

CASS COUNTY:

# WALKABILITY ASSESSMENT REPORT



POWERED BY Wellmark  

## FOREWORD

**Thank you to all the participants who took part in the walking audit workshop. Healthy Hometown<sup>SM</sup> Powered by Wellmark was invited by Healthy Cass County to assist in identifying opportunities for enhancing walkability and bikeability.**

Healthy Hometown is a way to make your community an even better place to live, work and play by using proven tools and techniques that help make the healthy choice the easy choice. Healthy Hometown provides evidence-based built environment and behavioral economics principles that result in desired action along with policy modifications to help communities make sustainable changes that will improve the overall well-being of residents. Implementing ways to make it safer for pedestrians and bicyclists is one primary way to achieve sustainable change.

The walking audit that was performed in Cass County was designed to help community members identify and visualize ways to provide a better environment to walk and bike. The walking audit is also designed to stimulate conversation within the community regarding actions that can be taken.

What follows is an identification of community members who participated in the walking audit, recommendations based on the walking audit and a summary of the conversation. Some recommendations are low cost and could be easy to implement, while others may be large expenses that could take years of planning and work. We hope these recommendations will provide a framework for your community to make Cass County more pedestrian- and bike-friendly.

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## SAFE AND ACTIVE STREETS

- Construct new **sidewalks** to fill gaps in the current network
- Establish and enforce a **sidewalk maintenance program**
- **Require sidewalks** with new development projects
- Install ADA-compliant **curb ramps** at all intersections
- Paint **continental-style crosswalks** with high-visibility markings
- Add **midblock crossings** on Chestnut Street between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets in Atlantic
- Replace traffic signals in downtown Atlantic with **all-way stop signs**
- Install **pedestrian countdown signals** at all intersections with traffic lights in Atlantic
- Construct a **trail connection** between downtown Atlantic and the Schildberg Recreation Area
- Connect Atlantic to the **T-Bone Recreational Trail**
- Install **bike lanes** on Olive Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Street in Atlantic
- Construct a **cycletrack** on Poplar Street in Atlantic



## CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

- Invest in **streetscaping** on Walnut Street in Atlantic
- Construct landscaped **bumpouts** at intersections in downtown Anita
- Work with local businesses to install **parklets** in downtown business districts
- Create a unique **public gathering space** at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Walnut Street in Atlantic
- Convert vacant lots into unique **pocket parks**
- Design and install branded community **wayfinding** signage

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Date of walking audit:  
Oct. 30, 2018

KARLA AKERS .....	Cass County Health System
DAVE CHASE .....	Nishna Valley Trails
LAVON EBLEN .....	KJAN Radio
ALEXSIS FLEENER .....	SWIPCO
DAN HAYNES .....	YMCA
DAVE JONES .....	City of Atlantic
DANI LUHRS .....	SWIPCO
RACHELLE MCCALLA .....	Presbyterian Church
HEATHER MCKAY .....	Atlantic High School
LLOYD MUNSON .....	Kiwanis
JENNIFER NICHOLS .....	Atlantic News Telegraph
BETH OLSEN .....	Cass County Memorial Hospital
KRISTY PELLET .....	Atlantic Community Schools
CAROLE SCHULER .....	Cass County Health System
CAROL SEDDON .....	Kiwanis
BAILEY SMITH .....	Atlantic Area Chamber of Commerce
SETH STAASHELM .....	Atlantic Parks & Recreation
SCOTT SUHR .....	Iowa DOT
BECKY WILLRICH .....	Pampered Chef
JIM CUSHING .....	Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield
ETHAN STANDARD .....	Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield

## WALKING AUDIT ROUTE

Participants completed a walking audit along a one-mile route beginning and ending at the Atlantic Public Library.

This audit began with observations of walking conditions along 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Poplar Street near Atlantic City Park. Participants then continued through downtown Atlantic along Chestnut Street and Highway 83 before returning to the library along Locust Street.



The map above depicts the route participants observed in Atlantic during the walking audit workshop.

