Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Cambridge, MA

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

Acknowledgements

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

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Kendall Square Association

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Cambridge Local First

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Pooja Paode

GrayMist Studio & Shop

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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Rapid Recovery Planning Program

● Program Communities
○ Non-Participating Towns and Cities
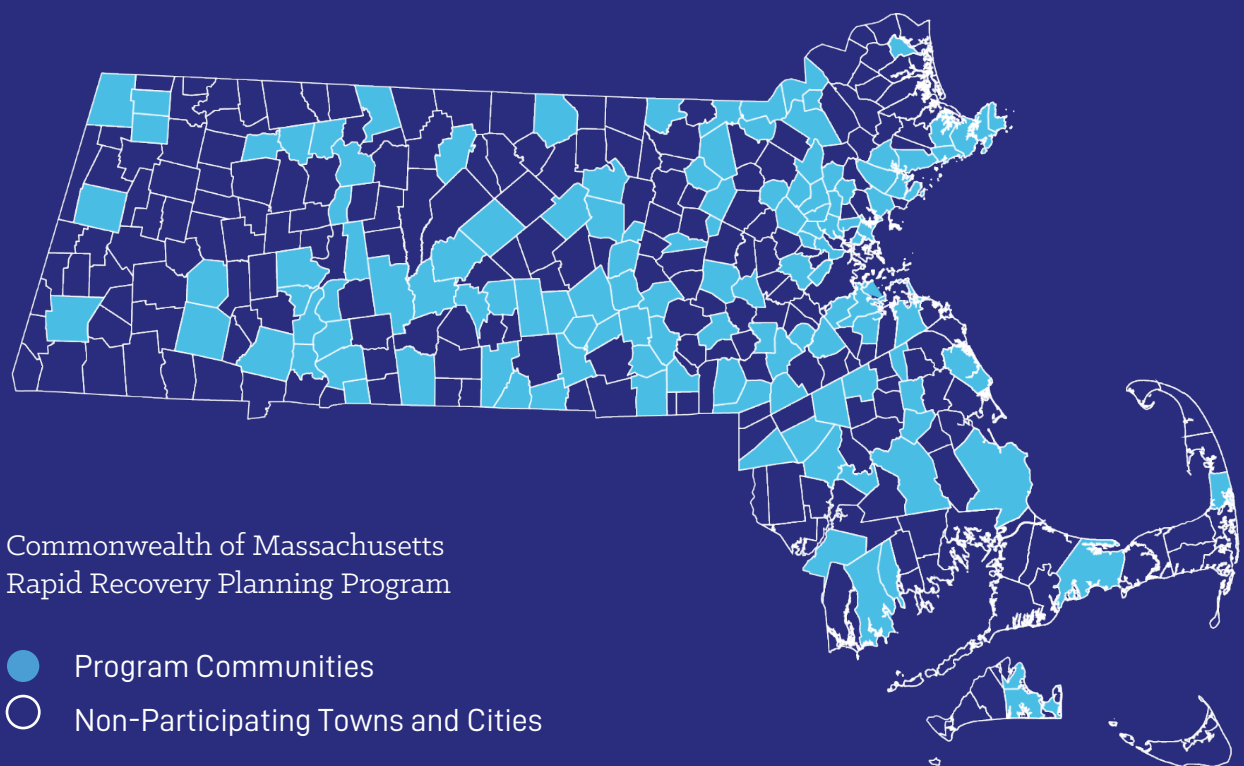
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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 non-profit entity) and Subject Matter Experts who supported the development of ideas for project recommendations and shared knowledge through best practice webinars and individual consultations.

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

Each Rapid Recovery Plan was developed across three phases between February-August 2021. Phase 1 - Diagnostic, Phase 2- Project Recommendations, Phase 3 - Plan.
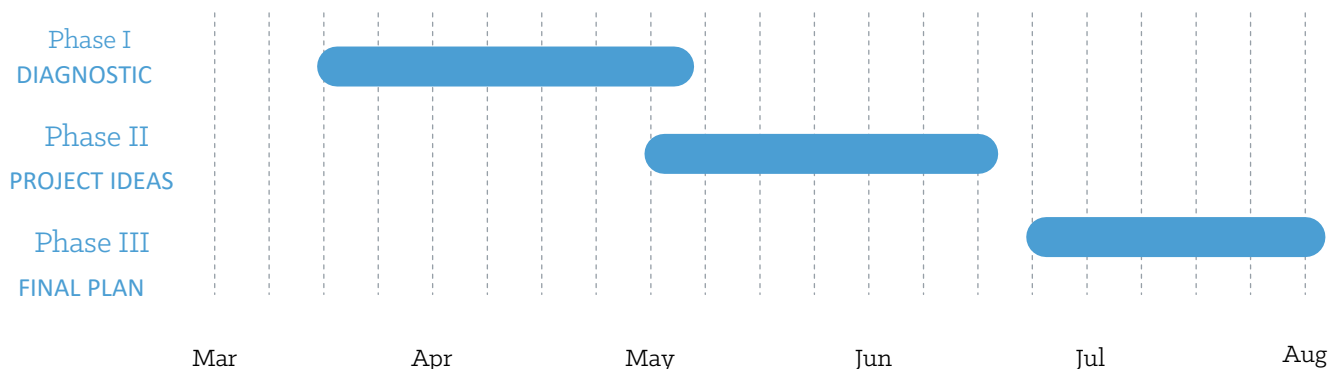
In Phase 1: Diagnostic, Plan Facilitators utilized the Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework that was adapted from the award-winning Commercial DNA approach as published by the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) in "Preparing a Commercial District Diagnostic", and authored by Larisa Ortiz, Managing Director, Streetsense (RRP Program Advisor).

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

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework

CUSTOMER BASE

Who are the customers of businesses in 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

Cambridge has a large and vibrant business community with nearly 900 storefronts and over 2 million square feet of ground floor retail space, according to City-provided data. These businesses are spread across the City, located within and between Cambridge's 11 separate commercial districts. These districts are unique in size, scale, infrastructure, and character (refer to the "Highlights from the Physical Environment" section of this report and the Appendix for a map of these districts). They also have varying levels of administrative capacity, creating inequities in opportunities and resource availability for local businesses. While one district is a designated Business Improvement District with significantly more dedicated staff members and resources, other districts have no district management in place, have a few business owners acting as informal stewards for the district, or have a dedicated district management entity with 1 - 2 staff members.

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly had an economic impact on local businesses across Cambridge, with 58 reported business closures Citywide as of March 2021. The retail and food services sectors were hardest hit, with 48 of the business closures (83%) occurring in these two categories. Data from the City's vacant storefront database reveals that the City had 132 vacancies as of March 2021. This data reveals that 60 of the 132 storefronts (45%) had been vacant for less than 10 months, indicating some may be directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the City and the City's various business groups sprang into action to assist businesses in need. In March 2020, the City announced the availability of $600,000 in grants for small businesses through a Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant. The grant program intended to award up to $6,000 to small businesses for expenses such as protective equipment, rent, employee wages, utilities, cost of goods, and outdoor dining infrastructure. To date, the City has awarded $4.8 million in grants and loans to support small businesses facing multiple challenges. Money was distributed via five different programs involving $1,100,000 from the Mayor's Disaster Relief Fund, $1.5 Million from the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority Zero-Interest Loan program, and a combined $2.2 million from Community Development Block Grant Funds and Federal CARES Act funds administered through the City of Cambridge Relief, Recovery and Winter COVID-19 Grant Programs. The grant and loan programs provided funds for small businesses for expenses such as protective equipment, rent, employee wages, utilities, cost of goods, and outdoor dining infrastructure. The average grant award amounted to $7,000. The various business associations across Cambridge also came together to participate in the City Manager's Small Business Advisory Committee with City administration to coordinate COVID-19 response efforts. This spurred several campaigns, such as the "Hello Neighbor" campaign to provide a unified message surrounding sanitation and safety and the "Pick it up Cambridge" campaign to encourage restaurant patrons to call direct to pick up their orders to save restaurant owners from paying third-party delivery service fees.

This report details a list of project recommendations developed collaboratively between the Plan Facilitator, Subject Matter Experts, and City of Cambridge Community Development Department. These project recommendations address the unique economic challenges and opportunities arising within Cambridge as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collected during Phase 1 (the diagnostic phase) of this plan helped inform the project recommendation selection and development process. The diagnostic phase included collecting demographic and market data that fell into four buckets (physical environment, business environment, market information, and administrative capacity). Two separate business surveys also provided key data to inform project recommendations. This plan's Citywide business survey was conducted during March and April of 2021 and received 71 responses from owners or other appropriate representatives of business establishments located in Cambridge. City staff also conducted a separate impact assessment survey for the small business COVID-19 relief grant mentioned above, which received 100 responses (from 150 contacted businesses) in September of 2020. Informational interviews were also held with several representatives from the various business associations across Cambridge to address the challenges and opportunities throughout the City and further inform the selection of project recommendations. Additionally, a community meeting was held in June of 2021 to present the findings from Phase 1 and receive feedback related to possible project recommendations.

This project was a Citywide effort, focusing on all 11 of Cambridge's commercial districts, and, as such, the resulting recommendations are not specific to any one district. Recognizing that there are a variety of support needs in each district, limited capacity with City staff, and a desire to support sustained independence from the commercial districts to continue developing and implementing the activations that support their growth and success, right-sizing the support for each district and prioritizing based on the gaps in each district and their capacity will be necessary. While there are individual summaries provided for each project recommendation, a holistic approach to implementation is advised. The impact in each commercial district can be maximized and there are administrative efficiencies that can be gained by using this approach, with staff hours being utilized more effectively as the projects are integrated into a larger system.

Diagnostic

Key Findings
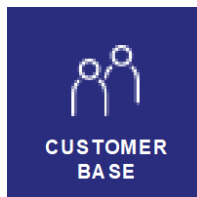
The City has a large, young, and well-educated customer base

The City's customer base includes an estimated 118,202 residents (Esri Business Analyst, 2020), 124,243 employees (US Census OnTheMap, 2018), 44,804 post-secondary students (City of Cambridge: Annual Town Gown Report Higher Education Statistics, 2020), and at least 10,000,000 annual visitors (Cambridge Office of Tourism, 2019). According to Esri Business Analyst data from 2020, the residential population is young, with a median age of 32. 58% of residents are between the ages of 25 and 64 (the typical working age). The City's residents are also very well-educated, with 79% of those 25 and older holding a Bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income is $99,021 and the average household size is 2 individuals.

The City's 6,769 businesses (Esri Business Analyst, 2020), 4 higher education institutes (Harvard University, MIT, Lesley University, and Hult International Business School), and 3,966 hotel rooms (City provided data, April 2021) contribute to its customer base.

CUSTOMER BASE

The City's public and private infrastructure are well-maintained

Cambridge is home to 869 storefronts, according to the City of Cambridge: Open and Closed Business List as of April 2021. The City has a healthy mix of ground floor uses, with 2,136,200 square feet of ground floor retail space, 2,871,000 square feet of ground floor office space, and 358,700 square feet of ground floor manufacturing space according to the City's FY2020 property assessor database.

The public realm offers ample open space for residents and visitors, with 888 acres of parks, fields, and plazas (City of Cambridge GIS open space data layer, 2021). There are an estimated 17,847 on-and-off-street parking spaces across the City (City of Cambridge GIS parking data layers, 2021). Roadbeds and sidewalks are generally well-maintained within the City's commercial districts, with street lighting and visible crosswalks helping to ensure the safety of pedestrians. A Citywide protected bike lane network is nearing completion, offering further improvements to the public infrastructure, as the City assumes a national leadership role in promoting and implementing large scale bicycle safety measures.

Commercial property owners appear to be proactive with property upkeep ensuring a generally well-maintained private realm across the City's commercial districts. Storefront facades are in excellent condition, with very few defects or enhancement opportunities, providing the commercial districts with a clean and appealing appearance. Visible and high-quality storefront signage is strongly utilized throughout the commercial districts as well.

There are opportunities to improve the pedestrian experience across the public realm with additional wayfinding/branding efforts and an increased supply of street trees and benches. An increased use of awnings and attractive window displays could further enhance the pedestrian experience within the private realm.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The City has a Healthy Mix of Retail and Restaurant Options

Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services are two of the largest industry sectors within the City, in terms of number of business establishments. There were an estimated 569 retail businesses and 563 accommodation/food services businesses across the City in 2020 (Esri Business Analyst). This highlights the importance of restaurants and retail establishments to the City's economy and the vibrancy of its commercial districts.

According to CoStar data, the average rent for retail space in the City was $43.53 per square foot (NNN) as of the fourth quarter of 2020. The average rent for office space was a robust $82.03 per square foot during this same period (CB Richard Ellis). The average office rent within the City is boosted by Kendall Square's regionally-leading Life Sciences sector, which typically demands much higher rent levels. The City's average rent for lab space reached $98.07 per square foot (NNN) in the fourth quarter of 2020 (CB Richard Ellis).

There were a total of 58 business closures across the City since the start of the pandemic, as of March 2021, according to City-provided data. Roughly half of these closures were in the Accommodations & Food Services NAICS industry with an additional third in the Retail Trade sector. Additionally, there were 132 vacant storefronts Citywide as of March 2021.

ADMIN CAPACITY
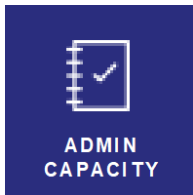
## The City has a Variety of Organizations Acting as Stewards for the Local Business Community

There are two Citywide organizations (Cambridge Chamber of Commerce and Cambridge Local First) and four districtwide organizations (the Central Square Business Improvement District, the East Cambridge Business Association, the Harvard Square Business Association, and the Kendall Square Association) championing economic development efforts within the City. The East Cambridge Business Association represents two commercial districts, both East Cambridge and Inman Square. Additionally, although there is no formal organization representing the Huron Village/Observatory Hill commercial districts, select business owners informally gather to organize various events and activities throughout the year. Resources are unequal across the city as existing business associations operate under different capacities (with some business associations staffed by one individual) and some districts have no formal district management entity. It is important for the Citywide organizations to offer resources and assistance to small businesses located within these smaller districts with limited or no formal management entity.

These groups play a vital role in the City's recovery efforts from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing the expertise and authority to carry out and advocate for resources and investments around economic development. Conversations with representatives from many of these groups revealed that day-to-day administrative and operational duties shifted as a result of the ongoing pandemic. These groups took on more of an advisory role in helping local businesses navigate the ever-changing state of local regulations and assisted with different types of administrative tasks (such as navigating the PPP loan process or creating a social media presence). These business groups are an asset to the business community, providing much needed assistance to small business owners across the City.

Highlights from the Physical Environment

The City of Cambridge has many vibrant commercial districts (pictured below). The physical environments within these districts vary significantly. To account for these differences, the districts were categorized by the City's Community Development Department into three distinct groups; neighborhood districts (those characterized by their surrounding residential neighborhoods), developing districts (those actively being developed with large projects ongoing), and large commercial districts (developed districts in busier commercial zones of the City). Detailed site walks were conducted for a representative district from each category, to assess the current state of the public and private realm across the spectrum of the City's commercial district types. The site walks were conducted in East Cambridge (a neighborhood district), Concord Alewife/Fresh Pond (a developing district), and Porter Square (a large commercial district).
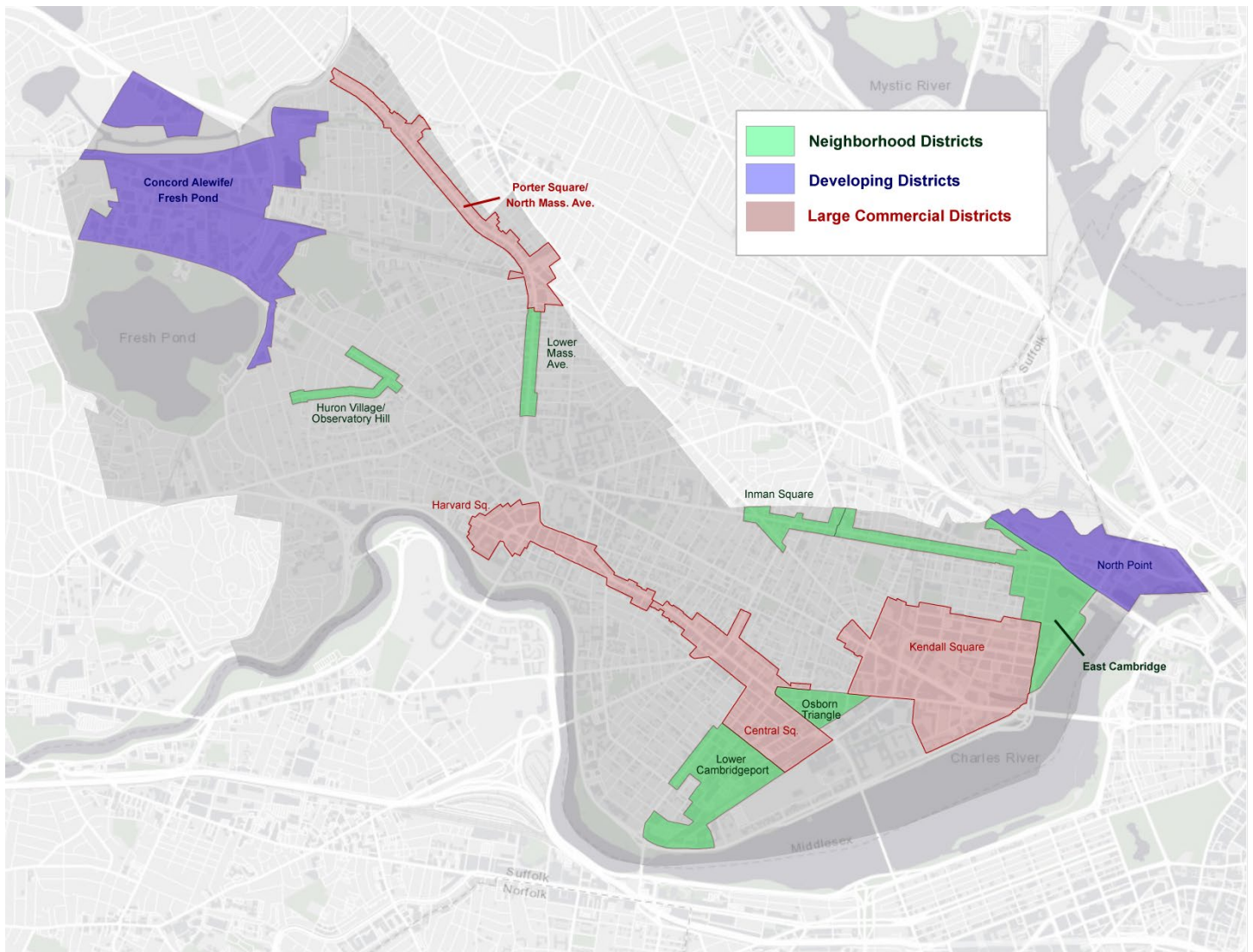
Map of Cambridge's Commercial Districts. Source: RKG Associates

ACCESS:

Access is generally strong across the three representative districts. Roads are well-maintained and crosswalks are safe and convenient to pedestrians. The roads in East Cambridge (the neighborhood district) balance the needs of motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians well, creating a safe environment for all users. The roads in the other two districts do provide crosswalks for pedestrians and lanes for cyclists, but their design largely prioritizes the movement of motor vehicles.

Additionally, sidewalks across all three representative districts are generally clean, well-maintained, and accessible to users of different ages and abilities.

Transit stops have clearly marked entrances with highly visible signage and adequate structures/shelters in place to protect pedestrians from the surrounding environment.

On-street and off-street parking areas have sufficient signage and lighting to aid in wayfinding for motorists.

The business survey revealed that business owners across the City are very satisfied with the condition of public spaces, streets, and sidewalks. They are also very satisfied with the access for customers and employees within the districts.

VISIBILITY:

Visibility is good across the City's commercial districts, but there is room for improvement. Clear visual cues, such as road signs and parking regulation signs allow motorists to navigate successfully through these commercial areas. However, the current signage does not serve pedestrians as well. While storefronts across all three districts have highly visible and high-quality signs and transit stops are clearly marked, there is limited signage reflecting the brand and identity of the area by identifying key assets and destinations to pedestrians.

Streets and sidewalks are well lit. Streetlamps and sidewalk lighting are plentiful within the three districts , providing ample lighting while ensuring pedestrian and motorist safety. Storefront interior lighting is present in small pockets throughout the three representative districts. Interior lighting can help enliven a commercial corridor and add additional security after business hours by helping to illuminate sidewalks.

Bus Shelter on Mass Ave. in Porter Square. Source: RKG Associates

Sidewalk Lighting on Cambridge St. in East Cambridge. Source: RKG Associates

Source: Cambridge Urban Design Guidelines: Outdoor Dining in Public Areas During COVID-19

The City has embraced the opportunity to expand outdoor dining

Data from this plan's business survey and conversations with business association representatives from across the City reveal that business owners and customers have enjoyed the expansion of outdoor dining areas across the City and want to see more opportunities for outdoor dining and selling in the future.

Over 120 businesses created or expanded outdoor dining areas across Cambridge in 2020 under the City's "Temporary Extension of Licensed Premises to Outdoor Area Due to Covid-19" program, according to the Outdoor Dining in Public Areas during COVID-19 urban design guideline document released in the Spring of 2021. This program requires business owners to apply for a permit for a temporary premises extension, allowing for outdoor dining for the maximum amount of time allowed per state law.

The City worked with an outside consultant to develop a comprehensive set of design guidelines for these outdoor dining areas to maintain pedestrian and customer safety and the vitality of the various commercial districts. These design guidelines provide guidance for tables and seating to ensure there is proper accessibility and physical distancing is maintained. Guidance related to barriers, flooring, weather protection, lighting, and decoration are also outlined.

