



Rapid Recovery Plan

Appendix

Town of Athol
October 2021

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1. LRRP Business Survey Results



This report provides the results of a business survey conducted during March and April of 2021. The survey is part of a program launched by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development to help communities develop Rapid Recovery Plans for downtowns and commercial districts. The survey was directed to owners or other appropriate representatives of business establishments located in the targeted commercial areas. (For Data Tables, see page 9.)

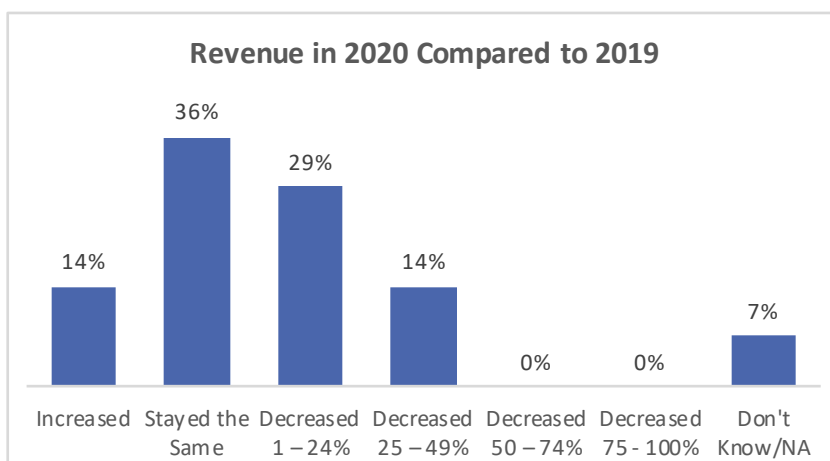
Athol

Downtown Athol

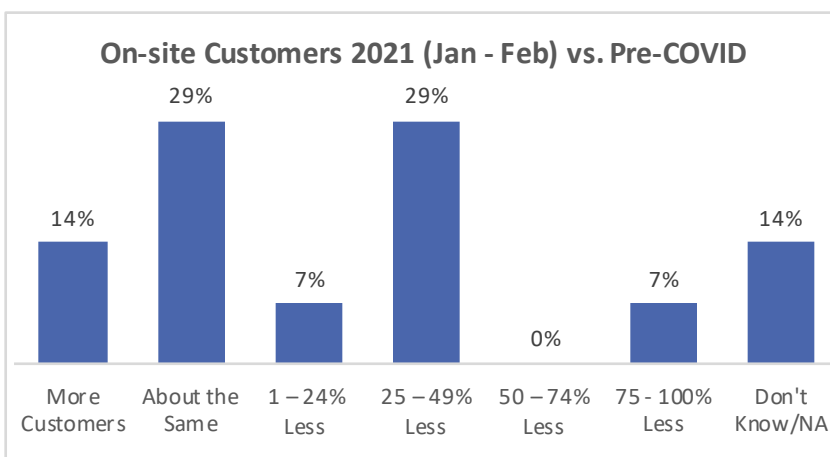
Responses: 14

Impacts of COVID-19**Decline in Business Revenue**

43% of businesses generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019.
For 14% of businesses, revenue declined by 25% or more.

**Less Foot Traffic in Commercial Area**

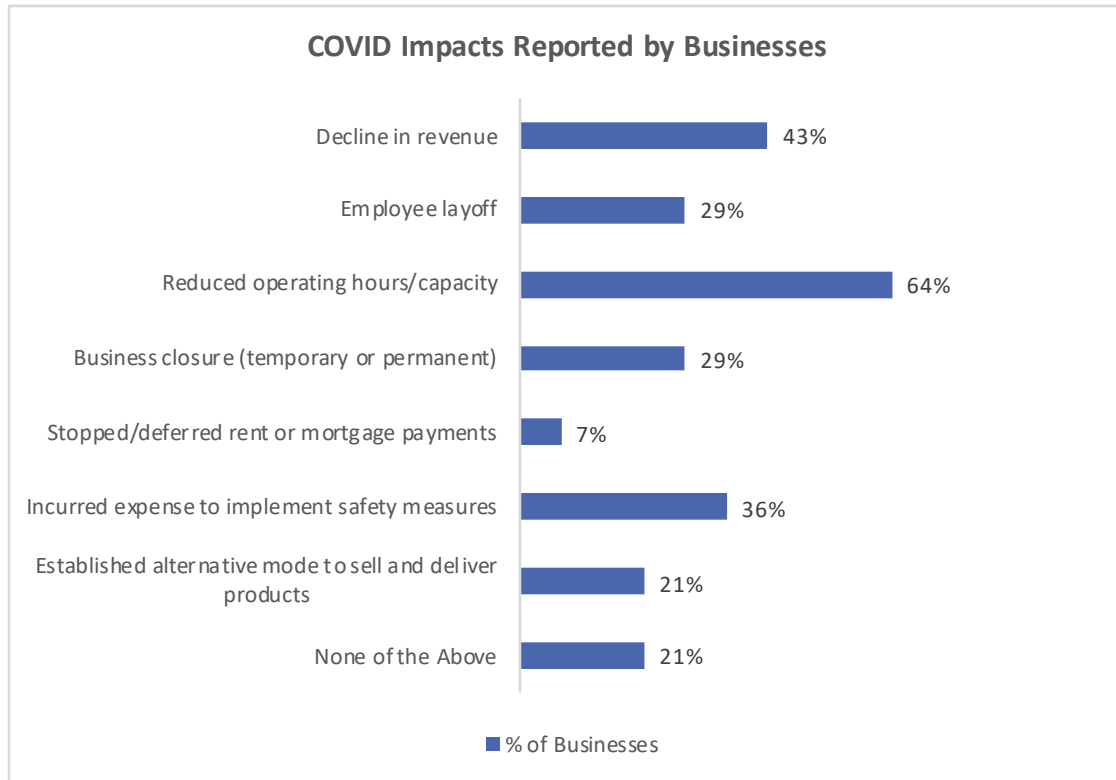
43% of businesses had less on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID.
36% of businesses reported a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more.



Impacts of COVID-19 (cont'd)

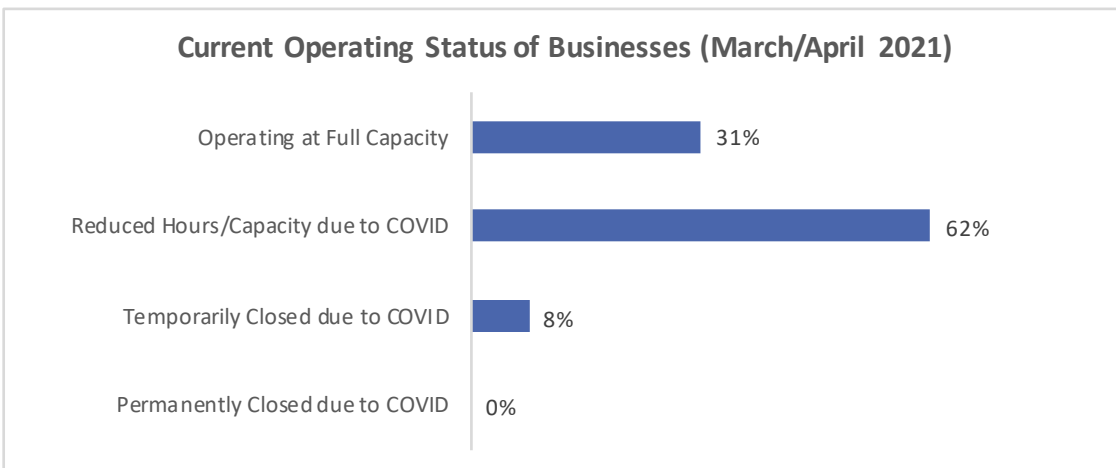
Reported Impacts

79% of businesses reported being impacted by COVID.



Operating Status

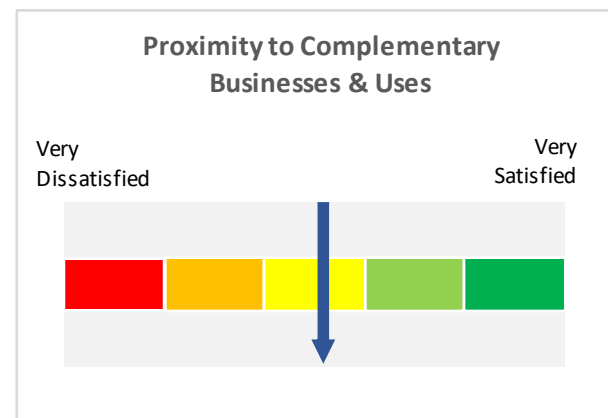
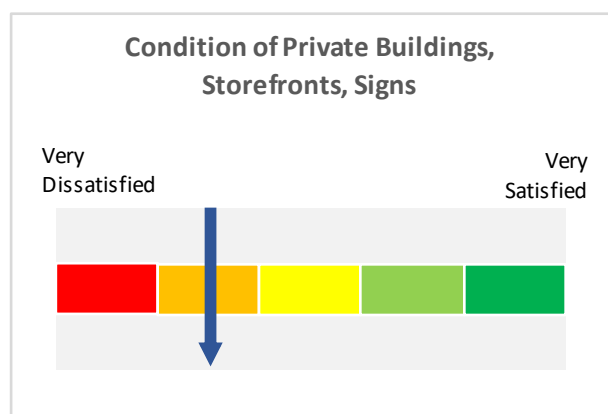
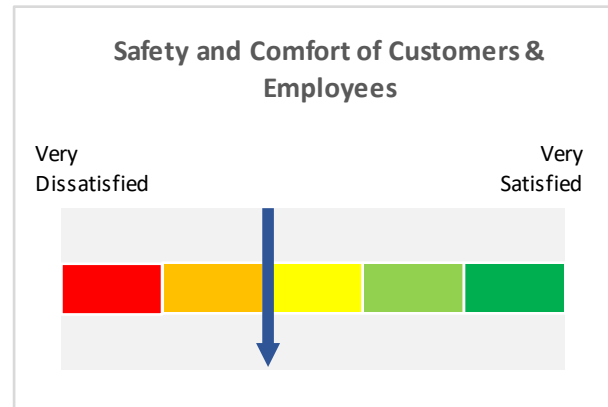
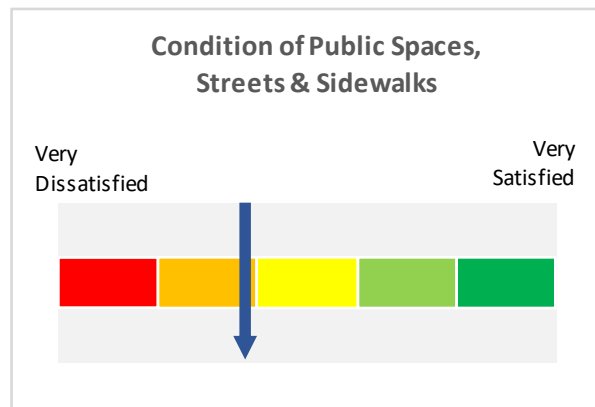
At the time of the survey, 69% of businesses reported they were operating at reduced hours/capacity or closed.



Developing Solutions in Partnership with the Athol Community

Business Satisfaction with Commercial District

The charts below illustrate the average satisfaction rating among respondents regarding various elements.

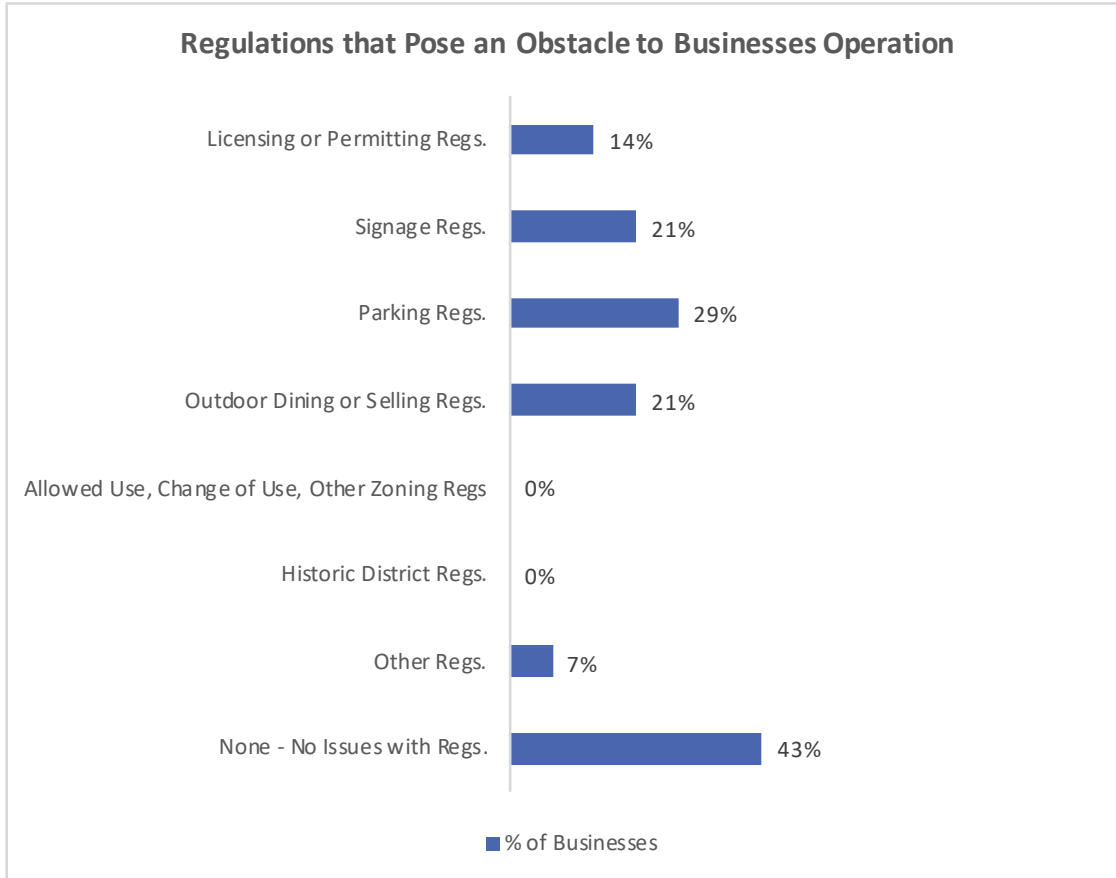


What Are the Priority Projects That Came from the Plan?

Business Satisfaction with Commercial District (cont'd)

Regulatory Environment

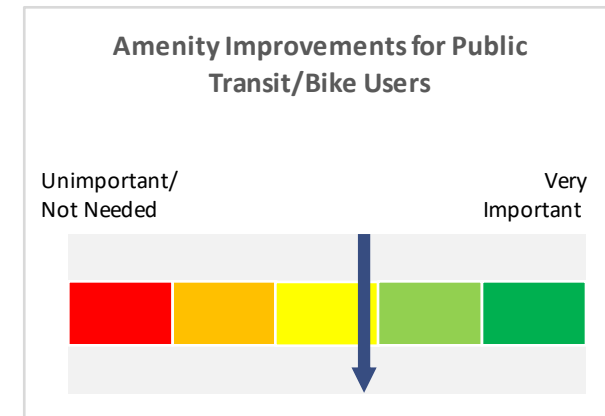
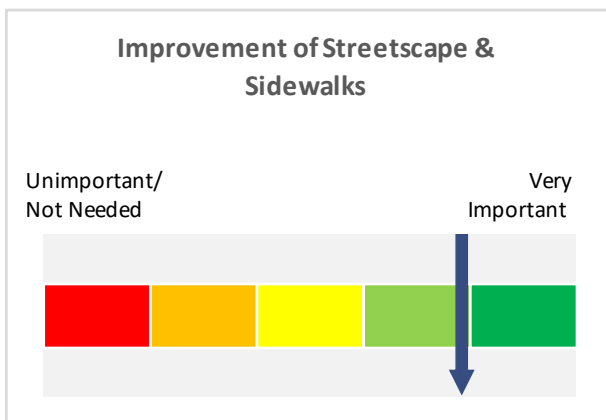
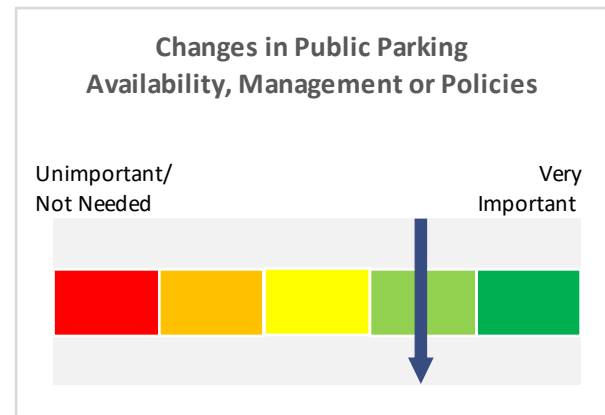
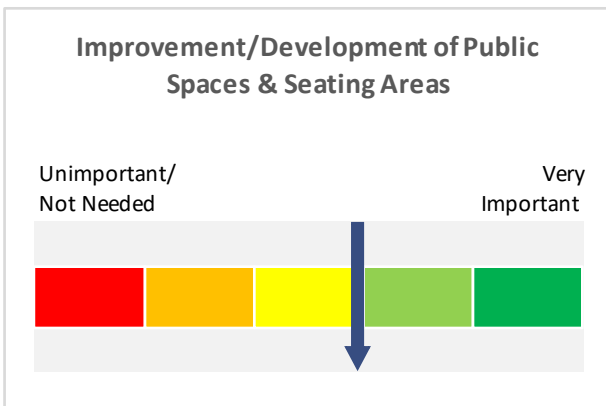
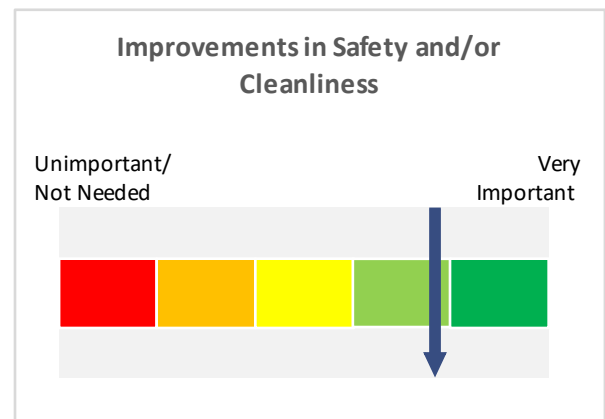
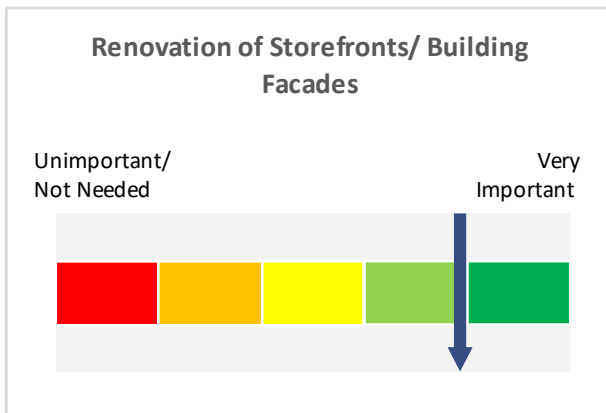
57% of businesses indicated that the regulatory environment poses an obstacle to business operation.



