



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

City of
Easthampton



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



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

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

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

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Panoramic view of the Mills District. Photo: City of Easthampton

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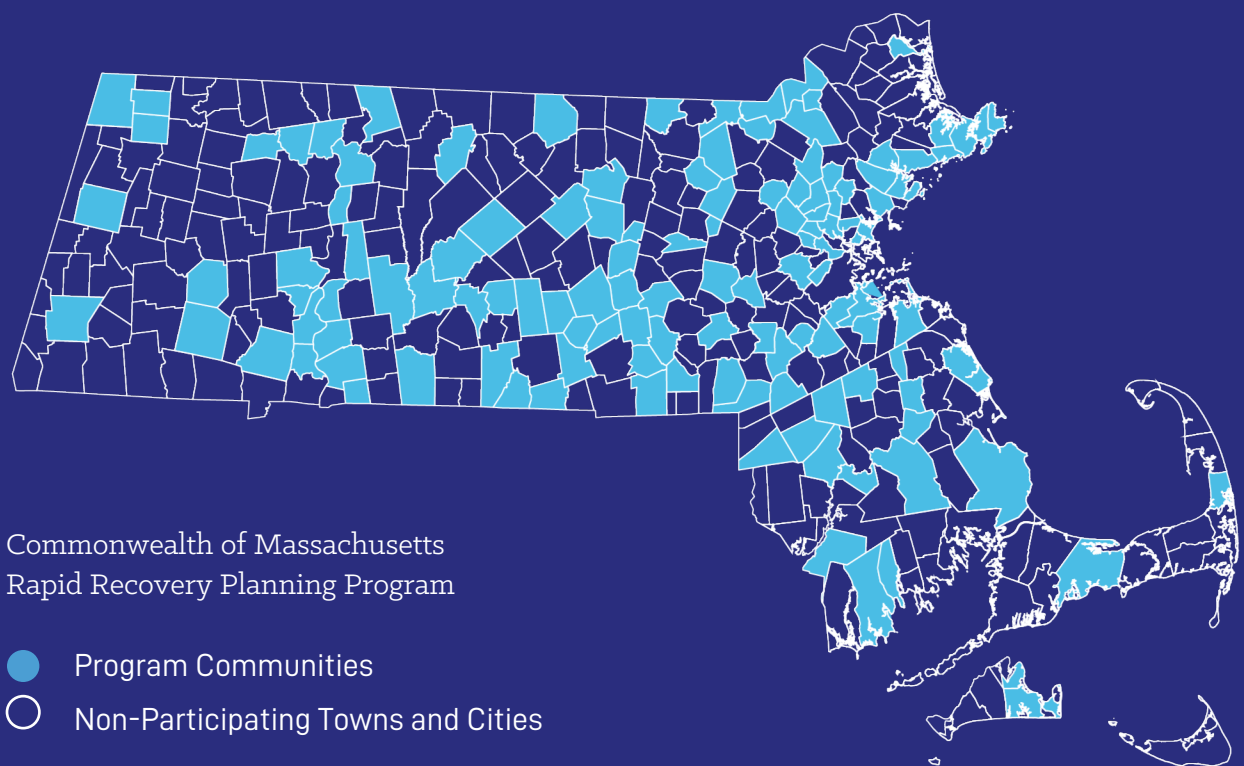
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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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.



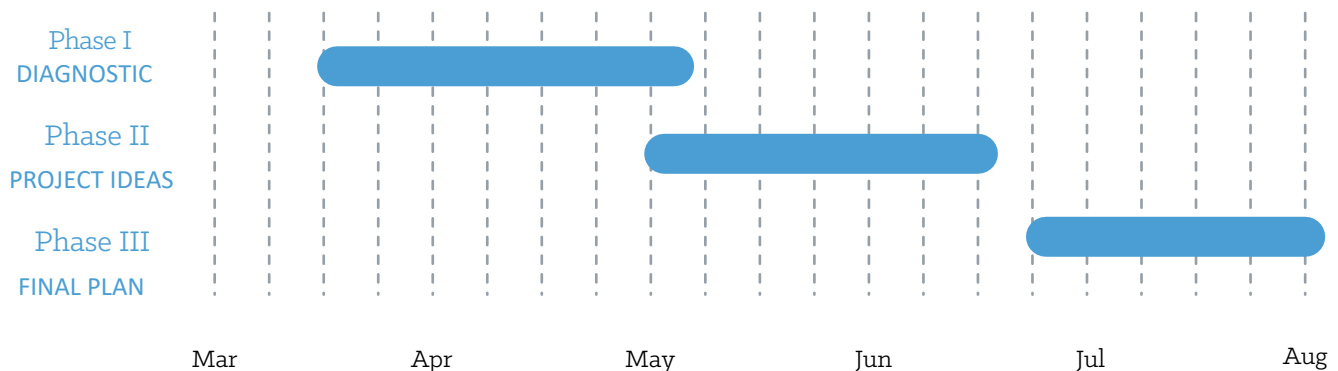
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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



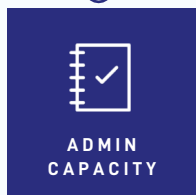
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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

A Trendy Town “Connecting the Dots” from Past to Present to Build Back Better

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

The City of Easthampton is a historic mill town known for textiles, buttons, and rubber manufacturing. Located in the Springfield Metro Area, colloquially referred to as the Pioneer Valley, the city is a nature lover's retreat with a host of natural amenities such as the Mount Tom Range, Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, Nonotuck Park, and Nashawannuck Pond Promenade. Over the last few decades, the city evolved into a thriving community attracting new waves of artists and small businesses seeking to earn a living while enjoying an environmentally conscious lifestyle. These and other advances were halted with the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the city's housing market continue to boom from people relocating from Northampton and Holyoke nearby—and as far as Boston—the pandemic-inspired shutdown resulted in loss revenues for the city. To resume growth, the city will need to employ an expansive mélange of recovery strategies that will allow it to look to the future while honoring its legacy as a “gritty mill town.”

KEY FINDINGS

The diagnostic phase of the Local Rapid Recovery Planning Program revealed that despite Easthampton's long-established suburban community (e.g., with a stable 60% owner-occupancy rate), there are some neighborhoods that remain in transition. Though scattered across the city, small concentrations exist in the mill district and Parsons Village. Median household incomes are about the same between the general population and the city's *Downtown Commercial Districts* (i.e., \$67,353 compared to \$63,722), which are slightly less than the national average. The median ages of residents are 46 and 40, respectively, contributing to the general stability in the area. Educational levels are consistent across the city with a comparable distribution of residents having attained undergraduate and advanced degrees.

The city has an aging public infrastructure with hazardous roads and intersections and narrow sidewalks. However, commercial establishments were generally well-maintained with attractive exteriors and identifiable brands. The city boasts an impressive array of festivals and businesses that were paused with the shutdown. Reportedly, “73% of businesses generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019” with 58% generating less foot traffic in winter 2021 than before COVID. About 70% reduced their hours or capacity and over half of survey respondents incurred unplanned expenses from pivoting and implementing safety measures.

PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

The enclosed recommendations are comprehensive by design beginning with a year of conversations with over 35 community members initiated by the Mayor in fall 2020—before the recovery program began. The forums featured representatives from local and state government, law enforcement, small businesses, higher education, non-profit, and a local Black Lives Matter coalition. As a result, municipal priorities involve streetscaping and wayfinding, embedding the arts and culture into real estate and infrastructure, technology-enabled marketing for the commercial district, ongoing racial equity training, establishing a coworking facility providing technical assistance to small businesses, and expanding the cultural district across downtown. Another major effort entails partnering with local business owners to revitalize the Mills on Pleasant Street. Inclusive collaboration and capacity building are critical to recovery and sustained growth.



Aerial View of the City of Easthampton. Source: City of Easthampton

A vibrant "gritty mill town" whose recovery will depend on greater connectivity between the arts, infrastructure, and local organizational capacity building

Once one of the most booming mill towns in Western Massachusetts, Easthampton has been reclaiming its joie de vivre in recent years. Artists and creative types have flocked to the town, churning out art and pottery from factory buildings once famed for textiles, buttons, and rubber. It is a small city in Hampshire County located on the southeastern edge of the Pioneer Valley region near the "five colleges" area, and is encompassed within the Greater Springfield metro area.

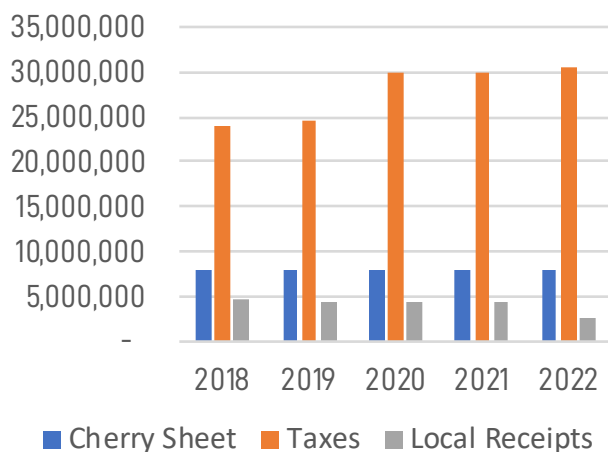
The City of Easthampton is home to a number of natural and constructed resources offering a high quality of life to its residents and a unique destination for tourists. The rugged Mount Tom Range adorning the city's skyline is the most iconic among them. Other prominent features include the 190-acre Nonotuck Park, Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, the Manhan Rail Trail, Nashawannuck Pond Promenade, the Cottage Street Cultural District, and the Mills District. With such an array of recreational alternatives, a diverse retail tenant mix across the city's crescent-shaped downtown commercial districts, and a strong housing market, this eclectic historic manufacturing community is primed for recovery and growth.

According to Trip Advisor, the top five things to do in the city includes:

1. [Biking or jogging along the Manhan Rail Trail](#)
2. [Visiting the Fort Hill Brewery for refreshment and tours](#)
3. [Socializing at New City Brewery for fellowship and small bites](#)
4. [Walking the trails and sightseeing at the Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary](#)
5. [Hanging out at Mill 180 Park for indoor play and a meal](#)

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on the city's social and economic well-being. A lack of tourism and retail activity has contributed to a roughly 50% decrease in the city's local receipts revenue, and budget reductions of 3.2% for fiscal year 2022. Local businesses have struggled to pivot and technical assistance providers suffer from resource constraints. Without additional investment, prospects for an inclusive recovery and growth may be stagnated.

General Fund Revenue Trend



Source: Annual Budget Report



Key Streets for improvement. Photo: Third Eye Network

Diagnostic

Key Findings



CUSTOMER BASE

The City's customer base is established and well-educated

Easthampton's customer base is predominately composed of established suburbanites who are fiscally responsible and environmentally conscious. While most neighborhoods are stable with an approximate 60% owner-occupancy rate and an average household size of 2.24, some neighborhoods remain in transition. The city has a total population of 16,285 with a median household income of \$67,353, which is slightly below the national average (i.e., \$67,521).

