



# WALKABILITY ASSESSMENT

ERIE, IL  
FALL 2021

Completed by:



This assessment was made possible by funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration granted to Blackhawk Hills Regional Council for assistance with response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Executive Summary

The Erie walkability assessment was completed by Blackhawk Hills Regional Council (BHRC) staff and was made possible through U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding for COVID-19 response and recovery. The goal of this assessment is to identify opportunities to improve active transportation within the Village of Erie. The three priority focus areas identified for assessment were 'School Routes,' represented by sections of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, 5<sup>th</sup> St, and 6<sup>th</sup> Ave between the middle and high schools, 'Core Sidewalks,' which included the downtown triangle and sections of Main St, Albany Rd, and 8<sup>th</sup> Ave, and 'Potential Trail Connections,' which was comprised of roads beyond the village core that could serve as connections to future recreational trails.

The assessment was completed by surveying the identified priority routes in each focus area. The survey looked at a variety of factors that contribute to walkability, including connectivity of the sidewalk network, compliance with accessibility standards, and streetscape elements that make a place more or less appealing to walk versus drive. To provide a measure of safety history, crash data for the village was obtained from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). Village ordinances were also reviewed for broader opportunities to improve active transportation.

Survey findings were presented to the steering committee along with initial recommendations for improvements. A combination of smaller, easily implemented improvements along with significant, large scale projects were discussed. Potential funding opportunities including Safe Routes to School and anticipated competitive grant programs stemming from the Infrastructure and Investment and Jobs Act were also reviewed.

Based on survey findings and follow-up discussion with the steering committee, the higher-prioritized recommendations are:

- A Safe Routes to School application for sidewalk additions and improvements around the middle and elementary schools
- Streetscaping around the downtown triangle to improve safety and walkability
- Crosswalk improvements at Albany Rd and 16<sup>th</sup> Ave and Albany Rd and 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2)
- Addition of a bike lane and/or sidewalk along 16<sup>th</sup> Ave for access to a potential future recreational trail north of the Erie Evangelical Free Church
- Construction of sidewalk on the north side of 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2) between Albany Rd and the Dollar General

## Project Overview

BHRC was awarded \$400,000 from the U.S. Economic Development Administration in 2020 to support the region's response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Providing an assessment of communities' walkability was identified as a comprehensive way to look at factors that contribute to safety, inclusivity, sense of place, and human health and well-being. These factors are major drivers of a community's resilience during the pandemic, the recovery period, and beyond.<sup>1</sup> Working on improvements for walkability has numerous positive implications for communities, including:

**Safety:** Over the past decade, the United States has seen a 45 percent increase in people struck and killed while walking. The past four years were the most deadly in the past three decades.<sup>2</sup> Despite fewer vehicles on the road during the height of the pandemic in 2020, pedestrians faced greater risks due to the absence of typical traffic congestion to slow speeds and the presence of other factors that contributed to dangerous driving behavior. When accounting for the 13.2 percent decrease in vehicle miles traveled in 2020, the pedestrian fatality rate saw an unprecedented 21 percent increase from 2019.<sup>3</sup> Improving safety for pedestrians helps make roads safer for all users. Traffic calming and other engineering techniques designed to create safer environments for pedestrians also have the impact of reducing fatalities from automobile crashes.<sup>4</sup>

**Health:** Nearly 80 percent of American adults do not get enough physical activity. About half of all American adults have one or more chronic diseases, and seven of the most common chronic diseases can be improved by regular physical activity.<sup>5</sup> Walking offers a no-cost, low-skill opportunity for people to be active across a lifetime.

**Social Equity:** Non-motorized transportation is essential for accessibility. One-third of Americans do not drive due to age, disability, choice, or lack of financial means to own

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<sup>1</sup> Love, Hanna and Mike Powe. "The Necessary Foundations for Rural Resilience: A Flexible, Accessible, and Healthy Built Environment." Brookings. 1 Dec. 2020 <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-necessary-foundations-for-rural-resilience-a-flexible-accessible-and-healthy-built-environment>. "Cities that Heal: How the Coronavirus Pandemic Could Change Urban Design." On Point. WBUR. 3 Aug. 2020. <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2020/08/03/healthy-cities-urban-design-pandemic>. Sisson, Patrick. "How the '15-Minute City' Could Help Post-Pandemic Recovery." Bloomberg CityLab. 15 July 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-15/mayors-tout-the-15-minute-city-as-covid-recovery>

<sup>2</sup> Dangerous by Design 2021. National Complete Streets Coalition and Smart Growth America. <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design>

<sup>3</sup> Snider, Adam. "Pedestrian Deaths Soar in 2020 Despite Precipitous Drop in Driving During Pandemic." Governors Highway Safety Association. 20 May, 2021. [Pedestrian Deaths Soar in 2020 Despite Precipitous Drop in Driving During Pandemic | GHSA](https://www.ghsa.org/news/2021/05/20/pedestrian-deaths-soar-in-2020-despite-precipitous-drop-in-driving-during-pandemic)

<sup>4</sup> "What is Vision Zero", Vision Zero Network, <https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. 2nd Edition. 2018.

and maintain a vehicle.<sup>6</sup> Consequences for poor walking and wheelchair rolling conditions are disproportionately affecting older adults, people of color, and people walking in low-income communities. These groups are overrepresented in fatal pedestrian crashes – even when accounting for differences in population size and walking rates.<sup>2</sup>

**Environment:** The transportation sector is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Passenger vehicles and light-duty trucks are the largest contributing category, emitting 59 percent of transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>8</sup> In addition to reducing transportation’s large carbon footprint, trading more short drives for active transportation (walking, biking, or rolling) can also positively affect air quality. Ground level ozone, created by vehicle emissions, can create health problems, especially for children, older adults, and individuals with chronic conditions like asthma and emphysema.<sup>9</sup>

**Transportation:** Active transportation is a viable alternative to driving for many trips from a distance perspective. About 40 percent of all trips are less than 3 miles.<sup>10</sup> Improvements to pedestrian infrastructure benefit everyone, as even motorized trips involve an active transportation link such as from a parked car to a destination.

**Economy:** Automobile-dependent communities offer residents less opportunity for economic resiliency. During times of unexpected financial distress, such as job loss or fuel price spikes, households are left with few options to reduce their transportation costs, which is the second largest household expense in the United States.<sup>11</sup> In addition to helping families find ways to reduce their transportation costs, improving walkability can help communities recruit talent and attract business. Between 2010 and 2015, nearly 500 companies relocated to more walkable downtowns.<sup>12</sup> This trend was seen across the country in both small and large cities.

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6 Thomas Gotschi and Kevin Mills. Active Transportation for America: The Case for Increased Federal Investment in Bicycling and Walking. Rails to Trails Conservancy. 2008.