## SAFE AND ACTIVE STREETS

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people who are physically active tend to live longer and have a lower risk for heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, and some cancers.<sup>1</sup> And while individuals must choose to be physically active, communities can make changes to their environment that help make this choice easier. Ensuring residents are able to access worksites, schools, homes, grocery stores, parks and trails by walking and biking will help encourage people to be more physically active in their everyday lives.

### Sidewalks

Installing sidewalks in key areas where there are gaps can help improve the connectivity of your community's pedestrian network and promote physical activity. Future gaps can be prevented by adopting policies that require new development projects to install sidewalks as part of their construction plans.

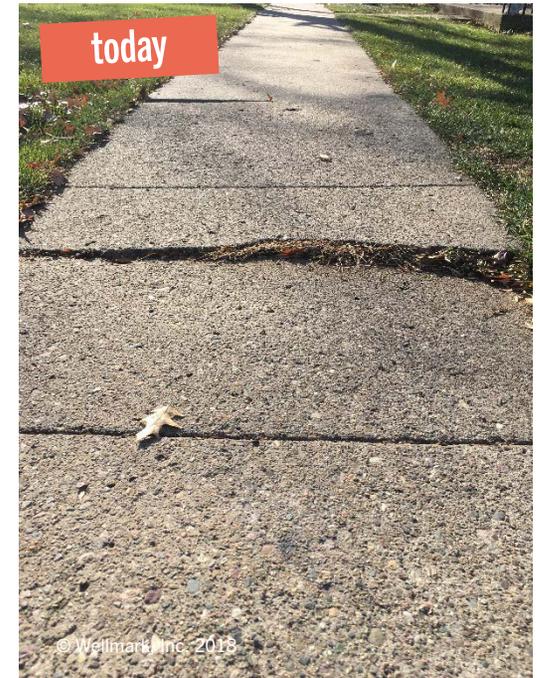
Once sidewalks have been installed, ensuring that they are adequately maintained is another challenge that must be addressed. Keeping sidewalks in good repair can be accomplished through the establishment and enforcement of a sidewalk maintenance program that routinely inspects and repairs damaged sidewalks.

- Construct new sidewalks to fill gaps in the current network
- Establish and enforce a sidewalk maintenance program
- Require sidewalks with new development projects

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/data/facts.htm>



A sidewalk maintenance program can ensure that damaged sidewalks are properly repaired or replaced.



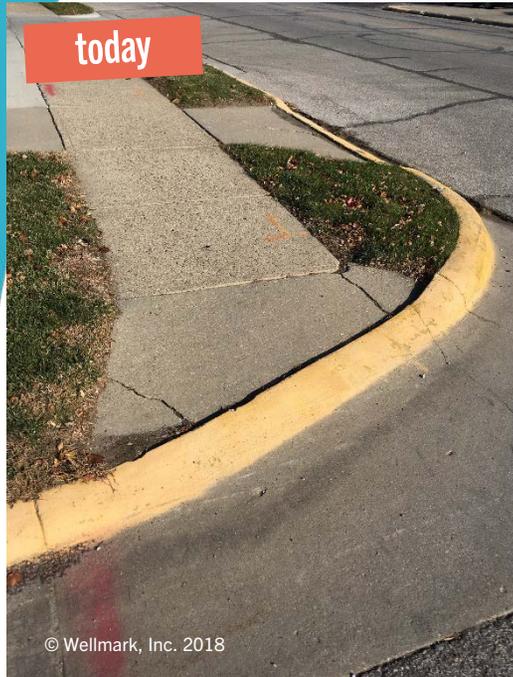
Uneven sidewalks can create dangerous tripping hazards and barriers for people in your community.

# SAFE AND ACTIVE STREETS

## Curb Ramps

In addition to gaps in the sidewalk network, missing curb ramps also represent impediments to those navigating your community. These situations can be remedied by updating curb ramps to ensure they are ADA-compliant. At intersections that do not have curb ramps, sidewalks can be difficult to navigate and pose significant challenges for parents pushing strollers and people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

- Install ADA-compliant curb ramps at all intersections



This intersection along Poplar Street is in need of updated curb ramps.



Example of a newly installed ADA-compliant curb ramp with yellow truncated domes for people with visual impairments to detect the edge of the crosswalk.

