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Introduction

Collegeville was selected as the first community to hold a walkability audit hosted by the Montgomery County Planning Commission. Subsequent walkability audits will be conducted as a part of Montgomery County’s walkability planning initiative Walk Montco, and as a part of MCPC’s community planning assistance program. The MCPC Community Planning Assistance Program provides technical assistance in the fields of comprehensive planning, zoning, land use, transportation, landscape design, economic development, and other disciplines on a fee-for-service basis. Communities that might be interested are encouraged to contact MCPC to discuss the possibility of hosting their own walkability audit.
Why Should You Care About Walkability?

For your health!

Today, more than one third of children are overweight or obese. Among adults, one third are obese—compared to 15% in 1970. Depending on the survey, it appears that between 66% and 80% of adults do not meet the recommendation of 30 minutes of daily physical activity five times per week.

For the environment!

In the U.S. today, vehicle emissions represent a large portion of pollutants in the air. To be exact; 31% of carbon dioxide, 81% of carbon monoxide, and 49% of nitrogen oxides released are a result of vehicle emissions.

Everybody wants to live in a safe community!

Each year 6,000 pedestrians are killed and 90,000 are injured. Somehow we have come to except this as a fact of life. Scared of flying? You are 300 times more likely to be killed walking than flying. In fact, less than 6% of all Americans’ trips are on foot, yet 13% of all traffic deaths involve pedestrians. What can be done to correct these tragic statistics? The fact of the matter is that our communities are dangerous because we have designed them that way.

Because it saves us all money!

The average cost of operating a sedan for a year is between $5,900 and $12,700—and the cost of operating an SUV is between $10,000 and $13,000. Eliminating or reducing that expense could make a big difference for households.
People of all ages need to get around!

In the United States, about one quarter of all households include someone who is 65 years of age or older. Likewise, about one third of households include someone who is 18 years of age or younger. These two groups, children and seniors, are two groups that stand to greatly benefit from living in a walkable community. At the same time, barriers to a safe pedestrian environment can loom even larger for these two groups.

It supports local economic development and government efficiency!

Studies have shown that low-density, discontinuous and automobile-dependent land use patterns can cause higher direct business costs and taxes. No one wants to pay higher taxes, yet our built environment is one that costs more to maintain than it is worth. Sprawling, auto-dependent land use patterns are much more costly to maintain than compact development with a mix of uses. In communities that are built out already, trails and sidewalk connections can help connect uses to the pedestrian network and make existing infrastructure more efficient.
Collegeville Borough is a member of the Central Perkiomen Valley Regional Planning Commission (CPVRPC), a multi-municipal planning effort that unites six adjacent municipalities in their long-range planning and land use goals. The participants include Collegeville, Trappe, and Schwenksville Boroughs and Perkiomen, Lower Frederick, and Upper Frederick Townships. This joint planning commission helps to coordinate regional planning efforts, review developments for regional impacts, and gives members more leeway in their local land use controls.

Centered along Main Street and shopping centers along Gravel Pike, Collegeville is the commercial heart of the Central Perkiomen Region. This pattern of a walkable mix of housing, shops, and restaurants is surrounded by a relatively dense set of residential neighborhoods containing apartments, townhomes, twins, and single-family dwellings is specifically supported by the Regional Comprehensive Plan. One of CPVRPC’s primary duties is to establish future land use categories and help member municipalities to direct future development according to these categories. Collegeville Borough is classified as a Borough Conservation area and the Comprehensive Plan recommends zoning and other local codes strengthen the character of the borough.

In 2009 the Central Perkiomen Valley Regional Planning Commission commissioned a transportation study to resolve traffic issues throughout the Central Perkiomen Region. The Central Perkiomen Valley Regional Transportation and Community Character Study made specific recommendations to improve traffic flow at problem intersections and roads with a mandate that the recommended improvements be compatible with the character of the surrounding community. As a walkable borough this meant that suggested improvements for Collegeville had to make pedestrian needs a priority.
over automobile traffic. The study also provides several strategies for physical improvements and traffic calming elements that the municipalities could implement to improve pedestrian safety without sacrificing automobile traffic flow. Collegeville has implemented some of these measures with enhanced streetscaping and intersection crossings along Main Street, a mid-block crossing on Main Street, and crosswalks at the redesigned intersection of Gravel Pike and Main Street.

Certainly there remains room for improvement but both the Central Perkiomen Valley Regional Comprehensive Plan and its Transportation and Community Character Study make walkability and pedestrian safety a priority. The pedestrian focus of Main Street and the tight-knit, walkable neighborhoods surrounding it are highly valued in both documents, giving Collegeville a strong pedestrian foundation.