7 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2021). Carbon Pollution from Transportation. <https://www.epa.gov/transportation-air-pollution-and-climate-change/carbon-pollution-transportation>

8 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2020). Fast Facts on Transportation Greenhouse Gas Emissions. <https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/fast-facts-transportation-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

9 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2021). How Mobile Source Pollution Affects Your Health. <https://www.epa.gov/mobile-source-pollution/how-mobile-source-pollution-affects-your-health>

10 Litman, T. Short and Sweet: Analysis of Shorter Trips Using National Personal Travel Survey Data. Victoria Transportation Policy Institute. 2010. [www.vtpi.org/short\\_sweet.pdf](http://www.vtpi.org/short_sweet.pdf)

11 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Consumer Expenditures-2019. Economic News Release (2020). <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cesan.nro.htm>

12 Smart Growth America. Core Values: Why American Companies are Moving Downtown (2015). <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/core-values-why-american-companies-are-moving-downtown>

## Goals & Objectives

Erie was included in the second round of walkability assessments conducted in fall of 2021. A kick-off call was held on October 19th with the steering committee to introduce the assessment process and begin identifying local goals.

During the kick-off call, the steering committee identified priority issues and routes to be surveyed. Three major themes emerged from these discussions: school routes, core sidewalks including and emanating from the downtown triangle, and potential connections to future trails. With the help of the steering committee, BHRC staff tailored the assessment to identify opportunities for improving active transportation options to schools, downtown amenities, and future recreational trails for all residents but especially populations that rely on active transportation. Specific objectives to meet the goal included:

- Survey three route categories in the village (*see map below for locations*):
  - **School Routes:** Sections of roads around the middle and high schools including 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, 5<sup>th</sup> St, and 6<sup>th</sup> Ave were analyzed for potential improvements. These streets lack sidewalks, but are often used by students getting to and from the schools and athletic fields.
  - **Core Sidewalks:** These routes include the downtown triangle, Main St, Albany Rd, and a section of 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. Sidewalks along these roads provide connections to downtown amenities and serve as main routes through the village.
  - **Potential Trail Connections:** Developing a recreational trail is one of the Village's longer term goals. Two potential locations for future recreational trailheads were identified at Heritage Park and off 16<sup>th</sup> Ave near the Erie Evangelical Free Church. Highland Ave and 16<sup>th</sup> Ave were analyzed for their potential to serve as connections to future recreation sites.
- Review crash data for incidents within the village limits
- Examine village ordinances for opportunities to further encourage active transportation and associated infrastructure
- Create a table of recommendations for improving active transportation in Erie
- Identify grant opportunities and funding strategies to implement selected recommendations



Map 1. Selected survey routes

## Methods

Routes within the three focus categories (School Routes, Core Sidewalks, and Potential Trail Connections) were assessed using a set of surveys designed to evaluate sidewalk conditions, intersections, and ADA compliance. Surveys were completed on November 3rd and 8th, 2021, through ArcGIS Survey123 app data collection, photography, road measurements, qualitative notes, and observational walking methods.

### Locations Surveyed and Data Reviewed

#### School Routes:

- 5<sup>th</sup> Ave from Main St to the middle school
- 5<sup>th</sup> St from 5<sup>th</sup> Ave to 6<sup>th</sup> Ave
- 6<sup>th</sup> Ave from 5<sup>th</sup> St to east side of the high school

#### Core Sidewalks:

- Main St from 5<sup>th</sup> Ave to 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2)
- Albany Rd from Main St to 16<sup>th</sup> Ave
- 8<sup>th</sup> Ave from Main St to 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2)
- Connection to Casey's and Dollar General off 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2)

#### Potential Trail Connections:

- Highland Ave from Albany Rd to Heritage Park
- 16<sup>th</sup> Ave from Albany Rd to 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2)

A mapping exercise using Google Earth aerial imagery was also conducted to develop a sidewalk audit. The resulting map allows for identification of patterns in missing sidewalks throughout the village (see map below).

IDOT crash data for roads within the Village from 2016 to 2020 was reviewed for insight on recent safety history. Village ordinances were also reviewed for opportunities for improvement via planning and policy changes



Map 2. Existing sidewalk network in the Village of Erie

## US Access Board's Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG)

Originally established in 1973 to ensure access to federally funded facilities, the US Access Board is now the nation's lead agency on accessible design. In 1990 when the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law, the board was tasked with developing accessibility guidelines for facilities and transportation systems.<sup>13</sup> Since the board published the original ADA Accessibility Guidelines in 1991, several updates have been published to incorporate additional aspects of public life and changes in technology.

In 2011, the board issued proposed Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) for public comment.<sup>14</sup> These guidelines would set standards for sidewalks, pedestrian crosswalks, and other public right-of-ways. The PROWAG have not yet been finalized for a variety of reasons including the board's decision to supplement the guidelines to address shared use paths. Although not yet enforceable at the federal level,<sup>15</sup> the PROWAG offer the most up-to-date and recommended design practices for supporting accessible active transportation. It is anticipated that the board will release the finalized version of the guidelines shortly, and for that reason, the proposed guidelines were used as a benchmark for assessing accessibility in this study.

## ADA Self Evaluations and Transition Plan Requirements

Two critical requirements of the ADA, which are frequently left uncompleted, are a self-evaluation and transition plan.

The 1991 ADA regulation required all public entities, regardless of size, to evaluate all of their services, policies, and practices and to modify any that did not meet ADA requirements. In addition, public entities with 50 or more employees were required to develop a transition plan detailing any structural changes that would be undertaken to achieve program access and specifying a time frame for their completion. Public entities were also required to provide an opportunity for interested individuals to participate in the self-evaluation and transition planning processes by submitting comments.<sup>16</sup>

Completing or updating a self-evaluation and transition plan would give the Village a broader perspective of where improvements in accessibility are needed, an action plan to implement needed changes, and would ensure that legal obligations are being upheld should a complaint be filed.

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13 U.S. Access Board (2021). About the U.S. Access Board. <https://www.access-board.gov/about/>

14 U.S. Access Board (2021). (Proposed) Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines. <https://www.access-board.gov/prowag/>

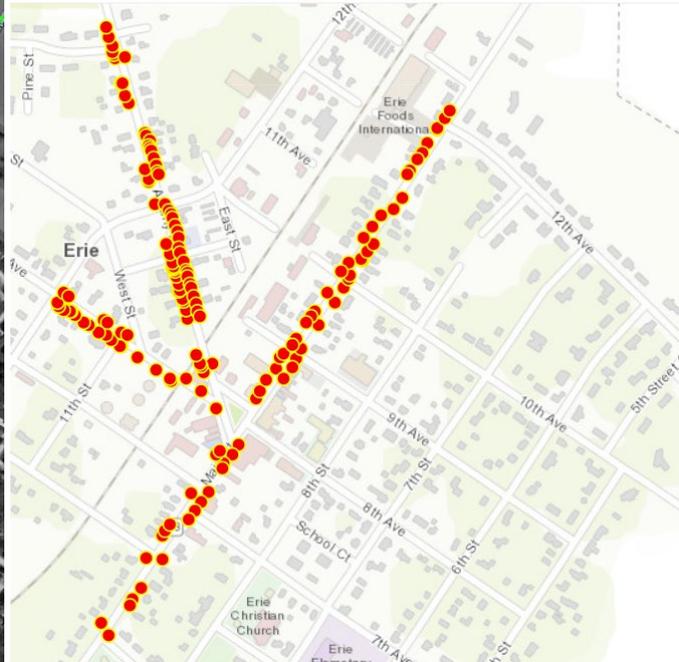
15 The 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design are the current enforceable standards to date, but lack nuanced guidance for outdoor access routes.

