

NORTH SCITUATE PLANNING AND STREETSCAPE STUDY

DRAFT REPORT





Submitted to:
Town of Scituate

Submitted by:
The Cecil Group, Inc.

December 30, 2003

North Scituate is a charming historic village center in the Town of Scituate. The rehabilitation of an old railroad right-of-way and the construction of a new commuter station at the center of the village will significantly alter the existing conditions in the near future. The



new station will be part of the new Greenbush line, an ongoing Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) project to restore commuter rail operations along the former Old Colony Rail corridor connecting Boston to the South Shore.

As a result of the construction of the new commuter station, sizable parking lots will be built in North Scituate to accommodate approximately 400 cars. These will have an impact on land use and peak-hour vehicular traffic in the area. An important part of the impact mitigation package negotiated by the Town and the MBTA will

include the design and construction of pedestrian connections to link the commuter rail station to locations for pedestrian amenities, neighborhood businesses and residential areas. Approximately \$1 million have been appropriated for this purpose. These improvements will, in turn, contribute to strengthen and support the existing businesses and the quality of living in the village.

A similar situation may be expected in Greenbush, another Scituate village located further south, in the vicinity of Old Oaken Bucket Pond. As a result of the construction of the new commuter line, Greenbush will become the site for the end station and approximately 1000 new parking spaces. Both North Scituate and Greenbush villages are the subjects of this planning study. This report is focused on North Scituate. An accompanying report has been produced for Greenbush.

The overall purpose of this planning study is to explore the potential for streetscape, open space and land use improvements that may result from the upcoming changes, and how to steer that potential towards achieving positive benefits for the community. Two public

workshops with a specific focus on North Scituate have been held as part of this process, which were attended by local residents, business owners, and members of the Town planning board. The first meeting was dedicated to review the existing conditions and establish goals and objectives for the future. The second one was focused on the review of streetscape design alternatives and preferred concept.



North Scituate is one of only three active commercial village centers that exist in Scituate today. It is strategically located at the intersection of the Country Way and Gannet Road, also designated as Henry Turner Bailey Road west of the intersection. The Country Way is an important local connector that runs north south linking North Scituate to Greenbush and Cohasset. Gannett Road connects to Hatherly Road to the east, which in turn leads to Scituate Harbor, the third commercial village in Town. Henry Turner Bailey Road connects to Justice Cushing Highway (Route 3A) to the west.

Traditionally, North Scituate was also linked to other South Shore communities by the Old Colony Railroad, which provided rail service from Boston to Cape Cod, Fall River, and Newport, Rhode Island. The Old Colony ceased operations many years ago, although its rail alignment remained in public ownership. Today, the MBTA is in the process of building a new commuter rail line that will connect the South Shore to Downtown Boston using the prior Old Colony rail alignment. North Scituate is one of the two stations planned for Scituate.

Planning and designing the new commuter rail line took many years and costly efforts. Community participation in the planning processes has been long and arduous. Now that construction of the new rail line is a given, the MBTA is conscious of the impacts that the new facilities will cause in the community, particularly in terms of traffic. As part of the mitigation package negotiated as compensa-



tion for the negative consequences that the new line will bring to the village, the Town will receive approximately \$1 million from the State to invest in North Scituate, in order to cover needed streetscape improvements that will support better pedestrian access and connections between the new rail station and the rest of the village.



Unlike the parallel study and report for Greenbush, which identifies potential locations for new transit-oriented development, this study does not anticipate significant new development in North Scituate. One reason is the lack of sewer infrastructure, which is not planned for the foreseeable future. Another reason is the existing density and variety of uses, which makes for a fairly diverse and sustainable mix of services, and the relative lack of developable areas in the vicinity of the new station.

The study focus area encompasses the land roughly located between the proposed rail station site and the

Musquashicut Brook wetlands system, mainly centered on Gannet Road and the area historically known as Gannett Corners. The stretch of the Country Way between the future commuter parking lots and Booth Hill Road is also included due to anticipated impacts on its traffic volume and the potential need for traffic and streetscape improvements at key intersections.