Revitalization Plan

In 2010 Collegeville Borough completed and adopted the Collegeville Revitalization Plan. Strengthening the business districts along Main Street and the shopping centers along Gravel Pike are the primary goals of the plan and improving pedestrian access to these areas was one of the main mechanisms. By making the borough more lively and walkable with improved pedestrian facilities and public art, visitors would be drawn to businesses in the borough. These improvements would also make it easier for residents to reach shopping destinations or even simply run errands to local stores. Further, increasing safety and convenience for Ursinus College students and staff would make it easier for them to walk down and frequent the shops and restaurants of Main Street and the Shopping Centers. In effect walkability became a significant approach to community redevelopment.

The Perkiomen Trail is a major recreational trail that passes through several communities throughout the Perkiomen Valley and connects Green lane Reservoir to the Schuylkill River Trail and the Lower Perkiomen Park. Capitalizing on the Perkiomen Trail was another tactic promoted by the Revitalization Plan. The trail attracts thousands of users per year, all of them crossing Main Street on foot or by bicycle. Drawing these visitors into borough businesses with pedestrian enhancements and signage has been a winning strategy. The Appalachian Brewing Company sits at the intersection of Main Street and the Perkiomen Trail and has found success marketing to trail users.
Municipal Sustainability Plan

The Collegeville Borough Municipal Sustainability Plan is an effort by the borough to lead by example in energy efficiency and sustainable municipal practices. The plan helps the borough maintain its prosperity and face future challenges without sacrificing the prosperity of future generations. Walkability becomes a major priority as a means of improving public health, making the borough less car-dependent, and ensuring safe and convenient access to open space.

As obesity and diabetes rates continue to climb across the country, combating this public health crisis should be a top priority for any community. The Sustainability Plan highlights walkability as a way to increase physical activity and fight obesity and obesity-related diseases. Besides making it easier to walk to shops and restaurants, connections to recreation areas increase residents’ opportunities for physical activity. This is a long-term investment in the community’s health that will have tremendous impact for future residents.

The Sustainability Plan also specifically recommends physical improvements to fill sidewalk gaps and encourages residents to walk to local businesses, municipal meetings, and events wherever possible. Promotion of walking and bicycling makes the borough less car-dependent, significantly reducing the borough’s carbon footprint. Short car trips with multiple starts and stops are highly inefficient; a good way to waste fuel and money. A decrease in car trips in favor of walking or biking will cut the borough’s carbon footprint, save residents money, and increase physical activity.

History

Collegeville Borough sits close to the geographic center of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania and is one of the most historic of Philadelphia’s suburbs. The area’s earliest settlers arrived in the late 17th century and many of their buildings are still standing, including the Perkiomen Bridge Hotel which has existed in that spot since 1689. The historic bridge, an iconic entrance to the Borough located right next to the Hotel, was completed in 1799, allowing the town to flourish. With the addition of the railroad and a small liberal arts college that would one day become Ursinus College, Collegeville Borough began to take shape as the small college town it is today. Over the decades the railroad disappeared but development in and around the Borough continued and accelerated.

Today the Borough has a population of just over 5,000 residents and supports 2,246 jobs located within the municipality. Collegeville has emerged as a dense, walkable community built around a traditional main street and bolstered by Ursinus College, its largest employer.
Despite this walkable land use pattern, the Borough is experiencing challenges common to many developed suburban areas. Businesses on Main Street and in the shopping centers in the Borough have struggled in the face of competition from larger nearby shopping centers, encouraging residents to drive rather than reach these services on foot. The Borough is also at the crossroads of some very busy roads as Gravel Pike and Ridge Pike meet just east of downtown. Although this brings a great deal of potential shoppers into the Borough it is also a quality of life issue, as the large volume of traffic makes it difficult to walk or bike through town and reduces air quality.

Collegeville’s location also affords it the opportunity to enhance its walkability by building on natural features and recreation areas throughout the region. In addition to the Perkiomen Trail, which connects communities throughout the Perkiomen Valley, the Borough has direct access to the Perkiomen Creek itself. Green Lane Park, Evansburg State Park, and Valley Forge National Historic Park are all a few short minutes away. Collegeville can capitalize on these amenities by providing easy, car-free access to them from any point in the Borough—Green Lane Park Reservoir and Valley Forge are already easily accessible by bike from the Perkiomen Trail.

