



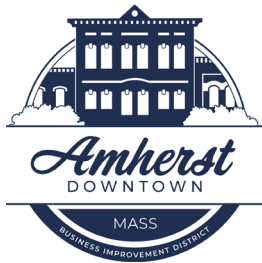
Rapid Recovery Plan

October 8, 2021

Downtown Amherst

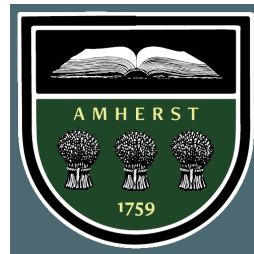


Acknowledgments



Amherst Business Improvement District

Gabrielle Gould, Executive Director



Town of Amherst

Paul Bockelman, Town Manager

Town Council

George Ryan, Town Councilor, District 3

Plan Facilitator and
Subject Matter Experts

CivicMoxie

CivicMoxie, LLC

Susan Silberberg, Principal
Sue Kim, AICP, Senior Planner
Clay Lin, Planner/Urban Designer
Greg Hanafin, Planner
Michael Rosenberg, Planner/ Graphic Designer
Shana Penna, Planning Analyst
Annie Streetman, Planner
Kelsey Hubbard, Graphic Designer
Madeleine Kelly, Planning Intern
Robyn Lee, Planning Intern

Subject Matter Experts



Stantec

Amelia Casey, Transportation Planner
Jason Schrieber, Senior Principal

DODSON & FLINKER
Landscape Architecture and Planning

Dodson & Flinker

Dillon Sussman, Senior Associate
Peter Flinker, Principal

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

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

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

For more information, contact DHCD:
100 Cambridge St, Suite 300
Boston, MA 02114
617-573-1100
mass.gov/DHCD

The Planning Team would also like to thank the following individuals for participating as key stakeholders throughout the planning process:

Clare Bertrand

Yasmin Eisenhauer

Ewen Chen

Amy Gates

Rachel Hart

Cinda Jones

Gerald Jones

Tony Maroulis

Jon Niedzielski, District Director, Office of

Congressman James P. McGovern

Keren Rhodes

Barry Roberts

Sharon Sharry

Curt Shumway

David Ziomek

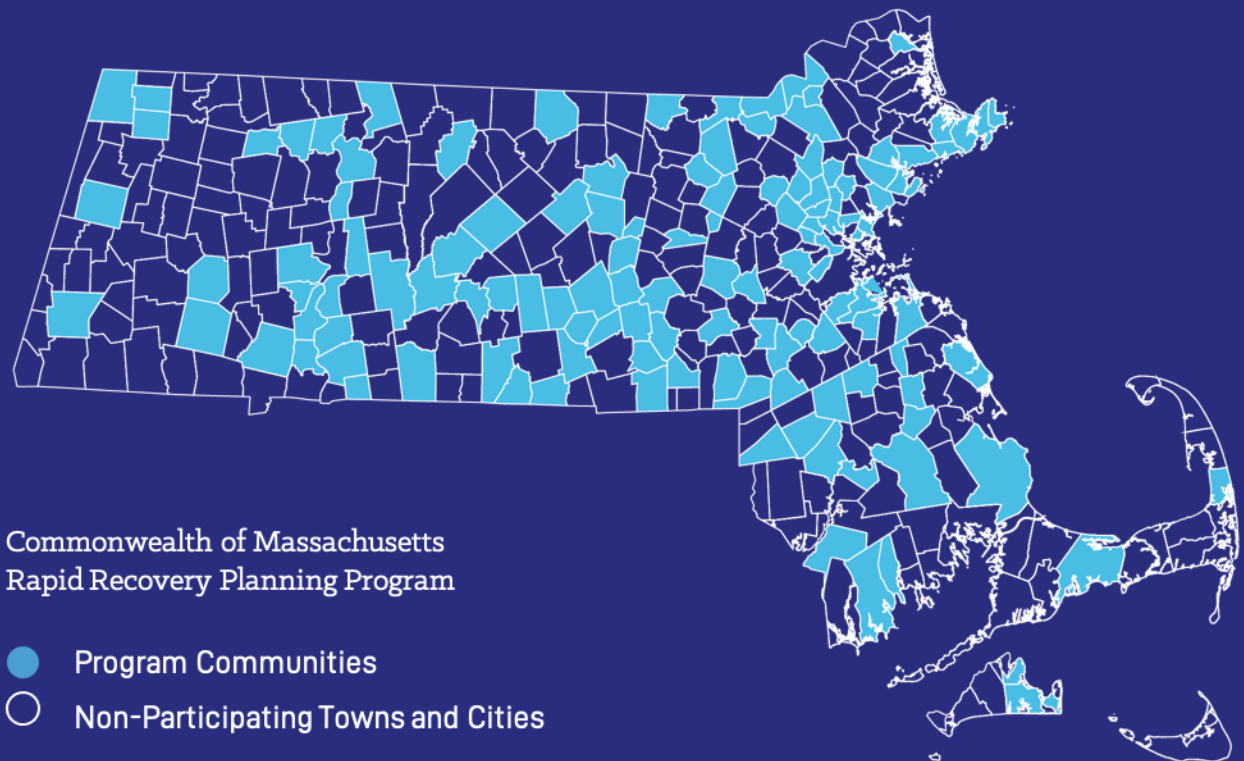
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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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.



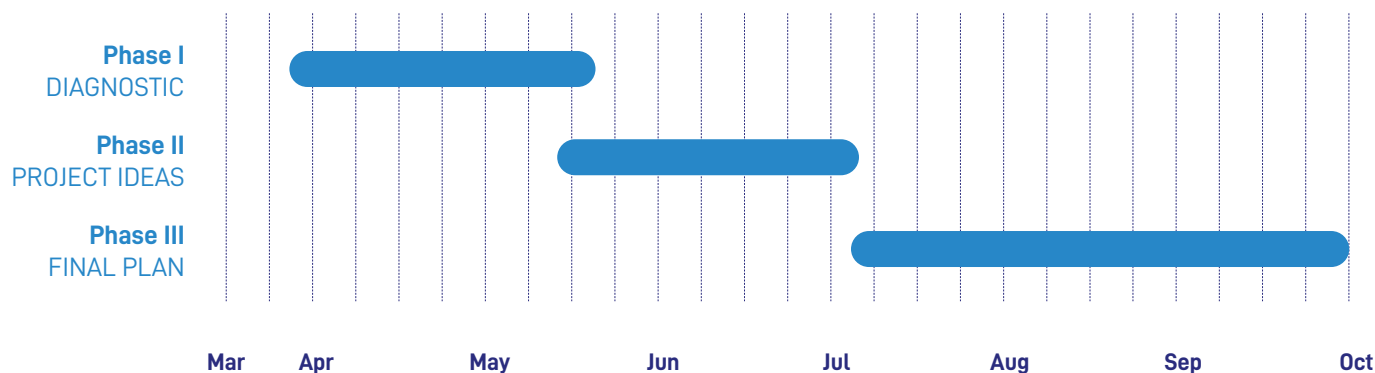
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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.

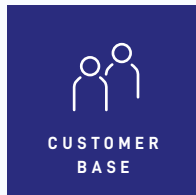
Each Rapid Recovery Plan was developed across three phases between February–October 2021. Phase 1 - Diagnostic, Phase 2- Project Recommendations, Phase 3 - Plan.



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

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

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



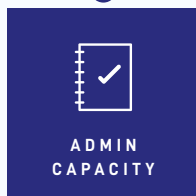
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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

The Town of Amherst is located in Hampshire County in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts. The town is just under 28 square miles and is bordered by Hadley to the west, Sunderland and Leverett to the north, Shutesbury, Pelham, and Belchertown to the east, and Granby and South Hadley to the south. In the 1700's the land in and around Amherst was being used for farmland, with agriculture being the main economy. Following the opening of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Amherst College in the 1800's, education became a large component of the town's economy, eventually becoming the largest source of employment.

The town hosts five higher educational institutions, with Amherst College and UMass Amherst within walking distance of the downtown. To reach these educational destinations, there are several public transportation options available to those visiting Amherst, including Amtrak, national bus services, and shuttles from several airports and other regional transit hubs.

The study area for this RRP is smaller than the Amherst Business Improvement District's boundaries to focus the recommended recovery projects to the more compact and continuous commercial portion of the downtown. Much of the study area has a traditional New England main street feel with pedestrian-scale streetscape features that are largely in very good condition, including multi-level street lighting, street trees, and seating, and sufficiently wide sidewalks.

The Benefits of a College Town

The presence of 30,000 students and thousands of faculty and staff at area colleges and universities creates a market for downtown businesses and cultural destinations, such as the Emily Dickenson Museum, the Amherst College of Natural History, and Amherst Cinema, to name a few, greater than what would be supported by the town's residential population alone. These destinations, along with others, as well as events, concerts, and a wide range of food and shopping choices are all possible because of the staff, faculty, student, and visitor populations driven by local higher education.

The level of activity and types of businesses that depend on the university and college community became starkly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when most businesses and cultural institutions struggled to remain afloat. It has been a reminder that the downtown would be a much emptier place without students. A survey¹ of businesses in the study area reveals that many are dependent on area colleges for their customers. Without students, many of these businesses, as shown on the map below, would most likely be vacant storefronts.

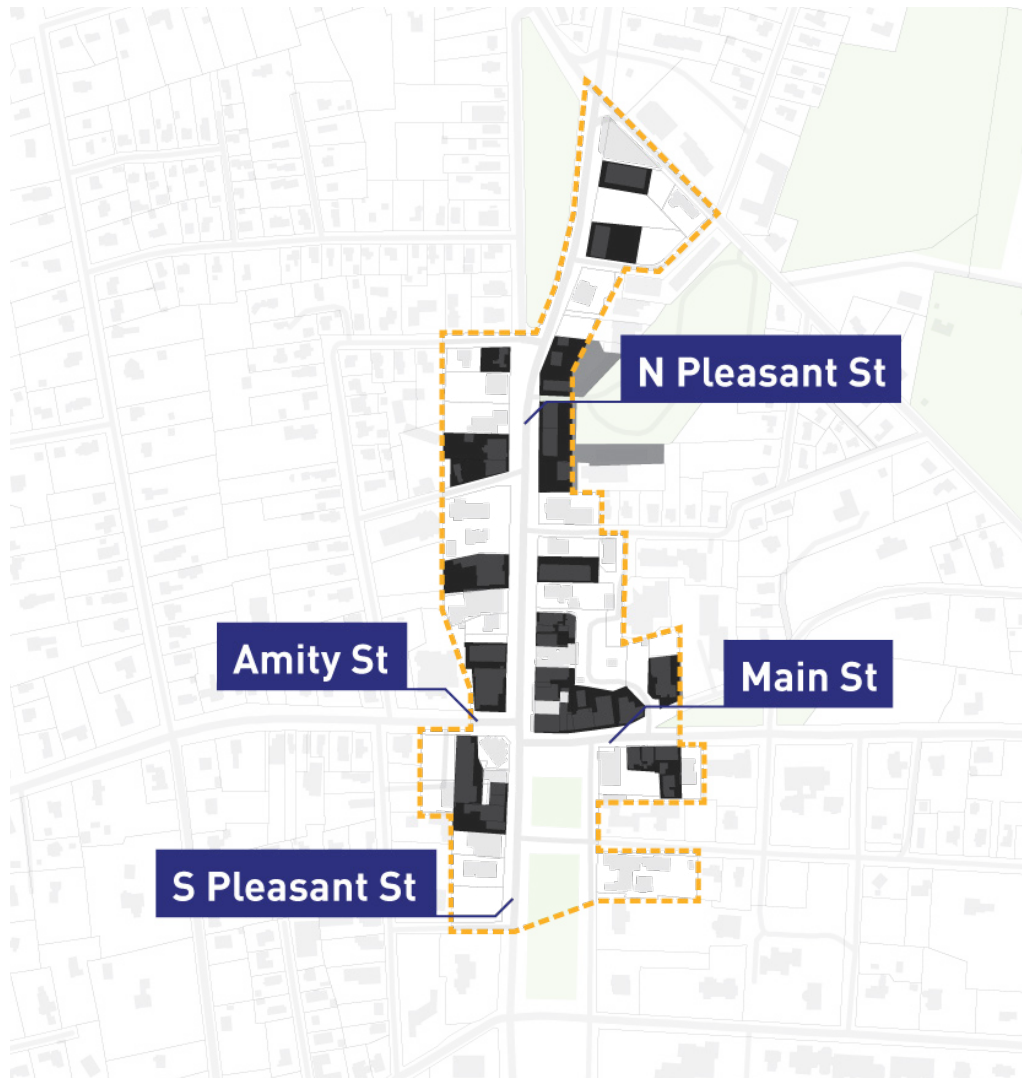
It is important to note trends that have impacted Amherst and the downtown in the last two decades. The University of Massachusetts at Amherst, with a student population of approximately 24,000 is ranked #68 in the country for National Universities, a group of schools including the "University of Chicago and Carnegie Mellon University, that offer a full range of undergraduate majors, plus masters and doctoral programs. These colleges are also committed to producing groundbreaking research."² No longer considered a "safety school" for applicants, the university sits at the top levels of research and student achievement in the country. In addition, the notion of a "college town" has changed in the last two decades as well, and far

¹ Information provided by BID staff knowledge of business owners, goods, and markets, spring 2021.

² <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/umass-amherst-2221>

from a disconnect between the college market and resident population, more than ever, there is great alignment on what these two demographic groups want and need in where they live, work, and play. Across the country, empty nesters and retirees are vying for urban (downtown) and walkable living opportunities with millennials and younger adults. As one recent report has stated, "The active wealthy senior is the new millennial."³ Older adults want the same things as young adults and millennials – walkable communities, accessible goods and services, proximity of arts, culture, food, and entertainment, and access to recreational and healthy living opportunities.

³ <https://archive.curbed.com/2017/10/24/16526158/real-estate-apartment-baby-boomers-senior-living>



■ Business with students as a large percentage of customer base

Source: Amherst Downtown BID, Spring 2021

Amherst is positioned to have the best of all worlds—residents have choices that are only possible because of the larger higher education market in and near the town while still enjoying small town life. Those choices are getting better and better. As the sophistication and spending power of the student population grows, opportunities to expand choices and destinations downtown abound. The Town, along with the Downtown Amherst Business Improvement District (BID), and Chamber of Commerce have more recently been making concerted efforts to diversify and broaden the types of businesses downtown and job opportunities throughout the town in response to emerging trends and demographic changes.

Part of recent BID efforts has included a stronger branding of the downtown as a regional arts and cultural destination. The BID has spearheaded the development of a cultural anchor to include a 200-seat performance and music space which is slated to open in the Winter of 2022, to be followed by associated arts spaces, coworking, and food venues. In addition to a repositioning of downtown, Amherst had been working on a number of issues that became more critical during the pandemic. The collaboration between the BID, Chamber of Commerce, and Town on reacting quickly to institute temporary ordinances and other measures to respond to business needs has been an excellent model for the power of collaboration, flexibility, and responsiveness to community and business needs.

Recommendations in this RRP support the ongoing work of the BID, Chamber, and Town and include utilizing public spaces and art as part of a larger effort to rebrand Amherst as a cultural destination for residents, visitors, and students. Continuing and expanding regional marketing with other organizations, such as the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce, along with encouraging a more diverse range of businesses, will broaden the district's customer base. Support for continued business recruitment and retention and an interesting business mix is provided in the form of projects that provide a business buddy program for new entrepreneurs, a feedback mechanism for the Town to hear how its efforts to be more business-friendly are going, and a recommendation for new Town hire(s) to support economic development and diversity. Currently, there is no Town economic development staff person, and the BID has taken on the role of championing business support in town, pursuing and obtaining an impressive portfolio of grants to support business survival, pandemic recovery, and growth.

How the Amherst Downtown BID, Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Downtown Amherst Foundation have Leveraged Public Funds for the Benefit of the Town

With limited capacity and a mission focused on the downtown, this model of the BID, with support from the Chamber, leading grant-writing and other economic development efforts is not sustainable, and capacity is needed at the Town level to continue this work. The good news is that there has been good coordination and collaboration between the Town, the Amherst BID, the Chamber of Commerce, businesses, and other institutions and organizations. This Plan builds on this work to support the continued efforts of all to support and enhance the downtown for the benefit of all.

Case Study: AMHERST, MA

Small Business Microgrants & Support Local Initiatives

- \$260K Relief & Resiliency Microgrant Program (Round 1 & 2)
- \$23K Winter Pivot Regional Microgrant Program
- \$10K Purchase of PPE (distributed to businesses at no cost)
- Pledge To Support Local (\$100K in local receipts in 3 months)
- Amherst Area Gift Program Launched (\$30K sold in 6 months)
- One-On-One Small Business Grant App Support
- FUNDING: \$350K Private Fundraising, \$10K Earmark from Sen. Jo Comerford, Leveraging Local CDBG dollars.

Tourism Campaign & Diversifying Local Economy

- What's Next? Greater Amherst campaign. See greateramherst.com
- Increased Funding for Hampshire Regional Tourism Council (HRTC)
- FUNDING: \$116K Recovery Grant from Mass Office of Travel & Tourism (MOTT).

Combating Food Insecurity & Supporting Restaurants

- Tuesday/Thursday Dinner Delights Distribution to Family Outreach of Amherst Clients
- Friday Community Meals with Amherst Survival Center
- FUNDING: \$55K Earmark Rep. Mindy Domb, \$35K from Amherst Business Improvement District, \$10K Town of Amherst CARES Funds.

Placemaking & Infrastructure

- Local Rapid Recovery Program Grant with Civic Moxie
- Pilot Program \$175K to start building of Live Performing and Music Venue in Downtown Amherst
- #IAMherst Branding Campaign
- Outdoor Dining
- Sidewalk and Road Improvements
- \$25K Winter Lighting & Ice Sculpture Festival
- Wayfinding Signage and Beautification
- FUNDING: \$10K from Mass Development's Commonwealth Places, \$25K from Barr Foundation, MDOT's Shared Streets grants.

amherstdowntown.com
amherstarea.com

DOWNTOWN
AMHERST FOUNDATION

Amherst
DOWNTOWN

Amherst
Area
Chamber of Commerce

Diagnostic



Key Findings

Overview

A Small Town Downtown with a Big Presence

Amherst is a town defined by its rural history and character and the five higher education institutions located adjacent to or near the downtown. The downtown retail, food offerings, and cultural offerings, belie the town's small size and offer a broad range of choices for residents and visitors.

Major Influences and Impacts

This college town has its share of student shops and food choices but is increasingly defined by other influences and attractions, with arts and culture enjoying a growing presence in the downtown. The downtown is influenced by the following conditions:

- The Downtown BID is a strong presence, supporting businesses, actively pursuing a full portfolio of public grants and funding, and providing a strong vision for the downtown as a cultural and civic hub for residents, students, academics, and visitors.
- There are 30,000 students and many more thousands of faculty and staff in and around the downtown, providing a broad market for goods, services, and dining in downtown.
- Cultural organizations and institutions in and around the downtown draw an estimated 700,000 visitors annually, contributing to Amherst's growing reputation as an arts and cultural hub.
- The "Drake" music and performance space is slated to open in Winter 2022 and will provide a long-desired cultural venue in the downtown...providing a cultural anchor that will raise the visibility of the downtown, provide customers for dining and retail businesses, and spur more arts and cultural uses.
- Amherst's network of wide sidewalks, alleys, and small and large public spaces provide extraordinary opportunities for public art, public space activation, and connectivity that can enhance pedestrian experiences and provide interesting destinations.
- The diverse mix of business owners provides opportunities to grow the tenant mix further. Support for culturally diverse businesses and owners will be an important action to retain businesses and help them thrive.

Overall Commercial Area Grades and Conditions – Things of Note

Focus areas for improvements for the commercial district should be:

- Connectivity and visibility: the interesting network of spaces such as the Boltwood Walk, pass-throughs between buildings, and picturesque walkways create both opportunities and challenges. These spaces are a delight to find and can also feel remote and isolated. Focusing on celebrating, lighting, and activating small and remote spaces can elevate the downtown experience for all.
- Public art opportunities: temporary and permanent public art can support downtown as a cultural destination and help enliven spaces.
- Wayfinding: better connectivity to the Pleasant Street Parking Lot and Boltwood Garage can help better utilize this existing parking and also provide a stronger sense of security downtown, particularly for new visitors.

Administrative Capacity

The COVID-19 pandemic brought new levels of collaboration and flexibility to the town. There has been overwhelming agreement by businesses that this good communication and quick action should continue between Town departments (i.e., Public Works, Health Department, etc.), the BID, the Chamber of Commerce, and businesses.

Big Picture Takeaways

- Build on the Town and BID successes during the pandemic. The Town, BID, and Chamber get high marks for flexibility and rapid responses. Businesses and the downtown experience for everyone is best served if this spirit of collaboration, flexibility, and innovation continues. The pandemic forced everyone to think outside of the box with positive results. As with many communities across the state, an examination of what worked well and how "business as usual" should be adjusted for the long-term can yield longer-term benefits.
- Residents have the benefit of goods, dining, services that exist because of colleges...embrace it or lose it. Conversations with Town officials and others reveal that over the years, area colleges and universities have created more amenities, entertainment, and food options right on campuses, creating reasons for students to stay put and not frequent downtown. This has partly occurred because the downtown didn't have enough to offer. Attracting even a fraction of the area student, faculty, and staff population means the difference between a full range of dining and shopping choices for residents and vacant storefronts.
- The student population is very different than it was a decade or more ago...area colleges and universities attract top researchers and scholars; students want the same things professionals, empty nesters, and seniors want, which is good food, culture, outdoor recreation, walkable destinations, friendly and safe civic spaces, and their parents want it too.
- The downtown is the first impression in recruiting students to area colleges and universities. That leaves lots of room for collaboration, and both the Town and BID can work with these institutions to support an environment everyone loves.
- Arts and culture are key opportunities here – do everything you can to protect and nurture.
- Old stories die hard. Town officials, working with the BID, have been trying to change perceptions of Amherst as a place less friendly to businesses but are learning that the stories stick around even as things are changing. Recent changes and updates to permitting and licensing and the flexibility shown by the Town during the pandemic creates opportunities for a new shared message – Amherst welcomes businesses. It will be important to back this progress up with additional business supports and programs.

Key Findings



Demographics

Study Area (ESRI Business Analyst Projections - 2021)

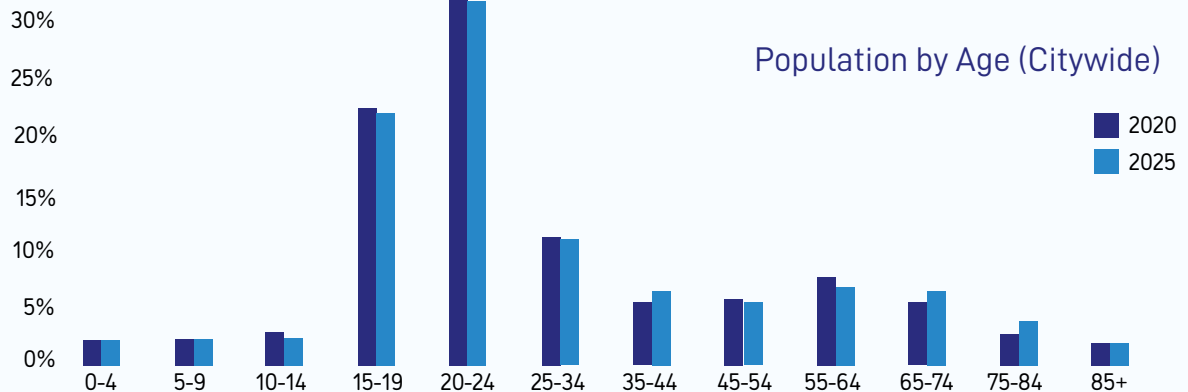
- Largest % age cohort is 20-24 years old; second largest is 15-19 years old.
- Projected population in 2025 shows marked increases in 65-74 years old and 75+ years old cohorts.
- Approximately 40% of Households have annual incomes <\$25,000.

Provided by institutions:



Total Annual Visitors

687,825



Number of Households (2020)



Study Area: **49 households**

Amherst: **9,741 households**

Percent Owner Occupied (2020)



Study Area: **9% owner-occupied**

Amherst: **41% owner-occupied**

Hampshire County: **59% owner-occupied**

Massachusetts: **55% owner-occupied**

Median Household Income (2020)



Study Area	\$31,933
Amherst	\$68,178
Hampshire County	\$77,772
Massachusetts	\$80,643

Median Age (2020)



Study Area: **22.7 years young**

Amherst: **23.2 years young**

Hampshire County: **37.9 years young**

Massachusetts: **40.3 years young**

Key Findings



Study Area

The study area for this plan is more concentrated than the boundaries of the Downtown Amherst BID. The boundaries include approximately 0.5 miles on both sides of the street from South Pleasant Street heading north to East Pleasant Street, including several blocks from Amity Street to Main Street, focusing on areas with more continuous commercial uses to focus the recommended recovery projects.

Average Study Area Grades:

Grades range from "A" to "F" depending on how much of the area or properties or storefronts within the study area were attractive, well-maintained, or included desirable physical characteristics. An "A" generally meant that 75% or more of the area or storefronts within the study area had attractive or well-maintained elements (e.g., sidewalks or storefront windows and lighting); "B" grades were for about 50% of the area or storefronts; "C" for around 25% of the area; and "F" for unattractive or complete lack of desirable elements.



Public Realm

Key Takeaways:

- While materials, design, and maintenance of the public realm elements varied throughout the district, the overall condition was very good. There are multiple places with seating and good amenities, such as bike racks and trash cans, and adequate signage.
- The northern part of the study area has good public realm infrastructure but loses density and activity...it doesn't "hold together" with the rest of the shopping area.
- Wayfinding to connect parking areas and destinations is weak in areas and could benefit from visual or physical clues linking spaces (public art, street furniture, color coding, etc.).

Sidewalks

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



While the sidewalks varied somewhat in width depending on location within the study area, for the most part, sidewalks are generous in width and accommodate benches street trees, and bike racks easily. Sidewalks are generally well-maintained.

Street Trees and Benches

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



Street trees are located throughout the downtown and the placement of seating in relation to trees creates pleasant spots for pedestrians to rest and socialize. Seating is located primarily along South and North Pleasant Streets.

Lighting

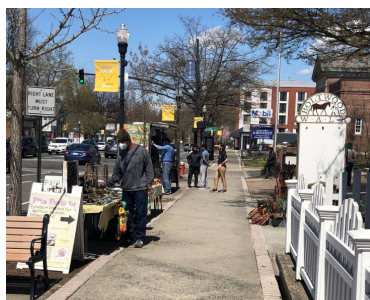
- (A)** *More than 75% of the study area utilizes a range of lighting strategies to ensure safety of pedestrians and motorists, as well as highlight the identity and history of the area.*



Throughout the study area, the street lighting appeared to be multi-level, with pedestrian- and auto-scale street lights for appropriate visibility and safety. The historic street lights additionally added definition to the downtown as a district.

Wayfinding/Signage

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



Signage is generally good although signage for public parking areas could be improved. Throughout the district, wayfinding is needed to better link parking to key destinations, particularly to ensure the use of underutilized parking that can feel unsafe because of remote locations.

Roadbed/Crosswalks

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



The roadbed and crosswalks throughout the study area were in generally good condition with some smaller areas in need of regular maintenance or repaving.



Private Realm

Key Takeaways:

- Most of the storefronts maintained very good signage and visibility into their businesses. The overall impression is of a well-maintained commercial area.
- The amount of outdoor dining opportunities varied throughout the district. Temporary dining in parking locations outside some businesses are combined with patio dining in designated spaces with questions about post-pandemic town policies related to expanding dining spaces.
- Façade materials, design, and conditions are overall very good throughout the district.
- Most of the storefronts maintained very good visibility into their businesses.
- The amount of outdoor dining opportunities varied throughout the district – often due to sidewalk constraints.
- While most businesses had very good signage, there were a number of businesses throughout the district lacking visible and legible signage.
- Façade materials, design, and conditions vary significantly but are overall very good throughout the district. Some buildings would greatly benefit from modest improvements.

Windows

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



The roadbed and crosswalks throughout the study area were in generally good condition with some smaller areas in need of regular maintenance or repaving.

Outdoor Dining/Display

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



Many of the sidewalks have ample width for outdoor dining. There are also portions of the downtown with built-in space for outdoor seating and dining on the sidewalk.

Signage

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



The signage for businesses within the study area was very good with appropriate sizing, location, and legibility. Wayfinding to connect to remote parking areas would be helpful in ensuring these spaces are used and that pedestrians feel safe using them.

Awnings

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



As was common for other communities throughout the state, not all commercial buildings had awnings, and due to the criteria for grading, the average was lower. The awnings or canopies on buildings that had them were generally in very good condition.

Façade

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



While there was a very wide range of building types and styles throughout the study area, the facades of commercial buildings were mostly well-maintained.

Lighting

- (A) *More than 75% of storefronts have lighting that helps illuminate sidewalks.*



Lighting on individual commercial buildings in most of the downtown was present and sufficient, particularly in conjunction with the street lighting to allow customers to easily see the businesses.

Key Findings



Study Area Businesses and Market Information

Highlights from DHCD March – April 2021 Business Survey Report for Amherst Downtown (small sample size), May 7, 2021 Business Focus Group and Business Owner interviews

Key Takeaways

- Town has been really supportive during COVID-19 pandemic – quick actions and accommodations have helped, and now businesses would love to see those good results continue: streamlining permitting and decisions, outdoor dining, implementing the Town-commissioned parking studies; continue the great communication.
- Costs for permitting – varied and multiple reviews, fees, and timelines for inspections and reviews can be prohibitive for new and existing businesses.
- Universities (students, staff, faculty, parents and visitors) are the main market for downtown Amherst, and accommodating that market allows the other goods, services, and dining that town residents enjoy and love.
- Need to attract and retain larger destination businesses (loss of Judy's as a local and family restaurant hurts everyone). Need anchors that appeal to locals, college market, including the professionals that work there, and regional visitors.
- Parking will be a major issue post-pandemic. People come from a 25-mile radius to the theater and a larger area to visit colleges and for meetings. Parking rates and time limits exclude theatre and restaurant goers...8 pm deadline is tough when eating and going to a show.
- Universities provide rich cultural destinations and resources...continue to collaborate and link them to downtown.
- Link outdoor events and cultural activities to businesses and downtown to create customer traffic, support existing businesses.
- The BID is a great advocate and resource. Encourage more collaboration between Chamber, BID and the Town. What's good for downtown is good for residents...the more people, the safer the streets, the better the selection of stores, dining, and services, and the better the upkeep of buildings and public realm.