16 U.S. Department of Justice (2015) ADA Update: A Primer for State and Local Governments. [https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleII\\_2010/title\\_ii\\_primer.html#coordinator](https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleII_2010/title_ii_primer.html#coordinator)

## Findings



Map 3a. Survey data points imported into Google Earth



Map 3b. Survey data points in ArcGIS online

Survey data points have been provided to the steering committee via Google Earth compatible files and a link to an ArcGIS online map

## SURVEY

### School Routes

#### *5<sup>th</sup> Ave, 5<sup>th</sup> St, and 6<sup>th</sup> Ave*

The most concerning gap in the sidewalk network surrounding the elementary, middle, and high schools is along 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. This road is approximately 26ft wide with no shoulders and sees fairly heavy traffic including farming equipment and semi-trucks. There is one short sidewalk segment on the northeast side of the street from the intersection with 6<sup>th</sup> St. The sidewalk ends before the next intersection with 5<sup>th</sup> St and is in fair to poor condition. Students are using the lawns and edge of the road to continue the route to 5<sup>th</sup> St which is evident from a worn in dirt path. There is a misaligned crosswalk (striping on the street doesn't align with sidewalk) across 5<sup>th</sup> St, and a

crosswalk that crosses 5<sup>th</sup> Ave to the middle school. This crosswalk lacks adequate signage for traffic approaching from either direction.



*Semi-truck traffic on 5<sup>th</sup> Ave*



*Misaligned crosswalk in poor condition across 6<sup>th</sup> St*

5<sup>th</sup> St, which provides a connection between the middle and high schools and runs along the northwest side of the athletic fields, also lacks sidewalks. The road sees less traffic, is signed as a 20 mph school zone, and has a 6ft (faded) striped shoulder on the southeast side. The striped shoulder is intended to provide students a safer route option between the schools and fields, but its intended purpose is not signed. The shoulder is also used for parking during baseball games.



*Striped shoulder along 5<sup>th</sup> St*



*Lack of curb ramps at 6<sup>th</sup> Ave and 6<sup>th</sup> St*

6<sup>th</sup> Ave from the intersection with 5<sup>th</sup> St past the high school lacks sidewalks along the road, but a network of walkways to the school provide students with access to the building. Although not a part of the planned survey route, BHRC staff noticed issues on the northwest end of 6th Ave near the elementary school. Intersections at 6<sup>th</sup> St and 7<sup>th</sup> St lack curb ramps which is problematic for students and other members of the community who have disabilities.

## Core Sidewalks & Potential Trail Connections

### *Main St*

The sidewalk network along Main St is complete from the intersection with 5<sup>th</sup> Ave northeast to the Erie Foods North Plant. Sidewalk conditions are fair to good with conditions deteriorating slightly the farther one gets from the downtown triangle. Condition issues include sections of narrow (<4ft wide) sidewalk, problems at intersections with driveways (including cross slopes greater than 2%, deterioration, and missing concrete), spalling (deterioration of the top surface of the sidewalk), and vertical faults greater than ½ inch. There is also a cluster of similar issues around the Clock Tower Bank that include deterioration around the sidewalk panel joints.



*Gravel accumulation and spalling on north end of Main St.*



*Missing curb ramp at 9<sup>th</sup> and Main*

Most intersections along Main St are missing ADA-compliant detectable warning strips, and a few are missing curb ramps. There are two curb ramps (on Main & 9<sup>th</sup> and Main & 5<sup>th</sup>) with slopes that exceed ADA guidelines (8.33% maximum). These curb ramps may have been retrofitted into the curb by grinding or may have experience frost heaving that has increased the slope.

The northeast end of Main St past the sidewalk terminus was reviewed for its potential to connect to future recreational trail opportunities off of 16<sup>th</sup> Ave. The speed limit is 30 mph and the road width is approximately 24ft. The road's potential for a walk/bike friendly connection to a recreational trail is currently poor as the road also lacks any constructed shoulder. A costly

extension of the sidewalk would improve conditions, but the intersection with 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2) presents further problems. The railroad crossing just prior to the intersection has flangeway gaps that exceed the ADA standards for freight (3in). Once at the intersection, pedestrians and bicyclists would be traveling across a very wide intersection with traffic potentially coming from four directions as 16<sup>th</sup> Ave and Lakeside Dr meet with 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2).



*BNSF rail crossing on northeast end of Main St*



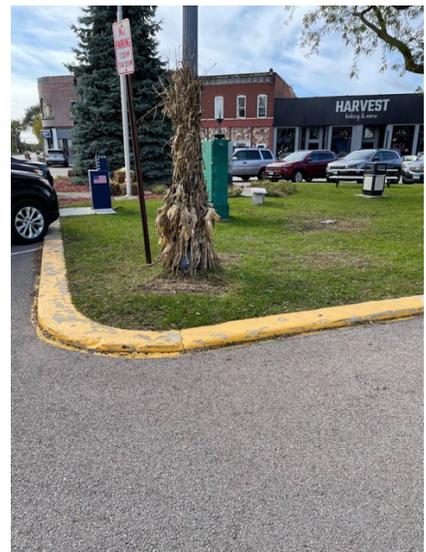
*Intersection of Main, 12<sup>th</sup> (IL 2), 16<sup>th</sup> and Lakeside*

### *Downtown Triangle*

Sidewalks around the downtown triangle are 5ft wide (and greater) and in good condition except for heaving and deterioration just past Shaheen's Market near the Corner Café at Albany Rd & Main St. It is suspected that there is a structural issue underground that is likely causing these sidewalk issues.