Walkability Audit and Workshop

The Collegeville Walkability Audit and Workshop were so popular that the event had to be split into an afternoon and an evening session at Collegeville’s Borough Hall. Eighteen residents, planners, business leaders, and local officials attended the afternoon session and nineteen attended the evening session. After a brief introductory presentation about the issues and opportunities surrounding walkability in Collegeville, our focus groups participated in a walking tour through the borough that explored Collegeville’s downtown, the Community park area, and the Main Street portion of the Ursinus College campus. Following the tour, participants gathered around a map of the borough to review what they had learned, make recommendations for areas of improvement, and take note of effective pedestrian features. In addition to the following general concerns, more specific comments are illustrated by the maps on pages 11 through 15.
Walkability Audit Route

This map shows the specific route that the focus groups walked in their exploration of pedestrian and cycling issues in the borough. Though observations were made about issues that affected this study area in particular, many of the issues can be observed—and solutions applied—throughout the rest of the borough as well.
Walkability: The Issues

Pedestrian Connectivity

As an historic borough, Collegeville is well-connected—with a network of sidewalks, trails, and efficient intersecting streets. However, gaps and inefficiencies can be found in even the most well-connected pedestrian networks. On our walk, participants noticed that there is a gap in the sidewalk system along 3rd Avenue between Collegeville Community Park and Chestnut Street. There are also no sidewalks or trails along the eastern side of Park Avenue, south of Chestnut Street or between 4th Avenue and Freeland Place. Additionally, there is no pedestrian infrastructure on the east side of 5th Avenue along the study area. Several participants also noted that there are gaps in the pedestrian network outside the study area as well.

**Action Item:** A walkable, mixed-use borough such as Collegeville is best served by having sidewalks on both sides of all residential and commercial streets. Efforts should be taken to fill in the gaps mentioned above, as well as other gaps throughout the borough. When prioritizing improvements the Borough should think about access to major destinations and connectivity to the Perkiomen Trail.

Infrastructure Maintenance

A well-connected sidewalk and trail system is no use if it is not well maintained. Maintenance of pedestrian infrastructure with limited resources is an issue that all communities have to deal with, and Collegeville is no exception. Participants noticed that there were maintenance issues along the study area, which is to be expected. Specific issues included faded crosswalks and lack of ADA compliant wheelchair ramps and tactile pavers in multiple locations.

**Action Item:** Efforts should be made to bring corridors and intersections, such as the one at Park Avenue and 3rd Avenue, up to ADA compliance. Cracks in the sidewalk can be shaved down as a temporary solution, but sidewalk replacement should be a long-term goal. When sidewalks are replaced, care should be taken to locate them around utilities when possible and to widen them to at least five feet through residential areas and eight feet or greater along Main Street.
Bicycle Facilities

Collegeville is generally bicycle friendly, with a connected street grid and access to the Perkiomen Trail. However, participants noted several places where bicycle facilities could be improved. There is sufficient cartway width along all of the streets in the study area to add bike lanes—Main Street and 3rd Avenue would specifically benefit from this change, which would also serve as a traffic calming device. The rendering below is a reimagining of Main Street near Ursinus College with bike lanes. Participants also noted that bike racks would be useful at the bus stops at the intersection of 3rd and Main.

**Action Item:** The Borough should find ways to expand bicycle facilities through the addition of bike lanes and sharrows—shared access lanes with painted symbols notifying motorists of the presence of cyclists. PennDOT would be a partner in any changes to Main Street and SEPTA is a potential partner in upgrades to bicycle facilities at bus stops.

Crosswalks

Multiple crosswalks are faded and in need of repainting, as already mentioned under the Infrastructure Maintenance heading. Additionally, participants noted locations where there are missing crosswalks and where a midblock crossing could be added. Also noted was the need for safety improvements at the Ursinus College midblock crossing on Main Street.

**Action Item:** Safety at the midblock crossing on Main Street at Ursinus College was a major point of discussion for participants. It was suggested that better signage and the possible addition of flashing lights would make the crossing more visible. It was also suggest that pavement markings could help improve the situation. The Borough should also explore the addition of midblock crossings, particularly on 3rd Avenue as noted on the accompanying maps. Finally, making sure that all crosswalk marking are visible should be an ongoing priority.
Traffic Calming

There are opportunities for traffic calming at multiple points in the study area. Participants noticed that the cartway was overly wide along 3rd Avenue and along portions of Main Street. Those areas are designated for corridor improvements on the accompanying maps. It was also noted that other streets outside the study area might benefit from traffic calming as well.

