



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

City of Leominster



Acknowledgements



City of Leominster



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The Local Rapid Recovery Planning (RRP) program is a key part of the Baker-Polito Administration's Partnerships for Recovery Plan, the strategy established to help communities stabilize and grow the Massachusetts economy as a result of the economic impacts brought on by COVID-19. The plan invests \$774 million in efforts to get people back to work, support small businesses, foster innovation, revitalize downtowns, and keep people in stable housing.

In addition to the planning program, recovery efforts include a Small Business Relief Program administered by the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation. This program, which concluded in May 2021, provided more than \$687.2 million to over 15,000 businesses across the Commonwealth, with a focus on businesses located in Gateway Cities, among demographic priorities, or operating in sectors most impacted by the pandemic. Cities, towns, and non-profit entities are using Regional Pilot Project Grant Program funding for recovery solutions that seek to activate vacant storefronts, support regional supply chain resiliency, and create small business support networks. To promote recovery in the tourism industry and support the ongoing My Local MA marketing initiative encouraging residents to support their local economies by shopping, dining and staying local, another \$1.6 million in grants were awarded through the new Travel and Tourism Recovery Grant Pilot Program. Through April 2021, MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program has invested \$26.4 million in municipal Shared Streets projects to support public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce.

In support of the overall recovery strategy, the Administration made \$9.5 million in awards for 125 communities to create Local Rapid Recovery Plans, through the MA Downtown Initiative Program. These plans address the impacts of COVID-19 on local downtowns and small businesses by partnering with Plan Facilitators and Subject Matter Experts to pursue locally-driven, actionable strategies.



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Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Local Rapid Recovery on a Statewide Scale

Like thousands of communities across the United States, Massachusetts' towns and cities experienced months of significant financial loss during the COVID-19 pandemic as business districts had to temporarily close and then face extended periods of safety-related measures that limited visitation. For many businesses, this meant permanent closure. Others were aided by federal and state programs, working diligently to keep their livelihoods intact during a very difficult period. These difficulties were particularly notable in New England where historic village centers have defined communities for generations. Over 350 distinct jurisdictions make up the Commonwealth, and nearly every place has at least one village business district greatly impacted by COVID-19. Every one faces serious challenges recovering from the pandemic. Fortunately, the LRRP is a tremendous opportunity to leverage upcoming stimulus dollars for downtown benefits across the state.

While hundreds of distinct districts are a challenge to address systematically, this diversity is a natural strength for Massachusetts. Every affected downtown is the crossroads for its broader community—typically a compact and walkable place where vacancies may be readily visible but where every business knows each other and has come together to face the pandemic. The interdependencies are quickly evident when talking with local stakeholders who take ownership of their village centers. Working with municipal officials, LRRP Plan Facilitators have quickly leveraged the energy of downtown merchants, engaged residents, vested landowners and village organizations to create the solutions within this plan—solutions tailored to the unique character of this place. Leominster, like over 120 other communities in Massachusetts, now has a comprehensive recovery strategy and the momentum to implement lasting change, collectively supporting the entire Commonwealth.

What are Downtown Leominster's primary goals for this process?

Leominster's project goals focus on empowering the downtown community to build on its strengths and resume revitalization progress underway prior to the pandemic. These goals were directly informed by this planning process' assessment of needs and engagement with the community to develop responses.

Restore downtown's momentum

Most people engaged in this project, from business owners to community members to public

officials, considered downtown Leominster on an upward trajectory ahead of the pandemic. More entrepreneurs, businesses, and residents were moving to and investing in downtown. The City was improving public spaces and driving year-round event programming. Moving past the pandemic, a widespread goal is to regain this momentum and “pick up where we left off.”

Support businesses as they resume normal operations

As this planning process proceeded, the businesses which survived the pandemic's initial impacts were increasingly returning to relatively normal operations. Given the strains of the pandemic experience and its aftershocks on the local economy, the community understands businesses will need ongoing support to avoid further disruptions during this period of recovery.

Bring more customers and activity downtown

Many downtown businesses survived in large part thanks to loyal customers who continued patronizing their favorite establishments however possible during the pandemic. Moving forward, the community recognizes adding to this local customer base should be a top priority, such as by inviting more visitors through event programming, adding downtown residents, and streamlining access to downtown in general.

Remove friction to downtown access and navigation

To maximize downtown's economic recovery and longer-term success, visiting the district should be as easy and attractive as possible. This planning process has revealed several areas for improvement that could encourage more people to utilize downtown's assets and opportunities more readily.

Help businesses expand audience and exposure both physically and digitally

Not all downtown businesses have access to or facility with the full suite of digital and online tools and channels available today. The community prioritizes extending these resources and capabilities to all interested businesses to help maximize their efficiency and ability to reach current and future customers.

What are the projects that came from the plan?

The planning process ultimately translated diagnostics findings, stakeholder engagement, past planning documents, and community representatives' insight into a set of project recommendations specially tailored to support rapid recovery from Covid impacts to the local economy and business environment:

Category	Project	Description	Timeframe	Budget	Priority
Public Realm	Retrofit downtown streets and intersections for improved walkability	Lane narrowing, crosswalks, etc. (a "once-over" upgrade for the whole downtown)	Short-Term	Medium	
	Install mid-block pedestrian crossings	Emphasizing safety at vulnerable locations	Short-Term	Low	
	Connect Twin Cities Rail Trail to downtown core	Inserting an on-street segment between the end of a new trail and the center of downtown	Short-Term	Low	
	Upgrade downtown wayfinding for parking	Focusing on parking access needs only	Short-Term	Low	
Tenant Mix	Create a downtown housing development strategy	Mix of adaptive reuse and infill housing to accommodate demand	Short-Term	Medium	✓
Revenue/Sales	Technical assistance for businesses	Focusing on support to mobilize businesses most impacted by COVID	Short-Term	Low	
Admin Capacity	Develop a downtown signage code	Focusing on signage improvements to existing buildings	Short-Term	Low	
	Update downtown design guidelines	To inform programs like facade improvement	Short-Term	Low	
	Design and implement a downtown branding strategy	Focusing on downtown identity and marketing collateral	Short-Term	Medium	✓
	Establish Facade Improvement Program	Focusing on upgrading existing facades	Short-Term	Low	✓

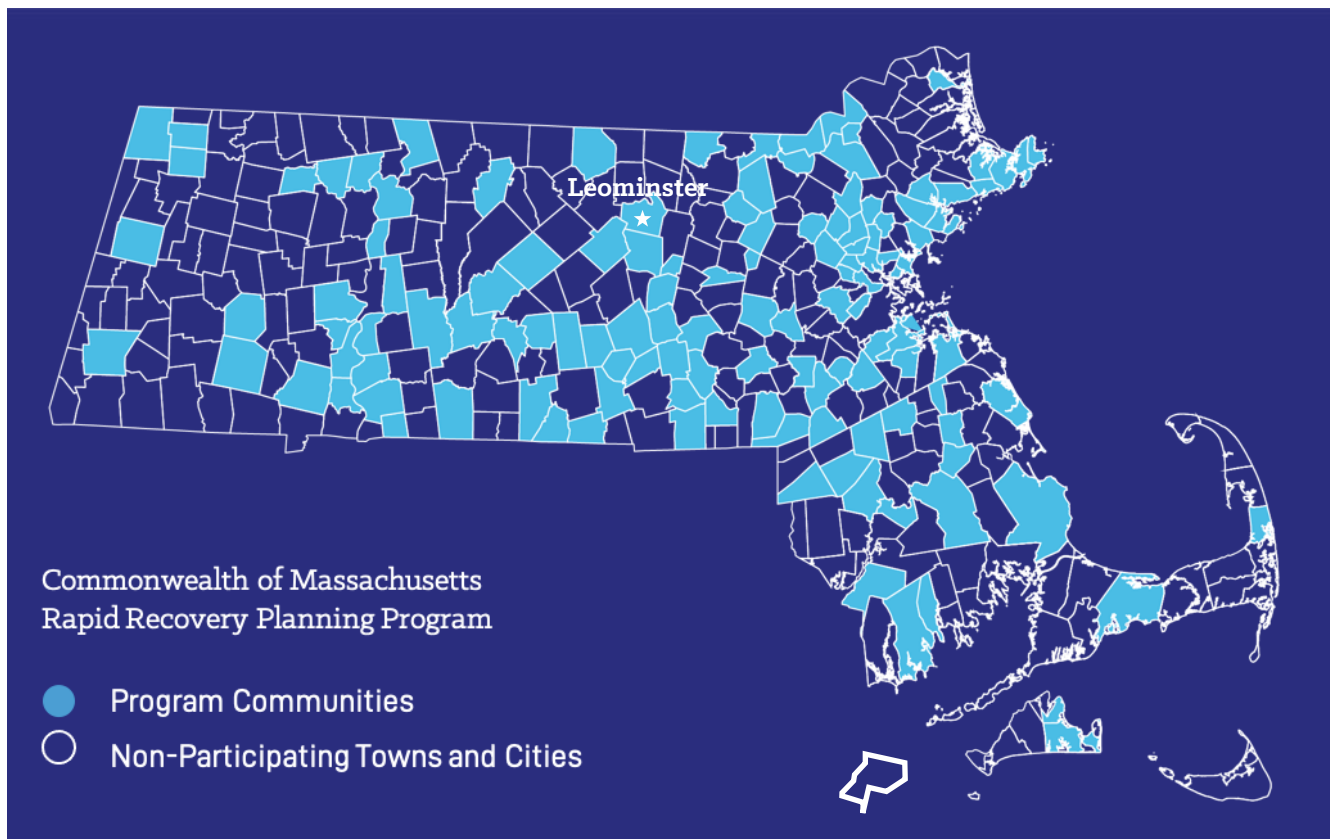
Rapid Recovery Plan Background



125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

- 52 Small Communities
- 51 Medium Communities
- 16 Large Communities
- 6 Extra Large Communities

Mass Downtown Initiative distributed nearly \$10 million across 125 communities throughout the Commonwealth to assess impacts from COVID-19 and develop actionable, project-based recovery plans tailored to the unique economic challenges in downtowns, town centers, and commercial districts.



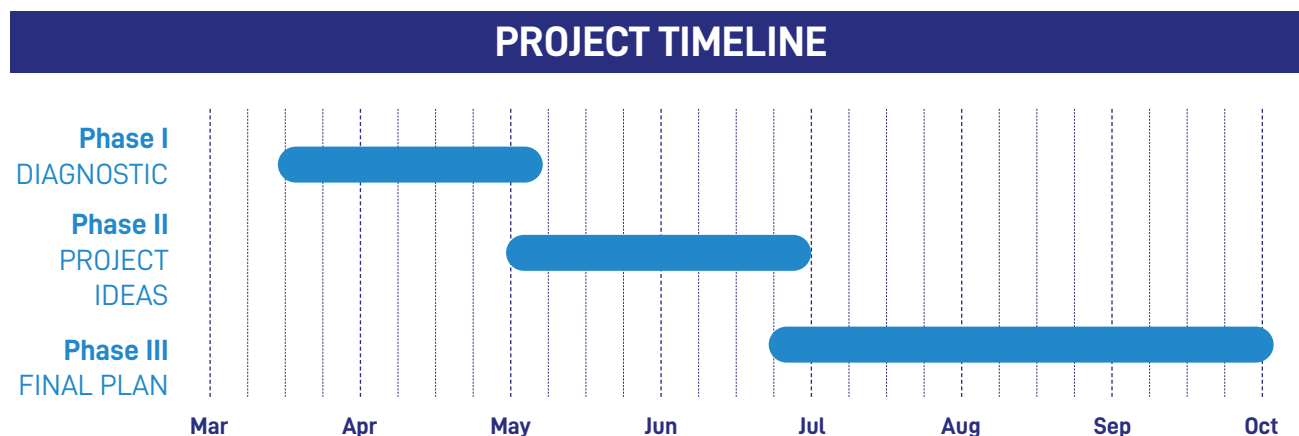
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

The Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program is intended to provide every municipality in Massachusetts the opportunity to develop actionable, project-based recovery plans tailored to the unique economic challenges and COVID-19 related impacts to downtowns, City centers, and commercial areas across the commonwealth.

The program provided technical assistance through Plan Facilitators assigned to each community applicant (e.g., city, town, or nonprofit entity) and Subject Matter Experts who supported the development of ideas for project recommendations and shared knowledge through best practice webinars and individual consultations.

Communities and Plan Facilitators were partnered through the program to assess COVID-19 impacts, convene community partners to solicit project ideas and provide feedback, and develop project recommendations. The following plan summarizes key findings from the diagnostic phase of the program and includes a range of priority project recommendations for the community.

Each Rapid Recovery Plan was developed across three phases between February-October 2021. Phase 1 - Diagnostic, Phase 2- Project Recommendations, Phase 3 - Plan.



In Phase 1: Diagnostic, Plan Facilitators utilized the Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework that was adapted from the award-winning Commercial DNA approach as published by the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) in "Preparing a Commercial District Diagnostic", and authored by Larisa Ortiz, Managing Director, Streetsense (RRP Program Advisor).

The framework was designed to ensure methodical diagnosis of challenges and opportunities in each community, and to identify strategies and projects that aligned with the interests and priorities of each community. The framework looks at four areas of analysis: Physical Environment, Business Environment, Market Information, and Administrative Capacity - each equipped with guiding questions to direct research conducted by Plan Facilitators.

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic



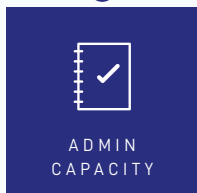
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



How conducive is the physical environment to meeting the needs and expectations of both businesses and customers?



What are the impacts of COVID-19 on businesses in the Study Area? How well does the business mix meet the needs of various customer groups?



Who are the key stewards of the Study Area? Are they adequately staffed and resourced to support implementation of projects? Are the regulatory, zoning, and permitting processes an impediment to business activity?

Following the diagnostic in Phase 1, Plan Facilitators, in close coordination with communities, developed and refined a set of recommendations that address priority challenges and opportunities. These project recommendations are organized in clear and concise rubrics created specially for the Rapid Recovery Plan Program. Project recommendations are rooted in a set of essential and comprehensive improvements across six categories: Public Realm, Private Realm, Revenue and Sales, Administrative Capacity, Tenant Mix, Cultural/Arts & Others.



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue & Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

Diagnostic Data Collection Methodology

Data Collection Goals

Baseline data collected will be used by the Commonwealth to communicate overall program impact and to support future funding and resource allocations that may be used toward implementation of final projects across participating communities.

Baseline data sets a minimum expectation for data collection and only reflects what the Commonwealth is requesting from all Plan Facilitators such that it will enable the measurement of COVID impacts at the State level for all participating communities. Beyond the baseline data outlined in this guide, it was expected that Plan Facilitators (PF's) would glean additional insight from their analysis, observations and feedback from the community and businesses. Plan Facilitators ensured that additional information collected through their own discretionary methods and processes would be integrated into the Diagnostic section of each final Rapid Recovery Plan and were used to inform the unique Project Recommendations that emerge through this process.

Diagnostic Asset Breakdown

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) worked with Larissa Ortiz, the Managing Director at Streetsense, to adapt the "Commercial DNA Framework" as published by the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) and Streetsense. The framework uses four major components – Market Demand (Customer Base), Physical Environment (Public and Private Realm), Business Environment, and Administrative Capacity – to assess the vitality of a commercial district. The Local Rapid Recovery Program team tailored this framework to align with the vision to develop plans and a comprehensive dataset that analyzes economic challenges to downtowns and town centers.

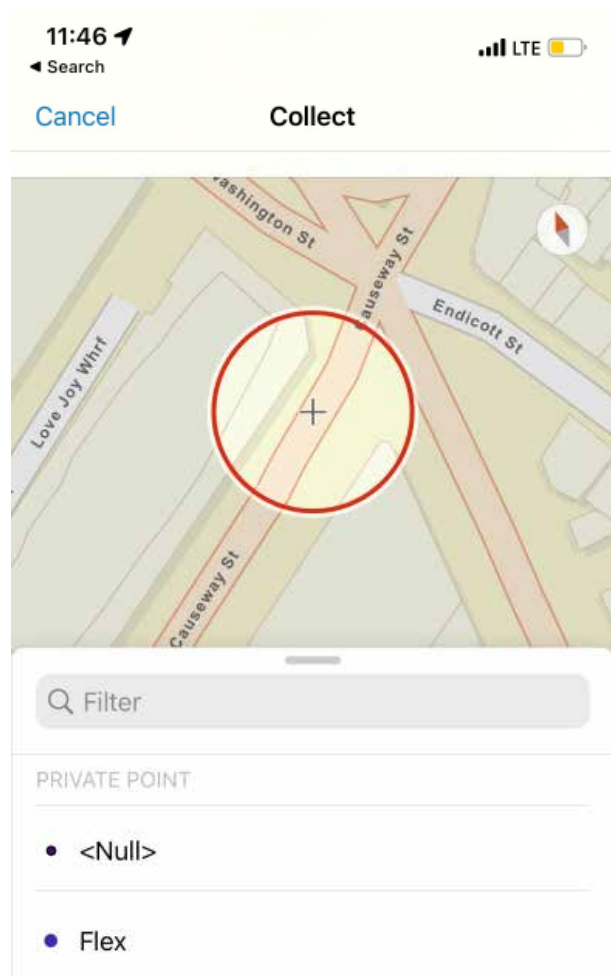
Data Collection Process

In order to effectively capture public and private infrastructure, market demand data, and business environment statistics within the Leominster study area, the Plan Facilitator team developed a robust data collection structure. The team utilized platforms such as ArcGIS Field Mapping and Spatial tools, ESRI Business Analyst, and Co-Star Market Data software to collect data for their community and adhere to the Rapid Recovery Program requirements.

To gather the public and private realm physical environment data, the team deployed field collectors utilizing ArcGIS Collector software and hardware to conduct site visits lasting between four to eight hours to spatially record all physical environment assets. The field collectors used the ArcGIS Collector tool to record field observations, take imagery for each public and private realm asset, and document various characteristics and assets within the defined LRRP study area. The ArcGIS Collector platform compiled all field data alongside other spatial information on business environment details such as vacancy rates and annual average rent into a geodatabase that could be analyzed and mapped remotely.

Public and private realm characteristics collected in the field included elements such as the condition, width, placement/location, and presence of streetscape amenities, lighting, seating areas, and ADA-compliant infrastructure. Based on the observations and characteristics for each diagnostic category, the data collector determined an objective grade for each public and private realm asset,

such as a crosswalk, sidewalk, awning, or façade. The collectors adhered to the grading system developed by the DHCD LRRP team, which ranged from A (highest grade) to Fail (lowest grade). More details on the field categories and type of data collected can be found on pages 21-23.

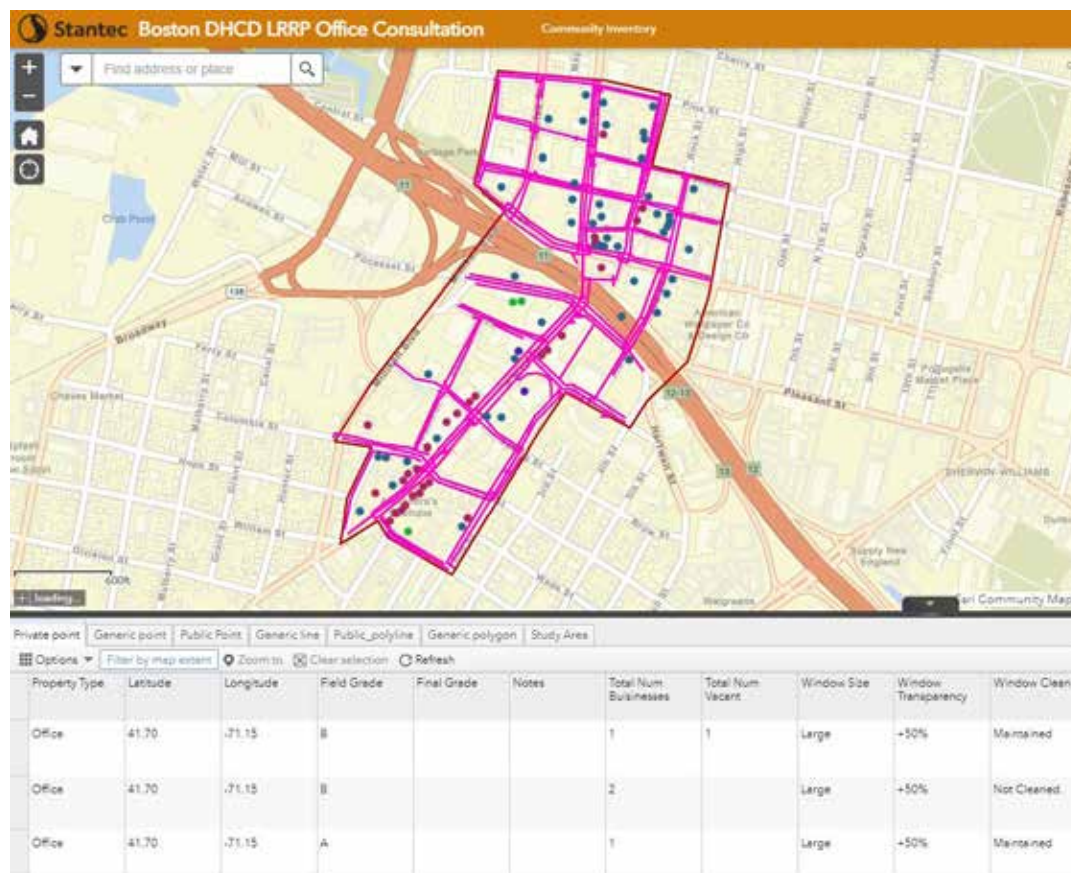


The ArcGIS Collector tool allowed data collectors in the field to develop an online database for public and private realm data

Data Analysis & Outputs

Upon completion of data collection efforts for the public and private realm physical environment assets, Plan Facilitators used the spatial database and ArcGIS WebApp platform (as seen in the image below) to assess collected assets and their associated attributes and characteristics. The Plan Facilitator also reviewed each field grade determined by the data collector by comparing to the field imagery. Each asset received a final grade once the Plan Facilitator conducted a thorough review of each asset characteristic, image, and observations. For example, a crosswalk asset that received a "C" field grade could have a width between four to six feet, poorly maintained paint, and lack a detectable panel and/or curb ramp on either side. The Plan Facilitator confirmed or changed this grade after a final review of the asset attribute data and documented field image.

Developing a database for the spatial elements of the diagnostic data highlights major gaps within the commercial fabric of the business district and identifies areas that lack adequate streetscape amenities or connectivity infrastructure. Ultimately, the data gives communities the opportunity to capitalize on these challenges and promote projects that enhance their downtowns or town centers.



The ArcGIS database platform allows Plan Facilitators to query data based on asset type, final grade, or condition/maintenance level.

Final Diagnostic Grade

The final stage of the data collection process included developing an aggregate score for each physical environment element. Plan Facilitators conducted an analysis that created an average score of "A" (highest score), "B", "C", or "Fail" (lowest score) for diagnostic components based on the collective grades for each individual asset. For example, the public realm category "Sidewalks" received one final, overall grade for the study area, and the private realm category "Building Facades" received a study area grade as well (as seen in the image below).

Example



As required by the Program, all Plan Facilitators presented the final diagnostic results to their communities during a public meeting. This forum allowed municipal representatives and the public to provide input on the program approach, diagnostic framework, and final results. Each Plan Facilitator ultimately submitted the entire database of all diagnostic categories to DHCD to be compiled with the results from all LRRP communities.



PHYSICAL
ENVIRONMENT

Diagnostic Asset: Physical Environment (Public Realm)

Physical Environment: Public Realm Diagnostic Geodatabase Fields	
Field	Field Description
Indicator Type	Wayfinding/Signage Park Open Space Other
Diagnostic Grade	A, B, C, Fail
Image	Data Collectors took imagery of each asset
Signage Condition	Wayfinding/general signage condition/maintenance
Signage Icon	Presence of icons on signage (pedestrian for walking, arrows for direction, bus for transit stop)
Signage Point of Interest	Directions or distance of current location to Downtown points of interest
Signage Distance	Presence of walking/driving distances on signage
Signage Map Presence	Presence of Downtown map on signage
Signage Technology	Presence of smart technology/interactive screen on signage

Physical Environment: Public Realm Diagnostic Geodatabase Fields	
Field	Field Description
Indicator Type	Sidewalks Crosswalks Pedestrian Signals Roadbed Streetscape Amenities Lighting
Diagnostic Grade	A, B, C, Fail
Image	Data Collectors took imagery of each asset
Sidewalk Assets	Width, condition, material type
Crosswalk Assets	Width, condition, presence of a detectable panel and ADA ramp, material type, crosswalk type, presence of sign (s)
Pedestrian Signal Assets	Presence of pedestrian signal
Roadbed Assets	Material type, condition, paint condition
Streetscape Amenities	Trees: number of trees, tree health, tree pit maintenance, tree shade cover Benches: number of benches, bench age, condition, cleanliness of bench
Lighting Assets	Condition of lighting structure, extent of light brightness

These tables provide details on the physical environment elements collected during site visits to the LRRP study area. Data collectors created assets for each public realm component, and populated the fields with characteristics such as asset condition or dimensions. Each asset then received a grade (A, B, C, or Fail) based on field observations.