The types of physical spaces available for outdoor dining arrangements in the public realm are limited to sidewalk or curbside corral locations in the street within a parking lane. This highlights inequities in opportunities because of the differences in the physical environment across the City's many commercial districts. Some districts with narrower sidewalks are limited to smaller sidewalk arrangements or strictly curbside parking lane arrangements. The continued installation of the Citywide protected bike lane infrastructure will enhance the challenges for these districts with narrow sidewalks, as curbside street space may no longer be a viable option for outdoor dining arrangements.

Highlights from the Business Environment

The industry sector with the largest number of establishments in the City as of 2020 is Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services. There are 1,015 businesses within this sector, which is comprised of businesses in a variety of industries, including legal services, architectural/engineering services, consulting services, computer services, advertising, research, and many more.

Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services are both among the City's top 5 NAICS sectors (in terms of total establishment count). Data reveals East Cambridge has the largest concentration of retail businesses (71), followed by Harvard Square (65) and Central Square (47). Harvard Square is home to the most Accommodation & Food Services establishments (78), with Kendall Square (63) and Central Square (61) following closely behind.

Category	Count
Professional & Technical Services	1,015
Other Services	784
Retail Trade	569
Accommodation & Food Services	562
Health Care	514
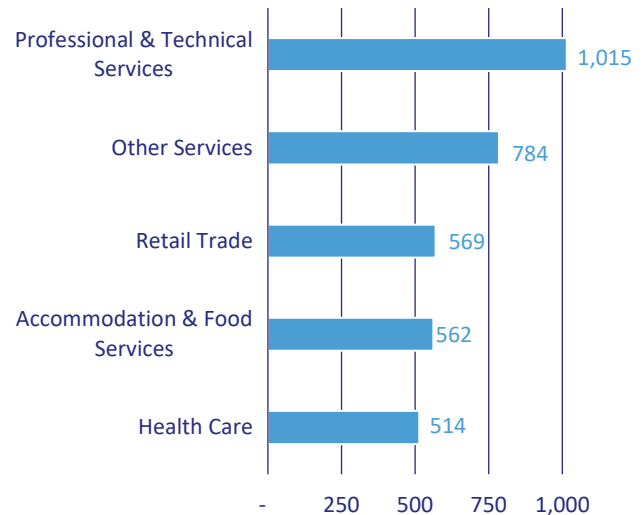
Number of Businesses Citywide (Top 5 Categories). Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2020

Variety of businesses in the Harvard Square commercial district. Source: RKG Associates

Porter Square Shopping Center Entrance. Source: RKG Associates

Permanent Business Closures

There were 58 business closures across the City as of March 2021, with the highest concentration within the Harvard Square commercial district, where 12 businesses (21% of the City's closures) permanently closed. The Inman Square and Kendall Square commercial districts each accounted for 7 additional closures (each representing 12% of the total), while the Porter Square/North Mass. Ave., East Cambridge, and Central Square commercial districts accounted for 5 closures each (9% of the total).

48 of the City's 58 business closures (83%) were retail or accommodation/food services businesses. 29 closures occurred in the accommodation/food services sector (50% of all Citywide closures). All 7 of the business closures within the Kendall Square commercial district were bars/restaurants. 5 of the 7 closures in the Inman Square district and 4 of the 12 in the Harvard Square district were bars/restaurants.

19 of the City's closures were retail businesses (33% of all closures). The vast majority of these occurred in the Harvard Square district, which lost 8 retail businesses.
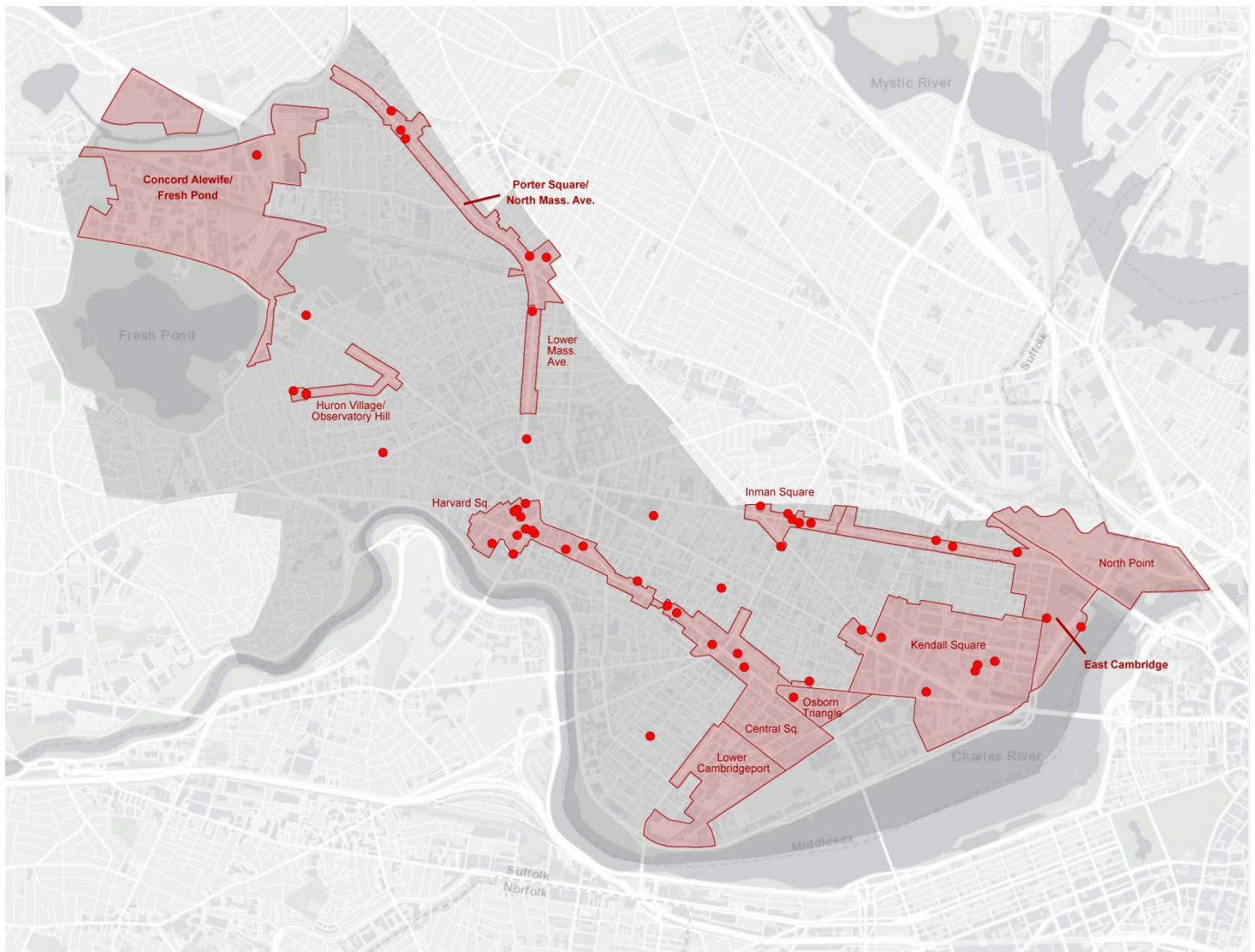
Map of Permanent Business Closures as of March 2021. Source: City of Cambridge Community Development Department, RKG Associates

Retail Vacancies

The City had 132 vacant storefronts as of March 2021. Again, the majority of these vacancies are located in the Harvard Square commercial district. This district accounted for 40 of the 132 total Citywide vacancies (30%). The Central Square, East Cambridge, and Porter Square/North Mass. Ave. commercial districts follow with 17, 14, and 13 vacancies, respectively.

The City's Community Development Department keeps records of all vacant retail storefronts (updated quarterly), which helps in identifying vulnerable areas and districts. According to data provided by the City, 60 of the 132 (45%) vacancies have been vacant for a period of less than 10 months. An additional 33 storefronts (25%) have been vacant for 1-2 years. In total, 70% of all vacant storefronts as of March 2021 (93 storefronts) have been vacant for less than 2 years. Conversely, 22 storefronts have been vacant for 2-5 years and 14 have been vacant for 5 or more years.

In 2018, an outside consultant completed a Vacant Storefront Best Practices Report that included recommendations around tenant attraction and temporary activation strategies aiming to maintain street level activity and safeguard against commercial property blight.
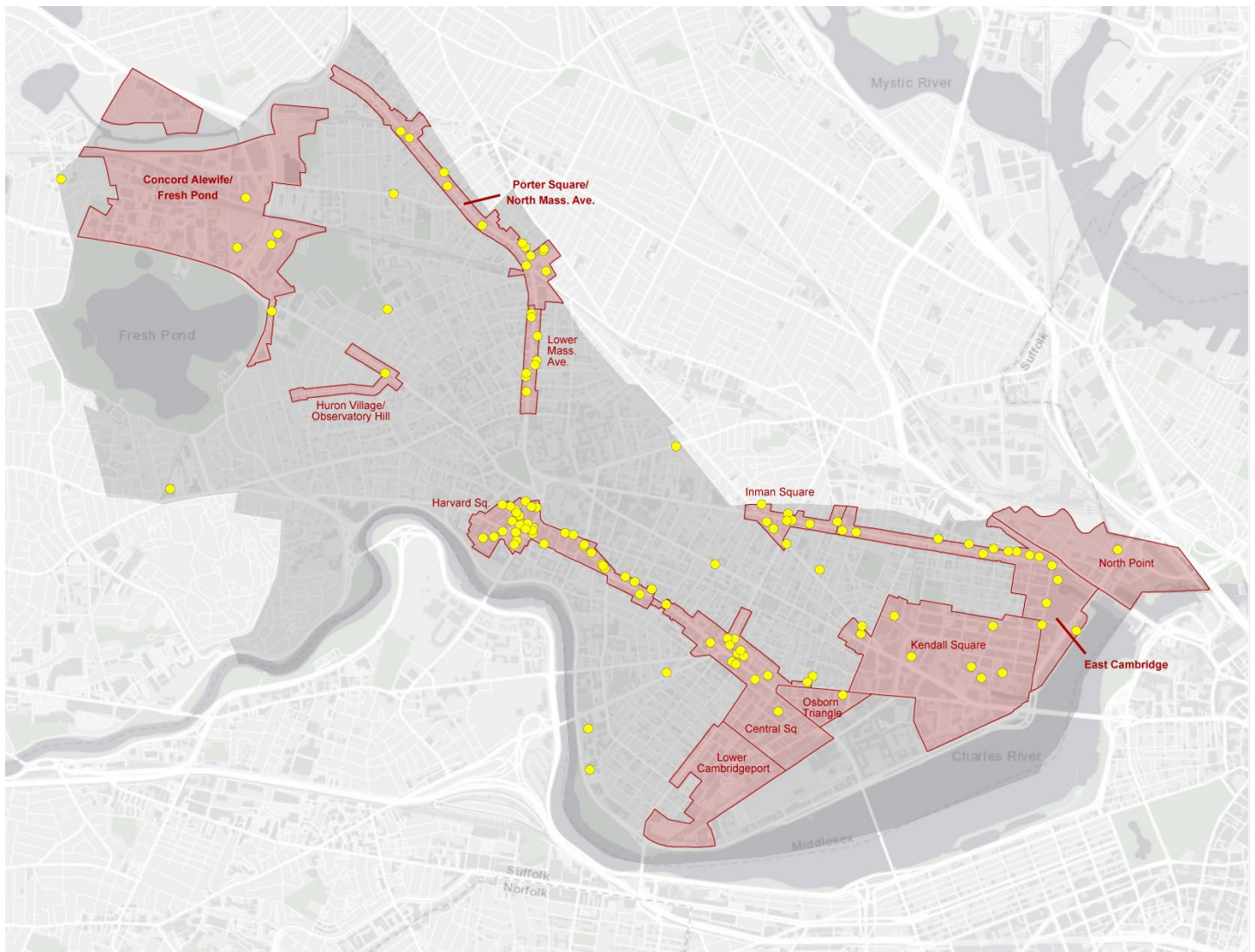
Map of Ground Floor Storefront Vacancies as of March 2021. Source: City of Cambridge Community Development Department, RKG Associates

Using Results from the Diagnostic Phase to Inform Recommendations

The key findings highlighted in the preceding section, along with the remainder of the data collected throughout the diagnostic phase helped to inform the remaining pieces of this plan. Data was obtained from third-party providers, directly from the City, from visual inspections during physical site walks in the commercial districts, from responses from the two separate business surveys (one conducted as a part of this plan and the other previously conducted separately by the City), from the informational interviews conducted by the plan facilitator with representatives from the City's business associations, and from community feedback obtained during the community meeting held in June of 2021. This diagnostic phase focused on four areas of analysis; the physical environment, business environment, market information, and administrative capacity.

The findings from the diagnostic phase assisted in identifying priority challenges and opportunities facing the City of Cambridge. This informed the selection of project recommendations across six categories; public realm, private realm, revenue & sales, administrative capacity, tenant mix, and culture/arts. The project recommendations are detailed in the section that follows with associated best practice examples included.

Project Recommendations

Implement citywide wayfinding system to promote movement between squares (with integrated branding/art)

Category		Public Realm
Location		Citywide (within each commercial district; start with one district and then expand)
Origin		RKG Associates, City of Cambridge Community Development Department, Selbert Perkins Design Collaborative
Budget		Medium ($50,000 - $200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk - Data shows a desire from business groups and business owners for more wayfinding/branding
Key Performance Indicators		Longevity of brand and system, community and business feedback through public surveys and polling, pedestrian counts near kiosks
Partners & Resources		City of Cambridge Community Development Department, Cambridge Office of Tourism, Cambridge Local First, the Central Square BID, Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, the East Cambridge Business Association, the Harvard Square Business Association, the Kendall Square Association, consultant team to assist with design and strategy, Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department and Department of Public Works to assess safety of placement

Imagery of existing wayfinding system in place in the Kendall Square commercial district, designed by Minelli Inc. Source: Minelli Inc.

Diagnostic

The ongoing pandemic has led to a significant reduction in commercial activity and foot traffic across the entire City. This proves challenging for the smaller commercial districts, as noted in discussions with business representatives. Small business owners expressed a strong interest in promoting movement between the various commercial districts, to increase foot traffic in certain areas that have seen a dramatic decrease because of the impacts of COVID-19. A separate City-conducted business survey identified further assistance with driving foot traffic as a key area of need.

A recent wayfinding initiative in Kendall Square has provided some initial momentum surrounding these efforts. The implemented signage is visually appealing and offers an opportunity for expanded wayfinding efforts in other districts to incorporate existing design pieces into a broader system. The unique character of each of the City's various commercial districts offers an opportunity to create a system implementing distinctive branding elements from each district with a unified theme across the City.

This project holds the potential to create better direction for pedestrians with a cohesive system promoting movement throughout the City and connecting the many commercial districts. Cambridge has a vibrant restaurant and retail scene, with incredible access to a variety of public transportation options and a large amount of foot traffic within many of the commercial districts. There is an opportunity to provide better on-street communication.

Action Item

This project aims to implement a citywide wayfinding system to promote movement between squares (with integrated branding/art). It could improve on-the-ground communication to visitors within each commercial district, allowing for easier movement and the opportunity for visitors to travel more easily to other districts throughout the City. This has the potential to improve economic activity by retaining visitors for longer periods of time and creating more opportunities for commerce.

Action items include:

- Organize branding ideas from stakeholder meetings. This work is planned in a separate project recommendation (district-specific marketing campaigns) so a holistic approach to this plan will be most efficient.

- Plan the design of the system. Strategies for rolling out the project in phases should be identified. Identifying who the signage will be directed towards is important and will inform placement decisions.

- A design/strategy team will need to be identified to complete design and design review for the pilot district. Community feedback should be considered or expect pushback.

- Implementation and tracking. Measure success of first implementation to inform expansion efforts to other districts.

 # 1

The Process of Developing Wayfinding & Signage

1. Gather Your Assets

When it comes to making an impact with wayfinding, understanding the current state of the City's wayfinding signage is the first step. When the term "wayfinding" is attached to signage, it means the messaging on the sign is directing the viewer towards a destination.

Any maps indicating where current wayfinding signage exists will be very useful, and a beneficial first step. If you don't have this, an audit will likely be required.

Citywide or Neighborhood Planning documents that outline goals for the City are useful as well, as they will likely be referenced regarding planning around future goals and projects.

While a street sign could be considered wayfinding, the important distinction for this exercise should focus on sign types that include more information about destinations.

Gathering a master list of Points of Interest, or POI is also a good decision. Once the list feels comprehensive for the City, a good idea is to categorize or sort this list into groups based on popularity of the given POI as a destination. This should give the wayfinding team a clear idea of goals for the wayfinding program.

2. Layer the Data

Once the team has any maps, Citywide or Neighborhood Plans, POI's and traffic maps, the goal should be to layer these sets of information over each other.

The data will begin to form a clear picture of how the wayfinding system should address the topography of the City. The team should be able to see major routes for vehicles & pedestrians, POI's, town limits, parking & points of entry and exit. Based on all this information, the wayfinding team can make an educated assessment on where signage can be placed to help specific users find their way through the City. Keep in mind that wayfinding users will have different objectives; visitors will have different destinations from residents.

Beyond this, the team should add locations that are instrumental in helping people navigate the environment in an ideal way. Selbert Perkins (the SME for this project recommendation) calls these decision points – they represent a point on a journey that can influence the user to take a more beneficial or easier route.

The resulting maps should outline locations that are likely underutilized for signage and wayfinding.

3. Identify the Sign Types

When it comes to identifying the signage elements, the first step will be looking at the needs of your wayfinding from a mapping perspective and assessing how those needs can be met with physical signs. Before picking visuals, really deliberate about the role of each sign in each instance.

Wayfinding information will be perceived differently based on context, as users driving have substantially less time to read signs than pedestrians.

Typically, the result of this exercise will lead to a set of signs that each have different roles. Selbert Perkins refers to this as a signage family. These are often shown at scale on a single page and compared to ensure each sign has a specific duty and avoids being redundant to users.

The most common sign would be a directory sign, which is designed for pedestrians. This is placed in high pedestrian traffic situations, normally where most traffic originates. Typically, a map is shown outlining all points of interest in within a certain walking distance. A best practice is to indicate the amount of time it would take to walk to each destination, either in time or distance.

Also commonly seen in wayfinding packages, a vehicular directional sign includes large text, and is meant to indicate direction for top tier destinations. This information is meant to influence wayfinding users that are driving vehicles, so text should read large. These signs should also be placed *before* users have to make turns in their journey – they should have enough time to interpret the signage, make decisions and have time to correct their course before an intersection.

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4. Designing the Signage

Once the sign types have been identified, the visual design can be applied to the signage family. It's important to let the objectives of each sign type lead in this phase, and not let visuals dictate the overall design. Here, form follows function.

Vehicular and bike signage should be large to allow for large type. All signage should be high contrast and use fonts that are highly legible. In some instances, signs are seen for less than five seconds, and have information on them that will be crucial, like indicating direction to a hospital.

Pedestrian signage can be smaller in size but should be more targeted. Vehicular signage is still relevant to people on foot, and a good directional sign in the proper location will be relevant to all users and can save the City money as a more efficient use of budget in the wayfinding package.

5. Fabrication Partners

When the wayfinding package has its locations and signs identified, a fabrication partner can be approached to help bring the project into reality.

Their first step should be coordinating base pricing to establish overall project costs, including installation. This allows the wayfinding design team to make changes in the wayfinding plan to save costs where they can and allow the fabrication team to pursue any discounts based on volume pricing.

A good fabrication team will be an invaluable partner. They can work with the City for any permitting, identify production methods that yield better pricing, and can complete a certain amount of design work. Always bid out to more than one fabricator to ensure even and fair pricing.

Timeframe

On average, Selbert Perkins prefers 4-8 months for designing a wayfinding program, and another 3-6 months for fabrication. If a design firm is brought onboard to also oversee fabrication and installation, parts of the process can run in parallel to shorten the overall timeframe. Signage entering the existing built environment is subject to city ordinance and zoning, so we advise to plan accordingly for the permitting process to occur if necessary.

Risks

Signage and wayfinding projects are typically considered low risk. The biggest risks to a signage and wayfinding project usually occur during fabrication and implementation. Provided the design and fabrication teams have proper documentation regarding the location of the signage elements, installation risk can be mitigated early in the fabrication process.

In some instances, signage cannot be fabricated as designed and will incur additional cost to the project. There is also an opportunity in this phase to value engineer signage, thus reducing cost of a signage style. Signage Value Engineering is the process of identifying, from both a business and a technical perspective, the best approach to transitioning signage from old brand identity to new.

Signage that requires electricity for illumination, digital displays or interactivity require proper planning. Preliminary site surveys can mitigate the risk but having to run electrical to signage elements can adversely impact a budget.

Another instance of risk comes with installation, where unforeseen obstacles will prevent signage from being installed in a planned location. Fabrication install teams will usually provide a secondary solution should an issue arise.

Process (continued)

Budget & Funding Sources

For budgets related to signage and wayfinding, Selbert Perkins advises to expect a range in cost. The budget will fluctuate based on the experience of the design firm, needs of the client, scale of the signage program, the schedule for the deliverables and the cost of fabrication and installation.

Wayfinding Design $ 25K - $150K+

- o Stakeholder engagement (interviews) $5 – 15K
- o Public Engagement (survey – online or in person) $10K – $20K
- o Wayfinding Analysis (Circulation Plans, Sign Location Plans, etc.) $8K – $18K
- o Signage Standards or Citywide/Neighborhood Plan Document (plus above services) $10K – $25K
- o Concept Design $15K - $30K
- o Design Development $15K - $30K
- o Design Intent $10K - $20K
- o Bidding + Negotiation $5K – $10K
- o Construction Administration $10K – $25K

Fabrication $75 – $500K

- o Simple metal or vinyl signage $5k – $25K
- o Illuminated pylons/gateways $50K - $200K each
- o Non-illuminated, freestanding signage $25K- $50K (each)
- o General Conditions and Installation $20 – 175K
- o Digital directories $25K- $100K
- o Mapping $5K - $25K

Additional details specific to Cambridge that are important to consider:

- • The districts that the City have defined have local communities that should be highlighted. This is a great opportunity to incorporate art into the wayfinding.

