



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Easton, MA



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



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

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

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

For more information, contact DHCD:
100 Cambridge St, Suite 300
Boston, MA 02114
617-573-1100
mass.gov/DHCD

Acknowledgements



Easton, MA

Stephanie Danielson, AICP
Director of Planning and Economic Development



Plan Facilitator

Heather Gould, AICP, Director of Planning

Subject Matter Expert for Transportation

Michael Santos, PE, PTOE, Traffic Engineer

Subject Matter Expert for Open Space

Rachel Salch, PLA, Landscape Architect



Subject Matter Expert for Administrative Capacity

Jeff Levine, AICP, Owner



Subject Matter Expert for Placemaking

Jonathan Berk, New England Director, Bench Consulting

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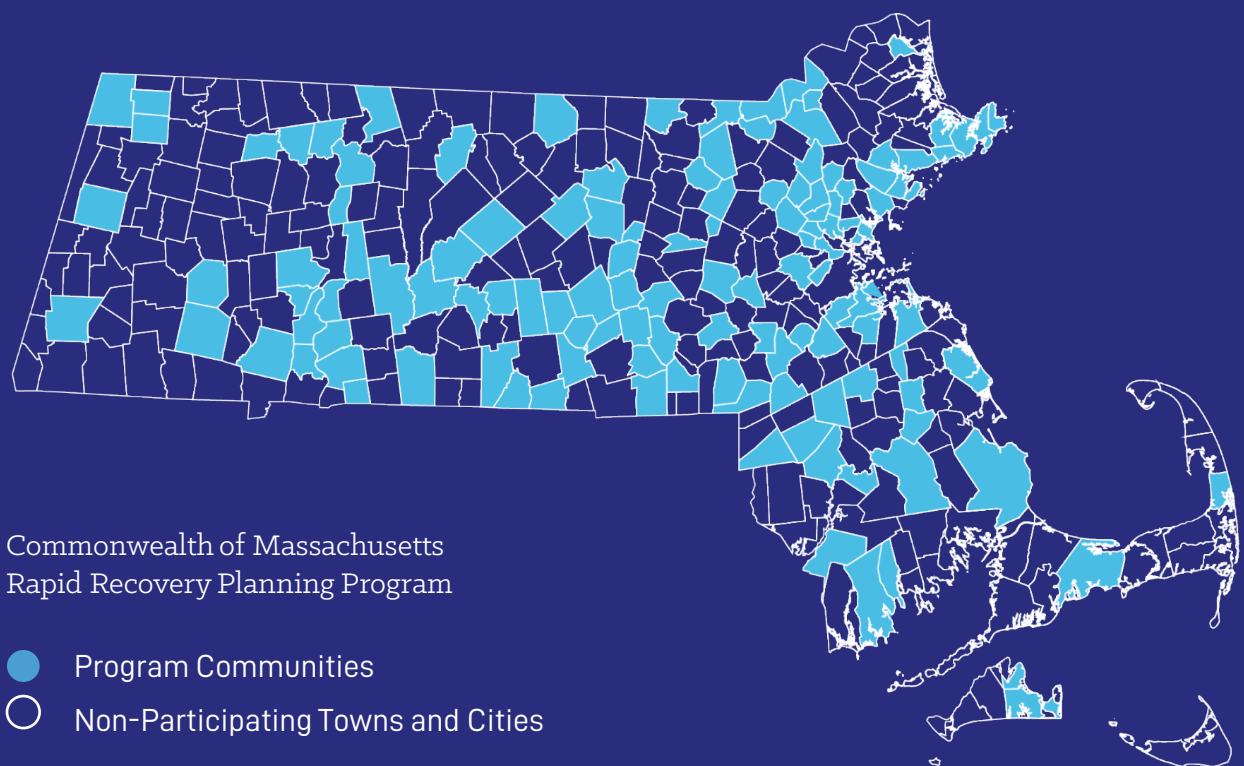
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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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.



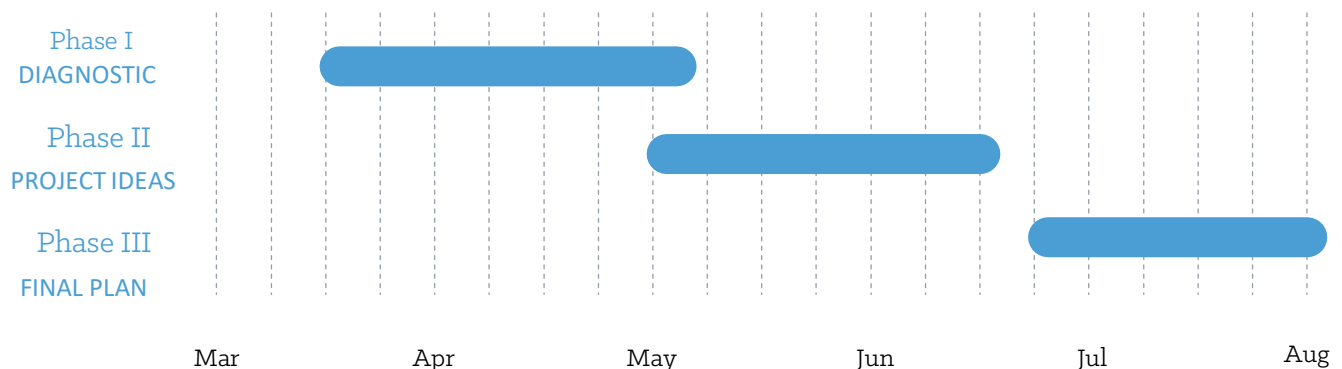
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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.

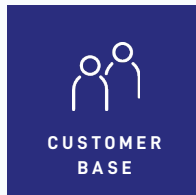
Each Rapid Recovery Plan was developed across three phases between February-August 2021. Phase 1 - Diagnostic, Phase 2- Project Recommendations, Phase 3 - Plan.



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



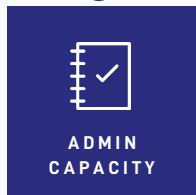
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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

Easton's Queset Commercial District – A Corridor in Transition

The Queset Commercial District runs approximately 0.8 miles along Washington Street (Route 138) from Belmont Street to the north to Depot Street to the south. This portion of Washington Street consists of two travel lanes in each direction and presents mostly as single-story strip plazas and service-oriented commercial development. The entire portion of Washington Street within Easton falls under MassDOT jurisdiction as a state-controlled highway. Based on the MassDOT Road Inventory Database, traffic counts are in the 13,000-14,000 vehicle/day range.

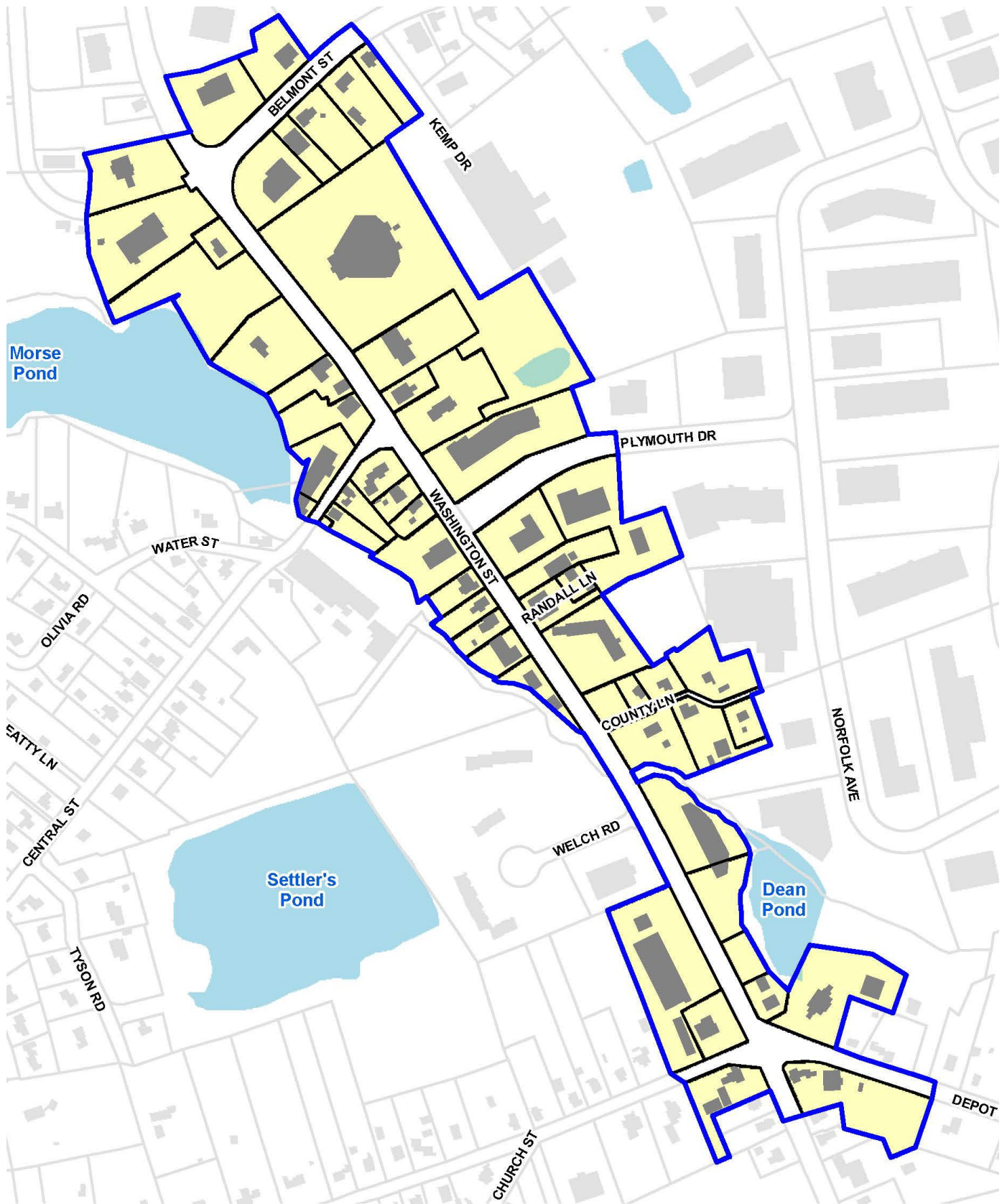
The Easton Industrial Park is just east of the LRRP study area while Stonehill College is to the northeast. To the northwest is Queset Commons, a 40R smart growth development. The Queset Commercial District was re-zoned in 2016 with the intent to promote a more walkable, mixed-use commercial district. Approximately half of the corridor is connected to public sewer, the other half requires private septic systems.

There is approximately 125,000 square feet of retail and 33,000 square feet of office space in the Corridor. Per field data collection, 71 total businesses were documented. The mix of businesses includes, among others, retail trade (21%), other personal services (17%), food services (15%), health care & social assistance (10%), professional, scientific, and technical services (10%). In addition, residential uses are scattered throughout the corridor. There is little to no opportunity for outdoor dining, and while there is open/conservation space surrounding the study area, there are no direct connections from Washington Street.

An assessment of the corridor's physical environment in spring 2021 included the following observations:

- Two large strip plazas, one at each end of the district, are largely unoccupied and account for most storefront vacancies in the corridor. Both plazas sit on large parcels and are prime mixed-use redevelopment opportunities.
- There is limited opportunity for the Town to make public realm improvements relative to the roadway, such as traffic calming or complete streets measures to enrich the comfort and feel of the district without considerable cost and coordination with MassDOT or private property owners.
- Lack of landscaping, lack of property maintenance, old signs/sign clutter, and tired storefronts exist throughout the corridor. This does not encourage motorists to stop and stay in the corridor.
- The Corridor is auto-centric not pedestrian-friendly or accessible. There are poorly marked crosswalks, antiquated traffic control equipment, narrow sidewalks, no shoulders, large curb cuts, and overhead power lines.
- Commercial buildings are set back from the street, and typical of strip mall development, parking is located primarily between the roadway and buildings.

Data collected through business owner surveys, interviews, and meetings revealed the impacts of COVID-19 on the Queset Commercial District. Declines in revenue and reduced operating hours/capacity were commonly reported. Businesses were required to quickly respond to the pandemic, and many reported incurring unanticipated expenses to implement safety measures and establish alternative modes to sell and deliver products.



LRRP Study Area - Queset Commercial District

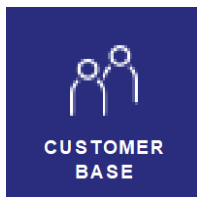
The Town's Recovery will depend on completing public improvements, facilitating private investment to redevelop underutilized sites, and enabling business growth through increased capacity and incentive programs

Based on the economic development goals stated in the Town's Envision Easton Master Plan and Queset Commercial District Economic Development Strategy, coupled with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Queset Commercial District's business community and the findings of the LRRP diagnostic phase, the ten (10) project recommendations listed below will be discussed in greater detail later in this report.

Recommendation	Project Category
1. Upgrade Intersections to Enhance Pedestrian Access and Safety	Public Realm
2. Connect the Corridor to Surrounding Open Spaces	Public Realm
3. Extend Public Sewer Service within the QCD	Public Realm
4. Partner with MassDOT to Redesign the Roadway as a Complete Streets Project	Public Realm
5. Create a Placemaking Plan for the Corridor	Public Realm
6. Implement a Signage Improvement Program	Private
7. Redevelop Underutilized Commercial Space	Private
8. Organize and Build Capacity of the Business Community	Private
9. Hire an Economic Development Coordinator to Support Business Development Efforts	Administrative Capacity
10. Identify and Correct Zoning and Permitting Impediments	Administrative Capacity

Diagnostic

Key Findings



Young and well-educated customer base

Easton is home to 25,679 residents. The population is well-educated with 52% of residents age 25+ having earned a bachelors degree or higher. Median household size is 2.66 people and median household income is \$112,029, higher than neighboring communities of Stoughton, Brockton, Raynham, and Norton and slightly lower than Mansfield. The median age in Easton is 40.9 years. Twenty-five percent of the population is under age 20 and 17% is 65 years or older, a slightly younger age profile than some of its other suburban neighbors. The Queset Commercial District has a smaller household size (1.74 people), lower median household income (\$80,210) and is older (median age is 42.5) compared to the town overall.

Adjacent to the commercial district is Stonehill College, with approximately 2,500 students enrolled, and an industrial park with approximately 1,000 workers. Both are potential sources of customers for local businesses though community stakeholders feel that this potential remains untapped.

Source: ESRI Demographic Indicators, 2020



Vehicle-oriented commercial corridor

Easton's Queset Commercial District is connected by Washington Street/Route 138, a state highway. The road has an average of 13,773 vehicles traveling on it daily (*MassDOT Road Inventory Database*). Community stakeholders report that the road is challenging and unsafe for pedestrians because of the speed of traffic and 2 vehicle travel lanes in each direction. Additionally, the sidewalks and crosswalks connecting the district to Stonehill College, just yards away, are not considered safe enough to encourage students to shop local. MassDOT Region 5 is currently conducting a field survey and considering a road diet for the district.

Stakeholders feel the current condition of the public realm is not inviting. The district lacks shade trees and benches. Too many signs create a cluttered view, and shopping plazas are set too far back. Further, the public sewer line has a limited reach and currently does not connect to the industrial park and other developable properties.

When surveyed, business owners rated improvements of streetscape and sidewalks, improvements in safety and cleanliness, and renovation of storefronts/building facades as their top physical environment strategies to improve the commercial district and support businesses. Community members have also expressed an interest in a walking trail, along the Queset Brook that would provide recreation opportunities, as well as better pedestrian and bike access.

As part of the LRRP, the Queset Commercial District was assessed and received the following scores (A, B, C, or Fail): Sidewalks: C; Street Trees and Benches: F; Lighting: C; Wayfinding/Signage: B; Roadbed and Crosswalks: B.



Service retail, personal services, fast-food, and gas/auto

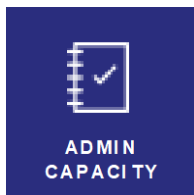
The Queset Commercial District has 71 storefronts including retail, restaurants, banks, and offices. This represents approximately 158,434 square feet of combined retail and office space according to the Town's Assessor's database. Eighteen of the 71 storefronts were vacant during April 2021 site visits, with two known business closures occurring since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

Seventy-one businesses operate within the commercial district. (This includes buildings with one storefront but multiple tenants.) Retail trade represents the highest proportion of businesses in the district at 21%, followed by other services (salons, laundry/dry-cleaning, etc.) at 17%, then accommodation and food services (15%) and health care and social assistance (10%). Community stakeholders note that hotel rooms are needed to accommodate visitors to Stonehill College and the industrial park, currently visitors stay in Brockton, Randolph and Raynham.

