



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Williamstown,
Massachusetts



This plan has been made possible through technical assistance provided by the Baker-Polito Administration's Local Rapid Recovery Planning program.



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

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

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

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Acknowledgements



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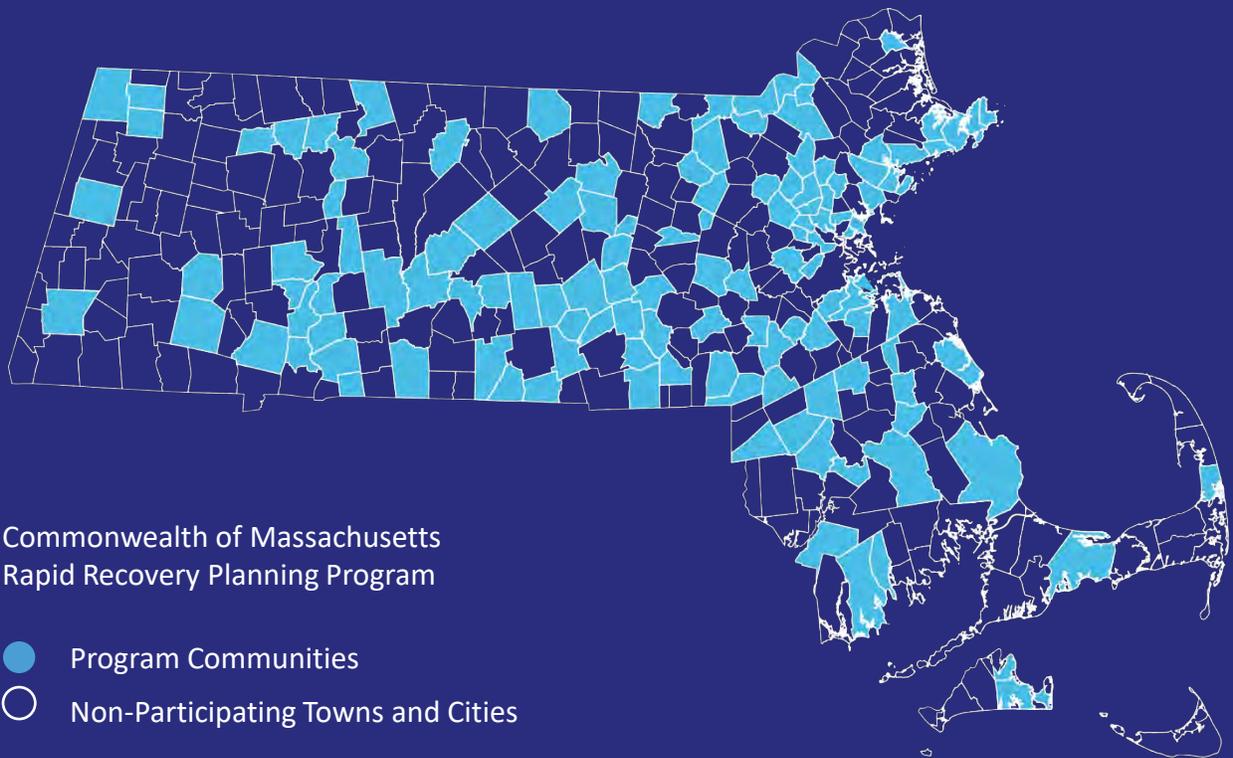
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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



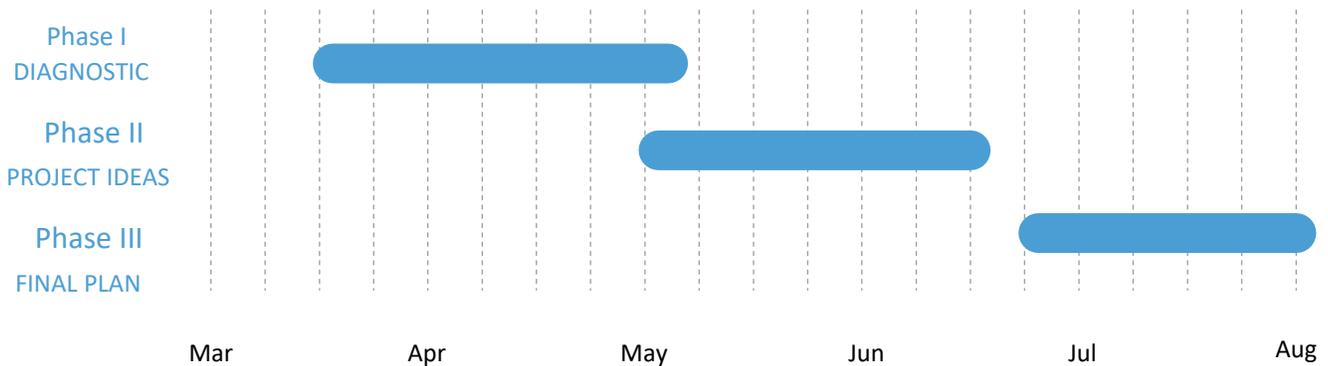
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

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

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue/Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, businesses have had to significantly reduce their dining rooms and sales floors (i.e. customers per square foot of sales floor). The top priority is to create safe, attractive, and usable outdoor spaces that businesses can access to extend their footprint.

The second priority is to improve the visual streetscape of the Study Area. To create a high-quality design incorporating walking paths, street trees, seasonal plantings, and street lighting that will contribute to an appealing public realm while preserving and enhancing the downtown character.

COVID-19 has highlighted the lack of larger outdoor spaces within the Study Area that can accommodate safe gatherings. By encouraging community involvement through events and social gatherings, the community can continue to support the downtown's economic vitality.

The pandemic has highlighted the lack of appropriate space for pedestrians and nonmotorized transportation in the downtown area. The hope is to correct this long-term issue with this Local Rapid Recovery Plan. A safe and attractive pedestrian environment is a critical component of a successful town center.

The pandemic has shown the lack of larger outdoor gathering spaces that will allow the community partners to host events that rebuild and reinforce community cohesion. Downtown revitalization is a holistic one; that it addresses economic and community development needs; and that it provides a framework of interrelated activities that promote positive change in a downtown to keep it healthy and prosperous.

In the medium to long term planning discussions, the community needs to address the number of businesses that shuttered their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the Downtown District areas - Water Street - is practically void of businesses now. The Town and Chamber of Commerce need to work on a long-term business recruitment and retention strategy to support local merchants and that will stabilize the business district. A successful downtown revitalization requires a healthy mix of businesses, residences, and civic spaces that is adaptable to change, sustainable, and appropriate to the district.

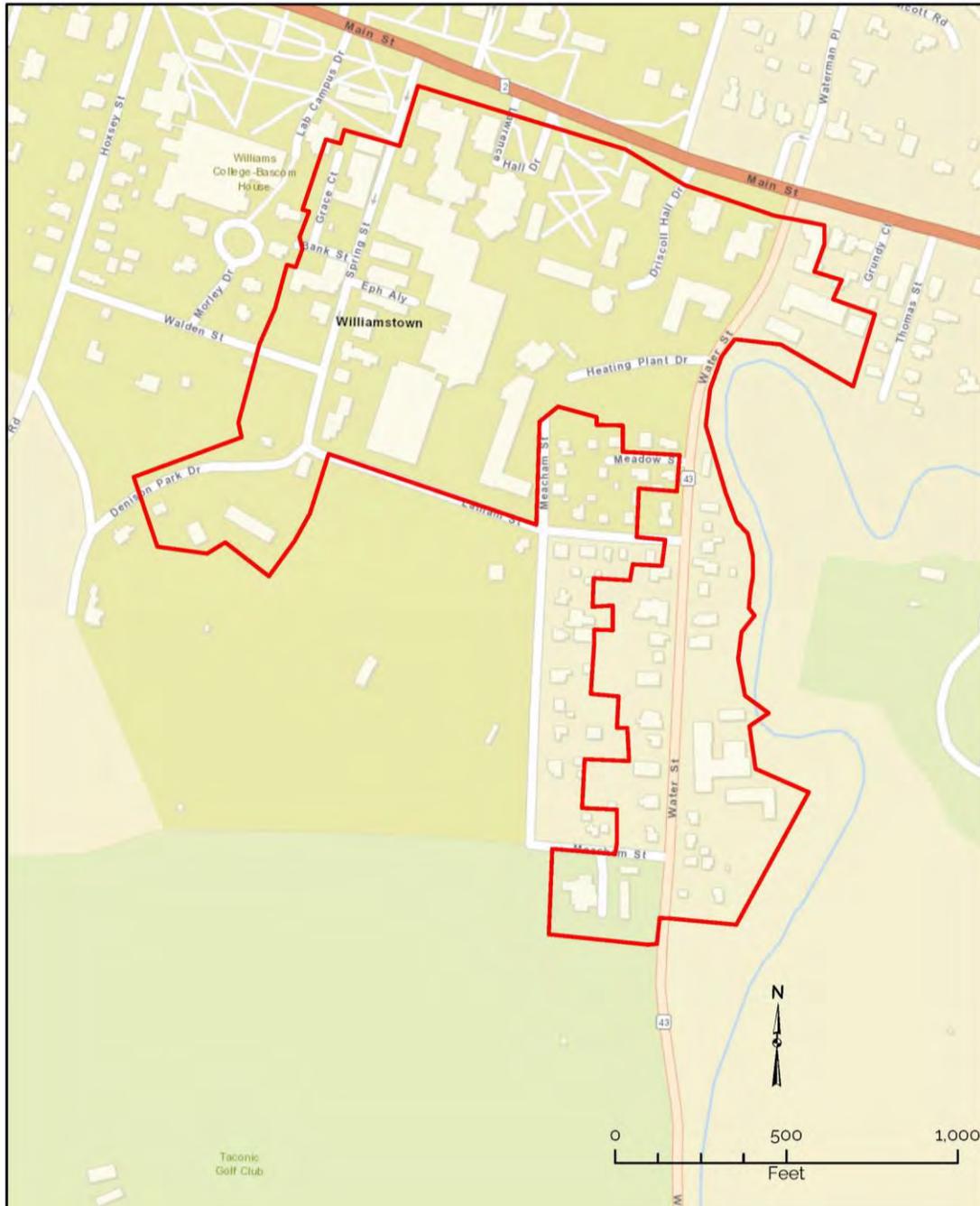
The Williamstown Chamber of Commerce will work directly with the Town of Williamstown and business leaders who own businesses within the Study Area. The Chamber's direct connection with the local business community offers a great opportunity for a fast, effective, and direct collaboration with key constituents. The Chamber of Commerce will partner with the Town of Williamstown to mobilize municipal resources, such as the Public Works Department, to assist with design implementation.

The goal is to create an actionable plan that incorporates a high-quality streetscape design of pedestrian walking paths, crosswalks, street trees, seasonal plantings and decorations, street lighting, seating, and gathering areas that will contribute to an appealing public realm that residents and visitors perceive as safe, active, and pedestrian friendly. Public input is very important in Williamstown. Part of the planning process has involved public forums where our businesses and residents can hear, learn from, and engage with the consultant, creating buy-in for what ultimately becomes the action plan.

Downtown Williamstown: Study Area

The Study Area is composed of two main commercial corridors; Spring Street and Water Street. These two streets run parallel and are connected by both Main Street and Latham Street. Spring Street has the most commercial activity and is home to the vast majority of businesses within the Study Area. Much of Spring Street has ground-level commercial uses and housing on the upper floors of the buildings.

