



Walkability Audit  
Monument Community;  
Concord, California

Next Steps Memorandum  
September 2012



## Sustainable Communities Building Blocks

### Walkability Audit for Monument Community, Concord, California

#### Next Steps

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) selected Contra Costa County and the Monument Community Partnership of Concord, California for Sustainable Communities Building Blocks technical assistance associated with improving safety and public health in Concord's Monument Community by increasing walking and connecting destinations. A centerpiece of this technical assistance involved educating community stakeholders on the key principles and benefits of walkability, conducting a walkability audit and facilitating discussions to identify next steps for addressing walkability concerns throughout the community.

This memorandum describes the walkability workshop held on August 18, 2012, and focuses on the outcomes of the audit and next steps that the community may undertake as a result of this technical assistance. EPA Contractors Katharine Ange, AICP and Mike Callahan of Renaissance Planning Group led the walkability workshop in partnership with staff from Contra Costa County, including John Cunningham, Coire Reilly and Will Dominie; Blanca Campos from the Monument Community Partnership; and Carolyn Mulvihill from EPA's Region 9.

## 2. WORKSHOP EVENTS

The technical assistance centered on a day-long workshop held at the Michael Chavez Center in Concord and included a walkability audit of the surrounding Monument Community neighborhood with a focus on Detroit Avenue between Clayton Road and Monument Boulevard (see Figure 1 in the Appendix). The workshop began with summary presentations on the key principles and benefits of walkability and effective ways to make a community safer and more inviting for walking. This was followed by an orientation to the walking route and walking audit survey tool. This tool helped participants focus their observations and document existing conditions relative to how well the built environment supports walkability. Throughout the day, there were between about 30 and 45 local community participants engaged in the activities. English/Spanish-language translators assisted throughout the workshop because many of the participants were monolingual, Spanish speaking only. After the morning walking tour, participants broke into small working groups to review their

observations captured during the audit, identify their top priorities for improvements, and develop action steps for engaging the community as well as local and regional government agencies to improve walkability communitywide. The contractor, county, and Monument Community Partnership staff met via conference call on the Monday following the workshop to review key issues raised by participants and identify specific next steps and actions the community could take for documentation in this memorandum.



**Figure 1 - Walking Audit Group Passes Bus Stop on Detroit Ave.**

## 3. KEY ISSUES

The walking audit and workshop centered on Detroit Avenue, which is located in a predominantly Hispanic and lower income area known as the Monument Community. The walkability audit complements some ongoing initiatives in this community including the Monument HEAL Initiative (Healthy Eating Active Living) which is working to encourage physical activity in the neighborhood, including walking and bicycling, as a

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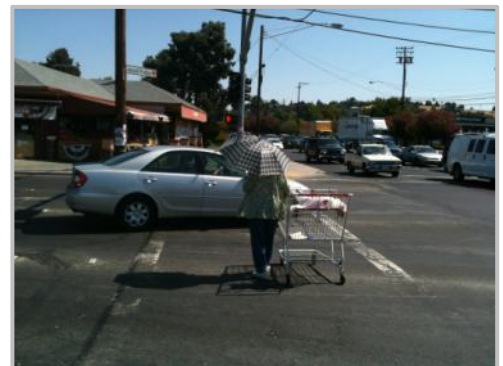
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strategy to reduce the number of people who are overweight or obese; and the City's efforts to amend its general plan to include a complete streets policy. The workshop increased awareness of these efforts and prepared the community to engage in the city's general plan amendment. The following paragraph contains a brief description of how the existing general plan addresses Detroit Avenue.

The *Concord 2030 Urban Area General Plan*<sup>1</sup> currently identifies Detroit Avenue as a basic street<sup>2</sup>. The average daily traffic volume on Detroit Avenue north of Monument Blvd is approximately 13,500 vehicles per day. Given the current and projected future volumes, it may be possible to make some improvements to Detroit Avenue that are consistent with "complete streets"<sup>3</sup> principles without degrading the street's performance below the existing level of service standards established based on the city's current transportation policies. These improvements would be consistent with policy T-1.5.2 of the General Plan, which states "use innovative and effective walkway features to enhance the pedestrian environment" (pg. 5-23). However, as these policies are evaluated and updated as part of the Complete Streets amendment to the Comprehensive Plan, so too might these level of service standards be adjusted to reflect the surrounding residential character and context. The importance of pedestrian transportation along Detroit Avenue is reinforced by the presence of an elementary school and the city's zoning ordinance, which allow high and medium density residential housing along much of the corridor.

