

NORTH ADAMS

A COMPLETE STREET INITIATIVE FOR ASHLAND STREET

FINAL REPORT

Prepared for the City of North Adams, Massachusetts
Submitted by The Cecil Group, Inc.

October 30, 2015



Massachusetts Downtown Initiative

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Summary

Project Overview

The City of North Adams is engaged in the initial stages of a streetscape improvement program for a segment of Ashland Street (Route 8A) with a particular focus on the segment between Main Street and the railroad bridge near Davenport Street. Ashland Street in this section is lined by a diverse collection of commercial, institutional, and residential uses and serves as an important north-south connector road within North Adams. As a regional roadway, Route 8A extends to the southern end of North Adams and meets with Route 8, an important regional roadway that goes north to Vermont and south to Adams, Massachusetts.

The City has initiated the improvement process with this study, with the goal of applying design concepts drawn from emerging practices for “complete streets”. This approach balances pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle modes with the need for safer and greater walkability, sense of place, aesthetics and environmental sustainability. In part, this planning initiative has been organized to envision significant improvements to Ashland Street so that it will be more balanced in serving the needs of motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists. A related purpose is to illustrate methods to enhance the streetscape and aesthetic qualities of the corridor, contributing to the economic value of adjacent land and contributing to the civic image of North Adams.

There are substantial opportunities for improvement. As a primary gateway into the city, this segment of Ashland Street is lined by a number of auto-oriented uses, service areas and other uses that are connected to Ashland Street by driveways and curb cuts that provide access to parking areas. This stretch of Ashland Street has a good network of sidewalks and crosswalks, and is a relatively friendly environment for pedestrians or bicyclists despite some unattractive uses along the corridor. The streetscape of lighting, landscaping and signage is the result of incremental improvements that are inconsistent with one another. There are notable instances of deterioration and poor quality conditions.

This study was prepared for the City and its Office of Community Development through a grant from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, which is a program of the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). The study was prepared by The Cecil Group, a professional planning and design firm. This document outlines The Cecil Group’s existing analysis, recommendations, alternatives and implementation strategies to assist the City of North Adams in advancing the complete streets strategies and techniques to Ashland Street. A Steering Committee assembled for this project provided input and advice during key steps in the planning process.

Process

The planning process involved three sequential steps:

- Review of existing conditions and opportunities - A review of existing conditions was undertaken including site visits and a photographic inventory of existing conditions. The planning team reviewed relevant City plans, policies and zoning and used mapped information that the City made available. The Steering Committee provided insights on key issues and site-specific conditions.
- Optional strategies - The planning team prepared a presentation and facilitated discussions regarding two different approaches that the City might consider as it seeks to create a more complete street and successful district. A community meeting was held on September 22, 2015 and the community input form that was distributed to participants at the meeting can be found in Appendix C. Hosted by the City of North Adams, attendees participated in a session that discussed the issues, alternatives and vision for this portion of Ashland Street.

- Report - The team drew upon the input from participants in the public meeting, the Steering Committee and City staff to assemble this *Report* which contains observations and guidance for the next steps in implementing improvements to Ashland Street.

Planning and Design Context

The complete street vision for the study area took into account a range of conditions and constraints which are described in more detail in the next section of the *Report*. Key aspects of the existing circumstances included:

- Image and condition - The overall appearance of this portion of Ashland Street is inconsistent with a number of vacant or poorly maintained structures and properties with an area with many auto-oriented uses.
- Lack of pedestrian and bicycle facilities - Sidewalks are incomplete and some are in poor condition, and there are no provisions for bicycles.
- Safety - Crosswalks are sparse, there are no dedicated bike lanes, and there are many curb cuts and driveways that promote left hand turns across approaching traffic.
- State ownership of the right-of-way - Ashland Street is owned and maintained by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and subject to its approval of any design and improvements.
- Accessibility - Portions of the corridor do not meet accessibility standards for people with handicaps including crosswalks and sidewalks.
- Lack of “central” park - The City lacks a prominent “central” park that attracts people from around the city.
- Landscape and streetscape amenities - Ashland Street lacks a cohesive and consistent landscape and streetscape amenities program.
- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts - Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) is an important stakeholder in North Adams and can evolve as a strong anchor for the southern end of the Ashland Street corridor.
- Overhead wires - Overhead wires and utility poles detract from the streetscape aesthetics.

Recommendations

The recommendations within this *Report* include a series of fundamental changes that would achieve community goals and result in a more complete Ashland Street.

- Use the available right-of-way to provide for all modes of transportation while enhancing the landscape – There is sufficient right-of-way to provide for dedicated bike lanes, sidewalks, and landscaping along with appropriate automobile travel lanes. Narrower lanes and other measures can be used to help slow traffic and better utilize the entire right-of-way.
- Provide continuous sidewalks along both sides of the entire corridor - Provide fully accessible sidewalks with crosswalks at every intersection along the entire corridor.
- Provide landscape and streetscape enhancements – The addition of appropriate shade and ornamental tree and shrub species will insert vibrancy and interest into the streetscape. A consistent program of streetscape amenities will foster streetscape activity and provide a distinct character to the corridor.

- Complete bicycling infrastructure – Make provisions for appropriate bicycle circulation and provide bike racks near destinations.
- Enhance the pedestrian realm – A more walkable and complete streetscape can be produced by implementing a consistent network of sidewalks that are adequately wide enough along Ashland Street, provide quality and signalized crosswalks, and provide better lighting that together create a safer and more attractive pedestrian experience.
- Provide better access management – The strategic consolidation reduction of excessive curb cuts and driveways will result in less congestion and safer conditions for motorists and pedestrians.
- Transform the streetlighting - Improved streetlighting with attractive fixtures and contemporary technologies can provide a safer, more attractive and more pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Relocate overhead utilities - Pursue funding that will allow utilities to be placed underground along this segment of Ashland Street, substantially improving the visual character of the area.
- Improve signage - Provide clear signage indicating the intersecting streets, and incorporate improved, appropriate standards for business signage to enhance the legibility and attractiveness of the corridor.
- Provide and invite special features - Special features should be encouraged such as sponsored landscapes, improvements on private property that complement the streetscape and perhaps public art, if opportunities arise.
- Provide Parallel Parking - The existing right-of-way north of Chestnut Street can accommodate parallel parking.
- Provide a “central” park – Ashland Street could feature a significantly-sized green space to meet the community’s desire for a large green space. This would provide a respite for pedestrians and bicyclists along the corridor and provide an opportunity for residents and students to engage in a public green space.
- Provide Strategic Street Realignment - The intersections with Washington Avenue was identified as a challenging, and sometimes dangerous intersection. Ashland Street under the railway bridge could also undergo a street realignment. This turn is narrow and could be realigned to provide for greater use of limited space to provide for sidewalks and bicycle sharrows.

Options and Variations

The recommendations in this *Report* provide a set of ideas that would result in the substantial transformation of Ashland Street. They express an initial vision, but there are other options or variations that the City should consider as it advances this initiative and pursues detailed studies and designs. As a reference, this *Report* includes several alternative approaches and variations on the design concepts that were explored during the planning process and are included here for future reference and consideration. Specific optional strategies and variations in this *Report* include:

- Consistent streetscape amenities plan - A consistent streetscape amenities plan that calls for limited variation in street furniture, landscaping, wayfinding, and public art.
- Park placement - Location of park space is conceptual, and other publicly-owned or underutilized private parcels could be identified as potential sites for a public park.

Implementation Strategies

Although this segment of Ashland Street is owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the complete street improvements envisioned in this *Report* must be advanced primarily by the advocacy and actions of the City of North Adams. The following actions can be undertaken to help achieve the community goals and visions.

Action Items

- Meet with MassDOT representatives to discuss this initiative and the implications relative to state priorities, requirements and procedures, and solicit conceptual support.
- Allocate funding to advance specific engineering and design studies to establish specific design recommendations and preliminary engineering including costs estimates to support funding and grant submittals.
- Meet with the legislative delegations to solicit understanding and support for the improvements.
- Identify and target appropriate funding or grant sources for the improvements.
- Secure funding, finalize the design and engineering and implement reconstruction and management of streetscape after reconstruction.
- Promote beneficial development patterns in concert with streetscape and circulation improvements through zoning, design guidelines or other City actions.
- Create a Complete Streets City policy and extend similar ideas to other parts of the Ashland Street corridor.
- Advance initiatives and secure funding to attract artists and public art to target sites along Ashland Street
- Research Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) initiatives

Existing Streetscape Analysis

Corridor Characteristics

Ashland Street, also known as Route 8A, traverses North Adams north-south connecting Downtown North Adams, and important institutions such as the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA), to the north, to the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) to the south. Ashland Street serves as an important north-south roadway in North Adams. It is one of the primary roadways into the city, and therefore serves as one the first glimpses visitors get of North Adams.

