



# Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

City of Holyoke

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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# Acknowledgements



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Holyoke Redevelopment Authority

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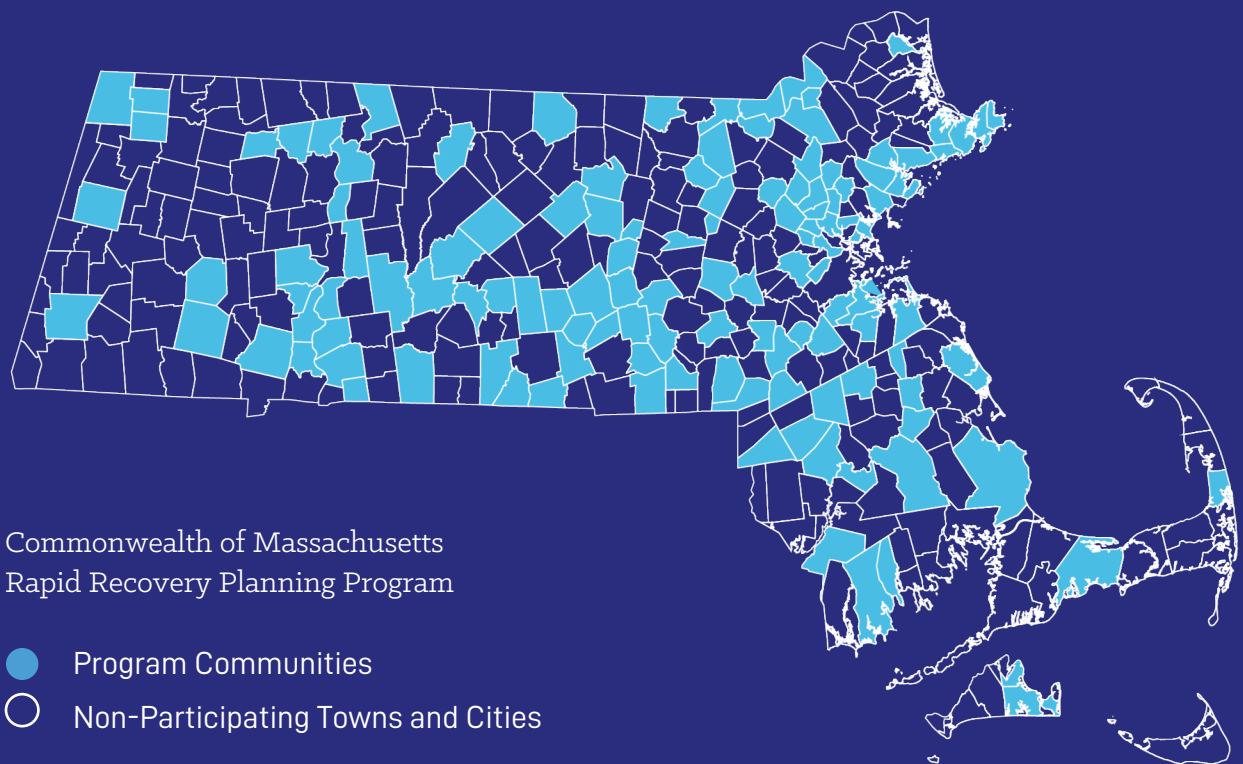
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## 125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



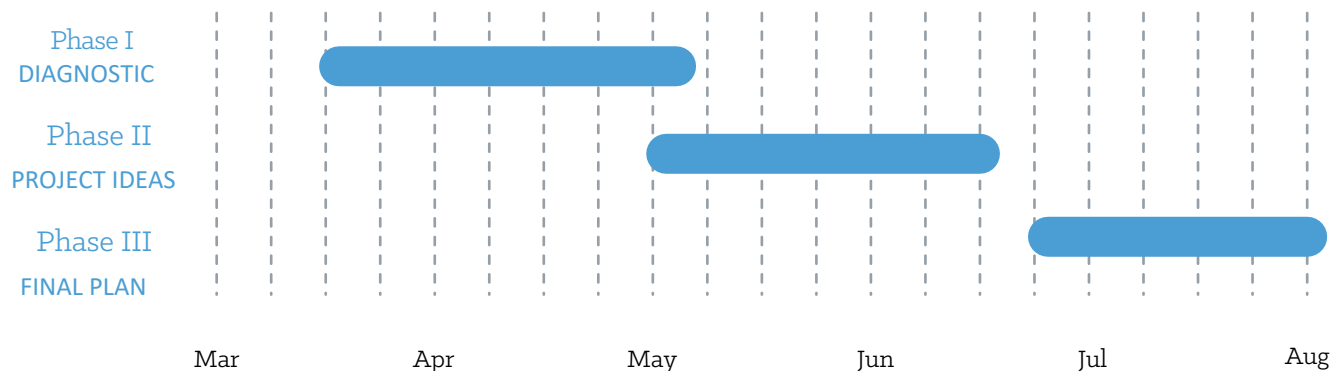
# Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

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



## Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue/Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

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## Executive Summary



# Executive Summary

## An Inclusive Gateway City Leveraging People Power and Resources to Forge Forward

### COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

The City of Holyoke is a charming and historic Gateway City in the Pioneer Valley Region of Massachusetts that aspires to realize equitable growth and social inclusion as it explores a comprehensive suite of strategic alternatives for recovering from its economic woes resulting the COVID-19 pandemic. The city has a rich diverse mix of natural, built, and social capital resources upon which to advance a transformational agenda. These assets include, but are not limited to: The Mount Tom Range, the Connecticut River and the Holyoke Canal System, the International Volleyball Hall of Fame and Children's Museum, Wistariahurst Museum, two prominent colleges, and a host of parks, memorials and plazas. As its general fund increases to nearly \$45 million, additional support will allow the community and businesses operating within the City Center Commercial District to flourish as it once did as the "Queen of Industrial Cities."

### KEY FINDINGS

The diagnostic phase of the Local Rapid Recovery Planning Program revealed significant social and economic disparities upon comparing the city's general customer base to the residential population located within the City Center Commercial District. Residents located within the district were about 10 years younger (i.e., 36.2 compared to 26.8) with slightly larger families (i.e., 2.5 compared to 2.8) and median household incomes less than half of the size of the general population (i.e., \$39,939 compared to \$17,713). In addition the population within the district was significantly less skilled than the general population (i.e., 67.5% compared to 90% earned less than an associates degree), demonstrating the concentration of poverty in the city's center.

Examining the physical environment reveals that the city has aging public and private infrastructure characterized by corroded streetscapes and building façades, boarded up structures lacking awnings, and windows that makes it difficult to observe commercial activity from outdoors. All the while, local business owners continue to struggle with pivoting operations (e.g., expenses incurred to implement safety measures and establishing alternative modes to sell and deliver products), navigating regulatory requirements, and securing capital to establish, recover, and expand their businesses. The community's arts and cultural institutions, while rich in history and quality offerings, also suffer from the effects of poverty in the area, which has only been exacerbated by the shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

The collection of recommended recovery strategies are inclusive by design, having been informed by over a 50 representatives from a diverse bench of stakeholder groups—across government, small business, education, philanthropic, non-profit, and health care sectors. They frame priorities across domains to address streetscaping and walkability, wayfinding, community engagement, access to capital, technology-enabled marketing for the commercial district, incorporating racial equity training, and the expansion of arts and culture with the creation of a cultural district. Another major effort includes supporting the restoration of the historic MIFA Victory Theatre, which has already identified \$31 million in funds towards its \$55 million project.



*Image of Holyoke City Hall Building. Source: Wikimedia Commons*



## A charming historic Gateway City whose recovery will depend on deep levels of cross-sector collaboration with a racial equity lens

The City of Holyoke aspires to be "a city that inspires, in constant growth, creating opportunities for all." It is a small Latinx-majority city in Hampden County, Massachusetts, situated between the western bank of the Connecticut River and the Mount Tom Range. The city is a part of the "five college" area and is located within the Greater Springfield metro area. With strong Irish roots and incorporated as a town in 1850, Holyoke was one of the United States' first planned industrial communities once recognized as the "Queen of Industrial Cities" and the "Paper City of the World" where textiles were its first major product followed by paper.