*Deterioration and heaving near Main & Albany intersection*



*Curb wrapping downtown triangle*

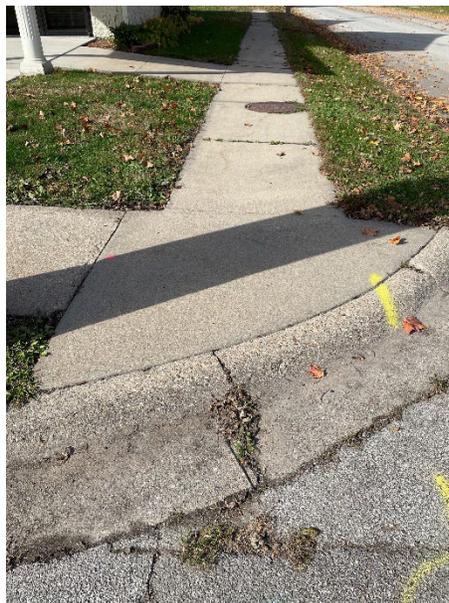
Despite the good condition of the sidewalks, the downtown triangle presents a challenge for pedestrian circulation. Without crosswalks, curb ramps, or sidewalks through the triangle, pedestrians trying to cross must either go to a crosswalk at one of the triangle points or navigate the streets. Crossing at the triangle can be particularly challenging because it is difficult to tell which direction traffic may be coming from and whether or not drivers have a stop sign. These challenges are exacerbated if pedestrians are visitors and not familiar with the area.

### *8<sup>th</sup> Ave*

8th Ave from the downtown triangle to 12th St (IL 2) was included in the survey to determine whether it might provide a better crossing of 12th St (IL 2) for access to a potential recreational trail on the northwest side of the village. Various features and conditions uncovered during the survey prove 8<sup>th</sup> Ave to be a less desirable route. The rail crossing just northwest of the triangle is not ADA compliant with flangeway gaps at 4in wide. Northwest of the rail crossing, the sidewalk is missing for a block on the northeast side. The southwest side of the street has sections in very poor condition with deterioration of full panels. The intersections at 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2) are also missing detectable warning strips and curb ramps. Crossing 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2) from 8<sup>th</sup> Ave is further challenging because of poor sightlines in the northeast direction due to a curve in the road. Oak St, which was not surveyed, may have more potential as an alternate to Albany Rd and should be considered in future planning.



*Sidewalk deterioration on southwest side of 8<sup>th</sup> Ave*



*Missing curb ramp at 8<sup>th</sup> & 11th*



*Curve in road northeast of 8<sup>th</sup> & 12th*

## *Albany Rd*

Sidewalk conditions along Albany Rd are fair to poor with more issues on the east side of the street. Condition issues include substantial cracking, vertical faults greater than ½in and spalling. A missing sidewalk panel on the west side was blocked off with cones and signs at the time of the survey. Intersection issues include missing detectable warning strips and curb ramps (at 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and Highland Ave intersections). The rail crossing just northwest of the downtown triangle again exceeds the maximum for flangeway gap width.



*Severe cracking on west side of Albany Rd*



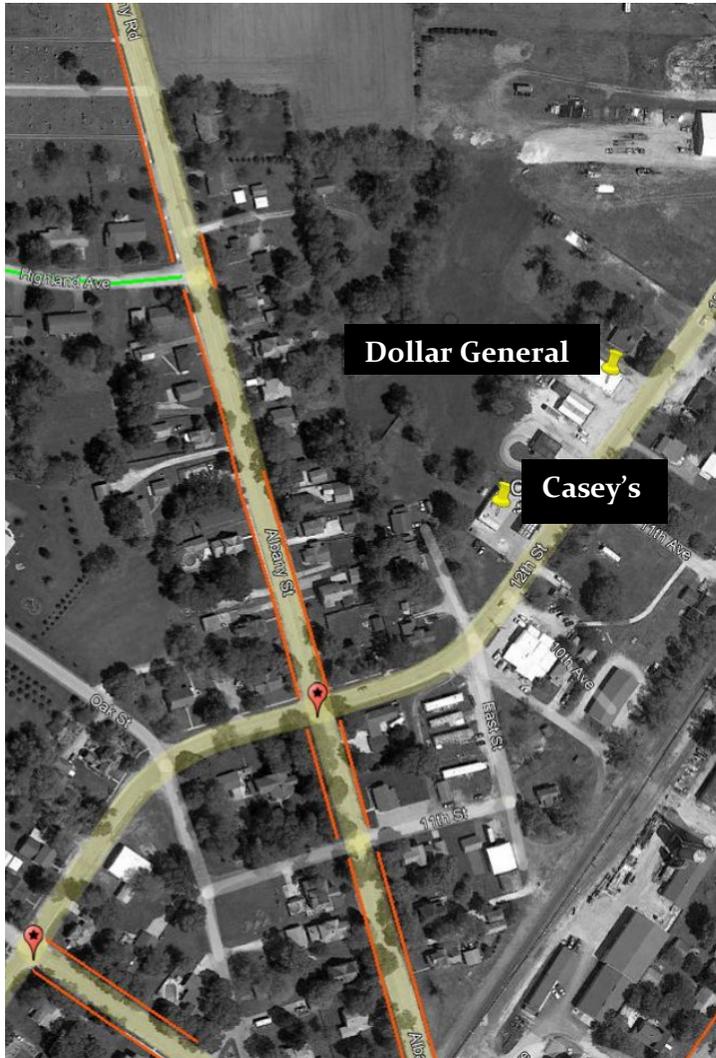
*Missing curb ramp at Albany & 12<sup>th</sup> (IL 2)*

The intersection at 12th St (IL 2) & Albany presents a significant challenge for pedestrians. Traffic only stops along Albany Rd (12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2) has the right of way). The speed limit is 35 mph along 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2) at this location, there is moderate traffic (ranges with time of day), and sightlines are obstructed in both directions due to curves in the road.

Sidewalks along Albany Rd end south of Highland Ave on the east side (apart from a small island segment across from Highland Ave) and on the north end of the cemetery on the west side. There is no shoulder on the west side and a paved 6ft shoulder on the east, which is in fair to poor condition. The road is approximately 29ft wide and traffic speeds are high as drivers enter and exit town. An officer monitoring traffic speed was stationed at the cemetery entrance during the survey suggesting that speeding is a known issue for this area.

*Access to Casey's & Dollar General*

The survey also looked at pedestrian access to Casey's and Dollar General located on 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2) just east of the intersection with Albany Rd. A short sidewalk segment on the north side of the street ends just east of the Albany Rd intersection. Northwest of the sidewalk section, a gravel shoulder approximately 3ft wide lines both sides of the street. The road is about 24ft wide, and the curve at the intersection with East St impacts sightlines. The route between the end of the sidewalk and Casey's is clearly seeing use as is evident by the dirt path worn into the grass along the roadside.



Map 4. Casey's and Dollar General along 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2)



*Dirt path to Casey's*



*Gravel shoulder along 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2)*

### *16<sup>th</sup> Ave*

16<sup>th</sup> Ave was reviewed for its potential in serving as a connector to a possible recreational trail. If a trail were to be developed off 16<sup>th</sup> Ave careful consideration for safe pedestrian and bicycle access would need to be taken. Access from the west would include a section of Albany Rd that lacks sidewalks, and access from the east would entail navigating the challenging intersection with IL 12<sup>th</sup> (IL 2) addressed earlier in this report. 16<sup>th</sup> Ave sees less traffic than surrounding streets and the speed limit is 30 mph, but it lacks sidewalks, bike lanes, or shoulders.



