Franklin Lane Scoping Study
BENNINGTON TAP TA13(12)

Bennington County Regional Commission
MSK Engineering & Design
Goldstone Architecture

Funded by a grant from the Vermont Agency of Transportation
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SUMMARY

Franklin Lane and the surrounding paved area occupy 3.4 acres and is a major land use in downtown Bennington. The lane is also an important pedestrian link connecting the municipal parking lot to South Street and Main Street.

The municipal parking lot, particularly its eastern end, is underutilized. The lot has 124 public parking spaces. The average use during business hours is 55.5%. The highest one-time peak use (based on 40 periods of data collection throughout the year) was 78% (98 spaces used). [See Appendix for more information.]

Franklin Lane is not an inviting pedestrian environment. Speeding, poor lighting, lack of sidewalks and barren expanses of pavement make it an uninviting place to walk. The alley leading out to South Street is especially unpleasant. It is lined with dumpsters. At night it is almost completely dark. Cars sometimes use it to avoid the traffic light at the Four Corners and drive through at excessive speed pushing pedestrians to the side. Improving the alley and the rest of Franklin Lane will make downtown Bennington more walkable and may increase utilization of the municipal parking lot.

This study identifies problems and offers recommendations to make the lane safer and more inviting for pedestrians. We recommend:

- Improving the pedestrian connection between the municipal parking lot and the “Four Corners” (the intersection of routes 7&9).
- Transforming the alley section of Franklin Lane into a shared street and adding a new sidewalk along the lane’s western end.
- Lowering the lane’s design speed and improving aesthetics by replacing unnecessary pavement with landscaping and street trees.
- Narrowing driveway accesses and shortening turning radii with curbed grass areas will define the street’s edge and will calm traffic.

We focus on improvements within the public right-of-way. Ambitious, long-term, recommendations that fulfil the project area’s potential as a vibrant, urban square in the heart of downtown Bennington are not
practical at this time because much of the project area is outside of the public right-of-way and many of the abutting properties are vacant or in transition. In particular, we recommend that any work along Franklin Lane directly adjacent to the former Greenberg’s store site be coordinated with redevelopment of the property.

The public right of way is narrow along Franklin Lane and some of our proposed improvements extend onto private property. We believe that all adjacent property owners will benefit from an improved Franklin Lane, but it will be necessary for the Town to get formal approval from property owners before constructing improvements on their property. So far, property owners have had mixed reactions to the proposals.
This driveway entrance is poorly defined and too wide. The street’s edge is lost here.

Drivers often miss the DO NOT ENTER sign.

Dumpsters and trash bins dominate Franklin Lane’s alley.

Pedestrians and vehicles mix in the alley, but it is not designed as a “Shared Space.”

buildings that surround it contain residences, business and government offices, including the Bennington Town Office and a unit of the Vermont National Guard. The lane provides pedestrian access to these buildings, and connects the municipal parking lot to Main Street and South Street. The Four Corners intersection, which Franklin Lane leads to, is the crossroads of Bennington and the region’s busiest pedestrian crossing.

Despite the project area’s importance as a pedestrian and bicycle route, it has deficiencies that make it unsafe and unwelcoming to walk and bike. The project area has the following deficiencies:

Vehicles often fail to stop before turning left onto Franklin Lane. A STOP sign would improve safety.

Turning trucks have damaged this corner of the Bennington Taxi office (painted white) three times in the past year.

This driveway entrance is poorly defined and too wide. The street’s edge is lost here.
Lack of Traffic Controls
- Many drivers fail to see (or ignore) the one-way sign at the alley entrance (see photo on previous page).
- Much of the street lacks curbs, bollards or street trees to protect people or buildings from the large tractor-trailers that frequently maneuver to access adjacent loading docks. An example of the danger this poses – trucks have damaged the Bennington Taxi building at the western end of Franklin lane three times in the past year.
- There is no stop sign or stop bar in front of the armory building. Many vehicles fail to stop before turning left onto Franklin Lane.
- Driveway entrances at the western end of Franklin Lane are undefined and excessively wide.

Lack of Lighting
- There are no lights in the alley at the eastern end of Franklin Lane. At night it is hard for pedestrians to see where they are going – or be seen by drivers.