Diagnostic Asset: Physical & Business Environment (Private Realm)

Physical & Business Environment: Private Realm Diagnostic Fields	
Field	Field Description
Property Type	Retail Office Industrial
Diagnostic Grade	A, B, C, Fail
Occupancy	Number of businesses and number of vacant storefronts
Window Assets	Window size, transparency of window, maintenance/ cleanliness
Outdoor Display & Dining	Storefront Displays: presence of storefront display, cleanliness of display, condition of display Storefront Dining: presence of outdoor dining facilities (chairs, benches, tables), outdoor dining protection from vehicles, canopies present, accessibility infrastructure (ADA ramps, detectable panels)
Storefront Signage Assets	Exterior signage present, visibility of signage from 10-feet away, condition/maintenance, signage branding (integration with storefront design)
Storefront Awning Assets	Storefront awning present, retractable capabilities, condition/maintenance, protection from weather events, awning design (integration with storefront design)
Storefront Facade Details	Building façade condition/maintenance, building façade material, building facade paint condition/maintenance
Storefront Lighting Assets	Exterior and interior lighting fixtures present, lighting present/turned on after standard working hours
Business Characteristics	Average asking price, average rent, average unit square footage, number of units, percentage vacant, property address, annual rent by square footage, zoning classification

This table provides details on the physical environment elements collected during site visits to the LRRP study area. While in the field, data collectors provided edits to the existing storefront assets that assessed storefront infrastructure such as lighting, outdoor displays, and windows. Each asset then received a grade (A, B, C, or Fail) based on field observations. The private realm database later incorporated business characteristics (for each storefront) such as average rent, number of units, and vacancy information.



Diagnostic Asset: Business Environment (Business Survey)

The DHCD LRRP program included a survey of local business owners located in the targeted Leominster LRRP study area. The purpose of the survey was to obtain business input to help guide strategy development, garner buy-in from the local business community and provide data from all LRRP participating districts for DHCD to inform programs and policy.

The LRRP team administered the survey online and via printed hard copies to representatives from for-and non-profit businesses (including temporarily closed businesses). The Plan Facilitator (PF) and Leominster LRRP team promoted the survey to local businesses and distributed the link to encourage response. The business survey opened on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, and closed on Monday, April 12, 2021. DHCD developed the survey in both English and Spanish, and additional languages were accommodated through oral interview methods (with translators).

The DHCD LRRP team worked with FinePoint Associates to finalize the design of the survey. After the survey closed, FinePoint developed a summary results report for each LRRP community. The report produced provided results in aggregate form only so that the results will be anonymous. These results contributed to the diagnostic phase data collection efforts and helped inform project idea and plan development.

The business survey included questions that addressed the following topics areas:

- Business characteristics and satisfaction with location
- COVID-19 impacts on businesses and their operations
- Potential strategies to support businesses and improve the commercial district



Local Rapid Recovery Plan Program - Business Survey

The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development has launched a program to help communities develop Rapid Recovery Plans for their downtowns and commercial districts.

The business survey was distributed online and via paper hard copies in each LRRP community. The Leominster PF team worked with the Leominster staff to distribute and promote the survey.

Sample Questions:

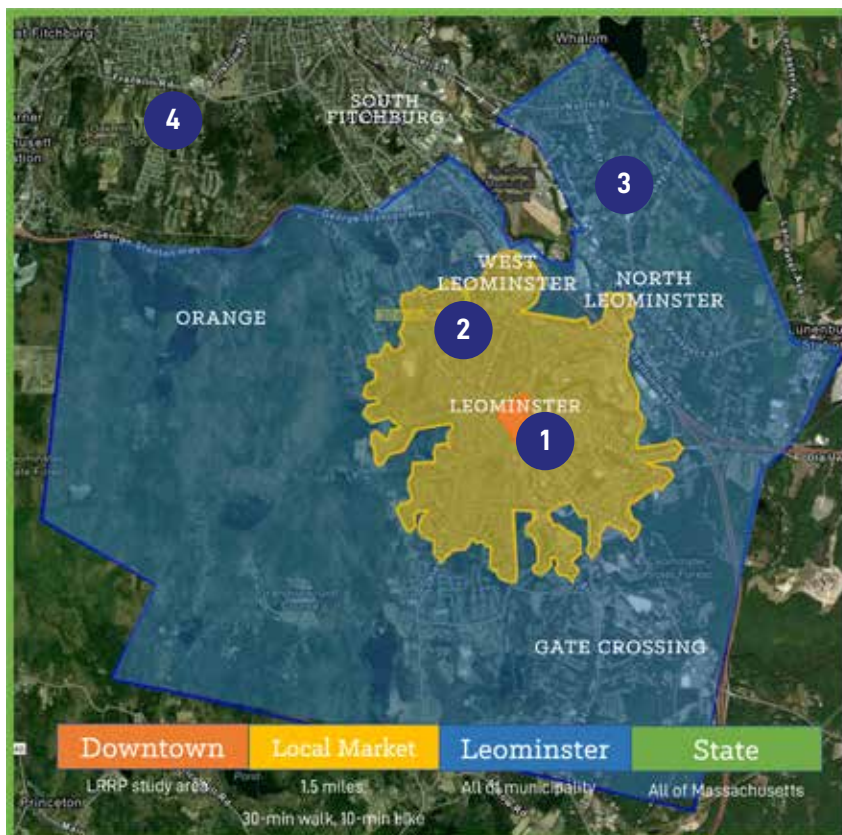
- **Do any local regulations (not related to COVID) pose an obstacle for your business operation?**
- **How did your 2020 business revenue compare to your 2019 revenue?**
- **Considering the conditions in your commercial area, how important to you are each of the following strategies that address Attraction and Retention of Customers and Businesses? (Strategies included more opportunities for outdoor dining, creation of a district management entity, and recruitment programs to attract businesses)**



Diagnostic Asset: Customer Base

To supplement DHCD's diagnostic data, the LRRP Plan Facilitator team extracted market demand data (customer base data) from ESRI's Business Analyst tool to understand demographics, customer statistics, and market profiles. The data looked at customer base profiles for four regions: statewide, municipal-wide, "locality" (1.5 mile radius), and the LRRP study area. The following table below summarizes the specific data collected for this diagnostic category.

Customer Base Data	
Data	Data Description
Demographics	Population Trends Age Distribution
Education	Educational Attainment
Customer Statistics	Average Household Size Employment and Income Statistics Jobs-to-residents ratio Median Home Value Home Value Growth
Retail Market Profile	Retail Leakage (total retail surplus) Grocery Store Leakage (total surplus) Restaurant Leakage (total surplus)
Other Statistics	Crime Index Vehicle Ownership Poverty - unemployment status



- 1 LRRP Study Area Boundary - Downtown area/commercial district**
- 2 Local Market Area - 1.5 mile radius, which includes a 30-minute walk and 10-minute bike ride**
- 3 LRRP Communitywide - encompasses all of the municipality**
- 4 Statewide - encompasses all of Massachusetts**

The above map highlights the four regions included in the Customer Base analysis

Diagnostic Key Findings



LRRP Study Area

Why Focus on the Commercial Core?

The Local Rapid Recovery Program targets downtowns, town centers, and commercial districts in order to assess the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on local businesses and downtown activity. LRRP study areas include concentrated areas of commercial and retail activity (i.e., "Nodes, Corridors, Town Centers or Commercial Areas"), therefore excluding significant areas of non-commercial, non-retail uses. This program did not look at residential zones or collect data related to residential infrastructure or local residential statistics. By focusing on the commercial/retail core, communities can use the LRRP plans and diagnostic data to implement data-driven, easily implementable solutions to revitalize a downtown.

Leominster LRRP Study Area



Existing Conditions & Project Orientation Map of the Leominster LRRP Study Area

Source: Stantec

Key Findings & Diagnostic Data Overview



Downtown is a major economic asset for Leominster and helps set it apart in the region.

Leominster's high quality downtown attracts ambitious entrepreneurs and contributes to a strong local housing market.

More housing in and around the core could help foster new customers, activity, and investment

Additional housing development – both adaptive reuse and new construction – could add momentum to downtown's revitalization.



Leominster offers an attractive and well-appointed downtown environment.

In addition to scoring well across most general categories, downtown includes numerous special features such as the Common, Riverwalk, and seasonal flowers.

Downtown's sidewalk network is largely complete.

Most sidewalks and crosswalks are accommodating and in good repair. There are some areas for improvement and gaps to fill but no major deficiencies.

The majority of downtown's building stock is in good condition.

However, some are in need of repair or refurbishment and should be addressed to support a more positive overall downtown public image.



Most businesses surveyed experienced Covid impacts

88% of downtown businesses participating in the survey reported experiencing one or more COVID-19 related impacts to their business operations, capacity, revenue, or expenses.

Half of downtown businesses would defer recovery assistance

Reflecting downtown Leominster's broader culture of self-sufficiency and entrepreneurialism, 50% of surveyed business owners indicated they would rather other businesses receive assistance instead of theirs.

Businesses consider downtown an attractive asset

Though most had ideas for improvements, most businesses are generally satisfied with the quality of the downtown environment.



There are no major gaps in Leominster's administrative capacity.

City staff is very busy supporting downtown businesses but maintains adequate capacity to be effective. Most downtown businesses also "do their part" to supplement downtown's success and beautification.

Opportunities for support could be focused on creating programs that staff could then administer.

Project recommendations should focus on establishing and outfitting policies and programs which staff can then take over and execute moving forward.



CUSTOMER BASE

Highlights from the Customer Base Data

What is the Customer Base Diagnostic?

Demographic data from ESRI's Business Analyst software helps us to understand the local customer base, their spending habits, and the degree to which businesses are capturing customer dollars. Data such as a community's population trends, age and education profiles, household statistics, vehicle accessibility, and employment and income profiles help to tell a story on who is frequenting the town or a commercial district. It also highlights the demand for certain retail or commercial uses, therefore assisting in community-wide economic development efforts.

The Customer Base Diagnostic poses the question: **who are the customers of businesses in the LRRP Study Area?**

Customer Base Results in Leominster

Downtown Leominster includes a significant population of daytime workers to patronize retail and restaurants within the study area. However, the district does not include many residential units so lacks a significant built-in population within walking distance to add to the local commercial market base. Additionally, while city and regional residents do visit downtown for events, dining, and specialty shopping, there are no grocery stores or similar anchors that might drive significant daily shopping traffic to the district.

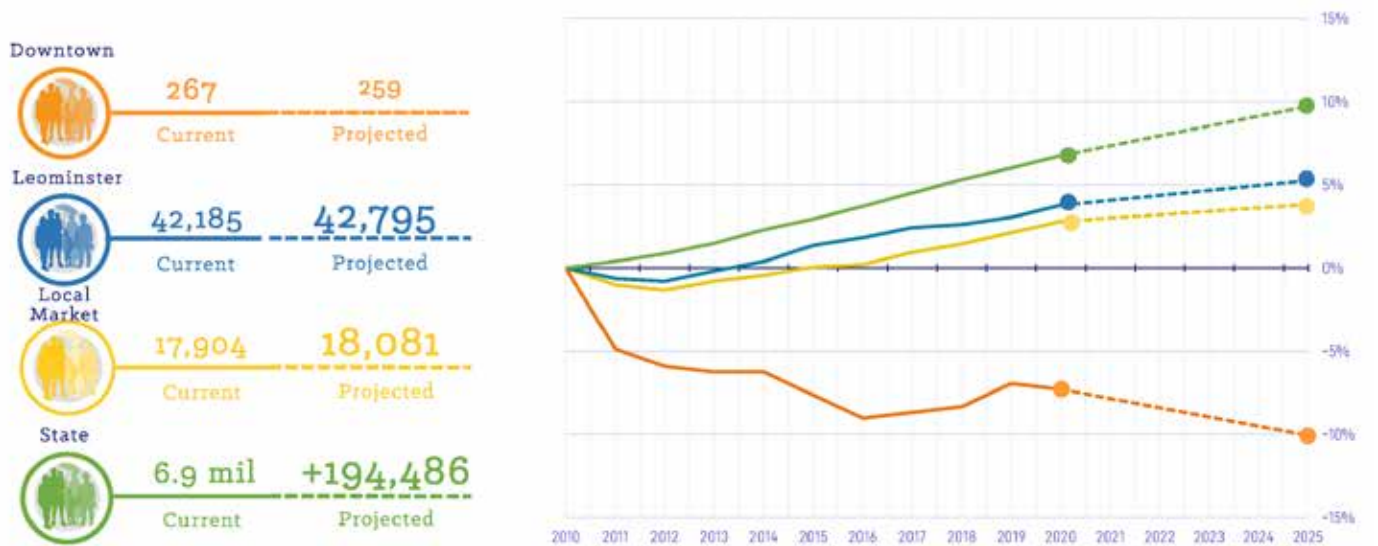




DEMOGRAPHICS

The study area's population is only 267, so demographic indexes are skewed. The local market's population is a better indicator for the trajectory of the area.

The study area and surrounding areas lag behind the state's growth.



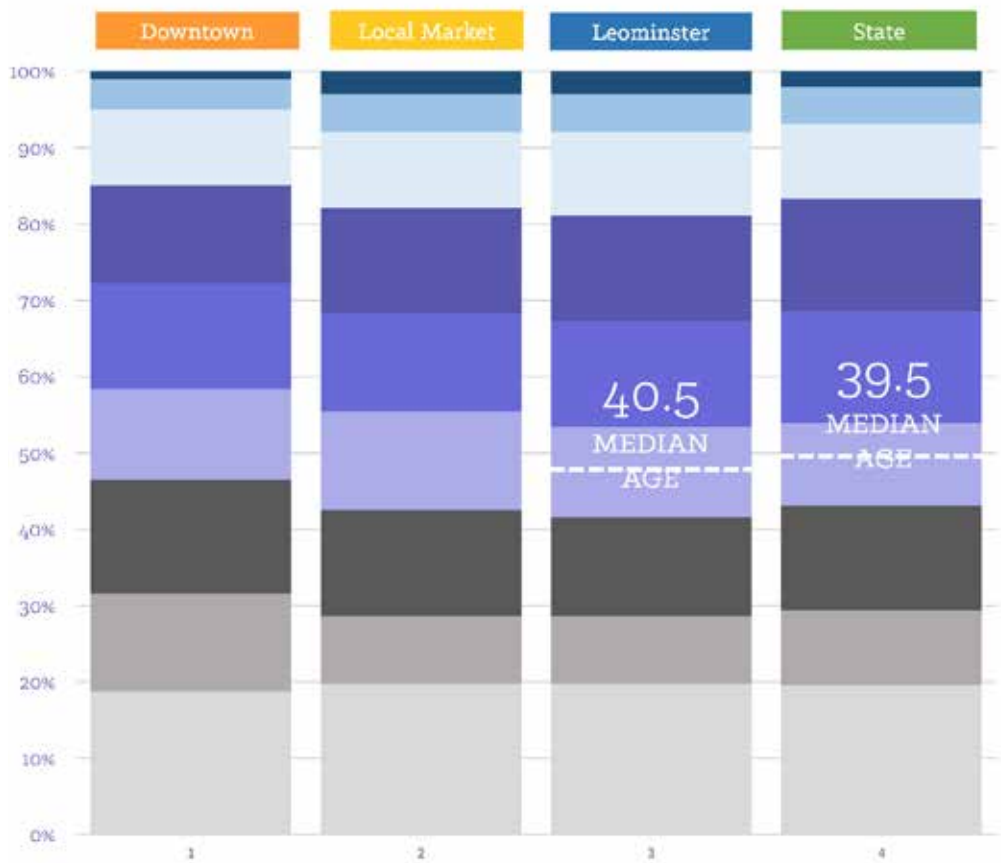
Population trend in the study area
Source: ESRI Business Analyst



DEMOGRAPHICS

The local area's age distribution closely matches that of the state.

Age Distribution



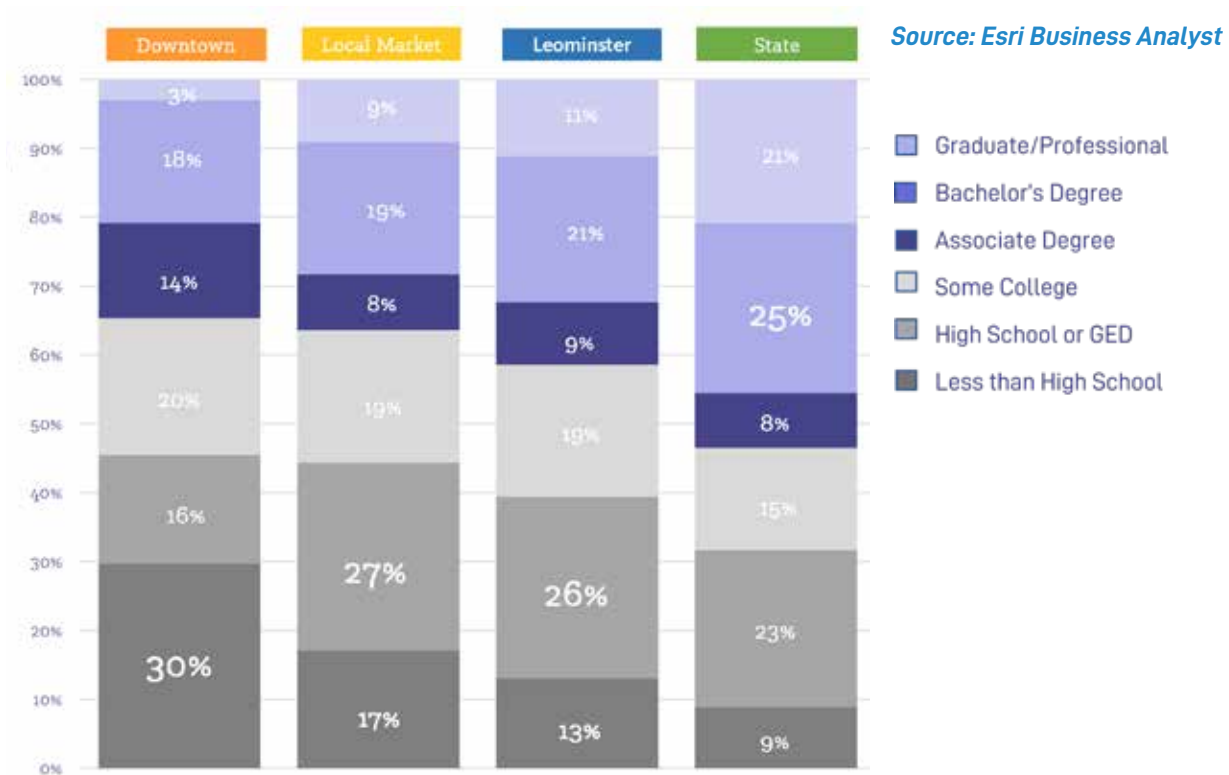
Source: Esri Business Analyst

- 85+
- 75-84
- 65-74
- 55-64
- 45-54
- 35-44
- 25-34
- 18-24
- 0-17

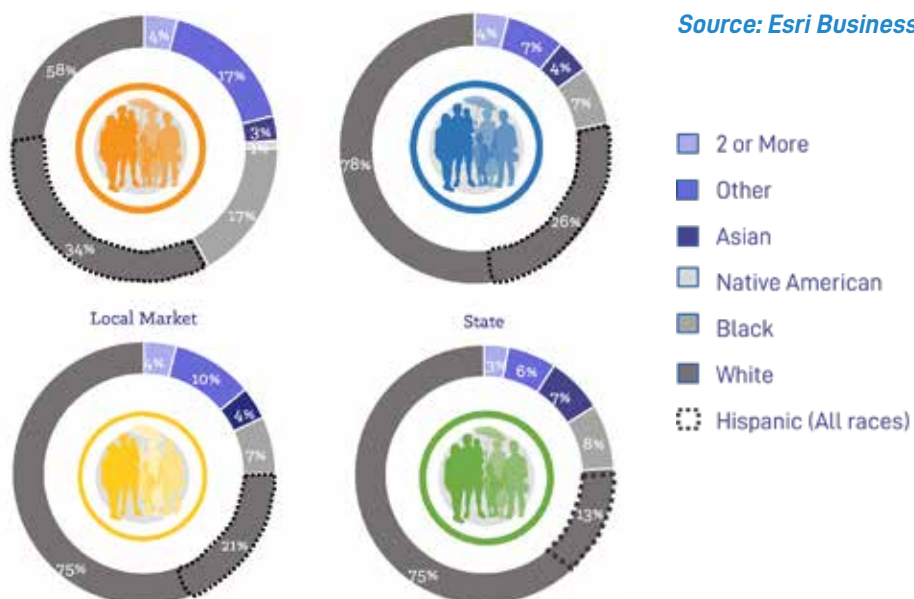


DEMOGRAPHICS

Education



Race and Ethnicity





CUSTOMER STATISTICS

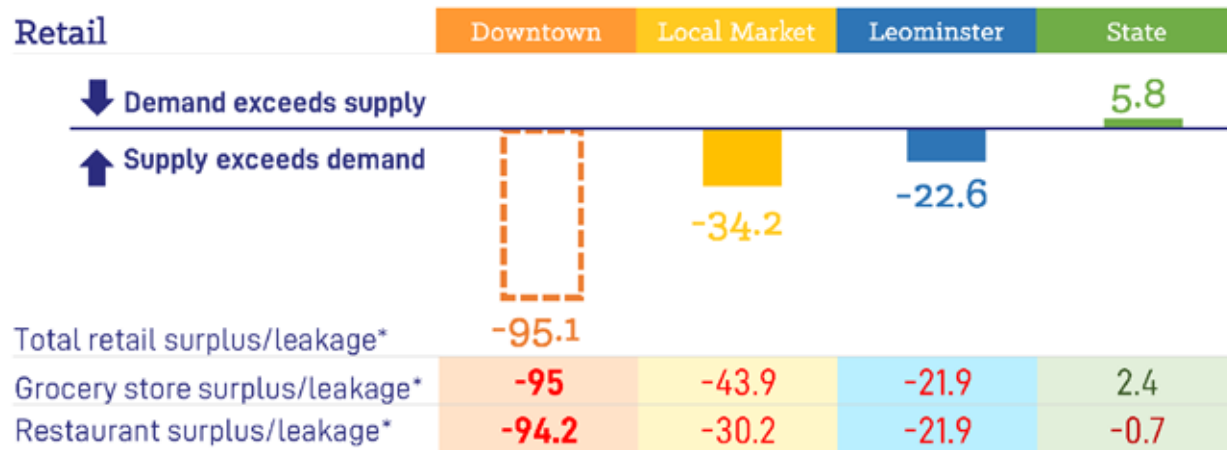
The local area is expected to add an **additional 177 households** in the coming 5 years.

	Downtown	Local Market	Leominster	State
Population				
	1.9	2.3	2.4	2.5
Avg. household size				
Residential population	267	17,904	42,185	6,993,463
Households	142	7,584	17,328	2,702,578
5-year forecast, population change	-8	177	610	194,486
5-year forecast, household change	-5	66	234	73,332
Median age	38	40	42	40
Employment and income				
	\$40k	\$51k	\$60k	\$81k
Median household income				
Employees	723	8,055	18,569	3,384,476
Students (secondary & above)	41	1,972	4,267	933,098
Jobs-to-residents ratio	2.7	0.4	0.4	0.5
Housing				
	\$225k	\$239k	\$269k	\$415k
Median home value				
5-year forecast, home value growth	56%	16%	18%	17%
Owner-occupied housing	7%	46%	57%	61%



CUSTOMER STATISTICS

The study area has a surplus of retail and food/ beverage and grocery stores when compared to the residential population. The study area has a much higher rate of crime than the national average.



