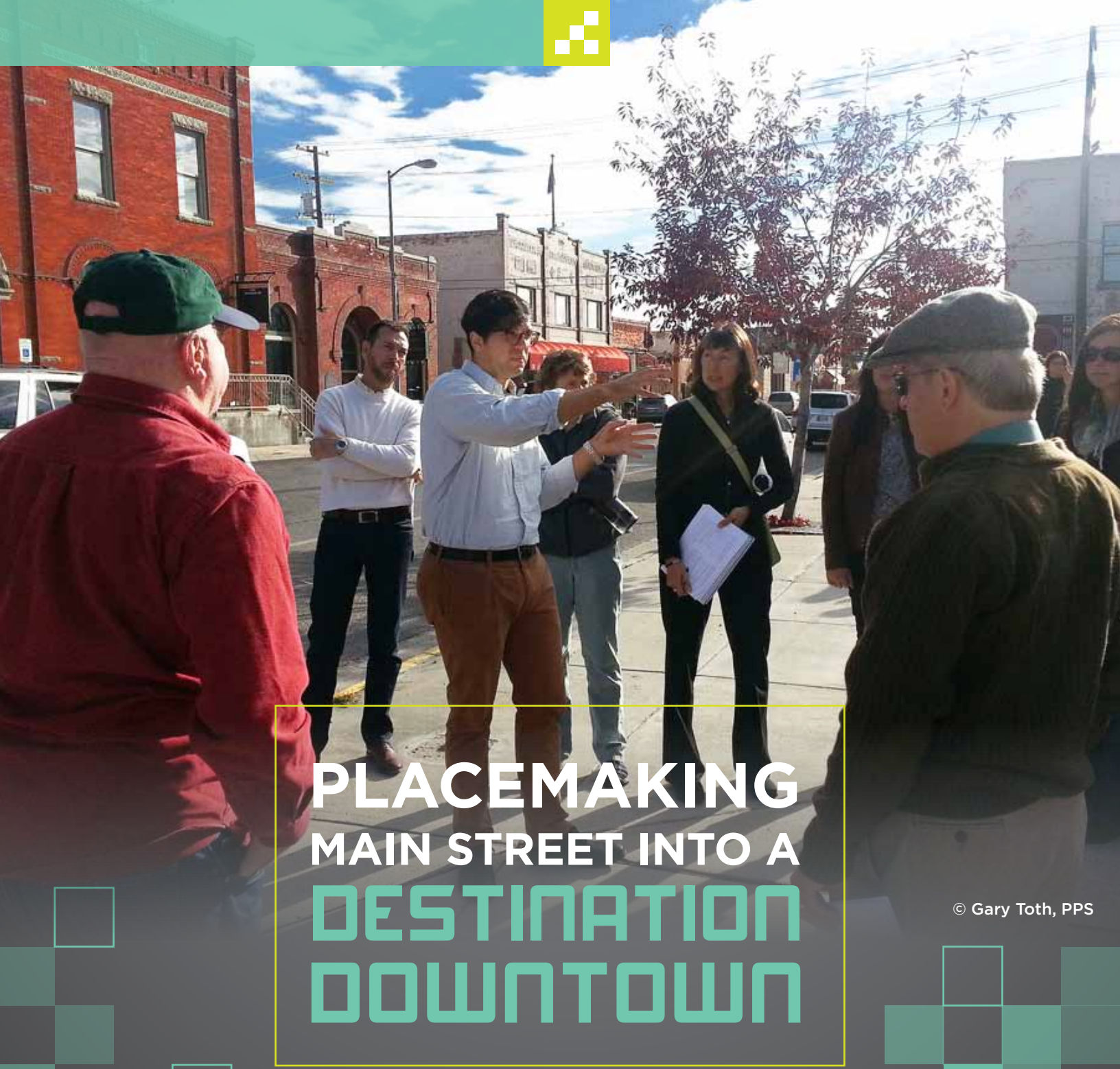

PLACEMAKING
MAIN STREET INTO A DESTINATION DOWNTOWN

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By
Fred Kent and
Gary Toth
Project for
Public Spaces

With additional writing by **Craig Raphael**

The traditional Main Street is one of the most iconic images of America. With its unique blend of housing, retail, and civic uses, Main Street served as the social and commercial hub of communities until World War II. Since then, suburban development favoring shopping malls and single-use zoning have driven resources away from these vital places. Furthermore, the devaluing of places due to the 20th-century obsession with tuning streets for high speed mobility has also taken its toll. Not only is fast-moving traffic less likely to stop, but speed kills a street's sense of place and diminishes its value for all users.

