



# Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Ashburnham

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# Acknowledgments



## Town of Ashburnham, MA

Brian Doheny, Town Administrator  
Kirby Lecy, Chair of the Economic Development Commission  
Rosemarie Meissner, Chair of the Town Selectboard



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



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

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

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

**For more information, contact DHCD:**  
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The Planning Team would also like to thank the following individuals for participating as key stakeholders throughout the planning process:

#### Town Selectboard

Mary Calandrella, Executive Assistant to Town Administrator  
Leo Janssens, Member  
Rosemarie Eldridge-Meissner, Clerk  
Bill Johnson, Chairman

#### Economic Development Commission

Ronald Putnam, Member (Advisory Board)  
Christina Sargent, Member (Resident/Property Owner/Historic Commission)  
Richard Wright, Member (Resident/Planning Board Member)  
Kirby Lecy, Chair (Resident/Business Owner)  
Paul Silva, Member (Cushing Academy Representative)  
Rosemarie Meisner, Vice Chair (Board of Selectmen Liaison)  
Philip M. Papoojian, Member (Resident/Business Owner)



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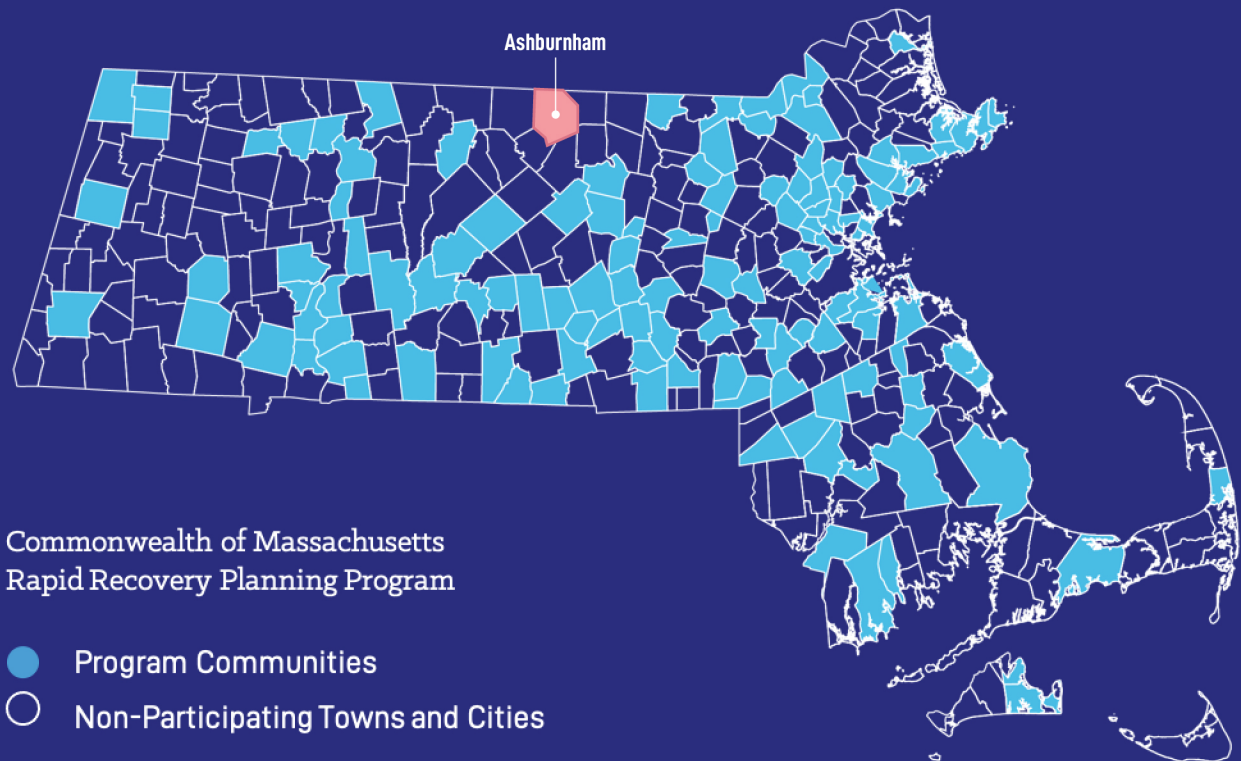
# Table of Contents

Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program	7
Executive Summary	9
Diagnostic Key Findings	11
Project Recommendations	24
1. Provide Support to Businesses in Need	25
2. Enhance Village Center Identity	34
3. Improve Pedestrian Safety	37
4. Bring Key New Business to Village Center	48
5. Attract Visitors to the Village Center	52
6. Attract New Investment	77
Appendix	80

## 125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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





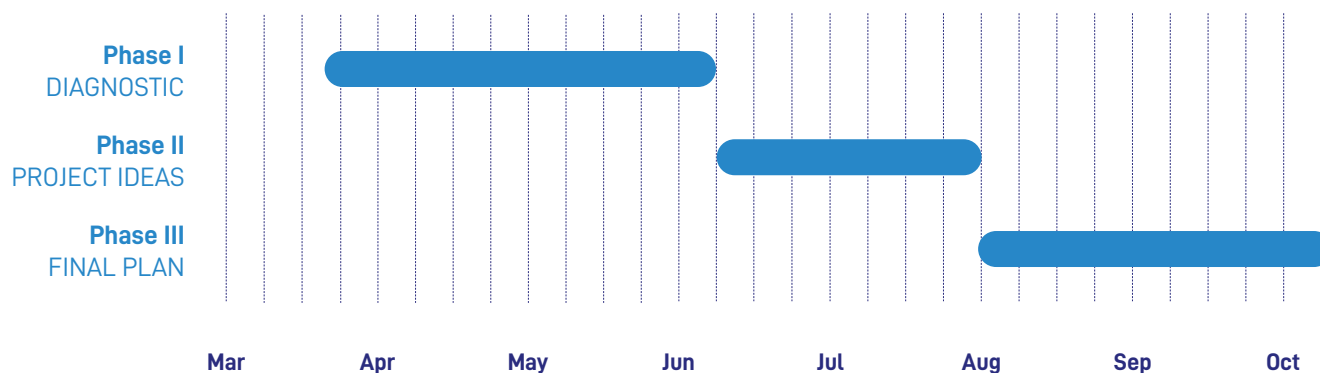
# Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

The framework was designed to ensure methodical diagnosis of challenges and opportunities in each community, and to identify strategies and projects that aligned with the interests

and priorities of each community. The framework looks at four areas of analysis: Physical Environment, Business Environment, Market Information, and Administrative Capacity - each equipped with guiding questions to direct research conducted by Plan Facilitators.

## Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



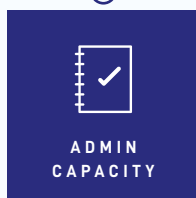
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue & Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



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## Executive Summary

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# Executive Summary

Ashburnham's Village Center is located in Central Massachusetts, between Boston and Worcester. It's on the way from the Massachusetts Turnpike to New Hampshire. It's between small cities like Fitchburg and large towns like Winchendon or Gardner. The Village Center is literally at the intersection of two state roads (routes 12 and 101).

It's also in the middle in other key ways. On a list of 350 towns and cities of Massachusetts ranked by per capita income, Ashburnham is number 201. It is neither in dire economic straits and therefore not eligible for special attention, nor is it wealthy enough to fund many of the desired changes on its own. It has a well educated population that embraces life in a rural setting.

The Village Center—Ashburnham's main business district—has good bones. Centered along Main Street, it has a diverse building stock, including many historic buildings. There is a mix of retail options including some businesses that survive in part thanks to the presence of Cushing Academy, a preparatory school located at the north end of the study area. The Village also supports quality cultural opportunities, including art exhibitions and piano concerts, that belie its relatively small size. In addition, there is a park by the Town Hall and a number of hiking trails nearby.

It is not, however, without its challenges. Some of these were brought about by the pandemic, but many existed beforehand and were exacerbated by it. The closing of schools and other places took a toll on many of the businesses. A number of these businesses were already in poor condition. The two state roads don't encourage cars to stop, and the speed of the car passing through discourages those who do.

A number of the buildings seem under- or poorly-utilized, leading one to question their current uses. In addition, public parking is scarce in the Village, and unfortunately, several businesses have converted their frontage into perpendicular parking.

Moreover, Town Hall capacity is limited, and the men and women working there are often overstretched. For example, there is no town planner. As a result, many initiatives are run by a series of well meaning but ultimately overworked volunteers.

The aim of this study is to prepare the town to address these issues as part of a comprehensive recovery effort, with the goal of making the village center a more vibrant and economically prosperous destination, create a safe and active environment for citizens to use, and provide support for businesses that were affected by the pandemic and are interested in participating in a vibrant and safe neighborhood.

## List of Recommendations

To that effort, and in consultation with the Selectboard, the Economic Development Committee and the Town Administrator, this report proposes a series of recommendations. It should be noted that the illustrations that support these recommendations should be viewed as initial possible suggestions that will require further development, and will likely change as a result.

1. Provide Support to Businesses in Need
  - Use Recovery Funds to bolster Town Hall capacity
  - Assist in acquiring funds for cash-strapped businesses
  - Create a Storefront Improvement Program to improve existing businesses
2. Enhance Village Center Identity
  - Create a Village Center brand
3. Improve Pedestrian Safety
  - Conduct mobility research & design (implement temporary traffic calming strategies)
  - Modify traffic speeds
  - Implement permanent mobility strategies
4. Bring Key New Business to Village Center
  - Develop Tenant Recruitment and Retention Plan
5. Attract Visitors to the Village Center
  - Streamline permitting processes to encourage outdoor activation
  - Create and market unique and vibrant events
  - Rethink the design and programming of Winchester Park
  - Create a new park at the former town pool area
  - Create connections to surrounding natural resources and trails
  - Create an incentivization program to shop locally
6. Attract New Investment
  - Attract investment for the redevelopment of the DPW lot



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## Diagnostic Key Findings

# Key Findings



The Town's customer base consists of families with young children and older adults.

Ashburnham is considered an affordable and pleasant community to raise a family or to retire. Those who chose to live here are attracted by the relatively affordability and the quality of life available. Outside of the pandemic, the young population of the town is augmented by the presence of Cushing Academy, a preparatory school for approximately 400 students. Not only do the students and their families augment the customer base, the campus's athletic fields and other amenities also serve as an attraction for many residents of the town, as does Winchester Park.



The Village Center has a traditional New England town feel, but lacks safe pedestrian infrastructure.

While the buildings that line Main Street are an eclectic grouping, collectively they hold together clearly as the traditional business center of a small Massachusetts town. Fine examples of American civic architecture share the street with storefront commercial buildings and single family homes, many of which have been converted into shops. Other buildings remain intact, but have had their front yards reconfigured to accommodate strip mall-style head-in parking. This is in part a reaction to the fact that Main Street doubles as a state road and, as a result, has a reduced amount of public parking. The allowable speeds along Main Street discourages drivers from stopping and pedestrians from feeling safe to walk it freely, an impression that is further compounded by numerous curb cuts caused by off-road parking.



The Village Center has a number of niche businesses, but lacks a programmatic anchor.

The presence of Cushing Academy and other cultural institutions in the Village Center have supported a number of niche businesses that might not exist in other towns of a similar size, including a sushi restaurant and design store. While these are excellent additions to the business mix of downtown Ashburnham, neither serves as a programmatic anchor for the district. While there is a market centrally located between Main Street and Winchester Park, it does not currently appear to serve in this anchor role either. It should be noted that all of these businesses were seriously affected by the pandemic. Many establishments were hard hit, and have yet to fully recover.



ADMIN  
CAPACITY

The town has limited staff capacity.

Ashburnham's Town Hall is understaffed for a community of its size. Reductions in staffing were made during the Great Recession and have not been rectified since, in part because of the pandemic. In Ashburnham, the town administrator works closely with the select board and various committees. While these are committed citizens, such a system relies too heavily on the energy and investment of volunteers to address issues of import to the community.



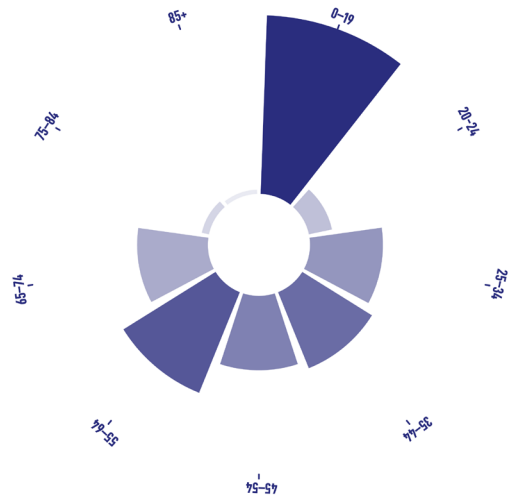
## Highlights from the Customer Base

### Population Age Group

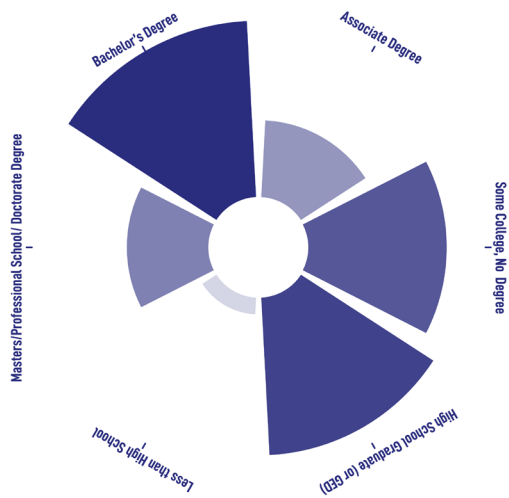
Recent Census Bureau information reveals that the single largest age group in Ashburnham is 0-19 year-olds, followed closely by the 55-64 age bracket. One can assume that the former is composed of school age children, while the former are near retirement. When aggregated, the groups 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54 are approximately equal to the school age population, suggesting that together, these form the nuclear families of Ashburnham.