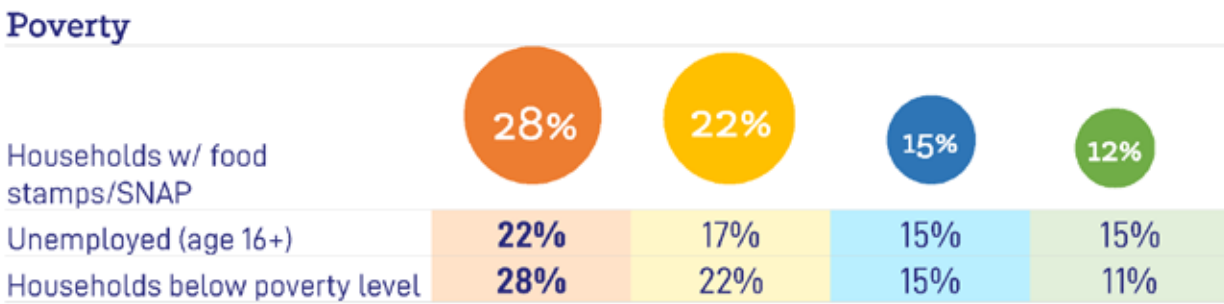
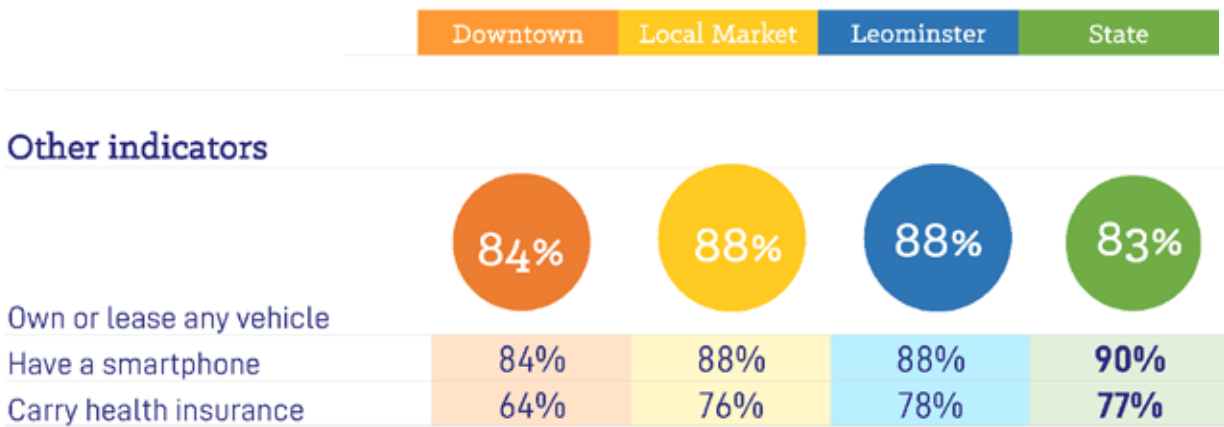
**Crime index score of 100 is the national average. A score of 200 is double the national average and a score of 50 is half the national average.



ADDITIONAL STATISTICS

Most study area residents have access to a vehicle.

The proportion of households below the poverty level and unemployment in the study area is higher than the statewide average.





PHYSICAL
ENVIRONMENT

Highlights from the Physical Environment

What is the Physical Environment Diagnostic?

The integrity of public infrastructure and private buildings and storefronts plays an important role in the experience of a downtown, town center, or commercial district. Accessibility from a parking lot to the sidewalk, comfortability while using streetscape amenities, and an inviting storefront window all have an impact on the vitality of a town center. It is important to bifurcate the physical environment into the public and the private realm to acknowledge the fundamentally different nature of the tactics and funding mechanisms available for each. The following public and private elements of the Fall River's physical environment have been analyzed:

- Public Realm: Sidewalks, street trees & benches, lighting, wayfinding and signage, roadbed and crosswalks
- Private Realm: Storefront windows, outdoor display and dining, signage, awning, facades, and lighting

The Physical Environment Diagnostic poses the question: **How conducive is the physical environment to meeting the needs and expectations of both businesses and customers?**





SIDEWALKS

Leominster has some high quality sidewalks, with the overall score for most study area sidewalks averaging B.

A

More than 75% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned, well-maintained and accessible to multiple users across different ages and abilities.



B

About 50% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned and well-maintained.



C

More than 25% of sidewalks in the study area pose challenges to the pedestrian experience (including narrow sidewalks and lack of cleanliness/maintenance).



F

There are no sidewalks in the study area.



Best Practice Guiding Principles:

Sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate both the flow of customers and spillover retail/dining activity. In addition, sidewalks should be clean and well-maintained to ensure the safety and comfort of pedestrians.



STREET TREES AND BENCHES

Leominster has street trees and benches throughout the study area, though improvements and maintenance are needed, resulting in a B grade overall.

A

Street trees and benches are readily available throughout the study area. They are well-designed, well-maintained, and offer shade and comfort to pedestrians.

B

Although street trees and benches are available, these amenities have not been cleaned or well-maintained, and require improvements.

C

Limited availability of street trees and benches creating uncomfortable pedestrian experience.

F

There are no street trees and benches in the study area.



Best Practice Guiding Principles:

Sidewalks should facilitate a variety of activities, including resting, people-watching and socializing. Street trees and benches are key amenities that support such activities and should be made available without disrupting the flow of pedestrians.



LIGHTING

Lighting in the study area is almost exclusively focused on the street, leaving many pedestrian areas underlit, scoring a C grade overall.

A

More than 75% of the study area utilizes a range of lighting strategies to ensure safety of pedestrians and motorists, as well as highlight the identity and history of an area.

**B**

About 50% of the study area is serviced by street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety.

**C**

Street lighting on the primary street in the study area does not support pedestrian visibility and safety.

**F**

There is no street lighting in the study area.



Best Practice Guiding Principles:

Street lighting improves pedestrian visibility and personal safety, as well as aids in geographic orientation.



WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

While wayfinding is not overly coordinated, there are ample examples of driver-oriented signing throughout the study area, warranting a B grade overall.

A

There is a comprehensive and cohesive wayfinding system that offers geographic orientation to pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Signage reflects brand/identity.



B

Wayfinding in the study area is primarily geared towards directing cars. There is limited signage to identify key assets and destinations to pedestrians.



C

Limited to no signage available throughout the study area.



F

There is no wayfinding/signage in the study area.



Best Practice Guiding Principles:

A wayfinding system supports overall accessibility of a commercial district. It benefits pedestrians and bicyclists and directs motorists to park and walk. Without clear visual cues, customers may find it difficult to park or may be less aware of local offerings.



ROADBED AND CROSSWALKS

While pedestrian and bicycle accommodation is not prioritized, roadways and crosswalks overall warrant a score of B.

A

Roads are designed to balance the needs of motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians and create a safe environment for all users.

B

Roads are designed primarily to move motor vehicles across the study area efficiently, with limited crosswalks for pedestrians.

C

Roads are hazardous to all users.

F

The study area is not connected by any major roads.



Best Practice Guiding Principles:

Roads should be well-maintained to ensure safety of drivers and pedestrians. Crosswalks that are unsafe or inconvenient to customers may undermine accessibility between stores and overall shopper experience.



WINDOW

Leominster's business have good transparency to attract customers, scoring a grade of B overall.

A

More than 75% of storefronts maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.

B

About 50% of storefront windows maintain at least 70% transparency.

C

More than 25% of storefronts have windows with limited transparency.

F

All storefronts are boarded up and/or have limited transparency.



Best Practice Guiding Principles:

Storefronts that maintain a minimum of 70% transparency ensure clear lines of sight between the business and the sidewalk to enhance attractiveness of storefront, as well as improve safety for the business, customers, and pedestrians.

SIGNAGE

Signs in the study area are prevalent and warrant a B grade overall.

A

More than 75% of storefront signs reflect the unique brand identity of tenants and can be easily seen from more than 10 ft distance.

B

About 50% of storefronts have clear signage that reflect basic business information and can easily be seen from adjacent sidewalks.

C

More than 25% of storefronts have signage that does not communicate names of business or types of products/services being offered.

F

Storefronts in the study area do not have signage.



Best Practice Guiding Principles:

Signage can help customers identify the location of storefronts and businesses from a distance. Signage should also reflect the visual brand and identity of tenants to help attract new customers.



AWNING

Awnings are not very common in the study area, scoring a grade of C overall.

A

More than 75% of properties in the study area have retractable awnings that have been well-maintained and cleaned.

B

About 50% of properties in the study area have functioning awnings that have been well-maintained and cleaned.

C

More than 25% of properties in the study area do not have awnings and/or have awnings that are unusable or have not been cleaned and maintained.

F

Storefronts in the study area are not equipped with awnings.



Best Practice Guiding Principles:

Awnings can provide shade during warmer months, enabling comfortable outdoor dining arrangements for customers. However, they must be well-maintained and designed in coordination with other elements of the storefront.



FACADE

Leominster's small city historic fabric is fairly-well maintained, scoring a B overall.

A

Storefronts that use high-quality materials, and paint and color to differentiate from other businesses, can dramatically improve the appearance of the commercial district.

B

Most properties have clean and well-maintained façades, but at least one significant property requiring structural façade improvements.

C

More than 25% of properties require significant building façades improvements, including power washing, painting, and structural enhancements.

F

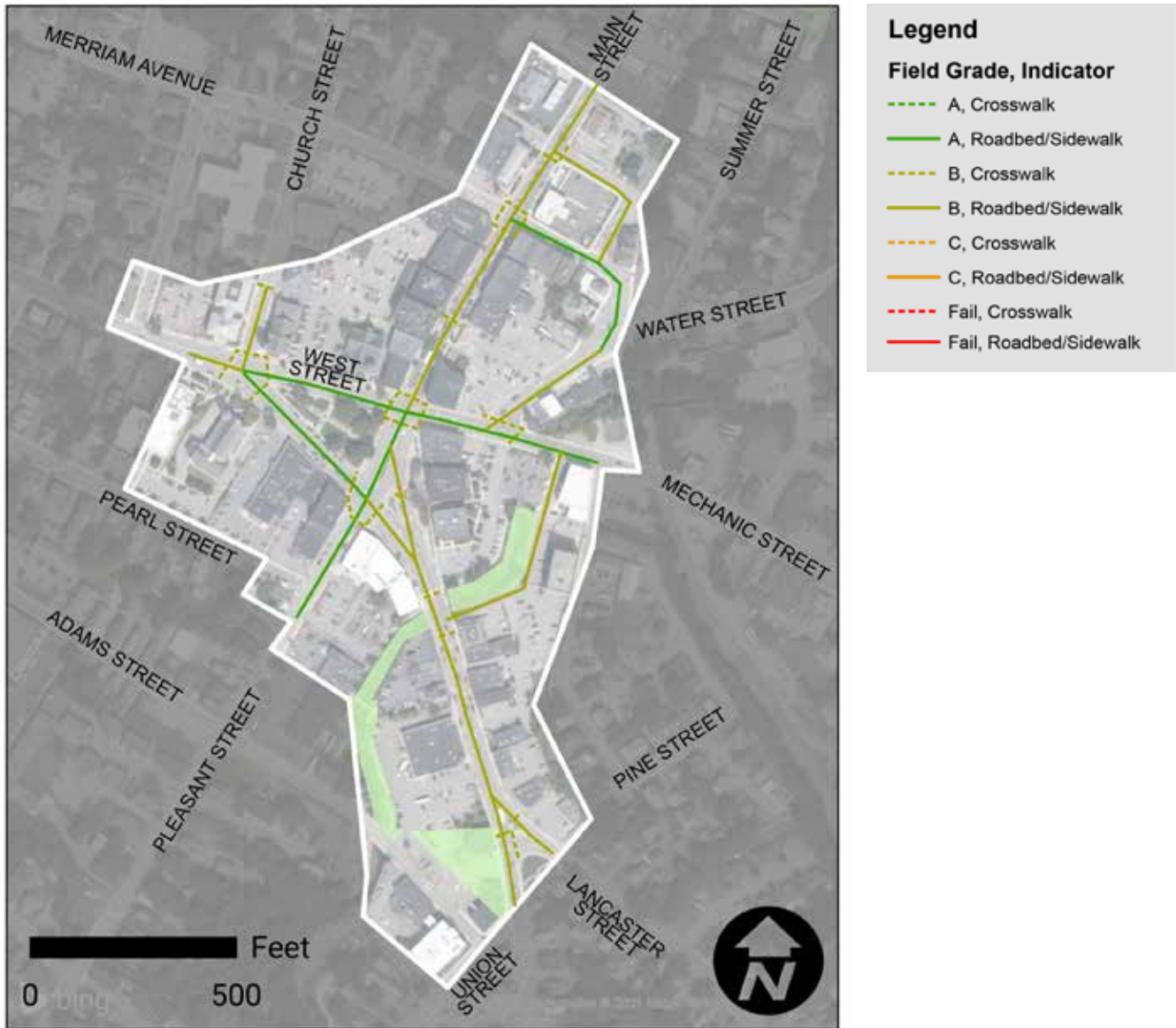
All properties in the study area require significant façade improvements.



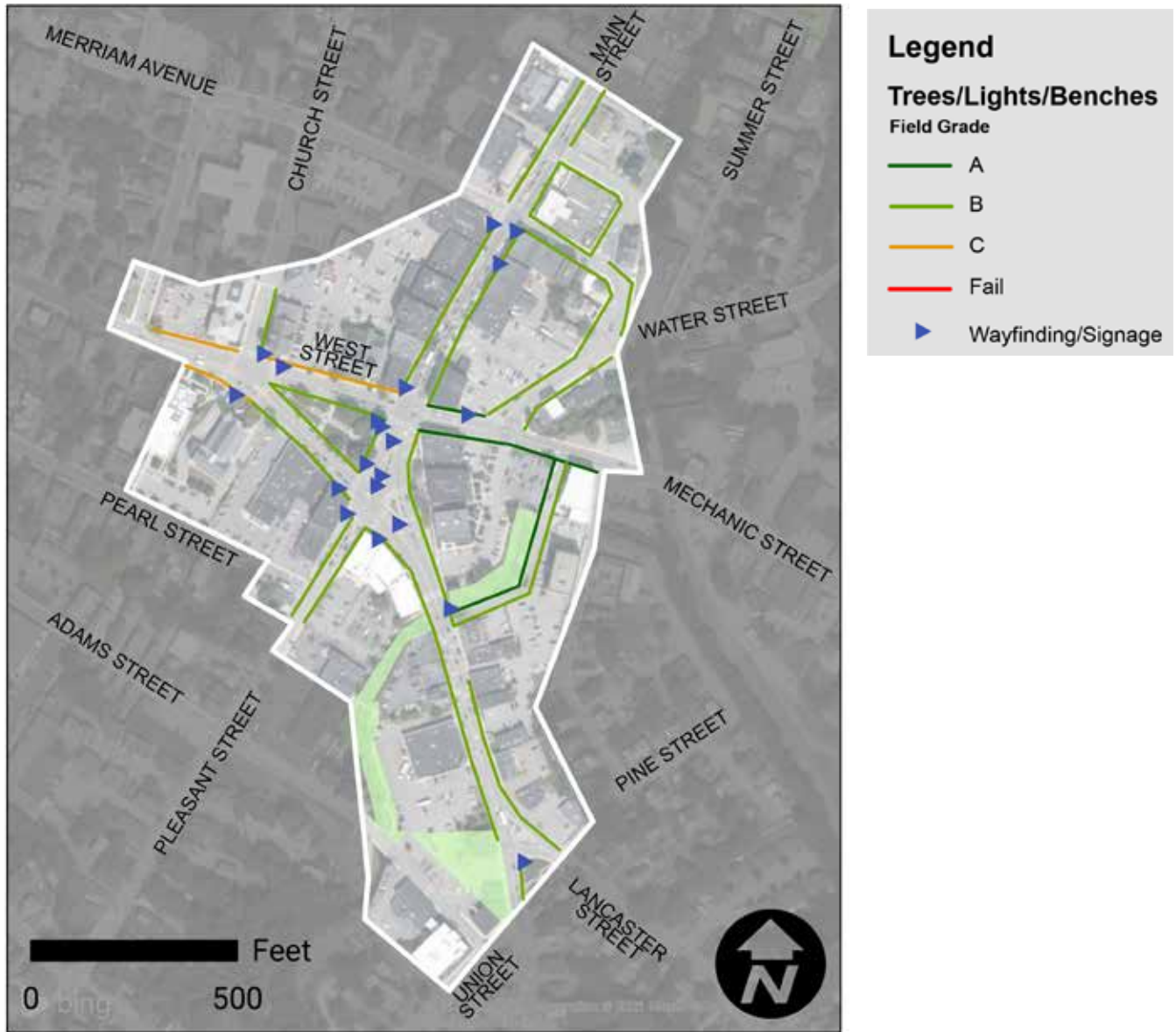
Best Practice Guiding Principles:

Storefronts that use high-quality and durable building materials, as well as paint and color to differentiate from other businesses, can dramatically improve the appearance of the commercial district to potential customers.

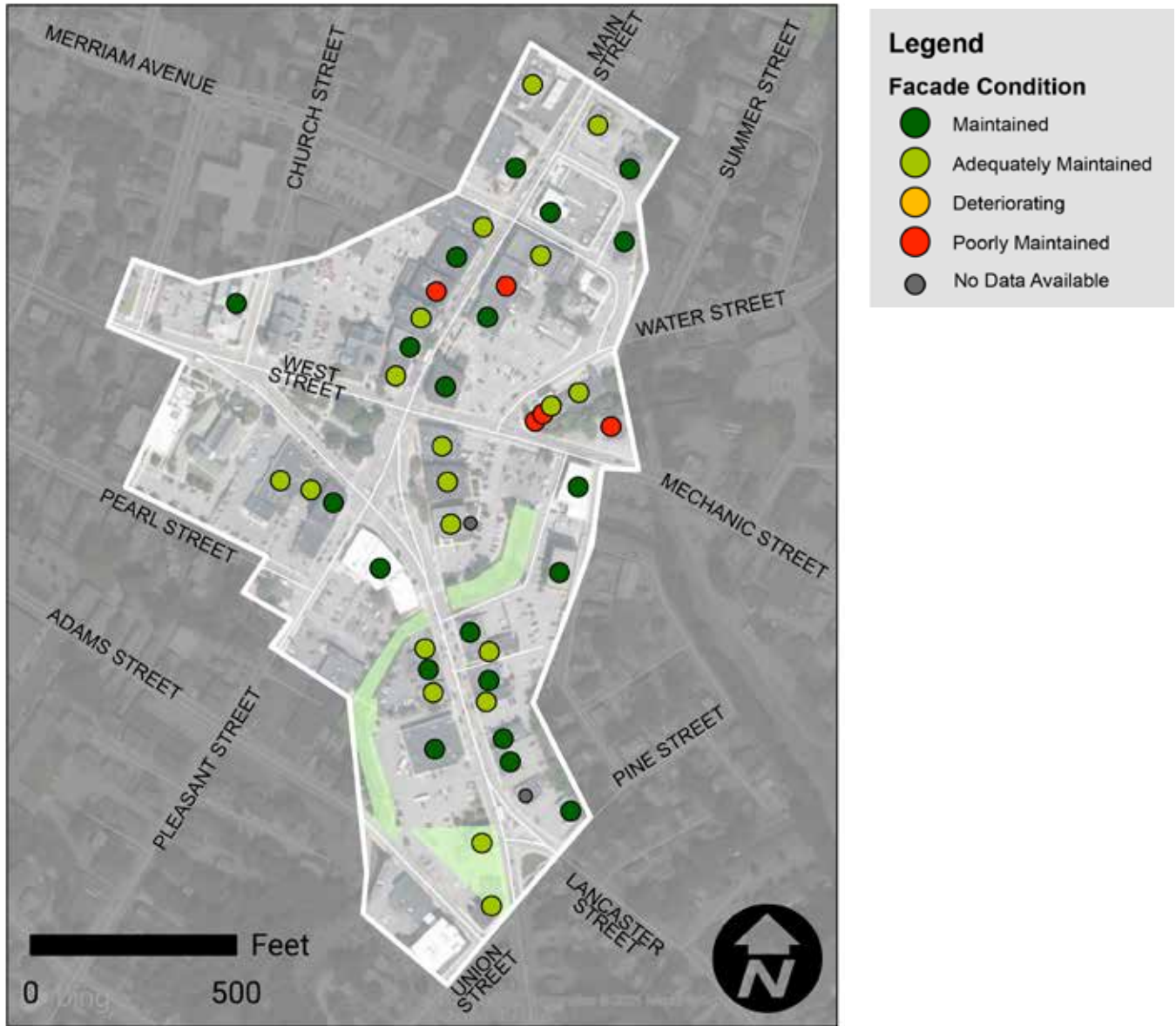
CROSSWALK AND SIDEWALK SCORES



STREETScape INFRASTRUCTURE



FACADE CONDITIONS





Highlights from the Business Environment Diagnostic

What is the Business Environment Diagnostic?

The conditions of the local business environment, including business density, quality, and type of offerings, play a critical role in how successful businesses are in meeting the needs of the district's customers. Collecting data related to the tenant mix and concentration of stores provides an insight into the health of local businesses, as well as highlights the presence (or lack of) major anchors and drivers that attract visitors and residents to frequent businesses in the district.

The Business Environment Diagnostic poses the question:

- "What are the impacts of COVID-19 on businesses in the Study Area, and how well does the business mix meet the needs of various customer groups?"

Downtown Leominster Business Survey Results

A survey was completed by a variety of 25 businesses in the area. A large majority of businesses surveyed (88%) reported experiencing one or more COVID-19 related impacts to their business operations, capacity, revenue, or expenses. Businesses most commonly experienced reduced operating hours and capacity and declines in revenue, pausing a period of growth and stability over the three years prior. One year into the pandemic, in March and April 2021, only 36% of surveyed businesses were operating at full capacity.

Despite these COVID-19 related impacts, half of downtown businesses surveyed were not interested in receiving assistance. Of those interested, popular forms of assistance included: Low-cost financing for storefront and facade improvements, and opportunities for shared marketing and advertising.

While businesses overall reported being satisfied with the quality of the downtown environment, they also identified a number of ways to make downtown better, including:

-
- Renovation of storefronts and building facades
 - Improvements in safety and cleanliness
 - Changes in public parking availability, management, or policies
 - Improvement of streetscape and sidewalks
 - More cultural events and activities to bring people to the district
 - Recruitment programs to attract additional businesses
 - More opportunities for outdoor dining and selling
 - Implementing marketing strategies for the district

60%

of businesses surveyed saw a decrease in revenue in 2020 compared to 2019

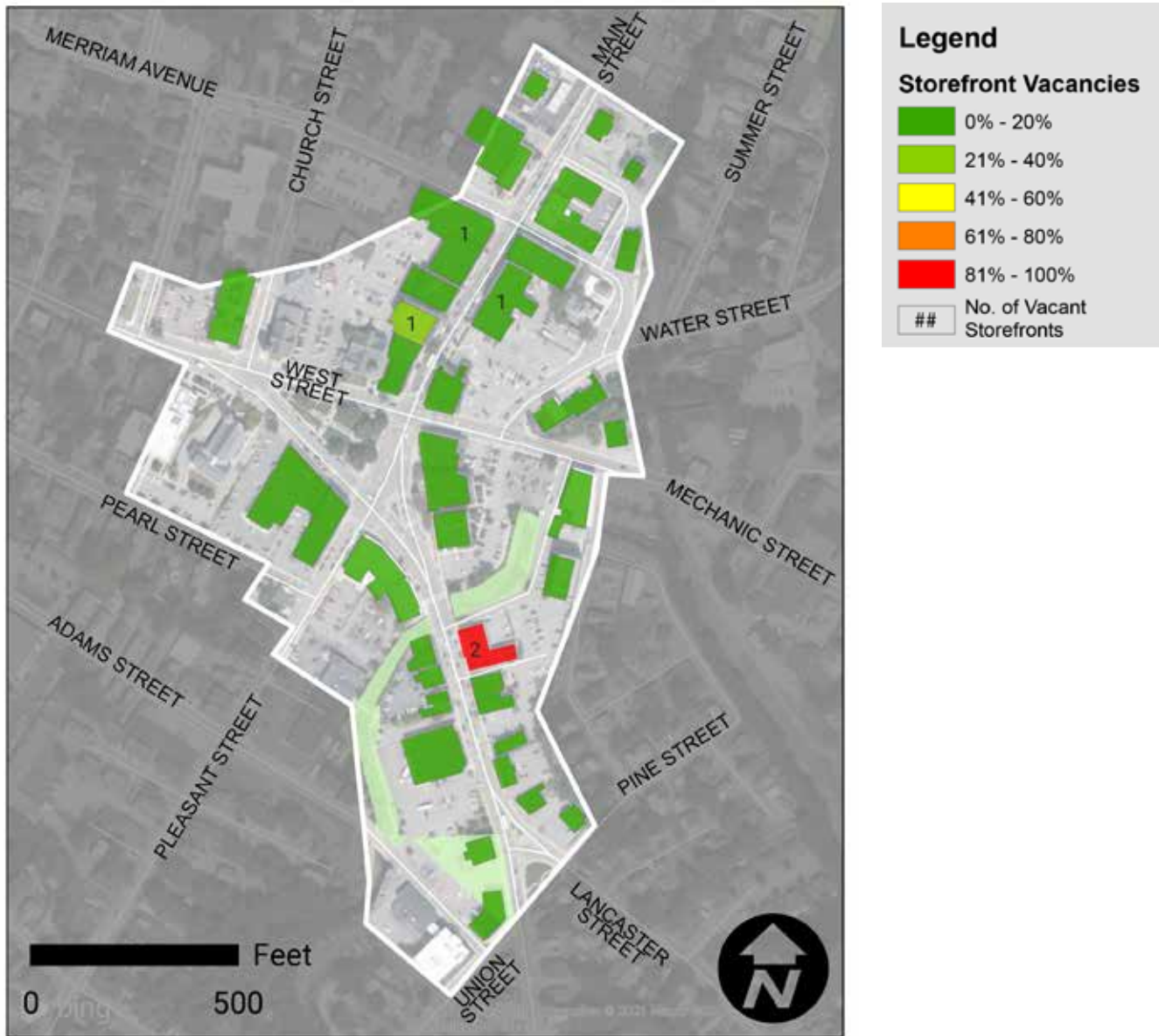
36%

of businesses surveyed were back to full operational capacity by March/April 2021

Top 4 most reported COVID-19 impacts:

- Reduced operating hours/capacity
- Decline in revenue
- Business closure (temporary or permanent)
- Incurred expenses to implement

VACANCY/OCCUPANCY PROFILE IN THE LRRP STUDY AREA



Source: Stantec



Highlights from the Administrative Capacity

What is the Administrative Capacity Diagnostic?