Land Use

The existing commercial land uses in North Scituate include diverse types of retail, professional offices, a bank, and a few restaurants and cafes. The existing stores provide a wide range of services, including a food store, gifts, tea shop, drugstore, dry cleaner, furniture store, hair salon, clothing outlet, gas station, and auto parts. Residential uses are mostly single-family homes surrounding the commercial center. The village also has its own Post Office, and a public parking area. In comparison to Greenbush, there are more stores in North Scituate and the types of services available are more varied and specialized.

Most of the existing structures are one-story high. The few taller buildings (two- and three-story high) are mainly commercial, including professional offices or accessory space on the upper floors.

The location of the small shopping center and parking lot on Gannett Road generate an important focal node for the village center. Parking is conveniently located in a way that provides service for both the shopping center and the businesses across the street. However, the adjacency of parking areas and vehicular right-of-ways with-



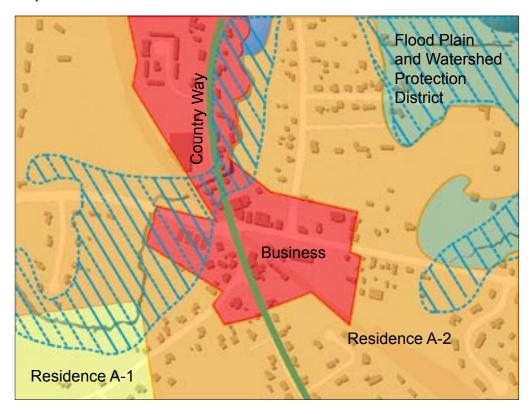
out physical boundaries contribute to create a perception of an extensive "sea of asphalt", where road, parking spaces and walkways are not clearly defined. This is one of the issues that need to be addressed by means of streetscape design and improvements.

Zoning

Most of the study focus area is zoned as a Business District, as shown in the enclosed Zoning map. Most of the surrounding areas are designated as residential (A-2 Residence District), and portions of the district located to the west of the Country Way are also part of a Flood Plain and Watershed Protection District. The following is a summarized description of the key characteristics of these districts.

Business (GB District)

This zoning district allows for a wide variety of retail, professional service and office uses, including mainly businesses that don't require large extensions of land for outdoor storage. In fact, this district requires all commercial activities to be conducted within an enclosed building except by a few exceptions, consistent with the relatively dense character and close proximity between buildings that characterizes traditional business centers. Residential uses are permitted in this district.



The general dimensional requirements for this district effectively call for 30-foot setbacks between any building and the exterior line of any street or way. Requirements also allow an exception for streets where the average distance of buildings on the same side of the street is less than 30 feet. It is important that the exception be the rule in places like North Scituate, where most of the traditional buildings have no front setbacks. Otherwise, setback require-



ments could lead to situations where new buildings do not maintain the historic street lines, introducing gaps between the buildings and the sidewalk that are often filled with parking spaces. This in turn could result in the loss of continuity and character of the commercial frontage, and the fragmentation of the village fabric.

The dimensional requirements also allow for a maximum of three stories or a 40-foot maximum building height to the top of the roof, which seem to be appropriate for a traditional village center such as North Scituate where most of the existing buildings are one- and two-story high.

A-2 Residence District

This district supports medium density, detached single-family housing, with a minimum site requirement of 15,000 sf. per dwelling. Certain commercial uses are allowed by Special Permit.