# SAFE AND ACTIVE STREETS

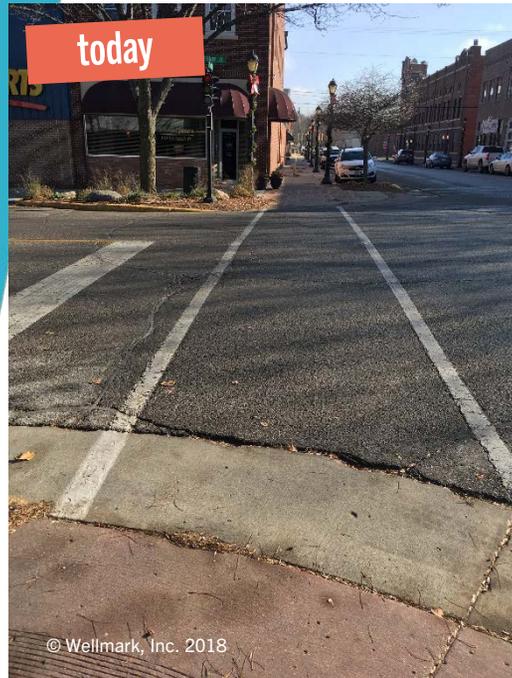
## Crosswalks

Installing safer crossing points for people walking and riding bikes is a key component of making Cass County communities more walkable.

Some communities currently use standard-style crosswalk markings at intersections, which consist of two thin parallel white lines. Crosswalk visibility could be enhanced through the use of another striping style known as continental-style (pictured at right).

While most crosswalks had recently been painted, others were less noticeable due to faded paint. Repainting these crosswalks and using higher-visibility markings will improve pedestrian safety.

- Paint continental-style crosswalks with high-visibility markings



Many crosswalks are currently painted using standard-style crosswalk markings (pictured above in downtown Atlantic).



Using continental-style striping (pictured above in Griswold) helps improve the visibility of painted crosswalks.

## SAFE AND ACTIVE STREETS

### Midblock Crossings

On Cedar Street, some blocks may benefit from the addition of formal pedestrian crossing points between crosswalks located at intersections.

Adding pedestrian crosswalks in the middle of a block (midblock) provides people with another safe point to cross the street. Midblock crossings can lead to more efficient use of on-street parking spaces and improve walkability in a downtown business district.

- Add midblock crossings on Chestnut Street between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets in Atlantic



Examples of midblock crossings from West Union, Iowa, and Oelwein, Iowa.

## SAFE AND ACTIVE STREETS

### Traffic Signal Removal

Chestnut Street in downtown Atlantic has several intersections with traffic signals that are programmed to constantly display flashing red lights.

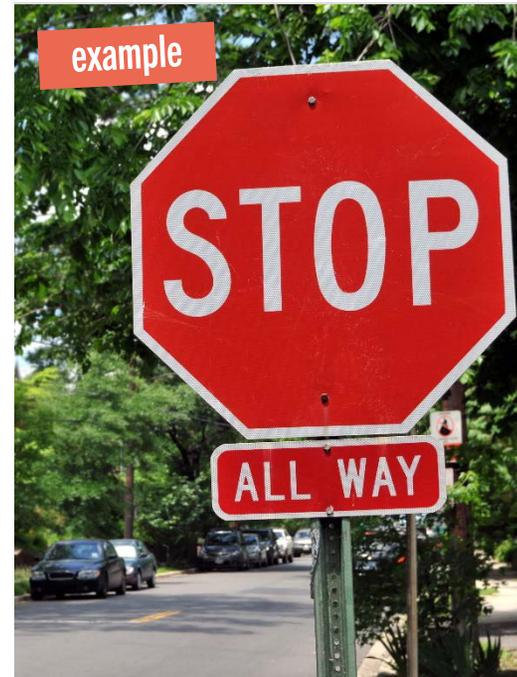
Removing these traffic signals will eliminate the need for future capital expenditures as well as ongoing maintenance and operating costs.

It will also improve safety by reducing confusion at other traffic signals in the community that are functioning properly.

- Replace traffic signals in downtown Atlantic with all-way stop signs



Flashing red traffic signals currently used in downtown Atlantic are not needed.