Administrative capacity refers to a combination of leadership, organizational capacity, resources, and regulatory and policy frameworks that enable catalytic investments and improvements to take root. Understanding leadership roles and champions as well as funding mechanisms and existing partnership are critical components to assessing the administrative capacity of a community.

The Administrative Capacity Diagnostic poses questions such as:

- Who are the key stewards of the LRRP Study Area? Are they adequately staff and resourced to support implementation of projects?
- Are the regulatory, zoning, and permitting process an impediment to business activity? Why or why not?
- If lack a stakeholder entity, is a discussion needed on District Management?

There are no major gaps in Leominster's administrative capacity.

In general, Leominster celebrates a culture of teamwork and mutual support among businesses and with the City. This was reflected in both stakeholder interviews with local businesses and also conversations with City staff.

City staff is very busy supporting downtown businesses but maintains adequate capacity to be effective.

Most downtown businesses and institutions "do their part" to contribute to downtown's success and beautification, though an organizing structure could help streamline.

Opportunities for support could be focused on program creation.

While City staff has capacity and capabilities to effectively champion and administer existing economic development and related programs, setting up new programs and policies would strain resources. Therefore, project recommendations should focus on support establishing and outfitting policies and programs which staff can then take over and execute moving forward.

Project Recommendations



Identification & Prioritization of Projects

Integration of Project Goals & Recommendations

All project ideas developed through the LRRP program integrate the overarching goals of supporting business competitiveness, building vibrant communities, creating a trained and skilled workforce, and using technical assistance to create a defined and actionable project list.

The RRP goals build upon the goals and priorities identified in previous and concurrent planning initiatives taking place in Leominster. The LRRP planning process concludes with a set of project recommendations tailored to respond to each community's needs, opportunities, and resources.

Each project falls into one of the following diagnostic categories:

Physical Environment: Public Realm

Projects for the public realm enhance streets and public spaces in communities to spur other investment and create opportunities for business activity and gathering that lead to community vitality. The recovery of Massachusetts downtowns, town centers, and business districts has relied on public spaces like these to extend the areas in which business communities and public life can operate.

Physical Environment: Private Realm

These projects focus on enhancements on private properties and buildings, improving the aesthetics and attractiveness of existing buildings but also helping new buildings to contribute to a commercial district's recovery in a positive way.

Business Environment: Revenue and Sales

Projects intended to increase revenue and sales can include strategic organizations such as task forces and business improvement districts, but also include more creative approaches that draw on attributes of the physical environment and special events to promote businesses in a downtown district and encourage increased visits and spending.

Business Environment: Tenant Mix

These project efforts are intended to diversify the types of businesses in communities. This can not only respond more closely to community needs, but also work toward a more resilient commercial fabric in business centers so that major disruptions like COVID-19 do not result in disproportionate closures and a lack of activity.

Administrative Capacity

Capacity-building projects help make local governments and their partner agencies more able to take on the other kinds of project efforts recommended in this Local Rapid Recovery Plan.

Public Engagement Efforts

Downtown Leominster's LRRP process included several community engagement opportunities, from a formal presentation to phone and digital outreach to a public open house.

Introductory presentation at Council meeting

The plan facilitator delivered an introductory presentation at a June City Council meeting which was also broadcast online and recorded for public review. This presentation included an overview of the process, draft community goals, data collection summary and findings, and an invitation to stay involved for the rest of the process.

Business survey

The community issued a DHCD-crafted survey to downtown businesses to inform a baseline understanding of how covid impacted the downtown economy and how establishments navigated the pandemic.

Stakeholder interviews

The plan facilitator team engaged approximately a dozen downtown stakeholders for one-on-one interviews and conversations focused on covid impacts to downtown businesses and ideas and strategies to recovery and restore the revitalization momentum downtown had been enjoying prior to the pandemic. Interviewees included a representative sample of local business owners, employers, residents, and other downtown stakeholders.

Local Rapid Recovery Planning Program



The Mass Downtown Initiative (MDI) awarded the City of Leominster with a Local Rapid Recovery Planning technical assistance grant which is part of the Baker-Polito Recovery Plan to revitalize downtowns, respond to the effects of COVID-19 on local businesses, and prioritize actions and strategies.

Downtown Leominster Local Rapid Recovery Plan *Phase I findings summary*

Join us for an Open House as we present our Phase I Summary findings. It will be an opportunity to review the findings and give us your input!

Leominster City Hall
25 West Street, Downtown Leominster
John R. Tata Auditorium
Open House 5:00pm-7:00pm
Thursday, July 15, 2021

Light refreshments will be served

Public open house

The community and plan facilitator hosted a public open house event at City Hall to provide an update on the process and gather ideas and feedback from local residents, business owners, and other stakeholders. Participants represented a wide cross-section of the Leominster community and supported an engaging and productive conversation to help clarify project goals and advance recommendations.

Subject Matter Expert (SME) Guidance

Based on the planning process's analysis, diagnostics, and stakeholder engagement, the community's top needs and priorities emerged, informing which areas of focus and intervention might have the most significant impact for economic recovery.

DHCD provided a roster of "Subject Matter Experts" (SMEs) available to consult with communities and help develop their highest priority project ideas.

For Leominster, the following SMEs were engaged for specialized support to help define and plan's most potentially significant project recommendations:

Emily Innes from **Innes Associates Ltd.** provided guidance and resources informing the plan's recommendations for a facade improvement program, updated sign code, and updated design guidelines.

Jeanette Nigro from **Perch Advisors** provided insight and examples to support the downtown branding strategy.

David Correia from **Goman + York Advisory Services** helped develop the downtown housing development strategy.



Prioritization Process

The following sources, analyses, and processes informed how project recommendations were identified and prioritized in Leominster

Project identification

The project recommendations list was informed by a synthesis of the following stages of this planning process:

Business survey: provides insight into the experience and priorities of local entrepreneurs and operators downtown.

- *Physical diagnostic assessment:* highlights areas of need for potential future public and private realm investment.
- *Community demographics analysis:* indicates trends that projects might help channel to strengthen revitalization progress.
- *Stakeholder engagement:* provides a sounding board to test ideas and clarify priorities.
- *Subject Matter Expert guidance:* injects deep experience and insight to shape ideas into proven project models.
- *Alignment with existing plans, initiatives, and opportunities:* highlights existing programs and resources that could be leveraged to advance new project ideas more efficiently.

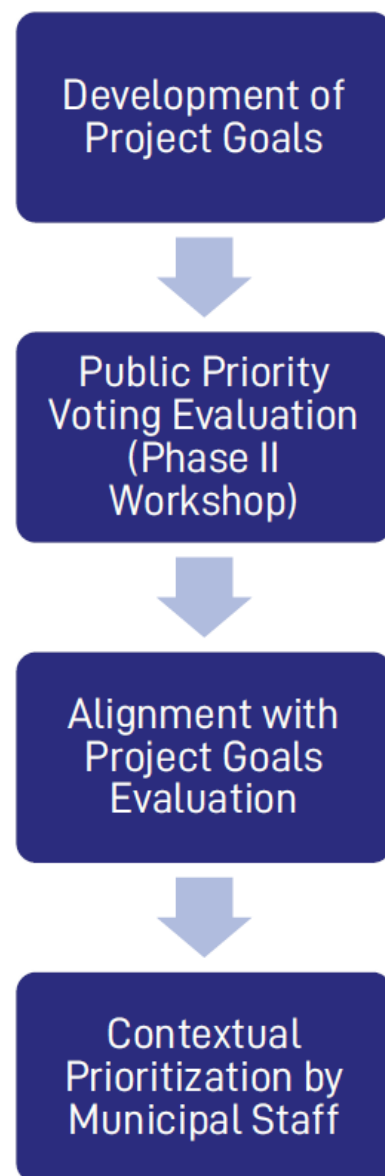
The plan's project list was developed to reflect and respond to the key findings, priorities, opportunities, and ideas generated and ranked through the above steps and processes.

Project prioritization

Recommendations were prioritized in parallel

with developing the project list itself.

In Leominster, it became clear that a facade improvement program, downtown branding, and housing development offer most significant impact in counteracting the impacts of Covid on the study area. Therefore, they have been highlighted for priority consideration for funding and implementation through future DHCD programs and other programs and initiatives.



Project List

Project Ideas

The following section provides an overview of the project prioritization results from the public engagement efforts and stakeholder feedback, along with a map that illustrates project locations at a site and district-level. The Leominster LRRP Report includes 10 projects, all of which address dynamics addressed in the diagnostic, including Physical Environment, Business Environment, Customer Base, and Administrative Capacity.

Category	Project	Description	Timeframe	Budget	Priority
Public Realm	Retrofit downtown streets and intersections for improved walkability	Lane narrowing, crosswalks, etc. (a “once-over” upgrade for the whole downtown)	Short-Term	Medium	
	Install mid-block pedestrian crossings	Emphasizing safety at vulnerable locations	Short-Term	Low	
	Connect Twin Cities Rail Trail to downtown core	Inserting an on-street segment between the end of a new trail and the center of downtown	Short-Term	Low	
	Upgrade downtown wayfinding for parking	Focusing on parking access needs only	Short-Term	Low	
Tenant Mix	Create a downtown housing development strategy	Mix of adaptive reuse and infill housing to accommodate demand	Short-Term	Medium	✓
Revenue/Sales	Technical assistance for businesses	Focusing on support to mobilize businesses most impacted by COVID	Short-Term	Low	
Admin Capacity	Develop a downtown signage code	Focusing on signage improvements to existing buildings	Short-Term	Low	
	Update downtown design guidelines	To inform programs like facade improvement	Short-Term	Low	
	Design and implement a downtown branding strategy	Focusing on downtown identity and marketing collateral	Short-Term	Medium	✓
	Establish Facade Improvement Program	Focusing on upgrading existing facades	Short-Term	Low	✓

Implementation / Next Steps

Project Action Plan

The Local Rapid Recovery Program gives communities a defined and implementable compilation of projects that have been vetted by the community, as well as a data-driven plan that can alleviate the impacts from COVID-19 pandemic. This report provides detailed information on the budget ranges, timeframe, funding sources, action items, and key processes required to properly execute and implement the project ideas. The project ideas developed through this program serve as opportunities for communities to rapidly implement capital improvements and address administrative and economic development challenges. Municipal departments and planning entities can use the project ideas as a resource for internal or external funding opportunities.

Obtaining Funding

Considering the vast number of project ideas and differing budget ranges (less than \$50K or greater than \$400K), it can be overwhelming and overly time-consuming for communities to seek assistance and find funding opportunities. The Department of Housing and Community Development provides extensive resources that contain information on existing local, state, and federal grant programs, organized by the diagnostic categories including physical environment, business environment, administrative capacity, and customer base.

The tables on the following pages organize the projects for the Leominster LRRP plan by implementation timeframe (short, medium, or long-term), as well as budget range (less than \$50K or greater than \$400K). Organizing projects by potential budget and timeframe can act as a resource for communities to assess projects that could be implemented quickly and cheaply, and which projects should be addressed at a later date due to funding, political, or administrative setbacks.

Establish facade improvement program

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Study Area
Origin		Mayor's Office
Budget		Low (less than \$50,000) or Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe		Short-term (1-5 years)
Risk		<p>Medium- The risk level depends on the community and the relationships of the property owners with the municipality. The highest level of risk occurs in conversations with property owners; for various reasons, the owners of the most distressed properties may be reluctant to participate. Once funding is secured and a few projects have been successfully completed, this risk level is likely to drop. Early engagement with property and business owners will also reduce this level of risk.</p>

Some communities have indicated that that owners will not want to participate in programs funded by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds because of the number of requirements. Communities using these funds should consider helping with the paperwork and providing a list of local designers and contractors who meet the program's eligibility requirements.

Façade improvements can also be about community values relative to the physical space; a third level of risk occurs within the community conversations around the design standards for the program. In some communities, a façade improvement program may be an implementation step in an earlier planning process. In others, developing a community vision for the area before creating the program will be necessary to receive support for the program.

The final risk is the displacement of smaller businesses as property values, and rents, increase to match the upgrades to the physical environment. Since many smaller businesses are often also local businesses, improvements without protection for those small businesses may result in attractive, but empty, storefronts. Municipalities should consider structuring the criteria for participation in their façade improvement programs to reduce the risk of displacement.

Key Performance Indicators

Improvements as a result of these programs include safety, accessibility, pedestrian comfort, and aesthetics. Over time, upgrades to façades and sites contribute to a perception that an area is vibrant, safe, and attractive to businesses and their customers. The increase in value attracts investment and contributes to a higher tax base.

KPI for this project could include the following:

- Creation of the program.
- Number of applicants over a specific timeframe.
- Number of façades, storefronts, and/or sites improved within a specific timeframe.
- Maintenance of the improvements after a set number of years.
- Increase in visitors to the target area.
- Increase in sales at the property/business improved and within the target area.
- Ability to extend the program to other commercial areas within the municipality (if appropriate).

If anti-displacement measures are included in the program:

- Number of local businesses within improved properties that are still there after a set number of years.
- Number of new local businesses that have started or relocated to the target area within a set number of years.

Partners & Resources

Cty of Leominster
Downtown property owners and businesses

Potential Funding Sources:

- MA Development Initiative Program (DHCD)
- Community Development Block Grant (DHCD)

Relevant Diagnostic Results

Reasons for undertaking a façade or storefront improvement program may include one or more of the following:

- Requirements to address the transmissibility of COVID-19, such as new windows, doors, or HVAC system may be unaffordable to a small business owner and/or may have a negative impact on the façade if improperly sourced and installed.
- On-site parking spaces are poorly organized and, if reorganized, can provide room for outdoor dining or retail display.
- Local small businesses do not have the resources (time, money, expertise) to address substandard storefronts.
- Distressed properties have a negative impact on people's impression of the viability and/or safety of a business district and property owners are unable to make the improvements themselves.
- Storefronts are not accessible to those who have problems with mobility, whether temporary or permanent.
- Historic downtowns often have empty upper floors because of the lack of accessible elevators. A major improvement project could provide grants to address both interior and exterior accessibility.
- Historic properties may have been "improved" with inappropriate materials or repairs.

- Site improvements that reduce asphalt and add landscape can address public health issues by reducing the heat island effect, planting trees to address air quality, and using low impact design to manage stormwater onsite.

Action Item

The municipality needs to make certain decisions prior to and during the creation of this program. If the municipality already knows the answers, then staff can proceed with developing the program. If not, the municipality can work the decision points into a scope of work for assistance in development and perhaps managing the program. See Process for some of these questions.

If starting from scratch, the municipality will need to accomplish the following:

- Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
- Develop an appropriate level of design guidelines.
- Engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.
- Develop the criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance.
- Develop the funding and oversight structures.

Process

- Establish program structure and processes
- Identify funding streams (in addition to CDBG)
- Engage the businesses, property owners, and community early on to get buy-in for the program
- Designate top priority properties/businesses for funding
- Develop an appropriate level of design guidance/guidelines, and scope the focus of the program: Does it include signage, lighting, awnings, other smaller elements?
- Develop the criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance
- Develop the funding and oversight structures. The program could provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. If uptake is slow, Leominster could consider offering grants to the first 3-5 to sign up (depending on resources), or through a lottery process, transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This would allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area. This would need to be a highly transparent process.
- Manage implementation

Also see the best practice examples from Ashland MA, Cambridge MA, and nationally in the Best Practice Appendix at the end of this report.

Potential Funding Sources

In addition to municipal funds, the following could be potential funding sources:

- **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA):** Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should

cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or site improvements when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Possible impacts are addressed in the sections on Key Performance Indicators and Diagnostic.

- **Hometown Grants (T-Mobile):** This program will fund up to \$50,000 per town and may be used to rebuild or refresh community spaces, including historic buildings.
- **Local Banks and other Community Development Financial Institutions:** Local banks with a community development financing program for small businesses may be able to help provide low or no interest loans to small businesses for their share of the improvements, especially for a storefront or sign upgrade. The focus of the program at each bank is different; contact your local bank(s) and discuss how they could participate in investing in the community.
- **Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000):** All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which could include creating the program, developing the design guidelines, and providing conceptual designs for improvements, depending on the complexity of the project. This program could be used to develop the design guidelines for the façade improvement program.

The following sources can work in tandem with a façade improvement program to address buildings with larger needs:

- **Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth: Underutilized Properties Program**
MassDevelopment: As with the historic tax credits below, this funding source is for a much larger project. It could be used to help address larger buildings in a target area that have more significant issues. Bundling this program and a few of the other more specialized grants could help a municipality address smaller properties with the façade improvement program and larger ones with these more targeted funds.
- **Municipal Vacant Storefronts Program**
Economic Assistance Coordinating Council: This program will not fund façade improvements. The municipality would form a district. Businesses the district then apply for the funds to address vacant storefronts. This could help reduce the number of vacant storefronts while the façade improvement program addresses accessibility, deferred maintenance, and design issues on the exterior or the site
- **Collaborative Workspace Program**
MassDevelopment: This grant provides another option to address both the exterior and the interior of this space while also helping to support local jobs and job creation.
- **Community Preservation Act**
This source only applies in those communities that have adopted the CPA. CPA funds may be used to acquire, preserve, and rehabilitate and/or restore historic assets. A municipality could tie this to the design guidelines for a façade improvement program and consider, for

example, acquiring a downtown historic building, updating the façade and ground floor for commercial use, and adding an elevator to allow for housing on the upper floors.

- **Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund Massachusetts Historical Commission (project limit \$3,000-\$100,000, depending on project type):** This is a 50% reimbursable matching grant for preserving properties, landscapes, and sites listed in the State Register of Historic Preservation. Applicants are limited to municipalities and nonprofits. Many downtown and village centers include nonprofit and municipal anchors. This grant could be used to ensure that all properties in a target area are brought, over time, to the same standard of repair. The program does have limitation on allowable costs. A preservation restriction is required
- **Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Massachusetts Historical Commission:** This is available for significant rehabilitation of historic buildings and may help supplement a larger project in a downtown. This is included in this best practice sheet because the guidelines developed for the municipal façade/storefront improvement program could be incorporated into the review of larger project

Design and implement a downtown branding strategy

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Study Area
Origin		Mayor's Office
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) - with brand deployment
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		Low Risk – Any investment in downtown branding will move the needle in the right direction.
Key Performance Indicators		Increase in number of visitors, businesses, and employers downtown
Partners & Resources		<p>City of Leominster Local businesses and stakeholders</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MA Development Initiative Program (DHCD) • Competitive Tourism Grants (EDA)

Relevant Diagnostic Results

Downtown Leominster does not have a clear identity; visitors and residents alike lack a clear sense of what Downtown is all about.

There is a need to attract attention to Downtown Leominster from several angles:

- Visitors, who might shop downtown
- Future residents, who might live downtown
- Entrepreneurs, who might open businesses downtown
- Employers, who might bring employees downtown

Action Item

Downtown Leominster should develop a branding strategy focused on several user/interest groups. This would involve:

- Identifying funding
- Developing overall strategy
- Place branding (physical interventions), graphic design/signage, wayfinding
- Implementing recommendations

Process

Data Collection

- Create a database of all businesses in Downtown Leominster and adjacent corridors and their contact information.
- Create a unified guide for categorizing businesses. (See HERE for an example of business categories. Also, see Live XYZ business map).
- Consider what a public-facing business directory might look like:
 - What format (digital, print)?
 - Does it include a map?
 - Will there be space for ads?

Asset Mapping

- Identify and convene stakeholders for

inclusive participation and consensus building

- ID opportunities for feedback
- Community events
- Town board meetings
- Survey businesses, residents, visitors for perception/attitude of town/region
 - Create digital visitor/ resident survey
 - Create digital business survey
 - Offer incentives for survey participation - raffles (free event tickets, locally donated goods, etc)
 - ID opportunities for survey collection
- Market Analysis: What are others (municipalities/regions) doing? Are they successful?

Create Branding and Outreach Strategy

- Identify key imagery based on resident/ visitor engagement and asset identification
- Identify target audience -- who do we want to attract?
- Identify assets and placement opportunities: Physical signage -- banners, trash can wraps
- Digital: Social media presence for Downtown

Create Digital Strategy

- Leverage newly created organizational identity to create listing in digital sphere (ie, Google Map location, Yelp!, other mapping platforms)
- Determine best platforms for messaging and create accounts (ie, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- Create internal communications platform for businesses to communicate freely with each other
- Consider a basic website or offshoot of city website to promote Leominster

businesses.

- Purchase relevant domain and use template website (squarespace, wix) to create simple landing page with links to social and relevant websites.
- Use content from any print collateral as well.
- Can crowd source or allow for self listing and/or promotion.
- Provide technical support to businesses to help them get online - easy starts are google maps pages with accurate information (location, hours, events, etc.)

Leverage Draw of Local Attractions and Cultural Institutions to Market Leominster Businesses

- Leverage newly created downtown brand identity to develop a brochure or other marketing asset advertising local businesses. Can be sorted by business type (places to eat, places to stay, etc).
- Distribute brochures at local attractions (apple picking, hiking sites).
- Consider also including local events in brochures.

Co-market Regional Attractions with Downtown Leominster Businesses

- Leverage newly created downtown brand identity to develop a brochure or other marketing asset advertising local businesses and local attractions in tandem.
- Consider cross-promotional discounts (eg, "get 10% off your dinner with proof of apple picking ticket purchase)
- Distribute in-person outside of region to promote tourism (New Hampshire, Vermont, etc)
- ID tourism and visitor center locations to target that are along thoroughfares near Leominster.

- Consider partnerships with hotel/ AirBnbs

Event Planning/Campaign

- Leverage an already-existing Leominster event as an opportunity for businesses to engage with consumers
- Connect Seasonal and Annual events in the Leominster area to downtown using sponsorships and activating public spaces

Leverage Engagement around marketing campaign to Initiate/Create/Formalize Downtown Business Association

- Develop Steering Committee and Identify Leadership
- Identify merchants and other stakeholders capable of playing an active role in the formation and leadership of a merchants association
- Establish a purpose for the merchants association
- Develop a set of goals that respond to the identified corridor needs and challenges
- Solidify goals into a purpose or mission statement which can be communicated to neighborhood stakeholders
- Create an Information Database
- Engage steering committee to assist in the development of a database containing property and business owners, and commercial vacancies.
- Regularly scheduled meetings of steering committee and merchant / property owners / stakeholders

Also see the best practice example from Brooklyn NY in the Best Practices Appendix at the end of this report.

Create downtown housing development strategy

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		Study Area
Origin		Mayor's Office
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years) for development of strategy and ongoing implementation of program
Risk		<p>Low - Medium Risk</p> <p>Depending on adopted strategy, the risks range from ineffective to costly. Typical solutions to spurring new development often require public investments in the form of tax abatements, waived permit fees, or public infrastructure.</p> <p>Poorly implemented strategies may not produce desired redevelopment after significant public investment.</p>
Key Performance Indicators		<p>New Building Permits for residential units in & around Downtown</p> <p>Private investment \$ in the Downtown area</p>
Partners & Resources		<p>City of Leominster Staff</p> <p>Landowners of key Downtown parcels</p> <p>Local & Regional Developers</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Development Block Grants (DHCD) • MassWorks Infrastructure Program (EOHED) • MA Development Initiative Program (DHCD) • Housing Choice Capital Grant (Mass Housing Choice Initiative)

Relevant Diagnostic Results

The effects of COVID-19 highlighted the need for a more resilient downtown as the pandemic caused many of the local office workers who frequently shopped in the district to begin working from home.

