



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Town of Grafton



**OFFICE OF THE
TOWN ADMINISTRATOR**

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October 7, 2021

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Re: Grafton Local Rapid Recovery Plan – Letter of Support

On October 5, 2021, the Grafton Select Board reviewed Grafton's Local Rapid Recovery Plan as drafted in coordination with KARP Strategies, LLC. The Select Board notes the high level of effort and community engagement included in the development of this plan which was coordinated over a relatively short timeframe. The Board wishes to thank the stakeholders involved for their input, and professional planning staff who worked to make this plan a reality. It is the Board's hope that the plan will provide an effective road map to the New England Village's recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please take this letter as the Select Board's formal letter of support for the plan as voted at their October 5, 2021 meeting.

Evan Brassard



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PLANNING DEPARTMENT

October 8, 2021

Emmy Hahn, MDI/LRRP Program Coordinator
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Re: Grafton Local Rapid Recovery Plan – Letter of Support

Hello:

On September 27, 2021, the Grafton Planning Board reviewed Grafton's Local Rapid Recovery Plan as drafted in coordination with KARP Strategies, LLC. The Planning Board notes the high level of effort and community engagement included in the development of this plan which was coordinated over a relatively short timeframe. The Board wishes to thank the stakeholders involved for their input, and professional planning staff who worked to make this plan a reality. It is the Board's hope that the plan will provide an effective road map to the New England Village's recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please take this letter as the Planning Board's formal letter of support for the plan as voted at their September 27, 2021 meeting.

Sincerely,

Christopher J. McGoldrick
Town Planner

Cc: Charles Sanderson, MDI/LRRP Program Assistant Coordinator, DHCD (via Email)
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Grafton Select Board (via Email)
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Acknowledgements



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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:

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mass.gov/DHCD**

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

Town of Grafton

David Robbins
Karl Mosian
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Kristen Belanger
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Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce

Jeannie Herbert

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Juli Bovenzi

Grafton Grill

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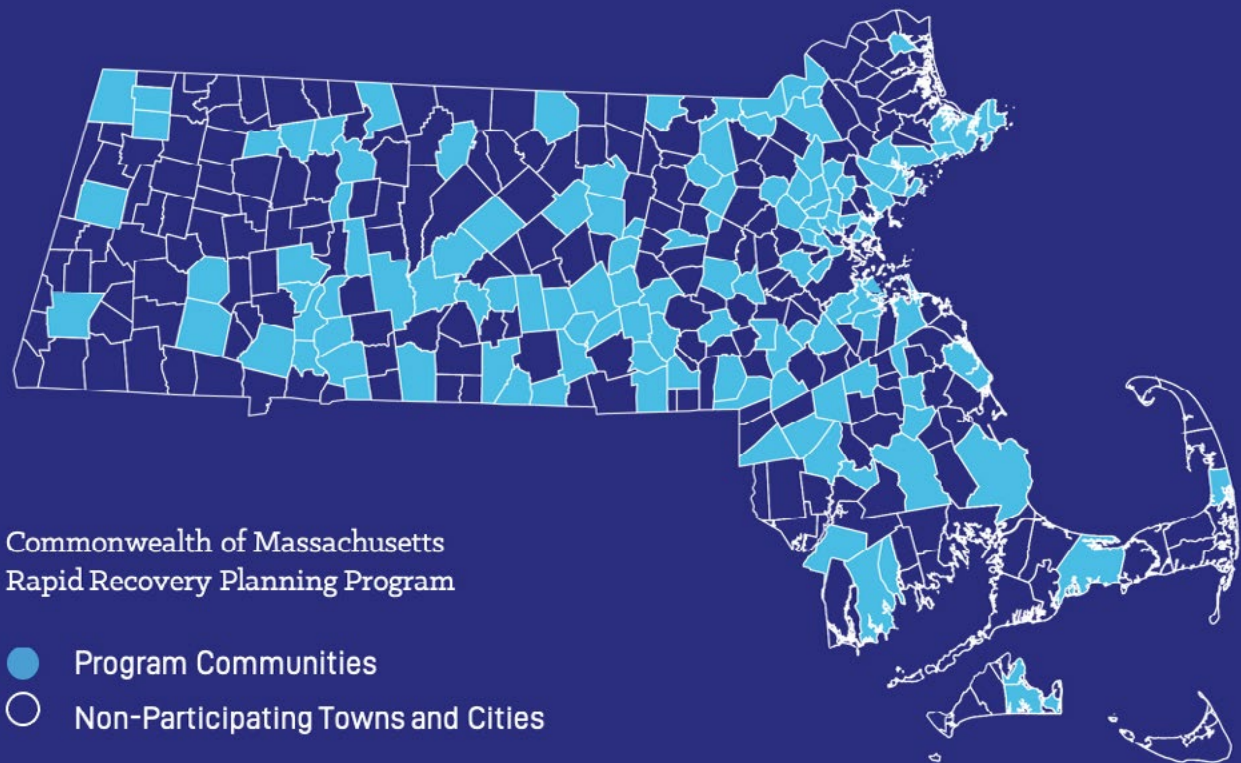
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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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.



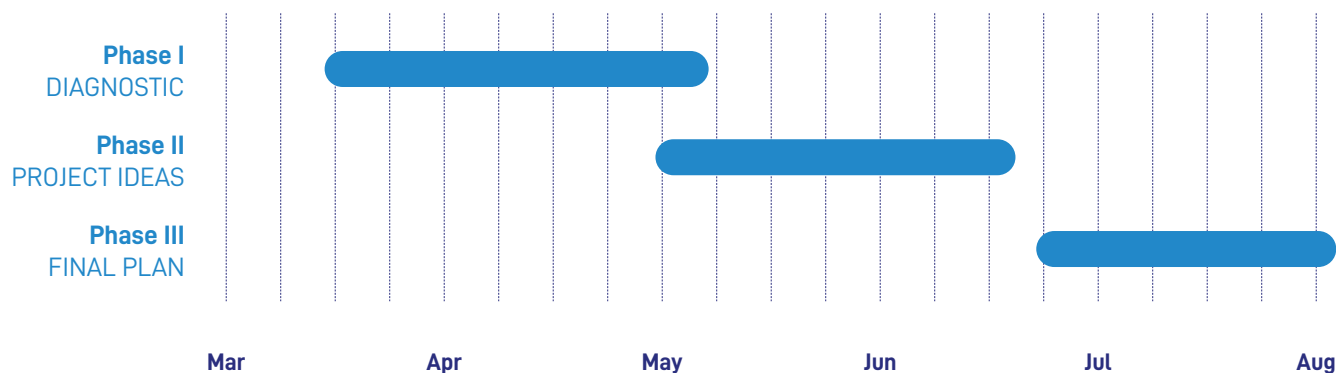
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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



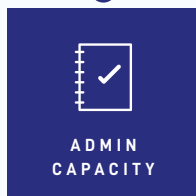
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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

An Industrial Village with Modern Potential

Grafton is a quaint New England town in the heart of the Blackstone River Valley in Worcester County, Massachusetts. First incorporated in 1735, Grafton has grown into a small but vibrant community of just over 19,000 residents. The town is well-connected regionally, not only forming an important part of the Blackstone Valley and Worcester County communities but even feeding into the greater Boston metro area. However, Grafton is more than a commuter suburb: the town has a unique character driven by engaged residents, thriving local businesses, and a rich historical feel complemented by modern amenities.

North Grafton is one of Grafton's three main business districts. The area is defined by its historic and industrial character. The district sits on both sides of Routes 30 and 140, including the vehicular corridor as well as the residential and industrial surrounding areas. At the center of North Grafton is Washington Mills, a longtime industrial hub that is also the district's largest employer. Washington Mills remains active between its two sites on each side of Route 30, and truck traffic between the two locations is a defining characteristic of North Grafton. Aside from the Mills, North Grafton has several vibrant local businesses and restaurants. These amenities attract a diverse customer base from across Grafton and nearby communities. Relatively high-density residential communities flank these industrial and commercial hubs, with residents in neighborhoods like Perry Hill frequently living in multi-story apartment buildings.

Among Grafton's business districts, North Grafton has been the subject of the fewest planning initiatives to date. Isolated initiatives have improved several areas of the district in recent years. For example, the recent construction of a new pedestrian plaza and bridge over the Quinsigamond River added a vibrant pedestrian amenity to the area. Despite a few such successful efforts, however, North Grafton has lacked a comprehensive planning effort in recent years. As a result, extant zoning and infrastructure generally support existing uses, but restrict the development of new amenities.

Since North Grafton's potential as a thriving business district has not been prioritized in past planning efforts, the Town is focused on area initiatives that will improve walkability and commercial activity. Existing parks and open spaces are in need of infrastructure and programming improvements to transform them into attractive amenities for pedestrians. New sidewalks and paths are needed to connect the area's commercial and open space amenities to one another. Existing businesses would benefit from Town support to upgrade their facades, expand outdoor dining, and find creative parking solutions. Outreach and marketing efforts to attract new businesses and services would help diversify the tenant mix. Finally, zoning changes are required to facilitate new and existing business development.

The 12 projects proposed in this report are largely short-term, low budget improvements that will help improve North Grafton's existing amenities and attract those that are missing. In tandem with future initiatives, these projects will help North Grafton move towards its potential as a thriving, walkable business district.

Diagnostic

Key Findings



CUSTOMER BASE

Grafton is family-oriented and highly educated

Grafton is a family-oriented, middle class community in the heart of Worcester County. The population of 19,211 residents is mostly comprised of children and middle-aged adults between the ages of 45 and 65. Grafton residents are primarily well-educated: nearly half of adults have a Bachelor's degree or higher. As a result, the median household income of over \$103,000 is well above the regional figure of \$73,500. About 83% of Grafton residents are white, while roughly 11% are Asian. There are around 9,480 jobs in Grafton; many residents commute to cities such as Milford, Worcester, and even Boston for work.

North Grafton has similar demographics to the town as a whole among its 129 residents. It is also a family-dominated community with lower numbers of young adults and elderly residents. The median income of about \$69,000 is lower than the town as a whole, and residents of North Grafton are generally less educated, with just over one-third holding a Bachelor's degree or higher. Around 92% of North Grafton residents are white, higher than across the town.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

North Grafton is an industrial and commuter hub

North Grafton, known to some locals as New England Village or Perry Hill, is a largely industrial hub with residential clusters and emerging commercial attractions. The district is defined in character and use by the presence of Washington Mills, a longtime industrial institution that employs many locals. Washington Mills has two large facilities on each side of Route 30; these complexes, along with the frequent truck traffic between them during the week, define the area's physical environment.

The area around the Mills is a car-centric district dominated by commuters traveling along North Main Street on their way in and out of Grafton. Traffic on this street is often congested, which frustrates both commuters and truck drivers from the Mills. Additionally, the heavy traffic from both commuters and trucks serves as a barrier to pedestrian access. Despite the presence of sidewalks along North Main Street and several parks in the area, few locals view this district as walkable. Infrastructure upgrades for both cars and pedestrians, including parking, stoplights, expanded sidewalks, park improvements, and placemaking and wayfinding elements, are all areas of need in North Grafton.

North Grafton is home to several thriving businesses, including popular restaurants such as the Post Office Pub and Grafton Grille. However, there is a need for physical upgrades to existing and potential commercial lots. Many storefronts require facade and signage improvements. Parking demand exceeds supply, which is a barrier to attracting new businesses to the area. Several vacant lots and commercial buildings are underutilized due to industrial zoning, which prevents many commercial or mixed uses. Improvements to businesses' physical infrastructure and administrative capacity are areas of further need.



North Grafton has thriving businesses, but not enough of them

There are 21 businesses in the North Grafton district. Of these, eight are service-based, five are retail establishments, and an additional five are industrial, such as construction and manufacturing. Washington Mills is the most prominent business in the district. It was established in 1868 and continues to employ more than 200 workers, many of whom are local to the area. Two restaurants, the Post Office Pub and Grafton Grille, are successful and attract customers from across Grafton. No businesses closed in North Grafton due to the COVID-19 pandemic, though one business did close for unrelated reasons. There are four vacant storefronts in the area, as well as several undeveloped lots with the potential to become commercial sites.

Eight North Grafton businesses responded to the LRRP business survey in March and April 2021. Respondents included two restaurants, two retail establishments, and four other local businesses. Four were microenterprises with five or fewer employees, while one respondent had more than 50 employees. Businesses largely weathered the COVID-19 pandemic well, as only three of the eight respondents reported a decline in revenue from 2019 to 2020. However, six respondents reported some disruption due to the pandemic, including reduced visitor traffic and additional expenses incurred to meet safety requirements.

Overall, businesses expressed few concerns with existing conditions in North Grafton. Survey respondents were very satisfied with the condition of public space, safety and comfort for employees and customers, and access to resources and complimentary amenities. Potential improvements to the physical environment including storefronts, streetscape and sidewalks, public seating, and other amenities were identified as unimportant by respondents (although Town leaders did flag these as areas of need for this district). Improvements most desired by business owners include parking improvements, additional strategies to attract new businesses, and general marketing strategies for the district.



North Grafton has not yet been the focus of major planning initiatives

Grafton has a dedicated team of staff and volunteers serving in various planning capacities. The Town currently centers its planning decisions around the 2001 Grafton Master Plan, though a number of plans and reports for specific topics and districts have been released more recently. Several areas in Grafton, including the Grafton Town Common, have been the focus of extensive planning work and are regarded by Town leaders as well-designed districts. Multiple boards and committees hold planning jurisdictions throughout the Town, including the Select Board, the Planning Board, the Zoning Board of Appeals, and the Economic Development Committee. Business owners, residents, and board members alike expressed satisfaction with the level of collaboration between boards as well as between the various boards and the community.

While these planning entities have conducted extensive work in other parts of Grafton, there have yet to be any major recent planning efforts in North Grafton. Locals view this district as a commuter corridor and industrial hub; while the foundations are in place for a strong commercial and walkable district, efforts to develop these features are mostly nascent. As a result, North Grafton is an area without a distinct brand or character. Town leaders and local residents and businesses are committed to developing the district's brand through concerted planning initiatives in the future.



Map of North Grafton (Study Area for this Planning Process)
Source: ESRI, USDA, and USGS

Project Recommendations

Create a Business Association

Category		Private Realm
Location		North Grafton (Option to Include All of Grafton)
Origin		Town leaders identified the need for a unified business association in North Grafton during Karp Strategies' site visit. This need was reiterated by business owners and subject matter experts during stakeholder interviews.
Budget		Low Budget (Under \$50,000): The only direct costs associated with forming a business association are time and materials for Town staff to oversee the process. Additional administrative costs may arise as needed in the future, such as the potential hiring of permanent staff to manage the new association and/or retaining legal counsel for the association.
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years): A business association can be formed in 6-18 months, depending on administrative capacity. Long-term administration of the association may last indefinitely as desired by the Town and local businesses.
Risk		Low Risk: There is little risk associated with forming a business association, as it has few direct costs and may provide substantial benefits. One potential risk is that a minority of businesses may feel ostracized or unrepresented by the leadership of the new association. Another potential risk is that the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce also serves as a business association for many local businesses, and creating a new entity may create tension in that working relationship.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of businesses who join the business association• Number of new businesses in North Grafton• Number of grants and resources obtained by North Grafton businesses

Action Item

The Town may support local businesses in North Grafton in creating a local business association. Such an association would help businesses assist one another in obtaining resources from the Town and outside sources as needed. This association may be a local chapter of a regional organization such as the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce or may be a standalone entity.

Diagnostic

Local businesses in North Grafton currently operate largely in isolation from one another. While regional entities such as the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce offer membership to interested North Grafton businesses, there does not exist any business association that specifically represents North Grafton businesses and facilitates partnership between them. The Town would like such an entity to be formed to improve communication and resource distribution with businesses in this area. Local businesses have also expressed a desire for an association that will represent their interests, advocate for changes to existing policy and zoning barriers, and assist them in their efforts to obtain business development resources such as grants.

Partners & Resources

Implementation Partners

- Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, Worcester Chamber of Commerce, Grafton Economic Development Commission (EDC): These entities have relationships with local businesses and experience organizing various business entities.
- Local business owners: Business owners will play a critical role in the planning, development, and ongoing leadership of the new business association.
- The Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network Central Regional Office (MSBDC) at Clark University: This office offers resources for entrepreneurs and small businesses in Massachusetts, including connections to federal and state assistance as well as dedicated local support. These connections may help the business association develop relationships and access resources.

Implementation Tools

- Commercial data and analytics providers like D&B Hoovers, Zoominfo, Insideview, and Experian: These are business database providers that sell access to information about business people and companies. The information about business trends, business industries, and contact information from these databases can be used to develop Grafton's registry.
- City Council/Town Meeting and/or Small Business Fair: These events might attract local business owners and other neighborhood organizations who will be able to provide additional information and insights.
- Worcester Chamber of Commerce: The chamber's Connect for Success program offers three groups which meet twice a month. Groups from non-competing industries make connections to grow their business through this networking opportunity. They also provide a number of other programs including in education and workforce development.



Small business fairs, such as the above event in Kutztown, PA, can support business associations by attracting new customers and nearby businesses which may be potential members.

Sources: Kutztown Community Partnership (2020)

Partners & Resources (continued)

Funding Sources

- Central Massachusetts Planning Commission (CMRPC): CMRPC's Resource Development Assistance program shares information about current funding opportunities via direct email and/or newsletters. For some funding sources, CMRPC may be available to assist resource development (fund raising) and grant administration (contact person: [Chris Ryan](#)).
- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge: EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition.
- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance: This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs.
- Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants: A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects.

Process

1. Develop a North Grafton business registry with contact information for all businesses in the area. This registry will be crucial to contacting and organizing local businesses into a business association. A business registry of this scale may be compiled in Excel or Google Sheets, with business identified through Town offices such as the Town Clerk and sales tax registry, regional entities such as the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, Google searches, and/or word of mouth in the area. At a minimum, the Town should collect the following pieces of information for each business:
 - a. Business type, including NAICS codes;
 - b. Street address;
 - c. Block and lot number;
 - d. Type of space occupied (eg. home-based, office, storefront, restaurant, etc.);
 - e. Primary and secondary contacts within the business;
 - f. For businesses with an office or storefront, type of occupancy (ie. ownership or rentership);
 - g. For businesses who rent space, contact information for the landlord;
 - h. M/WBE certifications, if applicable; and
 - i. Any other information desired by the Town.
2. Convene an organizing committee among local business owners in North Grafton. This committee will likely be volunteer-based and should include representatives from a diverse range of local businesses. Interested representatives can be identified by reaching out to businesses via the registry established in step (1).
3. Conduct outreach to North Grafton businesses that do not have a representative on the organizing committee. The committee should seek to understand what local businesses hope to obtain from membership in a business association. This may include guidance such as technical assistance training, grants or other funding sources, partnership for events and improvements to the public realm, and/or other benefits.
4. Coordinate with the organizing committee and the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce to determine whether the ideal business association in North Grafton is a local chapter of the CoC or a standalone entity. Blackstone Valley offers many services to member organizations. Local businesses may feel that the best path is to join this existing entity, or may prefer to create their own association with a more local focus.
 - a. If the organizing committee determines that the Blackstone Valley CoC is a sufficiently desirable resource and a new association is not needed, the rest of these steps may be disregarded. In this case, local business owners should work to register with the CoC and convene local meetings to discuss strategy for obtaining guidance and resources offered by the CoC.