From Spring 2021 site survey and survey data



135
Businesses
in Study Area



11
Vacant Storefronts
(from site survey)

\$25/SF Average Asking Rent
Ground Floor Retail
(from CoStar and/or interview)

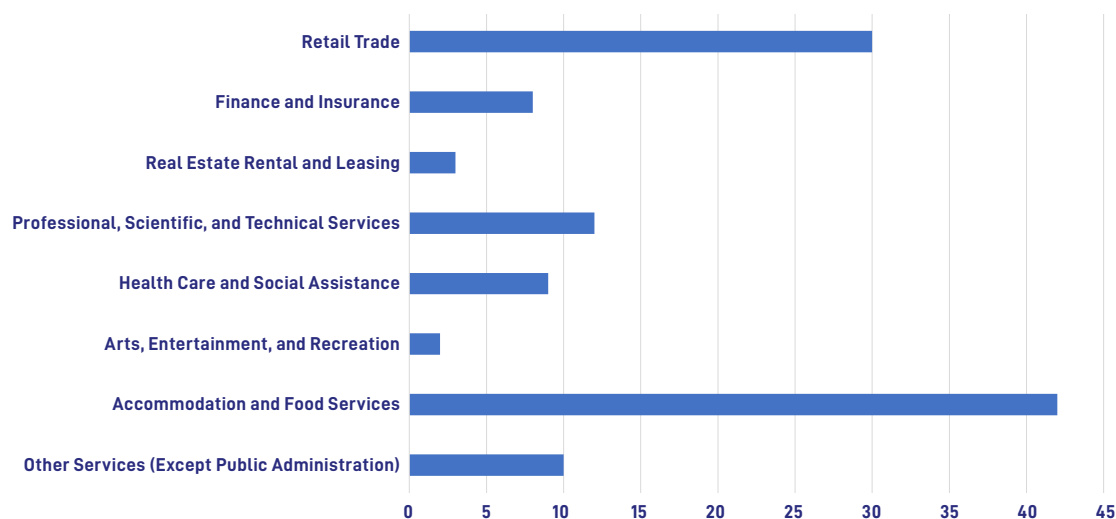
\$22/SF Average Asking Rent
Office Space
(from CoStar and/or interview)

Study Area Business Mix

Key Takeaways

- Top two business types are, by far, Accommodations and Food Services; Retail Trade.

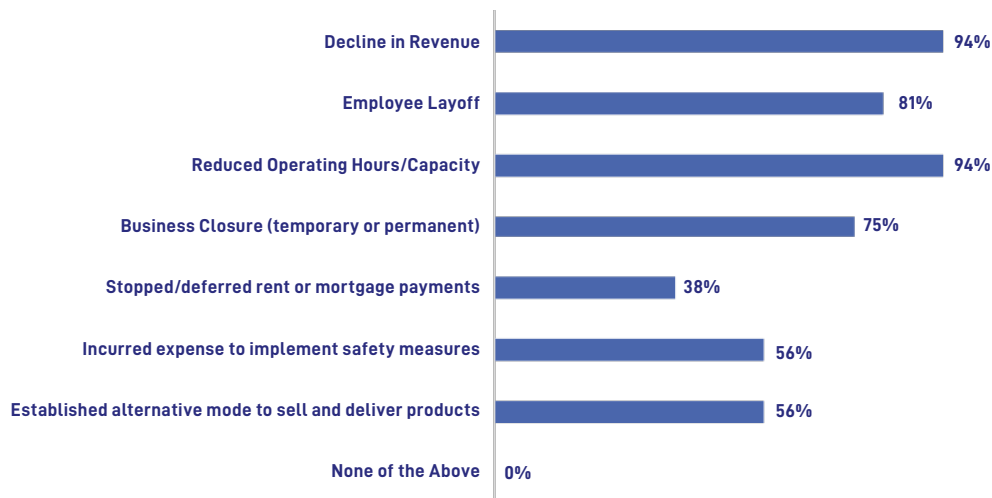
Number of Businesses by NAICS Category

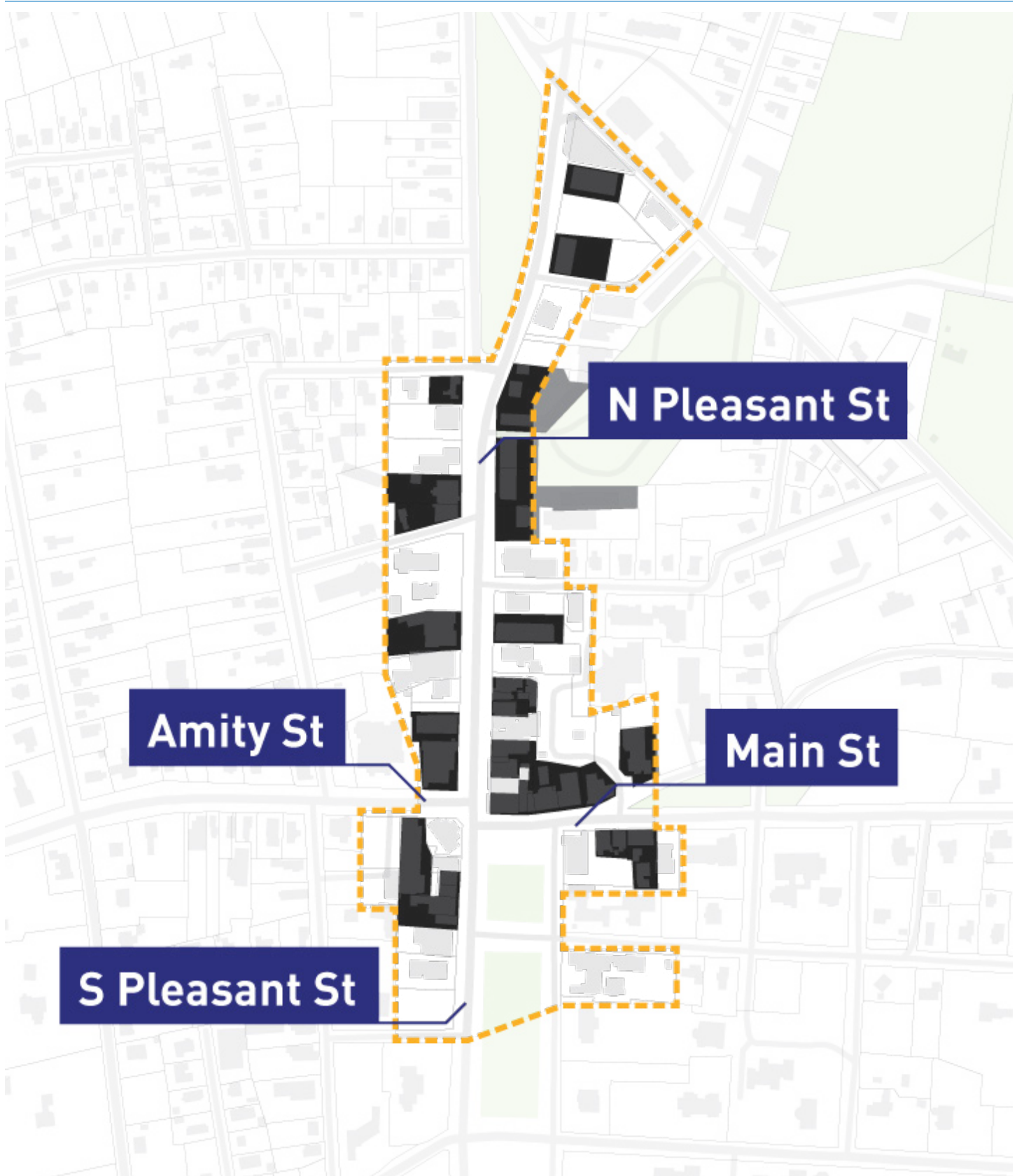



Highlights from DHCD March – April 2021 Business Survey Report for Downtown Amherst (16 responses to the survey)

- 89% of businesses had revenue decline by 25% or more in 2020 from 2019.
 - 88% of respondents rent their space.
 - 38% of businesses are microenterprises (≤ 5 employees).
 - 57% satisfied/very satisfied with public realm conditions (public spaces, sidewalks, streets).
 - 69% satisfied/very satisfied with private realm (building facades, storefronts, signage).
- Respondents' Thoughts on Strategies for Improvement... (important/very important)
- 61% to improve streetscape and sidewalks.
 - 82% to add more cultural events/activities.
 - 82% to implement marketing strategies for the district.
 - 76% for more opportunities for outdoor dining/selling.
 - 75% to change parking availability/management.
 - 69% to improve public spaces and seating.
 - 69% to improve streetscape and sidewalks.

COVID-19 Impacts Reported by Businesses





 Business with students as a large percentage of customer base

Source: Amherst Downtown BID, Spring 2021

Key Findings



Local Entities Directly Involved in RRP Application and Plan:

- Downtown Amherst Business Improvement District
- Town of Amherst
- The Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce
- The Downtown Amherst Foundation

Issues or Gaps we Heard:

- Need for continued good communications between Town departments (i.e., Public Services, Health Department, etc.), BID, Chamber, businesses that was instituted during pandemic

Big Picture Takeaways and Priorities

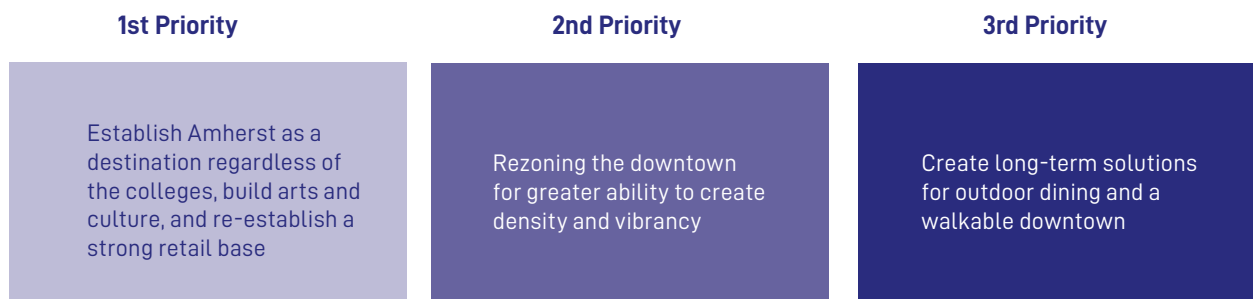
Big Picture Takeaways

- Build on the Town and BID successes during the pandemic. The Town, BID, and Chamber get high marks for flexibility and rapid responses. Businesses and the downtown experience for everyone is best served if this spirit of collaboration, flexibility, and innovation continues. The pandemic forced everyone to think outside of the box with positive results. As with many communities across the state, an examination of what worked well and how "business as usual" should be adjusted for the long-term can yield longer-term benefits.
- Residents have the benefit of goods, dining, and services that exist because of colleges...embrace it or lose it. Conversations with Town officials and others reveal that over the years, area colleges and universities have created more amenities, entertainment, and food options right on campuses, creating reasons for students to stay put and not frequent downtown. This has partly occurred because the downtown didn't have enough to offer. Attracting even a fraction of the area student, faculty, and staff population means the difference between a full range of dining and shopping choices for residents and vacant storefronts.
- The student population is very different than it was a decade or more ago...area colleges and universities attract top researchers and scholars; students want the same things professionals, empty nesters, and seniors want, which is good food, culture, outdoor recreation, walkable destinations, friendly and safe civic spaces), and their parents want it too.
- The downtown is the first impression in recruiting students to area colleges and universities. That leaves lots of room for collaboration, and both the Town and BID can work with these institutions to support an environment everyone loves.
- Arts and culture are a key opportunity here – do everything you can to protect and nurture.
- Old stories die hard. Town officials, working with the BID, have been trying to change perceptions of Amherst as a place less friendly to businesses but are learning that the stories stick around even as things are changing. Recent changes and updates to permitting and licensing and the flexibility shown by the Town during the pandemic create opportunities for a new shared message – Amherst welcomes businesses. It will be important to back this progress up with additional business supports and programs.

Town of Amherst Short-Term Priorities



Town of Amherst Medium/Long-Term Priorities





Project Recommendations

Project Recommendations

1. Create a Business Buddy System to pair existing business owners with prospective new entrepreneurs in town to give inclusive support and encouragement to new businesses.
2. Undertake a consensus building process to enable adoption of zoning revisions for downtown Amherst to strengthen local businesses, especially arts and cultural activities, expand housing, and improve permitting predictability and built outcomes.
3. Create a public art and public spaces strategy that connects the downtown, supports downtown arts and cultural branding, and helps maximize use of underutilized spaces and amenities.
4. Support the creation of a new cultural anchor downtown.
5. Create a map that identifies potential public art locations and places to activate public spaces in the downtown as a base to initiate the larger public arts strategy.
6. Develop a coordinated and collaborative communications and marketing strategy to promote downtown as a regional (and beyond) arts and cultural destination.
7. Create a "Business Talks" feedback mechanism to allow the Town to get timely responses to efforts to be more business-friendly and to get input on possible modifications to licensing, permitting, and zoning procedures.
8. Hire Town economic development staff and provide enhanced business recruitment and technical assistance for a diverse range of entrepreneurs to locate and succeed in the Downtown and throughout Amherst.
9. Make temporary outdoor dining regulations permanent for Downtown.
10. Implement parking strategies and public realm enhancements to make use of downtown underutilized parking in the near term and to meet increased demand in the future to support the recovery of businesses, the success of a new arts and culture anchor, and the brand of downtown as a cultural destination.

Create a Business Buddy System to pair existing business owners with prospective new entrepreneurs in town to give inclusive support and encouragement to new businesses.

Potential names: Amherst Business Alliance (ABA), Better Together

Category		Administrative Capacity
Location		Study Area and all of Amherst
Origin		Town of Amherst
Budget & Funding Sources		<p>Medium Budget</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>Costs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time for Town, BID, and Chamber to review project recommendations, set goals, needs, and timeline, as well as oversee program. • A consultant's time to help set up program and train mentors in the buddy system. • The administrative work to match existing business owners to prospective business owners – Town, BID or Chamber staff person. • Marketing costs – add-on for existing Chamber or BID marketing, supported by Town: social media, other outreach, branding of program (between \$1,000 - \$2,500). <p>Sources of Funding</p> <p>In addition to Town funds and staff support, the following are appropriate sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) • Biz-M-Power (Project limit: \$20,000) To assist low-income and moderate-income entrepreneurs with their acquisition, expansion, improvement or lease of a facility, purchase or lease of equipment, or with meeting other capital needs of a business. • MA Downtown Initiative Project (Project limit: \$25,000) Technical assistance for downtown revitalization in 6 categories (public realm, private realm, revenue and sales, tenant mix, culture/arts, administrative capacity). • Regional Economic Development Organization Grant Program (Project limit: N/A) Grants should be used to assist entrepreneurs, small businesses, and business partners in order to stabilize and/or grow regional economy.

Budget & Funding Sources

- Small Business Matching Program
(Project limit: \$5,000) To support micro-enterprises (businesses with 5 or fewer employees) that need help with marketing and accounting.
- Small Business Technical Assistance Grant
(Project limit: \$85,000) To fund specific counseling and training programs that assist small businesses in securing new or increased financing for growth, providing digital grants (MGCC Program), establishing crowdfunding campaigns through the Biz-M-Power grant (MGCC Program), achieving stability and viability, creating/retaining jobs, increasing the economic vitality of the neighborhood, community, or region.

Timeframe



Short Term (<5 years)

Note that timelines below can be condensed based on actual program components. See Process section for a full description of possible steps.

Program Planning Part 1 (Internal Planning): 6 months

Program Planning Part 2 (Community Outreach): 6 months

Program Planning Part 3 (Marketing): 6 months

Program Management: trial period of 5 years, and indefinite if successful

Risk



Low Risk

Risks are relatively low for this project. Risks to be considered are:

- The program isn't as successful as the Town/BID/Chamber hopes it to be, resulting in wasted money and efforts.
- Resistance from community members who want to slow development and tourism.

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of new emerging businesses in Amherst
- Number of new business applicants
- A revitalized Town reputation of being welcoming and encouraging of new prospective businesses
- Increased tourism in the restaurant, recreation and retail sectors
 - ◊ Increased sales and store/business visits by customers
 - ◊ Increased foot traffic by residents and visitors

Partners & Resources

Partners

- Town of Amherst staff (administrative staff, planning and economic development, building and health code inspectors)
- Existing Amherst business owners and entrepreneurs
- Prospective Amherst business owners and entrepreneurs

Resources

- Mass Development

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

Similar to most business districts during the COVID-19 pandemic, Amherst faced a decline in sales and revenue from its restaurant, recreational, and retail industries. The Town made extraordinarily successful efforts during the pandemic to build in flexibility to zoning for outdoor dining and create more streamlined processes for businesses and continuing these model efforts (Amherst has been held up as a state-wide example of good practices to support businesses during pandemic) is critical to the ongoing health of the district.

The one challenge to continued success is in recruiting new businesses and filling vacant storefronts. Amherst is hurt by a preexisting perception that is unfriendly and unwelcoming to new and prospective businesses. This reputation contributes to the struggle the BID and Town has with recruiting new businesses to fill vacancies and to contribute to the goods and services residents, students, and visitors need and want.

The client has expressed the following concerns:

- Amherst has a reputation of being unfriendly and unwelcoming to new and prospective businesses and entrepreneurs.
- The town lacks permanent streamlined rubrics for business permitting and licensing and new business owners can be daunted by the requirements for setting up shop in the town.

Developing a business buddy system can support all the good things the Town has accomplished during the COVID-19 pandemic and will send a clear message to new and prospective business owners that their businesses are welcome and encouraged.

This project also supports two other LRRP project recommendations:

- Create a feedback mechanism to make continued improvements to licensing and permitting requirements
- Implement a business recruitment and mentoring program that sends a strong message that Amherst is business-friendly for BIPOC entrepreneurs and other business owners.

Action Item

Create a Business Buddy Program that matches prospective town businesses and entrepreneurs with existing business owners to create personal connections and provide a "buddy" or liaison to assist with navigating the Town's regulations and rules.

The long-term overall goals of the program are to support the work of the Town in supporting businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure the word gets out to counteract any previous negative perceptions about the Town's business friendly environment.

Specific goals include:

- Economic development through invigorated tourism
- Create new narrative about town's relationship with businesses (existing and prospective)
- Create a sense of unity and collaboration within the business sector
- Create a network of business buddies or liaisons that can offer support to new businesses

Process

Please note that although multiple steps are indicated below, this program can be as simple or complex as the town desires and/or has resources and capacity to implement.

Program Planning Part 1:

Internal Planning within Planning and Community Development Departments and others such as the Downtown BID

1. Decide whether this is a project that can be done in-house or requires a consultant with appropriate expertise.
2. Determine targets for the program in order to understand the resources and assistance needed to implement the program:
 - Number of existing businesses/entrepreneurs who may be buddies
 - Possible number of prospective businesses and entrepreneurs
 - Number of trainers (if any) to create and facilitate trainings for existing businesses/entrepreneurs
3. Decide which funding sources are appropriate and, if the source is a grant program, apply for funds.
4. If a consultant is necessary, issue an RFP for services, or go through the Commonwealth's procurement process (unless the grant program has an on-call consultant).

Program Planning Part 2:

Community Outreach

5. Host a public town meeting calling all existing businesses and entrepreneurs. Goals of the town meeting:
 - a. To educate existing businesses on the benefits of creating and participating in a business buddy system
 - b. To get all potentially participating parties on the same page
 - c. To gather a sense of willingness to enter the business buddy system
 - d. To collect confirmation (post meeting – after given enough time to process and reflect) from existing businesses that they are willing to participate
 - e. To collect information from existing businesses on their mentorship capabilities that the administrative staff will use to match to prospective businesses.
6. Form a Working Group of key stakeholders to strategize best methods for implementation. The Working Group should include:
 - a. Town Planner/Economic Development (lead)
 - b. Amherst BID
 - c. Existing businesses and entrepreneurs
 - d. Administrative staff who will be in charge of mentorship matching
 - e. Project consultant if applicable

Program Planning Part 3:

Marketing

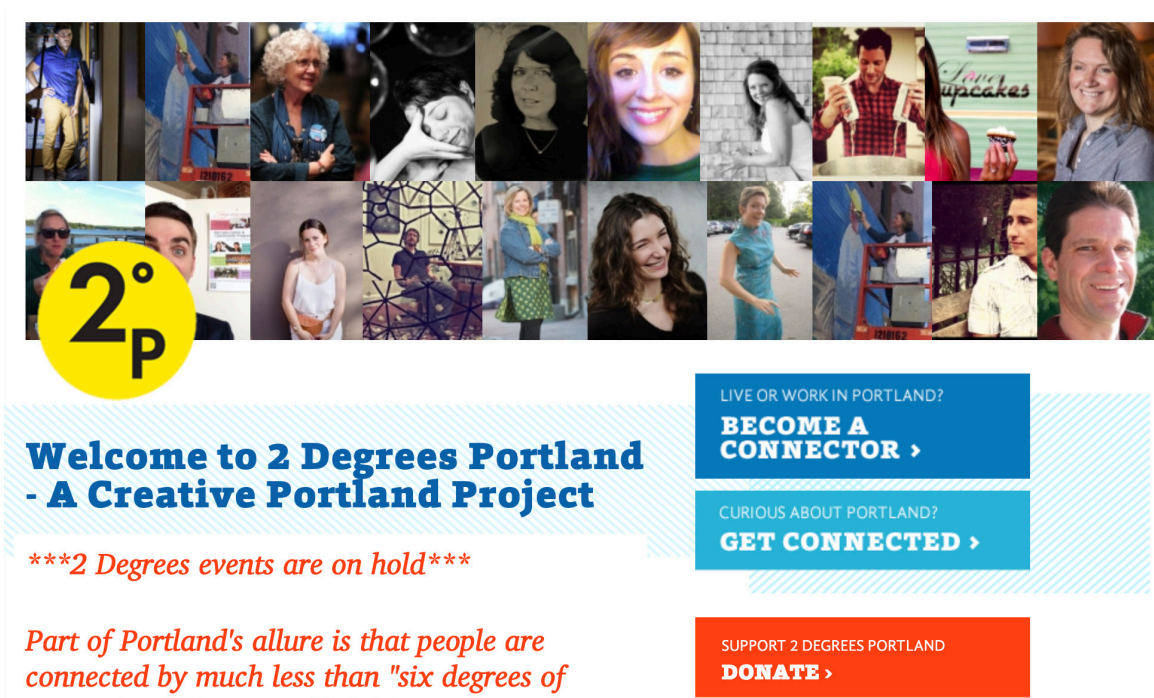
7. Establish a budget for marketing.
8. Create a marketing strategy to create a network of new and prospective business owners and to send the message that Amherst is offering this project to support new businesses in the Town.

Project Example

2 Degrees Portland, Portland ME

2 Degrees Portland is a networking service for engineers, artists, entrepreneurs, designers, and other creative professionals who want to find out what it's like to live and work in Portland. Visitors to Portland or those who are exploring the city through online means can ask Creative Portland to connect them with a like-minded professional. The organization has also sponsored gatherings so people can connect in person.




For more information: www.creativeportland.com/connect-visit/2-degrees-portland



Screenshot of the 2 Degrees Portland Website
Photo: [2 Degrees Portland](http://www.creativeportland.com)

Undertake a consensus building process to enable adoption of zoning revisions for downtown Amherst to strengthen local businesses, especially arts and cultural activities, expand housing, and improve permitting predictability and built outcomes.

Contributions from Dodson & Flinker, Inc., SME consultant

Category		Administrative Capacity
Location		Study Area
Origin		Amherst Downtown BID, Local Businesses
Budget & Funding Sources	 	<p>Low – Medium Budget</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>Cost of project is relatively low and involves staff time, or consultant fees, to conduct a public process to come to consensus about the vision for downtown Amherst. When consensus is achieved, staff or a consultant can write zoning recommendations and/or prepare more detailed analysis of potential zoning impacts and build-out expectations.</p> <p>Sources of Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Board budget—if the Board has a sufficient budget allocated Local appropriation at Town Meeting Community Planning Grant from EOEEA (\$25,000-\$75,000 in FY22 round). This program is now part of the One Stop for Growth. Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) Technical Assistance Grant. This grant provides for up to \$25,000 of technical assistance which is provided by consultants under contract with MDI. The applicable project category from the FY22 application guidelines are "Design" and/or "Housing." This program is now part of the One Stop for Growth. District Local Technical Assistance. Regional Planning Agencies—like PVPC—receive funding from the Commonwealth to provide technical assistance to member communities. Usually, the regional planning agency issues a solicitation to municipalities for projects. While obtaining District Local Technical Assistance is a relatively easy lift for a municipality, it is important to match the project scope with the capabilities of the available staff at the regional planning agency. Most regional planning agencies have staff that are experienced with traditional zoning and may have worked on design guidelines. They may be well suited for later stages in this project. However, because consensus building is a relatively specialized skill, it is worth asking if regional planning agency staff have experience with complex consensus building processes.

Budget & Funding Sources

- MVP Action Grant. Amherst received a \$100,000 MVP Action Grant to "provide additional resources to build out our Climate Action Plan and ensure vulnerable communities are able to engage in the process that impacts their lives most directly." The Town could build off of that effort to get MVP funding to implement aspects of the #2 top action in Amherst's MVP Plan which was (emphasis added) "Sustainable land use and development: Recognizing the desirability of Amherst as a place to live, participants repeatedly discussed strategies for development in a community with one-third of its land dedicated to conservation as well as an aging housing stock. **Participants suggested greater density near existing infrastructure systems,** revealed a clear appreciation for the conservation of natural resources, **pointed to the town's housing shortage, and highlighted the tension between preserving Amherst's character and facilitating new development.** Participants also devoted significant time to discussing the town's master plan, brainstorming ways to update, improve, and build upon the completed document to forefront equity and sustainability."
- Foundation Grants. Amherst may be able to find foundation grants for a consensus building process from foundations focused on social justice, grass-roots community organizing, climate change, housing, or arts and culture. However, many foundations are not able to give grants that influence government policy.

Timeframe



Short Term

- Establish working group (2 months)
- Hire consensus building consultant, if needed (3 months) (concurrent with above step)
- Undertake consensus building process (8 months-1 year)
- Hire zoning consultant if needed (3 months)
- Develop zoning changes (1 year)
- Adopt zoning changes (3 months)

A consensus building process for downtown Amherst should have a strict limited duration to prevent "analysis paralysis" and cut off excessive debate. Eight months to a year of focused effort should be sufficient to explore the issues and determine whether a consensus can be achieved. Adoption of zoning changes could take up to an additional 1-2 years depending on the scope.

Risk

Low Risk

Risks include political – zoning revisions do not pass – and staff time as well as board time to discuss and review that do not result in changes. Risks are higher as related to success of BID efforts to use arts and culture to support downtown and ensure residents have the goods, services, and destinations they need and desire. New efforts for an arts and culture anchor downtown cannot exist in a vacuum and the investments made by the property owner, BID, and proposed businesses in that project will be at risk if overall support for arts and cultural uses and greater density, including housing options, cannot be implemented.

Key Performance Indicators

- Change in the zoning code.
- Ability of arts and cultural uses and activities to locate in the downtown (number of new uses, activities, programs).
- Occupancy rate of ground floor spaces in existing and new construction.
- Growth and survival of existing businesses.
- Number of business expansions.
- Number of new housing units downtown.
- Reduced time for approval of permits.
- Anecdotal evidence of decreased conflict around land use issues.

Partners & Resources

Partners

- Town of Amherst - lead
- BID
- Downtown Amherst Foundation
- Chamber of Commerce
- Property owners
- Existing arts and cultural businesses and organizations
- Amherst Cultural Council
- Renters
- Residents of all ages and socio-economic statuses (utilize networks developed during recent climate planning and other community-led planning efforts)
- Sustainability Coordinator

Resources

- Baltimore zoning changes to allow live music in more restaurants (2021) and text of the adopted legislation
- City of New Orleans – Zoning, Permitting, and Licensing for Cultural Businesses and more info on MaCCNO
- Food Truck Legal Toolkit (City of Boston)
- American Planning Association PAS Info Packet – Regulating Food Trucks (2015) – note this is a few years old but lists a number of zoning examples/best practices

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

Downtown Amherst businesses needed to adapt and change quickly during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the shut-down of local universities (and absence of 30,000 students and the thousands of staff and faculty at these institutions) made it clear that businesses need to diversify from reliance on the high-education population for survival. The Town was flexible and quick to respond to business needs. Further Town actions, related to zoning changes, can continue to support downtown recovery and ongoing success of the district. Allowing more arts and cultural uses as of right, providing more flexibility for ground floor uses that recognize the local market, increasing density to bring more housing to the downtown, and clarifying design review to provide tangible targets and guidelines can all help support downtown.

It should be noted that as of September 2021, Amherst is working on zoning amendments to address some of the issues discussed in this project recommendation. The assessment of zoning presented in the themes below is intended to be unbiased as to the current political process in order to offer information for consideration and decision-making.

A high-level review of Amherst's zoning bylaw illuminates several themes:

1. The zoning reflects a downtown that is a long-term transition from a small-town center to a more vibrant mixed-use downtown. It strikes a balance on several issues that will likely continue to be debated for coming decades including: the appropriate level of housing development; how to maintain a cohesive commercial core in the face of economic trends that have reduced the market for retail space (and potentially office space in the wake of COVID-19); how to balance the needs of downtown with those of adjacent residential areas; how to address the differing needs or desires (or the perception that they are different) of younger people and older people.
2. Amherst's zoning is complex and nuanced. This can make it difficult to navigate, even though it is relatively well organized and generally clearly written.
3. Special Permit Findings, Site Plan Review Criteria, and Design Review Standards are all relatively broad and unspecific. This leaves review boards with wide latitude. More objective standards would constrain boards and applicants but increase predictability for applicants, board members, and residents of the Town at large. In particular, the Design Review Standards and the associated Design Review Board Handbook could be updated to incorporate best practices developed by the form-based code movement and/or recently developed design guidelines or standards (including those developed for 40R districts).
4. If Amherst desires additional entertainment venues, it could consider allowing theater, motion picture house, or other indoor commercial amusement or assembly use by right (or by site plan review) with performance standards to mitigate any unwanted impacts of those uses.
5. There are several key provisions in the zoning that are unclear, including those related to which districts are subject to ground floor residential is limitations, and which dimensional standards some B-L uses are exempt from (footnote b in the Dimensional Table). The pdf zoning map's symbology could be clarified—without changing its content.
6. Many zoning changes that could facilitate business success and additional housing in downtown Amherst are not technically complex—some are as simple as changing a single number—but making those changes would require a strong consensus about what the downtown should be.

See Memo from Project SME to Town of Amherst and Amherst Downtown BID dated 9/21/21 for further details.

Action Item

Undertake a consensus building process to enable adoption of any zoning changes for downtown Amherst that: prioritize arts and cultural uses and activities downtown; facilitate downtown housing development to meet housing needs and provide customers to support existing businesses; manage the transition between the downtown core and residential areas; clarify design standards to improve permitting predictability and built outcomes, especially the interface between buildings and sidewalks; and clarify confusing provisions in the zoning.