PPS's David Nelson leads a Walk Audit on Main Street and Park Avenue in Anaconda, Montana.

Thankfully, today various organizations and communities are working to restore the historic functions of main streets and reestablish them as the centers of towns and cities. Many have achieved success by using the Main Street Approach, a unique tool that combines organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring to help build a complete revitalization effort. Collectively, these tools are called the Four Point Approach and have done much to reverse damage created by the first wave of competition for Main Streets: the rise of the suburban mall.

Main Streets are now facing a second wave of competition: online shopping. The ability to "window shop" from the comfort of one's home has created an all new challenge; but, in this case, Main Street has an advantage over malls: the power to create Place. Increasingly, as electronic communication has made it possible to live anywhere and still connect with others, the freedom to work and play apart has increased the sense of isolation and the craving for new ways of interacting socially and meeting informally. Main Street is far better positioned to fulfill that burgeoning need than malls. Being geographically positioned within walking distance of neighborhoods, Main Streets are suited perfectly to evolve, via Placemaking, into the great destinations of the 21st century.

How can Placemaking help restore Main Streets to the forefront in the 21st Century?

"Placemaking" provides a powerful set of tools for change. Not a new profession, discipline, or field of study, Placemaking brings out the best of professional knowledge and skills while supporting a participatory process that challenges and empowers local communities to take ownership over the planning process. Disciplines will no longer be working in silos but instead subjugating their expertise to the larger goal of creating great Main Streets.

Stakeholder buy-in will be quicker and more sustainable. Thanks to their informality and simplicity, Placemaking tools such as the Power of Ten; Walking and Street Audits; and Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper will extend the reach and simplify conversations about a project enough to allow everyone to contribute, not just the experts and a few businesses.

These tools involve everyone directly in determining the scope and shaping the preliminary design process in informal settings, as citizens work side by side with subject matter experts. Formal roles are not predefined but emerge throughout the process, which is managed to ensure participation by all. Everyone will participate in creating Main Street goals in ways that move them from passive supporters to active project advocates. What results will be a richer more livable plan since it goes beyond the "three D's" (density, design, and diversity of uses) of modern smart growth planning and the Four Points of the Main Street Approach.

The Power of Ten. In a nutshell, the Power of Ten means that people will be attracted to Main Streets where there are lots of things to do. The Power of Ten (POT aka Placemapping) process will engage stakeholders to assess the assets and liabilities (i.e., underperforming places) of Main Street. Rather than have experts bring formulae in from other towns, Placemapping will allow local stakeholders to identify the best, worst, and highest opportunity places and help them figure out how to make substantive physical and social connections between existing spaces, how to strategically create new places, and how to harness the energy that can be generated through building a network of destinations.

Walking and street audits can also be conducted to diagnose places along Main Street and create a wish list of desired future change. Any potential future changes can be tested out via Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC) strategies. LQC provides a visual representation of what an appropriate street, sidewalk, or building wall change can look like. It can also demonstrate how street changes would affect flow, not only for cars, but also for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit, as well as show the benefits (or detriments) to sidewalk and shopping activity. The tangibility of doing this in real life, as opposed to simply doing a traffic study, is important for developing community buy-in.

Main Street in Hyde Park, Vermont, retains much of its historic feel and small-town charm. However, over the years, it has lost businesses and restaurants to adjacent suburban development, leaving locals and tourists with little reason to visit. During a PPS workshop in 2013, a local resident commented that he now takes a walk down Main Street about once a year, to get some exercise and remember the good old days.

Which Placemaking Concepts Can Be Applied to Main Streets?

CREATING MULTI-USE DESTINATIONS

"It's difficult to design a space that won't attract people. What is remarkable is how often this is accomplished."
– William H. Whyte

We know that the more uses public spaces can accommodate, the more successful they will become as community gathering places. Simply stated, the more varied the uses, the more varied the audience becomes. But still we are designing and managing too many places that have only a single purpose—whether it is a park, a square, or a street. All too often, uses and people don't mix. As our communities become more diverse and

Better Block Philly created a series of temporary street changes to demonstrate the value of reallocating street capacity for all uses. Here a parklet was created.

populous, we will not only need more public spaces; we will need places where people of different backgrounds feel comfortable coming together. How can we promote more of the right kind of design, management, and investment to create multi-use public spaces and places?