Business Input Related to Possible Strategies

Physical Environment, Atmosphere and Access

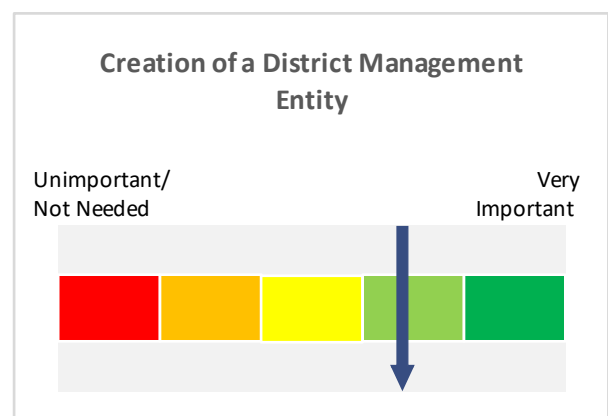
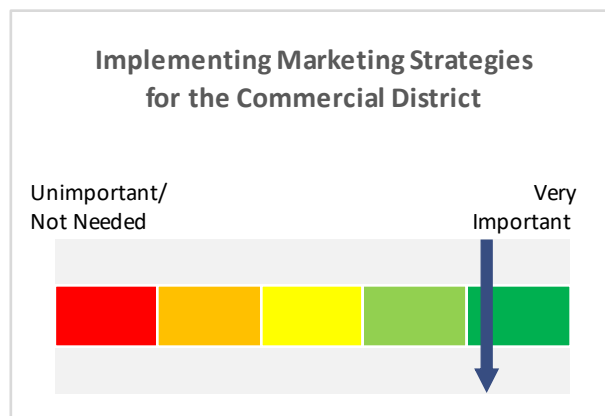
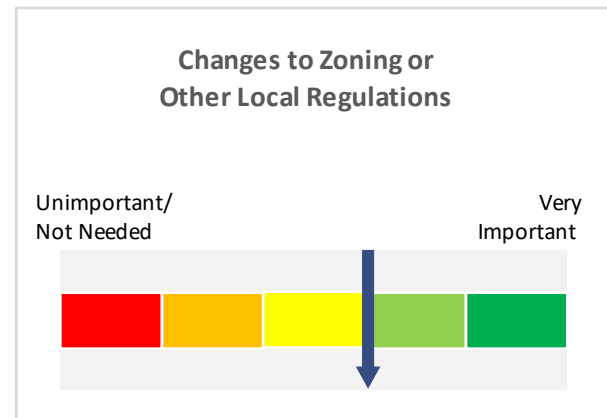
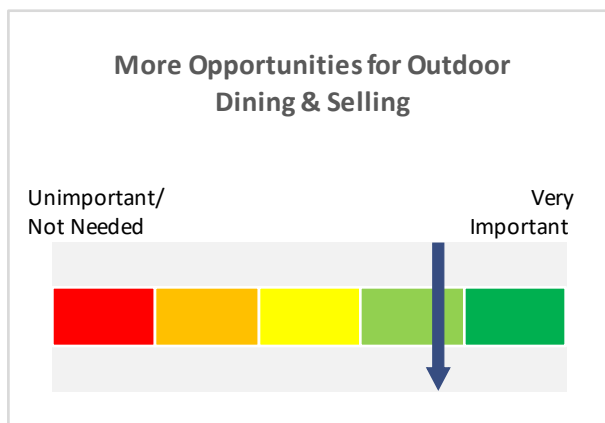
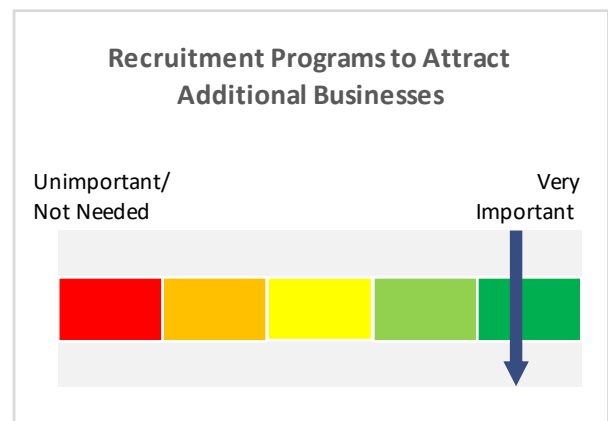
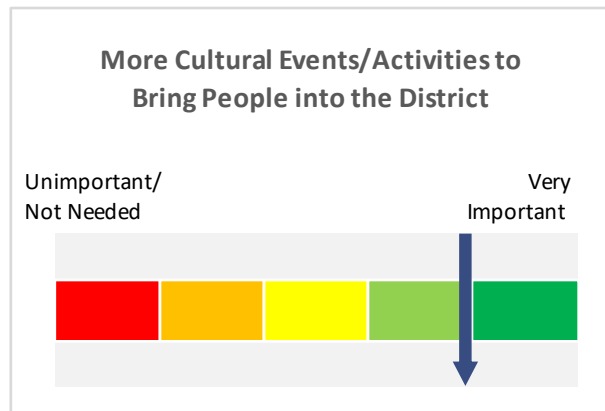
The charts below illustrate the average rating among respondents regarding importance of various strategies.



Business Input Related to Possible Strategies (cont'd)

Attraction/Retention of Customers and Businesses

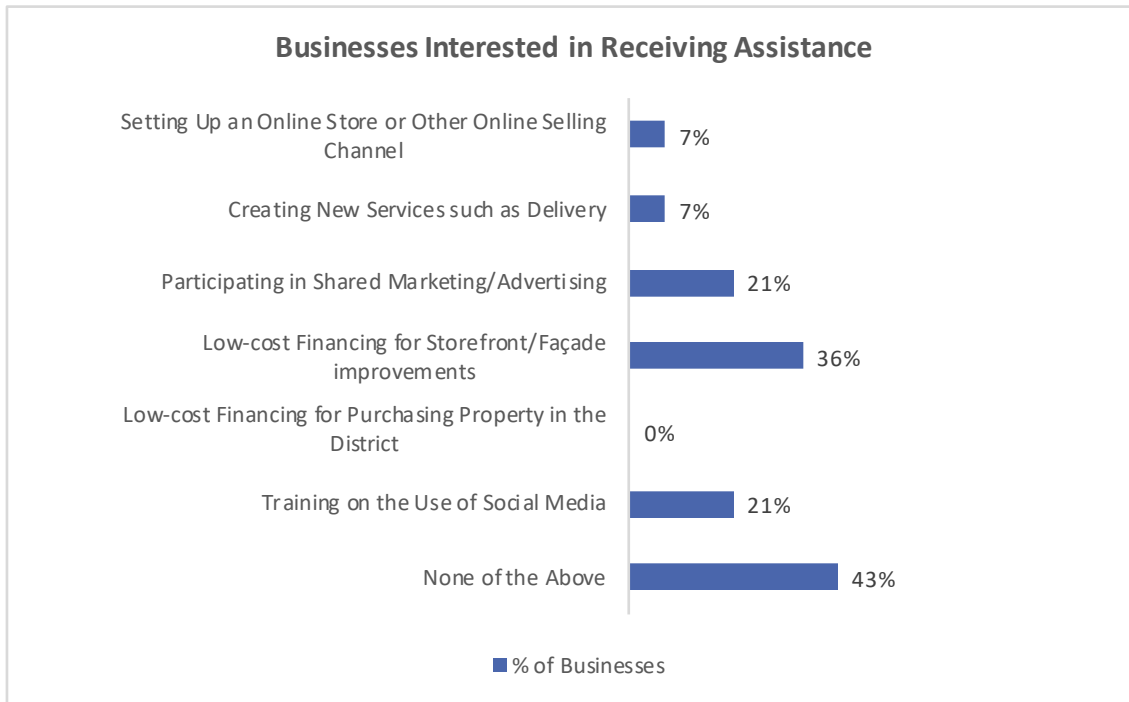
The charts below illustrate the average rating among respondents regarding importance of various strategies.



Business Input Related to Possible Strategies (cont'd)

Businesses Support

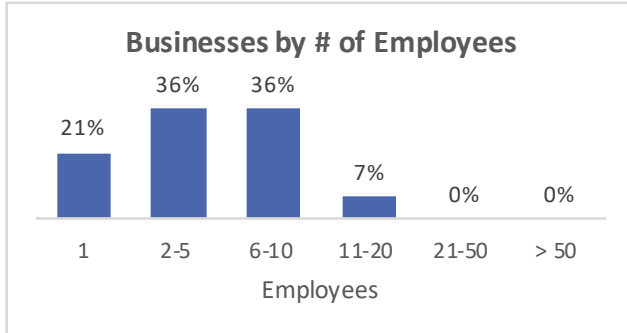
57% of businesses expressed interest in receiving some kind of assistance.



Business Characteristics

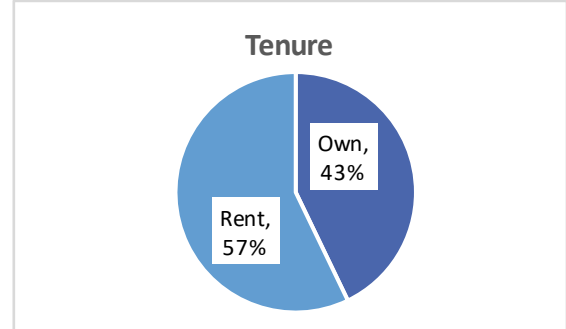
Business Size

57% of businesses are microenterprises (≤ 5 employees).



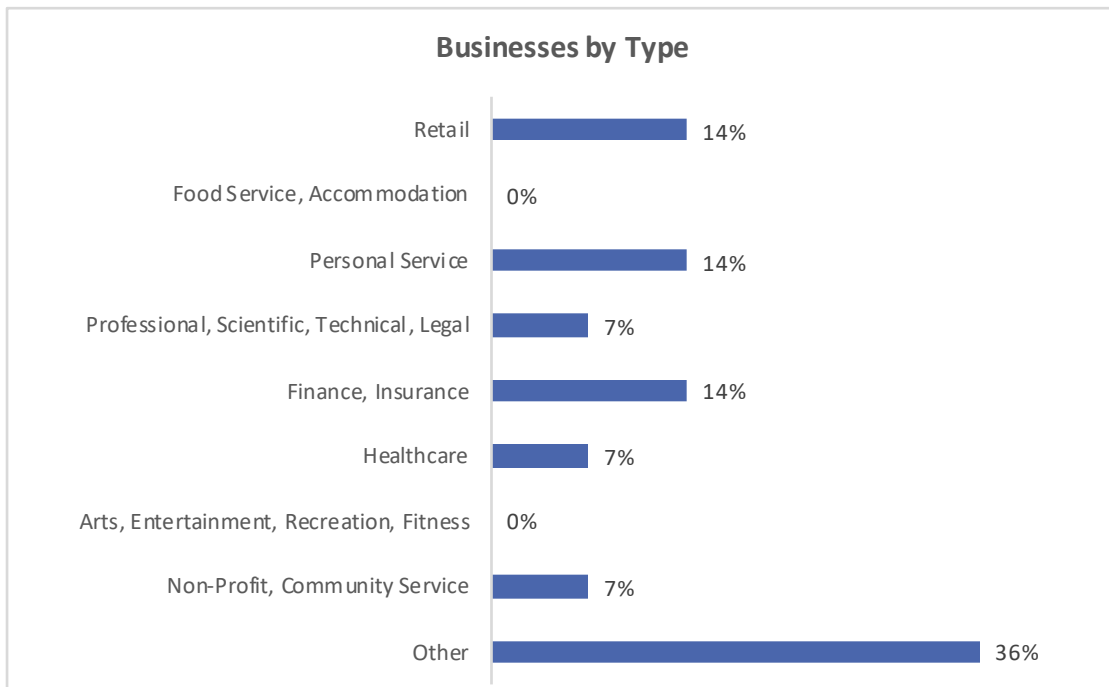
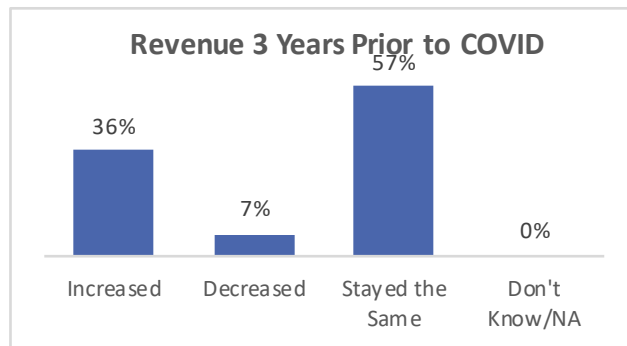
Business Tenure

57% of businesses rent their space.



Revenue Trend Prior to COVID

36% of businesses reported increase in revenue during the 3 years prior to COVID.



Business Survey Results - Data Tables

Community Where Targeted Downtown or Commercial District is Located

1. Please select the community where your business is located.

Athol	14
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Business Characteristics & Satisfaction with Commercial Area

2. Including yourself, how many people did your business employ prior to COVID (February 2020), including both full-time and part-time?

1	3	21%
2 to 5	5	36%
6 to 10	5	36%
11 to 20	1	7%
21 to 50	0	0%
More than 50	0	0%
Total	14	100%

3. Does your business own or rent the space where it operates?

Own	6	43%
Rent	8	57%
Total	14	100%

4. During the 3 years prior to COVID, had your business revenue . . . ?

Increased	5	36%
Decreased	1	7%
Stayed about the Same	8	57%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	0	0%
Total	14	100%

5. Please select the category that best fits your business.

Retail (NAICS 44-45)	2	14%
Food Service (restaurants, bars), Accommodation (NAICS 72)	0	0%
Personal Service (hair, skin, nails, dry cleaning) (NAICS 81)	2	14%
Professional Scientific, Technical, Legal (NAICS 54)	1	7%
Finance, Insurance (NAICS 52)	2	14%
Healthcare (medical, dental, other health practitioners) (NAICS 62)	1	7%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Fitness (NAICS 71)	0	0%
Non-Profit, Community Services	1	7%
Other	5	36%
Total	14	100%

6. Please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of the Downtown or Commercial District where your business is located.

Condition of public spaces, streets, sidewalks

Very Dissatisfied	1	7%
Dissatisfied	7	50%
Neutral	4	29%
Satisfied	2	14%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	14	100%

Condition of Private Buildings, Facades, Storefronts, Signage

Very Dissatisfied	3	21%
Dissatisfied	7	50%
Neutral	2	14%
Satisfied	2	14%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	14	100%

Access for Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied	2	14%
Dissatisfied	2	14%
Neutral	8	57%
Satisfied	2	14%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	14	100%

Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied	2	14%
Dissatisfied	4	29%
Neutral	5	36%
Satisfied	3	21%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	14	100%

Proximity to Complementary Businesses or Uses

Very Dissatisfied	1	7%
Dissatisfied	2	14%
Neutral	6	43%
Satisfied	5	36%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	14	100%

7. Do any local regulations (not related to COVID) pose an obstacle to your business operation?

Licensing or permitting regulations	2	14%
Signage regulations	3	21%
Parking regulations	4	29%
Outdoor dining or selling regulations	3	21%
Allowed uses, change of use or other zoning regulations	0	0%
Historic District regulations	0	0%
Other regulations (not related to COVID)	1	7%
None - No Issues with regulations	6	43%

Impacts of COVID

8. Did your business experience any of the following due to COVID? Select All that apply.

Decline in revenue	6	43%
Employee layoff	4	29%
Reduced operating hours/capacity	9	64%
Business closure (temporary or permanent)	4	29%
Stopped/deferred rent or mortgage payments	1	7%
Incurred expense to implement safety measures	5	36%
Established alternative mode to sell and deliver products (on-line platforms, delivery, etc.)	3	21%
None of the Above	3	21%

9. How did your 2020 business revenue compare to your 2019 revenue?

Increased compared to 2019	2	14%
Stayed about the same as 2019	5	36%
Decreased 1 – 24% compared to 2019	4	29%
Decreased 25 – 49% compared to 2019	2	14%
Decreased 75 - 100% compared to 2019	0	0%
Decreased 50 – 74% compared to 2019	0	0%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	1	7%
Total	14	100%

10. Please estimate how the number of customers that physically came to your business in January and February 2021 compares to before COVID.

