Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Town of Boylston

dhcd
Massachusetts

RAPID RECOVERY PLANS

dhcd Massachusetts
RAPID RECOVERY PLANS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF

HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

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

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

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Table of Contents

Figures & Tables:

Figures & Tables:

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.

Phase I
DIAGNOSTIC

Phase II
PROJECT IDEAS

Phase III
FINAL PLAN

Mar   Apr   May   Jun   Jul   Aug
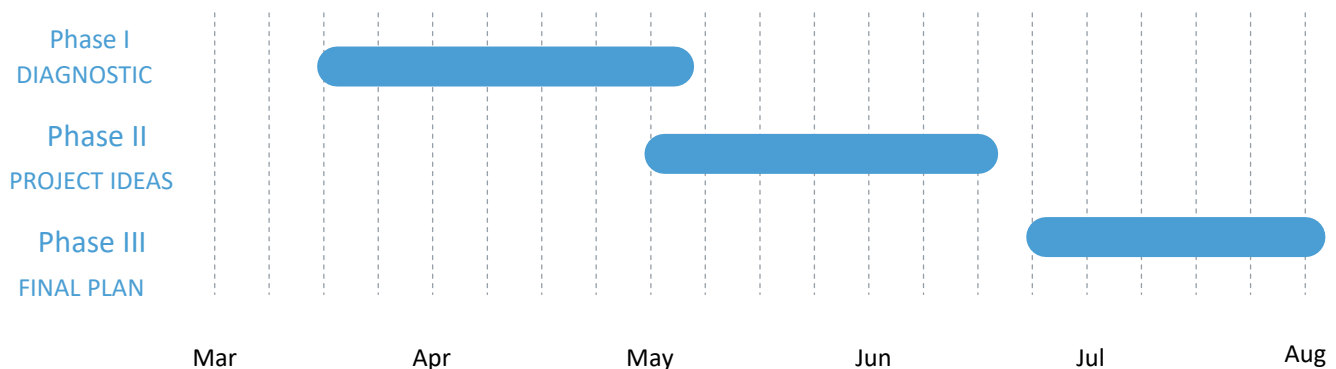
In Phase 1: Diagnostic, Plan Facilitators utilized the Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework that was adapted from the award-winning Commercial DNA approach as published by the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) in "Preparing a Commercial District Diagnostic", and authored by Larisa Ortiz, 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.

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.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Rapid Recovery Planning Program

● Program Communities

○ Non-Participating Towns and Cities

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework

CUSTOMER BASE
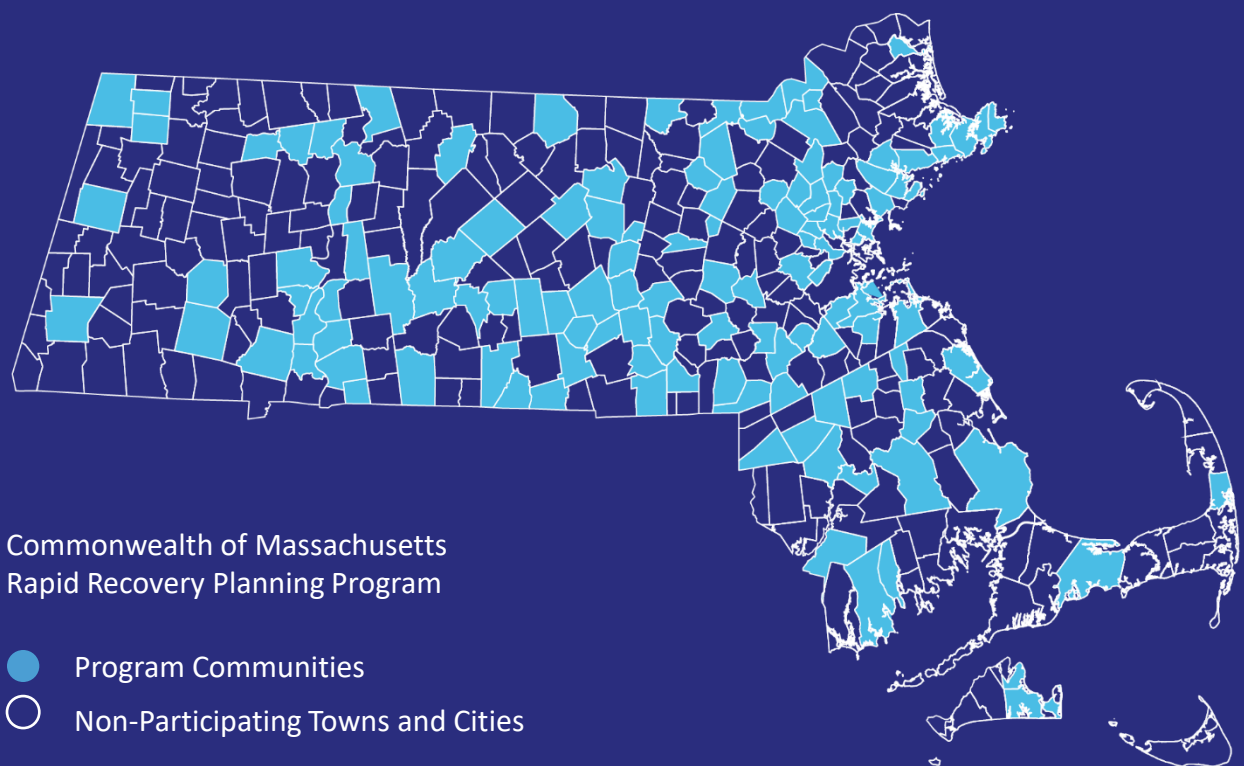
Who are the customers of the businesses within the Study Area?

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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?

ADMIN CAPACITY

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

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

Public Realm   Private Realm   Tenant Mix   Revenue/Sales   Admin Capacity   Cultural/Arts   Other

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Building a Better, More Resilient Boylston

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Town of Boylston has been working with businesses and community members on pandemic recovery strategies. In spring of 2021, the Town redoubled its efforts through participation in a statewide "Rapid Recovery Program" intended to help preserve and revitalize Massachusetts downtowns and commercial business areas. Aided by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC- Plan Facilitator) and other state and regional entities, the Town collected data to demonstrate the impacts of COVID-19 on downtown commercial activity, surveyed business owners and residents about their needs and priorities, and developed short, medium, and long-term recommendations based on community consensus and expert feedback. The findings and recommendations are included herein as the *Town of Boylston Rapid Recovery Plan*.

Boylston residents, business owners, and local government have been working together to help mitigate economic fallout from COVID-19. The *Town of Boylston Rapid Recovery Plan* builds on countless dialogues and measures to formally quantify needs, establish community supported strategies, and help the town make the case for external project funding. The Planning Team (CMRPC and the Town) have developed a set of strategies for supporting business recovery in Boylston's primary commercial area: the Route 140 corridor. While this initiative focuses its attention on businesses within this target area, many of the strategies are applicable to businesses regardless of location. Similarly, the initiative prioritizes short-term projects. Accordingly, the project team focused in on projects that could be immediately implemented and were low-cost or free to implement. That said, medium and long-term projects, alongside higher cost projects are included as well.

Figure 1. Map of Study Area: Route 140/ Shrewsbury Street, Boylston, Massachusetts
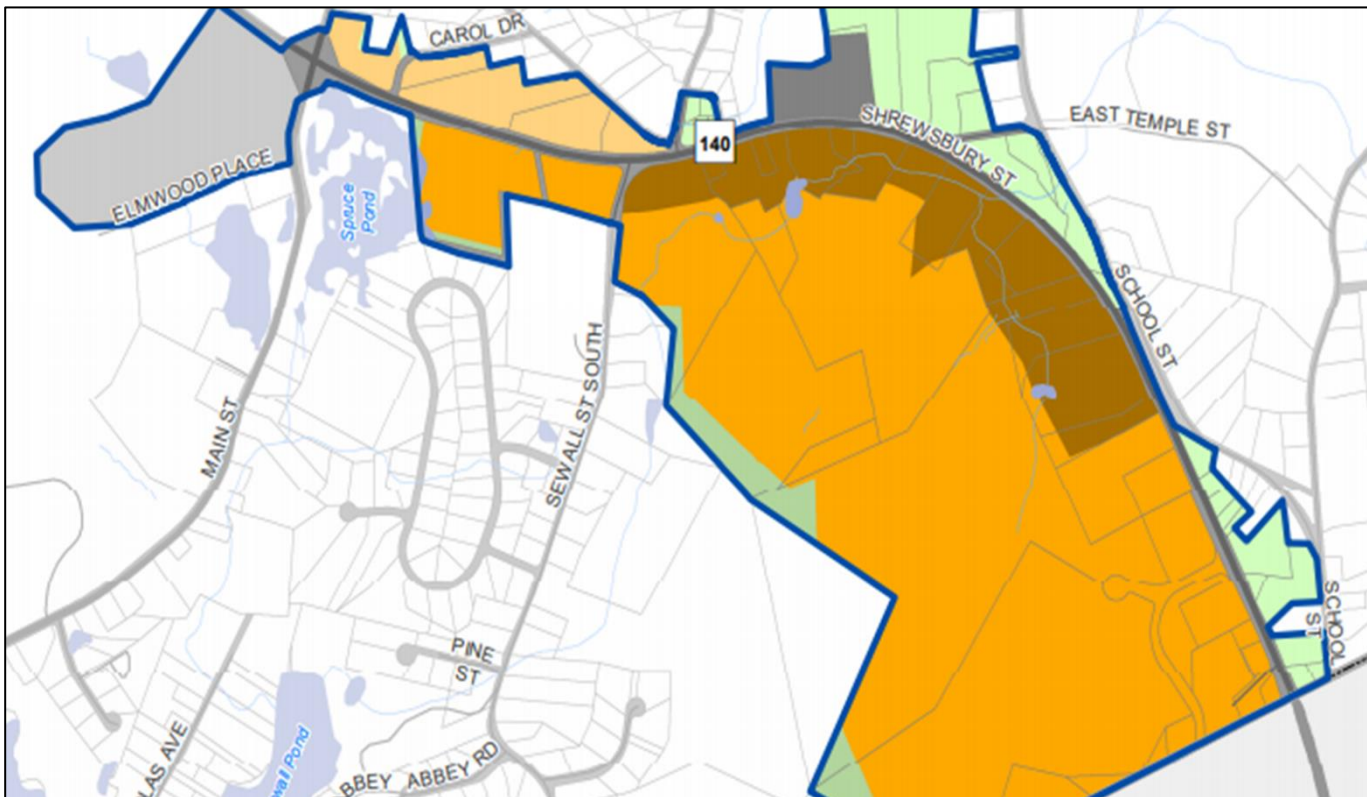
An overview of the study area.

Figure 2. Partial Aerial of Study Area: Route 140/ Shrewsbury Street, Boylston, Massachusetts

An aerial photograph of the study area looking northwesterly. Wachusett Mountain and the Wachusett Reservoir can both be seen in the top right.

DIAGNOSTIC PHASE

Phase I of the Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) process focused on diagnosing existing conditions in the target area. During Phase I, CMRPC gathered and reviewed information to identify findings and inform eventual project recommendations. The diagnostic phase was crucial for fully examining the current situation in the study area to allow for the development of prudent project recommendations. In order to accomplish this, CMRPC and other participating team members collected and analyzed a variety of data from sources such as the U.S. Census, CoStar, ESRI Business Analyst, and a local business survey. Additionally, the CMRPC Drone Team conducted aerial photography of the Route 140/ Shrewsbury Street Corridor, aiding in visual analysis.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

During the Phase I (diagnostic phase), the RRP team developed a local business survey to collect information and input from local business owners. The local business survey covered several topics to better understand the existing business conditions in the study area. Some of the topics included questions about how COVID-19 has impacted respondents' businesses, questions about storefronts and facades, and respondents' opinions about potential strategies to support businesses in the study area.

A total of 12 surveys were received. Of the businesses surveyed, 83% reported being impacted by COVID-19 in some way (e.g., decline in revenue, employee layoffs, incurred expenses to implement safety measures). Furthermore, 42% of the surveyed business owners reported experiencing reduced operating hours/capacity. A more detailed overview of the business survey results can be found in the Diagnostic Section, and the full business survey results can be found in the appendix.

Additionally, CMRPC staff conducted stakeholder interviews with several business owners in the Route 140 Corridor. The feedback, insight, and details gathered from these interviews were invaluable in providing perspectives on the challenges business owners were facing and guided the creation of project recommendations.

Figure 3. RRP Outreach Flyer

The project team conducted outreach in several ways, including a survey of businesses in the target area.

Figure 4. RRP Business Survey Results
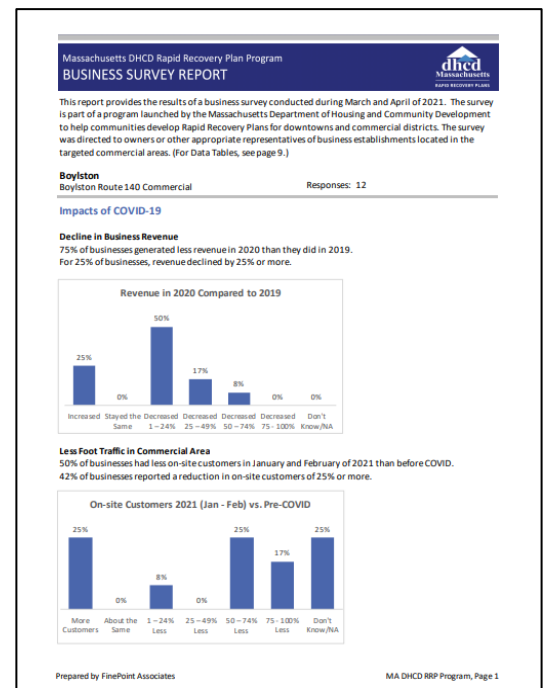
Boylston's Business Survey Report

COMPLEMENTARY PLANNING EFFORTS

The Town of Boylston has consistently worked to promote and support economic development in the community. Beginning in 2020, the Town started updating its town-wide comprehensive Master Plan to be completed in June 2022. The Master Plan update process ran parallel to the RRP program and will provide detailed analysis and recommendations on topics including economic development and the Route 140 corridor.

Overseen by a dedicated steering committee, the Master Plan process included robust community engagement. As an initial step, the town surveyed residents about their priorities across various topics, including those relevant to the Route 140 corridor that is the focus of this LRRP plan. More than 400 Boylston residents participated in the survey, and the Town then held a community-wide visioning session that was open to all residents, business owners, and interested stakeholders. The goal of the session was to lay out a long-term vision for the community. With a vision established, and clear preferences identified in the survey, the committee has been working to identify goals and strategies to advance the collective vision.

Additionally, the Town has undertaken several other planning efforts that inform and complement some of the themes present in this LRRP plan. Some of the major accomplishments over the last 20 years include: Boylston Community Development Plan (2005), Route 140 Corridor Plan: Shrewsbury Street, Boylston (2010), the Central Thirteen Prioritization Project (2012), Boylston Open Space and Recreation Plan (2020), and Boylston Housing Production Plan (2021).

Aspects of the Master Plan process and other past planning efforts will supplement and inform the goals and strategies that are central to this LRRP plan. Similarly, the goals from this plan will reinforce and augment the Master Planning process and other future planning efforts. Ultimately, this will ensure alignment between complementing planning efforts and enhance the development of detailed implementation strategies.

Figure 5. Screenshots of prior planning efforts
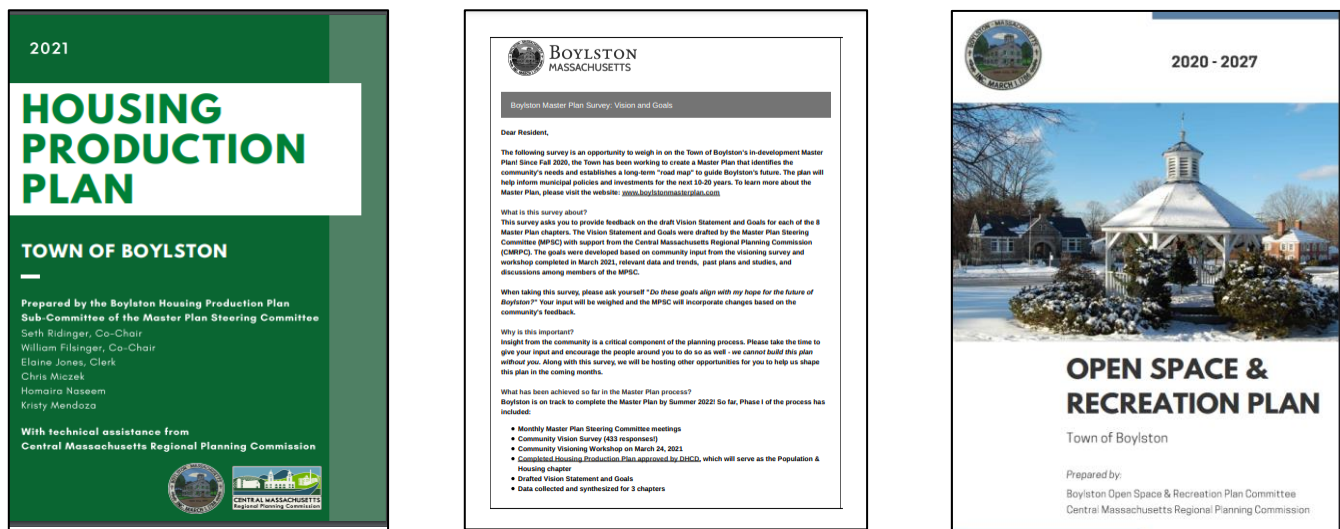
Some of the previous planning efforts, including Boylston's 2021 Housing Production Plan and the 2020 Open Space & Recreation Plan.