The median age of the population is 46 with a little under a third of the population (i.e., 5,533) participating in the workforce. The customer base is largely educated with half of the population having attained at least an associates (21%), or a bachelors and advanced (29%) degrees. Residents enjoy outdoor living and a number of cultural events that brings the community together. For decades, the city's kid-friendly neighborhoods have attracted a new generation of young couples, contributing to the city's small, but growing diversity.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The City has aging public infrastructure

The targeted areas for improvement encompassed all of downtown Easthampton including Pleasant Street, a segment of Main Street, Union Street, and Cottage Street—referred to as *Easthampton Downtown Commercial Districts* during the study. While about half of the roads are in good condition, all roads are hazardous to users in some form or fashion. In the case of Union Street, the roadbed is significantly worn and in need of repair. Other primary and access roads were similarly worn, unclean, or bore cracks within pedestrian crosswalks. In addition, a few intersections between roads and the rail trail create risks for pedestrians and cyclists as there are no yield signs or other devices for dampening the follow of traffic near those points.

Throughout the Downtown Commercial Districts, the city has sidewalks that run the gamut from well-maintained to narrow and worn, occasionally rendering them inaccessible for pedestrians passing one another along active retail corridors. More than 25% of sidewalks in the districts pose challenges to the pedestrian experience either due to a need for maintenance or redevelopment. While also requiring some maintenance, there are an ample amount of street trees, benches, public art, trash bins, and other amenities throughout the city and districts.

Other aspects of the public environment includes wayfinding resources and lighting. With the exception of street signs and a few markers identifying parks and the Cottage Street Cultural District, there was limited to no signage throughout the broader commercial districts—including along the rail trail. About 50% of the districts are serviced by street lighting that aids pedestrian visibility and safety.



The City is anchored by cultural and entertainment venues

The City harbors more than 130 storefronts with 577,866 square feet of ground floor retail and office space. There are a diverse array of retail options within walking distance along each commercial corridor. Business owners in Easthampton also invest in their facilities and customer experience.

More than 75% of storefronts maintains windows with at least 70% transparency and most maintain attractive window displays. Many also feature limited spillover merchandise and outdoor dining areas. The vast majority of businesses display signs reflecting their unique brand identities or those of their tenants, which can be easily seen from more than 10 feet distance. For those who have awnings, they generally appear to be clean and in working order.

While there are a few facilities in a state of disrepair requiring significant levels of structural improvement, the vast majority of facilities throughout the districts had well-maintained and at times distinct façades. At night, most of the storefronts use a combination of interior and exterior lighting that further illuminated sidewalks, showcased product displays, and brings vibrancy to the city's nightlife.

The private sector contributes to the city's cultural identity. Millside Park and Lower Mill Pond are privately owned assets adjacent to the rail trail and the Mills on Pleasant Street. The mills is home to a wide-ranging assortment of establishments including: Bars and restaurants, a blown glass company, retail shops and art galleries, a bowling alley, a table tennis center, a local broadcast media network, the Department of Motor Vehicles, and an indoor park. Several of the mills also has offices and residential on the upper levels.

The city collaborates with the business and residential communities to host a number of arts and cultural events behind the mills, public parks and lots, and along Cottage Street. A few known events that have attracted tourists and bolstered retail include Cultural Chaos, Book Fest, Spot Lot Events, and "Whobalation"—a local holiday where the city transforms into Dr. Seuss' Whoville in celebration of 'The Grinch Who Stole Christmas'.



The City has no downtown organization overseeing recovery efforts

With all of the activity taking shape in Easthampton, the city lacks the institutional infrastructure and capacity to manage the implementation of inclusive recovery and growth strategies. Here, the term 'inclusive' is used to emphasize the city's recognition of its growing diversity and multi-faceted populace. To effectively evolve the local economy without leaving anyone behind, the city will need "feet on the street." The benefits of such a community-based, entrepreneur-led economic development agenda would deepen cross-cultural relationship building and information sharing to facilitate trust-building, enabling culturally and contextually congruent business assistance.

While public administrators have demonstrated commitments to serving all residents by recognizing the city's growing diversity, gaps persist in its ability to realize these prospects without additional resources. Currently, there are no district organizations or staff roles within the city solely dedicated to business and economic development. There are also no publicly administered financial assistance programs to which local businesses can turn. With a tightening budget, the city is unable to create new roles dedicated to community engagement or resource navigation. The city also lacks the capacity to oversee the implementation of the enclosed projects without assistance.

For these reasons, additional financial and structural investments and collaborative partnerships are mission-critical. Unfortunately, there are a lack of entrepreneur support organizations in the immediate area, and those such as the local chamber has its own share of staffing and financial resource constraints.



Highlights from the Physical Environment

PUBLIC REALM: ACCESS

As previously noted, accessibility proves to be a challenge for pedestrians within Easthampton's Downtown Commercial Districts for several reasons. The narrow width of the city's sidewalks was one reason noted by the administration and project team during the diagnostic phase of the program.

As local retail establishments made adjustments to comply with state requirements during the shutdown, social distancing policies caused some to have patrons stand outside, leverage curbside pick-up, and online ordering as alternative means for accessing goods and services. Lines of patrons along narrow sidewalks stifle foot traffic, making it difficult for others to pass without stepping onto the edge of the road or meandering around street assets such as trees and sign posts. These pose significant challenges for the elderly and individuals with disabilities.

roads throughout the districts—such as Payson Avenue, Union Street, and Ferry Street—the risk of accidents may persist, especially if distracted drivers reach those points as pedestrians attempt to cross.

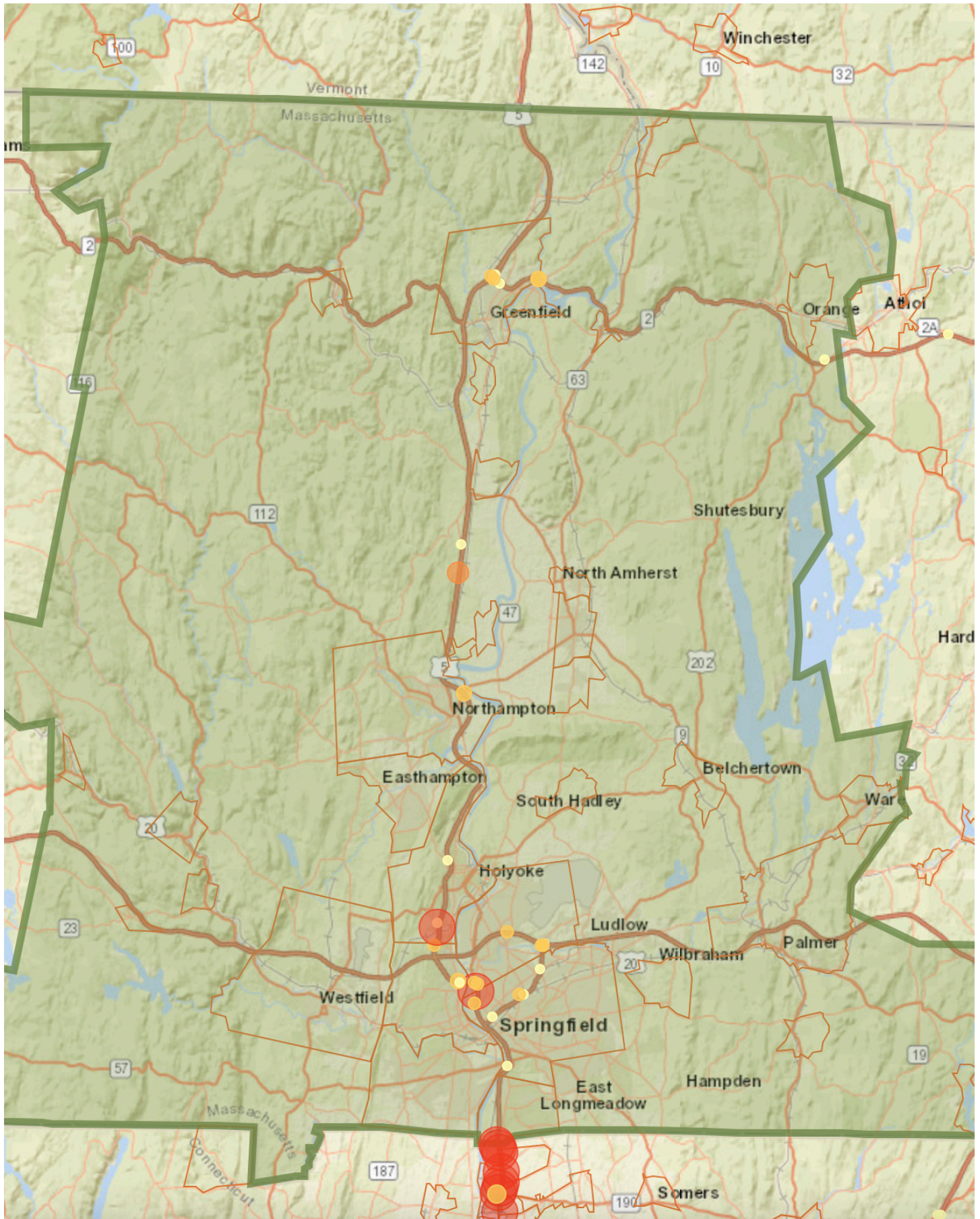
A final visibility challenge from the public realm concerns lighting in certain spots throughout the districts (e.g., Pleasant Street and Union Street), especially along side streets adjacent to the main corridors.

PUBLIC REALM: VISIBILITY

Another challenge noted from the study is the lack of wayfinding signage catering to multimodal travelers—automobiles, cyclists, foot traffic, and individuals and groups using public transit. Pedestrians traversing the Rail Trail are unable to identify the resources and retail opportunities to them. And tourists visiting the city are left to rely on personal relationships and general Internet searches to identify what might be available to them beyond the original purposes motivating their travels to the city. These become missed opportunities for local businesses who have indicated a variety of effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on their businesses.

Visibility also manifests as personal dangers for drivers and pedestrians. Multi-directional points along Cottage Street lacks signage indicating right of way and other traffic dampening mechanisms. The city has been fortunate not to have accidents at these relatively new intersections. State restrictions were provided as the reason the chosen design was used.

Access points along the Rail Trail also pose challenges for pedestrians. Because there are no traffic dampening mechanism at major intersecting



Map of region with Historical Highway Traffic Data from 2010 to 2020. Source: Esri



Image of Nonotuck Park Signs. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

The Town has a robust network of parks and open spaces

PUBLIC REALM: PARKS

There are several parks near and throughout the districts including Nonotuck Park and Main Street Park, Millside Park, Parsons Street Park, and other “pocket parks.” These spaces are replete with benches, trash receptacles, playgrounds, gazebos, a band shell, and other amenities available to residents and businesses.

PUBLIC REALM: PLAZAS

The intersection of Union Street and Cottage Street features a small plaza near the Nashawannuck Pond Promenade. Across the street from the Municipal Building, the plaza contains benches, public art installations, trash bins, and tower viewers. There is also an access point to the pond for human-powered boats—rowboats, paddleboats, canoes, kayaks, and even rowing shells.

PUBLIC REALM: PARKLETS AND SHELTERS

The city has a few places where pedestrians can stop and sit for a while before continuing their journeys. Particularly, there are a couple of covered benches with shelters on Union Street—near Main Street—and at the beginning of Cottage Street. These points also serve as pick-up and drop-off points along the bus line.



