

safe routes

WEST SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

to school



This report was prepared for the West Springfield Wellness Leadership Team by the students of GARP 219 Land Use and Resource Planning, spring 2017, under the guidance of Associate Professor Marijoan Bull, PhD, AICP. Student members include: Thomas Aitken, Liam Anderson, Connor Aubuchont, Katherine Baldiga, Arianna Becker, Christopher Bennett, Carly Camossi, Daniel Hartmann, Daniel Holbrook, Stephanie Ladas, Ryan Malakie, Brian Miles, Nathan Moreau, David Pena, Chelsey Pousland, Shanice Raschilla, Luis Santiago-Ramirez, Aliya Stevenson, Alexander Ziter, and Daniel Zuccaro.

Our thanks to all the members of the West Springfield Wellness Leadership Team, Dillon Sussman and Corrin Meise-Munns (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission), Principal Shelly St. George (Coburn School), Principal Donna Calabrese (Memorial School), Priscilla Reyes (Program Director, West Springfield Boys and Girls Club), Jennifer Brennan (Community and Family Engagement Coordinator, West Springfield School District) and Elaine Tiboni (Safe Routes to School Instructor, MassBikes).



Westfield
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Introduction

This report was completed in spring of 2017 for the West Springfield Wellness Leadership Team. Led by Public Health Director, Jeanne Galloway, the Wellness Team is part of the statewide Mass in Motion program¹ aimed at promoting wellness through healthy eating and physical activity. One aspect of this focus is instilling healthy active lifestyles in children, as active children are more likely to be active adults. The Safe Routes to School program is one way for children to incorporate activity into their day. For this work, Coburn and Memorial elementary schools were chosen. We have worked closely with the Wellness Team and the school principals, as we assessed conditions near the schools, held dialogues with parents and caretakers, and led bike safety events at the Boys and Girls Club.

Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a federally-funded initiative of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. SRTS works with schools, communities, students, and families to increase biking and walking among the elementary and middle school students in the Commonwealth. SRTS promotes a community-focused approach that fosters partnerships between advocacy groups, law enforcement, education leaders, and public health departments to promote safer routes to get to school. This is a national program where local communities determine what is needed to make choices safe. The Massachusetts SRTS distinguishes itself from others by providing services to interested schools through outreach, program support, and grants.

SRTS encourages elementary and middle school

¹ Mass in Motion is a program of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

students to walk and bicycle to school safely by implementing the Safe Routes six E's: education, encouragement, enforcement, evaluation, engineering, and equity. The program works to make the experience of getting to and from school healthier, safer, greener, and fun! The work includes ensuring safety when using sidewalks, crossing streets, and riding a bike to/from school. To make these trips greener, there are recommended practices to reduce engine idling and unnecessary auto trips such as Walk/Ride Day events, walking school bus groups, and priority dismissal for children walking or biking. Another objective is to encourage positive social interactions and connections among community members, by strengthening interactions in the community.

To support the work of the West Springfield Wellness Committee, this report includes descriptions of the following:

- Summary of a bike education event held at the Boys and Girls Club,
- Data and Analysis from street audits for the walking portion of the attendance zones of Coburn and Memorial schools,
- Data from hand-raised travel to school homeroom surveys,
- Findings from parent dialogues on SRTS,
- Mapping of relevant data, and
- Recommended actions to support SRTS in West Springfield.

Boys & Girls Club Bike Safety

On Monday April 17th, six WSU students travelled to the Boys & Girls Club of West Springfield to lead activities related to SRTS. Two different age groups of students, the 5-6 years old and the 9-10 years old, were engaged. Each group participated in activities that increased their knowledge on proper Safe Routes to School etiquette.

Mass Bikes certified SRTS instructor, Elaine Tiboni taught the 5-6 years old group about the importance of safety while biking. This included a discussion on what the students already knew about biking and road safety, a demonstration on how to properly wear a helmet, listening to the story, *Franklin's Bicycle Helmet* by Paulette Bourgeois, and an activity in which they had the chance to ride a bike around the gymnasium and interact with road signs. Riding the bike on a short course set-up in the gym, the children had to respond to stop signs, traffic lights, one way signs, and dismounting to walk the bike through a crosswalk area.



Figure 1 Boys and Girls Club Event April 2017

Because there were approximately 24 students in the group, the group was split into two. While one group was riding bikes in the gym, the other group participated in a creative activity where they had the chance to decorate a helmet with stickers and coloring crayons. Overall, the attitude, focus, and excitement from the students was outstanding. They participated fully and were attentive throughout the two hours.

The 9-10 years old group activity was focused on learning about global positioning systems (GPS) and connecting maps to school routes. They learned how to use hand held Garmin GPS units to increase their knowledge of navigation and tools associated with navigation. The discussion started out with asking how they got to school and what they knew about global positioning system (GPS). All the students had previously heard about GPS and six of them were familiar with using the units. The first part of our lesson included map printouts of West Springfield. The students were asked to draw what they believed were their routes home from the Boys & Girls Club. Following that, we compared their hand-drawn routes to the Google Maps generated routes. The students were able to determine alternative routes

home using various modes of transport (walking, biking, public transit). The next activity included six handheld GPS units that were split between three groups. The students were instructed to navigate their way to preset geocache waypoints by using their handheld Garmin units. Prizes (dum-dum pops) were awarded to those who successfully completed the activity. Lastly, we had the students use a walking-wheel to measure distances of various areas within the property. First they guessed the lengths of features and then they measured sidewalks, parking spaces, and the length of an entire parking lot. Overall, like the 5-6 years old group, the children were extremely attentive and enthusiastic about the activities that day.

The staff of the Boys and Girls Club were very supportive of the effort, and through some grant money, we provided the Boys and Girls



Figure 2 Boys and Girls Club Event April 2017

Club with two bikes suited for 5-6 years-old and 4 bicycle helmets.

Coburn Elementary School

Coburn Elementary School is a public school with 515 students, ranging from kindergarten to 5th grade. The student teacher ratio is 12.5 to 1. Among these students, English is not the first language for 62.1% of the students, and 67.4% are economically disadvantaged.² Coburn functions as the district’s English Language Learning (ELL) center, with students from throughout West Springfield being bused to Coburn for ELL classes. The surrounding area that encompasses the walking portion of the Coburn Elementary School attendance zone is comprised of roughly 13 streets. The walking portion of the attendance zone is bounded by the more commercial and heavily trafficked Elm Street, Route 5, and Park Avenue which includes the North End Bridge, and the rotary which connects to the city of Springfield. Elm Street, serves as a hub for the community with storefront shopping, restaurants, and private businesses resulting in heavy traffic. Other heavy traffic in the area occurs along Park Avenue and the rotary.

The neighborhood surrounding Coburn Elementary School is generally developed as single-family homes, in some blocks on lots of 5,000 square foot areas, and in other places lots of 15-20,000 square feet. The neighborhood is quiet with tree lined streets.

The walking neighborhood generally consists of sidewalks in decent condition with moderate accessibility for disabled or handicapped residents. Most streets had well established curbs and easily visible crosswalks, some with

²

<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavID=1&eftNavId=100&orgcode=03320007&orgtypecode=6>

sufficient crossing signals and markings. One area specifically, Harrison Place, was lacking in sidewalks and curbs, but was heavily residential. There was also an intersection that seemed hazardous at Neptune Avenue, Avondale Avenue, and Roseland Avenue where traffic patterns are unclear and signage and crosswalks are lacking.

Our quick hand raising survey of students in homeroom (completed on April 27, 2017) found 80 students or 17% walked to school. A MassDOT led winter 2016 survey completed by 342 parents at an evening open house had similar walking numbers with 17% in the morning and 20% in the afternoon.³ The student answers should be considered estimates as students were not always raising their hands accurately (especially the younger students), the weather is a factor, and the attendance on the survey day affects the outcome.

Grade	Total Students	Walk	Bike	Yellow School Bus	Car/Vehicle	Other	Carpool
1	69	15	1	55	10	1	0
2	107	19	1	68	23	2	0
3	84	16	2	54	18	2	0
4	71	14	0	41	15	0	0
5	128	16	0	68	28	0	0
Total	459	80	4	286	94	5	0
Percentage	100%	17%	.8%	62%	20%	1%	0%

Figure 3 Hand Survey of Students April 27, 2017 Travel to Coburn School

The remainder of the students were either picked up by parents on the school premises (20%) or took the bus home or to an afterschool program (62%), while just a few chose to bike (less than 1%).

