

WALKABLE COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Downtown Bellbrook
April 12, 2017



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Area Background

The Regional Planning and Coordinating Commission of Greene County (RPCC) is working with the City of Bellbrook to update Bellbrook's Comprehensive Plan. One of the areas of focus for the plan update will be the downtown area. The City, RPCC, and the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVRPC) agreed to conduct a walkable community workshop for the downtown area as a precursor to beginning work on the Comprehensive Plan update.

While much growth has occurred in the western part of the city in response to I-675, the Old Village downtown remains an important factor to consider in attracting new residents and businesses. It is crucial to retain its character and its ability to provide an alternative experience to the suburban development to the west. Older areas are experiencing a rebirth in the 21st century.

Downtown Features

The downtown area is focused along State Route 725, the main transportation corridor running east-west through the City. The most recent average daily traffic count from the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is 7,240 vehicles per day in 2012. Many alleys run between blocks for access to houses, businesses and parking. One of the recommendations from the workshop was to find ways to better utilize these alleys, as they are a prominent feature of downtown.

The Old Village Area (Downtown) is home to a number of public facilities. The Municipal Building and the Winters-Bellbrook Library are both on Franklin Street, as well as Sugarcreek Township Fire Station #71. Bellbrook Fire Station #1 and city service garage are on North West Street near the Bellbrook Plaza. Bellbrook Park, along Main Street, offers recreation just a short walk north from the Franklin Street corridor.

Downtown Bellbrook is anchored by its two largest retailers, Dot's Supermarket on the west and Dollar General on the east. Most retail is concentrated along Franklin Street and within Bellbrook Plaza. A number of single-family homes are intertwined with the businesses along Franklin Street, especially east of East Street and west of West Street. There is a concentration of multi-family structures northeast of the center of town along Ryder Street. The residential area south of the downtown is primarily single-family dwellings with some two-family units and a few multi-family structures.



Commercial and mixed-use buildings along Franklin

To the north and west of Downtown Bellbrook are a growing number of single-family suburban neighborhoods potentially within walking and biking distance. A key issue associated with many of these surrounding neighborhoods is a lack of safe and pleasant pedestrian/bike connections to downtown, especially for the neighborhoods along Little Sugarcreek Road. One of the recommendations from the workshop

was to figure out ways to link these subdivisions to downtown. Highview Terrace, Sable Ridge, the Vineyards of Bellbrook and Landings at Sugarcreek are all less than a mile from the city center, yet lack safe and pleasing pedestrian/bike connections to downtown.

Also surrounding the downtown area are a number of parks and open spaces. Magee Park, Sackett-Wright Park, Spring Lakes Park, Washington Mill Park and Sugarcreek Reserve offer hundreds of acres of outdoor recreation within a short distance from downtown, but safe pedestrian/bike connections are missing.

Focus

The focus of the workshop was to examine problems and opportunities related to making downtown safer and more pleasant for pedestrians and bike users, making connections to surrounding parks and neighborhoods, and making the downtown area more attractive to businesses. During the workshop, attention was given to the following:

- The condition and location of sidewalks, curb ramps and crosswalks
- Drainage issues
- Location and amount of existing parking and potential areas for additional parking
- Lack of biking infrastructure
- Signage for businesses, wayfinding and historical buildings
- Exploring better ways for vehicles, pedestrians and bikes to coexist through streetscape improvements
- Property maintenance issues
- Pedestrian and bike connections to parks surrounding the city center

Summary

Following the workshop, the groups put together their observations and suggestions from what they experienced on the walk. A map with several of these suggestions identified by their location is found in Appendix C. The issues and opportunities follow:

Sidewalks and Curb Ramps

One of the most evident issues throughout downtown Bellbrook is the poor condition of many sidewalks and curb ramps, especially along Franklin Street. Observations from workshop participants include:

- Inconsistencies in the condition of the sidewalks create hazardous walking conditions for pedestrians, as many are cracked or being damaged by tree roots. The lack of maintenance is also notable, as several sections are blocked by overgrown vegetation.

- While the majority of Franklin Street has sidewalks, extending the sidewalks east to the intersection of Washington Mill Road as well as west to Little Sugarcreek Road would make the entire downtown more accessible.
- Adding sidewalks along N. West Street would create safer access to businesses in Bellbrook Plaza.
- Making some of the alleys between Bellbrook Plaza and Franklin Street more pedestrian/bike friendly would also provide more safety.
- Several curb ramps are sinking and in need of improvement, especially at the Main Street/Franklin Street intersection. The intersection of N West Street and Franklin Street is also lacking a curb ramp.