Key Actions

1. Decide on the best method for building consensus about zoning changes in downtown Amherst and the policy decisions that underly them.
2. Obtain funding and hire consultant, as needed.
3. Undertake consensus building process. Potential policy decisions include:
 - ◇ What is the role of arts and culture businesses and activities in the downtown and how can any negative impacts from them be mitigated?
 - ◇ What is the level of housing density needed to meet Amherst's housing goals and to support current and future businesses and the vibrancy of downtown overall? How much of that housing should be provided downtown, in what configurations (building types, unit types) and in which locations?
 - ◇ Are the existing transitions between downtown and adjacent neighborhoods successful? How do they need to change?
 - ◇ Do the built outcomes of recent projects meet expectations and contribute to a high-quality public realm? If not, what changes to zoning or design standards are necessary?
4. Make decisions about key topics and record them.
5. Publicize the results of the consensus building process widely, including extensive community outreach.
6. Obtain funding and hire a consultant for zoning changes, if needed.
7. Draft and revise zoning changes, including extensive community outreach.
8. Adopt zoning changes.
9. Publicize zoning changes to potential developers and business owners.
10. Monitor impacts of zoning changes and revise as needed.

Process

There are many ways to implement the actions above. The following process describes one approach to Consensus Building and the Zoning Consensus Building Process:

- Explain the consensus building process and why it is necessary to community leaders including relevant Town staff, Town Council, Planning Board. Determine whether the community leaders will agree to support the results of the working group process. If they will, proceed. If not, stop here.
- Establish the framework for a consensus building process. Set project objectives, preliminary timeline, preliminary list of types of participants, assemble background materials, identify preliminary consensus building approach. Note: these will all be confirmed or revised by participants.
- Determine whether a consultant is required.
- Obtain funding if needed.
- Hire consultant if needed.

Process

- Recruit and train a working group composed of representatives from a broad cross-section of groups and interests in Amherst. It is important that representatives be able to “speak for their constituents” and that their constituents will trust any decision their representative endorses.
- Working group reviews and agrees upon objectives, timeline, ground rules, and participants (adding more if needed).
- Undertake shared fact finding—working group members review background information, determine whether they agree with the facts or not, clarify facts as needed, gather additional facts through additional research as needed.
- Identify underlying values and interests of the working group members and by extension the community.
- Identify options and evaluate them, including options identified through previous planning work.
- Agree upon the best options for decision points.
- Document the working group's decisions in accessible and visually compelling materials.
- Craft an implementation plan that the working group members formally agree to support.

Zoning Revisions

- Determine whether a consultant is required.
- Obtain funding if needed.
- Hire consultant if needed.
- Determine the best method for implementing the policy decisions made by the working group. Review recommended implementation method with working group for their approval.
- Draft zoning provisions.
- Illustrate how zoning provisions will impact development by developing test designs for actual sites.
- Conduct broad community outreach about proposed zoning provisions with the working group out in front.
- Revise zoning provisions as needed.
- Bring zoning changes through formal adoption process.

Implementation and Evaluation

- Publicize zoning changes and encourage businesses and property owners to take advantage of new opportunities.
- Identify local and regional developers and business owners with relevant experience and strong track records of success and engage with them about opportunities in the downtown.
- Track new applications to understand how zoning changes are being used.
- Evaluate effectiveness of zoning regularly and revise as needed.

Project Example

Somerville Zoning Overhaul

Somerville, MA

Somerville, the most dense community in Massachusetts, undertook a successful complete rewrite of its zoning code. The multi-year effort involved extensive community outreach. It resulted in the most ambitious form-based code adopted in Massachusetts. The code contains a variety of design standards as well as use-based standards that could be a model for Amherst.



Consensus Building Institute

Meriden, CT

In the early 2000s various stakeholders embarked on the "The Meriden City Center Initiative." The goal of the project was to create a plan to revitalize the downtown. Consensus Building Institute was hired to conduct a stakeholder assessment to evaluate public opinion and concerns about redevelopment, and to design a public involvement plan. They hosted 43 stakeholder meetings, and three larger meetings to gather information from all invested parties. The results of their meetings helped inform Phase II of the final report.

[Read the full case study here.](#)

Create a public art and public spaces strategy that connects the downtown, supports downtown arts and cultural branding, and helps maximize use of underutilized spaces and amenities.

Category		Arts & Culture
Location		Study Area
Origin		Amherst BID, Town of Amherst
Budget & Funding Sources		<p>Medium Budget</p> <p>Budget <i>This is a longer-term project with short-term actions.</i></p> <p><u>Near-term</u> The near-term goals are for art crosswalks and smaller building murals. These items are low budget and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning work: Town staff time (planning, economic development, DPW, transportation, parks) and BID time to review Public Art and Public Space Map as the base for the larger arts and space strategy. • Project coordination: BID staff member. • Crosswalk or pavement art: goal would be five crosswalk/pavement works spread across the downtown. Cost \$2,000-\$5,000 each (depending on complexity and road or sidewalk width. Includes maintenance for 2 years. Wear and tear is different on every surface). • Murals: \$3,000 - \$4,000 per small or medium size mural for artists fee (dependent on size and complexity), materials for a total of up to \$20,000. • Sidewalk poetry – DPW • LED art projects - widely varies. • Marketing and graphic design work for logo/branding/social media for overall project: existing BID effort. • Insurance costs – require artists to have insurance or use blanket Town or BID policy for the project, if possible (allows more artists to participate). • Public space activation (parking lots/garage) – Town to contract with BID, possibly private businesses to manage pop-ups. • Materials for temporary projects, events, and activities related to the overall effort (for marketing and public interest purposes and to launch the project) including chalk, pavement paints, planters, street furniture (tables and chairs). \$2,500 - \$5,000.

Budget & Funding Sources

Mid to longer-term

Mid to longer-term work on public art and spaces will require additional funding at a higher level and this includes murals on larger buildings, sculpture, as well as retrofit of public spaces for more user-friendly amenities.

Sources of Funding

- Town of Amherst
- [Cities of Service grant](#) (must become Cities of Service member)
- [MassDevelopment Technical Assistance](#)
- [Mass Cultural Council](#)
- MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places
- Amherst Cultural Council
- [MA Community One Stop for Growth](#)
- [NEA Our Town Grant](#)
- Funding for Town projects already in pipeline (parks, transportation, infrastructure, beautification, etc.) that could incorporate public art and beautification.
- Local and regional foundations
- Patronicity Campaign

Timeframe



Short Term – Medium Term

Near-term goals can be accomplished in 6-9 months with longer-term actions requiring two years or more. This phased effort is designed to have short term results without a longer-term framework for ongoing public art and space improvements in the next decade and beyond.

Near-term

Months 1-4: While the Public Art and Public Space Map project is underway, identify first pilot projects and funding sources, identify pop-up opportunities, draft guidelines and RFP for artists.

Months 4-5: Issue RFP, selection process, contract with artists.

Months 6-9: Execution of first pilot projects, public event and marketing to celebrate same.

One year and onward: Move forward with additional projects (Immediate goal is 5 murals and 5 crosswalk/pavement art projects in the first two years, if possible.

Mid to longer-term

To be determined based on success of first phase.

Risk



Low Risk

The risks are relatively low for this project. Risks to be considered are:

While the planning of using public art and cultural activities to link throughout the downtown is a low risk, the implementation will require political and community agreement in placement and selection of artwork/ activities, possible regulatory changes, and ongoing funding for installation, maintenance, and events.

Other risks include:

- Achieving critical mass: The Town must install a critical mass of public art to create destination points throughout the downtown to be successful in connecting spaces and providing a pleasant pedestrian experience. This is particularly true around efforts to connect to the Boltwood Garage and enhance perceptions of pedestrian safety in this area.
- Marketing: This entire effort must be branded and marketed to have an impact on walkability and connectivity in the downtown as well as in attracting visitors in all seasons.
- Ownership: Spaces identified will very likely include public and private spaces and owners must be on board.

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of new crosswalk/pavement art works, murals, and LED lighting art projects
- Number of new temporary improvements to public space (tables, chairs, etc.)
- Creation of art walk/public art map (showing "as built" conditions and made public as the Downtown Art Map)
- Increased foot traffic by residents and visitors
- Increased use of underutilized spaces (Boltwood Parking Garage, other remote or hidden parking lots)
- Increased sales and store/business visits by customers
- Number of social media likes, impressions, forwards of public art images

Partners & Resources

Partners

- Town of Amherst
- Amherst Downtown BID
- Amherst Cultural Council
- Massachusetts Cultural Council
- Amherst Chamber of Commerce
- Private property owners
- Area educational institutions

Resources

- Mass Development
- MAPC Arts and Culture Planning Toolkit

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts	<p>The impacts of COVID-19 to the business community were felt instantaneously with the temporary shutdown of business-as-usual, but more acutely with the universities and colleges sending students and employees home. The need to broaden the destination-aspect of the downtown along with improving the links between spaces within the district to provide more "stickiness" was identified early on.</p> <p>As the Amherst BID continues to craft an arts and cultural image for the downtown, the use of public art, sidewalk poetry, and art LED lighting projects, supports these goals. These art projects can link spaces (parking lots, underground garage, major destinations) and encourage pedestrian exploration of the downtown while also enhancing perceptions of safety and shortening perceived distances to unpopular or distance locations (underground garage, hidden parking, northern part of the downtown disconnected with core of downtown).</p>
Action Item	<p>Identify a range of near and longer-term public art and public space improvement opportunities and develop the framework and funding to create a sustainable public art and public space program that creates areas of interest throughout the downtown. New public art installations and public space improvements will help knit the downtown together and offer cultural destinations to help Amherst diversify the business market and visitor demographic.</p>
Process	<p>Phase I</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Town and BID to review Public Art and Public Space Map (provided separately in that project recommendation) to initiate the larger art and public space strategy. The map is a guide for starting. Town and BID should continually revise criteria for public art locations and adjust map accordingly to show all possible locations with type of art project suitable. 2. From the list of identified properties from the Public Art and Public Space Map project and using Town Assessor data, contact building and property owners/managers of locations shown on the map or adjacent to those locations. Ask their interest in participating by offering space or a wall for a mural. 3. Secure a minimum of \$25,000 - \$50,000 funding for the initial phase. 4. Work with Town to identify easy first projects (sidewalk poetry installed by DPW with volunteer help, pop-ups on roof of Boltwood Garage, etc.). 5. Develop an RFP for first public art installations (murals and/or crosswalks) with clear guidelines and locations for five inaugural murals. Include photos of locations, overall theme if applicable, and guidelines for content, timeline, artist credentials, etc. Decide on criteria for artist eligibility: local, experience with a certain number of murals, etc.? Consider requiring artists to run a half-day workshop or actual temporary art session outside in the downtown to kick-off mural painting – contributing to a public art event at the project kick-off. 6. Consider using the selection process as a public outreach/marketing opportunity – the assessment of proposals could be a public event, or all entries could be displayed in public locations on posters for feedback from community before final deliberations. Be clear on process in the RFP. 7. Announce selected artists and murals through social media and other channels. 8. Contract with the five artists and begin mural work.

Process

9. Create a map showing murals and public art in the downtown, update regularly as the public art program progresses. Consider creating a district treasure hunt with public art/murals at different scales and in hidden places to attract visitors and customers throughout the area (ensuring businesses benefit from public art program).
10. Plan for a series of events to celebrate the mural and crosswalk/pavement art work including:
 - a. Start-up day events including artist-led sidewalk chalk activities.
 - b. Do video and photo documentation to post on Facebook, Instagram, and in other ways for the duration of the project.
 - c. Completion festival (develop strategies for this festival to support local businesses by creating a passport for various destinations in town, featuring local businesses on the mural map, etc.)

Phase II

1. This work would include additional public art including public space improvements and larger projects. Phase 2 can include sculpture, LED light art, and can be closely aligned with public events.

Project Example

Central Square Murals

Cambridge, MA

Diagnostic or challenge they were trying to solve

Create a mural walk and destination for a Massachusetts Cultural Council designated Cultural District. The goal was to create 10 murals to help enliven and celebrate the diverse urban nature of Central Square, while bolstering the cultural district status.

Action item

The Central Square Mural Project is rooted in the community with support from local businesses, property owners, residents, and students. The murals celebrate Central square, the local creative economy, equity, inclusion, and social and environmental justice. Unlike typical mural project that feature visiting artists, Central Square Mural Project focused on artists that have a tie to the Boston-Cambridge region. While some of these artists are world-renowned, all of them are either native or long-term residents of the area which breathes a deeper celebration of the Central Square into the works.

Partners, budget, funding, timeline info

This project was created through a partnership between Central Square Business Association, MIT, and Cambridge Arts Council. The project was funded through Patronicity and MassDevelopment's program Commonwealth Places. They raised \$51,400 through this effort. Other funding from the partners may have been utilized to complete this project.






Central Sq by Need Signs Will Paint
Photo: CivicMoxie



For Cambridge, With Love From Nepal by IMAGINE
Photo: CivicMoxie

Support the creation of a new cultural anchor downtown.

Category		Arts & Culture
Location		Study Area
Origin		Amherst Downtown BID
Budget & Funding Sources		<p>High Budget</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>\$500,000 for build-out, including state-of-the-art sound, staging, and lighting; opening; and programming for first season.</p> <p><i>The Downtown Amherst Foundation (DAF) and Downtown BID secured a Massachusetts Regional State Pilot Grant through the Massachusetts Office of Business Development for \$175,000 in April 2021 which has covered work completed to date (including three-year prepayment of friendly long-term lease agreement, professional design services, and demolition). In addition, the BID has donated \$80,000 toward lighting and sound for the project.</i></p> <p>Sources of Funding</p> <p>(For completion of project as well as possible public realm programming and art projects connected to the facility)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ARPA Funds (through the Town of Amherst)• Patronicity online funding campaign• MassDevelopment Cultural Facilities Fund• Cities of Service grant (must become Cities of Service member)• MassDevelopment Technical Assistance• Mass Cultural Council• MA Community One Stop for Growth• MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places
Timeframe		<p>Short Term</p> <p>Phase 1: performance and music venue for 200 people. Demolition completed and construction to start in mid-September 2021. Slated to open in Winter 2022.</p> <p>Phase 2: local food market (840 sq ft), art studios (2,316 sq ft), restaurant (4,857 sq ft) and other uses. Twelve months after completion of Phase 1.</p>

Risk

Medium Risk

This project has more political risk than financial. If the remaining \$500,000 can be raised to complete the project, financial risk is low for multiple reasons:

- There is a long-term extremely friendly lease deal on the building.
- The Commonwealth of MA Pilot Program grant of \$175,000 has enabled prepayment of three years on the lease, allowing the project to focus on excellence in programming and operations during the start-up period.
- The launch of The Drake will involve a number of local partnerships with deep roots in the Valley's music scene. Laudable Productions of Easthampton, Massachusetts, will work with the DAF to book and program the performance space with a global offering of well-known and sought-after acts, and an experienced food service manager will be managing the operations of the bar and space.
- Plans for The Drake were launched after surveys of downtown patrons and focus groups and discussions with downtown stakeholders, residents, and town officials. While Amherst has a number of museums and performing arts venues, most reside on the campuses of UMass Amherst and Amherst and Hampshire Colleges. Overwhelmingly, conversations and interviews revealed a demand for a downtown music venue.

Political risk for this project is higher than financial risk. Political commitment is needed for the project to get the \$300,000 support needed from the Town through ARPA funding. Given the investment already made by the MA Office of Business Development, lack of Town support for this project could jeopardize future funding and credibility of ongoing BID/DAF efforts to use arts and culture to support downtown and ensure residents have the goods, services, and destinations they need and desire. New efforts for an arts and culture anchor downtown cannot exist in a vacuum or without Town support. The ongoing ability to attract State and Federal funding and grants and the investments made by the BID and proposed future businesses in the anchor will be at risk if overall support for arts and cultural uses and transformative efforts are not supported.

Key Performance Indicators

Phase 1: Second Floor 200-seat music and performance space "The Drake."

- Completion of construction and performance build-out and opening.
- Number of performances – scheduled during peak and "down times" for downtown.
- Ticket sales – percentage of performances with high sales.
- Demographic of audience for performance venue – regional draw that is beyond Amherst local market (possibly international as well).
- Performance/dining/shopping package discount deals – how many audience members are frequenting local restaurants and shops.

Phase 2: Bank Building build-out with market, art studios, and restaurant, and farm-to-fridge market in a downtown with no grocery or market space.

- Sales revenue from food shop/farmers market.
- Occupancy rate of coworking space.

Partners & Resources

Partners

- Town of Amherst
- Amherst Downtown BID
- Amherst Downtown Foundation
- Property owner/landlord
- Independent businesses who are tenants
- Arts and cultural organizations, creatives

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shutdown of area colleges that bring approximately 30,000 students, as well as thousands of staff and faculty into town, brought in sharp relief the dependence of downtown Amherst businesses on nearby academic institutions for customers. As the downtown recovers, its rebranding as an arts and cultural destination is part of an ongoing effort to broaden the regional market base while offering town residents the amenities, food, and entertainment they desire. This strategy aligns with the recommendations of the Town-commissioned "2018 Retail Market Analysis" that identified:

"two dominant market segments:

- *college students (UMass, Amherst College, and Hampshire College)*
- *affluent (and generally older) households*

Each presents unique opportunities but the greatest potential is for businesses that cater to both markets such as restaurants and entertainment businesses."

The Market Analysis went on to note that these two dominant market segments form a base to build a larger customer base: "Potential to enhance downtown as a dining and entertainment destination. There may be an opportunity for the town to build off its strength as a dining destination while catering to the two primary market segments in the town through new restaurants, bars, and entertainment businesses."

This cultural anchor project is a major step toward realizing the downtown's ability to draw a regional market.

Action Item

Support the creation of a new cultural anchor downtown to address Town economic development and downtown goals. Support includes funding as well as zoning changes to increase cultural uses to create a critical mass in support of the anchor and public space and art improvements (covered in separate project recommendations).

Process

- Provide ARPA funding to support completion of the project, a major destination for downtown (in alignment with recommendations in the Town-commissioned 2018 Retail Analysis).
- Support the cultural anchor project with complementary uses and downtown improvements by undertaking other Town actions and projects in this Plan Including:
 - ◊ Parking enhancements
 - ◊ Zoning changes
 - ◊ Permanent outdoor dining
 - ◊ Public art and connectivity/space improvements

Project Example

AS220

Providence, RI

After artists occupied a 2nd-floor space above the Providence Performing Arts Center (PPAC), they acquired a "21,000 sq ft three story building downtown that was severely blighted and almost totally abandoned" in 1992 with community and City support. The City provided a grant toward the rehabilitation cost and also worked with the project to relax some building code and build-out requirements – allowing minimal build out of living spaces with the understanding that affordability for artists was a priority and that they could finish the spaces (kitchen cabinets and counters, for instance) themselves over time. The City grant, low interest loans, and modification of permitting requirements were essential to the success of this project that is considered a national role model.

"What was once an almost lifeless block in downtown Providence is today a thriving mixed-use arts complex and a destination for an estimated 93,000 people each year. [It was] one of the first significant steps in the creation of the Providence Arts and Entertainment District."

Dreyfus Building

"The third and fourth floors of the Dreyfus building contain a total of fourteen residential studios, ranging in size from 356 to 516 sq ft." Eleven of them are affordable. Work Studios on the second floor of the Dreyfus range from 200 to 286 sq ft.

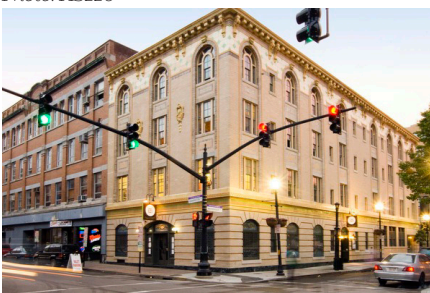
Mercantile Block Building

"The third and fourth floors of the building offer 22 live and work studios for the creative community. On the second floor, a mix of individual work studios, non-profit office space, and AS220 program space co-mingle. Two long time tenants, Clark the Locksmith and The Stable bar, continue their tenancy in renovated storefronts on the Mercantile's first floor, where they are now joined by local restaurant, Viva Mexico!... along with two music rehearsal studios and an audio production studio (basement)."

For more information: <http://as220.org/about/history/>

Top:
Dreyfus Building
Photo: AS220



Bottom:
Mercantile Block Building
Photo: AS220



AS220 All Access Symposium
Photo: AS220

Create a map that identifies potential public art locations and places to activate public spaces in the downtown as a base to initiate the larger public arts strategy.

(See Public Art and Public Space Strategy Project Recommendation)

Category		Arts & Culture
Location		Study Area
Origin		Amherst Downtown BID, Town of Amherst
Budget & Funding Sources		<p>Low Budget</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>This is a short-term, low-budget project that will work in concert with the longer-term Public Art and Public Space Strategy project.</p> <p>Costs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning and initial mapping work: Town staff time (planning, economic development, DPW, transportation, parks) and BID time to create criteria and categories by potential uses for public art and public space enhancements and generate a map with possible locations that align with planned infrastructure work, where possible• Project coordination: BID staff member <p>Sources of Funding</p> <p>This effort uses BID and Town staff time. If funding is needed for mapping and graphics, sources could include combining this with the public art and space strategy and pursuing funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Town of Amherst• MassDevelopment Technical Assistance• Mass Cultural Council• Amherst Cultural Council• Funding for Town projects already in pipeline (parks, transportation, infrastructure, beautification, etc.) that could incorporate public art and beautification• Downtown businesses (that may be hosting art in interior spaces (gallery on the walls of a restaurant for instance) and on exterior walls or public spaces) to sponsor a public art map of downtown that is a visitor guide

Timeframe



Short Term

This project can be accomplished in 1-3 months with possible modifications needed to the map as the Public Art and Public Space Strategy project progresses. A version of the map can be used as a visitor resource – Art Amherst! or some other brand to guiding visitors to the public art of the downtown.

Months 1-3: Develop criteria to create a map of possible public art and space activation opportunities. Identify property owners, if locations are not Town-owned. Use project recommendation map as a starting point. Ongoing: update map and use a “built conditions” version of the map for a visitor guide to public art downtown.

Risk



Low Risk

The risks are low for this project. Risks to be considered are issues with existing Town policies, potential conflicts with scheduled infrastructure projects, and having sufficient Town staff time.

Key Performance Indicators

- Creation of actual map with public art locations identified and public space activation strategies noted.
- Number of potential public art and spaces identified on a map by location and possible use.
- Identification of property owners if locations are not Town-owned.

Partners & Resources

Partners

- Town of Amherst
- Amherst Downtown BID
- Amherst Cultural Council
- Amherst Chamber of Commerce
- Private property owners
- Area educational institutions

Resources

- Mass Development
- MAPC Arts and Culture Planning Toolkit

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to the business community were felt instantaneously with the temporary shutdown of business-as-usual, but more acutely in downtown with the universities and colleges sending students and employees home. The need to broaden the destination-aspect of the downtown along with improving the links between spaces within the district to provide more "stickiness" was identified early on. In order for the Amherst BID to continue its work to bring arts and culture to downtown, creating criteria and a visual map of potential locations for public art and public space activation that link destinations and encourage pedestrian exploration of the downtown will be essential.

Action Item

Create criteria with potential locations for public art and space activation and generate a map. Identify property owners if locations are not Town-owned. The map may need to be updated as the Public Art and Public Space Strategy project progresses and other issues and opportunities are identified. A version of the map showing "built conditions" can be used as an art visitor guide to the downtown, contributing to the brand of the downtown as an arts and cultural destination.

Process

1. Town and BID to create criteria for space requirements for different types of public art. The map provided with this project recommendation is a guide for starting this process. Town and BID should review and continually revise criteria for public art locations and adjust the list of spaces accordingly to show all possible locations with type of art project suitable. Criteria should include:
 - a. Availability of wall, land, location, and willingness of owner (public or private) to participate in program.
 - b. Visibility of location – first murals should be in prominent locations.
 - c. Location throughout downtown – one main purpose of this program is to knit together the long district. Art should be spaced to create destinations throughout the study area. The goal is to entice visitors and residents to explore the downtown and frequent stores and restaurants.
 - d. Accessibility of the space for installation, performance, viewing, or interaction with art.
 - e. Consider movable murals on canvas for interior locations of businesses.
 - f. Ability to connect murals and public art through a public art trail or treasure hunt.
2. Generate a map of recommended locations and identify existing Town infrastructure and other projects that may have alignment with these project goals.
3. Town and BID to review the map and identify any property owners for locations that are not Town-owned. Contact property owners about their participation in the program (using their spaces, walls, and interior spaces for art on a permanent or temporary basis).
4. Use a version of the map as a public guide to all existing public art and space activation locations in the downtown. Update regularly and make available on the BID website and other outlets including signage and posters in the downtown.

Project Example

As Amherst builds its catalog of public art in the downtown, a version of this public art and space map can be created as a Public Art Map for Visitors. Examples of easy-to-create and update online maps as well as traditional print maps are presented here:

The Avenue Concept

Providence, RI

Temescal BID

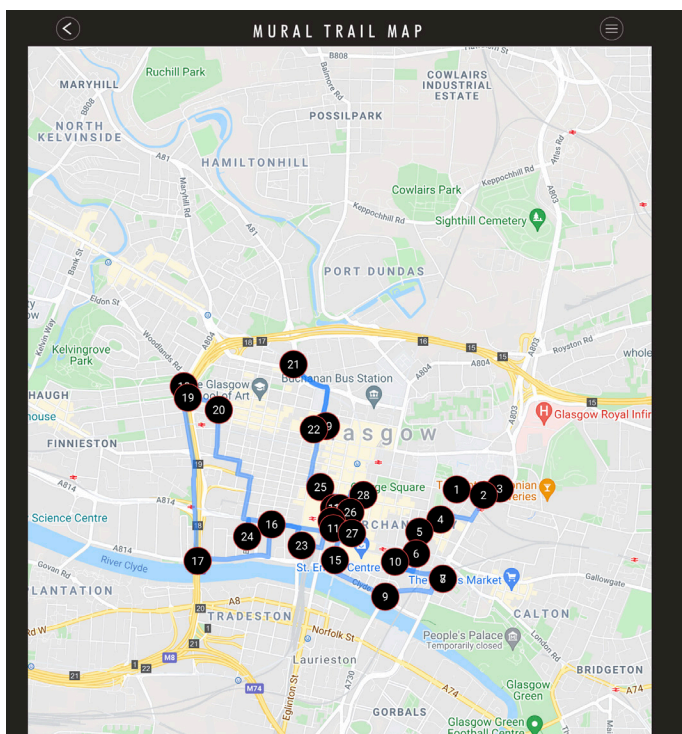
Oakland, CA

City Centre Murals

Glasgow, UK

Downtown Houston

Houston, TX






City Centre Mural Trail Map
Photo: City Centre Mural Trail



Temescal Art Walking Map
Photo: Temescal District

Develop a coordinated and collaborative communications and marketing strategy to promote downtown as a regional (and beyond) arts and cultural destination.

Category		Revenue/Sales
Location		Study area and town-wide arts and culture venues
Origin		Amherst Downtown BID, Town of Amherst
Budget & Funding Sources		<p>Low Budget</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>This strategy relies on human assets (business owners, institutions, individuals, creatives, etc.) to implement.</p> <p>Costs are the time needed by a coordinator or consultant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organize and implement the overall program• Train (and offer practice for) those businesses, institutions, and others contributing to the effort <p>Costs include training and professional help to guide overall creation of strategy and program and periodic evaluation, as well as staff costs for a program coordinator.</p> <p>Estimated costs (start-up creation of strategy and program, training for all participants): \$5,000 – \$10,000</p> <p>Estimated cost to hire someone to manage social media and coordinate various partners/collaborators: varies</p> <p>Part-time social media manager: up to \$1,000 a month, depending on experience (20-40 hours a month)</p> <p>Sources of Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MassDevelopment Technical Assistance• Seaport Economic Council Grant Program• MA Community One Stop for Growth• Pooled Community Resources (BID, Business Association, Town, Local Businesses, etc.
Timeframe		<p>Short Term</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 months for goals and strategy guide, program set-up and initial training.• Assumes branding for the district is already complete.• Yearly evaluation - the implementation of the program requires consistency and will be ongoing.

Risk



Low Risk

Risks are low for this project.

- There must be a density of uses, destinations, public art, and events to market.
- Political will and agreement are needed on branding Downtown as an arts and cultural destination.
- Assistance will be needed from businesses and organizations in their participation in a coordinated marketing effort.
- Sustainability in marketing will be a key factor in success and the capacity needed for a long-term effort is needed.

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of visitors to downtown.
- Attendance numbers/ticket sales for the arts and cultural destinations downtown and elsewhere in the town.
- Number of social media impressions and likes for arts and cultural destinations downtown including murals, dining, new cultural anchor, museums, other public art, etc.
- Increased sales for downtown businesses.
- Capacity percentage or restaurant tables filled on weekends and weeknights.
- Increase in the number of arts and cultural uses, businesses, and events downtown.

Partners & Resources

Partners

- Town of Amherst
- Amherst Downtown BID
- Amherst Cultural Council
- Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce (What's Next? Campaign)
- Hampshire Regional Tourism Council (HRTC)
- Local arts and cultural organizations and destinations, all downtown businesses
- Local universities and colleges (information/messaging about downtown Amherst students and families)

Resources

- Consultant needed to set up strategy and conduct training
- Collaborative effort - many partners needed to utilize a broad range of resources and diverse methods to expand reach

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, it became painfully evident that Downtown Amherst is dependent on the student and staff populations of its universities to support stores and restaurants, as well as existing cultural destinations such as the cinema. With universities shuttered and students and faculty shifted to online classes, downtown businesses were severely impacted. The Spring 2021 LRRP Business Survey indicated that 89% of businesses had revenue decline from 2019 to 2020 of 25% or more and 89% of businesses had employee layoffs in 2020. The survey also indicated that 75% of responding businesses had temporary or permanent business closing.

To broaden the Downtown's market base, Amherst is in the process of rebranding as an arts and cultural destination to ensure a variety of shopping, dining, and other experiences that appeal to a more diverse customer and visitor base. A rebrand can also aide in business recruitment by showing the town's support of diversity and inclusion in downtown and with town-wide economic development efforts. With limited resources, a collaborative and coordinated social media marketing campaign can be an effective way to amplify the downtown brand as well as support a new cultural anchor - a 200 seat music and performance venue slated to open in Winter 2022.

Action Item

Create a marketing campaign that makes use of coordinated social media marketing and creates momentum building off the planned downtown cultural anchor that is in construction, a proposed performance shell, and the existing Amherst Center Cultural District. Marketing is to be focused on downtown as an arts and cultural destination.

Build from the Downtown BID's marketing work, including the #IAMherst branding campaign to message an arts and culture theme. Action steps include:

- Review branding (#IAMherst, What's Next?) and assess arts and cultural message and consistency. Create overall strategy/message
- Initial planning session with all potential partners
- Training
- Coordinated social media marketing
- Periodic evaluation and adjustments, as necessary

These actions support other project recommendations in this Plan, including supporting a new cultural anchor and creating a public art and public space plan.

