



# Rapid Recovery Plan

Town of Athol  
October 2021

# Acknowledgements



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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. Athol, 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.

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## Addressing Top Priorities for Economic Recovery in Athol

In the past 5 years, Athol has made great strides with new Town and Planning leadership, and an active Downtown Vitality Committee. During this time, many planning studies have been completed in areas ranging from the retail market and a master plan, to downtown parking and ecotourism. Grants have been diligently pursued and won to support many of these efforts. However, limited funds and limited administrative capacity has been a barrier in advancing some of the recommendations outlined in these efforts to be able to generate the momentum Athol needs to create the shift toward noticeable changes downtown.

As with other small towns across America, Athol has sustained some economic impacts as a result of COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, Athol was already challenged with longer-term economic stagnation resulting from a range of factors. In spite of this, Athol is also changing quickly in some ways- it was one of the first towns in Massachusetts to host marijuana facilities, a new restaurant offering on Main Street has generated significant activity, and the Town just approved its first parking price increase in decades.

Now is the time to kickstart local recovery in Downtown Athol through this plan which will help bring some old and new great ideas into fruition while also setting precedents as the town continues to evolve. The plan takes consideration of quantitative and qualitative data to help Athol focus and prioritize a series of projects that address challenges now while also setting the stage for long-term processes, resources, and alliances that can build on the Town's current capacity and keep Athol moving forward in the right direction.

## Downtown Athol Faces Notable Challenges for Recovery

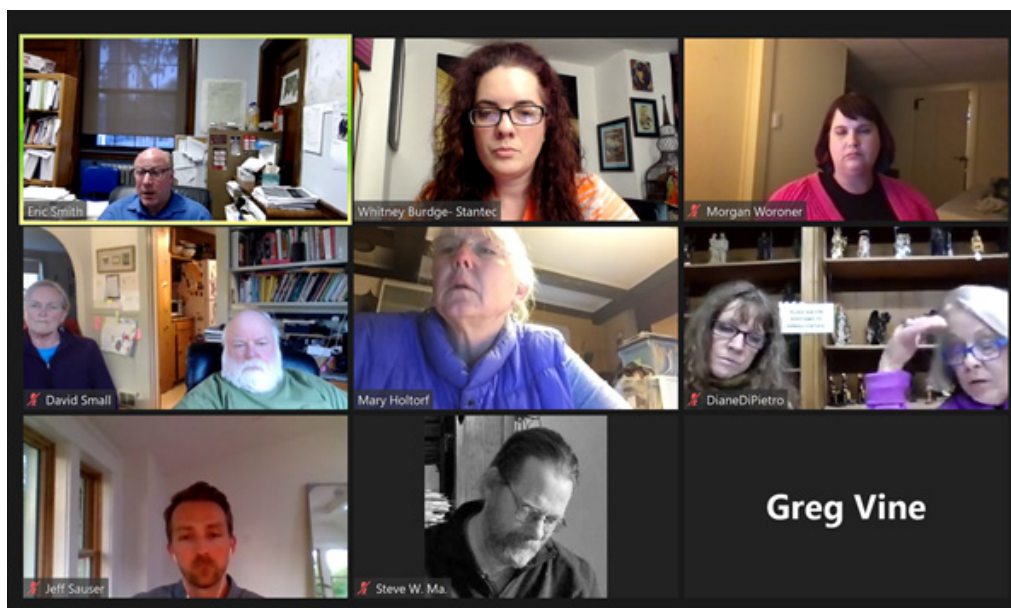
As a result of data gathered as part of this effort, and revelations earned from past planning experience, several needs were identified within the 4 LRRP diagnostic categories of *Physical Environment*, *Business Environment*, *Administrative Capacity*, and *Market Information*. However, Athol's greatest need ultimately lies in both attracting and maintaining a sense of downtown vitality- whether in the diversity of commercial offerings available to potential businesses, in the type or quality of physical spaces available to serve essential community purposes, or in the policy structures to be able to accommodate a fresh approach to what Athol can become as part of its long-term vision. As such, three sub-goals emerged early on in the LRRP process: **1) Create an inviting and cohesive pedestrian environment, 2) Support existing businesses and attract new businesses, and 3) Preserve and re-invest in Athol's building stock.**

Through the pursuit of these goals, Athol can close the gap in some of its longest-running challenges while building the capacity to mitigate their re-occurrence in the future.

## Developing Solutions in Partnership with the Athol Community

The LRRP process included a multi-pronged approach to reach as many people invested in the community as possible.

- **Business Survey-** A (paper and online) survey was conducted of business owners to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on their particular establishment, as well as to understand their overall satisfaction levels of physical and operational components of the current business environment.
- **Public Meeting #1-** In tandem with one of the Downtown Vitality Committee's meetings, a (virtual) public meeting was held to educate the public about the LRRP process, Athol's goals, and early takeaways from the data collection phase of the project. This information was delivered through a Powerpoint Presentation.
- **Public Survey-** An online survey (below right) was conducted to share the finalized LRRP project list with the public, and to allow them to rank the projects in order of importance and select their prioritized potential project outcomes.
- **Public Meeting #2-** A virtual public meeting was held to share information about the finalized LRRP projects, how they ranked according to the public survey and Town discussion, and to allow the public to share any other information that should be considered as part of the LRRP effort. This information was delivered using the online, interactive Mural platform
- **Media Articles-** The Town both advertised and summarized meetings and survey information periodically in the Athol Daily News (below left).
- **Town Website Information-** The Town provided information on their website about planned LRRP meetings, the surveys available, and information about the final LRRP projects.
- **Downtown Vitality Committee-** The Town made periodic updates about the LRRP project to the Committee and solicited their input throughout the process.



*The project team presented information about the LRRP goals and early data in May 2021.*

## What Are the Priority Projects That Came from the Plan?

Athol's 10 LRRP projects were developed through the following process:

**STEP 1.** Projects which were requested in the **Town's original application** to participate in the LRRP were considered.

**STEP 2.** The **data collection** process (including field data and business survey data) revealed areas within the four diagnostic categories needing particular attention

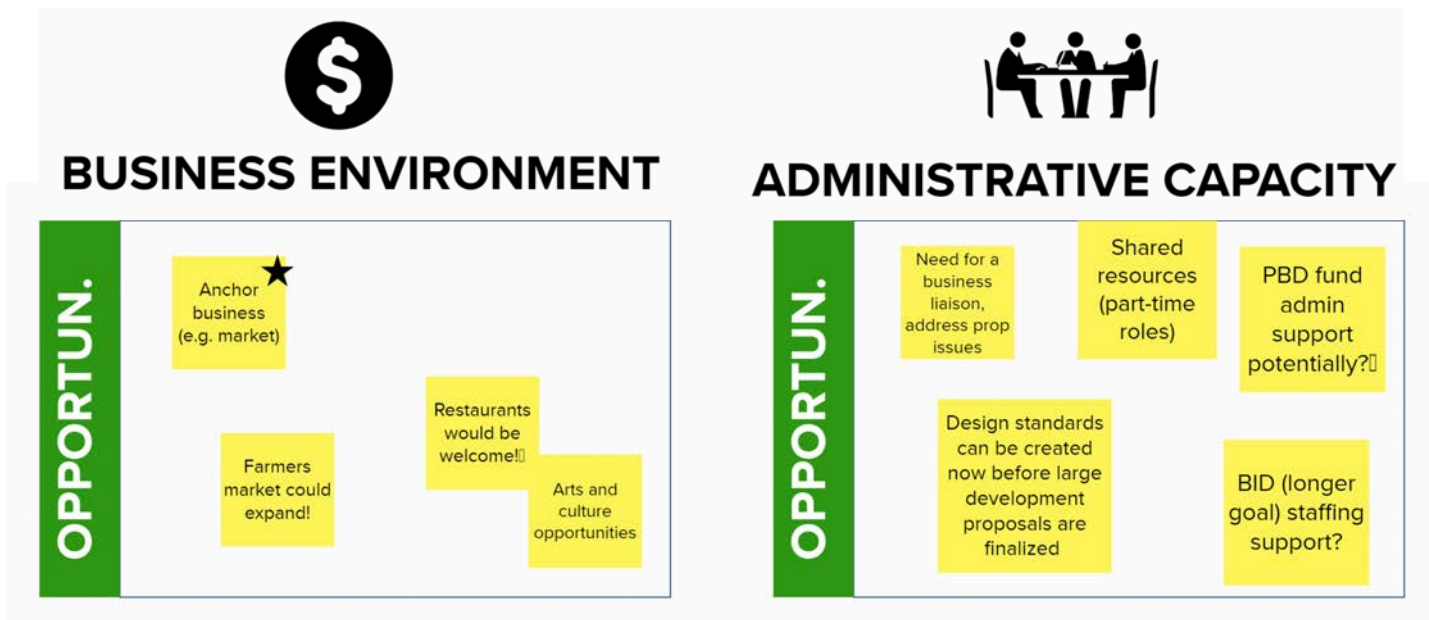
**STEP 3.** A **S.W.O.T. (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) Exercise** was conducted with the project team to further identify both positive and negative areas of emphasis within each of the diagnostic categories.

**STEP 4.** General recommendations were defined to support each of the **3 project goals**. Within each of these goals, projects were then defined (see below).

**STEP 5.** The projects were **ranked in order of priority** and importance by 3 different parties:

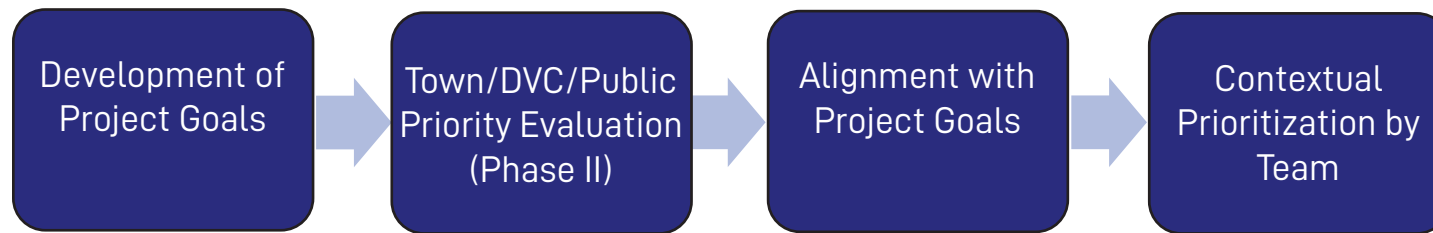
- The Town
- The Downtown Vitality Committee
- The Public (Survey)

**STEP 6.** Taking these results into consideration, the priority issues emphasized in earlier steps, as well as with an understanding of where existing capacity and progress had already been made to support some projects, a finalized **TOP-5 priority list** was confirmed.



*Sample from Mural S.W.O.T. exercise (Source: Stantec)*





*This general process outlines the evolution of project prioritization (Source: Stantec)*



*The evolution of the development of project goals was initiated by first focusing on the Town's early defined goals. (Source: Stantec)*

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## Implementing Rapid Change in Downtown Athol

The key actions Athol should take following the finalization of this plan, include:

**FORMALIZE.** Once the Local Rapid Recovery Plan has been approved by the Board of Planning and Community Development, the Town should formally outline its own implementation plan using the details and recommendations included with each of the proposed projects.

This includes:

- Agreeing to the plan of projects in order of priority
- Allocating time/budget of staff where necessary to lead or execute various tasks
- Formal applications for funding resources or other permissions should be initiated

**ADVERTISE.** The Town should continue to keep the public and other interested parties updated through various channels throughout the implementation process. Excitement should be generated to demonstrate that action, and not just well-intentioned planning, is taking place to improve downtown. Establishing positive morale up front will make it easier to secure stakeholder buy-in and public awareness/patience during the transitional phases of a project's execution. Awareness may also bring unexpected allies out of the woodwork and spark collaborative opportunities.

**ORGANIZE.** The Town should collectively assemble all individuals/parties who will play a role in any of the projects to help them understand the following:

- What the LRRP projects are and how they overlap or impact each other (including timelines)
- Roles and expectations of participation/commitment for those who will be involved (including the formation of committees, as needed)
- Process for guidance and asking questions about projects relating to LRRP
- Where to find resources to support specific roles and project needs

**MOBILIZE.** Project coordination meetings should be scheduled. Funds should be disbursed, as relevant.





# 1. Rapid Recovery Program Background

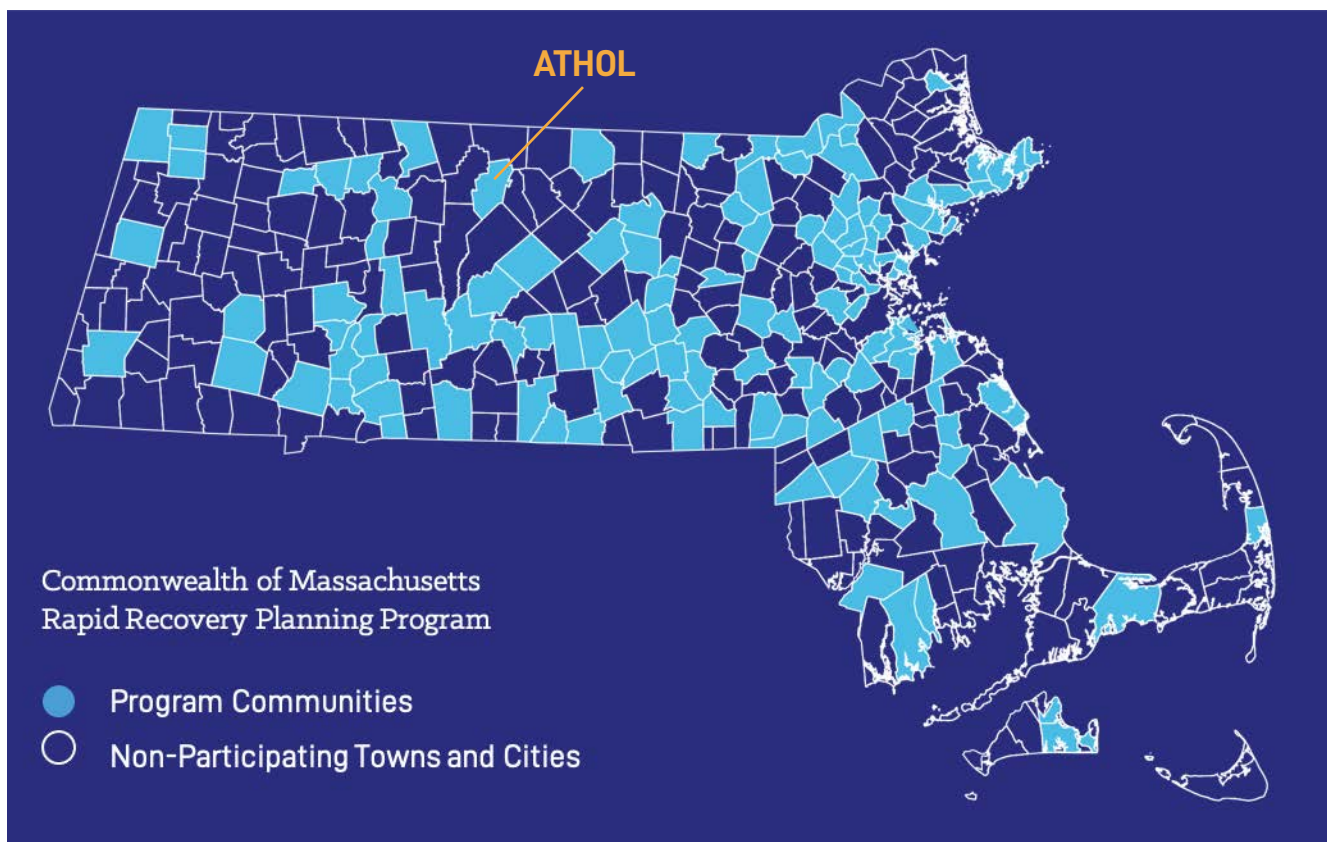


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## 125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

The 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 these downtowns, town centers, and commercial districts.





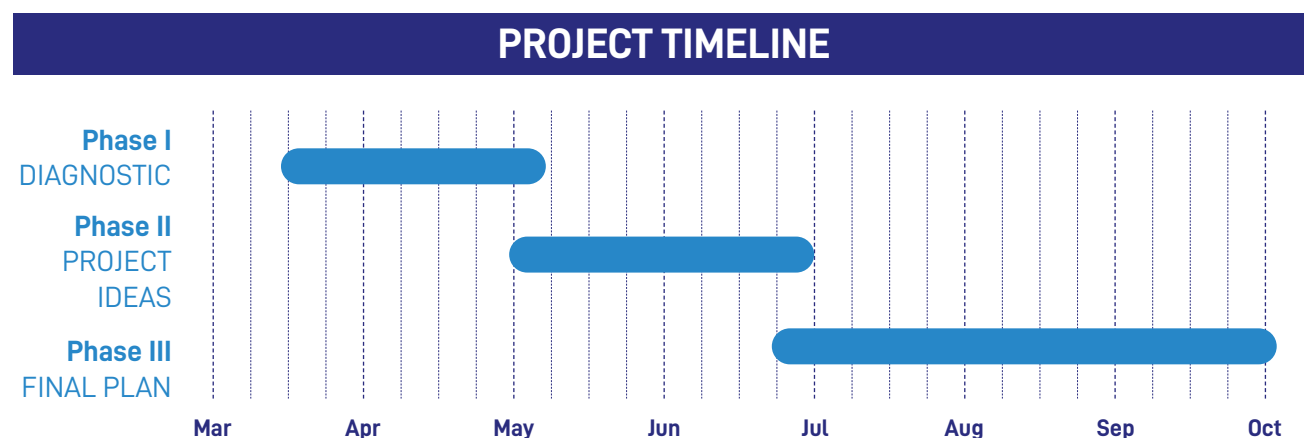
## 1.1 Introduction

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, town 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 Downtown Athol.

Each Rapid Recovery Plan was developed across three phases between February-August 2021: Phase 1 - Diagnostic, Phase 2- Project Recommendations, and 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", authored by Larisa Ortiz, Managing Director, Streetsense (RRP Program Advisor).

The framework was designed to ensure a 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.

## 1.2 Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



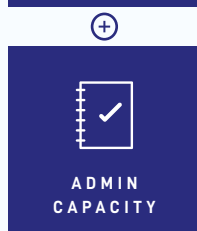
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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

## 1.3 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.

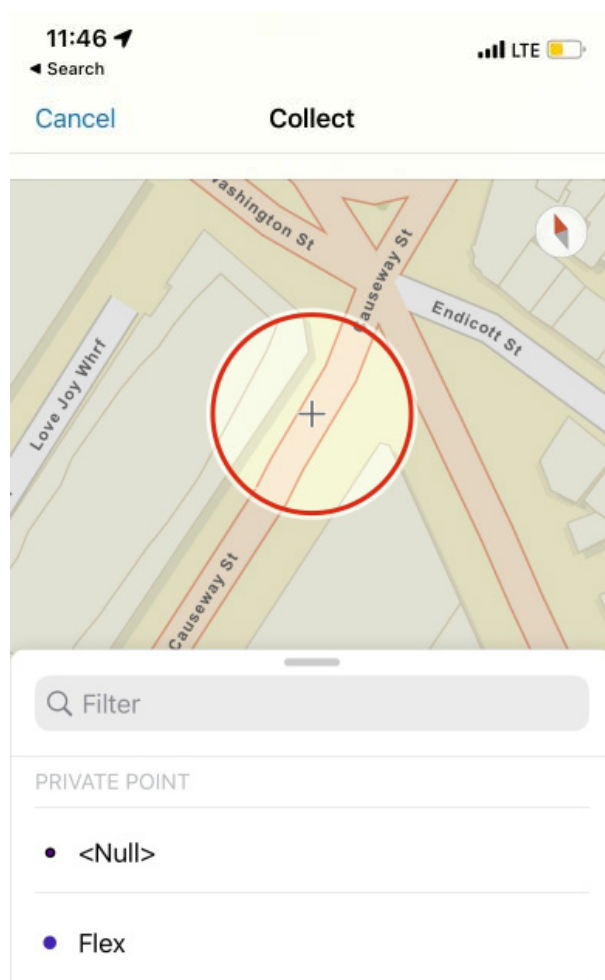
## Data Collection Process

In order to effectively capture public and private infrastructure, market demand data, and business environment statistics within the Downtown Athol 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.



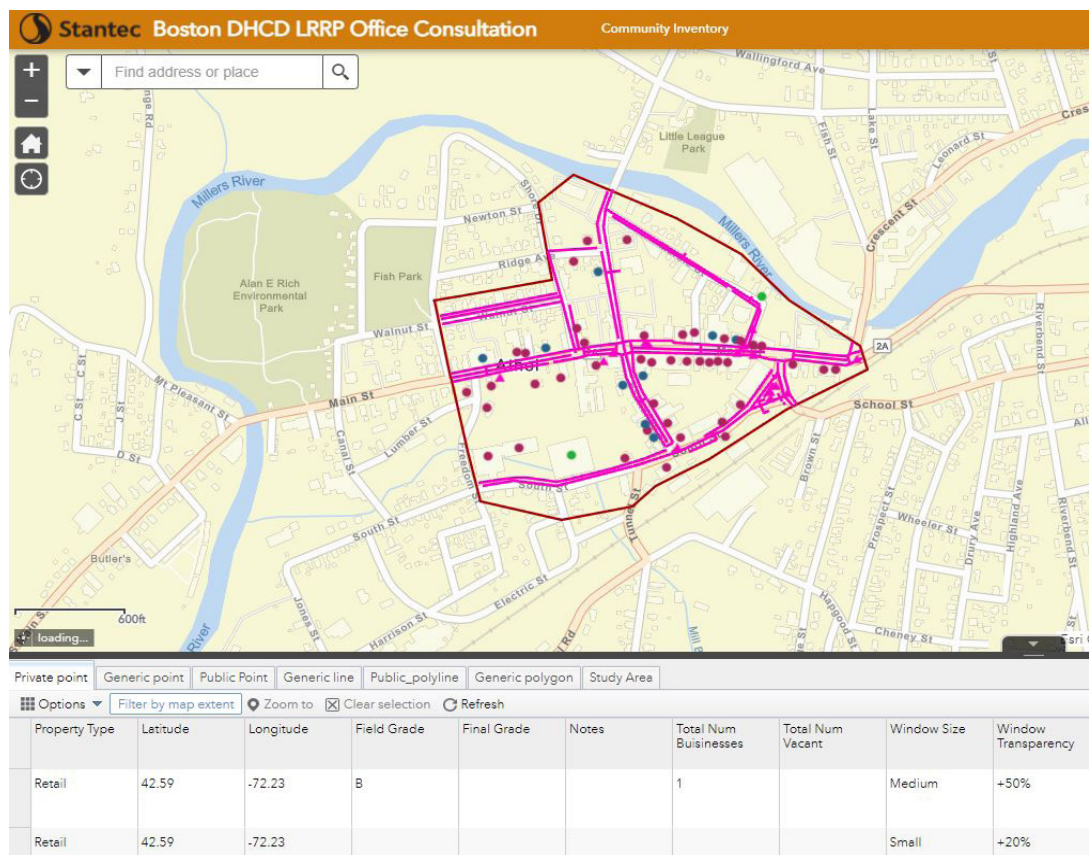
*The ArcGIS Collector tool allowed data collectors in the field to develop an online database for public and private realm data*



## 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 Analysis

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).

### ELEMENT: FACADE EXAMPLE



How **Downtown Athol** ranks:

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.

**Example diagnostic grade for Athol's "facade conditions" for all businesses within the LRRP Study Area.**

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.



=Δ=19=DELTA-APARTMENTS=28=Δ=

## 2. Diagnostic Key Findings





## 2.1 Diagnostic Assets



### 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)

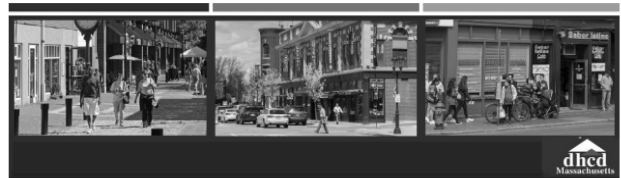
The DHCD LRRP program included a survey of local business owners located in the targeted Athol LRRP study area. The purpose of the survey was to obtain business input to help guide strategy development, garner buy-in from the local business community and provide data from all LRRP participating districts 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 Facilitators (PFs) and Athol 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 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 Athol PF team worked with the Athol 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)**

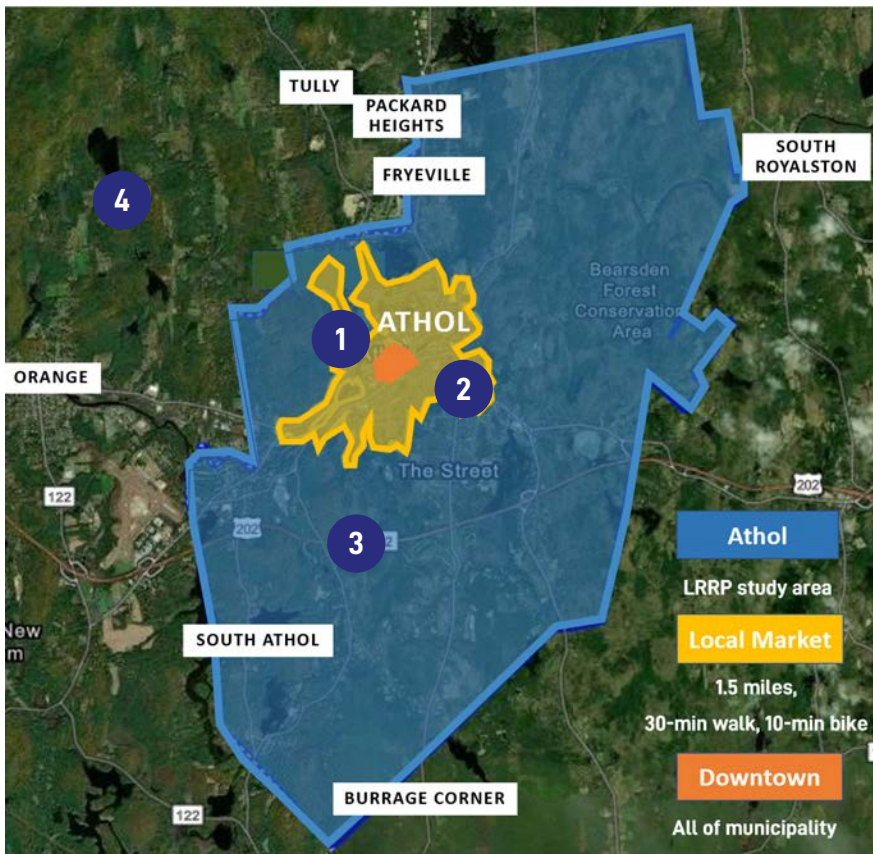




## Diagnostic Asset: Customer Base

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

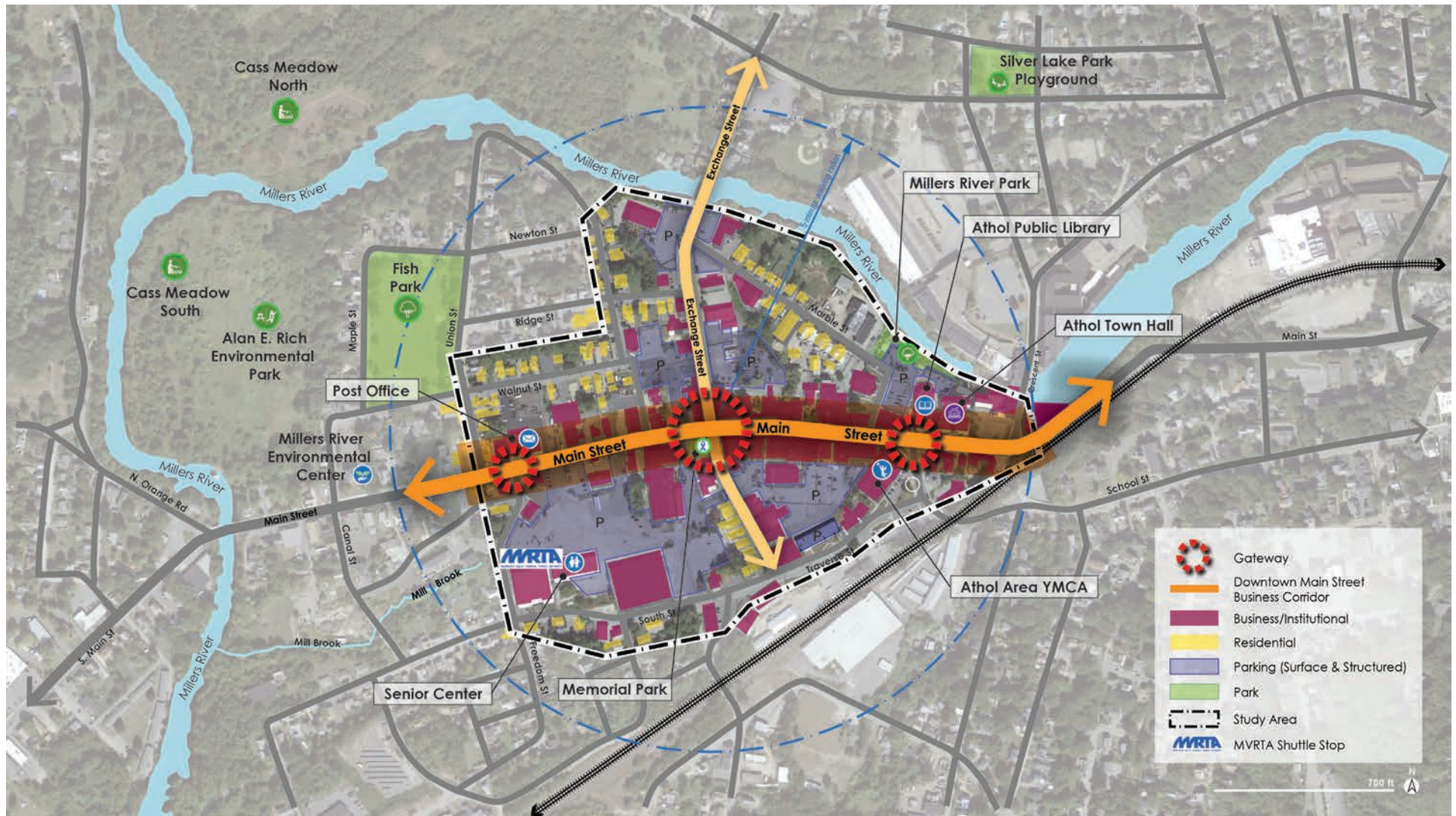


- 1** LRRP Study Area Boundary - Downtown area/commercial district
- 2** Local Market Area - 1.5 mile radius, which includes a 30-minute walk and 10-minute bike ride
- 3** LRRP Communitywide - encompasses all of the municipality
- 4** Statewide - encompasses all of Massachusetts

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



## Study Area Map



## 2.2 LRRP Study Area

### Why focus on the commercial/retail 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 zones 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.

### Athol LRRP Study Area

To accurately encompass all of the commercial and retail activity within the defined downtown Athol study area, the Town worked with the Plan Facilitator team to identify an area that generally include the central commercial area. This includes areas above Main Street between Union Street (east side) and Crescent Street, extending north to Marble Street; areas above Main Street between Union Street (east and west sides) and extending up to Ridge Avenue; and areas below Main Street between Freedom and Traverse Street, extending just below South Street.

The Downtown Athol LRRP study area includes public and private parking facilities, key civic destinations, core businesses and storefronts along Main Street, and some adjacent residential areas.



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## 2.3 Previous Plans Reviewed

Many of Athol's previous plans and studies were consulted for an understanding of previous Town efforts and resulting recommendations and priorities in order to ensure that projects selected as part of the LRRP process were in keeping with the Town's longer term goals. Recommendations from two of the key, recent plans are included below:

### Downtown Athol Analysis of Economic and Market Conditions (2017)

FinePoint developed this plan with the purpose of assessing the economic conditions and retail environment of Downtown Athol (including the potential impact of the new commercial development at North Quabbin Commons) in order to provide a strong foundational base of information that can help guide commercial revitalization activities.

Its recommendations included:

- 1. Consider creation of working groups** (e.g., public safety, business recruitment) and expanding the existing events working group to include development of cultural events, promoting the hosting of cultural activities, sponsored by other groups and recruiting/developing cultural attractions.
- 2. Address the issues contributing to an unsafe feeling in Downtown** (e.g., loitering, resident behaviours, drugs)
- 3. Explore opportunities to create cultural attractions in Downtown** (e.g., cultural center/community theater in town hall auditorium) and increase development and hosting of cultural events (e.g. first-Fridays)
- 4. Look for anchor uses that would meet needs in the community**, could occupy underutilized space and attract new users (e.g. community college satellite)
- 5. Recruit businesses (especially restaurants) to downtown** and support restaurant development (e.g. support re-opening of Blind Pig and help with promotion, promote the availability of liquor license availability, pre-permitting/expedited permitting, business recruitment committee, business ombudsman, recruitment brochure/fact sheet)
- 6. Explore options for allowing/facilitating outdoor/sidewalk dining** to increase vitality and offer dining experience that would be unique from North Quabbin Commons (e.e. parklets)
- 7. Look for ways to cross-promote** Downtown Athol with North Quabbin Commons (e.g. signage, business directories, website, social media)
- 8. Explore strategies to incentivize property owners** to make property improvements and care about first floor commercial occupancy (e.g. explore potential for financing programs, evaluate assessment policies, etc.)
- 9. Dis-incent use/conversion of additional space for Section 8 housing** within Downtown; encourage mixed income residential.
- 10. Examine possibility of creating an Historic District** (National Register) as a tool to preserve property and encourage renovation with Historic Tax Credits; evaluate pros and cons.
- 11. Pursue Slum & Blight designation** to facilitate the use of CDBG funding.
- 12. Encourage office space uses in upper floors** and light manufacturing uses in underutilized space that could create employment opportunities without disrupting character of Downtown (explore funding programs at [www.mamanufacturing.com](http://www.mamanufacturing.com)).
- 13. Encourage enforcement of parking meters** to alleviate long-term non-customer parking. Work toward dedication of parking meter revenue into a Downtown Improvement Fund.

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## Downtown Athol Parking Plan (2019)

The Town used funding from a "Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Technical Assistance Program" from the State Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to prepare the plan. The intent of the plan was to determine how downtown Athol might see increased activity without burdening its parking system. It was further identified that as the Town looks at opportunities to revitalize its downtown, reevaluating the current parking system and adjusting it to create a new parking management plan is of utmost importance for Downtown and the residents.

Its recommendations included:

### 1. Identify options for sharing parking spaces by

- Amending ordinances to encourage shared parking at current and future developments
- Providing educational materials and sample agreements
- Pursuing shared agreements between the Town and landowners with certain revenue sharing or in-kind services provided by the Town to help private lots become part of an overall public system - while ensuring that all private right to shared lots can revert with short notice.

### 2. Identify short- and long-term parking areas

- Work with landowners and business owners to identify various needs for short and long-term parking (e.g. number of employees vs. needs for loading areas and short-term deliveries)
- Designate on-street parking spaces along east Main Street as short-term
- Designate lots or portions of lots that can support all-day parking (e.g. the Municipal lot or Lord Pond Plaza lot) and form an agreement with relevant landowners and businesses
- Reinforce these areas through wayfinding techniques that provide high-visibility direction (e.g. lamp-post banners, permanent street signs like the example shown)
- The Town should also publish a user-friendly parking
- map on the Town website to describe available parking resources and help visitors easily find the right parking.

### 3. Update municipal and Plaza lots

- Update striping, lighting, landscaping, signage, vehicle access points, and safe pedestrian markings for access between these lots and Main Street (some of this has been proposed as part of the BSC

development plan)

- Establish an ongoing maintenance strategy to include potential funding resources and responsible parties

### 4. Improve wayfinding and cues to parking

- Define clear parking rules
- Identify public parking, including short and long-term parking (both on-and off-street)
- Identify major points of interest (such as the Millers River Trail and bus stops)
- Guide people walking to destinations Downtown – and importantly back to parking locations

### 5. Crosswalk Treatments

- Extend/widen the crosswalk at School and Main Street intersection
- Install flashing crosswalk signs
- Install pedestrian refuge island at crosswalks near Island Street and in front of Town Hall

### 6. Improve downtown lighting

- Develop a priority plan for areas needing improvements (e.g. Exchange Street corridor, coordination with recommended Complete Streets and trail development recommendations as outlined in the Athol Transportation Element, 2018)
- Investigate temporary lighting options that are more financially feasible in the short-term (e.g. solar-powered, post-mounted lights, portable generator-powered floodlights for street corners)

### 7. Improve bicycle markings

- Identify and designate a formal bike network
- Implement consistent pavement markings and signage that alert drivers and safely direct bicyclists (e.g. painted sharrows, Share the Road signs)
- Advertise the network with publicly-

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accessible maps and information through a variety of platforms

- Evaluate and make necessary safety improvements to roads that are likely connections for bicyclists to the new, proposed route

#### **8. Improve transit visibility**

- Increase signage at bus stops and display current bus schedules (The BSC development already proposes an improved bus shelter in Lord Pond Plaza)
- Upgrade the bus stop near YMCA
- Improve clarity of pedestrian connections to bus stops with wayfinding/other visual cues

#### **9. Investigate future parking benefit district**

- The Town should establish a group composed of individuals with different interest to champion the PBD
- Create a guiding set of principles, goals and rules of the PBD
- Develop action plan to identify location of meters, projects to be funded, and responsibilities
- Identify potential funding mechanisms that have been recommended through other studies in the Town (e.g. recommendation of a District Improvement Financing District through the BSC development project) and evaluate how/if they should support or supplement a PBD
- Adopt ordinance provision for separate meter fund allocation (as outlined by the Office of Planning & Dev. in July 2018)

#### **10. Review and amend parking ordinances**

- The Town should complete an evaluation of its zoning ordinance relative to downtown development and allowable uses per zoning code. Some by-right uses within certain zoning districts may not be considered conducive to promoting a vibrant, mixed-use downtown district.
- Reference study findings and national standards for appropriate and relevant parking ordinance wording that would be relevant to Athol and its development goals
- Establish zoning and ordinance amendments prior to the adoption of current developments and proposals being considered for the downtown area (e.g. BSC development proposal). This will aid in setting the stage for

long-term best practice.

#### **11. Maintain and update parking study information**

- Identify information/data analyzed in this report that is likely to fluctuate over a period of time (e.g. parking counts)
- Identify a time period for regular updates
- Identify potential staff/committee that can help update data

#### **12. Adjust current meter pricing (ACHIEVED)**

- Conduct analysis following implementation of development changes Downtown to understand parking utilization trends and changes in areas and intensity of demand
- Identify areas where parking demand should be reduced and consider raising prices by a small amount
- Follow on by analyzing impacts of new prices on parking demand over time as town development and visitors increase

#### **13. Upgrade parking meters**

- Consider ease of use for Athol's customer needs when selecting a meter vendor
- Consider ease of management by Athol (in context of administrative capacity) for revenue gathering, maintenance of selected parking technology, etc
- Consider investigating the purchase of used (though more modern than Athol's current meters) meters from a community that has recently upgraded them
- Consider surveying residents 6 months after the new technology has been implemented to gauge overall satisfaction

#### **14. Increase enforcement and parking ticket costs**

- Targeted parking enforcement along East Main Street during the weekday when parkers tend to exceed time limits most
- Increase parking ticket fines to an amount high enough that greatly discourages parkers from exceeding time limits
- Consider implementing a 'first-ticket free' policy and have police officers share parking information (pricing, time restrictions, available parking areas) in place of a ticket for a first-time offender
- Consider recruiting a voluntary parking ambassador for handing out information about parking requirements and available areas



## 2.4 Diagnostic Highlights



### Highlights from Customer Base

#### 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 Downtown Athol

Athol's population continues to grow, and continues to exceed the growth rate of the state. Considering the fact that approximately 25% of the local population is above 55 years old, it is important to prioritize investments in mobility infrastructure and accessibility improvements to accommodate older populations between 55 - 74. Income also plays a vital role in the customer base profile of a community. In Athol, there is a large difference between the median income of the Town and the state. This implies a need for the commercial area businesses to cater to people with different spending capacity.

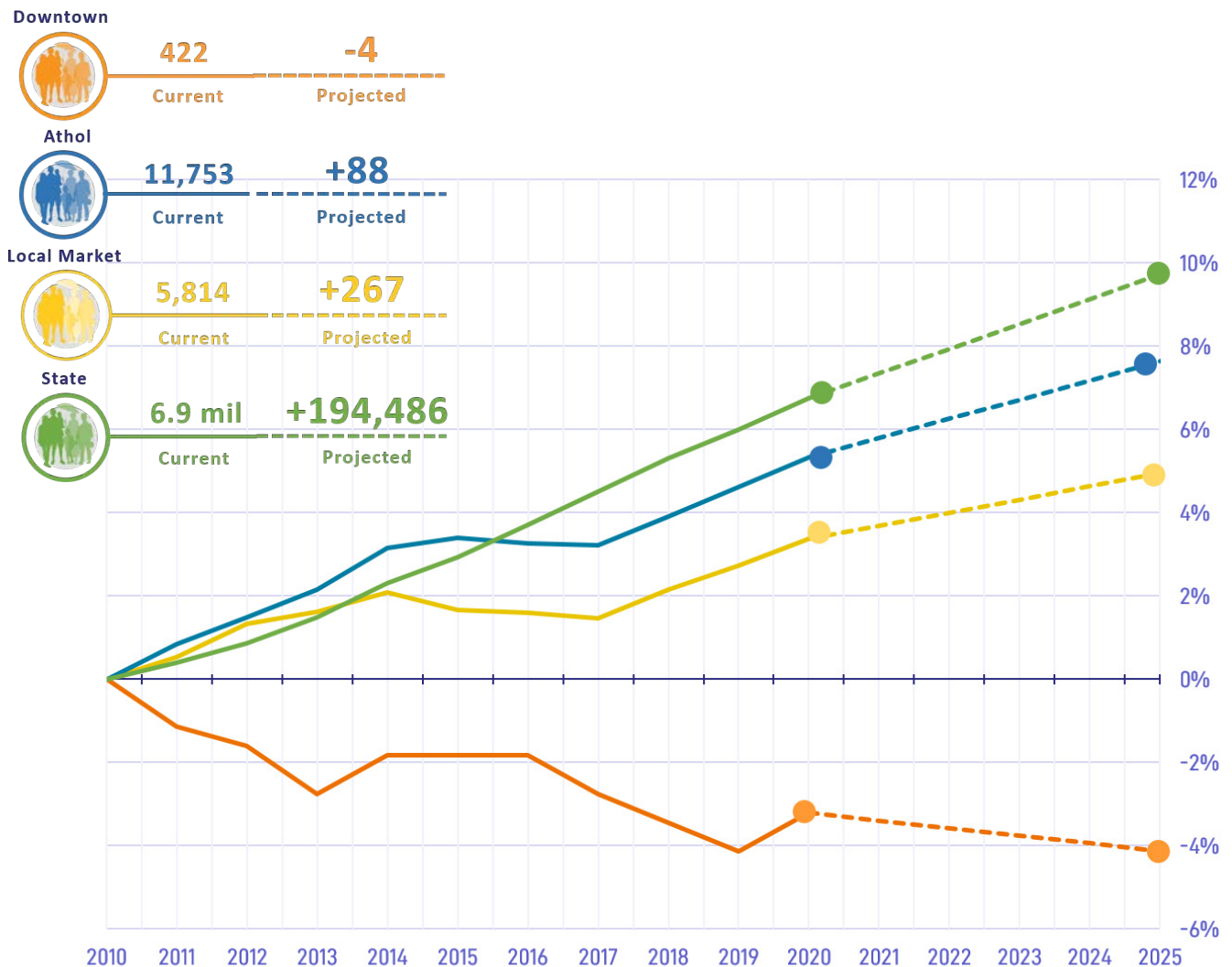


**A group of residents at Athol Senior Center** (Source: Athol Daily News)



## POPULATION TREND FROM 2010 TO 2025

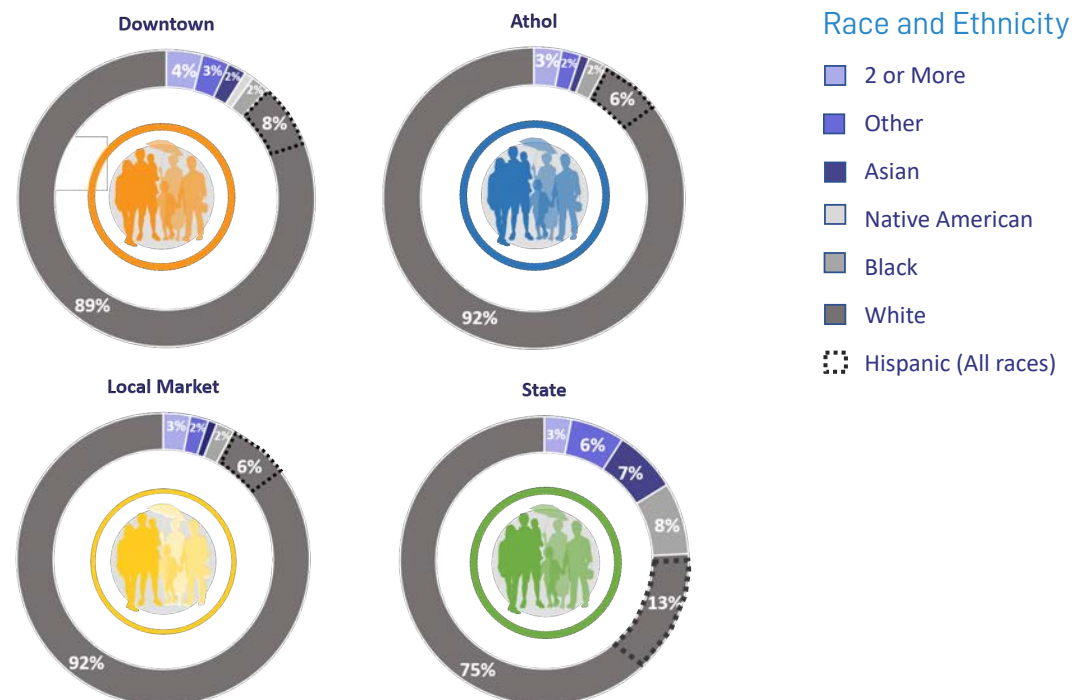
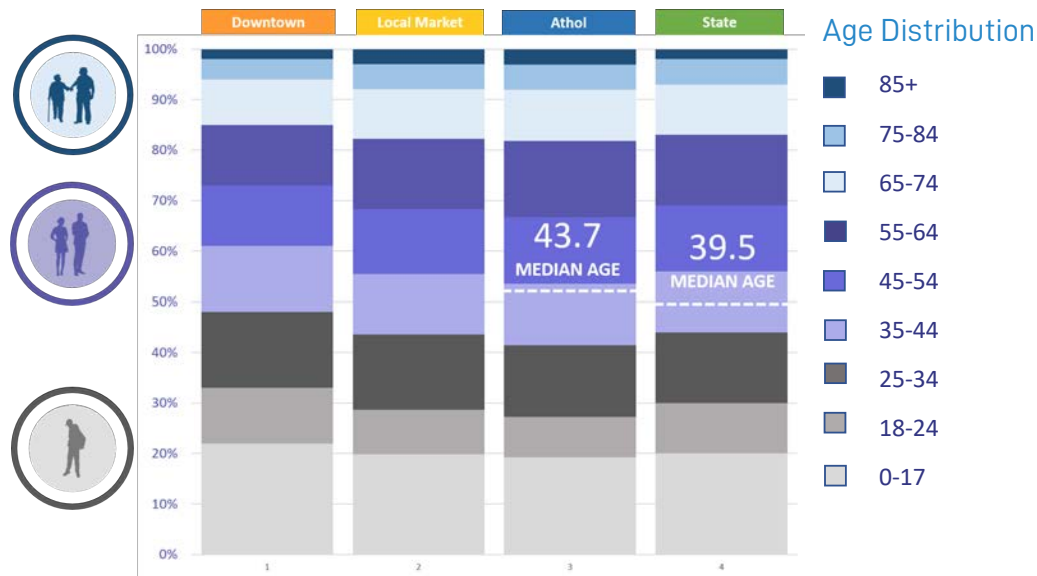
The local area lagged behind the state growth rate from 2014-2017, but appears to be back on track with modest growth projections. The downtown study area itself has a very small population of 422 and is projected to remain nearly stagnant, which may be responsible for the dissimilar trendline. Downtown Athol's relatively low turnover of commercial properties, a lack of new, high-quality available housing stock, and a lack of concentrated recreational and cultural amenities for families are some of the factors which may be contributing to the Town's stagnant growth and the ability to attract younger residents who are seeking a longer-term place to settle.





## DEMOGRAPHICS

Downtown's population breakdown closely matches the state average, with a slightly stronger representation of younger people below 35. The downtown and local market are significantly less ethnically diverse than the state.

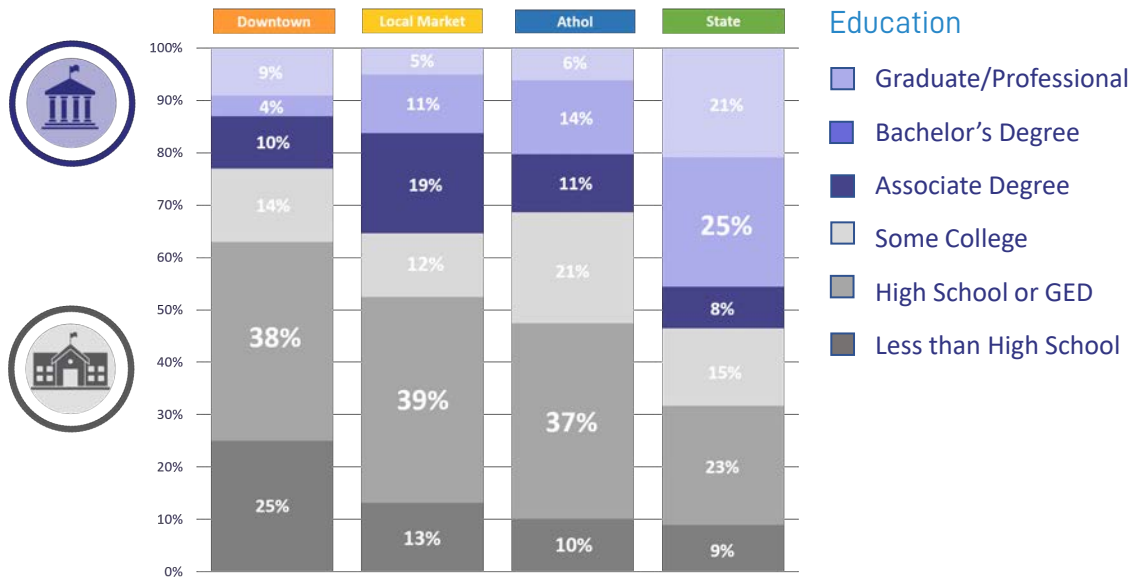






## EDUCATION

The community lags behind the state average for educational attainment.



## CUSTOMER STATISTICS

The local area is expected to add an additional 88 households in the coming 5 years. This will provide an opportunity to potentially attract new residents with greater diversity, skills, and local spending power.

	Downtown	Local Market	Athol	State
<b>Population</b>				
	1.8	2.4	2.5	2.5
Avg. household size				
Residential population	422	5,814	12,240	6,993,463
Households	234	2,369	4,911	2,702,578
5-year forecast, population change	-4	88	267	194486
5-year forecast, household change	-2	40	42	73332
Median age	37	40	42	40



## CUSTOMER STATISTICS

The number of jobs in the study area is nearly equal to the residential population. Very few students are located in the downtown area. Housing in the study area is predominantly rental, while home-ownership levels in the local market are the same as the state.



### Employment and income

	Downtown	Local Market	Athol	State
Median household income	\$20k	\$46k	\$53k	\$81k
Employees	377	1,789	4,388	3,384,476
Students (secondary & above)	21	454	1,024	933,098
Jobs-to-residents ratio	0.9	0.3	0.4	0.5



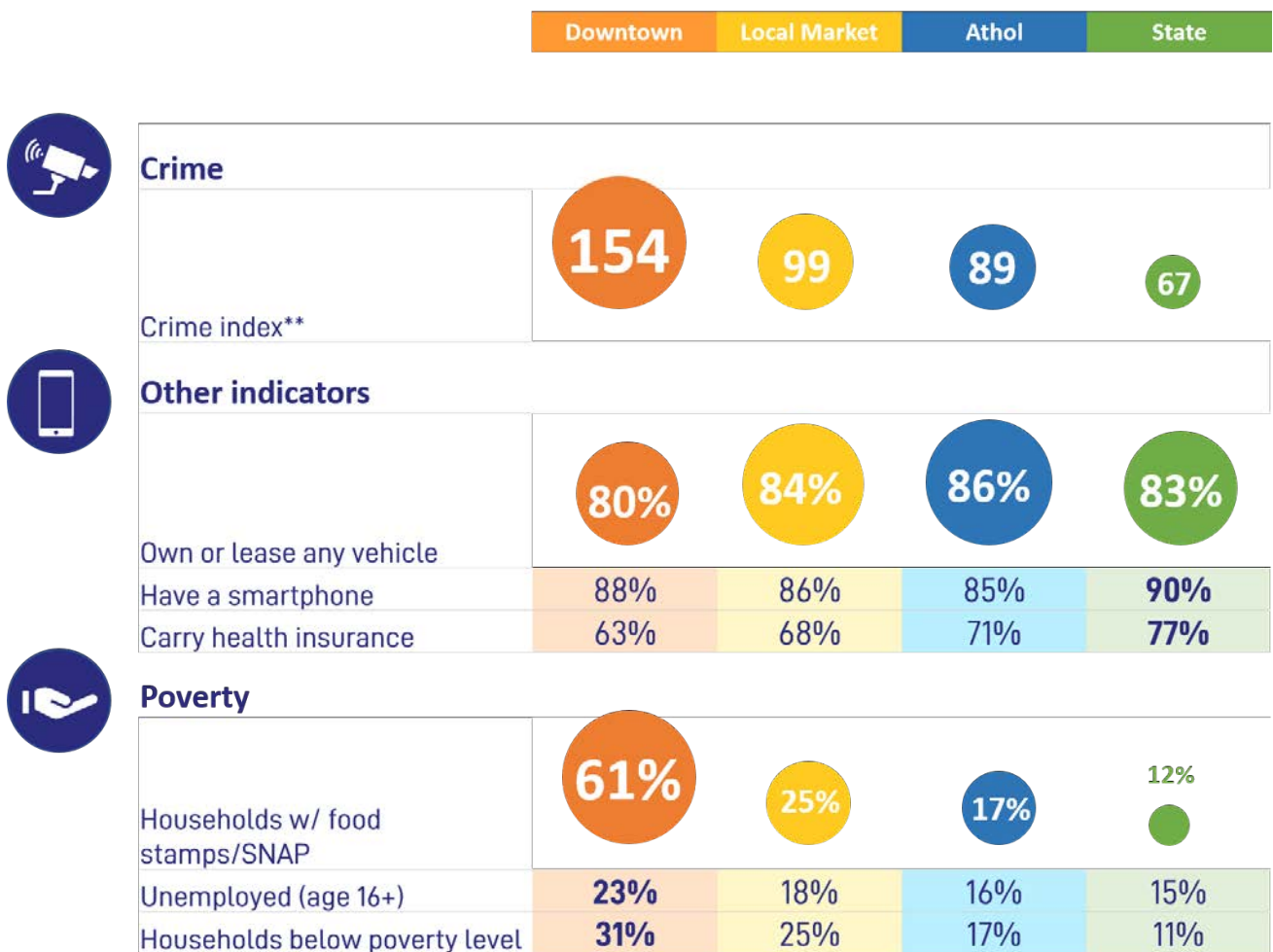
### Housing

Median home value	\$138k	\$150k	\$162k	\$415k
5-year forecast, home value growth	5%	15%	14%	17%
Owner-occupied housing	26%	61%	71%	61%



## CUSTOMER STATISTICS

The study area has more than the national average crime rate. Most study area residents have access to a vehicle. The proportion of households below the poverty level and unemployment in the study area is significantly higher than the statewide average.





## 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, comfort 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 Athol'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?

### Physical Environment Results in Athol: Access

Downtown Athol's Main Street falls along the east-west state highway 2A, between the town of Orange to the west and the access point to State Route 202 to the east. Downtown can also be accessed from two primary northern connections- via Crescent Street near Starrett Manufacturing facilities, and via the Exchange Street Bridge, which crosses Millers River. This route connects to a range of natural recreation destinations and some residential neighborhoods. These two primary access roads are in generally good condition. As such, vehicles are easily able to access downtown Athol. Finding access to parking, however, may pose a challenge for less familiar visitors.

While there are generally some available on-street parking spaces along Athol's Main Street at any time, visitors may be unaware of Athol's central municipal parking lot and how to access it. The parking lot is located on the southern part of the Main Street block between Exchange Street and Traverse Street but is shielded from view by buildings or structures on all sides. A comprehensive downtown wayfinding system both for vehicle access points and destinations is a need that has long been recognized by the Town, and will be pursued in the not-too-distant future.



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Once arriving in Athol, pedestrians are able to access nearly all of the downtown areas via the sidewalk network and painted crosswalks. Detectable warning surface panels are present at most pedestrian crossing points. Marble Street, parallel with Main Street to the north, and connecting to/from the Athol Public Library, was recently completely resurfaced and features new sidewalks. However, north of Main Street along Exchange Street features the one area downtown with a significant gap in the sidewalk network. Sidewalks are also largely missing along the southern side of Traverse Street, which forms the boundary of the LRRP downtown study area. Currently, there are few active uses/properties along this area that would attract pedestrian activity.

There is not a large volume of bicyclists who travel to or through Athol, but those that do utilize the same road network as vehicles. There is no dedicated infrastructure for bicycle access, such as bike lanes, or other road markings, such as sharrows. There is, however, a large bike rack for parking, located centrally at the library. While the downtown is easily accessible, generally, some layers are missing from both an infrastructure and wayfinding perspective to increase the ease of navigation, particularly for infrequent visitors.

### **Physical Environment Results in Athol: Visibility**

As will be detailed in other sections of this report, there are some limitations of visibility and engagement with the downtown's storefronts, which have particular impact on attracting visitors and in advertising the Town's offerings. Athol's central Main Street core is small and can be driven through in less than one minute (at appropriate speeds). While downtown's historic structures are a beautiful feature, the clear visibility of commercial, cultural, and recreational activity is imperative in attracting a non-local visitor to stop and spend time in downtown.

There are 3 key ingredients needed in downtown Athol to achieve this "sweet spot" of visibility:

- 1) Clear shopfront signage which advertises businesses and services clearly enough for a person driving past quickly;
- 2) Wayfinding signage that directs both drivers and pedestrians to destinations in downtown that may not be immediately visible/apparent from Main Street; and
- 3) better visibility into storefronts for observation of activity and store offerings during all times.



**Example of crosswalk conditions in Downtown Athol** (Source: Stantec)

## Physical Environment Results in Athol: Parks

Athol's downtown is contained within a smaller geographic area, and is densely built. The Town's primary park, Fish Park, is located within a 5-minute walk outside of the downtown area and within a residential neighborhood. The park features a historic, restored bandstand, a small, informal baseball field, two tennis courts, and a basketball court. This park is the primary recreational area for children and families.

More recently, a small park was established along Millers River at the rear of the parking lots behind the Athol Library. The park features a small, open circular area with two large, stone boulders, connecting to an approximate 140' stone-laid path that runs parallel to the southern edge of Millers River. This path is lined with trees to the north, and features a small landscaped area to the south before opening up to a concrete and stone area that is partially multi-level and has been known to be used by skateboarders. There is also one bench and a small, grass area to the south, which forms the western edge of the Library's outer parking lot. This area is not heavily used by the public.

Generally, there is a perception of lack of visible green spaces downtown for people to spend time and enjoy.



**Athol's Veteran Park is centrally located but underutilized** (Source: Stantec)



**Park access point at the east end of Marble Street** Source: Google (Dennis Washburn)

## The Town has a shortage of centrally-located parks and open spaces

### Physical Environment Results in Athol: Plazas

The Veteran's Park at the southwestern corner of the intersection of Exchange Street and Main Street is the one location in town that currently has the potential to function as a town plaza and gathering space. The approximate 5,000sf surface is inlaid with pavers. A small memorial sculpture is located in the center. Otherwise, the area is open aside from a short, 3-sided boundary stone wall functioning as a planter for bushes. It is also inlaid with two benches. While the open nature of the area leaves room for flexibility for potential programming, it has been very underutilized and could benefit from a revised approach to be inviting and interactive in its design. The Town intends to investigate a re-design of the park in the future. In the meantime, downtown Athol is in sore need of a space that provides ample seating for the public to gather, and is also in need of support

to generate the activity that a public plaza relies and thrives on.

### Physical Environment Results in Athol: Parklets

Athol has not yet experimented with parklets. Results from the 2019 Downtown Parking Study show that parking demand at on-street areas along Main Street is not significant enough to discourage the strategic testing of parklets.



## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT GRADING FRAMEWORK: PUBLIC REALM

Physical Environment: Public Realm					
Element	Guiding Principles	A	B	C	FAIL
<b>Sidewalks</b>	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.	More than 75% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned, well-maintained and accessible to multiple users across different ages and abilities	About 50% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned and well-maintained.	More than 25% of sidewalks in the study area pose challenges to the pedestrian experience (including narrow sidewalks and lack of cleanliness/ maintenance).	There are no sidewalks in the study area.
<b>Street Trees &amp; Benches</b>	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.	Street trees and benches are readily available throughout the study area. They are well-designed, well- maintained, and offer shade and comfort to pedestrians.	Although street trees and benches are available across the study area, these amenities have not been cleaned or well-maintained, and require improvements.	Limited availability of street trees and benches creating uncomfortable pedestrian experience.	There are no street trees and benches in the study area.
<b>Lighting</b>	Street lighting improves pedestrian visibility and personal safety, as well as aids in geographic orientation.	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.	About 50% of the study area is serviced by street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety.	Street lighting on the primary street in the study area does not support pedestrian visibility and safety.	There is no street lighting in the study area.
<b>Wayfinding/ Signage</b>	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.	There is a comprehensive and cohesive wayfinding system that offers geographic orientation to pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Signage reflect the brand and identity of the area.	Wayfinding in the study area is primarily geared towards directing motorists across the study area. There is limited signage to identify key assets and destinations to pedestrians.	Limited to no signage available throughout the study area.	There is no wayfinding/ signage in the study area.
<b>Roadbed &amp; Crosswalks</b>	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.	Roads are designed to balance the needs of motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians and create a safe environment for all users.	Roads are designed primarily to move motor vehicles across the study area efficiently, with limited crosswalks for pedestrians.	Roads are hazardous to all users.	The study area is not connected by any major roads.



## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT GRADING FRAMEWORK: PRIVATE REALM

Physical Environment: Private Realm					
Element	Guiding Principles	A	B	C	FAIL
Window	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.	More than 75% of storefronts maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.	About 50% of storefront windows maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.	More than 25% of storefronts have windows with limited transparency.	All storefronts are boarded up and/or have limited transparency.
Outdoor Display/ Dining	Attractive window displays and spillover retail/restaurant activity on sidewalks or adjacent parking spaces can help contribute to overall district vibrancy.	More than 75% of storefronts feature an attractive window display and/or spillover merchandise and dining areas that align with the brand and identity of the district.	About 50% of storefronts maintain an attractive window display with limited spillover merchandise and/or dining areas.	More than 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise display and outdoor dining that pose challenges to the pedestrian experience.	There is no spillover retail/restaurant activity in the district.
Signage	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.	More than 75% of storefront signs reflect the unique brand identity of tenants and can be easily seen from more than 10 ft distance.	About 50% of storefronts have clear signage that reflect basic business information and can easily be seen from adjacent sidewalks.	More than 25% of storefronts have signage that does not communicate names of business or types of products/services being offered.	Storefronts in the study area do not have signage.
Awning	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.	More than 75% of properties in the study area have retractable awnings that have been well-maintained and cleaned.	About 50% of properties in the study area have functioning awnings that have been well-maintained and cleaned	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.	Storefronts in the study area are not equipped with awnings.



PHYSICAL  
ENVIRONMENT

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT GRADING FRAMEWORK: PRIVATE REALM

Physical Environment: Private Realm					
Element	Guiding Principles	A	B	C	FAIL
Facade	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	More than 75% of properties have well-maintained façades. Limited structural enhancements are required.	Although most properties in the study area have clean and well-maintained façades, there is at least one significant property requiring structural façade improvements.	More than 25% of properties require significant building façades improvements, including power washing, painting, and structural enhancements.	All properties in the study area require significant façade improvements.
Lighting	Storefront interior lighting after business hours help enliven the corridor and boost security on the street.	More than 75% of storefronts have lighting that help illuminate sidewalks.	About 50% of storefronts have some interior lighting that help illuminate sidewalks.	More than 25% of storefronts do not have lighting.	All storefronts in the study area are shuttered and dark at night.





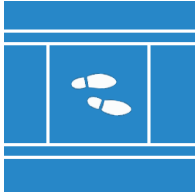
## OVERALL GRADE

**Downtown Athol's overall Physical Environment grade** **C**

Some of downtown Athol's physical features are in good condition and achieve their intended function, but some degree of improvement is needed in most categories, resulting in an overall grade of C.



**Downtown Athol**



## SIDEWALKS

Athol's sidewalks are in generally good condition, with only a few areas needing minor repairs. The sidewalk gaps on North Exchange Street and south Traverse Street need to be addressed.

**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**

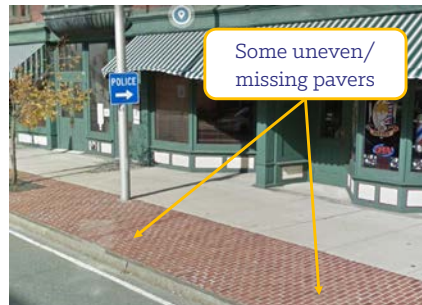
About 50% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned and well-maintained.

**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.



**Existing Sidewalks, Downtown Athol** (Source: Google, Stantec)

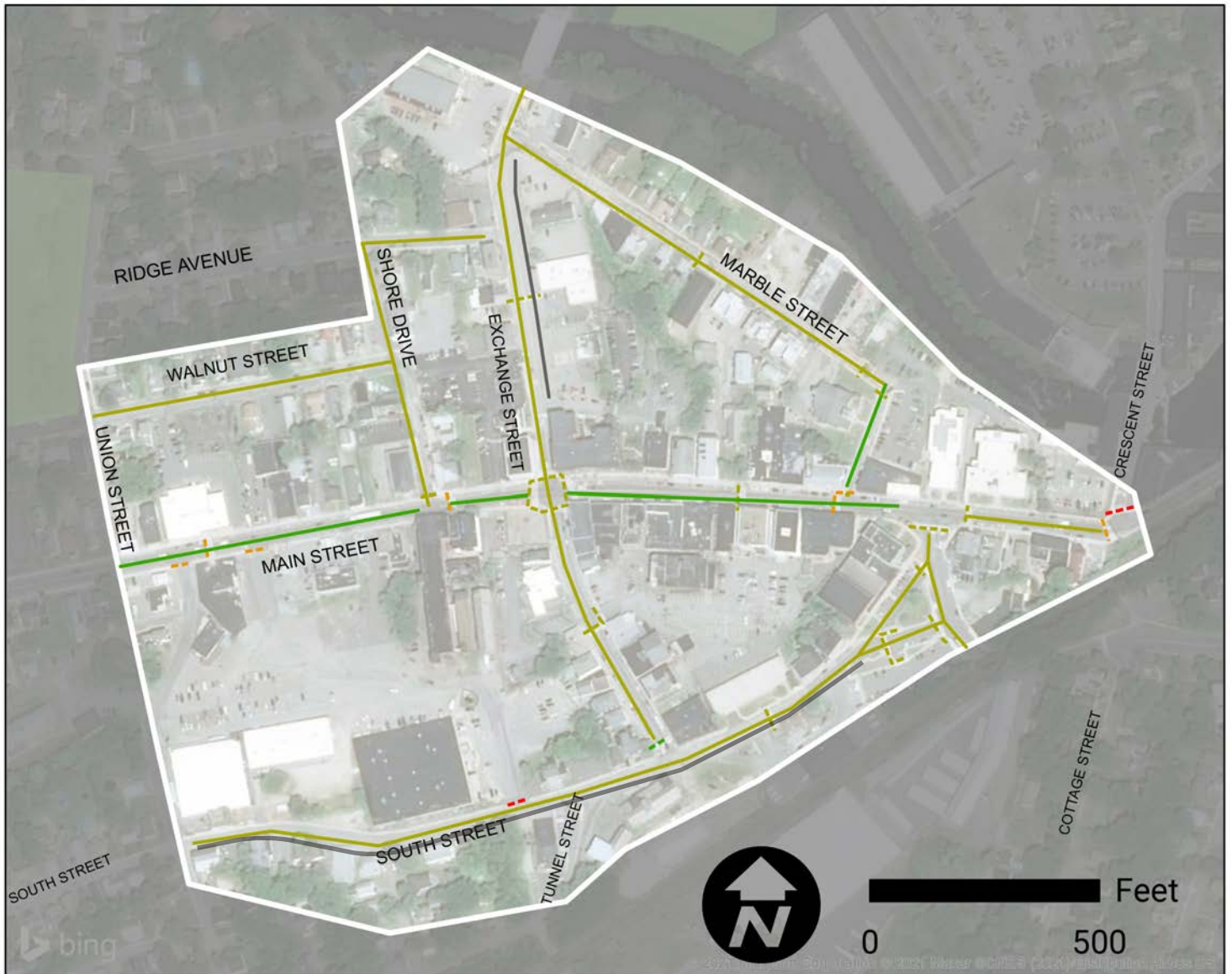


**Best Practice Example**

### 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.





**Map of Sidewalks and Crosswalks Grading** (Source: Stantec)

### Legend

#### Field Grade, Indicator

- A, Crosswalk
- A, Roadbed/Sidewalk
- B, Crosswalk
- B, Roadbed/Sidewalk
- C, Crosswalk
- C, Roadbed/Sidewalk
- Fail, Crosswalk
- Fail, Roadbed/Sidewalk
- No Sidewalk





## STREET TREES AND BENCHES

Downtown Athol features some trees, however they could be increased and spaced consistently along Main Street and other areas. Benches along Main Street are completely absent.

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

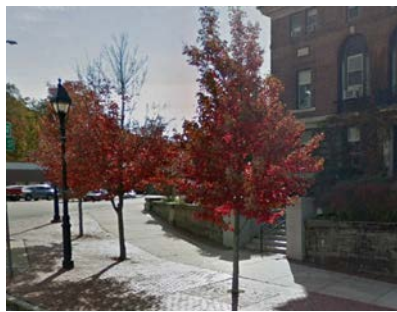
Although street trees and benches are available, these amenities have not been cleaned or well-maintained, and require improvements.

C

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

F

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



**Existing Streetscape, Downtown Athol** (Source: Google, Stantec)



**Best Practice Precedent, Ottawa, KS** (Source: Shutterstock)

### 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

Downtown Athol is primarily lit by attractive, historic lighting fixtures. Areas beyond Main Street though, have particular need for increased frequency of lighting fixtures.

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.



**Existing Lighting, Downtown Athol** (Source: Stantec)



**Best Practice Example**

### Best Practice Guiding Principles:

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



## WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

Downtown Athol has few signs which direct visitors to specific attractions. Some are very outdated and there is not yet a comprehensive and coordinated townwide wayfinding system. This will be essential for both attracting visitors and helping them navigate to areas of interest.

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.



Existing Signage, Downtown Athol (Source: Stantec)



Best Practice Precedent

### 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 road conditions are generally good, all crosswalks in the downtown area are in need of new paint, or other markings and signage to improve pedestrian safety.

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.



Existing Crosswalks, Downtown Athol (Source: Stantec)



Best Practice Precedent

### 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.





## Summary: Public Realm

### Nearly complete sidewalk network

It is a strength that the majority of downtown is connected with sidewalks that are in generally good condition but closing the major gap on Exchange Street is essential for creating more opportunities for activity north of Main Street.

### Additional crosswalk safety measures needed

There is opportunity to build on the asset of existing crosswalks by updating them to improve visibility and facilitating safer conditions near them.

### Parking and parking management is an issue

Parking is underutilized and can benefit from recommendations from previous studies to improve its efficiency and management.

### Need for increase of streetscape amenities

There is significant opportunity to increase vitality by adding more benches and other amenities that make visiting and spending more time in downtown desirable.

### Lighting improvements needed

While pedestrian-scale lighting is strong on Main Street and in a few locations, it can be improved throughout the study area to provide consistency and remove conditions that contribute to undesirable behavior.

### Comprehensive wayfinding system needed

The need for wayfinding is directly linked to the Town's goal for a stronger identity and desire to attract both existing and new visitors to downtown destinations.



## WINDOW

A number of storefront windows, particularly on the prominent southern side of Main Street's central block, have limited or completely restricted visibility. Only a small number of storefronts have taken advantage of the opportunity to utilize window space to create displays that are indicative of the businesses offerings and are inviting to passing visitors.

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.



Existing Facades, Downtown Athol



Best Practice Precedent

### 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.



## OUTDOOR DISPLAY AND DINING

Athol doesn't currently host any outdoor dining or spillover retail areas, however there are several locations which make sense to accommodate this activity and attract downtown vitality.

**A**

More than 75% of storefronts feature an attractive window display and/or spillover merchandise and dining areas that align with the brand and identity of the district.

**B**

About 50% of storefronts maintain an attractive window display with limited spillover merchandise and/or dining areas.

**C**

Only about 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise display and outdoor dining limiting the pedestrian experience.

**F**

**There is no spillover retail/restaurant activity in the district.**



**Existing Storefront Displays, Downtown Athol** (Source: Stantec)



**Best Practice Precedent, St. Louis, MO** (Source: St. Louis Magazine)

### Best Practice Guiding Principles:

**Attractive window displays and spillover retail/restaurant activity on sidewalks or adjacent parking spaces can help contribute to overall district vibrancy.**



## STORE

### SIGNAGE

While some storefronts utilize creative, colorful, and highly-visible signs, many are in need of more legible, high-quality signs that advertise services more specifically, and are in keeping with the desired ambience of a small-town Main Street.

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

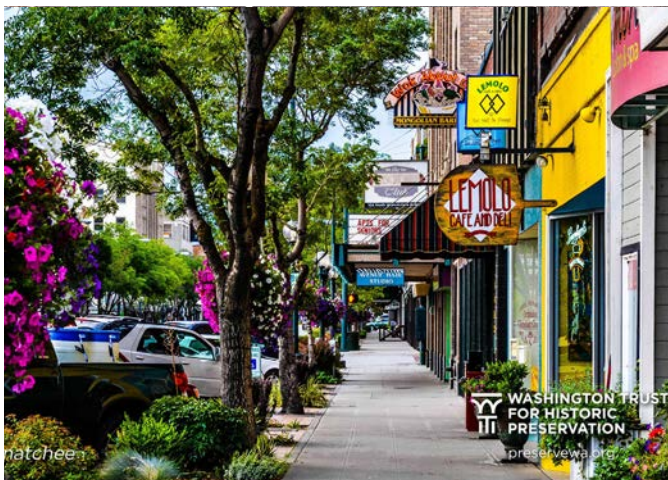
**More than 25% of storefronts have signage that does not communicate names of business or types of products/services being offered.**

F

Storefronts in the study area do not have signage.



Existing Signage, Downtown Athol (Source: Stantec)



Best Practice Precedent, Wenatchee, WA (Source: WA Trust)

### 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

Many properties along Main Street's primary corridor do not feature awnings, which could contribute to a lack of design cohesion and distinction between its establishments.

**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.



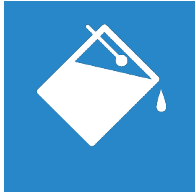
Existing Awnings, Downtown Athol (Source: Stantec)



Best Practice Example

### 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

Several structures downtown feature facades that are in need of significant repair and care, which diminishes the esthetic value of adjacent, maintained properties and decreases the perceived sense of collective pride in downtown and its identity.

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 facades, but at least one significant property requiring structural façade improvements.**



C

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

F

All properties in the study area require significant façade improvements.



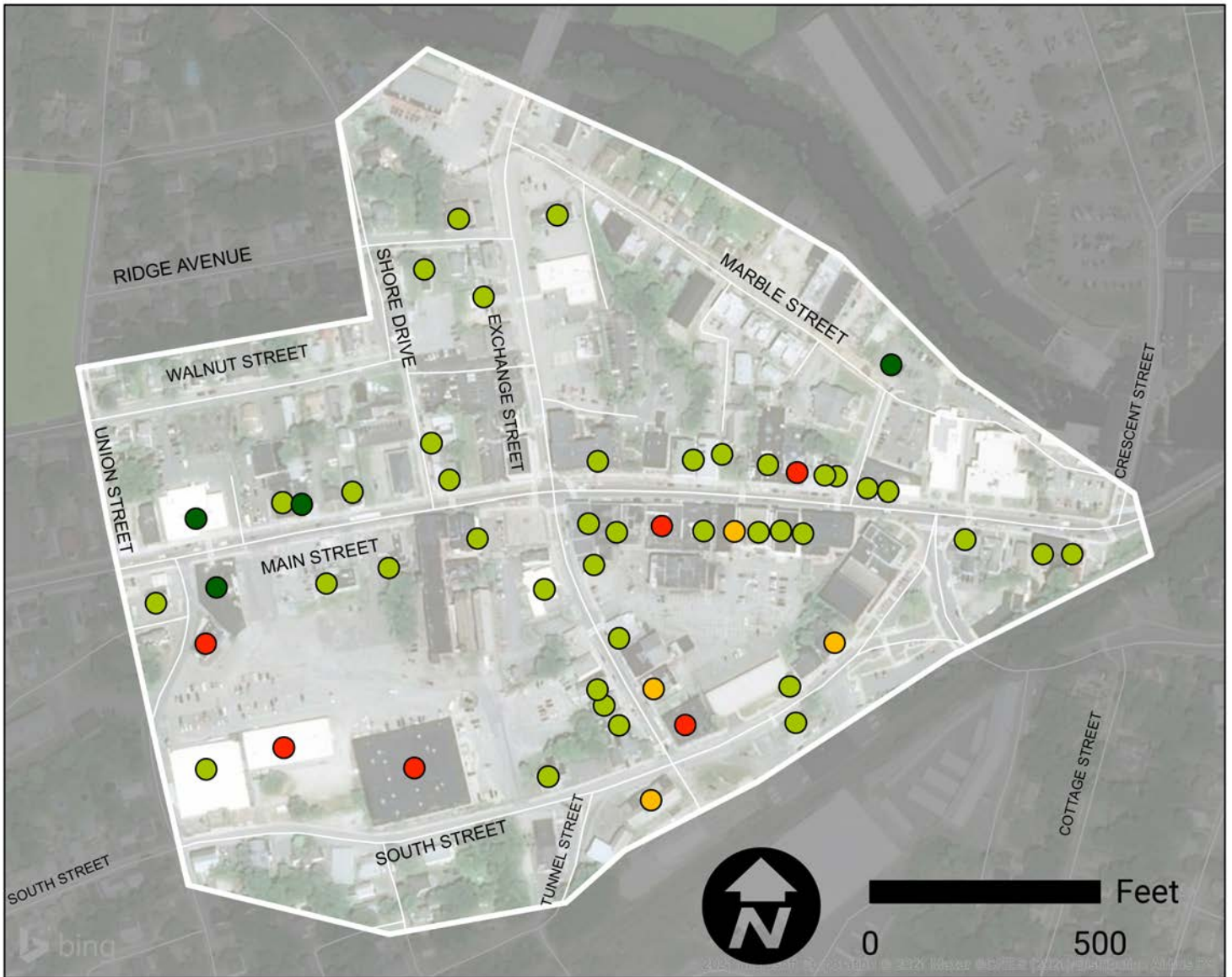
Existing Facades, Downtown Athol (Source: Stantec)



Best Practice Precedent

### 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.



**Map of Storefront Facade Grading** (Source: Stantec)







## Summary: Private Realm

### **Downtown has strong building “bones”**

It is an asset that the majority of downtown buildings facades are in a generally good state of repair but the lack of consistent quality in signage, effort of window displays, awnings demonstrate an opportunity to improve the collaboration between businesses

### **Crime management approach needed**

It is a strength that there is generally good outdoor store lighting for sidewalks but there is opportunity to identify ways of attracting downtown visitors in the evening to increase a feeling of safety

### **Outdoor dining and retail is needed**

The lack of outdoor dining or retail spillover is a significant hindrance to increasing vitality downtown, particularly in attracting pass-through visitors





## Highlights from the Business Environment

### What is the Business Environment Diagnostic?

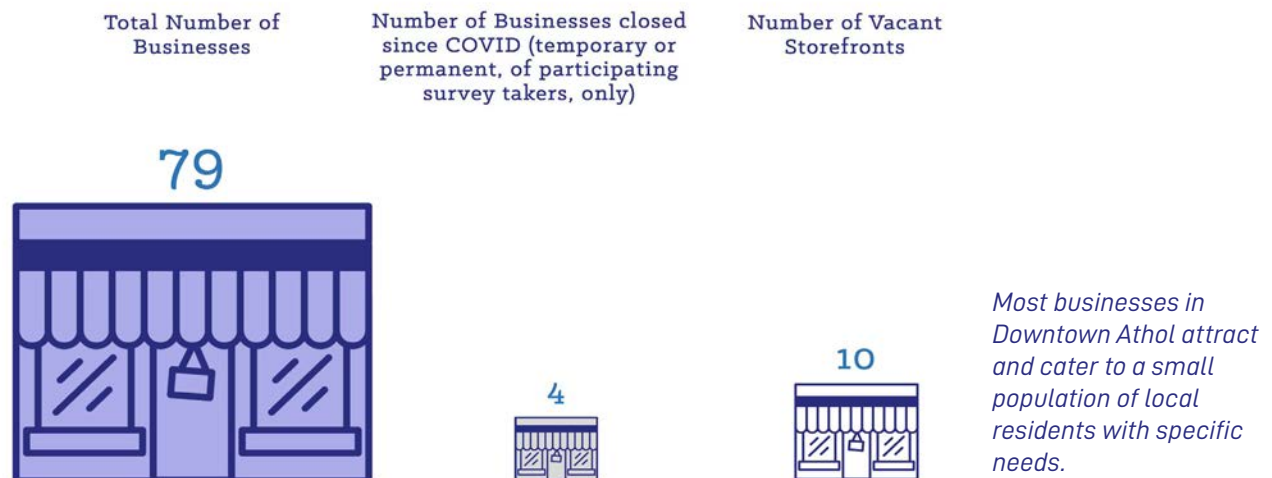
The conditions of the local business environment - including business density, quality, and type of offerings - play a critical role in how successful businesses are meeting the needs of the district's customers. Collecting data related to the tenant mix and concentration of stores provides an insight 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. In support of this diagnostic, the State sent out business surveys at the beginning of the LRRP and shared results with Plan Facilitators.

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?"

### Business Environment Results in Downtown Athol

Athol's downtown businesses offer a wide range of professional services, most of which are not open in the evening. The existing business environment also lacks variety in retail and restaurant opportunities, and is in need of an anchor establishment that attracts visitors beyond Athol. Responses from the business survey highlighted the need to revitalize and activate the downtown area to attract more visitors, and demonstrated particular interest in support for low-cost financing for improving storefronts/facades. Most respondents identified that the creation of a district management entity would be 'important' or 'very important'. Increased resources in administration and other financing mechanisms can greatly support Athol's businesses.



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## Business Environment Results in Downtown Athol: Anchors/Destinations

The primary public service destinations in downtown Athol include City Hall, the Public Library, and the YMCA at its eastern end, and the Post Office at its western end. A range of professional services are available downtown, from D'Ambrosio Eye Care and Quabbin Valley Dental to Cornerstone Insurance Agency and H&R Block. The majority of these locations are utilized by locals only, and are daytime-only destinations.

For several years, downtown Athol has maintained a relatively low turnover in businesses. While it is a strength to have long-standing tenants, the lack of turnover has also resulted in a lack of new retail destinations to expand the current limited offerings. This, in part, has likely had an impact on drawing in new types of businesses to attract a wider variety of visitors interested in something "different" or particular to their preferences. A few recently opened businesses have brought new visitors to downtown, including the Privilege351 barber shop and the Birdsnest Martial Arts facility.

Lord Pond Plaza has served as the primary anchor establishment downtown, largely because of the Ocean State Job Lot retail store. The opening of the North Quabbin Shopping Plaza introduced a concentration of popular destinations that may attract visitors passing through Athol, including a Starbucks, new movie theater, Market Basket grocery store, Hobby Lobby craft store, and fast-food chain offerings. Some retail options are available downtown, however many target customers with very specific interests, such as Tintagels Gate, a long-running Medieval and metaphysical shop, or the new Elev8 Cannabis store.

The particular need for an increased diversity of restaurant offerings however, has most often been raised. Currently, there are several pizza restaurants located downtown, including a Dominos that was opened in 2020. During the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most popular socializing spots for locals and regulars, The Steel Pub, closed its doors. The opening of the Los Agaves Mexican Restaurant in 2021 somewhat replaced that gap and has maintained a steady stream of customers. This success is also proof that Athol is "hungry" for new options. Athol could greatly benefit from one or two anchor destinations targeted to attract a wider customer base.



**View from Athol Library** (Source: Stantec)



**The Athol Post Office** (Source: Stantec)

## Business Environment Results in Downtown Athol: Nodes/Clusters

Athol's downtown is fairly compact and walkable, spanning only two to three blocks in either direction, and is less than a five-minute walk from end to end.

Generally, the stretch of Main Street between Exchange Street and Traverse Street is considered the primary commercial cluster. Because of the overlap and inconsistency of business hours of other commercial services in downtown, there is less likeliness of visitors going to multiple destinations on a trip, or in happening upon a point of interest. In addition, the distance between locations of businesses that are open at any one time can be varied, meaning walking point to point may not always be a convenient solution.

The aforementioned Los Agaves Restaurant is the only dining location on downtown's primary Main Street block on the south side, with Athol's House of Pizza being the only restaurant on the north side of the block. If visitors dine at these locations in the evening, most other businesses in the Main Street are closed. In essence, they operate as "island" destinations without being part of active clusters. The YMCA offers some programming in the evening, however is located just south of Main Street.

Lord Pond Plaza generally functions as its own node, but because of its positioning at the rear of a very large parking lot, is moreso for driving visitors than pedestrians. The Dominos Pizza is near the Plaza, and the Post Office is across Main Street to the north, both of which have higher volumes of activity at different time

There is great opportunity to better coordinate between businesses and to strategically activate existing vacant storefronts to generate destinations with clusters of activity both during the day and evening.

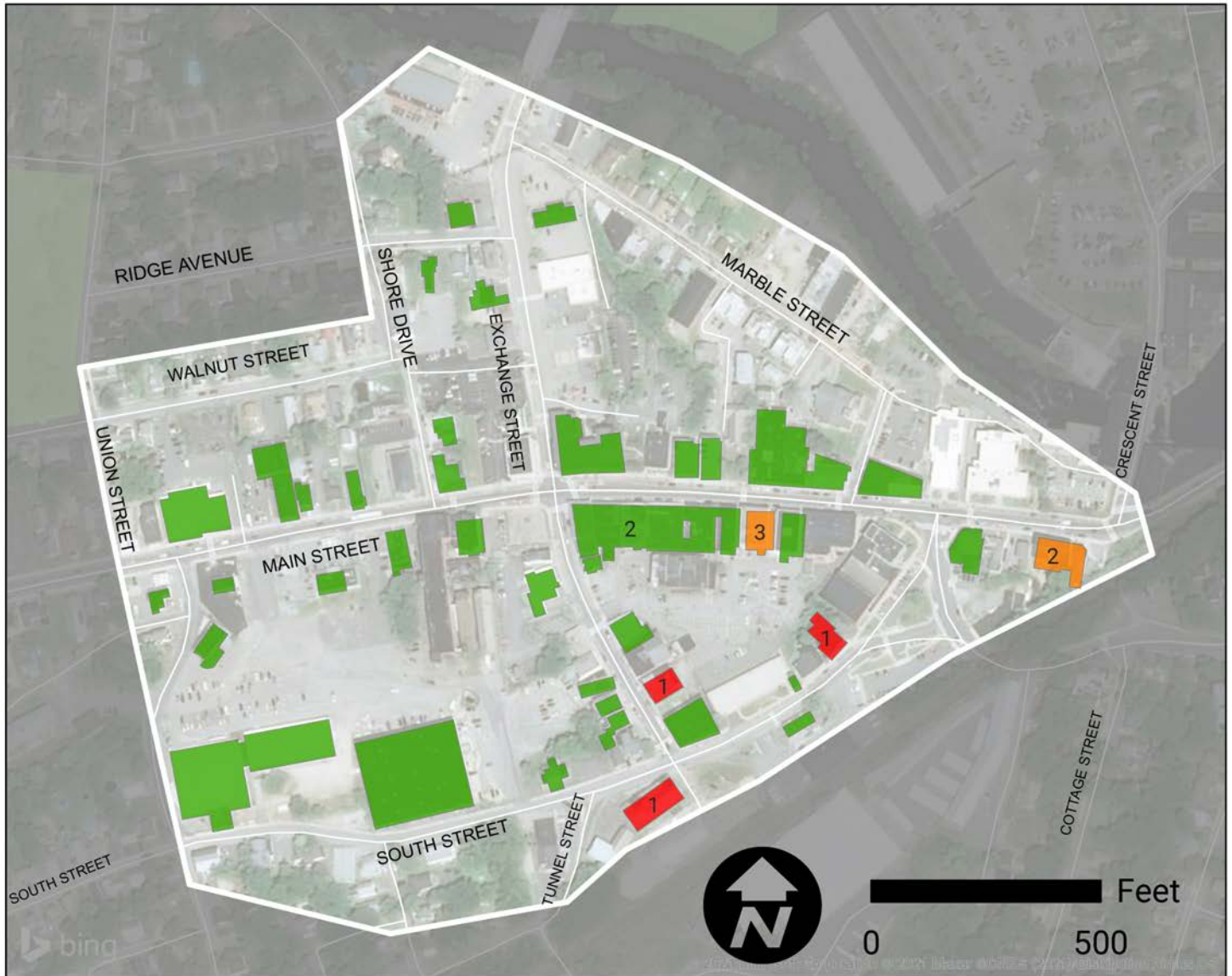


**Western Main Street** (Source: Stantec)



**Athol's House of Pizza** (Source: Stantec)

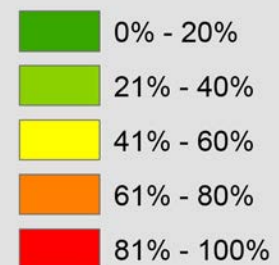




**Map of Storefront Vacancies** (Source: Stantec)

### Legend

#### Storefront Vacancies



##	No. of Vacant Storefronts
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## RETAIL LEAKAGE

As the data in the image below suggests, there is an excess of supply of some retail types in the Downtown Athol area. Because there are limited options for visitors, whether for restaurants, arts/cultural hubs, or retail/convenience stores, this data implies a lack of presence of some retail types leads to lack of demand.



## LRRP BUSINESS SURVEY

The LRRP Business Survey aimed to obtain input to guide plan development, gain buy-in from the local business community, and collect data across all LRRP communities to inform statewide programs and policy. The survey addressed topics including business satisfaction (such as with the regulatory environment), business conditions and the impacts from COVID-19, and sought input from the business community regarding potential strategies and types of assistance needed/desired for economic support.

## 2021 BUSINESS SURVEY RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

- Athol businesses experienced a reduction in capacity and visitors due to COVID-19
- Businesses noted that regulations associated with parking, outdoor dining/selling, signage, and licensing/permitting are some obstacles to their business operations
- Businesses are somewhat dissatisfied with the condition of public spaces, streets, and sidewalks

### The top 3 business impacts due to COVID-19 were:

- Reduced operating hours/ capacity
- Decline in revenue
- Incurring expenses for safety measures

**43%**

of businesses had less on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID.

**43%** of businesses generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019.

For **14%** of businesses, revenue declined by 25% or more.

## 2.5 Key Findings



ADMIN  
CAPACITY

### Key Findings: 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?

#### Administrative Capacity Results in Athol

The Town has made great strides with very limited staff capacity in recent years but will need additional support to be able to pursue the many recommendations which have emerged from this and other recent plans and mobilize projects to kickstart a synchronized long-term effort that aligns with the Town's goals of vitality. The following section provides an overview of key findings from the administrative capacity analysis for Downtown Athol.





## ADMIN CAPACITY - WHERE ARE THE GAPS?

Support needed for building inspector's determinations and empowering enforcement (Selectboard, Town Manager, Inspector collaboration needed)

More planning staff needed, particularly for assistance with zoning, to be able to advance important, slow-burning efforts for Athol's future, not just the short-term, urgent planning needs

Dedicated downtown marketing staff or organization to help advance a clear and focused Town identity to attract the right mix of businesses, residents, and development.

Police staff has had a high level of turnover, and without consistent, long-term support, are not able to follow-through on services needed

Administrative facilities are incompatible with cross-departmental collaboration, and form a barrier to ease of public process and access

## Athol needs a dedicated entity to focus on business support and marketing

Athol's Downtown Vitality Committee is a volunteer-based organization comprised of residents, business owners, and community leaders. The Committee is focused on enhancing the image of downtown and helping to promote economic vitality and achieve other goals. This committee provides an inviting forum for businesses to unite and discuss administrative hurdles, development goals, and aspirations for downtown. Entities like these invite the business community, consultants, and residents to collaborate on town-wide solutions and opportunities. However, businesses in the area need support to sustain, and attracting new businesses is a priority to strengthen the Town's economy and build resilience. Incentives and programs are needed to help them create a solid foundation in the commercial district. A full-time Main Streets Organization or Business Association for Athol's business community can increase access to resources that help existing and new businesses renovate their storefronts, streamline efforts, or seek funding for additional investments. Either forming or enlisting a professional entity to create a brand and town marketing strategy for the Athol community can also attract local and regional visitors, provide a place for businesses to promote their services and products, and encourage residents to frequent the downtown year-round.



## Key Findings: Customer Base

### **The growth and diversity of Athol's population is a hindrance to economic growth**

There is a large difference between the median income of downtown, the local market, and the State. Athol's population will continue to stagnate without increased diversity of downtown commercial and housing options to attract a wider range of long-term residents with different spending power.

### **Younger people who are unemployed or living in poverty need additional support**

There is significant opportunity to engage the group of people under 34 with businesses or activities downtown that would appeal to them, as well as in supporting their growth and opportunities for employment.

### **Downtown's infrastructure needs to support people of all ages and mobility levels**

The lack of outdoor dining or retail spillover is a significant hindrance to increasing vitality, particularly in the evening.

### **A long-term strategy to address crime is needed**

Crime is an ongoing and largely unmanaged deterrent to downtown. There is significant need to address the crime rate. A combination of physical, programming, and enforcement improvements is likely needed in order to attract visitors and ensure they feel safe and welcome at all times of the day.



**The intersection of Main Street and School Street** (Source: Stantec)



## Key Findings: Physical Environment (Public Realm)

### Athol's public realm can benefit from improved cohesion and connectivity

Downtown Athol's built environment benefits from having "good bones". Many of its historic structures along Main Street feature beautiful, original details that are in good condition, such as the Athol Savings Bank. There are no "missing teeth", or empty lots along the study area. However, several significantly visible buildings are in a considerable state of disrepair, including the vacant historic York Theatre, which is in a state of near-condemnation and often inhabited by the homeless, or the partially-underutilized property at 339 Main Street, commonly referred to as "the Coffin Factory". The Town also benefits from having a near-complete sidewalk network (excluding north Exchange Street) that is in relatively good condition. The roads are also in relatively good condition and feature some crosswalks to support pedestrians moving through downtown; however, many crosswalk markings are faded and are not effectively calming traffic to support real and perceived pedestrian safety.

Other components of the public realm can also be enhanced to create a more inviting atmosphere. While historic light fixtures are present along Main Street and south Exchange Street, Athol has long dealt with perceived and real issues of crime, and more lighting should be provided along north Exchange Street, Traverse Street, and in the municipal parking lot to improve the sense of downtown safety. Some small trees are located intermittently along Main Street and add to downtown's beauty when they are in bloom, yet there is only one tree on Exchange Street and an increased presence of green elements would improve downtown's overall aesthetic.

Two other components are significantly needed to attract the sense of vitality that Athol is seeking. Currently, there are few places for visitors to sit and enjoy the outdoors. The Veterans Park features two benches. There is also one bench located in the park area at the eastern end of Marble Street. Providing seating for visitors along Main Street can encourage people to stay longer, provide a place of rest for people with mobility challenges, and create opportunities for more social interaction. The Town is also lacking a wayfinding system. Without streamlined and branded signage, there is no "sense of arrival" for visitors. This can prevent downtown's visitors from being able to navigate to destinations of interest and spending more time. It can also prevent people passing through Athol from stopping to explore the downtown and potentially become regular visitors. Comprehensive wayfinding system needed. The lack of wayfinding is directly linked to the Town's goal for a stronger identity and desire to attract both existing and new visitors to its destinations. In summary, current and recommended components of the public realm have potential to "speak" to each other and contribute to a greater sense of general cohesion, community, and pride in the built fabric of Athol's downtown.





## Key Findings: Physical Environment (Private Realm)

### Athol's private realm can benefit from increased stewardship and updated policies

Much of what gives small towns their charm stems from not only the offerings of the small business community, but its physical appearance. Vibrant storefronts with attractive and inviting window displays and signage are essential to attracting new and repeat visitors. Downtown Athol has the potential to generate a bustling Main Street but long-needed physical improvements which haven't been addressed implies a general association of the downtown's private realm with merely maintaining "the status quo". While most of the building facades of Athol's downtown are generally clean and maintained, several show signs of age and wear. This may be due to a combination of factors, including economic decline and long-term vacancies, lack of stewardship by property owners, and sometimes a lack of understanding about funding options and support to make improvements. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to additional vacancies and financial impacts on businesses.

More than 25% of Athol's storefront windows have limited or no transparency into the interior. Some windows have been blocked with curtains, tinted films, or with other materials. Without being able to view the inside of a business, pedestrians passing by on the sidewalk, or even passing drivers are unable to be certain of what type of service is being offered, or the atmosphere. The business, in turn, is unable to attract and reciprocate activity on the street.

Many communities across Massachusetts had successful experiences experimenting with providing outdoor dining areas in response to COVID-19. Downtown Athol does not have any outdoor dining areas available. Casual conversations to initiate this have not been successful but, given the success of the Los Agaves Restaurant (which began its indoor dining service in 2021 following its 2020 opening and initial carry-out service), the number of people who come to dine in Athol will increase. Dining activity outdoors provides welcome liveliness to downtowns.

Other elements of the private realm, including signage, awnings, facades, and lighting all have varying levels of consistency in quality and maintenance in downtown Athol. While some businesses have invested in high-quality, visible signage, many do not communicate the type of service being offered. Other signs are of a clearly outdated aesthetic, and do not contribute to the charm of a small-town Main Street. More importantly, many businesses do not have clearly

displayed hours of service. This is problematic as many of Athol's businesses operate at infrequent or irregular hours, and further contributes to a limit of opportunity in being able to generate consistent pedestrian activity and vitality.

Some buildings feature awnings, however all should have them, where physically possible, for consistency and providing shade to visitors. Some storefronts feature window displays that have been creatively and thoughtfully arranged while others look cluttered or are empty. Many facades are in need of new paint or could greatly benefit from higher-quality materials. Athol's current design guidelines are severely out of date. The Town will need to update and enforce standards to achieve a distinct and consistently beautiful downtown.

Generally, while some business owners have taken the lead in updating and maintaining the physical elements of their properties, many others will need to step forward to contribute to the cohesive and inviting potential of Athol's downtown. This includes coordination of potential events and exploring new collaborations to maximize on the physical environment. The investment can provide a return to all businesses and generate collective pride.



**Storefronts along Main Street** (Source: Stantec)



## ADMIN CAPACITY

## Key Findings: Administrative Capacity

### The Town doesn't have one organization with capacity to oversee recovery

Existing gaps in particular, include- Support for building inspector's determinations, and empowering enforcement (Selectboard, Town Manager, Inspector collaboration needed), More planning staff needed, particularly for assistance with zoning, Dedicated downtown Marketing staff/ organization, Police staff does not stay long-term, not able to follow-through on services needed.

The Downtown Vitality Committee has provided a consistent and active voice during planning efforts and should be incorporated in processes led by town departments, external organizations, or other experts with both time and experience to be able to lead the organization and execution of various projects.







**Meetings of the Athol Downtown Vitality Committee (left), and the Board of Community and Planning Development (right)** (Source: Athol Daily News)



## 2.6 Project Goals and Needs

### Alignment of Goals & Key Findings

In order to develop project ideas that address the primary needs of Downtown Athol, the Plan Facilitator team compared the diagnostic grades and findings for the physical environment (public and private realm), business environment, customer base data, and administrative capacity observations to the Downtown Athol's LRRP project goals.

	PROJECT NEED	Overall Goal- Increase Downtown Vitality		
		GOAL #1 Create an inviting and cohesive pedestrian environment	GOAL #2 Support existing businesses and attract new businesses	GOAL #3 Preserve and reinvest in Athol's historic building stock
 ADMIN CAPACITY	Additional staff for planning enforcement		X	
	Updated policies		X	X
	Consistent, long-term police support	X	X	
	Coordination between responsible parties		X	
	Zoning that reflects Athol's vision		X	X
 CUSTOMER BASE	Tools for new development/developers		X	X
	Improve ease of parking downtown	X	X	
	Improve ease of navigating downtown	X	X	
	Improve pedestrian safety	X	X	
	Solution for use of existing vacant spaces		X	X
 BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT	Improve engagement with Main Street	X	X	
	Increase diversity of offerings	X	X	
	Engage non-local business interest		X	
	Mechanisms to support struggling businesses		X	
	Updated/new design guidelines	X	X	X
 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	Areas designed for public use/gathering	X	X	
	Exchange Street to be integrated better	X	X	
	Preservation of historic properties	X	X	X
	More placemaking elements downtown	X	X	



### 3. Project Recommendations





## 3.1 Project Identification and Prioritization

### 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. Athol's goals focus on enhancing the components of downtown that, collectively, support and attract economic vitality and contribute to a stronger sense of small-town identity and community pride. The efforts of this process took into account that Athol wants to evolve and adapt to include new ideas and economic opportunities, while also retaining the familiarity that has kept many of its residents and businesses local for decades. During the project development process, the Plan Facilitator team worked with the Town, existing organizations, and the public to create a comprehensive list that balances community needs and desires.

Project ideas focused on a few key themes, including:

- Building the administrative capacity to execute the many plans and ideas in the works
- Improving the efficiency of, and connection between, parking
- New approaches to filling the significant gaps in public spaces
- Tailoring the Town's zoning, ordinances, and guidelines to prepare for the right kinds of development while improving the current private realm
- Setting the foundations to help the Town establish a strong identity

The following section documents the project prioritization process, and feedback received from the community to better understand the goals from the resident, municipal, and business perspectives.





## Development of Project List

### PHASE TWO

## PROJECTS & PRIORITIES

\*Outcomes in bold are those which were most selected during the public survey. Rankings were determined based on a combination of public survey preferences and discussions with the Downtown Vitality Committee.

	Project Name	Site or Potential Improvement	Project Description	Potential Outcomes	Impact Area
PRIORITY ★	1. Create a Developer Toolkit		This project intends to create an one-stop online toolkit for potential developers that includes Athol's regulatory details, information about specific opportunities, and is combined with a marketing strategy to attract developers to further Athol's downtown vision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>An opportunity to update/modernize properties in disrepair</b></li> <li>• Attraction of local developers</li> <li>• Attraction of regional developers</li> <li>• A "preserve and protect" approach</li> </ul>	
PRIORITY ★	2. Pop-Up Storefront and Art Competition		This project aims to use an existing vacant storefront as a short-term testing space for small businesses (or other highly active organizations) that can help attract more visitors and long-term businesses to Main Street.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Fill an identified commercial need/gap downtown</b></li> <li>• Increase business collaboration</li> <li>• Testing out a new concept to put Athol on the map</li> <li>• Increasing evening activity</li> </ul>	
PRIORITY ★	3. Zoning Audit and Develop Town Design Guidelines		This project intends to identify specific recommendations for amending zoning and ordinances, as well as developing an updated set of design guidelines to improve the visual consistency of the built environment and preserve Athol's character.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Encourage landowners to improve facades</b></li> <li>• Zoning that is more appropriate to Athol context</li> <li>• Reduction of unnecessary parking requirements</li> <li>• Consistency in the character of Main Street</li> </ul>	

Downtown Athol's businesses and residents had the opportunity to attend a virtual open house to provide input on draft project ideas and LRRP study goals. (Source: Stantec)

## Public Engagement Efforts

### PHASE I DIAGNOSTIC DATA PUBLIC MEETING

In order to understand the needs and goals of the Downtown Athol community, the LRRP team included a series of engagement efforts with the public. On May 11, 2021, the Downtown Vitality Committee hosted a virtual public meeting to present the program goals and schedule, as well as the diagnostic approach, results, and key findings.

### PHASE II PUBLIC SURVEY

Between July 21 and August 8, 2021, the team provided an opportunity for the public to learn about the proposed project ideas and to rank them in order of their priority. The survey received 69 responses.

### PHASE II PROJECT IDEA OPEN HOUSE

On August 3, 2021, the Town and project team hosted a virtual open house to provide an update on project status, collect feedback on project goals and priorities, and preliminary project ideas. While good discussion was generated, this event was not well attended. The

project team subsequently uploaded the project materials to the Town's website, and further advertised the opportunity for the public to review the information and provide feedback.

### SME GUIDANCE

To better define and create strong and implementable rubrics, the Downtown Athol LRRP team worked with other Plan Facilitators across the Rapid Recovery program through the Subject Matter Expert efforts. The team met with community activation experts as well as zoning and development specialists to assist with project idea development.

### MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

A representative from Athol Daily News attended both public meetings and maintained communication with the Town throughout the LRRP process. They were supportive in preparing news articles to both advertise opportunities for the public to engage in the process, as well as to report on key milestones and highlights.

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## Public Engagement Efforts

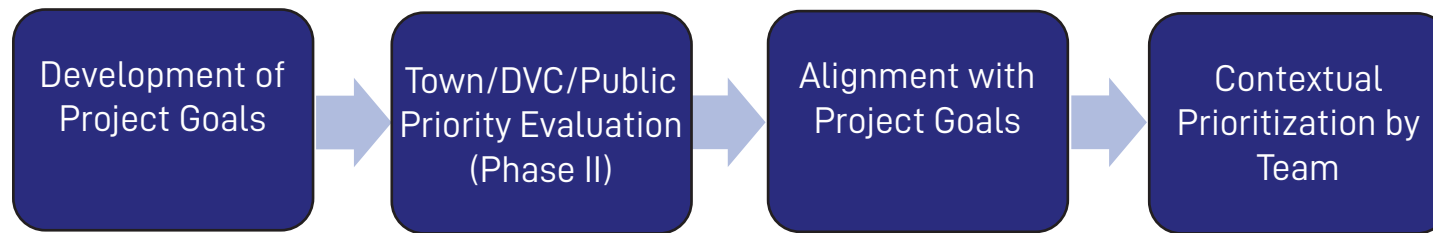
### Prioritization Process

The project team developed a prioritization process that evaluated project ideas based on public feedback, alignment with the project goals, and municipal priorities.

During Phase II, both the Downtown Vitality Committee (as part of one of their regularly scheduled meetings) and members of the public (through the online survey and Phase II virtual open house) had the opportunity to vote on their top priority projects. Using these lists as a baseline, and as informed through discussions with the project team regarding early town actions and achievements that could potentially initiate momentum in some project areas/goals, the consultants finalized the ranked list of projects in order of priority. Discussions with the primary municipal representative were particularly helpful in providing an additional layer of context regarding local priorities, funding sources, and future planning initiatives. The prioritized project list can be found in the "Project List and Map" section.

Athol's 10 LRRP projects were developed through the following process:

1. Projects which were requested in the **Town's original application** to participate in the LRRP were considered
2. The **data collection** process (including field data and business survey data) revealed areas within the four diagnostic categories needing particular attention
3. A **S.W.O.T. (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) Exercise** was conducted with the project team to further identify both positive and negative areas of emphasis within each of the diagnostic categories.
4. General recommendations were defined to support each of the **3 project goals**. Within each of these goals, issues were identified and scored based on a series of considerations (see below) to inform the final list of project ideas.
5. The projects were **ranked in order of priority** and importance by 3 different parties:
  - The Town
  - The Downtown Vitality Committee
  - The Public (Survey)
6. Taking these results into consideration, the priority issues emphasized in earlier steps, as well as with an understanding of where existing capacity and progress had already been made to support some projects, the **final TOP-5 priority list** was confirmed.







*This general process outlines the evolution of project prioritization (Source: Stantec)*



*The evolution of the development of project goals was initiated by first focusing on the Town's early defined goals. (Source: Stantec)*



Key Project Goal: Increase Vitality!	Issue	Level of <b>Community</b> <b>Priority</b> (Plans, etc) (Scale 1-5)	Level of <b>Add'l Effort</b> to Address (\$, Admin) (Scale 1-5)	Level of Validation by LRRP <b>Data</b> (Scale 1-5)	TOTAL SCORE (Priority)	Potential Project	SME
 <b>Market Information</b> Trends Consumer Profiles Demand	1. Target demographic unknown				<b>7</b>	Use retail assessment data and set up a "Who is Athol" section on Town website for businesses/developers to visit     Prepare vacant storefront/property to host revolving 3-week pop-up shop ST OPPORTUNITY	Revenue and Sales- Promotion     Tenant Mix- Retail Recruitment
	2. Lack of ease of access for business				<b>5</b>		
	3. Lack of business engagement with the downtown				<b>7</b>		
	4. Lack of business coordination with each other				<b>6</b>		
	5. Lack of balance to attract local/regional visitors				<b>13</b>		
	6. Collaboration with Orange, etc.				<b>3</b>		
 <b>Physical Environment</b> Public Realm Private Realm Access + Visibility	1. Lack of vibrant storefronts/windows				<b>10</b>	Prepare vacant storefront/property to host revolving 3-week pop-up shop ST OPPORTUNITY STREETSCAPE PLAN   Re-design of Veteran's Park (20TH ANNIV. SEPT)  Create town wayfinding plan. <b>SIGN DESIGN GUIDELINES</b>	Public Realm- Placemaking, LA    Revenue and Sales- Marketing
	2. Safer connections for pedestrians (lighting, complete sidewalks)				<b>12</b>		
	3. Some historic buildings beyond repair				<b>12</b>		
	4. Lack of common/public space				<b>11</b>		
	5. Uncooperative landowners				<b>9</b>		
 <b>Business Environment</b> Anchors/Destinations Asset Mix Nodes/Clusters	★Lack of identity/wayfinding				<b>12</b>		
	1. Inconsistency of business hours				<b>8</b>	Create toolkit/info packet for developers and businesses with data, property info, benefits	Tenant Mix- Small Biz Tech Assistance
	2. Lack of an anchor business				<b>11</b>		
	3. Lack of restaurants/food variety				<b>11</b>		
	4. Lack of arts/culture				<b>10</b>		
	★Zoning may not accommodate desired downtown mix				<b>6</b>		
	6. 'Chicken and egg' challenge				<b>4</b>		
 <b>Administrative Capacity</b> Partners Funding Regulations/Zoning	1. Lack of planning staff to execute everything desired				<b>11</b>		
	2. Lack of support/proactivity for building enforcement				<b>7</b>		
	3. Cannot rely on police services to follow-through, stay in town				<b>7</b>		
	4. Design standards outdated				<b>10</b>		
	★Lack of dedicated marketing staff				<b>9</b>		
	6. Zoning adjustments needed				<b>7</b>		

*A step in defining Athol's LRRP projects utilized a scoring system that took several factors into account.*

## 3.2 Project Overview

### Project 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 project 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.

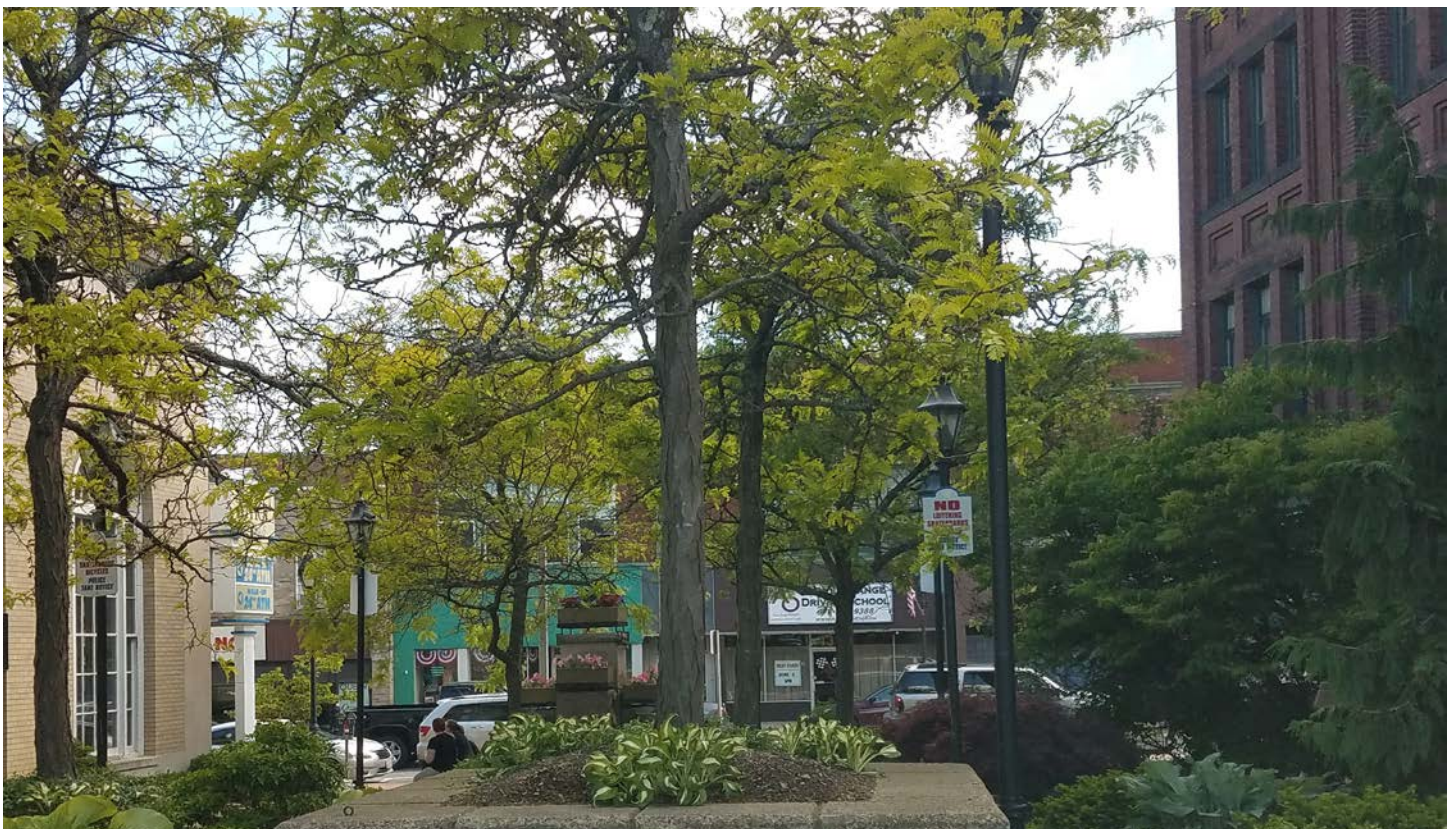


## 3.3 Project List

### 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 recommended project locations.

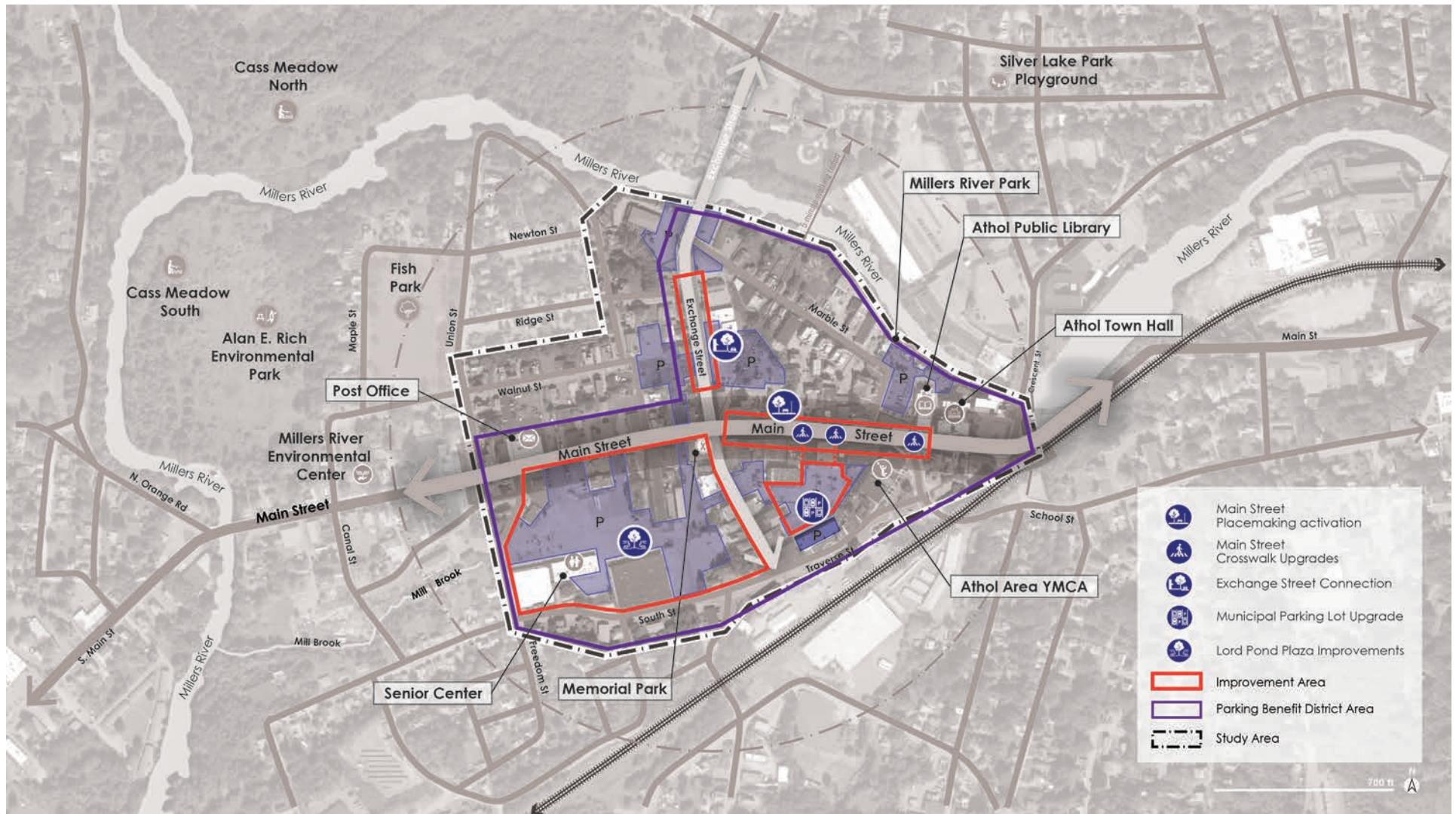
The Downtown Athol LRRP Report includes 10 projects, all of which fall within the DHCD categories including Physical Environment, Business Environment, Customer Base, and Administrative Capacity. The projects were selected for their wide range of potential impact, for their ability to create a tipping point for efforts which have already been kick-started, and for their collective ability to create noticeable change and generate momentum to transition Athol towards its next stage of vitality.





Downtown Athol LRRP Project Idea List		
Project Idea	Description	Priority Ranking
Create a Developer Toolkit	This project intends to create an one-stop online toolkit for potential developers that includes Athol's regulatory details, information about specific opportunities, and is combined with a marketing strategy to attract developers to further Athol's downtown vision.	★ 1
Establish a Pop-up Storefront on Main Street	This project aims to use an existing vacant storefront as a short-term testing space for small businesses (or other highly active organizations) that can help attract more visitors and long-term businesses to Main Street.	★ 2
Conduct Zoning Audit and Develop Town Guidelines	This project intends to identify specific recommendations for amending zoning and ordinances, as well as developing an updated set of design guidelines to improve the visual consistency of the built environment and preserve Athol's character.	★ 3
Establish a Parking Benefit District	This project intends to develop a process and recommendations so that parking fees in a designated parking benefit district can be re-distributed to fund small downtown improvements (such as benches, landscaping, sidewalk repairs, etc).	★ 4
Advance Lord Pond Plaza Improvements	This project intends to test out some temporary ideas (such as defining seating areas, pedestrian paths, etc) for how the plaza might be used. This will ensure the final proposed development plan supports how residents and visitors want to engage with the space.	★ 5
Municipal Parking Lot and Crosswalk Upgrades	This project intends to create a new layout of the parking lot with improved pedestrian connection, added safety elements and amenities, and upgraded crosswalks along Main Street.	6
Placemaking Activation Along Main Street	This project intends to creatively transform and test small spaces along Main Street to attract visitors, such as creating a parklet, designating an area for outdoor dining, or engaging an artist to transform one of Main Street's allies.	7
Improve Exchange Street Connections	While future development may activate the street years from now, this project intends to test temporary solutions to address issues, now (narrowing the road, defining a pedestrian path on the east side, improving lighting, etc).	8
Establish a Skate Park	This project intends to identify potential sites and early concept plans for a skate park/public park in the downtown area. The park would include components designed to be utilized by the public, regardless of age and ability.	9
Pursue Historic District and Demolition Delay Bylaw	This project intends to enact a demolition delay bylaw in combination with a review of guidelines, reformation of oversight committees, and increased enforcement relating to the preservation and maintenance of historic properties.	10

## 3.4 Overall Project Map





# Project Recommendations: Priority Projects







# #1. Create a Developer “Toolkit”

**Description-** An online and/or print resource including information about development regulations, potential development opportunities, and details about Athol's long-term vision. The kit would include parts with pertinent information for potential property and business investors.

## PROJECT GOALS

- **Modernize/update properties in disrepair** (*public survey priority*)
- Increase transparency and ease of regulations
- Help them efficiently evaluate if you are a match for their interests and generate excitement about possibilities
- Introduce developers to key contacts and direct them to next steps.
- Build relationships and getting the next “first down.”
- Attraction of both a local (familiar) and regional (fresh) development perspective
- A “preserve and protect approach”

Category		Private Realm
Location		Study Area, generally
Origin		Eric Smith- Athol Planning Director, Mary Holtorf- Chair of the Downtown Vitality Committee (committee members also reviewed project)
Budget		<p>Low Budget (&lt;\$50,000), includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff time for organization and preparation of information to be included in the toolkit</li> <li>• Staff time for updates of content to website/print as needed Potential branding/graphic design of webpage and related printed materials so they are easily recognizable</li> <li>• Potential advertisement in local and regional development/real estate publications/platforms</li> </ul>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		Low Risk – Primarily focuses on general outreach and education about town's current resources and information
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of visitors to website</li> <li>• Expressed interest from developers in potential opportunities</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources		<p>Partners- Existing or re-formed Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, Building Inspector, DPW, Town Planner, potential Business Liaison, Intern support, Landowners.</p> <p>Resources-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DHCD, MA Development Assistant Program</li> <li>• DHCD, Community Development Block Grant</li> <li>• EDA, Build Back Better Community Challenge</li> <li>• EDA, Competitive Tourism Grants</li> </ul>

## Diagnostic

Athol is a historic town and is fully developed. However, inactive landowners and changes in the activity and overall use/investment of some parcels over the years, leaves some areas of town ripe for redevelopment.

