



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

East Longmeadow



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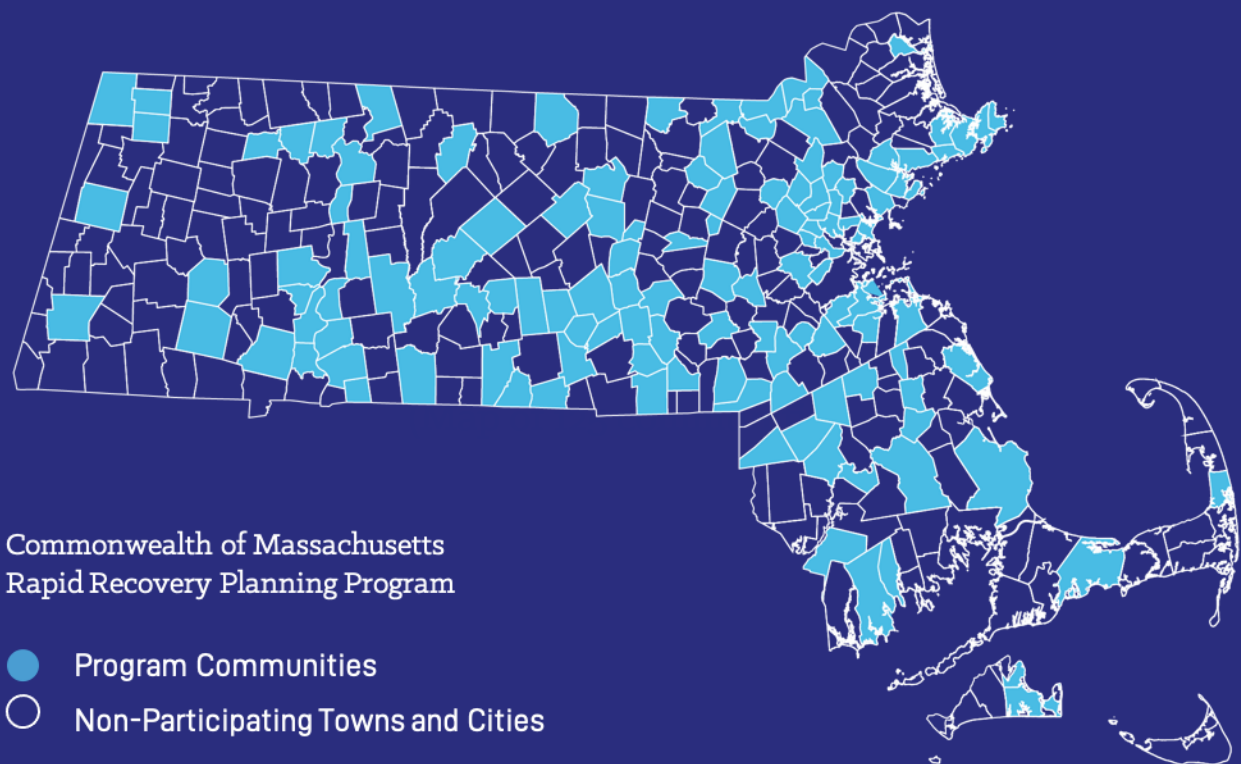
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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



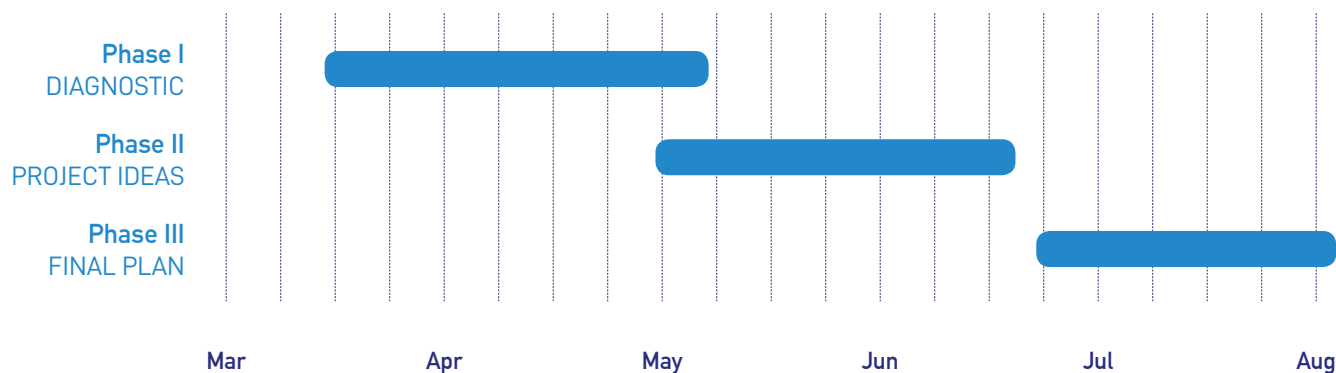
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

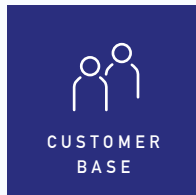
Each Rapid Recovery Plan was developed across three phases between February-August 2021. Phase 1 - Diagnostic, Phase 2- Project Recommendations, Phase 3 - Plan.



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

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

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



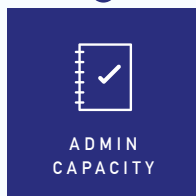
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue & Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The North Main Street district is a small commercial area that has many unique offerings but is often overlooked by anxious drivers on their way to nearby supermarkets and East Longmeadow Town Center. It is also avoided by pedestrians, despite being situated among dense residential neighborhoods in the adjacent city of Springfield and on local streets. Because of the many cars turning and entering, as well as limited sidewalks and pedestrian amenities, walking is uncomfortable and hazardous, a situation the Town is eager to correct as soon as possible through Shared Streets and Spaces programming and ultimately major street and sidewalk upgrades.