Process

1. Assess current branding (#IAMherst, What's Next?). How to draft from region and beyond for arts and culture? What is the message? The destinations? Who are the audiences?
2. Determine who can lead effort. Is it current BID marketing staff? Is a consultant needed to set up strategy and training for participants?
3. Create an overall social media plan, list of collaborators, etc.
4. Assemble all the constituency groups for an initial planning session (possibly consultant led):
 - Agree on goals
 - Discuss capacity and resources, roles for all parties
 - Assignment of tasks/activities for each partner/stakeholder group
5. Set up training framework, conduct training (consultant led?).
6. Create timeline, establish weekly, monthly, quarterly goals.
7. Provide ongoing training, as needed, after program is up and running (after 6 weeks).
8. Assign editorial, blog posts, news items to partners for distribution to traditional media as appropriate.
9. Develop a map of attractions, along with information on parking and how to get around, for posting on the BID and Cultural District websites.
10. Employ periodic program reporting and evaluation through metrics such as online analytics, sales, and employment, to measure success.

Project Example

City of Cumberland Arts and Entertainment District

Cumberland, MD

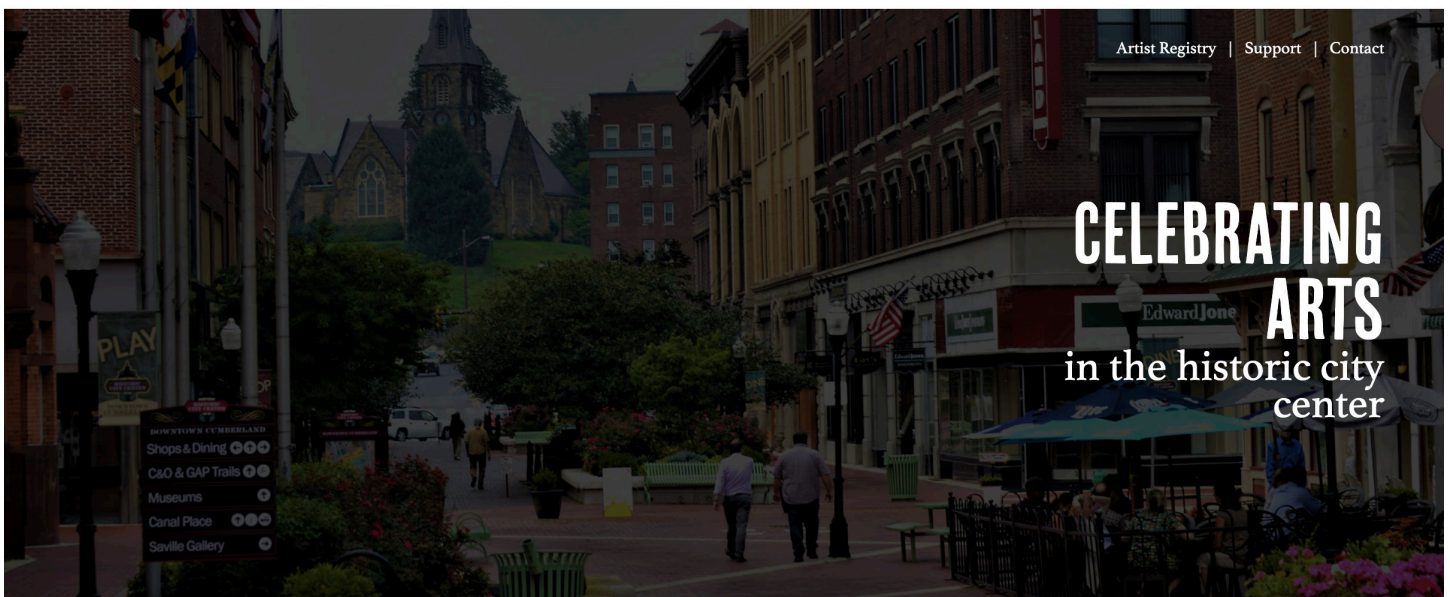
Established in 2002 as one of Maryland's Arts and Entertainment Districts, the district has leveraged creative marketing strategies to promote awareness, appreciation, and engagement in the arts. Strategies include a logo and video, painting and signage (such as for the City Center Parking Garage to identify activities that support theater, dining and other attractions found within the district boundaries), an online calendar of events and artist registry, and active social media accounts. The district is in the process of building a new website to support the district's work, which will be found at www.cumberlandaande.org.

The Allegheny Arts Council offers annual memberships starting at \$25 to support the organization financially. It also offers annual community partnerships starting at \$75 for nonprofits, \$100 for small businesses, and \$250 for more than 10 employees. To promote these opportunities, the Council has created a [brochure](#) highlighting the impacts of support for artistic endeavors in the community.

According to a 2018 impact analysis, the City of Cumberland Arts and Entertainment District supported 421 jobs, nearly \$49 million in state GDP, and over \$15 million in employee compensation. Reported activity in Cumberland supported nearly \$3 million in tax revenues.





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Allegheny Arts Council Website

Create a “Business Talks” feedback mechanism to allow the Town to get timely responses to efforts to be more business-friendly and to get input on possible modifications to licensing, permitting, and zoning procedures.

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		Study area and application to all businesses in town.
Origin		Town of Amherst, Amherst Downtown BID, study area businesses
Budget & Funding Sources		<p>Low Budget <i>This is a low budget project that mostly relies on time of existing staff and volunteer members of a “Business Talks” Advisory Group.</i></p> <p>Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town staff (existing or new) to coordinate with Business Talks Advisory Group. Other Town staff in applicable departments/divisions to participate in listening sessions, respond to issues/suggestions in terms of permitting, licensing, zoning, etc. • Business Talks Advisory Group members would be volunteer. • Staff or IT consultant time to create an online suggestion form (could be google forms) for businesses to submit suggestions and feedback. • Potential costs associated with the Town's response to feedback (example: changes to procedures, requirements, etc.) • Cost of marketing (assumed most through regular Town methods and also by the Downtown BID and Chamber) to get the word out through various channels that Amherst is listening to businesses and continuing its COVID-19 work to support entrepreneurs in the town. <p>Sources of Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MassDevelopment Technical Assistance • MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places

Timeframe



Short Term

This project could get up and running in as little as three months but is meant as a long-term effort that becomes part of the Town's overall economic development and business recruitment and retainment strategy.

- Month 1: Create a Business Talks Advisory Group (some members may also be Business Buddies (see separate project recommendation).
- Month 2: Create online comment option for Town website for suggestions to improve processes, regulations, timeframe for business applications and approvals, etc. Communicate with local businesses about the Business Talks program and advertise the comment portal.
- Month 3 and beyond: Monthly or bi-monthly (every two months) meeting to review online comments, feedback given to Advisory Group, etc., decisions on further action.
- One year and annually thereafter: Town report card on program (comments received, actions taken, etc.).

Longer Term

The information gleaned from this program could inform a longer-term project to develop a series of business "how to's" and tutorials on the Town website.

Risk



Low Risk

The risks are relatively low for this project. The potential risks include:

- Requires volunteer time on the part of business owners in town...a possible burden for single proprietors.
- Unwillingness of businesses to use the comment portal (which would be anonymous) in concern that criticism may be traced back to them and be detrimental in some way. Getting the word out that this program allows anonymous feedback will be important in order to ensure sufficient participation to make this entire feedback effort worthwhile.

Key Performance Indicators

- Existence of Business Talks Advisory Group.
- Participation by Town departments or divisions who are part of business approvals, licensing, permitting processes.
- Number of online comments received.
- Number of comments addressed, efforts made to improve processes and regulations.
- Number of new and prospective businesses moving to Amherst.
- Local business happiness (determined through anonymized numerical surveys after the roll out of the program).
- New narrative about Amherst being business friendly.

Partners & Resources

Partners

- Town of Amherst - lead
 - ◊ Permitting: building code, zoning, signage, trees, etc.
 - ◊ Licensing: health
- Amherst Downtown BID – marketing for program as part of general outreach program
- Amherst Business Buddy System – possible source of suggestions and feedback for Business Talks Advisory Group (and possible overlap of members)
- Amherst Chamber of Commerce

Resources

- 2019 Thumbtack Small Business Friendliness Survey
- Guide to Doing Business in Portland
- City of Denver online roadmap for small businesses

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

The Town of Amherst and the Amherst Downtown BID are models of responsive and timely efforts to support businesses during COVID-19. These efforts have begun to change long-held perceptions that Amherst is unfriendly to businesses – a perception that hurts efforts to realize Downtown's full potential and that puts recent investments, including the creation of a new cultural anchor in the Downtown, at risk. In addition, the Town has worked to make its permitting processes more user-friendly and would benefit from having real-time feedback in how effective these efforts are and what other changes might be necessary. The creation of a feedback mechanism to send the message that the Town is open to constructive suggestions and wishes to work with businesses can ensure that the Town's efforts are having their maximum impact as well as help re-brand the Town as more business friendly, with review timelines and business start-up expectations that are in alignment with surrounding and competing communities.

Action Item

Offer a program/mechanism for the Town to receive real-time and useful feedback from businesses so that recent and ongoing efforts to simplify permitting and licensing can improve as much as possible. This program can also support all the recent work the Town has done during COVID-19 to support businesses and can reinforce the message that the Town welcomes new businesses and wants to make things as easy as possible for entrepreneurs. Actions include:

- Create a comment option for business/potential business feedback, both through the municipal website.
- Ensure the feedback mechanism is created in a way to encourage businesses to share valuable information to enable a relationship between town staff and local businesses without fear of negative consequences.
- Town and Business Talks Advisory Group regular meetings and follow-up by the Town, where possible.
- Longer term: the Town could develop a series of how to notices for businesses on the Town website that are informed by information learned through this Business Talks initiative (hard to navigate parts of permitting and licensing, streamlined processes, timelines, etc.).

Process

1. Develop a program description and determine the Town staff who will oversee the initiative.
2. Recruit a group of businesses to be volunteer members of the Business Talks Working Group. Possible roles include:
 - a. Reviewing online comments (provided by Town staff on a regular basis) and attending meetings (monthly to start and then perhaps bi-monthly (every two months).
 - b. Act as ambassadors for the town with regards to businesses...be willing to get feedback in other forms and report back to the Working Group.
 - c. Review possible changes to Town inspection/permitting/licensing procedures and offer feedback on how to make these processes more efficient, timely, supportive to businesses, etc.
 - d. Collaborate with Amherst Business Buddy system to hear on-the-ground feedback of what's working well and what isn't.
3. Create an online feedback form with a link that can be provided on the Town website and possibly other sites such as the Downtown BID and Chamber websites to allow businesses and prospective businesses to offer suggestions, give feedback, etc. Provide feedback options for non-native English speakers as well.
4. Create a reporting procedure so that there can be a regular public report back of comments received and actions taken by the Town. Create an annual survey for town businesses regarding satisfaction with Town response to issues, permitting/licensing, etc.
5. Possible Future Project: Create an online portal through the municipal website for existing and prospective businesses and entrepreneurs that provides necessary information for developing and operating a business in Amherst. Information should take the form of instructional guides, videos, contact information, online resources (including the online feedback portal), etc. (Potential name for online business portal: Business Pointer Portal, Business Bits, Backing Businesses, Business Gateway) .

Project Example

Many cities and towns have online feedback portals that allow residents and businesses to give reactions to the ways in which the municipality is operating. Below are some examples:

California City Solutions

Santa Barbara, CA

Santa Barbara established a program to aid small business owners in navigating the regulations and requirements for city businesses. The program created an [online portal of business information](#) which includes an instructional guide, online resources, videos, and quarterly newsletters to supply business owners and entrepreneurs with the resources they need.

The program also initiated Town Hall discussions between the mayor and local small businesses and entrepreneurs in order to hear their experiences and difficulties with finding information and fulfilling permitting/licensing requirements.

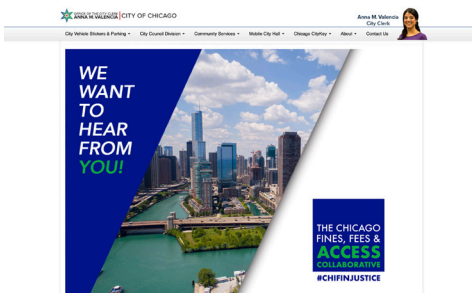


Online Feedback Portal and The Fines, Fees, and Access Collaborative

Chicago, IL

City Clerk, Anna Valencia, created an [online feedback portal](#) in 2019 to gain feedback from residents on their experiences with the practices of fees and fines in Chicago. This was done in order to give residents who are impacted most by these practices a seat at the table.

The portal was created in response to a suggestion made by The Fines, Fees, and Access Collaborative, which was established in 2018 to conduct a review of the City's inner workings.

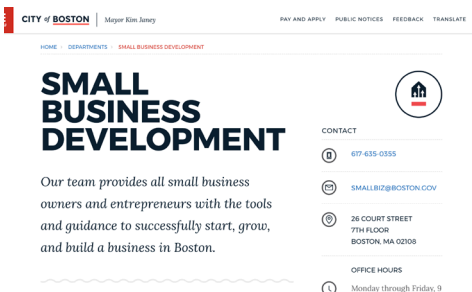


Small Business Development Survey

Boston, MA

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Boston created an economic recovery plan, which included the establishment of a [small business development survey](#) that created a spot for small businesses to voice their needs and struggles. The survey is kept private unless businesses request follow-up. Examples of the questions that the survey asks:

- What are the top issues facing your business right now?
- How many employees do you need?
- What is your average hourly rate for the positions that you need to hire?
- What continues to be the most challenging pandemic adaptations for your business (childcare, reduced demand for my goods, supply chain problems, skills/technology to do business online/work remotely)



Hire Town economic development staff and provide enhanced business recruitment and technical assistance for a diverse range of entrepreneurs to locate and succeed in the Downtown and throughout Amherst.

Category	 Tenant Mix
Location	Study Area and all of Amherst
Origin	Town of Amherst Planning and Development, Amherst Main Streets
Budget & Sources of Funding	 <p>The budget will be determined by a number of factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What staff will the Town hire to lead economic development efforts and to support diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) in supporting businesses? • What technical assistance and other support does the Town wish to offer? • Will Amherst work directly with small businesses or convene and coordinate a network of business support organizations or consultants working with entrepreneurs? • The extent of the process to build a program and the availability of resources. <p>Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town staff (economic development) • Town staff (DEI for Town) or consultant working with Town economic development staff person to oversee program of business recruitment and TA for all businesses to grow and succeed. If Town staff, salary range: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ Technical Assistance and Resource Navigators for businesses (if in house, staff budget may span \$56,589 to \$92,651 per staff member. This is the annual median cost range for salaries plus 30% for benefits for full-time Training and Development Specialists (\$71,270), Social and Community Service Managers (\$67,310), Community and Social Service Specialists, All Other (\$43,530) based on the following Standard Occupation Classification Codes 13-1151.00, 11-9151.00 and 21-1099.00, respectively for the State of Massachusetts. Figures obtained from www.onetonline.org. • Culturally Congruent Workshops/Training: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ Undoing Racism Workshop (\$20,000 for 35 participants) ◊ Other types of antiracism and equity training (\$10,000 - \$20,000) • Events supporting businesses \$5,000 - \$20,000 annually • Possible consultant to assist with Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building \$25,000 - \$75,000 annually. See Appendix for a sample proposal for services for an overview of possible costs.

Budget & Sources of Funding

Sources of Funding:

- [MassDevelopment Technical Assistance](#)
- MGCC [Biz-M-Power](#) grant
(Project limit: \$20,000) *To assist low-income and moderate-income entrepreneurs with their acquisition, expansion, improvement or lease of a facility, purchase or lease of equipment, or with meeting other capital needs of a business.*
- MGCC [Empower Digital](#) grant
(Project limit: N/A) *To provide funding for the needs of small businesses owned by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals seeking tools and services to develop their digital capabilities in partnership with a Small Business Technical Assistance (SBTA) provider.*
- MGCC [Small Business Technical Assistance Grant](#) (Non-profits only)
(Project limit: N/A) *To complement and enhance traditional public and private small business assistance networks by providing technical assistance or training programs for under-resourced and disadvantaged businesses with 20 or fewer employees. The program seeks to facilitate economic stability and viability for small businesses by helping to improve their ability to navigate business operations in a post COVID-19 era, including ability to secure private and public financing, business grants, and micro-loans.*
- [MA One Stop for Growth](#) grant portal
(Project limit: N/A) *The Community One Stop for Growth is a single application portal and collaborative review process of grant programs that make targeted investments based on a Development Continuum.*
- [Seaport Economic Council Grant Program](#)

Timeframe



Staff and/or consultant hiring and the basic program design and set-up will take 9–12 months, but implementation and ongoing evaluation will be ongoing.

Risk



Risks are low to moderate.

For any business recruitment and retentions efforts to be successful, they need the resources to succeed and must be based on positive changes to the business environment. There are risks that a recruitment effort could be based on promises that can't be kept with regard to mentorship, support, and goals, which could be detrimental to businesses and the overall image of Amherst and the Downtown.

In terms of DEI work and training/workshops, other risks may include various forms of fatigue (e.g., racial battle fatigue syndrome, White fragility, etc.), backlash, and sabotage, and employee turnover. Efforts can also falter without strong leadership support and resources, or if the responsibility for these efforts is placed upon the shoulders of one person or a small team with little authority or improperly located within the organizational hierarchy (a danger when hiring a director of DEI and then not giving that person the authority and resources to be effective).

Key Performance Indicators

- Allocating funding and staff for sustainable economic development efforts and DEI program.
- Number of new businesses open after 1 year, 2 years, 5 years, success rate for BIPOC businesses.
- Diversity of businesses in the study area (owner ethnicity, experience, range of goods, dining, services).
- Reduced number of vacancies, including ground floor spaces.
- Efforts of all departments in terms of DEI and overall business recruitment (measured in attendance at meetings, number of changes to rules, average length of time for completion of applications and certificate of occupancy).
- Attendance of at Culturally Congruent Workshops and Training:
 - ◊ Town departments responsible for permitting, inspections, and licenses
 - ◊ Other Town employees
 - ◊ Chamber of Commerce staff
 - ◊ BID staff
 - ◊ Existing businesses, particularly those owners/staff participating in the business feedback program and business buddy program – see those project recommendations)
- Results of annual survey presented to new/existing businesses on their experiences with Town, BID, and Chamber, and needed areas of improvement (anonymous or reviewed by business feedback advisory group – see that project recommendation).

Partners & Resources

Partners:

- Town of Amherst (lead) and all departments, commissions and boards connected to permitting, licensing, approvals, etc.
 - ◊ New staff (Economic Development, DEI staff position)
- Organizational and/or consultant partners (for business TA and Culturally Congruent workshops/training)
- Amherst Downtown BID
- Chamber of Commerce
- Existing businesses (as mentors and participants in effort)

Resources:

- [Undoing Racism® Community Organizing Workshops](#)
- [SourceLink](#) has prepared a short video that outlines four fundamental clusters of businesses regardless of industry or sector.
- Kauffman Foundation an annual global [ESHIP Summit](#) and its [playbook](#) for ecosystem builders.
- [International Economic Development Council](#) certification on entrepreneurial economic development.

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

The Town of Amherst and the Amherst Downtown BID were quick to respond to business needs when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Shortened permit review times, temporary outdoor dining ordinances, and other measures were put into place to help businesses survive. However, the Town has a less than positive reputation when it comes to business friendliness and Amherst is seen as difficult environment for new and existing businesses, with longer permitting/licensing times and costs and less overall support than neighboring municipalities.

Currently, the Amherst Downtown BID and Chamber of Commerce are standing in for Town economic development and recruitment efforts because there has been no staff member in that position at the Town for over two years. The BID, with the Chamber's support, has had extraordinary success in obtaining State grants and its work in supporting businesses during the pandemic has been a role model recognized by the State. The Town has been supportive by issuing temporary ordinances and supporting changes that were needed to assist businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, but moving forward, the BID has neither the mission nor resources to be the sole economic development force for the Town.

The Town should allocate the staff and resources necessary to recruit new businesses and support economic development and offer ongoing support to existing businesses. As Amherst works towards rewriting the narrative about its relationship with businesses, it's crucial that it do so through a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to ensure that a broad range of businesses, including those owned by BIPOC entrepreneurs, are welcome and supported.

The Downtown BID has a goal of recruiting and retaining a diverse mix of businesses and business owners and there are overall economic development goals in the town. Because Amherst is home to over 30,000 students, the market for businesses that serve and attract a diverse array of interests, cultural backgrounds, and hobbies is much larger than what would be supported by the Town's permanent residential population. Active recruitment of diverse businesses and business owners can improve the overall image of the downtown and create a magnet for customers, while serving a diverse range of needs and desires of residents and visitors. Support services and technical assistance will also be needed to ensure new businesses succeed over the long haul.

All Amherst residents reap the rewards of having many more choices and a much larger downtown than would be possible without the presence of higher education. Supporting a Cultural Congruent approach to business recruitment, support and TA ensures all of the efforts by the Downtown BID, Chamber of Commerce, and Town bring their full value to Town economic development and Downtown vitality.

Action Item

To support overall Town economic development and a good mix of retail, food, and other businesses in the Downtown and enhance the walkability and street vibrancy of the area, action items include:

- Hire Town economic development staff person.
- Hire Town DEI staff person or contract with organizational partners and/or consultants to create a program and ongoing support of efforts to welcome and support a diverse mix of business owners in Amherst, including BIPOC entrepreneurs.
- Provide the resources necessary to support the work of Town staff to achieve goals.
- Actively recruit independent businesses and creative economy entrepreneurs including BIPOC business owners.
- Provide ongoing technical assistance to retain businesses and support their growth and success.
- Cultivate a racial equity lens to ensure the deployment of culturally congruent economic development strategies and practices.
- Create an ecosystem of support for businesses (see project recommendations for business buddy system and business feedback program).

Process





1. Hire economic development staff person to lead business recruitment and support efforts and work closely with the Downtown BID to coordinate efforts.
2. Hire a DEI director and allocate the necessary resources and authority for the director to achieve goals and be effective.
3. Create an inventory of vacant storefronts and vacant and underutilized spaces downtown (to ensure recruitment goes beyond ground floor spaces) and throughout the town.
4. Determine if Amherst will offer business services and supports in-house or if it will contract with a network of organizations or consultant to design and oversee the program (it is recommended that Amherst either hire a DEI director experienced with this type of program or contract with consultant or organizational providers. Even with a staff person, outside support and training will be needed to supplement staff expertise and capacity).
5. Embark on a program of cultural congruent economic development. Traditionally, government, planning, and economic development agencies adhered to a universal playbook for community, business, and economic development normalized under a Euro-American worldview—emphasizing top-down approaches. Universalism and individualism are among the core premises of this construct. However, in our increasingly multiethnic, pluralistic, and linguistically diverse society, traditional approaches are increasingly yielding suboptimal results. The emerging playbook calls for bottom-up approaches, requiring organizations and systems to adopt cultural relativism as the new paradigm to ensure success in our complex communities.
6. Consider offering cultural sensitivity and anti-racism training and workshops. One such option is [Undoing Racism® Community Organizing Workshops](#). Workshops should be open to Town licensing and code inspectors, all employees, boards and commissions, BID staff, Downtown business owners and staff, etc.
7. Determine what supports and services Amherst will offer. The mix could include business development workshops and classes, technical assistance (e.g., helping with completing financial assistance applications or writing business plans) and resource navigation (e.g., serving as a concierge and making referrals to the appropriate sequence of support services), and cohort programs focused on helping businesses obtain minority and women-owned business and other business certifications).

Process

8. Determine what kinds of entrepreneurs and small businesses to support within the cultural communities of focus. For the Downtown BID, the target businesses will likely be in two clusters:
 - Main street cluster (restaurants, retail shops and the like that bring vibrancy to commercial corridors and neighborhoods, but whose firms are unlikely to grow too much).
 - Microenterprise cluster (small businesses with 10 or fewer employees, often operating in the "gig" economy and including freelance photographers, event planners and promoters, consultants, pursuing their craft for personal income full-time or as side jobs).

In Town-wide efforts, Amherst will likely target other clusters as well (see SourceLink in the resources section above for a link to a description of the four clusters).
9. Create recruitment materials and a workplan and timeline for business recruitment as well as target goals.
10. Create and implement a marketing plan to attract entrepreneurs to the Downtown and to market the Downtown to customers...advertising the range of businesses and diversity in the Downtown, including info on:
 - BID successes and activity
 - Arts and cultural destinations
 - Food variety
 - Student population
 - Demographics of residents
 - Types of spaces
 - Type and number of unique and creative businesses now
 - Events and other activities
 - Business support services
11. Post on diversity recruitment websites and job boards about vacant retail and office spaces for business owners and entrepreneurs to see. Examples:
 - [Black Career Network](#)
 - [Black Jobs](#)
 - [Diversityjobs.com](#)
 - [Hispanic/Latino Professionals Association \(HLPAA\)](#)
 - [Noirefy](#)
 - [Incluzion](#)
12. Create and publish a Town-wide Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statement.
13. Ask existing business owners to create diversity-centric recruitment goals.
14. Connect new BIPOC-owned businesses with a mentor through the Business Buddy Program to create a continued sense of support (see Amherst Business Buddy LRRP).
15. Collect data routinely from businesses on diversity of businesses and business owners/staff, feedback on Town supports, feedback on licensing and permitting processes, needs, etc.
16. Evaluate efforts and adjust as necessary.

Make temporary outdoor dining regulations permanent for Downtown.

Category		Public Realm
Location		Study Area
Origin		Town of Amherst, Amherst BID
Budget		<p>Low Budget</p> <p>Costs are low and include dedicated Town staff time to decide what is needed and take action to make decisions, instigate necessary changes, and provide clear and concise guidelines and requirements to businesses.</p>
Timeframe		<p>Short Term</p> <p>Timeframe is estimated to be from 3 – 6 months to make temporary outdoor dining regulations permanent. Additional time possibly needed to conduct outreach and education prior to attempting any permanent zoning bylaw changes that may be needed.</p>
Risk		<p>Low Risk</p> <p>Risks are low for this project and include building political will, weighing the cost vs. benefit of the program, and any financial costs the Town wishes to incur to support businesses (lower permit fees, covering cost of bulk purchases, consultant fees, etc.).</p>
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restaurant and retail business retention rates (how many can stay open during various phases and resurgences during the COVID-19 pandemic). • The number of new outdoor dining and/or retail spots created. • The number of new businesses that open and are in business one year and two years out. • Results of business survey indicating changes in sales/revenue. • The number of social media impressions of dining and retail spots.
Partners & Resources		<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town of Amherst to be the lead as a change in zoning bylaws is required • Support from: Amherst BID, Local businesses <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LRRP Outdoor Dining and Retail Toolkit • Lessons learned from local businesses that have implemented temporary outdoor dining

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

With restrictions on indoor dining during the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants shifted to takeout and outdoor dining to remain in business. The State temporarily loosened several permitting requirements for outdoor dining and Amherst expedited their local permitting processes to make it easier for businesses to quickly implement. As the pandemic continues, businesses need certainty in terms of the consistency of temporary bylaws and other regulations so that they can make investments in construction, equipment, and furniture for outdoor dining and retail. In addition, more permanent measures will allow for a closer look at impacts on the public realm. Simplifying outdoor dining requirements and permitting, providing clear regulations and shortened review and permitting timelines, and assistance with design and other elements of outdoor dining/retail will ensure that businesses get the support they need to stay open. Clear outdoor dining/retail design requirements will also help create the best possible public realm and commercial district experience to assist all businesses in the study area.

Action Item

The *LRRP Outdoor Dining/Retail Toolkit* is a resource to assist Amherst staff in understanding how it can facilitate the creation and ongoing success of outdoor dining. The Downtown BID has done significant work in helping businesses shift to outdoor dining and now action lies with the Town to create certainty for restaurants for future operations. The kit offers project examples from other communities as well as sample space guidelines that adhere to good design practices and ADA requirements. After decisions are made, the Town can provide its own business toolkit for restaurants and retail, if it chooses, to help take the guesswork out of outdoor dining/retail design, permitting, and construction.

Work should begin with an assessment of Amherst's existing temporary outdoor dining program. The process could include a Task Force or Working Group composed of public sector (planner, DPW, transportation, public health, fire department, etc.) and private sector (business representatives, civic advocates) to help assess work and move the process along through public adoption.

The recommended process is listed below.

Process

Phase 1 (2 - 4 weeks)

- Conduct an internal needs assessment by reviewing the Toolkit, conducting an internal meeting with planners, DPW, transportation, public health, and others, about current state of outdoor dining and/or retail and feedback on how effectiveness and challenges with current status.
- Get feedback from businesses about their needs and feedback on how any current program is going (what works/what doesn't) using one or more of the following:
 - ◊ Conduct focus group(s)
 - ◊ Issue online survey
 - ◊ Conduct a larger meeting

Questions should include: desire for winter dining, storage challenges, permitting process feedback, interest in bulk purchasing, financial assistance, etc.

- From internal meeting and business survey, identify focus areas for making a permanent program.
- Create a Task Force or Working Group representative of the focus areas for your Outdoor Dining/Retail program. Suggested members include:
 - ◊ Planning or economic development staff, DPW, parks, health dept, transportation
 - ◊ Amherst BID
 - ◊ Business representatives
 - ◊ Others as needed

Process

- Set an overall schedule for this project and regular meeting dates.
- Create a presentation template to use during project including:
 - ◊ History of what Amherst and the Downtown BID has done to support outdoor dining/retail during pandemic
 - ◊ Rationale for current efforts

Phase 2 (4 weeks)

- Review Toolkit and research examples of permanent bylaw changes in other Massachusetts communities.
- Write up draft regulations and requirements.
- Prepare educational materials/presentations for boards/commissions/public/businesses.
- Conduct outreach.

Phase 3 (10 – 24 weeks or longer)

- Institute changes, obtain agreement on concepts, bylaw votes, etc.

Project Examples

Examples of best practices are included in the LRRP Outdoor Dining and Retail Toolkit.

Rapid Recovery Plan

Outdoor Dining/Retail Community Toolkit

*A guide for communities seeking to assist business owners
in creating outdoor dining and retail options*





September 2021



Outdoor Dining/Retail Community Toolkit

Implement parking strategies and public realm enhancements to make use of downtown underutilized parking in the near term and to meet increased demand in the future to support the recovery of businesses, the success of a new arts and culture anchor, and the brand of downtown as a cultural destination.

