CHAPTER 6

ON-FOOT IN THE GRAND ISLAND AREA

THIS CHAPTER ADDRESSES PEDESTRIAN ISSUES IN THE GRAND ISLAND AREA. Often, pedestrians and bicyclists have similar interests and many projects and policies are beneficial to both groups. But pedestrians have specialized needs as well.

Almost all of us walk outside for a purpose during the course of most days, and recreational walking almost always rises to the top of the list of recreational activities. Grand Island, like most cities, has a large capital investment in its pedestrian infrastructure: mainly sidewalks but also trails in Grand Island. But all too often, pedestrian facilities don't always receive the attention they deserve. But incorporating walking paths (sidewalks, paths, and multi-use trails) into new development and areas of existing development are essential to maintaining a safe, convenient active environment.

While the earlier chapters of this plan may appear to focus on bicycle transportation, most of its concepts and criteria also apply to pedestrians. For example:

- The performance criteria that open Chapter Three – integrity, directness, safety, comfort, experience, and feasibility– apply equally to people on bikes and on foot.
- The active network, incorporating street routes and trails, provides a framework that applies to both active modes.
- Pedestrians and bicyclists will both use the support facilities discussed in Chapter Four.
- Barriers for bicyclists also present barriers for pedestrians and the solutions and practices presented in Chapter Five bridge these obstacles for both groups.

Recent research and surveys indicate that households of all ages increasingly value "walkability" and the form of the development that walkability encourages. In a truly walkable community, neighborhood commercial services, schools, and other activity centers are relatively accessible to housing. Walkable communities encourage pleasant, unplanned social interaction and expand transportation options.

Decisions regarding vehicular travel also affect a community's walkability. A good transportation network uses special design techniques to ensure that street traffic is consistent with pedestrian safety, which is important when linking

neighborhoods to commercial and civic destinations around the community.

This chapter provides analysis and recommendations that reflect good current practice but are adapted to conditions in the Grand Island area. It places a special emphasis on the traditionally most important pedestrian trip – the walk to school. The goals of this part of the plan are to:

- Ensure that most areas and key activity centers are comfortably accessible by a network of pedestrian facilities.
- Create good linkages between residential neighborhoods and walking distance destinations.
- Reduce barriers that discourage walking and create obstacles to people with or without disabilities.

The specific issue areas discussed here include:

- Sidewalk zones and widths
- Sidewalk infill and improvements
- Pedestrian access to commercial areas
- ADA compliance
- Sidewalk Coverage Near Schools

SIDEWALK ZONES AND WIDTHS

Sidewalks are the most fundamental element of the pedestrian network, providing an area for pedestrians separated from vehicle traffic. Providing adequate and accessible facilities can lead to increased numbers of people walking, improved safety, comfort, and places for people to socialize (See Figure 6.1 for sidewalk zone examples). Current standards for Grand Island sidewalks are found at http://www.grand-island.com/your-government/public-works/infrastructure-specifications-and-standard-plans.

Typical Application and Features

- Sidewalks should be provided on both sides of urban commercial streets, and should provide continuity on at least one side of the street (preferably both sides) in residential areas of urban density, generally above 2 units per acre.
- When retrofitting gaps in the sidewalk network, locations near schools, parks, public buildings, and other areas with high concentrations of pedestrians should be the highest priority. If Grand Island implements the flexible route service from the Illustrative Plan of the Regional Transit Study, the sidewalk system should also serve timepoints.
- It is important to provide adequate width along a sidewalk corridor. An unencumbered pedestrian through zone width of five feet enables two pedestrians (including wheelchair users) to walk side-by-side, or to pass each other comfortably. It is particularly important to avoid obstructions in this zone such as poles, utility boxes, and other obstacles.
- In high demand areas such as Downtown Grand Island and areas immediately adjacent to schools or sports facilities, sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate the high volumes and different walking speeds of pedestrians.
- The sidewalk setback zone (sometimes referred to as a "furnishing" zone or tree lawn) provides opportunities for street trees and also provides a place for storing plowed snow that maintains pedestrian access.

Figure 6.1: Sidewalk Zone Examples

SIDEWALK INFILL AND IMPROVEMENT

This section focuses on opportunities to upgrade short segments of missing sidewalk or existing sidewalks that were constructed in Grand Island with sub-standard widths.

The majority of streets in Grand Island have sidewalks on both sides. However, some residential, commercial, and industrial areas have missing segments along an otherwise continuous corridor. Some of these areas have sidewalk on only one side of the street, making access to both sides difficult. Figure 6.2 illustrates a method of addressing these gaps.

In Grand Island, as elsewhere in Nebraska, special assessments on adjacent property are the most common mechanisms for funding sidewalk infill programs. This frequently leads to opposition from property owners who don't perceive sidewalks as a benefit to them. Communities have been able to find other ways of funding sidewalk improvements, including state and federal grant programs such as Safe Routes to Schools or Safety grants, Food and Beverage Tax funding for standalone projects, gas tax funds for eligible sidewalks constructed with street projects, private sector funding of trails and sidewalks within their developments, and general funding through the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) when appropriate.

Funding for projects should be guided by adoption of a Major Pedestrian System, analogous to the Major Street System. This plan establishes the framework for such a system that includes:

- Sidewalks and trails that comprise the Active Network presented in Chapter Three.
- A web of sidewalks within a quarter mile of elementary school sites.
- Areas that have an especially high density of pedestrian use because of their character or concentration of land uses. Examples include Downtown Grand Island or the concentration of visitor services along Allen Drive.