Staff members carefully facilitated dismissals in an organized manner. Buses lined up along the west end of the building in the parking lot, and students were dismissed one bus at a time. Parents lined up along Southwick Street in the

³ MASaferoutesSurvey.org, Coburn School January 23, 2017.

fairly new parking area within curb extensions (see pictures). Some parents also parked in the adjacent private commercial lot along Southwick Street, where it was observed there were plenty of open parking spaces. At dismissal, walkers were directed toward a crossing guard at Southworth and Lathrop Street, and crossed Southwick Street in this location, to then travel west, east, or north. Multiple crossing guards are dispersed throughout the neighborhood, ensuring the children can cross safely, especially on the busier roads of Elm Street and Park Avenue. Some of the crossing guards also serve those attending Cowing School. One student on a bike was observed correctly dismounting and crossing Elm Street in the crosswalk on foot. The higher number of bus riders (62%) is not surprising given Coburn functions as the ELL center for the district, picking up students from throughout the community.

After collecting various types of data, several maps were prepared to display the information. For each school a map was prepared that indicates the location of the school, the school's attendance zone, the area within the District's ¼ mile non-transport policy,⁴ the location of bus stops, and the location of crossing guards. The following map, Coburn Elementary Busing and Walkers displays this information.⁵

Also include is a map indicating the zoning of the Coburn attendance zone. For the Coburn area, the predominant zoning is Residential B "RB" which has a minimum lot size of 10,000 square feet. Coverage (just buildings) can be up to 30%, and building heights cannot exceed 2 ½ stories (40ft). This specific zoning allows for the following uses:

- Residential:
 - Single family detached dwelling

- Two family dwelling
- Community Facilities,
- Agriculture, and
- Accessory Uses.⁶

This indicates (without a zoning change) the neighborhood will remain residential in character.

Walking Audits

Utilizing an audit sheet designed from a variety of other models (see Appendix),⁷ students assessed the streets in the walking portion of the attendance zone for safety features to accommodate walkers and bikers, and users of varying degrees of mobility. The audit sheets assessed sidewalks – both their presence/absence and condition, crosswalks, curbing, obstacles to pedestrian mobility, accommodations for the disabled, lighting, marked crosswalks, and traffic. These assessments were used to calculate general ratings that can be used as a guide for prioritizing improvements in the area, from a low point value of 1 for poor safety conditions, to a high value of 5 for excellent safety conditions. As conditions were evaluated GPS points were created to note conditions such as heaved or cracked sidewalks, blocked or narrowed sidewalks, missing sidewalks, and more.

A map summarizing the walking audit scores awarded each roadway in the area is included, (see map Safety Audit Scores-Coburn Elementary) along with a map pinpointing specific hazards and concerns in the area, gathered and noted during the walking audit (Coburn Hazard Map). The Safety Audit Scores map includes information for traffic counts on roadways in the area. These are reported in terms of Average Daily Traffic (ADT). For the

⁴ <https://sites.google.com/a/wsps.org/policy-manual/wsps-policy-manual-introduction/section-e/eea/eea-r>

⁵ The attendance zone data was provided by the School Principals, the crossing guard locations through observation, and the bus stops from the website of the West Springfield School District.

⁶ <http://gisweb.west-springfield.ma.us/ZoningDocs/RB.pdf>

⁷ Including reference to the National Center for SRTS at http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/resources/Prioritizing_Infrastructure_Projects.PDF

Coburn area figures such as 10,000 ADT on Elm Street and 13,000 on Park Avenue, reflect very high levels of traffic, and roadways serving as principal arterials.⁸

Also, the Pioneer Valley Planning Council 2011-2013 Top 100 Regional crash locations includes 4 total for West Springfield. Of these 4 hotspots, only 1 is near Coburn School– the intersection of Riverdale (Route 5) and East Elm Street – at the northern end of Coburn’s attendance zone. The bus stops on the map, Coburn Elementary Busing and Walkers, indicates any students near this intersection would have a bus option nearby.⁹

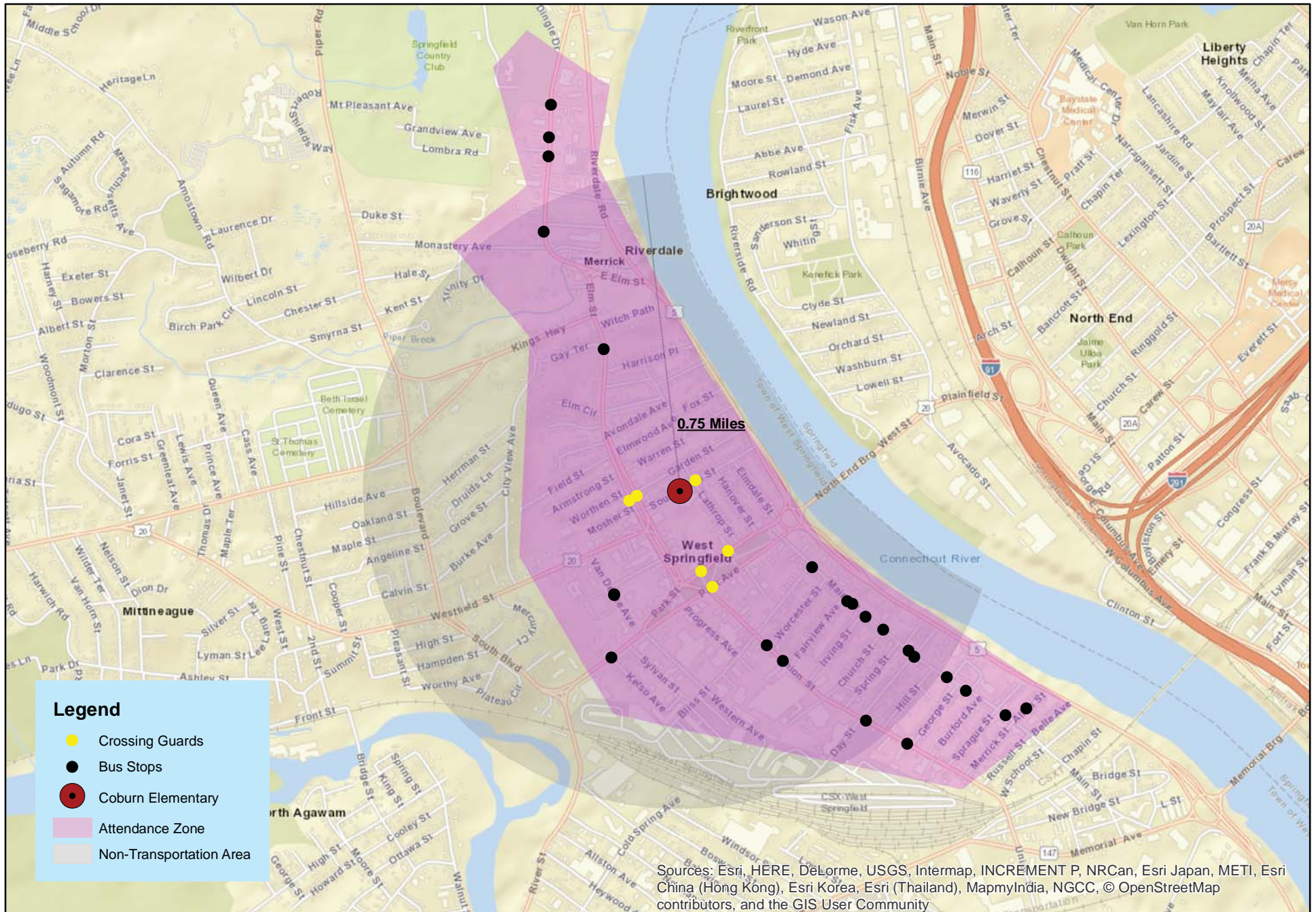


Figure 4 Map in Coburn School indicating where families are originally from. West Springfield is a refugee receiving community, with the non-profit Ascentria Care Alliance facilitating resettlement (see <http://www.ascentria.org/>).

⁸ ADT values are from Pioneer Valley Planning Association. (2011-2015). West Springfield Traffic Counts 2011-2014 [Data file]. Retrieved from: <http://www.pvpc.org/projects/municipal-traffic-counts-2011-2015>.