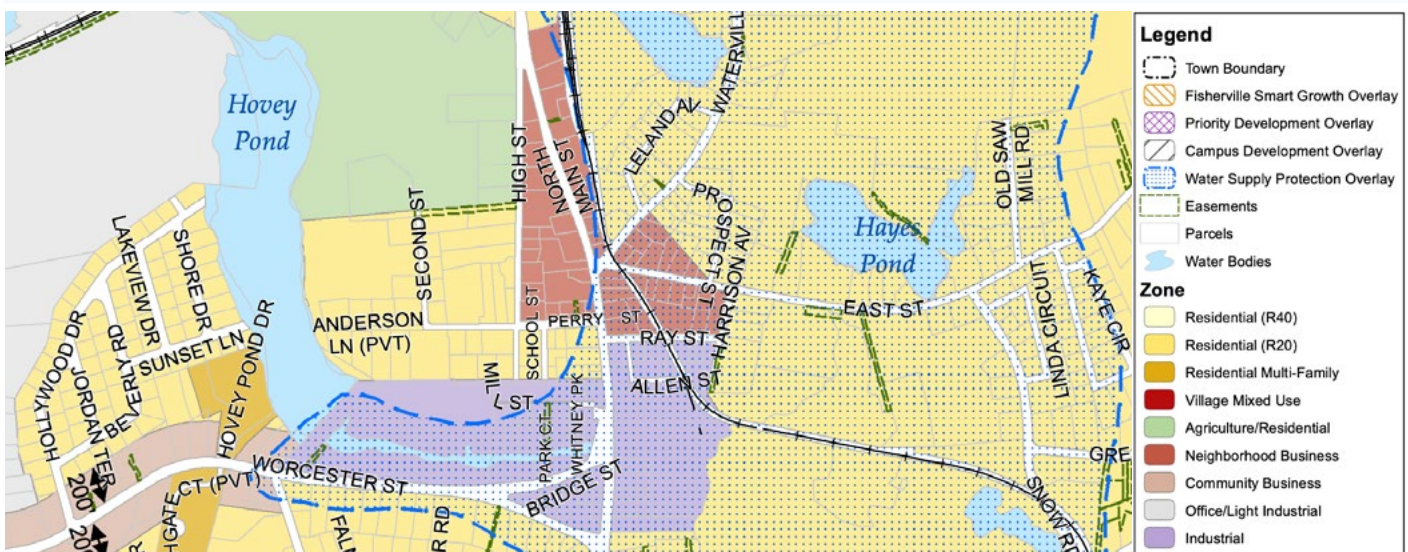
Process (continued)

5. Collect data to develop a regional business landscape analysis. Determine the strengths and weaknesses of North Grafton from a business perspective relative to other commercial districts in the region. Identify business development initiatives underway in other parts of the region. Prioritize broad needs shared by businesses in North Grafton and identify solutions in place in nearby communities. Identify services and resources already available to North Grafton businesses through regional entities such as the Blackstone Valley CoC and CMRPC to avoid duplication where possible.
6. Conduct outreach to regional chambers of commerce and other local business associations for assistance developing the structure, bylaws, procedures, and other administrative elements of the new business association. Draw best-practice examples from other entities where possible and seek advice on how to best grow a new entity.
7. Set up the business association based on the guidelines determined in step (6). If an elected Board of Directors is the optimal leadership structure, coordinate this election with all local businesses. Determine any electoral processes and succession plans for leadership in the association to ensure longevity. Implement processes to prevent politicization within the association, such as leadership term limits, qualification requirements, and mandatory disclosures.
8. Once the business association's leadership is in place, coordinate all administrative and legal setup processes. This should include conflict of interest protection and bylaw development. Coordinate with the Town's legal counsel to identify any legal and permitting requirements the association may need to fulfill. If necessary, research and retain legal counsel for the association.
9. Define specific goals for the first term of the business association. These goals should identify specific outcomes the association hopes to achieve for its members within a set period of time. For each goal, leadership should identify actionable steps to meet the goal, key performance indicators (KPIs), and any necessary regulations or bylaws.
10. Conduct outreach and marketing to attract members from the North Grafton business community. All businesses who are not represented among the association's leadership should be directly contacted and offered membership. Specific effort should be made to identify the needs and desires of these businesses to ensure that the association's leadership reflects the interest of all members. Additional marketing efforts such as social media posts, newspaper and newsletter advertisements, publicity at Town meetings and gatherings, and developing a website are all potential attraction strategies.
11. Determine any membership requirements, such as fees and mandatory meeting attendance. Requirements should be attainable for all businesses, which may require a scaled fee or attendance system to ensure feasibility based on each business' available resources and administrative capacity. Determine any consequences for non-compliant members. Communicate all requirements and consequences to members of the business association.
12. Develop a budget and funding structure for the association. This should include details on revenue generation, financial management and investment, financial resources available to members, and any other budget-related information.
13. Develop an event calendar and plan events for the association's members. These events may be one-time or recurring and should occupy a range of locations, event types, and costs. For each event, the association should consider ways to implement fundraising, member attraction, and marketing opportunities.
14. Coordinate with Town leadership to develop formal pipelines for the association to participate in Town processes, such as those overseen by the EDC, the Board of Selectmen, and the Planning Board. The business association should be given ample opportunity to influence and participate in Town processes and advocate for the interests of its members.

Rezone the Industrial Area to Accommodate Businesses

Category		Public Realm
Location		Parcels Zoned for Industrial Use in North Grafton
Origin		Multiple business owners and other stakeholders in North Grafton indicated that the current zoning is a barrier to the desired uses in the district. Multiple vacant lots and storefronts have been identified as ideal sites for new commercial attractions, but these uses are currently prohibited by the industrial zoning restrictions.
Budget		Low Budget (Under \$50,000): Aside from administrative costs, there are not any direct expenses required to facilitate a zoning change in this district.
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years): This project can be implemented as quickly as Town processes allow. There are not likely to be any logistical or other barriers to implementation.
Risk		Medium Risk: Most stakeholders in the area, including Town leadership, are likely to support this project, as it will facilitate activation of currently underutilized spaces. The greatest potential opponent may be Washington Mills, as its leadership may view a reduction of industrial restrictions in North Grafton as a potential threat to the Mills' operations.

Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of new development projects in North Grafton Number of new businesses in North Grafton Reduction in vacant lots and storefronts
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Much of North Grafton around North Main Street and Bridge Street is currently zoned for industrial use.
Source: Town of Grafton (2015)

Action Item

The Town may change the zoning in much of North Grafton from its current industrial use to a more flexible zoning category, such as Village Mixed Use, which has been successful in other parts of Grafton. By relaxing zoning restrictions on commercial and residential uses, the Town would facilitate an increase in commercial and economic development throughout the area. Several parties have already expressed interest in providing new developments in vacant lots and storefronts in North Grafton, indicating that if zoning were changed to allow this, there is a high likelihood of new development taking place.

Diagnostic

North Grafton is presently zoned largely for industrial use, which supports the heavy industry at Washington Mills but is no longer reflective of other uses in the area. Many existing residential and commercial parcels exist either through variances or as pre-existing non-conforming uses. However, this is a barrier to new commercial and residential development in much of North Grafton. Several residents and business owners have visions for new amenities in vacant lots and buildings, such as an ice cream parlor, which are currently disallowed by the zoning ordinance. Attracting new businesses to this area is a critical component of North Grafton's post-COVID recovery. Rezoning the area from industrial to Village Mixed Use or another designation which allows commercial development is key to facilitating this development. Village Mixed Use is a desirable zoning designation due to its success in other central parts of Grafton, including the Grafton Common district.

Partners & Resources

Implementation Partners

- Grafton Planning Department: Municipal planning staff can assist with review of land subdivision and development proposals to ensure conformity with local, state, and federal laws and regulations.
- Local and Regional Developers: Local and regional developers can provide insights as to where key opportunity areas are located based on experience of re-zoning/re-developing industrial zones to accommodate business needs.
- Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC): CMRPC offers several tools for towns seeking to update zoning, including zoning bylaw reviews and village center zoning assistance.
- Grafton Economic Development Commission (EDC): The mission of the EDC is to promote sustainable economic development towards the implementation of the Town's economic goals and objectives.



Village Mixed-Use zoning, which has been adopted in other commercial districts in Grafton like the Grafton Common, has fostered a sense of vibrancy and walkability that is attractive to new customers and businesses alike.

Sources: Wikipedia (2009)

Partners & Resources (continued)

Implementation Tools

- Reach out to neighborhood organizations and/or businesses within and surrounding the district to gain the best understanding of what the zoning needs are.

Funding Sources

- Planning Assistance Grants offered by Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) : EEA is offering Massachusetts cities and towns technical help to improve their land use practices (note: FY22 deadline to apply has passed, but this is a yearly recurring grant). Grants are available to the Commonwealth's municipalities and to regional planning agencies acting on their behalf to support their efforts to plan, regulate (zone), and act to conserve and develop land consistent with the Massachusetts' Sustainable Development Principles.
- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge: EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition.
- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance: This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs.
- Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants: A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects.

Process

1. Convene the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and/or other Town body to initiate rezoning discussions for North Grafton and develop a formal set of goals for the rezoning. At this stage, the Town should identify which kinds of new businesses and other uses it hopes to attract to the area.
2. Conduct a zoning study to identify where the current uses in North Grafton do and do not align with the industrial zoning. Given that some parcels in the area are actively used for heavy industry, such as Washington Mills, a comprehensive rezoning is unlikely to be the best approach. Instead, the Town should isolate the parcels and blocks where zoning is misaligned with the industrial designation and where rezoning may be most beneficial, such as vacant buildings and lots.
3. Engage with stakeholders in the community to identify goals and barriers for the rezoning. This should include outreach with potential developers such as local business owners and investors. Local residents, homeowners, and Washington Mills leadership should also be contacted, as each group may be opposed to rezoning that threatens their interests in the area. Through this outreach, the Town should seek to determine where and how rezoning will provide the most benefit and the most potential harm to the existing community.
4. Develop a rezoning proposal that identifies parcels to be rezoned and new zoning designations, whether Village Mixed Use or otherwise. This proposal should incorporate takeaways from the zoning study and community engagement to optimize the benefits of rezoning while mitigating negative impacts to existing stakeholders such as Washington Mills.
5. Coordinate with the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) to follow Town procedures for presenting and ratifying the zoning change into the Town zoning ordinance.

Recruit Critical Businesses and Services

Category	 Tenant Mix
Location	Vacant Lots and Storefronts in North Grafton
Origin	Town leaders mentioned the need for recruiting critical businesses and services during the LRRP Phase 1 presentation. This need was supported by the feedback received from business owners through interviews.
Budget	 Low Budget (Under \$50k): This project will primarily be based on communication and marketing, and will incur minimal expenses.
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years): In less than a year, Grafton can work with commercial real estate brokers to market and recruit essential downtown businesses to North Grafton. Ongoing recruitment strategies may be implemented beyond this timeframe.
Risk	 Low Risk: This project has few political or economic risks, as new business growth in North Grafton is likely to be popular among residents and require few costs for the Town. One potential risk is that there may not be enough available commercial space in the district to attract many new businesses.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of new businesses in Grafton• Increase in pedestrian inflow to North Grafton



New amenities like coffee shops can complement North Grafton's thriving businesses and attract new customers to the area.
Source: Bplans Business Planning

Action Item

The Town of Grafton may run targeted marketing, communication and networking activities to recruit critical amenities such as ATMs, coffee shops, and general merchandise shops that act as strong downtown businesses and can attract more people to North Grafton. Grafton's Economic Development Commission (EDC) and Planning Department can help facilitate and plan for the communications and implementation of this project.

Diagnostic

Through the interviews and group discussion sessions, town leaders and business owners noted that North Grafton lacks crucial downtown elements, such as ATMs, coffee shops, and general merchandise shops. This directly causes North Grafton to be a loosely connected stretch within Grafton that does not encourage retail activity and pedestrian movement. To create a district that serves both local residents and out-of-town visitors, the Town should identify critical services that are undersupplied and closely work with real estate groups to recruit those services to North Grafton.

Partners & Resources

Implementation Partners

- MassHire, Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (MGCC), and/or the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce: These organizations create and sustain connections between property owners, businesses, and funding to meet their recruiting and industry needs. They provide free resources for business growth and maintenance. This can be leveraged by Grafton to attract new businesses.
- Grafton Economic Development Commission (EDC) and Planning Department: These two town entities can work together to facilitate and plan implementation.

Implementation Tools

- Commercial real estate brokers, commercial and retail credit unions, and loan officers in and around Grafton: These providers can help Grafton spread the word about opportunities in the town for interested businesses owners.
- Worcester Chamber of Commerce: The Chamber's Connect for Success program offers three groups which meet twice a month. Groups from non-competing industries make connections to grow their business through this networking opportunity. They also provide a number of other programs including in education and workforce development.

Funding Sources

- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Good Jobs Challenge: Regional workforce training systems and sectoral partnerships funded under this grant should connect employers in an industry with key regional stakeholders, including state and local governmental entities, economic development organizations, workforce development boards, employer-facing organizations, education and training providers, community-based organizations (CBOs), worker-serving organizations (WSOs), and/or labor unions. The grant requires the initiative be led by a System Lead Entity or Backbone Organization, which in this case could be the Grafton EDC or a designated Chamber of Commerce with the capacity to coordinate between multiple stakeholders.
- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge: EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition.
- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance: This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs.
- Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants: A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects.
- MGCC Small Business Resources: Their website frequently updates grant opportunities ranging from Restaurant Revitalization, Shuttered Venue Operations, Economic Injury Disaster, etc.

Process

1. Identify stakeholders in North Grafton and set up a representative committee to create a unified vision for business attraction to the district. Current business owners and other stakeholders in North Grafton should be at the forefront of preparing a vision for the area and attracting new businesses and services to bring it to life. Potential members of the committee may include representatives from the following entities:
 - a. Washington Mills;
 - b. Thriving North Grafton businesses like the Truth Organic Spa;
 - c. Restaurants like the Post Office Pub and Grafton Grille;
 - d. Current business owners in target industries (eg. restaurants and retail);
 - e. Real estate brokers, particularly those who specialize in commercial real estate;
 - f. State entities like MassHire and the MGCC;
 - g. Regional entities like the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce;
 - h. Grafton Town representatives from committees such as the EDC, Board of Selectmen, and Planning Board; and
 - i. Residents of North Grafton.
2. Identify needs and gaps to business development in North Grafton. Create a list of business and service types that are currently missing or underrepresented in North Grafton that would help make the area a more active, desirable downtown district. Highlight current barriers and opportunities for improvement in Town incentives and regulation for businesses. Incentives such as property tax reductions, parking requirement exemptions, zoning variances, pedestrian-only streets, and outdoor dining permits are proven examples of Town-led initiatives that make a downtown district more appealing to prospective businesses.
3. Implement any up-front changes and incentives to make North Grafton a more supportive and appealing environment. The incentives identified in step (2) are one key area of improvement. Upgrades to the public realm such as placemaking, event programming, pedestrian infrastructure upgrades, open space developments, and wayfinding signage are other potential strategies to increase the economic appeal of North Grafton. Another key step is to improve the Town's resources for businesses, such as the EDC website. Prior to reaching out to any prospective businesses, the Town should seek to make the physical environment as appealing to businesses and customers as possible, as well as creating incentives and other programs to overcome potential financial, logistical, and administrative barriers to business development.
4. Design an ideal tenant mix in collaboration with local stakeholders, Town leaders, and business development experts. This step should create a list of the ideal distribution of commercial amenities in North Grafton based on the needs of customers and insight from outside experts regarding ways to attract new visitors. The ideal mix may include both specific businesses as well as general business categories or typologies. In either case, this list will be used to target and contact prospective businesses who best fit the needs and gaps of the existing business community.
5. Assemble recruiting and marketing materials to distribute to prospective businesses. A wide range of materials should be developed to maximize the reach of attraction marketing efforts. The focus of all materials should emphasize the appeal of establishing or moving a business to North Grafton. This may include photos, maps, stories, testimonials, data, and any other media to emphasize amenities in the physical environment, business community, and Town support for businesses in the area. Maps are a particularly useful way to demonstrate amenities in the physical environment, from open space and pedestrian infrastructure to existing and potential sites for thriving businesses. Site-specific materials should also be included for any specific lots or buildings that the Town would like new businesses to occupy.

Process (continued)

6. Identify prospective tenants who fit the criteria established in step (5). The Town should compile a list of specific potential tenants who are strong fits for the needs and culture of the North Grafton business community. These prospective businesses may include:
 - a. Existing businesses in and around North Grafton who may want to relocate within North Grafton;
 - b. Existing businesses from other parts of Grafton and surrounding communities who may want to relocate to North Grafton;
 - c. Emerging entrepreneurs looking to establish a new physical location; and
 - d. National chains who may be interested in opening a new location in North Grafton.
7. Conduct general marketing efforts to reach prospective business tenants who are not specifically identified by the Town in step (6). While direct identification is an important step to reaching strong candidates for business growth in North Grafton, the Town should also create opportunities for other businesses to express interest in relocating to the district. The Town can take several steps to market this district openly:
 - a. Identify commercial real estate brokers in the area who can help market the opportunities in North Grafton. Set up meetings with these brokers to discuss their role in helping the town to market retail opportunities. Create marketing materials in the form of brochures and retail availability databases, and real estate pro formas. Encourage brokers to send marketing materials to potential business owners or investors looking to start a business.
 - b. Partner with technical assistance providers like the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce for targeted recruitment/business attraction. Work with these organizations and current business owners to identify opportunities for training and technical assistance.
 - c. Post marketing materials in public locations such as the Town and EDC websites, social media, newspapers and newsletters, emails, and billboards.
 - d. Encourage local businesses to spread information about the district via word of mouth to their business contacts in other locations.
8. Contact prospective business tenants identified in steps (6) and (7). The Town should directly reach out to all businesses who may be interested in relocating to North Grafton to gauge their interest and capacity for doing so. Outreach may be conducted through various media:
 - a. Letters of introduction (physical mail or email);
 - b. Recruitment phone calls;
 - c. In-person visits to existing businesses; and
 - d. Open houses or other opportunities for prospective businesses to visit North Grafton.
9. Finalize agreements with all interested businesses to secure their relocation to or within North Grafton. Leadership from the Town or North Grafton business association should work with businesses to identify vacant lots or buildings for their new commercial space. This information could be collected by representatives from the Town physically surveying the area regularly and by sourcing them from real estate agents. Any Town incentives, such as tax credits, construction subsidies, and permitting exemptions, should be negotiated and finalized to support building and site upgrades that are required. All businesses should complete any necessary permitting processes and register in the Town's commercial registry and the North Grafton business association.
10. Publicize all successful business attraction efforts through marketing campaigns. Social media, news coverage, newsletters, and website postings are effective ways to spread awareness of all new businesses attracted to the area. The Town should partner with the North Grafton business association and regional entities such as the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce to spread awareness of these new businesses.

Provide Facade Improvement Grants

Category	 Private Realm
Location	North Grafton (Option to Include All of Grafton)
Origin	Town leaders identified that facade upgrades could help enliven the North Grafton area and attract additional customers and businesses.
Budget	 Low Budget (Under \$50,000): This project is scalable to meet the needs of the Town and potential funding sources. Program management expenses would be limited, and expenditures would primarily fund building supplies reimbursed for local businesses.
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years): This project can be planned and executed in under a year. If a revolving loan funding structure is selected, this project may be implemented on a repeating basis.
Risk	 Low Risk: This is a low-budget, short-term project that requires limited time for Town staff and is unlikely to face budgetary concerns. A potential risk is perceived unfairness in the grant process from businesses who are not awarded a grant.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of facade grants awarded• Additional funds spent on facade improvement beyond grant funding• Complete execution of planned improvements• Adherence to design guidelines



Facade improvements to businesses like this bar in New Albany, Indiana, are an effective, low-cost way to bring new life to historic business districts like North Grafton.
Source: City of New Albany, Indiana (2018)

Action Item

The Town may create a Facade Improvement Grants program for North Grafton businesses. Based on design guidelines created by the Town, businesses could receive partial or full financial support to upgrade the exteriors of their buildings. Improvements can include new exterior paint, signage, building features, or other aesthetic enhancements. A to-be-determined committee can manage the grants program including the creation of an application and evaluation system, grant and fund management, and program execution.

Diagnostic

Town leaders identified facade improvements for several businesses in North Grafton as an effective short-term step to improve the district. Several existing and vacant businesses are in need of facade improvements to facilitate a more lively and cohesive commercial feel. As other efforts look to attract more businesses and implement placemaking and public space upgrades, a facade improvement program for local businesses would help improve existing assets in North Grafton.

Partners & Resources

Implementation Partners

- Grafton Historical Commission, Grafton EDC, and/or Grafton Community Preservation Commission: These public entities in Grafton have the ability to manage, and/or support the facade improvement program.

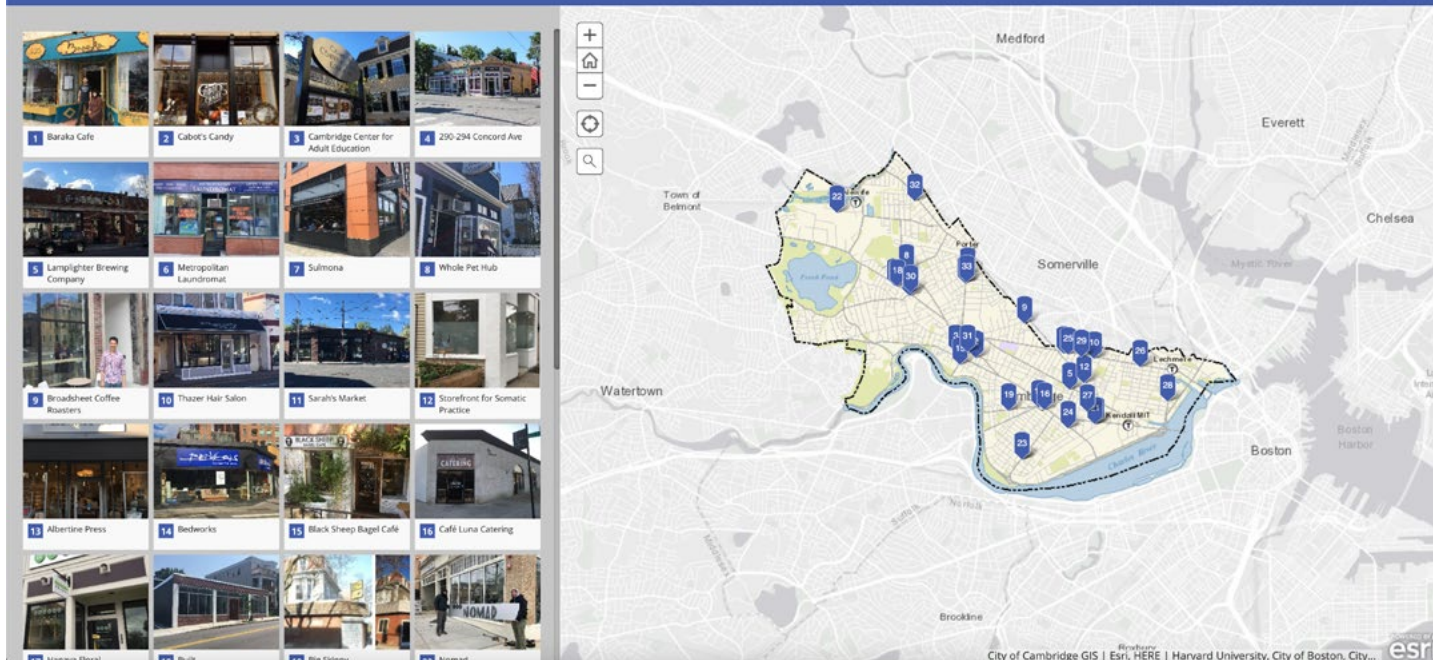
Implementation Tools

- Design Guidelines can be an effective way for the Town to guide facade improvements towards a cohesive aesthetic across the district.
- Consult with local architects to seek input on Design Guidelines, ideal facade improvements, and prioritization strategies for funding allocation.
- Host a block party or other form of community event to garner support for and interest in the initiative.