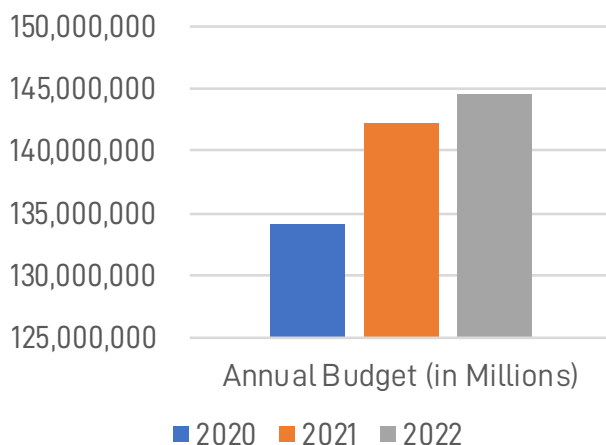
Today, the city offers retail establishments, entertainment venues, and urban apartment complexes along the Connecticut River and Canal System where the mills once operated. [Niche.com](#) explains the city provides residents with "a dense suburban feel." Holyoke is the birthplace of volleyball and is also home to the Volleyball Hall of Fame. The city is also home to Mount Holyoke College, the oldest of the Seven Sister Colleges, and Holyoke Community College. Other prominent features include Heritage State Park, the Wistariahurst Museum, and Holyoke Mall.

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

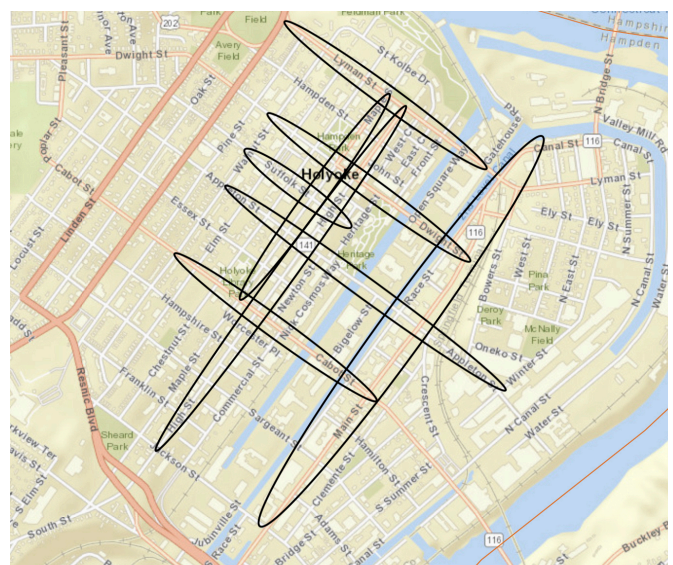
1. [Sightseeing at the Mount Tom State Reservation](#)
2. [Taking pictures of the Dinosaur Footprints](#)
3. [Visiting Holyoke Children's Museum](#)
4. [Hiking the Ashley Reservoir Trail](#)
5. [Going shopping at Holyoke Mall](#)

Despite its rich cultural history and growing budget, the city was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The shutdown affected many businesses and major cultural institutions, and led to the cancellation of major events that bring people downtown, including the preeminent St. Patrick's Day Parade. The city will require investment to recover.

### General Fund Trend



Source: Annual Budget reports for Fiscal Years 2021 and 2022



Key streets for improvement and spaces for engagement. Photo: Third Eye Network

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## Diagnostic



# Key Findings



## CUSTOMER BASE

### The city's customer base is young and culturally diverse

Holyoke has a moderately liberal population of over 40,800 residents. The customer base has an average household size of 2.52 and median age of 36.2 years, but only 26.8 in the commercial district. With fresh ambitions, these young families—many of whom are recent immigrants—center their lives and work around their children. Nearly 57% of the population reside in renter-occupied housing units, which is about 83% in the district.

The city's non-White population 41.2% predominately composed of Latinx, some other race alone (29%), and Black (5%). The Latinx community makes up about 58% of the total population, including those who identify as White. The percentage is even higher within the commercial district.

The workforce makes up about 60% of the population at 24,458 and predominantly occupies low- and middle-skill jobs in the retail and services sectors. The city's cost of living is 6.5% lower than the national average, corresponding to a median household income of \$39,939. The unemployment rate is 25.6% within the district, which comparatively has a median household income of \$17,713.



## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

### The city has aging public infrastructure

Holyoke's public infrastructure is largely in a state of disrepair. More than 25% of sidewalks in the district pose challenges to the pedestrian experience. This includes a lack of cleanliness and maintenance. There are many instances of raised sidewalk slabs and bricks missing from brick-based walkways. While some street trees and a few benches are observable throughout the area, these amenities have not been cleaned or well-maintained, requiring improvements.

Roadbeds and crosswalks were substantially worn out, especially on Hight Street and Race Street. Some spots were so bad they are hazardous to all users (e.g., motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians). This was especially apparent by the main entrance to Heritage State Park, where a deep gash in the crosswalk spans beyond the width of a car tire.

Wayfinding throughout the district primarily geared towards directing motorists around the area. Street signs varied a bit across the district and was not always displayed with signs for cross streets. Moreover, very few signs identify key assets and destinations for drivers and pedestrians. Noted signs included a parking sign and signage indicating the direction of neighboring cities and towns.

At night, there is a great deal of visibility around the district, where a range of public lighting strategies ensure the safety of motorists and pedestrians. It also serves to highlight the cultural identity and history of the area. For example, with all facility lights off, a single street light was able to illuminate the front of the building occupied by Nueva Esperanza.

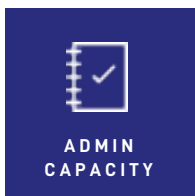


## The city is anchored by cultural and entertainment venues

There are a plethora of anchor institutions located within the commercial district from arts and cultural organizations to business and workforce development centers. Among the arts and cultural set, enthusiasts can visit the Internationally Volleyball Hall of Fame, the Children's Museum at Holyoke, visit the Holyoke War Memorial Building, or learn about efforts to restore the MIFA Victory Theatre. Workers and aspiring business owners are able to seek assistance at the MassHire Holyoke Career Center, enroll at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, use the facilities at Spark Cowork, or locate their business in the Cubit.

Similar to the conditions of the public sector, private sector facilities were generally in a state of disrepair. Almost all storefronts are boarded up or have limited transparency. In some instances, windows on the upper stories have been recently updated, while the ground floor commercial spaces require improvements. Only a few storefronts were equipped with awnings and a significant number of properties, more than 25%, require renovation. Where some may benefit from power washing or painting, others need substantial structural enhancements.

There is no spillover retail or restaurant activity readily observable across the district. However, about half of the storefronts display signs that convey businesses' identity and is legibly seen from adjacent sidewalks or across the street. At night, roughly 50% of the storefronts have interior or exterior lighting that showcases their window displays and contribute to district safety and visibility by augmenting the streetlights.



## The city has no downtown organization overseeing recovery efforts

Recently, recovery efforts have been the focus of the Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED). However, staffing and budget restraints have prevented the office from becoming deeply engaged in overseeing recovery efforts. The agency has discussed the possibility of collaboration local entities such as Holyoke Chamber of Commerce, EforAll/Spark Cowork, and Holyoke Community College to name a few. Many of these partner prospects also share in the constraints faced by the office.

During Phase II of the rapid recovery planning program, the chamber expressed an interest in developing a business improvement district for focus on physical enhancements throughout the public realm. This idea remains early stage, but may bring potential value to recovery activities in the short-term. Part of the challenge with addressing recovery oversight is rooted in recent staff turnover in OPED. As the recovery program began, office leadership was only a few months in their roles, and by the end of the program one of the key personnel was preparing to transition out of the city.

