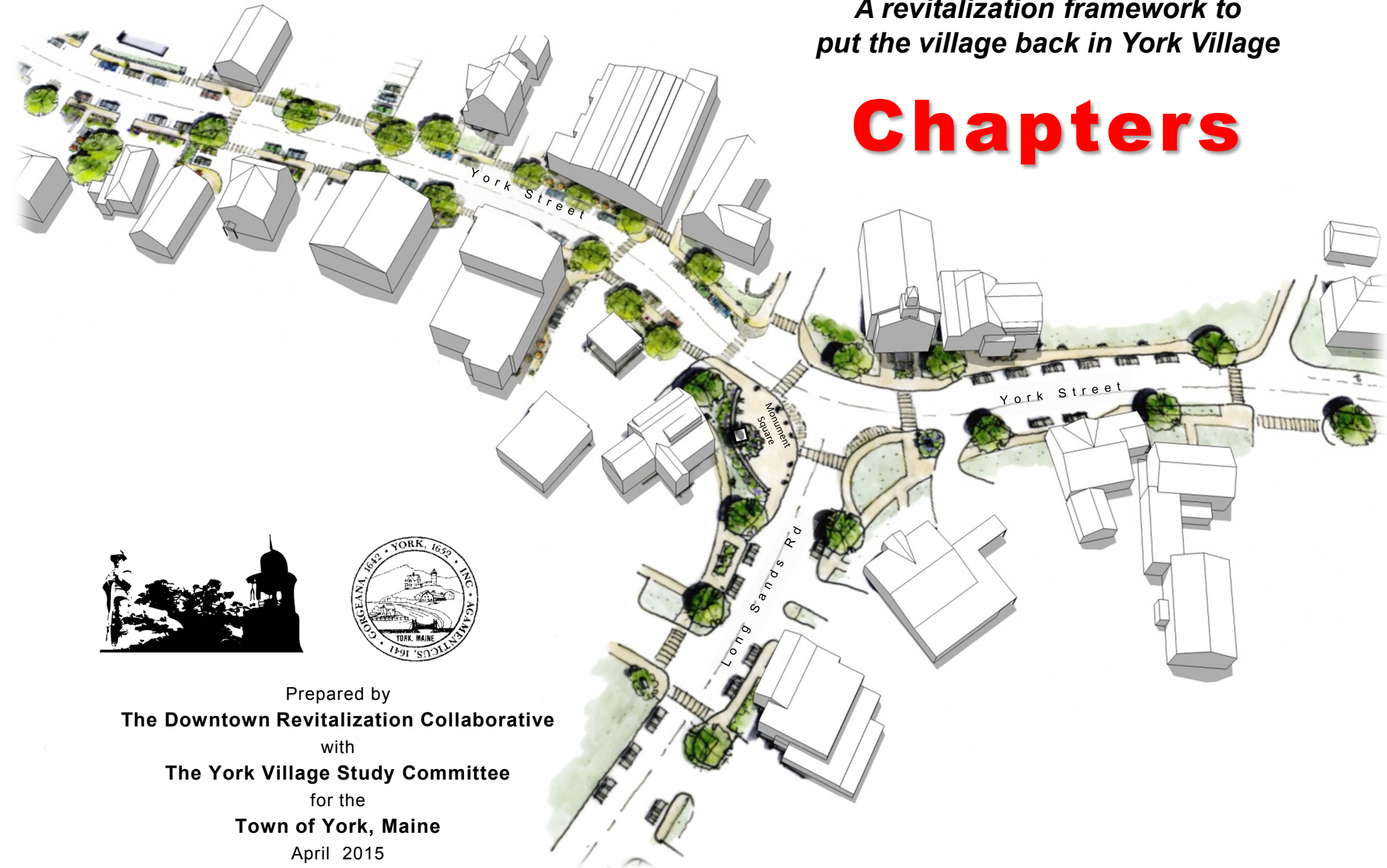


The York Village Master Plan

*A revitalization framework to
put the village back in York Village*

Chapters



Prepared by
The Downtown Revitalization Collaborative
with
The York Village Study Committee
for the
Town of York, Maine
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PURPOSE

“York Village feels more like an intersection than a village.” This comment during the first community workshop perhaps best summarizes what is lacking in York Village: the village. The framework is in place: historic buildings and homes, beautifully landscaped properties, schools, and civic attractions. Yet, something is missing. Community members expressed desire for more destinations, slower traffic, a cohesive network of sidewalks, green spaces, trails, and those “little things that count,” like well-tended flower boxes. Revitalizing York Village requires all of these things and something more: people. To attract residents and visitors, York Village needs to capitalize on its “Place-Making Dividend,” – those unique cultural and physical qualities that speak to the Village’s history, community and sense of place. Kennebunk did it. Portsmouth did it. York Village can do it. This chapter provides the guidance necessary to create a vibrant streetscape and to improve accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists.