Storefront Improvement Program

The Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) has assisted numerous businesses all over Cambridge in making their storefronts more attractive, effective, and accessible. This is a sample of success stories.

Cambridge, MA CDD



Facade improvement programs in other New England towns like Cambridge, MA, have been highly successful.

Source: [City of Cambridge, Massachusetts \(2021\)](#)

Partners & Resources (continued)

Funding Sources

- **MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places grant program:** This grant program is designed to advance locally driven placemaking in downtown and neighborhood commercial districts in central MA towns. It is primarily targeted at COVID-19 recovery and economic development efforts. These funds can be used for many public space and commercial district improvement projects to facilitate improved attraction and safety for customers and pedestrians.
- **Mass CPC Community Preservation Act (CPA) Funds:** The CPA allows towns to set up a community preservation fund to generate funds for local preservation projects. Grafton has already created a CPA fund that has been used for other purposes. CPA funds can be raised through multiple mechanisms:
 - Property tax surcharge, up to 3%;
 - Fund matching from statewide CPA fund; and/or
 - Bonds issued against future CPA revenue.
- **EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation:** EDA's grant can award anywhere between \$100,000 and \$10,000,000. This grant is designed to provide a wide-range of financial assistance to communities and regions to rebuild and strengthen their travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation industry through various infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects.
- **EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge:** EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition.
- **EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance:** This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs.
- **Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants:** A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects
- **Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Technical Assistance Program (TAP):** The TAP is a funding program that enables and assists municipalities in implementing projects that are beneficial to the community. TAP can fund a diverse range of projects including housing, economic development, shared services, municipal effectiveness, public engagement, public safety, public health, climate change, clean energy, equitable transit-oriented development, bicycle/pedestrian mobility, environmental protection, creative placemaking, and arts and culture planning. Municipalities can submit concepts for individual community-specific projects and for multi-community projects. Projects that promote regional collaboration and serve multiple communities, advance racial equity in the region, and/or promote COVID recovery will receive preference.

Process

1. Secure funding for the grants. The specific process for this step will vary based on the funding source(s) used.
2. Determine an award mechanism for funds distributed to businesses. The Town may elect to provide grants or distribute funds through a revolving, low-interest loan program. The appropriate funding mechanism should be determined based on the funding source and input from prospective applicants.
3. Identify whether an existing entity such as the Historical Commission or Planning Board can oversee this program or whether a new decision-making body is needed. The Historical Commission should be consulted in some capacity throughout the project, as many structures in the study area may be subject to historic preservation guidelines.
4. Convene the decision-making body to administer the grants or loans, as determined in step 2.
5. Set goals and evaluation measures. Define any design guidelines for facade improvements and determine business eligibility, geographic scope, eligible improvements and line-items, and any financial commitment for applicants. These criteria should be determined in accordance with other improvements and branding efforts in North Grafton and should also be applied to future new developments.
6. Develop a rubric and scoring system for evaluating applications from businesses, including the funding range for recipients. Businesses with the highest need for facade upgrades should be prioritized. If funds are distributed as loans, applicants' ability to repay the loans may be a factor as well.
7. Coordinate financial details, including timelines, payout mechanisms, and reporting requirements. If funds are distributed as loans, this should account for loan repayment details as well.
8. Coordinate contracting mechanisms with the Town's legal counsel.
9. Create an application that businesses and other property owners can use which shares the selection criteria, design guidelines, and eligibility requirements. The application should be as simple and easy to access as possible to accommodate businesses with limited administrative capacity. Online application submission should be permitted, if possible.
10. Market the application to all potential recipients based on pre-determined eligibility. The forthcoming North Grafton business association will be a valuable tool for identifying and contacting eligible businesses.
11. Develop a Q&A mechanism, set a Q&A period, and respond to questions. Multiple avenues of inquiry should be made available to businesses, including in-person and online formats.
12. Review applications to score adherence to design guidelines and other criteria as determined in steps 3-4.
13. Determine grant/loan winners and award amounts. The number of awardees should be determined by the amount of available funding and the level of demonstrated need from applicants.
14. Coordinate with the Town Financial Committee to distribute funds based on the mechanism determined in step 2.
15. Alert winners, and set up agreements and legal documents.
16. Communicate construction milestone expectations in partnership with the Financial Committee, the Historical Commission, and the Planning Department.
17. Monitor construction progress and troubleshoot issues as needed. Applicants should be evaluated for their adherence to proposed timelines and designs.
18. Review final outcomes based on project review. Create any necessary reports or presentational documents to highlight improvements made through the program.
19. Report back to the funding source and the Grafton community. Successful improvements should be marketed via press releases, social media, and other publication media.
20. If a revolving loan structure is utilized for fund distribution, these steps may be repeated as the Town reclaims funds from initial awardees.

Support Outdoor Dining for Local Businesses

Category	 Private Realm
Location	North Grafton (Option to Include All of Grafton)
Origin	Town leaders identified outdoor dining as a need in Grafton during Karp Strategies' visit to the site. Restaurant owners reiterated this as an area for growth during one-on-one interviews.
Budget	 Low Budget (Under \$50,000): Costs to the Town for this project will likely be limited to time and materials for business outreach and changes to permitting processes. If desired, the Town may also elect to provide financial support to businesses for materials such as tables and chairs, dining structures, parking, signage, and/or other elements.
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years): Streamlined permitting processes for outdoor dining can be coordinated in under a year. Further changes and support programs may be implemented on an iterative basis in the future.
Risk	 Low Risk: Restaurants and customers alike have demonstrated a clear interest in outdoor dining across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses who implemented this in nearby towns have demonstrated revenue gains despite the pandemic. A primary risk is the loss of parking and safety risks to customers that accompany the placement of outdoor seating in roads and parking lots.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of restaurants that add outdoor dining• Number of new customers to restaurants with outdoor dining (assessed via a business survey)• Revenue growth of restaurants with outdoor dining (assessed via a business survey)



Outdoor dining helped several North Grafton restaurants like Grafton Grill (above) thrive during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Source: Grafton Grill & Crust Facebook Profile (2021)

Action Item	<p>The Town may implement additional support systems for local restaurants that would like to introduce or increase outdoor dining capacity. Outdoor dining was a great success for many Grafton businesses during the pandemic, but barriers such as parking requirements and a lack of available open space have limited how much outdoor dining restaurants are able to offer. The Town may take steps to reduce permitting and parking requirements, provide support to businesses for purchasing materials and constructing outdoor dining spaces, and linking restaurants with available open space to increase capacity.</p>
Diagnostic	<p>Outdoor dining has been very successful in Grafton for businesses who chose to implement it during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Grafton Grill, Post Office Pub, and others have established outdoor dining to some capacity. However, parking requirements and other spatial conflicts restrict the scale of outdoor dining that businesses can implement. Supporting the permitting and working with businesses to create outdoor dining could increase patronage of those restaurants and surrounding retailers.</p>
Partners & Resources	<p>Implementation Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grafton Planning Department, Open Space and Recreation Committee: These Departments and committees can oversee permitting, environmental and commercial assessments, and other elements of the outdoor dining implementation and permitting process. Grafton Economic Development Commission (EDC): Grafton EDC has a directory of local businesses and information that could be useful in determining which restaurants already have outdoor dining permits and those who need support in obtaining them. <p>Implementation Tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect with Local Businesses: Connecting with local businesses early on in their process of applying for permits will help streamline the process. Ensure local restaurants are connected with the "Let's Go Out" campaign spearheaded by Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) and appear on the directory. <p>Funding Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program offered by The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT): This grant supports municipalities and transit authorities to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge: EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition. EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance: This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs. Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants: A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects. Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (MGCC) Small Business Resources: Their website frequently updates grant opportunities ranging from Restaurant Revitalization, Shuttered Venue Operations, Economic Injury Disaster, etc.

Process






1. Identify an oversight body to manage outdoor dining support programs and serve as a liaison to North Grafton restaurants. This body may be an existing Grafton entity such as the Planning Board, the EDC, or the Recreation Commission, or it may be a newly-created committee with representatives from multiple Town agencies. The committee may also include representatives from the restaurant community.
2. Convene the oversight committee and determine a set of goals for outdoor dining in North Grafton. This should include a vision for where and how much outdoor dining will be available in the district. Among others, the following considerations should be discussed:
 - a. Location of dining infrastructure (eg. parking lots, public parks, streets and parklets, etc.);
 - b. Temporal availability (eg. summer only, year-round, etc.);
 - c. Social distancing requirements;
 - d. Safety requirements with regards to vehicle traffic; and
 - e. Uses and availability (eg. restaurant-specific, shared spaces, public spaces, etc.).
3. Conduct outreach with restaurants in North Grafton to determine their desires and needs for outdoor dining. Businesses should have ample opportunity to provide feedback on what their goals for outdoor dining are and what barriers exist to realizing them. Feedback can be obtained through multiple outreach methods, including one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and online surveys or feedback forms.
4. Identify best practices in other municipalities through research and outreach with experts. Many places have implemented creative and successful strategies for facilitating outdoor dining during the pandemic. The Town should research these approaches and speak with experts from other jurisdictions who have successfully implemented similar strategies to solicit ideas on how to optimize outdoor dining in North Grafton.
5. Review the Town's permitting processes and requirements for outdoor dining to identify opportunities for improvement. Reduced or altered parking requirements for businesses who implement outdoor dining is one potential way to ease the strain on restaurants. Other permitting changes to requirements such as safety, construction, and location can help facilitate an easier outdoor dining process for restaurants.
6. Identify funding opportunities for businesses to cover costs such as tents, tables and chairs, and construction materials and labor. These costs can be steep for small businesses to cover and often must be funded up-front to facilitate successful outdoor dining development. The Town could help connect businesses with grants or loans to ease this initial financial burden. These funds may come directly from the Town's budget or may be third-party sources which the Town supports businesses in obtaining.
7. Release promotional materials to advertise new outdoor dining spaces and attract visitors from within and outside Grafton to the North Grafton area. This may include social media posts, newspaper articles, local news segments, flyers and posters, and promotion at Town meetings and events.



Many restaurants turned to outdoor dining to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, but safe and welcoming outdoor seating can help restaurants thrive even under non-pandemic conditions.

Sources: Modern Restaurant Management (2020)

Improve the Park at 5 Mill Street

Category		Public Realm
Location		Park at 5 Mill Street, North Grafton
Origin		Town leaders identified this site as an area of need during Karp Strategies' visit to North Grafton. Several business owners and local residents reaffirmed the Town's desire to develop a stronger sense of place at this site.
Budget	 	Low Budget (Under \$50,000) to High Budget (More Than \$200,000): The budget will heavily depend on the nature and scope of improvements made to the site. Some potential options, such as public seating and outdoor games, can be implemented at a low cost. Larger changes, including new parking lots or other significant infrastructure upgrades, would carry a much higher price tag. The Town may choose to outsource site assessment, community engagement, and/or design tasks to external consultants, which would further increase the cost of this project. 1
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years): Most proposed uses for this space can be designed, procured, and installed within five years. This timeline would be extended if alternate uses such as infill development or underground parking were chosen for this site.
Risk		Medium Risk: Local residents and business owners are likely to support this project, as it will improve an easily-accessible public space and increase public amenities for locals. Most opposition is likely to come from Washington Mills due to the heavy truck traffic that travels along Overlook Street throughout the workday. Any potential changes to this site would need to consult with the Mills to ensure that safety and access for truck drivers, as well as pedestrians, would be preserved.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of visitors to 5 Mill Street park Number of pedestrians in North Grafton



The park at 5 Mill Street currently consists of a large grass rectangle adjacent to an empty concrete space and two other small grass spaces. This parcel is currently vacant, with the concrete area used informally as parking for local residents and employees.
Sources: Google Maps (2021)

Action Item

The Town may implement placemaking and infrastructure upgrades to the grass and concrete open space at 5 Mill Street. This space currently consists of a large grassy area adjacent to an undefined concrete strip between Mill and Overlook Streets. Both areas are potential sites for upgrades to facilitate passive pedestrian use, such as outdoor games and public seating, while preserving safety and access for truck traffic from nearby Washington Mills. Potential upgrades include passive outdoor games like chess and bocce ball, seating, dog parks, concert or event space, and public parking.

Diagnostic

The park space at 5 Mill Street is currently an empty grass field crosscut with a pedestrian path. The space is underutilized, with no elements to activate the space for pedestrians and visitors. Although residents have been heard anecdotally to use the park occasionally, Town leadership believes it is mostly unused. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of activation elements in the park prevented it from serving as a safe outdoor gathering space for local residents. Given proximity to many other amenities, such as Perry Hill Park, multiple restaurants and businesses, and the pedestrian river crossing to the south, this park offers an opportunity for activation. A successful improvement of this space would not only transform it into a safe, accessible public amenity, but also connect the space with other nearby attractions and contribute to a broader sense of place in North Grafton.



Other towns have found creative ways to activate small park spaces, such as (clockwise from top left): outdoor games like Bocce ball in Redding, CA; a small concert or event venue in Lee's Summit, MO; an underground parking lot beneath a small park in Stanford, CA; and diverse outdoor seating with a mix of green- and hardscape elements in Sunnyvale, CA.

Sources: City of Redding, CA; City of Lee's Summit, MO; Watry Design; and Harris Design.

Partners & Resources

Implementation Partners

- Grafton Department of Public Works and Planning Department: These Departments can oversee permitting, environmental and commercial assessments, and other elements of the sidewalk construction process.
- The Grafton Conservation Commission: As the official agency charged with the protection of Grafton's natural resources, they will be key partners.
- Grafton Open Space & Recreation Committee

Funding Sources

- Central Massachusetts Planning Commission (CMRPC): CMRPC's Resource Development Assistance program shares information about current funding opportunities via direct email and/or newsletters. For some funding sources, CMRPC may be available to assist resource development (fund raising) and grant administration (contact person: [Chris Ryan](#)).
- Land and Recreation Grants & Loans offered by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental's (EEA) Office: The EEA offers various grants and loans for land and recreational projects such as the Landscape Partnership Grant Program, which can provide grants to build a park or playground. (Note: FY2021 Deadline was in May 2021, so the Town of Grafton would likely have to wait another year to apply for the next round).
- Commonwealth Places funding offered through MassDevelopment: The statewide program will help fund place-based, community-driven projects – art installations, parks, bike trails, markets, and more – that revitalize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. This is a competitive opportunity to advance locally driven placemaking in downtown and neighborhood commercial districts in eligible communities throughout Massachusetts.
- Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Grant Program offered by Division of Conservation Services: The PARC Program was established to assist cities and towns in acquiring and developing land for park and outdoor recreation purposes. These grants can be used by municipalities to acquire parkland, build a new park, or to renovate an existing park. Note: The FY22 Grant Round is now closed.
- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge: EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition.
- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance: This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs.
- Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants: A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects.

Process

1. Conduct a baseline conditions assessment to understand current uses and site conditions. The Town should seek to understand when and how the park and surrounding roads are currently used, including truck and other traffic on Mill and Overlook Streets. This assessment should include community engagement, data collection, and consultation with experts such as traffic engineers.
2. Hold an internal Town meeting to brainstorm potential uses for the park. This initial list should consider all possible uses for the space and set boundaries on uses that are not feasible. This process should consider who would be responsible for management and maintenance of each use. Potential uses may include:
 - a. Open park space;
 - b. Dog park;
 - c. Outdoor games such as large chess and bocce ball;
 - d. Concert or event space;
 - e. Housing or other infill development;
 - f. Programmed greenspace, such as a wooded area or farm;
 - g. Surface parking; and
 - h. Above/below ground parking.
3. Conduct a survey of the existing public assets inventory. For each potential use for this park space, the Town should identify the quantity and location of similar assets. The intention of this study is to determine which potential uses fill the greatest need and which may be redundant.
4. Conduct stakeholder engagement to present the full suite of feasible uses for this space. This outreach should include multiple stakeholder groups to discuss the feasibility and desirability of each potential use for the park. Through this outreach, the Town should narrow the list of potential uses to one or more that are most desired for the space. Multiple uses may be possible.
5. Facilitate a design phase to brainstorm potential applications of the final use(s) for the space as identified by the community. Site design should seek to realize the community's ideal use(s) as best as possible and should connect the space with other projects in North Grafton, including sidewalk expansion, public space placemaking, event programming, and district wayfinding and branding. The design phase should work closely with the community and include multiple opportunities for stakeholder input, including charrettes and working groups. The Town may opt to outsource design to a consultant; in this case, a full RFP phase must be completed in partnership with the Town's legal counsel and financial committee.
6. Once a final use and design are selected for the site, conduct an assessment of local groups who have experience and expertise in areas related to the selected use for the space. These groups may be able to serve as stewards or managers of the space. Potential groups include:
 - a. Community gardens;
 - b. Schools;
 - c. Local resident interest groups; and
 - d. The Recreation Committee.
7. Select a steward or manager for the space from this group, if applicable. The management structure may include collaboration between multiple groups and/or Town entities.
8. Facilitate procurement of construction materials and labor to install any new infrastructure elements. This will likely include a full RFP process with consultation from the Town's legal counsel and financial committee.
9. Oversee the construction period and conduct periodic site visits and progress assessments.
10. Once construction is complete, install other placemaking elements to connect the space with the broader vision for North Grafton. These elements may include wayfinding and branding signage, recreational infrastructure, tables and benches, greenscape elements, and lighting.

Conduct a Study of Parking Needs and Associated Zoning Revisions

Category		Public Realm
Location		North Grafton
Origin		Business owners cited parking restrictions and existing zoning as a barrier to growth and redevelopment during stakeholder interviews. Town officials reiterated the need for improved parking amenities and requirements during the public presentation.
Budget		Low Budget (Under \$50,000): A study to analyze parking conditions and needs in North Grafton can be carried out for less than \$50,000. The only direct cost will be procurement fees for a transportation planning firm to conduct the study.
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years): A study to analyze optimal parking requirements can be executed in three to six months once a firm is procured. Zoning changes may take longer to implement, depending on administrative requirements and the level of public support or opposition.
Risk		Medium Risk: Local businesses have expressed support for changes to parking requirements that may facilitate new development opportunities. Residents and customers may be concerned about increased demand for parking and a potential reduction in supply.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of available parking spaces• Number of new parking spaces• New business openings and/or developments• Number of alternative uses for parking lots (eg. outdoor dining, farmers market, community events, etc.)

Action Item

The Town may conduct a study to determine the effects of parking requirements on businesses in North Grafton. Based on the results of this study and engagement with businesses, the Town may also enact zoning changes related to parking and uses in this area to facilitate economic development.

Diagnostic

Parking requirements in the zoning code have been identified by business owners as barriers to economic development in North Grafton. Currently, Grafton's zoning requires 2-2.25 parking spaces per dwelling unit (residential) or 5-6.7 spaces per 1,000 square feet (commercial). However, healthy mixed-use village districts have been shown to succeed with about 1.5 parking spaces per dwelling unit and 3 spaces per 1,000 commercial square feet (figures from subject matter expert Dodson & Flinker, Inc. [Appendix D]). Businesses in the area would like to utilize open space on their properties for purposes such as outdoor dining, but are currently limited by the parking restrictions. This is also a barrier for new businesses who would currently have to create more parking spaces than they would feasibly use. Zoning revisions that adapt parking requirements to the conditions and needs of local businesses may encourage new commercial development and alternative uses for parking lots, such as outdoor dining and community events. If the supply of parking is reduced by these changes, alternative strategies, such as shared parking lots and parking-oriented wayfinding signage, may help mitigate impacts on local residents and customers.