More customers than before COVID	2	14%
About the same number as before COVID	4	29%
1 – 24% less customers than before COVID	1	7%
25 – 49% less customers than before COVID	4	29%
50 – 74% less customers than before COVID	0	0%
75 – 100% less customers than before COVID	1	7%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	2	14%
Total	14	100%

11. At the current time, what is the status of your business operation?

Operating at full capacity	4	31%
Operating at reduced hours/capacity due to COVID	8	62%
Temporarily closed due to COVID	1	8%
Permanently closed due to COVID	0	0%
Total	13	100%

Strategies for Supporting Businesses and Improving the Commercial District

12. A few approaches to address Physical Environment, Atmosphere and Access in commercial districts are listed below. Considering the conditions in your commercial area, in your opinion, how important are each of the following strategies?

Renovation of Storefronts/Building Facades

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	7%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	3	21%
Important	2	14%
Very Important	8	57%
Total	14	100%

Improvement/Development of Public Spaces & Seating Areas

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	7%
Of Little Importance or Need	4	29%
Moderately Important	3	21%
Important	1	7%
Very Important	5	36%
Total	14	100%

Improvement of Streetscape & Sidewalks

Unimportant/Not Needed	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	7%
Moderately Important	2	14%
Important	5	36%
Very Important	6	43%
Total	14	100%

Improvements in Safety and/or Cleanliness

Unimportant/Not Needed	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	14%
Moderately Important	2	14%
Important	3	21%
Very Important	7	50%
Total	14	100%

Changes in Public Parking Availability, Management or Policies

Unimportant/Not Needed	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	3	21%
Moderately Important	3	21%
Important	2	14%
Very Important	6	43%
Total	14	100%

Amenity Improvements for Public Transit Users and/or Bike Riders

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	7%
Of Little Importance or Need	4	29%
Moderately Important	3	21%
Important	2	14%
Very Important	4	29%
Total	14	100%

13. A few approaches to address Attraction and Retention of Customers and Businesses in commercial districts are listed below. Considering the conditions in your commercial area, in your opinion, how important are each of the following strategies?

More Cultural Events/Activities to Bring People into the District

Unimportant/Not Needed	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	14%
Moderately Important	2	14%
Important	2	14%
Very Important	8	57%
Total	14	100%

More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining and Selling

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	14%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	2	14%
Important	2	14%
Very Important	8	57%
Total	14	100%

Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	7%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	7%
Moderately Important	0	0%
Important	2	14%
Very Important	10	71%
Total	14	100%

Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses

Unimportant/Not Needed	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	3	21%
Important	1	7%
Very Important	10	71%
Total	14	100%

Changes to Zoning or Other Local Regulations (not related to COVID)

Unimportant/Not Needed	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	3	21%
Moderately Important	5	36%
Important	3	21%
Very Important	3	21%
Total	14	100%

Creation of a District Management Entity (Business Improvement District or other organization)

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	7%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	7%
Moderately Important	3	21%
Important	5	36%
Very Important	4	29%
Total	14	100%

14. Are you interested in receiving assistance for your business in any of the following areas? Select All that Apply.

Setting up an online store or other online selling channel	1	7%
Creating new services such as delivery	1	7%
Participating in shared marketing/advertising	3	21%
Low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements	5	36%
Low-cost financing for purchasing property in the commercial district	0	0%
Training on the use of social media	3	21%
None of the above	6	43%

15. Please list any specific suggestions or ideas for possible projects, programs or actions that could help support businesses and improve the commercial district. (Optional)

Comments

—
—
—
—
Monthly outdoor carnival, movie night, concert, beer garden, food truck event, trivia event
—
—
Pre k kidz
—
—
—
—
Repurpose town property, develop EDC to enable development, restore historic facades, Parking Benefits District, program to reduce vandalism and graffiti, road improvements, wayfinding, cleanup
Offering tax reductions/incentives for commercial property improvements

2. Public Survey Results



Athol Local Rapid Recovery Program

69
Responses

12:11
Average time to complete

Closed
Status

1. PROJECT- DEVELOPER TOOLKIT

A combination of economic changes over the years, and impacts from the pandemic provide Athol with an opportunity to target redevelopment opportunities in strategic locations downtown. 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.

QUESTION: Which one of the following potential project outcomes would be MOST interesting or important to you?

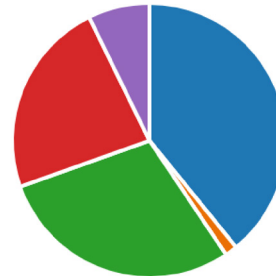
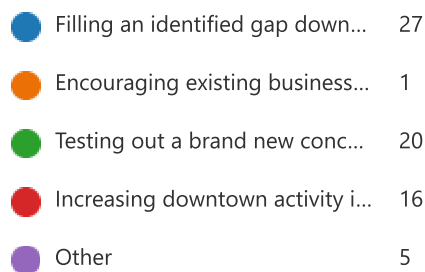
- Attraction of local developers ... 5
- Attraction of regional develop... 8
- A "preserve and protect" appr... 9
- An opportunity to update/mo... 42
- Other 5



2. PROJECT- POP-UP STOREFRONT

There are several factors which contribute to a lack of business vitality in small downtowns, including the presence of vacant buildings. 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 potential long-term businesses to downtown Main Street.

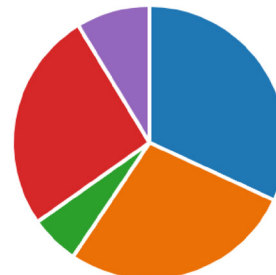
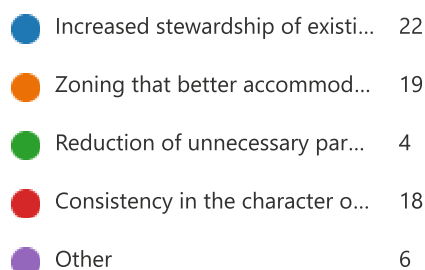
QUESTION: Which one of the following potential project outcomes would be MOST interesting or important to you?



3. PROJECT- ZONING AUDIT AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

Some parts of Athol's existing zoning regulations and design guidelines are outdated, difficult to enforce, or no longer align with Athol's downtown vision. 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.

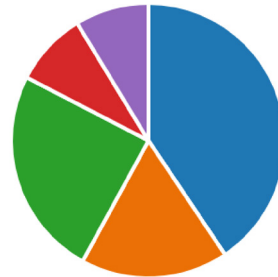
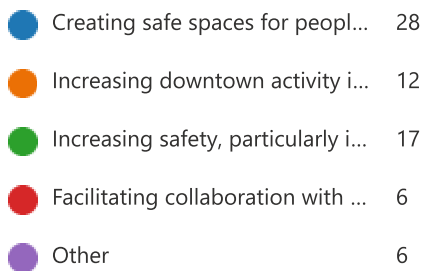
QUESTION: Which one of the following potential project outcomes would be MOST interesting or important to you?



4. PROJECT- PLACEMAKING ACTIVATION

A combination of factors contribute to a general lack of vitality and visitors to downtown, however small solutions can often have big impacts to create dynamic and engaging places. 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 alleys.

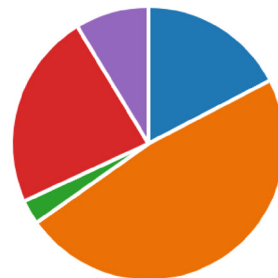
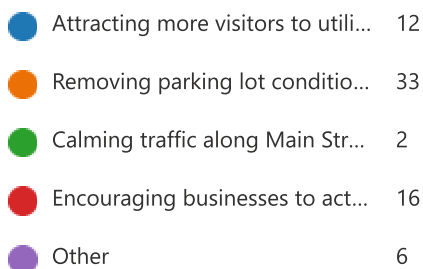
QUESTION: Which one of the following potential project outcomes would be MOST interesting or important to you?



5. PROJECT- PUBLIC PARKING LOT AND CROSSWALK UPGRADES

Studies and observations have identified that the public parking lot on Main Street is underutilized, and that also crosswalks connecting pedestrians to parking and other downtown areas could be improved. 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.

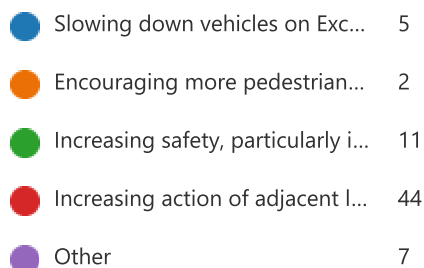
QUESTION: Which one of the following potential project outcomes would be MOST interesting or important to you?



6. PROJECT- EXCHANGE STREET CONNECTIONS

The current condition of Exchange Street has several challenges that prevent it from being an attractive or active route for pedestrians. 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)

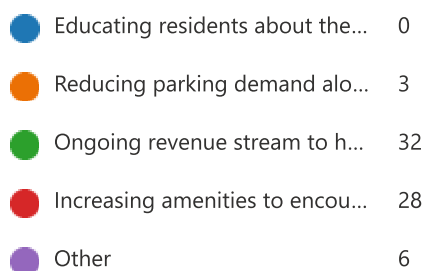
QUESTION: Which one of the following potential project outcomes would be MOST interesting or important to you?



7. PROJECT- PARKING BENEFIT DISTRICT

Athol has taken big steps in advancing the understanding of its parking challenges and opportunities, through a completed parking study, and recently approving the increase of parking meter prices. 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).

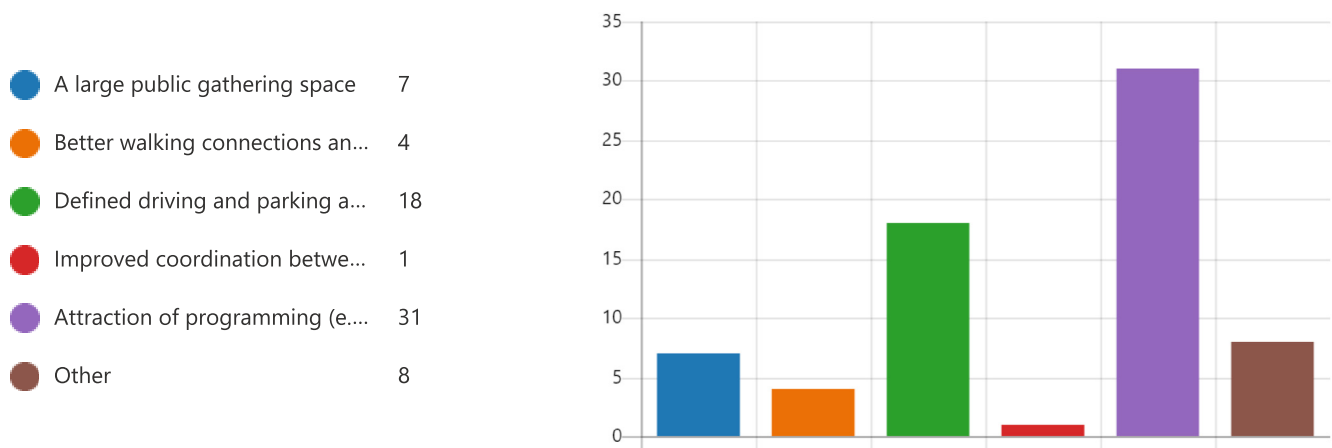
QUESTION: Which one of the following potential project outcomes would be MOST interesting or important to you?



8. PROJECT- LORD POND PLAZA IMPROVEMENTS

The Plaza has been the topic of several planning studies. The most recent has identified a potential design concept for a new plaza layout to be pursued in the coming years. Until that plan is finalized, 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 development plan supports how residents and visitors want to engage with the space.

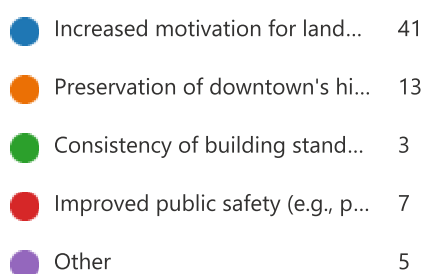
QUESTION: Which one of the following potential project outcomes would be MOST interesting or important to you?



9. PROJECT- HISTORIC DISTRICT AND DEMOLITION DELAY

Athol has previously taken steps to pursue designation of its downtown as a Historic District. Initial rejection of this application cites the need for stronger demonstration of broad landowner support. 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.

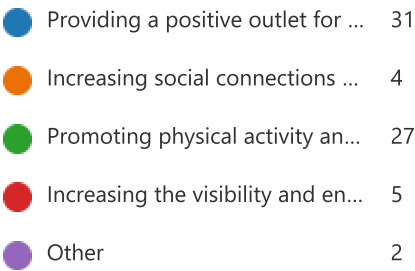
QUESTION: Which one of the following potential project outcomes would be MOST interesting or important to you?



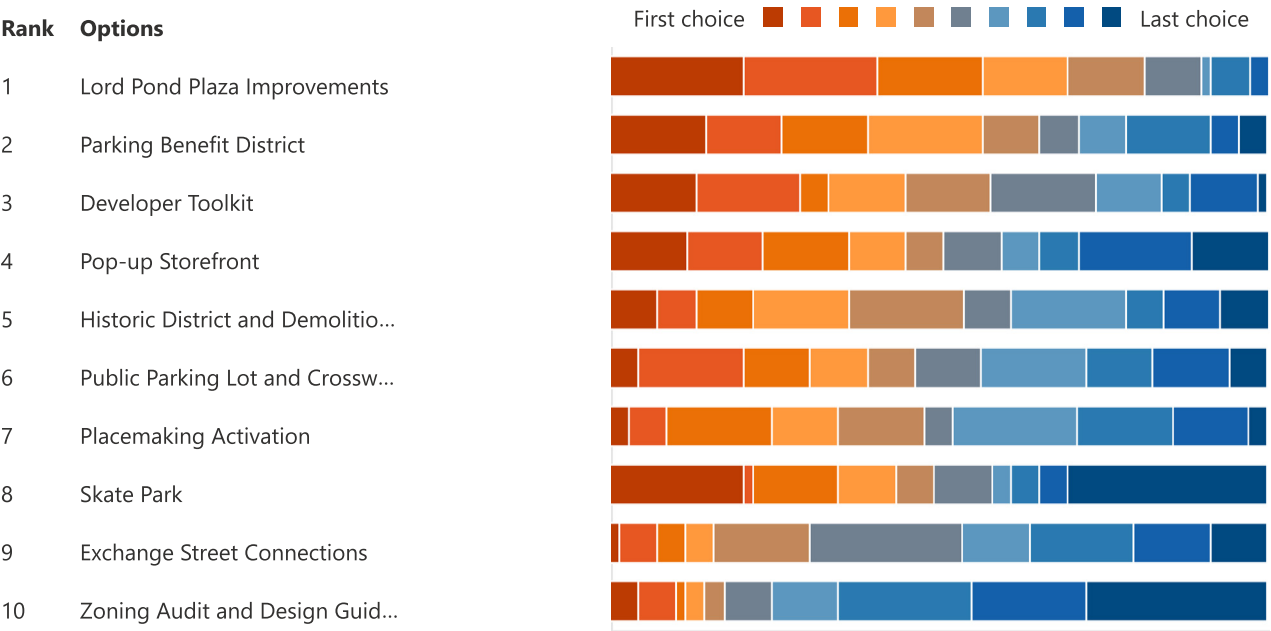
10. PROJECT- SKATE PARK

A lack of gathering spaces downtown has particular impact on Athol's younger people who would like to spend more time outdoors. 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.

QUESTION: Which of the one following potential project outcomes would be MOST interesting or important to you?



11. Based on the information above, and with consideration of the LRRP's goal of increasing Downtown Athol's vitality, please rank the projects in order of priority (with the first being the most important).



12. Do you have any additional comments or things you would like us to consider as we finalize the details for each project?

💡 Insights

69

Responses

Latest Responses

"There needs to be a conversation on how new businesses can come in..."

"Get it done, Athol needs some restructuring"

"No"

15 respondents (22%) answered **downtown** for this question.

A word cloud visualization of responses related to downtown Athol. The words are arranged in a circular pattern around the central word "downtown". The words are in various shades of teal and blue. The words include: "good", "Main Street", "skate park", "safety", "patrols downtown", "business owner", "need", "businesses", "Athol", "Downtown Athol", "people downtown", "building", "important", "parking lot", "downtown by police", "town", "look", "Downtown Common", "downtown area", and "Downtown Athol".

