



# Building to the future, preserving the past Douglas, Michigan

## Technical Memorandum



# Our People, Our Town





# Technical Memorandum

Date: September 10, 2010  
To: Ryan Kilpatrick, Community/Economic Development Director  
City of Douglas  
From: Dan Burden, Walkable and Livable Communities Institute  
Subject: Douglas; Your Town Recommendations

This technical memorandum reports on Douglas' unique position to build on its town center, marina, water, town connection, open space and wooded parks opportunities. My experience overseeing main street revitalization plans across the nation has taught me that many towns can be brought into balance to embrace new civic, retail and social life and vitality. Douglas has many near perfect features, but a few need essential tweaking. But to do this, it is necessary to turn to placemaking to overcome the harmful effects of overbuilding for the convenience of autos. Too many main street and regional roadway plans end up being compromises, or worse not featuring and defending those community building elements that provide flexible, green, and lively streets. People focused changes are often necessary to create a competitive place for existing and new stores, and to bring streets back to an active, natural public life.

**Background:** On August 11-13, 2010 under a National Endowment for the Arts SUNY Your Town sponsored grant, town leaders, retailers and other stakeholders in Douglas worked with Dan Burden around the theme of walkability.

**Opportunity:** The Blue Star Highway can become an important, compelling gateway into Douglas. Energies directed at bringing this roadway into modern times, to help build the community, will pay significant dividends. Other opportunities to set the stage for a quality connection from the downtown to the waterfront, and a compelling vision for the waterfront, including attractive public trails along the water, and improved wayfinding will do much to enhance the community. These changes, and the following efforts were identified by participants, and endorsed by the consultant team:

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- 1. Develop Walkability Advisory Committee:**  
Official committee appointed to prioritize and recommend plans to improve walkability and access throughout the City of Douglas.

This will be an ongoing working group that stays in place and works actively to put details of the Douglas' vision together. The community has given this group charge to reflect community held interests and values, and to attend to specific planning, funding and other solutions. A formal recognition and appointment of this group should be the first step. Once appointed set a goal to accomplish specific



actions each meeting. Members of all important working committees should have representation on this committee.

**First Order of Business:** Review policies and create/ update existing to support framework to implement road diets, sidewalk connectivity, active living spaces; prioritize projects based on community consensus of what can easily be accomplished short term with an eye on long term needs (what is the “low hanging fruit” ), explore partnerships with MDOT to leverage funding.

Fine tune the Douglas zoning code to help the town develop compactly. One quick, easy fix is to lighten up on parking requirements. The Douglas parking requirements in terms of number and the size of the parking spaces are excessive. Valuable land is consumed by requiring too much asphalt. To build a compact, walkable town, every square foot matters. The less distance one has to travel, the more likely one will walk.

**2. Riverfront Boardwalk:**

Pedestrian pathway extending along riverfront from Schultz Park to Tower Marina – providing public access to the entire riverfront within the City limits.

There are many details and partnerships to be worked out with the creation of a continuous walking route along the waterfront. Town code, site plans and other details will need to be created to allow this to become the foundation and legacy for Douglas’ future generations.

**3. Blue Star Road Diet:**

Reduce Blue Star Highway from four lanes to three – with bike lanes – between Center Street (in Douglas) and Lake Street (in Saugatuck).

The Blue Star Highway, a brilliant initial idea to protect and preserve the town, is well located, but engineered for speed. It has cut a swath through the community, and must now be properly scaled to achieve a place of beauty and respect for the community. This should be an early step. Funds are available for rebuilding streets to help build communities. A grant writer can help find these funds.

**4. Blue Star Traffic Calming:**

Install landscaped center median where left turn lane is not necessary along Blue Star Highway.  
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As part of the reconstruction process, the Blue Star should become a signature street, creating an address for nicely crafted retail stores, and to serve as a great address for new residences, and new, built to the street, shops and work centers. A green median and canopy will create lower speeds, and present a welcoming entry to Douglas.