Initial examination of the conditions of the downtown district has indicated that some buildings are deteriorating through lack of investment throughout the years and that much of the existing housing stock is in the need of redevelopment. Residential rents in the downtown district currently do not support organic private investment while rents in the surrounding towns and communities indicate a potential demand for newer, market rate housing.

Public support to spur on private redevelopment is likely needed.

Action Item

- The City of Leominster seeks to create a short-term plan to stop the deterioration of the existing housing stock and to encourage new private residential investment in the district.
- Additionally, the city seeks to create a long-term plan to identify parcels that are currently underutilized or vacant and to help attract developers to invest.

Process

Short-term

Seek to incentivize current landowners in the market to maintain and improve their units through "carrot & stick" programs such as reinvestment tax reduction programs, strategic code enforcement to reduce blight, and public property acquisition of underutilized and blighted properties

Medium-term

Look to form an economic development

committee, staffed with city employees, with the goal of overseeing the programs described in the short term and implementing more significant programs




- Retain a consultant to do an inventory of current market conditions in the defined downtown area, including but not limited to:
 - Underutilized parcels & Improper Land Use
 - Blighted & Unmaintained properties
 - Current rent pricing & trends
- Create a development district and produce an aspirational master plan, showing prospective developers the developmental potential of the area and indication of public support for private investment.
- Create a public development incentive program to help bridge the gap between the current market conditions and required market rates for private investment.

Options:

- Tax abatement program (Tax Increment Financing - TIF)- Offer developers tax breaks on the initial years of the development, increasing short-term returns and making redevelopment more attractive.
- District Improvement Financing- Offers the community the ability to borrow from future tax revenue to complete public infrastructure improvements.
- Program Implementation and Evaluation- Outreach to area developers for targeted sites, assistance with regulatory processes for applicants, and post development review.

Also see the best practice example from Union Square, Somerville MA, in the Best Practices Appendix at the end of this report.

Develop downtown signage code

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Study Area
Origin		Mayor's Office
Budget		Low (less than \$50,000) or Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe		Short-term (1-5 years)
Risk		<p>Medium-</p> <p>The risk for this project is in part dependent on the form of government and whether the design guidelines will be an advisory document or incorporated into the zoning bylaw/ordinance as specific standards.</p> <p>The highest risk would be a Town form of government in which the design guidelines become part of the zoning bylaws and municipal regulations have been controversial in the community.</p> <p>In general, experienced developers and builders like the predictability of a clear set of design guidelines which is consistently applied by a municipality. Property owners with less development experience are likely to have more concerns.</p> <p>A second risk category is creating a sign code that is too restrictive. This sends a negative message to those who are considering investing in the community. Guidelines for sign design that are too subjective send a similar negative message in that applicants cannot be certain as to how the guidelines will apply to them.</p>

Key Performance Indicators

Sign codes are important for several reasons:

- Visibility of businesses who wish to attract customers/clients.
- Pedestrian and vehicular safety (reduce distractions).
- Community aesthetics.
- Reduction in light pollution.

KPI for this project could include the following:

- Successful adoption of the new/updated code.
- Compliance of code with legal precedents.
- Implementation of streamlined process for approvals.
- Number of noncomplying/ nonconforming signs replaced.

If this project is accompanied by a façade/storefront improvement project, additional KPI related to the numbers of signs upgraded to meet the new code could be added. Without such a program, new applications will be dependent on changes in tenants or on enforcement of noncomplying/ nonconforming signs.

Partners & Resources

City of Leominster

Downtown property owners and businesses

Relevant Diagnostic Results

Updating a sign code and combining the update with financial assistance to small businesses to bring their signs into compliance can help address negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Signs are critical information to identify active businesses to customers. Outdated signs may suggest that a business is no longer in operation. Signs in disrepair may be dangerous or may contribute to a perception that a business area is not safe, discouraging potential customers.

Challenges across municipalities include the following:

- Existing signage is outdated, inconsistent, or in disrepair.
- The sign code is inconsistent with current best practices, new sign technology, or legal decisions related to signage regulations (ex. Reed v. Town of Gilbert).
- The approval process is perceived as onerous and/or arbitrary, especially for a small business.
- Enforcement has become an issue and/or sign permits are regularly approved with waivers.
- Sign code decisions are regularly appealed.

Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Understand why the sign code should be created/updated/replaced. What are the areas of greatest concern?
- Decide whether this is a project that can be done in-house or requires a consultant with appropriate expertise.
- Decide which funding source is

appropriate and, if the source is a grant program, apply for funds.

- If a consultant is deemed appropriate, go through the Commonwealth's procurement process (unless the grant program has an on-call consultant).
- Identify the people/organizations who need to be part of this process.
- Develop an engagement process appropriate for the municipality and the required approval process.
- Once the code has been approved, consider a public education program to inform people on a regular basis about the code and its implications. Key targets for this campaign include business and property owners and commercial real estate brokers.
- Consider aligning the enforcement process with the new regulations to ensure the effort leads to the anticipated improvements.

Process

The timeframe will vary depending on whether the municipality has a city form of government or requires Town Meeting to approve bylaw changes.

From the kick-off to entering the municipal approval process, the project should take 8-12 months.





- Months 1-2: Review existing code; develop sign inventory; interview municipal staff, boards with approval responsibility, former applicants, local land use lawyers, others with relevant experience and concerns.
-
- Months 3-4: Research appropriate

precedents; develop public outreach/engagement program.

- Months 5-7: Engage with business/property owners and public on options and concerns; develop draft code; develop illustrations and decide whether illustrations are part of code or a separate document. Consider meetings with appropriate boards to introduce the draft code and receive feedback.
- Months 8-9: Revise the code to its final draft prior to the municipal approval process. Publicize the final draft prior to City Council/Town Meeting review and approval.

Also see the best practice examples from Dedham and Arlington, MA in the Best Practices Appendix at the end of this report.

Update downtown design guidelines

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Study Area
Origin		Mayor's Office
Budget		Low (less than \$50,000).
Timeframe		Short Term (1-5 years)
Risk		<p>Medium- The risk for this project is in part dependent on the form of government and whether the design guidelines will be an advisory document or incorporated into the zoning bylaw/ordinance as specific standards.</p> <p>The highest risk would be a Town form of government in which the design guidelines become part of the zoning bylaws and municipal regulations have been controversial in the community.</p> <p>In general, experienced developers and builders like the predictability of a clear set of design guidelines which is consistently applied by a municipality. Property owners with less development experience are likely to have more concerns.</p> <p>A second risk category is creating design guidelines that are too restrictive. This sends a negative message to those who are considering investing in the community. Guidelines that are too subjective send a similar negative message in that applicants cannot be certain as to how the guidelines will apply to them.</p>

Key Performance Indicators

Design guidelines help reinforce a community's identity and provide a clear message that the municipality is balancing the needs of the community with a streamlined approval process for new development. Codifying community values about the physical environment into the guidelines allows applicants to present proposals for new construction, rehabilitation, or adaptive reuse that are consistent with those values.

KPIs for this project could include the following:

- Successful adoption of the new design guidelines.
- Increase in the number of applications that are consistent with the design guidelines.
- Decrease in the number of meetings dedicated to design in the site plan or special permit approval process.
- Increase in the number of buildings constructed, renovated, or rehabilitated that meet the design guidelines.

If this project is accompanied by a façade/storefront improvement project, additional KPI related to the number of façades or storefronts improved under the program could be added. Without such a program, changes will take more time as they will be dependent on applications for approval process that trigger the use of the guidelines. Without an application for site plan, special permit, and/or PUD approval, property owners are not obligated to meet the design guidelines.

Partners & Resources

City of Leominster
Downtown property owners and businesses

Relevant Diagnostic Results

Creating or updating design guidelines and combining the update with financial assistance to property owners to update buildings and sites to be consistent with the new guidelines addresses several negative economic impacts of the COVID -19 pandemic.

- Design guidelines can sometime be seen primarily as an aesthetic requirement. However, they can also have significant impacts on the economic and public health of an area, both of which are directly related to the continuing impacts of the pandemic:
- Small businesses in deteriorating downtowns, villages, and corridors are less likely to recover quickly because of a perception of a lack of safety or viability. Design guidelines that are responsive to community identity will reinforce a revitalized, vibrant area.
- Design guidelines that include landscape requirements can help improve air quality and reduce the heat island effect, improving public health for people who live, work, and shop in the target area.
- Design guidelines can also address accessibility for people with physical disabilities by requiring appropriate access that is well-integrated into the building and the site.
- Tools such as outdoor dining, outdoor retail display, serving windows, and upgraded HVAC systems can be integrated into the design guidelines to encourage permanent solutions that address the health and safety of the target area.

Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Understand why the municipality feels that design guidelines are necessary. Is this part of a façade/sign improvement program, a new local historic district, and/or to control new development in an existing area? What are the areas of greatest concern?
- Decide whether this is a project that can be done in-house or requires a consultant with appropriate expertise.
- Decide which funding source is appropriate and, if the source is a grant program, apply for funds.
- If a consultant is deemed appropriate, go through the Commonwealth's procurement process (unless the grant program has an on-call consultant).
- Identify the people/organizations who need to be part of this process.
- Develop an engagement process appropriate for the municipality and the required approval process.
- Once the design guidelines have been approved, consider a public education program to inform people on a regular basis about the new requirements and their implications. Key targets for this campaign include property owners and real estate brokers.

Process

The timeframe will vary depending on whether the municipality has a city form of government or requires Town Meeting to approve bylaw changes (and of course, whether the design guidelines are specifically incorporated into the zoning). From the kick-off to entering the municipal approval process, the project should take 8-12 months.

- Months 1-2: Review existing zoning bylaws for embedded design guidelines and standards; develop inventory of historic and current buildings and site treatments; interview municipal staff, boards with approval responsibility, former applicants, local land use lawyers, others with relevant experience and concerns.
- Months 3-4: Research appropriate precedents; develop public outreach/engagement program. Consider a public kick-off/charrette, depending on the needs of the community. Discuss the thresholds for use and the appropriate review body and process.
- Months 5-7: Engage with business/property owners and public on options and concerns; develop draft guidelines; develop illustrations. Decide (with municipality) whether design guidelines are a separate, advisory document or part of the zoning bylaw/ordinance. If the guidelines are integrated into the zoning, decide whether illustrations are part of the zoning or a separate document. Consider meeting with the appropriate boards to introduce the draft design guidelines and receive feedback.
- Months 8-9: Revise the design guidelines to its final draft prior to the municipal approval process. Publicize the final draft prior to City Council/Town Meeting review and approval.

Also see the best practice examples from Sterling, Arlington, Dedham and Cambridge, MA in the Best Practices Appendix at the end of this report.

Potential Funding Sources

In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:

Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth

Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000)

Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which would include developing the design guidelines. The MDI grant should be sufficient for the full project for a smaller community unless the community is looking for a more extensive set of illustrations or a significant public engagement process. A larger community may need additional funding.

Community Planning Grants (project limit \$25,000-\$75,000) Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

A Community Planning Grant may be used for Zoning Review and Updates, which could include design guidelines if it is part of the municipality's zoning bylaws or ordinance. In 2021, the priorities for this grant included mitigation of climate change through zoning and other regulations; design guidelines and standards integrated into the municipality's zoning and incorporating elements to reduce the impact of climate change would qualify.

District Local Technical Assistance Grant

Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) and DHCD

Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies. These funds may be used for planning projects. Each RPA has a different focus on how these funds may be used to meet the state's funding goals.

All municipalities are eligible to apply directly to their RPA. The RPA will work with the municipality on the program; a separate consultant is not usually required.

Retrofit downtown streets and intersections for improved walkability

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	Mayor's Office
Budget	<p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)</p> <p>Costs will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement and installation of temporary barriers • Stakeholder & public engagement • Completion of concept and detailed design, if pilot deemed a success and permanent enhancements are desired • Installation / construction of permanent enhancements, if desired • Depending on municipality's capacity, consultant may be brought on-board to support design and engagement <p>Traffic / pedestrian counts and observations can be conducted using municipal staff, interns, or volunteers.</p>
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	<p>Low to Medium risk- If initiated as a temporary pilot, the risk level is expected to be low:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No / temporary removal of on-street parking • Temporary installation can be removed seasonally or if desired impacts are not achieved • Low cost of materials required for installation <p>Permanent enhancements may present a higher level of risk if support is not achieved during temporary pilot. Building consensus is critical. Risks here may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns raised by public • Impacts to businesses during construction • Conflicts between user groups in terms of vision, use, and sharing of limited space • Permanent alteration of access or removal of on-street parking may meet resistance

Key Performance Indicators

Intersection enhancements / traffic calming at strategic locations in the downtown can:

- Improve the perception and accessibility of downtown for pedestrians and cyclists
- Improve driver, pedestrian, and cyclist safety
- Increase pedestrian and cycling trips to the downtown
- Reduce air pollution from vehicle emissions

KPIs for this project could include the following:

- Increase in visitors to the downtown
- Increase in sales at businesses within the downtown
- Increased pedestrian / cyclist counts
- Reduced vehicle speeds
- Reduced number of vehicle/pedestrian collisions
- Reduced severity of vehicle/pedestrian collisions (e.g. serious injuries, death)
- Improved air quality metrics
- Linear feet of public infrastructure (e.g. sidewalks, boulevards, roads, etc.) enhanced

Partners & Resources

City of Leominster Staff

Potential Funding Sources:

- Shared Streets and Spaces (MassDOT)
- MassWorks Infrastructure Program (EOHED)

Relevant Diagnostic Results

Intersection enhancements / traffic calming at strategic locations can help address negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing pedestrian and cyclist traffic in downtown Leominster and improving downtown aesthetics.

These measures can improve the perception of the downtown as a safe and welcoming destination for pedestrians and cyclists by providing a more comfortable environment to walk and bike downtown. Traffic calming measures also reduce vehicle speeds and improve visibility of pedestrians for drivers and improve safety.

Visual interest and improved aesthetics in the downtown can be achieved with added landscaping and street furniture. This can be achieved even with temporary measures such as using planters to create sidewalk “bump-outs” and colorful paint at crossings.

Widening sidewalks or permitting the temporary use of on-street parking for outdoor dining or outdoor markets can help support businesses and attract customers.

Key benefits include:

- Encourage visitors and customers to find and visit key sites of interest and support local businesses
- Improve accessibility to the downtown for non-drivers
- Create a safer environment for drivers and pedestrians
- Reduce fuel consumed by making walking or cycling downtown safer and more attractive, thereby reducing air pollution from vehicle emissions

Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Kickoff meeting with all department officials to confirm project goals
- Establish a steering committee
- Public / stakeholder engagement planning
- Site analysis (e.g. existing conditions, street /sidewalk dimensions, etc.), issues identification, and site selection
- Business owner outreach
- Design concept options and visualization
- Public / stakeholder engagement, document preferred alternative, and promote temporary pilot
- Pilot testing and observations
- Confirm longer-term / permanent design and installation, if applicable

Process

Temporary installation and piloting can take three (3) months or less. If the temporary installation / pilot proves successful, the interventions can remain in place or permanent enhancements can be explored, designed, and constructed.

Depending on community engagement, the extent of enhancements / traffic calming measures, and the municipality's procurement requirements permanent installation may take 12 months. The following process outlines a comprehensive planning and implementation program and should be adjusted to suit the scope, municipality's needs and goals.

Month 1 – Project Initiation:

- Discuss need and locations for interventions
- Prepare project plan and engagement plan

- Field visits, observations, pedestrian counts, traffic counts, documentation
- Measure key dimensions

Month 2-3 – Concept Development, Planning & Design:

- Prepare concept options
- Engage with business / property owners and public on options and concerns
- Develop preferred alignment and concept based on engagement feedback
- Refine the temporary pilot installation based on public feedback

Month 4 – Approvals & Temporary Pilot Testing:

- Seek approvals from relevant authorities (municipality and/or State)
- Temporary pilot materials acquisition (e.g. planters, flexible posts / bollards, paint, etc.)
- Temporary pilot materials installation

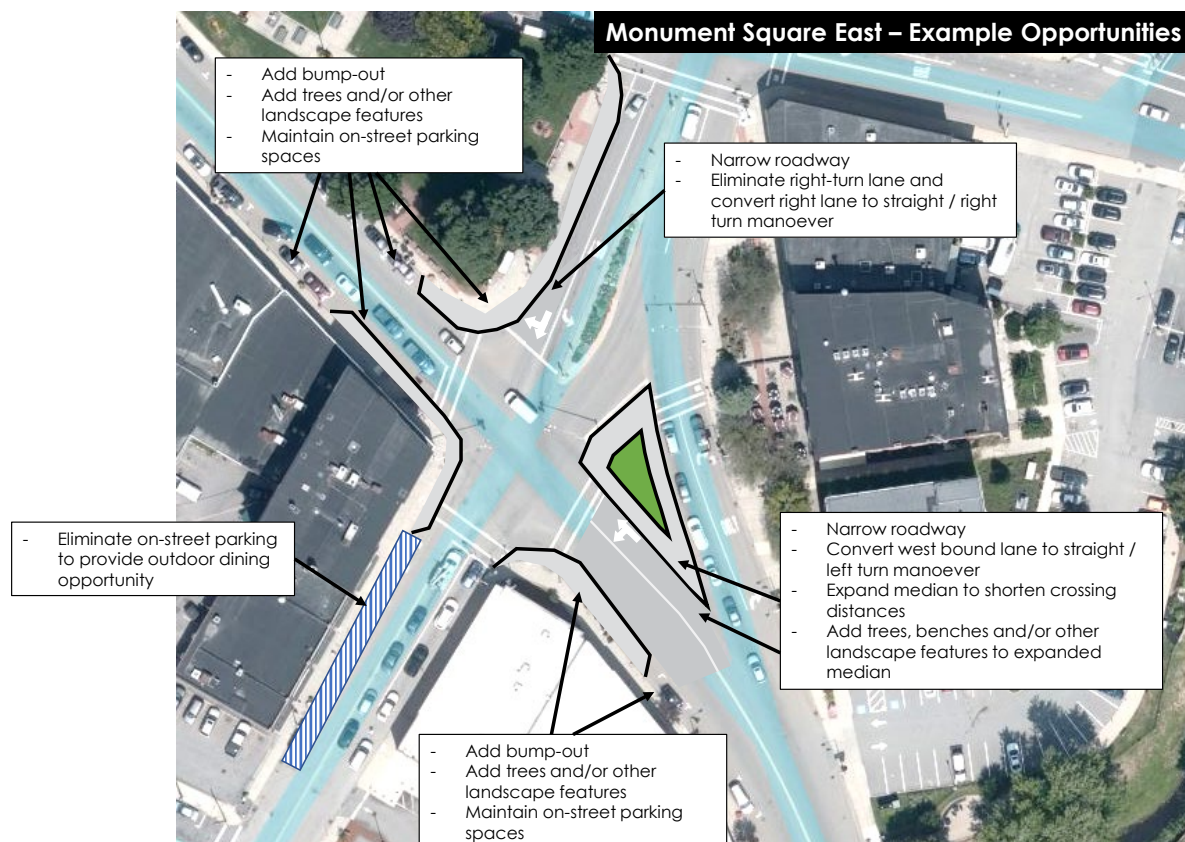
Month 5-6 – Evaluation & Removal / Modification:

- Field visits, observations, pedestrian counts, traffic counts, documentation, surveys
- Removal / modification – Based on observations or at end of pilot, remove or modify installation as necessary




Month 7-12 – Permanent Implementation

- Complete detailed design based on pilot findings, results, and surveys
- Engage with business / property owners and public
- Refine detailed design based on public feedback
- Procure contractor to proceed with construction / installation of improvements
- Materials acquisition
- Materials installation

Also see the best practice examples from Florence and Natick, MA in the Best Practices Appendix at the end of this report



Install mid-block pedestrian crossings

Category		Public Realm
Location		Study Area
Origin		Mayor's Office
Budget		<p>Low Budget (Under \$50k) – Temporary installations Medium Budget (\$50k - \$200k) – Permanent installations, depending on number of crossings added / enhanced</p> <p>Costs will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement and installation of temporary barriers • Stakeholder & public engagement • Completion of concept and detailed design, if pilot deemed a success and permanent enhancements are desired • Installation / construction of permanent enhancements, if desired • Depending on municipality's capacity, consultant may be brought on-board to support design and engagement <p>Traffic / pedestrian counts and observations can be conducted using municipal staff, interns, or volunteers.</p>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)

Risk



Low risk- If initiated as a temporary pilot, the risk level is expected to be low:

- No removal of on-street parking required
- Temporary installation can be removed seasonally or if desired impacts are not achieved
- Low cost of materials required for installation

Permanent enhancements may present a slightly higher level of risk if support is not achieved during temporary pilot but can still be considered low. Risks here may include:

- Concerns raised by public
- Impacts to businesses during construction

Key Performance Indicators

Adding or enhancing pedestrian crossings at strategic locations in the downtown can:

- Improve the perception and accessibility of downtown
- Improve driver, pedestrian, and cyclist safety
- Increase pedestrian and cycling trips to the downtown
- Reduce air pollution from vehicle emissions

KPIs for this project could include the following:

- Increase in visitors to the downtown
- Increase in sales at businesses within the downtown
- Increased pedestrian / cyclist counts
- Reduced vehicle speeds
- Reduced number of vehicle/pedestrian collisions
- Reduced severity of vehicle/pedestrian collisions (e.g. serious injuries, death)
- Improved air quality metrics

Partners & Resources

City of Leominster Staff

Potential Funding Sources:

- Shared Streets and Spaces (MassDOT)
- MassWorks Infrastructure Program (EOHED)

Relevant Diagnostic Results

Adding or enhancing pedestrian crossings at strategic locations can help address negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing pedestrian and cyclist traffic in downtown Leominster.

Adding or enhancing pedestrian crossings can improve the perception of the downtown as a safe and welcoming destination for pedestrians and cyclists by providing a clearly demarcated crossing locations to key destinations. Designed correctly, they can also reduce vehicle speeds and improve visibility of pedestrians for drivers and improve safety.

Visual interest and improved aesthetics in the downtown can be achieved even with temporary measures such as using planters to create sidewalk “bump-outs” and colorful paint at crossings.

Adding or enhancing pedestrian crossings can:

- Encourage visitors and customers to find and visit key sites of interest and support local businesses
- Improve accessibility to the downtown for non-drivers
- Create a safer environment for drivers and pedestrians
- Reduce fuel consumed by making walking or cycling downtown safer and more attractive, thereby reducing air pollution from vehicle emissions

Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Kickoff meeting with all department officials to confirm project goals

- Site analysis, issues identification, and site selection
- Business owner outreach
- Design concept options and visualization
- Public / stakeholder engagement, document preferred alternative, and promote temporary pilot
- Pilot testing and observations
- Confirm longer-term / permanent design and installation, if applicable

Process

Temporary installation and piloting can take three (3) months or less. If the temporary installation / pilot proves successful, the interventions can remain in place or permanent enhancements can be explored, designed, and constructed. Depending on community engagement and number of crossings, and the municipality's procurement requirements permanent installation may take an additional 3-6 months.

