

WATERLOO:

# 2021 WALKABILITY ASSESSMENT REPORT



POWERED BY Wellmark 

## FOREWORD

**Thank you to all the participants who took part in the walking audit workshop. Healthy Hometown<sup>SM</sup> Powered by Wellmark was invited by the City of Waterloo to assist in identifying opportunities for enhancing walkability and bikeability.**

Healthy Hometown is a way to make your community an even better place to live, work and play by using proven tools and techniques that help make the healthy choice the easy choice. Healthy Hometown provides evidence-based built environment and behavioral economics principles that result in desired action along with policy modifications to help communities make sustainable changes that will improve the overall well-being of residents. Implementing ways to make it safer for pedestrians and bicyclists is one primary way to achieve sustainable change.

The walking audit that was performed in Waterloo was designed to help community members identify and visualize ways to provide a better environment to walk and bike. The walking audit is also designed to stimulate conversation within the community regarding actions that can be taken.

What follows is an identification of community members who participated in the walking audit, recommendations based on the walking audit and a summary of the conversation. Some recommendations are low cost and could be easy to implement, while others may be large expenses that could take years of planning and work. We hope these recommendations will provide a framework for your community to make Waterloo more pedestrian- and bike-friendly.

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## CREATING SAFER STREETS

- Construct **infill sidewalks** to connect gaps in the existing sidewalk network
- Ensure that the city’s **sidewalk repair** policy is enforced
- Install ADA-compliant **curb ramps** at all intersections
- Paint high-visibility continental-style markings at all **crosswalks**
- Construct **bumpouts** at wide intersections
- Implement a **road diet** on Franklin Street
- Plant **street trees** between the curb and sidewalk throughout the community
- Remove **slip lane** at East Park Avenue and Walnut Street
- Replace existing **traffic signals** at East Park Avenue and Walnut Street with stop signs
- Convert **one-way streets** in the downtown area to two-way
- Make sure all **pedestrian infrastructure** is operable/in good working order
- Replace outdated pedestrian **push buttons** at traffic lights
- Install pedestrian **countdown signals** at all intersections with traffic signals

