



**Rural Walking Toolkit:
Developing walking facilities in rural
communities**

Presented September 23, 2013

Who are we?

WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and vibrant communities.



We are a non-profit membership organization dedicated to improving walking conditions in cities and towns across Massachusetts.

Today's premise:

Improved walking environments can **preserve rural character** while making rural communities **healthier and safer**.

Learning objectives

In today's webinar, you will learn...

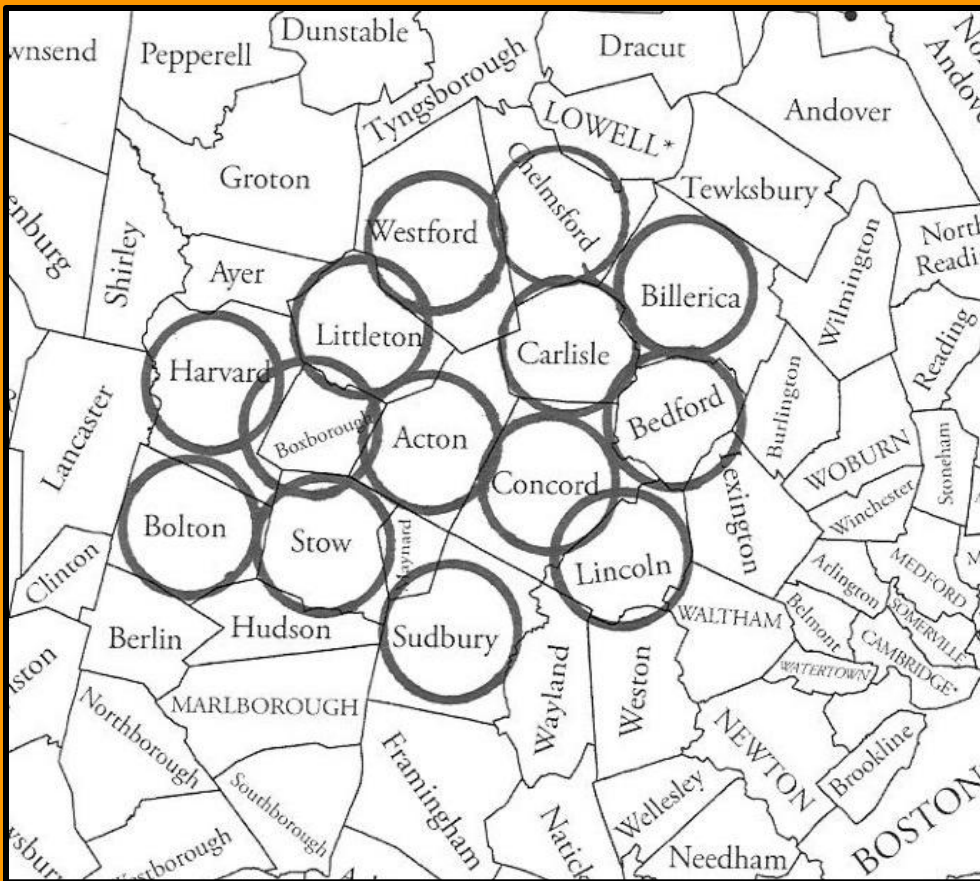
- to recognize types of rural walking infrastructure
- to figure out which might suit your community best
- to identify locations for walking improvements
- to discuss pedestrian issues in public meetings
- to maintain progress over time

A Walkability Puzzle

Can rural towns be made walkable, or are the distances within towns too great?