The workshop focused on strategies for improving walkability within the context of the general plan amendment. While these policies may improve walking conditions, there are already several positive elements of the area worth highlighting. The neighborhood is home to several key community assets including the Meadow Homes Elementary School, the Michael Chavez Center, apartment buildings, businesses, and parks. The existing streets are fairly well connected offering multiple routes for travel between these destinations. Speed bumps (which lower traffic speeds) and sidewalks are common throughout the neighborhood, creating "good bones" for walking.

Trees provide shade and create a safety barrier between pedestrians and traffic in some areas. The prevalence of destinations within walking distance, good climate, infrastructure supportive of walking, and a nearby rapid transit station all combined to encourage people to walk or bike. During site reconnaissance tours before the workshop, and during the walking audit, the study team observed a very high level of pedestrian activity present throughout the neighborhood.



**Figure 2 - Woman Crossing Detroit Ave. at Monument Blvd.**

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<sup>1</sup> Concord 2030 Urban Area General Plan: <http://www.ci.concord.ca.us/citygov/dept/planning/zoningupdate.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Detroit Avenue north of Monument Blvd is considered a "minor arterial street" under the federal functional classification guidelines. This makes improvements to the Avenue eligible for federal highway aid. It is the responsibility of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to program federal highway aid in the Bay Area, including Concord.

<sup>3</sup> The National Complete Streets Coalition on its website states that "complete streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users." A complete streets policy directs planners and engineers to "routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users." <http://www.completestreets.org/complete-streets-fundamentals/complete-streets-faq/>

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Despite these positive aspects of the existing environment, audit participants identified several areas in need of improvement to create more comfortable and safer conditions for walking and biking in the neighborhood. A summary of issues along Detroit Avenue is provided in the table that follows this paragraph. Additionally, it is worth mentioning some of the issues along Monument Boulevard, although this corridor was not explicitly examined during the audit. Monument Boulevard acts as a barrier to promoting walk access from the neighborhood to nearby commercial destinations due to the high traffic volume it carries, traffic speed, and the distance between signalized intersections where pedestrians can cross safely. The long blocks encourage many people to make dangerous mid-block crossings of the high-speed boulevard, and audit participants noted that several pedestrians have been struck by vehicles. The pedestrian hybrid beacon (also known as the HAWK beacon) or rectangular rapid flash beacons are warning devices that help people safely cross busy streets at mid-block crossings. These may be appropriate improvements for Monument Boulevard, but a professional engineer would need to study the feasibility of installing either of these devices. Additionally, consideration of creating new pedestrian paths along the existing underpasses associated with the streambeds that traverse under Detroit Avenue and Monument should be explored as a creative repurposing of these features.



Figure 1 - Group Breakout Discussion

### Detroit Avenue Walkability Issues

Workshop participants identified several issues during the walking tour of Detroit Avenue. The table below provides a summary of those issues as well as information about the different government entities that may be able to help address each issue. The issues are broken down into two broad categories: 1) Infrastructure Improvements 2) Maintenance, Education and Enforcement. Additionally, there is a column showing the likely cost (high, medium or low) of each issue relative to the other issues. These relative cost estimates does not indicate whether funding is available, but rather provides a framework for consideration of next steps and priorities should funding become available.

ISSUE	PARTY TO WORK WITH	RELATIVE COST CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Infrastructure Improvements</b>		
Only one intersection on Detroit Avenue between Clayton and Monument is controlled by a traffic light. Therefore, pedestrians cross Detroit at mid-block locations or intersections without a signal. Safety at these intersections could be improved with traffic calming treatments, such as adding new three-way stops signs, speed humps, or beacons that warn drivers of pedestrian crossings.	City of Concord Public Works	Medium