Project Recommendations

The following project recommendations for the Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street were carefully developed during this LRRP Process:

Project 1: Establishment of an Economic Development Committee

Development of an Economic Development Committee (EDC) to enhance the Town's ability to implement economic development projects, including those included in the RRP plan.

Project 2: Sidewalk, bike path, and access management (Route 140, west)

Pilot project to encourage multi-modal activity and safety on the western segment of the target area. Using paint, vertical flex posts, and other temporary installations, establish separated shared-use paths on 140, connected to the bicycle lane loop on East Temple Street. Reconfiguration and reduction of access points to commercial plaza will serve as supporting strategy.

Project 3: Placemaking through aesthetic enhancements (Route 140, west)

Landscaping and other low-cost aesthetic improvements in support of comprehensive placemaking efforts. General landscaping, defining gateways, half wall to define knoll next to pizza as passive recreation area, string lights and picnic tables between select buildings, improvements to signage and wayfinding.

Project 4: Placemaking through programming (Route 140, west)

Hold reoccurring and pop-up events in target area to help brand the area as a destination, attract patrons, and complement physical placemaking activities.

Project 5: Zoning and Design Guidelines (Town-wide)

Adopt zoning that better reflects the varied segments of the target area, using either overlays or changes to the base zoning. In complement, adopt design guidelines to help shape new development and exterior renovations through a menu or architectural and landscaping options.

Project 6: Façade Improvement Program (Route 140 corridor)

Undertake a façade or storefront improvement program to incentive and support private investment in building exteriors and landscaping.

Project 7: Expand public and private business capacity (Town-wide)

Enhance the Town's public and private business capacity through adjustments to procedures, processes, and capacity.

Diagnostic

Highlights from the Physical Environment Diagnostic

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REALM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

During the diagnostic phase of the RRP process, CMRPC collected and analyzed information from numerous data sources to evaluate the existing conditions and grade physical environment features of the Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street corridor. Using metrics prescribed by the RRP program, CMRPC planners assigned letter grades of A, B, C, or Fail to aspects of the physical environment including sidewalks, street trees and benches, lighting, wayfinding and signage, roadbeds and crosswalks, windows, outdoor displays and dining, awnings, and facades.

An assessment of the physical environment highlights many opportunities for improvements in both the public and private realm. The Town could focus on improving Sidewalks and Street Trees and Benches, for which it "Failed" the assessment. The Town received a "C" in the Lighting assessment and received a "B" in the Wayfinding and Signage assessment. The Study Area contains 114,747 sq ft of ground floor retail space. It is important to note that overall grades were determined by averaging the rankings recorded at many data points throughout the Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street corridor. Therefore, there may be specific areas or properties located in the Study Area that would rank individually higher or lower than the average grades seen in the table to the right.

Table 1. Physical Environment Diagnostic

Physical Environment Feature	Public Realm Grade	Private Realm Grade
Sidewalks	FAIL	N/A
Street Trees and Benches	FAIL	N/A
Lighting	C	B
Wayfinding and Signage	B	B
Roadbed and Crosswalks	N/A	N/A
Windows	N/A	B
Outdoor Displays/Dining	N/A	C
Awnings	N/A	FAIL
Façade	N/A	B
Total Number of Storefronts	N/A	N/A
Total Ground Floor Retail Space	N/A	114,747
Total Ground Floor Office Space	N/A	170,242
Total Ground Floor Manufacturing Space	N/A	229,995

Table showing the assessed grade of public and private features in the Study Area.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Opportunity: Pedestrian Infrastructure

CONNECTIVITY

As discussed, Boylston is well-connected to major regional transportation routes. Yet, at a more granular level, Route 140 has a relative lack of internal connectivity. Connections between different businesses in the study area are mostly limited to cars, given the lack of sidewalks and bicycle infrastructure. The lack of internal connectivity among businesses and nearby pockets of housing present possible limitations to development and access to customers for businesses along the Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street corridor.

PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

In the diagnostic section, the study area received a "FAIL" grade for sidewalks. The lack of sidewalks makes pedestrian travel difficult and dangerous. This was reflected in the business survey, in which 42% of respondents ranked "Improvement of Streetscape and Sidewalks" as Very Important or Important, while 42% of respondents ranked it as "Moderately Important." Additionally, in the recently conducted "Boylston Master Plan Update: Community Vision Survey", the most

Figure 6. Route 140 goat paths

A view of the lack of sidewalks in the Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street Corridor.

selected transportation option residents would like to see in Boylston was "improved sidewalks and crosswalks for pedestrians" at 67%, with the second closest choice being dedicated bike lanes at 36%. A link to these survey results can be found in Appendix A.

The lack of sidewalks along Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street has the potential to deter Boylston residents living in nearby housing from walking to businesses and prevents a more clearly defined and safer pedestrian connection among businesses.

Opportunity: Aesthetic Improvements

GATEWAY

The Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street Corridor acts as a gateway of entry or exit for many visitors traveling to or through Boylston, and importantly, for Boylston residents themselves. In the Boylston Master Plan Update: Community Vision Survey, Boylston residents were asked to identify their top 3 choices of what they think Boylston's greatest strength is. "Natural beauty" and "friendly small-town character" were the second and third most selected as a first choice by respondents, closely behind "location." When given the opportunity in the same survey, many respondents commented that Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street did not reflect residents' desired small-town character and natural beauty.

This sentiment is reflected in the "FAIL" grade that the study area received in the Physical Environment assessment for Street Trees and Benches. There are opportunities for improvements in the study area's private realm, including storefronts and facades, landscaping, and others.

Figure 7. Route 140 island and signage

The streetscape and storefronts along Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street.

Aesthetic improvements in both the public and private realms along the Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street Corridor can create a "gateway" into Boylston that better matches the small-town and natural character that residents value.

Figure 8. Route 140 businesses and parking

Opportunity: Infrastructure

SEWER

Currently, the Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street Corridor does not have a sewer system. The lack of a sewer system poses several different challenges, including limiting economic development in the study area to certain types of businesses and facilities.

In the Boylston Master Plan Update: Community Vision Survey, 52% of 360 respondents indicated they would support public investment in a town sewer system along major commercial corridors (Route 140 and/or Route 70).

Businesses and parking in the Study Area.

Figure 9: Boylston Master Plan Update: Community Vision Survey, 2021.

Q16 Would you support public investment in a town sewer system in any of the following scenarios? Check all that apply

Answered: 360   Skipped: 73

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Along major commercial corridors (Route 70 and/or Route 140)	52%	186
I would not support public investment in a town sewer system	36%	131
In new major residential developments	33%	117
To support commercial development of Town owned land around the Gough House/Hillside	26%	94
In rural residential areas	25%	90
Total Respondents: 360		

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Asset: Access and Location

ACCESS TO MAJOR HIGHWAYS AND REGIONAL ROADS

Boylston's Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street Corridor is well connected to major regional transportation infrastructure. This is in addition to being located approximately 15-20 minutes to Worcester, one hour to Boston, and one hour to Providence, RI.

These connections, and Boylston's natural geographical location, provide access to many of New England's largest regional economic markets. These advantages can be seen by businesses locating distribution facilities in Boylston, such as FedEx's ground transportation facility seen below to the right.

On a more localized level, the study area's direct and indirect access to major transportation routes like I-290, I-190, and Route 146 make it a corridor that Boylston residents and those from surrounding towns often pass through. This presents opportunity for drivers passing through to visit businesses in the study area.

Figure 10. Regional map
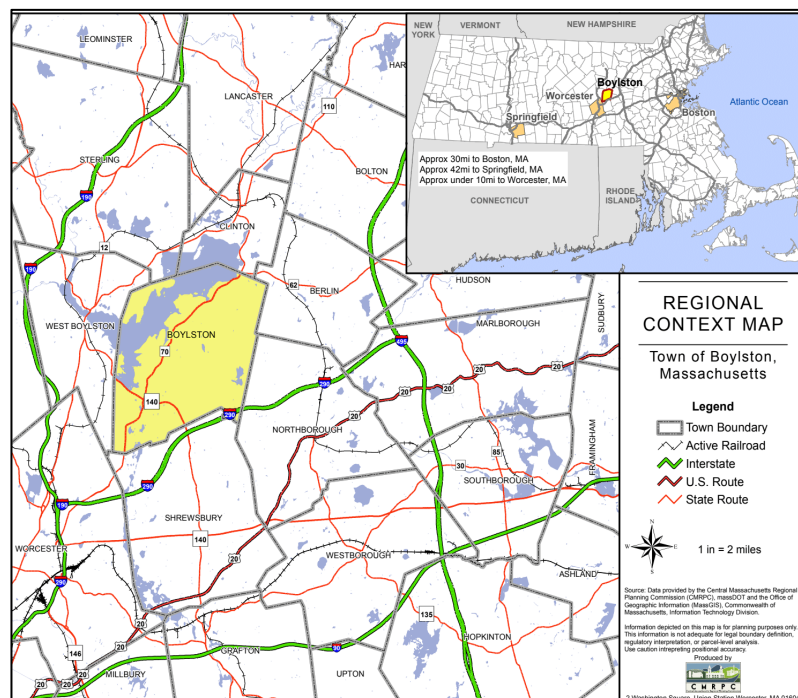
A regional context map of Boylston.

Figure 11. Aerial of target area distribution center

An aerial view of the FedEx distribution facility located in the study area near the Route 140 on-ramps to I-290.

Asset: Open Spaces and Recreation

WACHUSETT RESERVOIR

Boylston is one of four Massachusetts towns that border the Commonwealth's second largest inland body of water, the Wachusett Reservoir. The Wachusett Reservoir presents an abundance of recreational opportunities, including hiking, fishing, trail-running, cross-country skiing, and other activities. The proximity of the study area to this tremendous natural asset is a boon to the community. Boylston residents and visitors alike pass through the corridor on their way to enjoy the many recreational opportunities available at the Reservoir. Yet, there is also the need for improved direct or indirect connections between the study area location and the access points to roads and trails near the Reservoir. This would complement sidewalks for improved pedestrian access to the Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street corridor.

Figure 12. Map of Wachusett Reservoir

Wachusett Reservoir Public Access Map, MassDCR Office of Watershed Management. The Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street Corridor study area is located just to the south/southeast of "South Bay" below where the map cuts off.

Business on Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street

The Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street Corridor has 27 existing businesses that offer a variety of services. The Tables below and to the right provide a detailed overview of the types of businesses in the study area.

Table 2. Number of businesses in the target area by type

2020 Total (NAICS11-99) Businesses	27
2020 Agric/Forestry/Fish/Hunting (NAICS11) Businesses	0
2020 Mining (NAICS21) Businesses	0
2020 Utilities (NAICS22) Businesses	0
2020 Construction (NAICS23) Businesses	3
2020 Manufacturing (NAICS31-33) Businesses	1
2020 Wholesale Trade (NAICS42) Businesses	1
2020 Retail Trade (NAICS44-45) Businesses	2
2020 Motor Vehicle/Parts Dealers (NAICS441) Businesses	0
2020 Furniture/Home Furnishings (NAICS442) Businesses	0
2020 Electronics/Appliances (NAICS443) Businesses	0
2020 Bldg Material/Garden Equip&Suppl (NAICS444) Businesses	1
2020 Food & Beverage Stores (NAICS445) Businesses	0
2020 Health/Personal Care (NAICS446) Businesses	0
2020 Gas Stations (NAICS447) Businesses	0
2020 Clothing/Accessories (NAICS448) Businesses	0
2020 Sports/Hobby/Book/Music (NAICS451) Businesses	0
2020 General Merchandise Stores (NAICS452) Businesses	0
2020 Misc Store Retailers (NAICS453) Businesses	0
2020 Nonstore Retailers (NAICS454) Businesses	0

Table 2. Number of businesses in the target area by type cont.

2020 Transportation/Warehouse (NAICS48-49) Businesses	1
2020 Information (NAICS51) Businesses	1
2020 Finance & Insurance (NAICS52) Businesses	1
2020 Central Bank/Crdt Intermediate(NAICS521-522) Businesses	0
2020 Securities/Commodity Contracts (NAICS523) Businesses	0
2020 Insur/Funds/Trusts/Other (NAICS524-525) Businesses	0
2020 Real Estate/Rental/Leasing (NAICS53) Businesses	1
2020 Prof/Scientific/Tech Srv (NAICS54) Businesses	2
2020 Legal Services (NAICS5411) Businesses	0
2020 Mgmt of Companies/Enterprises (NAICS55) Businesses	0
2020 Admin/Support/Waste Mgmt&Remediatn (NAICS56) Businesses	2
2020 Educational Services (NAICS61) Businesses	1
2020 Health Care/Social Assistance (NAICS62) Businesses	0
2020 Arts/Entertainment/Recreation (NAICS71) Businesses	3
2020 Accommodation/Food Services (NAICS72) Businesses	1
2020 Accommodation (NAICS721) Businesses	0
2020 Food Srv & Drinking Places (NAICS722) Businesses	1
2020 Other Srv excl Public Admin (NAICS81) Businesses	2
2020 Automotive Repair & Maint (NAICS8111) Businesses	0
2020 Public Administration (NAICS92) Businesses	2
2020 Unclassified Establishments (NAICS99) Businesses	3

Tables showing the types of businesses available in Route 140 target area.

Business Survey Results

A majority of businesses in Boylston's Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street corridor report a loss of on-site customers in 2021 as compared to Pre-COVID. Additionally, many cite the need for improvements in all realms, including more opportunities for outdoor dining and selling, as well as renovations of storefronts and building facades. See Appendix for complete results.