There is no outdoor dining and selling in the district. Many facades need improvements and storefront windows and lighting did not contribute to an inviting, safe, or cohesive feel to the district. As part of the LRRP, the Queset Commercial District private realm was assessed and received the following scores (A, B, C, or Fail): Storefront windows: C; Outdoor displays/dining: F; Signage: B; Facades: C; Storefront lighting: C.

Chain retail and restaurants include CVS, Wendy's, Verizon, Dunkin', Papa Gino's and D'Angelo Grilled Sandwiches.

At 15.5%, Easton is on the lower end of commercial tax rates in Massachusetts, which has helped attract businesses. In a business survey with approximately 10% response rate, 67% of respondents reported that the regulatory environment does not represent an obstacle to doing business in Easton, the remaining 33% identified "other regulation" (i.e., not licensing, permitting, parking, signage, or outdoor dining) as posing an obstacle.



Limited town resources and staff capacity

The Town is recovering from staff reductions due to COVID. The Easton business community is supported by a 5-staff member Planning & Community Development department, an Economic Development Council, and the Easton Chamber of Commerce. Despite past efforts, a robust business community has not developed in Easton.

During the fall of 2020, #EastonOutside formed to help businesses impacted by COVID-19. The Economic Development Council and Easton Chamber of Commerce began the campaign to promote visiting Easton businesses and demonstrating that Easton businesses were safe. The campaign has expanded to promote recreational facilities as well as local nonprofits. #EastonOutside has continued through the early stages of the COVID-19 recovery and there is interest to continue to encourage families and individuals to come to Easton and enjoy local restaurants, shops, and outdoor amenities.

However, there is no merchant's association or organized business group for the Queset Commercial District. Organizing businesses and expanding their capacity to take on collective actions to advance the goals for the commercial district could be an important step in the Town's COVID-19 recovery efforts.



Low density development along Washington Street; Source: BSC Group

Highlights from the Physical Environment

PROMINENT SUBURBAN LANDSCAPE

The Queset Commercial District study area struggles from a lack of cohesion. Land uses are inconsistent throughout the corridor with residential buildings interrupting low-density, commercial strip mall development. Buildings are generally one-story and set back from the roadway. Typical parking is placed in the front of the parcel between the building and the roadway. Wide curb cuts are in abundance and sidewalks are narrow, providing no safe respite for pedestrians.

There is no sense of arrival into the corridor, no wayfinding, placemaking, or decorative streetscape to act as an attraction. Vehicular speeds are high, and with no buffer between the sidewalk and the road, safety is a concern. It is difficult to establish the district as a destination where people will spend time and visit multiple businesses in a single trip.

The Town is focused on changing this corridor, with recent revisions to zoning, to promote more dense mixed-use development. Focused efforts on promoting walkability and implementing traffic calming measures will go a long way to promoting the environment the Town has envisioned for this corridor.

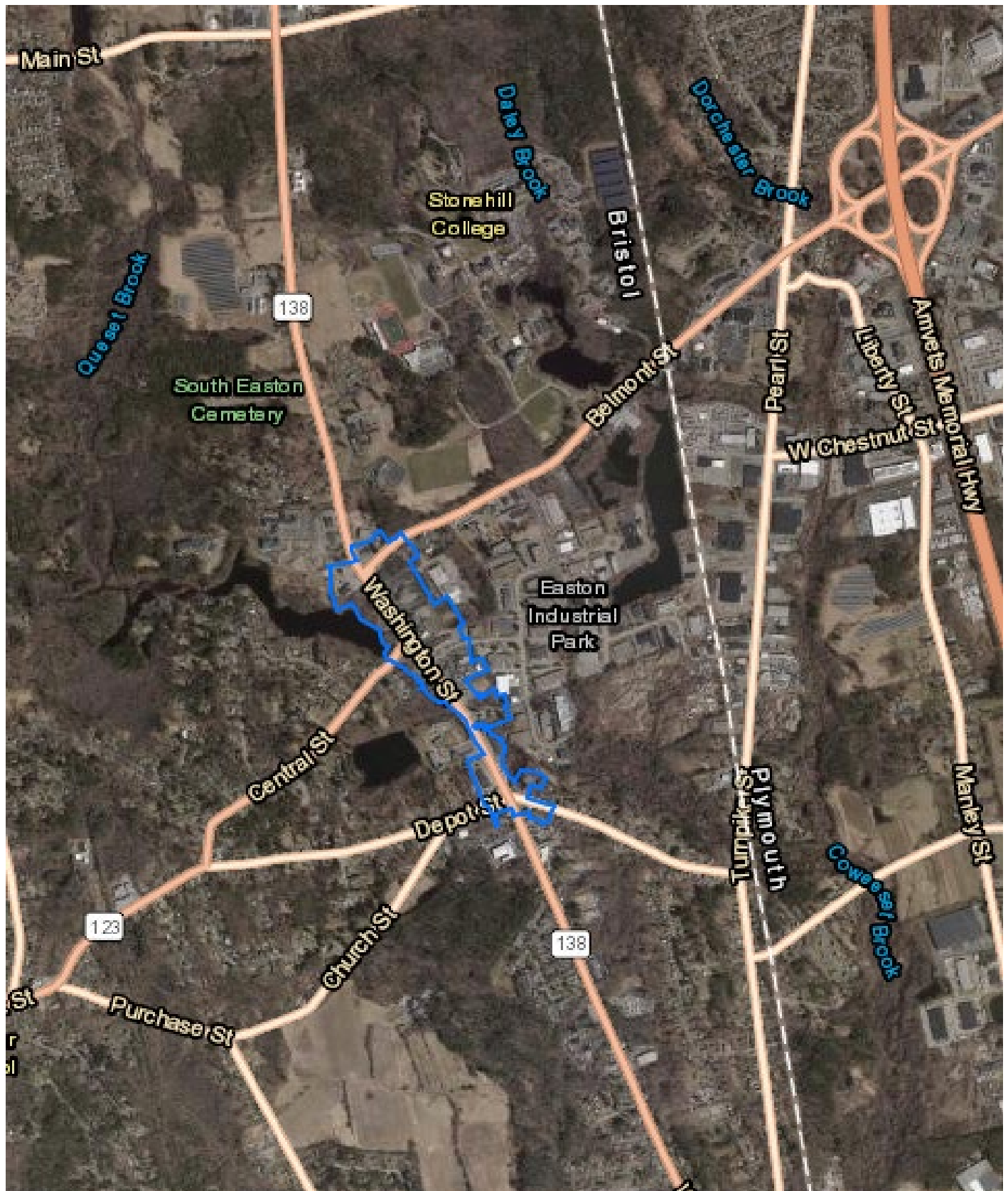
NEW DEVELOPMENT IS LIMITED BY LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Land development is influenced by the availability of public utilities like water and sewer. Public sewer exists in the northern portion of the corridor. However, the southern portion remains connected to private septic systems. This is a constraint on the ability to redevelop currently underused buildings. Septic systems also constraint any business expansion or growth on site.

For those businesses at the south end of the district that remain without public sewer service, capacity is dictated by private septic capacity. Besides maintenance costs to routinely empty septic tanks, there is an environmental concern as well if a leak occurs.

As a state highway, there is no on-street parking on Washington Street. Each business relies on its own private lot which also restricts building placement and business size.

Finally, overhead power lines can be a hazard in extreme weather. Downed power lines can cause power outages.



Map of Easton with LRRP Study Area Outlined in Blue; Source: ESRI GIS



Settlers Pond Source: Estatefy

There are opportunities for public spaces, connections, and creation of an open space network

CONNECTING TO SURROUNDING OPEN SPACE

Parks and recreation are vital to healthy, vibrant, and resilient communities. They also help promote a strong local economy and provide economic benefits such as attracting businesses, increasing property values, and increasing sales at local restaurants. A key challenge identified in the Queset Commercial District is the lack of parks, open space, and green space.

Some businesses mentioned wanting an outdoor space to offer the goods and services they provide. Most survey respondents felt that development of public spaces was an important strategy for supporting businesses and improving the commercial district.

There are several conservation land areas surrounding the corridor but no open spaces or public gathering spaces within the corridor. The creation of a network of existing open space and public spaces in and around the corridor will bring more pedestrians, primarily more residents and college students, as well as trail users into the area. This could stimulate and encourage more walkability throughout the corridor.



Queset Brook Source: BSC Group



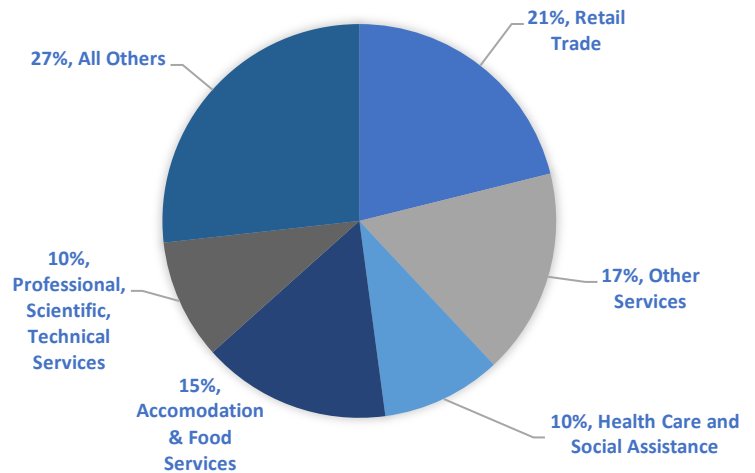
Highlights from the Business Environment

IMPACT OF RETAIL

Retail is changing, and this impacts the corridor. The Queset Commercial District has many service retailers. Service based retail sells services, not products.

There are eight retail plazas along the short stretch of Washington Street between Belmont Street and Depot Street. The Queset Commercial District is a prime location for service retailers due to traffic counts, proximity to nearby residential, Stonehill College, and the Easton Industrial Park.

BUSINESS MIX



Mix of business by NAICS category. Source: BSC Group

MIXED-USE REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Corridor is one of varying conflicts. Some properties have been invested in and maintain a modern façade and updated signage. Others sit vacant or in disrepair. This is the case for strip plazas. A number are maintained and fully occupied with businesses. However, a couple sit vacant with abandoned signage and empty parking lots.





The same is true for residential properties. Some appear maintained, and others are not. Since the residential lots along the corridor are smaller in size, assemblage of adjacent properties into larger development parcels is a possibility. It is especially important for the Town to consider this as it promotes its vision for the transformation of the corridor into a truly mixed-use district.



646 Washington Street. Source: BSC Group

Project Recommendations

Upgrade Intersections to Enhance Pedestrian Access and Safety

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Queset Commercial District/Census Tracts 6001 and 6002.02 (2020)
Origin	Two intersections act as gateways into the QCD, Washington/Depot Street and Washington/Belmont Street. Both have outdated traffic signals, narrow crosswalks, no audible crosswalk signals, and no accessible warning strips. The idea came from the town's LRRP working group.
Budget	 Medium (\$50k - \$200k) / Funding: State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP); Complete Streets; Shared Streets and Spaces; MassWorks Funding; ARPA; Chapter 90; Tax Levy; Developer Agreement
Timeframe	 Short-term – 2-5 years: Pedestrian improvements can be designed and constructed within a five-year timeframe.
Risk	 Medium risk: Risks to this project include the political will (state/local), the process to design and construct the improvements, available funding for the project, and timeline for design to construction.
Key Performance Indicators	Reduction in the number of collisions/accidents; more pedestrian activity; enhanced pedestrian safety; ADA compliant improvements; reduced vehicular speeds.
Partners & Resources	Town, MassDOT, Old Colony Planning Council, Private Developers



Existing conditions at the Washington and Belmont Street intersection
Source: BSC Group

Diagnostic

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted all aspects of transportation. With a shift in work culture, highly traveled corridors may no longer need to carry the vehicle demand they have in the past. This gives a municipality like Easton the opportunity to visit the way its transportation network serves the community. In addition, public health became a major focus during COVID-19. Transportation has many linkages to public health, such as physical activity, noise, vehicle crashes, and air pollution. The Town would benefit from looking at how to make this corridor more resilient, sustainable, multi-modal, and accessible.

The Corridor consists of an approximately 3,000-foot-long segment of Washington Street (Route 138). This segment of Washington Street consists of two travel lanes per direction and serves suburban-style commercial uses. The signalized intersections at Belmont Street and Depot Street are located at the northern and southern ends of the Project area, respectively. A third traffic signal is located at the intersection with Central Street.

Pedestrian accessibility and safety are challenges. The existing traffic signal equipment is outdated, and pedestrian accommodations are lacking at the gateway intersections at Belmont Street and Depot Street. Pedestrian signal equipment is not provided, curb ramps are not ADA compliant, and crosswalks are long and lack good visibility, creating both accessibility and safety issues. Sidewalks throughout the corridor are inadequate and traffic speeds are fast. Sidewalks are poorly defined, missing, or interrupted by wide curb cuts that serve the adjacent businesses throughout the entire corridor.

Safety concerns include high vehicular speeds, vehicular conflicts due to the numerous curb cuts, and lack of turning lanes throughout the corridor. The intersection at Depot Street has a high crash count.

Action Item

These intersections could benefit from an approach that considers traffic calming, updated traffic equipment, better vehicular turning movements, and increased pedestrian safety. Having a conceptual plan in place to show how the intersections could be upgraded would be useful as the town works to reinvigorate this corridor and create a sense of place.

The process for developing a safer corridor and gateway intersection improvements includes a detailed planning and design process that can implement complete streets principles to enhance safety and efficiency for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

A steering committee can be organized to include Town and State officials and Queset Commercial District stakeholders. The steering committee will help guide the process to identify existing issues and potential improvements.

The corridor and the intersections are under MassDOT jurisdiction, which requires the state to implement any improvements. However, it should be noted that the Town is a major stakeholder in the process and should work jointly with MassDOT to ensure that priorities are known, and concerns are sufficiently addressed in any redesign that is planned and implemented.



Gateway Intersection – Washington Street and Depot Street Source: BSC Group

Process / Improvements for Consideration

Work with Old Colony Planning Commission, the MPO, and MassDOT to plan, design, and implement intersection improvements.

Improvements to the QCD transportation network should include improved pedestrian facilities, the addition of bicycle infrastructure, and enhanced safety features. The following are recommendations for improvements to the corridor and at the gateway intersections:

1. Road diet: Review operations of the corridor and consider implementing a road diet for the entire length of the corridor. The cross section of the road can be reduced from two lanes per direction to a single lane per direction with additional turn lanes or a center turn lane to serve turning movements into driveways. A reduction in the number of vehicular lanes will also help to reduce speeds and eliminate conflicts related to left-turns and lane-changing maneuvers by vehicles. A road diet will provide additional width for bicycle facilities and/or widened sidewalks, enhancing pedestrian access and connectivity throughout the corridor. A road diet should be considered after conducting a study of operations. The study should review existing traffic volumes and vehicular speeds to determine if it is feasible while maintaining efficient operations.

2. Intersection improvements: Upgrade traffic signal equipment at the three signalized intersections within the project area. Signals should have backplates to improve visibility. Pedestrian signal equipment should be installed at Belmont Street and Depot Street and upgraded at Central Street. Review operations at intersections to determine if it is possible to convert one of the through lanes along Route 138 to an exclusive turn-lane. This change would allow for protected left-turn movements to occur. Review Belmont Street and Depot Street approaches to consider reducing width, eliminate channelizing islands, and reducing pedestrian crossing lengths.

