

# Elkin Walkability Study



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&  
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**Project Description:** Senior Friendly Walkable Communities is an initiative of the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services & the Northwest Piedmont Rural Planning Organization's (RPO) Pedestrian Plan. A senior friendly walkable community offers a wide range of social and economic opportunities and supports for all citizens, including seniors. This initiative values seniors' contributions to the community; promotes positive intergenerational relations; considers the needs and interests of seniors in physical and community planning; and respects and supports seniors' desire and efforts to live independently. There are many dimensions to developing a community that promotes quality of life in senior years. Phase I of the Senior Friendly Communities initiative focuses on the physical environment; exploring the existence, adequacy, accessibility, efficiency, and quality of the city's walkability.

**Objective:** The goal of this assessment is to explore the walkability of Elkin by identifying pedestrian safety concerns and issues.

**Plan of Action:** The Northwest Piedmont RPO received over 200 responses from volunteers that walked the Town of Elkin. Members representing the Northwest Piedmont AAA Regional Advisory Committee from Town of Elkin and Surry County assisted in recruiting volunteers and received their walking assignments, maps, and checklist. Each checklist asked volunteers to observe and identify five areas of concentration (ie: room to walk, easy street crossing, behavior of drivers, safety, and pleasantness of the walk). The Town of Elkin was divided into half a mile by half a mile grids, with volunteers receiving the route of their choice. Volunteers worked in groups, and with the aide of their checklist completed the following assessment:

## AREAS OF NEEDED IMPROVEMENT

- 1. Gwyn Ave:** Heavy vegetative growth makes it impossible to walk for people with wheel chairs, strollers, or side-by-side on the sidewalk. Combined with a 3-foot drop to the street, this is hard to maneuver. See Pictures. There are large cracks or slumps in many spots that need to be improved to make this walk easier for the aging community. See pictures. Complaints of speeding vehicles were also identified by the volunteers which makes walking on the road dangerous as well.



- a. Vegetative growth near intersection with E. Market Street. Also, the drop off makes it especially hazardous.



- b. Cracks and slumps can make it hard for people to maneuver. The drop-off adds to the danger of someone getting hurt.
- c. **Possible solution.** Cutting of vegetation on the side would allow for more room for people to walk. Unfortunately, the quality of the sidewalk makes it hard for aging adults, strollers, and people with a handicap to use. Because of this, a rehabilitation of the sidewalk is recommended. As far as slowing drivers down, radar speed signs can be a cost effective way of slowing driver down. Typical speed reductions are 8-15%, and overall compliance with the posted speed limit will go up by 30-60%.

2. **N. Bridge St.** Sidewalks on Monroe are on opposite sides of the street when crossing Main St. See Picture. And there is a small gap north of E. Highland Ave. North of NC 268 Bypass lacks sidewalks. Sidewalks can be a good revitalization tool for areas that a need economic improvement. Businesses are more likely to locate to an area that has sidewalks b/c it increases traffic to their stores, shows support by the local community, and increases aesthetic appeal.



- a. Going north on Bridge, sidewalks start on the western side. Upon crossing Highland Ave, they are on the eastern side. Sidewalks needed north of 268 Bypass.

b. **Possible Solution:** Create a crosswalk at Bridge/Highland intersection allowing for pedestrians to cross over Bridge in a safe manner. Try to find grants north of NC 268 Bypass such as a community development block grant.

3. **Roads South of Main St.** Main Street looked fantastic and got high grades. However, streets south of Main Street got very low grade. In particular, Standard and Commerce.

- a. **Commerce St:**



Condition of Commerce Street is low grade and hard to walk. Conditions on the side are extremely hard to traverse for someone with a baby carriage, especially through certain gravel spots (see 2<sup>nd</sup> picture).

- b. **Standard Street:**



Conditions for Standard Street were graded the same as Commerce Street. I found that the condition of Standard was not as bad as Commerce. However, left alone it eventually will be. Parts of

Standard Street's shoulder cannot be improved b/c of fencing around business property (see picture 1). There was also a complaint of trash, but it had been cleaned up when the RPO went



out to check (see picture to the right).

- c. **Possible Solution:** A potential CBDG grant could work well here also. Re-pavement of Standard Street would fix its problems.

- 4. **Oakland Drive.** Residents asked for a need for sidewalks here. The main issue is amount of traffic and no level shoulders. On the south side, there is a ditch and on the north side the ground slants down and away from the road. There are also sharp turns on Oakland that can make walking on the road dangerous.



- a. Sharp turn, ground going down and away on the left and a ditch to the right of the road.
- b. I have no traffic counts for this street and it would be a good place to see what the average daily traffic is for Oakland Drive to see if it warrants sidewalks or expanded shoulders. There is a church and a few off neighborhood streets right off of Oakland (ex. Westwood Ln).
- c. **Possible Solutions:** Widening shoulders.

**Table Summarizing Responses:** Because there were over 200 responses, there will be no table attached to this document. An excel file will be given to the Town of Elkin with the responses.

**Volunteer Feedback:** Following completion of their assignments, volunteers concluded that although some improvements were needed, they found their walks both gratifying and enriching.

**How the RPO can help:**

- ❖ Every **even** year, the RPO prioritizes pedestrian projects for our rural counties to be submitted to the NC Department of Transportation

- Improvement Program (TIP). It is important to get your input so that we know the citizens of our area are being served. .
- ❖ Enhancement projects tend to be projects of smaller scale and possibly could be used to improve many issues for pedestrians.
  - ❖ Community Development Block Grants could be a solution for some areas.
  - ❖ RPO will keep Town of Elkin aware of all pedestrian grants that come through.
  - ❖ Projects in this book will help NCDOT understand citizen needs for the upcoming Elkin/Jonesville Transportation Plan.