Switching them out for traditional stop signs would save money and reduce confusion.

## SAFE AND ACTIVE STREETS

### Pedestrian Countdown Signals

At intersections with traffic lights that are still in use, pedestrian countdown signals can eliminate a significant source of confusion for people crossing the street.

Countdown signals are beneficial because they inform pedestrians of the time they have remaining to cross the street once the hand signal starts flashing. Without that context, many people will begin running across the street as soon as the “walking man” signal disappears and the “stop hand” begins flashing. Sudden erratic movements can increase the chances of a pedestrian being struck by a vehicle.

- Install pedestrian countdown signals at all intersections with traffic lights in Atlantic



Today, pedestrian signals do not include countdown timers.



Using countdown signals for pedestrians helps eliminate confusion at intersections.

# SAFE AND ACTIVE STREETS

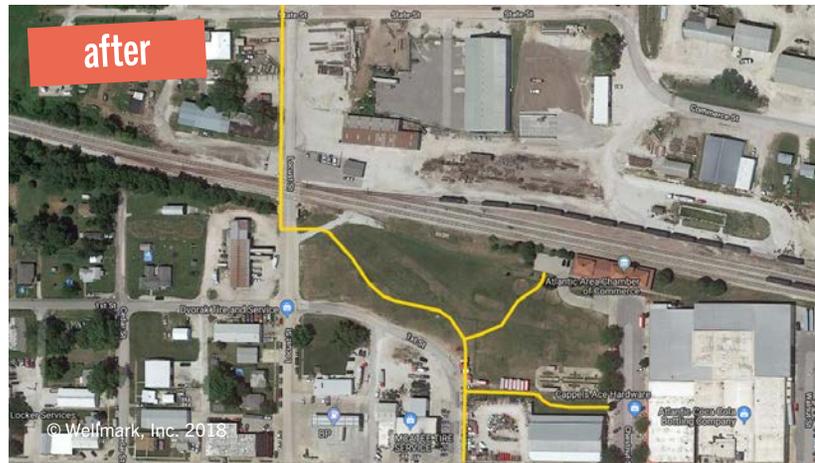
## Trails

Ensuring that residents are able to access existing neighborhood parks and trails by walking and biking will help encourage them to be more physically active in their everyday lives. Recreational trails are one tool that communities can use to make exercise more convenient and nudge people toward establishing healthy habits. Atlantic has a foundational network of trails on the northern edge of the city in the Schildberg Recreation Area that is somewhat disconnected from the downtown area and larger community.

Improving accessibility to trails in this area by connecting them to nearby neighborhoods and the downtown area could open up a new outlet for residents of Atlantic to get outdoors and naturally move more.

In addition to trail connections to the Schildberg Recreation Area, Atlantic should pursue the construction of a trail connection to the nearby regional T-Bone Recreational Trail. This would provide a continuous trail network between Atlantic and Audubon and would become a regional asset for the entire county to enjoy.

- Construct a trail connection between downtown Atlantic and the Schildberg Recreation Area
- Connect Atlantic to the T-Bone Recreational Trail



Map depicting possible trail connections from downtown to the Schildberg Recreation Area. The open space near the Atlantic Area Chamber of Commerce provides an opportunity to construct these trail connections.

# SAFE AND ACTIVE STREETS

## Bike Lanes

Bike lanes are an important component of a community's active transportation network. The City of Atlantic currently has a section of bike lanes on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. Other streets throughout the city may benefit from the addition of bike lanes as well. Standard bike lanes could be installed on the existing street surface to provide dedicated street space for people riding bikes. Building these bike lanes to connect community trails and neighborhood destinations will help get more residents to the places they need to go on a daily basis.

- Install bike lanes on Olive Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Street in Atlantic



Existing bike lanes on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Atlantic could be replicated on additional streets.



Illustration of bike lanes on Olive Street.