**Action Item:** The Borough should consider techniques such as road diets, speed humps, mini traffic circles, and curb extensions to help slow traffic throughout the study area and beyond. Specifically it was noted that narrowing the 3rd Avenue cartway and adding speed humps would be beneficial. It should also be noted that the addition of on-street parking can help slow traffic and create a barrier between pedestrians and moving cars.

For Main Street, the option of adding a landscaped median should be explored. This would help slow traffic and create an attractive space that the community can be proud of. The image above shows what Main Street would look like with bike lanes and a landscaped median.

Illustrating the Issues: The Mapping Exercise

As mentioned before, participants in both sessions took part in a mapping exercise where they were asked to write their observations on an aerial map of the study area. All suggestions were welcome and many of the same issues were observed by multiple attendees. On the following pages there are five maps. One composite map showing the entire study area, and four maps that zero in on issues at particular intersections and along particular corridors. The observations of the focus groups can serve as a tool to help inform future policy decisions and promote walkability and bikeability in the borough.
Overall Recommendations

- Corridor improvements needed for Main Street, west of 4th Ave.
- Intersection improvements here.
- Improvements to existing pedestrian crossing here.
- Corridor improvements needed for 3rd Ave.
- Intersection improvements here.
- Lack of connectivity between sidewalk and Perkiomen Trail.
Intersection Improvements: 3rd Avenue & Main Street

- Bus stop is located past the stop bar, and should be relocated out of the intersection.
- The cartway has been narrowed here with paint. Narrowing the cartway with permanent curb extensions would do a better job of slowing traffic.
- Add bike rack at bus stop.
- Crossing time is too short. Signal timing should be adjusted.
Intersection Improvements: 3rd Avenue & Park Avenue

- There is no ramp here. Ramps facing into the crosswalks with tactile pavers should be added.
- Crosswalks need a fresh coat of paint to improve visibility.
- Add ramps and sidewalks on the south side of 3rd Street and the east side of Park Ave.
- This ramp faces into the intersection. It should be replaced with ramps facing into the crosswalks.
- Add crosswalk on south side of intersection.
Another option would be to reclaim some of the roadway to create a buffer strip between the travel lanes and sidewalks.

A landscaped median is one option to calm traffic on this stretch of Main Street.

Better signage and pavement marking needed for increased safety.
There are lots of funding options out there if you know where to look! Here are a few examples of funding sources that communities can utilize to make their community friendlier for pedestrians and cyclists.

**Transportation Alternatives Program**

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a federal program authorized under the MAP-21 surface transportation bill, and replaces the former Transportation Enhancements Program. TAP funding can be used for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects, public transportation enhancement projects, safe routes to school projects, walkability audits, and other miscellaneous non-driver oriented projects. Recipients of TAP funds are selected through a competitive application process. More information about TAP funding in Pennsylvania can be found at: http://www.dvrpc.org/tap/PA.htm. Info about the Safe Routes to Schools program can be found at: http://www.saferoutespa.org/.

**Multimodal Transportation Fund**

Funds may be used for the development, rehabilitation and enhancement of transportation assets to existing communities, streetscape, lighting, sidewalk enhancement, pedestrian safety, connectivity of transportation assets and transit-oriented development. Grants are available for projects with a total cost of $100,000 or more. Grants shall not exceed $3,000,000 for any project.

**Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Funds**

The CMAQ program provides funding for projects and programs which reduce transportation-related ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate emissions. Pennsylvania’s Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) administer programs using CMAQ funds within their regions. Examples of eligible projects can be found in The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program Final Program Guidance located at: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/air_quality/cmaq/policy_and_guidance/cmaq08gd.pdf. One such example is “constructing bicycle and pedestrian facilities (paths, bike racks, support facilities, etc.) that are not exclusively recreational and reduce vehicle trips.”

**Municipal Liquid Fuels**

The Municipal Liquid Fuels Program funds a range of projects to support municipalities’ construction, reconstruction, maintenance and repair of public roads or streets, including curb ramps, lane and crosswalk painting, signs and signals,
and removal of debris from roads and shoulders, but not for curbs and sidewalks unless necessary for ADA compliance. Funds are only available to municipalities who submit annual reports. The amount of a municipality’s allocation is based on its population and miles of roads on their approved Liquid Fuels Inventory. More information can be found at: ftp://ftp.dot.state.pa.us/public/PubsForms/Publications/Pub%209.pdf.