This study considered a specific segment of Ashland Street between Main Street and the Railway Bridge south of MCLA. The length of this segment of Main Street is about three quarters of a mile long. At this distance, the segment could be comfortable for walking and bicycling for healthy adults. This segment can be walked in about fifteen to twenty minutes or biked in five to eight minutes.

The study area has limited crosswalks, incomplete sidewalk networks, no bicycle lanes, extensive surface parking lots in many areas, unsightly overhead wires, and inconsistent tree coverage along the corridor. This makes the corridor an unattractive area to walk along and unsafe for bicyclists.

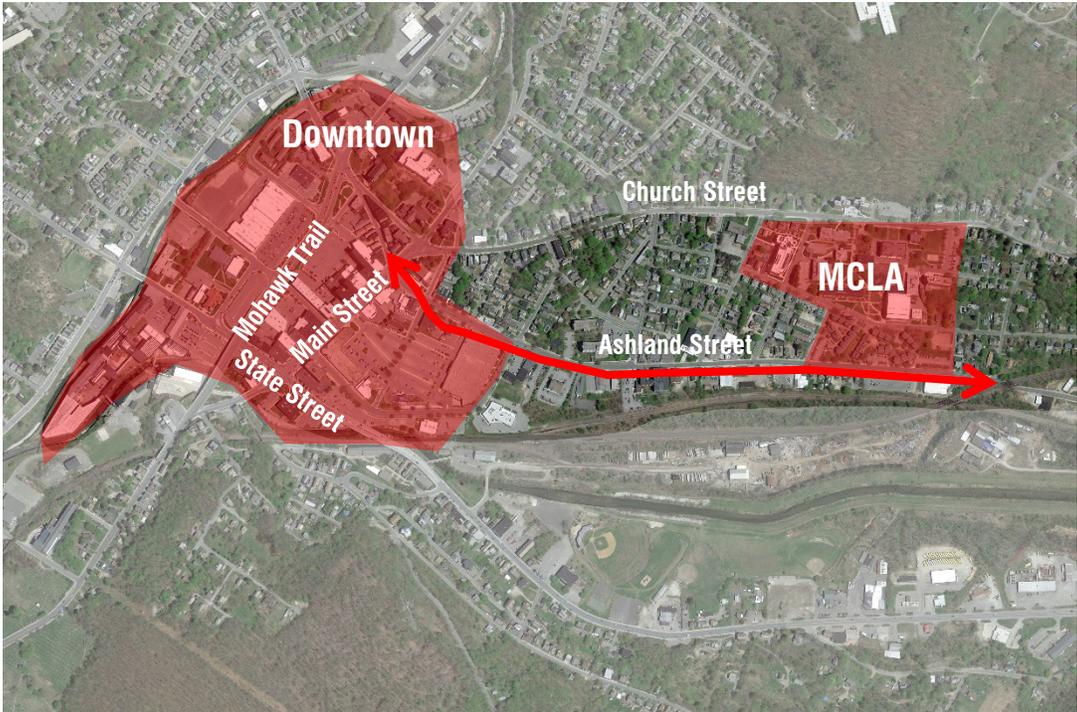


Figure 1: Aerial of existing conditions along Ashland Street. The red arrow marks the study area corridor. In red, are Downtown North Adams and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA).

Aerial source: Google Earth

Land Uses

Uses along the corridor reflect the different institutions and automobile-oriented character of Ashland Street. The corridor consists primarily of commercial, residential, and institutional uses. Commercial properties along Ashland Street are primarily automobile-oriented with ample surface parking lots and include businesses such as strip mall shops, restaurants, retail, and a credit union. Some of the institutional uses along Ashland Street include a United States Post Office bureau, the campus of MCLA, and the City's Department of Public Works building. Residences along the corridor include the apartments of the North Adams Housing Authority, and smaller two to three story multi-family residences.

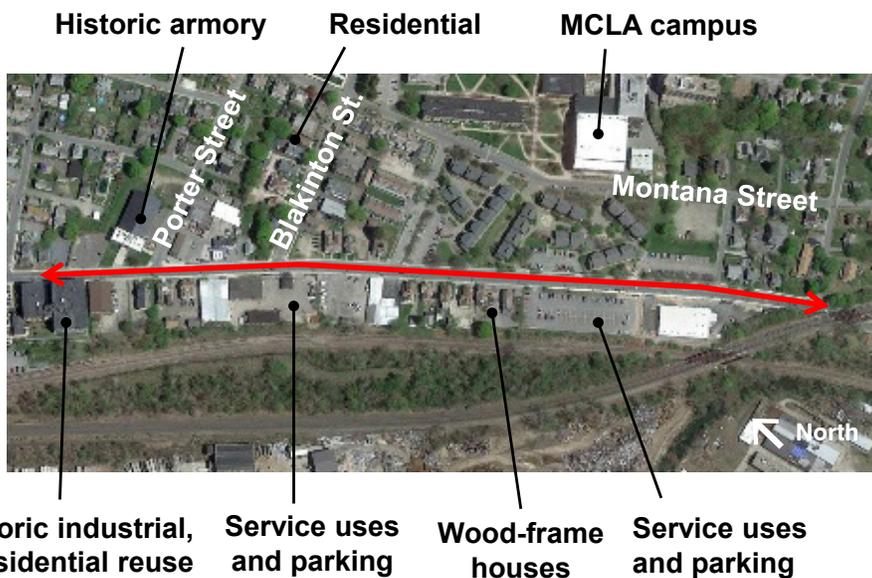
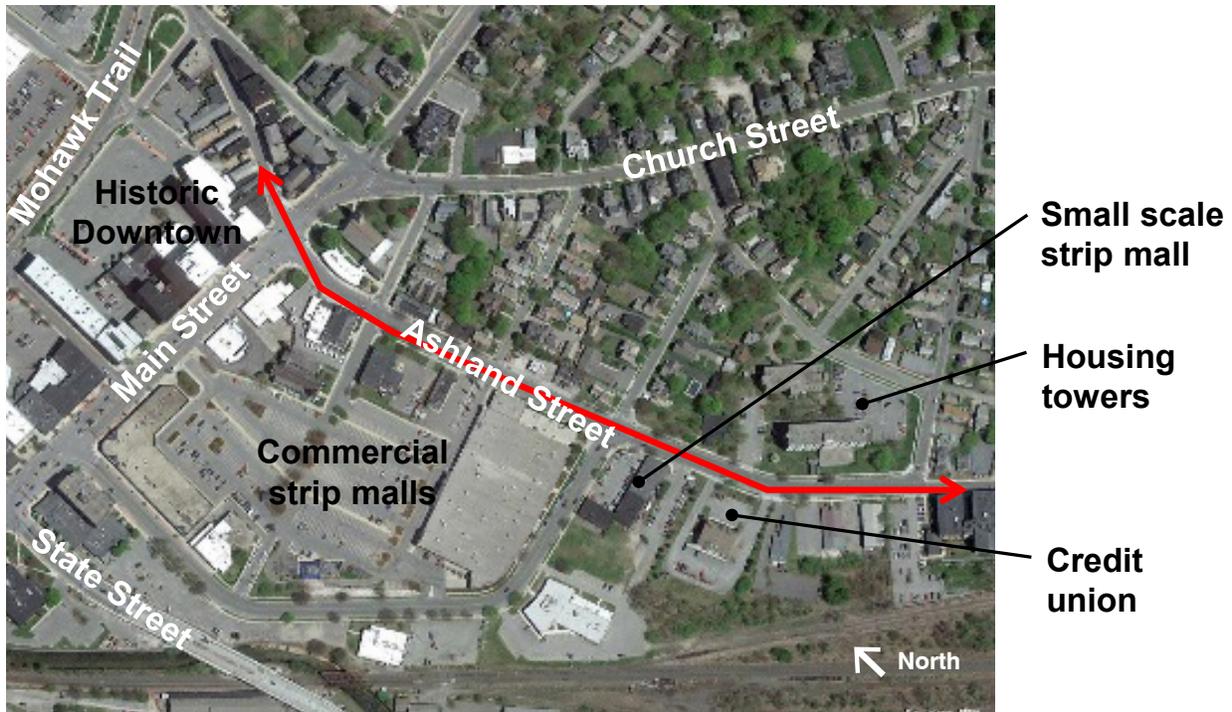


Figure 2: Aerial showing existing land uses on Ashland Street. Northern end of Ashland Street (top), southern end (bottom).
Aerial source: Google Earth

Corridor Segments

As a primary artery into North Adams, Ashland Street is currently designed for efficient vehicular circulation, but does not take into account effective pedestrian or bicyclist accessibility and safety. Each segment exhibits areas for improvement from fragmented sidewalks, poor pedestrian crosswalks, excessive curb cuts that endanger pedestrians and bicyclists, and a lack of pedestrian-scaled streetscape amenities such as street trees or lighting. At three quarters of a mile long, different segments of the corridor have unique characteristics that should be considered, as shown in Figures 3 and 5. The following four segments have been identified:

DOWNTOWN SEGMENT

The Downtown segment encompasses the area between Main Street and Chesnut Street. The current conditions in this segment, as shown in Figure 3, accommodate one lane of vehicle traffic in each direction with on-street parallel parking on certain blocks. There are sidewalks along both sides with a fair amount of street tree coverage, providing a more comfortable walking experience. There are no bicycle lanes or sharrows. This is the widest stretch of Ashland Street and can easily accommodate bicycle lanes and improved sidewalks and pedestrian amenities. Many of the uses in the Downtown Segment are commercial or governmental and serves as a gateway into Downtown.