Downtown Williamstown Local Rapid Recovery Planning





The Williams Bookstore. Source: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Strengthening Local Businesses

The Williamstown Local Rapid Recovery Plan has identified a mix of infrastructure improvements and organizational capacity related projects. It is important to recognize that there are infrastructure improvements and organizational capacity elements within each project that will influence budgets, timelines, and personnel. Williamstown, being a relatively small town in the Commonwealth, comes with pros and cons for implementing resources (both physical and staffing). Being a small town, there is excellent communication between public and private sectors; town authorities work coherently and collaboratively on projects and are fortunate to have a strong working relationships. However, small town resources are often stretched to the limits. It will be critical for Williamstown to recognize capacity limitations. Ultimately, these projects will ensure the health and longevity of the Town and its small-business community.

Infrastructure improvements will require collaboration and strategic relationships with the Town of Williamstown and the Commonwealth, as well as private and nonprofit partners. Understanding the project stakeholders and maintaining open communication, will allow projects to move forward. By creating seats at the table for the right people to collaborate, we can take the Infrastructure improvements projects from planning to shovel ready.

The organizational capacity decisions must be intentional and sustainable. Utilizing outside consultants and subject matter experts will maximize personnel. The goal is to deliver services and products that not only satisfy present community expectations, but continually anticipate future marketplace opportunities. Successful capacity building will strengthen the ability to have a positive impact on the community and the businesses within the Downtown district.

Diagnostic

Key Findings



The Study Area’s customer base is young and well-educated

The American Community Survey conducted by the Census Bureau estimates that Williamstown residents have a median age of 29.0 years old. This is significantly lower than the median age of Berkshire County residents as a whole: 47.1 years old. Additionally, 38.9% of the population age twenty-five and over have attained graduate or professional degrees which is more than double the rate of Berkshire County (14.9%).



The Study Area has good public infrastructure

The public infrastructure within the Study Area was divided into separate categories and then graded accordingly. The categories are as follows:

- Windows
- Outdoor displays / dining
- Signage
- Awnings
- Facades
- Lighting

Overall, the Study Area has good public infrastructure but there are some categories that need improvement. Sidewalks received an “A” grade because more than 75% of sidewalks in the Study Area are cleaned, well-maintained, and accessible to multiple users across different ages and abilities. Roadbeds and crosswalks received a “B” grade because roads are designed primarily to move motor vehicles across the Study Area efficiently, with limited crosswalks for pedestrians.

Finally, wayfinding and signage received a “C” grade because there is limited to no signage throughout the Study Area. The main signs are at either end of the Spring Street corridor, but this only consists of two signs. There is one public sign on Water Street that identifies restaurants and shops on Water Street, but the sign is small. For pedestrians, the sign is located well above eye level so it is easily overlooked and for automotive traffic the sign is small and would be hard to notice while driving.



Highlights from the Physical Environment

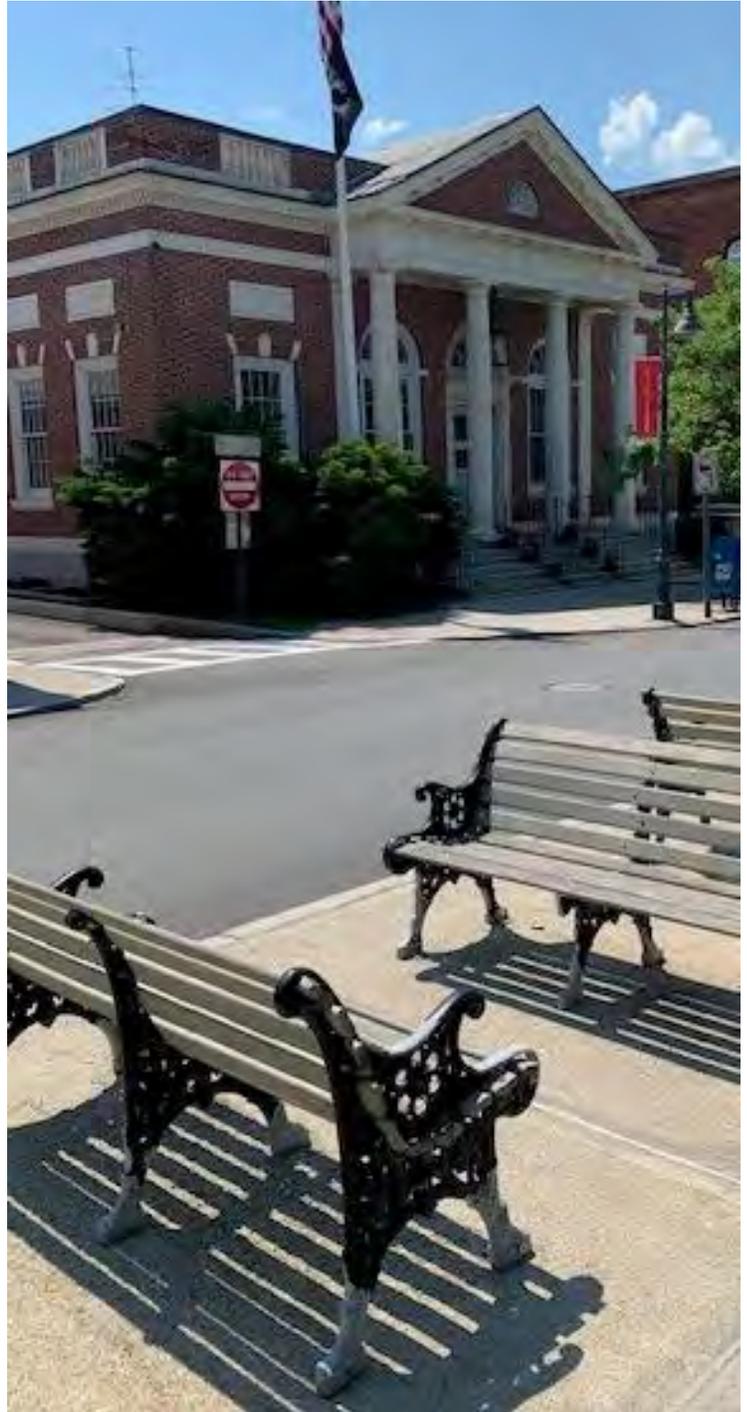
SIDEWALKS AND LIGHTING

The Study Area has exemplary sidewalks and lighting. Sidewalks are contiguous and in excellent condition. Slightly uneven sidewalks that may present a trip hazards are highlighted with spray paint to alert pedestrians.

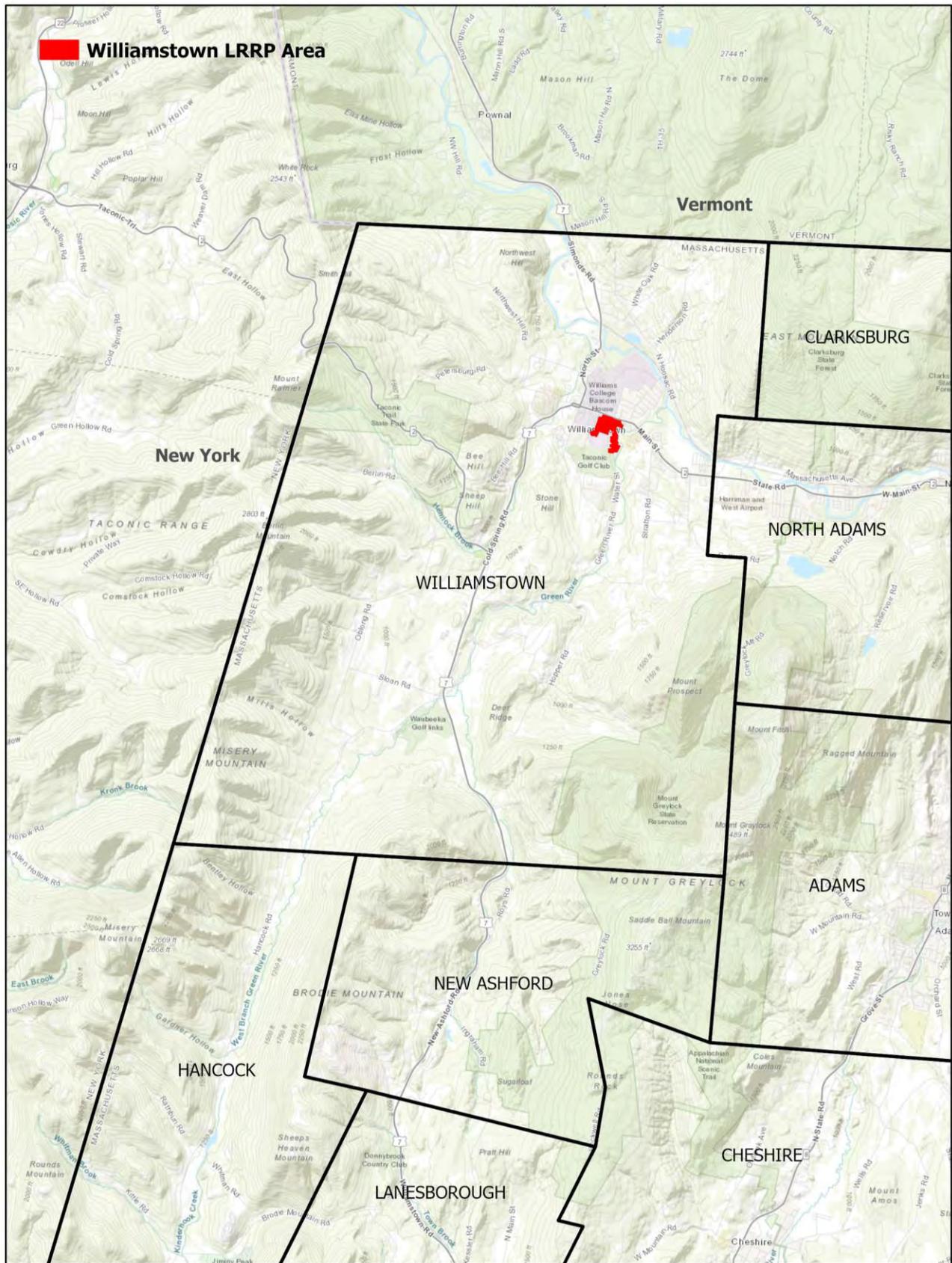
The public street lighting more than adequately illuminates all streets within the Study Area. The lighting from private businesses within the Study Area coupled with the public street lighting creates a streetscape that is easy to navigate and safe for visitors and patrons.

THE PRIVATE REALM

The physical environment of the private realm received an "A" grade in all categories. This means that more than 75% of storefronts maintain windows with at least 70% transparency, more than 75% of storefronts feature attractive window displays and/or spillover merchandise and dining areas that align with brand and identity of the Study Area, more than 75% of storefront signs reflect the unique brand identity of tenants and can be easily seen from more than a 10 foot distance, more that 75% of properties within the Study Area have retractable awnings that have been well-maintained, more than 75% of properties have well-maintained facades and limited structural enhancements are required, and more than 75% of storefronts have lighting that help illuminate sidewalks.



Sidewalks, crosswalk, and public benches. Source: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



Map of Region. Source: Plan Facilitator



Highlights from the Business Environment

TITLE OF SECTION: ANCHORS/DESTINATIONS

The majority of businesses in the Study Area are located on Spring Street. There are a total of 77 businesses in the Study Area and 10 vacant storefronts. The total ground-floor commercial vacant spaces is 13,100 square feet. Typically, the rent asked ranges from \$16 to \$20 per square foot.