*16<sup>th</sup> Ave & 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2) intersection*

### *Highland Ave*

Highland Ave was also reviewed for its potential in providing access to a future recreational trail. It currently provides access to Heritage Park. The road sees lower speeds and traffic volume as it is located in a residential neighborhood and dead ends at the park. Highland lacks sidewalks, and the road is approximately 23ft wide and in fair condition. Asphalt pavement transitions to a compressed pea gravel west of Walnut Street which may affect how easily individuals with disabilities can navigate the street.

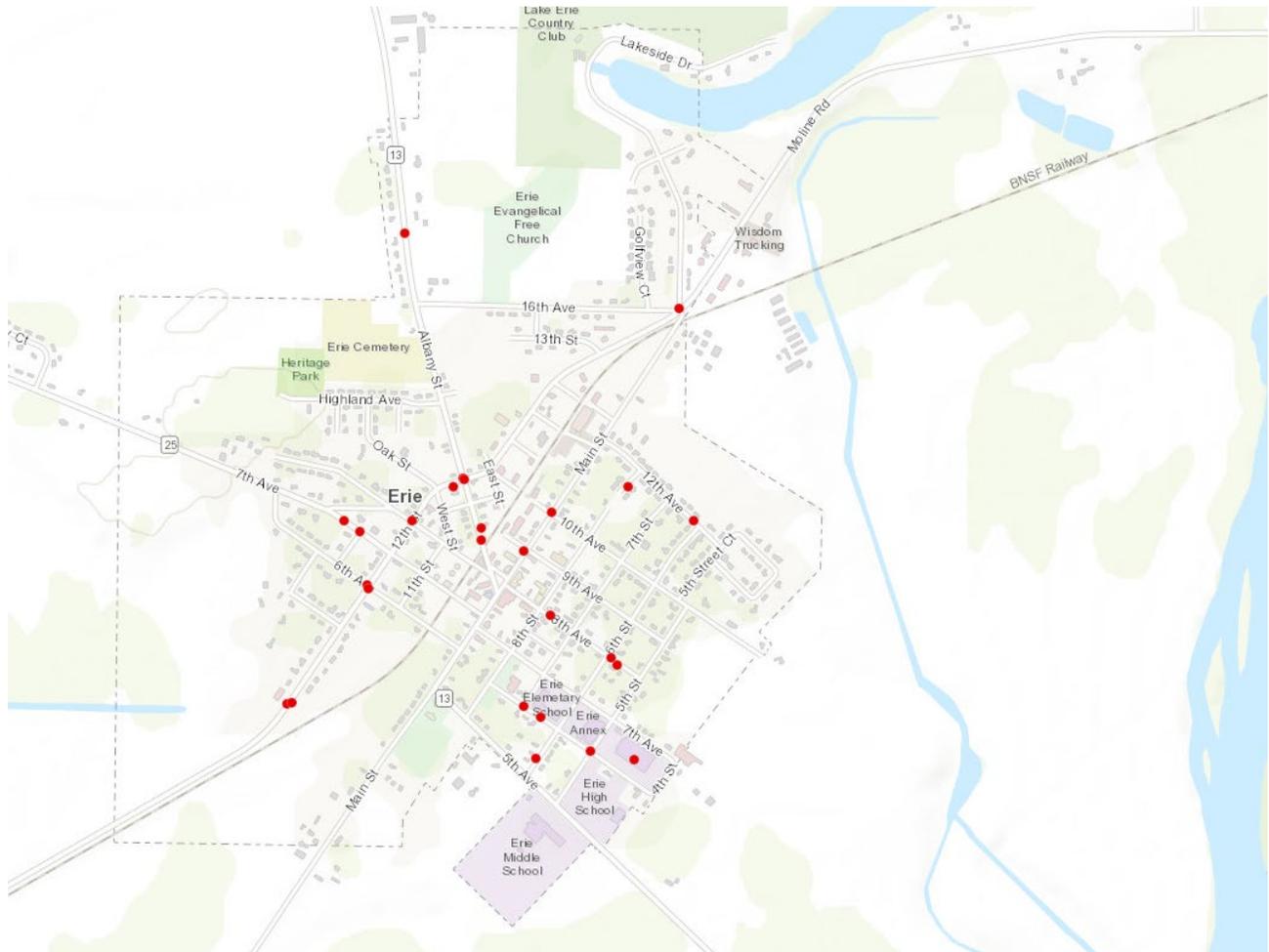


*West end of Highland Ave and Heritage Park*

## TRAFFIC CRASH DATA

Traffic crash data for the Village of Erie was requested from the Illinois Department of Transportation. Data was provided for roads within village limits for the years 2016 to 2020. None of the reported crashes involved pedestrians or bicyclists.

| Crash Data for Village of Erie (2016-2020) |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| Year                                       | Number of Crashes |
| 2016                                       | 7                 |
| 2017                                       | 6                 |
| 2018                                       | 2                 |
| 2019                                       | 4                 |
| 2020                                       | 7                 |



Map 5. Crashes in the Village of Erie (2016-2020). Red dots indicate reported crashes.

It is encouraging to see low numbers of crashes, however, it is important to remember that the data is limited to reported incidents. The map suggests a trend of more crashes along 12th St (IL 2) intersections and around the elementary and high school blocks on 6th Ave. These areas may warrant a higher priority for investments in safety improvements.

## VILLAGE ORDINANCES

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The **Code of Ordinances** reviewed for this assessment was last approved on April 13, 2021. The Village of Erie upholds several ordinances that provide a framework for walkability-related topics. Some of the pertinent ordinances include:

### **Title 6. Health & Sanitation:**

#### Chapter 3: Dutch Elm Disease

This chapter declares Dutch Elm Disease as a nuisance, authorizes inspection, and sets responsibility of abatement. Although Dutch Elm Disease remains a threat to elm species native to Illinois (American, slippery, and winged Elm), we have come a long way since the height of the Dutch Elm Disease infections in the 1950s. It is still pertinent to address the issue of removing infected elm trees, however, Emerald Ash Boer (EAB) presents a much more urgent concern for the trees in the village. Incorporating an EAB management plan into this chapter or as an addendum would assist the Village and residents in planning for ash tree removals, replacements, and treatments. A healthy tree canopy is a critical component of walkability as trees provide shade, protection from the elements, improved air quality, and a sense of place. Additional options for improving the village's street trees are listed in the recommendations table.