The many small businesses in the district are doing fairly well and seem to have loyal customer bases. However, during the COVID-19 shutdown in 2020 and the ongoing pandemic issues, some have suffered from supply chain disruptions, and others are having difficulty hiring sufficient staff. None of these businesses belong to the regional chamber of commerce, the East of the River Five Town Chamber, and there is no local business association. Proprietors interviewed for this project did not have sources of technical or financial assistance other than the federal government's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which was critical for them over the prior year. In parts of the district, there is some turnover as small operations grow and move elsewhere in town, creating an opportunity for new businesses to develop.

Aside from the access and pedestrian concerns, the area has very little green space, no trees, and many large asphalt parking lots, making it open to the weather and especially vulnerable to extreme heat. There are a multitude of signs, making it difficult to identify individual businesses. Most of the many small businesses have their own access drives or off-street parking areas, further complicating driving and walking.

The projects recommended in this Rapid Recovery Plan aim to assist businesses directly and generally, improve appearances, and foster a sense of place along this section of North Main Street. The business assistance projects will demonstrate the Town's wish and willingness to be more supportive of small business through targeted direct outreach and technical assistance as well as improved local processes and resources. They will also allow for greater creativity and flexibility in the use of space, including outdoor retail offerings. The appearance, amenities and community involvement throughout the district will also be addressed by these projects, with efforts to encourage community artmaking that celebrates and promotes local businesses.

Ultimately, it is hoped that the successful business environment along this busy stretch will become more attractive and appealing for customers and workers. Better amenities will draw more local residents to the small shops and personal services, creating a thriving district where growing businesses can expand into larger spaces and new entrepreneurs can start up and build a customer base.



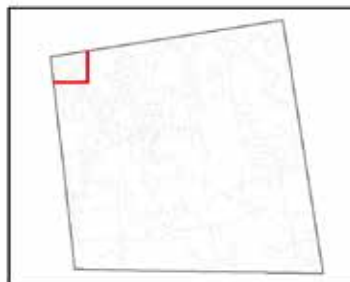
East Longmeadow, Massachusetts

Local Rapid Recovery Program Focus Area Map

Data Sources:
Town of East Longmeadow Massachusetts,
MassGIS, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.



Municipal Locator Map



Regional Locator Map



Project Map

Diagnostic

Key Findings



North Main Street's customer base is diverse

The project area and vicinity has a younger and more diverse population than the town as a whole, and it also has a lower level of workforce participation. Many of the stores and venues on North Main Street could serve as employment settings for these residents and can also target desired goods and services to this market. Improved transit and pedestrian accessibility would enhance this opportunity.



Public infrastructure is aging and in need of upgrades

The street corridor is due for a complete restoration and renovation, with new sidewalks, crosswalks, transit stop amenities, and lighting. Until that can be accomplished, the Town will be implementing a Shared Streets project that installs temporary curb extensions and planters, and enhances and adds to the existing crosswalks. Transit stops will be relocated and reconfigured as part of this effort, as well.



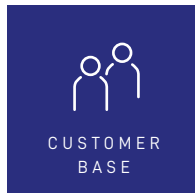
North Main Street's businesses provide a very wide range of goods and services

Nineteen (19) out of 40, or virtually half of the businesses in the project area, are in the service sector, while most of the remainder are retail stores and restaurants. The area provides many options: auto service and fueling; hair, skin and nail care; a variety of restaurants; skis, snowboards and bicycles; lumber and home remodeling materials; used vehicles; finance and insurance services; and even computer services. There are convenience stores and smoke shops, a barber shop and a wig shop. There is an appliance store and a fitness center that has a tanning salon. Any efforts to assist this area will hopefully support its diversity and interest.



There is no downtown organization overseeing recovery efforts

Although there is no single organization in charge of the project area, several local and regional entities have interest in its future. The challenge for the Town will be to coordinate and collaborate with all of these entities to achieve shared goals.



Highlights from the Customer Base

East Longmeadow's customer base draws partly from the local population of 17,000 residents with a median household income of \$88,959, a median age of 46, and 2.6 residents in the average household. The project area, which includes the North Main Street corridor plus a half mile radius, includes 5,400 residents with a substantially lower median household income of \$66,457 and a younger median age of 38 years. While more than half (54%) of the town's residents over 25 years of age have an Associate's degree or higher level of education, in the project area a smaller share (38%) have an Associate's or higher.

East Longmeadow's residents are comparatively young, with 31% of town residents and 32% of project area residents under 25 years of age. 25% of town residents and just 17% of project area residents are 65 years of age or older.

East Longmeadow has a diverse mix of races and ethnicities. Both the town and project area (which also draws from neighboring Springfield) have noteworthy Asian (town 714/project area 492), Black (770/321), and Hispanic or Latino (629/1,485) populations. East Longmeadow also has a population of approximately 834 secondary and post-secondary students. (U.S. Census American Community Survey 2015-2019)



Highlights from the Physical Environment

The project area comprises the western-most section of North Main Street in East Longmeadow and is about one-half mile long. The area has a fairly broad mix of commercial development. There are a total of 42 properties that were counted as "storefronts" under the project guidelines. Some of them are not what one might traditionally think of as storefronts, such as the East Longmeadow Animal Hospital or Century Fitness, but these entities were included as part of the project.

Total # of Storefronts	42
# of Vacant Storefronts	1
Total # of Businesses	40
# of Parking Spaces (on and off street)	Approximately 550

All elements were evaluated according to a set of criteria established by the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) along with Streetsense. MDI notes that it is important to bifurcate the physical environment into the public and the private realm to acknowledge the fundamentally different nature of the tactics and funding mechanisms available for each.

Public Realm

MDI specifies that the public realm includes common areas such as streets, sidewalks and public spaces that are typically under public ownership and may be managed and maintained by either the public sector or a nonprofit entity such as a BID. In the North Main Street project area, sidewalks are not continuous and need upgrading. In many places, the sidewalk disappears where there is a wide driveway or parking lot, making it hazardous for pedestrians, and in general sidewalks are in poor condition. Road conditions are somewhat better, although additional crosswalks are needed. There are no street trees or benches, and the only lighting comes from street lights and security lighting. Because the right of way along this street is quite narrow, it will be difficult to expand pedestrian amenities.