Figure 13. Business Survey results
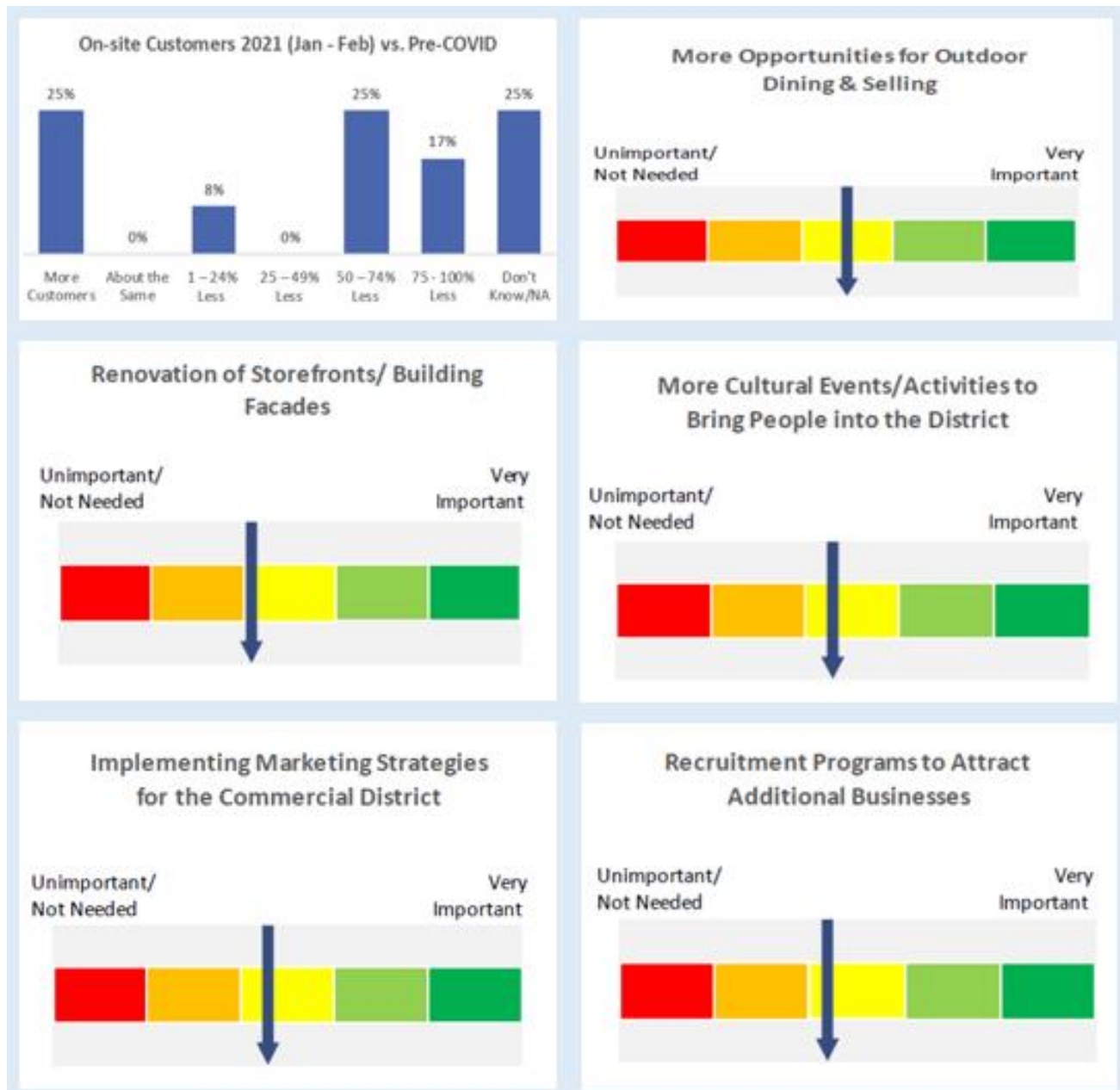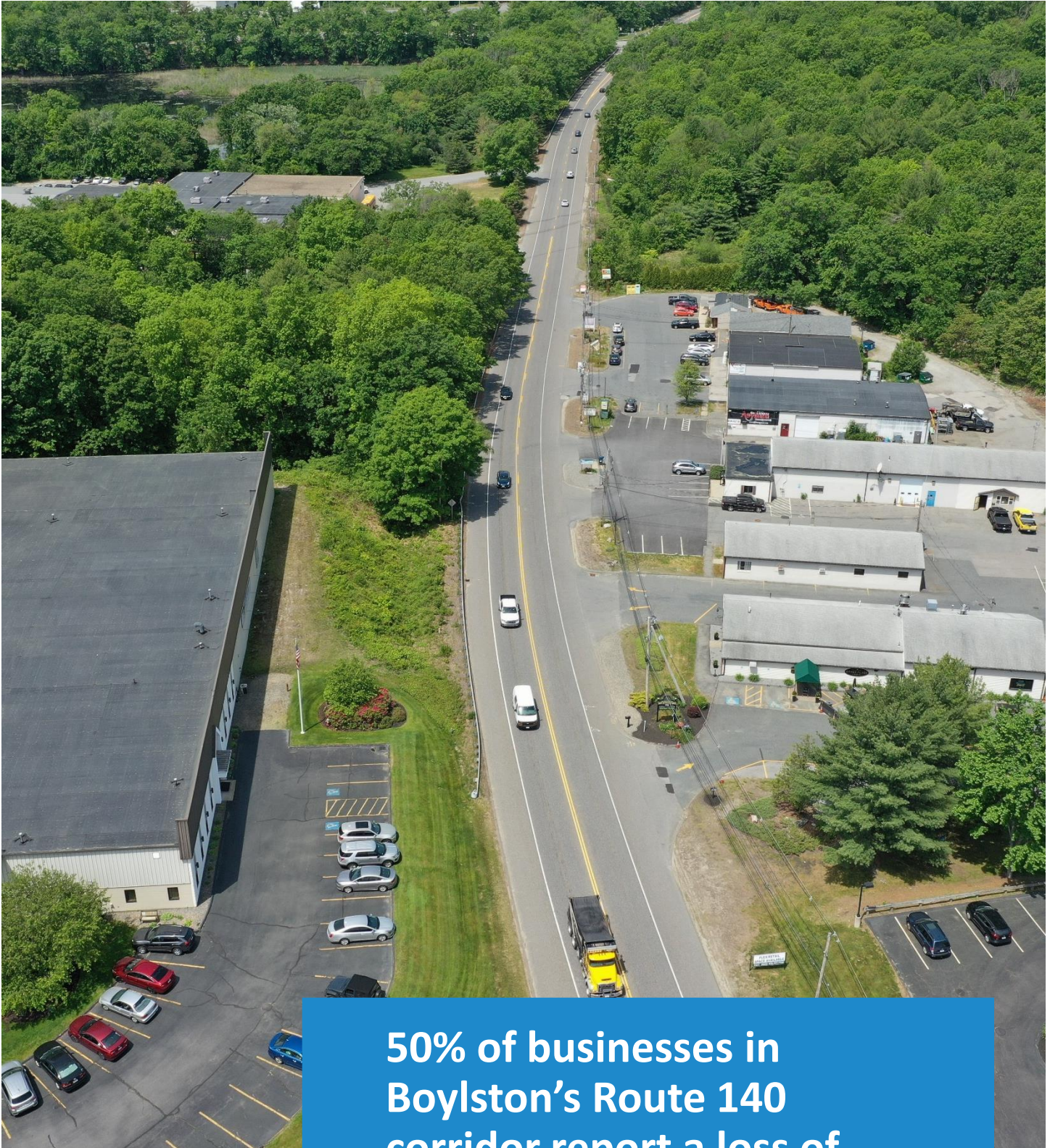
Ariel photo of Boylston's Route 140 corridor looking westward, several businesses and the surrounding streetscape.

50% of businesses in Boylston's Route 140 corridor report a loss of customers in 2021 as compared to pre-Covid.
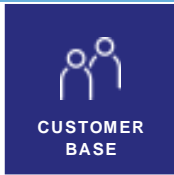
Consumer Demographics

The Study Area focuses on a subsection of the Town of Boylston that contains about 2% of its population. The Study Area has a larger household income but a slightly lower household size. The Study Area's population also has a proportionally similar educational attainment to the whole municipality and has proportionally similar population totals for different age ranges.

Image from annalect.com

Tables 3. Customer base diagnostic tables continued.

| Key Demographic Indicators	Study Area	Municipality
2021 Total Workforce/Employees	64	2,827
2021 Median Household Income (Esri)	$130,061	$105,870
2010 Median Age (U.S. Census)	N/A	44.3
2021 Median Age (Esri)	46.4	47.2
2021 Average Household Size (Esri)	2.48	2.56
2020 Educational Attainment Base Age 25+ (Esri)	74	3,517
2020 Population Age 25+: Graduate/Professional Degree (Esri)	16	632
2020 Population Age 25+: Bachelor's Degree (Esri)	28	1,256
2020 Population Age 25+: Associate's Degree (Esri)	6	385
2020 Population Age 25+: Some College/No Degree (Esri)	12	552
2020 Population Age 25+: High School Diploma (Esri)	10	534
2020 Population Age 25+: GED/Alternative Credential (Esri)	0	17
2020 Population Age 25+: 9-12th Grade/No Diploma (Esri)	1	69
2020 Population Age 25+: Less than 9th Grade (Esri)	1	72

Table showing a variety of demographic data for the Study Area and Boylston.

Tables 3. Customer base diagnostic tables

Population By Age	Study Area	Municipality
2020 Age 0-19 (Esri)	25	1,097
2020 Age 20-24 (Esri)	4	187
2020 Age 25-34 (Esri)	8	447
2020 Age 35-44 (Esri)	12	531
2020 Age 45-54 (Esri)	15	704
2020 Age 55-64 (Esri)	18	846
2020 Age 65-74 (Esri)	13	618
2020 Age 75-84 (Esri)	5	259
2020 Age 85+ (Esri)	2	112
2020 Total Population	102	4,801

Table showing the age breakdown in the Study Area and in the Town.

Key Findings

Streetscape & Sidewalks

The Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street Corridor received a "FAIL" grade for Sidewalks and Street Trees and Benches. In the Business Survey, the majority of surveyed businesses ranked improvements of the streetscape and sidewalks as a "Moderately Important" strategy to improve the study area's physical environment, with 5 businesses ranking the issue as "Important" or "Very Important."

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Private Realm

The Study Area's private realm received a B for Windows and Facades in its physical environment but received a C for Outdoor Display/Dining and a FAIL for Awnings. These two categories present the greatest opportunity for improvement to the physical environment in the study area's private realm.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Figure 14. Absent streetscaping and sidewalks

Businesses and streetscape of the Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street corridor looking westward.
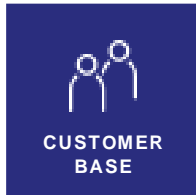
Demographics

The Study Area contains about just 2% of the Town's total population and has proportionally similar population totals for different age ranges. The Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street Corridor has a larger household income but a slightly lower household size. The Study Area's population also has a proportionally similar educational attainment base as the whole municipality.
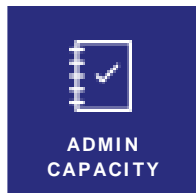
Organizing Body

There is currently no viable group acting as a steward for this area. Businesses in the area could benefit from a unifying organization, offering resources, support, and an information network.

Business Survey Results

Most businesses surveyed in Boylston's Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street Corridor, experienced some type of impact from COVID-19 pandemic. Of the businesses surveyed, 9 observed some decline in revenue in 2020 compared to 2019 and 4 reported either temporary or permanent closures. Additionally, 5 of the businesses surveyed reduced operating hours and/or capacity, experienced some level of employee layoffs, and incurred expenses to implement safety measures.

Project Recommendations

Project 1. Establishment of an Economic Development Committee

Category		Public and Private Realm
Location		Town-wide
Origin		Town of Boylston Planning Department; CMRPC
Budget		Low budget
Timeframe		Short Term (<1 year), ongoing
Risk		Low risk
Key Performance Indicators		Establishment of an Economic Development Committee that meets regularly with quorum; increase in economic develop implementation capacity; increase in business engagement activities; increase in new businesses, business growth, or receipts.
Partners & Resources		Board of Selectmen; Town Planner; other municipal boards, committees, and staff; non-residential property owners; business owners and liaisons (Chamber of Commerce); real estate brokers.

Figure 15. Westborough Economic Development Committee website
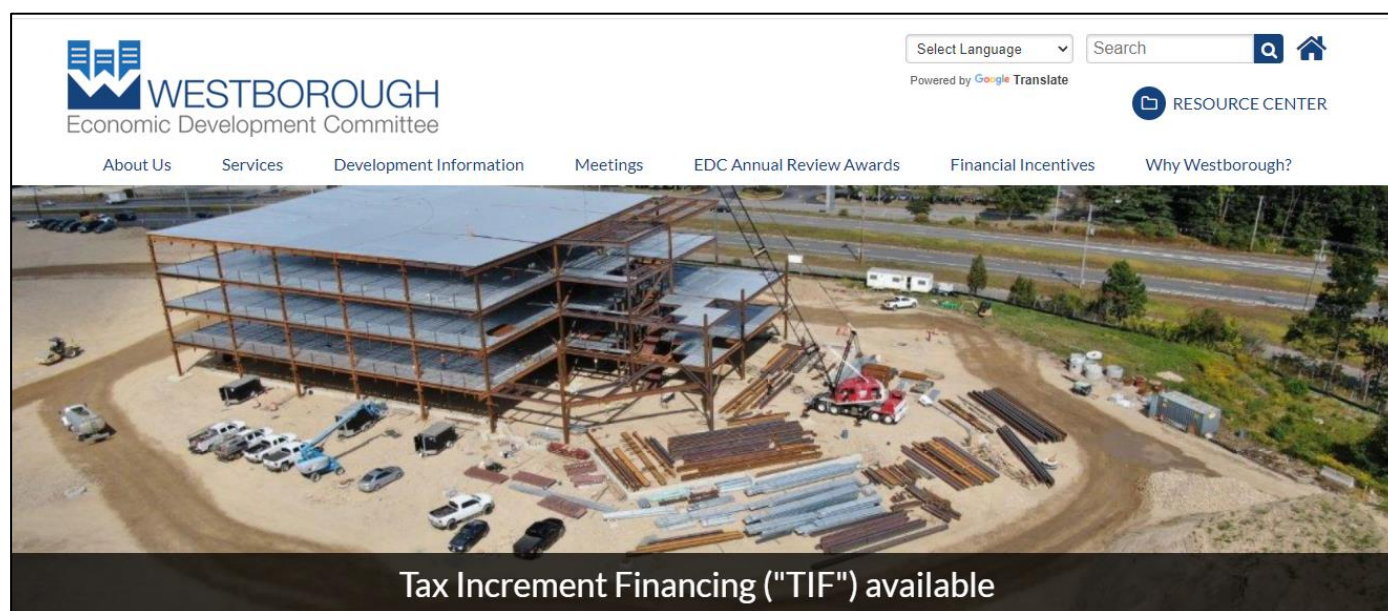
Economic Development Committees are an essential component of municipal economic development capacity. Such committees bring additional expertise and implementation capacity to professional staff, enabling more robust economic development planning, outreach, and activities.

Diagnostic:

The Town of Boylston has been working to enhance its public service and community development capacity. In 2020, the Town hired its first-ever Town Planner, a half-time staff position it shares with a nearby community. Accordingly, the Town is undertaking many first-time or first in a long-time planning initiatives. In addition to participating in the RRP program, the Town is working on a thorough update of its comprehensive Master Plan, and recently completed several topical planning initiatives. Despite these positive developments, the Town lacks staff and implementation capacity, especially around economic development.

Currently, the town has limited capacity to provide essential economic development functions. Boylston does not have a dedicated economic development staffer, Economic Development Committee, Business Association, or regular and proactive communications with the business community. Without additional resources, the town cannot expect to successfully undertake the projects outlined in this plan. The Town should establish an Economic Development Committee to support municipal staff in strategic economic development planning and implementation of RRP and related projects.

Action items:

- The Boylston Board of Selectmen should establish a committee of approximately 5-7 members that include representatives from various professional disciplines. Economic Development Committees are typically established as a means of providing municipal staff with additional expertise and implementation capacity for monitoring, assessing and strengthening existing economic development strategies and developing new strategies where appropriate. The committee complements staff input through the utilization and application of the special expertise possessed by its members.

- An EDC typically has between 5 and 7 members that represent different areas of the business community. The Town should ensure that the members of an EDC come from a spectrum of backgrounds so that the network created across the community is broad.

- Once established, the Committee should work to identify a guiding vision for its activities and develop core goals to help advance that vision. The other projects included in this plan can serve as a starting point and partial roadmap.

Figure 16. Southborough EDC Resource Center

EDCs provide supplemental expertise and implementation capacity to municipal staff. Figure 16 depicts a video of an Economic Summit held by the Southborough, MA EDC, which brought together the business community, municipal government, and residents for a long-term strategic planning process.

Figure 17. Shrewsbury EDC Promotes Town Center District
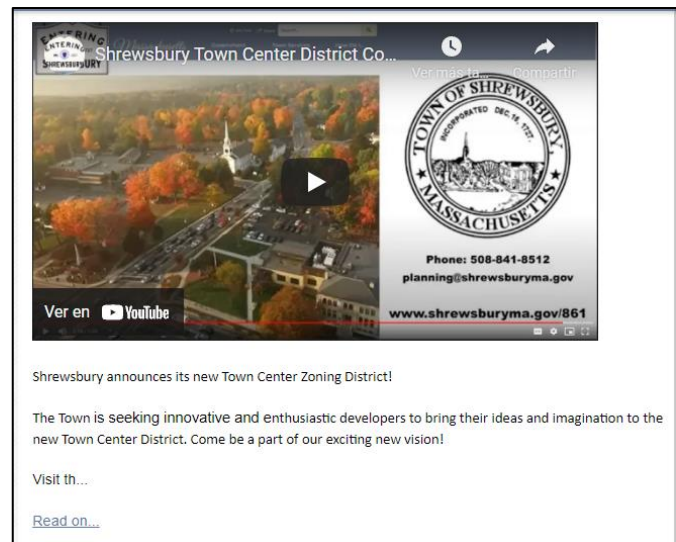
The Shrewsbury, MA EDC has been particularly effective in its collaborations with other boards and committees, developers, and state government. Figure 17 depicts a YouTube video the Shrewsbury EDC created to help promote its new Town Center District to developers.

Process:

- The Board of Selectmen establishes a standing committee of 5-7 members representing various professional disciplines. Members often include local business owners, owners of large commercial or industrial real estate holdings, real estate brokers, business or tourism advocates, and residents with expertise in land use, zoning, or planning. Members should be appointed based on knowledge of economic and business development, knowledge of other relevant fields, and useful skillsets, networks, and interests.

- Professional staff and external committee members should be appointed to non-voting positions for the purpose of liaising with, receiving updates from, and providing input on topics related to their area of expertise. Commonly, these include the Town Planner, a member of the Board of Selectmen, and other committees on an as-needed basis.

- Once established, the EDC should work on basic strategy articulation: develop a guiding vision/ purpose and goals and strategies to help advance its vision. Strategy development is aided by review of existing plans and studies, including the RRP, Master Plan and supporting community engagement materials. The projects included in this plan are ideally implemented by an EDC and supporting municipal staff.

Depending on the other goals identified by the EDC, members can also undertake and support different projects. Common tasks include:

- Helping to implement strategic plans

- Applying for grants, maintaining business and vacancy registries

- Conducting proactive business outreach for prospecting and retention.

- Organizing small business roundtables or helping get a Business Association off the ground

- Marketing the town to developers or working on initiatives to help revitalize the downtown

- Building local supply chains

- Helping local entrepreneurs or aspiring business owners navigate processes and get established.