- • Given the non uniform size of the districts, we recommend studying each district to determine the best location for a pylon or district identifier to exist. We discussed MBTA T stations as being a common theme as the cultural center of each district and would recommend starting there.

- • In addition to pylon / district identifier signage, Selbert Perkins would recommend supplementary signage that directs people to each square's district identifier. Incorporating walking signs, a similar brand, and bright colors for each district would increase usability and trust with pedestrians.

- • District identifier signage should only point to municipal POI to avoid businesses being involved in who is listed and who is not.

- • A full signage study would be very beneficial to this initiative, potentially highlighting other wayfinding opportunities that could be incorporated with this effort.

 # 2

Examples illustrating successful variants of district identifier signage. Lit elements, panels built to receive custom artwork, and color lend towards the overall goal of attracting pedestrians to a point and identifying a specific location.

Source: Selbert Perkins
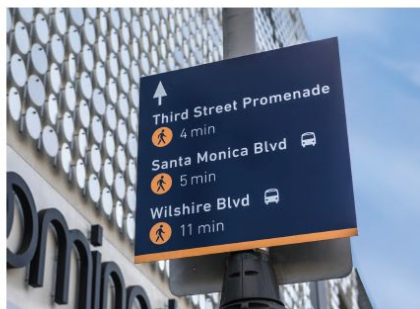
Beyond the pylon signage, Selbert Perkins would recommend smaller, aluminum signage that can direct pedestrians to other districts in Cambridge. The goal of the proposed wayfinding package is not only to highlight the cultural center of these squares, but to increase circulation between them. These secondary signage elements would cater to that goal. Showing small maps, or pairing directional messaging with QR codes is efficient, and can allow for navigation to continue on user's smartphones.
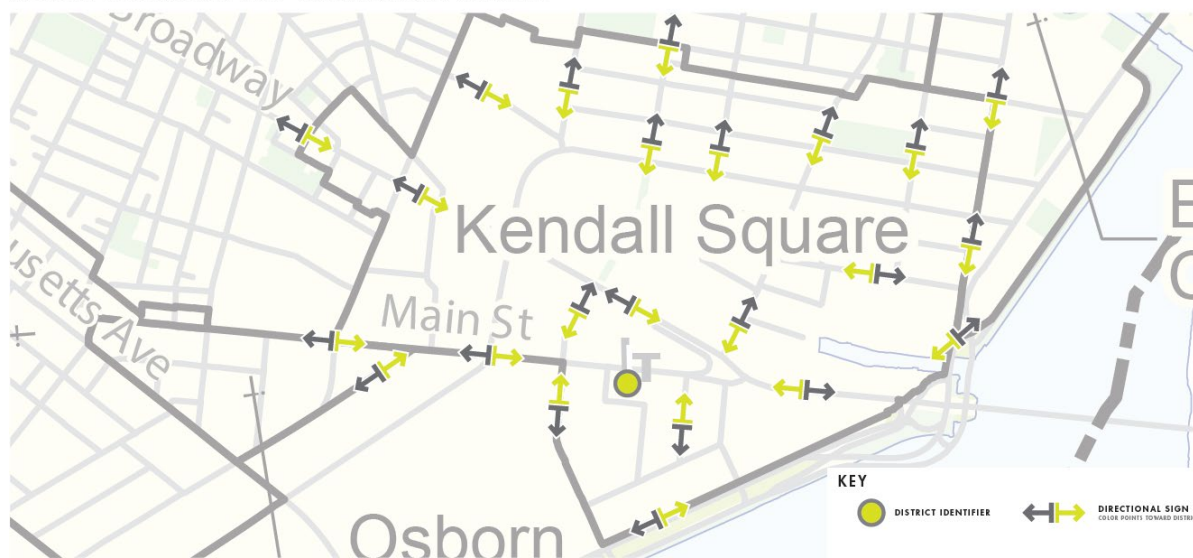
Source: Selbert Perkins

PROPOSED SIGN LOCATION PLAN

DISTRICT IDENTIFIER LOCATION

DIRECTIONAL SIGN LOCATION

A concept design of the proposed signage locations in the overall wayfinding system.

Source: Selbert Perkins

PROPOSED SIGN LOCATION PLAN - EXAMPLE DISTRICT DETAIL MAP

KEY

DISTRICT IDENTIFIER

DIRECTIONAL SIGN
COLOR POINTS TOWARD DISTRICT

An example of how a district can employ the proposed system. Popular routes to/from the primary district identifier could incorporate the secondary signage elements. The secondary signage can push users towards the square, or away towards the next closest square depending on their orientation if a dual-sided sign is employed.

Source: Selbert Perkins

Integrate Brand and Art into your Wayfinding System

PUBLIC REALM

Best Practice	Selbert Perkins Design (SPD) created a unified brand identity and wayfinding master plan for the City of Worcester, including:
	• City-wide Logo
	• District Identity
	• Storytelling and Interpretive Elements
	• Signage Design
	• Art Opportunities
	SPD collaborated with the project team to increase awareness and tourism, and to improve the overall image of the City by creating an iconic brand and functional wayfinding system for visitors and residents.
	As a large City, it was important to create consistency but also provide distinctions between districts to help people navigate and understand the unique character and stories of each area. The brand reflects the colors of each district and creates a scalable kit-of parts still in use some 15 years later. Worcester implemented a sampling of signs and landmarks to raise capital for the larger system, which is being installed now.
Action Item	As this project continues to roll out it will be important to look at it in light of current development, updating locations and messages as-needed.
	Things to consider adding in the future:
	• Dynamic signage
	• Walking distances
	• Sculptural landmarks
	• Integrated elements to reinforce District stories
	• Revenue generation
Process	• Understand who the stakeholders and decision-makers will be.
	• Visit site to audit of existing conditions.
	• Conduct a Wayfinding Analysis including; multi-modal circulation, main decision points, key destinations, etc.
	• Identify opportunities for art/placemaking
	• Research the history of the place, uncover stories that might inspire the design.
	• Engage with stakeholders and the public to understand needs and perceptions. If possible, create a survey to get feedback from a larger cross-section of people.
	• Develop project goals and a positioning statement to guide design efforts.
	• Design concepts for brand and wayfinding elements.
	• Develop the preferred design into a family of sign types with materials, colors, etc.
	• Provide a sign location plan and message schedule.
	• Create Design Intent drawings and a bid document to solicit pricing from fabricators
	• Update the budget and project schedule
	• Assist with communication between the fabricator and municipality.
	• Provide Construction Administration, Site Visits, and Punch List as needed.
	• Celebrate!

Best Practice

Create a way-finding system to help reinforce the downtown experience

PUBLIC
REALM

Location   Wakefield, MA

Best Practice

The Town of Wakefield is a suburban community north of Boston. Most residents work outside of Wakefield and commute to work. There are two MBTA Commuter rail stations in Wakefield—Wakefield Center and Greenwood.

There was no universally accepted brand or wayfinding system for the Town of Wakefield.

On the edge of Wakefield Center, Lake Quannapowitt is a popular setting for walkers, joggers, bikers, and in-line skaters off Route 128 in Middlesex County. It is the site of many organized races from 5Ks to Ultra Marathons. However, rarely do outside visitors travel beyond the lakeside the 200 yards to the Town of Wakefield's Downtown. This is a lost opportunity to support restaurants and shops in the Downtown.

With a vital mix of restaurants, goods, and services, the downtown appears robust. However, things could be improved by an effort for better direction and more on-street communication. Here was an opportunity to build on the downtown's commercial base and solidify Wakefield as a Northshore destination.

The Town's administration allotted funding to design a branding and wayfinding system. Seven months later a Massachusetts Legislative Earmark was granted to the Wakefield Main Streets Program for the design and fabrication of informational kiosks.

Action Item

The two overlapping programs took two different paths.

• Over an eight-month period, the branding and wayfinding design process went through a series of group meetings with a large Advisory Group of 24 representatives.

> A month after the town landscape-based brand was approved by the Advisory Committee and presented in the local daily newspaper and to the Town Council, a devastating lightning-induced fire burned down the majestic church steeple. The loss of the church set back the discussion of whether or not the approved image should be brought forward as a historical image or changed to reflect the current conditions.

> The designs and branding and wayfinding program were put on hold.

• Overseen by the Wakefield Main Streets Board of Directors and invited Town officials, the kiosk design program was mandated to have only 3.5 months to complete design, design review, put out for bidding and start implementation.

> The kiosk program went fully ahead.

> However, some community members felt left out of the design and placement of the project elements. Their concerns had to be integrated.

Process

• After a number of kiosk design alternatives were presented to the Wakefield Main Streets Board, one design was chosen to develop, locate and specify.

• Three (3) of the kiosks were to be two-sided and analog; the fourth was to be digital and four-sided. The digital one would be set closest to the lake.

• Historical town images and commentary was developed to fit around as a border around a business directory for one side of the directory.

• Set in an airtight locked Plexiglas window, this information could be easily changeable on the two-sided kiosks. On the opposite side was space for timely event posters and community announcements.

• The digital kiosk was designed to have a screen/monitor that was programmable from the town hall.

• There was much criticism around the placement and look of the digital kiosk. The town council eventually addressed the public and took a stand that the location, size and look of the kiosk was the best possible solution

Besides interested citizens, town officials including the Town Planner, Police Officer, and Main Street board member are making decisions regarding locations.

Source: Favermann Design

The Bandstand was the inspiration for the shape of the signage. Source: Favermann Design

Process (continued)

- Kiosk-opposing residents were invited to an expanded Branding and Wayfinding meeting to assist with eventual sign element placement on maps.

- Favermann Design was then hired by the Town administration to create a style guideline to reflect the iconic kiosk toppers.

- After a period of about four months the guidelines have resulted in the establishment of a consistent Town of Wakefield visual brand for internal communication, the official website, emails, business cards, interior town hall signage, newsletters and even drop boxes.

- These guidelines were in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and further thought was given to the on-hold wayfinding program. It was decided that a new approach should be taken that abandoned the problematic landscape and instead visually reflected the kiosk and style of the Town of Wakefield.

- Utilizing the new design approach, plans are going ahead for a new directional sign for the Greenwood neighborhood. A test will take place during the Summer of 2021 to see how wayfinding can connect the Lake with downtown.

Local press coverage. Source: Favermann Design

#3 Plan a "streetery" outdoor dining area to serve multiple businesses

Category		Public Realm
Location		A single strategic location within one of the City's commercial districts
Origin		RKG Associates, City of Cambridge Community Development Department
Budget		Low (< $50,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk - Data shows a desire from business groups, restaurant owners, and community members for continued outdoor dining opportunities.
Key Performance Indicators		Community and business feedback, pedestrian counts, number of seats added, added sales
Partners & Resources		Cambridge Local First, the Central Square BID, Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, the East Cambridge Business Association, the Harvard Square Business Association, the Kendall Square Association, restaurant owners, local artists, public safety departments, License Commission, Inspectional Services Department, Fire Department, Department of Public Works, Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department, City Manager's Office

One lane of street space was reallocated in the summer of 2020 to create outdoor dining areas on Cambridge Street in Inman Square. This was very popular and acts as a proof of concept for this project. Source: WickedLocal.com

Diagnostic

COVID-19 has impacted restaurants significantly, as indoor dining has proven to be a greater challenge because of physical distancing guidelines and shifting diner preferences due to safety concerns. Outdoor dining has proven effective in providing a safer environment for patrons to dine while following all required safety measures and reducing the risk of spreading the virus.

Data supports continued and expanded outdoor dining opportunities within the City. The RRP business survey identified "more opportunities for outdoor dining & selling" as a priority recovery strategy from business owners Citywide. Additionally, the City performed an independent COVID relief grant impact survey in September 2020, which revealed "outdoor dining support" as one of the most helpful areas for further assistance.

The community has also expressed a strong interest in maintaining the increased presence of outdoor dining across the City, even after the pandemic ends. The Cambridge Business Coalition (made up of Cambridge Local First, the Central Square BID, Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, the East Cambridge Business Association, the Harvard Square Business Association, and the Kendall Square Association) organized a petition to City Council and City Administration to show support for continued outdoor dining opportunities after pandemic restrictions are lifted. This petition (organized on Change.org) received 2,975 signatures from patrons of local restaurants and restaurant owners, demonstrating the community's strong support for the positive impacts that these spaces have on neighborhoods and commercial districts.

The ongoing presence of the virus necessitates the continued use of outdoor dining arrangements into the future to further promote safety and sanitation. It is complicated in Cambridge, however, because of limited parking for retail businesses and narrow sidewalks in certain districts. The City recognizes the desire for these spaces to stay but is cognizant of the challenges that accompany their presence. As such, the City is allowing permanent year-long outdoor dining licenses.

New outdoor dining design guidelines (developed by an outside consultant) must also be adhered to for safety reasons. The incoming Citywide network of protected bike lanes adds another complication, as additional infrastructure makes dining in street parking spaces more challenging (diners would be more exposed to traffic with less connection to the sidewalks in some areas). Outdoor dining will likely shift to mainly sidewalk and parking lot locations in certain high traffic areas of the City that will be receiving dedicated bike lanes. If a public street location is decided upon for a streetery, road closures and loss of street parking will be hurdles to address.

The consolidation of outdoor dining into one area could create a safe and inviting environment for diners and provide opportunities for restaurants to expand their overall seating capacity. This would allow restaurants to reinforce COVID-related physical distancing measures, ensuring the safety of diners as well as those on bicycles and in vehicles. The City may want to look into future shared outdoor dining/public patio areas where suitable. The right location may also present an opportunity to incorporate play areas for kids, making the space a family-friendly environment.

Action Item

The goal of this project is to create a shared/communal outdoor eatery area/public patio, serving customers of multiple restaurants within a commercial district. It will be set up as open seating area for take-out from area restaurants or "bag lunches" from area office workers.

This will be implemented in a single strategic location within one of the City's many commercial districts. The chosen location should be central to many establishments to serve the needs of diners from multiple businesses. It would also ideally be located near a variety of retail businesses that could benefit from an increased concentration of pedestrian activity as patrons finish dining and move about the district. **This first implementation will act as a pilot that can then be used to inform future expansion to other commercial districts.**

Action items include:

• Identify stakeholders and begin engagement

• Site identification and planning

• Business owner outreach

• Secure funding

• Design concept development

• Install materials

• Community engagement and feedback

Process

• Identify and form stakeholder group to oversee planning, outreach, and implementation of the project. Stakeholder group should include representatives from the variety of district-level and Citywide business groups, select business owners, and representatives from the City.

• Decide on the type of location for the streetery (closed street lane, municipal parking lot, extended stretch of on-street parking spaces, extended stretch of sidewalk space).

• Decide on the nature of the installation. Will it be a temporary or permanent fixture? This decision is crucial and impacts funding options (qualifications for grants), design decisions, quality of materials, and project costs.

• Decide on specific location for streetery (which district, and where specifically in that district).

  Take equity into consideration… Which districts need additional opportunities for outdoor dining based on existing and future limitations from their physical environment?

  Inman Square and further along Cambridge Street into East Cambridge might be an area to target. Sidewalks within this district are not as wide as in other areas of the City. Outdoor dining remains a larger challenge here as it typically must encroach into the street. The upcoming bicycle infrastructure upgrades across the City will remove the option to encroach into Cambridge Street so there will be reduced outdoor dining opportunities here, creating the need for a rapid response to provide outdoor space for businesses to safely accommodate serving customers.

Example of an outdoor dining arrangement in a parking lot at Naco Taco.
Source: Cambridge Urban Design Guidelines Outdoor Dining Lookbook

Example of an outdoor dining arrangement occupying a parking lane in a curbside corral at Tatte in Harvard Square.
Source: Cambridge Urban Design Guidelines Outdoor Dining Lookbook

Example of an outdoor dining arrangement on Lower Mass Ave., occupying sidewalk space.
Source: Cambridge Urban Design Guidelines Outdoor Dining Lookbook

Process (continued)

- Prepare budget and identify funding.

  Potential funding sources include:

  * The MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places grants program (up to $50,000 for placemaking initiatives; must be led by a community group/district management entity and may require crowdfunding match; Note that the median household income requirement may be flexible for RRP projects)

  * MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces grant program (up to $200,000 to support the repurposing of streets, plazas, sidewalks, curbs, and parking areas to facilitate outdoor activities and community programming, including but not limited to facilities for eating, shopping, play, and community events and spaces for all ages; projects must be on public property open to the general public and must be operational by December 31, 2021; projects may not be removed (must be permanent)

  * Crowdfunding from Patronicity, or a similar platform. Not that any crowdfunding efforts will need to be led by a non-profit, business association, or other non-City entity. According to a Patronicity blogpost (https://medium.com/placemakers/tuesday-tips-the-best-crowdfunding-advice-from-those-who-know-70f5feb72ec9), tips for planning a successful crowdfunding campaign include:

  Plan, plan, plan – Having a plan is most important. This plan should include clear and precise goals for the project and the district, how these goals will inform future decisions once success is achieved, how milestones will be gaged and rewarded throughout the campaign

  Have a few donors lined up to promote additional donations (as part of the crowdfunding initiative)– A plan for getting the ball rolling with donations is key, as is a plan for the timing of these large donations. To maximize the effect and imp[act of the campaign, consider the psychology of donations. When nearing the campaign's goal, smaller donations will likely slow down so it may be wise to hold off on depositing large donations until the end. Significant effort will be required to line up donations in advance. You will need to engage supporters ahead of the campaign to make sure this plan is viable. Determine the people, groups, and organizations that are likely to contribute and stay in contact with them.

  Get the community involved in the project – Organizing a team of people from across the community to lead the fundraising efforts can help rally the community behind the project, allowing for more contributions from a wider section of the City. Engaging those who live and work in the community helps develop relationships with project stakeholders and build word of mouth awareness. It is important to assemble a team with a diversity of backgrounds, skills, and specialties.

  Have an outreach strategy – Things such as visual design, positive press coverage, and strategic social media messaging go a long way and take a collaborative planning effort. If planned correctly, these efforts can have a significant impact by helping to extend the reach of the campaign.
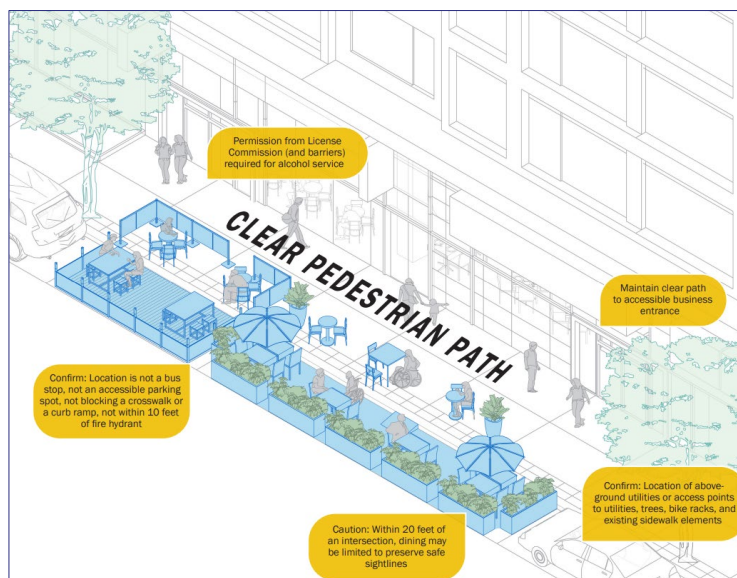
Cambridge urban design guidelines, prepared by Goody Clancy. Source: Urban Design Guidelines for Outdoor Dining in Public Areas During COVID-19

Process (continued)

- Engage stakeholders to begin the design process
    - Consult public safety departments, Inspectional Services Department, License Commission, Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department, City Manager's Office, and Police Department to assess safety
    - Consult the City's *"Urban Design Guidelines for Outdoor Dining in Public Areas During COVID-19"* document developed in Spring 2021 to address regulatory requirements, common challenges, and design inspirations.
    - Consult local artists

Design best practices (of which most are mentioned in the incredibly extensive design guidelines in the document mentioned above) include:

Always be aware of drainage – City streets and sidewalks are carefully engineered to properly direct stormwater. Any structures put in place, particularly those in parking lanes abutting street curbs, disrupt this designed flow so this should be a careful consideration in the design and installation process.

Maintain consistent grade – If a parking lane design, keeping it level with the adjacent sidewalk is important for both ADA compliance and aesthetic appeal/dining experience. Depending on the unique physical environment, this may require enhanced engineering such as adjustable support pedestals or tapered support beams.

Implement all safety measures and keep it as first priority – Outdoor dining in street brings added risks. It is important to provide a protective barrier between patrons and moving vehicles. A buffer clarifies who the space belongs to. Buffers can come many forms, including bike lanes and solid (relatively immovable) structures.

Maintain visibility – Try not to hide installations behind large walls. Keeping outdoor dining patrons and moving vehicles visible to one another can reduce fear and increases safety by making sure nothing is hidden or surprising.

Incorporate branding/personality into the design to make it your own – The space should be thought of as an extension of the businesses and district that it will serve. It should be treated and decorated as such. In this case, since the installation intends to serve multiple businesses within a unique commercial district, there is an opportunity to incorporate the branding/marketing efforts developed in separate RRP project recommendations, utilizing the holistic approach discussed earlier. This can be implemented in the barriers, the furniture, canopies, signage, etc.

Don't ignore the 'air rights' – Incorporating design features above the tables can help frame the space and create a better environment for patrons. This could be as basic as providing umbrellas, a shared canopy, or string lights or it could be more involved with pergola-type beams or hanging plants adding to the environment.