Individual Comments from Athol LRRP Public Survey July 21-August 8, 2021

COMMENT CATEGORY	COMMENT RESPONSE TO "Do you have any additional comments or things you would like us to consider as we finalize the details for each project?"
Administrative Capacity	<p>As with any survey almost every suggested idea looks good in theory. The most important outcome will be to get to a "top 5" consensus so that the policy making boards and officials can drive these improvements forward and catalyze private sector participation.</p> <p>We don't need to bring in additional out of town people. We should be making our town better for ourselves to enjoy. We don't want to bring in unwanted guests so to speak.</p> <p>Athol has tremendous potential and all of these initiatives have obvious benefits for the town. I would urge those who will make decisions regarding these changes to be both cautious and protective of Athol's unique New England character and it's small town feel. I would also remind folks to consult and collaborate with our excellent public safety personnel regarding any proposed changes before making costly changes that impact APD or AFD from performing their duties in a timely and efficient way.</p> <p>Enforce the plans and regs already on the books... DO YOUR JOB</p> <p>Get it done, Athol needs some restructuring</p> <p>I would like to see all social services housed at a common location, common building would be best. Many people utilize more than one social service, it would be most convenient to have them all together, and not on Main Street</p> <p>As a Main Street business owner, I strive to see Main Street return as a mostly retail area, choices of eateries, etc.</p> <p>I think improving downtown ie more shops, etc is very important. Having the once a month Friday activities has been a welcome for the town.</p> <p>We need coffee shops and restaurants on Main Street. They would attract businesses, customers.</p> <p>State grants for some of the stores on main st that are condemned should be accessible to renovate the space to optimize the potential space. Such as the old jolly tavern building. It is a waste of good space that can bring good revenue to the city and attract more people from surrounding towns.</p> <p>We need more family oriented businesses</p> <p>Clean up to attract businesses</p> <p>Need to have a downtown that brings in people from other area- wine bar , bistros ect</p> <p>Get big restaurant chains or store in the empty market basket plaza place</p> <p>It would be nice to have an area for sidewalk dining in the summer. And even better to try to get more dining in the downtown area</p> <p>There needs to be a conversation on how new businesses can come in to start in a new town.</p> <p>Let's make it happen. We need a outstanding focal point! Maybe a mural of everything this town has to offer . Something folks would drive to see!!!!</p> <p>real mess!</p> <p>done theirs.</p> <p>park</p> <p>Lord Pond should be made safer by limiting direction s it can be driven through. It should also be made into a green space . There is not need for all the parking it provides now. This would also be a good location for a skate park.</p> <p>What positive features of Athol and inhabitants demonstrate a forward looking history respecting, shows a proud welcoming community that encourages visitors to visit a community that is proud to show off its positive qualities</p> <p>Clean up downtown, ban panhandling, enforce the laws and fill the damn potholes. Buildings are run down, expensive and not attractive or feasible to many businesses. Parking lot is unsafe.</p> <p>More foot or bike patrols downtown by police</p> <p>Police presence throughout the day is needed through downtown and surrounding streets. Trash is s problem in the city and enforcing fines of such need to be implemented.</p> <p>I see the real need for a police presence on Main Street. Just the presence would discourage a lot of the bad behaviors that go on, and reassure a concerned community of it's safety.</p> <p>address panhandling</p> <p>Extra police patrols downtown to discourage drug and alcohol use. Too many scary direlicts hanging out.</p> <p>note: the strippers in the window on Main Street are disturbing many, especially since it's across the way from a preschool. It does NOT add good vibes to downtown area and makes it so much worse!</p>
Attracting the Right Businesses	
Creating Attractions/Activities	
Enforcement	

Improving Downtown's Aesthetic	Would love to see downtown revitalization. Cleaner and more attractive. Positive and socially engaged businesses, family friendly.
	I think improving facades of main st important to create a more appealing look to the area.
	This town could be potential to be beautiful and a fresh new look is needed keep open minds no more historic mindsets
	More green space
Improving Pedestrian Safety	Just remember motor vehicle driver's visibility is important, and that much of Main Street is affected by solar glare at different times of the day all year long. More people downtown and crossing the streets makes their safety a top concern.
Increasing Entertainment Options	Include an amphitheater in the lord pond plaza redesign
	A music venue would attract a lot of business!
Parking	It would be nice to see the town work with a theater group to do a restoration of the York Theater building. An active theater would attract new restaurants and other niche businesses.
Promoting Athol	Parking should be free in downtown.
Road/Building Maintenance	We need management and marketing, advocacy dedicated to the downtown. And advocacy for the return of rail service to Downtown Athol.
	Consider the cost and time for maintenance and upkeep required for any improvements, added burden on business owners, police, and department of public works!
	redoing roads and tearing down abandoned buildings should be the priority
	It would be nice to have somewhere safe for teens and young adults to hang out at and not on the streets keep kids out of trouble.....give them something to do.....
Supporting Youth	The bowling alley (the abandoned building) would be a great place for young kids to go and I love the idea of the skate park. It's so sad to see the kids getting in trouble because there is nothing for them to do in town
	Bringing a skate park or somewhere for kids to come together is important but safety should be considered as well. The current park at silver lake has been made unsafe at times and is sad. If some project is going to be completed for children and families safety protocol should be considered.



3. Public Outreach and Engagement Materials





Downtown Athol Local Rapid Recovery Plan

Public Meeting May 11, 2021



Agenda

- Project Background
- Project Goals/Timeline
- Diagnostic/Data Results
- Potential Projects
- What's Next?

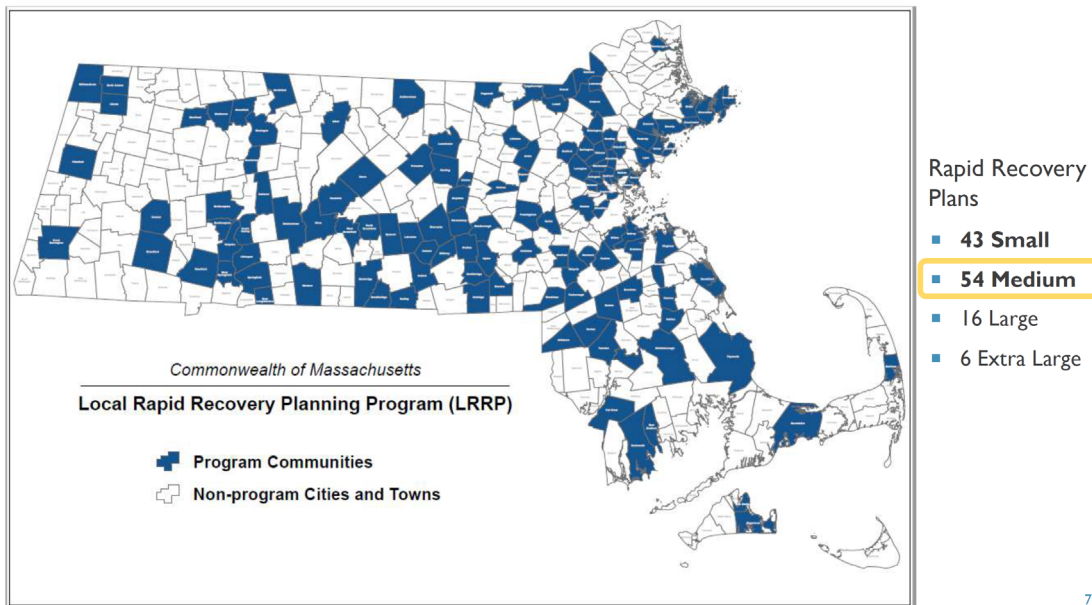




Project Background



WHY WAS THE PROGRAM CREATED?



7

PURPOSE OF THIS MEETING-

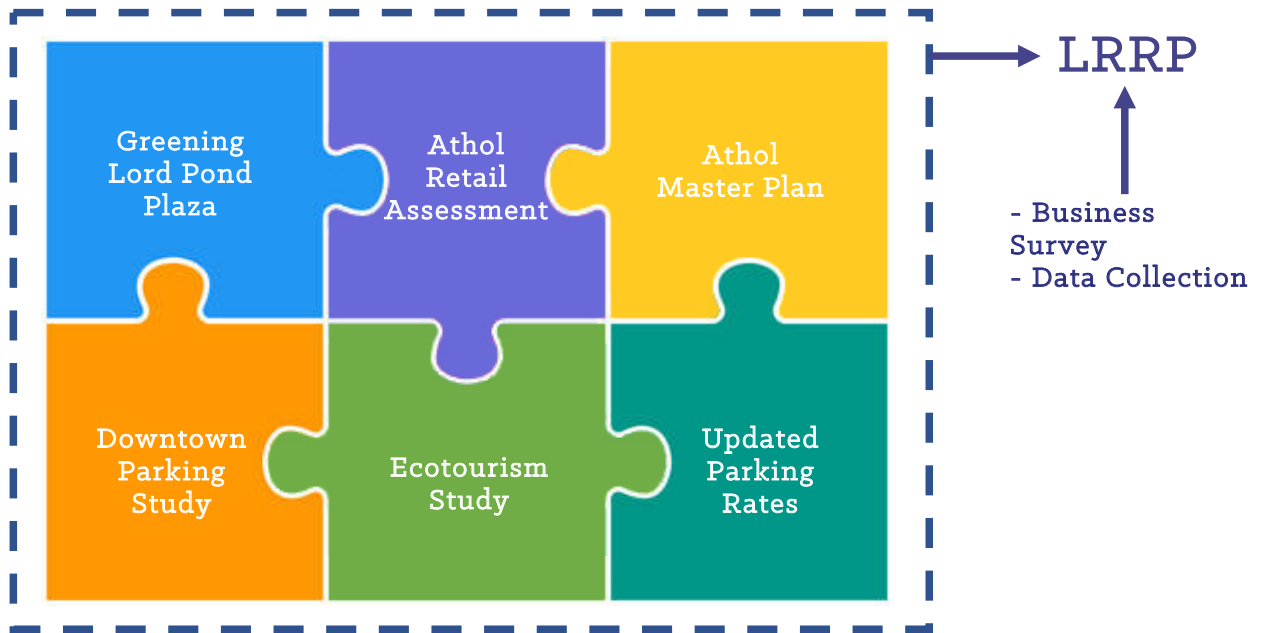


- Review early identified priorities
- Share the baseline data (qualitative and quantitative) for an overview of on-ground conditions
 - Data collected in the field
 - Business survey results to understand COVID impacts
 - Other community input to understand major district concerns
- Revisit priorities and adjust if needed
- Translate priorities into projects

ATHOL APPLIED WITH SOME SPECIFIC PROJECTS IN MIND TO INVESTIGATE

	 1 st PRIORITY	 2 nd PRIORITY	 3 rd PRIORITY
Short-Term	Establish a Downtown Parking Benefits District (PBD)	Improve Wayfinding	Review/Amend Zoning/Design Guidelines
Mid/Long-Term	Address Vacant Storefronts	Improve Town Marketing/Social Media	Revive Downtown Events

HOW THE LOCAL RECOVERY PLAN WORKS WITH OTHER EFFORTS



Project Goals/Timeline



PROJECT COMMUNITY GOALS

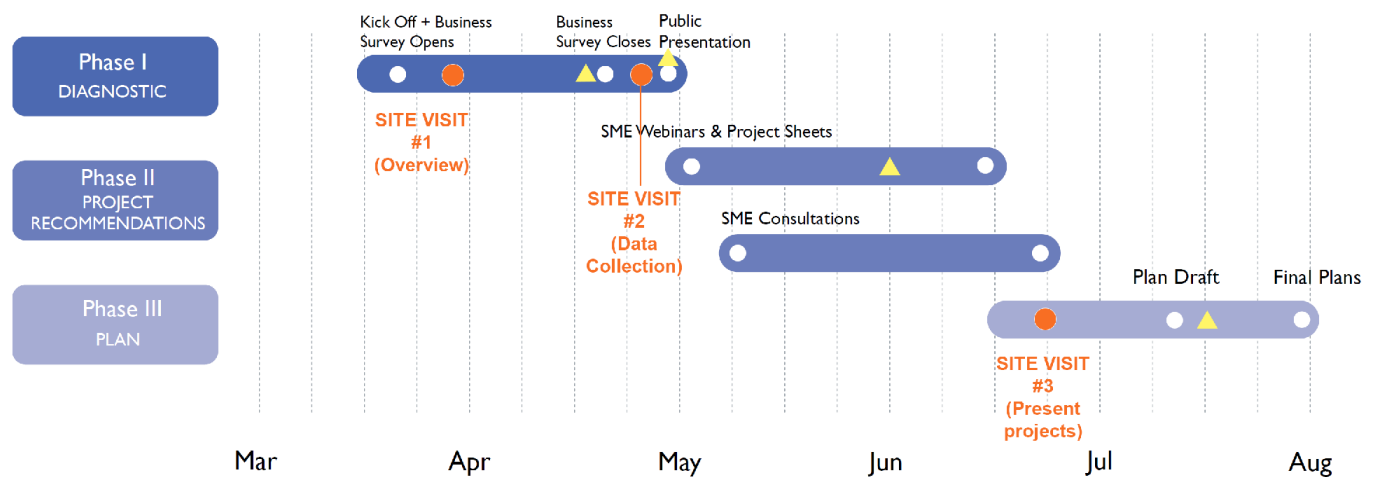
- Increase downtown **vitality**
- **Modernize** the parking system
- Attract **new business** owners and facilitate new economic opportunities
- Improve the **experience of visitors** to downtown, both physically and in access/wayfinding
- Strengthen the **collaboration** and communication between businesses
- Establish a strategy for developing a stronger **marketing campaign**/resource

OVERALL LRRP GOALS

- Ensure that communities have **data-driven plans** to aid in COVID-19 recovery effort.
- Support the Commonwealth in the collection and **standardization of baseline data** to measure COVID-19 impacts.

PLANNING SCHEDULE

▲ Downtown Vitality Committee Meeting





PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



Data Results



DATA/DIAGNOSTIC CATEGORIES



Market Information

Trends
Consumer Profiles
Demand



Physical Environment

Public Realm
Private Realm
Access + Visibility



Business Environment

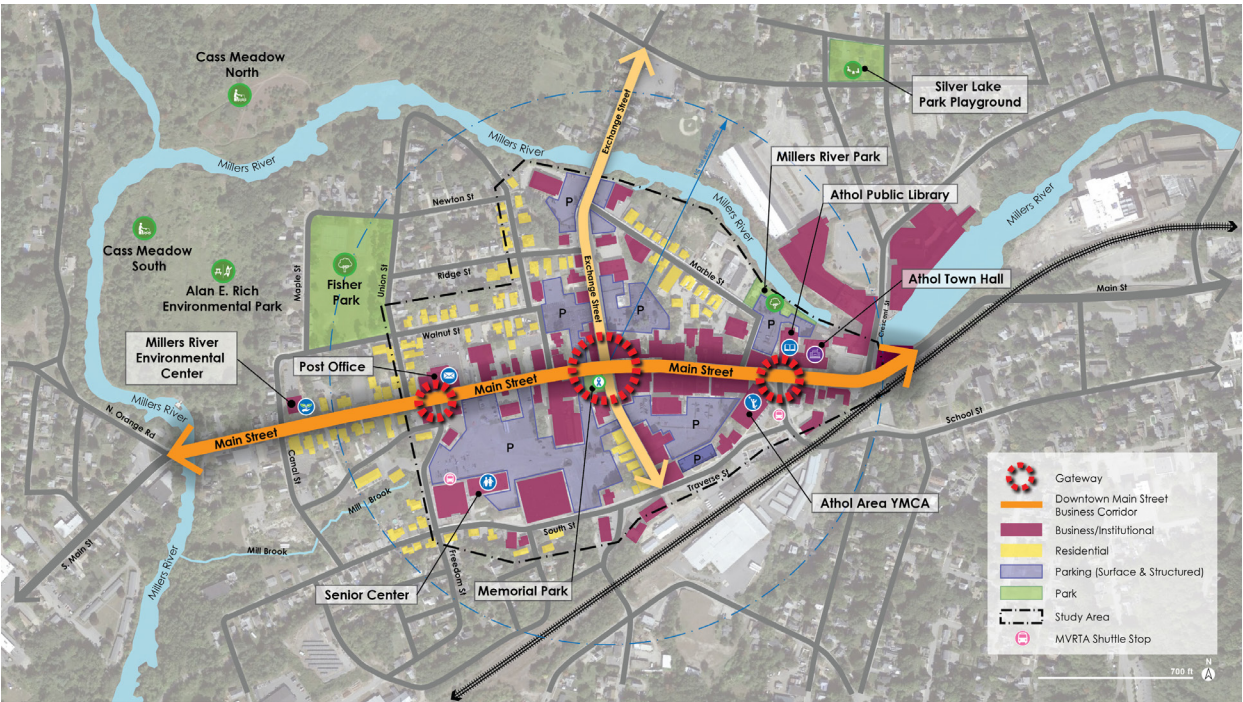
Anchors/Destinations
Asset Mix
Nodes/Clusters



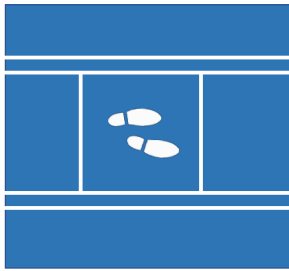
Administrative Capacity

Partners
Funding
Regulations/Zoning

STUDY AREA



ELEMENT: SIDEWALKS



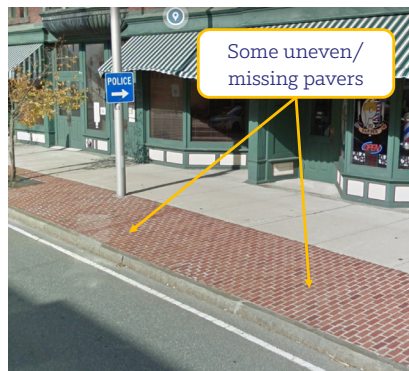
Guiding Principles:

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.



ELEMENT: SIDEWALKS

Importance of streetscape/
sidewalk improvements



How **Downtown Athol** ranks:

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.

ELEMENT: STREET TREES AND BENCHES



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.



Best Practice Example

ELEMENT: STREET TREES AND BENCHES



How **Downtown Athol** ranks:

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.

ELEMENT: LIGHTING



Guiding Principles:

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



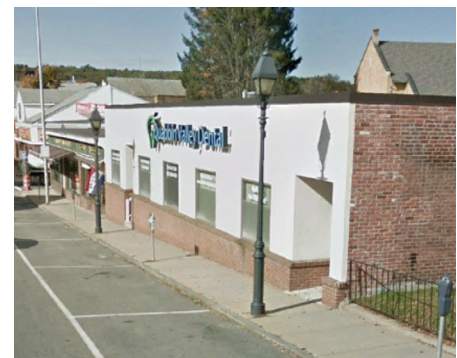
ELEMENT: LIGHTING



Importance of safety and/or cleanliness improvements

Low

High



How Downtown Athol ranks:

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.

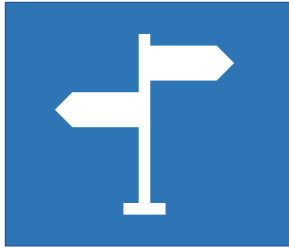
C

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.