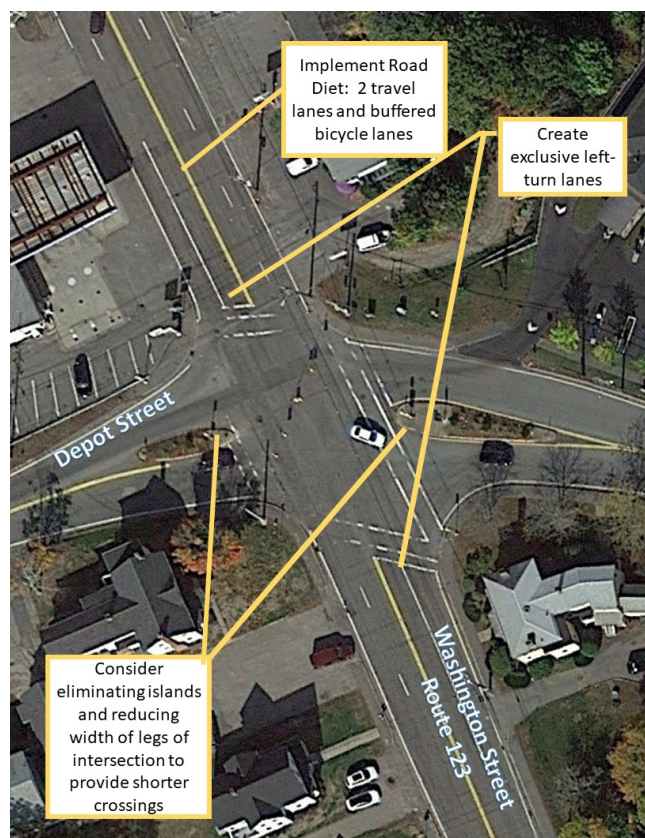
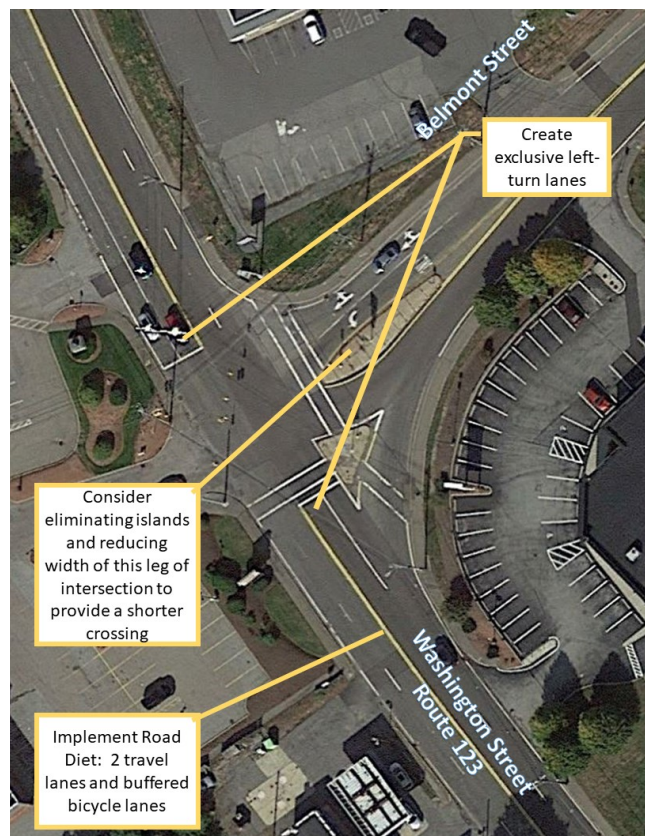
3. Pedestrian improvements: Install ADA-compliant curb ramps with detectable warning panels for all crosswalks. Repaint crosswalks to improve visibility. Consider a continental or ladder style design. Install new pedestrian signal equipment with audible indications at the three signalized intersections. Reconstruct and upgrade sidewalks on both sides of the corridor.

4. Access management: Reduce number of curb cuts and the overall widths of curb cuts. Require any future development or redevelopment to install/improve curb cuts. Require future development to provide internal connections with adjacent parcels to provide better connectivity between commercial properties.

5. Corridor study: This segment of Route 123 should be evaluated in more detail through the preparation of a transportation corridor study. A study will provide the framework for a comprehensive evaluation of issues and development of implementable measures that go beyond improving safety at the gateway intersections.

6. Streetscape elements: Additional streetscape elements such as landscaping and pedestrian-scale street lighting should be considered in combination with other improvements to the corridor.

These types of elements will improve the pedestrian environment and may contribute to a reduction in vehicular speeds along Route 123. Specific recommendations to consider for geometric improvements are shown in the following graphics.



Gateway Intersections – Noted Observations (BSC Group)

Intersection Improvements



Location

Belmont, MA

Project Overview

The Town of Belmont was seeking to improve conditions at three intersections located throughout the suburban community. Traffic and pedestrian safety are key concerns of Belmont officials and residents, and the improvements have been designed to reduce pedestrian/vehicle conflicts. Improvements such as reconfiguring intersection layout and by adding traffic signals with exclusive pedestrian phases have increased safety at these intersections. The first intersection is located near a large, under-utilized traffic island. By reconfiguring the intersection, BSC's landscape architects were able to create a small plaza adjacent to a restaurant. Plantings, varied pavement textures, and a bus shelter for MBTA patrons enhance the intersection's aesthetics.

Contract documents were also provided to improve traffic operations and safety conditions at the Belmont Street/Trapelo Road intersections. Project design was funded by the Chapter 90 State Aid Highway Program, with construction funded by State Transportation Bond bills.

Public Participation

The Belmont Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC) is composed of residents appointed by the Board of Selectmen who meet on a regular basis to provide input to planning and design. BSC made several presentations to the Committee to discuss alternative design plans and traffic operations issues with TAC and the Town. The citizen participation process resulted in Town-wide support for the selected final design.





MBTA Coordination

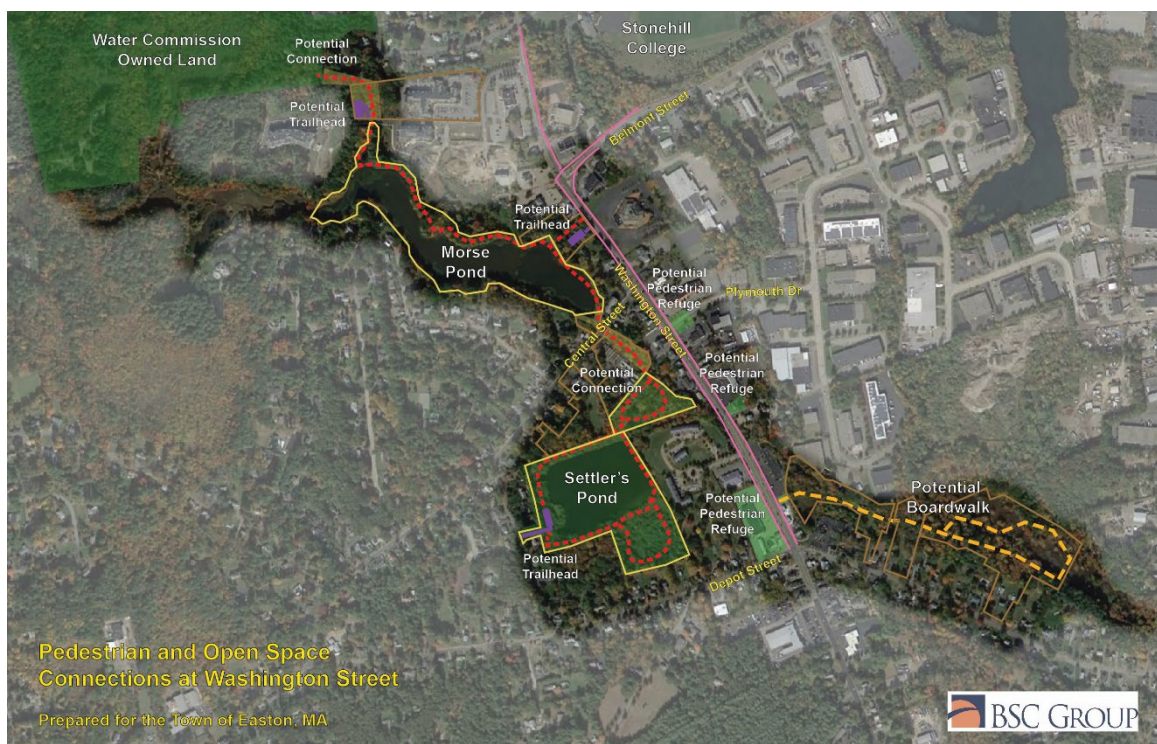
As the necessary traffic improvements correlate with public transportation bus route requirements, BSC staff met with officials of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) to discuss plans to relocate trackless trolley catenary lines and bus shelters. BSC prepared plans and coordinated design reviews with the MBTA's Bus Operations and Construction Department.



An example of complete streets, Belmont, MA Source: BSC Group

Connect the Corridor to Open Space

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Queset Commercial District/Census Tracts 6001 and 6002.02 (2020)
Origin	There are several conservation land areas surrounding the corridor, but no open spaces or public gathering spaces within the corridor. The LRRP working committee would like to pursue potential opportunities to connect the district with nearby open space and conservation land.
Budget	 High (over \$200k): Includes acquisition, design, and construction costs Funding: Town funds (community preservation funds); State funding (PARK Small Towns, LAND, LWCF); ARPA Funding; Private (developer) funding
Timeframe	 Phased Approach; Design – short-term; Construction – short- to medium term
Risk	 Medium Risk: Political will; Funding; Cost (design/construction); Community interest; Legal and liability concerns; Site ownership; Environmental constraints; Regulatory and Permitting
Key Performance Indicators	# of grants applied for/grant dollars obtained; Acres of parkland acquired; # of parcels acquired; # of connections created to corridor; #/frequency of trail users; Demonstrated increase in pedestrians and outdoor activity in the Corridor
Partners & Resources	Town, MassDOT, OCPC, Easton Chamber of Commerce, Business Community, Stonehill College, Developers, Property Owners, Residents, College Students, Easton Community Preservation Committee, Easton Conservation Commission, National Resources Trust of Easton



Conceptual Layout for Pedestrian and Open Space Connections to Washington Street Source: BSC Group

Diagnostic

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed a light on the essential role local parks and recreation has on public health. Parks, trails, and green spaces support physical and mental health and deliver vital services and programs to support a community. With a highlight on public health impacts surrounding COVID-19, communities have prioritized needed investments to sustain and enhance public spaces. According to the National Recreation and Parks Association, 83% of U.S. adults agree that visiting local parks, trails, and open spaces is essential for their mental and physical well-being during the pandemic.

Parks and recreation are vital to healthy, vibrant, and resilient communities. They also help promote a strong local economy, and provide economic benefits such as attracting businesses, increasing property values, and increasing sales at local restaurants.

A key challenge identified in the QCD is the lack of parks, open space, and green space. Some businesses mentioned wanting an outdoor space for the goods and services they provide. Most survey respondents felt that development of public spaces was an important strategy for supporting businesses and improving the commercial district.

Finally, the thought of creating a trail in and around the corridor will bring more pedestrians, primarily more residents and college students, as well as trail users into the area. This could stimulate and encourage more walkability throughout the corridor.

Action Item

Conduct a feasibility study on connecting the Corridor to existing conservation and open space. Such analysis will explore the potential connections to the nearby conservation and open space (both public and privately owned).

Identify appropriate spaces for pedestrian refuge. This could dramatically improve pedestrian connections and create multiple green space and placemaking opportunities along the corridor.

Identify a trail network connecting the existing conservation and open space to new open space in and around the corridor. A preliminary concept drawn by BSC proposes a trail network system that incorporates connections to the open space surrounding the Corridor as well as pedestrian refuge areas along Washington Street. Utilize the Town's existing properties such as the Settler's Pond. Currently, there are no official paths or pedestrian amenities around the pond, and it does not connect to the main corridor.

Identify potential locations for trailheads, signage, and parking. There is an existing connection to Tyson Road which can immediately be used to create a trailhead and other pedestrian amenities. A secondary connection could be created for pedestrians to connect back to Washington Street. One option would be to create an easement or property acquisition in the vicinity of 619 Washington Street.

Expand the trail connections as feasible. Morse Pond, although privately owned, could be connected to the Settler's Pond area. Connections to this parcel could be made through an easement or land acquisition of a parcel off Central Street. The utilization of the Morse Pond parcel would also allow the trail network to expand north into land owned by the Easton Water Commission, if desirable.



*Existing corridor lacks open space connections or pedestrian gathering space
Source: BSC Group*

Process

1. **Dedicate a Conservation Planner to manage the process.** This position should be able to bring project from conception through implementation.
2. **Engage public:** Create a steering committee that will work with the Conservation Planner and be involved in gathering information from the public, marketing and running public meetings, and will oversee social media for the project.
3. **Engage the services of an engineering and design consultant:** The consultant will assist the Town with the feasibility study and bring the conceptual design through the design development and construction document phases. The consultant can also help the Conservation Planner and steering committee with design options, public outreach, cost estimation, and construction.
4. **Develop a budget and pro forma.** Identify a range of costs based on the final design and create a financial plan for the project.
5. **Ensure the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan is up to date to pursue State funding.** Update Open Space and Recreation Plan as necessary.
6. **Work with Community Preservation Committee on funding components of the project.** Partner with the Community Preservation Committee to fund eligible project components with CPA funding.
7. **Partner with the Conservation Commission to obtain necessary permitting approvals and any deed restrictions.**
8. **Acquire properties as needed for Open Space/Conservation purposes.** Complete land appraisals, engage impacted landowners, and negotiate a settlement to acquire any parcels identified for incorporation into the trail network.
9. **Finalize Design and Proceed with Construction:** Finalize the construction documents and bid the project to hire a contractor to construct the trail network in accordance with the final design.



Example of the Pattern of Loss of Open Space Opportunities along Washington Street (Robert Chisholm Square)

Blackstone Gateway Park



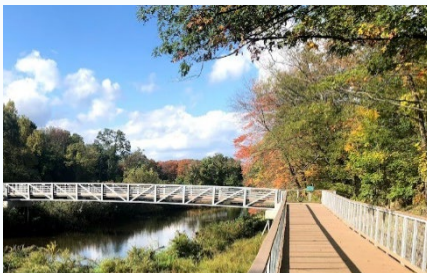
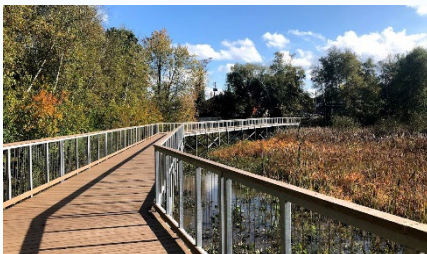
Location

Worcester, MA

Project Partners:

- City of Worcester
- Blackstone Heritage Corridor, Inc.,
- Quinsigamond Village Community Center
- Greenwood Street Landfill Task Force
- Congressman James McGovern
- Worcester Legislative Delegation
- MA Department of Conservation and Recreation

The total project cost was approx. \$4 million, funded by a \$1M grant from the Commonwealth and city funding (capital budget allocation and landfill tipping fees).



Blackstone Gateway Park is located approximately three miles south of the Worcester Downtown Business District on the edge of the Quinsigamond Village neighborhood.





This recently completed riverfront park stands out as a unique urban park in the City providing recreational amenities while maintaining the feel of a forested park surrounded by flowing water and stands of large canopy trees.

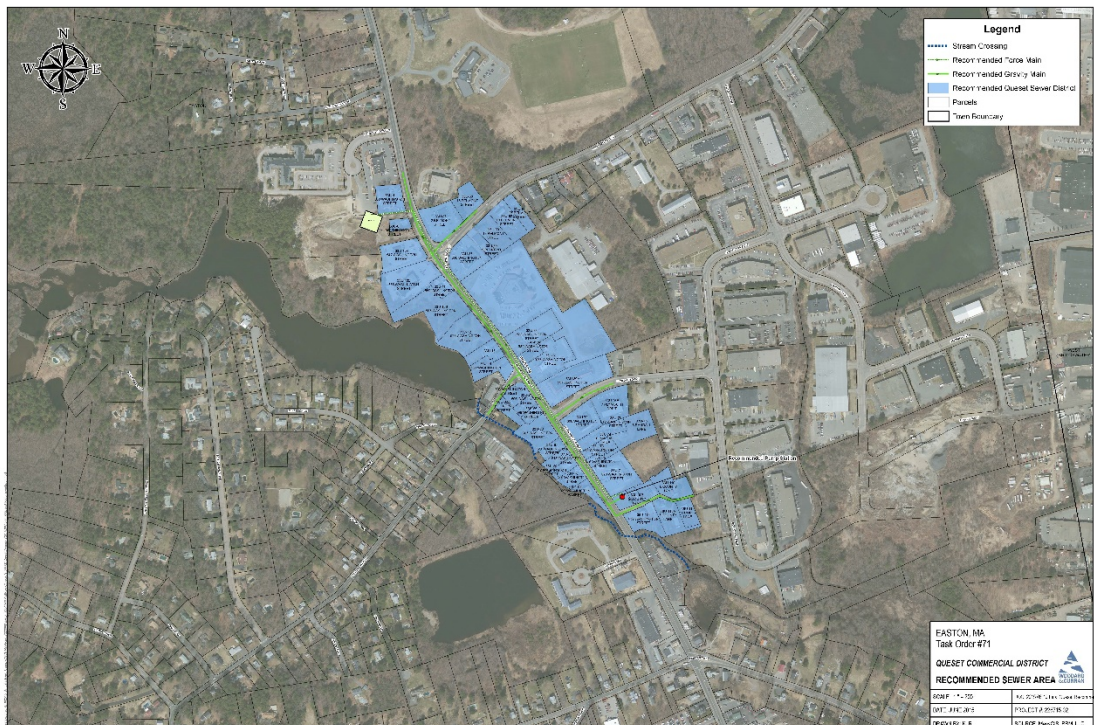
The park features 3,000 linear feet (about a half-mile) of accessible walking paths, elevated boardwalks and three bridge crossings a section of the Middle River that runs into the headwaters of the Blackstone River, adjacent to McKeon Road.