Figure 18. Boylston Economic Development Marketing in Action
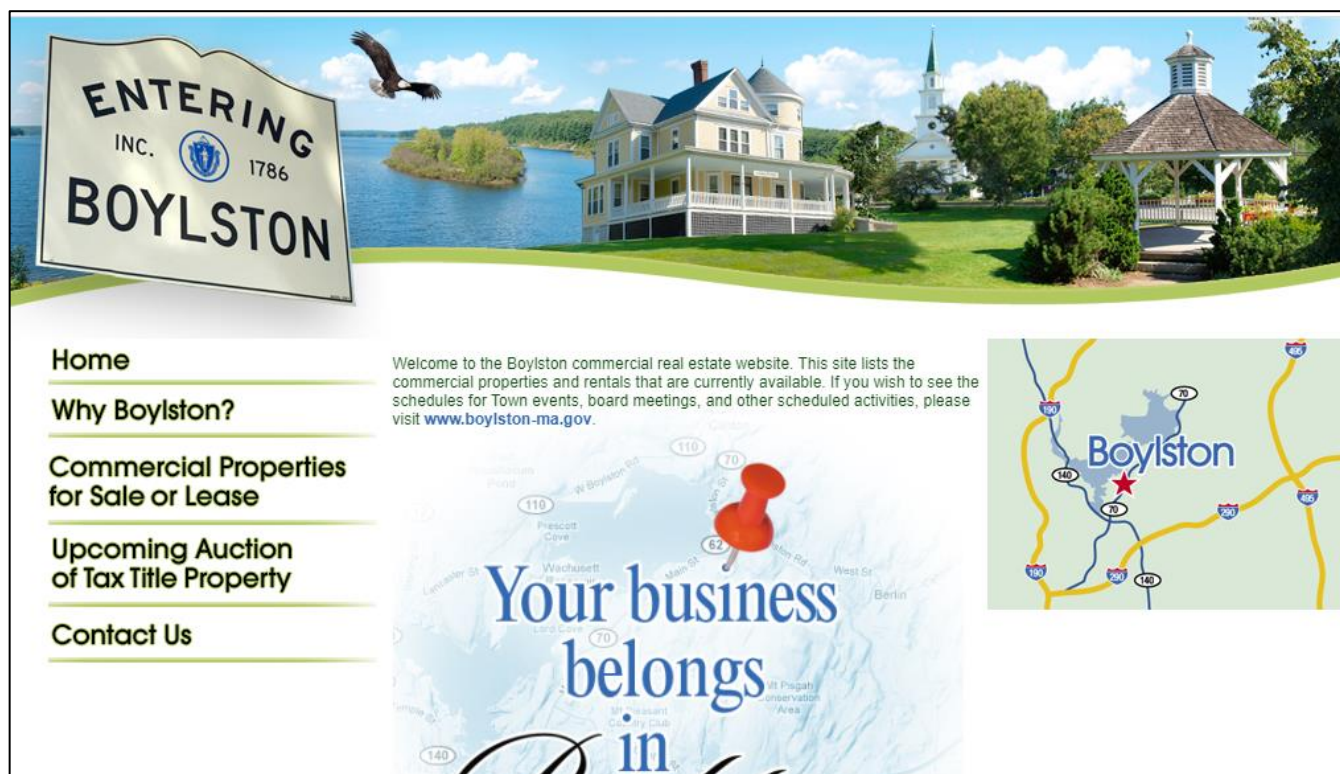
The Town of Boylston maintains some core economic development function, but many other needs remain unaddressed due to limited capacity. Figure 18 highlights the Town's current marketing efforts, which are positive for the town. With an EDC in place, the Town's capacity to undertake strategic economic development project will be greatly enhanced.

Project 2. Sidewalk, bike path, and access management

Category		Public Realm
Location		Western segment of Route 140 (beginning at the first commercial plaza east of Route 70) through to entryway to Brookside Apartments; portion of East Temple Street.
Origin		Town of Boylston Planning Department; CMRPC
Budget		Low budget: Less than $40,000
Timeframe		Short term: 3-5 months for painting sidewalks and installing flex posts.
Risk		Low risk: post-pandemic outlook for outdoor recreation appears strong and pilot intended to be low-cost.
Key Performance Indicators		Number of pedestrians and bicyclists using the facilities. Entering and exiting the businesses in the target area from the roadway is safer measured via intercept surveys and through crash data.
Partners & Resources		Future Economic Development Committee; Planning Department; Highway Department; Mass DOT Shared Streets and Spaces Program; Mass DOT Complete Streeting Funding Program.

Figure 19. Aerial, western target area

The western segment of the Route 140 target area has the potential to serve as more than a conventional highway district; however, strategies to increase non-vehicular travel are necessary.

Diagnostic:

Route 140 is a two-way arterial street with dual shoulders and no on-street parking, which encourages high traffic speeds and offers no protection for pedestrian and bicyclists. The western segment of the corridor is home to a cluster of retail businesses. These businesses are largely connected by parking facilities, but each have separate curb cuts/access to Route 140. Together, the high travel speeds, numerous ways to enter and exit the travel lanes, and lack of sidewalks or bike paths present safety issues and deter non-vehicular patrons.

Demand for pedestrian and bicycle use along the corridor is moderate and expected to increase as a result of nearby housing development and strategic planning for economic development. To mitigate safety issues and encourage visitation of the nearby businesses, several interventions are required. These include piloting a temporary shared-use lane (i.e., a makeshift lane for pedestrians and bicyclists) on the western segment of Route 140; piloting a temporary makeshift bicycle lane on East Temple Street (and potentially Route 70) to form a loop with Route 140; and managing access to the cluster of nearby businesses through changes to curb cuts.

Funding Sources:

Existing grant programs such as the MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces program are funding projects of this nature. Should the pilot project prove successful, such facilities can be pursued in a phased approach using funding from the MassDOT Complete Streets program. These programs can be pursued concurrently, as Shared Streets and Spaces can be readily implemented, whereas Complete Streets requires adoption of a formal policy, assessment, and prioritization prior to issuance of project funding.

Action Items:

- Route 140, west (approximately 59 Shrewsbury Street through to Brookside Apartments): Pilot a shared-use sidewalk/bike path using paint and removable vertical flex posts to begin building pedestrian and bicycle network, improve overall pedestrian and bicyclist safety, and facilitate connectivity between housing development and established businesses (see Figure 22).

- East Temple Street/ Route 70: Extend bike path from Route 140 along East Temple Street using paint and removable vertical flex posts to extend pedestrian and bicycle network, improve overall pedestrian and bicyclist safety, and facilitate connectivity between nearby housing and established businesses. If desired (and allowed by MassDOT) the bike path can extend to Route 70 and connect back to the Route 140 shared-used lane to form a full multi-modal loop (see Figure 22).

- Intersection of 140 and East Temple Street: Establish and stripe crosswalk at intersection using paint to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

- Commercial Plaza, west (approximately 59 Shrewsbury Street: Reduce entry and exit points to the plaza through access management. Currently, the plaza can be entered/exited 10 ways. Some curb cuts are also over-sized. Reduce access points by converting 2-way curb cuts into 1-way curb cuts, eliminating unnecessary access points, and reducing curb cut widths to a maximum of 12 feet per 1-way and 24 ft per 2-way. Such measures can be piloted through installation of self-watering planters, road cones, painted jersey barriers, and other low-cost, temporary measures (see Figure 23).

Figure 20. Area for shared-use lane

A shared-use sidewalk/ bike path would help connect businesses in the western segment of the target area with residents of nearby housing and help define the area as a destination. This could be piloted using paint and vertical flex posts.

Figure 21. East Temple Street

Quieter and more residential than Route 140, East Temple Street is collector road that connects to Route 140. To extend multi-modal efforts, the town can establish a bike lane along East Temple Street, possibly connected to Route 70 and the Reservoir loop. This can be piloted using paint and vertical flex posts.

Process:

This low-cost pilot project will test the viability of separated shared-use and bicycle lanes in the western portion of the target area. The project includes painted lanes and vertical flex posts within the buffer area between the vehicular travel lanes. The flex-posts can be installed with anchor cups that allows them to be screwed into the anchors for the spring, summer and fall seasons, and unscrewed during the winter to allow for snow plowing.

If the separated shared-use and bicycles lanes prove successful, the town can pursue phased construction to make such facilities permanent. In support, the Town can monitor and record pedestrian and bicycle volumes along the project corridor and measure vehicle speeds using video cameras. It will need to maintain flex posts, pavement markings and signage as needed.

Figure 22. Concept map, multi-modal loop
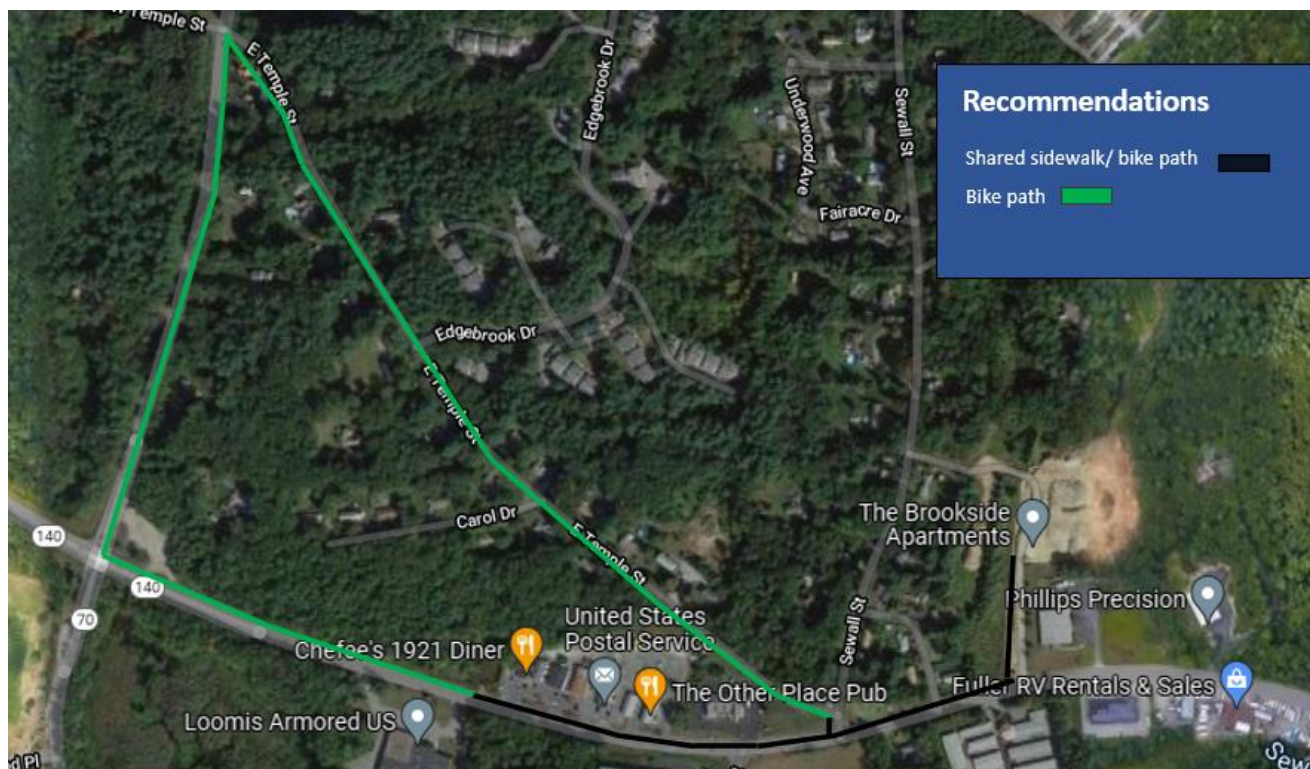
Figure 22 depicts a multi-modal loop comprised of a shared-use lane and bike path. While Route 140 and East Temple Street are town-owned, MassDOT maintains jurisdiction over Route 70; completing the loop via Route 70 requires collaboration with MassDOT.

Figure 23. Concept map, access management
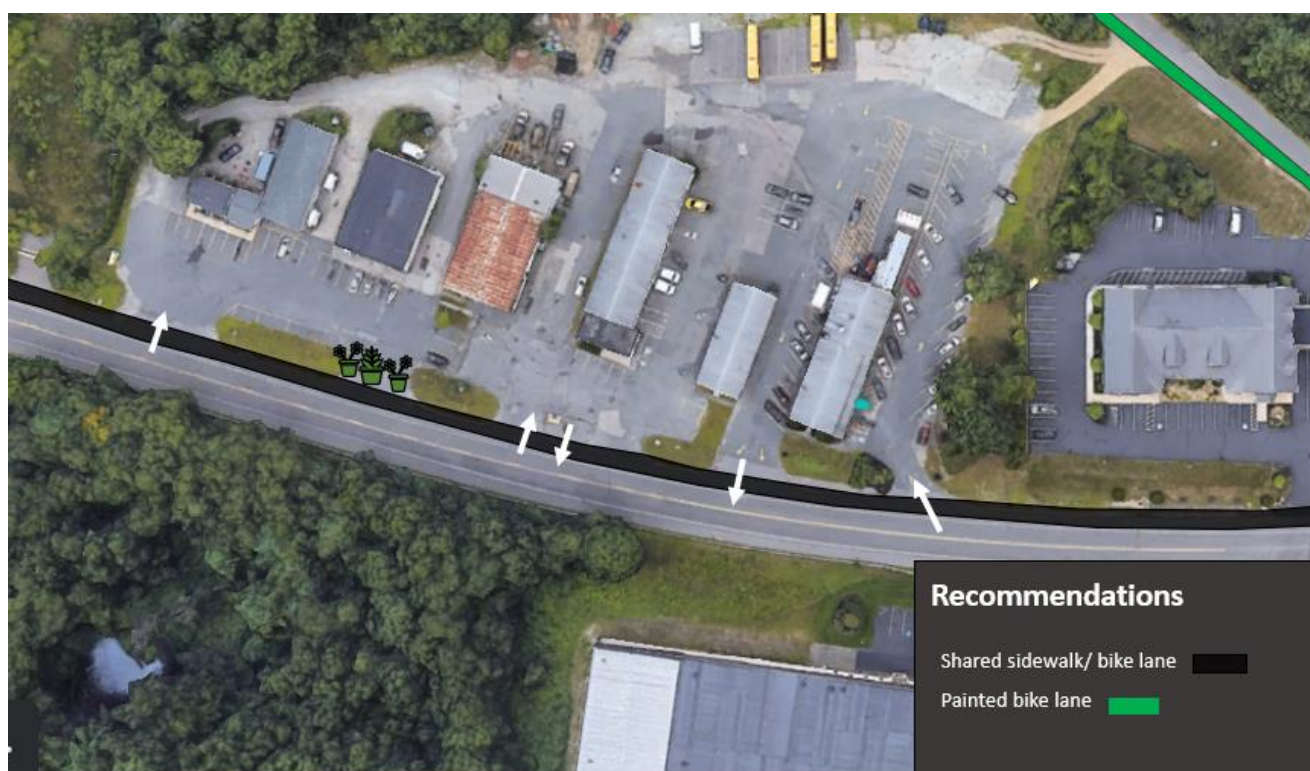
Figure 23 depicts access management strategies to improve safety and traffic flow in the western segment of the target area. Reducing the number and width of ingresses and egresses will make the area more suitable for multi-modal activity and provide new opportunities for greenery and other aesthetic improvements.

Implementation suggestions

Implementation of the shared-use lane and bicycle path can take a variety of forms. From painted lines, to road cones, to planters and decorative lanes, communities are piloting multi-modal lanes in a variety of ways. Examples from Best Practices and elsewhere are illustrated below.

Figure 24. Separated lane, temporary using cones

Photo Source: Dodson & Flinker, Best Practices Public Realm Compendium, Florence, Massachusetts.

Figure 25. Separated lane, temporary using lines
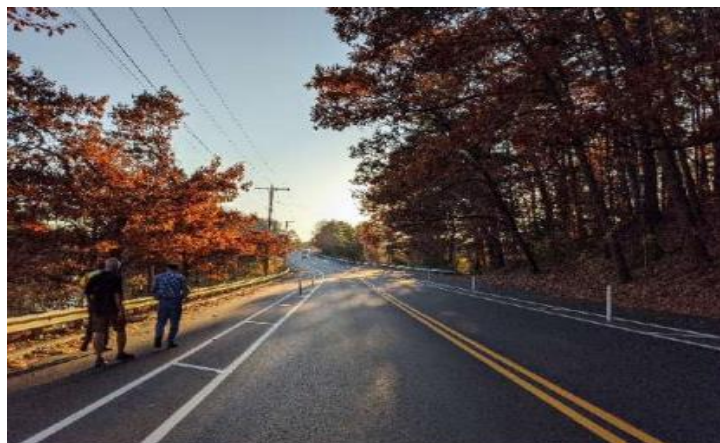
Photo Source: Dodson & Flinker, Best Practices Public Realm Compendium, Florence, Massachusetts.

Figure 26. Artistic zebra striping (1)

Photo Source: CMRPC, Bath Maine placemaking and pedestrian facility improvements.

Figure 27. Artistic zebra striping (2)

Photo Source: BETA Group, Inc. Project Watchemoket Square/1St Street Pilot Project – Protected Bike Lane Lincoln , RI East Providence, RI.

Figure 28. Temporary lane, fully painted

Photo Source: BETA Group, Inc. Wayland, MA Route 30 Shared Winter Streets and Spaces Separated Bicycle and Shared-Use Lanes Project Lake Cochituate Wayland Natick Town Line Exist. Trail Connections Project Limits N Natick, MA.

Project 3. Placemaking through aesthetic enhancements

Category		Public and private Realm
Location		Western segment of Route 140 (beginning at the first commercial plaza east of Route 70) through to intersection of East Temple Street.
Origin		CMRPC; Town of Boylston Planning Department
Budget		Low budget: Less than $50,000
Timeframe		Short term: 6 months – 1 year
Risk		Low risk: maintenance issues will be mitigated through use of self-watering planters. Other aesthetic elements will be designed to not interfere with line of sight.
Key Performance Indicators		Number of pedestrians and bicyclists using the facilities and reduction of vehicle speeds.
Partners & Resources		Future Economic Development Committee; Town Planner and Planning Board; BOS; Highway Department; local landscape companies, local fabricators, local craftspeople and artists to help design and build components of the project.

Figure 29. High visibility area on Route 140, west

The western segment of the target area can serve as more than a conventional highway district but requires aesthetics enhancements. Improved signage, landscaping, and better definition of potential use opportunities will help attract business patrons and visitors.

Diagnostic:

The western segment of the target area has the potential to serve as more than a traditional highway area. A combination of physical and programmatic strategies are recommended to slow traffic, attract patrons to existing businesses, and brand the area as a distinct place. Landscaping and other low-cost aesthetic improvements will contribute to placemaking efforts.