### Population By Educational Attainment

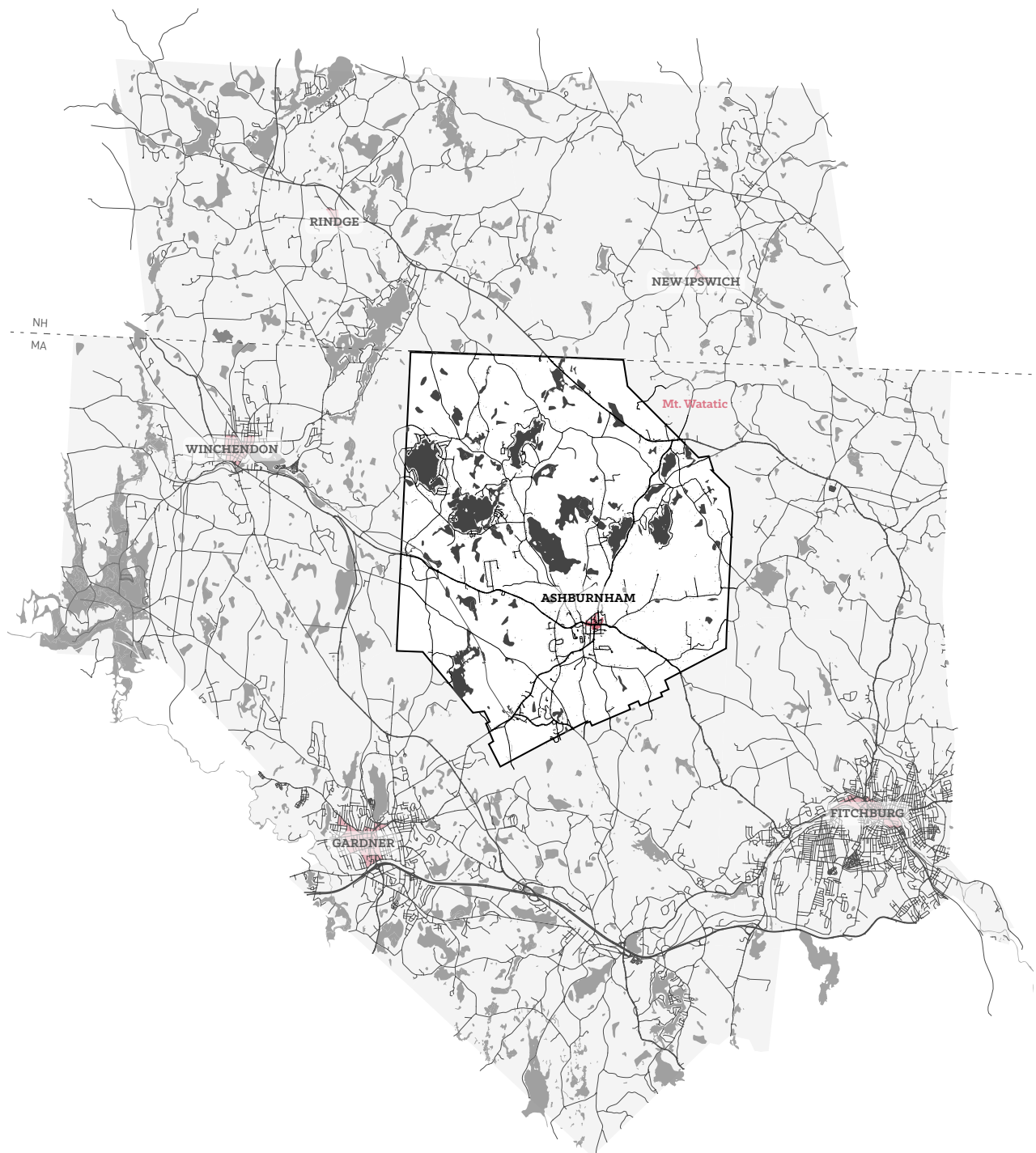
Ashburnham has a relatively well-educated population. The vast majority of the population possess at least some college level education, the largest subgroup of these have obtained a bachelor degree. Nearly 35% of the population have a post-secondary degree. Virtually all residents have achieved high school graduation or equivalent.



Population by Age.  
Source: 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Population by Educational Attainment.  
Source: 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Ashburnham & surrounding communities.  
Source: OverUnder

## Highlights from the Physical Environment

### Assets

Ashburnham's Village Center possesses some excellent building stock. Town Hall, the Library, and the Frederick Piano Museum building are all lovely examples of small town American architecture, as are many of the homes along Main Street. Together these create an eclectic yet cohesive New England downtown. As a result, the town has a center that is both quaint and recognizable.

Those who choose to live here appreciate its proximity to larger towns while also standing apart from them. The proximity to natural attractions, especially hiking and skiing, are key draws, as is the bucolic rural setting. They also appreciate key cultural institutions such as Cushing Academy and the Frederick Piano Museum, which help distinguish Ashburnham from other towns of a similar size. In addition to the concert series at the Piano Museum, Cushing has events all year round—concerts, plays, athletic events, all free. Their presence allows niche businesses such as Creative Connections and Yaka Sawa Sushi to survive here that might not in other rural communities.

### Challenges

At the same time, the Village Center sits at the intersection of two state roads, Route 12 and Route 101. One of these, Route 101, connects new Hampshire in the north to Route 2 in the south. As a result, it is

not uncommon to see heavy load trucks make an awkward series of turns in the heart of the Village Center. Moreover, Route 12 is a main east-west connection through town. Vehicles travel too fast on this road, in part because the speed limit is too high, but also because a sense of arrival is not clearly defined for the town center.

In addition, there is very little publicly owned parking in the Village Center. While there is no shortage of surface parking in the study area, most of it is privately owned, and it is not well signed, nor is it clear that it can be used. A pedestrian's way around the Village Center is not at all clear or perceived as safe. Currently the sidewalks are inconsistent in width and condition. In many instances, there is no sidewalk at all, as businesses have created additional parking on their parcels to accommodate drive-up customers at the expense of walk-in customers.

Other challenges include a perception of impediments to growth of the commercial tax base. There is a sense that existing zoning can be restrictive, for example in converting to mixed-use. There is also a general sense that the town could be more demonstrative of its support for new business ideas, and better communicate its willingness to aid new businesses.

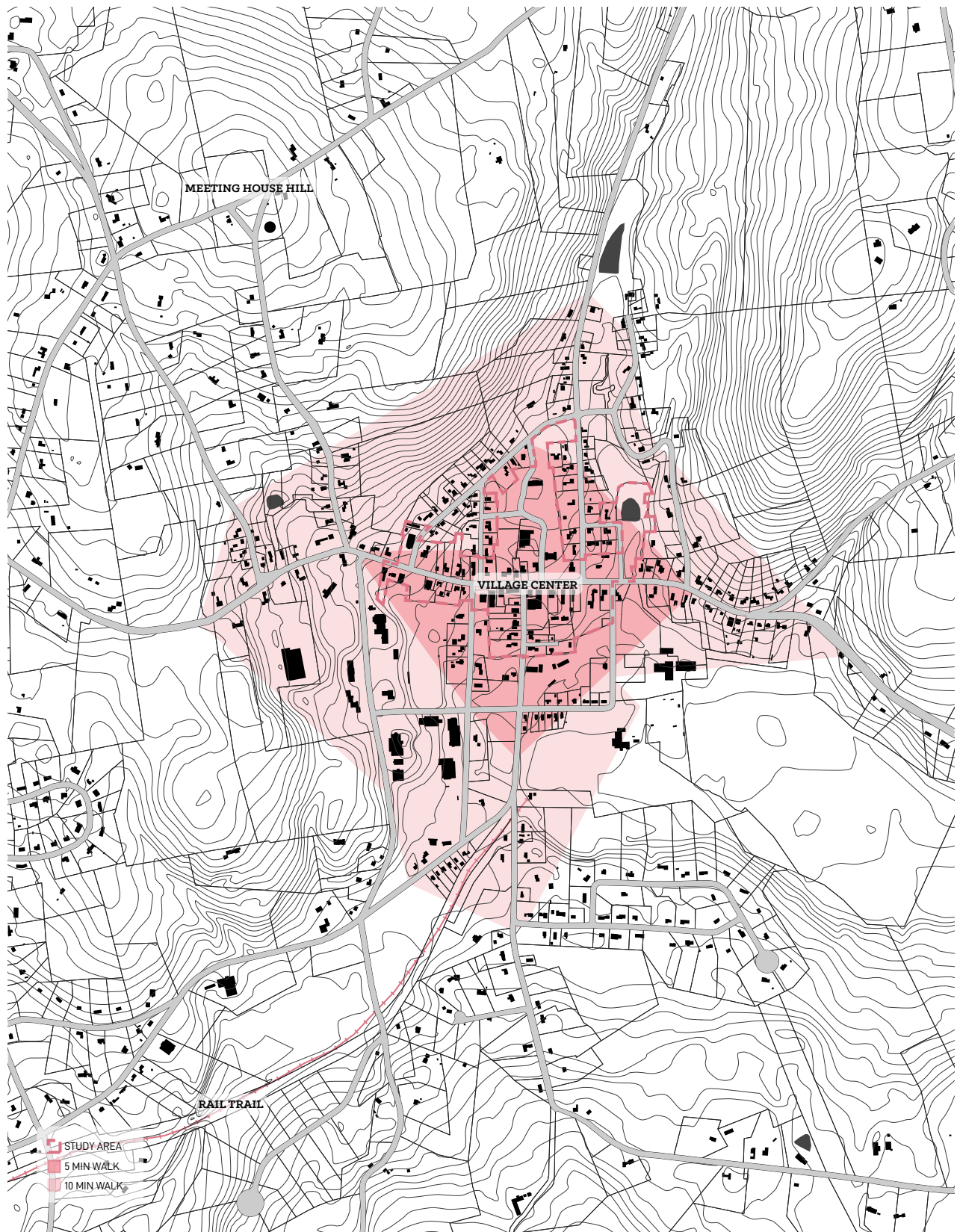


*Beautiful building stock in the Village Center.*  
Source: OverUnder



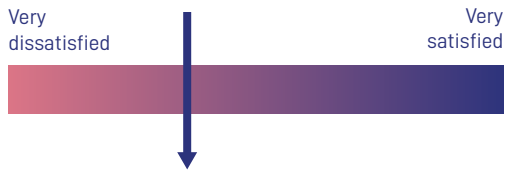
*Strip-mall style parking in front of a business in Ashburnham Village Center.*  
Source: OverUnder





Ashburnham Study Area.  
Source: OverUnder

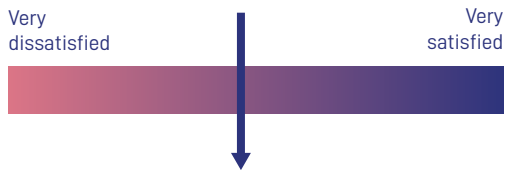
### Condition of Public Spaces, Streets & Sidewalks



### Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees



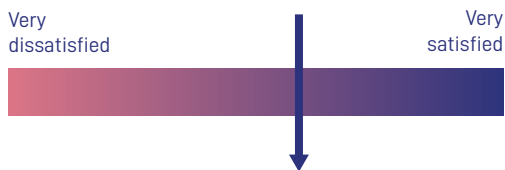
### Condition of Private Buildings Storefronts & Signs



### Proximity to Complementary Businesses & Uses



### Access for Customers & Employees



*Satisfaction with the physical environment of the commercial district.*  
*Source: Ashburnham Village Center Business Survey*



## Highlights from the Business Environment

### A mix of businesses

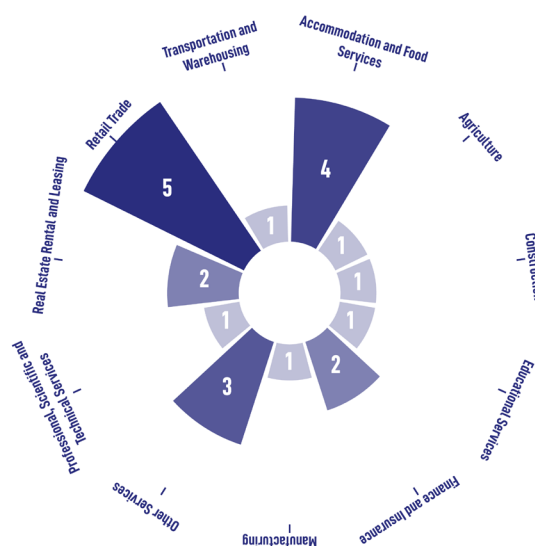
There are thirty one registered businesses located in the Village Center. While there is a wide spread of business types, more than half of them are considered services. A third are listed as "Accommodation and Food Services," which in downtown Ashburnham are eating establishments. Another 16% are listed as "Retail Trade," or shops. Other businesses include a construction company, financial services company, a hair salons, and two realtors. Perhaps because of the wide mix, Ashburnham businesses experienced the pandemic differently.

### The effects of the pandemic

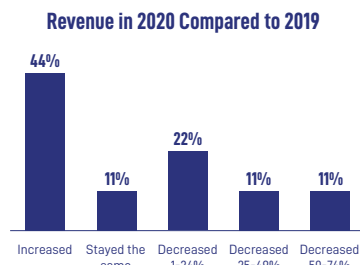
Of those responding to our survey, an equal amount (44%) indicated that their revenue had fallen in 2020 compared to 2019 as those who reported an increase in revenue during the lockdown. A majority reported that on-site customers had increased or stayed the same; only 22% reported a decrease in on-site customers as compared to pre-pandemic levels. Clearly the pandemic did not affect all businesses in a similar manner. It is worth noting however, that of those who did indicate a drop in revenue or in on-site customers, the drop was sometimes dramatic. For example, nearly a quarter reported a drop in revenue of 25% or more.

While some have voiced frustration with Town Hall regulations—licensing, permitting and signage regulations in particular—most expressed no issues with town regulations in a recent survey. The largest obstacle identified was parking regulations.

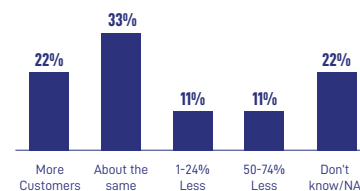
When, in the same survey, Village Center businesses were asked to evaluate potential kinds of assistance, most were uninterested in receiving assistance. Those that were expressed support for low-cost financing for storefront improvements.



**Study area businesses by type**  
Source: Ashburnham Village Center business directory provided by Economic Development Commission

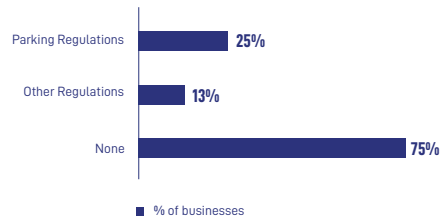


### On-site Customers 2021 (Jan-Feb) vs. Pre-COVID

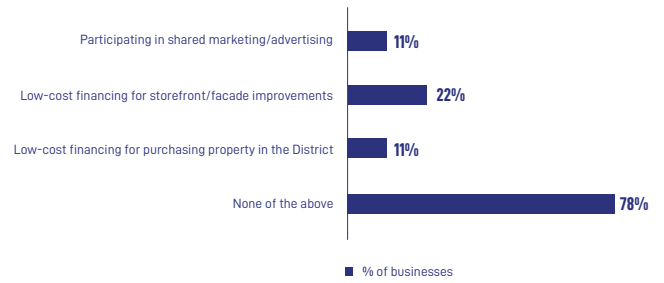


**Impacts of COVID-19 on Ashburnham's Village Center businesses.**  
Source: Ashburnham Village Center Business Survey  
Graphs prepared by: FinePoint Associates

### Regulations that pose an obstacle to business operation



### Businesses interested in receiving assistance



*Ashburnham Village Center businesses' input on the regulatory environment and strategies for business support.*  
*Source: Ashburnham Village Center Business Survey*  
*Graphs prepared by: FinePoint Associates*



## Highlights from Admin Capacity

### Current Capacity

Ashburnham's Town Hall is understaffed. A (relatively new) town administrator and his staff carry out the day to day needs of the town, reporting directly to the select board. Like most municipal workers, they have been extremely busy over the past two years adjusting to new—and changing—realities.