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<p>Sidewalks are narrow (4 feet in most locations) making it difficult for people to walk side-by-side or to pass each other, particularly if pushing a stroller or cart, or using a wheelchair. Replacing existing sidewalks corridor wide to widths of five feet or more would be desirable given the amount of pedestrian activity.</p>	<p>City of Concord Public Works</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Utility poles and trees are located in the middle of the sidewalk in some locations. This further restricts the space for pedestrians. Placing utilities underground can be very expensive, but it may be possible in some areas to realign the sidewalk, relocate a utility pole or remove a tree to address these issues.</p>	<p>City of Concord Public Works, utility companies</p>	<p>Medium – High</p>
<p>Laguna at Detroit is a key intersection for children walking to school and people accessing the adjacent bus stop or nearby BART station. A slight hill and curve on Detroit limit the visibility of pedestrians in the street for drivers traveling northbound. Better signage, warning beacons, and highly visible crosswalks could help improve safety.</p>	<p>City of Concord Public Works</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>There is a gap in the sidewalk on the western side of Detroit Avenue near Monument Blvd. Vehicles for sale by an auto dealership are parked where the sidewalk would otherwise be located, which often leads to pedestrians walking in the street, or crossing the street mid-block in this area. Filling this gap to create a continuous sidewalk between Clayton and Monument would enhance walkability and pedestrian safety.</p>	<p>City of Concord Public Works, property owner</p>	<p>Medium – High</p>
<p>Portions of the corridor would benefit from better lighting, particularly near bus stops. Better lighting would enhance visibility and safety for pedestrians walking at night.</p>	<p>City of Concord Public Works</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Some of the bus stops lack shelter, shade, adequate space to stand and wait for the bus or other amenities. Corridor wide enhancements for bus stops should be considered.</p>	<p>County Connection Transit and City of Concord Public Works</p>	<p>Medium</p>

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<p>Most of the crosswalks on Detroit and side streets are marked by two parallel lines, rather than the continental marking style (wider markings that run lengthwise with the direction of vehicular travel. They look similar to piano keys). The latter crosswalk style is easier to see for motorists. They can also see this type of crosswalk from a greater distance and therefore consideration should be given to repainting all crosswalks along Detroit Avenue with this style.</p>	<p>City of Concord Public Works</p>	<p>Low-Medium</p>
<p>The parking lane on Detroit Avenue appears to be wider than necessary in some locations, and inconsistently marked throughout. Repurposing some of the space for bicycle lanes should be considered. As well, consistent curb paint and other roadway markings to indicate parking locations should be explored.</p>	<p>City of Concord Public Works Department</p>	<p>Low-Medium</p>
<p>Detroit Avenue appears wider than necessary in many places for a two-lane roadway. This encourages speeding and discourages walking or biking, despite the fairly high residential density of the area. A “road diet” to reduce the size of the vehicular right of way could be an effective strategy for reducing traffic speeds and crossing distances for pedestrians.</p>	<p>City of Concord Public Works and Contra Costa Transportation Authority</p>	<p>High</p>
<p><b>Maintenance, Education and Enforcement</b></p>		
<p>Walking audit participants observed vehicles moving faster than the posted 25 miles per hour speed limit. Speeding is a recurring problem in the area. Setting up an electronic speed trailer on Detroit may be a helpful management strategy to discourage speeding.</p>	<p>City of Concord, Police Department</p>	<p>Low</p>
<p>Litter and dog waste are common along Detroit Avenue. Participants noticed only two trash cans between Monument Blvd and Clayton Road. Action should be taken to work with property owners and other entities to educate individuals about their responsibilities and ensure regular clean up and emptying of trash cans by the responsible parties.</p>	<p>City of Concord Public Works Department and Residents / Pedestrians</p>	<p>Low</p>

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ISSUE	PARTY TO WORK WITH	RELATIVE COST CONSIDERATIONS
Audit participants noticed standing water near the end of the sidewalk on the western side of Detroit Ave, just north of Monument Blvd. A strong odor was coming from the water, which a neighbor said comes from a faulty sprinkler system. This is a recurring maintenance problem that should be brought to the property owner's attention.	City of Concord Code Enforcement and property owner	Low
The views of some bus stop and regulatory signs (such as speed limit signs) are obstructed by landscaping, such as tree limbs. This is a landscaping maintenance issue that both the City and property owners need to address.	City of Concord Code Enforcement and Public Works	Low

During the breakout discussions workshop participants prioritized several low-cost maintenance strategies to address some of these problems, such as repainting fading crosswalks or tending to overgrown landscaping, that could be initiated quickly and at a low cost. They also identified steps that residents could take themselves, such as organizing a day to clean up the Detroit Avenue corridor. Other ideas would take longer to implement, and be subject to approval by city, state, and/or regional entities, and identification of funding. In addition to the physical infrastructure issues, most participants identified the need to conduct more education and outreach within the neighborhood to heighten awareness of the benefits, key principles and strategies to improve walkability. A summary of ideas generated during the workshop is provided in the following section.