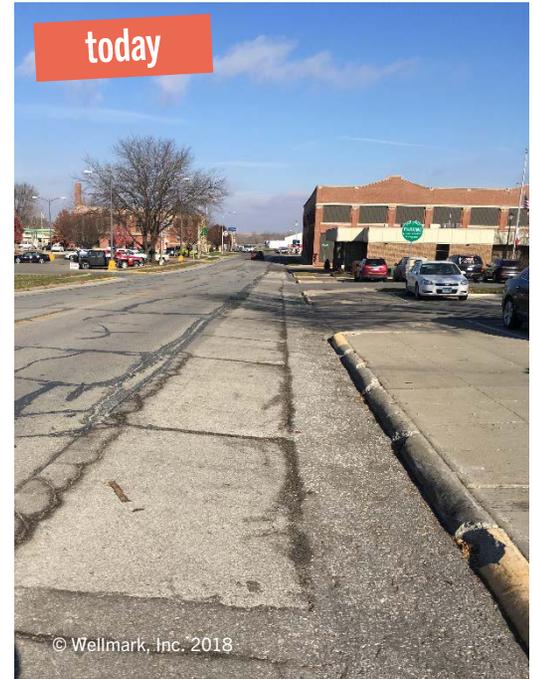
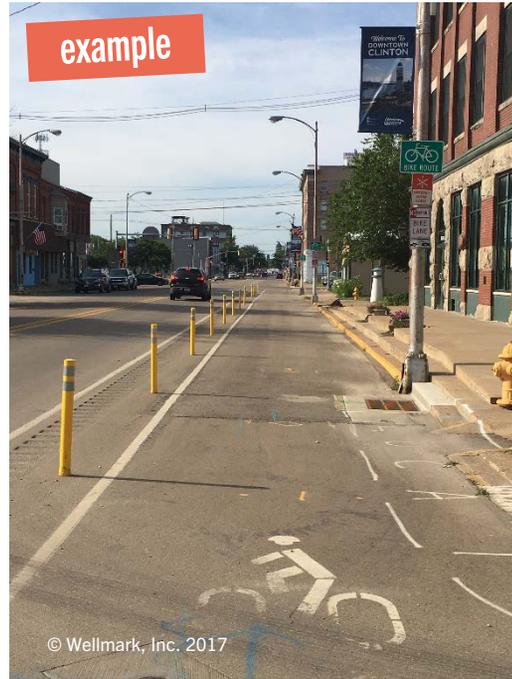
# SAFE AND ACTIVE STREETS

## Cycletrack

Another option to consider in areas with wider streets and low numbers of parked cars is a cycletrack.

Cycletracks function just like traditional trails but can be built on the existing street similar to bike lanes. They are oftentimes more cost-effective to construct than traditional off-street trails because they make use of the street surface that has already been constructed and paid for.

- Construct a cycletrack on Poplar Street in Atlantic



Examples of cycletracks from Sibley, Iowa, and Clinton, Iowa. Poplar Street in Atlantic could benefit from the addition of a cycletrack to connect with bike lanes leading to the Schildberg Recreation Area trails.

## CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

Placemaking is a creative process through which a community transforms and enhances underutilized spaces. Communities in Cass County have some unique opportunities to implement strategic placemaking concepts to enhance community pride and create places for residents to connect socially. This section of the report will identify ways placemaking could be done in Cass County.

### Streetscape

Investing in streetscaping can help create a welcoming environment in areas that are lacking warmth and vibrancy. The difference an enhanced streetscape can have is apparent in downtown Atlantic when you walk along Chestnut Street. The street trees, landscaping, pedestrian-scaled street lighting, benches, and trash cans all work together to create a place that people want to spend time in.

Walnut Street, however, provides quite a contrasting environment. Despite having many storefronts lining the street and a width comparable to Chestnut Street, Walnut Street doesn't feel as inviting and therefore lacks much measurable pedestrian and business activity. Investing in similar streetscaping elements along Walnut Street could provide downtown Atlantic with a "second Main Street."

- Invest in streetscaping on Walnut Street in Atlantic



Walnut Street and Chestnut Street have very different atmospheres, despite being only one block apart.

