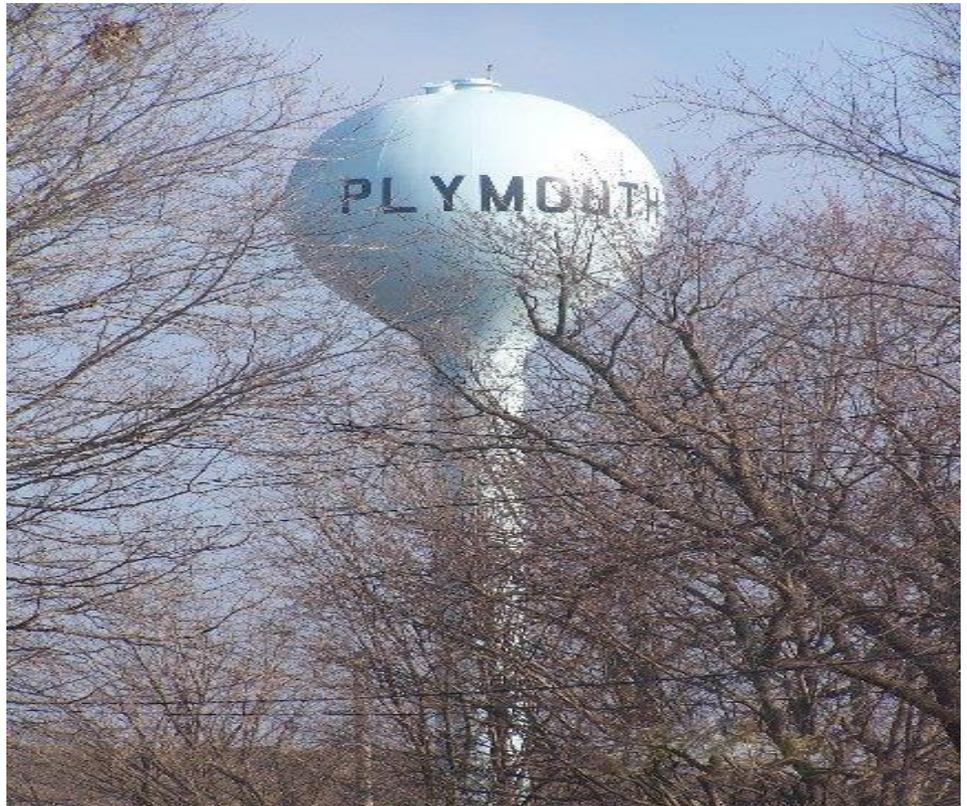


# PLYMOUTH WALKING AUDIT REPORT



7/17/2017

Supporting Walkable, Livable Communities

The “*walkability*” and design of a community can directly impact the health of its residents, its environment, its economic vitality and its sustainability.

# Plymouth Walking Audit Report

SUPPORTING WALKABLE, LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

## Table of Contents

- Why Encourage Walking and Biking in Plymouth?.....3
- Why A Walking Audit?.....4
  - Methodology
  - Participants
- Overview of the Pedestrian Environment in Plymouth.....4
- Plymouth Walking Audit.....5
  - Walking Audit Route
  - Top Observation
  - Top Recommendations
- Report Summary.....7
- Contacts & Project Information.....7
- Appendix.....8
  - I – Field Notes

## Why Encourage Walking & Biking in Plymouth?

The community of Plymouth prides itself on being a small, friendly community in the middle of everywhere, not in the middle of nowhere! Situated along the Shell Rock River just north of North Iowa's economic hub of Mason City, Plymouth offers a safe, neighborly community to raise a family, operate a small business and socialize with friends and family. In efforts to capitalize on the small town feel of our Community, the Plymouth Betterment Council recognizes that pedestrian friendliness is key to sustaining the "safe, small town feel" Plymouth prides itself on. Public policy, design and smart planning are important to:

- Connect Neighborhoods
- Improve the Health and Physical Fitness of Residents
- Support the Environment
- Improve Mobility and Increase Transportation Options
- Increase Community Safety
- Enhance Economic Vitality