Have a plan for maintenance – These setups typically have many pieces involved. Some of these pieces will need to be moved inside or to a safe storage area that is protected from the elements each night. Some pieces may be subject to theft. Responsibilities will need to be assigned to individuals on site. A plan will need to be in place for continued success

Incorporate 'winter plan' to maintain activation year-round – The winter brings new challenges to outdoor dining and outdoor placemaking initiatives in general. Mainly, a plan for warming/heating the space will need to be developed. While outdoor heating lamps became standard in 2020, new innovations have emerged to help keep plants and other objects warm overnight, such as incorporating a greenhouse type designed structure with water tanks as thermal mass heaters.

Physical elements, such as single-use blankets, warm café lights, and woody canopies can help to set up a cozier winter scene. Additional programming elements can be incorporated once the winter design takes hold and proves successful in drawing patrons. Events like a fire pit night, providing free hot cider or hot cocoa, and adding warming food items to menus (such as soups, stews, or hot toddies) can improve the environment and create an experience that people want to take part in. This requires an additional seasonal branding strategy and willingness from the community to accept the potential charm of winter outdoor dining. Winter games/activities (Christmas mazes, outdoor living rooms, hothouse igloos, art or light festivals, etc.) can be incorporated adjacent to the dining area to improve the mood and ambiance.

Refer to Bench Consulting's "Winter Places; A Design Guide For Winter Placemaking" document (https://benchconsulting.co/winter-places) for extensive details related to winter activation strategies ranging from outdoor dining to recurring events and festivals.

Process (continued)

- Present design to community to gather and incorporate their feedback.

- Plan installation date.

- Promote project through social media, City announcement channels, fliers, etc.

- Create list of materials needed and order materials.

- Installation.

- Collect feedback for future improvements.

Additional Useful Resource: An "Outdoor Dining/Retail Community Toolkit" was created by CivicMoxie as part of this plan to act as a guide for communities seeking to assist business owners in creating outdoor dining and retail options. This resource is located here: https://www.mass.gov/doc/outdoor-dining-retail-toolkit/download

Best Practice

Create Calm Street Pilots and Pop-Up Curbside "Streeteries"

Best Practice	Overly-large intersections and wide travel lanes were contributing to higher speeds of travel through the heart of Natick's pedestrian core. In order to create a more comfortable and attractive walking and biking environment, lane and intersection diets could be deployed to achieve safer operations while sustaining the same vehicle throughput.

The team worked to design solutions working with materials already owned, with limited purchases for temporary and safety materials.

In early pandemic social distancing, while indoor dining was unsafe, the Town was seeking quick solutions to help local businesses continue serving and attracting customers. Retrofitting on-street parking spaces for outdoor dining could help create interim options for safer dining and company.

Natick Center Cultural District also found ways to engage creative placemaking elements into the process in order to support local artists during the economic struggles of the pandemic. |
| Action Item | As communities grappled with strategies to restart local businesses – especially those that rely on foot traffic and shared spaces (i.e., retail and restaurants) – providing a safe environment that reinforces recommended COVID-19 physical distancing measures, is paramount. Given the need to provide more outdoor space for businesses to serve customers, and sidewalks unable to accommodate both business activity and pedestrian accommodation, communities like Natick were looking to repurpose streets to provide additional space so that both may be safely accommodated.

A rapid response was necessary to help businesses recover quickly as COVID-related restrictions began to relax and allow for non-essential business activity to resume. At the same time, ensuring the safety of restaurant users, as well as those in vehicles and on bicycles, was critical. A focus on low-cost, rapid implementation was critical to serving safety and business vitality needs. All programs and projects were designed to be flexibly modified.

Key actions included:

• A kickoff meeting with all department officials to confirm project goals
• Site analysis and issues identification
• Business owner outreach
• Design concept development
• Stakeholder presentations and tactical event promotion
• Traffic calming testing in the field
• Confirming longer-term trial design and installing materials
• Processing feedback and engagement |
| Process | • Discuss Need for Intervention
• Field Visits and Observations, Counts, Documentation
• Measure Key Dimensions
• Create Design Alternatives
• Present to Stakeholders for Feedback
• Plan Installation Date and Timeline
• Promote Event through Fliers, Social Media, and Town-wide Announcements
• Design Business and Citizen Engagement Survey
• Create Materials List, Budget, Order Supplies, and Plan for Deliveries
• Optional: Post Virtual Messaging Signs on Approaches to Announce Upcoming Changes
• Decide on Police Detail and Oversight Needs, Cover Liability Needs
• Optional: Plan for Street Sweeping
• Create Hour-by-Hour Install Schedule and Steps for Install Day
• Day of: Measure and Lay Down Materials, Observe and Tweak As- Needed, Document through Photos and Videos, Consider Intercept Surveys and Programming around Event
• After Day of Testing, Install More Permanent Seasonal Materials
• Optional: Consider Local Art Enhancements |

Best Practice

Tipton Alley

PUBLIC
REALM

Location   Tipton, Indiana

Best Practice	Issues arose around pedestrian safety crossing the alley space. Located in the heart of Main Street this space was an obstacle to a safe, inviting pedestrian experience. In addition, there was a startup Main Street organization looking to develop space, build support for its work, but more importantly, the Main Street district as a whole. The street itself was extremely car oriented with more traffic than pedestrians on the streets. An improved sense of place was needed to get drivers out of their cars and on foot, a proven tactic for increasing spending opportunity. The proximity to existing businesses, the town square, and the need for a gathering space made this alley ideal for investment and improvement.
Action Item	The intention with Tipton Alley was to develop a space that could serve as the hub of the Main Street. A space, built on a human scale, that provided a respite from the busy traffic on the street while enticing people to 1) visit downtown safely and 2) extend their stays while visiting downtown, and 3) create community connections. As with any placemaking project, the process is as important as the outcome. How do you ensure this space will be something that residents embrace and enjoy? Have them engaged in the planning and implementation process as much as possible. Because collaboration is key and here, local artists help design the mural installations on one wall and others worked to transform the entry way of the alley to incorporate historically contextual photographs. Early on, it was important to have proper permissions in place to use the alley and eliminate vehicle access from the main street on a permanent basis. Enjoy maintenance plans and activation and programming plans are also in place at the start. It was important to not just plan for how the space would be transformed but activated so a community wide "farm to table" dinner was planned as part of the planning and fundraising. This project focused on programming of the space in the design phase and clarified the needs for ongoing maintenance and support.
Process	LOCATE: Find a space that you have reasonable site control over or a permission agreement in place that is centrally located within your main street or commercial district. Consider spaces that need care and attention. PARTNER: The more local representation that's involved in planning and implementing these projects, the more successful they will be. Here, the local Chamber of Commerce was involved, engaging the business community, artists helped to design the public art and residents volunteered to implement. PLAN: Ensure site control is in order, insurance is in place and proper permissions to use any alley space have been granted before beginning to build your project. Define the potential uses for space, the more variety, the better. Consider local vendors and source products locally. IMPLEMENT: Consider adding elements in stages, celebrating at each milestone. Be sure your site is supervised. Communication with all contractors, artists, and volunteers is important so be sure to plan ahead. Getting community investment is critical, ask for the financial support you need locally first. FEEDBACK: Public comments can be typical and predictive, often they include questions about government waste, maintenance and use. Prepare your responses before hearings and reach out personally when possible. Also, prepare to preemptively share the most compelling project elements. ITERATE: Additional features can be added based on use, one example is Wi-Fi. If there is a high demand for the space, ensure there is a process for renting and reserving the space.

#4
#5

Inform City planning efforts towards setting up a pop-up market in the public realm, activating a City-owned parking lot for temporary retail use on a recurring basis

Category		Public Realm
Location		A to-be-determined strategic location within a commercial district
Origin		RKG Associates, City of Cambridge Community Development Department, The Musicant Group
Budget		Medium ($50,000 - $200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk – Risks relate to financing limitations (funds will be needed to construct and staff the space) and political pushback related to a temporary reduction of parking
Key Performance Indicators		Sales Figures (from both the pop-up vendors and neighboring establishments to measure economic impact on the district), pedestrian counts, number of businesses that use the space and expand to a brick-and-mortar within the City
Partners & Resources		City of Cambridge special events committee, local fabricators/artists/craftspeople, business associations, Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, Cambridge Local First, local volunteers

Retail pop-up space in Central Square's Starlight Square. Source: Starlightsquare.org

Diagnostic

This project aims to inform city planning efforts towards setting up pop-up markets in the public realm, activating city-owned parking lots on a recurring basis. This idea evolved from the city's desire to provide more opportunities for small businesses that don't have the resources to operate a brick-and-mortar storefront and to increase foot traffic to stimulate economic activity that has decreased as a result of COVID-19. Since this will be planned as a temporary monthly pop-up marketplace, a schedule of vendors will need to be set up and a site layout plan will need to be organized. Grants and other sources of funding should be identified and pursued. The city is unable to staff this on an ongoing basis and will need operational assistance during the events.

This project creates vibrancy in places that are lacking it and fosters a strong local economy. It will help to bring activity to a commercial district and supports small business allowing entrepreneurs to break into a market they would otherwise not have access to because of limited resources (without needing to put up the typical high startup costs associated with a brick-and-mortar physical space).

Continuously staffing the event is the biggest concern. The City may not have the capacity to oversee operations and a third-party will most likely need to be involved. With so much happening in and around Cambridge, generating strong interest in another pop-up retail market (outside of Starlight Square) may be a challenge. Starlight Square has proven the concept can work and be very successful, but this project will not have the Central Square BID's resources behind it. Other pop-ups have also been successful around the City (i.e. CultureHouse), so the planning and execution will be vital to this project's success.

Action Item

This project intends to support and grow local business, providing entrepreneurs with free temporary retail space in commercial districts and allowing for tremendous exposure to test out the market for their business. It also allows the community to gather, potentially revitalizing an area that has been hit hard by the effects of COVID-19. This project could prove to stimulate economic activity by increasing foot traffic and supporting existing and new businesses. It will be important to collaborate with local business organizations, non-profits, and community members to ensure success and prolonged community engagement.

An important action item is to identify the ideal location, in a strategic area that supports strong foot traffic and can draw visitors to nearby businesses. The City is open to hosting pop-up activities on municipal lots or public spaces (e.g., Palmer Street in Harvard Square). The special events committee will need to assist with licensing the identified area for commercial activities. The issue of who will staff the space will need to be resolved and vendor outreach will need to occur. Since this will be planned as a temporary pop-up marketplace, a schedule of vendors will need to be set up and maintained while a site layout plan will need to be organized. Grants and other sources of funding should be identified and pursued.

Process

4

Location Assessment

While the scope for the monthly pop-ups includes the use of city-owned lots, our conversations showcased that across the districts there was not consistent access to city-owned lots within each commercial district. Assessing which lots exist, and which districts would benefit from this initiative will be important in identifying next steps.

Leverage Alternate Locations - in districts where city-owned lots are not available, consider other public spaces that might also serve the needs of these cultural districts.

- Utilizing vacant storefronts for pop-up markets might be a great value add to the area. (this idea is explored in a separate project recommendation)
- Consider the use of alleyways to hold pop up street markets.
- Consider a sidewalk sale day, where each business opens their doors and host a sidewalk sale just outside their door.
- Consider off-hours use of privately-owned parking lots to support pop-up vendors.

Process (continued)

4

Partners & Buy-In

Pop-up markets often bring forward some hesitation with existing retailers. It's important to continue to generate buy-in around the monthly pop-up series and leverage their support.

Alternative Industries - Vetting pop-up vendors and ensuring there is no competition within the district already will support existing retailers. However, complementary industries can build consensus and a win-win for both the existing and pop-up retailers.

Cultivate the Unexpected- Showcase the spaces you have in a new light! Bringing in supportive decor, music, and ensuring good lighting help cultivate a sense of discovery and newness to familiar spaces. Help visitors see what is possible.

Treat it as a Pilot Program - These pop-up retailers will give you real-time feedback on the kinds of vendors and experiences the community is looking for. Ongoing and sustained activation of city-owned lots will further support lessons learned along the way.

Partnerships & Sponsors - Consider pulling together the entities that support makers and small businesses in the district to engage and sponsor the pop-up series. This can also be used to add additional workshops and educational opportunities that serve the needs of those looking to expand their businesses, offsetting some of the costs associated with the program, and support a collaborative and iterative process directly related to the district.

Build Capacity

Supporting Commercial Districts - Consider developing a best practices toolkit through this program so that commercial districts are more easily able to support sustained investment in pop-ups.

Embed Within Events - maximize the impact of these pop-ups by dovetailing them in between scheduled events within the district.

Consider Frequency - While initially a monthly program, there is room to expand and build frequency to support activity and stimulate existing businesses. As the program begins, learning more about attendance will help support spotting trends over time.

5

Reducing Barriers & Extending Impact

To support a more long-term vision for the pop-ups to generate new tenants, being a stepping stone for small businesses looking to expand their audience, consider the reduction of barriers to taking those next steps as a part of this pop-up experience.

Permitting - Education and reduced costs to access permits for this program, as well as their next steps beyond this pop-up market series, supports building capacity with these small business owners and cultivates the next generation of tenants in these cultural districts.

Marketing - Engage the participating businesses in marketing the series. Ensuring they have access to social media posts and images supports building their own social media capacity as well as supporting drawing an audience to the series on a regular basis. Unified images across multiple platforms and channels will also expand the impact of a collective marketing campaign.

Process (continued)

 # 5

Taking Next Steps - Supporting these small businesses and makers in taking the next steps after participation will continue to extend the impact across the commercial district, supporting filling vacant storefronts, the small business pipeline, as well as the overall economic health of the district.

- Host webinars and workshops close to the stores or digitally, to support expanding skills and building capacity to support more engaged and sustained marketing strategies. These workshops can serve as a recruitment tool and offer up additional resources that invest in the future success of the districts.

- Support the increased independence of commercial districts and build capacity through scaling existing programs.

- Consider toolkits that model a step-by-step approach and pair this with open Q&A sessions to work through common questions and pitfalls.

Meet Folks Where They Are - All strategies tend to meet the needs of certain demographics over others. When developing strategies and creating change, it is especially important to meet others where they are at.

- Keep programs open to all and focus on reducing barriers to participation.

- A focus on quick wins often is at odds with the desire to work with marginalized businesses. Identifying key community stakeholders and developing a committee or advisory board that supports relationships with marginalized community members and centers their experiences in crafting supportive programming.

- Create business-focused events with partnerships from existing businesses, letting them lead on what best meets their needs.

- Don't assume commonality. It's important to lead from a place of curiosity and level setting. Some folks might have shared experiences or needs, but assuming commonality can erase nuance and alienate others from the process.

Resources

The Musicant Group - Best Practices Sheed: Rice + Larpenteur: Activation and Retention in a Suburban Multicultural District –

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OAVKRTX0gJ4JaVIesBnsjekHle6V6Ep/view?usp=sharing

This prior presentation provides a case study of Rice & Larpenteur which has been combating a similar narrative around safety and demonstrates several of the outlined strategies.

Best Practice

Rice + Larpenteur: Activation and Retention in a Suburban, Multicultural Community

PUBLIC REALM

Location	Multicultural commercial district at the confluence of urban and suburban land uses where three municipalities converge in the Twin Cities region, Minnesota

Best Practice

The Rice and Larpenteur Alliance was created to support the community and commercial interests of the low-moderate income, multicultural community that converges at the intersection of three municipalities. The central commercial district was both bustling and suffering from neglect and bad press in large part due to one business. The goals of these events in general were to:

- Generate new, lasting positive activity and visitation in the district
- Strengthen the newly launched brand for the area and reputation broadly
- Test and build support for larger capital improvements

Key Opportunities included

- Building off the momentum and buy-in from the first event the year prior

Challenges included

- The need to take a concentrated event format and spread it out throughout the district
- Generate positive activity while also minimizing unsafe congregation
- Generating participation by and benefits for small businesses, especially BIPOC owned ones
- Ensuring those from communities who spoke one of 5 non-English languages felt invited and included
- Overcoming negative press from high profile incident that occurred at the longstanding bad behaving business

Action Item

The COVID-safe approach to the events was to create a main event hub that then supported attendees to visit businesses and other activities throughout the district.

Action #1 – Expand the event spaces and programming as a benefit, not a bug

While we couldn't have everyone come to a single site, we used it as an opportunity to get attendees to visit area businesses and organizations directly - which in many ways created even more benefit for them. This was done by creating an event hub that had live music and info tents that distributed district passports (with rewards to visiting all the sites) and branded bags to support shopping. The district was visibly activated by attendees who were walking between sites holding their branded bags. The event blended fun, food, community engagement, and services for those of all ages.

Action #2 – Lead with equity

Business are often seen as a source for event sponsorship revenue. As a district dominated by new and BIPOC owned businesses we wanted to ensure that the event series was as beneficial to these entities as possible. As such, small businesses were meaningfully compensated provide event features such as free food samples, live performances, and interactive demonstrations. For promotion, we both partnered with organizations and used communication channels in the native languages of those who lived in the surrounding neighborhoods to promote the event.

Action #3 – Use one-time events to drive long term improvements

Many changes to the physical environment are often possible during larger events that are more difficult to put into place during non-event days. Each of the events featured physical pilots that tested out concepts that stakeholders sought to implement in larger ways going forward these included: public art, a new plaza, new patio seating areas for restaurants, expanded landscaping, seating areas, and wayfinding.

Action #4 – Leverage positive events to create new narratives

Despite much good that occurs in the district, most mentions of the area were dominated by criminal activity that occurred at one business. The event series created reasons for the media to cover the district and served the change the narrative for the broader public

Process

- Establish shared goals for client, communities, small businesses, and other stakeholders

- Recruit event committee, roles, and meeting schedule

- Create event name, concept, and partner recruitment one-pager

- Conduct outreach to businesses and community organizations to host event sites and/or provide event activations

- Create promotional materials

- Secure 3rd party vendors and performers and stakeholder contributions

- Finalize site map, furnishings, supplies, give-aways, and volunteer shirts or hats

- Create passport and onsite signage

- Finalize day-of plan and program with staff and volunteer roles

- Notify press

- Execute event and track KPIs

- Create summery report with successes, lessons learned, and opportunities for increased impact in years to come

Event Features

Rice and LarpenTOUR Event

- Concerts and tents for participating non-profit organizations

- Two storefront patio expansions

- Permanent planter improvements

- Art installation at local park pavilion

- Free food samples given out by compensated local businesses

- Event passport

- Event poster, lawn signs, postcards

- Gift and Go Event

- Shop Local Guide

- Gift bags with local business gift cards, swag, cookies, branded PPE (mask, sanitizer)

Physical Improvements were part of the event activities provided for community participation.

Business owners were compensated for providing samples and food offerings during events.

The Corner Spot

PUBLIC REALM

Best Practice	The town had a small, municipally owned lot with a structure slated for demolition on the edge of downtown, between the center of Town and the MBTA station. A local diner had closed depriving the town of the key "third space." With an increasing number of storefront vacancies in the Downtown Area, there was a need to draw people back into the downtown while also encouraging stopping and staying activities. This need for a central gathering space and a place for small businesses to develop more of a foothold in the community made a project like the Corner Spot the perfect opportunity to create a "town square" like atmosphere for residents to create a public heart and hub of the community.
Action Item	The Corner Spot is a placemaking opportunity for downtown Ashland where businesses can test drive the market and residents can come together to increase the sense of community and help revitalize the downtown area. The Corner Spot is intended to stimulate economic activity in Ashland, attract new developers and business owners as well as increase foot traffic downtown to help support existing and future business. You'll need to locate a prime site for this, ideally on a property controlled by the town, whether municipal parking lot, vacant lot or centrally located space. Once you have the space determine any initial permitting issues that may preclude or hinder you from using the site for certain passive or commercial activities. Develop a site layout plan and a rough preliminary budget and allocate any funding opportunities including grants and private donations that may be available. Ensure you have an adequate programming plan and maintenance plan lined up for the site. Maintenance could require some funding so ensure you have long term funding set aside to operate the site.
Process	1. LOCATE: Find a suitable location for the project. This could be a vacant lot, an alley, a parking lot space or street space currently devoted to vehicles. Ensure its centrally located within walking distance of numerous other commercial opportunities. 2. PARTNER: Identify a strong base of supporters to help plan and implement any placemaking project from community groups to business owners, artists and other stakeholders. 3. PLAN: Determine the different major component parts of this project to begin to formulate a vision for the site. Do you want a mix of passive and active recreation opportunities? Seating to encourage takeout dining from area restaurants? Wi-Fi to encourage outdoor remote workers to the area? If there's a retail opportunity, what does the physical space look like? Do you to be able to conduct light food prep which will require plumbing? Determine any ADA and other accessibility issues early on as well. Obtain necessary permitting and insurance on the site. 4. IMPLEMENT: Demolition of the existing structure was donated by a local contractor and grading & landscaping labor was donated by another. From there, local makers were used for the swings and table seating and a local contractor fit out an old tool shed to design and develop the Corner Spot's central retail space. 5. FEEDBACK: The Town conducted numerous resident surveys during the first years of the Corner Spot and continues to solicit feedback from residents and businesses about how the space can better fit their needs. Use a combination of electronic and in person survey tools to engage constructive feedback. 6. ITERATE: Over the years, new components have been added to the site based on resident donations and new types of events based on requests of area businesses and residents. The space has become the "heart and soul" of the community allowing a passive space for community gathering in the heart of Downtown while also providing a space expose the community to area small and startup businesses.