ELEMENT: WAYFINDING/ SIGNAGE



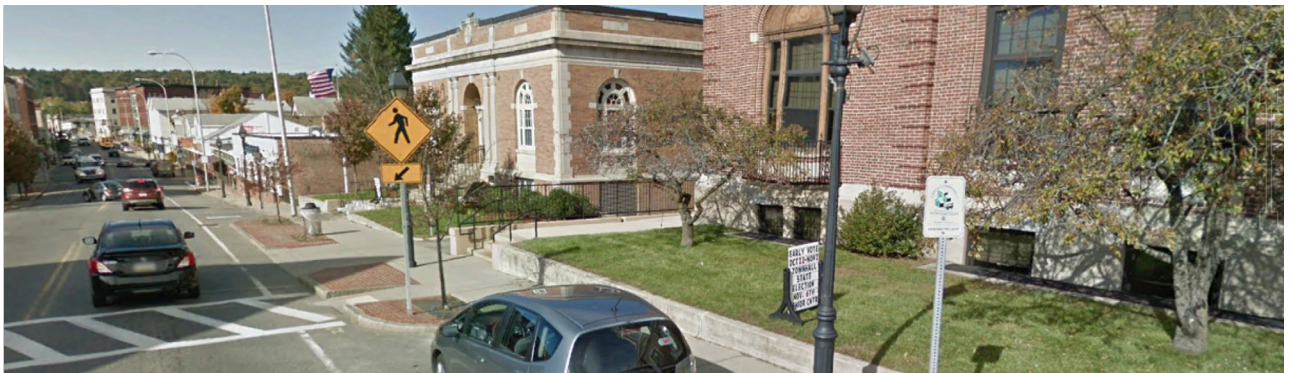
Guiding Principles:

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.



Best Practice Example

ELEMENT: WAYFINDING/SIGNAGE



How **Downtown Athol** ranks:

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.

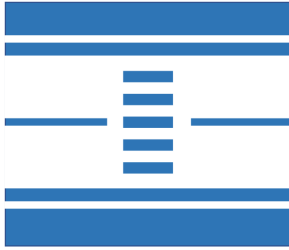
C

Limited to no signage available throughout the study area.

F

There is no wayfinding/signage in the study area.

ELEMENT: ROADBED/ CROSSWALKS



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.



Best Practice Example

ELEMENT: ROADBED/CROSSWALKS



How **Downtown Athol** ranks:

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.

PUBLIC REALM KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **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 **facilitating safer conditions** near them
- **Need for increase of streetscape amenities.** There is significant opportunity to increase vitality by **increasing the amenities** that make visiting and spending more time in downtown desirable
- **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 downtown destinations

ELEMENT: WINDOW



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.



ELEMENT: WINDOW



How **Downtown Athol** ranks:

A

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

B

About 50% of storefront windows maintain windows with 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.

ELEMENT: OUTDOOR DISPLAY/DINING



Guiding Principles:

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



Best Practice Example

ELEMENT: OUTDOOR DISPLAY/DINING



How Downtown Athol ranks:

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

More than 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise display and outdoor dining that pose challenges to the pedestrian experience.

F

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

ELEMENT: SIGNAGE



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.



Best Practice Example

ELEMENT: SIGNAGE



How **Downtown Athol** ranks:

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.

ELEMENT: AWNING



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.



Best Practice Example

ELEMENT: AWNING



How **Downtown Athol** ranks:

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.

ELEMENT: FACADE



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.



Best Practice Example

ELEMENT: FACADE



Condition of private buildings/ storefronts and signs



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.

ELEMENT: LIGHTING



Guiding Principles:

Storefront interior lighting after business hours help enliven the corridor and boost security on the street.



ELEMENT: LIGHTING



How **Downtown Athol** ranks:

A

More than 75% of storefronts have lighting that help illuminate sidewalks.

B

About 50% of storefronts have some interior lighting that help illuminate sidewalks.

C

More than 25% of storefronts do not have lighting.

F

All storefronts in the study area are shuttered and dark at night.

PRIVATE REALM KEY TAKEAWAYS

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



CUSTOMER BASE



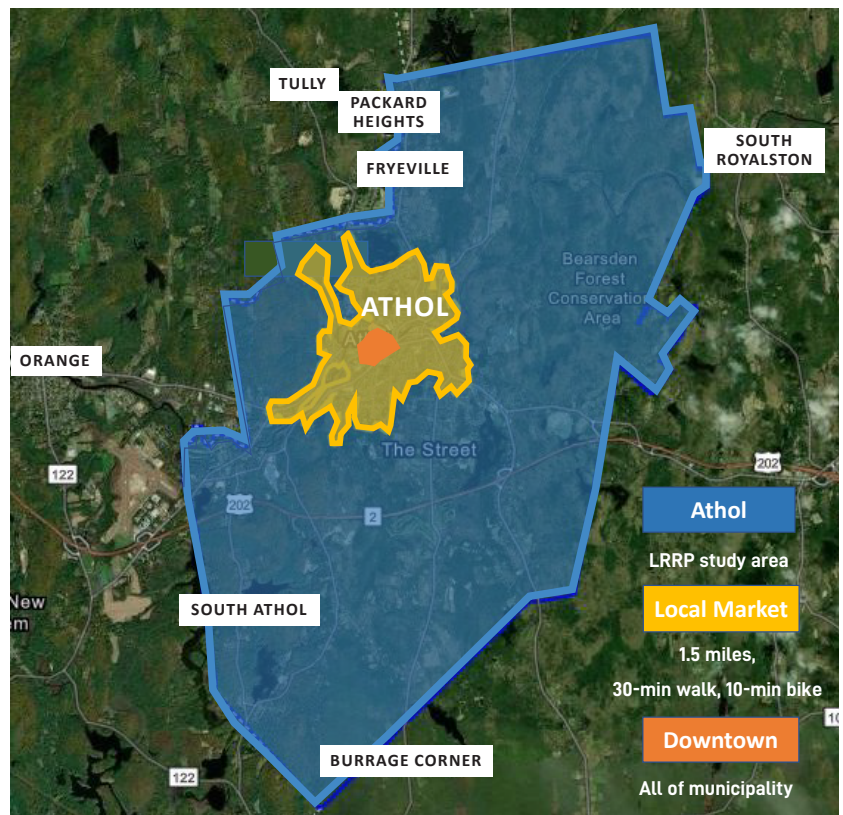
Data Results



Customer Base Comparison Areas

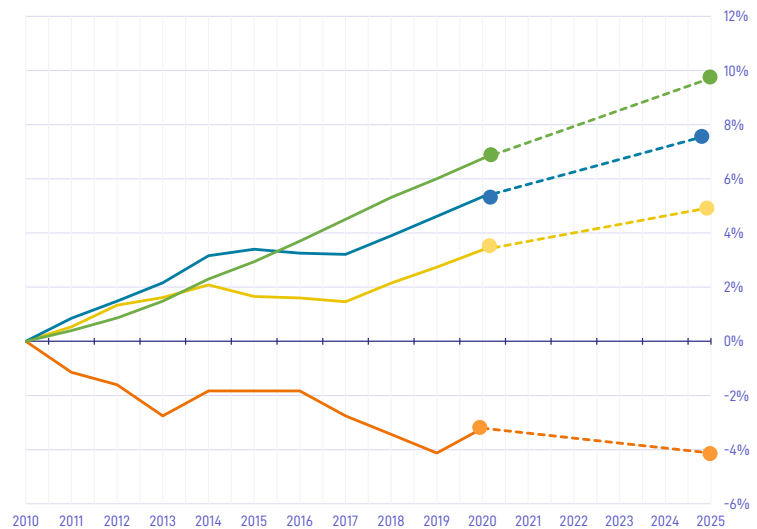
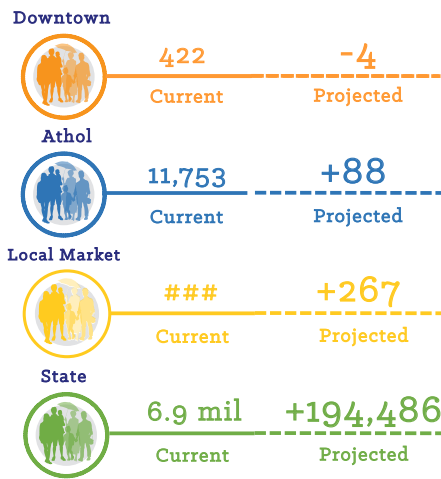
- The study area's extent is limited to the downtown business district.
- To understand the local market this analysis also looks at a 1.5-mile ring (30-minute walk, 10-minute bike ride) around downtown, the entire municipality, and statewide.

Downtown	LRRP study area
Local market	1.5 mi, 30-min walk, 10-min bike
Athol	All of municipality
State	All of Massachusetts



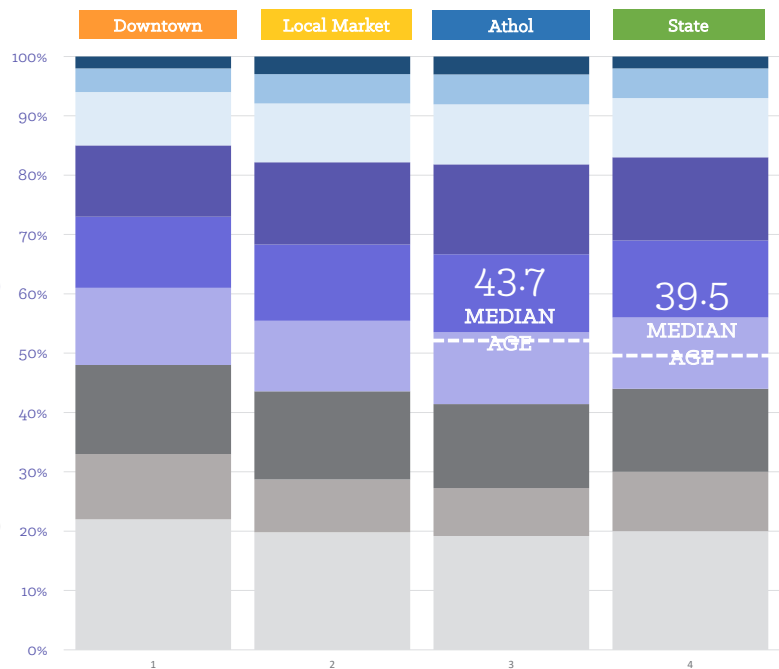
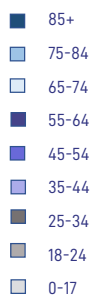
Population trend from 2010 to 2025

- The local area **lagged behind the state growth rate** from 2014-2017 but appears to be back on track.
- The study area itself has a very small **population of 422**, which may be responsible for the dissimilar trendline.



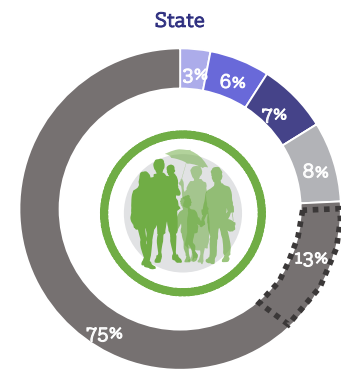
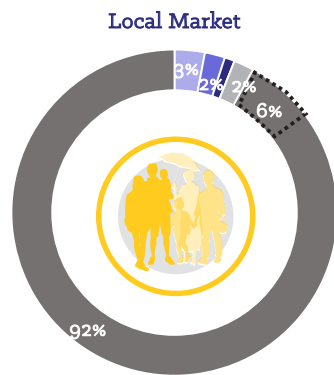
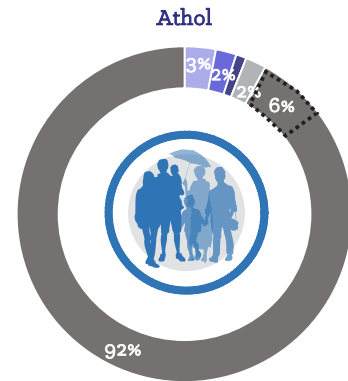
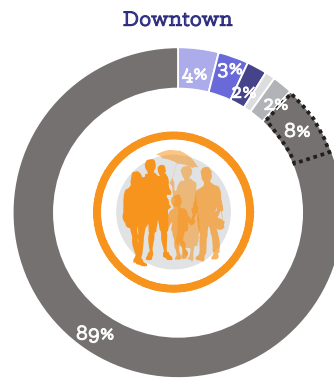
Age distribution

- Downtown's population rather closely matches the state average, with a slightly stronger representation of **younger people**.



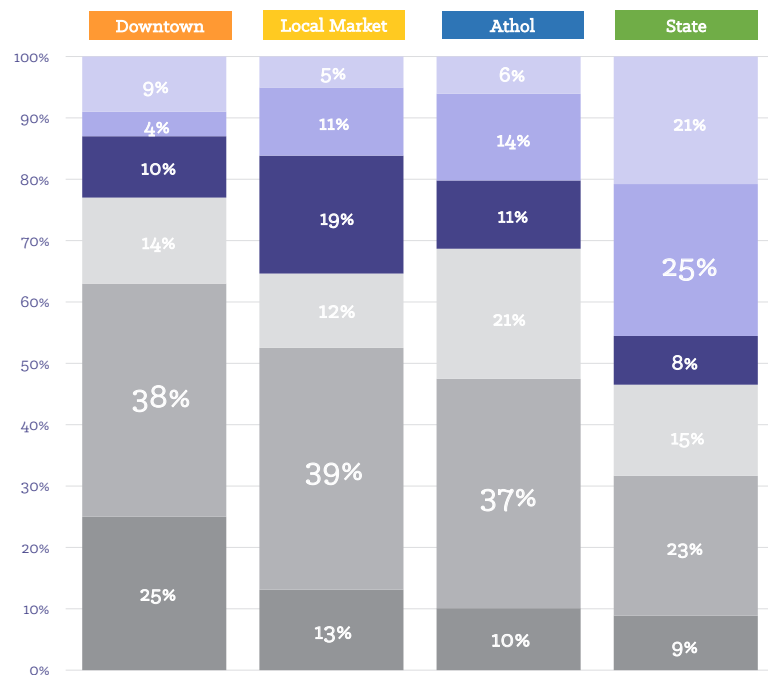
Race and ethnicity

- The study area and local community are **less diverse** than the state.
- The area has a relatively **lower proportion** of people with **Hispanic origin**.



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.



Population

	Downtown	Local Market	Athol	State
	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	194,486
5-year forecast, household change	-2	40	42	73,332
Median age	37	40	42	40

Customer statistics

- The number of jobs in the study area is about equal to the residential population.
- Housing in the study area is **predominantly rental**.



Employment and income

	Downtown	Local Market	Athol	State
	\$20k	\$46k	\$53k	\$81k
Median household income				
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

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

Additional statistics

- The study area has a surplus of retail, food/beverage, and grocery stores when compared to the residential population, while the local market area is leaking spending.

2021 Business Survey Responses

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

1. Reduced operating hours/capacity
2. Decline in revenue
3. Incurred expenses for safety measures

Retail

↑ Demand exceeds supply

↓ Supply exceeds demand

Downtown Local Market Athol State

18.3

3.2

5.8

-59.3

Total retail surplus/leakage*

Grocery store surplus/leakage*

Restaurant surplus/leakage*

-26.1

49.5

-33.9

2.4

-56

26.1

23.1

-0.7

*The Leakage/Surplus Factor is scaled from -100 (surplus supply) to +100 (leakage), the balance between sales volume and retail demand potential from household spending. Positive numbers are where demand exceeds supply.

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.

Additional 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 **above the statewide average**.

Crime

154

99

89

67

Crime index**

Other indicators

80%

84%

86%

83%

Own or lease any vehicle

Have a smartphone

Carry health insurance

88%

86%

85%

90%

63%

68%

71%

77%

Poverty

61%

25%

17%

12%

Households w/ food stamps/SNAP

Unemployed (age 16+)

Households below poverty level

23%

18%

16%

15%

31%

25%

17%

11%

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

CUSTOMER BASE KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Stable population.** It is a strength that there is no significant anticipated decline in the local population
- **Younger population to engage.** There is significant opportunity to **engage** the group of **people under 34** with businesses or activities downtown that would appeal to them
- **Wide range of incomes.** There is a large difference between the median income of downtown, the local market, and the State, implying a need for downtown businesses to cater to people with **different spending capacity**
- **Crime is a deterrent to downtown.** There is significant need to address the crime rate in downtown in order to attract **visitors** and ensure they **feel safe and welcome** at all times of the day



BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT



Data Results



Total Number of
Businesses

79



Number of Businesses closed
since COVID (temporary or
permanent, of participating
survey takers, only)

4



Number of Vacant
Storefronts

10



ADMIN
CAPACITY



Data Results

ADMIN CAPACITY-
Where are the gaps?

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

Admin facilities
incompatible with cross-
departmental
collaboration, ease of
public process

Potential Projects

ARE THESE STILL PRIORITIZED IN THE RIGHT WAY BASED ON THE DATA AND YOUR CURRENT NEEDS? IS ANYTHING MISSING?

Short-Term	 <p>1st PRIORITY</p> <p>Establish a Downtown Parking Benefits District (PBD)</p>	 <p>2nd PRIORITY</p> <p>Improve Wayfinding</p>	 <p>3rd PRIORITY</p> <p>Review/Amend Zoning/Design Guidelines</p>
	<p>Mid/Long-Term</p> <p>Address Vacant Storefronts</p>	<p>Improve Town Marketing/Social Media</p>	<p>Revive Downtown Events</p>

ARE THESE STILL PRIORITIZED IN THE RIGHT WAY BASED ON THE DATA AND YOUR CURRENT NEEDS? IS ANYTHING MISSING?

Short-Term	 <p>1st PRIORITY</p> <p>Establish a Downtown Parking Benefits District (PBD) to fund streetscape improvements such as benches, landscaping, signage, lighting</p>
------------	---

- This was recommended as part of the 2020 parking study
- Early buy-in has been secured for finalizing the increase of parking meter rates
- A Parking Benefits Task Force has already been established with a target of pushing forward the PBD in June

ARE THESE STILL PRIORITIZED IN THE RIGHT WAY BASED ON THE DATA AND YOUR CURRENT NEEDS? IS ANYTHING MISSING?