Partners & Resources

Implementation Partners

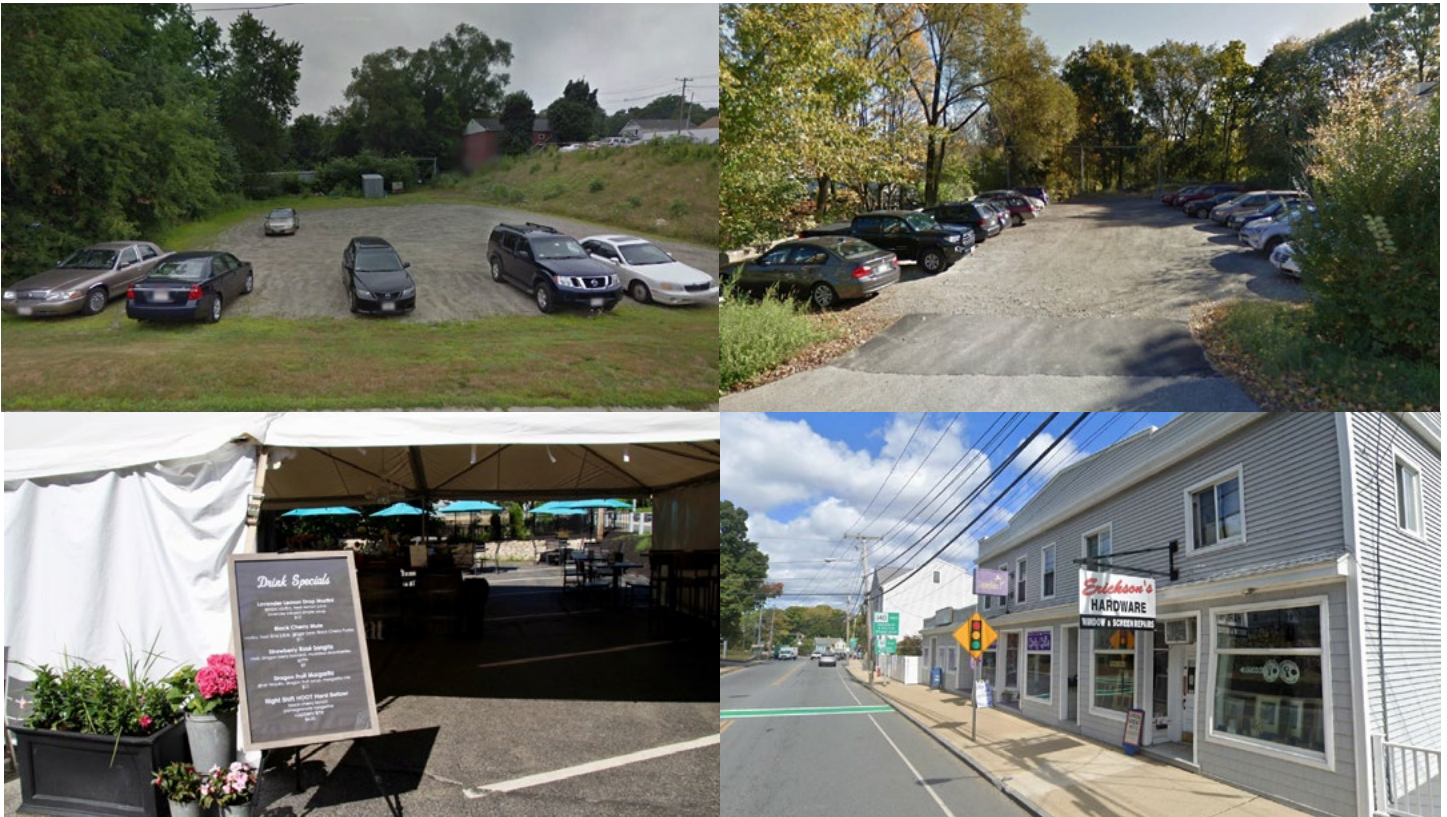
- [Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission \(CMRPC\)](#): CMRPC offers transportation planning and plan development services for towns in central Massachusetts. This body may be a resource with funding and/or implementing a parking study and any changes to Grafton's zoning.
- [Grafton Planning Board and Grafton Zoning Board of Appeals \(ZBA\)](#): These Grafton entities will likely oversee any changes to zoning and parking requirements in North Grafton.

Funding Sources

- [Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program](#) offered by The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT): This grant supports municipalities and transit authorities to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce.
- [Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program](#) offered by MassDOT: The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program is a first-in-the-nation program that dedicates state transportation funds to plan and implement Complete Streets. Latest Updates (March 2021) regarding the Complete Streets Funding Program can be found [here](#).
- [EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation](#): EDA's grant can award anywhere between \$100,000 and \$10,000,000. This grant is designed to provide a wide-range of financial assistance to communities and regions to rebuild and strengthen their travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation industry through various infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects.
- [EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge](#): EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition.
- [EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance](#): This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs.
- [Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants](#): A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects

Process

1. Establish an advisory committee or working group consisting of Town staff and officials, residents, business owners, property owners, and local developers.
2. Hold advisory meetings to determine the project goals, scope, and steps for a community-driven process. This may include internal advisory committee meetings as well as public workshops and consultations with experts.
3. Identify key stakeholders and define their interests and expectations. Local businesses and property owners have expressed interest in revisions to Grafton's parking requirements to facilitate new commercial development and easier access to alternative uses for parking lots, including outdoor dining and public events such as farmers markets. However, other stakeholders may be concerned about the negative impacts of increasing parking demand and/or reducing the supply. The latter category may include local residents, customers, and non-commercial entities such as Washington Mills. All potential stakeholders should be identified and organized based on expected needs and priorities.
4. Coordinate with municipal planning leaders in Grafton to collect data on land use, density, circulation, and other existing conditions in North Grafton. This may include data gathered through the ongoing master planning effort. This data can be used to help inform project goals and expectations. Once a consultant is procured, they should also be given access to the data as a foundation for their research and recommendations.
5. Identify funding sources. Possible sources include Town's annual budget, state and federal aid, and/or external grants.
6. Develop a process to hire a planning consultant. This may require a full RFP process in coordination with the Town's financial committee and legal counsel.
7. Conduct outreach in North Grafton to build support for the project. Given the likely contentious nature of this project, it will be essential to consolidate public support among a diverse range of stakeholders. Outreach such as public presentations, workshops, and design charrettes can be used to engage local residents, business owners and employees, customers, and property owners. A plan for parking requirement revisions is most likely to succeed with the support of members of each of these categories.



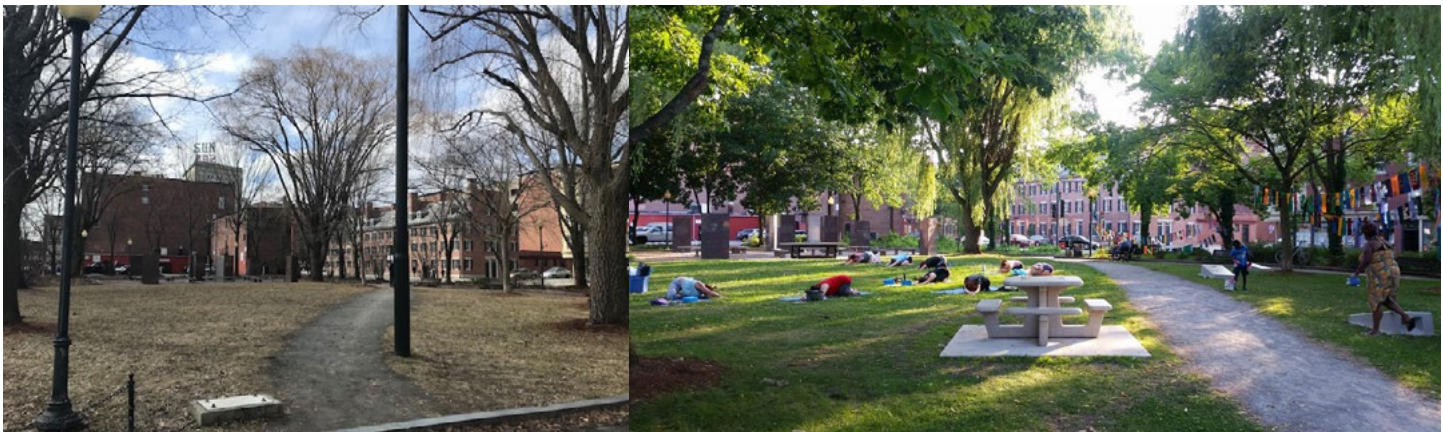
Limited parking supply in North Grafton leads many locals to use vacant parcels as informal parking. Meanwhile, local businesses struggle to provide the necessary amount of parking, especially restaurants with outdoor dining and storefronts on North Main Street, which does not offer street parking. New parking requirements and connections could increase the parking supply while better fitting the needs of local businesses.
Sources: Google Earth (2021), Grafton Common (2020)

Process (continued)

8. Using the process established in step 6, hire a consultant who will, in consultation with the Advisory Committee, implement a study of existing conditions and demand related to parking in North Grafton and make recommendations on any revisions to the zoning ordinance's parking guidelines. At a minimum, the study should include the following components:
 - a. Review existing conditions and make an inventory of existing parking spaces and utilization. This should include informal and shared parking uses, such as parking agreements or leases between businesses. For example, Washington Mills is known to allow employees of some local businesses to park on its property.
 - b. Analyze existing and potential future demand scenarios. This should include demand breakdowns by use (residential, commercial, and industrial) as well as specific location within North Grafton.
 - c. Conduct stakeholder meetings and public outreach. This should include regular consultations with the advisory committee as well as various outreach mechanisms with the stakeholder groups identified and engaged in step 3.
 - d. Identify potential opportunities for future parking additions. This may include vacant or underutilized parcels that may be developed into formalized parking lots. Additionally, any opportunities for further shared parking should be analyzed. If there is a spatial imbalance of parking supply and demand (ie. a majority of parking spaces are not adjacent to the most in-demand amenities), highlight any opportunities for alternate forms of connectivity between parking spots and visitor attractions, such as new pedestrian paths and/or wayfinding signage.
 - e. Make recommendations for an integrated parking strategy. This may include changes to the zoning ordinance, such as a reduction in residential and/or commercial parking space requirements. Opportunities for new parking spaces and/or improved connectivity between parking supply and demand locations should also be included in the recommendations to mitigate any reduction in the supply required by zoning bylaws.
 - f. Draft new or updated parking requirements and zoning bylaws for consideration by the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA).
9. Conduct additional outreach to stakeholders to obtain feedback on the draft bylaws and explore alternatives. Before any changes are formally introduced or implemented, stakeholders should have an opportunity to provide comments and suggest changes.
10. Hold preliminary discussions with Grafton's permitting agencies, including the ZBA and the Planning Board. Develop a strategy for implementing and enforcing any proposed changes. If any recommendations require collaboration with private entities, such as an expansion of shared parking between businesses, Town leadership should identify the incentives and/or enforcement mechanisms that will be used to implement them.
11. Test the new policies on a range of sites within the study area and revise the code as needed to ensure a desired outcome. This test period will allow Town agencies to identify and mitigate gaps and negative externalities in the proposed changes. Local businesses may be willing to help pilot the new policies and propose any necessary changes.
12. Prepare the final draft of bylaws with any suggested modifications and initiate the ZBA's formal processes of review and adoption.

Create Targeted Placemaking for Underutilized Public Spaces

Category		Cultural/Arts
Location		Public/Open Spaces in North Grafton
Origin		Town leadership identified a need for improved placemaking elements in North Grafton during the Karp Strategies team's visit to Grafton. Subject matter experts affirmed the importance of placemaking in the public space webinar.
Budget		Low Budget (Under \$50,000): Costs for this project will be for public space elements such as benches, tables, lighting, and planters. Additional costs may arise for art commissions and marketing.
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years): Procuring public space elements such as benches and lighting can be done in a matter of weeks or months. Art commissions and marketing may take longer, but can still be completed in fewer than five years.
Risk		Low Risk: This is a low-budget, short-term project with few risks. A potential risk is public discontent about the placement or style of public art installations.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of new public space elements installed • Number of visitors to North Grafton • Pedestrian activity in North Grafton • Increase in events/activities in North Grafton • Number of event attendees • Number of different groups public spaces for events • Average users per day • Public sentiment in North Grafton (obtained through surveys)



Placemaking improvements at Kerouac Park in Lowell, MA, activated and transformed the space into a vibrant amenity. Procurement and installation were funded through MassDevelopment’s crowdfunding match program. The project took under 12 weeks and \$50,000 in total costs to implement. Source: Kerouac Park Facebook Page (2019)

Action Item

The Town may create targeted placemaking to improve public space in North Grafton. Placemaking upgrades might include tables and benches, public art, lighting, and greenscape elements. These improvements can be a short-term (to implement), low-cost way to increase pedestrian activity and improve the look of North Grafton.

Diagnostic

Many of the public spaces in North Grafton, including streets and sidewalks, lack clear placemaking elements such as wayfinding and other signage, outdoor seating, and pedestrian and bike amenities. The Town believes that pedestrians and business patrons would feel more comfortable if public spaces were given a more cohesive sense of place through some of these targeted improvements. There are multiple sites that would serve as easily accessible venues for public art, like the Post Office Pub and Perry Hill Park. There is also potential for wayfinding and signage elements to create a cohesive branding for North Grafton, such as placards noting historic and commercial attractions. Improving access to the creek, which could include signage, new paths, and cleanup efforts, would add another greenscape element and create a stronger sense of place for North Grafton pedestrians.

Partners & Resources

Implementation Partners

- Grafton Department of Public Works and Planning Department: These Departments can oversee elements related to permitting, environmental, and/or commercial assessments.
- Grafton Historical Commission: The Historical Commission can provide insights to design and other standards when it comes to operating within certain neighborhoods.
- Grafton Public Works Advisory Committee, Recreation Commission, Open Space & Recreation Committee, and/or Cultural Council: These are some of the boards and committees that could provide insights, recommendations, and networking opportunities to the project.
- Local businesses: Businesses can be a partner for public space elements that go on or near their properties. For example, the Post Office Pub can partner with the Town to coordinate a mural on the side of the building.



Public space placemaking is not only effective in parks. In other cities, placemaking has been used to activate (top to bottom) streets and pedestrian crossings in Grove, CA; vacant lots and alleys in Tipton, IN; and sidewalks in Los Angeles, CA. Sources: Street Plans (2017); Bench Consulting (2019); LADOT (2016)

Partners & Resources

Funding Sources

- [Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program](#) offered by The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT): This grant supports municipalities and transit authorities to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce.
- [Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program](#) offered by MassDOT: The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program is a first-in-the-nation program that dedicates state transportation funds to plan and implement Complete Streets. Latest Updates (March 2021) regarding the Complete Streets Funding Program can be found [here](#). Complete Streets funding is primarily focused on streetscape improvements, but certain placemaking strategies near streets could be partially or fully funded through this program.
- [Commonwealth Places](#) funding offered through MassDevelopment: The statewide program will help fund place-based, community-driven projects – art installations, parks, bike trails, markets, and more – that revitalize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. This is a competitive opportunity to advance locally driven placemaking in downtown and neighborhood commercial districts in eligible communities throughout Massachusetts.
- [Biz-M-Power Crowdfunding](#) offered by Patronicity and the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (MGCC): This program helps small businesses acquire materials and other growth elements through a crowdfunding match campaign. Eligible applicants will set up a crowdfunding campaign through Patronicity and MGCC will match all funds raised. The minimum amount is \$2,500 per business and the maximum is \$20,000.
- [Public Arts Grants](#) offered by the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA): NEFA offers six public art-oriented grant programs designed to invest in community and public art across the New England region. Grants range from \$500 to \$10,000 and can help applicants hire local artists to complete public art projects.
- [Placemaking Grant](#) offered by the National Association of Realtors: This grant is available to local realtor associations and is intended to help transform unused and underused sites and "eyesores" into welcoming destinations accessible to everyone in a community. Two levels of grants are available that can provide up to \$5,000 per year in funding for placemaking projects.
- [EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge](#): EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition.
- [EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance](#): This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs.
- [Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants](#): A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects.

Process

1. Create a steering committee to oversee all the elements that will be installed. Existing Town bodies such as the Recreation Committee may be viable oversight entities. Otherwise, a new joint coalition or oversight group may be created specifically to oversee this project.
2. Identify locations for placemaking improvements in North Grafton. The park at 5 Mill Street is a logical centerpiece for this project, and many other spaces in the area may benefit from complementary improvements as well. This step should involve a mix of internal Town planning and engagement with the North Grafton community to identify optimal spots for placemaking upgrades.
3. Identify project inspirations from best practices in other jurisdictions. Many cities and towns have implemented versions of this project to improve the sense of place in their own public spaces. The attached document from Patronicity includes several successful examples of similar projects.
4. Determine a vision for each desired placemaking element, including its location and desired purpose and audience. Visions should be developed based on community input, best practices from other locations, and the Town's internal goals and priorities for North Grafton. At this stage, the Town should define what the success of this project should look like.
5. Establish a global project plan that incorporates each element's procurement and installation. This should include determining the appropriate timing for installing each new placemaking element. Community input should be gathered to help determine the priority level of each upgrade.
6. Determine the process(es) for procurement and development. Some placemaking elements may require full RFP processes. Others may be obtained through private procurement or direct purchase from suppliers.
7. Negotiate contractual agreements with the owners of public spaces (Parks Commission, DPW, local businesses, MassDOT) to determine necessary permits/permission and cost sharing, if applicable.
8. Conduct procurement and contracting for required third parties. For all public RFP procurement processes, coordinate with the Town's legal counsel and financial committee to execute contract and financial details.
 - a. Hire a design firm for wayfinding materials and branding.
 - b. Procure a manufacturer to create the desired wayfinding signage.
 - c. Hire artists for a mural and/or other public art elements.
 - d. Procure a retailer or manufacturer to acquire streetscape elements such as benches, tables, planters, and lighting.
9. Coordinate and execute installation including logistics, site inspections, and necessary permitting including coordination with relevant Town agencies.
10. Develop a maintenance and upkeep plan for all new elements. This may be managed long-term by the installation oversight entity or a different body.
11. Coordinate public marketing for new upgrades, such as social media posts, newsletters, and/or press coverage.
12. Reassess whether additional placemaking enhancements are valuable.

Develop Programmatic Attractions

Category		Cultural/Arts
Location		North Grafton (Option to Include All of Grafton)
Origin		Town leaders identified a need for increased programming in North Grafton during Karp Strategies' site visit. This need was reiterated by local stakeholders during the interview phase.
Budget		Low Budget (Under \$50,000): Many events can be organized for relatively low costs, which might include supplies, venue rentals, entertainment, insurance, and food and drink. Revenue from ticket or concession sales can help offset costs.
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years): Each event can be planned and implemented in under a year (though with the expectation that they will
Risk		Low Risk: This is a low-budget, short-term project that will likely be backed by town support. Potential risks include budget and administrative capacity limitations.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of events that are developed • Ongoing events led by residents or businesses that continue after Town-run programming • Number of visitors at Town-run events



Public events like block parties can attract residents and visitors alike to enjoy public spaces, patronize local businesses, and foster a strong sense of place.

Sources: Experience Fayetteville, Arkansas (2017)

Action Item

The Town may host new events in public spaces to attract new visitors to North Grafton. These events and programs can include a farmers market, pop-up retail, food trucks, movie nights, block parties, and more. In most cases, the Town could organize and manage the first iteration of each event and pass it on to members of the community to oversee in the future.

Diagnostic

North Grafton has several promising open space amenities, such as the pedestrian bridge over the Quinsigamond River and the two parks in Perry Hill. However, these spaces are currently not activated to the fullest extent due to a lack of programmatic events. By establishing more Town- and privately-run events in these places, the Town can activate public spaces and attract more pedestrians and visitors to North Grafton. In doing so, local restaurants and businesses will also likely experience greater patronization from foot traffic.



Many town events are popular ways to attract new visitors and activate public space, such as (clockwise from top left): food truck events in Sioux Falls, SD; town movie nights in Philadelphia, PA; touch-a-truck events in Gadsden, AL; and farmers markets in Durham, NC.

Sources: Sioux Falls Business (2021); University City District (2021); Greater Gadsden Area Tourism (2021); and Ecophiles (2019).

Partners & Resources

Implementation Partners

- Grafton Economic Development Commission (EDC), Grafton Public Works Advisory Committee, Recreation Commission, Open Space & Recreation Committee, and Cultural Council: These are some of the Boards & Committees that could provide insights, recommendations and networking opportunities to the project
- Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce: The Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce offers counseling and support for local businesses on how to attract customers and grow. They could be a useful resource providing recommendations on how local businesses can take advantage of surrounding outdoor spaces in collaboration with the Town to attract local and other customers.
- Local businesses: Businesses can be a partner for public space elements that go on or near their properties.

Funding Sources

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG): The Community Development Fund (CDF) awards grants to communities throughout the Commonwealth. This program helps eligible cities and towns to meet a broad range of community development needs in housing, infrastructure, revitalization, economic development and public social services. Eligible activities include but are not limited to: planning, downtown or area revitalization, community/public facilities, infrastructure, etc.
- Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Grant Program offered by Division of Conservation Services: The PARC Program was established to assist cities and towns in acquiring and developing land for park and outdoor recreation purposes. These grants can be used by municipalities to acquire parkland, build a new park, or to renovate an existing park. Note: The FY22 Grant Round is now closed.
- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge: EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition.
- EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance: This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs.
- Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants: A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects.