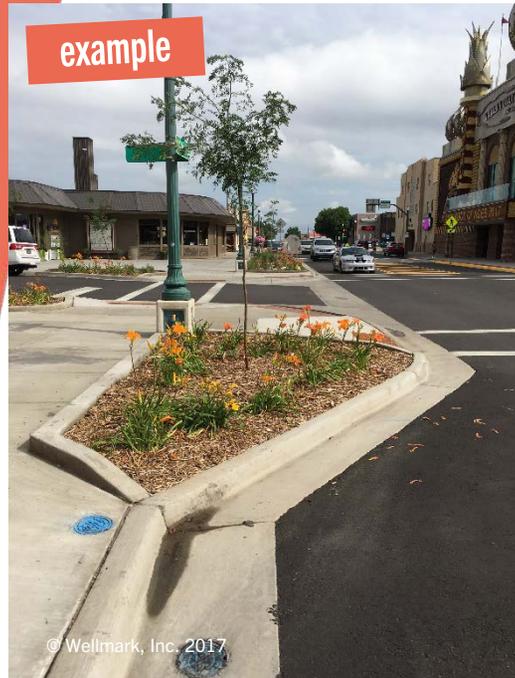
## CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

### Bumpouts

Bumpouts are one element of streetscaping projects. These are extensions of the sidewalk that take up road space not needed for vehicular traffic at the corners of intersections. Bumpouts that include various landscaping elements help create an inviting and comfortable walking environment. They also shorten crossing distances for pedestrians at intersections, decrease turning vehicle speeds, and provide opportunities for street beautification.

Chestnut Street in Atlantic has several intersections with bumpouts today, as does Main Street in Griswold. Intersections in Anita may benefit from the addition of landscaped bumpouts as well.

- Construct landscaped bumpouts at intersections in downtown Anita



Landscaped bumpouts help create an inviting and comfortable walking environment.



Illustration of bumpouts in downtown Anita that include new street trees and high-visibility crosswalks

# CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

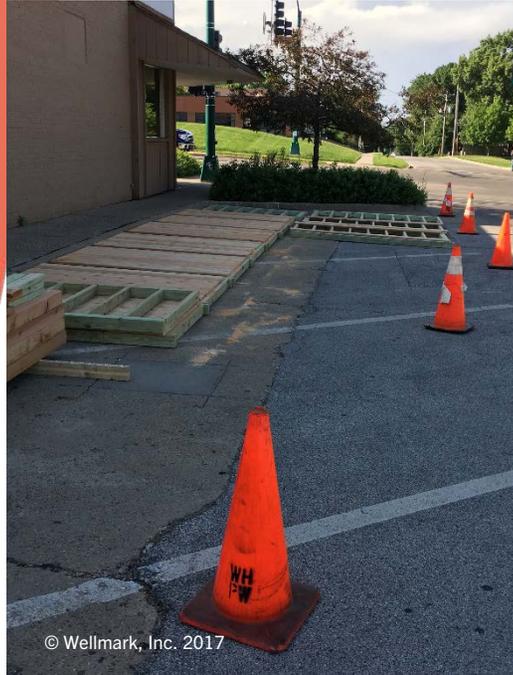
## Parklets

In most communities, streets make up the majority of publically owned land. Taking some of that space away from cars and dedicating it to people can be accomplished through the creation of parklets.

Parklets are temporary or permanent structures built in place of existing parking spaces.<sup>2</sup> Parklets may serve as social gathering spaces for community members by providing a relaxing space to sit and talk, enjoy a cup of morning coffee, or grab lunch with a friend. They also make a street more enjoyable and interesting to walk along. Parklets can be constructed out of a variety of materials including traditional lumber, pallets, tires, paint, and other unique decorations and furniture.

- Work with local businesses to install parklets in downtown business districts

<sup>2</sup> <https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/interim-design-strategies/parklets>



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This parklet is being installed by a restaurant to provide outdoor dining space for customers.



© Wellmark, Inc. 2017



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Examples of downtown parklets built for outdoor café dining.

## CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

### Outdoor Gathering Spaces

Providing outdoor opportunities and interesting things for people to see and do motivates them to get outside and explore their environments. This creates opportunities for residents to connect socially and be more physically active.

Underused outdoor spaces like alleyways and surface parking lots can be transformed into community destinations by adding dining tables with umbrellas, a variety of vegetation, and overhead string lighting. These spaces should be designed to provide a unique sense of place within the community.