Opportunities to Widen Sidewalks

Typical Application and Features

Although some sidewalks in Grand Island have planted buffers and wide sidewalks, other existing sidewalks are too narrow for comfortable pedestrian travel and are attached to the curb (Figure 6.3). When located along high speed and high traffic volume roadways, these conditions may deter people from walking for routine trips. They are also sometimes too narrow to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards and may create safety hazards for people who inadvertently walk off the sidewalk. These sidewalks

Figure 6.2: Gap Filling Opportunity

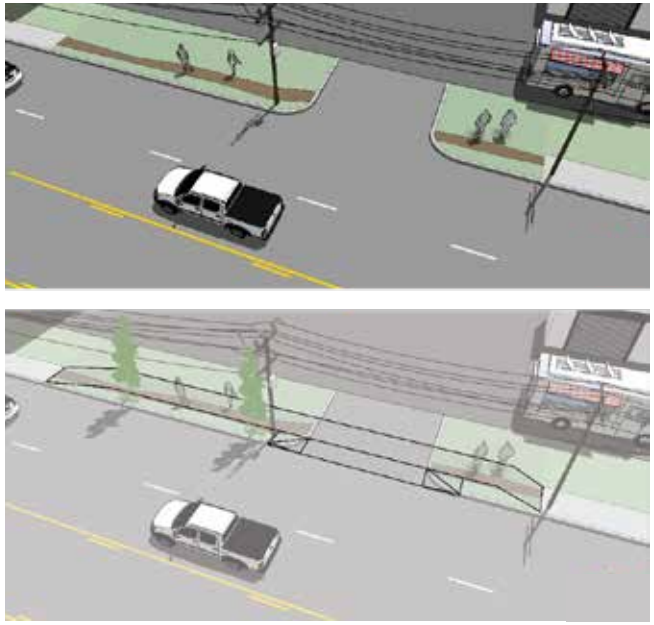


Figure 6.3: Narrow Back of Curb Sidewalk

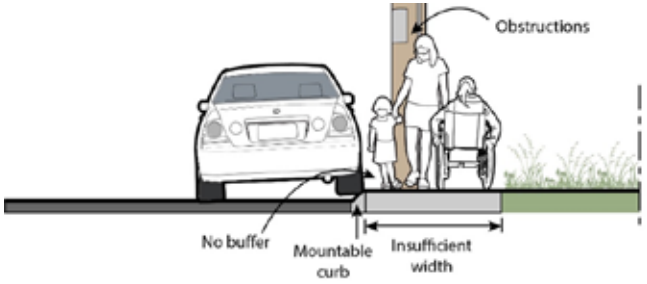
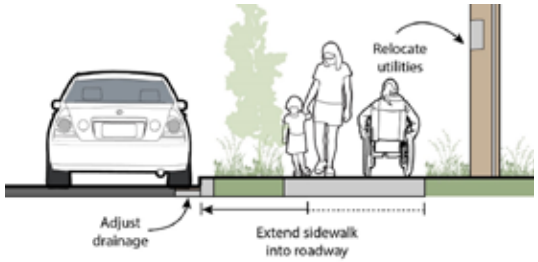
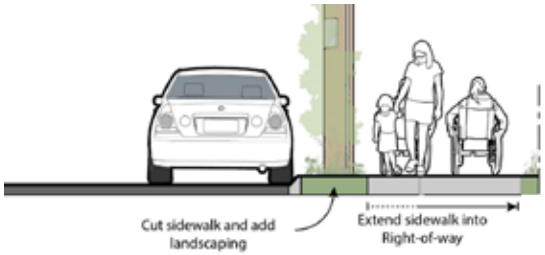


Figure 6.4: Outward Widening



Widening the sidewalk outward creates additional space for a buffer between the roadway and the sidewalk, making a more comfortable facility for people walking. Relocating utilities and other sidewalk obstructions outside of the sidewalk area increases the capacity and usefulness of the sidewalk.

Figure 6.5: Inward Widening



Widening the sidewalk inward into the right-of-way creates more space for a sidewalk. The existing sidewalk can be cut to create space for landscaping and utility poles.

are also often used by parked cars, completely blocking pedestrian access. The techniques illustrated in Figures 6.4 and 6.5 are potential solutions for narrow sidewalks.

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS TO COMMERCIAL DESTINATIONS

Connections to Mall Entrances and Internal Circulation

Sidewalk coverage on the west side of Grand Island is often inconsistent. Although some areas have sidewalks adjacent to commercial developments, such as shopping malls, pathways from adjacent streets and commercial development entrances are often disconnected or completely absent

Pedestrian connections are needed from existing sidewalks to mall entrances. Pedestrian access should create safe, shared use paths or sidewalks that extend from sidewalks on public streets to commercial area entrances. Examples of accessible routes from other communities often use landscaping or artistic features across parking lots.

In commercial areas that already have pedestrian connections from adjacent sidewalks across parking lots to the entrance, pedestrian crossings should be appropriately marked. This practice alerts motorists to the presence of pedestrians. These criteria should be integrated into site plan review for new major commercial development.

Major Street Crossings

Major streets in these commercial areas, such as 13th Street, US 281, Webb Road, Faidley Avenue, and State Street

From top: Safe and attractive paths from public sidewalk to front door also help to define areas within parking lots (Engelwood, CO and Des Moines, IA); sidewalk development along South Locust dramatically improved the street's business environment

Conestoga Mall includes sidewalk to the main entrance. Marked crossings need improvement as do pedestrian connections to other entrances (Credit: Google Maps).

frequently feature wide pedestrian crossing distances without marked crosswalks. A variety of potential solutions were discussed previously in Chapter Five.

