



# Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Gilbertville, Hardwick



# Acknowledgments



Town of Hardwick, Massachusetts

**DODSON & FLINKER**  
Landscape Architecture and Planning

Dodson & Flinker - Plan Facilitator



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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.

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

East Quabbin Land Trust

Cynthia Henshaw, Executive Director

Board of Selectmen

Kelly Kemp, Chair

Planning Board/Emergency  
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Eric Vollheim

Board of Health

Tex Sarabia

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Nicole Parker



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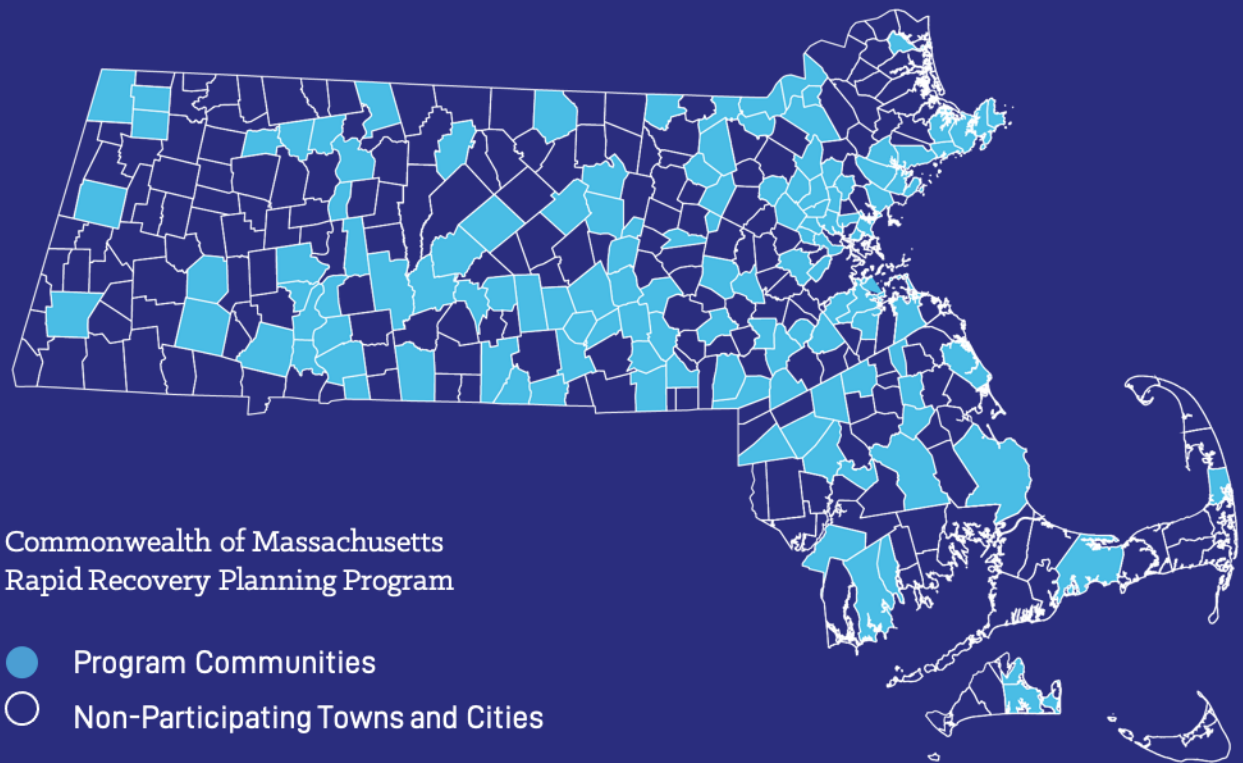
# Table of Contents

Rapid Recovery Program	
Introduction	6
Approach/Framework	8
Executive Summary	10
Diagnostic	
Key Findings	15
Customer Base	18
Physical Environment	25
Business Environment	35
Administrative Capacity	45
Project Recommendations	
Public Realm	48
Private Realm	87
Revenue and Sales	91
Administrative Capacity	97
Illustrations	104

## 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.





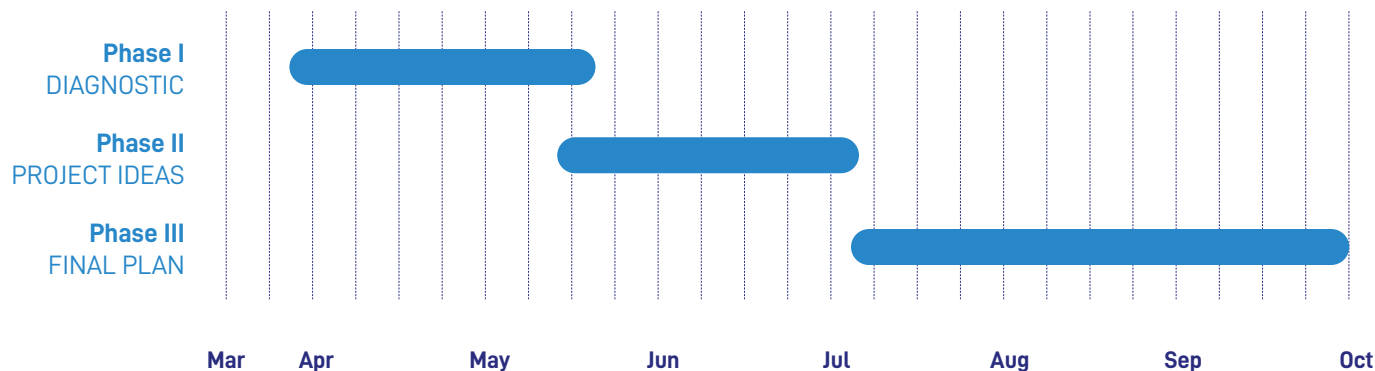
# Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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 March-October 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



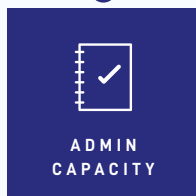
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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## Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

## A historic mill village with 21st century challenges and opportunities

Gilbertville, population 301, is an historic industrial village within the Town of Hardwick, Massachusetts. While the industries that built the community are largely gone, they left behind an extraordinary collection of historic mill buildings, worker housing, shops, churches, hotel, train depots, and other structures lined up between Main Street, rail road tracks and the Ware River. While disinvestment has brought empty storefronts and a decline in maintenance, these remarkably intact cultural features, sheltered within a beautiful natural setting of river and wooded hillsides, represent an incredible community resource.

While the Covid-19 Pandemic added to the social and economic challenges that Gilbertville already faced, a renewed focus on downtowns associated with state and federal Covid Recovery initiatives—including this Local Rapid Recovery Plan—provided an opportunity to identify needed improvements in Gilbertville to identify resources and processes necessary to implement them. Over the last six months, consultants worked with local stakeholders to assess current conditions, evaluate project alternatives, and assemble a set of clear recommendations for further action.

The project began with an assessment of physical, social and economic conditions in Gilbertville that led to several key findings. Gilbertville's customer base is made up primarily of residents of the village and nearby areas, supplemented by commuters and tourists traveling Routes 32 and 32A. The success of several relatively new businesses, including a bakery and brewery, suggest that businesses serving authentic locally-produced products can become destinations attracting people from the larger region. Gilbertville's physical environment includes resources that can be leveraged to support these businesses and foster new ones, including intact mill buildings and other historic structures, and a planned portion of the Central Mass Rail Trail following the route of the Ware River Railroad. Covid-19 impacted the downtown with the closure of two businesses, but there are signs of resilience: two new businesses have opened up and a proposed marijuana facility hopes to revitalize Mill #1. Among the challenges identified by the diagnostic is in the area of administrative capacity, with limited staff and overstretched volunteers working hard to keep up with existing demands, much less take on additional projects. Pursuing renewal and revitalization efforts will require shared effort and collaboration between town staff, elected officials, business owners, community organizations, residents, and regional partners—but it also means that in some cases funding for new projects will have to include financial support for staff time necessary to implement them.



## The Town's recovery will depend on a mix of infrastructure improvements, marketing, and building organizational capacity

Understanding these challenges and opportunities is fundamental to developing a Covid recovery strategy that is both meaningful in its outcomes and realistic in its implementation. This report concludes with a set of clearly-defined project recommendation designed to support grant applications and continued local initiatives to support continued Covid recovery efforts and build a foundation for Gilbertville's long-term growth and revitalization. These include:

- Building the Mass Central rail trail segments in Gilbertville to promote tourism and increase the customer base for local businesses.
- Establishing a public parking lot with public restrooms and visitor information tied to the bike path.
- Planting trees to enhance the appearance of Main Street, increase biodiversity and make the area more comfortable for both residents and visitors.
- Establishing a Business Improvement District (BID), including nonprofit organizations, to support downtown improvements and bring the business community together.
- Pursuing placemaking initiatives to enhance streetscape amenities and bring more life and activity to Main Street.
- Developing wayfinding to key destinations in the downtown
- Undertaking a branding and marketing program for the downtown and its businesses
- Developing a program to improve buildings and sites in the downtown to make the area more appealing for residents, customers, and potential businesses
- Hiring a grant writer and project manager to pursue economic development activities, including ongoing Covid Recovery efforts.



*Example of street improvements on Church Street  
Source: Dodson & Flinker*



*Replacing condemned buildings on Church Street with a parklet  
Source: Dodson & Flinker*



*Vacant Gilbertville Mill*

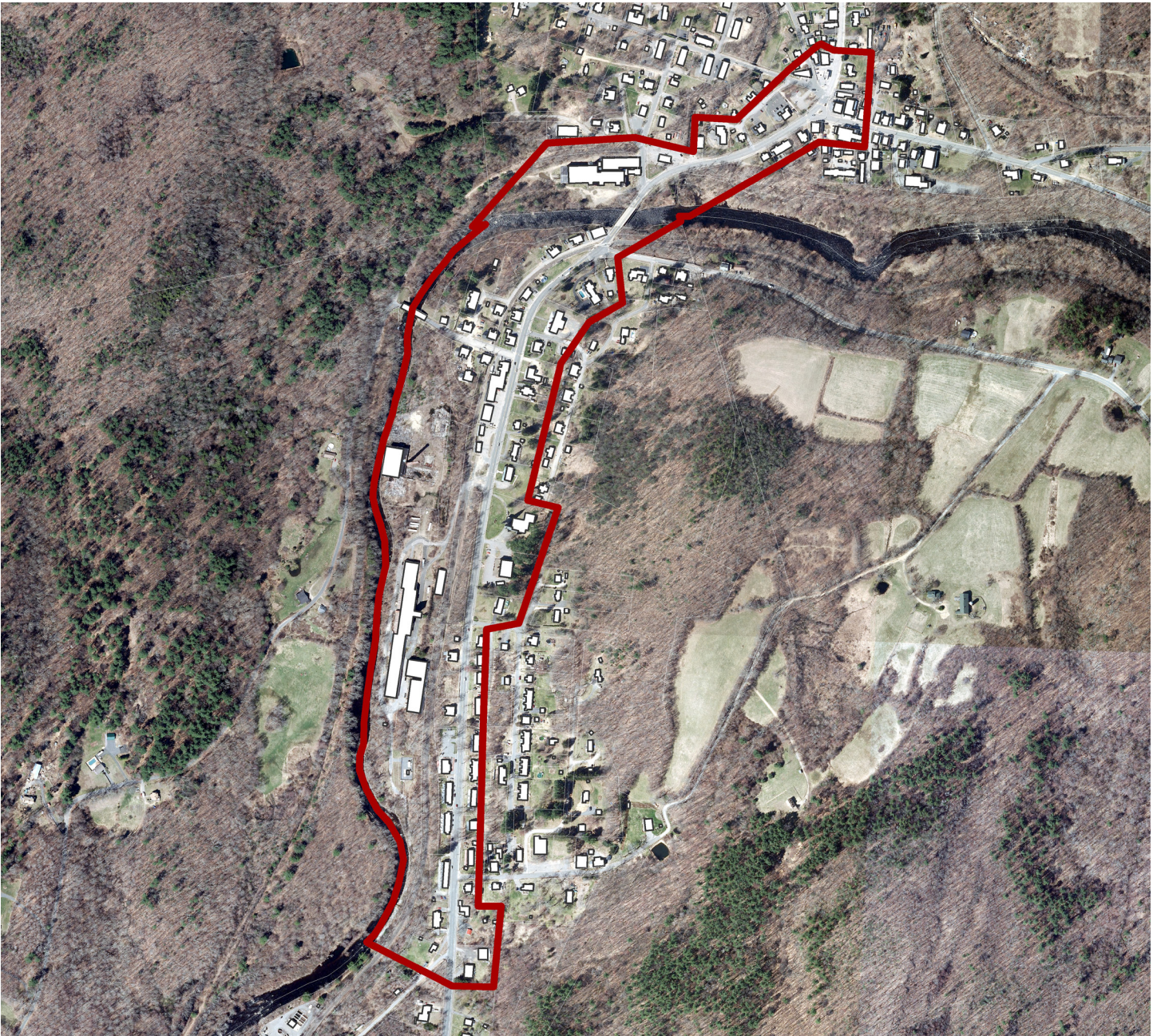
*Source: <https://abandonedonline.net/location/george-gilbert-manufacturing-company/>*

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# Diagnostic



# Gilbertville, Hardwick Project Area



*Gilbertville, Hardwick project area map*  
*Source: MassGIS, Dodson & Flinker*



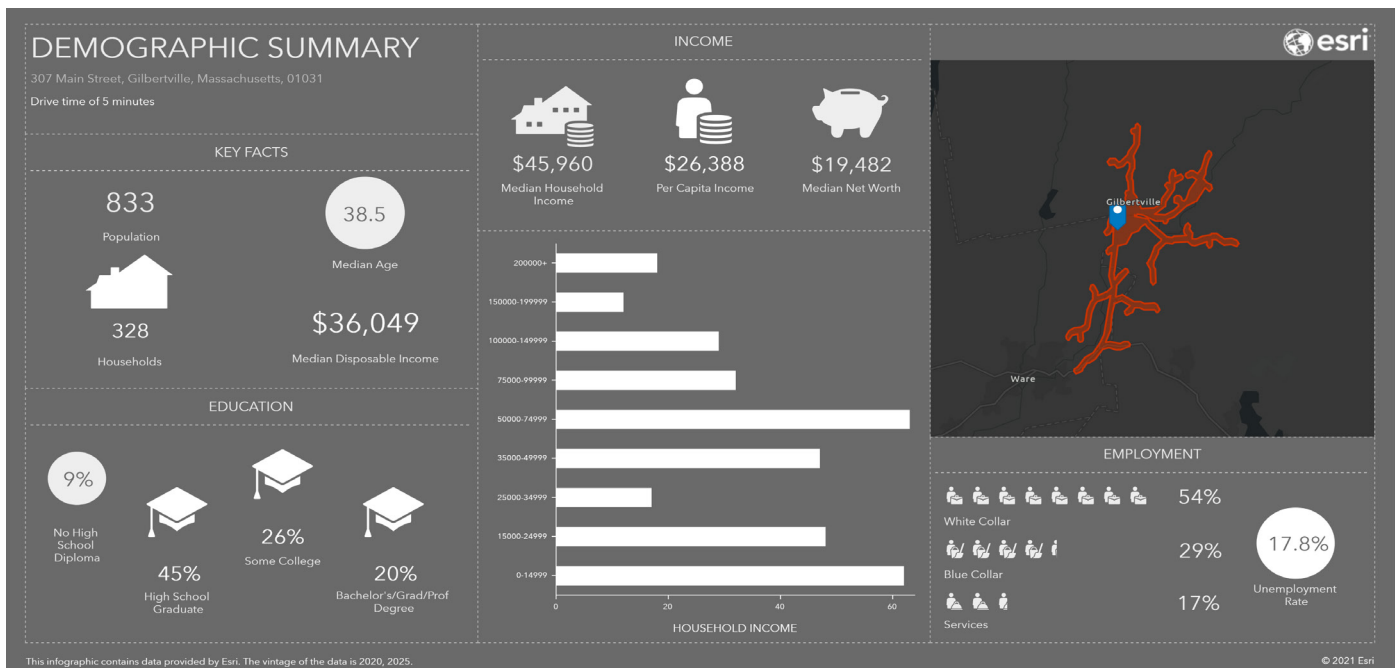
# Key Findings



## Gilbertville is primarily local-serving with a limited customer base

Gilbertville is an historic industrial village in the Town of Hardwick with an estimated total population of 301. About 31% of the residents are between the ages 0 to 24, representing the largest population group in the village, followed by residents aged 40 to 59 at 26%. Adults between the ages 25 to 39 comprise 22% of the population. The median age of the village is 37.3 years. Gilbertville has lower median income than Hardwick or the Quabog Valley as whole, likely at least in part due to low educational attainment levels. Only 4% of the residents have a Master's degree. 15% have a Bachelor's degree. Whereas, the high school diploma attainment rate is 47%.

The customer base of Gilbertville is limited both by the number of residents nearby and their limited spending power. Most Hardwick residents leave the town for work and those trips likely pass by convenient opportunities for shopping, dining out, and other typical downtown services. Traffic volumes in Gilbertville are low, limiting pass through traffic that would give businesses exposure to a wider customer base. That said, Gilbertville's isolation makes it an essential location for day-to-day goods and services needed by its residents. That is reflected in the businesses that have succeeded there. In addition, the scenic nature of Hardwick and Gilbertville, the area's outdoor attractions, and the historic resources in the village, provide an opportunity to expand the downtown's customer base. Two key opportunities are, expanding patronage from Hardwick residents and others within 10-15 minutes and developing more unique businesses that can draw visitors from farther afield.



**Key Demographics of Hardwick**  
**Source: ESRI Business Analyst**



## Gilbertville's historic physical environment is ripe for restoration

Gilbertville is an historic industrial village which retains a remarkably intact collection of the building types that characterize a mill village, including the mills, various types of mill housing, an old hotel, and train depots, as well as a beautiful covered bridge. With the closing of the mills and change in community needs, many buildings and the surrounding landscape have seen a decline in maintenance and structural/aesthetic integrity. Many buildings could be restored and retrofitted to reclaim their historic integrity and better adapt to the needs of current residents and businesses. There is limited parking in the downtown, in part due to shallow lots and MassDOT's prohibition on on-street parking in much of the downtown. Some businesses have found this to be a challenge. Expanding public parking and shared parking could help address the situation.

The public realm in Gilbertville is generally average to poor. However, a soon to be built MassDOT project for Route 32 will give a major face lift to the street and sidewalks. This could be complemented by further investment in other streetscape enhancements including: wayfinding, pedestrian lighting, planters, and pocket parks.

The Mass Central Rail Trail passes through Gilbertville. One section opposite Gilbertville in Ware is currently under construction. As the rail trail continues to be built out, new visitors will be exposed to Gilbertville and the town can capitalize on those customers. Supportive infrastructure, like public parking, restrooms and possibly additional commercial space at a trail head in Gilbertville would help make a good first impression.

Physical improvements in Gilbertville will benefit its current residents, enhancing their quality of life and mental and physical health. They could also attract new residents, potentially expanding the customer base for the downtown.



## Covid had severe impacts, but the downtown shows resilience

Downtown Gilbertville has 14 businesses dispersed along the Main Street/Mass Route 32 and adjacent streets. Businesses are primarily local serving, including several auto-repair shops, a hair salon, a dance studio, a laundromat, a juice and coffee bar, a convenience store, a pizza place, and a package store. Rose 32 Bread and Lost Towns Brewing serve both locals and attract customers from further afield. The business mix appears to effectively meet the needs of the customer base.

Covid-19 had severe impacts on the downtown with the closure of two businesses: a decades old restaurant that was a key community gathering place and the American Legion. Of the five businesses who responded to a survey for this project, all of them experienced disruptions from Covid, including a significant loss of revenue for some. Unemployment in Gilbertville shot up in April 2020 and has dropped since, though it is still higher than before the pandemic. Given the demographics of Gilbertville's population it is likely that the pandemic has had disproportionate impacts on the area's residents, many of whom were already economically vulnerable.

Two businesses have opened since the pandemic began, showing the resilience of the downtown.

There is ample space for new businesses in Gilbertville, especially industrial space. Revitalizing the mills has been a long term priority for Hardwick and will continue to be one. A proposed marijuana facility for Mill #1 holds promise. For now, the business environment is constrained by the limited purchasing power in the customer base, and the customer base is constrained by a lack of good paying jobs in the area. Long-term, Gilbertville needs the continuation ongoing efforts at improving the public realm, private realm, housing quality, good jobs, and a social and cultural environment that creates opportunities for old and new residents.



#### ADMIN CAPACITY

## The Town needs to increase its staffing capacity to speed up the local recovery efforts

The key stewards of the town are property owners, businesses, Town government, non-profit organizations, and local volunteers. There is no organized merchants group or downtown business association. The town does have strong partnerships with outside organizations, including two regional planning agencies (CMRPC and PVPC). The town has been effective at obtaining grants.

The Town has very limited staff. They and local volunteers are stretched thin in normal times. The pandemic has put an enormous strain on the town, volunteers, and businesses. Implementing an effective long-term Covid recovery will likely require additional capacity—for example additional town staff—leveraging partnerships, and effectively coordinating strategic actions, like those described in this plan.

The town's zoning bylaw could use some improvements to make housing and business development easier, including revisiting required lot dimensions and reducing parking requirements.



*Covered bridge over the Ware River*  
*Source: Dodson & Flinker*





## Highlights from the Customer Base

### POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLDS

Hardwick grew from 2,622 people and 997 households in 2000 to a population of 3,101 and 1,132 households in 2020. With a population density of just 76 people per square mile, the town ranks among the most rural in the state (299 out of 351 in 2010).

### POPULATION PROJECTION

Hardwick's population added 111 people between 2010 and 2020, and is projected to grow at a similar pace over the next twenty years, to a total of about 3300 people in 2040. The distribution of that population among various age cohorts will continue to change, however. The 2020 Census The proportion of elders over 80 will more than double as the baby boomers continue to age, while the population under 20 will shrink, reflecting a gradual drop in birth rates. The proportion of residents between 20 and 60 will grow modestly over coming decades. All of this implies a relatively stable local customer base, with an even distribution of folks in each age group from 20 through 60. Following trends across the region, households will likely continue to shrink over time, with fewer couples with children and more single-person households.

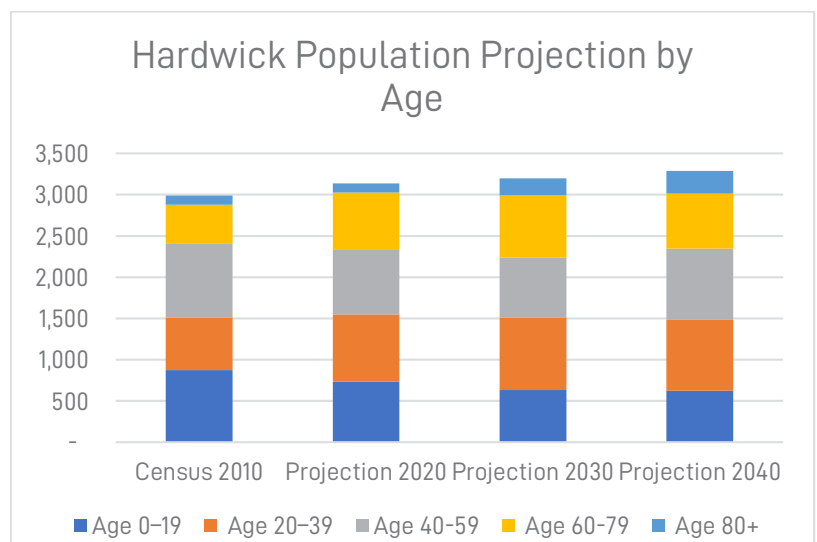
The number of households and population in Gilbertville itself, 301 people in 122 homes, is likely to remain fairly stable over time, with any new homes being balanced by smaller average household size. Residents in the village help to support several small businesses, but don't provide enough of a customer base to drive significant expansion. If there is growth, it will likely be driven by commuters, tourists and other visitors who come to Gilbertville for goods, services or experiences that are unavailable elsewhere.

Households	Gilbertville	Hardwick	Quaboag Valley
2010 Total Households	118	1,094	59,444
2020 Total Households	122	1,132	61,819
2020 Total Population	301	3,101	158,750
2020 Average Household Size	2.47	2.55	2.54

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Age Groups	Gilbertville	Hardwick	Quaboag Valley
Age 0-19	74 (25%)	821 (26%)	35085 (22%)
Age 20-24	19 (6%)	135 (4%)	8760 (6%)
Age 25-34	51 (17%)	402 (13%)	19974 (13%)
Age 35-44	32 (11%)	312 (10%)	18740 (12%)
Age 45-54	41 (14%)	388 (13%)	22766 (14%)
Age 55-64	38 (13%)	463 (15%)	25011 (16%)
Age 65-74	26 (9%)	356 (11%)	17398 (11%)
Age 75-84	14 (5%)	159 (5%)	7631 (5%)
Age 85+	7 (2%)	65 (2%)	3385 (2%)
2020 Median Age	37.3	40.7	43.3

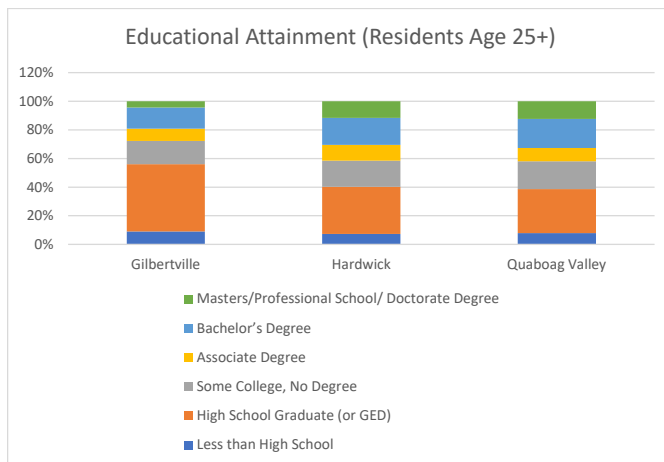
Source: ESRI Business Analyst



Source: UMass Donahue Institute Population Projections, Vintage 2018

Education of 25+ Year Old Residents	Gilbertville	Hardwick	Quaboag Valley
Less than High School	9%	7%	8%
High School Graduate (or GED)	47%	33%	31%
Some College, No Degree	16%	18%	19%
Associate Degree	9%	11%	9%
Bachelor's Degree	15%	19%	20%
Masters/Professional School/ Doctorate Degree	4%	12%	12%

Source: ESRI Business Analyst



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Housing Occupancy	Gilbertville	Hardwick	Quaboag Valley
2021 Owner Occupied Housing Units	56	783	45,347
2021 Renter Occupied Housing Units	66	349	16,496
2021 Vacant Housing Units	20	116	5,704
2026 Owner Occupied Housing Units	59	809	46,904
2026 Renter Occupied Housing Units	65	337	15,801
2026 Vacant Housing Units	19	119	5,976

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

## EDUCATION

Hardwick has a somewhat higher percentage of high school graduates than average for the Quaboag region, but a lower percentage of residents with bachelor's or graduate degrees. With 19% of residents having a bachelor's degree or higher (compared to 44% statewide), the town ranks among the lower 50 communities in Massachusetts for educational attainment.