Highway Safety Improvement Program

Highway Safety Improvement Program provides funding to states for projects that correct or improve a hazardous road location or feature. It was reauthorized under the MAP-21 federal transportation law with the goal of reducing traffic fatalities on all public roads. The legislation lists examples of many projects eligible for this funding, including improvements for pedestrian and bicycle safety, and installation and maintenance of signs at pedestrian and bicycle crossings. In Pennsylvania, we receive between $35 and $40 million in funding annually. Examples of projects utilizing HSIP funds in Pennsylvania include conversions of signalized intersections to roundabouts and the installation of pedestrian signals. For more information, contact the Federal Highway Administration, PennDOT, or DVRPC.

Community Transportation Grants

This program, administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, award grants to local governments and non-profits for programs designed to improve community health and prevent chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. The grants can be used for a wide array of programs and initiatives, including transportation improvements that help promote a healthy and safe physical environment.

More information can be found at: http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/communitytransformation/.

Community Development Block Grants

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program provides funding from HUD for the purpose of promoting community revitalization throughout the country. Eligible activities must meet one of the CDBG’s three national objectives:

1. To benefit low- and moderate-income persons (primary objective);
2. To aid in the prevention or elimination of slums or blight; and
3. To meet other community development needs that present a serious and immediate threat to the health and welfare of the community.

Over a 1-3 year period, at least 70% of the funds spent by a grantee must be used for activities that benefit low- and moderate-income persons. Some CDBG funds are provided to larger cities and counties directly by the federal government, other CDBG funds for “non-federal entitlement communities” come from the federal government through the state. Eligible “non-federal entitlement communities” include: boroughs, towns, and townships with populations of 4,000 or more based on the 2000 census, which also meet the current minimum standards of physical and economic distress of the federal Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) Program. There are both formula grants and competitive funding cycles. The Competitive Program is $500,000 maximum and is available to all non-federal entitlement municipalities.
Eligible walkability-related projects:

- Acquisition of property for public purposes
- Construction or reconstruction of streets
- Demolition
- Planning activities

And these walkable destination projects:

- Neighborhood centers, recreation facilities, and other public works;
- Rehabilitation of public and private buildings;
- Public services;
- Assistance to nonprofit entities for community development activities; and
- Assistance to private, for-profit entities to carry out economic development activities (including assistance to microenterprises).

For more information from the state go to:
http://www.newpa.com/communitydocumentspublications/cdbg or call (717) 787-5327 or send an e-mail to: cdbg&homequestions@pa.gov

For more information from the county, go to:

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)

DCNR offers several grants that help develop and maintain recreational facilities. The application period is from mid-January to mid-April. For more information go to: https://www.grants.dcnr.state.pa.us/GrantPrograms.aspx.

Community Recreation and Conservation grants are awarded to municipalities and authorized nonprofit organizations for recreation, park, trail and conservation projects. These include planning for feasibility studies, trail studies, conservation plans, master site development plans, and comprehensive recreation, park and open space and greenway plans; land acquisition for active or passive parks, trails and conservation purposes; and new development and rehabilitation of parks, trails and recreation facilities. Most projects require a 50% match, which can include a combination of cash and/or non-cash values.

Partnership grants are designed to promote statewide and regional capacity building. Grants are awarded to statewide and regional partners who advance DCNR’s Strategic Plan, Pennsylvania’s Greenway Plan, Pennsylvania’s Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan, Pennsylvania’s Heritage Areas Program, and the Conservation Landscape Program. Two types of Partnership grants are: Implementation Projects and Mini-Grants Projects:
• Implementation Projects are non-planning projects that implement recommendations of previously completed special purpose plans or studies. Examples of implementation projects include the construction of interpretive/educational exhibits, programs, signage and materials, and promotional/marketing products.

• Statewide and regional partners may request Mini-Grant funding to develop small grant programs that will implement multiple projects through their local partners. These projects should advance priorities identified through previous completed plans. The request can include a combination of project types eligible for funding under the Statewide and Regional category. A 50/50 match requirement applies to all projects funded. Any other proposed match amount will require written justification for review and consideration by DCNR.

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Further Planning Assistance

Pedestrian and bicycle planning may be undertaken as part of a Montgomery County Planning Commission Community Planning Assistance contract. The MCPC Community Planning Assistance Program provides technical assistance in the fields of comprehensive planning, zoning, land use, transportation, landscape design, economic development, and other disciplines on a fee-for-service basis.

Townships and boroughs can benefit from this program by entering into a planning assistance contract with our commission. Under the contract, which typically lasts for three years, the cost of the professional planner is evenly shared between the municipality and the county.

For further information about the program, contact John Cover at 610-278-3741 or jcover@montcopa.org.