## Why a Walking Audit?

A Walking Audit was conducted in July 2017 to allow members of the City Council, Betterment Council, Transportation Department and Plymouth residents share firsthand their experience of walking the streets and sidewalks of Plymouth and traveling as a pedestrian. While walking a predetermined route, the opportunity allowed for participants to take notes on their walking experience. Collectively, audit recommendations from participants are documented in this report and are intended to inform transportation and community planning efforts for future improvements to the community of Plymouth. A full list of observations and recommendations can be found in the field notes in the Appendix.

### Methodology

The following steps were undertaken to produce the walking audit:

- 1) **Information Gathering:** The Plymouth Betterment Council met with the Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health – Health Promotion staff to gain an understanding of the Walking Audit concept and how the built environment can impact the health of a community, the economic vitality, the socialization and the growth (or decline in population) of a community. Health Department staff shared facts, research and case studies illustrating field projects of neighboring communities that demonstrate the impact improving the walkability of a community can have on its health and liveliness.
- 2) **Ground-Truthing:** The Health Department and Betterment Council first discussed issues they thought to be problematic throughout the community at a round-table meeting in the Summer of 2016. Those discussions were captured and provided slight guidance on the development of the Betterment Council's action plan for park improvements. A Walking Audit was scheduled for the Summer 2017 to garner first-hand observations of their community. Notes and photographs were collected on pedestrian, bicycle and automobile infrastructure-related assets and issues.
- 3) **Scheduling:** The Betterment Council invited additional members of the community and transportation experts to participate in the Walking Audit. The audit was held on July 17, 2017 with 9 participants in attendance, as listed in the next section.
- 4) **Outreach:** The event was announced via word of mouth throughout the community and by select invitations to key officials (Mayor, Council Members, Transportation Officials)
- 5) **Walk Participation.** Walk audit participants were briefed on the purpose of a walking audit and previewed a short video on the importance of Community Walkability prior to beginning the

walk. They were issued a map of the route, clipboard, walk audit checklist and note pad to record observations. In addition, several participants took cameras/phones to capture images.

- 6) Reporting: The Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health collected the comments, photos, and subsequent recommendations and suggestions and compiled the findings into this report. The report is available to the City of Plymouth for review, feedback and revisions. It can also be circulated among residents and participants and is encouraged to be used to help the Plymouth Council draft “Comprehensive City Plans” and related walkability infrastructure policies.

## List of Plymouth Walking Audit Participants

Kelli	Gerdes	Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health
Jon	Vrieze	Plymouth Mayor
Jeff	Robak	Plymouth Council Member
Brianna	Nutting	Plymouth Betterment Council
Jody	Vrieze	Plymouth Betterment Council
Jeff	Bryant	Cerro Gordo County Law Enforcement – Sheriff’s Deputy
John	Shaw	Road Safety Liaison – Iowa State University Institute for Transportation
Pennie	Wyborny	Plymouth Resident – Walking Enthusiast
Youth Participant		(Accompanied by Parent – Stroller)

## Overview of the Pedestrian Environment of Plymouth

Plymouth is a very walkable community in that all community destinations are within a 1 mile distance. It is relatively easy and safe for a resident to travel by foot or bicycle to the Old School Park, downtown gazebo, bank, restaurant, or Community Center. The majority of Plymouth streets have sidewalks, although it certainly does not have a complete system in place, nor are existing sidewalks in optimal condition. Block lengths are reasonable and a majority of streets offer shade trees. However, many of the sidewalks were constructed using design standards that are now outdated.