Process (repeat for each event)

1. Convene a steering committee of leaders and organizers for the event, including external advocates who may be able to take over the event in the future. Town leaders should be present, as should representatives from community organizations who may have an interest in leading the event in the future.
2. Identify the vision and goals for the event and determine the target audience. This may be done in coordination with community members to determine how the event can best serve the community.
3. Establish a project plan including schedule, procurement, budget, needs assessment, project leads/point people, capacity, and other project-specific needs. Coordinate with the Town's legal counsel and financial committee for all contracting and budgeting items.
4. Find and secure a venue. Many events may be hosted in outdoor, Town-owned space, such as the 5 Mill Street park or the pedestrian plaza adjacent to the Quinsigamond River. Other events may require indoor or specialized space that will necessitate collaboration with local business and property owners.
5. Identify sponsors and create sponsorship materials, such as a pitch deck, photos and renderings, and community testimonials. Prospective sponsors are most likely to financially contribute to events which have a clear vision and plan for adding benefit to the community.
6. Coordinate fundraising and sponsorship with Town legal and finance departments. This can also involve financial support from the Town to existing groups in the community that organize events.
7. Secure necessary permits, event and liability insurance, and safety and emergency procedures with relevant Town entities. Each of these steps should be taken based on standard Town procedures.
8. Conduct outreach to vendors, suppliers, and other event participants to procure necessary equipment, personnel, and other materials. Where possible, local businesses should be prioritized for procurement.
9. Determine and coordinate elected official presence. Appearances by elected officials are an effective way to promote future events and demonstrate the Town's commitment to providing events for the community.
10. Market the event to the Grafton community including creating a webpage for the event, social media materials, mailing lists, and other marketing materials. Postings on the Town's website should be created.
11. Create materials including signage and wayfinding to promote the event and direct visitors. These materials may be temporarily added to existing signage or created as standalone products.
12. Coordinate press coverage of the event. Local and regional media should be present to promote the event. Successful promotion will help future events attract more visitors and secure additional funding sources.
13. Coordinate day-of logistics including run-of-show, volunteer management, setup and teardown, crowd management, parking, wayfinding, and safety procedures.
14. Execute the event plan and troubleshoot issues as needed.
15. Conduct an after-actions review to evaluate the event. Reach out to visitors, vendors, sponsors, and event planners to solicit feedback and suggestions for improvements in the future. Determine whether the event was successful in meeting the goals and vision determined in step (2).
16. Publish promotional materials showing highlights from the event. These may include photos and videos, testimonials from visitors, and profiles of sponsors or vendors. All promotional materials should be distributed through a variety of media, including social media and website posts, newspaper and newsletter sections, public mailings (including email), and discussion at Town meetings and events.
17. Identify steering committees and/or potential external leadership for future iterations of the event, if applicable. The Town's objective in this step is to pass off leadership of the project to private or non-profit entities. The first, Town-led iteration can serve as a trial run for what will then become a recurring private event coordinated in partnership with the Town. By passing event leadership to other entities, the Town allows residents and local organizations to play a greater role in building a sense of community and also preserves future administrative capacity for other programs.

Add Sidewalks in Perry Hill

Category		Public Realm
Location		Perry Hill
Origin		Town leaders identified the lack of sidewalks in much of North Grafton during Karp Strategies' visit to the site. Local business owners reiterated the desire for increased pedestrian access and infrastructure to facilitate foot traffic to commercial assets.
Budget		High Budget (Above \$200,000): The cost of this project may vary widely depending on the scope and type of sidewalks. The Federal Highway Administration's guidelines estimate that a standard six-foot wide concrete sidewalk costs between \$150,000 and \$250,000 per linear mile. Costs may rise or fall based on changes to sidewalk material and width.
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years): Sidewalk construction is likely to be completed in 1-2 years, but the total project length may take longer to account for environmental review, community engagement, and site preparation.
Risk		High Risk: Sidewalks are a relatively expensive infrastructure investment. The presence of Washington Mills in this area, which sends heavy truck traffic across the neighborhood throughout the workday, complicates pedestrian safety and access. New sidewalks should be designed in a way that accommodates Washington Mills' needs and maximizes pedestrian safety.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Length of total sidewalk/pedestrian path expansionNumber of pedestrians in North GraftonNumber of visitors to open spaces in North Grafton



Many streets in the Perry Hill neighborhood currently do not have sidewalks., such as this stretch of Mill Street.
Source: Google Earth (2021)

Action Item

The Town may develop new sidewalks and pedestrian paths throughout the Perry Hill neighborhood. There are currently sidewalks on both sides of North Main Street, but most of the rest of the study area is missing any sidewalks or other designated pedestrian paths. New sidewalks would increase pedestrian traffic throughout the area and improve connectivity between existing assets such as businesses and restaurants, parks, and the riverfront.

Diagnostic

There are currently few sidewalks and pedestrian paths in North Grafton. Although there are sidewalks on both sides of North Main Street, most of the rest of the study area lacks pedestrian paths of any kind. Several key public space attractions, such as Perry Hill Park, the 5 Mill Street park, and the pedestrian river crossing near Grafton Grille, lack pedestrian infrastructure connecting them to each other and other local assets. Local businesses also view the lack of pedestrian traffic they receive as a barrier to economic growth. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this was a barrier for local residents and businesses. The lack of sidewalks prevented residents from spending time outside and accessing public spaces. Meanwhile, businesses were harmed by an inability of customers to access their stores on foot. The addition of a comprehensive sidewalk network in Perry Hill that connects these assets to each other, as well as to local residences and public parking, is a critical step to both improving the public realm and facilitating local economic development.



Sidewalk and roundabout installations were part of Rethink9, a project to calm traffic and activate the historic downtown in Hillsboro, VA. The improvements, funded by \$30 million in state grants, transformed downtown Hillsboro from a car-oriented commuter corridor (left) to a vibrant, walkable district (right) in under two years.

Sources (clockwise from top left): Famartin via Wikimedia Commons (2016); Michael S. Williamson via the Washington Post (2021); Rethink9 (2021); and Neal Augenstein via WTOP News (2019).

Partners & Resources

Implementation Partners

- Grafton Department of Public Works and Planning Department: These Departments can oversee permitting, environmental and commercial assessments, and other elements of the sidewalk construction process. The Planning Department is currently overseeing a number of transportation-related improvement projects.

Implementation Tools

- Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) [Regional Pedestrian Plan](#): CMRPC's pedestrian plan offers strategies for increasing walkability and pedestrian safety across central Massachusetts.
- Consult with local construction companies and contractors to support local business.

Funding Sources

- [Bicycle and Pedestrian Program](#) offered by the US Department of Transportation (DOT): The DOT's webpage offers a list of all grants for which the town could apply for.
- [Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program](#) offered by The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT): This grant supports municipalities and transit authorities to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce.
- [Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program](#) offered by MassDOT: The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program is a first-in-the-nation program that dedicates state transportation funds to plan and implement Complete Streets. Latest Updates (March 2021) regarding the Complete Streets Funding Program can be found [here](#).
- [EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation](#): EDA's grant can award anywhere between \$100,000 and \$10,000,000. This grant is designed to provide a wide-range of financial assistance to communities and regions to rebuild and strengthen their travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation industry through various infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects.
- [EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge](#): EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition.
- [EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance](#): This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs.
- [Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants](#): A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects

Process

1. Determine an oversight entity for sidewalk expansion. The Department of Public Works is a logical candidate, although other municipal entities or community groups may also offer important oversight capacity.
2. Gather data on existing conditions for pedestrians in North Grafton through surveys, studies, expert consultation, and/or community engagement. In order to best plan sidewalk design and routes, the Town must be aware of multiple critical datapoints in the area. At a minimum, the Town should produce maps and data documenting the following conditions:
 - a. Location, condition, and capacity of existing sidewalks and pedestrian paths;
 - b. Popular and potential start and end points for pedestrian routes, including commercial attractions, public space amenities, placemaking features such as benches and WiFi hotspots, and residences;
 - c. Barriers to use for existing pedestrian amenities, sidewalks, and paths;
 - d. Desired uses for the sidewalks other than as a mode of transportation, such as a social gathering space or a recreational area; and
 - e. Schedules and routes for truck traffic between the two Washington Mills buildings.
3. Develop a stakeholder power map to organize potential interest groups in the area. Likely stakeholders include:
 - a. Washington Mills' senior management, employees, truck drivers, and stakeholders;
 - b. Employees and leaders of other local businesses and restaurants;
 - c. Local residents;
 - d. Civic institutions including the church and the fire station;
 - e. Relevant Town committees and boards, including the Traffic Safety Committee, the Public Works Advisory Committee, and the Economic Development Commission; and
 - f. Relevant State entities, including MassDOT.
4. Develop a preliminary vision for the sidewalk expansion to present to all stakeholders. This initial plan should connect to the Town's broader vision for North Grafton and should explicitly recognize physical, economic, and political boundaries that the expansion project may face. To the extent that any obstacles may threaten the project, the Town should also develop potential mitigation strategies.
5. Meet with stakeholders to present and workshop the preliminary sidewalk vision for the area. These meetings should take a variety of forms, including one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders, focus and working groups with residents and businesses, and town hall-style meetings to optimize the distribution of relevant information. The goal of all outreach should be to isolate potential changes and improvements to the sidewalk expansion plan.
6. Coordinate the design phase based on the preliminary vision and any changes proposed through stakeholder engagement. The Town may opt to handle this design internally or contract it out to a design firm. If the latter option is selected, the Town will need to facilitate an RFP process to procure a designer, with all standard contractual, legal, and financial components.
7. Repeat steps 4-6 as needed. There should be multiple opportunities for stakeholders to view and comment on the proposed design prior to finalization.
8. Conduct any necessary environmental review, as mandated by local, state, and federal development guidelines.
9. Facilitate procurement of construction labor and materials to install the new sidewalks. This will likely include a full RFP process with consultation from the Town's legal counsel and financial committee.
10. Oversee the construction period and conduct periodic site visits and progress assessments.
11. Once construction is complete, install other placemaking elements to connect the new sidewalks and paths with the broader vision for North Grafton. These elements may include wayfinding and branding signage, recreational infrastructure, tables and benches, greenscape elements, and lighting.

Develop and Install Wayfinding Signage

Category	 Public Realm
Location	North Grafton
Origin	Town leadership identified a need for improved wayfinding elements in North Grafton during the Karp Strategies team's visit to Grafton. Subject matter experts affirmed the importance of wayfinding and branding in the public space webinars.
Budget	 Low Budget (Under \$50,000): Wayfinding materials can be designed and procured cheaply. Costs may rise if a design firm is used to create the materials.
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 Years): Procuring wayfinding signage can be done in fewer than five years.
Risk	 Low Risk: This is a low-budget, short-term project with few risks. A potential risk is public discontent about the placement or style of public art installations.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of new signs installed • Number of visitors to North Grafton • Pedestrian activity in North Grafton • Increase in events/activities in North Grafton



Wayfinding signage can incorporate a wide range of designs, materials, installation sites, and content.

Source: Burlington, Vermont, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront (2015)

Action Item	<p>The Town may add wayfinding signage throughout North Grafton. This may include directions to local businesses and parks and branding and historical signage for parks. Wayfinding signage would help improve walkability in the area by connecting pedestrians to public spaces, commercial amenities, and parking.</p>
Diagnostic	<p>North Grafton lacks a sense of walkability and pedestrian accessibility. The district mostly caters to commuters and industrial uses. There are assets for pedestrians, such as the Grafton Grille and Perry Hill Park, but these are largely disconnected from each other to pedestrians. Wayfinding signage that connects existing assets, draws attention to attractions and historical character, and creates a sense of branding for North Grafton is an area of need to make this region more attractive to pedestrians.</p>
Partners & Resources	<p>Implementation Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grafton Department of Public Works, Planning Department, and Open Space and Recreation Committee: These Town departments and committees have experience with open space and pedestrian improvements in other parts of Grafton. • Grafton Historic District Commission: The Grafton Historic District Commission can provide oversight for designing site specific signage in historic districts or special placards. • Local businesses and neighborhood associations: Local businesses and organizations can be a partner for public space elements that go on or near their properties. • Design firms: Firms such as Civic Space Collaborative who have experience in designing open spaces and wayfinding elements can bring added value to the project by creating a cohesive design that aligns with Grafton's vision for public space. <p>Funding Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Development Block Grant (CDBG): The Community Development Fund (CDF) awards grants to communities throughout the Commonwealth. This program helps eligible cities and towns to meet a broad range of community development needs in housing, infrastructure, revitalization, economic development and public social services. Eligible activities include but are not limited to: planning, downtown or area revitalization, community/public facilities, infrastructure, etc. • EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge: EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition. • EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance: This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs. • Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants: A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects.

Process

1. Create a steering committee to oversee the creation of wayfinding materials. Existing Grafton entities may be considered for this role, such as the Planning Department, the Department of Public Works, and the Economic Development Commission. Representatives from other local and regional entities should be considered for a role on the steering committee, including:
 - a. Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC);
 - b. Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce;
 - c. Grafton Cultural Council;
 - d. Grafton Mill Villages Advisory Committee;
 - e. Grafton Open Space and Recreation Committee;
 - f. Grafton Traffic Safety Committee;
 - g. Grafton Police Department; and
 - h. Local residents and business owners.
2. Determine a specific vision for branding in North Grafton. The new wayfinding signage should align with the broader branding goals for the region, such as the historical New England Village designation or any other desired branding. The content and design of all new signage should contribute to this sense of place.
3. Identify existing deficiencies and needs within the pedestrian network, parking opportunities, and overall transportation network in North Grafton. A lack of connectivity for pedestrians and a lack of available parking have been consistently identified as barriers to getting around North Grafton. The new wayfinding signage should aim to mitigate these concerns by clearly directing pedestrians and cars to nearby amenities including restaurants and businesses, parks and open space, and parking opportunities. This step may require a full pedestrian needs assessment in collaboration with local residents and businesses and outside experts.
4. Determine a comprehensive vision and implementation plan for the new wayfinding materials, including its location and desired purpose and audience. This should incorporate the branding vision for North Grafton and needs identified in step (3) to create a detailed implementation plan for the new wayfinding signage, including quantity and location, design and branding elements, and amenities highlighted by the signs.
9. Determine the process for signage procurement and installation. This may require a public RFP process in collaboration with the Town's legal counsel and financial committee. It may also be possible to procure signs via direct purchase from a sign manufacturer. Installation may be handled by a contractor or assigned to Town staff, such as employees at the Department of Public Works.
10. Coordinate and execute installation including logistics, site inspections, and necessary permitting including coordination with relevant Town agencies.
11. Develop a maintenance and upkeep plan for all new elements. Maintenance may be assigned to a Town entity, such as the Department of Public Works, or contracted to a third party.







In addition to a wide range of signage types, wayfinding can also be integrated with artistic and historical attractions, infrastructure like streets and sidewalks, and environmental sustainability improvements.

Sources (left to right): Town of Worcester, MA (2021); London Festival of Architecture (2020); and DCL Boston (2019).

Process

1. Determine an oversight entity for sidewalk expansion. The Department of Public Works is a logical candidate, although other municipal entities or community groups may also offer important oversight capacity.
2. Gather data on existing conditions for pedestrians in North Grafton through surveys, studies, expert consultation, and/or community engagement. In order to best plan sidewalk design and routes, the Town must be aware of multiple critical datapoints in the area. At a minimum, the Town should produce maps and data documenting the following conditions:
 - a. Location, condition, and capacity of existing sidewalks and pedestrian paths;
 - b. Popular and potential start and end points for pedestrian routes, including commercial attractions, public space amenities, placemaking features such as benches and WiFi hotspots, and residences;
 - c. Barriers to use for existing pedestrian amenities, sidewalks, and paths;
 - d. Desired uses for the sidewalks other than as a mode of transportation, such as a social gathering space or a recreational area; and
 - e. Schedules and routes for truck traffic between the two Washington Mills buildings.
3. Develop a stakeholder power map to organize potential interest groups in the area. Likely stakeholders include:
 - a. Washington Mills' senior management, employees, truck drivers, and stakeholders;
 - b. Employees and leaders of other local businesses and restaurants;
 - c. Local residents;
 - d. Civic institutions including the church and the fire station;
 - e. Relevant Town committees and boards, including the Traffic Safety Committee, the Public Works Advisory Committee, and the Economic Development Commission; and
 - f. Relevant State entities, including MassDOT.
4. Develop a preliminary vision for the sidewalk expansion to present to all stakeholders. This initial plan should connect to the Town's broader vision for North Grafton and should explicitly recognize physical, economic, and political boundaries that the expansion project may face. To the extent that any obstacles may threaten the project, the Town should also develop potential mitigation strategies.
5. Meet with stakeholders to present and workshop the preliminary sidewalk vision for the area. These meetings should take a variety of forms, including one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders, focus and working groups with residents and businesses, and town hall-style meetings to optimize the distribution of relevant information. The goal of all outreach should be to isolate potential changes and improvements to the sidewalk expansion plan.
6. Coordinate the design phase based on the preliminary vision and any changes proposed through stakeholder engagement. The Town may opt to handle this design internally or contract it out to a design firm. If the latter option is selected, the Town will need to facilitate an RFP process to procure a designer, with all standard contractual, legal, and financial components.
7. Repeat steps 4-6 as needed. There should be multiple opportunities for stakeholders to view and comment on the proposed design prior to finalization.
8. Conduct any necessary environmental review, as mandated by local, state, and federal development guidelines.
9. Facilitate procurement of construction labor and materials to install the new sidewalks. This will likely include a full RFP process with consultation from the Town's legal counsel and financial committee.
10. Oversee the construction period and conduct periodic site visits and progress assessments.
11. Once construction is complete, install other placemaking elements to connect the new sidewalks and paths with the broader vision for North Grafton. These elements may include wayfinding and branding signage, recreational infrastructure, tables and benches, greenscape elements, and lighting.

Add Public WiFi Hotspots

Category		Public Realm
Location		Public Spaces in North Grafton
Origin		Town leaders identified the benefits of public WiFi hotspots in North Grafton during Karp Strategies' Phase 1 public presentation. This was noted as a complimentary upgrade to other public realm improvements.
Budget		Low Budget (Under \$50,000): Installation of public WiFi hotspots is not likely to exceed \$50,000 in costs. Extending the Town's existing internet cabling infrastructure will be the most expensive initial cost. However, ongoing costs of operating and maintaining an additional public network will continue for the duration of the project's lifespan. Depending on the scope of infrastructure expansion required, the budget may increase.
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years): Depending on the level of infrastructure expansions required, this project may take several months to several years to implement. Operation and maintenance will continue indefinitely and will likely be outsourced to the Town's IT organization.
Risk		Low Risk: Steps will need to be taken to ensure that the new network points are secure and reliable. Infrastructure expansions may be challenging, depending on scope and location. However, once the project is up and running, ongoing maintenance will be minimal. There is likely to be local support for this initiative.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of WiFi hotspots added• Number of visitors to public spaces in North Grafton



Free WiFi hotspots can encourage visitors to spend more time in public spaces.
Source: Telecoms (2017)

Action Item	<p>The Town may install WiFi hotspots in public spaces in North Grafton. These hotspots would be free for public use and would be owned and operated by the Town. This project is intended to attract more visitors into public spaces in North Grafton, including local residents as well as outsiders, and to encourage visitors to spend more time lingering in these areas.</p>
Diagnostic	<p>Many public spaces in North Grafton are underutilized and lack amenities to attract and retain visitors. In addition to other public realm improvements, such as park upgrades, placemaking initiatives, and sidewalk expansions, the area would benefit from the creation of new public WiFi hotspots. These hotspots would encourage visitors to come to the improved public spaces, including local residents who may be more likely to leave their homes if internet access is preserved. Visitors are also more likely to spend more time in public outdoor spaces if they have WiFi access.</p>
Partners & Resources	<p>Implementation Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grafton Planning Department and Department of Public Works: These two departments can coordinate efforts to determine location of WiFi hotspots with support and input from various town committees. Grafton's Capital Improvement Planning Committee, Information Technology Committee, and Shared Services Committee: These committees can all provide resources and recommendations as to project implementation. Massachusetts Broadband Institute at MassTech (MBI) <u>WiFi Hotspot Program</u>: MBI's WiFi Hotspot Program is dedicated to expanding access to free, public WiFi hotspots in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This program may be able to help coordinate implementation and possibly provide information regarding funding sources. <p>Implementation Tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service providers such as Verizon, Charter, Comcast, etc.: Major internet providers can provide connections and service for the hotspots. <p>Funding Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) <u>Technical Assistance Program (TAP)</u>: TAP is a funding program that enables and assists municipalities in implementing projects that are beneficial to the community. This program can fund a diverse range of projects including housing, economic development, shared services, municipal effectiveness, public engagement, public safety, public health, climate change, clean energy, equitable transit-oriented development, bicycle/pedestrian mobility, environmental protection, creative placemaking, and arts and culture planning. Municipalities can submit concepts for individual community-specific projects and for multi-community projects. Projects that promote regional collaboration and serve multiple communities, advance racial equity in the region, and/or promote COVID recovery will receive preference. <u>EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Regional Build Back Better Challenge</u>: EDA will award funds in two phases to regional coalitions who are implementing recovery projects in a wide range of areas. Phase I grants up to \$500,000 to coalitions for technical assistance developing projects. Phase II awards between \$25 and \$75 million for project implementation. This would require the Town to combine this project with others as a part of a regional development coalition. <u>EDA FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Economic Adjustment Assistance</u>: This broad grant program will provide funding for communities to plan, build, innovate, and put people back to work through construction or non-construction projects designed to meet local needs. <u>Mass Community One Stop for Growth Grants</u>: A single application portal allows applicants to be considered for ten grant programs from three state agencies. Funding is available for planning, infrastructure, capital, and programmatic projects.

