

[illegible]**PREPARED BY:**

## NASHUA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Merrimack Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan recommends that the town take specific actions to achieve a unified and well developed town center. The plan addresses sidewalks, trails, safety, design and parking; all critical elements of a successful town center. A key recommendation is the development of a Town Center Committee to implement the actions identified in this plan. This committee will be responsible for working with administration, town residents and local businesses to enhance the town center by creating a safe and inviting place for town residents and visitors to patronize local businesses and key destinations.

The following are prioritized sidewalk and trail improvements. Additional details for each proposed project can be found on pages 6 and 7. The following are recommended actions for the town center. The project completion dates are dependent upon suitable funding and may vary as opportunities present themselves.

### **SIDEWALK MASTER PLAN**

- 1-a. Pedestrian Connections at Abbie Griffin Park to connect the Merrimack District Courthouse to businesses along D.W. Highway. Completion 2010
- 1-b. Sidewalk in front of Watson Park. Completion 2010
2. West side of D.W. Highway between Church Street and Wire Road. Completion 2011
3. East side of D.W. Highway between Wire Road and Twin Bridge Road. Completion 2013
4. West side of O'Gara Drive from Baboosic Lake Road south to existing sidewalk. Completion 2013/2014
5. East side of D.W. Highway near Railroad Avenue. Completion 2015
6. South Side of Woodbury Drive from McElwain Street east to D.W. Highway. Completion 2015
7. Sidewalks on both sides of D.W. Highway and Baboosic Lake Road. Completion 2016-2017

### **TRAILS ACTION PLAN**

1. Connect Watson Park to the western side of the D. W. Highway near the fire station utilizing the old canal located under the bridge. Completion 2010
2. Develop a trail system along the northerly side of the Souhegan River from the fire station west to join with the trail under the Everett Turnpike at Merrill's Marauders Bridge. The trail will include a connection to the high school facility, to the new pedestrian bridge crossing over the river from West Chamberlain Road, to the system of trails extending into Wildcat Falls, will include the Heritage Trail segment and provide a trail loop along Baboosic Lake Road and D. W. Highway back to Watson Park. Completion 2011
3. Design and construct a trail leaving Watson Park on the old railroad bridge over Baboosic Brook towards the Merrimack River. The trail will turn north and west and connect to the northerly end of the Twin Bridges trail system. Completion 2014



# Merrimack Town Center Pedestrian & Trail Master Plan

November 2009

Existing Trail/Path

Conceptual Trail

Desired Trail Connections

1-3 Trail Priority

Rail Lines

Pedestrian Accommodation Areas

Potential Ped Bridge

Buildings

Commercial

Community Resource

Residential

School & Municipal

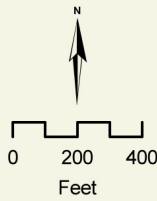
Sidewalk Existing

Sidewalk Need

# 1-7 Sidewalk Priority\*

Sidewalk recommended in Master Plan - Gaps

\*Note: Number 1-7 Indicate Project priority



Existing Signalized Crosswalk

Sidewalks recommended in Master Plan to fill gaps on DW Highway.

Potential New Crosswalk based on intersection re-design.

Twin Bridge Park & Kids Kove Playground Area

Existing Pedestrian Bridge and Payed Path

Conceptual Trail with Development

Potential Future Connections - Depending on Development

Sidewalk Needed

Sidewalks recommended in Master Plan to fill gaps on Baboosic Lake Rd.

#7

#1a

Site of New Courthouse

Abbie Griffin Park

Existing Crosswalks

Pedestrian Access

Sidewalks recommended in Master Plan to fill gaps on DW Highway.

#7

School Complex

Existing Pedestrian Crossing

Existing ROW Easement

Watson Park

Pedestrian Access Area

Existing Passage

Potential Crosswalk in corridor depending on pedestrian safety issues.

#6

Existing Service Road

Potential Pedestrian Bridge

Sidewalks recommended in Master Plan to fill gaps on DW Highway.

#7

#5

Wildcat Falls



Future pedestrian access under Merrill's Marauders bridge to connect to Wildcat Falls Conservation Area and bridge to neighborhoods south of river.