As is typical in small towns, committees of volunteers do an enormous amount of civic work to move things forward. In the case of this study, it has been the Economic Development Committee who have spearheaded the initiative. The plan facilitators and the subject matter experts (SMEs) have held numerous meetings with this group throughout the past four months to plan for the recovery effort.

### Future Needs

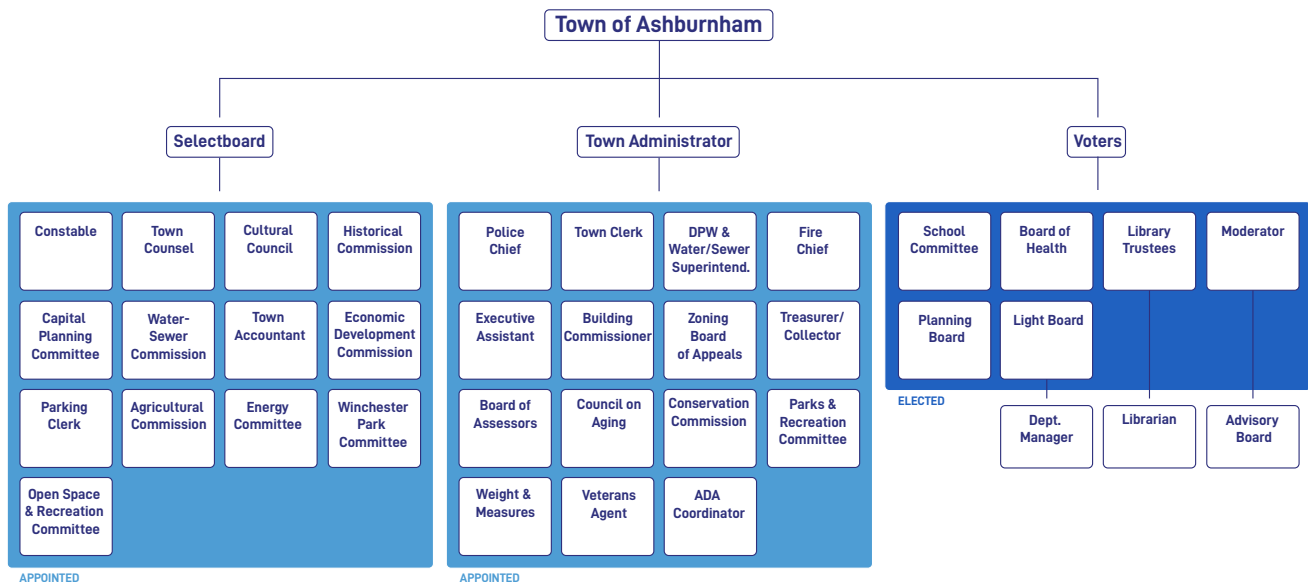
While this group is committed to the effort, and the town administrator and staff are extremely capable, it is possible that some of the project recommendations will necessitate an increase in capacity to support implementation.

A few frustrations were expressed by existing businesses in the survey with respect to the regulatory, zoning, and permitting processes. Nonetheless, it may be possible that some of the proposed recommendations will flag certain processes as impediments to desired change, and consequently, will need to be revised.

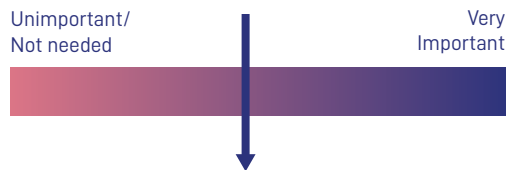


*Ashburnham's town hall has limited staff capacity.  
Source: OverUnder*

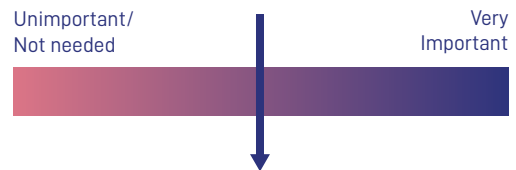
For example, the Economic Development Committee has already identified streamlining of permitting processes as an objective that they have begun to act upon. This effort preceded this current study, and involves a review of existing regulations and a push to utilize the town website to communicate more clearly what a business needs moving forward.



### Renovation of Storefronts/ Building Facades



### Improvements in Safety and/or Cleanliness



### Improvement/Development of Public Spaces & Seating Areas



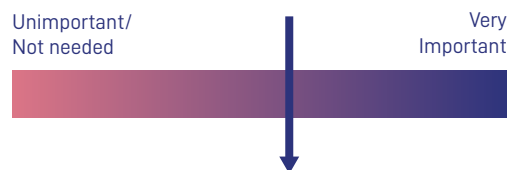
### Changes in Public Parking Availability, Management or Policies



### Improvement of Streetscape & Sidewalks



### Amenity Improvements for Public Transit/ Bike Users



*Business input related to possible strategies.  
Source: Ashburnham Village Center Business Survey*



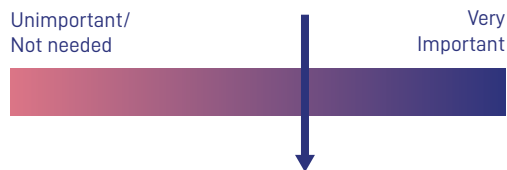
### More Cultural Events/Activities to Bring People into the District



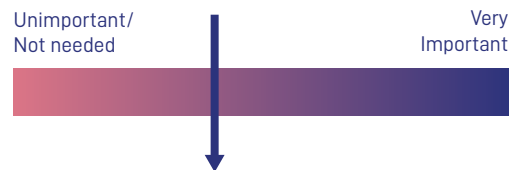
### Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses



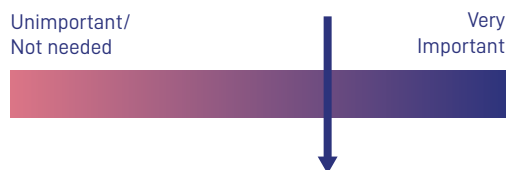
### More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining & Selling



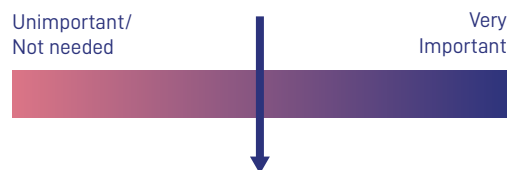
### Changes to Zoning or Other Local Regulations




### Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District



### Creation of a District Management Entity



*Business input related to possible strategies.  
Source: Ashburnham Village Center Business Survey*



*The town **doesn't support businesses.** There's a **lack of process** and **lack of accountability.***

*Create **discounts or incentives** for people who live in town to **shop locally.***

*The town should give people **options** for **getting around** other than cars.*

*The **second floor of the Library** is mostly vacant and could be **used for events.***

***Parking is a challenge.** There's **not a lot of vacant publicly-owned spaces** or lots in the Village Center. **How will you address it?***

*The town needs to **commit to helping businesses open and exist.** "Build it and they will come" is a fallacy — must have **support in place** to thrive.*

*How do we take the **maintenance** of spaces into account?*

*The Downtown **needs a draw.** We used to have Four Winds and the Victorian House as destination restaurants.*

*Select community feedback from the two public meetings.*

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## Project Recommendations

1. Provide Support to Businesses in Need
  - Use Recovery Funds to bolster Town Hall capacity
  - Assist in acquiring funds for cash-strapped businesses
  - Create a Storefront Improvement Program to improve existing businesses
2. Enhance Village Center Identity
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3. Improve Pedestrian Safety
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  - Streamline permitting processes to encourage outdoor activation
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  - Rethink the design and programming of Winchester Park
  - Create a new park at the former town pool area
  - Create connections to surrounding natural resources and trails
  - Create an incentivization program to shop locally
6. Attract New Investment
  - Attract investment for the redevelopment of the DPW lot

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## 1. Provide Support to Businesses in Need

DRAFT



# Use Recovery Funds to bolster Town Hall capacity

Category	 Admin Capacity
Location	Ashburnham Village Center
Origin	Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) Potential Funding Sources: Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
Timeframe	 Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Successful administration of recovery funds, successful response to Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds reporting requirements
Partners & Resources	Town Administrator, Town Selectboard, Town staff



Ashburnham Town Hall.  
Source: OverUnder

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### Diagnostic

There is no disputing that all Village Center businesses were seriously affected by the pandemic, though not evenly. Some businesses were able to pivot easily during lockdown, and others due to the nature of the business, were not. Food establishments were particularly hard hit, with many businesses yet to fully recover. The federal government has allocated money to states intended to provide assistance for these businesses. In order to determine a fair and transparent means of identifying and supporting those in need, as well as a clear method to assess proper use of funds, the Town should hire a Recovery Fund Coordinator. This would be a temporary, contract position which will primarily be responsible for administering and managing COVID recovery grant programs, coordinating with eligible business and commercial property owners and administering program funding in coordination with the Town.

### Action Item

This is to be a contract position that could be funded through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). Responsibilities would include administration of the Town's relief grant programming, preparation of written and graphic reports, and day-to-day administration of funding. This position would be responsible for oral presentations, performing field work, collaborating with other Town departments, and responding to requests for information from businesses and the general public.

### Process

- Confirm that grant money is available for dispersion to businesses in need
- Apply for grant to fund this position
- Hire suitable candidate
- Establish criteria for funding businesses in need of funds
- Determine caps for businesses
- Create an easy application process for businesses
- Publicize availability of funds and procedure
- Evaluate businesses
- Disperse funds
- Review correct use of funds
- Monitor and report on progress



# Assist in acquiring funds for cash-strapped businesses

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		<p>Low Budget (less than \$50,000)</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources: Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, SBA's Restaurant Revitalization Funding Program, MGCC's BIZ-M-POWER and Small Business Technical Assistance Grant, or Massachusetts DHCD's Community Development Block Grant for municipalities with a population of under 50,000.</p>
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low risk - technical assistance may be challenging due to capacity of small business owners
Key Performance Indicators		Increased business revenue, no business closures
Partners & Resources		Town Administrator, Town Selectboard, Business owners



*Main Street businesses.  
Source: OverUnder*

## Diagnostic

The results of the business survey conducted in the Village Center during March and April of 2021 showed that 4 out of the 9 businesses that participated in the survey experienced a decline in revenue due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, two thirds of the businesses surveyed reported being impacted by COVID in some way, such as operating in reduced hours or capacity, having incurred expenses to implement safety measures or temporary closures.

In discussions with community members, it was also noted that Village Center businesses missed a significant customer base from Cushing Academy's faculty, staff, students & parents, as the Academy switched to virtual learning in the spring and summer of 2020.

It is important for the town to identify and assist those businesses most affected by the pandemic in leveraging funds for local recovery coming from the federal Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, SBA's Restaurant Revitalization Funding Program, MGCC's BIZ-M-POWER and Small Business Technical Assistance Grant, or Massachusetts DHCD's Community Development Block Grant for municipalities with a population of under 50,000.

## Action Item

The project will include:

- Business outreach and engagement to identify needs for capital or technical assistance
- Identification of grants and eligible uses that best correspond to business needs
- Administration of a grant program that provides small business assistance for those Ashburnham Village Center businesses most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

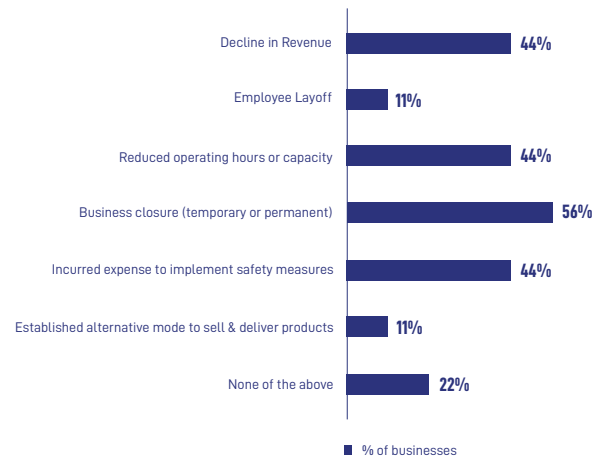
Bringing on additional capacity by hiring a town planner or a recovery fund coordinator is essential to the success of this program.

## Process

- Conduct analysis of current business needs, through a business survey and individual business interviews.
- Research business assistance grants to determine which one best aligns with the needs identified through business engagement, as well as the town's capacity to match the grant and adhere to reporting requirements.
- Identify business eligibility criteria

- Create online application platform on the town's website
- Open application period, including information session
- Review of applications by town staff
- Notify applicants and execute grant agreements
- Complete procurement process for Technical Assistance providers (if applicable)
- Complete reimbursement requests.
- Collect reporting documentation and close out award requirements.

### COVID Impacts Reported by Businesses



**COVID Impacts Reported by businesses that participated in the business survey.**

**Source: FinePoint Associates**

Best Practice

## Provide Funding and Technical Assistance to Enable Business Viability During COVID-19

**Provided by** Revby LLC

**Location** Arlington, MA

### Action Items





- Administering a relief program for Arlington businesses with twenty or fewer full-time-equivalent employees, including the owner.
- The program provides short-term working capital assistance and technical assistance to enable the viability of the business during the severe economic interruption related to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing restrictions

### Process

- Conduct analysis of current needs that align with eligible use of CDBG funds.
- Complete a substantial amendment of CDBG Annual Action Plan, including public comment period and citizen participation process.
- Open application period (including information session).
- Review of applications by 4 members of the team.
- Notify applicants and execute grant agreements.
- Complete procurement process for Technical Assistance providers.
- Complete reimbursement requests.
- Technical Assistance sessions and workshops: Topics include digital marketing, website assistance, eCommerce, SEO, Bookkeeping, and business resilience.
- Collect reporting documentation and close out award requirements with HUD.



# Create a Storefront Improvement Program to improve existing businesses

Category		Private Realm
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)  Potential Funding Sources: Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, T-Mobile's Hometown Grants, Local Banks, MA Downtown Initiative Program, Community Preservation Act
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Risk		Medium Risk - owners of the most distressed properties may be reluctant to participate. Early engagement with property owners is important.
Key Performance Indicators		Creation of the program; number of applicants over a specific timeframe; number of façades, storefronts, and/or sites improved within a specific timeframe; increase in visitors; increase in sales at the property/business improved and within the area
Partners & Resources		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, property and business owners



*Business storefronts on Main Street.  
Source: OverUnder*

## Diagnostic

Ashburnham Village Center has a beautiful building stock and a traditional Main Street feel. However, a number of Village Center business storefronts are substandard with inadequate signage, poorly organized interior layouts and outdoor spaces that cater to cars rather than pedestrians.

Local small businesses do not have the resources—time, money, expertise, language barriers—to address these issues. At the same time, distressed properties have a negative impact on people's perception of the business district and property owners are unable to make the improvements themselves.

Better storefronts will help the recovery of businesses hit by the pandemic, enhance the impression of the Village Center towards residents, visitors and business patrons, and attract new ones. Additionally, site improvements can provide spaces for outdoor activation (dining or retail display), and address the walkability and pedestrian level of comfort, encouraging walking and improving the overall health and well-being of town residents.