### **Title 7. Public Ways and Property:**

#### Chapter 1: Sidewalks and Streets

##### 7-1-1: Obstructing Public Ways:

This ordinance addresses depositing or allowing substances, including ice, to be left on public sidewalks in the village. Although the ordinance may imply that property owners are responsible for removing snow and ice, this isn't clearly stated. To provide clear expectations of property owners, a winter maintenance plan should be adopted by the Village (see further discussion on winter maintenance plans under Chapter 10. Snow and Ice Removal.

##### 7-1-4: Petition for Sidewalks:

This ordinance allows developers and property owners to request shared cost of new sidewalk construction at half the cost (not including the cost of ground preparation). This cost-sharing effort is a good start to encouraging sidewalk construction in new development and filling sidewalk gaps. The Village could expand its efforts to ensure new areas of development include sidewalks through zoning regulations (see further discussion under Title 9) and look for opportunities to fully fund priority sidewalk construction.

#### 7-1-5: Sidewalk Construction Specifications:

This ordinance requires sidewalks to be 4ft wide with an option to request narrower sidewalks. Current ADA standards require sidewalks to be a minimum of 4ft. The Village should consider adopting the US Access Board's PROWAG (Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines) as their standards for sidewalk construction. These standards are considered current best practice and are anticipated to be adopted as the enforceable standards in spring of 2022. By adopting PROWAG standards, the Village would also be including other important specifications such as curb ramp and side slope requirements.

#### 7-1-8: Maintenance of Sidewalk; Responsibility

#### 7-1-9: Village Notification for Sidewalk Repairs

#### 7-1-10: Repairs; Assessment of Cost

These ordinances collectively establish responsibility of sidewalk maintenance with the adjacent property owner and give the board of trustees the right to judge the necessity of repair. Property owners may be given up to 45 days to complete repairs or the Village may complete repairs at the cost of the property owner. The Village may want to consider the effectiveness of these ordinances and think about taking a more active role with a sidewalk maintenance plan.

Maintenance can help prevent and protect against liability claims in situations where sidewalk conditions are in question following an incident. Even when a community has ordinances that require adjacent property owners to maintain the sidewalk, the municipality may still be found ultimately responsible for sidewalk conditions. Having a sound written maintenance program can help limit exposure to liability. In times when a municipality's budget is minimal, having a policy in place that effectively uses resources that are available can still help mitigate risk of liability.<sup>17</sup>

The benefits of having a written sidewalk maintenance plan are manifold. Advantages of a maintenance plan include:

- Improved sidewalk conditions and safety
- Protection of infrastructure investment
- Conveyance of information to residents
- Provision of guidelines for city employees in public works departments
- Mitigation of exposure to lawsuits
- Compliance with the ADA and improved accessibility of the sidewalk network for all users

Sidewalk maintenance policies should contain some level of detail to be effective. Strong policies address the following elements:<sup>18</sup>

### **1. Identification of defective conditions**

The policy should establish criteria that defines when a sidewalk is defective and requires repair or replacement.

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, *A Guide for Maintaining Pedestrian Facilities for Enhanced Safety*. Washington D.C. (2013) [https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/tools\\_solve/fhwasa13037/chap2.cfm#ftn3](https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/tools_solve/fhwasa13037/chap2.cfm#ftn3)

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, *A Guide for Maintaining Pedestrian Facilities for Enhanced Safety*. Appendix D: Risk Management Information (2010). [https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/tools\\_solve/fhwasa13037/appxd.cfm](https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/tools_solve/fhwasa13037/appxd.cfm)

## **2. Development of an inspection procedure and schedule**

The plan should include conducting an initial survey (or continuation of the survey provided in this assessment). A frequency for subsequent surveys should be set, and it should be determined whether surveys cover the entire village or are done by sections.

## **3. Prioritization of repair and replacement needs**

An effective policy should establish prioritization criteria: location of sidewalk, pedestrian traffic, cost vs effect, resident complaints, etc. The development of a repair and replacement schedule should also be incorporated and designed in a way that can address unexpected changes in budget, resources for conducting work, and condition of sidewalks.

## **4. Development of cost-recovery mechanisms**

If property owners are expected to share the cost of sidewalk repair, clear policies and procedures for assessing costs to property owners should be established.

## **5. Response to resident complaints and concerns**

It is best to consult with an attorney to develop an appropriate plan for addressing sidewalk incidents and complaints.

More information about developing a sidewalk maintenance plan, including examples, can be found in the [US DOT Federal Highway Administration \(FHWA\)'s Guide for Maintaining Pedestrian Facilities for Enhanced Safety](#).

### Chapter 10: Snow and Ice Removal

#### 7-10-2: Removal from Sidewalks

#### 7-10-5: Penalty

7-10-2 establishes the responsibility of property owners around the downtown triangle to remove snow within 48 hours after the end of the storm event. The ordinance also requires the use of sand or de-icing material for accumulated ice and hardened snow. The penalty for violating this ordinance is set at a minimum of \$25 and not to exceed \$750.

The Village takes a good first step in requiring property owners around the downtown triangle to take responsibility for winter sidewalk maintenance. These sidewalks are likely to have the most use, so the impact of the maintenance requirement (and enforcement plan) should be significant. The next important step to take is to expand the maintenance requirement to all sidewalks and communicate this (and options for assistance) to residents.

Winter precipitation has a profound effect on all modes of transportation, but sidewalks can be particularly vulnerable as they are often last to be cleared or end up being used for snow storage after roads are cleared. A new, ADA-compliant sidewalk can be rendered useless after just a few inches of snow if a winter maintenance plan isn't in place. This can be particularly frustrating for those who have disabilities and rely on active transportation. The ADA requires any "accessible

route” to be maintained “in working order.” This means that sidewalks left covered in ice or snow are in violation of the ADA.

Expanding the ordinance along with an enforcement plan to include all sidewalks can play an important role in mitigating risks for the Village in the case of a lawsuit. The ordinance should address requirements for businesses, single-family residents, and property owners of multi-family housing with sidewalk frontage. Details about enforcement should also be explained so businesses and residents can know when to expect a warning or a fine.

It should be recognized that some residents may struggle to meet snow removal requirements due to age or disability. Pairing a snow removal ordinance with a volunteer program or student on-call job service can be a good way to address this need.

Informing and reminding residents and businesses about snow removal requirements should be the first step in gaining compliance. An annual brochure mailer is one method for ensuring that information is circulated. The brochure can also be used to share information about winter parking, snow emergencies, appropriate de-icing mechanisms (rock salt can be damaging to concrete sidewalks), and keeping catch basins and fire hydrants cleared. Massachusetts’s Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) has collected examples of snow removal procedure brochures which can be found in their [Snow Removal Policy Toolkit](#). The University of Delaware’s Institute for Public Administration also offers a [Winter Maintenance of Pedestrian Facilities Guide for Local Governments](#), as does the FHWA in its [Guide for Maintaining Pedestrian Facilities](#) and US DOJ in its [ADA Guide for Small Towns](#).