Highlights from the Business Environment

PRIVATE REALM: NODES/CLUSTERS

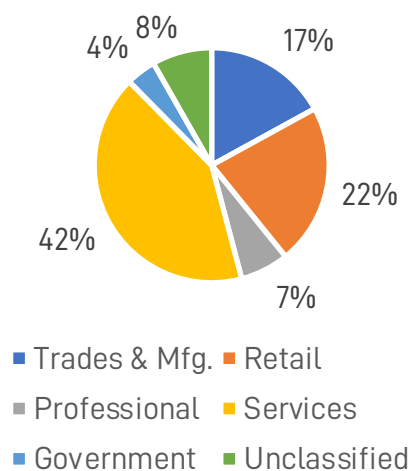
There are a total of 195 businesses located within the Downtown Commercial Districts, outside of the Mills District. The four commercial corridors that define downtown Easthampton represent the major nodes or clusters of businesses across the districts. Services and Retail represent the largest business segments.

These clusters are highly accessible by car, ride hailing, and by bike because of their juxtaposition to the Manhan Rail Trail, which intersects the districts. Shuttles are also provided for patrons during cultural events and activities to increase accessibility and retail opportunities.

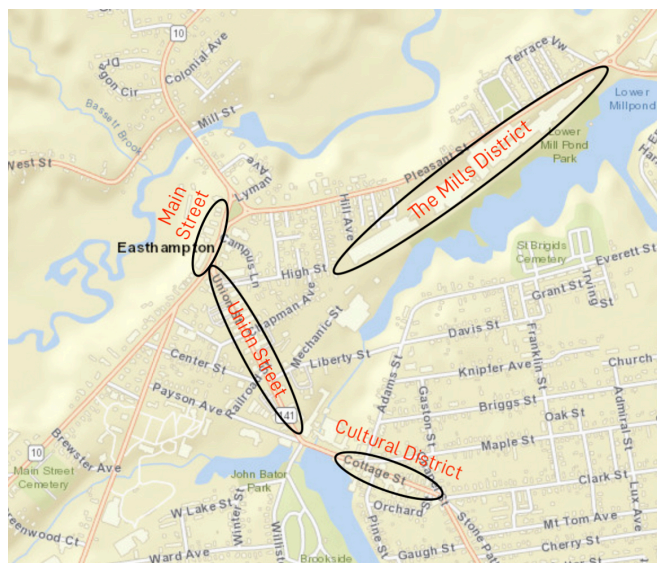
PRIVATE REALM: ANCHORS/DESTINATIONS

As previously acknowledged, the Mills on Pleasant Street contains multiple stories of commercial and residential tenants that add vibrancy to the city. Some estimates add an additional 100+ businesses to the total number of establishments when considering the mills, and not accounting for businesses that may be operating informally—home-, mobile-, and web-based, especially without a business license or permit to do so. Other cultural anchors include CitySpace, a 300-seat theater currently under construction within the Old Town Hall building, and the Cottage Street Cultural District that attracts residents and tourists alike.

No. of Establishments



Mix of businesses in the study area by NAICS category. Source: ESRI



Map of commercial nodes. Source: Third Eye Network

Project Recommendations

Implement Streetscape and Walkability Improvement Plans for Side Streets



Category	 Public Realm
Location	Census Tract No. 8223.00 and 8224.02
Origin	Mayor LaChapelle and the Easthampton Planning Office
Budget	 Large: Over \$500,000 including \$80,000 for planning; \$150,000 to \$250,000 estimated for design development; and \$1 million to \$2 million estimated for construction; see below for funding resources
Timeframe	 Short-term: less than 5 years
Risk	 Medium: Staffing capacity, maintenance, procurement process constraints
Key Performance Indicators	Total length of new sidewalk; number of new crosswalks; number of new on-street parking spaces with 300-feet of commercial streets; pedestrian traffic counts
Partners & Resources	Department of Public Works; planning and design may consider TDI Creative Catalyst, Commonwealth Places, MA Downtown Initiative, Community Development Block Grants; construction activities may consider MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces, MassWorks, CARES Act statewide programs, and American Rescue Plan Act funding



Image of the Manhan Rail Trail. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Diagnostic

Prior reports and unstructured business respondent feedback obtained during the diagnostic phase of the program underscored the sentiment among the business and residential community to create additional parking spaces throughout the district. This project recommendation is also supported by the business community's interest in "improvements in safety and cleanliness," and "improvement in streetscape and sidewalks."

The conditions of sidewalks were both narrow and in disrepair in certain segments of most of the commercial corridors downtown (e.g., especially Main Street, Union Street, and Cottage streets). The shutdown and subsequent occupancy restrictions resulting from COVID-19 pandemic created social challenges for pedestrians frequenting retail establishments particularly located on Cottage Street—during multiple site visits, we observed extensive lines patrons forming outside of the local ice cream shop on warmer days, and others dining outdoors from a local pizza shop. Each instance constrains foot traffic and accessibility for pedestrians with disabilities and temporary walking aids. Some pedestrians even step onto the edge of the street to pass where street trees inhibit social distancing while passing retail patrons.

Action Item

Identify and construct sidewalk improvements that connect commercial corridors to nearby residences and areas of available on-street parking, helping to alleviate the impulse to drive and park to every destination, building Easthampton as a more walkable, thriving and sustainable community that is more resilient. Key actions:

- Community Engagement (e.g., prioritize community engagement and education by stakeholder group throughout the entirety of project development and implementation to garner and maintain buy-in)
- Conceptual and Final Designs (e.g., target side streets adjacent to the Easthampton Downtown Commercial Districts; develop new side streets to connect the new school to the surrounding community; increase parking access and availability)
- Funding Recommendations (e.g., explore the funding programs on the preceding page)
- Construction (e.g., implement the final design)

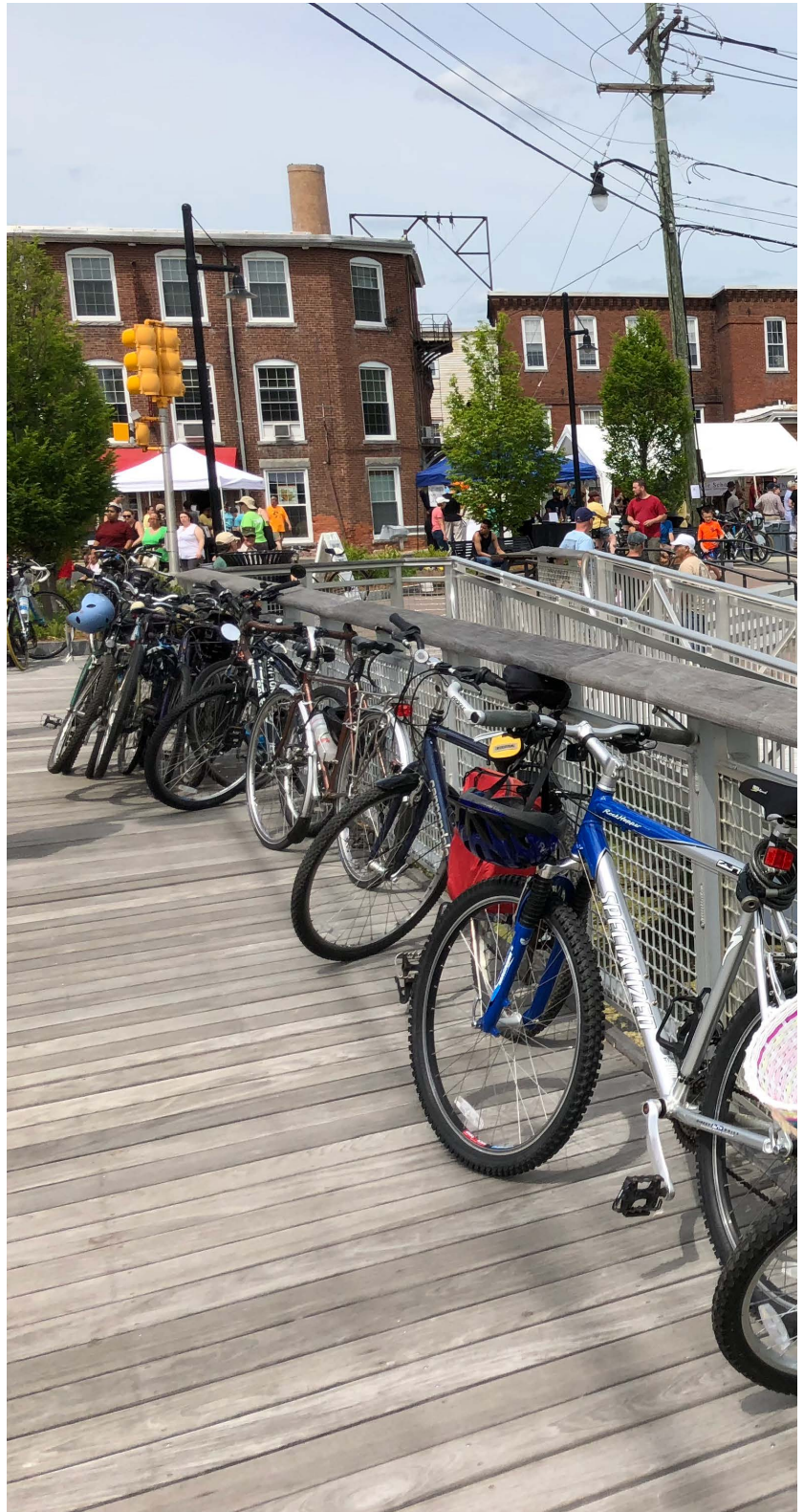


Image of bikes at Nashawannuck Pond Promenade. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Process

- Identify project lead, sponsor, and institutional partners: Preliminarily, the project will require coordination with city staff to build consensus around the purpose and need and to ensure the likely outcomes will be compatible with operational and design expectations, particularly around fire access, turning radii, and lane width.
- Seek initial study funding for engagement and conceptual design (e.g., city funds or local planning grant) and hire a consultant.
- Develop and begin a community engagement process –continuously throughout all steps below
- Conduct a mobility study to assess existing and future conditions and to support evaluation of design alternatives. The effort may include data and analysis about traffic movements by mode, speeds, crashes, roadway layout, rights of way, property lines and local and State regulatory environment. Include a parking supply and demand evaluation to demonstrate project value.
- Draft a project list (e.g., sidewalks, crosswalks and ramps, curb extensions, new markings, parking stalls, etc.) and score based on key performance metrics derived from community feedback on desired outcomes. Ensure metrics can evaluate before and after conditions in line with community goals.
- Develop conceptual designs for preferred projects.
- Submit for design and construction grant funding.
- Advertise and select a design consultant.
- Commence with site evaluation, analysis, survey and mapping.
- Conduct necessary drainage, utility and soils studies where needed.
- Finalize the conceptual design with Opinion of Probable Construction Cost (OPCC).
- Develop a schematic design with OPCC update.
- Develop a Maintenance and Protection of Traffic (MPT) plan.
- Identify and apply for the necessary permits and approvals
- Complete the detailed design (e.g., 90%, 100% and conformance documents for bidding) with OPCC at each stage.
- Establish and confirm final construction budget.
- Confirm funding and adjust project if needed.
- Proceed with contractor procurement activities and allow two to four months for this step.
- Complete construction, final punch list, and closeout.
- Assess project results against performance metrics established during scoping the work.



