

Master Plan: Full Transformation

The previous section of the Walkable Towson Plan detailed short-term recommendations, most or all of which can be started immediately and be accomplished within a relatively short time frame. Those recommendations will show tangible progress towards improving walkability and help build momentum for greater pedestrian orientation in the heart of Towson.

At the same time, there are additional design “interventions” that will necessarily take place over a longer period of time, but are no less critical to improving walkability. These recommendations are collectively referred to as those leading to “Full Transformation.” They will create a critical mass of transformative change beyond the short-term measures that will enable Towson to realize its full potential as a highly walkable place.

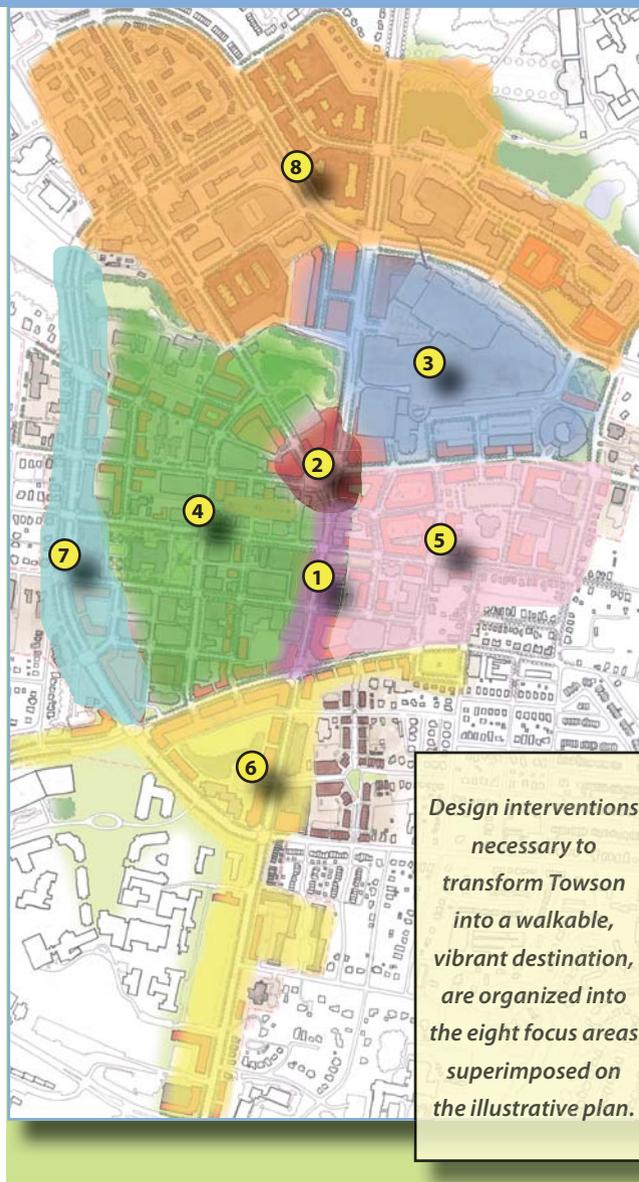
These recommendations are organized into eight “walkability focus areas”, as follows:

1. York Road “Main Street”
2. The Roundabout area
3. Towson Town Center Mall area
4. West of York
5. East of York
6. “Golden Triangle”/Towsontown/York Road South
7. Bosley Avenue Corridor
8. Fairmount/Dulaney Valley/Goucher College

The Illustrative Master Plan on the opposite page — also referenced on page v of the Executive Summary & Introduction — shows the culmination of the recommendations found within the eight focus areas.

Within each focus area, the recommendations fall into one of four categories. Each plays a role in fostering walkability and directly affects the extent to which Towson will become more pedestrian friendly and vibrant. The categories are described below in general terms with the key findings for each as it applies to Towson. The remainder of the section presents specific proposals for each of the eight focus areas, presented within the design categories.

1. Infill and Redevelopment. Most people assume that walkability is primarily a transportation issue.



While the design and character of the roadway network is extremely important, it is the development pattern that “drives” walkability. The way that buildings relate to the street and to the pedestrian has the greatest single impact on the degree to which a place is walkable.