A range of other tools can improve pedestrian crossings at signalized locations. Specific treatments may include adjusting signal phase walk-time, pedestrian countdown signals, and prohibition of right turns on red for motor vehicles. Busier intersections on wider streets may include pedestrian refuge islands, where slower pedestrians can safely stop and wait for another signal.

Applications to improve pedestrian crossings at major street crossings will be determined by further engineering evaluation, including a traffic study where relevant, and detailed plans that will be reviewed and approved by a Professional Traffic Operations Engineer.

Wide corner radii create long pedestrian crossing distances. Intersections lack marked crosswalks or other crossing features such as pedestrian refuge islands (Credit: Google Maps).

ADA COMPLIANCE

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted on July 26, 1990, provides comprehensive civil rights protections to persons with disabilities in the areas of employment, state and local government services, access to public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications.

Title II of the ADA prohibits state and local governments from discriminating against persons with disabilities by requiring them to make all programs, services, and activities accessible to persons with disabilities. Title II requires that a public entity must evaluate its services, programs, policies, and practices to determine whether they are in compliance with the nondiscrimination requirements of the ADA.

The City is responsible for providing ADA-compliant curb ramps. The City also maintains an inventory of curb ramps that are not ADA compliant. The City has a curb ramp transition program with a goal to provide ADA compliant curb ramps at every street intersection in the city. Property owners are responsible for maintaining sidewalks adjacent to their property. The City does not investigate sidewalk compliance unless the City receives a complaint. Data do not currently exist regarding mileage of sidewalks that are non-ADA compliant. In 2016, Grand Island voters rejected a

proposal to increase sales tax by a half-cent, part of which would have created a dedicated ADA funding source. The City of Grand Island should continue scheduling ADA improvements in conjunction with all street resurfacing or reconstruction projects as well as corridor-based "spot" improvements. Pursuing other opportunities to create dedicated funding streams would stabilize the City's ability to upgrade priority areas that are not ADA compliant.

The City should develop a more complete understanding of sidewalk compliance issues. A focused study should show the total mileage of non-compliant sidewalk as well as non-compliant sidewalk in priority areas, such as streets that make up the active network.

ACCESS TO SCHOOLS

Walking to elementary and middle school has long been a traditional part of growing up in America. Yet, it has gone into decline over the last 50 years. In 1969, 48% of all children between ages 5 and 14 walked or biked to school. In 2009, that number had dropped to 13%. A variety of trends led to this decline, including greater use of school transportation in urban districts, decentralization of the population, and perception of traffic-related hazards. About a third of parents in a 2005 survey by the Centers for Disease Control cited concern over traffic as the principal obstacle to their children walking or cycling to school. This, of course, creates a repetitive cycle: when parents are convinced that it is unsafe for their kids to walk to school, they drive them which in turn makes the problem worse. Some communities programs like Walking School Buses, in which volunteer parents lead a "busload" of kids walking to school together, have been effective in many places.

Other reasons exist for the decline in the number of students walking or riding to school. In Grand island (and other cities), many students are not required to attend their neighborhood school, and many choose to commute across town. This creates problems with projecting school traffic, although longer distance school commutes are feasible by bicycle. Nevertheless, many students do walk and bike to school in the city, especially where trails directly serve school sites. Examples are Gates School and the three west-side schools directly along the Shoemaker Trail.

It is probably impossible to restore the walking and biking to school levels of the past, but some efforts can help. The city of Grand Island has been working with the school district to address transportation issues and provide safe routes to schools. Progress has been made despite staff constraints, and these efforts should continue.

From an infrastructure point of view, parents must feel comfortable in letting their children walk or ride, and a portion (although not all) of that comfort is derived from the presence of safe routes. As a general standard, areas within 1/4 mile of a school site should have a web of continuous sidewalk to serve the school. This should provide continuity on at least one side of the street to minimize the number of times children must cross. Figures 6.6 through 6.20 analyze sidewalk coverage within 1/4 mile of each elementary and middle school in the Grand Island public school system and suggest potential options for increasing local area coverage. The national Safe Routes to Schools Guide (www.guide.saferoutesinfo.org) identifies an elementary school walking boundary of 1/2 to 1-mile, but notes that states and localities may establish different standards. For purposes of evaluating a realistic walking boundary for a continuous system of sidewalk in Grand Island, this study reduces that "walk zone" by 50%. Further engineering study may be required to refine these potential options.

