

Town of North Reading, MA
Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Technical Assistance Grant 2015
Category: Design

Project Overview

North Reading is requesting \$10,000 in technical assistance through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative program (Category: Design) to create a Complete Streets concept for a central portion of Route 28 (Main Street). Route 28 runs north/south through the easterly part of the town, connecting it with Andover to the north and Reading to the South. While North Reading does have a small historic center located in the geographic center of the town, containing schools and other public services, it is Route 28 that is the town's Main Street and the heart of its commercial activity, including nearly all of its retail.

Project Need, Issue to be addressed

The corridor has a number of challenges, and has long been identified by the town as a priority for revitalization. Route 28 has many vacant and underutilized properties, and is visibly less lively than the hubs of business and pedestrian activity seen on Route 28 in our neighboring towns of Andover and Reading. There is no defined central business district; rather, the 2-mile corridor has the feel of a highway. Vehicles cutting through town along Route 28 compete with local traffic, evidenced by many cars and trucks speeding past vehicles attempting to enter the parking lots of local businesses. Pedestrian and bicycle activity is clearly secondary to vehicle activity. Sidewalk infrastructure is inadequate, with sidewalks only provided on one side of much of the roadway, abruptly ending in many spots. Where sidewalks do exist, they are often in need of repair. Crosswalks are few and far between, and they usually require very long waits before pedestrian signals allow for crossing. These conditions, along with the speed of vehicles, make walking along Main Street a frightening and unsafe experience. Bicyclists are almost never observed.

Residents of North Reading are highly dependent on their cars, since the town has no public transit, and since very few areas of the town are compact enough to promote walking. Given the health, environmental, social and aesthetic problems associated with having such low pedestrian activity, the town would very much like to see this situation improved. The potential for the town to have a walkable, attractive, defined commercial center along its Main Street exists, but substantial physical changes to the streetscape are needed in order to achieve this.

Expected Long-Term Outcomes; Implementation

Through this grant opportunity, the town hopes to achieve a vision for the corridor that articulates a central business district, calms traffic and promotes safe access for bicyclists and pedestrians, allows for increased foot traffic to local businesses, and improves the aesthetics of the streetscape. The most recent reconstruction of Route 28

was completed in the early 1990's, and looking to reconstruction opportunities in the near future, the town would like to plan for a Complete Streets program that encourages walkability and safety, reduces vehicle trips where possible, and provides for a more attractive roadway throughout the corridor. The focus of these improvements would be the approximately one-half mile stretch from the intersection of Route 62/Lowell Road with Route 28, to just past the intersection of Route 62/Winter Street at 86 Main Street (please see the attached maps). The project's deliverable would be a plan outlining a Complete Streets concept program for this area, and more general recommendations for the rest of the corridor. In future planning, this concept would serve as a starting point for a 25% design for future Transportation Improvement Program funding for Main Street reconstruction. Upon receiving the final product, the town will immediately begin exploring possible funding sources to complete a 25% design, and will begin pursuing town administrative and public support for advancing the recommendations provided.

Public Outreach and Participation

Reaching out to our residents, local businesses and owners of the properties along Route 28 will be a key part of our strategy. Before investing in design plans and requesting inclusion on the TIP or pursuing other construction funds, the town must reach a consensus about the future design of Main Street. Key goals of the project are to obtain input from residents and key stakeholders about a Main Street vision that is in the best interests of the town, to ensure that the town is moving forward with support, and that proposed improvements benefit all users.

If the project is funded, the town will immediately proceed with convening its advisory committee to move forward. Individuals who have already committed to participating in and guiding the project are included in the attached list, which consists of town officials, local business owners and the executive director of the Reading-North Reading Chamber of Commerce. Our Chamber is uniquely positioned to contribute to these discussions, since it serves two communities; Reading recently completed streetscape improvements to its downtown in conjunction with the reconstruction of its Main Street, also Route 28. North Reading will be able to learn from Reading's experience from this process. The town welcomes input from business owners in Reading who have seen changes to their businesses after these improvements were made.

Project Costs/Scope of Services

The town anticipates the project will cost \$10,000, as follows:

Task	Hours	Cost
Existing conditions analysis	20	\$2,000
Stakeholder meeting/design charrette	12	\$1,200
Preliminary design plans & renderings	20	\$2,000

Community meeting/presentation #2	12	\$1,200
Final design plans & renderings	20	\$2,000
Final report & recommendations	16	\$1,600
Total proposed project budget	100	\$10,000

Additionally, the Town Planner anticipates devoting 60-70 hours to the project and will be available to support meeting organization and facilitation, survey work, outreach, data collection and other tasks as needed.

Previous Planning Efforts

Previous studies relating to the corridor include a 1996 revitalization study, *New Directions for Main Street* (KA Dorgan & Associates), in which 500 residents participated. The study focused on improving aesthetics and resulted in design standards codified into the town's Site Plan Review regulations. Another study, *Analysis of Potential Increased Property Tax Revenues Attributable to Municipal Sewer Service in the Concord Street and Main Street/Route 28 Study Area* (FXM Associates and Kleinfelder SEA Engineering) was done in 2011. (While sewer is not expected in North Reading for another approximately 10 years due to funding and permitting obstacles, the town is actively pursuing other strategies to develop its economy and support local businesses despite this disadvantage.) The town's 2004 master plan identified Route 28 as an important focus for economic development. In the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's 2014 Priority Mapping Project for the North Suburban Subregion, Route 28 was a locally identified priority for development and a regionally significant priority for transportation improvements.

The town also has recent traffic count data for selected locations along Route 28. However, a complete collection of traffic data, including counts and all turning movements for all seven intersections on Main Street, is planned for early spring and will be available for use in this project.

Public/Private Partnership

In addition to the studies noted above, the town is currently undertaking an EDSAT self-assessment through Northeastern University in order to understand, town-wide, what our strengths and weaknesses are with regard to economic development. A recent forum in support of the assessment was well-attended and supported by business owners and leaders, including members of the Chamber of Commerce. In convening the forum, the town had the opportunity to reach out to members of the business community who had not previously been represented in discussions about town planning. The town plans to continue the momentum initiated by the forum by

staying in contact with business leaders enthusiastic about participating in shaping the town's future economy, and including them to the greatest degree possible in all planning endeavors relating to Main Street, including this project, as well as a corridor plan and market analysis anticipated for 2015.