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

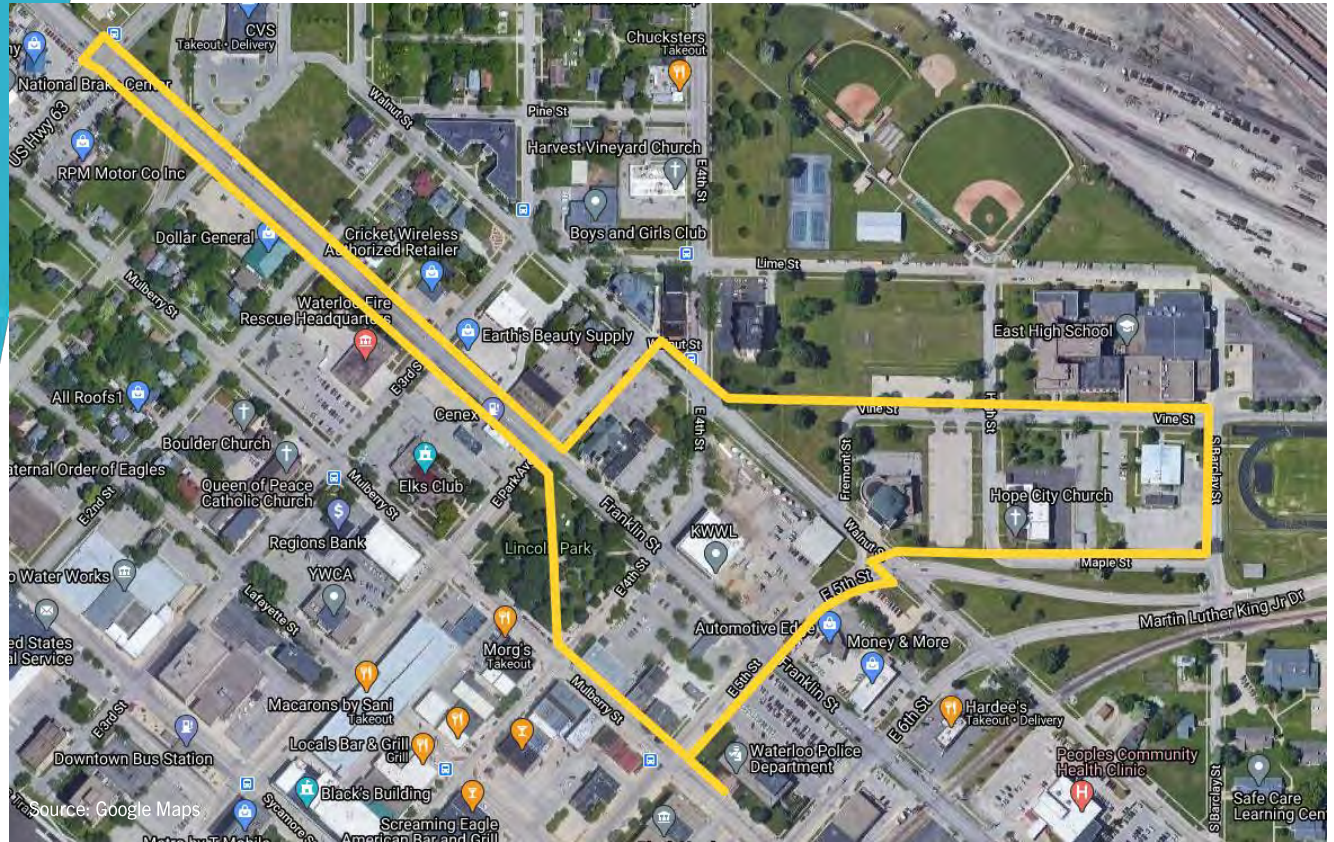
May 2021

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## WALKING AUDIT ROUTE

Participants completed a walking audit along a 1.5-mile route beginning and ending at Waterloo City Hall.

This audit began with observations of walking conditions along East 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Maple Street, Barclay Avenue and Vine Street near East High School. Participants then continued along Walnut Street, East Park Avenue, and Franklin Street to US Highway 63 before returning to City Hall along Franklin Street and Mulberry Street.



The map above depicts the first route participants observed in Waterloo during the walking audit workshop.

# CREATING SAFER STREETS

While individuals must choose to be physically active, communities can make changes to their environment that help make this choice easier. Ensuring residents can access worksites, schools, homes, grocery stores, parks and trails by walking and biking will help encourage them to be more physically active in their everyday lives.

## Sidewalks

Installing sidewalks in key areas where there are gaps can help improve the connectivity of your community's pedestrian network and promote physical activity. Future gaps can be prevented by adopting policies that require new development projects to install sidewalks as part of their construction plans.

- Construct infill sidewalks to connect gaps in the existing sidewalk network



Areas of missing sidewalk like the one pictured above along Vine Street near East High School could be eliminated with the installation of infill sidewalk.



Building sidewalks in strategic locations like the one pictured above on Vine Street near East High School would improve walkability.



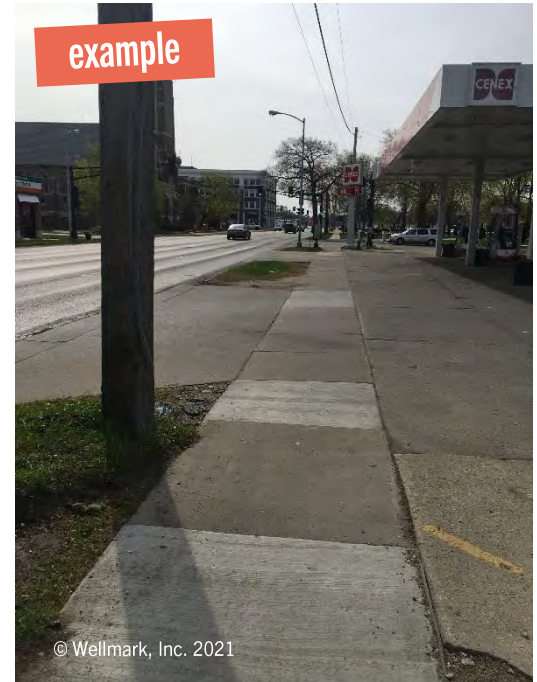
Example of a newly constructed sidewalk connection from Afton, Iowa.

