

Middleton, MA Healthy Community Workshop Recommendations

21-May-2015; facilitated by Mark Fenton

Middleton in Motion

Middleton should embrace its position “in the middle.” It earned its name as the halfway point from Andover to Salem, with a “tramp house” along the former rail line behind the Senior Center. It still has lots of traffic traveling through the area along routes 114 and 62 and this can be seen as a huge problem. But can also be an opportunity if two things happen—

- The corridor and key centers are made so livable and appealing that passers-by are motivated to stop, walk, and spend money at local businesses.
- The traffic is made to move at an appropriate “community center” speed that creates a disincentive to simply driving through Middleton to avoid using the highways. Those coming through should be given a clear message through roadway design and adjoining land uses that they are passing through a community, and should drive appropriately.

Next steps are recommended in three broad areas to increase routine walking, bicycling, and perhaps eventually transit use: *programmatic* efforts to build awareness and community engagement; projects to improve the physical infrastructure of the community and safety for walking and cycling; and *policy* changes that will lead to long-term changes in land use patterns,

Program

- Education. Help people understand the urgent need to increase routine walking and bicycling, and help them envision a more livable, walkable, and healthy community. Consider outreach and education activities as follows.
- Work with the schools to promote active transportation and begin to change parent and community attitudes. For example . . .
 - Create a “Free Range Kid” **parent club** to create mutual support for adults who would like to help develop free range children, encouraging them to walk and eventually ride bikes to friends’ homes, school, parks and playgrounds, perhaps even retail centers.
 - One specific focus must be on eliminating or reducing the fear on parents’ part by sharing the real data, and creating a supportive network in which there is a greater feel of shared parenting. An example would be setting up walking school buses; designated routes to school an adult walks each day picking children up for a safely supervised walk along the way. So, inspire parents to set up informal (handful of neighbors taking turns with their kids) or formal (schedule, designated routes and times) walking school bus groups.
 - Help teach adults how to become supporters, to speak at public meetings, etc. so they become advocates for complete streets roadway improvements.

- Work with library to create a reading and video series on creating healthy communities. Possible book titles (but
 - *Last Child in the Woods* – by Richard Louv, talks about the elimination of free range childhoods and the simple benefits of kids spending time outside.
 - *Geography of Nowhere* - a disheartening look at suburban style development and what it's done to America;
 - and *Home from Nowhere* - a manifesto for New Urbanism and building livable communities, both by James Howard Kunstler.
 - *Suburban Nation* by Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, a great discussion of how to create more livable cities and towns.
 - *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser.
 - *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* by Michael Pollan.
- School classes should use the rail trail early and often for field trips, and outdoor and place-based learning
- General community outreach.
 - Make video of Fenton presentation available to local access cable TV. Also have students develop a series of short, entertaining, very watchable video clips to teach key points such as
 - the recommendation to get a minimum of 30 (adults) or 60 (youth) minutes of physical activity a day, and the extraordinary variety of things that count.
 - The rules about bike lanes and shared-use arrows (sharrows) so that drivers know what they mean if you install some.
 - Trail etiquette (proper passing, not hogging the width of the trail, take out your own trash, etc.).
- Initiate a series of walk audits; every month,
 - HAVE each one hosted by on selectman, one planning board member, and one town staff member (health, planning, public works).
 - Locate them in key areas around town to develop a portfolio of specific recommendations to create healthier settings for walking a cycling (put a curb extension here, plant trees and place a bench here, strip a bike lane here).
- Launch pop up events. E.g. once a month do a “take back your street” day or try ‘pop up’ pedestrian and bike facilities, such as a curb extension, parklet, temporary mini-circle (to slow traffic in a neighborhood, instead of stop signs), etc.
 - Be sure to do these with an eye toward possible permanent or at least longer-term treatments or trials.
 - Have local businesses participate by bringing in pop-up retail activities (food carts, local business products, etc.)
- Launch a stealth team (interdisciplinary, 10 or fewer members), and several action teams on specific topics of interest. E.g. one team could focus on walking buses and improving routes to school; another could focus on the

walk audit series; another on creating pop-up events and traffic calming activities.

- Buy-a-bench, buy-a-bike rack opportunities. Consider a design contest among students to develop an iconic and functional Middleton bike rack. Then have them work with the technical high school to design them for fabrication at the school; have local businesses donate money for the materials, and then have town install racks at/near those businesses.

Project

- Middleton Square Route 114 redesign
 - o Short term ideas –
 - Curb extension at Lake Street on 114
 - Complete the trail from Town Hall to Maple Street/Washington St
 - Add crossing island on Maple St at Washington, and add some flexible bollards to slow turning vehicles.
 - Add way-finding signs to make clear the destinations around downtown area, and to trail heads, stream access points. This could be a boy scout or service group (Lions, Rotary) project over several years.
 - Close the northerly entrance from Cumberland Farm onto 114; eliminate traffic cut through of parking lot on that corner to avoid the signal.
 - o Longer term ideas –
 - Road diet on Route 114 (4 lane to 3 lane conversion)
 - Mini-circle at Liberty Street and Maple Street intersection to slow traffic entering town from the north, and make a safer highly visible trail crossing at this area.
 - Median islands (check if historic photos show a center grass median). And ideal location might be at major roadway trail crossings, such as near Liberty/Maple intersection.

Policy

- Empower the development review group to facilitate a required pre-application discussions with developers.
 - o Explicitly include this as a required step for all development.
- Specifically require all development to complete a Multi-Modal Transportation Analysis (never allow just a Traffic Impact Analysis). Require that all development include an examination of *best-case* pedestrian and bicycle trips, (not based on current conditions).
 - o Require them to propose mitigation of adverse impacts
 - o Require recommendations to maximize pedestrian and bicycle trips.
- Rezone Main Street corridor and Howes Station area for more pedestrian, bicycle, and slower traffic-friendly designs.

- Perhaps create village business districts: Howes Station, Middleton Square, and Logbridge Village (S. Middleton). Attributes should include
 - Multi-story buildings
 - Buildings at the sidewalk; parking on-street and/or behind buildings.
 - Mixed use; e.g retail on the first floor, housing or offices or a combination above.
- Use a consultant with experience in creating these overlays, to maximize economic potential for developers.
- Implement some demonstration projects as quickly as possible.
- During subdivision sign-off, require easements for public access to trails and adjoining subdivisions. *Do not grant waivers on this requirement!*
- This requires
 - Demarcation could be split rail fence, boulders, plantings, etc.
 - Must require enforcement of these linking easements, proof of their establishment before Certificates of Occupancy granted.
- Updated Master Plan must include
 - An explicit Active Transportation plan or chapter, connecting land uses, identifying key trip generators (schools, retail clusters, parks and open space,) and identifying key links for priority bicycle and pedestrian improvements.
 - Zoning changes for the three retail nodes: the village center, Howes Station area, and current 'big box' development area (for a new "southern" village center area).
 - This requires specifically a re-examination of parking requirements, and a courageous move from required parking minimums, to not-to-exceed parking maximums in the ordinance.
 - Update subdivision guidelines for narrower streets; sidewalks on both sides and on all property frontage, including sidewalk links to adjoining subdivisions; links to trail networks. Include strong incentives for cluster developments that preserve much more open space.
- Require formal health department sign-off on subdivision and other development permits, to assure consideration of health impacts (including physical activity) of all new and re-development.