Another hazard for both pedestrians and drivers is the large number of side streets intersecting with North Main in this area. The number of turns in so many different directions is a high predictor of accidents. Also, curbing is often lacking, and some side streets are very wide, making it harder for pedestrians to navigate.

Public signage is sufficient for basic travel needs but does not highlight the area, which is a gateway to the Town of East Longmeadow.



All photos, in this section, The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Private Realm

The private realm refers to buildings and storefronts that are typically owned by individuals or corporate entities. In the North Main Street project area, building facades are generally well-maintained. Most private signage is attractive and well maintained; however, there are a number of signs that are weathered and outdated, and many storefronts have multiple signs on the building façade and windows. The sheer abundance of signs along the corridor has created a “cluttered” look, and having multiple signs for one business adds to the visual confusion.

As for other aspects of curb appeal, most stores do not have merchandise displays outdoors or significant visibility into the store, and there is minimal landscaping. Only a couple of restaurants have outdoor dining, and only one built an outdoor deck during the pandemic. Most stores do not have outdoor lighting that illuminates the sidewalk, and they generally do not have awnings.



Access and Visibility

Access and visibility refers to the transportation network that offers customers convenient accessibility (whether by private vehicle, car share, foot, bike, or public transit) and the visibility of businesses to customers and passersby. North Main Street is easily accessible by car and mass transit. Bicycle and pedestrian access is much more limited, with unsafe conditions and crossings, including asphalt and concrete in poor condition. Businesses are fairly visible, but parking is very limited and cramped in a few cases.

In the case of transit, there are a few transit stops but no shelters, lighting or benches for those waiting. Some amenities in this regard would be more inviting to those shopping and working along the corridor.



Parks and plazas

Parks and plazas identified in this program are permanent spaces that are available for use year-round by the public. They are typically owned, managed, and/or programmed by the local Parks Department and/or another public or quasi-public entity. There are no public parks or plazas in this small area of East Longmeadow.



Highlights from the Business Environment

As mentioned, there are 42 storefronts with 40 businesses and one vacancy. Two storefronts have two businesses within them (Good Life Family Dental/Jelly on My Belly Ultrasound and Century Fitness/Island Tanning). Of the 40 businesses, one is seasonal and temporary, and the property is currently for sale (Vegetable and Fruit Bin property). Together these businesses provide about 550 parking spaces along North Main Street.

Anchors/Destinations

The project area has several “anchor” businesses that attract large numbers of people. Kelly Fradet Lumber is a home improvements retailer and service provider with three additional locations in Connecticut. Century Fitness is a large gym with an in-house tanning salon. The East Longmeadow Animal Hospital is inconspicuously tucked in on North Main Street, and a large ski and bike shop (Competitive Edge) is located here as well. Several of the restaurant properties are or have been regional draws.

Two major shopping centers are located just beyond the project area – these include the Heritage Plaza with Stop & Shop and another outdoor mall anchored by a Big Y Supermarket. A significant amount of the traffic in the project area is en route to these stores, for employment and shopping. One major change was the closure of the Staples store in the Big Y plaza several years prior to the pandemic.

There is sufficient traffic on North Main Street to supply customers for all of the businesses if their services are in demand and easily accessible.



Assets/Business Mix

North Main Street has a broad mix of commercial uses that meet a wide range of needs. Twelve businesses (30%) are retail stores, from small (Zain's Smoke Shop) to large (Kelly Fradet Lumber). Ten businesses, or one quarter (25%), are personal care including hair, nails, and skin care. Another nine (23%) are other types of services, including financial, insurance, auto repair, photography, and health. Eight (20%) are restaurants, including a pizza shop, long-time Italian restaurant where an outdoor deck was built during the pandemic, one of the few remaining Friendly's in the area, a local breakfast and lunch café, and an ice cream shop, among others.

It appears that no businesses have permanently closed due to COVID-19, although many did close temporarily and/or have had significant restrictions on operations. The former Pampered Pets building is the only truly vacant property in the project area. Two restaurants that changed hands prior to the pandemic are currently closed but are getting ready for a fall 2021 opening.

Nodes/Clusters

There are a couple of clusters in the project area. As mentioned above, there are a number of personal services – from hair salons and a barber shop to nail care, skin care, eyebrow threading, tanning, and even a wig shop associated with one of the salons. The other cluster is restaurants, as described above. The two new restaurants will be Torito's, a Mexican restaurant, and Redstone Pasta Company, with Italian food and homemade pasta.

The north end of street is older, with many small businesses and parking is very limited or more abundant but in the rear of the lot. There is a gradual transition to larger lots, parking areas, and buildings at the southern end of street.

Business Survey

A local Business Survey distributed door to door and by email in April 2021 yielded no responses, unfortunately. Nevertheless, PVPC staff and Town officials went door-to-door and made phone calls to gather information from businesses in the project area. Most businesses contacted said they had lost significant business during the shutdown period but had been recovering to about 75% of pre-pandemic levels. Some businesses have not fared as well, particularly restaurants, which have had trouble finding staffing. Two restaurants that were ready to open this year have delayed for several months for this reason.







Administrative Capacity Highlights

Although North Main Street does not have a business association, several entities are working to make it a better place to live, work and shop. The Town is an active participant, with a committed Town Planner, and the Public Works and Recreation Departments are extremely supportive of improvement and recovery activities. The Director of the East Longmeadow Community Access Television has also been involved in outreach to local businesses and is willing to help, and the Friends of Norcross Center is a cultural and historical group that will participate, as well. The East of the River Five Town Chamber of Commerce has a new Executive Director as of the summer of 2021 and is willing to work with the Town to assist local businesses.