2

Merrill's Marauders Bridge

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade the town of Merrimack has spent a considerable amount of effort planning for the future of the town center in the development of the Town Center Plan (1999), the Master Plan Update (2002) and the Merrimack Village Design Charrette (2006), developed by Plan NH. These plans, especially the Town Center Plan, provide a wealth of information about the existing features of the town center as well as a vision for the center's future. However, there are few recommendations in these documents for how to achieve this future vision.

This Merrimack Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan was developed through the Nashua Regional Planning Commission's Integrated Transportation and Community Planning Program, known as iTRaC. The iTRaC program assists communities in taking a holistic approach to integrated transportation, land use and environmental considerations through education and technical assistance. This project analyzed the existing town center documents and developed a short list of recommendations with specific items that can be implemented by the town to achieve a unified and well developed town center.



The project aims to achieve the following goals:

- Create a short action plan identifying a series of specific items for implementation in the town center during the development of the Merrimack District Courthouse and redevelopment of the municipal complex. The action items are based upon recommendations identified in the existing Town of Merrimack plans as stated above.
- Identify existing and future trail and pedestrian connections between key destinations in the town center.
- Develop a brochure for the public and identify outreach techniques to educate the town about the benefits of a well defined and developed town center.

## PROJECT SUBCOMMITTEE

The formation of the iTRaC Committee was endorsed by the Merrimack Town Council and was established as a subcommittee of the town's Economic Development Citizen Advisory Committee (EDCAC). The iTRaC Committee was comprised of a diverse group of individuals and included the following members:

Peter Flood, Chair, Economic Development Citizen's Advisory Committee; Representative Chris Christensen, Parks and Recreation Committee; Tracy Bull, School District; Richard Maloon, Watson

Park; Ellen Knowlton, Library; Nelson Disco, Planning Board; Andy Powell, Conservation Commission; Debra Huffman, Resident; Bill Wilkes, Merrimack Rotary President; Dave Nichols, Heritage Commission; and Linda Bonetti, Economic Development Citizen's Advisory Committee.

## PROJECT STUDY AREA

The project study area includes the town center of Merrimack generally within the boundaries of the Town Center Zoning Overlay District. This includes the Merrimack District Courthouse, municipal buildings, churches, pedestrian connections between the schools, town center amenities, businesses, Merrill's Marauders Bridge, and Wildcat Falls. Please see the Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan Map at the back of the plan.

The following quote is an overall goal listed in the Merrimack Town Center Master Plan Update (2002):

*"Build upon the existing concentration of public facilities, semi-public institutions, historic resources, businesses and residences to create a defined Town Center for Merrimack that will provide a vital, functional and aesthetically pleasing physical expression of Merrimack's cultural, commercial, community and civic life."*

The Town Center Pedestrian and Trails Master Plan identifies key action items to implement the above goal. The town center is already home to a number of excellent resources and key destinations including public gathering places, recreation sites, municipal buildings, churches, schools, restaurants, and businesses. In particular, the committee identified two pedestrian access areas in the central and southern end of the town center. The two areas are shown with a red dashed circle on the Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan Map.

The first Pedestrian Access area is centrally located at the intersection of Baboosic Lake Road and Daniel Webster Highway (D.W. Highway). This area is home to the municipal complex, Merrimack District Courthouse, library,



entrances to schools, churches, Abbie Griffin Park and the Merrimack Community Bandstand, as well as a number of businesses. The

goal is to enhance pedestrian amenities such as lighting, street furniture, landscaping, special sidewalk and crosswalk treatments as well as public art in this area to attract additional pedestrian traffic and encourage additional businesses and services.



The same is the case for the second pedestrian access area centered at Watson Park along D.W. Highway. Watson Park is anticipated to attract additional pedestrian traffic and create a desirable atmosphere for additional businesses. In recent years new businesses such as Swan Chocolates and Buckley's Great Steaks have located here.



Another key destination is Kids Kove Playground. This playground is located at Twin Bridge Park and although there are no sidewalks to access the park there is a beautiful trail through the woods running behind the park. The trail exits near the Commons Shopping Plaza and adjacent multi-family housing. This provides an excellent connection for families in this area to travel along



an attractive and well maintained trail to the park and adjoining ball fields. The pedestrian foot traffic has the potential to support businesses at the Commons Shopping Plaza, such as a café, ice cream and gift shop. Additional amenities such as seating, landscaping and signage will make this location more appealing to pedestrians.

These are just the beginnings of how the town center could evolve and really come to life to form a thriving and diverse center of the community.