Temporary Installation

Month 1 – Planning & Design:

- Discuss need and locations for interventions
- Field visits, observations, pedestrian counts, documentation
- Measure key dimensions
- Refine the tactical short-term installation by engaging residents and municipal/ State administrators

Month 2 – Approvals:

- Seek approvals from relevant transportation authority (municipality and/or State)

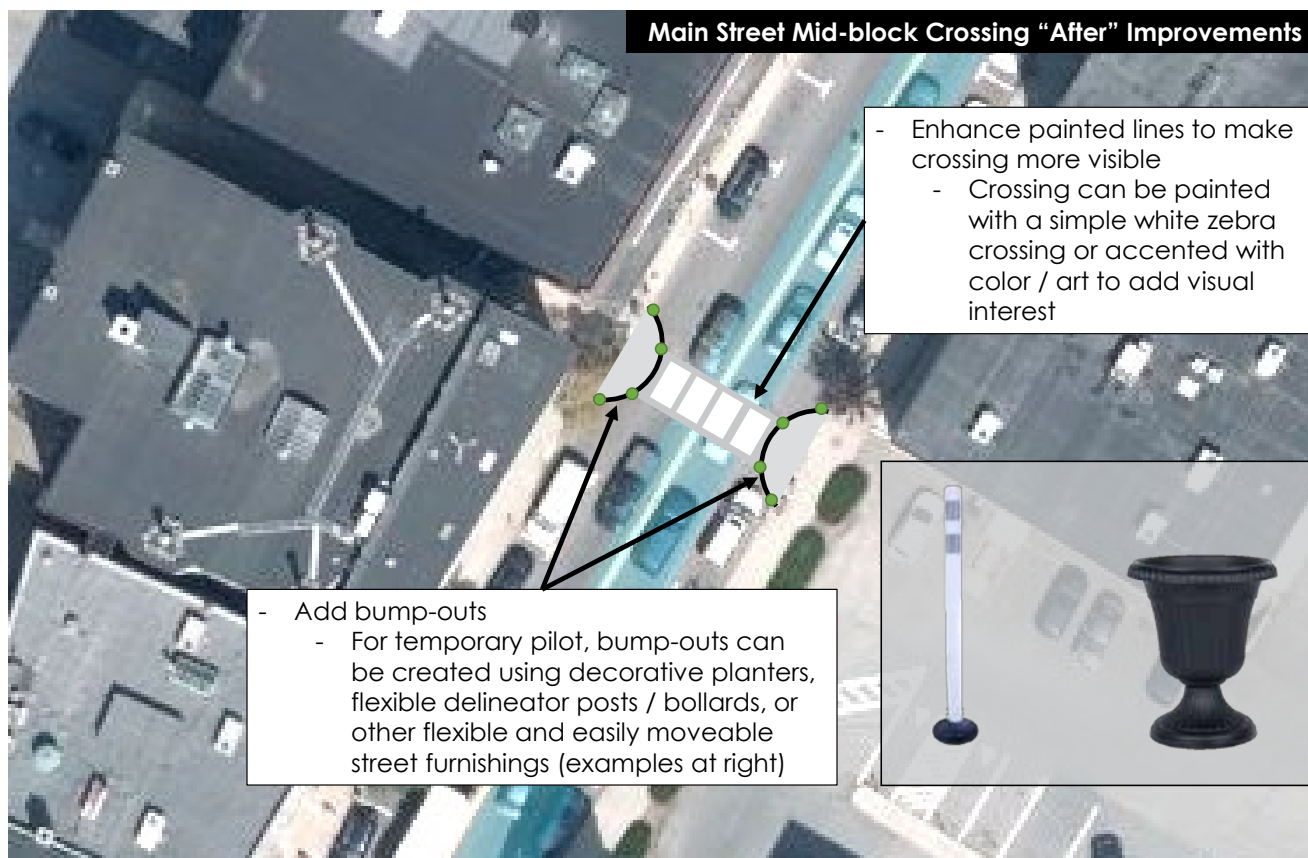
Month 3 – Implementation:

- Material acquisition (e.g. planters, flexible posts / bollards, paint, etc.)
- Installation
- Field visits, observations, pedestrian counts, documentation

- Removal / modification – Based on observations or at end of pilot, remove or modify installation as necessary

Steps for permanent installation will be similar to temporary installation but may take longer and should include a robust public engagement and communications program. Field visits / observations (prior to and following pilot implementation) should be used as part of business case to justify investment in permanent crossing additions / enhancements.

Also see the best practice example from East Boston, MA in the Best Practices Appendix at the end of this report.



Connect Twin Cities Rail Trail to downtown core

Category



Public Realm

Location

Study Area

Origin

Mayor's Office

Budget

High Budget (\$200k+)

Costs will include:

- Completion of concept and detailed design, as required
- Stakeholder & public engagement
- Installation / construction of trail extension, wayfinding signage
- Depending on municipality's capacity, consultant may be brought on-board to support design and engagement



Budget will depend on extent of improvements to existing infrastructure to support extension of the trail to the downtown.

Timeframe



Short Term (<5 years)

Risk

Low to Medium risk.

If project involves installation of wayfinding signage only, the risk level is expected to be low:

- No removal of on-street parking required
- Low cost of materials required for installation

Additional enhancements such as sidewalk widening may present a higher level of risk and may include:



- Concerns raised by public and general public buy-in
Public engagement should be completed to gather feedback on preferences. Information should be shared with the public on the purpose of the extension, benefits and risks, and how input will be / was used in to inform a final preferred concept.
- Impacts to businesses during construction
Every effort should be made to work with property owners on solutions before construction proceeds, keep the construction timeline short, provide alternate accesses, and enhanced signage to direct customers to businesses during construction.
- Funding (i.e. access to funding sources to support engagement, design, and construction processes)

Key Performance Indicators

Extension of the Twin Cities Rail Trail to the downtown can:

- Improve the perception and accessibility of downtown
- Improve driver, pedestrian, and cyclist safety
- Increase pedestrian and cycling trips to the downtown
- Reduce air pollution from vehicle emissions

KPIs for this project could include the following:

- Increase in visitors to the downtown
- Increase in sales at businesses within the downtown
- Increased pedestrian / cyclist counts
- Reduced vehicle miles traveled
- Improved air quality metrics

Partners & Resources

City of Leominster Staff

Potential Funding Sources:

- Shared Streets and Spaces (MassDOT)
- MassWorks Infrastructure Program (EOHED)
- Mass Trails Grants (DCR, MassDOT, EOEEA)

Relevant Diagnostic Results

Phase II of construction of the Twin Cities Rail Trail will take this pedestrian and cyclist corridor to Mechanic Street on the fringes of downtown Leominster. Simple enhancements such as signage or upgrading of sidewalks can serve to extend this important trail into the heart of downtown at the town common in Monument Square.

Extending the Twin Cities Rail Trail from Mechanic Street to Monument Square can help address negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing pedestrian and cyclist traffic to downtown Leominster.

Extending the trail will improve the perception of the downtown as a safe and welcoming destination for pedestrians and cyclists by providing a clearly demarcated extension to the larger Twin Cities Rail Trail connection.

In addition, placing the Leominster terminus of the Twin Cities Rail Trail in the town common can:

- Encourage visitors and customers to find and visit key sites of interest and support local businesses
- Improve accessibility to the downtown for non-drivers
- Reduce fuel consumed by providing an alternative to driving downtown, thereby reducing air pollution from vehicle emissions

Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Decide whether this is a project that can

be done in-house or requires a consultant with appropriate expertise.

- If a consultant is deemed appropriate, go through the Commonwealth's procurement process (unless the grant program has an on-call consultant).
- Decide which funding source is appropriate and, if the source is a grant program, apply for funds.
- Identify the people/organizations who need to be part of this process.
- Develop an engagement process appropriate for the municipality and the required approval process.
- Identify if the extension will retain existing facilities (i.e. existing sidewalks) or if enhancements to infrastructure are required (e.g. sidewalk widening, separated bike lane / share use path, etc.).
- Identify alignment of trail extension and concept options
- Once preferred alignment concept is selected and approved, complete detailed design and procure contractor to proceed with construction / installation of improvements (e.g. sidewalk widening, wayfinding signage, etc.).

Process

Timeframe will vary depending on municipality's capacity and extent of improvements to extend the trail downtown. The project should take 6 - 10 months, with a project involving more extensive improvements requiring a longer timeframe. If the project only involves installation of wayfinding signage, a substantially shorter timeframe may be possible (i.e. less than 3 months).

Public Realm Improvements (e.g. sidewalk widening + wayfinding)

Month 1-2 – Project Initiation:

- Establish scope of the extension and

enhancements

- Initiate procurement process if a consultant is required

Month 3-4 – Concept Development, Planning & Design:

- Prepare alignment and concept options
- Signage branding and design (align with existing Twin Cities Rail Trail branding and design)
- Develop public outreach / engagement program

Month 5-6 – Engagement:

- Engage with business / property owners and public on options and concerns
- Develop preferred alignment and concept based on engagement feedback

Month 7-9 – Approvals & Implementation:

- Complete detailed design
- Seek necessary approvals to preferred alignment and concept / detailed design
- Procure contractor to proceed with construction / installation of improvements

Wayfinding Signage Only

Month 1 – Planning & Design:

- Identify alignment options for extension and signage placement
- Signage branding and design (align with existing Twin Cities Rail Trail branding and design)

Month 2 – Engagement & Approvals:

- Engage with public on alignment options and signage locations
- Finalize alignment, signage locations, and design while incorporating public feedback
- Seek approvals for installation from relevant authority (municipality and/or State)

Month 3 – Implementation:

- Material acquisition
- Installation
- Monitoring (i.e. monitor condition of signage and repair / replace damaged signage)

Also see the best practice example from Rye, NY in the Best Practices Appendix at the end of this report.

Upgrade downtown wayfinding for parking

Category		Public Realm
Location		Study Area
Origin		Mayor's Office
Budget		<p>Low Budget (less than \$50,000)</p> <p>Costs will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of parking inventory • Stakeholder & public engagement • Creation of maps • Design assistance (branding and wayfinding signage standards) • Advertising and communications • Map printing (if physical maps will be used) • Wayfinding signage procurement and installation
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Low risk- The risk level depends on the community, relationships of the property owners with the municipality, and scope of the project.</p> <p>Risk sources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations with the public – Engagement and communications with the public will be critical. If changes to parking locations, hours or rates is included in the scope of developing a program for parking wayfinding, resistance may be encountered. • Conversations with property owners – If the municipality wishes to incorporate private parking lots in the wayfinding program, discussions / collaboration with private property owners will be required. For various reasons, the owners may be reluctant to participate.

Key Performance Indicators

Improvements to wayfinding for parking can:

- Improve the perception and accessibility of downtown
- Improve driver and pedestrian safety
- Reduce downtown congestion
- Reduce air pollution from vehicle emissions

KPIs for this project could include the following:

- Increase in visitors to the downtown
- Increase in sales at businesses within the downtown
- Increase in paid-parking lot revenue
- Increase in parking space turnover
- Improved intersection performance
- Reduced vehicle miles traveled
- Improved air quality metrics

Partners & Resources

City of Leominster Staff

Potential Funding Sources:

- Shared Streets and Spaces (MassDOT)
- MassWorks Infrastructure Program (EOHED)

Relevant Diagnostic Results

Creating or updating wayfinding signage and resources for parking can help address negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parking that is easier to find and presented in an organized manner can improve the perception that the downtown is a friendly, welcoming, and caring environment that is helpful to visitors and residents alike. It can also demonstrate a commitment by the municipality to supporting its local businesses and attractions.

In addition, providing parking information in a clearly presented manner before visitors and residents arrive downtown, while they are driving downtown, and during their stay can:

- Help people plan their trips before arriving downtown
- Reduce time spent searching for parking
- Reduce vehicle circulation as people search for parking, thereby reducing congestion and creating a safer environment for drivers and pedestrians
- Reduce fuel consumed while searching for parking, thereby reducing air pollution from vehicle emissions
- Enhance the visibility of off-street parking lots, encouraging long-term parkers to use them while leaving on-street parking or other prime spaces for short-term visitors and customers
- Encourage visitors and customers to find and visit key sites of interest and support local businesses

Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Identify capacity within the municipality to develop and implement the wayfinding program and bring on additional capacity or external expertise, as required
- Determine business / private lot owner interest in participating
- Complete parking inventory (If business / private lot owners participating, distinguish between public and private parking facilities)
- Establish branding and signage standards
- Develop an information and communications strategy appropriate for the municipality
- Deploy maps and signage

Process

Timeframe will vary depending on municipality's capacity and whether participation will include owners of businesses / private lots. If limited to improving parking wayfinding, the project should take six (6) months. Incorporation of more complex systems or processes such as implementation of real-time parking systems or completion of a parking management plan may require extended timelines.

- Month 1: Establish goals and scope of the program (i.e. on-street parking, off-street parking lots, public parking, privately owned and managed lots that are available for public parking); Contact private parking lot owners, as required; Determine desired tools (i.e. static mapping, digital / interactive maps, website, simple vs detailed on-street signage)
- Month 2: Complete downtown parking inventory of available parking stalls, lots, and existing rules (hours, paid vs unpaid, etc.) as defined by program scope; Rename lots (if necessary) to reflect location or landmarks; Consolidate lots (if possible) to simplify the parking landscape and improve visibility of lots

that are more difficult to find / access;
Identify opportunities to simplify parking rules

- Month 3: Draft updated parking rules and mapping; Draft branding and signage standards for auto-oriented wayfinding signage and parking lot / stall information signage (consider aligning with any existing municipal or downtown signage standards); Engage with community stakeholders for feedback on updates
- Month 4: Make revisions in response to feedback gathered, as appropriate; Finalize signage designs; Map out signage deployment, prioritizing wayfinding signage at gateways to downtown, key landmarks, key intersections, and parking lot accesses; Initiate procurement of signage
- Month 5: Finalize mapping design and website updates; Launch communications roll-out, highlighting how engagement feedback was used, key changes (available resources, signage, rule changes), timing of when updates will take effect
- Month 6: Deploy updated maps and signage; Launch updated parking website; Consider dedicating resource to monitor feedback during first month of deployment and update wayfinding strategy as necessary

Also see the best practice examples from Watertown, MA and Chattanooga, TN in the Best Practices Appendix at the end of this report.

Technical assistance for businesses

Category		Revenue and Sales
Location		Study Area
Origin		Mayor's Office
Budget		Low (less than \$50k) for initial planning and program development; Medium to high for program administration and funding activities
Timeframe		Short (less than 5 years)
Risk		Medium- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of business interest or engagement • Limited funding to execute program ideas
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader adoption of digital tools by businesses • More widespread online presence across business community • Broad engagement in programs and participation in activities
Partners & Resources		Town of Leominster Local businesses and organizations Potential funding sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MA Development Initiative Program (DHCD) • Build Back Better Regional Challenge (EDA)

Relevant Diagnostic Results

As observed in many municipalities, businesses without the ability to market and sell online were more likely to have significant negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Leominster small businesses include hospitality, food service and restaurants, antique shops, wedding venues, and other consumer goods / retail businesses. These business types are among the small businesses that are more susceptible to business interruption and may need assistance to increase business resilience.

Action Item

Identify a point person within the Town or business support community and identify programs in the "Process" section of this rubric to investigate as possible first projects.

It might be worthwhile to engage a consultant to help navigate the process, assess local gaps and needs, and develop a technical assistance plan.

The following questions might help guide project selection/development:

In terms of a Technical Assistance initiative, might the project include a combination of micro-grant and Technical Assistance (TA)?

- A grant may help a business to fund platform subscriptions, contractors, digital materials, ongoing maintenance.
- TA to create a digital marketing / eCommerce plan and help with initial implementation
- TA may include one-on-one consulting, workshops, digital material / toolkit

content, or a combination of approaches.

- TA may also include assistance on applications for other TA and funding programs at the state and federal level. For example, the MGCC Empower Digital grant.

What does the current level of engagement/ interaction between Town and business owners look like right now?

How do you plan to connect with the business community to begin creating trust in advance of a program offering? Be mindful of the pitfall, "if you build it, they will come." Program design and language should incorporate language used by business owners to describe their needs and desired outcomes, not just business jargon descriptions.

How can small business technical assistance be customized to reflect the business types and the current "day trip" trend in Leominster?

Topics may include strategies to support hospitality businesses on their marketing to encourage overnight visits.

Who will coordinate the RFP process and small business owner TA application process?

What criteria will you use to select businesses? How will you keep track of businesses accepted into programs and their outcomes?

Process

Small Business Technical Assistance Programming:

Begin with outreach and engagement to provide them with a voice; provide an opportunity to listen before there is any perception that you are “pushing” something to them that is not relevant considering their current mindset. Workshops can help business owners understand the subject matter and help them define what “online” and “eCommerce” can mean for them, on their terms, for their brand, and their comfort level.

One-on-One TA to work on a customer acquisition, retention, and online presence plan. Attention should also be spent on helping the business owner establish a plan to maintain activity, either through in-house staff support or through delegation to freelancers / contractors. Empower the business owner to not take everything on their own.

Subject matter categories to consider:

- Business operations resilience and growth planning; this includes staffing/ hiring and supply chain resilience
- Digital tool capabilities, including POS systems and bookkeeping (strategy and/ or implementation)
- eCommerce platform setup (e.g., Shopify, WooCommerce, connection to online marketplaces)
- Digital marketing (to support in-person commerce, not just eCommerce):
 - Website design, development, and maintenance planning
 - Social Media management (organic

and paid)

- Google My Business profile setup and optimization plan
- Review sites (e.g., Yelp, TripAdvisor, industry specific sites)

Technical Assistance format may be in workshop format, one-on-one format, and/or a combination of workshop and one-on-one TA.

Ideally, the technical assistance will provide tangible deliverables so the business owner feels it was worth their own time investment. For example, a new website, a collection of social media posts, help with an updated Google My Business profile, set up a new POS system, etc.

Also see the best practice example from Arlington, MA in the Best Practices Appendix

Project Rubric Best Practices



Ashland Sign and Facade Improvement Program

Town Contact

Beth Reynolds
Economic Development Director
breynolds@ashlandmass.com

Funding By

Ashland Economic Development Incentive Program; funds appropriated by Town of Ashland

Structure

50% match up to \$5,000

Characteristics

- Preferred target area (high traffic streets) but is open to all businesses in Ashland.
- Includes building improvements (accessibility, signs, awnings, painting).
- Includes site improvements (parking lots, planters, landscaping)

Cambridge Storefront Improvement Program

City Contact

Christina DiLisio
Project Manager
cdilisio@cambridgema.gov

Funding By

Municipal capital funds

Structure

Tiered matching grants based on improvement type

Characteristics

- Includes increasing accessibility to the store (part of their Storefronts-for-All program) and improving or replacing windows and doors to address COVID-19 restrictions.
- Also recommends tax credit programs to address accessibility, historic preservation, and energy efficiency



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PROJECT #1

Local Sign, Facade, and Storefront Improvement Programs

Location: Ashland and Cambridge, MA

NPS Main Street Facade Improvement Grant

- Main Street America announced a façade improvement grant program using funds from the Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program, now the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants Program. This grant is sponsored by the National Park Service.
- This example is not given as a funding source, rather, it is an option for using historic preservation funds, such as CPA funds, to create a façade improvement program that would address the historic buildings in a target area. This option is provided because some communities were looking at non-CDBG sources for a façade improvement program. This may be a useful model for a local program.
- The site provides a link to each of the communities chosen for this program. The awards are expected to be \$25,000 per project, and the site has the preservation covenants, grant agreements, and two webinars which may be useful.

Historic Commercial District Revolving Fund

- State-by-state program –in 2016, it was Texas and in 2019, it was Maine.
- This is not a funding source, but an example of a program that could serve as a model for communities with a significant number of historic buildings in their commercial centers.
- The Texas program includes a PDF of before-and-after pictures, the scope of work, and the cost for each building.
- This program also serves as a reminder that historic photos of a downtown can be used to as a base for developing design guidelines for the program, reinforcing characteristics specific and unique to each community.

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PROJECT #1

Leveraging Historic Revitalization Funds for Facade Improvement



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PROJECT #2

Rockaway ConneX

Location: Brooklyn, NY

Best Practice: Branding Rockaway ConneX

Rockaway ConneX was an innovative technology project that Perch Advisors lead in partnership with the Rockaway Business Alliance in 2017-2018. The project was funded by the Neighborhood Challenge Grant, a grant put forth by the New York City Department of Small Business Services and the New York City Economic Development Corporation, which challenged neighborhood based groups to propose a technological solution to a commercial corridor challenge. Rockaway ConneX sought to address the challenge of lack of connectivity between the various commercial corridors on the Rockaway peninsula by deploying QR codes and bluetooth beacons connecting residents and visitors with desired information, goods and services of the peninsula.

The Rockaway ConneX branding campaign was developed by Perch Advisors in partnership with graphic designer Lauren Peters-Collaer. Says Lauren:

"Rockaway ConneX is a digital platform designed to connect the visitors and inhabitants of Rockaway with desired information, goods and services of the peninsula. It was important to the creators of this product that ConneX be spelled with an "X" to allude to the crossroads, connecting functionality of their platform. This ultimately inspired the concept for the logo, as two arrows intersecting to create the X further visualizes its intended meaning, as well as the fundamental purpose of the platform."

Both the arrows and the X then became central elements of the larger identity, often being combined with images and illustrations of the physical things this platform connects users to: food, fun, activities, beach needs, and other people."



Themes and inspiration for design elements:

- A carefree, breezy day at the beach, conveyed through bright, fun colors
- Beach iconography: beach umbrella, surfboard, popsicle
- Connectivity: bold, intersecting lines and shapes
- Supporting local business: Citisticks is a Rockaway local brand of uniquely flavored custom-made popsicle, so incorporating a Citisticks pop into the campaign furthered the theme of promoting Rockaway local businesses

Themes and inspiration for copy:

- Chummy, welcoming
- Accessible
- Informative



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PROJECT #2

North Flatbush BID: Open For Business Campaign

Location: Brooklyn, NY

Best Practice: Branding

North Flatbush BID: Open For Business Campaign

Part 1: Construction Mitigation

Construction can have hugely detrimental impacts to small businesses like those on North Flatbush Avenue. With support from Councilmember Cumbo's office and the marketing team at LockStep Studios, the North Flatbush Avenue Business Improvement District launched Stop By. Shop. Buy., a bright, whimsical effort to keep the public engaged with local businesses as the streets and sidewalks experience traffic flow interruptions, and let the public know that the NFBID is Open for Business.

"Our work on the "Open for Business" campaign draws inspiration from a couple of sources. First, small and local businesses have a long history of beautiful and unique signs. The type for the "Open for Business" campaign references the typographic sensibilities found in such signage. We also referenced the design of construction signage, but paired it with bright colors and playful copy, helping to lift the mood and, of course, remind passersby that the North Flatbush BID shops are in fact open for business"

- Dailey Crafton and Cindy Rodriguez, Lockstep Studio

"Construction can be a real hassle for small businesses like BYKlyn: dust, noise, water shut-downs, scaffolding. Our North Flatbush Avenue BID however, has done a great job easing the construction burden. They have been very good about communicating all the construction details and schedules. And they have made great new signage — bright and bold-- that says we are "open for business."

- Amy Glosser, owner, Byklyn

Themes and inspiration for design elements:

- Vintage/ retro small business signage
- Construction signage and materials (construction tape, sidewalk stickers)
- Bright colors

Themes and inspiration for copy:

- Playful, welcoming, engaging
- Puns, plays on words

Part 2: COVID Response

The North Flatbush Avenue BID once again partnered with Lockstep Studios to launch a collective marketing campaign for NFBID businesses to share their progress in reopening, and remind customers to practice safe behavior. These snazzy posters and informational signage were distributed throughout the district, and also featured on the NFBID's social media and newsletters!

Themes and inspiration for design elements:

- Vintage/retro small business signage
- Bright colors

Project: Union Square

Key points

[Union Square Planning | City of Somerville \(somervillema.gov\)](http://somervillema.gov)
[Redevelopment ENF Filing \(unionsquareneighborhoodcouncil.org\)](http://unionsquareneighborhoodcouncil.org)

- 2012 (revitalization plan adopted)
- Union Square Redevelopment Project includes the redevelopment of approx. 15.7 acres of land.
- Completed Project is proposed to include:
 - Approx. 17 new buildings and 1 renovated building, totaling approx. 2,397,000 SF of development
 - 11 new civic spaces totaling more than 108,000 SF, and
 - Approx. 43,500 SF of new thoroughfares.
- The revitalization will be spurred by the introduction of new transit to the neighborhood via the \$2.3 billion Green Line Extension project.



Project: Union Square

Redevelopment Costs and Benefits. Source: [Redevelopment ENF Filing](#)

- Total investment: \$1.5 billion (est.)
- Direct economic benefits (est.):
 - \$32.4 million one-time
 - \$11.3 million new annual tax revenue

The Project		Phase 1 Project	
Capital Investments (estimated)			
Union Square Station Facilities		End of line facilities to support station operations	Improvements delivered for MBTA operations unlock the Phase 1 benefits, and its potential to commence Union Square's long anticipated revitalization
Private Investment	\$1.5 billion	\$325 million	This investment was critical in the City's ability to secure more than \$16 million in MassWorks Infrastructure funding for Union Square infrastructure improvement programs (a public good)
Contribution to Off-site Infrastructure	\$4.8 million	\$1.2 million	Supports the renewal of area infrastructure and streetscape
GLX Contributions	\$5.8 million	\$1.5 million	Direct contribution in support of the GLX

Economic Benefits (estimated)			
Land Sale Proceeds		\$14.8 million	Reimbursement of the City for the D2 land
New Annual Tax Revenue	\$11.3 million	\$2.3 million	Expected to the City's debt service on funded critical infrastructure improvements
Housing Linkage Payments	\$10.9 million	\$1.5 million	Contributes funds to affordable housing
Building Permit and CO Fees	\$18 million	\$4 million	Contribution for each new building project
Inflow and Infiltration Fees	\$3.5 million	\$1 million	To offset volume contribution to systems
Employment Benefits (estimated)			
Construction Jobs	4,300	1,083	Commitment to give priority to qualified Somerville residents and veterans
Permanent Jobs	5,000	500	Upon stabilization, jobs will range from professional, technology and life sciences opportunities, to arts and creative pursuits, to other part-time and service jobs
Jobs Linkage Payments	\$2.9 million	\$250,000	Funds job training for existing residents

Sign Code Bylaw Study Dedham, MA

Town Contact

Jeremy Rosenberger, Town Planner
jrosenberger@dedham-ma.gov

Consultant

Innes Associates Ltd., Harriman, and Steven Cecil Design & Planning

Cost

< \$50,000

Status

- Sign Code is part of the General Bylaws.
- Code is text-based and will be hosted on eCode
- Illustrations are in a separate document.