The other challenge has to do with the current transition of power underway at the city, which will be complete in early November. Once settled, the incoming administration will be able to decide how best to support recovery activities given the resources and available alternatives for doing so. The possibility of establishing a new Office of Community Wealth Building jointly staffed by OPED and the Office of Community Development was one option discussed with Acting Mayor Murphy.



## Highlights from the Physical Environment

### PUBLIC REALM: ACCESS

The need for maintenance across the commercial district made access a challenge. About one third of the sidewalk in front of the Social Security Administration building slants downward. In addition the parking lot at City Hall is greatly worn out with potholes, cracks, and rubble. The lot is available for public parking after hours and on weekends. Given its proximity to Heritage State Park and stakeholder interests in using public parks and vacant lots for cultural community engagement activities and pop-up market opportunities, repaving the lot should be considered a priority project.



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

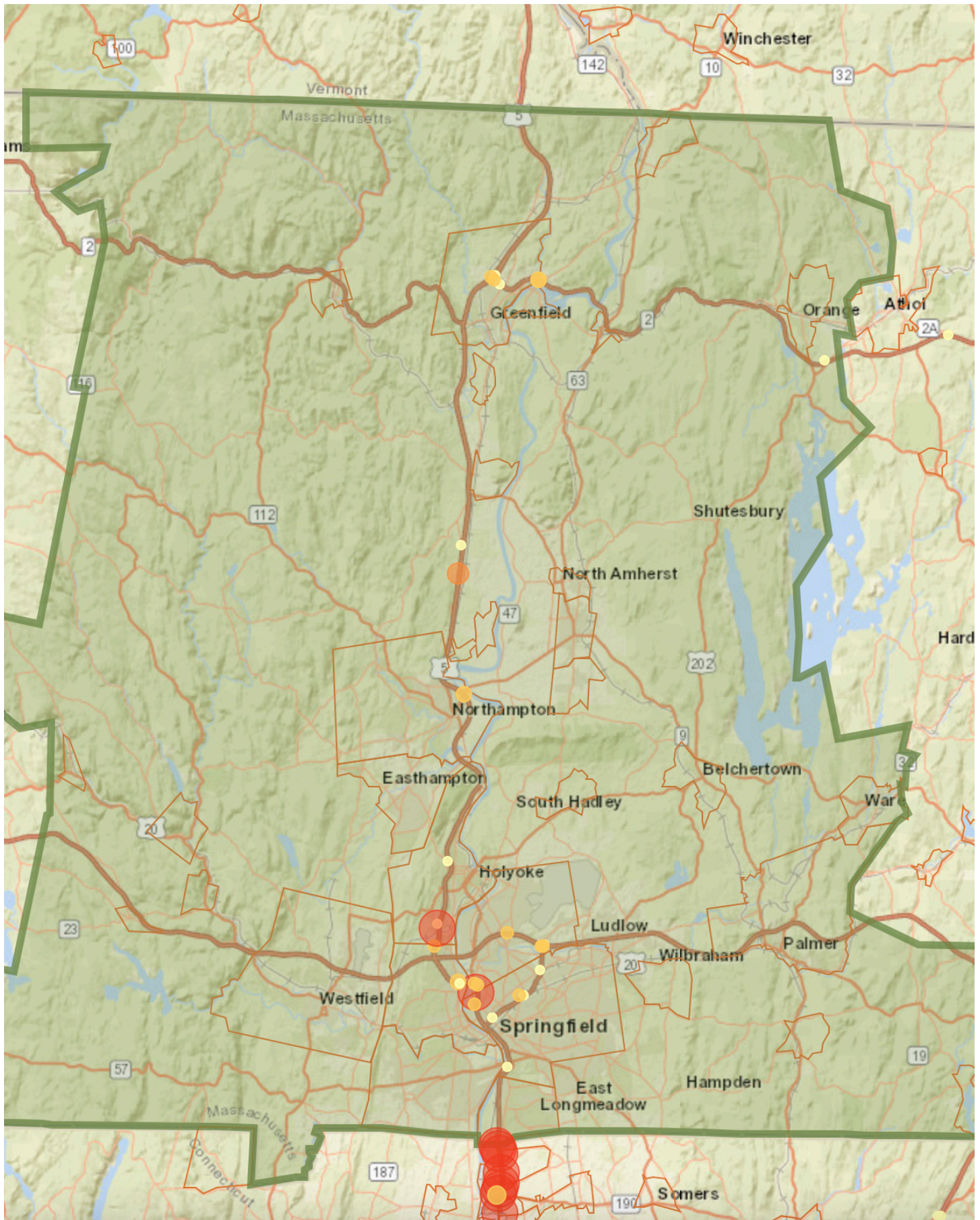
### PUBLIC REALM : VISIBILITY

Pedestrian visibility did not seem to be a prevalent concern or challenge throughout the district. The majority of the corridors were sufficiently lighted. However, parts of Main Street and side streets require additional lighting or maintenance of street trees that restrict the available lighting's ability to reach adjacent sidewalks. Visibility seemed to be more of an issue near parks and behind privately-owned buildings.



*Image of the crosswalk at the entrance of Heritage State Park. Source: Third Eye Network*





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





*Image of Heritage State Park. Source: Community Preservation Act Committee*

## The Town has a robust network of parks and open spaces

### **PUBLIC REALM: PARKS**

According to the 2019–2025 Open Space and Recreation Plan, the City of Holyoke touts over 50 parks and recreation facilities that provide active and passive recreation opportunities to residents and tourists. There are a total of seven parks located within the City Center Commercial District:

- Heritage State Park
- Holyoke Library Park
- Hamden Park
- Sheard Park
- Deroy Park
- Pina Park
- McNally Field

### **PUBLIC REALM: MEMORIALS AND PLAZAS**

There are also a few plazas located within the district. The Korean War Veterans Memorial Plaza is located adjacent to city hall, featuring a plaque and benches.

Another is the John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza located south of Holy Cross Roman Catholic church. The full list of memorials and plazas located in Holyoke is maintained by Holyoke Soldiers' Memorial Commission, which can be viewed at [soldiersmemorialcommission.org/war-memorials](https://soldiersmemorialcommission.org/war-memorials).

### **PUBLIC REALM: PARKLETS AND POCKET PARKS**

Parklets and pocket parks are also available features across the district, although parklets were not prominent. The 2018 Community Preservation Plan discussed the process used to engage Holyoke residents in public forums. Creating pocket parks downtown by extending Canalwalk was proposed during the discussion, garnering significant community support from 64% of participants. Two of the open ended comments provided additional context indicating while expensive to maintain, the development of pocket parks were preferred without necessarily extending Canalwalk. Pocket parks were also a component of a 2019 construction project to develop a new 17,000 square foot, three-story apartment building and renovate the existing apartments at Holyoke Farms.





## Highlights from the Business Environment

### PRIVATE REALM: ANCHORS/DESTINATIONS

There are a total of 560 businesses located within the City Center Commercial District, employing 6,833 workers—a population ratio of 76 employees per 100 residents. Retail destinations within the district include Fernandez Family Restaurant and Catering, Khi and Eli's Food For The Soul, Holyoke Cannabis Dispensary, and Dream Décor Holyoke to name a few. Non-commercial anchors bringing visitors to the district include the Holyoke Children's Museum,, Wistariahurst Museum, Gateway City Arts, and the Volleyball Hall of Fame.

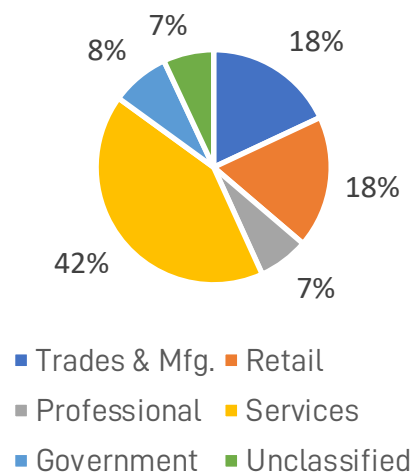
There are some challenges to ensuring property owners maximum the value of their facilities. One owner noted the requirements imposed by the Fire Department—costs of installing sprinkler systems and adding transformers to power legacy buildings. Another mentioned troubles navigating municipal policies and securing financial assistance. Also, some owners have not been able to renovate the upper levels of their building to have fully occupied.