Image of the sidewalk on Main Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Downtown Wayfinding for Automobiles, Pedestrians, and Bicyclers (Phase II)

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Census Tracts No. 8223.00 and 8224.02, major commercial corridors providing access to the city and Downtown Commercial Districts, and the Manhan Rail Trail
Origin	Stakeholder interviews with the Easthampton Planning Office and mill owners
Budget	 High: Over \$500,000 including \$25,000 to \$150,000+ for wayfinding design; and \$75,000 to \$500,000 for fabrication
Timeframe	 Short-term: Less than five years including four to eight months for designing a wayfinding program and another three to six months for fabrication
Risk	 Low: Primarily concerning financial and installation risks. With proper documentation regarding the location of the signage elements, installation risk can be mitigated early in the fabrication process by the design, fabrication, and installation teams.
Key Performance Indicators	Public surveys for rating final signage and the wayfinding project; impact of wayfinding signage on resident and visitor journeys; number of integrated art installations
Partners & Resources	Easthampton Cultural District Planning Committees, Easthampton City Arts, Easthampton Health Department, and residents. Google maps is a critical resource for obtaining distances by miles (e.g., for biking) and time (e.g., for walking); funding sources include MassTrail Grants, Destination Development Capital (DDC) Program, Community Development Block Grant, Urban Agenda Grant Program; EDA Economic Adjustment Assistance and Competitive Tourism Grant Programs



Image of public Valley Bikes. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Diagnostic

Survey responses from the diagnostic phase of the program indicated businesses were generally satisfied with access to the commercial districts for customers and employees. However, they generally favored amenity improvements for public transit and cyclists and they wanted more cultural events and activities that brings people into the district. With the development of the new school underway, challenges of connectivity will be significant. One project recommendation advocates for the creation of new streets to facilitate access to the main thoroughfares and downtown.

Additionally, 73% of businesses indicated that they generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For 55% of businesses, revenue declined by 25% or more and 58% of businesses had less on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID. Another 38% of businesses reported a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more. This project recommendation aims to steer multimodal traffic to Easthampton's Downtown Commercial Districts to raise awareness of available points of interests from cultural assets and natural resources to retail and social destinations. This recommendation also supports mental health and wellness for residents who have become frustrated with remaining homebound—confined to remote work and video conferencing.

Action Item

Identify and catalog neighborhood-level resources, amenities, sites, and services to indicate relevant points of interest.

Determine neighborhood-level delineations (e.g., wards and districts) and collaborate with residents to development names and sub-brands under the wayfinding system for each ward.

Expand resources and the efforts of arts-based groups and the Easthampton Health Department and to support cultural integration and utilization of the districts and routes encompassed within the downtown wayfinding system. These actions will ensure wayfinding efforts are not disconnected from these dimensions of the community.

Refer to the enclosed “Best Practices and Recommendations; Signage and Wayfinding” report in the appendices.



Image of wayfinding signage on Cottage Street. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Process

- Gather your assets.

Conduct an audit with maps indicating where current wayfinding signage exists.

Master planning documents that outline goals for the city will also be useful.

Gather a master list of points of interest and sort them into groups based on popularity.

- Layer the data.

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 and pedestrians, points of interests, town limits, parking and points of entry and exit.

Generate a list of destinations and descriptions segmented by mode of travel. A “hub-and-spoke” model (e.g., districts and connecting routes) can be used to determine when to use walking, biking, and automobile signs. Also, note that wayfinding users will have different objectives. QR codes can be powerful sign assets.

Permanent applications are preferred over temporary applications (e.g., “tactical urbanism”).

- Identify the sign types.

Determine the needs of your wayfinding from a mapping perspective and assess how those needs can be met with physical signs before selecting a branded signage family.

A best practice is to indicate the amount of time it would take to walk to each destination, either in time or distance.

Signs should also be placed before users have to make turns in their journey—with time for interpretation and decision-making.

- Design the signage.

Let the objectives of each sign type to lead in this phase, do not allow visuals to dictate the overall design.

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.

Pedestrian signage can be smaller in size, but should be more targeted (e.g., the Rail Trail).

- Select fabrication partners.

Once the wayfinding package has its locations and signs identified, prepare a request for proposals and select fabrication vendors.

Coordinate base pricing to establish overall project costs, including installation.



Image of the Manhan Rail Trail from Payson Avenue. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Creating Connections: A Community Mapping Workshop to Embed the Arts and Culture into Real Estate and Infrastructure


Category	 Public Realm, Private Realm, and Cultural/Arts
Location	Census Tracts No. 8223 and 8224.02 (Hampshire County); and also major commercial corridors leading into and out of the city.
Origin	Easthampton City Arts
Budget	 Medium: Allocate \$50,000 to \$200,000 including a pilot project
Timeframe	 Short-term: Less than 5 years.
Risk	 Low: Based on current staff capacity and precedent undertakings.
Key Performance Indicators	Stakeholder participation, successful launch of pilot project, feedback from the community, leveraging the placemaking work, increase in foot traffic, increase in participation in events, increase in sales, decrease in vacancy rates, and a functional framework that accommodates additional programming.
Partners & Resources	ECA Board, MA Realtors Association, Mass Cultural Council, Easthampton City Arts, Real Estate Developers including Mill Owners, Dept. of Public Works, Office of Planning, Parks Department, and MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs; funding considerations planning assistance grants, MassWorks Infrastructure Program, Destination Development Capital, Hometown Grant Program, Seed Grant, Grow Grant



Image of Mill 180. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Diagnostic

One of the most significant effects of the COVID-19 pandemic was decreases in average annual daily traffic and foot traffic of nearly 2,000 vehicles as businesses were required to shutdown. As previously mentioned, 73% of them generated less revenue and 58% of them had less on-site customers.

Businesses responding to the survey felt the "improvement of streetscape and sidewalks" as well as the "improvement and development of public spaces and seating areas" were important potential recovery strategies. Since the majority of place-based opportunities will fall within the targeted area for expanding the downtown cultural district, the proposed strategy for incorporating the arts and culture into developmental improvements creates high touch possibilities. Pursuing these kinds of investments are expected to generate multimodal traffic in the heart of the city and bolster retail activity.

One important aspect of this project is that it focuses on creating vitality across realms, allowing for community interaction to take place while also ensuring social distancing if required. Notably, public art and placemaking programs can be tailored for cold weather, short days, etc. to limit isolation and ensure community connection all year long. In addition, such a public sector activities may inspire similar investments in the private sector.

Action Item

Hold a *Creating Connections: A Community Mapping Workshop* to develop placemaking strategies and drive implementation of a multi-block public art program for the Easthampton's downtown commercial districts.

Leverage the Union Street Redesign, Side Streets Re-Development Project, and Mills District Revitalization activities and current work on development of pocket parks, effectively linking all of them as components of a unique, urban-scaled arts-based economic development scheme.



Aerial view of Union Street. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Process

Plan Workshop:

Identify a project manager, other core team members, and hire planning consultant(s). The core team should identify all major real estate and infrastructure projects underway or scheduled to be underway soon in the focus areas, including any already identified opportunities to integrate placemaking and public art into these projects.

Work with planning consultants to establish project scope and goals; and allocate and/or secure grant funding. Depending upon target timeline and number of participants envisioned, it may be advisable to apply for a Commonwealth Places Seed Grant to assemble key materials, support development of the project brief, identify relevant case studies, and train workshop leaders to lead mapping and documentation exercises.

Conduct Workshop:

Welcome participants, explain the format and goals of the workshop to stakeholders, and contextualize the opportunities at hand within broader community development goals. Start the day with a short playful exercise that gives participants a chance to meet each other and casually interact.

Workshop activities should be place-based, allowing participants to observe and experience different areas of the district. It may, for instance, be necessary to organize short tours so that participants have some common and shared understanding of the focus areas.

Explore insights from case studies including winners of the International Award for Public Art. Ask select stakeholders to share case studies they have experienced and to present on these. Discuss what elements are relevant for Easthampton.

Build upon Kevin Lynch's community mapping exercises and theory development in *Image of the City* to guide a community mapping process tailored for Easthampton. Deploy new technology (e.g., www.mural.com) to allow for IRL—an app—virtual participation, and real time-documentation of the event. Establish a multi-dimensional theme or question to guide idea development: “What connects us?” The community mapping activities should center around a set of key exercises, such as:

MAP THE NOW: “What is here now that I value?”
What would I recommend others to see? What do I find beautiful?



Image of a bus shelter and art display on Cottage Street. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton



Image of a local restaurant on Union Street. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Support Mill District Revitalization Along Pleasant and Ferry Streets

Category	 Private and Public Realms
Location	Census Tract No. 8224.02
Origin	City of Easthampton, mill owners
Budget	 High: Depending upon funding available, the vision and enhancement plan could be phased, with a recommended minimum first phase budget of \$25,000
Timeframe	 Mid-term: 5 to 10 years; Mills District Vision and Enhancement Plan: four to six months, including pre-planning for work sessions. Full District Development
Risk	 Medium/High: TBD. It is imperative that this be a process where mill owners can build trust with one another and town staff. External threats include challenges of securing project financing for construction as well as changes impacting market demand for space. All can be addressed through the collaborative planning process outlined.
Key Performance Indicators	Number of renovation projects completed; district accessibility; percent increase in parking and housing availability; funds raised; occupancy rates; foot traffic
Partners & Resources	City of Easthampton, Mill Owners, and Mass Development; funding considerations may include local American Rescue Plan Act funds, Hometown Grant Program, MA Downtown Initiative Program; Federal Tax Credits, BIZ-M-Power, Community Development Block Grant, Destination Development Capital



Image of a local business in the Mill District. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Diagnostic

The mill district may have been the single most impacted area throughout the City of Easthampton given its composition as a collection of five or more contiguous multi-level indoor structures with a diverse concentrated tenant mix. With the shutdown, street-facing businesses were able to pivot to online retail and curbside pick-up operations, while businesses located in the mill district lacked a curbside option. During the diagnostic phase of the program (e.g., March/April), more than two-thirds of business respondents indicated that they closed permanently (1%) or temporarily (5%) or reduced their hours and/or capacity (64%). Nearly 80% of the businesses experienced declining revenues and more than half (54%) incurred expenses to operate safely.

With several hundred tenants located in the mill district, this project recommendation presents perhaps the most significant opportunity to jumpstart Easthampton's economy and mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic through transformational investments. While business survey respondents were neutral regarding their level of satisfaction with the "condition of private buildings and storefronts and signs" within the study area, they were interested in "changes in public parking availability, management, or policies." Conversations with mill owners illuminated interests consistent with expressed interests in attracting additional businesses and foot traffic to the area. Most of them also mentioned parking and housing options as interests for consideration.

Action Item

Develop a shared vision and enhancement plan for the Mills District to identify opportunities for project synergy, knowledge and cost sharing, and cooperative marketing.

Start by agreeing to an inter-mill coordination and communication strategy (i.e., monthly owners' meetings, new tenant distribution lists). Initial steps were taken as a result of a stakeholder interview hosted with mill owners. The first mill owners' meeting took place on September 15, 2021.

A lens:

- What helps each mill individually?
- What helps the mills collectively?
- What helps Easthampton?
- Where does public funding fit?

Actions will be generalized on the following pages to create space for deeper planning activities without locking in particular project efforts. They should be adjusted to remediate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mills and tenants with additional studies being conducted as needed.