## EXISTING VERSUS DESIRED AMENITIES

Merrimack's town center is home to a number of public gathering places, recreation sites, churches, municipal buildings, schools, restaurants, businesses and existing residences. Town residents visit many of these sites on a routine basis, however

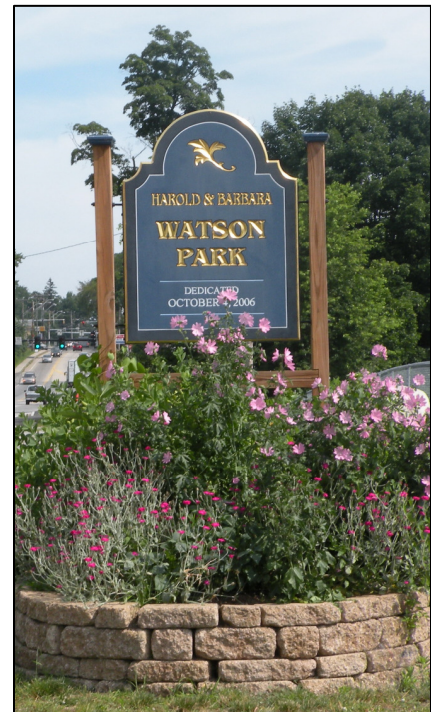


additional amenities and connections should be made to enhance their pedestrian experience in the town center. Connections between sites need to be enhanced with improved trail

and pedestrian connections and amenities to allow people to park at one location and walk to several destinations. The Town Center is continuing to attract new businesses, and in recent years has seen additions such as CVS, Swan Chocolates and Buckley's Great Steaks. These businesses are opportunistically



located across from Watson Park, all of which are within walking distance of the high school. Special attention should also be paid to current and future town center residents to encourage walking between their homes and other destinations. Additional amenities should also be added to enhance the pedestrian experience, including street furniture, landscaping, public art, attractive lighting, sidewalks, trails, signage, public parking, and bike racks.



## SIDEWALK MASTER PLAN

The following is a list of connections as shown on the Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan Map, listed in priority order. The project completion dates are dependent upon suitable funding and may vary as opportunities present themselves.

- 1-a. Pedestrian Connections at Abbie Griffin Park to connect the Merrimack District Courthouse to businesses along D.W. Highway. *(High priority due to current development of Merrimack District Courthouse.) Completion date: 2010*
- 1-b. Sidewalk in front of Watson Park *(High priority due to planned development of this sidewalk and Watson Park.) Completion date: 2010*
2. West side of D.W. Highway between Church Street and Wire Road. *(Important connection to facilitate access from the north as well as Twin Bridge Park and Kids Kove Playground.) Completion date: 2011*
3. East side of D. W. Highway between Wire Road and Twin Bridge Road *(Will facilitate access to the Commons and residential areas at the north end of the town center, however this section is likely to require ROW acquisition, grading, and a needed bridge.) Completion date: 2013*
4. West side of O’Gara Drive *(Requires input from the school district and would impact current parking patterns. Sidewalk would provide an ideal walking loop for pedestrians.) Completion date: 2013-2014*
5. East side of D. W. Highway near Railroad Avenue *(Small section along Frasier Square at the southern end of the Town Center.) Completion date: 2015*
6. South side of Woodbury Drive *(Ideal connection between D.W. Highway and the High School. This would require coordination with the School District, re-evaluation of existing traffic patterns, and engineering review.) Completion date: 2015*
7. Sidewalks on both side of D.W. Highway and Baboosic Lake Road. *(Will complete any missing sidewalk segments.) Completion 2016-2017*



## FUTURE FINANCING

In order to extend the network of sidewalks throughout the town center a designated on-going funding source for sidewalks and trails is needed. The following is a list of potential options for sidewalk and trail revenue sources for consideration by the Council.

- Explore grant opportunities, such as Transportation Enhancement, (NH DOT) and private foundations for fitness grants.



- Development of a designated Town Center specific fund for sidewalks, trails, and streetscaping which would implement the Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan.
- Support the funding of the Road Infrastructure Capital Reserve Fund.
- Work with the town to incorporate projects into the Capital Improvement Plan.
- Continue to work with developers to make on-site and off-site improvements, as well as obtain land grants and right-of-way easements as new development opportunities present themselves. New developers should be made aware of the Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan.
- Explore the feasibility of Development Impact Fees

## **TRAILS MASTER PLAN**

The town center and Watson Park in particular, is designated as a central destination for sidewalks and walking and biking trails in the referenced town center documents. Currently several trail segments are being used, not as town-managed trails, but still in use by citizens as they travel on foot throughout this area. Connecting them into a trail network, expanding the system and maintaining them will enhance the accessibility and expand traffic into the town center.