These locations can play a key role in filling significant identified gaps (i.e. opportunities) in restaurant, retail, and other functions downtown. The downtown's current mix of uses supports limited demand for visitors beyond the town, and does not facilitate a smart growth approach as the town evolves. This, in combination with a general lack of downtown vitality may be contributing to a perception by developers that Athol is not a desirable place to invest. With further impacts of COVID on business activity downtown, business owners and developers need to be equipped with the tools that will help shift the balance of risk for people considering opportunities for investment in Athol.

Recent studies have outlined a map for the pursuit of redevelopment in downtown but will need to be supported by a clear vision of what the Town wants and needs to strategically take steps towards economic sustenance and an appropriate mix of uses. Nearby new developments have also raised the bar through offering several desirable mixed-use destinations. How Athol uses its development opportunities as a tool will greatly impact its ability to stay competitive in the region and to solidify its town identity.

## Early Actions/Achievements to date

The Town is fortunate to have completed its Aspire Athol master plan for development in the past several years, which identifies priority zones and recommended options for redevelopment or new development.

The Town was one of the first in the Commonwealth to meet the requirements for zoning accommodation for recreational marijuana operations, and medicinal marijuana dispensaries, and hosts two active facilities.

The recent opening and success of the Los Agaves Restaurant on Main Street demonstrates that downtown visitors have a strong desire for new offerings and that diversifying downtown's development can draw investment and new mixed use opportunities.

## Action Item

The project involves the development of an online and printable developer toolkit with information to both educate and attract developers to opportunities in Athol. This project directly aligns with a separately identified LRRP project of auditing/updating downtown zoning and design guidelines. The project will begin with a full understanding of existing resources and information available for developers and will incorporate both internal and external discussions to understand needs for additional or updated information to potentially attract interest, particularly as the general climate of building/development is resuming typical activity as COVID transitions. The process will then proceed with the prioritization of a defined set of action items and responsibilities determined through a collaborative effort between the town and other appropriate parties.

## Process

### PHASE 1

- Identify existing data, information, guidelines that would be useful to educate developers about the process for developing in Athol
- Identify gaps or needs for updates in existing data, information and guidelines to increase the attractiveness of developing in Athol
- Conduct an "interview" with local developers about perception of challenges/potential deterrents to developing in Athol
- Create a map of current specific development sites
- Referring to recent studies, identify local/regional developers that specialize in the kinds of gaps Athol needs to fill (multi-family housing, retail, mixed-use, etc)
- Hire/allocate responsibility and defined tasks/process for updating content of the toolkit
- Hire a graphic designer/software developer
- Design the website resource page and integrate into the Town's website
- Create a printable and PDF version of the information that can be emailed or printable for potential developers
- Develop parallel outreach and marketing plan that includes advertising approach

### PHASE 2

- Maintain/update the toolkit

## Project Element- Existing Information on Athol's Website Appropriate for a Toolkit





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## Project Element- Recommended Qualitative Interview Questions Prior to Toolkit Planning

The following data would be gathered as part of short, semi-structured, "qualitative" interviews/ conversations (10-15 mins) where the interviewer records the key points/responses said by the interviewee and then subsequently codes/summarizes these for review by Town Staff, the Downtown Vitality Committee, etc. Gaining responses from a small sample may generate helpful insights. Responses can also become part of the kit content as quotes - and/or this process may help identify individuals/ projects to include as examples, etc.

### **New/recent business owners:**

- *What is your business and when did it open?*
- *Do you rent or own?*
- *What led you to locate in Athol?*
- *What has been the best thing about your experience so far?*
- *Could the Town be even more supportive? If so, how?*
- *What types of new businesses would help create synergy with your business?*
- *Do you refer customers to other businesses? If so, which businesses and why?*
- *How do you market your businesses? What do you think has brought you the most success?*
- *Are you familiar with business technical assistance, loan and grant programs offered by MassDevelopment? Would you like more*

### **Property owners:**

- *When was the last time you made a substantial improvement in your property? What was it, and what was the motivation for doing so?*
- *If financed: How was it financed? Where is the lender based? Was it difficult to obtain financing?*
- *What are your main concerns about investing in your property? What data would help you?*
- *Would you be interested in meeting with a representative of MassDevelopment to learn more about state-run grant and loan programs for which your property may be eligible? (Programs include technical assistance for retrofit design, construction improvements as well as in some cases, low interest loans for equipment.)*

### **Potential business or property investors (if these can be reached through existing Town networks):**

- *What type of information would be most useful to your due diligence process and/or business plan development regarding investing in Athol?*
- *Do you have any particular concerns or questions at this time that an information toolkit could help address?*

## Project Element- Recommended Approach on Feedback Prior to Development of Toolkit

### PASSIVE SHARING

- Link on town home page
- Embed content and offer a downloadable PDF (information current as of 2021)
- Add ons: short video-profiles and interviews - either organized comprehensively or by individual businesses

### ACTIVE SHARING

#### Virtual

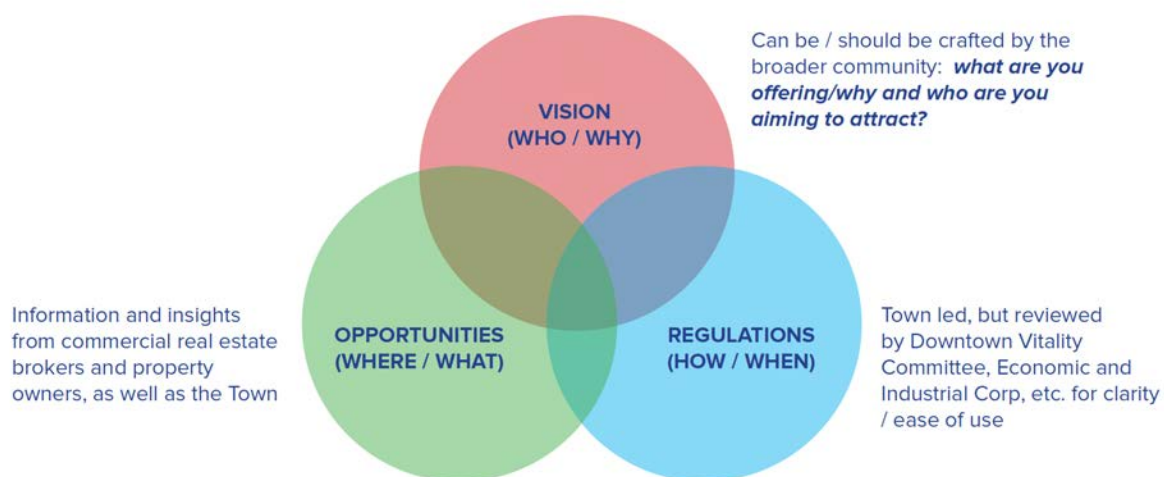
- Email to all businesses and property owners and ask them to SHARE!
- Email in responses to any inquiry
- Boost / advertise online with emphasis on using a social media campaign / cross-posting

#### In person

- Distribute copies to businesses
- Integrate into campaigns
- Distribute during key events
- Plan a developer's tour\*

## Project Element- Guidance on Soliciting Input and Feedback on a Draft Toolkit Proposal

- Increase Transparency of Regulations
- Introduce Development Opportunities
- Educate about Athol's Long-Term Vision



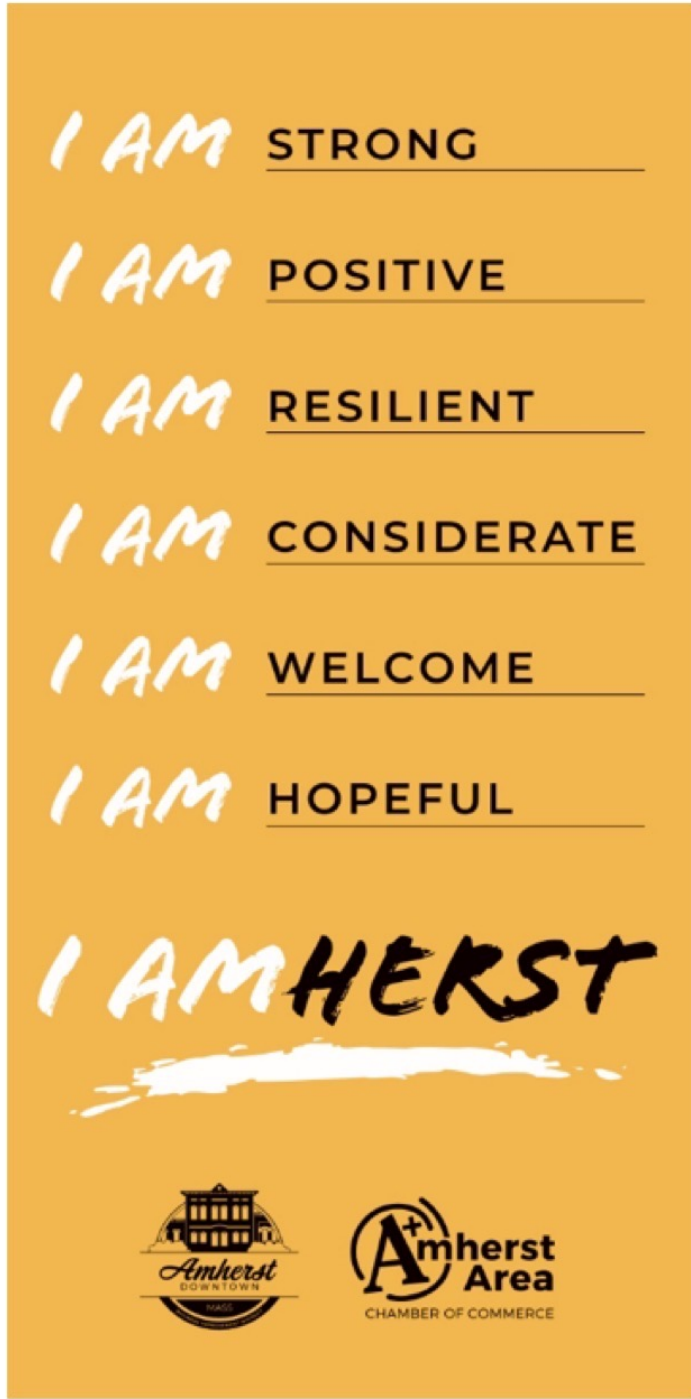
For a 5-7 pager: a single content leader + a graphic designer (and photographer if budget allows) can do the job. Content leader is on point for coordinating content on vision, opportunities, regulations.

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## Project Element- Guidance for Working With Landlords Who Do Not Maintain Properties

- 1. Maintain a vacant property registry** and map the district by property ownership; explore strengthening regulations around vacant, abandoned and foreclosing property, including fees for vacancy (See Town of Swansea, City of Fall River).
- 2. Identify how much property a problematic landlord owns** and how many problematic landlords exist. Develop a good working inventory of key issues -- and whether these are tied to one landlord or represent something more systemic / structural.
- 3. Define the issue:** is it a failure to comply with building codes or zoning; failure to comply with design guidelines; other health & safety concerns; aesthetics? Be sure property owners understand discrete repercussions: condemnation, fines, etc., and know about available resources. Provide warnings and resources to help address outstanding issues.
- 4. Talk with existing tenants:** ensure they know their rights and best practices for communicating issues.
- 5. Identify need for rehabilitation:** be sure property owners have current information on available grants and no/low interest loans available through state programs - including programs that offer technical assistance -- as well as pertinent contact information. If there is demand across multiple buildings, consider applying for assistance as a district.
- 6. Create a toolkit for marketing properties** (developer toolkit) and offer property owners best practices -- such as having properties "move in ready" and/or making property available through a (town approved) short term lease program. Make current real estate comps widely available so that property owners do not maintain unrealistic expectations about what a property will rent or sell for.
- 7. If possible, make introductions.** Sometimes property owners who are interested in selling simply need to be approached.
- 8. Consider working with maintenance providers** to provide a discount program if multiple properties commit to a service agreement. And ensure the Town is doing its part to maintain the public realm.
- 9. Share best practices** on leasing and building configuration/condition improvements, including new approaches that have emerged or gained popularity post COVID. In some case, improvements that generate energy efficiency may be eligible for grants or rebates.
- 10. Promote/praise and acknowledge** the specific work of landlords who are keeping their buildings in good shape, making improvements and being creative in solving problems.
- 11. Create a culture around pride of place**, even among property owners who are awaiting permits or in limbo about next steps. Doing simple things -- like keeping windows washed, trash out of vestibules and select building lighting operable -- will communicate care, security and stability.
- 12. Create a beautification / awards program by category:** most creative rehab, best lighting scheme, best window design, best landscape design, most sensitive treatment of a historic building, etc. and publicize the businesses/property owners who are working hard to shine.
- 13. Promote peer-to-peer learning and information sharing:** use committees and message boards for sharing resources on common issues: trash management; security lighting; marketing programs, etc.
- 14. If all else fails, be prepared to issue fines**, condemn buildings or explore eminent domain. While none is ideal, knowing that enforcement is in place may lead property owners to take some action over doing nothing.








# #IAMherst Welcome

Provided by SME Consultant Amherst Business Improvement District

Location Amherst MA



Origin	Amherst BID, Downtown Amherst Foundation, Town of Amherst, Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce
Budget	 <p>Low Budget: Materials \$15,000/ Graphics \$1,500 Marketing \$2,500</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Immediate impact but with a message that can and will continue long past the pandemic with simple alterations and replacements</p>
Risk	 <p>Every moment of this pandemic has been immediate and high risk for downtowns and Main Streets across the globe. There was never time, money or energy to waste.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Social Media reaction. Business stability. Consumer Confidence .
Partners & Resources	Tiger Web graphics, Downtown Amherst Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce
Diagnostic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amherst MA was effectively “shut down” 3 weeks prior to the Shelter in Place orders on March 13. The University and College with in 48 hours closed and sent their students, faculty and staff home, effectively removing close to 40,000 residents of our community. Our downtown and surrounding areas became a ghost town overnight. We did not see the robust summer that the “summer vacation destinations” enjoyed while case numbers were relatively low. Amherst business hovered at around 20-25% of previous years and our unemployment at an all time high of 22% in the State today remains at one of the highest at 5.1%.</li> <li>Consumer confidence during the pandemic with our student population and spikes had to be addressed as did the “anti-student” sentiment that continued to grow with each spike. The #IAMherst campaign addressed head on our demands that in our BID area masks were to be worn, distancing was to be respected and that we took this Virus seriously. Just as important to this messaging was that ALL are WELCOME in Amherst and that we are a strong, resilient, compassionate and open community to all residents.</li> </ul>
Action Item	Create a marketing campaign that can launch Amherst Wide on all available platforms addressing the immediate concerns of the pandemic while reminding all that we are welcome, safe and in this together.

## Process

- ① Identify the need for rebranding for Pandemic Life
  - ② Bring Tiger Web design team on board
  - ③ Start with key elements of 1.Mask 2. Hand washing 3. Social Distance
  - ④ Look to how to "lighten" and make less threatening
  - ⑤ Establish "emoicons"
  - ⑥ #IAMherst – borrowed from incredible ad campaign seen in Amsterdam
  - ⑦ Brainstorm of who "we are": Strong! Resilient! Etc.
  - ⑧ Maintain thread that We, YOU, I am/are WELCOME – keep in mind that we want this campaign to go past COVID-19
  - ⑨ Be able to separate with ease the COVID related parts. IE: hand wash, mask, distance
  - ⑩ Selfie Wall concept – large scale – find placement
- Distribution: 100+ Light post banners
  - Wear a Mask, Wash Your Hands, 6' Distance Posters in over 200 Amherst wide storefronts
    - Delivered with FREE PPE: masks, gloves, hand sanitizer
  - 12 Sandwich boards Amherst wide
  - 8 – 12' tall window "Selfie wall" I AM & Welcome Back facing UMASS campus
  - Continued Print and Social Media
  - 20+ Town Ambassadors promoting mask awareness, health and safety wear the "I AMherst" shirts

Continued messaging and support with and for businesses that Amherst businesses take this pandemic seriously, we take safety measures, we support you and are grateful that you support local business.





## Post Pandemic

- The #IAMherst campaign will continue post pandemic with timeless messaging that our community both visitors, residents, students and passers through are WELCOME
- The Campaign serves this community through uncertain and certain times and maintains a positive, happy and heartening message for all when in our downtown.
- The mask, hands and distance signs will outlive their relevance but the #1 AM signs will continue to serve our area with bright, open messaging






**Takeout & Delivery Options**  
Scan Image QR Code



**Support Local • Eat Global**  
amherstdowntown.com/takeout

*Fridge magnet QR code to current up to date list of dining establishments . 10,000 given out at start of fall semesters to UMASS & Amherst College students*



Origin	Established in 2019, the Retail and Restaurant Technology Initiative has piloted, vetted, and implemented its mission in partnership with Boston Main Streets Foundation, the City of Boston, and Citizens Bank. During the COVID-19 crisis we have quantified the significant impact of our program and are proud to promote the great diversity of participants.
Budget	 \$1,000-\$2,000 per site to design and build
Timeframe	 1-2 weeks for a website to be designed and built depending on complexity
Risk	 <p><b>Participant Limitations</b> – Project timelines are dependent on participant involvement. We use our screening process to make sure those chosen have the time and ability to commit.</p> <p><b>Language Barriers</b> – Language can present a challenge, but we have invested in translation services to keep our program available to businesses owners of different races and creeds.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Development time, online ordering/eCommerce integration, website traffic
Partners & Resources	<p><u><a href="#">Cambridge Retail Advisors</a></u> – Website design and development</p> <p><u><a href="#">Erin of Boston Photography, LLC</a></u> – Photography services</p>
Diagnostic	Websites are a pivotal gateway for businesses to reach out to the world, often serving as a centralized hub of activity. As part of this process, we provide expertise that has been refined through hundreds of builds. Our Rapid Website Development is honed and proven to deliver immediate digital transformation.
Action	Our website development program provides a fast and effective web presence for retailers or restaurants. We alleviate the major pain points of including technological hurdles and costs, and in less than 2 weeks create a platform to promote from and sell on. Websites not only serve as the face of an organization, but they also serve as a pivot point for most operations including marketing and sales. We're proud to offer this service and have many success stories from small businesses throughout Boston.

## Rapid Website Development



REVENUES  
& SALES

Provided by SME Consultant

Cambridge Retail Advisors

Location

Boston, MA

## Process

### Onboarding Phase

1. Explain the simple design process and benefits of the end website
2. Purchase the desired domain name
3. Set manageable goals with clear timeframes

### Discovery Phase

4. Gather content and determine look/feel for the website
5. Collect media such as photos and video *(Schedule photographer if required)*
6. Link Social Media *(if applicable)*
7. Link online selling platforms *(if applicable)*

### Review/Finalization Phase

8. Review website with business owner prior to publishing live
9. Publish site and encourage business owner to incorporate their new website into their marketing plan
10. Handoff website to business owner and encourage frequent edits!



# Redeveloping Underutilized Commercial Space



Provided by SME Consultant

Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Location

Various locations

Origin

Chris Kuschel, AICP and Ralph Willmer, FAICP

Budget



Low (staff time)

Timeframe



Long (3-5 years)

Risk



High (financial)

Key Performance Indicators

Adoption of zoning by City or Town Council/Town Meeting; assuming zoning is adopted, the transition of the site to new residential and commercial space

Partners & Resources

Municipal government planning staff, elected officials, licensing/permitting staff; local property owners, local residents, developers, attorneys, architects, engineers, landscape architects

Diagnostic

Within the Greater Boston region, there are 3,100 sites covering approximately 10.5 sq. miles in area. These sites are currently occupied by strip malls and related auto-centric retail, some of which can be redeveloped into more productive properties. As single-story, single-use structures with abundant parking, they are often under-utilized. Factors that are driving this condition include various demographic shifts, changes in personal shopping preferences, environmental considerations, and an increased attention to equity. COVID-9 has accelerated these changes.



## Diagnostic

These under-utilized developments present opportunities to activate the sites by creating a more vibrant place with multi-use structures that include both residential and commercial uses. Frequently, zoning changes are required to permit that more expansive range of allowable land uses. These sites can be further enhanced through design guidelines that encourage streetscape improvements, public open spaces and plazas, and landscaping.

The process for amending and updating zoning bylaws and ordinances can be a challenging one. The more successful efforts involve a robust community engagement process that includes a wide variety of stakeholders. These stakeholders can include municipal government planning staff, elected officials, local property owners, local residents, developers, and business owners.



## Action Item

In its role as the regional planning agency, MAPC regularly works with communities to promote Smart Growth and identify sites that have redevelopment potential. Once a site has been identified, it is important to review the existing zoning to ascertain if there are any barriers to redevelopment such as the uses allowed in the specific zoning district, dimensional regulations, parking standards, etc. In many cases, zoning amendments are required to encourage more efficient use of a site and better design than what had been previously allowed.

## Impact

Redevelopment could revitalize existing businesses, provide much-needed housing and enhance the surrounding neighborhoods.

Redevelopment offers the following potential benefits:

Preserving existing businesses

- Preserving active, vibrant businesses during the redevelopment is crucial

Ease of redevelopment

- Parcels are typically small enough that they can be redeveloped in a relatively short amount of time
- It can be easier politically to change uses and forms than single-family districts

Creating cohesive neighborhoods

- Multiple contiguous parcels can be redeveloped incrementally to enhance or create cohesive neighborhoods over the long term

Dior – Dedham near Legacy Place



Mashpee Commons

## Key to Success

### Local creativity

- Use local help: using local architects and attorneys allow a developer to navigate local politics and know what is expected
- Activate outdoor space: overcapacity of parking can allow surplus space to be used for food vendors and seating to activate space
- Break up big box space: breaking down large anchor space allows for more small local businesses

### Work with what exists

- When possible, work within existing zoning: proposing a development aligned with existing zoning could remove roadblocks
- Leverage existing planning studies: planning studies can provide a vision and market analysis for the area
- Have patience: long lead time and red tape can be daunting for a developer

## Process

### Local government

- Provide education to local property owners regarding opportunity and potential
- Help identify locations for updated planning and zoning for mixed-use development
- Work with property owners to identify barriers
- Connect developers with property owners on sites that help achieve the municipality's goals
- Ensure that there is a robust public outreach process to explain and advocate for the zoning changes including the use of graphic material that helps to visualize the proposed changes

### State government

- Incorporate analysis as part of scoring for various grant programs
- Utilize that analysis for infrastructure investments





## #2. Create a Pop-up Shop on Main Street

**Description-** This project aims to use an existing vacant storefront as a short-term testing space for small businesses (or other highly active organizations) that can help attract more visitors and long-term businesses to Main Street. In parallel, it will host a competition for artists to develop a concept for integration either as part of the pop-up shop facade or in a nearby designated area.

### PROJECT GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Fill existing commercial/cultural gaps downtown** (*public survey priority*)
- Increase visibility of Main Street business activity
- Attract long-term tenants and engage artists
- Test concepts that put Athol on the map
- Encourage more collaboration between business owners
- Increase activity in the evening

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		To be determined. Candidate locations include 491 Main St, parcel ID 030-235, hosting 3 store fronts (including Los Agaves Restaurant in one).
Origin		Eric Smith- Athol Planning Director, Mary Holtorf- Chair of the Downtown Vitality Committee (Committee members also reviewed project)
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000), includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simple facade and internal improvements/material costs</li><li>• Artist stipend</li><li>• Advertising</li><li>• Staff time for development of program conditions, application and review process, and implementation oversight</li></ul>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		Medium Risk – The project utilizes existing vacant property, so there is less risk associated with identifying or developing a long-term space. Some risk is involved in garnering participation by pop-up vendors/artists/services that the public may be attracted to. There may also be additional work/minor investment required in order to make the spaces usable and in keeping with safety/permitting requirements.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New visitors to downtown (perceived increase of activity),</li><li>• Increase in monthly sales of nearby businesses</li><li>• Increased formal interest in long-term usage of space by potential business owners</li><li>• Participation level of people of various ages in art project/competition</li></ul>

## Partners & Resources

Partners- Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program, Downtown Vitality Committee, North Quabbin Community Coalition, DPW, Building inspector

### Resources-

- North Quabbin Loan Fund
- Mass Development Underutilized Properties Grant
- DHCD MA Development Initiative Program
- EDA Build Back Better Regional Challenge

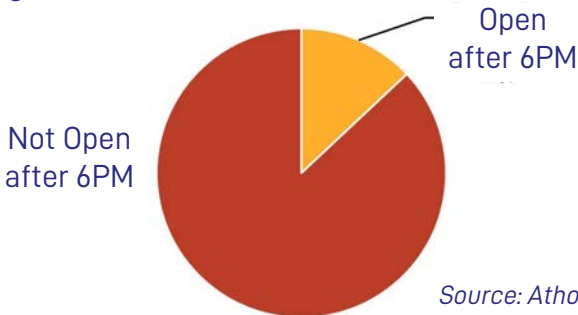
Other resources to support the project include:

- 'Placemaking Your Main Street- Connecting Community & Commerce Toolkit' (The Musicant Group)
- Article on 'Get Funded: Tips for a New Era of Placemaking Philanthropy' (Project for Public Spaces, January 17, 2020)
- 'How to Create a [Freespace] Toolkit' (Freespace)

## Diagnostic

A lack of visibility into Main Street's storefronts and lack of strong business connections with the street are key elements contributing to a general lack of vitality and energy downtown. This has been further compounded by new commercial vacancies as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, most businesses close by 6pm, leaving a significant gap of activity in the evenings. This has significant impact on the attraction of new potential business owners to available spaces.

### Operating Hours of Athol's Businesses



Source: Athol Retail Action Plan

Athol's economy has been relatively stagnant for many years but some COVID-related impacts on businesses were identified in the LRRP survey, including new costs incurred as a result of safety protocol, the closure of a long-standing, popular restaurant/pub, and even less perceived pedestrian traffic than was occurring pre-pandemic. One of Main Street's long-term active retailers is anticipated to re-locate in the near future, creating an additional gap.

A highly-visible project to boost the engagement of current business owners on Main Street and to attract potential business owners arose as an urgent priority throughout this process. New and different dining offerings, or a shop which hosts a cultural or recreational activity targeted to a wider audience would be welcome for testing out potential long-term pursuits that increase the reach of interest in visitors to downtown.

## Early Actions/Achievements to Date

In 2020, the Town experimented with a Mobile Market, and is currently completing the second year of it's Farmer's Market. These temporary offerings have been successful endeavors and are examples of smaller-scale business opportunities that can attract both locals and regional visitors.

The Town has also conducted early investigation into the Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program (MVSP), which may be an appropriate avenue for pursuit of this project. This program allows municipalities to apply to the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) for certification to designate a defined downtown or other commercial area, as a Certified Vacant Storefront District. After achieving such a designation, and achieving a commitment of local matching funds, businesses or individuals may apply to the EACC for refundable EDIP tax credits for leasing and occupying a vacant storefront in that district. This subsequent application is to become a Certified Vacant Storefronts Project.

### GROWING PLACES MOBILE MARKET



Do you know that all people who have SNAP also receive the MA Healthy Incentive Program (HIP) that doubles SNAP dollars when you purchase fresh local produce at certified locations like Growing Places Mobile Market?

All you need is to bring your SNAP card to the market!  
Households of 1- 2 people get \$40 , 3 - 4 people get \$60 and  
5 or more people get \$80 per month in HIP dollars.

**DATE:** Every Thursday starting July 23, 2020

**TIME:** 9:30 am to 10:30 am

**LOCATION:** Lord Pond Plaza Parking Lot  
Freedom St., Athol, MA



*Flyer for the 2020 Lord Pond Plaza Mobile Market*



*Athol Farmer's Market in Summer 2021 (Source: Mary Holtorf)*



## Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Identifying **which spaces** are the most appropriate for temporary occupation and which can generate foot traffic in areas it is most needed
- Determine whether an **open invitation** for businesses to occupy the space or selectively inviting businesses (whose services may be a good fit for the space) is more likely to secure commitment.
- 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**
- Identify the **people/organizations** who need to be part of this process.
- Identify both local and regional resources for **artistic talent** that could be solicited and likely to participate in an art competition.
- Develop an **engagement process** appropriate for the municipality and the required approval process.
- Once the pop-up shop has been implemented, **evaluate its success** to consider if it should be extended, or if interest from other businesses would warrant multiple pop-up shops to be tested with defined revolving periods. A public education program to inform people on a regular basis about the new offerings will be essential in building support and generating excitement.



*A unique mobile pop-up shop approach that may be another option for Athol to consider in a location alternative to a vacant storefront (Source: Sully's)*

## Process

### PHASE 1 (Month 1)

- Work with DPW/building inspector to finalize selection of suitable vacant property(ies)
- Work with DPW/building inspector to install signage regarding property access (e.g. 'no entry without town official', etc')
- Work with DPW/building inspector to identify simple physical improvements needed/possible for façade/interior that require minimal labor (e.g. updated paint)

### PHASE 2 (Months 1-2)

- Define a selection process and review committee (or designated reviewer(s))
- Prepare applications for both pop-up shop vendors and artist applicants
- Outline a written agreement that incorporates the "rules" of the pop-up shop (funding/service support, type of service permitted, hours of operation, duration of usage, property maintenance, restrictions on alterations, compliance with liquor laws, waste management, other ordinances, etc)
- Outline a written agreement that incorporates the "rules" of the art program (physical size of window display art space, location, stipend amount and conditions, media permitted, duration of art, IP/"ownership", etc)
- Advertise the opportunity in both local and regional media

### PHASE 3 (Months 3-4)

- Selection process to identify artist(s), vendor(s) and sign agreements
- Onboarding of vendors, tech assist on best practices for success (e.g. placemaking, signage, online presence, payment options, etc)
- Prepare space for occupation (sourcing volunteers, business owners, etc)

### PHASE 4 (Months 5-6)

- Launch pop-up shop and implemented art display
- Provide a place/source for public feedback
- Conduct periodic check-in with vendors and address any concerns
- Conduct "exit" process for vendors as part of compliance with written agreements (e.g. property returned to original state of condition, etc.)
- Post-evaluation by review committee/person(s) on success of project and potential (data gathering, informal surveys, etc)

## Project Element- Recommendations for Selection of Storefront

Focus first on locally-owned properties. There is a higher likelihood of participation from owners who are also community members.

Consider the storefronts that are in close proximity to struggling businesses and those that would benefit from the existing foot traffic near thriving businesses. Balance the selection of activation locations so that those visiting experience both thriving businesses and support struggling businesses.

Recruitment of landlords and storefront owners can happen before recruitment of activations. Knowing what types of spaces are available will draw more place-based responses for use. There is the added benefit of getting an early understanding of what landlords are willing to host.

## Project Sheet Element- Recommendations for Securing Landowner Buy-In

Encourage property owners that we are all in this together. This is a time for them to demonstrate that they are a true partner in the success of the City as a whole. Communicate that this is a way to meaningfully enhance the reputation of the building/landlord as one who cares about and supports their community.

Pitch it as marketing their leasable space. A successful program undoes itself - the temporary uses boosting foot traffic to their space, generating leads for new tenants and resulting in new leases. The value statement to them for why they should allow low or no-cost use of the space is that this use does not preclude them from seeking out permanent tenants and activates a space that wouldn't have been generating revenue during this time anyway.

Provide financial incentives to support the building owners (especially the first one as a proof of concept to attract others), such as:

- \$500+ temporary use fee for the first landlord
- Waiving the fees of any permitting
- Voucher to artists/entrepreneurs to procure space to look more like a traditional lease
- Cultural Council Grants
- Clearly communicate implementation and management strategies up front so owners feel comfortable.

## Project Sheet Element- Regulatory and Permitting Considerations

The time burden of a difficult regulatory process can prevent efforts like these from getting off the ground. From the city's perspective, they should look to create as easy of a process as possible that ensures people's safety. Whatever permitting that is needed should be blanket on the front end - ie once it's done at the start, that should cover everything for a while rather than having to pull permits throughout an engagement.

If using a third party, make sure as much of the burden falls on the third party who is holding the master use agreement/lease.

There may be two broad categories of use: exterior and interior.

- It can be challenging to use a vacant building that does not have a certificate of occupancy. If that is the case, target this location as an exterior-only activation (facade improvements through art, community messaging, local business owner highlights, etc.)
- If owner/landlord is looking to rent space but can't because of Covid/economy, a short-term internal use can be a win for the landlord and the community.

## SHOP SMALL AT STARLIGHT SQUARE

### POPPORTUNITY POP-UP SHOPS

Support Central's newest  
shops at Starlight Square

SATURDAYS + SUNDAYS  
12 - 6PM, WEATHER PERMITTING



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Cedar Ventures  
Mumus Pikliz  
ButtaH Beauty

ILoveFGC  
Mahogany Expression  
East Coast Store  
Jesse Haley  
Tokens of Light

Made by Carola  
Boston Artesanal  
Wes Leaf Design + Decor  
Ninawa Zero-Waste  
Cini's Coffee  
+ food by Carolicious

*Sample Public Advertisement  
for Larger-Scale Pop-up Shop  
Program (Source: Starlight  
Square)*



## Project Sheet Element- Recommendations for Recruitment and Activation of Selections

Make sure you have landlords committed to participate before starting the recruitment process.

Explore community needs through a survey: what are missing amenities/activities and see if those could be built into vacant spaces?

Simply upgrading the facade can have a big impact on the overall feeling of a street. A full activation is not always necessary. Colorful paint is probably the biggest ROI for a facade, window displays, art, and decals also are effective. If there is space for outdoor seating, that would also be a high ROI investment. (This applies to both vacant storefronts and existing struggling businesses. Outdoor space improvements provide dual benefit to the business and the community streetscape, which drives more foot traffic and thus more business.

### ARTIST RECRUITMENT

- Art Competitions require work in advance of compensation/reward. Best practice requires limited inputs of artist time on the front end (such as submission of prior work and qualifications) and production of new work once the opportunity is secured (ideally with compensation).
- Given the lack of participation to date, an alternative strategy to create more positive activity could be to focus on having the vacant spaces used as artist studios, rather than galleries. There is often a large unmet need for quality and affordable space for artists to make their wares, vs a very limited need for them to have space to display them. If Athol does not have many working artists in need of space they should promote it to neighboring communities and also consider providing micro grants to artists to set up their studios within the vacant spaces.
- Seek artists via social media groups (facebook, reddit, next door), art fair lists, neighboring community art commissions
- If an art in storefronts or mural approach is taken, directly commissioning a piece may be the better strategy than a competition given the lack of interest. Conversely, working with local schools and their art departments/teachers would also be a possible approach. This could also be an effective way to engage with youth who are downtown.

### OTHER NON-ART IDEAS

Exterior: Local Business spotlight - monthly local business highlight in store windows (owner, store history, etc.) This could be free advertising, or charge for it as a revenue stream. This helps local businesses and fosters community pride.

Exterior: Use facade/windows to connect to Pond Plaza initiative. Show large-scale project concept drawings and ask for public feedback (mailbox, website?)

Exterior: Create a connected piece that tells a story or is a riddle/scavenger hunt that gets people to walk the length of the town, visiting each of the storefronts.

Exterior: Holiday-based or event based window decorations. Get people back to see the updates each season.

Interior: Home businesses in need of space to assemble their goods or test out a physical sales location

Interior: Fitness clubs or social clubs (see example of Freespace below in Resources): a space for people to have micro gatherings, concerts, game nights, music lessons, indoor winter "park" space, lending library, movie nights with \$3 popcorn sales, etc.

Interior: Pay someone to organize micro events in one of these spaces



**A successful pop-up shop experiment in Peabody, Massachusetts** (Source: Patch News)

## Project Sheet Element- Recommendations for Implementation and Management

Create a low-barrier process for owner participation. Create a submission form requesting contact information, level and type of activity they are interested in (such as will they need a closed storefront or open to visitors, how many hours, time of day, days of week, etc.)

Given the low revenue generating potential, consider a third party management entity to hold a master use agreement or lease for the vacant properties and use their existing insurance capacity.

- The third party should enter into use agreements with the users of the vacant spaces that defines rules and regulations, but does not put the logistical or insurance burden on the landlord/owner.
- The third party could also cover utilities to lessen the burden even more for owners.
- The use agreement should stipulate a minimum and maximum of operational hours. (Though to start and when you are trying to build demand, being more flexible is probably best.)
- The use agreement should have clauses about what would trigger immediate termination of the agreement, such as uses you want to prohibit.
- The agreement should also define what the landlord will provide (access to the building, utilities, any FFE) and what the master agreement holder and end user will be responsible for providing.

Create a follow-up plan of regular check-ins with owner and lessee to ensure the use is complying with agreed upon parameters. Have a plan to shut down activations that don't follow the rules.

Determine ways to connect the storefronts together. Set up a temporary page on your website that has information about all of the storefronts participating. Create a QR code window cling to put up in each storefront.

Timing: Ideally you should be able to promise at least 60 days to make it worthwhile for the occupant and then have a rolling 30 day expulsion clause for no cause going forward to allow for the space to be rented.

## Potential Partners

A range of partners may provide resources of staff time, funding collaboration, contact lists and professional connections, data sharing, etc. Partners can provide guidance on the most viable type of business or service to occupy a pop-up shop, make connections with businesses and artists, and be champions in helping the project maintain momentum. A few potential partners have been identified below-



### **Project Sheet Element- Recommended Questionnaire/Assessment Process Prior to Project Initiation**

The following questionnaire/assessment will provide background of qualitative context for being able to identify the most appropriate type of business for the space-

- **Q1.** Who are your customers? List a few characteristics of a "typical" customer
- **Q12.** Where is your storefront? Where does your engagement with your customers start, where could it start? How do people arrive? Describe their journey during the 50 yards before they reach your storefront.
- **Q3.** After walking the journey to a storefront yourself, what are your observations?
- **Q4.** How do people hear about your business? Why do they come in?
- **Q5.** Do you have seating for people to wait, talk and connect? Is it comfortable? Is it in a location that supports your business?
- **Q6.** What is your lighting like? Does it focus attention on the things you want people to see? Does it celebrate borders and transition zones?
- **Q7.** How many things can visitors do outside your storefront? How many are related directly to your business? What other activities could be added to provide additional reasons to visit and linger?
- **Q8.** How are the 5 senses being engaged?

### **NEXT STEPS**

Recalling the journey that your customers take to your storefront and the experience they have when they arrive, what are the best locations to enhance? Consider: pathways, sight-lines, adjacent and nearby uses, and "empty" spaces.

Once the best locations for enhancement have been identified, how can you use one or more of the "6 Windows" to activate these within your storefront area in order to get customers to better?




What items do you need to make this improvement/experience available? What do you already own that could be easily deployed? Do you at least have enough to run a little experiment? There's no substitute for action, taking the first step (no matter how small!), and trying something out.

**The 2017 Downtown Athol Retail Assessment identified the following popular establishment types as not being offered in Athol. A public survey as part of this effort revealed the number of respondents (x%) who had a desire for some select potential businesses identified-**

- **Coffee shop (57%)**
- **Wider variety of restaurants with entertainment (64%)**
- **Outdoor dining**
- **Gift shop**
- **Pet supplies**
- **Bookstore (54%)**
- **Grocery Store (54%)**
- **Hobby Store**





Origin	Community group, artists collaborating with landlords to revitalize store closures due to impacts of COVID-19
Budget	 Low (<\$50,000)—utilization of existing artwork
Timeframe	 Medium-term – planning and implementation took 6 months
Risk	 Low Risk for project execution. However, connecting with absentee landlords will present difficulties.
Key Performance Indicators	Perceived street enhancements; No. of potential tenants engaged; No. of tenants signing leases
Partners & Resources	Town Administrators, City Departments of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts—including the Cultural Division, the Planning and Economic Development Department and the Department of Public Works, local landlords, potential tenants, arts organizations and artists

## Creative empty storefront treatments by Newton Community Pride’s WindowArt



Provided by SME Consultant

Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location

City of Newton (in two Villages)

## Diagnostic

Though the Covid-19 Pandemic more finely focused on the dilemma of empty storefronts, this is a continuous, if sometimes only temporary, negative situation in downtowns and commercial districts. Vacant stores are a glaring or at least front and center visible loss to a commercial area, block or building. And most landlords do the least effort to re-lease—simple signs, ads or word of mouth to existing tenants.

The issue is how to combine the needs of the commercial district to the resources available to be creative and commercially reinforcing. One thoughtful solution was by Newton Community Pride, a non-profit organization building community for all to enjoy through arts and culture programming.

The Newton Community Pride staff and board recognized the empty storefront needs of the City of Newton commercial districts. They also had an inventory of artwork by local resident artists.

They wanted to install artwork in as many empty storefronts as possible. However, it was challenging to ascertain landlord ownership especially with absentee landlords, as a they are a subgroup of landlords with less incentive to visually enhance their empty properties. They focused on identifying and working with various owners that they could,

After a short few weeks, Newton Community Pride installed a number empty storefronts with art.

## Context

- No matter how beautiful or historic a façade is, an empty storefront makes it an eyesore.
- Empty Storefronts are distractions from a vital commercial area or downtown.
- With no rent, revenue or relief, unless enlightened or visionary, a landlord usually does the least expensive solution like just paper in the windows, standard for lease signs, etc.
- Arts organizations, student artists and community artists have all assisted to make the empty stores more visually appealing.



*Vacant ground floor uses were mapped and space characteristics noted.*



*The vacant storefronts contributed to lack of vibrancy in the City of Newton's commercial districts.*



## Action Items/Process

- Document the empty storefronts in a particular commercial area. In the City of Newton's case, there are 13 separate villages with some commercial district located in eight (8) of them.
- Select focus areas. In Newton's case, focus was centered upon the greatest concentration of stores and empty storefronts.
- Identify landlords and reach out to landlords through cold calls, e-mails, and online and print publications. Persistence in reaching out seemed to payoff the most.
- To augment the "Call for Interested Landlords," Newton Community Pride used local media through press releases including The Boston Globe, local online publications, social media and their own website to communicate the program.
- Discuss and agree with landlords on the organization's approach to the empty storefront. Individual property managers made final decisions about what went where.
- Develop an approach to the installations or create an inventory of existing artwork by local artists. In this case, the artwork already existed and had been used as part of the previously funded Newton Community Pride program, FenceArt. FenceArt produced a juried "call to artist" that generated an inventory of artwork.
- All art was previously printed on vinyl banners, and this allowed for an easy installation behind storefront windows..
- The results of the initial effort were disappointing to the organization who desired much more landlord participation. However, the lessons learned here allow for future project application.



*Even the most beautiful block architecturally with wonderful historic detailing looks bad when the empty storefronts are empty.*



*Empty storefronts in a beautiful commercial block is like the missing tooth in the beautiful smile.*



## Process – Strategic Decisions

- Establishment of a collaborative network to discuss and share resources.
- Decide who are the key decision-makers of each project be they landlords, business associations, arts organizations, city agency, etc.
- Think innovatively, out of the box. In this case, the decision to utilize existing and available artwork allowed for several steps to be skipped in the process.
- Learning from this experience, in the future it would be desirable to have a City of Newton official agency to identify landlord ownership. In-turn, this would facilitate greater numbers of cooperating storefronts.
- Publicizing the successful projects to encourage more landlord/building owner involvement.
- Decision that the installed program should have a time limit for elements to be replaced.
- It was determined that this WindowArt Project was a part of the overall Covid-19 Program titled "Newton Al Fresco" that also included artist-decorated Jersey barriers, painted cable spools as side tables for benches for outdoor eating and individual murals.
- A related project to WindowArt and another creative Covid-19 response is an innovative new pilot program partnered by the City of Newton, the Town of Needham and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Project: Pop-Up*.
  - This will allow small retailers to access 1-3 storefronts in Needham and 4-5 storefronts in Newton at a significantly reduced cost.
  - The retailers, many of whom are currently operating primarily online, will have access to the commercial space for 2-3 months to introduce their businesses to a wider audience and will have access to a wide range of support services.



*Newton Community Pride Artwork Installation in Empty Storefronts*



Newton Community Pride energizing empty storefronts with artists' work (above); Articles about the program (below).

#### Community Corner

## WindowART To Fill Vacant Windows Around Newton

Newton Community Pride is trying something a little different this year and repurposing its FenceArt project.

Jenna Fisher, Patch Staff

Posted Tue, Apr 20, 2021 at 10:09 am ET | Updated Tue, Apr 20, 2021 at 12:46 pm ET

Like 15 Share

Reply

Newton Community Pride is trying something a little different this year and repurposing its FenceArt project. (Gloria Gavris, courtesy)

**NEWTON, MA** — If you've ever walked past a vacant storefront and felt a little hopeful about the potential that space has, you're not alone.

Newton Community Pride, a nonprofit volunteer group with a mission that includes beautification projects that support the community, decided to fill vacant windows with art.

NEWTON-TAB

## Newton Community Pride announces WindowART to fill vacant windows

COURTESY OF NEWTON COMMUNITY PRIDE

Published 9:15 a.m. ET Apr. 16, 2021

Facebook Twitter Email Print

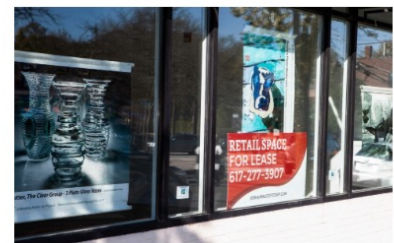


Newton Community Pride will host WindowART, a public art initiative to bring art to Newton's commercial districts.

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## Newton Community Pride Fills Vacant Storefronts With Artwork

By Julia Remick

April 25, 2021 Updated April 25, 2021 at 11:19 pm

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A photograph of a vibrant red archway in Mexico next to a red "for rent" sign draws public attention in an otherwise empty Newtonville storefront window. As a part of a new public art initiative sponsored by Newton Community Pride, vacant Newton storefronts will display professional artwork in an effort to beautify the city.




"It's a lovely opportunity to have shoppers and diners stumble across a beautiful piece of artwork, as opposed to brown paper cardboard or a for lease sign, so it makes a nice addition to our villages," Gloria Gavris, board chair of Newton Community Pride, said.

The project, called WindowART, incorporates the pieces from Newton Community Pride's annual FenceART project, including local artist Howard Fineman's "Nestled Arches, Mexico." This public art initiative is a submission-based competition that displays winning artists' work on fences throughout Newton, such as at the Newton Free Library and the Newton Senior Center. A jury of professional artists selects 20 submissions to be printed on vinyl banners and displayed throughout the year.

Newton Community Pride rotates the art among five Newton fences every 10 weeks, beginning in October and November, Gavris said. Submissions to the competition were open to artists who reside, work, or participate in art classes in Newton.

### Summary

- Think of the empty storefront as an opportunity for creative artistic expression to energize a storefront, block or commercial area.
- This allows the commercial building or district to take a negative and make it into a positive through visual enhancement while generating provocative conversation or even by creating a temporary art gallery.
- Partners are necessary so that collaboration can take place smoothly between the community agencies, business and arts communities.
- Publicize the activity. This draws community interest, reinforces artists' involvement and attracts potential landlord participants.

Origin	Fort Worth, TX; Austin, TX; Burlington, VT
Budget	 Medium cost, municipal staff participation/training and possible investment in permitting software
Timeframe	 Medium-term, will require changes to municipal review processes
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Number of permits reviewed and issued, length of permitting and approval process, collaborator level of satisfaction
Partners & Resources	Municipal departments, to include, but not limited to Planning, Police, Fire, Building, DPW, and Health, and Town/City Administration; DLTA funding to assess permitting
Diagnostic	<p>As downtowns emerge from the pandemic partners, collaborators and business improvement districts are eager to plan and hold pop-up (time-limited and purposefully impermanent) events, such as a pancake breakfast, to bring people back to these vital retail and commercial centers. In Springfield MA both the city and collaborators have been frustrated by the city's event permitting process and are eager to seize this moment to improve the process. Issues identified include: lack of an on-line event permitting process; requirement to pay fees using cash; necessity to make in-person visits to multiple city offices; time required, and confusion about the materials required to make the request. Springfield is in the midst of addressing this issue; <a href="#">Fort Worth TX</a>, <a href="#">Austin TX</a> and Burlington VT are Best Practice sites as they have implemented on-line relatively easy to navigate event permitting processes. Fort Worth has a robust on-line event permitting system that includes a downloadable manual as well as numerous topic specific PDFs and a phone number to call with questions and/or for additional information. Austin TX has created the Austin Center for Events, an interdisciplinary team to assist applicants through the event permitting process, and Burlington VT produced an <a href="#">exemplary manual</a> in 2018 that is referenced by most cities working on this issue.</p> <p>More efficient and easier permitting processes can lead to quicker turn-around and peace of mind for those organizing these events for the community and will increase the likelihood of such events happening and bringing people back to our city and town centers and other commercial districts. Implementing on-line permitting for local government is an appropriate and approved use of COVID recovery funds from the federal government so it is timely to advance this best practice.</p>

## Permitting Pop-Up Events



Provided by SME Consultant

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Location

Fort Worth, TX; Austin, TX; Burlington, VT



## Action Plan

Permitting a pop-up event efficiently requires municipal staff to differentiate permitting processes for permanent versus impermanent events. An important pre-requisite for a user-friendly efficient pop-up permitting process is a user-friendly municipal website. Making sure your municipal website is easy to navigate and includes a "How do I..." option is recommended because many applicants will come to the municipality not knowing where to start. Ideally the municipality will accept pop-up event applications electronically, and this may require new software, staff training, and updates to the existing municipal permitting processes; additional best practices are to identify a municipal staff person charged with helping applicants to navigate the process and including a flow chart or other visual display of the process. In Burlington VT the event permitting process is facilitated by an Associate Planner in the Planning Department but the approvals and permits are granted by the Department of Public Works (DPW), the entity responsible for streets and rights of way-the location where most events happen. In Fort Worth TX they have an Outdoor Events Manager to facilitate the process and they differentiate between neighborhood events (that require a one-page form) and larger city-wide events that require a 6 page form).

Just as many cities and towns have a Development Review Committee, made of municipal staff representing the departments that need to sign off on new developments (DPW, Planning, Building, Police, Fire, Health, Legal, Licensing), it is recommended that municipalities form a comparable pop-up event review committee. In Springfield this group is called the "Events and Festival Committee". Applicants visit this committee to propose pop-up events and receive preliminary approval, and then have to visit all the participating departments to receive their separate approvals. Stream-lining this process to move from paper to an electronic application would enable the Events & Festivals committee to forward their preliminary approval to all the relevant municipal departments clearly stating any necessary supplemental information required from the applicant. The applicant provides the necessary information electronically and the permit is issued.

Pop-up event applications can be simplified, but by their very nature are not simple and it may make sense to explain this to potential applicants. Applicants will need to explain where the event is taking place, provide a site plan, proof of insurance, and an operations plan. Fort Worth TX provides sample traffic plans and sample site plans as part of the application process on their outdoor events webpage.



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Home / Departments / Public Events Department / Office of Outdoor Events

## Office of Outdoor Events

Any outdoor gathering on public or private property that attracts more than 500 attendees, requires a street to be closed, sells food or beverages, or uses tents, stages, bleachers, fireworks, open flames or portable toilets requires a city permit. The rules also apply to parades, neighborhood events requiring the use of city streets, events in parks and some First Amendment activity.

Events conducted entirely on the property of a church, educational institution, college or university campus, or on property containing an occupied residence are exempt. Also, events per contracts with the City or at City-owned facilities and at the Texas Motor Speedway are exempt.

Event organizers are required to apply to the city within a lead time based on event size and purpose in order to obtain approval, be placed on the city's Event Calendar, attend the Pre-Event Committee Meeting and provide notice to surrounding property owners. Two committees are in charge of scheduling events, reviewing event plans and applications. The Event Calendar Committee includes city staff and representatives from Sundance Square, Downtown Fort Worth Inc., the Cultural District, Fort Worth South, the Chambers of Commerce and the Stockyards. The Pre-Event Committee includes city staff and representatives from Trinity Metro, the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission and various stakeholders. A designated employee from the City's Public Events Department will serve as special events manager to coordinate the process.

Please carefully read the guidelines below for **document submission deadlines** specifically for Neighborhood Events and Parades, Large Outdoor Events and Parades, and First Amendment activity.



### Contact Us

**Location**  
Fort Worth

### Ordinance

- [View the ordinance »](#)
- [View the latest updates »](#)  
(PDF, 86KB)

### Other

View information on Fort Worth street classifications in the [Master Thoroughfare Plan](#).

**Staff Contact:**  
Cynthia Alexander, Outdoor Events  
Manager  
817-392-7894

*Office of Outdoor Events, City of Fort Worth, TX*

<https://www.fortworthtexas.gov/departments/public-events/outdoor-events>

## Process

Permitting a Pop-Up event efficiently requires municipal staff (especially decision-makers) to believe in the importance and utility of pop-up events. Municipalities need a pop-up event champion(s) to secure the necessary human and financial resources to make these processes work efficiently and effectively. Consider reaching out to your BID or any existing business support organization if you are experiencing push-back from CEOs or other decision-makers. Investing in an on-line permitting software package and related training and web-site updates and refinements is the ideal process for facilitating pop-up events for larger municipalities hoping to host numerous events annually. Fort Worth TX is using Accela for their on-line permitting. The pandemic has taught cities and towns around the country that we do not need as much paper and in-person contact as we used to think we did and that we can conduct work on-line safely, securely and efficiently. Moving to on-line applications has increased employee safety, customer satisfaction and will facilitate pop-up events.

As identified in the Action Plan, the process to make pop-up event permitting more efficient is:

1. Assess your current situation: are your collaborators and affected municipal staff happy with the existing process? Identify 'pain points' and start improving there. Who makes decisions and why? Who is missing? And what can you learn from COVID innovations that can become permanent?
2. User-friendly municipal website. Fort Worth, TX, designed their page to have a landing page where you could easily find the documents and requirements of what was needed for special events. Additionally, a citation and link to the city ordinance is presented which establishes the justification for the requirements to follow.
3. On-line and/or e-permitting software. At a minimum accept applications via email, and consider investing in e-permitting software, especially after the pandemic as such investments by municipal government are an approved use of federal COVID recovery funds. [Accela permitting software](#) is being used in Fort Worth to process pop-up event applications.
4. Identify and publicize a Pop-up event coordinator. A municipal staff person or department needs to be identified as the primary contact for pop-up permits. The staff person assists the applicant with ensuring the review process is comprehensible and efficient and that all the requirements of the application are met. In Burlington, VT, the Associate Planner in the Planning Department is the facilitator of the application and process. In Fort Worth, the Office of Outdoor Events has a staff contact, an Outdoor Events Manager, who is tasked with facilitating the process of review and determining whether an application is for neighborhood events or larger city-wide events, which is determined in accordance with their City Ordinance.
5. Create a Manual that describes the process and publicize it widely and regularly. All three example cities have developed beautiful, easy to follow manuals that not only explain the local permitting process but also help applicants differentiate between the kinds of pop-up events possible and how to design and implement effective ones.
6. Provide sample documents. Fort Worth requires a site plan and offers a sample version on the permit website to make it easier for applicants to understand what is needed.



## Process (Continued)

7. Create a pop-up event permitting review committee comprised of the municipal staff representing departments that need to approve the permits: Streets (DPW), law enforcement and public safety, Insurance (Legal), Parks or Schools if not on the streets, and others as appropriate to your situation.

For municipalities not yet ready to move to an on-line permitting process, it is recommended that you mimic the effectiveness of on-line permitting in real life by forming a pop-up event review committee, similar to a Development Review Committee, with very clear guidance on all information required of applicants to host a pop-up event and commit to requiring no more than two meetings with the applicant: one for preliminary approval and the second to receive any information missing from the first visit. Each department that needs to sign off should delegate a pop-up event staff person and a back-up. Fees should be able to be paid using credit cards or other on-line payment methods.

Some additional resources utilized for this document and will be used to explore further recommendations for permitting pop-up events can be found here:

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission produced a Toolkit on "The Pop-Up Economy" that explains three different kinds of pop-up events: shops, events and planning, emphasizing the temporary nature of pop-up events and how cities and towns can more easily facilitate such happenings.

<https://www.dvrpc.org/reports/MIT026.pdf>



Source: Renew Newcastle

Origin	Renew Newcastle was an effort started by an urbanist and arts and events organizer to fill vacant storefronts with new creative industries in a post-industrial city.
Budget	 Medium
Timeframe	 Medium
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Number of vacant storefronts filled, number of tenants that went on to rent permanent space as viable businesses, stabilization and rise of property values, reduction in crime, economic benefit to the community
Partners & Resources	Organization that led creatives recruitment, landlord matching, and marketing, including events, City Planning Department (zoning), private funders to provide seed money for cleaning/maintenance of storefronts.

Connect artists, entrepreneurs, and makers/crafters with landlords to fill vacant storefronts and change Main Street image



CULTURAL/  
ARTS

Provided by SME Consultant

Susan Silberberg, CivicMoxie

Location

Newcastle, Australia

## Diagnostic

Newcastle is a post-industrial city 100 miles north of Sydney, Australia. In 2008, there were a significant number of vacant buildings in the downtown and 150 vacant storefronts on the mile-long stretch of the city's main street. Challenges were numerous:

- What industries could take the place of the former coal, steel, and shipbuilding center of the country?
- How could low property values and crime be addressed by recruiting new 21<sup>st</sup> Century industries to the city?
- What uses could fill vacant storefronts to give vibrancy to the street?
- How might a solution be scaled to make a difference in the image of the city and significantly reduce ground floor vacancies?

The project identified new “industries” to replace long-defunct economic engines in the city.



## Action Item

Through online searches, Marcus Westbury, the creator of Renew Newcastle, identified a significant number of creatives, artists, and makers living and working in and near Newcastle. By surveying those creatives about their space needs and interest in bricks and mortar locations downtown, he was able to identify a large need for space. After matching with landlords eager for even temporary tenants, the Renew Newcastle program slowly and steadily built momentum and a new image for the city...one of a destination for makers and creatives and their customers. The program focused new tenants in targeted areas and then staged events to draw attention to the businesses. The goals were to support creatives and help them transition to viable businesses and permanent space in the city.

Renew Newcastle set up 250 temporary projects in vacant properties and 1/3 of the projects become sustainable businesses. Of those, 81 of those enterprises became a viable business and permanently occupied their storefronts.

*In 2008, there were 150 vacant storefronts on the mile-long strip of the city's main street.*



Source: Renew Newcastle

*Five years into the program, the main street of the city boasted a density of creative uses and entrepreneurs.*



## Process

- Set up a non-profit with a board of directors that come from a wide range of backgrounds including local business, arts, community representatives. An alternative is to work under the auspices of an existing organization such as the BID, Main Streets Program, or local Chamber of Commerce.
- Survey local restaurants, artisans, makers, creatives (look on Etsy), to see who would benefit for having a temporary brick and mortar location in downtown.
- Assess ownership of all the vacant storefronts in downtown.
- Meet with planning department to discuss opportunities for temporary uses that would not require changing zoning or getting variances (avoid applications and formal legislative process as much as possible).
- Approach owners of vacant properties and ask if spaces could be “borrowed” on a very short-term basis for creatives to sell products.
- Use a Rolling 30-day license agreement.
- The Nonprofit or other entity manages relationship with property owners and works with the City to create a short-term agreement that avoids changing zoning.
- Nonprofit also carries insurance for all of the temporary projects.
- With temporary leases secure, clean up/renovate store fronts.
- Help local small business/artisans move into the spaces.
- When there are several storefronts occupied in one location, host events to garner attention.



Source for all photos: [www.edwinrichards.com](http://www.edwinrichards.com) Instagram: @edwinajillrichards

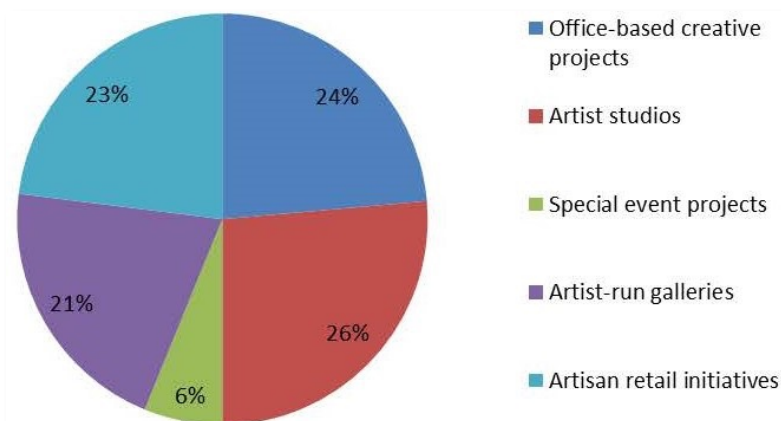
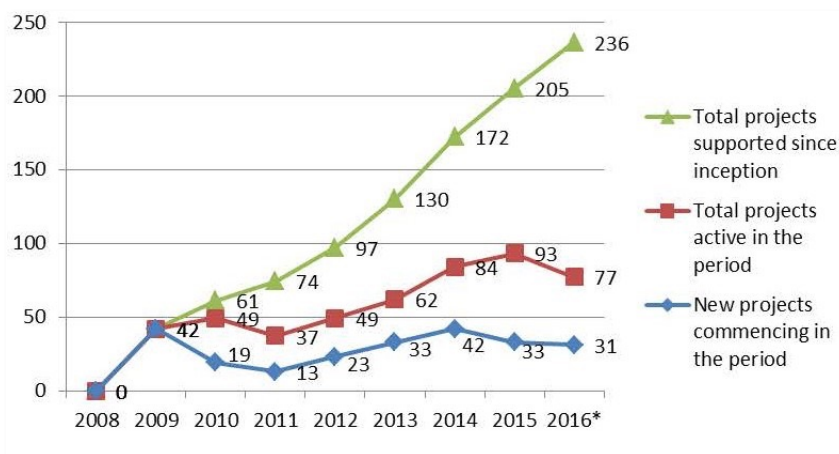
*Many of the artisans and entrepreneurs went on to rent permanent space.*

## Economic Impact to the Community

An economic impact study conducted in 2015-16 looked at the value of the following impacts:

- Creation of jobs and skills developed
- Conversion to commercial leases
- Volunteer engagement
- Mitigation of blight
- Improved business and community confidence
- Improved regional brand

It was determined that for the annual budget of \$208,000 Australian Dollars for Renew Australia, economic impact across the above areas was valued at a little over \$3m Australian Dollars for a benefit-cost ratio of 14:1.