## Action Item

The project will include:

- Identifying appropriate funding sources
- Engaging businesses and property owners
- Developing storefront design guidelines
- Developing criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance
- Developing the funding and oversight structures

Bringing on additional capacity by hiring a town planner or a recovery fund coordinator is essential to the success of this program.

## Process

- Research funding sources and determine the appropriate ones for this program. Decide if the program will be administering grants, loans or a hybrid. Grants may provide a greater incentive to participate while loans (no or low interest) provide a revolving fund to assist more properties. Forgiving loans after a certain time if the improvements are maintained is another option.
- Conduct a current conditions assessment
- Engage business and property owners to get buy-in for the program. Differentiating between the responsibilities of the tenant and the landlord is critical – a small business may be enthusiastic about the assistance, but the landlord may not. The municipality may need to consider parallel outreach processes.
- Determine eligibility and evaluation criteria, program length, maintenance requirements and enforcement (e.g. repayment of a grant or a lien on a property)
- Hire a consultant to develop storefront design guidelines
- Create online application platform on the town's website, including design guidelines
- Open application period, including information session
- Review of applications by town staff
- Notify applicants and execute grant or loan agreements
- Collect reporting documentation and close out award requirements



**Sketch example of storefront design guidelines.**  
**Source: Town of Stoughton, MA**

Best Practice

## Sign and Facade Improvement Program

**Provided by** Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Innes Associates Ltd.

**Location** Ashland, MA

### Structure

- 50% match up to \$5,000

### Characteristics

- Preferred target area (high traffic streets) but is open to all businesses in Ashland.
- Includes building improvements (accessibility, signs, awnings, painting).
- Includes site improvements (parking lots, planters, landscaping)



## APPLICATION FOR SIGN & FAÇADE PROGRAM

### Purpose:

The Sign & Facade Program was established to provide technical and financial assistance to Ashland businesses making external improvements to their establishments. This program matches up to half of the project's cost or \$5,000 (whichever is less) for facade and/or sign improvements with town funding through the Ashland Economic Development Incentive Program. In doing so, the Town seeks to promote local merchants and enhance the physical appearance of Ashland.

### Eligibility Requirements:

This program is open to all businesses in Ashland but targeted to properties located on visible or high-traffic areas such as Main Street, Pleasant Street, Route 135, Pond Street. The applicant must either own the property in question or have a letter of authorization for the project from the owner. Moreover, the property must not have any outstanding obligations to the Town (i.e. no back taxes owed, town liens, etc.).

The project must have all required town approvals and permits. There is no permit required for basic landscape improvements but please consult the building department if any structures, paving or signs that are being modified.

Examples of exterior improvements that are eligible under this program include:

- Accessibility improvements (i.e. handicapped accessible ramps)
- Exterior signs
- Awnings
- Lighting energy conservation for windows & doors
- Painting
- Surface Parking lots
- Planters and landscaping
- Correction of Code
- Program funds may not be used for improvements to the interior of the business or to sidewalks or public walkways.

*Source: Town of Ashland, MA*







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## 2. Enhance Village Center Identity

DRAFT

# Create a Village Center brand

Category		Culture & Arts
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		Low Budget (less than \$50,000)  Potential Funding Sources: MA Downtown Initiative Program, Regional Economic Development Organization Grant Program
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Medium Risk - needs support from Village Center community stakeholders
Key Performance Indicators		Widespread deployment of brand identity, resident & business community embracing the Village Center brand
Partners & Resources		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard, Village Center residents and businesses



Existing banners installed on lamp posts in the Village Center.  
Source: OverUnder

## Diagnostic

The Village Center is visually undefined. While there exists a prototypical New England main street, it is not clear when you have entered or exited the downtown because of the proximity of businesses and residences. And those businesses have no unifying element. This all contributes to the "pass-through" nature of the current Village Center. There have been attempts to create a downtown brand with signage advertising downtown businesses, but the efforts have been disparate and non-comprehensive. Additionally, it is difficult to direct potential visitors to the area because of its lack of identity.

## Action Item

Branding the Village Center would bring definition to Main Street and identify it as a clear hub of activity. Creating a visual identity will both capture the essence of the Village Center and be a chance to tease out aspirations of residents and business owners. There is enormous potential to draw from for a visual identity: the natural beauty of Mount Watatic and the lakes, the arts and culture of the downtown, the strong relationship with Cushing Academy, etc. This project would involve hiring a graphic design/marketing firm to lead the effort.

## Process

- Hire graphic design/marketing/wayfinding firm to lead effort
- Engage downtown businesses and communicate how it would benefit them
- Brainstorm what kind of message the collective wants to communicate, ideally something welcoming and vibrant
- Hold community engagement meetings to solicit feedback from residents and business owners
- Determine a brand roll-out strategy broken up into phases, soliciting feedback after each phase to determine if following pieces need modifying
- Selected brand identity should be deployed to social media and Town website
- Design concepts for wayfinding elements
- Develop preferred design into a family of sign types with materials, colors, etc.
- Create sign location plan and message schedule to include in bid package to fabricators



*Example of brand design guidelines for a rural town.  
Source: Town of Nanton, Alberta in Canada*





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### 3. Improve Pedestrian Safety

DRAFT



# Conduct mobility research & design and implement temporary traffic calming strategies

Category		Public Realm
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		<p>Low Budget (less than \$50,000)</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources: MassDOT Complete Streets or Shared Streets &amp; Spaces funding is available for initial study, plan and lower-scale implementation.</p> <p>Alternative study/plan funding sources include DHCD's Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places, and upcoming grants from Massachusetts funded by the CARES and ARP Acts.</p>
Timeframe		<p>Short Term (less than 5 years)</p> <p>Phase I—Research (1 month, Summer 2021)</p> <p>Phase II—Mobility Study (4 months, Fall-Winter 2021)</p> <p>Phase III—Plan Development (4 months, Spring 2022)</p> <p>Phase IV—Funding &amp; Approvals (3 months, Summer 2022)</p>
Risk		Low Risk - Shared Streets and Spaces Grant was granted to the town
Key Performance Indicators		Increased pedestrian counts; increased business revenues; increased cultural event attendance; new business openings; new cultural events
Partners & Resources		MassDOT, Ashburnham Department of Public Works, Ashburnham Select Board, Ashburnham Complete Streets Committee, Design Consultant, Transportation Engineering Consultant



*Road and sidewalk conditions on Main Street*  
Source: OverUnder

## Diagnostic

During the pandemic the desire to support local businesses in Central Massachusetts has increased, as has the desire to walk and bike to these locations. These are trends that residents wish to maintain. In many ways, Ashburnham's Village Center, a typical New England Village Center with a traditional Main street and a well-maintained building stock is well suited to accommodate these wishes.

However, the area is challenged by the two state roads (MA-101 and MA-12) that meet downtown. Route 12 in particular is extremely busy and the speed limits are quite high.. Traffic volumes, speeding and missing sidewalks make the roads generally unsafe for pedestrians.

## Action Item

An initial mobility study for the downtown corridor will be conducted, focusing especially where Routes 12 and 101 overlap in the heart of downtown. This study should include new multi-modal data collection, identify local resident and business goals, create metrics to evaluate those goals, prepare analyses of data using those or similar metrics to ensure a relevant consensus outcome, and develop appropriate solutions for the downtown context that support broader community goals.

Study and recommended solutions should focus on defining appropriate cross-sections that accommodate vehicle and truck movements without encouraging higher speeds or over-accommodating turns to the detriment of other modes, particularly those seeking to walk to local business safely. Particular focus on the design of the Route 101 intersections with Route 12 required.

## Process

### Mobility Study:

- Develop scope for analysis
- Identify funding sources & procure consulting assistance (if needed)
- Initiate study and collect data about multi-modal traffic movements, rights-of-way, and local and State regulatory environment
- Implement temporary strategies to test alternatives
- Identify community/abutters' goals for how they use and access Main Street
- Develop appropriate metrics based on goals
- Analyze travel data per metrics and prioritize needs
- Develop a plan/conceptual design with specific measures and locations
- Conduct a community workshop to refine plan

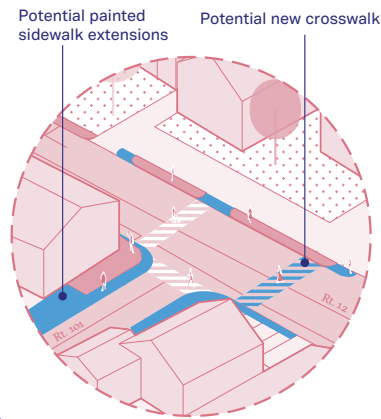


*Example of temporary implementations using paint.*



## Potential temporary traffic-calming strategy along Routes 12 and 101

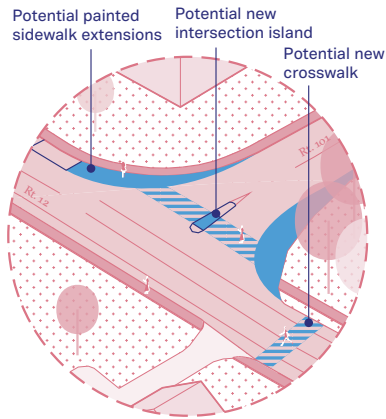
Sidewalk extensions and brightly-painted crosswalks expand the pedestrian realm while reducing the road width. There is the potential for new on-street parking spaces near Town Hall. Lastly, prominent gateway signage at either end of Main Street creates thresholds into the Village Center.



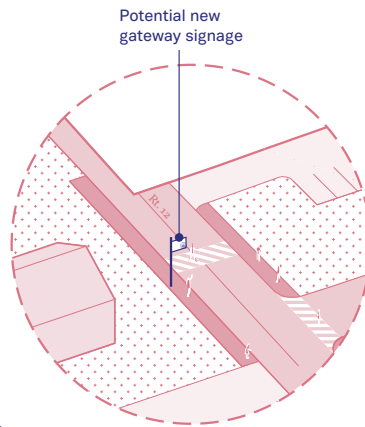
**A** INTERSECTION OF 101 & 12 (1)



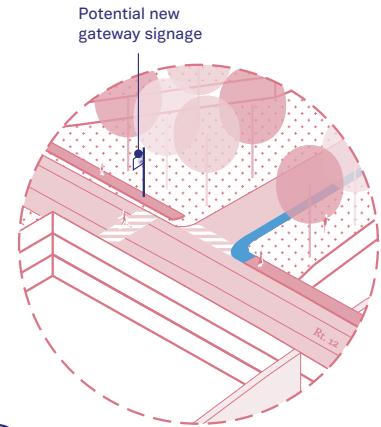
**B** CROSSWALK AT TOWN HALL



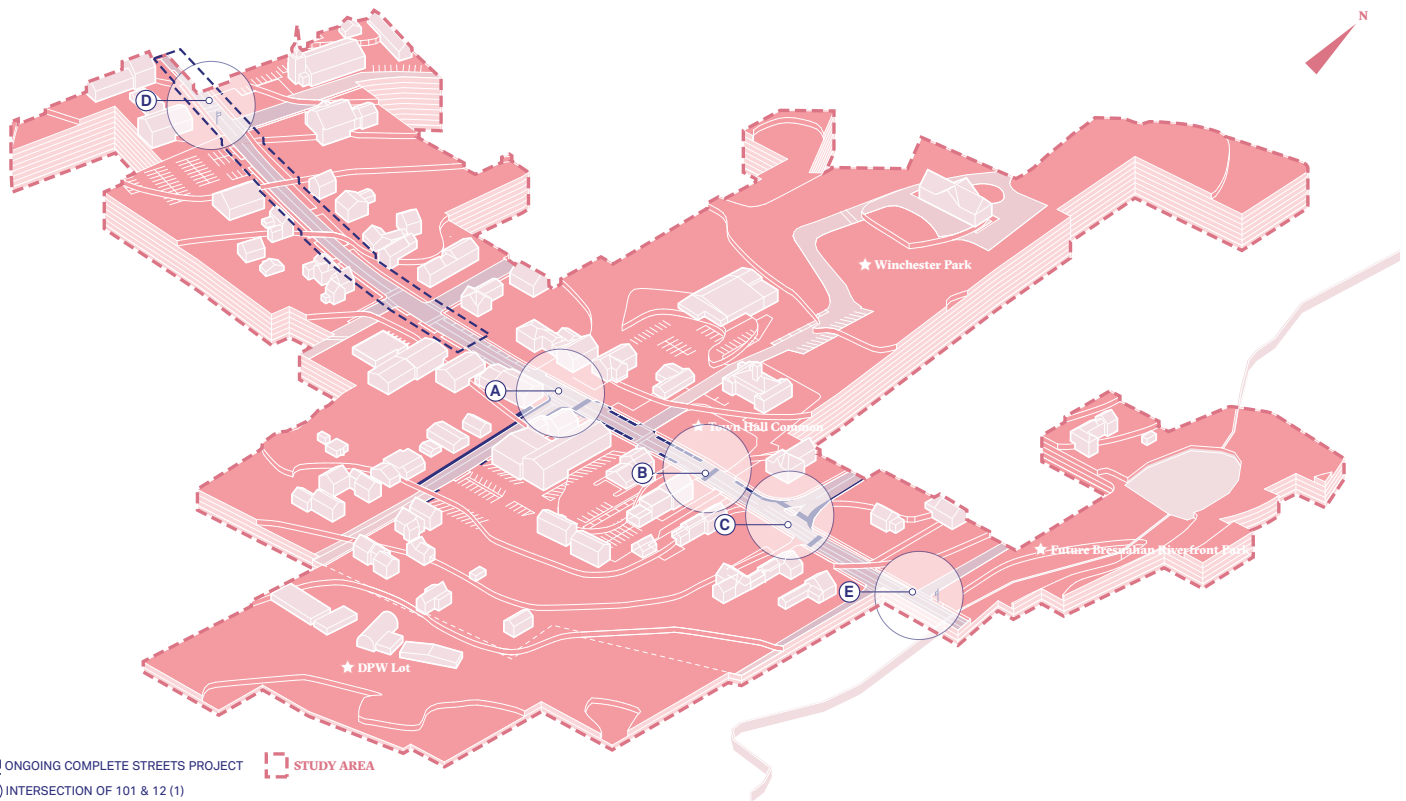
**C** INTERSECTION OF 101 & 12 (2)



**D** GATEWAY FROM NORTHWEST



**E** GATEWAY FROM SOUTHEAST



- ONGOING COMPLETE STREETS PROJECT
- STUDY AREA
- A** INTERSECTION OF 101 & 12 (1)
  - B** CROSSWALK AT TOWN HALL
  - C** INTERSECTION OF 101 & 12 (2)
  - D** GATEWAY FROM NORTHWEST
  - E** GATEWAY FROM SOUTHEAST

# Modify traffic speeds

Category		Public Realm
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		Low Budget (staff time)
Timeframe		Short Term
Risk		Low Risk – needs coordination with MassDOT, may require changes to Town bylaws
Key Performance Indicators		Reduced recorded speeds; reduced traffic incidents; increased pedestrian traffic; increased number of visitors; increased business revenue
Partners & Resources		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard, Town Administrator, MassDOT, Town Police Department



Entrance to Ashburnham Village Center from the North  
Source: OverUnder

## Diagnostic

Although the pandemic saw diminished traffic flow across the state, it also saw an increase in traffic speeds. A [MassDOT study](#) in May 2020 found that while traffic in Massachusetts had decreased by 50% in the early months of the pandemic, the rate of fatalities had doubled. Although none of these occurred on Ashburnham's Main Street, the pandemic has exacerbated a condition that existed beforehand: cars drive too quickly through the downtown. The posted speed of 30 miles per hour is arguably too high, and is not regularly enforced. This makes it difficult for businesses trying to recover from the pandemic-driven downturn to attract potential new customers. It also makes it less safe for those who have ventured out of their cars to use the street.