### PRIVATE REALMS: NODES/CLUSTERS

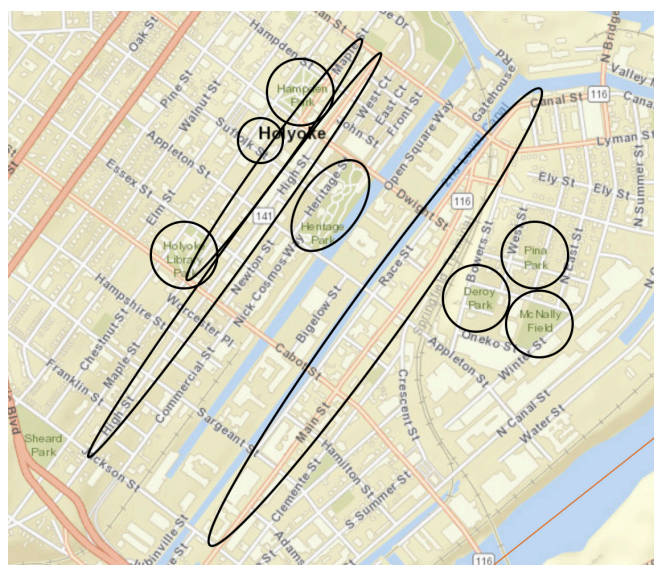
The primary commercial nodes within the district are located along the northeastern end of Maple Street, High Street, Race Street, and Main Street. High Street and Main Street has the highest concentrations of commercial establishments within the district, with most recent development activity taking place on the east end of High Street. A number of historical and social factors have negatively impacted the district including the development of Holyoke Mall at Ingleside in 1979, the natural gas moratorium in 2019, and the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020.

Creating new public-private sector collaboration may be one of the more exciting opportunities for jump-starting retail activity across the district. Utilizing public spaces for district-wide public and pop-up market events will allow aspiring business owners to test product and service ideas before committing to a commercial lease. In addition, it establishes touchpoints for identifying businesses operating within the informal sector—without a business permit or licensure—and creating pathways to formalization and helping them fill vacant storefronts as they grow. It also makes retail more accessible for downtown residents while honoring social distancing guidelines.

No. of Establishments



Mix of business by NAICS category. Source: Esri



Map of commercial and community nodes. Source: Third Eye Network

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## Project Recommendations

# Implement Streetscape and Walkability Improvement Plans for the District

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Census Tracts No. 8114, 8115, 8116, and 8117
Origin	Diagnostic phase; and Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development
Budget	 Large: Over \$500,000 including \$80,000 for planning; \$150,000 to \$250,000 estimated for design development; and \$1 million to \$2 million estimated for construction; see below for funding resources
Timeframe	 Short-term: less than 5 years
Risk	 Medium: Staffing capacity, maintenance, procurement process constraints
Key Performance Indicators	Total length of new sidewalk; Number of new crosswalks; Number of new on-street parking spaces with 300-feet of commercial streets; Pedestrian traffic counts
Partners & Resources	Department of Public Works; planning and design may consider TDI Creative Catalyst, Commonwealth Places, MA Downtown Initiative, Community Development Block Grants; construction activities may consider MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces, MassWorks, CARES Act statewide programs, and American Rescue Plan Act funding



Image of hazardous sidewalk on High Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



## Diagnostic

Results from diagnostic activities convey that respondents were dissatisfied with the conditions of public spaces, streets, and sidewalks. This sentiment was echoed by unstructured feedback indicating the need to “clean up the city streets” because trash and sidewalk conditions makes walking “difficult” for some. Although street trees and benches—sporadically—are available across district, they have not been well-maintained. Sidewalks and road beds tended to be in disrepair and occasionally hazardous on most streets (except Race Street). In addition, most crosswalks were largely faded, making it challenging for pedestrian crossing since stopping points for automobiles lack definition.

Survey respondents and stakeholder interviews supported a few actions for improvement. The development of public spaces and seating areas was important. But, it was very important to respondents to improve “safety and cleanliness” and “[the] streetscape and sidewalks.” When addressed, streetscaping can create “more opportunities for outdoor dining and selling,” which was also perceived to be an essential potential recovery strategy. Investments in streetscape and walkability will make the district more welcoming and will assist with shifting negative perceptions of the City Center Commercial District.

## Action Item

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

- Prioritize community engagement and education by stakeholder group throughout the entirety of project development and implementation to garner and maintain buy-in.
- Prepare conceptual and final designs.
- Pursue funding program recommendations on the preceding page.
- Proceed with construction activities to implement the final design.



*Image of hazardous road bed on High Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network*



## Process

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



Image of hazardous crosswalks on Cabot Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network

# Improve Downtown Wayfinding for Automobiles and Pedestrians





Category	 Public Realm
Location	Census Tracts No. 8114, 8115, 8116, and 8117, and major commercial corridors providing access to the City Center Commercial District
Origin	Diagnostic phase; and Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development
Budget	 High: Over \$500,000 including \$25,000 to \$150,000+ for wayfinding design; and \$75,000 to \$500,000 for fabrication
Timeframe	 Short-term: Less than five years including four to eight months for designing a wayfinding program and another three to six months for fabrication
Risk	 Low: Primarily concerning financial and installation risks. With proper documentation regarding the location of the signage elements, installation risk can be mitigated early in the fabrication process by the design, fabrication, and installation teams.
Key Performance Indicators	Public surveys for rating the completed signage and wayfinding project; impact of wayfinding signage resident and visitor journeys; number of integrated art installations
Partners & Resources	Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development, Department of Public Works, and residents. Google maps is a critical resource for obtaining distances by miles (driving) and time (walking); funding sources include MassTrail Grants, Destination Development Capital Program, Community Development Block Grant, Urban Agenda Grant Program; EDA Economic Adjustment Assistance and Competitive Tourism Grant Programs



Image of wayfinding signage. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



## Diagnostic

Wayfinding in the study area is primarily geared towards directing motorists across the study area. However, survey responses indicated businesses thought it was important to implement marketing strategies, more cultural events, and activities that brings people into the district. There is limited signage identifying key assets and destinations for pedestrians. Respondents also moderately favored amenity improvements for public transit and bike users and changes to public parking availability, management and policy. Improvements in wayfinding provide significant recovery opportunities because it improves navigation and connectivity. Particularly, it can assist travelers with finding available parking, cultural destinations, and commercial districts. By incorporating digital resources like QR codes, it can provide a meaningful boost to district-wide marketing activities.

Additionally, 63% of businesses indicated that they generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 70% of businesses had less on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID, with more than 50% reporting a reduction of 25% or more. This project aims to steer multimodal traffic to Holyoke's City Center Commercial District to raise awareness of available points of interests from cultural assets and natural resources to retail and social destinations. It also supports mental health and wellness for residents who have become frustrated with remaining homebound—constrained by remote work.

## Action Item

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

Leverage community-based delineations (e.g., wards and neighborhoods) to collaborate with residents to inform the development of the wayfinding system.

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

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



Image of parking signage. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



## Process

- [Gather Your Assets](#)

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

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

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

- [Layer the Data](#)

The data will begin to form a clear picture of how the wayfinding system should address the topography of the city. The team should be able to see major routes for vehicles and pedestrians, points of interests, town limits, parking and points of entry and exit.

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

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

- [Identify the Sign Types](#)

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

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

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

- [Design the Signage](#)

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

Vehicular and bike signage should be large to allow for large type.

All signage should be high contrast and use fonts that are highly legible.

Pedestrian signage can be smaller in size, but should be more targeted.