	Estimate
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>\$208,000</b>
<b>Benefits</b>	
Creation of jobs and skills development	\$2,358,436
Conversion to commercial lease	\$191,828
Volunteer engagement	\$62,763
Mitigation of blight	\$100,698
Improved business and community confidence	\$55,183
Improved regional brand value	\$234,069
<b>Total Benefits</b>	<b>\$3,002,977</b>
<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURES</b>	
<b>Net Benefit</b>	<b>\$2,794,977</b>
<b>Benefit Cost Ratio</b>	<b>14.4</b>

Source: An Economic Evaluation of the Renew Newcastle Project, CofFEE, 2016

# Etsy



Source for all photos: [www.edwinrichards.com](http://www.edwinrichards.com) Instagram: @edwinajillrichards





## Interactive Storefronts: Engage Residents Through Artistic Installations in Storefronts



CULTURAL/  
ARTS

Provided by SME Consultant

Civic Space Collaborative

Location

Creative Commons storefronts at 554 Main St, Worcester, MA

Origin	During the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan (2020), Interactive Storefronts was created by Claudia Paraschiv, Adrienne Schaeffer-Borego, and Michelle Moon (Civic Space Collaborative), with Evelyn Darling and Andrew McShane (Worcester BID) and Hank Van Hellio (Worcester PopUp at the JMAC), and Courtney Truex (Menkiti Group).	
Budget		Low Budget (\$4,800): Full installation, including \$900 artist stipend and \$300 material budget for each artist/storefront
Timeframe		Short Term (6-9 months)
Risk		Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Transformation of empty storefronts; Increased foot traffic; Ongoing implementation of the storefront program	
Partners & Resources	Funding by Downtown Worcester BID and the storefront space's owner, the Menkiti Group, with instrumental support from Hank Van Hellion of Worcester PopUp at the JMAC. The Downtown Worcester BID oversaw the installation days and coordinated directly with the artists.	
Diagnostic	<p>Interactive Storefronts were a direct response to the shifting COVID-19 landscape, where social distancing was a key factor to maintain public health, yet engaging the community in public processes remained an important goal.</p> <p>The Interactive Storefronts operated simultaneously with an online survey and the development of a Downtown Placemaking Plan. Interactive Storefronts enabled civic art for public engagement in a creative and safe manner according to current COVID-19 best practices for public safety. Staggered installation times and viewing art through a storefront was a COVID-friendly activity. The use of photography, social media, and QR codes were engaged. The project helped bring art to a diminished Downtown, support a local artist community, and engage residents in a planning process while maintaining public health.</p>	
Action Item	<p>Interactive Storefronts enlisted local artists to engage residents in feedback for the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan and enliven downtown storefronts in anticipation of the Creative Commons at 554 Main Street. Residents and Downtown visitors were able to view the public process of the placemaking and beautification survey unfold in-person. Over several months the Interactive Storefronts traced the survey progress from survey questions, to community answers, and finally to proposed public space placemaking interventions.</p> <p>The goals of the project included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging residents to enjoy public art in Downtown Worcester.</li> <li>• Encouraging residents to provide input toward the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan in a real physical space, and to interact with the installations through photography and social media.</li> <li>• Motivating residents to access the full placemaking survey via QR codes.</li> <li>• Supporting the local artist community, especially emerging artists, while keeping opportunities for engagement alive during COVID-19.</li> <li>• Prototype Interactive Storefront Art for future iterations.</li> <li>• Creating public art while maintaining safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>	



## Action Item (Continued)

The storefronts featured temporary installations from August to December 2020 with a rotation of three phased installations:

**Phase 1:** Placemaking survey engagement to prompt people to take the online survey (with a QR code) and respond to a question on site through safe interaction.

**Phase 2:** Survey results to communicate primary survey results to the public.

**Phase 3:** Placemaking proposals to illustrate primary placemaking interventions coming to Downtown Worcester.

Artists creatively brought empty storefronts to life and engaged residents to participate in a placemaking survey with such novel artistic strategies as creating a “mirror” to show who Downtown Worcester is and encouraging viewers to take a photo for themselves and post on social media.



*Interactive Storefront Installation Phase 1 (Survey Questions) by Joshua Croke*

## Process

### Planning

In Worcester, the Interactive Storefronts served multiple purposes: engaging the community to participate in the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan, activating empty storefronts, supporting the local artists community, and keeping public health as a priority during Covid-19. The Interactive Storefront Committee emerged from these desired outcomes. Our Interactive Storefront Committee met weekly for several weeks and communicated by email to get from concept to implementation efficiently.

It is important to engage the community around a common issue: Identify a local policy, public realm / placemaking, or community / environmental issue that would benefit from creative community engagement. For Worcester Interactive Storefronts, the project engaged residents to participate in a survey for the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan.



*Interactive Storefront Installation Phase 2 (Survey Answers) by Joshua Croke*



## Process (Continued)

### Create an Interactive Storefront Committee:

Identify one to three local groups to help shepherd the project. In Worcester, the collaborative efforts between Civic Space Collaborative, the Downtown BID, the building owner, and local Worcester PopUp covered all the necessary needs for a successful project. Local groups should have expertise, connections, and missions around local placemaking, creative endeavors, community building, or particular issues as they relate to the policy issue to be addressed. For instance, if the goal is to inform residents about sea level rise, then a local nonprofit focused coastal clean-up may be a good partner.

### Identify a Project Lead, clarify roles for the Committee members, and create a project implementation timeline, and clear budget.

The Project Lead is responsible for overseeing the Call for Art, shepherding the selection process, and aiding the implementation. The Lead can be a member from the Committee, or a hired local with an interest in civic and/or artistic engagement and can themselves be an artist. Civic Space Collaborative led the initial process including the Call for Art, and up until the artist selection, and then wrote the artist prompts for Phases 2 and 3 based on survey responses and selected projects. For implementation, the local Worcester team (Downtown BID and Worcester PopUp) took over to support on the project on the ground. This was a successful transition of leadership that strengthened the relationship between local institutions and individual artists and built local capacity to create similar projects in the future.

**Identify location(s):** Identify visible and accessible empty or underused storefronts for the art-work. Note that underused means that, while the space may have a tenant, the tenant might not have the ability or inclination to outfit their public facing storefront and may benefit from the artistic installation. In Worcester, the Interactive Storefronts served the plans of the building owner to create an artistic hub in the future, Creative Commons, as well as the goals of the rest of the Committee. Ideally, finding shared goals is important, but equally effective is using a storefront activation to serve multiple discrete goals.

### Build and support the local artist community:

One of the goals of the project is to help build up the local artist community. To create a more supportive and inclusive process, the Call should clearly favor local artists, and it should be accessible to artists at different levels of their career, especially beginning, and of varying degrees of proficiency in English, technology, or other barriers to applying. The Committee Members should be comfortable acting as support to the artists. In Worcester, four artists participated over the course of seven months as they activated the storefronts and were involved in the civic process of the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan, the Covid-19 response of bringing art Downtown, and building community with each other.



Artist: John Vo, Phase 3 (Public Space Interventions)



Artist: Pamela Stolz, Phase 1 (Survey Questions)



## Process (Continued)

### Call for Art + Artist Selection

**Issue a Call for Storefront Art:** Gather all the partners and create a mutually beneficial plan outlined through a “Call for Storefront Art.” Choose an agreed upon digital space such as Google Drive or email to collect the information. The Project Lead should keep all discussions, drafts, and ideas in one organized space. Translate the Call into different languages to reach immigrant communities. Determine a feasible schedule that keeps momentum but is do-able for artists and the Storefront Art Committee. Distribute important technical information to aid artists in their application regarding any restriction on materials or media (for example: specify only non-toxic, sustainable, recyclable materials), whether the installation would be on the exterior of the storefront (as a painted mural) or on the interior (as either a painted mural or a multi-media installation), availability of electricity, and dimensions of the storefront window and space for the installation.

**Support artistic freedom in public art:** Art is meant to hold up a mirror to society, to lead the viewers to question assumptions, and to provoke. Too often, art that is curated by a committee becomes a watered-down version of itself. Make a commitment to each other and to artists that they have artistic freedom and will be judged on excellence of vision and craft, rather than on an unspoken censorship of pleasing the least common denominator.

**Distribute the Call for Art:** Distribute the call through all available channels such as: email networks of partners, municipal networks, social media, e-newsletters, newspapers, targeted emails and phone calls to specific artists, and flyers at schools, libraries, coffee shops, and other hubs of foot traffic. Create an opportunity for an online information session where artists seeking to submit applications can go over the Call step by step and ask questions. In Worcester, the information session was well attended by over a dozen artists who asked clarifying questions about the Call for Art and better understood the requirements and the process. Even during times where in-person gathering is safe, an online information session is convenient and can be viewed on people's own schedules. Ensure the info session is recorded for those who cannot attend.

**Select the artist(s):** Determine a Selection Committee, review and selection process, and timeline to select the artist(s). A good process includes allowing each committee member to review the submissions before coming together to review and select. For Worcester, the Committee was able to efficiently and unanimously select artists over an online meeting. Immediately following the meeting, email every applicant whether they were selected based on clear selection criteria.



Detail of artist: Pamela Stolz, Phase 1 (Survey Questions)



Detail of artist: Eamon Gillen, Phase 1 (Survey Questions)



## Process (Continued)

### Installation + Removal

**Preparing for Installation:** The client and artist should sign contracts and be clear about expectations soon after selection that outlines the deliverables, time, and payment amount. In addition, discuss need and coverage of insurance. In the case of Worcester, the building owner provided insurance coverage for the artists during installation, as well as for the artwork.

**Publicize and promote the installation:** Distribute press releases, post in eNewsletters, and on social media about the installation. The Worcester BID and Civic Space Collaborative worked to develop the materials and publicize the project.

**Installation day and events:** Determine appropriate times and a timeline for installation. If social distancing is required, then stagger installations of multiple storefronts. If the installation is entirely from the interior, then public viewing on the installation day can still follow public health social distancing guidelines. If social distancing is no longer required, then installation day is a good opportunity to engage the local community by providing a local ambassador to speak with the public about the goals of the project. In the case of Worcester, we maintained social distancing as was necessary for public health. Each artist had a set time for the installation and a BID staff member met the artist on site. The installation is also a good opportunity to hire a local photographer to document the process and any events.

**Help visitors view and understand the storefront art:** Provide simple, legible information about the purpose of the installation and a bio of the artist(s) on site, and to translate the information as appropriate. A QR code is an effective way to connect interested viewers with more information. At the Worcester Storefronts their signs about the survey with QR code and website links posted for the Phase 1 installation.

**Removal of installation:** In few cases, the artist can save the installation for another purpose; however, in most cases, the installation will need to be removed and properly disposed. Recycle as much as possible, for instance in the case of fabric art installation, use textile recycling. In the case of paint on glass, use a bladed paint scraper to remove all paint without getting it into the storm drain system. If the paint is stubborn, spray the on the glass mural/paint with a mixture of warm water and acetone at a 1:1 ratio, soaking the scraper in the mixture prior to scraping. Keep a trash barrel close by to toss the paint chips and a broom and dust pan to sweep up and properly dispose of paint dust.

Following this Storefront Installation the BID installed a snowflake installation in winter 2020-2021 and is working on larger storefront installation in 2021.



Artist: Eamon Gillen, Phase 1 (Survey Questions)



Artist: Eamon Gillen, Phase 2 (Survey Answers)



Artist: Eamon Gillen, Phase 2 (Survey Answers)





## Supporting Entrepreneurs and Commercial Landlords with Pop Up Business Activations




TENANT  
MIX

Provided by SME Consultant

Jeanette G. Nigro, Perch Advisors

Location

Various Locations [[New York City ]

Origin	Project was created within ideation of the NYC Department of Small Business Services and ChaShaMa, property owners, and business owners, along with community orgs such as BIDs
Budget	 Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000) – Project required dedicated staff and project subsidies
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) – Program launched within 90 days; space is generally tenanted for 30 – 60 days maximum
Risk	 Low Risk – Landlords with existing empty space offer short term opportunities with no permanent build out or commitment
Key Performance Indicators	Temporary commercial vacancy reduction; business increase in sales; businesses accessing space
Partners & Resources	NYC Department of Small Business Services, ChaShaMa
Diagnostic	<p>With an increased amount of vacant space in New York City during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City partnered with ChaShaMa, a not-for-profit that generally offers space to artists, to create short term opportunities for businesses to test out a brick-and-mortar location in commercial areas across the city.</p> <p>This creates opportunity to liven commercial districts with new, short-term businesses, helping landlords to activate their unused space, make the street feel more alive, create increased opportunities for commerce for small, minority and women-owned businesses, and provide no-cost space to businesses otherwise unlikely to be able to afford commercial rents in high traffic commercial corridors.</p> <p>Challenges of this program currently being addressed are ensuring businesses have commercial storefront opportunities once the no-cost space has ended; supporting businesses with technical assistance such as access to capital and finding affordable, permanent space, and sustainable resourcing of the project for the long term success of small minority and women-owned businesses.</p>
Action Item	<p>Storefront Start-Up is a partnership between a not-for-profit community organization that typically supports artists in accessing work and exhibit space and the NYC Department of Small Business Services to support minority and women-owned businesses in accessing free storefront space (avg 30 days) in high traffic commercial areas.</p> <p>The non-profit or municipal partner can begin by evaluating vacant space in their commercial corridors and contacting property owners to determine their interest in short term space leases. The organization will have to determine if they can cover necessities for opening a commercial space (such as utilities and wifi) or if a landlord would be willing to provide short term access to these services.</p> <p>Simultaneously, the lead partner can connect with local businesses in need of space through social media marketing (no to low cost), partnerships with local business serving organizations (such as SBDC's, chambers of commerce) and begin to create a database of businesses interested in short term commercial leases. Essentially, building both the space and potential tenants together will help launch the matches efficiently and quickly.</p> <p>The lead organization should also determine business priority – is the program focused on women entrepreneurs? People of color? Create an evaluation tool to match businesses with respective spaces based on a set of priorities.</p> <p>Businesses should receive operating guidelines, a MOU to discuss what they can and can't do with the space, their responsibility to the program, and how long the term of the space use is.</p> <p>The lead organization should provide as much support to both the landlord and tenant as possible and consider connecting with a local technical assistance provider to help the business leverage the storefront opportunity to their long-term growth.</p>

## Process

- Determine the strategy to support businesses – are you focused on serving a specific demographic (ex. Women-owned businesses) or sector (retail, design)
- Decide on a criteria on how businesses will be selected for space
- Research and identify vacant storefront properties in communities, particular those commercial corridors that may have high current vacancy rates. Local BIDs or DIDs can help identify vacant properties.
- Connect with property owners of vacant spaces to determine their interest in short-term no-cost lease opportunities, and if so, their terms of use.
- Create a database with notes and updates on available properties and interested businesses.
- Create a standard Memorandum of Understanding to be used as a baseline of agreement between the organization, the property owner, and the business owner. For example: how long will the space be used? Who will pay for buildout costs (if any)? Who will cover utility costs?
- Begin to match businesses with potential vacant spaces. Determine how far in advance businesses would need to be "occupancy ready" and how long landlords would need for the property to be considered "move in condition"
- Support both the business and property owner with the transition into the space; troubleshoot any issues in real time to mitigate any future problems or miscommunications
- Create social media and marketing opportunities to businesses to let people know they will be in the activated space, with plenty of lead up marketing prior to the move in date
- Determine further support for the business after the space agreement has expired, if any








## #3. Conduct an Audit of Existing Zoning and Update Design Guidelines

**Description-** Zoning audit and update of design guidelines to better accommodate appropriate uses downtown and create consistency with the built fabric to support Athol's long-term development vision.

### PROJECT GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Increased stewardship of existing business owners** (*public survey priority*)
- **Zoning that better accommodates appropriate downtown uses** (*public survey priority*)
- Better Accommodate Appropriate Uses Downtown
- Create Consistency with the Built Fabric to Support Athol's Long-Term Development Vision
- Consistency in the character of storefronts and signage
- Reduction of unnecessary parking requirements for development

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Not applicable but targeting the study area, generally
Origin		Eric Smith- Athol Planning Director, Mary Holtorf- Chair of the Downtown Vitality Committee (committee members also reviewed project)
Budget		<p>Low Budget (Less than \$50,000*), includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff time for review and oversight of process, as well as potential board approval of recommended changes</li> <li>• Potential hiring of a consultant for a formal zoning review and technical memo outlining recommended adjustments</li> <li>• Potential hiring of a consultant for development of a formal design guidelines document</li> <li>• Hiring of a business liaison to bridge the communication and stewardship gap between the town, business/ landowners, and enforcement.</li> </ul> <p>* It should be noted that costs are dependent on how illustrative the Town wants the design guidelines/sign code to be. A smaller update would be in the range of \$25,000-\$60,000, depending on whether the Town wants to address design guidelines and sign code in one project.</p>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)

## Risk



Medium Risk – Some changes will result in properties not being in compliance with either land use and/or design condition. A careful approach needs to be designed to address how to transition them into compliance, particularly where existing non-compliance is not required by law to be changed. Potential significant changes since the last outdated set of design guidelines will require stronger enforcement support and potentially ongoing design guidance to property owners/ developers and closer, frequent monitoring to establish a new set precedents.

This project has a caveat that there is no incentive for immediate improvements absent an application for approval, and that widely-visible improved changes to the physical appearance of downtown's facades, generally, will take time. A façade/storefront improvement program may be beneficial for setting the stage and generating initial interest.

### Key Performance Indicators

- New developments in either concept or planning stage based on opportunities provided by re-zoning within one year of adjustments
- Design guidelines established prior to formal pursuit of developments in existing available areas of downtown
- Enforcement/repair of a priority list of design elements that are outdated/in a poor state of repair within 6 months
- Increased visibility of consistency in the designed environment of downtown within one year of implementation of guidelines

### Partners & Resources

Partners- Board of Planning and Community Development, Zoning Board of Appeals, Landowners, Building Enforcement, Historical Commission, Downtown Vitality Committee, Zoning Bylaw Review Committee, Board of Selectmen

Resources-

- North Quabbin Loan Fund
- American Rescue Plan Act (ARP or ARPA) (fund business liaison position for first few years)
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth:
- Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000)
- Community Planning Grants (project limit \$25,000-\$75,000)

## Diagnostic

The Town's zoning bylaws were established in 1965 and were most recently revised in October of 2020. Currently, the bylaws do not entirely align with the Town's desire for appropriate mixed uses in the downtown to help advance the town's economy while sustaining its historic character. As such, a balanced mix of appropriate uses is not supported. With impacts of COVID-19 on business activity downtown, business owners and developers need to be equipped with the tools that will help shift the balance of risk for people considering opportunities for investment in Athol.

Some of the challenges identified in recent analyses of the bylaws include:

- The boundary of the Central Commercial Area does not extend to areas considered as part of the downtown area
- The Commercial District doesn't accommodate necessary mixed-use housing to be able to fill the local needs identified. Several buildings in the CA which could potentially accommodate housing are not in a condition to do so (e.g. no existing elevator access to upper floors).
- Some required uses not in keeping with town's geographic context
- Parking requirements are too high for some uses considering Athol's density and vast existing supply of parking spaces

In addition to the zoning bylaws, very outdated town design guidelines (last updated in 1997) have contributed to a lack of cohesion and investment in some of downtown's areas, as well as a lack of enforcement. As such, diminished stewardship and cooperation between landowners has resulted in several downtown properties or highly-visible design elements falling into conditions of disrepair or have been designed out of sync with the town's unique character.

Although the design guidelines (excerpt included on the following page) outline general best practice principles, experience shows that Athol is in need of stronger clarity and more detailed specifications to achieve a more uniform and distinct designed environment to help highlight its historic past and pride.

In combination, amended zoning bylaws and updated design standards should be aligned in intent to support the Town's long-term goals of smart development and historic preservation of character.

\*Note: The Town may also wish to consider a supporting façade/storefront improvement program. A zoning change alone will not establish a requirement for changes.. Enforcement of substandard existing conditions will only bring them up to building code requirements.



This excerpt from the current Downtown Design Guidelines (1997) demonstrates that there is opportunity to increase clarity of some design components, such as regarding size, or guidelines for electronic signage, to better streamline the appearance and quality of the built environment downtown.

## Signs

Signs are a vital part of any Main Street and is often a customer's first introduction to a business. A sign calls attention to a business and creates an individual image. Well-designed signs add interest and variety to a building's facade and enliven the street scene. Poorly designed signs confuse customers and detract from an otherwise attractive storefront. The most compelling and legible signs are often not the largest, the brightest, or the most clever. In a cluttered downtown environment, restraint may be a more effective way of capturing attention.

The sign is an inexpensive place to begin projecting a store's image, through careful selection of materials, typeface and color. Good sign design considers all the following factors: layout and composition, materials, color, size, graphics, typeface and installation. The best signs deal with these issues in a way that is compatible with the design and materials of the buildings on which they are placed. Also, regularly maintained, properly lighted signs are generally known to attract more positive attention. Correctly installed signs will present a harmonious appearance while serving to the commercial district's overall image as well.

1. When a building facade contains a "sign band" or panel to carry a sign (usually above the storefront), locate a flat sign in that space.
2. Align multiple signs on a building and with adjacent and neighboring buildings.
3. Signs should blend with the architecture and not hide or cover detailed elements which maintain the building's design integrity.
4. When signs share a building, coordinate the shapes, materials, colors, typefaces, and graphics.
5. Three dimensional signs (carved wood and raised letter signs) are encouraged.
6. Signs should not hide architectural detailing such as cornices, moldings, and decorative trim.
7. Signs should be properly installed. Hardware should be either shielded from view or selected as an ornamental design feature.
8. Sign messages should emphasize business identity: name and principal product. (No name brands unless it is the business specialty).
9. Use logos where possible; "one picture is worth a thousand words."
10. Merchandising and advertising messages should be in temporary displays, not in the sign. (Example: Pepsi, Coca-Cola, etc.) Telephone numbers should not be displayed on the main sign. Smaller window stenciling may be more appropriate.



## Early Actions/Achievements to date

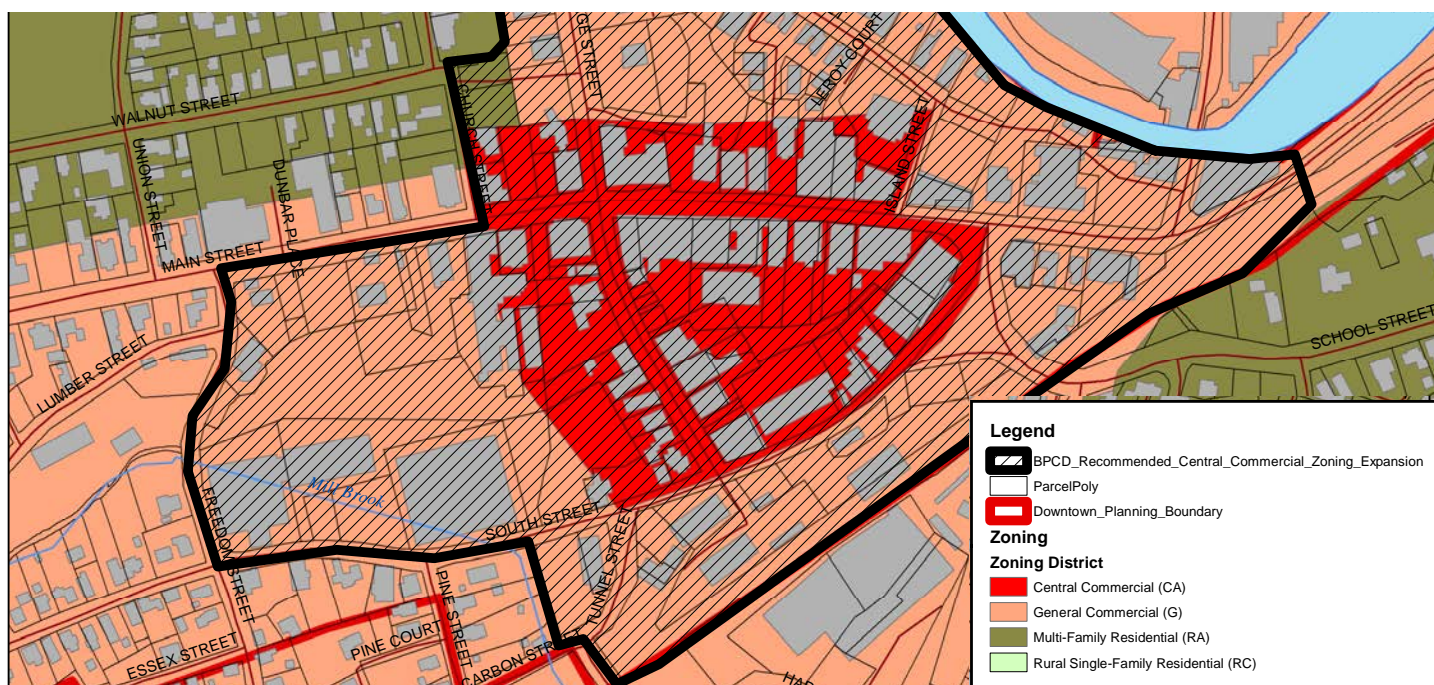
The Town's zoning has been the subject of recent analysis and efforts, including a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) conducted by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) in 2017, which recommended that the Commercial Area (CA) be expanded and that on-site parking requirements in this zone should be reduced to include only single businesses of 5,000sf or more.

The Town has recently been reviewing their zoning for the Downtown area and identified various specific areas to be addressed. Future reviews as part of this project can build on the discussions had, to date, as well as reference Athol's Community Development Strategy (draft, 2014), which outlines a goal *"...to upgrade the Zoning bylaw using Smart Growth planning, i.e., complementary strategies that incorporate land use, economic development, preservation of resources, and other planning strategies."*

The following objectives were also defined, which can inform the recommended zoning updates as part of this project:

- *Re-evaluate zoning language for Central Commercial District (downtown), particularly in regards to signage and aesthetics*
- *Upgrade the Athol zoning bylaw - including rezoning to accommodate industrial and business growth, preservation of rural character and strengthening of the Town's tax base*
- *Limit the extension of water and sewer infrastructure to areas planned for growth and development*

The Town is also currently working with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission on efforts that can influence/update the sign code.



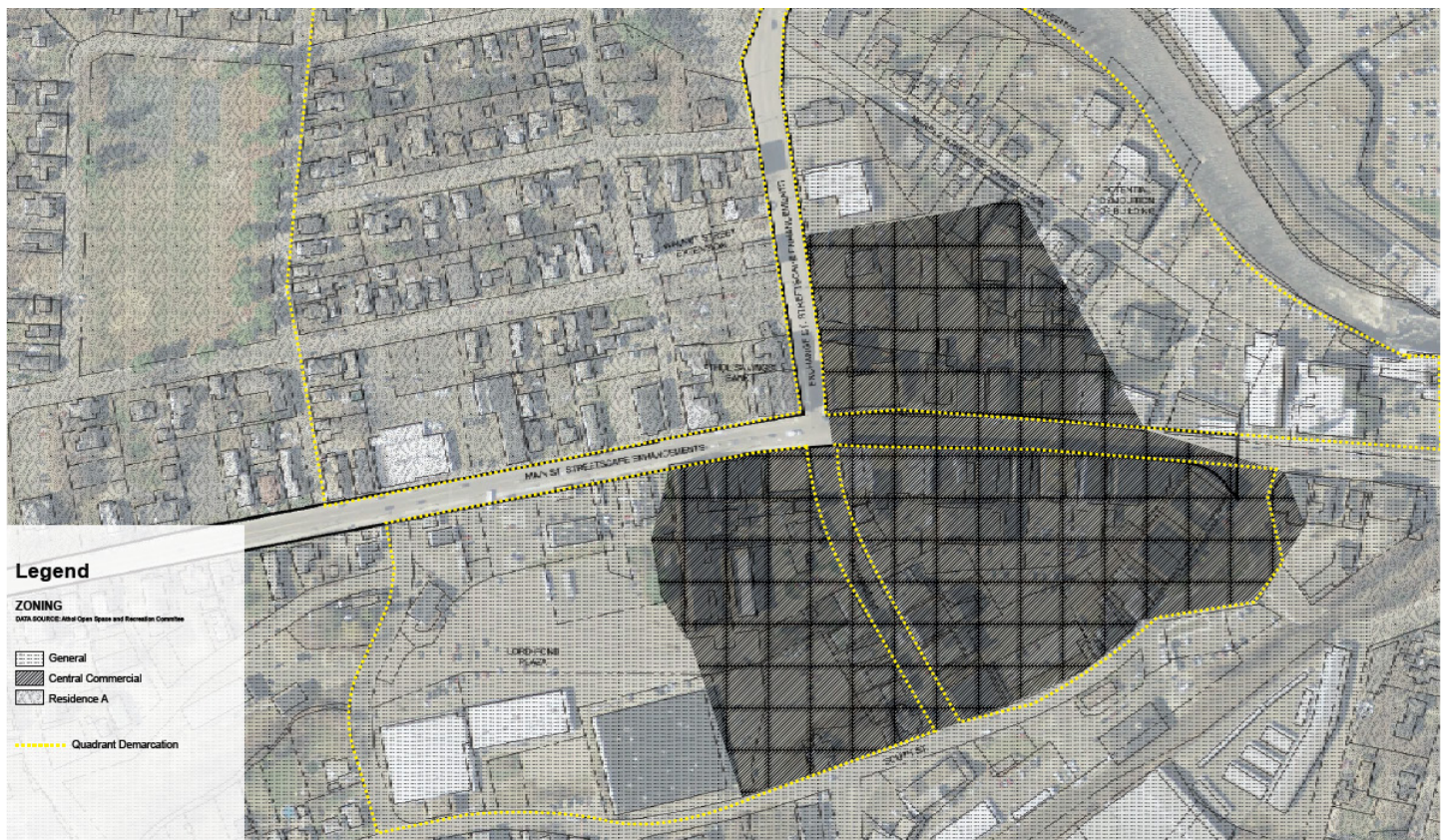
**Map of a potential expanded Athol Central Commercial Zoning District as recommended by the Town's Board of Planning and Community Development** (Source: Town of Athol)



## Action Item

Key activities for this project include:

- Defining roles and responsibilities of a business liaison position and whether to hire internally or externally
- Engaging appropriate departments and cross-coordinating to align zoning, design guidelines, and other related documents. Prioritization of a defined set of action items and responsibilities determined through a collaborative effort between the town and other appropriate parties.
- Hiring consultants to develop technical memos for both zoning review and design guidelines recommendations
- Public meeting to share recommended updates
- Review and approval process of proposed updates
- Ongoing engagement of business liaison



*Athol's existing zoning map (Source: Town of Athol)*



## Process

### For Design Guidelines Project Component

#### MONTH 1

- Develop description and responsibilities of new 'business liaison' (or similar) position and secure approval for hiring of additional staff
- Hire a business liaison

#### MONTHS 2-3

- Engage the Downtown Vitality Committee and Athol Historic Commission in the process of reviewing current outdated guidelines for specific needs of updates and consensus for desired changes
- Compile design needs/preferences for reference of hired consultant for a design guidelines document
- Revisit zoning adjustments proposed as part of BPCD recommendations
- Compile needs/preferences for reference of hired consultant for a zoning technical memo

#### MONTHS 4-5

- Hire a consultant to produce zoning and design guidelines document(s) and engage the public as part of the process

#### MONTH 6

- Review technical memo and design guidelines for consensus on adjustments and next step actions prior to proceeding with Board approval process

#### MONTH 7+ (ongoing)

- Approve and adopt the guidelines
- Interview people with experience in applying for a sign permit and property/business owners who are interested in updating their façade/storefront.
- Activate business liaison role, which may include engaging landowners collectively, and as a collaborative approach to gain their buy-in to the changes, improve ongoing education about the benefits of the guidelines, and improve stewardship

## Process

### For Zoning Review Project Component

#### MONTH 1

- Conduct internal review of zoning and recent proposed town zoning recommendations (both in the context of recent/ anticipated plans and feedback from the LRRP study), with questions identified for hired reviewer to address in a technical memo.

#### MONTHS 2-3

- Hire consultant to perform zoning review

#### MONTH 4

- Technical memo produced by consultant and reviewed by relevant internal departments

#### MONTH 4-5

- Proposed zoning adjustments shared during a town meeting for education and consensus
- Interviews with the Board of Planning and Community Development and ZBA and some outreach to the public.

#### MONTH 6

- Zoning adjustments brought before board for approval

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In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate 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. Creating or revising design guidelines may be linked to a façade/storefront improvement program. Possible impacts are addressed in the sections on Key Performance Indicators and Diagnostic.

**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.

**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.

**Survey and Planning Grant Program- Massachusetts Historical Commission**

This grant is a 50/50 matching program that support planning activities that help preserve significant historic resources. For communities, whose target area contains significant resources, this source may help fund design guidelines that include specific requirements for the preservation of significant historic resources. Interested communities are encouraged to reach out to the Massachusetts Historic Commission directly about this grant; it may be tied to the creation of a local historic district.

**Complete Streets Funding Program- Massachusetts Department of Transportation**

Design guidelines do not have to be limited to the private realm. Creating consistency in a downtown, village, or corridor is an important part of defining its identity both within and beyond the community. As part of a Complete Streets Project, a municipality should identify the specific materials, street furniture, trees, and public signage (including wayfinding) that will be used in the target area. These choices can be incorporated into the overall design guidelines to address both public and private realms.





# Housing as a Complement to Local Businesses






Provided by SME Consultant

Levine Planning Strategies, LLC

Location

Biddeford, ME

Origin	City of Biddeford (ME)
Budget	 Low Budget – less than \$10,000
Timeframe	 Short Timeframe – 6 to 12 months
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Change in economic activity downtown; number of housing units produced; additional net tax revenue.

Partners & Resources

Planning Board; municipal officials; Select Board/Mayor/City Manager; Town Meeting or City Council; downtown and neighborhood organizations

## Diagnostic

Too often, the zoning in downtown districts discourage development of housing. Sometimes, local zoning intentionally limits housing to preserve space for commercial activity. Just as often, housing may be permitted, but treated like housing in other areas of the community, requiring parking, setbacks and density limits that don't match downtown environments.

At the same time, the pandemic has been a challenge for downtown businesses, who may be used to serving workers downtown, or visitors from other communities. Having a population of local residents who can easily walk to downtown businesses builds another natural clientele into downtown. These residents can provide a boost to local businesses as they recover from the loss of business during COVID-19, as well as protect them from future shocks. Providing housing downtown is recommended by planning professionals as part of an overall economic development strategy, especially as a re-use strategy for B- and C-class commercial real estate.

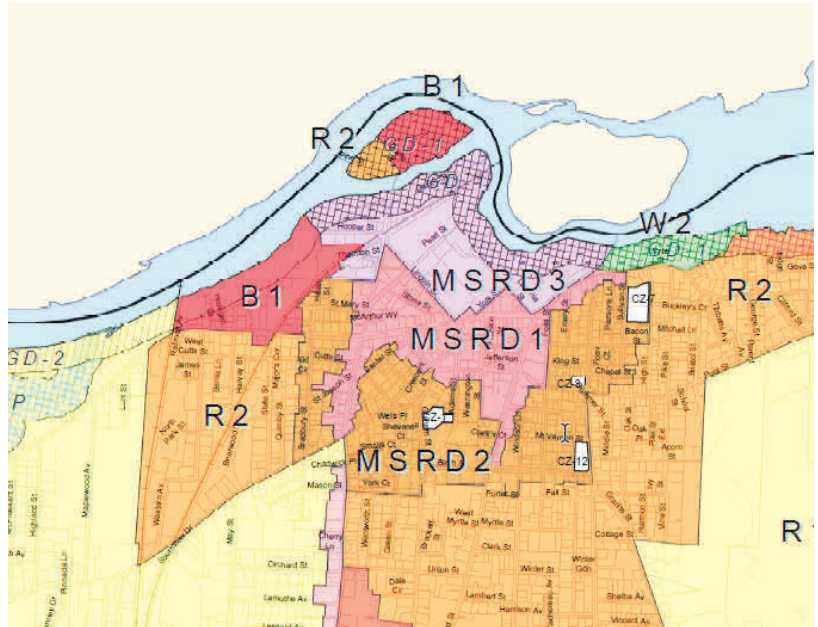
However, acknowledging the need for downtown housing is only the first step in producing that housing. The next step is to amend local zoning to allow for housing production appropriate for walkable, mixed-use areas such as downtown. Biddeford, Maine, provides a good model for how downtown zoning can acknowledge both the interest in housing production, as well as the density, mobility, and built environments specific to downtown locations.

Biddeford's example is particularly helpful because the zoning in the downtown district also avoids another common pitfall of being too specific as to the type and location of downtown housing. Often, when a community decides to allow for downtown housing, it adds limitations such as:

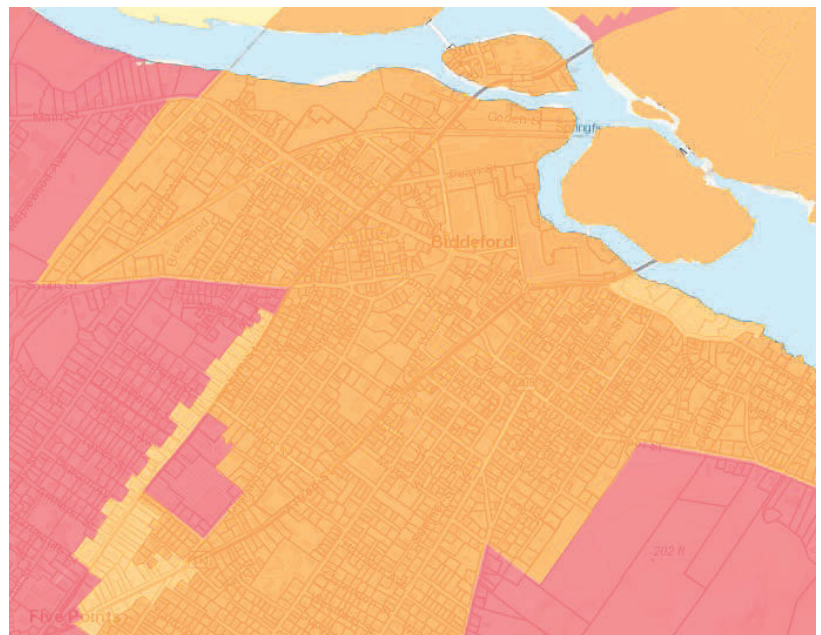
- Requiring that housing be only on upper stories;
- Requiring build-to lines (or maximum setbacks);
- Requiring minimum building heights; and
- Retaining extensive site plan and design review requirements that add cost and risk to a development.

These kinds of limitations are understandable but can reduce the interest in developing downtown housing. For example, limiting housing to upper stories is usually designed to create mixed-use buildings.

However, from a downtown business perspective, the goal is to increase the number of people living downtown. A vibrant, mixed-used downtown does not necessarily require mixed use buildings as long as the overall mix is vibrant.



*Zoning in Downtown Biddeford (shown in the MSR D-1, MSR D-3 and B-1 districts) puts few limits on multifamily housing production, in part to help local businesses and cultural organizations in light of pandemic-related restrictions. In the long term, additional foot traffic from nearby housing will help downtown remain resilient and quickly recover from future shocks.*



*A study under way by the Greater Portland Council of Governments classifies the zoning in downtown Biddeford as some of the least restrictive for multifamily housing in the region*

## Action Item

Biddeford was traditionally a working class community centered on jobs located in downtown mills. French Canadian immigrants traditionally lived in multifamily homes away from the Saco River and walked downtown to work. Downtown storefronts provided services for local families, as well as lunch and after-work refreshment for employees of the mills. After most of the mills closed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, downtown Biddeford was left with a number of empty storefronts and large brick buildings. While the market was relatively strong regionally, downtown was held back by both the existing zoning, as well as a downtown trash incinerator that discouraged people from visiting the core of the city. Approximately 15 years ago, the city implemented a plan to remove the incinerator, and also took on the challenge of its downtown zoning.

While there have been several steps toward improving the potential for housing downtown, the most notable parts of downtown Biddeford's zoning include:

- Allowance for multifamily dwellings by right;
- Limited setback requirements (neither minimums nor maximums);
- Parking requirements that are flexible and based on actual need; and
- Flexible height requirements (buildings can generally be up to 6 stories tall, with a minimum height of two stories.)

In convincing the City Council to support this level of flexibility, City staff has emphasized the advantages of providing additional housing downtown, both in terms of tax base as well as for the benefit of downtown businesses. During the pandemic, housing production in downtown Biddeford has continued at a brisk pace, setting the stage for a faster post-pandemic recovery.

## Process

Passing new zoning, especially more permissive zoning, must be done in a thoughtful and inclusive way. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, there is also some need to provide tangible tools for housing developers to utilize in the near term. Even if zoning is approved tomorrow, it will still take time for developers to acquire sites, find financing, develop construction documents, and actually build the housing.

In making any changes to allowances for housing downtown, a community should take the following actions:

1. Audit the current zoning and determine what aspects of it may be limiting downtown housing production. Contacting housing developers – both private and non-profit – and seeking their input will be helpful.
2. Determine what space existing downtown for housing production. Is it primarily upper stories of existing buildings? Vacant lots? Parking areas that are underutilized?
3. Reach out to downtown interests such as local business organizations to hear their thoughts about housing downtown.
4. Draft zoning amendments that can address the limits outlined in #1 above, in light of the physical opportunities identified in #2 and the concerns and interests in #3.
5. Develop clear communications materials that explain why you are looking to increase housing production downtown and how it will benefit the community and downtown coming out of the pandemic.
6. Begin the formal process of Planning Board and Town Meeting/City Council review. Be sure to budget time for ongoing communication and outreach with stakeholders. Be prepared to propose amendments if needed to address legitimate concerns that are raised.
7. Once new zoning is in place, make sure that housing developers know about it so they can look at opportunities it may unlock.





# Improve zoning, licensing, and permitting interactions





Provided by SME Consultant

BSC Group, Inc.

Location

Various locations – subject matter is about processes not a location-based project

Origin	Multiple municipalities – Examples are not site/community specific
Budget	 Low budget (Under \$50,000)
Timeframe	 Short term (Less than 5 years) – many achievable in days to weeks
Risk	 Low risk
Key Performance Indicators	<p>Municipalities needed to modify permitting requirements/procedures to meet the needs of businesses who needed to change/modify business practices to respond to COVID and public health concerns and regulations. This included actions by municipalities to expedite permitting processes. Success is measured by tracking: the ease of filing and obtaining a permit; how quickly permits are issued; and the ratio of permits issued vs. permits denied.</p>
Partners & Resources	<p>Municipal Departments, Boards and Commissions such as: Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, License Commission Health Department, Police, Fire, Department of Public Works (DPW) Business support organizations such as Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement Districts (BID's)</p>

## Diagnostic

The COVID-19 pandemic required municipalities to rapidly adapt their regulatory processes through an evolving public health crisis to help businesses survive. Though challenging, a crisis such as COVID presented communities and businesses with new opportunities for improved and streamlined operations.

When COVID-19 impacts reached Massachusetts in the spring of 2020, public health precautions quickly initiated a transition to less in-person contact for retail transactions. To adapt and remain in business, retailers sought approval for new actions such as: increased delivery service; short-term parking for take-out and curbside pickup; alcohol to go; and a transition from indoor to outdoor dining, fitness, shopping and recreational activities.

These changes required municipalities to consider new regulatory procedures, adaptation of prior regulations, and taking advantage of the state's relaxation of certain requirements. Throughout Massachusetts, municipalities and businesses met the COVID challenge by taking chances, being flexible, pivoting business models, and thinking creatively and "outside the box." Critical to the success was the transition to online permitting processes, permits and approvals for new approaches to deliver products/food to customers, leniency for outdoor eating and drinking, and other unique and creative solutions.

## Action Items

Municipalities worked to quickly adapt or modify rules and regulations to support the business community, knowing that time was of the essence. The following actions were proven to be successful. These actions were either initiated by municipalities or requested by business owners and then approved by municipalities.

- Waive time limits for permits to minimize the need to re-apply to continue an approved action
- Encourage Boards and Commissions to hold joint meetings to expedite and streamline certain permitting processes
- Improve municipal websites and outreach to businesses to explain current as well as changes to the regulatory framework
- Encourage Planning Boards to either grant the following or gave planning staff the ability to provide administrative approvals to relax certain zoning requirements such as :
  - Temporary or permanent reduction in parking requirements to provide additional outdoor dining and gathering in areas currently used for parking.
  - Relaxed signage requirements to allow temporary signs to promote outdoor sales and dining
- Establish procedures for police, fire and public works to easily review/approve requests to block-off on-street parking spaces or portions of streets to be used for outdoor dining/events
- Create requirements describing how to safely block-off portions of a roadway or on-street parking with rigid and visible barriers to allow them to be safely used by pedestrians/customers.
- Waive some permitting requirements and fast-track others for a more efficient permitting process to allow businesses to quickly take advantage of a more flexible regulatory framework.

## Process

### Promote associations who can speak for the greater good

- form new or strengthen existing business associations who speak for all the businesses in a commercial area to advocate for permitting and regulatory changes to benefit all businesses. This minimizes pitting the interests of one business versus another and provides a unified voice in promoting change.

### Make it easier for businesses to find the information they need

- Municipalities should consolidate all relevant business information in a single location on the municipality's website including permitting and regulatory items. Streamlined permitting and joint meetings of permitting boards is also encouraged to expedite permit requests.

### Propose that successful temporary regulations to become permanent

- Where permitting changes made to accommodate COVID have proven successful, municipalities should consider making temporary changes permanent.

### Roll-over permits

- Some municipalities who issued permits in 2020 for COVID related accommodations have agreed to allow those permits to "roll-over" to 2021 through a written request from the business, and therefore avoiding a full permit re-application.





Origin	Mayor, City of Everett
Budget	 Low - \$35,000 for design fee + program to subsidize implementation for \$25,000
Timeframe	 Short- 10 -12 months
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Level of participation by landlords and merchants
Partners & Resources	City of Everett, Everett Building Department and Community Development Department, and landlords and merchants.

# Developing storefront guidelines to energize downtown



Provided by SME Consultant      Mark Favermann, Favermann Design  
 Location      Everett, MA

## Diagnostic

The City of Everett is a primarily working class community just north of Boston. It has a large share of Brazilian, Latino and Italian first- and second-generation residents.

In the last few years, a very large casino has located there that gives the city some needed donations and fees for public improvements. There are two major retail enclaves in Everett: Everett Square and Glendale Square.

Everett Square, the larger of the two, is the traditional downtown where the public library and City Hall and many amenities are located.

Stores and restaurants are primarily locally-owned, family enterprises. Only a minority of Everett's business are national or regional chains.

In a bid to encourage the appeal of Everett's downtown to outside visitors, the year before the Pandemic, the Mayor directed the Community Development Director to create a framework to better guide merchants in enhancing their storefronts. A subsidy grant program was being developed to encourage merchant and landlord participation.

The Mayor also felt that a more restricted approach to storefront design be adhered to with similar sign details and limited awning colors. A study was commissioned to develop Guidelines for Signage and Storefronts. Following this, the guidelines were to be translated into the City of Everett's Building Code.

## Action Items

- Photo-documentation of all commercial blocks and stores in both Everett Square and Glendale Square.
- Creating a panoramic view each block showing "existing" and "proposed."
- Thorough review of existing storefront improvement programs throughout the United States and Canada to recognize applicable precedents and best practices.
- Development of a City of Everett Guidelines format while exploring various cases for refinement and review.
- Drafting distinct pages referencing individual aspects of storefronts. These included wall signs, blade signs, awnings and window treatments.
- Review the drafted pages with Everett's planning staff, Building Department and representatives of the Mayor's office.
- Final approval of Storefront Guidelines.



*Everett Square*

### Applicable Commercial Areas

The Everett Storefront Sign and Design Guidelines are applicable to any storefront located in the Everett Square neighborhood and the Glendale Square Neighborhood.

### Everett Square

Everett Square is a prominent commercial corridor in the city center running along Broadway Street between Hancock Street in the north and Revere Beach Parkway in the south. The center of Everett Square is at the intersection of Broadway and Chelsea/Norwood streets.



*The high number of vacant storefronts contributed to lack of vibrancy downtown.*

## Process

- Extensive research of other cities and towns' guidelines and procedures.
- Based on best practices, create easily understandable illustrated storefront component pages that reference City of Everett regulations.
- Establish storefront element criteria through including specifically referenced dimensions, materials and placement.
- Photo-document good and bad examples of storefront elements.
- Create a City of Everett color pallet.
- Show by illustration approved and not approved ways of applying storefront elements.
- Circulate among town staff the drafts individual guideline pages for review and refinement.
- Organize whole Storefront Guidelines set of pages.
- After completion of Storefront Guidelines, during the Covid-19 shutdown, work with the Building Commission to rewrite Everett's Building Code to reflect the clearer storefront criteria.
- Others involved in the rewriting of Building Code include the city attorney and community development director.
- This sentence by sentence intense exercise gave focus to the Building Code while doing away with unnecessary zoning code criteria
- This Collaboration made a tedious set of tasks quite reasonable to complete.
- This process allowed an opportunity to address sign issues throughout the City such as non-conforming uses, public/private garages, etc..

## Signs

### Signs

Business signage is a very critical element to the storefront. Not only does it provide a first impression to customers, but it also helps convey the business' brand and character.

Signs should clearly communicate the business name, but not be overwhelming. The average person can only process four to seven words while passing by. Therefore keeping text and graphics to a minimum will make the most impact.



**City Ordinance/Regulation:**  
Section 12-54(n) of the City Ordinance further regulates the number and size of signs. See Technical Requirements for more information.

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Signs and Technical Requirements

### Awnings

Awnings can be a great addition to a storefront. Not only can they provide an area for signage, but they also help provide a visual cue on where the entrance is located. Awnings also provide shelter for customers in inclement weather and also provide shade for store items being displayed in the window.

**City Ordinance/Regulation:**  
City Council Rule 74.8 further regulates awnings.  
Awning signs are also further regulated in City Ordinance Section 12A.



### Awning Signs - Material

Awnings should be a solid color and made from a fabric or canvas material. Shiny, high gloss or translucent materials should be avoided.

Lettering and material should be consistent for all awnings on the same building.



This fabric awning is NOT shiny, high gloss or translucent. The awning frame also matches the black fabric.



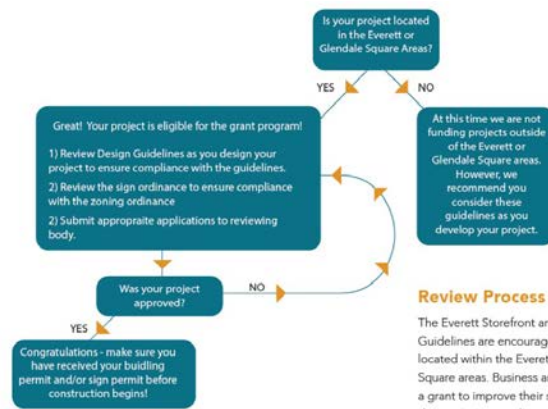
This awning is made of shiny vinyl and is not encouraged.

*The block party was a near-term, easy action item in the overall implementation plan and was intended to support a good image for this area of the downtown and set up for larger and longer-term action items such as building redevelopment, wayfinding, and business recruitment for ground floor spaces.*



## Process- Strategic Decisions

- City of Everett deciding to create storefront guidelines
- Building Commission desiring to match new guidelines to City's Building code.
- Creation of a digital set of storefront criteria for use by merchants, landlords and fabricator/installers.
- Use of panoramic photo-montage to establish existing conditions.
- Use of photo-montages to act as baseline show proposed conditions using new storefront criteria.
- Collaboration between strategic City departments for ownership of the guidelines and shared development of the review process for design and grant applications.
- Creation of easily understandable and illustrated storefront criteria.



### Review Process

The Everett Storefront and Facade Design Guidelines are encouraged for any storefront located within the Everett Square and Glendale Square areas. Business and property owners seeking a grant to improve their signage or awning shall demonstrate compliance with these guidelines and any applicable zoning regulations. This flow chart is meant to help you understand the process to get your project approved.

*Review Process and Grant Application*

## Everett Square

### Before



### After





#### Projecting/Blade Signs

Projecting/blade signs should be limited one to a business entrance and should not contain more than two faces. To maintain the pedestrian feel of the corridor, projecting/blade signs cannot project more than 5 feet from the building or be larger than 8 square feet. The sign should also not be placed higher than the following (whichever is the lowest): 25 feet above grade; the top of the sills of the first level of windows above the first story; or the height of the building at the building line.

**This** ✓



**Not This** ✗



Too many blade signs, only one permitted for each storefront. Blade signs cannot project more than 5 feet in height and must be at least 15 feet from grade.

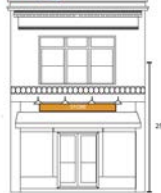
#### Wall Signs

##### Wall Signs - Height

The top of wall signs should be higher than any of the following, whichever is lowest:

- 25 ft above grade;
- top of sills of the first level of windows above the first story; or
- the height of a building at the building line.

**This** ✓



**Not This** ✗



This wall sign is not compliance since the wall sign is located 25 feet above grade.

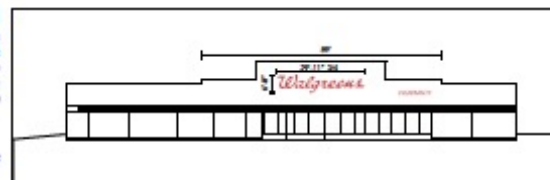
## Everett MA Signage Case Study

The following depicts how signage is applied based on current and proposed regulations. The proposed regulations are depicted in Example 2. However, two additional renderings were provided to show alternative sign sizes.

#### Example 1

Allowed Under Current Regulations  
Based on Sign Permit Documentation  
Max Sign Size = 395 (158ft x 2.5 = 395, per sign permit)

Main Sign As Shown = 199.77sf

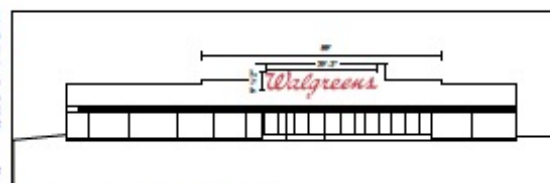


Note - square footage is split up between the two signs "Walgreens" & "Pharmacy"

#### Example 2

Proposed Regulations  
4 square ft per linear foot of wall which pertains to the sign, for facades set back more than 100-feet from the centerline of the road.  
Max Sign Size = 356 sf

As shown = ~ 354 sf  
Dimensions = 39.25' x 9.04'

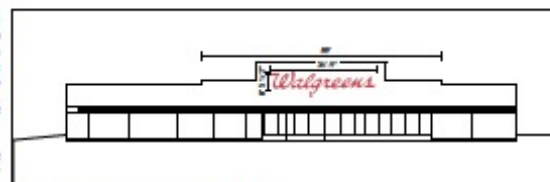


Note - proposed regulations would not permit two wall signs on the same facade, therefore this example using all allotted sign size to the single wall sign.

#### Example 3

Comparison  
3.5 sf per linear foot of wall which pertains to the sign, for facades set back from than 100-feet from the centerline of the road.  
Max Sign Size = 311.5sf

As shown = ~ 311.12sf  
Dimensions = 36.75' x 8.47'

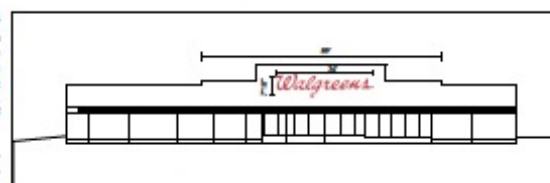


Note - proposed regulations would not permit two wall signs on the same facade, therefore this example using all allotted sign size to the single wall sign.

#### Example 4

Comparison  
3 sf per linear foot of wall which pertains to the sign, for facades set back from than 100-feet from the centerline of the road.  
Max Sign Size = 267sf

As shown = ~ 266.30'  
Dimensions = 34' x 7.83'






Note - proposed regulations would not permit two wall signs on the same facade, therefore this example using all allotted sign size to the single wall sign.

FAVERMANN DESIGN | DECEMBER 2019

Examples of City of Everett's Storefront Guideline Pages.

Case Study of Walgreen's non-conforming storefront signage on set-back shopping strip façade.



Origin	Innes Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Rapid Recovery Program sponsored by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Budget	 Low (less than \$50,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term (1-5 years)
Risk	 Medium
Budget: Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Costs will include the consultant's time, if a consultant is used. If the design guidelines are fully incorporated into the municipal zoning bylaw or ordinance, review by municipal counsel is recommended.</li> <li>The range for the consultant's time is between \$20,000-\$50,000, depending on the level of public engagement and how illustrative the code is. Review by municipal counsel may be covered by the municipal on-call agreement or may need to be added to the cost of the project.</li> </ul>

Create or update design guidelines for a downtown, village center, or commercial corridor.



Provided by SME Consultant

Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Innes Associates Ltd.

Location

Any downtown, commercial corridor, or village center.



## Example 1: Town Center Design Guidelines

Sterling, Massachusetts

### Town Contact

Domenica Tatasciore  
Town Planner  
dtatasciore@sterling-ma.gov

### Consultant

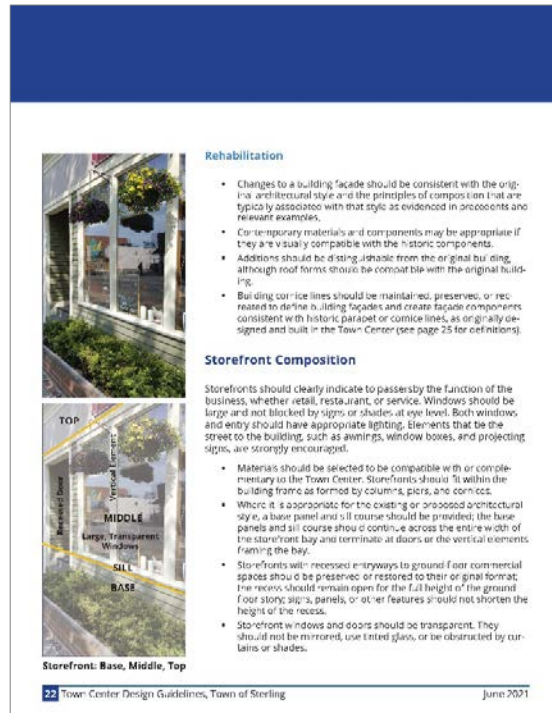
Innes Associates Ltd./Harriman

### 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 4: Kendall Square Design Guidelines

Cambridge, Massachusetts

### City Contact

Jeff Roberts  
Zoning and Development Director  
Community Development Department  
jroberts@cambridge.gov

### Consultant

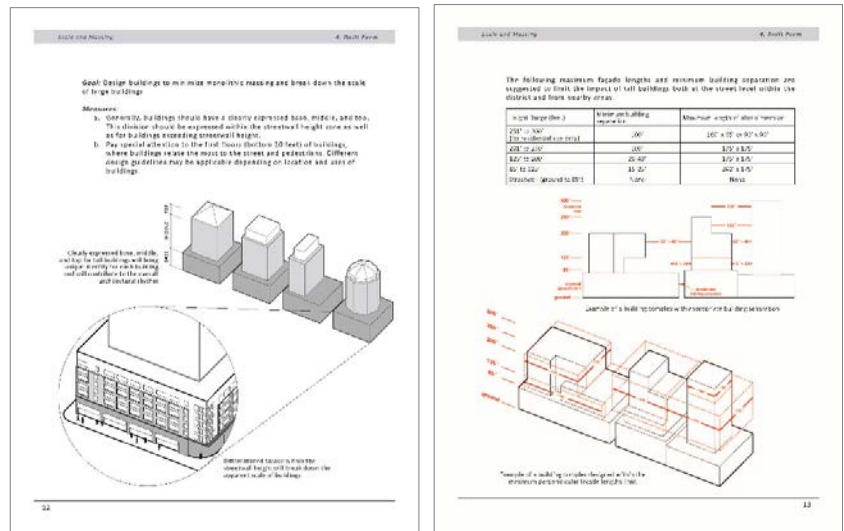
Goody Clancy

### 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



Origin	City of Burlington (VT) Office of City Planning
Budget	 High Budget – \$450,000 (HUD Sustainable Communities Challenge Grant)
Timeframe	 Medium Timeframe – 6 years (3 years' planning & 3 years to finalize code)
Risk	 Medium Risk – increased timeframe and cost helped reduce risk
Key Performance Indicators	Growth and survival of existing businesses; number of business expansions
Partners & Resources	Federal agencies; Community & Economic Development Office; Mayor's Office

# Zoning for a Resilient Downtown

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Provided by SME Consultant

Location

Levine Planning Strategies, LLC

Burlington, VT



## Diagnostic

Downtown businesses often need to adapt and change quickly. However, many local zoning codes make it difficult to quickly adjust business models. In many cities, use tables are many pages long, with many common uses requiring a discretionary review. Adding a new use or adding space to a business, even on a trial basis, can be difficult to do. In addition, changes may trigger increased parking requirements that cannot easily be met in a downtown setting. For these reasons, many downtown businesses are reluctant to change their model and potentially find a successful new strategy.

This problem predates COVID-19. However, in the wake of the pandemic, businesses had to adapt quickly, experiment, and be prepared to provide new uses to attract customers. In the short-term, many communities were flexible. Going forward, however, its likely that many communities will return to reviewing changes in use or space. At the same time, research suggests that businesses need flexibility to succeed post-COVID-19.

Some communities have responded to this issue by reducing the number of uses in their zoning. Others have simply made it easier to add a new use on site or expand existing uses. Still others have looked to remove use limitations altogether in certain zones, focusing on goals outlined in local plans to guide decisions.

## Action Items

An important step to help businesses post-COVID is to think about zoning requirements as a small business might. What if a record store wanted to add a small bookstore in the back of their space? Would that be allowed? Would they have to somehow provide additional parking? Would it require a public process with the risk and cost of being denied? If so, communities should think about whether that is their goal. In some cases, it may make sense to keep zoning restrictions on certain uses. For example, drive thru restaurants often have negative externalities, especially in a downtown location. On the other hand, a walk-up window for pedestrians is likely to have few of those negative effects, and can help drive local businesses as visitors continue to be wary of going indoors. Once you have a sense of how your zoning affects business decisions, it would be advisable to check in with some local businesses to get their thoughts as well.