## Action Item

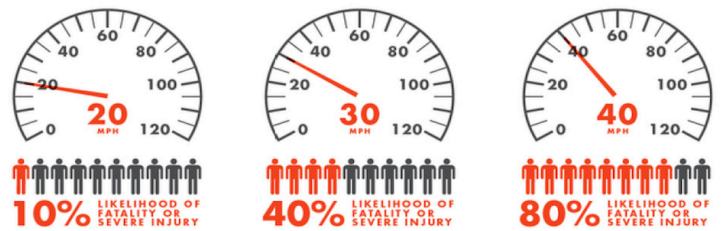
The initial mobility study noted above should include a safe speed study to ascertain an appropriate speed for Main Street. Given the location of the several key pedestrian attractors (school, park, places of worship), there appear to be several factors that would justify lowering the speed limit.

One possible mechanism for doing so is to declare Main Street a "slow zone." Slow zones are specifically designated areas with slower speeds than otherwise similar streets in the same jurisdiction. They are a useful tool for addressing high-priority areas such as locations with elevated collision rates or sensitive land uses.

It is essential that the public be engaged during the decision-making process, and that an effective messaging campaign ensues after determinations have been made. Finally, enforcement of the new speed limit is a key component of successful implementation.

## Process

- Confirm the process by which the town could reduce speed along Main Street
- Conduct a safe speed study
- Designate Main Street as a Slow Zone
- Educate and inform the public through effective messaging
- Enforce the new speed limit



## DEATH DUE TO SPEED



*Various messaging campaigns regarding speed limits from Portland, NYC, and Minneapolis*  
*Source: [NACTO](#)*



## Best Practice

# Vision Zero Action Plan





**Location** Portland, OR

Portland's Vision Zero Action Plan sets out specific, measurable actions to move toward zero traffic deaths or serious injuries on Portland streets. A major component of this effort has been to reduce speeds across the city anywhere pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles mix. This has required a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach and includes the following:

- Set safe speed limits
- Redesign dangerous streets to encourage safe speeds
- Educate Portlanders about the impact of speed
- Enforce the speed limit



# Implement permanent mobility strategies

Category		Public Realm
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years) Phase IV-Implementation (2 months, Fall 2022 or Spring 2023)
Risk		Medium Risk-Local & State permitting & design regulations; funding limitations; stakeholder / abutter opposition
Key Performance Indicators		Increased pedestrian counts; increased business revenues; increased cultural event attendance; new business openings; new cultural events
Partners & Resources		MassDOT, Ashburnham Department of Public Works, Ashburnham Select Board, Ashburnham Complete Streets Committee, Design Consultant, Transportation Engineering Consultant



**Ashburnham Village Center Main Street**  
*Source: OverUnder*

### Diagnostic

During the pandemic the desire to support local businesses in Central Massachusetts has increased, as has the desire to walk and bike to these locations. These are trends that residents wish to maintain. In many ways, Ashburnham's Village Center, a typical New England Village Center with a traditional Main street and a well-maintained building stock is well suited to accommodate these wishes.

However, the area is challenged by the two state roads (MA-101 and MA-12) that meet downtown. Route 12 in particular is extremely busy and the speed limits are quite high.. Traffic volumes, speeding and missing sidewalks make the roads generally unsafe for pedestrians.

### Action Item

The project will evaluate mobility options to address traffic impacts on local business viability and pedestrian safety, including conflicts, speeds, crossing distances, sightlines, on-street parking availability and parcel driveway access.

Solutions to be considered should include:

- Access management controls and driveway narrowing
- Addition of on-street parking for access and traffic calming
- Installation of missing sidewalks
- Crosswalk curb extensions to improve visibility
- Reconfiguration of the Rt. 101 N & Rt. 12 intersection island
- Implementation of other strategic traffic calming measures, such as speed humps, narrowed lanes, raised crosswalks, crossing islands, bike lanes, gateway signage, etc.

### Process

Finalize plan

- Prepare cost estimate
- Design & Installation:
- Identify and secure funding
- Complete 30% design
- Obtain approvals from MassDOT
- Complete 100% design
- Develop bid documents, advertise, select & hire contractor
- Implement measures



## Best Practice

# Creating Safe Pedestrian Access in a Rural Village Center

**Provided by** Franklin Regional Council of Governments

**Location** Whately, MA

The Whately Historic District Complete Streets project included the construction of new sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure on the town's main street, Chestnut Plain Road – e.g. construction of a new section of sidewalk in front of the Whately Inn, a vibrant local restaurant, where there was no sidewalk. Some of the parking for the Whately Inn was located next to the road in the space where a sidewalk would be located. The town worked cooperatively with the Whately Inn to redesign and relocate the parking area to allow for the construction of a sidewalk. By relocating the entrance to the parking area, additional parking was created and the sidewalk was constructed.

The project also improved pedestrian connections between the Whately Inn and the recently renovated old Town Hall, which is now a community center and local history museum. As in-person events begin to be held again at the old Town Hall, residents and visitors can safely and easily park and walk to and from the Whately Inn and the event.

## Process

- Completion of a conceptual design process that included broad participation.
- Adoption of a Complete Streets Policy.
- Development of a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, facilitated by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments.
- Approval of Complete Streets Prioritization Plan by the Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program so that the community is eligible to apply for complete streets implementation funding.



*Source: Franklin Regional Council of Governments*

- Application to the Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding
- Program for project implementation funding.
- Approval of implementation funding through the Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program for the project.
- Completion of the final design for the project which includes collaboration with businesses and abutters so as to address needs for parking, outdoor dining, and pedestrian facilities.
- Temporary construction or permanent easements were identified and sought
- Conduct procurement process to hire a contractor.
- Contractor completes project construction.







*Source: Franklin Regional Council of Governments*

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## 4. Bring Key New Business to Village Center

DRAFT

# Develop Tenant Recruitment and Retention Plan

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		<p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources: Community Development Block Grant, MA Downtown Initiative Program, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Planning Assistance Grants, Regional Economic Development Organization Grant Program</p>
Timeframe		Medium Term (5-10 years)
Risk		<p>Medium Risk – needs a coherent strategy that will be supported by all community interests while also being responsive to consumer needs and preferences.</p> <p>Site owners and existing business users may be challenging to coordinate with; many people in town travel to other communities to use commercial services; there may not be sufficient critical mass in the village center to get visitors to stop.</p>
Key Performance Indicators		New business openings; increased pedestrian traffic downtown; increased tax revenue.
Partners & Resources		Ashburnham Select Board; Ashburnham Economic Development Commission; Town Administrator; Cushing Academy; Village Center Property & business owners; Economic Development Consultant



*Existing mix of businesses in the Village Center.  
Source: OverUnder*

### Diagnostic

The pandemic has not only hurt existing businesses in the Village Center, but has further discouraged new businesses from starting for fear of failure. Additionally, the complex and strict zoning regulations and permitting processes are long-standing hurdles for potential new businesses.

A tenant recruitment and retention plan is needed to help existing businesses, address current inadequacies with the town government and come up with new lures for businesses. This effort could help the Village Center after the pandemic with a clear vision for business recruitment and retention, with a chance to capture more of the emerging market.

### Action Item

This program would be designed to help the Village Center achieve a mix of businesses that are viable in the long-run, while also growing creative industries. One factor in program design is the relatively small size of the Town and its distance from larger communities. While that is in some ways a disadvantage, it can also be an advantage in some situations. Ashburnham also is the home to Cushing Academy, which provides a major institutional presence, and has also work with the Town to improve the Village Center.

The project will include the following steps:

- Collect and Analyze Data about the Market and Regulatory Environment.
- Receive Community Input and Identify Resources
- Develop Tenant Recruitment and Retention Plan
- Conduct Community Workshop to Refine Policies and Program
- Finalize Plan
- Obtain Approval from Town Boards



# Ashburnham

## Business Development Guide

*Ashburnham Business Development Guide*

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## Process

- Determine what the Town is hoping to accomplish with a tenant recruitment and retention program. What businesses should be attracted? Which ones would leave a gap if they left?
- Meet with existing businesses to hear what they think would be complementary businesses to what they provide.
- Analyze (or hire a consultant to analyze) what the consumer capacity is for downtown. This will involve determining disposable income within certain distances as well as what competition exists in that area.
- Analyze (or hire a consultant to analyze) what gaps appear to be in the market downtown. Are there missing types of retail, service, or business uses that could be supported?
- Determine what aspirational or "basic" industries (that might attract other businesses and visitors beyond basic needs) are of interest.
- Research the economics of these aspirational industries to understand what subsidies or other public or non-profit actions might be needed to make them relevant.
- Examine existing zoning and licensing rules for the village center to determine if there are likely barriers to new business attraction that could be modified.
- Interview key stakeholders, including property owners; business owners; officials at Cushing Academy; and visitors to downtown about what potential they see for additional businesses.
- Survey residents to hear what they would like to see downtown.
- Determine what resources (local, regional, state or private) exist to fund an effort and whether they are sufficient for such a program.
- Explore interest in funding for regional recruitment efforts.
- Determine if there are certain "hooks" that might help corner a recruitment effort (in addition to Cushing Academy) such as outdoor activities or a regional attraction.
- Create a draft set of policies based on data and brainstorming that would guide a program.
- Given the policies and resources identified, and the market realities and aspirations documented, design a program that works within those constraints and opportunities.
- Develop a draft workplan for the program, including any staffing needs and unknowns, as well as metrics to gauge success.
- Determine how to leverage redevelopment of the DPW parcel to achieve tenant attraction goals.
- Present these draft policies to stakeholders such as business leaders and residents for response.
- Structure feedback to suggest constructive changes to draft policies and program.
- Check in with boards that will need to approve the effort in 7. (below) to receive interim feedback.
- Revise the draft policies as needed and finalize a set of guiding policies.
- Revise program as needed to implement revised policies.
- Provide opportunities for media to learn about the program and/or policies and provide coverage.
- Based on program components, determine what approvals are needed and
- Propose amendments to Town codes and bylaws as necessary for consistency with tenant recruitment and retention policies.



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## 5. Attract Visitors to the Village Center

DRAFT

# Streamline permitting processes to encourage outdoor activation

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		Low Budget (under \$50,000)  Potential Funding Sources: Community Development Block Grant, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Planning Assistance Grants, Shared Streets & Spaces Grant
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators		Number of event and outdoor dining permits issued; length of permitting and approval process; event attendance; increased business revenue
Partners & Resources		Economic Development Commission, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard, potential event organizers, retail and restaurant business owners



*Outdoor Dining at Harlow's Pub in Peterborough, NH*

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## Diagnostic

With restrictions on indoor dining during the Covid-19 pandemic, restaurants shifted to takeout and outdoor dining to remain in business. As the pandemic continues, businesses need certainty in terms of the consistency of temporary regulations so that they can make investments in construction, equipment, and furniture for outdoor dining and retail. 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.

In addition, more permanent measures will allow for a closer look at impacts on the public realm. Clear outdoor dining/retail design requirements will help create the best possible public realm and commercial district experience to assist all businesses in the Village Center.

At the same time, the pandemic led to a renewed interest in the use of public space to meet and interact with others in the community safely. Public outdoor events can activate public spaces and provide an environment for safe community gathering. However, currently, there is a lack of event programming in the Village Center.

## Action Item

### Phase 1: Outdoor Dining/Retail

The RRP Outdoor Dining/Retail Toolkit is a resource to assist Ashburnham in facilitating the creation and ongoing success of outdoor dining and/or retail in the Village Center; the kit offers project examples from other communities as well as space guidelines that adhere to good design practices and ADA requirements. After decisions are made, Ashburnham 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.

The process should include a Task Force or Working Group composed of the public sector (Town Administrator, Selectboard, DPW, public health, fire department, etc.) and private sector (business representatives, civic advocates) to help assess work and move the process along.

### Phase 2: Events & Festivals

Ashburnham needs to identify potential suitable locations for events, review all processes for issuing of permits for public and privately organized events in these locations, solicit feedback from organizations, companies or individuals that are interested in holding public events within the Village center and develop recommendations for removing barriers.