Project Recommendations

Help Small Businesses Overcome the Digital Divide

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		North Main Street
Origin		Town of East Longmeadow staff and planning board
Budget & Sources of Funding		<p>Medium Budget (\$50-200K)</p> <p>In addition to municipal funds, the following are potential sources:</p> <p><u>American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</u> Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p><u>Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000) Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. • Community Planning Grants (project limit \$25,000-\$75,000) Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (possibly) • Urban Agenda (possibly) <p>Mass Growth Capital Corporation (possibly)</p>
Timeframe		Short-Term (1-5 Years)
Risks		Medium Risk – Business owners in this location can be hard to reach, and some may be reluctant to take the time to participate if they don't see sufficient value for themselves. The program will also require robust municipal participation and guidance.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of businesses engaged by the program • Number of businesses that survive and remain in East Longmeadow • Increased sales reported by businesses • # of websites created; # of businesses able to sell products or schedule services online; # of new hires
Partners & Resources		Municipal staff (Deputy Town Manager planning and economic development, building inspector) Property/business owners
Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts		Many businesses had to close temporarily and/or reduce hours during the shutdown. Those that had an online presence were better able to weather the disruption and are still in a better position. Still, businesses are struggling to find staffing to support their re-openings.
Action Item		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify what small businesses need the most help with in solidifying their operations, including technology infrastructure, digital marketing, e-commerce, point-of-sale hardware and software, succession planning, hiring, and other tools and resources. 2. Seek providers to implement program via RFP. 3. Work with consultant to develop outreach plan to businesses and approach owners with empathy, patience and encouragement, acknowledging that the topics are difficult for many of the diverse audiences that suffer from a digital divide disadvantage. 4. Develop criteria for RFP and advertise for service provider.

Process

5. Work with consultant to research needs of impacted small businesses, and interview organizations that are currently assisting businesses during the pandemic to identify best practices.
6. Develop Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to keep track of businesses engaged in the program.
7. Develop outreach and communications plan, including yard signs, direct mail campaign, blogs, social media strategy, etc.
8. Receive applications and select businesses eligible for program.
9. Administer one-on-one TA program.

Best Practice**Small Business Technical Assistance project with Revby, LLC in Boston, Massachusetts.**

This project involved one-on-one technical assistance to drive business resilience and opportunity by providing companies with tailored tools and professional assistance. It focused on providing service to diverse communities, particularly those that have limited digital infrastructure.

The program provider gained buy-in from the business owners at an initial meeting to develop a project plan. The sessions included brainstorming and the introduction of subject matter that included digital tools that can save time and increase customer acquisition.

Engage Community and Businesses with Public Art

Category



Cultural and Arts; Public Realm

Location

North Main Street

Origin

Town of East Longmeadow

Budget & Sources of Funding



Low budget (less than \$50,000)

- Massachusetts Cultural Council
- East Longmeadow Cultural Council
- MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places
- MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces
- New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA)
- Patronicity



Solar System Sidewalk Art
Photo credit: Bing Images

Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years) – carry out at least one project in late 2021 or early 2022, but lay the groundwork for future and longer-term projects.
Risks		Low Risk - There are significant numbers of stakeholders and local artists to engage in this. The biggest challenge is finding and gaining permission to use desirable spaces for the art. Public spaces within the project area include sidewalks and rights-of-way, and there is a town park (Heritage Park) just outside the project area that could be utilized. There is also private property that would be visible to the public and work well for this program, if permission is granted.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of private owners giving permission to use their property. • Number of artists commissioned. • Successful public art project completion. • Successful development of long-term public art program. • Number of public art pieces installed. • Change in foot traffic around implementation areas.
Partners & Resources		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town of East Longmeadow • East Longmeadow Cultural Council • East Longmeadow Cable Access Television (ELCAT) • Local experienced community artist and art teacher, Brianna Ashe
Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts		The pandemic shut down almost all cultural activities and venues, with the exception of outdoor events. Now the community needs special and gatherings to bring everyone back together and celebrate the Town's history, culture and community spirit. Also, the project area is in need of community activity and presence to help bring customers back. Public art projects can be done safely outdoors with few health concerns.
Action Item		<p>Develop a program to engage the community in planning and carrying out public art projects.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Create Public Art and Events Working Group to manage and oversee the process. 2) Develop community-wide strategies and/or policies that guide and support commissioning, installing, and maintaining works of public art. 3) Ensure that all proposed artwork adheres to existing zoning bylaws and permitting processes. 4) Plan and install at least one public art project in 2021-22, and provide stipends to artists.



Portrait Painting
Photo credit: Pinterest

Phase 1: Planning & Engagement (3-6 months)

- **Identify key stakeholders:** Engage the artist community, property owners, and Town permitting and licensing departments.
 - o Identify which organization will oversee the application and approval process; appoint a board or working group to review applicants and coordinate efforts.
- **Identify types of public art projects:** There are a number of public art projects that include murals, storefront art displays, sculptures, art on utility boxes, and so on. Meet with the key stakeholders to identify the top types of art to priorities and then develop a plan to implement those types of projects. Ensure that all projects meet current zoning bylaws and adhere to existing permitting processes.
- **Property owners and permission:** Work to properly incentivize property owners in becoming a part of the public art program. Art installations may be on exterior walls and storefront windows, including empty storefronts. Obtain written permission from property owners willing to participate in the public art program. As part of the application, request a letter to be submitted from the property owner.
- **Application:** Create an online application process that includes key project details such as site location, description of the artwork, drawing/artwork, artist resume. A standard application is useful to review and approve art projects and allow for artists and businesses to initiate their own projects.
- **Call for Art:** Another approach is to draft and post a call for artists on Town websites, social media, and newsletters, as well as local and regional artist forums. Convey expectations and compensation in the call for artists.
 - o Application updates could include a required question for artists and owners to ask if they are requesting to create or commission specific subject matter or open to custom designs.
 - o Create a guide for installing a public art project with accompanying infographics and the website QR code, to make the information more accessible and interesting.
- **Scope of work:** Develop scope of work with key stakeholders and release an RFP for a consultant to help establish the public art program.
 - o Select a consultant to oversee the program development process and provide expertise on different mediums of public art.