**5. Improve Major Crosswalks:**

Install a center median for pedestrians as half-way point when crossing Blue Star Highway. Consider a raised crosswalk or change in surface material.



A number of crossing locations must be addressed. The most severe problems are in crossing the Blue Star Highway. Ideal crossing will be no more than a single lane. Medians and traffic calming can be featured at these crossings.

**6. Roundabout/gateway:**

Construct a single lane roundabout at the intersection of Blue Star and Wiley Road to function as the southern gateway into the primary commercial corridor before entering downtown. This also serves to slow traffic and improve pedestrian circulation.



A specific engineering plan can be prepared to place this roundabout. Either a roundabout or a large median island can be placed on other entries into town.

**7. Pathway to Lakeshore:**

Identify feasible means to construct a non-motorized path from downtown to Lake Michigan.



This is a long term vision, but can be worked out early on. Properties in Douglas will become more valuable as this pathway is worked out and constructed.

**8. Improve Douglas Beach:**

Enhance the stairway descending the dunes to include terraced seating areas at street level and halfway down the dunes. Remove vegetation where appropriate to improve views to the water.

Such an important visual connection can become one of the most authentic and fun projects in the community. Think of the power of the stairwell in Park Guell in Barcelona, as an inspiration to make this gateway connection a feature by itself.

**9. Urban Forest Program:**

Begin City tree farm and establish inventory of existing street trees. Implement an annual planting schedule of new trees along City rights of way which is compatible with City sidewalk plan.

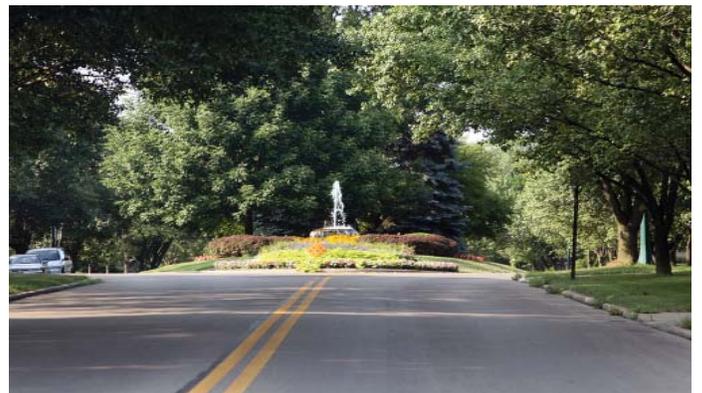


Well placed street trees provide one of the most important environmental and visual features to a town. Having a Douglas forest nursery is an important step.

**10. Wade's Bayou:**

Relocate existing structures as appropriate to provide additional open space and to create a possible amphitheater. Construct dinghy docks and improve launch site.

Again, this is a great focus for funding, often with help of sponsors and a few grant sources. Several features such as an amphitheater can create a venue for many other waterfront investments.







# Douglas, A town with Great Taste and Achievements...



*Both urban infill and improved placemaking will have greatest impacts here. Douglas' focus on placemaking can make not only the town, but all parts of the community, more attractive for walking, bicycling, shopping, festivals and other events. The town is ideally located to compete for regional shopping. While work is largely accomplished at the center, the entrances and other key roads are lacking character and appropriate community focused design. Douglas is the destination, not the way to get to other destinations.*



... And a few challenges



Very few people would disagree with the statement that North America has “engineered” activity out of daily life. In transportation and town planning, we have applied advanced sciences to move more cars and move them faster. The unfortunate results, in many cases, are streets that accommodate only cars and that actually deter people from using the most basic form of transport – feet – for their daily errands, to stay socially connected, and for their daily exercise. This is compounded by land settlement practices (e.g. strip centers, cul-de-sacs, poor school siting, and single-use zoning) that has led to auto dependency and social isolation. The result is deteriorating individual and public health – physical, social, and psychological health – in addition to escalating childhood obesity rates, increased sense of social disconnectedness, higher consumption of finite and polluting resources, higher transportation costs, and continued environmental degradation. To counter these things, we need to fix existing built environments and rethink how we plan and design new communities. The healthy choice needs to be the convenient choice; the active way needs to be an option.



