enhance efforts to revitalize the downtown area.

In addition to the infrastructure and aesthetic improvements, identified through the use of the AARP Sidewalks and Streets Survey, and as indicated in this report, consideration needs to be given to ensuring that there are destinations for people to walk to, and that those destinations consider aspects of overall downtown design. Such considerations include:

- Sidewalks, streets, and other public spaces can be great spots to attract people. Work with business owners to have their businesses “spill over” into the streets. Examples include providing dining space and racks of sale items outside (**pg. 12, Image 20**). In addition, since short blocks and pedestrian alleyways are a great way to encourage walking, work with adjacent building owners to make more attractive, safe alleyways.
- Help business owners to improve their building facades to maintain character and to motivate pedestrians to park and walk. For example, untint store windows (**Image 25**) for pedestrians to see into and add pedestrian-oriented hanging street signage.

- Encourage new development to build up to the sidewalk with small setbacks, so that people are nearby as they walk past. Areas with an unbroken block created by fences, buildings with solid walls or tinted windows, or raised retail shops do not allow pedestrians to look in, lack human scale, and are more unpleasant spaces to walk (**Image 25**).



- Destinations are important components of walkability. Orienting the downtown area to pedestrian safety and implementing aesthetically pleasing destinations is important.
- Ensure new development, including chain stores, matches the character of the downtown and enhances the sense of place. Developers will make what the community wants, as long as the community is clear about what that is. Some communities are using Downtown Design Guidelines to establish this and make it clear.

- When new parking is constructed, encourage it to be located towards the rear of buildings instead of between the businesses and the sidewalk. Encourage on street parking and shared use parking. Limit driveways as much as possible because the potential points of conflict make unpleasant walking conditions for the pedestrian. When driveways are too wide and lack curbs and discernable boundaries, it creates confusion for motorists and very unsafe conditions for pedestrians.
- Equally important, is a downtown that is inter-generational where people of all ages – seniors, families, young professionals – live together. Therefore, seek to provide various types of housing, including upscale rentals, to appeal to all types because having people live downtown contributes greatly to maintaining vibrant main streets through ways such as creating foot traffic for businesses and promoting safety by keeping “eyes on the street.”
- Use public infrastructure as an opportunity to incorporate public art that is also functional. For example, instead of installing traditional bike racks, opt to install racks that have a unique shape or design.

Incorporating overall downtown design (human scale, recognizing the space between buildings as assets through enhancing alley ways, orientation of parking, and business owners taking pride in and enhancing facades) adds to comfort and appeal and builds upon infrastructure and safety improvements, to make more healthy and vibrant communities.

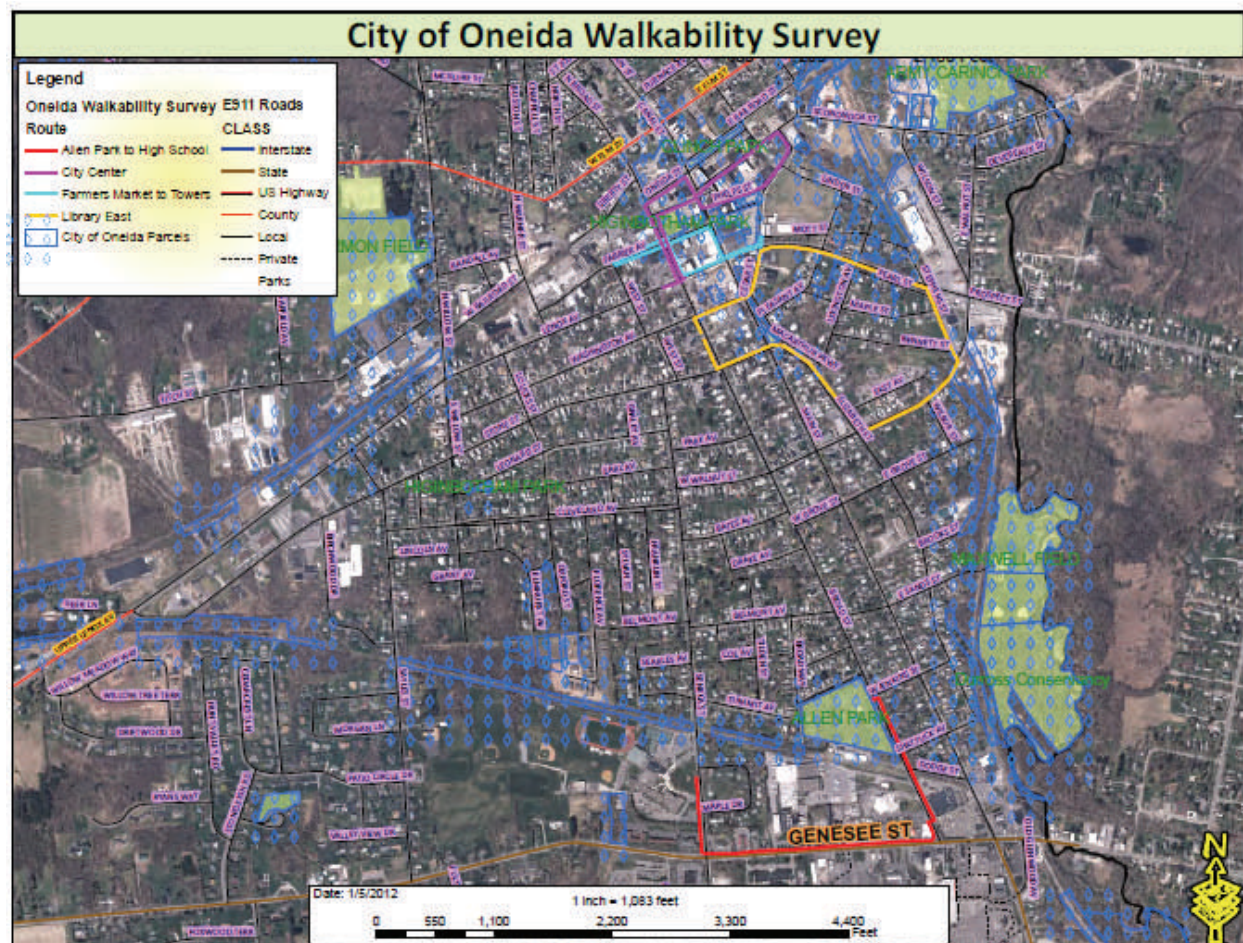
Appendix

A-1

The Ten Smart Growth Principles

1. Mix land uses
2. Take advantage of compact building design
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
4. Create walkable neighborhoods
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
7. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

A-2



A-3

Link to Sidewalks and Streets Survey by AARP

http://www.chfwcn.org/Tools/BroadCaster/Upload/Project13/Docs/AARP_Sidewalks_and_Streets_Survey.pdf



For more information contact:

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Planning Department