This chapter addresses:

- 1.1 Existing Conditions / Assessment**
- 1.2 Considerations**
- 1.3 Recommendations**
- 1.4 Implementation**

1.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS / ASSESSMENT

Introduction

York Village, with its quaint New England character and abundance of historical destinations, holds a special charm that is closely tied to both its Maine coastal heritage and its community. The Village center is rich with landmark architecture and important civic destinations such as the Public Library, the Town Hall, First Parish Church, and the Museums of Old York - all centered



Above left: View of First Parish Church, a prominent feature of the Village; Above right: Flower pots adorn the entrance of a local business.

upon the Civil War monument located in the heart of the village community. Historic homes and stately trees speak to generations past and contribute to the Village’s engaging character. Off the primary route, the Village is buoyed by established residential neighborhoods and several schools within easy walking distance to the center. The Village is blessed as well by its proximity to amazing natural and recreational areas like the First Parish trail system, the 17 acre Steedman Woods, the picturesque Wiggly Bridge, and Cliff Walk. There are so many contributing features that make York Village truly unique and special.

Yet despite these wonderful assets, York Village - like many other small town centers in Maine - has struggled to retain its former vibrancy as a center of economic, social, and civic activity. Urban sprawl and Route One commercial development have pulled businesses and potential visitors away from the Village core, and much of the commercial activity of the town is focused upon



Above: York Street facing the Kyricos building and Cumberland Farms.

the Route One corridor. Residents have been quick to point out the Town's complicity in the decline of the Village center in past decades when officials sought to move businesses out to Route One where parking is plentiful and easy. Vehicle-centric motivations for decision-making such as this have had profound effects on communities like York Village. They have altered the economic vitality as well as the urban and social fabric of traditional downtowns and village centers. Nowhere is this more evident than in the heart of York Village, where the vast majority of space has been allocated to the automobile. Buildings, pedestrian space and streetscape elements such as trees, streetlights, and benches have

all been displaced by a melee of moving and parked vehicles.

Traffic and Parking

Traffic is an issue for the Village, and particularly in the Village center. Traffic speeds, excessively wide streets, and a confusing intersection at the Village center degrade the pedestrian environment and subsequently, the level of pedestrian activity that is necessary to ensure the vitality of the core business area. The classic New England village character of western York Street and Long Sands Road, distinguished by historic architecture and mature street trees, disappears closer to the commercial core, where vehicle demands have compromised the quality of the built environment. There are no visual or physical cues to designate a high pedestrian zone or to calm traffic. Sight lines between vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists are impaired by on-street parking, extensive curb cuts, and steep grades at the street edges. Opportunities to create streetscapes, gathering places, and visual settings have been overwhelmed by parked cars. The resulting environment is intimidating, unsafe, and unattractive despite the incredible efforts of business owners to beautify and make their properties attractive to customers.



Top left: Close-up view of the Civil War monument, which marks the center of the Village; Top right: A wider view showing the monument's setting.

”For as long as I’ve been driving around looking for New England’s prettiest towns, I’ve never run out of villages that look just like their postcards. A white-steeped church fronts the town green, which is bordered by black-shuttered white clapboard houses; or squat Capes clad in weather-beaten shingles match the shacks where the lobstermen work down by the harbor.”

– Janice Brand, “New England’s Prettiest Towns: A Sampler of Picture Perfect Villages.” *Yankee Magazine*. May 2008.

Pedestrian Connectivity

Throughout the master planning process, community members stressed the importance of a safe and convenient network of pedestrian routes linking residential neighborhoods, schools, the Village center, and destinations beyond. York Village is blessed by the density of homes and destinations that allow it to be a walkable community. The sidewalks along the northerly side of eastern York Street and Long Sands Road provide critical connections stretching through the Village from Route One to York Harbor Beach. While these are valuable connections, the community has clearly expressed a desire to widen or extend these connections to both sides of the street, particularly along York Street near area schools. Woodbridge Road is also an important link between the Village, area neighborhoods, and Route 1A destinations, but it lacks a sidewalk between Eldredge Road and Scott Avenue.