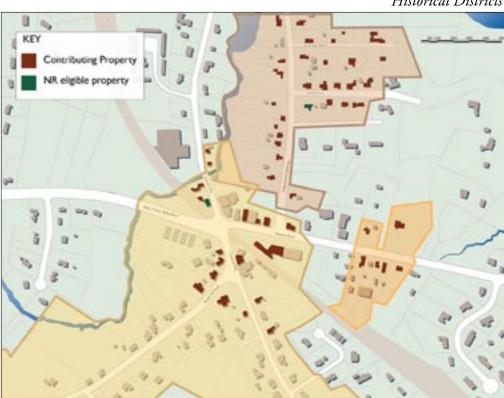
Flood Plain and Watershed Protection

This is an overlay district designed for the purposes of protecting the health and safety of the general public and the community water supply, through the preservation and maintenance of the ground water table.

Historic Resources

North Scituate is rich in historic buildings and resources., as seen in the map below. The Gannett Road area was named in honor of Matthew Gannett, who settled in the area in 1651. The area itself however, did not get developed until much later, when the Town started to grow in the mid-nineteenth century as a resort and suburb to Boston. This was made possible by the construction of the railroad line, which opened in 1871 and connected Scituate to Cohasset and Duxbury.

As part of the design and mitigation efforts for the new Greenbush line, three historic districts have been proposed in order to recognize and protect the historic significance of this area – the Gannett's Corner Historic District, the Gannett Road Historic District, and the Mordecai Lincoln Historic District. In addition, parts of the study area are also located on



Historical Districts

the Country Way Historic District. Several buildings in these districts are considered to be eligible for listing in the National Registry. There are also numerous buildings in the area considered as contributing properties in a listed or eligible National Registry district given their age and architectural character.

The most significant of the historic structures in North Scituate is the Seavern's Country Store, originally built as a general store in the late 19th century. The building is still standing and functioning as a gift store, and it has been the subject of recent renovations. The immediate surroundings of the building will be improved as a result of the construction of the new station.

Village Character

North Scituate is a village center with a strong commercial character and a lot of traditional charm. Part of its special character is due to the small scale of its buildings, mostly one- and two-story high, and the village density generated by their close proximity to each other. The stretch of Gannet Road east of the Country Way also has its own defined character, which is created in



part by the visual perception of the roadway and parking space as an enclosed shopping area. However, as mentioned before, there also is an image of too much asphalt and a need for more sidewalks and trees.

A condition that will significantly impact the character, feel and look of the village is the fact that the rail line will cut through the middle of the intersection of Gannett Road and the Country Way, as it used to do in the past. For many years, since the Old Colony Railroad ceased operations, there have been no trains crossing the intersection. When the commuter rail service opens again, the at-grade crossing will add an important element to the townscape that needs to be assimilated and integrated into the spirit of the village. It is critical that the intersection is well designed and equipped as proposed with guardrails and signal-operated barriers to protect vehicles and pedestrians from hazard.

The overall visual character and image of North Scituate could be strengthened through physical improvements and creative streetscape design. The village center could become a very special place if parking areas are reorganized and clearly defined, new sidewalks are built at certain locations, some of the buildings and storefronts are renovated, and trees are planted in a few locations. An important part of this planning process has been working with the community in defining the image and character of the new improvements, which are outline in the following sections of this report.

VILLAGE CHARACTER









Challenges and Opportunities

At a difference from Greenbush, it is unlikely that the village character of North Scituate will be significantly altered by the upcoming rail service in terms of potential new development, an important reason being because there is no sewer infrastructure that would support significant new development in the village. However, it is important that efforts be made to prevent and mitigate negative impacts in terms of traffic and pedestrian safety.



Impacts will be felt in terms of additional traffic, noise, and the construction of extensive parking lots for commuters. These have been widely reviewed and discussed as part of the design and review process for the new Greenbush line. It will be the State's responsibility to provide for traffic and safety improvements at key intersections, including traffic lights and pedestrian crossings where needed, as well as signal operated traffic barriers at the Gannett Road and Country Way intersection.