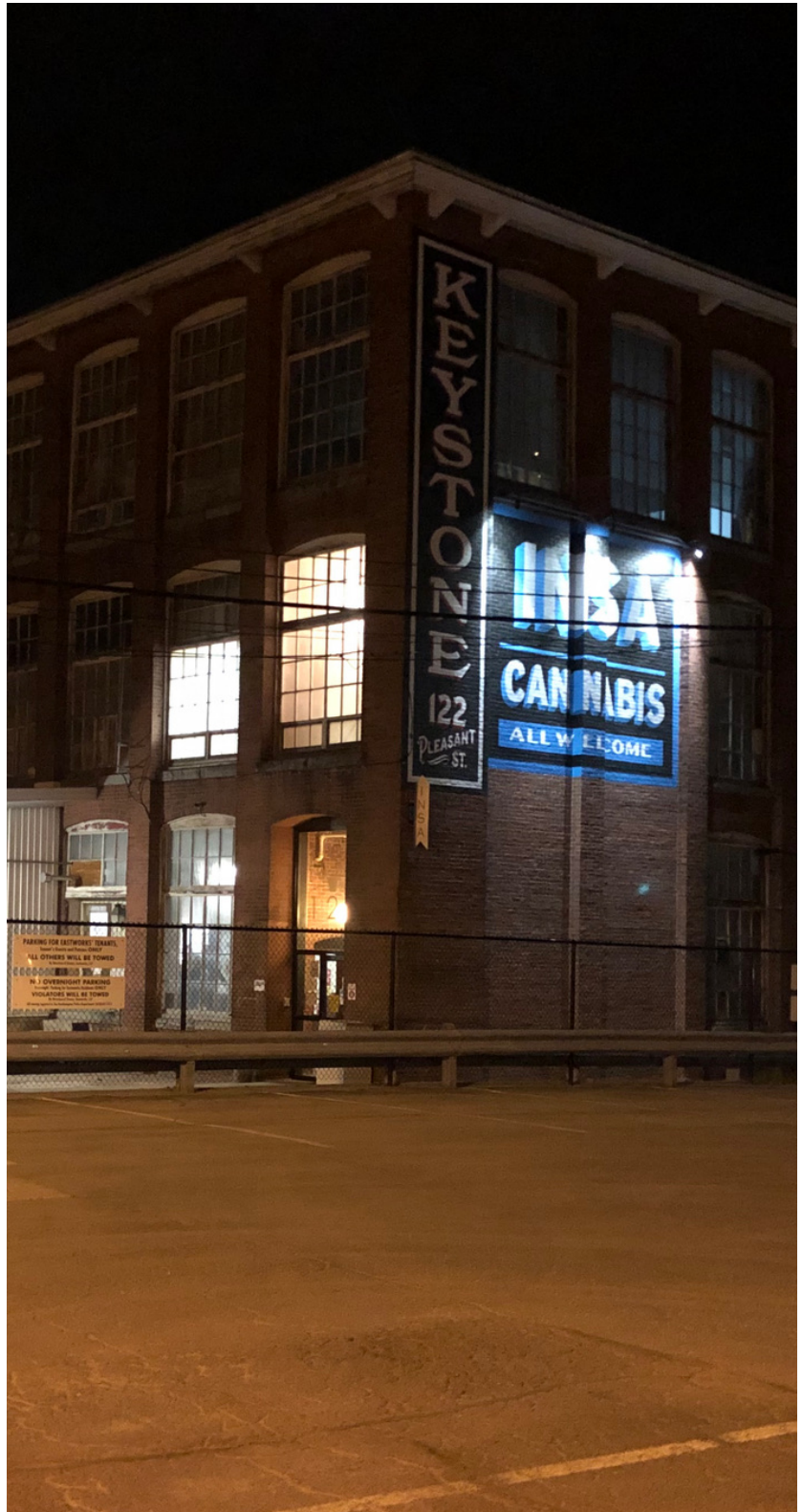


Image of Keystone Mill on Pleasant Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Process

PRE-PLANNING:

Confirm project management and core team. Ensure all mill owners have been briefed on planning objectives and agree to participate, including providing key data. [Note: This proposal outlines a process that focuses on mill owners as key stakeholders, with the intent to build capacity and collaboration among a distinct set of abutting property owners. The Creating Connections proposal, which addresses a geography inclusive of the Mills District, outlines a participatory planning process to serve a very broad set of stakeholders.]

Work among all parties to agree to plan development scope. It is to be expected that the level of detail of some plan elements may change as information unfolds in the planning process. Create a planning process that allows for some iteration to take place.

Assemble baseline data for each mill project as well as other critical project data to put the district transformation in context. Develop a preliminary Gantt chart that puts all project schedules on the same page. Present this information as part of the first plan development session.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT SESSION TOPICS:

Develop the Mills District Shared Vision and Enhancement Plan through a series of hands-on sessions to address key questions and to find opportunities for further collaboration:

Develop a shared vision for the Mills District. Discuss individual project aspirations and intent and allow all property owners to convey or articulate how their projects will contribute to community and economic development in Easthampton. Confirm ideas and themes where there is the strongest overlap and note any ideas that may be in conflict if fully realized.

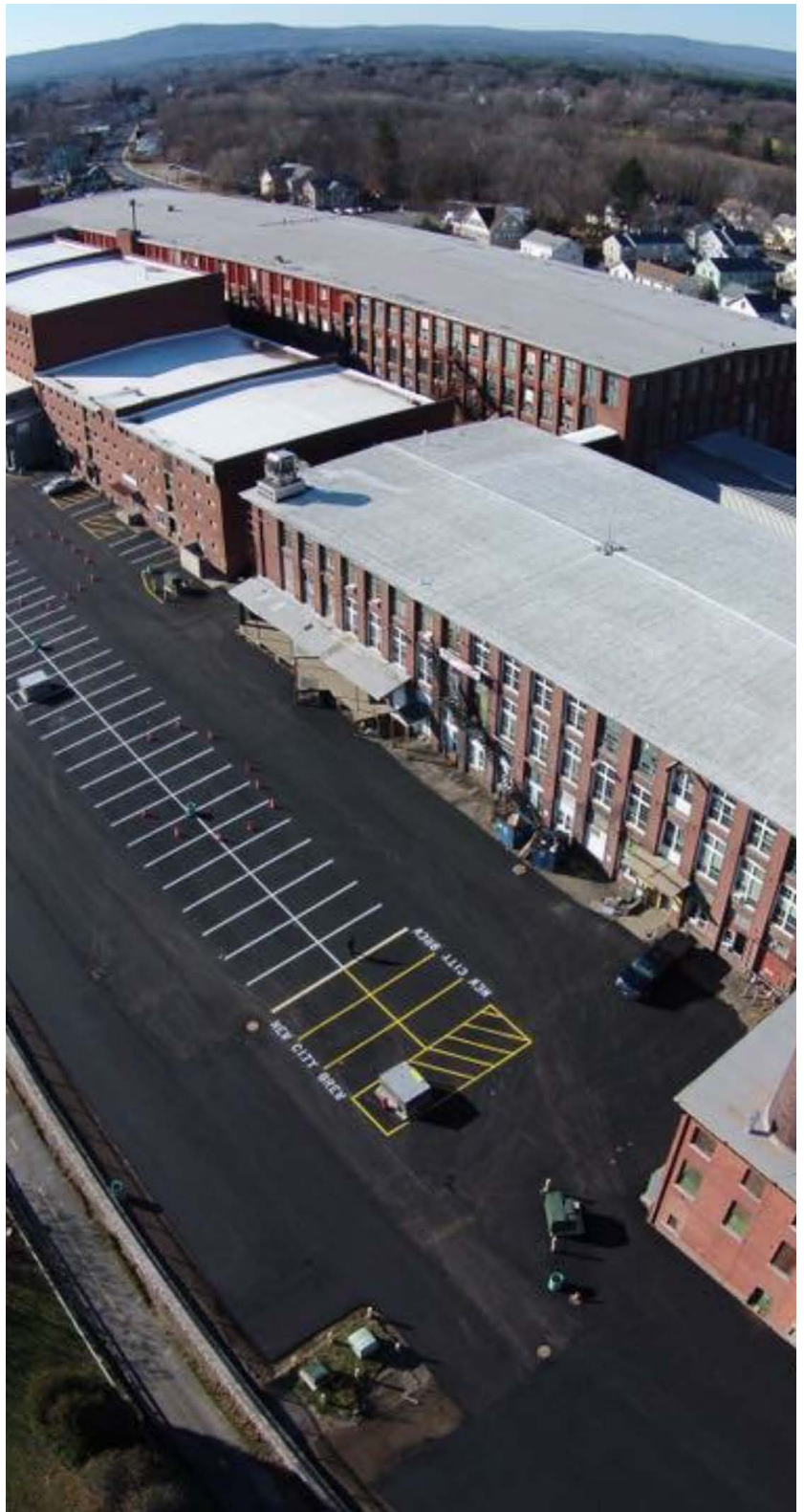
Comprehensive Space Utilization Program Analysis:

Discuss the impact that COVID-19 has had on projects individually as well as what it means for the district.

Discuss details and status of space utilization programs, including interior and exterior spaces, for each building. By looking at program across all buildings, there may be ways to amplify positive synergies and mitigate conflicts or eliminate them altogether.

Progress / Gap Analysis:

Determine what common needs exist to expedite [progress in the private sector](#) for individual building revitalizations. Gaps to be addressed may include:



Aerial view of the Mill District. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Process

- Market data to inform key decision-making (e.g., the changing nature of the housing market and housing trends post COVID-19).
- Insight on state and federal funding programs, including changes post-COVID-19.
- Financing partners and tax credit specialists
- Key tenants and/or operators
- Other technical assistance

For any areas where there is strong consensus about need, move forward in securing technical assistance through key programs (e.g., MA Downtown Initiative, Mass Development, etc.).

Determine what common needs exist around enhancement of the public realm and/or access to the district.

Needs already identified include:

- Streetscaping access roads
- Expand parking along Pleasant street and around the mills
- Implement façade and lighting improvements

Establishing consensus on needs and priorities is critical for informing decision making on local and state public realm funding. Further, this may start the process for working toward the next round of MassWorks grant funding and/or MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces funding.

Property owners and city staff should work together create an efficient process to ensure that property owners stay in the know about public sector projects. This can be achieved simply by having city staff provide an update at regularly scheduled mill owners' meetings.

Community engagement: How can Easthampton paint a picture, or develop a shared road map, that shows the entire community—inclusive of stakeholders (e.g., property owners, lenders, town staff, tenants, etc.)—how this work is coming together (i.e., “Show the synergy”)?

District level branding and marketing: How can Easthampton stay in communication about progress, schedule changes, opportunities for involvement, etc.? What narratives about transformation can be built in the process? How can this content and effort be part of the marketing of new developments?

PREPARE VISION DOCUMENT

In addition to articulating a collective vision for the district, the report should outline findings from all work session topics covered, key agreements reached, parties responsible for leading, and strategies for ensuring financial

support for each effort – whether this is private funding, public funding, grants or a combination. Possible outcomes include:

Development of a website that shows progress on all projects and puts it in the context of broader redevelopment efforts underway in Easthampton. Each mill owner agrees to provide key content for their redevelopment project profile. All collectively agree to the type of information to be provided and maintained. For areas that are to be determined, decide upon a fair and reasonable approach for providing available content.

Commitments to share market data and co-fund specific market research if needed

Commitments to seek grant funding and share in the cost for specific district improvements

Commitments to participate in a collective branding process, with the renaming/branding the district to distinguish Easthampton's "Mills District" from others in the region (per Mayor LaChapelle) and working to strengthen the brand elements of individual mills.