With that data in hand, communities can use their plans to guide how to change their zoning. A few small steps may make a big difference. These could include:

- Reducing or removing regulations on outdoor dining in zoning. Licensing and other municipal processes can usually suffice;
- Revising parking requirements for new uses downtown. Re-tenanting an existing space, or changing from one use to another, should not generally trigger any new parking requirements; and
- Streamlining the review process for changes in use. Either reduce the number of use groups in zoning so small changes don't trigger zoning review or allow more uses by right. If some public review is appropriate, rely on staff-level administrative review as much as possible.



## Process

Burlington's planning process began in earnest in 2010 when the city received a Sustainable Communities Challenge Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development. That grant made it possible to develop a plan for the downtown and waterfront, called "PlanBTV." The vision in that plan was then codified in a form-based code beginning in 2013. The new zoning reduced the number of uses downtown by 50%. More importantly, it made it easier for a business to modify their use category by significantly reducing the timeframe and risk to the business. Changes such as these are ongoing. Most recently, city planners have worked to update the definitions and uses for food and beverage uses to recognize the rise of new dining and drinking options.

Not every community needs to have as extensive a process as Burlington. Simply auditing the use table, streamlining the list of uses, and making it easier to change from one use to another, would be helpful for downtown businesses post-pandemic. That process could be done at a much lower cost and much more quickly.



*The Pine Street Enterprise District in Burlington (Credit above & cover: David White, FAICP, Burlington Office of City Planning)*







## #4. Implement a Parking Benefit District (PBD)

**Description-** A Pop-up shop allowing vendors to temporarily utilize an existing vacant storefront

### PROJECT GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Ongoing revenue stream to maintain downtown, followed by increasing benefits to encourage more walking** (*public survey priority*)
- Reduce parking demand along Main Street
- Increase amenities to encourage people to walk downtown more
- Educate residents about the value of parking

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		See map on p.162
Origin		Eric Smith- Athol Planning Director, Mary Holtorf- Chair of the Downtown Vitality Committee (committee members also reviewed project)
Budget		<p>Low Budget (Less than \$50,000), includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff time for review and oversight of process and Parking Benefit Task Force</li><li>• Potential feasibility study</li></ul>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Low Risk – The Town has already cleared significant hurdles in achieving early public and political buy-in for the pursuit of a potential Parking Benefit District- the Town has recently approved and implemented an increase of parking prices with the intention of supporting a potential PBD and the formation of a Parking Benefit Task Force has been initiated. The remaining administrative steps to finalize the PBD process are low in risk but will require dedicated staff time.</p> <p>Other minimal risks include the waiting period between the accumulation of funds over a period of time and the time at which improvements that are funded through the PBD become perceptible to the Town and/or public. The educational component of how a PBD works and seeing its benefits in practice will be an important step in maintaining long-term support.</p>



## Key Performance Indicators

- Increased annual revenue for use in downtown improvements
- Regular PBD reporting taking place

## Partners & Resources

Partners- Town Departments of Planning, Public Works, and Treasurer/Collector, Council on Aging, Parking Benefit District Task Force, Downtown Vitality Committee, Board of Planning and Community Development

### Resources-

- EOEAA Planning Assistance Grants
- DHCD Community Development Block Grant
- DHCD MA Development Initiative Program

## Information from the Downtown Athol Parking Plan, 2019

57%

Percentage of survey respondents who support increased meter prices if they were reinvested into into downtown improvements

138

Number of parking meters in Athol

7%

Percentage of survey respondents who were familiar with Parking Benefit Districts

30%

Number of survey respondents who were familiar with parking kiosk technology

## Diagnostic

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, municipal funds both in Athol and across the Commonwealth have been squeezed even tighter, and some desired downtown improvements have been forcibly lowered in their level of funding priority. The LRRP diagnostic process identified several category areas in need of improvement in the public realm, some of which would be appropriate to fund through PBD revenue. These include sidewalk maintenance, parking enforcement, street furniture, parking signage and wayfinding, etc.

Downtown Athol's parking utilization is relatively low in the context of its capacity, implying the revenue which is currently generated from its on-street parking meters is that much more precious in being used efficiently. As other projects in this report are pursued, the downtown will move towards its overall LRRP goal of "increasing downtown vitality", and increased parking demand, revenue, and the momentum to make downtown improvements is only expected to increase.

## Early Actions/Achievements to Date

In 2016, the State updated its Municipal Modernization Act to include new authorization for communities in the Commonwealth to establish Parking Benefit Districts. Since then, there has been a high level of activity in communities that have adopted PBD Districts. Following recommendations from 1) a ULI Technical Assistance Panel in 2017 to "raise parking fees and dedicate revenues to Downtown Athol improvements," and 2) the Downtown Athol Parking Plan in 2019 to "adjust meter pricing", the Town also began pursuit of taking steps towards a PBD.

In 2021, Athol made several victories to advance this pursuit. After decades of maintaining the same parking meter pricing of 15 cents an hour, the Town was able to approve and implement the pricing to 50 cents an hour in Spring 2021. Based on total meter revenue from the most recent "typical" fiscal year of 2019, this change could result in an approximate \$37,000 annual increase of revenue. With the potential for increased downtown vitality due to the implementation of other projects through the LRRP, this amount could increase, and provide the Town with a vital, recurring funding resource for downtown improvements.

The 2019 parking plan also included a recommendation of adopting an ordinance provision for separate meter fund allocation (as outlined by the Athol Office of Planning and Development in July 2018).

In anticipation of proceeding with the pursuit of a PBD, the Town also formed a PBD Oversight Committee in 2021 and is currently in the stage of finalizing its participating representatives.

<b>Action Item</b>	<p>Key activities for the project include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Formalizing the PBD boundary</b></li> <li>• <b>Developing funding</b>, managerial, and operational structure</li> <li>• <b>Defining responsibilities</b> and activating the Parking Benefit Task Force</li> <li>• <b>Educating the public</b> about the PBD and what it should achieve</li> <li>• <b>Determining the desired process</b> for establishing the PBD and executing it</li> <li>• <b>Developing and approving relevant ordinances</b> and procedures (including financial) for how the PBD will function and be monitored</li> <li>• <b>Ongoing monitoring</b> of parking pricing adjustments and impacts</li> </ul>
<b>Process</b>	<p><b>MONTH 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene relevant representatives and departments to determine desired approach for PBD (i.e. whether to pursue immediately or first solicit a feasibility study)</li> <li>• Finalize the PBD boundary, incorporating site visits if needed to evaluate the impacted area</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTHS 2-3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define necessary funding, managerial, and operational structures</li> <li>• Define roles and responsibilities of the Parking Benefit Task Force</li> <li>• Develop and approve new/updated ordinances</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTH 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct public and stakeholder outreach, particularly targeting landowners and business owners with properties located within the defined PBD boundary</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTH 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase/install materials (if desired) to support ongoing public education component (e.g. informative stickers on parking meters, etc)</li> <li>• Update the Town website with a PBD map and other information</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTH 6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The PBD is put into action</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTHS 6+ (ongoing)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow defined procedures for periodic reporting</li> <li>• Collect data to understand impacts of meter pricing on revenue and parking infractions</li> </ul>



## Project Sheet Element- Town of Athol Parking Revenue

The following outlines the Town's revenue from both parking meters and parking enforcement tickets for the past 10 fiscal periods. Although the revenue from FY2020 was significantly lower as a result of impacts from COVID-19, these figures give an indication of typical levels of annual revenue and the scale of downtown improvements they could potentially fund through the process established for a Parking Benefit District.

Fiscal Year	FY Parking Meter Receipts	FY Parking Ticket Receipts
FY2020	\$8,128	\$2,005
FY2019	\$16,083	\$6,100
FY2018	\$14,674	\$5,275
FY2017	\$11,328	\$6,697
FY2016	\$16,722	\$11,170
FY2015	\$11,420	\$11,810
FY2014	\$16,157	\$14,065
FY2013	\$14,630	\$13,570
FY2012	\$24,245	\$16,120
FY2011	\$20,623	\$25,625
FY2010	\$17,520	\$20,058

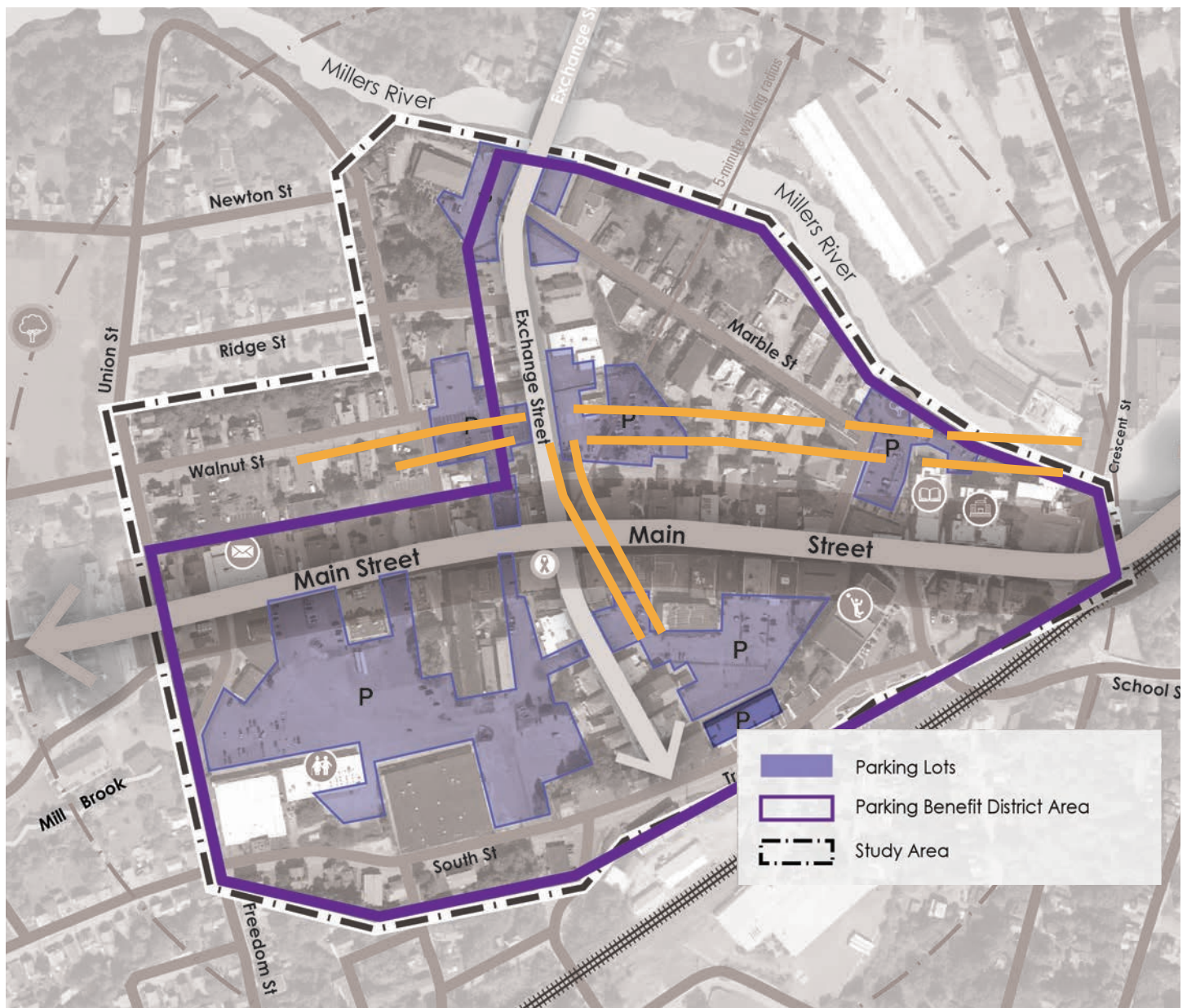


***Athol's parking meters prior to the updated pricing in 2021 (left). The Town intends to eventually upgrade the meters, as well. The City of Old Pasadena, CA uses similarly outdated parking meters (right) but have added a label as a simple tool to educate users about the PBD and its benefits. (Sources: Stantec and Metropolitan Planning Council)***

## Project Sheet Element- Recommended Parking Benefit District Boundary

The Town of Athol's current paid (metered) parking areas include areas on Main Street between its eastern intersection with Crescent Street and Cumberland Farms to the west, and along South Exchange Street (generally indicated in yellow below). A Parking Benefit District boundary should include not only the areas immediately accommodating the parking revenue sources but extend to other areas that would be desired for improvements to be funded through the district. Based on information gathered through the process of the LRRP project, consideration of the smaller geographic area of Athol's downtown, and through understanding of priority areas identified for improvements, the following boundary is recommended.

Through directing PBD funds to serve this core area of the Town's economy, the positive associated impacts of potential funded improvements over a period of time can set precedents and initiate momentum in other areas of Athol.



### Common goals of a Parking Benefit District include:

- Create tangible benefits from priced parking
- Dedicate a revenue stream to finance district improvements
- Reallocate parking revenue
- Diversify transportation improvements across transportation needs and the public realm (including parking maintenance, wayfinding, walk/bike infrastructure improvements, streetscape, open space, marketing and events)

### Project Sheet Element- Highlights from Various PBD Approaches Throughout the Commonwealth

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to establishing a Parking Benefit District. Athol should consider best practice recommendations in combination with town-specific needs and capacity to deliver the goals of the district. The following select details outline different approaches through various Massachusetts communities.

#### ARLINGTON, MA

- Proposed meter installation & PBD implementation simultaneously
- Kept violation revenue in General Fund
- Allocated meter & permit revenue to parking fund

#### ROCKPORT, MA:

- 12% of meter revenue / up to \$10,000 Funds go to Time and services for Cultural District Director, or works to bring artists, cultural organizations, businesses together
- District is one of seven state-designated districts in the area
- District works with local partners for physical maintenance and community programming

#### BROOKLINE VILLAGE, MA

- \$1,000,000 of parking meter revenue transferred to PBD
- Funds go to public art, parking and traffic operations, accessibility improvements to infrastructure in the PBD



*Example public engagement approach as part of establishing a PBD (Source: Town of Arlington)*



## Project Sheet Element- Key Components of Establishing a Parking Benefit District



### ADOPT NECESSARY LEGISLATION

- Adopt Section 22A to allow priced parking\*
- Adopt Section 22A1/2 to allow the establishment of a PBD\*\*
- Adoption typically requires a local legislative vote (Council/Board)

\* Not needed if already pricing.

\*\* Not needed if a parking fund already exists to absorb revenues



### ESTABLISH PBD BOUNDARY AND FUND

- Identify the district for priced parking and expenditures\*
- Establish dedicated parking fund for meter revenue\*\*
- Town/City can decide the amount/percentage of revenue to be allocated

\* Fees also can be spent outside district.

\*\* Fees can be channeled outside of general fund for up to 5-years before dedicated fund is formally established.



### CHOOSE A CHAMPION

- Specific entity\* that manages the PBD
- Develop a Working Group that includes at least municipal staff & key stakeholders in boundary (although recommended, this is not required in the state legislation)
- A Business Improvement District or Main Street organization should be involved

\* Can be municipal department or a non-profit downtown organization



### CREATE PRIORITIZED LIST OF IMPROVEMENTS

- Working Group determines public realm priorities in District
- Projects can include capital improvements, maintenance expenditures and staff time
- Spend according to priorities



### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Administrative costs
- Revenue fluctuates annually with demand
- Expenditures should adjust to reflect needs

## Project Sheet Element- Key Components of Establishing a Parking Benefit District



### Adopt necessary legislation

If adopting Section 22A of MGL Ch. 40 (allowing priced parking), it is best done in parallel with 22A1/2

Adopting Section 22A1/2 of MGL Ch.40 (allowing a PBD), some must concede only partial segregation from General Fund

Legislative (Council or Select Board) adoption process at municipality's discretion



### Establish PBD boundary and dedicated fund

A parking study is best to determine rates, regulations & geography for priced parking

Align PBD boundary to encompass entire intended area of expenditures and revenue collection

Revenue sources can be mingled (i.e. violations, meter fees, off-street fees, BID revenues, etc.)

Dedicated fund likely is an Enterprise Fund or a Special Fund (either annually appropriated or preferably a revolving fund)



### Choose a champion

Not necessary for manager of fund expenditures to be the municipal collections manager (though both roles should be represented on Working Group)

If created, a Working Group should include stakeholders from businesses, landowners, and others invested in public realm

Group should coordinate with other stakeholders as necessary & report to municipal finance staff at least annually



### Create prioritized list of improvements

Consider public realm improvements that realistically be funded by projected revenues

Attach tangible district improvements to PBD expenditures, including meters, wayfinding, landscaping, arts installations, visible staff positions, parking supply, sidewalk improvements, lighting, etc

Consider PBD revenues for related programmed infrastructure, overcoming any concerns about lost General Fund revenues



### Other considerations

PBD revenues will fluctuate with demand & economy; don't over-promise

Implementing new pricing (ideally tiered, performance-based zones) with a PBD can show a net revenue increase

Administrative cost/burden will increase slightly but can be off-set by PBD revenues

## Project Sheet Element- Massachusetts Legislation on What PBD Funds May Be Used For

Excerpt from Massachusetts Part I, Title VII, Chapter 40, Section 22A-

In any city or town that accepts this sentence, the agreement for the acquisition or installation of parking meters may provide that payments thereunder shall be made over a period not exceeding 5 years without appropriation, from fees received for the use of such parking meters notwithstanding section 53 of chapter 44. Such fees shall be established and charged at rates determined by the city or town. Rates may be set for the purpose of managing the parking supply. The revenue therefrom may be used for acquisition, installation, maintenance and operation of parking meters and other parking payment and enforcement technology, the regulation of parking, salaries of parking management personnel, improvements to the public realm, and transportation improvements, including, but not limited to, the operations of mass transit and facilities for biking and walking.

### SUMMARY OF LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

- Municipality must formally accept the legislation
- Parking money can be used over five years to install/maintain meters
- Chapter 44, Section 53 can be ignored (which says \$\$ paid to Town/City needs to be put into general fund and then appropriated for a use)
- Municipality can use meter rates to manage parking supply
- Revenue can be used for:



**METER OPERATIONS  
AND MAINTENANCE**



**OTHER PARKING  
TECHNOLOGY**



**SALARIES FOR PARKING  
MANAGEMENT**



**IMPROVEMENTS TO  
THE PUBLIC REALM**



**PARKING REGULATION  
AND ENFORCEMENT**



**TRANSPORTATION  
IMPROVEMENTS**



## Project Sheet Element- Parking Benefit District Applicable Funding Types

### SPECIAL REVENUE FUND TYPES AND DETAILS

#### Receipts reserved for appropriation:

- Accounts for the proceeds of specific revenue sources (other than those for major capital projects) that are restricted legally to expenditure for specified purposes.
- Must be spent by appropriation

#### Revolving Fund:

- Receipts required from a specific revenue source
- Can be spent without appropriation to support the activity/program that generated the revenue
- \$\$ accounted for separately from General Fund

Must be established by statute

### ENTERPRISE FUND DETAILS

- Separate accounting/reporting mechanism for municipal services for which a fee is charged "like a private enterprise"
- Helpful to understand impacts of a certain program
- Can be subsidized, cost-neutral, or make money
- Retains any investment income/surplus
- This must be formally appropriated by legislative body back to fund
- Does not require a separate bank account
- Minimum 3 years
- Enterprise funds are part of a municipality's tax rate calculation through the Tax Rate Recap process

## Project Sheet Element- Sample List of Projects and Programs Fundable Through A PBD

- Additional parking enforcement
- Valet parking
- Outreach programs
- Marketing and promotion
- Management activities for the oversight entity
- "Mobility Ambassadors"
- Construction of additional parking
- Purchase and installation costs of meters/meter upgrades
- Parking operations costs, including fees and labor
- Purchase or leasing of private off-street spaces
- Wayfinding and signage
- Landscaping, lighting and streetscape greening
- Street cleaning, power-washing of sidewalks, and graffiti removal
- Transit, pedestrian, and bicycle infrastructure and amenities



***Parking Ambassadors in Pittsfield, MA (Source: Downtown Pittsfield, Inc.)***

## **Project Sheet Element- Sample Downtown Parking District Ordinance Language from the City of Ventura, California**

### **USE OF REVENUE**

All revenues collected from parking pay stations, meters, leases, and permits, in the Downtown Parking District shall be placed in a special fund, which fund shall be used exclusively for activities benefiting the parking district. The specific authorized use of revenues shall be as follows:

1. For purchasing, leasing, installing, repairing, maintaining, operating, removing, regulating and policing of pay stations and/or parking meters in the parking district and for the payment of any and all expenses relating thereto.
2. For purchasing, leasing, acquiring, improving, operating and maintaining on- or offstreet parking facilities.
3. For installation and maintenance of alternative mode programs, landscaping, pedestrian linkages, sidewalk cleaning, street, way finding systems, and trafficcontrol devices and signals.
4. For the painting and marking of streets and curbs required for the direction of traffic and parking of motor vehicles,
5. For proper security within the district.
6. For the proper regulation, control, enforcement and inspection of parking and traffic upon the public streets and off-street parking facilities.
7. To be pledged as security for the payment of principal of and interest on financing mechanisms used by the city to meet any of the purposes authorized by this section.
8. For transportation and parking planning, marketing and education programs related to the Downtown Parking District.
9. For construction and maintenance of public restrooms that enhance parking facilities.
10. Revenues from residential parking permits may, in addition to the foregoing, be used for sidewalk, landscaping and other transportation, pedestrian or bicycle enhancements on streets where the residential permit parking is provided.

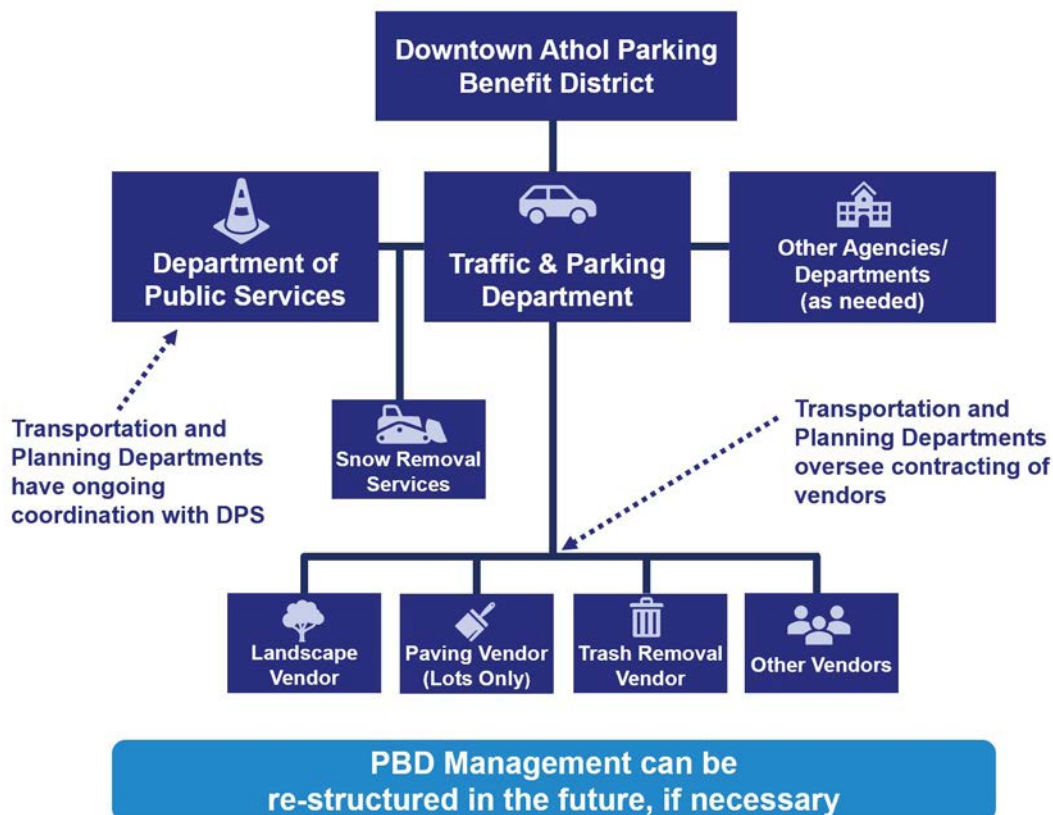
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**Defining a tiered approach may be a desirable solution for finding funding balance of needs and desires-**

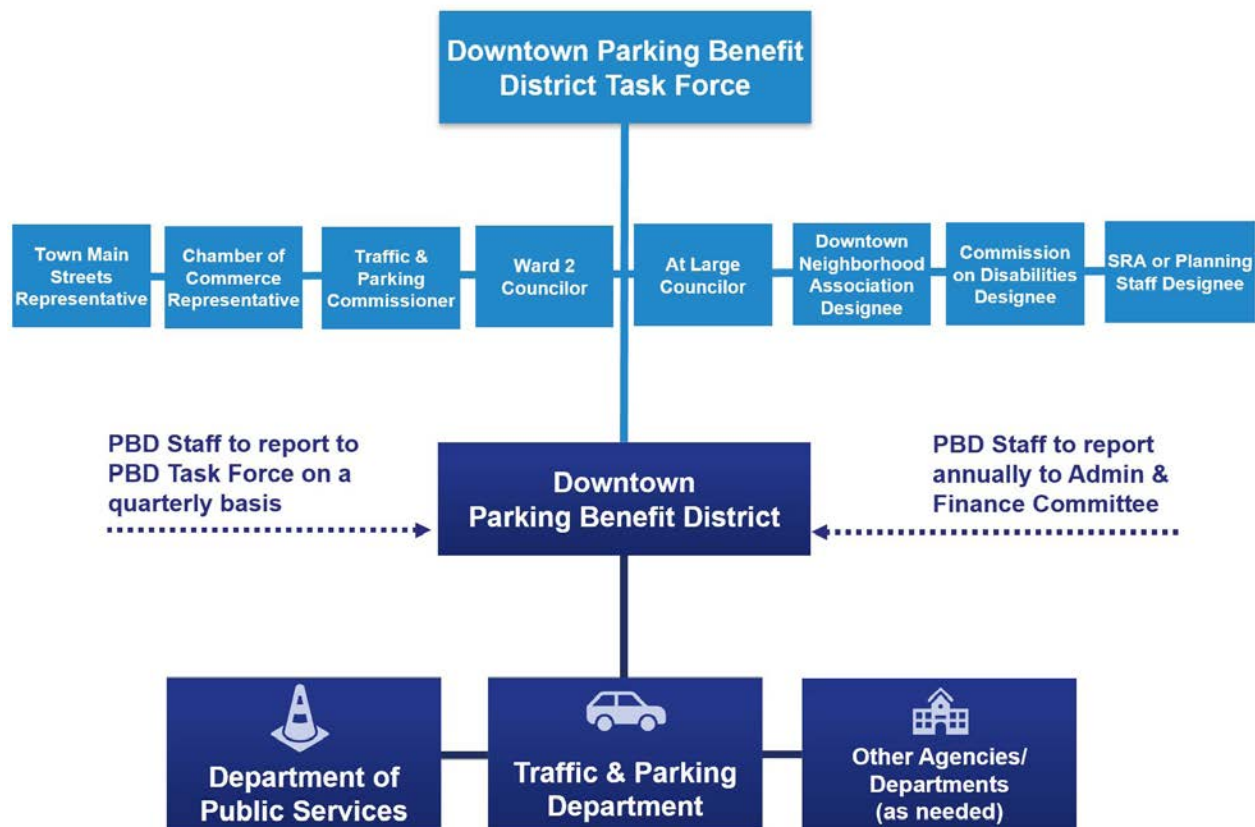
**TIER ONE- Could be dedicated to needs and ongoing maintenance items (e.g. landscaping, waste removal, snow removal)**

**TIER TWO- Could be dedicated to one-time expenditures and capital improvements (e.g. signage/wayfinding, street furniture, parking meters)**

## Project Sheet Element- Example Parking Benefit District Management Approach



## Project Sheet Element- Example Parking Benefit District Municipal Reporting Structure







Source: Wickadlocal

## Establish Parking Benefit District to Better Manage Parking Resources and Enhance Village Vitality






PUBLIC  
REALM

Provided by SME Consultant

Stantec Consulting, Inc.

Location

Brookline, Massachusetts

Origin	Town of Brookline
Budget	 <p>Low – No cost to the Town to establish a Parking Benefit District (PBD) and supporting committee. Administrative responsibilities are conducted by existing departments/employees.</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (&lt;5 years) – The establishment of the Parking Benefit District and formal allocation of meter funds took approximately one year.</p>
Risk	 <p>Medium Risk – Political buy-in and support from local businesses and public for increase in parking prices</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Net new parking meter revenues
Partners & Resources	Parking Benefit District Advisory Board, Department of Public Works, Arts Commission, Select Board, Transportation Board, Local Businesses
Diagnostic	<p>The creation of the PBD was intended to help Brookline respond to the commercial decline of Brookline Village and an increase in vehicle congestion. Through the creation of a PBD, funds from meters in a Parking Meter Zone could be allocated to expenditures and Town budgets used to create improvements that continue attracting visitors and businesses, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility improvements to sidewalk infrastructure</li> <li>• Public art recommendations from the Arts Commission</li> <li>• Parking and traffic operational improvements (related to needs identified by the Transportation Board and/or DPW)</li> </ul>
Action Item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Brookline Parking District Advisory Board was established and is comprised of local businesses and residents.</li> <li>• The BVPBDAB defined the area of the parking benefit district.</li> <li>• The BVPBDAB ongoing tasks include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommending an annual budget;</li> <li>• Reviewing and adjusting parking rates, as necessary, and expenditures in the PBD to the Select Board for approval; and</li> <li>• Making recommendations related to parking/traffic operations and temporary or permanent physical changes to the Transportation Board and/or DPW as appropriate and making recommendations related to public art to the Arts Commission.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Process

In 2016, the Massachusetts General Court enacted the Municipal Modernization Act. One of the provisions of that law authorized the creation of parking benefit districts (PBDs).

The Town approved the article to create a PBD in Brookline Village and an associated Brookline Village Parking Benefit District Advisory Board (BVPBDAB). The BVPBDAB is composed of nine members appointed by the Select Board, at least five of whom shall be business/commercial owners and managers in the district.

The BVPBDAB recommends an annual budget, parking rates, and expenditures in the PBD to the Select Board for approval. The Advisory Board will also develop and propose recommendations that will be funded by the PBD fund.

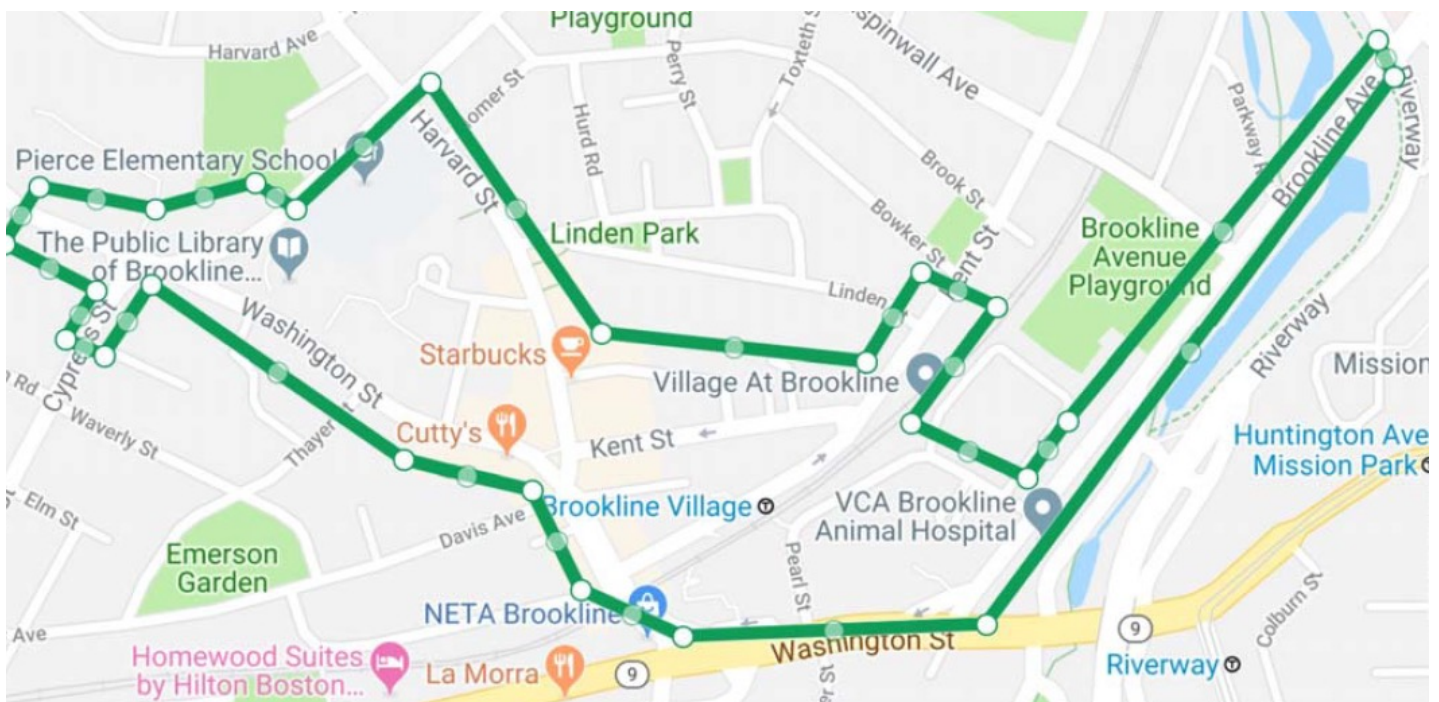
Once the area had been defined, a portion of parking meter revenues only is transferred into the Parking Benefit District Revolving fund.

Fund revenues are the increment above previous parking revenues, which continue to flow into the General Fund. Incremental increases in revenue are based on a parking pricing rate increase from \$1.25 to \$1.50/hour. This does not include revenue from parking violations or parking permits.

## Success Story

Since the establishment of the PBD, \$1M has been invested to support a range of improvements and associated administrative oversight.

Brookline was awarded a MassDOT Shared Streets & Spaces Grant and installed many temporary dining areas, drop-off zones, and bike lanes. The Town intends to use PBD funds to make many of these improvements permanent.



Brookline's PBD Map. Source: May 2019 Annual Town Meeting





Source: Arlington

## Establishment of Parking Benefit District for Improvements and Amenities in Arlington's Town Center



Provided by SME Consultant

Stantec Consulting, Inc.

Location

Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

Origin	Town of Arlington
Budget	 <p>Low – No cost to the Town to establish a Parking Benefit District (PBD) through the Select Board. Arlington DPW manages maintenance tasks. The Town hired a contractor for beautification efforts and snow plowing.</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (&lt;5 years) – The establishment of the Parking Benefit District, implementation of new parking meters, and formal allocation of meter funds took approximately 1 year.</p>
Risk	 <p>Medium Risk – Political buy-in and support from local businesses and perception issue related to implementing new meters</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Parking meter revenue
Partners & Resources	Arlington Select Board, Arlington Department of Public Works, Finance and Capital Planning Committee
Diagnostic	<p>Arlington was in need of a dedicated revenue source to fund needed changes in their Town Center. The PBD was ideal for setting aside a stream of money to implement improvements that did not have priority in the Town's Capital Plan.</p> <p>Through a parking study, Arlington determined that a performance-based adjustment to their parking pricing would provide much needed curbside availability while increasing revenues. Arlington installed new meters and initiated the parking management changes during the PBD approval process.</p> <p>The PBD fund was created to support a wide range of physical improvements as well as administrative/maintenance responsibilities including installation &amp; ongoing meter maintenance; the parking control officer's salary; credit card &amp; collection fees; servicing lease payments for meters; implementing pay-by-phone; snow removal in parking lots; the Arlington Center Sidewalk Project (ongoing); and parking lot re-designs.</p>
Action Item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing a Parking Advisory Committee, to manage the PBD. The Committee has complete flexibility to amend revenue allocation details and the operational/managerial structure, as the adopted local enabling legislation was written to ensure flexibility</li> <li>Establishing a system of accountability and trust for ongoing oversight by the Town's Financial Committee &amp; Capital Planning Committee, including             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Periodic reporting to committees &amp; stakeholders, maintaining consistent engagement and input; and</li> <li>Making an annual presentation at Town Meeting</li> </ul> </li> <li>Establishing a special revenue fund with a revolving fund structure for on-going parking meter revenues</li> <li>Defining a list of streetscape, mobility, connectivity, and accessibility improvements that are funded by the PBD special revenue fund</li> </ul>

## Process

In 2016, the Massachusetts General Court enacted the Municipal Modernization Act. One of the provisions of that law authorized the creation of parking benefit districts (PBDs).

The Town approved the article and adopted local legislation to create a PBD in Arlington Center with a defined geographic area, per State rules.

The Arlington Center Parking Benefit District Committee formed and developed a reporting structure to the Select Board, regularly proposes PBD-funded improvements, and manages PBD operations.

Once the PBD had been defined, parking meter revenue only is transferred into the Parking Benefit District Special Revenue fund, from which disbursements are made.

Following the adoption of the PBD, additional managerial responsibilities and expenditure management tasks may need to be assigned depending on the project type (e.g. the Department of Public Works manages sidewalk improvements).

## Success Story

Upon adoption of the PBD no negative impacts have been identified. New parking meters on Massachusetts Avenue were readily embraced by the community.

The original PBD revenue projection presented to the Select Board was conservative. It has regularly exceeded expectations.

The PBD has created an appetite for parking meters in other districts, which are being explored.

While parking revenue was lower due to pandemic impacts, the Town took advantage of the MassDOT Shared Streets & Spaces Grant in 2020 to create impactful temporary improvements downtown. PBD funds were used to supplement this award through the purchase of planters to beautify and protect outdoor dining areas.

In the future, the PBD will fund permanent installations of other temporary improvements including outdoor dining infrastructure and landscaping.

**ARLINGTON CENTER  
BUSINESS OWNERS**

*Join Us For a Meeting about*  
**NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENTS**  
from parking meter income  
**Wednesday March 1st at 8:30 am**  
**Regent Underground, 7 Medford Street**

RSVP to [acarter@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:acarter@town.arlington.ma.us)

TAKE THE ONLINE SURVEY:  
[SURVEYMONKEY.COM/R/GVP2XFS](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GVP2XFS)

Save the date for the community  
meeting March 30th at 6pm

Public engagement flyer for PBD. Source, Arlington.



Plan of proposed downtown improvements, including PBD-funded features such as landscaped pots and benches, and sidewalk enhancements. Source, Town of Arlington.










## #5. Initiate Temporary Improvements to Lord Pond Plaza

**Description-** Advance the recently proposed Lord Pond Plaza Development through Testing Tactical Urban Solutions in Open Space and Connectivity

### PROJECT GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Attraction of programming** (*public survey priority*)
- **Defined driving and parking areas to improve safety** (*public survey priority*)
- Large public gathering space
- Better walking connections and access through the Plaza
- Improved coordination between Plaza landowners/businesses

Category		Public Realm
Location		Lord Pond Plaza
Origin		Eric Smith- Athol Planning Director, Mary Holtorf- Chair of the Downtown Vitality Committee (committee members also reviewed project), BSC Development (consultants who developed final referenced concept)
Budget		<p>Large Budget (\$200,000+), includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff time for coordination of consultants, oversight of installation</li><li>• Hiring consultant to develop and install quick, creative temporary concepts</li><li>• Materials cost</li><li>• Hiring consultant to conduct speed/traffic study</li></ul>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 	<p>Medium to High Risk- As the installations will be temporary, political support shouldn't be a significant challenge, however there is existing planning fatigue surrounding the site as several plans have looked at addressing the Plaza issue. In Spring 2021, a development concept was finalized following a public process, however it will be a few years before its construction will proceed. There will be a fine balance in making temporary improvements which speak to the overall intent of the final proposed concept and setting positive precedents (for prioritizing non-vehicle mode movement and creating public spaces) with the understanding the Plaza's ultimate design has generally gained public support.</p> <p>There may also be resistance from select, small groups of the public who have informally claimed area of the Plaza as their own without sufficient permission.</p>

## Key Performance Indicators

- Utilization of the space by the public, particularly of nearby senior citizens and young people
- Utilization of the space by small businesses and other local organizations
- Data to understand how the Plaza is used by pedestrians and vehicles
- Integration of improved adjustments and proven preferred uses/configuration in the final development of the Plaza

## Partners & Resources

Partners- Town, North Quabbin Community Coalition, Downtown Vitality Committee, Athol Council on Aging, North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce

Resources-

- MA DOT Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program
- DHCD MA Development Initiative Program

Additional potential resources include:

- 'Placemaking Your Main Street- Connecting Community & Commerce Toolkit' (The Musicant Group)
- Article on 'Get Funded: Tips for a New Era of Placemaking Philanthropy' (Project for Public Spaces, January 17, 2020)
- 'How to Create a [Freespace] Toolkit' (Freespace)



*Lord Pond Plaza's primary destination attracting a wider range of visitors (Source: Stantec)*

## Diagnostic

Lord Pond Plaza is a primarily town-owned parcel located just off Main Street. Current active uses on the site include the Athol Senior Center, a COVID-19 testing site, and a Chinese restaurant. An Ocean State Job Lot is the plaza's primary visitor destination, and sits on privately-owned land. The plaza's key feature however, is its significantly large parking lot and excess of parking spaces.

Due to its significant land size and current underutilization, the plaza can benefit from new activation techniques and improved interaction with Main Street and downtown. Increased pedestrian linkages and new public spaces are needs for downtown that have risen to the top of priority lists as part of the LRRP effort, and particularly in reaction to impacts of COVID-19 on outdoor community engagement, statewide.

A recent development proposal (selected following a public engagement process in May 2021) has begun envisioning the future of this site; however, upon expert review, is still falling short in some key areas. The intention of the concept is to "green" the plaza and emphasize its environmental opportunities by daylighting the stream which flows below the parking lot. Yet, the concept could benefit from greater emphasis on public interaction and flexible use of the space, and de-emphasize its parking function.

Considering that it could be years before redevelopment of the site is physically initiated, now is the ideal time to pursue testing potential alternative (small-scale) improvements relating to prioritizing pedestrian connectivity and public spaces. This project could set important precedents by using a tactical urbanism approach that provides opportunities for data and physical context about how the site could realistically function and best serve the identified needs of downtown.

Key existing challenges of the site include:

- Vehicles speed through with no formal driving route.
- Underutilized parking at all times. As shown on the following page, the Downtown Athol Parking Plan 2019 data reveals that the plaza parking spaces are never more than half full.
- A lack of defined and safe pedestrian connections and access
- Tractor-trailers often informally claimed an area immediately behind the Cumberland Farms convenience station.
- There are no green elements to make the area more inviting.
- There is a transit stop located on site but there is no wayfinding from Main Street to direct potential riders.

**Participants in the business survey as part of the LRRP process provided a ranking for how important they view public spaces in the downtown to be.**

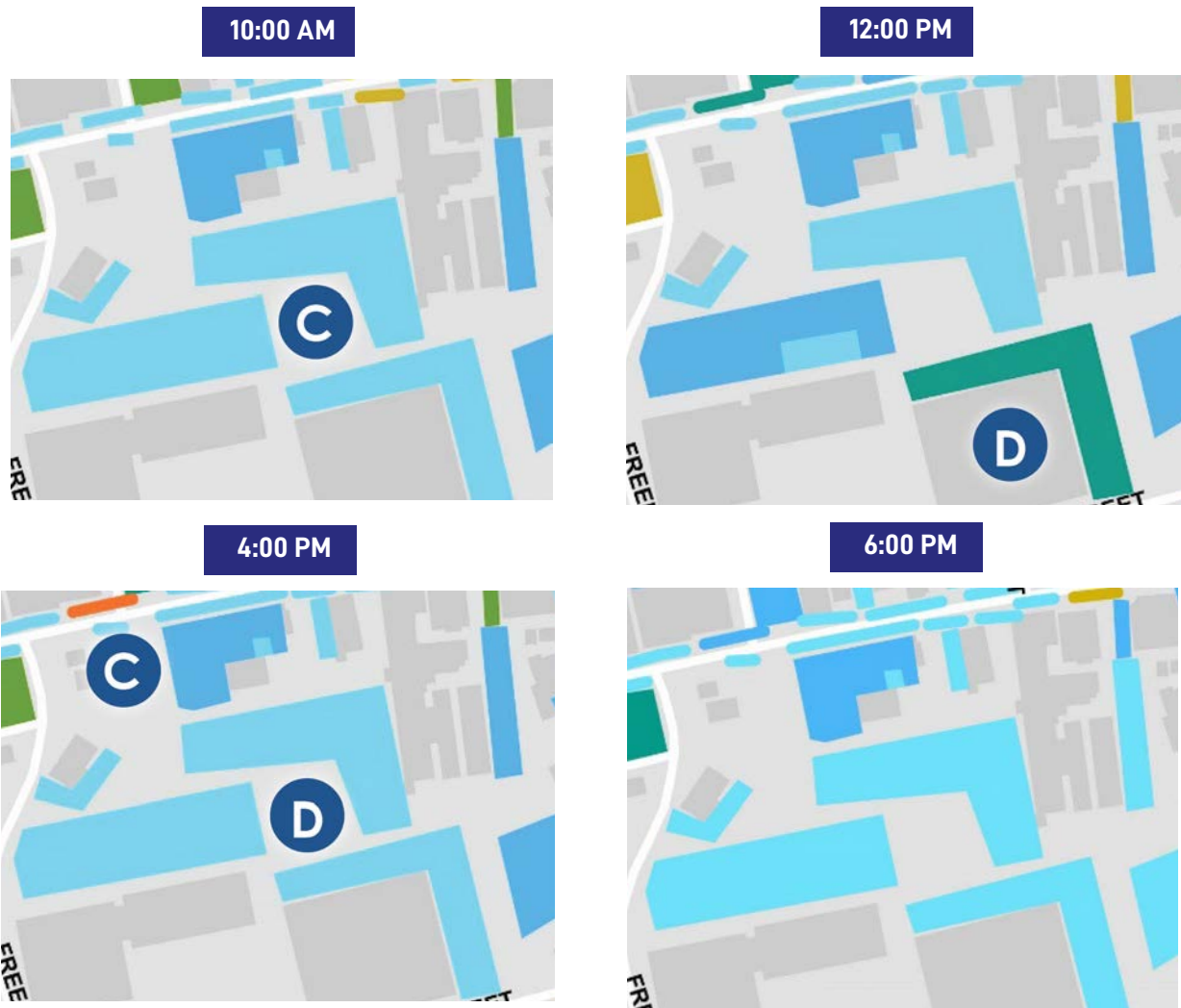


Importance of public space  
and seating areas





Lord Pond Plaza Parking Lot Utilization Levels Throughout a Typical Day



**The Lord Pond Plaza parking areas are significantly underutilized at all times of the day.**  
(Source: Downtown Athol Parking Plan, 2019)



Typical condition (utilization) of the parking area once entering the Plaza via Main Street (Source: Stantec)

## Early Actions/Achievements to date

Significant public outreach and discussions have already taken place regarding the plaza, most recently surrounding the proposed final development plan (Spring 2021). These have brought to light recurring public desires that can be tested and potentially permanently addressed through thoughtful amendments to the most recently approved concept.

Additionally, several public events have been held in and near Athol in recent years, which are examples of activities that are well-suited to the Plaza if a dedicated space for hosting them was defined. Athol's history of successful collaborations for positive programming is shown below.



*Athol Woman's Club (Athol Daily News)*



*Downtown, Pedestrian-only Event (Greenfield Recorder)*



*Multi-town National Night Out Event (Athol PD)*



*Athol Fourth Friday (Fourth Friday & Festival Merchant Group)*



## Action Item

Key activities for the project include:

- **Identifying people/organizations** who will be involved in the project process
- **Building consensus** with adjacent landowners and businesses
- **Establishing protocol** and procedures for how the site can be used, managed, maintained, etc.
- Identifying strategies for how the Plaza can function with active uses during **all seasons**
- Identifying and pursuing appropriate **funding sources**
- Defining and approving a **final temporary concept**
- Soliciting interest from local and/or regional businesses or organizations to provide **retail opportunities**, or other services and programs to attract visitors
- **Sourcing materials** to implement the temporary concepts
- **Gathering data** both during and afterwards
- **Maintaining dialogue** with developers who created the long-term development concept for the Plaza



*Looking northeast from within Lord Pond Plaza (Source: Stantec)*



## Process

### MONTH 1

- Form a selected group/meeting to identify biggest priorities for the site that could be executed with temporary improvements (e.g., pedestrian path connections, public space, higher visibility bus stop)

### MONTHS 2-3

- Pursue funding resources
- Hire consultant to develop informal, quick-to-implement concepts
- Develop agreements, permits, etc, as needed to manage, enforce, and maintain the temporary spaces

### MONTHS 3-4

- Work with landowners and DPW to inform of and/or secure permissions/process for making installations
- Solicit interest from business owners or organizations about providing services on the site

### MONTHS 4-7 (potentially longer)

- Purchase materials and source from vendors as needed
- Advertise the concept and a calendar of opportunities or list of options for engaging with the site
- Install and test the concept

### MONTHS 7+ (ongoing)

- Post-evaluation provide detailed data (qualitative and quantitative) to BSC Developers (TBD)

### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Given the scale of the Pond Plaza, a one-time demonstration event may be the best place to start.
- An activity such as "Paint the pavement" could be up for an entire summer or year depending on paint quality.
- Summer and Fall are ideal if snow/cold are a barrier to the place being active all year. Additional resources are usually required to stay active in the winter.

## Project Sheet Element- Recommended Data Items to Collect During the Temporary Deployment

- 2-hour counts/observations at least three times before and after improvements to identify change in both pedestrian and vehicle behavior.
- Time lapse cameras from on top of a nearby building to track movement ("desire lines") and usage of the space.
- Surveys that ask people their experience in the spaces impacted (length of stay in downtown, if it was their first time, what is most important to improve their experience, what features they would like to see incorporated going forward).
- Parking utilization counts
- Transit ridership at the bus stop located next to the Ocean State Job Lot

### **Project Sheet Element- Recommended Activation Ideas for the Space**

Activating the space in order to get community feedback prior to development can inform how people want to use the space and garner support for the project. Depending on the resources available, we see the following scopes having the most impact relative to their budget.

#### **Small scale:**

- Block-party sized event. Mark off areas to show where the public spaces would be created (stream, vegetation, pathways, etc.) Use bollards or cones to block off areas that would be just for pedestrian use.
- Activate the area with furniture: movable tables and chairs, adirondacks, picnic bench with shade umbrella, a cart with board and lawn games. This would serve as a test for how the broader public spaces could be used.
- Focus on generating feedback on experiences people want to have in the space and use those experiences to guide the design and plan development.

#### **Medium scale:**

- Larger event in the Pond Plaza area that is laid out in a fashion consistent with the future design. Use the event to build support of the project, test ideas, and iterate on design concepts based on functional feedback that comes to light as people interact in the space. Are there bottlenecks? Do certain spaces feel isolated? Do people gravitate to certain spaces that should be improved more?
- Have community organizations produce the various activities within the large event. Generate a sense of active place through keeping those multiple partner driven activities being available in a defined event space. See TMG's Rice and Larpenteur example in the RRP case study list for an example of this type of medium scale event.

#### **Large scale:**

- Paint the plaza for an entire summer/year (blue for water, green for vegetated areas, tan for new pathways, etc.)
- Block off the future areas that will become the plaza and furnish with seating and games. This will allow vehicles to test out

the new traffic/parking patterns over time and give feedback.

- Stage several medium and small scale events within the space to garner community feedback and momentum with community partners. Make changes with each event to test different design concepts.

### **Project Sheet Element- Recommended Pre-Activation of the Space Prior to Development: Changing People's Perception of the Space**

Setting up the lot for periodic larger events not related to the design can get people to start thinking about the space as a social place rather than a parking lot. Activating the space unrelated to the design can show people what is possible, change the narrative and build momentum around the project without even referencing the project. Ideas might include:

- Movies + drive ins
- Bike rodeos
- Ice rink
- Skate park
- Adventure playground
- A block party
- Pay youth to come up with events.
- Work with the library to host an event.
- Have the neighboring restaurant have an "eat outside" day - bring tables into the plaza.

### **Project Sheet Element- Recommendations for Event Management**

- Conduct a survey around uses and activities to determine what people would like to do.
- If a project-based event, communicate to the community that part of the purpose of the event is to get feedback on design improvements before it is built out and final.
- Continuum of activities - make sure you provide activities that will draw the variety of residents. Every event doesn't need to speak to everyone, but the total of events should target the entire community.
- Get photos for newspaper/social media to show that people have participated in the process and to encourage more involvement.

### **Project Sheet Element- Recommendations for Event Management**

- Resources **MUST** be allocated to ongoing care and cleanliness (and ideally programming) for any temporary public space to be successful - don't spend all the money just on building it.
- Don't forget to provide shade and movable seating so everyone is comfortable.
- How will you draw people into the space? What is the creative edge at the roadway?
- Consider building in concessions if adjacent businesses don't sell food.
- Give grants to people/organizations to seed the activations
- Have third parties rent/lease/use-agreements for the spaces and take on liability, then sub contract out to other entities
- Get photos for newspaper/social media to show that people have positively used the space to get people to change their attitude of the space.

### **Project Sheet Element- Recommendations for "Ownership" and safety in temporary public spaces**

- Community ambassadors who spend time on site activating it and caring for the space often create safer environments than police that cycle through. If possible, have a dedicated person (or persons) who are in the space regularly to pick up trash, greet visitors, and execute events/activities.
- Issue a call for X (Community Ambassador, Space manager etc) and promote through churches, schools, local news online/ newsletters
- Involve the youth in the creation of the spaces and their ongoing activation. This will create buy in and likely dramatically reduce their bad behaviors in the area. Make sure there are many positive things to do in the space - positive activity reduces negative activity. Places to sit, games to play, frequent small scale events.
- Make it a "yes" space, where it is easy to do small positive things without outside permission.

### **Project Sheet Element- Recommendations for Establishing Authorized Uses**

- Post signage in the City-owned portion of the lot that parking will no longer be allowed in that area starting on a given date that ties to a change in use in the property. If drivers see the space staying unchanged and empty after the requested change, they are more likely to be jaded about why they should go to the trouble of changing their behavior.
- On that date, section off the area and monitor it. Give the truck drivers free coffee and donuts and information on the larger plan to give them context and develop relationships with them. Focus on why it benefits the community to comply with the new rules.
- Make sure they know about the events in the plaza so they can experience the benefits of the change. Give them incentives to come to events (like food vouchers).
- Keep the area sectioned off and see how traffic and semi parking flows change.

### **Project Sheet Element- Funding Tips**

- Funnel activities associated with existing large festivals and events into Pond Plaza to try things in the space.
- Use the materials that are already on hand - paint for the pavement is not expensive, neither are many outdoor patio furniture or game items.
- Resources flow to things that work/happen - don't let a perceived lack of cash stop you from starting. Starting is the key with whatever is already at hand!
- This article lists some good resources for getting started with attracting private dollars to your public space project. Some will be more applicable than others, but it does cover a full range of small dollar seed funding up through a more substantial project funding opportunity. <https://www.pps.org/article/get-funded-tips-for-a-new-era-of-placemaking-philanthropy>
- Explore County or State level funding opportunities.
- Building political capital for an improvement fund to be included in the next city budget/ general fund cycle to include funds for a Demonstration project phase that will direct the larger investment in a future year.



## Project Sheet Element- Most Recently Adopted Proposal for Lord Pond Plaza Redevelopment



*The Development Option Selected through Public Process for the Greening Lord Pond Plaza Project (Source: BSC Group)*

### Top 3 responses to the question- “What types of uses would you like to see at Lord Pond Plaza?”

- Community gathering space (166)
- More options for shopping and dining (161)
- Passive recreational uses (93)

The public survey was conducted as part of the Greening Lord Pond Plaza Project in Spring 2021.

*(Source: BSC Group)*

## Project Sheet Element- Concept for “Temporary Activation Zones” to Test Prior to Formalization and Construction of Greening Lord Pond Plaza Concept

The following concept identifies a series of small-scale strategies to address known existing challenges and public desires not entirely captured within the proposed Greening Lord Pond Plaza Concept. In particular, are opportunities to improve vehicle and pedestrian flow, reduce the emphasis of parking on the Plaza footprint and increase opportunities for other programming that support the improved vitality of the local economy and cultural offerings. This concept recommends short-term tactical solutions (to be refined and implemented with the assistance of a hired consultant) to guarantee that the long-term development of the Plaza truly speaks to the needs of the community and integrates with the rest of downtown, generally.







# Host a downtown cultural event to support businesses and show positive change



CULTURAL/  
ARTS

Provided by SME Consultant

Susan Silberberg, CivicMoxie

Location

Fall River, MA

## Origin

Collaborative effort growing out of MassDevelopment TDI project and including other FRACC members involved in Viva Fall River (the Arts, Culture and Creative Economy Master Planning effort for the city)

## Budget



Low – \$37,000 plus in-kind donations

## Timeframe



Short – planning and implementation in 3-1/2 months

## Risk



Low

## Key Performance Indicators

Number of attendees, Number of partners working together successfully, Good press

## Partners & Resources

One SouthCoast Chamber of Commerce, Fall River Arts + Cultural Coalition (FRACC), MassDevelopment TDI, BayCoast Bank, We Love Fall River, Fall River Public Schools, City of Fall River – main partners



## Diagnostic

Fall River has many outstanding attributes but is lacking in a collaborative vision and image that can pull all the great things together. There are many different efforts and activities with no central organizing force to advocate, market, and lead the way in business support, tourism development, and arts and cultural coordination across the city.

Key challenges include high turnover and legal issues for City Hall leaders in recent years that have grabbed headlines and stolen the narrative of the good things happening in the city. In addition, there is a fragmented approach to solving problems and building momentum for positive change. The downtown has significant vacancies and the geographic spread of the city, as well as its hilly topography, make connections and focus a challenge. However, the diversity of the city, including its residents and cultural traditions, food and restaurant offerings, and presence of a small but strong “making” economy offer some unique opportunities. The city’s location on the water, proximity to Boston and Providence, and abundance of relatively affordable housing and workspaces, and a sizeable inventory of old mill buildings provide many opportunities.

## Action Item

The Winterbridge cultural events (running Fridays and Saturdays for six weeks in the Winter of 2021) at Gromada Plaza downtown was planned to build on the MassDevelopment TDI work on South Main Street and to showcase the collaborative power of FRACC, a 40-member diverse group of arts and culture, business, community nonprofit, philanthropic, and public sector stakeholders. FRACC is charting new territory in the scope of its goals and Winterbridge was meant as a way to:

- Bring the community together and engender city pride (begin to take back the narrative of the city)
- Demonstrate the power of collaboration (put the power of FRACC to work)
- Provide community activities and spaces during winter under Covid-19 guidelines

Winterbridge included music, fire pits, evergreen trees, live painting, community partners providing grab n go services, dancing/Zumba sessions, live entertainers (costume characters, singers, and musicians), and a We Love Fall River window display competition.



*Live painting was part of the event.*



*Source: for all photos: FRACC*

*There were over 36 businesses, nonprofits and individuals who came together to provide staff, funding, programming, marketing, and other needs for the events.*

## Process

The Winterbridge cultural events grew out of the desire for an early “win” and demonstration of the power of collaboration including the MassDevelopment TDI and FRACC. Planning goals focused on attracting people to downtown and exposing them to music, dance, live painting, and other cultural elements...showing what the future can look like. The steps to plan and execute this type of event include:

- Set goals such as: 1) desired audience; 2) how to help businesses attract customers downtown; 3) change image of downtown; 4) practice collaboration or implement a pilot project to see feasibility, etc.
- Gather parties with similar interests, complementary resources and expertise.
- Brainstorm ways to achieve the core goals. Develop criteria to select one strategy to move forward: 1) Is there someone who has done an event before? 2) Does someone have paid staff that can lend a hand? 3) Who has graphics and marketing expertise? Can this strategy tag onto another event or a milestone in the community?
- Answer these questions: 1) Who is the audience? 2) What message to convey? 3) How does this align with municipal and business district goals? 4) What does success look like? 5) What would cause everyone to smile the day after the event? Keep the answers to these questions in mind throughout planning
- Work back from the goals to identify people, organizations, agencies available to help: chart interests, capacity, resources, contacts.
- What location best supports the goals? Create a plan of the area.
- List and draw activity areas, block party elements
- Link program activities with partners/volunteers.
- Refine event: what happens, time, day, activities
- Create a budget sheet for overall event, each activity area.
- Think carefully about branding...what to call it? How does this fit with overall branding and marketing for the downtown or commercial district?



*Volunteers helped build the “set” for the weekend activities.*



*Winterbridge was a success and led to increased “buzz” about what is possible downtown and also the power of collaboration and FRACC’s work.*



## Process (Continued)

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- Create a budget sheet for overall event, each activity area.
- Think carefully about branding...what to call it? How does this fit with overall branding and marketing for the downtown or commercial district?
- Create a detailed implementation plan with timeline of tasks, roles.
- Document what you do and think about how to make the effort sustainable in the long run. How can this event be a pilot project for ongoing programming?
- During the event, try to include ways to capture information the attendees (raffle that requires their zip code, ideas chalk wall that asks what people want to see in the district, etc.)
- Do a debrief immediately after the event to improve efforts for the future. Ask businesses for their input and reactions.



*Volunteers helped build the “set” for the weekend activities.*



*Winterbridge was a success and led to increased “buzz” about what is possible downtown and also the power of collaboration and FRACC’s work.*



The Fall River TDI District is creating an Arts & Culture Master Plan that supports the city's arts, cultural diversity and traditions, vibrant public spaces, and economic vitality. The goal is to understand how residents enjoy arts and culture in the city and region, identify what may be missing, and create a roadmap to move forward to support robust arts and culture in the city.

Please take the **5-minute survey** so we can make sure many voices are heard during this planning process!



[bit.ly/36AoZ6g](http://bit.ly/36AoZ6g)



@vivafallriver



facebook.com/VivaFallRiver

Viva  
Fall  
River

GRAB A MARKER  
AND WRITE DOWN  
YOUR IDEAS HERE!