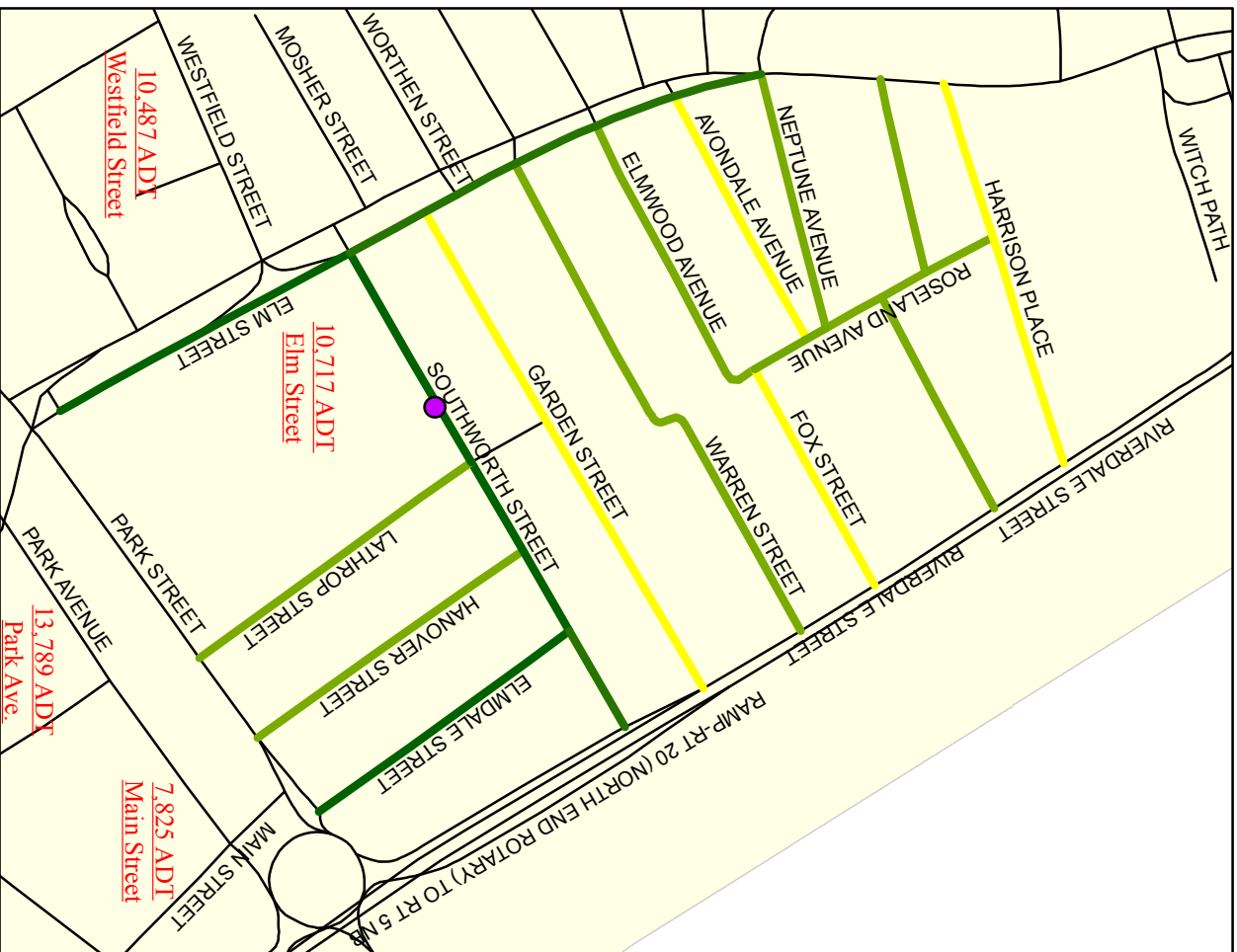
⁹ <http://www.pvpc.org/sites/default/files/Top%20100%20High%20Crash%20Intersections.pdf>

Coburn Elementary - Busing and Walkers



Sources: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, USGS, Intermap, INCREMENT P, NRCan, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri Korea, Esri (Thailand), MapmyIndia, NGCC, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Safety Audit Scores - Coburn Elementary



Hazards Found on Streets:
Missing curbs
Sidewalks end periodically
Industrial road
No street crossings
Poor sidewalk conditions
Large amounts of debris
Structures/vegetation hanging over sidewalk
Busy intersection

Legend

● Coburn Elementary

Streets For Coburn

Score

- 1 - Poor
- 2
- 3 - Fair
- 4
- 5-Excellent

A point system determines the scores each street receives. The safety of the sidewalks, driveways, obstacles, and crosswalks make up the point system. This can be seen on an audit sheet in the appendix.

Conditions in the Vicinity of Coburn Elementary School (9 Pictures)



Location: Southworth Street

Description: Sidewalk – both sides; dedicated drop off zone; grass strip separates sidewalk from street.



Location: Southworth Street

Description: sidewalk – both sides; Sidewalks (and road) could use repair/renovation; grass strip separates sidewalk from street; controlled parking entrance/exit to Coburn School



Location: Corner of Hanover St and Southworth Street

Description: raised strips at crossing; crossing line not (yet) marked; good road/sidewalk surface –flat, recently paved



Location: Southworth Street

Description: dedicated drop off zone; sidewalk surface good quality



Location: Lathrop Street

Description: sidewalk surface uneven; grass strip separates sidewalk from street.



Location: Lathrop Street

Description: sidewalk surface uneven- but still straight largely flat and nicely bikeable/walkable; grass strip separates sidewalk from street.



Location: Lathrop Street

Description: sidewalk surface uneven; grass strip separates sidewalk from street.



Location: Hanover Street

Description: sidewalk – both sides; straight, flat (though street has very slight slope); street recently paved; grass strip separates sidewalk from street

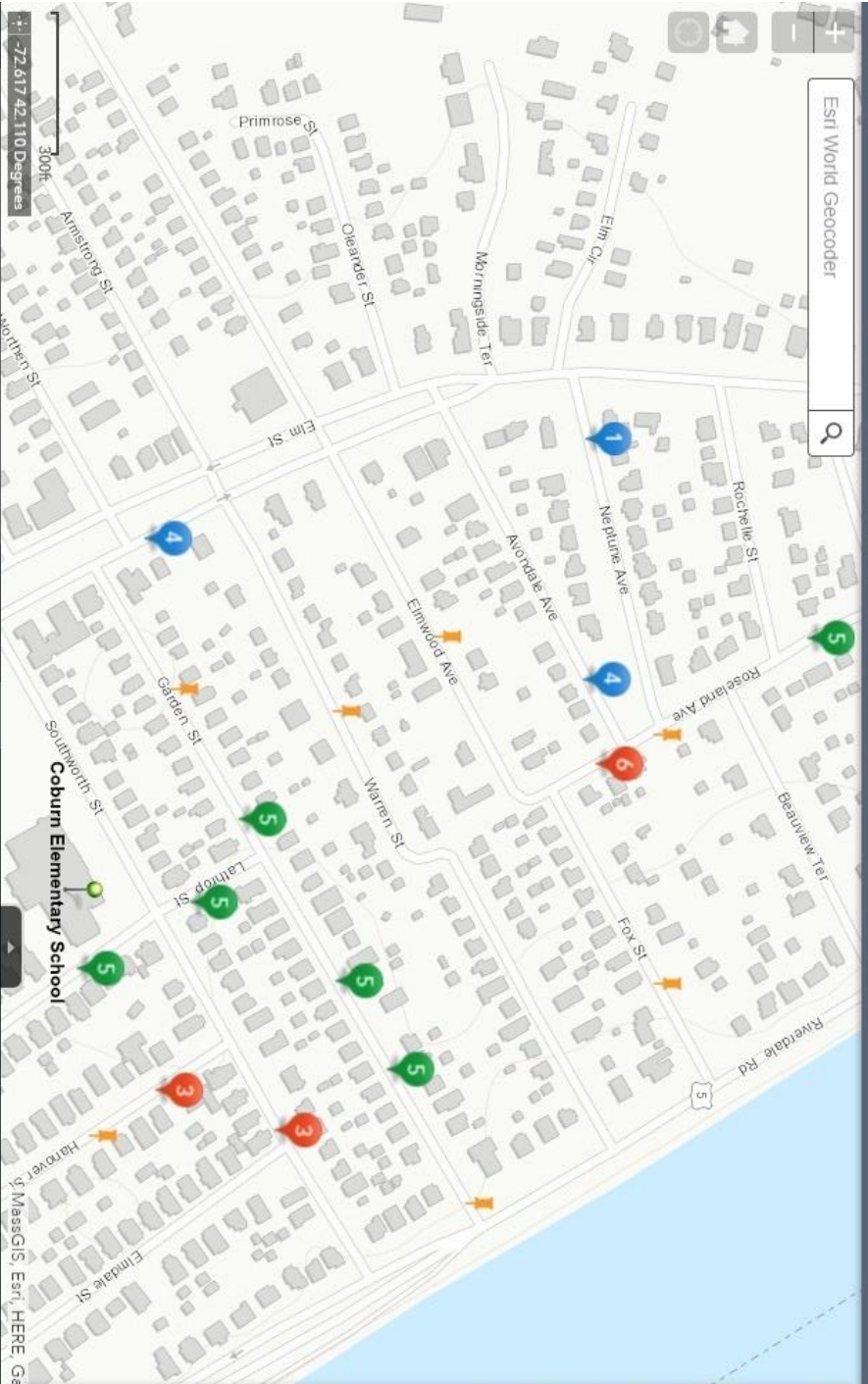


Location: Elm Street and Garden Street

Description: Crossing Guard assisting child crossing Elm Street after school. This is an area scheduled for improvements (see later section).



