

RETAIL VISIONING



Technical Assistance Report

Bringing Best Retail Practices to Downtown
Businesses in Millbury, MA

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Retail Program: Bringing Best Retail Practices to Downtown Businesses in Millbury, MA

The town of Millbury, MA applied for and was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative to share best retail practices with owners of existing businesses in the downtown corridor. Retail consultant, Christine Moynihan of Retail Visioning was selected to fulfill the scope of work associated with this grant request. The objective for this program was to help existing retail and storefront business in Millbury learn and apply current best practices in retailing leading to a stronger downtown retail district that would attract additional quality businesses. This program, called Best Retail Practices, had three parts.

- A community-wide educational component that involved a 2-hour workshop to which all retailers, restaurateurs and other store front service businesses in Millbury were invited.
- A consulting component that involved eight (8) one-on-one store visit/consultations with individual storefront businesses within the downtown area of Millbury.
- A grant from the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce in the amount of \$250 for each business (total \$2000) so that they could implement at least one of the recommendations for improvement.
- A special loan for program participants who wanted to do more extensive improvements was made available by a consortium of local banks. Example: \$5000 minimum @ 1% over 3 years for a new awning.

The timeline for this program took about 5 months with the actual activities supporting this program as follows:

- In May, Christine Moynihan met with a steering committee for this project (Economic Development Department and volunteer committee) to learn more about Millbury and the challenges of its downtown retailers and to share an outline of the workshop that would be delivered. At this meeting she also provided recommendations for questions that would be helpful to the application process to help the committee select the one-on-one participants from those who attended the workshop. She also helped develop materials for fliers and press releases to help market the program and recruit participation in the overall program.
- The committee then selected a good time and date for the workshop, reserved a large community room and began promoting the program and inviting local business owners to the workshop.
- On July 22, 2015 Christine delivered a 2 hour workshop from 8am -10:00AM. The focus of the workshop was on how to apply Best Practices to your own small business in the areas of: business positioning, signage, windows and exterior presentation, interior layout, décor and display, in-store, in-print and on-line marketing and customer service.

- Applications for one-on-one consultations were distributed at the workshop and eight participants were selected.
- In early August, Christine and a Retail Visioning account associate visited the businesses selected and met with the owners for about an hour and a half, each. At these meetings the situation was reviewed and pictures taken of each business environment so as to prepare a set of recommendations that might improve opportunities for these businesses. The recommendations were then delivered at follow-up one-on-one meetings in September. A 4-5 page report was presented to each business owner with a copy to the town.

Recommendations were specific to the needs of each business.

Matt's At the Buzzer – Barbershop – Add fixture to improve retail sales of grooming products and tee shirts. Add awning to exterior. Leverage social media.

Gert's Antiques – Add visibility by adding a blade sign as her business is within the Felters Mill complex. Hire an intern to manage social media. Build database and communicate frequently.

Classic Tailoring & Design – Improve windows by adding lettering and removing old signs. Add retail area of custom made items. Add “Elizabeth” to all signage to improve SEO and add infuse business with lovely personality of owner. Add OPEN flag

Pizza Chef – Add table top communications. Cross promote lunch/dinner. Add lighting to change atmosphere and customer experience at night. Update exterior to pay off much nicer interior.

Millbury Towne Consignment – Organize items by category and add signage. Use vertical space in windows and make displays BIG. Hide or remove out of season or boxed up items that are being donated.

Millbury Federated Church Nursery School and Joining Hands Childcare – Establish new positioning and identity. Create signs for visibility in community. Design brochure about these recently combined businesses/ services.

Elm Draught House Cinema – Update lobby area and consolidate identity to one look. Leverage “tee shirt phrases” in other ways, i.e website, posters, etc. Build website or landing page asap.

The Candy Shoppe – Add large photos or graphics to walls, move furniture to establish good window displays. Build website. Remove mirrored windows so customers can experience candy making by watching kitchen. Consider cocoa to go, brownies, own “chocolate-ness”

Even before our final reports were delivered to the participating businesses, many recommendations were already in place. Conversations with business owners have suggested that other recommendations will be implemented when time and resources become available.

Actual recommendations reports are attached to this report.