## **Title 9. Zoning Regulations:**

### Chapter 10: Subdivisions

#### 9-10-9: Installation of Improvements

This ordinance indicates that developers may choose to construct sidewalks, and if so, they should be 4in thick and a minimum of 4ft wide. To support a complete sidewalk network, the Village should consider requiring new subdivisions to include sidewalks. This reduces the burden on homeowners and puts the sidewalk construction upfront, when it is less likely to encounter issues with existing utilities or landscaping.

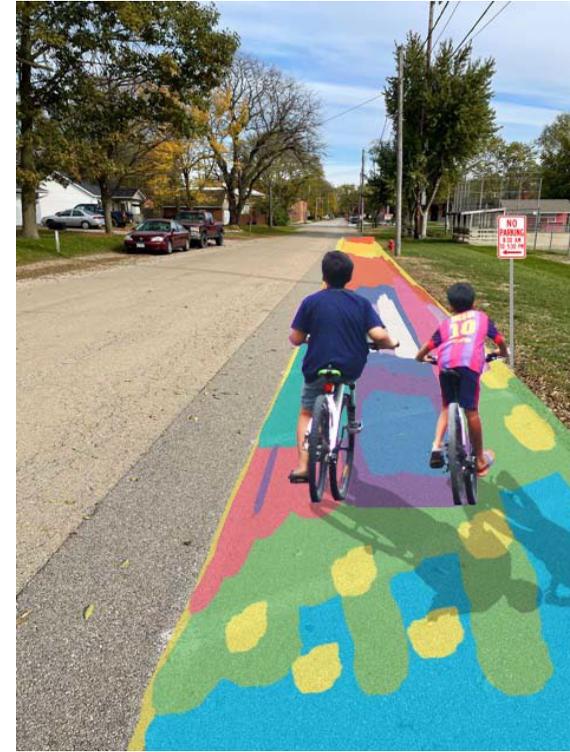
## Recommendations

The following improvement options were identified based on survey findings, review of village ordinances, and discussions with the walkability assessment steering committee.

| Improvement  | Route Category | Cost/Benefit | Requires ext. involvement (IDOT) | Requires ext. involvement (other) | Relies on other improvements to be effective | Notes   |
|--|----------------|--------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Demonstration Project  |                |              |                                  |                                   |  |   |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> St shoulder painting and parking times signage | School Routes  | Low/Moderate |                                  |                                   |  | By painting over the faded shoulder striping along 5 <sup>th</sup> St, a clear separation between the road and walking route can be established. A collaborative mural-style painting of the shoulder could include students in the project and demonstrate the Village's commitment to improving safety. |



Current conditions along 5<sup>th</sup> St between the middle and high schools



Graphic depicting a mural-painted shoulder and time-restricted parking signage

| Improvement  | Route Category | Cost/Benefit  | Requires ext. involvement (IDOT) | Requires ext. involvement (other) | Relies on other improvements to be effective                        | Notes   |
|--|----------------|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Infrastructure Improvements  |                |               |                                  |                                   |   |   |
| Streetscape improvements around the downtown triangle to include crosswalks and an accessible route through the triangle | Core Sidewalks | Moderate/High |                                  |                                   | ✓<br>Most effective in coordination with traffic circulation review | Locations for crosswalks and associated signage would be best selected with council from a traffic engineer |



Graphic depicting streetscape improvements including crosswalk, curb ramp, and sidewalk through the downtown triangle

| Improvement   | Route Category | Cost/Benefit           | Requires ext. involvement (IDOT) | Requires ext. involvement (other) | Relies on other improvements to be effective                        | Notes   |
|---|----------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Review of traffic circulation around the downtown triangle and implementation of resulting recommendations  | Core Sidewalks | Low/Moderate           |                                  |                                   |   | Best conducted by a traffic engineer  |
| Construction of sidewalk along the northeast side of 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave from Main St to the middle school (length of village jurisdiction)                 | School Routes  | High/High              |                                  | ✓<br>Private property owners      |   | Sidewalk construction would also benefit parishioners of St Ambrose Catholic Church and would provide needed separation between pedestrians and semi-truck and farming equipment using the road.              |
| Installation of additional crosswalk signage along 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave in front of the middle school  | School Routes  | Low/Moderate           |                                  |                                   |   |   |
| Curb ramp additions around the elementary school at 6 <sup>th</sup> St & 6 <sup>th</sup> Ave and 7 <sup>th</sup> St & 6 <sup>th</sup> Ave                   | School Routes  | Moderate/High          |                                  |                                   |   |   |
| Address stormwater management issues along Main St and other parts of the village experiencing flooding   | Core Sidewalks | Moderate-High/High     | ✓<br>Depending on location       | ✓<br>Depending on location        |   | Inadequate stormwater management is suspected to be causing erosion issues and damage to sidewalks. Implementing a stormwater management plan should be completed prior to sidewalk repairs and replacements. |
| Repair and replace sections of cracking and degraded sidewalk   | Core Sidewalk  | High/Moderate          |                                  |                                   | ✓<br>Stormwater management improvements should be implemented first | Focusing on the west side of Albany Rd and sections along northeast Main St and near the Clock Tower Bank would likely have the biggest impact  |
| Curb ramp repairs/replacements along the west side of Albany Rd and along Main St intersections at 9 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> , and 10 <sup>th</sup> | Core Sidewalks | Moderate-High/Moderate |                                  |                                   |   | Many curb ramps need updated ADA-compliant detectable warning strips while others need to be replaced due to frost heaving. Several intersections along these routes are missing curb ramps.                  |
| Work with IDOT to improve intersection safety for pedestrians at Albany Rd & 12 <sup>th</sup> (IL 2)  | Core Sidewalks | Low-Moderate/High      | ✓                                |                                   |   | Potential improvements could include installing rapid-flashing beacon crosswalk lights  |

