Peril and Promise:

The Impact of COVID-19 on the Streetscapes of Today’s Cities and Towns
and the Promise of Social Infrastructure

SNEAPA 2020 | Thursday, October 29, 2020 | 2:45 P.M. - 3:45 P.M.
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Michael Di Pasquale, AIA, AICP | UMass Amherst
Stacey Beuttell, AICP | WalkBoston
“COVID-19 has created challenges and opportunities in cities and towns across the world. Inspired by the changes to municipal streets - such as pop-up bike lanes, open streets, and outdoor dining - this session explores how tomorrow’s streetscapes can look different, healthier, and more accessible for all community residents.”
# The Impact of COVID-19 on the Streetscapes of Today’s Cities and Towns and the Promise of Social Infrastructure

## Introduction

- **Real-Time Research:** Social infrastructure and the impact of COVID-19

## Takeaways:

### Stacey Beuttell, WalkBoston:
- Pedestrian realm Springfield
- Challenges and opportunities

### Michael Di Pasquale, UMass:
- Mid-sized Legacy/Gateway Cities
- Challenges and opportunities

### Takeaways:
- **Stacey Beuttell:** Walk audits method
- **Virtual community engagement**

### Takeaways:
- **New ways to reimagine vacant spaces in older cities and towns**

## Resources:
- Review of sources and guidelines
- Recommendations

## Group Discussion

1. Social infrastructure in your community?
2. COVID-related changes in your community?
3. How to support social infrastructure in tomorrow’s streetscapes?
Real-Time Research:
Social infrastructure
Impact of COVID-19

Takeaways:
Framework of social infrastructure
Examples of COVID-responses

Resources:
Review of sources and guidelines
Recommendations
Social Infrastructure

Places that allow:

- People to gather
- A welcoming atmosphere
- Different uses for different people

Matching **physical infrastructure** with the way a place is **experienced**
Social Infrastructure

- Abundance
- Diversity
- Accessibility
- Maintenance
- Response

Location of street conversations lasting two minutes or more at Saks Fifth Avenue and Fiftieth Street. Cumulative for five days in June. Note main concentration at corner, secondary one outside entrance.
Ten Ways Every City Should Respond to COVID-19 On Its Streets, Compiled by NACTO

The novel coronavirus has rapidly changed the way we use our roads. Cities must respond to the emergency — but they have to do it right.

Memo#7: Reallocating Main Street Space to Support Community Wellbeing

The Pandemic Has Pushed Aside City Planning Rules. But to Whose Benefit?
As bike lanes and cafes sprout on streets, marginalized residents wonder when their priorities will get attention.

‘Safe Streets’ Are Not Safe for Black Lives
A transportation planner warns pedestrian-friendly street redesigns that happen without diverse public input can end up harming the communities they serve.
Resources and Recommendations
Planning for Social Infrastructure during and after COVID-19

Made available for: CHณะน, 2020 Licensees, October 2020

Principal Investigator: Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, University of Massachusetts Amherst
Co-Principal Investigators: Massinc, Valkirk

Resources

Industry Guidelines

* Early planning recommendation for mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19, World Health Organization

The guidelines are based on the fact that COVID-19 is a new disease and that there are currently no vaccines or treatments available. It is important to take steps to prevent the spread of the virus and to protect the health of people who may be at risk of severe illness.

* WHO’s risk-prioritized COVID-19 risk assessment tool - religious events, World Health Organization

The tool helps to prioritize the risk of COVID-19 transmission in religious events. It is useful for determining whether a religious event is safe and can be held, or whether it should be postponed or cancelled.

* COVID-19 Response, American Planning Association

The APA’s COVID-19 Response Toolkit offers guidance on how to adapt community planning and design practices to respond to the pandemic. The toolkit includes resources such as guidance on public health measures, community engagement, and the use of technology to support planning.

Information Sharing Tools for COVID-19, American Planning Association

The APA’s COVID-19 Resource Hub is a one-stop-shop for resources and information related to COVID-19. The hub includes guidance on how to adapt planning practices and strategies to respond to the pandemic.