In the Village center, pedestrian infrastructure has been severely compromised over the years. Parking has displaced sidewalks, resulting in an uncomfortable and often dangerous pedestrian environment. Pedestrians are often forced to walk into the street to move around parked cars and trucks. Alleyways and side street connections, which are important links between parking and destinations, have been largely assigned to vehicle use. There are few provisions for pedestrians. The few remaining sidewalks are isolated and lack accessibility. Additionally, steep grades off York Street obstruct sight lines and can be challenging to navigate, particularly along the numerous alleyways along the eastern side of York Street. The Village center is an inhospitable place for pedestrians.

Pedestrian crosswalks in the Village often feel unsafe, many times forcing walkers to cross excessive roadway widths in areas of confusing traffic patterns, poor sight lines, and swift moving vehicles. In most areas, parking reduces pedestrian visibility and, in some cases, restricts pedestrian flow to sidewalks.

Streetscape and Village Arrival

One of the greatest potential assets of York Village is its quality of place – those character-defining elements that distinguish it and make it resonate with visitors and residents alike. The Village center is defined by its historic architecture and landmarks, mix of local businesses, clustered civic destinations, and “third places” where neighbors meet neighbors – places like the Bagel Basket and the Village Scoop.

Beyond the Village center, historic homes with mature landscapes line the street and contribute to the Village’s engaging character and sense of place. And while the community seems to agree about what makes the Village special, there are diverse opinions as to where the Village begins and ends. Many feel that there are phases of arrival cued by density, scale, and qualities of architecture and landscape – with the outer Village beginning near Route One to the northwest, Long Sands Plaza to the northeast and Route 103 to the southeast; the inner Village beginning at Lindsay Road, where the Remick Barn sits opposite the white spire of First Parish Church and extending through the Village center to Woodbridge Road to the



Top: Crosswalk configuration around diagonal parking. The crossing terminates at a parked vehicle; Above left: Crosswalk near Cumberland Farms; Above right: Pedestrians forced to walk against traffic.

northeast and the Bagel Basket to the southeast. What is certain, though, is that there is an opportunity to reinforce those qualities that make York Village special, particularly in the Village center.

As explained earlier, the vast majority of space in the center of York Village has been allocated to the automobile. Buildings, sidewalks and streetscape elements like trees, streetlights, and benches have all been displaced by vehicles. The resulting environment is counter-productive to the efforts of business owners to beautify their properties and make them attractive to customers. The qualities and character that distinguish the Village are visually compromised amidst the chaos of traffic and parking.

Bicycle Routes and Amenities

There are designated bicycle lanes along several segments of York Street: between Route One and Lindsay Road and east of the Bagel Basket. The lanes, however, disappear near the Village center and lack consistency along the northerly portions of the route. While

lane widths would accommodate designated bike routes along Long Sands Road, bicycle lanes are not defined. Additionally, those shoulders and bicycle lanes wider than 6 feet are being used for parking and bypass lanes, which restrict movement and create hazardous conditions for cyclists. Parents have expressed concern about the safety of on-street bike lanes for school aged children, saying they preferred to see wider sidewalks which could accommodate multiple users, particularly along the western portion of York Street.

Shared lanes through the Village center are not marked and there is no signage to alert drivers of bicycle activity. Bicycle movement through the intersection is ill-defined. Diagonal parking, particularly along the east end of York Street, obscures visibility of cyclists and is dangerous for cyclists moving through the Village. The Village center also lacks bicycle parking.

1.2 CONSIDERATIONS

Traditional Downtowns are Making a Comeback

Over the past decade, downtowns across America have begun to experience a renaissance of sorts. In its recent study on downtown



Above: A bicyclist navigating through the central intersection.

revitalization, the Brookings Institute found a trend toward growth and development. In a survey of 45 communities, the Institute found a 13% increase in households living in their downtowns between 1990 and 2000. Two things set these areas apart from typical suburban places to live and shop: walkability and sense of place. Walkability - or “walkable urbanism” - describes a setting where safety, density, and diversity of experiences within a vibrant center invite and engage pedestrian activity. Increased public desire for walkable communities combined with growing pressures on suburban commercial areas provide an unprecedented opportunity for economic and social revitalization of traditional downtowns and business centers like York Village. The importance of setting the stage for redevelopment cannot be understated. Public investment in place-making is a critical first step in stimulating private investment. A recent publicly-funded \$150 million dollar pedestrian-oriented revitalization project in Lancaster, California spurred \$125 million in private investment, leading to a 26% tax revenue increase and 800 new jobs.