MARKET CITIES AND LOCAL ECONOMIES

"When you want to seed a place with activity, put out food."
– William H. Whyte

Historically, cities grew around their marketplaces—bustling centers of commerce and activity. As communities grew, they became market cities. At the National Main Streets Conference in Detroit, we talked about the need to expand the Placemaking conversation to more than traditional farmers markets and public markets—to encompass all types of districts that seed local economies while creating great gathering places. Markets are great catalysts for the creation of and organic growth of such places. The growth of farmers markets in the U.S.

(now more than 7,000) offer the raw material for a broader rebirth of local economies and places. There is new interest in all things local. How can we take advantage of these trends to advance local places and economies?

ARCHITECTURE OF PLACE/ COMMUNITY ANCHORS

"What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people."
– William H. Whyte

Placemaking brings new ways of redefining the nature and function of libraries, art and cultural institutions, city halls, and other institutions. Indeed, there are an increasing number of innovative examples of individual institutions that are becoming multi-purpose "community anchors," not just iconic design statements. How can we encourage more building owners (whether institutions, corporations, developers, or governments) and their designers to promote an "architecture of place"—creating place-supportive design that also redefines the public gathering roles these institutions play in communities?

STREETS AS PUBLIC SPACES

While streets are the most fundamental public spaces in communities, they may also be the most conflicted and under-recognized. "Streets as Public Spaces" is premised on the idea that streets should not simply move people from point A to point B, but must add value to the community along the way. Streets can no longer be viewed simply as arteries for conveying cars; even "Complete Streets" may not be complete enough. Great streets build communities as well as provide ways of connecting other great places. This is what links communities of all sizes together. As we gather in Pittsburgh prior to a major conference on walking and biking, how can we move communities to this broader vision of streets and transportation investments?

Less than three months after PPS facilitated a capacity-building workshop in Brunswick, Maine, the community began lighter, quicker and cheaper changes to its Main Street, blocking off a lane with barrels to see how it affected pedestrian and shopping activity and traffic flow.

Principles for Fostering Main Streets as Public Spaces

RULE ONE: DESIGN FOR APPROPRIATE SPEEDS.

Streets need to be designed in a way that induces traffic speeds appropriate for that particular context. Whereas freeways should retain high-speeds to accommodate regional mobility, speeds on other roads need to reflect that they are places for people, not just conduits for cars. Desired speeds can be attained with a number of design strategies, including changes in roadway widths, curvature, and intersection design. Of course, Placemaking is a big part of the success; and roadside strategies, like building setbacks and sidewalk activity, can also affect the speed at which motorists comfortably drive.

Speed kills sense of place. City and town centers are destinations, not raceways, and commerce needs traffic—foot traffic. You cannot buy a dress from a car. Even foot traffic speeds up in the presence of fast-moving vehicles. Access, not automobiles, should be the priority in city centers. Don't ban cars, but remove the presumption in their favor. People first!

RULE TWO: PLAN FOR COMMUNITY OUTCOMES.

Cities and towns need first to envision the kinds of places and interactions they want to support and then plan a transportation system consistent with this collective community vision. Transportation is a means for accomplishing important goals—like economic productivity and social engagement—not an end in itself.

Great transportation facilities, such as Grand Central Terminal in New York City and the wide sidewalks of the Champs Elysées, have truly improved the public realm. Designing road projects to fit community contexts can help increase developable land, create open space, and reconnect communities to their neighbors, a waterfront, or a park. They can reduce household dependency on the automobile, allowing children to walk to school, connecting neighborhoods to downtowns, and helping build healthier lifestyles by increasing the potential to walk or cycle. Think public benefit, not just private convenience.