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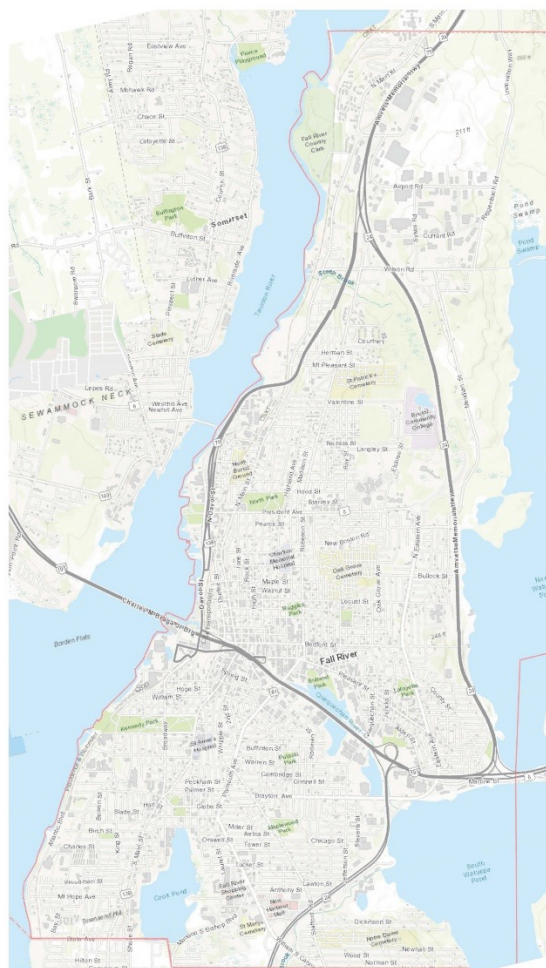
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CivicMoxie®



# Winter Activation at the Panoway in Downtown Wayzata



Provided by SME Consultant

The Musicant Group

Location

Linear lakefront park within downtown Wayzata, MN

Origin

The Musicant Group + Wayzata Chamber of Commerce with funding from the City of Wayzata and the Panoway Conservancy

Budget



\$90,000 covering larger events, weekly programming, physical improvements, project management and staffing

Timeframe



Planning: Nov - Dec 2020 | Implementation: Jan - Mar 2021

Risk



Very short planning period, frigid temperatures, alignment within the partnership, brand new space

Key Performance Indicators

Return visitors during event series, emergence and increases in self-programming, local news coverage, community awareness of the space displayed by event attendance, number of pilot features continued during future seasons

Partners & Resources

Small businesses and community organization partnerships to co-produce events. City provision of bathrooms, storage, snow removal, site care, and Christmas trees. These partnerships unlocked a significant increase in possible programming and expanded of the impact from a one-time site activation to a series that would impact traffic in downtown overall.

<p><b>Diagnostic</b></p>	<p>Wayzata is a lakefront main street community located 15 miles west of Minneapolis, MN long known as a destination for shopping and dining. A major challenge that the downtown has faced for decades is that while the single-sided main street looks out over Lake Minnetonka, there lies a parking lot and active freight railway that cut off access between the two. Through years of effort, the 2-block long parking lot was converted into a linear park – the Panoway – which opened in the late summer of 2020. As the effects of COVID were increasingly felt by the community and the retailers, the city and chamber saw the newly opened space as a strategic features to help drive customer traffic downtown during the coldest months of the year.</p> <p>In order to remain responsive and iterative with the changing COVID-19 landscape, we adopted a gradual implementation that focused on providing a variety of activities within regularly scheduled times and serving the needs of the community members already present, while building to safe in-person gatherings for signature events.</p> <p><b>Key opportunities included:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leveraging the views of the lake</li> <li>• Providing high quality outdoor places for people to enjoy take out</li> <li>• Working with existing habits of dog walking, walking, running, bike riding, and fire building</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenges included</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that visitors could stay warm and/or warm up</li> <li>• The need to create experiences that didn't need to be actively staffed</li> <li>• How to translate a long standing one-time event into a season long experience</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action Item</b></p>	<p>The project took a holistic approach to the activation of the space and its impact on the entire downtown. We combined the physical enhancement of the space with a spectrum of programming and promotion to support a continuum visitation – from daily, to weekly outing, to first-time local tourist.</p> <p><b>Action #1 – Persona Generation + Experience Mapping</b></p> <p>At the onset we mapped out the different audience/user types (personas), identifying their characteristics, wants, desires, and pain points. We then collated these together to craft the key experiences that the overall project should aim to deliver.</p> <p><b>Action #2 - Building Partnerships</b></p> <p>Once the core event and improvement framework had been set, we engaged with local businesses and organizations to co-produce events as part of the activation. Critically, budget was allocated to pay the partners for their participation. These efforts brought in additional resources, promotional capacity, and generated heightened feelings of community ownership.</p> <p><b>Action #3 – Physical improvements</b></p> <p>Throughout the activation, improvements were made to support programming and everyday use. The two fold focus of these were to enhance visitor warmth and to create more things to do. Enhancements included: a winter garden / wind block, curling court, activity cart, fire pits, ice sculptures, light installations, and a pop up dog run.</p> <p><b>Action #4 – Execute Programming</b></p> <p>Each Friday new small and large scale events would occur, providing both regularity and variety – which together serve to build an audience over time.</p> <p><b>Action #5 – Promotion</b></p> <p>Through multichannel marketing, PR, and the events themselves the brand and awareness of the space downtown grew which drove continued increases in daily visitation, weekly rituals, and destination tourists.</p>



## Process

- Project launch with the city to define shared goals and what can be done as-of-right, what needs a permit, and what is off limits. Also to catalogue what other resources partners can provide upfront and stakeholders who should be engaged
- Engage with the broader community – both stakeholders, partners, and the broader public. Conversations with stakeholders and partners should focus on what shared success looks like and if there are ways to collaborate. For the public, focus question on what they want to be able to do in the site – these then shape the core experiences that the project / site should deliver.
- Feedback from the public and stakeholders should shed light on which direction to take for items where the project team may disagree.
- Once personas and priority experiences have been defined, craft improvements plan that incorporates physical improvements, events, promotions, and site care.
- Make first round of improvements. Gauge relative success through agreed upon metrics. Be sure to reserve budget to fund iterations based on learnings that can only occur after a project has begun
- Promote via mediums that are relevant to the site and targeted audiences. Leverage community partners to promote through their networks.
- Collect data throughout the effort to gauge success, lessons learned, and testimonials. Capture data that not only is important to you, but also current and future project partners and funders
- Once project is complete, craft a final report that can be used to guide future iterations and to solicit funding in future years.



*Physical Improvements: Fire to warm up visitors, a winter garden of repurposed evergreen trees, and lighting installations with pop-up domes*



*Ongoing Site Materials: Outside of events, there were still elements available on site for users to enjoy, including a Letters to the Lake interactive opportunity, an activity box, and a Puppies of Panoway box of dog treats + toys.*





## Gove Street Crossing: Pop-up Park + Plaza

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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	 <p>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)</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (&lt;5 years) – October 2018 to June 2019</p>
Risk	 <p>Low Risks (temporary installation, low-cost materials)</p>
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"> <li>1. a pop-up plaza on Gove Street next to a residential apartment building, and</li> <li>2. a seasonal installation on the Greenway.</li> </ol> <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 BS�A 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

Origin	Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies, Osceola County (FL) Board of County Commissioners Community Development Department
Budget	 Low-cost, municipal staff engagement
Timeframe	 Short-term, may require changes to municipal review processes
Risk	 Low risk
Key Performance Indicators	Number of permits reviewed and issued, length of permitting and approval process
Partners & Resources	Municipal departments, to include, but not limited to Planning, Police, Fire, Building, DPW, and Health, and Town/City Administration; DLTA funding to assess permitting
Diagnostic	<p>The COVID pandemic has unleashed creativity and permissiveness in municipal special events permitting that cities and towns want to hold onto as society opens up. Elements to be retained include easing the burden of applying for permits and making sure costs reflect the amount of effort necessary to process the permits and do not result in inequitable access by different groups.</p> <p>More efficient and easier permitting processes can lead to quicker turn-around and peace of mind for those organizing these events for the community. Streamlining event permitting can help agencies organizing events to use their resources more efficiently and will result in better events when permitted on a singular parcel as zoning dictates.</p> <p>The following example is a regulatory process taken from Osceola County in Florida that employs best practices for special event permitting: a central repository for application with the ability to submit electronically and follow the permit review process via electronic permitting. Review processes are done transparently and discussed at routinely scheduled meetings in conformance with the local government's regulatory codes.</p>

## Streamlining Special Event Permitting



Provided by SME Consultant

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Location

Osceola County, Florida

## Action Item

In order to streamline your permitting process, the municipality should review its permitting powers: who reviews and approves, how much does the permit cost, is there an appeal procedure, etc.

The following Best Practices can be used to improve communication between stakeholders and the community about the local permitting process for special events. For this best practice, the Osceola County Board of County Commissioners utilizes these techniques to ensure an expedient, open permitting process for their special events.

- Single Point of Contact
- Users' Guide to Permitting with Permitting Flow Charts & Checklists
- Clear Submittal Requirements
- Concurrent Applications
- Combined Public Hearings, if needed
- Pre-Application Process
- Development Review Committee (DRC)
- Regularly scheduled inter-departmental meetings
- Physical proximity of professional staff to review

These best practices apply to streamlining special event applications that are allowed in specific areas of a community. In most cases, the zoning district would dictate the type of uses allowed in a community. This particular example permits special events as a type of use in commercially zoned areas and have a limitation of occurrences per calendar year.

## Process

As listed above, streamlined permitting can be realized if a municipality explores the concepts below. Not only has COVID maybe expedited these processes, but it has likely created a more permanent change in the ways municipalities interact with special events.

1. Single Point of Contact. The Community Development Department was the repository for the initial application and would determine if requirements were met leading to the scheduling of a Development Review Committee Meeting.
2. Users' Guide to Permitting and Permitting Flow Charts and Checklists. If a community already has a product like this, the process for permitting for special events can be incorporated into the existing guide. As the government provided an electronic permitting system, following the flow of the permit was easy for the applicant to see what either was missing or if a staff review had occurred.
3. Clear Submittal Requirements. Special event permit applications required documented permission from the property owner, site plan, photos, proof of insurance, and a narrative description of the event. Other documents would be required if necessary.
4. Concurrent Applications. Other required application permits, and their approvals, would need to be furnished as part of the permit approval process. The communication internally would be to ensure those permit approvals were occurring with the County Health Department or Public Safety, if necessary.
5. Combined Public Hearings, if needed. This was not a likely occurrence due to the local regulation, however, concurrent approvals would occur at a designated meeting of the local Development Review Committee.
6. Pre-Application Process. The point of contact for the process was the specific department staff person who would be able to address outstanding issues and questions regarding the permit requirements.




## Process (Continued)

Development Review Committee. The administrative approval of the DRC would occur either through a consent agenda or if pulled to be addressed publicly. The DRC included DPW, Buildings, and Planning/Zoning. The Departments of Public Safety and Health and the School District are often attendees at these meetings.

Regularly scheduled inter-departmental meetings. These meetings kept the issues of the specific special event permit in the County's pipeline of coordinated reviews.

Physical proximity of professional staff to review. The County Administration Building housed all departments. The housing of all departments in the building allowed for a One-Stop shop of sorts. Like with other permitting, increased the ability of interdepartmental staff communications with applicants and each other.

	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Osceola County Special Event Application</h3> <p>Osceola County Board of County Commissioners Community Development Department 1 Courthouse Square, Suite 1400 Kissimmee, FL 34741 Phone: (407)742-0200 Specialpermits@osceola.org</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Application No.: _____ Date Received: _____</p>	
<p><b><u>Submittal Checklist</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Property Owner Authorization</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Proof of Ownership</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Legal Description</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Narrative describing the event in detail. Including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sounds which will project beyond the property lines.</li> <li>• Vehicular Traffic and parking</li> </ul> </li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site plan showing:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lot Dimensions,</li> <li>• Location of Special Event (with all details of set-up), Setbacks of set-up from property and right-of-way lines, Driveways, identifying parking and access, roads, tents, signs, portable toilets, and any other structures and setbacks from property lines and any other existing site improvements</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Application Fees \$620.00</li> </ul>	<p>In accordance with Chapter 3, Article 3.8, Section 3.8.1.O of the Osceola County Land Development Code, authorization for a Special Event is issued to:</p> <p><b><u>Applicant</u></b></p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Agent/Lessee: _____ Tax ID# _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p>Email: _____ Phone: _____</p> <p><b><u>Event Details</u></b></p> <p>Address of Event: _____</p> <p>Parcel Number: _____</p> <p>Dates of Event: _____ Hours: _____</p> <p>Event on County property? Yes ( <input type="checkbox"/> ) No ( <input type="checkbox"/> )</p> <p>If yes provide liability Insurance. The insurance shall have a limit not less than \$1 million per occurrence for the general aggregate.</p> <p>_____</p> <p><b>Details of Event:</b> (a narrative may be attached to describe the event in detail.)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	

*An application like this existed both as a fillable paper version and electronically at the county's permitting website.*

## Project Recommendations: Other Projects









## #6. Update Municipal Parking Lot and Improve Pedestrian Connections to Parking

**Description-** This project includes the revised layout of municipal parking lot with improved pedestrian connections, increased safety elements and amenities, and upgraded crosswalks along Main Street.

### PROJECT GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Remove conditions that facilitate unwanted behavior** (*public survey priority*)
- Attract more visitors to utilize the lot instead of on-street spaces
- Calm traffic along Main Street
- Encourage businesses to activate or improve the rear of shops

Category		Public Realm
Location		Municipal parking lot located behind the buildings on the south side of Main Street between Exchange Street and Traverse Street.
Origin		Eric Smith- Athol Planning Director, Mary Holtorf- Chair of the Downtown Vitality Committee (committee members also reviewed project)
Budget		<p>High Budget (Over \$200,000), includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff time for review and oversight of the process</li> <li>• Costs for the retention of a consultant for finalized design and engineering services, and for construction/installation of included elements (e.g., asphalt, paint, lighting fixtures, signage, landscaping)</li> </ul>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Medium Risk – The parking lot upgrade will require sensitivity and flexibility with how it interacts with the parking area below the parking deck along Traverse Street. The parking deck has recently been determined to have structural concerns and is currently closed from use. Whether it will be re-worked, or whether it will retain its function as a parking deck is yet to be determined.</p> <p>While the parking lot upgrade construction is taking place, temporary measures to re-locate vehicles to other convenient parking areas will require a traffic plan and arrangements with landowners of other available parking facilities. Coordination with various Town departments and business owners along Main Street, in particular, will also be necessary to ensure no interruption in business activity or services requiring rear-of-building access.</p>



## Key Performance Indicators

- Increased utilization of parking lot during both the day and evening periods
- Decreased occurrence of negative social behaviors
- Increase activation of spaces at the rear of Main Street businesses
- Reduced occurrence of speeding vehicles along the Main Street corridor
- Increase of pedestrian activity

## Partners & Resources

Partners- Town Planning and Department of Public Works, Police Department, Select business owners, Downtown Vitality Committee

Resources-

- MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces Grant
- DHCD Community Development Block Grant



*View of the municipal lot from the Traverse Street parking deck*



*View from the municipal lot towards the under-deck parking*



*View of the municipal lot from the Traverse Street parking deck*



*View of the alley connecting the municipal lot to Main Street*

## Diagnostic

The Municipal Parking Lot is centrally located but, because it is bounded by multi-storey buildings on Main and Exchange Streets and the two-level parking deck on Traverse, it is completely shielded from view by the road on all of its sides. As such, it is likely to only be used by people "in the know" and does not easily accommodate visitors to Town who may be unfamiliar with available parking facilities. This also creates higher demand for on-street spaces along Main Street. The 2019 Downtown Athol Parking Plan data (see below) showed that the parking lot is functioning below what is considered an efficient utilization rate (between 80-90%) during all times of the day. This may be due to a combination of factors:

- A lack of wayfinding directing parkers to the lot
- The lot is surrounded by rear of properties that are inactive. There are no "eyes on the street" to contribute to a feeling of safety
- The rear of the lot is dominated by a partially enclosed, dark parking area below the parking deck. It is an area known to attract graffiti and other unwelcome behaviors.
- Crosswalks along Main Street have been observed to not be effective in calming speeding vehicles, which further disincentivizes people from walking to parking areas
- The Main Street alley connection is unwelcoming and unclear.
- Businesses along Main Street operate during highly varying hours.

Responses from the parking plan public survey imply that the lack of maintenance, lighting, and other access challenges of these lots impact their implied level of safety and overall desirability. The plan recommended updating the striping, lighting, landscaping, signage, vehicle access points, and safe pedestrian markings for access between the parking lot and Main Street. The Aspire Athol Plan also highlighted the parking lot with a sample reconfiguration as part of a town-wide development strategy.

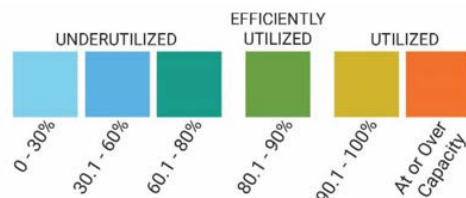
The parking lot's final configuration should improve its appearance and amenities, enhance safety elements, increase activation and vitality, and improve connectivity to the destinations it serves.

### Athol Municipal Parking Lot Utilization Levels Throughout a Typical Day



**The Municipal Parking Lot is underutilized at all times of the day.**

(Source: Downtown Athol Parking Plan, 2019)



<p><b>Early Actions/Achievements to Date</b></p>	<p>The LRRP 'Placemaking Activation Project' outlined within this report will also support the goals of the Municipal Parking Lot Upgrade Project through its aesthetic enhancements to Main Street. These will increase the attraction of pedestrians, facilitate their comfort and safe movement, and better direct/connect people to the parking lot through the proposed alley improvements.</p>
<p><b>Action Item</b></p>	<p>Key actions include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the <b>people/organizations</b> who need to be part of this process.</li> <li>• Develop an <b>engagement process</b> appropriate for the municipality and the required approval process, particularly targeting the input of every landowner/business owner adjacent to the lot</li> <li>• Decide which <b>funding source</b> is appropriate and, if the source is a grant program, apply for funds.</li> <li>• If a consultant is deemed appropriate, go through the Commonwealth's <b>procurement process</b></li> <li>• Developing a <b>traffic management plan</b> while the lot is being upgraded, and a maintenance/ownership plan once finalized</li> <li>• Conduct a <b>post-installation evaluation</b> (following a defined period of use) to understand parking utilization levels, changes in business activity, and to identify reductions in negative social behaviors.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Process</b></p>	<p><b>MONTH 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene people/organizations to define roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Conduct site visit with DPW, engineers to identify potential challenges</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTH 2-3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct engagement of businesses and landowners to identify needs and inform draft design concepts</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTHS 3-4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop draft designs (and costings) with input from engineers, DPW, and other relevant parties to ensure compliance and best practice</li> <li>• Pursue potential funding sources</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTH 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share draft designs with town officials to identify preferred plan, make revisions if needed, and secure approval to proceed</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTHS 6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (If funding is secured), initiate contracting process and define an installation plan, order materials through vendors</li> <li>• Develop traffic management plans and update management/enforcement/maintenance policies for the parking lot, as appropriate</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTH 7</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Installation of small-scale upgrades, including crosswalks and parking wayfinding signage</li> <li>• Resurfacing/restriping of parking lot and installation of other elements, including lighting fixtures, outdoor dining pad, landscaping</li> </ul> <p><b>MONTH 8+ (ONGOING)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-evaluation by the Town on success of the upgrade using a data collection process</li> </ul>



## Project Sheet Element- Parking Lot Design Best Practice Guidance (Source: ParkingBoxx)

**Parking Space Dimensions and Layout-** How many spaces you can fit in your parking layout depends in part on the dimension of each space. (Though, there are many other elements you'll need to include in your layout — parking spaces are just one.) Typically public parking spaces are 9' x 18' with tiny spaces as small as 7.25' x 15.1'. Depending on the angles in which vehicles park, aisles for driving may be 11' to 23'.

### Configuring Your Parking Layout Design for Pedestrian Safety and Convenience

Designing your parking lot around foot traffic is important for safety and customer convenience. While thinking about where people will naturally need to walk through and around your parking lot, keep these principles in mind:

If you align rows of parking spaces perpendicular to the facility, you'll minimize the number of pedestrian aisle crossings (which is ideal)

- Provide plenty of access points and crosswalks from parking areas to facility entries
- Separate pedestrian walkways from parking aisles whenever possible
- Keep the number of aisles pedestrians must cross to a minimum
- To safely allow pedestrians to walk in the drive aisles, parking aisle widths should be wider for two-way traffic; width varies with one-way parking depending on the angle of the parking
- Accessible parking spaces should be located as close to the facility entrance as possible. Where there is more than one access point (for example, when your parking lot serves multiple buildings), accessible parking spots should be made available close to each entrance.
- Try to keep parking spaces within 250 feet of a facility entrance. Proximity is especially key for customer or visitor parking.

### Parking Space Configuration for Efficiency and Driver Safety

Basic best practices are to:

- Eliminate dead-end parking areas, so there's



**Example of a recently upgraded parking lot in Massachusetts that prioritizes pedestrian connections** (Source: Stantec)

always a flow-through of traffic along aisles (the driving lanes facilitating access to parking spots)

- Locate aisles and rows of parking parallel to the long dimension of the site
- Orient parking on each side of an aisle
- The three main parking configurations are parallel, perpendicular (90 degree), or at an angle to the aisle (30, 45, or 60 degree).
- Parallel parking works well in narrow, linear spots, which are also space-efficient. But as most drivers know, it's difficult to maneuver into parallel spaces and can cause issues with traffic.
- 90-degree parking (perpendicular) accommodates significantly more vehicles than angled parking (e.g. 30-degree) and works with one-way or two-way aisles. The closer to perpendicular, the less area you'll need per vehicle in your layout, so it's more efficient and cost-effective. However, perpendicular parking can be difficult for some drivers to maneuver and can cause visibility issues

## Laying Out Your Parking Lot Based on Setting, Weather and More

Of course, every parking lot layout is influenced by the site. You'll need to consider the surrounding area, seasonal weather, pedestrian traffic flow, safety and more.

While great parking lot layout depends on the context, keep these general principles in mind:

- **Be a good neighbor:** If your lot is surrounded by residential areas, consider how you can screen the lot with fencing, trees, hedging and earth berms around the parking perimeter.
- **Consider the environment:** How can you preserve or enhance the natural environment in and around your parking lot? Avoid unnecessarily removing mature vegetation or degrading soil stability.
- **Keep sightlines clear:** Think about how landscaping or landmarks (existing or planned) will impact drivers' sightlines. For example, if you have parking islands in your lot, keep those clear of tall impediments.
- **Be prepared for the weather:** When it rains, your parking lot needs excellent drainage. When it's hot, you'll need shade. And if you're designing a parking lot anywhere it snows, you'll also have to consider snowplows and snow piles. How can you accommodate plowing and snow holding areas without blocking parking spaces or the flow of traffic?

## What Other Parking Lot Design Elements Do You Need to Make Parking User-Friendly?

Good parking lot layout also factors in ways you can help customers and pedestrians navigate the space safely. For example:

- What lighting will you need and how will that impact the available space?
- What striping and signage will you use to indicate regular and handicapped spaces?
- How will you clearly mark the direction of traffic flow?
- What visual aids will customers need to quickly locate the parking equipment?
- What barriers will you need to keep cars safely situated in their spaces and protect property? (Consider wheelstop barriers along



**Examples of two different but impactful approaches to well-lit and landscaped parking lots** (Source: Top- Whole Building Design Guide, Bottom- ELED Lights)

the front end of parking slots, a curb along the parking lot edge and barriers around parking lot equipment)

User-friendly parking lot layout includes accessibility considerations.

Factor in easy access from accessible spaces to walkways.

Don't forget to include ramps in your parking lot layout. Curbs or stairs should, of course, be avoided on the accessible entrance route. Accessible routes should be at least three feet wide and slip-resistant.

Viewing your parking lot layout from the perspective of users will help you spot any usability issues in advance.



## Project Sheet Element- Potential Municipal Parking Lot Concept

The sample concept below illustrates a potential revised configuration for the municipal lot. The resurfaced and restriped lot efficiently accommodates parking, while reducing the number of pedestrian crossing points. A painted pedestrian path is proposed for linkage to Exchange Street, which might be coordinated with a Town wayfinding program. Signs to direct vehicles and people to parking are also proposed in strategic locations, and crosswalks along Main Street are restriped and enhanced with further signage. An outdoor dining area is proposed at the north of the lot as a natural connection near the public alley for people to gather after shopping or visiting other destinations.

The concept is conditional upon the complete restriction of access to the lower area of the Traverse Street parking deck, as it has been identified to have structural deficiencies, and agreements with landowners for potential of activating access points at the rear of businesses. Business delivery and waste locations for vehicles should also be maintained or condensed. Final plans to upgrade the parking lot should be refined following discussions with adjacent property owners, engineers, the Department of Public Works, and other relevant parties. This project directly correlates with the 'Main Street Placemaking Activation Project' also defined in this Rapid Recovery Plan.



The Aspire Athol Plan (2017) included a proposed layout for the parking lot (left), which relies upon the demolition of the existing building at the rear of 465 Main Street, and the redevelopment of properties adjacent to the Steel Pub Building on S. Exchange Street. The concept generally includes good practices for parking design but also speaks to Athol's need to consider parking improvements that can both improve the current conditions of the parking lot with anticipation that the evolution of Athol's downtown development may warrant further adjustments to accommodate changes in demand or available footprint.





Origin	Town of Wakefield
Budget	 Medium-- approximately \$80,000 (kiosk only; additional elements to cost \$30,000)
Timeframe	 Short – planning and implementation in 3-1/2 months
Risk	 Medium --political will, lightning caused devastating fire, unjustified NIMBYism and lack of community transparency
Key Performance Indicators	Continued use by visitors and residents
Partners & Resources	Wakefield Main Streets, Town of Wakefield, Mass Legislature, Wakefield Police Department, Wakefield Public Library, Wakefield Historical Commission and Wakefield DPW

## Create a way-finding system to help reinforce the downtown experience



PUBLIC  
REALM

Provided by SME Consultant

Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location

Wakefield, MA

## Diagnostic

The Town of Wakefield is a north of Boston middle-income suburban community. Most residents work outside of Wakefield and commute to work. There are two MBTA Commuter rail stations in Wakefield—Wakefield Center and Greenwood.

There was no universally accepted brand or wayfinding system for the Town of Wakefield.

On the edge of Wakefield Center, Lake Quannapowitt is a popular setting for walkers, joggers, bikers, and in-line skaters off Route 128 in Middlesex County. It is the site of many organized races from 5Ks to Ultra Marathons. However, rarely do outside visitors travel beyond the lakeside the 200 yards to the Town of Wakefield's Downtown. This is a lost opportunity to support restaurants and shops in the Downtown.

With a vital mix of restaurants, goods and services, the downtown appeared robust. However, things could be improved by an effort for better direction and more on-street communication. Here was an opportunity to build on the downtown's commercial base and solidify Wakefield as a Northshore destination.

The Town's administration allotted funding to design a branding and wayfinding system. Seven months later a Massachusetts Legislative Earmark was granted to the Wakefield Main Streets Program for the design and fabrication of informational kiosks.

## Action Item

The two overlapping programs took two different paths.

- Over an eight-month period, the branding and wayfinding design process went through a series of group meetings with a large Advisory Group of 24 representatives.
  - A month after the town landscape-based brand was approved by the Advisory Committee and presented in the local daily newspaper and to the Town Council, a devastating lightning-induced fire burned down the majestic church steeple. The loss of the church set back the discussion of whether or not the approved image should be brought forward as a historical image or changed to reflect the current conditions.
  - The designs and branding and wayfinding program were put on hold.
- Overseen by the Wakefield Main Streets Board of Directors and invited Town officials, the kiosk design program was mandated to have only 3.5 months to complete design, design review, put out for bidding and start implementation.
  - The kiosk program went fully ahead.
  - However, some community members felt left out of the design and placement of the project elements. Their concerns had to be integrated.



*Joggers and runners around Crystal Lake, a target audience of non-residents as potential patrons to the downtown.*



*Old Band Stand adjacent to Lake Quannapowitt in Wakefield, MA*

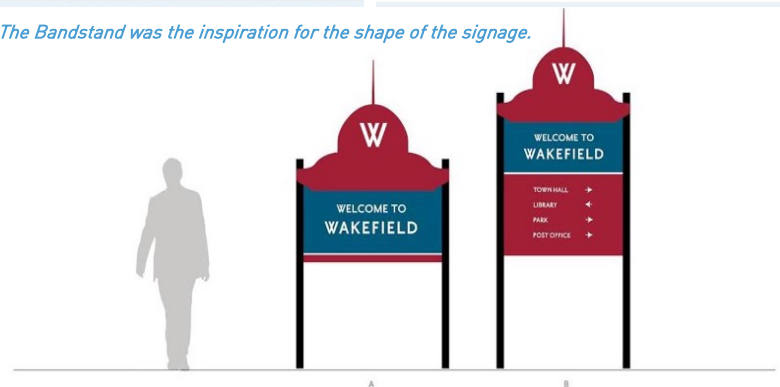


## Process

- After a number of kiosk design alternatives were presented to the Wakefield Main Streets Board, one design was chosen to develop, locate and specify.
- Three (3) of the kiosks were to be two-sided and analog; the fourth was to be digital and four-sided. The digital one would be set closest to the lake.
- Historical town images and commentary was developed to fit around as a border around a business directory for one side of the directory.
- Set in an airtight locked Plexiglas window, this information could be easily changeable on the two-sided kiosks. On the opposite side was space for timely event posters and community announcements.
- The digital kiosk was designed to have a screen/monitor that was programmable from the town hall.
- There was much criticism around the placement and look of the digital kiosk. The town council eventually addressed the public and took a stand that the location, size and look of the kiosk was the best possible solution.
- Kiosk-opposing residents were invited to an expanded Branding and Wayfinding meeting to assist with eventual sign element placement on maps.
- Favermann Design was then hired by the Town administration to create a style guideline to reflect the iconic kiosk toppers.
- After a period of about four months the guidelines have resulted in the establishment of a consistent Town of Wakefield visual brand for internal communication, the official website, e-mails, business cards, interior town hall signage, newsletters and even drop boxes.
- These guidelines were in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and further thought was given to the on-hold wayfinding program. It was decided that a new approach should be taken that abandoned the problematic landscape and instead visually reflected the kiosk and style of the Town of Wakefield.
- Utilizing the new design approach, plans are going ahead for a new directional sign for the Greenwood neighborhood. A test will take place during the Summer of 2021 to see how wayfinding can connect the Lake with downtown.



*The Bandstand was the inspiration for the shape of the signage.*



*Besides interested citizens, town officials including the Town Planner, Police Officer, City Counselor, and Main Street board member are making decisions regarding locations.*



## Local Press Coverage of Controversial Town Council Meetings Occurred due to Kiosks

- Though carefully announced by the Main streets Board, controversy was caused by residents feeling left out of the process.
- Several Town council meetings addressed the size, content and location of the kiosks, especially the proposed digital one adjacent to the lake.
- All kiosk locations are on Town property and are at the best decision-point locations possible.
- The "waters" were eventually calmed and the process continued until a successful implementation of the program.

## Previous Historical Landscape Design for Wakefield's Branding and Wayfinding Shelved

- Below is an image of the previous design that was affected by the destructive church fire.
- The "new" simpler design has found favor in the community.
- The Town of Wakefield is now creating a fully consistent "look" for all its official elements.



### Sailboat with cherries



A BLACK CHERRY tree (according to the Audubon Field Guide: New England) along the shore of Lake Quannapowitt. (Robert Pushkar Photo)

## Community Meeting and Open House: Hurd School future options

WAKEFIELD — The Town Council and Town Administrator Stephen P. Maio would like to give the public an update on the ongoing

evaluation of the Hurd School located at 27 Cordis Street in the "Lakeside" neighborhood. The public is invited to a second Open

House and Community Meeting. The first floor will be open for public viewing at 6:15 p.m. followed by the community meeting in the auditorium at 7 p.m. on Wednesday June 20 at the school. The Town Administrator will lead the discussion and provide updates to the ongoing evaluation followed by a question and answer session about the building's future.

## Stolen credit cards reported

WAKEFIELD — A Winsip Drive woman called police at about 11 a.m. yesterday to report that her credit cards had been stolen. The woman noticed that the cards were missing over the weekend but was not sure when they were taken. Police said that fraudulent charges were made using the credit cards at Home Depot in Danvers and Target in Stoneham. The cards have been cancelled.

At about 3 p.m. yesterday, a caller reported that a UPS truck took down some wires at the corner of Oak Street and Orchard Avenue. Police confirmed that they were cable wires and made sure they

POLICE Page 9

"After hearing from the public at our first meeting and evaluating our swing space and other needs, it is time to re-engage this neighborhood and community to discuss the best use of the building moving forward," according to the Town Administrator.

The Hurd School was declared excess property in 2005 by the Wakefield School Committee and

HURD Page 7

## Kiosks coming to downtown

Town Council notebook

By MARK SARDELLA

WAKEFIELD — As part of the ongoing effort to revitalize the downtown area, four new kiosks will be installed at various locations offering "way-finding" and other useful information for visitors and residents. The Town Council approved the installation of the signs, one of which will have a digital component, at their meeting last week.

Bob Mailhot, president of Wakefield Main Streets, appeared before the Town Council along with Mark Faverman of Faverman Design to discuss the project. The kiosks will be paid for by Wakefield Main Streets through their private fundraising efforts. Faverman Design has been retained by the town to develop a branding and wayfinding program for the town's business districts.

Two of the free-standing, two-sided kiosks will be located on sidewalks in the Square and will be placed at Main and Water streets and Main and Albion streets. A third two-sided kiosk will be placed near Veterans Field on North Avenue. The digital kiosk will be three-sided and will be placed at the southern end of the Lower Common, near the corner of Common Street and Lake Avenue. One side of this kiosk will be digital and have a changeable screen. Faverman talked about the design of the kiosks, which will incorporate the look of the iconic Bandstand, including a red top that

KIOSKS Page 7

KIOSKS LIKE THIS ONE will be installed at four key locations around town to help promote the downtown area. Conceived by Faverman Design, the kiosks will incorporate the look of the iconic Bandstand.



### Kiosks back before Council tonight

Published in the July 18, 2018 edition.

WAKEFIELD — In a bid to display wayfinding kiosks in a way to help drive voter turnout to the downtown area, the town has a plan to bring the kiosks back before the council tonight.

The specific form of the kiosks is the subject of a proposal that was presented to the council at their May 31 meeting. The proposal was to install four kiosks in the downtown area, one of which would have a digital component.

The kiosks will be paid for by Wakefield Main Streets through their private fundraising efforts. Faverman Design has been retained by the town to develop a branding and wayfinding program for the town's business districts.

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The design of the kiosks will incorporate the look of the iconic Bandstand, including a red, curved top and a large screen. The person is pointing at the screen.

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### Kiosk Debate Dominates Town Council Meeting

Latest town effort to draw walkers/runners from Lake Quannapowitt to downtown meets resistance.

By Mark Sardella, Staff Writer | July 18, 2018 11:13 pm ET



WAKEFIELD — It's true that Lake Quannapowitt was named by glacial ice some 12,000 years ago. It's also true that Monday night's Town Council meeting wasn't the first time the town has argued over what's best for the roughly 100-acre lake.

But a spirited, even angry, debate over Sunday's plan that different Wakefield elected officials have been trying for years to lure visitors and runners who walk around the lake to take a slight detour into the town center and spend more money. So, which, huh... just need to bring a discussion started to add kiosks at key points around the lake that would attract visitors, etc., what was going on just a few steps away to downtown.

Putting the digital kiosk just a few feet away from three immovable to a white safety wall, the town has a plan to bring the kiosks back before the council tonight.

The specific form of the kiosks is the subject of a proposal that was presented to the council at their May 31 meeting. The proposal was to install four kiosks in the downtown area, one of which would have a digital component.

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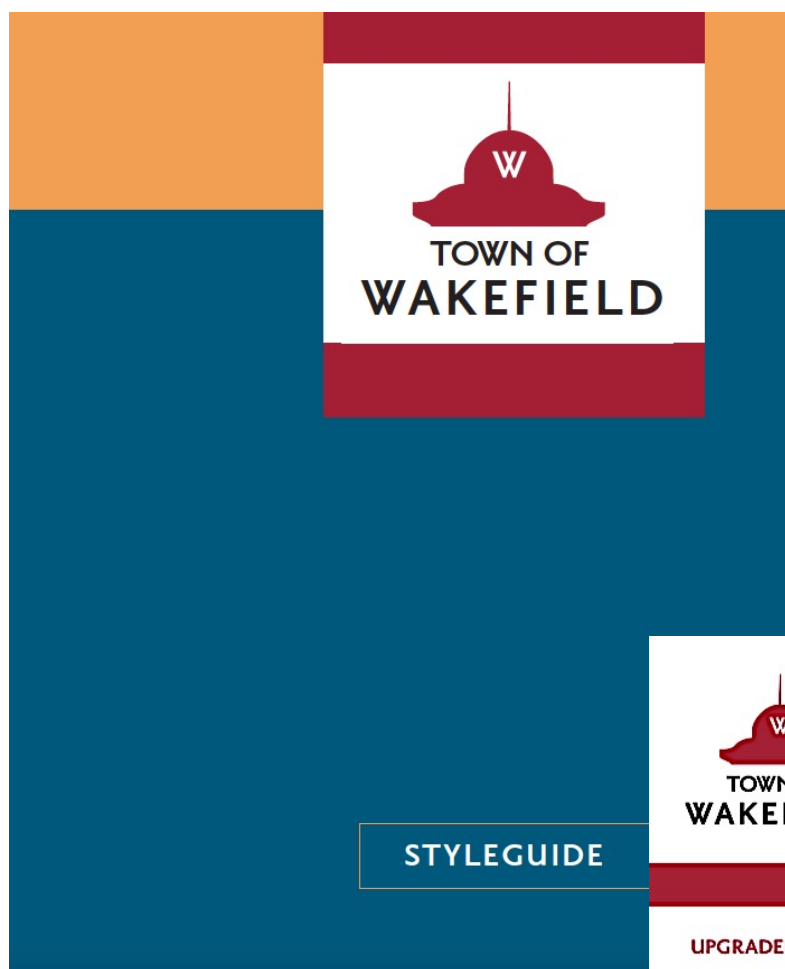
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#### UPGRADED DROP BOXES AT TOWN HALL



With safety a top priority for Town Hall employees and guests, residents are strongly encouraged to conduct their Town transactions virtually. Payments can be made online at [www.wakefield.ma.us/online-payments](http://www.wakefield.ma.us/online-payments) for many services, including taxes, water bills, white-goods stickers, refuse bags, cemetery services, and more. Many forms and applications can also be accessed on the Town's website [www.wakefield.ma.us](http://www.wakefield.ma.us).

Town Hall has installed new drop boxes to make submitting documents to staff quick and easy. These boxes are clearly marked and located near the accessible parking spaces and sidewalk ramp, to the left of the Town Hall entrance.

#### DATES TO NOTE

##### Tax Collector

Third-quarter actual real estate bill due:  
February 1, 2021  
Third-quarter actual personal property bill due:  
February 1, 2021  
2021 motor vehicle excise bill commitment #1  
Issued February 4, 2021 | Due March 8, 2021

##### Assessing Department

Abatement applications due:  
February 1, 2021  
Statutory exemptions due:  
April 1, 2021



In 2015, Wakefield lifted its December-to-April on-street parking ban and now enforces parking limitations on an emergency basis.

When preparing for a snow event, the Town often initiates a temporary restriction of on-street parking. This allows plowing crews and public safety vehicles to safely access the roads and perform curb-to-curb cleanup. Parking ban announcements and other emergency notifications are made via our CodeRED e-alert system.

All parked cars must be removed from the roadways during a parking ban. If your residence does not have a driveway, connect with your landlord for parking options or coordinate with a neighbor who has extra driveway space. Vehicles that interfere with snow operations or emergency-vehicle access may be towed.

1 Lafayette Street Wakefield, MA 01880 | [wakefield.ma.us](http://wakefield.ma.us)

*The Town of Wakefield "branded" elements and strictly adhered to style guidelines demonstrate how programs can build upon and even improve each other to reinforce a sense of place, a sense of arrival and a sense of shared experience.*



Origin	City of Tipton, Tipton Main Street Association, Chamber of Commerce, Tipton County Economic Development Organization
Budget	 \$39,000
Timeframe	 Two to three months to build and install most components and artwork.
Risk	 Low risk assuming you can get buy in from local property owners and those who use the alley. Low investment costs makes this a low risk, high reward proposition.
Key Performance Indicators	Visitor counts, "stopping and staying time," events and attendees at programmed events. Change in area vacancy rates and, if you have willing businesses, sales numbers before and after intervention.
Partners & Resources	Tipton Main Street, Local economic development corporation, the area Chamber of Commerce and local artists and youth organizations. Funding was provided through a combination of crowdfunding and matching grant dollars from a state government grant program.

# Tipton Alley



Provided by SME Consultant

Bench Consulting (from Patronicity)

Location

Tipton, Indiana





Before



After

<p><b>Diagnostic</b></p>	<p>Issues arose around pedestrian safety crossing the alley space. Located in the heart of Main Street this space was an obstacle to a safe, inviting pedestrian experience. In addition, there was a startup Main Street organization looking to develop space, build support for its work, but more importantly, the Main Street district as a whole. The street itself was extremely car oriented with more traffic than pedestrians on the streets. An improved sense of place was needed to get drivers out of their cars and on foot, a proven tactic for increasing spending opportunity. The proximity to existing businesses, the town square, and the need for a gathering space made this alley ideal for investment and improvement.</p>
<p><b>Action Item</b></p>	<p>The intention with Tipton Alley was to develop a space that could serve as the hub of the Main Street. A space, built on a human scale, that provided a respite from the busy traffic on the street while enticing people to 1) visit downtown safely and 2) extend their stays while visiting downtown, and 3) create community connections.</p> <p>As with any placemaking project, the process is as important as the outcome. How do you ensure this space will be something that residents embrace and enjoy? Have them engaged in the planning and implementation process as much as possible. Because collaboration is key and here, local artists help design the mural installations on one wall and others worked to transform the entry way of the alley to incorporate historically contextual photographs.</p> <p>Early on, it was important to have proper permissions in place to use the alley and eliminate vehicle access from the main street on a permanent basis. Enjoy maintenance plans and activation and programming plans are also in place at the start.</p> <p>It was important to not just plan for how the space would be transformed but activated so a community wide "farm to table" dinner was planned as part of the planning and fundraising. This project focused on programming of the space in the design phase and clarified the needs for ongoing maintenance and support.</p>
<p><b>Process</b></p>	<p><b>LOCATE:</b> Find a space that you have reasonable site control over or a permission agreement in place that is centrally located within your main street or commercial district. Consider spaces that need care and attention.</p> <p><b>PARTNER:</b> The more local representation that's involved in planning and implementing these projects, the more successful they will be. Here, local Chamber of Commerce was involved, engaging the business community, artists helped to design the public art and residents volunteered to implement.</p> <p><b>PLAN:</b> Ensure site control is in order, insurance is in place and proper permissions to use any alley space have been granted before beginning to build your project. Define the potential uses for space, the more variety, the better. Consider local vendors and source products locally.</p> <p><b>IMPLEMENT:</b> Consider adding elements in stages, celebrating at each milestone. Be sure your site is supervised. Communication with all contractors, artists, and volunteers is important so be sure to plan ahead. Getting community investment is critical, ask for the financial support you need locally first.</p> <p><b>FEEDBACK:</b> Public comments can be typical and predictive, often they include questions about government waste, maintenance and use. Prepare your responses before hearings and reach out personally when possible. Also, prepare to preemptively share the most compelling project elements.</p> <p><b>ITERATE:</b> Additional features can be added based on use, one example is WiFi. If there is a high demand for the space, ensure there is a process for renting and reserving the space.</p>







## #7. Activate Placemaking Elements Along Main Street

**Description-** A series of creative components installed to transform small areas along Main Street with the intention of attracting visitors and beautifying downtown's primary corridor. These include the creation of a parklet, designated area(s) for outdoor dining with a streamlined permitting process, engaging an artist to transform the Municipal Parking Lot Alley, and the installation of landscape pots, benches, and signage to accommodate sidewalk retail.

### PROJECT GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Creating safe spaces for people to spend time** (*public survey priority*)
- Increasing downtown activity in the evening
- Increasing safety, particular in the evening
- Facilitating collaboration between business owners for potentially sharing spaces

Category		Public Realm
Location		Main Street between Exchange Street and Crescent Street
Origin		Eric Smith- Athol Planning Director, Mary Holtorf- Chair of the Downtown Vitality Committee (committee members also reviewed project)
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000), includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff time for review and oversight of processes</li><li>• Staff time for potential education and packaging of an outdoor dining permitting process</li><li>• Materials for a parklet, artist stipend for alley art, and other placemaking elements</li></ul>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Low Risk – Placemaking elements incorporated as part of this project are small-scale, with only positive expected impacts on improving the general ambience of downtown's Main Street. There is some risk of lack of participation of business owners in taking advantage of opportunities for outdoor dining, however project details included provide recommendations on establishing ease of process for all parties. There is also some low risk in being able to secure a local artist with the skills and capacity to complete a public art project, so talent may need to be sourced from beyond Athol.</p> <p>There may be initial concern over the utilization of a parking space for a parklet, however the 2019 Downtown Parking Plan demonstrates that demand for on-street parking is generally much lower than the capacity of spaces available.</p>



## Key Performance Indicators

- Increased foot traffic along Main Street, particularly in the evening
- Increase of dining covers due to outdoor seating utilization
- Increased on-street parking utilization

## Partners & Resources

Partners- Town, North Quabbin Community Coalition, Downtown Vitality Committee, Athol Council on Aging, North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce

Resources-

- T-Mobile Hometown Grant Program
- DCR Partnerships Matching Funds Program

Additional informational and creative resources include-

- Project for Public Spaces 'How to Turn a Place Around: Placemaking Handbook'
- The DHCD Rapid Recovery 'Outdoor Dining/Retail Community Toolkit'
- City of Boston's 2021 Outdoor Dining Pilot Program website
- NACTO's (National Association of City Transportation Officials) Urban Street Design Guide for parklets
- Parkade's 'Complete Guide to Parklets and Streeteries'
- 'Reclaiming the Right of Way- A Toolkit for Creating and Implementing Parklets' (UCLA Luskin School)



**Sample locations in downtown Athol that could benefit from a sense of place, such as including seating options, landscaping elements, sidewalk signage, etc. (Sources: Stantec)**

## Diagnostic

As demonstrated through data in the Physical Environment diagnostic section earlier in this report, the scoring of several categories which contribute to an enhanced sense of place in small downtowns was relatively low in downtown Athol. The diagnostic led to a conclusion that a limited number of street trees and benches were some of the barriers to Athol establishing an inviting environment where visitors will want to spend time. This is a particularly important gap along Main Street, which serves as Athol's access gateway but also communicates information about the Town's character, and overall level of pride and community investment.

Several organizations nationwide have identified 'great places' as those at the intersection of 1) strong design and physical elements, 2) management and stewardship, and 3) events and activities. Athol's Main Street benefits from being clean, hosting a selection of well-preserved historic structures, and featuring historic light fixtures, all of which contribute to the charm of a small-town. However, significant gaps in Athol's public spaces and consistency/quality of storefront facades mean that other solutions are needed to supplement that extra layer of 'place' to downtown. Improving this first physical and design component will help Athol's Main Street become an attractive and distinct destination for more visitors, rather a drive-by point to other locations.

Between 2020-2021 the Massachusetts Department of Transportation conducted 3 rounds of competitive grants as part of a Shared Streets and Spaces Program. The intention of this program was to fund municipalities to be able to immediately implement short-term solutions that support rapid post-COVID 19 economic recovery. Although Athol did not participate in this program, similar needs are evident, and this project offers a similar, small-scale/big-impact approach.

Small, visible improvements are recommended, such as adding new benches, trees, landscape pots/planters throughout Main Street, and Town-branded banners to light posts. The public alley is also recommended for a makeover that includes a larger-scale public art mural, and signage to direct people to the municipal parking lot. Another important component of this project will be addressing the lack of outdoor dining and spillover retail downtown, as a simple way to generate vitality. A parklet is recommended to be established on Main Street to host both dining and other potential uses.

In combination, these Main Street improvements (and others from the "Municipal Parking Lot Upgrade" project in this report) can kickstart a much-needed sense of stewardship in the Town, and attract more dynamic and frequent programming to achieve a strong sense of place.

## Early Actions/Accomplishments to Date

Early discussions have already taken place with one landowner who would be amenable to hosting a parklet outside of his business. Other discussions have taken place with business owners about interest in outdoor dining opportunities. Details within this project can help further those discussions towards potential agreements.

In recent years, Athol has made efforts to increase vitality downtown by closing Main Street to pedestrians-only for special events, and hosting other activities to increase the engagement of businesses with the public. As placemaking elements become integrated, the visitor experience will be enhanced, and a potential increase of visitors both within and outside of Athol can support opportunities for further programming.

## Action Item

Key action items for this project will include:

- **Identifying responsible parties** to implement the project
- Determining if an **application process** will be developed for the parklet
- Pursuing and **securing funding**, and engaging a mural artist
- **Generating excitement** and engagement from business owners
- **Developing a process** for how the placemaking components will be managed and maintained
- **Installing or implementing** the elements
- **Communicating the project** to the public and attracting new interest in visiting downtown
- **Identifying data** to be gathered for an understanding of project impacts

## Process

### MONTH 1

- Assemble people and organizations who will be responsible for planning, coordinating, and overseeing the execution of the project
- Solidify approach and placemaking elements to be pursued
- Initiate pursuit of appropriate funding source

### MONTH 2

- Conduct discussions with Main Street landowners/business owners
- Advertise a call for a mural artist

### MONTH 3

- Purchase placemaking materials, using vendors, as needed
- Develop a maintenance and management plan for the components
- Develop protocol for how the parklet can be used, and enforcement procedures, if necessary

### MONTH 4

- Construct the parklet, hiring a contractor, as needed
- Install placemaking elements, including alley mural installation
- Advertise the project to the public and "launch", ideally in coordination with a special Main Street event

### MONTH 5+ (ongoing)

- Conduct a follow-on survey or other data to understand the impact and success of the project
- Continue Main Street-focused programming



### What's happening at the State...

Per [An Act relative to extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the state of emergency](#), a municipality's local licensing authority (LLA) can approve applications for an extension of outdoor table service until April 1, 2022 without the need to provide advance notice to abutters or hold a public hearing on the application. The State has not explicitly allowed this bypass for other forms of outdoor business, such as retail, other than table service.

At present, businesses that have been granted an outdoor extension of their premises through this expedited process will revert to their pre-approval status after April 1, 2022.

The Massachusetts Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission (ABCC) has the following general regulations for licensed establishments to serve alcohol on patio and outdoor areas:

- i. Alcoholic beverages cannot be served outside of a licensed establishment unless and until an application to extend the licensed premises has been approved.
- ii. An application to extend the premises must describe the area in detail, including dimensions, seating capacity, and maximum occupancy.
- iii. The premises must be enclosed by a fence, rope, or other means to prevent access from a public walkway.
- iv. The outdoor area must be contiguous to the licensed premises with either (a) a clear view of the area from inside the premises, or, alternatively (b) the licensee may commit to providing management personnel dedicated to the area.
- v. The applicant must have a lease or documents for the right to occupy the proposed area.
- vi. The licensing authorities should consider the type of neighborhood and the potential for noise in the environs.
- vii. Preferred are outdoor areas where alcohol is served to patrons who are seated at the tables and where food is also available.



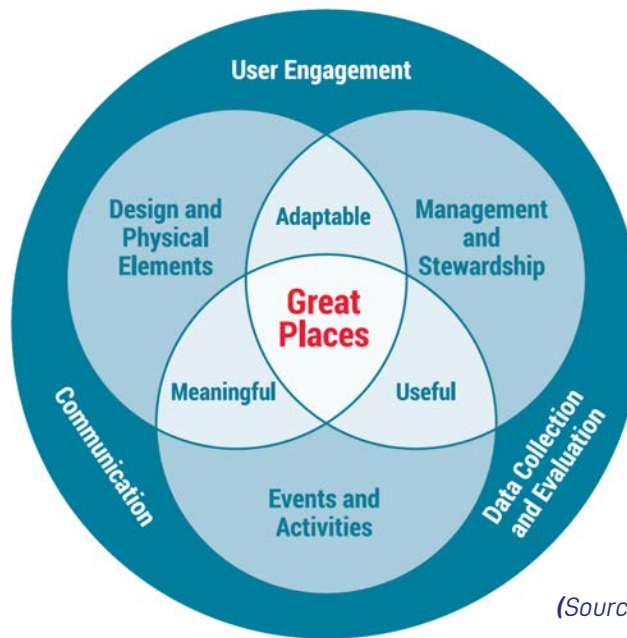
Before you submit your application, please review the following checklist. This checklist provides an overview of the documents that you will need to prepare and upload with your application. Please reach out to [2021outdoordining@boston.gov](mailto:2021outdoordining@boston.gov) if you have any questions after reviewing.

**Documents required from every applicant:**

- ☐ **Copy of Licensing Board License:** Please have ready a copy of your Licensing Board License (example [here](#)) to upload. You will also be required to enter your license number.
- ☐ **Site Plan:** A site plan drawing of the proposed outdoor dining extension will be required. This may be hand drawn. It will need to include square footage, access to and from the licensed premise, and location and number of tables and chairs. See the [2021 Guidance document](#) for more information on site plan and site set-up requirements.
- ☐ **Recent Photo(s) of Proposed Location:** You will be required to upload at least one and up to three recent photos of the proposed location of the outdoor dining extension. These photos will be used to give reviewers a better understanding of the location, so please upload clear photos from several angles to assist with review.
- ☐ **Photo of Proposed Barrier(s):** You will be required to upload a cut sheet, diagram or image of the proposed type of barrier to be used to create separation from traffic (e.g. planters, water filled barriers, wooden barriers). Please note: Barriers are needed for both sidewalk seating and on-street seating.
- ☐ **Legal Right to Occupy:** If you are applying for an extension on private property, you are required to submit a letter from the landlord granting the right to utilize the space. If you are applying for an extension on public property, legal right to occupy will be granted if your application is approved through the 2021 program application. See the [2021 Guidance document](#) for more information
- ☐ **Certificate of Inspection:** Please have ready a copy of your most recent Certificate of Inspection (example [here](#)), whether current or expired.
- ☐ **Health, Safety and Operation Plan:** Please have ready a Health, Safety and Occupation Plan that adheres to the information outlined [here](#). These plans should include the following:
  - ☐ Description of proposed service (including staffing levels, days of the week, hours of operation)
  - ☐ Overview of how the extension will be separated from the non-licensed area & supervised
  - ☐ COVID-19 precautions for employees and patrons & a social distancing plan
  - ☐ Structures separating patrons from traffic
  - ☐ ADA accessibility
  - ☐ Maintenance and storage plan (will tables and chairs be removed when not in operation)
  - ☐ Safety plan (what steps are being taken to ensure materials do not enter the travel path)

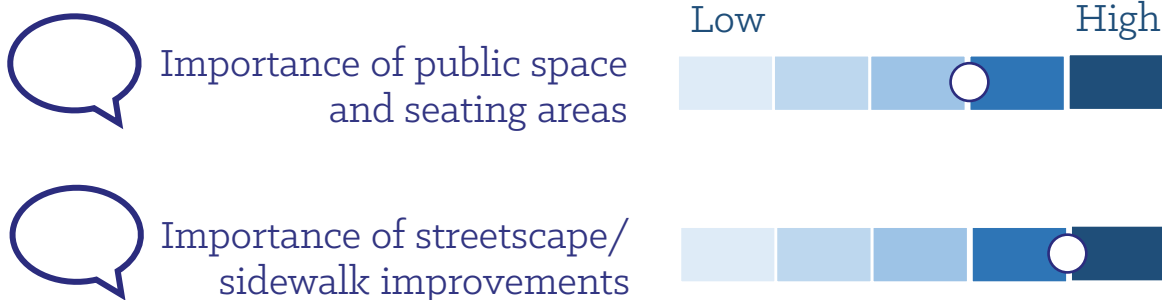


## Project Element- Principles of “Great Places”



(Source: Musicant Group)

Participants in the business survey as part of the LRRP process ranked how important they felt some placemaking elements are in the downtown-



**Two restaurants located directly on Athol's primary Main Street block that could benefit from either dedicated or shared outdoor dining areas.** (Sources: Los Agaves Restaurant, Google)



### Project Sheet Element- Top Tips for Encouraging Businesses to Initiate Outdoor Dining Downtown

- Offer a **single application** for businesses to apply for permits and licenses to provide outdoor dining and retail.
- Provide a **checklist** for all requirements
- Offer an **online application**
- Provide a **liaison** at Town Hall
- Create a short-track or **condensed timeline for permitting** and approvals
- Provide **clear design guidelines** and other requirements including alcohol licensing checklist of all requirements
- Offer **bulk purchasing** of common items needed for outdoor dining and retail

### Project Sheet Element- Sample Questions for City Staff to Consider When Pursuing a Parklet

#### DESIGN/DEVELOPMENT

- Describe the history of the program. Where did the initial idea come from and how it came to be as it is today?
- Please describe your program goals. Do you have any written documentation on these goals?
- How do you select sites for parklets? Are there established selection criteria? What are the common surrounding land uses? Who owns the land, or is it leased temporarily?
- What will the size of the parklet be, and once the first one is installed, does the city plan to allow more parklets to be installed?
- Are there landscaping/design features desired for the parklet? If yes, of what kind? Also, if yes, are these features required?
- Overall, what are the functions of the parklet? Who are the primary users?
- Do you consider parklets as public spaces? If so, how do you denote this to the public? Are there restrictions to their access and use?

#### IMPLEMENTATION/MAINTENANCE

- How is design and construction of the parklets funded?
- Which departments are involved in parklet regulation and development and what are their roles? Has the city issued new ordinances or policies for the development and regulation of the parklets or are you using existing ones?
- Is a permit required? If so, who is eligible to apply for a permit and how much does it cost?
- Is the public involved in the parklet development process?
- How are the parklets maintained? Who is in charge of their maintenance? Is there an agreement about their maintenance which you can share?
- How does the city handle liability concerns about the parklets? Who must hold the insurance and how much? Have you had any liability issues to date?

(Source: UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs)

## Project Sheet Element- Sample Placemaking Materials

The following identifies typical materials that might be used to support the placemaking activation of Athol's Main Street. Final material selection should be determined using input from the delegated project team, through consideration of budget and ease of installation, and through engagement of other appropriate parties.



**Customizable lamp post banner and hanging flower basket**  
(for all Main Street light fixtures)



**Wooden street bench**  
(at intermittent locations where sidewalk widths allow)



**Landscape planter**  
(at a few, strategic locations near crosswalks)



**6' High Potted Tree**  
(at a few, strategic locations where sidewalk widths allow)

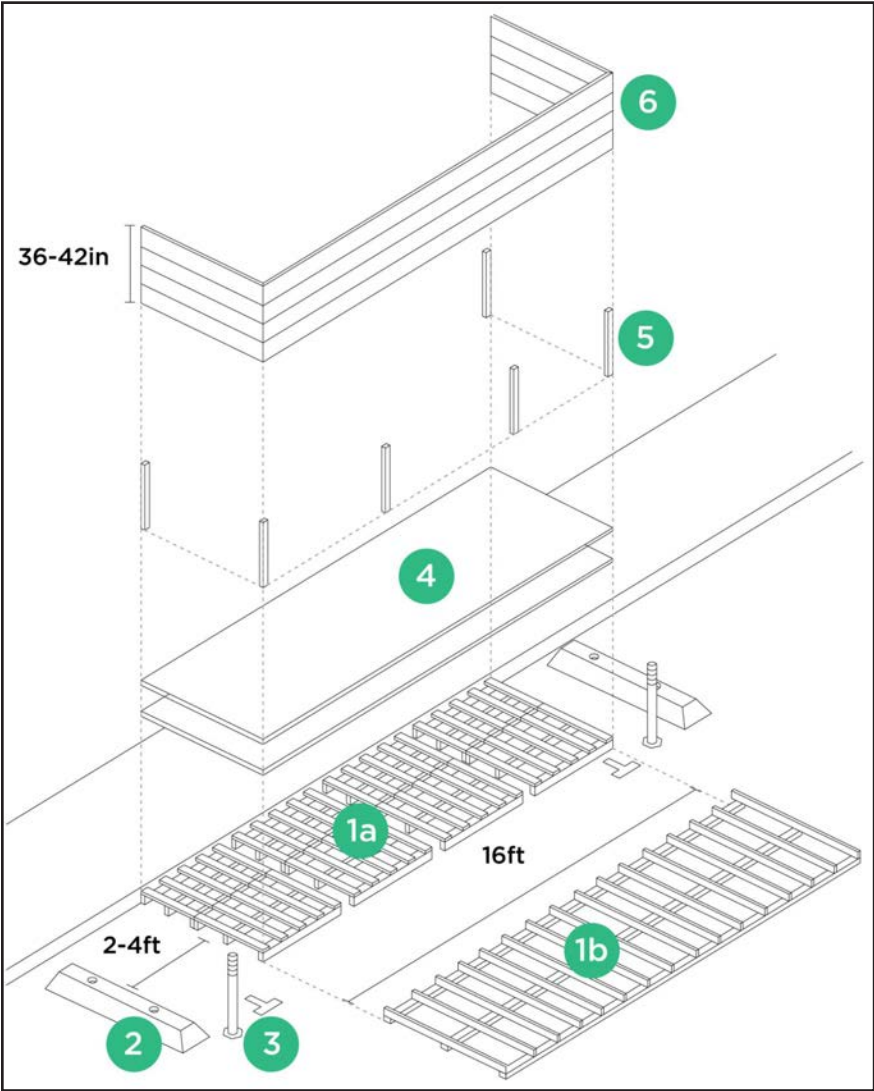


**Wall-mounted exterior spotlight**  
(for highlighting the public alley to feature art and facilitate safe pedestrian movement)



**Sandwich board sign**  
(for businesses to attract foot traffic or the town to advertise points of interest/events)

Project Sheet Element- Sample Design for a Parklet for Less than \$1,000



There is no "typical" cost of creating a parklet. The complexity of the design, effort to build, and types of materials used generate a wide range of potential costs. This sample design from Parkade illustrates one of the most cost-efficient approaches. The actual cost of materials will vary dependent upon where/how they are purchased, and other factors.