Process

1. Identify a decision-making body to oversee the installation and management of the new public WiFi hubs. The Town IT Commission may be able to act as this body. A coalition of different entities may also be necessary.
2. Convene the decision-making body to develop a set of goals and parameters for the new public WiFi network. These goals should identify the geographic scope that the Town desires to have access to the public network. Any potential usage restrictions, such as site blockers or usage time limits, should be identified at this stage as well. As part of this step, the decision-making body should speak with grant providers and other municipalities who have experience with public WiFi hotspots to discuss potential strategies and challenges.
3. Select a network infrastructure from which to draw the new public network. One option is to connect it to the cellular network, which would likely require a cellular plan with monthly payments. Another option is to tap the new network into the Town's existing fiber system, which operates public internet in municipal buildings. This option would more easily integrate with the Town's existing network infrastructure, but would require safeguards to ensure privacy and security and prevent users from exceeding the Town's bandwidth capacity.
 - a. If necessary, hire a consultant or IT firm to research various network options and recommend the best selection. In this case, a full RFP process would likely be necessary, including consultation with the Town's legal counsel and financial committee. The Town's existing IT contractor may also be able to provide this service without necessitating an RFP process.
4. Coordinate with the Town's IT contractor to establish any necessary network safeguards. The network should ensure privacy and security for public users. If the public hotspots are connected to the Town's internal network, steps should be taken to ensure that internal servers, files, and other data are not exposed to the public. If bandwidth limitations are needed, these should be coordinated as well.
5. Procure an engineer to identify specific sites for all new WiFi hotspots and design any necessary infrastructure additions, such as an expansion of the Town's fiber cable network. Procurement should be conducted through an RFP release in coordination with the Town's legal counsel and financial committee.
6. Procure all necessary materials, including WiFi hotspots and any other components as needed. Procurement should be conducted through an RFP release in coordination with the Town's legal counsel and financial committee.
7. Oversee the construction/installation period and conduct periodic site visits and progress assessments.
8. Once construction is complete, power the hotspots on and allow the public to connect to the network.
9. Release promotional materials to advertise the new network and attract visitors from within and outside Grafton to the North Grafton area. This may include social media posts, newspaper articles, local news segments, flyers and posters, and promotion at Town meetings and events.

Create a Business Association

Category		Private Realm
Location		North Grafton (Option to Include All of Grafton)
Origin		Town leaders identified the need for a unified business association in North Grafton during Karp Strategies' site visit. This need was reiterated by business owners and subject matter experts during stakeholder interviews.
Budget		Low Budget (Under \$50,000): The only direct costs associated with forming a business association are time and materials for Town staff to oversee the process. Additional administrative costs may arise as needed in the future, such as the potential hiring of permanent staff to manage the new association and/or retaining legal counsel for the association.
Timeframe		Short Term (Less than 5 years): A business association can be formed in 6-18 months, depending on administrative capacity. Long-term administration of the association may last indefinitely as desired by the Town and local businesses.
Risk		Low Risk: There is little risk associated with forming a business association, as it has few direct costs and may provide substantial benefits. One potential risk is that a minority of businesses may feel ostracized or unrepresented by the leadership of the new association. Another potential risk is that the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce also serves as a business association for many local businesses, and creating a new entity may create tension in that working relationship.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of businesses who join the business association• Number of new businesses in North Grafton• Number of grants and resources obtained by North Grafton businesses

Appendix

Appendix A: Attract or Recruit Critical Businesses/Services to North Grafton

Provided by: Revby LLC

Luiz Moras, Administrative and Business Development Associate

Michael Aparicio, Founder and Principal Consultant

Christophe Le Gorju, Advisory Member

Massachusetts Local Rapid Recovery Program SME Consultation Report

To: Grafton

From: Revby LLC

Project: Attract or Recruit Critical Businesses/Services to North Grafton

The Town of Grafton may run targeted marketing, communication and networking activities to recruit critical businesses such as ATMs, coffee shops, and general merchandise shops that act as strong downtown businesses and can attract more people to North Grafton. Grafton's Economic Development Commission and Planning Department can help facilitate and plan for the communications and implementation of this project. The project planning effort needs support on how to attract mission critical businesses and services to the North Grafton downtown area.

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Project Feedback & Considerations

Key Elements

A. Identify stakeholders: Set up a committee with a unified vision.

- Washington Mills owner/management
 - What does Washington Mills have to gain by coming to the table for community engagement and possible sponsorship of revitalization initiatives? Is there an opportunity to offer sponsorship of a shared use space for pop up food service and retail, the type of businesses that would benefit Washington Mills employees?
- Spa Owners
 - Is there an opportunity to increase spa experience branding/awareness to attract more leisure visitors?
- Current business owners in target industries (e.g., food and retail)
- Landlords
- Real estate brokers / commercial business brokers
- MassHire or Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Mass Growth Capital Corporation
- Grafton town representatives / economic development
- Residential community

B. Identifying needs:

- What's missing, what type of business will bring people, visitors, and more business. Creating a new center of life dedicated to bring back people. What goods and service are needed?
- Creating an active, desirable downtown with a strong sense of place;
- Attracting new businesses that create a robust mix of shopping, dining, entertainment and service options for residents and visitors, and that provide job opportunities for a variety of skills and salaries; Ex: culinary experience after a SPA.
- Enhancing public spaces for arts and cultural events that serve the existing members of the community but also draw in attendees from around the region; (e.g., History of the mills).
- One of the location could be a city run Pop-up space, for art, tech, comics, photo, food...

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- How to ensure business sustainability over time: Tax incentive reduction, Property tax reduction, rent control, job creation tax incentive.
- Will the city consider creating a zone with no traffic, converting street to pedestrians only? This has been very successful in Europe to revitalize the center of cities.
- Will the city authorize terrace for restaurant, café and bar and front outdoor sales space for other businesses?
- Set up a downtown dedicated website that will direct consumers to businesses.

C. Attract the business. How will you bring business in? What's in it for them?

- Create a welcome package "handbook"
- Set-up an application process for businesses to move in.
- Cutting the red tape: Set up a package "Ready to Use" this will include permit and license according to each location. With an expedite process and cost at zero or reduced.
- Offer free consulting to new business/start-up: type of corporation, rules and regulations, feasibility (cash flow projection, business plan)
- Provide financing or advise on possible financing (work with local bank)
- Vacant space map: List all space available and what kind of business each of them could host in agreement with landlord. Includes square feet, map, location, rent cost, and all other available specs
 - How many of the vacant space are street front?
 - How many are first floor? How many on upper floor?
 - What's the possible use of each vacant space? (is it fit for a restaurant?)
- Help landlord to be compliant with regulations such as environmental, energy regulation and more
- Work with landlord to update space for energy incentives: MA offer many incentives such as: heating and cooling, lighting and appliances, weatherization, building or renovating a home, financing, and additional special offers. <https://www.mass.gov/guides/massachusetts-energy-rebates-incentives>
- Work with business to help them enrolled in point of sales payment system, build on-line presence, set up correct accounting and bookkeeping

D. Review Process

- Make it an exclusive / competitive process
- Review all the application received from entrepreneurs looking into starting, extend, a business
- With the stakeholder identify what business or project should move in: Select the right mix of business as to avoid a cluster of identical businesses.
- Accompany all the "Selected" in the process of moving in/opening (refer to C.)

Keep in mind a strategy that "sells" the North Grafton area to new businesses. You are selling:

- The area as a business location
- Consumers (local residents, commuters, and visitors)
- The physical retail space
- The process and municipal support

Short term or long term?

Is the effort to fill vacancies / recruit businesses a short term or long term initiative? If long-term, is there consideration of a Business Improvement District being created? <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/business-improvement-districts-bid>

Project Examples / Resources

A. Downtown Business Recruitment Resource – DANTH, Inc. New York

C. The Downtown Business Recruitment Function.

Downtown business recruitment is an economic function with a distinct array of component parts. It involves a lot more than identifying, wooing and winning tenant prospects.

1. Involving The Landlords. Local landlords control the downtown's commercial spaces. Without their cooperation and participation, a downtown organization's recruitment efforts will have very limited success.

2. The Identification, Cultivation And Attraction Of Tenant Prospects. Some tenant prospects are like wild flowers and weeds -- they just appear at the door of the landlord or the downtown development organization without any "seeding". Most have to be identified, wooed and then finally signed up. Some of these tenant prospects will be desirable firms, but many others may be of questionable value.

3. Marketing The Downtown And The Available Commercial Spaces. This can be done by the landlords, the chamber of commerce, the downtown development organization, the municipality. some combination of the above, or by nobody.

4. Making The Deal. Getting signed leases from new businesses is the bottom line for any recruitment program; getting renewed leases from quality business operations that are already situated in the downtown is the prize of any retention effort. These deals will always involve the tenant and a landlord or their respective representatives. ALWAYS! They may or may not involve the downtown organization's "business recruiter."

5. Getting Required Government Approvals And Permissions. The number of approvals -- and the length of the gauntlet that must be negotiated to obtain them -- will vary from deal to deal and the ordinances of each community. For example, new retail tenants in the Bayonne Town Center will need approvals from the Town Center SID and the City's Zoning Officer for new signs and façade improvements and approvals from the building department for any structural work, be it inside or just on the façade. A restaurant would also have to get approvals from the City's Health Department. A new development project would have an even more extensive list of approvals from the Planning Board and the City Council to negotiate. Some cities develop a reputation for having a "red tape" approvals and permissions process that makes tenant prospects and developers unwilling to even consider them as business locations. Such reputations can be absolutely poisonous to recruitment efforts.

Source: <https://www.ndavidmilder.com/>

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B. University of Wisconsin-Madison Downtown and Business District Market Analysis

Step 5: Identify Prospective Tenants

The team's next responsibility is to find appropriate businesses that might be interested in a site in your market area or need new space to expand.

Sources of Leads

Leads can be broken down into four general categories:

Existing Businesses within or near the business district – Often the best leads are found near home. Leads might include existing businesses seeking more space or a better location in the business district. The district's business owner survey as well as ongoing conversations and personal contacts of the recruitment team, chamber of commerce and other economic development professionals can help identify these leads.

Emerging Entrepreneurs - Downtowns and business districts are often attractive to independent businesses. Accordingly, leads might include home-based or garage-based businesses seeking more fitting space and a convenient location for their customers. These leads might include managers of existing businesses wishing to go into business on their own. Commercial lenders, business schools, Small Business Development Center (SBDC) counselors, Main Street program business specialists, Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), chamber of commerce and other public or private small business professionals should be asked to help identify these leads. See toolbox section on entrepreneurship.

Existing Local or Regional Businesses - Local or regional businesses, particularly those that have branch stores and are ready to expand, are often excellent prospects. These business operators typically have a good knowledge of the market area, and may already have **multiple stores**. They are often interested in expansion as a way to improve their penetration of the market. These leads can be identified through your team's knowledge of the business mix in other communities in the region and information collected from your local consumer research. In addition, realtors, commercial brokers, sales representatives and suppliers that work within the region can be helpful. Sometimes ads in regional business, real estate and regional lifestyle periodicals can generate leads.

National Chains - If local or regional businesses are not interested in expanding, larger national chains can be contacted. It is important to be realistic about the kinds of chains that might be interested in a small community as their market, store size and parking requirements may preclude them from considering your district. Leads can be identified through directories and

Source: <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/downtown-market-analysis/putting-your-research-to-work/business-recruitment/>

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C. City of Santa Monica – Economic Recovery Task Force



Programs | Services | Getting Around | Art, Culture & Fun | Businesses | Your City Hall

Economic Recovery Task Force

About the Task Force

The Santa Monica Economic Recovery Task Force was created in April 2020 and formally launched with City staff members. The Task Force consists of the following five policy areas listed below. A working group has been created for each policy area. The Task Force, along with expert business and community economic development advisors, were brought together to identify key actions item sand local champions for each area.

Business Retention and Reopening

- **Summary:** Helping businesses reopen quickly and more flexibly, different configurations and requirements, marketing support via existing Buy Local partnerships (Business Improvement Districts, Santa Monica Travel & Tourism, and the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce)
- **Working Group Co-Leads:** Jing Yeo (CDD), Jason Kilgier (CCD), and Brandon Ward (CAO)

Business Processes and Permitting Cost

- **Summary:** Enhancing the existing Chamber-Santa Monica Alliance effort involving Economic Development, City Planning, Building & Safety, Finance and Public Works
- **Working Group Co-Leads:** Ariel Socarras (CDD), Haley Favre-Smith (FIN), and Jing Yeo (CDD)

Federal and State Resources

- **Summary:** Leveraging technical assistance for local businesses and accessing loans, grants, and stimulus resources. Expand existing partnerships with El Camino College Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Santa Monica College, Los Angeles Economic Development Corporations (LAEDC) in addition to identifying federal/state opportunities.
- **Working Group Leads:** Lisa Parson (CMO), Melissa Spagnuolo (PW)

Community and Economic Development

- **Summary:** Creating opportunities, such as a rental assistance program, job fairs or web-based resources, to connect displaced workers to prior/new jobs and promoting resources and support for those who have lost jobs due to COVID-19 impacts. Tracking child care. Assessing the potential expansion of Pico Wellbeing Project efforts to citywide.
- **Working Group Leads:** Angel Villaseñor (CSD), Carla Fantozzi (CSD), and Shannon Daut (CSD)

Outreach and Communications

- **Summary:** Public messaging campaign that focuses on business resilience and businesses reopening using communications strategies like "Open for Business" / "Back and Better than Ever".
- **Working Group Leads:** Debbie Lee (CMO) and Erin Taylor (CMO)

Source: <https://www.santamonica.gov/economicrecovery/about>

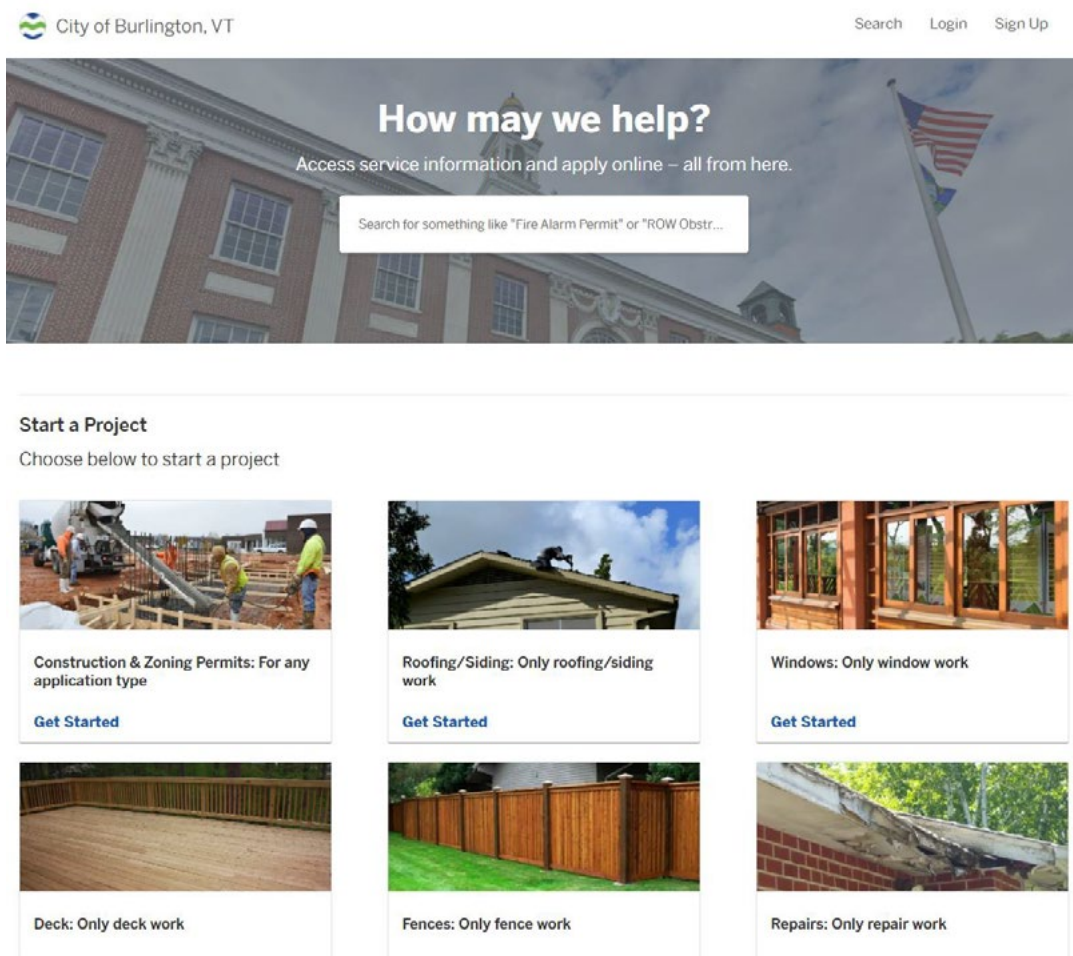


D. City of Burlington, VT – Central permit and zoning online resource

Creation of an online portal: business.burlingtonvt.gov

“The business portal is great! Super helpful. The process was totally straightforward, and the resource center was also helpful and robust. I think this portal will make gathering the necessary paperwork painless for starting a new businesses.” – Travis Bragg, Burlington entrepreneur

<https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/Press/city-of-burlington-launches-new-online-business-tool-for-startups>




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FAQs

Signing Up, Creating a Profile & Accessing Your Information, Applying for a Permit & Paying Fees + 4 more


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DPI Zoning Administration

Zoning Certificate of Occupancy Request, Zoning Sketch Plan Review + 1 more

[Explore](#)



DPI Trades Division

Electrical Permit, Mechanical / HVAC Permit + 3 more


[Explore](#)



DPI Administration

Property Research Request, Zoning Compliance Request


[Explore](#)



DPI Housing Division

Rental Inspection, Housing/Zoning Complaint

[Explore](#)



DPW Right-of-Way

ROW Excavation Permit, ROW Encumbrance Permit + 3 more

[Explore](#)



Fire Marshal



Water Resources

Source: <https://business.burlingtonvt.gov/>

Case study on Small Business Technical Assistance

To access the case study, please refer to the following best practice included in the [Tenants Mix Best Practice Sheets Compendium](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rapid-recovery-plan-rrp-program) on <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rapid-recovery-plan-rrp-program>

E. “A Collaborative Small Business Technical Assistance Effort to Drive Business Resilience and Opportunity to Diverse Communities” (Arlington, Virginia)

Action Item

Community Action Items:

- Identify partners/providers to implement program in a timely fashion
- Identify marketing tools to reach the target market
- Identify what microentrepreneurs need the most help with in solidifying their organizations
- Ensure there are enough resources to meet the need
- Consider CARES Act Funding to help with impact
- Ensure quick turnaround with Purchasing Office to Select consultants

Process (by the Community)

1. Research needs of hard impacted small businesses
2. Interview organizations which are currently doing work to assist businesses during the health pandemic. Identify best practices and improve deliverables
3. Design framework for ReLaunch program. [ReVitalize = Technical Assistance & ReNew = Technology Assistance]
4. Develop working Budget
5. Work with purchasing office to develop criteria for vendor's who can provide assistance
6. Advertise for assistance with formal RFP process
7. Hire Vendors
8. Training of Vendors
9. Training of Staff
10. Develop CRM system to keep track of businesses accepted/rejected or pushed forward.
11. 10-month Communications plan designed - yard signs, direct mail campaign, blogs, social media strategy etc.
12. Select businesses eligible for ReLaunch program
13. Communicate with vendors. Repeat for the next 10 months
14. Program ends December 31, 2021

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ReVitalize Application

Thank you for your interest in applying to the **ReVitalize Technical Assistance Consulting** program ("Program") for your Arlington-based business or nonprofit organization. These are tough times, and we have designed a technical assistance program to help you address challenges in the following areas: financial management, access to capital, marketing and branding, increasing your digital online presence, business knowledge, legal structures and strategic planning. We invite you to apply for the **ReVitalize** program if you are seeking complimentary consulting help to sustain and grow your business.

We are conducting a rolling application process. A maximum of 20 eligible businesses will be selected each month for the technical assistance service. If you are not selected in the month in which you apply, you will be automatically eligible the following month, with no need to reapply. *This program will end December 31, 2021, or when all of the funding has been awarded, whichever comes first.*

We recommend you use a browser other than Internet Explorer.

Next

Figure 1: Application portal for Small Business Technical Assistance, including assistance on building an effective online presence.



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Business Recruitment

This section explains in brief how market analysis data can be used in the various steps of a business recruitment program. Communities can influence business investment decisions by drawing attention to local market characteristics that might otherwise be overlooked. A business recruitment team can identify high potential business sectors, compiling information of interest to business prospects, and marketing to those prospects. The key is to demonstrate that the community is a profitable place to do business.

Market analysis data can be used in the following steps of a business recruitment strategy.

- [Step 1: Form a Business Recruitment Team](#)
- [Step 2: Create a Supportive Business Environment](#)
- [Step 3: Assemble Recruitment and Marketing Materials](#)
- [Step 4: Design an Ideal Tenant Mix](#)
- [Step 5: Identify Prospective Tenants](#)
- [Step 6: Contact Prospective Tenants](#)
- [Step 7: Close Deals with Prospects](#)
- [Step 8: Maximize Your Success](#)

Related Content

The following recruitment strategies pertain to downtown and business districts. These strategies were drawn from valuable resources on the topic:

- [Fill-in-the-Blank Business Recruitment published by the National Main Street Center](#)
- [Making Downtowns & Village Centers More Attractive For Development, Vermont Forum on Sprawl, 1998;](#)
- Baraboo (WI) Retail Market Analysis including a section on recruitment summarized by Deborah Ersland of Redevelopment Resources, LLC.
- [Downtown Revitalization: Business Recruitment Book, DANTH, Inc.](#)

Step 1: Form a Business Recruitment Team

The founding members of this team are extremely important for establishing the enthusiasm, momentum, professionalism and organization that will be needed. They need to be problem solvers, and action oriented. This team and the recruitment process need effective and enthusiastic leadership to stay on track and be organized. Funding and in-kind services will be important to this committee.

Select the Team

To begin the recruitment process, a proactive business recruitment team needs to be assembled. This team should bring a clear and realistic understanding of the market analysis, have skills in economic development and real estate along with connections to local decision-makers, and have an ability to sell and follow through. Training for the team may be necessary. A team of five to seven participants could include:

- Established (and retired) business owners;
- Local real estate professionals;
- Current building owners who are interested in exploring various uses for their property;
- Bankers;
- Local entrepreneurship and development organization representatives;
- Elected officials; and
- Chamber of commerce and visitor bureau directors.