CIVIC SEGMENT

The Civic segment encompasses the area between Chesnut Street and near Blackinton Street. The current conditions in this segment, as shown in Figures 3 and 5, accommodate one lane of vehicle traffic in each direction with on-street parallel parking on the northern blocks. There are sidewalks along both sides with limited to no street tree coverage, providing a less comfortable walking experience than the Downtown segment. There are no bicycle lanes or sharrows. The portion between Washington Avenue and Blackinton Street is the narrowest stretch of Ashland Street, but can however, accommodate bicycle sharrow markings and improved sidewalks and pedestrian amenities on either sides. The uses along this segment are diverse and include wood frame residential, small storage and warehouse facilities, government offices, a gas station, and retrofitted historic mill buildings.



Figure 3: Aerial of northern end of Ashland Street showing Downtown and Civic segments.
Aerial source: Google Earth

CAMPUS SEGMENT

The Campus segment encompasses the area between Hoosac Street and Bond Street. The current conditions in this segment, as shown in Figure 5, accommodate one lane of vehicle traffic in each direction. There are sidewalks along both sides with fair street tree coverage near the MCLA campus. There are no bicycle lanes or sharrows. This segment can accommodate bicycle lanes and improved sidewalks and pedestrian amenities on both sides. The uses along the Campus Segment are dominated by the MCLA campus, and includes some MCLA parking lots, service, and facility spaces.

TRANSITION SEGMENT

The Transition segment encompasses the area between Bond Street and beyond the railway bridge. The current conditions in this segment, as shown in Figures 4 and 5, accommodate one lane of vehicle traffic in each direction. Underneath the bridge, there are no sidewalks on either side and neither bicycle lanes nor sharrows. This serves as a gateway to the corridor.

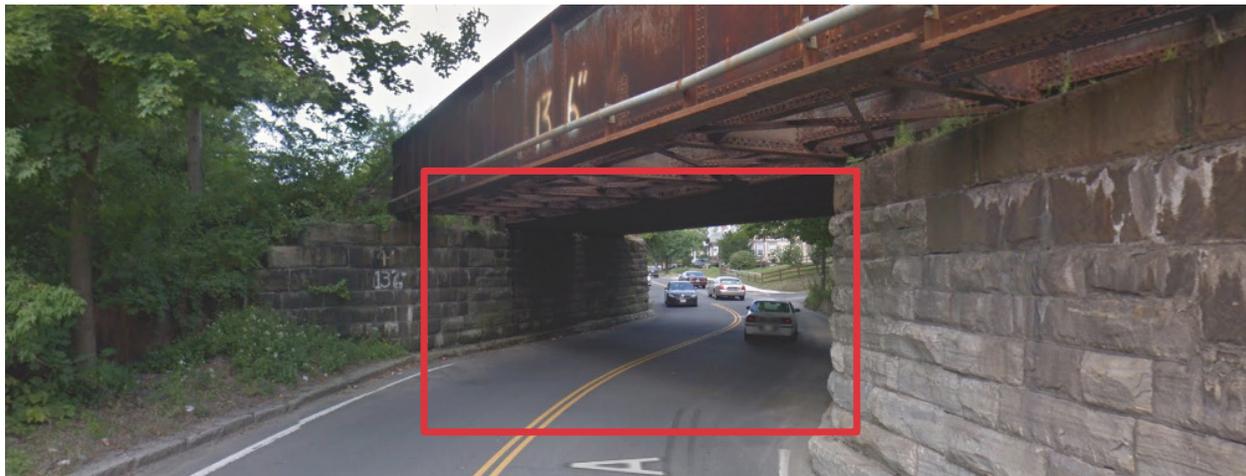


Figure 4: View of the tight roadway underpass under the railway bridge. This area could serve as a gateway into the Ashland Street corridor and could be improved to provide a visual welcome for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists into North Adams.

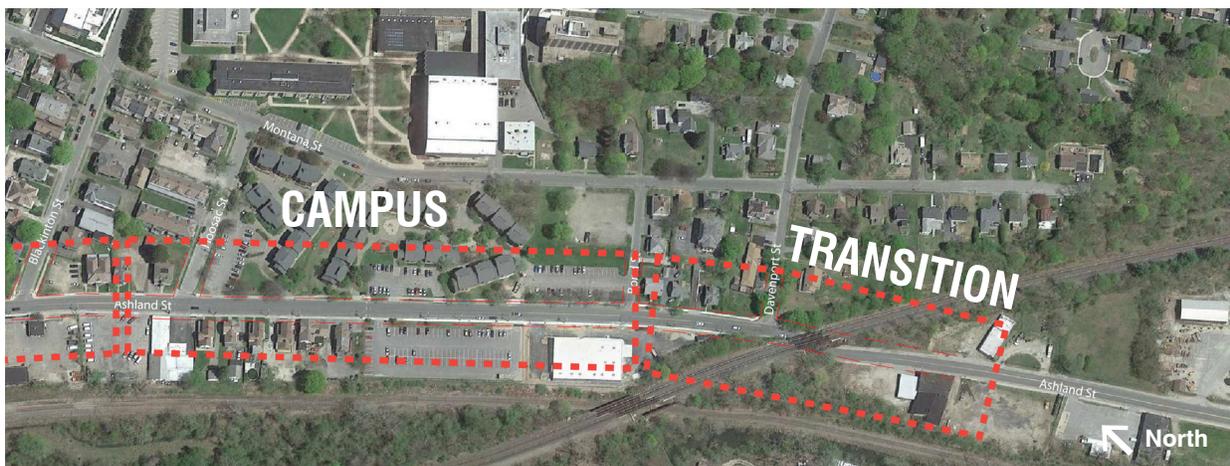


Figure 5: Aerial of southern end of Ashland Street showing Campus and Transition segments. Aerial source: Google Earth

Vehicular Mobility

PARKING LOTS

Ashland Street is lined by many commercial and service uses that are accessed almost exclusively by patrons and employees in vehicles. Businesses along the corridor, therefore, are surrounded by extensive surface parking lots that provide ample parking for patrons and employees, but create an unattractive streetscape condition, as shown in Figure 10. In their current state, the parking lots create an unattractive visual of Ashland Street. This poses a variety of issues for the future of the corridor, including poor pedestrian accessibility, substantial and underutilized business curb cuts, and a lack of a consistent landscape treatment.

CURB CUTS AND VEHICLE SPEEDING

Multiple unshared business curb cuts create an excessive amount of curb cut locations along Ashland Street. While vehicular circulation and access must be considered in streetscape design, the number of curb cuts are debilitating to accessibility, pedestrian movement and safety, and safe vehicular circulation, as shown in Figure 8. Harnessing shared opportunities and reconfiguring curb cuts would allow for an efficient and accessible streetscape.

Additionally, the ample width along large segments of Ashland Street, particularly the northern end near Downtown as shown in Figure 6, encourage vehicle speeding. Fast moving vehicles dissuade bicycling and walking, as bicyclists and pedestrians can feel unsafe in close proximity to speeding vehicles.



Figure 6: The ample width of the northern end of Ashland Street encourages vehicle speeding. Narrowing of travel lanes can increase safety and attractiveness of bicycling and walking along Ashland Street. Aerial source: Google Earth

Pedestrian Mobility

SIDEWALKS AND CROSSWALKS

Sidewalks and crosswalks should provide accessibility for persons with handicaps. Accessibility issues along the existing streetscape stem from a variety of issues ranging from insufficient curb ramp locations, sidewalks lacking any buffering, narrow sidewalks that are inaccessible for those on wheelchairs or with strollers (Figure 7), faded crosswalk markings, disappearing curb locations (Figure 8), a lack of consistent sidewalk materials, and sidewalks ending abruptly. While there are some examples of successful accessibility on the existing street conditions, the presence of any of these key characteristics has the potential to undermine a successful streetscape.