## HOUSING

Gilbertville has significantly more renter occupied housing (46%) than Hardwick as whole (28%) or the Quaboag Valley Region (24%). It also has more vacant housing (14%) than Hardwick (9%) or the Quaboag Valley Region (8%). Housing projections from ESRI predict that only one housing unit will be added to Gilbertville over the next five years and just seventeen in Hardwick as a whole.

The high percentage of rental units in Gilbertville is a legacy of the mill worker housing developed in Gilbertville's heyday. This rental housing is a regionally valuable resource. It provides homes for people who may not otherwise be able to afford housing. It is likely partly responsible for the higher percentage of 25-34 year olds in Gilbertville than in Hardwick or the Quaboag Valley Region (17% vs 13%). The young adult population in Gilbertville may provide a crucial opportunity to balance out the aging of Hardwick if the younger renters can find suitable housing and jobs as they move into middle age and beyond.

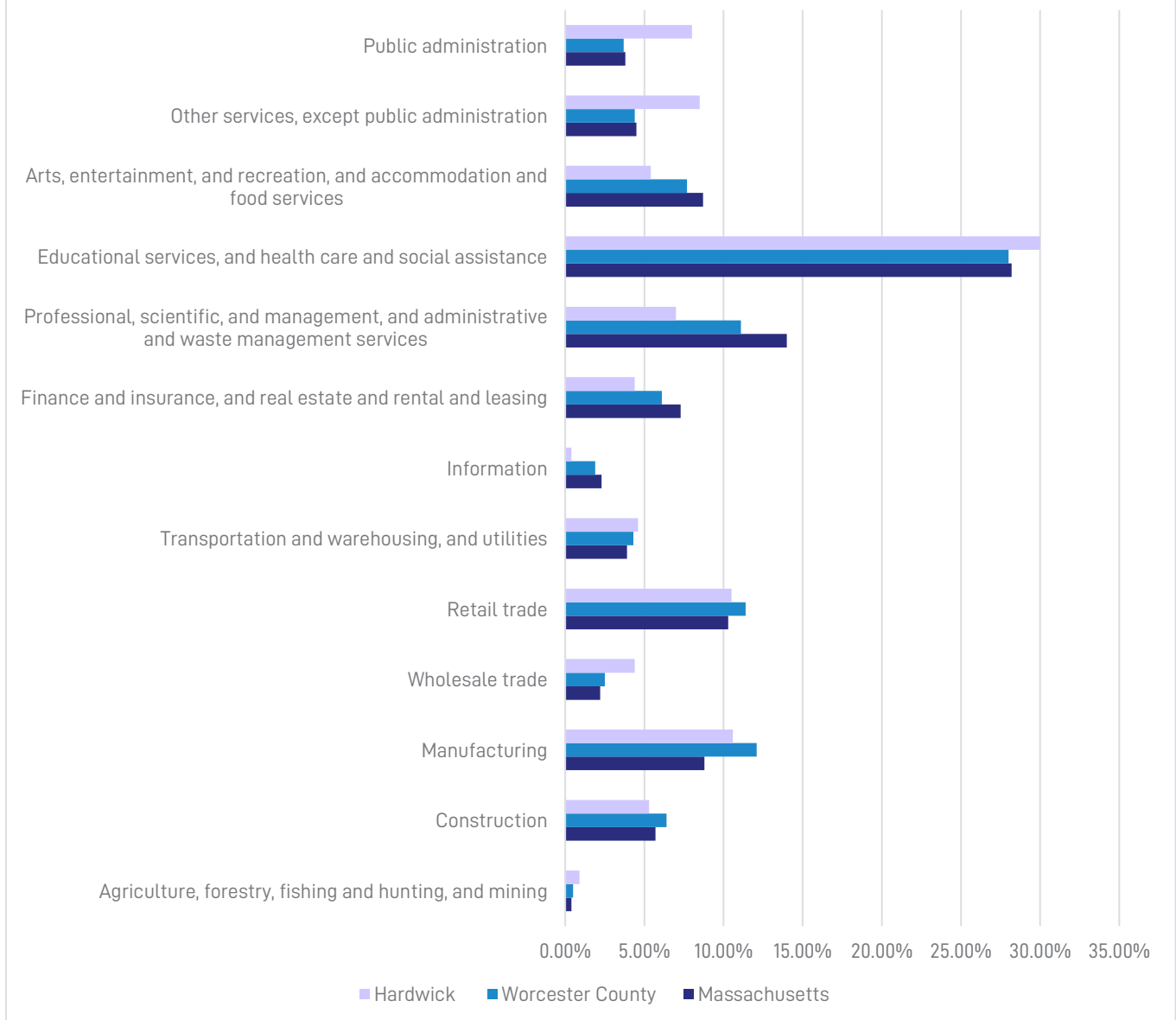
## EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIES

According to the Census Bureau's On the Map website, out of a total population of around 300 people, 60 Gilbertville residents are in the labor force. The majority (54%) are employed in white collar jobs that require high-skills and are higher wage professions. About 29% of the residents worked in blue collar jobs and 17% were employed in other services.

In 2020, the unemployment rate of Gilbertville was estimated at 17.8%, compared to the 6.8% average across all of Massachusetts (ESRI Business Analyst). The relatively high number is likely the result of the Covid-19 pandemic. 2021 unemployment has since fallen to 10.9% in Gilbertville, which is still remarkably high (ESRI Business Analyst).

Note: this report consulted several measures of unemployment which provide different estimates. This may reflect the fluid nature of the pandemic.

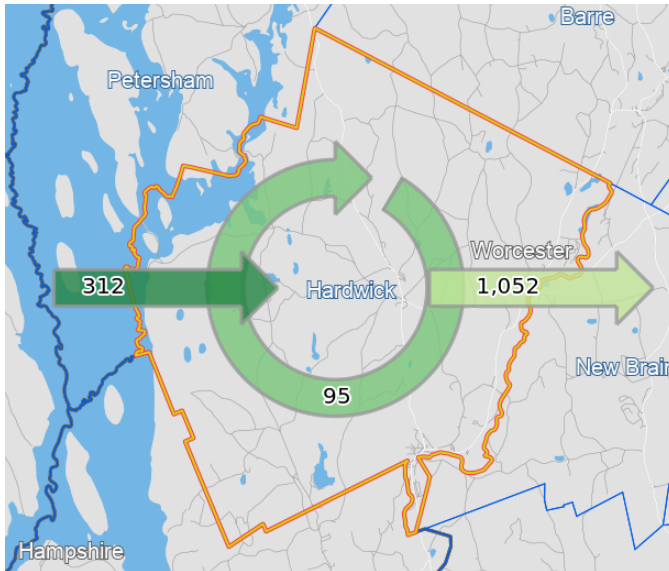
## Industry Breakdown of Civilian Employed Population (16+ years old)



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2015-2019

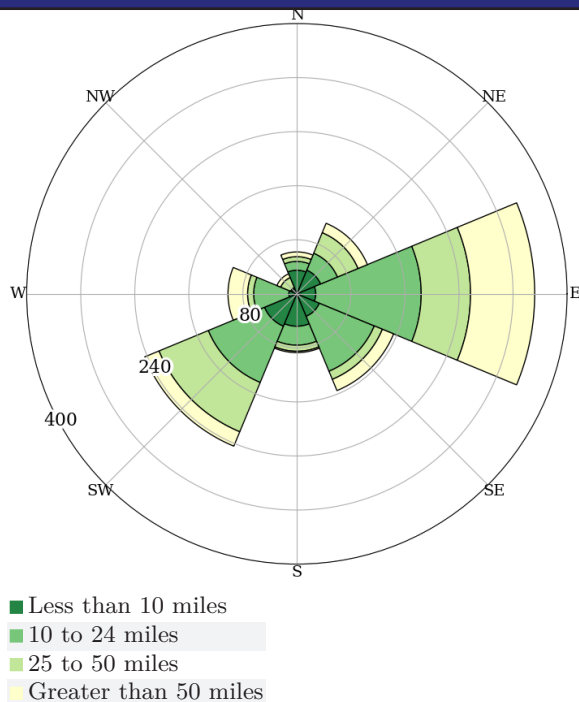
### EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

Hardwick residents are employed in public administration, education, health care and social assistance industries at a higher rate than in Worcester County and Massachusetts as a whole. They have lower rates of employment in professional, financial, insurance and real estate industries than those in the surrounding region, as well as in arts, entertainment and recreation.



Worker Inflow and Outflow in Hardwick	Number	Percent
Employed in Hardwick	407	100.0%
Employed in Hardwick but Living Outside	312	76.7%
Employed and Living in Hardwick	95	23.3%
Living in Hardwick	1,147	100.0%
Living in Hardwick but Employed Outside	1,052	91.7%
Living and Employed in Hardwick	95	8.3%

**Commute Distance and Direction for Hardwick Residents**



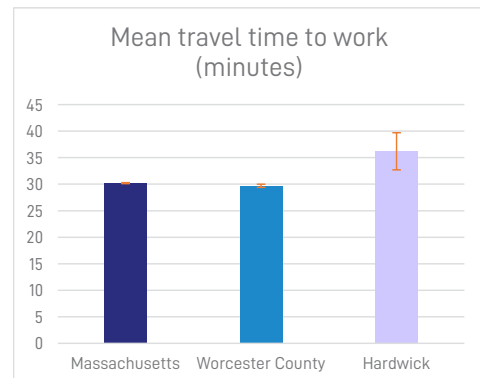
Source (Top, Middle, Bottom): Census on the Map, 2018

## TRAVELING TO WORK

Of the 407 workers employed in Hardwick, only 95 live in town, while 312 local jobs are filled by people who commute from out of town. 1,052 Hardwick residents, meanwhile, commute to work elsewhere. For these folks, travel time is somewhat higher than the average commute for Worcester County or Massachusetts as a whole, averaging about 37 minutes, compared to 30 minutes.

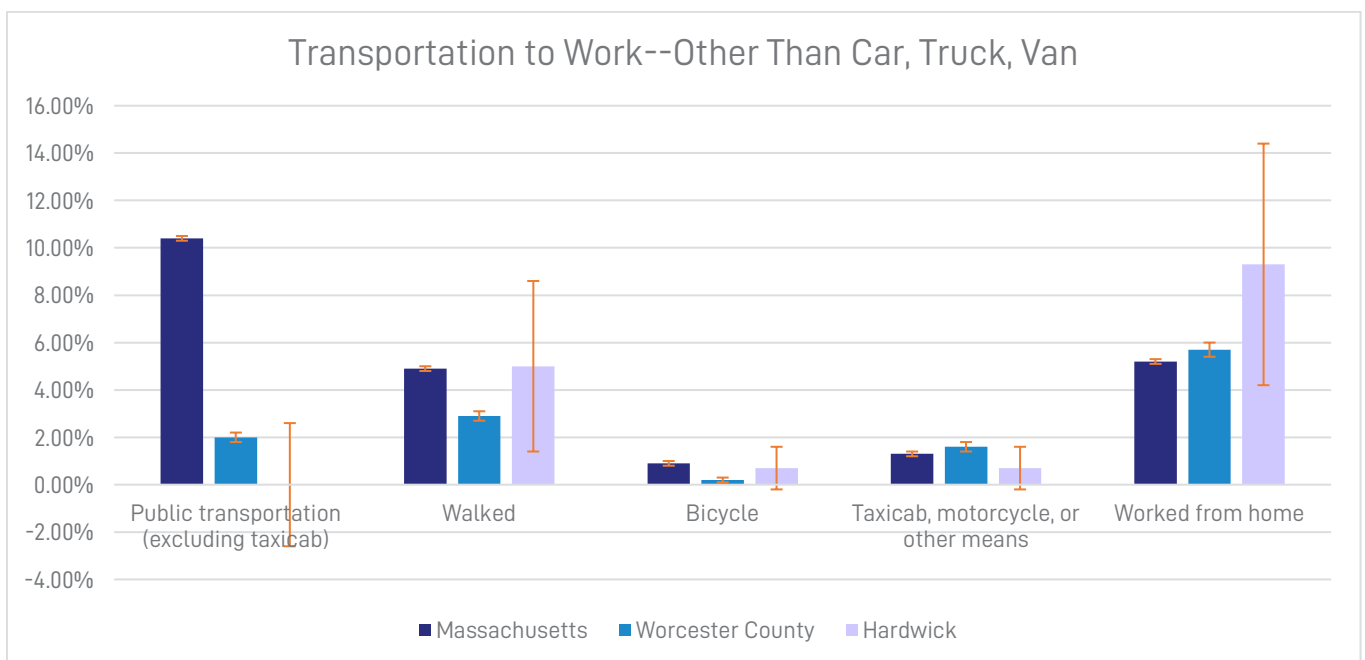
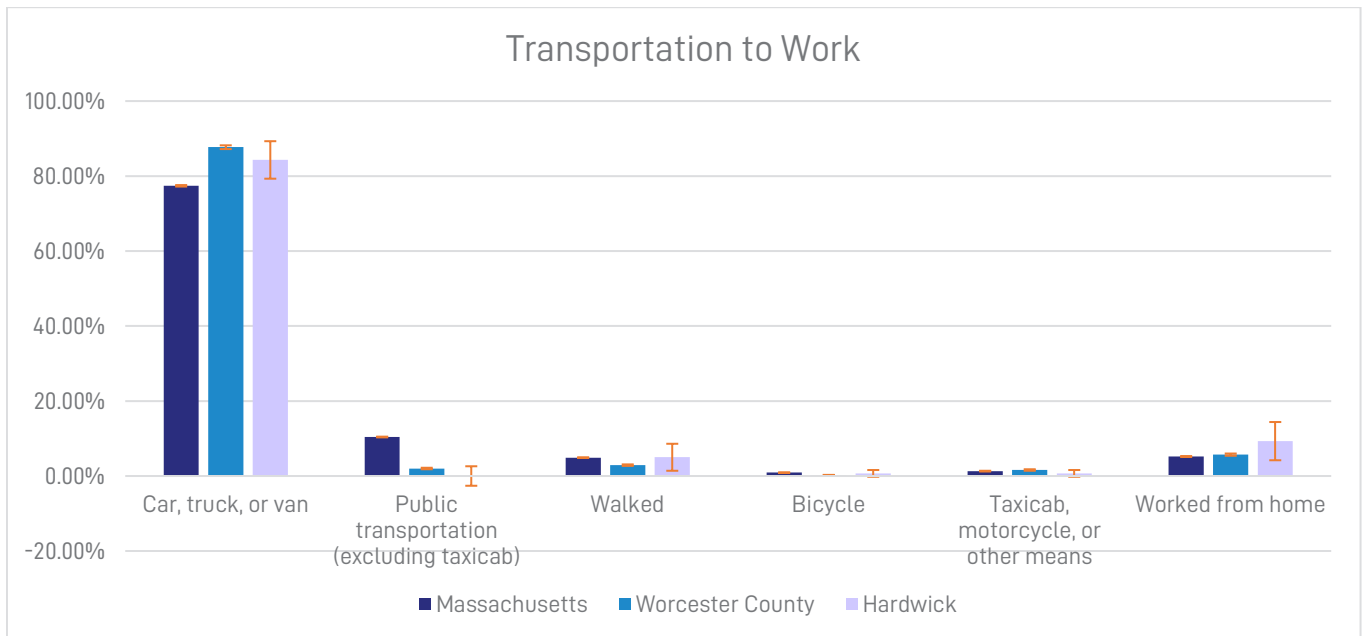
The largest commuting cohort travels east to work towards Worcester and Boston (some for more than 50 miles), followed by a group that travels southwest towards Ware and Springfield.

The 312 people who work in town but live elsewhere provide a customer base for local businesses offering food, beverage and convenience items. The 95 Hardwick residents who also work in town will likely take advantage of local goods and services to save a trip. However, the nearly 92% of residents who leave town every day for work, are likely shopping on their way home at the Big Y Plaza or Gibbs Crossing Walmart in Ware, or perhaps at the Hannaford's in North Brookfield, the Spencer Big Y, and any number of other shopping centers in greater Worcester.



Source: ACS Five-year Estimate, 2015-2019  
(note: fine red lines indicate margin of error)





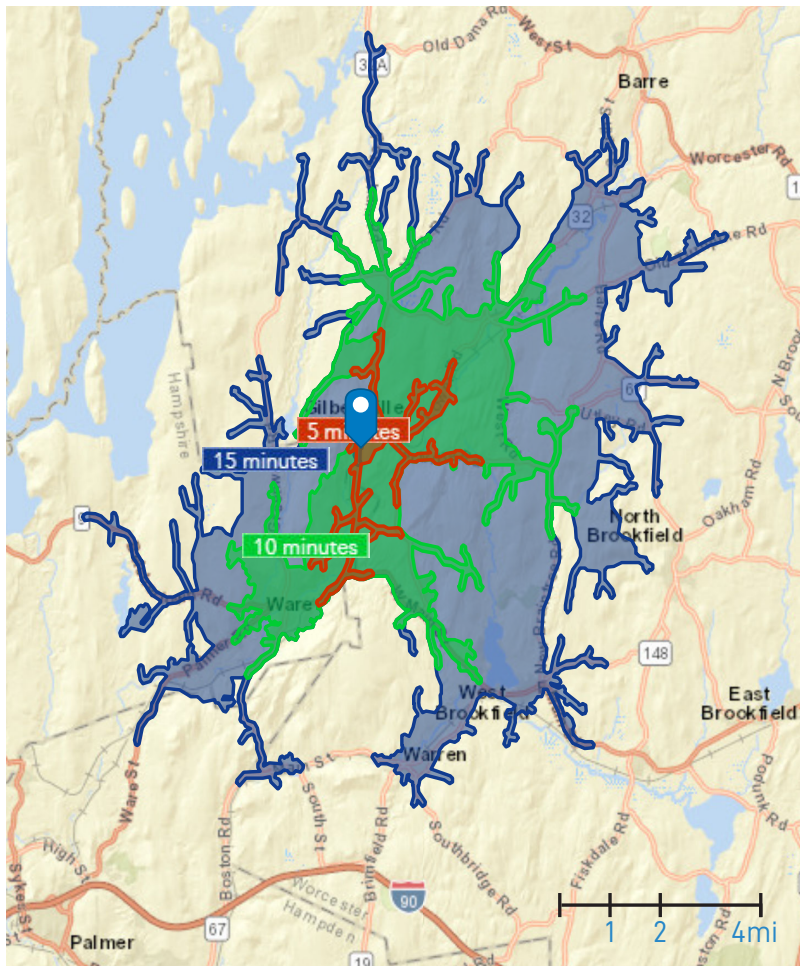
**Source: ACS Five-year Estimate, 2015-2019**  
 (note: fine red lines indicate margin of error)

#### COMMUTE MODE

Like many small towns and rural places, the vast majority of commuters in Hardwick travel by car, truck or van to work. That said, compared to Worcester County, Hardwick has a relatively high percentage of people who walk or bicycle to work or work from home. This a bright spot for Hardwick, both because these trips are healthy and not contributing to climate change, but also because walkers and bikers are more likely to patronize local businesses. The percentage of people working at home has likely increased during the pandemic.

#### DAYTIME POPULATION

Based on the small number of businesses in Gilbertville and the high number of Hardwick residents who commute out of town, we would expect that Gilbertville has a small daytime population. Indeed, ESRI estimates it at just 239 people. The lack of daytime population will limit business opportunities in Gilbertville, especially for business types that depend on daytime customers, like lunch restaurants.



**5, 10 and 15 minute drive times from the center of Gilbertville**  
Source: ESRI Business Analyst

## DRIVE TIMES

The map above shows 5, 10, and 15 minute drive times from the center of Gilbertville (roughly the Municipal Offices). Drive times are a useful way of evaluating the potential customer base for an area. Customers within a 5 minute drive have a day-to-day relationship with a downtown. Some of these customers can access the area on foot or bicycle, which increases the appeal of the area. These customers may patronize businesses in the downtown primarily because they are convenient.

Customers within 10 minutes are also likely to find the area convenient but will likely have other businesses that are equally accessible (notably, most of the businesses in Ware are within a 5-10 minute drive of Gilbertville). These customers will likely patronize businesses in the downtown if they are equivalent to businesses that are located further afield. Customers at a 15 minute drive or greater will likely have access to several competing areas that are equally convenient from a transportation perspective. To attract these customers, businesses must offer a competitive advantage like price, quality, or service. It also helps if the downtown has several businesses or attractions that the customer wants to visit on one trip.

## TRAFFIC COUNTS

Customers are much more likely to patronize businesses if they are passing by them anyway. That is why foot traffic and vehicle traffic volumes are a key measure of the economic potential of a downtown. There is no data available for foot traffic in Gilbertville. Traffic volumes have been measured in several locations and were downloaded from the MassDOT Traffic Count Portal. These counts are expressed in terms of Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) which represents the total number of trips past a given point over the course of a year, divided by 365.

- 2019 counts found 4,198 AADT on Main Street at the New Braintree Town Line.
- A 2016 count recorded 711 AADT at Gilbertville Road east of Summit Rd (at New Braintree Town Line).
- Counts on Church Street east of High Road were conducted in 2019 and again during the pandemic in 2020. Not surprisingly, traffic counts were lower during the pandemic (2165 AADT vs 2795 AADT).

Overall, traffic counts in Gilbertville are relatively low. They are nowhere near the volumes that a typical chain store like a Dunkin Donuts would look for, generally in the tens of thousands. Passing traffic is not likely to provide a significant customer base for Gilbertville businesses.

## TAPESTRY MARKET SEGMENTATION

ESRI's Tapestry Market Segmentation divides populations into groups that share similar demographic, spending, and consumer preferences. These Market Segments are sometimes used by businesses to determine whether an area has a customer base that is suitable for their business model.

Within a 5 minute drive of Gilbertville, the Front Porches segment dominates, with 272 households, followed by Parks and Rec (29 households) and Comfortable Empty Nesters (26). At ten minutes, the percentage of the latter two segments rise but Front Porches are still the majority (1,558 households, vs. 603 and 317). At a 15 minute drive, a new market segment, Green Acres appears, while Front Porches and Parks and Rec each make up a little less than a third of the market segmentation (1,869 households, vs. 1,857 and 1,096).

The dominant market segments are briefly described below.

### Front Porches




- Young families with children or single households. Median age: 34 years.
- Half of all households are occupied by renters and many homes are old town homes or duplexes
- Blue-collar workers with limited incomes for whom price is more important than style/brand. With limited incomes, these are not adventurous shoppers. They would rather cook a meal at home than dine out. They seek adventure and strive to have fun.

### Parks and Rec




- Primarily dual income married couples approaching retirement age. Usually own older home, duplexes and townhomes are common
- Diverse workforce with college-educated professionals
- Residents are careful to research their big-ticket purchases
- Live in well-established neighborhoods with amenities and programs to support kids

### Comfortable Empty Nesters




- Married couples aged 55 years or older, some with children but most without
- Well-educated professionals working in health care, government, or manufacturing
- Earn a comfortable living and benefit from years of saving and investment
- Prefer eating at home instead of dining out
- Home maintenance is a top priority for these households. They also value their health and financial well-being. Physically active.

 8E	<b>Front Porches</b> 272 households	82.9% of Households	▼
 5C	<b>Parks and Rec</b> 29 households	8.8% of Households	▼
 5A	<b>Comfortable Empty Nesters</b> 26 households	7.9% of Households	▼

### Population within a 5 minute drive time

 8E	<b>Front Porches</b> 1,558 households	55.3% of Households	▼
 5C	<b>Parks and Rec</b> 603 households	21.4% of Households	▼
 5A	<b>Comfortable Empty Nesters</b> 317 households	11.3% of Households	▼

### Population within a 10 minute drive time

 8E	<b>Front Porches</b> 1,869 households	29.6% of Households	▼
 5C	<b>Parks and Rec</b> 1,857 households	29.4% of Households	▼
 6A	<b>Green Acres</b> 1,096 households	17.3% of Households	▼

### Population within 15-minute drive time

Source, top, middle, bottom: ESRI Business Analyst

### Green Acres

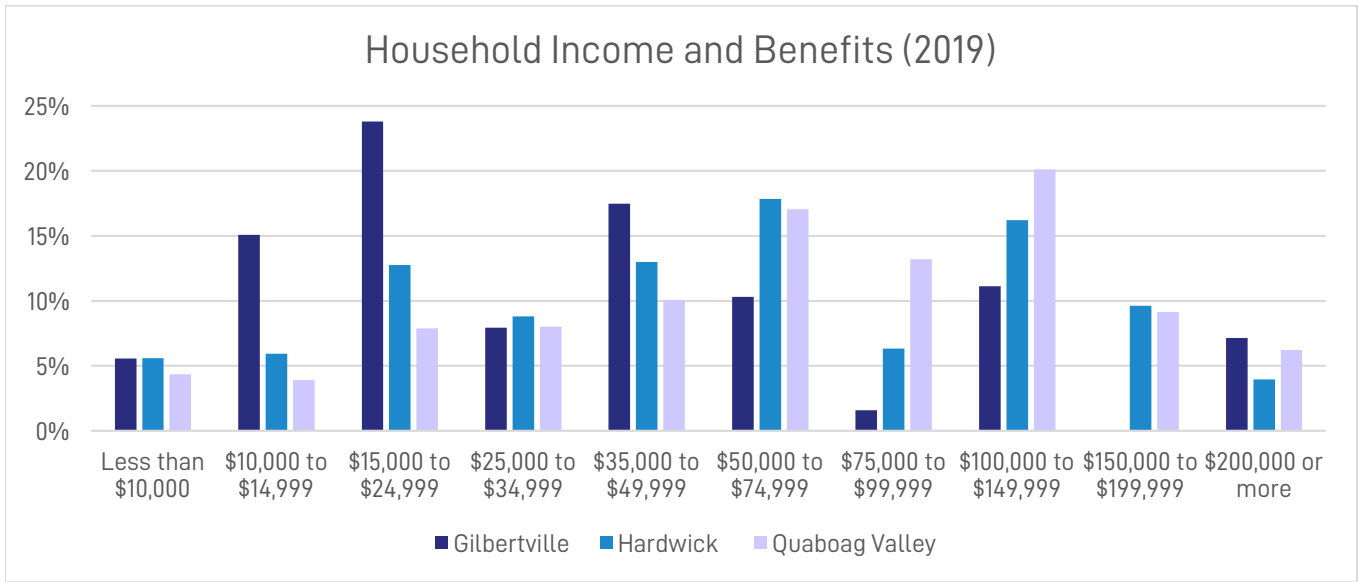
- An older market, primarily married couples, most with no children. 60%+ college educated.
- Avid do-it-yourselfers, maintaining and remodeling their homes and gardens, with all the necessary power tools to accomplish the jobs
- Pursue outdoor living and a variety of sports
- They are cautious consumers with a focus on quality and durability.
- Comfortable with technology, more as a tool than a trend: banking or paying bills online is convenient; but the Internet is not viewed as entertainment.
- Economic outlook is professed as pessimistic, but consumers are comfortable with debt, primarily as home and auto loans, and investments.