Towson is currently going through a dramatic period of redevelopment, and every development proposal affects walkability to some degree. The Master Plan identifies opportunities for pedestrian-supportive redevelopment on a parcel-by-parcel basis, and also identifies sites that are particularly critical because of their location and visibility.

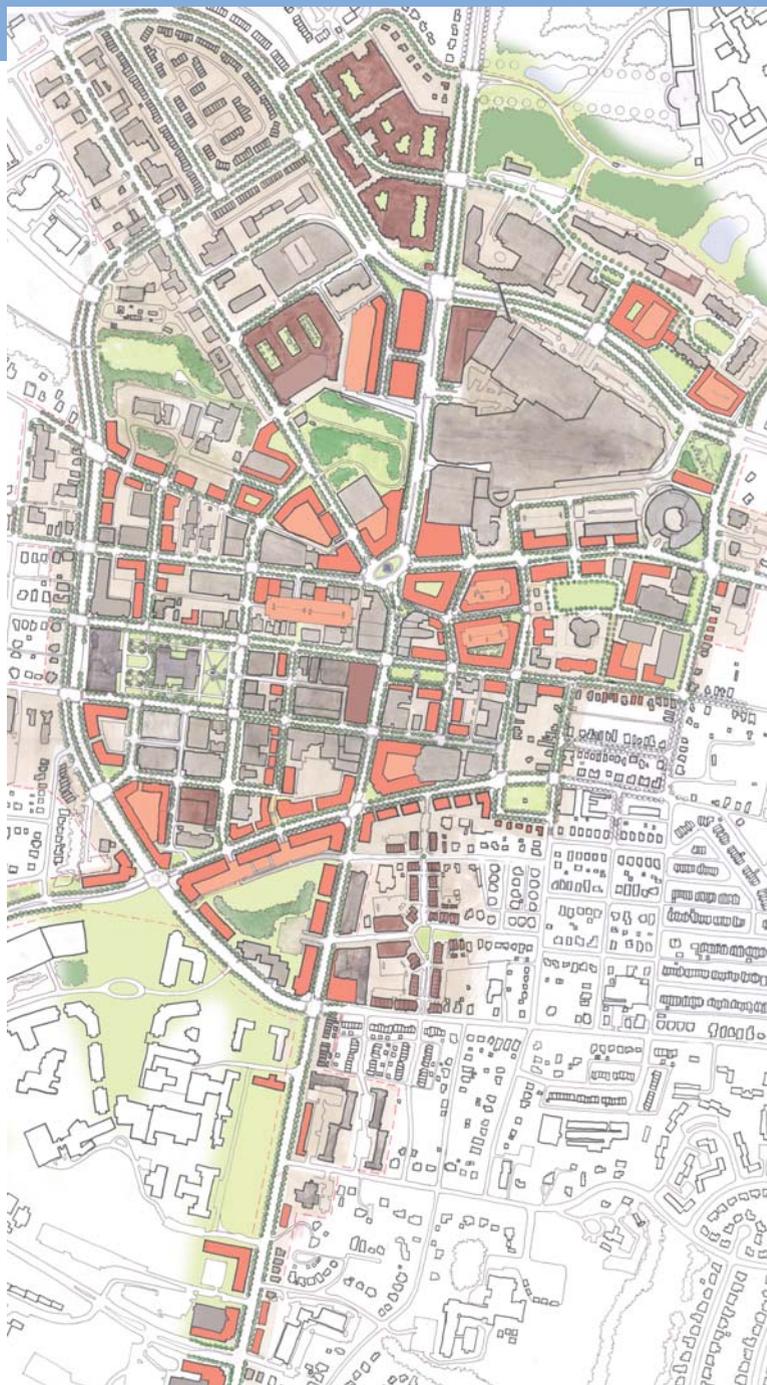
There are numerous opportunity sites within the Master Plan area, including surface parking lots and other voids between buildings that should be filled in over time. There are also properties within the downtown area that are increasingly under redevelopment pressure. The plan does not necessarily advocate the replacement of these buildings, but recognizes properties that have a higher likelihood of being replaced over time, and in some cases, shows an appropriate replacement if it were to occur.