ESRI World Geocoder

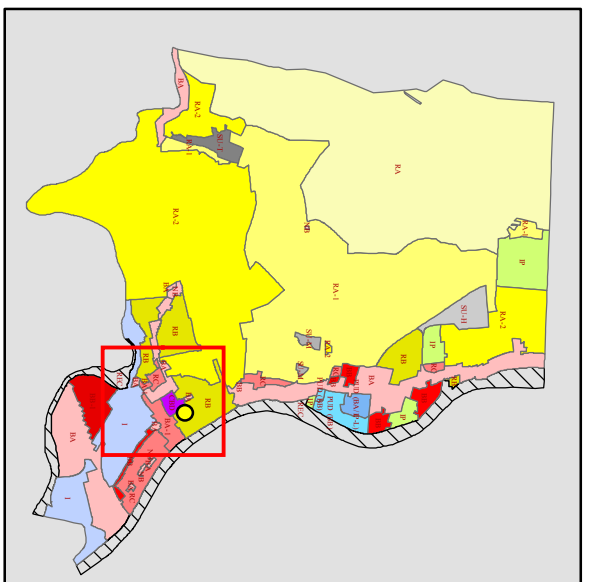
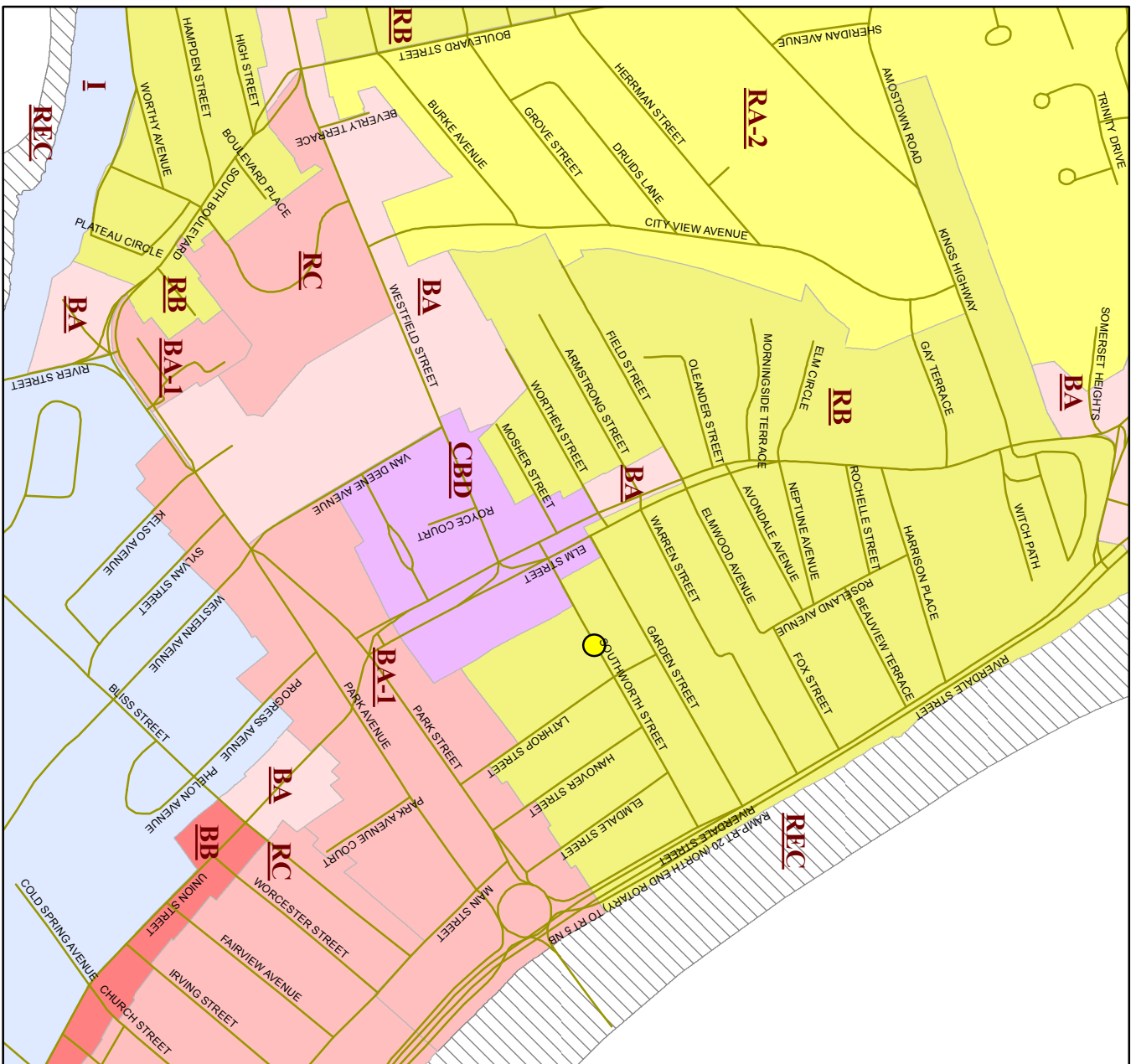


Legend

SRTS Hazards

- 1 Poor curbing/No curb
- 2 No parking available
- 3 Sidewalk obstructed
- 4 Sidewalks on one side only
- 5 Poor sidewalk conditions
- 6 No sidewalk
- Other areas of concern

Zoning Around Coburn Elementary



- Legend**
- Coburn Elementary
 - BA
 - BA-1
 - BA-1-1
 - BA-2
 - BB
 - BB-1
 - CBD
 - I
 - IP
 - NB
 - PUD (BA/IP-L)
 - PUD (BB)
 - RA
 - RA-1
 - RA-2
 - REC
 - REC-I
 - SU-H
 - SU-M
 - SU-T

Memorial Elementary School

Memorial Elementary School is located at 201 Norman Street in West Springfield's Memorial neighborhood. This elementary school currently enrolls 236 children from Grades 1-5. The student teacher ratio is 15 to 1. Among these students, English is not the first language for 35.2% of the students, and 65.7% are economically disadvantaged.¹⁰

The walking portion of the school's attendance zone is bordered by the Consolidated Rail Corp railyard to the north, River Street/the Westfield River to the west and south, and Memorial Avenue/the Eastern States Exposition to the east extending from the north to south where it meets River Street. The unique location of this neighborhood between the Westfield River, the Eastern States Exposition, and the Consolidated Railyard clearly defines the area of interest for implementing Safe Routes to School objectives. This walking portion of the attendance zone is bound by major impenetrable physical barriers in the form of train tracks, and the heavily trafficked roads of River and Memorial Streets.

This part of the Memorial neighborhood is an exceptionally diverse mix of commercial businesses, industry buildings, and residential housing. Truck traffic, to service the many businesses in the area, is heavy and steady throughout the day.

The area falls in a Business B-1 (BB-1) zoning district (see Map Zoning Around Memorial Elementary). In this district, the only permitted residential uses are multi-family through a site plan review process. Much of the existing housing appears to be pre-existing non-

conforming uses. Lot sizes in the neighborhood vary greatly with many residential lots of 5,000 sq ft, and larger commercial and industrial lots of over 100,000 sq ft. Commercial, wholesale, and industrial uses are allowed by-right, subject to site plan review. The district allows an intense use of lots, including 60% coverage (buildings) and up to 4 stories in height.¹¹

The mix and distribution of business and industrial areas in relation to the residential housing creates some unique challenges for residents and children. A major concern is that along many streets (see map Safety Audit Scores Memorial Elementary) the sidewalks are spotty – appearing and disappearing along the length of the street. Also, there are many examples of parking lots lacking controlled access—that is the entire property frontage is open to the street, and parking spaces back out onto what would be the sidewalk area. This creates unsafe conditions for pedestrians as cars and/or trucks can pull in all along this frontage, and back out at many points. Another characteristic of the area is that there are many surface parking lots that appear to serve the Big E during its operation, providing off street parking within a reasonable distance.

The unsafe condition of parking along open frontage, without curbing, exists adjacent to Memorial School both at the corner of Norman Street and Cold Spring Avenue, and Baldwin Street and Cold Spring Avenue (see photos below). In addition, at several locations in the walking area cars were parked on sidewalks creating obstructions that oblige pedestrians to walk in the street. Several of these were at residential properties and thus may be related to small lot sizes that minimize the length of driveway available.

Many of the sidewalks in the area are in good shape having been recently renovated, yet there are several streets without sidewalks on both sides of the street. Residential housing is

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<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavID=1&eftNavId=100&orgcode=03320007&orgtypecode=6>

11 <http://gisweb.west-springfield.ma.us/ZoningDocs/BB-1.pdf>

not contiguous with some areas where businesses and large commercial buildings are interspersed with many residential uses. This mixes commercial traffic with residential living, not the safest conditions especially for children playing outside.

Overall, the neighborhood feels more commercial and industrial than residential. However, as the only community use in the area Memorial School is a focal point for the residents, and its 2017 renovated playground and its sports fields, serve as the major green space and recreation area for local residents. Despite its location in a business district and along a principal arterial (River Street has an ADT of 11,774),¹² Memorial School is an important recreational destination for children and families outside of school hours, and the school year.