Action Items:

Landscaping and other low-cost aesthetic improvements including:

- Defining the gateways of the western segment of the target area: To encourage patronage of Route 140 (west), the Town should enhance and define the area's gateways. Hanging banners and baskets from gooseneck streetlights, self-watering planters, painted road art, replacement of dirt patches with paving stones, and other low-cost aesthetic improvements will make the area more inviting to visitors. High visibility areas such as the entryway to the 1921 Diner and nearby businesses (pictured left) represent top priority areas.

- Creation of passive recreation spots between select buildings: In the western segment of the target area, some plazas suffer from too many access points and undirected traffic flow through connected parking lots and between buildings. In addition to limiting curb cuts (see Project 2), parking lot traffic can be guided through repurposing spaces between buildings as passive recreation space. Such spaces can be passively programmed through installation of low-cost fixtures such as string lights, picnic tables, and murals.

- Redefine and encourage recreational use of knoll next to pizza plaza: The grassy area next to the plaza can be repurposed as a pocket park for active or passive recreation. While the green space currently lacks appeal, half wall buffers and planters would provide a sense of protection from traffic, define the space, and maintain the visual line of sight for passing vehicles. Basic landscaping, installation of picnic tables and bike racks would encourage use (see Figures 33 and 34).

- Develop uniform signage and wayfinding to clearly convey information to visitors and encourage exploration: The western segment of the target area lacks wayfinding and public signage. Existing private signage is inconsistent and unappealing. Adoption and distribution of attractive, branded signage would help further define the target area.

- Landscaping elements: Islands between parking lots and travel lanes and other high visibility areas should be improved through general landscaping. DIY self-watering planters serve as attractive, movable, low-cost options for defining spaces, buffering unflattering views, and encouraging passive recreation (See Appendix B for build instructions). Longer-term, potential improvements can include the installation of brick paver stones instead of concrete sidewalks, decorative trash receptacles, benches, pedestrian information/location signs, decorative street and traffic signs, uniform property information, address signs, and lighting.

Figure 30. Islands (1), Route 140, west

Figure 31. Islands (2), Route 140, west

Islands between parking lots and travel lanes can be improved through basic aesthetic improvements including landscaping and attractive, uniform signage. Unification of signage as depicted in Figure 31 would transform the island shown in Figure 30.

Figure 32. Route 140, west intersection and recommended implementation

The intersection of Route 140 and East Temple Street can be enhanced to help define the target area gateway. Decorative painted sidewalks can feed into adjacent measures including activation of knoll adjacent to plaza and shared use lane and bike path. The Gove Street Crossing: Pop-up Park + Plaza in East Boston, a project by Civic Space Collaborative, provides inspiration for the intersection of East Temple Street and Route 140. Paired with other aesthetic improvements, such an installation would help define the western segment of the target area, encourage walking and biking, and encourage slower vehicular speeds.

Figure 33. Concept Map, Route 140, west

The recommended improvements to Route 140, west aesthetics and infrastructure are most clearly conveyed through collective depiction. The various measures are shown below.

With some basic aesthetic improvements, Route 140, west can be redefined as a destination. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities (detailed in project 1) are complemented by installation of self-watering platers, new passive recreation areas, and other low-cost improvements.

Figure 34. Passive recreation area (1) and recommended implementation

The grassy area adjacent to plaza pictured in Figure 34 would make an ideal pocket park for active or passive recreation. To activate the space, the town should help define the park and make it an inviting space through physical and visual buffers. Picnic tables and bike facilities will encourage passive recreation and complement the adjacent shared-use lane and bike path. A Stantec Consulting, Inc. project in the Town of Arlington (pictured left) serves as a successful example of low-cost visual buffering using jersey barriers and trellis to define and encourage use of space.

Figure 35. Passive recreation areas (2) and recommended implementation
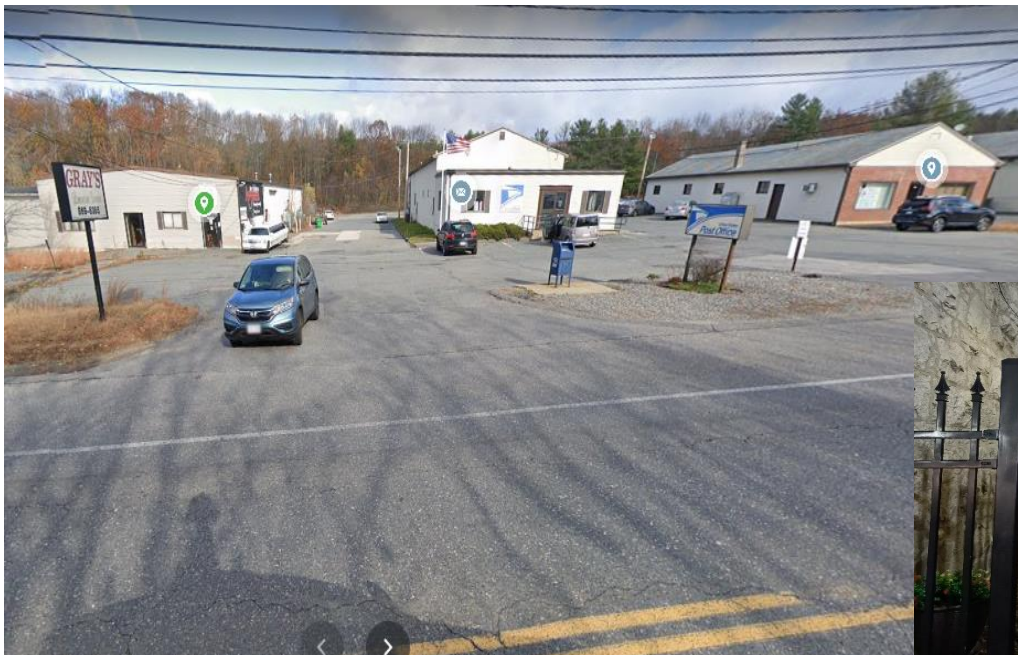
Underutilized areas between buildings can serve as passive recreation areas. Low-cost measures such as installation of tables and benches, string lights, and murals can easily define such spaces. A pocket park in Hudson, MA (depicted right) demonstrates the concept. Photo Source: CMRPC.

Project 4. Placemaking through programming

Category		Public and private Realm
Location		Route 140, west
Origin		Town Planning Department; CMRPC
Budget		Low Budget (<$50,000, see process section)
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years) and ongoing
Risk		Risks include liability related to public use of private property; project outcomes contingent upon private property owners.
Key Performance Indicators		Regular pop-up events and installations held. Additional foot traffic and patronage to businesses in the target area and town. Increase in number of people engaged.
Partners & Resources		Municipal staff, boards, and committees (EDC, highway, transportation, public safety, recreation, alcohol permitting, etc.); organizations, landlords, and tenants interested in offering programming; nonprofits (e.g., garden clubs, arts societies and artists, cultural council); Council on Aging and Senior Center; Planning Board; Schools; Chamber of Commerce; Banks; large local employers.

Figure 36. Fall River Cultural Event

Beyond aesthetic and infrastructure improvements, successful placemaking initiatives typically use programming to draw people to target areas. Activation of underutilized spaces requires more than physical measures; pop up events, cultural programming, passive and active recreation opportunities, and self-programming are all methods of encourage visitors and patronage or nearby businesses. In Boylston, the western segment of the target area includes connected and underutilized properties than are suitable for various types of events.

Funding Sources:

Community One-Stop for Growth:
Rural and Small Town Development Fund Capital Grant Program
This new grant program to provide communities funding for capital projects in Rural and Small Towns - towns with populations less than 7,000 or with a population density of less than 500 persons per square mile (measured by the 2010 US Census). This program funds capital projects exclusively for qualifying Rural and Small Towns. Grants in this category will likely be $50,000-$400,000.

Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit $25,000)
All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which could include creating the program, developing the design guidelines, and providing conceptual designs for improvements, depending on the complexity of the project.

Diagnostic:

The RRP Survey of Route 140 businesses indicated that cultural events and activities are a top priority. In that same survey 50% of businesses reported a drop in on-site customers compared to pre-covid conditions and of these, 42% said the drop was 50% or more.

The impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Boylston require a recovery plan that improves the image of the Route 140 corridor and provides a magnet for customers. Because of its length and sprawling nature, the corridor lacks a natural unified hub of activity. It needs an overall public space activation strategy that supports businesses by encouraging increased foot traffic and providing public activation strategies to help overall vibrancy. The western segment of the target area is best suited to such measures.

Route 140, west is home to a business plaza oversupplied with parking. Most of the buildings in the plaza share a common owner; hence, the parking lots that serve these buildings are also connected. With an abundance of parking behind the plaza as well, these connected parking lots could serve as an excellent location for events and programming without limiting necessary vehicular use. Additionally, potential recreation opportunities exist in the knoll adjacent to the pizza plaza, which could be redefined to be more appealing to patrons (see Project 3). Such activities will complement physical placemaking initiatives to further define the area as a destination.

Figure 37. Primary area for events and active programming

The western-most plaza in the target area contains a cluster of businesses connected by shared, street-adjacent parking lots. With a large amount of parking behind the plaza, this underutilized area could be used for public events and programming.

Figure 38. Secondary area for events and programming

Looking westward near where East Temple Street meets Route 140 / Shrewsbury Street.

Action Items:

- Create a cultural and events strategy and implement the same. The events/cultural activation strategy should be guided by a dedicated staff member supported by an events committee.

- This project will require significant collaboration and coordination, particularly regarding partners and sponsors, marketing efforts (including an online events calendar and regional efforts), and business partnerships to ensure that both goals are met; activation and improved image of the Route 140 corridor and increased revenues for businesses (and new business locations).

- Establish and inspire events to draw patrons and visitors to the western segment of the target area and its businesses. Encourage and enable a variety of events so that use is ongoing- activity should be such that community members anticipate and seeks out the area for new, reoccurring, and self-guided programming.

Process:

- Initiate dialogue with property owners and tenants to generate support and buy-in for on-site programming.

- Establish a working group or committee to oversee area programming. Notify and engage local groups, residents, and tenants to inspire programming elements such as:

  - Food trucks, farmers' markets, music events

  - Kids events – tie dye workshops, face painting, book walks, chalk art events

  - Collaborate with local organizations for programming (Council on Aging, garden club, Historical Society)

  - Winter events- ice castles, hayrides, snow shoeing, cross country, hot chocolate, cider, donuts, snow suit soiree, ice skating rink

  - Arts, Horribles' parade, yoga, fitness, dance

  - Informal music events on Friday and Saturday nights

- Establish agreements with property owner regarding public use of private property.

- Apply for and secure funding from external sources from Town (grants, State, private foundations, etc.) · Develop DRAFT and FINAL "site plans for review" by key stakeholders

- Graphic design and branding work is needed to create an overall brand or name for the events program (Boylston Live!, Meet us on Main Street, etc.). Develop logo, and project graphics.

Additional considerations:

- Streamlined permitting can enable and help speed up implementation of events.

- There may be a risk that events provide short-term vitality to the downtown but don't contribute to increased business revenue or new businesses. Careful planning of the location and type of events, as well as involvement of local businesses can mitigate this risk.

- If events are held on privately-owned property, private owners may be concerned about liability and the Town should consider if it can provide a blanket liability protection for these situations or indemnification agreement.

Required inputs:

- Town staff time (recreation, planning, highway, public safety).

- Marketing/branding to highlight program and spaces – social media, signs/banners, possible sidewalk signs. Payment for musicians, performers, other contributors to event.

- Marketing materials (banners, flyers, social media manager)

- Materials for temporary events such as sidewalk chalk and pavement paints, rentals, etc.

Figure 39. Primary area for events and active programming

Programming is an essential component of placemaking and space activation. Figure 39 depicts a simple event in Newcastle Australia, highlighted as a Best Practice for RRP by Susan Silberberg of Civic Moxie. Boylston's underutilized spaces can be activated similarly through pop-up events and programming.

Project 5. Zoning and Design Guidelines

Category		Public Realm
Location		Route 140
Origin		CMRPC; Town of Boylston Planning Department; Master Plan Steering Committee;
Budget		Low Budget (<$50,000) - Operating Funds, Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, MassDevelopment Technical Assistance, District Local Technical Assistance
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		Low Risk – some political risk of delayed passage or cause modifications.
Key Performance Indicators		Desirable and appropriate new businesses relocating to Route 140. Number of design components incorporated into new developments.
Partners & Resources		Planning Board; EDC; Town Planner; CMRPC; property owners, tenants', employers.

Figure 40. Aerial, Route 140 western segment

Route 140 in Boylston contains several distinct areas that can be further defined to target appropriate and desirable uses. The western segment of the corridor (shown above) has consumer-facing businesses and other elements that make it more suitable for multi-modal, mixed-use activity. Targeted zoning and Design Guidelines can be used to establish a vision for each segment of the target area, providing formal requirements and recommendations for design and aesthetics.

Funding Sources

District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA):
Recognizing the tremendous need area planners, town board and commission volunteers, and municipal officials must continually stay up to date on ever-changing topics related to planning, CMRPC offers technical assistance through its District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program. Since 2006, this program has enabled CMRPC to provide technical assistance to member communities on eligible projects. Typically, proposed projects must fall into one of the following four general priority categories to be considered eligible for technical assistance: 1. "Planning Ahead for Housing" 2. "Planning Ahead for Growth"; 3. Technical Assistance to support Community Compact Cabinet Activities; and 4. Technical Assistance to support Regional Efficiency.

EEA Planning Assistance Grants
The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) offers Massachusetts cities and towns technical help to improve their land use practices. Grants are available to the Commonwealth's municipalities, and Regional - Planning Agencies acting on their behalf to support their efforts to plan, regulate (zone), and act to conserve and develop land consistent with the Massachusetts' Sustainable Development Principles. These Planning Assistance Grants are part of an effort to encourage municipalities to implement land use regulations that are consistent with the Baker-Polito Administration's land conservation and development objectives including reduction of land, energy, and natural resource consumption, provision of sufficient and diverse housing, and mitigation of/preparation for climate change. Funds help communities retain appropriate technical expertise and undertake the public process associated with creating plans and adopting land use regulations.

Community One Stop for Growth
Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit $25,000)
All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which could include creating the program, developing the design guidelines, and providing conceptual designs for improvements, depending on the complexity of the project. This program can be used to fund development of design guidelines.

Community Planning Grant Program: Community Planning grants may be used for a variety of activities related to land use, such as but not limited to development. Activities may include the development of a Master Plan, Housing Production Plan, Zoning Review and Updates, Urban Renewal Plan, Land Use Plan, Downtown Plan, Parking Management Plan, Feasibility Study, or Other Strategic Plans. These are planning grants, and projects must use the funds to produce a planning document. Grants in this category will likely be $25,000-$75,000.

Diagnostic

Route 140 in Boylston is comprised of several distinct segments. The western segment is home to a cluster of consumer-facing businesses such as restaurants, a post office, retailers and housing developments. Other segments of the target area are dominated by industrial uses or are characterized by conventional highway development styles. Yet, Route 140 is zoned in its entirety. Use of a single zoning district is not ideal for an area with multiple distinct segments and needs, nor does it facilitate a multi-modal, mixed-used neighborhood in the western segment of the target area. Zoning tailored to each segment of the target area will better serve the town's development.

Similarly, the Town of Boylston lacks design guidelines outside of the those required by Site Plan Review. Design Guidelines are a tool communities use to articulate aesthetic preferences for architecture, landscaping, materials, and other design elements. Such guidelines complement zoning to guide developers and new business owners as they plan out new construction or major exterior renovations. Design Guidelines are a long-term mechanism for guiding development; over the course of years, they can significantly shape the overall feel of an area. If the Town proceeds with Project 6 (Façade Improvement Program), development of Design Guidelines will help inform that initiative as well.

Action items

Use community engagement from RRP and Master Plan processes to identify vision for zoning bylaws and design guidelines. Potential zoning modifications include changes to base zoning to add new and more specific zoning districts, or establishment of overlays in service of the same. In complement, the town can undertake development of Design Guidelines to help shape new construction or exterior renovations. The Town should match community vision for new development and provided a menu of options for encouraged designs. Such a menu allows for a flexible response from projects of varying sizes, densities, and uses. Use drafts to launch additional community engagement and education.

Process

The implementation process for Zoning changes are as follows:

- Identify vision for the area by reviewing LRRP and Master Plan surveys.

- Review best practices and model bylaws to identify and develop draft zoning language to advance community vision.

- Discuss draft language with appropriate land use boards and modify as needed to address concerns. Submit the draft language to the municipal approval process which will vary by municipality but will include the Planning Board and either or Select Board/Finance or Bylaw Review Committee/Town Meeting.

- (If the zoning change is successful) Publicize the new zoning broadly prior to new applications for development.

- Track and evaluate the applications and which public realm components were most successful in terms of implementation. Evaluate whether the development standards need to be modified to address changing conditions.

The implementation process for establishment of Design Guidelines is as follows:

- Review existing zoning and other regulations to identify any pre-existing design requirements. Review model design guidelines to identify common elements for inclusion.

- Design and conduct a visual preference survey using renderings and best practices examples. Work with CMRPC or another consultant to analyze synthesize findings into a comprehensive Design Guidelines document.

Example 1: Town Center Design Guidelines

Sterling, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Domenica Tatasciore
Town Planner
dtatasciore@sterling-ma.gov

Consultant
Innes Associates Ltd./Harriman

Cost
$15,000 (Massachusetts Downtown
Initiative)

Characteristics

• Advisory

• Includes discussion of design elements
  for public right-of-way

• Refences historic buildings as context
  for new development.

