

Dementia Friendly Design Considerations for Shared Streets and Spaces

The Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) prioritizes projects that are inclusive of older adults, including infrastructure that surrounds councils on aging/senior centers, senior housing, and travel corridors used by older adults.

To complement this “age-friendly” framing, the Massachusetts Alzheimer’s Advisory Council’s workgroup on Age- and Dementia Friendly Physical Infrastructure, chaired by Executive Office of Elder Affairs Secretary Elizabeth Chen, developed guidance that can help grant applicants support older adults and people living with dementia.

The following is not intended to be a checklist, but rather a resource of considerations to assist applicants to the Shared Streets and Spaces Program.

- Create an easily understood and standardized wayfinding system:
 - Provide signage with *both* large graphics *and* symbols at eye-level in clear color contrast to the background, preferably dark lettering on a light background with non-glare lighting and non-reflective coating.
 - Include signs to exits and entrances, restrooms, civic buildings, parks, transit stops and stations, and/or other community gathering spaces.
 - At transit stops and stations, such as bus stops, provide clear, concise signage using words and icons to clarify their purpose; provide shelter and traditionally designed comfortable seating with back and arm rests; ensure appropriate lighting to enhance safety and comfort; provide transit schedules in large font and display them at eye level; and provide live way-finding assistance to individuals as needed and if possible.
 - Install visual landmarks at important intersections and complex junctions to assist wayfinding. For example: garden beds, murals, water fountains, public art, painted benches, mailboxes, trees, and statues.
- Minimize street clutter (e.g., advertisements and billboards) and eliminate unnecessary and confusing signage.
- Provide plenty of benches with arm and back rests designed in a traditional look, avoiding abstract shapes.
- Minimize acoustic clutter with acoustic barriers such as grass, shrubbery, trees, or flower beds rather than hard surfaces.
- Clearly mark level changes; provide adequate lighting on sidewalks, walkways, and gathering spaces; provide non-slip, non-glare surfaces; and install handrails and ramps where needed for safety and accessibility.
- Replace cobbled or rough sidewalks and walkways with smooth surfaces.
- Provide wide, flat, smooth, non-slip sidewalks and walkways away from bicycle lanes and ensure that bicycle lanes are clearly marked and separate to prevent pedestrian injury.
- Include audible cues at pedestrian crossings, ensure they are well lit, and increase crossing time for safety.

For more information, contact:

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