Contributions from Stantec, SME consultant

Category		Public Realm
Location		Study Area
Origin		Town of Amherst (<i>Downtown Parking Report</i> , Prepared by the Amherst Planning Department, October 23, 2015), Amherst Downtown BID
Budget & Sources of Funding		<p>Medium – High Budget</p> <p><i>Note: at the time this plan was going to press, a Town evaluation of the Boltwood Garage yielded concerns about the maintenance and condition of the structure. Phase 1 of this project focuses on increasing the visibility of the public parking that is more remote and the recommendations apply to all parking, not just the garage. That said, there is no better canvas for art projects and creativity, particularly low-cost efforts, than a structure that needs some work!</i></p>
		<p>Budget Phase 1 (Medium Budget)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public art/public space enhancements at Boltwood Garage, North Pleasant Street, Amity, and Lower Bangs lots: (\$25,000-\$50,000). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ Sidewalk stencils ◊ Crosswalk and pavement art ◊ Overhead signing Boltwood garage art improvements (\$10,000-\$40,000 depending on condition of garage and level of effort - professional artist, community art projects and efforts, etc.). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ Murals ◊ LED art Concierge/ambassador program for Boltwood Garage (two full-time FTEs, est. \$120,000 per year). Creation of an art walk/public art map and treasure hunt (covered under separate project recommendation). Enhanced signage and wayfinding for Boltwood Garage and the North Pleasant Street Lot (first priority) as well as the Amity and Lower Bangs lots (\$10,000). Installation of improved lighting/fixtures (\$50,000).

Budget & Sources of Funding



Budget Phase 2 (High Budget, +\$200,000)

- New parking Garage on the Pleasant Street Lot Site. According to an annual study by WGI Parking of parking garage construction costs, average hard costs in the Boston area were over \$30,000 per space. MAPC estimates that annual operating and maintenance costs can range from \$1,200- \$2,000 per space. Final soft and hard costs can be expected to be over ten million dollars.

Sources of Funding Phase 1:

- MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places
- DHCD's MDI
- Town funding
- Upcoming CARES Act disbursements from the State of MA (TBD)
- Upcoming ARPA grants (TBD)

Sources of Funding Phase 2:

- Town of Amherst (sale of parking garage to Amherst Downtown BID)
- Municipal bonding
- Parking Benefit District proceeds (If PBD established)
- A public-private partnership
- Payments in lieu of required parking
- State sources, including MassWorks, PWED, or CDAG programs
- Federal sources, including FTA and EDA

Timeframe

Short – Medium Term

This project has two phases:



Phase 1: 1-2 years and then ongoing

- Implement near-term parking strategies and public realm enhancements that support use of current underutilized parking.



Phase 2: 5 years

- Plan to construct a parking garage to meet projected future demand as the brand of the downtown grows as a regional cultural destination and new uses create increased demand for parking.
- The construction of a new parking garage will require community input, determination of need, design, identification of funding or financing, construction, leasing, and programming. The garage could be completed in approximately 3.5 to 5 years if approved:
 - ◇ Permitting & public approvals—12-18 months
 - ◇ Funding application & securement—6-12 months
 - ◇ Design—6-8 months
 - ◇ Contractor bidding & selection—4-6 months
 - ◇ Mobilization & site prep—3 months
 - ◇ Construction—9-18 months

Risk

Low – High Risk



Phase 1

- Phase 1 is low risk. Risks involve political will to improve public parking areas with public art, LED art, and wayfinding.
- This project is also tied to other project recommendations, creating risks related to creating an overall comprehensive plan for public art and the public realm as well as related mapping and programming and marketing.
- A density of uses will be needed for this strategy to be successful... the more art and the more people who use the parking lots/garage, the safer and higher the visibility of these spaces (creating a cycle of use that will be self-supporting).



Phase 2

- Phase 2 is medium to high risk depending on parking demand at time of implementation, cost of financing, grants and Town support, and other factors.
- Parking garage design solutions must appeal to the community and meet the needs of businesses.
- Zoning changes will be required to build a lot on the Pleasant Street Lot site.
- A funding strategy will need to be developed and approved by the municipality.
- Community consensus will be required to garner widespread approval.



Key Performance Indicators

Phase 1

- Number of public space and lot improvements (public art, sidewalk stencils, signage, etc).
- Creation of a public art map/treasure hunt.
- Higher level of use for all existing parking lots and garage.
- Increased pedestrian activity and use of public spaces at more remote parking areas.
- Feedback from businesses that parking is less of a challenge for their customers.

Phase 2

- Documented implementation actions for most recent Downtown Park Plan.
- Clear timeline and plan for construction of downtown parking garage.
- If garage constructed: utilization of and availability in garage.
- If garage constructed: perception and input from business community regarding customer parking experience.
- If garage constructed: perception and input from concierge/ ambassador program regarding visitor parking experience.
- Revenue generated from constructed garage.

Partners & Resources

Partners

Phase 1

- Town of Amherst (lead)
- Amherst Downtown BID
- Amherst Local Cultural Council
- Massachusetts Cultural Council
- Area artists and creatives

Phase 2

- Town of Amherst (lead)
- Amherst Downtown BID
- Amherst Local Cultural Council
- Massachusetts Cultural Council
- Area artists and creatives
- Funding Entities/Agencies
- Parking and Public Space Designer
- Chamber of Commerce

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

The Spring 2021 Business Survey indicated that 76% of responding businesses want more opportunities for outdoor dining/selling and 75% of respondents desire changes to district parking availability/management. In follow-up community meetings, the loss of parking spaces for outdoor dining, the remote location (and underutilization) of the Boltwood Garage and Pleasant Street Lot, and low visibility and weak physical connections at some parking areas were all cited as concerns by business owners. The Town has commissioned two parking studies. The latest study in 2015 had a parking supply update in 2016. The Town is reluctant to move forward on any parking strategies, particularly ones such as a garage, that require large capital investment. However, with cultural venues such as the movie theatre reopening, an additional 300 apartments going online in downtown, the planned winter 2022 opening of a 200-seat performance and music venue, and additional cultural uses and attractions in the pipeline (\$36 million dollars of investment in downtown development is in the pipeline), that lack of easily accessible and safe parking in the near-term and sufficient supply to meet increased demand in the longer-term, will hamper downtown recovery and growth. The loss of parking for outdoor dining uses, and increased market for cultural activities and destinations, will require additional parking strategies that meet immediate as well as longer-term needs.

Action Item

Phase 1

Support better utilization of Boltwood Garage and public parking lots through the use of public art, public space improvements, wayfinding, and an art walk map (see other project recommendations regarding public realm and connectivity/safety).

Identify opportunities for parking sharing between private lots/business spaces and evening uses for dining and cultural events.

Action Item

Phase 2

- BID wants town to rezone Pleasant Street Public Parking Lot to expand the B-G (general business) zone of downtown to include the lot, rezone to allow 100% coverage.
- Issue RFP for parking garage/sell for \$1. BID will submit proposal and develop. Business plan shows that if zoning is changed, they can make numbers work for a 3 story 195 space parking garage. BID will maintain and provide staff to run garage.
- Conduct updated parking study to demonstrate sufficient demand for a second garage.
- Conduct community education process - demand, costs, concept design, funding, timing and impact.
- Obtain design funding.
- Develop design documents.
- Design approval and authorization by municipality.
- Secure construction funding (if not included in design grant).
- Determine a management structure.

Process

Phase 1

Boltwood Garage (and other remote lot locations) Art and Pop-up Pilot

1. Coordinate with public art and public space project recommendation.
 - Review map of public art and public space possibilities and determine early pilot possibilities. Choices could include:
 - ◊ Pop-up café/coffee kiosks
 - ◊ Murals on walls of garage
 - ◊ Pavement painting
 - ◊ LED lighting art in garage that also serves to upgrade lighting/security
2. Develop on-going maintenance and upkeep agreement with the Town.
 - Consider that the Downtown BID take on ongoing oversight and management of the garage from the Town of Amherst, treating the structure as public space (to activate, ensure safety, beautify, and ensure full-utilization).
 - Develop an MOU for BID management and activation.
3. Hire ambassadors and/or contract for pop-up retail/food at the garage.
 - Ambassadors to greet parkers, offer art interpretation (of future murals, LED art, pavement art, etc.), and/or staff at pop-up kiosks can help make the garage more inviting and create a destination in the space.
 - The goal is to make the garage attractive for both parkers and for visitors and include the structure on art maps and as another activity node in town...helping increase utilization and enhance public perception of safety and nearness to other uses.
4. Install lighting upgrades
 - Lighting upgrades can follow an LED art theme and create additional attractions in the structure...adding to a sense of security and visibility while providing public art.
5. Install wayfinding & signing
 - Maintain public art theme with new wayfinding and signage. Consider renaming the garage to convey new theme of public art within and around the structure.
6. Install murals
 - Murals inside the structure can be points of interest throughout the garage and may be as simple as large font messages or poetry, or paintings.

Process

Phase 2

Parking Garage Design Process for New Structure

A series of important considerations throughout the stages of developing a new garage should be planned for and investigated. These include:

Conceptual planning steps

Demonstration of need—To build consensus locally and justify potential grant funding, a clear demonstration of the need for this significant investment should be developed. This would likely include:

- Conducting a parking demand study, including estimates of future need to support any expansion of supply beyond replacing spaces lost to on-street dining.
- Development of alternatives and selection of a preferred approach that has the highest degree of community consensus.
- A preliminary cost comparison of alternatives to ensure that public funding is prudently applied.

Site selection considerations—The final size and capacity of a garage is limited largely by its footprint. Key items to evaluate include:

- Sufficient site width for standard garage "trays." A minimum efficient width of 120' is typical, expandable in 60' tray width increments for maximum efficiency. This width does not include any necessary set-backs or buffering.
- Sufficient site length to ensure acceptable tray/ramp slopes.
- The proximity to nearby structures and the impacts of a garage on ventilation, fire code requirements, abutter loading, etc.
- The location of vehicle access points relative to garage circulation and connecting streets and the resulting number of entry/exit lanes to accommodate the garage's supply.
- Pedestrian access points and vertical circulation requirements by code, including elevators and emergency stairs.

Pre-permitting due diligence—Obtaining legal and regulatory advice on the development of a garage:

- Ensuring land control and ownership (this is a Town-owned parcel).
- Reviewing any easements, liens, and liabilities associated with abutting properties or utilities.
- Understanding any zoning and permitting processes and associated timeframes.
- Identifying early any potential funding or financing options and associated eligibility.

Engineering investigations

Site conditions investigation—Thorough engineering assessments and surveys of the site are necessary, including:

- Detailed site survey, including identification of utilities and easements.
- Soils and environmental testing to determine any needed remediation.
- Geotechnical evaluation of soil strength to determine necessary load carrying ability and garage foundation system.
- Utility evaluation, including proximity and adequacy of necessary electrical, water, and stormwater services (plus multi-use services, which may include sewer, telecommunications, other).

Process

Conceptual design

Facility design considerations—Architects and planners should begin working through key features that go into the final design:

- Desired building and façade architecture and fenestration treatments, particularly with regard to fitting into the local context.
- Stormwater handling features, including incorporation of best management practices and green infrastructure.
- Amenity needs, such as bathrooms, utility hook-ups, lighting, enclosures, HVAC, etc.
- Vertical circulation and lobbies.
- Universal design features (accessibility).
- Incorporation of bike parking, EV charging, solar roofing, drop-off areas, etc.
- Needed parking control and payment equipment.
- Other code requirements (fire suppression, ventilation, clear height, emergency lighting, safety rails, etc.).

Funding & financing considerations—With sufficient knowledge of all desired structural features, the scope of required funding or financing can be determined:

- Detailed soft and hard cost estimates.
- Necessary steps to secure funding (grants process, bond approval, etc.) and potential financing (revenue bond, equity markets, etc.).
- On-going operations & maintenance costs, including weighing revenue streams against annual expense estimates, debt service estimates, and (ideally) sinking fund payments (replacement cost fund tied to the structural life of garage).

Operations considerations—Prior to completing a garage, plans for its operation should begin in advance:

- Parking management plans for all potential users.
- Security equipment, staffing and protocols.
- Determining needed liability protection.
- Planning regular maintenance and associated costs.
- Preparing for planned structural maintenance intervals.
- Preparing for periodic structural upgrades or major repairs (from a sinking fund).

Final design and construction

Design process considerations—With funding secured and a conceptual design complete, a garage designer and constructor can be hired. Plan for the duration necessary to complete:

- Designer advertising, selection, and contracting process.
- Design development and completion of final construction documents.
- Contractor advertising, selection, and contracting process.

Construction process considerations—Multiple considerations should fall on both the contractor and the client (Town):

- Clearly preparing the community for the full project duration.
- Understanding mobilization/staging needs of the contractor and construction equipment, cranes, and materials stockpiles.
- Preparing a multi-phased traffic management plan.
- Identifying temporary parking locations while the site is under construction.
- Planning for mitigation measures against construction impacts (noise, dust, light, traffic).
- Plans to maintain or augment abutter parcel access where necessary.

Project Example

Phase 1: Pop-up art in existing parking garages

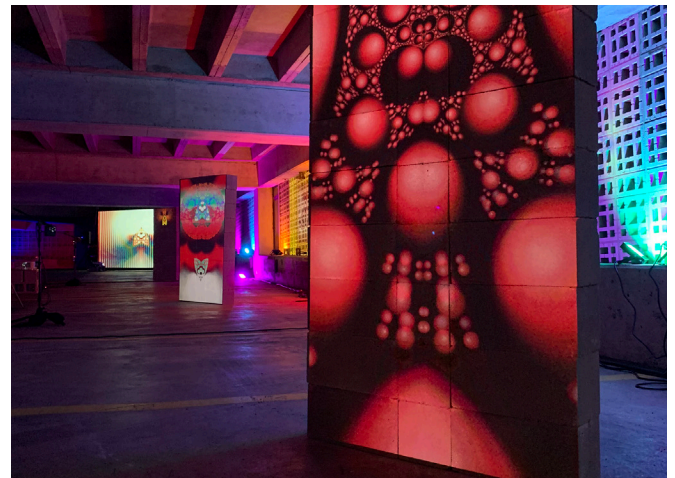
Area 3 by Aurora Dallas

Dallas, TX

Area 3 transformed a 100,000 sq ft parking garage into an exhibition with large-scale light, video and sound installations. Featuring art from Joshua King and other local artists, the exhibition was designed around social distancing in the COVID-19 pandemic and rethinking how exhibitions can change to fit the time. All of the installations and performances could be seen from the safety of the beholders' cars. Area 3 took place in the Dal Park Parking Garage (1600 Commerce St., Dallas) from October 1, 2020–January 1, 2021.



Area 3
Photo: Aurora Dallas



David Stout's "The Chamber" at Area 3
Photo: UNT

Corcoran Garage Art Wrap

Durham, NC

The Corcoran Garage Art Wrap was installed in August 2018 and was part of the "Back Porch" concept area of the SmART Vision Plan. The wrap, entitled "Durham in Continuum," focuses on activating and transforming the visual experience between city districts. The wrap consists of large scale art banners that wrap the south and southeast exterior of the City-owned parking garage.



Corcoran Garage Art Wrap
Photo: SmartDurham

Project Example

Phase 1/2: Murals on Parking Garages

William F Poe Parking Garage

Tampa, FL

Artist team Leon "Tes One" Bedore and Ales "Bask" Hostomsky create several murals on the William F Poe parking garage under the theme "Stay Curious."



Beyond Mural
Photo: Matthew Paulson



Stay Curious Mural
Photo: Greg Byron

Green Street Garage

Cambridge, MA

Part of the [Central Square Murals](#) project, this mural was painted by Cedric Douglas and Julz Roth.



260 Green St
Photo: Central Square BID

Project Example

Phase 2: Garages built with art in mind:



Museum Garage
Photo: Phillip Pessar

Museum Garage

Miami, FL

Museum Garage is a seven-story mixed use building in the Miami Design District featuring ground floor retail spaces, art space, a public garden, a lending library, a playground, and a parking garage with the capacity for 800 vehicles. In 2015, Design District developer Craig Robins commissioned architect Terence Riley of Keenen/Riley to develop the facade design for the building. Riley worked with five international studios, WORKac, J Mayer H, Clavel Arquitectos, and Nicolas Buffe, to create a bold facade treatment inspired by the surrealist parlor game Exquisite Corpse which synthesizes individually created images into a single composition. The result is a mash-up of five different facades that play off of the monumentality, innovation, and public accessibility of the building and its location.



Museum Garage
Photo: Phillip Pessar

Lake Nona Parking Garage

Orlando, FL

The Parking Garage at Lake Nona is a collaboration between JEFRE and Michael Counts. The parking lot is wrapped in a 264-foot-long Code Wall and also includes a 60-foot steel structure called The Beacon. The Code Wall features cut-outs in metal that cast shadows in the day, and the parking garage becomes a projection art piece at night with a different projection every night, featuring 15 different themes.

University of Nebraska, Pacific Parking Garage

Omaha, NE

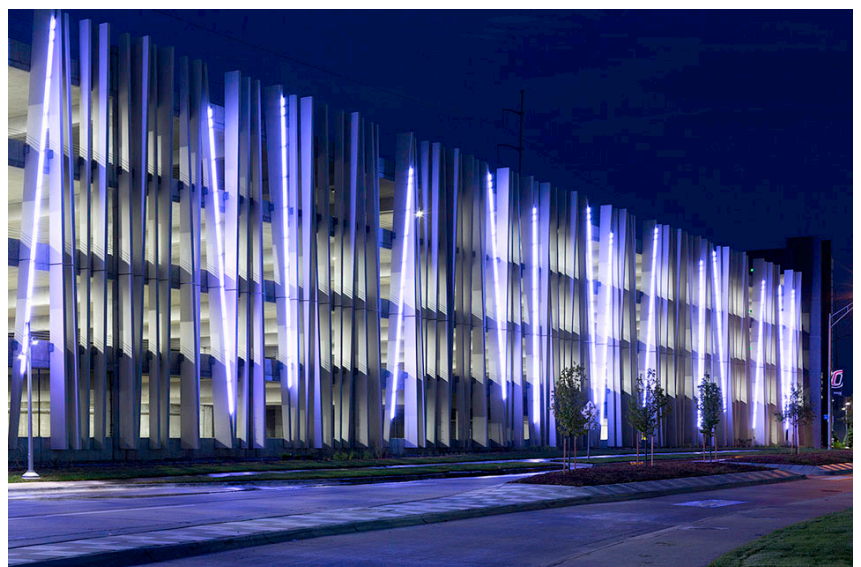
The Pacific Parking Garage is a 1,400 parking space structure designed for functionality and art. The building is lit with Vaya Tube RGB luminaires to provide color-changing light. This allows for color changing effects, but also provides some night safety and illumination.



Lake Nona Parking Garage Projections
Photo: Orlando Architecture



Lake Nona Parking Garage Code Wall
Photo: Lake Nona



Pacific Parking Garage
Photo: Color Kinetics

Appendix

Appendix

Community Involvement

The following documents are included:

- [Downtown Amherst LRRP Focus Group Summary Notes, May 7, 2021](#)
- [Downtown Amherst LRRP Community Meeting Notes, June 22, 2021](#)
- [Downtown Amherst LRRP Community Meeting Presentation, June 22, 2021](#)

DODSON & FLINKER

Landscape Architecture and Planning

September 21, 2021

To: Town of Amherst, Planner
Amherst Downtown BID

From: Dillon Sussman and Peter Flinker
Dodson & Flinker, Inc.
40 Main Street, Suite 101
Florence MA, 01062

Subject: Subject Matter Expert Consultation for Amherst Project Recommendation—Zoning Changes

Dodson & Flinker were selected by the Rapid Recovery Program to serve as a Subject Matter Expert for Amherst's Rapid Recovery Plan. We were asked to vet the plan's preliminary recommendations for zoning changes to facilitate the success of downtown businesses and downtown more broadly, and to provide recommendations for a process to carry out the zoning changes and examples of similar completed projects. The Subject Matter Expert consultation was held on August 20, 2021. It was attended by Gabrielle Gould, Executive Director of Amherst BID, Susan Silberberg, Plan Facilitator from CivicMoxie and Peter Flinker and Dillon Sussman (Subject Matter Experts from Dodson & Flinker).

Gabrielle Gould explained the context of the plan's zoning recommendations. Gabrielle shared the BID's vision for Amherst's downtown: it be a lively, walkable place which equally meets the needs of young people and older people with thriving businesses, restaurants, a renewed focus on entertainment, and ample housing so that there are enough residents to support the downtown businesses. Gabrielle explained that the town's zoning and permitting processes are barriers to achieving this vision. She cited several specific barriers including:

- The ground floor commercial requirement for mixed-use buildings, which has resulted in unfinished and unoccupied space due to the limited market for commercial tenants.
- The challenges of obtaining a special permit, especially related to uses that include live music and entertainment. In particular, Gabrielle is concerned about permitting for a proposed entertainment venue.
- The lack of specificity in the Design Review Handbook for the Design Review Board. Applicants are unable to determine what the Design Review Board wants prior to applying to the Board. This results in extra time and money to make revisions to accommodate the Board's opinions.
- Barriers to building a parking garage on the Pleasant Street Parking LOT, specifically the lot coverage requirement.
- The cap on the number of units allowed in an apartment building (24 units).
- A variety of limitations in the B-L district as compared to the B-G district.

Following the consultation, Dodson & Flinker completed a quick review of Amherst's downtown zoning. A full review of the Town's zoning is beyond the scope of this engagement. What we found is a complex zoning bylaw that is generally well organized and well written. The Town's

zoning contains numerous provisions that appear to reflect a coherent planning strategy for downtown. Overall, it appears that the Town is trying to develop a dense mixed-use core, with active street frontages, housing above commercial, all supported by a public or shared parking. The zoning pays close attention to the proximity between the downtown core and adjacent “small town” residential neighborhoods, through a variety of means including increased setbacks for properties in the B-G zone that abut a residential zone, and use of the B-L zone to create a transition between B-G and residential zones.

The zoning has many detailed and nuanced provisions. Reviewing it, one can easily imagine the community conversations that led to the bylaw that exists today. For example, debates about how to maintain commercial space when the housing market is stronger than the commercial market, or how to balance the need for entertainment with noise impacts on adjacent uses.

The zoning for downtown is made more complicated by several overlapping overlay districts including the Municipal Parking District, and two Design Review Districts. While the use of overlays is inherently confusing, Amherst’s at least have clear purposes and provisions and are limited in scope.

The Zoning Map pdf file on the Town’s website is very difficult to interpret and could be easily improved by reworking the symbology, adding parcel boundaries, and labeling all streets. That said, the GIS webmap on Amherst Maps is user friendly and much easier to understand.

A cursory review of the Dimensional Requirements for the B-G district shows that the minimum and maximum front setbacks, side and rear yards, maximum building coverage, maximum lot coverage all appear consistent with a walkable mixed-use downtown. The zoning does place additional side and rear setback requirements for parcels adjoining a residential zone. While this is likely intended to manage the transition between the downtown and residential areas, it may limit the development potential of small lots and may have an outside impact on the development potential of the B-G district overall because of the small size of the B-G district and the number of lots that abut residential districts. It might be worth conducting an analysis of the development potential of lots subject to this requirement, if that has not already been completed, to ensure that the requirement does not have unintended consequences.

Maximum floors and height are a topic of controversy in many downtowns experiencing growth. We are not in a position to evaluate the policy decision that Amherst has made regarding downtown building height. It is worth noting that it may be difficult to build a 55’ foot building with five stories in some circumstances. That said, the zoning provides a mechanism for additional height in some situations.

Basic minimum lot area, lot area/family, and basic minimum lot frontage are not required for townhouses, apartments, buildings containing dwelling units in combination with stores or other permitted commercial uses, and other permitted multi-unit residential uses in the B-G district.

Dimensions for the B-L district are more constraining on development than those in the B-G district. These requirements are more consistent with a village center than a downtown, and likely reflect both existing conditions in the B-L zone and its intent as a transitional zone. Over time, as the B-G district is redeveloped with larger buildings, it may be appropriate to revisit the

dimensional requirements in the B-L district to allow it too, to develop more. While several items in the dimensional table for B-L contain a footnote “b”, the district is not mentioned in the footnote and it is unclear which of the exemptions apply to the B-L district. This could be clarified with some text editing and/or formatting.

Parking requirements are in line with those in many communities. The Municipal Parking District covers most of downtown and does not require off-street parking for Residential Use (Section 3.32), Retail Business and Consumer Service Use (Section 3.35), and Research and Industrial Use (Section 3.37). This is an admirable aspect of the downtown zoning and essential for maintaining or developing a vibrant cohesive downtown. For areas not covered by the Municipal Parking District, the requirement that each dwelling unit have 2 parking spaces may be a significant constraint on development (especially in historic areas with smaller parcel sizes) and/or significantly increase the cost of housing.

The use regulations for housing seem rational. In the B-G District, Townhouses, Apartments, Converted Dwellings, and Mixed-Use Buildings are allowed by Site Plan Review, while Subdividable/Converted Dwellings, require a Special Permit. In the B-L District, Townhouses, Apartments, Subdividable/Converted Dwellings, require a Special Permit, while Mixed-Use Buildings and Converted Dwellings are allowed by Site Plan Approval. Depending on the vision for the B-L districts downtown, it may be worth revisiting the special permit requirement for Townhouses and Apartments in this district, perhaps adding standards to better manage how those uses fit the B-L districts transitional role.

Apartments in Amherst are limited to between three and twenty-four units. This may incentivize mixed-use buildings which do not appear to have a cap on the number of allowed units. On the other hand, increasing the cap on the number of apartments may make residential projects more viable, especially when affordable housing is included. Amherst needs to walk the fine line between trying to maintain commercial space downtown while also ensuring that housing development is economically viable. Many communities are finding that the market for housing is much stronger than that for commercial space and that with the very high cost of construction, requiring excessive commercial space can be a deal breaker.

There are several provisions in the Table of Use (3.325) that place limitations on Mixed-use buildings, including the requirement for a special permit for more than 10 upper story apartments, or a requirement that first floor residential use cannot front on a street, public plaza or other public space and that it be limited to 40% of the gross floor area. However, **neither of these limitations appear** to apply to the RRP study area. The first applies to B-L districts that do not abut the B-G district and the COM district. The later appears to only apply to the COM District, though the relevant text is unclear. The text below is provided for reference with emphasis added:

“A management plan, as defined in terms of form and content in the Rules and Regulations adopted by the Permit Granting Authority shall be included as an integral part of any application made under this section. **In those Limited Business (B-L) Districts not abutting the B-G District, and in the Commercial (COM) District,** a Special Permit from the Special Permit Granting Authority authorized to act under this section of the bylaw shall be required wherever proposed residential uses above the first floor exceed ten (10) dwelling units. The proposed use shall meet the criteria of Section 10.38 or

Section 11.24, as applicable, with respect to the site and potential conflicts between the residential and commercial use(s).”

“In the Commercial (COM) District no dwelling unit nor any internal space associated with a dwelling unit shall occupy any first floor portion of a building facing onto a street, public plaza, or other space customarily used by the public. First floor residential dwelling units, and any required entries thereto, shall be located on the rear of buildings, adjacent to any required parking and private open space associated with and serving those units. No more than forty percent (40%) of the first floor Gross Floor Area shall be used for residential purposes, which shall include not more than fifteen percent (15%) of said GFA associated with or incidental to, whether for storage, required entries, stair/elevator towers, or other purposes, any residential uses on upper floors.”

Regarding the second paragraph above, it is unclear whether “In the commercial (COM) District” applies to just the first sentence or the full paragraph. Given the structure of other similar statements in the table of use, it seems most likely that “In the COM district” would apply to the full paragraph. If this is not the intent, a paragraph break could be inserted after the first sentence to clarify the meaning, perhaps with “In all districts” added to the beginning of the sentence. If the ground floor residential use limitation applies in the downtown, Amherst could explore other ways to achieve the goal of active street frontages. For example, many communities set require ground floor commercial within a certain number of feet behind street facing facades (often 20-30 feet). This fulfills the goal of having a pedestrian oriented use along sidewalks or public spaces, while not requiring excessive floor space to be dedicated to a use for which there may not be a strong market. In recognition of the shrinking market for downtown commercial space, and the comparably strong need for housing in downtowns, many communities or reducing the portion of their downtown that is subject to a ground floor commercial requirement. For example, Northampton is considering zoning changes that would reduce its ground floor commercial requirement to essentially just its Main Street and two key nodes in downtown Florence.

Site Plan Review: While the Table of Use requires Site Plan Review for many typical downtown uses, the Site Plan Review section states that Site Plan Review shall not be required when there is “No Change to Building or Site,” when only the Use is changing, or when only Signage is changing. The Site Plan Review section further provides for an Administrative Review (11.214) for minor projects, for example those without footprint expansion. As with Special Permits, the Review Criteria/Design Guidelines are numerous. They are clearly written and seem reasonable, but likely create plentiful opportunities for debate.

The downtown zoning limits entertainment uses and other uses associated with alcohol and noise. Theater, motion picture house, bowling alley, dance hall, arcade or other indoor commercial amusement or assembly use require a Special Permit in both B-G and B-L. The zoning requires a special permit for a “Class II Restaurant or bar.” The distinction between Class I and Class II is based on hours of operation, alcohol service, and proximity to residential dwellings in a residential district. In addition 5.042 says:

“Live or pre-recorded entertainment involving music and/or human voice, whether amplified or unamplified, may be permitted in the B-G, B-L, B-VC, B-N and COM districts as an accessory use to a restaurant, bar, inn or bed and breakfast (Section 5.0102 only) under a Special Permit or Site Plan Review, whichever is required for the principal use,

except that a Special Permit shall be required whenever any accessory entertainment is proposed and any outside wall of that portion of the building occupied by the principal use is located 150 feet or less from a residential dwelling in a Residence district.

The following conditions shall apply to any entertainment permitted under this section:

5.0420 Such entertainment shall be clearly accessory and incidental to the principal use.

5.0421 Sound produced by the proposed entertainment shall not generally exceed 70 dB (A) as measured at any boundary of the property on which the establishment is located, as determined by the regulations adopted pursuant to Section 5.0422.

Special permit requirements can be a barrier to the establishment of a new business, so if Amherst wants to expand entertainment venues in its downtown, these provisions may warrant reexamination. That said, provisions like the distinction between Classes of restaurants and bars and noise limits outside of businesses were clearly developed to address concerns specific to downtown Amherst.

Special Permits. The required findings associated with a Special Permit are more detailed and extensive than many communities but do not seem onerous. However, in the context of a controversial project application they do provide many opportunities for debate. Some of the criteria, do not seem suited to a downtown context. For example, requirements for screening.

Design Review. The downtown is covered by two different design review overlays: Design Review District and the Town Common Design Review. The zoning bylaw contains five general principles and nine standards for design review. The standards generally say that various aspects of design “should be compatible” both internally (e.g. all parts of a building are compatible) and with the surrounding context. These standards are supplemented by the *Design Review Board Handbook* which expands on each standard and includes an illustration of considerations for each standard. Every community with design review needs to decide how to calibrate its standards or guidelines on the range between broad guidelines and detailed standards. Broad design guidelines allow greater flexibility for applicants and also for boards. They can allow more creativity but can also result in unpredictable and contentious permit reviews as terms like “compatible” are easily debated. Detailed standards, on the other hand, can be more objective. They can limit creativity for applicants and flexibility for review boards, but increase review predictability for everyone involved: applicants, boards, and residents. Amherst’s “design standards” and its handbook are on the broad guideline end of the spectrum. We recommend that Amherst evaluate whether it is time to update its design standards and its Design Handbook. Since the Design Review Board Handbook was last updated in 2009, the form-based code movement has advanced the practice of more objective design standards, while a number of Massachusetts communities have adopted design guidelines that can serve as models for Amherst. In particular, Amherst’s design standards or handbook could pay more attention to how buildings relate to sidewalks and streets, how ground floor facades are designed, details like window transparency, the use of front setbacks if any, landscaping, sustainable design, and improvements to public spaces that might be warranted in association with new development.