A simple hands-raised survey of students at Memorial School was conducted on April 3, 2017. This found 38% of the students attending Memorial traveled to school by riding the Yellow School Bus, and 44% were driven to school by their parent or guardian. A total of 31 students, or 14%, reported walking to school (see Figure 4). This figure is an estimation, as like Coburn, it is affected by weather, attendance on the survey day, and inaccurate (yet enthusiastic!) responses from the youngest children.

Crossing guards are located at the intersections of Norman and Baldwin Streets with Cold Spring Avenue (see Map Memorial Elementary Busing and Walkers). These are critical crossing places for access to Memorial School. Also observed, were parents walking children to school forced to maneuver around parked trucks and cars at the business located at 198 Norman Street. This business is one where parking is not defined by curbing, and vehicles are

haphazardly parked in what would be the sidewalk area (see pictures below). The portion of Norman Street from Cold Spring Avenue to River Street, lacks a sidewalk on the south side.

There is an orderly dismissal routine, with buses lined up along Norman Street, and parents waiting in the parking lot and along Cold Spring Avenue. Walkers used the crossing guards located at the two intersections with Cold Spring Avenue.

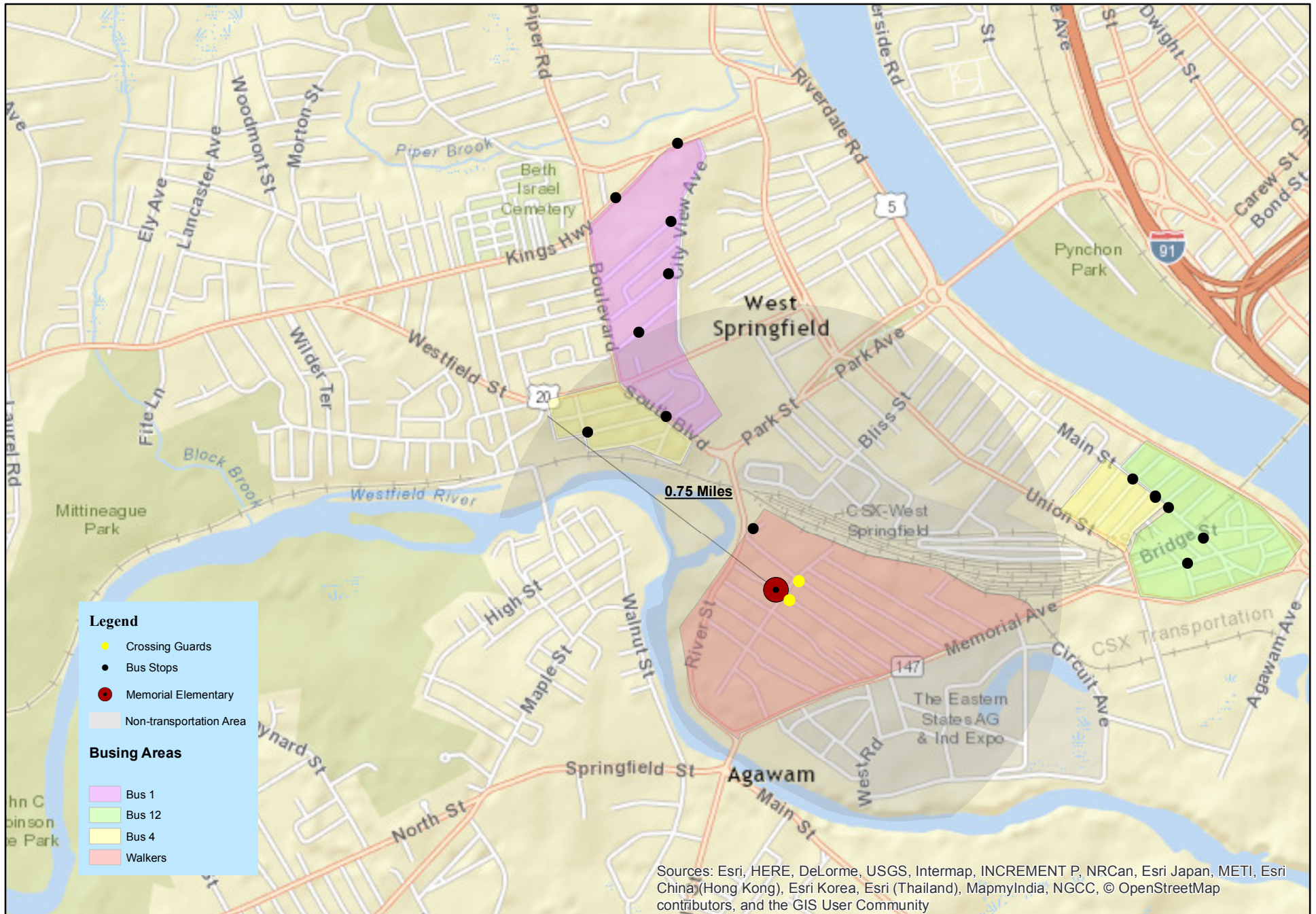
Grade	Total Students	Walk	Bike	Yellow Bus	Car/Vehicle	Other	Carpool
1	41	10	0	17	14	0	
2	42	3	0	15	22	0	
3	41	3	0	15	21	0	
4	56	6	0	26	21	0	5
5	36	9	1	10	16	0	1
Total	216	31	1	83	94	0	6
Percentage	100%	14%	1%	38%	44%	0%	3%

Figure 5 Hand Survey of Students April 3, 2017 Travel to Memorial Elementary School.

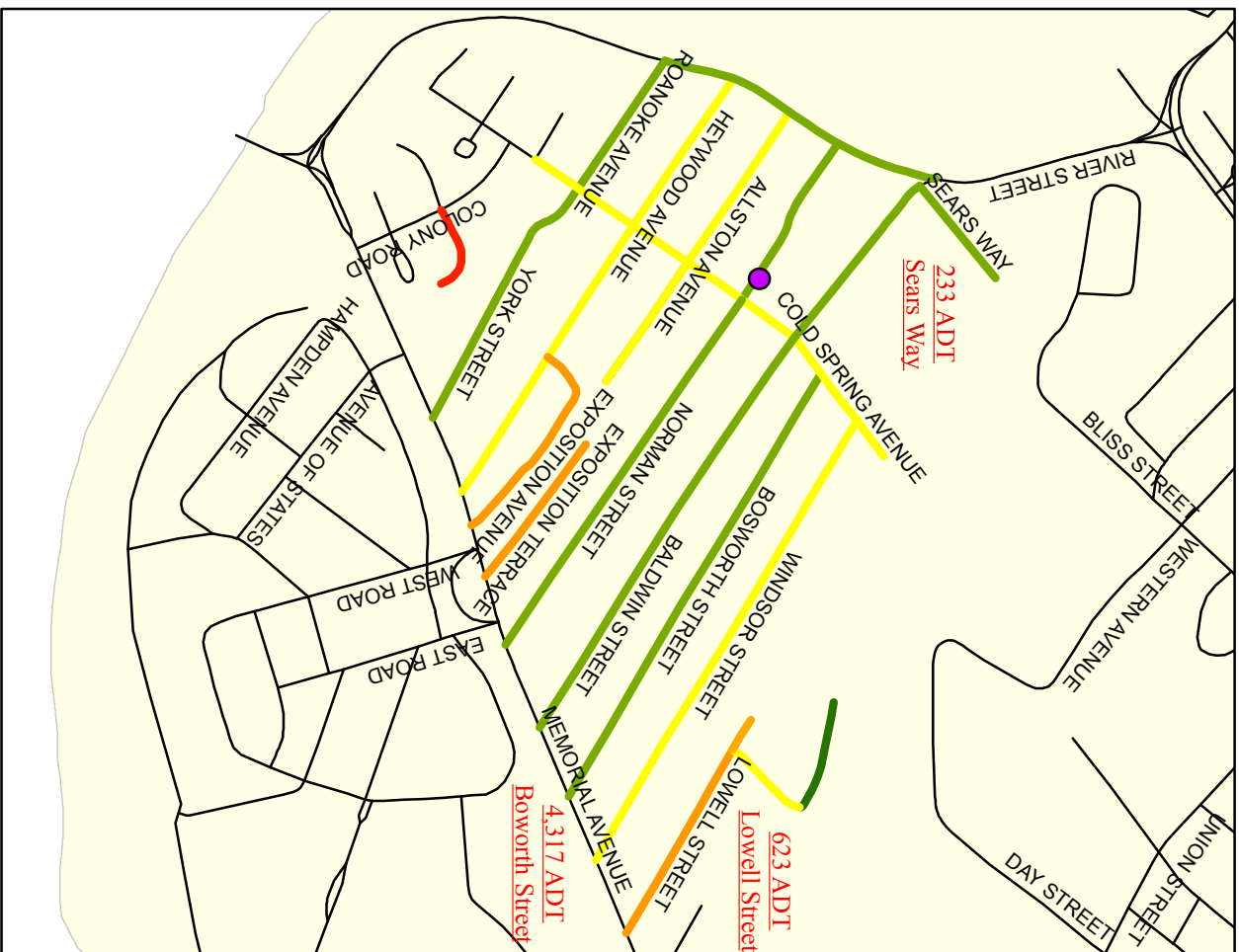
There are flashing signals warning of school zone along Baldwin Street, Norman Street, and Cold Spring Avenue.