Figure 6.6: Engleman Elementary School

Figure 6.7: Shoemaker Elementary School

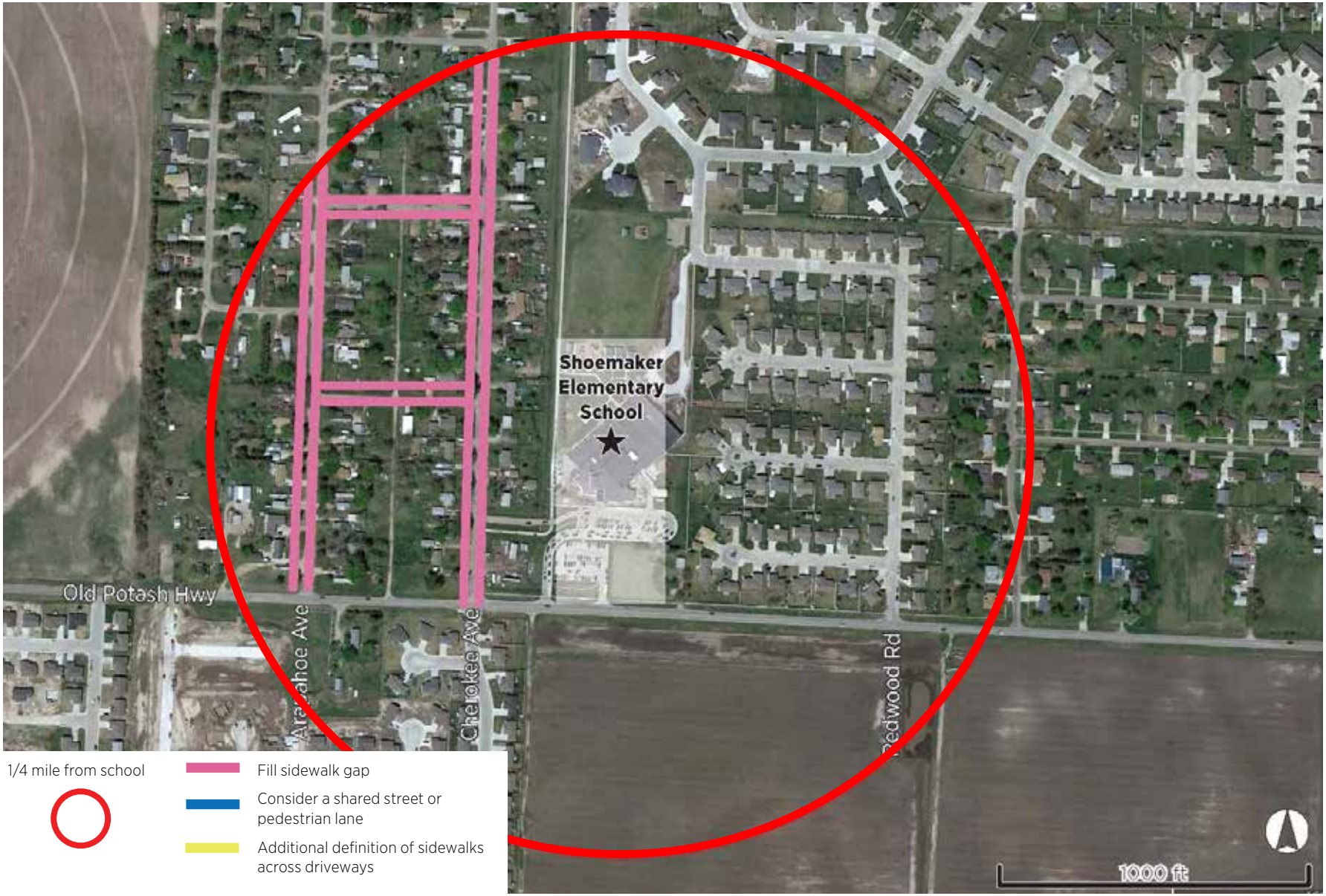


Figure 6.8: Gates Elementary School

Figure 6.9: Stolley Park Elementary School

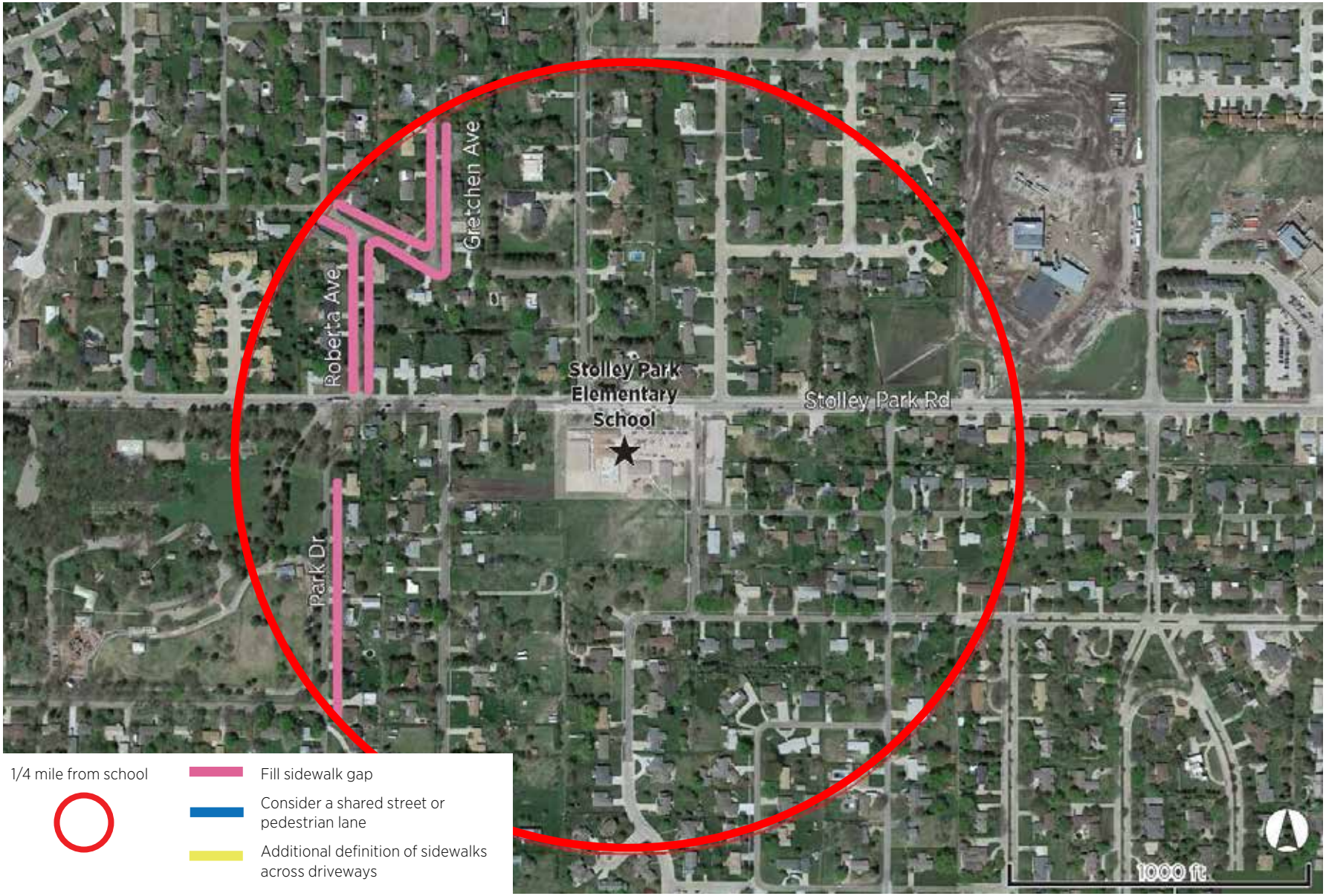


Figure 6.10: Howard Elementary School

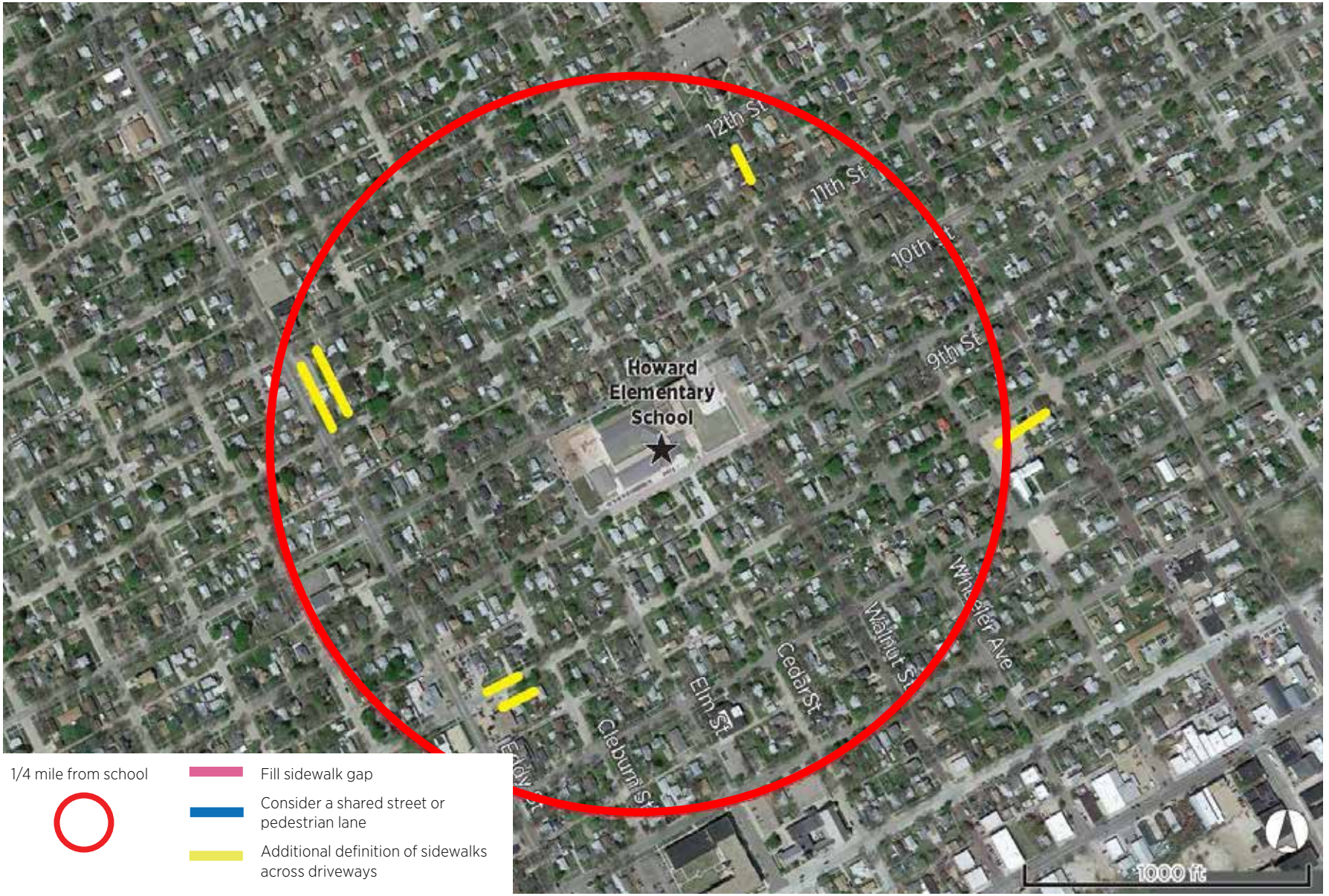


Figure 6.11: Starr Elementary School and Barr Middle School

Figure 6.12: Lincoln Elementary School

Figure 6.13: Jefferson Elementary School

Figure 6.14: Wasmer Elementary School

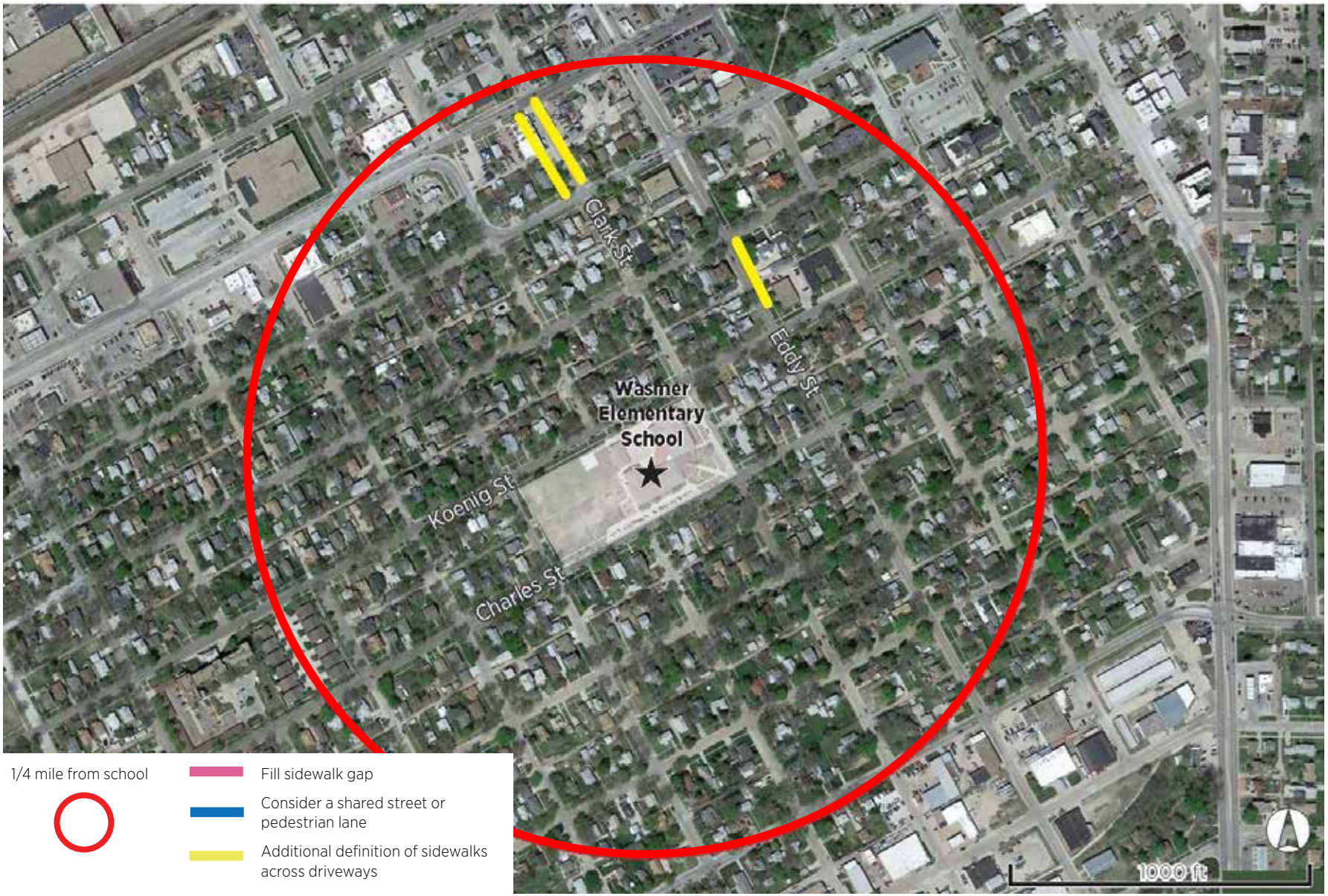


Figure 6.15: Dodge Elementary School

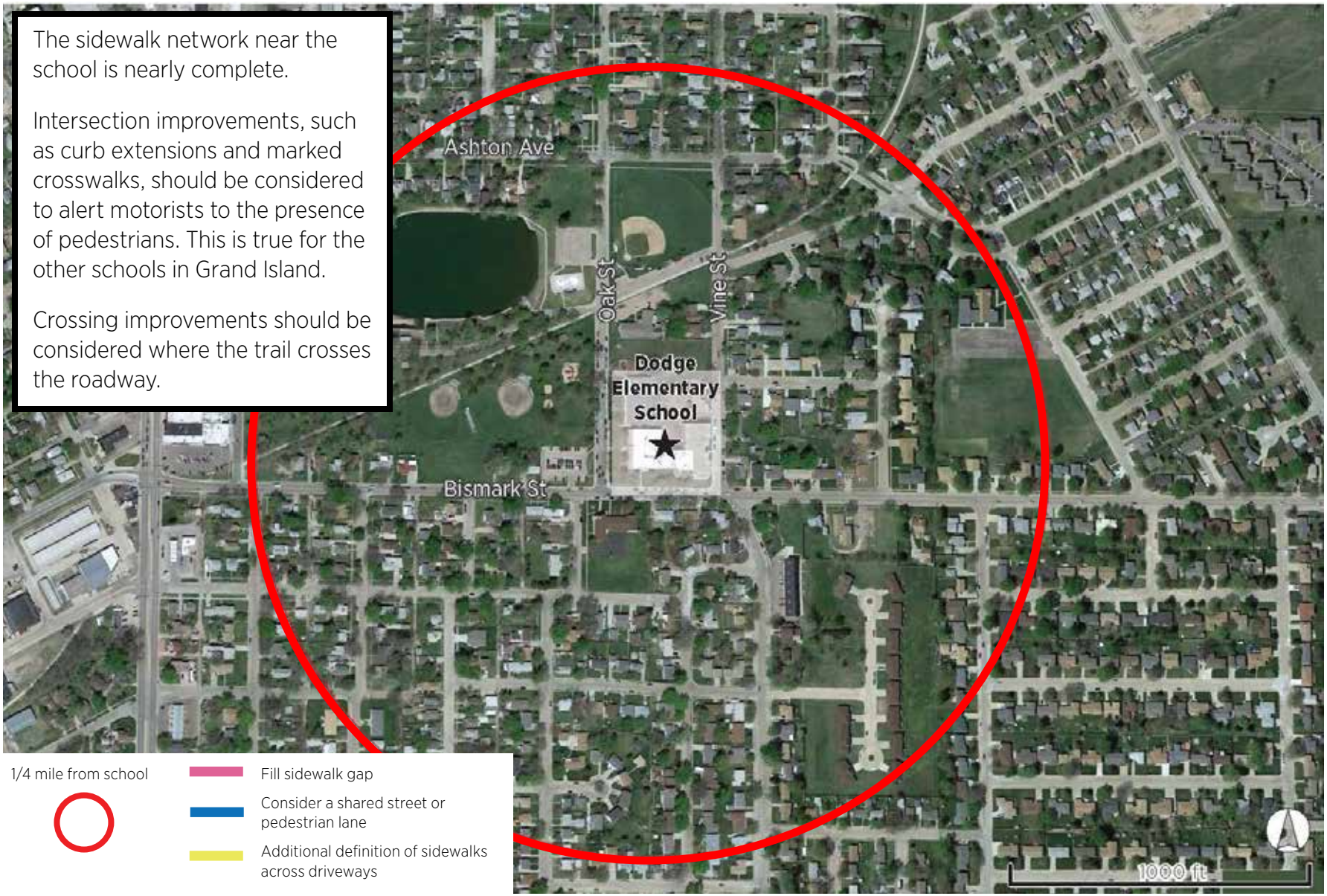