The team will help serve as a management entity for recruitment efforts, focusing on those properties and areas that are critical for the economic success of the business district. Through the process, the team will coordinate efforts with local real estate professionals. A strong leader is necessary to maintain momentum of the team.

Develop a Common Purpose

Before beginning a business recruitment effort, it is important to understand its objectives. For most districts, the effort should help:

- maintain and develop the district as a mixed-use, multi-purpose center; and
- strengthen the businesses and the business mix to enable the district to compete successfully in the market.

The purpose of the effort should also articulate a clear market position statement for the district that characterize the type of retail mix, business opportunities, the shopping environment, and the target customer market. The statement distinguishes your district from surrounding shopping districts. Often, a community's market position statement will serve as background for identifying the types of businesses that could be recruited.

Draft a Work Plan

The first step for this group is to develop an initial work plan. All work plan action steps should be listed and prioritized. Sample work plan components might include the following:

- gather data about the community from the market analysis;
- inventory the real estate in the various business districts, particularly the vacant or underutilized buildings;
- survey the business situation by looking at the present businesses and why they are working, who are the “anchor” tenants, as well as the previous failures or relocations;
- meet with the property owners of these buildings to garner their support in the process;
- outline all incentives for business development, create a simple sales package; and
- develop your prospect list, etc.

Realistic timeframes need to be assigned to every step. The right team member(s) need to be assigned to every step (match skills to tasks). Most importantly, involve the broader community in your work and seek assistance, ideas and contacts through the process. This work plan should be reviewed, updated and modified as needed.

Step 2: Create a Supportive Business Environment

Before actual recruitment can begin, the team must make sure that the district presents itself as an inviting place to do business. The commercial center must present a quality business environment in order to attract viable businesses and ensure the successful operation of businesses within the commercial center. It must appeal to the rational investor who is seeking to minimize risk and maximize financial return. Often, this supportive business environment will include incentives to help “level the playing field” with other commercial centers including those developed on the edge of town.

Make the Environment Appealing

To attract retailers, a community must first make its business district visibly active, attractive, convenient and safe. This is often more difficult for non-shopping center locations including downtowns as they typically do not operate under a central management. Before the recruitment process begins, work with existing business operators and city officials to ensure:

- An aesthetically pleasing commercial environment;
- A safe and secure commercial center;
- Adequate and conveniently located parking and transportation services; and
- High business operational standards and service which project a quality, unified and consistent image for the district.

Overcome Barriers to Business Investment in the District

Many retail and service businesses choose "edge" locations on the outside of town because such locations have proven successful and expansions are easy to replicate. According to the Vermont Forum on Sprawl, downtown and other in-town commercial areas need to recognize and overcome barriers to business investment in their districts. Barriers often include:

- Higher land costs;
- More title problems (because of their history);
- Permitting that is more complex and time-consuming;
- Zoning that may be more restrictive;
- Site preparation (for new construction) that is more complex;
- Construction and renovations that are more complex;
- Building footprints that are typically smaller; and
- Parking that is more restrictive.

The recruitment team should understand these barriers, both perceived and real, and work with business and community leaders to minimize them. Sometimes creative incentives can be developed to make the district more competitive from a business investment perspective.

Offer Incentives

It is also important that the team fully understand what the community can to offer the prospective business. Incentives might include:

- Technical assistance including market and feasibility analysis, business plan development, governmental regulations, advertising and physical design;
- Negotiation and leasing of space if the prospect is not working with a broker or not familiar with the area;
- Assistance with local zoning and development procedures;
- Centralized retail management in which business district organization gains the right to lease property from owners and place businesses in locations prescribed by an overall commercial center plan;
- Financing of building improvements, facades, displays, fixtures, inventory and start-up costs including a low-interest loan pool;
- Counseling with local financial institutions and assistance in completing loan applications;
- Financing options and incentives appealing to developers such as low-interest loan, Tax Increment Financing, or Community Development Block Grant funding programs;
- District wide image and marketing programs and advertising and promotion assistance for individual firms;
- An effective business to business networking system;
- Private development partnerships made up of local investors who might develop, own and operate a needed business; and
- Business incubator(s) to help establish new businesses at a reasonable cost and provide them with space and common services.

Step 3: Assemble Recruitment and Marketing Materials

Attractive recruitment and marketing materials should be developed to convey the market potential of the business district. Business recruitment materials must help convince a business operator that your district is unique and that it offers a competitive edge over other locations.

General Marketing Materials

Market analysis data already collected earlier in your study will help potential business operators evaluate the potential for their venture. When developing marketing materials, provide only relevant information to avoid information overload. Consider the following:

- Letter of introduction including compelling reasons to consider your district;
- General information and photos of the community highlighting its assets;
- Market position and vision statements;
- Wish list of new businesses supported by market demand and supply data;
- New developments demonstrating investment downtown;
- Information on past openings and closings of businesses;
- Trade area geographic definition and demographic and lifestyle data;
- Trade area economic data including actual and potential sales data if available;
- Nonresident consumer data (including daytime population and tourism visitation);
- Descriptions of target market segments served;
- Major employers and institutions;
- Vehicle and pedestrian traffic volume;
- Mix of existing retail, service, dining, housing, office and lodging in the district;
- Press coverage and testimonials highlighting success stories;
- Promotional calendar; and
- Summary of financial incentives and other business assistance services available in the business district.

Assemble Maps

Graphs and maps are particularly effective ways to describe the region, the local area, retail competition, and development trends. For the business district and trade area, include:

- Current district vacancy map;
- Business mix and clustering map displaying information on all district buildings;
- Major employers, institutions and points of interest map of area;
- Traffic volume map;
- Trade area maps defined by customer origin and drive-times; and
- Consumer spending demand and supply or surplus/leakage maps.

When targeting retail prospects, remember that not all retailers have the same requirements. A grocery store typically requires a different market than a general merchandise store. Communities should customize information to fit the needs of the particular prospect.

Building/Site Specific Materials

In addition to market data, information on specific buildings may also be useful. Secure the cooperation of the building owners and the real estate brokers if the property is listed for sale or lease. This information might include:

- Maps and photos describing the location, building and its history;
- Complementary businesses/clusters nearby;
- Sales and rent per square foot (with comparison market data);
- Available commercial and residential space and floor plan;
- Operating expenses including utility rates and taxes;
- Zoning and building code conditions or restrictions;
- Current tenants and how the building could be optimally reused; and
- Property owner or other contact for more information.

When completed, recruitment and marketing materials should be assembled in an attractive packet and possibly offered online. Quality content, graphics and formatting are required to support your community profile and image. Develop a simple sales package that is interesting, informative, honest and current, one that describes your community as a good place to do business.

Step 4: Design an Ideal Tenant Mix

This requires using the information on a community's targeted retail categories as well as where business in these categories should be physically placed. Compare these categories with available real estate. Ideal businesses will blend with and enhance existing businesses, utilize the available vacant space wisely, create synergy and offer unique merchandise or style. It may be useful to first list your vacancies on paper. Create a lease plan of the business districts and insert all current businesses and note the anchor tenants. Identify the vacancies and acknowledge their size and relationships to other businesses.

Opportunities that are supported by the Market Analysis

To explore business categories with high potential for success, market analysis findings could be summarized in a format similar to the following:

Sample Worksheet Summarizing Opportunities Identified in Market Analysis

NAICS Code	Category	Market Opportunities	Supported in Study:				
			Focus Group Results	Consumer Survey	Business Owner Survey	Business Mix Analysis	Demographic Analysis
442	Furniture/Furnishings					X	
443	Electron/Appliance			X			X
444	Building material and garden equip dealers	Garden store Hardware store	X	X		X	X
445	Food and beverage stores	Grocery store Specialty food (local foods, meats, cheese, wine)	X	X	X	X	X
446	Health and personal care stores			X		X	
448	Clothing and clothing accessories stores	Specialized clothing stores	X	X	X	X	X
451	Sporting goods, hobby, book, and music stores	Outdoor recreation stores (bicycles, outdoors wear, etc.)		X	X	X	X
452	General merchandise stores	Small household merchandise store	X	X		X	X
453	Miscellaneous store retailers	Gift shops, incubator and galleries Office supply store Pet supply store	X	X	X	X	X
722	Eating and Drinking Places	steakhouse, seafood, Italian, brew pub, deli Coffee shops and other "place-making" businesses (from ice cream to jazz bar) Fine dining and full-service restaurants	X	X	X	X	X

Creating a Business Wish List

A wish list of potential businesses should be developed by the team. These potential businesses should complement and strengthen the existing businesses and reflect the market position statement. Realistic annual recruitment goals (number and type of businesses) should be set.

To identify appropriate business candidates (retail, service, restaurant, etc.) for your community, first analyze your list of market opportunities (see preceding example). Those categories that make market sense are then analyzed to make sure they fit into the niche, space utilization (specifically clustering) and marketing (specifically target market) recommendations.

Use the following criteria in finalizing your wish list:

- Is there appropriate space in the district for this type of business?
- Will it complement existing businesses?
- Will it serve targeted market segments?
- Does it fill an important gap in the business mix?
- Will the business strengthen an existing cluster of businesses?
- Was this business category identified as important in local consumer research?
- Does market demand and supply data support the need for this types of business?
- Does the business fit it with the market position and vision statements?

Step 5: Identify Prospective Tenants

The team's next responsibility is to find appropriate businesses that might be interested in a site in your market area or need new space to expand.

Sources of Leads

Leads can be broken down into four general categories:

Existing Businesses within or near the business district – Often the best leads are found near home. Leads might include existing businesses seeking more space or a better location in the business district. The district's business owner survey as well as ongoing conversations and personal contacts of the recruitment team, chamber of commerce and other economic development professionals can help identify these leads.

Emerging Entrepreneurs - Downtowns and business districts are often attractive to independent businesses. Accordingly, leads might include home-based or garage-based businesses seeking more fitting space and a convenient location for their customers. These leads might include managers of existing businesses wishing to go into business on their own. Commercial lenders, business schools, Small Business Development Center (SBDC) counselors, Main Street program business specialists, Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), chamber of commerce and other public or private small business professionals should be asked to help identify these leads. See toolbox section on entrepreneurship.

Existing Local or Regional Businesses - Local or regional businesses, particularly those that have branch stores and are ready to expand, are often excellent prospects. These business operators typically have a good knowledge of the market area, and may already have multiple stores. They are often interested in expansion as a way to improve their penetration of the market. These leads can be identified through your team's knowledge of the business mix in other communities in the region and information collected from your local consumer research. In addition, realtors, commercial brokers, sales representatives and suppliers that work within the region can be helpful. Sometimes ads in regional business, real estate and regional lifestyle periodicals can generate leads.

National Chains - If local or regional businesses are not interested in expanding, larger national chains can be contacted. It is important to be realistic about the kinds of chains that might be interested in a small community as their market, store size and parking requirements may preclude them from considering your district. Leads can be identified through directories and private databases listing chain site selection criteria and contacts. In addition, leads can also come from commercial brokers, trade shows, "deal making forums," and conferences such as those offered by International Franchise Association or the International Council of Shopping Centers.

Ensuring a Good Fit

Once leads have been identified, a retail assessment checklist can be developed to ensure quality standards for prospects and to make sure the business would fit the market. The checklist could be completed by a team member on a reconnaissance visit to the business. It might include:

- Business category (type);
- Target markets;
- Businesses' location requirements;
- Image;
- Inventory and selection;
- Pricing;
- Presentation;
- Exterior appearance;
- Interior décor, lighting and fixtures;
- Service; and
- Traffic generated.

Step 6: Contact Prospective Tenants

The recruitment team must now focus on a personalized sales effort that conveys a message that the district is a good location for expansion of a business or new business development. Efforts to personally communicate and then follow up with potential businesses are essential to the success of a recruitment effort. Presented below is a sequence of steps to reach potential business owners or developers.

Send Letter of Introduction

Initial contacts with a prospect can be made through a personalized letter. In the letter, explain why your district would be an excellent place to do business. Identify selected incentives and summarize the most relevant market data that would interest the prospect. Your recruiting and marketing materials can be enclosed or include as a link to a web site with the information.

Make Recruitment Calls and Visit their Business

After the letter of introduction, a call should be made to the business to set up an appointment for a personal visit by someone on the recruitment team. The purpose of the appointment is to explain why your community is interested in their business. Be personal when making a contact, and impress them with your knowledge of their business. You need to express why you feel your community would be an appropriate match for their business. Explain why their business would be profitable and what incentives might be available. Provide recruitment and marketing materials and any other information to demonstrate the pro-business character of business district. Offer an invitation to the business operator to visit your community.

Host the Prospect in Your Community

It is the host's job to persuade the prospective business or developer that your town has a distinct advantage over other locations. The site visit is a critical opportunity to persuade the business owner to invest in your district. Prospects should be personally invited to tour the community. The tour should include stops at possible business sites, competitive business districts, residential neighborhoods, employment centers and City Hall. Set up visits with key local merchants. Lunch or dinner should be included with selected business operators, property owners and public officials. Throughout the prospect's visit, the host should be prepared to answer questions such as why similar businesses have closed, the history of adjoining businesses next to prospective sites, and how to contact local landlords.

Follow-up

After the visit, it is important that thank you letters be sent from various community leaders including the mayor and selected business representatives. Mail or fax articles and publicity about downtown events and businesses during the following weeks. Deliver a basket of merchandise offered in your downtown. Finally, make sure the recruitment team is prepared to promptly answer follow up information requests in a prompt and professional manner.

Step 7: Close Deals with Prospects

It is important to make it very simple for the prospect to work with you. Be prepared to handle their objections, their concerns, and any obstacles that might come up. If they are concerned about financing improvements, take them to see the local banker. If they want outside dining but the zoning doesn't allow for it, help them work through the process with the City. If they object to some of the lease terms, assist in negotiating with the landlord. It's important to provide a single contact person responsible for keeping negotiations moving and follow-up on details.

A leader on the recruitment team should close the deal by selling the merits of locating in the business district. Remind the prospect that your district is looking for a business with their characteristics. Practice effective sales presentation skills and focus on key selling points of interest to the prospect:

- Key market data (such as a population density surrounding the district);
- Findings from your analysis of demand and supply in the particular business category;
- Expected sales per square foot and reasons why they would be successful there;
- Examples of comparable businesses in the district that have prospered; and
- Why the district is a better place to do business.

Continue to stay in contact with the prospect. If the prospect is interested, follow-up immediately with an action plan and necessary assistance (however, do not attempt to broker the property). If only marginally interested, call the prospect again in six weeks. If not interested at this time, include the prospect on your mailing list.

After businesses have been recruited, they must be welcomed and supported as are existing businesses. Marketing the new business and helping the owners network with others in the district will be especially important in its early months of operation. Ongoing advocacy and follow-up will be essential.

During your business retention/recruitment process, you need to critique your work plan and update it based on the experience you have had. You want to create a repeatable sales process that will work again. Keep all your contact files and sales materials updated. Reevaluate your retention and recruitment criteria for the next situation and modify it as necessary.

Step 8: Maximize Your Success

When you have been successful in recruiting a new business or expanding an existing one, all efforts and contributions should be recognized. Celebrate a grand opening with your new business, run a special ad announcing the new business or expansion in your local paper, get the local paper to run a feature article about the business recruitment/retention work and your success, speak at the Rotary, Lions, etc. about your accomplishments. After the “dust has settled” make sure you get testimonials from the new business, their landlord, from elected officials, other businesses, etc. that you can use in your next round of recruitment.

Your work is not complete once you have successfully found a new business for your community. It’s important to generate a welcome for this business and make sure that they are settled in and operating according to their plans. Keep up contact with your business in both good times and bad. Involve the new business in community activities and organizations, and by all means, involve them in your future business recruitment efforts! They can speak about the process and what changes could be made to improve it.

About the Toolbox and this Section

The 2011 update of the Downtown and Business District Market Analysis Toolbox is the product of a collaborative effort involving University of Minnesota Extension, Ohio State University Extension, and University of Wisconsin Extension. The update was supported with funding from the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

The toolbox is based on and supportive of the economic restructuring principles of the National Trust Main Street Center. The Wisconsin Main Street Program (Wisconsin Department of Commerce) has been an instrumental partner in the development of this toolbox.

This section includes new methods added by Debra Ersland of Redevelopment Resources, LLC and Bill Ryan of University of Wisconsin Extension.

September 22, 2011

Appendix B: Placemaking and Park Improvements

Provided by: Patronicity
Jonathan Berk, New England Director

NORTH GRAFTON HUB

Grafton, Massachusetts - Prepared for LRRP Program



DIAGNOSTIC

This project is for Grafton to create targeted placemaking to improve public space function and user engagement in North Grafton. These improvements can be a short-term, low-cost way to increase pedestrian activity and improve the look of North Grafton. This is imagined as a way to bring people back in to the business center, supporting a businesses community that struggled to return customers during the pandemic and is intended to support and engage both businesses and residents.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

The North Grafton Hub would be situated on the town owned grass space between Mill Street and Overlook Street and serve as a place to host small community gatherings like fitness classes and movie nights while also serving as a space for residents and visitors to bring takeout food from area restaurants to enjoy a night out with friends, neighbors and the greater Grafton community. We propose purchasing equipment like tables, chairs, movie projectors, benches, bean bags and other items to facilitate more planned passive activation during off peak trucking hours so as to be conscious of the active industry in the area.

PARTNERS & RESOURCES

- Town Representative
- Area restaurants like Grafton Grill and Post Office Pub
- Residents of the adjacent residential area
- Local contractors and suppliers to source project materials and build.
- Local DPW to support installation
- 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

Movies in the Park, Tecumseh, MI



Tecumseh was seeking to bring back a previously successful initiative of movies in the park, encouraging more residents to come to the Downtown adjacent, underutilized park space to enjoy an evening with the community.

BUDGET: \$15,000 for movie equipment

IMPLEMENTATION: overnight

TIMELINE: Seasonal

MATERIALS: inflatable screen and projector

MAINTENANCE: staffing movie night events

Kerouac Park, Lowell, MA



Lowell was seeking to activate an underutilized downtown park to serve as a space to hold community gatherings and small events. A shipping container was purchased and fit out as a stage alongside tables, chairs, a sound system, lawn games and more were incorporated into this "park in a box." Partnerships with area organizations ensure continuous activation of the space bringing new visitors to enjoy the park and surrounding community.

BUDGET: \$50,000 for all components

IMPLEMENTATION: 8-12 weeks

TIMELINE: year round programming

MATERIALS: shipping container fit out w/ a stage, sound equipment, tables, chairs, benches, umbrellas & games

MAINTENANCE: staffing, maintenance & repairs.

NORTH GRAFTON HUB

Grafton, Massachusetts



PROCESS



Location & Team

Initially we'll use the green space on Mill St. but components can be shifted to other sites in Town. Engage area residents and businesses in the planning of this space and any activations. They'll be more apt to stay engaged long term if they're there from the start and encourage long term support of any tactical interventions.

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.

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. .

MATERIALS & COST ESTIMATE

PROJECT TYPE:	"Park in a box"
BUDGET:	\$20,000 - \$30,000
IMPLEMENTATION:	2 - 4 weeks for development of kit
TIMELINE:	3- 5+ Months (with iterations and improvements beyond)
MATERIALS:	Tables, chairs, storage container or shed, sound equipment, projector, screen, lawn games, beanbag chairs
MAINTENANCE:	Hosting and facilitating events on site.



LOCATION



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 North Grafton (obtained through surveying)

KEYS TO SUCCESS



Early Engagement

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



Programming

Develop a 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

With the wide array of uses in the area including residential, commercial and industrial, its going to be extremely important to constantly gather feedback to both head off concerns while also adapting to any issues early that could potentially derail the entire project in the long term. 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 Grafton community.

Appendix C: Develop and Install Wayfinding Signage and Pedestrian Improvements

Provided by: BSC Group
Michael A. Santos, Project Manager

August 26, 2021

Joseph Sutowski
Erik Strand
Karp Strategies
26 Broadway, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10004

RE: North Grafton Subject Matter Expert Response – Local Rapid Recovery Program

Dear Joe and Erik;

BSC Group, Inc. (BSC) has prepared this document in response to your request for a Subject Matter Expert (SME) related to wayfinding and other pedestrian improvements in the village of North Grafton, 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 village of North Grafton and address the effects of COVID-19 on local businesses. The following information includes and expands upon the summary provided in the initial rubric prepared for the project and offers specific recommendations to meet the Town's goals. The original rubric included the development of a wayfinding signage program throughout North Grafton. Based on our discussions, these recommendations were expanded to include additional pedestrian and safety improvements that should be considered in conjunction with the wayfinding signage program.