Figure 7: Sidewalks are immediately adjacent to speeding vehicles, with no landscape buffer. This condition creates an unattractive and unappealing walking experience for pedestrians, discouraging people to walk in the area.



Figure 8: Many sidewalks in the area end abruptly. This makes walking challenging or impossible for people on wheelchairs or with strollers.

Visual and Aesthetic Environment

STREETLIGHTS AND OVERHEAD WIRES

The western edge of Ashland Street is lined by an extensive network of overhead wires. The utility poles also serve as the street lighting supports. The overhead wires detract from the streetscape aesthetics and the lighting quality is typical of automobile-oriented streets and arterials.



Figure 9: Overhead wires and tall light poles create visual blight along Ashland Street.

SIGNAGE

Signage along Ashland Street is varied and at different scales depending on the use and type of business or institution it serves. Color, size, scale, and placement are diverse and show no consistency throughout the corridor. Signage is an important element to create a consistent streetscape design that signals an identity for Ashland Street. Zoning changes can provide the guidelines to encourage a pedestrian-scaled signage style that is more consistent throughout the study area.

LANDSCAPING AND EDGE CONDITIONS

The existing plantings vary in type, quantity and quality within the properties that line Ashland Street. There is not a consistent program of placement between trees and building façades or curb cuts. This has led to pockets of mature street trees along uninterrupted spans on the streetscape, but also creates many areas along Ashland Street with little to no street tree coverage.

The edge condition between sidewalks and the roadway features little to no landscaping in many segments of the corridor, as shown in Figures 10 and 11. In areas with landscaped edge conditions, many of these have

a very thin strip of green space with mulch, weeds, or unkempt ground covering. These conditions create an unattractive landscaping feature. Maintenance of existing conditions is a significant problem that needs to be addressed, as shown in Figure 9. Unplanned flora has grown into sidewalks in public areas and some private properties have become overgrown and unattractive.

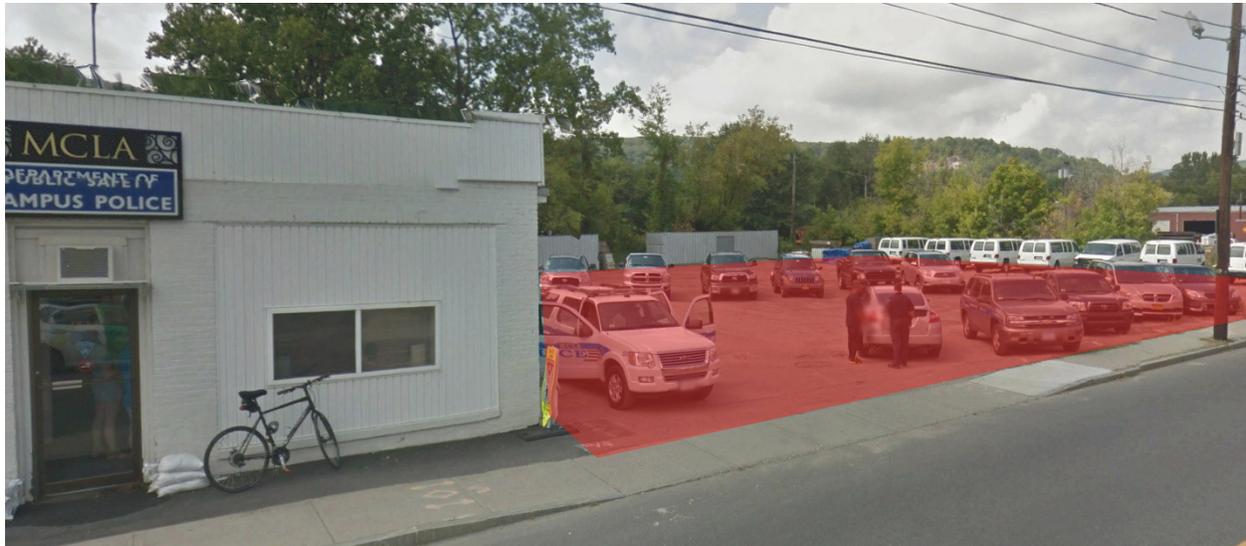


Figure 10: Surface parking lots along Ashland Street are unattractive edge conditions, and create “dead” zones and visual blight.

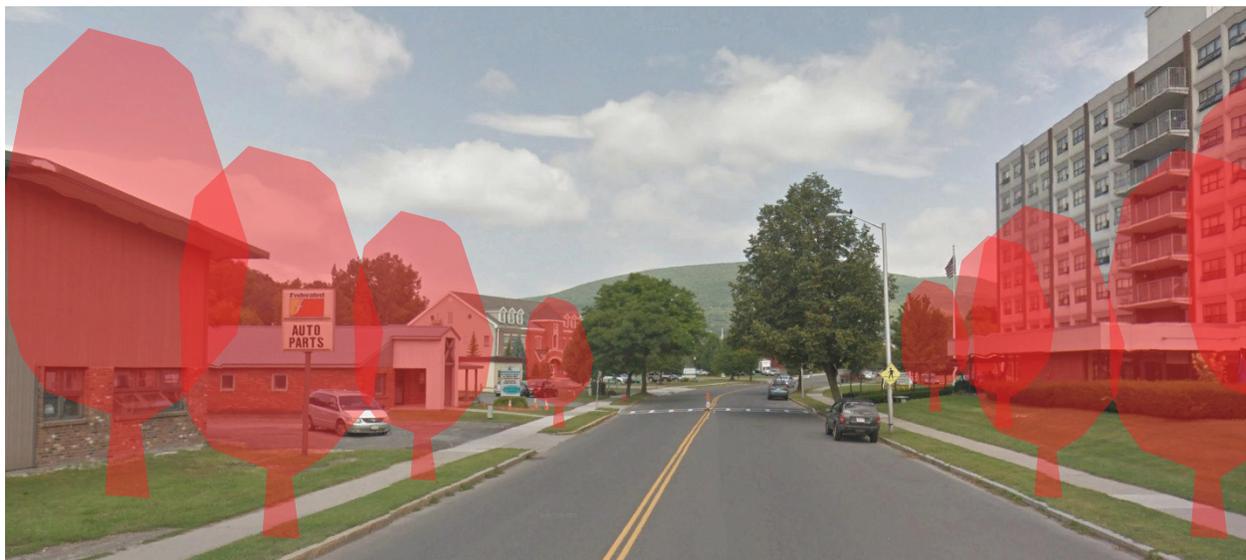


Figure 11: Existing edge condition along much of the corridor lacks attractive landscaping or tree plantings.

Design Concepts

Alternative Approaches

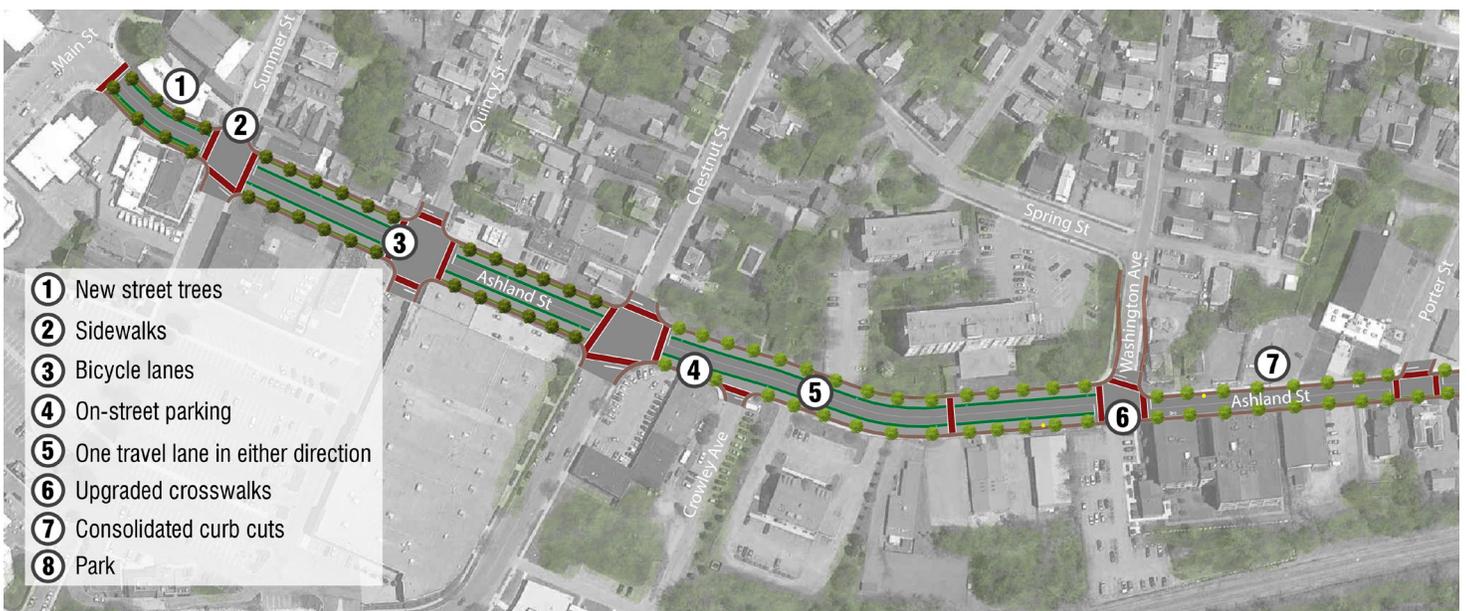
There are many ways to create an appropriate complete street environment along Ashland Street. The final design will depend on many detailed considerations and technical evaluations of traffic conditions to establish the most beneficial approach. During this process, preliminary concepts were explored that may accomplish the City’s goals and indicate promising directions to explore in the future.