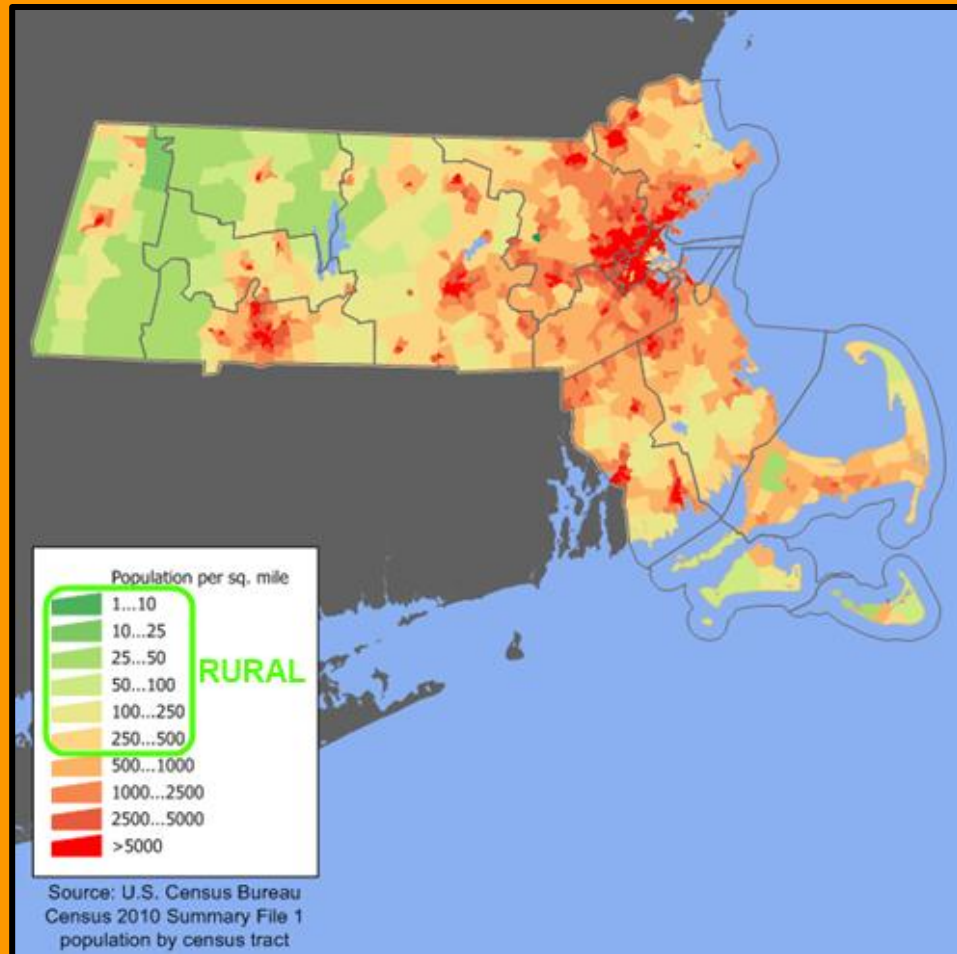
PARTICIPANT POLL

MA towns are often six miles across



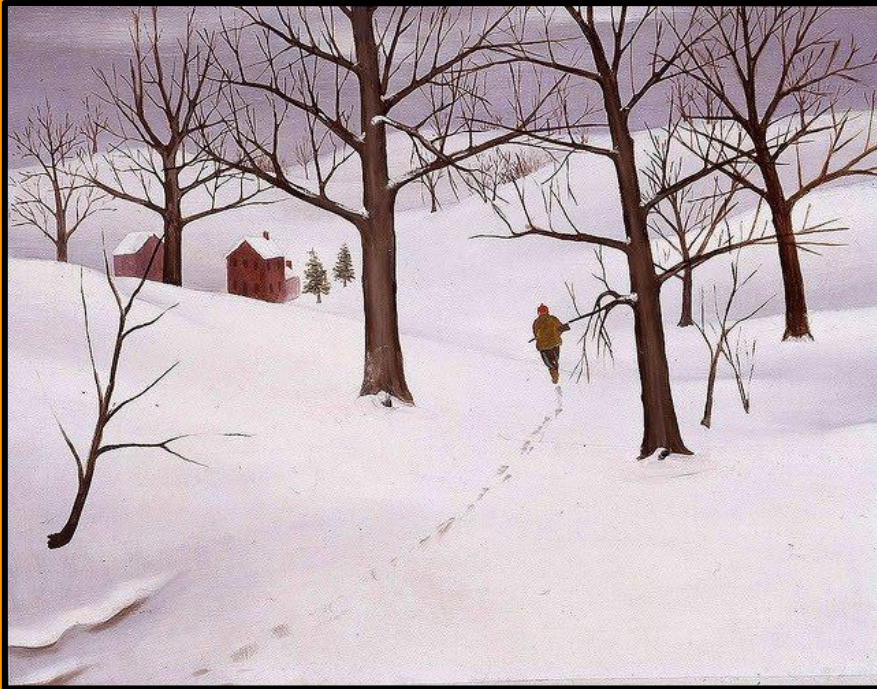
- Our rural towns developed with walking as the primary transportation mode
- It was a 3-mile radius (a 1-hour walk) to the centrally-located meetinghouse
- Present-day boundaries reflect colonial-era walking