An emphasis should be placed on new housing opportunities within the downtown core. Attractive and appropriately designed mixed-use buildings that adhere to pedestrian-supportive design principles, including residential units on upper floors and retail and eating establishments at street level, should become the standard model of infill development within the Walkable District. This will help grow a pedestrian-based market for retail within the downtown area without dramatically increasing the demand for parking or traffic generation associated with new downtown businesses.

2. Street and intersection Design. Designing a street network that complements and supports a pedestrian-friendly development pattern is critical to achieving walkability. Specific changes to streets and intersections that will still accommodate traffic but create more of a balance between pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles are an integral part of the plan. Each street modification in the plan is meant to slow traffic and reduce crossing distances for pedestrians, while still allowing safe and reasonable vehicular movement.

Most of the design modifications to streets fall into one or more of the following categories:

- the narrowing of certain travel lanes, particularly where they are currently as wide as interstate highway lanes;



Illustrative Master Plan

- elimination of travel lanes from sections of roadways that are considered to be “over-designed,” often adding on-street parking and/or bike lanes;
- converting one-way streets back to two-way operation.

In addition, several intersection modifications are recommended to enhance pedestrian comfort and safety by shortening crossing distances while slowing turning traffic down. These generally involved “tightening up” corners by reducing the curb return radius or eliminating a separate right turn lane so that drivers are required to slow down or stop before making a turn.

Finally, a conceptual bicycle network plan was developed as part of the Master Plan. It is designed to make downtown Towson more accessible and inviting to bicyclists by improving connections to surrounding neighborhoods. This will also benefit pedestrians. Further discussion of this topic is included in the Policy Section.

3. Streetscapes and Frontages. Sidewalk areas from the curb to the face of buildings comprise the primary public realm in Towson. A high degree of design quality of these areas is essential to attract pedestrians. Towson lost a great deal of its pedestrian-friendly character over the last 40 years by permitting a significant amount of its traditional building fabric to be replaced by buildings that do not conform to the principles of walkability. Also, this development resulted in gaps in the urban fabric, such as surface parking lots, that created places that are unfriendly to pedestrians.

During this same period, little emphasis was placed on historic preservation within Towson’s downtown core, unlike other nearby Maryland towns such as Annapolis, Ellicott City, and Frederick. Prior to the post-war period, Towson had character and charm similar to what these other places have been able to retain. Now each of these has become a major destination, in large part because people are attracted to their historic and pedestrian friendly streetscapes.

In order for Towson to recapture the pedestrian friendly, inviting character it enjoyed throughout its past, a new focus should be placed on restoring the traditional “townscape” and unique identity of downtown Towson. This can be achieved through a number of fundamental design improvements that will redefine the public realm:

- New streetscaping that includes an overhaul and improvement to the first generation of streetscape efforts. In addition, a unified design theme that can be applied

to new street signage, furniture, wayfinding kiosks, and gateway monuments will help foster an identity within Towson’s core. Strong emphasis should also be placed on tying this streetscape design to Towson’s historic buildings and landmarks.

- Pedestrian-oriented urban design principles, as mentioned in the Executive Summary, must be applied for all new buildings and renovations of existing buildings.

- Enhance the county’s facade improvement program in the downtown area to increase its use and focus on restoring the original material of pre-war commercial building facades. This should be pursued as a high priority and can have a dramatic effect on improving the image of downtown.

4. Parks and Plazas. There is a critical need for quality open space in the form of parks and plazas within Towson’s central core. The plan identifies opportunities to achieve this by enhancing existing open spaces, introducing new ones, and replacing ones that don’t function well with more appropriate uses.

Parks and plazas should be designed to encourage frequent and diverse activity. This is achieved in part by ensuring that they have active uses fronting and overlooking them. This is important from a security standpoint. It is necessary for people to feel safe using public spaces.