Observational platforms, kiosks, and interpretive signage providing historical and ecological information about the Blackstone River and the role it played in the history of Worcester and the Blackstone Valley Corridor are included along the trails and boardwalks. The park also includes public art in the form of custom park furnishings such as benches, bicycle racks, and trash receptacles.

Photos Courtesy of Jeanette Tozer, BSC Group

Extend Public Sewer Service within the QCD

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Queset Commercial District/Census Tracts 6001 and 6002.02 (2020)
Origin	Only a portion of the QCD has public sewer, impeding growth within the QCD. The working group recognizes that the extension of the sewer on Washington Street from County Lane to Depot Street as well as into the adjacent industrial park will stimulate additional economic growth.
Budget	 Budget: >\$1M Funding: Town (recovered through betterment assessment); ARPA (potentially); DIF Program; Massworks, MassDevelopment Site Readiness (potentially); Chapter 90
Timeframe	 Medium (3-5 years): Cost-benefit analysis, pursue funding, design/construction phases
Risk	 Medium Risk: Political will; Funding; Cost (design/construction); Community interest; Legal and liability concerns; Environmental constraints; Regulatory and Permitting
Key Performance Indicators	Number of parcels serviced by public sewer; # of tie-ins; dollars private investment; square footage private investment; # of new businesses to area; increased land values; increased town revenues; improved land use; growth in commercial units/SF
Partners & Resources	Town – Departments and Economic Development Committee, Private Property Owners, Chamber of Commerce, Local Businesses, Developers, MassDOT



Parcels served by the Queset Commercial Sewer District
https://www.easton.ma.us/sewer/easton_center.php

Diagnostic

COVID-19 has stalled commercial real estate development. By prioritizing sewer upgrades in this area, the Town is showing it is proactive and invested in the future success of the QCD.

Expanding sewer service will encourage new development and property upgrades. The addition of public sewer will enhance property values and the attractiveness of the QCD to investors. It will further promote private larger-scale mixed-use development in the district, such as at the vacant plaza at 661 Washington Street. The area will benefit from improved land use, new businesses, new jobs, and increased tax and fee revenues to the Town.

Adding sewer capacity will help strengthen the local economic impact to the area by encouraging the construction of multi-story office developments, multi-family housing developments, and restaurants, in concert with the Town's economic goals and strategy for the QCD. Finally, there are environmental benefits of municipal sewer.

Action Item

Examine current capacity to accommodate sewer extension.

This item includes initial engineering assessments to understand scope and potential obstacles with extending the sewer through the end of the study area. Confirm the benefits of such a project and prepare a draft cost estimate.

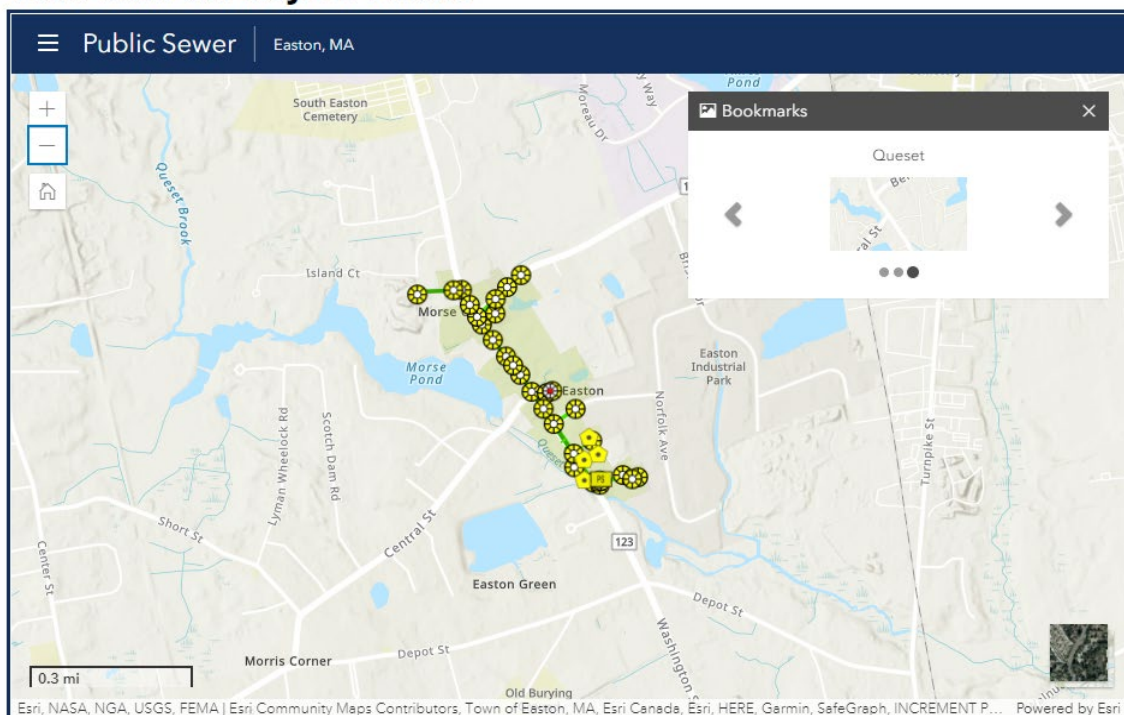
Secure community approval and funding for sewer extension.

Easton is familiar with the public engagement process required for a project of this type given that the recent public sewer project in the district and in other areas of town. Property owners along the project area and potential developers should be engaged to confirm level of interest in the project and to provide other input. The project must be considered at Town Meeting for approval and for appropriation of town funds, for example to complete the design or to provide any town match required if the project is grant funded. In addition, the Town should seek public funding such as through Massworks or MassDevelopment, in coordination with any potential developers interested in redevelopment of impacted parcels.

Coordinate with MassDOT. As the extension would occur along a MassDOT road, the Town must coordinate with MassDOT through planning and construction. Efforts should be made to coordinate this project with other desired improvements along the same stretch of road, for example, grounding of overhead utility lines, or new water mains.

Design Plans and Construction Documents. Bid project, award, and commence construction.

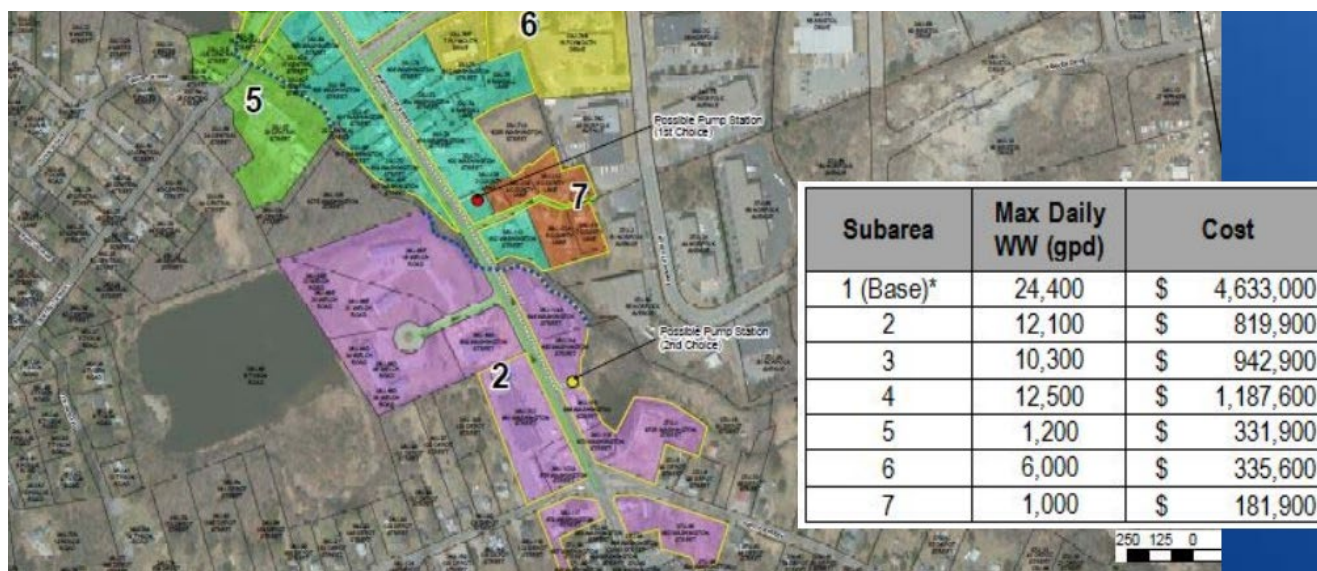
VIEW SEWER PROJECT AREAS



Existing Sewer in Queset Commercial District (Town of Easton Website)

Process

1. Conduct sewer prioritization assessment to confirm benefits of Washington Street sewer extension.
2. Engage property owners, businesses, and developers with a stake in the project area to assess interest and collect other feedback.
3. Conduct assessment (engineering; permitting) to examine capacity for and obstacles to completing sewer extension.
4. Explore funding models for the project (town appropriation, betterment tax, state, or federal grant funds, etc.).
5. Develop project proposal for review/approval at Town Meeting.
6. Secure project funding for design and construction.
7. Procure engineering services to complete design and construction documents. Coordinate with MassDOT during design process.
8. Bid construction project.
9. Award and commence construction.



Proposed Area for Sewer Extension (Subarea 2)

https://eastontownma.documents-on-demand.com/Document/4bd25e57-38ef-e411-ab9f-001fbc00ed84/Queset_Sewer_District_InfoSession_Presentation_04292015.pdf

Sewer Extension Projects



Location

Stoughton, MA

Park Street Sewer Extension Project, Stoughton, MA

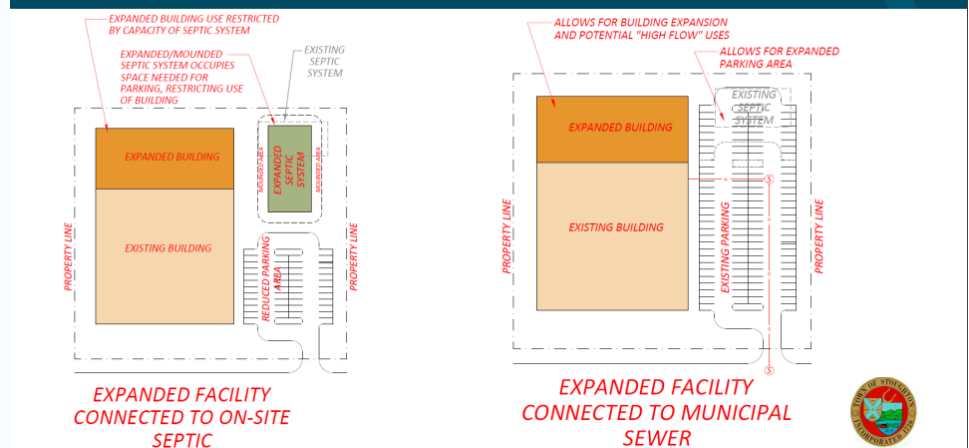
More information:

https://www.stoughton.org/sites/g/files/vyhlif3866/f/pages/park_street_sewer_march_2019.pdf

The Town of Stoughton conducted a series of studies including a town-wide sewer priority plan which identified the Park Street area as a top option for public sewer. Further analysis established economic and environmental benefits to extending sewer in this area. The project was found to provide economic growth for the entire town, open new opportunities for improved land use, and increased commercial/industrial land value. The extension would also increase town revenues through a tax level and water/sewer use fees. By expanding sewer, capacity restrictions could be lifted and commercial building footprints and parking area could expand where septs were once needed.

New Growth Analysis

14



Graphic of Sewer Extension New Growth Analysis Source: Kleinfelder for Town of Stoughton





Four Corners Sewer Extension, Groton, MA

More information:

<https://www.lowellsun.com/2017/07/27/grotons-four-corners-state-grant-makes-more-than-sewer-line-possible-video/>

This project, funded by town appropriations and a \$2.1M MassWorks grant, allowed for the development of vacant commercial lots. Prior to installing sewer, the commercial district included several vacant storefronts. While business were interested in operating in Groton, septic tanks would not work for their businesses. Initial projects following the sewer extension include a 7,500 SF commercial building housing food, medical offices, and a bank as well as a new housing development bringing more people closer to the commercial district.

Partner with MassDOT to Redesign the Roadway as a Complete Streets Project

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Queset Commercial District/Census Tracts 6001 and 6002.02 (2020)
Origin	The Corridor would benefit from traffic calming and streetscape improvements. This was discussed during site visits and conversations with the LRRP Working Group.
Budget	 High Budget/ Funding: Massworks, STIP, Shared Streets and Spaces, Complete Streets Chapter 90; Tax levy, Developer Agreement, ARPA
Timeframe	 Medium to Long Term
Risk	 Medium Risk: Political will; Funding; Community interests, Legal and liability concerns; Environmental constraints; STIP process
Key Performance Indicators	Increased land values; \$ private new development; SF new development; \$ increased town revenue; Documented more pedestrians; Increased business involvement in local affairs
Partners & Resources	Town, MassDOT, Developers, Property Owners, Residents, Businesses, OCPC, Easton Chamber of Commerce
Diagnostic	<p>As people continue to adapt to life amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, communities continue to seek transportation systems that provide safe access for all users of all ages and abilities. The federal government is committed to investing in the nation's infrastructure to help communities bounce back and move forward as they recover from the impacts of COVID-19.</p> <p>Good streetscapes play an important role in safety and mobility for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles. They contribute to enhanced public health, benefit the environment, improve quality of life, strengthen community connections, and stimulate economic growth.</p> <p>Easton can address both current COVID-related impacts and longstanding redevelopment challenges in the QCD exacerbated by the pandemic by partnering with MassDOT to redesign Washington Street to encourage pedestrian and bicycle activity, promote public health and a higher quality of life, calm traffic, improve safety, reduce pavement and urban heat island effect, and enhance the public realm. MassDOT has partnered with other communities interested in rapidly transforming their streets to facilitate responsible public health practices, safe mobility, and renewed commerce.</p> <p>Finally, many respondents to the LRRP business survey stated a dissatisfaction with the condition of public spaces, streets, and sidewalks, and that improvements of streetscape and sidewalks was a very important strategy for supporting businesses and improving the commercial district.</p>

Action Item

Partner with MassDOT. Work closely with MassDOT on the project, meeting regularly and in routine coordination. Discuss Town's goals, priorities, and vision for the Corridor and set expectations for type of project the Town would like to realize.

Conduct public outreach. Meaningful community engagement is key to the design process to gain buy-in and support for the plan and recommendations. Discuss vision and goals.

Use technical assistance. Coordinating with MassDOT, complete a corridor assessment and safety audit. Also include project identification, development of conceptual and/or quick-build design and safety evaluation, including American with Disabilities Act considerations. Identify challenges and opportunities.

Obtain funding. Working with MassDOT to ensure that various sources of funding can be obtained in an expedited manner to address elements beyond basic roadway resurfacing projects related to paving, traffic equipment, and sidewalks.

Complete preliminary engineering design. This process allows various plan elements to be considered, including:

- Green Infrastructure/Design (including street trees and stormwater mitigation)
- Wide Sidewalks
- Reduction in Vehicular Travel Lanes
- Decorative Lighting
- ADA Improvements
- Crosswalk Enhancements
- Updated Traffic Equipment
- Signage/Wayfinding
- Bicycle Accommodations
- Reduced Curb Cuts
- Lighting
- Utility and Infrastructure Upgrades

Pilot a demonstration project. Take a portion of Washington Street to demonstrate what improvements may look like and ensure functionality.

Identify necessary easements/takings for right of way improvements. Work with legal counsel to complete outreach to impacted property owners.

Complete final engineering design. Finalize plans and procure a contractor.

Proceed with construction.

Process

1. Engage MassDOT.
2. Complete existing conditions analysis and traffic and safety evaluations.
3. Engage the community.
4. Identify proposed projects and programs and prioritize.
5. Pilot a project in a portion of the QCD to highlight impact of overall project.
6. Obtain funding and local approvals as required.
7. Finalize design and create construction documents.
8. Obtain right-of-way easements as required.
9. Procure a contractor for construction.
10. Commence construction.