Short-Term	1 st PRIORITY	2 nd PRIORITY
	<p>Establish a Downtown Parking Benefits District (PBD) to fund streetscape improvements such as benches, landscaping, signage, lighting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was recommended as part of the 2020 parking study • Early buy-in has been secured for finalizing the increase of parking meter rates • A Parking Benefits Task Force has already been established with a target of pushing forward the PBD in June 	<p>Improve Wayfinding for cars trying to find parking and for pedestrians to be guided to primary destinations such as the Library, or bus stops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was recommended as part of the 2019 Complete Streets Plan • A PBD or future MDI grant could fund some of these improvements • As parking rates change, identifying areas for free parking will be important • There is no existing administrative support to develop a wayfinding system

ARE THESE STILL PRIORITIZED IN THE RIGHT WAY BASED ON THE DATA AND YOUR CURRENT NEEDS? IS ANYTHING MISSING?

Short-Term	1 st PRIORITY	2 nd PRIORITY	3 rd PRIORITY
	<p>Establish a Downtown Parking Benefits District (PBD) to fund streetscape improvements such as benches, landscaping, signage, lighting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was recommended as part of the 2020 parking study • Early buy-in has been secured for finalizing the increase of parking meter rates • A Parking Benefits Task Force has already been established with a target of pushing forward the PBD in June 	<p>Improve Wayfinding for cars trying to find parking and for pedestrians to be guided to primary destinations such as the Library, or bus stops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was recommended as part of the 2019 Complete Streets Plan • A PBD or future MDI grant could fund some of these improvements • As parking rates change, identifying areas for free parking will be important • There is no existing administrative support to develop a wayfinding system 	<p>Review/Amend Zoning/Design Guidelines to better accommodate the Town's desired mix of uses downtown</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MRPC has been awarded a grant to provide tech assistance • This is a priority initiative of the BPCD • Some proposed revisions have already been discussed • Existing design guidelines have not been updated since 1997

ARE THESE STILL PRIORITIZED IN THE RIGHT WAY BASED ON THE DATA AND YOUR CURRENT NEEDS? IS ANYTHING MISSING?

Mid/Long-Term

 1st PRIORITY

Address Vacant Storefronts

- The Downtown Retail Assessment identified some opportunities
- Pop-up shops are of interest until long-term tenants can be secured
- There has been limited interest in businesses taking advantage of potential support from grants

ARE THESE STILL PRIORITIZED IN THE RIGHT WAY BASED ON THE DATA AND YOUR CURRENT NEEDS? IS ANYTHING MISSING?

Mid/Long-Term

 1st PRIORITY

Address Vacant Storefronts

- The Downtown Retail Assessment identified some opportunities
- Pop-up shops are of interest until long-term tenants can be secured
- There has been limited interest in businesses taking advantage of potential support from grants

 2nd PRIORITY

Improve Town Marketing/Social Media

- The marketing provides an opportunity for close collaboration between DVC and business owners
- The town is soon bringing on an intern, who may be able to support social media efforts with committee help

ARE THESE STILL PRIORITIZED IN THE RIGHT WAY BASED ON THE DATA AND YOUR CURRENT NEEDS? IS ANYTHING MISSING?

Mid/Long-Term	1 st PRIORITY	2 nd PRIORITY	3 rd PRIORITY
	Address Vacant Storefronts	Improve Town Marketing/Social Media	Revive Downtown Events
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Downtown Retail Assessment identified some opportunities Pop-up shops are of interest until long-term tenants can be secured There has been limited interest in businesses taking advantage of potential support from grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The marketing provides an opportunity for close collaboration between DVC and business owners The town is soon sharing an intern with Orange, who may be able to support social media efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative ideas for events have been proposed, generally, but it may take some time to recover pre- COVID participation levels and organizing capacity is limited There is opportunity to informally "claim" spaces for events to test out their potential of becoming permanent (tactical urbanism)

What's Next?

Subject Matter Experts will be available in the following categories:

- Public Realm**
 - Public Space Transformation (Parking, Biking, Sidewalks, Streets)
 - Finding opportunities in overlooked spaces
- Private Realm**
 - Overcoming Zoning/Permit/Licensing Hurdles
- Revenue and Sales**
- Administrative Capacity**
- Tenant Mix**
- Cultural/Arts**

Screenshot from Downtown Vitality Committee Virtual Meeting- May 11, 2021



Attention: Downtown Athol Businesses

We need your input!

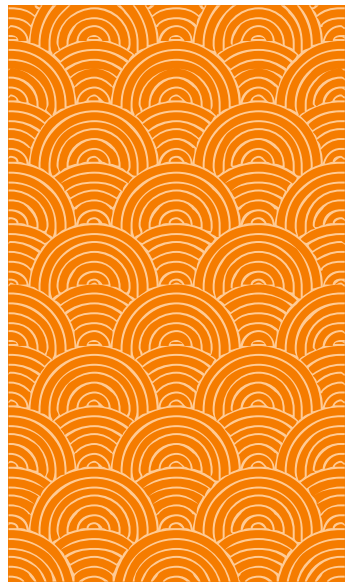
Athol is participating in the Massachusetts LRRP Program to help communities develop Local Rapid Recovery Plans for targeted downtowns and commercial districts.

An initial component of this program includes a survey of owners (or managers) of business establishments located in the Downtown Athol area including for-profits and non-profits, and even if your business is temporarily closed.

Your input will help develop a plan that meets the needs of local businesses and inform future policy decisions.

The survey will ask a few questions about your satisfaction with your business location, impacts of COVID on your business and your opinion regarding potential strategies to support your business and improve the commercial district.

Use the link or QR Code to access the survey
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LRRPBiz>



For More
Information . . .
planning@townofathol.org



Attention: Athol Residents + Businesses Project Ideas for Comment!

For the past several months Athol has been participating in the Massachusetts LRRP Program to develop a Local Rapid Recovery Plan for Downtown Athol. Following the initial phase of data collection and analysis, the team has created a set of ten projects to be included in the plan to support the recovery of both the physical and business environments downtown in the near future.

There are two ways to engage with the team during this last phase of the project:

1) ONLINE SURVEY

The survey link or QR code below provides an opportunity to learn about each of the projects at a general level, to vote on their desired outcomes, and to rank the projects by priority. The survey will be available from **July 21st - August 8th**

2) VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE

On **August 3rd from 5:00-6:30**, the public is invited to join an "open house" to view the projects in greater detail, ask questions, and share any other information to support the finalization of the LRRP report.

Click **here** to visit the meeting at any time and using these details:

Meeting ID: 872 2728 3475

Passcode: 328985

**For More
Information . . .**
*planning@townof
athol.org*

Click **here** or scan the QR Code to access the survey



LRRP Public Survey Flyer

Attention: Athol Residents + Businesses **Project Ideas for Comment!**

For the past several months Athol has been participating in the Massachusetts LRRP Program to develop a Local Rapid Recovery Plan for Downtown Athol. Following the initial phase of data collection and analysis, the team has created a set of ten projects to be included in the plan to support the recovery of both the physical and business environments downtown in the near future.

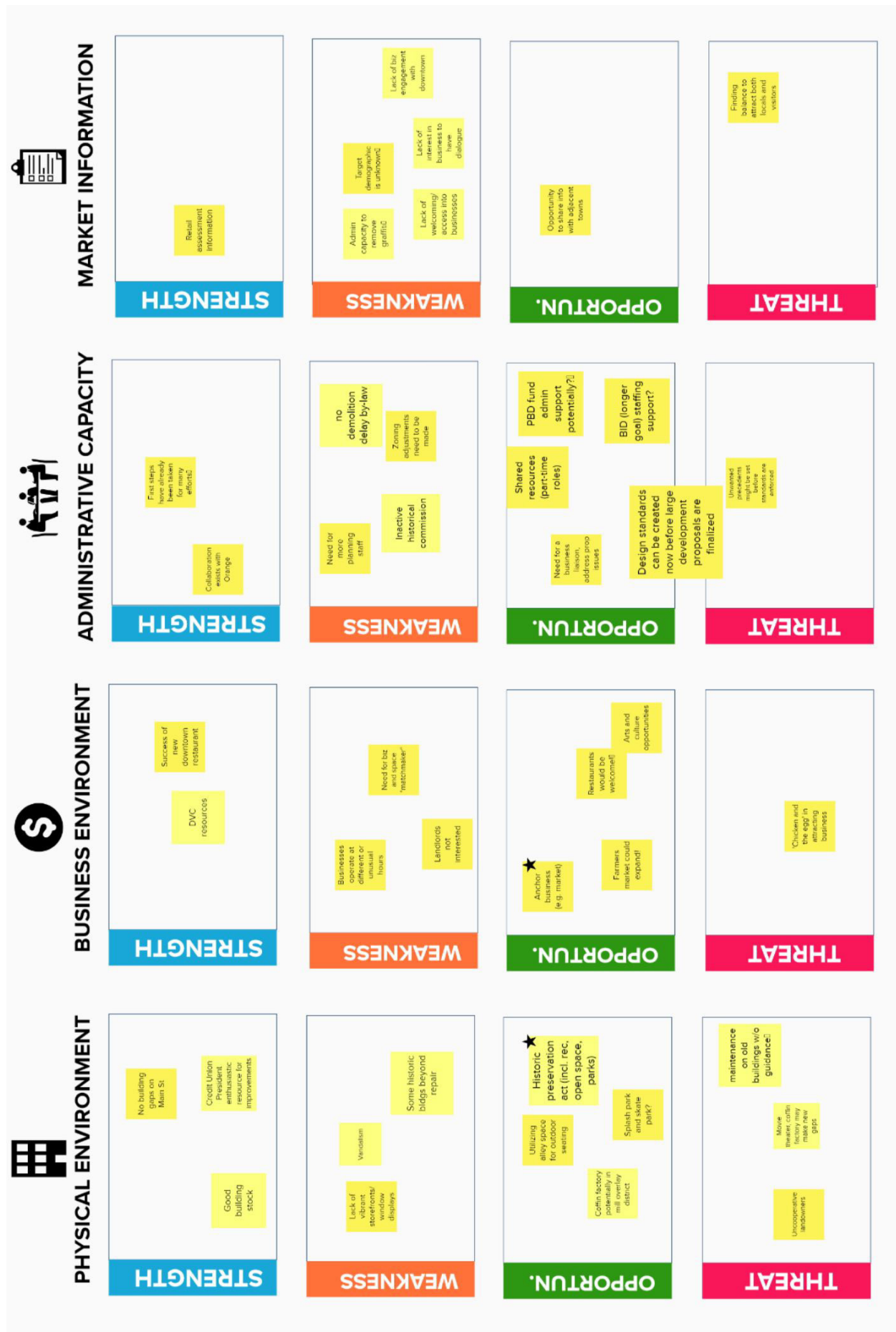
ONLINE SURVEY

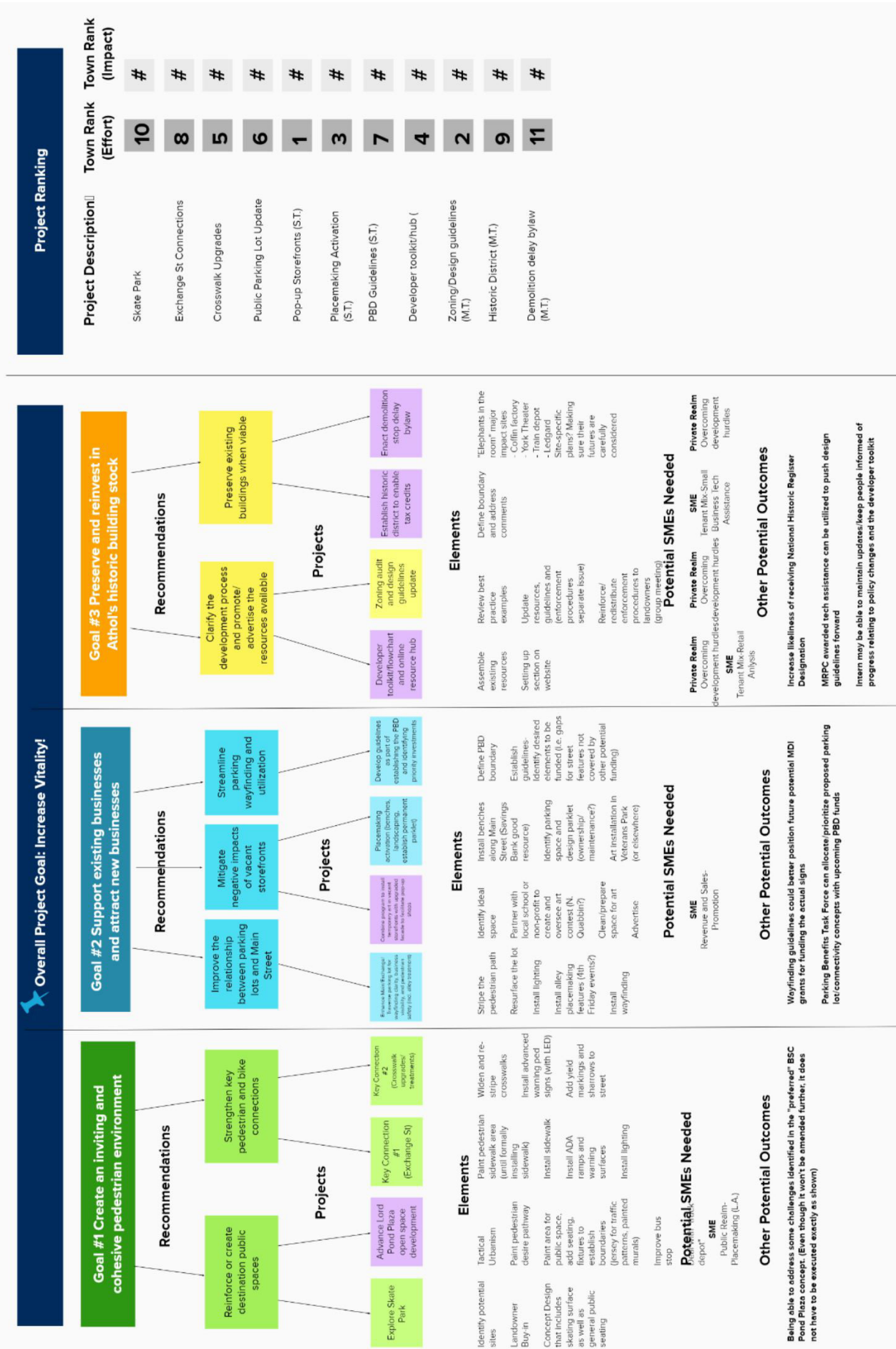
The survey link or QR code to the right provides an opportunity to learn about each of the projects at a general level, to vote on their desired outcomes, and to rank the projects by priority.

<https://forms.office.com/r/gsQWgYCh7Z>

The survey is available now through August 8th!







Key Project Goal: Increase Vitality!	Issue	Level of Community Priority (Plans, etc) (Scale 1-5)	Level of Addtl Effort to Address (\$, Admin) (Scale 1-5)	Level of Validation by LRRP Data (Scale 1-5)	TOTAL SCORE (Priority)	Potential Project	SME
Market Information Trends Consumer Profiles Demand	1. Target demographic unknown 2. Lack of ease of access for business 3. Lack of business engagement with the downtown 4. Lack of business coordination with each other 5. Lack of balance to attract local/regional visitors 6. Collaboration with Orange, etc.	● ●	● ●	○ ○	7 5 7 6 13 3	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
	1. Lack of vibrant storefronts/ windows 2. Safer connections for pedestrians (lighting, complete sidewalks) 3. Some historic buildings beyond repair 4. Lack of common/public space 5. Uncooperative landowners ★ Lack of identity/wayfinding	● ●	● ●	○ ○	10 12 12 11 9 12	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. SIGN DESIGN GUIDELINES	Public Realm- Placemaking, LA Revenue and Sales- Marketing
	1. Inconsistency of business hours 2. Lack of an anchor business 3. Lack of restaurants/food variety 4. Lack of arts/culture ★ Zoning may not accommodate desired downtown mix 6. 'Chicken and egg' challenge	● ●	● ●	○ ○	8 11 11 10 6 4	Create toolkit/info packet for developers and businesses with data, property info, benefits	Tenant Mix- Small Biz Tech Assistance
	★ Lack of planning staff to execute everything desired 2. Lack of support/proactivity for building enforcement 3. Cannot rely on police services to follow-through, stay in town 4. Design standards outdated ★ Lack of dedicated marketing staff 6. Zoning adjustments needed	● ●	● ●	○ ○	11 7 7 10 9 7		

Athol Aug 3 Public Meeting • Sta

+

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Athol Aug 3 Public Meeting

Facilitator

All changes saved!


Athol's Local Rapid Recovery Plan to "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 building stock

DOWNTOWN ATHOL STUDY AREA & DATA FINDINGS



Phase I Findings

CUSTOMER BASE

It is a strength that the population growth is stable.

There is significant opportunity to engage the group of single order for sale businesses or retailers that would appear to have.

There is a need for downtown development to create a variety with different shopping capacity.

There is a demand to downtown. There is an opportunity to create a variety of businesses and services that can serve the needs and desires of all visitors of the city.

BUSINESS

There is opportunity to increase the number of offerings, particularly for retailers.

Some businesses have extensive signage and business for specific areas.

Many businesses have limited outdoor seating or have abandonment of services and operating hours.

Outdoor dining or sidewalk retail is needed.

PUBLIC/INFRASTRUCTURE ASSETS

It is a strength that the majority of downtown is contained within sidewalks and closely to major transportation lines.

There is opportunity to build on the asset of existing resources for facilitating safe conditions near these.

There is significant opportunity to increase safety with resources that more operating hours in downtown districts.

The need for sidewalks is directly related to the Town goal for a stronger identity and there is a direct link existing and new visitors to downtown destinations.

ADMIN CAPACITY

Build and downtown marketing staff is needed.