# CREATING SAFER STREETS

## Sidewalk Repair

As sidewalks age, it's important they are adequately maintained. In order to keep all sidewalks well maintained, the city may need to annually inspect all sidewalks within specific neighborhoods and notify property owners who have sidewalks that are out of compliance. Inspections could eventually cover the entire city as the program moves to different neighborhoods each year.

- Ensure that the city's sidewalk repair policy is enforced



Some sections of sidewalk in Waterloo need to be repaired or replaced. Other areas of the city have recently had damaged sidewalk panels replaced with new concrete, as seen in the example photo above.

# CREATING SAFER STREETS

## Curb Ramps

In addition to sidewalks, missing and outdated curb ramps represent impediments to those navigating your community. These situations can be remedied by updating curb ramps to ensure they are ADA-compliant.

Many intersections in Waterloo already have updated curb ramps. In remaining locations that do not have curb ramps, sidewalks can be difficult to navigate and pose significant challenges for parents pushing strollers and people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices. Additional curb ramp replacements should be targeted along priority pedestrian routes in the community.

- Install ADA-compliant curb ramps at all intersections



The curb ramps at this intersection need to be replaced to make them ADA-compliant.



Poor curb ramp conditions can make navigating streets challenging for people with limited mobility.



Example of a recently constructed ADA-compliant curb ramp from Altoona, Iowa.



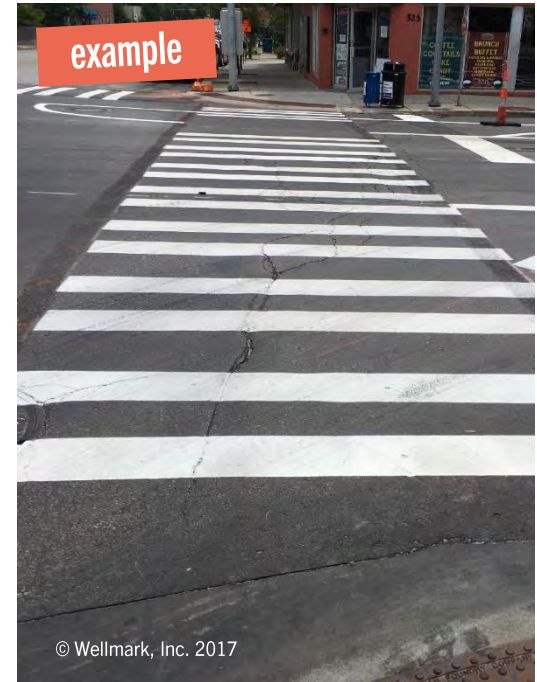
# CREATING SAFER STREETS

## Crosswalks

Installing safe crossing points for people walking and riding bikes is a key component of making Waterloo a more walkable and accessible community. Marked crosswalks are one component of improving the safety for people crossing streets.

Today, Waterloo has marked crosswalks at most intersections. Many of these crosswalks are painted with standard-style markings that have faded. Upgrading all crosswalks to high-visibility, continental-style markings will improve pedestrian safety.

- Paint high-visibility continental-style markings at all crosswalks



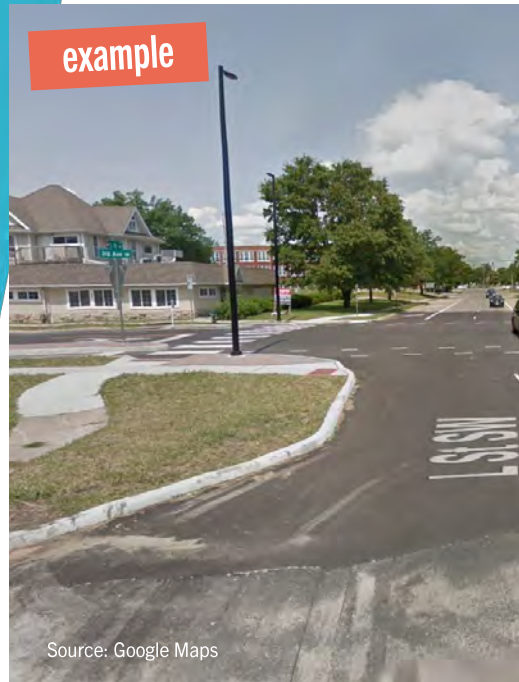
Existing crosswalks could benefit from the addition of high-visibility, continental-style markings (pictured above) to help improve the visibility of painted crosswalks.