Present-day rural MA



- “Rural” means having a density of fewer than 500 people per square mile
(UMass Center for Rural Massachusetts)
- 190 of the 351 towns in Massachusetts are thus considered rural

Perceptions of rural character



Martha Levy, *Winter Scene* (1934)

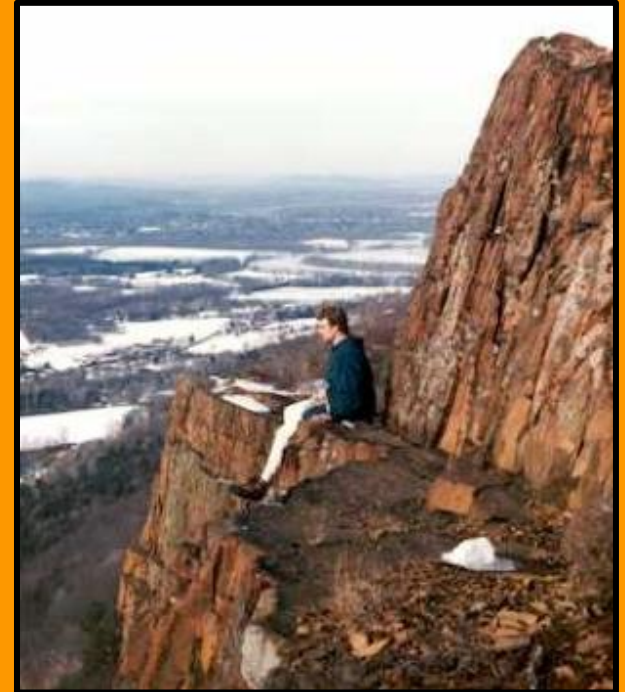
- Rural ambiance is often a principal reason people choose a community
- Residents are often fiercely protective of image
- Concerns about urbanization: walkways = urban? = density?

Infrastructure possibilities

- The following are examples of generally available options for rural walkways
- Each is unique in funding and design requirements
- Most options are accessible to people with disabilities
- Consider which might be most useful to your community (we'll ask you later!)

Hiking trails

- Usually narrow, unpaved, inexpensive



Regional multi-use trails

- Paved, usually 10-12 feet wide
- Involve state funding, usually expensive



Road shoulder

- Potentially hazardous
- Widening pavement can be expensive



Sidewalk with curb

- The most urban type of walkway
- Includes curbs, gutters, drainage pipes
- Expensive (\$100-200 per square foot)



Roadside path



- Maintains rural appearance
- Separated from road by buffer strip
- Least expensive walkway (\$4-5 per sq. ft.)

Meandering roadside path



- Not parallel to road nor straight
- Can go around trees or rocks, follow existing topography
- Inexpensive
- Wider buffer than other paths

Traffic calming

- Roadside signs, painted lines, chevrons, stanchions
- Comparatively inexpensive



Question break and PARTICIPANT POLL

Were these options clear? Which can you most envision selecting for your community's next pedestrian project?