The establishment of a Trail Master Plan must take into consideration the following tasks, each listed with a projected completion date. Please refer to the Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan Map at the beginning of the document for an overview of the trail system.

1. Connect Watson Park to the western side of D. W. Highway near the fire station, utilizing the old canal located underneath the bridge. Completion of this trail segment will not only provide a connection to the extended trail along the river but will also provide pedestrian traffic to and from Watson Park with a means to cross D. W. Highway safely. Completion date: 2010
2. Develop a trail system along the northerly side of the Souhegan River from the fire station west to join with the trail under the Everett Turnpike at Merrill's Marauders Bridge. The trail will include a connection to the high school facility, to the new pedestrian bridge crossing over the river from West Chamberlain Road, to the system of trails extending into Wildcat Falls, and will include the Heritage Trail segment and provide a trail loop along Baboosic Lake Road and D. W. Highway back to Watson Park. Completion date: 2011
3. Design and construct a trail leaving Watson Park on the old railroad bridge over Baboosic Brook towards the Merrimack River. The trail will turn north and west and connect to the northerly end of the Twin Bridges trail system. Completion date: 2014

Portions of the proposed trail system are being studied and will be constructed by joining forces with other organizations already working on this project including the Merrill's Marauders Bridge Committee and the Merrimack Conservation Commission. A substantial portion of the trail system can be completed using volunteer labor from scouting organizations, civic groups and interested citizens. However funds will be needed for some elements of the project. As development continues along the path of the trails, we should solicit their assistance in ensuring a route for

pedestrian traffic along the designated trail route. Grant funds should be explored at private, state and federal levels. Finally, the establishment of a Town Center fund for use on trails, sidewalks and streetscaping in support of the Town Center Master Plan should be established and funded.

As development opportunities arise on the east side of Baboosic Brook, on the Longa Property, it would present an ideal opportunity to expand the trail from Watson Park along Baboosic Brook to the back of Twin Bridge Park. This trail could provide alternative transportation between the town center and future development east of Baboosic Brook.

### **FUTURE FINANCING**

In addition to sidewalks, a proposed trails network has also been identified to increase pedestrian access in the town center. This effort will be much more successful with a designated funding stream. The following options could be considered:



- Explore private foundation grants as well as opportunities at the state and federal level for trails development.
- Encourage Eagle Scout projects as a means of trail development.
- Establish an Adopt-A-Trail Program or projects and promote to the Boy/Girl Scouts, businesses, and civic groups.
- Development of a designated Town Center specific fund for sidewalks, trails and streetscaping which would implement the Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan.
- Continue to work with developers to make on-site and off-site improvements as well as obtain land grants and right-of-way easements as new development opportunities present themselves. New developers should be made aware of the Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan.

### **PARKING**

In order to encourage people to park in a central location and walk to multiple destinations, there needs to be general parking for use by the public. Watson Park will provide about 30 parking spaces, and the municipal complex also has parking. However, these are heavily utilized for business at the Town Hall and the Merrimack District Courthouse. The committee feels that sufficient parking is currently available in the town center. However, it is mostly located at existing public and private entities and the general public may not feel that it is available. One way to address this is to contact these locations and negotiate the use of public parking at certain times of the day or week. For instance the schools, churches and Merrimack Youth Association (town owned) have ample parking areas which may be utilized by the general public with proper permission. The newly formed Town Center Committee would address the following actions:



- Contact public and private entities to determine if agreements could be developed to allow for public parking during off-peak hours.
- If successful, provide signage directing the public to available parking.

## **SAFETY**

Many high school students walk along Woodbury Street, which does not currently have sidewalks. In addition, vehicle traffic leaving the high school travels east on Woodbury Street and must make a right turn on D.W. Highway as left turns are restricted. Many vehicles leaving the high school travel east on Woodbury Street, turn left behind Tire Town and exit onto D.W. Highway at CVS. This creates an unsafe travel pattern, but is used to avoid the right turn only from Woodbury Street onto D.W. Highway.