Above: Pedestrians enjoy the Front Street streetscape in historic Bath.

Traditional Downtowns are Important to Maine

Here in the State of Maine, the Downtown Focus Group of the Governor’s Council on Maine’s Quality of Place recently reported that healthy traditional downtowns are vital to sustaining Maine’s Quality of Place by limiting sprawl and preserving natural land and waters. Their visionary goals for Maine Downtowns included a renewed sense of civic engagement, distinctive historical and



Above: Views of streetscape improvements in downtown Kennebunk.

architectural structures, housing, thriving storefronts, public gathering spaces, and a walkable interface between the natural and built environments. The future viability of Maine’s Quality of Place, according to the Council, requires planning and investment in Maine’s traditional downtowns: acquisition of land and easements for urban parks and trails, rehabilitation of historic community buildings, and physical enhancements, such as sidewalks, street lamps, and benches. The group called for an integration of parks, open spaces, and greenways into urban centers to provide “healthy, natural settings that make downtowns more attractive and invoke our heritage.” York Village center is poised to capitalize on its “Place-Making Dividend” by investing in physical improvements that both accentuate those qualities that make the Village special and invite increased use.

Increased Pedestrian and Bicycle Activity is Good for Business

For traditional downtowns and village centers, high pedestrian and bicycle activity along with attractive streetscapes translate to consumer dollars and long-term economic sustainability. A recent study by the University of Washington, for example, found that people were willing to pay 11% more for goods in landscaped business districts. When New York converted parking to pedestrian

space on Prince Street recently, spending by visitors increased five-fold. This finding is in line with another study of East Village shoppers, which found that people arriving on foot or by bicycle spent about 10% more per capita than motorists. Pedestrians and cyclists were also found to visit local businesses more frequently - 17% more than motorists. Put quite simply, investments in complete streets – those that improve sidewalks, introduce landscaping, reduce traffic speeds and provide accommodations for bikes – are very good for business. Evidence suggests that

Walkability and Quality of Life Elements Attract Businesses and Residents

Walkability, quality of life, and outdoor recreational opportunities are key considerations for attracting new businesses and residents to a community center such as York Village. Recent surveys of members of the “New Economy” workforce (smokeless industries, high technology and service-sector businesses) showed that quality of life in a community increases the attractiveness of a job by 33%.



Above: Images of those qualities that contribute to York Village’s sense of place : beautiful storefronts, community activities, and many historic assets.

improvements to pedestrian and bicycle amenities in York Village will create a setting for a more vibrant and healthy center of community and increased economic activity.

Bicycles are especially good for business. Studies estimate that the bicycle industry supports 1.1 million jobs, generates \$18 billion in federal, state and local taxes, and contributes \$133 billion annually to the U.S. economy. A recent study of the economic impacts of bike tourism in Colorado, for example, demonstrated that over 50% of summer visitors engaged in bicycling. Smart Growth America reports that after the addition of bike lanes and pedestrian enhancements in the Mission District of San Francisco, local merchants experienced a 60% sales increase.

According to the American Planning Association, mobile retirees are also seeking communities that provide scenic beauty as well as leisure and recreational opportunities. It is estimated that by 2050,

A vibrant downtown “sends friendly and welcoming signs with the promise of social interaction.”

- Jan Gehl, “Cities for People.”

**Public investment in place-making
is a critical first step in stimulating
private investment.**

25% percent of Americans will be aged 65 or older. “Retirement Migration” back to community centers has been defined as a “new, clean, growth industry in America today,” and a trend that York Village is well-poised to take advantage of.

A generational shift in automobile ownership has also been taking place. In 2013 the New York Times reported that Americans are getting fewer licenses, driving less, and buying fewer cars. From 2001-2009, the number of young people driving decreased 23%. “Millennials don’t value cars and car ownership. They value technology,” the article reported. This trend is even evident in



Above: Birdseye view showing the preliminary design concept for the Village center.