# CREATING SAFER STREETS

## Bumpouts

Bumpouts are extensions of the sidewalk that take up road space not needed for vehicular traffic. Bumpouts that include various landscaping elements help create an inviting and comfortable walking environment. They also shorten crossing distances for pedestrians at intersections, decrease turning vehicle speeds, and provide opportunities for street beautification.

- Construct bumpouts at wide intersections



Example of a recently installed bumpout from Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

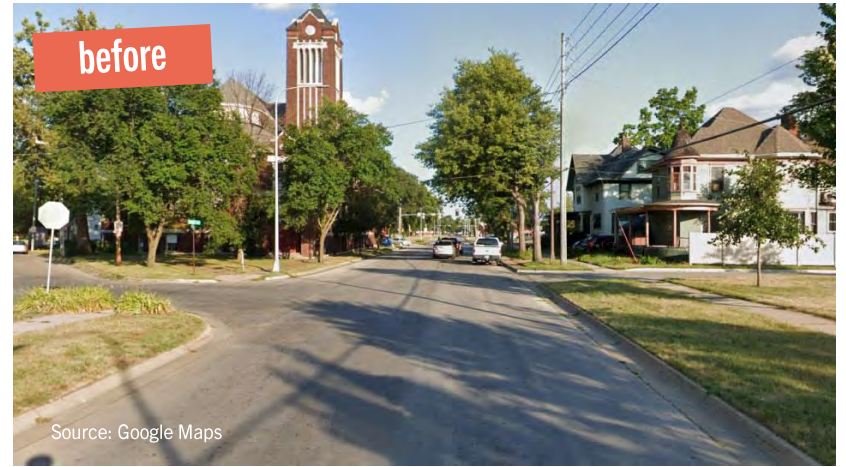


Illustration of potential bumpouts on Walnut Street.

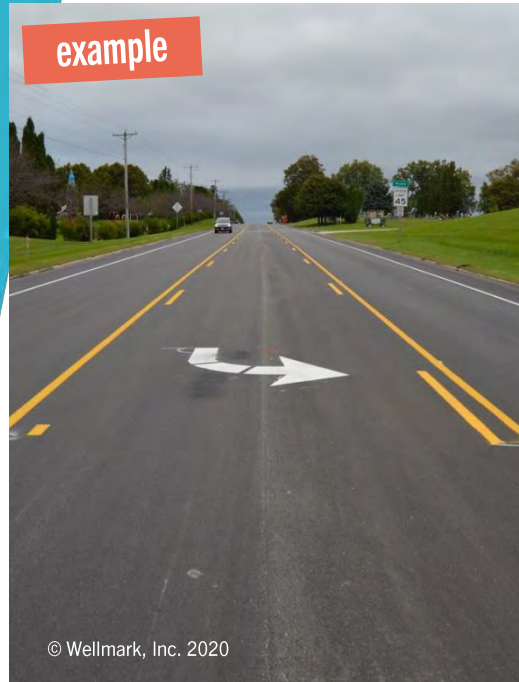
# CREATING SAFER STREETS

## Road Diets

Franklin Street currently has more lanes for vehicular traffic than daily traffic counts warrant. This makes it a candidate for something known as a “road diet.” A road diet involves reducing the number of lanes for vehicles and using the extra space for a different use. Most communities use the opportunity to reconfigure parking, widen sidewalks or add bike lanes.

These changes will encourage lower vehicle speeds, which are more conducive to a vibrant community atmosphere. The streets should be engineered so that vehicles are more likely to naturally travel at the current posted speed limit.