Traffic delays and level of service at intersections are expected to be generally acceptable after the new line is built, except for the intersection of Booth Hill Road and the Country Way, which is expected to be slightly improved due to a proposed realignment. Moderate traffic volume increases are to be expected at peak hours, mostly local, according to the project assessments. However, the railroad grade crossing will cause delays at the intersection. The MBTA plans to install new signal-operated barriers with preemption, which will automatically close down when a train is approaching.

At the same time, the new changes will also create opportunities to improve the quality of the pedestrian environment and the key pedestrian routes connecting parking, stores, and adjacent homes to the new station. The Town will receive funding from the State to

design and build streetscape improvements that will facilitate the connections between the station and the rest of the neighborhood, in addition to the traffic improvements that will come as a direct result of the construction of the commuter parking lots and the railroad crossing at-grade.



Some of the important issues and concerns identified by the community at the first workshop that need to be addressed as part of the planning process are the following:

- The increase in pedestrian hazards at key intersections that will likely take place as a result of increases in peak-hour traffic
- The increase in traffic speeding through main roads as a result of the construction of the new station and commuter parking areas
- The possibility that commuter parking will spill over the commercial area, reducing the amount of spaces available for local customers
- The negative land use and visual impacts of large commuter parking lots
- The displacement of existing recreational facilities and historical structures (tennis courts, playground, historic bell, road marker, etc.)
- The potential loss of charm if improvements are not done to the highest level of quality



- There is a need for better parking management and enforcement
- Pedestrian safety issues along Gannett Road (the parking areas merge with traffic lanes and pedestrian crosswalks, there is a lack of sidewalks in several locations)
- There is a lack of trees and landscaped public open space
- Overhead utilities and wires detract from overall image

On the other hand, there are important qualities that are valued by owners, residents and users of the village, and need to be protected or represent opportunities for the future:

- Unique village character and charm, represented by the scale and quality of its buildings, and the space and activities they generate
- Good mix of businesses and services, including a few restaurants and cafes, which sustain a fair level of economic and pedestrian activity
- An attractive brook and natural wetlands that contribute significantly to the quality of living in the surrounding residential areas
- An important node along bicycle and pedestrian routes crossing the neighborhood
- The presence of elements of historic value that need to be protected and enhanced
- Opportunities for the creation of small pocket parks and pedestrian sitting areas that could make the area really attractive and friendly



One important goal of this study has been to work with the community to articulate a coherent vision for the future of North Scituate in terms of its streetscape character and quality of living. The first workshop held as part of the planning process was dedicated to review opportunities and constraints, and identifying overall goals and objectives for the area that will help achieve the community's vision. The following is a summary of the key goals and objectives identified at the meeting:

- Promote pedestrian safety
- Mitigate railroad and traffic impacts on pedestrians
- Retain and enhance special village character
- Improve streetscape quality, design and image
- Protect and enhance historic resources
- Manage and control parking
- Create places for people, kids, and bikes
- Improve buildings and storefronts
- Improve the quality and consistency of signage
- Increase maintenance efforts
- Encourage high quality construction

The following are additional goals and objectives that help convey the community's vision for the future of North Scituate:



- To mitigate the impacts of the construction of the new station, particularly impacts caused by traffic and noise
- To provide good quality buffers between the new railroad facilities and the surrounding areas
- To protect and enhance the historic character of the village by implementing historic district regulations
- To retain charming coastal village character
- To create a clean, well-lit and attractive place
- To discourage cut through-traffic by implementing traffic calming measures

- To restrict traffic from residential streets at peak commuter hours (i.e. Mordecai Lincoln Road)
- To consider the provision of speed bumps at critical locations
- To improve the appearance of existing private parking lots and buildings
- To set and enforce parking time limits that will discourage commuters from parking on the street
- To improve and enhance the pedestrian infrastructure
- To build new sidewalks in the commercial area, particularly at locations where they are missing
- To be able to walk to the new commuter station from multiple locations