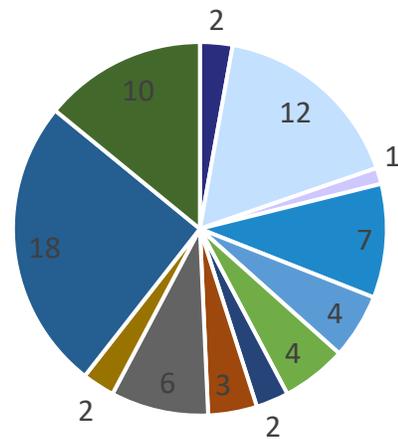
TITLE OF SECTION: NODES/CLUSTERS

As mentioned previously, most of the businesses are located along Spring Street. However, there are small clusters of business located on Water Street as well. One of the challenges experienced in the Study Area is the lack of connectivity between Spring Street and Water Street. People who visit businesses on Water Street are there because they already have a destination in mind rather than patrons of Spring Street businesses organically flowing from Spring Street to Water Street. This is exacerbated by a lack of signage to direct visitors.



Water Street Signage. Source: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Number of Businesses



- Construction
- Retail
- Information
- Finance and insurance
- Real estate
- Professional
- Admin. and waste management
- Education
- Health care
- Arts and entertainment
- Food
- Other

Mix of business by NAICS category. Source: US Census Bureau



Spring Street, outdoor restaurant seating. Source: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Market Information

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic information can be collected at the Census Tract level to better understand trends in small areas. However, Census Tract boundaries do not align with the boundaries of the Study Area. For this reason, this section provides information about Williamstown as a whole so the information presented herein comes with a higher degree of accuracy.

Unlike many Berkshire County towns and cities, Williamstown has a young population. The largest age cohort in town is people between the age of 20 and 24. This is largely due to Williams College. The population is also well educated – having earned a Master’s Degree or higher – and generally earn higher incomes than some neighboring municipalities. Williamstown has one of the most racial diverse populations in the County. All this translates to an eclectic population that fuels the business activity in the Study Area.

PARKLETS AND PLAZAS

The business environment is coupled with outdoor amenities that provide space for visitors to gather. This was crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic because there were outdoor options for visitors to socialize and eat.

The Study Area has several small areas that provide outdoor seating and green space. However, there are some underutilized areas, such as alleyways, that could be altered to promote more outdoor activity. This will be detailed later in this plan.

Project Recommendations

1. Improve Wayfinding and Community Branding.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	Chamber of Commerce and through a public meeting and the results of the survey
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) Potential Funding Sources: National Endowment for the Arts Grant, MassWorks Infrastructure Program, TDI Creative Catalyst
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk – stakeholders and members of the public agree that wayfinding can be improved, as demonstrated through questionnaire responses.
Key Performance Indicators	Installation of the physical wayfinding signage and then increases to pedestrian foot traffic, daily automotive traffic counts, and increases to local business revenue.
Partners & Resources	The Clark, Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown Chamber of Commerce

Signage in Study Area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Diagnostic

During the diagnostic phase of the plan, public signage and wayfinding received grades of B and C on the different streets of the Study Area. This means signage was limited throughout the Study Area and was mainly geared towards automotive traffic rather than pedestrian or cyclists.

The impacts of COVID-19 did not increase or decrease the amount of signage, but Williamstown hosts many tourists and with businesses reopening in the wake of the pandemic, visitors will rely on appropriate signage to navigate town and discover businesses and cultural institutions.

Action Item

Improving wayfinding in town will focus on directing visitors to local cultural institutions such as The Clark, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Williams College Museum of Art, etc. and local businesses within the Study Area. Additionally, hiring an outside consultant will be necessary to improve community branding.

The key action that will be taken is the physical installation of new signage. This includes directories, street banners, and directional signage. Signage will have to be strategically located to maximize visibility and its effectiveness.



Signage for local business. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Process

- It is recommended to hire a consultant that can work with the town to determine the brand standards which will be incorporated into the new signage. Additionally, the consultant can provide guidance on strategic locations for signage to maximize effectiveness. Case studies have shown that a lack of administrative capacity – for example, not being able to create digital renderings of the signage – can prevent this project from being realized.
- The approval process of the proposed new signage should follow local sign regulations and should have a public participation component so the community can provide feedback. This requires review of local zoning to determine if and/or what the permitting process is and the necessary steps that need to be taken. The public participation portion can be held in the form of a charette when residents and local business owners can view different options for design.
- Finalizing the wayfinding sign design can involve the installation of temporary signs which may have more lenient approval process compared to permanent signs. The efficacy of the temporary signs can be tracked to determine whether changes need to be made to create the final design.



Storefront on Spring Street. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



Wayfinding on Fairmount Greenway



PUBLIC
REALM

Provided by SME Consultant

CivicSpace Collaborative

Location

Boston, MA

Origin	Fairmount Greenway Task Force
Budget	 Low Budget (approximately \$10,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term (approximately 10 weeks)
Risk	 Low Risk: Temporary installation requiring no major construction, low cost, no City approvals needed
Key Performance Indicators	Installation of twelve wayfinding signs to mark 1.5 miles of the Fairmount Greenway route. Increase usage of bike share programs, pedestrian walkways, and T-rider ship.
Partners & Resources	Fairmount Greenway Task Force, Neighborhood Associations, DotBike, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, City of Boston Transportation Department, The Trust for Public Land, Civic Space Collaborative
Diagnostic	<p>The Fairmount Greenway is an on-street cycling and walking route, also known as a "neighborhood greenway" or "neighborway", that links MBTA stations, business districts, open space, and other developing neighborhood amenities along the MBTA's Fairmount/Indigo Rail Line. Currently, along the Fairmount Corridor in Dorchester residents fear cycling and walking in their neighborhoods due to a lack of safe infrastructure. Wayfinding signs, combined with on-street improvements part of the Boston Transportation Department's Slow Zone program such as shared lane markings ("sharrows"), district signage, speed humps, and bulb-outs, comprise the treatments for the Greenway. In addition, Blue Bike Stations have been installed further south in Dorchester with four stations along this 1.5-mile stretch.</p> <p>During the pandemic, we have seen arise in cycling across the nation, in Boston, and especially among Black and Brown people. With the increase in people cycling and walking, the Fairmount Greenway route signs are incredibly timely. This summer, we anticipate seeing an increase in walking and cycling along the Fairmount Greenway to reach business districts, the Fairmount Line, and recreation to reach regional parks and greenways, such as the Neponset River Greenway, Franklin Park, the Emerald Necklace, and Southwest Corridor.</p>
Action Item	<p>Boston's nine-mile Fairmount Greenway is a life-changing development, connecting Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, and Hyde Park with a route that links parks, green space, on-street bike routes, trails, transit stations, and city squares. Since 2008, the Greenway's 10-member task force have been working with the City of Boston and multiple other organizations on this long-term vision to connect the Fairmount communities to the heart of Boston. More than 1,000 residents have joined in planning, designing, and implementing Greenway park, streets, and greenway projects.</p> <p>In 2021, the Fairmount Greenway installed wayfinding signs to mark a 1.5-mile on-street route of the Fairmount Greenway in Dorchester near Four Corners and Codman Square. The wayfinding signs were updated to include key neighborhood destinations and mark the on-street route in February 2021. Twelve signs were printed on corrugated plastic and installed with residents in May 2021.</p>

Process

Planning + Design

- Fairmount Greenway concept development (2008 – 2010): The Fairmount Greenway concept first emerged in 2008 for an on-street walking and biking route that loosely follows the MBTA Fairmount Rail Line. In 2011, the Fairmount Greenway Concept Plan was published, outlining 10 to 20 years of phased developments, portions of which were incorporated into the Mayor's Go Boston 2030 plan.
- Signage branding, design, and placement (2013 – 2014): The Fairmount Greenway Task Force (FGTF) worked with MAPC to create a wayfinding system, utilizing existing street poles to attach signs. The FGTF worked on branding the Greenway sign design process and solicited feedback from the City of Boston's transportation department. Based on the City's comments, additional destinations were added to the signs to create wayfinding signs.
- Approval Process: The original request to the City was to install metal signs, but due to lack of funding for the required CAD drawings, the signs were not installed.
- Finalizing wayfinding sign design (2021 – 4 weeks): In 2020, the FGTF received funding for temporary signs through a grant from The Trust for Public Land. The temporary signs did not require approval from the City as they were made of corrugated plastic. The wayfinding signs design were updated for 1.5 miles on Fairmount Greenway to include the route directions, Fairmount Station, and local parks.



Key spaces to connect and a Fairmount Greenway map



Photo of Michelle Moon with the test print, final signage design

Process (Continued)

Installation

- Material Acquisition: The wayfinding signs PDF were sent to a local, minority-owned print shop in Mattapan. A test sign and twelve final signs were printed on 12 x 18-inch corrugated plastic sheets for \$250. Additional materials needed include zip-ties to attach the signs to street poles and a drill to add holes to the signs.
- Installation Day: A group of 4-6 volunteers will install the signs in May.
- Monitoring: WOW members will monitor the conditions of the signs and let the project team know if any are damaged and need to be replaced.



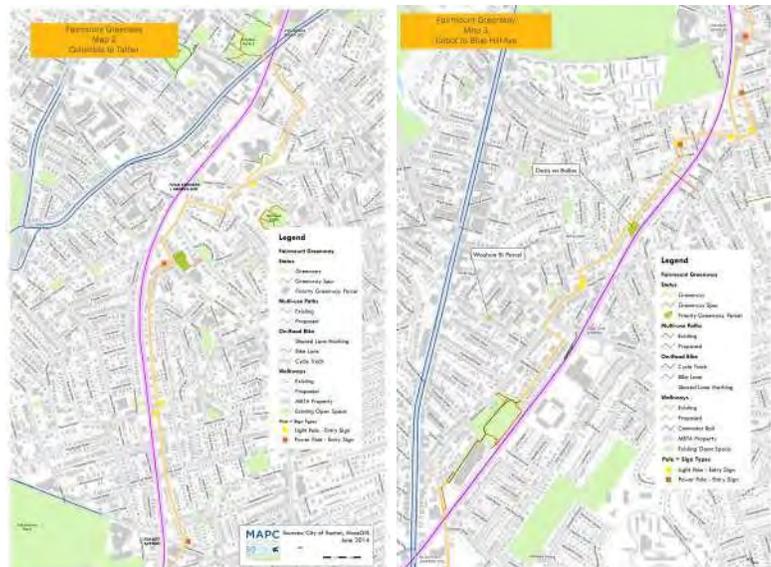
NEIGHBORWAY Mamelon Circle, Mattapan

Neighbor way on Mamel on Circle, Mattapan



PLAY STREET Magnolia Street, Dorchester

Play street programming concept along Fairmount Greenway Route in Dorchester



Fairmount Greenway Map with sign locations and types (Columbia to Talbot) and Map 3 (Talbot to Blue Hill Ave)

2. Create dedicated space for outdoor movies, concerts, art shows, etc.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	Chamber of Commerce and through a public meeting and the results of the survey
Budget	 <p>Low Budget (under \$50,000)</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources: MA Downtown Initiative Program, Commonwealth Places, Shared Streets and Spaces</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (<5 years)</p>
Risk	 <p>High Risk – many of the “public” areas are not actually public but owned by Williams College. There is a need for more physical infrastructure.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Hosting events and tracking the number of events held.
Partners & Resources	Williams College, Images Cinema, Williamstown Cultural District.

Outdoor courtyard and vacant storefront in Study Area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Diagnostic

This project responds to challenges created by COVID-19 by focusing on *outdoor* entertainment. Hosting outdoor events provides a setting where people can safely congregate while being socially distant. During the pandemic, many events had been cancelled because there was inadequate space for them to be held safely. Outdoor spaces not only presents a solution for the limitations of COVID-19 but encourages people to be outdoors which provides for a healthier and more vibrant downtown area.

Action Item

For this project recommendation, the noticeable actions will be if more outdoor events are held. One key challenge has been having outdoor areas that are covered. Many events require electronic equipment which cannot get wet from rain. In the past, event have been cancelled due to the possibility of rain. More adequate equipment could prevent future cancellations due to inclement weather.