Develop and Install Wayfinding Signage and Pedestrian Improvements North Grafton, Massachusetts

Origin	Town of Grafton	
Budget	Low budget (Under \$50k): Wayfinding signage is a low-budget project related to the installation of signage throughout the village. Additional improvements to the overall pedestrian infrastructure is a medium to high budget project, depending on the level of improvements, sidewalk installations, and other physical upgrades.	Engineers
Timeframe	Short term (Less than 5 years)	Environmental Scientists
Risk	Low risk: The wayfinding signage element of this project is a low-budget, short term project. A potential risk is public discontent about the placement or style of wayfinding elements. Pedestrian improvements are also a low-risk project, as they address existing gaps in the network and safety deficiencies throughout the village. Risks related to pedestrian improvements are increased design costs and identifying funding sources.	Custom Software Developers Landscape Architects Planners Surveyors



Key Performance Indicators	Number of new signs installed Number of visitors to North Grafton Pedestrian activity in North Grafton Increase in events and activities in North Grafton
Partners & Resources	Town of Grafton -Historical Commission -Department of Public Works -Police Department -Economic Development Commission Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce Local businesses: -Post Office Pub -Grafton Grill -Washington Mills -Other small businesses on North Main Street
Diagnostic	<p>The Village of North Grafton is a historical mill village situated on the Quinsigamond River within the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. North Grafton is served by Massachusetts State Routes 30, 122, and 140. The core area of the village extends between 55 North Main Street (currently Truth Organic Spa and Wellness Center) in the north to Bridge Street in the south for a distance of approximately 1,400 feet. This area also includes the signalized intersection at Waterville Street (Route 30). These routes are dominated by commuters and industrial uses while also serving the local businesses and residences of the village.</p> <p>The village lacks a sense of walkability and pedestrian accessibility. While there are several businesses and amenities that are ideal for pedestrian activity within the village, such as the Grafton Grill, Post Office Pub, and Perry Hill Park, pedestrian connectivity is poor due to missing or damaged sidewalks, poor ADA accessibility, lack of wayfinding signage, and poor crosswalk conditions on North Main Street.</p> <p>The Town of Grafton recently constructed a new pedestrian bridge over the Quinsigamond River connecting Bridge Street, near the Grafton Grill, to a parking area off North Main Street. This Project installed a small pedestrian plaza with benches directly over the river. Improvements to the pedestrian network in North Grafton should be expanded and integrated with this project.</p> <p>Washington Mills is an existing industrial use within the center of North Grafton and generates a significant amount of truck activity across North Main Street, creating conflicts between pedestrian activity from the local residents and customers patronizing the local area businesses and the through commuter traffic. The industrial site is historical in nature, being one of the oldest abrasive grain</p>



	<p>companies in continuous operation in the United States, dating back to 1868.</p> <p>A comprehensive pedestrian plan for the village is needed and should encompass both wayfinding elements to create a sense of branding for North Grafton and overall improvements to the pedestrian infrastructure to address gaps in the network. Wayfinding signage and improvements to the overall pedestrian network that can connect existing assets, draw attention to attractions, enhance historical character, create a sense of branding for North Grafton is an area of need to make the village more attractive and safer for pedestrians, and to enhance the village's open spaces such as Perry Hill Park.</p>
Action Item to Consider	<p>The process for developing an improved pedestrian environment and wayfinding signage program should involve community stakeholders, public officials, and regional entities (e.g. chambers of commerce, historic commissions, etc.).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A steering committee should be developed through the Town of Grafton. Individuals from the following groups should be considered for inclusion on the committee:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grafton Planning Department• Grafton Department of Public Works• Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission• Grafton Economic Development Commission• Grafton Cultural Council• Grafton Mill Villages Advisory Committee• Grafton Open Space and Recreation Committee• Grafton Traffic Safety Committee• Grafton Police Department• Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce• Local business owners• Local residents and any neighborhood groups that represent North Grafton2. The steering committee should determine a specific vision for branding and identify pedestrian needs throughout North Grafton.3. The steering committee should identify existing deficiencies with the pedestrian network, parking opportunities, and overall transportation network in North Grafton.4. The goal of the steering committee should develop a comprehensive plan for implementation of wayfinding signage and pedestrian improvements. The steering



	<p>committee should also develop a list of existing issues to address related to pedestrians, parking, and the transportation network.</p> <p>5. Procurement for the installation of wayfinding signage and pedestrian improvements should be determined by the steering committee. A list of potential funding sources is provided in the next section.</p>
Recommendations to Consider	<p>A successful wayfinding program should be implemented to enhance the village's character and visibility, promote local businesses, and provide residents with a more walkable neighborhood. Through this process, the village should become a more attractive place to increase usage of public open spaces to host events and become a destination. For example, the village common between Overlook Street and Mill Street can be enhanced through an improved pedestrian environment and can serve as a central meeting place for events such as farmers markets, summer music series, and other types of public events that may be attractive to residents of North Grafton and throughout the region.</p> <p>The wayfinding signage program should be supplemented with improvements to the pedestrian infrastructure and parking management to provide safe, efficient, and orderly modes of mobility for visitors to the village.</p> <p>Recommendations have been developed for both wayfinding implementation and pedestrian improvements and are described in the sections below:</p> <p>Wayfinding and Branding Program</p> <p>1. Develop a brand related to the history of North Grafton village. North Grafton is a historical mill village, similar to many other villages throughout southern Worcester County and the Blackstone River Valley. The industrial history of the village should be considered to be a prominent feature in the local branding. The village lies within the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, an area rich in industrial history. Members of the steering committee may want to consider researching historical village names to include in the branding and possibly to rename the village. Many of the nearby villages throughout the Blackstone River Valley Corridor and Worcester County currently have a consistent style of signage installation at the village gateways. Examples of this signage are shown below:</p>





This style of signage is also used for other villages within Grafton and it is recommended that it be installed at the gateways to North Grafton village. The signage should be located at the northern and southern ends of the village along North Main Street as well as the east and west entrances to the village along Bridge Street and Route 30.

2. It is recommended that the village of North Grafton work with local businesses and other stakeholders to install banners along North Main Street. These would be installed on the existing utility poles for a short-term solution. Should the Town of Grafton decide to upgrade street lighting and install decorative luminaires, banners could be placed on these.
3. A pedestrian and bicycle-oriented wayfinding signage system should be installed throughout the village on North Main Street. These signs can be developed using aluminum panels and should include the preferred branding for the village. Specific information on the wayfinding signage should include public open space such as Perry Hill Park and the village “common” that is bounded by Overlook Street and Mill Street. Other destinations may include recreational areas along the Quinsigamond River such as the



	<p>new pedestrian plaza off of Bridge Street.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Motorists that drive through North Grafton village along Routes 30, 122, and 140 are not alerted that they are traveling through a distinct village of Grafton. Additional signage should be considered in advance of the village along each of these roadways to direct people to the village. For example, motorists traveling along Route 122 from the west are directed around the southern portion of the village, with no information being relayed to them that the village exists just to the north. This type of signage would likely need to be coordinated through MassDOT.5. The installation of an informational kiosk should be considered. The kiosk can include information related to the local businesses and recreational opportunities in the village. The kiosk may also include historical information related to both the village and the broader Blackstone River Valley region. The kiosk should include branding consistent with the wayfinding signage. <p>Pedestrian Improvements</p> <p>Pedestrian improvements should be implemented throughout North Grafton village to enhance safety and connectivity. A “park once” model should be supported through improvements to parking, pedestrian connectivity, and the wayfinding signage program. Visitors should have the ability to park at a single location and visit the various destinations within the village.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide sidewalks along Overlook Street and Mill Street that connect to existing facilities on North Main Street. Pedestrian connectivity between the public open spaces along Overlook Street and Mill Street is poor and should be enhanced. These improvements should be integrated with the wayfinding signage program to direct pedestrians to the open spaces.2. Install sidewalks along the residential side streets throughout the village (e.g. Perry Street, High Street, School Street, etc.)3. Upgrade all curb ramps throughout the village to meet accessibility standards.4. Reconfigure the intersections of Mill Street/North Main Street and Overlook Street/North Main Street. These intersections have poor definition and lack curbing, creating wide and undefined pedestrian crossings. Curbing should be installed in conjunction with new sidewalks along both side
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	<p>streets. These improvements will also better define the truck routes that cross over North Main Street, providing better safety for all users of the area.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. A specific truck route should be identified for crossing North Main Street. Use Mill Street for truck routing and prohibit trailer trucks from Overlook Street. This can be accomplished through signage and through design described above. Any new design should be conducted in collaboration with Washington Mills to ensure that they are provided an efficient way to cross North Main Street. These improvements can significantly improve the separation of truck maneuvers, pedestrian activity, and passenger vehicle movements.6. Install decorative street lighting along North Main Street. Decorative street lighting will create a human-scale environment and can also serve to support banners as part of the wayfinding and branding program.7. Reconfigure the large paved area between the common along Mill Street and Overlook Street and North Main Street. This area can be converted to public parking to serve public parking needs in the village.8. The intersection of North Main Street/Waterville Street/East Street is currently under design review. If possible, the Town of Grafton should install stamped crosswalks at the intersection. Additional mid-block crosswalks should be installed on North Main Street using the same stamped-style of treatment. Curb extensions and rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs) should be considered for mid-block crosswalks. These improvements will provide enhanced connectivity throughout the village.
Potential Funding Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MassDOT Complete Streets program• Massachusetts Downtown Initiative• Massachusetts Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program• Chapter 90 funding• MassWorks funding (in conjunction with any future development projects in North Grafton)• Local funding sources• Local area business contributions



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 North Grafton.

Very truly yours,

BSC Group, Inc.

Michael A. Santos, PE
Project Manager

Appendix D: Conduct a Study of Parking Needs and Associated Zoning Revisions

Provided by: Dodson & Flinker, Inc.
Peter Flinker, Principal

Grafton LLRP, North Grafton, MA
Conduct a Study of Parking Needs and Associated Zoning Revisions

Action Item:

Conduct a study to determine the effects of parking requirements on businesses in North Grafton. Based on the results of this study and engagement with businesses, enact zoning changes related to parking and uses in this area to facilitate economic development.

LRRP Deliverable

Category	Public Realm
Origin	Business owners cited parking restrictions and existing zoning as barriers to growth and redevelopment.
Budget	Low Budget (under \$50,000.)
Timeframe	Short Term (less than 5 years); the speed of the rezoning process will be determined by the length of time necessary to identify optimal parking requirements and build a support for adoption. This will necessarily depend on related efforts to establish a clear vision for the future of the study area and determine objectives for land use, density, pedestrian and vehicular circulation, architecture, streetscape, etc. A study of parking alone, including inventory of existing conditions and analysis of demand, could be accomplished in 3-6 months. A master plan of the area that includes zoning as one element with a study of land use, density, circulation and environmental issues, could take 9-12 months. Revisions to zoning can be accomplished within 6 months, determined by process of review, public hearings, and approval by Town Meeting.
Risk	Medium Risk: Businesses in the area support change in zoning requirements, while residents will likely be concerned about increased demand on existing parking supply. Risk of unintended consequences and spillover effects can be minimized by considering changes in parking requirements within the context of a shared vision and municipal parking strategy for the study area, including provision of shared parking lots and on-street parking.
KPI's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Business expansion and new business openings with a balanced parking supply. ● Preservation and reuse of existing historic structures. ● Ability to provide space for outdoor dining and other desired uses. ● Ability to enhance walkability and neighborhood character with minimal visual impact from parking lots.

Preliminary Partners & Resources:

- Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
 - CMRCP offers transportation planning and plan development services for towns in central Massachusetts. This body may be a resource with funding and/or implementing a parking study and any changes to Grafton's zoning.
- Grafton Planning Board, Grafton Zoning Board of Appeals, Public Safety Services, Department of Public Works and Planning Department

- These Grafton entities will be important participants in establishing planning policy, exploring alternatives and costs/benefits and implementing changes to zoning and parking requirements in North Grafton.

Recommendations :

1. Conduct a planning process to assess existing and potential future land uses in the study area and predict likely parking demand.
2. In coordination with related studies of land use and zoning in the study area, determine appropriate balance of parking with existing and potential future uses.
3. Consider reducing or eliminating minimum parking requirements for commercial or industrial uses in the study area.
4. Consider a maximum parking requirement for large businesses or certain land uses to preserve the neighborhood's character and reduce the negative effects of parking.
5. Consider reducing or eliminating minimum parking requirements for businesses within walking distance of a public or dedicated private parking lot.
6. Consider reduction in parking requirements for mixed use projects or neighborhoods.
7. Expand provision of shared public parking within a system of municipal lots and on-street parking spaces.

Diagnostic:

Parking requirements and zoning have been identified as barriers to local economic development by business owners in North Grafton. Most of the land in North Grafton is currently zoned for industrial uses. While there is interest in new retail, commercial, and residential development in the area, these uses are restricted by the zoning bylaws. Businesses would like to utilize open space on their properties for purposes such as outdoor dining but are currently limited by the stringent parking restrictions. These requirements also serve as a barrier for new businesses that would have to create more parking spaces than they have room to build on a given property.

As North Grafton evolves from industrial to mixed use, additional parking will be required, but the town's current standard is unnecessarily high. Currently, the town requires 2 spaces/unit for 1-2 family homes, and 2.25/unit for multi-family. Business uses less than 2000 s.f. need 1 space per 200 s.f. of building area (5 spaces/1000), while businesses over 2000 s.f. need to provide 1 space per 150 s.f. (6.7 spaces/1000). While these standards may be appropriate for a suburban shopping center, for a mixed-use village they are likely to provide twice as much parking as actually needed – manifested in a sea of paved parking lots perhaps twice as large as the floor areas of the buildings they serve.

Studies of healthy mixed use village centers – even those predominantly serviced by the automobile – demonstrates that a better balance of parking rests at about 3 spaces per 1000 s.f. of floor area, and about 1.5 spaces per dwelling unit. This results in an area of parking about equal to the given floor area. Active management of the entire parking inventory, whether public or private, can greatly enhance its utility and efficiency. This can include circulation improvements – especially connections across lot lines and shared access points, shared entrances – as well as wayfinding signage, shared snow-plowing and other maintenance, lighting, etc. Time restrictions and/or paid parking can encourage turnover so that spaces are always available in the core of the village, while encouraging long-term parking in lots around the periphery.

Action Items:

1. Consult with the Town officials, business owners, property owners, developers, and residents to define issues and opportunities and verify the need to update new parking requirements and associated zoning bylaws.
2. Involve key stakeholders in defining project goals, scope, and steps for a community-driven process.
3. Integrate parking analysis with study of land use, density, connectivity, zoning and other issues for the entire study area.
4. Earmark funds from the Town's Annual budget or apply for grants to hire consultants, conduct the parking study, and draft revisions to the zoning bylaws.
5. Explore multiple alternatives related to potential changes in land use policies and zoning across the study area.
6. Present alternatives to key stakeholders, town officials and residents and work to identify a preferred approach.
7. Draft new/updated parking requirements and zoning bylaws and conduct public review and evaluation process.
8. After the zoning bylaws are approved, conduct public workshops to inform people about the changes and its implications.
9. Evaluate design options for on-street parking, and as appropriate pursue strategies to take over jurisdiction from MassDOT.

Process:

1. Establish an advisory committee or working group consisting of Town staff and officials, residents, business owners, property owners, and local developers (coordinate with larger master planning effort to look at land use, density, circulation and other factors, if appropriate).
 - a. Hold advisory meetings to determine the project goals, scope, and steps for a community-driven process.
 - b. Identify key stakeholders and define their interests and expectations.
 - c. Identify funding sources (Town's annual budget or apply for new grants).
 - d. Develop a process to hire a planning consultant.
 - e. Conduct outreach to build support for the project
2. Hire a consultant who will, in consultation with the Advisory Committee:
 - a. Review existing conditions and make an inventory of existing parking spaces and utilization;
 - b. Analyze existing and potential future demand scenarios;
 - c. Conduct stakeholder meetings and public outreach;
 - d. Make recommendations for integrated parking strategy
 - e. Draft new/update parking requirements and zoning bylaws.
3. Conduct additional outreach to business owners, the Town, community members, and other stakeholders to obtain feedback on the draft bylaws and explore alternatives.
4. Hold preliminary discussions with permitting agencies.
5. Test the new policies on a range of sites within the study area and revise the code as needed to ensure a desired outcome.
6. Prepare final draft of bylaws and initiate the formal process of review and adoption.

Funding Sources:

- **Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth** - Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) Technical Assistance Program

The MDI grant is funded by the State's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). All communities are eligible to apply, but some funding is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. The maximum award amount per project is \$25,000. The grant can be used to conduct a parking and zoning analysis and develop new zoning bylaws with the help of a consultant assigned by the MDI staff.

- **Community Planning Grants**

The grant is funded by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. The maximum award amount per project is \$25,000 to \$75,000. These funds could be used for Zoning Reviews and Updates, including updates to current parking requirements and zoning bylaws. All communities are eligible to apply for this grant.

- **District Local Technical Assistance Grant (DLTA) program**

The program is funded by the State's Legislature and the Governor. The funds are allocated to the 13 Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) and all municipalities can directly apply to their RPA. Each RPA has a different criteria for selecting projects based on their community development goals. The RPA also provides matching funds and assists the municipalities on the projects. The funds can be used for planning and zoning projects.

Best Practices and Case Study Examples

The unintended consequences of overly stringent parking requirements have been well documented by Donald Shoup ([The High Cost of Free Parking](#)) and others. While parking is necessary, requiring each use to provide on-site parking calibrated for the highest possible demand will hollow out a downtown or village center, replacing active uses with dead parking lots. Many communities are taking the approach of eliminating minimum parking requirements entirely, allowing owners and developers to build the amount of parking they need to serve their tenants, rather than some arbitrary minimum. In practice, cities and towns typically start with small steps:

- Reducing parking ratios to better reflect typical demand for the planned use;
- Allowing for parking to be provided on a separate lot within reasonable walking distance;
- Allowing a reduction in parking spaces based on compatible shared uses;
- Allowing fee-in-lieu payments to a town parking fund instead of building parking spaces.

All of these help reduce the economic drag parking places on reinvestment, particularly in built-up village centers and downtowns where there is little extra room for parking without demolishing existing structures. Reduced parking requirements, however, will tend to increase pressure on existing parking spaces and may raise issues when existing businesses that have parking are surrounded by new

businesses that do not. Therefore cities and towns that reduce parking requirements within zoning pursue a simultaneous strategy of developing a shared parking system, often combining on-street spaces with municipal surface lots or garages, with appropriate wayfinding signage and maps to help visitors locate parking. Time limits and paid parking may be helpful to encourage turnover.

Examples:

Fayetteville, Arkansas – No Parking Minimums for Commercial properties Citywide (2015)

Fayetteville eliminated minimum parking requirements for commercial properties citywide, meaning that new businesses do not have to provide a set number of on-site parking spaces. Previously, the city mandated that businesses had to include parking based on square footage. The updated policy allows businesses to determine how much parking they feel is necessary, rather than providing spaces to satisfy peak demand, as was previously required. Other goals include reducing barriers to small-business creation, promoting walking, and bicycling, and decreasing the likelihood of the creation of additional underused parking lots.

Fayetteville also caps the maximum allowed number of parking spaces based on use and/or square footage. Increases beyond the maximum ratios are allowed under certain conditions, including for developments providing on-site storm water management features.

Key Features:

- Reduction/Elimination of Parking Minimums
- Parking Maximums/Caps

More information:

https://library.municode.com/ar/fayetteville/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CD_ORD_TITXVUNDEC_O_CH172PALO_172.05STNUSPUS

Phoenix, Arizona – Reduced Parking Requirements and Parking Maximums (2015)

The Phoenix Planning and Development Department updated the Downtown development ordinance to reduce parking minimums across the board and eliminated them entirely in the “business core” for nonresidential uses. It also added downtown parking maximums.

Residential uses may reduce required off-street parking by 25 percent in designated transit-oriented development (TOD) districts when the building is located within 1,320 feet from a light-rail station. Additional parking provision reductions are based upon building height, use, and other factors. Shared parking reductions of up to 15 percent may be granted for retail, office, or mixed-use projects after using the city’s shared parking model to estimate parking demand for a specific mix of uses.

Key Features:

- Reduction/Elimination of Parking Minimums
- Parking Maximums/Caps
- Shared Parking

More information:

<https://phoenix.municipal.codes/ZO/702>

Massachusetts Examples

Many communities in Massachusetts are reducing or eliminating parking requirements in downtowns and village centers. Usually this is married to provision of shared public parking, including on-street parking within the public right-of-way and municipal parking lots.

- Ipswich does not require parking for developments in their Central Business District or within 500 feet of municipal parking.
- Salem does not require parking for non-residential uses in their B-5 district, nor for religious communities and education uses.
- Gloucester, Massachusetts does not require parking for non-residential uses within 400 feet of a municipal parking facility.
- Middleborough waives parking requirements for residential units on the second or third story of a downtown building if the building is within a quarter mile of a public parking area available for overnight parking.
- Acton reduced parking requirements in village centers across the board. The town took over ownership of Rt. 1A in West Acton from Mass Highways in order to build on-street parking, which helped support mixed use redevelopment.
- Northampton has eliminated parking requirements in its Central Business District, coupled with provision of extensive public parking lots, on-street parking, and a central garage – with time limits and pay station fees calibrated to each area to encourage turnover for the most convenient spaces.

The Massachusetts Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit provides a **Model Smart Parking Bylaw** that incorporates many of these techniques and addresses three distinct issues relative to off-street parking:

- reducing the standards for required parking, with maximums as well as minimums;
- inclusion of innovative solutions for shared and off-site parking; and
- enhanced parking lot design.

The shared parking strategies involve three approaches. The first addresses shared parking between competing and non-competing mixed-uses. The second focuses on locating parking off-site on other private or public parking lots. The third provides language for a fee-in-lieu approach, that allows for private contributions to a fund that supports construction and maintenance of shared public parking.

With review organized around the Site Plan Review process, the model bylaw addresses Low Impact Development (LID) techniques to reduce stormwater runoff and the potential for flooding and water quality impacts. It also provides standards for landscaping and tree planting appropriate to enhance aesthetics and reduce heat-island effect.

More information:

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/smart-growth-smart-energy-toolkit-modules-smart-parking>