*Courtesy of the Town of
Dedham, Innes Associates,
Harriman, and Steven Cecil
Design & Planning*

Illustrations of Selected Sign Standards in the Dedham Signage Code

To assist in understanding some of the specific standards within the Dedham Signage Code, these illustrations indicate how typical circumstances may be applied. As illustrations, they are not intended to replace or alter the design standards or their interpretation; in every instance, the text of the Signage Code and its interpretation by the Town will govern reviews and approvals.

1. Calculating the Area of Individual Signs
2. Calculating the Maximum Area for Window Signs
3. Calculating the Maximum Sign Area Length of Principal Facades along Streets
4. Calculating the Maximum Sign Area Length of Screen Facades along Parking Areas or Private Ways
5. Identifying and Using Sign Senses
6. Averaging Sign Area Standards
7. Incorporating Sign Signs within Facades and Facade Architecture
8. Averaging Exempt Signs

1. CALCULATING THE AREA OF INDIVIDUAL SIGNS



For signs with borders or backing surface integral to the sign, the sign area is calculated by including them.

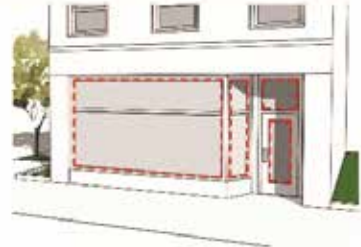


For signs with individual letters, the calculation is based on an outline that encompasses them.



For complex sign shapes, the sign area is calculated by adding together the areas of simple geometries that encompass the sign text and graphics.

2. CALCULATING THE MAXIMUM AREA FOR WINDOW SIGNS



The maximum area of window signs may not exceed 25% of the total window and door glazing area of a business or establishment. The total window area is the sum of the glazing of the components of a storefront.

For any business or establishment and as part of this maximum sign area, one window sign may consist of a Digital Display Sign or Edge Lit Sign up to a maximum area of 2 square feet, or 1 Neon-Type Sign with a maximum area of 6 square feet.

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PROJECT #4

Signage Code Bylaw Study, Regulations Update, and Audit

Location: Dedham, MA; Arlington, MA; Portland, ME

Sign Regulations Update Arlington, MA

Town Contact

Jenny Raitt, Director, Dept. of Planning and
Community Development
jraitt@town.arlington.ma.us

Consultant

Lisa Wise Consulting, San Luis Obispo, CA

Cost

< \$50,000

Status

- Sign Code is part of the Zoning Bylaws
- Code is text-based but includes illustrations
- Zoning Bylaws are provided in the standalone PDF.

Sign Audit & Recommendations Report Portland, ME

Town Contact

Christine Grimando, Director, Planning &
Urban Development Dept.
cdg@portlandmaine.gov

Consultant

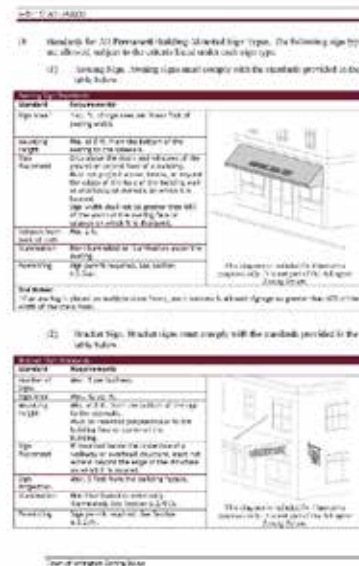
ReCode and Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc.

Cost

\$50,000

Status

Sign Code is part of the Zoning Bylaws



*Courtesy of the
Town of Arlington
and Lisa Wise
Consulting*

Selected resources:

Signage Foundation, Inc. (the.signagefoundation.org) has a great research library of articles. Some of the links are broken, but you may be able to search for the articles on another search engine.

These non-Massachusetts model sign codes are helpful but should be reviewed by municipal counsel first to make sure the provisions are compatible with Massachusetts General Laws.

- The Pennsylvania chapter of the APA has a model sign code. The current link is <https://planningpa.org/wp-content/uploads/Model-Sign-Plan-2.pdf>

- Also in Pennsylvania is the Model Sign Ordinance from the Montgomery County Planning Commission (Pennsylvania), 2014. The current link is <http://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/7070>

- Scenic Michigan produced the Michigan Sign Guidebook: The Local Planning and Regulation of Signs. The second edition, published in 2021, is available here: <https://scenicmichigan.org/sign-regulation-guidebook/>

Example 1: Town Center Design Guidelines

Sterling, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Domenica Tatasciore

Town Planner

dtatasciore@sterling-ma.gov

Consultant

Innes Associates Ltd./Harriman

Cost

\$15,000 (Massachusetts Downtown Initiative)

Characteristics

- Advisory
- Applicable to Town Center only
- Includes discussion of design elements for public right-of-way
- References historic buildings as context for new development.



Courtesy of the Town of Sterling, Innes Associates, and Harriman

Example 2: Residential Design Guidelines

Arlington, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Jenny Raitt

Director

Department of Planning and

Community Development

jraitt@town.arlington.ma.us

Consultant

Harriman

Cost

\$49,000

Characteristics

- Advisory
- Applicable to Residential zoning districts
- Included analysis of neighborhood characteristics
- Included in-depth public outreach



Courtesy of the Town of Arlington and Harriman

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PROJECT #5

Example 3: Dedham Square Design Guidelines

Dedham, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Jeremy Rosenberger

Town Planner

jrosenberger@dedham-ma.gov

Consultant

Gamble Associates

Cost

\$30,000

Characteristics

- Advisory
- Applicable to Dedham Square and gateway streets
- Includes discussion of design elements for pocket parks and connections to open spaces.
- References historic development patterns.



Courtesy of the Town of Dedham and Gamble Associates

Example 4: Kendall Square Design Guidelines

Cambridge, Massachusetts

City Contact

Jeff Roberts

Zoning and Development Director

Community Development Department

jroberts@cambridge.gov

Consultant

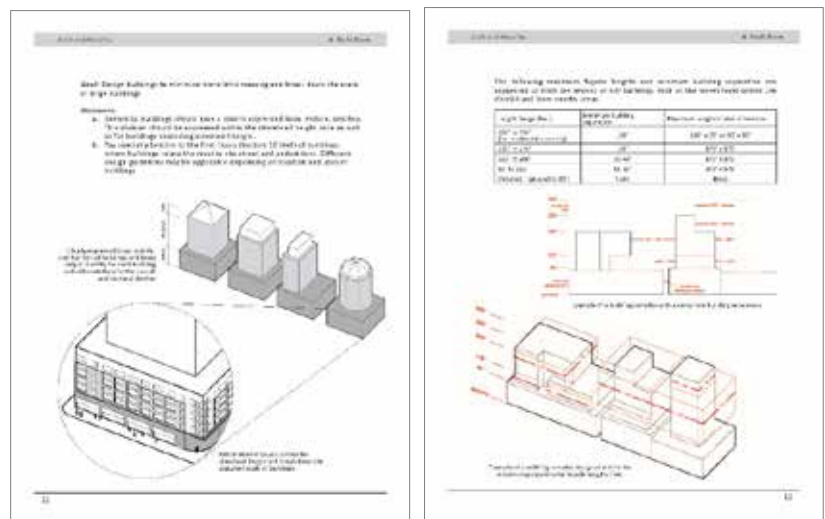
Goody Clancy

Cost

Unknown

Characteristics

- Tied to zoning, including special permit and PUD applications
- Applicable to Kendall Square
- Addresses different building uses, including residential and academic buildings.



Courtesy of the City of Cambridge and Goody Clancy

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PROJECT #5



Undertake a Public Planning and Visioning Process for the Public Realm



Provided by SME Consultant

Dodson & Flinker

Location

Florence, Massachusetts

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PROJECT #6

Origin

Planning and visioning is a common function of community planning departments, regional planning agencies, and their consultants, and there are many great examples. Those included here are drawn from the experience of Dodson & Flinker and our client teams in Northampton, Turners Falls and Williamsburg.

Budget



Low Budget: (Under \$50k) depending on size and extent of project area and the goals of the project.

Timeframe



Short term: (less than 5 years) a typical master-planning and visioning process can be accomplished in less than a year, but the time frame needs to fit the community's specific needs and challenges relative to outreach, public involvement and consensus-building.

Risk



Low to Medium: With careful preparation and inclusion of all interests and community stakeholders, most people can be brought to the table. Forging a consensus among them is the point of the process.

Key Performance Indicators

Public support for necessary zoning and regulatory changes; increased funding and public investment in improvements and infrastructure; physical and policy changes adopted to implement the vision.

Partners & Resources

Downtown residents, landowners, businesses, government agencies, boards and commissions, non-profits, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Business Association.

Diagnostic

The typical public realm planning process starts with a desire to improve physical and aesthetic conditions to bring people downtown, to make the area safer and more accessible, to accommodate new uses, or all of the above. Often there is a real or perceived conflict that arises when different groups of people need to share a limited space. Landowners and businesses that have invested in a place may need parking and amenities for their tenants and customers, while residents and visitors may have other needs.

Often the varied stakeholders in a village or downtown setting have little to do with each other until there is a conflict, or when that conflict comes before a local board, commission, council or town meeting. Along with creating a physical plan and action strategies, the purpose of the planning and visioning process is to bring diverse stakeholders together to have a conversation about the future; to build a shared understanding of the facts of the matter; to evaluate alternatives and their resulting costs and benefits; and to forge a consensus in support of that alternative that will achieve broad and lasting improvement for the whole community.

Action Item

The actions required to develop a plan or vision for the public realm follow the traditional planning process of inventory, analysis, exploration of alternatives and selection of a preferred approach. Each step requires a level of public involvement and review appropriate to the specific location and issues at hand, but the most durable plans are usually rooted in a shared consensus that cannot be achieved in a vacuum. Typical steps in the planning process include:

1. Define the specific study area and its planning context.
2. Establish a steering committee and determine the means of organizing the public process, either through a representative working group, a series of open public meetings, or some combination of the two.
3. Collect and review all relevant topographic surveys, GIS data, publicly available and proprietary data, previous reports and other materials relevant to the project area.
4. Prepare a detailed survey and analysis of existing conditions, including dimension of streets and sidewalks, architecture, use patterns, materials, etc. as appropriate to the scope of the effort.
5. Prepare an analysis of trends and likely future conditions, based on zoning, demographics, real estate market, business conditions.
6. Develop and visualize alternatives for redesign and redevelopment of the public realm within this larger physical, economic, social and environmental context.
7. Evaluate alternatives within a robust public discussion and build consensus in support of a preferred alternative.
8. Document the preferred alternative within a final masterplan and/or design strategy and prepare an action plan to implement it.

Process

Implementing the plan begins with a detailed action strategy that should be part of the plan itself. The best action plans detail realistic and achievable objectives and list the specific actions necessary to achieve them. The description of each action includes the time frame, needed resources (whether funding or staff time), and most importantly, the party responsible for carrying out that action. If that party has not accepted that responsibility, at least on a preliminary basis, that action should not be included in the final plan.

Implementation of a typical public realm plan includes using staff or volunteers to identify and apply for grant funding (or secure town funds) to pursue detailed design and construction, but it can also include zoning and regulatory changes, establishment of formal or informal improvement organizations, and partnerships with local institutions, landowners, non-profits and developers. Even after changing zoning to enable redevelopment, in many places the potential rental rates will not support private redevelopment efforts. Some form of direct investment or subsidy by government or institutions may be required to overcome these inherent economic challenges.

Get Public Input Early and Often

Getting public input on existing conditions, problems and opportunities in the study area sets a strong foundation for further planning. Establishing a shared understanding of facts and asking residents and businesses to weigh in on “what’s working well” and “what needs to be fixed,” builds trust in the process and ensures that the planning and design process addresses the most important issues.



Images from public workshops in Florence and Williamsburg

Ask “What’s Working?” “What Needs to be Fixed?”

Given the right tools, local residents and business owners can quickly identify the most important issues – saving time and ensuring the focus is on the key problems and opportunities.



Participants used stickers and notes to identify positive and negative aspects of existing buildings and streetscape elements in Florence.

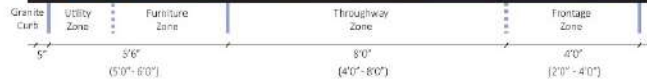
Reach out to Town Staff, Residents and Business Owners

Walking the study area with residents, business owners and town staff is a great way to gather information while forging the connections that will be critically important for further planning and implementation.



Document How the Public Realm Works Today

Streetscape design and other planning concepts can be confusing to a layperson. Simple maps, photos and diagrams help to communicate key concepts using examples that are familiar to local residents and business owners.



Celebrate What's Working Well

There are usually some successful elements within the existing public realm, or as in this case, within the private frontage adjacent to the sidewalk. These examples illustrate the goals of the planning process and can serve as models for continued investment in other parts of the study area.



Take Stock of What's Not Working So Well

Without pointing fingers, it's useful to analyze why some uses need to be improved or replaced. Often, as in this case, the approach succeeded in providing parking or meeting other needs but failed to account for how that use impedes the success of the surrounding area.



Test Alternatives and Get Public Feedback

The growing popularity of Tactical Urbanism strategies demonstrates the value of testing out potential improvements on a temporary basis. Whether applying paint striping for a period of months, or demonstration projects lasting a day or a week, this method of testing alternatives is guaranteed to prompt immediate engagement and feedback from those most affected by the potential changes. As in the Williamsburg example, temporary installations can be combined with local festivals and other events that bring people downtown.



Images from Park[ing] Day in Florence, involving taking over a parking space for a day to create a "parklet." This is an annual event started by Rebar in San Francisco in 2005 and sponsored locally by members of the American Society of Landscape Architects.



"Burgie Revelation Day" in Williamsburg, combined a festival atmosphere with temporary markings for a new multi-use path and a "ribbon-cutting" ceremony to celebrate envisioned future improvements (project by Dillon Sussman while at Pioneer Valley Planning Commission).

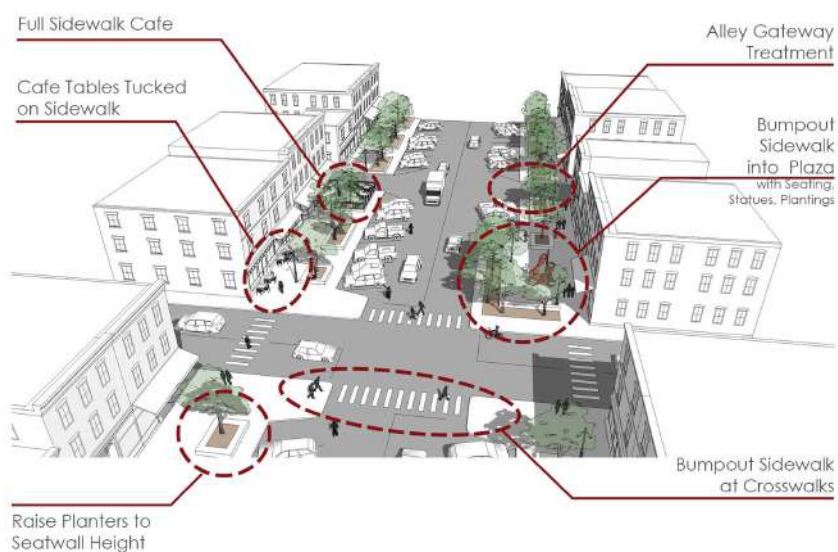
Visualizing Alternatives

Sketchup and other modeling tools allow for the creation of simple models and diagrams that help participants understand how various streetscape improvements fit together. In these views from the Downtown Turners Falls Livability Plan, a view of existing conditions on Avenue A is contrasted with a diagram showing a range of potential Complete Streets improvements and pedestrian amenities. The project laid the groundwork for creation of a sidewalk plaza, lighting upgrades, rebuilt sidewalks and other improvements.

https://www.montague-ma.gov/files/Downtown_Turners_Falls_Livability_Plan_2013.pdf



Digital model showing existing conditions along Avenue A in Turners Falls.



Digital model showing potential Complete Streets improvements and streetscape amenities.

Visualizing Alternatives

Rendered models helped stakeholders in Florence understand alternatives for redeveloping Main Street, including the potential for new mixed-use buildings within the private realm and potential improvements to the public realm.

A key benefit of the digital approach is allowing for multiple alternatives to be turned on an off. This helps make choices clear, while showing how public and private realm improvements can be coordinated within an overall masterplan. It also helps show the potential phasing of improvements over time – allowing participants to see how public investment in new sidewalks and street trees can help set the stage for private redevelopment efforts.



Digital model showing existing conditions on Main Street in Florence.



Model view showing potential Complete Streets improvements and tree plantings in the Public Realm.



Model showing potential infill development and a new park within the private realm.



BEST
PRACTICE

PROJECT #6

Create Calm Street Pilots and Pop-Up Curbside “Streeteries”





PUBLIC
REALM

Provided by SME Consultant

Nelson\Nygaard

Location

Natick, MA

Origin	Town of Natick, Natick Center Cultural District
Budget	 Low Budget (Under \$50k)
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Create an Inviting Pedestrian Retail Environment (Measures: Speed of Cars Before and After, Number of Crashes, Perception Survey), Support Social-Distance-Safe Local Dining and Spending (Measures: Number of Seats Added, Sales)
Partners & Resources	MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program, A Greener Greater Boston (AGGB) program of the Solomon Foundation and Barr Foundation
Diagnostic	<p>Overly-large intersections and wide travel lanes were contributing to higher speeds of travel through the heart of Natick's pedestrian core. In order to create a more comfortable and attractive walking and biking environment, lane and intersection diets could be deployed to achieve safer operations while sustaining the same vehicle throughput.</p> <p>The team worked to design solutions working with majority already-owned materials, with limited purchases for temporary and safety materials.</p> <p>In early pandemic social distancing, while indoor dining was unsafe, the Town was seeking quick solutions to help local businesses continue serving and attracting customers. Retrofitting on-street parking spaces for outdoor dining could help create interim options for safer dining and company.</p> <p>Natick Center Cultural District also found ways to engage creative placemaking elements into the process in order to support local artists during the economic struggles of the pandemic.</p>
Action Item	<p>As communities grappled with strategies to restart local businesses – especially those that rely on foot traffic and shared spaces (i.e., retail and restaurants) – providing a safe environment that reinforces recommended COVID-19 physical distancing measures, is paramount. Given the need to provide more outdoor space for businesses to serve customers, and sidewalks unable to accommodate both business activity and pedestrian accommodation, communities like Natick were looking to repurpose streets to provide additional space so that both may be safely accommodated.</p> <p>A rapid response was necessary to help businesses recover quickly as COVID-related restrictions begin to relax and allow for non-essential business activity to resume. At the same time, ensuring the safety of restaurant users, as well as those in vehicles and on bicycles, was critical. A focus on low-cost, rapid implementation was critical to serving safety and business vitality needs. All programs and projects were designed to be flexibly modified.</p>

Action Items (Continued)

Key actions included:

- A kickoff meeting with all department officials to confirm project goals
- Site analysis and issues identification
- Business owner outreach
- Design concept development
- Stakeholder presentations and tactical event promotion
- Traffic calming testing in the field
- Confirming longer-term trial design and installing materials
- Processing feedback and engagement

Process

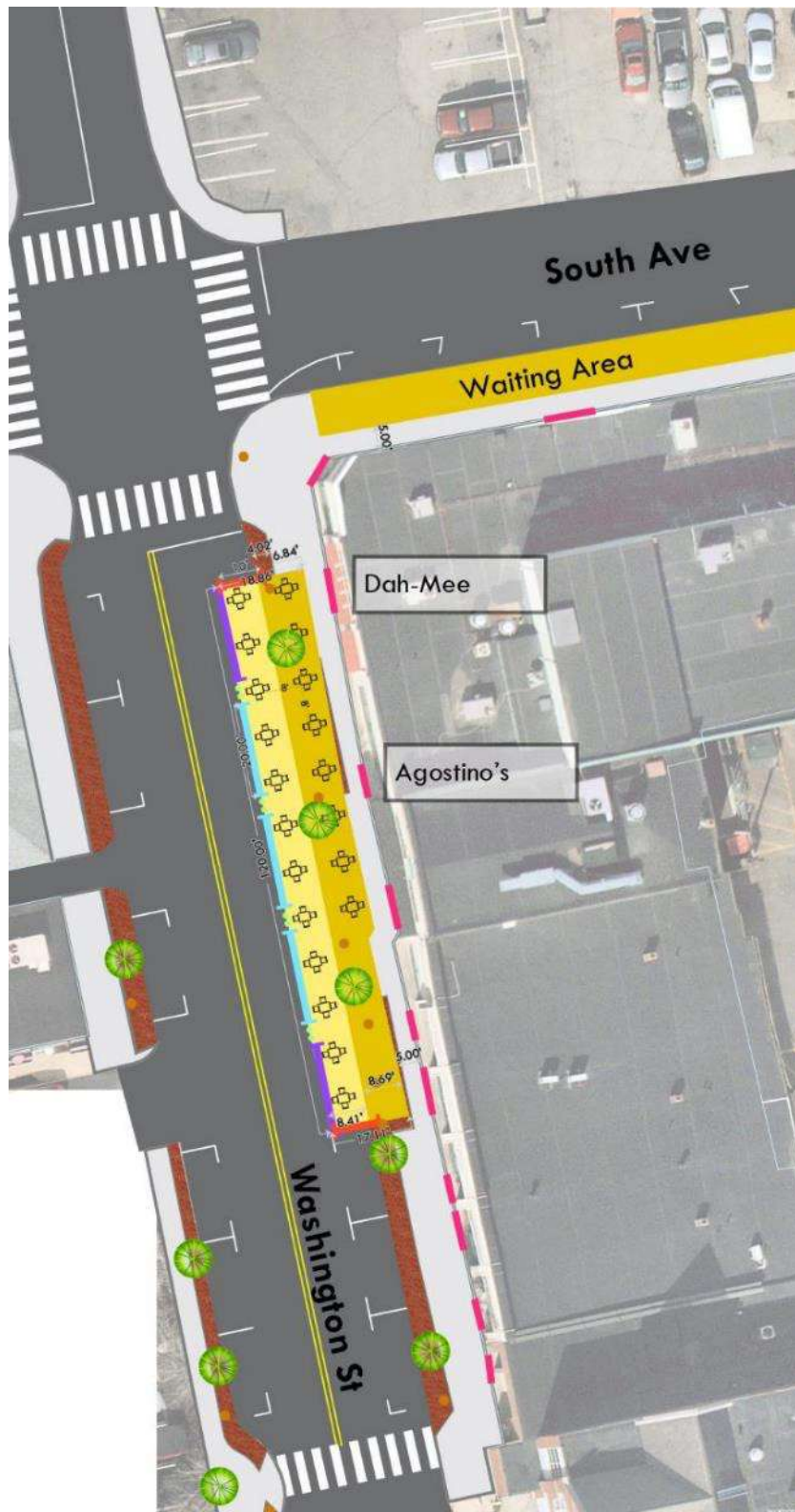
- Discuss Need for Intervention
- Field Visits and Observations, Counts, Documentation
- Measure Key Dimensions
- Create Design Alternatives
- Present to Stakeholders for Feedback
- Plan Installation Date and Timeline
- Promote Event through Fliers, Social Media, and Town-wide Announcements
- Design Business and Citizen Engagement Survey
- Create Materials List, Budget, Order Supplies, and Plan for Deliveries
- Optional: Post Virtual Messaging Signs on Approaches to Announce Upcoming Changes
- Decide on Police Detail and Oversight Needs, Cover Liability Needs
- Optional: Plan for Street Sweeping
- Create Hour-by-Hour Install Schedule and Steps for Install Day
- Day of: Measure and Lay Down Materials, Observe and Tweak As-Needed, Document through Photos and Videos, Consider Intercept Surveys and Programming around Event
- After Day of Testing, Install More Permanent Seasonal Materials
- Optional: Consider Local Art Enhancements