Aesthetic Problems
- Along the project area’s northern side, the unbroken expanse of blacktop is visually oppressive.
- Much of the project area lacks trees or other plantings – particularly along the northern edge.
The project area’s unbroken expanse of blacktop is visually oppressive. The street lacks definition along its northern edge.
• There are two large, unscreened dumpsters in the alley. Broken pavement prevents them from being pushed to the edge, out of the travelled way.

• There is a prominent and visually obtrusive utility pole near the center of the project area.

• There are many un-landscaped, scruffy, weedy patches of ground along Franklin Lane’s periphery.

• At the Four Corners, the unpainted metallic traffic signal poles clash with the historical style of the surrounding streetlights and buildings.

Underutilization

• The 124-space municipal parking lot, particularly the western end, is underutilized. Parking counts show the lot averages 55.5% occupancy during business hours. The lot averages 58.6% occupancy when the Bennington County Courthouse is in session.

• The project area and the surrounding paved area is a major land-use in downtown Bennington, but few activities take place there despite its proximity to Main Street’s storefronts, restaurants, bars and commercial offices. Much of the project area is used only to store vehicles or to provide access to unused loading docks of vacant buildings. There are no benches, food trucks, play-areas, picnic tables, café tables, or other traditional urban street amenities.

Lack of Way Finding Signs

• There are no way-finding signs. For people unfamiliar with the area, it is not clear how to walk to downtown businesses.
Crash History 2008 – 2012
Three crashes were reported in the project area between 2008 and 2012. None of the crashes caused injuries. It is likely there have been other minor crashes that were not reported.

- Broadside collision at the Franklin Lane/South St. intersection due to a “technology related distraction.” 08/15/2009
- Rear-end collision at the Franklin Lane/Washington Ave. intersection due to a “technology related distraction.” 02/11/2011
- Head on collision due to “no improper driving.” 12/14/2011

Source: VTrans General Yearly Summaries – Town Highway Crash Listing: Non-Federal Aid Highways – Local

Road Classification
Class 3 Town Highway (#424)

SITE CONSTRAINTS
The project area has constraints that limit options for addressing the project’s Purpose & Need.

Limited ROW
The project area’s public and private spaces form a continuous urban space, but along most of Franklin Lane, the public right-of-way is only 16-feet wide. In the alley, more than 10 feet of width is not within the public ROW. Near the Bennington Taxi building, the public right-of-way widens out to about fifty feet. The Town will need formal approval from property owners before constructing improvements outside of the public right of way.
Adjacent Properties Are In Transition
Some of the property along Franklin Lane is vacant, or will soon be vacant. Because the buildings’ future use is unknown, it is difficult to create a vision for the project area beyond the limited public right-of-way.

- Greenberg’s Home Center recently closed. It’s not clear what will happen to the property, or if loading dock access will be needed in the future.
- The National Guard plans to move out of the armory.
- The Hotel Putnam building’s upper floors are unoccupied and in need of major renovation.
- The Pennysaver Press will close at the end of 2014.

Loading Dock Access
Several loading docks are accessed from Franklin Lane, although none will be active by the end of 2014 due to businesses closing.

The preferred alternative preserves access to all four of the loading docks behind the Greenberg property and the loading dock at the Pennysaver Press. If the buildings’ future use does not require loading dock access, property owners and the Town should consider installing a large green space with trees.

Private Use Within the Public Right-of-way
Some public right-of-way on the northwestern end of Franklin Lane is now used for private purposes. The building that houses Bennington Taxi and Paula’s Weaving Shop was once Bennington’s bus station, and the right-of-way goes through the building, its front yard, and parking area. The property owners are aware of this and have given their initial support for the proposed conceptual alternatives.

Historic Resources
The project area is within Bennington’s Downtown Historic District and has several buildings listed on the Vermont State Historic Registry.

The Downtown Bennington Historic District along US Route 7 and VT 9 was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. The district includes many buildings, which are historically, architecturally and functionally related to the commercial activities of the town. Historic buildings adjacent to or near Franklin Lane include: 215 South St., the Old Blacksmith Shop, built in 1833, now the Better Bennington Corporation; 207 South St., the Bennington County Superior Court, built in 1936; 205 South St., the Bennington Town Office, a 19th century home given to the Town to be used as its office in the 1920s; 201 and 203 South St., a 19th century home converted to commercial spaces, and another home built behind it in the early 1900s; and the Drysdale building and the Putnam Hotel building, built between the 1860s and 1870s, now serve multiple uses.