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## Process

### Phase 1: Outdoor Dining/Retail

- Conduct an internal needs assessment by reviewing the Toolkit, conducting an internal meeting with Town Administrator, Selectboard, Economic Development Commission, DPW, public health, and others, about the current state of outdoor dining and/or retail and feedback on effectiveness and challenges with current status.
- Get feedback from businesses about their needs. Questions should include: desire for winter dining, storage challenges, permitting process feedback, interest in bulk purchasing, financial assistance, etc.
- From internal meetings and business engagement, identify focus areas for making an outdoor dining/retail program.
- Create a Task Force or Working Group representative of the focus areas for your Outdoor Dining/Retail program.
- Review Toolkit and research info on focus areas for the program. Possible focus areas could include:
  - Single online application for businesses to apply for permits and licenses to provide outdoor dining and retail and a checklist of requirements.
  - Town Hall liaison
  - Short-track or condensed timeline for permitting and approvals by coordinating Town inspections and reviews.
  - Clear design guidelines
  - Bulk purchasing of common items needed for outdoor dining and retail to get better prices for businesses
  - Encouraging winter outdoor dining
- Develop draft guidance for each focus area and list pros and cons
- Conduct public meeting to get feedback on draft ideas
- Revise program elements as necessary based on feedback.
- Write up draft regulations and requirements
- Prepare educational materials/presentations for boards/commissions/public/businesses
- Institute changes

### Phase 2: Events & Festivals

- Designate specific areas "pre-approved for events" and choose these areas to also benefit Village Center businesses
- Review processes for issuing of permits for events within the Village Center
- Solicit feedback from community stakeholders on opportunities and challenges
- Streamline permitting and applications processes and allow an online process with checklist for submittals. Include the following in streamlined process (and consider reduced fees):
  - Public safety
  - Sanitation
  - Basic Event permit
  - Public health
  - Alcohol
- Consider allowing and implementing street closures on a regular basis for events

## Best Practice

# Strategy Guide for Activating Public Spaces

**Provided by** Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission

**Location** Worcester, MA

### Outreach and background research

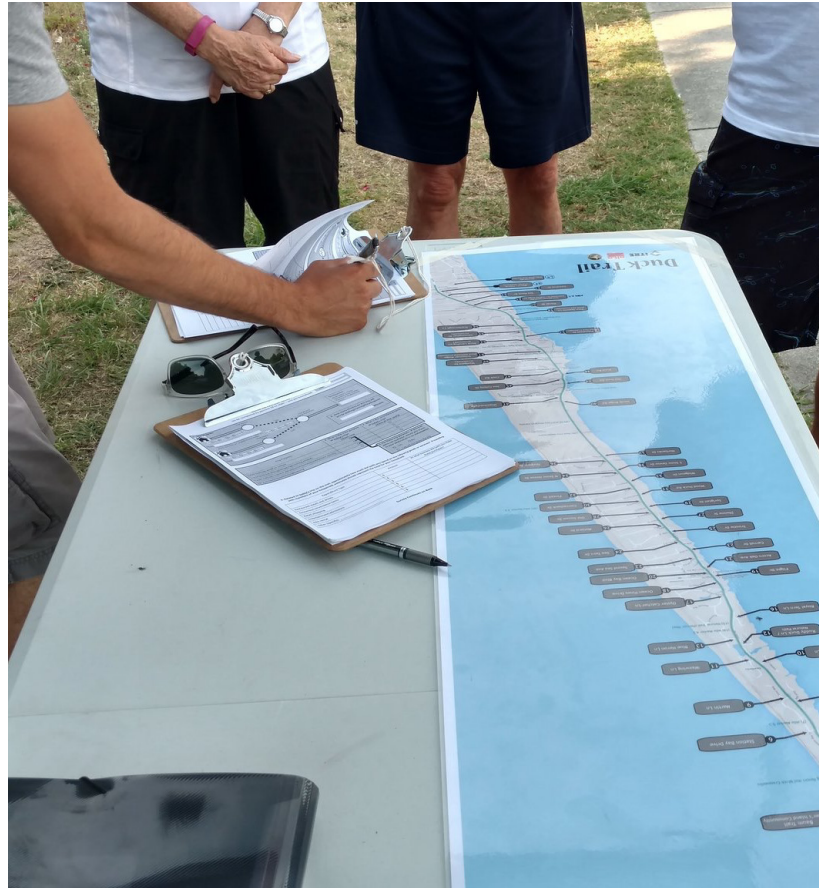
- Identify the location and basic characteristics of all public spaces within the study area, including access, ownership and suitability for public activities
- Review all processes for issuing of permits for public and privately organized events within public spaces
- Identify and solicit feedback from organizations, companies and individuals that have in the past held public events or showed interest in holding public events within the town or study area
- Analyze potential opportunities and challenges around utilization of public spaces
- Research similar communities in the state and region and create a catalogue of realistic, achievable activities
- Solicit feedback on existing processes, paying special attention to what has worked, where friction points may be
- Solicit feedback from community stakeholders on opportunities and challenges
- Summarize all community feedback and develop recommendations for reducing friction points

### Develop draft materials and visuals

- Strategy Guide Development and Review
- Summary and analysis of existing processes
- Opportunities and Challenges
- Case Studies
- Recommendations for streamlining the permitting process

### Municipal review and revision

- Review all recommendations with municipality and incorporate recommended edits



*Source: Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission*



# Create and market unique and vibrant events

Category		Public Realm
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Town Selectboard, Economic Development Commission
Budget		Low Budget (under \$50,000) Potential Funding Sources: MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places Grant, Hometown Grant Program
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators		Increased number of events in the area, event attendance, community & business participation
Partners & Resources		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard, Ashburnham Public Library, Cushing Academy, Frederick Piano Museum, Village Center business owners



# Ashburnham Farmers Market

*Last Saturday of the Month  
10am - 1pm / May - October*

Local Farm Based Products.  
Meetinghouse Hill (top of Cushing St.)

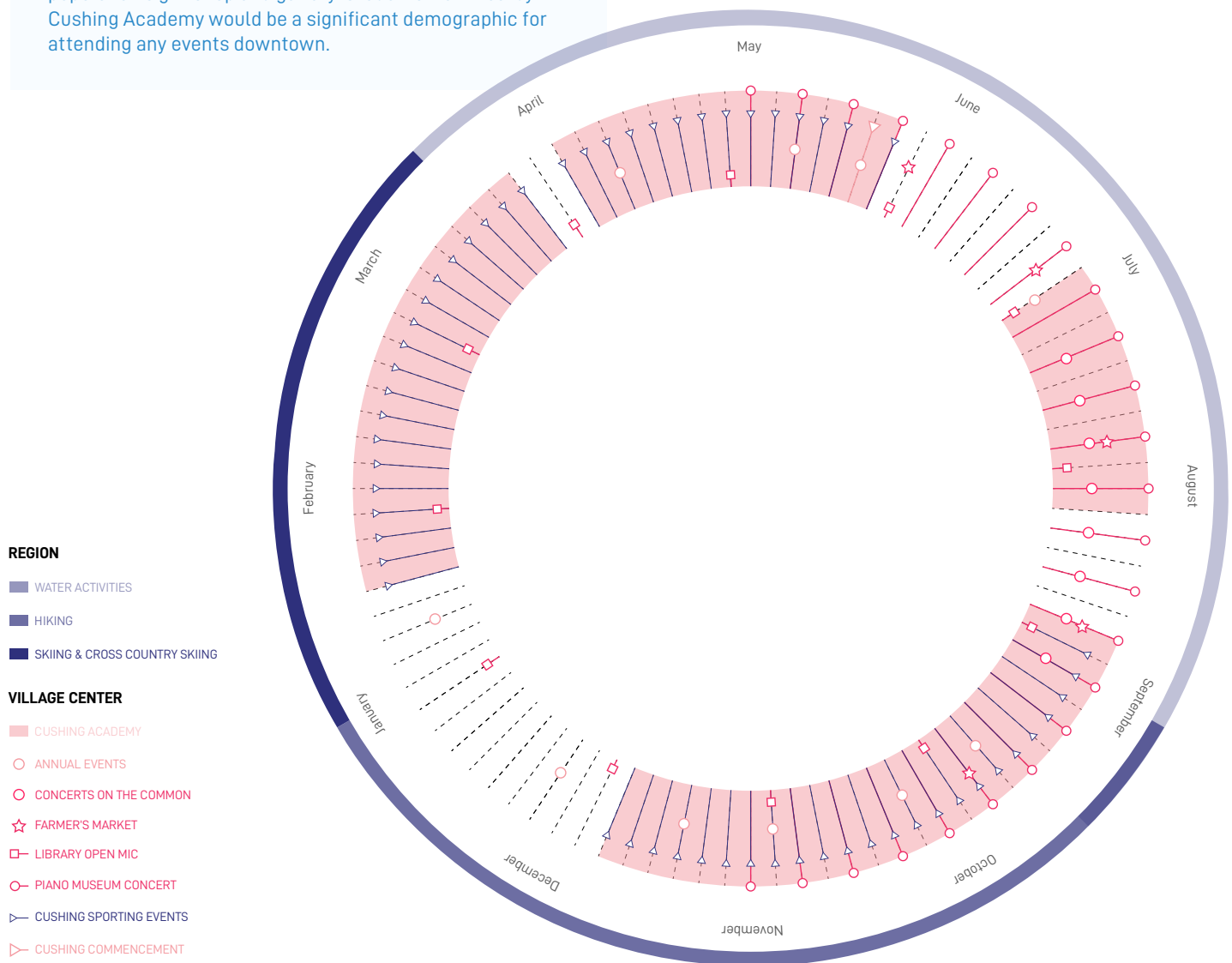


Ashburnham Farmer's market.

Source: [Ashburnham Farmer's Market Facebook page](#)

## Diagnostic

The significance of outdoor space, and by extension outdoor activities, has been given new life by the pandemic. Ashburnham has plentiful open space for events, especially Winchester Park, which benefits from its central location between Town Hall and the Town Library. That park's main drawback is that it is not highly visible from Main Street. A vibrant farmer's market occurs monthly, but it is located outside of the downtown area — the main concern is that there isn't enough parking at Winchester Park to accommodate the number of visitors. In addition to plentiful open space, the thriving arts culture of the town can be harnessed for events. The Frederick Collection of Historic Pianos is located right downtown, and performances are held in the nearby church. Creative Connections is a popular arts gift shop and gallery. Students from nearby Cushing Academy would be a significant demographic for attending any events downtown.



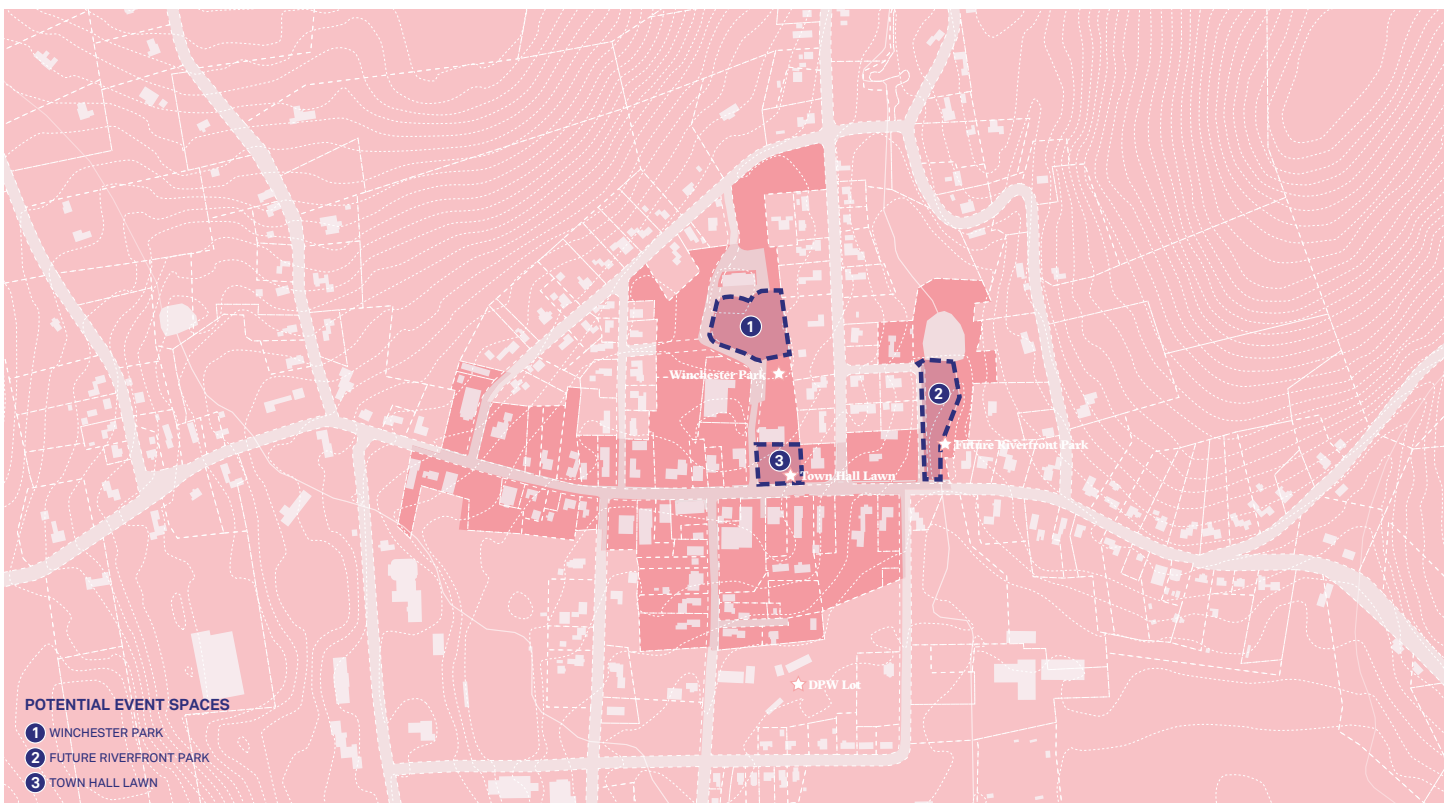
Existing events in the Village Center mapped over a typical year.  
Source: OverUnder

### Action Item

A few key locations can be utilized for outdoor events: Winchester Park, the future potential Riverside Park, and what can be described as the Town Hall Lawn on Main Street. Each of these areas has a different character and scale, which help to determine the type of programming that might happen there.

### Process

- Select point-person at Town Hall to lead effort, or create new position to handle events as part of their work responsibilities
  - Solicit volunteer work
  - Investigate funding sources for event programming
  - Engage local student groups and businesses for potential fundraising events
  - Engage Town Library administration for assistance in planning
- Explore large temporary structures that can be deployed as needed; something more bespoke would be more of a draw and make the downtown unique
  - Explore smaller individual structures like sheds that can be used as market stalls or artist work spaces; these can be deployed in multiple locations
  - Review zoning by-laws to determine if there are any hindrances to large events
  - Explore ways to market events, not only on Town website, but also on social media and mailers to local residents





## Best Practice

# The Corner Spot

**Provided by** Bench Consulting (from Patronicity)

**Location** Ashland, MA

The Corner Spot is a placemaking opportunity for downtown Ashland where businesses can test drive the market and residents can come together to increase the sense of community and help revitalize the downtown area. The Corner Spot is intended to stimulate economic activity in Ashland, attract new developers and business owners as well as increase foot traffic downtown to help support existing and future business. You'll need to locate a prime site for this, ideally on a property controlled by the town. Once you have the space determine any initial permitting issues that may preclude or hinder you from using the site for certain passive or commercial activities. Develop a site layout plan and a rough preliminary budget and allocate any funding opportunities including grants and private donations that may be available. Ensure you have an adequate programming plan and maintenance plan lined up for the site. Maintenance could require some funding so ensure you have long term funding set aside to operate the site.



*Source: Bench Consulting*

## Process

- Find a suitable location for the project. This could be a vacant lot, an alley, a parking lot space or street space currently devoted to vehicles. Ensure its centrally located within walking distance of numerous other commercial opportunities.
- Identify a strong base of supporters to help plan and implement any placemaking project from community groups to business owners, artists and other stakeholders.
- Determine the different major component parts of this project to begin to formulate a vision for the site. Do you want a mix of passive and active recreation opportunities? Seating to encourage takeout dining from area restaurants. Wifi to encourage outdoor remote workers to the area? If there's a retail opportunity, what does the physical space look like, do you want to be able to conduct light food prep which will require plumbing. Determine any ADA and other accessibility issues early on as well. Obtain necessary permitting and insurance on the site.
- Demolition of the existing structure was donated by a local contractor and grading & landscaping labor was donated by another. From there, local makers were used for the swings and table seating and a local contractor fit out an old tool shed to design and develop the Corner Spot's central retail space.
- The Town conducted numerous resident surveys during the first years of the Corner Spot and continues to solicit feedback from residents and businesses about how the space can better fit their needs. Use a combination of electronic and in person survey tools to engage constructive feedback.
- Over the years, new components have been added to the site based on resident donations and new types of events based on requests of area businesses and residents.



Source for all photos: Bench Consulting



## Best Practice (2)

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

**Provided by** Susan Silberberg, CivicMoxie

**Location** Fall River, MA

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

Set goals such as: 1) desired audience; 2) how to help businesses attract customers downtown; 3) change the image of downtown; 4) practice collaboration or implement a pilot project to see feasibility, etc.