Phase 2: Public Art Program Development (3-6 months)

- **Funding:** There are several funding and grant opportunities, such as Mass Cultural Council and Commonwealth Places. Murals on pavement have been funded by the MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces grant program.
- **Database:** Create an artist database, including fields for the type of artwork they do and their style, as well as a record of properties willing to be a canvas.
- **Social Media Content:** Create social media content for public art in East Longmeadow. Include information about the application to create a public art installation, images from past events and installations, and other relevant information such as artist profiles, maps, and materials.
 - o An interactive map with projects and artists from previous years is another tool to increase engagement with artwork. Interactive maps can be created on Google MyMaps (free) or ArcGIS Online (paid).
 - o Utilize QR codes to collect data to track the number of site visits. Metrics can be tracked by an external agency, or by Town staff using Google Analytics which is free.
 - o QR codes could also be placed on site near the mural to direct viewers to more information and allow for more data to be collected.

Phase 3: Design & Implementation (3-6 months)

- **Identify selection process:** Create a protocol for how the artist and the mural location are matched.
- **Artwork and approval:** Concept artwork should be submitted at the time of application, and the appointed Working Group should coordinate design changes if necessary. The artwork should be reviewed by the Working Group and receive approval from relevant Town departments to ensure content appropriateness and operational viability.
 - o Contracting: Form and execute contracts which outline the terms and conditions of the scope of work between the artist and the property owner. The contract should include who determines the content of the mural, how much and when payment will be made, insurance responsibilities, timeline expectations, maintenance and repairs, copyright, and acknowledgements.

Process (cont'd)

- o Insurance: Commercial general liability insurance is the most common type of insurance for public artwork, and cost is variable based on the size, duration, and risk associated with the installation. Depending on the installation, artist insurance may be necessary.
- **Plan implementation:** Once an artist is matched with a location to work and artwork is finalized, the Working Group will help facilitate the dates, times, personnel, and process of the installation.
- **Documentation:** The art installation may be videotaped or documented photographically.
- **Implementation oversight:** A public art program facilitator will oversee the installation to ensure the proper steps are being taken for safety measures and artwork longevity.

Phase 4: Maintenance, Operations and Evaluation (Ongoing)

- **Maintenance:** Ideally, a public art program facilitator will assess the artwork on a regular basis to ensure it is in good condition.
 - o Maintenance needs depend on the location of artwork and weather. Murals on asphalt that gets vehicular traffic and plowing will need maintenance every year or two, while sidewalk murals can around two years. Wall murals can last about five years. Other options include touch ups as needed, and creating artwork on movable surfaces, such as panels or doors.
 - o Mural sealant is an option that can provide longevity to the artwork but it can be costly. This option is best reserved for artwork intended to be permanent.
- **Operations:** The responsibilities of maintenance requests should be delegated in the Planning and Engagement phase.
 - o Depending on the source of funding and subsequent deadlines to use funding, maintenance costs should be estimated and built into budget proposals.
- **Evaluation:** Capture metrics listed in the Key Performance Indicators section on an annual basis. Determine whether changes may be needed to the existing zoning bylaws and permitting processes in order to allow more flexibility in types and location of art.

Best Practices

Where? Ware! Exhibit in downtown Ware, Massachusetts:

#Where?Ware! installation - YouTube

Beyond Walls Mural Festival in Lynn, Massachusetts
Beyond Walls - Strengthening Communities (beyond-walls.org)



Beyond Walls Festival in Lynn
Photo credit: Photo Gallery – Beyond Walls-Strengthen Communities
(beyond-walls.org)

**Best Practices
(cont'd)**

Beyond Walls is a non-profit placemaking agency that has done a number of community activation projects around greater walkability and more public art in Lynn. Over the past three years, Beyond Walls has held Mural Festivals to highlight the 46 murals and counting that have been created through the program. The mural program is funded by the Barr Foundation, MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places, Patronicity, and The Boston Foundation.

The artist selection process includes a public call to artists on their social media platforms, as well as posting on artists forums. The Beyond Walls committee and team review submissions for complete applications, their style of artwork, and their cultural background. Beyond Walls mural program aims to reflect and celebrate the cultural diversity of Lynn, and highlights artists that have been historically underrepresented.

Their community partners include International Union of Painter's and Allied Trades DC 35, The Office of Community Development & Lynn Engineering Department, The City of Lynn, Atlantic Toyota, RAW Art Works, East Coast International Church, Salem State University, and Volunteer Committee. The International Union of Painter's and Allied Trades DC 35 preps and primes all the walls as canvases for the artists.

Special Events Committee (Sturbridge, MA)

Not dissimilar from other town committees, municipalities throughout the Commonwealth will often have an events committee whose missions are to support the establishments of events and oversee their fundraising and operations. By sitting under the purview of the municipal government, they are privy to general and specific public funds that an ad-hoc community group may not necessarily have an opportunity to access.

The Town of Sturbridge has formed a temporary Special Events Committee that meets on a routine basis in a public forum. Their members include members of the general public as well as administrative and elected officials. Each meeting is recorded via documented minutes which are located on the town's website, which also includes photos of past events and information on upcoming events.

Website: <https://www.sturbridge.gov/special-events-committee>

Additional websites:

Example of an agreement for commissioned artwork: https://www.publicartist.org/resources/922_1.pdf

Develop Façade and Sign Improvement Program

Category



Administrative Capacity

Location

North Main Street

Origin

Town of East Longmeadow staff and planning board

Budget & Sources of Funding



Low Budget (less than \$50,000)

In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or sign upgrades when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth

Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000) Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which would include creating the program, developing the design guidelines, and providing conceptual designs for improvements, depending on the complexity of the project. An MDI grant may be sufficient for the full project unless the community is looking for a more extensive set of illustrations or a significant public engagement process.