A plan to develop a comprehensive internal/external **wayfinding system** for the facilities and incorporation of arts-based placemaking throughout. (See “*Creating Connections*” proposal)

A pop-up space coffee bar/community meeting space that is also a place to see physical plans and documentation of community input displayed while experiencing the transformation underway. This could be installed at one location and move to another mill location as development unfolds.

Agreements for in situ pilot activities: Including other types of pop-ups, short lease programs and public art installations, even as planning and construction are underway in certain buildings. Mill owners can, for instance, embed art in construction fencing. A key goal would be to build community relationships as a lead up to attracting tenants and consumers. Providing “temporary” offerings can be a great way to test the market and even to raise capital/investment interest. Examples of piloting might include:

- From temporary co-working to permanent workspace
- From event space to restaurant
- From pop up to permanent store
- From workout space to permanent studio
- From photoshoot to gallery
- From festival location to performance venue

A shared public relations strategy that creates a “birds eye view” and informs the community as well as broader markets about all mill revitalization projects, supported by monthly updates/newsletter /social media updates. The potential to transform Easthampton at this scale is a rare and impactful opportunity that should be documented and celebrated as such.

Adopt Location-based Marketing Platforms for Local Retail Activation





Category	 Revenues and Sales
Location	Census Tracts No. 8223 and 8224.02 (Hampshire County); also Pioneer Valley Region
Origin	Third Eye Network; Easthampton Chamber of Commerce
Budget	 Medium: \$50,000 to \$200,000 including \$140,000 for a local customer loyalty pilot, and \$60,000 for a digital marketplace for two years
Timeframe	 Short-term: Two years
Risk	 Medium: Financial sustainability and community adoption may be challenges. Restrictions to product-based businesses or the number of items permitted by vendors may impact shopper experience (e.g., missed sales opportunities; particularly for those unable to visit physical locations).
Key Performance Indicators	Number of subscribers; user statistics; sales; customer loyalty and satisfaction rates
Partners & Resources	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, along with approximately 43 regional towns, municipalities, chambers, and local businesses. Resources include digital and printed collateral for organizing and promoting this network strategy; funding options include Regional Pilot Project Grant Program and a Small Business Technical Assistance Grant



Image of local businesses on Main Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Diagnostic

The diagnostic phase of the program revealed that 95% of businesses were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, where 53% "established alternative modes to sell and deliver products." These modes include taking advantage of technology-enabled purchasing and delivery services as well as curbside pick-up. Because of the compounding effects of the Digital Divide, not all businesses were able to take advantage of these 21st Century resources and methods. Accordingly, 61% of survey respondents expressed an interest in receiving some kind of technical assistance in order to shift their operations and remain viable given the current environment.

Survey results supported the need for "implementing marketing strategies for the commercial district." The most relevant forms of assistance of interest that informs this project recommendation includes, "participating in shared marketing and advertising" (39%) and "setting up an online store and other online selling channels" (12%). Driving online and foot traffic can alleviate declines in average annual daily traffic resulting from the pandemic. Given Easthampton's relative size and proximity to neighboring municipalities, a regional approach based on the functional economy would bolster tourism to optimize revenue generating activity for local businesses while enabling economies of scale by distributing the costs of technology-based solutions across communities.



Image of local business on Union Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Action Items

Work with local and regional partners to identify towns and municipalities that might want to participate in pilot programs.

Host community conversations to gauge current participation and interest in social media, online selling, and customer loyalty programs.

Identify and select relevant vendors for initiating pilot program communities to implement the strategy (Phase I).

Expand successful programs locally and across the region as resources and interests permit (Phase II).

[Note: Several vendors were consulted for this digital infrastructure development strategy including Cepheid Solutions Inc./Mondofoa, Member Marketplace Inc/Shop Where I Live, and Klosebuy. Refer to their handouts enclosed for additional details.]



Image of Eastworks Mill on Pleasant Street. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Process

- [Establish coordinated communications.](#)

This is a two-part project. The first part is the creation of an organization – either formal or informal. The second step is establishing the resources and processes to get these different constituencies to collaborate and message their respective audiences in a coordinated and complementary manner to build momentum and garner buy-in.

- [Develop an education-certification program.](#)

A managed program could offer a structure for different levels of proficiency. The courses could be offered either via internally developed content or through external content which has been reviewed and approved by an appropriate body (e.g., hub organization, a coordinating committee, the Chamber, and/or city administration).

- [Build or buy community-business directories.](#)

Providing a centralized website to facilitate community engagement, easy information access, and meaningful links to other aspects of the community will help community members find what they are looking for.

- [Expand online local businesses' presence](#)

The strength and value of digital infrastructure depends on the number of internet-enabled businesses and community members that participate. This step involves assisting with sign-up and usage of adopted platforms and resources.

- [Launch a multi-vendor marketplace.](#)

This approach would local/regional small businesses to compete with the large e-tailers by offering broad product selection and the convenience of online shopping, while enabling online sales directly with local retailers. It will be important to onboard a minimum number of retailers to make site usage worthwhile for shoppers, upload their inventory, train them in the management and administration of their e-store, and discuss strategies to leverage their new online sales capability. Most vendors have their own onboarding processes for consideration.

- [Formalize a shared marketing program.](#)

The success of these strategies is not automatic. Once established, ongoing marketing and promotions with support will be vital to long-term adoption. These costs and efforts should be centralized through local and regional partners, like the chamber and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.



Image of local business signage on Cottage Street. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Institutionalize Blueprint Easthampton and Expand the Resource Navigator

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	City of Easthampton (administrative organization); Census Tracts No. 8223 and 8224.02 (Hampshire County); Pioneer Valley Region (resource navigator)
Origin	Mayor LaChapelle, Kasey Corsello, and Third Eye Network
Budget	 High: \$5,000 to form a non-profit, \$212,500 for an executive director, \$217,650 for two community navigators/street liaisons, \$97,125 for an Administrative Assistant for two years each; \$125,000 for Resource navigator expansion and \$750,000 per peer learning cohort of three entrepreneur support organizations
Timeframe	 Short-term: Less than five years
Risk	 Low: The primary risks include raising funding to properly staff the organization once formed as well as identifying sources of funding to sustain the digital infrastructure and peer learning cohort program for entrepreneur support organizations.
Key Performance Indicators	Amount of funds raised, number of partnerships form/maintained, number of new/existing programs; number of businesses and jobs created/retained
Partners & Resources	Easthampton Chamber of Commerce, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, City of Easthampton, MA LGBT Chamber of Commerce, and Black Economic Council of MA; funding considerations include the Regional Pilot Planning Grant, Community Compact IT Grant, MA Downtown Initiative, Build Back Better Regional Challenge



Image of local businesses on Cottage Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Diagnostic

During prior stakeholder interviews with Mayor LaChapelle and her community partners, small businesses were uncertain where to turn for help during the pandemic. The Mayor expressed concerns about informal entrepreneurs with home occupations and smaller less established businesses and initiated the establishment of "Blueprint Easthampton" in November 2020. The intent of the city's entrepreneur-led economic development strategy was to centralize resources and technical assistance offered by entrepreneur support organizations in an online navigator and a printable small business resource guide powered by SourceLink, a program of the University of Missouri System.

Resource partner listings in the resource navigator have far surpassed the City of Easthampton. Additionally, the website for Blueprint Easthampton was set up by the city largely funded by philanthropic investments. Given the threats posed by political risk, long-term sustainability proves to be a challenge for this vital economic development strategy, which can be staved with the establishment of a 501c3 organization. While the rapid recovery planning, the sentiment of expanding the resource navigator across Pioneer Valley was believed to have the potential to spark shared economic prosperity benefiting the city and municipalities across the region.

Action Item

Establish a 501c3 non-profit economic development corporation named Blueprint Easthampton with dedicated personnel focused on community engagement. The entity can maintain a formal relationship with the City of Easthampton by way of a multi-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) designating the entity as a critical partner for local-regional strategic alignment in addition to the Chamber and its prospective foundation.

Hire and designate an executive director and street liaisons (i.e., personnel dedicated to these activities) to support organizational development and assist businesses with navigating network resources.

Partner with Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to rebrand and scale the resource navigator, resource finder and resource rail across the region, and subsequently launch a pilot peer learning cohort of three to six entrepreneur support organizations to begin enhancing the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Hire a director of economic development with requisite support staff to partner with Blueprint Easthampton's future personnel and the Easthampton Chamber of Commerce.



Image of a historic gazebo. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Process

- Form a non-profit entity.

Identify and strive to maintain an odd number of members candidates to serve as founding board members, including the Mayor or her designee(s).

Hire an attorney to complete the entity formation process: File a Certificate of Incorporation with the Commonwealth's Corporations Division, prepare by-laws, request an Employer Identification Number, and register with the Non-Profit Organizations/Public Charities Division, filed for tax exempt status.

Establish banking and begin operations.

Conduct organizing meetings to begin the development of a strategic plan for the organization. Prepare an MOU with the city.

- Hire dedicated staff to manage operations.

This continuity strategy requires human and financial resources to promote operational effectiveness. Salary data was benchmarked to average median salaries for select Standard Occupation Classifications based on calculations for Massachusetts obtained from www.onetonline.org, including:

- 11-1011.00 - Chief Executives
- 21-1099.00 - Community and Social Service Specialists, All Other
- 43-6014.00 - Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive

- Scale entrepreneurial ecosystem building.

An entrepreneurial ecosystem is "a network of people supporting entrepreneurs, and the culture of trust and collaboration that allows them to interact successfully. The speed at which talent, information, and resources move through the ecosystem can affect entrepreneurs at each stage in their lifecycle" (www.kauffman.org/ecosystem-playbook).

Partner with a regional planning or economic development organization to rebrand and scale the resource navigator, resource finder and resource rail across the region, and subsequently launch a pilot peer learning cohort of three to six entrepreneur support organizations to scale ecosystem enhancement.

- Hire an economic development director with requisite support staff.



Image of Easthampton Congressional Church on Main Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Advance Equitable, Inclusive Recovery with Undoing Racism® Workshops





Category	 Admin Capacity
Location	City of Easthampton
Origin	Third Eye Network
Budget	 <p>Medium: Hosting three or more workshops annually can surpass \$50,000 with the following cost categories, \$13,500 to \$16,500 per workshop fee; up to \$5,000 for hosting fees (e.g., facility rentals, catering, supplies, and decorations); up to \$2,500 for marketing and promotions</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term: The city hosted two workshops between August 2021 and October 2021. Additional workshops can be offered on an ongoing basis.</p>
Risk	 <p>Low: The topics of “race” and “racism” can prove daunting for some community members, which can result in increased conflict and morale issues if not properly guided and supported following the workshop.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Participation Rate: Number of participants, number of workshop alumni, percent of engaged workshop alumni. Learning and development: Embedding a racial equity lens into the work to ensure economic recovery efforts inclusive and culturally relevant; sense of belonging, local social/cultural climate
Partners & Resources	The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, sponsoring organizations; facilities (e.g., physical workshops), conferencing software (e.g., virtual workshops), catering; funding includes Planning Assistance Grants, Grow Grant, Young Leader Grant, Community Change Grant, and the Urban Agenda Planning Grant



Image of a boarded up building at the intersection of Main Street and Pleasant Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Diagnostic

Multiple racially-motivated incidents have transpired across the community that has led to a number of progressive actions by the City of Easthampton to address racial disparities. A local Black Lives Matters coalition formed around the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic underscoring the growing civil unrest resulting from racial disparities experienced by the city's increasingly diverse local student population and residential community. The pandemic seems to have exacerbated these challenges as public officials sought to guide the city's recovery.