*From a semi-sleepy hamlet, to oversized, overbuilt roads for their mission, Douglas is now interested in properly sizing and scaling their village, to regain its footing. We have the opportunity to think about the community we wish to build and to learn from experiences. A roundabout (below) can more than adequately handle all assigned traffic, plus will help create the sense of place that Douglas wishes for itself.”*





The Blue Star Highway should embrace the future. The roadway can be rebuilt to form attractive gateways into Douglas, make it easy to cross streets, and for people to see Douglas for its natural and hand crafted charm. New features might include sidewalks, bike lanes, a single lane in each direction, parking on each side, and new mixed use development. The road should be designed to achieve speeds at, or below, 25 mph.



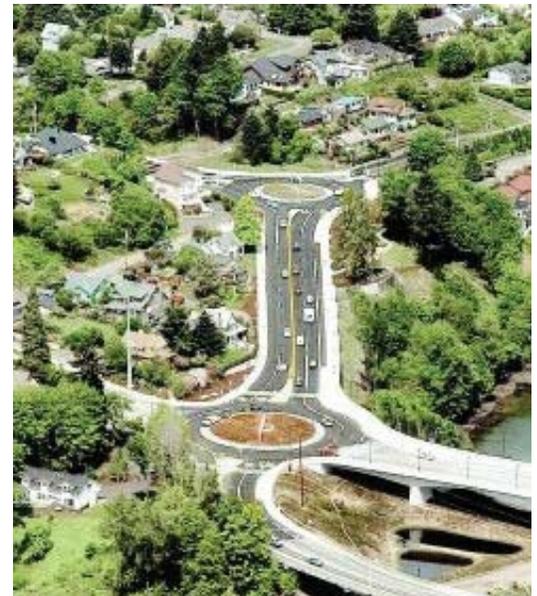


# Roundabouts

Above: Brighton, Michigan's roundabout handles 21,000 vehicles per day. Placement of roundabouts facilitates through traffic and turning movements without requiring signal control. Roundabouts are made up of a circulating roadway with an island that is often used for landscaping or other decorative features. The circulating roadway is typically wider than the approach roadways and features an additional 'apron' against the edges of the island; both of these features allow for operating contingencies, especially with trucks, emergency response vehicles, and other large vehicles.

Roundabouts have been demonstrated to increase intersection volume by up to 30 percent. As the only requirement for yielding the right-of-way is to traffic already in the circulating roadway, vehicles can continue moving through intersections carrying a light volume, requiring no queue at the approach roadways and potentially allowing all intersecting streets to use the intersection at once. Due to their low speed (15-20 mph in and out on each leg), roundabouts also drop every personal injury crashes by 80-90%. Roundabouts reduce delay to all types of movement, which reduces idling engines, air pollution, noise and lost time.

Roundabouts provide safer and more comfortable pedestrian crossings. Splitter islands serve as a pedestrian refuge. Allowing one car length between the crossing and circulating lane(s) optimizes roundabout efficiency for vehicles. Roundabouts reduce conflicts in multiple ways: when crossing, pedestrians face only one potential conflict (traffic either entering or exiting the roundabout, divided by the splitter island), and not the six conflicts per crossing leg in full-crossing intersections. In properly designed roundabouts, all conflicts are at low speeds for both entering and exiting traffic (15-22 mph). Roundabouts also create the least delay to pedestrians wishing to cross a street. Instead of waiting for up to two minutes to cross (common with a signal), the pedestrian reaching a roundabout rarely has more than a 2-8 second delay for each leg that they cross. Most bicyclists circulate with traffic (since it is now going their speed).