Across the Special Permit Findings, Site Plan Review Criteria, and the Design Review Standards, the bylaw often states what will be reviewed but does not provide an objective description of the threshold for meeting the criteria. Instead, the bylaw describes what is desired in general terms, including terms like “adequate” or “reasonably consistent with.” This approach is quite

common in zoning bylaws and Amherst's criteria are clearer and better organized than those in many zoning bylaws in Massachusetts. The advantage of Amherst's approach is that it provides flexibility for applicants and the board to allow the best site-specific design. The disadvantage is that it does not provide a clear direction to applicants when multiple design alternatives are possible and it leaves open room for disagreement about what is "adequate," potentially making review processes more difficult for applicants, board members and other interested community members.

Conclusion

After a cursory review of Amherst's zoning bylaw several themes rise to the top.

1. The zoning reflects a downtown that is a long-term transition from a small-town center to a more vibrant mixed-use downtown. It strikes a balance on several issues that will likely continue to be debated for coming decades including: the appropriate level of housing development; how to maintain a cohesive commercial core in the face of economic trends that have reduced the market for retail space (and potentially office space in the wake of COVID); how to balance the needs of downtown with those of adjacent residential areas; how to address the differing needs or desires (or the perception that they are different) of younger people and older people.
2. Amherst's zoning is complex and nuanced. This can make it difficult to navigate, even though it is relatively well organized and generally clearly written.
3. Special Permit Findings, Site Plan Review Criteria, and Design Review Standards are all relatively broad and unspecific. This leave review boards with wide latitude. More objective standards would constrain boards and applicants but increase predictability for applicants, board members, and residents of the Town at large. In particular, the Design Review Standards and the associated Design Review Board Handbook could be updated to incorporate best practices developed by the form-based code movement and/or recently developed design guidelines or standards (including those developed for 40R districts).
4. If Amherst desires additional entertainment venues, it could consider allowing theater, motion picture house, or other indoor commercial amusement or assembly use by right (or by site plan review) with performance standards to mitigate an unwanted impacts of those uses.
5. There are several key provisions in the zoning that are unclear, including those related to which districts are subject to ground floor residential is limitations, and which dimensional standards some B-L uses are exempt from (footnote b in the Dimensional Table). The pdf zoning map's symbology could be clarified—without changing its content.
6. Many zoning changes that could facilitate business success and additional housing in downtown Amherst are not technically complex—some are as simple as changing a single number—but making those changes would require a strong consensus about what the downtown should be.

Amherst has experienced the success of its downtown zoning with several new buildings having been built. It has also experienced a pandemic which significantly stressed its downtown businesses community. This may be an appropriate time for Amherst to undertake an intentional process of community consensus building about the next steps for the downtown. If Amherst can come to agreement about what kind of downtown it wants, how much housing it wants, what the role of entertainment venues is, and how to manage the transition between

downtown and adjacent residential neighborhoods, then it will be able to make simple but far-reaching improvements to its zoning and its permitting processes.

Please see our edits to the Project Rubric for specific recommended changes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dillon Sussman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "D" and "S".

Dillon Sussman, Senior Associate
Dodson & Flinker, Inc.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Flinker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "P" and "F".

Peter Flinker, Principal
Dodson & Flinker, Inc.

Downtown Amherst LRRP Focus Group Summary Notes

May 7, 2021 9:00 – 10:00AM

Via Zoom

Participants: Yasmin Eisenhauer, Rachel Hart, Tony Maroulis

CivicMoxie Team: Susan Silberberg and Shana Pena

Summary Notes

CivicMoxie provided a brief summary of the state's LRRP program and the intent to help commercial districts throughout the state. This focus group is to specifically hear from businesses directly to find out what has worked, what hasn't, and any ideas for improvement.

COVID-19 Impacts

- Amherst Cinema lost a lot of its programming during the pandemic – such as the See, Hear, Feel, Film program that usually brings thousands of third graders to the cinema for film education.
- Programs that could, pivoted to online streaming, FaceBook live events, and Zoom.
- Earned revenue dropped about 90% during pandemic – combination of memberships, contributions/ donations, and CARES Act support has been essential.
- Transitioning back to in-person but considering continuing the virtual programming (which is now two systems).
- Staffing – supporting them and safety – key.
- Funding for businesses is the top need.

Market Base

- When UMass closed and everyone went remote, it changed Amherst overnight. Unlike other Western Massachusetts communities, it went from busy to shut down completely.
- University and colleges are always blamed for the economic woes of downtown (either students are off campus and in downtown too much or not spending enough because they're staying on-campus).
- Changing the stories of local businesses and the student purchasing power that helps keep them going. (Donahue Institute study of the state and local impacts of the UMass system.)

Town Coordination and Permitting

- Cooperation with Town has been better during the pandemic with permitting becoming easier with more Town assistance.
- Town is known to be notoriously difficult to work with – especially for permitting for everything from signage to alcohol licenses, but the Town has stepped up, and the businesses would like to see that continue.
- Town needs to focus on economic development.

BID and Chamber Capacity and Coordination

- Both the BID and Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce should facilitate partnerships with the Town. The BID is a convener but only focuses on downtown, while the Chamber's area is larger.
- BID and the Chamber should continue to work together – both forward thinking.
- BID is really good at communicating what is going on with Amherst and businesses but needs to be better at communicating with businesses about what they should be paying attention to or advocating for. The Chamber is actually really good at the advocating piece and sends out lengthy emails.
- Joint lobbying of business needs in Town Hall.
- Funding opportunities and grants – there are state and federal programs, but nothing local? (Impacts ability to hire staff)
- Some businesses complain, but overall business atmosphere pretty good.

Arts and Culture/ University and College/ Pop-Ups

- The theater is an economic multiplier. Support of arts and cultural uses should be valued.
- Where do universities/ colleges fit in? Where and how are they connected to arts?
- Create true and aspirational stories of downtown and Amherst
- Spontaneity and pop-ups are possible but are missing here.

Parking

- "Parking shouldn't be so hard."
- Parking has long been an issue. Parking issues are also reflective of good things like a busy downtown, so we can't forget that.
- People (visitors and residents) driving in from a larger area. Parking rates and timing is an issue, especially for those coming for dinner and an event (8pm meters).
- The best parking systems control the movement of people in the area.
- Right now, businesses each have to tell customers where to park – an updated Town parking map including zone issues could help.
- With outdoor dining, some of the on-street parking has been converted – what's going to happen long-term?
- Public-private partnership for use of private parking lots during off-business hours?
- Better signage and map linking available parking to destinations? Example the CVS lot to the theater?
- Will a new public parking garage get built?

Downtown Amherst LRRP Community Meeting Notes

June 22, 2021 12:00 – 1:30PM

Via Zoom

Participants: Gabrielle Gould, Clare Bertrand, Paul Bockelman, Ewen Chen, Gerald Jones, Tony Maroulis, Jon Niedzielski, Keren Rhodes, Barry Roberts, George Ryan, Sharon Sharry

CivicMoxie Team: Susan Silberberg and Sue Kim

Summary Notes

Gabrielle Gould, Executive Director of Amherst Business Improvement District (BID), and Susan Silberberg, Principal at CivicMoxie, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

CivicMoxie provided background of the Department of Housing and Community Development's Massachusetts Downtown Initiative's (MDI) statewide Local Rapid Recovery Program. As the basis for the program, each consultant team conducted a diagnostics phase to capture the current conditions of the community's commercial district after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. (See PDF of presentation)

Presentation Notes:

CivicMoxie explained that the letter-grades of the physical conditions within the commercial area were based on an overall average for the whole district, understanding that conditions vary widely within the district.

Since the RRP is meant to capture a "current" status of the businesses in the study area, and the site surveys were conducted in the spring, some of the observations did not capture outdoor and sidewalk activity that occurred the previous summer and fall.

As part of the RRP program, MDI issued an online survey that was open to all commercial users within the different study areas. While Amherst had a good number of responses, the survey results still represent only a portion of the businesses within the Study Area. The issues and concerns identified were, therefore, supplemented with a focus group and interviews.

Included in the presentation is a pretty general list of possible projects. CivicMoxie wants to hear your priorities before digging deeper.

Community Discussion Notes:

Market and Narrative

- There's actually a lot of benefit to having the large student body and their spending dollars in town; full-time residents can benefit from the same services, dining, and amenities that the students help support.

- Changing of the narrative – UMass Amherst no longer is a safety school but is a top research university. The students have disposable income and want an environment with amenities.
- Confirmation of the story that the connections between the students and full-time residents give each other what they want.
- We're a higher ed town and we should build on that.

Business Assistance and Recruitment

- Recognize the cost of the permitting process for new and existing businesses – the time, value, and costs involved to get through the Town's process. The buddy system idea could be great to help businesses feel supported. Some new restaurants coming to town have still voiced frustration with the process and costs, so for the Town to continue looking for ways to streamline things is helpful.
- Also need to work on changing the perception that Amherst not welcoming to new businesses – marketing the new message to keep up the good work and communications that happened during the pandemic.
- How can the town diversify its businesses and restaurants? It's all sort of one type of restaurant – how do we expand?
- CM commented that a marketing and recruitment effort – between Town, BID, and existing business owners – can create a strategy to target arts/ culture, different restaurants, businesses, etc. It would be easier to make a pitch if there's an idea for what the overall target mix is.

Regional Marketing and Arts and Culture

- Amherst BID working with Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce on a new regional branding/marketing campaign launching in August to highlight what Amherst has to offer.
- There's the potential to drive arts and culture in town to go beyond the university. Create reasons outside of the colleges for visitors and residents to come downtown and help the area mature to what it could be.
- Live music and performance space would be a destination use that could help support the other businesses. Example – Berkshires is a destination – it's in the middle of nowhere, but there's MassMOCA and all the Shakespeare, etc.

Parking

- How will we deal with the use of needed parking spaces for the outdoor dining – as things open back up, how will this work?
- CivicMoxie commented that this issue will need to be thought through with strategies for where the outdoor dining can continue – and possibly grouped instead of individual; and letting people know where the parking is available and how safe/easy to park and walk.
- Parking has been an issue – there's the implementation of the parking study, but there's a feel that the downtown needs a parking garage and not an underground garage. Any new business considering coming to the downtown will want to have secure parking.

- CivicMoxie commented that it sounds like people don't want to use the underground parking, but can people be encouraged to use it if there's art, lighting, wayfinding, visible safety features, etc.?
- There's also just on-street parking management – where short-term pick-up and take-out delivery spaces should be kept and not be used for outdoor dining/parklets.

Funding

- The \$100m question – will there be financing for some of this project recommendations that come from the RRP program? Can we look at these ARPA monies? State money and what projects can we fund with what's out there.
- CivicMoxie stated that MDI has identified some existing funding sources but the RRP program itself may be helping the State determine how else to focus its economic development resources to best help the communities throughout the state.

Downtown Amherst Phase 1 – Baseline Data Summary Local Rapid Recovery Program

Tuesday, June 22, 2021, 12:00 – 1:30PM

Via Zoom



Agenda

- The Rapid Recovery Plan Program
- Diagnostics Summary
- Preliminary List of Possible Projects
- Let's Talk!
- Next Steps



The Rapid Recovery Program



What is the Rapid Recovery Plan Program (RRP)?

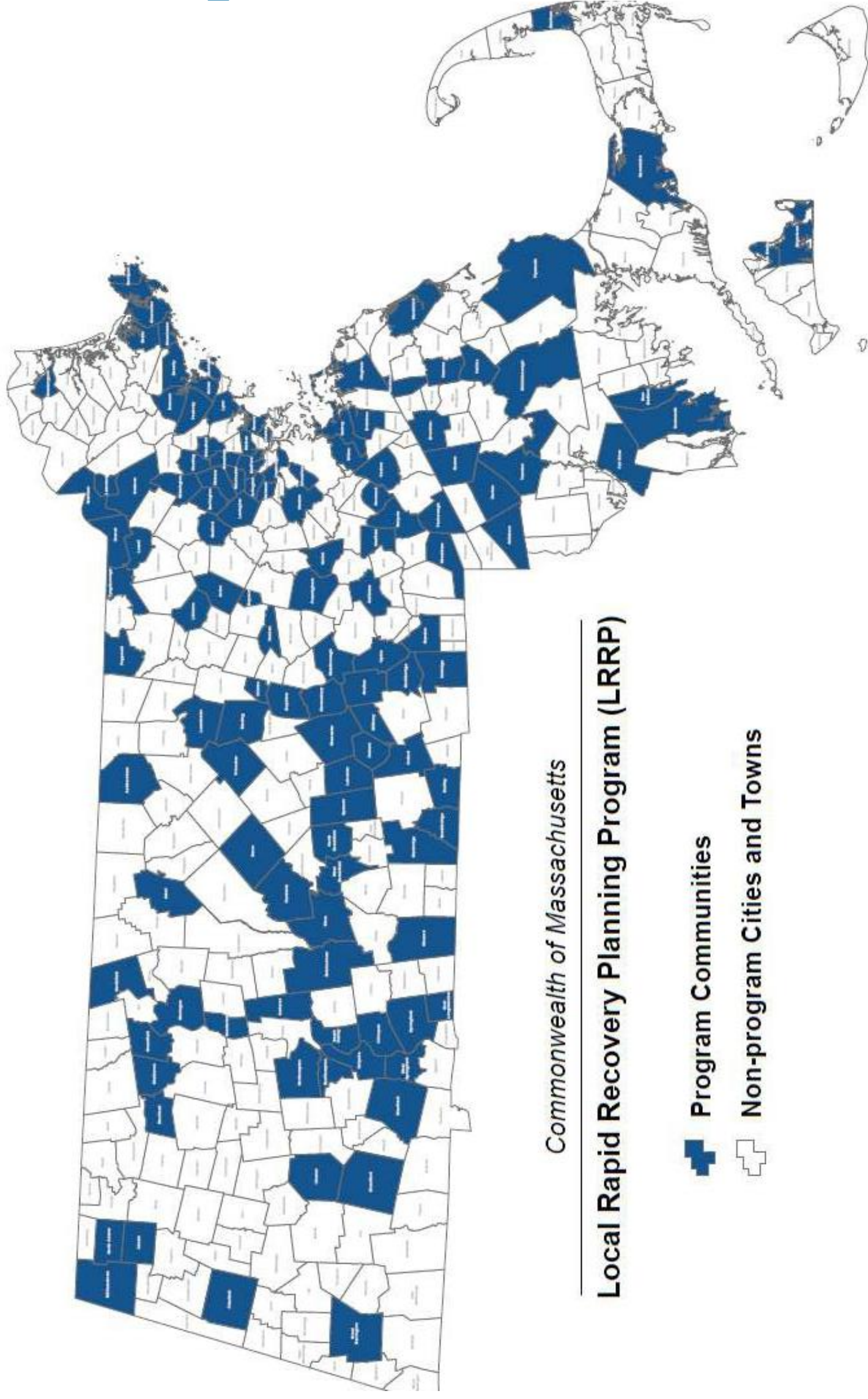
A planning grant program offered by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

Goal: To develop *actionable, project-based recovery plans* tailored to the unique economic challenges and COVID-19 related impacts to downtowns and commercial areas.

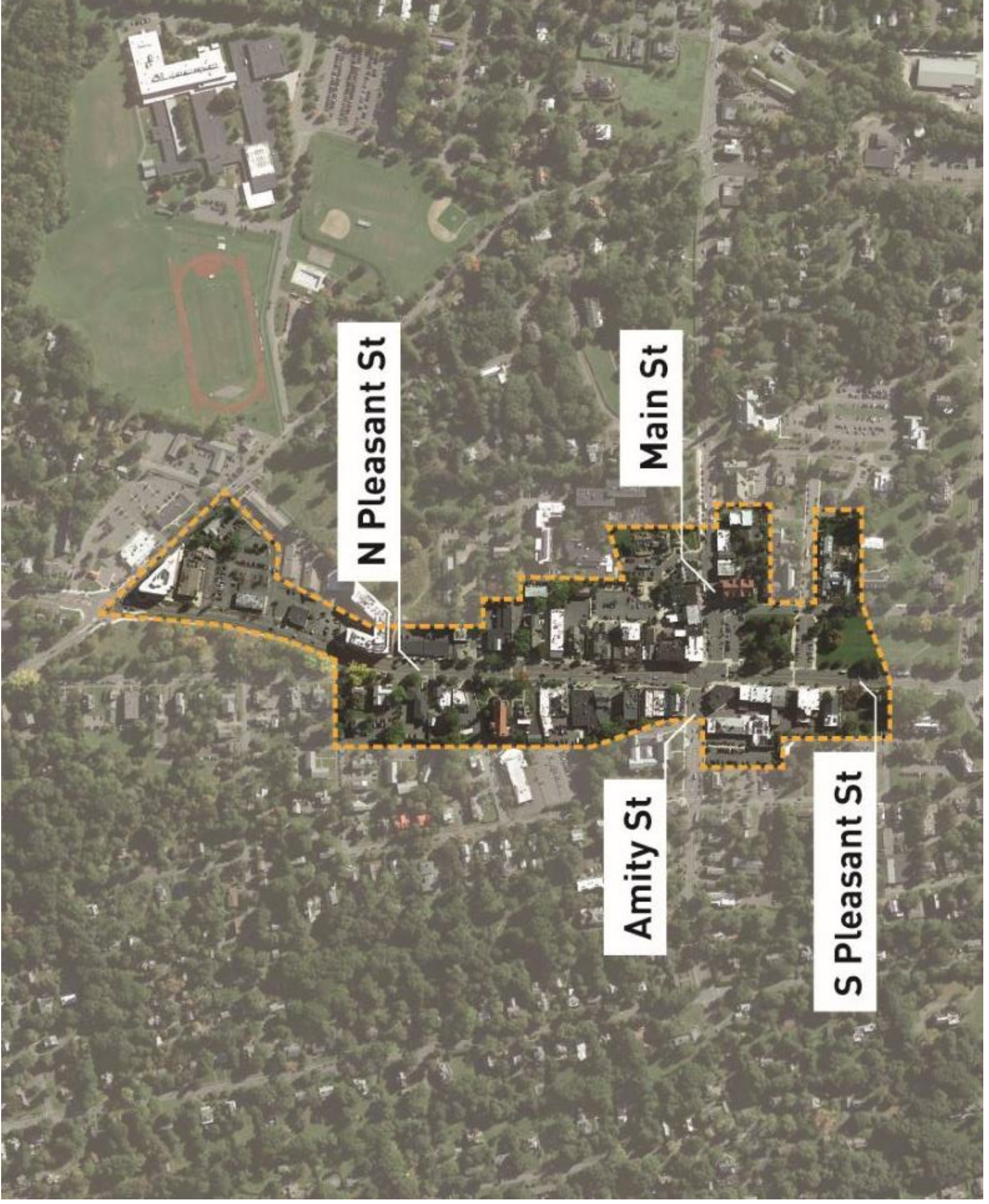
- Collect primary data to measure COVID-19 impacts on the local business community.
- Create data-driven plans to aid COVID-19 recovery efforts.
- Develop short, medium and long-term recovery goals and a list of projects.

Program website: [Rapid Recovery Plan \(RRP\) Program | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rapid-recovery-plan-rrp-program)

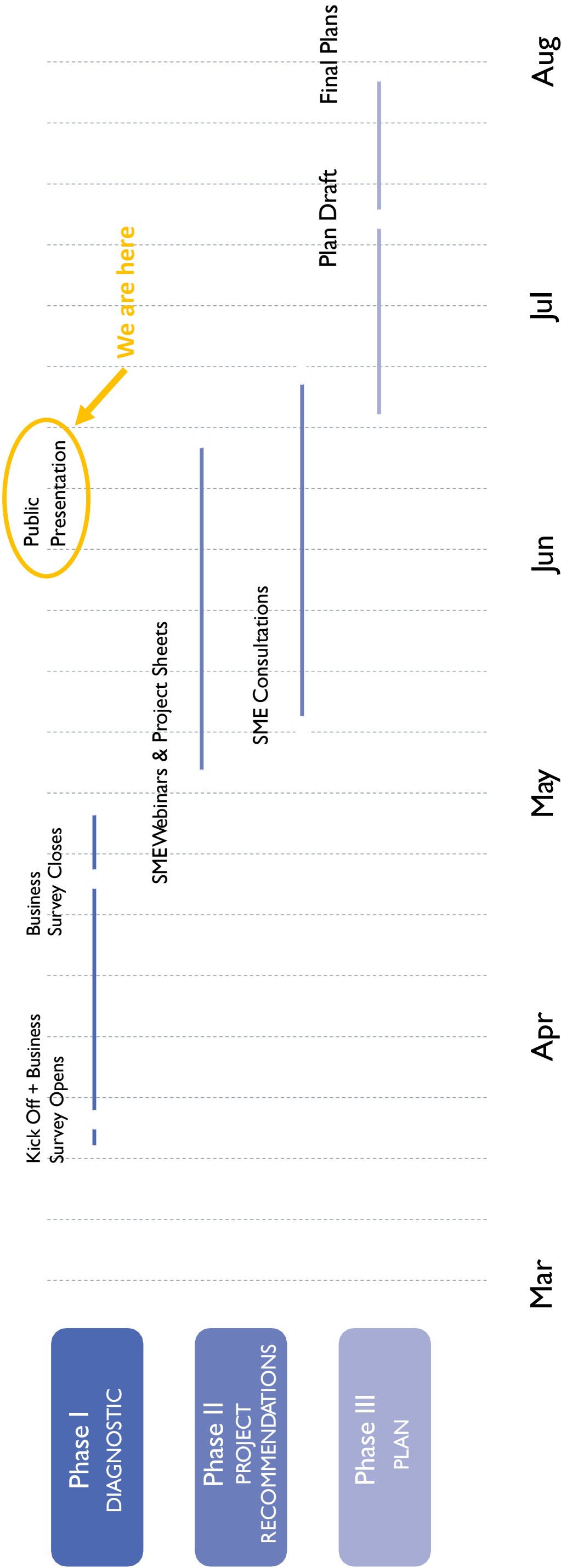
Participating Communities



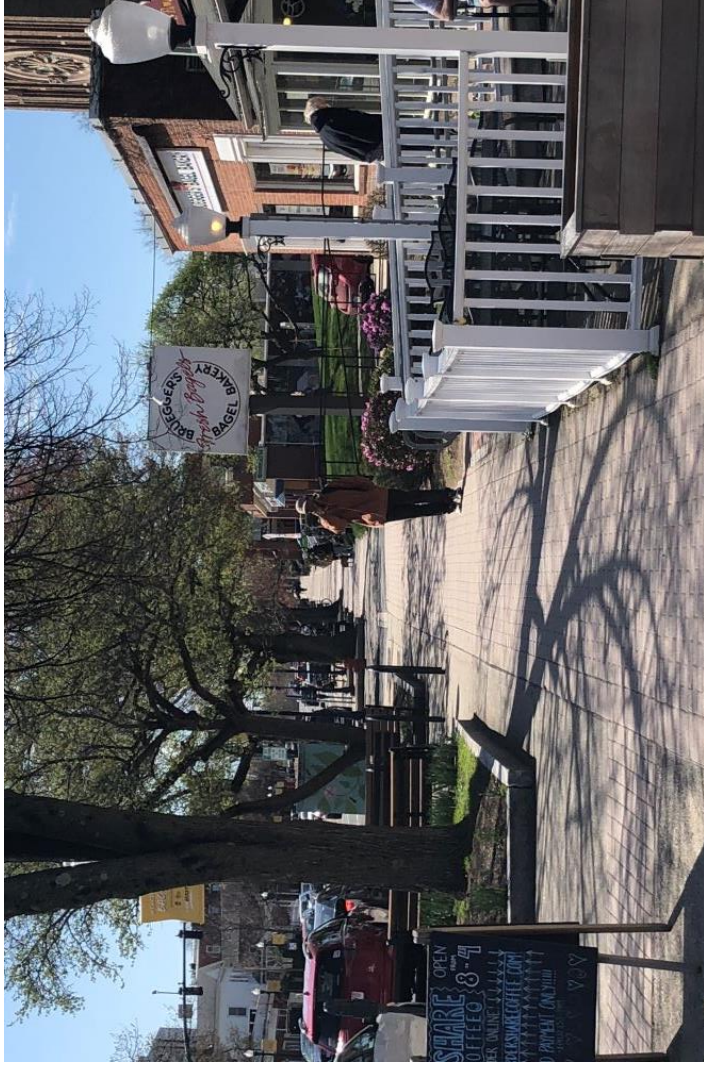
Downtown Amherst Study Area



PLANNING SCHEDULE



Purpose of this Meeting



- Highlight key baseline data/ diagnostics (summary of quantitative and qualitative)
- Review initial priorities
- Discuss draft list of possible projects with you
- Next Steps



Plan Diagnostics/Data Categories



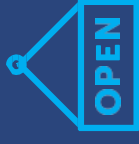
Physical Environment

Public Realm
Private Realm
Access + Visibility



Market Information

Trends
Consumer Profiles
Demand



Business Environment

Anchors/Destinations
Asset Mix
Nodes/Clusters

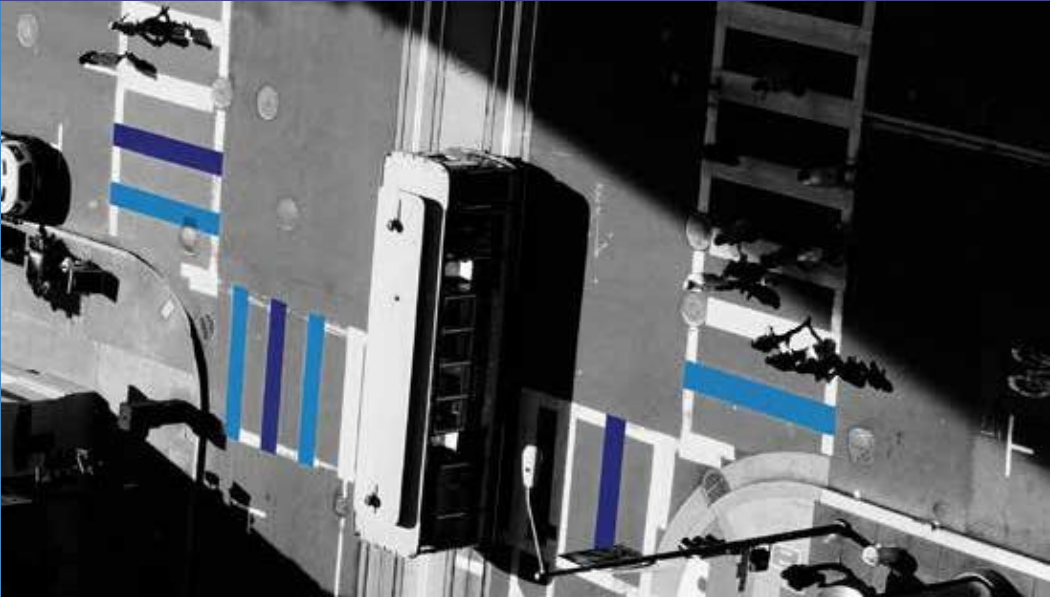


Administrative Capacity

Partners
Funding
Regulations/Zoning



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



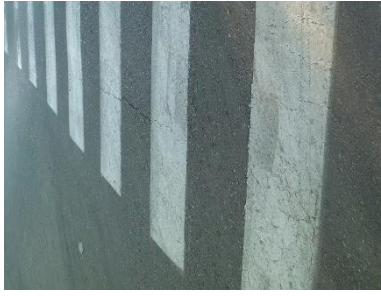
Diagnostics Summary: Physical Environment

Physical Environment Elements

Physical Elements are separated into two categories:

Public Realm and Private Realm

Public Realm Elements:



Examples (not the study area)

- Sidewalks
- Street Trees and Benches
- Lighting
- Wayfinding/ Signage
- Roadbed/ Crosswalks

Private Realm Elements:



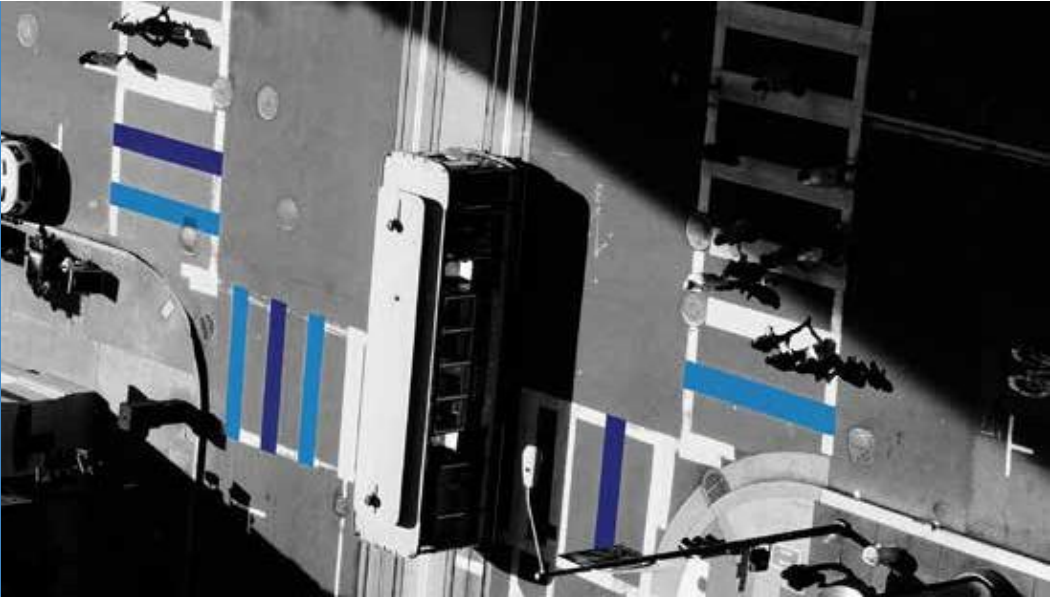
Examples (not the study area)

- Windows
- Outdoor Display/ Dining
- Signage
- Awnings
- Façade



PHYSICAL
ENVIRONMENT

Public Realm



Element: Sidewalks

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



Amherst's Study Area's Average Rating

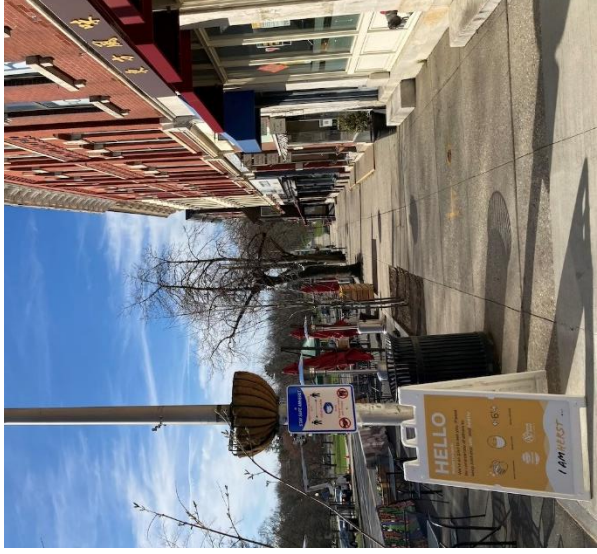
A

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



B

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



C

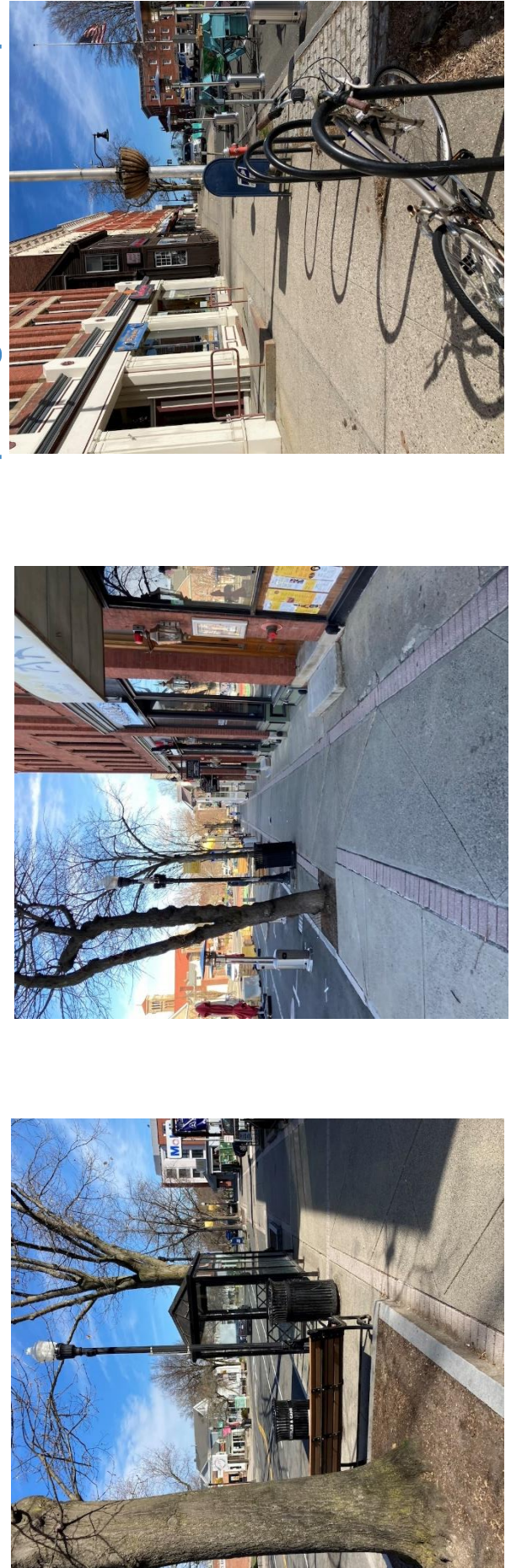
More than 25% of sidewalks in the study area pose challenges to the pedestrian experience (including narrow sidewalks and lack of cleanliness/ maintenance).