None of the conceptual alternatives presented in this study will directly impact any of these historic structures.

Natural Resources
The project area is almost entirely paved. There are no significant natural resources.

Utilities
The proposed alternatives will not impact existing utility poles in the project area.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Improve Pedestrian Connections to South St. & Main St.
A safer and more appealing walk between the municipal parking lot and downtown may increase the parking lot’s utilization.

Reduce Unnecessary Pavement
Minimizing paved areas will calm traffic and will provide space for pedestrians, street trees and plantings.

Create a Shared Street
A shared street is a street that prioritizes pedestrians, but is open to

What is a Shared Space?
Shared Space is more a way of thinking than it is a design concept. It is most readily recognized as a street space where all traffic control devices such as signals and stop signs, all markings such as crosswalks, and all signing have been removed. Curbing is removed to blur the lines between sidewalks and motorized travel way. The philosophy is that absence of all of those features forces all users of the space — from pedestrians to drivers — to negotiate passage through the space via eye contact and person to person negotiation.

This is all premised on the idea that traditional streets allocate distinct spaces to the different modes, and in doing so create a false sense of security to each user leading them to behave as if they have no responsibility to look out for other users in “their” space.

–Project For Public Spaces
http://www.pps.org/reference/shared-space/
vehicle traffic. There is no grade separation between pedestrians and vehicles. We recommend transforming the alley section of Franklin Lane into a shared street. Pavers, bollards, plantings and street trees will calm traffic and reinforce pedestrian priority.

**Install a Curbed Sidewalk**

We recommend installing a new curbed sidewalk along the western end of the project area along the former Greenberg’s store and lumber sheds. The work directly adjacent to the former Greenberg’s store should be coordinated with the property’s redevelopment.

**Create At-grade Paths**

An at-grade path will provide a transition between the shared street in the alley and a new, curbed sidewalk at the western end of Franklin Lane. Another path will highlight the walking route through the northern alley to Main Street. The paths could be delineated with pavers, tinted concrete, thermoplastic imprinting, or other materials. The paths will not impede vehicle traffic.

**Street Trees and Landscaping**

New street trees and landscaping will break up the large, barren expanses of pavement, and will provide shade and visual relief.

**Reduce Driveway Entrance Widths**

We recommend narrowing the driveway entrances near the Bennington Taxi building to better define the street’s edge.
**Improve lighting**
The alley is now very dark at night. New lights will make the alley safe and inviting for pedestrians. A historic streetlight, similar to the nearby lights on South Street, will replace the bent, yellow bollard at the alley’s entrance. The light will be shielded to prevent unwanted light flooding nearby residences. Surface mounted lights attached to adjacent buildings will light the rest of the alley.

**Provide Space for Dumpsters and Trash Bins**
Pavement in the alley will be repaired so the dumpsters can be pushed to the edge, out of the travelled way.

**Relocate “DO NOT ENTER” Sign**
We recommend moving the sign to the opposite side of the alley and closer to its entrance so it is more noticeable to drivers (see proposed improvement drawings).

**Reduce the Speed Limit**
Lower the speed limit to 15 mph.

Vermont 23 V.S.A. § 1007 allows municipalities to set speed limits less than 25mph in downtown development districts. The project area is within Bennington’s downtown development district.

**Calm Traffic**
- The street design strategies outlined above will lower the street’s design speed and will calm traffic.

**Paint Four Corner’s Traffic Signal Poles**
Painting the signal poles black will make them less visually prominent and better match the other street hardware that is painted black (see photo rendering on the next page).

**ALTERNATIVES**

**Alternative: NO BUILD**
Does not address the project’s Purpose and Need Statement.

**Alternative IMPROVEMENTS**
This includes improvements that can be accomplished mostly within the public right-of-way, without significant impacts to abutting property (see Concept Drawing).
Painting the traffic signal poles would be much cheaper than replacing them.

This photo rendering shows what the traffic signal pole would look like if it were painted black.

The existing Four Corners traffic signal pole is now unpainted.
Cost estimate
The total project is estimated to cost $229,739. This assumes the use of federal funding, which requires a design engineer and construction inspector.