- To extend cafes into the sidewalks
- To create more places for kids and recreation
- To highlight historic elements and provide places to gather
- To provide good and convenient connections for bicyclists
- To consider future provision of sewer service
- To provide street and parking lot lighting that does not create light "pollution"
- To review and update signage guidelines and regulations
- To coordinate temporary signs that may be put up during construction
- To encourage the use of historic period-style design elements (i.e. fences, lighting, benches, etc.)
- To provide more trees and better landscaping to unify the area consider cherry blossoms
- To consider provision of short light fixtures (bollards) at certain pedestrian locations
- To salvage and relocate the existing road marker and old station canopy within the area
- To encourage the use of good quality and durable materials, such as granite and cobblestones, instead of cement barriers
- To develop design guidelines for new buildings and renovation improvements
- To encourage and support building façade and storefront renovations
- To promote support of the existing businesses

The proposed townscape concept, shown in the enclosed plan diagram, is based on the provision of streetscape improvements along Gannett Road and the Country Way. Nature trails and soft meandering pathways could also extend further beyond hard paved areas to allow for passive recreation and the enjoyment of the Bound Brook and its natural surroundings.

The following planning and design elements are proposed as part of the village townscape concept:

- Streetscape improvements along Gannett Road and the Country Way
- Village overlay zoning district and design guidelines
- Renovation and upgrading of old buildings and storefronts
- Pocket parks and public outdoor sitting areas
- New pedestrian connections and nature trails



The following is a summary of planning and design recommendations that constitute the proposed strategy for preservation and enhancement of the village qualities found in North Scituate.

Streetscape Improvements

The proposed improvements are aimed at creating an inviting, friendly and attractive walking environment within the village commercial center. Providing for the continuity of sidewalks and crosswalks along the main pedestrian routes throughout the village will contribute to strengthen its image and perception as an interesting and attractive place to visit.

Before



After

- Provide new sidewalks along Gannett Road where these are missing
- Provide a landscaped island separating the parking along Gannet Road from the road itself
- Enhance and widen sidewalks at the intersection of the Country Way and Booth Hill Road
- Provide period-style pedestrian lighting, sidewalk extensions at corners, and trees
- Provide pedestrian activated signals at key roadway intersections
- Screen parking lots by using berms, clusters of trees, and shrubs
- Create public outdoor sitting areas and pocket parks
- Relocate overhead utilities underground
- Relocate the existing road marker and old station canopy within public outdoor sitting areas

The proposed improvements are illustrated in the enclosed images representing "before and after" views at key locations within the village. It is important that the quality of the proposed design elements and materials be consistent with the historic character and charm that identify the district, and are so highly valued by the community.

Streetscape Design Standards

The following are some recommendations on overall design standards for the proposed improvements. These standards should be expanded and refined as part of the more detailed planning and design studies that will be carried out as part of future implementation.

Before





After

- New sidewalks should be at least 8-foot wide, planted with trees at an average distance of 40 feet. A 3- to 4-foot wide brick band design pattern along the curb is encouraged, in order to enhance the aesthetic appearance of the sidewalk. The brick ban could also be used to mark the location of streetlights, signs, benches, trash receptacle, and other street furniture.
- Sidewalk extensions should be provided at the corner of intersections, in order to clearly demarcate points of access to pedestrian crosswalks and shortening crossing distances. A particular location where these should be provided is in front of Jamie's restaurant.
- Traditional period-style streetlights are recommended along Gannett Road, and the Country Way between the new parking lots and the intersection with Booth Hill Road, in order to complement and enhance the historic character of the village.
- Traffic lights with pedestrian-activated signals should be considered for the intersections of Henry Turner Bailey Road/Gannett Road and the Country Way, and the Country Way and Booth Hill Road.
- A continuous island located in front of the parking area on Gannett Road should be provided to separate parking from the road itself. It should include a granite curb, and landscaped with grass, plantings, fencing and trees.
- The intersection of the Country Way and Booth Hill Road needs some special consideration. Members of the community attending the workshops pointed out the need for wider sidewalks and safe pedestrian crossings, ideally equipped with a traffic signal. They also indicated that the current configuration encourages speeding and unrestricted right-turns. A detailed study of alternatives to solve these problems, including a possible reconfiguration of the intersection layout in the form of a T-shaped intersection, is recommended.

