



Which Way Should We Go?

A Report On Existing “Wayfinding” Infrastructure &
Proposed Improvements in Downtown Bath, Maine

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Introduction:

Wayfinding, loosely defined, is a set of visual cues that help people navigate the built environment and get from one place to another in a smooth, seamless fashion. We have all seen images in Western movies of pioneers on horseback stopping at “wayposts” that denote the approximate distances to multiple destinations. These early forms of wayfinding were a crude and effective means of conveying useful information to travelers; however, modern wayfinding strategies in modern cities must incorporate multiple layers of complex information to both motorists and pedestrians so that they can efficiently and safely access goods and services.

The key to a successful wayfinding strategy is to cue travelers in a way that is aesthetically consistent, highly legible and easy to use. A proper wayfinding strategy must also keep in mind safety, accessibility and visual impacts on the surrounding environment. When these considerations are taken into account, a cohesive wayfinding system can have a tremendous impact on the cultural and economic viability of a town or city. This has special importance to the City of Bath, which has a tourist-supported economy. If the city seeks to maximize the economic benefits that tourism can provide, it must first offer a simple and consistent visual methodology for people to navigate and access the numerous services and attractions this city has to offer free of confusion and inconvenience.

Currently, the City of Bath has some wayfinding infrastructure in place to instruct motorists and pedestrians about the locations of several key features, such as: Downtown, the Visitor’s Center, Parking, Bath Iron Works and the Maine Maritime Museum. However, there is great room for improvement to the legibility, consistency and ease-of-use of the system, particularly for people unfamiliar with the layout of the city. The intent of this report is to highlight any inconsistencies and identify gaps in the existing wayfinding infrastructure with an aim toward identifying specific improvements that might enhance a more effortless flow of vehicle and foot traffic to and from Bath’s numerous amenities.

The report will concentrate on two major scales of wayfinding: pedestrian and vehicle-oriented visual communication strategies. Because cars and people move at different speeds and access different areas of the city, it is sometimes necessary to separate these two visual platforms. Wayfinding information aimed at vehicle traffic must necessarily be larger and more succinct. On the flipside, pedestrian-oriented information can often be more detailed and less visually obtrusive, while simultaneously providing useful information. It may be possible to utilize wayfinding techniques that service both scales of travel in some cases.

SECTION I: VEHICLE-ORIENTED SIGNAGE

There are several ways to access Downtown Bath, primarily from the North and South along Route 1 and also from Route 209 (High Street), the popular route to Phippsburg and Popham Beach. The vast majority of vehicles entering Bath do so from Route 1. Currently there are 3 primary access points to Downtown via Route 1. These are:

- The High Street exit ramp
- The Vine Street exit, beneath the Route 1 viaduct
- The Front Street exit from the Sagadahoc Bridge (southbound)

HIGH STREET RAMP

A motorist heading northbound along Route 1 entering Bath may choose to exit onto High Street, near the intersection of High St. and Centre St. Upon reaching the end of the ramp, they are confronted with a decision to travel north toward Centre Street, or south toward Phippsburg.



Yet, this is a vague and almost misleading illusion to Downtown, Parking options and the Waterfront. After turning left toward these options, the motorist is then confronted with another choice at the stop sign near Mae's Café. Was the arrow pointing toward downtown, or simply in the direction of the next turn? It is unclear. So, the motorist can continue straight on High Street, or take a right onto a feeder road that merges with Centre Street toward Downtown. From this vantage point, one can see Downtown however there is no follow-through on the signage. Nothing instructs the motorist to turn right, except for their own intuition—an informed guess. The water has not become visible yet, nor has anything that would denote parking.

CENTRE & HIGH STREET INTERSECTION
PRIORITY LEVEL: MEDIUM
COMPLEXITY: EASY



Looking northbound at the intersection of High Street and Centre Street, one must turn right to go downtown, however, nothing instructs motorists where to turn.

A tourist or first-time visitor to Bath who elects to exit via High Street must turn right onto Centre Street in order to access Downtown, however, the signage does not instruct them to turn. From this vantage point, downtown is only partially visible. At peak traffic hours one's focus must be on navigating the busy intersection, decreasing awareness and time for decision making.

A small pole-mounted sign beneath the stop sign, or attached to the "One Way" pole would help inform people where to go. A large, formal sign such as the ones beneath the viaduct would be inappropriate at this intersection because it would obstruct the view of the memorial statue. A discrete, but legible sign would be preferable in this location.

A more detailed sign could also be useful at this location to direct drivers toward other key features in this part of town—namely, Morse High School, Huse School, YMCA and the Middle School/ Athletic Facilities on Congress Avenue. This type of sign would be most effective on the corner next to the existing "One Way/ To Route 1 North" sign, or replace it altogether, incorporating that information also.

PARKING SIGNAGE INCREASED VISIBILITY

PRIORITY LEVEL: Low

DIFFICULTY: Easy



The sign directing drivers toward the Water St. parking lot is subtle and easily missed.