- Implement a road diet on Franklin Street



Example of a recently completed road diet on Highway 9 in Waukon, Iowa.

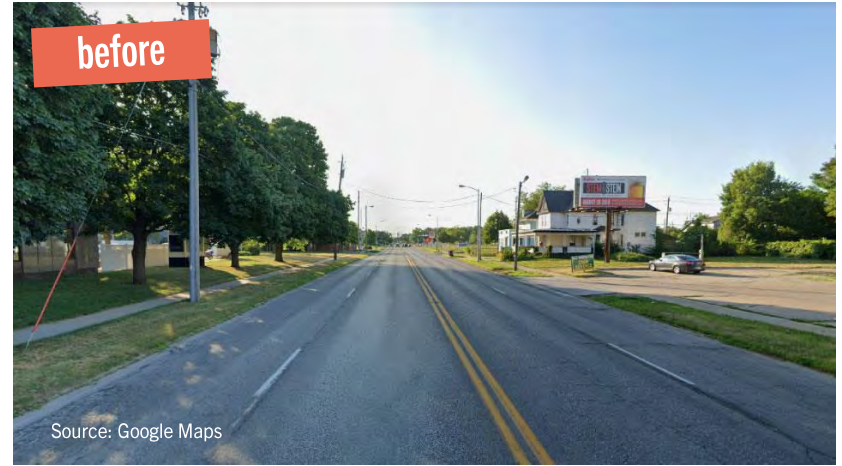


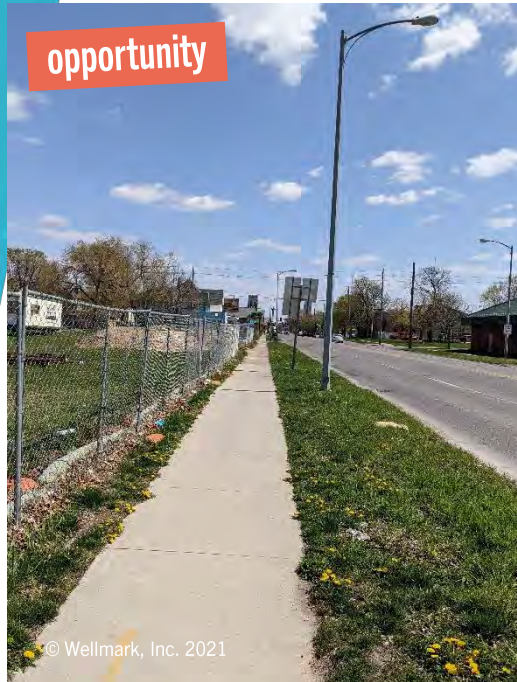
Illustration of a potential road diet on Franklin Street.

# CREATING SAFER STREETS

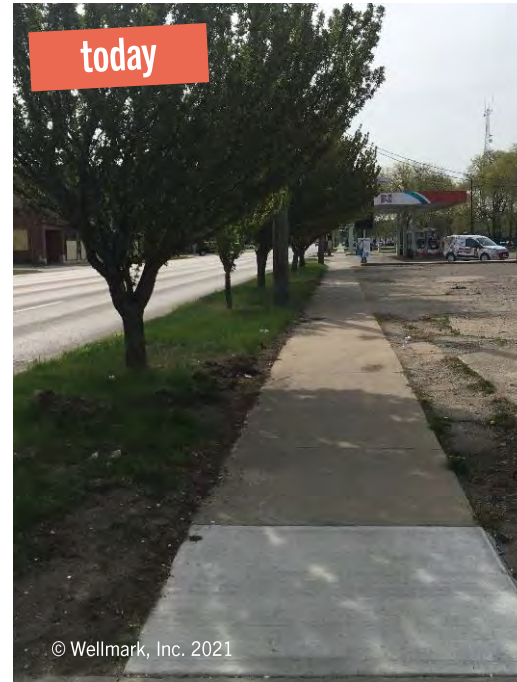
## Street Trees

Another way to help make walking more pleasant and provide a more visually interesting streetscape is planting street trees. In places with open greenspace alongside the road, planting new street trees would increase the aesthetic appeal of the environment and make walking more comfortable during warmer parts of the year. Many streets in Waterloo benefit from older trees with large canopies, though some additional streets could use new trees to provide the same benefits over time.