Community Planning Grants (project limit \$25,000-\$75,000) Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

A Community Planning Grant may be used for Zoning Review and Updates, which can include the sign code and design guidelines if they are part of the municipality's zoning bylaws or ordinance.

District Local Technical Assistance Grant

Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) and DHCD

Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and may be used for planning projects. Each RPA has a different focus on how these funds may be used to meet the state's funding goals.

All municipalities are eligible to apply directly to their RPA. The RPA will work with the municipality on the program; a separate consultant is not usually required.

Timeframe



Short Term– (1-5 years)

Risks



Medium Risk – One risk is creating a program or regulations that are too restrictive. This would send a negative message to those who are considering investing in the community. Also, guidelines that are too subjective send a similar negative message in that applicants cannot be certain as to how the guidelines will apply to them.

Also, there is a risk that the improvements program, once developed, may not be utilized.

Key Performance Indicators

A façade and signage improvement program will help reinforce a community's identity and provide a clear message that the municipality is balancing the needs of the community with a streamlined approval process for new development.

Other impacts include:

- Improved visibility and appearance of businesses who wish to attract customers/clients.
- Pedestrian and vehicular safety (reduce distractions).
- Community aesthetics.
- Reduction in light pollution.

KPI for this project could include the following:

- Appointment of Design Review Committee.
- Development of façade and signage improvement program.
- Compliance of regulations with legal precedents.
- Implementation of streamlined process for approvals.

Partners & Resources

Municipal staff (planning and economic development, building inspector)

Municipal boards (Town Council, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Committee)

Property/business owners

Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts

The diagnostic phase revealed that a significant number of businesses have outdated or deteriorating signage and façades. Given the financial losses during the pandemic, small and micro businesses, as well as landlords, do not have the resources (time, money, expertise) to address substandard storefronts and signage.

Also, requirements to address the transmissibility of COVID-19, such as new windows, doors, or HVAC system may be unaffordable to a small business owner and/or may have a negative impact on the façade if improperly sourced and installed.

Action Item

The project will involve the following steps:

1. Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity – in this case it may be the new Deputy Town Manager.
2. Identify who needs to be part of this process and engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.
3. Develop sign code revisions to bring the current sign regulations up to current standards.
4. Develop the funding and oversight structures.

Process

Pre-program development

1. Identify who in the municipality will manage this program: municipal staff, existing nonprofit committee/organization, volunteer committee, or a hybrid.
2. Discuss the potential focus of the program: will it involve components of a storefront, the entire storefront, the entire façade, all façades, or the entire site? Will lighting, awnings and other smaller elements be included? Will interior improvements to address accessibility be included? Will the municipality fund the design, all or some of the improvements, or both?
3. Discuss what will not be eligible. Eligibility may also be determined by the funding source (for example, CDBG funds).
4. Discuss the length of time that improvements must be maintained and the enforcement process for ensuring that improvements are maintained. Maintenance requirements could be tied to the length of the tenant's lease.
5. Consider the funding structures. The program, once established, could provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. Grants may provide a greater incentive to participate, while loans (no or low interest) provide a revolving fund to assist more properties. Another option is to forgive loans after a certain time if the improvements are maintained.
6. If the property owners are less interested in the program, the municipality might consider offering grants to the first 3-5 to sign up (depending on resources) or through a lottery process and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area. This would need to be a highly transparent process.
7. Decide whether the guidelines and program will be developed in-house or whether the municipality will seek outside help. The funding source may determine the type of outside assistance; for example, certain programs will assign on-call consultants. For others, the municipality may need to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP).

Process (cont'd)

Developing the program

1. Decide the following:
 - a. Grant, loan, or hybrid
 - b. Which elements will the program fund and which are the responsibilities of the property owner?
 - c. What are the eligibility requirements for participating in the program?
 - d. What is the length of the program?
 - e. How long will property owners be required to maintain the improvements?
 - f. What is the enforcement procedure for maintenance? (This could be repayment of a grant or a lien on a property.)
 - g. Will the responsibility for maintenance transfer to a new owner if the property is sold?
2. Differentiating between the responsibilities of the tenant (often the small business) and the landlord (the property owner) is critical – a small business may be enthusiastic about the assistance, but the landlord may not. The municipality may need to consider parallel outreach processes.
3. Decide on the application process and how applicants will be evaluated. Are certain property types or improvements given priority over others? Make sure the process of choosing participants is transparent.
4. Develop the forms and identify the people who will be evaluating the applications. They may need to be trained in the process.

Education of all people involved in the program needs to be an ongoing component. A municipality that is short on project management resources should consider hiring a dedicated staff member or consultant to manage this program. Finally, the municipality should consider streamlining approvals of projects under this program to reduce the time needed for implementation.

Best Practice

Ashland, Massachusetts is conducting a Sign and Façade Improvement Program that provides a 50% match up to \$5,000. This program is a revolving loan fund, but this can also be done with grants. The preferred target area is high-traffic streets but it is open to all businesses in Ashland.

The program includes building improvements (accessibility, signs, awnings, painting) and site improvements (parking lots, planters, landscaping).

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

Activate Public and Private Spaces

Category		Public Realm; Administrative Capacity
Location		North Main Street
Origin		Town of East Longmeadow
Budget & Sources of Funding		<p>Low budget (\$<50K)</p> <p>Low budget (\$<50K) In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:</p> <p><u>American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</u> Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or sign upgrades when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p><u>Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth</u> Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (technical assistance up to value of \$25,000) Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) MDI staff assigns a consultant to assist the community with technical services, which would include assistance with permitting, identifying properties, and engaging with the public.</p> <p>District Local Technical Assistance Grant Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) and DHCD Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and may be used for planning and regional COVID economic recovery projects. All municipalities are eligible to apply directly to their RPA, which will work with the municipality on the program.</p> <p><u>MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces</u> Grants of up to \$200,000 are available 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.</p> <p><u>T-Mobile Hometown Grant Program</u> Up to \$50,000 for towns <50,000 population to build/rebuild/refresh community spaces that help foster local connections in town.</p>
Timeframe		Short Term- (1-5 years)
Risks		Low Risk - The Town would be facilitating a process that will encourage community members and businesses to plan and carry out pop-up events. The Town would need to assess existing zoning bylaws and permitting processes prior to implementing all of these recommendations, but having the regulatory and organizational processes in place will allow more creative use of outdoor space by local businesses and organizations.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of sites identified for use • Number of partners collaborating • Number of pop-up events held
Partners & Resources		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal departments, to include, but not limited to Planning, Recreation, Police, Fire, Building, DPW, Health, and Town/City Administration • Business Owners • Residents