New Public Engagement Resources, American Planning Association

The APA’s Public Engagement Toolkit offers guidance on how to adapt planning practices and strategies to respond to the pandemic. The toolkit includes guidance on how to engage the public in planning processes and how to use technology to support public engagement.

Recovery Resources for Cities, National Association of City Transportation Officials

The NACTO’s Recovery Resources for Cities offers guidance on how to adapt planning practices and strategies to respond to the pandemic. The toolkit includes guidance on how to support transportation and mobility in urban areas.

Recommendations

Adapting Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery in Massachusetts

June 18, 2020

As Massachusetts continues through the phases of reopening plans, municipalities across the state will need to make tough decisions on their streets and public spaces in order to ensure public health and economic viability. It is important to support residents and small businesses and give people enough space to move about, with physical distancing guidelines to help slow the virus and allow for businesses to reopen. Although Massachusetts has recently moved into a new phase, it’s likely that infection rates will fluctuate and we could experience a second wave in the coming months, requiring adjustments at a small scale and an appropriate response.

Various municipalities are organizing budget strategies due to the impact of the pandemic, highlighting the importance of planning in a fiscal and strategic manner. This includes the following recommendations:

- Health and safety: traffic and road safety and the public need to remain vigilante to change that may be needed to keep people safe - rather than COVID-19 to traffic drivers.
- Mobility: Prioritizing those who are most impacted by COVID-19, such as older adults, essential workers, black and brown people, and other vulnerable populations.
- Partnership: How to partner with community organizations, Main Streets organizations, and the private sector to support the economic recovery.
- Community engagement: Connect with community members and groups to determine the right strategies and approaches to address community needs and interests in the future.
- Build on what works: Design new streets and spaces that are designed to change quickly. Many municipalities already know what works and are already using these models to design new streets and spaces that are more sustainable and less vulnerable to change.

Below are a number of additional recommendations for planning for streets and public spaces in this new context, to help people feel safe and continue their economic recovery.

- Health and safety: traffic and road safety and the public need to remain vigilant to change that may be needed to keep people safe - rather than COVID-19 to traffic drivers.
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Data collection: examples United States
Data collection: examples Massachusetts
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>Location: <strong>Country, City, State, U.S. Legacy City?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meta-data: <strong>Source, Official Source, Date?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Measure: <strong>Design Treatment, Temporary or Permanent, Motivated by COVID-19, What, Why, Where?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Details: <strong>Who, By Whom, Community Engagement, Project Status, Process, Outcome</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis: <strong>Overall Theme(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By far, most interventions were installed to benefit restaurants, and then businesses, more generally.
Findings (2)

Although less common, 41% of cities made changes to infrastructure that did not directly benefit businesses.
Lack of community engagement.
Findings (4)

Almost all interventions were planned as temporary measures at the time of our data collection.

LET’S TALK!

Stay Healthy Streets can only be an asset with input and support from the people who live along and use them. Over the next few weeks, we’ll launch outreach to gather input on making them permanent. Our efforts will center race and equity, discuss how to respect the cultural significance of neighborhoods to those that live there and how to evolve the streets into the neighborhood fabric, share the type of treatments we could use to replace the current Street Closed signs, and collect potential locations for expansion. We’ll also discuss creating a possible ambassador program, similar to adopting a traffic circle.

We are currently designing the engagement plan and expect to start conversations in the next couple of weeks. We’ll look to the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods and community leaders to identify good forums for talking to you, as well as providing online opportunities. In the meantime, you can express your interest by emailing StayHealthyStreets@Seattle.gov.

Seattle, Washington, source: Seattle.gov, updated August 14, 2020
From temporary to permanent measures?