Maine, where the number of registered passenger vehicles dropped by 12,000 – a 23% decrease. Car ownership in Portland fell 33% from 2004 to 2011. Between 2005 and 2011, the number of vehicle miles traveled declined 7% in Portland and 4% in the state. This societal shift away from the automobile suggests that investments in alternate modes of transportation, including pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, are of growing importance to communities like York Village.

Walkability Supports Home Values

A 2009 study funded by CEO’s for Cities showed a positive correlation between walkability and home values. In the metropolitan areas studied, houses with above average levels of walkability typically commanded a premium between \$4,000 and \$34,000 over similar houses in less walkable neighborhoods. The study concluded “urban leaders should pay close attention to walkability as a key measure of urban vitality and as impetus for public policy that will increase overall property values – a key source of individual wealth and of revenues for cash-strapped governments.”

Public Investment is Necessary for Revitalization

The Maine State Planning Office’s August 2008 Downtown Revitalization Report noted that upgrades to infrastructure, such as lighting, landscaping, roads, and parking, are necessary investments for communities seeking to draw private investment into downtowns and village centers. The Brookings Institute backs up this premise. For downtown revitalization to be successful, the Institute reports, private sector investment must be reestablished since for every \$1 of public investment, there will typically be \$10-15 of private money. The bulk of public investment is required early in the revitalization process in order to attract private development and investment in the downtown. Public improvements projects, such as those recommended in the York Village Master Plan, are therefore necessary first steps in leveraging future business and investments in the Village center.



Auto-Centric



Achievement of the Master Plan Objectives will require a better Balance of Uses.

Pedestrian-friendly

Vehicle space needs to be Streamlined to make way for Pedestrians, Bicyclists and Streetscape.

1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a Pedestrian-Oriented Village
- Integrate Bicycle Improvements
- Create Village Arrival Zones
- Initiate Wayfinding Improvements

The pedestrian, streetscape and bicycle recommendations included below encompass many layers of design considerations the need to create 21st century function without losing cherished qualities, balance competing pedestrian with vehicular needs and foster economic prosperity.

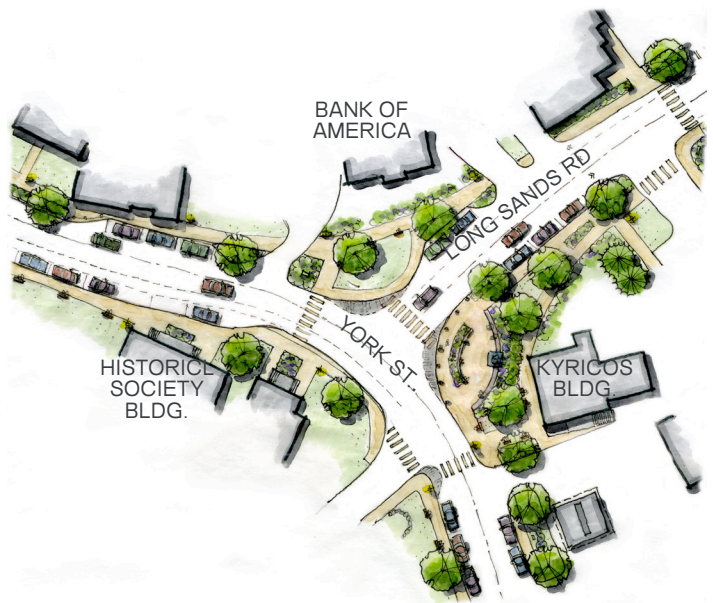
The following recommendations have been organized for ease of understanding and use by Town staff. Supplemental information, such as schematic plans, design details, costs, and phasing recommendations have been provided in other sections of the Master Plan.

Create a Pedestrian-Oriented Village

“Streets have become a void in the mind of city planners. Transportation planning has been made separate from city planning and, accordingly, streets separate rather than link the different pieces of the city.” – Anne Vernez Moudon, Professor of Urban Design, University of Washington.

If suburban development is like Wonder Bread – “bland, easily digestible, convenient, but offering little in terms of nutrition for the soul,” then it might be said that traditional downtowns are like Artisan Bread – made of local, quality ingredients and full of life-sustaining nutrients. For decades, places like York Village have sought to compete with vehicle-centric and sprawling commercial areas – often compromising those very qualities that make traditional downtowns special. York Village today is inarguably a much better place for vehicles than for people. Making space for pedestrians, cyclists, and the streetscape features that are necessary for revitalization requires reducing the amount of space that is

Reference resources include AASHTO (2012) Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities, FHWA (2009) Manual on Uniform Traffic Control, and NACTO (2012) Urban Bikeway Design Guide.