For years we've seen this philosophy gain traction in leading cities around the world. Barcelona has built boulevards and Ramblas (broad avenues) that give pedestrians priority over the automobile. Paris has developed a neighborhood traffic-calming program to rival that of any city anywhere. By charging congestion fees for vehicles entering the city center, London has successfully reduced traffic levels and funded an aggressive program to improve transit. Bogotá now boasts a world-class rapid transit bus system and has established a mandate to eliminate private auto use during the morning rush hour by 2015. These projects offer strategies that can be used to redesign our transportation networks to reflect their true importance as public spaces and manifestations of our vision for our towns and cities.

It is also essential to foster land-use planning at the community level that supports, instead of overloads, the transportation network. This includes creating more attractive places that people will want to visit in both new and existing developments. A strong sense of place benefits the overall transportation system. Great Places—popular spots that have a

Narrow cross section and parking make it difficult to drive faster than 15 mph on this Lambertville, New Jersey, Main Street.

good mix of people and activities and can be comfortably reached by walking, biking, and perhaps by public transit as well as by car—put little strain on the transportation system.

Poor land-use planning, by contrast, generates thousands of unnecessary vehicular trips, creating dysfunctional roads, which further deteriorate the quality of places. Transportation professionals can no longer pretend that land use is not their business. Transportation projects that were not integrated with land-use planning have created too many negative impacts to ignore.

RULE THREE: THINK OF STREETS AS PUBLIC PLACES.

Not so long ago, this idea was considered preposterous in many communities. "Public space" meant parks and little else. Transit stops were simply places to wait. Streets had been surrendered to traffic for so long that we hardly considered them public spaces at all. But now we are slowly moving away from this narrow perception of "streets as conduits for cars" and beginning to think of "streets as places."

The road, the parking lot, the transit terminal—they can all serve more than one mode (cars) and more than one purpose (movement). Sidewalks are the urban arterials of cities: make them wide, well lit, and stylish and accommodating with benches, outdoor cafes, and public art. Roads can be shared spaces with pedestrian refuges, bike lanes, and on-street parking. Parking lots can become public markets on weekends. Even major urban arterials can be designed to provide dedicated bus lanes, well-designed bus stops that serve as gathering places, and multi-modal facilities for bus rapid transit or other forms of travel. Roads are places too!

Transportation—the process of traveling to a place—can be wonderful if we rethink the idea of transportation itself. If we remember that transportation is the journey, but enhancing the community is the goal. ■