Before



After



MBTA station and parking areas

The following are recommendations for the design and construction of streetscape improvements included as part of the new station and parking lots:



- Old platform roof The MBTA plans for the new station call for the retention of the old platform roof now attached to the existing shops on Gannett Road, which is a positive decision in terms of protecting the historic design character of North Scituate. However, the future use and purpose of the canopy at its current location is not clear. Alternatives for its reuse and relocation within the new station improvement area, including its potential incorporation into the design of the new platform should be studied and evaluated jointly by the Town and the MBTA.
- Station parking and pedestrian connections It is important that a good pedestrian crossing is provided to connect the parking area on Henry Turner Bailey road to the rest of the station. This is a very important connection that will be used by dozens of people every day, and should be clearly marked and have a special character (perhaps the old station canopy could be relocated along this pedestrian path and used as a covered sitting area).
- Plantings around station areas The MBTA plans show the provision of general circulation trees (red and pin oaks) between parking aisles inside the parking lot on Henry Turner Bailey. This is a positive landscaping decision that will contribute to enhance the image, feeling and perception of the parking area, and should be extended to the other proposed parking lots. It is important that the new trees provided are not so young that they could be vulnerable to vandalism or damage from people and vehicles moving around. Ideally, the trees located in active areas and areas of high visibility should be at least 3 to 3 ½" caliper (whenever possible within budget limits).
- Platform benches and furniture Ideally, the new benches, trash receptacles, bicycle racks, and other site furniture that will be provided as part of the station equipment should be of durable quality and a design compatible with the style and character of the surroundings, and the design of the new park proposed along Henry Turner Bailey Road.
- Bell pedestal It is important that the historic bell pedestal to be constructed as part of the new park improvements has a historic feel to it. One way of reflecting this historic character could be by using stone materials for the pedestal, or maybe even metal. It may also be useful to explore alternative designs for a taller pedestal. It would be interesting to assess the visual impact of a pedestal that locates the bell at a higher level (up to 5 feet) making it more visible from the road, and contributing to anchor the entire design of



the park. There is a historic metal plaque embedded in the existing concrete pedestal that should be recovered and relocated to the new pedestal together with the bell.

Safety barriers – Pedestrian safety along Gannett Road, and in particular at
the intersection of the Country Way and the rail line, is critical for the success of the commercial section of the village. The proposed automated safety
barriers for pedestrians and vehicles when trains are approaching the new
station represent a significant expenditure within the construction budget,
but it is a critical improvement that needs to be provided in order to ensure
everyone's safety.

Overlay Zoning District

The creation of a North Scituate Village Overlay District is recommended in order to fine-tune the current Business District zoning requirements to more accurately reflect and protect the special village character of North Scituate. The purpose of this district would



be to set controls to potential new development that could happen in the future in terms of scale, location and character. Another important purpose would be to protect the quality of design by means of design and signage guidelines that could be highly specific for this area. To this effect, zoning parameters should be aimed at:

- Control potential infill development in terms of height and scale
- Provide for appropriate mixed use development, with emphasis on quality and specialty uses that could include low-rise multifamily housing
- Take advantage of short walking distances to promote Transit Oriented Development in the vicinity of the new rail station
- Encourage use of transit and shared parking by setting low parking ratios
- Reduce front setbacks requirements in order to support storefront continuity along the sidewalk
- Include design guidelines to support a type of architecture consistent with the existing village character and the coastal character of the Town
- Establish signage guidelines and controls to ensure consistency of design and quality

Building Renovation and Upgrading

The character of the village is in many ways defined by the character and design of its buildings. However, some of the buildings are in disrepair or have been altered in ways that detract from their original architectural character and the success of the village as a whole.

Appropriate new architecture and high quality renovations can contribute to consolidate and enhance the ambiance of the village. Positive change should happen gradually, with the willing participation of property owners and businesses. The Town can assist by encouraging and supporting building owners in their efforts, and by establishing a building improvement program that could include the following initiatives:



- Create special design guidelines to advise owners and builders
- Create a special grant or loan fund to support façade improvements
- Create site planning standards that reinforce the goals for the area



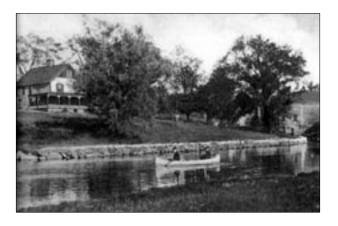


The new streetscape improvements should include small pocket parks and public outdoor sitting areas throughout the village. This should be especially designed based on those particular locations that provide an opportunity because of their surroundings and availability. They could be very simple, just a bench and a tree, but they will be useful and attractive if they are at the right location. The design of a special park at the intersection of Gannett Road and the Country Way that will create a focal point and a landscape landmark where the existing historic bell will be relocated is currently underway. However, opportunities for more pocket parks and public sitting areas exist at the following locations:

 Within the public parking area on Gannett Road and in the vicinity of the adjacent stores, as allowed by the reconfiguration and design of the improved parking lot.

- In the vicinity of the Post Office
- In the vicinity of the new commuter parking lots and the historic Seavern's store
- In the vicinity of the Cosmos restaurant, depending on the reconfiguration of parking and the location of new sidewalks

There also are opportunities to extend pedestrian access from the main roads and sidewalks to the adjacent natural and open space areas. The potential to create pedestrian connections and nature trails linking the new rail station and the village commercial areas to Mill Pond, the Bound Brook, Musquashicut Brook, and the neighboring Town forests need to be studied and considered. Such connections and trails would need to be implemented in ways that would not disrupt the privacy of the neighboring residential areas and that are consistent with the highest environmental standards.



Bicycle access to the village and its natural surroundings also deserves to be considered. Community members made a point at the workshops to request the provision of dedicated bicycle lanes along the main roads in the village, namely Gannett Road and the Country Way. The width of the public right-of-way at these locations may not allow for enough clearance to safely provide bicycle lanes. However, future studies and detailed design of the roadway sections along the newly improved areas should include a detailed analysis and assessment of the potential to create bicycle lanes, trails and other connections.

Other Recommendations

The following strategies also need to be studied and implemented as part of improvement initiatives:

- Traffic calming measures along the main roads approaching the village center
- Parking management strategies to ensure the availability of parking for customers
- Implement historic district regulations to protect the historic character of the village
- Strengthen business cooperation into the improvement and maintenance of public spaces

North Scituate has the basic ingredients it needs to project its role as a successful village center well into the future. The impact of changes resulting from the rehabilitation of the commuter rail line that will connect Scituate to Boston and other towns along the South Shore can be mitigated to a great extent by implementing necessary traffic and pedestrian improvements. Pedestrian safety and traffic calming measures are two of the key concerns of the community that need to be addressed as part of mitigation measures. The opportunity exists to create a unique sense of place in the village by complementing these needed improvements with the enhancement of the streetscape qualities, and the creation of new pedestrian amenities.

Some of the future steps that need to be undertaken by the Town are the following:

- Coordinate with the State and the MBTA all the necessary steps for project funding and approval
- Initiate detailed streetscape design studies leading into schematic design, design development, and construction documents
- Implement historic district regulations and review the existing zoning in order to protect and enhance the special qualities of the village
- Select a contractor or group of contractors based on an open bidding process
- Secure the participation of internal Town management in overseeing the design and construction of new traffic and streetscape improvements
- Promote renovations and upgrading through the establishment of a building improvement program and the support of business associations