*Pop-up clothing boutique
Photo credit: Sanofre Parks Foundation*

Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts

As commercial areas recover from the economic shutdown and cope with the global pandemic, outdoor pop-up events are a safe, relatively easy way to gather people, provide more services and retail goods, and allow for cultural activities. Pop-up events can be characterized as time-limited and purposefully impermanent events, such as the Cars and Cones events held at The Depot in East Longmeadow, to bring people back to these vital retail and commercial centers.

Retail pop-up stores are temporary establishments that are designed to reach and engage customers through a creative experience. The cost of opening a pop-up shop is much less than that of a brick-and-mortar store, and it can be used to test a product idea, create buzz during a holiday, or simply generate more awareness of a store's brand.

These events are a more recent trend, common in more urban areas, and many community and business members of East Longmeadow may not be familiar with them. This project will enable the Town of East Longmeadow to facilitate the process.



*Open Up Markets in Darling Quarter, Sydney, Australia
Photo credit: Wiltshire+Dimas, wdmanagement.com.au/open-up/*

Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts (cont'd)

Efficient permitting processes can lead to quicker turn-around for those organizing these events in the community and will increase the likelihood of such events happening and bringing people back to local commercial districts.

Action Item

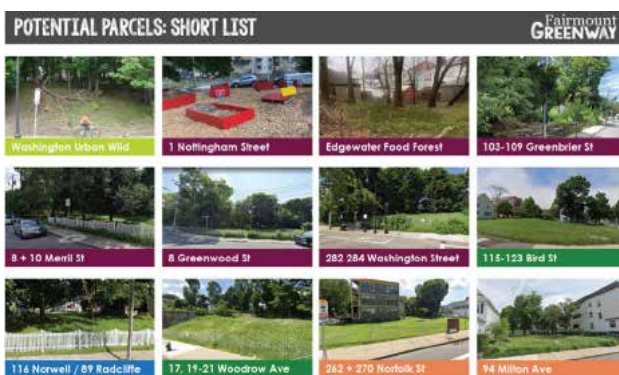
- 1) Streamline process of holding a pop-up event
- 2) Potentially Inventory vacant lots, underutilized private property (including parking lots), and town-owned spaces to hold events. Conduct outreach to property and business owners to assess interest and willingness to allow use of their property.
- 3) The Town may choose to sponsor one or two pop-up events to demonstrate the utility and effectiveness of these activities.
- 4) Encourage community members and private businesses to plan and carry out their own pop-ups, and assist with streamlined permitting and approval processes.

Process

Permitting a Pop-Up event efficiently requires municipal staff (especially decision-makers) to believe in the importance and utility of pop-up events. Municipalities need a pop-up event champion(s) to secure the necessary human and financial resources to make these processes work efficiently and effectively. The pandemic has taught cities and towns around the country that we do not need as much paper and in-person contact as we used to think we did and that we can conduct work on-line safely, securely and efficiently. Moving to on-line applications has increased employee safety, customer satisfaction and will facilitate pop-up events.

As identified in the Action Plan, the process to initiate and expand the use of pop-ups may include the following steps:

1. Assess your current situation: are your collaborators and affected municipal staff happy with the existing process? Identify 'pain points' and start improving there. Who makes decisions and why? Who is missing? And what can you learn from COVID innovations that can become permanent?
2. Create a user-friendly municipal web page with on-line and/or e-permitting software. At a minimum accept applications via email. These elements are addressed in another recommended Rapid Recovery project in this plan.
3. Create a Manual that describes the process and publicize it widely and regularly. Several of the communities in the Best Practices section have developed attractive, easy to follow manuals that not only explain the local permitting process but also help applicants differentiate between the kinds of pop-up events possible and how to design and implement effective ones.
4. Identify and publicize a Pop-up event coordinator. A municipal staff person or department could be identified as the primary contact for pop-up permits. The staff person assists the applicant with ensuring the review process is comprehensible and efficient and that all the requirements of the application are met.
5. Conduct a "desktop" analysis of vacant lots; create a list and possibly a map. Identify owners.
6. Similarly inventory potentially underutilized private property such as large parking lots that are mostly or frequently vacant due to limited store hours and/or COVID restrictions. Other examples include vacant parking lots or side yards of businesses that are closed, or alleys between properties.
7. Inventory town-owned parcels for their pop-up potential.



Inventory available spaces
Photo credit: Civic Space Collaborative



Planning potential sites
Photo credit: Civic Space Collaborative

**Process
(cont'd)**

8. Conduct outreach to property and business owners identified above to assess interest and willingness to allow use of their property for small events.
9. Possibly hold or sponsor pop-up events to demonstrate the utility and effectiveness of pop-up activities. These could include a variety, such as a crafts sale, pop-up park in a mostly paved area, traveling smoothie bike, live painting, and so on.
(Smoothie Bikes – Welcome to London Bike Hub; Smoothie Bike | Wellbeing People)
10. Encourage community members and private businesses to plan and carry out their own pop-ups, and assist them as much as possible with streamlined permitting and approval processes.
11. Track and monitor results. How many pop-ups are being held, and what is the attendance level? Has the process been smooth?

Best Practice

Best Practices included here are from Fremont CA, Chicago IL, Austin TX, Greater Philadelphia, PA, Holyoke MA, Burlington VT, and Boston MA.