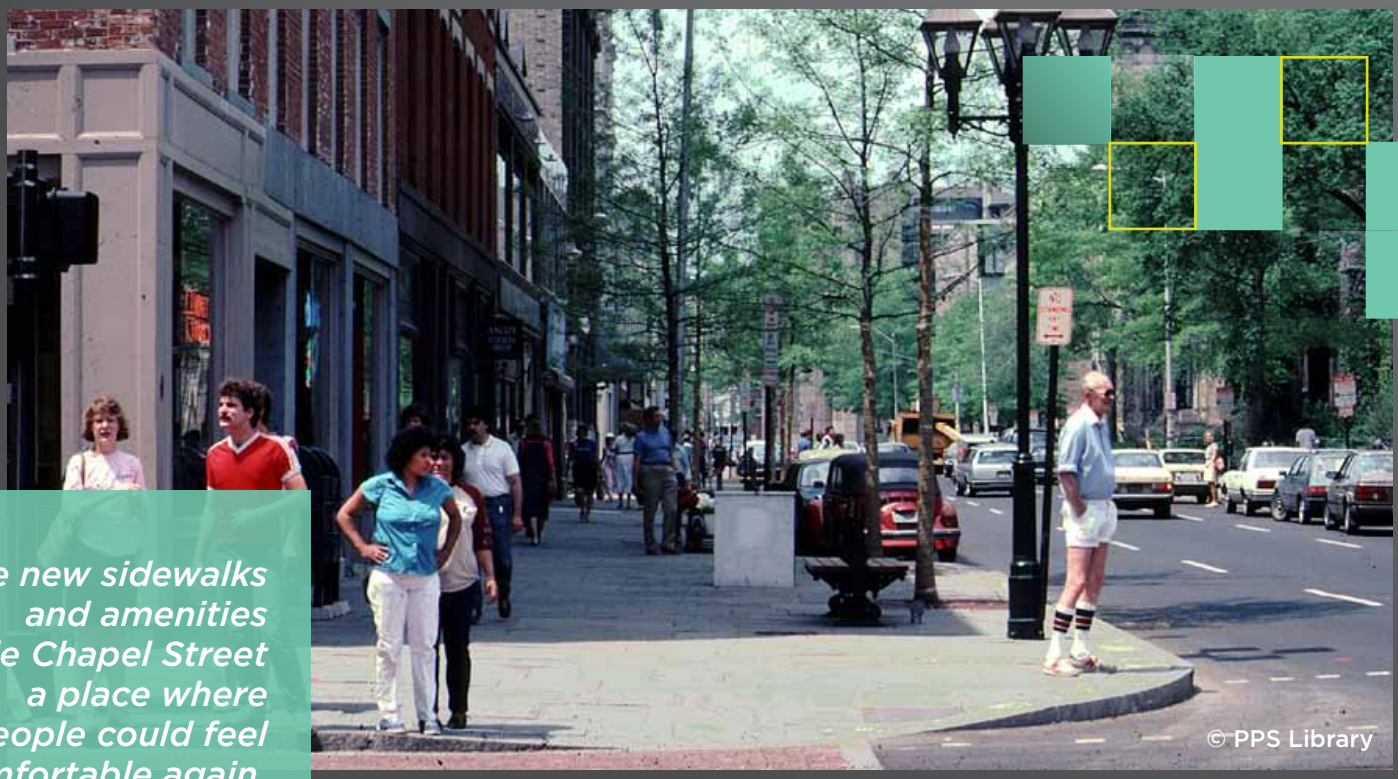
Fred Kent is a leading authority on revitalizing city spaces and one of the foremost thinkers in livability, smart growth, and the future of the city. He is the founder and president of Project for Public Spaces (PPS). Fred offers technical assistance to communities and gives major talks across North America and internationally. Over the past 37 years, Fred has worked on hundreds of projects, including Bryant Park, Rockefeller Center, and Times Square in New York City; Campus Martius in Detroit; and a City-Wide Placemaking Campaign in Chicago. Before founding PPS, Fred studied with Margaret Mead and worked with William H. Whyte on the Street Life Project, assisting in observations and film analysis of corporate plazas, urban streets, parks, and other open spaces in New York City. He has degrees in Economics and Urban Geography from Columbia University.

Gary Toth is Senior Director of Transportation Initiatives, Project for Public Spaces. He is one of the nation's leading experts on how to engage DOTs through transportation planning, funding, project development, and design processes to achieve sustainable and livable outcomes. He summarized these insights in a 2009 book, The Citizen's Guide for Engaging Transportation Professionals.

CHAPEL STREET, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

Situated at the southern end of the Yale University Campus, Chapel Street was a thriving residential and commercial district as late as the 1960s. But by 1983, its vacancy rate had reached 95 percent, and people found little reason to go there. A local developer began buying and renovating historic structures and hired Project for Public Spaces (PPS) to help turn the street into a vibrant place once again. Drawing on the insights of merchants, community members, and the city department of transportation, PPS came up with a plan to reclaim space for pedestrians and create a more favorable environment for retail and greater public use.

Sidewalks along Chapel Street in New Haven were widened to create a better environment for the public.