#### **4. ACTIONS/ TIMEFRAMES/ RESPONSIBILITIES**

The key to an effective walkability audit and EPA's Building Blocks program is to cultivate champions who will carry the knowledge gained from the technical assistance forward to address the community's health and accessibility needs on a comprehensive and consistent basis. Toward that end, the Monument Community Walkability Workshop involved several key community representatives who pledged to apply the knowledge gained during the workshop to address issues in this part of the community as well as other parts of the City to further generate interest and involvement from residents and other stakeholders. During the workshop and post-audit workshop discussions, participants identified several priorities and next step action items as described in the following table. These actions reflect ideas generated from the workshop process. The pursuit of these actions is fully at the discretion of the relevant party – either local participants or elected officials.

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ACTION	PURPOSE	LEAD ENTITIES	TIMING
<b>A. Community Engagement with Concord</b>			
Encourage workshop participants to become involved in the Monument Community Partnership's Transportation Action Team. Send information about next meeting to all workshop participants. The Action Team meets the fourth Thursday of each month in the Keller House.	The Action Team has a relationship with the City of Concord. Concerns raised through the workshop can be shared through the Action Team, and it offers a method to be involved in ongoing city efforts, such as the General Plan amendment to incorporate a complete streets policy.	Monument Community Partnership Transportation Action Team	Short Term (prior to their next meeting on September 27 <sup>th</sup> )
Help workshop participants that would like to share their ideas with elected officials. This assistance can come through helping them identify the appropriate official(s) to contact, write letters, or make a statement at a public meeting.	Workshop participants expressed an interest in becoming more involved in their local government. However, many said they are not sure who to contact or how their government works to address livability issues.	Monument Community Partnership	Short Term (1-3 months)
Be involved in the city's work to incorporate a complete streets policy into the general plan. Attend meetings or provide a comment letter from the Partnership to the city council.	To promote new policies that will improve the city's streets for all users.	Monument Community Partnership	Mid Term (3-12 months)
Contact the police department to request they place a radar speed trailer on Detroit Avenue. More information can be found at <a href="http://www.ci.concord.ca.us/police/traffic/">http://www.ci.concord.ca.us/police/traffic/</a>	To reduce speeding on Detroit Avenue.	Monument Community Partnership Transportation Action Team	Short Term (1-3 months)
Share concerns expressed in this memorandum with the City of Concord's code enforcement unit. The code enforcement unit can be reached at (925) 671-3075	To share concerns about issues such as property cleanliness and overgrown landscaping with the city's code enforcement officers.	Monument Community Partnership Transportation Action Team	Short Term (1-3 months)



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<b>B. Community Organizing</b>			
Organize a group of volunteers willing to donate time and raise funds for smaller scale projects and programs, such as a clean-up day on Detroit Avenue.	To take on smaller scale projects that the community can handle without government assistance, and to increase community unity and concern about the walkability conditions.	Monument Community Partnership	Mid Term (3 – 12 months)
Work with Contra Costa County Health Services Department to identify projects and programs related to walkability that could be eligible for funding by related grant programs. Continue participating in the HEAL efforts to increase active living and transportation in the community.	To better understand how transportation planning and funding works and position specific projects within the community for potential grants or other funding assistance, and to stay involved in an ongoing program supported by the county.	Monument Community Partnership along with Transportation Action Team	Mid Term (3-12 months)
<b>C. Potential Infrastructure Improvements</b>			
Ask the city to consider improvements for pedestrians at the intersection of Detroit Avenue and Laguna Street. Potential improvements identified by workshop participants include better crosswalks, lighting, and installation of a warning beacon, such as a rectangular rapid flashing beacon if warranted by an engineer's professional judgment.	To improve safety for pedestrians walking to the Meadow Homes school or to and from the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station on Monument Blvd.	Monument Community Partnership Transportation Action Team	Mid Term (3-12 months)
Ask the city to consider improvements to sidewalks (such as widening them to five feet and moving obstructions such as trees) and crosswalks (such as repainting them in the continental marking style).	To improve safety of pedestrians walking in the corridor.	Monument Community Partnership Transportation Action Team	Mid Term (3-12 months)