Legend

1a

Base option 1a: Wood pallets

2

Wheel stop protector

4

Deck attic pine standard board

6

Barrier wall

1b

Base option 1b: Wood frame

3

Vertical traffic markers (cone, etc)

5

Barrier wall structural support posts

List of materials (using pallets)			
Item	Price	Quantity	Total
Traffic delineator	\$30	2	\$60
New wood GMA pallet 48"x40"	\$28	10	\$280
Rubber parking block 6'	\$36.95	2	\$73.90
Attic pine strand board 5/8"x2'x4'	\$7.48	24	\$179.52
2"x4" dimensional lumber 12' (Railing)	\$7.47	2	\$14.94
Attic pine strand board 5/8"x2'x4'	\$7.498	14	\$104.72
			\$863.05

(Source: Parkade)



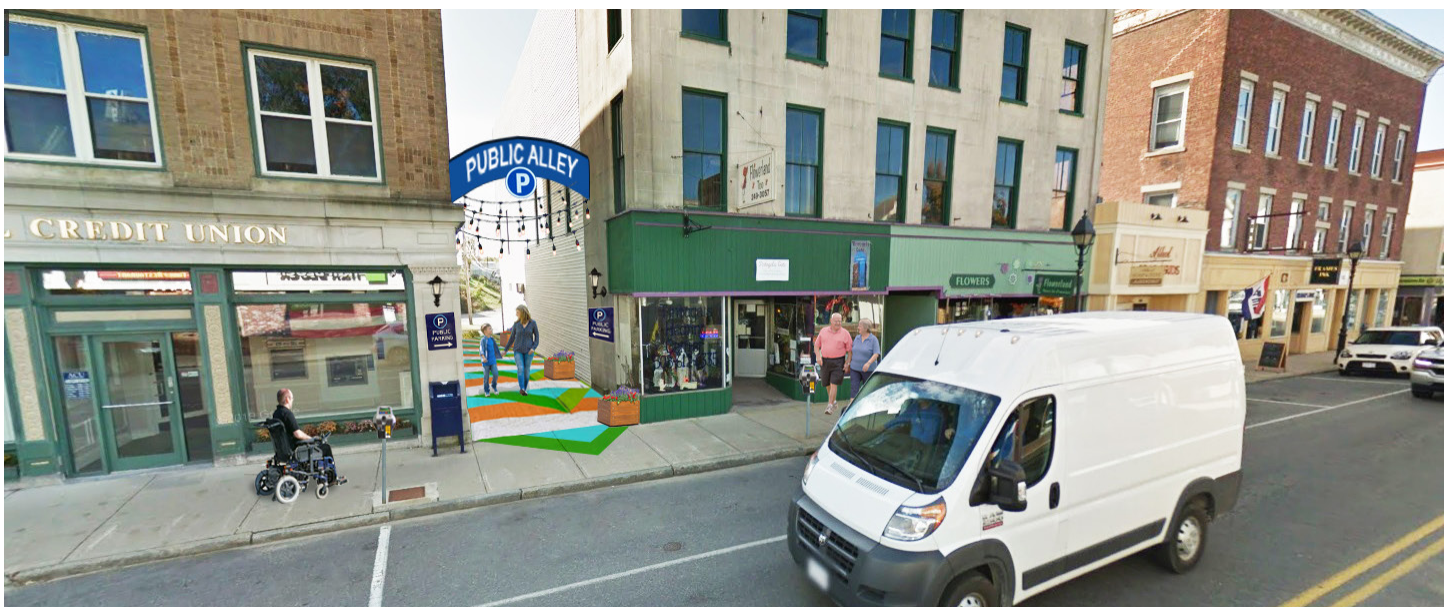
## Project Sheet Element- Potential Public Alley Upgrade Concept

The public alley which connects to the Municipal Parking Lot at the rear of Main Street has been identified as a potential priority area for a concentration of placemaking improvements. The alley is centrally located and acts as the primary pedestrian connection between the most convenient public parking facility downtown and the core of the commercial center. Downtown Athol doesn't currently host outdoor public art installations. Enlisting an artist to create a mural within the alley is a low-risk approach to inviting art into the downtown and beautifying a space that isn't specifically associated with one business. The art could draw the eye to help pedestrians navigate but also be an attraction in itself or be a "revolving" opportunity for different artists to experiment.

In addition to the art, the alley should also be improved with the addition of lighting and wayfinding signage that is visible both to pedestrians and passing vehicles. Other elements should also be added to the space to make it warm and inviting, such as landscape planters. Informal discussions with businesses about the option of expanding dining and/or spillover retail onto the sidewalk have taken place. The alley may potentially accommodate some of these activities, such as with a few small dining tables, retail shelves and tables, a small snack/food vendor kiosk, etc.



***The Municipal Parking Lot Alley currently lacks definition as to where it leads and does not include features that make it feel safe for use in the evenings. (Source: Google)***



***Concept rendering of the Municipal Lot Alley with improved lighting, signage, and incorporated art element. (Source: Stantec)***



Origin	CMRPC
Budget	 Medium
Timeframe	 Medium Term
Risk	 Medium Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Communities will have realistic action plan for easily permitting commercial and community activity on a range of public spaces
Partners & Resources	Regional Planning Agency, Municipal Planning Boards and Staff

# Strategy Guide for Activating Public Spaces



Provided by SME Consultant

Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission

Location

Worcester, MA

## Action Items

### 1.0 Background and Baseline Research

- 1.1 Inventory of public spaces (public and private): Identify the location and basic characteristics of all public spaces within the study area, including access, ownership and suitability for public activities
- 1.2 Inventory of existing permitted activities and processes  
: Review all processes for issuing of permits for public and privately organized events within public spaces
- 1.3 Stakeholder Identification and Outreach: Identify and solicit feedback from organizations, companies and individuals that have in the past held public events or showed interest in holding public events within the town or study area
- 1.4 SWOT Analysis : Analyze potential opportunities and challenges around utilization of public spaces
- 1.5 Case Studies and Resources: Research similar communities in the state and region and create a catalogue of realistic, achievable activities

### 2.0 Community Input

- 2.1 Municipal Listening Session(s): Solicit feedback on existing processes, paying special attention to what has worked, where friction points may be
- 2.2 Community / Stakeholder Listening Session(s): Solicit feedback from community stakeholders on opportunities and challenges
- 2.3 Summary of Community Feedback: Summarize all community feedback and develop recommendations for reducing friction points

### 3.0 Strategy Guide Development and Review

- 3.1 Summary and analysis of existing processes
- 3.2 Opportunities and Challenges
- 3.3 Case Studies
- 3.4 Recommendations for streamlining the permitting process
- 3.5 Review all recommendations with municipality and incorporate recommended edits

## Process

1. Outreach and background research
2. Develop draft materials and visuals
3. Municipal review and revision





Origin	Town of Chelmsford's Community Development and Planning Department
Budget	 Medium (\$80,000 - \$100,000)
Timeframe	 Short – planning and implementation in 6 months
Risk	 Medium- DPW limited capacity to install and warehouse
Key Performance Indicators	Residential and visitor use of the furniture for comfort and function
Partners & Resources	Funded by Mass Legislative Earmark + Isupport from Bicycle Commission, Historic Commission and Economic Advisory Commission of Town of Chelmsford

## Beech Tree themed street furniture: community branding through functional public art



Provided by SME Consultant

Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location

Chelmsford, MA

## Diagnostic

Previously uninspired and the deteriorating older streetscape for the Town of Chelmsford, MA Downtown Historic District was in great need of added vitality, visual quality and places for rest and contemplation. It was a hard landscape that needed softening. After thoughtful study, it was determined that a "family" of themed sculptured street furniture was needed that provided benches, bike racks, planters, kiosks, tree grates and tree guards.



*Town of Chelmsford Beech Tree Leaf Metal Planter*

## Action Item

Working with the Town's administration including the Community Development Director, the Planning Board, the Historical Commission, the Bicycle Commission and the Department of Public Works. Due to the rapid turnaround because of the Legislative earmark funding source, planning, design, review and fabrication took place over a five (5) period.

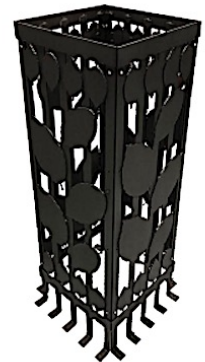
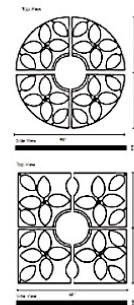
### T-GT

#### TREE GRATE

**STRUCTURE**  
Overall Dimensions: 48" x 48"  
Material: Cast Iron or Aluminum  
Powder coated: Black  
Paint applied to all sides, must have 10 year guarantee

#### SPECIAL CONDITIONS

# of Units \_\_\_\_\_  
Custom Artwork \_\_\_\_\_  
Material \_\_\_\_\_  
Finish Option \_\_\_\_\_



*Beech Tree Leaf Tree Grate and Tree Guard*

## Process

The confirmation of this project's funding was made in early February. This meant that everything had to be completed by June 30. Basing designs on very popular thematic wayfinding sign detail of a leaf pattern, our firm created a series of thematic street furniture elements. Considering the elements as functional public art pieces, they were shared at public meetings including the Town's Planning Board Economic Development Committee, the Bicycle Commission and the Historic Commission. Once reviewed and refined, the designs were developed into a specifications package that allowed for vendor review and cost proposals. The fabrication/installer vendors were asked to give costs in a 10 day period. After the contract was delivered by the Town, fabrication commenced. It was decided to save funds that the Chelmsford DPW would be the installers.



*Themed benches being fabricated.*



*Part of the 20 themed bicycle racks that were blessed by the Bicycle commission.*



## Process – Strategic Decisions

- To use street furniture as a key Downtown Historic District Enhancement too.
- Decision to use Beech Tree Leaf as sculptural motif.
- To create a themed family of street furniture
- To apply sculptured street furniture elements throughout the Downtown Historical District
- To seek advice and review of the Historic Society
- To seek advice and review from the Bicycle Commission
- For the Town's DPW to be the project installer
- Appeared at a series of public meetings that included the planning board, the historical commission and the Select board
- Worked with an expedited schedule to meet very restricted time constraints
- Developed a set of specifications for bidding and fabricating by vendors
- Site visit to chosen vendor during fabrication



*Inspiration for the brand came from a famous former beech tree on the Town Common. A granite marker commemorates the tree's long life and Town's admiration for it.*





*Town of Chelmsford's themed sculptural street furniture installations throughout the Downtown Historic District strategically added interest, visual and material texture and comfort to the previously rather barren, hard environment.*





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



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

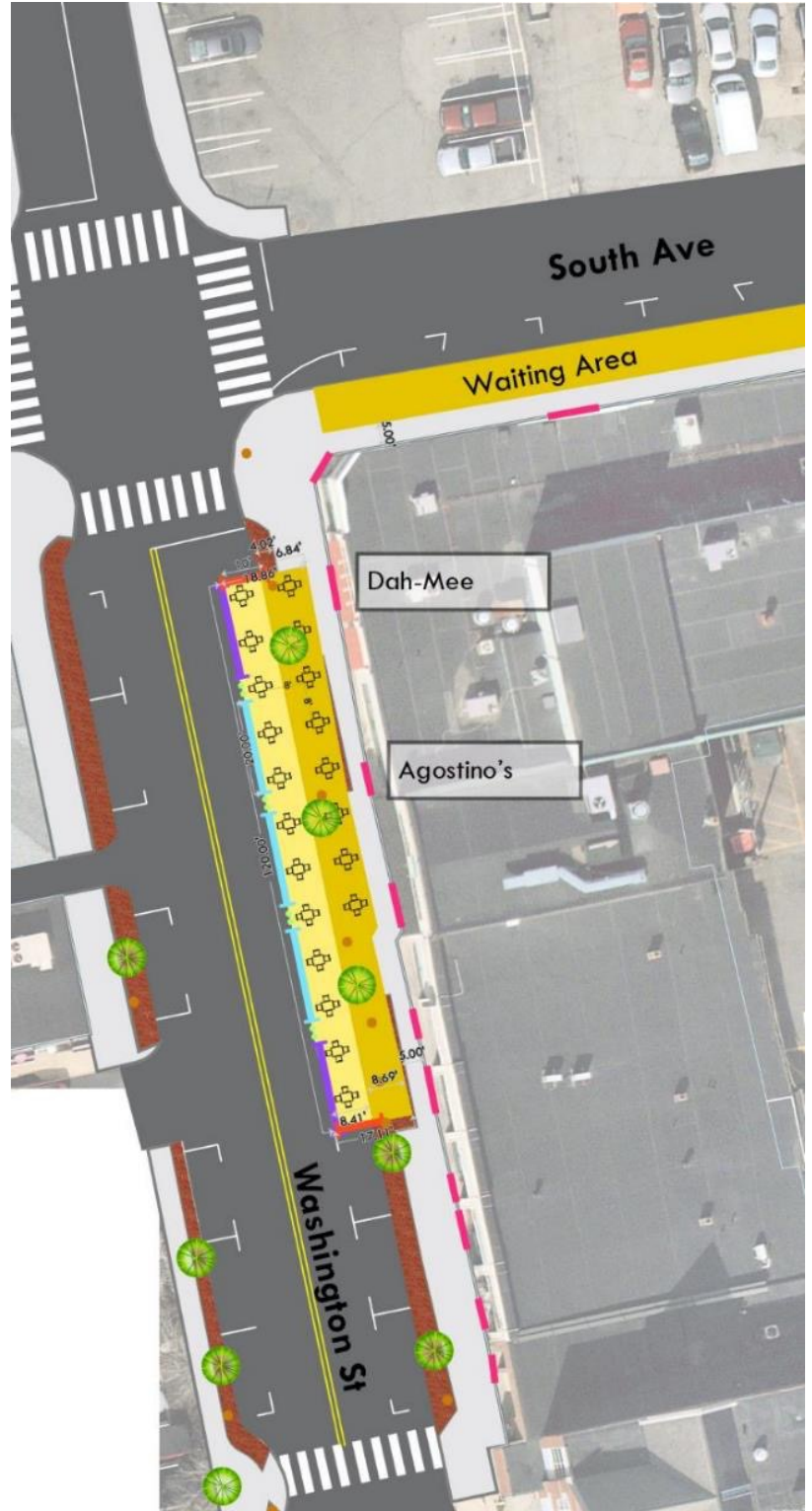
- Discuss Need for Intervention
- Field Visits and Observations, Counts, Documentation
- Measure Key Dimensions
- Create Design Alternatives
- Present to Stakeholders for Feedback
- Plan Installation Date and Timeline
- Promote Event through Fliers, Social Media, and Town-wide Announcements
- Design 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*

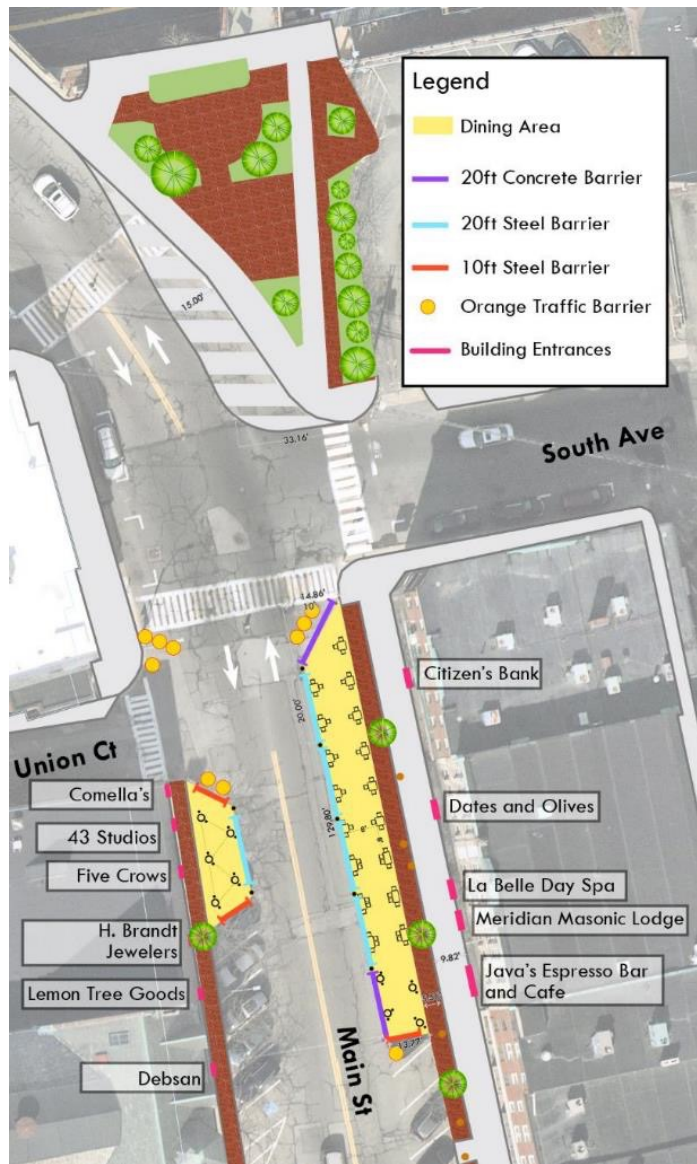


*Image of Washington Street Eatery As Installed*



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



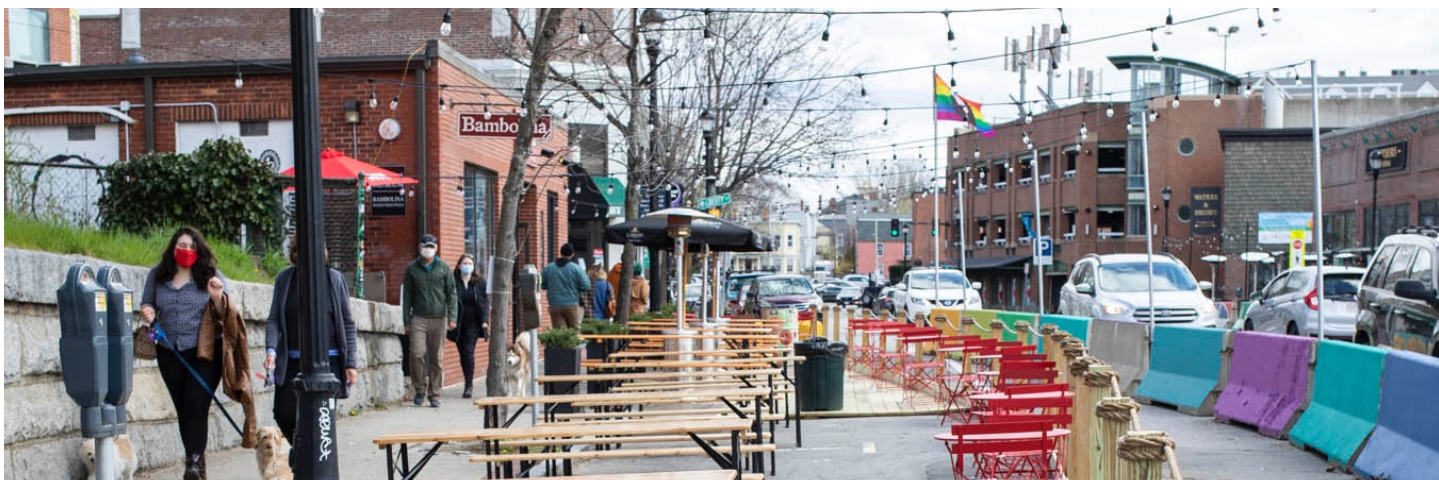


Layout pLan of before and after conditions for traffic calming and in-street outdoor dining on Main Street



*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*





#### Budget



Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000 paid for by individual restaurants owners with City of Salem support to install custom outdoor dining spaces)

#### Timeframe



Short (4 months)

#### Risk



Medium (Uncertainty over upcoming state laws)

#### Key Performance Indicators

Allowed restaurants to stay open and stay in business. Beneficial marketing for the restaurants. Beneficial marketing for the downtown district. Facilitated sense of social connection and community.

#### Partners & Resources

Creative Collective, City departments (Mayor's Office, Planning + Community Development, and Department of Public Works), individual restaurants owners/manager, and artists

#### Diagnostic

##### Opportunities

- Initial quick roll-out showed the community it is possible to transform underutilized public spaces into vibrant outdoor dining.
- Restaurant owners and managers are keen to keep the outdoor dining.
- Most community leaders and members love the program as demonstrated by several surveys conducted during 2020.

##### Challenges

- The transition from temporary to permanent will require significant investments in design and construction.
- Parking is a real and perceived loss for businesses and people driving into Downtown Salem.
- Considerations related to universal design, public health, and building codes.

# Provide Welcoming Outdoor Dining



Provided by SME Consultant

Civic Space Collaborative

Location

Salem, MA



## Action Item

The outdoor dining program was a successful transformation of public and private spaces into outdoor “streeteries” for the benefit of restaurants and the Salem community, including residents and tourists.

Over 50 restaurants participated in the program in 2020, and 56 have applied for the 2021 season.

Local artists were employed with to transform protective jersey barriers into works of art.

With an eye towards making the program permanent, the design and implementation of these spaces has already evolved to be more safe, accessible, usable, and attractive.

## Process

- Establish a core group of stakeholders to shepherd the project and to meet weekly to get the project started.
- Hire a project manager with restaurant community connections. In Salem, John Andrews, Owner / Chief Creative Officer of Creative Collective managed, coordinated, and helped implement the program for 2020 and the evolution of the program in 2021. Creative Collective was hired by the City of Salem. The project manager brings together the stakeholders from City departments, restaurants, and local artists to create functional, safe, community minded, and aesthetically pleasing installations for outdoor dining.
- Communicate with each individual restaurant owner or manager to establish their needs and possible contribution (materials or labor). Communication with any available channels (from email to social media to going door to door) is key.
- Create a marketing strategy with a mix of different communication methods. Examples: posting to Facebook groups, direct messaging on social media, door to door campaign, and phone calls.
- Communicate design guidelines for best practices related to public health, universal design, and building code compliant design.



*Outdoor Seating at Rockafellas Restaurant on Washington Street in Salem, MA*



*Sidewalk seating and tent seating at Ledger Restaurant on Washington Street*

## Process (Continued)

- Determine if pedestrian right-of-way needs redesign, new accommodation. Ensure full accessibility with universal design.
- In 2021, obtain City approval based on an automated application under the viewpoint portal.
- Aid and assist as needed in the build-out of individual spaces.
- Determine items to be provided by the City. In Salem, the City provided jersey barriers heaters, and the City also provided labor and material support on an individual restaurant basis.
- Coordinate with Department of Public Works on delivery and placement of jersey barriers and heaters.
- Hire local artists to paint barriers and coordinate mural with aesthetic input from individual businesses. The City of Salem hired the artists.
- Create a plan for storage and winterization.
- Meet with core stakeholders to iterate for the following season, learn from mistakes, and evolve the program.



*Outdoor Seating at Brother's Taverna on Derby Street*



*Outdoor Seating for Bambolina Restaurant with new pedestrian right-of-way on Derby Street*

*(Photo credit: Pamala Joye)*





# #8. Improve North Exchange Street

**Description-** Test temporary solutions to address issues of speeding vehicles (realign lanes to calm traffic), safety for pedestrians (re-locate and upgrade existing crosswalks, add lighting) and general improvement to help activate the area (identify on-street areas for parking to support potential mixed use development in the future, allocate seating and landscaped areas to beautify the street and invite more people to utilize it). The project includes a before and after speed study to monitor the impact of improvements.

PROJECT GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Increase action of adjacent landowners to improve or activate unused properties** (*public survey priority*)
- Slow down vehicles on Exchange Street
- Provide better walking and biking linkages to recreational opportunities
- Increase safety, particularly in the evening

Category		Public Realm
Location		North Exchange Street between Main Street and Marble Street
Origin		Eric Smith- Athol Planning Director, Mary Holtorf- Chair of the Downtown Vitality Committee (committee members also reviewed project)
Budget		<p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000), includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff time for project coordination and management, and data gathering (including a speed study)</li><li>• Purchase of materials (see sample list later in this section) including paint for striping areas, traffic cones and/or safety barriers, benches, landscape pots, speed limit sign, lighting fixtures, and other advisory/directional signage, as appropriate</li><li>• Staff time for installation</li></ul>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Low Risk- There are few potential risks identified with this project. Project elements are anticipated to improve conditions of the street without significant disruptions to vehicle flow while being installed, or disturbance to adjacent properties.</p> <p>As the project components are temporary, they are encouraged to be planned for flexibility and be adaptable based on new data gathered during their use. They can therefore be used as a tool to inform future longer-term plans developed for the corridor without causing conflict.</p>



## Key Performance Indicators

- Vehicle speeds
- Pedestrian and bicycle volumes
- Number of activated storefronts or existing properties

## Partners & Resources

Partners- Town Planning and Department of Public Works, Police Department, landowners and business owners

Resources-

- DHCD MA Development Initiative Program
- MADOT Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program

Additional resources include-

- National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Street Design Guide on 'Interim Design Strategies'
- Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) Part 6 on 'Temporary Traffic Control'
- Project for Public Spaces 'How to Turn a Place Around: Placemaking Handbook'



Existing Conditions of Properties Along North Exchange Street (Source: Stantec)

## Diagnostic

North Exchange Street is an area that has long-struggled to feel integrated with the downtown area, generally, or to facilitate safe movement of various modes. A lack of definition of right-of-way boundary on its eastern side, compounded by a lack of sidewalks, leaves an exceptionally wide area (~30' as opposed to standard vehicle lane widths between 10'-12') for northbound traveling vehicles. This can encourage speeding. The large setback of properties on the east side also pose a challenge in establishing clear boundaries- here, there is little to no observed business activity taking place (particularly at the parcel on the corner of Exchange Street and the rear access road to Athol Savings Bank), and equipment without clear ownership contributes to a perception of the area as having been abandoned. The Athol Daily News Building recently became inactive, and the North Quabbin Community Coalition Building has very limited activity. On the west side of the street, Tool Town Pizza is the only structure with an active use and regular customers. The abandoned fire station is a prominent feature on the west side, as well.

Beyond Marble Street, and adjacent to Millers River, is the Police Station (west side) and a dry cleaner and car washing business (east side). As such, there are few destinations to attract a higher volume of people to this area of town.

Another disadvantage of this corridor is its lack of lighting and placemaking elements. There are no signs to direct vehicles or bicycles to recreation areas or other points of interest downtown and there are no green features.

In spite of these challenges, North Exchange Street is an important link for several reasons:

1. It serves as the northern gateway directly into downtown Athol once crossing the Millers River;
2. It provides a natural link to recreational areas north of the river, such as the Cass Meadow Conservation Area and Silver Lake Park; and
3. It is an ideal area to accommodate new, mixed uses the Town is in need of, such as those outlined in general development concepts in the Aspire Athol Plan.

As the road surfacing is in moderate condition, and until more permanent plans for this corridor begin in earnest, temporary and small-scale improvements can be implemented to greatly raise the profile of the street and enhance the linkage to existing and potential businesses in the area.

### Project Sheet Element- Sample Placemaking Materials List

The following identifies typical materials that might be used to collectively improve Exchange Street temporarily until final plans are developed and constructed/installed. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) developed a vendor guide as part of the Massachusetts Shared Streets and Spaces Program in 2020. Some of the contacts listed may be resources for the items below.



**33" High Stanchion Pair  
With Chain**



**Reflectorized Safety Drum**



**MUTCD-compliant  
Speed Limit Sign**



**MUTCD-compliant  
Pedestrian Crossing Sign**



**6' High Potted Tree**



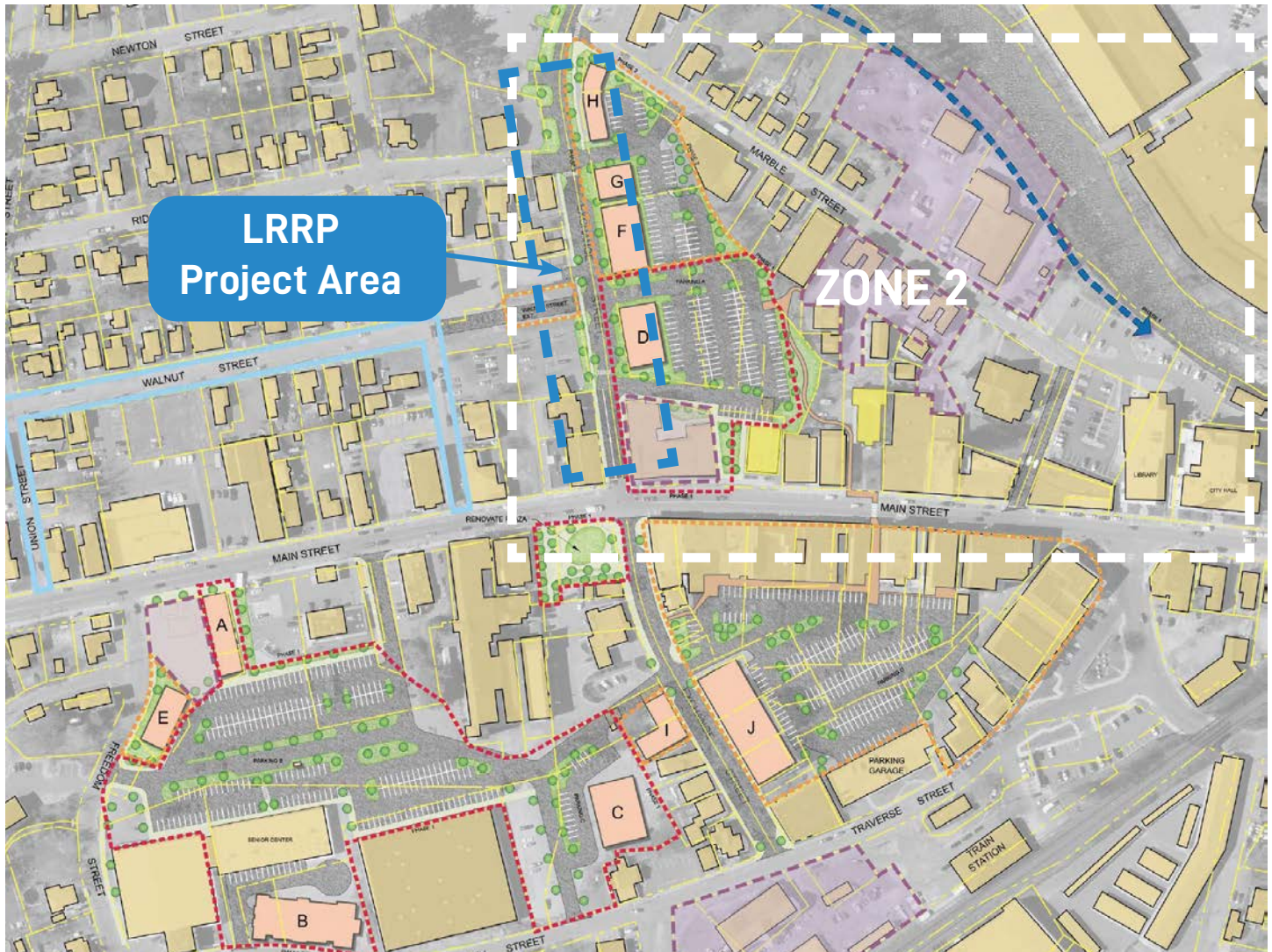
**Customizable Sandwich  
Board Signs**



## Project Sheet Element- Development Recommendations Along Exchange Street and Throughout Downtown Athol (Aspire Athol Plan, 2017)

The plan identifies Exchange Street as within a defined ZONE 2 Priority Area and recommends the following-  
*"...Future actions proposed include streetscape improvements along Exchange Street, including but not limited to, a reduction in the width of vehicle travel lanes, the addition of additional on-street parking, crosswalks, wider sidewalks, and street trees. A riverwalk trail running from the parking lot adjacent to the library to Exchange Street has been identified as a potential open space opportunity in the heart of downtown. Since a number of underused and vacant properties are in this area, an enhanced public realm and additional parking could spur development opportunities."*

These recommendations are in line with the proposed LRRP project (area has been highlighted below).



### LEGEND

- PROPOSED BUILDING
- PROPOSED PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION
- PROPOSED TREE
- PROPOSED RIVERWALK
- POTENTIAL PRIVATE REDEVELOPMENT
- VACANT BUILDING
- FY19 CDBG PROJECT
- PHASE 1
- PHASE 2

### PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1		
BUILDING A	5,200SF	
BUILDING B	11,500SF	
BUILDING C	7,700SF	
BUILDING D	6,000SF	
TOTAL PHASE 1	30,400SF	
PHASE 2		
BUILDING E	4,000SF	
BUILDING F	6,500SF	
BUILDING G	3,000SF	
BUILDING H	3,600SF	
BUILDING I	4,400SF	
BUILDING J	14,000SF	
TOTAL PHASE 2	35,500±SF	

### PROPOSED PARKING

PARKING A	168
PARKING B	222
PARKING C	15
PARKING D	198
TOTAL	603

\* AREAS SHOWN ARE FOR GROUND FLOOR ONLY

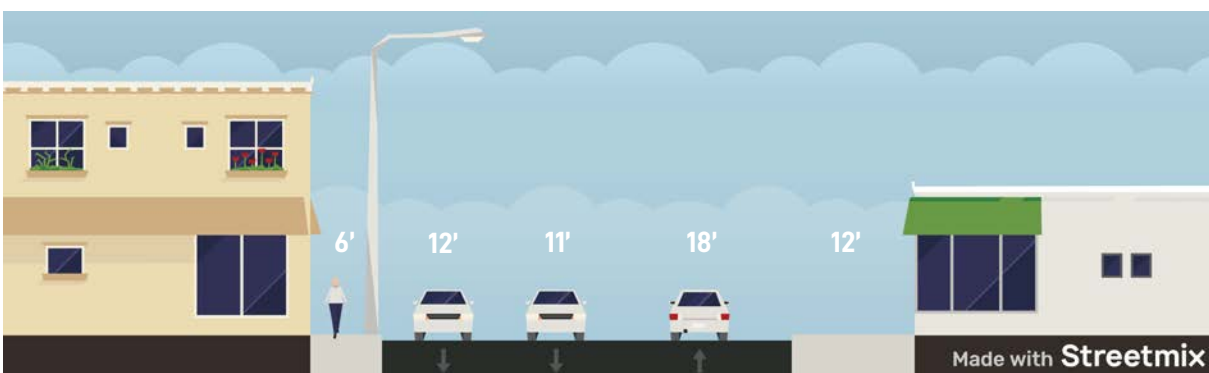


## Project Sheet Element- Potential Temporary Improvement Concept Plan and Sections

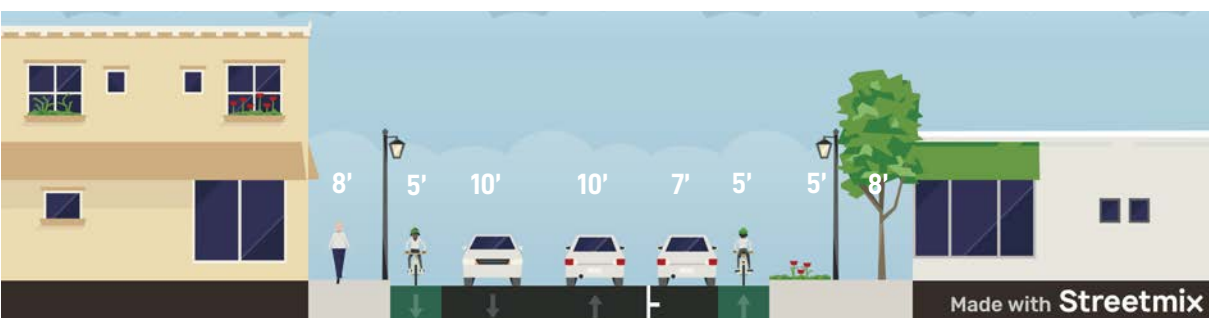


The primary features of the proposed concept are a realignment of the roadway to force vehicles to slow speeds, and the expansion/definition of pedestrian and landscaped areas. Final concept design and engineering will be required.

Existing Section Looking North on Main Street



Proposed Section Looking North on Main Street



## Project Sheet Element- Potential Temporary Improvement Concept Renderings



No lighting  
towards north area

No sidewalks or  
defined boundary

Travel lane too  
wide

No signage or mid-  
block crosswalk

**North Exchange Street Current Condition** (Source: Google)



On-street parking  
defined

Temporary trees  
placed

Bike lane  
painted

Mid-block crossing  
established

Lanes narrowed/  
bike lane protected

**North Exchange Street Proposed Temporary, Interim Improvements** (Source: Stantec)



Road alignment  
formalized

Landscaping  
elements installed

Supporting signage  
installed

Historic lighting  
integrated

Curbs and raised  
bike lane built

**North Exchange Street Proposed Long-Term Improvements** (Source: Stantec)



## Project Sheet Element- Defining Sidewalk Zones

The following diagram demonstrates best practice guidance on how attractive and functional sidewalk spaces should be defined in order to attract activity. Various temporary measures as part of this LRRP project can achieve the same effect.



### FRONTAGE ZONE

The frontage zone describes the section of the sidewalk that functions as an extension of the building, whether through entryways and doors or sidewalk cafes and sandwich boards. The frontage zone consists of both the structure and the facade of the building fronting the street, as well as the space immediately adjacent to the building.

### PEDESTRIAN THROUGH ZONE

The pedestrian through zone is the primary, accessible pathway that runs parallel to the street. The through zone ensures that pedestrians have a safe and adequate place to walk and should be 5–7 feet wide in residential settings and 8–12 feet wide in downtown or commercial areas.

### STREET FURNITURE/ CURB ZONE

The street furniture zone is defined as the section of the sidewalk between the curb and the through zone in which street furniture and amenities, such as lighting, benches, newspaper kiosks, utility poles, tree pits, and bicycle parking are provided. The street furniture zone may also consist of green infrastructure elements,

### ENHANCEMENT ZONE

The enhancement/ buffer zone is the space immediately next to the sidewalk that may consist of a variety of different elements. These include curb extensions, parklets, stormwater management features, parking, bike racks, bike share stations, and curbside bike lanes or cycle tracks.

*Urban Street Design Guide on Sidewalks (Source: NACTO)*

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## **Project Sheet Element- Fundamental Principles of Temporary Traffic Control (sourced from MUTCD Part 6)**

### **1. General plans or guidelines should be developed to provide safety for motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, workers, enforcement/emergency officials, and equipment, with the following factors being considered:**

- A. The basic safety principles governing the design of permanent roadways and roadsides should also govern the design of TTC zones. The goal should be to route road users through such zones using roadway geometrics, roadside features, and TTC devices as nearly as possible comparable to those for normal highway situations.
- B. A TTC plan, in detail appropriate to the complexity of the work project or incident, should be prepared and understood by all responsible parties before the site is occupied. Any changes in the TTC plan should be approved by an official who is knowledgeable (for example, trained and/or certified) in proper TTC practices.

### **2. Road user movement should be inhibited as little as practical, based on the following considerations:**

- A. TTC at work and incident sites should be designed on the assumption that drivers will only reduce their speeds if they clearly perceive a need to do so (see Section 6C.01).
- B. Frequent and abrupt changes in geometrics such as lane narrowing, dropped lanes, or main roadway transitions that require rapid maneuvers, should be avoided.
- C. Work should be scheduled in a manner that minimizes the need for lane closures or alternate routes, while still getting the work completed quickly and the lanes or roadway open to traffic as soon as possible.
- D. Attempts should be made to reduce the volume of traffic using the roadway or freeway to match the restricted capacity conditions. Road users should be encouraged to use alternative routes. For high volume roadways and freeways, the closure of selected entrance ramps or other access points and the use of signed diversion routes should be evaluated.
- E. Bicyclists and pedestrians, including those with disabilities, should be provided with access and reasonably safe passage through the TTC zone.
- F. If work operations permit, lane closures on high-volume streets and highways should be scheduled during off-peak hours. Night work should be considered if the work can be accomplished with a series of short-term operations.
- G. Early coordination with officials having jurisdiction over the affected cross streets and providing emergency services should occur if significant impacts to roadway operations are anticipated.

### **3. Motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians should be guided in a clear and positive manner while approaching and traversing TTC zones and incident sites. The following principles should be applied:**

- A. Adequate warning, delineation, and channelization should be provided to assist in guiding road users in advance of and through the TTC zone or incident site by using proper pavement marking, signing, or other devices that are effective under varying conditions. Providing information that is in usable formats by pedestrians with visual disabilities should also be considered.
- B. TTC devices inconsistent with intended travel paths through TTC zones should be removed or covered. However, in intermediate-term stationary, short-term, and mobile operations, where visible permanent devices are inconsistent with intended travel paths, devices that highlight or emphasize the appropriate path should be used. Providing traffic control devices that are accessible to and usable by pedestrians with disabilities should be considered.
- C. Flagging procedures, when used, should provide positive guidance to road users traversing the TTC zone.

### **4. To provide acceptable levels of operations, routine day and night inspections of TTC elements should be performed as follows:**

- A. Individuals who are knowledgeable (for example, trained and/or certified) in the principles of proper TTC should be assigned responsibility for safety in TTC zones. The most important duty of these individuals should be to check that all TTC devices of the project are consistent with the TTC plan and are effective for motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, and workers.
- B. As the work progresses, temporary traffic controls and/or working conditions should be modified, if appropriate, in order to provide mobility and positive guidance to the road user and to provide worker safety. The

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individual responsible for TTC should have the authority to halt work until applicable or remedial safety measures are taken.

C. TTC zones should be carefully monitored under varying conditions of road user volumes, light, and weather to check that applicable TTC devices are effective, clearly visible, clean, and in compliance with the TTC plan.

D. When warranted, an engineering study should be made (in cooperation with law enforcement officials) of reported crashes occurring within the TTC zone. Crash records in TTC zones should be monitored to identify the need for changes in the TTC zone.

**5. Attention should be given to the maintenance of roadside safety during the life of the TTC zone by applying the following principles:**

A. To accommodate run-off-the-road incidents, disabled vehicles, or emergency situations, unencumbered roadside recovery areas or clear zones should be provided where practical.

B. Channelization of road users should be accomplished by the use of pavement markings, signing, and crashworthy, detectable channelizing devices.

C. Work equipment, workers' private vehicles, materials, and debris should be stored in such a manner to reduce the probability of being impacted by run-off-the-road vehicles.

**6. Each person whose actions affect TTC zone safety, from the upper-level management through the field workers, should receive training appropriate to the job decisions each individual is required to make. Only those individuals who are trained in proper TTC practices and have a basic understanding of the principles (established by applicable standards and guidelines, including those of this Manual) should supervise the selection, placement, and maintenance of TTC devices used for TTC zones and for incident management.**

**7. Good public relations should be maintained by applying the following principles:**

A. The needs of all road users should be assessed such that appropriate advance notice is given and clearly defined alternative paths are provided.

B. The cooperation of the various news media should be sought in publicizing the existence of and reasons for TTC zones because news releases can assist in keeping the road users well informed.

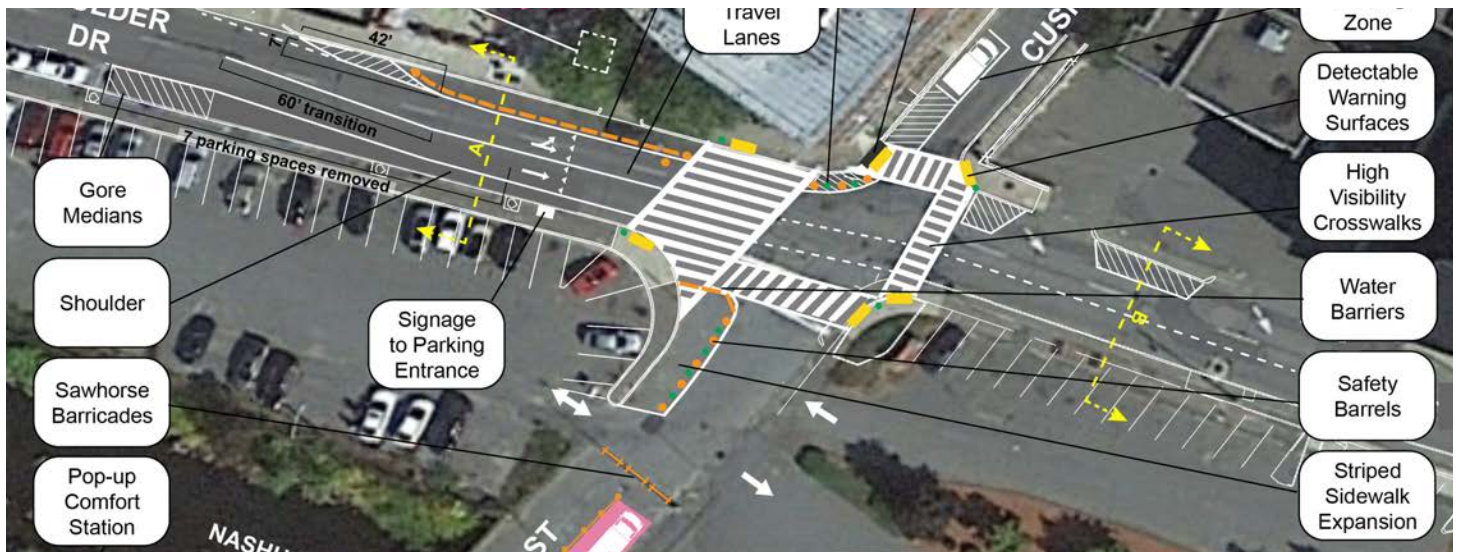
C. The needs of abutting property owners, residents, and businesses should be assessed and appropriate accommodations made.




D. The needs of emergency service providers (law enforcement, fire, and medical) should be assessed and appropriate coordination and accommodations made.

E. The needs of railroads and transit should be assessed and appropriate coordination and accommodations made.

F. The needs of operators of commercial vehicles such as buses and large trucks should be assessed and appropriate accommodations made.





Origin	City of Fitchburg
Budget	 High Budget (>\$200,000)
Timeframe	 Short-term (Less than 5 years)
Risk	 Medium Risk- The conditions associated with the MA Shared Streets and Spaces grant to potentially fund the project required full implementation within 90 days of the receipt of the award. There was a risk in delay of materials which had to be ordered, and some risk in securing workers for the installation of some components. The proposed concept also included a narrowing of a roadway, and the removal of a few parking spaces which could have caused surprise to frequent visitors of the area.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slowed vehicle speeds</li> <li>Pedestrian counts</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources	Massachusetts Department of Transportation Fitchburg Department of Public Works

## Commercial Street Closure & Riverfront Park Improvement Project



Public Realm

Provided by SME Consultant

Stantec

Location:

Fitchburg, MA

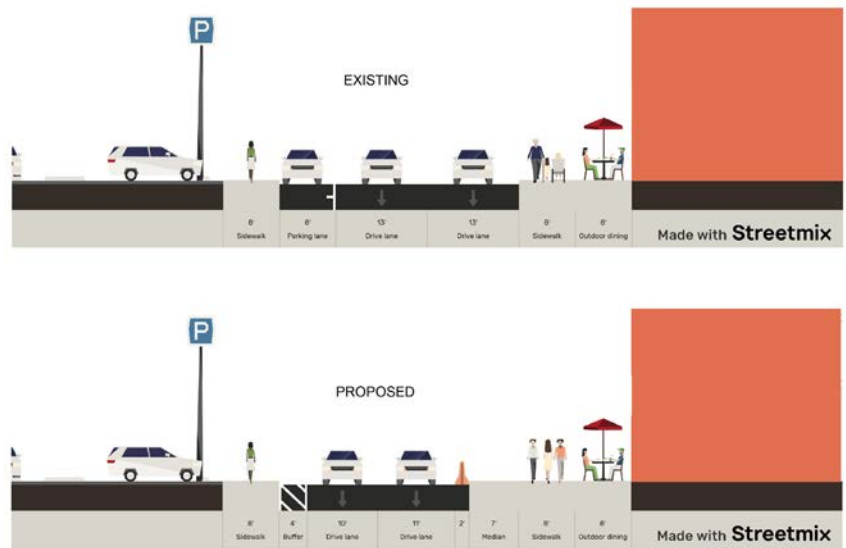
## Diagnostic

Commercial Street is a dead-end street that provides access to a public parking lot and terminates at the primary, eastern pedestrian entrance of Riverfront Park. Pedestrianized Mill Street is also an important secondary connector between Boulder and Main Street. This historic walking street showcases the City's arts and cultural identity, ever, Mill Street's limited width restricts its ability to accommodate the recent increase in both visitor and commercial activity. The downtown area of the city falls within an environmental justice community area, so there is particular need in ensuring all residents and visitors have access to the city's offerings.

This proposal ultimately targeted building a stronger linkage between Riverfront Park, Mill Street, and Main Street through the following improvements:

- Road diet on Boulder Drive and expanded outdoor dining area
- Parking lane removed to create vehicle buffer to support roadway realignment
- Expanded curbs and restriping of all pedestrian crossings at the Boulder and Cushing Street intersection.
- Mid-block pedestrian crossing and refuge island added on Boulder Drive
- Painted area on Mill Street to accommodate retail/restaurant cendors and outdoor seating
- Semi-permanent stage installed in Riverfront Park to host cultural events
- Seating in the park and comfort stations for hand sanitizing and for shade in the summer months

In combination, these strategies were designed to calm traffic, improve safety, and encourage pedestrians to explore and enjoy downtown programming options.



*Proposed cross-section for Boulder Drive realignment*



*Existing conditions of Boulder Drive*



## Action Item

- Project team coordination and roles
- Conduct before speed study
- Procurement of materials
- Finalized timeline of installation
- Traffic management plan
- Installation phase
- Advertisement of the project to the public
- Conduct after speed study
- Attracting programming opportunities to activate the newly-defined vendor areas

## Process

Within 0-15 days of the award, the City was required to install landscape pots, all forms of barriers, pavement markings, parking sign, and Astroturf areas. The City will also erect tents for comfort stations, handwashing stations, waste bin, bike rack, and distribute coolers to potential vendors. The Boulder Dr/Commercial St intersection improvements will also be implemented.

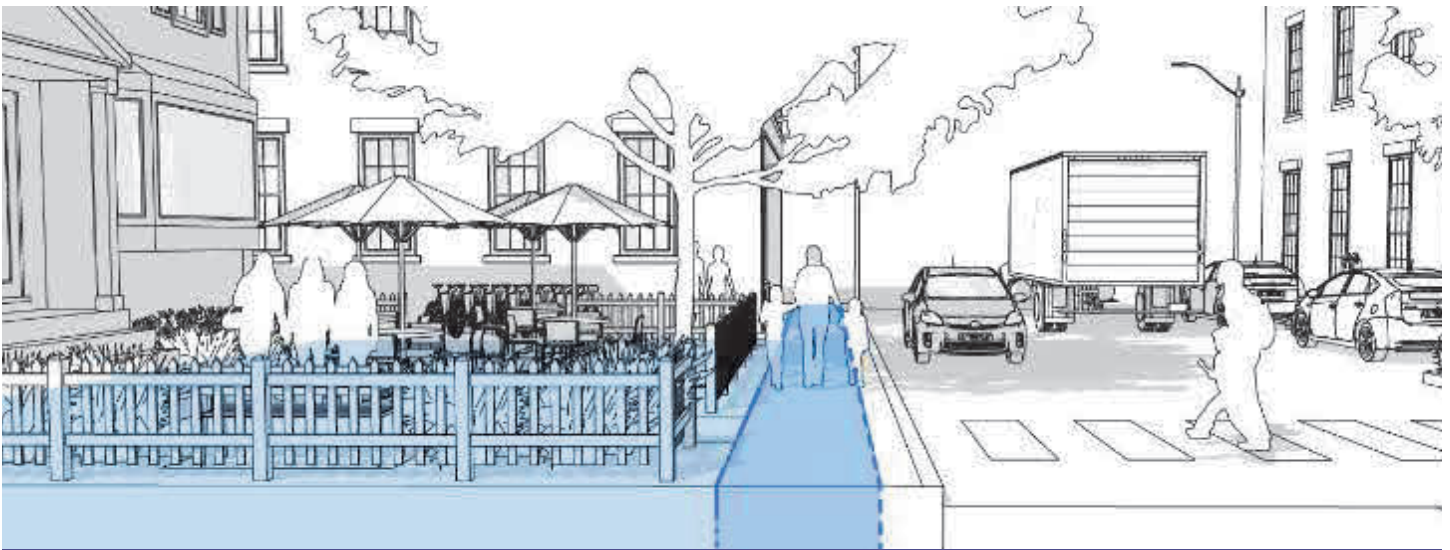


*Early phases of the intersection improvements*



*Proposed concept for the Riverfront Park area*





# Use a Form Based Code to Shape Public Realm Improvements Over Time



Provided by SME Consultant

Dodson & Flinker

Location

Florence, Massachusetts

## Origin

An ongoing project of the Northampton Dept. of Planning & Sustainability, with consulting assistance from Dodson & Flinker and Brovitz Community Planning and Design (please note that zoning elements described here have not been adopted, and many elements have changed or been eliminated over the course of the project).

## Budget



Medium Budget: (\$50k-\$200k) depending on size and extent of project area and the complexity of potential development types.

## Timeframe



Medium: while codifying the design standards is relatively straightforward, building consensus around the masterplan and streetscape design on which those standards is based can take several years, and is often accomplished in stages.

## Risk



Low to Medium: If there has been an effective, stakeholder-driven planning process leading to a shared vision, form-based codes are well-supported; resistance rises according to the extent to which landowners and businesses see that vision as limiting rather than enabling future opportunities.

## Key Performance Indicators

Reduced time in design, review and permitting; reduced conflicts between users of the public realm; improved longevity of street improvements and tree plantings; increased investment in public realm improvements; increased rents; increased property values.

## Partners & Resources

Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Business Association, Planning Board, Design Review Committee, Downtown residents and business owners.

## Diagnostic

Like a lot of communities, Northampton is working to promote redevelopment of its downtown while preserving the historic character of its unique buildings and streetscapes. An architectural review committee administers design guidelines that were prepared 20 years ago, but much time is spent in negotiation as the committee works with applicants to interpret them. Current district boundaries, moreover, include areas within the core historic district where stringent architectural guidelines make sense, as well as side streets and transitional areas where more flexibility is appropriate.

The form-based code approach provides an opportunity to fine-tune the zoning for each part the downtown: setting clear standards for good urban design in all areas, maintaining a strong historic preservation standard in the core, and allowing for more flexibility and creativity in other areas.

The challenge (as well as opportunity) of this approach is that before the code can be written there has to be a clear idea of what is desired. Where the current zoning and review process leaves a lot of those decisions to be made (and negotiated) during the design and permitting process, the form-based code requires the community to make those design decisions up front – greatly simplifying design and permitting and allowing for a predictable outcome for all concerned.

## Action Item

1. Define the study area and generally establish how detailed the code should be, and whether it should be very prescriptive or more flexible.
2. Review the existing zoning for the area and consult with property owners, residents, business owners, developers, planning department staff, planning board members, zoning board of appeals members, and the code enforcement officer to determine what is working in the existing zoning and should be kept and what is not working and needs to change.
3. If none exists, conduct a detailed survey and analysis of existing conditions, including dimension of streets and sidewalks, setbacks, lot dimensions, parking, landscaping, architecture, use patterns, materials,, etc.
4. Establish and/or verify the community's overall vision for the future of the area, likely including some combination of preservation, adaptation or transformation. Verify how the vision relates to the public and private realms, including functional and aesthetic goals, pedestrian connections, complete street concepts, etc.
5. Determine the best approach to enabling the community's vision, which could be adopting a new district with form-based standards, a form-based overlay district, or incorporating form-based standards throughout the code.
6. Determine the topics to be regulated and the standards for them. At a minimum, establish maximum front setbacks, building massing standards including the height and orientation of buildings fronting streets and public spaces, a front entrance requirement, standards for ground-floor uses, minimum transparency on the ground floor, and standards for pedestrian friendly off-street parking.
7. Draft the code at the level of detail needed to establish a clear and predictable process of design and review, balanced with the specific community's capacity to manage that process and the ability of the real estate market to support the desired vision. Test the code on a range of sites within the study area and revise the code as needed to ensure the desired outcomes.
8. Incorporate within each of these steps a robust process of public involvement and iterative development of design concepts and regulatory approaches. Most communities benefit from a scenario-based process that explores multiple alternatives at each stage before settling on a preferred approach.

## Process

The process of implementing a form-based code for the public realm starts with planning for the district and drafting the code itself, as described above. Key implementation steps involve bringing the code forward for public review, making any necessary changes to respond to feedback from stakeholders, and moving through the adoption process as governed by state and local law.

### Throughway & Frontage Zone Standards | Main Street- Primary [MS-p]

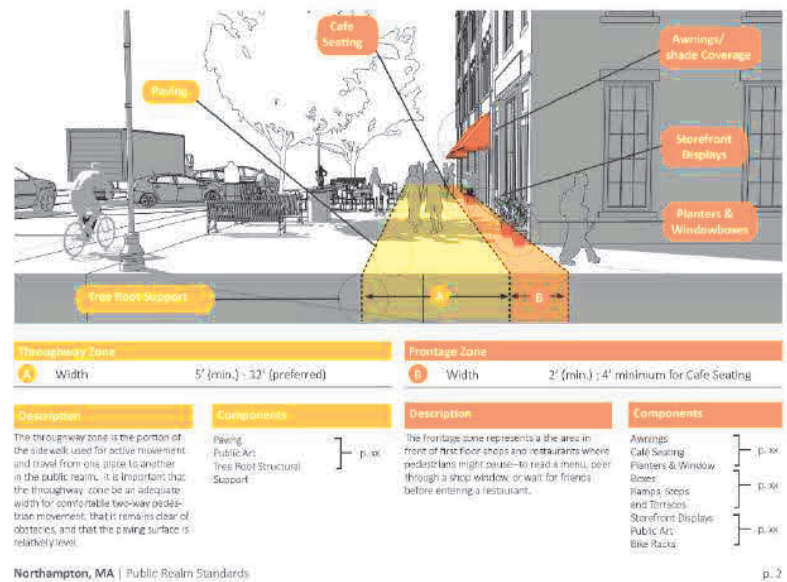


Diagram showing dimensions, allowed components and uses within the Throughway and Frontage Zones.

## Defining Standards for the Public Realm

The form-based code for the public realm provides a detailed breakdown of each element, including the frontage zone adjacent to the buildings; the throughway zone that provides a clear path for pedestrians; and a furnishing and utility zone for trees, light fixtures, benches and other furnishings. It can also include a street enhancement zone with standards for parking spaces, stormwater management and temporary uses within the parking area.

A simpler or more complex cross section can be developed, depending on the need. The goal is to provide for a predictable arrangement of all desired elements, coordinated with the provision for vehicular passage, parking, public transit and bicycling. This ensures that outdoor dining, sidewalk displays, public seating, art and other elements can all coexist within a compact footprint while minimizing conflicts. If some uses won't fit the dimensions of the street or are inappropriate to the area, that decision is made up front, providing clear direction to all involved.

### Furnishing & Utility and Street Enhancement Zone | Main Street- Primary [MS-p]

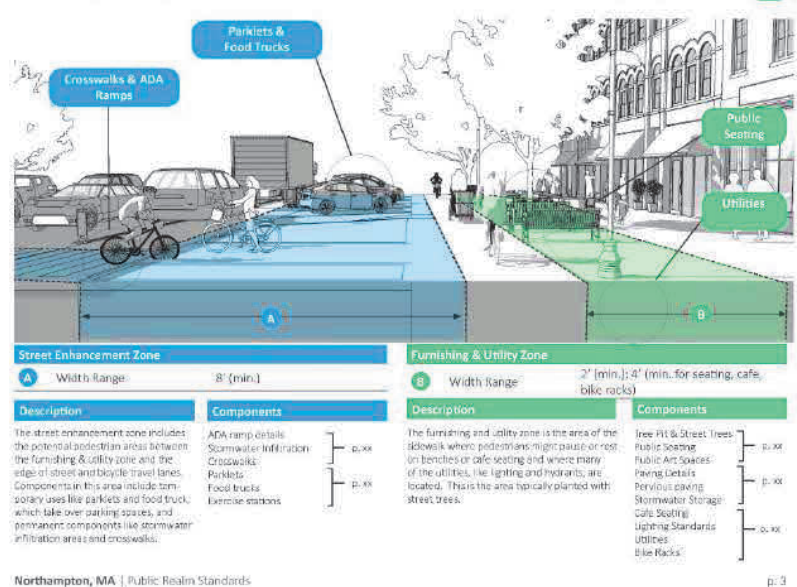


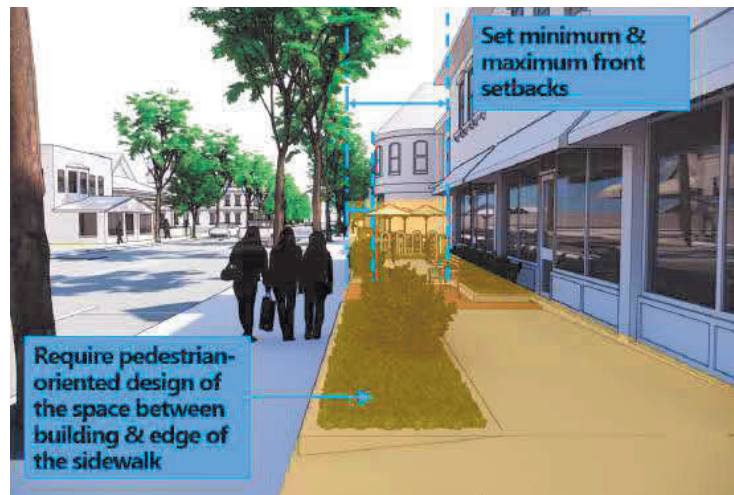
Diagram showing dimensions, allowed components and uses within the Furnishing and Utility and Street Enhancement Zones.



## Calibrating Public Realm Standards to different street types, districts or neighborhoods.

One value of the graphic form-based code is the ease to which it can be calibrated to reflect different design and dimensional standards for varied districts or street types.