- Plant street trees between the curb and sidewalk throughout the community



This section of Franklin Street could benefit from the addition of street trees between the curb and sidewalk.



Participants stated that they were more comfortable walking along Franklin Street in areas where street trees were present.

# CREATING SAFER STREETS

## Intersection Modification

Participants indicated some enhancements could be made to the intersection of East Park Avenue and Walnut Street. Today, this is a signalized intersection that includes a slip lane for vehicles to turn left on East 4<sup>th</sup> Street from East Park Avenue. The slip lane adds unnecessary confusion for people driving and walking. Removing it would simplify the intersection's design and make it safer for all users.

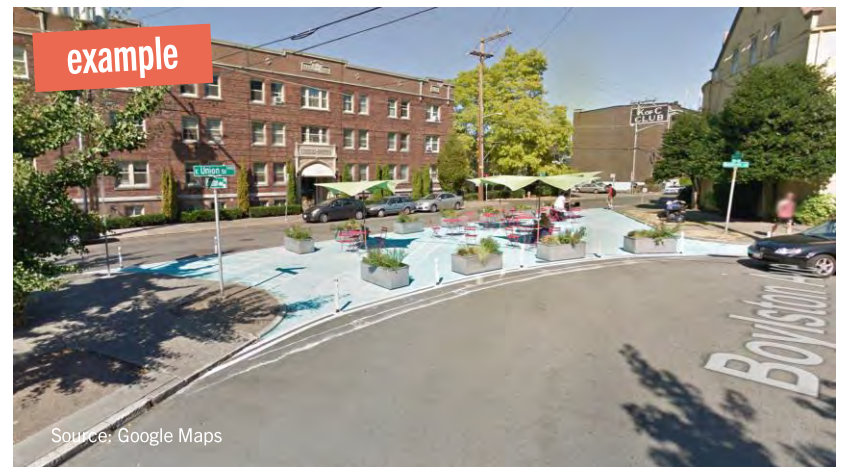
- Remove slip lane at East Park Avenue and Walnut Street
- Replace existing traffic signals at East Park Avenue and Walnut Street with stop signs



The intersection of East Park Avenue and Walnut Street could benefit from the addition of bumpouts and removal of the existing slip lane.



The picture above shows the existing slip lane connecting to East 4<sup>th</sup> Street.



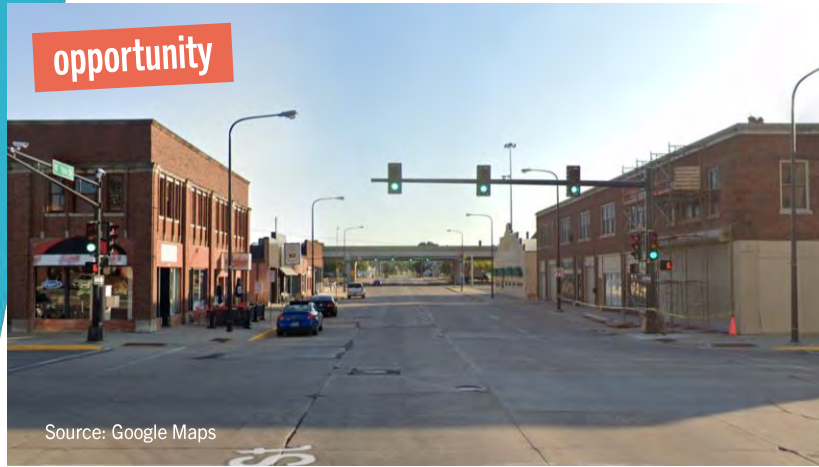
Example of an intersection that was modified using paint, planters, and seating from a neighborhood in Seattle, Washington.