- Create a unique public gathering space at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Walnut Street in Atlantic



Example of a transformed alleyway from Oskaloosa, Iowa.



This underused space at the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Walnut Street is an ideal location for a unique placemaking project.



Example of a formerly vacant lot that has been converted into a unique space with public art, lighting and landscaping.

## CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

### Pocket Parks

Pocket parks are another form of placemaking that communities may pursue. They involve the use of landscaping, seating, and lighting to create a park-like atmosphere on a smaller scale in spaces between existing buildings.

Transforming areas that have limited current use can encourage social interaction and breathe life back into spaces within a community.

- Convert vacant lots into unique pocket parks



Murals are a great way to incorporate public art and create a unique sense of place that makes people more interested in walking around and exploring an area.

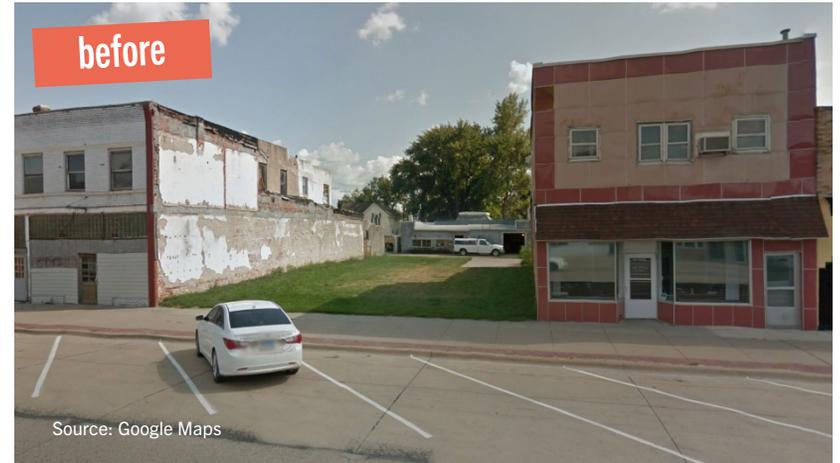


Illustration of a pocket park in downtown Griswold.

## CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

### Wayfinding Signage

Wayfinding signs can be an important way to help people connect with their surroundings. Visitors and community members can be encouraged to walk around town with signs that give walking distances and times to shops, restaurants, libraries, swimming pools, parks, schools, and other local landmarks.

- Design and install branded community wayfinding signage



Examples of branded wayfinding signage from other communities throughout Iowa.

## PARTICIPANT DISCUSSION/NEXT STEPS

Following the walking audit, participants noted several elements that made walking more comfortable, as well as many elements that made walking more difficult or less safe.

The recommendations included in this report have been assembled to serve as a guide for your community to improve upon some of those elements and prioritize which ones are most important to pursue.

This report can be used as a tool to help build support from community leaders, elected officials, and the community at large to create a plan of action.

Citizen engagement is the best way to address many of the recommendations outlined in this report. All of the walking audit participants are encouraged to stay involved with ongoing efforts to improve walkability in Cass County. Working collaboratively will ensure that Cass County continues on the path of becoming a vibrant, active and healthy county.



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## AFTERWORD

At Wellmark, our vision is to continuously improve the health of our members and the communities we serve. We envision a future in which every generation experiences greater quality of health and improved quality of life. Many experts agree where we live is more impactful on our overall health than our own genetics. Our surroundings and environment prompt us to make decisions impacting our health without even realizing it. We created Healthy Hometown to provide evidence-based (proven) solutions that help communities structure their environment to nudge citizens toward healthy behaviors. When we engage in healthy behaviors, we have the opportunity to live our best life – and hopefully avoid serious illnesses. Making the healthy choice the easy choice is the best answer to keeping Iowans healthy.

eat well

move more

feel better

**Important:** This report, and the recommendations contained within, are provided by Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield (Wellmark) as suggestions about how walkability, bikeability and social interactions may be enhanced in your community. These are simply suggestions that your community can choose to implement at its own discretion. Wellmark bears no responsibility for any implemented suggestions and provides no guarantee of any particular results.

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