| Improvement   | Route Category              | Cost/Benefit               | Requires ext. involvement (IDOT) | Requires ext. involvement (other)                  | Relies on other improvements to be effective             | Notes   |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Construct sidewalk along the west side of Albany Rd to the intersection with 16 <sup>th</sup> Ave                                     | Potential Trail Connections | Moderate/Moderate-High     |                                  | ✓<br>Private property owners north of the cemetery | ✓<br>Crosswalk improvements at Albany & 16 <sup>th</sup> | This improvement would be important for establishing a safe connection to a recreational trail north of 16 <sup>th</sup> Ave  |
| Add crosswalk paint, signage, and potentially a rapid-flashing beacon to the intersection at Albany Rd and 16 <sup>th</sup> Ave       | Potential Trail Connections | Low-Moderate/Moderate-High |                                  |  | ✓<br>Sidewalk addition on the west side of Albany Rd     | This improvement would be important for establishing a safe connection to a recreational trail north of 16 <sup>th</sup> Ave  |
| Bike lane or sidewalk construction along the north side of 16 <sup>th</sup> Ave   | Potential Trail Connections | Low-High/Moderate-High     |                                  | ✓<br>Potentially private property owners           | ✓<br>Crosswalk improvements at Albany & 16 <sup>th</sup> |   |
| Work with BNSF to improve accessibility of at-grade rail crossings  | Core Sidewalks              | Moderate/Moderate          |                                  | ✓<br>BNSF railroad                                 |  | Rail crossings have flangeway gaps that exceed the 3in maximum for accessibility. Focusing on improvements at the Main St rail crossing may be most effective.  |
| Sidewalk construction along 12 <sup>th</sup> St (IL 2) from east of Main St intersection to Dollar General                            | Core Sidewalks              | Moderate-High/High         | ✓                                | ✓<br>Potentially private property owners           |  | Pedestrians frequently walk this route as is evident by the dirt path worn in on the side of the road. Adding a sidewalk would improve the safety of this area significantly as pedestrians contend with heavier traffic and poor sightlines. |
| Replace sidewalk panels affected by heaving and cracking at the outer southwest corner of the downtown triangle near Shaheen's Market | Core Sidewalk               | Moderate-High/Moderate     |                                  | ✓<br>Potentially private property owners           |  | This sidewalk condition issue may be associated with some underlying structural issues around the adjacent buildings  |
| Construct sidewalk along the east side of Albany Rd to fill a gap in the sidewalk south of Highland Ave                               | Potential Trail Connections | High/Moderate              |                                  | ✓<br>Potentially private property owners           |  |   |

Policy, Plan, and Ordinance Changes

| Improvement  | Notes   |
|--|---|
| Develop a written sidewalk maintenance plan  | A sidewalk maintenance plan that addresses short and longer-term needs would help the village plan for improvements by identifying both budget and coordination needs with IDOT, businesses, and/or residents. A maintenance plan could work particularly well in combination with a village tree plan or forestry program to address necessary tree removals and replacements.   |
| Extend the sidewalk snow removal ordinance to include all sidewalks  | The ordinance update should be done in tandem with an enforcement plan, a plan for residents who require assistance with snow removal, and a plan to inform residents about the requirement and options for assistance.   |
| Require new subdivision developers to construct sidewalks and, in certain cases, bike lanes along any new roadways | Requiring new subdivisions to include sidewalks will help to ensure that new parts of the village are connected to the sidewalk network and will reduce future gaps. Criteria for when bike lanes would be required should also be incorporated.  |
| Broaden Dutch Elm Disease ordinance to address emerging community forestry issues, particularly Emerald Ash Boer   | Adopting an Emerald Ash Boer management plan will be critical for the Village in preserving and re-establishing tree canopy on public and private properties.   |
| Develop a community forestry program to address tree health, and tree planting needs                               | <p>Working through the Tree City USA program would provide a strong framework for the village to address concerns and needs regarding trees. The process of becoming a designated Tree City requires municipalities to develop a tree board, establish a tree care ordinance, institute a community forestry program, and host an Arbor Day observance and proclamation. <a href="#">Tree City USA</a> offers helpful resources and templates for developing these programs and ordinances.</p> <p><a href="#">Trees Forever</a>, a non-profit based in Marion, IA, assists communities in Iowa and Illinois in community forestry efforts and would be a helpful partner for the Village in establishing a forestry program.</p> |
| Complete or update an ADA self-evaluation and transition plan for the Village                                      | To be compliant with the ADA, the Village should ensure that a self-evaluation has been completed and is on file. Although not required for municipalities with fewer than 50 employees, a transition plan would be helpful in planning out improvements to meet compliance. The New England ADA Center offers an <a href="#">Action Guide for State and Local Governments</a> on how to conduct a self-evaluation and develop a transition plan. The website also offers sample documents and self-evaluation forms.   |

## Funding Strategies

The following grant opportunities and programs are a snapshot of what is currently available or may be available in the future. Additional guidance and future opportunities are likely to be offered as the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic progresses. It is anticipated that several competitive funding opportunities will stem from the recent Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act including one for improving at-grade rail crossings.

| Grant/Strategy   | Administrating org.                                 | Funding available & match requirements   | Applicable projects  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p><b><u>Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP)</u></b><br/>Next funding cycle will be announced in the fall of 2022</p> | <p>Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT)</p> | <p>Up to \$2,000,000, Illinois House Bill 270, which was passed by the State House and Senate in May 2021, removed the 20% local match requirement for biking and walking infrastructure on IDOT-maintained roads.<br/>Preliminary engineering costs is eligible for reimbursement, but invoices must be submitted after Federal Authorization of the funding.</p> | <p>All improvements along and within the IL 2 corridor.</p>              |
| <p><b><u>Local Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)</u></b></p>   | <p>IDOT</p>   | <p>State DOTs receive federal funding for projects on their State Transportation Improvement Program lists.</p>  | <p>Work with IDOT staff to determine if IL 2 projects would qualify.</p> |
| <p><b><u>Safe Routes to School (SRTS)</u></b></p>  | <p>IDOT</p>   | <p>Up to \$250,000. 20% local match required.</p>  | <p>All improvements within a 2 mile radius of the schools.</p>           |

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p><b><u>AARP Community Challenge Grant</u></b><br/> Next grant window is expected to open in February of 2022</p> | <p>AARP</p>  | <p>Grants can range from several hundred dollars to several thousand or tens of thousands of dollars. Applications are typically due in April and projects must be complete by November of the same year.</p>  | <p>Most improvements along local roads would qualify under the Transportation category. A demonstration project, such as a mural crosswalk or other quick-build projects, would likely be competitive. The Village may be interested in submitting other projects under the Public Places or Diversity and Inclusion categories.</p> |
| <p><b><u>Rapid Flashing Beacons Give Away</u></b></p>  | <p>America Walks</p>                                   | <p>In Spring of 2021, America Walks partnered with Carmanah Technologies to give away rapid flashing beacons to communities who applied and showed need. Although it is uncertain whether this will be an annual opportunity, it is worth checking for subsequent years.</p> | <p>Crosswalk improvements at Main St and 16<sup>th</sup> Ave or Main St and 12<sup>th</sup> St (IL 2) may be good candidates.</p>  |
| <p><b><u>America Walks Community Change Grant</u></b></p>  | <p>America Walks</p>                                   | <p>Grants of \$1,500 are awarded for projects that improve walking and movement at the community level. Awarded funding is to be spent within one year.</p>  | <p>Some lower-cost project recommendations, such as school crosswalk signage, would qualify.</p>   |
| <p><b><u>Urban and Community Forestry Grants</u></b></p>   | <p>Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)</p> | <p>The program is 50/50 cost share reimbursement. The applicant must have an approved tree care ordinance or equivalent or must use an application to ask for funding to create a tree care ordinance.</p>   | <p>Creation of a tree care ordinance and village forestry plan.</p>  |