Support is needed for building inspectors' administration, and improving enforcement (downtown). Some changes/inspector resources needed.

More planning staff is needed, particularly for business with zoning.


Long-term, consistent police support is needed.

DOWNTOWN ATHOL Local Rapid Recovery Plan

PROJECT IDEAS & PRIORITIES

Project Name	Site or Potential Improvement	Project Description	Potential Outcomes	Impact Area	Your Priority?
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 bring more businesses to Main Street.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fill an identified commercial need downtownIncrease business collaborationTesting of a new concept to put Athol on the mapIncreasing meeting activity	Business Environment	High
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 permanent development plan supports how residents and visitors want to engage with the space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A large public gathering spaceBetter walking connections and access to major transitDefined dining and parking areas to improve safetyImproved coordination between businesses	Physical Environment	Medium
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">Encourage landowners to improve facilitiesZoning that is more appropriate to Athol's visionReduction of unnecessary parking requirementsConsistency in the character of Main Street	Administrative Capacity	Medium
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Strong model for youthIncrease outdoor recreationProviding physical activity and outdoor recreation for all agesIncreasing the mobility of youth downtown	Physical Environment	High
Placemaking Activation		This project intends to creatively transform and test small-scale concepts, such as creating a pop-up, activating public space for outdoor dining, or engaging an artist to transform a site or Main Street's appearance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Creating safe spaces for people to spend timeIncreasing downtown activity in the eveningIncreasing safety, particularly in the evening	Physical Environment	Medium

Public Parking Lot and Crosswalk Upgrades




This project intends to create a new layout of the parking lot with improved pedestrian connections, additional safety elements, and amenities, and updated crosswalks along Main Street.

- More visitors within the neighborhood
- Reduced traffic congestion
- Enhanced safety for pedestrians and cyclists
- Increased visibility for businesses and services

Physical Environment

High

Establish a Parking Benefit District




This project intends to develop a process and recommendations on how parking fees in a designated parking benefit district can be used to fund small-scale improvements (such as benches, landscaping, sidewalk repairs, etc.)

- Residents learn about the value of parking
- Reduced traffic congestion
- Enhanced safety for pedestrians and cyclists
- Increased visibility for businesses and services

Physical Environment

Medium

Improve Exchange Street Connections




While future development may activate the street space, this project intends to test temporary solutions to address safety, ease of movement, and improved connections to the east side, improving lighting, etc.

- Slow down vehicles
- Improve pedestrian connections
- Improve safety, particularly in the evening
- Increase safety of adjacent businesses to attract or improve current properties

Physical Environment

Medium

Preserve Historic District and Demolition Delay Bylaw




This project intends to enact a demolition delay bylaw in conjunction with a review of guidelines, enforcement of overnight construction, and increased enforcement regarding the preservation and maintenance of historic properties.

- Increase motivation for landowners to actively maintain properties
- Preserve downtown character
- Consistency of building standards
- Improve public safety

Administrative Capacity

High

Create a Developer Toolkit



This project intends to create an easy-to-use toolkit for potential developers that includes all regulatory details, information about specific opportunities, and is combined with a marketing strategy to attract developers to further Athol's downtown vision.

- Attraction of local developers
- Attraction of regional developers
- Pressure downtown character
- A "sense of place" or "sense of pride"
- An opportunity to update existing regulations to improve safety

Physical Environment

Medium

Rapid Recovery Plan- APPENDIX

Town of Athol

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BACKGROUND

PROJECT GOALS AND PROCESS

OVERALL LRRP GOALS

- Ensure that communities have data-driven plans to aid in COVID-19 recovery effort.
- Support the Commonwealth in the collection and standardization of baseline data to measure COVID-19 impacts.

ATHOL'S LRRP GOALS

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 building stock

PROJECT PROCESS

- Goals were defined (see lower left)
- Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered in four diagnostic categories (below)
 - Field data was collected
 - There were discussions with the Town and Downtown Vitality Committee
 - Public presentations were conducted
- A series of project ideas were developed following analysis of recent/concurrent planning efforts and identification of key issue areas relating to COVID-19 recovery (based on the collected data)
- Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) met with the Town to provide particular expertise and recommendations relating to specific project ideas
- A public survey was conducted to understand preferences for project rankings and their potential outcomes
- The final report is currently being finalized and will outline information for each project (including recommended processes and funding sources) to support the pursuit of their implementation in the near future

DATA DIAGNOSTIC CATEGORIES

Market Information

Trends
Consumer Profiles
Demand

+

Physical Environment

Public Realm
Private Realm
Access + Visibility

+

Business Environment

Anchor/Destinations
Asset Mix
Nodes/Clusters

+

Administrative Capacity

Partners
Funding
Regulations/Zoning

Athol has already begun to lay the groundwork for a wide range of needs and improvements that also speak to areas raised during the LRRP process.

DOWNTOWN ATHOL Local Rapid Recovery Plan



DOWNTOWN ATHOL

STUDY AREA & DATA FINDINGS



STUDY AREA MAP

Phase 1 Findings



CUSTOMER BASE

- It is a strength that the population growth is stable.
- There is significant opportunity to engage the group of people under 34 with businesses or activities downtown that would appeal to them
- There is a need for downtown businesses to cater to people with different spending capacity
- Crime is a deterrent to downtown. There is significant need to address the crime rate in order to attract visitors and ensure they feel safe and welcome at all times of the day



PUBLIC/INFRASTRUCTURE ASSETS

- It is a strength that the majority of downtown is connected with sidewalks but closing the major gap on Exchange Street is a big priority
- There is opportunity to build on the asset of existing crosswalks by facilitating safer conditions near them
- There is significant opportunity to increase vitality with amenities that make spending more time in downtown desirable
- 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 downtown destinations



BUSINESS

- There is opportunity to increase the diversity of offerings, particularly for restaurants
- Some businesses have attractive signage and facades, but quality varies
- Many businesses have limited window visibility or clear advertisement of services and operating hours.
- Outdoor dining or sidewalk retail is needed



ADMIN CAPACITY

- Dedicated downtown Marketing staff is needed
- Support is needed for building inspector's determinations, and empowering enforcement (Selectboard, Town Manager, Inspector collaboration needed)
- More planning staff is needed, particularly for assistance with zoning
- Long-term, consistent police support is essential

DOWNTOWN ATHOL Local Rapid Recovery Plan








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 a 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"> An opportunity to update/modernize properties in disrepair Attraction of local developers Attraction of regional developers A "preserve and protect" approach 	Market Information
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"> Fill an identified commercial need/gap downtown Increase business collaboration Testing out a new concept to put Athol on the map Increasing evening activity 	Business Environment
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"> Encourage landowners to improve facades Zoning that is more appropriate to Athol context Reduction of unnecessary parking requirements Consistency in the character of Main Street 	Administrative Capacity
PRIORITY	4. 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)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing revenue stream for downtown maintenance Reduce Main St. parking demand Increase amenities that encourage people to walk more Residents learn about the value of parking 	Administrative Capacity
PRIORITY	5. 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A large public gathering space with planned activities Better walking connections and access through the Plaza Defined driving and parking areas to improve safety Improved coordination between landowners/businesses 	Physical Environment

*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
6. Public 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove conditions that facilitate unwanted behaviors More visitors utilize the lot instead of on-street spaces Calm traffic along Main Street Businesses activate or improve rear of shops 	Physical Environment
7. Placemaking Activation		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 alleys.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating safe and welcoming spaces for people to spend time Increasing downtown activity in the evening Increasing safety, particularly in the evening Facilitating collaboration with business owners to share the new spaces 	Physical Environment
8. 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)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase action of adjacent landowners to activate or improve unused properties Slow down vehicles Encourage more pedestrians Increase safety, particularly in the evening 	Physical Environment
9. 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy outlet for youth Increase resident connections Promoting physical activity and outdoor interaction for all ages Increasing the visibility of youth downtown 	Physical Environment
10. 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase motivation for landowners to actively maintain properties Preserve downtown's character Consistency of building standards Improved public safety 	Administrative Capacity

4. SME Consultation Final Documents





MEMORANDUM

To	Whitney Burdge, Transportation Planner, Stantec – Urban Places mobility Plan Facilitator for Athol
From	Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Principal
Date	August 16, 2021
Project	RRP - Athol
Subject	SME Request for Zoning and Design Guidelines
Cc:	

The following information is intended to enhance and/or supplement the Project Rubric you submitted in your request for SME services for Zoning and Design Guidelines. I have followed the structure of the rubric and provided a best practices project sheet with this memorandum. The intent is to allow you to cut and paste information directly into your report for the Town of Athol.

Based on our conversation and our subsequent meeting with Eric Smith, Mary Holtorf, and Jeff Sauser, I understood the following concerns:

- CDBG programs for storefront improvements have been problematic because of the requirements of that program.
- The treatments of historic façades and storefront windows in the Downtown area are not providing a sense of activity downtown.
- Materials for signs and storefronts are not durable.
- Signage is not consistent in style and signs for one business block those of other businesses.
- Business owners have not been engaged in this process and the Town lacks the staff to assist in an expanded outreach program.

I have reviewed the documents you sent, and the current sign regulations do not match current best practices for sign regulations. The Downtown Design Guidelines are dated 1997; again, some of the suggestions are no longer compatible with best practices.

Small businesses often do not have the resources (time, money, and expertise) to address these issues. Because many also suffered from negative economic impacts due to the downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, resources are even tighter. Programs to improve to the visibility and aesthetics of the downtown and of individual businesses are critical to assisting small businesses with their recovery efforts.

Innes Associates Ltd.
36R Moody Street
Byfield, MA 01922
emily@innes-design.com
(857) 226-3815

Auditing and then revising the zoning to add design guidelines and update the sign code would complement the Town's current efforts to revise their zoning bylaw with respect to the two zoning districts in their downtown.

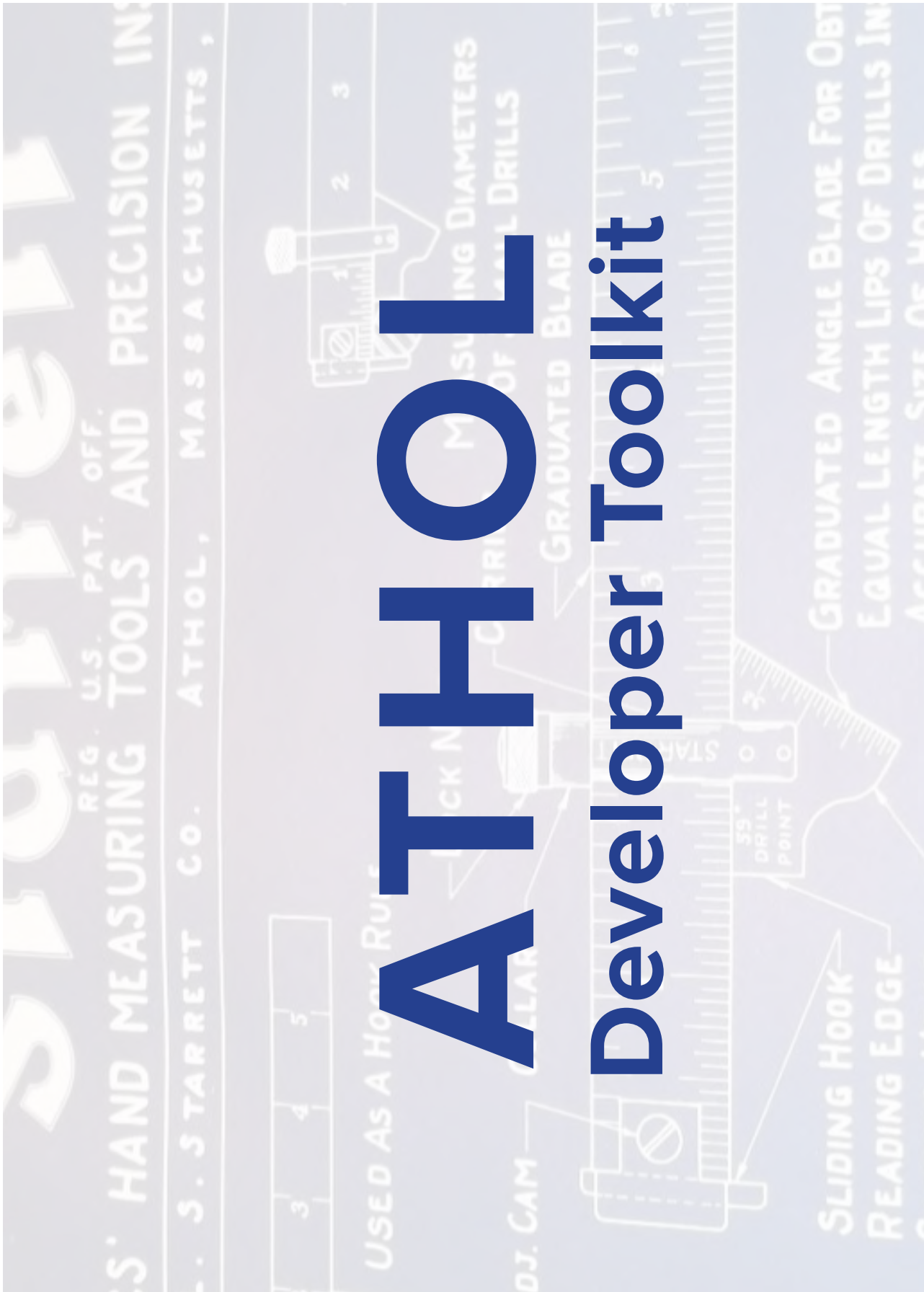
The table below will provide you and the Town of Athol with the information you need to complete this project sheet.

Project Rubric: Zoning Audit and Design Guidelines

The Town is in the process of reviewing their zoning for the Downtown, so my comments below are assuming a narrower project that incorporates design guidelines (and standards) and a revised sign code into the zoning. The changes required for the sign code are more than just the design guidelines – in a quick review, there are some non-design aspects that also need updating.

Budget	<p><u>Costs:</u></p> <p>I'd add that costs are dependent on how illustrative the Town wants the design guidelines/sign code to be. This would probably 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. This rubric could also be two separate projects – one for façade/storefront design guidelines and one for a sign code (with signage-specific design guidelines).</p> <p>The higher funding requirements (over \$60,000) would be for a supplemental façade/storefront improvement program (see notes on that below). If the Town wants improvements to properties in the near term, this project would be important.</p> <p>If you are interested in more information on a sign code or façade/storefront improvement program, please let me know.</p> <p>Finally, the ARPA funds could be used to fund the business liaison position for the first few years.</p> <p><u>Sources:</u></p> <p>American Rescue Plan Act (ARP or ARPA)</p> <p>Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Community Planning Grants (project limit \$25,000-\$75,000)</p>
Timeframe	<p>The timeframe is missing public engagement during the months in which the design guidelines/sign code is evaluated and updated. I would add some time to interview people with experience in applying for a sign permit and property/business owners who are interested in updating their façade/storefront. I would also add interviews with the Planning Board and ZBA and some outreach to the public. This is likely</p>

	<p>to add a month or two before zoning amendments/design guidelines are brought forward for approval. Also, zoning will need to be approved by Town Meeting, so that should be included.</p> <p>Post-approval, I would also add an education component to the ongoing meetings – property and businesses owners, developers/builders/sign-makers, commercial real estate brokers, and the public will need to learn about the new requirements and the implications.</p> <p>Discussion of transitioning properties would be part of a second action for façade/storefront improvements. Zoning changes do not create a requirement for immediate updates.</p>
Risks	I agree that the risk category is Medium. Again, the caveat is that there is no “stick” for immediate improvements absent an application for approval of a project. The “carrot” could be a façade/storefront improvement program.
KPI	The time frame for improvements is short without the façade/storefront improvement program. A zoning change alone will not establish a requirement for façades, storefronts, and signs to change. Enforcement of substandard existing conditions will bring them up to building code requirements, but would not, for example, require an existing sign to meet new requirements.
Partners	Add Zoning Bylaw Review Committee, Board of Selectmen
Action Items	This section could be more specific in terms of the focus. Zoning changes in this section would be limited to design guidelines and updating the sign code so as to complement the work that is being done by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission.
Process	As with timeframe above, this section is missing the public engagement components, which will be critical to getting approval of the zoning changes at Town Meeting and buy-in from the community.



LRRP SME Review: July 13, 2021
Laurie Zapalac, PhD



Roadmap:

1. What is a Developer Toolkit?
2. How to assemble it / When & where to put it to use?
3. Feedback on draft proposal
4. Examples from other cities & towns
5. Summary of best practices
6. Questions

1) What is a Developer Toolkit?

- Kit with pertinent information for potential property and business investors
- Help them efficiently evaluate if you are a match for their interests
- Excite them about possibilities
- Introduces them to key people and direct them to next steps. It's about building relationships and getting the next "first down."

2) How to Assemble It? / When & Where to put it to use?

Like any toolkit:

- Start small (1pg>5pg) and build up
- Keep it up to date / keep it organized

To be effective:

- Easily accessible - think about “where it is stored” and how to deploy it frequently.
- Frequently = multiple parties have “responsibility” for sharing
- Each deployment is part of a two-way conversation

Passive Sharing:

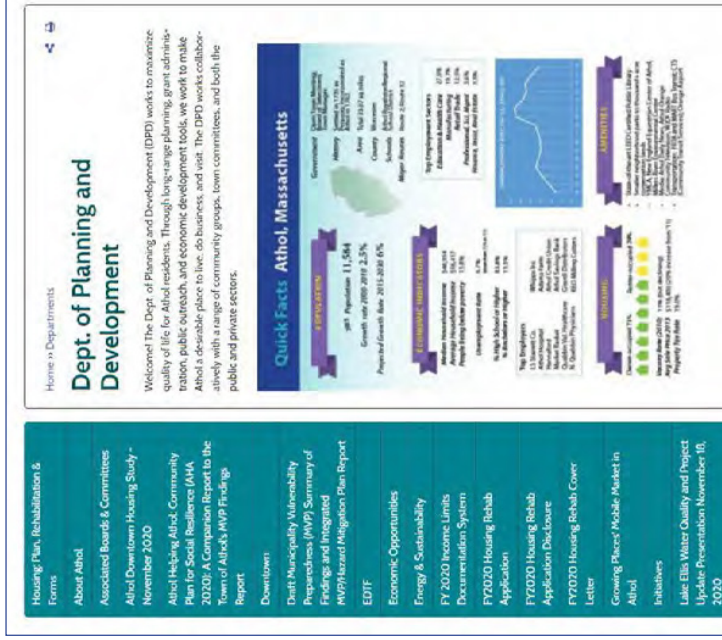


Link on Town Home Page

Embed content & offer a downloadable PDF

(*Information current as of July 2021*)

Add ons: short video-profiles and interviews - either organized comprehensively or by individual businesses



Quick Facts = YAY!