Inconsistent and hazardous sidewalk along Franklin Street

Crosswalks

Pedestrian crossings in Downtown Bellbrook should be improved to ensure pedestrian safety when crossing the street. Observations made during the workshop made it evident that the quantity and condition of highly-identifiable crosswalks are lacking. Observations include:

- Adding crosswalks on Franklin Street at Washington Mill Road, the Library, at Dot's and at the intersection with Little Sugarcreek Road should be considered. Children were seen crossing at Little Sugarcreek Road during the walkabout.
- Main Street also lacks well-marked pedestrian crossings. Crosswalks are needed at Maple and Walnut Streets. Again, people were seen crossing Main Street both at and near these intersections.
- Existing crosswalks, especially at West Street and Franklin Street, need to be restriped and marked for better visibility. Raised crosswalks at certain locations along Franklin Street could be a safety option to make drivers slow down.



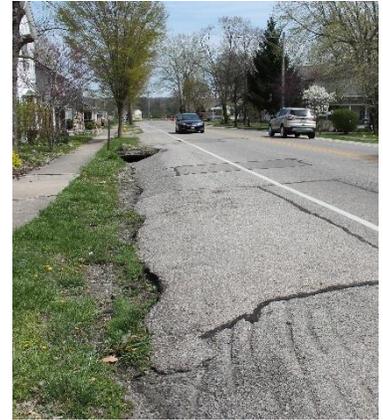
Crosswalk lacking signage and a curb ramp at West and Franklin

Drainage



Poor drainage along Maple Street

Sections of Franklin Street currently have open drainage between the road and the sidewalk, limiting parking and making an unpleasant experience for pedestrians. Installation of storm sewers would be beneficial in creating more parking and a more attractive environment. Drainage is currently an issue in parts of the residential areas south of downtown. Standing water and mud often block the sidewalks along Maple Street, causing pedestrians to walk in the street.



Drainage ditch along East Franklin Street

Parking

For those coming into Bellbrook from other areas, parking can be a problem. Lack of an adequate number of public parking spaces causes a headache for visitors and discourages potential businesses from operating in downtown. Observations include:

- Additional public parking lots would be beneficial. One suggestion was to look into the feasibility of adding parking in the now vacant area west of the Bellbrook Plaza and creating a better pedestrian gathering space in front of the Plaza.
- On-street parking spaces should be individually marked and signs should be added for a better understanding of where parking is allowed and restricted within downtown.
- Along Franklin Street, chicanes with diagonal back-in parking zones that alternate between sides of the street might create more parking and help to regulate traffic flow.
- Downtown businesses might benefit from implementing shared parking agreements, allowing for private parking to be used publicly during certain hours.



Back-in angle parking allows for a safer, more efficient use of space in Dayton

Biking

The bike route that runs along Franklin Street does not provide bikers with designated bike lanes. Instead, they must share lanes with traffic, creating potential safety issues. Observations include:

- Bike and car spaces need to be better defined along Franklin Street.
- There is a general lack of bike infrastructure around downtown. Adding bike racks would encourage bikers to spend time in the city rather than just passing through, as well as entice more residents from nearby neighborhoods to walk or use bikes instead using cars for a downtown trip.



Example of defined bike space along Brown Street, Dayton, OH

Signage



Lack of pedestrian signage at Plaza

For those travelling along Franklin Street, it is often difficult to navigate to the various businesses around the corridor. The ability for drivers and pedestrians to navigate safely to businesses is crucial in downtown areas. Observations include:

- Improve wayfinding signage, especially for the Bellbrook Plaza. It would benefit businesses there by making them easier to find.
- Sign appearance around Bellbrook lacks a theme, and the signs for the businesses at the Plaza cannot be seen while walking along the storefronts.
- The small signs along Franklin Street that identify the bike route are not distinct and should be upgraded.



Wayfinding sign example in Piqua,

Streetscape and Connection Improvements

Improving the pedestrian spaces within Downtown Bellbrook would allow for a more enjoyable walking experience. Improving pedestrian connections within the city would create easier access and mobility around the city. Observations include:



Example of pedestrian-scale lighting

- Finding a place to sit along Franklin Street can be challenging. Additional public benches and landscaping are suggested.
- Some areas of Franklin Street are not lined with trees, resulting in a lack of shade for pedestrians.
- Several businesses have opportunities to improve their outdoor seating areas.
- Lighting is currently geared towards motor traffic. Adding decorative lighting at the pedestrian level could improve pedestrian safety and add to the streetscape.