This is usually represented by cross sections (or three-dimensional representations) of each area, with simple tables defining the desired parameters for setbacks, street and sidewalk elements, and the relationship of building entrances and façade elements to the public way.



*The form-based code establishes appropriate building setbacks, then provides standards for designing both public and private frontage areas within a unified composition.*



*Diagram showing cross section, dimensional parameters and photographic examples for a typical "Main Street - Secondary" block.*



*Diagram showing cross section, dimensions and examples for a typical "Side Street" block.*

## Raising the Bar for Streetscape Design

In a successful downtown, the streetscape and buildings work together to shape a series of "outdoor rooms." The character of these outdoor rooms fundamentally shapes people's perceptions of the downtown, how they move through it, and how they can use the space. A form-based code provides the opportunity to ensure that public and private investments are working in tandem to create memorable and functional places.

A form-based code takes the successful elements of a typical streetscape project and places them into zoning, where they will have a chance to outlive the brick and mortar of the original plan. It also makes clear which elements of the streetscape design are key contributors to the character of that place across decades, and which ones can and should vary over time to reflect new materials and design trends. It can also serve as a guidebook to how best to accommodate the growing demand for temporary private use of the public space for outdoor dining, display, retail sales and other purposes.

A form-based code provides an opportunity to set a higher standard for the design of elements that, whether installed by the town DPW or a private abutter, tend to be driven by the needs of the moment rather than the long-term vision. It also allows for functional elements such as stormwater treatments, bike lanes, and crosswalks to be integrated into a comprehensive scheme based on a shared community vision.

### Public Realm Component Standards | Street Trees & Tree Pits



Description	
A	Tree Pit length
B	Tree Pit width
C, D	Tree Pit alternative length and width
E	Maximum tree spacing (trunk to trunk)
F	Recommended tree spacing (trunk to trunk)

#### General Standards

- (1) Sidewalks must include street trees planted within the furnishing zone in a regularly-spaced allee pattern, with a recommended spacing of twenty to thirty (20 - 30) feet on center depending on species, and no greater than forty (40) feet on center. Along Frontage Zones, street trees may be planted in an irregularly-spaced allee pattern to avoid obscuring windows and signage. Tree pits should not be placed in front of doorways or stairs.
- (2) When planted, street trees must be a minimum height of ten (10) feet and/or two (2) inches in caliper.
- (3) Recommended tree pit dimensions are five (5) feet wide (dimension perpendicular to curb) and ten (10) feet long (dimension along curb), for the area of exposed soil surrounding the tree. If this configuration is not possible due to site constraints, other tree pit configurations amounting to 50 square feet may be allowed. When level with an adjacent sidewalk, the soil area must be protected by eighteen (18) inch tall metal tree guard fencing. When recessed below an adjacent sidewalk, open soil areas must be protected by porous rubber tree pit surfacing.
- (4) Sidewalks in front of terminated vistas and along civic space frontage may be planted a wider from street tree requirements at the discretion of the Planning Board.
- (5) Street trees must be planted at least five (5) feet from fire hydrants, six (6) feet from street signs, seven (7) feet from curb cuts, and thirty (30) feet from stop signs. The edges of tree planting beds must be at least two (2) feet from gas, electric, water, and sewer lines, and at least four (4) feet from oil fill pipes.

#### Dimensional Standards

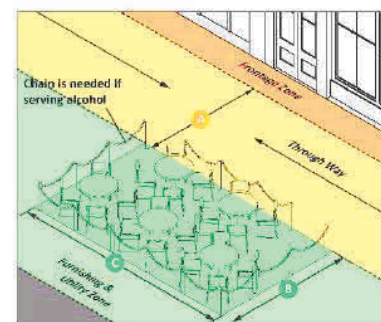
A	Tree Pit length	20'
B	Tree Pit width	5'
C, D	Tree Pit alternative length and width	50 sq'
E	Maximum tree spacing (trunk to trunk)	20'
F	Recommended tree spacing (trunk to trunk)	20' - 30'
Recommended soil volume		600 cubic feet (min) for small tree to 1000 cubic feet (min) for large tree

Northampton, MA | Public Realm Standards

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*Adequate standards for street tree plantings, especially for providing sufficient soil volume, are lacking in many communities.*

### Public Realm Component Standards | Cafe Seating



Description	
A	Through Way Width
B	Cafe Seating Depth
C	Cafe Seating Length
D	Width of Clear Path of Access to Entrance

#### Dimensional Standards




A	Through Way Width	5' minimum typical (4' minimum on Side Streets)
B	Cafe Seating Depth	6' minimum to 15' maximum from facade
C	Cafe Seating Length	Adjacent to and not extending beyond the establishment it serves
D	Width of Clear Path of Access to Entrance	4' minimum

Northampton, MA | Public Realm Standards

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*Clear standards for outdoor dining should establish acceptable locations within a particular cross section, as well as the relationship of seating areas to the through way and other elements.*



Origin	City of East Providence, RI: James Moran Chief Economic Planner, William Fazioli, Director Planning; Erik Skadberg, City Engineer; Christopher Martin, Executive Director, East Providence Waterfront Commission
Budget	 \$35,000
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) – project is in development phase
Risk	 Medium Risk -post-pandemic outlook on outdoor recreation and outdoor dining appears good
Key Performance Indicators	Number of pedestrians and bicyclists
Partners & Resources	Various City Departments; East Providence Chamber of Commerce

## Watchemoket Square/1<sup>st</sup> Street Pilot Project – Protected Bike Lane



Provided by SME Consultant

BETA Group, Inc.  
Lincoln, RI

Location

East Providence, RI



## Diagnostic

The 1<sup>st</sup> Street Protected Bike Lane Pilot Project in Watchemoket Square in East Providence, RI will fill an existing gap in the East Bay Bike Path system. The 1<sup>st</sup> Street segment is the only link in the multi-mile system that does not have protected or buffered bike lanes.

1<sup>st</sup> Street is a narrow two-way street with no formal on-street parking, shared lanes for traffic and bicycles, and sidewalks on both sides. The traffic volumes and speeds are moderate and sharing the roadway presents a safety issue for bicyclists. This segment of Bike Path is used by commuters, as well as by riders of all ages for recreation. The businesses located along 1<sup>st</sup> Street have an opportunity to serve active transportation pedestrians and bicyclists.

The Pilot Project was developed to test the feasibility and operations of implementing separated bike lanes. The Pilot Project would also convert two-way 1<sup>st</sup> Street to one-way southbound direction for traffic. Outreach with abutters was a critical element of the project. Key issues included maintaining access to business parking lots and change in circulation of 1<sup>st</sup> Street.

## Action Items

Planning and design for the 1<sup>st</sup> Street Protected Bike Lane Pilot Project in Watchemoket Square in East Providence, RI is completed. The Pilot Project is planned to be implemented in Spring 2021 and will be in operation until Fall 2021.

The City of East Providence will obtain the materials and construct the Pilot Project. Actions will include:

- Secure materials for construction.
- Implementation of pavement markings, signage, flex posts, and mountable curbs.
- Traffic management during construction.
- Outreach to abutters to solicit feedback on Pilot operations, access, deliveries, etc.
- Adjust elements of the project as needed based on feedback.
- Record number of pedestrians and bicycles using the 1<sup>st</sup> Street during the Pilot Program.



*Intersection of 1<sup>st</sup> St and Warren Ave. Existing and proposed*







*Intersection of 1<sup>st</sup> St and Mauran Ave. Existing and proposed*

## #9. Establish a Skate Park

**Description-** The site identification, planning and design, and construction of a skate park with the intention of engaging the youth in Athol (of all skill levels) in physical activity of skateboarding or biking, as well as creating a landscaped gathering space for the general public to gather.

### PROJECT GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Provide outlet for youth energy** (*public survey priority*)
- **Promote physical activity and interaction for all ages** (*public survey priority*)
- Increase social connections between residents
- Increase the visibility and engagement of youth with downtown

Category		Public Realm
Location		To be identified.
Origin		Eric Smith- Athol Planning Director, Mary Holtorf- Chair of the Downtown Vitality Committee (committee members also reviewed project)
Budget		<p>High Budget (over \$200,000), includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultant services for siting and civil engineering services, public engagement, concept design and report production, 3-D concept graphics (sample fee matrix is included in the appendix)</li> <li>• Construction services for installation of skate park</li> </ul>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Medium Risk – While the need for more outdoor public spaces has long been identified, the siting of the skate park may increase some sensitivity of potential adjacent neighbors/ landowners. The park should provide a place that allows youth (and visitors of all ages) to feel the freedom to recreate while also respecting the neighborhood atmosphere, and disincentivizing unreasonable levels of noise, litter, or other unwanted behaviors.</p> <p>One of the potential benefits of the skate park is to attract more “eyes on the street”, and improve the perception of safety in downtown Athol. However, consistent police presence in downtown will be important both in enforcing potential undesirable behavior, and the Town's Department of Public Works will need the capacity to regularly maintain the park.</p>

## Key Performance Indicators

- Observed activity of youth utilizing the skatepark responsibly

## Partners & Resources

Partners- Town, Department of Public Works, North Quabbin Community Coalition, YMCA, Athol High School

Resources-

- Tony Hawk Foundation
- Grants from athletic shoe companies, such as Vans, Nike, Converse, New Balance, and Reebok
- MA DOT Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program

Stantec can also provide the Town with its 'Funding Services Toolkit' which is particular to the skate park funding process.



**Small-scale skate park built in Jamaica Plain in southwest Boston** (Source: Stantec)



## Diagnostic

As demonstrated in the data gathered as part of the 'Customer Base' section of this plan, downtown Athol has a combination of factors that are likely contributing to the unproductivity of some of the youth's population. 61% of downtown's households use food stamps or the SNAP program, more than three times the 17% of households in Athol, overall. Of downtown residents over the age of 16, 23% are unemployed, 7% more than Athol, overall. These factors perpetuate the likeliness of negative behaviors being pursued by young people because there are 1) not enough locally-based employment opportunities to meet the needs and skills of the unemployed, and 2) "there is not much to do" for recreation and entertainment. The onset of COVID-19 has also created a limit for local youth to engage in recreational activities outdoors, due to social distancing and many households electing to self-quarantine indoors, when possible.

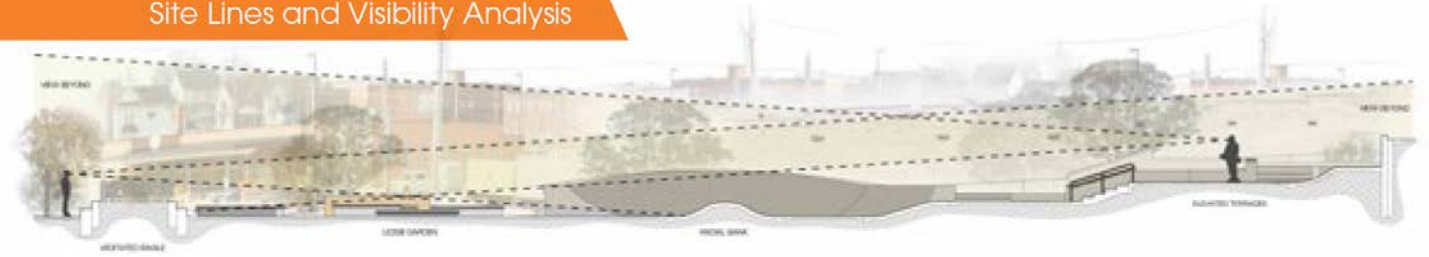
Observations have been raised by residents that some youth (and residents of other ages) are engaging in drug activity or other crimes and often occupy the streets at night. One of the locations identified in particular includes the area below the parking deck on Traverse Street. These activities are a known deterrent to the general public and maintaining a safe and inviting downtown atmosphere in the evening. The recent opening of the Birdsnest Martial Arts facility and classes/facilities available at the YMCA are great resources to engage youth. For those that don't have disposable income, a free outdoor recreational opportunity would be a welcome addition to downtown and potentially encourage more interaction and social programming with students at Athol High School (346 enrolled), located 1.8 miles from downtown.

## Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- **Identify the people/organizations** who need to be part of this process, including in particular a youth representative, and a representative from an organization currently providing services targeted to local youth.
- **Identify a shortlist** of desirable sites to consider.
- Decide **which funding source** is appropriate and, if the source is a grant program, apply for funds.
- **Identify the preferred consultant** to help execute the project, or issue an RFQ/RFP process.
- **Develop an engagement process** appropriate for the municipality and the required approval process.
- Once the skate park has been constructed, **activate the space** with a kick-off and through strategic programming
- Following a period of implementation, **analyze how the skate park is meeting its intended goals** and if physical or management-related adjustments are needed.

## Site Lines and Visibility Analysis



*Sample analysis during the design and engineering process for a skate park (Source: Stantec)*

### Process

#### PHASE 1

The timeframe provides only general recommendations and is dependent upon timelines of the specific funding pursued, the administrative capacity for initiating and finalizing a potential RFQ/RFP process, and seasonal considerations that may have impact on construction timelines. From the kick-off to the launching of the constructed park could take approximately 12 months.

- **MONTH 1-** Convene the committee/group of people who will be responsible for initiating and overseeing the planning and execution of the project. Research appropriate precedents; develop public outreach/engagement program. Consider a public kick-off/charrette, depending on the needs of the community. Discuss the preferred approaches for funding and recruitment of consultants to assist in the design and construction of the final design.
- **MONTH 2:** Site selection
- **MONTHS 2-3:** Actively pursue funding resources with chosen site in mind
- **MONTHS 4-5** (following reward/allocation of funds): Solicit and retain consultants for pre-construction services
- **MONTHS 6-8:** Engage with business/property owners and public on options and concerns; develop guidelines on park usage; develop illustrations. Consider meeting with the appropriate boards to introduce the draft design guidelines and receive feedback.
- **MONTH 9:** Solicit and retain consultants for construction services
- **MONTHS 10-11:** Construction of the skate park takes place
- **MONTH 12:** Hold a formal community opening/launch of the skate park, including advertising through various media channels

## Project Sheet Element- 5 Tips for Successful Skate Park Plan Process

1. **Build buy-in.** Leverage voices of the skate community and hold open forums to shine a light on all the positive impacts of creating dedicated, safe places for skateboarding and wheel-friendly activities.
2. **Create a shared vision of authenticity.** Consider the town's culture/heritage, vetting ideas with local skate enthusiasts, artists, etc. [Outcome example: references to local history in the form of sculptural, wheel-friendly skate elements]
3. **Design for intended use and neighborhood context.** Consider details such as warm colored concrete, lighting, elements for users of all abilities and skill-levels.
4. **Environmentally-friendly.** Leverage sitework to incorporate green infrastructure strategies into the site, if practical.
5. **Ensure a realistic construction schedule.** The specialty skatepark contractors require a specific schedule and, in New England, the weather can dictate construction timelines.



*An attractive skate park naturally integrated with its surroundings in Staten Island, New York (Source: Stantec)*

## Project Sheet Element- Key Skate Park Design Considerations

### Usability concerns:

- Flow
- Traffic
- Speed
- Difficulty
- Visibility (within the skating area)
- Stylistic discipline

### Functional concerns:

- Capacity
- Seating/resting
- Access
- Visibility (into and around the park)
- Safety and Drainage
- Aesthetic Appeal, Landscaping



## Project Sheet Element- Potential Sites for Skate Park

While the ultimate selection of a skate park in Athol will require a significant process of investigation, research, and formation of agreements, the adjacent locations (generally) may be desirable for early consideration for the following reasons:

- Proximity to downtown and destinations where youth may visit (e.g. library, YMCA, barber shop, pizza restaurants)
- Ease of redevelopment (i.e. no existing vertical structures to remove)
- Not entirely secluded. Some sites have stronger sightlines for an "eyes on the street" approach to safety
- Most are connected to existing sidewalk networks

### Skatepark Size Typology

	Skate Spot	3,000—5,000 sf Serves 12,000 residents 5 patron capacity
	Neighborhood Skatepark	8,000—11,000 sf Serves 25,000 residents 65 patron capacity
	Regional Skatepark	20,000+ sf Serves 75,000 residents 100+ patron capacity

SizeTypology



- 1) Eastern end of Marble Street  
 2) Inactive parcel on North Exchange Street  
 3) Lord Pond Plaza  
 4) Converted parking deck on Traverse Street  
 5) Parcel near intersection of School and Exchange Streets  
 (Source: Google Earth)

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## Project Sheet Element- Recommended Engagement Activities

### IN-PERSON ACTIVITIES

Key activities that we would seek to include as part of the face-to-face engagement (based on Stantec capabilities and experience, as an example) include:

- Town staff & officials interviews. One-on-one meetings early in the process with Town staff and officials will orient the consulting team about Town issues, initiatives and expectations. Repeat interviews may be needed at later stages of the project.
- Key stakeholder interviews. One-on-one meetings with stakeholders will assist the consulting team in updating information and identifying important issues and areas of concern. Stakeholders identified by the Town could include neighborhood leaders, skaters, businesses and property owners, developers, real estate professionals, service organizations, design and engineering professionals, and environmental advocates.
- Advisory Group meetings. The Advisory Group established by the Town represents a diverse cross-section of the Town's citizens. Contributing their expertise, they serve as a partner in service to the community through participating in regular meetings throughout the life of the project. They provide technical review of materials and make recommendations through a facilitated process.

Other in-person activities, which can be included for an additional fee, and which can be conducted as required, might include:

- Focus groups. Used to generate ideas and observe public reactions. Facilitated by a Stantec planning professional, small groups of participants discuss their perceptions and expectations to help better understand different viewpoints on a particular subject.

- Community events & organizations. Displays and personal interaction with attendees at events, such as local farmer's markets, children's festival, or Mission Fest, and presentations to community organizations and local businesses.
- Public workshops & meetings. In addition to public hearings, townwide public meetings may be charrettes, open houses, or workshops, allowing the public to interact with the planning team and with each other. Survey tools, including keypad polling technology, can be used to identify characteristics of participants, visual preferences, project priorities in real time.

## Project Sheet Element- Recommended Engagement Activities

### VIRTUAL ACTIVITIES

Key activities to include as part of the online engagement (based on Stantec capabilities and experience, as an example) include:

- **Media relations.** We can assist with communicating project messages, and in publicizing the project and public events through community radio, public service announcements, press releases, interviews, and editorial board briefings.

Project information may also be shared with Town public information offices, government access channels, community bulletin board, and Internet blog sites. It is especially important to communicate project milestones and key decisions such as project start-up, site selection, finalization of detailed design, and construction and finishing schedules, in order to keep the community aware of project progress.

- **Social media.** Stantec can work with the Town to create appropriate content for its Twitter feed, Facebook page and YouTube channel and to promote the project through retweets and sharing by people in the Town who are "influencers" with significant community followings in social media.
- **Online forums & surveys.** We have experience with several online engagement tools used to gather and analyze stakeholder input. Our preferred partner in creating a robust online presence for the project is mySidewalk.

mySidewalk is an online engagement platform that fosters conversations with and among stakeholders in an easy and manageable way. It allows you to dig deeper into their needs and wants. Stantec is an unlimited partner with mySidewalk, making these services available at no extra cost other than staffing hours.

Through mySidewalk, we can conduct surveys (such as preferences for locating the skate park), upload draft information and plans for community comment, host a discussion forum, connect the work of the Advisory Group to the wider community, and a host of other activities. We can establish a one-step link from the Town's own website to the mySidewalk site that we set up specifically for this project.

Additional online activities, which can be included for additional fee, and which can be conducted as required, might include:

- **Telephone city halls.** Real-time interactive meetings which utilize telephone conference call, television, and/or online technologies to broadcast meetings. This technology allows members of the public to speak directly to a panel of Town officials and/or project staff. Public participants may submit comments or questions in real time during the event, online or on the phone.
- **E-newsletters & E-blasts.** Through the Town's website, stakeholder groups, sign-ups at meetings, and other methods an email list can be developed and maintained to inform interested persons about project activities and document.



## Project Sheet Element- Sample Fee Matrix

The following outlines typical pre-construction fees associated with a recent skate park project that was completed by Stantec. The costs are for reference and informational purposes, only. Fees specific to a proposal in Athol would require customized calculation.

TASK	DESCRIPTION	FEE
1.0	Analysis/Planning	\$5,476.00
2.0	Schematic Planning/Design	\$8,426.00
3.0	Feasibility Report	\$5,390.00
4.0	Cost Estimating	\$2,705.00
TOTAL		\$21,997.00
Reimbursables/Travel Expenses		\$880.00
TOTAL INCLUDING REIMBURSABLES		\$22,877.00

DESIGN	PROJECT ROLE TITLE	HOURLY RATE	ANALYSIS/ PLANNING	SCHEMATIC PLANNING/DESIGN	FEASIBILITY REPORT	COST ESTIMATING	FEE SUMMARY/ TOTALS
		Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.
Stantec-Mike McIntyre	Principal-Action Sports	\$ 242.00 1	\$ 242.00 1	\$ 242.00 1	\$ 242.00 1	\$ 242.00 4	\$ 968.00
Stantec-Kanten Russell	Design/ P.M.	\$ 154.00 12	\$ 1,848.00 16	\$ 2,464.00 8	\$ 1,232.00 4	\$ 616.00 40	\$ 6,160.00
Stantec-Colby Carter	Design/ Production	\$ 135.00 10	\$ 1,350.00 20	\$ 2,700.00 6	\$ 810.00 1	\$ 135.00 37	\$ 4,995.00
Stantec-Mary Soria	Design/ Production	\$ 107.00 8	\$ 856.00 12	\$ 1,284.00 12	\$ 1,284.00 16	\$ 1,712.00 48	\$ 5,136.00
Stantec-Cat Tran	Report Production	\$ 101.00 2	\$ 202.00 2	\$ 202.00 12	\$ 1,212.00 0	\$ - 16	\$ 1,616.00
TOTAL DESIGN FEE:		\$ 4,498.00	\$ 6,892.00	\$ 4,780.00	\$ 2,705.00	\$ 18,875.00	

3-D GRAPHICS	PROJECT ROLE TITLE	HOURLY RATE	ANALYSIS/ PLANNING	SCHEMATIC PLANNING	FEASIBILITY STUDY	COST ESTIMATE	FEE SUMMARY/ TOTALS
		Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.
Stantec-Graphics	3-D Graphics	\$ 154.00 0	\$ - 6	\$ 924.00 0	\$ - 0	\$ - 6	\$ 924.00
TOTAL GRAPHICS FEE:		\$ -	\$ 924.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 924.00	

Engineering	PROJECT ROLE TITLE	HOURLY RATE	ANALYSIS/ PLANNING	SCHEMATIC PLANNING	FEASIBILITY STUDY	COST ESTIMATE	FEE SUMMARY/ TOTALS
		Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.	Amount Hrs.
Stantec-Ted Grove	Civil Engineering	\$ 242.00 1	\$ 242.00 1	\$ 242.00 1	\$ 242.00 0	\$ - 3	\$ 726.00
Stantec-Stephen Crevoiserat	Civil Engineering	\$ 184.00 4	\$ 736.00 2	\$ 368.00 2	\$ 368.00 8	\$ - 8	\$ 1,472.00
TOTAL DESIGN FEE:		\$ 978.00	\$ 610.00	\$ 610.00	\$ -	\$ 2,198.00	

REIMBURSABLES	EXPENSES	UNIT COST	ANALYSIS/ PLANNING	SCHEMATIC PLANNING	FEASIBILITY STUDY	COST ESTIMATE	FEE SUMMARY/ TOTALS
		Amount Qty.	Amount Qty.	Amount Qty.	Amount Qty.	Amount Qty.	Amount Qty.
Reimbursables/Travel Expenses-Stantec							\$ 880.00
TOTAL EXPENSE FEE:		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 880.00	

GRAND TOTAL FIXED FEE
\$ 22,877.00

# Telulah Park Skate Park

Appleton, WI

100% Probable Cost

Date:12.18.2013

## Project Sheet Element- Sample Fee Breakdown

The following outlines typical fees associated with construction of a recent skate park project that was completed by Stantec. The costs are for reference and informational purposes, only. Fees specific to a proposal in Athol would require customized calculation.

ITEM NO.	DESCRIPTION	APPROX. QUANTITY AND UNIT	UNIT PRICE	TOTAL AMOUNT
<b>00000 - General</b>				
1	10% Mobilization	1	\$ 20,598.70	\$ 20,598.70
<b>02220 - Demolition</b>				
2	REMOVAL OF LANDSCAPE AND IRRIGATION	7,500 sf	\$ 0.75	\$ 5,625.00
<b>02300 - Earthwork</b>				
3	Import - Engineered Fill Material	200 cy	\$ 25.00	\$ 5,000.00
4	Rough Grading	7,500 sf	\$ 1.50	\$ 11,250.00
<b>02440 - Entry Sign</b>				
5	Metal Entry / Rules Sign with Tubular Steel Post	1 ea	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00
<b>02700 - Storm Drainage</b>				
6	6" [15.24cm] Zurn #15B Floor Drain Catch Basins / Deck Drains	3 ea	\$ 300.00	\$ 900.00
7	4" PVC Lines	100 lf	\$ 50.00	\$ 5,000.00
<b>03300 - Cast-In-Place Concrete</b>				
8	Saw cut joints	860 lf	\$ 1.00	\$ 860.00
9	Cold joint	645 lf	\$ 1.00	\$ 645.00
10	Expansion joints	225 lf	\$ 1.00	\$ 225.00
11	5" Flat Top Deck - Rebar Reinf. Conc. Over Aggregate Base	4,403 sf	\$ 8.00	\$ 35,224.00
12	6" Flatbottom - Rebar Reinf. Conc. Over Aggregate Base	151 sf	\$ 9.00	\$ 1,359.00
13	6" Banks	219 sf	\$ 11.00	\$ 2,409.00
14	Ledges / Boxes / Manual Pads / Jersey Barriers- BASES	189 cf	\$ 55.00	\$ 10,395.00
15	Ledges / Boxes / Manual Pads / Jersey Barriers- 6' FOOTINGS	720 cf	\$ 15.00	\$ 10,800.00

17	Stairs - Rebar Reinf. Conc. Over Aggregate Base	78 sf	\$ 50.00	\$ 3,900.00
28	1' Thickened Edge	29 lf	\$ 10.00	\$ 290.00
18	Turndown Wall (+/- 16" High)	176 lf	\$ 60.00	\$ 10,560.00
19	Retaining Wall (+/- 30" High)	127 lf	\$ 65.00	\$ 8,255.00
20	Retaining Wall (+/- 30" High)- FOOTINGS	127 lf	\$ 15.00	\$ 1,905.00
<b>03300 - Shotcrete</b>				
21	6" [15.24cm] Bowl Transitions	2,476 sf	\$ 20.00	\$ 49,520.00
22	6" [15.24cm] Banks	995 sf	\$ 19.00	\$ 18,905.00
<b>05500 - Metal Fabrications (Coping)</b>				
23	2" Round coping	209 lf	\$ 40.00	\$ 8,360.00
24	2" x 6" x 4" Angle iron-galvanized	130 lf	\$ 50.00	\$ 6,500.00
25	2" x 6" x 2" Angle iron-galvanized	32 lf	\$ 50.00	\$ 1,600.00
<b>05500 - Metal Fabrications (Free Standing Rails)</b>				
26	Rectangular Steel Rail	60 lf	\$ 75.00	\$ 4,500.00
<b>Contingency</b>				
28	10% Construction Contingency	1	\$ 20,598.70	\$ 20,598.70
<b>BASE BID COST ESTIMATE</b>				<b>\$ 247,184.40</b>

## SKATE PARK ADD ALTERNATES

### SKATE PARK LIGHTING

1	Lighting system (foundation, poles, Control-Link System)- Includes installation and underground wiring	1 LS	\$ 55,000.00	\$ 55,000.00
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### SEATWALLS

1	Concrete seatwalls	3	\$ 1,100.00	\$ 3,300.00
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## TOTAL PROJECT COST

**\$ 302,184.40**





# Lindo Lake Skate Park

Provided by SME Consultant

Stantec

Location:

San Diego, CA



Public Realm



Origin	City of San Diego	
Budget		High Budget (>\$200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Risk		Medium Risk- This was the city's first skate park which required a learning curve about the design and planning process along with educational outreach to secure buy-in from the public. There was also some sensitivity in making sure the park was integrated with the local recreational Lindo Lake Trail network.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilization of the park</li> <li>No breach of stormwater</li> </ul>	
Partners & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of San Diego</li> <li>Tony Hawk Skate Park Foundation</li> <li>Circa Shoes</li> <li>Zero Skateboards</li> <li>Birdhouse Skateboards</li> </ul>	



*One of the concept renderings developed*

## Diagnostic

The City of San Diego, CA identified a need for a skate park to engage youth and promote active lifestyles. It was also desired that the park should be developed with elements to attract other types of recreational visitors, and particularly to integrate with the adjacent Lindo Lake recreational trail network.

It was desired that the park be pedestrian friendly, with adequate community access to and from the park, and areas to accommodate spectator viewing.

A custom concrete skate park was designed with an open plaza theme and a backyard style pool for bowl skating.

## Action Item

- Project team coordination and roles
- Pre-design services
- Site visits and concept designs
- Application for grant funding
- Public engagement process
- Create stormwater management plan
- Construction document created
- Construction services retained
- Construction process
- Grand opening

## Process

Stantec was the landscape architect, providing services from planning, public facilitation, schematic and conceptual design, 3-D modeling, design development, and construction document development. As part of this effort, they created a stormwater management plan, the first for the San Diego County Park and Recreation Department.

The team provided design services for the Lindo Lake Skatepark prior to their employment with Stantec. Construction Administration services were provided as Stantec.



*The park in use*

The park's stormwater management system includes a proprietary underground vault Low Impact Development (LID) structure for treatment of surface water coming from the skate plaza drain inlets. The LID, with its 32' by 33' concrete basin, allows sediment to settle at the bottom and excess water to drain out of a small diameter pipe into the adjacent lake. There are four access ports for periodic removal of sediment using a vacuum truck.

Lindo Lake Skate Park has been tested by the top pros, including the legendary Tony Hawk and the Birdhouse team, Andy Macdonald, Circa Shoe team, the Zero skateboard team, as well as many others. It has been met with rave reviews. This skate park project was also the proud recipient of a grant from the Tony Hawk Skate Park Foundation.





# Poplar Bluff Skate Park

Provided by SME Consultant

Stantec




Location:

Poplar Bluff, MO



Public Realm



Origin		City of Poplar Bluff
Budget		High Budget (>\$200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Risk		Medium Risk- This site required brownfield redevelopment of a centrally-located downtown parking lot which had potential for raising controversy.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilization of the park</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of Poplar Bluff</li> <li>Missouri Foundation of Health</li> </ul>



*The park in use by local youth*

## Diagnostic

To create a new park for the City that was inviting and accessible to all, Stantec paid special attention in the urban design theme, reflecting features of the existing environment and creatively fitting the plaza into and enhancing its context. They used several of the surrounding historical architectural features in the design, such as a historical brick façade replicated on the back transition wall. The focal point for the park's main corridor, multi-colored sunburst concrete paving patterns, were developed from colors of the local movie theater. Sustainable design features, carefully placed landscaped areas, drain the site while enhancing the look of the park.

## Action Item

- Project team coordination and roles
- Pre-design services
- Site visits and concept designs
- Application for grant funding
- Public engagement process
- Create stormwater management plan
- Construction document created
- Construction services retained
- Construction process
- Grand opening

## Process

Stantec was the landscape architect, providing services from planning, public facilitation, schematic and conceptual design, 3-D modeling, design development, and construction document development. Their renowned community outreach process helped with public facilitation to clarify the design. In addition, they also provided grand opening assistance.



*Final park design*



*An informative sign helps define the rules of use of the park*



# #10. Pursue Historic District Status and Enact a Demolition Delay Bylaw

**Description-** The enactment of a demolition delay bylaw in combination with a review of guidelines on historic presevation, reformation of oversight committees, and increased enforcement relating to the preservation and maintenance of historic properties to increase historic district eligibility.

PROJECT GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Increase motivation for landowners to improve properties in need of maintenance** (*public survey priority*)
- Preserve downtown's historic character
- Improve consistency of building standards
- Improve public safety (e.g., prevent access to abandoned buildings)

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Not applicable but targeting the study area, generally
Origin		Eric Smith- Athol Planning Director, Mary Holtorf- Chair of the Downtown Vitality Committee (committee members also reviewed project)
Budget		<p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000), includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff time for development of bylaw and relevant supporting procedures, as well as for the renewed activation and regular engagement of the historical commission, and committee formation for the pursuit of historic district status.</li><li>• Staff time for review and oversight of process, as well as potential board approval of recommended changes</li><li>• Potential development of educational materials on historic preservation and Athol's intent to be shared with the public and potential landowners and developers.</li></ul>
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Medium Risk – Although there aren't any active plans for structures downtown which are vacant and known to be vulnerable to being considered for demolition, there may be potential conflict with landowners and/or developers who wish to pursue the demolition of a structure in favor of redevelopment prior to the adoption of the bylaw.</p> <p>The process for pursuit of a historic district is not quick and requires the formation of a committee to oversee the process.</p> <p>The project process should prioritize the inspection of current vulnerable properties and increase enforcement tactics and measures to prevent public access. This may generate conflict with homeless individuals or others who access the spaces.</p>



## Key Performance Indicators

- Adopted demolition delay bylaw
- Re-formation of Athol Historical Commission and regular meetings
- Successful application for Local Historic District Status
- Reduction of access of informal dwellers/non-permitted members of the public into vulnerable historic structures
- Demolition as a last resource for Athol's historic assets

## Partners & Resources

Partners- Town, Athol Historical Commission, Massachusetts Historical Commission, Local Businesses and Landowners

Resources-

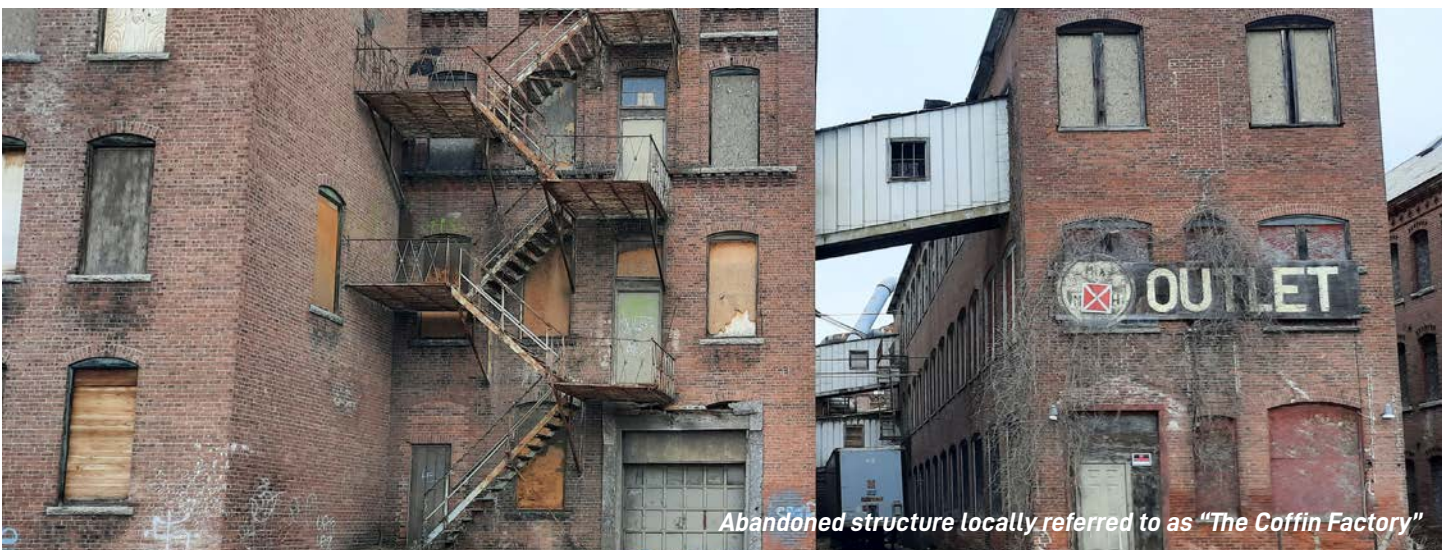
- Massachusetts Historical Commission
- Massachusetts Preservation Funds
- Precedent Communities throughout the Commonwealth that achieved similar bylaws and/or historic district status



*Abandoned historic York Theatre*



*Abandoned properties along S. Exchange Street*



*Abandoned structure locally referred to as "The Coffin Factory"*

**Some of downtown Athol's vulnerable abandoned and historic structures. (Source: Stantec)**

## Diagnostic

Downtown Athol, particularly along Main Street, features many attractive buildings with historic and cultural significance. Some have been listed within the Massachusetts Historical Commission database, also known as the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS). However, there is currently no procedure in place to protect them from demolition, whether for redevelopment or due to a significant state of disrepair.

Athol's historic structures are a fundamental component of the Town's overall character. In the Aspire Athol Plan recommended that *"Ideally...a local historic district will be just one component of a much larger and more comprehensive strategy to ensure the preservation of historic resources and community character."* The Town is in need of mechanisms, in combination with other efforts relating to appropriate zoning and historic guidelines being updated and enforced, to create a more stringent process for proceeding with demolition of the Town's structures and attaining historic district status to increase eligibility for funding support.

## Early Achievements/Progress

The existence of Athol's Historical Commission (although currently inactive) is a first step in building the collective buy-in and capacity to both recognize and develop a process for protecting Athol's historic assets.

Objectives identified in the Town's Community Development Strategy (2014 draft) outline clear intent- *"- Athol Historical Commission (AHC) Inventory is complete – take the next steps for Historic District designation – [Historical Society, Historical Commission, OPD, 2014, \$1,000]. -Create outreach programs and brochures to increase the public's awareness of Athol's history and historic and scenic resources, and to help market these resources as part of an initiative to promote heritage and recreational tourism within the Town and the region."*

The Town has previously applied for Historic District status. Although the application was unsuccessful, it provided insight into the depth of process required for success, both from a dedicated committee/commission but also from business owners, landowners, and the community at large to recognize Athol's historic value and commit to protecting and enhancing it.



**A sample of illustrations of downtown Athol's Main Street which were completed in the 1980s. (Source: Town of Athol)**



## Action Item

Key actions for this project include:

- Ensuring the Historic Commission members represent the **right combination and levels of expertise** to oversee the organization's tasks
- **Adding additional responsibilities** to the Historic Commission
- **Defining the appropriate period** of demolition delay
- **Communicating the intent** of the bylaw to the public and landowners, in particular
- **Establishing a procedure** and engaging appropriate parties to increase eligibility for attaining historic district status

## Process

### MONTHS 1-2

- Update and/or define additional responsibilities and roles of Athol's Historic Commission
- Re-structure and enlist new members, if needed, and reactivate the Athol Historic Commission
- Draft a demolition delay bylaw purpose statement.

### MONTH 3

- Provide a bylaw voting opportunity through a Town meeting
- Historic Commission adopts the bylaw
- Advertise the process for demolition application requests to all landowners and business owners

### MONTH 4 (ongoing)

- Historic Commission should meet regularly and actively pursue preservation measures, including the pursuit of historic district status



*One of Athol's historic structures that could benefit from the protection of a demolition delay bylaw. (Source: Stantec)*



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## **Project Sheet Element- Guidelines for Drafting a Demolition Delay Bylaw (sourced from Fairhaven, MA)**

A demolition delay ordinance or bylaw should include the following provisions:

### **A. Purpose Statement.**

### **B. Definition of commonly used terms.**

### **C. Procedures detailing the operation of the demolition delay process, which should include:**

i. Preamble- A statement declaring that no permit for the demolition of a building shall be issued which is not in compliance with the provision of the ordinance or bylaw.

ii. Application- Information which must be included in an application for a demolition permit to allow the historical commission to make a prompt and reasonable determination, and obtain background information to facilitate the process if a delay period is deemed necessary.

iii. Initial Determination- A detailed outline of the initial process for determining whether the building subject to the application a demolition permit is significant and requires further review.

iv. Public Hearing- The public process for making a final determination of whether a historically significant building should be "preferably preserved" and subject to a delay period.

v. Final Determination- A statement explaining when and how the final decision will take place and what effect it will have.

vi. Notice Requirements.

vii. Failure to Act.

**D. Responsibility of Owner**- A section outlining the duties of the owner of record. For instance, the owner should be responsible for participating in the investigation of options and for facilitating the process by providing any necessary information, allowing access to the property, securing the premises, and actively cooperating in seeking alternatives with the commission and any interested parties.

**E. Exception**- A statement allowing the local building commissioner to issue a demolition permit for a significant building at any time after receipt of (written) notification from the local historical commission that there is no reasonable likelihood of preserving, restoring, rehabilitating or moving the building, or that the owner has made a continuing, bona fide, reasonable effort to formulate a solution for a period of time equal to the delay period, and that such efforts have been unsuccessful.

**F. Building Permits**- A section declaring that no permit for the erection of a new structure on the existing site of an existing significant building may be issued prior to the issuance of a demolition permit for such existing building.

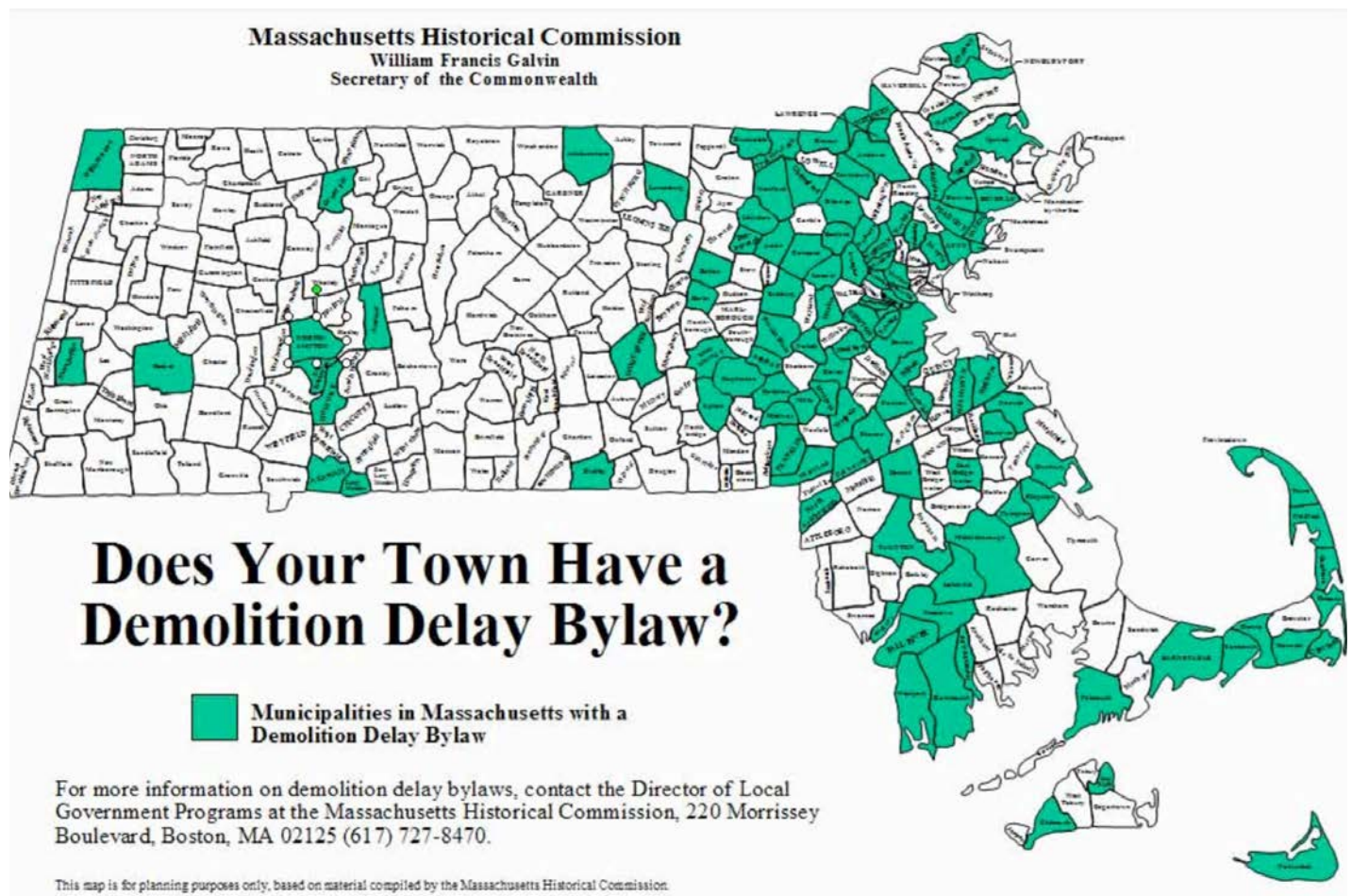
**G. Emergency Demolitions**- A statement allowing the local building commissioner to issue a demolition permit at any time in the event of imminent and substantial danger to the health or safety of the public due to deteriorating conditions.

**H. Enforcement and Remedies**- A provision authorizing the local historic commission or the building inspector to institute any and all proceedings in the law or equity necessary to obtain compliance with the requirements of the ordinance or bylaw, or prevent a violation of its terms.

**I. Historic Districts Act**- A statement declaring that if any of the provisions of the ordinance or bylaw conflict with the M.G.L. Chapter 40C, the Historic Districts Act, that act shall prevail.

**J. Severability**- A statement deeming the provisions of the ordinance or bylaw severable.

## Project Sheet Element- List of Massachusetts Communities with Demolition Delay Bylaws



(Source: Cape Cod Commission)

## Project Sheet Element- Responsibilities of a Historical Commission (Defined by the establishing legislation (MA General Laws, Chapter 40, Section 8d)

### RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary responsibility is community-wide historic preservation planning. Specific requirements are to:

- Research places of historic or archaeological value;
- Cooperate with the State Archaeologist in conducting surveys and reporting sites;
- Coordinate with other preservation organizations;
- Keep accurate records of its actions and file an annual report;
- Maintain a membership of not less than three nor more than seven members, duly appointed by the appropriate municipal authority.
- Unless given authority through a local bylaw or ordinance, the historical commission has only an advisory role within local government. As such, they make recommendations to the Select Board on matters relating to the preservation, protection and development of historic areas, buildings, structures and sites. In addition, to further its objectives, the commission may hold hearings, enter into contracts for services and cooperative endeavors, accept gifts, contributions and bequests of funds from individuals, foundations and governmental bodies, make and sign agreements and may do and perform any and all acts which may be necessary or desirable to carry out the purposes of this section. Further, it may acquire in the name of the city or town by gift, purchase, grant, bequest, devise, and lease or otherwise the fee or lesser interest in real or personal property of significant historical value and may manage the same.

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## **Project Sheet Element- Roles of a Historical Commission (Defined by the establishing legislation (MA General Laws, Chapter 40, Section 8d)**

### **ROLES**

In executing the responsibilities described above, the Commission takes on certain tasks or performs certain roles, including the following:

**Preservation Plans** – A preservation plan can be part of a comprehensive/master plan for the community or can be a separate document. In either case, the plan should demonstrate what the challenges are for preservation, what should be preserved, what tools are most appropriate and when each tool should be implemented.

**Inventory/Survey** – An inventory is basically a detailed look at each of the buildings, structures, monuments, objects, landscape features and burial grounds in the community. A survey form contains a black and white photo, a map, an architectural description and a brief history of the property. Inventory forms are used constantly by local historical commissions and the Massachusetts Historical Commission for a variety of preservation planning activities.

**Advocacy** – Historical Commissions are advocates for historical resources as they advise the Select Board on all matters impacting historic resources.

**Public Education** – Are residents in Maynard aware of the unique history, buildings and landscapes located in their own community? Educating the public about local historical resources raises awareness and support for the Historical Commission responsibilities and goals. Slide shows, newspaper articles, library displays, walking tours and brochures are just a few examples of public education.

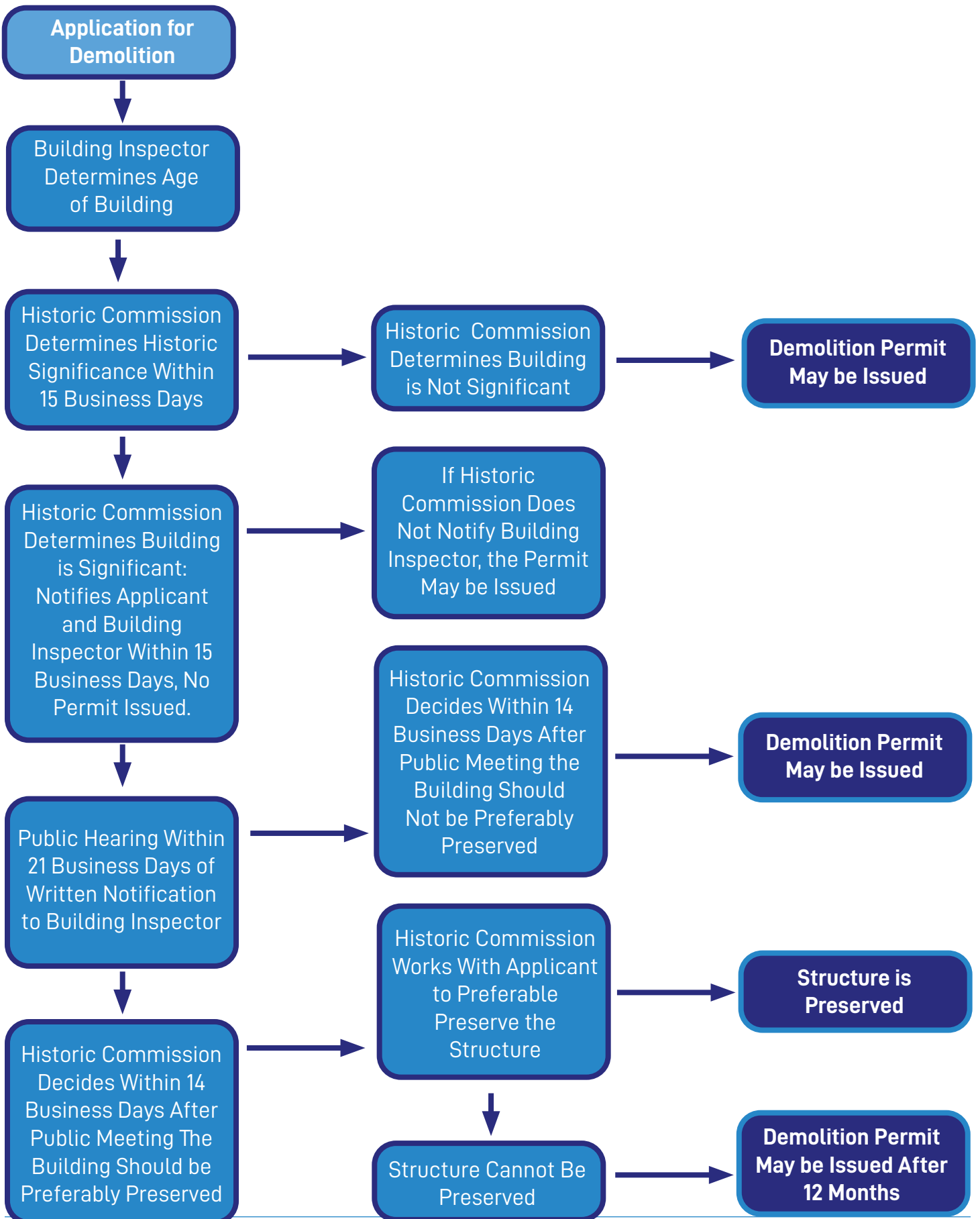
**Survey and Planning Grants** – While inventory forms and National Register nominations may be completed through the efforts of local volunteers, Historical Commissions in Massachusetts may apply for matching Survey and Planning grants. With an S&P grant, the Historical Commission can hire a professional preservation consultant to prepare the documents. S&P grants are awarded annually by the Massachusetts Historical Commission and are available for inventory form preparation, National Register nominations, preservation plans and public information documents.

**Project Impact Review** – Historical Commissions may occasionally receive inquiries from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) or other state or federal agencies asking for comments on a proposed "state or federally involved" project in Maynard that may impact on historical or archaeological resources. Section 106 and Chapter 254 are federal and state laws that require MHC review when a state or federally involved project is undertaken in Massachusetts. Examples of state or federally involved projects include state funded road widening projects, telecommunications towers that need an FCC license, and school rehabilitations, among others. MHC reviews over 8,000 federal or state involved actions each year. As part of these reviews, local historical commissions are encouraged to participate. A recent example in Maynard was the proposal to replace the Main St. Bridge, scheduled for 2009.

**Local Bylaws and Ordinances** – A Historical Commission may seek to create or change local bylaws to better protect historic resources. Examples might be local historic districts, scenic road bylaws or village center zoning. The Maynard Historical Commission provides review and oversight of the town's Demolition Delay Bylaw.



**Project Sheet Element- Recommended Process for Establishment/Enactment of a Demolition Delay Bylaw**



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## **Project Sheet Element- Sample Criteria for Determining Historical Significance (from City of Boston Article 85 Demolition Delay)**

### **CRITERIA**

- The building is identified in the Landmarks Commission's Comprehensive Preservation Survey as: (i) listed on the National Register of Historic Places; (ii) recommended for such listing; or (iii) the subject of a pending application for such listing.
- The building is the subject of a petition to the Landmarks Commission for designation as a Boston Landmark.
- The building is historically or architecturally significant because of period, style, method of building construction, or important association with a famous architect or builder.
- The building has an important association with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the City.
- The building is one whose loss would have a significant negative impact on the historical or architectural integrity or urban design character of the neighborhood.
- Please note that a determination of significance as described above does not necessarily mean the structure meets the criteria for local designation as a Boston Landmark.

## **Project Sheet Element- Difference Between Local Historic District and National Historic District Status (an excerpt from guidance from the Massachusetts Historical Commission)**

Although the same area may be designated as both a local historic district and a National Register District, there are substantial differences between the two designations. The National Register of Historic Places is a listing of buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts significant in our nation's history, culture, architecture or archaeology and that are worthy of preservation. It is a Federal designation, administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Massachusetts Historical Commission as the State Historic Preservation Office.

Listing in the National Register provides formal recognition of the property's significance, potential tax incentives for owners of income-producing property, and limited protection from state or federally funded, licensed, or assisted projects. National Register listing in no way limits the owner's use of the property, and places absolutely no restrictions or conditions on changes made by a private property owner unless there is state or federal involvement in a project, or unless some other regional and/or local regulation is in effect. Nominations to the National Register are usually initiated by a property owner or by the local historical commission, and do not require any local government approval. Property owners have the right to object to listing on the National Register; a district will not be listed if the majority of owners formally object.

A local historic district, on the other hand, is established locally through town meeting or city council vote. It provides a regulatory review process for all changes to exterior architectural features visible from a public way. For more information on how a local historic district works, contact the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Both National Register Districts and Local Historic Districts are automatically listed on the State Register of Historic Places. This listing provides limited protection from adverse effects by state funded, licensed, or assisted projects, and makes properties owned by municipalities or non-profit organizations eligible for grants from the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund when available.

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## Project Sheet Element- Steps For Pursuing a Historic District (an excerpt from thorough guidance available through the Massachusetts Historical Commission)

### PROCESS

- **Appointment of a Local Historic District Study Committee (LHDSC) by the Board of Selectmen or the City Council.** The historic district study committee will be responsible for conducting an investigation of the desirability of establishing a local historic district, developing a report to present its findings and recommendations, and conducting a public hearing on the proposal prior to its consideration by town meeting or city council.
- **The Vote to Establish a Local Historic District Study Committee**
- **Nomination and Appointment Process for the Study Committee.** Besides those organizations specified in the Historic Districts Act, consideration should be given to the following:
  - Local Historical Commission Members
  - Architectural Historians
  - Historians
  - Landscape Architects
  - Lawyers
  - Residents or Property Owners in potential districts
  - Business Owners and Chamber of Commerce Members
  - Public Relations Professionals
  - Planning Board Members
  - Conservation Commission Members
  - Open Space Advocates
  - Institutional Property Owners
  - Real Estate Professionals
  - Building Contractors or Tradespersons
  - Affordable Housing Advocates
  - Elderly Housing Advocates
- **Organizing the Local Historic District Study Committee**
- **Contact the Massachusetts Historical Commission for a Meeting** once the organization and operating procedures of the study committee have been established.

**At the outset, the Local Historic District Study Committee should fully understand that a local historic district usually takes at least 18 months to accomplish. This is because public education regarding the local historic district is essential and should not be rushed.**

Essential steps once initiating the process, include:

- **Investigating the historical resources.**
- **Developing a base map.**
- **Determining the approximate boundaries of the historic district.**
- **Assembling Property Street Addresses.** Once the local historic district study committee has a rough idea of the area for the proposed district, it is time to go back to the assessors office and obtain a list of all the street addresses and owners names/addresses. The street address list is an essential component to establishing a local historic district. With this list of addresses, you can contact all of the property owners in the next step for their opinions.
- **Gauging Public Opinion and Building Support.** It is highly recommended that the study committee seek the input of property owners early in the process. It is recommended that the LHDSC begin their work by asking property owners (and residents or business owners if applicable) in the proposed district for their opinions on the proposed local historic district. This could be done through an opinion survey mailed to each address. Or members of the LHDSC might want to invite property owners to neighborhood meetings to discuss the proposed local historic district.
- **Submitting the Preliminary a Study Report for to the Massachusetts Historical Commission.**
- **Conducting a Public Hearing**
- **Submitting a Final Report**
- **Enacting a Town Meeting or City Council Vote**

(If Status is Granted)

- **Notifying the Attorney General**
- **Recording the Map at the Registry of Deeds**
- **Notifying the Mass Historical Commission**



Project Sheet Element- Sample Letter to Property Owners Regarding the Proposed Establishment of a Local Historic District

Dear Property Owner:

The Historical Commission (or the Local Historic District Study Committee) would like to hear your input into establishing a local historic district in the center village. The Historical Commission believes that by establishing a local historic district, the character and historic significance of our village can be preserved.

We can be very thankful that so many buildings from our town's past still remain in the village center. However, without a local historic district, our village center could be lost forever through future demolitions and alterations. A local historic district will help to guide future changes, making sure that historic character will remain a distinct part of the village center.

In a local historic district, exterior architectural features visible from a public way are reviewed by a locally appointed historic district commission to make sure that the proposed changes are appropriate to the historic character of the district.

Today, there are over 200 local historic districts in Massachusetts and that number grows each year.

Please take a few minutes to express your thoughts on whether a local historic district is needed in the village center by filling out the attached survey and returning it to the Historical Commission in the envelope provided.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely  
Chairman,  
Historical Commission

Project Sheet Element- Sample Definitions Identified by the Town of Amherst, NH Historic District Commission

Historic Designation and Listing <sup>1</sup>	
<p><b>Definitions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Historic Resource:</b> Any prehistoric or historic site, place, building, structure, or object that is deemed by the commission to have historic, cultural, social, economic, political, or architectural significance.</li><li>• <b>Historic District:</b> An area designated by ordinance of the Town of Amherst and which contains within definable geographic boundaries a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development.</li></ul> <p><b>Amherst Historic District Classifications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Contributing Property:</b> A structure or site listed in the Historic District that generally has historic, cultural, social, economic, political, or architectural significance.</li><li>• <b>Non-Contributing Property:</b> A structure or site listed in the Historic District that generally does not have historic, cultural, social, economic, political, or architectural significance. <i>(Buildings less than 50 years old that are of modern design, appreciably different scale, height or building materials.)</i></li></ul>	<p><b>Local Designation</b></p> <p>Local designation of a historic property or district provides a tool for local communities to determine what is architecturally and historically important to their community and a mechanism for the regulation of proposed changes to those properties.</p> <p><b>Certified Local Government</b></p> <p>The Certified Local Government program is designed to provide an opportunity for local governments to become more directly involved in identifying, evaluating, protecting, promoting and enhancing the educational economic value of local properties of historic, architectural and archeological significance.</p> <p><b>The National Register of Historic Places</b></p> <p>The National Register of Historic Places is the United States government’s official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects identified as worthy of preservation. Listing in the National Register does not eliminate or restrict property rights of individual owners. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service, a division of the Department of the Interior.</p>



## 4. What's Next for Athol?



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## Implementing Rapid Change in Downtown Athol

In recent years, Athol has made much progress in unveiling specific challenges the town faces in areas ranging from underutilized parking and untapped environmental resources to unbalanced housing stock and retail limitations. While some items to address these have been “checked off”, or partial progress has been made, there is still much to do and the Town will not be able to do it alone. The information in this report provides Athol with a fresh perspective on the state of its economic recovery in the context of all of the components which define and support the economy- the physical, administrative, policy, and business elements. In order for Athol to secure the momentum it needs to experience real transformation and reach its full potential, immediate consensus, collaboration and, most importantly, *action* will need to be pursued by all who live, work and are invested in Athol's future.

The LRRP process has identified resources both within the Town and through other potential external partners that can help advance Athol's recovery. Guidance provided through the Subject Matter Experts should provide the Town with a strong starting point to build existing relationships or to create new ones.

The key actions Athol should take following the finalization of this plan, include:

**FORMALIZE.** Once the Local Rapid Recovery Plan has been approved by the Board of Planning and Community Development, the Town should formally outline its own implementation plan using the details and recommendations included with each of the proposed projects.

**ADVERTISE.** The Town should continue to keep the public and other interested parties updated through various channels throughout the implementation process. Excitement should be generated to demonstrate that action, and not just well-intentioned planning, is taking place to improve downtown. Establishing positive morale up front will make it easier to secure stakeholder buy-in and public awareness/patience during the transitional phases of a project's execution. Awareness may also bring unexpected allies out of the woodwork and spark collaborative opportunities.

**ORGANIZE.** The Town should collectively assemble all individuals/parties who will play a role in any of the projects to help them understand the following:

- What the LRRP projects are and how they overlap or impact each other (including timelines)
- Roles and expectations of participation/commitment for those who will be involved (including the formation of committees, as needed)
- Process for guidance and asking questions about projects relating to LRRP
- Where to find resources to support specific roles and project needs

**MOBILIZE.** Project coordination meetings should be scheduled. Funds should be disbursed, as relevant.

**SYNERGIZE.** Connect to celebrate successes or collaborate to solve challenges met along the way.

Although Athol's transformation will not occur overnight, there is much that can get going today, and much to look forward to!