- Hiking trail
- Regional multi-use trail
- Road shoulder
- Sidewalk
- Roadside path
- Meandering path
- Traffic calming

Steps towards rural walkways

- Generating specific ideas
 - Connecting destinations or providing recreation
 - Finding walkway space
 - Choosing a walkway type
- Engaging your community
 - Addressing local perspectives
- Finding capital funding and right-of-way
- Administering the project and maintaining stewardship

Connecting destinations

Access to schools

Improved mobility for seniors and children



Connecting destinations

Walking to shopping, jobs, civic uses



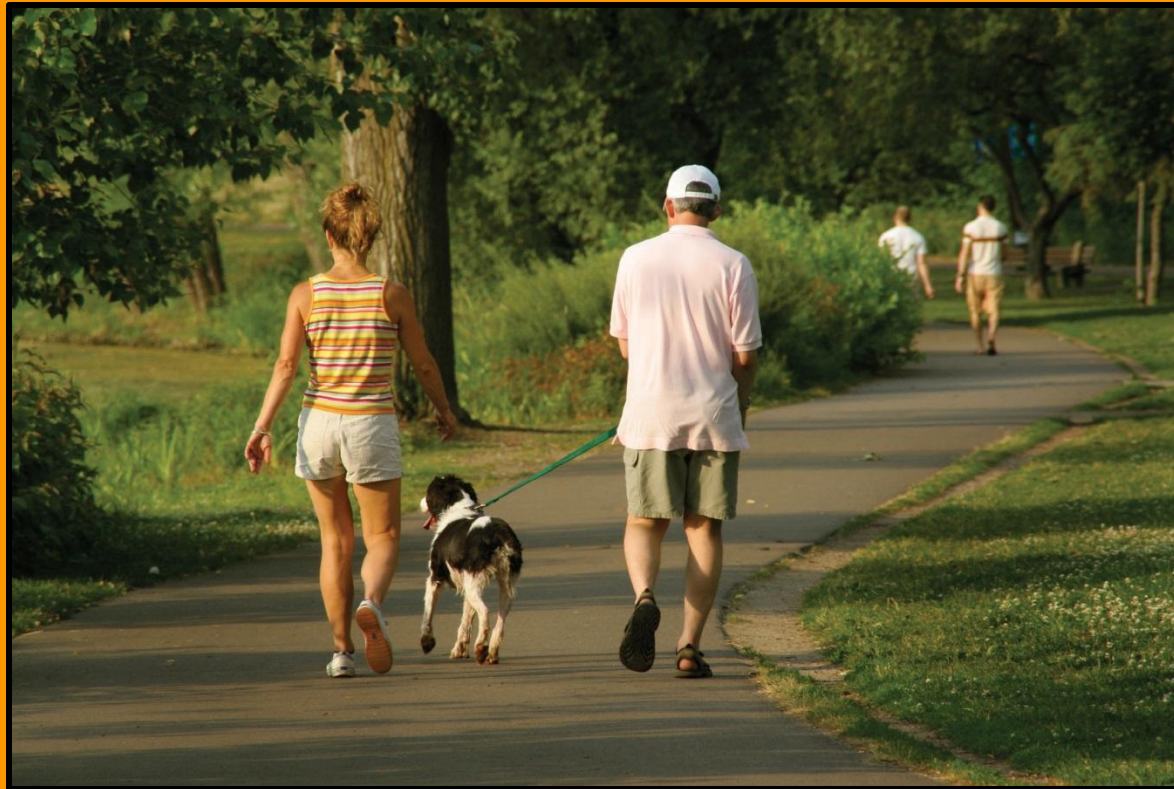
Recreation and exercise

Family outings and social occasions



Recreation and exercise

“Park-and-walk” locations



Finding walkway space



On publicly-owned land

- Along a publically-owned right-of-way
- On a roadside
- Abutting public land

Finding walkway space



On privately-owned land

- A wider linear path along a public road on private land
- A path through private land that doesn't parallel a road

Choosing a walkway type



A **roadside path** is a strong option to maintain rural character & provide an inexpensive option.

- Get more mileage for your money than other options
- Comparatively minimal construction/landscaping effort

Choosing a walkway type

A **meandering roadside path** may be a good choice because it does not need to alter existing trees, walls, or other elements.

It can also provide a wider buffer from the road.



Choosing a walkway type



A **sidewalk** is often the best choice in town centers.

A **shared use path** can have strong support where there is available right of way and a desire for a regional facility.



Engaging your community

Public engagement is useful!