- [Select Fabrication Partners](#)

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

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



*Image of Heritage State Park: Third Eye Network*



# Adopt a Community-driven Civic Engagement and Development Strategy






Category	  Public Realm and Cultural/Arts
Location	Census Tracts No. 8114, 8115, 8116, and 8117
Origin	This placemaking strategy was originally submitted as part of the community's application to participate in the Rapid Recovery Planning Program.
Budget	 Medium: \$50,000 to \$200,000 including \$75,000 for annual event coordination, planning, and marketing; \$2,000 for vending booths; \$15,000 for place-based investment resources; \$3,000 for stakeholder forums; a fund for awarding \$500 to \$1500 grants for “placekeeping;” plus staffing costs
Timeframe	 Short-term: Less than five years with up to a year for strategy development, community outreach, and marketing. Events and activities may be recur weekly, periodically, seasonally, annually or biennially.
Risk	 Medium: Ability to garner and sustain diverse residential community, businesses, and partnering organization engagement, identify sustainable funding sources, socio-political climate, and measuring impact over time
Key Performance Indicators	Number of events by site; vendor and attendee participation rates; retail activity for “mainstreeters” and vendors; grants made by volume and amounts; partnerships formed/managed, permits granted by frequency and population segment or niche
Partners & Resources	City of Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development, Holyoke Tourism Advisory Committee, Holyoke Local Cultural Council, Genuine Culture LLC, Holyoke Media, City Council representatives, Explore Western Mass, Passport Holyoke, Neighbor to Neighbor MA, the Parade Committee, Nueva Esperanza, El Corazón (e.g., the Heart of Holyoke), local businesses, and other nonprofits and community organizations (i.e., Boys & Girls Club of Greater Holyoke)



Image of a local community organization on Main Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



## Diagnostic

Survey respondents expressed interests in the development of "more cultural events and activities to bring people into the district," "more opportunities for outdoor dining and selling" and "implementing marketing strategies for the commercial district." The shutdown and cancellation of several large events, including the St. Patrick's Day Parade and Road Race, significantly impacted revenues for 70% of downtown businesses. The development of a community-driven engagement strategy would spur additional opportunities for cultural community engagement, which would afford significant economic benefits for food and retail establishments across the district.

Stakeholder interviews revealed a number of informal activities are led by local artists and community groups that garner more traction and support outside of Holyoke than by the city and its community partners. They also indicated, "we need a 'placekeeping' strategy and a Latinx Cultural District." Events and retail activity are generally reinforcing. With 50% of businesses operating at reduced capacity and for fewer hours following a period of temporary closures and cancelled cultural events, this project recommendation would enable targeted corridors to generate foot traffic through culture-based activities. It would also attract new art investment opportunities that could be targeted for each commercial corridor and their surrounding communities.

## Action Items

Involves building and sustaining a comprehensive strategy to encourage, fund, and coordinate community-driven events and activities downtown that invigorate civic life and provide added visibility and sales local businesses. Components should include the following actions:

- Dedicate staff resources to centralize municipal support or contract with select community partners or a professional coordinator to facilitate planning and coordination and ensure continuity and sustainability.
- Standardize needs assessment and map current workflows for government assistance with these activities and establish activity-level performance indicators and feedback loops to track success.
- Poll the community (e.g., residents, businesses, and visitors) to determine current and anticipated needs and desires and to evaluate operational effectiveness. Maintain stakeholder alignment across all activities.
- Develop an annual calendar of cultural community events, activities, and occasions. Identify key community partners and organizers to champion identified events and activities.
- Establish a database of sites and locations where events and activities take place. Develop a shared marketing distribution list.



Image of project sign outside of City Hall on High Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



## Process

- Consider hiring college Interns (e.g., planning, marketing, communications) to assist with preliminary inventory, presentation materials, and community survey and outreach.
- Conduct a complete survey and inventory of nonprofits and community organizations in the city with contact Information and mission.
- Conduct a downtown space assessment and prepare a map of possible event spaces and types of events appropriate to each (e.g., sidewalks, parks, street closure locations, parking spaces, private and public parking lots, vacant lots, building plazas, etc.).
- Develop a presentation of the proposed program. including:
  - Proposed program name
  - Goals (support downtown businesses, community culture and civic life)
  - Overall proposed timeline to create the program framework and implementation
  - 2 to 3 best practices to provide a vision of what can be accomplished
  - Possible framework or organizational structure and budget
  - Next steps (e.g., assessment of community needs, interest, aspirations, capacity, etc.)
- Create an online survey for businesses, residents, organizations and groups.
- Conduct outreach by attending meetings and events organized by community partners and offer to make presentations. Develop an “elevator pitch” or talking points for use. Distribute materials containing the survey link, and also conduct intercept surveys downtown.
- Analyze survey results to summarize:
  - Needs and aspirations,
  - Interest,
  - local capacity,
  - Level of commitment, etc.
- Based on how survey results inform proceeding, update program materials to include survey insights. Look at best practices and determine possible program framework and desired outcomes, and measurement Indicators. Considerations should include:
  - How might the City best support the activity while empowering community-driven actions? Think of city’s roles of convener, supporter, and occasionally sponsor and its ability to provide overall support (e.g., public safety, public works, traffic, parking, credibility, etc.)



Image of local public transit service. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



## Process

- How can the activity acknowledge the value of local knowledge, compensate organizations, individuals for contributions? How can the program align with goals of community organizations? For instance, can teens be paid as part of a larger mentoring program while they learn organizational, planning, and communication skills assisting with initiatives?
- Create a preliminary budget. Fundraise to secure the first two years of expenses (e.g., grants, sponsorship, sales, donations, etc.)
- Hire coordinator or consultant. Important qualities include the ability to connect or relate to others, understand diverse community and business needs, strong communication skills, high energy, multi-tasking; and marketing and promotions experience are a plus.
- Create a guide book or toolkit for community-drive events providing information on types of events, possible spaces, and ways the city can support efforts (e.g., streamline permitting processes, information, referrals, staffing and resource lists, financial assistance, etc.)
- Launch city-sponsored and community-led events focusing on quality over quantity since most activities grow over time. Consider building momentum and creating expectations for regular activities (e.g., first Friday salsa nights).
- Consider a community placekeeping fund that provides grants for community-led events and activities in the downtown. This can be a program under the proposed “Revitalize Holyoke Fund.”
- Provide ongoing support for community-led events.
- Evaluate the program and revise accordingly.
- Refer to “Places in the Making” for case studies (<https://issuu.com/mit-dusp/docs/mit-dusp-places-in-the-making>)



Image of historic Parsons Hall entrance on Race Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



# Develop Creative Capital Solutions to Increase Access to Capital for Small Businesses





Category	 Private Realm
Location	City-wide
Origin	Third Eye Network (Plan Facilitator)
Budget	 High: \$250,000 to \$750,000
Timeframe	 Short-term: Less than five years, include one year for environmental scanning, up to a year for financial program development and one to two years for marketing and community adoption
Risk	 Medium: Key risks include organizational environmental factors such as culture, staff constraints, internal structural and socio-political dynamics that tend to inhibit equitable participation in capital programs
Key Performance Indicators	New program development; participation rates; awards by size and volume; number of businesses created, expanded, and sustained; number of jobs created, expanded, and sustained
Partners & Resources	EforAll for start-up capital, Holyoke Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, Holyoke Gas and Electric, Office of Community Development, and other capital providers; resource considerations include Opportunity Zones, Community Development Block Grant, MA Downtown Initiative Program, BIZ-M-POWER, Build Back Better Regional Challenge, Hometown Grant Program



Image of Holyoke Gas and Electric Department. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



## Diagnostic

The physical exteriors of buildings located within the district require significant capital improvement as conveyed via the diagnostic phase. About half of all storefronts have clear visible signage reflecting basic business information and interior lighting that helps illuminate sidewalks at night. However, more than 25% of properties require significant building façade improvements, (e.g., power washing, painting, and structural enhancements). There were also unsatisfactory evaluations for windows, awnings, and outdoor displays and dining availability. Nearly all storefronts within the study area were either boarded up or have limited transparency. Very few were equipped with awnings and there were no instances of spillover retail or restaurant activity in the district.