Courtyard and outdoor seating. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Process

Since many of the outdoor spaces in the Study Area are owned by Williams College, the success of this project will rely on developing a partnership with the College to host these events. Additional steps will include designing adequate outdoor spaces to hold a variety of events and building infrastructure to host events with the potential for inclement weather.



Outdoor seating. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



Programming & Activating Open Streets



PUBLIC
REALM

Provided by SME Consultant

Jeanette Nigro—Perch Advisors LLC

Location

Brooklyn, New York City

Origin	Open Streets – Vanderbilt Avenue is led by Prospect Heights Neighborhood Development Council with support from Perch Advisors.
Budget	 <p>Medium Budget: Year 1 (2020) budget was less than \$20,000, but year 2 (2021) projected budget is approximately \$85,000</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (<5 years) The 2020 season of Open Streets Restaurants Vanderbilt Avenue was a pilot, and a process of continual experimentation, iteration and improvement from start to finish. As a pilot program, it was launched in a matter of weeks. The program was relaunched in 2021 with improvements to streetscape, business engagement, and community input.</p>
Risk	 <p>Medium Risk: Project needed extensive support from the community and required a high level of involvement from NYC DOT</p>
Key Performance Indicators	<p>Increased pedestrian traffic volume and use of roadway for safe cycling Increased self-reported revenue for participating businesses Increased job opportunities within the commercial corridor Reported increased engagement between the community and local businesses, deeper sense of connection between neighbors and the local business community Drop in traffic noise during times of program</p>
Partners & Resources	<p>NYC Department of Transportation, NYC Department of Sanitation, NYPD, Prospect Heights Neighborhood Development Council, Community Volunteers, restaurants, Perch Advisors</p>
Diagnostic	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses were forced to close their indoor spaces to customers as a result of local restrictions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, and evidence that increased rates of transmission take place indoors. As a result of lack of customers, many businesses struggled to cover costs. • The apartment buildings on Vanderbilt Avenue and adjacent blocks typically do not have private or communal outdoor space (terraces, balconies). There remained among community members a desire for safe spaces to gather to host socially distanced events such as family meals, birthday celebrations, children playing and community events. <p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDC guidelines suggest that COVID transmissions are significantly reduced outdoors. City streets offer open space for the local community to gather and interface with local businesses, so that businesses can recoup lost revenue. • Open Streets was introduced by New York City Mayor Bill DeBlasio as a citywide program allowing commercial streets to apply to New York City Department of Transportation for permits to close streets to vehicle traffic so that businesses, including restaurants and retail, can expand into the travel lanes of the roadway. • NYC's Open Streets program was developed through a partnership between NYC Department of Small Business Services, NYC Department of Transportation, and neighborhood-based community organizations representing local business communities, such as Business Improvement Districts, Merchants Associations, and Local Development Programs in neighborhoods throughout the 5 boroughs. • The Open Streets program transformed Vanderbilt Avenue into public square, providing a desperately needed opportunity to mingle, people watch and appreciate the pleasures of city life.

Action Items

Vanderbilt Avenue OpenStreets was piloted in 2020 by Prospect Heights Neighborhood Development Council (PHNDCC). The program was launched within a very quick time frame and was revised in 2021 to address challenges and opportunities presented in the first iteration of the program. The program allows communities to embrace new public space and support small businesses.

- Outreach to businesses to determine interest in participating in an Open Streets program
- Determine timing of proposed OpenStreets (once a week, every weekend)
- Secure support and needed permits from local Department of Transportation to close streets
- Determine staffing and fundraising plan (Paid staff will require a higher level of fundraising, while volunteers will require a higher level of management and coordination)
- Coordinate deployment of barriers and cones to close streets and indicate bike lanes -- either from DOT or privately purchased
- Determine seasonality of OpenStreets -- does it take place all year long? Only in the spring and summer?

Create long-term goals, in partnership with the local Department of Transportation's 10-year goals:

- Does the community seek to reduce or eliminate car usage? Encourage public transit? Long term plans might work in partnership with other city transportation objectives, such as building out public transportation and bike infrastructure
- Long term goals: Permanent OpenStreets – Use the temporary OpenStreets program and outcomes as a model for a permanent closed street setting

Process

Considerations in implementing such a program:

- OpenStreets programs should take place with some level of regularity, even if it's only once a week.

Example: Vanderbilt Avenue is the major traffic conduit between Prospect Park and South Brooklyn and Atlantic Avenue onwards to Manhattan. The Avenue sees heavy bike traffic (approximately 800 bikes per hour at its peak). Thus accommodations must be made for bike traffic, with a clear bike path.

- Make sure businesses have equitable access to open space.

Alternating sides of bike route so that businesses on one side of the street don't consistently lose the space for business. Businesses should pay proportionately to the amount of space they access.

- Make sure program can be sustained.

Activation of more permanent solutions to operating Open Streets likely to be funded through use of federal COMD relief funds that are intended for permanent pedestrian blocks, staffing, operations.

- Activate underutilized space in the Open Street with arts and cultural programming.

Ensure that members of the local artistic community have equal access to the opportunity to perform, create and install art.

Programming should be:

- Diverse and inclusive
- Last a reasonable amount of time (30 - 90 minutes)
- Take place at reasonable hours (not when neighbors may be sleeping)
- Family friendly
- Reasonable volumes so as not to disturb neighbors

The program was transformative to the neighborhood and helped 24 restaurant partners to survive complete closure of indoor shopping and dining due to COVID-19. Feedback from residents, visitors and businesses to PHNDC has been extremely positive and supportive of continuing in the future.

For a great article on the NYC OpenStreets Program, visit: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/12/17/nyregion/nyc-open-streets.html>

3. Increase the number of public trash and recycling bins in the Study Area.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	Chamber of Commerce and through a public meeting and the results of the survey
Budget	 Low Budget (under \$50,000) Potential Funding Sources: Hometown Grant Program, Massachusetts Recycling Fund
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk – there are already trash and recycling bins in the Study Area. This project would simply add more, or larger, bins.
Key Performance Indicators	Less visible litter on streets and sidewalks, and fewer overflowing bins.
Partners & Resources	Town of Williamstown

Trash and recycling bins in Study Area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Diagnostic

During the pandemic there has been an increase in patrons to businesses where food and beverages can be consumed outside in public spaces. While this has helped some businesses survive during the pandemic, it has also led to increased litter in the streets.



Action Item

The action item for this project is simple: having better trash and recycling bins throughout the Study Area and a reduction in the amount of litter in the streets and sidewalks.

Trash and recycling bins in Study Area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Process

The process for this project is to have a better understanding of the scope of the problem. Trash and recycling are collected daily (except Sunday) and yet there is still litter found on streets and sidewalks. This is in part caused by bins that are overflowing. This poses the question: should there be more bins throughout the Study Area, or should bins be larger to reduce overflow?



Trash and recycling bins in Study Area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

4. Widen sidewalks along Spring Street.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	Chamber of Commerce and through a public meeting and the results of the survey
Budget	 High Budget (\$200,000+) Potential Funding Sources: MassWorks Infrastructure Program, Commonwealth Places, MA Downtown Initiative Program
Timeframe	 Medium Term (5-10 years)
Risk	 High Risk – this project presents a short-term risk to the businesses located along Spring Street since it would involve street closure which will prevent both automotive and pedestrian traffic. Construction should be scheduled to limit the detriment to local businesses.
Key Performance Indicators	A safer, more enjoyable, and more socially distant pedestrian experience.
Partners & Resources	Town of Williamstown and Williams College as a partner.

Sidewalk and bumpout in Study Area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Diagnostic

Many of the sidewalks in the Study Area are barely wide enough to comply with the American Disabilities Act and Spring Street is wide enough to accommodate two parking lanes and still have enough space in the street for cars to double park and have automotive traffic pass double-parked cars. In short, the sidewalks are too narrow and the street is too wide.

Action Item

The action items for this project would include a complete street redesign to make the Study Area more pedestrian-centric rather than focusing on accommodating automotive vehicles. There is enough space – especially on Spring Street – to provide for pedestrians, cyclists, and automotive vehicles. Additionally, the parking arrangement could be reconfigured to allow more space for outdoor dining and bumpouts for more street trees.



Signage for local business. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

Process

The scale of this project is the largest of the projects proposed in this plan. It would involve a full-scale redesign and reengineering of the current street layout. It comes with the highest cost of all the projects and likely the longest time to complete. The success of this project will rely heavily on public and private funding and procurement.



Bumpout to crosswalk in Study Area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

5. More street trees, planters, and hanging baskets along Spring Street.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	Chamber of Commerce and through a public meeting and the results of the survey
Budget	 <p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources: Hometown Grant Program, MA Downtown Initiative Program</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (<5 years)</p>
Risk	 <p>Medium Risk – increasing the number of street trees will involve sidewalk reconfiguration which is expensive and can reduce the number of parking spaces and be disruptive to businesses.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Street beautification.
Partners & Resources	The Williamstown Garden Club, Town of Williamstown, and local vocational schools.

Image of X. Photo Credit: Flickr

Diagnostic

During the pandemic, more people have been drawn to outdoor spaces. The outdoor experience is enhanced by having greener streets. Additionally, greener streets create a more attractive downtown area which attracts more visitors and can bolster businesses in the Study Area.

Action Item

Although there were no harmful impacts of COVID-19 that this project seeks to address, the pandemic has made the town reevaluate the entire outdoor experience. To the Town's credit there are already green spaces and numerous planters and street trees in the Study Area, but this can be expanded.



Planters outside Williams Bookstore. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Process

One method of increasing the greenery in the Study Area is to use hanging baskets for plants on utility poles. There are already numerous street trees and planters in the Study Area and planting more street trees requires sidewalk reconstruction which can be costly. Hanging baskets could be a cheaper alternative but would require engineering of the baskets and researching the weight limits for the utility poles. Additionally, the baskets would require more maintenance than a typical street tree. Other components of the process could include paying a local vocational school to create the baskets and install them.



Street trees on Spring Street. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



Undertake a Public Planning and Visioning Process for the Public Realm



PUBLIC
REALM

Provided by SME Consultant

Dodson & Flinker

Location

Florence, Massachusetts

Origin	<p>Planning and visioning is a common function of community planning departments, regional planning agencies, and their consultants, and there are many great examples. Those included here are drawn from the experience of Dodson & Flinker and our client teams in Northampton, Turners Falls and Williamsburg.</p>
Budget	<p> Low Budget: (Under \$50k) depending on size and extent of project area and the goals of the project.</p>
Timeframe	<p> Short term: (less than 5 years) a typical master-planning and visioning process can be accomplished in less than a year, but the time frame needs to fit the community's specific needs and challenges relative to outreach, public involvement and consensus-building.</p>
Risk	<p> Low to Medium: With careful preparation and inclusion of all interests and community stakeholders, most people can be brought to the table. Forging a consensus among them is the point of the process.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	<p>Public support for necessary zoning and regulatory changes; increased funding and public investment in improvements and infrastructure; physical and policy changes adopted to implement the vision.</p>
Partners & Resources	<p>Downtown residents, landowners, businesses, government agencies, boards and commissions, non-profits, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Business Association.</p>

Diagnostic

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

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

Action Item

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

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

Process

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

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

Get Public Input Early and Often

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



Images from public workshops in Florence and Williamsburg

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

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



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

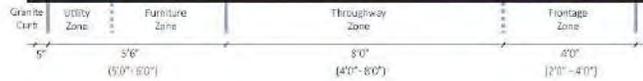
Reach out to Town Staff, Residents and Business Owners

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



Document How the Public Realm Works Today

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



Celebrate What's Working Well

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



Take Stock of What's Not Working So Well

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



Test Alternatives and Get Public Feedback

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



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



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

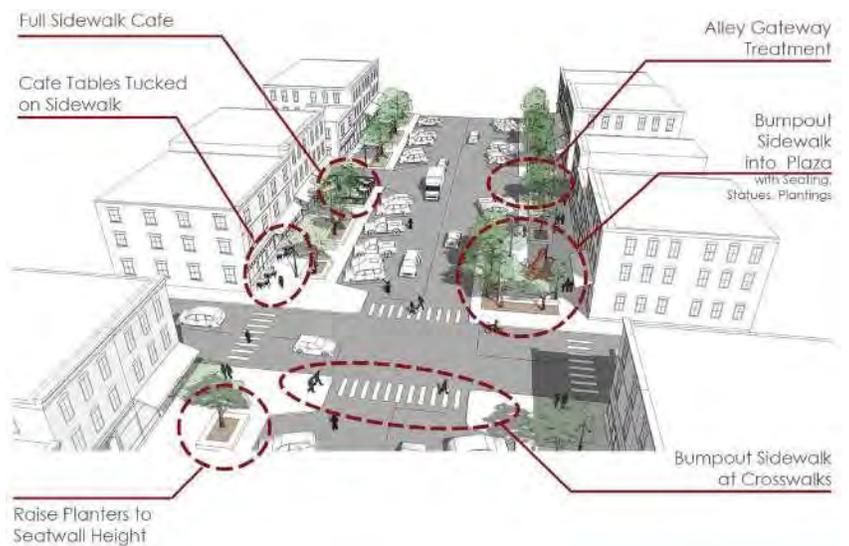
Visualizing Alternatives

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

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



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



Digital model showing potential Complete Streets improvements and streetscape amenities.