NYC Open Streets, Open Restaurants to Become Permanent, Year-Round Initiatives

Published September 25, 2020 • Updated on September 25, 2020 at 11:32 pm

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker doubling funding for Shared Streets and Spaces to $10 million; Program helps businesses adapt outside spaces amid coronavirus

Updated Sep 10, 2020; Posted Sep 10, 2020

Next Phase of Boston’s ‘Healthy Streets’ Will Make Downtown Bike Lanes Permanent, Advance Projects in Outlying Neighborhoods

By Christian MilNeil | Aug 19, 2020 | 0 COMMENTS
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Takeaways:
- Walk audit methods
- Virtual community engagement

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WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and more vibrant communities.
Walkability

CONNECTIONS  DESTINATIONS  SAFETY  COMFORT  ACTIVITY
Connections: Get people to where they need to go

Streets and sidewalks balance walking, biking, transit with cars
Paths and crosswalks are where they are needed
Mix of offices, shops, restaurants, parks, and residences
Lots of destinations that appeal to people of all ages, abilities, and income-levels
Safety: Provide safe crossing and smooth walkways

Signs and crosswalks alert drivers to potential walkers
Walking surfaces are smooth and well-lit
Walking paths are well-shaded and walkers are separated from vehicles
Welcoming building facades
Walking environment is maintained year-round (snow, trash)
Places to sit and rest
Shade
Activity: Attract people

Banners and art contribute to civic pride
Installations activate street life
Festive lighting encourages evening activity year-round
Session 1 (Zoom):
Ped 101 workshop and walkability discussion

Self-led walk audit:
Walk on their own and record photo, video and written observations

Session 2 (Zoom):
Post-walk discussion and built environment change recommendations
Springfield Walk Audit: Social Infrastructure

Comfort: Outdoor seating

Safety: Road design
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Loss of Social Infrastructure

Eric Klinenberg
“Heat Wave”
CELEBRATING THE CITY

JANE JACOBS

100 YEARS

POPULATION DENSITY

1

Fought against big money developments.

2

Mixed-use:

A mixture of residences, workplaces & shops brings people out on the street at all times.

3

Old buildings:

Older buildings often provide open space for new business & home office environments.

4

Short blocks:

A dense, street network means more opportunities for residents & more chances for engagement.

5

She believed:

Children playing on the sidewalk helps them become better parts of their community.

6

I lived here:

If people live on the street, they look out for each other.

7

She believed:

Well-designed & public spaces make life & their neighborhoods more vibrant.

8

More info at:

www.mas.org
www.fps.org

brought to you by:

MAS NYC

PUBLIC SPACES

CURBED
COVID-19 Pandemic/Research

Public Space/Outdoor Space/Shared Streets
Do something/Experiment
Keep Businesses Open
Funding available
What did we learn?
How are cities benefiting?
DIY/Do things differently/Creative arts
New ways to collaborate (city, BID, DPW, police)
Co-benefits of Placemaking/Sustainable Design
Grassroots/Bottom up approach
Flexible/Tactical Urbanism/Try things out
Economic boost
Challenges

Diversity/Equity
Long-term funding
How do we keep it going/winter
Uncertain longer term impacts of Pandemic
How do we translate lessons to long term change?
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1. **Social infrastructure in your community?**
   - What are some examples of common and unique social infrastructure(s) in your community?
   - What can support or constrain the development of social infrastructure?

2. **COVID-related changes in your community?**
   - How did your community address challenges related to COVID? What worked, what did not work?
   - What new challenges impact old priorities?
   - What are obstacles to implement different tactics more permanently?

3. **How can we support social infrastructure (for everyone) in tomorrow’s streetscapes?**
   - What works to prioritize these needs? (Funding, zoning, …)
   - What scale (neighborhood, city/town, region)?
   - Who benefits and who does not?
COVID-19 murals express hope and help envision urban futures

June 3, 2020 10:45am EDT

Rather than blank boarded-up storefronts, artists in Vancouver have created murals to offer inspiration, public health messaging and beauty during the coronavirus pandemic. This one is by Will Phillips. (Eugene McConnell) CC BY