According to survey respondents, 90% of businesses reported being impacted by COVID with 70% acknowledging declines in revenues.

Respondents were generally dissatisfied with the conditions of private buildings, storefronts, and signs. A significant number of them were in favor of obtaining low-cost financing for renovating storefronts and building façade improvements (30%), and purchasing property (20%). Yet, access to capital barriers persist for start-ups, microenterprises, businesses operating informally and main street (e.g., “brick-and-mortar”) businesses, especially those owned by People of Color. This project recommendations aims to elevate the importance of alternative inclusive sources and uses of capital.

## Action Item

Build the internal capacity and operational alignment within the city to systematically develop and enhance culturally and contextually congruent financial assistance programs with appropriate levels training for underserved and marginalized small business segments.

Perform a biennial environmental scan of the local, regional, state financial ecosystem and develop new financial assistance programs to close gaps within the local funding ecosystem.

Explore permissible alternative uses and policy setting opportunities for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to optimize the resource.

Develop a comprehensive marketing and promotions strategy coupled with hand-on technical assistance aimed at increasing access to capital start-ups, microenterprises, businesses operating informally and main street businesses, especially those owned by People of Color.



Image of the Greater Holyoke Chamber of Commerce building. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



## Process

### Develop Creative Capital Solutions

- Establish and maintain a database of local, regional, and state-wide organizations offering small business financial assistance programs.
- Identify the range of existing financial programs administered by the city and local providers. Categorize all existing local uses of CDBG and other financial assistance programs.
- Review the CDBG manual and alternative funding guidelines to explore the range of possible uses.
- Develop new financial programs to close gaps in the capital stack. Use diverse funding sources and work diligently to mitigate application barriers by removing nonessential submission requirements for non-CDBG backed funds.
- Hire a new marketing director and staff to promote all funding alternatives, using culturally-relevant communication methods and avenues.

### Equitable CDBG Administration

- Conduct an analysis of current needs of diverse businesses aligned with eligible uses of CDBG.
- Complete substantial amendments of the city's annual action plan and policies for CDBG.
- Open the application period and host information sessions.
- Establish an inclusive application review protocol and score submissions using three to seven person committees.
- Select and notify successful applicants.
- Execute the grant agreement.
- Prepare requests for proposals to procure a bench of technical assistance providers.
- Host technical assistance workshops and classes on an ongoing basis. Possible topics include digital marketing, business modeling, pricing strategy, accounting, government and corporate contracting, certification training (e.g., MWBE, HUD Section 3, SDVOB, etc.), and grant reporting.
- Complete reimbursement requests on an ongoing basis. Where permitted, provide direct vendor pay as an alternative to reimbursable expenses in order to mitigate financial barriers to grant administration (e.g., match requirements for newer and smaller businesses).
- Collect reporting documentation and initiate award close out procedures with HUD.



*Image of a municipal parking facility on Dwight Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network*

# Adopt Location-based Marketing Platforms for Local Retail Activation





Category	 Revenues and Sales
Location	Census Tracts No. 8114, 8115, 8116, and 8117; also Pioneer Valley Region
Origin	Third Eye Network (Plan Facilitator)
Budget	 Medium: \$50,000 to \$200,000 including \$140,000 for a local customer loyalty program pilot, and \$60,000 for a digital marketplace (two years)
Timeframe	 Short-term: Two years
Risk	 Medium: Financial sustainability and community adoption may be challenges. Restrictions to product-based businesses or the number of items permitted by vendors may impact shopper experience (e.g., missed sales opportunities; particularly for those unable to visit physical locations).
Key Performance Indicators	Number of subscribers; user statistics; sales; customer loyalty and satisfaction rates
Partners & Resources	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, along with approximately 43 regional towns, municipalities, chambers, and local businesses. Resources include digital and printed collateral and the Blueprint Easthampton Resource Navigator; funding options include the Regional Pilot Project Grant Program and Small Business Technical Assistance Grant



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



## Diagnostic

The diagnostic phase of the RRP program revealed that 90% of businesses were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, where 53% “established alternative modes to sell and deliver products.” These modes include taking advantage of technology-enabled purchasing and delivery services as well as curbside pick-up. Because of the compounding effects of the Digital Divide, not all businesses were able to take advantage of these 21st Century resources and methods. Accordingly, 67% of survey respondents expressed an interest in receiving some kind of technical assistance in order to shift their operations and remain viable given the current environment.

Survey respondents felt “implementing marketing strategies for the commercial district” was important. The most relevant forms of assistance of interest that informs this project recommendation includes, “participating in shared marketing and advertising” (33%), “training on the use of social media” (17%), and “setting up an online store and other online selling channels” (7%). Driving online and foot traffic can alleviate declines in average annual daily traffic resulting from the pandemic. Given Holyoke’s relative size and proximity to neighboring municipalities, a regional approach based on the functional economy would bolster tourism to optimize revenue generating activity for local businesses while enabling economies of scale by distributing the costs of technology-based solutions across communities.



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

## Action Items

Work with regional partners to identify towns and municipalities that might want to participate in the program.

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

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

Expand successful programs across the region (Phase II).



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

## Process

- [Establish Coordinated Communications](#)

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

- [Develop an Education-Certification Program](#)

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

- [Build or Buy Community-Business Directories](#)

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

- [Expand Online Local Businesses' Presence](#)

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

- [Launch a Multi-Vendor Marketplace](#)

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

- [Formalize a Shared Marketing Program](#)

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



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



# Advance Equitable, Inclusive Recovery with Undoing Racism® Workshops

Category	 Admin Capacity
Location	City of Holyoke, especially Census Tracts No. 8114, 8115, 8116, and 8117
Origin	Third Eye Network (Plan Facilitator)
Budget	 Medium: Hosting three or more workshops annually can surpass \$50,000 with the following cost categories, \$13,500 to \$16,500 per workshop fee; Up to \$5,000 for hosting fees (e.g., facility rentals, catering, supplies, and decorations); up to \$2,500 for marketing and promotions
Timeframe	 Short Term: The City hosted two workshops between August 2021 and October 2021. Additional workshops can be offered on an ongoing basis.
Risk	 Low: The topics of “race” and “racism” can prove daunting for some community members, which can result in increased conflict and morale issues if not properly guided and supported following the workshop.
Key Performance Indicators	Participation Rate: Number of participants, Number of workshop alumni, Percent of engaged workshop alumni. Learning and development: Embedding a racial equity lens into the work to ensure economic recovery efforts inclusive and culturally relevant; sense of belonging, local social/cultural climate
Partners & Resources	The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, sponsoring organizations; facilities (e.g., physical workshops), conferencing software (e.g., virtual workshops), catering



Image of two cultural institutions on Dwight Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



## Diagnostic

The small business survey and most of the data collection requirements from the diagnostic phase were not particularly designed to assess the social and cultural climate of participating communities. However, the demographic data alluded to the concentration of People of Color within the City Center Cultural District. This contrast was most apparent when comparing White and Latinx population data between the city and study area. Across the city, both segments are about the same at approximately 23,000 residents each. However, within the city center, the White population (3,497) declines by more than half the Latinx population (8,434).

Additionally, “some other [non-White] race alone” surpasses the concentration of White residents by over 700 where this group is less than half of the White population across the city (11,650). This data is more instructive upon reviewing the median ages (36.2 and to 26.8) and household incomes (\$39,939 and \$17,713) between the city and city center, respectively.

These data suggest the population is segregated by class and ethnicity. These assumptions were further corroborated by multiple participants during stakeholder interviews held at City Hall. Some participants expressed cross-cultural engagement was low and often surface-level, leaving some factions of the community feeling excluded and invisibilized. It is in this vein, this project recommendation has been prepared.

## Action Item

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

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

Explore resources provided by The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, Government Alliance for Racial Equity, National League of Cities (Race Equity and Leadership Initiative), Living Cities (Closing the Gaps Network), 1000conversations.org, and “Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence” by Derald Wing Sue. Two day workshops and other resources offered by the Healing Racism Institute another alternative ([www.healingracismpv.org/](http://www.healingracismpv.org/)).