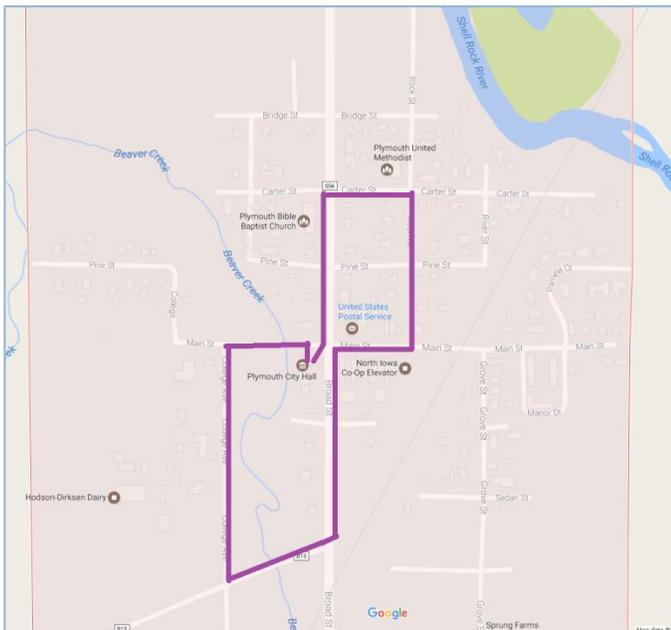
The Plymouth Council has worked to support Plymouth walkability. This report notes some of their achievements while identifying opportunities for further support.

- As new downtown corridors are reconstructed, ADA approved sidewalk standards are applied to ensure appropriate sidewalk amenities.
- Residents can be issued repair notices by the City Council if sidewalks along their property are found to be in need of repair.
- A flashing traffic light was installed to bring awareness to the 4-way STOP intersection in the middle of town - Broad Street and Main.
- Street Lights are stationed at many corners throughout town to provide night illumination.

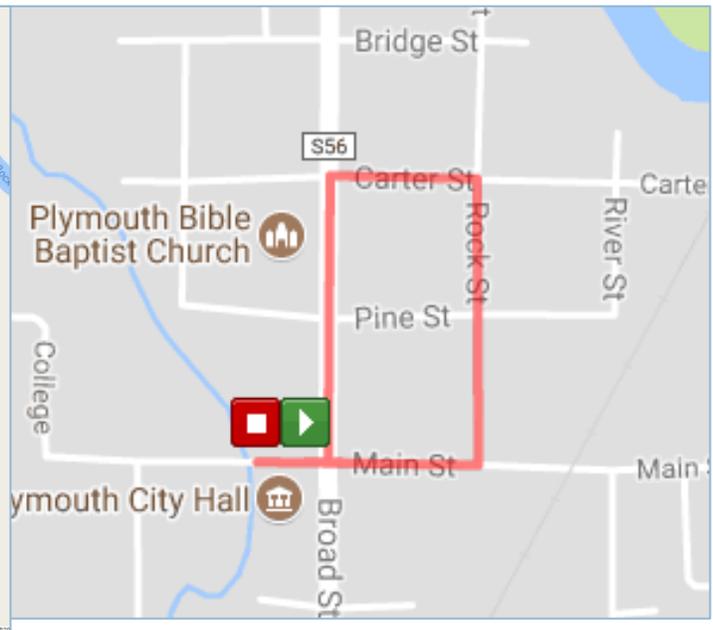
While most communities are designed with a car centric focus, Plymouth lends itself well to the notion of designing a community around pedestrians and social infrastructures first and foremost. Incremental changes to existing infrastructure or retrofitting projects can slowly provide a more walkable and safe environment for Plymouth residents and visitors. Walkable communities attract businesses, families, and visitors to enjoy the local amenities. We hope this report guides the Council to consider adopting policies that support a walkable infrastructure as Plymouth moves into the future.