Visualizing Alternatives

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

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



Digital model showing existing conditions on Main Street in Florence.



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



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

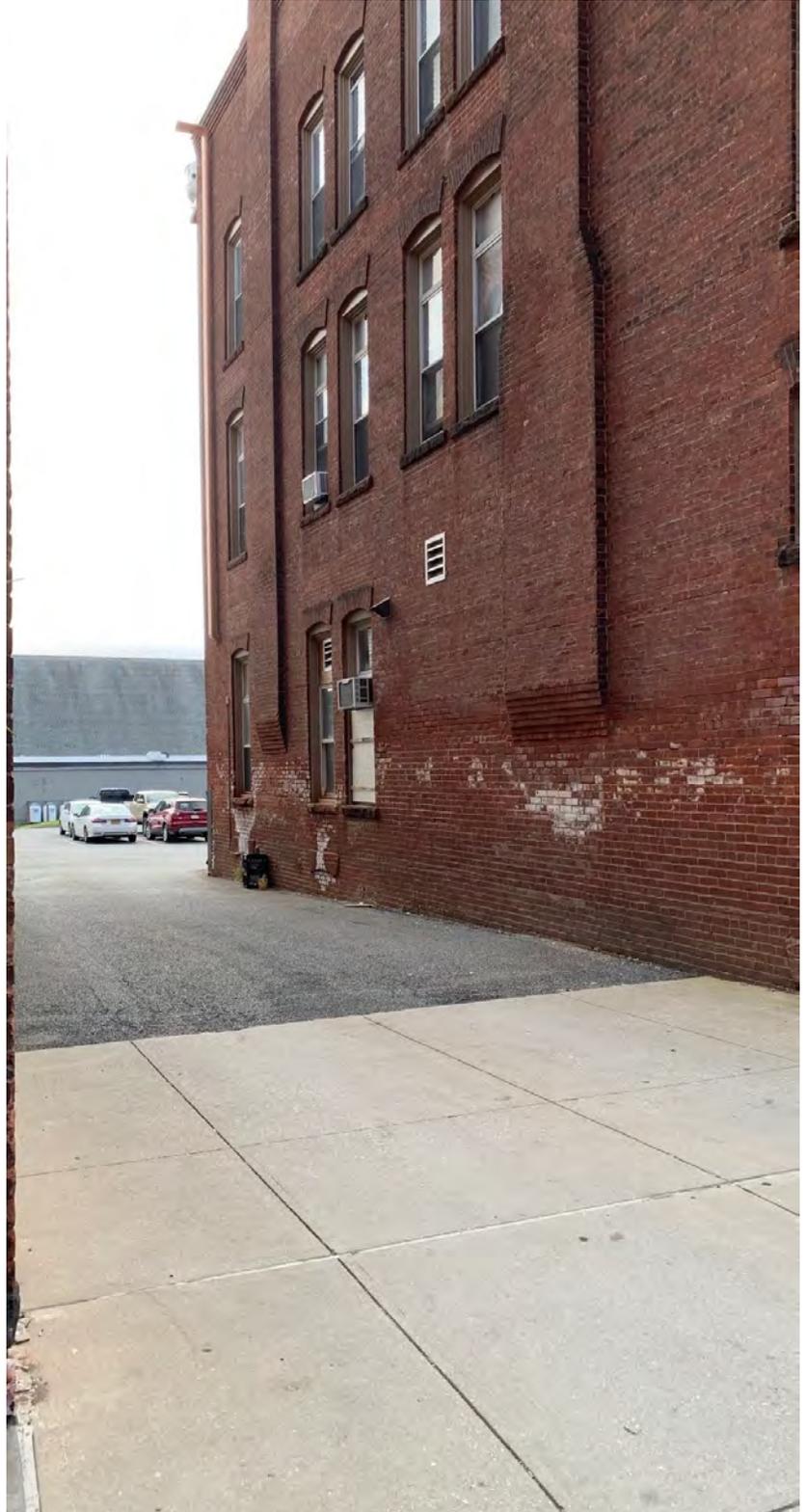
6. Create a park space by closing Eph Alley and Walden Street. Add tables, greenery, benches, lighting, etc.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	Chamber of Commerce and through a public meeting and the results of the survey
Budget	 <p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources: Shared Streets and Spaces, MA Downtown Initiative Program , Hometown Grant Program</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (<5 years)</p>
Risk	 <p>High Risk – all this space is privately owned. In the past there has been support of a temporary park space, but resistance to a permanent park space.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	People using the park space.
Partners & Resources	Town of Williamstown and Williams College.

Image of X. Photo Credit: Flickr

Diagnostic

This project capitalizes on a key opportunity identified during the diagnostic phase which is that people want to be outside because it presents a space where people can socialize safely. Using underutilized outdoor spaces is an easy way to create more outdoor spaces without drastically changing the downtown area.



Eph Alley. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Action Item

The action item for this project would be to implement a park space with grass, planters, etc. and benches where visitors can gather.

Process

Since the proposed space for this project is privately owned, this will be the biggest challenge. The Town will need to coordinate with the owner and garner their support and determine the funding required for implementation.



Public benches in Study Area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



Activate Alleys: Attract People to Under-Utilized Spaces



PUBLIC
REALM

Provided by SME Consultant

Neighborways Design

Location

Frost Alley Somernova Campus, Somerville, MA

Origin	Rafi Properties LLC / Somernova Campus, Neighborways Design, Principal Group
Budget	 Phase 1 and 2 - Labor Budget: \$30,000 Materials Budget: \$20,000
Timeframe	 Phase 1: 2 to 6 months Phase 2: 6 months to 2 years
Risk	 Coordinate approvals with private public partnerships for traffic flow changes, Fire department access, parking impacts
Key Performance Indicators	<p>Use: event registrations to track repeat visitors, non-event use to track how people use alley</p> <p>Modal split: increase walking and biking mode share</p> <p>Economic Impact: evaluate event and vendor profits</p> <p>User Feedback: Intercept surveys to capture user perceptions and feedback</p>
Partners & Resources	Somernova tenants, abutters, City of Somerville Traffic and Fire Departments, Somerville Groundworks (watering / maintenance) Green and Open Somerville (Native Plant Experts), Local nurseries

Diagnostic

Frost Alley is a 10-minute walk from one of Somerville's most active business districts, Union Square, and for years has been a desolate cut through dominated by vehicular traffic.

Working with the development team at Rafi Properties, the Alley Activation project aims to create a more inviting, artistic, and lively space for people walking, biking, and wheeling, and as a destination for events and enjoyment.

Using traffic calming, placemaking, and programming, the team has been engaging in planning and design efforts with abutters to vision the space.

Phase 1 involved existing conditions assessment, planning, and installing self-watering planters in the summer of 2020. In 2021 working with Green and Open Somerville, we planted over 200 native plants in self-watering planters. Branded as native Nova, the planters serve as an educational tool to encourage native pollinators and community engagement in ecological gardening.

Temporary public art was sprinkled on the pavement to celebrate Earth Day and create an engaging place for a pop-up market, Somerville Open Studios. The alley hosted over 20 vendors that would have otherwise not had a space to share their artisan crafts due to COVID-19.

Next steps are under way to engage local artists to implement unique and detailed art on the many blank walls and boarded up windows in the alley. Movable seating and an urban disc golf course will be installed to encourage activity and create a destination to spend time in, rather than pass through.

A youth design competition organized by a Groundworks Somerville, will engage high school students and offer prizes to the best design of custom planters.



Before



Concept Rendering



Phase 1: Traffic Calming via Self-Watering Planters, 2019

Diagnostic

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Action Items

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Youth design competition organized by a Groundworks Somerville, will engage high school students and offer prizes to the best design of custom planters.



Before



Concept Rendering



Phase 1: Traffic Calming via Self-Watering Planters, 2019

Process

1. Project Initiation and Planning: Establish project goals, define success and how to measure it. Conduct fieldwork and "negative space" assessment to determine available space to program with traffic calming and placemaking. Coordinate master planning efforts for area.
2. Community Design Process: Conduct feedback listening sessions to address challenges and vision opportunities for the future. Based on community feedback develop concept renderings and design plans for a phased implementation. Consider a range of finishes and cost options. Consider ways to involve the community including community design contests engaging students and local artists.
3. Implementation: estimate quantities and procure materials. Meet onsite for installation and assemble DIY self watering planters and plant native plants. Hire local artists to install unique art pieces in the alley.
4. Programming: Plan for temporary street closures and events in the alley. Consider hosting existing events in the space and plan new events such as pop-up markets, concerts, performances, walking tours, urban frisbee golf, food truck festivals, and rotating art installations.
5. Ongoing Monitoring / Maintenance: hire people to maintain and water planters to ensure plants survive.
6. Iteration and Evaluation: conduct before and after analysis including quantitative (e.g., speeds, volumes, revenue of businesses) and qualitative (e.g. photo, video, conversations, surveys) measures.

Lessons Learned

Keys to success: invest in an iterative public engagement strategy that provides multiple opportunities for engagement.

- Conduct door to door canvassing and flyerng
- Host online community feedback meetings
- Work to find a win-win when there are competing interests – clarify needs vs desires.

DIY self-watering planters to reduce maintenance and save on costs. Featured planters cost approximately \$250/ea with labor and materials vs similar sized planters can range in cost from \$500- \$700.

Challenges / Lessons Learned:

- Provide multiple opportunities and advanced notice to engage the community
- Vandalism and theft are opportunities to bring the community together and iterate improvements.



DIY Self watering planter construction.



Temporary painting and native pollinator garden installation

7. Create more space for restaurants to utilize outdoor dining.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	Chamber of Commerce and through a public meeting and the results of the survey
Budget	 <p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources: Commonwealth Places, Shared Streets and Spaces, MA Downtown Initiative Program, Restaurant Revitalization Fund</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (<5 years)</p>
Risk	 <p>Medium Risk – more space for outdoor dining may cause a reduction in the number of parking spaces.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Additional outdoor seating for restaurants.
Partners & Resources	Town of Williamstown

Image of X. Photo Credit: Flickr

Diagnostic

This COVID-19 pandemic has shown that restaurant patrons will utilize outdoor seating if it is available. Some restaurants in the Study Area have already dedicated space for outdoor seating but this can be expanded to make more dining options for restaurants-goers.