Compatibility With Town and Regional Plans
Bicycle and pedestrian improvements along Franklin Lane are consistent with town and regional plans. Bennington’s Town Plan policies and recommendations state “the safety of all users of the transportation system, including pedestrians, bicyclists… and motor vehicle drivers shall be accommodated and balanced in all transportation and developments projects.” The Bennington Town Plan strongly emphasizes the importance of multimodal transportation and the need to maintain and enhance these facilities as well as the aesthetic quality of the historic character of downtown Bennington. In accordance with that goal, parking lots are to be landscaped and include “sidewalk linkages that provide for safe pedestrian movements to and through these areas.” Much of the area around Franklin Lane is used for vehicular parking. According to the Regional Plan, special attention should be given to the “provision of safe and efficient pedestrian routes within large parking lots and between parking lots and pedestrian destinations.” Likewise, the Town Plan states that parking lots with excessive spaces are considered inappropriate and undesirable as they are aesthetically unpleasant and a poor use of space. Improvements along Franklin Lane would reduce vehicle speeds, enhance safety for all users and provide better use of an important downtown location.

Maintenance
• If properly designed, the recommended features will not impede snow plowing.
• Pavement markings will require periodic replacement.
• Street trees and plantings will require maintenance.

Public Outreach
Significant efforts were made to get input from stakeholders, abutting property owners and the public. Two public meetings were held. Invitations to the meetings were sent to all abutting property owners, businesses, residents and stakeholders. Flyers advertising the meetings were posted at the Town Office and around the project area. Several key stakeholders were also interviewed. Comments made at the public concerns meeting shaped the Purpose & Need Statement.

Public Meetings
• May 27, 2014 – Public concerns meeting.
• October 2, 2014 – Public open house to review conceptual alternatives.
• Affected property owners were also interviewed.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>ALTERNATIVES MATRIX</th>
<th>FRANKLIN LANE</th>
<th>FOUR CORNERS SIGNAL POLE HARDWARE</th>
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<td>Calm Traffic</td>
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* One public space along the armory building, one private space in the alley, and one private space next to the Buckley property.
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<td>45.00</td>
<td>$19,125.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Construction: $162,935.96
Contingency: 15% $24,440.39
Design Engineering: 15% $24,440.39
Construction Admin: 11% $17,922.96

Total Cost: $229,799.73
NEW CONCRETE CURBS (TYP.)

NEW 5' WIDE CONCRETE SIDEWALK (SEE DETAIL 2)

APPROX. PROPERTY LINES (TYPICAL)

EXISTING PARKING AREA

EXISTING PARKING AREA (REVISED)

NEW LIGHT POLE (TYPICAL OF 2)

RELOCATED "DO NOT ENTER" SIGN

RELOCATED CATCH BASIN

NEW BRICK PAVED PLAZA AREA WITH GRANITE BORDER (SEE DETAIL 3)

NEW "STOP" SIGN

NEW WALL-MOUNTED LIGHT FIXTURE ON BUILDING

NEW STOP BAR

PROPOSED LOCATION OF FUTURE PARKING ISLAND (NOT INCLUDED IN CURRENT PROPOSAL)

5' WIDE PAINTED WALKWAY (TYPICAL 2 PLACES) - NOT INCLUDED IN COST ESTIMATE

PROPOSED SITE IMPROVEMENTS

NORTH SCALE: 1:20

MSK ENGINEERING AND DESIGN, INC.
P.O. BOX 12, 140 DEPOT STREET
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201
PH: 802-447-9996 FAX: 802-447-9991

FRANKLIN LANE SCOPING STUDY
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201

PROPOSED SITE IMPROVEMENTS
EXISTING SIGN TO BE REPLACED WITH NEW "15 MPH SPEED LIMIT" SIGN

EXISTING ELEVATED FIRE ESCAPE LOCATION

EXISTING BILCO HATCH

EXISTING ASPHALT PARKING AREA

GRANITE BORDER

PAVING DETAIL

HERRINGBONE PATTERN BRICK PAVERS

NEW WALL-MOUNTED LIGHT FIXTURE ON BUILDING

NEW LIGHT POLE

ONE WAY TRAFFIC PLANTING AREA

NEW "STOP" SIGN TO WASHINGTON AVENUE

PROPOSED LOCATION OF FUTURE PARKING ISLAND (NOT INCLUDED IN CURRENT PROPOSAL)

5' WIDE PAINTED WALKWAY (TYPICAL 2 PLACES)

EXISTING PARKING AREA

APPROX. PROPERTY LINES (TYPICAL)

TWO-WAY TRAFFIC CONCRETE CURB

EXISTING FUEL ENTRANCE

EXISTING STEPS AND LOADING AREA

DUMPSTER LOCATION (TYP.)