Figure 6.16: Newell Elementary School and Walnut Middle School

Figure 6.17: West Lawn Elementary School

Figure 6.18: Knickrehem Elementary School

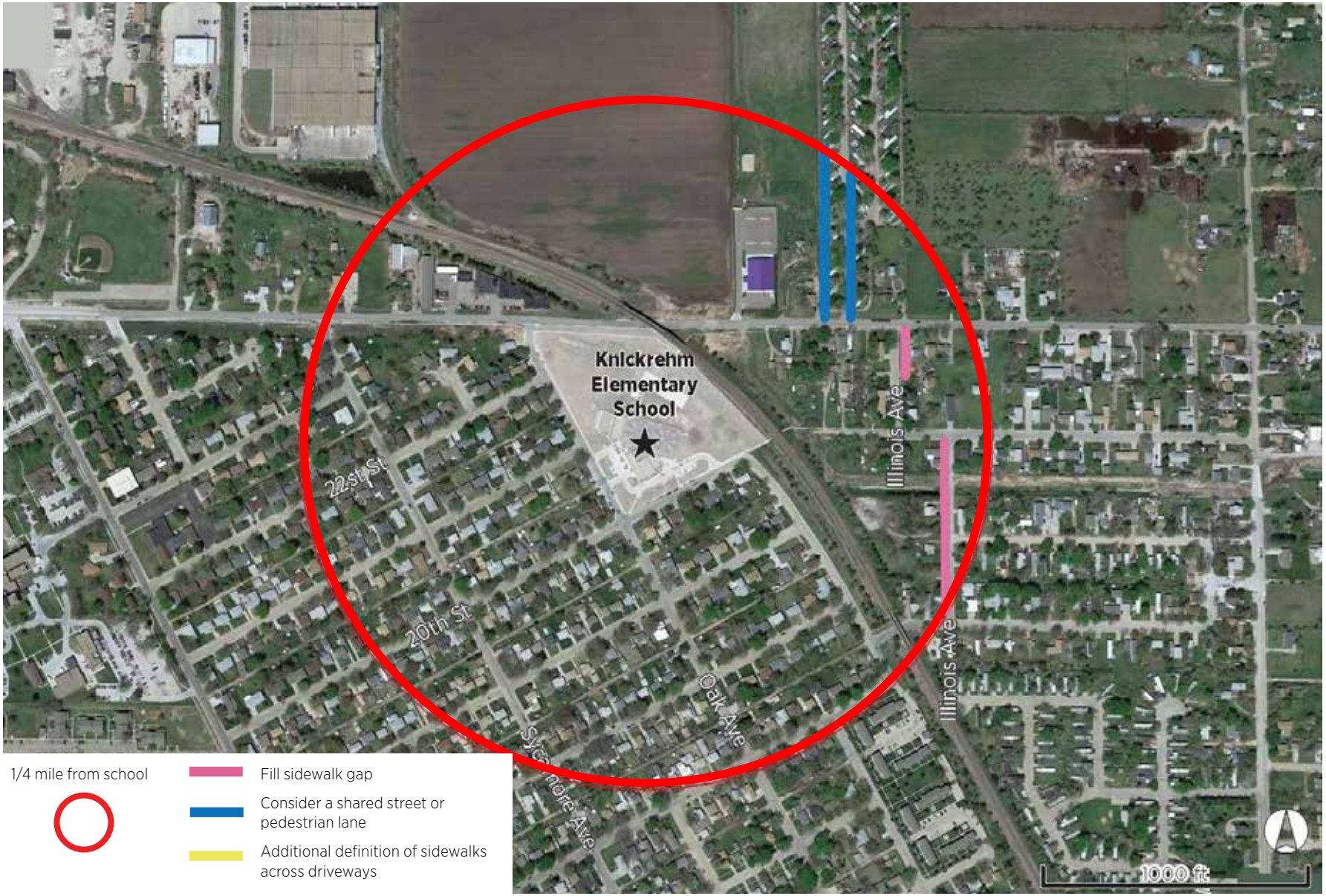


Figure 6.19: Seedling Mile Elementary School

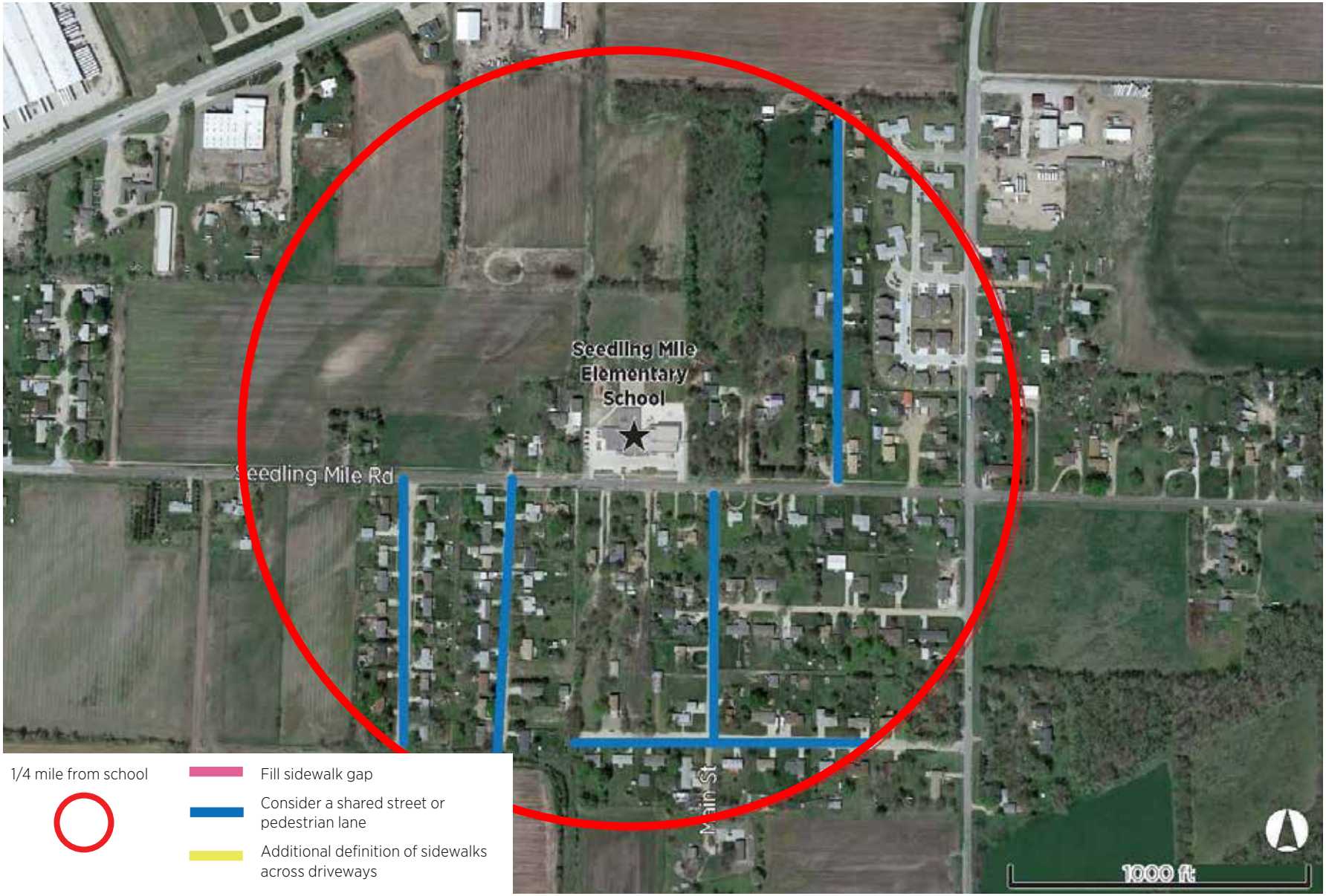


Figure 6.20: West Ridge Middle School

PRIORITY CRITERIA

Completing a long-term pedestrian development program is only accomplished through an incremental process that requires setting priorities and evaluating new conditions along the way.

Evaluative criteria apply questions such as the following to specific sidewalk projects when they are considered.