In effort to be inclusive from the outset, the Mayor retained the services of local and national consultants to spearhead the development of a "Mayor's Pledge," a "Discovery Weekend" report that identified strategic alternatives for ensuring equitable recovery and growth for diverse local business owners and residents, hosted Undoing Racism® Workshops, and sought to engage community members in culturally appropriate ways. Intentional efforts were also made to diversify representation on the Community Advisory Committee. While People of Color represents 20% of residents located within the study area, and 13% of the city, the Mayor and her leadership team persistently conveyed desires to cultivate a racial equity lens to inform the city's community and economic development activities. The above actions strove to mitigate the compounding effects of the pandemic.

Action Item

Periodically host Undoing Racism Workshops for city staff, city council members, local business owners, developers, community-based organizations, and general community members.

Encourage ongoing community conversations about "race," "racism," and intersectional identity statuses (e.g., age, gender, class, LGBTQ, etc.) to establish common ground and co-create solutions to social and economic challenges.

Explore resources provided by The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, Government Alliance for Racial Equity, National League of Cities (Race Equity and Leadership Initiative), Living Cities (Closing the Gaps Network), 1000conversations.org, and "Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence" by Derald Wing Sue.

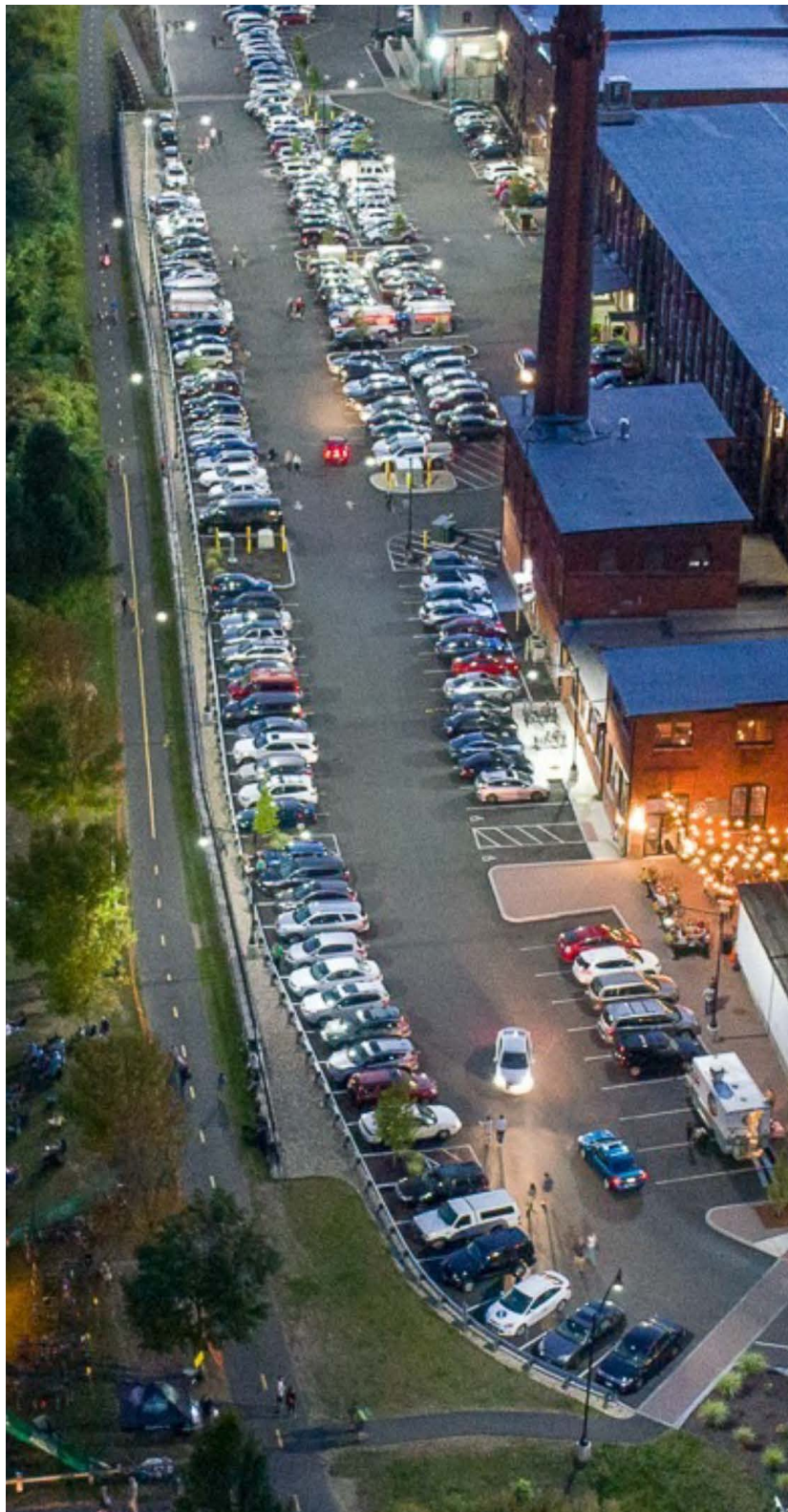


Image of Mill District parking lot. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Process

Refer to the handout, “Ten Steps to Hosting” an Undoing Racism®/Community Organizing Workshop, by The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond for additional details.

- Become Familiar!

Learn about the People’s Institute, the Undoing Racism®/Community Organizing Workshop and our trainers by visiting www.pisab.org or connecting with the Undoing Racism® Organizing Collective (UROC) based out of Springfield.

- Clarify your needs.

Why does your organization or community want to host the Workshop?

Are there specific concerns that you hope this workshop will address?

Is there some particular incident, event or pressure that is causing your organization or community to consider hosting a workshop?

- Identify your constituency.

Determine if the workshop be an in-house training, with partnering organizations, and/or for the community at large with a diverse mix of anticipated participants.

- Contact the People’s Institute.

Call the National Office at (504) 301-9292 to ask questions and “get the ball rolling.”

- Request a preliminary consultation.

Sponsoring organizations should meet with the trainers (via conference call) prior to the workshop.

- Access organizational finances.

Work with the National Office to discuss the workshop fee and allocate sufficient resources for hosting (e.g., supplies, catering or food vouchers for virtual workshops).

- Set a workshop date.

Discuss potential dates with the Logistics Coordinator and complete the Workshop Information Form.

- Meet with the trainers.

To clarify needs, discuss expectations, establish goals, and develop an agreement for working together.

- Make workshop arrangements.

Provide participants with workshop overview materials and expectations for participation.

- Promote the workshop!

Use multiple avenues to get the word out.



Image of patrons at Nashawannuck Pond Promenade. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Develop the WorkHub on Union and the Community Business Academy

Category	 Tenant Mix
Location	Union St., Census Tract No. 8224.02 (Hampshire County)
Origin	Chamber of Commerce, National League of Cities/Kauffman Foundation City Innovation Ecosystem Commitments Program
Budget	 Medium: \$50,000 – \$200,000 for the costs of facility development, program licensing, staffing, and marketing and promotion
Timeframe	 Short Term: Less than five years
Risk	 Low: Identifying entrepreneurs operating informally is no easy feat, since there is no central repository that can be used as a start list.
Key Performance Indicators	Number of business served; number of businesses formalized; conversion rate
Partners & Resources	Easthampton Chamber of Commerce (lead); City of Easthampton; Rising Tide Capital; funding considerations include Regional Pilot Project Grant Program, MA Downtown Initiative Program



Image of the Easthampton Chamber of Commerce and a local business on Union Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Diagnostic

The Easthampton Chamber of Commerce is the primary entrepreneur support organization within the city. The chamber is located Union street, the center of Easthampton's Downtown Commercial District, making it accessible to businesses throughout the city. During early conversations throughout the diagnostic phase of the program, Mayor LaChapelle regularly expressed concerns about the well-being of businesses operating informally (e.g., home-based, online, and mobile businesses that may operated without registration, permits, and licensure) who were and remain unable to access public resources such as Payroll Protection Program Loans and COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loans due to their informal status.

This project recommendation was derived from businesses impacted by the above circumstances and the data indicating that 61% of survey respondents expressed an interest in receiving some kind of technical assistance. The most prominent areas included, "participating in shared marketing and advertising" and "training on the use of social media." The WorkHub on Union will bring small businesses together in a community of support and create opportunities for collaboration among small business owners while centralizing small business development activities.

Action Item

Establish The WorkHub on Union within the chamber building in order to establish a cowork space with virtual office options to create pathways to legitimacy for small businesses operating in the informal economy.

Develop and/or enhance small business services (e.g., targeted technical assistance and capacity building programs) including the adoption of Rising Tide Capital's Community Business Academy model.

Adopt an organizational client relationship management system like Salesforce to enable case management and data tracking capabilities for measuring performance

Establish a 501c3 not-for-profit chamber foundation to capitalized on capacity building activities such as fundraising, tax-deductible donations, and staff development. [Refer to page 39 for the process on forming a non-profit entity.]



Image of local businesses on Cottage Street. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Process

Establish The WorkHub on Union.

- Prepare a request for proposals with a detailed scope of work with requirements.
- Solidify the project budget and secure the necessary permits and approvals.
- Monitor the execution of the project work.
- Launch cooperative marketing programs for tenants

Adopt the Community Business Academy.

• Complete a Readiness Assessment:

Speak with the Rising Tide Capital representatives to learn about the Affiliate opportunity and start mapping the “fit.” Complete the readiness assessment that includes an environmental scan of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem and an organizational scan of the operator(s).

• Complete the Application and MOU:

Affiliate will complete an application which includes:

- A Statement of Purpose and Vision
- A brief statement on strategic fit
- A 2-year operational plan including a basic budget and fundraising plan

The Affiliate and RTC will sign an MOU confirming their interests in signing an Affiliate agreement.

• Handle Local Preparations and Scheduling:

The length of this period will depend on existing personnel, infrastructure, and financial resources available to the Affiliate. At a minimum, the Affiliate will secure and allocate \$20,000 for the License Acquisition and Training fee and identifying two candidates to be trained as Community Business Academy Instructors.

The Affiliate and RTC will confirm attendance at an upcoming Affiliate Training and a proposed launch date for the Community Business Academy. Typically, three-months are anticipated between the start of training and the launch of an academy (e.g., begin training by June 15th to successfully recruit and launch a cohort by September 15th).

• Execute the Licensing Agreement:

Sign the formal licensing agreement and Affiliate will transfer the License Acquisition Fee to RTC.

• Complete the Trainer Training:

Affiliate training will occur across two modules delivered in a cohort setting to diversify the learning environment and build connections between Affiliates.

Module 1: Mission Basics and Administration
Module 2: Instructor Training

• Launch the Academy:

Once trained, market and administer the program.