Income and Net Worth	Gilbertville	Hardwick	Quaboag Valley
2020 Median Disposable Income	\$33,309	\$49,106	\$55,140
2020 Average Disposable Income	\$49,235	\$62,239	\$69,532
2020 Aggregate Disposable Income	\$6,006,694	\$70,454,507	\$4,298,427,046
2019 Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	24	137	7,364
2020 Median Net Worth	\$14,637	\$91,073	\$143,319
2020 Average Net Worth	\$181,267	\$585,701	\$737,526
2020 Aggregate Net Worth	\$22,114,525	\$663,013,916	\$45,593,133,689
Source: ESRI Business Analyst			

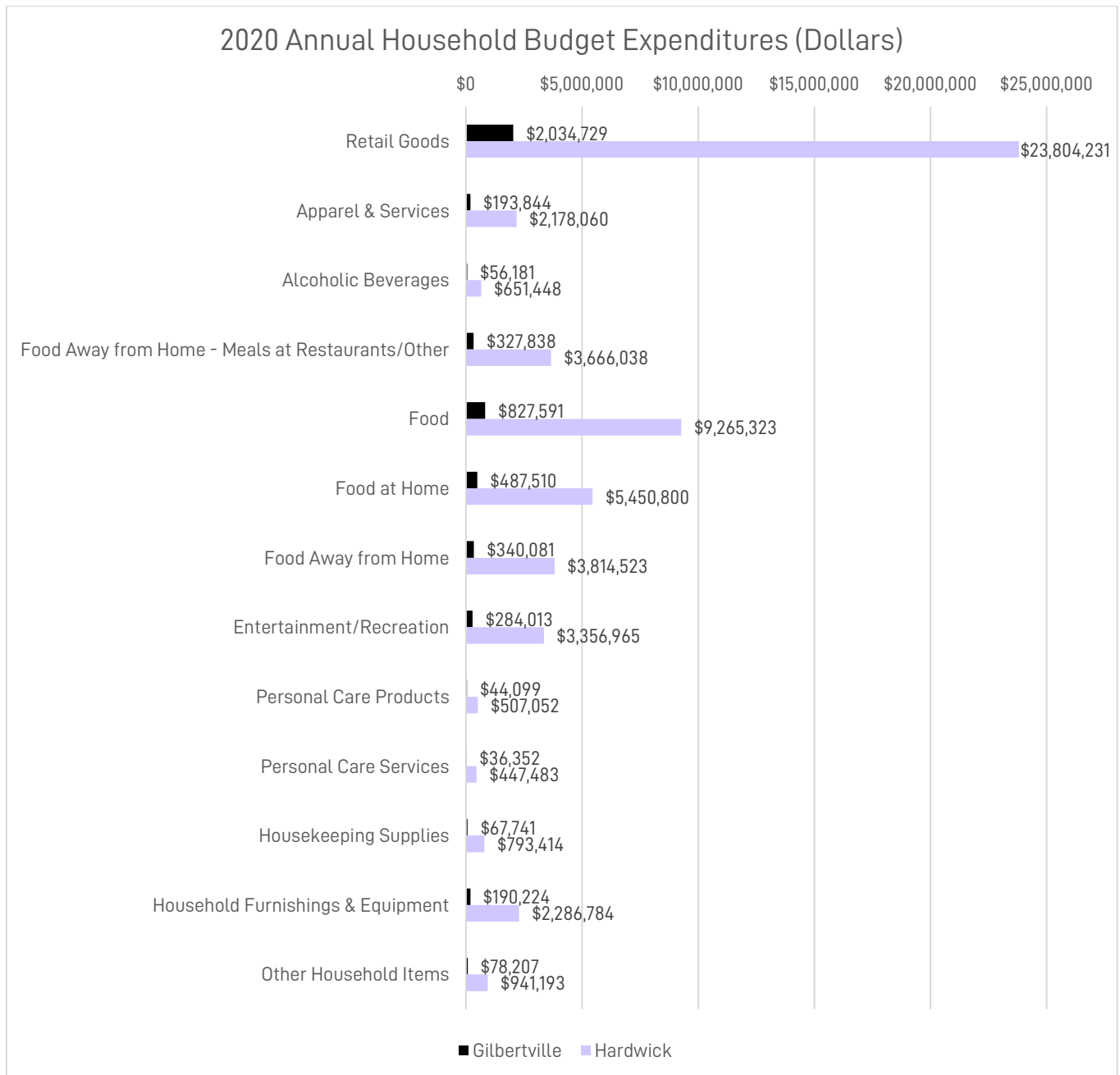
### INCOME CHARACTERISTICS

On average, the typical Gilbertville household has less disposable income than the average household in the town of Hardwick as a whole, which in turn is less than that of the average for the entire Quaboag Valley Region. The implications for support of business are clear when these are aggregated according to the number of households. Within Gilbertville total disposable income is some \$6 million, with \$70M for Hardwick as a whole and \$4.3 Billion for the entire region. Reflected in both yearly income (median \$33,309) and aggregate net worth (\$14,637), Gilbertville residents are not able to save or invest much of what they make.

In terms of the local customer base, this implies that what Gilbertville residents need are businesses that provide food and other necessities rather than luxuries. Gilbertville's businesses, on the other hand, may have to look to the larger region to support growth and development. These factors are perhaps demonstrated by the current mix of businesses in Gilbertville, where the gas station, market/package store, pizza shop, and auto repair shops carry on while other businesses have faded. Meanwhile Lost Towns Brewing and Rose 32 Bread Bakery have found some success by providing a more upscale product (unavailable in the larger shopping centers in Ware and elsewhere) that attracts customers from the larger region.



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2015-2019 via ESRI Business Analyst

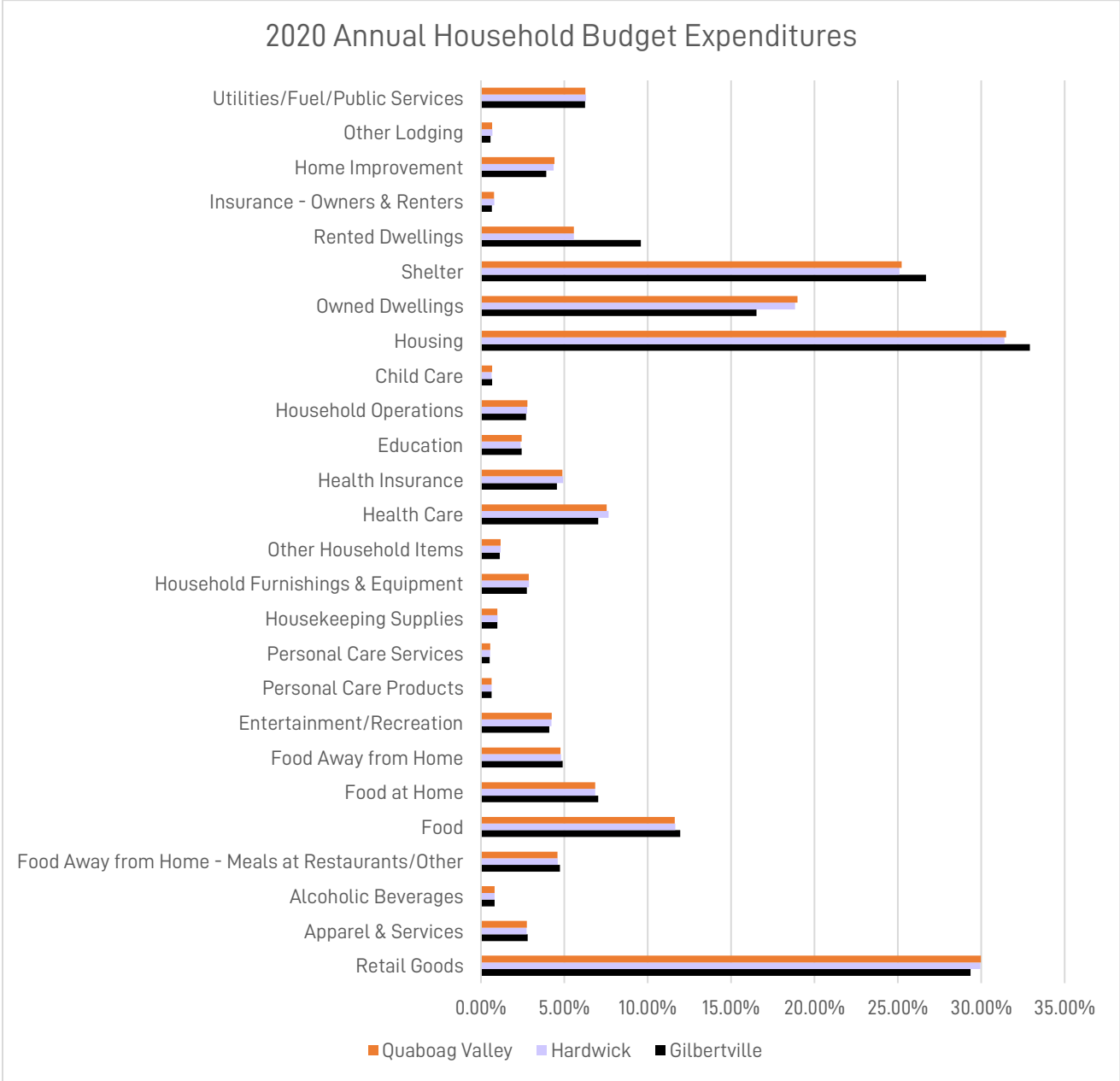


Source: ESRI Business Analyst

#### ESTIMATED DISCRETIONARY SPENDING BY HOUSEHOLDS IN GILBERTVILLE VS. HARDWICK

Household budget expenditures shown here focus primarily on discretionary spending, rather than basics like housing and transportation. These estimates are based on the latest Consumer Expenditure Surveys from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). ESRI Business Analyst uses the results of these and other data collected by the federal government, which

are referenced to income and demographic data, to estimate the annual spending patterns of households with similar characteristics in Gilbertville and Hardwick. This type of analysis is used by businesses to gauge the market for retail goods, food and beverages in a particular community.



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

#### ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLD BUDGET EXPENDITURES

The estimated breakdown of household spending in Gilbertville, Hardwick and the surrounding Quaboag Valley region shows that households across the region share very similar demographic and income characteristics. As expected, Gilbertville households, with lower average income, spend a somewhat higher proportion of their budgets on necessities like housing/rent and food, and less on retail goods, health care and home improvement.



## Understanding and Evaluating Gilbertville's Physical Environment



*Aerial view of Gilbertville*  
*Source: MassDOT Pictometry*

### RRP DATA COLLECTION FRAMEWORK:

The second part of the RRP Data Collection Framework asks "how conducive is the physical environment to meeting the needs and expectations of both businesses and customers?" In order to answer that question, the process applies an assessment approach that divides the physical environment into two equally important elements: the Public Realm, which includes public streets, parks, sidewalks and their associated signs and furnishings; and the Private Realm, primarily the privately-owned buildings and their components, including facades and fenestration, signage and lighting. While they are owned and managed by different entities, the public and private realms are equally important to Gilbertville's success as a center of business and community life.

Based on site visits, interviews and analysis of maps and photographs, the following assessment describes each aspect of the public and private realm and assigns a letter grade to summarize its relative strength or weakness. (This framework is adapted from the award-winning Commercial DNA approach, as

published by the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) in "Preparing a Commercial District Diagnostic", authored by Larisa Ortiz (Managing Director, Streetsense) and funded in part by Citi Community Development.)

The assigned grades for each element of the physical environment are based on a shared RRP rubric provided to each of the consultants. Essentially, if the desired element is present and functioning well as part of the downtown, it gets a higher grade. If it is absent or dysfunctional, it gets a lower grade. The point of this assessment is not to assign blame or point out the deficiencies of any particular property, but rather to identify which elements of the physical environment support the needs of businesses and customers and which ones represent opportunities for improvement. By looking at this comprehensively, the process can help identify potential projects or improvements with the greatest impact on the attractiveness and functionality of the downtown environment.





## Highlights from the Physical Environment of the Public Realm

### SIDEWALKS

There is a continuous asphalt or concrete sidewalk on at least one side of Main Street from 569 Main in the south to 66 Hardwick Road in the north, and most of it is separated from the roadway by granite curb. In most of the study area, utility poles are placed at the curb line within the sidewalk, narrowing the through-way by 12-18 inches. There are quite a few areas where sidewalks merge into a continuous curb cut, providing access to a driveway, street intersection or parking lot.

Surface conditions vary from relatively new concrete walks in the north end of the village to asphalt in the majority. While there are many cracks, the walks appear relatively even and adequate for accessibility. There are curb ramps at major intersections, though only some have clear markings and detectable warning strips.

Rating: "C" with more than 25% of the sidewalks in the study area posing challenges to the pedestrian experience. While there is some form of sidewalk in most of the study area, there are limitations, due to width, on any use other than as a through-way for single pedestrians.

### STREET TREES AND BENCHES

There are virtually no street trees within the public right of way throughout the study area. There are also relatively few trees in the private street frontage that are close enough to the public sidewalks to provide any shade.

There appears to be one bench at the town parking lot in the center of the study area.

Rating: "Fail" with very few trees shading the public realm and no benches in most of the study area.

### VISIBILITY

Street lighting is limited to cobra-head fixtures on utility poles. These carry the standard assortment of high voltage lines, step-down transformers and separate lines connecting the transformers to street lights, homes and businesses. Lower down they also carry thick cable and telephone lines.

Throughout the study area the poles and wires detract greatly from the historic character of the area.

Rating: "C" with the tall street lights and parking lot flood lighting providing for general illumination and visibility, but creating an environment that is not supportive of a comfortable pedestrian environment.



*Gilbertville sidewalk and pedestrian crossing sign  
Source: Dodson & Flinker*



*Typical utility pole, light fixture and utility cables  
Source: Google Street view*



*Gilbertville individual business signs*  
Source: Dodson & Flinker



*Gilbertville streetscape and signage*  
Source: Google Street view

## WAYFINDING/SIGNAGE

There is signage for individual shops, restaurants and other businesses. There are street signs and a sign identifying the Gilbertville Public Parking Lot. There is no wayfinding signage directing visitors to key locations, other than a sign for the covered bridge and a sign for Hardwick Center. There are no welcome signs for Gilbertville itself.

Rating: "C" with wayfinding in the study area provided primarily by street signs and signs for individual businesses. There is limited signage to identify key assets and destinations.

## ROADBEDS AND CROSSWALKS

Main Street, AKA Mass Route 32, is one lane in each direction with narrow striped shoulders. There appear to be no impediments to easy vehicular movement and no reason to slow down other than the somewhat complicated intersection of Main Street and Church Street, which has a triangular island, and the adjacent convergence of Prospect, Mechanic Street and Hardwick Road.

There are a limited number of crosswalks in a variety of conditions depending on age and construction. The best one crosses Main Street in front of the Library. There are additional crosswalks crossing Main Street Church Street and Bridge Street. There are crosswalks

parallel to Main Street at its intersections with Bridge Street, Taylor Street, and Joslyn Road. Several additional crosswalks on Church Street and Hardwick Road appear to have been installed somewhat informally. In several areas the sidewalk ends on one side of the street and continues on the other with no crosswalk, requiring some backtracking.

Rating: "B" with roads designed primarily to move motor vehicles across the study area efficiently, with relatively few crosswalks for pedestrians.

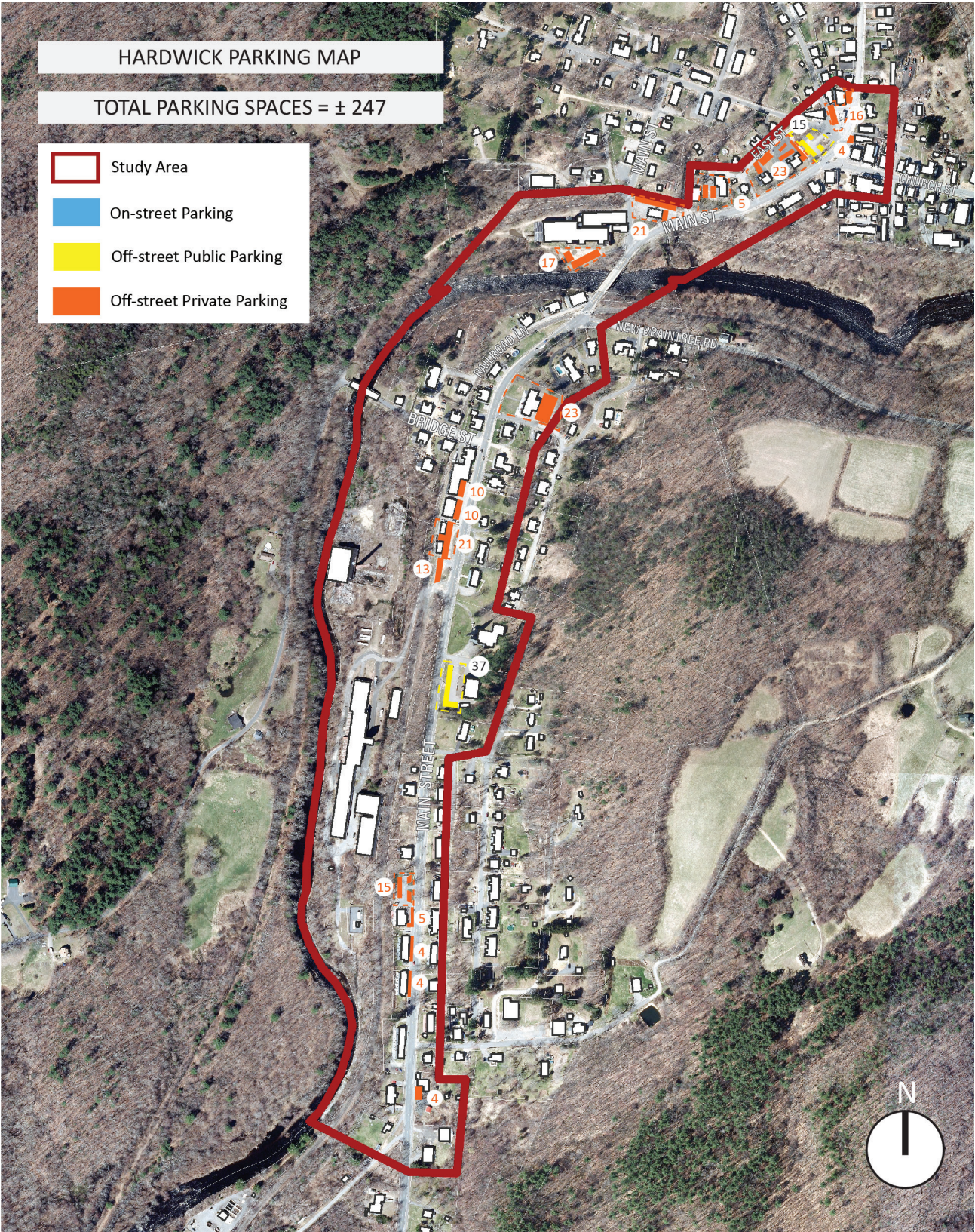
## PARKING

There are approximately 247 parking spaces in Gilbertville, primarily on private properties along Main Street. There are 37 public parking spaces at the Town Hall and in 15 spaces in a town-owned lot at the intersection of Prospect Street and Route 32A. Parking appears to be adequate for most businesses, although the limited parking for Lost-Towns Brewery has been identified as a long-term challenge. MassDOT prohibits on-street parking within their jurisdiction which includes Route 32 from the town line to just north of the Hardwick Market & Package Store.

Overall, parking does not appear to be an issue for most businesses, but could be if businesses experience an uptick in customers. Improving utilization through shared public or private parking would allow businesses to grow without the need for additional pavement.



PARKING



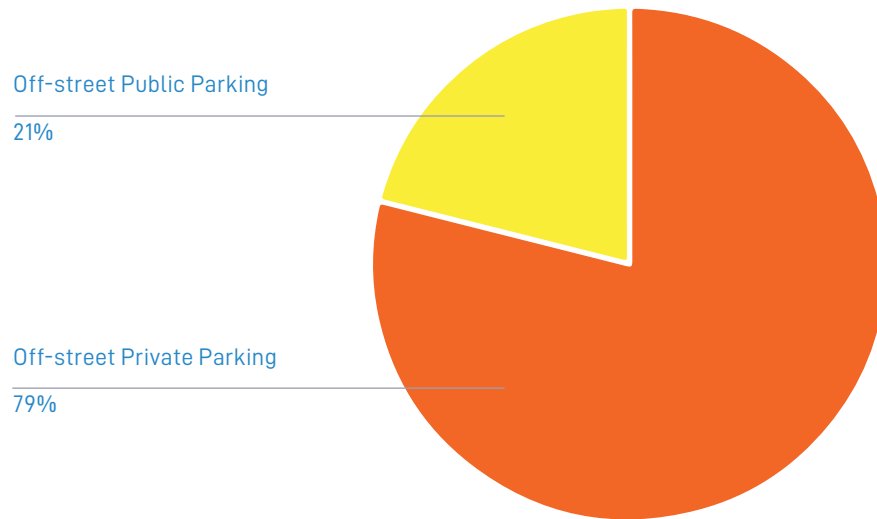
*Parking Inventory Map*  
*Source: Dodson & Flinker*



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## Distribution of Parking Spaces in the Project Area



**Distribution of Parking Spaces**  
**Source: Dodson & Flinker**

### TRAILS AND OPEN SPACES

Previous planning studies for Hardwick recommended that Hardwick promote eco-tourism as an economic development strategy. The town of Hardwick has attractive terrain with pastoral views and roads lined with stone walls. The town has a good selection of preserved open spaces with trails, many under the auspices of the East Quabbin Land Trust.

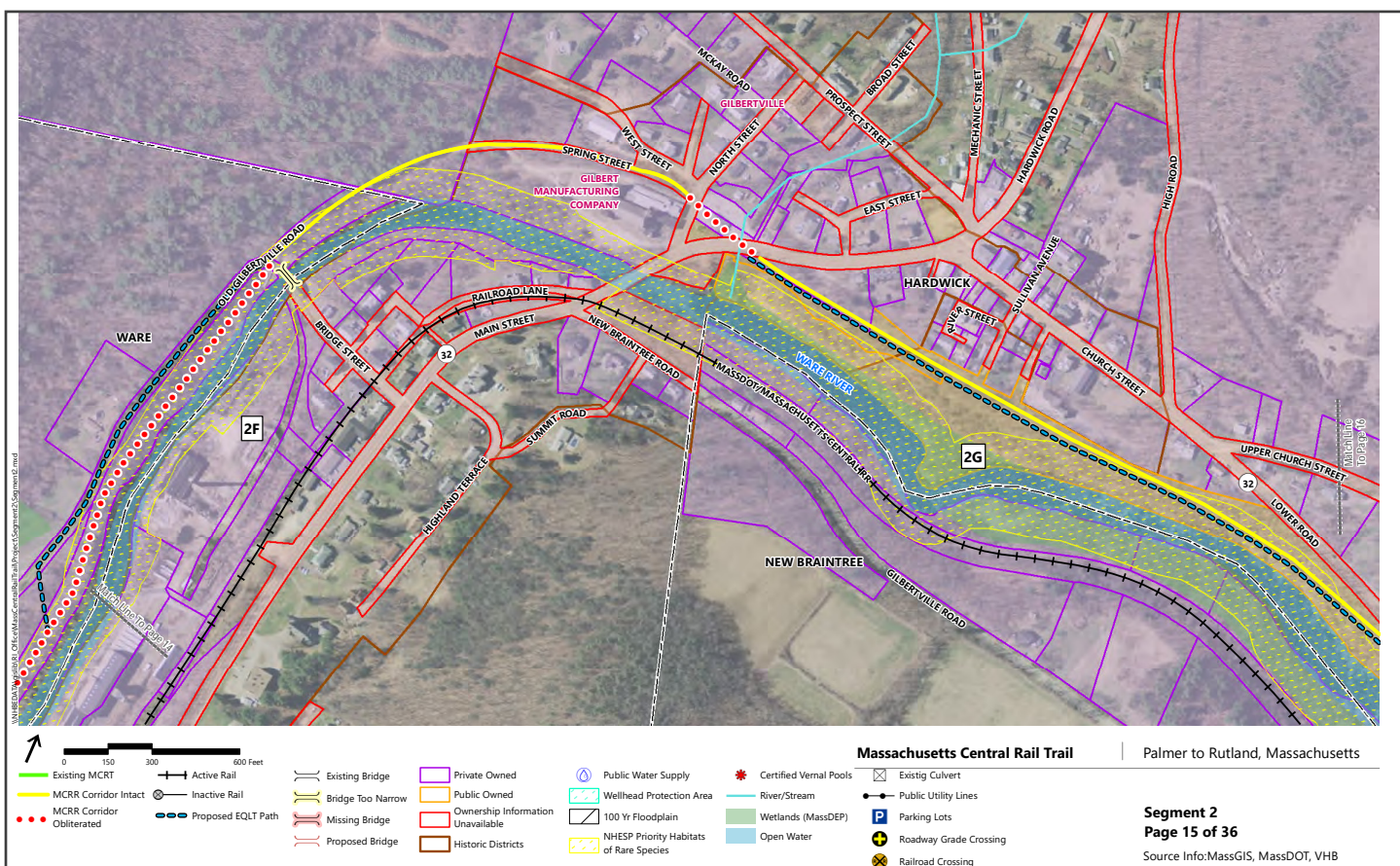
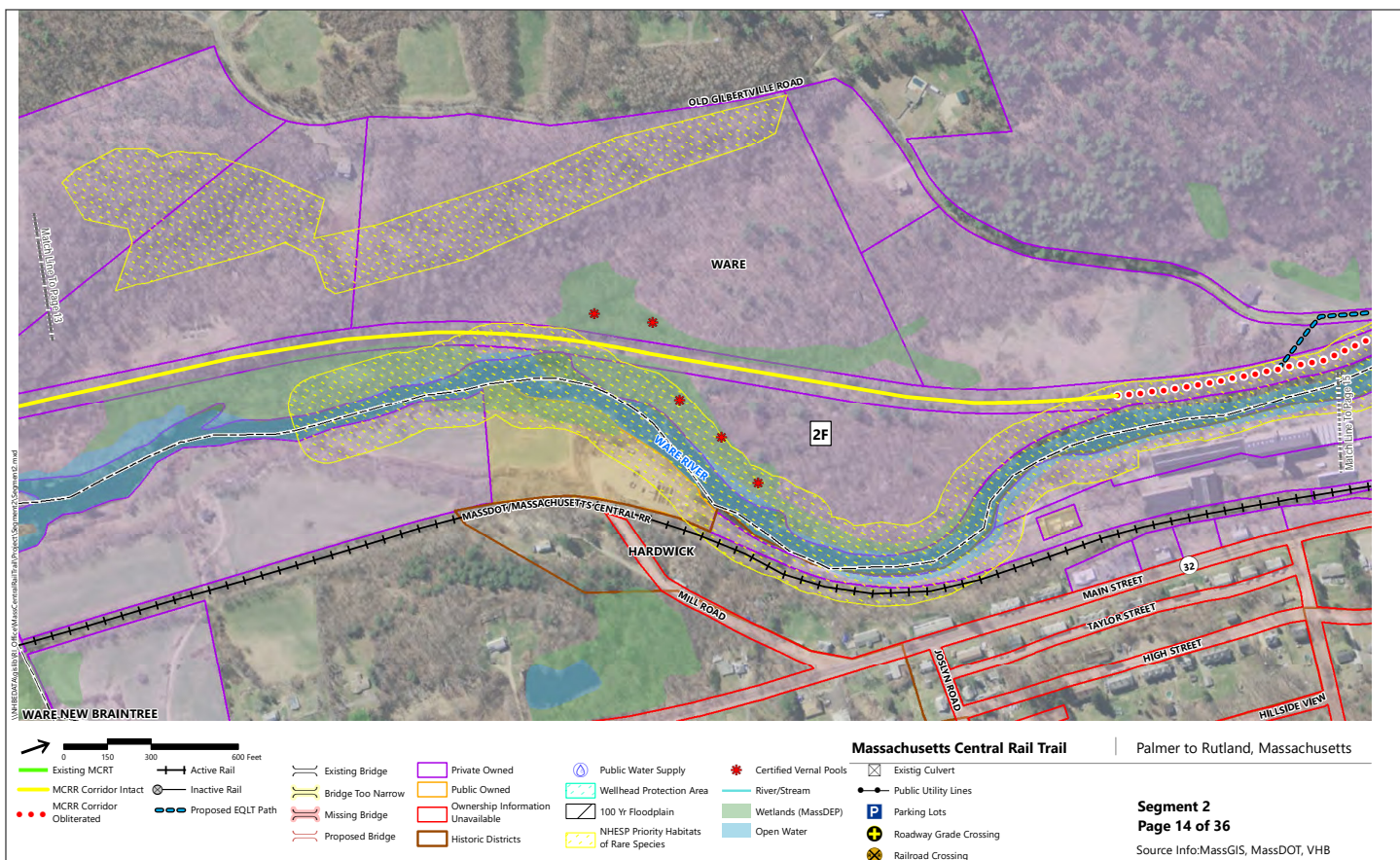
There are several current and planned trails in Hardwick. A small trail leads from the viewing platform across from Hardwick House of Pizza down to the Ware River. The Gilbertville Fitness Trail provides an opportunity for outdoor exercise.