- Does the sidewalk connect important resources, such as schools to neighborhoods?
- Does the sidewalk provide continuity and integrity to the surrounding vicinity and overall system?
- Does the sidewalk create a safer path for pedestrians?
- Does the sidewalk generate community support or consensus?
- What is the sidewalk's potential to transform the image of the area?
- Does the sidewalk respond to a specific need for improved trail facilities?
- Does the sidewalk incorporate and leverage outside funding sources, such as state grants or charitable contributions?
- Is the engineering and cost feasible to construct?
- Does the sidewalk yield economic development opportunities?

The key to successful implementation will be to establish priorities based on the specific benefits of the project.

Considering priorities for Grand Island's system begins with identifying individual destinations and the quarter-mile area surrounding the destination. These target areas help establish a system of priorities that connect residents to amenities in the community.

- Schools. Access, circulation, and safety to schools is a critical to ensuring mobility choices. Increased access reduces traffic congestion.
- Shopping Centers. Providing convenience to major shopping centers.
- Community Destinations. These include the Public Library, hospitals and medical facility concentrations, and recreation and community centers.
- Employment Centers. Providing convenience between homes and places of employment will encourage people to travel to work by alternative means.
- Neighborhoods. Connecting residents to businesses and work places, providing convenient trips by sidewalk.
- Parks and Trails. Completing this plan will connect users to the city's parks and open spaces.


SPEED LIMIT
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