*Above: Examples of attractive, gateway mini-circles. Top photo, Orlando, Florida. Both mini-circles manage traffic quietly, maximize on street parking by bringing speeds down, and offer attractive corners in the commercial districts they occupy. A mini-circle or two on key streets on gateway approaches to town, in downtowns and other locations will add charm, beauty and movement.*

*By helping rescale a roadway, roundabouts help set the stage for more successful retail trade and social life. The roundabout below transformed an ugly strip street in Golden, Colorado, into a much better proportioned street. Four roundabouts were built; all signals were removed. One surprising result: retail trade in the corridor outperformed all other streets in the state of Colorado during the last recession.*

*Mini-circles, such as the below treatment in Los Angeles, California, are low cost and attractive traffic management tools that can be easily designed and installed. Although costs can be as low as \$15-25k, much more attractive circles are recommended for a number of historic roads where speeds are too high. A cost range of \$75-125k would be appropriate for central locations, while modestly-priced circles can be used elsewhere in the community.*



*Mini-circles reduce the potential for personal injury crashes by 99%. Yield controls are used on all approaches. Seattle, Washington has placed over 1,000 mini-circles.*



## Changes and Transitions

Communities have the opportunity to make a number of easy, short term, affordable changes to improve active transportation, walkability, alternative transportation and livability. For instance, signal timing, signing and pavement markings can all be adjusted to better accommodate a wider diversity of street users. Strong, compelling edges (vertical walls of green) through the planting of hearty trees on a number of key streets creates added desire to travel through what is otherwise a bleak area.

An inventory of bike racks and indoor bike storage (protection from rain and sun) are easy to develop and add to over time. Seating is cheap. Trees can be planted soon in a nursery then brought to streets when plans can be completed. In many cases, bike lanes can be added by applying paint.

Larger scale projects, including road diets, the creation of complete streets and roundabouts will take a significant focus of resources and community feedback. Through a public charrette process, cities and towns can solicit feedback from residents and address complex design problems by having interagency and interdisciplinary coordination.

As you are considering projects and how to prioritize them for maximum impact, it is useful to look at what other departments and agencies are doing. This level of collaboration and planning sets towns and cities apart because resources are protected and benefits are maximized.



*Roundabouts allow roads to be better scaled (2-3 lanes versus 4-5 lanes), create an attractive terminating vista, allow for on street parking, and significant new “greening” and commercial retail success. A recent project built in the San Diego (Bird Rock) area took 5 lanes to 2, moves 23,000 cars and trucks per day, getting people to their destinations in less time than with signals, and with a 90% improvement in safety. In order to design and gain stakeholder backing for a street remake, it will be necessary to conduct a public charrette. A similar project in Hamburg, New York, altered three key streets and provided the same level of achievements.*



*Example of a former 4-lane road, placed on a road diet with on-street parking, bike lanes, one travel lane in each direction and a raised median. This style of roadway design (boulevard) is 30-50% safer than existing state 5-lane streets. An engineering analysis and public charrette would be applied to confirm the ability for converting roadways to a higher urban form and performance. With the aid of roundabouts, it is possible to move 30% more traffic at lower speeds, with reduced noise and delay than with what existing roads move today. (Kirkland, Washington, 17,000 ADT)*

# Stairs and Grade

*Douglas has an opportunity to take advantage of its change in terrain. This can benefit the community in many ways, but one of the most beautiful treatments is to come up with an attractive set of stairs. Stairs can be very simple (Left: Port Townsend, Washington, to a featured Walk (Right: USCLA) to quite elegant (Below: Park Guell, Barcelona, Spain)*