The planned route of the Mass Central Rail Trail passes through the center of Gilbertville, following an historic rail bed. The Mass Central Trail, when fully built, will connect from Boston to Northampton. About 50 of the trail's 104 miles are already built.

A portion of the trail was funded for construction in 2021. East Quabbin Land Trust received a \$200,000 Mass Trails grant to construct 1.8 miles of a 10-foot wide shared-use path that will run from north of Church Street in Ware to south of the covered bridge in Gilbertville. A feasibility study by VHB that was completed in March 2021, recommended the trail be connected to an on-road path from there to the Bridge Street and then continue on Spring Street to North Street. After crossing Hardwick House of Pizza's parking area, the trail would continue as an off-road path to the east.

The MassCentral Trail is arguably the most significant economic and quality of life opportunity for Gilbertville. Rail trails can be a significant visitor draw. Providing a trail head for the MassCentral in Gilbertville, especially one with amenities like bathrooms, would be an effective way to attract visitors to Gilbertville. Those visitors would augment the customer base for area businesses.





Feasibility analysis for Mass Central Rail Trail in Gilbertville area. Shows that the former rail corridor is intact heading north from Ware up to Mill 4. From there to Bridge Street, the trail has been "obliterated" and VHB recommends an on-road connector. The trail continues up Spring St to North Street. This section requires paving. It is obliterated across Hardwick House of Pizza's parking area, and intact east of Main Street

Source: Mass Central Rail Trail Feasibility Study, Segment 2 (VHB, 2021), accessed at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/mcrt-feasibility-study-segment-2/download>





## Highlights from the Physical Environment of the Private Realm

### WINDOWS

There are about 12 buildings that either host active businesses or which are vacant and could reasonably be put back into service. Only a few of these, including Lost Towns Brewing and Rose 32 Bakery, actively engage the street frontage with doors and windows. The nicest commercial shopfront is the building on the corner of Church and Main, a former antique shop now unfortunately closed. Most of the other businesses have little to offer the streetscape other than a doorway, including car repair, convenience goods, pizza shop, liquor sales, salon and dance studio, all of which have more or less opaque facades.

Rating: "C" with more than 25% of the storefronts and other businesses having limited transparency.

### AWNING

Only Susan's Headquarters has an awning, though 6 of the other businesses have projecting eaves or porches that shelter their doorways.

Rating: "Fail" with only one building having an awning.

### OUTDOOR DISPLAY/DINING

Hardwick House of Pizza has some picnic tables and Rose 32 Bakery has a more extensive terrace with tables and umbrellas. Otherwise, none of the businesses in the study area actively engage the public pedestrian realm with window displays or outdoor displays.

Rating: "C" with no storefronts creating active window displays and little spillover retail/restaurant activity on sidewalks and other shared spaces.

### SIGNAGE

Several of the newer businesses have attractive signage; for the most part signage can best be described as adequate and functional, with plenty of room for improvement.

Rating: "C" with more than 25% of businesses lacking effective signage to communicate the name of the business or type of product/services being offered.

### LIGHTING

Most buildings are close to the street and rely on street lighting or parking lot lights to provide for general illumination and security along the street frontage. Some have modest lighting at doorways, small post lamps, etc. The Hardwick Market and Cumberland Farms have facade lighting or canopy lighting that probably helps with visibility but notably detracts from the character of the area.

Rating: "C" with more than 25% of storefronts lacking effective lighting to enliven the corridor after dark.

### FACADE

There are a number of historic commercial or mixed-use structures in the study area with attractive facades. Several businesses are in interesting historic structures, including Hardwick House of Pizza, the (closed) Whistlestop Café, Susan's Headquarters and Get Up and Dance. Even the two car repair shops are in buildings that reflect Gilbertville's commercial and industrial heyday and contribute to the historic context. Virtually all of them need some repair, repainting, and renovation. Both the Brewery and bakery are in new or renovated buildings with attractive and well-maintained facades. The Hardwick Market & Liquor Store and Cumberland Farms appear to be reasonably well-maintained, but have a strip mall character that doesn't support the public realm.

Rating: "C" with more than 25% of properties requiring significant facade improvements, including power washing, painting and structural enhancements.



*Facade of the now-closed Whistlestop Cafe  
Source: Dodson & Flinker*



## Highlights from the Business Environment

### TYPES OF BUSINESSES IN GILBERTVILLE

There are twelve businesses in Gilbertville. The majority of the businesses are Other Services Excluding Public Administration (NAICS 81) with five businesses followed by Accommodation/Food Services (NAICS 72) with four businesses, followed and Retail Trade (NAICS 44-46) with 2 businesses. There is one Educational Services (NAICS 61) business in the village.

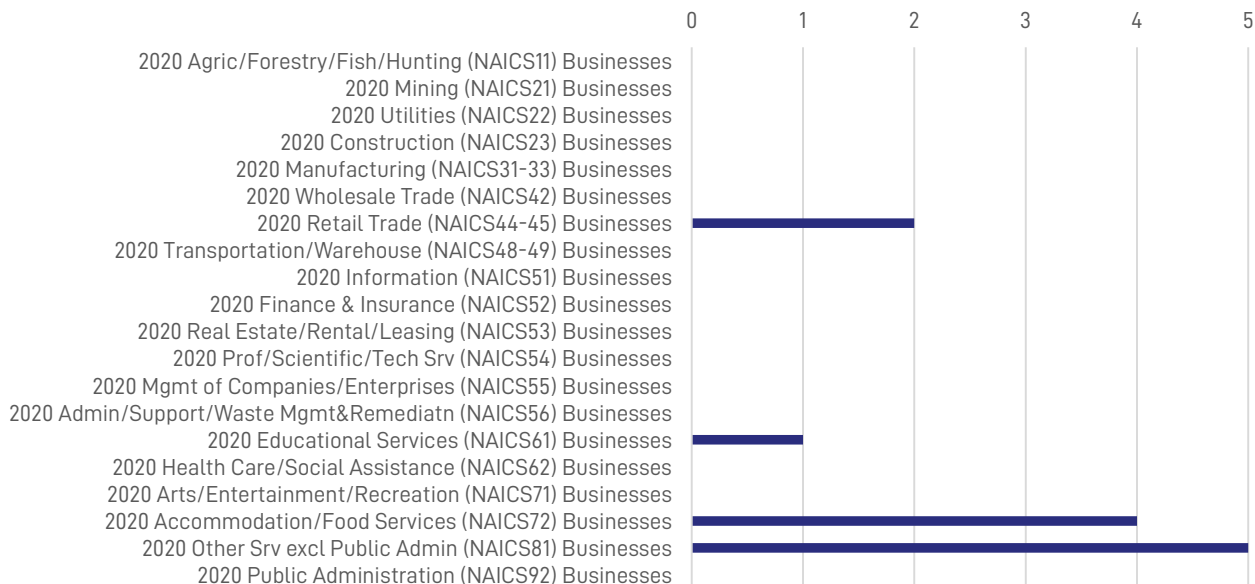
### NODES

Gilbertville is not a "typical" downtown, with a single strong node. Instead it is spread out along about a mile of Route 32. This development pattern was likely driven by the placement of mills and the development of associated housing, stores, and railroad depots, and because the southern portion of the downtown is constrained physically by the Ware River on one side and steep slopes on the other.

Gilbertville contains roughly four nodes. Entering the community from the south on Route 32, the first node is composed of Rose 32 Bread and Lost Towns

Brewing. This node is relatively easy to access for residents who live on the hillside east of Route 32 via Joslyn Road. The second node includes several municipal and civic functions, the Municipal Offices, Gilbertville Library and the Stone Church, which is both a functioning church and home to Friends of Stone Church, which offers events in the church and works to preserve the property. This node also includes Mill #4, the depot (formerly Whistlestop Restaurant), and several active businesses. This node includes the Covered Bridge. This node is accessible for residents who live on the hillside east of Route 32 via High Street. The third small node is on the north side of Route 32 where it intersects with North Street. This node contains the vacant Mill #1, Hardwick House of Pizza, the Post Office and Gagne's Garage. This node includes the viewing platform over the Ware River across the street from Hardwick House of Pizza and the entrance to the Gilbertville Fitness Trail on the east side of Route 32 just north of Hardwick House of Pizza. The fourth node centers around the intersection of Route 32 and Route 32A. This node looks most like a town center. It sits at an intersection of major roads—a hallmark of a typical village center. Two prominent two-story buildings line the intersection: the former

Total Number of Businesses by NAICS Code (July 2021)  
Gilbertville



*Businesses by NAICS Codes in Gilbertville, Hardwick*  
*Source: Dodson & Flinker*



Business Name	Address	NAICS
Lost Towns Brewing	483 Main St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Accommodation/Food Services (NAICS72) Businesses
Rose32 Bread	412 Main St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Accommodation/Food Services (NAICS72) Businesses
Stone Church/ Friends of The Stone Church	283 Main St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Other Services except Public Administration (NAICS81) Businesses
Vacant (former Whistlestop)	248 Main St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	
Hardwick Market & Package Store	232 Main St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Retail Trade (NAICS44-45) Businesses
Route 32 Auto Service	220 Main St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Other Services except Public Administration (NAICS81) Businesses
Hardwick House of Pizza	76 Main St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Accommodation/Food Services (NAICS72) Businesses
Gagne's Garage	31 Spring St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Other Services except Public Administration (NAICS81) Businesses
Rise and Grind Nutrition	14 Prospect St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Accommodation/Food Services (NAICS72) Businesses
Laundromat	14 Prospect St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Other Services except Public Administration (NAICS81) Businesses
Get Up and Dance	14 Hardwick Rd, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Educational Services (NAICS61) Businesses
Regin's Repair	19 Church St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Other Services except Public Administration (NAICS81) Businesses
Cumberland Farms	29 Hardwick Road, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Retail Trade (NAICS44-45) Businesses
Susan's Headquarters	14 Church St, Gilbertville, MA 01031	Other Services except Public Administration (NAICS81) Businesses
Vacant Storefront	1 Mass Route 32	
Vacant Storefront	1 Mass Route 32	

**List of Businesses in Gilbertville, May 2021**

**Source: Dodson & Flinker based on assessors data, field visit, and stakeholder interviews**

hotel which now contains housing owned by Southern Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) and the vacant red building with two storefronts at 1 Mass Route 32. Additional businesses line Route 32, Route 32A and Prospect Street, including Rise and Grind Nutrition, Laundromat, Get Up and Dance, Regin's Repair, Cumberland Farms, and Susan's Headquarters. This node also has public parking.

Distances between the nodes vary from about 650 feet to about 1200 feet. These distances are easily walked, if the environment is safe and appealing and there is a destination worth walking to.

Downtowns function best when they contain a close-knit mix of businesses, civic uses, housing and open spaces. Activities feed off and support each other. A sense of place is created along with a sense of community.

Because Gilbertville is stretched out across four nodes, it is more difficult for the downtown to achieve downtown synergy. That said, Gilbertville's four nodes provide more spaces for new businesses to establish. Recent business openings in Gilbertville seem to indicate that availability of low cost space is the driving factor for where businesses open. The spread of the downtown also maximizes exposure along major roads, although as we described earlier, pass through traffic is likely not a significant driver of business in Gilbertville.

Going forward, Hardwick can work to knit the four nodes into a more recognizable downtown. For example, streetscape improvements and wayfinding can make the downtown look more cohesive and can encourage customers to visit more than one node, expanding the range of businesses they patronize.

## COMMERCIAL SPACES

Gilbertville has ample space for businesses, largely due to the large underutilized mills. Dodson & Flinker estimated ground floor commercial space in Gilbertville using GIS.

We found 13 storefronts, two of which are vacant, both in arguably the most “prime” building in Gilbertville, 1 Mass Route 32, located at the corner of Route 32 and 32A. This building has both a great location and a pleasing facade with traditional storefronts. It reportedly also has a high quality interior with a marble counter and tin ceilings. Filling this space with new businesses or otherwise activating it would go a long way toward improving the downtown. Other communities have used pop-up shops or window displays to mitigate the drag that vacant storefronts can have on a downtown.

There is a small amount of space functioning as offices in Gilbertville. While commercial office space took a major hit during the Covid pandemic, many workers are growing tired of inadequate work from home spaces and we may see a rebound in demand for small offices that can be used for remote work. Attracting additional office uses could help bolster the daytime population of Gilbertville with spillover benefits for restaurants, retail, and service businesses.

There is a massive amount of manufacturing space in Gilbertville. The town has worked for years to find willing tenants for these spaces. A proposed marijuana cultivating and processing facility at the former Mill #1 would be a huge win for Gilbertville, especially if it employs a significant number of people and/or provides retail space (either for marijuana or other businesses).

Gilbertville's Commercial Spaces	
Total No. of Storefronts	13
Total Ground Floor Retail Space	37,070 s.f.
Total Ground Floor Office Space	1,269 s.f.
Total Ground Floor Manufacturing Space	119,274 s.f.

*Source: GIS Analysis and Field Work by Dodson & Flinker*

## COMMERCIAL RENTS

The asking rent for commercial space is a significant determinant of whether it is feasible for a business to establish in a downtown. Asking rents in Gilbertville were collected from Co-Star for the Worcester Market Area, the most relevant geography available.

The average asking rent for ground floor retail space in 2021 is \$14.35/square foot. The average asking rent for ground floor office space in 2021 is \$17.87/square foot. These numbers likely overestimate asking rents in Gilbertville due to the area's limited customer base and the relatively poor quality of most commercial spaces in the downtown.



*Mill #1 in Gilbertville  
Source: Dodson & Flinker*

## Impact of COVID-19 on the Business Environment

### BUSINESS SURVEY ABOUT COVID IMPACTS

A business survey was conducted in March/April 2021 by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to assess the impacts of COVID-19 on the downtowns of communities participating in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program. Five businesses from Gilbertville Participated, about a 40% response rate.

According to the survey, 25% of businesses in Gilbertville are micro-enterprises with less than 5 employees. About 80% of the businesses rent their space, potentially making them vulnerable to rent increases or a lack of investment by landlords. The survey highlighted that in the three years before COVID-19, 80% of the respondents experienced an increase in revenue and 20% of the businesses saw no net profit or loss. This indicates that the local economy was on a good track prior to the pandemic.

The survey revealed that 40% of responding businesses reported a decline in their revenues. About 40% of the businesses had to reduce their operating hours and layoff employees.

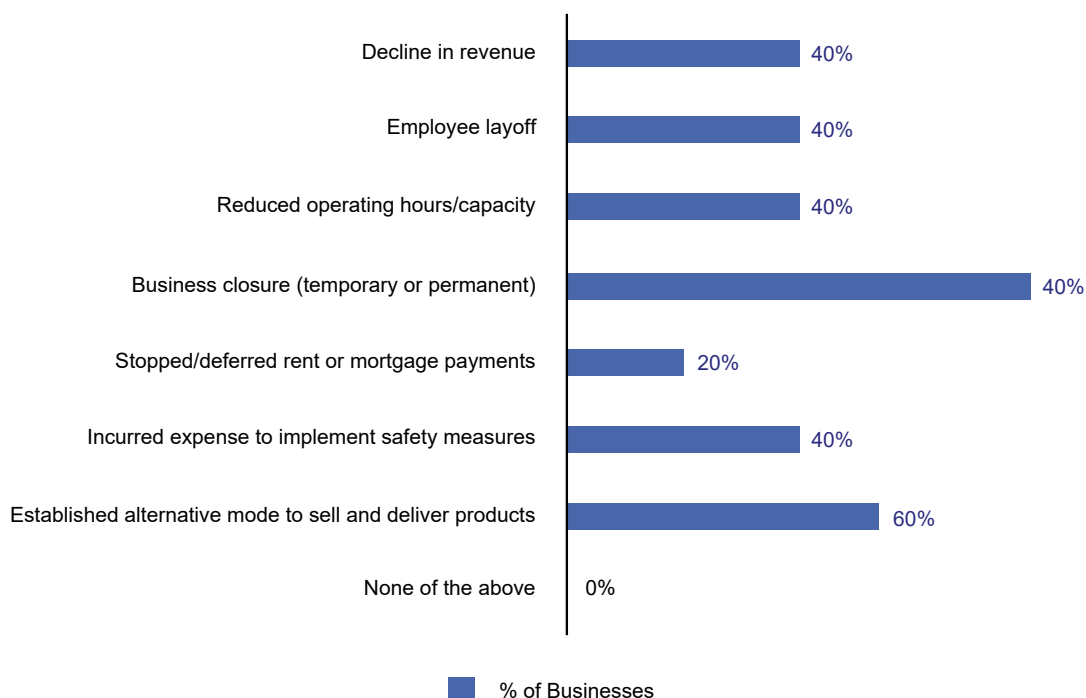
Out of the 10 businesses in Gilbertville, 2 were permanently shuttered due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social distancing decreased the foot traffic in commercial areas, forcing 60% of the businesses to establish an alternative mode to sell and deliver their products. In addition, 20% of the businesses stopped/deferred the rent or mortgage payments to stay afloat and 40% businesses incurred expenses to implement safety measures.

The survey asked what could help businesses recover from the pandemic's impacts. 60% of the respondents expressed interest in shared marketing/advertising initiatives. About 20% of the businesses are interested in setting up an online store or channel. 20% were interested in assistance with setting up a new service such as delivery.

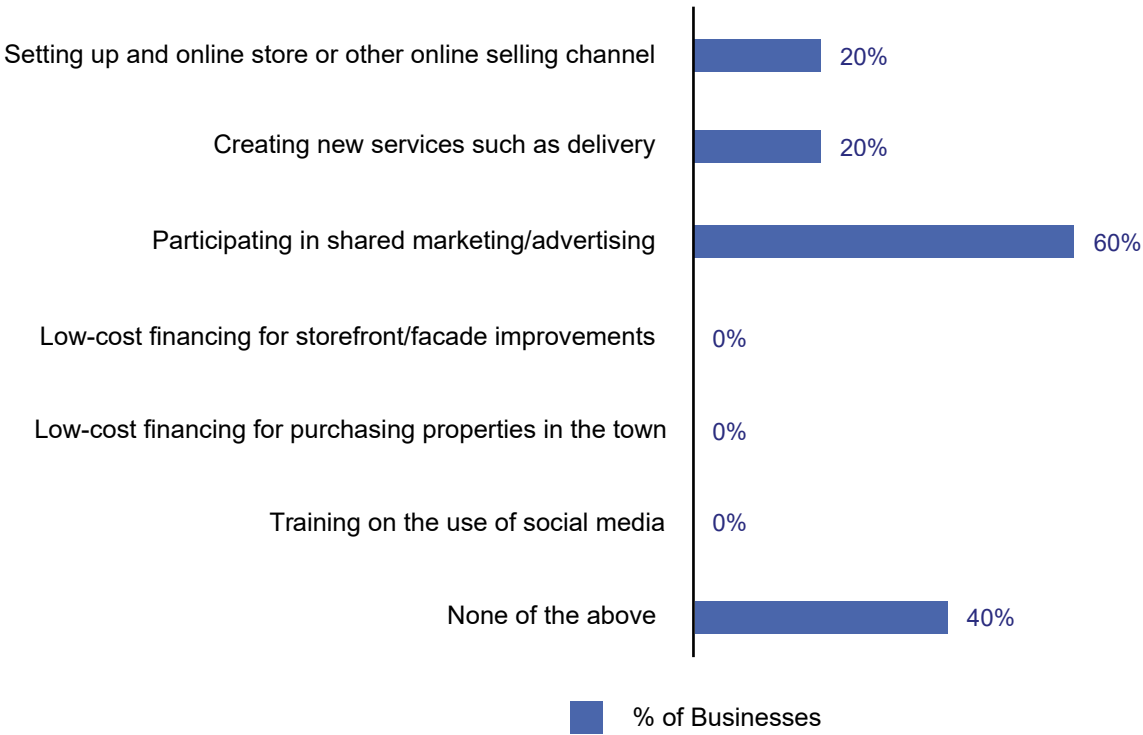
Businesses were also asked about their satisfaction with the downtown. Business owners were generally dissatisfied with the public and private realm, proximity to other businesses and access for customers and employees.

### COVID-19 Impacts Reported by Businesses



*COVID-19 Impacts Reported by Businesses in Gilbertville, Hardwick*  
*Source: Massachusetts DHCD Rapid Recovery Plan Program - Business Survey Report*

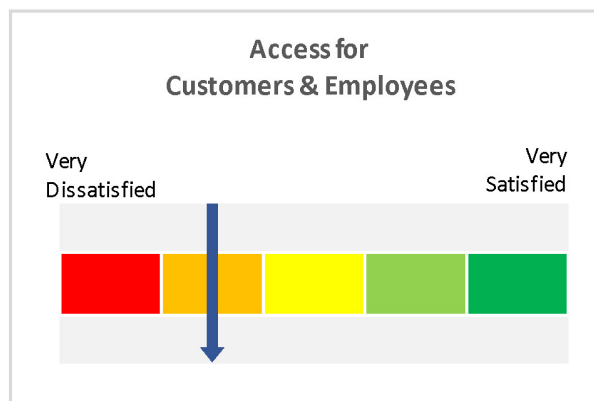
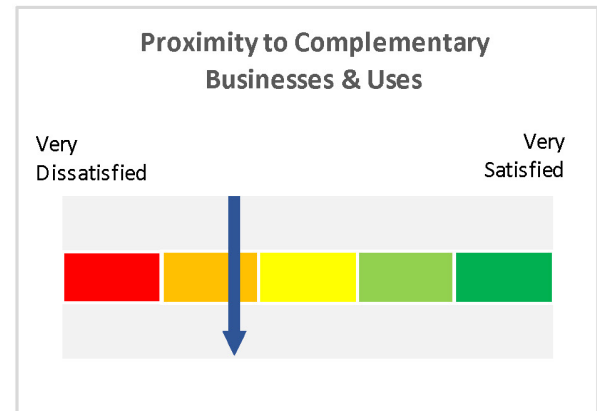
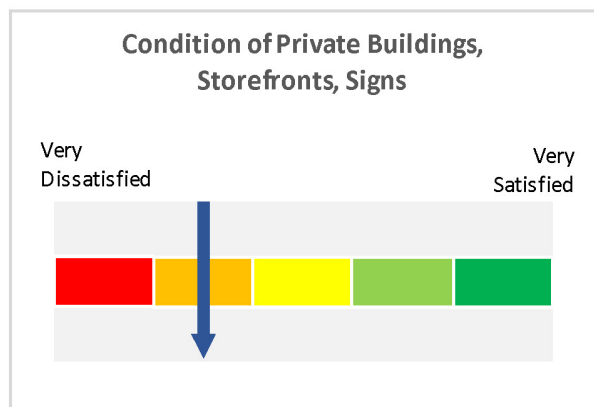
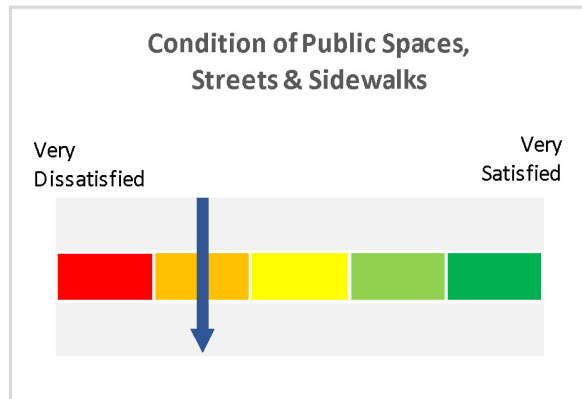
## Businesses Interested in Receiving Assistance



*Businesses Interested in Receiving Assistance in Gilbertville, Hardwick*  
*Source: Massachusetts DHCD Rapid Recovery Plan Program - Business Survey Report*



## Business Satisfaction with the Commercial District



## MEASURING THE IMPACT OF COVID: MEALS TAXES

One measure of the impact of Covid is the receipt of meals taxes in a community. Meals taxes provide a window into the revenue declines of local food service businesses, which were hit particularly hard by the pandemic, especially in the early days.