Existing conditions on Washington Street Source: BSC Group



Complete Streets project, Belmont, MA Source: BSC Group

Complete Streets Prioritization Planning



Location

Pittsfield, MA

Project Overview

As part of MassDOT's Tier 2 Complete Streets Funding Program, the City of Pittsfield wanted to develop a 5-year Prioritization Plan. Notably, with the assistance of the hired consultant, the City of Pittsfield successfully received \$353,500 in funding, which benefited 10 sites throughout the City and involved many necessary improvements to sidewalks, curb cuts, signals, bike lanes and other elements intended to make streets safer for all modes of travel.

As part of the planning process, the consultant provided technical assistance to develop a prioritization plan, for submittal to MassDOT.





Elements of the project scope have included:

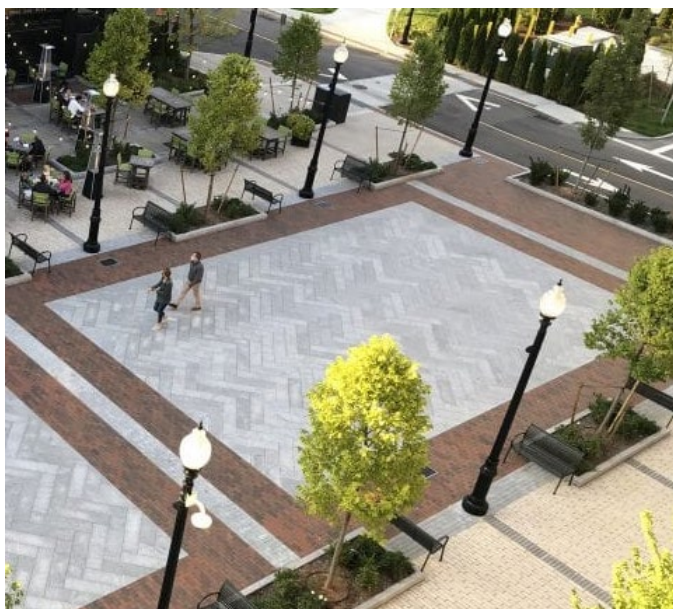
- Compiling all available and relevant data and information to completely understand the overall transportation network and infrastructure currently in place in the City.
- Evaluating the existing systems and coordination with the staff members to identify where gaps existing with respect to bicycle, pedestrian, and transit systems.
- Reviewing and identifying potential projects to be included in the plan. Included order-of-magnitude cost, crash data, vehicular speeds, vehicular volume, existing environment (population, terrain, school proximity), and project beneficiaries.
- Discussions with the current Environmental Justice Population areas with respect to the Complete Streets policy.
- Developing an online interactive map and making available to the general public to present the Complete Streets concept, the Prioritization Plan goals and strategies, and obtain feedback from the community with respect to needs, desires, and outcomes.



An example of complete streets, Pittsfield, MA Source: BSC Group

Create a Placemaking Plan for the Corridor

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Queset Commercial District/Census Tracts 6001 and 6002.02 (2020)
Origin	The QCD is a vehicle-oriented roadway with multiple commercial strip plazas. The road does not encourage pedestrian activity; commercial nodes are widely dispersed / high speed of traffic makes walking uncomfortable. The LRRP working group would like to develop a placemaking plan that contributes to a district identity / identifies opportunities for unconventional public gathering space / public art.
Budget	 Low Budget - \$0 - \$50,000; Funding: MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces; ARPA funding (TBD); Commonwealth Places, MassDevelopment; CDBG; Foundation support (state/regional); Crowdfunding through Patronicity platform; NEFA; Art Place America; National Association of Realtors Placemaking Grants
Timeframe	 Short-term (Less than 5 years)
Risk	 Political will; Funding availability; Design/implementation costs; Community interest (by residents and businesses); Legal and liability concerns
Key Performance Indicators	Event attendee numbers; number of events; number of different groups using the space for events; average users per day; change in sales at area businesses during events; overall user sentiment of the Corridor; time spent within the Corridor; user sentiment obtained through polling; Increase in visitors and first-time users to the corridor; redevelopment of vacant parcels
Partners & Resources	Town representatives, MassDOT, Old Colony Planning Council, Chamber of Commerce, local property owners and small businesses, Stonehill College, residents, local contractors/suppliers (to source project materials and build), local DPW support installation, placemaking consultant to support both planning and continued community engagement as project goes through iterations. AARP Community Challenge



Quincy Square, Quincy, MA Source: BSC Group



Family Events at the Corner Spot, Ashland, MA
Source: Public Realm Best Practice Sheet Compendium

Diagnostic

As communities adjust and respond to the impacts of COVID-19, the Commonwealth's administration has been focused on supporting local economic recovery through placemaking. A key challenge identified during the Easton LRRP process is the lack of publicly programmable space within the QCD. The Town would like to find new and creative ways to promote businesses within the QCD and attract attention to vacant and underused parcels. A placemaking plan would provide an opportunity to create a destination where residents and visitors can dine, shop, and support local businesses, but be done in a way that encourages them to walk the Corridor rather than drive up and down it.

"138 Corridor Places" could be a plan for dispersed placemaking activation throughout the commercial corridor that would be geared towards creating a destination, encouraging people to come to the district for something other than a single errand, stay longer, and return more frequently. Placemaking interventions would be staged in a few commercial centers along the district with a central, main placemaking experience located within one of the nodes as a main "draw" to the district. The hope is to cohesively brand each of the spaces to improve the user experience while supporting local businesses and giving the district a consistent identity between commercial plazas.

Action Item

To hire a consultant to work with the town, business community, and other stakeholders to produce a placemaking plan that creates a unified brand and sense of place, thereby giving the QCD a recognizable identity. Action items for the team include:

1. Engage the community.
2. Identify the vision, goals, and priorities for each location (the Plan).
3. Determine activation locations along Route 138.
4. Obtain public easements or permission from property owners.
5. Obtain funding.
6. Design and implement.
7. Program the space and advertise it widely.
8. Seek feedback once area is open to public.
9. Evaluate and adapt as needed.

The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit

Projects that inspire change — and improve communities for people of all ages



AARP
Real Possibilities

team
better
block

Cover: AARP The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit

138 CORRIDOR PLACES

Easton, Massachusetts



PROCESS



Location & Team

Using the 661 Plaza as a focal point, we'd propose using that space as a base for larger activations, partnering with the developer to prove out the viability of the site as extensive commercial use for future development. Then, scattered down the street, activation in parking lots along the streetscape to show passers by that there's more here to stop for.



Identify Inspiration

We've provided two sample projects that encapsulate components of our recommendations for implementation here. Please feel free to explore other inspiration projects as you seek to implement programming here.



Plan & Implement

Determine appropriate timing of activations of the space and determine what "success" looks like before hand. While food trucks will be a great option to bring energy to the space, engage area restaurants to see how they can best support events on the lawn. Ensure partnerships to plan events & host meetups to activate space. Engage local creative community.



Feedback

An incredibly important part of any iterative project like this. Ensure you're actively seeking input through in person and online methods. During any events or programming, have someone on site surveying community members, businesses and area residents.



Iterate

What worked? What didn't work? Adapt your project based upon user feedback. Did residents benefit? Did area businesses benefit. How could things be improved and could another location be more appropriate for this intervention. .

ACTIVATION LOCATIONS

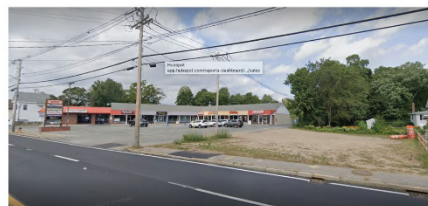


Scotts Plaza

Using the 661 Plaza as a focal point, we propose creating a highly programmed space supporting outdoor food vending from local businesses, festive lighting to host night and winter events and tables, chairs, seating, and games for people to passively enjoy the space. Opportunity to host pop up small businesses, farmers markets, fitness classes and local crafts fairs could provide a great anchor for the district and other activated spaces.

Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, umbrellas, stage, storage unit, paint, temporary landscaping, lawn games, sound equipment, storage sheds converted into retail spaces, temporary lighting.



El Mariachi Plaza

Using similar branding to the materials chosen for Scotts Plaza, tables, chairs, temporary landscaping and lighting could be installed at a small pocket park adjacent to the plaza to create a passive space for people to bring takeout food, grab a coffee and gather.

Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, umbrellas, planters and temporary landscaping, gravel.



Phase 2: Third Location TBD

Thinking of this project as a multi-phase experiment to understand what will attract people and encourage them to feel comfortable and stay, invest in the first two locations while waiting to integrate a third into this program after a few months analyzing the first two spaces. Proof of concept in the first two locations will hopefully allow you to more easily identify successful interventions in a phase 2.

The Corner Spot



Location

Ashland, MA

The Corner Spot

The Corner Spot is a place in downtown Ashland where businesses can test-drive their market and residents can come together. This space was created as a shared, sustainable community gathering place and incubator for pop up businesses. The Corner Spot is intended to stimulate economic activity, attract new developers and business owners, and increase foot traffic downtown to help support existing and future business.

The Corner Spot serves as the home for new businesses to "pop up" every week (or more), allowing residents to enjoy a variety of potential additions to the Ashland business community. Local sponsors provide donations for upkeep and may donate equipment or other amenities for the space. The Corner Spot is run by a volunteer committee and organized by the Town Economic Development Director.





The Corner Spot is a small park space with a shed / bathroom that is open from dawn to dusk, and wifi is available. Rental to use the space is \$100 a week to cover utility and rental fees. Residents can also rent the space for the day at \$50 (outdoor use), or \$100 (use of 300 sq. ft. space with bathroom).

<https://thecornerpotashland.com/welcome>



*An event at the Corner Spot, Ashland, MA
Source: The Corner Spot*

Implement a Signage Improvement Program

Category	 Private Realm
Location	Queset Commercial District/Census Tracts 6001 and 6002.02 (2020)
Origin	During the LRRP Working Group meetings, the condition of business signage throughout the corridor was noted as needing improvement
Budget	 Low - (\$0-50,000): Sources of Funding: Town funding (general or set-aside); ARPA (potentially); private/nonprofit/foundation, CDBG, special taxing districts (e.g., TIFs); One Stop for Growth; District Local Technical Assistance
Timeframe	 Short Term
Risk	 Medium Risk - Political will; Funding; Community interest; Legal and liability concerns; Regulatory and permitting; Reluctance on businesses to participate; Displacement of existing businesses; Increased property values/rent
Key Performance Indicators	Creation/funding for program, # of applicants, # completed projects, amount of private investment generated, increase property values, increase tax revenues, increase in business sales, # of projects maintained over time, increase in visitors
Partners & Resources	Town, Private Property Owners, Easton Chamber of Commerce, Local Businesses Owners
Diagnostic	<p>A common theme identified during the LRRP diagnostic phase was a lack of cohesiveness along Washington Street. One contributing factor to this is the number of old and outdated business signs along the corridor. According to the respondents completing the LRRP business survey, COVID-19 negatively impacted business revenues, reduced operating capacity, and forced additional, unanticipated costs to implement safety measures to keep employees safe.</p> <p>However, as a state-controlled road with no public or open space along the corridor, private realm improvements are a vital pathway to improving the physical environment and visitor experience in the commercial district. Survey respondents felt that renovation of storefronts/buildings facades was an important strategy for supporting businesses and improving the commercial district. However, when asked about receiving assistance through low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements, respondents stated no interest. As such, this recommendation to create a municipal signage improvement program is offered as a pilot program for the Town to gauge real interest in the program and if successful, could lead to expansion to a façade or storefront improvement program.</p> <p>Updating a sign code and combining the update with financial assistance to small businesses to bring their signs into compliance can help address negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Signs are critical information to identify active businesses to customers. Outdated signs may suggest that a business is no longer in operation. Signs in disrepair may be dangerous or may contribute to a perception that a business area is not safe, discouraging potential customers.</p>

Action Item

Example of cohesive signage, Hudson Square, Hudson, MA Source: BSC Group

When developing any type of small business assistance program, proponents should strongly consider:

Identify Town Capacity to Implement – Dedicate a staff person to administer the program (see recommendation relative to hiring an economic development coordinator).

Build Community Support – Engage early with property / business owners. Seek to build relational capital to gain, credibility, and community support as program enhancements are developed. Stakeholders should be involved early in the process; the program should consider small business' needs / identify specific ways the program can help.

Determine Program Details and Funding Options – Explore and secure funding. Many communities utilize CDBG funding for small business incentive programs, but other types of funding are available. Consider funding amounts for individual projects. Funding amounts must be adequate such that the cost to participate does not outweigh the funding provided.

Develop Signage Design Guidelines - Include specific signage design guidelines. A visual guide should be created for applicants to understand the program vision; depict examples of preferred dimensions, styles, locations, and types of signs. Decide if illustrations are part of code or a separate document.

Offer Design Services –The Town may benefit from offering participants a design professional / fabricator to engage with. Many programs include design services as a benefit of program participation. During this period of COVID recovery, funds may be available for this type of small business assistance. Collaboration with local artists / Stonehill College students may provide mutual benefit to artists / designers / program participants. Atlanta's BeltLine façade improvement program partners local artists / makers with businesses to complete capital improvements.

Advertise the Program – PSAs, social media, and a prominent location on the Town's/partners' websites can increase awareness of the program and participation. Word of mouth and project visibility has been shown to be one of the most important ways to promote these programs.

Town Approval of Any Change in Regulations - If changes to the zoning bylaw are proposed, they will need to be approved by the Planning Board and at Town Meeting.

Process

A common theme identified during the LRRP diagnostic phase was a lack of cohesiveness along Washington Street. One contributing factor to this is the number of old and outdated business signs along the corridor. According to the respondents completing the LRRP business survey, COVID-19 negatively impacted business revenues, reduced operating capacity, and forced additional, unanticipated costs to implement safety measures to keep employees safe.

However, as a state-controlled road with no public or open space along the corridor, private realm improvements are a vital pathway to improving the physical environment and visitor experience in the commercial district. Survey respondents felt that renovation of storefronts/buildings facades was an important strategy for supporting businesses and improving the commercial district. However, when asked about receiving assistance through low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements, respondents stated no interest. As such, this recommendation to create a municipal signage improvement program is offered as a pilot program for the Town to gauge real interest in the program and if successful, could lead to expansion to a façade or storefront improvement program.

Updating a sign code and combining the update with financial assistance to small businesses to bring their signs into compliance can help address negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Signs are critical information to identify active businesses to customers. Outdated signs may suggest that a business is no longer in operation. Signs in disrepair may be dangerous or may contribute to a perception that a business area is not safe, discouraging potential customers.



Hammer & Stain South Shore Source: BSC Group

Process

1. **Engage:** Solicit input on what property owners and businesses would like for a program. This is the time to discuss eligible projects, the application process, funding models and limits, and any assistance awardees might want or need.
2. **Plan:** Explore feasibility of program elements identified by the Town, stakeholders, and best practices. Arrange for funding mechanisms (e.g., allocation of ARPA funds, if applicable), develop program guidelines and paperwork, and engage any new program partners such as artists or design professionals.
3. **Advertise and Implement:** Create town webpage containing program information. Cross market with partners such as Economic Development Committee, Easton Chamber of Commerce, on social media, and through PSAs. Solicit project participants and administer the program.
4. **Evaluate and Decide Future:** Determine program metrics (e.g., business sales, property value, vacancy rate, public/private investment) and measure at appropriate time intervals. Seek feedback from program participants; and utilize feedback to improve and market the program.



Bad



Good



Good



Good



Bad

Examples of how exterior improvements to storefronts and signage completely transform a single business or business area

Downtown Storefront Façade and Signage Improvement Program



Location

Woburn, MA

The Downtown Woburn Storefront Façade and Signage Improvement Program is administered by the Woburn Redevelopment Authority (WRA) and funded by the Woburn Development and Financial Corporation (WDFC). The program provides funding to property owners and business tenants seeking to renovate their building facades/storefronts or signs.

The main purposes of this program are to improve building facades that are visible to the public and to encourage merchants and commercial property owners in downtown Woburn to install attractive, quality commercial signage in accordance with the City of Woburn's Sign Ordinance.