6

Increase landlord participation and expand upon existing Vacant Storefront Creative Design Contest (installing local artists' work into vacant storefronts)

Category		Private Realm
Location		Citywide, in priority areas within commercial districts with high concentrations of vacancies.
Origin		RKG Associates, City of Cambridge Community Development Department
Budget		Low (< $50,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk – There is an existing program in place
Key Performance Indicators		Community and business feedback, number of participating landlords, number of vacant windows filled, number of potential tenants engaged, number of tenants signing leases
Partners & Resources		City of Cambridge Community Development Department, private landlords of vacant ground floor commercial properties, Cambridge Arts Council
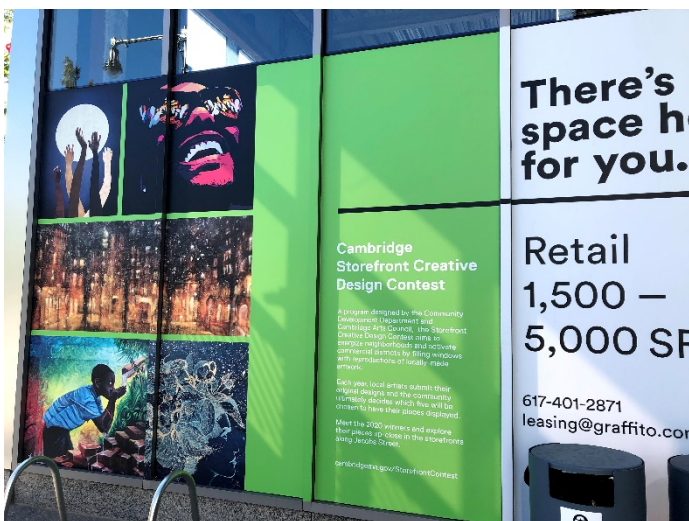
Current installations of existing program. Source: City of Cambridge Community Development Department

Diagnostic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the small business community in Cambridge, leading to an increased number of storefront vacancies as many business owners have been unable to continue operating due to reduced commercial activity. The City had a total of 132 vacancies as of March 2021, according to City data. The data suggests some of these vacancies may be related to the ongoing pandemic, as 60 storefronts (45% of the Citywide total) have been vacant for less than 10 months.

Vacant storefronts can have a negative impact on the perception of an otherwise vibrant commercial district. The City recognizes the importance of reducing this negative impact by activating vacant storefronts. Through a vacant storefront initiative, the City maintains a database of all affected properties, provides activation resources to property owners, has developed a set of best practices to address ongoing challenges, and directs a vacant storefront creative design contest. Activating vacant storefronts can improve the pedestrian and shopper experience at the ground level. It can also bring more eyes to available commercial spaces (with potential new tenancies) while protecting property values, maintaining neighborhood integrity, and safeguarding against further impacts.

The City's existing storefront creative design contest puts local artists' work into windows of vacant ground floor storefronts. The current program was designed by the City's Community Development Department in partnership with the Cambridge Arts Council (a City agency funding and promoting arts across Cambridge). It fills empty storefront windows with reproductions of locally-made art. There is a well-defined process in place, with an annual contest inviting submissions from local artists. Judges then select 12-15 finalists and the community votes to determine five winners from the pool of finalists. These winning submissions are then available to be displayed in vacant storefront windows with each winner receiving $1,000 for their design.

The most notable initial challenge for the City has been with successfully contacting the absentee landlords (REITs and national owners) of some of these vacant properties. Generally, absentee landlords may have less motivation to activate a space for a variety of reasons.

A highly visible vacant storefront on Mass. Ave. in the Lower Mass Ave commercial district
Source: RKG Associates

Another highly visible vacant retail space on Brattle St. in Harvard Square.
Source: RKG Associates

Action Item

The goal of this project is to enhance the existing program, focusing on increasing landlord participation. The current program is designed well. It engages the community and includes the local arts council. The City also has an incredible asset in its robust database of vacant properties. With these pieces already in place, a lot of the legwork has been done to achieve success and this project focuses on strategies related to increasing landlord outreach.
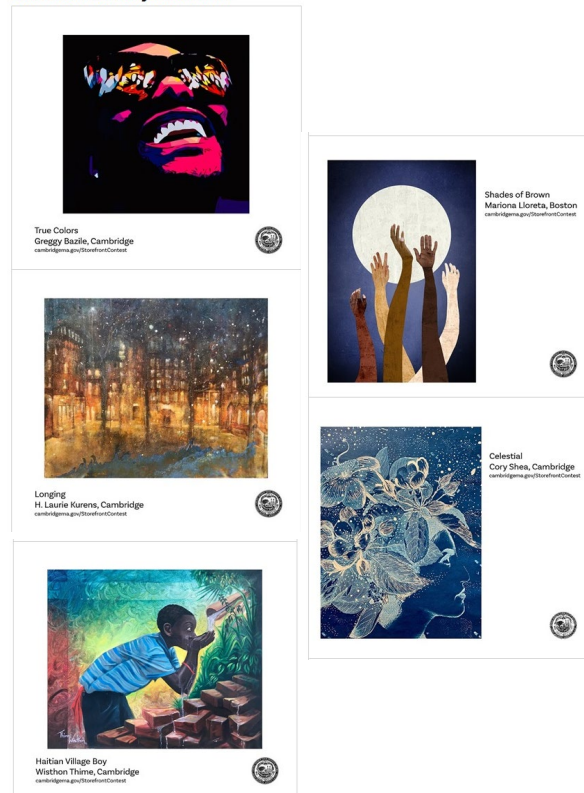
Action items include:

- Utilize the robust existing vacant storefront database to identify priority vacancies for this project.
   - Categorize properties based on the ease of communication with landlord, the location's foot traffic, and the visibility of window space.

- Identify a person to manage this ongoing process.
   - Decide whether this person will be within the City's Community Development Department (CDD) or elsewhere.
   - If there is enough capacity for the City to handle the accompanying administrative duties, the small business liaison position within CDD (recommended in the Storefront Vacancies Best Practices report) could take on this responsibility.
   - This position can handle communications with artists and landlords while facilitating the temporary art installations.

- Utilize a variety of strategies to initiate outreach to landlords.

- Track responses.
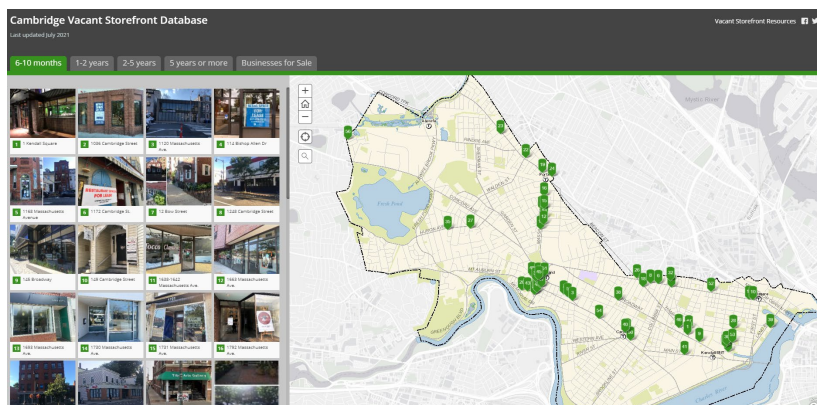
Screenshot of the City's regularly updated and publicly available vacant storefront database. Source: Cambridge Open Data Portal

Winning entries from the City's 2020 Vacant Storefront Design Contest. Source: cambridgema.gov

Process:

- Plan and assign someone to oversee this initiative (either from CDD or elsewhere) with the intent to continually maintain this program on an annual basis. Administrative capacity is already strained within the City and adding more responsibilities will be difficult unless a new position is created within CDD.

- Utilize the robust existing vacant storefront database to identify focus area/s for this project.
    - Categorize properties based on the ease of communication with landlord, the location's foot traffic, and the visibility of window space.

- Create a list of priority landlords to reach out to (based on categorized vacant property database). This should be done by CDD.

- Initiate outreach process:

    Prioritize a "local first" strategy - Reach out to independent local landlords first. This tends to lead to more success as smaller-scale landlords often relate better to a community buy-in. Provide local examples and communicate that neighboring stores are on-board in attempts to move the conversation along.

    First try cold calls, emails, and online and print publications - Persistence has been key in other similar projects.

    Use local media and press releases - Publicize past successes to garner more interest from landlords that may have not been directly contacted. In Newton, a similar project used a press release in the Boston Globe, local online publications, social media, and the Newton Community Pride's website to communicate the program and broadcast the call for interested landlords. This draws community interest, reinforces artists' involvement and attracts potential landlord participants.

    Frame the activity as a passive marketing opportunity - If landlords continue to be non-responsive, this is another tactic to increase buy-in. Stress how participation in the program could bring more eyes and people to their property, which, in turn, could lead to interest from potential tenants.

    Refer to the "Connect entrepreneurs with commercial landlords for temporary pop-up business activations in vacant storefronts (partnering with landlords for short term leases)" project recommendation for more details related to landlord outreach.

- Since the current process selects an inventory of artwork to be on display, create a list of display/layout options. Will it be on vinyl/banners/framed/poster?

- Discuss and agree with landlords on the approach to each empty storefront. The landlords will ultimately have the final say on the piece/pieces to display and the layout/style/size of display.

* Note that a program already exists, and this project requires allocation of additional staffing hours to improve access to commercial property owners and increase the success of the program.

A variety of artwork displayed in storefronts across Cambridge. Source: RKG Associates

Creative empty storefront treatments by Newton Community Pride's WindowArt

PRIVATE
REALM

Location	Newton, MA

Best Practice

Though the Covid-19 Pandemic more finely focused on the dilemma of empty storefronts, this is a continuous, if sometimes only temporary, negative situation in downtowns and commercial districts. Vacant stores are a glaring or at least front and center visible loss to a commercial area, block or building. And most landlords do the least effort to release—simple signs, ads or word of mouth to existing tenants.

The issue is how to combine the needs of the commercial district to the resources available to be creative and commercially reinforcing. One thoughtful solution was by Newton Community Pride, a non-profit organization building community for all to enjoy through arts and culture programming.

The Newton Community Pride staff and board recognized the empty storefront needs of the City of Newton commercial districts. They also had an inventory of artwork by local resident artists.

They wanted to install artwork in as many empty storefronts as possible. However, it was challenging to ascertain landlord ownership especially with absentee landlords, as a they are a subgroup of landlords with less incentive to visually enhance their empty properties. They focused on identifying and working with various owners that they could.

After a short few weeks, Newton Community Pride installed a number of empty storefronts with art.

Action Item

• Document the empty storefronts in a particular commercial area. In the City of Newton's case, there are 13 separate villages with some commercial district located in eight (8) of them.

• Select focus areas. In Newton's case, focus was centered upon the greatest concentration of stores and empty storefronts.

• Identify landlords and reach out to landlords through cold calls, e-mails, and online and print publications. Persistence in reaching out seemed to payoff the most.

• To augment the "Call for Interested Landlords," Newton Community Pride used local media through press releases including The Boston Globe, local online publications, social media and their own website to communicate the program.

• Discuss and agree with landlords on the organization's approach to the empty storefront. Individual property managers made final decisions about what went where.

• Develop an approach to the installations or create an inventory of existing artwork by local artists. In this case, the artwork already existed and had been used as part of the previously funded Newton Community Pride program, FenceArt. FenceArt produced a juried "call to artist" that generated an inventory of artwork.

• All art was previously printed on vinyl banners, and this allowed for an easy installation behind storefront windows..

• The results of the initial effort were disappointing to the organization who desired much more landlord participation. However, the lessons learned here allow for future project application.

Vacant ground floor uses were mapped and space characteristics noted. Source: Favermann Design

The vacant storefronts contributed to lack of vibrancy in the City of Newton's commercial districts. Source: Favermann Design

Process

• Establishment of a collaborative network to discuss and share resources.

• Decide who are the key decisionmakers of each project be they landlords, business associations, arts organizations, city agency, etc.

• Think innovatively, out of the box. In this case, the decision to utilize existing and available artwork allowed for several steps to be skipped in the process.

• Learning from this experience, in the future it would be desirable to have a City of Newton official agency to identify landlord ownership. In-turn, this would facilitate greater numbers of cooperating storefronts.

• Publicizing the successful projects to encourage more landlord/building owner involvement.

• Decision that the installed program should have a time limit for elements to be replaced.

• It was determined that this WindowArt Project was a part of the overall Covid-19 Program titled "Newton Al Fresco" that also included artist-decorated Jersey barriers, painted cable spools as side tables for benches for outdoor eating and individual murals.

• A related project to WindowArt and another creative Covid-19 response is an innovative new pilot program partnered by the City of Newton, the Town of Needham and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Project: Pop-Up.

    • This will allow small retailers to access 1-3 storefronts in Needham and 4-5 storefronts in Newton at a significantly reduced cost.

    • The retailers, many of whom are currently operating primarily online, will have access to the commercial space for 2-3 months to introduce their businesses to a wider audience and will have access to a wide range of support services.

Newton Community Pride Artwork Installations in Empty Storefronts. Source: Favermann Design

Coordinate a plan for implementing multi-platform districtwide marketing campaigns, incorporating district branding efforts

Category		Revenue/Sales
Location		This will be district-specific, and for multiple commercial districts
Origin		RKG Associates, City of Cambridge Community Development Department, The Musicant Group
Budget		Medium ($50,000 - $200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk – Will have to be sensitive with messaging and be aware of privacy concerns (some people may not want to be reached)
Key Performance Indicators		Message impressions (number of unique views on social media), followers (on social media), responses (through social media, email, mail, and word of mouth), reach. Change in total retail sales can also be measured.
Partners & Resources		City of Cambridge Community Development Department, City of Cambridge Public Information Office, Cambridge Office of Tourism, Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, Cambridge Local First, East Cambridge Business Association, Harvard Square Business Association, Kendall Square Association, Central Square BID, business community
Diagnostic		Small businesses across the City have been impacted significantly by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. According to data from this plan's Citywide business survey conducted in March 2021 (which received 71 responses from business owners/representatives, 73% of which had 10 or fewer employees), 96% of respondents reported being impacted by COVID-19 and 80% generated less revenue in 2020 than in 2019. Furthermore, survey respondents ranked implementation of coordinated district-specific marketing strategies as the most important possible strategy for COVID recovery efforts. Additionally, shared marketing/advertising ranked as the highest category of need for assistance (with 41% of respondents interested in this). Declining sales have left small business owners with limited resources. In turn, businesses are having to prioritize their spending and pooled marketing/advertising efforts would be a tremendous help.

This project aims to coordinate a plan for implementing multi-platform district-wide marketing campaigns. This idea evolved from survey data and conversations with representatives from the City's numerous business associations. Small business owners and the business group representatives expressed a need for marketing assistance and a desire for more district-wide branding efforts. An identified challenge is ensuring people are aware of the campaign and are buying into it at the business level (not the district level). Focusing on the reach of the campaign will be key, to create awareness and engagement. |

Action Item	This project aims to support local business, providing entrepreneurs with free marketing of the overall district and businesses that comprise the district. It allows for additional exposure to potential customers with a goal to drive more activity within the commercial district. Branding efforts within each unique district will allow community members to work together with businesses and organizations to create a stronger sense of community (these discussions can help inform decisions within other project recommendations as well). Prolonged engagement will be important to ensure the project keeps positive momentum and creates an impact. This project aims to be a multi-channel effort, through social media, newspapers, direct email, and traditional marketing handouts/flyers/window placement (stickers and posters).

Action items include:

- Plan the scope and reach of the campaign. Plan what channels to use, who to target as the audience, and how to reach them.

- Identify messaging and branding strategy, with significant public input.

- Train staff to execute goals

- Set up social media accounts/independent district-specific websites, reach out to newspapers, and purchase raw materials for posters/flyers/stickers.

- Develop content

- Operate the program

- Coordinate and measure impacts along the way

- Iterate as needed and report on impact

Process

A guided marketing and branding framework could empower district leaders and decision makers (whether they be business association representatives, business owners, or others) to initiate districtwide marketing campaigns. This could be of great help to some commercial districts that lack the resources and administrative capacity that other districts have. While the elements of this framework could be applied to Citywide marketing campaigns, the City will likely act as a guide/advisor to district leaders in their marketing efforts.

Step 1: Stakeholder and Process Organization

The process should start with stakeholder committee meetings and public engagement efforts within each separate commercial district in Cambridge. Because this initial work deals with identifying what makes each district special, it will be important to drive these discussions with those that spend most of their time within the district and are familiar with the character of the district, such as business owners, community members, and business association representatives. These discussions will be unique to each district, but overarching strategies for effective decision making and process structuring can be shared.

 # 7

- **Identify stakeholders**. This includes individuals (shoppers, business owners, property owners, residents, etc) as well as groups of people (community institutions, business associations, historic organizations, etc). Look at the district's surrounding demographics. Also, look at the next generation coming up in the district's area - these are your future constituents/clientele/tenants. Brand building is forward-looking and having an understanding of the future make-up of the district is important.

  - Keep in mind that it is unlikely that individuals can be grouped in very large categories. For example, it is likely not sufficient to stop at "residents." Feedback from different subgroups, such as economic brackets, age, or ethnicity, should be considered. This is extremely important when calculating sample size (see below).

 # 7

- **Assign process leaders.** Because each district in Cambridge is different (in size, business composition, accessibility, availability of resources, etc.), generalizing this process across districts will be difficult. Conversations are expected to be quite different between districts (as opportunities and threats to each district are unique) and, for this reason, assigning a separate individual to lead these efforts within each district would be wise. This individual can continue along as the unofficial marketing and branding district lead, helping organize the project timeline, manage deadlines, organize conversations, procure materials, and all other coordination. These responsibilities should fall on those most familiar with each district. Representatives from the business associations and community-focused business owners would be good candidates for this responsibility.

Step 2: Branding Inspiration and Strategy

District leaders should acknowledge that people already have an idea of what the brand of this area is. Ask business owners, residents, and patrons. Brands can be very strong, even if they haven't been officially announced. People likely already have an idea of what their commercial district means to them. Be intentional about who you invite into the process and be as broad as you can be. Shoppers, commuters, community members, visitors, business owners, property owners, city officials. Invite (ask for) both positive and negative feedback, but it is helpful to guide the conversation. What is here that is good/working? What is missing?

Focus on creating a mission for your district brand. Today this is more important than ever. Branding goes beyond a static statement of what your commercial district is in the community. Branding should include what your commercial district contributes to the community, and how it is working to improve and better the lives of residents, workers, and visitors. Go beyond what you do, to think about what you stand for. This is where a brand mission comes in. It is easy for people to get locked into the details of the look and feel of an image, icon, or logo - the brand identity. But ahead of this, the most important question to start with is, "Does the brand work to accomplish the goals related to the impacts you are hoping to achieve?" A brand mission should be concise and to the point, conveying clearly the purpose of your brand to its audiences. Once this is discerned, then it's time to build out your brand voice and brand identity.

Step 3: Community Engagement through Surveying

The City currently performs commercial district surveys, with equity as a core consideration. There may be an opportunity for the marketing and branding district leads to incorporate additional questions into these surveys or cooperate with the City to distribute a separate survey specific to this project's needs alongside the City's survey. This will increase efficiency during this key information gathering stage. The City can provide technical assistance related to survey strategies and implementation planning, but district leads should develop content and manage the independent district-specific surveys.

Community engagement is not a means to an end, it is an ongoing practice. This project should not be considered a one-time communication event, but the *beginning* of a conversation with your community.

For each stakeholder group, first determine how an ongoing conversation could take place. From there, move on to what additional methods might be needed to kickstart this particular initiative. Ideally, formally beginning or enhancing your ongoing communication practices will be enough for gathering this branding feedback.

Determine sample size. It is unreasonable to expect feedback from every individual stakeholder. Determine the appropriate sample size needed for a representative response. There are many places to learn more about sample sizes and calculate a sample size; here is one: https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/

Provide a variety of methods to give feedback. For example, an online survey is great, but also consider a paper version, or engaging people directly at an event. Providing multiple methods for each stakeholder increases the feedback response, as well as further diversifies responses. Small focus groups are particularly useful on testing branding.

Go where they are. Instead of asking people to come to you (public meeting, online survey) go to where they are. This is most easily applicable to group stakeholders. Get on the agenda at board meetings of local organizations. Attend (or get a booth at) events that are already happening in your community. Do you have a local farmers market? Does your library have regular story time where you could engage with parents?

Online surveys: general practices for development and distribution.

- Start a survey as if it were a conversation. Rarely should the first question be "How old are you?". Frame a survey as a friendly conversation with the respondent. (Demographic questions should come at the end of a survey unless obtaining demographics is the purpose of the survey.)

- Start with broader questions, then move to specifics, and end broadly.

Process (continued)

 # 7

Opening: broad questions

- While it is not always possible to have open-ended questions (if surveying thousands of people, open-ended questions may not be reasonable to evaluate), beginning with an open-ended question lets people give an opinion before being swayed in any way by questions. Gut reactions can be obtained in the first open-ended question.

- Broad does not have to equal open-ended. For example, a broad single-response question might be something like "Do you think the overall "brand" of this district is positive or negative?" Later in the survey when asked about specifics, respondents will be slightly swayed (either positively or negatively) as they think through the details of the district brand. An early broad question gets at the gut reaction.

Middle: focused questions

- The middle of the survey is where to get specific. Think about what needs to be known and what how that information needs to be used. This is helpful to weed out questions that don't have a clear purpose and just add length to the survey. For example, one might ask, "How often do you come to this district?" Is this information useful? How would it change or guide branding? A question like that, though interesting data, does not drive purpose.

End: broad questions

- At the end, provide another broader question. It is often helpful to provide an open-ended question at the end to allow people to give additional feedback or ideas. Only those with strong opinions will take the time at the end to fill this in.

- If you want to avoid open-ended questions because of sample size, another broad question at the end might ask people to rate the importance of various elements of the commercial district. For example, "What is most important to you about this district?" followed by a selection of various elements (shops, restaurants, transportation options, theater, public gathering spaces) or various experiences (shopping, meeting up with friends, eating, attending theater).

- Most surveys will have multiple collection methods. One survey could have different web addresses (largely undetectable to the public) which allows further analysis of results without asking additional questions. Maybe a different QR code for different parts of the district (one posted in a district anchor location, another posted in shops further from the high-traffic anchor). Maybe there is a different link for different mailing lists that have already been established. A question like "How/where did you hear about this survey" need not be asked.