Action Item

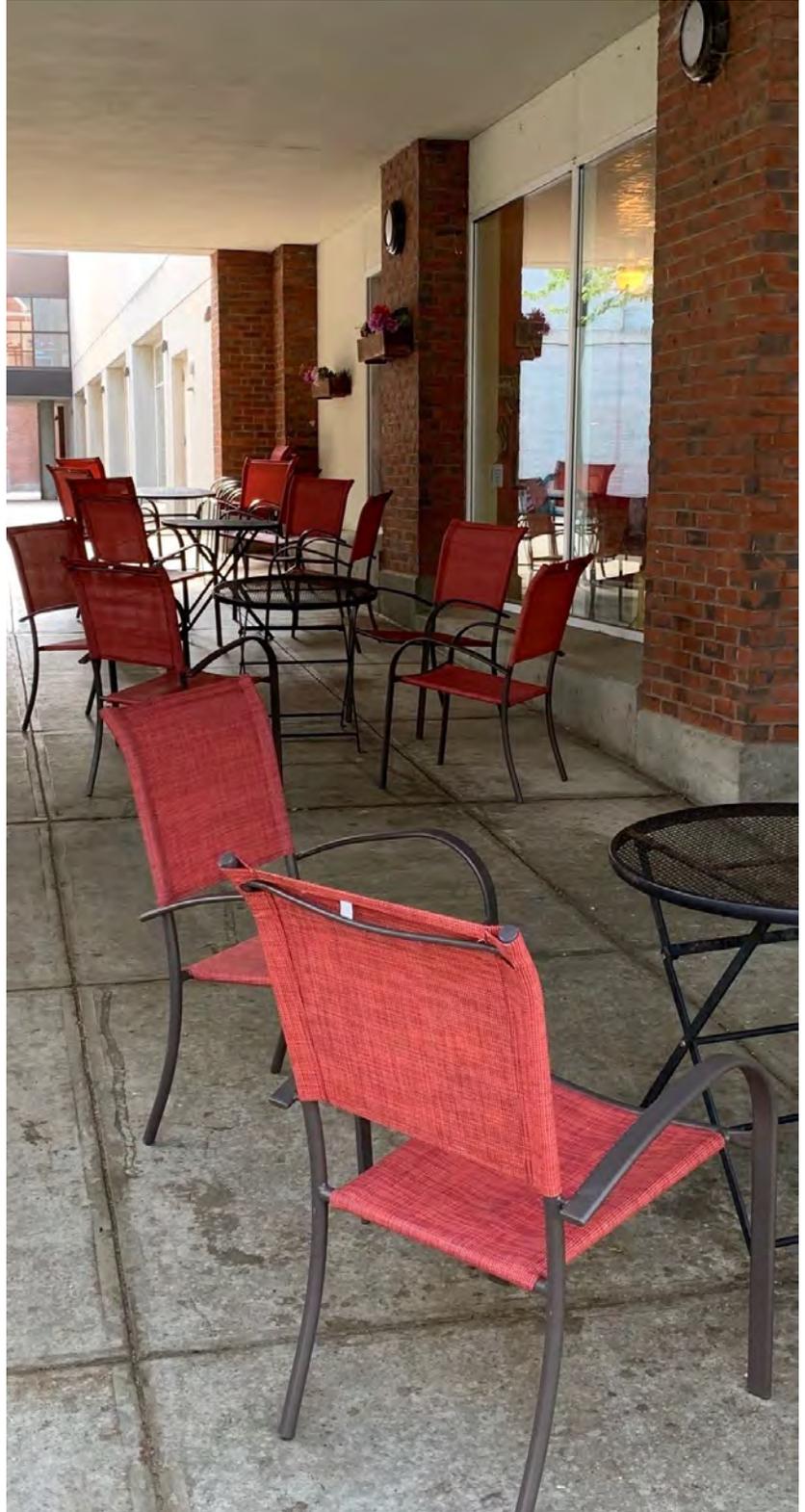
Most of the actions to realize this project involve coordination with restaurant owners. It will be necessary to first find which restaurants have a need for outdoor dining, or to expand the outdoor dining they may already be using. After identifying outdoor dining need, more specific steps towards implementation can be taken.



Outdoor space for restaurant seating. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Process

Frist, the needs to restaurant owners in the Study Area need to be identified. Then the Town of Williamstown (owner of the public sidewalks) can work with the restaurant owners to design parklets and secure funding for building outdoor seating spaces. The outdoor spaces should be welcoming to visitors and enhance the overall experience of being in the Study Area.



Outdoor space for restaurant seating. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



Provide Welcoming Outdoor Dining



PUBLIC
REALM

Provided by SME Consultant

CivicSpace Collaborative

Location

Salem, MA

Provide Welcoming Outdoor Dining

Provided by SME Consultant

CivicSpace Collaborative

Location

Salem, MA

Origin	City of Salem Mayor's Office; Salem Economic Development Rapid Recovery (EDRR) Task Force; John Andrews & Creative Collective
Budget	 Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000 paid for by individual restaurants owners with City of Salem support to install custom outdoor dining spaces)
Timeframe	 Short (4 months)
Risk	 Medium (Uncertainty over upcoming state laws)
Key Performance Indicators	Allowed restaurants to stay open and stay in business. Beneficial marketing for the restaurants. Beneficial marketing for the downtown district. Facilitated sense of social connection and community.
Partners & Resources	Creative Collective, City departments (Mayor's Office, Planning + Community Development, and Department of Public Works), individual restaurants owners/manager, and artists
Diagnostic	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Initial quick roll-out showed the community it is possible to transform underutilized public spaces into vibrant outdoor dining.Restaurant owners and managers are keen to keep the outdoor dining.Most community leaders and members love the program as demonstrated by several surveys conducted during 2020. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">The transition from temporary to permanent will require significant investments in design and construction.Parking is a real and perceived loss for businesses and people driving into Downtown Salem.Considerations related to universal design, public health, and building codes.

Action Item

The outdoor dining program was a successful transformation of public and private spaces into outdoor "streeteries" for the benefit of restaurants and the Salem community, including residents and tourists.

Over 50 restaurants participated in the program in 2020, and 56 have applied for the 2021 season.

Local artists were employed with to transform protective jersey barriers into works of art.

With an eye towards making the program permanent, the design and implementation of these spaces has already evolved to be more safe, accessible, usable, and attractive.



Outdoor Seating at Rockafellas Restaurant on Washington Street in Salem, MA

Process

- Establish a core group of stakeholders to shepherd the project and to meet weekly to get the project started.
- Hire a project manager with restaurant community connections. In Salem, John Andrews, Owner / Chief Creative Officer of Creative Collective managed, coordinated, and helped implement the program for 2020 and the evolution of the program in 2021. Creative Collective was hired by the City of Salem. The project manager brings together the stakeholders from City departments, restaurants, and local artists to create functional, safe, community minded, and aesthetically pleasing installations for outdoor dining.
- Communicate with each individual restaurant owner or manager to establish their needs and possible contribution (materials or labor). Communication with any available channels (from email to social media to going door to door) is key.
- Create a marketing strategy with a mix of different communication methods. Examples: posting to Facebook groups, direct messaging on social media, door to door campaign, and phone calls.
- Communicate design guidelines for best practices related to public health, universal design, and building code compliant design.



Sidewalk seating and tent seating at Ledger Restaurant on Washington Street

Process (Continued)

- Determine if pedestrian right-of-way needs redesign, new accommodation. Ensure full accessibility with universal design.
- In 2021, obtain City approval based on an automated application under the viewpoint portal.
- Aid and assist as needed in the build-out of individual spaces.
- Determine items to be provided by the City. In Salem, the City provided jersey barriers, heaters, and the City also provided labor and material support on an individual restaurant basis.
- Coordinate with Department of Public Works on delivery and placement of jersey barriers and heaters.
- Hire local artists to paint barriers and coordinate mural with aesthetic input from individual businesses. The City of Salem hired the artists.
- Create a plan for storage and winterization.
- Meet with core stakeholders to iterate for the following season, learn from mistakes, and evolve the program.



Outdoor Seating at Brother's Taverna on Derby Street



Outdoor Seating for Bambolina Restaurant with new pedestrian right-of-way on Derby Street

(Photo credit: Pamela Joye)

8. Host themed events for target audiences.

Category	 Cultural/Arts
Location	Study Area
Origin	This project was identified through the public survey.
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) Potential Funding Sources: Shared Streets and Spaces, MA Downtown Initiative Program TDI Creative Catalyst
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk – there are no foreseen negative consequences to hosting themed events.
Key Performance Indicators	Performance indicators will be the number of events held and the number of attendees.
Partners & Resources	Williamstown Cultural District, Images Cinema, Williamstown Theater Festival, and anyone else who would want to host an event.

Image of X. Photo Credit: Flickr

Diagnostic

Themed events designed for target audiences has the main goal of attracting people to the Study Area. This could be an increase in visitors but also an increase in business owners who could occupy vacant storefronts.

Action Item

The main action item for this project is to hire a full-time events coordinator. This position would require communication with the entities listed in the “partners and resources” section. A proposed idea for recurring events would be “second Sundays” or “first Fridays”.



Street festival with food trucks. Photo Credit: Google stock photos

Process

The process of this project will be to identify a desired audience, help attract visitors to the Study Area's businesses, potentially change the image of downtown, and possibly running a pilot program for recurring events.

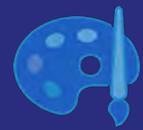
The events held should expose visitors to music, dance, cinema, art, and other cultural elements.



Street festival with live music. Photo Credit: Google stock photos



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



CULTURAL/
ARTS

Provided by SME Consultant

Susan Silberberg, CivicMoxie

Location

Fall River, MA

Origin	Collaborative effort growing out of MassDevelopment TDI project and including other FRACC members involved in Viva Fall River (the Arts, Culture and Creative Economy Master Planning effort for the city)
Budget	 Low – \$37,000 plus in-kind donations
Timeframe	 Short – planning and implementation in 3-1/2 months
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Number of attendees, Number of partners working together successfully, Good press
Partners & Resources	One SouthCoast Chamber of Commerce, Fall River Arts + Cultural Coalition (FRACC), MassDevelopment TDI, BayCoast Bank, WeLove Fall River, Fall River Public Schools, City of Fall River –main partners

Diagnostic

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

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

Action Item

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

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

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



Live painting was part of the event.



Source: for all photos: FRACC

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

Process

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

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



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



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

Process (Continued)

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

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- Work back from the goals to identify people, organizations, agencies available to help: chart interests, capacity, resources, contacts.
- What location best supports the goals? Create a plan of the area.
- List and draw activity areas, block party elements
- Link program activities with partners/volunteers.
- Refine event: what happens, time, day, activities
- Create a budget sheet for overall event, each activity area.
- Think carefully about branding. . . what to call it? How does this fit with overall branding and marketing for the downtown or commercial district?
- Create a detailed implementation plan with timeline of tasks, roles.
- Document what you do and think about how to make the effort sustainable in the long run. How can this event be a pilot project for ongoing programming?
- During the event, try to include ways to capture information the attendees (raffle that requires their zip code, ideas chalk wall that asks what people want to see in the district, etc.)
- Do a debrief immediately after the event to improve efforts for the future. Ask businesses for their input and reactions.