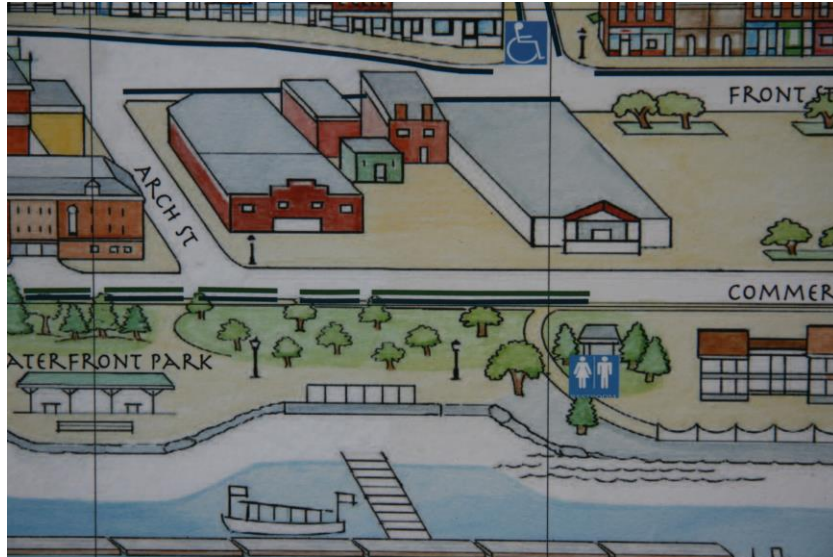
Heading eastward on Centre Street, drivers are shown a small parking sign directing them north on Water Street toward the parking lot that faces the back of the Downtown Shops. At this point, a tourist who has never been to Bath

SECTION II: PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED SIGNAGE

MODIFYING EXISTING WAYFINDING SIGN AT WATERFRONT PARK

PRIORITY LEVEL: Low

DIFFICULTY: Easy



A close up detail of the sign at Waterfront Park reveals its proximity to Front Street. This sign would be greatly aided by a red or yellow star stating, "You are Here."

IMPROVING VINE STREET APPROACH TO DOWNTOWN

PRIORITY: Medium

DIFFICULTY: Moderate



Looking North from Vine Street, a sidewalk (right) and stairwell (left) provide two routes for pedestrians to access the heart of Downtown Bath.

An underutilized approach to downtown Bath is the route via Vine Street. Shown here is a semi-neglected area with tremendous potential to serve as a beautifully landscaped welcome feature and outdoor seating feature. It also has high visibility from Rt. 1 and serves as the access point to a stairwell that accesses Centre Street.

Perhaps the city, in conjunction with the Garden Club, could revitalize this corner, including more attractive landscaping and a sign directing pedestrians up the staircase toward Downtown. This is one of those little pockets of Downtown that would be tremendously useful if more people knew about it.

MAINTAINING EXISTING WAYFINDING SIGNS (PAINT & CAULK)

PRIORITY: *High*

DIFFICULTY: Easy



Many of the large downtown wayfinding signs are significantly deteriorating.

Regular painting will help lengthen the lifespan of these vital elements. Currently, they are at a salvageable stage, however without paint in the next 6 months, they could easily lose some structural integrity and require costly repair work. This cosmetic work should be considered **high priority** in order to protect previous investments and mitigate future repairs.

Top 3 Priorities:

- 1. Create a preferred vehicular approach to Downtown and provide consistent signage pointing toward downtown from Route 1 Northbound.** The goal should be to encourage as many visitors as possible to use the viaduct off ramp, as opposed to the High Street exit which requires a tricky interchange at High/Centre St. This includes consolidating the two big signs under the viaduct that point to downtown in DIFFERENT directions. While multiple routes exist, tourists do not want to have to make extra decisions. Give them a clear, concise directive and they will follow it. This could be achieved by consolidating the two large signs into one, or separating them into destinations that are North and South. Currently the word “Downtown” appears on both signs.
- 2. Create a more intuitive approach to the Visitor’s Center** and make it *clear* that parking exists at the Visitor’s Center. Make the entrance to the Visitor’s Center more approachable and add a larger, more visible sign designating “Visitor’s Center.” People intuitively want to head left toward downtown. Locating the Visitor’s Center in the opposite direction creates confusion at an already complex interchange, so it must be clear to people that they can park adjacent to the building.
- 3. Provide a more clearly marked connection between Front Street and the Waterfront/ Commercial Street.** Due to the parallel layout of Front Street and the Kennebec River, most of the Downtown shops are invisible from the Waterfront and vice versa. Three feeder roads (like rungs on a ladder) connect these streets—Lambard St., Arch St., and Broad St. The least frequently used street by cars is Arch Street. This would be the preferred pedestrian corridor between these two heavily used areas, particularly since it aligns with the heart of Front Street. As things pick up in the Summer months along Waterfront Park (Farmer’s Markets, boating activity, etc.) this will be helpful in activating downtown shops, and also encourage shoppers to use the park.