## Plymouth Walking Audit:

### Proposed Route:



### Actual Route: (modified due to high temperatures)



## Top Observations

### Community Strengths:

- **Wide Streets** – The main boulevards in Plymouth (Broad Street and Main Street) are very wide and would lend themselves well to add designated bike lanes, on-street marked parking spaces, and the possibility of new landscaped medians or landscaped curb bump-outs. By decreasing the width of the car lane, the built environment can easily encourage slower traffic speeds, enhance the aesthetics of the community through greenspace and provide safe active transportation lanes.
- **Streets at Level Grade** – Plymouth is relatively flat in geographical terms and therefore lends itself well to active transportation as it is easy for residents to walk/bike around town.
- **Some ADA/Tactile Curb Cuts** at ends of sidewalks – A few sidewalk ends in the downtown area are ADA compliant, featuring tactile pads that assist pedestrians in recognizing intersections, particularly if blind. In addition, a few sidewalks also provide a gentle slope into the intersection instead of high curbs, which are not easily maneuverable by wheelchairs, strollers and bicycles.
- **Mature Shade Trees** – Plymouth is a well-established town with plenty of mature landscaping and shade trees. In the residential blocks of the community, the tree canopy provides a natural traffic calming presence to automobile drivers, while also providing shade for pedestrians and an aesthetically pleasing appearance.
- **Partial Sidewalk System** – Plymouth has approximately 60% of its city streets with accompanying sidewalks or pedestrian trails. Most sidewalks do not meet today's codes and standards as they were installed several decades ago. Filling gaps in sidewalks and adding paths to popular community destinations would greatly increase the walkability of Plymouth.
- **Railroad Crossing Arms along Broad Street RR Crossing** – Railroad Crossing arms were added to the crossing on South Broad Street, a busy corridor that often experiences faster automobile speeds than posted by law. The crossing guards are certainly a safe measure for Plymouth to be proud of.

- **Flashing Stop Light on Broad Street** – Another safety mechanism in Plymouth is the red flashing light at the prime intersection of Broad and Main Street. This light can be seen from several blocks away and is particularly helpful in the evening and night hours when the stop signs are not as visible.
- **Crosswalk Paintings along some intersections** – Several downtown intersections are marked with white paint to delineate pedestrian crossing zones. There are several alternative painting options to heighten visibility of the crossing zones.
- **Good Lighting** – Each corner in Plymouth features a street light, although during the walking audit we were not able to verify if all are in working order, as the audit was conducted during day hours. It was noted that Alliant is in charge of a few utility poles in town and it can be difficult getting them to fix any issues.
- **Easy Access to “Destinations” by foot/bike** (park, gazebo, services (bank, food)) – Plymouth features many amenities that foster socialization and community interaction. The Old School Park is located on the west side of Main Street. A centrally located gazebo and water fountain are located downtown for residential use. And the Shell Rock River canoe/tubing access point is located just north of town at Strand Park. With all destinations within walking and biking distance, connecting these amenities to neighborhoods would greatly increase the walkability of Plymouth and encourage safe and healthy lifestyles.

Community Concerns:

- Unmarked Bus Stop
- Sidewalk Gaps & Sidewalk Obstacles (cars, overgrown grass, gravel, chipped cement, utility poles, etc.)
- Dangerous Drainage Corners
- Unmarked Parking Spaces
- High Motor Traffic Speeds
- Hidden Signage (from tree brush)
- Lack of Way-Finding Signs (to destinations like the parks)

Opportunities & Recommendations:

- **Bus Stop:** Establish a well-marked school bus stop to help increase visibility of children to nearby vehicular traffic. Solutions could include adding a Bus Stop sign, an accompanying flashing light, paint to delineate pedestrian zones or in-street signage.
- **Sidewalk Gaps, Repairs:** Establish a sidewalk program that outlines plans to complete the sidewalk system in the town incrementally; establishes policies for all new construction to include pedestrian and/or bike lanes or sidewalks on the property; retrofits all existing sidewalks to meet new codes and standards over time and provides enforcement for proper upkeep of sidewalks along residential and commercial properties; extending paths and/or sidewalks to popular destinations in town is also proposed (parks, river access).
- **Unmarked Parking Spaces:** In the downtown corridor, the group noticed several cars parked in pedestrian zones (on sidewalks). The addition of paint to identify parking spots and/or parking buffers such as small cement barricades or landscaping could help separate the vehicle space from the pedestrian space. Painting on-street parking spaces could also help visually narrow the wide streets in town and slow traffic speeds.
- **High Vehicular Traffic Speeds:** Broad Street is a major boulevard through Plymouth that sees a large volume of traffic, many times traveling at faster speeds than legally posted. In addition, a decent amount of traffic does not sufficiently stop at the marked intersection, thereby putting pedestrians and other drivers at risk. Road diets are one way to slow traffic and it was suggested adding painted bike lanes, painted on-street parking or even a landscaped median down the center of the road could all drastically impact the look and feel of the road and