Two alternative were presented before the City of North Adams during the planning process. One alternative called for retaining a consistent streetscape design throughout the entire length of the corridor. This alternative called for highlighting the corridor as one, unified streetscape. The second alternative called for the concept of recognizing the diverse uses and characteristics along Ashland Street and highlighting the changes. This alternative recognizes different “segments” along the corridor, and varies the streetscape design accordingly.

“Corridor Segments” Streetscape

This second alternative is dubbed “Corridor Segments”. Four major corridor segments are identified along Ashland Street, as shown in Figures 3 and 5. Streetscape amenities such as street trees, lighting, street furniture, wayfinding signage, public art, and crosswalk styles vary depending on the character of the segment. The entire Ashland Street corridor would feature consistent landscaping, sidewalks, bicycle lanes or sharrows, and traffic lanes narrower than the twelve-foot widths that has often been used as a standard in the past in the United States.

Figure 12: Design Recommendations Diagram
Aerial source: Google Earth
Diagram produced by: The Cecil Group



TRAFFIC CALMING

Ashland Street would feature one lane of vehicle traffic in either direction, with on-street parallel parking in the Downtown segment. Most areas of the corridor would feature dedicated bicycle lanes, or sharrow markings in narrow stretches of the corridor. The current intersections along Ashland Street would be replaced by intersections that are safer for pedestrians and bicyclists with crosswalks, narrower lanes, and bicycle lanes or sharrow markings. Together, these serve as a traffic calming measure and as a placemaking element, forming a corridor that is more walkable and attractive for multimodal uses. Seasonal plantings and banners that create a sense of place and branding for Ashland Street would also encourage motorists to drive at lower speeds. Additionally, intersections could be raised slightly from the road to further slow down vehicles, making the crossings safer for pedestrians and bicyclists.

WALKING AND BICYCLING

Bicycle lanes or bicycle sharrow markings could be provided along the entire corridor, as shown in Figure 12. Areas with a narrow right-of-way such as in the Civic segment or in the Transition segment, would feature sharrow markings on the roadway. On-street bicycle lanes would transition to sharrows with adequate signage to alert bicyclists and motorists.

Sidewalks at six feet wide would be provided on both sides of the street along the entire length of the corridor. Crosswalks would be located on all sides of every intersection along Ashland Street, and in some midblocks on blocks that are particularly long. The crossings would be designed to provide a comfortable and safe crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists. Crossing signals activated by the push of a button would be installed at all crosswalks, along with tactile paving, flashing crosswalk signs, and signage to alert drivers of the presence of pedestrians.



CURB CUTS AND ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Excessive curb cuts are due in part to the large areas of surface parking lots and the uncoordinated development of properties along Ashland Street. The study suggests limiting the amount of curb cuts by having property owners work together to consolidate entrances to properties. An access management plan that consolidates curb cuts and connects adjacent properties is recommended. Limiting the amount of curb cuts on Ashland Street improves vehicular circulation and safety, and the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.

STREET TREES AND NEW PUBLIC PARK

Street trees would be planted along Ashland Street. The tree species would vary depending on the segment, varying the appearance and feel of the corridor, as shown in Figure 13. Along with the enhancement of street trees, the study has shown a parcel of land, the current site of the Department of Public Works office, that could be used as a public park, as shown in Figure 14. This park has the potential to serve as a central gathering space for the City between the attractions in Downtown and MCLA. This would help transform Ashland Street into a more walkable street with various landscaping amenities that provide a respite area for walkers and bicyclists to stop and observe and enjoy the natural areas beyond the park.

PUBLIC ART

With two major cultural and educational institutions along the corridor, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, Ashland Street is prime for public art to highlight one of the strengths and distinguishing factors of the corridor. Local artists, students, city art programs, and community members can be invited to engage in and produce local public art that could range from murals, temporary installations, lighting shows, and interactive and engaging public art installations.

The public art could be displayed for short periods of time and reflect seasonal local events or festivals. Temporary public art can create a dynamic streetscape that encourages repeat visitors along the corridor. Temporary art installations also have reduced long-term maintenance costs.

Public art could be displayed at sites such as the Department of Public Works property, the Armory, along either side of Ashland Street along the MCLA campus, on blank walls along the corridor, and at the railway bridge to provide a unique visual welcoming to visitors to Ashland Street and North Adams.



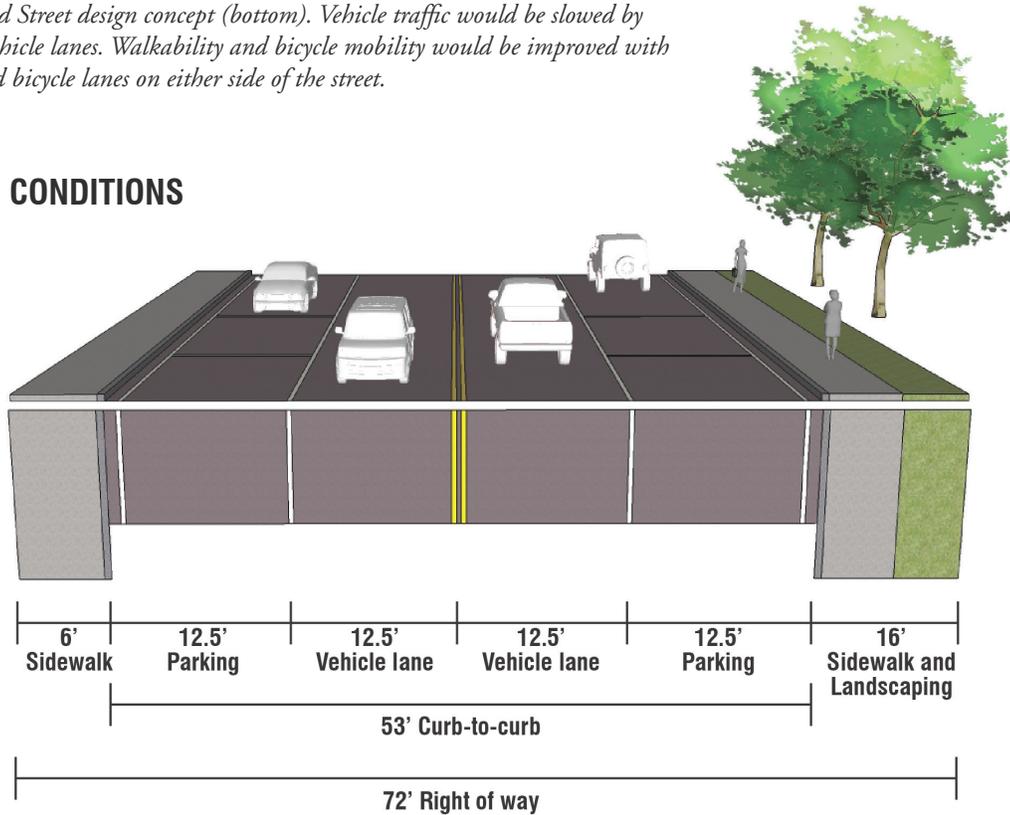
Figure 13: “Downtown segment” of Ashland Street. Crosswalks are shown in red, bike lanes in dark green, landscaping in light green, and sidewalks and shared path in pink/brown. Vehicle traffic has one lane of traffic in either direction with one street parallel parking. Street trees here change, showing the transition in character from the “Downtown” segment, labelled as “Tree variety A”, to the “Civic” segment, labelled as “Tree variety B”.
Aerial source: Google Earth



Figure 14: Site of potential public park along Ashland Street could serve as a central gathering space for the community.
Aerial source: Google Earth

Figure 15: Ashland Street at the Downtown segment. Existing Ashland Street conditions (top). Ashland Street design concept (bottom). Vehicle traffic would be slowed by narrowing vehicle lanes. Walkability and bicycle mobility would be improved with sidewalks and bicycle lanes on either side of the street.