# CREATING SAFER STREETS

## One-Way Conversions

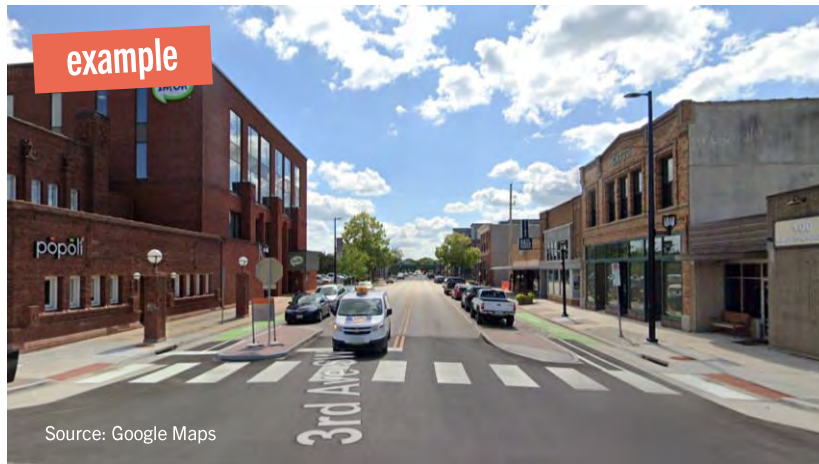
Calming traffic and improving the walking and biking environment on city streets can be achieved by converting one-way streets to two-way streets. These conversions eliminate the ability for motorists to pass other vehicles traveling in the same direction and provide extra road space for features like on-street parking and protected bike lanes. Waterloo currently has several one-way streets in the downtown area that could be converted to two-way traffic.

- Convert one-way streets in the downtown area to two-way



Source: Google Maps

Today, West 5<sup>th</sup> Street is designed with multiple lanes traveling in the same direction, resulting in traffic traveling at higher speeds.



Source: Google Maps

Example of a one-way conversion implemented in Cedar Rapids, Iowa that includes bumpouts, crosswalks, and protected bike lanes.

# CREATING SAFER STREETS

## Traffic Signals

At intersections with traffic signals, pedestrian signals were almost always present. However, participants noted that some crosswalk lights were not properly functioning. Monitoring these signals so that repairs can be made routinely will be important going forward. The use of countdown signals for pedestrians at intersections can also help eliminate a significant source of confusion.

- Make sure all pedestrian infrastructure is operable/in good working order
- Replace outdated pedestrian push buttons at traffic lights
- Install pedestrian countdown signals at all intersections with traffic signals



Some push buttons at traffic signals are outdated and not working properly. Updating these push buttons and using countdown signals for pedestrians will help eliminate confusion and improve safety at intersections.

## PARTICIPANT DISCUSSION/NEXT STEPS

Following the walking audit, participants talked about their observations from the walk. Participants noted several elements that they felt made walking more comfortable, as well as many elements that made walking more difficult or less safe.

The recommendations included in this report have been assembled to serve as a guide for your community to improve upon some of those elements and prioritize which ones are most important to pursue.

This report can be used as a tool to help build support from community leaders, elected officials, and the community at large to create a plan of action.

Citizen engagement is the best way to address many of the recommendations outlined in this report. All walking audit participants are encouraged to stay involved with ongoing efforts to improve walkability in Waterloo. Working collaboratively will ensure that Waterloo continues the path of becoming a vibrant, active, and healthy community.



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## AFTERWORD

At Wellmark, our vision is to continuously improve the health of our members and the communities we serve. We envision a future in which every generation experiences greater quality of health and improved quality of life. Many experts agree where we live is more impactful on our overall health than our own genetics. Our surroundings and environment prompt us to make decisions impacting our health without even realizing it. We created Healthy Hometown to provide evidence-based (proven) solutions that help communities structure their environment to nudge citizens toward healthy behaviors. When we engage in healthy behaviors, we have the opportunity to live our best life – and hopefully avoid serious illnesses. Making the healthy choice the easy choice is the best answer to keeping Iowans healthy.

eat well

move more

feel better

**Important:** This report, and the recommendations contained within, are provided by Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield (Wellmark) as suggestions about how walkability, bikeability and social interactions may be enhanced in your community. These are simply suggestions that your community can choose to implement at its own discretion. Wellmark bears no responsibility for any implemented suggestions and provides no guarantee of any particular results.

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