- Safety concerns should be further analyzed, and existing movement restrictions reviewed to identify potential safety improvements along Woodbury Street and at the intersection of D.W. Highway and Woodbury Street.

With the opening of Watson Park, it is anticipated that pedestrian movement will increase in the vicinity of the park with pedestrians desiring to cross D.W. Highway to travel between the park and Swan Chocolates, or to access the high school. However, locating a crosswalk in this area is extremely challenging due to the roadway speed, site distance and a significant curve in the roadway just to the south and therefore is not currently feasible.

- Research and explore the feasibility of implementing traffic calming measures, such as pedestrian refuge islands, sidewalks and landscaping, or a roundabout as a means to slow traffic, to facilitate the successful location of a crosswalk across D.W. Highway in the vicinity of Watson Park and Woodbury Street.
- Direct pedestrian crossing north of Watson Park at the CVS crosswalk.
- Explore the feasibility of closing the Church Street entrance to D.W. Highway to facilitate development of sidewalks and overall safety.

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- After Watson Park has opened to the public, pedestrian patterns should be reviewed to determine if any behavior changes or patterns have occurred and any changes or improvements are required.
- Explore the feasibility of locating an outdoor fitness park along O’Gara Drive. Many residents utilize a loop along Baboosic Lake Road, O’Gara Drive, and McElwain Street for walking and running. This could be enhanced by locating an outdoor exercise park in an open space along the west side of O’Gara Drive.
- Explore private foundation fitness and health grants as well as opportunities at the state and federal level to plan and build a fitness park.

## **DESIGN GUIDELINES**

The town center is subject to design guidelines in both the Subdivision Regulations and the Town Center Overlay District of the Zoning Ordinance and Building Code.

- Develop design guidelines for lighting within the town center, in accordance with Planning Board Regulations. The Heritage Commission, Planning Board and Public Services of New Hampshire should be consulted for input on design requirements.
- Develop a Visual Guide of desired design features for the town center. This could be provided to the planning board, developers and property owners in the planning stage of new construction and redevelopment projects.
- In the Town Center Overlay District add language about methods to enhance streetscape features in the Pedestrian Access Areas as shown on the Town Center Pedestrian and Trail Master Plan. An enhanced streetscape can help create attractive and inviting locations for pedestrians to utilize in the town center. The following amenities should be considered: public art, benches, landscaping, banners, signage, bicycle racks, and sidewalk and crosswalk treatments.
- In the Town Center Overlay District add language about unified signage directing visitors, pedestrians and drivers to key destinations and amenities in the town center. Should also consider uniform standards for business signs.
- Consider the feasibility of moving the former Chamber of Commerce information booth to Watson Park.
- Coordinate with the local Garden Club about possibly enhancing the existing island at Frasier Square.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH MATERIALS & METHODS**

In order to successfully expand the network of sidewalks and trails within the town center, this effort needs to be spearheaded by a specific group. In addition this group will need to solicit support from the general public. It is recommended that the town designate a committee dedicated to furthering the development of a vital town center.

- Establish a permanent Town Center Committee to spearhead this effort and educate the general public about this on-going effort.
- Develop and distribute educational materials at public venues and events throughout town including Merrimack cable access, the local paper, the town website, and the Merrimack Expo.
- A brochure on the benefits and key elements of a successful town center has been developed as part of this project for general distribution and education purposes.
- Solicit participation and contributions to support and sponsor this initiative from area residents, businesses, and civic organizations.

The following are a variety of outreach methods that can be used to help effectively communicate the importance of a well developed and connected town center with board members, elected officials, and the general public. In order to connect with the greatest number of residents it is advisable to implement several different techniques.



Board/Elected Officials Outreach Materials & Methods

- Presentations at Town Council and Board Meetings
- Guidebooks
- Board training
- Fact sheets
- Brochures

General Outreach Materials & Methods

- Press releases
- Fliers
- Posters
- Informational brochures
- Display boards
- Partnerships with the Merrimack School District
- Cable access public service announcements
- Municipal websites
- Civic group presentations
- Email meeting reminders
- Police department mobile electronic signs
- Direct mail

When communicating with the general public, it is important to remember that not every resident will prefer to receive information in the same manner. Therefore, a variety of outreach methods will need to be employed. It is beneficial to meet with local officials and opinion leaders before conducting a public outreach campaign to ensure that the most effective strategy is developed.

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