The Downtown Woburn Storefront Façade and Signage Improvement Program provides matching 1:1 grants of up to \$2,000 for signage improvements and matching (1:1) loans of up to \$15,000 per building for façade improvements. Properties must be located within the Downtown Business District. Loans are interest-free and due and payable ten (10) years from the date of the loan commitment letter or upon sale or transfer of ownership of the property, whichever occurs earlier.

https://www.woburnma.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/WRA-facade-and-signage-improvement-program-guidelines_7.13.2017-2.pdf







The Pilgrim Building in 1998



The Pilgrim Building Today

Redevelop Underutilized Commercial Space

Category	 Private Realm
Location	Queset Commercial District/Census Tracts 6001 and 6002.02 (2020)
Origin	There are multiple opportunities along the corridor identified for potential site redevelopment. This originated from the Queset Commercial District Economic Development Strategy and was discussed with the Town during the diagnostic phase.
Budget	 Low (site assessment) and High (redevelopment) Sources of Funding: Town funding, ARPA (potentially), special taxing districts (e.g., TIFs), MassDevelopment, Planning & Zoning Grants (MA Community One Stop for Growth), brownfields funding – state/federal (potentially)
Timeframe	 Short Term
Risk	 Medium Risk - Political will; Funding; Community interest; Legal and liability concerns; Regulatory and permitting; Reluctance on property owners to participate
Key Performance Indicators	Amount of funding obtained for effort, # of sites evaluated, amount of private investment generated, increase property values, increase tax revenues, Total SF developed (commercial, residential, mixed-use), # of jobs created
Partners & Resources	Town, Private Property Owners, Easton Chamber of Commerce, Local Businesses Owners, Residents, Developers, OCPC, MassDevelopment
Diagnostic	<p>A common theme identified during the LRRP diagnostic phase was the lack of new development along Washington Street. In addition to enhancing the image and appearance of the QCD to make it more attractive, another goal of the Town is to grow the local real estate tax base. By pursuing redevelopment opportunities in a strategic way, the Town can successfully achieve both goals.</p> <p>Pockets of disinvestment are located throughout the corridor that offer numerous opportunities for economic growth. A primarily vacant strip mall is flanked by two nearby gas stations near the gateway intersection of Washington/Depot Streets. Another large commercial plaza building stands predominantly vacant near the gateway intersection at the Washington/ Belmont Streets. As single-story, single-use structures with abundant parking, they are underutilized.</p> <p>The diagnostic phase found that while there were approximately 18 vacant storefronts within the corridor, most vacancies were in buildings in obvious disrepair. In addition, some residential buildings along the corridor suffer from a lack of maintenance and disinvestment. However, while those blighted properties remain in disrepair and vacant, the buildings that are highly maintained are fully occupied.</p> <p>COVID-19 has only exacerbated the problem for these chronically vacant properties. Lack of demand for this type of commercial space has made it harder for those buildings to be rented, and without tenants, property owners do not have income available to make investments to attract new tenants.</p> <p>These underutilized properties present opportunities to activate the sties by creating a more vibrant place with multi-use structures that include both residential and commercial uses. Since private realm improvements are an important pathway to improving the physical environment and sense of place in the district, as the market recovers, the Town of Easton would benefit greatly from working with property owners, funders, and developers to pursue redevelopment strategies for these underutilized properties in the QCD.</p>

Action Item

Identify Town Capacity to Implement: Ensure that there is a dedicated staff person to work with property owners/developers/funders (see recommendation relative to hiring an economic development coordinator).

Review Existing Zoning: A review of existing zoning is important to ascertain if there are any barriers to redevelopment such as the uses allowed, dimensional regulations, parking requirements, etc. In many cases, zoning amendments are required to encourage more efficient use of a site and better design than what have been previously allowed.

Outreach to Property Owners: Early and continued engagement with property owners is critical to gain an understanding of the owner's intentions for the property. Determine whether the property owner is willing to work with Town to find ways to invest in the property, sell the property, or work partner with a developer.

Outreach to Funders: Meet with MassDevelopment representatives to ensure familiarity with funding programs such as Site Readiness and Underutilized Properties program to fund pre-development activities at potential redevelopment sites. Additional funding could be available for technical assistance through the Commonwealth's One-Stop for Growth program.

Obtain Technical Assistance: Study the site to identify highest/best use of each underutilized property. Consult with Zoning Bylaws to ensure reuse is consistent with zoning language. Work to identify the challenges the property faces and funding for components of a proposed redevelopment program. If it is beneficial for the Town to acquire a property (potentially for open space purposes), determine legal process as necessary.

Clear impediments to development: Work through the identified challenges/barriers to prepare the site for redevelopment.

Create a development program: Create a conceptual plan for the property redevelopment and a financial plan (estimate of costs/pro forma/funding sources). Progress to design and construction documents.

Implement development program: Work with property owners and developers to redevelop properties in accordance with the vision set forth for the QCD. If necessary, market the property.





Process

1. **Engage:** Conduct outreach to property owners, stakeholders, funders, and developers. Provide education to local property owners regarding opportunity and potential. Connect developers with property owners on sites that help achieve the municipality's goals.
2. **Project Planning:** Explore feasibility of redevelopment, complete market analysis and site predevelopment activities, develop a conceptual plan, identify funding and costs for redevelopment.
3. **Create Buzz:** Talk up the proposed redevelopment project to attract attention and interest in the property.
4. **Seal the Deal:** Form partnerships, link projects to funding, negotiate a developer agreement, obtain necessary site plan approvals and building permits, and construct.



An example of underutilized space in Easton

Organize and Build Capacity of the Business Community

Category	 Private Realm
Location	Queset Commercial District/Census Tracts 6001 and 6002.02 (2020)
Origin	There was a lack of engagement on the part of business owners to participate in the LRRP. However, of those business owners interviewed, some expressed interest in participating in a business organization.
Budget	 Low Budget to start Initial Sources of Funding: Town (for staff support); One-Stop for Community Growth
Timeframe	 Short Term
Risk	 Low Risk - Political will; Community/business interest; Lack of participation/interest
Key Performance Indicators	% businesses in the corridor participating, frequency of meetings, Number of special programs offered / business concerns addressed /of activities completed
Partners & Resources	Town, Easton Chamber of Commerce, Local business owners and property owners
Diagnostic	<p>The COVID pandemic significantly impacted commercial districts. Easton's business survey confirms that 57% of businesses reported being impacted by COVID. They also incurred expenses to implement safety measures, reduced hours/capacity, and established alternative modes to sell and deliver products.</p> <p>Commercial districts with active organizations demonstrated an ability to pivot and respond to this crisis to help local small businesses weather the storm. Stakeholders have identified several opportunities to support recovery of the QCD including beautification efforts, façade/signage improvements, marketing, community events, business-to-business communication, creation of public gathering space, and coordinated communication with the Town. However, there is no mechanism to organize these efforts. A better organized business community could more readily engage in these kinds of planning discussions with the town. As the Town and business community pursue this objective, it is likely that it will take an incremental approach toward building capacity.</p> <p>The Town should work with the businesses in the corridor in the creation of a voluntary business organization as a way of sharing information and connecting with others in the business community. A challenge to this effort is the fact that most of the QCD businesses surveyed are small businesses with few employees. They often do not have the manpower to participate in a small business support group. However, if the organizing effort is arranged such that dates/times are flexible, or can be done remotely, participation may be higher. Since private realm improvements are an important pathway to improving the physical environment and sense of place in the district, as the market recovers, the Town of Easton would benefit greatly from working with the small businesses in the QCD to rally around common wants and needs for the corridor.</p>

Action Item

Build Capacity and Support: Engaging businesses requires staff capacity and funding. While business leader involvement is important, communities should not assume that merchants will or can volunteer; prioritize assigning a paid person to tasks or a paid person to manage volunteers. Identify an organization that can serve as a short-term fiscal conduit for grant money such as local cultural non-profits, civic groups, etc.

Collect District Data: Creating a database of businesses along Washington Street is the first step to engaging them. There is an inventory of businesses from the Queset Commercial District Economic Development Study that can be updated and used as a basis for moving this initiative forward. Additional information on other district stakeholders should be gathered as well, including any non-profit service-based/social organizations, developers, residents, and property owners.

Engage Identified Stakeholders: Conduct outreach and discuss concept one-on-one with stakeholders. Survey them on top concerns in the district and discuss desired outcomes for the district. Gauge interest and level of participation.

Establish Internal Communication Platforms: A dedicated communications platform provides a forum for business operators and key stakeholders to engage. This platform can be used to share pertinent information in real time, request assistance of peers, share success stories, etc. (This is seen as the largest benefit for such an organized effort at this time.)

Event Planning: Rally businesses around a specific shared concern or objective (district marketing, commercial attraction initiative, beautification, district clean-up day). Successful event execution builds district awareness, reinforces district identity, and supports organizational foundations that can be leveraged for commercial attraction.

Create/Formalize Business Association: Similar to district marketing, a formalized organization can be a space to address opportunities and threats to the QCD. This action should include developing, at the very least, a task force and establishing a purpose and goals for it.

Process

- Develop partners, short-term goals, and corresponding funding/staffing plan to conduct shared activities.
- Create database of stakeholders.
- Survey stakeholders on concerns/priorities for district.
- Educate them as to importance of having an organized effort surrounding a business organization for the district.
- Create internal communications platform for business owners/property owners.
- Hold a public presentation on the effort to build momentum.
- Meet regularly and communicate often.
- Create a strategic plan that addresses the business community's shared goals and vision.
- Rally businesses around a pilot initiative that addresses a shared concern or objective (e.g., marketing campaign, beautification project, etc.)
- Continue to engage the group and market the efforts to garner additional participation.
- Program additional efforts and keep momentum.



An example of Building the Business Community

Hire an Economic Development Coordinator to Support Business Development Efforts

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Queset Commercial District/Census Tracts 6001 and 6002.02 (2020)
Origin	The Town's Planning and Economic Development Department does not have a dedicated position related to Economic Development. Although there is an Economic Development Council, this is a town committee comprised of volunteers. The LRRP working group agreed such a position would be beneficial for the Town to pursue.
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) – Sources of funding include a town appropriation, ARPA (potentially), State grants (Community Compact), Tax incentive programs (like a DIF), consortium funding
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) – Phased Approach: To start, part time position; transitioning to a full-time position 2-5 years out
Risk	 Low Risk – Political will; Community interest / partners; Financing limitations / sustainable funding sources
Key Performance Indicators	Position funded; # businesses helped through outreach, coordination, and direct assistance; Increase in # of businesses in town; Increased business involvement in local affairs; Creation and funding of business incentive programs; Dollars secured/distributed; Growth in local commercial tax base.
Partners & Resources	Chamber of Commerce; Business Community; Stonehill College; Developers; Town Boards/Committees (Economic Development Committee, Select Board, CPA); OCPC



An Economic Development Coordinator can help support businesses as they rebuild their community after major effects due to COVID shutdowns
Source: WRFA-LP 107.9 FM

Diagnostic

The rapid recovery plan process has identified a need for the Town to work closely with businesses and property owners in commercial districts to help them recover from the pandemic and thrive in the post-pandemic economic context.

Currently, there is not a lot of coordination between the town and businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that businesses have limited capacity to steward a commercial corridor and that businesses in the corridor need the support of Town government to advance collaborative efforts.

Establishing a town position dedicated to supporting existing businesses, attracting new businesses, and spearheading economic development initiatives would contribute greatly to improving the business climate, provide capacity for capital improvement projects, and signal to businesses that the Town values them and takes their concerns seriously.

While this need was identified as part of the work for the Quset Commercial District, this need is Town-wide. As such, any new staff added would make the most sense in a Town-wide capacity, with a focus on Easton's commercial districts. The town will be seen as business-friendly and responsive. There will be better coordination and communication with businesses, developers, and Stonehill College.

Action Item

A key challenge identified is a lack of capacity at the town level. The Planning Director is responsible for economic development, among all other duties, including running a department. This project was challenged by a lack of participation by businesses in the QCD. An Economic Development Coordinator could assist the Planning Director with multiple efforts.

- **Liaison to Business Community:** Serve as the point person for business engagement, business development for the Town who will be a resource and ombudsman. Businesses have a direct point of contact to problem solve and alleviate concerns.
- **Small Business Coordinator:** Focus on business engagement to understand local business needs, issues, and opportunities; devise strategies, and create partnerships. Provide an avenue for businesses to collaborate, strengthening the relationship between the town, college, and business community. Provide a direct point of contact to help problem solve and alleviate any concerns and help with marketing and promoting businesses.
- **Business Attraction/Retention/Recruitment:** Increased capacity will create an opportunity to provide additional jobs, additional tax revenue, and needed goods and services. Work with property owners and real estate leaders to seek new business opportunities for vacant parcels/commercial buildings. Collaborate with local partners, regional, and state leaders to create business development opportunities and innovative programs (e.g., façade improvements, pop-up shops, creative economy, restaurant week, etc.)

Process

1. Identify Funding and Successfully Advocate for the Creation of a Position. Once funding is identified, the creation of a position should be recommended by the Town Administration and be approved at a Town Meeting.

2. Formalize Job Description: The Town should create a job description detailing the responsibilities of an economic development position. The main goal of such a position is to hire someone who can help find ways to support existing businesses and bring in new businesses that serve the needs of the community and create job opportunities. These responsibilities could include, but not be limited to:

- Business outreach and direct assistance
- Coordination with business/community groups
- Project management
- Grant writing
- Data collection and analysis
- Administration of a small business assistance program (i.e., façade and storefront improvements)
- Special Events Assistance

Additional efforts could include advocating for funding and creative partnerships, identifying alternative, creative funding sources (other than from the general fund) to implement initiatives, coordinating with the Easton Chamber of Commerce, creating a business guide that walks through the steps to opening a business in Easton, understanding the zoning and regulatory processes to help other town staff problem-solve issues or concerns, providing technical assistance, advocating for the regulatory process, and creating a business retention program to strengthen the local business economy.

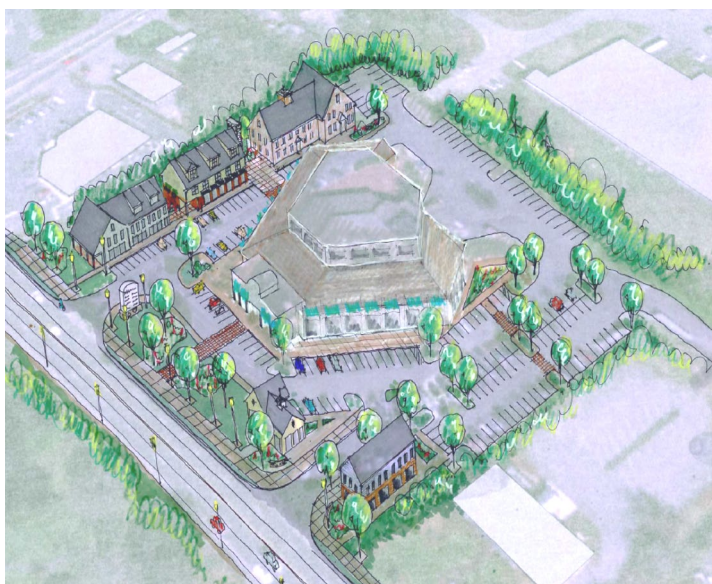
3. Initiate the Hiring Process.

Challenges

- Funding to support a position long term. If Town funding is not available, consider alternative opportunities like college interns or shared positions with regional planning agency/other towns
- Ensuring position provides fair and equitable distribution of time/resources for all responsibilities
- Setting expectations too high or being unrealistic with responsibilities allocated to this position
- Managing competing goals/expectations and maintaining ongoing and continued communication between staff, stakeholders, businesses, etc.

Identify and Correct Zoning and Permitting Impediments

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Queset Commercial District/Census Tracts 6001 and 6002.02 (2020)
Origin	The Town created the Queset District Zoning with three subdistricts (A, B, C) to promote a more walkable, mixed-use commercial district in 2016. However, the vision set forth from the Queset Commercial District Economic Development Strategy (2018) is not being realized. The LRRP working group discussed zoning as an impediment to redevelopment.
Budget	 Low Budget – Consultant to review and offer edits to QCD Zoning. Sources: Town funding; Planning & Zoning Grants (MA Community One Stop for Growth)
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk – Political will; Community interest; Continued lack of development
Key Performance Indicators	Number of new developments (by SF, use, and units); reduced widths of curb cuts (measured by linear feet); increase in pedestrians; documented change in locations of new buildings on a parcel; # of new businesses
Partners & Resources	Town Departments (Planning & Economic Development, Economic Development Committee, Planning Board, Board of Health) Developers (potential), Zoning Consultant, OCPC



Rendering of infill development opportunity at the Marketplace site on Washington Street Provided by Town of Easton



Marketplace Building Photo Source: BSC Group

Diagnostic

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the commercial and residential real estate markets. Supply shortages and chain disruptions for materials has increased the cost of supplies and construction and slowed or postponed planned developments. The Town of Easton should be proactive in re-evaluating its zoning code to make necessary amendments now to bolster economic recovery efforts in the near-term. While the Town recently made amendments to the requirements for commercial use within the QCD-C subdistrict in response to changing market conditions accelerated by the COVID-19 health and safety responses and to accommodate a particular development project, changing zoning on a reactive case-by-case basis is not recommended as a practice. Other standards and requirements within the zoning code should be evaluated for all three QCD subdistricts.