Data for Meal Tax liability for establishments in the town of Hardwick show a steep year over year drop

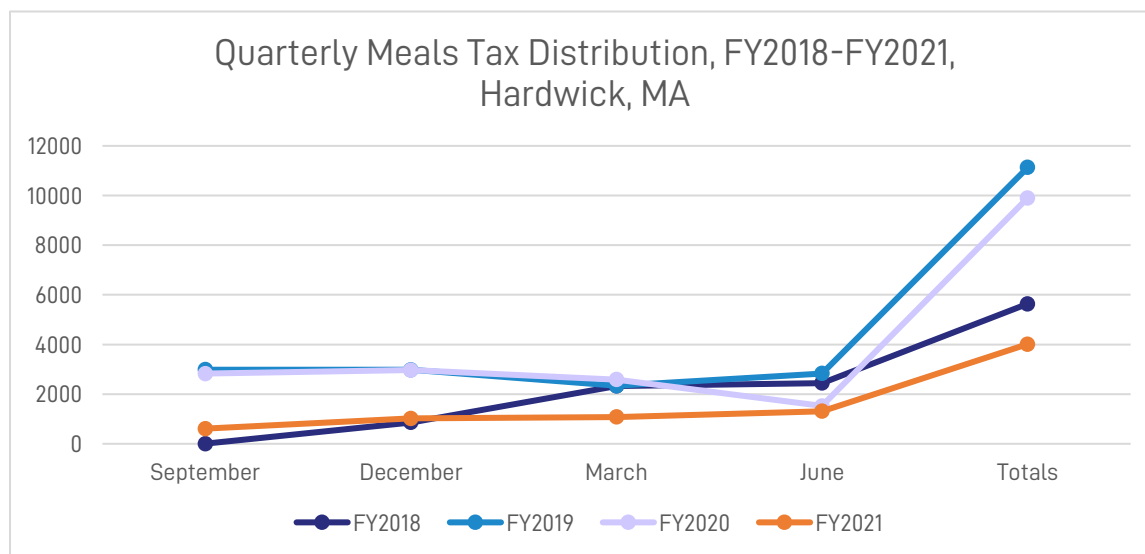
between March 2020 and September 2020. The worst month was April 2020, when revenue was 17% of the previous year. Other months vary between about a 20% and 30% of the equivalent pre-pandemic month.

Quarterly meal tax distributions to Hardwick show that revenues remained lower in 2021 than in 2020, except for the quarter ending in June 2021.

	Meals 2018		Meals 2019		Meals 2020	
Month	Tax Liability	Number of Returns	Tax Liability	Number of Returns	Tax Liability	Number of Returns
January			689.86	10	752.04	9
February			800.96	10	830.05	9
March			1,015.83	10	532.27	9
April			928.80	10	158.59	9
May			1,036.14	10	201.97	9
June			1,026.77	10	192.10	9
July	857.22	10	762.85	9	210.42	10
August	1,068.79	10	1,087.67	9	233.98	10
September	1,009.79	10	927.28	9	303.53	10
October	922.00	10	992.50	9		
November	785.60	10	930.25	9		
December	923.70	10	858.69	9		

*Meal Tax Liability for businesses in Hardwick July 2018-September 2020. The meal tax rate in Hardwick is .75%. Blank cells in the table indicate that data was not available.*

*Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue*



*Meals tax distribution to Hardwick by quarter FY2018 through FY2021*

*Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue*

### IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES

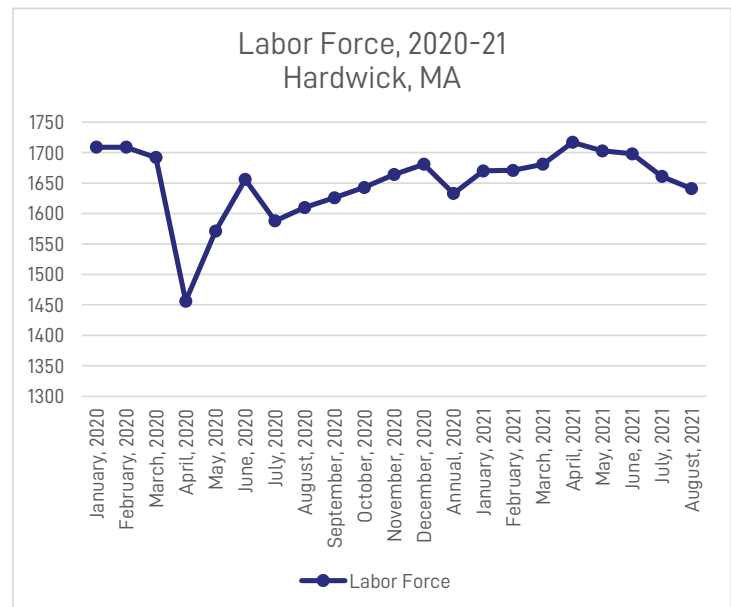
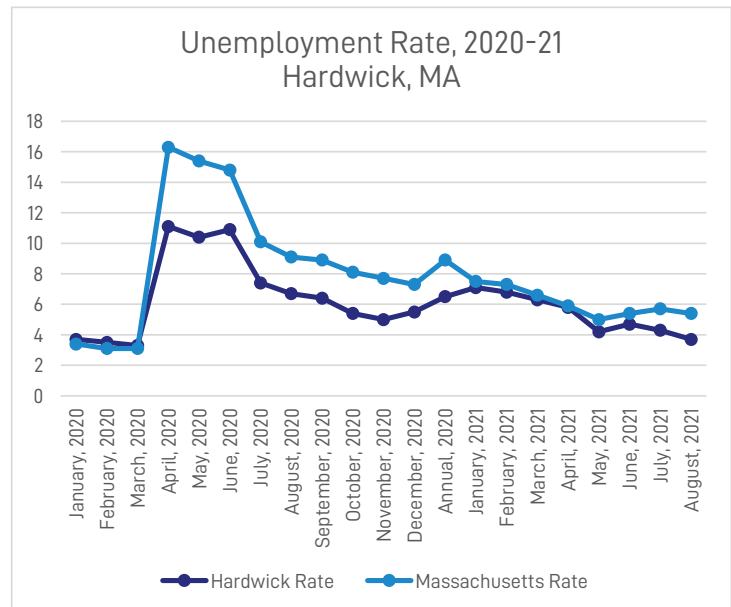
The Bureau of Labor Statistics evaluated the reduction in employment for the 343 largest counties in the United States between March 2020 and March 2021. Worcester County's 6.5% drop in employment ranked 75th out of the 343 largest counties in the country.

In Hardwick, the unemployment rate rose sharply from 3.3 in March 2020 to its peak of 11.1% in April 2020. It has generally fallen since then, with a rise between November 2020 and February 2021 during the second major wave of COVID in Massachusetts. The current unemployment rate in August 2021 was 3.7%, the same rate as January of 2020.

The size of the labor force in Hardwick dropped precipitously in April 2020, then quickly rebounded over the next two months. After a drop the next month (July 2020), the labor force generally grew, though it has been shrinking since April of 2021. The labor force was 1641, 95% of its peak (1709) in January and February 2020.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows the varying impacts of the pandemic across industry supersectors. The dataset includes changes in the employment and wages over the first year of the pandemic. Between March 2020 and March 2021, Worcester County saw increased employment in Natural Resources and Mining and Construction. All other supersectors had a decrease in employment, ranging from a -1.6% decline in Professional and Business Services to a -21% decline in Leisure and Hospitality employment. Data for several sectors was unavailable. Over the same year, average weekly wages increased across all supersectors, except for Natural Resources and Mining which had a -10.9% decline and Manufacturing which was essentially flat at -.1%. The largest wage increases were in Professional and Business Services (14.6%), Service Producing (8.6%), and Financial Activities (8.5%). Industries with the largest declines in employment saw wage increases of 4.4% (Leisure and Hospitality) and 9% (Other Services) likely showing the need for employers to raise wages to rehire workers lost during the pandemic.

As has often been mentioned, the pandemic hit the most vulnerable populations hardest. Generally high wage industries saw less job loss and wages had rapid growth. It is very likely that the pandemic had a disproportionate impact on residents of Gilbertville.



## Private Establishments: Employment and Wages, Quarter 1, 2021

### Worcester County

	Number of establishments Private Q1 2021	Employment Private Mar 2021	12 month percent change in employment Private Mar 2020-Mar 2021 (%)	12 month change in employment Private Mar 2020-Mar 2021 (#)	Location quotient Private Mar 2021	Average weekly wage Private Q1 2021	12 month percent change in average weekly wage Private Mar 2020-Mar 2021 (%)	12 month change in average weekly wage Private Mar 2020-Mar 2021 (#)
Natural Resources and Mining	120	1,183	4.10%	47	0.31	\$704	-10.90%	(\$86)
Construction	2,416	14,942	1.70%	248	0.9	\$1,426	3.30%	\$45
Professional and Business Services	3,628	36,056	-1.60%	-582	0.75	\$1,833	14.60%	\$234
Goods-Producing	3,429	50,002	-2.50%	-1,294	1.02	\$1,579	0.40%	\$6
Financial Activities	1,552	15,203	-2.90%	-447	0.79	\$2,218	8.50%	\$173
Trade,Transportation, and Utilities	4,039	61,272	-2.90%	-1,823	0.98	\$1,032	2.60%	\$26
Manufacturing	893	33,877	-4.50%	-1,589	1.19	\$1,675	-0.10%	(\$2)
Education and Health Services	9,306	78,599	-6.70%	-5,679	1.49	\$1,008	2.20%	\$22
Service-Providing	22,693	226,858	-6.90%	-16,852	0.99	\$1,171	8.60%	\$93
Information	367	3,253	-9.70%	-350	0.51	\$1,943	3.30%	\$62
Other Services	1,813	8,382	-15.70%	-1,562	0.9	\$725	9.00%	\$60
Leisure and Hospitality	1,988	24,093	-21.00%	-6,409	0.81	\$431	4.40%	\$18
Public Administration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unclassified	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total, all industries	26,122	276,860	-6.20%	-18,146	1	\$1,245	7.00%	\$81

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

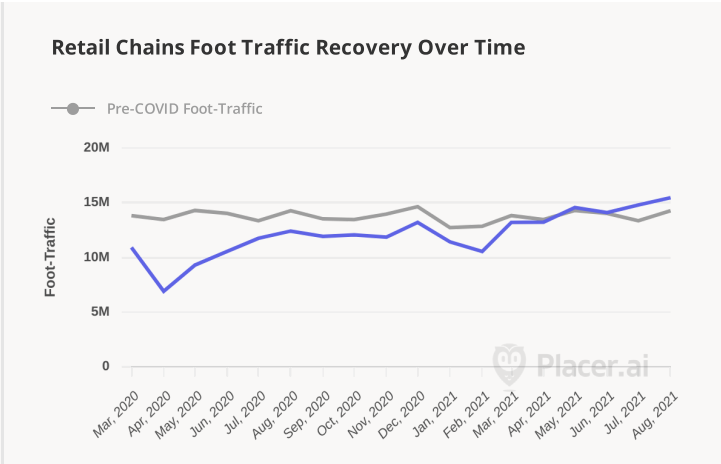


**PANDEMIC RECOVERY ACCORDING TO LOCATION DATA**

Placer.AI is a provider of mobile phone location data. Using proprietary methods, they created Covid recovery dashboards for each county in the United States by extracting information about foot traffic at various retail chains. The data should be taken with a grain of salt both because the underlying methodology is not publicly available and because it focuses on retail chains which have a different business model than most businesses in Gilbertville. Nonetheless, the data provides an interesting perspective on Covid recovery.

Their dashboard for Worcester County shows that, as of August 2021, foot traffic at major retail chains had recovered to just over pre-pandemic levels (108%). The recovery varies by store type, with Medical and Health, Spa & Beauty, Groceries, Superstores and Dining having the largest recovery, while Electronics, Office Supplies, Hotels/Casinos, and Leisure lag. Electronics, and Office Supplies likely show the impacts of customers shifting to online purchasing, while Hotels/Casinos and Leisure indicate that many people are still unwilling to undertake higher risk activities.

For Gilbertville, the implication is that businesses providing essential goods and services appear to be faring best during the Covid recovery. To speed recovery from the pandemic, economic development for Gilbertville should focus on essential local goods and services businesses. Businesses that are likely to fare well include those based in human relationships like spas and beauty or medical care; businesses where proximity and convenience is a selling point, like car repair or a convenience store; and businesses that provide a place-based experience that cannot be provided through Amazon, like dining. In addition, it appears that businesses with unique offerings can thrive in Gilbertville.



Category	Recovery
Apparel	95%
Dining	107%
Fitness	94%
Groceries	112%
Home Improvement	109%
Hotel/Casinos	84%
Leisure	86%
Medical & Health	128%
Shop & Service	107%
Spa & Beauty	126%
Superstores	116%
Office Supplies	89%
Electronics	52%

Sources (top, bottom): Placer.ai



## Highlights from Admin Capacity

### PARTNERS IN RAPID RECOVERY FOR GILBERTVILLE

Gilbertville does not have a merchants group, business improvement district, or other district management entity. Businesses in the district have diverse interests and many have well established customer bases, so they may not see a compelling reason to collaborate to improve the area. In addition, many businesses are struggling with impacts of Covid and do not have spare time or money to invest in improving Gilbertville.

The Town of Hardwick's has limited staff who are all maxed out with the normal job duties.

The town has active volunteers, many of whom have served on several Town boards for decades. These volunteers too have more demands than they have time. Participants in the RRP plan described the need for staff and volunteers to be very strategic about what they invest time into.

The Covid pandemic put extreme stress on the town government and its staff. The need to respond to the pandemic resulted in many town initiatives falling behind. The Town Administrator that worked through the first year of the pandemic resigned in late April of 2021 and a new Town Administrator started in July of 2021. This left the town further behind in its efforts. The new Town Administrator has ample work to catch up on work that was deferred as a result of the pandemic, including administering a number of significant grants.

There are number of competent organizations that have an interest in Gilbertville and could help in its Covid recovery.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. The regional planning agency for Hampshire and Hampden Counties has long assisted Hardwick with Community Development Block Grant applications and administration. This has resulted in a number of improvements in the area including streetscape improvements, the construction of the town parking near the intersection of 32 and 32A.

Central Mass Regional Planning Commission has a full complement of planners with a wide range of expertise. CMRPC recently completed a strategic plan for Gilbertville and was an active partner in this project. Staff from CMRPC have offered to help Hardwick implement the recommendations of this plan.

Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation is a natural partner for Covid business recovery in Gilbertville. "Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation is a member-based, non-profit organization committed to economic development and helping small businesses grow and prosper. Serving the 15 towns of the Quaboag Region and Southern Worcester County, QVCDC and its partner organization, Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation (QVBAC) offer many programs and services with a focus on community and economic development and supporting small business in our region." The town could develop a stronger partnership with the CDC.

Friends of Stone Church. According to their website, "The Friends of the Stone Church is a public charitable corporation and community group organized in 2015, and open to all people. In partnership with the Hardwick Historical Society, and in collaboration with the congregation of the Trinitarian Congregational Church. Our mission is to preserve and protect the Gilbertville Stone Church and to facilitate its use by and service to the community. Our vision is to use this historic landmark as a place of cultural and community enrichment. Working collaboratively with individuals and with private and public organizations, we seek to improve the lives of those in our community and region." The Friends of the Stone Church expressed interest in the RRP and provided background information.

East Quabbin Land Trust. East Quabbin Land Trust has been a key partner in many efforts to improve Gilbertville and to preserve land throughout Hardwick. They recently were awarded a MassTrails Grant to build a portion of the rail trail from Ware to just shy of the Covered Bridge. A similar application to MassTrails in partnership with Hardwick was not awarded for FY2021. East Quabbin Land Trust also led the creation of the Gilbertville Fitness Trail. Staff from East Quabbin Land Trust provided valuable input on the RRP Plan.

Eagle Hill School. The Eagle Hill School has an interest in the stability and attractiveness of the Town of Hardwick. They partnered with the Town on a significant sewer upgrade that is ongoing.

Worcester Regional of Commerce. The largest chamber of Commerce in New England has members in Hardwick, but there is no formal affiliate chamber serving Hardwick as is there is for some of its neighbors. For example, the Brookfields are part of



395 Corridor Blackstone Valley Sturbridge Townships Wachusett Worcester

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HOME / ARTICLES

## 12 Hours in Hardwick Massachusetts

One of the most picturesque towns in Central Mass, Hardwick is worth the trip for sightseeing, local wine, and farm to table cuisine.

A page featuring Hardwick on the website for Discover Central Mass

Source: <https://www.discovercentralma.org/articles/12-hours-in-hardwick-massachusetts/>

REGION  
Sturbridge Townships

TOWNS  
Hardwick  
West Brookfield

the Central Mass South Chamber of Commerce.

Discover Central Mass. A membership-based organization whose mission is, "To market Central Massachusetts as a competitive destination for travel and tourism; as well as conventions, meetings, and events. Worcester, which is located in the center of the region, is the state's second-largest city, and the second-largest city in New England." Discover Central Mass has a high quality website promoting tourism, including some attractions in Hardwick.

Central Mass Grown. A non-profit organization promoting local food and increasing the profitability of farms in Central Mass. It has a web-directory of food businesses, including several in broader Gilbertville.

### REGULATIONS

A recent review of Gilbertville's zoning by CMRPC for the Gilbertville Strategic Plan made several recommendations to facilitate housing and economic viability in the downtown. Their recommendations include:

- Reduce minimum lot sizes for buildings structure and uses
- Reduce frontage requirements
- Reduce parking requirements for commercial uses and multi-family dwellings
- Adjust dimensional requirements to align with multi family developments with 3 or more units

Local participants in the RRP expressed that MassDOT's prohibition on on-street parking on Route 32 is a barrier to business success in Gilbertville.

Many parcels and structures in Gilbertville were established before cars were invented and do not have adequate off-street parking. On-street parking is a tried and true method for providing parking in historic village center. In addition to making efficient use of pavement, on-street parking can slow traffic and buffer pedestrians on sidewalks. Design plans for MassDOT improvements to Route 32 do not appear to have added on-street parking. Instead, bike shoulders have been added and sidewalks have been widened where feasible. It therefore appears that on-street parking is unlikely to be allowed in the near future. MassDOT's jurisdiction on Route 32 ends just north of the Hardwick Market and Package Store. North of that point the town could allow on-street parking.

Participants in the RRP did not mention other regulations that are a major barrier to Covid recovery.

### TOWN WEBSITE

The Town's website is a key tool for communicating about projects for Covid recovery and other town activities. It is also a major opportunity to promote local businesses. The website has organizational and graphic design issues that make it difficult to find information. Updating the Town website would be a worthwhile endeavor. In particular, we recommend cleaning up the front page (potentially by establishing a page dedicated to News and Alerts), making it easier to find strategic planning documents that guide the town's work, and improving the "Community Page" by additional information about the profiled entities and organizing profiles into topical groups.

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## Project Recommendations



# Build a Rail Trail

Category		Public Realm
Location		Gilbertville, Hardwick
Origin		RRP Advisory Committee
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe		Medium Term (5 to 10 years) - Planning and Implementation in 5 years, followed by on-going maintenance.
Risk		<p>Low Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of funding and political support</li> <li>• Local opposition due to high volume of crowds</li> </ul>
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in number of visitors and tourism revenue</li> <li>• Increase in pedestrian and bicycle activity</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources		<p>Town of Hardwick, Town of Ware, East Quabbin Land Trust, local businesses, and residents.</p> <p>Funding Source:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rails-to-Trails Conservancy grants</li> <li>• MassTrails Grant Program</li> <li>• Recreational Trail Program by the Federal Highway Administration of the Department of Transportation</li> </ul>

## Diagnostic

The Mass Central Rail Trail starts from the junction of Route 32 and 32A in Gilbertville and continues to run parallelly along Route 32 before entering the Town of Wheelwright. The Hardwick-New Braintree section of the trail is 2.7 miles long.

The East Quabbin Land Trust received \$200,000 from the MassTrails Grant Program to construct a 1.8 mile long, 10 foot wide paved path of Phase 2 of the Mass Central Rail Trail in Ware and Hardwick. The new trail begins from the north of Church Street in Ware, runs parallel to the Ware River, and ends at the Covered Bridge in Gilbertville. The grant will cover a gap of 3.5 miles, connecting the Grenville Park in Ware with the Gilbertville Fitness Trail.

Building a new rail trail will increase the number of visitors and promote local businesses and other key destinations of the town, helping them recover from the impacts of Covid. It will also increase biking and walking in the study area, improving public health.

## Action Item

Key actions:

- Define project goals and scope; build local support
- Conduct an initial assessment to connect the new and existing rail trail
- Identify wayfinding, parking, and mobility requirements along the trail
- Collaborate with the East Quabbin Land Trust to develop plans and other project documents
- Hire a consultant
- Contracting and implementation
- Ongoing maintenance and monitoring

## Process

1. Establish an advisory committee composed of Town staff and officials, East Quabbin Land Trust members, local businesses, and residents.
2. Hold Advisory Committee meetings to:
  - a. Identify key project goals and basic project scope.
  - b. Identify potential parking lot locations
  - c. Identify funding sources
  - d. Develop a process for hiring a consultant
  - e. Conduct outreach to build support for the project
3. Hire a consultant
4. Develop concept plans
5. Conduct additional outreach to business owners, the Town, residents, and other stakeholders to obtain feedback on the site plan
6. Hold preliminary discussions with permitting agencies

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**Process**

7. Develop cost and material estimates
8. Finalize the trail route
9. Identify wayfinding, parking, and mobility requirements based on an estimate number of visitors
10. Obtain land and/or access easements, if needed.
11. Undertake procurement and contracting.
12. Manage implementation.
13. Develop a guidance document for future improvements, if necessary.



## Best Practice

# Building a Rail Trail



Location: Various

Expanding regional networks to promote alternative transportation

A growing number of communities and regions in the US have repurposed deactivated railroad beds as multipurpose public paths, known as "rail trails". The existing raised beds can create conditions for a flat or gently sloping pathway that connects communities along scenic corridors, and paved rail trails can accommodate walking, jogging, biking, and other modes of transportation, and in many cases are ADA accessible.

The following two case studies of rail trails in the Capitol Region of Albany, NY and in Greater Boston, demonstrate how a combination of resident advocacy, state and non-profit funding, and local regulation and maintenance help launch successful rail trails.



### Albany County Helderberg-Hudson Rail Trail

The Delaware and Hudson Railway, which passed through Albany, NY, became dormant in the early 1990s, and the tracks were removed in 2004. The railway land was initially purchased by Albany County in 2010 with funding (\$700,000) from Scenic Hudson, a non-profit organization focusing on environmental advocacy and conservation, and a grant from the New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation. In 2011, a group of volunteer trail advocates established the Friends of the Rail Trail (FORT) as a committee of the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy (MHLC) to create a multi-use trail that supports activities such as walking, biking, educational tours, and public art. The FORT advocacy group has over 50 local volunteers, also known as the Trail Ambassadors, who help to monitor the trail conditions and prevent any potential hazards. The Trail Ambassadors also help with regular light maintenance and meet the trail users to understand their experience.

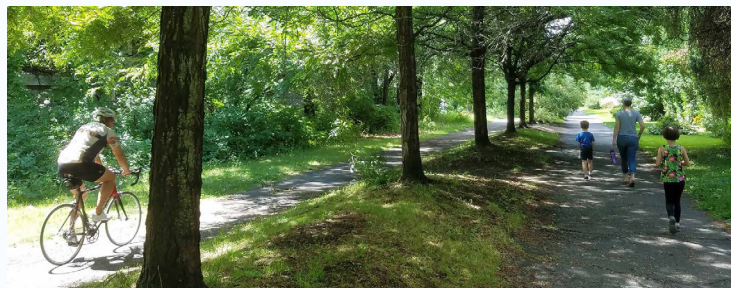
In 2018, the Albany County rail trail received a grant from the Hudson River Valley Greenway to help trail users with wayfinding, create a brand identity, promote awareness about the history of the rail line, and boost community support. One of the key takeaways of the rail trail project is to have a dedicated leadership from the beginning, to build strategic partnerships, and ensure public support to maintain and expand the trail. The Trail Ambassador program, involving local volunteers, fosters a sense of ownership and promotes community engagement.

The rail trail management plans to add information kiosks, signs, benches, restrooms, beautification improvements, and a public park in a property adjacent to the trail. In addition, there are plans to connect the Albany County Trail to the Mohawk-Hudson-Hike-Bike Trail on, forming a link on the Empire State Trail to connect Albany to Buffalo.



***A live music event organized by The Friends of the Rail Trail (FORT) at the Albany County Rail Trail***

***Source: Trail Management Best Practices: Case Studies in Creating Successful Community Trails***



***Biking and walking routes at the Albany County Rail Trail***

***Source: Trail Management Best Practices: Case Studies in Creating Successful Community Trails***



***Signage developed with funding from the Hudson River Valley Greenway***

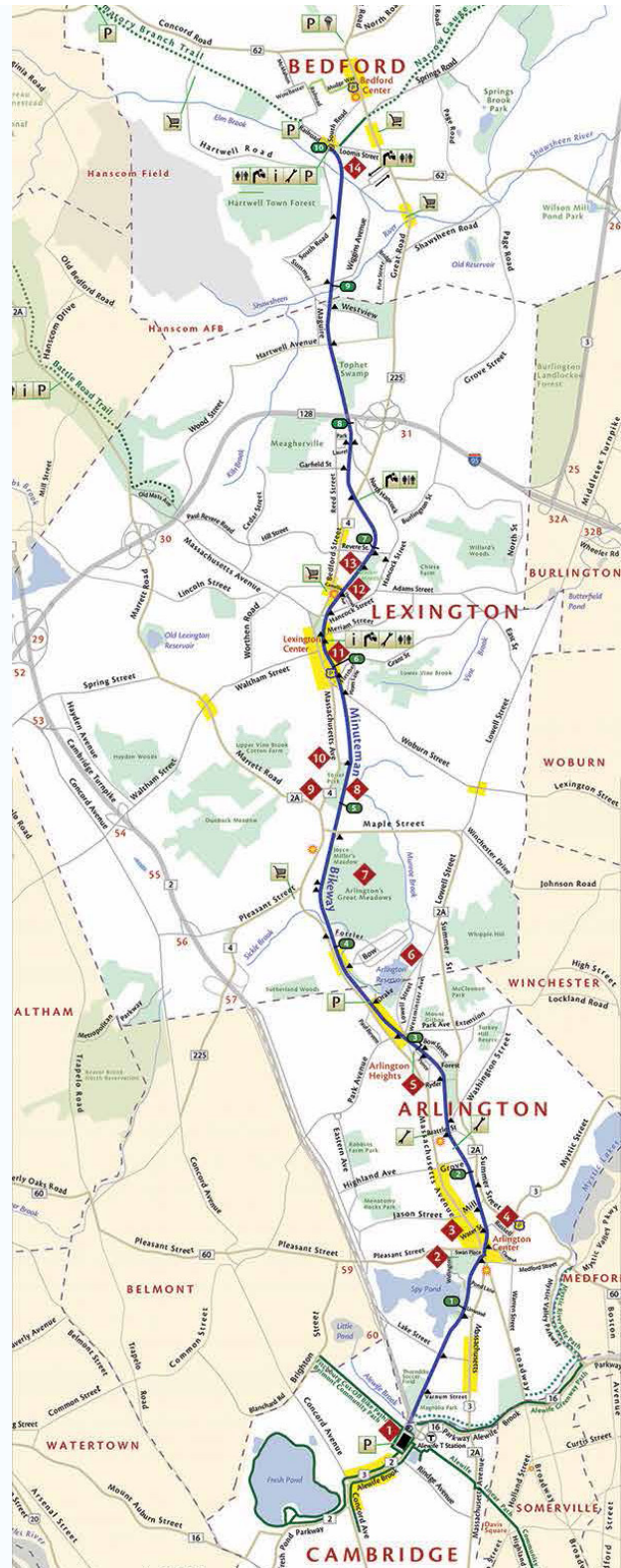
***Source: Trail Management Best Practices: Case Studies in Creating Successful Community Trails***

## Minuteman Bikeway Trail

In 1981, all rail service along the Lexington and West Cambridge corridor and the Middlesex Central corridor was discontinued. There were plans to expand the current MBTA Red Line Commuter subway along the old rail line route, but due to local opposition rejected this proposal, and the trail advocates proposed an alternative idea to convert the rail line into a bicycle trail. There was some opposition to this idea too because the bicycle trail would invite large crowds in the backyards of residential properties adjoining the old rail line. However, the perseverance of the local trail advocates and grassroots organization efforts got the approval for the construction of a multi-use trail in 1991.