- For distribution: partner with businesses and ask them to send it to their mailing list. Post a QR code in store windows, at bus stops, in coffee shops. Have hard copies in businesses for customers to fill out. Attend events. Host an event. Use social media and other traditional media methods (newspaper, radio) to get the word out.

Step 4: Implementing and Communicating the Brand through Marketing Campaigns

 # 8

Lay the Groundwork for Growth. Support the long-term development of marketing initiatives across Cambridge's commercial districts through building their capacity.

- The City could consider a basic template that district leads can use as a stepping stone for their marketing efforts. A simple outline/template that district leads can add district-specific content to.

  As previously mentioned, the districts themselves will need to manage their own marketing/branding efforts. This responsibility cannot lie with the City. Any websites developed for marketing purposes will need to be independently developed and managed by each district. The City of Cambridge offers financial support for marketing and event initiatives through the Small Business Challenge (up to $7,000 per group, per fiscal year).

  District representatives could decide to apply separately to develop and manage their own marketing websites. This would be most useful for the districts with no formal representation, as several of the larger districts with more resources have existing websites in place.

- Support capacity building with specific educational workshops and best practices.

  - Training and support around technology

  - How to develop branding

  - How partnerships can expand their reach

Process (continued)

 # 8

Host webinars and workshops within districts or digitally, to support expanding skills and building capacity to support more engaged and sustained marketing strategies. These workshops can serve as a recruitment tool and offer up additional resources that invest in the future success of the districts. The City already hosts workshops focused on branding, online marketing, and website design. Marketing and branding district leads may consider attending these to inform district strategies and lead their own district-specific workshops.

When is the best time to introduce new branding? Use the energy already captured to move that brand forward. Marketing and branding should move along with other initiatives so that all the work being done is connected and contributing to the brand. Other initiatives can also provide opportunities to pilot the brand.

Use existing community assets. Understand what is most important to people and build on that (those could be feelings, experiences, or physical assets). Is there a significant yearly event in each district? A significant historic feature, such as a clock tower or marquee, or a significant physical feature, such as a connection to waterways? Layer branding in a way that speaks to the nature of the space.

The public realm should support the brand. In addition to signage and logos, is the seating, vegetation, transportation options, and mix of goods and services in support of the brand? Not all of these elements can change quickly but get an understanding of what is supporting and detracting from the brand and make plans to change over time.

Pilot solutions to see how people react. Save money in the long run by piloting changes and gathering feedback from the community. Having a mindset of piloting allows for experimentation that may not have occurred in the past. Pilots allow for a **demonstration of what the branding is**. Combat negative narratives by demonstrating the kinds of things that are possible, and what is desirable. Demonstrate a vision for the future. This is specific to each district's implementation of their unique branding initiatives and should be considered a part of the overall brand evaluation process.

Communicate along the way. Use brand ambassadors or brand champions (the district-level leads) along the way. Never say "we have been doing this work for the last year...". Use local media and social media to help communicate the message/mission of the brand. Leverage existing investment meetings and event volunteers to share the message. Arm them with the vision.

Use vacant storefronts as a canvas for piloting new branding/messaging. Many communities are suffering with vacant storefronts due to COVID-19. These storefronts offer an inexpensive opportunity for large-scale messaging that may not be available at other times.

Step 5: Plan Funding

Funding may come from several places. Think broadly about how the community engagement and implementation can be funded.

- There is an opportunity today to use funding related to COVID recovery (ARPA).

- If there is a board of directors or other key influencers tied to a district, they might also have ties into funding opportunities.

- Some of the community events might be funded by non-profits through their grants. Tie in multiple goals to one event to leverage the event and move the branding initiative further.

- Dividing up the budget in different deliverables may open up additional opportunities for funding. For example, can an aspect of implementation (such as a mural) be funded through an art grant?

- Determine initial funding requirements and long-term funding requirements. These budgets are also likely to be funded differently

Potential Timeline

Branding should consist of a cohesive identity for the area that is easily recognizable on social media and the web. District-specific websites should be independent of the City's website and should be engaging and searchable across all platforms (monitors, laptops, phones, etc). The following timeline offers a framework for district leaders to reference when initiating their independent marketing/branding efforts.

- 0 to 3 months: create a logo and tagline for the district, create social media accounts for district/association (if not already in existence)

- 0 to 12 months: Collect photographs documenting each district throughout the year. Capture various moments for stores, storefronts, and the district in general. These images could be used on the website, on social media, and archived for future marketing purposes.

Process (continued)

Potential Timeline (continued)

- 0 to 12 months: Create a website for the district with a searchable menu for stores, events (including the theater), and general happenings. Link the site to the City's site for redirect. The typical range is 3 - 6 months but could take longer with more stakeholders involved.

  Note that the City performs individual commercial district assessments, maintains commercial district maps, and provides details specific to each commercial district. All of this is available on the Community Development Department's website. If additional independent marketing materials are created independently by district representatives, the inclusion of appropriate links on the City's district-specific pages may help increase the awareness and spread of each campaign.

- 6 - 12 months: Assign a social media person to promote the branding efforts across social platforms. Incorporate stories about the businesses, people, events that make this place important, vibrant, where you want to be. This person should be able to edit and create images/videos across all platforms. Ideally, the marketing and branding district leads identified earlier in the process can continue to handle these duties at the district level.

- 12 - 13 months: Launch website with a possible event to draw attention to the branding efforts and drive people to the area. Engage with local artists to create "Instagrammable" moments with hashtags that boost brand recognition organically.

- 12- 36 months: Depending on need and scope, the marketing position may need to maintain social, website, and in-person branding for an extended period of time to maintain consistency. If there is no association, this person would be a connector for the community.

Resources

Sprout Social - What is a brand mission and how to define it –
https://sproutsocial.com/insights/brand-mission/
This article discusses what a brand mission statement is and how to define one.

Survey Monkey - Sample Size Calculator -
https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/
There are many sample size calculators on the web. Survey Monkey is a good start, and has many resources to assist you in creating effective surveys.

The Musicant Group - Friendly Storefronts Toolkit - http://www.musicantgroup.com/free-ideas.html
This toolkit provides ideas for activating storefronts. When implementing your brand, this may be useful in working with your storefronts to communicate not only their business, but the town brand.

The Musicant Group - Placemaking Your Mainstreets Toolkit -
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oarrKwakmkp415exLIQrP3ywTGMUmrEu/view?usp=sharing
This toolkit provides ideas for thinking through how placemaking can support mainstreets. When thinking through how brands exist beyond formalization, this may be useful to intentionally refine that brand.

Hennepin County Covid Response Toolkit for Business Districts -
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VTM6M7GL8smIrkqtNuvn6KBtxkMLO0Nj/view
Created in partnership with The Musicant Group, this toolkit provides strategies and resources for businesses to respond to the challenges of operating during Covid.

Restaurant Support Program

Location   Bloomfield, CT

REVENUES & SALES

Best Practice

The Business Recovery Team recognized the importance of supporting the local restaurants and the small business community throughout the pandemic period and now that the recovery period has started with vaccination rates increasing and restrictions lessening. They realized that ongoing and continuing support was critical. Development and town officials needed to offer quick responsive support to the community's restaurants, many of which were small locally-owned, and in some cases failing fast.

As restaurants were one of the hardest hit business sectors it was apparent that the Economic Development team, GOMAN+YORK's team, as the town's advisors, and the Town's Covid Business Recovery Team needed to offer support to the restaurants that would generate business to an industry in flux – sit-down restaurants had to do a 180° pivot in how they served customers, switching to mainly take-out, establishing online ordering capabilities. It's no surprise that pizza and QSR (Quick Service Restaurants) were for the most part weathering the pandemic best. This is their business model. Outdoor dining became the norm as we saw sidewalks, parking lots/spaces and alleys transformed into patios where there once were none.

Restaurant sales, like other small businesses, were non-existent, down over 50%, mandated to or voluntarily closed, switched to take-out, only 25%...only 50% capacity with social distancing – for some it was an impossible model to work and survive through.

The importance of an ongoing effort to support our Downtown small businesses and in particular, restaurants is critical post-COVID as in many of our communities' restaurants represent 40-50% of the Downtown businesses and employ many that live in the local community.

Action Item

- Develop a Communication Plan to communicate with the restaurants
  - What forms of communication will be utilized?
  - Messaging strategies – keeping in mind that you are helping them to thrive – keep it positive and supportive
  - Get Input – Survey, calls
  - Create Contact Lists – with EMAILS

- Develop a Marketing Plan to support the restaurants

- Host Webinars – Industry experts and local restauranters

- Keep businesses informed on programs, informational webinars, funding, and policy updates. In one case, the restaurant owner did not understand the differences between SBA loans, PPP funding, and grants.

Action Item (continued)

- Share resources & knowledge – Share ideas and best practices
  - If it works for another restaurant or community, chances are it will work in yours.

- Be accessible – virtual, by phone or in person

- Offer one-on-one business support consultations

- Work with the owners through town policies and regulations – this was critical when the outdoor seating issues came up – regulations were changed swiftly, and fees were waived to accommodate a quick response – in CT municipalities were given 7 days to approve outdoor dining requests from restaurants. Before COVID this type of approval could have taken months.

- Towns have recognized that this is the new normal for restaurants and have begun to enact long-term regulations to embrace outdoor dining and other zoning issues that have arouse from the pandemic.

Process

Marketing – Event & Promotion Support

Recognizing that many small businesses and restaurants, are family run is important. They are working 60–80-hour work weeks, leaving little time for extras such as marketing, promotions and social media.

If they did have personnel handling their marketing, most likely during the pandemic many were forced to lay-off staff or relegate them to other positions in order to accommodate the change in how they were doing business.

This is where community-wide support of the local restaurants is key as it will supplement any recognition programs they may or may not have.
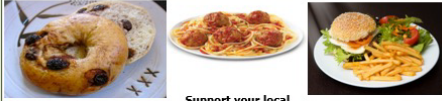
In the case of Bloomfield – the restaurants were all supported through the marketing efforts – whether they were national chains or locally-owned. It was key to remember that that these restaurants and small businesses were supporting our community through their hiring of the local community, and it was now the community's turn to "Order Up" from them.

The program for the campaign shown on this page is more fully detailed in the Project Rubric on Tenant Mix – Restaurant Programs.

Community marketing campaigns to support local restaurants. Source: R. Michael Goman

Process (continued)

Communication/Messaging Support for Restaurants

Communication is key – not only for the restaurant's patrons, but to their landlords, vendors and suppliers. How your restaurants are messaging & targeting customers is vital. Some examples of the messages for the restaurants were:

- Safety is key and top of mind – expect this consumer behavior to continue.

- The importance of supporting "Local" is important to your customers now more than ever

- Earning back your customers trust – loyalty bonuses for eating in; thank you on menu

- Creative specials at off hours to spread out business

- Stay Upbeat – Thank you's are important; staff attentiveness

- Consistent Hours

- Monitoring of online search engines (yelp, google updates)

- Online Ordering Capabilities were critical – Door Dash, Resy, ChowNow – some subscription-based

- Internal & External Communications

- Signage - welcoming

Tools to support businesses – Black Business Alliance Workshop, Small Business Toolkits. Source: R. Michael Goman

Process (continued)

Informational Support

BLOOMFIELD MEANS BUSINESS

Information from
Bloomfield Business COVID-19 Recovery Team

Deloitte.

New study focuses on the
The Restaurant of the Future

The restaurant of the future arrives ahead of schedule - Deloitte study focuses on customer and industry trends from over 500 respondents.

Learn:
What customers are saying,
How restaurants are responding, and
How restaurants will look in the post-COVID era.

We are sharing in these documents with you in both the long-form and the 2-page dashboard highlight document. Click the links to view them.

Link to study.

Deloitte summary of Customer and Industry trends - Dashboard document.
Link to summary dashboard document.

2021 SHOP, DINE & SUPPORT LOCAL

town clerk | council | planning | tax collector | police | permitting | bids | budget

Government   Departments   Visitor   How Do I   Helpful Links   Video Tour

Culture, Parks and Recreation
Dining in Bloomfield
Discover the Connecticut Valley Region
Historical Photo Gallery
Public Meeting Calendar

Home ›› Visitor

Dining in Bloomfield

- Bloomfield Village Pizza - 34 Tunxis Ave, Bloomfield, CT 06002 - 860.242.3339
- Bloom Hill Farm Ice Cream - 696 Cottage Grove Rd, Bloomfield, CT 06002 -

○ **#2 - Focus on Restaurants – #BloomfieldEatsLocal**
Monday, September 21, 2020 – 3pm – 4pm
   ▪ Focus: Moving forward with change
   ▪ Sep 21, 2020 03:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
     Topic: BLOOMFIELD COVID-19 BUSINESS RECOVERY SUPPORT SERIES
     Register in advance for this webinar:
     https://bloomfieldct.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_l3G-iShrS3yKIIk4HX9Dzg
   ▪ Youtube Link: https://youtu.be/JzH97mB1GbA

○ **#4 – Focus on the Future – Weathering the Storm**
Monday, October 5, 2020 – 3pm – 4pm
   ▪ Focus: Planning for uncertainty and financial stability
   ▪ Oct 5, 2020 03:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
     Topic: BLOOMFIELD COVID-19 BUSINESS RECOVERY SUPPORT SERIES
     Register in advance for this webinar:
     https://bloomfieldct.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_fasItp_WR1Cpj0m_ce53GQ
   ▪ Youtube Link: https://youtu.be/b4N40NFO8Zo

Webinars, Informational Eblasts, Linking to Town's website, Sharing relevant information.
Source: R. Michael Goman

#9 Plan a local sourcing program encouraging local businesses to buy local products from each other

Category		Revenue/Sales
Location		Online (Citywide effort)
Origin		RKG Associates, City of Cambridge Community Development Department
Budget		Medium ($50,000 - $100,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators		Number of participants, number of partnerships formed, revenue as a result of newly formed partnerships, revenue saved through shortened supply chain, community and business owner feedback
Partners & Resources		City of Cambridge Community Development Department, East Cambridge Business Association, Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, Cambridge Local First, the Central Square BID, the Harvard Square Business Association, the Kendall Square Association, Cambridge restaurant owners, potentially an outside technology consultant
Diagnostic		The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on supply chains across all industries. Encouraging a local approach to sourcing can help restaurants and small businesses shorten supply chains and improve resiliency by reducing the risk of disruption during times of emergency. This project aims to promote local sourcing amongst businesses across the City, shortening supply chains with a focus on sustainability. The project will contribute to a circular economy approach while allowing businesses to be more flexible in times of emergency (the City has an ongoing circular economy study). The project will also stimulate the local economy through increased spending on locally produced goods and increase awareness of this local spending across the community.

Increasing awareness of local sourcing within the small business community can help businesses reduce their environmental impact. Local sourcing can lead to greater certainty and predictability of delivery times, lower delivery costs, and a smaller carbon footprint (with reduced transportation miles, processing, and packaging). Additionally, local suppliers can be more innovative and reactive. Selling and marketing local goods fosters relationships within the community as local businesses support each other.

Challenges may arise initially as with any disruption to an existing system. It can be time consuming and costly for restaurant owners to change their current practices. It will also be up to each individual business owner to see the value in adopting a new approach.

Action Item

The City's small business community is already incredibly supportive and there have been several recent campaigns encouraging local spending from both City Administration and local business groups. Most of the initiatives have been directed towards residents and visitors, promoting shopping local. These initiatives include the City's 'Small Business Saturday', the City's commercial district maps, the City's 'Cambridge Local Retail/Restaurant Business List', East Cambridge Business Association's 'Retailer Guide', Cambridge Chamber of Commerce's 'Taste' dining passport program, the Cambridge Arts 'Creative Marketplace', and the 'Shop Harvard' and 'Shop Inman' construction mitigation efforts. This project aims to direct these same efforts towards business owners, with a goal of increasing business-to-business spending and developing relationships within the Citywide business community.

The East Cambridge Business Association launched a campaign within the past year that is a catalyst for these efforts. The 'ECBeeA Crosspollinator' campaign intends to highlight local supply chains, amplify the impact of local spending and demonstrate the value that members of the small business community bring to each other through a branding/marketing initiative. Participating businesses display decals in their storefront windows recognizing their existing supply chain partnerships within the City along with a list of these local business partnerships. It is a fantastic initiative to celebrate how local businesses support each other and raise awareness amongst the community about how local spending is amplified by shopping at participating stores. This project has similar goals to highlight and amplify local spending but also aims to encourage more business-to-business relationships by providing the necessary platform to enable direct connections between business owners to be made Citywide.

While transitioning suppliers and menu changes can be costly and takes a proactive effort, this project aims to make it easier for small changes to a small business supply chain to be made by providing business owners with pertinent information about their peers within the local ecosystem. It aims to promote the City's vast small business ecosystem, offering businesses the chance to advertise/communicate to each other what goods they can supply, such as local beer from nearby breweries, alcohol from distilleries, wine from wineries, coffee from roasters, bread and desserts from bakeries, meat from butchers, and fish from nearby fish markets. This program can also promote other types of business relationships such as introducing local banks, accountants, or lawyers to new potential small business clients.

In addition to providing a platform for direct connections to be made, this project aims to build off the momentum of the 'ECBeeA Crosspollinator' campaign by offering decals to be displayed in storefront windows identifying participating businesses Citywide. This will raise awareness of the local spending initiative and how local spending can be amplified by shopping at participating locations, supporting not just one business but supporting the City's local ecosystem.

Action items include:

- Decide who will be in charge of the administrative duties for this initiative.

- Analyze best practice policies and programs from circular economy efforts in other cities to incorporate this project into a future circular economy effort within Cambridge. This local sourcing initiative will support developing sustainable supply chains, enhancing a Cambridge economic system that designs-in regenerative production and limits consumption and waste. Note that the City is currently engaged in a circular economy consulting project.

    Best Practice examples include:

    - RELondon: https://relondon.gov.uk/business/
    - Seattle Made: https://www.seattlemade.org/about/
    - Circular Charlotte: https://www.metabolic.nl/projects/circular-charlotte/
    - Scotland Government Policy: https://www.gov.scot/publications/supply-chain-resilience-and-diversity-sppn-9-2020/

Action Item (continued)

- Decide on the type of platform to use (Facebook group, independent marketplace, or City-managed portal) for business owners to connect and receive information about each other. This allows buyers to understand what items could be purchased and make a direct connection for transactions.

- Encourage restaurant owners to ask their current distributors if they have the capacity to source locally.

- Promote this initiative through various city channels to make sure the business community is aware of the initiative and knows where to go to access information.

- Design a logo to be displayed in participating storefront windows Citywide
  - Consider adding a second identifying layer to promote woman-owned and minority-owned businesses (potentially a particular color or symbol in the corner of the logo)

Social media post for a participating business in the 'ECBeeA Crosspollinator' campaign. Source: ECBA social media

Process

- Identify who will lead the program and manage the process (will it be someone from the City, someone from a business group, or someone else?). As has been mentioned, administrative capacity is already strained within the City and adding more responsibilities will be difficult unless a new position is created within the Community Development Department. This type of work would ideally be handled by the small business liaison position.

- Form a team of stakeholders to act as decision makers and push the project forward (deciding on logo, platform, marketing, etc.). This stakeholder group will likely include representatives from the City, representatives from the various business groups, and representatives from the business community.

- Speak with business owners and representatives from varying districts to gather insights as to the type of platform that would be preferable and easily accessible.

East Cambridge Business Association's decal for the 'ECBeeA Crosspollinator' campaign. Source: ECBA social media

Process (continued)

- Platform Options include:

  A Facebook group: this could be exclusive to small business owners, with an administrator controlling membership. This is a low-cost option but requires business owners to have a Facebook account and knowledge of how to use the platform.

  A City-owned platform: A directory could be included in the upcoming small business portal, the existing small business data dashboard, or another location. This is a low-cost option that is accessible to all, with an internet connection being the only requirement. There may be less privacy with less control over who can access the information, unless restrictive access is applied. This option would require more effort from the City, as they would maintain the information included on the site. The existing "Cambridge Local Retail/Restaurant Business List" is a good starting point. It acts as a directory of local businesses for the public currently but could either be replicated or expanded (to include goods that businesses can offer to each other and include more detailed contact information).

  An independent marketplace: Similar to the 'local e-commerce marketplace' best practice example that follows. This would most likely be a consultant-led project and is a high-cost option that requires the most resources. However, this option offers the most functionality as it could allow for actual transactions to take place on the platform rather than just serving as a directory.

  - Significant funding would be required for a marketplace platform like this.
  - Funding sources could include:
    - Community Development Block grant funds
    - State's Community Compact IT grant: a competitive grant program focused on driving innovation and transformation at the local level via investments in technology. Up to $200,000 for one-time capital needs for innovative IT projects (which could include design/planning-related expenses). For communities who have applied to enter into a Best Practice Community Compact with the Baker-Polito Administration.
    - Crowdfunding with Patronicity or a similar platform. Refer to the "Plan a 'streetery' outdoor dining area to serve multiple businesses" project recommendation for details and tips related to successfully implementing crowdfunding campaigns.

- Determine platform/portal specifics (what type of platform, what will it look like, what information will be displayed, who will have access, how can business owners participate, how can business owners connect with each other once participating, how will information be updated, etc.).

- Initial outreach efforts to communicate the project to local businesses, promote and spread awareness of the initiative (communicating through all City and Business Association channels)

  - Be sure to include large businesses and anchor institutions in these outreach efforts. The impact of the project could be magnified with buy-in at this level.

- Design and produce a decal with a unified logo to be displayed in participating storefront windows Citywide (adding a second identifying layer to promote woman-owned and minority-owned businesses). Any business that buys something from another local business from the directory can display the decal, which will raise awareness of the initiative and promote local spending.

Local eCommerce Marketplace

Location	Online – Ashland, MA

REVENUES & SALES

Best Practice

Every porch-delivery – by FedEx, UPS, Amazon, etc. – is potentially a purchase that was made online and shipped from a distant retailer. Most of these purchases are items that could be purchased from local retailers. Providing a "shop local online, buy local online" capability, mindset, and awareness can strengthen the local economy, and help local retailers.