F

There are no sidewalks in the study area.

Element: Street Trees and Benches

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



Amherst's Study Area's Average Rating	A	B	C	F
	Street trees and benches are readily available throughout the study area. They are well-designed, well-maintained, and offer shade and comfort to pedestrians.	Although street trees and benches are available, these amenities have not been cleaned or well-maintained, and require improvements.	Limited availability of street trees and benches creating uncomfortable pedestrian experience.	There are no street trees and benches in the study area.

Element: Lighting

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



Amherst's Study Area's Average Rating

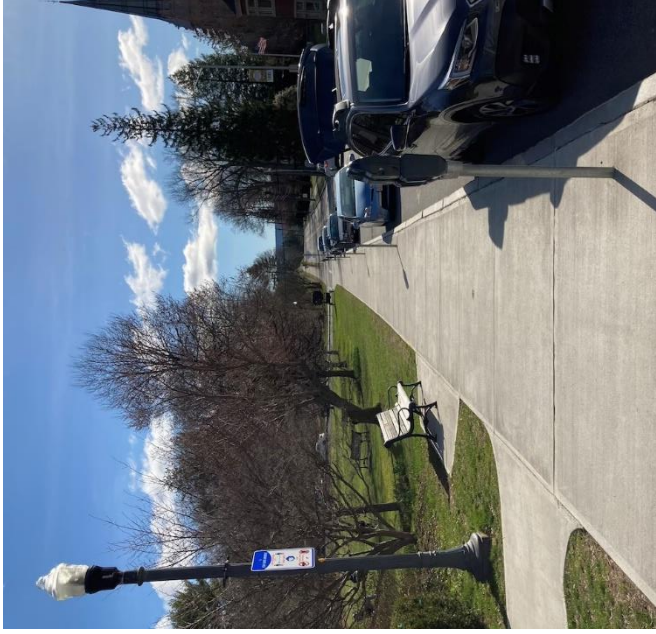
A

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



B

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



C

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

F

There is no street lighting in the study area.

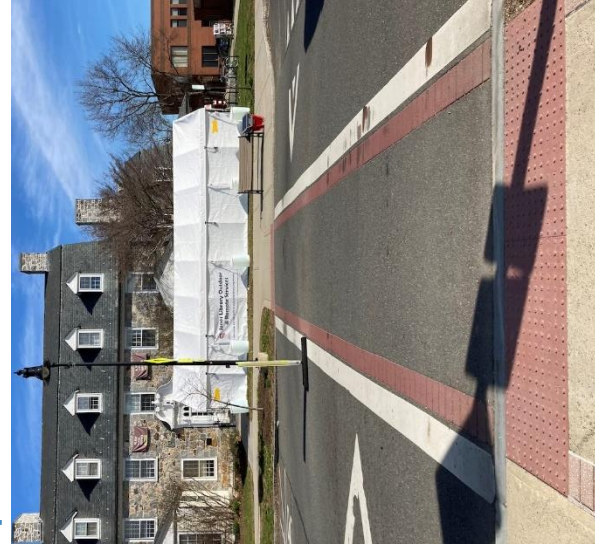
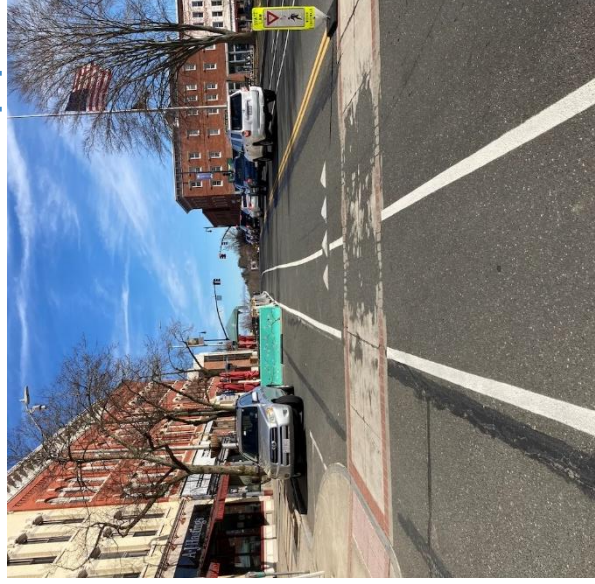
Element: Wayfinding/ Signage

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

Amherst's Study Area's Average Rating	A	B	C	F
	<div>There is a comprehensive and cohesive wayfinding system that offers geographic orientation to pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Signage reflects brand/identity.</div>	<div>Wayfinding in the study area is primarily geared towards directing cars. There is limited signage to identify key assets and destinations to pedestrians.</div>	<div>Limited to no signage available throughout the study area.</div>	<div>There is no wayfinding/signage in the study area.</div>

Element: Roadbed/ Crosswalks

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



**Amherst's Study
Area's Average
Rating**

A

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

B

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

C

Roads are hazardous to all users.

F

The study area is not connected by any major roads.

Public Realm Key Takeaways

Grades for Public Realm Elements for many portions of the Study Area are above the average for the entire District

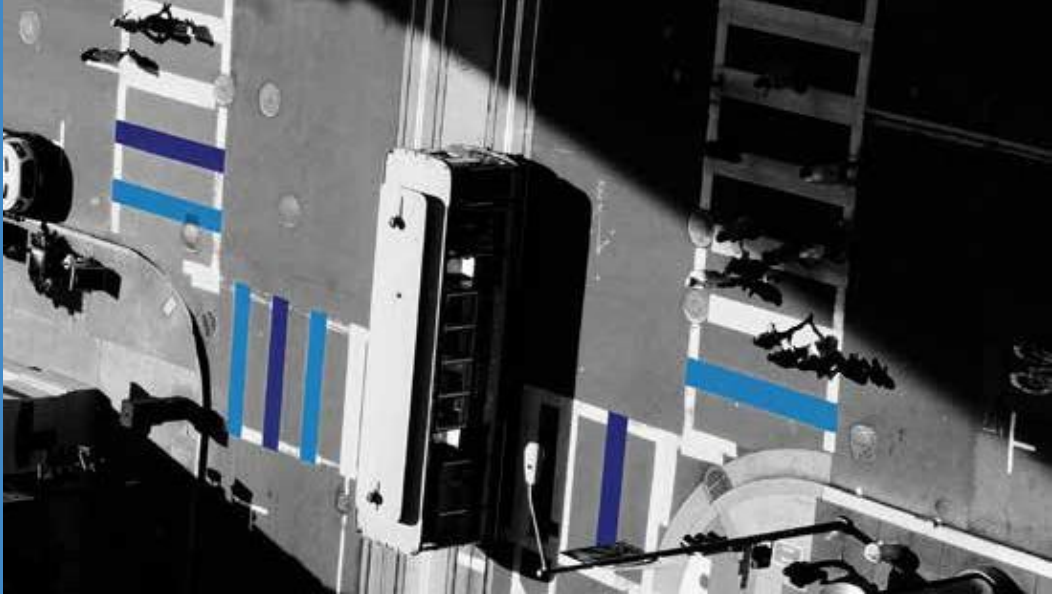
Takeaways:

- While materials, design, and maintenance of the public realm elements varied throughout the district, the overall condition was very good. There are multiple places with seating and good amenities, such as bike racks and trash cans, and adequate signage.
- The northern part of the study area has good public realm infrastructure but loses density and activity...it doesn't "hold together" with the rest of the shopping area.
- Wayfinding to connect parking areas and destinations is weak in areas and could benefit from visual or physical clues linking spaces (public art, street furniture, color coding, etc.)



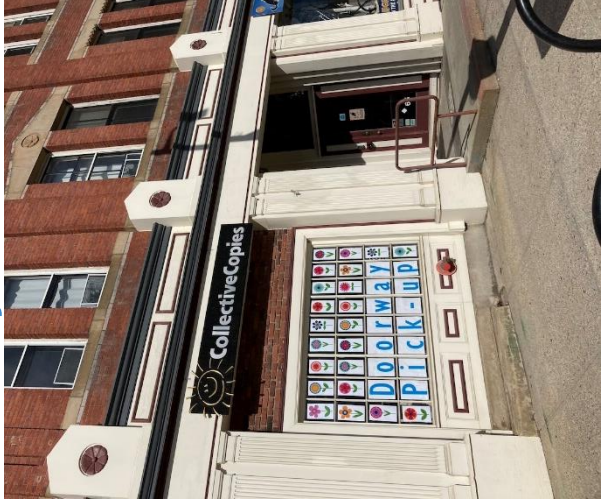
PHYSICAL
ENVIRONMENT

Private Realm



Element: Windows

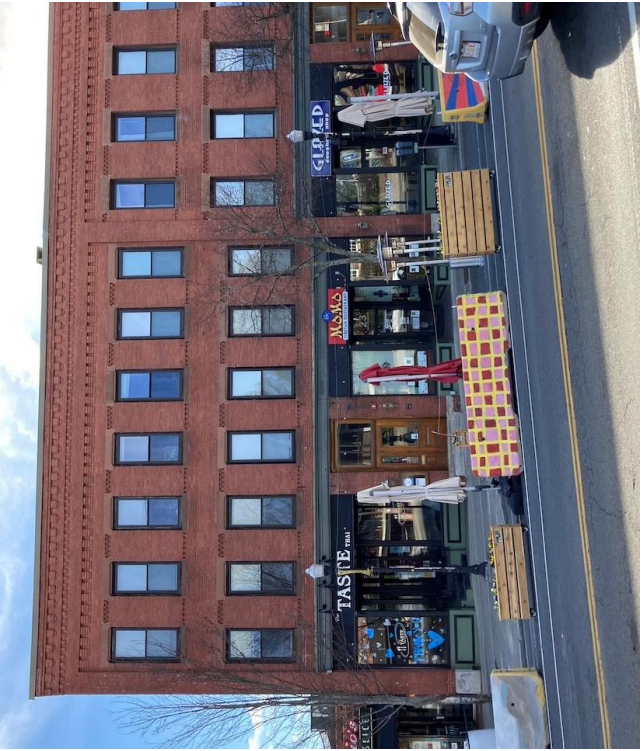
Guiding Principle: Storefronts that maintain a minimum of 70% transparency ensure clear lines of sight between the business and the sidewalk to enhance attractiveness of storefront, as well as improve safety for the business, customers, and pedestrians.



Amherst's Study Area's Average Rating	A	B	C	F
	More than 75% of storefronts maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.	About 50% of storefront windows maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.	More than 25% of storefronts have windows with limited transparency.	All storefronts are boarded up and/or have limited transparency.

Element: Outdoor Display/ Dining

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



Amherst's Study Area's Average Rating	A	B	C	F
	More than 75% of storefronts feature an attractive window display and/or spillover merchandise and dining areas that align with the brand and identity of the district.	About 50% of storefronts maintain an attractive window display with limited spillover merchandise and/or dining areas.	More than 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise display and outdoor dining that pose challenges to the pedestrian experience.	There is no spillover retail/restaurant activity in the district.

Element: Signage

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



Amherst's Study Area's Average Rating	A	B	C	F
	More than 75% of storefront signs reflect the unique brand identity of tenants and can be easily seen from more than 10 ft distance.	About 50% of storefronts have clear signage that reflect basic business information and can easily be seen from adjacent sidewalks.	More than 25% of storefronts have signage that does not communicate names of business or types of products/services being offered.	Storefronts in the study area do not have signage.

Element: Awnings

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



Amherst's Study Area's Average Rating

A

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

B

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

C

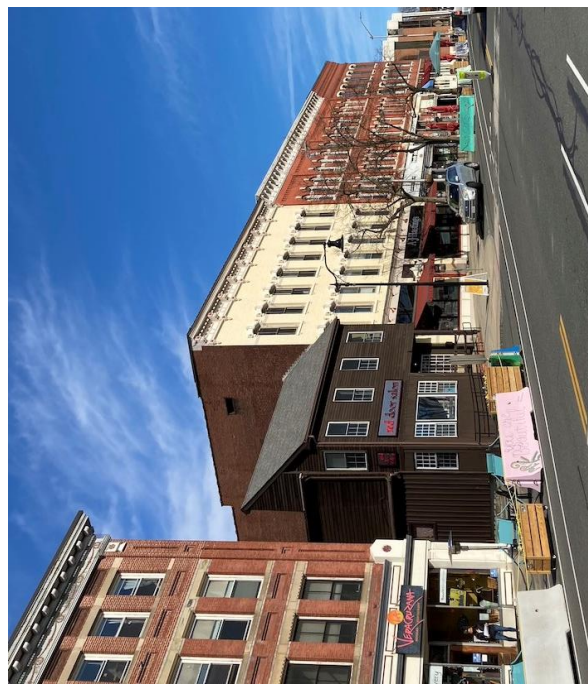
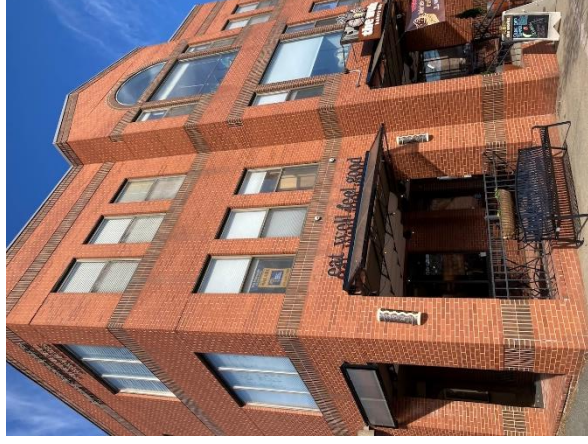
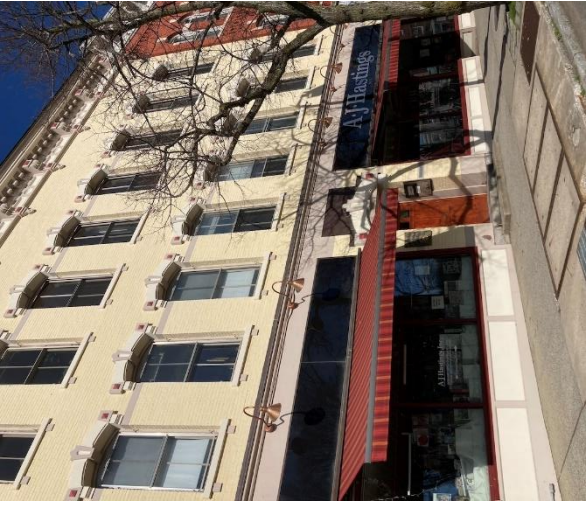
More than 25% of properties in the study area do not have awnings and/or have awnings that are unusable or have not been cleaned and maintained.

F

Storefronts in the study area are not equipped with awnings.

Element: Façade

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



Amherst's Study Area's Average Rating

A

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

B

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

C

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

F

All properties in the study area require significant façade improvements.

Element: Lighting

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



**Amherst's Study
Area's Average
Rating**

A

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



B

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



C

**More than 25% of
storefronts do not have
lighting.**

F

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

Private Realm Key Takeaways

Grades for Private Realm Elements for many individual buildings are above the average for the entire District

Takeaways:

- Most of the storefronts maintained very good signage and visibility into their businesses. The overall impression is of a well-maintained commercial area
- The amount of outdoor dining opportunities varied throughout the district. Temporary dining in parking locations outside some businesses are combined with patio dining in designated spaces with questions about post-pandemic town policies related to expanding dining spaces.
- Façade materials, design, and conditions are overall very good throughout the district.

Private Realm Key Takeaways

Grades for Private Realm Elements for many individual buildings are above the average for the entire District

Takeaways:

- Most of the storefronts maintained very good visibility into their businesses.
- The amount of outdoor dining opportunities varied throughout the district – often due to sidewalk constraints.
- While most businesses had very good signage, there were a number of businesses throughout the district lacking visible and legible signage.
- Façade materials, design, and conditions vary significantly but are overall very good throughout the district. Some buildings would greatly benefit from modest improvements.



CUSTOMER
BASE

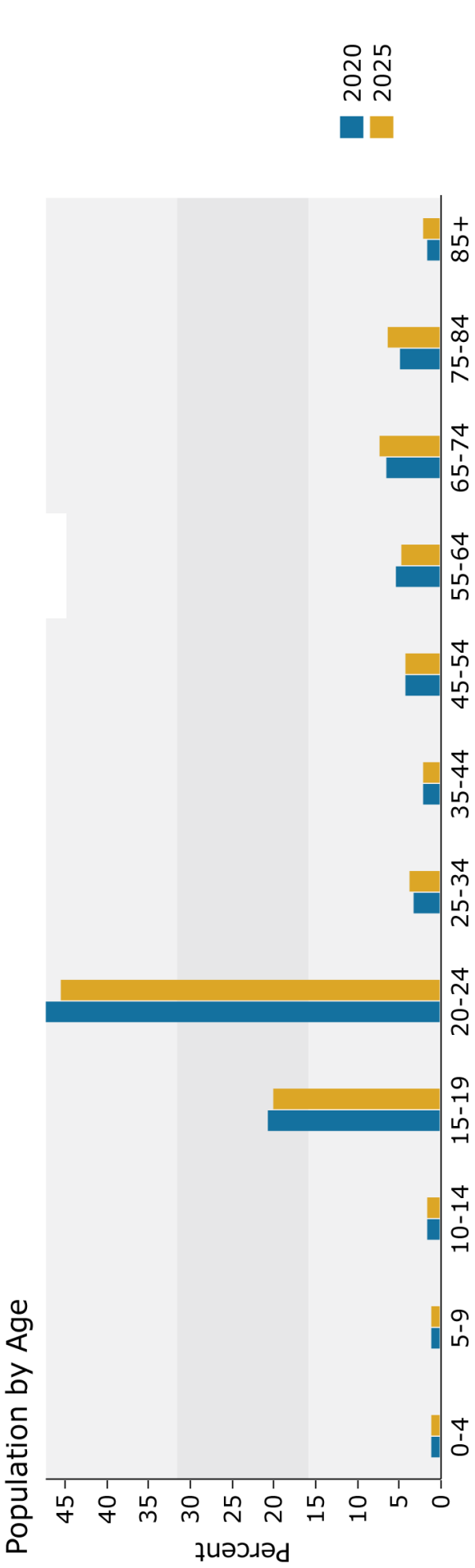


Diagnostics Summary: Market Information

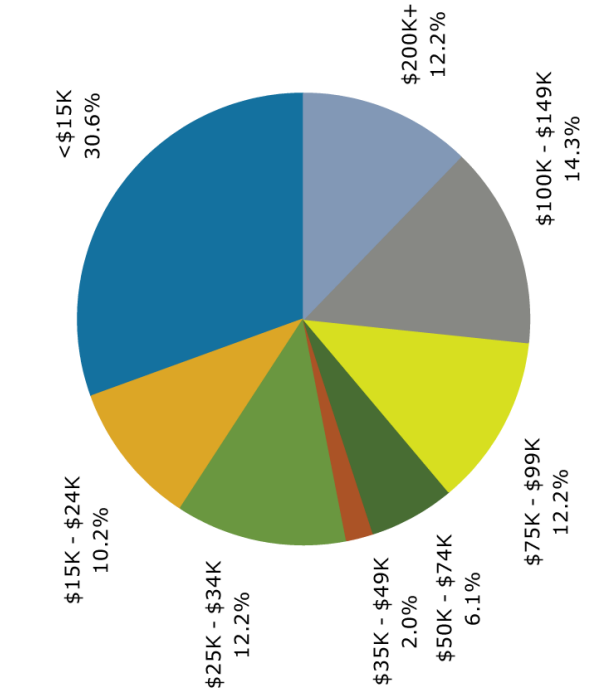
Demographics Summary Highlights (Study Area)

(ESRI Business Analyst Projections)

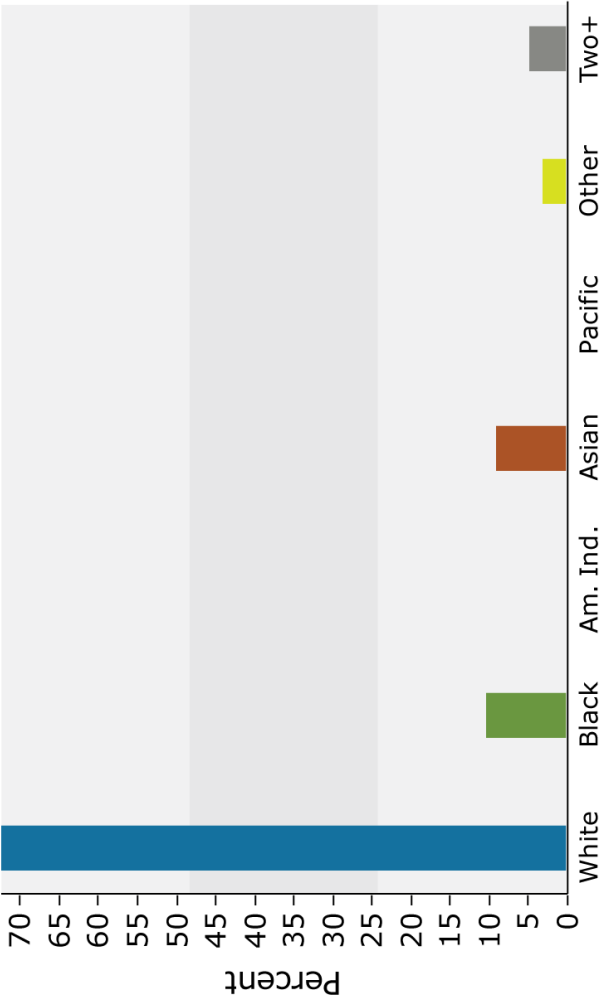
- Largest % age cohort is 20-24 years old; second largest is 15-19 years old.
- Projected population in 2025 shows marked increases in 65-74 years old and 75+ years old cohorts.
- Approximately 40% of Households have annual incomes <\$25,000.



2020 Household Income



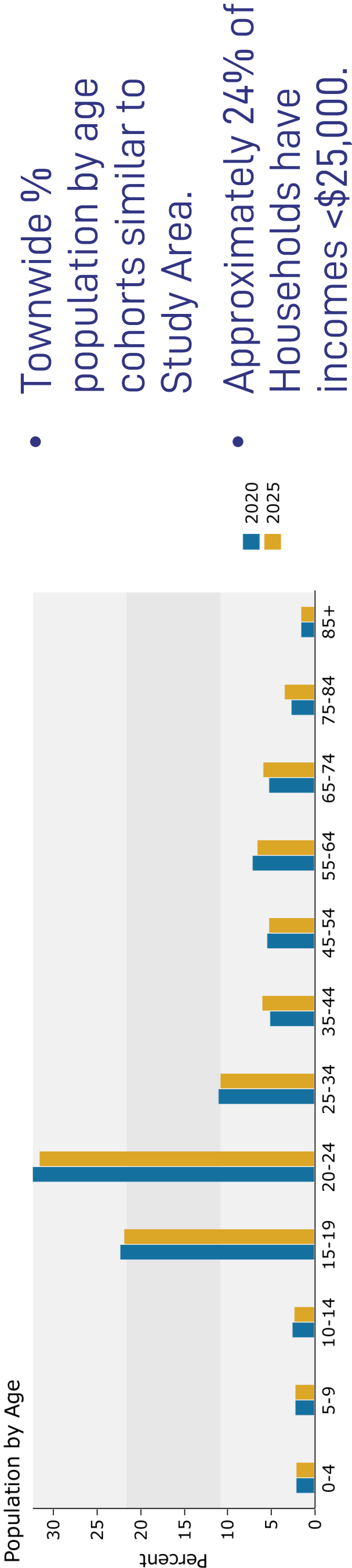
2020 Population by Race



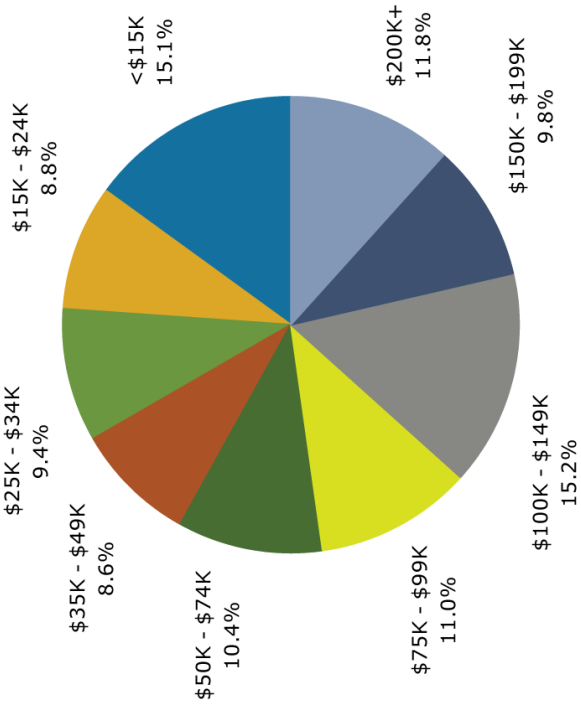
2020 Percent Hispanic Origin: 13.5%

Demographics Summary Highlights (Townwide)

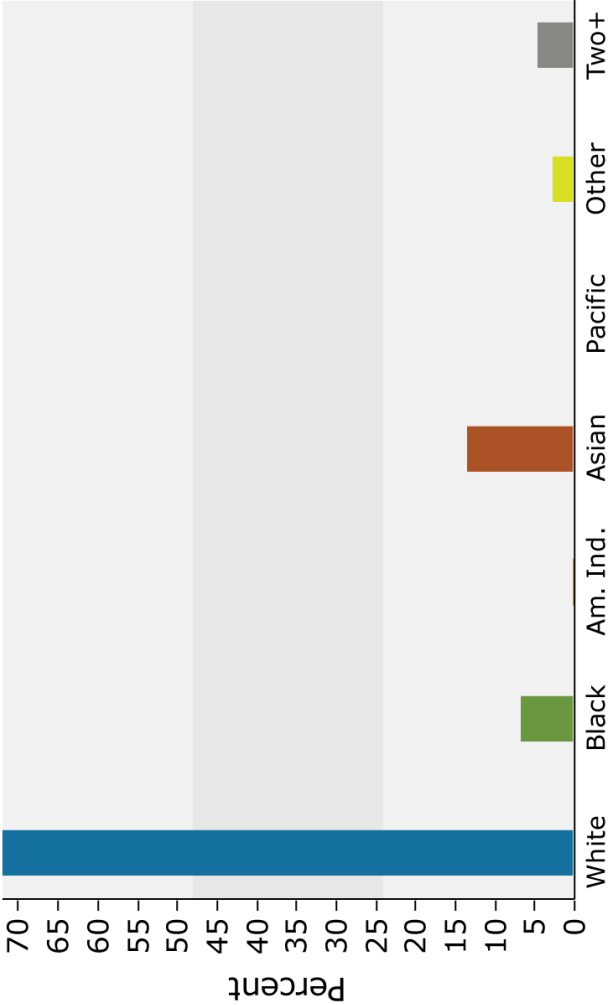
(ESRI Business Analyst Projections)



2020 Household Income



2020 Population by Race



2020 Percent Hispanic Origin: 9.0%



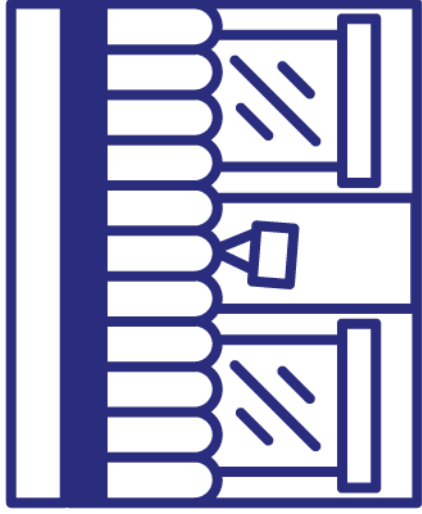
BUSINESS
ENVIRONMENT



Diagnostics Summary: Business Environment

Study Area Businesses

(From Spring 2021 site survey and survey data)