- Gather parties with similar interests, complementary resources and expertise.
- Brainstorm ways to achieve the core goals. Develop criteria to select one strategy to move forward: 1) Is there someone who has done an event before? 2) Does someone have paid staff that can lend a hand? 3) Who has graphics and marketing expertise? Can this strategy tag onto another event or a milestone in the community?
- Answer these questions: 1) Who is the audience? 2) What message to convey? 3) How does this align with municipal and business district goals? 4) What does success look like? 5) What would cause everyone to smile the day after the event? Keep the answers to these questions in mind throughout planning
- Work back from the goals to identify people, organizations, agencies available to help: chart interests, capacity, resources, contacts.



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



Source for all photos: FRACC



# Rethink the design and programming of Winchester Park

Category		Public Realm
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		<p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources: MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places Grant, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Grant Program, Land and Recreation Grants &amp; Loans, MassTrails Grant</p>
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Risk		Medium Risk – Community interests, financing limitations, regulatory restrictions
Key Performance Indicators		Change in foot traffic; number of event attendees; change in business revenue
Partners & Resources		Ashburnham Select Board, Economic Development Commission, Landscape and Historic Preservation Consultant Library, schools, parents' groups, Downtown Business owners



*Winchester Park in Ashburnham Village Center.  
Source: OverUnder*

## Diagnostic

### Opportunities

- Town-owned properties
- Traditional Main Street feel
- Proximity to natural attractions
- Beautiful and well-maintained building stock

### Challenges

- Winchester Park parcels have use restrictions
- COVID led to business closures
- COVID led to less foot traffic in the Village Center

## Action Item

The project will include restoration of Winchester Park, including the relocation of the existing playground. Since there are two sites (Winchester and the River Street site), it may be most efficient to work on both sites simultaneously with one design team and a community engagement process around both sites. The site design should also include a restoration plan.

## Process

### Phase 1: Planning and Project Development (1 to 3 months)

- **Convene key stakeholders:** Discuss goals for the restoration of both sites. Review existing documents and plans for Winchester Park. Determine if an existing group such as Open Space and Recreation Committee (OSRC) could help to guide the process.
- **Define project scope:** Define the project scope with key stakeholders and identify who will be responsible for the site design and implementation, as well as at what points the process approvals are needed. There is existing interest and momentum to build a natural playground at Winchester Park, as well as additional overall park design considerations for future project such as ADA accessibility and library expansion. In addition, Winchester Park could also better connect to Town Hall and Main Street. A full site design for Winchester Park is recommended to redesign the whole site that looks at park amenities (e.g. natural playground, stage/performance space, story circle, improved landscaping), pedestrian and vehicular circulation, improved site lines from Main Street, and site/wayfinding signage. The whole site design can still include the natural playground features. The park

construction could be phased based on funding and other site construction to the library and ramp.

### Phase 2: Community Engagement and Design Process (6 to 9 months)

- **Hire a landscape architect:** Draft and release an RRP to hire a landscape architect to oversee the design process for the open space site, or an existing open space site that needs to be redesigned.
- **Community outreach and engagement:** Throughout the design process Ashburnham residents should be engaged around additional uses for Winchester Park which are complementary to the playground and Stevens Memorial Library. The project manager and building committee should develop an outreach and agreement strategy to best reach.
  - Outreach methods to reach residents could include posting about the meetings in eNewsletters, social media, direct emails, and posters in public buildings.
  - Engagement methods could include a combination of the following community meetings, drop-in sessions at the library to collect ideas, engaging kids at schools or after school programs, joining other community meetings, online surveys, and on-site engagement at events. Since Winchester Park is located next to the library, directly engaging library patrons at the library is recommended.
- **Conceptual design:** The design process should consist of three phases to develop the concept design for the site. At the end of the process the landscape architects should provide a project budget. The three phases include the following:
  - Idea collection that can be done through community visions sessions, online surveys, and engaging youth at school or at the library.
  - Conceptual design options created by the landscape architect, shared with the community to collect their input.
  - Final designs based on feedback from the conceptual designs, providing a final period for public review and comment.
- **Site survey:** Conduct a site survey, site assessment, and soil tests prior to beginning work on the construction drawings.
- **Construction drawings:** Once the concept drawing is final then the construction drawings can be created along with a project budget. The landscape architects should provide an updated project budget that includes soft and hard costs for the project construction.
- **Approvals:** Obtain approvals from town boards after the conceptual design and final construction drawings are complete.



#### Phase 3: Fundraising (6 to 12 months)

- **Secure Funding:** Identify grants to apply for funding and apply for grants (see list in the budget section for potential funding sources).

#### Phase 4: Implementation (3 to 6 months)

- **Hire contractor:** The Town should draft and release an RFP to hire a contractor to construct the new open space.
- **Notifications:** Notify the public and direct abutters that constructing is happening via eNewsletters, emails, press releases, mail to abutters, posters at the library, and on-site signage.
- **Construction:** The project manager will oversee the contractor's construction process. There should be regular onsite meetings and final walk through with the contractor.
- **Host ribbon cutting** event after the project has been implemented.

#### Phase 5: Maintenance and Programming (on going)

- **Write a maintenance plan** prior to starting construction.
- **Maintain new parks:** Identify which project partners will be responsible for regular maintenance responsibilities, including keeping playgrounds and other facilities clean and safe, maintaining landscape features, and repairing or reporting any damages. If residents are interested, organize community clean-up days.
- **Events and Programs:** Encourage community groups and the library to host events on site to help bring people to the new parks and to Downtown.



*Natural playground Fisher Hill Reservoir Park in Brookline, MA  
Source: Klopfer Martin Design Group*



*Concerts on the Common in Waltham, MA*



# Create a new park at the former town pool area

Category		Public Realm
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)  Potential Funding Sources: MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places Grant, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Grant Program, Land and Recreation Grants & Loans, MassTrails Grant
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Risk		Medium risk - Community interests, financing limitations, regulatory restrictions
Key Performance Indicators		Change in foot traffic; number of event attendees; change in business revenue
Partners & Resources		Ashburnham Select Board, Economic Development Commission, Open Space and Recreation Committee, Landscape and Historic Preservation Consultant, schools, parents' groups, Downtown Business owners



*Publicly-owned former town pool area in Ashburnham Village Center.  
Source: OverUnder*



## Diagnostic

### Opportunities

- Town-owned properties
- Traditional Main Street feel
- Proximity to natural attractions
- Beautiful and well-maintained building stock

### Challenges

- River Street parcel overgrown and neglected
- COVID led to business closures
- COVID led to less foot traffic in the Village Center
- COVID demonstrated a clear need for additional outdoor space

## Action Item

The project will include the design & implementation of a park at the town-owned lot, east of River Street. Since there are two sites it may be most efficient to work on both sites simultaneously with one design team and a community engagement process around both sites. The site design should also include a restoration plan.

## Process

### Phase 1: Planning and Project Development (1 to 3 months)

- **Convene key stakeholders:** Discuss goals for the restoration of the former town pool park along River Street. Review existing documents and plans. Determine if an existing group such as Open Space and Recreation Committee (OSRC) could help to guide the process.
- **Define project scope:** Define the project scope with key stakeholders and identify who will be responsible for the site design and implementation, as well as at what points the process approvals are needed. For the River Street project, there could be short-term activation to the site while working towards a full site design.



*Example of pop-up shops that can be temporarily deployed in the park.  
Source: Dalegate Market in the UK*

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Phase 2: Community Engagement and Design Process (6 to 9 months)

- **Hire a landscape architect:** Draft and release an RFP to hire a landscape architect to oversee the design process.
- **Community outreach and engagement:** Throughout the design process Ashburnham residents should be engaged around what they would like to see at the River Street lot. The project manager and building committee should develop an outreach and agreement strategy to best reach.
- **Conceptual design:** The design process should consist of three phases to develop the concept design for the site. At the end of the process the landscape architects should provide a project budget. The three phases include 1) Idea collection, 2) conceptual design options, and 3) final designs based on feedback from the conceptual designs, providing a final period for public review and comment.
- **Site survey:** Conduct a site survey, site assessment, and soil tests prior to beginning work on the construction drawings.
- **Construction drawings:** Once the concept drawing is final then the construction drawings can be created along with a project budget. The landscape architects should provide an updated project budget that includes soft and hard costs for the project construction.
- **Approvals:** Obtain approvals from town boards after the conceptual design and final construction drawings are complete.

Phase 3: Pop-up installation at River Street Park

- **Community clean-up day:** Organizing a community clean-up day could help to engage residents early in the process so to help build support for both short and long-term improvements to River Street.
- **Pop-up installation:** Define the scope of a short-term pop-up installation and determine how best to advance the design to implementation. The pop-up design can be simple but should include a list of materials and location of new features.
- **Approvals:** Obtain approvals from town boards for the pop-up installation. There may not be a process to approve this type of project, therefore stakeholders should meet with the Town to determine the approval process.
- **Budget:** Create project budget to be used for fundraising.

Phase 4: Fundraising (6 to 12 months)

- **Secure Funding:** Identify grants to apply for funding and apply for grants (see list in the budget section for potential funding sources).

Phase 5: Implementation (3 to 6 months)

- **Hire contractor:** The Town should draft and release an RFP to hire a contractor to construct the new open space.
- **Notifications:** Notify the public and direct abutters that constructing is happening via eNewsletters, emails, press releases, mail to abutters, posters at the library, and on-site signage.
- **Construction:** The project manager will oversee the contractor's construction process. There should be regular onsite meetings and final walk through with the contractor.
- **Host ribbon cutting** event after the project has been implemented.

Phase 6: Maintenance and Programming (on going)

- **Write a maintenance plan** prior to starting construction.
- **Maintain new park:** Identify which project partners will be responsible for regular maintenance responsibilities, including keeping playgrounds and other facilities clean and safe, maintaining landscape features, and repairing or reporting any damages. If residents are interested, organize community clean-up days especially for River Street.
- **Events and Programs:** Encourage community groups and the town to host events on site to help bring people to the new parks.

# Doyle Playground

**Location** Boston, MA

Over the past ten years, Southwest Boston CDC (SWBCDC) worked to organize residents and gain approvals with DCR to move forward the creation of a design for the park. In 2016, SWBCDC organized residents in the neighborhood who then formed a group called P.O.W.H.E.R. and they identified the Doyle site as one of their top priorities to focus on. P.O.W.H.E.R. organized clean-up days and set up meetings with DCR to discuss their interest in redesigning the site. After these meetings, DCR took additional steps to clean up the site and began to mow the site more frequently.

The project team is now working with DCR to advance the site towards construction. In the meantime, significant improvements to the site have included removing fences and trash, clearing invasive trees, removing blacktop, seeding and mowing a lawn, creating a walking path out of woodchips, and fundraising for and painting a mural on a large wall. These improvements helped to create a park that can be used for passive recreation by all ages and abilities.




A large mural on a building wall depicting a park scene. The mural features a winding river, lush green trees, a dog on the left, and people in a canoe and on a bench. The text 'POH.WER artists full.vitality' and 'SOUTHWEST BOSTON CDC' is visible on the right side of the mural. A logo for 'dcr' is also present.

## Rapid Recovery Plan



# Create connections to surrounding natural resources and trails

Category		Public Realm
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) Potential Funding Sources: MassTrails Grants
Timeframe		Medium Term (5-10 years)
Risk		Low Risk – there is already a public easement to connect to the nearby Rail Trail
Key Performance Indicators		Comprehensive trail system; new pedestrian paths; increased pedestrian activity
Partners & Resources		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard, Open Space & Recreation Committee, DPW, DCR, landscape and wayfinding consultant



*Ashburnham Rail Trail head near the Village Center*  
Source: OverUnder



### Diagnostic

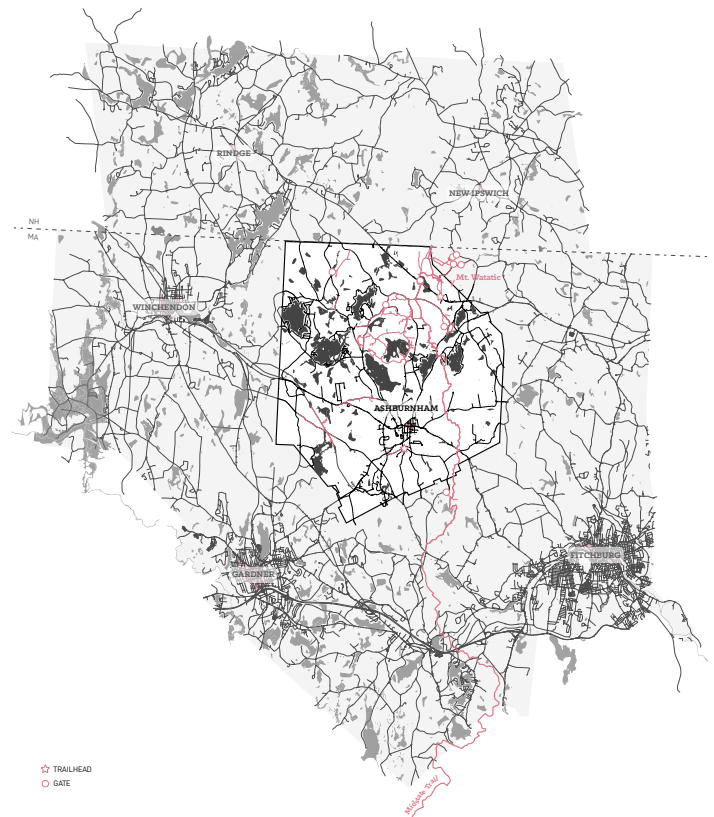
While Ashburnham has plentiful and beautiful recreational space, there's a disconnect between it and the Village Center. Not only is it crucial to point the way to prominent spaces from downtown, attracting individuals from those spaces is key to helping the downtown thrive. The closest trail is the Ashburnham Rail Trail, which is just far enough South from Main Street that a visitor wouldn't even know it existed.