Potential pedestrian connection at Library

- Several areas in downtown could benefit from simple pedestrian connection improvements, such as the connection from the Library parking lot to an alley that is currently blocked with a gate.
- A pedestrian path connecting the apartments east of Ryder Court to East Franklin Street would also be beneficial.
- A currently unused, unmarked pathway from Bellbrook Park to Pavilion Lane could be upgraded, creating an alternate route into downtown.
- The subdivisions surrounding downtown have poor pedestrian connections to downtown. Exploring ways to improve these connections would encourage more people to walk to downtown, decreasing auto congestion and demand for parking.

Parks and Accessibility



Bellbrook Park on north edge of downtown Bellbrook

Downtown Bellbrook is within walking distance of acres of preserved parkland, but lacks attractive pedestrian connections to them. It is recommended that Bellbrook capitalize on the parks and greenspace surrounding it by exploring better bike and pedestrian connections. Observations include:

- Driving is the only easy way to access many of the parks around Bellbrook. Improving pedestrian access could benefit both the parks and the downtown area by making it a starting and stopping point for recreational trips.
- A multi-use path from the current sidewalk ending at Washington Mill Road around the south end of Bellbrook, looping back up to South and Maple Streets with connections to the Sackett-Wright Park, Spring Lakes Park and the Sugarcreek Reserve could be explored.

- Pedestrian connections from Magee Park to downtown could also create a linkage to the subdivisions along Little Sugarcreek Road.

Vehicular Traffic

Drivers in the city should adjust their speed and behaviors appropriate for promoting a safe and pleasant environment for pedestrians and bikes.

Traffic observations include:

- Drivers from the east often enter the city at high speeds. Traffic calming measures such as chicanes, rumble strips or a roundabout should be explored on Franklin Street near Washington Mill Road.
- Lane widths along Franklin Street are inconsistent and wide, encouraging drivers to drive through the city center faster.
- Too many access points along Franklin Street create greater safety issues and reduce the number of potential parking spaces. Rerouting vehicular access from some of these access points could be beneficial, as long as alternative access is safe and made attractive.



Example of traffic calming - chicanes

Property Maintenance

Aesthetics of the surrounding area can be an important factor in deciding where to walk.

Observations include:

- Several businesses could benefit from improved curb appeal and better maintenance of their properties.
- Homeowners should continue to upkeep their properties and fix any code violations.
- The abundant number of historic buildings, especially along Franklin Street, create the potential for a historic walking tour of the area, possibly accompanied by podcasts.



Attractive streetscapes start with property maintenance

Next Steps

At the end of the workshop, groups came together to determine what steps should be taken in order to improve the issues that were found on the walkabouts. These steps included:

- Make improvement of Franklin Street (State Route 725) a priority for the city.
- Conduct traffic counts for more up-to-date traffic data.
- Conduct bike and pedestrian counts along Franklin Street, as there have not been any of these kinds of counts completed in the past.
- Develop standards for sidewalks and infrastructure to be included in the city plan.
- Develop a list of priority issues as soon as possible with considerations of cost and benefits, and closely manage improvement processes afterward.
- Develop a list of possible grant assistance, along with grant process education.
- Explore creative ways to fund improvements in order to make the most of a limited budget, and obtain additional funding from various Active Transportation funds, including:
 - MVRPC STP, CMAQ, and TA Programs
 - ODNR Outdoor Recreation Facility Grants
 - ODOT Highway Safety Improvement Programs
- Find ways to improve access to the quality parks and green spaces near Downtown Bellbrook, thus allowing it to be a starting/stopping point for recreational activity.
- Approach the Chamber to discuss and broker shared parking agreements.
- Revise the zoning code for signs, as it has not been reviewed since the mid-1990s.

Attendees

The workshop consisted the following attendees split into four groups:

Name	Organization
Green Group Leader – Brianne Hetzel	ODOT District 8
Mike Murray	City of Bellbrook
Forrest Greenwood	City of Bellbrook
Jacqueline Greenwood	City of Bellbrook
Doug Doherty	City of Bellbrook
Josh Anderson	RPCC of Greene County
Shannon Webster	Greene CATS
Jillian Drew	Greene County Public Health
Elaine Long	Citizen
Gwen Price	Thomas & Grushon Insurance Agency
Chris Ewing	Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Chamber of Commerce
Holly Beard	Parrot Promo Essentials
Red Group Leader – Ken LeBlanc	RPCC of Greene County
Nick Edwards	City of Bellbrook
Louie Schatzberg	City of Bellbrook
Dale Wilson	City of Bellbrook
Don Buczek	City of Bellbrook
Jo Ellen Fannin	Winters-Bellbrook Library
Liz Betz	Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Schools
Kerry McIntosh	McIntosh's Pub & Grub
Lisa Gooding	Citizen
Greg Davis	Farmers Insurance
Dwight Bartlett	Bellbrook Historical Museum
Michael Sabin	Bellhop Café
Carolyn Destefani	Sugarcreek Township
Blue Group Leader – Kjirsten Frank-Hoppe	MVRPC
Mark Schlagheck	City of Bellbrook
Elaine Middlestetter	City of Bellbrook
Jim Neidhard	City of Bellbrook
Mitch Thompson	City of Bellbrook
Dona Seger-Lawson	City of Bellbrook/DP&L
David Nottingham	Citizen
Chrisbell Bednar	Greene County Parks & Trails
Kirk Barrett	Bellbrook Lions Club
Rob Bernhard	Dot's
Cara Tilford	Sugarcreek Township
Purple Group Leader – Matt Lindsay	MVRPC
Bob Baird	City of Bellbrook
Daryll McGill	City of Bellbrook
Denny Bennett	City of Bellbrook
Carol Bennett	City of Bellbrook
Sandy Holmes	Riverbend Daylily Garden
Jeff Stewart	Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Park District
Mike Pittman	Sugarcreek Township
Barry Tiffany	Sugarcreek Township
Ashley Stevely	Greene County Public Health
Greg Dart	Dart Contracting

Walking Routes

Each group focused heavily on Franklin Street, while also looking at other residential and commercial areas around the corridor. The routes can be seen below:



Downtown Bellbrook Walkability Checklist Results

Each participant was provided a checklist for use during the walkabout on April 12, 2017. This list shows the number of participants who felt each individual environmental condition was important enough to be noted. The numbers before each question indicate the number participants who checked at least one of the conditions listed under that question. The numbers in the parentheses indicate the average rating for each question for all participants who indicated a rating. The rating scale used was as follows:

- 1=Awful
- 2=Many Problems
- 3=Some Problems
- 4=Good
- 5=Very good
- 6=Excellent

35 Did you have room to walk? (Rating: 3.1)

- 1 Yes
- 30 Some problems:
 - 20 Sidewalks or paths started and stopped
 - 29 Sidewalks were broken or cracked
 - 19 Sidewalks were blocked with poles, signs, shrubbery, dumpsters, etc.
 - 18 No sidewalks, paths, or shoulders
 - 4 Too much traffic
 - 7 Something else

34 Was it easy to cross streets? (Rating: 2.8)

- 6 Yes
- 27 Some problems:
 - 2 Road was too wide
 - 1 Traffic signals made us wait too long or did not give us enough time to cross
 - 26 Needed striped crosswalks or traffic signals
 - 11 Parked cars blocked our view of traffic
 - 4 Trees or plants blocked our view of traffic
 - 29 Needed curb ramps or ramps needed repair
 - 0 Something else

34 Did drivers behave well? (Rating: 3.8)

- 15 Yes
- 15 Some problems: Drivers ...
 - 1 Backed out of driveways without looking
 - 9 Did not yield to people crossing the street
 - 1 Turned into people crossing the street
 - 12 Drove too fast
 - 3 Sped up to make it through traffic lights or drove through traffic lights?
 - 2 Something else

33 Was it easy to follow safety rules? Could you and your child... (Rating: 3.2)

- 15 Yes 16 No Cross at crosswalks or where you could see and be seen by drivers?
- 22 Yes 9 No Stop and look left, right and then left again before crossing streets?
- 19 Yes 7 No Walk on sidewalks or shoulders facing traffic where there were no sidewalks?
- 29 Yes 3 No Cross with the light?

35 Was your walk pleasant? (Rating: 3.6)

- 9 Yes
- 22 Some problems:
 - 19 Needed more grass, .flowers, or trees
 - 0 Scary dogs
 - 0 Scary people
 - 11 Not well lighted
 - 10 Dirty, lots of litter or trash
 - 1 Dirty air due to automobile exhaust
 - 9 Something else

How does your neighborhood stack up? (Overall Rating: 16.1)

- 26-30 Celebrate! You have a great neighborhood for walking.
- 21-25 Celebrate a little. Your neighborhood is pretty good.
- 16-20 Okay, but it needs work.**
- 11-15 It needs lots of work. You deserve better than that.
- 5-10 It's a disaster for walking!

Recommendation Map

Several of the suggestions stemming from the workshop activity are shown in the map below.