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



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

9. Vacant space activation – attract new tenants through storefront displays.

Category	 Cultural Arts
Location	Study Area
Origin	Chamber of Commerce and through a public meeting and the results of the survey
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) Potential Funding Sources: TDI Creative Catalyst, Small Business Assistance Grant, Hometown Grant Program, National Endowment for the Arts Grants, Biz-M-Power
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk – there are no foreseen negative consequences to hosting themed events.
Key Performance Indicators	Renting storefronts and less vacant space.
Partners & Resources	Local landlords of commercial buildings, Williamstown Chamber of Commerce, and the Williamstown Cultural District.

Image of X. Photo Credit: Flickr

Diagnostic

A common symptom of the COVID-19 pandemic has been businesses being forced to close their doors because they could not accommodate patrons safely. This project is aimed at revitalizing the Study Area and renting storefronts that became vacant during the pandemic.

Action Item

Beyond COVID-19 exacerbating storefront turnover, it also accelerated the business cycle. In the wake of the pandemic, the Town should aim to reduce business turnover to create a more stable economy in the Study Area.



Vacant storefront in Study Area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Process

The process of filling vacant storefronts will begin with coordination with landlords of the commercial properties in the Study Area. Currently, there are “For Lease” and “For Rent” signs in the vacant storefronts but the example provided on the following page suggests a more involved approach to addressing vacancy.

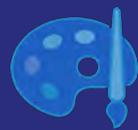
Engaging residents and visitors is more successful when creating interactive storefronts by using artistic installations. This method supports local artists and keeps public health a priority since the installations are visible from outside the store and people can be socially distant.



Vacant storefront in Study Area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



Interactive Storefronts: Engage Residents Through Artistic Installations in Storefronts



CULTURAL/
ARTS

Provided by SME Consultant

CivicSpace Collaborative

Location

Creative Commons storefronts at 554 Main St, Worcester, MA

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

Action Item (Continued)

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

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

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

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

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



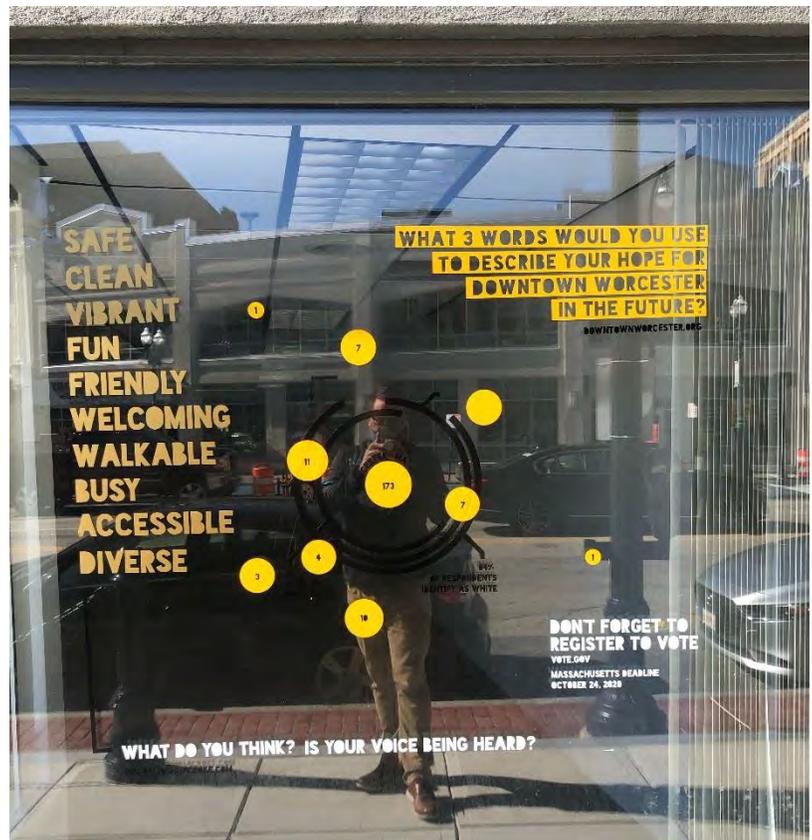
Interactive Storefront Installation Phase 1 (Survey Questions) by Joshua Croke

Process

Planning

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

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



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

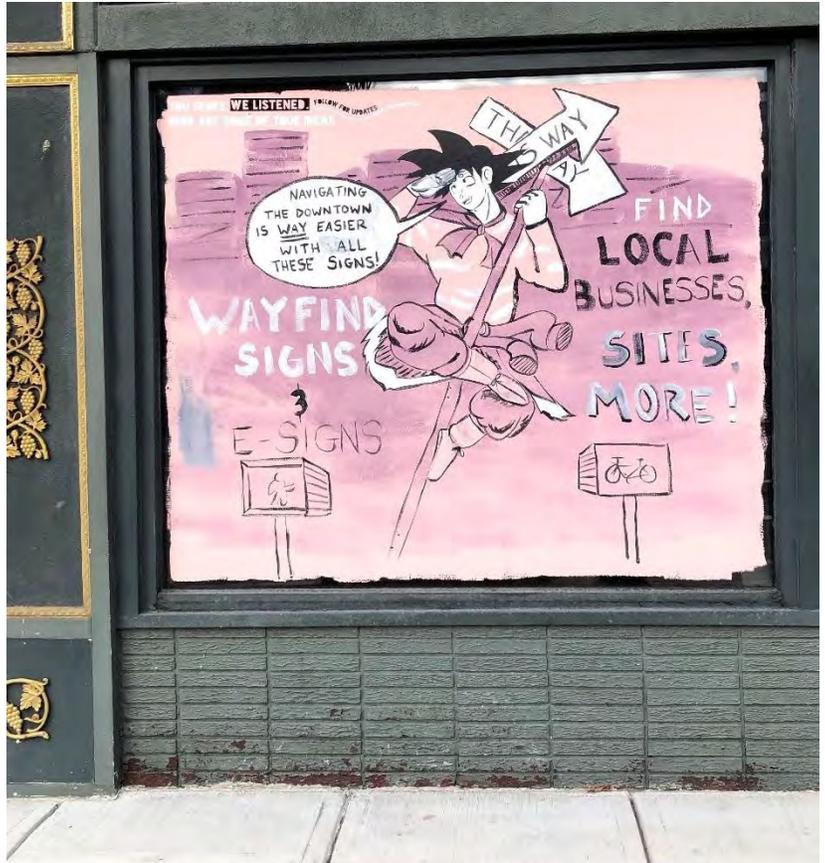
Process (Continued)

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

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

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

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



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



Artist: Pamela Stolz, Phase 1 (Survey Questions)

Process (Continued)

Call for Art + Artist Selection

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

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

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

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



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



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

Process (Continued)

Installation + Removal

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

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

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

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

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

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



Artist: Eamon Gillen, Phase 1 (Survey Questions)



Artist: Eamon Gillen, Phase 2 (Survey Answers)



Artist: Eamon Gillen, Phase 2 (Survey Answers)

10. Relocate the Farmers Market from the parking lot on Spring Street.

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Study Area
Origin	Williamstown Community Development Department
Budget	 Low Budget (under \$50,000) Potential Funding Sources: Shared Streets and Spaces, MA Downtown Initiative Program
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Medium Risk – there is a potential push-back from the community regarding the relocation of the Farmers Market.
Key Performance Indicators	Key indicators would be not just relocating the Farmers Market but also increasing the amount of parking for people to shop at the Farmers Market.
Partners & Resources	The coordinators of the Farmers Market, Town of Williamstown, and Williams College (since they control the electricity to the Farmers Market).

Image of X. Photo Credit: Flickr

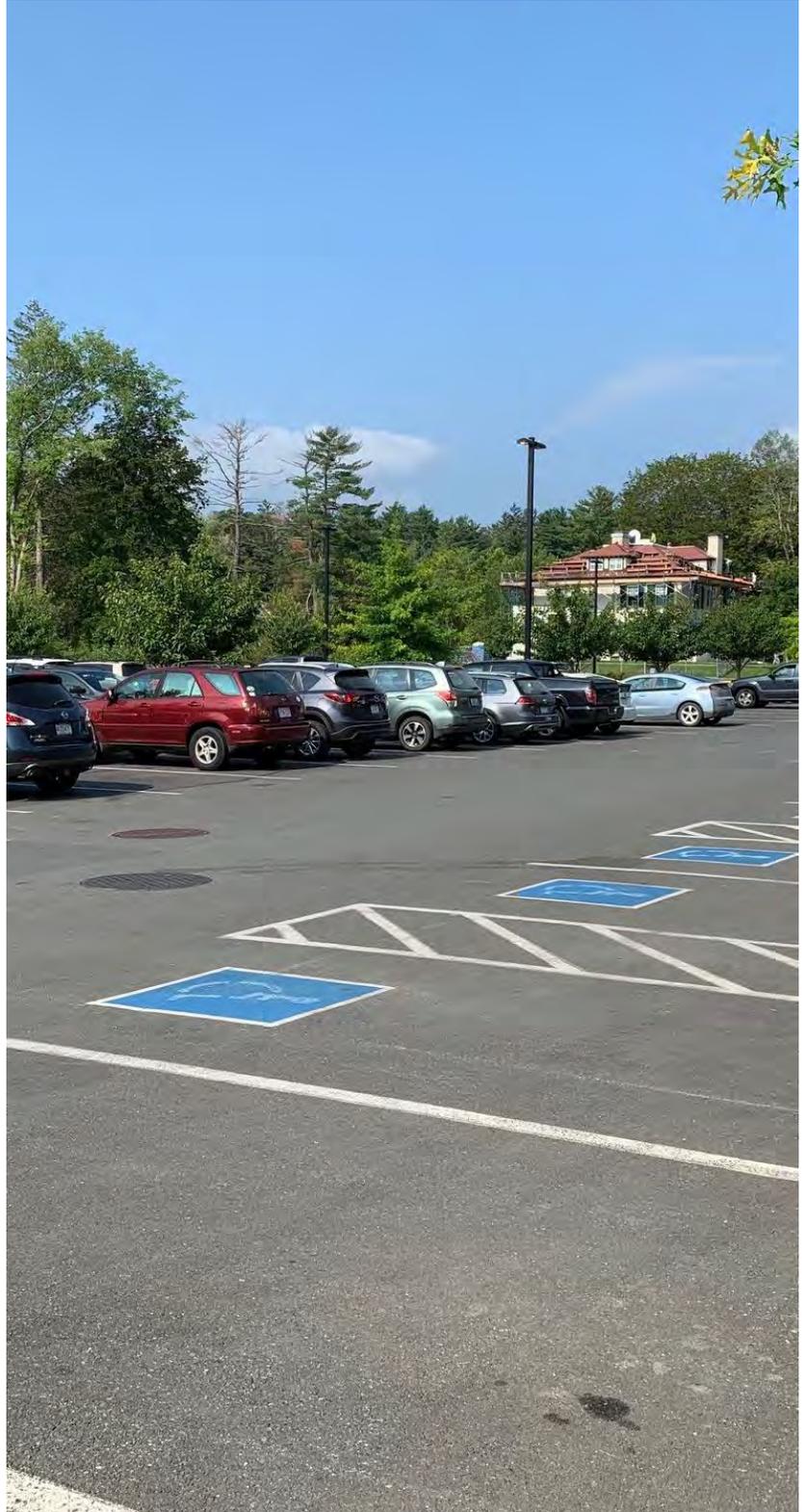
Diagnostic

The diagnostic phase showed that there is concern over a lack of parking available on Saturdays when the Farmers Market is held.

Additionally, COVID-19 highlighted the public's desire to shop locally which is one of the pillars for the Farmers Market.

Action Item

The action item for this project is the physical relocation of the Farmers Market from the parking lot on Spring Street to being held in the automotive lane on Walden Street.



Spring Street parking lot. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Process

The process for this project involves meeting with the people who coordinate the Farmers Market, the Town of Williamstown, and the Fire Department to figure out if a street closure is viable and to work on crowd control as well as the automotive traffic from Spring Street and the parking lot where the Farmers Market is currently held.