The **City of Fremont, California** has a pop-up program that began with outdoor dining patios, due to COVID-19, and has expanded to allow fitness classes and personal services.

[Pop Up Patio Pilot Program | City of Fremont Official Website](#)

The website explains that this program will become more permanent, as it has seen much success:

“As the City transitions into the next phase of the pandemic response and recovery, we are making plans to allow the vibrant outdoor spaces created through the Pop Up Patio program on a more permanent basis.”

There are a number of resources on the website, including an interactive map of all the Pop-up Patio sites. The Frequently Asked Questions page is also extremely informative:

[FAQs | City of Fremont Official Website](#)

The City of Chicago, Illinois has a similar program, but allows a broader range of permits, including non-specific-site-based, and allows retail pop-ups. Their website is very informative, as well.

[City of Chicago :: Chicago's Pop Up Initiative](#)

[City of Chicago :: Pop-Up Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Austin TX has implemented on-line event permitting processes and has created the Austin Center for Events, an interdisciplinary team to assist applicants through the event permitting process

Burlington, Vermont produced an exemplary manual in 2018 that is referenced by many cities and towns working on this issue.

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (covering Greater Philadelphia, a bi-state region of Pennsylvania and New Jersey) produced a Toolkit on “The Pop-Up Economy” that explains three different kinds of pop-up events: shops, events and planning, emphasizing the temporary nature of pop-up events and how cities and towns can more easily facilitate such happenings.

<https://www.dvrpc.org/reports/MIT026.pdf>

For municipalities not yet ready to move to an on-line permitting process, it is suggested that you could mimic the effectiveness of on-line permitting in real life by forming a pop-up event review committee, similar to a Development Review Committee, with very clear guidance on all information required of applicants to host a pop-up event and commit to requiring no more than two meetings with the applicant: one for preliminary approval and the second to receive any information missing from the first visit. Each department that needs to sign off should delegate a pop-up event staff person and a back-up. Fees should be able to be paid using credit cards or other on-line payment methods.

A local example from Holyoke, MA:
'Pop-up restaurant' treats Holyoke diners to Boston cooking - masslive.com

The Fairmount Greenway Project in Boston, MA included a process of inventorying parcels that was completed by Civic Space Collaborative. As shown in the photos on the "Process" section of this project recommendation (above), the firm worked with the community to inventory vacant parcels that had potential for use as pop-up parks along this urban corridor. They then looked into each site in greater detail and mapped and photographed them. This is a more comprehensive approach that could be adapted for other types of pop-ups, such as those in vacant storefronts, underutilized parking lots, or alleys between shops. This slide deck from DHCD includes the Fairmount project plus several other relevant projects on Public Space Activation: [download \(mass.gov\)](http://download.mass.gov) .

Develop Business Resource Portal on Town Website

Category



Administrative Capacity

Location

North Main Street

Origin

Town of East Longmeadow Staff and Planning Board

Budget & Sources of Funding



Medium Budget (\$50-200K)

In addition to municipal funds, the following are potential sources:

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth

- Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000) Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities.
- Community Planning Grants (project limit \$25,000-\$75,000) Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
- Urban Agenda (project limit \$100,000)

Community Compact



- IT Grants (up to \$200,000)
- Best Practices Grants (TA only?)
Citizen Engagement and Transparency



*Small business in East Longmeadow
Photo credit: www.Dreamstime.com*



*Business Owner
Photo credit: PVPC*

Timeframe		Short Term– (1-5 years)
Risks		One risk is that the site could be underutilized. However, by incorporating e-permitting into the site, that will drive more traffic and engage more businesses.
Key Performance Indicators		<p>Success is measured by tracking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of businesses accessing the site. • Number of businesses submitting permitting applications online. • Number of permit approvals given for online applications.
Partners & Resources		<p>Municipal staff (Deputy Town Manager, Planning Department, IT Department, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Health Department, Police, Fire, Department of Public Works)</p> <p>Local business owners</p> <p>Consultant team</p>
Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts		<p>When businesses were first closed down due to COVID-19, there was no single source and no local source of information and guidance. A single information portal, located on the Town website, would have provided a place for the Town to post information and resources available to businesses of every type and size. The 5-Town chamber of commerce that serves East Longmeadow has only the area's largest businesses as members.</p> <p>During any type of disaster or disruptive event, businesses do not have a reliable place to turn for help and must wade through too much confusing and sometimes conflicting information. Additionally, if Town regulations or processes must be changed quickly to respond effectively to an unexpected event, this can be communicated much more quickly and efficiently via a website.</p>
Action Item		<p>The Town is considering conducting an overhaul of their website. Whether this occurs in the near future or is a year or two away, this process could begin in order to ultimately provide a business resource that will encourage business growth and development in East Longmeadow.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Release RFP for services to develop a web page on East Longmeadow's website specifically for businesses. 2) Work with the consultant to provide information and links to business resources on the page. 3) In parallel with this process, install electronic permitting software that is linked to the business web page and integrated into East Longmeadow's website.
Process		<p>Work with consultant on the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Develop e-permitting process and forms, using specialized software. 2) Conduct outreach and engagement with local small businesses to solicit ideas and input for business resources to include on the new web page. 3) Collect all pertinent business information that should be available on the page. 4) Create links to e-permitting process on the page. 5) Embed the ability to waive some permitting requirements and fast-track others for a more efficient permitting process to allow businesses to quickly take advantage of a more flexible regulatory framework if needed.
Best Practice		<p>The City of Fremont, California has a good business resource page: Business Resources During COVID-19 Outbreak City of Fremont Official Website</p> <p>BSC Group, Inc. includes a guide to "Improve Zoning, Licensing and Permitting Interactions" in DHCD's Administrative Capacity Compendium. download (mass.gov)</p> <p>BSC Group recommends that "Municipalities should consolidate all relevant business information in a single location on the municipality's website including permitting and regulatory items. Streamlined permitting and joint meetings of permitting boards is also encouraged to expedite permit requests."</p>