### Action Item

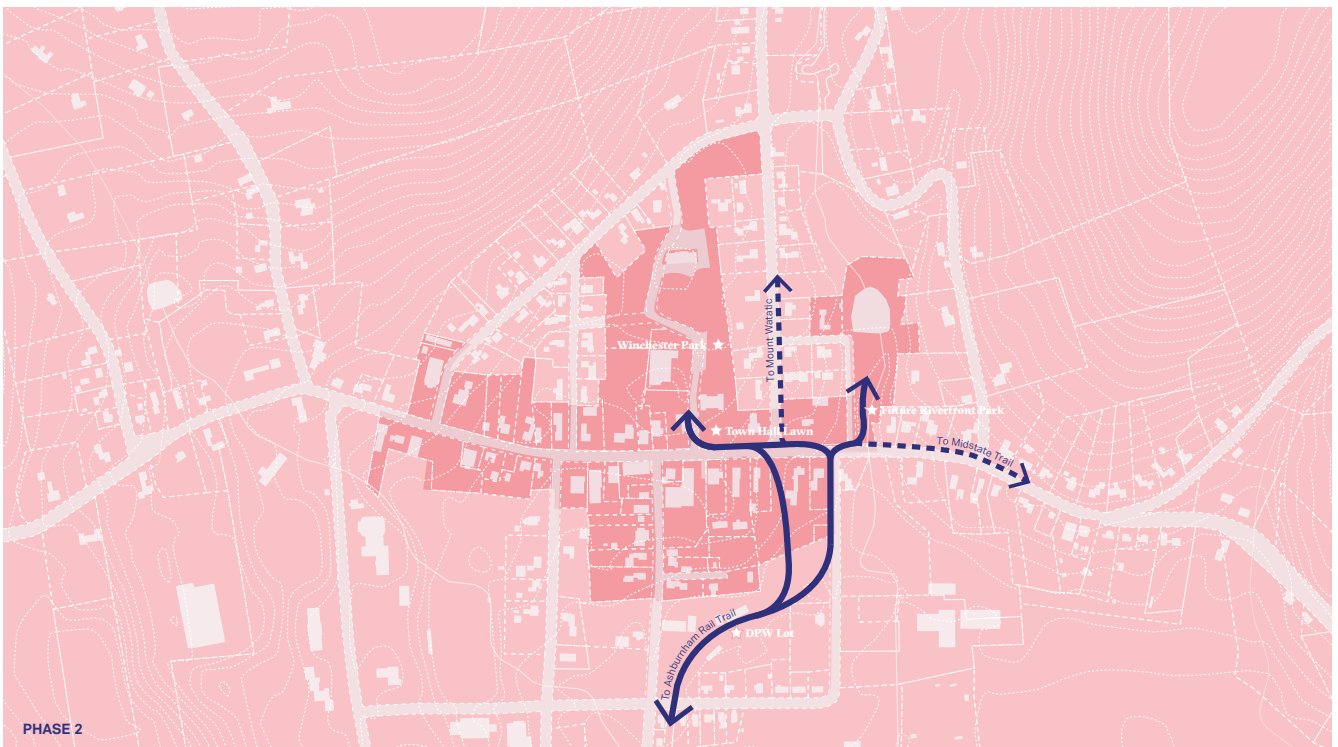
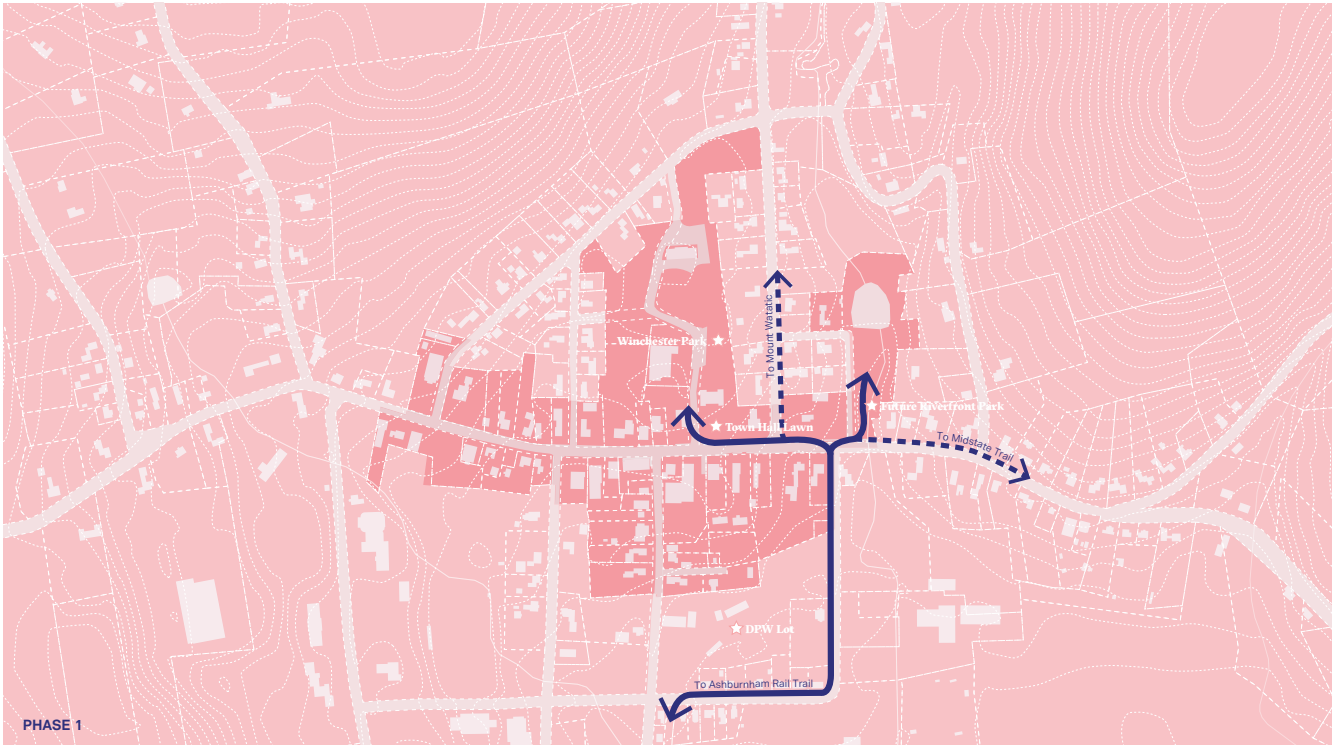
Signage is the key element to making this project successful. A wayfinding consultant would be hired to help determine a signage master plan to properly locate signs. Actual signage design can involve any number of creative solutions, from formal permanent signage to road and sidewalk paint to art/placemaking pieces. There could also be maps produced that detail all the prominent open spaces in Ashburnham and their proximity (in walking time and/or driving distance) to the Village Center.

### Process

- Hire a wayfinding consultant
- Brainstorm design concepts for connecting Main Street to prominent open spaces
- Create a signage master plan
- Design actual wayfinding elements
- Produce bid package for fabricators



**Ashburnham Nearby Trails & Trailheads**  
**Source: OverUnder**



*Phasing of a Village Center multi-use path and potential connections to nearby attractions.  
Source: OverUnder*

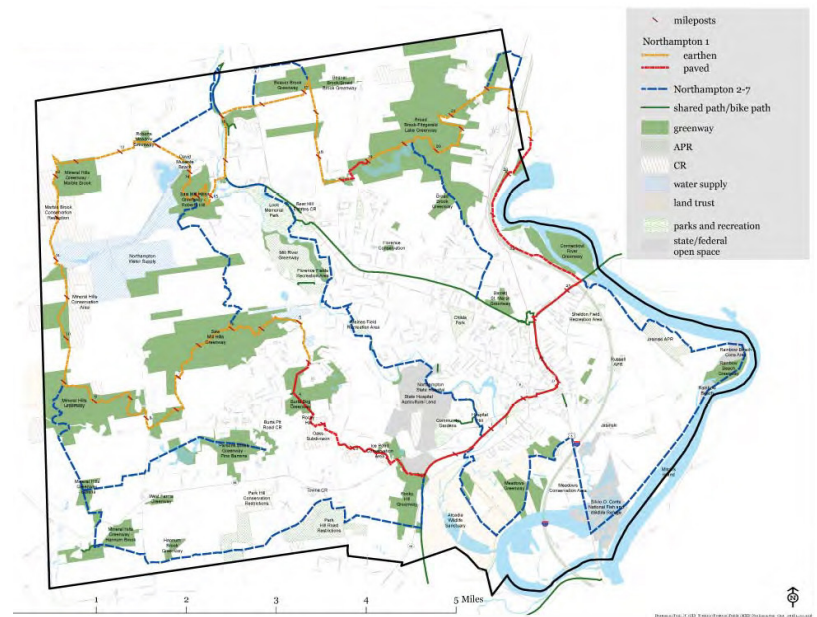
## Best Practice

# ONE Northampton

**Location** Northampton, MA



The Northampton Open Space, Recreation, and Multi-Use Trail Plan included a recommendation to "Develop a ONE Northampton trail that encircles the city, building on existing trails, adding trails where there are gaps, with a good treadway, consistent signing. ONE Northampton should be an easily identifiable trail and attract more people."

The City of Northampton will use a \$50,000 MassTrails grant to fund the development of this long distance walking and mountain biking trail.



**Source:** Northampton Open Space, Recreation, and Multi-Use Trail Plan

# Create an incentivization program to shop locally

Category		Private Realm
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		Low Budget (less than \$50,000)  Potential Funding Sources: Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, SBA's Restaurant Revitalization Funding Program, MGCC's BIZ-M-POWER and Small Business Technical Assistance Grant, or Massachusetts DHCD's Community Development Block Grant for municipalities with a population of under 50,000.
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk – free for businesses
Key Performance Indicators		Increased pedestrian traffic; increased number of visitors; increased business revenue; reduced leakage from Ashburnham's market to larger markets
Partners & Resources		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard, Business owners



*Creative Connections on Main Street.  
Source: OverUnder*



## Diagnostic

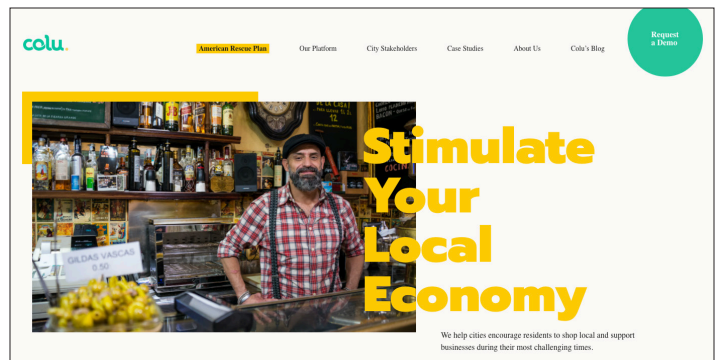
It's no secret that residents of Ashburnham regularly travel to neighboring areas and towns to shop, whether it be for necessities like groceries, or for other desired goods and services, rather than travel to the Village Center. This "leakage" from Ashburnham's consumer market to larger markets means that money is not being circulated through Ashburnham, which would benefit both the businesses and residents themselves. The idea of shopping locally has been embraced in towns small and large as a way to combat the very conditions that have contributed to towns falling into difficulty.

## Action Item

There are many ways to structure an incentivization program. One option is to simply create a centralized discount program that applies to all businesses in the Village Center. Often this will entail gaining access to various discounts upon spending X dollars or after visiting a certain number of times. This can be the same kind of discount for all businesses (e.g. spend \$50, get \$5 toward next purchase), or can be tailored to individual businesses (e.g. buy 5 pieces of artwork at Creative Connections, get a 6th free). Another option is introducing a currency that is only exchanged in the Village Center. There would likely need to be an "ambassador" for this new currency to promote its use and educate residents and businesses.

## Process

- Determine if this program will be short or long term — short term could generate more interest and immediate activity, whereas long term could affect more lasting change
- Create centralized discount program that applies to all Village Center businesses
- Allow each business to tailor their discount(s)
- Consider introducing currency only accepted at Village Center businesses
- Appoint "ambassador" of new currency to promote and educate on its use
- Consider collaborating with a company like [Colu](#), which partners with towns and cities to create a mobile app that runs a customized rewards program



*Homepage of Colu, a company that partners with cities and towns to create a mobile app which encourages local shopping.*



*Example of advertising the rewards program in Akron, OH.*



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## 6. Attract New Investment

DRAFT

# Attract investment for the redevelopment of the DPW lot

Category		Private Realm
Location		Ashburnham Village Center
Origin		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard
Budget		High Budget (\$200,000+)  Potential Funding Sources: MassDevelopment's Site Readiness Program & Underutilized Properties Program, Brownfields Redevelopment Remediation Fund, Housing Development Incentive Program, Community Development Block Grant
Timeframe		Long Term
Risk		High Risk - need to create an attractive downtown first, in order to be able to attract potential investors.
Key Performance Indicators		Increased residential population; increased number of businesses; pedestrian traffic; increased number of visitors; increased business revenue; increased tax revenue
Partners & Resources		Economic Development Commission, Town Selectboard, DPW, potential developer, Village Center community



*Current condition of the DPW Lot.  
Source: OverUnder*

### Diagnostic

A sizeable town-owned parcel sits adjacent to the Village Center. Currently used by the Department of Public Works (DPW), the lot could be transformed to bring welcome new development to Ashburnham's downtown. Planning for the site began several years ago, but was delayed by the pandemic, which has had a chilling effect on new developments.

The DPW site can not only be a fiscally positive contribution to the Town, but new housing and commercial activity is also likely to benefit other Village Center businesses. Service businesses such as coffee shops, pharmacies and dry cleaners need more people than they once did within walking distance to thrive, due to online competition and greater mobility created by highway improvements.

### Action Item

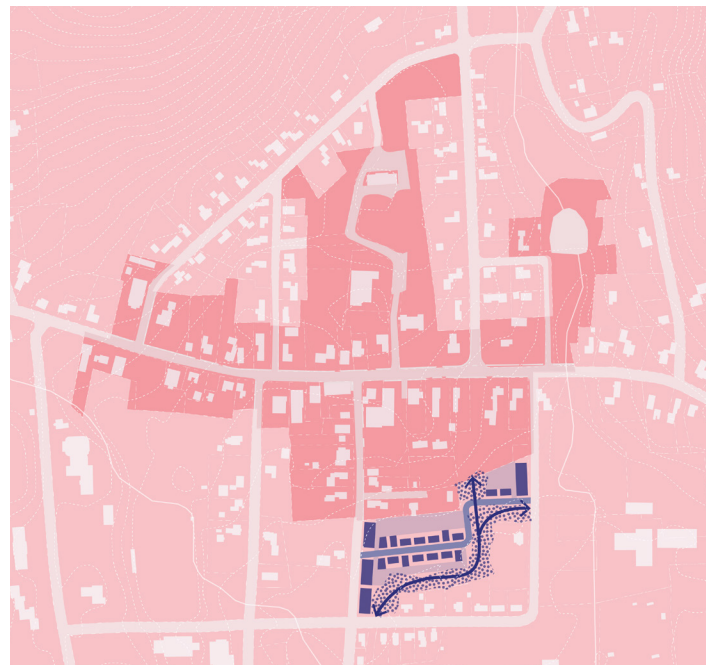
The Town has recently completed a build-out analysis and fiscal impacts study. A market research study is now needed to align aspirations with market realities.

### Process

- Obtain funding to conduct a market research study
- Engage consultant
- Consultant will conduct interviews with key stakeholders, complete a market analysis, evaluate demographic trends, and provide comparative analysis of similar properties
- The consultant's report will provide the Town with a realistic view of what is possible
- The Town will then prepare a package to attract potential investors



*DPW Lot Design Charette, 2007*



*Redevelop the DPW Lot to bring new residential and commercial development near the Village Center.*

*Source: OverUnder*

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# Appendix

1. Outdoor Dining/Retail Community Toolkit  
(prepared by CivicMoxie)
2. Mobility Plan Guide  
(prepared by Stantec)
3. Ashburnham Business Survey