*Image of a boarded up vacant building on Main Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network*

## Process

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

- Become Familiar!

Learn about the People’s Institute, the Undoing Racism®/Community Organizing Workshop and its trainers by visiting [www.pisab.org](http://www.pisab.org) or connecting with the Undoing Racism® Organizing Collective [www.urocofwesternmass.org/](http://www.urocofwesternmass.org/) in Springfield.

- Clarify Your Needs

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

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

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

- Identify Your Constituency

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

- Contact the People’s Institute

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

- Request a Preliminary Consultation

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

- Access Organizational Finances

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

- Set a Workshop Date

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

- Meet with the Trainers

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

- Make Workshop Arrangements

Provide participants with workshop overview materials and expectations for participation.

- Promote the workshop

Use multiple avenues to get the word out.

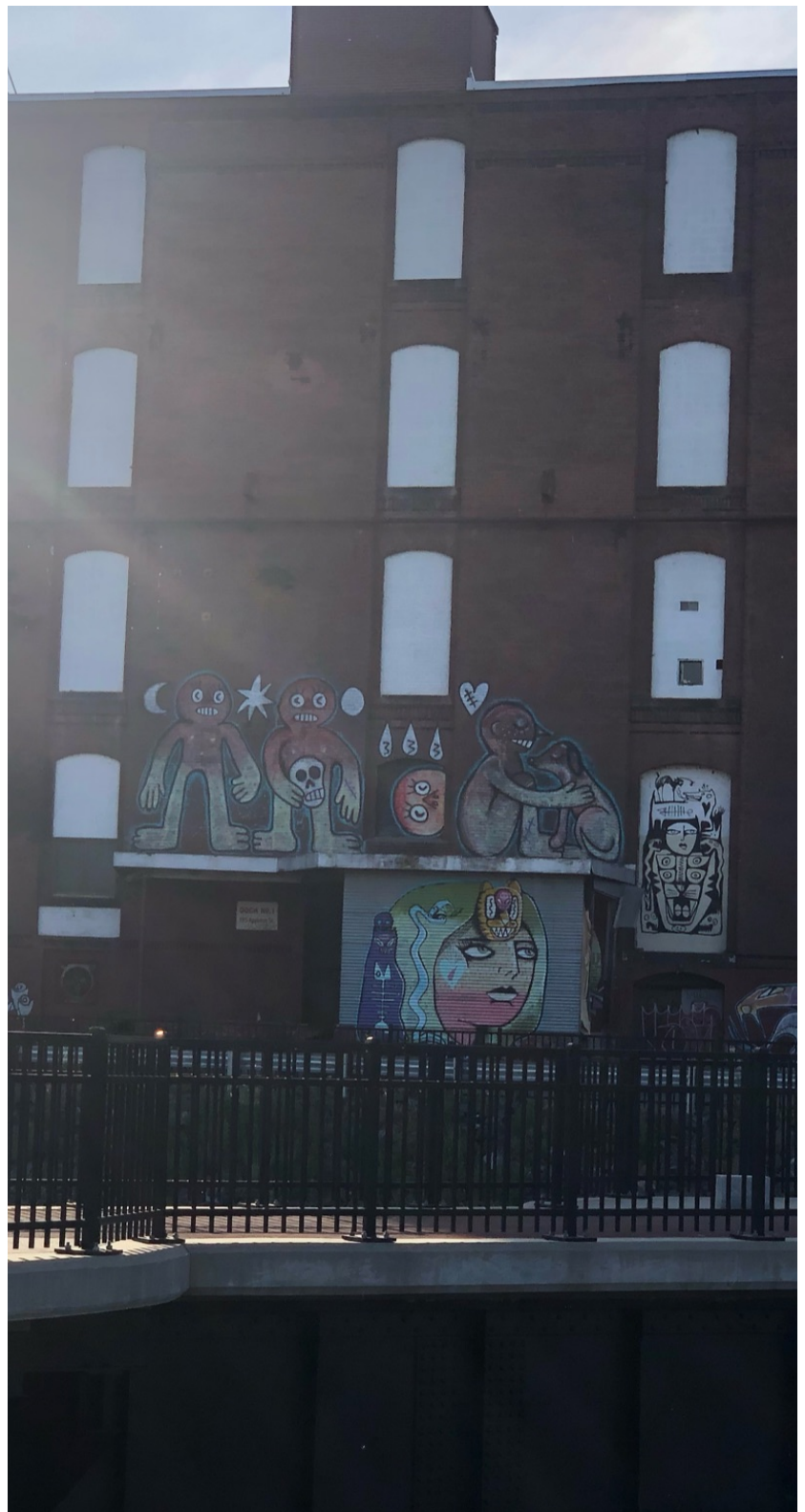






Image of street art across the canal from Race Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



# Refresh Passport Holyoke to Centralize the Arts, Culture, and Tourism Online

Category	 Cultural/Arts
Location	City-wide, especially Census Tract No. 8114, 8115, 8116 and 8117
Origin	Passport Holyoke was mentioned during a personal interview with a local building developer who recognized the importance of refreshing the defunct website to reinvigorate downtown to complement his placemaking efforts on High Street.
Budget	 Medium: \$50,000 to \$200,000 including \$10,000 for brand development, up to \$50,000 for site development, up to \$50,000 for marketing and promotion, and \$81,540 for two years of salary expenses for a program coordinator
Timeframe	 Short Term: Less than five years, including a year for brand and web development, with marketing and site administration ongoing
Risk	 Medium: This recommendation may struggle if the steering committee is under-resourced (i.e., people, skills, and budget) like the first iteration of the site, which was volunteer-led. Paid, dedicated staff and collaboration will be critical to the success of this project.
Key Performance Indicators	Partnerships formalized; participation and engagement rates, Google analytics - website tracking, Performance evaluation, Awareness and climate
Partners & Resources	See partners below; key resources include a content management site, calendaring and event registration software with billing, and partnership agreements; funding considerations include TDI Creative Catalyst, Competitive Tourism Grant, Community Development Block Grant, and the Build Back Better Regional Challenge



Screenshot of the original Passport Holyoke website. Photo Credit: Website

## Diagnostic

Cultural institutions were adversely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Some cultural institutions considered permanently closing (e.g., Gateway City Arts), while others suffered huge losses in sales and donations. Some began reopening during summer 2021, while organizers of the historic MIFA Victory Theater Restoration Project have been hosting online events as part of their fundraising efforts. It became apparent promoting cultural events and institutions are essential to Holyoke's recovery along with 21st century approaches for positioning Holyoke as a gateway city and destination with much to offer.

Stakeholder meetings with the Tourism Advisory Committee indicated the current website suffered from a lack of ownership, leadership, and a viable revenue model. However, they believe this project presents tremendous opportunity for marketing the district and attracting tourists along with positive social and economic implications. These sentiments are consistent with survey research where respondents favored the creation of "more cultural events and activities to bring people into the district" and "implementing marketing strategies for the commercial district." The new website and collateral will also create advertising opportunities for businesses located within the City Center Commercial District. Advertising revenues can help sustain the platform and cultural arts-related activities.

## Action Item

Hire a program coordinator dedicated to the Tourism Advisory Committee and activities pertaining to the arts, culture, tourism.

Develop a new brand identity set reflecting Holyoke's cultural diversity to properly package and convey the value of the arts and culture as an economic driver for the City of Holyoke.

Build a new culturally-appropriate website for Passport Holyoke (e.g., language translation tool, imagery, color scheme, and design elements) with a content management system and social media integration to centralize and promote the arts, culture, and tourism.

Design a comprehensive integrated marketing and promotions strategy for the program featuring bilingual printed collateral, web and social content, and a multi-faceted outreach campaign targeting residents, businesses, artisans, and tourists.