EXISTING CONDITIONS



DESIGN CONCEPT

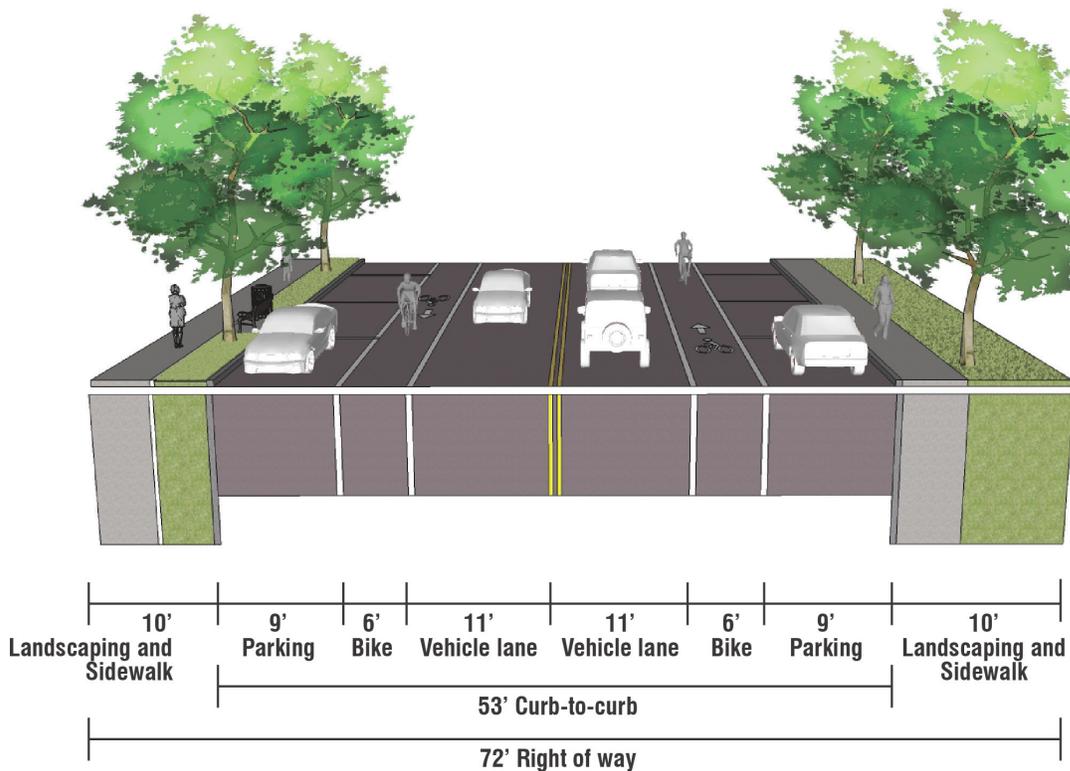
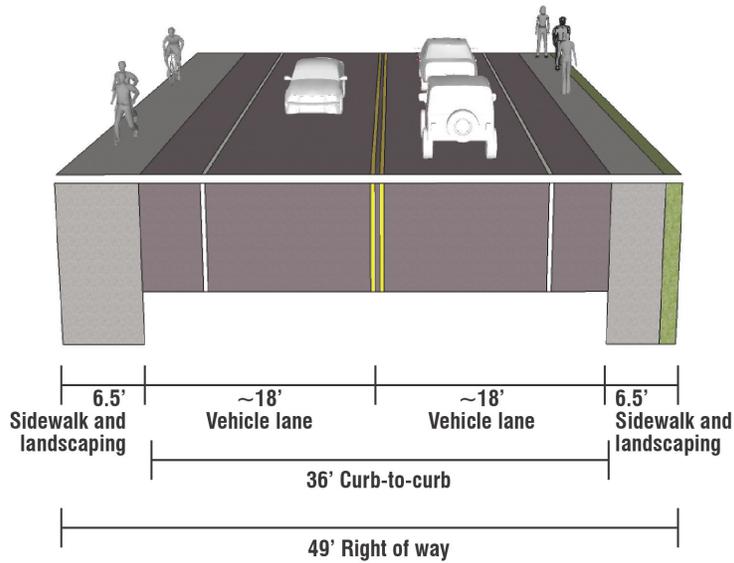
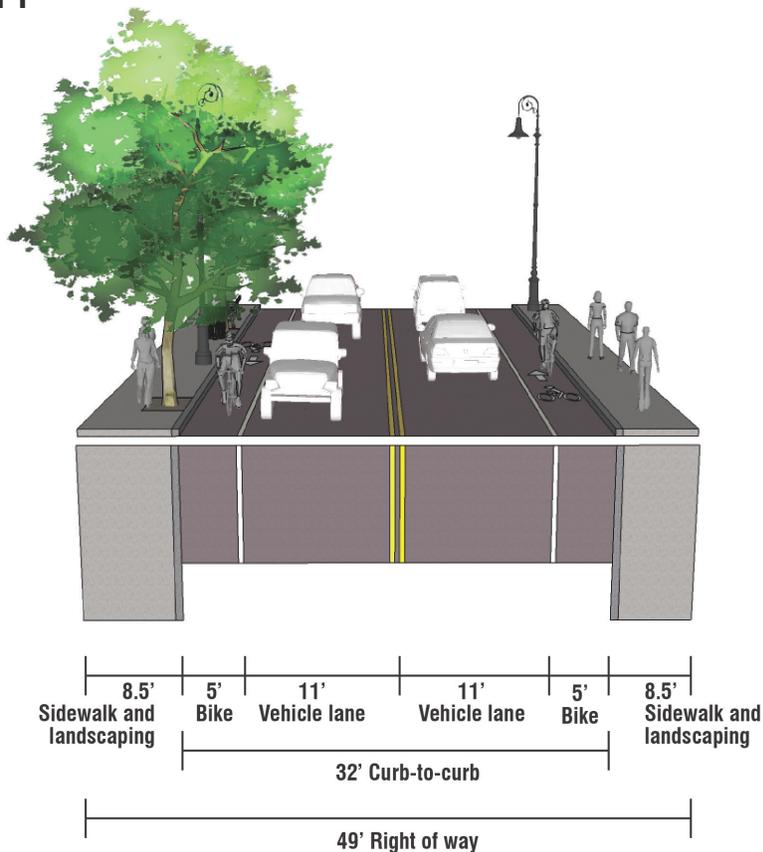


Figure 16: Ashland Street at the Campus segment. Existing Ashland Street conditions (top). Ashland Street design concept (bottom). Vehicle traffic would be slowed by narrowing vehicle lanes. Walkability would be improved with a sidewalk and pedestrian crosswalk amenities on either side of the roadway. Bicycle mobility would be improved with the bicycle lanes on either side of the roadway.

EXISTING CONDITIONS



DESIGN CONCEPT



EXISTING CONDITIONS



DESIGN CONCEPT



Figure 17: Intersection of Ashland Street and Blackinton Street looking south towards MCLA. Existing conditions (top) with design recommendations below. Vehicle traffic would be slowed by narrowing vehicle lanes. Walkability would be improved with a sidewalk on both sides of the street. Bicycle mobility would be improved with bicycle lane on most segments of Ashland Street, with sharrow in other portions as seen above. Overhead wires and utility poles would be removed and placed underground, thus improving the appearance and character of the corridor. Street trees would beautify the corridor and provide shade for pedestrians and bicyclists, encouraging more walking and biking. A new public park could be built on Ashland Street, providing a centralized green space between Downtown and MCLA.

Implementation Strategies

When the time comes to implement this streetscape initiative for Ashland Street, the City must be prepared with an efficient means of funding, active leadership, and other resources to implement the community improvements and recommendations. The recommendations listed in this study cannot be achieved at once and should be thought through accordingly.