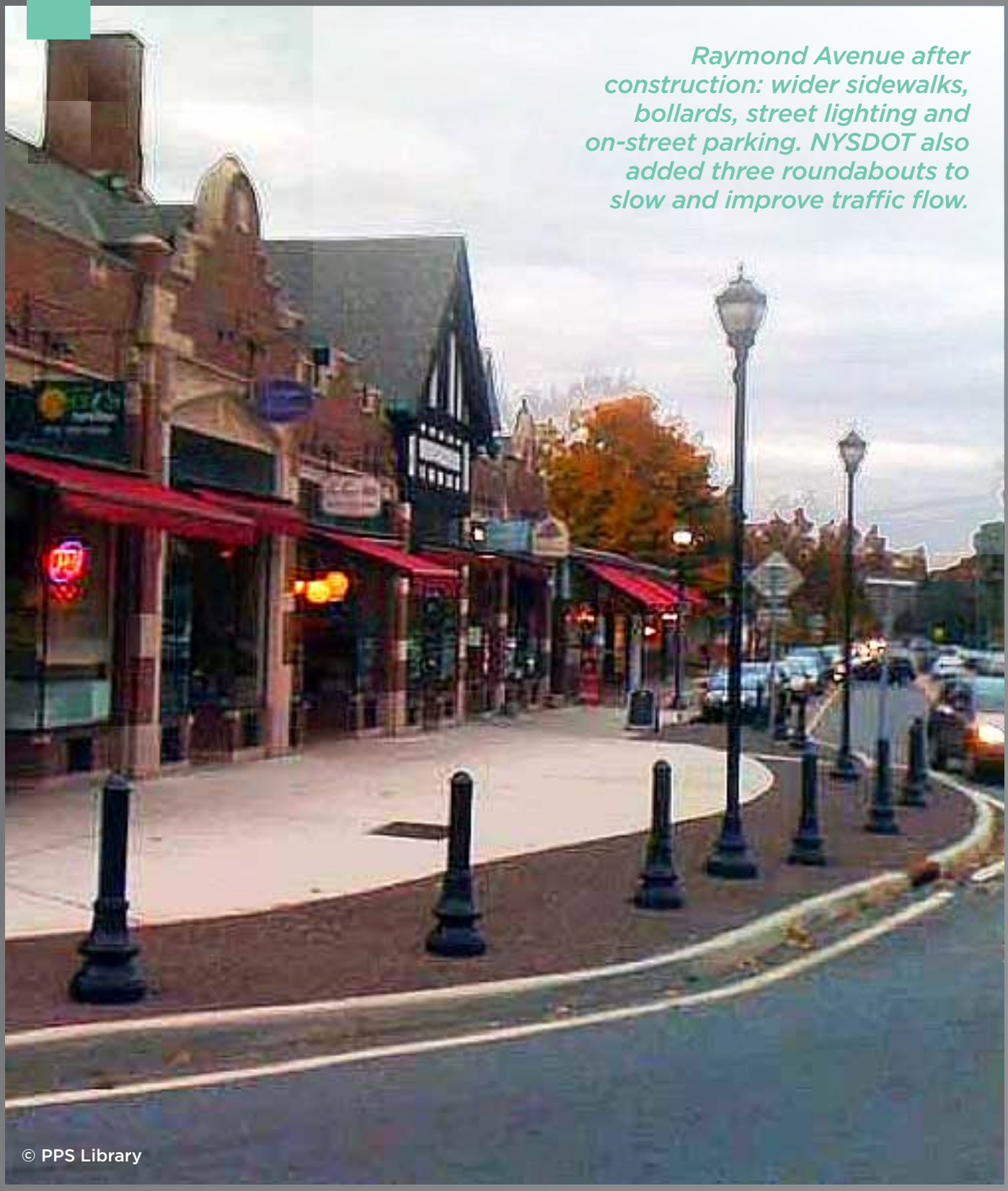


The new sidewalks and amenities made Chapel Street a place where people could feel comfortable again.

ARLINGTON DISTRICT, POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK

Arlington is the historic heart of the Town of Poughkeepsie, New York, where shops, movie houses, and restaurants flourished in the past alongside banks, churches, libraries, schools, and other institutions, including Vassar College. In the 1960s, the district's main street—Raymond Avenue—was widened to four lanes and landscaped medians were removed in the name of efficient traffic management. As a result, businesses suffered and the street lost much of its small-town character. In the late 1990s, a committee of business leaders, representatives from Vassar College, and members of public and private organizations worked with PPS to develop a revitalization strategy to once again make the district a vibrant place. Recently, many of PPS's traffic-calming recommendations were implemented by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT).

Raymond Avenue in the Arlington district of Poughkeepsie, N.Y., before improvements were made.



Raymond Avenue after construction: wider sidewalks, bollards, street lighting and on-street parking. NYSDOT also added three roundabouts to slow and improve traffic flow.