¹² ADT values by community available at: <http://www.pvpc.org/projects/municipal-traffic-counts-2011-2015>

Memorial Elementary - Busing and Walkers



Safety Audit Scores - Memorial Elementary



Hazards Found on Streets:
Missing curbs
Sidewalks end periodically
Industrial road
No street crossings
Poor sidewalk conditions
Large amounts of debris
Structures/vegetation hanging over sidewalk
Busy intersection
Live wire hanging

Legend

● Memorial Elementary

Streets for Memorial

Scores

- 1 - Poor
- 2
- 3 - Fair
- 4
- 5 - Good

A point system determines the scores each street receives. The safety of the sidewalks, driveways, obstacles, and crosswalks make up the point system. This can be seen on an audit sheet in the appendix.

Conditions in the Vicinity of Memorial Elementary School (14 Pictures)



Location: Cold Spring Ave, looking towards memorial School
Description: Sidewalk – One Side; Open commercial lot-no sidewalk-hazard



Location: Windsor Street
Description: Sidewalk- both sides of street (but not continuous – see picture 3 and 4); houses close to street-obstruct vehicles from seeing pedestrians; sidewalk and road service excellent; grass strip acts as barrier between sidewalk and road.



Location: Cold Spring Avenue/198 Norman Avenue
Description: Business Vehicles – no sidewalk, curbing, off street parking, and or controlled access.



Location: Norman Street/Cold Spring Avenue Description: Crossing Guard in the morning for Memorial School arrivals.



Location: Windsor Street

Description: Car obstructing sidewalk; tree-lawn acts as barrier between sidewalk and road



Location: Windsor Street

Description: (Above) sidewalk only ONE side – not continuous; business heavy-residential further down; grass strip acts as barrier between sidewalk and road.



Location: Windsor Street

Description: no sidewalk/designated walking surface, open business lot hazard, car parked part-way in street-partway on lot-pedestrians forced into street



Location: Bosworth Street

Description: car partially obstructing sidewalk, sidewalk- both sides in this section, grass strip acts as barrier between sidewalk and road



Location: Bosworth Street

Description: sidewalk-one side; long, straight, continuous, flat, even.



Location: Baldwin Street looking towards Memorial School

Description: school zone speed limit signal, excessive debris on sidewalk, multi-family with open continuous frontage and parking directly off sidewalk area—a danger for pedestrians to cross and immediately diagonally across from Memorial School.



Location: Cold Spring Avenue/Baldwin Avenue, Memorial School on left
Description: lack of controlled access and no off-street parking aisle.



Location: Norman Street
Description: several cars blocking sidewalk; on-street parking; grass strip as barrier between sidewalk and road; school zone speed limit signal.



Location: Titan USA at 140 BALDWIN STREET

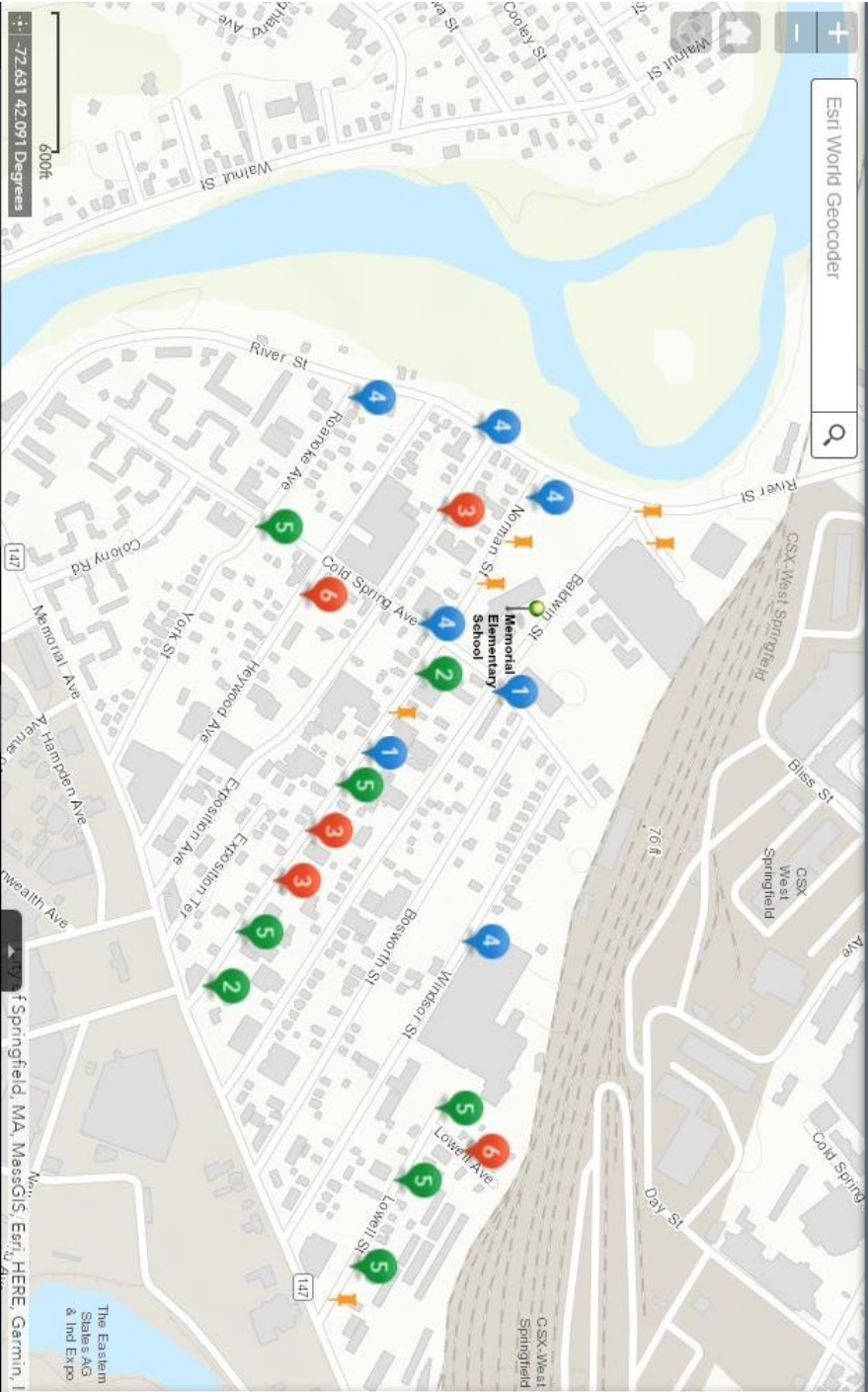
Description: business redevelopment shows how to improve with controlled access driveways, curbing and landscaping (Images from Google Maps Street View).