The Minuteman Bikeway Trail was completed in 1993, connecting the City of Cambridge to the North of Arlington, Lexington, and the Town of Bedford. The trail provides space for biking, walking, jogging, and inline skating. According to a 2015 study, the trail has about 2 million visitors per year, making it one of the busiest rail trails in the country.




The trail is divided into three segments (Bedford-Lexington-Arlington) which are individually managed by their respective municipalities. Each town has local Bike Committees (advocacy/volunteer groups) that help to identify issues along the trail (passing through their local jurisdiction) and request assistance from the Town Officials. The Department of Public Works (DPW) offices and a group of local volunteers are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the trail. In Bedford, the local DPW office handles trail maintenance and provides funding for improvements. The Friends of the Lexington Bikeways group, - a nonprofit organization, raises money for improvements along the Lexington portion of the trail, in addition to the Lexington Bikeway Advisory Committee, which provides funding for Lexington and Arlington.



**Minuteman Bikeway Trail Route, Boston, Massachusetts**

**Source: Trail Management Best Practices: Case Studies in Creating Successful Community Trails**

# Create a wayfinding system

Category		Public Realm
Location		Gilbertville, Hardwick
Origin		RRP Advisory Committee
Budget		Low Budget (Under \$50,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Low Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of funding, political will, and staffing resources</li> <li>• Jurisdictional challenges due to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) ownership of Main Street in the southern portion of the village.</li> </ul>
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in number of visitors and spending at various businesses and destinations in the village</li> <li>• Utilization of parking</li> <li>• Increase in the time spent by visitors in the village</li> <li>• Increase in pedestrian and bicycle activity</li> <li>• Visitor and resident satisfaction, and opinions about the ease of navigating through the commercial areas</li> <li>• Improved connectivity to the village's points of interest and businesses</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources		<p>Town of Hardwick, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, local businesses, and community organizations.</p> <p>Funding Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</li> <li>• Massachusetts Downtown Initiative</li> <li>• Massachusetts Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program</li> <li>• MassDOT Complete Streets program: The Town of Hardwick would need to initiate this process and can update their prioritization plan every three years.</li> <li>• Chapter 90 funding</li> <li>• MassWorks funding (in conjunction with any future development projects in Gilbertville)</li> <li>• Local resident/business contributions</li> </ul>



## WAYFINDING OPPORTUNITIES

The existing green space with monuments has space for a variety of street improvements that could help tie together Gilbertville's nodes. Wayfinding could direct visitors to points of interest along North St and indicate that the center continues to the south and north.

Direct visitors to the covered Bridge and the future rail trail. Direct people arriving from Bridge St to key destinations along the north and south of the Town.

Add wayfinding along the Main Street directing visitors to key destinations (The Stone Church, historic covered bridge, the Gilbertville Library, municipal offices, and local businesses).

Add directional signs from main roads to entrance to public parking lot.

Traffic island has a cluster of faded and inconsistent signage. Add wayfinding signs, after the MassDOT intersection improvements.

Add signs or pavement markings to indicate the time required to walk from one destination to another.

At Gateways: Add streetscape improvements, signage, banners, etc. to indicate that one has entered a village center

Install signs at the intersection of Route 9 and Route 32 that promote Gilbertville businesses



Gateway

Gateways

Navigation Decision Point

Encourage Continued Exploration/Link



## Diagnostic

Gilbertville has a range of businesses dispersed along Main Street (designated as Massachusetts Route 32). Most businesses have adequate and functional signage. However, there are limited street signs to identify key assets and destinations within the village and the surrounding area.

Existing signage indicate locations of Hardwick Center and the Gilbertville Public Parking Lot. Signage is lacking at the gateways of Gilbertville to indicate to travelers that they are entering the village. The historic covered bridge over the Ware River is a prominent feature of the village, but there is inadequate signage to draw in visitors.

Concerns from local businesses and organizations include difficulty in finding public parking on Main Street. A comprehensive and consistent wayfinding system would allow visitors to explore new places, increase revenues for local businesses, and improve utilization of parking spaces.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, two out of the ten existing businesses closed, and two new businesses have opened. The wayfinding signage program will help visitors and residents to patronize the various businesses within the village. It will also encourage pedestrians and bicyclists to stop in Gilbertville and enjoy the local businesses, historic sites, and recreational resources.

MassDOT is currently undertaking a design project that will resurface and upgrade portions of Route 32 and Route 32A through Gilbertville. This project will provide upgrades to existing pavement markings and pedestrian facilities within the state's jurisdictional limits.

Discussions with Town staff and the plan facilitator indicated that there will be some level of short-term economic investment related to the reuse of industrial mill buildings in the center of Gilbertville along the Ware River, which could increase demand for pedestrian facilities and local area businesses throughout the village.

## Action Item

The process for developing a wayfinding signage program and identifying improvements to the pedestrian and bicycle environment should involve community stakeholders, public officials, and regional entities (e.g., chambers of commerce, historic commissions, etc.).

1. A steering committee should be developed through the Town of Hardwick. Individuals from the groups indicated in the "Partners & Resources" list above should be considered for inclusion on the committee and one person should be appointed as the chairperson and point of contact.
2. Conduct an existing conditions assessment of Gilbertville's needs to help facilitate the planning process. This can be conducted in-house or through a consulting firm depending on staff availability. The assessment should include an inventory of existing signage and should identify deficiencies that should be addressed. The findings of the assessment should be summarized in a memorandum or a report.
3. Develop a list of conceptual ideas for implementation. This document will present some recommendations in the next section that can be incorporated into this step of the process.

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**Action Item**

4. Select preferred concepts to move forward into the design phase.
5. Develop conceptual plans and supporting documentation with an appropriate level of detail that can be used for securing funding through grant applications or other funding mechanisms. This step will vary based on the level of funding and the funding sources that will be pursued.
6. Determine how the project will be funded. Potential funding sources will be provided in a later section of this document.

**Process**

1. Establish an advisory committee composed of business owners, Town staff and officials, community members, and partner organizations.
2. Hold Advisory Committee meetings to:
  - a. Identify key project goals and basic project scope.
  - b. Identify long-term funding sources.
  - c. Develop a process for hiring a consultant.
  - d. Conduct outreach to build support for the project.
3. Hire a consultant
4. In consultation with the Advisory Committee:
  - a. Map existing circulation patterns.
  - b. Identify key destinations that need additional visibility
  - c. Identify key locations where navigational decisions are made
  - d. Identify locations where visitors will need encouragement to continue exploring
  - e. Shape Gilbertville's "brand" and plan for how wayfinding can reinforce it
5. Develop concept designs for branding and wayfinding improvements
5. Create a sign location plan and message schedule (the content on each sign)
6. Conduct additional outreach to business owners, the Town, community members, and other stakeholders to obtain feedback on the concept designs and alternatives.
7. Hold preliminary discussions with permitting agencies.
8. Finalize the design, number, size, content, and location of the wayfinding elements.
9. Finalize designs. Develop specifications and working drawings. Develop a guidance document for future improvements to the wayfinding and branding system, if necessary.
10. Develop a vendor list and cost estimates in collaboration with local fabricators and installers.
11. Undertake procurement and hire a vendor.

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## Process

12. Obtain permits, as needed.
13. Implement the wayfinding elements.
14. Monitor how well signs are working by measuring performance indicators.
15. Update locations and integrate new elements based on the response to the installations.

## Recommendations to consider

A successful wayfinding program should be implemented to enhance the district's character and visibility and promote local businesses and natural and historical resources. The wayfinding program should look to improve and highlight existing assets within Gilbertville by developing a branding program that aligns with the needs and wishes of the community and applying that brand to elements that will drive visitors and residents to local businesses and other points of interest.

Through this process, the village should become a more attractive place to attract visitors, enhance the walkability for pedestrians, improve parking accommodations, and promote local businesses and village assets for motorists that are traveling through the area.

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 Gilbertville.

Recommendations have been developed for the implementation of a wayfinding signage and branding program and are described below:

1. Develop a brand through the steering committee. Gilbertville has a history of being a mill village along the Ware River, which may be considered for incorporation into the branding for the village. The steering committee should solicit input from residents and business owners to develop a vision for a specific brand that can be incorporated into wayfinding elements throughout the village.
2. Gateway signage should be placed at the entrances to Gilbertville along Main Street (Route 32) northbound, south of Gilbertville, along Lower Road (Route 32) southbound, east of Gilbertville, and along Hardwick Road (Route 32A) southbound, north of Gilbertville. These three roadways comprise the major through roadways that intersect within the village center.
3. Consideration should be given to placing additional guide signage along Route 9 in both directions which serves as a major east-west corridor through Massachusetts and is located approximately 3 miles south of Gilbertville. (Continued)

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## Recommendations to consider

3. Motorists traveling along this route are not alerted that Gilbertville exists only three miles to the north. Gilbertville is in proximity to the Brookfields to the east and the Town of Ware to the south and additional signage may attract visitors to the village. Along with additional guide signs, specific points of interest should be considered for inclusion in any signage on Route 9. This recommendation will likely need MassDOT involvement and approval.
4. Wayfinding signage should be installed along Main Street, Hardwick Road, and Lower Road to identify specific points of interest. Restaurants, retail shops, and historical and recreational opportunities should direct visitors to the center of Gilbertville.
5. Additional wayfinding signage should be included within the center of Gilbertville to direct visitors to specific destinations. The intersection of Main Street/Hardwick Road/Lower Road has a small existing island with a cluster of faded and inconsistent signage. A long-term recommendation at this location is to redesign the intersection with consideration of installing a roundabout or improving the channelizing island to create additional space for wayfinding signage and other streetscape/landscape elements. This recommendation also has the benefit of improving traffic flow and enhancing safety for motorists and pedestrians.
6. The intersection of Main Street at North Street contains a large, landscaped island with historical streetscape elements. This intersection is located on the north side of the Ware River, with an existing mill building that has the potential for some redevelopment on the northern side. The island at this intersection should be considered for wayfinding signage to direct visitors to points of interest along North Street and south of the river.
7. The majority of the businesses, municipal buildings, churches, and historical assets within Gilbertville are located along Main Street south of the Ware River. Wayfinding signage should be in visible spots along Main Street to direct visitors to destinations such as the Gilbertville Library, The Stone Church, the municipal offices, the historic covered bridge, and local area businesses along Main Street.
8. Additional streetscape elements should be considered within Gilbertville. Banner-style signage and flower boxes are recommended for consideration along the stretch of Main Street south of the Ware River. The Town may work with local businesses and community organizations for maintenance and funding in a public-private partnership. The Town should work closely with local businesses to help promote them through the streetscape elements. These additional streetscape elements can be included on light poles, within traffic islands, and along the Main Street Bridge over the Ware River.
9. Improvements to the existing pavement markings, sidewalks, and curbs should be considered. As previously noted, MassDOT is currently undertaking a project to resurface a portion of Main Street through Gilbertville.. The Town should look to improve sections of Main Street that are not included in MassDOT's project by resurfacing the road, installing new pavement markings, curbing, and improving sidewalks.



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## Recommendations to consider

10. As a longer-term project, the Town can consider the installation of pedestrian-scale decorative light poles along Main Street to enhance the village feel and to differentiate it from the surrounding highway-style roadway infrastructure on the outskirts of Gilbertville. Decorative luminaires can also provide an ideal location for banners, flowers, and other decorative features to give the village a distinct feel.
11. Consideration should be given to improving curb cuts and access to adjacent properties throughout the entire village. Many properties have wide curb cuts with no curb line or little curb reveal, creating safety issues for pedestrians and for turning maneuvers. Some properties do not have any definition between parking areas and the sidewalk. There should be a clearly defined back-of-sidewalk that delineates the pedestrian path from existing parking area. Short term improvements can include installing concrete sidewalks or pavement markings to provide different textured elements. Longer-term improvements can include the installation of planting strips and working with local property owners on property improvements.
12. The Town of Hardwick should consider developing design standards for private businesses related to signage and facades of buildings to ensure that the village has a framework for future economic development and improvements to properties.
13. Pedestrian improvements should be implemented throughout the entire village. The Town should consider adopting a specific crosswalk style (e.g. stamped concrete) and color for all locations throughout the village. Additional crosswalk locations across Main Street should be considered near points of interest and retail uses. Upgrades should include the installation of new fluorescent yellow-green warning signs at and in advance of all crosswalks. Consideration for the installation of rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs) should be given for locations that experience higher usage.
14. The Town should work with local businesses, churches, and municipal buildings to develop shared parking strategies for uses that have different peak hours of operation. On-street parking availability should be well defined throughout the village. This includes posting additional signage and improving curb cuts and curb lines. Parking is prohibited along MassDOT owned roadways, but can be allowed on the roadways that the Town controls. Allowing parking on Main Street within the Town's right-of-way during certain times of the day should be considered if there is a need for additional public parking.
15. There may be future consideration for the extension of the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail through Gilbertville, which could lead to an increase in bicycle and hiking activity through the village. Wayfinding signage should be placed along the surface streets and along the future trail route to direct people to/from this future recreational activity.
16. The Town should consider a long-term transformation of Spring Street to a recreation trail. This street connects Bridge Street at the western end of the covered bridge to the intersection of Main Street/North Street and runs along the north side of the Ware River. Other than emergency vehicle access and access to the mill building on North Street, there does not appear to be any real need for this street to be open to through traffic for passenger vehicles. There may be potential for pedestrian connections to the riverfront that could enhance the recreational nature of the village and increase usable park space and open space.



Source: Arnett Muldrew & Associates

Best Practice

## Community Branding & Wayfinding



Location: Various

Effective Wayfinding Strategies link visitor orientation to branding and placemaking

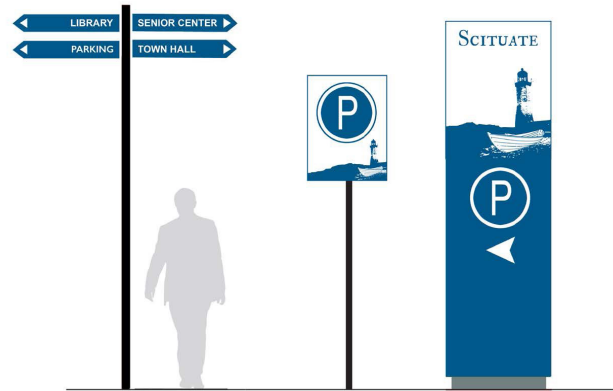
Wayfinding refers to information systems that guide people through the physical environment and enhance their understanding and experience of the space. It starts with basic directional signage, but goes further: helping people understand their location in relation to the rest of the district or downtown; highlighting key landmarks and corridors that aid in navigation; and creating a unique identity and visual character for special places within the downtown as well as for the downtown as a whole.

Wayfinding systems provide an opportunity to create a unique brand identity that builds on "sense of place." This can reference historic or natural features, cultural events or other aspects of the community - with the design of signage often coordinated with marketing and outreach materials, websites and other communication tools.

## Scituate, MA Wayfinding & Branding Program

Scituate is a historic coastal town located midway between Boston and Plymouth in Massachusetts. The town has a beautiful harbor that offers many activities such as retail, dining, seasonally active boating, sailing, fishing, educational and cultural programs, and tourism. The harbor attracts a large volume of residents and visitors during the summer months, increasing the demand for parking, improved signs for connectivity, and welcoming streetscapes.

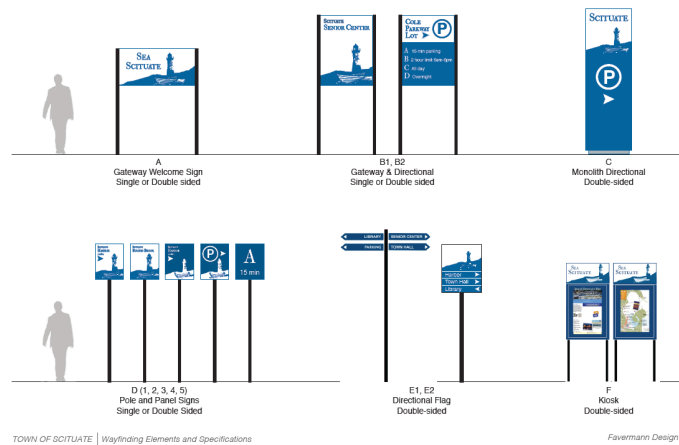
The Town of Scituate partnered with Favermann Designs to create an illustrated brand/slogan and wayfinding signs to drive local economic growth. The Town's Economic Development Commission (EDC) allocated \$10,000 from the FY 2018 funds towards the implementation of the wayfinding project. The consultants received \$18,000 from the Town as their services fees. The Town planned to replace an old taxi stand with information kiosks and a pocket park. The kiosk includes a list of town events, a map of key destinations, and a local business directory. The EDC and the consultants created a logo/brand that represents the future vision of the town. The logo -- "Sea Scituate" -- is used on directional signs and kiosks to ensure the visitors and residents are aware of these changes. EDC also marketed the logo on the Town's social media pages.



**Wayfinding System Elements - Street and Destination Signs**  
Source: Favermann Design

### The Town of Scituate Family of Elements

3



TOWN OF SCITUATE | Wayfinding Elements and Specifications

Favermann Design

**A detailed wayfinding plan shows how each element fits into the overall system with coordinated graphics.** Source: Favermann Design



**Coordinated kiosk design accommodates different needs - public announcements, an orientation map, and a map of businesses.**  
Source: Favermann Design

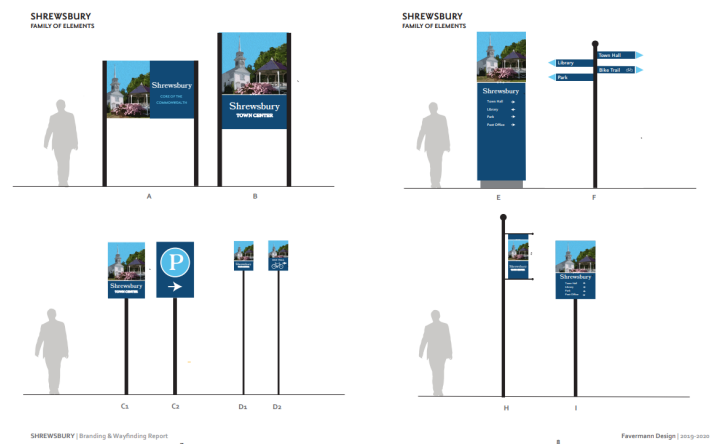
## Shrewsbury Community Branding & Wayfinding Project

Shrewsbury is a commuter town located next to the City of Worcester in Massachusetts. The town has a notable economic history, including agriculture, leather industries, sawmills, and recreation and tourism. In recent years, the town witnessed a population growth due to its proximity to Worcester and colleges, universities, and a medical center and school. The town has an active tourism industry which was only interrupted in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Town of Shrewsbury received \$15,000 in grant funding from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) program of the Commonwealth's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). This grant paid for consulting services to create a community branding and wayfinding plan. The project aimed to reinforce a sense of place, arrival, and shared visual experience through signage and informational markers.

The Town established an Advisory Committee to represent different perspectives on the community's essence and vision for the future. The project's consultant - Favermann Design - worked with the Advisory Committee to create alternatives for a brand theme, logo and slogan. The Town's Board of Selectmen reviewed the designs in a virtual public forum (due to COVID-19) and provided recommendations. The consultant designed a family of wayfinding signs and a map of site placement.

*Existing decorative light fixtures and banners were identified as a starting point for a larger branding and wayfinding system in a previous downtown masterplan.*  
Source: Horsley Witten Group



*Wayfinding System Elements*  
Source: Favermann Design



*Wayfinding System Location Map*  
Source: Favermann Design

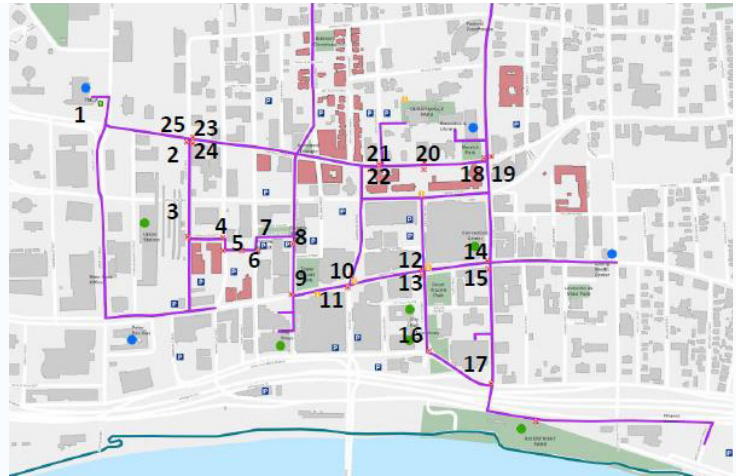


## WalkBoston Wayfinding Program

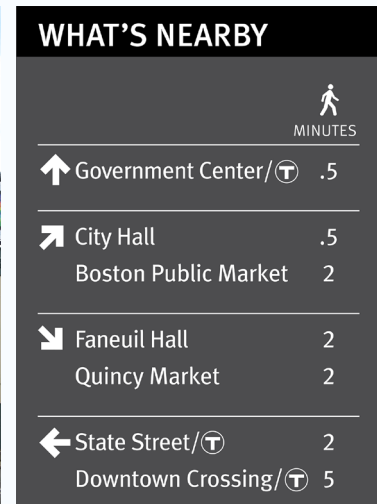
WalkBoston's mission is to encourage utilitarian walking as part of everyday life. One potential strategy they identified to increase everyday walking is the installation of wayfinding signs, which can give local residents clear information about walking routes and walking times to get to key destinations. With funding from Massachusetts Department of Public Health, WalkBoston started working with seven community to create systems of wayfinding signage.

Their first project, in 2014, focused on Codman Square, a commercial and civic hub in the Dorchester Neighborhood of Boston. Working with local community organizations, WalkBoston installed 90 wayfinding signs along the arterial streets leading to the square. In 2016 they placed 300 additional wayfinding signs in Springfield, Fall River, Turners Fall, Northampton and Belchertown.

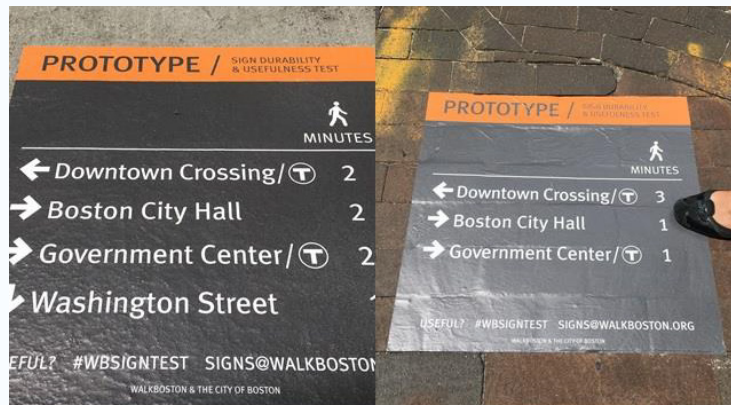
Unlike other wayfinding projects that include branding and placemaking as part of the design, the WalkBoston signs are purely utilitarian, with basic information about routes and destinations, with travel time for walking (and in some cases, biking). The point is to overcome uncertainty as to the best route, while helping pedestrian understand how easy it is to walk to where they want to go.



Part of the process is close consultation with local stakeholders to determine desired walking destinations, routes and sign locations as shown on this map of the wayfinding loop for Downtown Springfield. Source: WalkBoston







The signs themselves are simple and focused on communicating direction and distance to key destinations. Source: WalkBoston



WalkBoston has also been testing wayfinding pavement decals in downtown Boston - designed for areas with no available sign poles - in order to determine their durability. Source: WalkBoston

# Install streetscape amenities

Category		Public Realm
Location		Gilbertville, Hardwick
Origin		RRP Advisory Committee
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years) - Planning and implementation in 1-2 years
Risk		<p>Low Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of political will</li> <li>• Conflicting priorities for use of space</li> <li>• Conflicting ideas about the vision (some people may want the brand to reflect the history, and some may want it to be futuristic).</li> </ul>
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in number of visitors</li> <li>• Increase in sales</li> <li>• Greater social cohesion</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources		<p>Town of Hardwick, Department of Public Works, local businesses, landowners/landlords and residents, traditional media.</p> <p>Funding Source:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</li> <li>• Massachusetts Downtown Initiative</li> <li>• Massachusetts Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program</li> <li>• MassDOT Complete Streets program: The Town of Hardwick would need to initiate this process and can update their prioritization plan every three years.</li> <li>• Chapter 90 funding</li> <li>• MassWorks funding (in conjunction with any future development projects in Gilbertville)</li> <li>• Local resident/business contributions</li> </ul>



## PLACEMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

Upgrade sidewalks, stripe on street parking, add decorative lighting, trees, street furniture, and planters.

Expand public access to Ware River wherever feasible

Transform the triangle into a true park with seating, tree planting, and public art.

Explore reuse of former school for business incubator, coworking, housing, or municipal use.

Plant trees on front lawns throughout the study area, especially at the library, the Stone Church and other civic facilities.

Rehab the steps in front of the Municipal Office Building and/or transform the area into a pocket park

Improve streetscapes throughout the center with benches, banners, planters, decorative streetlights and tree planting.

Reveal Gilbertville's history throughout the center with interpretive signs, art installations, etc.