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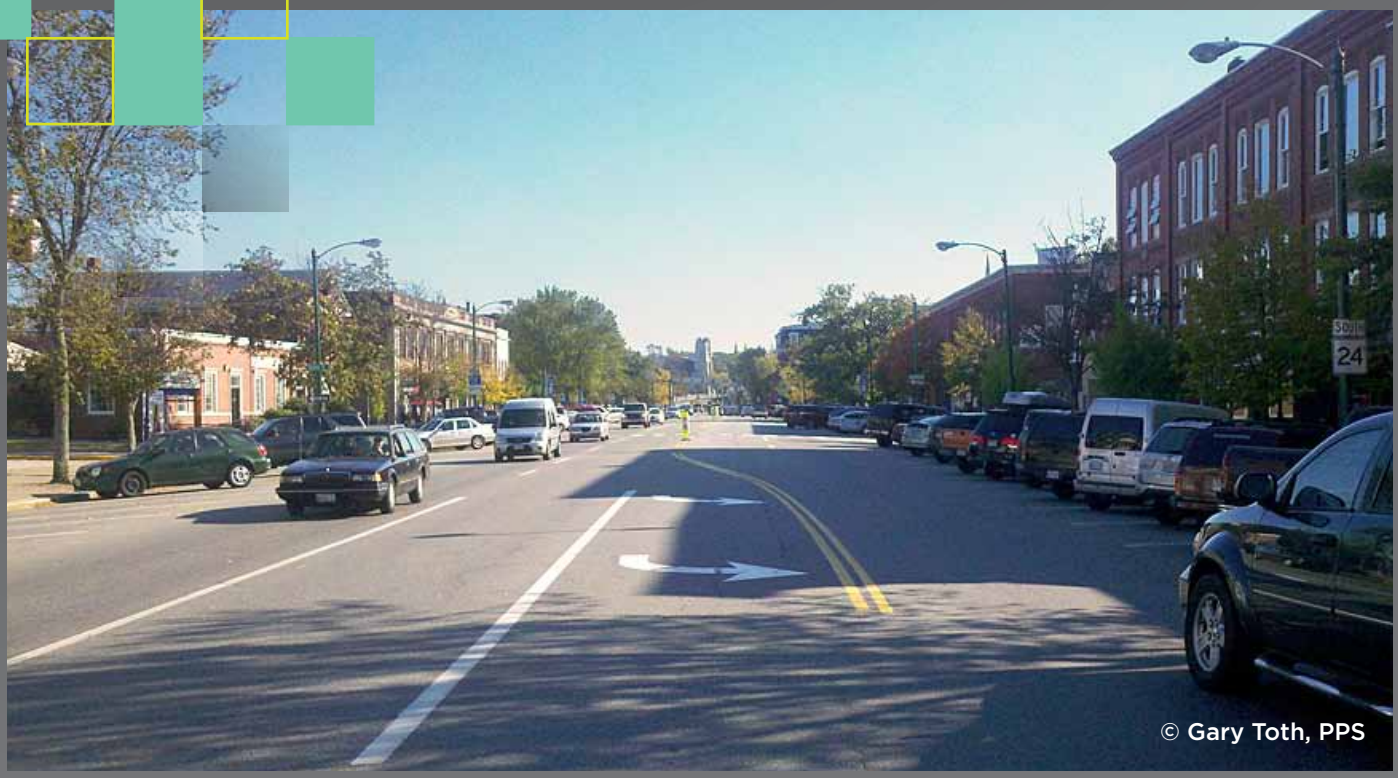
BRUNSWICK, MAINE

Over a century ago, the Main (Maine) Street in Brunswick was widened enough to facilitate the transportation of lumber through town. More than a hundred feet wide in some parts, the section that served the town so well previously, now has speeds that are too high and crossing distances that are too wide for comfortable pedestrian traffic.

The Town of Brunswick realized that its focus on tuning its streets to move vehicular traffic was constricting commerce and quality of life, while also threatening bicycle and pedestrian safety. PPS worked with Brunswick on a plan to rebalance its streets to support all modes of transportation, boost economic development, and enhance quality of life. The cornerstone street in the process was Maine Street.

Maine Street, the primary road in downtown Brunswick, Maine, is more than a hundred feet wide in some areas. The decision to focus on vehicular traffic flow created a street that threatens the safety of bicyclers and pedestrians.