135
Businesses
in Study Area

\$25/SF
(from CoStar and/or interview)

Average Asking Rent
Ground Floor Retail



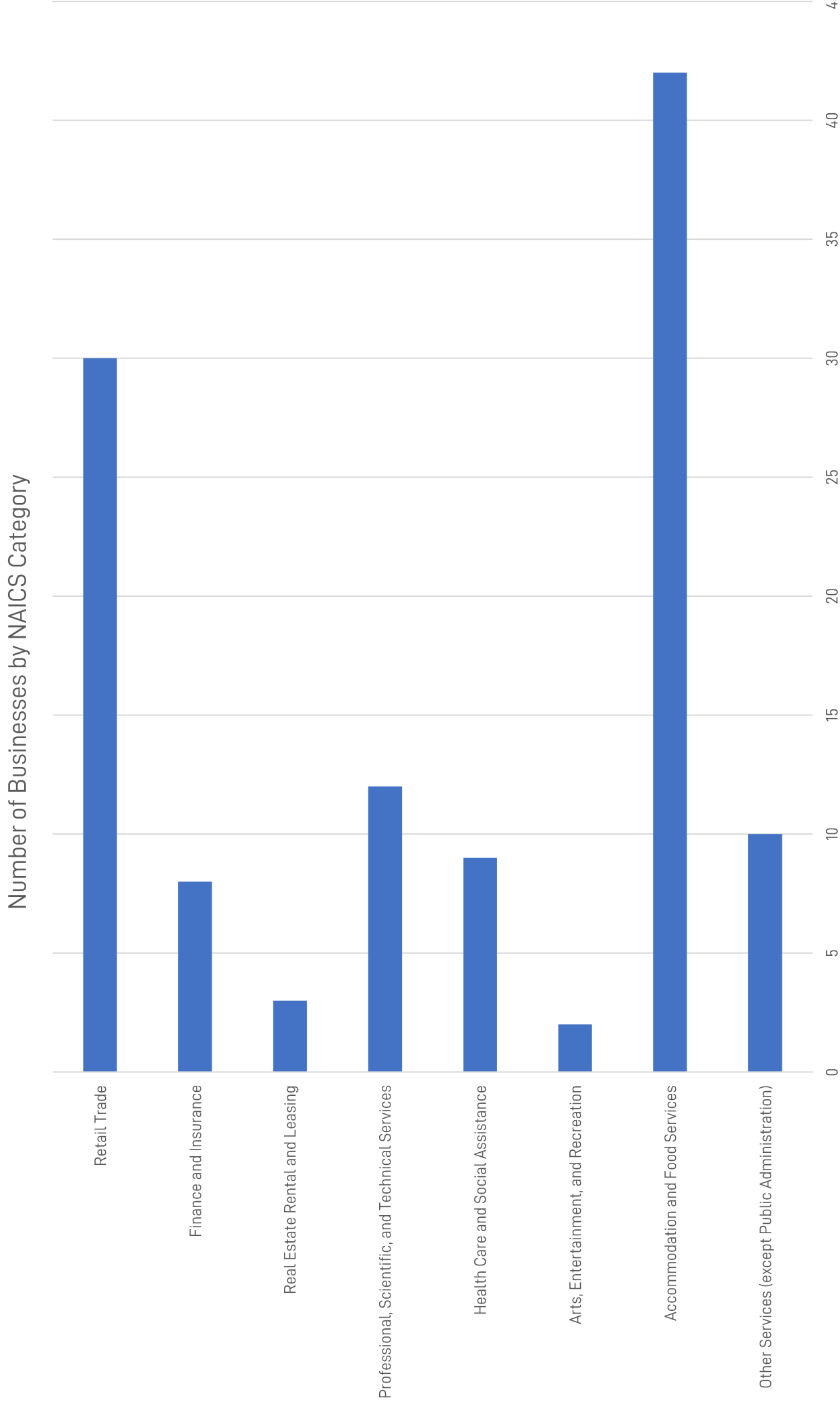
11
Vacant Storefronts
(from site survey)

\$22/SF
(from CoStar and/or interview)

Average Asking Rent
Office Space

Study Area Business Mix

Number of Businesses by NAICS Category



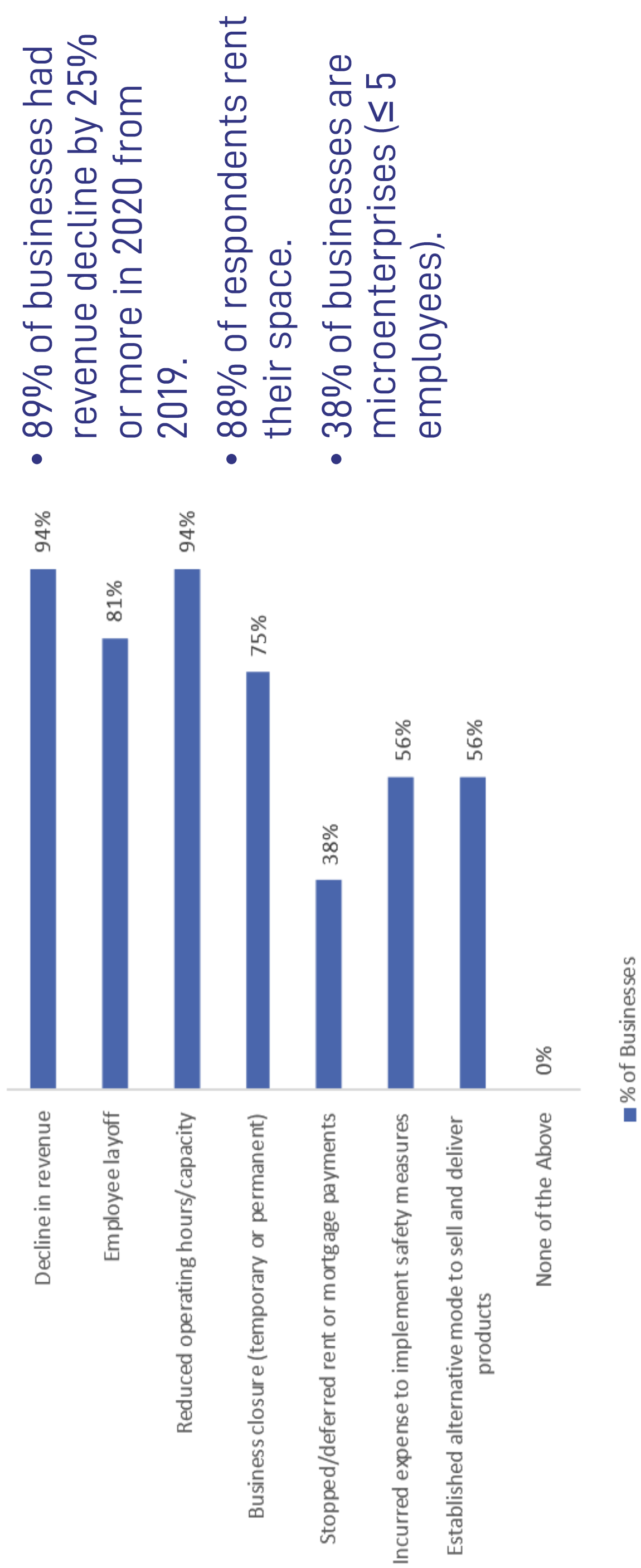
- Top two business types are, by far, Accommodations and Food Services; and Food Services; Retail Trade.

Study Area Business Status

Highlights from DHCD March – April 2021 Business Survey Report for Downtown Amherst

(16 responses to the survey)

COVID Impacts Reported by Businesses



Study Area Business Status

Highlights from DHCD March – April 2021 Business Survey Report for Downtown Amherst

(16 responses to the survey)

Respondents' Satisfaction with...

- 57% satisfied/very satisfied with public realm conditions (public spaces, sidewalks, streets).
- 69% satisfied/very satisfied with private realm (building facades, storefronts, signage).

Respondents' Thoughts on Strategies for Improvement... (important/very important)

- 82% to add more cultural events/ activities.
- 82% to implement marketing strategies for the district.
- 76% for more opportunities for outdoor dining/selling.
- 75% to change parking availability/management.
- 69% to improve public spaces and seating.
- 69% to improve streetscape and sidewalks.

Study Area Business Feedback

Highlights from DHCD March – April 2021 Business Survey* Report for Amherst Downtown, May 7, 2021 Business Focus Group and Business Owner interviews

Key Takeaways

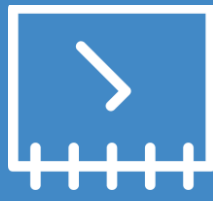
- Town has been really supportive during COVID – quick actions and accommodations have helped, and now businesses would love to see those good results continue: streamlining permitting and decisions, outdoor dining, implementing the Town-commissioned parking studies; continue the great communication.
- Costs for permitting – varied and multiple reviews, fees, and timelines for inspections and reviews can be prohibitive for new and existing businesses.
- Universities (students, staff, faculty, parents and visitors) are the main market for downtown Amherst, and accommodating that market allows the other goods, services, and dining that town residents enjoy and love.
- Need to attract and retain larger destination businesses (loss of Judy's as a local and family restaurant hurts everyone). Need anchors that appeal to locals, college market, including the professionals that work there, and regional visitors.

Study Area Business Feedback

Highlights from DHCD March – April 2021 Business Survey* Report for Amherst Downtown, May 7, 2021 Business Focus Group and Business Owner interviews

Key Takeaways

- Parking will be a major issued post-pandemic. People come from a 25-mile radius to the theater and a larger area to visit colleges and for meetings. Parking rates and time limits exclude theatre and restaurant goers...8 pm deadline is tough when eating and going to a show.
- Universities provide rich cultural destinations and resources...continue to collaborate and link them to downtown.
- Link outdoor events and cultural activities to businesses and downtown to create customer traffic, support existing businesses.
- The BID is a great advocate and resource. Encourage more collaboration between Chamber, BID and the Town. What's good for downtown is good for residents...the more people, the safer the streets, the better the selection of stores, dining, and services, and the better upkeep of buildings and public realm.



ADMIN
CAPACITY



Diagnostics Summary: Administrative Capacity

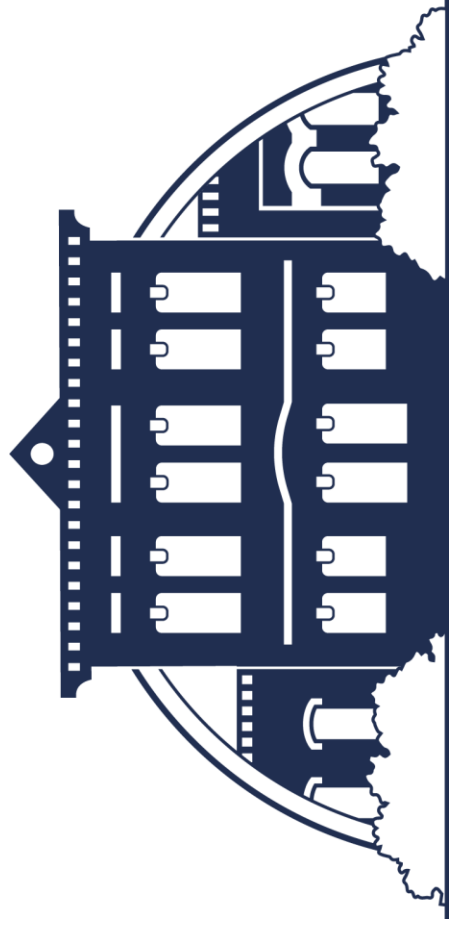
Administrative Capacity

Local Entities Directly Involved in RRP Application and Plan:

- Downtown Amherst Business Improvement District
- Town of Amherst
- The Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce
- The Downtown Amherst Foundation

Issues or gaps we heard:

- Need for continued good communications between City departments (i.e., Public Services, Health Department, etc.), BID, Chamber, businesses that was instituted during pandemic.



Amherst
DOWNTOWN



Review Initial Priorities



Several Priorities from RRP Application

1st Priority

2nd Priority

3rd Priority

Short-Term

Help the businesses stay open with relief and support

Broaden marketing to attract customers supporting local businesses

Create attractive outdoor dining options while not infringing on parking, bike lanes, bus lanes and pedestrian access

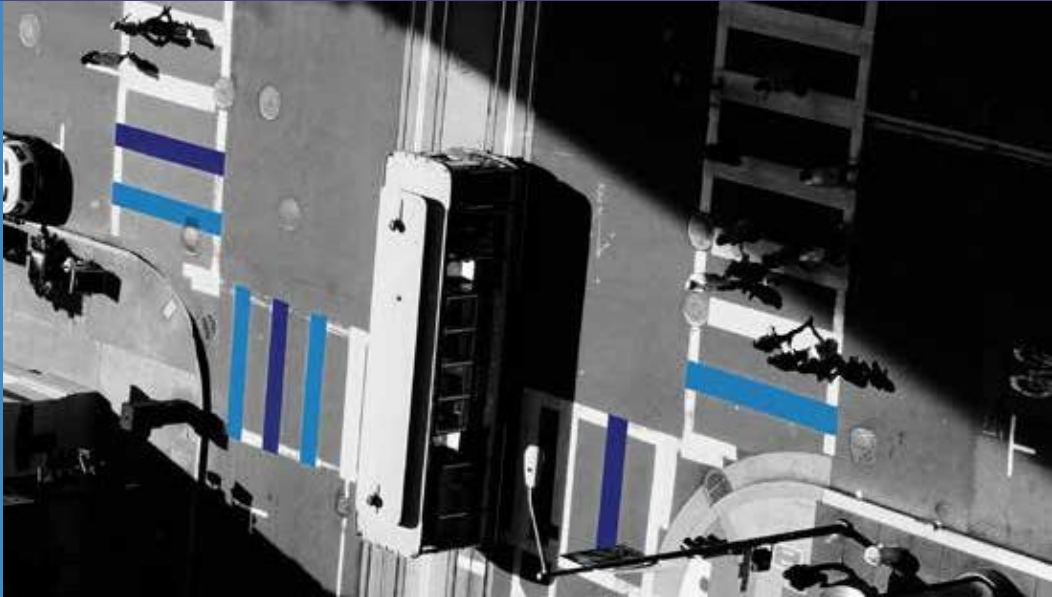
Mid/Long-Term

Establish Amherst as a destination regardless of the colleges, build arts and culture, and re-establish a strong retail base

Create long-term solutions for outdoor dining and a walkable downtown

Rezoning the downtown for greater ability to create density and vibrancy

Draft List of Possible Projects

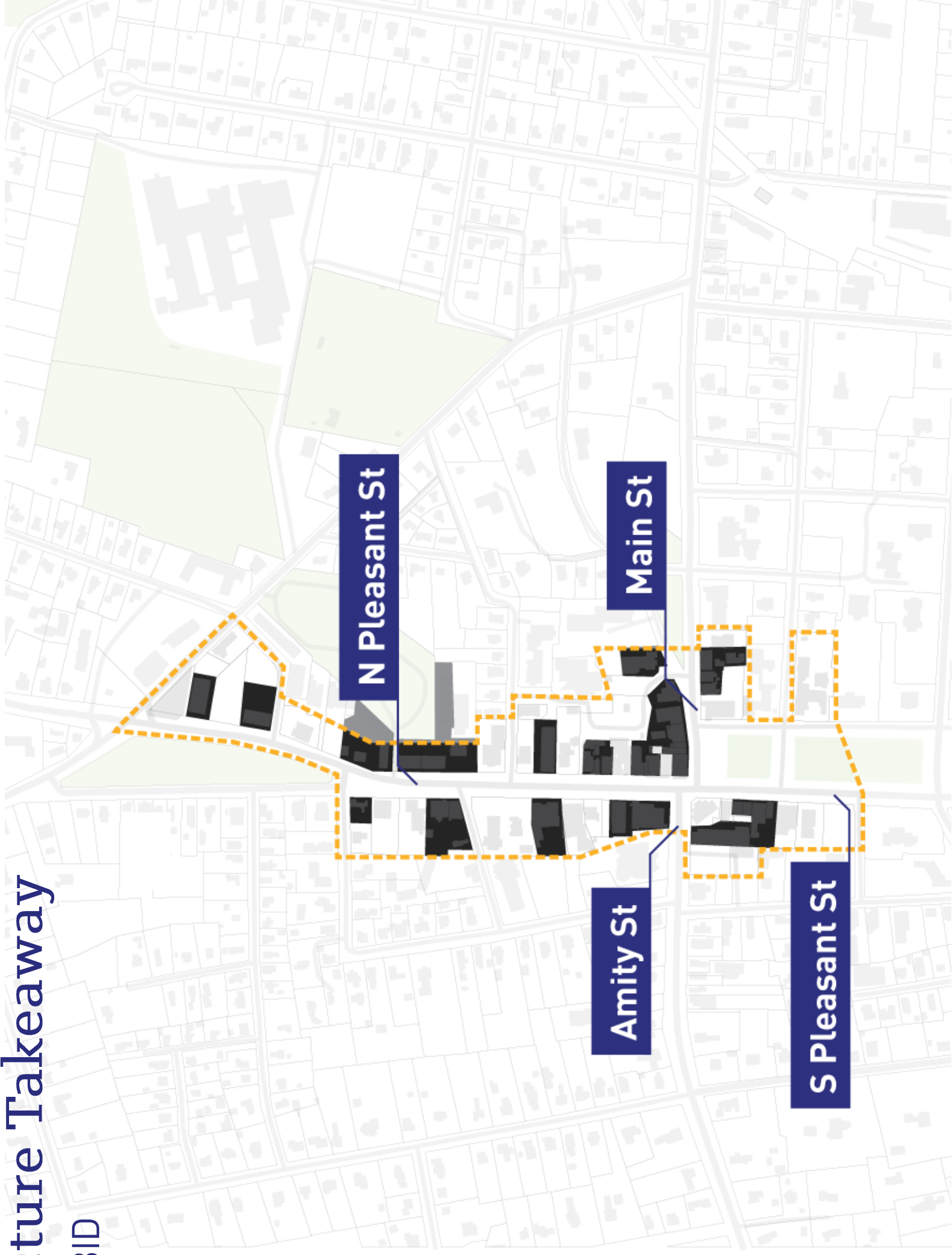


Our Big Picture Takeaway

- Build on the Town and BID successes during the pandemic – high marks for flexibility, rapid response, innovation!
- Residents have the benefit of goods, dining, services that exist because of colleges...embrace it or lose it.
- The student population is very different than it was a decade or more ago...update the story – top researchers and scholars, disposable income, students want the same thing empty nesters do (good food, culture, outdoor recreation, walkable destinations, friendly and safe civic space) – and their parents want it too.
- Town is first impression in recruiting of students to universities – work with them to create an environment everyone loves.
- Arts and Culture is a key opportunity here – do everything you can to protect and nurture.
- Old stories die hard...support recent changes and updates to permitting and licensing with a new shared message – Amherst welcomes businesses – and back it up with a support network and program.

Our Big Picture Takeaway

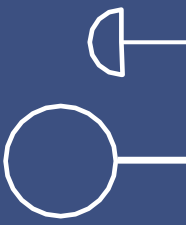
Source: Amherst BID




Recommended Project Categories




Public Realm




Private Realm




Revenue & Sales



Admin Capacity



Tenant Mix



Cultural/Arts

+ OTHERS

Possible Projects to Consider

Possible projects listed by main category and priority

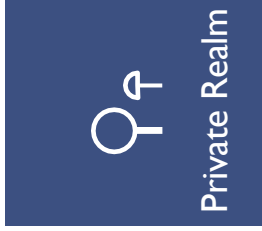
(**Short-term** / **Mid-Long-term**)



Public Realm:

- Create more visible pathways between parking and destinations that enhance perceptions of public safety and ensure all parking capacity is utilized.
- Develop an urban design strategy for visual cues to attract customers and pedestrians to northern edge of the BID – possibly some coordinated streetscape, such as color-coordinated seating and coordinated outdoor dining/retail spaces to also improve the pedestrian experience, public art (see arts and culture section).
- Review pandemic-related changes (outdoor dining, public realm use) and make permanent those changes that have supported businesses and enhanced the quality of downtown for all.
- **Implement the Town-commissioned parking study.**

Possible Projects to Consider



Private Realm:

- Support one or more anchor projects that are destinations for residents and university and visitor markets:
 - Destination restaurant serving locals, visitors, and families.
 - Arts/Food anchor downtown in collaboration with universities and other existing and new nonprofits and businesses.



Revenue & Sales:

- Review Covid-19 zoning and permitting changes. Determine locations for permanent outdoor dining and public space activation (music, events, pop-ups) and make locations and allowed uses permanent.
- Build on existing market studies to recruit and support businesses that serve both university and resident needs and desires. Opportunity to create many more choices for residents and increase revenues for Town.
- Develop regional marketing strategy (perhaps collaboration with Northhampton?).
- Re-imagine and re-tell stories of the links between universities and town – humanize student body – tell stories of their achievements, document their spending power, their volunteer work, and scholastic achievements.

Possible Projects to Consider



Admin Capacity:

- Collaborate with Town to refine ongoing permitting streamlining process both for business operations, outdoor Town-owned property use for outdoor dining/retail and events, and for new businesses.



Tenant Mix:

- Create a Business Buddy System (and Feedback Framework) to create a business-friendly support structure in the town.
- Build off of ongoing improvements in licensing and permitting streamlining and broadcast a new narrative supporting the message that Amherst welcomes businesses.
- Recruit and support in any way possible a food market and more food choices for downtown which is currently a food desert.
- Permit food trucks and tie trucks with local promotions for bricks and mortar restaurants to build image of downtown as a food destination (which will support all food businesses).

Possible Projects to Consider



Cultural/ Arts:

- Conduct a cultural needs and assets assessment to understand demand and potential supply of creative businesses, arts, cultural organizations, space needs, and programming opportunities to establish Downtown as a major arts and cultural destination in the region.
- Consider using public art, sidewalk poetry, and other arts devices to link spaces and encourage pedestrian exploration of the district. Use strategies to link parking to major destinations, such as the cinema.
- Allow and streamline permitting for bar tents for outdoor performing arts venues on the common and in other areas.
- Allow live music in restaurants and other businesses.
- Create a map of potential dining and arts and cultural activity spaces and prime permitting for these spaces that matches appropriate activity with space (see Revenue + Sales).

Available SME Consultations

Public Realm

- Public Space Transformation (Parking, Biking, Sidewalks, Streets)
- Finding Opportunities in Overlooked Spaces
- “Outside the box” approaches to using public space
- How Branding and Wayfinding can be a Key Part of Covid-19 Commercial Reawakening

Private Realm

- Connecting with Customers: Using Your Storefront, Display Windows & Signs to Increase Business

Revenue and Sales

- Laws of Attraction: Marketing, Programming, and Interactive Strategies to Bring People (back) Downtown during COVID-19

Administrative Capacity

- Downtown Organizations - How Downtown Organizations Mobilize a Pandemic Response & Recovery
- Overcoming Zoning/Permitting/Licensing Hurdles

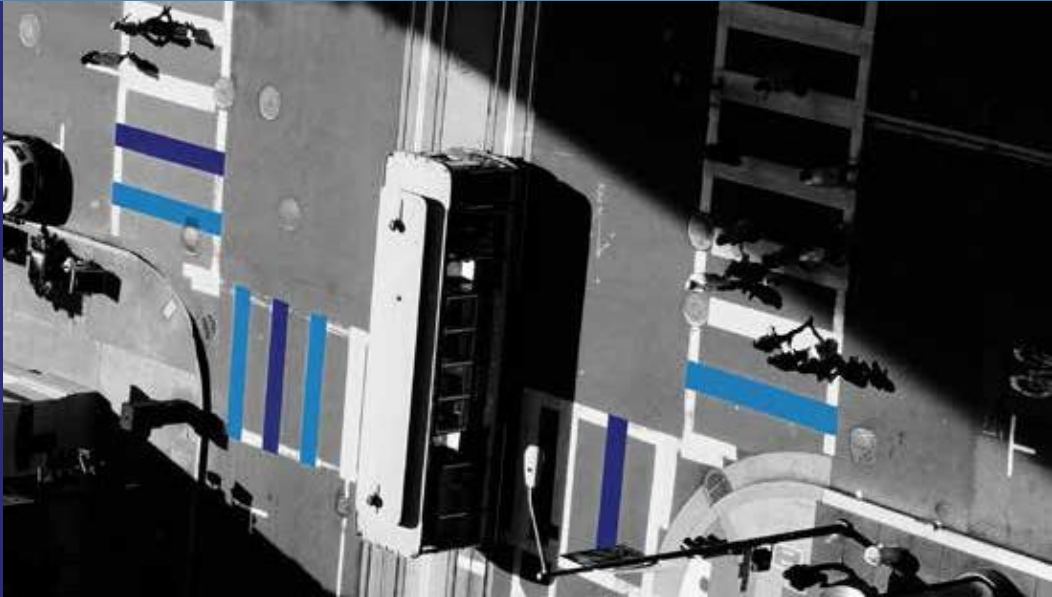
Tenant Mix

- Small Business Technical Assistance and Beyond: Helping Small Businesses Stabilize and Grow in the Face of COVID-19
- Post COVID-19 Restaurant Survival: Key Technologies, Strategies and Best Practices
- Culturally-relevant Approaches: Embedding Racial and Equity Lenses to Ensure Inclusive Economic Growth within Commercial Areas Impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic

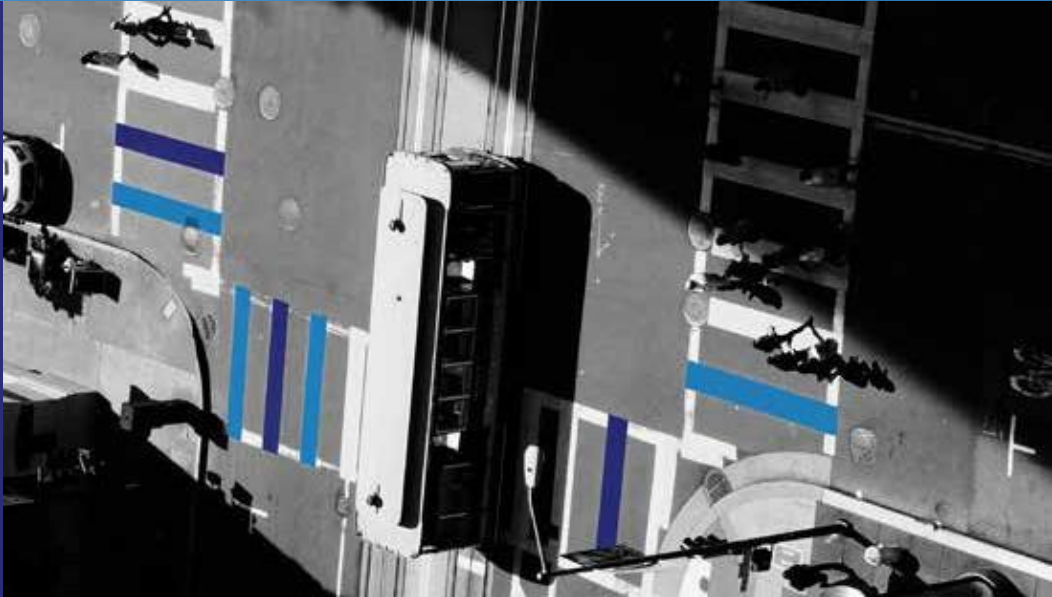
Cultural/Arts

- Community Resilience: COVID-19 Impacts and Re-partnering Arts + Culture to Main Street

Let's Talk!



Next Steps

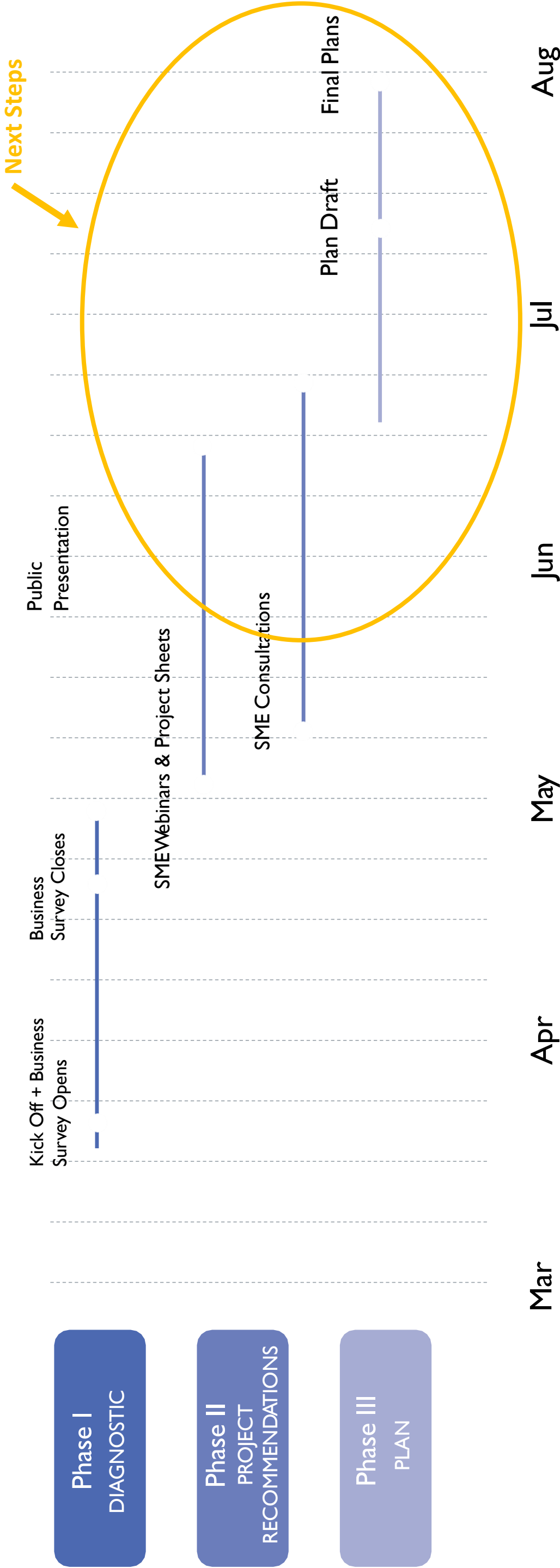


Narrow down Draft Projects List

Refine Possible Projects – with best practices, case studies, and assistance from Subject Matter Experts

Draft Plan with Refined Draft Projects

Finalize Plan with Recommended Projects



Thank You!

Amherst Business Improvement District
Town of Amherst
CivicMoxie, LLC