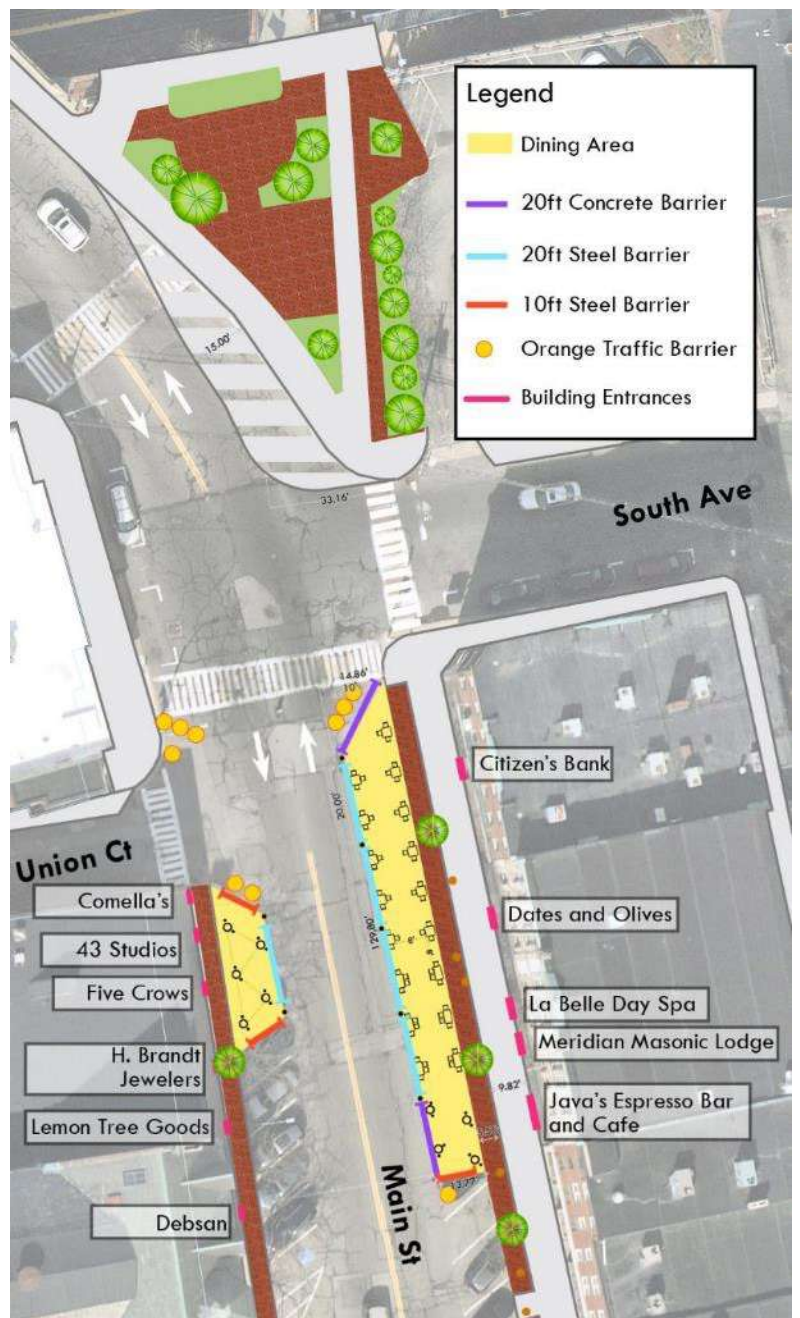
Image of Tactical Testing Before Striping and Adding Bollards



Image of Washington Street Eatery As Installed



Layout Plan of Washington Street Eatery In On-Street Parking Lane



Layout pLan of before and after conditions for traffic calming and in-street outdoor dining on Main Street



Images of jersey barriers with reflective tape and artist mosaics and of temporary chalk art in tactical curb extensions – will receive art murals long-term. Credit: Ted Fields



**BEST
PRACTICE**

PROJECT #7

Gove Street Crossing: Pop-up Park + Plaza



**PUBLIC
REALM**

Provided by SME Consultant

Civic Space Collaborative

Location

East Boston, MA

Origin	Friends of the Mary Ellen Welch Greenway and Boston Society of Landscape Architects (BSLA)
Budget	 Low (\$16,000 in total from Barr Grant: \$6,000 for materials, \$10,000 BSLA design competition and project management, \$20,000 pro bono time from Toole Design)
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) – October 2018 to June 2019
Risk	 Low Risks (temporary installation, low-cost materials)
Key Performance Indicators	Participants at events, increase in the number of people sitting on the Greenway and picnic, positive comments from greenway visitors, and excited youth walking to school.
Partners & Resources	Friends of the Mary Ellen Welch Greenway, Greenway Council, Boston Society of Landscape Architects (BSLA), Toole Design, Boston Parks, City of Boston's Public Realm Director, East Boston Public Library, Krina Patel (artist), Zumix (music onsite), and volunteers
Diagnostic	<p>This project happened prior the COVID-19 pandemic, although planning and installation would be possible while still maintaining appropriate guidelines for public health.</p> <p>Painting the asphalt, planting annuals in the containers and perennials, and building the benches were all COVID-19 friendly activities since people were able to social distance and/or work in small groups.</p> <p>Over the past year, we saw important open space in our communities is for both physical and mental health, with parks being one of the few places where people could meet up safely outside. The pop-up park and plaza activated the Greenway using tactical urbanism and placemaking. As a result, the Greenway became even more of a destination and provided passive forms of recreation, which did not previously exist. In addition, the Greenway was transformed into an exciting place for people, and especially for children. As part of the installation, mini-libraries were filled with children's books and toys and were very exciting for the kids to discover when they went to school on Monday morning. With everyone spending a lot of time in their neighborhoods this past year, it is important to make spaces a little more exciting.</p>
Action Item	<p>The Friends of the Mary Ellen Greenway (FoMEWG) worked with the Boston Society of Landscape Architects (BSLA) to host a design competition for the Gove Street section of the Mary Ellen Greenway. A 12-member jury selected Toole Design to work on a seasonal installation.</p> <p>Over three months, Toole Design worked to refine the design by engaging East Boston residents. The final design and project included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a pop-up plaza on Gove Street next to a residential apartment building, and 2. a seasonal installation on the Greenway. <p>Both designs included a pavement graphic and seating. The FoMEWG hosted several programs at the pop-up plaza.</p> <p>This project was funded by a Barr Foundation grant to the Friends of the Mary Ellen Welch Greenway</p>



Gove Street Crossing: Pop-up Park + Plaza site plan. [Site Design: Toole Design]

Process

Design Competition

- **Design Challenge:** FoMEWG worked with BSLA to host a design competition for the Gove Street section of the Greenway. Eight entries were submitted that included both long and short-term ideas for the Greenway at Gove Street. The full set of design entries can be viewed at <https://marvellenwelchgreenway.org/2019/03/27/bsla-design-challenge-entries/>.
- **Design Selection:** The entries did not include the names of the individuals or firms in order to ensure a blind judgement of the designs. The 12-member jury of East Boston residents selected Toole Design to work on a seasonal installation. The final design was selected since it successfully active the spaces, greatly enhanced the east / west connections used by students, incorporated community engagement into the design process, and the materials were also in Spanish.

Pop-Up Installation Planning + Design

- **Planning + Design:** Over three months in Spring 2019, Toole Design worked to refine the tactical short-term installation by engaging East Boston residents and FoMEWG. The design was shared at the monthly Greenway meeting, and the Project Team engaged youth at the East Boston Public Library. The final tactical design with pavement graphic and seating including:
 1. a pop-up plaza on Gove Street next to a residential apartment building, and
 2. a seasonal installation on the Greenway.



Toole Design laying out the design before volunteers arrive



Working on an active Greenway and volunteer recruitment for people walking or biking by



Gove Street one week pop-up tactical plaza

Process (Continued)

- **Approvals for Boston Parks:** The Project Team met with Boston Parks to review the proposed design, and Boston Parks was asked to weigh in on the seating structures and painting before the design was final. The FoMEWG submitted a “Small Projects Form” outlining the proposed project, its design, and maintenance plan for Parks to review and approve.
- **Approvals from Boston Transportation Department:** The Project Team met with the City of Boston’s Public Realm Director to discuss the plaza concept. For the one-week temporary plaza installation, the project team applied for a 1-week event permit and posted “No Parking” signs.

Implementation

- **Material Acquisition:** In June, the project team acquired the materials from nurseries, lumber yards, the hardware store, and ordered the bistro sets online. These items were transferred to the site in East Boston upon procurement.
- **Installation:** Toole Design staff worked to build the exchange benches off-site and then assisted the benches on site. The Project Team planned for two installation days, which included a Saturday. Toole Design outlined the pavement graphics prior to volunteers arriving each day. Volunteers painted the pavement graphics on the Greenway and plaza, planted plants in the planters, and placed the seating. Lunch was provided to the volunteers.
- **Programs:** The FoMEWG hosted several programs at the pop-up plaza, including music in the evenings by local musicians, a piñata party with a local artist, Krina Patel, and games for children. Later in the summer, the Friends and Toole Design lead a bike ride for the LandLine Coalition, a group working to connect community paths and greenways in the Greater Boston region.
- **Removal:** The one-week pop-up plazas were removed, and the chairs and tables were relocated to the seasonal Parks installation on the Greenway. In the fall, the Parks installation with the benches were removed and put into storage for the winter.
- **Re-Installation:** In Summer 2020, the benches and Adirondack chairs were placed in the Parks section of the Greenway.



View from Bremen Street towards the Mary Ellen Welch Greenway, exchange benches with cases and planters



Gove Street Crossing: East Boston Greenway signage and temporary benches



Pinata Party planned by artist Krina Patel at the pop-up plaza

Example 1: Forest Avenue / Manursing Avenue Pedestrian Improvement Study

Rye, New York

Town Contact

Christian K. Miller
City Planner
cmiller@ryeny.gov

Consultant

Stantec Consulting Ltd.

Cost: <\$50,000

Status: Complete

Characteristics

- Project scope included the right-of-way along Forest Avenue between Apawamis Avenue and Manursing Avenue (approximately 3,700 linear feet) and along Manursing Avenue between Forest Avenue and Davis Avenue (approximately 650 linear feet)
- Study was used to inform the City and the public of possible pedestrian improvement options and encourage a formal discussion as a design alternative is chosen by the City for implementation
- Detailed preliminary plans (40%) for each of the viable alternatives were prepared with sufficient detail to properly assess project impacts, physical constraints and anticipated cost

Example 2: Wayfinding on Fairmount Greenway

Boston, Massachusetts

Coordinator

Michelle Moon
Civic Space Collaborative
michelle@civicspacecollaborative.org

Cost: \$10,000

Status: Completed May 2021

Characteristics

- Installation of wayfinding signs to mark a 1.5-mile on-street route of the Fairmount Greenway in Dorchester near Four Corners and Codman Square.
- Wayfinding signs were updated to include key neighborhood destinations and mark the on-street route
- Twelve signs were printed on corrugated plastic and installed with residents
- No approvals required for installation

**BEST
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PROJECT #8



Example 1: Forest Avenue / Manursing Avenue Pedestrian Improvement Study
Rye, New York

Example 1: Watertown Parking Management Plan

Watertown, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Laura Wiener

Senior Transportation Planner

lwiener@watertown-ma.gov

Consultant

Stantec Consulting Ltd.

Cost

\$100,000

Status

Complete

Characteristics

- Comprehensive summary of findings and recommendations for improving and managing parking at Watertown Square and Coolidge Square in Watertown, MA
- Includes two recommendation related to wayfinding for parking as well as discrete action items for implementation

**BEST
PRACTICE**

PROJECT #9

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Strongly Identify Municipal Parking Lots by Branding and Wayfinding

OVERVIEW

In Watertown and Coolidge Square, municipal parking lots do not have official, designated names and lack directional signage. The lack of official names can confuse Square visitors, as it can be difficult for those who drive to find public parking. Establishing formal names helps wayfinding, making it easier for drivers to find information on where to park.

ACTION ITEMS

- Establish official names for municipal parking lots
- Install standardized public parking signs that include parking lot names



WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

- Municipal lots are not easily visible. Almost 30% of respondents are not aware that Coolidge Square has public park
- Directional signage is inconsistent
- There are no official, standardized signs or other identifiers for each public lot



In both Watertown and Coolidge Square, public lots do not have designated names. Instead, the public refers to lots such as the Watertown Square Municipal Lot as the "CVS lot".

18 Watertown, MA | Parking Management Plan

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Improve Wayfinding and Signage

OVERVIEW

Create a visitor friendly environment with wayfinding signage to help visitors access parking. Wayfinding signage should highlight on and off-street parking options. The signage should clearly indicate where the public is allowed to park and where businesses and local attractions are located. Wayfinding signage should:

- Define clear parking rules
- Identify public parking, including free and long-term parking (both on- and off-street), and bicycle parking. 30% of survey respondents are unaware that public parking exists in Coolidge Square
- Identify major points of interest, such as the Cultural Center, popular restaurants, the Public Library, and Armenian museum
- Guide people walking to destinations

ACTION ITEMS

- Install standardized public parking signs that are directional and provide estimated walking distances and times
- Publish a user-friendly parking map on the Town website
- Add signs to direct drivers to underserved lots and on-street spaces
- Work with private businesses to create standardized signage



WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

- Drivers are unaware of less-used parking locations
- There is no easy way to walk between lots and destinations
- Prime parking areas are overwhelming for drivers. 50% of Coolidge Square drivers say they have left because they were unable to find parking
- Wells Avenue Municipal Lot is difficult to access from Mt. Auburn Street



The parking map above clearly delineates parking locations and regulations in a public-friendly format

21 Watertown, MA | Parking Management Plan

Example 2: Downtown Chattanooga Parking Study- Chattanooga, Tennessee

Consultant

Stantec Consulting Ltd.

Cost: \$60,000

Status: Complete

Characteristics

- Comprehensive summary of findings and recommendations for improving and managing parking in downtown Chattanooga, TN
- Includes recommendations related to wayfinding for parking as well as discrete action items for implementation

GEN9: CONSISTENT SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

A simple and complete signage and wayfinding system should easily guide people parking to resources that meet their needs. For example, employees may want to find lower-cost long-term parking, while visitors may be price neutral and simply want to get close to the front door. A parking information system should align with other mobility information systems (i.e. bus stops, bikeshare locations, pedestrian wayfinding) and consider the following elements:

Before arrival

- Online resources that indicate where key parking facilities are. This is particularly important for event management to help direct large numbers of parkers who may be unfamiliar with the system.
- Working with local businesses, transportation managers and associations, and event managers to link their information to a common resource that provides parking information, ideally on the CARTA/CPA website.
- Providing GPS-ready addresses that help drivers find parking facilities instead of driving directly to the front door of their destination.

At arrival

- Real-time auto-oriented directional signage at strategic locations to direct people to large facilities, such as CARTA North and South. These signs should incorporate both availability and price.
- Directional signage with a consistent look (i.e. font, colors, branding as Public) that directs people driving to other parking facilities. Signage should include at least general

information on price ("discount" v. "premium") and should match signage at facilities.

- Signage at facilities that clearly designates public parking. For shared parking facilities that are restricted at certain times of day and/or privately owned, signage should clearly indicate when the parking is available to the public.
- Simple signage that is user-oriented and clear about what times parking is allowed, rather than focusing on when parking is restricted.

During stay

- Pedestrian-oriented signage that helps people who have parked return to their vehicles
- Parking information on printed materials. This can be distributed by local businesses as well as with parking tickets/warnings to help people find the resources they need.

This approach will help broaden the reach of the parking system as it helps people to understand how it works, and directs drivers to parking resources that may be located just a block or two away from a given destination. For example, in the MLK district, the CARTA North garage is a large parking resource within a five minute walk of many restaurants and the museum. Clearly providing a path for both people driving and walking to and from that facility will help increase awareness of that resource.

**BEST
PRACTICE**

PROJECT #9

Provide Funding and Technical Assistance to Enable Business Viability During COVID-19



Provided by SME Consultant

Revby LLC

Location

Arlington, MA

**BEST
PRACTICE**

PROJECT #10

Origin	Arlington Department of Planning and Community Development; Arlington Economic Development Recovery Task Force; Arlington Community Development Block Grant Subcommittee
Budget	 <p>Medium (\$200,000) - \$180,000 of direct assistance to businesses via working capital grants and \$20,000 to a technical assistance program with two contracted consultants.</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (< 1 year) - TA contract to end of 2021. One-on-One TA: 10 hours to be completed within that timeframe. Workshops completed before end of June 2021.</p>
Risk	 <p>Low Risk - A challenge for the Technical Assistance program was limited capacity on the part of the small business owners. Must follow CDBG requirements; subject to be returned to HUD should use of funds be deemed ineligible.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Business vitality (sales performance) through the pandemic and into the post-pandemic world.
Partners & Resources	Town of Arlington, MA Dept. of Planning and Community Development; Small businesses (grant recipients); Contracted consultants (technical assistance providers), including Revby LLC
Diagnostic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need for working capital was identified as the most urgent need in the business community; thus, the majority of funds for the program were dedicated to direct assistance. CDBG funding entails reporting requirements that must be explained to business recipients. The technical assistance program was a pilot initiative.

Action Item

The Department of Planning and Community Development Action Items:

- Administering a relief program for Arlington businesses with twenty or fewer full-time-equivalent employees, including the owner.
- The program provides short-term working capital assistance and technical assistance to enable the viability of the business during the severe economic interruption related to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing restrictions.

Technical Assistance project Action Items (by Revby, a TA provider):

- Build trust with the business owner during the first sessions and collaboratively work on a plan on how the technical assistance time allotted may be used to support the business owner in the best way possible.
- Conduct several TA sessions over Zoom
- Provide a final project deliverable that outlines the work completed and provides resources and recommendations for the business owner's ongoing use.
- Provide workshops on topics including business resilience and digital marketing.

Process

Process by the Town of Arlington:

1. Conduct analysis of current needs that align with eligible use of CDBG funds.
2. Complete a substantial amendment of CDBG Annual Action Plan, including public comment period and citizen participation process.
3. Open application period December 2020-January 2021 (including information session).
4. Review of applications by 4 members of DPCD team.
5. Notify applicants and execute grant agreements (February).
6. Complete procurement process for Technical Assistance providers (January-February).
7. (Ongoing) Complete reimbursement requests.
8. (Ongoing) Technical Assistance sessions and workshops: Topics include digital marketing, website assistance, eCommerce, SEO, Bookkeeping, and business resilience.
9. Collect reporting documentation and close out award requirements with HUD.

Process by Revby, a TA Provider:

1. Conduct first meeting introduction over a Zoom call; identify needs; create plan for time allotted.
2. Conduct interactive working sessions to build capacity and improvements around the identified topics. Facilitate brainstorming sessions so the business owner can create their own content and action items. Provide tools, examples, recommendations to support the sessions.

Additional notes regarding the program design used by the Town of Arlington, MA.

Information source: Town of Arlington, CDBG Administrator

Retention or creation of at least one job held by an individual who earns a low- to moderate-income is required to access funds or technical assistance in this program. Job retention is defined as total full-time equivalent (FTE) positions retained at 30 hours per week, or any combination of part-time positions combining for 30 hours per week, including owners. At least 51% of the positions your business retained or created must be held by employees who earn a low- to moderate-income.

The grant is a working capital assistance grant.

The grant is a reimbursable grant, so selected businesses will be required to incur expenses before being reimbursed. If the Review Committee approves your application, we will issue a grant agreement. It will be the responsibility of the business owner to submit eligible expenses to the Department of Planning and Community Development for reimbursement. Ten percent of the grant will be held until the time that the job creation/ job retention certification form is received.

Most grants will not exceed \$10,000

A points-based scoring rubric was created to review and prioritize qualified applicants. Assessment criteria included:

- Business Health
- Business Location

- DBG Eligibility
- Community Impact
- COVID-19 Hardship
- Recovery Plan
- Technical Assistance (likeliness of positive impact)

The Review Committee assigns applicants a technical assistance provider who will distribute services as determined by the contract with that provider, and can include but is not limited to: One-on-one technical assistance for businesses on the following topics: website development, e-commerce, live commerce, digital/traditional marketing, search engine optimization, and bookkeeping/ accounting; and Group workshops or session.

Budget overview:

- \$10,000 working capital grants to 25 eligible businesses (number of businesses can be scaled down to match the community's needs and budget).
- Approx. \$20,000 budget for one-on-one technical assistance for 6 selected businesses and 4 workshops for all 25 grant recipients. (Low budget range when considering just the one-on-one TA and workshops, much of which focused on digital marketing)

The following is the project description included in an RFP for similar work for the Cape Cod Commission. Leominster may decide a smaller subset of services based off of the Cape Cod Commission example as deemed appropriate for the scale, subject matter priority, and budget. For example, given Leominster's small business profiles, workshops and toolkits for the following sectors may be appropriate:

1. Hospitality, including wedding venues
2. Food Service and Restaurants
3. Retail and other brick & mortar product and service businesses

Project description that was included in the original RFP documentation:

TASK 1. REVIEW EXISTING DATA AND LITERATURE ON ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CAPE COD.

Commission staff will review existing data with the consultant, including reviewing the two economic impact surveys completed earlier in 2020. Commission staff has also begun identifying best practices from other region's economic resiliency planning efforts, reviewing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plans in comparable regions in the U.S., and collecting examples of technical assistance resources for business recovery planning from natural and man-made disasters.

The consultant will participate in a virtual meeting to review this information, set milestone dates, and assign project management tasks.

Deliverable: Virtual meeting to review goals, materials, and project schedule.

TASK 2. DEVELOP TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WORKSHOPS FOR BUSINESS RECOVERY PLANNING.

The consultant will work with Commission staff to develop a series of virtual technical assistance workshops around business recovery planning. The consultant will facilitate two workshops per industry group (with 5 total industry groups anticipated). Industries of particular interest given survey results and percentage of total employment in Barnstable County may include: Retail, Accommodations, Food Services/Restaurants, Arts/Culture/Recreation, Professional/Technical Services, and Personal Care Services. The Commission and consultant will work together to outline the workshop agendas but the Commission generally anticipates the overall framework for the workshops to be:

a) Workshop 1: Confirm business/industry needs and challenges identified through economic impact surveys and literature review research and provide an overview of business recovery planning, including walking through steps of planning efforts for individual businesses.

b) Between workshops: Leverage research from Task 1 and feedback from Task 3 to create technical assistance workshop materials and toolkits that business owners can use in facilitating their economic recovery (Task 4).

c) Workshop 2: Present the toolkits and ensure participants are familiarized with local, regional, state, and federal resources for economic recovery and resiliency (Task 5).

Through this process, the Commission is interested in learning about ways in which businesses successfully adapted to COVID-19, and what attributes facilitated adaptability and resiliency, as well as key barriers and challenges to adapting from businesses' perspective.

Deliverables: Written framework for stakeholder engagement including workshop frequency, goals, structure, content, outreach plan, and timeline. Include outreach plan to disseminate workshop materials to broader audience following meetings.

TASK 3. FACILITATE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WORKSHOP 1

The consultant will host a workshop during which they learn about the business needs in the economic recovery context by industry group and provide an overview of business recovery planning, including walking through steps of planning efforts for individual businesses. Outreach is anticipated to be conducted by both Commission staff and the consultant primarily through email and will leverage existing contact lists at the Commission. In both Workshop 1 and 2, the Commission anticipates 10-30 attendees per industry session.

Deliverable: Up to 5 workshops, development of associated meeting content, and meeting summaries/minutes.

TASK 4. DEVELOP TOOLKITS FOR EACH INDUSTRY SUBJECT AREA

The consultant will develop an accompanying digital toolkit, including, when applicable, business recovery plan templates, checklists, worksheets, or lists of relevant

local, state, and federal resources, for each industry-specific workshop. At the end of the workshop series, the consultant will use participant feedback to refine the toolkit for future use by local partners facilitating comparable workshops and by the Commission in its economic recovery and resilience plan.

Deliverable: One toolkit per industry group (up to 5 total)

TASK 5. FACILITATE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WORKSHOP 2.

In collaboration with Commission staff, the consultant will facilitate virtual technical assistance workshops. The content will be determined at the planning stage (Task 2), but the Commission anticipates presenting the toolkits and guiding small business owners on their recovery planning efforts. In both Workshop 1 and 2, the Commission anticipates 10-30 attendees per industry session.

Deliverable: Up to 5 workshops, development of associated meeting content, and meeting summaries/minutes.

TASK 6. MEMO ON PRIORITY RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY STRATEGIES.

Based on the economic impact survey results, feedback from the technical assistance workshop process in Task 5, best practices research in Task 1, and the expertise of the consultant, the consultant should present recommendations on prioritized recovery and resiliency strategies that address the unique challenges of Cape Cod's regional economy, and ensures businesses can best adapt to an uncertain economic

climate.

Commission staff will share the memo with stakeholders for review and will eventually integrate the recommendations into an Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan into the CEDS.

Deliverable: Memo on key priority recovery and resiliency strategies for Cape Cod's economy.

Overall project Budget:
Low-Medium, Approximately \$50,000