



TOWN OF ARLINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING and
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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MEMORANDUM

To: Adam Chapdelaine, Town Manager
Cc: Jennifer Raitt, Director of Planning & Community Development
From: Daniel Amstutz, Senior Transportation Planner
Date: May 29, 2020
RE: Brooks Avenue Shared Street Pilot Results and Next Steps

A weeklong Shared Streets Pilot Project for Brooks Avenue in East Arlington started on Wednesday, May 20 and ended Wednesday, May 27. This project was led by the Department of Planning and Community Development in coordination with the Town Manager's Office, Department of Public Works and Arlington Police Department, and was assisted by Neighborways Design with funding support through the Lawrence and Lillian Solomon Foundation. The Pilot included Brooks Avenue from Lake Street to Varnum Street as well as the following adjacent streets between Brooks Avenue and Herbert Road: Chandler Street, Egerton Road, Milton Street, Melrose Street, and Varnum Street. The purpose of the Pilot was to provide more street space for people to social distance while doing active recreation or travel (walking, biking, jogging, skateboarding, etc.) as part of the Town's COVID-19 response strategies.

Overall the Pilot was successful and well-received by the residents within the pilot area and the wider East Arlington community. The post-pilot survey showed overwhelming support for the pilot, with 82% of respondents in support of keeping the Pilot project on Brooks Avenue longer than a week, and 84% in favor of expanding the Pilot to areas of the town beyond Brooks Avenue and East Arlington. A survey for residents to "nominate a street" to implement similar interventions has so far received 116 suggestions. More information about the results and evaluation of the Pilot are included in the attached case study.

Recommendations & Next Steps

Given the success of the shared streets pilot on Brooks Avenue, town staff propose developing a framework for identifying and implementing strategies for the overall goal of opening street space for social distancing. This framework will include parameters for implementing different kinds of strategies for opening street space in different areas of town. These strategies support the need for active recreation and travel as well as economic recovery efforts in the town's main commercial areas.

Strategies to open street space for social distancing for active travel modes can be split into two main categories: neighborhood-based strategies and commercial area strategies. These strategies can be further split into four sub-categories to consider as part of the COVID-19 response. They are explained below with a general outline of their applicability.

Neighborhood-Based Strategies

- **Localized Interventions:**

The Brooks Avenue Pilot is an example of this strategy. These are targeted towards local neighborhood streets with low traffic and generally low speeds and can be converted into shared streets. They may provide mobility for neighborhood residents to walk, bike, and social distance within their neighborhood without a need to travel to a congested park or trail where social distancing could be difficult. Traffic calming strategies may be needed to reduce automobile traffic to a point where pedestrians and cyclists are comfortable sharing the road with cars.

- **Connected Street Networks:**

Networks of local neighborhood streets can be connected through the shared streets model to create long corridors of streets where walking and biking is prioritized and comfortable. These corridors can connect to key commercial areas on Mass Ave, provide connections to the Minuteman Bikeway and other outdoor space, and provide an alternative to crowded trails like the Bikeway. Ideally they would be at least one or two miles long and would follow low traffic neighborhood streets. Similar to the localized interventions, traffic calming strategies may be needed to make sharing the road easier.

Commercial Area Strategies

- **Relieving Hotspots:**

Certain commercial areas along Mass Ave or Broadway may have more businesses reopening than other areas, and the likelihood of crowding is higher. Social distancing becomes more difficult when people are waiting for take-out orders, eating at outdoor tables, and pedestrians are passing through the area. Focusing on these “hotspots” of activity for sidewalk extensions and buffer space for social distancing may be necessary where open businesses are clustered and must use outdoor space for multiple purposes.

- **Streetscape Corridors:**

Broader spaces can be created to provide an uninterrupted space for outdoor dining and retail as well as additional social distancing space. This goes beyond the “hotspot” approach to designate a larger area where multiple businesses would benefit. Medford Street between Mass Ave and Chestnut Street is one possible location for such an approach.

With approval from the Board, DPCD staff will work with the Town Manager’s Office, the Department of Public Works, and Arlington Police Department to craft guidelines for both neighborhood-based and commercial area strategies and identify priority areas for implementation. Factors such as the nominations for shared streets by the public and areas with a high density of reopening businesses will be considered as part of the prioritization process.