Memorial Hazard Map

with Web Appbuilder for ArcGIS

Esri World Geocoder

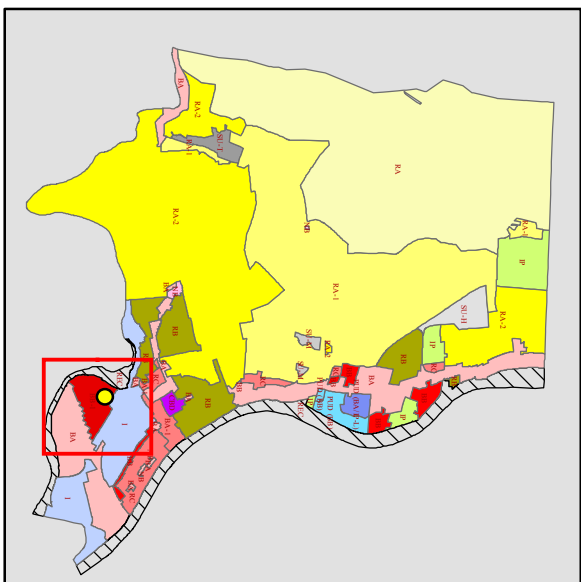
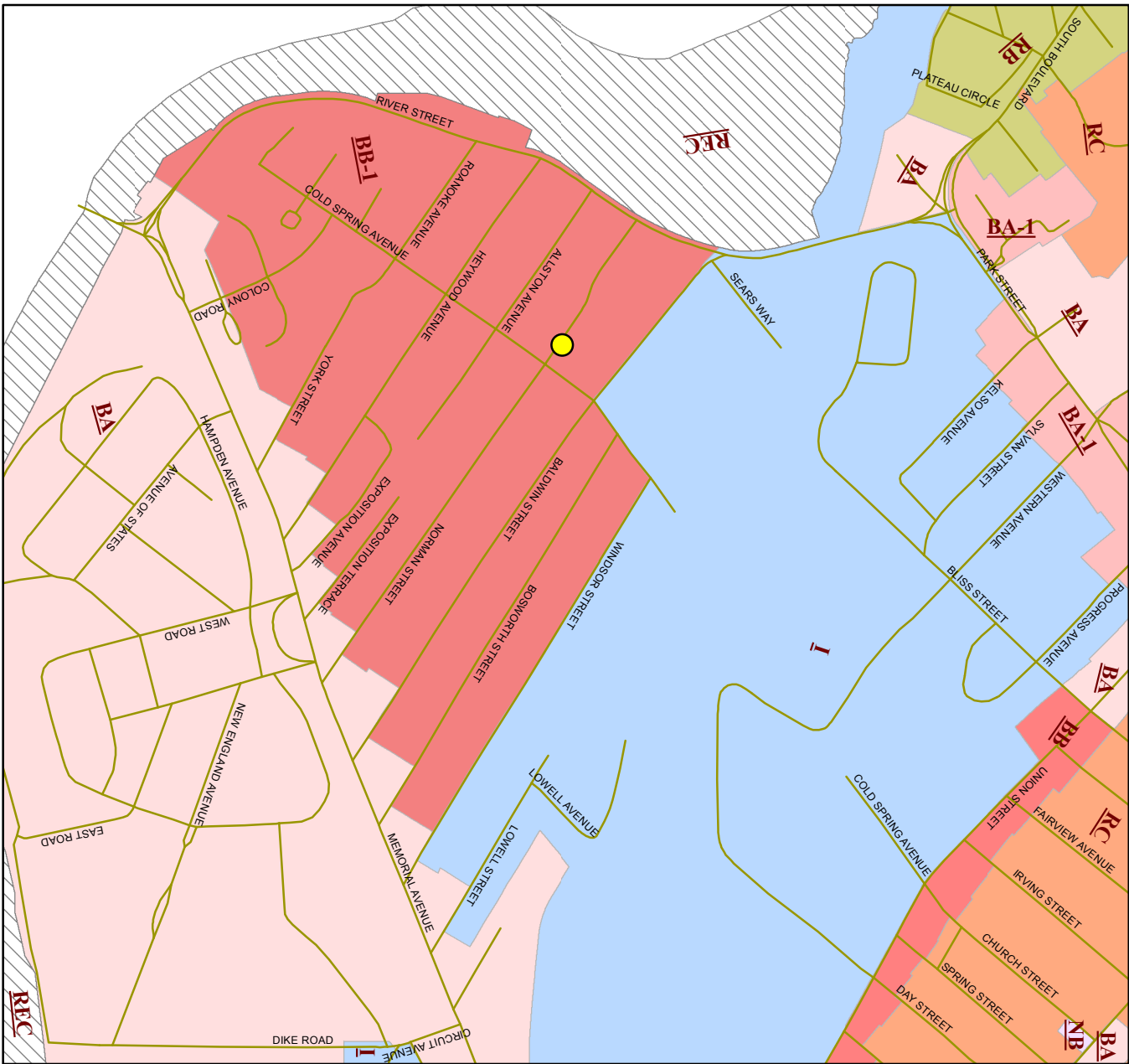






















Legend

SRTS Hazards

- 1 Poor curbing/No curb
- 2 No parking available
- 3 Sidewalk obstructed
- 4 Sidewalks on one side only
- 5 Poor sidewalk conditions
- 6 No sidewalk
- Other areas of concern

Zoning Around Memorial Elementary



- Legend**
-  Memorial Elementary
 -  BA
 -  BA-1
 -  BB
 -  BB-1
 -  CBD
 -  I
 -  IP
 -  NB
 -  PUD (BA/IP-L)
 -  PUD (BB)
 -  RA
 -  RA-1
 -  RA-2
 -  RB
 -  RC
 -  REC
 -  SU-H
 -  SU-M
 -  SU-T

Parent Dialogues

To learn more about parent attitudes surrounding travel to and from school, we arranged for three Parent Dialogues:

- (1) **April 11, 2017 at 3:15 PM at Merrick Station**—open to all and advertised by the School Engagement and Outreach Coordinator, Jenn Brennan.
- (2) **April 27, 2017 at 4:00 PM at the Merrick Station** – for parents attending ELL classes, following the end of class.
- (3) **May 3, 2017 at 5:30 PM at Memorial School Cafeteria**, as part of the PTO meeting., advertised by Principal Donna Calbrese.



Figure 6 Parents at April 27 Merrick Station Dialogue.

Unfortunately, the first meeting fell on the first day of summer-like temperatures and sun, so no parents came to the dialogue. The second event had 15 attendees. These included 2 interpreters (who were residents) and 13 parents. Two participants spoke Russian (one from Russia, one from Kazakhstan), and the other parents were from Nepal and spoke Nepalese. The third meeting was scheduled as the first part of a regular Memorial School PTO meeting, and had 15 parents and five school personnel,

including the principal and teachers, in attendance.

The same basic flyer was used for each event, except for the post-ELL class event which was arranged by asking parents who attended the classes if they would be interested in the dialogue (see Appendix).

The dialogues began with a brief explanation of the Safe Routes to School approach, and an overview of the work of the West Springfield Wellness Leadership Team. This was followed by several structured questions (see Appendix). Parents were asked how their children get to and from school, and why they use the mode of transportation that they do. Further questions sought to get a conversation going about what age is appropriate for walking alone (it was made clear that there is no right answer and that the group could expect to have differing views), and how the experience could be better. The main points made during the April 27th ELL parents meeting are as follows:

- Most of these parents had children who rode the bus, due to the distance to the school.
- Parents had concerns about traffic and considered the bus the safest way to travel to school.
- Parents wanted the bus to be more reliable.



Figure 7 Parents at April 27 Merrick Station Dialogue

- Parents wanted the bus to be more accommodating in the colder weather. (Those

parents that did walk joked about being picked up along the walking route.)

- One of the Russian parents said she considered the bus a luxury and that there was nothing like that in her home country where children either must walk long distances or ride on public transportation to get to school. She expressed appreciation of the bus as a service for her children. The Nepalese parents agreed, noting access to school is an improvement for some of them, and they very much see the bus as the safest most direct connection to the school program. They view the bus as a way to directly deliver their children into the school system, from their home block.
- Parents expressed a range of ages for what is necessary to be able to walk alone to school but generally agreed on 13- 15 years old.

The main points from the May 3, 2017 Memorial School PTO meeting are as follows:

- Parents expressed a variety of safety concerns with regard to children walking to school including: traffic speeds, people children may encounter, winter weather conditions, and poor street clearing.
- One parent said her worries about strangers extended to all places – not just the school neighborhood.
- Parents noted there are many businesses in the neighborhood and this affects the mix of traffic – more trucks—that are on the streets. One stated her husband had grown up in the area and they had seen it become increasingly commercial.
- A staff member noted the problem of the open frontage parking areas, stating that this is a safety concern she has for when they do safety drills and they must practice evacuation.
- Another parent said she would like her child to walk home but she goes to an after school program so must take the bus. They walk together to school in the morning.
- Staff and parents commented that they have experienced traffic exceeding the school zone

speed limit and ones that have failed to stop for buses with stop signs extended.

- Some parents noted other parents can also be a problem – not obeying the exit/entrance signs of the parking lot, parking for pick-up in the wrong locations, or dropping off children outside before school is open.
- Parents and staff noted the new playground is a draw for children outside of school hours. They expressed concern for children accessing the playground when crossing guards are not on duty. A major safety issue was seen for crossing Norman Street and Baldwin Street at Cold Spring Avenue.
- One parent expressed support for making the area more pedestrian and bike friendly. She said she would like to see bike lanes. This parent noted that although few children ride their bikes to school, many ride bikes at home in the neighborhood and conditions are not safe.
- Parents, in general, thought children should be 10 – 12 before they could walk to school alone. Some said they would not be comfortable at any age.
- Students do obey the crossing guards.
- A staff member offered high praise for the crossing guards, saying they do an outstanding job – getting to the location early, and knowing the children by name.
- Principal Calabrese explained her process for reviewing bike to school requests, describing how she considers the safety of the route and stipulates a helmet must be worn.



Figure 8 Parents at May 3 Memorial School PTO Dialogue

Planned Improvements

Town Engineer James Czach noted the following improvement projects are planned in West Springfield, near the Coburn and Memorial schools, to enhance pedestrian safety and the walking experience:

- Curb Extensions will be constructed along with installation of rectangular “rapid flash” beacons on both sides of the road with “Pedestrian Crossing” signs located on the flashing beacons. These will be added to the following locations near Coburn School:
 - The corner of Elm and Garden Streets.
 - The corner of Elm and Park Streets.
 - The first crosswalk when turning onto Elm Street from Route 20.¹³



Figure 9 Example, from in front of the Post Office on Elm Street, of curb extensions with rapid flash beacons and crosswalk.