### Diagnostic

While Gilbertville's historic character invites people to live and visit the town, there is a need to improve the streetscapes through placemaking initiatives. Most of the sidewalks are narrow, limiting any use other than as a through-way for single pedestrians. The surface conditions are also not ideal for pedestrians with many cracks and areas where the sidewalks merge into a continuous curb cut providing access to a driveway or parking lot. It reduces the walkability and accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists.

There is only one bench at the town parking lot in the center of the study area. Although there are a few lighting fixtures, they carry thick cables and telephone lines, reducing the aesthetics of the town. The roads and the crosswalks are primarily designed for vehicles, posing challenges for pedestrians.

### Action Item

Install streetscape amenities in the public realm to increase the functionality and appeal of the downtowns. The town can add amenities such as:

- **Public seating:** Seating builds social interaction and makes it easier for people of all ages and abilities to spend more time in the town. Visible seating signals that the town is welcoming.
- **Light fixtures:** Creative outdoor lighting would make the downtowns safer and more inviting to navigate on foot and by bicycle at night. Lighting can help expand the number of hours that customers visit a downtown, increasing sales opportunities. Lighting can also be used to build the sense of place through attractive fixtures, and customized lighting effects, like colored fixtures, highlighting features in the built or natural environment, and projected images or textures.
- **Art installations:** Art can drive engagement on the street, give visibility to local artists, and stimulate social media posts that provide free advertising for the town.

### Process

Planning and Design:

1. Identify key partners and responsibilities for managing project design and implementation
2. Develop project goals and a positioning statement to guide design efforts.
3. Obtain funding for design and installation.
4. Hire a designer, if needed
5. Conduct a site analysis and identify locations to install streetscape amenities
6. Create a site plan showing proposed locations of streetscape amenities.
7. Develop concept designs showing alternatives for families of street furniture and amenities.



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**Process**

8. Review concept designs with business owners, community members, local officials, potential donors, and other stakeholders
9. Develop specifications, working drawings, and cost estimates
10. Discuss design proposals with permitting agencies
11. Revise design as needed
12. Obtain funding for that installation
13. Undertake procurement for installation
14. Obtain permits
15. Create a project report for future reference.

**Installation:**

1. Acquire amenities and materials
2. Install amenities
3. Monitor for future upgrades.



# Streetscape Planning and Placemaking



Various Locations

## The Power of Placemaking

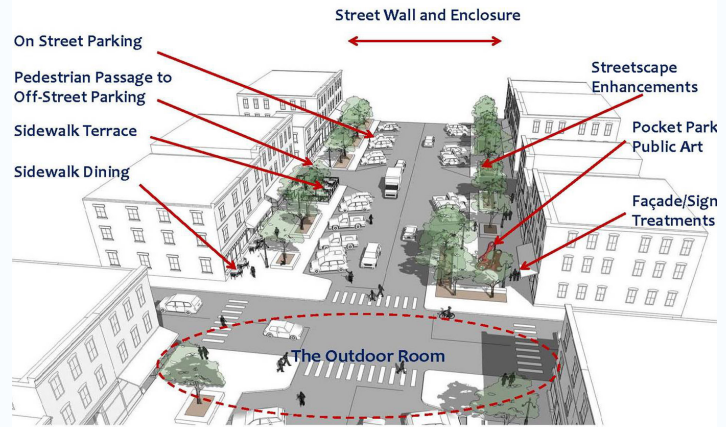
Our historic main streets and village centers evolved in a time before automobiles, when catering to the needs of the pedestrian was the key to attracting customers. Whether old or new, successful streets and pedestrian places build on time-honored principles to provide pedestrian functionality and physical comfort within an beautiful and stimulating setting. Planning for the streetscape involves looking at the entire cross-section between buildings and the street in order to accommodate desired activities.

A streetscape plan typically includes paving, planting, lighting, benches, signage and other elements within a coherent and attractive composition. Placemaking takes the process one step further, with a focus on how people experience and use a space, and how that space expresses the character and culture of that community.

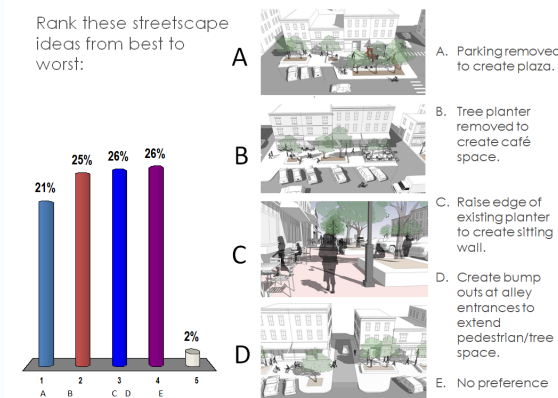
## Turners Falls Downtown Plan

The award-winning 2013 Downtown Turners Falls Livability Plan focused on the streetscape of Avenue A. Despite improvements to streetscape installed in the 1980s, the downtown suffered from a lack of pedestrian activity and community life. While the sidewalks themselves were landscaped and comfortable, there was no focus of activity, nowhere people gathered. Through a collaborative planning process, the plan defined the strengths and weaknesses of the downtown and explored a range of ideas for improving streetscape design and creating a stronger sense of place.

In addition to the typical mapping, site analysis and functional assessments, the project focused on identifying improvements and potential activities that would build on Turner Falls incredible historic fabric and sense of place and give people a reason to keep coming back.



**Illustration showing streetscape and placemaking alternatives (above) - local stakeholders helped develop a series of improvements to explore, then rated them during a public forum to identify priorities for implementation (below).**  
Source: Dodson & Flinker



**New pedestrian plaza installed in Turners Falls as a result of the Downtown Plan**  
Source: Berkshire Design Group



## Oak Bluffs Streetscape Master Plan

A year-long planning process organized by the Oak Bluffs Downtown Streetscape Committee produced detailed plans and visualizations of potential improvements to three areas of downtown Oak Bluffs. Completed in 2015, The plan included exploration of alternatives for the traditional streetscape elements of sidewalks, parking spaces, tree plantings and landscaping, with a particular focus on connectivity - linking up existing sidewalks, boardwalks and paths into a continuous system, and identifying the key gaps. One of the goals of the project was to come up with consistent streetscape materials, plantings and furnishings to make the downtown more inviting and "true to Oak Bluff's unique character." The plan incorporated goals for "green streets" as well as incorporating universal design principles to accommodate people of all abilities.

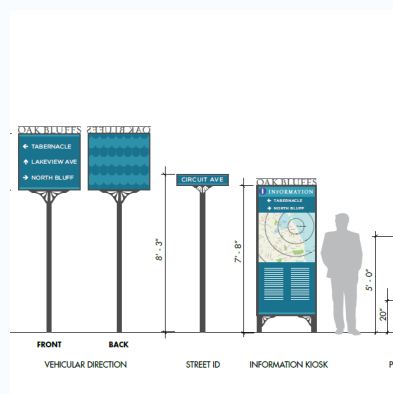
The Oak Bluffs plan generated ideas for placemaking, wayfinding and branding, ranging from renaming streets to a coordinated plan for graphic design and signage. Funding has been secured for major upgrades to the streetscape; the plan meanwhile has helped to coordinate simple improvements to signage and landscaping.



**Visualization of Streetscape Improvements**  
Source: Horsley Witten Group



**Placemaking ideas for a gateway at North Bluff Park**  
Source: Horsley Witten Group



**Initial wayfinding sign concepts were incorporated with only minimal changes in signs installed since the project was completed**



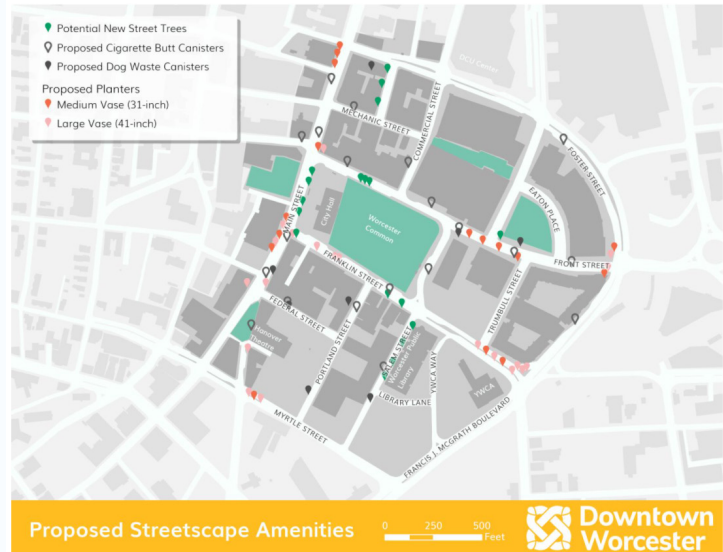
## DOWNTOWN WORCESTER PLACEMAKING AND BEAUTIFICATION PROJECT

In 2018, the City of Worcester approved the formation of the Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District (BID) to promote local economic growth, active programming, walking and bikeability, and to create a vibrant place for both residents and visitors. Currently, the BID works with 140 property owners to implement the vision.

The City and the BID received a \$54,000 grant funding from the MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces Program to revitalize the downtown. The two entities worked together to develop a placemaking plan that involves strategies to convert on-street parking spaces into outdoor dining spaces, install new landscaping elements, and create a safe space for pedestrians and bicyclists by adding street lighting and signage. The BID hired the planning consultants from – Civic Space Collaborative – to create an action plan, design community engagement tools, and implementation strategies. Other project partners include The Menkiti Group; The Worcester Pop-up at JMAC – a program by the Worcester Culture Coalition in partnership with the Hanover Theatre.

The short-term goals include installing planters, cigarette butt disposals, and dog waste disposals. The long-term goals are increasing outdoor dining, installing bike racks, trash receptacles, and street trees. The BID also created an Ambassador program to keep the downtown safe and clean. The Ambassadors are responsible for maintaining the new streetscape amenities. They need to empty the cigarette butt disposals and dog waste disposals 2-3 times a week and monitor daily. They also need to maintain the planters and monitor for trash and other waste.

The City and the BID were planning to add the placemaking elements before the end of Summer 2021.







*A masterplan shows the location of proposed short-term improvements.*  
**Source: Proposed Downtown Worcester Streetscape Amenity Additions Placemaking Plan (Storymaps. ArcGIS)**



*"Quick win" improvements focus on quality of life issues like cigarette butts and dog waste, as well as simple beautification projects like flower planters.*

**Source: Proposed Downtown Worcester Streetscape Amenity Additions Placemaking Plan (Storymaps. ArcGIS)**

# Initiate a Tree Planting Program

Category		Public Realm
Location		Gilbertville, Hardwick
Origin		RRP Advisory Committee
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Medium Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of long-term funding for maintenance</li><li>• Coordination with multiple partners to decide the location for the trees to not coincide with public infrastructure</li><li>• Uncertain business support if the trees are blocking their shop/ restaurant view</li></ul>
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lush and inviting places for both residents and visitors</li><li>• Decrease in stormwater run-off</li><li>• Increase in biodiversity</li></ul>
Partners & Resources		<p>Town of Hardwick, East Quabbin Land Trust, local businesses and residents</p> <p>Funding Source:</p> <p>US Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) grant</p>

## Diagnostic

Gilbertville has virtually no street trees within the public right of way. There are a few trees on the private streets that are close enough to the public sidewalks to provide some shade. The community members expressed concerns about the lack of street trees in the town which creates an unwelcoming image and unattractive views. It has a negative impact on the healthy and local economy of the town.

Planting street trees will make more livable and comfortable places. It will provide shade in the summer months and create cool sidewalks, reducing the air conditioning costs. It will enable residents and visitors to spend more time exploring the downtown. Street trees will also reduce pollution, increasing the quality of life in the town.

## Action Item

Key actions:

- Define project goals and scope; build local support
- Conduct an initial assessment to replace existing and plant new trees
- Identify opportunities for sidewalk management and tree retention
- Obtain funding
- Hire a consultant (Engineer and Arborist)
- Develop a street trees map
- Contracting and implementation
- Ongoing maintenance and monitoring

## Process

1. Establish an advisory committee composed of business owners, Town staff and officials, community members, and partner organizations
2. Hold Advisory Committee meetings to:
  - a. Identify key project goals and basic project scope.
  - b. Create tree ordinance to protect and preserve existing trees, and decide when, where, and how to plant new trees
  - c. Create a comprehensive plan to manage all the street trees on both public and private land
  - d. Develop a street tree inventory and map with details such as species, size, ownership/maintenance. It can be a public map to facilitate public engagement and stewardship.
  - e. Comply with the ADA guidelines to ensure the trees are not in the public right-of-way.
  - f. Create a street tree and sidewalk design plan to set standards for the sidewalk widths, setbacks, spacing, and tree types.
  - g. Identify funding sources for long-term maintenance
  - h. Develop a process for hiring an engineer and arborist
  - i. Conduct outreach to build support for the project.
3. Hire a consultant (Engineer and Arborist)

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**Process**

4. Develop a site plan with potential tree locations and sidewalk designs
5. Conduct additional outreach to business owners, the Town, community members, and other stakeholders to obtain feedback on the site plan.
6. Hold preliminary discussions with permitting agencies.
7. Develop a vendor list and cost estimates in collaboration with local contractors.
8. Finalize the locations. Develop specifications and working drawings. Develop a guidance document for future improvements, if necessary.
9. Undertake procurement and contracting."
10. Plan for ongoing maintenance and monitoring





Best Practice

# Tree Planting Initiative



Various Locations

Connecting people to nature and preserving the local natural history

The US Forest Service's Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) Program is a grant program that "promotes collaborative, science-based restoration of priority rural forest landscapes" and supports the goals of State Forest Action Plans (USFS, 2021). Two projects in central and western Massachusetts have taken advantage of this grant to support municipal tree planting – one in Greenfield, Montague, and North Adams, and one in Southbridge and Ware. Similar to Hardwick, these municipalities share features as small, post-industrial cities and towns in rural areas that lack resources for urban forestry programs, making them a priority for the Massachusetts Forest Action Plan. The projects have targeted low-income areas with low tree canopy in the cities' downtowns. It also involved working with local hospitals and universities, and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation has donated trees and training.

## Grassroots Tree Planting in Three Small Low-Income Cities within Rural Massachusetts

In 2018, Franklin Land Trust, based in Shelburne Falls, MA, initiated a multi-city tree planting campaign in Greenfield, Montague, and North Adams to address shared needs of low canopy cover, high poverty, and low per capita tree spending. According to a report from the US Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) grant that the project received, these cities have low municipal capacity for tree planting and maintenance and are listed as priorities for urban forestry in Massachusetts 2010 Forest Action Plan. The resulting initiative aims to plant 2,400 trees between the three cities, targeting core downtown neighborhoods with higher concentrations of low-income families and lower canopy cover.

In addition to the LSR grant of \$219,399 and sponsorship by Franklin Land Trust, the project has received technical and planning support from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and UMass Amherst and other local organizations. According to the LSR grant report, as of the end of 2020, the cities had planted 925 trees, primarily on public land and some on private land, and have hosted several tree planting trainings and events. Planning and mapping tree planting locations has taken significant time and effort during the first two years of the project, as well as setting up tree committees and engaging volunteers in planting and maintaining the trees, which remains a challenge. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reduced tree planting and public engagement.



***A Greenfield Tree Committee member plants a tree at Lunt Field as part of a community planting that took place in Fall 2020***



***Greenfield Tree Committee volunteer plants a tree in Greenfield.***  
***Source: Forest Service, US Department of Agriculture***



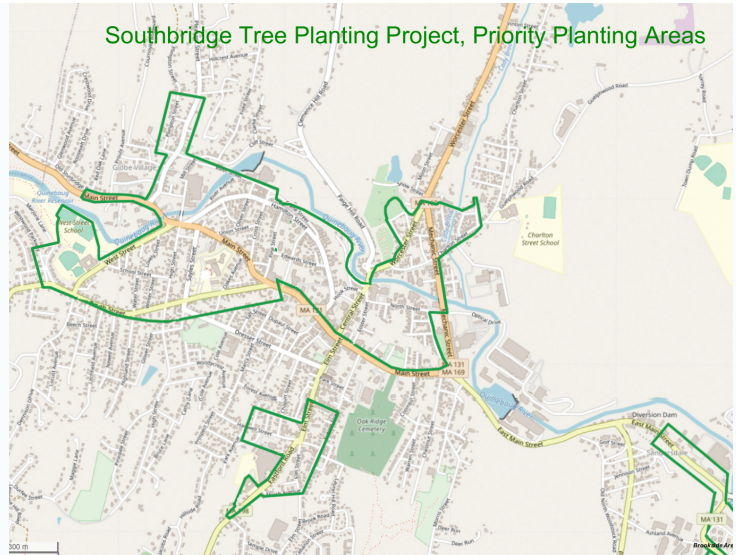
***Neighborhood tree planting efforts led by the Greenfield Tree Committee increase public support and enthusiasm for trees. Source: Greenfield Recorder***



## Planting Trees for Improved Community Health at Southbridge and Ware

Southbridge and Ware also teamed up with local land trusts to earn a US Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) grant intended to "increase canopy cover, improve public health and reduce home energy use for heating and cooling" by planting trees (EQLT, 2021). Modeled after the Greening the Gateway Cities Program, the initiative aims to plant 1,000 trees on both public and private property in each municipality, in part by asking residents to volunteer to have a tree planted in their front or side yard, in exchange for a commitment to water the tree. In Southbridge, renters may participate with written permission from landlords. Trees are donated by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation, and trained arborists work with participants to select the trees "best suited to your planting site" (OLT, 2021). Grant funds also work to hire local tree planting crews.

The municipalities qualified for the LSR grant as small, low-income communities in rural areas, designated as a "top priority" for community and urban forestry in the Massachusetts Forest Action Plan. The communities have received additional support from local hospitals in engaging local communities, as well as monitoring of the effect of the trees by Clark University. According to a LSR Project Report, as of the end of 2020, the initiative had planted 74 trees between the two cities – 35 in Southbridge and 39 in Ware. Similar to Greenfield, Montague, and North Adams, the program has faced significant challenges in tree planting and public engagement due to the pandemic.



**Southbridge Tree Planting Project Priority Areas**  
**Source: Opacum Land Trust**



**Tree planting initiative at Ware**  
**Source: East Quabbin Land Trust**

# Establish a Public Parking Lot with Visitor Center

Category		Public Realm
Location		Gilbertville, Hardwick
Origin		RRP Advisory Committee
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Low Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of funding and political support</li> <li>• Lack of consensus on locations of the restrooms and parking lot</li> <li>• Uncertain business and community support</li> </ul>
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less cruising time for drivers</li> <li>• Less traffic/vehicle congestion</li> <li>• More on-street parking space for local businesses</li> <li>• Increase in the number of visitors of all age groups, especially kids and older adults, and their time spent in the town</li> <li>• Decreased requests to use restrooms for businesses</li> <li>• Increased number of pedestrians and bicyclists</li> <li>• Improved town image in terms of cleanliness and convenience</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources		<p>Town of Hardwick, local businesses, property owners, and residents.</p> <p>Funding Source:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MassWorks grant</li> <li>• T-Mobile Hometown Grant</li> </ul>



## POTENTIAL LOCATIONS FOR RAIL TRAIL PARKING/SHARED PUBLIC PARKING

### Pros:

- Large underutilized parking areas behind mill and around Hardwick House of Pizza
- Adjacent to the trail end at North Street.
- Synergy between trail & revitalization of mill
- Could serve business/civic clusters to north & south

### Cons:

- Privately-owned sites
- May not be enough space for trail parking and commercial uses. Need to further evaluate parking demand
- Potential security concerns for proposed marijuana facility
- Far from most local businesses and civic buildings.

### Pros:

- Visible from Main Street
- Close to future trail end at the junction of Spring St and Bridge St
- Close to covered bridge
- Close to civic buildings and • Moderately close to the southern business node (Rose 32 & Brewery)
- Attractive depot building could be visitor center

### Cons:

- The Whistlestop Restaurant land is privately-owned.
- Ownership of the property south of the former Whistlestop is unclear

### Pros:

- Existing parking lot.

### Cons:

- Serves existing businesses.
- May be undersized if both trail and businesses are heavily used.

### Pros:

- Large unused parking lot.
- Owned by Town
- Close to the future trail end at the junction of Spring St
- Close to Covered bridge
- Moderately close to the Gilbertville Public Library and the Stone Church.

### Cons:








- The parking lot is not visible from Main St.
- Future reuse of the Mill building may create conflicts with the trail/shared parking

### Pros:

- Existing public parking lot.
- Moderately close to the future trail end at the junction of Spring St and the covered bridge
- Close to the Library and the Stone Church

### Cons:

- Steep lot and driveway
- May not be enough space for trail parking and existing use of parking

- |   |                            |   |                                |
|---|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
|  | Study Area                 |  | Trail route, needs upgrades    |
|  | Off-street Public Parking  |  | Trail improvements funded      |
|  | Off-street Private Parking |  | Connections from the trail end |
|  | Potential Parking Lots     |   |                                |





### Diagnostic

Gilbertville has approximately 245 parking spaces, including public and private lots. However, there is a lack of on-street parking spaces, making it difficult for both visitors and residents to stop and stroll around the town. It is challenging for businesses to increase revenue and load/unload their inventories.

There are a few parking spaces at the Polish Club located up street from the Rose 32 brewery, but it is inaccessible due to lack of ownership information. The community members showed interest in adding parking spaces on Route 32A which houses popular businesses such as Rose 32 bread and Lost Town Brewing.

The town also lacks public restrooms that create a more inviting and comfortable image of the place. A discussion with the community members revealed that a parking lot with public restrooms and visitor information about bike paths will attract visitors and residents to the commercial corridor and stimulate local economic growth. Potential locations for the parking lot and bathrooms are former Whistle stop restaurant, school, and Polish Club.

### Action Item

Public outreach for the RRP program revealed there is a strong need for parking and public restrooms in the town. It will invite people of all ages and abilities and create a perception of a comfortable place. It will reduce cruising time for drivers and create more on-street parking and outdoor dining spaces for local businesses. The parking lot can also include visitor information about the bike path, local business directory, and a town map for wayfinding. Key actions:

- Identify suitable locations for the parking lot
- Estimate the costs and materials
- Obtain funding
- Hire a consultant
- Create a site plan showing parking spaces, public restrooms, and information kiosks
- Obtain permits from the Town
- Contracting and implementation
- Traffic management during construction
- Ongoing maintenance and monitoring

### Process





1. Establish an advisory committee composed of business owners, Town staff and officials, community members, and partner organizations
2. Hold Advisory Committee meetings to:
  - a. Identify key project goals and basic project scope.
  - b. Identify potential parking lot locations
  - c. Identify funding sources
  - d. Develop a process for hiring a consultant
  - e. Conduct outreach to build support for the project
3. Hire a consultant (Architect/Transportation Planner)
4. Develop concept plans and designs for the parking lot and the visitor center.

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## Process

5. Develop a concept panel to finalize the contents of the information kiosk
6. Conduct additional outreach to business owners, the Town, community members, and other stakeholders to obtain feedback on the site plan and restroom design alternatives.
7. Finalize the kiosk design, content, and location.
8. Finalize site plan and restroom and information kiosk designs. Develop specifications and working drawings.
9. Make a list of available sites and create cost estimates to obtain funding.
10. Hold preliminary discussions with permitting agencies.
11. Obtain land and/or access easements, if needed.
12. Develop a vendor list and cost estimates in collaboration with local contractors.
13. Undertake procurement and contracting.
14. Manage Implementation of Improvements.
15. Develop a guidance document for future improvements, if necessary.
16. Monitor the buildings and landscapes by measuring performance indicators.
17. Ongoing maintenance and monitoring:
  - a. Regularly maintain the parking lot (marking strips and wayfinding signs) and clean and supply the restrooms.
  - b. Track the parking lot and restroom use and solicit feedback about the cleanliness and convenience from visitors and residents

# Building and landscape improvements

Category		Private Realm
Location		Gilbertville, Hardwick
Origin		RRP Advisory Committee
Budget		High Budget (Above \$200,000) - Low budget to create program. Medium-to-high to implement, depending on the type of improvements. Dividing the project into program creation and implementation may help with funding cycles for grants.
Timeframe		Medium Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Medium Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of long-term funding and political support</li> <li>• The involvement of multiple partners can lead to conflict of interests and co-ordination can be a difficult task</li> <li>• Initial excitement that does not lead to implementation</li> <li>• Difficult to maintain public and local business support as their needs keep changing</li> </ul>
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in number of customers, sales, and property values.</li> <li>• Maintenance of the improvements after a set number of years.</li> <li>• Attractive streetscapes that encourage visitors to stay longer in the town and motivate other property owners or tenants to make upgrades.</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources		<p>Town of Hardwick, property/business owners, residents, and traditional media.</p> <p>Funding Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</li> <li>• Massachusetts Downtown Initiative</li> <li>• T-Mobile Hometown Grants</li> <li>• District Technical Local Assistance grant (Program creation)</li> </ul>



## PRIVATE REALM OPPORTUNITIES

- Consolidate and formalize parking around Hardwick House of Pizza.

- Improve facade of the Mill building with murals and/or upgraded doors, windows, etc.

Rehab or demolish  
condemned structures

Identify best use for former  
foundry site

- Improve parking lots: establish shared parking; consolidate parking lot entrances and exits and close excess curb cuts; add landscaping and green infrastructure.

- Explore transitioning to angled parking accessed immediately from Main Street (no driveway) with sidewalks relocated to be between parking spaces and buildings.

Clarify ownership of former Polish Club and identify best reuse

Address deferred maintenance, facade design, site design, and signs throughout study area, as needed





### Diagnostic

Gilbertville is an old industrial village which retains most of its historic architecture. As mills closed and community needs changed, many buildings and the surrounding landscape have seen a decline in maintenance and structural/aesthetic integrity. Many buildings could be restored and retrofitted to reclaim their historic integrity and better adapt to the needs of current residents and businesses.

These building improvements are more cost-effective than a new construction. It would create new jobs and draw new businesses to the town, thus stimulating local economic growth. It would also encourage mixed-use development in Gilbertville and open new revenue streams (property tax, income tax, etc.) for community development.

### Action Item

A building and landscape improvement program would help property or business owners improve the exteriors of their buildings to attract new customers and beautify the area. These improvements could include façade design or structural changes, painting, lighting, windows, doors, and signage. The initiative will empower the Town of Hardwick, local businesses, and residents to improve the first impression of Gilbertville.