Actions

There are a series of actions that should be considered in the short term to set the stage for implementation of these recommendations. The actions that the City of North Adams should consider immediately are:

- Meet with representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and the City's legislative delegation to present the ideas in this *Report* and solicit support.
- Fund and undertake engineering and design studies to finalize the scope, character and cost of intended improvements, establish detailed cost estimates and phasing plans. These are often considered as "25%" plans, and are used for grants, funding and financing.
- Devote time and resources to secure state funding and allocate appropriate City resources for improvements, including targeting multiple potential sources such as the state's MassWorks program, allocation of Chapter 90 infrastructure funds, and special legislative allocation in view of the importance of these improvements to the City and region, and City funding.
- Prepare final designs and implement construction.
- Sponsor a long-term circulation plan to determine complementary actions to provide for improved crossing movements and intersections.
- Promote beneficial mixed-use development that can take advantage of the improved Ashland Street Corridor and its enhanced pedestrian orientation.
- Consider the creation of a Complete Streets Ordinance or policies to guide further infrastructure improvements consistent with the goals for Ashland Street.
- Research and align with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) initiatives for smart growth and complete streets for North Adams.
- Develop an understanding of the sustainable and complete streets initiatives implemented by other communities.

Tools

There are a series of programs and funding sources that can advance North Adam's Ashland Street initiative, ranging from policy and program support to financial support.

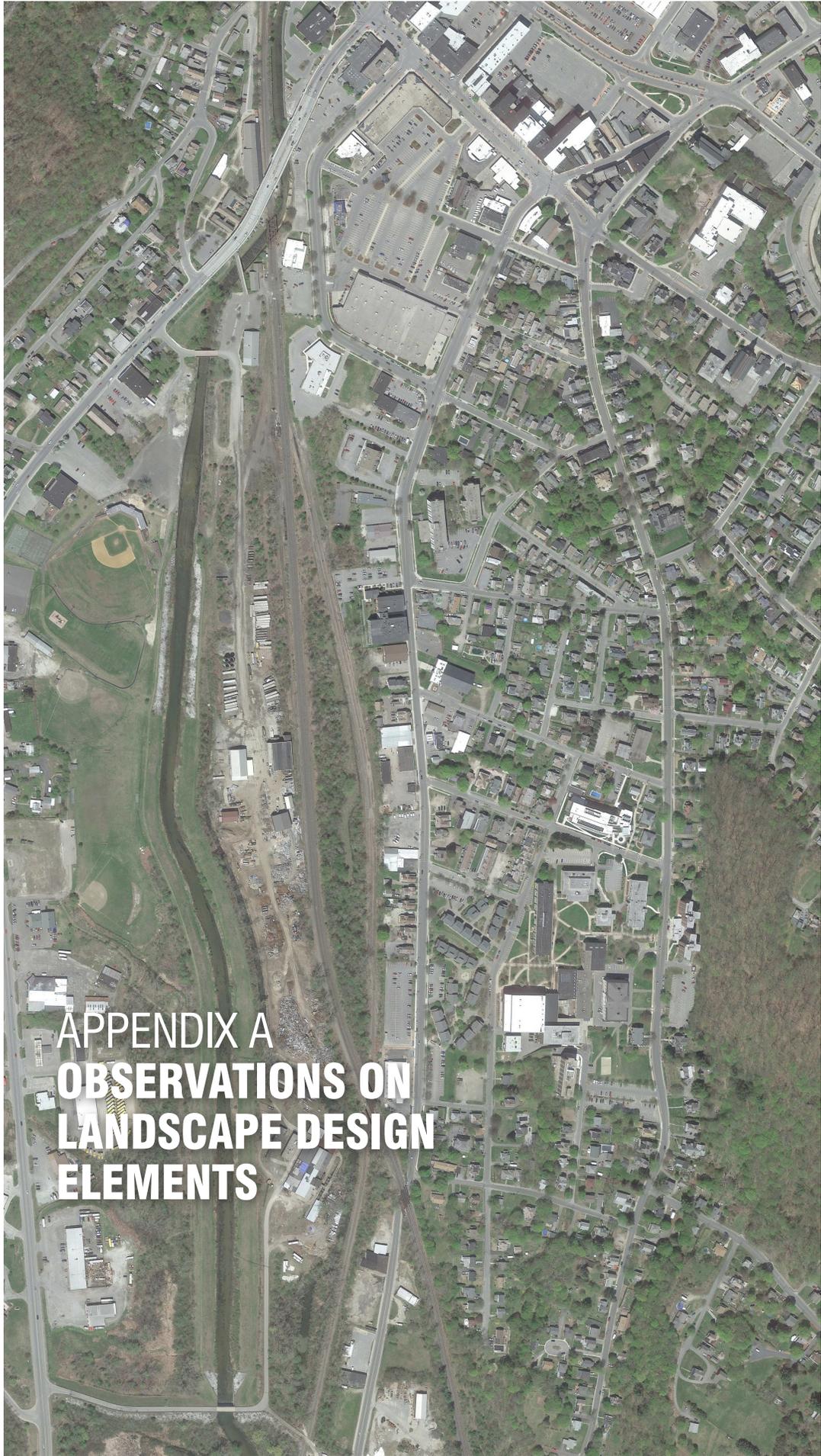
These include the following:

- MassWorks Infrastructure Program – This includes a number of formerly separate state funding programs, including the Public Works Economic Development Grant (PWED) program, which was created to invest in infrastructure that stimulates economic development. The level of grants has typically been one-half to over a million dollars.
- Massachusetts Chapter 90 Funding – These funds are allocated yearly to municipalities to fund road and bridge construction and maintenance projects.
- Community Preservation Act (CPA) – This legislation is an important funding source for

open space, historic preservation, and housing and recreation projects. With BRPC, North Adams can create and implement the CPA for development and assessment of open spaces and recreation, and other potential open spaces in this study.

- Mass In Motion – This is a statewide movement that promotes opportunities for healthy and active places for people to live, learn, work and play. Funding from various health initiatives and foundations can help promote a complete streets approach for wellness
- Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) – This grant is often used to support urban streetscape projects, and can be used for planning and construction of infrastructure and recreation projects that support the goals of the CDBG program to service residents with lower income jobs and housing.
- Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) – This is a federally funded program for infrastructure improvements to highways and roads. It addresses many challenges related to safety, reducing traffic congestion, improving efficient freight movement, increasing connectivity and protecting the environment. The program covers several areas, including wayfinding/signage, bicycle safety and environmental and/or recreational stewardship.
- Recreational Trail Program (RTP) – This program provides funds to states to develop and maintain recreational trails and facilities, and could be used for the temporary realignment of the existing rail trail crossing

The relative benefits and drawbacks of these strategies will need to be further considered.



**APPENDIX A
OBSERVATIONS ON
LANDSCAPE DESIGN
ELEMENTS**

A. Observations on Landscape Design Elements

STREET TREES

Street trees can become a transformational element along Ashland Street, serving multiple purposes. The following observations consider various factors that should be taken into account in forming a specific design plan.

VARIETY VERSUS UNIFORMITY

In the case of Ashland Street, there are distinct advantages associated with creating a more uniformly attractive streetscape environment. This can be accomplished by consistent use of the same tree species and varieties within the corridor. However this does not imply the use of be a single standard street tree. Rather, there should be consistent use of a limited number of street tree species and varieties along the distinct segments and places to create a coherent composition. There are four distinct corridor segments that should be considered: the Downtown, Civic, Campus, and Transition segments.

SPACING

Street tree spacing has a significant impact on the visual character of the street. The spacing should be chosen which helps define a the edge of the corridor with spacing that is fairly uniform and avoids major gaps. From a distance, the trees should help form a sense of enclosure and limit views of adjacent areas. However, as vehicles approach sites and businesses, the spacing should not impede safe sight lines or inappropriately obscure businesses and signage.

UTILITIES AND STREET TREES

The overhead utilities will constrain the growth patterns of street trees beneath them. This will influence the alignment and the choice of trees. It may be appropriate to have a different tree on the side of the street with overhead utilities than the side of the street that is free from this constraint.

SHAPE AND HABIT

The choice of trees should consider the overall shape of the trees and the form that they will take, which is termed their “habit”. Trees have been cultivated to take on a variety of shapes with a limited amount of pruning. Unless the setbacks from the street are significant, trees that have a relatively narrow and vertical shape are most practical, so that they are not trimmed by passing trucks. The vertical shaped trees include cultivars that are columnar or oval.

SPECIES AND VARIETIES

There are many appropriate varieties of native or non-invasive trees that serve well as street trees. The City should consider the long-term opportunities associated with mature species and varieties such as maples and oaks. However, given the characteristics of the distinct corridor segments and integration with overhead utilities, there are many colorful and interesting smaller trees that can be chosen for their appearance and decorative contributions. A few examples are indicated in the attached photographs to suggest how the species and varieties can be matched to the specific purposes and locations.

PLANTINGS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The choice of plantings and the associated curbing, paving, soils and drainage can directly contribute to environmental sustainability.