Top left: Master Plan sketch showing the proposed intersection and streetscape improvements at the center of the Village. The current traffic configuration is clarified, pedestrian crossing points are reduced, and the monument is shifted back to allow plaza space in front of the statue, where visitors can fully appreciate the monument. Top right: A sketch showing possible long-term improvements, including a consolidated shared parking lot, alleys repurposed as pedestrian spaces, and Village-oriented infill development that helps enliven the streetscape. This scenario will require buy-in from property owners. Above: Sketch showing improvements along York Street in the commercial center. The plan includes new sidewalks, outdoor spaces, and streetscape elements.



Above left: A repurposed alley in York Village with a business entrance, connection to the street and streetscape elements that make an successful pedestrian space; Center: A view of outdoor dining at the Bagel Basket - one of the Village's "third places," and an important community gathering place; Right: The Kyricos building located in the heart of the Village center, with its thoughtful landscaping and pedestrian-scaled entrance space. These are some of the wonderful qualities that infuse a sense of pride and place that makes York Village special. The Master Plan recognizes and builds upon these attributes.

currently allocated to the automobile. This includes “right-sizing” streets to calm traffic and reduce the vehicular footprint within the Village center, repurposing alleys as pedestrian-friendly spaces, and shifting a portion of curbside parking off-street.

The Master Plan Concept is a visual representation of what these improvements may entail, but it is important to note that roadway modifications and recommendations for parking are absolutely essential components of the plan going forward. Other changes will take time. The Long-term Conceptual Plan for consolidating commercial parking lots behind the York Street business block, for example, will require strategic investment partnerships between the Town, property owners, and businesses. This investment is an important project as it would accomplish several things. It would establish centrally-located public parking that is safe and convenient to businesses. It would reduce curb cuts along York Street, creating safer sidewalks and opportunities for improved handicap access to buildings. It would also provide the potential for businesses to expand into the streetscape realm with outdoor dining, seating, and attractive landscapes. It would further provide the opportunity for the public to access their businesses from the rear parking area.

While there is a clear imbalance between automobiles and pedestrians in the Village center, much of the physical character and

structure remains intact. There are exceptions – what landscape architect Lawrence Halperin describes as “parking lots which intrude like cavities in the fabric of the city,” where large, paved areas have replaced buildings in traditionally dense downtowns. As the Village center recalibrates and makes room for pedestrians, the Town will need to rework zoning and encourage infill and business models that support redevelopment objectives. The Long-Term Scenario Conceptual Plan in the Visual Master Plan section of this report shows how Village-oriented infill development can integrate streetscape elements and site design to directly engage pedestrians and add to a vibrant and beautiful environment.

Integrate Bicycle Improvements

Improving accommodations for bicycle travel with clear signage, route markings, and maps is an imperative first step in improving safety and convenience for cyclists. These improvements have often been requested by Cycle York. Existing bicycle lanes along York Street and Long Sands Road should be retained except within the Village center, where shared use lanes are proposed due to lack of roadway width. Bike lanes should be between 4-6 feet wide and should be designated as an exclusive space for cyclists with regular roadway marking and vertical signage. Where curbs are present, bike lanes should be at least 5 feet wide to ensure adequate

uninterrupted travel space around catch basins. All basin grates should be evaluated to determine whether they are bike-friendly.

In association with these provisions, the Town should provide bicycle racks in the downtown, at shared parking facilities, and on shuttles to encourage bicycle commuting, touring, and sight-seeing. York Village should consider developing a public transit connection to the Shoreline Explorer that runs along Route 1A to Ogunquit, Wells, and Kennebunk with connections to the Wells Regional Transportation Center and Sanford Airport.

York Village may also want to team with the Beach community to find opportunities for bike sharing programs. Programs such as Boston’s New Balance Hubway bike sharing system promote “green transit options” by providing fleets of bicycles-for-lease at transit hubs throughout the city. Boston’s program is underwritten by Mass DOT and New Balance. Bike sharing is an emerging program in Maine as well. Portland Transportation Center, for example, recently developed a 10-bike, short-term parking station with the bike-sharing company Zagster. It is important to note that communities sometimes do not need to make direct investments in bike-sharing. Having great pedestrian and bicycle infrastructures often open opportunities for small business development. In San Francisco, a network of bike-rental companies and vendors has grown along popular pedestrian and bicycle routes. With its summer draw, proximity to the beaches and natural areas like the Wild and Scenic York River and Mount Agamenticus, York could develop an incredible bicycling culture.