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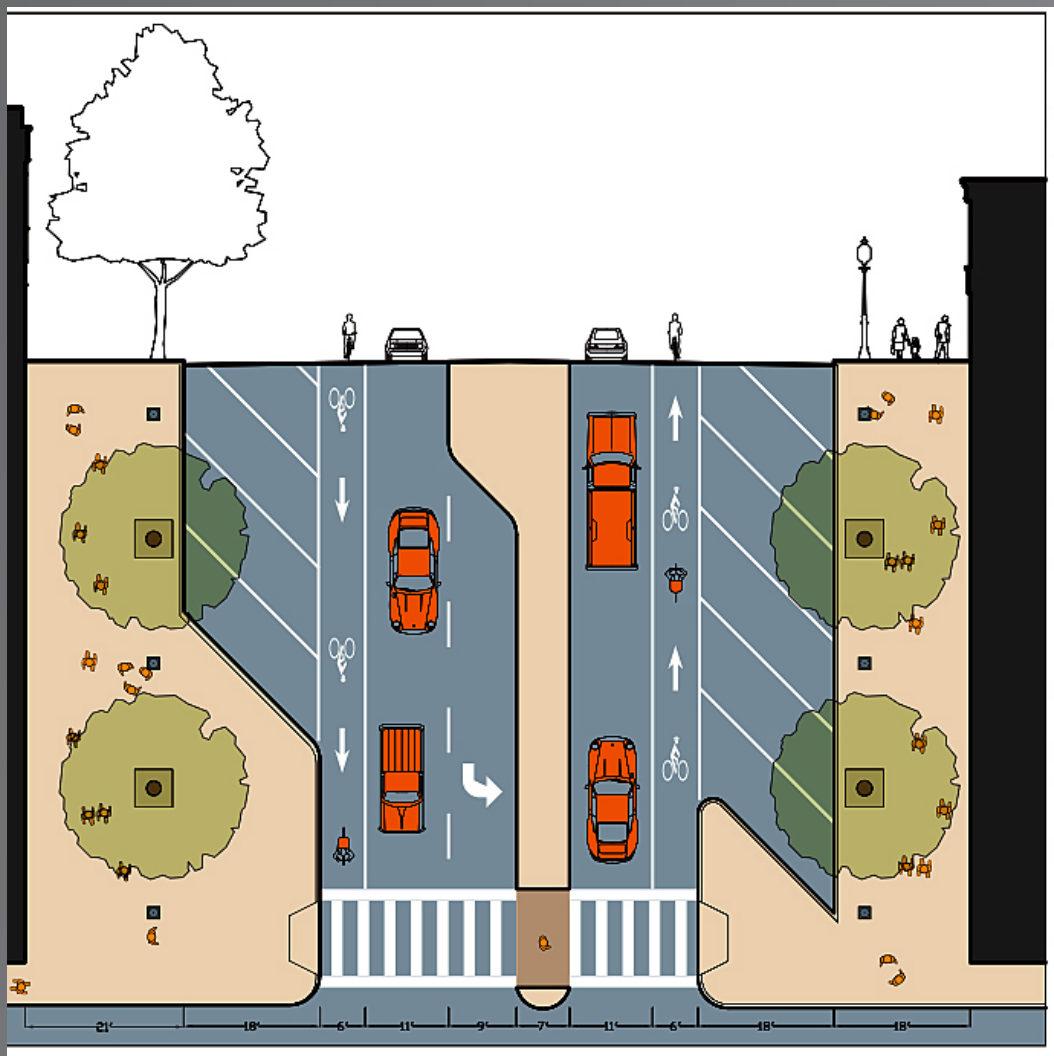

Opportunity 2

Pros

- Narrower lanes encourage slower traffic
- Bump-outs and pedestrian refuge island reduce pedestrian crossing distances.
- Designated space for cyclists
- Back-in angled parking is safer for cyclists and drivers
- turn lanes allow turning vehicles to que without stopping through traffic
- If flush, median can be used for temporary parking
- Medians and bump-outs can be used for greening, stormwaer infiltration, or pedestrian amenities
- can store snow in median

Cons

- potential conflicts between cyclists and parking cars
- If raised or planted, median cannot be used for temporary parking
- Single lane of through traffic could reduce capacity (though this is offset by the addition of turn lanes
- bump outs create some reduction in parking

CSS Champions: Brunswick, ME 21

PPS facilitated a community engagement process that led to development of five possible alternatives for the rightsizing of Maine, each retuning the street to a different balance of priorities (e.g. emergency vehicle access, biking, pedestrian, snow removal and storage, etc.). Brunswick is now working on a redesign of Maine Street using these and lessons learned from the LQC intervention. One of the five opportunities that will reframe Maine Street into a Street as a Place is shown here.