In addition, street wall continuity is lacking throughout the corridor. The Town's efforts at transforming the Queset Study from an auto-centric commercial strip to a walkable destination has been setback by the COVID-19 pandemic. But the corridor in its current state also reinforces how unfriendly the district is to pedestrians and bicyclists as more people turn to the outdoors for activity and social distancing. This has had a negative impact on the district's businesses.

The amount of off-street parking in the QCD appears excessive. The Town should evaluate to confirm parking requirements per use are not unreasonably high or excessive. Also, the Town should evaluate landscaping and setback requirements.

Finally, the Town has a temporary outdoor dining policy. It would be beneficial for the town to work toward a more permanent solution as this Select Board Policy #38 is set to expire once the Governor's COVID-19 Order No. 35 is rescinded. As a result of COVID-19, public health requirements for social distancing have placed new burdens and challenges on the business community to provide more physical space between customers and staff. Outdoor dining will continue to help restaurateurs recover faster from the impacts of lost revenue at the height of universal closures as diners continue to prefer socially distanced outdoor dining space.



The Town obtained renderings to represent mixed-use, compact, and pedestrian friendly development on the Washington Street Corridor. Provided by Town of Easton

Action Item

The Town is seeking to use the zoning code as a tool to guide the physical change of the corridor to a more aesthetically pleasing and walkable area.

Key actions include:

- Obtain Funding for Technical Assistance.
- Procure assistance from a zoning expert.
- Evaluate current zoning to identify impediments/inconsistencies.
- Evaluate current Quset Commercial District Design Guidelines to identify impediments/inconsistencies.
- Consider updating signage requirements and recommendations based on building location and proximity to street.
- Consider whether the front and side yard setbacks and parking requirements in the QCD subzones are excessive.
- Evaluate utility placement (overhead vs. underground) and impact to walkability.



The Town obtained renderings to represent mixed-use, compact, and pedestrian friendly development on the Washington Street Corridor Provided by Town of Easton

Process

1. Determine whether zoning amendments are to be prepared in house or with outside consultant.
2. Planning Board to establish a working/advisory group to guide the process.
3. Articulate the purpose, need, and origin of the proposed zoning amendment.
4. Prepare draft amendments and vetting with working group, stakeholders, and community.
5. Planning Board prepares the final draft of zoning amendments and submits to the Board of Selectmen for inclusion in the Town Meeting Warrant.
6. Planning Board hold required public hearing and makes recommendation to Town Meeting.
7. Town Meeting approval requires a vote of 2/3 for passage.
8. Planning staff works to attract developers.

Revising the Zoning and Permitting Process



Location

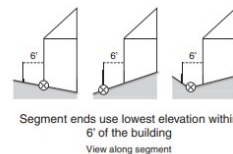
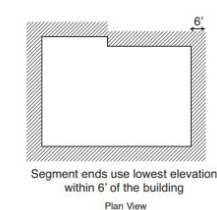
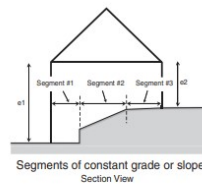
Newton, MA

The Process to Redesign

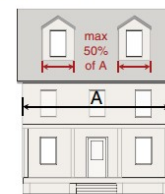
The City of Newton's Zoning Redesign project is a multi-year effort to update and rewrite Newton's Zoning Ordinance. Zoning is the set of laws governing such things as the size and shape of buildings, additions and renovations, and what types of activities can take place in which buildings.

In 2011 the Zoning Reform Group, which was formed in response to broad sentiment, including from the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, that the Zoning Ordinance was difficult to understand, and did not always provide the desired outcome. The Zoning Redesign process goes back to the early 2010s and is overseen by the City Council Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP). City staff, ZAP, and the Planning & Development Board are committed to a diverse and robust engagement process.

- 1) The zoning proposal is formally presented to the City Council
- 2) The ZAP reviews the proposal
- 3) There must be a notification of a Public Hearing
- 4) The Public Hearing takes place
- 5) The Planning and Development Board Submits a Formal Recommendation
- 6) Finally, City Council Deliberates



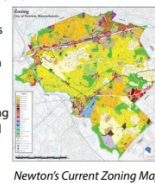
- b. A dormer may be no wider than 50 percent of the length of the exterior wall of the story next below. Where more than one dormer is located on the same side of the roof, the width of all dormers combined may not exceed 50 percent of the length of the exterior wall next below.



The new Zoning Ordinance includes many illustrations to help clarify design requirements
Source: Town of Newton

What is Zoning in Newton?

There are two major components of zoning in Newton. The first is the Zoning Ordinance text which lays out specific rules and regulations for each zoning category. The second is the zoning map, which is a city map overlaid with colors showing the type of zoning that applies to each property.



Newton's Current Zoning Map

Zoning Districts in the Zoning Map

Residential zones occupy most of the city. These zones allow for housing primarily, but community amenities like schools, parks, and places of worship are also permitted. There are 7 kinds of residential zones in the city that range in what they allow, from only **single-family** detached houses (SR1) to higher-density apartment buildings (MR4).

Tip: also look up 'duplex' & 'multi-family' in the Dictionary on p.16

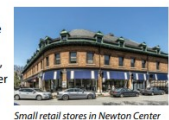


Single-family home in Auburndale (SR-1 zoning district)



Multi-family housing near Oak Hill (MR-3 zoning district)

Business zones are where you'll find commercial buildings. These can include offices, shopping malls, restaurants, grocery stores, banks, boutiques, and many other similar establishments. There are five business zones, BU1 - BU5. The business zones also allow for housing (such as apartment buildings), but the ground floor is typically reserved for commercial uses such as shops and restaurants.



Small retail stores in Newton Center

Mixed Use zones include the areas along Needham Street which primarily include large commercial uses and some manufacturing and office buildings, the proposed new development at the Riverside T station, and new mixed use buildings in village centers such as Austin Street and Trio in Newtonville. There are four mixed use zones, MU1 - MU4. However, MU1 and MU2, located along Needham Street, do not actually allow for a large mix of uses and only allow very limited amounts of housing.



Mixed-use building at 28 Austin Street (MU-4 zoning district)



The new Zoning Redesign Booklet was generated to help explain the process of rewriting the Zoning code
Source: Town of Newton

Appendix

September 16, 2021

Heather Gould
BSC Group, Inc.
33 Waldo Street, 4th Floor
Worcester, MA 01608

RE: Town of Easton Subject Matter Expert Response – Local Rapid Recovery Program

Dear Heather;

BSC Group, Inc. (BSC) has prepared this document in response to your request for a Subject Matter Expert (SME) related to transportation and pedestrian upgrades at the Queset Commercial District gateway in the Town of Easton, Massachusetts. This information was prepared to assist you with your ongoing work with the Town's involvement with the Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) to revitalize the Queset Commercial District and address the effects of COVID-19 on local businesses. The following information includes summary provided in the initial rubric prepared for the project and offers specific recommendations to meet the Town's goals.

**Upgrade Queset Commercial District Gateway Intersections
Easton, Massachusetts**

Origin	Town of Easton
Budget	Medium (\$50k - \$200k): Intermediate intersection improvements related to pedestrian upgrades may include new signal equipment, reconstructed curb ramps and sidewalks, new crosswalks, and curb extensions. The cumulative budget to install or upgrade these items can range from a low budget to into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, depending on the specific scope of work to be undertaken.
Timeframe	Short term (Less than 5 years): Pedestrian improvements can be designed and constructed within a five-year timeframe.
Risk	Medium risk: Risks to this project include the political will of the state, the process to design and construct the improvements, and available funding for the project.
Key Performance	Reduction in the number of collisions; more pedestrian activity; enhanced pedestrian safety; reduced vehicular speeds



Indicators	
Partners & Resources	<p>Town of Easton</p> <p>Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)</p> <p>Old Colony Planning Council</p> <p>Private developers</p>
Diagnostic	<p>The Project area is an approximate 3,000-foot long segment of Washington Street (Route 138) within the Quset Commercial District (QCD) in Easton, Massachusetts. The signalized intersections at Belmont Street and Depot Street are located at the northern and southern ends of the Project area, respectively. A third traffic signal is located at the intersection with Central Street, approximately 950 feet south of Belmont Street.</p> <p>The segment of Washington Street consists of two travel lanes per direction within the Project area and serves suburban-style commercial uses with many curb cuts. The existing traffic signal equipment is outdated and pedestrian accommodations are lacking at the gateway intersections at Belmont Street and Depot Street. Pedestrian signal equipment is not provided, curb ramps are not ADA compliant, and crosswalks are long and lack good visibility, creating both accessibility and safety issues at the intersections.</p> <p>Sidewalks are poorly defined, missing, or interrupted by wide curb cuts that serve the adjacent businesses throughout the entire corridor. Bicycle facilities are also non-existent in the Project area. Safety concerns include high vehicular speeds, vehicular conflicts due to the numerous curb cuts, and lack of turning lanes throughout the corridor. The intersection at Depot Street is also identified as a high-crash cluster for bicycles in the MassDOT Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) database.</p>
Action Item to Consider	<p>The process for developing a safer corridor and gateway intersection improvements includes a detailed planning and design process that can implement complete streets principles that enhance safety and efficiency for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists.</p> <p>A steering committee can be organized to include Town and State officials and QCD stakeholders. The steering committee will help guide the process to identify existing issues and potential improvements.</p> <p>The corridor and the intersections are under MassDOT jurisdiction, which requires the state to implement any improvements.</p>
Recommendations to Consider	<p>Improvements to the QCD transportation network should include improved pedestrian facilities, the addition of bicycle infrastructure, and enhanced safety features. The following are recommendations to consider for improvements to the corridor and at the gateway intersections:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Road diet: Review operations of the corridor and consider implementing a road diet for the entire length of the corridor. The cross section of the road can be reduced from two lanes per direction to a single lane per direction with additional



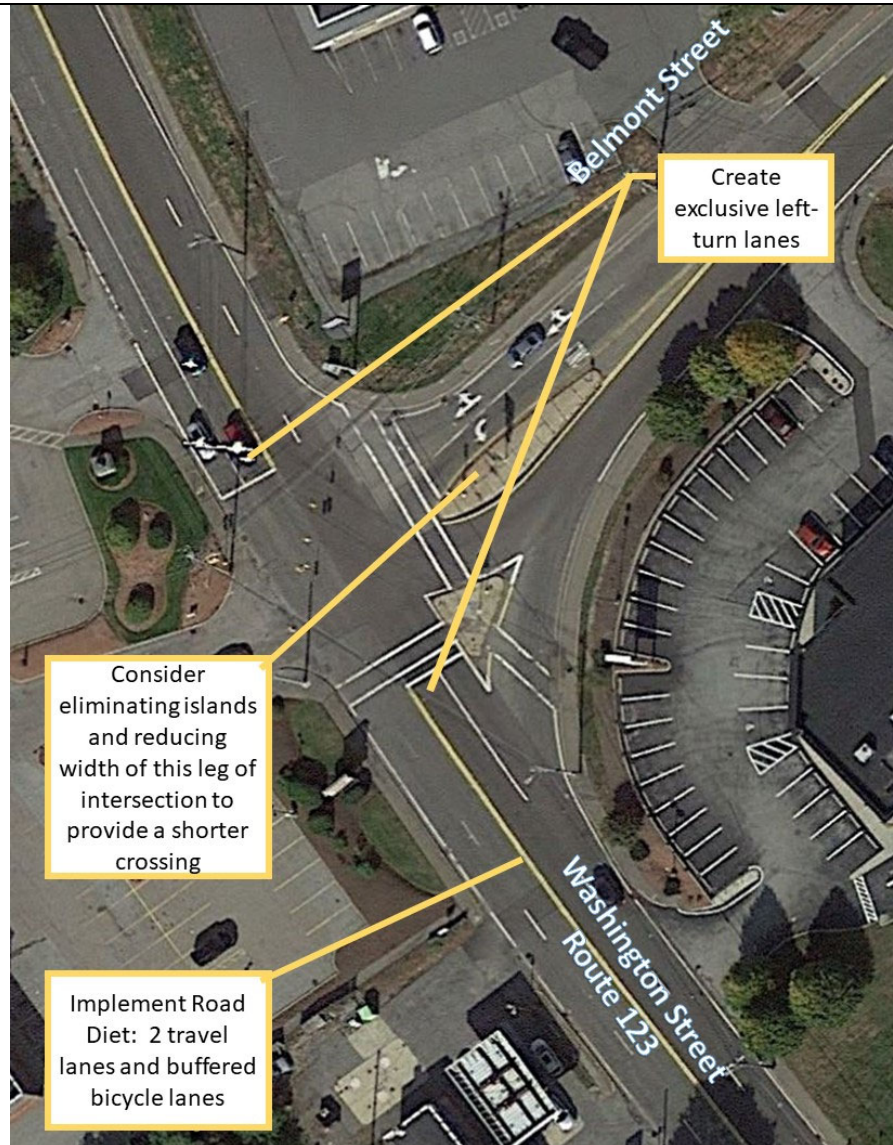
turn lanes or a center turn lane to serve turning movements into driveways. A reduction in the number of vehicular lanes will also help to reduce speeds and eliminate conflicts related to left-turns and lane-changing maneuvers by vehicles. A road diet will provide additional width for bicycle facilities and/or widened sidewalks.

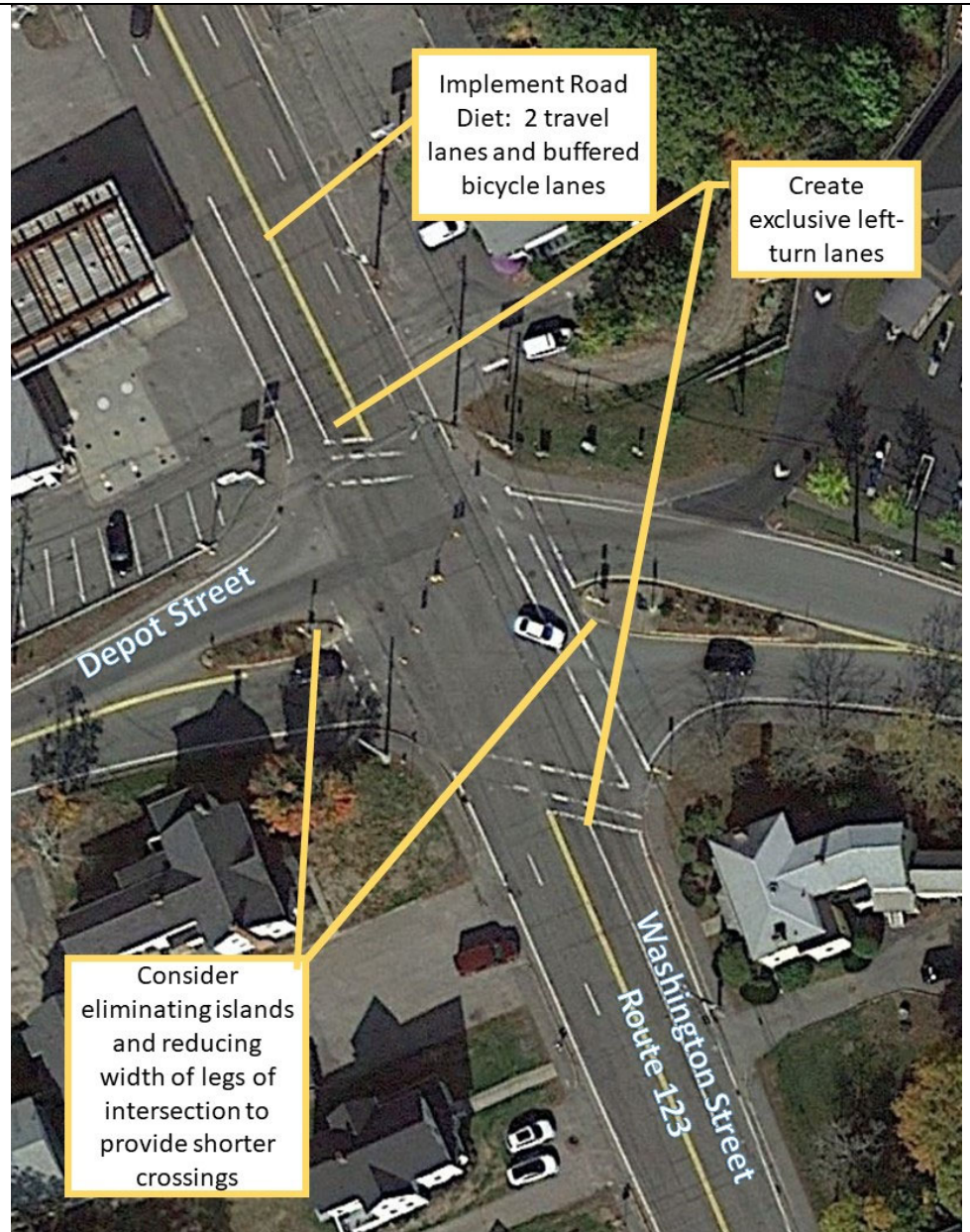
A road diet should be considered after conducting a study of operations. The study should review existing traffic volumes and vehicular speeds to determine if it is feasible while maintaining efficient operations.