- You should provide basic information on approach and likely options
- Present tactical, project-oriented approach

Engaging your community

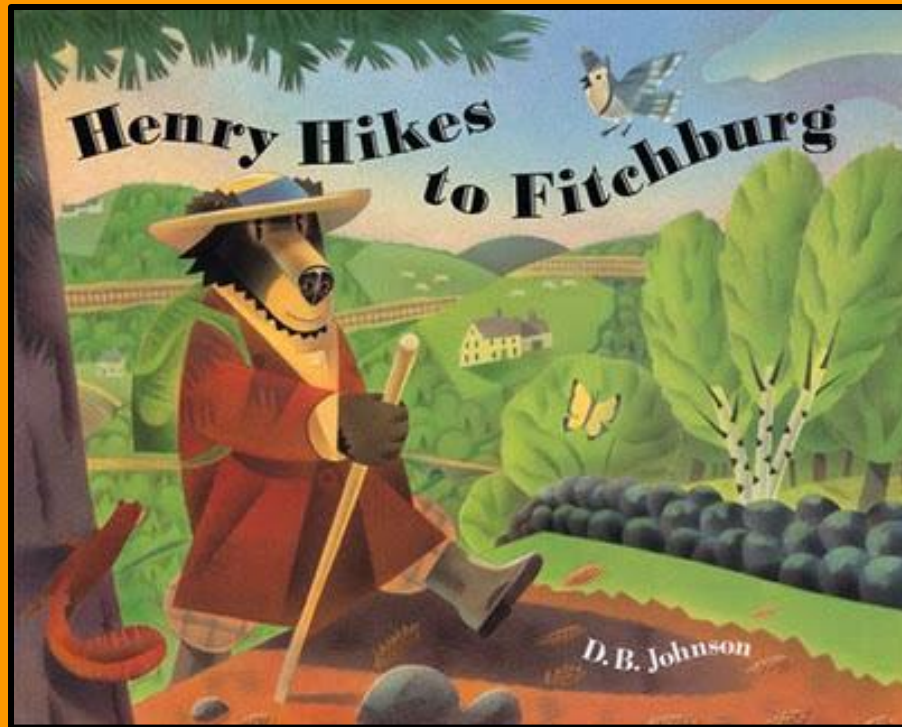
Targeting public input to specific projects



- Make public aware of specific opportunities and limitations, including funding, space, et cetera
- Ask for suggestions on options

Addressing local perspectives

Make clear that walkways are in character with rural placemaking



Addressing local perspectives

Stress the health benefits of walking



Addressing local perspectives

Children and seniors need walking routes!



Finding capital funding

Local funding

- Town capital improvement funds
- Mitigation mandated to developers
- Fundraising for specific projects by local non-profits

Finding capital funding

State and federal funding

- Longer-term, frequently very competitive
- Often associated with roadway projects or rail trails

Procuring right-of-way: public

- Existing roadway right-of-way
- Public lands, e.g. parks, schools, tec.
- Abandoned rail tracks

Procuring right-of-way: private

- Outright purchase
- Land donations
- Easements (permanent use of private land)
- Use of subdivision regulations
- Licenses (temporary use of private land)

Procuring right-of-way: private

Licenses: an interesting, inexpensive possibility



- “Temporary”
- Usually no cost
- Appealing as a local good deed

Implementation by town staff or local nonprofit organization



- Find precedents in other towns
- Apply for specialized grants
- Find and develop projects
- Fit projects into a larger context
- Assign responsibilities to specific individuals
- Help guide the entire project to completion

Stewardship



- Need a long-term commitment to result in a walking network
- Consider partnering with a land trust to smoothen the process

Stewardship



- Encourage residents to join planning process
- Cultivate “champions” to lead efforts

Case study overview: Lincoln



- Network of paths around roads and conservation areas
- Long-term stewardship through nonprofits and resident involvement

Recap

Today, you learned how...

- to recognize types of rural walking infrastructure
- to figure out which might suit your community best
- to identify locations for walking improvements
- to discuss pedestrian issues in public meetings
- to maintain progress over time

PARTICIPANT POLL

How prepared do you now feel to start a walking project in your own community?

Discussion/questions