A leading metric of this phenomenon is Decreasing Total Retail Sales. In the absence of decreasing population, this is an indicator that sales dollars are being spent outside the community.

Decreasing retrial employment is generally an early indication that revenue/employee is insufficient to maintain employee headcount. Technology can be a force multiplier which can increase sales per employee, and create a need for additional employees, and increase the needs for other supporting businesses that provide training, equipment, communications, and connectivity services

Even local retailers that have their own websites from which they can sell, are at a competitive disadvantage to large eCommerce platforms that present thousands of products in dozens of product categories. A local multi-vendor eCommerce marketplace combines the communities total product selection, and creates a comparable selection of products to large eCommerce companies, making the community an eCommerce destination.

This approach should also promotes the store, provides, a map to their location, and strengthen the relationship between shoppers and local businesses. Retailer identification and branding reinforces the shopper/retailer relationship, and encourages repeat business.

Action Item

The recommended course of action is an initial outreach to community stores to present the benefits of a coordinated community-centric online marketplace technologies. This may require some collateral materials, and an outreach effort.

As with the "Coordinated Communications" project, the "Local eCommerce Marketplace" project is effectively a coordinated and integrated process. This means that the project results will benefit greatly from identifying a point person to coordinate the discussion and efforts.

The community of retailers may also benefit from a group presentation on the creation of a marketplace, websites, a local online business directory, local search technologies, and how integrating the various technologies and platforms can create a powerful "local online" alternative to the major eCommerce websites.

Many of the technologies and platforms are already built and no development or customization activity is required. Awareness of the technologies and how to apply and integrate them will also benefit from a community sponsored publicity effort and/or outreach campaign.

In some cases, integrating the various technologies may require some outside specialists or training, depending on the specific groups of technologies selected. Retailers can and should sign up for accounts on various platforms and establish omni-channel strategies. Communities can and should build directories. Directories and websites can and should be integrated with marketplace platforms. And, ideally, retailers should leverage cross-platform inventory management tools.

Process

The process for implementing this project begins by identifying whether this should be a consultant-led project, a DIY project, or some combination of the two. The community should identify the community point person on the project who will centralize communications, set a project schedule, and monitor the key metrics in monitoring its success. This should be someone that can speak for the community and with local retailers.

Next, we recommend scheduling a community discussion/presentation (~1 hour) to present the project, describe the implementation, and enroll participants.

Each enrollee will receive an email that provides links to information, tools, and tutorials that will help them create vendor accounts on the various platforms. Emphasis should be placed on these activities being coordinated on a community level and integrated to create a "the community is a marketplace" result. Ideally, this should also include a community retail business directory and local-search enabled marketplace platform.

With vendors accounts created and products uploaded, the marketplace is effectively fully operational. However, it is our experience that merely creating the capability does not automatically mean that customers will begin using it.

We highly recommend that the marketplace project be implemented in conjunction with a marketing or communications project. This can take many forms, from community communications up to a fully coordinated social media marketing project. We will provide a Best Practices project sheet for a coordinated social media marketing project which is designed to work with the marketplace project but can also be leveraged to benefit any community projects or communications.

We highly recommend integrating the directory and marketplace with other online retail initiatives, facilitating an omni-channel solution for those retailers engaged in selling via multiple online marketplaces.

The last component in the process is to collect data on the project progress and integrate it with other community communications. This will keep residents and businesses engaged and informed about the community's efforts to strengthen the local economy and invested in a positive outcome.

To be competitive with major eCommerce websites, the community marketplace will need to provide a comparable level of product selection and convenience features. But the project can gain a competitive advantage by emphasizing those dimensions of competition which eCommerce sites cannot match, such as: Customer Service, Product Demonstrations, shopping as an experience, personal relationships, proximity, and location-based fulfillment options (BOPIS…buy online, pickup in store, BOPAC…buy online, pickup curbside, Local Delivery, etc.)

A community business directory (community government owned) provides a listing service for interested businesses. In this example, different pages are created for different categories of businesses, including restaurants and retail. Source: Mondofora

Mondofora is a local-search enabled marketplace, that allows shoppers to identify their location, their radius of search, and keywords of the product that they are shopping for. The Home page also provides featured vendors that might be of interest to shoppers. Source: Mondofora

Pledge To Support Local

Location	Amherst, MA

Best Practice	Holiday Shop local, support small business and "take away" were main focus of the Pledge Campaign. Pledge Cards were printed on card stock, available to download from website and placed in local paper to cut out. Local radio marketing invited people near and far to take the challenge to support local. Over 2 months eat at or take away from 10 downtown Amherst restaurants. Cafes or coffee shops, purchase from at least 5 local retail stores and enjoy 3 downtown services. Success was immediate with requests for pledge cards from all businesses. Hundreds of entries were mailed to us with receipts as proof. Calls, social media posts and emails to our offices expressing excitement and commitment to supporting downtown were constant through out – months later we are being asked to run a similar campaign. This campaign was run by the Amherst Business Improvement District, not the municipality.

Process	1. Concept: Incentivize people to shop local over a 2-month period in a fun and light way
	
	2. Treasure hunt concept boiled down to a check list
	
	3. Make sure it is within reach, a bit of a stretch but nothing too daunting
	    1. 10 restaurants
	    2. 5 retail
	    3. 3 services
	    4. 10 weeks to complete
	
	4. A Pledge to support: involved, active, challenge for the greater good
	
	5. Create and print Pledge Cards
	
	6. Marketing: Honest "State of the Downtown": Businesses down 70+%, due to pandemic, you make the difference: a call to arms
	
	Marketing Plan:
	
	• 12-week Radio Buy
	• 4 radio stations
	• playing 15 spots daily
	• 4 full page full color back page of the local paper with "cut out lines"
	• 10,000 rack cards distributed to all local business to hand out and include with take away orders and shoppers bags
	• Download pledge card from BID website
	• Social Media promotions and push to neighboring areas
	
	Success:
	
	• The Pledge to Support was a HUGE success for our downtown businesses
	• Hundreds of completed pledge cards were mailed, emailed and dropped off complete with all receipts as proof
	• We received countless emails and calls letting us know how fun this was, how many NEW businesses they tried
	• Businesses reported sales increase and customers relating that they were there because of the Pledge and will be back to continue to support
	• All winners were awarded local area gift cards – keeping the money local and in the hands of our small business owners.

Pledge Card. Source: Amherst Business Improvement District

#10

Connect entrepreneurs with commercial landlords for temporary pop-up business activations in vacant storefronts (partnering with landlords for short term leases)

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		Citywide (priority commercial districts experiencing higher impact from vacancies)
Origin		RKG Associates, City of Cambridge Community Development Department, The Musicant Group
Budget		Medium ($50,000 - $200,000) – Project will require dedicated staff and rent subsidies
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk – Risks include navigating regulatory restrictions, financing limitations, liability and insurance concerns, and potentially limited participation from landlords
Key Performance Indicators		Number of storefronts filled (temporarily and long-term as a result of project), sales figures (from pop-up vendors and neighboring establishments), pedestrian counts, number of businesses that go on to expand operations within the City
Partners & Resources		City of Cambridge Community Development Department, non-profit partner, commercial property landlords

Two vacant retail storefronts in Harvard Square, the commercial district with the highest concentration of vacancies. Source: RKG Associates

Diagnostic	This project aims to connect entrepreneurs with commercial landlords for temporary pop-up business activations in vacant storefronts (partnering with landlords for short-term leases). This idea evolved as a means to reduce the number of ground floor vacancies, which have increased dramatically as a result of COVID-19 impacts on retail businesses.

This project creates vibrancy in places that are lacking it and fosters a strong local economy. It will help to temporarily reduce the number of vacant storefronts to improve the street-level experience for people passing through, bringing more activity to commercial districts. It helps landlords to activate their unused space and helps entrepreneurs to test out their ideas without the typically high capital investment and startup costs related to opening a brick-and-mortar location.

Supporting small businesses in their next step of the journey within this process may prove to be challenging after their short-term stay expires. Business owners may need assistance finding additional space or funds to access space to continue operating their business. Contacting certain commercial landlords of vacant spaces across the City has also proved challenging. The City and business groups may prove to be valuable in identifying willing landlords. |
| Action Item | The first action Item will be to identify a non-profit partner (and any other potential partners) and begin collaboration discussions. The City will be a great resource in identifying vacant spaces that will work as well as identifying landlords that may be amenable to this program. These landlords will then need to be approached to determine their interest in short-term leases. Several agreements will need to be made to keep these spaces operational throughout the process (i.e. how will payment of utilities be handled).

A list of potential short-term tenants will also need to be created. Again, the City and its numerous business associations will be a great resource in identifying local entrepreneurs in need of space. A potential non-profit partner may be of assistance with these efforts as well, particularly with social media marketing efforts (utilizing their social media presence to spread the word and help garner interest from small business owners).

The partners can collaboratively determine which types of businesses to target (will this program be directed towards minority and women-owned businesses) and match the database of available spaces to potential tenants based on needs and priorities. Operating guidelines will need to be created/communicated and technical support will need to be available throughout (and potentially beyond) the tenancies. |
| Process | **Attracting Property Owners and Selecting Locations**

Attracting partners - Go local. Focus first on recruiting locally-owned properties. There is a higher likelihood of participation from owners who are also community members. Encourage property owners with collective-action centric messaging (i.e. that we are all in this together, the district's reputation and appeal is not a zero-sum game). Activating the main street benefits the entire community. Communicate that this is a way to meaningfully enhance the reputation of the building/landlord as one who cares about and supports their community/district.

Find spaces before activations. Recruitment of landlords and storefront owners should happen before recruitment of activations. Knowing what types of spaces are available will draw more place-based responses for use. There is the added benefit of getting an early understanding of what landlords are willing to host. Make sure you have landlords committed to participate before starting the recruitment process. |

Process (continued)

Pitch it as marketing their leasable space. A successful program undoes itself - the temporary uses boosting foot traffic to their space, generating leads for new tenants and resulting in new leases. The value statement to them for why they should allow low or no-cost use of the space is that this use does not preclude them from seeking out permanent tenants and activates a space that wouldn't have been generating revenue during this time anyway.

Consider Location. Pop-ups in storefronts that are in close proximity to struggling businesses will help give those businesses a boost. Pop-ups near thriving businesses will benefit from the existing foot traffic. Balance the selection of activation locations to benefit everyone and so that visitors experience both thriving businesses and support struggling businesses of your community.

If owners are reluctant to give internal access, pitch window-only activations. Using vacant store windows as a canvas is a great way to add vibrancy to a street, and there is little risk for the store owner. No one need enter the storefront in this scenario. Window activations can create interest in the street, bringing more people to the area and also keeping them walking further down the street, increasing foot traffic for open storefronts. Some ideas:

- Artist installations
- A connected piece spanning multiple storefronts that tells a story or is a riddle/scavenger hunt. This gets people to walk the length of the town.
- Promotion of a community-wide event or building project.
- Rotating themed window decorations. Get people back to see the updates each season.
- Advertising space for other businesses or non-profits.
- Community message boards.

Create a follow-up plan. Regular check-ins with owner and lessee/activator ensures the use is complying with agreed upon parameters. Have a plan to shut down activations that don't follow the rules.

Funding the Program

Provide financial incentives to support the building owners and artists. This may be especially important for the first one to sign up, as a proof of concept to attract others. Provide a signing bonus or waive the fees of any leasing/permitting. For window activations, including a decal or logo indicating "I support my district" or something similar may provide further incentive.

- Look into developing a temporary use fee for the first landlord ($500+)
- Waiving the fees of any permitting
- Voucher to artists/entrepreneurs to procure space to look more like a traditional lease. This responsibility will likely fall on a non-City entity.
- Grants

Managing the Program

For vacant properties and interior activations, consider a third-part management entity. Given the low revenue generating potential, a third-party management entity to hold a master use agreement or lease for the vacant properties can simplify the process and provide use of their existing insurance capacity.

Process (continued)

- The third-party should enter into use agreements with the users of the vacant spaces that defines rules and regulations but does not put the logistical or insurance burden on the user who is likely unfamiliar or ill-equipped to take on logistical hurdles for short-term use.

- The third-party acts as the recipient of the sublease and utilizes existing organizational insurance and capacity to navigate any permitting needs and building owner requirements.

- The third-party could also cover utilities to lessen the burden even more for owners/short-term use tenants.

- The use agreement should stipulate a minimum and maximum of operational hours needed to produce the activation outcomes the program wants to see. (Though, to start, and when you are trying to build demand, being more flexible is probably best.)

- The use agreement should have clauses about what would trigger immediate termination of the agreement, such as uses you want to prohibit. This is a strategy to mitigate activity that the property owner or third-party master-agreement holder believes will significantly increase their liability.

  - Examples for publicly open spaces (i.e. retail stores with customers) would be hosting non-standard events in the space, making un-approved modifications to the space.

  - Examples for private space activation (i.e. artist studios or other uses with a limited number of authorized occupants) would be inviting in unauthorized users who cause damage to the property or consumption of illegal substances on site.

  - Examples for closed storefront displays (i.e. display of art or community engagement/education) would be display of nudity or profanity that is not removed within 24 hours of request.

- The agreement should also define what the landlord will provide (access to the building, utilities, any furniture, fixtures & equipment) and what the master agreement holder and end user will be responsible for providing.

- In the case of activation in vacant storefronts you should be able to promise at least 60 days to make it worthwhile for the short-term occupant and then have a rolling 30-day expulsion clause for no cause going forward to allow for the space to be rented and temporary uses to cease.

Appropriate uses vary based on context, but food businesses are not recommended unless they already have a significant operations basis. The food industry has significant barriers to entry and the first three months of a new food business are turbulent. Even if the on-season business is a food business, sharing kitchens is a frequent source of conflict. If the space would require significant build out to house a food business, that can create a financial and permitting barrier to a rapid-implementation activation project. The quickest route to implementation is a pop-up retailer that already has online sales or artists who already have work created that can be displayed while they utilize the space for ongoing creation.

Common challenges arise from lack of communication or overly reactive building owners, so relationship building on the front end is critical to success and stability of storefront activations.

Process (continued)

Ideas for Vacant Storefront Use

Explore community needs through a survey. What are missing amenities/activities and see if those could be built into vacant spaces? Do the vacant storefronts provide an opportunity to deliver resident desires?

Consider this an opportunity to curate your main street, balancing the mix of offerings to increase the types of goods and services that are provided. Don't have a hardware store in the area? How about a pop-up tool library, or a fix-it clinic. If there is success, maybe you will draw a business in. Consider the pop-up types and how they will complement existing businesses. More people will come to the area if there is more variety of things to do/buy.

Simply upgrading the facade can have a big impact on the overall feeling of a street. A full activation is not always necessary. Colorful paint is probably the biggest ROI for a facade, window displays, art, and decals also are effective. If there is space for outdoor seating, that would also be a high ROI investment. (This applies to both vacant storefronts and existing struggling businesses. Outdoor space improvements provide dual benefit to the business and the community streetscape, which drives more foot traffic and thus more business.)

Resources

The Musicant Group - Friendly Storefronts Toolkit - http://www.musicantgroup.com/free-ideas.html

> *This toolkit provides ideas for activating occupied storefronts, but the tactics for tactical improvements are applicable to pop up spaces too!*

The Musicant Group and Hennepin County - Covid Response Toolkit for Business Districts - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VTM6M7GL8smIrkqtNuvn6KBtxkMLO0Nj/view

> *This toolkit provides strategies and resources for businesses to respond to the challenges of operating during Covid.*

Culture House - Community Hub Manual - https://culturehouse.cc/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/culturehouse_manual.pdf

> *This manual provides information on creating community spaces.*

Freespace Toolkit - San Francisco - http://freespace.io/toolkit/

> *This toolkit is based on a project with a wealth of creative culture to build from, but the structure of how they approached finding and utilizing their space may be helpful as you go down this path.*

Supporting Entrepreneurs and Commercial Landlords with Pop Up Business Activations

TENANT
MIX

Best Practice	With an increased amount of vacant space in New York City during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City partnered with ChaShaMa, a not-for-profit that generally offers space to artists, to create short term opportunities for businesses to test out a brickand-mortar location in commercial areas across the city. This creates opportunity to liven commercial districts with new, short-term businesses, helping landlords to activate their unused space, make the street feel more alive, create increased opportunities for commerce for small, minority and women-owned businesses, and provide no-cost space to businesses otherwise unlikely to be able to afford commercial rents in high traffic commercial corridors. Challenges of this program currently being addressed are ensuring businesses have commercial storefront opportunities once the no-cost space has ended; supporting businesses with technical assistance such as access to capital and finding affordable, permanent space, and sustainable resourcing of the project for the long-term success of small minority and women-owned businesses.
Action Item	Storefront Start-Up is a partnership between a not-for-profit community organization that typically supports artists in accessing work and exhibit space and the NYC Department of Small Business Services to support minority and women-owned businesses in accessing free storefront space (avg 30 days) in high traffic commercial areas.

The non-profit or municipal partner can begin by evaluating vacant space in their commercial corridors and contacting property owners to determine their interest in short term space leases. The organization will have to determine if they can cover necessities for opening a commercial space (such as utilities and wifi) or if a landlord would be willing to provide short term access to these services.

Simultaneously, the lead partner can connect with local businesses in need of space through social media marketing (no to low cost), partnerships with local business serving organizations (such as SBDC's, chambers of commerce) and begin to create a database of businesses interested in short term commercial leases. Essentially, building both the space and potential tenants together will help launch the matches efficiently and quickly.

The lead organization should also determine business priority – is the program focused on women entrepreneurs? People of color? Create an evaluation tool to match businesses with respective spaces based on a set of priorities.

Businesses should receive operating guidelines, a MOU to discuss what they can and can't do with the space, their responsibility to the program, and how long the term of the space use is.

The lead organization should provide as much support to both the landlord and tenant as possible and consider connecting with a local technical assistance provider to help the business leverage the storefront opportunity to their long-term growth. |
| Process | • Determine the strategy to support businesses – are you focused on serving a specific demographic (ex. Women-owned businesses) or sector (retail, design)
• Decide on a criteria on how businesses will be selected for space
• Research and identify vacant storefront properties in communities, particular those commercial corridors that may have high current vacancy rates. Local BIDs or DIDs can help identify vacant properties.
• Connect with property owners of vacant spaces to determine their interest in short-term no-cost lease opportunities, and if so, their terms of use.
• Create a database with notes and updates on available properties and interested businesses.
• Create a standard Memorandum of Understanding to be used as a baseline of agreement between the organization, the property owner, and the business owner. For example: how long will the space be used? Who will pay for buildout costs (if any)? Who will cover utility costs?
• Begin to match businesses with potential vacant spaces. Determine how far in advance businesses would need to be "occupancy ready" and how long landlords would need for the property to be considered "move in condition"
• Support both the business and property owner with the transition into the space; troubleshoot any issues in real time to mitigate any future problems or miscommunications
• Create social media and marketing opportunities to businesses to let people know they will be in the activated space, with plenty of lead up marketing prior to the move in date
• Determine further support for the business after the space agreement has expired, if any |

Coordinate a plan for a continuous cultural event/festival celebrating a different commercial district each month

Category		Cultural/Arts
Location		Each of the City's designated commercial districts
Origin		RKG Associates, City of Cambridge Community Development Department, The Musicant Group
Budget		Low (< $50,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators		Number of attendees, sales from district establishments, press and social media reaction
Partners & Resources		City of Cambridge's special events committee, Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, Cambridge Local First, East Cambridge Business Association, Cambridge Local First, Central Square BID, Harvard Square Business Association, Kendall Square Association

Cambridge's Dance Party, a free community event held annually to celebrate summer. Source: CambridgeMA.gov

Diagnostic

This project aims to coordinate a plan for a continuous cultural event/festival celebrating twelve different commercial districts in Cambridge, including some smaller ones that may typically be left out of celebrations. Events would occur on consecutive weekends, moving from one side of the city to the other. Specific locations in each district are to be determined.

The events are meant to support businesses, increase foot traffic and bring vibrancy to these districts after prolonged periods of reduced sales volumes due to COVID-19. There is an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of Cambridge's businesses and restaurants.

With so much happening In Cambridge, attracting focus to the event might be difficult. Connecting to potential attendees and successful marketing reach may prove challenging.

Action Item

This project could potentially stimulate economic activity by increasing foot traffic and supporting existing businesses.

The first action item will be to review and create a list of annual events currently held in each district. Strategize how the City can support existing events and fill in gaps in districts that are not hosting events. For each district, identify the ideal location and type of event to hold within each district (in a strategic area that supports strong foot traffic and can draw visitors to nearby businesses afterwards). Determine the scope and the timing of events (will there be a pilot event to inform future events?). Donations will need to be gathered and logistics scheduled. Marketing and outreach initiatives will need to be planned. Operational duties will need to be determined (who will staff each event?). Regulatory issues will need to be addressed (are street closures happening? Do permits need to be issued? Will police or fire departments need to be in attendance?)

Process

11

Visioning

Leverage What Is. Capitalize on the existing structure, narrative, and stories to begin to build a program that supports the work already happening in each district. This not only honors the existing work being done by individual entities, but also supports it, invites participation, and elevates the impact of this work over time.

Fill the Gaps in Programming. Consolidate the experiences within the commercial districts to maximize their impact, identify and fill gaps in the calendar with activations and events. A full calendar shows investment and demonstrates safety.

- Create an event schedule that builds reliable patterns of events to encourage repeat engagement that develops connections and relationships with the commercial district.
- Consider the audiences at these events and ensure a wide variety of experiences that address multiple audiences. They don't need to be present at each event but should be addressed throughout the full slate of events in the community.
- Creating supported cultural events not already present.
- Treat these like pilot programs the first time out, see if there is an appetite for more, and right-size them.

Locate the Event. Knowing the type and size of event you want to have will determine the locations. This event may be in a vacant lot, or may be better located on streets, via street closures.