Walden Street – potential new location for Farmers Market. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



Shared Streets - Peer Exchange



Provided by SME Consultant

Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Location

Virtual

Origin	Cities and towns across the Commonwealth
Budget	 Low - Budget
Timeframe	 Short-term (3-9 months)
Risk	  Low - Medium Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Number of participants, evaluation and data captured
Partners & Resources	Funding from Massachusetts Department of Transportation; Partners included local business associations; resident groups; artists; DPW, Fire, Transportation Department

<p>Diagnostic</p>	<p>The MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces Program was established in June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 public health crisis with the goal of helping Massachusetts cities and towns adopt quick-/launch quick-build projects that would support public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce in their communities. The program was relaunched in November 2020 with a focus of addressing winter-related challenges. Since its inception, the program has awarded a total of \$26.4 million dollars to 161 municipalities and four transit authorities to implement 232 projects. Grant-funded projects have ranged from dedicated bus and bike lanes to seasonal parklets, road diets, safer crosswalks, and new bike share stations.</p>
<p>Action Item</p>	<p>In January 2021, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council in partnership with MassDOT and the Solomon Foundation hosted a peer exchange for the grant recipients of the first round of funding. The goal of the exchange was for communities who had successfully implemented projects to come together and share lessons, challenges and successes across their work. 65 people attended the peer exchange itself, with municipal staff, engineers, public utilities, elected officials, nonprofits representing 57 communities from across the Commonwealth.</p>
<p>Process</p>	<p>In order to host similar spaces of peer learning, special attention should be paid to recruiting a group of diverse communities that represent different:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project types (outdoor dining, temporary sidewalks, bike lanes, bus lanes) • Project locations (suburban, urban, rural) • Scale of projects (small, medium, large) <p>Peer exchanges should be held in a neutral space and light facilitation provided for small group discussions to occur. We recommend that group discussions are divided by topics of interest which can be determined through the registration process (i.e. asking "what topics on your shared street project would you like to discuss").</p> <p>Following the peer exchange, a brief summary of highlights and lessons learned should be produced by the organizers to distribute to participants.</p>

Shared Streets Peer Exchange Summary and highlights

The following was the summary produced from the January 2021 peer exchange where participants shared their experience with the process of planning to implementation of shared streets projects within their communities.

- Shared Streets Peer Exchange Summary and highlights
- *How has your project impacted or changed your community's streets?*
- Initial hesitation paved the way for later enthusiasm
- Less pushback than anticipated once projects implemented.
- Pilot projects showed what is possible short- and long-term.
- Great opportunity to engage the local business community.
- Community feedback on projects identified areas for future projects
- Visibility has played important role for permanence
- Visible projects allowed people to see the change that could take place.
- Communities reported traffic has slowed or calmed.
- Some reported more kids walking or biking to school, and people using the bike lanes to commute to work.
- Projects addressed the need of local businesses
- Creative solutions to parking.
- Outdoor dining and retail was lifeline for businesses in the summer and fall.
- Success could bring regulatory change in future, such as expedited permitting.
- Challenge of snow removal and winter maintenance addressed by relocating street furniture to public facilities
-

Shared Streets Peer Exchange Summary and highlights

Shared Streets - Peer Exchange Summary and highlights

What was challenging or went well from planning to implementation?

Solicit project support for long-term success

- Pitch as "pilot" and demonstrate economic benefits
- Coordinate with business owners through social media, focus group, WhatsApp, texting
- Supportive residents can help get the word out
- Outreach to older adult communities can be challenging – important to engage senior centers, etc.

Look into existing projects for new ideas

- Success in identifying projects through plans and wish lists of existing projects.

Plan for expenses

- Plan for unanticipated expenses in collaboration with business associations, community groups, and others.

Keep up to code with implementation (ADA, etc.)

- Critical to ensure compliance with ADA regulations, which requires creativity.

Consider cross-departmental coordination

- Working with DPW, Fire and Police Departments early on is critical.
- Important to keep everyone on the same page for maintenance and storage.
- Consider waiving permits and fees.

Plan for procurement

- Procuring materials on time is challenging – plan in advance, if possible.
- Important to communicate expectations and follow-up for future projects.
- Some communities worked with local nonprofits for procurement – made process smoother.



*Belmont Shared Streets – Outdoor dining
Photo credit: MAPC*



*Town Center shared space in West Stockbridge
Photo credit: Erin Clark*



*Outdoor dining in Salem with painted concrete barriers
Photo credit: City of Salem, MA*



*Shared safe outdoor dining space in Norwood
Photo credit: Town of Norwood, MA*



*Outdoor dining in Plymouth with planters to buffer pedestrian crossing
Photo credit: Jerry Kelleher*



*A snowy parklet in Melrose Town Center
Photo credit: Melrose Pedestrian and Bicyclist Committee*



Outdoor dining and commerce in Moody Street in Waltham
Photo credit: Martha Creedon



Hay bales/pumpkin-festooned crosswalks in Topsfield
Photo Credit: Town of Topsfield, MA



Cummins Highway Boston quick build protected bike lane
Photo credit: Liveable Streets Alliance



Watertown Pedestrian Walkway
Photo credit: Erin Clark



Outdoor dining and painted concrete barriers in Amherst
Photo credit: Erin Clark



Public parklet in Wellesley
Photo credit: Town of Wellesley

11. Improve business permitting guidelines.

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Town-wide
Origin	This project was identified through case studies seen in other municipalities.
Budget	 Low Budget (under \$50,000) Potential Funding Sources: MA Downtown Initiative Program, Small Business Technical Assistance Grant, Grow Grant, Biz-M-Power
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk – there are no foreseen negative consequences to hosting themed events.
Key Performance Indicators	Additional businesses starting in the Study Area.
Partners & Resources	Williamstown Chamber of Commerce and Town of Williamstown.

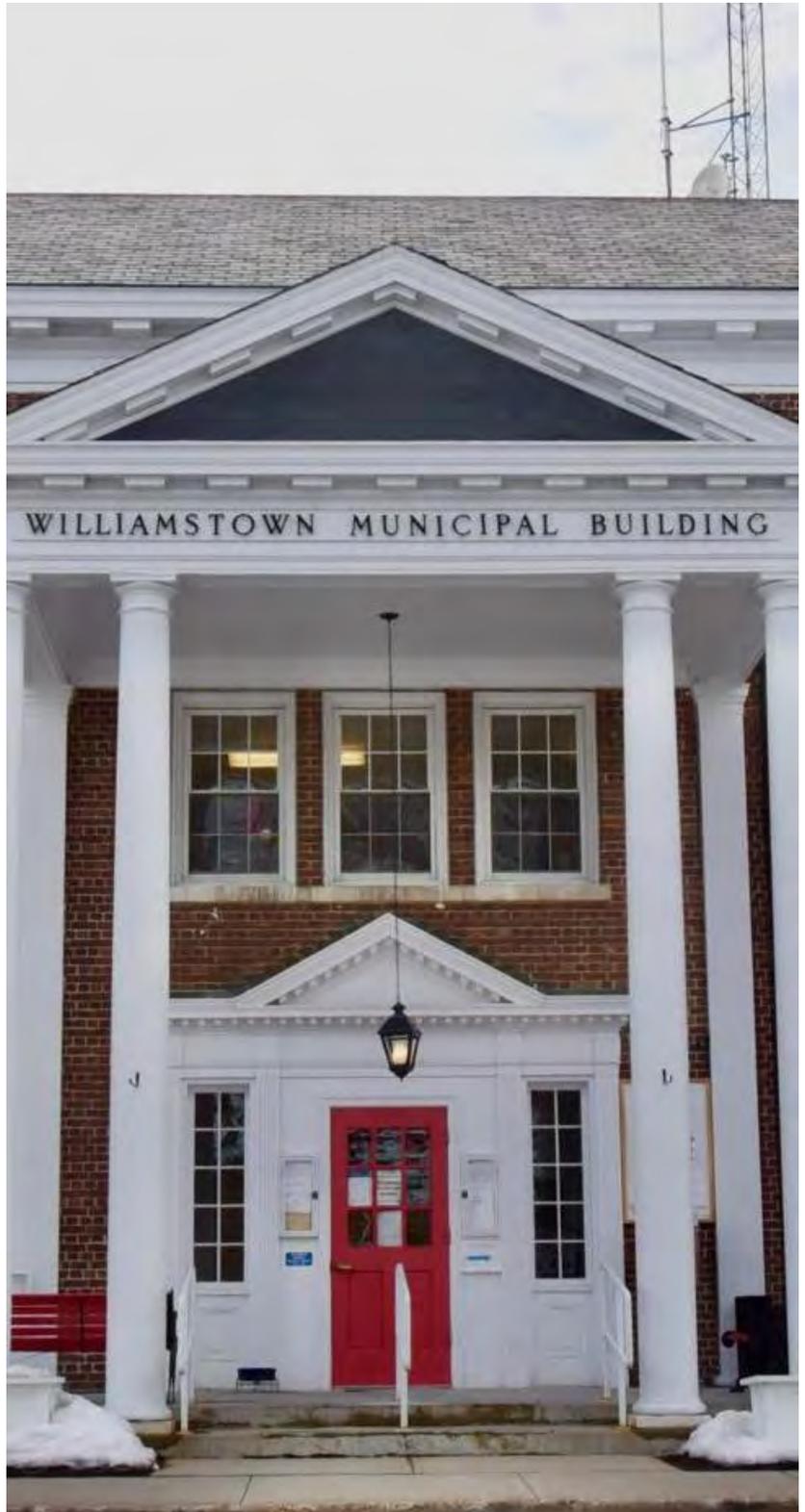
Image of X. Photo Credit: Flickr

Diagnostic

The economic impacts of COVID-19 has led to businesses being unable to operate and an increase in storefront vacancy. The goal of this project is to simplify the process a prospective business owner will have to go through to start a business in the Study Area. There should be a guidebook which details the process that is available through the town website.

Action Item

The action item for this project is to develop a business permitting guidebook for prospective business owners. Making it easier to start a business will contribute to the reduction of vacant storefronts.



Williamstown Town Hall. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Process

The process for this project involves the Town of Williamstown staff and staff from the Chamber of Commerce to meet and review the current regulation for starting a business in the Study Area. This process can be reduced to a single page that will instruct potential business owners and will be readily available on the town's website.

Storefront in the study area. Photo Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



Improve zoning, licensing, and permitting interactions



Provided by SME Consultant

BSC Group, Inc.

Location

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

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

Diagnostic

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

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

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

Action Items

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

-Waive time limits for permits to minimize the need to re-apply to continue an approved action

-Encourage Boards and Commissions to hold joint meetings to expedite and streamline certain permitting processes

-Improve municipal websites and outreach to businesses to explain current as well as changes to the regulatory framework

-Encourage Planning Boards to either grant the following or gave planning staff the ability to provide administrative approvals to relax certain zoning requirements such as :

- Temporary or permanent reduction in parking requirements to provide additional outdoor dining and gathering in areas currently used for parking.
- Relaxed signage requirements to allow temporary signs to promote outdoor sales and dining

-Establish procedures for police, fire and public works to easily review/approve requests to block-off on-street parking spaces or portions of streets to be used for outdoor dining/events

-Create requirements describing how to safely block-off portions of a roadway or on-street parking with rigid and visible barriers to allow them to be safely used by pedestrians/customers.

-Waive some permitting requirements and fast-track others for a more efficient permitting process to allow businesses to quickly take advantage of a more flexible regulatory framework.

Process

Promote associations who can speak for the greater good

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

Make it easier for businesses to find the information they need

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

Propose that successful temporary regulations to become permanent

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

Roll-over permits

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