naturally cause motorists to slow down. Slower speeds will thereby increase safety of pedestrians, and possibly invite consumerism when visitors notice nearby businesses, restaurants, and places of destination.

## Report Summary

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Findings from the Plymouth Walking Audit that took place in July of 2017 are presented and summarized in this report for the purpose of influencing the Plymouth City Council and local transportation officials in their plans for community enhancements in the coming years. By focusing on our residents as pedestrians first, and not automobiles, we can achieve a more viable, livable, mobile and enjoyable community to live, work and play.

## Plymouth Walking Audit Contacts:

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For more information about this report, please contact:

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kgerdes@cghealth.com

Jon Vrieze, Plymouth Mayor  
Community of Plymouth, Iowa  
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plymouth@myomnitel.com

APPENDIX I – WALKING AUDIT FIELD NOTES (Monday, July 17, 2017)

Intersection	Community Asset	Engineering	Enforcement	Education	Encouragement	Policy	Field Observations	Recommendation	Image
Broad St & Main St		X					Cross Walk Paint faded; Unsure if stop bars are at least 4 feet from crosswalk markings	Pedestrian Crosswalks could be painted more visibly and within standardized distances from the corner.	
		X					Missing sidewalk curb cuts; Corner Sidewalks not ADA compliant;	Sidewalk Curb Cuts could be updated to be ADA compliant at intersections.	
		X					SW corner crosswalk is entirely blacktop/concrete	Landscaping pedestrian buffer zones at corners could enhance aesthetics and safety.	

						Nice “social” are for residents and guests: gazebo, water fountain	Add flowers, shrubs, way-finding signage, etc. to encourage gathering and guide to nearby destinations	
Broad Street		X				Traffic traveling above posted speeds; Driver behavior indicates not many cars complete full stop at 4 way STOP intersection	Extra wide-width of road lends itself well to traffic calming measures: Landscaped Median Painted Bike Lanes On-Street Parking	
		X	X			Flashing Red Light provides visibility of stop intersection	If suspended flashing light is too expensive to maintain, lights posted over stop sign may be alternative option.	
		X			X	Sidewalks along street are not all in good condition	Sidewalk Condition Improvements – make curb intersections ADA compliant	
		X				Sidewalks along street are blocked by parked cars	Install parking blocks to distinguish parking lot/spots from sidewalk	

		X	X			Low hanging branches blocking traffic signs	Trim tree branches, shrubs, etc. along roads and sidewalks	
					X	Gravel from Business Parking lots spilling into sidewalks	Adopt city codes for businesses and home to maintain sidewalk conditions near/on their property.	
Rock St & Carter St		X				Water Drainage Site at sidewalk corners designed dangerously	Add gravel drainage; raise grate with slight slope (not as drastic as current condition)	
Main St		X				Utility Pole in middle of sidewalk (north)	Move toward one side or another of the sidewalk, or add landscaped bump-out	
		X				Wide Main Street may encourage high speeds	Add on-street parking paint; add trees, landscaping in bump-out	
		X		X		Bus Stop Unmarked	Designate Bus Stop area (with paint, signage, shade, bench, etc.)	

		X				X	Sidewalk crossing Railroad Bed is in poor condition	Replace sidewalk; improve sidewalk conditions; Adopt Sidewalk or Complete Streets Policy		
		X					No pedestrian "lane" along bridge to Old School Park	Add "bike/walk" lane along sides of bridge to designate pedestrian pathways to connect sidewalks.		