 # 11

Share the Vision and Ask for Feedback

Ask the community what they want to see/do. Before you begin planning, ensure your vision is grounded in community needs. Does every district need an event like this? Remember that the festivals are meant to support businesses, increase foot traffic and bring vibrancy to these districts after prolonged periods of reduced sales volumes due to COVID-19. *Also see information about Gathering Input from the community in the District-wide Marketing SME Consultation write-up.*

This is unlikely to look the same in each district. Support District individuality by helping them create cultural events that work for them.

- Conduct a survey around uses and activities to determine what people would like to do.
- Continuum of activities - make sure you provide activities that will draw the variety of residents. Every event doesn't need to speak to everyone, but the total of events should target the entire community.
- Get photos for newspapers/social media to show that people have participated in the process and to encourage more involvement.
- Engage distinct members and remove barriers to their contributions and ideas.
- Feature each neighborhood's hidden gems to support a narrative of discovery.
- Let the community guide your investments. Build what you want to see together.

Given the feedback, determine which parts of the event work for all districts and which require customization by district. Common elements could be supported by the City, at least in the first few years; customized portions should be led by the district.

 # 12

Planning and Capacity Building

Create partnerships to deliver priority experiences as a pilot for the long-term use. Partner with organizations and community groups who have a stake in seeing these ideas come to life. If the City can attract the funds to produce the pilot, often the organizations will be able to support with the staff capacity the City doesn't have to spare. An active Business Improvement District could also act as a sponsor.

Build a brand around the event. Collect experiences and images unique to each district to create content with a unified "Look" that also highlights the variations for each district. The districts can share the customized branding to their own social accounts.

Scaling the Programs. Support the increased independence of cultural districts and build capacity through scaling existing programs. One potential model for this structure:

- Year One: The City will cover x number of permits, help with marketing and get the event off the ground.
- Year Two: The City provides permits, leads a committee meeting structure.
- Year Three: 50% off permitting, everything else lives with the commercial district.
- Year Four: The commercial district is independently producing, with only coordination of dates with the City.

This program can help enable repeat events, removes the initial barriers to regular event production, develops and reinforces community capacity building.

12

Maintain Connection

All successful events are built upon relationships and authentic connections. Strategies, improvements, branding, and events will all fall flat without an ongoing authentic connection to the people who live, work and visit this place.

Ask the Question - Cultivate continual feedback from the businesses - asking them what they need in capacity building opportunities, how the strategies are going from their perspective, and including them in the process at a level they can sustain is key in developing relationships and responsive solutions.

Meet People Where They Are - All strategies tend to meet the needs of certain demographics over others. When developing strategies and creating change, it is especially important to meet others where they are at.

- Keep programs open to all and focus on reducing barriers to participation.
- A focus on quick wins often is at odds with the desire to work with marginalized businesses. Identifying key community stakeholders and developing a committee or advisory board that supports relationships with marginalized community members and centers their experiences in crafting supportive programming.
- Create business-focused events with partnerships from existing businesses, letting them lead on what best meets their needs.
- Don't assume commonality. It's important to lead from a place of curiosity and level setting. Some people might have shared experiences or needs, but assuming that commonality can erase nuance and alienate others from the process.

The Practice is Success - Attendance, while great to have, isn't the only goal. Remember that the practice of supporting and investing in what the community wants to see, consistency is essential in building audiences. Even events with low attendance demonstrate care, which is fundamental to constructing an identity and in itself an investment in the community.

Sample Event Timeline & Budget (generalized to pertain to a variety of event types)

Month	Planning	Outreach
6 months out	Submit street closures or other City permits	Convene event committee, begin community engagement
5 months out	Build out event experience	Solicit sponsorships & partnerships to build out the event
4 months out	Set marketing & PR strategy	Finalize in-kind and monetary sponsors, press release, promote event
3 months out	Secure and confirm vendors, gather logos, and create images	Start social media cross-promotion for partners/vendors, promote event
2 months out	Define volunteer strategy, refine vendors, and add to the experience	Promote volunteers, cross-promote any media attention
1 month out	Finalize logistics, site maps, experience enhancers	Confirm details with participating vendors/partners
2 weeks out	Confirm with all vendors, partners, and volunteers	Send out pre-event emails
Estimated Budget		**$5,000 hard costs, $10,000 with labor**

Process (continued)

Resources

The Open Streets Project - https://openstreetsproject.org/

> *This site provides a comprehensive toolkit to get your Open Streets program started.*

Open Streets Minneapolis - https://www.openstreetsmpls.org/

> *Open Streets Minneapolis provides an example of how one city is implementing an Open Streets festival in three districts. See how they set up the program, both in providing consistency in events along with customizations for each area.*

Dancers Talking Dance: Critical Evaluation in the Chreography Class - Larry Lavender - https://www.academia.edu/19486047/Dancers_Talking_Dance_Critical_Evaluation_in_the_Choreography_Class

> *This model for discussion is a great one to leverage for generating feedback around experiences, while geared towards the performing arts, the fundamentals of ORDER would be especially relevant for focus groups, open conversations, and consistent engagement within the community.*

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

CULTURAL/
ARTS

Location   Fall River, MA

Best Practice

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

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

Action Item

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

- Bring the community together and engender city pride (begin to take back the narrative of the city)

- Demonstrate the power of collaboration (put the power of FRACC to work)

- Provide community activities and spaces during winter under Covid-19 guidelines

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

Process

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

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

- Gather parties with similar interests, complementary resources and expertise.

- Brainstorm ways to achieve the core goals. Develop criteria to select one strategy to move forward: 1) Is there someone who has done an event before? 2) Does someone have paid staff that can lend a hand? 3) Who has graphics and marketing expertise? Can this strategy tag onto another event or a milestone in the community?

- Answer these questions: 1) Who is the audience? 2) What message to convey? 3) How does this align with municipal and business district goals? 4) What does success look like? 5) What would cause everyone to smile the day after the event? Keep the answers to these questions in mind throughout planning

- Work back from the goals to identify people, organizations, agencies available to help: chart interests, capacity, resources, contacts.

- What location best supports the goals? Create a plan of the area.

- List and draw activity areas, block party elements

- Link program activities with partners/volunteers.

- Refine event: what happens, time, day, activities

- Create a budget sheet for overall event, each activity area.

- Think carefully about branding…what to call it? How does this fit with overall branding and marketing for the downtown or commercial district?

Process (continued)

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

- Gather parties with similar interests, complementary resources and expertise.

- Brainstorm ways to achieve the core goals. Develop criteria to select one strategy to move forward: 1) Is there someone who has done an event before? 2) Does someone have paid staff that can lend a hand? 3) Who has graphics and marketing expertise? Can this strategy tag onto another event or a milestone in the community?

- Answer these questions: 1) Who is the audience? 2) What message to convey? 3) How does this align with municipal and business district goals? 4) What does success look like? 5) What would cause everyone to smile the day after the event? Keep the answers to these questions in mind throughout planning

- Work back from the goals to identify people, organizations, agencies available to help: chart interests, capacity, resources, contacts.

- What location best supports the goals? Create a plan of the area.

- List and draw activity areas, block party elements

- Link program activities with partners/volunteers

- Refine event: what happens, time, day, activities

- Create a budget sheet for overall event, each activity area.

- Think carefully about branding…what to call it? How does this fit with overall branding and marketing for the downtown or commercial district?

- Create a detailed implementation plan with timeline of tasks, roles.

- Document what you do and think about how to make the effort sustainable in the long run. How can this event be a pilot project for ongoing programming?

- During the event, try to include ways to capture information the attendees (raffle that requires their zip code, ideas chalk wall that asks what people want to see in the district, etc.)

- Do a debrief immediately after the event to improve efforts for the future. Ask businesses for their input and reactions.

Volunteers helped build the "set" for the weekend activities. Source: Fall River Arts + Culture Coalition

Winterbridge was a success and led to increased "buzz" about what is possible downtown and also the power of collaboration and FRACC's work. Source: Fall River Arts + Culture Coalition

There were over 36 businesses, non-profits and individuals who came together to provide staff, funding, programming, marketing, and other needs for the events. Source: Fall River Arts + Culture Coalition

Event Branding: Taste Fall River

PUBLIC
REALM

Location	Fall River, MA

Best Practice

In 2017 Fall River launched a new "brand" for the city, *Make it Here*, drawing from the city's textile heritage and celebrating its potential as an environment for Makers.

Fall River had applied to the MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative and in 2018, MassDevelopment wanted to ensure that critical public sector, private sector and institutional partners on the ground were ready to make the commitment to support the two to three-year technical assistant program to drive transformative change on Main Street.

Just as planning was underway, negative headlines about Fall River started appearing in the press in relationship to the indictment of the current mayor. This led to broader discussion about the need to drive key narratives about Fall River that put a spotlight on positive things in the community

In 2019, planning begun on the creation of a "first initiative," intended to give the partners experience collaborating with one another while addressing the need to amplify an existing city brand and find new things to celebrate.

The partnership had enough institutional memory to know that a similar event had been carried out in Fall River in years past – and had been relatively successful – but not sustained due to relying heavily on volunteers, so one goal was to strengthen cross-sector collaboration and work toward a sustainable operating model.

Among the Main Street businesses there were traditional, well known Portuguese and Portuguese-influenced restaurants – something for which Fall River is recognized – as well as number of newer additions expanding offerings in downtown.

While Main Street had maintained an interesting mix of uses, there were deficiencies in building management and some properties were vacant. So one goal was to raise the "brand" of Main Street by showing it's potential and a vibrant and activated streetscape.

As the *Taste Fall River* idea emerged, there were two interrelated concerns from certain members of the partnership: 1) Would anyone from beyond Fall River be interested in this event and 2) Were online ticket sales even necessary? - reflecting an "everyone uses cash" mindset. The partnership discussed both and pressed forward with the idea that if they worked to assemble a top-notch event, there would be interest from Fall River – as well as other markets. That then confirmed that investing the time and money in developing a website and Eventbrite posting for the event would be necessary and worthwhile.

Action Item

The relevance of this project for thinking about Covid rapid recovery includes:

- Bringing together a set of partners to collaborate on a response to drive economic development and direct narratives towards shared values and aspiration.

- The actual event included *Taste Fall River* – a one evening dining event – and Fall River Restaurant Week – a weeklong program of discounts offered by participating businesses.

- In tandem, the partnership developed an information "kit" that included a topline narrative that elaborates on the core "Make it Here" brand, while also including practical information for any party interest in investing or developing along Main Street. We gathered cut sheets for all property listed for sale or lease and summarized this information, making all of it available as part of the information kit.

Process

- **Event conceptualization led by the partnership**, including event co -chairs who organized schedule, recruited restaurants to participate, other "node" locations to be open, and managed ticket sales by all partners. Other partners played key roles including securing sponsorships and lining up musicians who played at key locations throughout the evening.

- **Coordination led by the City of Fall River representative on the partnership** – including securing trolley, permitting, police detail, etc.

- **Website Design and Social Media Campaign**. The lead consultant worked closely with one of the event co -chairs to launch an event website. Another partner member set up the Eventbrite for online ticket sales (and acted as the fiscal representative for the project). Another partner worked with an in -house graphic designer to develop the event poster. We found ways to message creative and strategic tie -ins between the Make it Here and Taste Fall River concepts, "Make it a girls' night, make it a date night … etc."
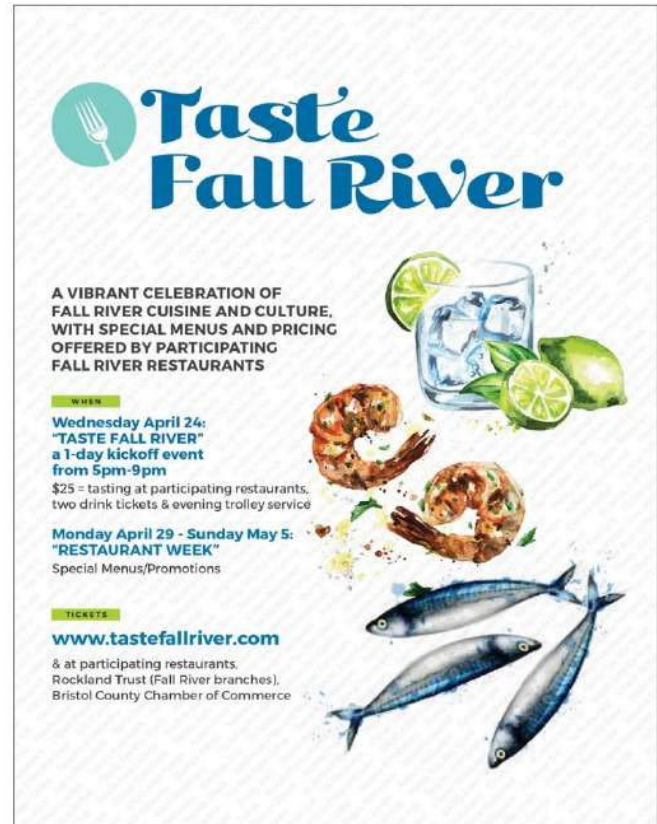

Taste Fall River – Fall River, MA

Process (continued)

- Any social media coverage for a new event starts small – so it was important to not let a low number of "likes" discourage efforts. Training and encouragement were necessary to drive home the importance of liking/sharing/posting – but we felt this was worthwhile overall to encourage businesses to support one another.

- We aligned with a relevant social media influencer active on Instagram (and Facebook) to push out the message to her audience and provide some specialty photography. On the day of the event, we posted restaurant owners preparing ("pre-game"), during the event, as well as as the event wrapped and an after-party at one of the participating restaurants was underway.

- A partner member with marketing and social media experience was instrumental in deploying a press release and managing a social media campaign.

- **Information Kit and Real Estate Data**. Was created by the lead consultant, with input from local commercial real estate brokers.

- 2019 Taste Fall River proved to be a fun and successful event, helping Main Street businesses built stronger relationships, prove the vitality of the district, showcase a unique range of dining offerings, and inspire confidence in all partners as well as the broader community about what is possible in Fall river's future.

- Having access to analytics from the event website, Evenbrite, Facebook and Social Instagram gave us clear feedback about what messages resonated and hard data about interest in Fall River from the broader regional market.

- The partnership surpassed the goal of selling 400 tickets, and the profit was donated to the City of Fall River to be put towards the purchase of an ADA-accessible trolley.

Appendix
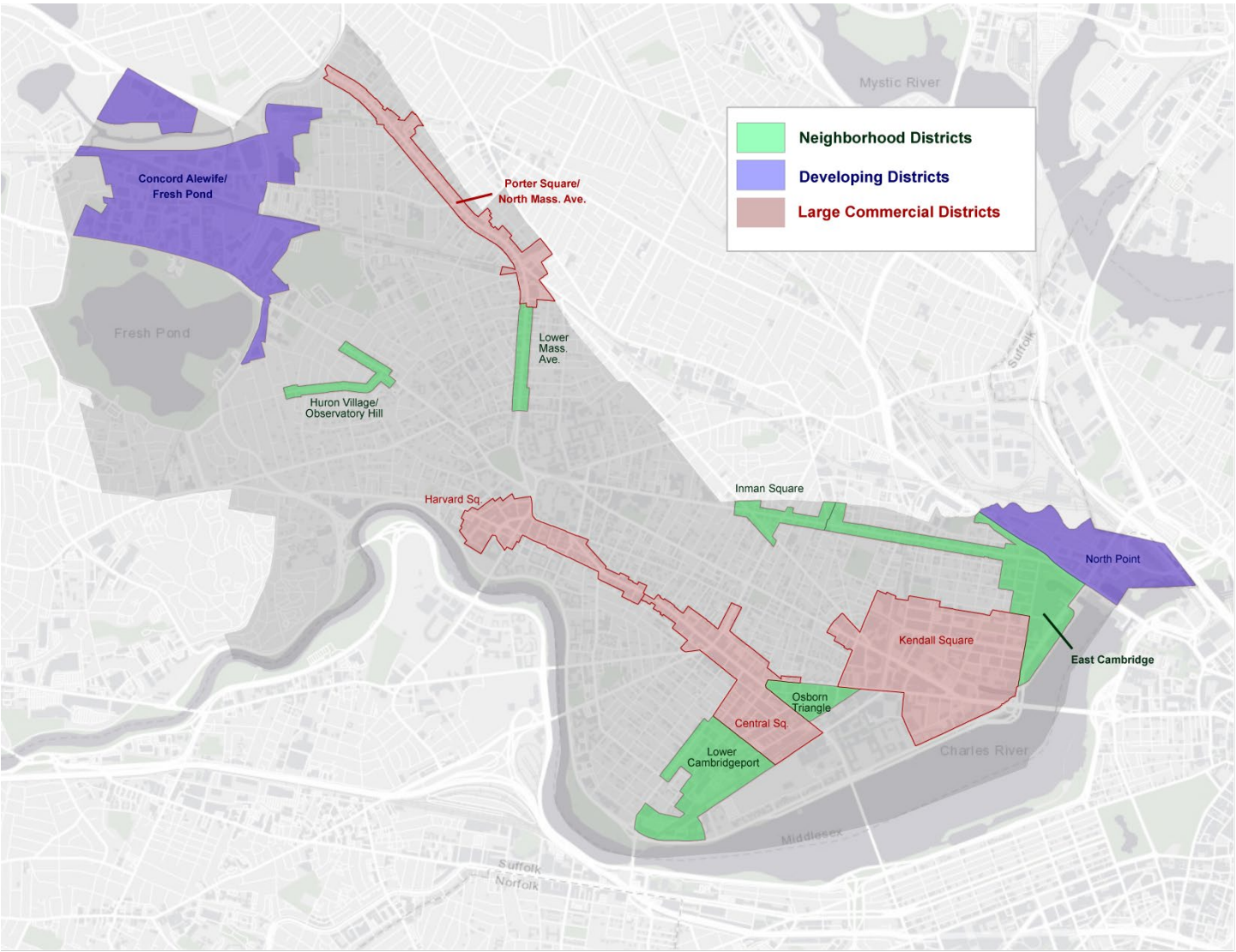
Map of Cambridge's Commercial Districts. Source: City of Cambridge Community Development Department, RKG Associates
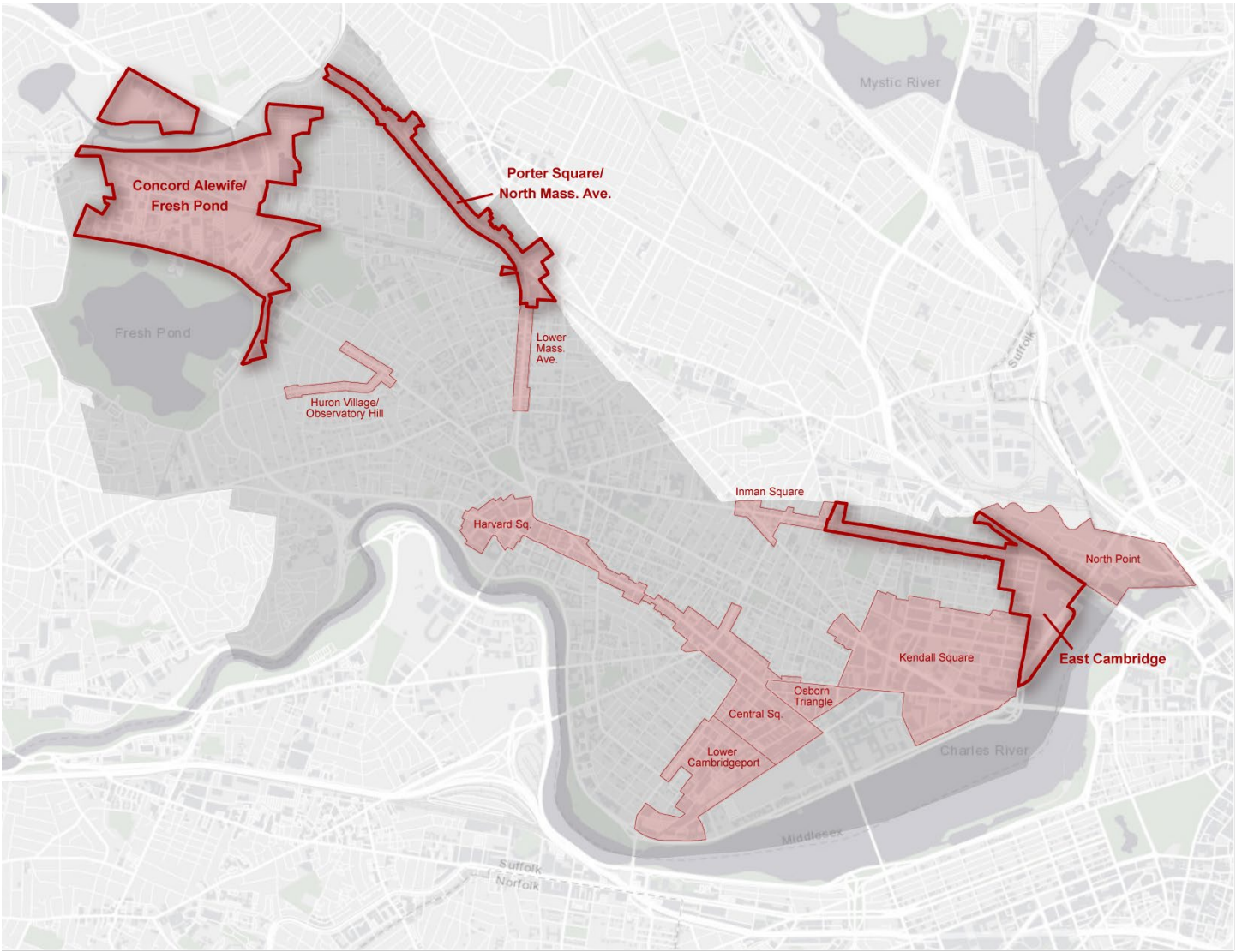
Three Commercial Districts where site walk was performed. Source: City of Cambridge Community Development Department, RKG Associates