Active Sharing:

Virtual:

Email to all businesses and property owners and ask them to SHARE!

Email in responses to any inquiry

Boost / advertise online

Social media campaign / cross-posting

IRL:

Distribute copies to businesses

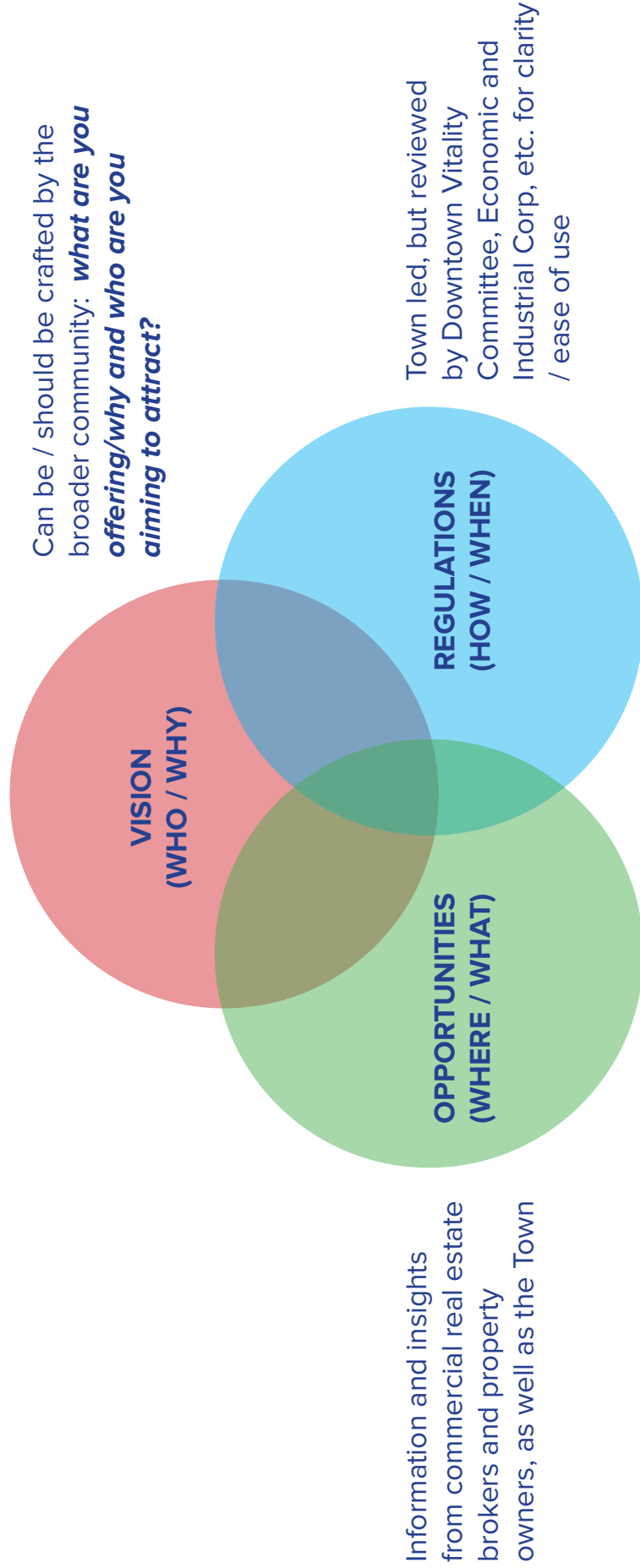
Integrate into campaigns

Distribute during key events

Plan a developer's tour*

3) Input / feedback on draft 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.

4) Examples / Best Practices: *Lights on Chicopee*

**LIGHTS ON
CHICOPEE**

**A Historic
New England
Mill City
Defines
LIVE-WORK-PLAY
On its
Own Terms**

CHICOPEE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

CITY of CHICOPEE
Incorporated 1820

with support from: MASS DEVELOPMENT

- Six pages total; first person testimony
- Shared at Lights on Arts & Culture (Winter Placemaking / multi-site event)
- Created concurrently with assembled real estate cut sheets as well as discrete info on OZ development opportunity

FOR RENT

**43-57 Springfield Street
(former Rivoli Theater Building)**

Zoned: Business A

Chicopee - Property Profile

PROPERTY OVERVIEW

- 20+ Spaces For Lease
- Office, Retail and Restaurant Ready Spaces
- Downtown Location
- Adjacent to City Hall
- Very Walkable (85 Walk Score)
- Daytime Foot Traffic
- High Ceilings
- Refinished Wood Floors
- Kitchen Facilities
- Historic Building

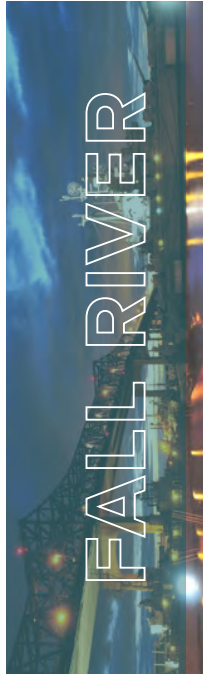
PROPERTY LOCATION

CONTACT
Jeremy Casey
(413) 505-9010
jcasey@srocommercial.com

DESCRIPTION
SR Commercial Realty is pleased to offer this beautiful mixed retail/office space for lease in the center of downtown Chicopee. Available spaces include a fully built and furnished first-floor cafe and 18 fully renovated offices. Many of these offices have spectacular views of the city. Located minutes from all major area highways and Chicopee retail/dining establishments. Only ten minutes from downtown Springfield. Call today to take a look at this gorgeous building!

- Cut Sheet Example - note assembled by Chicopee Town Planning Staff!

4) Examples / Best Practices: *Make it In Fall River*



BRISTOL COUNTY
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

with support from:
MASS DEVELOPMENT

Live-Work-Create

Fall River grew substantially during the late 19th and early 20th century as a mill and factory town, with residential neighborhoods a short distance from locations of work and production. In addition to the numerous 19th century and early 20th century industrial mill complexes still found throughout city, wealth and patronage generated from its industrial success was invested in architecture and landscape architecture. Noted architect Ralph Adams Cram designed the **Fall River Public Library**, which opened in 1899 and was restored in 2001, and the city boasts three **public parks** designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. The unique topography means that parts of the city share urban form characteristics with San Francisco (beautiful houses on a hillside, looking across a bay to a remarkable bridge), other parts embrace its working waterfront, while still others serve as a gateway to the farmland and nature preserves of the South Coast.



Main Street Revival

Looking back on its character in the middle of the 20th century, journalist William Moniz refers to Fall River's **Main Street** as an "elongated town square" and "the artery serving the heart of the city" where all members of society crossed paths. It was a densely populated promenade with theaters, schools, houses of worship, department stores for every price point, hotels and dining establishments, banks, and a center of local and county government. Though transformed over time by catastrophic fires, highway projects and the construction of a major government center complex under urban renewal, Main Street maintains many of its accrued assets and continues to be an important linkage between north and south neighborhoods. The potential to revive its mixed-use walkable and social urban characteristics -- both by restoring its physical density and through the introduction of more stores, businesses and cultural venues in existing buildings -- is supported by three factors: the density of residential neighborhoods such as **Corky Row** that abut it, its renewed connection to the waterfront brought about by recent investment in highway rerouting and waterfront beautification, and the presence of key businesses, developers and institutions already leading the way. Further, the central section of Main Street falls within a designated **opportunity zone**, with two adjacent census tracts also designated.



From top: a historic photo of the **Capitol Theater**. Founder Fatima Rodrigues and others gather as Mayor Josee Correia undertakes the ribbon cutting of the renovated theater building. The interior of the restored Capitol Theater, showing the restored entry level of the theater.

Transformation Underway

Alexandra's Boutique personifies Main Street's potential. Founded by Fatima Rodrigues, the bridal boutique carries the largest selection of custom designer wedding gowns in New England and an extension collection of formal wear. A Fall River native, Fatima's entrepreneurial vision has led her to lease or acquire five separate buildings on Main Street. The most recent is the **Capitol Theater**, which opened in 1926 and was designed by Maude Darling Parin, the city's first female architect and the first female graduate of MIT. The building's entry level now serves as a dedicated showroom for the Jovani brand and the company intends to revive the once elegant 1,500 seat theater as an iconic event space.

- Profile who is there already and show their impact.

- Seven pages total
- Shared at Taste Fall River
- Note range of people represented

5

4) Examples / Best Practices:

The collage consists of eight photographs arranged in a grid-like fashion. The top row features a modern building with a glass facade and a large 'MARKET BASKET' sign on a brick building. The middle row shows a historic brick building and a man holding a beer. The bottom row includes a modern building with a glass facade, a man holding a beer, and a group of people sitting at a table. The photos highlight the diverse architectural and community landscape of New Bedford.

- 38 pages total
- Intros from MassDevelopment and Mayor
- Tour day program, property profiles and maps
- New Bedford summary information - history, industries, culture, momentum, contact info

The New Downtown



Throughout our history, New Bedford has always been a creative and diverse community. During the 19th century, when the whaling industry fueled New Bedford's economy, acclaimed artists, such as Albert Bierstadt, William Bradford, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and Clifford Ashley lived and worked in this cosmopolitan seaport.

Today, New Bedford's downtown is the arts and culture center of the SouthCoast of Massachusetts, boasting a wide array of attractions and diverse venues that showcase the historic, artistic, and cultural fabric of a community that is home to hundreds of artists and performers contributing to our distinct seaport identity.

Downtown is home to nearly 600 establishments, with over 6,500 employees, and \$500 million in annual business sales. Regional business clusters exist in printing and publishing, depository institutions, real estate, legal services, accounting and consulting services, and administration of human resource programs. There is a strong potential to build clusters in health services, educational services, and eating and drinking establishments.

Competitive advantages include developable space, the National Park, existing business and arts and culture clusters, parking and public transportation, proximity to the working waterfront, and superior access to large regional consumer and business markets.

Since 2007, 60 businesses have opened or expanded in downtown New Bedford. We see that trend continuing with a new hotel, 4 additional establishments and residential projects scheduled to break ground or open in the next year.

"New Bedford is where the arts, history, culture and commerce intersect in a pedestrian friendly downtown. Come see why Richard Florida ranked New Bedford among the best cities in America for artists to live and work."

ADRIAN TIO, FORMER DEAN OF THE UMASS DARTMOUTH
COLLEGE OF VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

5) Summary of Best Practices

1. **Be people centric!** Show vibrancy - people doing things and enjoy themselves. Let your existing entrepreneurs and civic-minded citizens be your storytellers. Support **first person storytelling** with data.
2. **Quality and content** of photos (and video) matter. Even empty buildings are beautiful and suggest possibility when photographed well. Use images from social media / prior publication (with permission); commission photos if necessary.
3. Focus on articulating your **community vision** and you will attract developers/investors/ businesses well matched with your community values.
4. Think of this an **evolving project**, especially because data will change. Plan/budget for periodic updates. This opens up opportunities for creativity.
5. The **process** is as important as the product.



2019 River Rat Race - Athol Daily News. Staff file photo/ Dan Little

Questions?

(see following pgs)

Thank you!

LRRP SME Review: July 13, 2021
Laurie Zapalac, PhD



1) Potential additional data to collect prior to developing a toolkit and/or planning a developer tour?

I would recommend collecting this data as 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. Even 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:

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

*Questions 1 & 2 are somewhat redundant with the LRRP survey but are helpful for context.

Property owners:

1. When was the last time you made a substantial improvement in your property? What was it?
2. If financed: How was it financed? Where is the lender based? Was it difficult to obtain financing?
3. What are your main concerns about investing in your property? What data would help you?
4. 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 your existing networks):

1. 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?

Developer kit / tours - impacts:

New Bedford: James McKeag, former New Bedford MassDevelopment TDI Fellow (and current Fall River Fellow). Email: jmckeag@massdevelopment.com

Lynn: Joe Mulligan, former Lynn MassDevelopment TDI Fellow. Email: jmulligan3@earthlink.net

2) How to deal with landlords who do not maintain property?

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 around issues.
5. 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. Do property owners express interest in rent or selling but fail to take action? 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. If maintenance is an issue across multiple buildings, 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.



ADVANCE LORD POND PLAZA SME CONSULTATION

By: The Musicant Group for the City of Athol

To: Whitney Burdge
Stantec Plan Facilitator

From: The Musicant Group
Max Musicant, Ella Rasp, Linda Spohr

Re: SME Consultation for Advance Lord Pond Plaza

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you on the Lord Pond Plaza project. Our notes and recommendations are below. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or would like to work with The Musicant Group further on implementing any of these initiatives.

Activating the Space Prior to Development: Gaining Project-Based Feedback

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.

Activating 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.

Tips for Events 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.

Tips for Space 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.

“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.

Timeline recommendations for temporary improvements

- If the NE Plaza is chosen, those could be done throughout the year.
- Given the scale of the Pond Plaza, a one-time demonstration event may be the best place to start.
- 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.

Approaches for data collection

- Lowest input option: 2 hour counts/observations at least three times before and after improvements to see change in behavior.
- Time lapse cameras from on top of a nearby building would be a great way to track movement 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’d like to see incorporated going forward).

Funding sources

- 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.

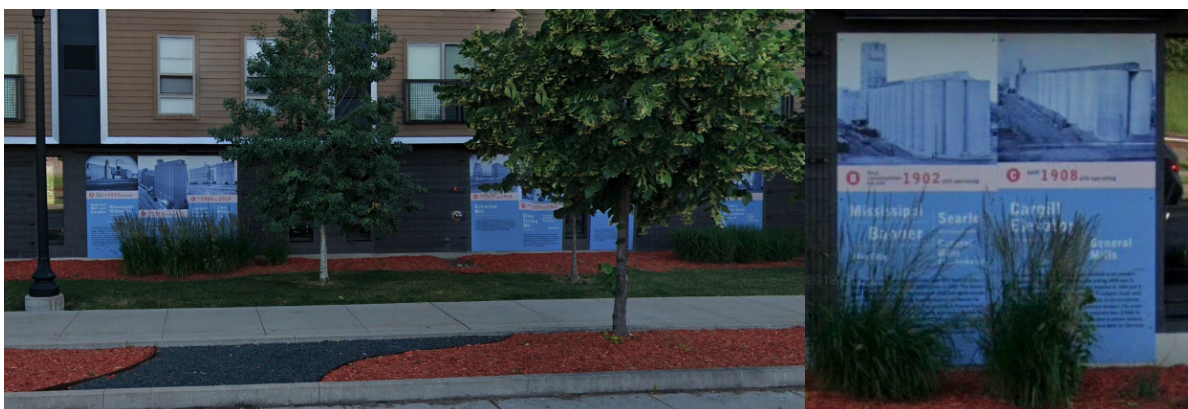
Other Notes: Semis Parking in Pond Plaza

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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).
4. Keep the area sectioned off and see how traffic and semi parking flows change.
5. Adapt as needed.

General Notes on the Design

We see a lot of benefit in creating a strong connection to the NE plaza space, even with the near term barriers with pavement quality. This could be a main entry point to Lord Pond Plaza, accessible from a major intersection which creates an active edge and strong visibility of the activities there.

The southern edge of the plaza space meets large, blank building walls. Part of the design process could incorporate art on these buildings to add interest and a backdrop to the space. Local artists could design murals; or the wall space could be a canvas to provide history of the plaza or town. (Here is an example image of some project information + historic interpretation along a public trail and housing development.)



For more on The Musicant Group, please visit our website www.musicantgroup.com or contact info@musicantgroup.com for further support on implementing your vision.



POP-UP STOREFRONTS SME CONSULTATION

By: The Musicant Group for the City of Athol

To: Whitney Burdge
Stantec Plan Facilitator

From: The Musicant Group
Max Musicant, Ella Rasp, Linda Spohr

Re: SME Consultation for Pop-up Storefronts

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you on the Pop-up Storefronts project. Our notes and recommendations are below. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or would like to work with The Musicant Group further on implementing any of these initiatives.

Selecting Storefronts for the program

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.

Increasing landlord and property-owner 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.

Recruitment and Selection of Activations

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, etc.
- 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

Implementation and Management Approaches

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.

Funding: Given that this is the first time this has been tried and there may be low demand, a strategy that could help would be the provision of micro grants to support temporary users in their occupancy of the space. Explore funding ideas for payment to both owners/landlords and participants. (Ideas: Lions or Masons, Downtown Vitality Committee Members, Community

Foundations - Worcester or North x Community Coalition, Library or Friends of the Library, Cultural Council, grandt, Community Redevelopment Corporation).

Regulatory/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.

Resources

The Musicant Group - Friendly Storefronts Toolkit - <http://www.musicantgroup.com/free-ideas.html>

This toolkit provides ideas for activating occupied storefronts, but the tactics for tactical improvements are applicable to pop up spaces too!

Freespace Toolkit - San Francisco - <http://freespace.io/toolkit/>

This toolkit is based on a project with a wealth of creative culture to build from, but the structure of how they approached finding and utilizing their space may be helpful as you go down this path.