RELOCATED "DO NOT ENTER" SIGN

EXISTING "DO NOT ENTER" SIGN TO BE RELOCATED

NORTH SCALE: 1:10
PLAZA AND WALKWAY DETAILS

**PLAZA TYPICAL**

- UNDISTURBED OR COMPACTED SUB-BASE
- INITIAL SAWCUT
- 2" THICK GRANITE BORDER (TYPICAL AT PERIMETER)
- 2" THICK HERRINGBONE PATTERN BRICK UNIT PAVERS (TYPICAL)
- TYPICAL JOINT TREATMENT - DRY BRUSHED SAND
- 6" DEEP 1:6 MAX.
- 12" DEEP 1:6 MAX.
- CRUSHED STONE

**EXISTING PAVEMENT**

**EXISTING SUBBASE**

**'GEOTEX' 200ST WOVEN STABILIZATION FABRIC**

**APPROVED BACKFILL AS REQUIRED**

**BLEND TO EXISTING GRADE, APPLY TOP SOIL AND SEED AS NECESSARY**

**SIDEWALK DETAIL**

- 7" SAWCUT
- EXISTING PAVEMENT
- 1' 1/2" R
- 1/4" R
- 2% SLOPE
- CONCRETE TO BE MIN. 3500 PSI
- 12" BANKRUN GRAVEL
- UNDISTURBED OR COMPACTED SUB-BASE
- BLEND TO EXISTING GRADE, APPLY TOP SOIL AND SEED AS NECESSARY
- APPROVED BACKFILL AS REQUIRED

**NEW, SLIP FORMED CONCRETE CURBING**

**PATCH PAVEMENT FOLLOWING INSTALLATION TO MATCH EXISTING**

**SIDEWALK DETAIL**

- 7" SAWCUT
- FACE OF EXISTING BUILDING
- 12" BANKRUN GRAVEL
- UNDISTURBED OR COMPACTED SUB-BASE
- INITIAL SAWCUT
- APPLY TOP SOIL AND SEED AS NECESSARY
- APPROVED BACKFILL AS REQUIRED

**NEW, SLIP FORMED CONCRETE CURBING**

**PATCH PAVEMENT FOLLOWING INSTALLATION TO MATCH EXISTING**
2014 BENNINGTON COUNTY REGIONAL COMMISSION PARKING DATA • SOUTHWEST MUNICIPAL LOT

LOT INFORMATION

SOUTHWEST MUNICIPAL LOT

LOT CAPACITY/TOTAL SPACES
This is the total number of available parking spaces within the SW Muni lot.

124 SPACES

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL DOWNTOWN PUBLIC PARKING
This is the percentage of all the public parking spaces in and near the downtown that are located within the 124-space SW Muni Lot.

19.5%

The Southwest Municipal Lot (SW Muni) is a large parking lot in the Southwest Quadrant of downtown Bennington that is owned and maintained by the Town of Bennington. The SW Muni lot regularly serves several nearby functions, including the town offices and courthouse, a few offices and apartments, and the Army National Guard Armory. Several spaces within the lot are reserved for National Guard use.

PARKING USE

Below is a table of parking lot occupancy data for the SW Muni Lot. This data was collected throughout 2014, during 40 separate counts, which have been organized into four quarters. Counts were conducted during business hours (9:00am - 4:00pm; M - F) on varying times and days. Because the SW Muni Lot is immediately adjacent to the Bennington County Courthouse, which is only in session on certain business days, BCRC staff also correlated usage data with court days. All of this is organized in the following table. The percentages refer to the percentage of spaces occupied on average.

TABLE: AVERAGE LOT OCCUPANCY • SW MUNICIPAL LOT • 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALL DAYS</th>
<th>ALL YEAR</th>
<th>JAN - MAR</th>
<th>APR - JUN</th>
<th>JUL - SEP</th>
<th>OCT - DEC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SW MUNI:</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURT CLOSED</td>
<td>Court Closed</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURT OPEN</td>
<td>Court Open</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL DAYS</td>
<td>124 SPACES</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL YEAR</td>
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<td>JAN - MAR</td>
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</tr>
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<td>APR - JUN</td>
<td>124 SPACES</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCT - DEC</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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