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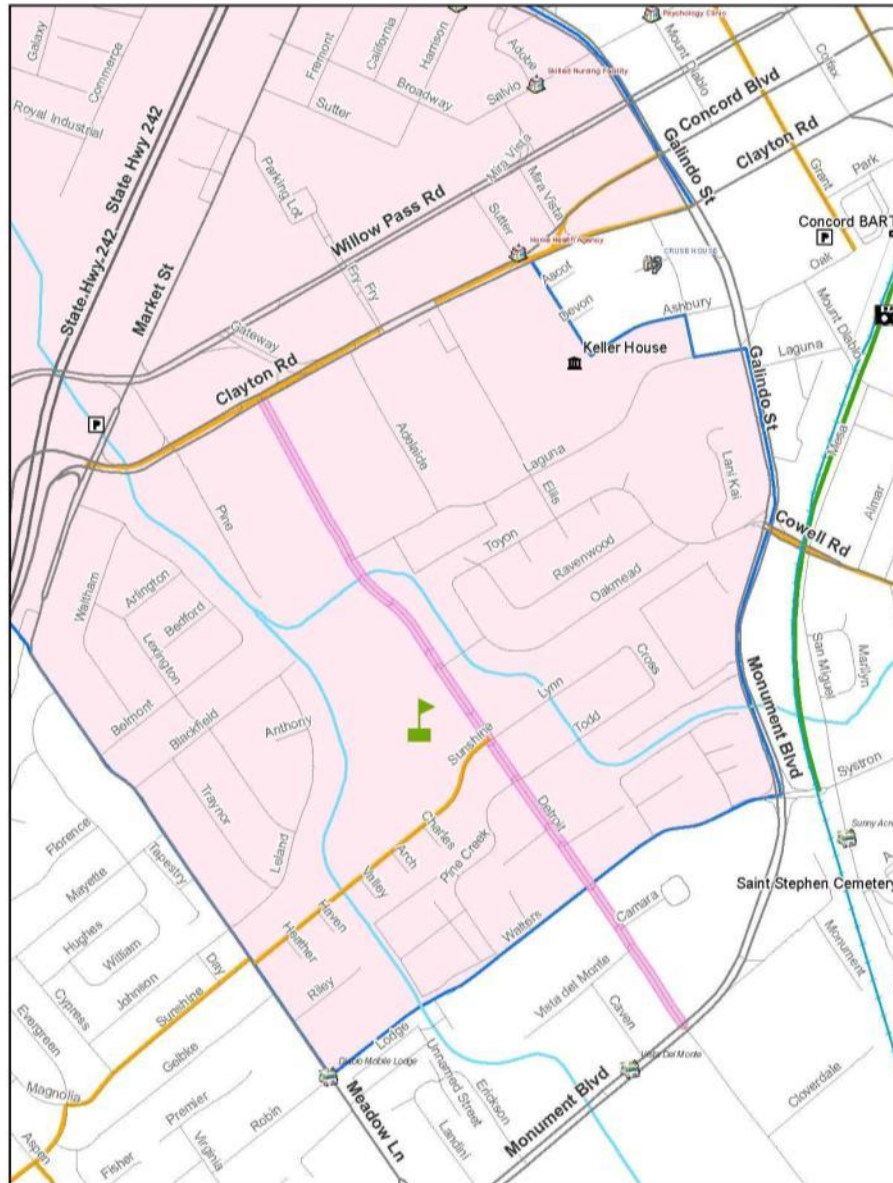
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
In the long term, encourage the city to redesign Detroit Avenue as a complete street and work with the city's elected and appointed officials to build support for the project and identify funding. This project would not preclude the short-term community and/or city government improvements to move forward.	To make Detroit Avenue a model example of a complete street.	Monument Community Partnership, with the Contra Costa Health Department (through future workshops)	Long Term (beyond 1 year)
Engage with the Contra Costa Transportation Authority during the update of the countywide transportation plan in 2014.	Position and prepare to advocate for project and program funding beneficial to the city and the neighborhood, such as a redesign of Detroit Avenue.	Monument Community Partnership Transportation Action Team	Long Term (beyond 1 year)

## 5. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Figure 1 – Monument Community Audit Route
  - Walkable and Livable Communities Institute: <http://www.walklive.org/>
  - U.S. EPA Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities: <http://www.epa.gov/dced/buildingblocks.htm>
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**Figure 1 – Walkability Audit Walking Tour Map**



-  Walking Audit Route
-  Meadow Homes Attendance Boundary