Create Village Arrival Zones

A distinct arrival zone to the Village builds upon the existing quality of place and uses visual cues to slow traffic and announce pedestrian activity. To this end, the Town should extend sidewalk improvements, street lighting, and tree plantings from Route One along York Street to Woodbridge Road to the northeast and Moulton Lane to the southeast. Enhance visual arrival zones to the Village center with gateway signs, upgraded streetscape treatments like brick sidewalks, bench seating, street lighting and wayfinding graphics. These streetscape elements set the tone for the Village center as a pedestrian-oriented place and include visual cues to

calm traffic and stimulate driver awareness: painted ladder style or brick crosswalks, narrowed street crossings and well-placed granite bollards.

Initiate Wayfinding Improvements

As stated previously, a comprehensive sign and wayfinding program is an essential step in guiding visitors to destinations, including public parking lots, cultural attractions, local businesses, trails and bicycle routes. Signage and wayfinding are essential components of the built environment and our experiences of it. A comprehensive signage and wayfinding program offers a unique marketing advantage by branding and communicating the Village’s unique identity and sense of place. The York Village Study Committee has undertaken the first steps in developing a logo,



Clockwise, from top left: Beautifully landscaped Civil War Monument; Well-tended yard of a York Village business; Picturesque view of the York River - a short walking distance from York Village; View across the Old Burying Ground to Remmick Barn; . All of these features support the Village’s Sense of Place.

which can be used on all Village signage. The Town should consult with an environmental graphic designer to develop comprehensive signage and a wayfinding design system for York Village. This effort should include appropriate outreach with the business community, the Study Committee and Town officials to tailor the approach. Existing zoning ordinances should be reviewed and updated as required to support implementation of the final sign and wayfinding recommendations.

1.4 - IMPLEMENTATION

The Maine Downtown Center notes that revitalization happens in incremental steps rather than large ones. The Town may be required to do the initial heavy lifting, so to speak, in order to demonstrate its commitment to redevelopment and to set the stage for private investment by making upgrades to public infrastructure and other enhancements. Planning for larger, more expensive projects is imperative, but the Town should also consider implementing smaller projects immediately to demonstrate change to future investors, business owners, workers, and the general public.

New signage and planters, for example, are visual indicators of Village improvement that have a relatively high impact for little investment. It is very important that this planning effort is highlighted by a noticeable physical improvement, no matter how small. As one community member aptly put it, “It is the little things that count.”

Updates to infrastructure and the development of public open spaces will require public-private partnerships as well as funding assistance. There are financial resources to help fund these projects. The Funding chapter of this report details many funding sources and opportunities. The Maine Downtown Center and the Department of Community and Economic Development are also excellent resources for funding opportunities and related application processes.

There are a few key steps to be undertaken before diving into infrastructure construction.

- Design Development. Further develop conceptual-level designs to include a higher level of technical design and detailing, which will allow more specific costs and phasing recommendations.
- Update Zoning. It is understood that the Town will be reworking much of its current zoning language. Redevelopment of York Village will require reducing or even eliminating minimum parking standards to stimulate new business and infill development opportunities. Signage, lot coverage, and setback requirements should also be carefully reviewed to ensure that zoning language is aligned with the desired outcome for density and character within the Village center.
- Immediately begin discussions and negotiations with private landowners to secure shared parking arrangements and public land uses. The Town should consider moving forward immediately with the purchase of the Hodgin lot, which is an integral part of the parking management strategy for the Village.

CONCLUSION

A growing public desire for walkable communities combined with York Village’s inherent “Place-Making Dividend” provides an unprecedented opportunity for economic and social revitalization of the Village center. It is time to adjust the balance of land use to create a place for people - a vibrant center of community and economic activity that reinforces the Village’s historic character. The recommended revitalization changes will require a significant public investment and public-private partnerships to be successful. As noted previously, public investment is required early in the revitalization process in order to attract private development and investment in the Village. Public improvements projects, such as those recommended in the York Village Master Plan, are therefore necessary first steps in leveraging future business and investments in the Village center.

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