2. **Intersection improvements:** Upgrade traffic signal equipment at the three signalized intersections within the Project area. Signals should have backplates to improve visibility. Pedestrian signal equipment should be installed where at Belmont Street and Depot Street and upgraded at Central Street.

Review operations at intersections to determine if it is possible to convert the one of the through lanes along Route 138 to an exclusive turn-lane. This change would allow for protected left-turn movements to occur. Review Belmont Street and Depot Street approaches to consider reducing width, eliminate channelizing islands, and reducing pedestrian crossing lengths.

Specific recommendations to consider for geometric improvements are shown in the following graphics.





3. **Pedestrian improvements:** Install ADA-compliant curb ramps with detectable warning panels for all crosswalks. Repaint crosswalks to improve visibility. The continental or ladder style design should be considered. Install new pedestrian signal equipment with audible indications at the three signalized intersections. Reconstruct and upgrade sidewalks on both sides of the corridor.
4. **Access management:** Reduce number of curb cuts and the overall widths of curb cuts. Require any future development or redevelopment to install/improve curb cuts. Require future development to provide internal connections with adjacent parcels to provide better connectivity between commercial properties.



	<p>5. Corridor study: This segment of Route 123 should be evaluated in more detail through the preparation of a corridor study. A study can be implemented as part of one of the “actions items to consider” listed above and will provide the framework for a comprehensive evaluation of issues and development of implementable measures that go beyond improving safety at the gateway intersections.</p> <p>6. Streetscape elements: Additional streetscape elements such as landscaping and pedestrian-scale street lighting should be considered in combination with other improvements to the corridor. These types of elements will improve the pedestrian environment and may contribute to a reduction in vehicular speeds along Route 123.</p>
Potential Funding Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)• Massachusetts Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program• MassWorks funding (in conjunction with any future development projects in Easton)• ARPA funding sources

The information contained above provides a summary of the project, the goals of the project, the issues that need to be addressed, and a list of recommendations to consider. The success of the implementation of these recommendations will be dependent upon the involvement of Town staff and the development of an appropriate steering committee that will ultimately fine-tune the recommendations and determine a prioritization plan for implementation.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office with any inquiries you may have. We look forward to continuing to assist you with your work in the Town of Easton.

Very truly yours,
BSC Group, Inc.

Michael A. Santos, PE
Project Manager

Water Commission
Owned Land

Potential
Connection

Potential
Trailhead

Stonehill
College

Belmont Street

Potential
Trailhead

Morse
Pond

Potential
Pedestrian
Refuge

Plymouth Dr

Washington Street

Potential
Connection

Potential
Pedestrian
Refuge

Settler's
Pond

Potential
Pedestrian
Refuge

Potential
Boardwalk

Potential
Trailhead

Depot Street

Pedestrian and Open Space Connections at Washington Street

Prepared for the Town of Easton, MA

DIAGNOSTIC

The 138 Corridor is a fairly nondescript suburban commercial strip set along a very high traffic roadway. The road is not conducive to encouraging pedestrian activity as commercial nodes are widely dispersed and high speed of traffic makes a walk very uncomfortable. Longer term, there is hope to develop a cohesive brand and placemaking activation plan for this strip and any interventions here could be used to creatively launch this process.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

138 Corridor Places is a plan for dispersed placemaking activation throughout the commercial corridor that would be geared towards creating a destination, encouraging people to come to the district for something other than a single errand, stay longer and come back more frequently. Placemaking interventions would be staged in a number of commercial centers along the district with a central, main placemaking experience located within one of the nodes as a main "draw" to the district which could also serve as a retail incubator of sorts. The hope is to cohesively brand each of the spaces to improve user experience while supporting local businesses while giving the district a consistent identity between commercial plazas.

PARTNERS & RESOURCES

- Town Representative
- Area property owners and small businesses.
- Local residents engaged early to ensure adoption.
- Local contractors and suppliers to source project materials and build.
- Local DPW to support installation
- Placemaking Consultant to support both planning and continued community engagement as project goes through iterations.

FUNDING

- Shared Streets and Spaces - MassDOT
- ARPA Funding (TBD)
- Commonwealth Places, MassDevelopment
- CDBG Funding
- State and regional foundation support
- Crowdfunding through Patronicity
- NEFA Arts Grants
- Art Place America
- National Association of Realtors Placemaking Grants

PROJECT INSPIRATION

Prova, Brockton, MA



Brockton was seeking to activate a vacant parcel in its Downtown core to prove the viability of the Downtown as a commercial destination, particularly on nights and weekends, and create a cohesive community space in the heart of Downtown. Prova brought together public art, community, local commerce and more in a temporary activation of a lot slated for development.

BUDGET: \$110,000 for movie equipment

IMPLEMENTATION: 3-6 weeks

TIMELINE: Seasonal but can be extended to winter

MATERIALS: tables, chairs, stage, retail sheds, lighting, umbrellas, paint, sound system, plantings.

MAINTENANCE: staffing and upkeep of space

Corner Spot, Ashland, MA



Ashland was seeking to create a community hub in the Downtown that would be a passive place for residents to gather, grab a meal or enjoy take out from town while also hosting small recurring events. The retail space serves as a way for area businesses to test the viability of a brick & mortar retail presence while also serving as an activator for the space itself.

BUDGET: \$65,000 for all components

IMPLEMENTATION: 8-12 weeks

TIMELINE: year round programming and passive use

MATERIALS: landscaping, swings, tables, chairs, shade sails, shed fitted for retail use, audio equipment, games

MAINTENANCE: moderate- cleaning, landscaping, repairs, event programming.

PROCESS



Location & Team

Using the 661 Plaza as a focal point, we'd propose using that space as a base for larger activations, partnering with the developer to prove out the viability of the site as extensive commercial use for future development. Then, scattered down the street, activation in parking lots along the streetscape to show passers by that theres more here to stop for.

Identify Inspiration

We've provided two sample projects that encapsulate components of our recommendations for implementation here. Please feel free to explore other inspiration projects as you seek to implement programming here.

Plan & Implement

Determine appropriate timing of activations of the space and determine what "success" looks like before hand. While food trucks will be a great option to bring energy to the space, engage area restaurants to see how they can best support events on the lawn. Ensure partnerships to plan events & host meetups to activate space. Engage local creative community.

Feedback

An incredibly important part of any iterative project like this. Ensure you're actively seeking input through in person and online methods. During any events or programming, have someone on site surveying community members, businesses and area residents.

Iterate

What worked? What didn't work? Adapt your project based upon user feedback. Did residents benefit? Did area businesses benefit. How could things be improved and could another location be more appropriate for this intervention. .

ACTIVATION LOCATIONS

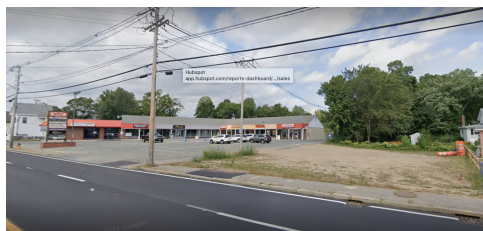


Scotts Plaza

Using the 661 Plaza as a focal point, we propose creating a highly programmed space supporting outdoor food vending from local businesses, festive lighting to host night and winter events and tables, chairs, seating, and games for people to passively enjoy the space. Opportunity to host pop up small businesses, farmers markets, fitness classes and local crafts fairs could provide a great anchor for the district and other activated spaces.

Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, umbrellas, stage, storage unit, paint, temporary landscaping, lawn games, sound equipment, storage sheds converted into retail spaces, temporary lighting.



El Mariachi Plaza

Using similar branding to the materials chosen for Scotts Plaza, tables, chairs, temporary landscaping and lighting could be installed at a small pocket park adjacent to the plaza to create a passive space for people to bring takeout food, grab a coffee and gather.

Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, umbrellas, planters and temporary landscaping, gravel.



Phase 2: Third Location TBD

Thinking of this project as a multi-phase experiment to understand what will attract people and encourage them to feel comfortable and stay, invest in the first two locations while waiting to integrate a third into this program after a few months analyzing the first two spaces. Proof of concept in the first two locations will hopefully allow you to more easily identify successful interventions in a phase 2.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Event attendee numbers
- Number of events
- Number of different groups using the space for events
- Average users per day
- Change in sales at area businesses during events
- Overall user sentiment of The 138 Corridor
- Time spent within the Corridor.
- User sentiment obtained through polling
- Do visitors make more trips to the corridor?
- Do visitors consider the corridor more of a destination as opposed to a single errand.

KEYS TO SUCCESS



Early Engagement

Bring together a team of engaged business owners, property owners, creatives and residents from the area early in this planning process so they can feel as much of the planning process as possible and are more likely to stay engaged throughout this first iteration and hopefully beyond.



Programming

Develop an easy system for groups to sign up to utilize the spaces to host meetups and small events. This is a great way to increase visitors to the area while taking some of the responsibility for programming off the town.



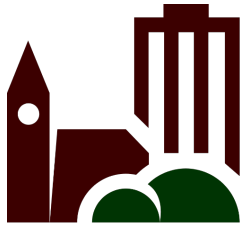
Feedback

Have an online survey always open combined with in person surveys of attendees to events and users of the space as well as direct outreach to abutting residents and businesses.



Flexibility

Any equipment purchased for this project should be viewed as portable, meaning it can be reused in a different space in town should this space not become widely adopted and can be packed up and reused to activate another public space throughout the rest of the Easton Community.



LEVINE PLANNING STRATEGIES

Tools for Building Communities

Levine Planning Strategies, LLC

PO Box 7215

Portland, ME 04112-7215

jlevine@levineplans.com

617-817-0424

SME PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

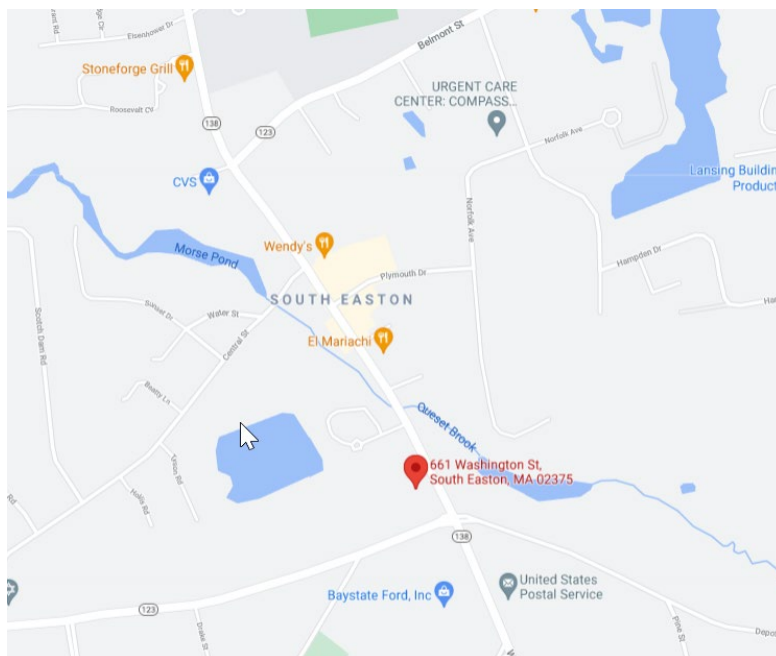
Administrative Capacity Project: Rapid Recovery Program

“Increase capacity with a focus on economic development”

Easton (BSC Group)

September 4, 2021

You have requested a Subject Matter Expert (SME) to assist you in developing a process for evaluating how Easton might retain ongoing, professional assistance to help with local economic development efforts. This might start as a part-time effort and increase to full-time over a 3-to-5-year time period. The rapid recovery plan process has identified a need for the Town to work closely with businesses and property owners in commercial districts to help them recover from the pandemic and thrive in the post-pandemic economic context. While this need was identified as part of the work on the Washington Street (Route 138) corridor, it exists throughout the Town. In addition, any new staff capacity would make the most sense in a Town-wide capacity, with a focus on Easton’s commercial districts.



The Department of Planning & Economic Development has talented staff that takes on efforts in day-to-day planning work, grant writing, and special projects to improve the public realm. However, they lack the capacity to initiate regular contact with local businesses, as well as to seek funding for economic development programs. At the same time, funding for additional staff at the local level is limited. Creating any additional position will require creative funding.



KEY FACTORS

Timeframe: Short – a part-time position could start quickly and evolve and potentially expand to full-time over time.

Concerns: Political will; Community interest/partners; Sustainable funding source(s.)

Partners: Chamber of Commerce; Business Community; Stonehill College; Developers; Town Boards/Committees (Economic Development Committee, Select Board, CPA); Old Colony Planning Council.

Relationship to COVID-19 Recovery: Such an effort would help downtown adapt to new norms and practices; downtown economy would be more resilient with professional assistance in case of new disruption (related to COVID-19 resurgence or other events.)

Performance Indicators: Funding for additional capacity; Number of tangible strategies developed (business assistance, marketing, branding); Number of businesses helped through outreach, coordination, and direct assistance; Increased business involvement in local affairs; Creation and funding of business programs such as storefront and façade improvement funds and microloan programs; Amount of dollars secured and distributed; Growth in local commercial tax base.

RECOMMENDED PROCESS

Based on the information provided, as well as the meetings we have held with the project facilitator and local project team, we recommend the following process for moving forward with this proposed project:

1. Brainstorming

- ✓ Survey the potential pool of ideal candidates – if not by name than by current job types. Would you expect to hire someone local? Is there a candidate pool nearby or would someone have to relocate? Developing this list will help inform the intent of creating this position.
- ✓ Develop a conceptual job description that outlines key job responsibilities and reporting structure for the position. Is this an administrative position as part of town government, or would the position stand alone as part of a non-profit entity?

2. Identifying Funding

- ✓ Identify potential funding sources. Will the town be willing to appropriate funds for at least the first couple of years? Are there grants available? Would there be a grant writing aspect to this position that would help fund it?
 - Other than town appropriations, some funding sources to explore would include state grants; Community Development Block Grant funds; a downtown Business Improvement District or District Increment Finance district; and grants from foundations.



- ✓ Determine if there is interest in funding the position with the anticipation that part of the position's responsibility would be to write and obtain grants, with a portion of grant funding assigned to ongoing support for the position?
- ✓ Line up funding commitments. Town funds would have to be appropriated at Town Meeting and other funding would have to be secured in advance.

3. Drafting a Formal Job Description

- ✓ Draft a formal job description based on the conceptual description developed during brainstorming. This description will be affected by the funding received, both in terms of job expectations and hours per week.
- ✓ Have the description approved by funding sources, such as Town human resources and any grantees (if necessary).

4. Posting and Recruiting

- ✓ Advertise the position widely, in conventional job posting sites but also in specialized sites such as the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association website and your regional planning agency. Post the position on listservs if possible. Ask local universities that train economic development professionals to list the position.
- ✓ Use informal word-of-mouth to spread the word about the position locally.

5. Interviewing and Hiring

- ✓ Create a strong and diverse hiring committee to gain a variety of perspectives and legitimacy for the position. Including a local business owner should be considered.
- ✓ Interview all candidates with the same general set of questions and in the same environment.
- ✓ Check references of your top one or two candidates.
- ✓ Make a clear offer and express excitement about the chosen candidate.
- ✓ Have a backup candidate in mind in case the leading choice does not accept the position.

6. Onboarding

- ✓ Make sure the new staff person feels welcome and has access to information about the community and their new role.
- ✓ Immediately pivot to ongoing funding of the position, through pursuing additional grants.



INITIAL THOUGHTS

- A position such as this would likely best be housed in town government and report to the Director of Planning & Economic Development. That location will allow a flexible use of staff resources when different aspects of planning and economic development efforts require attention. In addition, there is a natural connection between existing efforts in that office and the anticipated role of this additional position.
- The long-term funding of such a position is most likely if this person is also accomplishing other administrative tasks for the town. On the other hand, this position cannot become simply administrative. The most likely way to fund this position in years two through five is through creative use of grant funds. In year one, the position will likely need town or state funding, while after year four the additional tax revenue brought in through this position is likely to pay for much of it.
- A combined Economic Development Coordinator/Grantwriter position is worth serious consideration.

I hope this process overview is helpful as you work on this project.