Figure 41. Sterling Town Center Design Guidelines

Courtesy of the Town of Sterling, Innes Associates, and Harriman

Example 2: Residential Design Guidelines

Arlington, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Jenny Raitt
Director
Department of Planning and
Community Development
jraitt@town.arlington.ma.us

Consultant:
Harriman

Cost
$49,000

Characteristics

• Advisory

• Applicable to Residential
  zoning districts

• Included analysis of
  neighborhood characteristics

• Included in-depth public outreach

Figure 42. Arlington Residential Design Guidelines
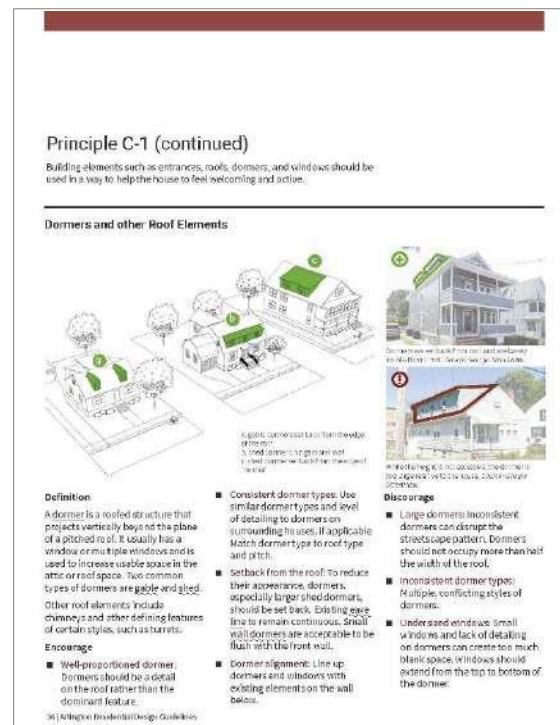
Courtesy of the Town of Arlington and Harriman

Example 3: Dedham Square Design Guidelines

Dedham, MA

Contact
Jeremy Rosenberger
Town Planner
jrosenberger@dedham-ma.gov
Consultant: Gamble Associates

Cost: $30,000

Characteristics
- Advisory
- Applicable to Dedham Square and gateway streets
- Includes discussion of design elements for pocket parks and connections to open spaces.
- Refences historic development patterns.

Figure 43. Dedham Square Design Guidelines

Courtesy of the Town of Dedham and Gamble Associates

Example 4: Kendall Square Design Guidelines

Cambridge, MA
Contact: Jeff Roberts
Zoning and Development Director
Community Development Department
jroberts@cambridge.gov
Consultant: Goody Clancy

Cost: Unknown (part of larger project)

Characteristics
- Tied to zoning, including special permit and PUD applications
- Applicable to Kendall Square
- Addresses different building uses, including residential and academic buildings.

Figure 44. Kendall Square Design Guidelines
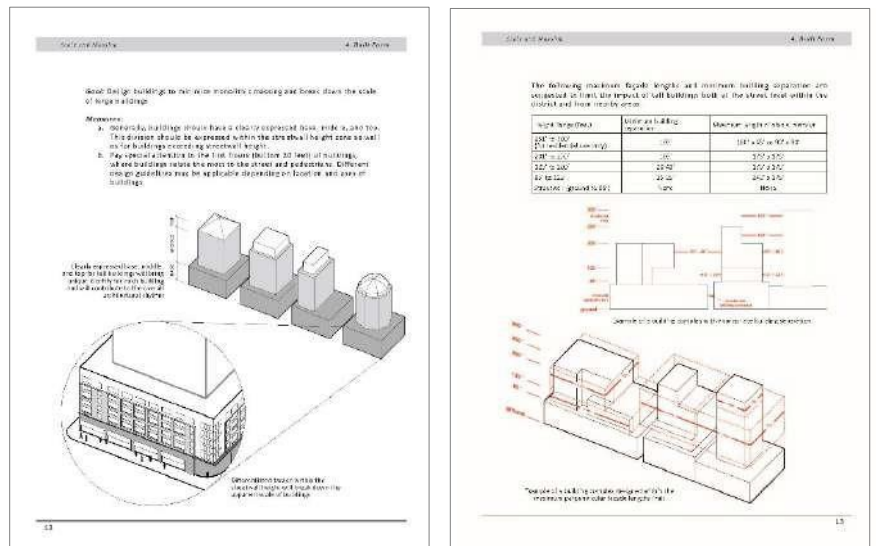
Courtesy of the City of Cambridge and Goody Clancy

Project 6. Façade Improvement Program

Category		Public and Private Realm
Location		Route 140
Origin		Town of Boylston Planning Department; CMRPC
Budget		Medium Budget ($50,000-$200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		Medium Risk
Key Performance Indicators		Increased foot and bicycle traffic in the area. Increased patrons in nearby businesses and area overall.
Partners & Resources		Municipal Boards and Committees; Residents, Property owners; Municipal Boards and Staff

Figure 45. Attractive façade in western segment of the target area

The condition of building facades in the target area vary. Some, like the above featured building, serve as example of attractive, well-maintained, facades. A program that helps incentivize facade improvements can complement other aesthetic projects to make the target area and its businesses more appealing.

Potential Sources of Funding

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or site improvements when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Possible impacts are addressed in the sections on Key Performance Indicators and Diagnostic.

Hometown Grants
T-Mobile
This program will fund up to $50,000 per town and may be used to rebuild or refresh community spaces, including historic buildings. https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/hometown-grants

Local Banks and other Community Development Financial Institutions
Local banks with a community development financing program for small businesses may be able to help provide low or no interest loans to small businesses for their share of the improvements, especially for a storefront or sign upgrade. The focus of the program at each bank is different; contact your local bank(s) and discuss how they could participate in investing in the community.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth
Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit $25,000)
All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which could include creating the program, developing the design guidelines, and providing conceptual designs for improvements, depending on the complexity of the project. This program could be used to develop the design guidelines for the façade improvement program.

Business Improvement District or Other Downtown District
Funds from a BID may be used for a façade improvement program.

Funding Sources that May be Leveraged

A façade improvement program may be used to address components of the façade (including awnings and signs), a storefront system, accessibility, the entire façade or façades visible from a public way, and/or components of the site (including signage, planters, restriping for outdoor dining or retail display, or adding more permanent landscaping). However, within a target area such as a downtown, corridor, or other commercial area, some buildings may have more extensive needs.

The sources on the next page are examples that can work in tandem with a façade improvement program to address buildings with larger needs.

**Potential Sources of Funding
Continued**

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth:
Underutilized Properties Program
MassDevelopment
As with the historic tax credits below, this funding source is for a much larger project. It could be used to help address larger buildings in a target area that have more significant issues. Bundling this program and a few of the other more specialized grants could help a municipality address smaller properties with the façade improvement program and larger ones with these more targeted funds.

Municipal Vacant Storefronts Program
Economic Assistance Coordinating Council
This program will not fund façade improvements. The municipality would form a district. Businesses in the district then apply for the funds to address vacant storefronts. This could help reduce the number of vacant storefronts while the façade improvement program addresses accessibility, deferred maintenance, and design issues on the exterior of the site.

Collaborative Workspace Program
MassDevelopment
This grant provides another option to address both the exterior and the interior of this space while also helping to support local jobs and job creation.

Community Preservation Act
This source only applies in those communities that have adopted the CPA. CPA funds may be used to acquire, preserve, and rehabilitate and/or restore historic assets. A municipality could tie this to the design guidelines for a façade improvement program and consider, for example, acquiring a downtown historic building, updating the façade and ground floor for commercial use, and adding an elevator to allow for housing on the upper floors.

Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund
Massachusetts Historical Commission (project limit $3,000-$100,000, depending on project type)
This is a 50% reimbursable matching grant for preserving properties, landscapes, and sites listed in the State Register of Historic Preservation. Applicants are limited to municipalities and nonprofits. Many downtown and village centers include nonprofit and municipal anchors. This grant could be used to ensure that all properties in a target area are brought, over time, to the same standard of repair. The program does have limitation on allowable costs. A preservation restriction is required.

Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit
Massachusetts Historical Commission
This is available for significant rehabilitation of historic buildings and may help supplement a larger project in a downtown. This is included in this best practice sheet because the guidelines developed for the municipal façade/storefront improvement program could be incorporated into the review of larger projects.

Diagnostic

Reasons for undertaking a façade or storefront improvement program often include the following:

- Requirements to address the transmissibility of COVID-19, such as new windows, doors, or HVAC system may be unaffordable to a small business owner and/or may have a negative impact on the façade if improperly sourced and installed.
- On-site parking spaces are poorly organized and, if reorganized, can provide room for outdoor dining or retail display.
- Local small businesses do not have the resources (time, money, expertise) to address substandard storefronts.
- Distressed properties have a negative impact on people's impression of the viability and/or safety of a business district and property owners are unable to make the improvements themselves.
- Storefronts are not accessible to those who have problems with mobility, whether temporary or permanent.
- Historic downtowns often have empty upper floors because of the lack of accessible elevators. A major improvement project could provide grants to address both interior and exterior accessibility.
- Historic properties may have been "improved" with inappropriate materials or repairs.

Site improvements that reduce asphalt and add landscape can address public health issues by reducing the heat island effect, planting trees to address air quality, and using low impact design to manage stormwater onsite.

Action items

- Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
- Develop an appropriate level of design guidelines.
- Engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.
- Develop the criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance.
- Develop the funding and oversight structures.
- Consider connecting artists, entrepreneurs, and makers/ crafters with landlords to fill vacant storefronts and change target area image.

Process

Pre-program development

1. Identify who in the municipality will manage this program: municipal staff, volunteer committee, or a hybrid.
2. Decide how guidelines will be developed. Will the design guidelines be just for the façade improvement program, or will they be more broadly applicable?
3. If the property owners are less interested in the program, the municipality might consider offering grants to the first 3-5 to sign up (depending on resources) or through a lottery process and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area. This would need to be a highly transparent process.
4. Decide whether the guidelines and program will be developed in-house or whether the municipality will seek outside help. The funding source may determine the type of outside assistance; for example, certain programs will assign on-call consultants. For others, the municipality may need to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP).

Process - continued

Developing the Guidelines

1. If the municipality already has design guidelines that can be used for the façade improvement program, skip to the next section.
2. For developing the guidelines, review the Best Practices for Design Guidelines.

Developing the Program

Decide the following:
1. Grant, loan, or hybrid
2. Which elements will the program fund and which are the responsibility of the property owner?
3. What are the eligibility requirements for participating in the program?
4. What is the length of the program?
5. How long will property owners be required to maintain the improvements?
6. What is the enforcement procedure for maintenance? (This could be repayment of a grant or a lien on a property.)
7. Will the responsibility for maintenance transfer to a new owner if the property is sold?

Differentiating between the responsibilities of the tenant (often the small business) and the landlord (the property owner) 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.
Decide on the application process and how applicants will be evaluated. Are certain property types or improvements given priority over others? Make sure the process of choosing participants is transparent.
Develop the forms and train the people who will be evaluating the applications.

Implementation

The program can provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. Grants may provide a greater incentive to participate for reluctant property owners, while loans (no or low interest) provide a revolving fund to assist more properties. Some communities have indicated that requiring a match from the property owner may create longer- term support of the program.

If the property owners are less interested in the program, the municipality might consider offering grants to the first 3-5 participants to sign up (depending on resources) and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area.

Education of all people involved in the program needs to be an ongoing component. A municipality that is short on project management resources should consider hiring a dedicated staff member or consultant to manage this program.

Finally, the municipality should consider streamlining approvals of projects under this program to reduce the time needed for implementation.

Example 1: Sign & Façade Improvement Program

Ashland, Massachusetts <u>Town</u>
<u>Contact</u>
Beth Reynolds
Economic Development
Director breynolds@ashlandmass.com

<u>Funding by:</u>
Home Rule petition for annual appropriation and Home Rule petition for revolving fund – both approved by Town Meeting.

Structure
50% match up to $5,000

<u>Characteristics</u>

- 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)

https://www.ashlandmass.com/669/Business-Incentive-Programs

Example 2: Storefront Improvement Program

Cambridge, Massachusetts
<u>Contact:</u> Christina DiLisio
cdilisio@cambridgema.gov

<u>Funding by:</u>
Municipal capital funds

<u>Structure</u>
Tiered matching grants based on improvement type

<u>Characteristics</u>

- Includes increasing accessibility to the store (part of their Storefronts-for-All program) and improving or replacing windows and doors to address COVID-19 restrictions.

- Also recommends tax credit programs to address accessibility, historic preservation, and energy efficiency

https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/econdev/smallbusinessassistance/smallbusinessprograms/storefront

Note: Many existing programs use CDBG funds. Examples 1 and 2 both use municipal funding sources. Examples 3 and 4, which are both Main Streets Programs, provide a model for using historic preservation funds.

Figure 46. Ashland Sign & Façade Improvement Program

Courtesy of the Town of Ashland

Figure 47. Cambridge Storefront Improvement Program

Courtesy of the City of Cambridge

Example 3: NPS Main Street Façade Improvement Grant

Main Street America:
https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/projectspotlight/facadeimprovements/npsgrant

- Main Street America announced a façade improvement grant program using funds from the Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program, now the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants Program. This grant is sponsored by the National Park Service.
- This example is not given as a funding source, rather, it is an option for using historic preservation funds, such as CPA funds, to create a façade improvement program that would address the historic buildings in a target area. This option is provided because some communities were looking at non-CDBG sources for a façade improvement program. This may be a useful model for a local program.
- The site provides a link to each of the communities chosen for this program. The awards are expected to be $25,000 per project, and the site has the preservation covenants, grant agreements, and two webinars which may be useful.

Example 4: Historic Commercial District Revolving Fund

Main Street America:
https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/projectspotlight/facadeimprovements/hcdrf

- State-by-state program – in 2016, it was Texas and in 2019, it was Maine.
- This is not a funding source, bur an example of a program that could serve as a model for communities with a significant number of historic buildings in their commercial centers.
- The Texas program includes a PDF of before-and-after pictures, the scope of work, and the cost for each building.
- This program also serves as a reminder that historic photos of a downtown can be used to as a base for developing design guidelines for the program, reinforcing characteristics specific and unique to each community.

Project 7. Expand public and private economic development capacity

Category	Admin Capacity
Location	Town-wide
Origin	Town of Boylston Planning Department; CMRPC
Budget	Low budget
Timeframe	Short Term (<1 year), ongoing
Risk	Low risk
Key Performance Indicators	Development of key deliverables including business roster, commercial vacancy inventory/ registry, permitting guidebook. Single municipal point of contact for business development services. Processes and procedures revised.
Partners & Resources	Board of Selectmen; various staff including Town Planner, Building Department, Town Clerk, Assessor, other permitting and relevant staff; Planning Board, EDC, ZBA, Con Com, business owners and developers.

Figure 48. Town of Boylston Zoning Bylaws

Front page of Boylston Zoning Bylaws

Diagnostic:

In conjunction with establishment of an Economic Development Committee, there is much the Town can do to increase its public and private business capacity. By fine-tuning municipal processes, procedures, and capacity, the town can foster an environment more supportive of business development.

Over the past decade, economic development has been redefined as a core government function, like assessing, planning, and municipal management. The recent addition of a part-time Town Planner was a positive and necessary step for strategic land use and economic development planning; however, catching up on decades of economic development best practices, and proactively addressing current and emergent issues, requires more than a single part-time planner. The town should work to increase its economic development capacity through volunteer, public/private hybrid, and staff positions. Such capacity is necessary to assess, customize, and implement various economic development initiatives that were not previously addressed.

Funding Sources

District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA)

Recognizing the tremendous need for area planners, town board and commission volunteers, and municipal officials must continually stay up to date on ever-changing topics related to planning, CMRPC offers technical assistance through its DLTA program. Since 2006, this program has enabled CMRPC to provide technical assistance to member communities on eligible projects. Typically, proposed projects must fall into one of the following four general priority categories to be considered eligible for technical assistance: 1. "Planning Ahead for Housing" 2. "Planning Ahead for Growth"; 3. Technical Assistance to support Community Compact Cabinet Activities; and 4. Technical Assistance to support Regional Efficiency.

Community Compact Cabinet Efficiency and Regionalization Program

The purpose of the Efficiency and Regionalization (E&R) competitive grant program was to provide financial support for governmental entities interested in implementing regionalization and other efficiency initiatives that allow for long-term sustainability. These grants provided funds for one-time or transition costs for municipalities, regional school districts, school districts considering the formation of a regional school district or regionalizing services, regional planning agencies and councils of governments interested in such projects. The application period for the FY22 E&R Grant program opens on January 10, 2022.

EEA Planning Assistance Grants

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) offers Massachusetts cities and towns technical help to improve their land use practices. Grants are available to the Commonwealth's municipalities, and Regional - Planning Agencies acting on their behalf to support their efforts to plan, regulate (zone), and act to conserve and develop land consistent with the Massachusetts' Sustainable Development Principles. These Planning Assistance Grants are part of an effort to encourage municipalities to implement land use regulations that are consistent with the Baker-Polito Administration's land conservation and development objectives including reduction of land, energy, and natural resource consumption, provision of sufficient and diverse housing, and mitigation of/preparation for climate change. Funds help communities retain appropriate technical expertise and undertake the public process associated with creating plans and adopting land use regulations.