- Some construction outside of the West Springfield Council of Aging to repair sidewalks.
- Memorial Bridge going into Agawam is hoping to expand and feature three lanes with the middle lane being an exclusive turning lane. It will also feature a bike path that will connect

paths from West Springfield with those in Agawam. Sidewalks will also be included on both sides of the bridge.

- The height of the railroad track bridges will be changed (River Street and Union Street). There is a need to raise the bridge while lowering the road, to accommodate the height of trucks. The problem is that changing the bridge height has to be gradual otherwise it will disrupt the tracks. (This has been in the works for ten years.)

West Springfield maintains a sidewalk list prioritized by complaints, conditions, and usage. As funds are available repairs or additions are implemented. In addition, West Springfield has access to the Massachusetts gaming Commission Community Mitigation Fund for traffic related upgrades with some relationship to the demands placed on West Springfield from the new MGM Casino under construction in Springfield, MA.

Also important to note, in 2016 West Springfield adopted a Complete Streets policy that stipulates, “*The Town will, to the maximum extent practical, design, construct, maintain, and operate all streets to provide for a comprehensive and integrated street network of facilities for people of all ages and abilities.*” With this policy in place, all improvement projects will be assessed for walkability and bikability. The policy also calls for developing performance metrics to track the increases in sidewalks, bicycle accommodations, and other safety related measures.

¹³ These were identified in an April 2016 Walk Boston report, Philip G. Coburn Elementary Walk Audit.

Recommendations: The Six Es

A set of recommendations was developed based on the audit results, data gathering, and parent dialogues. The recommendations are meant to reflect the concerns voiced by residents and be unique to the circumstances in West Springfield.



Evaluate

In the near future, Coburn School is scheduled to be razed and a new school building constructed. This is an opportunity to design with safety and multi-modal transport in mind. Consideration should be given to the SRTS approach, looking at pedestrian connections and safety, sidewalks, covered bike racks, pickup areas, etc.. It should be remembered that a covered bike rack can serve more than just students – staff, too may want to travel to and from work by bike.



Educate

Massbikes provides safety training on bike riding for schools participating in SRTS. From our experience this is a worthwhile and easy event to arrange and implement, and schools should consider doing it annually. Such training can also be requested for community events.



Encourage

The West Springfield schools we interacted with had concerns about managing walking school buses. Rather than having schools play this role, West Springfield can instead widely promote Walk to School Day, and encourage parents to make their own connections to other walking parents.



Engineer

West Springfield should use the Audit and Hazard maps produced in this report to add the needed sidewalk repairs and additions to the list maintained by the Town. In the Coburn neighborhood, Harrison Place lacks sidewalks, and in the Memorial neighborhood, sidewalks are spotty or only on one side for most of the streets. These additions can be added by priority according to the audit rating, and moving from the school outwards.

While this report considered Safe Routes to and from School, the new playground at Memorial school serves as a major draw from residents in the neighborhood. This school facility serves as the major recreation space for this area. This means children will be traveling to the site outside of school hours, on weekend days, and during the summer months. These are times when crossing guards will not be located at the key intersections of Norman and Baldwin Streets with Cold Spring Avenue. Given this reality, it is strongly recommended that these intersections receive, at a minimum, push button activated crossing signals. These intersections should also be evaluated for curb extensions, to shorten the pedestrian crossing distance and to provide prominent visual signals to drivers that it is a crossing area.

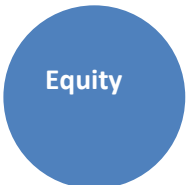
While Coburn is going to be rebuilt, in the meantime a simple bike rack should be installed, with plans for an upgrade to a slightly more expensive covered bike rack with construction of the new building.

The parent dialogues indicated concern about street safety in general (not just to and from school) and in particular a desire to have a community where bike riding was safe. This was in effect a statement of support for the Complete Streets Policy with an expressed desire for bike lanes near Memorial School to serve all users.



Parents and staff expressed a need for periodic traffic enforcement near Memorial to slow traffic and retrain drivers about laws for stopping when buses have lights flashing and are loading or unloading.

West Springfield should use Site Plan Review standards during redevelopment and new development to improve the design of commercial uses in the Memorial neighborhood. In particular, controlled access along frontage and on-site parking aisles, are needed to increase pedestrian safety. Existing businesses may be non-conforming in these regards, but as redevelopment occurs, the safety of pedestrians and bikers should be considered and the designs should meet the Site Plan Review standards to the maximum degree feasible.



Parents at Memorial School felt there were some dead-ends in the area that were not plowed of snow in a timely manner. They requested snow removal be as efficient and timely as in other parts of town.

The residential areas of the Memorial neighborhood are pre-existing non-conforming residential uses. These places are home to many families and should receive the same level of protection other residential uses get, through the rigorous application of Site Plan Review standards to commercial uses, and traffic controls to provide a safe environment for residents.

APPENDIX

Street Name: _____ **Date:** _____ **Time:** _____
Or Block section: from _____ to _____
(if full street cannot be covered)

Section 1

Answer each question Yes or No

Are sidewalks provided along both sides of the street?

Is curbing present along the sidewalk?

Are the sidewalks an adequate width for mixed uses?(wheelchair, bike, etc.)

Are sidewalks free of major blockages? (parked cars, driveways, trees)

Are street crossings adequately marked?

Are all pedestrian signals and push buttons functioning correctly?(if applicable)

Are the school zone/speed limits adequately marked?(if applicable)

Section 2

Rate each category on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being very poor, 2 being poor, 3 being adequate, 4 being good, 5 being excellent)

Rate the condition of the walking surface (Is it well maintained?)

Rate the visibility of signs, pavement, and school zone markings along/on the street

Rate the traffic conditions of the street
(do they negatively impact the walkability of the street?)

Rate the intersections in terms of their crossability and overall pedestrian safety (excessive on-street parking, high traffic, visual obstructions)

Rate the overall accessibility of the walking conditions (taking to account signage, markings, sidewalk surfaces, ADA accommodations, etc.)

Rate the frequency/adequacy of the lighting infrastructure of the street (as it appears during the day)

Section 3

Outstanding comments on poor street conditions

Comment

Specific Location(Street Address?)

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How would you describe the foot traffic of the street? (Estimate the amount of people you saw walking)

Section 4

Assessment

Scoring:

Section 1 - Yes= 3pts, No=0pts

Section 1 Total _____/21

Section 2 - 1=1pt, 2=2pts, 3=3pts, 4=4pts, 5=5pts

Section 2 Total _____/30

Section 3 - to be noted on map

Total Points - Section 1 Total+Section 2 Total

Total Points _____/51

Points	Score	Points	Score
1-5pts	= 1	26-30pts	= 6
6-10pts	= 2	31-35pts	= 7
11-15pts	= 3	36-40pts	= 8
16-20pts	= 4	41-45pts	= 9
21-25pts	= 5	46-51pts	= 10

Score _____/10

Join Us!



**Come and Enter a Raffle
to Win a New Bike
and Helmet Sized
to Your child!**

All participants will receive a gift card for food.

TUESDAY APRIL 11

AT 3:15 PM

**MERRICK STATION
389 MAIN STREET
WEST SPRINGFIELD, MA**

**Parents & Caretakers
Come to Share Your
Experiences!**

**Safe Routes
to School Dialogue**

**Make getting to school
healthier, safer,
greener, and more fun!**

**Please come and share
your stories and
concerns.**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
PLEASE CONTACT:**

**Jeanne Galloway
Director of Public Health
413.263.3206
West Springfield, MA**



West Springfield Safe Routes to School

Dialogue with parents/Care-givers

Participants: Parents, grandparents, and caretakers of *all* elementary school children – not just those that walk or bike. The intent is to have a conversation and hear from the community, working together to share experiences, express concerns, consider conditions, and brainstorm possible improvements!

Discussion: **How to make the trip from home to school and back, HEALTHIER, SAFER, GREENER, AND MORE FUN!**

Raffle for Bike w/Helmet (sized to child). Also \$10 Food Gift Card.

Potential Focus Group Questions:

- 1) On most days, how does your child(ren) get to/from school? If they do not walk, why?
- 2) How does your child(ren) most like to travel to/from school?
- 3) What age do you think children can walk alone to school?
- 4) Do you have any concerns for their safety in making this trip? Other concerns?
- 5) Can you share any stories about this trip that your child has told you?
- 6) What would you consider the ideal way for your child to get to/from school?
- 7) What can be improved? Is there a location (or an issue) that should be focused on?
- 8) What can the school do to improve the trip? What can parents do to improve the trip? What can the community do to improve the trip?

This will happen in small groups (depending on the total in attendance). WSU students will act as scribes taking down main points on easel pads. Report out to larger group at end.

Discussion summarized in final report.