Image of a local business on Cottage Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Accelerate the Development of the CitySpace Theater in Old Town Hall





Category	 Cultural/Arts
Location	Old Town Hall. Census Tract No. 8224.02 (Hampshire County)
Origin	Based on input from city residents following a survey conducted by City staff
Budget	 First floor: \$35,000; Second floor: \$2.7M
Timeframe	 First floor: Fall 2021, Second floor; Construction to begin in late 2022 through to 2023/early 2024
Risk	 Low: Fully funding the project by 2022; adhering to regulatory requirements
Key Performance Indicators	Return to the community will include local retail activation, community building, cultural vibrancy, some tax revenue from concessions, historic preservation
Partners & Resources	CitySpace, City of Easthampton, Easthampton City Arts, Big Red Frame, Easthampton Community Preservation Act, Main St. Historic District, and Galaxy; significant financial support has been provided by over 350 donors including Bank ESB, Mass Cultural Council, Mass Development; additional considerations include the TDI Creative Catalyst, Competitive Tourism Grants, and the Hometown Grant Program



Image of CitySpace Theater Facility (Old Town Hall). Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Diagnostic

This project was started before the pandemic began, but the value of its continuance is consistent with survey respondents' interests in having "more cultural events and activities that bring people into the district."

This project would bring additional shared parking opportunities to the district, which was also generally identified during the diagnostic phase of the Rapid Recovery Planning program as a need by the business community who favored "changes in parking availability, management, and policies," while generating additional foot traffic for the commercial district.

Accordingly, "58% of businesses had less on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than they did before COVID," and "35% of businesses reported a reduction of 25% or more."

For these reasons, investing in this project would bring vibrancy, additional parking, and retail opportunities to Easthampton's Downtown Commercial Districts.

Action Items

Create an affordable cultural space for the arts by update the first floor performance space.

Renovate the 3,500 square foot space on the second floor of the facility.

Add additional shared parking to accommodate theater patrons and shoppers frequenting local establishments in the Downtown Commercial Districts.



Image of Main Street Park. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

Processes

- First Floor Renovations

These activities involve updating the first floor performance space.

Review code requirements

Prepare a request for proposals with a detailed scope of work with requirements

Solidify the project budget

Secure the necessary permits and approvals

Monitor the execution of the project work

- Second Floor Renovations

These activities include adding an elevator and theatrical lighting, restrooms, greenroom, and an office.

Prepare a request for proposals with a detailed scope of work with requirements

Work with selected contractors to explore possible configurations

Obtain and approve possible schematics in adherence with state, local, and industry requirements

Solidify the project budget for each renovation project

Secure the necessary permits and approvals

Monitor the execution of the project work

Host a launch event once all projects are complete and market the theater's programs

- Shared Parking Lot

Since parking is a major constraint that regularly surfaces in local reports and community conversations, the development of shared parking was scoped into this project.

Prepare a request for proposals with a detailed scope of work with requirements (e.g., lot size, number of parking spaces, etc.)

Work with selected contractors to explore possible configurations

Obtain and approve possible schematics in adherence with state, local, and industry requirements

Solidify the project budget for each renovation project

Secure the necessary permits and approvals

Monitor the execution of the project work



Image of bike rack and local businesses on Main Street. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Expand the Easthampton Cultural District to all of Downtown





Category	 Cultural/Arts
Location	Census Tracts No. 8223 and 8224.02 (Hampshire County)
Origin	Easthampton City Arts
Budget	 Medium: \$50,000 to \$200,000 including the initial expansion of the District; \$5,000 to \$10,000 for branding, \$50,000 to \$75,000 to develop a master plan for the district, with initial implementation costs to be determined; ongoing cultural district strategies may exceed \$200,000 over time.
Timeframe	 Short-term: 6 to 9 months estimated. An additional 12 to 18 months allotted for strategic planning. Implementation and activation will be ongoing.
Risk	 Low: Designations of cultural districts are handled at the state level. This may impact the ability to expand the district from a timeline perspective. Medium: Staffing constraints presents a challenge for effort since one person currently convenes meetings and supports the current geography.
Key Performance Indicators	Phase 1: Massachusetts Cultural Council approval. Dependent upon the number of partners involved. Phase 2: Strategic master plan. Increase in foot traffic, decrease in vacancy rates, increase in sales for businesses, increase in cultural programming, increase in new businesses that open after 1 to 2 years, and number of social media mentions.
Partners & Resources	City of Easthampton Planning Department, Easthampton City Arts and the Cottage Street Cultural District Subcommittee, Blueprint Easthampton, Chamber of Commerce, Massachusetts Cultural Council, Hampshire County Regional Tourism Council, Friends of Manhan Rail Trail, and downtown businesses



Image of a community event. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Diagnostic

Survey respondents expressed interest in the development of "more cultural events/activities to bring people into the district." The shutdown led to cancellation of several existing cultural events including Cultural Chaos, Winter Fest, Book Fest, and Spot Lot events. An expansion of the cultural district would spur additional opportunities for cultural community engagement, which would also afford significant economic benefits for food and retail establishments across the districts. Unstructured survey feedback from small business respondents called for "more street festivals."

The shutdown also negatively impacted all brick-and-mortar establishments including those within the current Cottage Street Cultural District where events and retail activity generally positively reinforces one another. With businesses operating at a fraction of their full capacity and for fewer hours following a period of temporary closures and cancelled cultural events, an expansion of the cultural district would enable all major commercial corridors within the study area to generate foot traffic through culture-based activities. It would also attract new art investment opportunities that could be targeted for each commercial corridor and their surrounding communities throughout the expanded cultural district.



Image of the Cottage Street Cultural District sign. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Action Item

Expand the existing Cottage Street Cultural District to include Union, Main, and Pleasant Streets (see adjacent map).

Create momentum with the establishment of a broad-based arts coalition comprised of partnering organization, funders, and community advocates to enhance public programs, public art, events, and marketing for the cultural district.

Produce a district-wide strategic master plan to create a road map for implementing a vision for the newly expanded cultural district over the next ten years.

Hire an events manager and a few coordinators to transition away from volunteer organizers in order to sustain the work.



Artistic map of downtown Easthampton. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Process

Phase 1: Establish Goals for District Expansion

The City of Easthampton should consider goals for expansion and list the opportunities available by doing so. It will also be imperative to clarify the problems or challenges to be solved by the expansion. Inventory and map the cultural assets in the district, including:

- Cultural organizations
- Destinations
- Educational institutions
- Creative businesses
- Food and dining
- Events and activities
- Public spaces and parks
- Historic buildings and narratives

For an outsider perspective on the existing and expanded districts, consider searching online visitor sites (e.g., TripAdvisor; visithampshirecounty.com/explore/destinations/easthampton; etc.) for useful information about the city's image, messages conveyed to "visitors" before they arrive, etc.

Examine the MCC Cultural District requirements: massculturalcouncil.org/communities/cultural-districts/application-process/

Consider options for meeting the compact and walkable requirement:

- Cottage street is 1/3 mile long
- Proposed Union Street is almost ½ mile long
- Proposed Main Street segment is less than 1/4 mile long
- Proposed Pleasant Street is almost 1 mile long

Contact the MCC to discuss options for expansion as the combined length of proposed district is approximately 2 miles long. Each of the four segments are unique – can there be a special larger district with four distinct zones? Should more than one district be designated with the same overall partnership structure? These questions should be answered early in the process and at the end of this Phase of work.

The phases below assume that expansion of the district can be accomplished in one or more ways.



Image of local businesses and a family biking on Cottage Street. Photo Credit: City of Easthampton

Process

Phase 2: Establish a Working Group

Involving possible partners and advocates in early planning is critical to long-term success and widespread support. Consider city-wide stakeholders and potential long-term partners in the process.

The Cottage Street Cultural District Subcommittee of Easthampton City Arts should be enlarged to represent the entire new proposed district which has four distinct sections. Consider a Working Group that encompasses:

- Public sector (e.g., planning, possibly transportation, economic development, etc.)
- City-wide and regional stakeholders who can offer resources, ideas, and momentum for the effort
- Key players (e.g., business owners, property owners, destinations) from each of the sections of the proposed cultural district
 - Cottage Street (existing subcommittee)
 - Union Street
 - Main Street
 - Pleasant Street

Roles for the Working Group:

- Set goals
- Set principles for planning and implementation
- Set and oversee the workplan
- Raise funds with the assistance of Easthampton City Arts
- Select a consultant, if needed
- Act as transitional subcommittees for the expanded cultural district

Phase 3: MASS Cultural Council Application

Because the City already has the Cottage Street District, application for expansion should be relatively simple.

Identify goals and objectives from Phase 1.

Articulate how the existing district management plan will change with the expansion of the district.

Describe the new district marketing plan.

Using goals from Phase 1, develop metrics to assess progress on objectives. Consider possible unique metrics for the four segments (i.e. vacancies may be more an issue in one area than another, or building an image may be a focus area for one area more so than others, etc.)

Assuming the expanded district is approved, the following are next steps:

Phase 4: Strategic/Master Plan

A new, expanded cultural district offers new opportunities and will also require new strategies, resources, and partners. A strategic master planning process can explore possibilities and needs, building public support, identify funding options and partners, and set a road map with goals and metrics for moving forward.

Does Easthampton City Arts and the Working Group have the capacity and expertise to complete a strategic master plan for the district?

- If so, what is the timeline and what are roles and expectations?
- Is professional assistance needed for any parts of the plan? The entire plan?
- If help is needed, consider State resources: <https://massculturalcouncil.org/communities/cultural-districts/resources/>
- Keep in mind that a manager or coordinator will be needed when using state resources.
- If a professional consultant is needed, prepare a work plan and request for proposals.

Interview candidates, and contract for assistance.

A strategic master planning process should take 7-12 months and the plan should include:

- Reason for the plan
- Context (e.g., existing assets, urban design analysis of district, public art opportunities, local-regional history, political and economic environment)
- Needs assessment (stakeholder outreach and community input regarding what is needed, challenges, and hopes)
- Vision statement and themes of the plan (in this case, articulation of the character of the three areas of the proposed district)
- Goals and recommendations
- Implementation plan with priorities, roles, funding sources, best practices, metrics for success

Phase 5: Action

Implementation of the plan will require additional resources including:

- Events manager
- Support staff
- Marketing
- Fundraising

Focus should be on partnerships and alignment with other initiatives outside of arts and culture to broaden funding and opportunities for deeper connections with community, employers, and city initiatives (e.g., public health – walking and street closure events in the district; teen mentorship – murals and temporary artwork; education – partnerships with theatre/music at public schools, etc.)

Appendices

Summary of Attachments

PUBLIC REALM

- A. Selbert Perkins Design Collaborative Memo - Best Practices and Recommendations Signage and Wayfinding
- B. Selbert Perkins Design Collaborative Memo - Signage and Wayfinding for Towns and Cities - Rubric Guide
- C. Stantec Deck - Mobility SME Toolkit - Mobility Plan Guide
- D. Stantec Deck - Mobility SME Toolkit - Parking Plan Guide
- E. Zapalac Deck - Embedding Arts and Culture in Real Estate and Infrastructure

PRIVATE REALM

- F. Eastworks Deck - Initial Opportunity Summary
- G. Fluidity Professional Qualifications 2021
- H. Zapalac Deck - Mills District Revitalization

REVENUE AND SALES

- I. Mondoforma Memo - Digital Infrastructure Strategy for Easthampton
- J. Pitch Deck - Klosebuy
- K. Shop Where I Live - Information Booklet
- L. Shop Where I Live - Site Success Plan

CULTURAL/ARTS

- M. Case for Support - The Transformation Campaign for Easthampton's Old Town Hall
- N. CitySpace Easthampton - Strategic Plan
- O. Project Timeline - Easthampton's Old Town Hall 2nd Floor Renovation