Community One Stop for Growth

The Community One Stop for Growth is a single application portal and collaborative review process of community and economic development grant programs that make targeted investments based on a Development Continuum. This process will streamline the experience for the applicant and better coordinate programs and staff on engagement and grant making. It will also reorient the State from a passive reviewer of funding requests to an active partner in economic development strategy, priorities, and investment.

Community Planning Grant Program

Community Planning grants may be used for a variety of activities related to land use, such as but not limited to development. Activities may include the development of a Master Plan, Housing Production Plan, Zoning Review and Updates, Urban Renewal Plan, Land Use Plan, Downtown Plan, Parking Management Plan, Feasibility Study, or Other Strategic Plans. These are planning grants, and projects must use the funds to produce a planning document. Grants in this category will likely be $25,000-$75,000.

Action Items

Seek funding to hire a full or part-time economic development coordinator. In the interim, assess existing staff positions for best single municipal point of contact to shepherd people through town processes and provide business development services.

Establish subcommittees (of the Planning Board and future Economic Development Committee) to work on municipal processes, policies, and procedures relevant to economic development that need fine-tuning.

Explore use of the following best practices and implement as appropriate:

- Business roster with commercial and industrial tenants and property owners' contact information, enabling responsive and proactive engagement

- Permitting guidebook to help developers and business owners understand the permitting process; adoption or expansion of online permitting

- Vacant parcel inventory/ vacancy registry requirements to encourage dialogue between property owners and town staff.

- Policies that support streamlined application and permitting processes including standing Roundtable Review and zoning combined permitting and zoning diagnostic to identify uses for which Special Permit might be replaced by Site Plan Review or By Right use.

- Proactive and administrative functions including business lead tracking, facilitation of business dialogues, marketing, etc.

- Tax incentives for attracting desirable new businesses.

Process

Seek funding for dedicated Economic Development Coordinator. Funding to pilot a part-time position shared between multiple municipalities may be available through Community Compact. In the interim, establish a single municipal point of contact charged with fielding inquiries and shepherding non-residential developments through municipal processes and procedures related to business development.

- Work with CMRPC to develop job Economic Development Coordinator job description, identify possible communities for job sharing, and advertise position.

- Ensure Economic Development Committee is established and has a clear mission and dedicated members. Once EDC is well-established, it can help the town spearhead a Business or Merchants Association.

- To create a business roster, relevant staff (Town Planner, ED Coordinator, Assessor), subcommittees, or senior volunteers can work to identify all existing businesses. Business owners, tenants, and commercial / industrial property owners should be included. The Town Clerk can provide basic information on most town businesses through Doing Business As certificates. Information for additional businesses needs to be collected by identification using windshield surveys, google, social media, and other means. All businesses, when registering or updating their information with the Town, should mandatorily include their email addresses and phone numbers.

Process- continued

- A Permitting Guidebook will help prospective developers and business owners navigate the permitting process more easily and with fewer questions to staff and boards. The Town can work with CMRPC to design a guidebook that is user-friendly, either in a guided online question and answer format, or standard written document.

- Online permitting software: seek funding through the Community Compact Efficiency and Regionalization program.

- Ensure Economic Development Committee is established and has a clear mission and dedicated members. Once EDC is well-established, it can help the town spearhead a Business or Merchants Association.

- Establish a vacant parcel inventory to encourage dialogue between property owners and town staff. Typically, municipal employees possess a working knowledge of vacant commercial properties. Maintaining a formal list of vacancies ensures that all development employees possess up-to-date information on current and upcoming vacancies. It also streamlines distribution of property information to prospective business owners, real estate agents, Chambers of Commerce, and real estate websites (another important strategy).

- Establish vacancy registry, requiring property owners to notify the Town within a defined period after a property becomes vacant. Such registries help municipal staff stay apprised of commercial vacancies and are a means of establishing constructive dialogue with property owners. Once a landlord has registered a vacancy, the Town should work with the property owner to identify and address the cause of the vacancy.

- Business lead tracking: As development and planning staff receive inquiries from potential business owners, these leads should be tracked. In most municipal settings, municipal employees will often receive calls about specific properties or business ideas but cannot immediately match the interested party with a suitable property. Formally tracking business leads will ensure that opportunities are not overlooked when they emerge later-on. It will also ensure that staff is actively reviewing leads.

- Roundtable review meetings are a favorite tool of many economic development practitioners (and developers). By holding standing, formal appointment meetings that are open to prospective developers at all stages of the development process, Towns can increase the desirability (and success) of development proposals. Such meetings allow prospective business owners to communicate with community development staff as well as staff from fire, highway, police, and other review departments, from the initial stages of a project through to implementation. Currently, Holden conducts inter-departmental review meetings for any substantial site plans and subdivisions. Transitioning to a standing meeting of all relevant staff could enhance communications between the Town and developers and enable the Town to mitigate potential issues early on.

- Complement Roundtable Review with Zoning Combined Permitting. This process allows the combination of multiple special permit and / or site plan approval applications into a single application and requires a single public hearing. Doing so can significantly improve permitting timeframes and, perhaps equally important, enhance the Town's image as an easy place to do business.

- Temporary Use Permits: To activate vacant space, adopt a pop-up retail ordinance that allows and streamlines temporary uses, especially in the western segment of the target area. Given the area's limited scale, one prominent vacancy (or several less prominent ones) could diminish the area's vitality.

Appendix A: Business Survey Results

BUSINESS SURVEY REPORT

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

Boylston
Boylston Route 140 Commercial

Responses: 12

Impacts of COVID-19

Decline in Business Revenue

75% of businesses generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019.
For 25% of businesses, revenue declined by 25% or more.

Revenue in 2020 Compared to 2019

	Increased	Stayed the Same	Decreased 1 – 24%	Decreased 25 – 49%	Decreased 50 – 74%	Decreased 75 - 100%	Don't Know/NA
%	25%	0%	50%	17%	8%	0%	0%
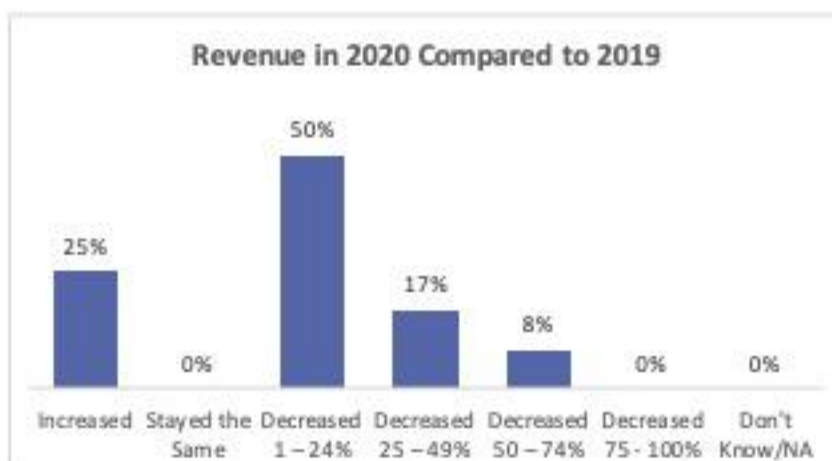
Less Foot Traffic in Commercial Area

50% of businesses had less on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID.
42% of businesses reported a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more.

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

	More Customers	About the Same	1 – 24% Less	25 – 49% Less	50 – 74% Less	75 - 100% Less	Don't Know/NA
%	25%	0%	8%	0%	25%	17%	25%
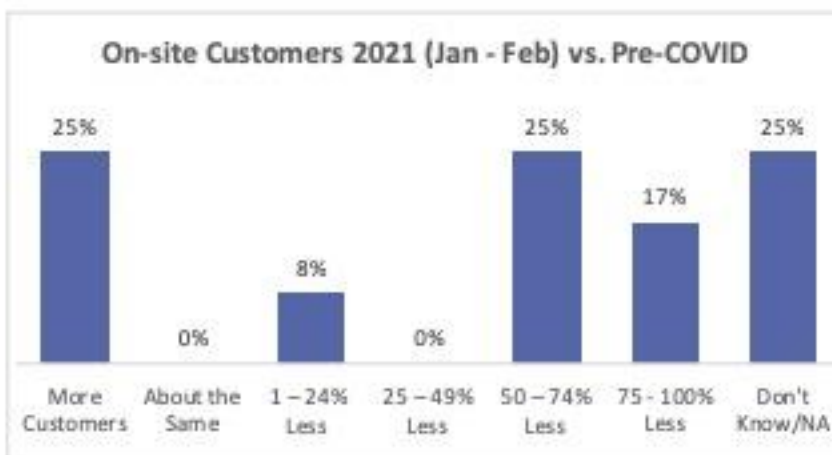
Impacts of COVID-19 (cont'd)

Reported Impacts

83% of businesses reported being impacted by COVID.

COVID Impacts Reported by Businesses

Impact	% of Businesses
Decline in revenue	67%
Employee layoff	42%
Reduced operating hours/capacity	42%
Business closure (temporary or permanent)	33%
Stopped/deferred rent or mortgage payments	17%
Incurred expense to implement safety measures	42%
Established alternative mode to sell and deliver products	25%
None of the Above	17%
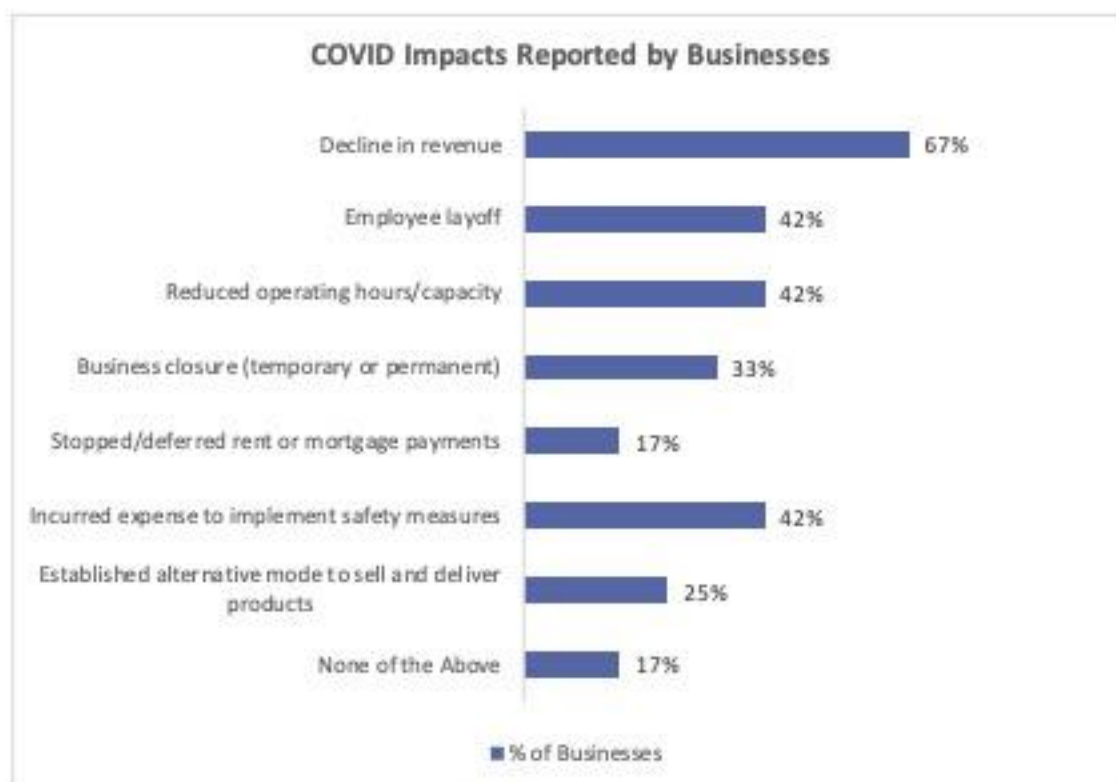
■ % of Businesses

Operating Status

At the time of the survey, 42% of businesses reported they were operating at reduced hours/capacity or closed.

Current Operating Status of Businesses (March/April 2021)

Status	%
Operating at Full Capacity	58%
Reduced Hours/Capacity due to COVID	42%
Temporarily Closed due to COVID	0%
Permanently Closed due to COVID	0%
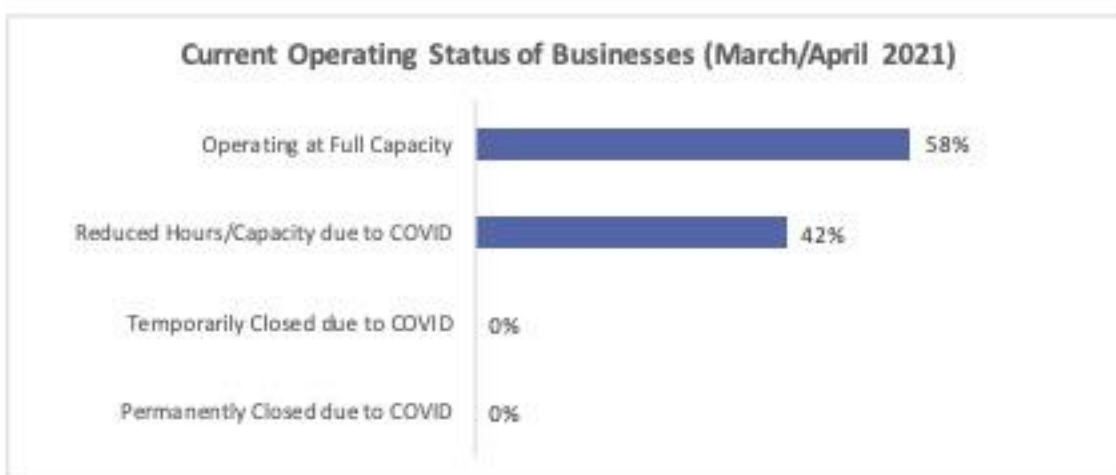
Business Satisfaction with Commercial District

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

Condition of Public Spaces, Streets & Sidewalks

Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied

Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied

Condition of Private Buildings, Storefronts, Signs

Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied

Proximity to Complementary Businesses & Uses

Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied

Access for Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied   Very Satisfied

Regulatory Environment

25% of businesses indicated that the regulatory environment poses an obstacle to business operation.

Regulations that Pose an Obstacle to Businesses Operation

Regulation	% of Businesses
Licensing or Permitting Regs.	8%
Signage Regs.	8%
Parking Regs.	0%
Outdoor Dining or Selling Regs.	0%
Allowed Use, Change of Use, Other Zoning Regs.	8%
Historic District Regs.	0%
Other Regs.	0%
None - No Issues with Regs.	75%

■ % of Businesses
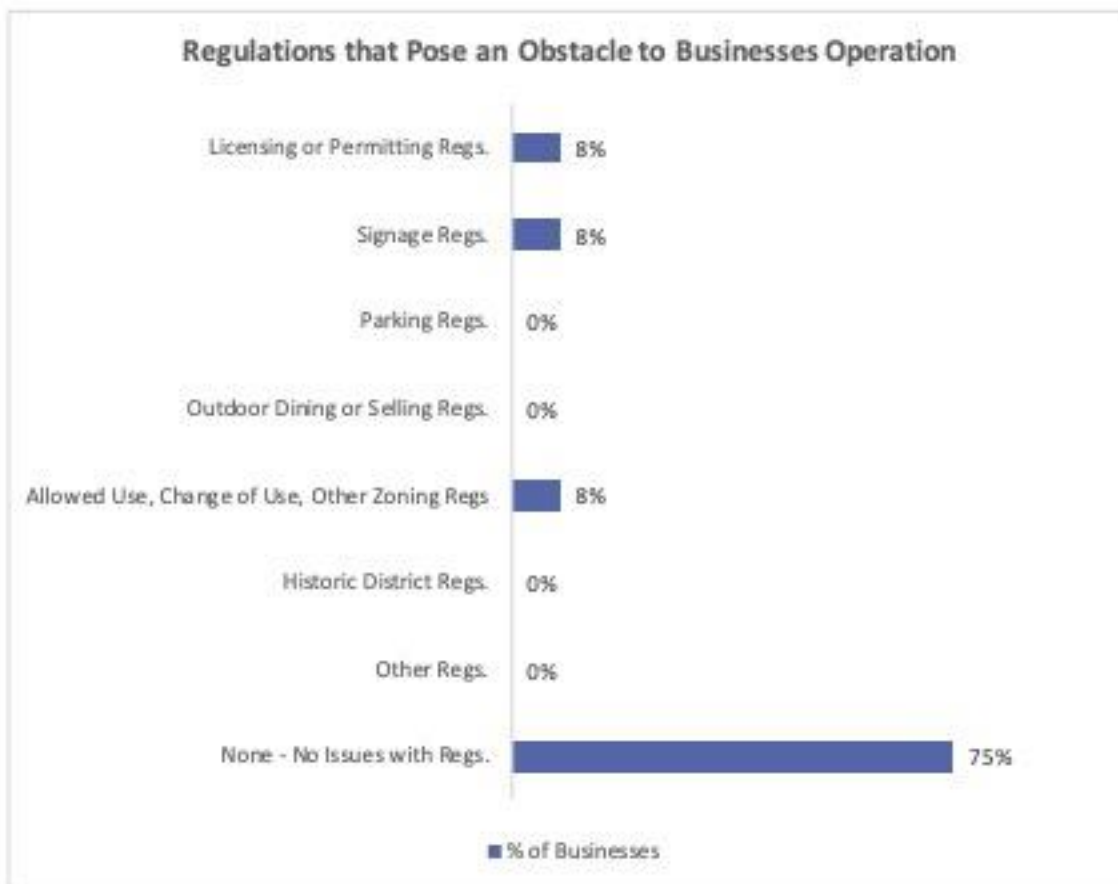
Business Input Related to Possible Strategies

Physical Environment, Atmosphere and Access
The charts below illustrate the average rating among respondents regarding importance of various strategies.