# Crossings

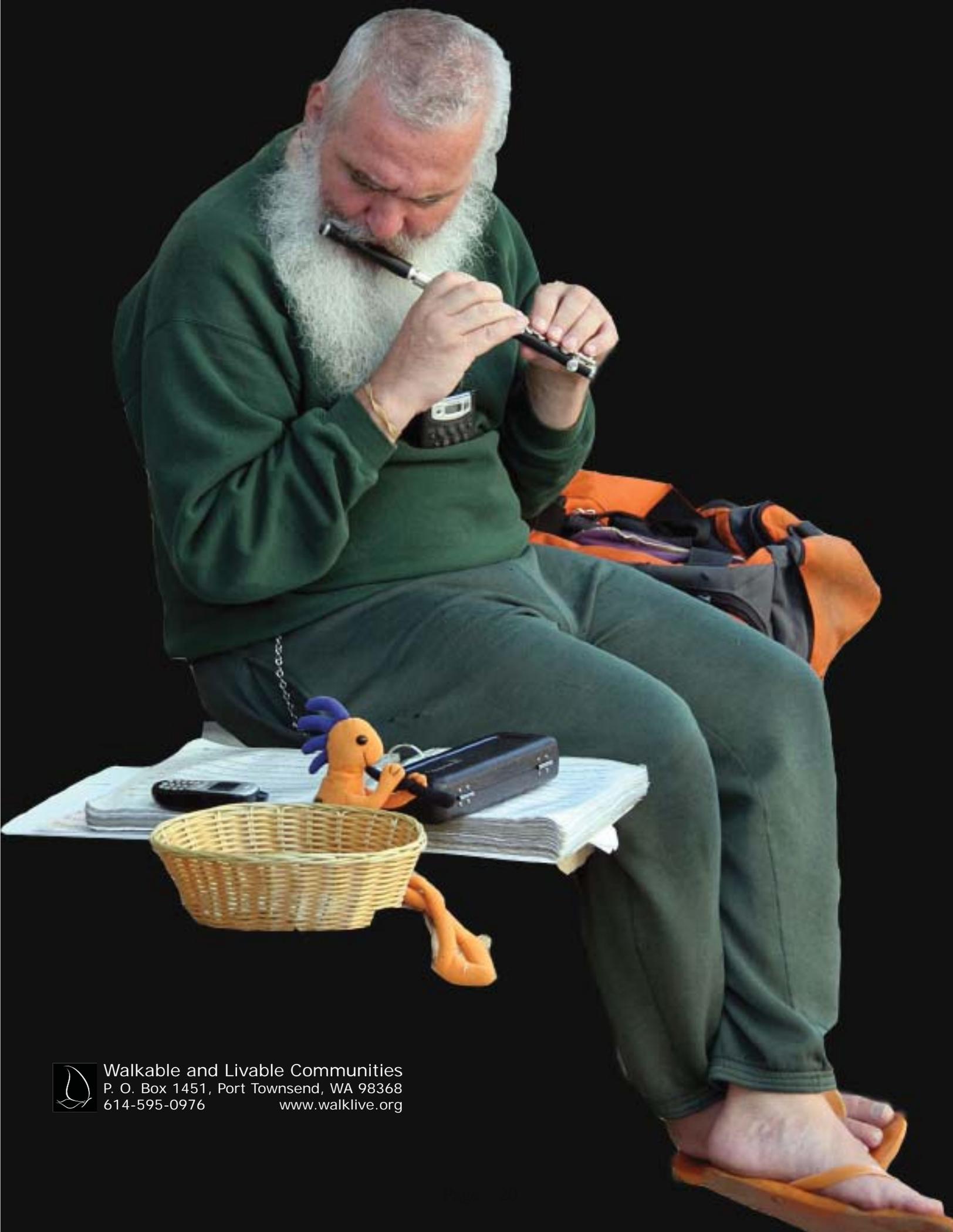
Tools used to slow traffic and help people cross streets.

*If space exists where some crossings will be warranted, then a median island can be added. This is a former 4-lane road, in Olympia, Washington. With medians pedestrians are only exposed to one direction of moving traffic at a time. Medians should have both ground cover and trees to make them more noticeable to motorists from greater distances. Use of these features slows speed, then draws attention to the crossing.*



# Avenue with Multi-Use Trail





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