Key actions:

1. Define project goals and scope; build local support
2. Obtain funding, preferably long-term to avoid any gaps in the program
3. Hire a consultant to help the property/business owners with the improvements
4. Identify potential projects and partners to get a head-start
5. Develop preliminary and final designs by involving the community at all stages
6. Contracting and implementing the designs
7. On-going maintenance and monitoring to determine the success rate

### Process

1. Establish an advisory committee composed of business owners, Town staff and officials, community members, and partner organizations.
2. Hold Advisory Committee meetings to:
  - a. Identify key project goals and basic project scope.
  - b. Identify buildings and landscapes that need Improvement.
  - c. Establish partnerships with building owners and businesses to pursue selected projects
  - d. Identify long-term funding sources
  - e. Develop a process for hiring a consultant
  - f. Conduct outreach to build support for the project.
3. Hire a consultant
4. Develop concept designs for building and landscape improvements

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**Process**

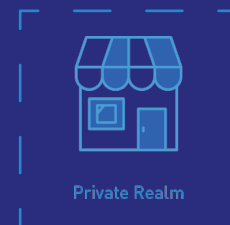
5. Conduct additional outreach to business owners, the Town, community members, and other stakeholders to obtain feedback on the concept designs and alternatives.
6. Hold preliminary discussions with permitting agencies.
7. Develop a vendor list and cost estimates in collaboration with local contractors.
8. Finalize designs. Develop specifications and working drawings. Develop a guidance document for future improvements, if necessary.
9. Undertake procurement and contracting.
10. Manage implementation of Improvements.
11. Monitor the buildings and landscapes by measuring performance indicators.





Best Practice

## Building Improvements



Location: Various

Improving building facades to make inviting downtowns

Storefront improvement programs can provide a locally administered source of financial assistance for businesses that wish to make their storefronts more attractive and accessible. The following two case studies in Cambridge and Arlington, Massachusetts demonstrate how small, competitive grants can allow municipalities to support projects at different scales and incentivize business owners to address needs ranging from improved awnings to greater wheelchair accessibility.

## Cambridge Storefront Improvement Program

The Cambridge Storefront Improvement Program provides financial assistance to property owners and tenants making external improvements to their storefronts. The main purpose of the program is to help local businesses increase accessibility to their stores and enhance the physical appearance of the city's commercial districts.

The grants range from \$2,500 to \$35,000 based on the scope of the work. For example, ADA improvement projects receive a 90% matching grant up to \$20,000. The improvements can include installing ramps, lifts, doors and automatic openers, accessible parking, and signage. While other facade improvements such as restoring windows, paneling, architectural details, and historic features are eligible to receive a 50% matching grant up to \$15,000. In addition, signage, lighting, and awning improvements receive a 50% matching grant up to \$2,500. The City requires the businesses to seek approval on a design and receive a contract from the Program's review committee to receive funding.



*This Mediterranean eatery in Porter Square used the SIP to install bright signage that clearly communicated their brand at their new location. (FY 2017)*

*Source: [Cambridgema.gov](http://Cambridgema.gov)*



*This neighborhood liquor store used SIP assistance to install new signage, walkway improvements, and an ADA push button system. Taken together, these adjustments bolstered the business' accessibility and street presence.*

*Source: [Cambridgema.gov](http://Cambridgema.gov)*



## Arlington Storefront Improvement Program

The Arlington Storefront Improvement Program aims to improve the curb appeal of the storefronts to increase foot traffic in the Town's commercial districts. The Program provides up to \$10,000 in grants and free architectural design services to property owners and tenants seeking to renovate or restore their building facades. The design fees are covered by the Town through the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). However, these funds are limited, requiring businesses to immediately apply and adhere to the program guidelines.

Managed by the Arlington Redevelopment Board, the Program connects the participating businesses with an experienced architect to redesign storefronts – add architectural elements – and preserve or highlight the historical character. Program also provides access to low interest financing available from local banks or financial institutions to qualifying applicants.







*Before and After images of a local business that participated in the Storefront Improvement Program at Arlington, Ma*

*Source: Arlington's Commercial Revitalization Initiative Report*



# Shared Marketing and Branding

Category		Revenue/Sales
Location		Gilbertville, Hardwick
Origin		RRP Advisory Committee
Budget		Low Budget (Under \$50,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years) - For Planning and Implementation. Program should be on-going.
Risk		Medium Risks  Due to the town being a small rural community, continuing funding for the program and staff/management may be an issue.
Key Performance Indicators		Increase in sales and foot traffic in the commercial areas
Partners & Resources		Town of Hardwick and local businesses  Funding Sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</li><li>• Massachusetts Downtown Initiative</li></ul>

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## Diagnostic

The Gilbertville section of Hardwick, along with the Town of Hardwick, have a rich variety of historic buildings and wonderful nature trails. Due to the remoteness of the community, lack of awareness of what the area has to offer visitors and the lack of an identity for the community, there is a need to develop an identity or visual brand for the community. Creating a branding and marketing effort will aid in increasing awareness of the community and increasing traffic to stimulate economic growth.

The area is rich in outdoor activities, is home to a brewery and winery and soon the vacant mill structure will house a new cannabis facility with retail. The Town staff is limited and relies on volunteers to help with any additional efforts. The crossroads at Routes 32 & 32A in the center lack any type of visualization or signage that indicate you are in Gilbertville other than the green highway signage directing you to other towns.

Many Gilbertville businesses reported a decline in their revenues due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A business survey, conducted in March/April 2021 by The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DCHD/LRRP), revealed that 60% of the business respondents in Gilbertville expressed interest in shared marketing/advertising initiatives. Developing a brand for the community and the merchants to use will help with the recognition of both.

## Action Item

**Develop a brand/image for the area** – History, culture and uniqueness of the area are important and relevant to the branding process. This may also include a tagline for the area.

**Brand recognition** – Once the brand is established it can be used in various applications – this should be seen as a starting point for other projects that were proposed through the LRRP initiative – i.e., wayfinding signage, events, business advertising, communications and social media, and economic development.

**Focus & build on what the area has to offer** – since the area has few businesses the focus should be on the nature trails and outdoor recreation, bucolic charm of the area, winery, brewery and covered bridge – drawing visitors to the area will help to foster and drive traffic to the local businesses.

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## Process

1. Develop a Marketing and Communications Plan – Consider if this is done in-house or if there is a need to hire a marketing consultant. This will affect your budget structure. Consider funding this program to both market the area, businesses and to foster economic development.

This plan will be the roadmap to enhance the Gilbertville brand year-round and should incorporate how you communicate that "you are not in the middle of nowhere – you are in Gilbertville" – i.e., develop hashtags for social media, determine what sources can be utilized for messaging for businesses, to the public and the surrounding communities. The plan should be developed as an ongoing effort that will expand the efforts to promote the area – it is recommended that a 5-year plan and budget be developed and that the efforts be evaluated and adjusted yearly as new opportunities may arise.

2. Select a team to work on this effort – it should be comprised of key stakeholders from the town – officials, volunteers and business owners. This team should work with the consultant to determine the "Look" of the area and consider the various uses of the brand.
3. Hire graphic designer – consider using a local designer that knows the area and can reflect in the design that this is a special and unique area. The designer should also be able to apply this new look to your marketing efforts – for various applications as well as for use by the area businesses.
4. Utilize the brand to create a welcoming atmosphere to Gilbertville – A banner program is a visual way to launch the new brand and market the area. This can be done at the Route 32/32A intersection and select entry points into the area. The new brand can also be incorporated into signage or wayfinding improvements. (See examples above).
5. Build on and complement what has been done in the area – New and current businesses, culture and amenities of the area should be highlighted in marketing and social media efforts. Utilize the website [DiscoverCentralMA.org](http://DiscoverCentralMA.org) and populate it with Gilbertville and Hardwick's businesses and recreation.

Consider linking to, expanding and refreshing the Town website with a tab or section that features "Visit Gilbertville" with recreation, businesses and restaurants information. Develop a section to focus on new business development and attraction. (See examples below.)

Concentrate on the Excitement in the area – Focus should be on the highlights of Gilbertville what's great and unique about it and its businesses, history and culture. The revitalization of the mill taking place, the bakery, the brewery and recreation – are exciting for the town residents and visitors.

6. Provide training and support for local businesses for marketing their businesses individually and in a shared format – This effort would focus on social media, geo-targeted advertising, sales and events marketing programs will serve to enhance promotion of the individual businesses. Businesses indicated that they were open to this. Enabling businesses with the ability to self-promote and better market their businesses will also serve to draw more traffic to the area.





Wells, Maine— Source: Favermann Design

# Marketing and Branding



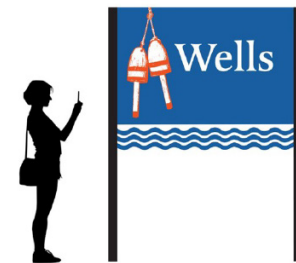
Location: Various

## Building a brand around a town's unique assets

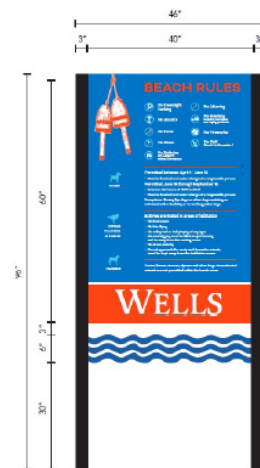
Small towns often lack the staff and consulting budgets to pursue the kind of branding and marketing campaigns that larger towns and cities can afford to implement. Regional chambers of commerce often take on this role, but then it's sometimes hard for individual towns to distinguish themselves. Web sites and social media make it easier than ever for small towns to communicate to potential visitors, but what is it that they're trying to say? In the following examples, each town started by identifying the community features, stories and resources that draw people there, as well as the images that seemed to capture that brand identity. These were incorporated in different forms of communication: a traditional print, media and public display campaign in Bethel, CT; a wayfinding project in Wells, Maine; and a downtown branding and wayfinding program in Wakefield, MA.

## Uniting Branding and Wayfinding in Wells, ME

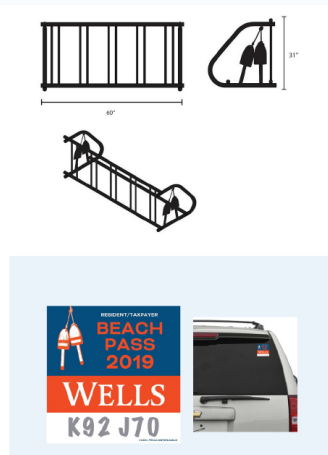
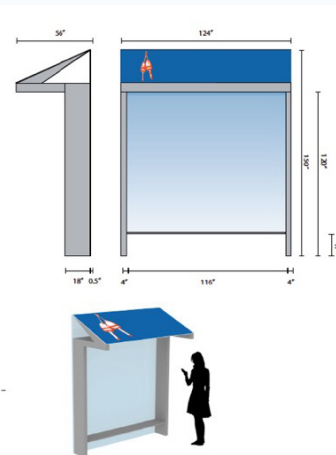
Wells hired Favermann Design to develop a branding and wayfinding sign system that also had applications for internal communications, street furniture and public art. Starting with a visual survey of the community historic features and natural setting, the firm worked with an advisory committee to identify a set of simple images, colors and shapes that could be shaped into a common brand identity. The resulting logos and graphic template were then worked into a template for welcome and wayfinding signage, informational kiosks, bike racks, and print materials.



Precedent: Lobster buoys.



*The project team identified a simple waterfront theme with reference to local colors and materials and developed a consistent series of applications.*  
Source: Favermann Design



*With the central theme and logo established, the project showed how it could be applied to different elements, including a bus stop, bike rack, and even beach stickers.* Source: Favermann Design

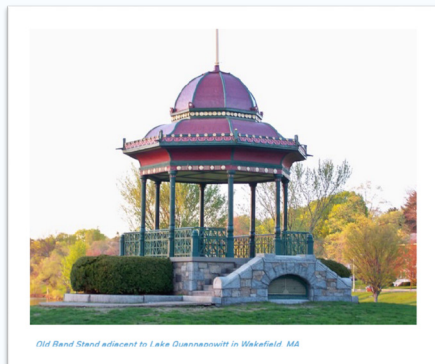
## Discover Bethel Marketing Strategy, Bethel, CT

The Bethel Chamber of Commerce built a downtown marketing campaign based on identifying and celebrating local resources. The "Discover Bethel!" theme revolves around recreation, history, local traditions and unique shopping and dining opportunities, and packages them as a unified package with something for everybody. The central means of outreach is the DiscoverBethelCT.com website, but materials are also carried through public signage, T shirts, and traditional print media.



Sources: Bethel Chamber of Commerce





Old Band Stand adjacent to Lake Quannawauitt in Wakefield, MA.

## Downtown Branding & Wayfinding Program Wakefield, MA

Wakefield identified the need to reinforce the success of its downtown with a brand identity and better directional signage. After a period of study with a town committee they identified some general themes based on local history. They hired Favermann Design, which took the ideas forward and expanded plans for information kiosks into a more comprehensive strategy that would extend the brand across multiple aspects of the wayfinding and communications campaign. The firm took the image of the town's historic bandstand and used it as the graphic theme for signage, kiosks and print materials. This included welcome and directional signs, kiosk displays and other outdoor communications. They chose a common color scheme for the signs and brought the same colors and typography into a style guide for written communications.



The Bandstand was the inspiration for the shape of the signage.



Kiosks, welcome signs and wayfinding all reference the form and colors of the historic bandstand to form a consistent brand identity. Source: Favermann Design



A style guide provides a graphic template using the same themes as the outdoor signage which is used for newsletters and web pages. Source: Favermann Design

# Hire a Grant Writer and Project Manager

Category		Administrative Capacity
Location		Gilbertville, Hardwick
Origin		RRP Advisory Committee
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Low Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of long-term funding</li><li>• Lack of capacity to oversee another town staff person</li></ul>
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Progress in implementation and close out of existing grants</li><li>• Number and dollars of new grants received</li><li>• Progress in implementing local plans</li><li>• Improved communication between businesses and town</li><li>• Local economic growth, enhanced downtown appearance, new business openings</li></ul>
Partners & Resources		<p>Town of Hardwick, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, local property owners, businesses, and grant funding agencies.</p> <p>Funding Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</li><li>• Massachusetts Administration and Finance grant (Community Compact)</li></ul>

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## Diagnostic

Hardwick has a minimal municipal governments with limited staff for economic development. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed that businesses have limited capacity to steward the downtowns and that businesses need the support of Town government to advance collaborative efforts—for example administrative support to organize events, or grant-writing and project management for improvements in the public realm.

The Covid-19 pandemic put significant strain on Town staff, forcing them to shift their efforts to addressing the pandemic rather than their regular functions. This resulted in a backlog of work, especially in administering a number of grants. At this point, the backlog of work prevents Town staff from taking steps to fulfill the intent of the ARPA grant, and make long-term improvements to Gilbertville that would make it a healthier place for residents and more successful business center.

Establishing a Town position dedicated to grant writing and administration would enable the town to continue to move forward with actions identified in this plan and other previous plans. The position would have a focus on addressing disproportionate impacts of Covid on the town's vulnerable populations and building back better. With a focus on economic development, this position could help improve communication between businesses and the Town, provide capacity for downtown improvement projects, and signal to businesses that the Towns value them and take their concerns seriously.

## Action Item

Hire a temporary Grant and Writer and Project Manager for Economic Development and Covid Recovery. The initiative would include developing a job description, hiring a project manager, and working out the details of the project manager's role and responsibilities. A two-year pilot test would provide time for the concept to be tested and evaluated.

## Process

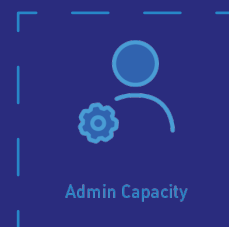
1. Conduct a brief scoping session with the Board of Selectmen to identify the duties and responsibilities of the Project Manager, the management structure for the position, and pursue initial planning.
2. Introduce the idea to businesses, town officials, and community members and build support for the pilot project.
3. Determine the budget and hiring timeline
4. Allocate funds and/or obtain a grant for the position
5. Advertise the position
6. Select the candidate
7. Conduct monthly/quarterly progress review with the Project Manager
8. Document the Pilot Test so that other municipalities can learn from the Pilot Test. If the Pilot Test shows that the Project Manager is successful, identify a long-term funding source and make a long-term hire.





Best Practice

## Hiring a Short-Term Grant Writer



Location: Lee County, Iowa

### Using federal funding to secure other funds

The Lee County Board of Supervisors decided to use the county's share of ARPA funding to hire someone to manage the funds and write additional grants. The County has \$6.5 million reserved in ARPA funding, out of which 3% (\$195,000) can be used for administrative purposes. These funds will be allocated over the period of five years until Dec 31, 2026.

The County looked at two options for hiring a new position. The first option was to hire a part-time (20 hours/week) funding coordinator to exclusively handle the ARPA funds and related documentation. The second option was to hire a full-time position to handle ARPA funds and secure other grant funding for the County. The Board decided the new staff person will be offered a salary of around \$63,000, partially coming from the ARPA funds and the rest from the new grants. If the position does not generate enough revenue by the end of the ARPA funding allocation period, the County will discontinue the position.

# Establish a Business Improvement District (BID)

Category		Administrative Capacity
Location		Gilbertville, Hardwick
Origin		RRP Advisory Committee
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) - with brand deployment
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years)
Risk		<p>Medium Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of funding and political will</li> <li>• Coordination with multiple partners</li> <li>• Uncertain property owner, business, and community support</li> </ul>
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A formal vote by the Board of Selectmen to establish the BID</li> <li>• Number of interested property/business owners</li> <li>• Corporate and tax filings complete</li> <li>• Staffing and initiation of services</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources		<p>Town of Hardwick, property/business owners, and residents.</p> <p>Funding Source:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massachusetts Downtown Initiative grant</li> <li>• Community Planning and Funding Services offered by the MA Department of Housing and Community Development division</li> <li>• Local community organization funding</li> <li>• Local resident/business owner contributions</li> </ul>

## Diagnostic

The Town of Hardwick has limited administrative capacity to oversee the proper functioning of the three villages, including Gilbertville, Wheelwright, and Old Furnace. The Town has a hard time promoting the local businesses and key attractions due to lack of staffing and financial resources. In addition, the pandemic reduced foot traffic to the village center, thus impacting the local economic growth.

It is essential to draw activity back to the Main Street and help local business owners address the impacts of the pandemic. Creating a Business Improvement District (BID) will create a stable local management structure that promotes the businesses and keeps the commercial areas clean and safe, making it easier to attract visitors and residents. The BID will also act as a strong advocate for the village center and help community members voice their opinions through community engagement initiatives. As a public-private partnership, the BID will leverage additional funding for storefront improvements, placemaking, public safety, and other local economic development initiatives.

The BID formation process may take a long-time and requires continuing support from property owners, business owners, and local community stakeholders. The community members need to initiate the creation of

## Action Item

Key actions:

- Identify staff and financial resources
- Establish a strong property owner based steering committee
- Create a property owner outreach strategy
- Ensure there is consensus among the stakeholders on program priorities, fee structures, boundaries, and budget
- Execution of the petition process and formal approval by the Board of Selectmen
- Initialization of BID services

## Process

Phase I

1. Create an existing conditions analysis to determine the need to form a BID.
2. Develop a case statement to set clear goals.
3. Establish a steering committee of property owners, commercial tenants, the Town officials, community-based organizations, and residents.
4. Determine the boundaries of the BID (it could be tentative).



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## Process

6. Create a database with information on properties, property owners, and tenants within the boundaries of the BID.
7. Develop a project plan to set target dates.

### Phase II

1. Conduct a needs assessment to identify the services and programs required by the stakeholders
2. Conduct outreach to the community
3. Draft a district plan including planned services and improvements, budget (first-year), and assessment formula to determine the amount each property owner pays on a yearly basis.

### Phase III

1. Prepare the BID petition and get signatures from all the property owners to ensure local support.
2. Organize the legislative authorization process
3. Form bylaws and establish the Board of Directors
4. Hire staff
5. Select vendors to start the improvements
6. Launch services

The BID can also apply for a nonprofit status after seeking approval from the Board and local community stakeholders. Please refer to the BID Formation manual available on [www.mass.gov/MDI](http://www.mass.gov/MDI) and case studies at [www.massdevelopment.com](http://www.massdevelopment.com)

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# Illustrations

The illustrations on the following pages show examples of how project recommendations can be put together in actual locations in Gilbertville to help improve conditions for business success.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS





## CHURCH STREET | GILBERTVILLE



1. IMPROVE FACADES, INCLUDING SIDING REPLACEMENT, REPAINTING, NEW WINDOWS AND DOORS, IMPROVED SIGNAGE

2. DEMOLISH CONDEMNED BUILDINGS AND REPLACE WITH PARK

3. ADD COORDINATED BENCHES, TRASH RECEPTACLES, AND PLANTERS WHERE SIDEWALK WIDTH IS ADEQUATE (3' MINIMUM, 5'-8' PREFERRED)

4. DEFINE ON-STREET PARKING SPACES

5. BURY POWER LINES WITHIN COMMERCIAL AREA

## EXAMPLES OF STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS



6. ADD COORDINATED VEHICULAR AND PEDESTRIAN SCALE LED LIGHTING WITH ATTACHED VILLAGE CENTER BRANDING AND EVENTS SIGNAGE

7. PLANT ADDITIONAL STREET TREES (WITHIN R.O.W. AND THROUGH PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIVATE PROPERTY OWNERS)

8. ADD BUFFER TO EXISTING PARKING LOT, PAVE, AND DEFINE SPACES

9. IMPROVE BUSINESS ACCESSIBILITY AND LANDSCAPING

10. RENOVATE SIDEWALKS AND CURBS

## CHURCH STREET | GILBERTVILLE



1. PARK PAVILION OR OTHER COVERED SEATING AND EVENT STRUCTURE

2. SHADE TREES

3. LOW MAINTENANCE, NATIVE, POLLINATOR-ORIENTED PLANTINGS

4. BIKE RACKS

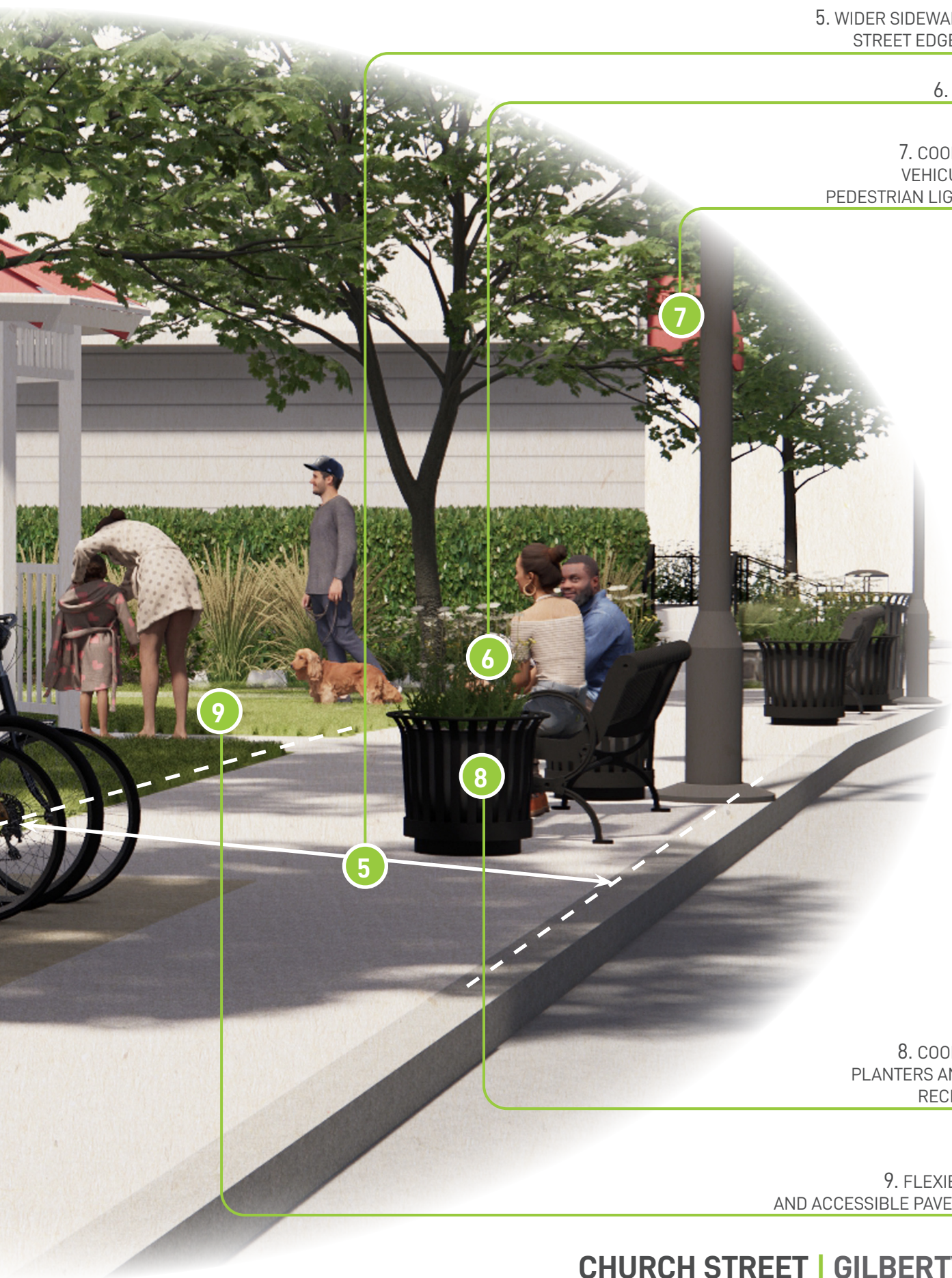
## EXAMPLES OF NEW PARK AMENITIES TO REPLACE EXISTING CONDEMNED BUILDINGS



5. WIDER SIDEWALK ALONG  
STREET EDGE OF PARK

6. BENCHES

7. COORDINATED  
VEHICULAR AND  
PEDESTRIAN LIGHT POLES



8. COORDINATED  
PLANTERS AND WASTE  
RECEPTACLES

9. FLEXIBLE LAWN  
AND ACCESSIBLE PAVED SPACES

## CHURCH STREET | GILBERTVILLE





## EXISTING CONDITIONS





## PROSPECT STREET | GILBERTVILLE



1. REPLACE SIDING AND TRIM AND/OR REPAINTING.

2. ADD CANOPIES, AWNINGS, AND/OR PORCHES TO PROTECT ENTRANCES FROM RAIN AND SHADE WINDOWS

3. ADD STURDY SIGNAGE SCALED TO BUILDING AND ORIENTED TOWARD SIDEWALKS

4. COMBINE WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS WITH LANDSCAPING AND SEATING

## EXAMPLES OF FACADE AND LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS



5. INCREASE VISIBILITY OF BUSINESSES AND  
IMPROVE ACCESS TO THEM BY RETROFITTING  
STOREFRONTS WITH ADDED/EXPANDED WINDOWS  
AND DOORS

6. ADD HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL TRIM  
ELEMENTS TO ADD VISUAL INTEREST TO  
EXISTING FACADES



7. IMPROVE WALKABILITY  
ALONG STREET WITH NEW  
CURBS AND CONCRETE WALKS

8. REPLACE PERPENDICULAR PARKING AGAINST  
BUILDING WITH PARALLEL PARKING

## PROSPECT STREET | GILBERTVILLE

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# Rapid Recovery Plan Gilbertville, Hardwick



**DODSON & FLINKER**  
Landscape Architecture and Planning

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