Renovation of Storefronts/ Building Facades

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

Improvements in Safety and/or Cleanliness

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

Improvement/Development of Public Spaces & Seating Areas

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

Changes in Public Parking Availability, Management or Policies

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

Improvement of Streetscape & Sidewalks

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

Amenity Improvements for Public Transit/Bike Users

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important
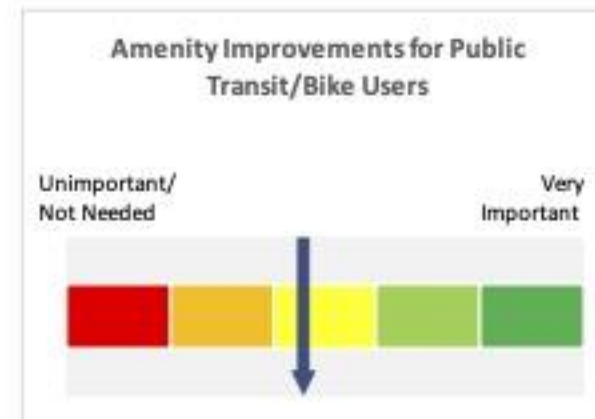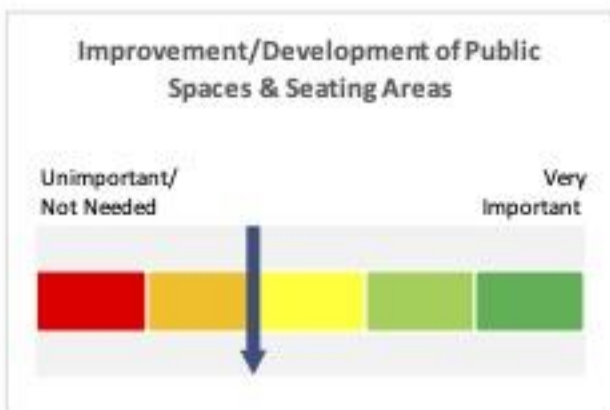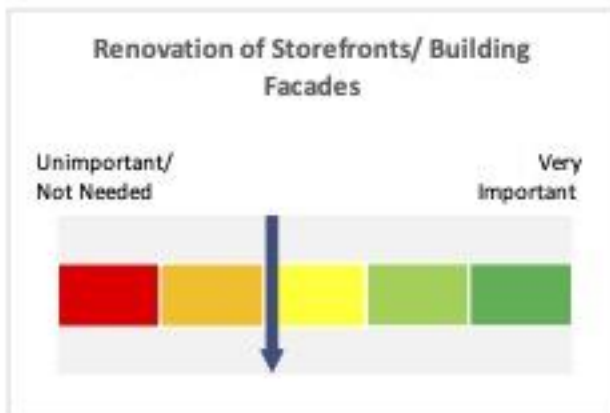
Attraction/Retention of Customers and Businesses

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

More Cultural Events/Activities to Bring People into the District

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining & Selling

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

Changes to Zoning or Other Local Regulations

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

Creation of a District Management Entity

Unimportant/ Not Needed — Very Important

Business Input Related to Possible Strategies (cont'd)

Businesses Support
42% of businesses expressed interest in receiving some kind of assistance.

Businesses Interested in Receiving Assistance

Category	% of Businesses
Setting Up an Online Store or Other Online Selling Channel	8%
Creating New Services such as Delivery	17%
Participating in Shared Marketing/Advertising	33%
Low-cost Financing for Storefront/Façade improvements	8%
Low-cost Financing for Purchasing Property in the District	25%
Training on the Use of Social Media	17%
None of the Above	58%

■ % of Businesses

Business Characteristics

Business Size
25% of businesses are microenterprises (≤ 5 employees).

Businesses by # of Employees

Employees	Percentage
1	0%
2-5	25%
6-10	17%
11-20	8%
21-50	42%
> 50	8%
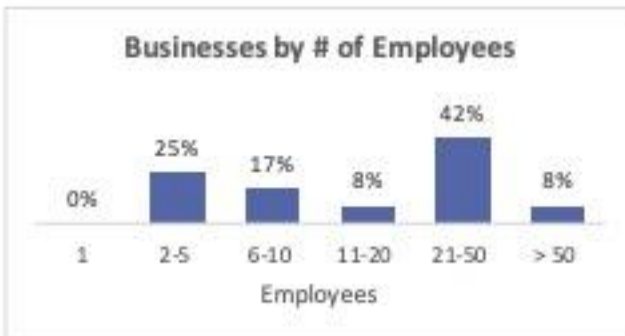
Business Tenure
83% of businesses rent their space.

Tenure

Own, 17%

Rent, 83%

Revenue Trend Prior to COVID
83% of businesses reported increase in revenue during the 3 years prior to COVID.

Revenue 3 Years Prior to COVID

	Percentage
Increased	83%
Decreased	0%
Stayed the Same	17%
Don't Know/NA	0%

Businesses by Type

Type	Percentage
Retail	17%
Food Service, Accommodation	17%
Personal Service	0%
Professional, Scientific, Technical, Legal	0%
Finance, Insurance	8%
Healthcare	0%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Fitness	0%
Non-Profit, Community Service	8%
Other	50%
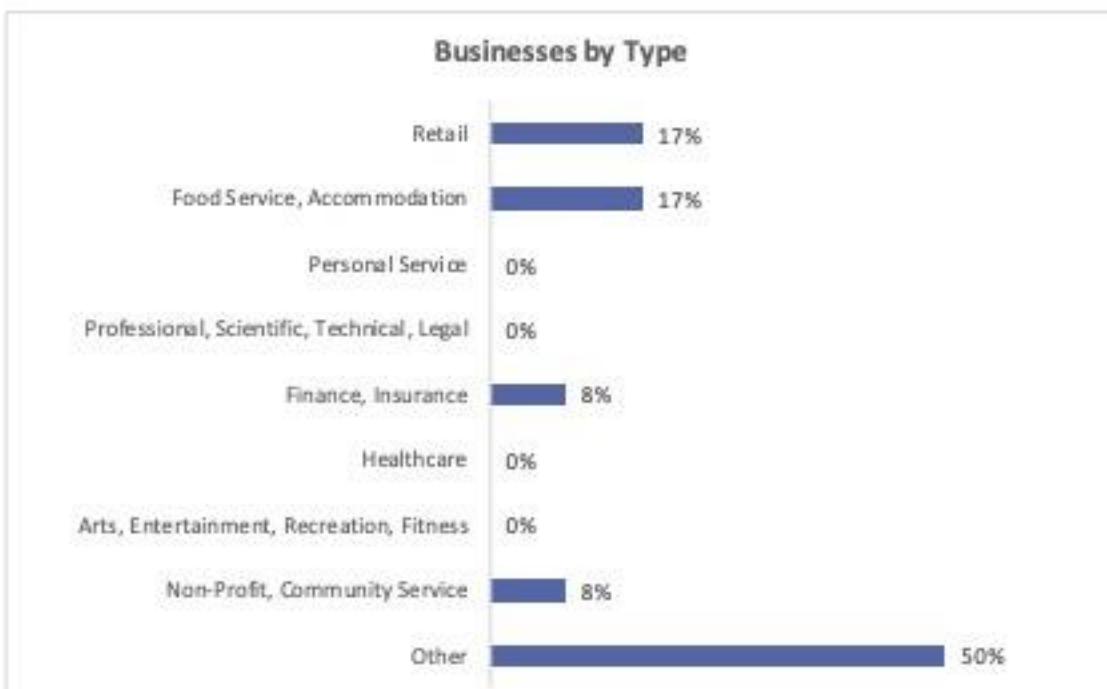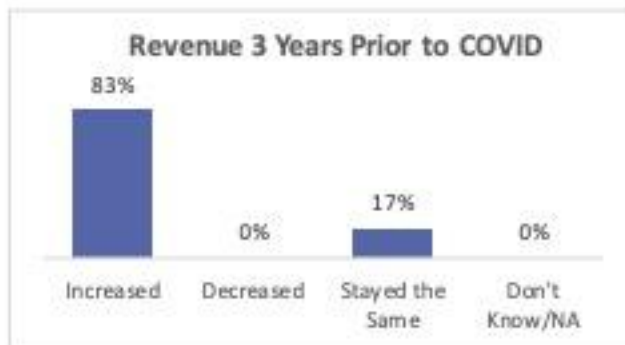
Community Where Targeted Downtown or Commercial District is Located

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

Boylston	12

Business Characteristics & Satisfaction with Commercial Area

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

1	0	0%
2 to 5	3	25%
6 to 10	2	17%
11 to 20	1	8%
21 to 50	5	42%
More than 50	1	8%
Total	12	100%

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

Own	2	17%
Rent	10	83%
Total	12	100%

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

Increased	10	83%
Decreased	0	0%
Stayed about the Same	2	17%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	0	0%
Total	12	100%

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

Retail (NAICS 44-45)	2	17%
Food Service (restaurants, bars), Accommodation (NAICS 72)	2	17%
Personal Service (hair, skin, nails, dry cleaning) (NAICS 81)	0	0%
Professional Scientific, Technical, Legal (NAICS 54)	0	0%
Finance, Insurance (NAICS 52)	1	8%
Healthcare (medical, dental, other health practitioners) (NAICS 62)	0	0%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Fitness (NAICS 71)	0	0%
Non-Profit, Community Services	1	8%
Other	6	50%
Total	12	100%

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

Condition of public spaces, streets, sidewalks

Very Dissatisfied	1	8%
Dissatisfied	1	8%
Neutral	4	33%
Satisfied	6	50%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	12	100%

Condition of Private Buildings, Facades, Storefronts, Signage

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	3	25%
Neutral	2	17%
Satisfied	7	58%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	12	100%

Access for Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	2	18%
Neutral	1	9%
Satisfied	8	73%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	11	100%

Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	1	8%
Neutral	1	8%
Satisfied	8	67%
Very Satisfied	2	17%
Total	12	100%

Proximity to Complementary Businesses or Uses

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	1	8%
Neutral	3	25%
Satisfied	8	67%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	12	100%

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

Licensing or permitting regulations	1	8%
Signage regulations	1	8%
Parking regulations	0	0%
Outdoor dining or selling regulations	0	0%
Allowed uses, change of use or other zoning regulations	1	8%
Historic District regulations	0	0%
Other regulations (not related to COVID)	0	0%
None - No Issues with regulations	9	75%

Impacts of COVID

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

Decline in revenue	8	67%
Employee layoff	5	42%
Reduced operating hours/capacity	5	42%
Business closure (temporary or permanent)	4	33%
Stopped/deferred rent or mortgage payments	2	17%
Incurred expense to implement safety measures	5	42%
Established alternative mode to sell and deliver products (on-line platforms, delivery, etc.)	3	25%
None of the Above	2	17%

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

Increased compared to 2019	3	25%
Stayed about the same as 2019	0	0%
Decreased 1 – 24% compared to 2019	6	50%
Decreased 25 – 49% compared to 2019	2	17%
Decreased 75 - 100% compared to 2019	1	8%
Decreased 50 – 74% compared to 2019	0	0%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	0	0%
Total	12	100%

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

More customers than before COVID	3	25%
About the same number as before COVID	0	0%
1 – 24% less customers than before COVID	1	8%
25 – 49% less customers than before COVID	0	0%
50 – 74% less customers than before COVID	3	25%
75 – 100% less customers than before COVID	2	17%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	3	25%
Total	12	100%

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

Operating at full capacity	7	58%
Operating at reduced hours/capacity due to COVID	5	42%
Temporarily closed due to COVID	0	0%
Permanently closed due to COVID	0	0%
Total	12	100%

Strategies for Supporting Businesses and Improving the Commercial District

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

Renovation of Storefronts/Building Facades

Unimportant/Not Needed	3	25%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	8%
Moderately Important	5	42%
Important	3	25%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	12	100%

Improvement/Development of Public Spaces & Seating Areas

Unimportant/Not Needed	3	25%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	17%
Moderately Important	4	33%
Important	3	25%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	12	100%

Improvement of Streetscape & Sidewalks

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	17%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	5	42%
Important	4	33%
Very Important	1	8%
Total	12	100%

Improvements in Safety and/or Cleanliness

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	8%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	17%
Moderately Important	3	25%
Important	6	50%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	12	100%

Changes in Public Parking Availability, Management or Policies

Unimportant/Not Needed	4	33%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	17%
Moderately Important	3	25%
Important	3	25%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	12	100%

Amenity Improvements for Public Transit Users and/or Bike Riders

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	17%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	17%
Moderately Important	4	33%
Important	4	33%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	12	100%

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

More Cultural Events/Activities to Bring People into the District

Unimportant/Not Needed	3	25%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	8%
Moderately Important	4	33%
Important	3	25%
Very Important	1	8%
Total	12	100%

More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining and Selling

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	17%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	17%
Moderately Important	3	25%
Important	4	33%
Very Important	1	8%
Total	12	100%

Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	17%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	17%
Moderately Important	4	33%
Important	4	33%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	12	100%

Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	8%
Of Little Importance or Need	3	25%
Moderately Important	6	50%
Important	2	17%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	12	100%

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

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	17%
Of Little Importance or Need	3	25%
Moderately Important	4	33%
Important	2	17%
Very Important	1	8%
Total	12	100%

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

Unimportant/Not Needed	3	25%
Of Little Importance or Need	4	33%
Moderately Important	3	25%
Important	2	17%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	12	100%

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

Setting up an online store or other online selling channel	1	8%
Creating new services such as delivery	2	17%
Participating in shared marketing/advertising	4	33%
Low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements	1	8%
Low-cost financing for purchasing property in the commercial district	3	25%
Training on the use of social media	2	17%
None of the above	7	58%

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

Comments

New signage for existing businesses, Boylston Restaurant Week, outdoor venues and patios, beautifying the roadside (flowers, plants)
—
G&L Plumbing, Inc.
Clinton Savings Bank
none
The Other Place Pub
—
Mikes moonwalk Rentals & Backyard BBQ
Boylston Beverages
—
—
—

Appendix B: Neighborways Planters Presentation

"Self Watering" Planters that can be made for under $20

These only need watering about once a week.

55 gallon drums can be had for free with some sleuthing; or $20 on Craigslist. Each drum makes two planters.

Drum in hand: Drill a pilot hole and cut your drum with a jig saw.

If you want a perfectly straight line pre-tape drum with masking tape

Supplies Needed

½ barrel or other large water tight container. Cost: free to $10

2" or larger PVC pipe for fill pipe. Cost: free to $1.35

½" PVC male terminal adaptor for drainage hole (while it says half inch, the drilled hole that it screws into is ¾").   Cost:15 cents

Pipe or other water proof material to hold soil out of reservoir. Shown is 4" PVC pipe. You can also use old 16 ounce plastic deli containers with holes drilled in the top of them. Or perforated pipe which is quite inexpensive and great for this. Cost: free to $4.

Landscape cloth (shown later) to keep soil out of reservoir. Cost: $1.30 when purchased as part of a 50 foot role.

Rope and old hose for handles. Free/ Salvage

Tools
- ¾" Drill bit for drilling handle holes and drain/ overflow hole
- 1/8" drill bit for holes to secure top of filling pipe. Ziptie. nylon string or electrical wire are all great to secure the pipe!
- Jigsaw to cut barrel
- Hacksaw, angle grinder or circular saw to cut PVC
- Sharp knife or scissors to cut rope and old hose for handles
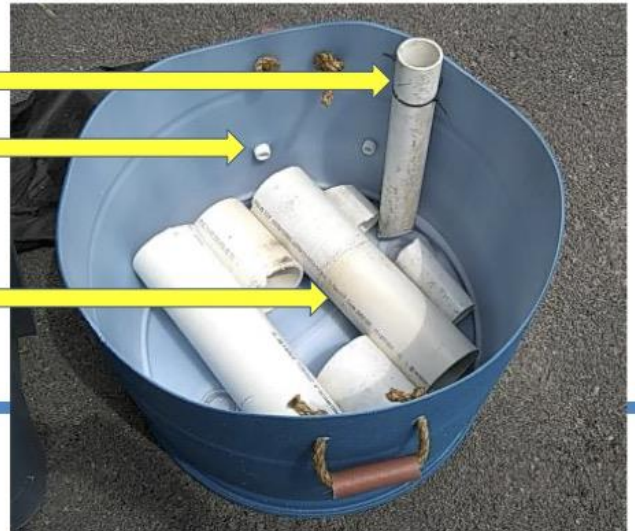
Tips

Line the drain hole up with the handles when drilling it so that if you want to move the planter you can empty the reservoir. To do this lift the handle opposite the drain hole and the water will drain making the barrel much lighter to move.

Note placement of landscape cloth to keep soil from building up around the bottom of the filling pipe.

Place fill pipe so that it will empty quickly into a cavity. Don't have it up against the side of your reservoir piping, but against an open hole.

More Tips!

- Keep the watering hole drain holes covered or plugged between waterings so that mosquitos don't breed in your reservoir.
- When you add soil to the planter for the first time, make sure to wet it down so that it forms a wicking action to the reservoir. Dry soil will not wick!