The design of the streetscape should include consideration of contemporary methods for filtering stormwater runoff and providing for low-maintenance plantings that will complement and support the nearby natural areas along the railroad tracks. The contemporary techniques include channeling stormwater runoff through natural planting beds using native species and varieties that are drought tolerant and require relatively little maintenance. The design of the underlying soils, gravel and drainage structures should be integrated into the design.

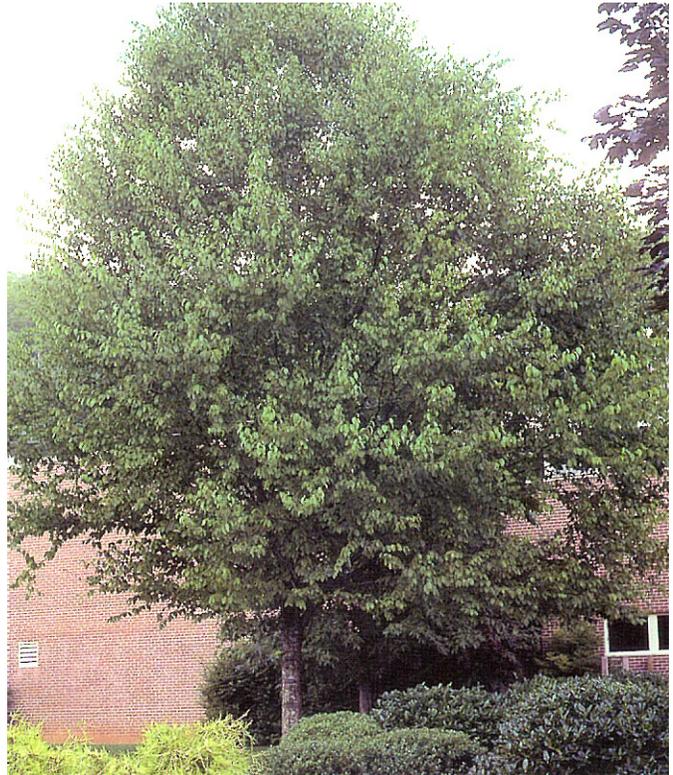
The overall aesthetic effect typically results in a picturesque, informal or natural appearance to bordering vegetation. This would benefit from the choices of grasses or shrubs that grow to a scale that will help diminish the views of large pavement areas and parked cars.

Because of the salty conditions that often occur because of winter road treatments, the choice of salt-tolerant species is recommended for roadside plantings. Various candidate plant species that are typically used in association with sustainable landscapes have been provided as examples.

STREET TREES



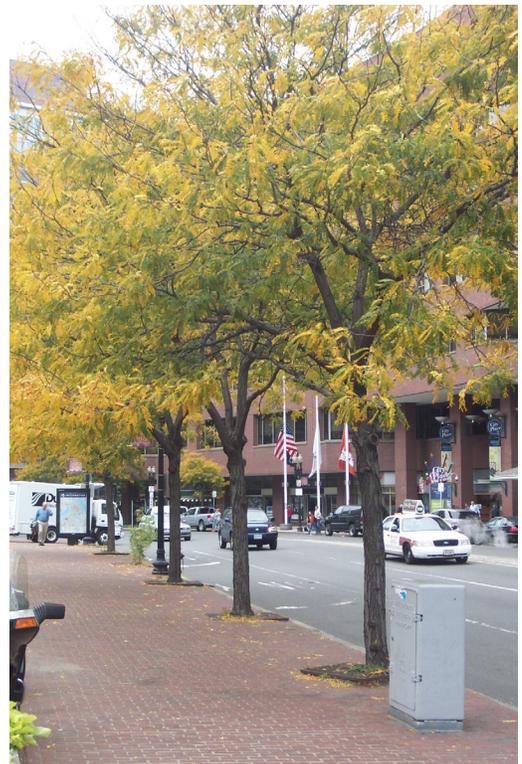
Acer rubrum 'Bowhall' - Bowhall Red Maple



Acer rubrum - Red Maple



Amelanchier laevis - Serviceberry



Gleditsia Triacanthos - Thornless Honeylocust

SHRUBS



Buxus microphylla - Boxwood



Deutzia gracilis - Slender Deutzia



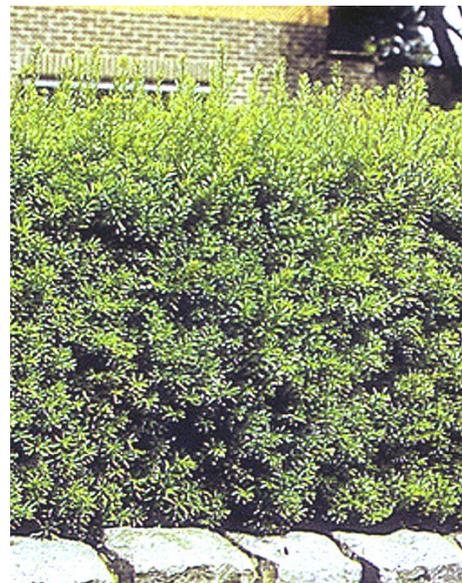
Euonymus alatus - Winged Euonymus



Ilex glabra - Compact Inkberry



Juniperus chinensis 'Hetzii Glauca' - Hetz Blue Juniper



Taxus x intermedia - Yew

PERENNIALS / GRASSES / GROUNDCOVER



Hemerocallis 'Stella D'Oro' - Dwarf Daylily



Iberis sempervirens - Evergreen Candytuft



Lavandula angustifolia 'Munstead' - Munstead Lavender



Leucanthemum x superbum - Shasta Daisy



Narcissus - Daffodil

PERENNIALS / GRASSES / GROUNDCOVER



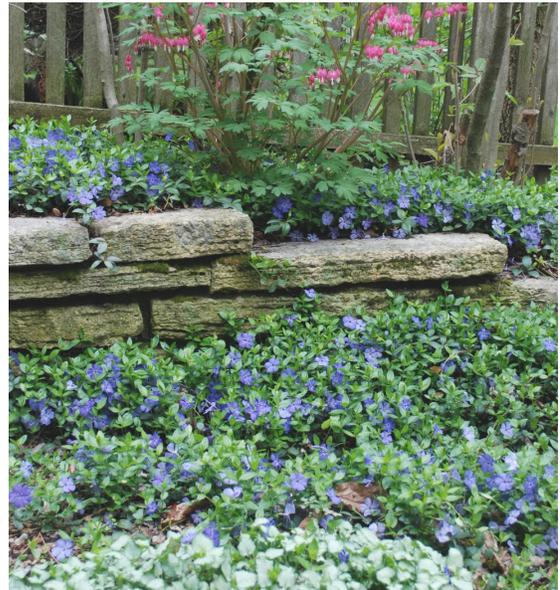
Calamagrostis acutiflora 'Karl Foerster' - Feather Reed Grass



Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Hameln' - Dwarf Fountain Grass



Arctostaphylos uva-ursi - Bearberry



Vinca Minor - Periwinkle



**APPENDIX B
PUBLIC WORKSHOP
SUMMARY**

B. Public Workshop Summary

The community meeting was separated into three different sections; discussion of elements that make up a unique and successful streetscape, existing conditions streetscape walk and a breakout group discussion of current conditions. The community was tasked with three separate tasks to inform The Cecil Group of existing conditions and potential future conditions of the streetscape; what is good about the existing conditions, what should be changed, and what the community would like to see in the future complete streets design.

ASHLAND STREET North Adams

Community Workshop - September 22, 2015

The Cecil Group

Baseline improvements for both options:

Like Dislike

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Continuous dedicated bike lanes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wayfinding signage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pedestrian-scale street lighting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Improved crosswalks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Traffic calming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Potential strategic street realignments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Continuous sidewalks on both sides |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Parallel parking on northern end of corridor |

Option 1 (Strengthen one corridor identity):

Like Dislike

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Artwork- Sequenced art highlights the corridor's combined identity. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Crosswalks- Enlarged along the route. Different pattern for crosswalks crossing Ashland Street. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Green spaces- Highlight consistent corridor identity. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Street lighting- Consistent design throughout corridor. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Street trees- Continuous design and placements. |

Comments:

Option 2 (Strengthen variety along corridor):

Like Dislike

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Artwork - Artwork highlights the different segment identities of the corridor. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Crosswalks - Different crosswalks for the "Downtown" segment than the rest of the corridor. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Green spaces - Different design based on segment. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Street lighting - Different lighting for the "Downtown" segment than the rest of the corridor. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Street trees - Design and placement varies throughout corridor depending on the identity of the corridor segment. |

Comments:

Additional comments:

