

I2 Walk Audit at Kessler Elementary School
Helena, Montana
Conducted: 03 January 2023, 11:00am-12:30pm
Published: 11 January 2023

Attendees: Greg Wirth (NMTAC member), Abigail McClane (Kessler Parents Council and Parent), Ron Bartsch (Sussex Construction), Bekka Cantrell (Sussex Construction), Derek Davis (Sussex Construction), John Andrew (Helena Citizen’s Council Representative), Todd Verrill (Helena Schools), Craig Puchat (Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks), Patrick Marron (Neighbor, St Andrews parent), Cory Chenoweth (Neighbor, Kessler parent), Riley Thatcher (Principal at Kessler), Sarah Perry (Save Helena Westside, Neighbor, Kessler parent), Amy Geiger (St. Peter’s Health Injury Prevention), Charles Alvarez (Ability MT), Anna Jayne Pentecost (Neighbor, Kessler parent), Sarah Sandau (Lewis and Clark Public Health and walk audit Facilitator), Patricia Bik (Helena Citizen’s Council), Mark Young (City of Helena), Kevin Rechkoff (NMTAC member)

Background: On the November Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council (NMTAC) meeting, Save Helena Westside group requested a walk audit and a recommendation from NMTAC on the routes to Kessler Elementary. On the December NMTAC meeting, the request was made again to NMTAC, and NMTAC agreed to host a walk audit around Kessler Elementary. NMTAC requested that Lewis and Clark Public Health assist in coordinating an Inclusive Interdisciplinary Walk Audit (I2 Walk Audit) at and around Kessler Elementary. Concerns were regarding accessibility and safety.

In this area of town, there are numerous houses, schools (Kessler Elementary, St. Andrew, Pick up for C.R. Anderson), access to trails, and connectivity to downtown. The route considered was all originally located in the County but is now mostly public right-of-way in the City limits.

Route: The group started at the Kessler parking lot on the east side of the building at 11:00am. They walked south on Silverette Street to Hauser Boulevard (1.5 blocks), then west on Hauser to Granite Avenue (1 block), and finally North on Granite to Knight Street (2 blocks). (See Figure 1 below for map of the route)

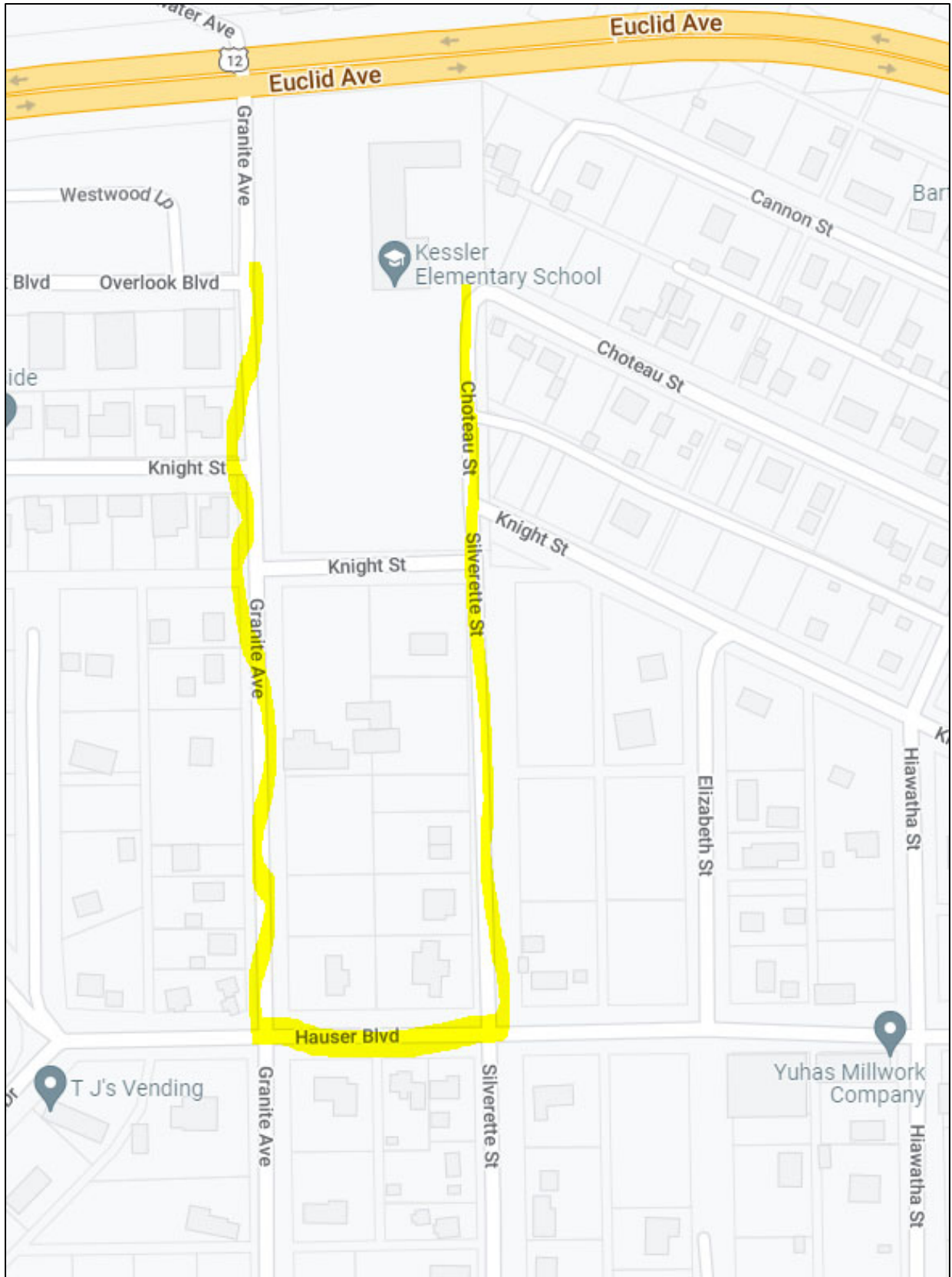


Figure 1

Observations, questions, and ideas from the I2 Walk Audit are as follows:

Stop #1: Intersection of Choteau Street and Knight Street. At the first stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 2.5. Comments on the first leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: Paved street, wide road, stop sign, setback of fence to the school, good shoulder, parking on one side, bike racks.

Needs Improvement: No sidewalks, boulevards, crosswalks, or lighting make it difficult and unsafe to walk. No speed limit signs or school zone signage visible. No shade or trees. Drop off gets scary with parents trying to cut the line and zip around.

Ideas: Add speed limit signage, more school signage, sidewalks, lighting, possibly speedbumps.

Stop #2: Intersection of Silverette Street and Hauser Blvd. At the second stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 2. Comments on the second leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: Stop signs, access to trails, visibility, speed signage, visible driveways, pretty views, close to St. Andrews.

Needs Improvement: Busy and quick moving street. No sidewalks, boulevard, crosswalks, or lighting. Since it is not paved, it turns into an icy/mucky mess.

Ideas: Add sidewalks, bike lanes, traffic calming, paving of the street, and street lighting.

Stop #3: Intersection of Hauser Blvd and Granite Ave. At the third stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 2. Comments on the third leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: Stop sign for Hauser traffic, speed limit signage, visibility, good views, grassy areas, less ice/better surface, setback in the driveways, bus stop for multimodal transportation, wide street.

Needs Improvement: No sidewalks, crosswalks, or lighting. No benches or areas of respite. High speedy going down Granite Ave with no traffic control. No safe route to the bus stop nor safe area to wait. House encroachments on City roads. Heavy traffic volume.

Ideas: Officers can enforce speed limit more often. Perform a traffic study focused on traffic calming/slowing. Add sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting, speed limit feedback signage.

Stop #4: Intersection of Granite Ave and Knight Street, east of Granite. At the fourth stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 2.5. Comments on the fourth leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: ADA ramps, school signage, sidewalks, crosswalk, paved road, trees, open,

Needs Improvement: Connection of sidewalks, more bulb outs, high-speed going down Granite Ave,

Ideas: Officers can enforce speed limit more regularly. Traffic calming/slowing study (maybe speedbumps). Roundabout potentially or more bulb outs.

Stop #5: Intersection of Granite Ave and Knight Street, west of Granite. At the fifth stop the team did not assess a score or. Comments on the fifth leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: ADA ramps, sidewalks, boulevards, crosswalk, paved road

Needs Improvement: Boulevard vegetation block view from entering Granite. Drivers must pull into crosswalk to see oncoming traffic on Granite.

Ideas: Trim existing deciduous trees and remove existing evergreen trees in boulevard for better visibility.

Summary suggestions:

1. Continuous, connecting sidewalks
2. Increase school and speed limit signage
3. Cutting down the evergreen trees in the boulevard on Granite Avenue
4. Add lighting on the streets
5. Paving Silverette Street
6. Speed study for Granite Avenue
7. Police monitoring/enforcing the speed limit more often

Next Steps:

This summary account will be provided to all participants in addition to NMTAC. This will be discussed at the next NMTAC meeting on Tuesday, February 8th at 5:15pm via zoom. NMTAC will then decide on whether to make a recommendation to the City of Helena Commission.

Community members can always make requests to the City on their own through the My Helena App. Or, they can fill out a “Traffic Calming Application Form.” They can email Mark Young, City Transportation Engineer at myoung@helenamt.gov if they have questions on those avenues.

Appendix A

Emailed Feedback / Public comments on the Kessler I2 Walk Audit

From: John Andrew <j53andrew@gmail.com>

Date: January 9, 2023 at 10:16:54 AM MST

To: Sarah Sandau <[SSANDAU@lccountymt.gov](mailto:ssandau@lccountymt.gov)>, Wilbur Rehmann <wilbur@wt.net>, Greg Wirth <GregWirth@hotmail.com>

Cc: Diana Hammer <diana.hammer.hcc@gmail.com>, patriciabikhcc@gmail.com, jrandrew211@gmail.com

Subject: Re: Walk Audit Report

Hi Sarah,

I thought your summation of the walk audit was straight forward and succinct so I don't have much to add. I went back Sunday afternoon to check out the Kessler Parking lot without vehicles and people although I'm sure that is not the main focus of the walk audit. Although NMTAC probably would like to recommend connectivity all the way around Kessler School I found myself more concerned about the approach from Choteau and Silverette Streets to the school parking lot which has the most traffic along with buses and no sidewalks entering into the main landing point for students. With the lack of funding I would like to recommend that NMTAC particularly highlight those streets into Kessler School. Thanks for all considerations to this matter.

Best,

John E. Andrew

HCC - District 1

From: Ashley Bryson <ashleya816@hotmail.com>

Date: January 10, 2023 at 12:51:51 PM MST

To: wilbur@wt.net

Subject: Walkability audit

Dear NMTAC and support staff,

I just wanted to say thank you for the walkability audit recently completed around Kessler school. I live in the area and have two children that attend Kessler school. They both walk to school every day along with a group of children from our neighborhood. Unfortunately, we have many stories about “near misses” and unsafe conditions they have experienced on their way to and from school. The neighborhood around the school has been expanding with many new multi-family homes over the last couple years, bringing with it more traffic and more potentially dangerous conditions for the many children who walk and bike to school daily. There are plans for quite a bit of continued growth. I love this neighborhood, and I want to see it continue to be a great place to raise children, recreate, walk our pets, and enjoy the nearby trail access. I would greatly appreciate any formal recommendations you may be able to make to improve the safety of this neighborhood as it currently stands and as it continues to expand.

Thank you,
Ashley Bryson
Resident at 2549 Knight Street

From: judy ludwig <ludwigjudy@gmail.com>

Date: January 9, 2023 at 3:59:00 PM MST

To: wilbur@wt.net

Subject: NMTAC Walk Audit

Chairman Wilbur Raymann

Thanks to you and all of your crew for the walk audit around Kessler Elementary. I appreciate all the work that went into it, especially during the cold.

I hope you encourage improvements for walkability, especially through sidewalks, in this area.

As you probably are aware, the times just before and after school is in session create quite a hazard for the little ones walking to and from Kessler with people dropping off and picking up students. The city is doing a much better job of plowing and sanding on Granite during the winter, but there are still many hazardous conditions. I have noticed that when the snow has been heavy kids are forced to walk more in the middle of the road, with two way traffic trying to dodge them and other cars. Shoulders remain icy and uneven, kids goof around with each other, and slips on the road scoria happen. Sidewalks on Granite and other nearby neighborhood arteries would help insure safer passage for kids and all pedestrians.

Thanks again for all of your efforts, they are appreciated.

Judy Ludwig

Mark Young

From: hanna m <hthies@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 9:50 AM
To: Mark Young; wilbur@wt.net
Subject: Helena Westside development.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear NMTAC,

First, I wanted to thank you for taking the time to perform a walking assessment around Kessler school. We really appreciate you taking your time to see our concerns. Our family is a very active family walking, running, and riding bikes all over the west side of Helena and appreciate all you have done to help with this in our city.

I hope that after the walking assessment you can see our concerns with the lack of safe non motorized space there currently is on our main roadways. With the current proposed development and this mass increase in cars this could become very unsafe. Right now there is not enough room for two vehicles to pass and have someone walking on the road on Granite St. Every morning I have to stop in the dark as another car is coming down the hill so a kindergartner can safely walk on the street to school.

Also the Granite St intersection onto Euclid is already unsafe in the mornings and after school but even worse when trying to cross Euclid to reach the centennial trail by foot or bike during 8am or 5pm traffic. Trying to cross five lanes of traffic with children is terrifying and will only become more dangerous with increase in traffic.

Our family would like to safely continue our active lifestyles. This is why we chose to live on the west side. We are not against the development but just want to make sure the development is completed safely and correctly for the neighborhood. I appreciate all the time you have taken to look over all the information.

Thank you
Hanna Marron
2590 Knight St.

Sent from my iPhone

Mark Young

From: Colleen <soultree@bresnan.net>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 2:18 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: NMTAC

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

We have been residents at 913 Granite for the past 33 years and appreciate NMTAC doing a walkability audit of our neighborhood. Over the past few years we have contacted the city numerous times due to our concerns with speeding traffic. It seems to fall on deaf ears.

We are asking that the results of the audit and any recommendations that NMTAC has shared with the City Commission. The proposed west side Woods subdivision will have a very negative impact on the safety of our neighborhood unless identified issues from the audit are addressed prior to approval of the subdivision.

Our children attended Kessler school in the 90s and our grandchildren are now there, and there has been no improvement in the walk ability to and from school in all these years, in fact now with all the increased traffic it is even more of a danger.

Thank you for what you do to improve non motorized transportation in Helena.

Dan and Colleen Nichols

Sent from my iPad

Mark Young

From: Eve Byron <evebyron@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 2:39 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: Helena Westside walkability

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good afternoon.

Thank you for taking the time to tour our little neighborhood to discuss its "walkability."

I live on the corner of Hauser and Granite, and walk the neighborhood often. A couple items stand out in my mind regarding the safety of pedestrians and bikers:

1. The Granite and Hauser intersection would best be served by a roundabout. Traffic flies up and down Granite, but a four-way stop sign at the intersection would make it difficult for drivers in the winter. I envision those traveling downhill wouldn't be able to stop and those traveling uphill might not be able to get started when icy. A roundabout would keep traffic moving. The school would need to move the bus stop from Granite to Hauser, but that's not too difficult. The bus parks on Hauser most mornings when it's arriving at the stops early.
2. If a light is installed at the intersection, I request that it be focused downward in order to maintain the Dark Skies ambiance.
3. Sidewalks, sidewalks, sidewalks, but only on one side of the road please. This is especially important all along Hauser to the intersection with Henderson. The traffic in the morning is dreadful, and students are having to walk in the streets not just to Kessler but also to CR Anderson and St. Andrews. It's particularly dangerous during the winter, when it's dark in the morning.
4. I have witnessed numerous accidents at Hauser and Joselyn. A stop sign might work well there.
5. It is impossible to cross Highway 12 at certain hours. An overpass would be a great safety investment.
6. While it was outside of your walking tour, Park Avenue has a blind hill, where I always walk on one side of the road so traffic behind me knows I'm there, then switch to the opposite side of the road when I get close to the top of the hill so I can avoid any oncoming traffic. I don't have a solution for this mess, other than to lower the top of the hill to increase the sight-distance.

Thank you again for your interest in our part of the community. If you have any questions, please contact me at 406/422-6601.

Eve Byron

Mark Young

From: Melanie Symons <msymons321@msn.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 3:30 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Cc: jeandrew.hcc@gmail.com <jeandrew.hcc@gmail.com>
Subject: NMTAC Kessler School Walkability Audit

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good afternoon Wilbur and Mark

I have been following NMTAC's Kessler School Walkability Audit and have reviewed the final report. Please accept my sincere thanks for conducting this audit in such a timely manner and for taking into consideration the neighborhood's immediate concerns and hopefully the impact of Westside Woods on the area.

I am writing to encourage NMTAC to share the Kessler school audit and related concerns and recommendations to the Helena City Commission. I understand and agree with most of John E Andrew's thoughts regarding the Choteau and Silverette area. However, the traffic on the westside of the school is frankly unmanageable at the start and end of the school day. Sidewalks on at least one side of Granite extending from Knight to Hauser or beyond would improve the safety of school children and our neighborhood.

I am aware of the financial constraints the city faces and appreciate Commissioner Logan's recent editorial regarding the many and varied needs of our community. I am also aware that City's policy is to not annex land until there is sufficient infrastructure to support it. I encourage NMTAC to remind the city that a sound infrastructure, including paved streets and sidewalks should be a condition of approval for the proposed Westside Woods subdivision.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to the safety of Helena's citizens.

Melanie Symons

Msymons321@msn.com

(406) 431-0720

Mark Young

From: Peter Larsen <pete.h.larsen@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 3:47 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: Non-motorized travel advisory council and Westside Woods development

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Commissioner Rehmann and Mr. Young-

Thank you for taking the time to perform a walk audit around Kessler School. I am writing to encourage you to make a formal recommendation for *significant* traffic safety improvements around Kessler and in the adjoining neighborhoods. We have one daughter who attends school there now and another who will be attending Kessler in the not-too-distant future. My family lives near the intersection of Woodward and Granite. In short, my concerns, which are shared by a significant number of families, include the:

1. Lack of sidewalks running all the way up Granite to Woodward as well as some of the other lateral (East-West) streets
2. Insufficient or non-existent street-lighting along Granite
3. High rate of speed that people drive up and down Granite
4. Misleading traffic estimates collected near the school

As you probably saw, there are no sidewalks that extend all the way up Granite to Woodward and there are only a few streetlights. My daughter used to walk to school with her classmates, but we started to drive her because it is extremely dangerous for them to walk on Granite during the months of the year when the sun comes up late/goes down early. We are also concerned about speeding, especially for traffic coming down the hill. I have personally witnessed some kids that had to jump down into the ditch along Granite when a downhill driver narrowly missed hitting them.

Finally, I was very concerned when I read about the traffic estimates that were collected recently because I believe that these estimates are misleading. I believe the numbers that have been collected significantly under-counted the actual traffic already occurring. I read that one measurement of vehicle traffic was taken during a time of road construction on or near Granite and another measurement was taken when school was not even in session. I can tell you that there is significant congestion on Granite starting at about 7:45am and then again at about 2:45pm. In fact, you cannot find a spot to park within a few blocks if you arrive to the school after about 3pm. If it would be helpful, I would be happy to take a picture and share it with you.

Thank you for all that you are doing to ensure that our community is safe and accessible to other forms of transportation (e.g., walking, biking).

Kind regards,

Peter Larsen

Mark Young

From: Shawn Whyte <ShawnWhyte@outlook.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 3:54 PM
To: Mark Young; wilbur@wt.net
Subject: NMTAC meeting - Kessler walk audit

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello to both of you,

I am a longtime Helena west side resident who raised 3 children through Kessler, CRA, and CHS. I would like to thank all the people who participated in the walking assessment around Kessler school. I support all the recommendations that were listed in the report and would like to put emphasis on sidewalks and traffic measures that could help kids cross Hauser as the walk from the neighborhoods south of Hauser to get to Kessler on the north side of Hauser. I hope the City of Helena, the Helena School District, and Sussex Construction are all in alignment and support of protecting the youngest members of our community as the go to and from school every day.

In addition to the suggestions gathered, I would like to request that the NMTAC review the traffic study conducted and attached to the Sussex subdivision proposal. In that subdivision request, there is not access from the new neighborhood directly to highway 12. The property owned by Sussex does have frontage along highway 12, but it will be costly to do the dirt work, grading, and construction of an access point. I do not think the cost of the work should be a factor in determining what the appropriate course of action should be. Please review all the data in the subdivision request and join the west side neighbors in emphasizing the need to pull that traffic off Granite and away from the school by allowing drivers to exit the neighborhood directly to highway 12 using a new feeder road.

Like many others, I am not against the new subdivision, but I do request that the developer be held to a standard that protects children and non-motorized use of our streets.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Shawn Whyte

Mark Young

From: Janice Long <janicelong2525@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 4:03 PM
To: Mark Young; wilbur@wt.net
Subject: Kessler School

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good afternoon Wilbur & Mark:

I would like to thank you for the walk audit for Kessler School- this is such a critical thing to address in keeping our children safe.

I would like to make a formal recommendation request for your help to make the 12 recommendations for improvement around the Kessler School area!!

Thank you so very much for your help in keeping our children safe!!

Sincerely

Janice Long

Mark Young

From: judy ludwig <ludwigjudy@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 4:16 PM
To: Mark Young
Subject: NMTAC Walk Audit Kessler Elementary

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Mark Young
City Transportation Engineer

Dear Mr. Young:

I understand that the NMTAC is presenting information about the walkability audit near Kessler Elementary School.

The results seem pretty dismal for walkability in the neighborhood, which I feel impacts most directly the young children attending that school and their ability to walk safely to and from Kessler.

I am hoping to see curbed sidewalks, improved visibility at corners, some additional controls at Granite and Euclid, and maybe some speed signs indicating what speed your car is traveling (not opposed to speed bumps either).

The City has really improved their snowplowing and graveling on Granite over the last several years, but kids trudging up and down that street still have to migrate towards the middle of the road during heavier snowstorms, which is a real hazard for the little guys.

Thanks for helping out with safety and walkability of the streets for not only the kids, but for the large number of recreational walkers and hikers using the streets.

Judy Ludwig

Mark Young

From: David Ulrich <ulrich406@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 4:27 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: Kessler Area Walk Audit

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello,

I recently read the Walk Audit report that was done for the Kessler School area. I greatly appreciate the time and focus that has been brought up for the School, Neighborhood and people using the area for walking and getting around.

I know that a lot of areas in Helena have issues and am glad that this area is becoming part of the focus to hopefully make updates/changes as needed. It's also great to see that this is happening while the Westside Woods subdivision proposals are happening because that area will be bringing twice as much or more traffic to this area and become more hazardous to the community walking around the school and neighborhood.

Any input you have in improving the safety for the area is greatly appreciated, and hopefully the input will be heard in conjunction with the Westside Woods Subdivision Application process too.

Thank you again for the effort in keeping the safety of kids, school district employees, parents and families addressed through any processes that affect the area.

David Ulrich
2530 Knight St
Helena, MT 59601

Mark Young

From: Chelsea Culpon <chelsearandf@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 4:44 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Cc: joicefranzen@yahoo.com; lowell.chandler@gmail.com; kevin.rechkoff@gmail.com; szerwo@gmail.com; Sarah Sandau; andy.shirtliff@gmail.com; GregWirth@hotmail.com; joelebert54@gmail.com; lucasalanwallace@gmail.com
Subject: Walk audit support
Attachments: I2 Walk Audit at Kessler Elementary 1.3.23.pdf

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Happy 2023 Chairman Rehmann and Engineer Young and members of NMTAC,

Please see the attached and know that we fully support all of the recommendations from recent walk audit conducted by NMTAC.

Professionally I have worked with healthy communities and walkability in Montana for 15 years. Several communities across MT have made life changing improvements and reaped the benefits.

Sincerely,

Chelsea & Chris Culpon
2670 Hauser Blvd.

Parents of 4 kids who love to walk and ride around town and have utilized Kessler as a playground many times

Sent from my iPhone

Mark Young

From: THERESA MALESKI <Maleski4@aol.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 5:59 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net
Cc: Mark Young
Subject: Walk Audit/ Westside

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

NMTAC Members,

We were very pleased to hear about the Walking Audit around Kessler School this past week. We have watched the upper westside grow over the 30+ years we have lived here. It has been a concern, with this growth, that the infrastructure has not kept up in many circumstances. An important start was seen by your group of the basic safety needs for students at Kessler and all pedestrians. Connecting sidewalks, on at the least one side of Granite street plus speed checked due to high volume of traffic on Granite and surrounding roads. Thank you for taking time to do the walking assessment. Our children safely walked to Kessler School growing up and we can see the small children now struggling to walk a few blocks to their school. We see first hand living on the corner of Granite and Flowerree Street. We have seen many houses built north of our home over the years. We are definitely not against growth or access to all the westside has to offer. We strongly believe it would not benefit the area with a large development and growth without the infrastructure concerns being met first hand. As they say, let's not put the cart before the horse.

Thank you for your time and seeing the many concerns we have for the area.

Mark and Theresa Maleski
2520 Flowerree Street
Helena, Mt.

Mark Young

From: Carolyn Truscott <lv4jsus@msn.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 8:14 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: Walkability Study and Recommendations

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

As a concerned resident who lives on Silverette, I would like to thank you for making the walkability study happen.

As I read the results, I would like to add these recommendations:

Summary suggestions:

1. Continuous, connecting sidewalks
2. School and speed limit signage
3. Cutting down the evergreen trees in the boulevard on Granite Ave
4. Lighting on the streets
5. Paving Silverette St
6. Speed study for Granite Ave
7. Police monitoring/enforcing the speed limit more often.

Thank you.

Carolyn Truscott

Mark Young

From: Save Helena Westside <savehelenawestside@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 8:53 PM
To: Wilbur Rehman; Franzen Joice; Chandler Lowell; Rechkoff Kevin; szerwo James; Wirth Greg; Wallace Lucas; Ebert Joel; Shirtliff Andy; Sarah Sandau; Mark Young
Subject: Comment for Jan 10th meeting
Attachments: NMTAC Letter Jan 10_from SHW.pdf

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear NMTAC members,

Please see the attached letter with public comment from the five Save Helena Westside directors regarding the recent Kessler walkability audit and our recommendations.

We appreciate your time and consideration,
SHW Directors

We are grateful to the Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council (NMTAC) and to Lewis and Clark County Public Health for conducting a Walk Audit at Kessler. Reading through the Walk Audit report, there is agreement for the need to improve the area streets to provide safe routes for schools and pedestrians in general.

The current proposal for the Westside Woods (WSW) subdivision would result in significant increase in traffic volumes on those very same streets and the current traffic infrastructure is not sufficient to safely service the subdivision as proposed. After full buildout of WSW, Granite is projected to have traffic 3 to 4.9 times the current load¹. Quiet county roads like Hauser, Park, Stuart, and Flowerree will see traffic volumes increase as much as 10 times their current load².

It is the policy of the City of Helena to avoid annexation of undeveloped land until a plan is in place for adequate infrastructure to serve the new development. Therefore, Save Helena Westside (SHW) again would like NMTAC to consider recommending to City Staff and the City Commission regarding the following infrastructure upgrades as conditions of annexation of the property for the proposed WSW subdivision:

1. **Direct the majority of new subdivision traffic away from existing streets via a connection to the west.** – A road should be built connecting the WSW subdivision to HWY 12 via Park Lane and Le Grande Cannon. This will reduce traffic impact around Kessler and on Granite and Hauser, as well as will improve non-motorized access for bikers and others to Fort Harrison and the 10 Mile and Scratch Gravel trail systems.
2. **Improve local roads to “Complete Street” standards to accommodate new traffic on existing streets east of the WSW subdivision.** – In conjunction with #1 above, sidewalks and streetlights should be installed on Granite from Kessler school up to Flowerree street, on Hauser from Joslyn to the WSW subdivision, on Stuart and Flowerree from Granite to the WSW subdivision, and on the Hauser/Park Dr corridor leading to the WSW subdivision to encourage safe non-motorized transportation.
3. **Upgrade and add crosswalks, including lights.** – In conjunction with #1 and #2 above, lighted crosswalks, and safety signals should be installed around Kessler school to improve pedestrian safety.

Please note that the current application for the proposed WSW subdivision does not include any additional “complete street” upgrades to area streets beyond what is directly adjacent to the proposed subdivision boundaries, nor does it include any upgrades for pedestrian safety around Kessler School.

SHW and area residents support development that prioritizes public safety. As seen with the project to build sidewalks on Knight St East of CR Anderson, it can take years to secure funding and City support to add sidewalks to existing school routes. Neighborhoods east of Kessler that were annexed into the City in the past few years have not undergone any improvements to pedestrian safety. There is no guarantee of *any* upgrades if the can is kicked down the road. Therefore, it is best to proactively address safety needs up front, as conditions of annexation, prior to the WSW subdivision adding thousands of additional vehicle trips per day.

Thank you for your ongoing advocacy for safety of non-motorized travel within our Helena neighborhoods.

SHW Directors

¹ WSW TIS reports 584 VPD on Granite currently and 1,726 VPD at full buildout (3.0 times current load). City of Helena Staff Report for Pre-Zone of WSW, however, states that with the proposed zoning, “there is a potential for 2,869 new trips.” The WSW TIS predicts 80% of the new traffic will use Granite, which would result in 2,879 VPD on Granite at full buildout (4.9 times current load).

² Flowerree St west of Granite, with 4 homes currently, will be a straight cut-through route to 45 new residences.

Mark Young

From: Sarah Perry <sarah.3.perry@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 9:59 PM
To: Mark Young; Wilbur Rehmann
Subject: Comments to be sent to the NMTAC for Jan 10th

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear members of the NMTAC,

Thank you for requesting and facilitating the Kessler Walk Audit, with the help of Sarah Sandau! It meant a great deal to area residents and Kessler families to have members of the community take the time to walk our streets, experience what it is like to be a pedestrian, and brainstorm recommended improvements. I support the recommended changes in the report.

In listening to the recordings from a handful of your 2022 meetings, it has been encouraging to hear your council going to great lengths to do what you can to make safety of non-motorized travel around our community a priority. That has been particularly apparent anytime the NMTAC was discussing routes to schools. I know now more than ever that the NMTAC has A LOT of potential projects and recommendations for improvement around town and really, every school in Helena needs pedestrian improvements. I am not trying to say those other projects are ANY less important.

However, the situation around Kessler is unique. The walk audit identified numerous and severe deficiencies. The average scores at each stop were 2.5 or less. For comparison, at the Broadwater school audit, the average scores ranged from 5 to 8.

Even more unique in this case is the fact that the city is being asked to annex nearly 60 acres of NEW land with a major subdivision that will put additional traffic impact on existing streets, ALL of which are proposed to be on routes to school that DO NOT have sidewalks. I am not aware of any other school in the City of Helena that is facing a similar situation.

With annexation on the table, this project and associated recommendations need to be a priority TODAY. As Chairman Rehmann told you all during orientation in the Feb 2022 NMTAC meeting, [Resolution 19549](#), which established the NMTAC, states that one of the duties of the NMTAC is, "advocating for non-motorized facilities in new public and private development projects". Weighing in with your recommendations on how to reduce negative impacts of the proposed subdivision on non-motorized facilities is absolutely in your purview!

In addition to the impact Westside Woods would have on safe walking routes to Kessler and St Andrews School as well as CR and Hawthorne bus routes, the subdivision will also add considerable traffic to existing county roads. Flowerree, Hauser, Park, and Stuart are quiet roads with only a handful homes on them. Most of those streets are fairly flat streets for that reason are used by many of the elderly and young children in the neighborhood for recreation and walking. The streets have almost no traffic on them currently and feel safe even without sidewalks. However, the traffic on those streets will change drastically as hundreds of new residents use them as cut through streets to access a major subdivision.

With the previous submission of this subdivision to the City, all blocks of Flowerree, Hauser, and Park Dr west of Granite were recommended city staff to be annexed into the city and upgraded to complete street

standards. And the developer agreed to all those conditions of annexation with their last submission. However, with the new proposal, the developer has not proposed any such upgrades and there is no guarantee new city staff will make the same recommendations. Please, encourage the city to recommend upgrades to Flowerree, Hauser, Park, and Stuart to ensure area residents can continue to safely use those roads for non-motorized travel.

My concerns with the proposed development are all safety related. With the right conditions of annexation for safety, I would happily go to the City Commission and advocate FOR the WSW development.

Your recommendation to the City to require the necessary upgrades as conditions of annexation will be in line with the City's own Growth Policy and is a way to ensure the neighborhood and the NMTAC are not having to fight for decades to come to retrofit existing neighborhoods with much needed sidewalks. Let's make sure this is done right from the start!

Sincerely,
Sarah Perry

Mark Young

From: Anna Jayne Pentecost <ajpentecost3@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 11:13 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: Walkability Study

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good evening,

I'm writing to encourage NMTAC to make recommendations to the city of helena based on the walkability study.

Specifically

1. Continuous, connecting sidewalks
2. School and speed limit signage
3. Cutting down the evergreen trees in the boulevard on Granite Ave
4. Lighting on the streets
5. Paving Silverette St
6. Speed study for Granite Ave
7. Police monitoring/enforcing the speed limit more often.

Kessler Elementary is directly affected by these recommendations now and into the future. Please help us put in a solid foundation now and not 50 years down the road, trying to fight for a simple sidewalk, like Mark has been fighting for with CR Anderson. Yes Kessler has a horrible layout and it needs to be fixed but that is not possible right now. These recommendations might be. We can't make everyone happy. It will not be perfect. However we can at least use our voices to advocate for those that can't. Please, at least try and ask.

Anna Jayne Pentecost
Mother and Certified Emergency Room RN

Mark Young

From: Matthew Pentecost <mgpentecost@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 11:21 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: NMTAC recommendations

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good evening,

I'm writing to encourage NMTAC to make recommendations to the city of helena based on the walkability study.

Specifically

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6. Speed study for Granite Ave
7. Police monitoring/enforcing the speed limit more often.

Kessler Elementary is directly affected by these recommendations now and into the future. Please help us put in a solid foundation now and not 50 years down the road.

Matt Pentecost

Mark Young

From: Anna Jayne <sweetjane33@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 11:24 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: NMTAC meeting

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good evening,
I'm writing to encourage NMTAC to make recommendations to the city of helena based on the walkability study.

Specifically

1. Continuous, connecting sidewalks
2. School and speed limit signage
3. Cutting down the evergreen trees in the boulevard on Granite Ave
4. Lighting on the streets
5. Paving Silverette St
6. Speed study for Granite Ave
7. Police monitoring/enforcing the speed limit more often.

Kessler Elementary is directly affected by these recommendations now and into the future. Please help us put in a solid foundation now and not 50 years down the road.

Annie Howell

Mark Young

From: Matt Johnson <mattjohnson311@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 10, 2023 8:13 AM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: Kessler Walk audit

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Greetings,

As a resident of Helena Westside with children starting school at Kessler next year, I want to thank you for conducting the walkability audit. I encourage you to please make formal recommendations to the commission for their review of the Westside Woods development proposal.

After your walk, I'm sure you'll agree, the estimated traffic volume associated with the development will significantly exacerbate conditions that are already unsafe and substandard for kids walking to school, as well as general pedestrian traffic. This area was poorly developed and lacks basic infrastructure for conveying pedestrians.

In addition, Park Drive, Stuart, Floweree, and Hauser to the west of the area walked are designated to convey new subdivision traffic. These streets are dirt and lack infrastructure to accommodate those traffic loads. Significantly unsafe conditions will be created when that vehicle traffic volume is added to current and future pedestrian traffic. These streets and sidewalks need to be developed if this subdivision comes forth.

As a rapidly growing community, we cannot approve projects that will worsen conditions for pedestrian traffic. On the contrary, modern transportation planning encourages providing dedicated routes and safe conditions for pedestrians, to offset our past bias towards vehicular modes of transportation.

We need to take every opportunity to modernize our mistakes of the past for the sake of our future generations.

Thank you for considering the broader picture and considering this opportunity to improve our community.

Best regards,
Matt Johnson
2690 Park Dr, Helena, MT 59601

Mark Young

From: Orpha Smigaj <opiernc@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 10, 2023 9:31 AM
To: Mark Young
Subject: Walkability Audit Kessler School area

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.



Orpha Smigaj <opiernc@gmail.com>

Dear Mr. Young

Thank you for completing the Walk Audit for Kessler School. Kessler is a wonderful school for our neighborhood with many safety concerns for children and parents who attend this school. I appreciate all of the work that is being done to make this neighborhood school safer for our children. I have lived on the corner of Hauser and Silverette for over 30 years. I have witnessed many near miss collisions with children and cars on these streets. Our neighborhood would be made a safer one with installation of paved roads, lighting, signage, sidewalks and crosswalks. With the proposed westside subdivision these issues are going to worsen tenfold. Before and after school pickup and drop off is currently a nightmare and it is only going to get worse with a huge influx of houses in this proposed subdivision. The crosswalk zone on Granite is a very short distance to Highway 12. Cars are backed up; kids dart out in the street and people speed through this area coming off of Highway 12 onto Granite and the crosswalk. There is no more room for more cars, more kids in this area. I am not against development in this area. I am against how big the subdivision is going to be, there are way too many houses proposed for this subdivision. It is going to flood this already congested neighborhood area and school.

Thank you again for the walk audit, I believe the recommendations would greatly improve the safety of our neighborhood and school.

Sincerely,
Orpha Smigaj

Mark Young

From: Lu Driessen <ldriessen929@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 10, 2023 10:08 AM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: Public comment NMTAC meeting

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Greetings,

Thank you for conducting an audit of the walkability of the area around Kessler School.

Reading the report emphasizes the safety concerns we see, as active members of the neighborhood. Use of the area has increased, as development has grown. We expect that to continue.

Please utilize the audit to establish priorities for improvement and set forth a concrete plan, with an established timeline, to address deficiencies identified.

Helena is looking to create a safe, more walkable community. Given this area is directly adjacent to a well attended school, we ask for expediency in addressing the identified concerns.

Thank you,

Lu Driessen

Scott Harris

2600 Hauser Blvd, Helena, MT 59601

Mark Young

From: Jim Lund <pjameslund@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 10, 2023 10:29 PM
To: wilbur@wt.net; Mark Young
Subject: recent NMTAC Audit walk and report

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Thank you for your attention to assess the pedestrian situation for the area around Kessler Elementary School. The roads audited are extremely busy during school pick-up and drop off. The lack of sidewalks on several of the main roads, particularly during busy times, is a danger to those that are walking. I am not surprised that in the audit many of the intersections scored just 2.5/10.

There is foot and bicycle traffic that often comes through Granite for walkers, runners, and cyclists that are accessing the numerous trail systems just to the north (Centennial trail, Spring Meadow Lake, Ten-Mile Creek Park). I live in this neighborhood and bike or jog commute to Fort Harrison via Granite to the trail system most days year around. Thank you for your efforts to make this area safe for cyclists and pedestrians.

With warm regards,

Jim Lund
2610 Knight St
406-422-8844