*Image of the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute on Race Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network*



## Process

### Staffing and Site Administration

- Formalize the authority of the Tourism Advisory Committee as the project lead with the development of a charter containing the charge, scope of activities, and available resources.
- Hire a program coordinator who will serve as the primary administrator or “clearinghouse” for the website.
- Generate diverse community interests in committee membership and input on the project. Residents, local leaders of cultural organizations, creatives, arts-based businesses, and other stakeholders should actively contribute to the effort to build broad-based ownership. Here are few examples encompassing a range of activities that draw visitors across multiple ages and diverse backgrounds:
  - <https://www.visitgreenvillesc.com/>
  - <http://stamford-downtown.com/signature-events/>
  - <https://www.ypsireal.com/>
- Develop a detailed action plan with a multi-year budget for web development and other associated elements.
- Secure funding from diverse sources including grants, advertising, partner contributions, community donations, and corporate sponsorship. Creatively recognize supporters and sponsors year-round.
- Secure staffing

### Brand Identity and Web Development

- Prepare requests for proposals to identify designers developers, and other creatives to assist with these activities. Key items include brand elements (e.g., logo, taglines, color palette, stationary, collateral, and imagery) and site elements (e.g. domain and hosting, site maps, wire frames, design, programming, audiovisuals, platform integrations, and maintenance).
- Content is king. Information gathering is an essential step in populating the website with worthwhile content that draw repeat visitors. Writers, illustrators, photographers, videographers, and entertainers are examples of other creatives that can be engaged as part of the process.



*Image of Nueva Esperanza on Main Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network*

## Process

### Marketing, Promotion, and Site Administration

- Develop the marketing and promotional plan to launch and promote the website – consider QR codes, social media campaigns and paid advertising.
- Host a launch event and demonstrate how to access and navigate the site. Be sure to invite the media and “go live” on social media during the event. Also, distribute collateral and possibly prizes. “ARTWALK in Stamford Downtown” is an example of a successful event that provides patrons with passports that are stamped in exchange for opportunities to win raffle prizes.
- Regular updates and additions to the website (e.g., annual events calendar, instructional videos, etc.) are vital in addition to ongoing promotion of the site and upcoming activities.
- Evaluation of the website and marketing efforts should be ongoing to monitor performance over time.

### Partnering Arts and Culture Organizations

There were a number of organizations that participated in the original site. The new website can organize and segment these stakeholders by category (e.g., groups, museums, sites, and events) as well as by their respective contributions (e.g., sponsors, partners, organizers, etc.). The list below, presented in alphabetical order, was distilled by city staff and Tourism Advisory Committee members during stakeholder interviews:

- Business and Community Representatives
- Enchanted Circle Theater
- Gateway City Arts
- Greater Holyoke Chamber of Commerce
- Holyoke Civic Symphony
- Holyoke Community College
- Holyoke Creative Arts Center
- Holyoke Heritage State Park
- Holyoke League of Arts and Crafts
- Holyoke Local Culture Council
- Holyoke Parks and Recreation
- Holyoke Public Library History Room & Archive
- Holyoke Saint Patrick’s Parade and Road Race
- Massachusetts Academy of Ballet
- MIFA- Victory Theatre
- Open Square and Mill 1 at Open Square
- The Holyoke Merry-Go-Round
- The United Congregational Church of Holyoke
- Volleyball Hall of Fame
- Wistariahurst Museum



*Image of the Holyoke War Memorial Building on Appleton Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network*



# Establish a City Center Cultural District in Downtown Holyoke





Category	 Cultural/Arts
Location	Census Tract No. 8114, 8115, 8116, and 8117; district boundaries are to be determined, but may be contained within Chestnut St. (east), Main St. (west), Lyman (north), and Jackson (south)
Origin	This project recommendation was made during a Group Stakeholder Meeting on July 1, 2021.
Budget	 Medium: \$50,000 to \$200,000 including the establishment of the District; \$5,000 to \$10,000 for branding, \$50,000 to \$75,000 to develop a master plan for the district, with initial implementation costs to be determined; ongoing cultural district strategies may exceed \$200,000 over time.
Timeframe	 Short-term: 6 to 9 months estimated. An additional 12 to 18 months allotted for strategic planning. Implementation and activation will be ongoing.
Risk	 Low: Designations of cultural districts are handled at the state level. This may impact the ability to expand the district from a timeline perspective. Medium: Staffing constraints presents a challenge for effort since one person currently convenes meetings and supports the current geography.
Key Performance Indicators	Phase 1: Massachusetts Cultural Council approval. Dependent upon the number of partners involved. Phase 2: Strategic master plan. Increase in foot traffic, decrease in vacancy rates, increase in sales for businesses, increase in cultural programming, increase in new businesses that open after 1 to 2 years, and number of social media mentions.
Partners & Resources	City of Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development, Tourism Advisory Committee, Holyoke Cultural Council, Nuevo Esperanza, El Corazon Advisory Group, Wistariahurst Museum (keeper of culturally-specific collections), City Historian (maintains the history of the district), City Council (for approval of the cultural district), the Chamber of Commerce – Latino Business Committee, and downtown businesses



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



## Diagnostic

The Covid-19 pandemic greatly impacted cultural institutions and destinations in downtown Holyoke and cultural icons such as Gateway City Arts struggled to survive. Some cultural institutions considered permanently closing and overall, there is an understanding that the loss of these destinations would be a severe blow to the other businesses, vitality and image of the downtown and city.

Stakeholders participating in a project planning meeting on July 1st expressed an interest in creating a cultural district to highlight the history, cultures, and assets of an area of downtown and to create a sustainable framework to support the arts and culture in the city. A cultural district in the downtown area would create a focal point for cultural events and activities that bring people to the district and would spur additional opportunities for cultural community engagement, increasing overall vibrancy downtown. Cultural activities and destinations will also generate foot traffic economically benefitting local businesses and enhancing the image of the city, while facilitating business and resident recruitment and private investment.



*Image of Gateway City Arts on Race Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network*

## Action Items

Create a new Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) Cultural District in downtown Holyoke—with exact boundaries to be determined—and identify a robust group of partners, funders, and advocates to enhance public programs, public art, events, and marketing for the district. Begin with prior efforts for a Puerto Rican Cultural District.

Post-designation, produce a 10-year master plan to create a roadmap for implementing a shared vision for the new district. Overall goals for this project include:

- Brand a portion of downtown and create a strong image and destination focus targeting local, regional, and beyond the market area.
- Attract artists, creative entrepreneurs, cultural organizations and groups.
- Encourage business and job development and support existing businesses the downtown.
- Establish the district as a tourist destination.
- Preserve and reuse historic buildings and tell multiple stories and histories of residents, businesses, and neighborhoods to celebrate the past, present and future.
- Enhance property values without displacement.
- Foster local cultural development.

Implement the plan

## Process

### Phase 1: Establish a Working Group for MCC Cultural District Exploration of Possibilities and Application

- Convene a Working Group for this project. Involving possible partners and advocates in early planning is critical to long-term success and widespread support. Consider city-wide stakeholders and potential long-term partners in the process.
  - Public sector (e.g., planning and economic development, transportation, etc.)
  - Cultural institutions and groups, artists and creatives, in the downtown and elsewhere
  - City-wide and regional stakeholders who can offer resources, ideas, and momentum for the effort
  - Key players (e.g., business owners, property owners, destinations) from areas where the cultural district may be formed.
- Establish Roles for the Working Group Members:
  - Set goals
  - Set principles for planning and implementation
  - Set and oversee the work plan
  - Raise funds with the assistance of City of Holyoke
  - Select a consultant, if needed
  - Form a new subcommittee under the Tourism Advisory Committee, if approved by the MCC, to manage the new district
- Examine the MCC Cultural District requirements:  
<https://massculturalcouncil.org/communities/cultural-districts/application-process/>
- Develop a work plan and timeline.
- Determine what resources are needed:
  - Can the application process begin with City staff time and working group volunteer efforts?
  - Are consultants needed for some action items?
  - Can a graduate planning intern provide sufficient support in mapping, taking inventory of assets, case studies, etc.?
- Identify and secure diverse sources of funding and staff resources in support of the effort, as needed.



Image of El Corazon district banners. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network



## Process

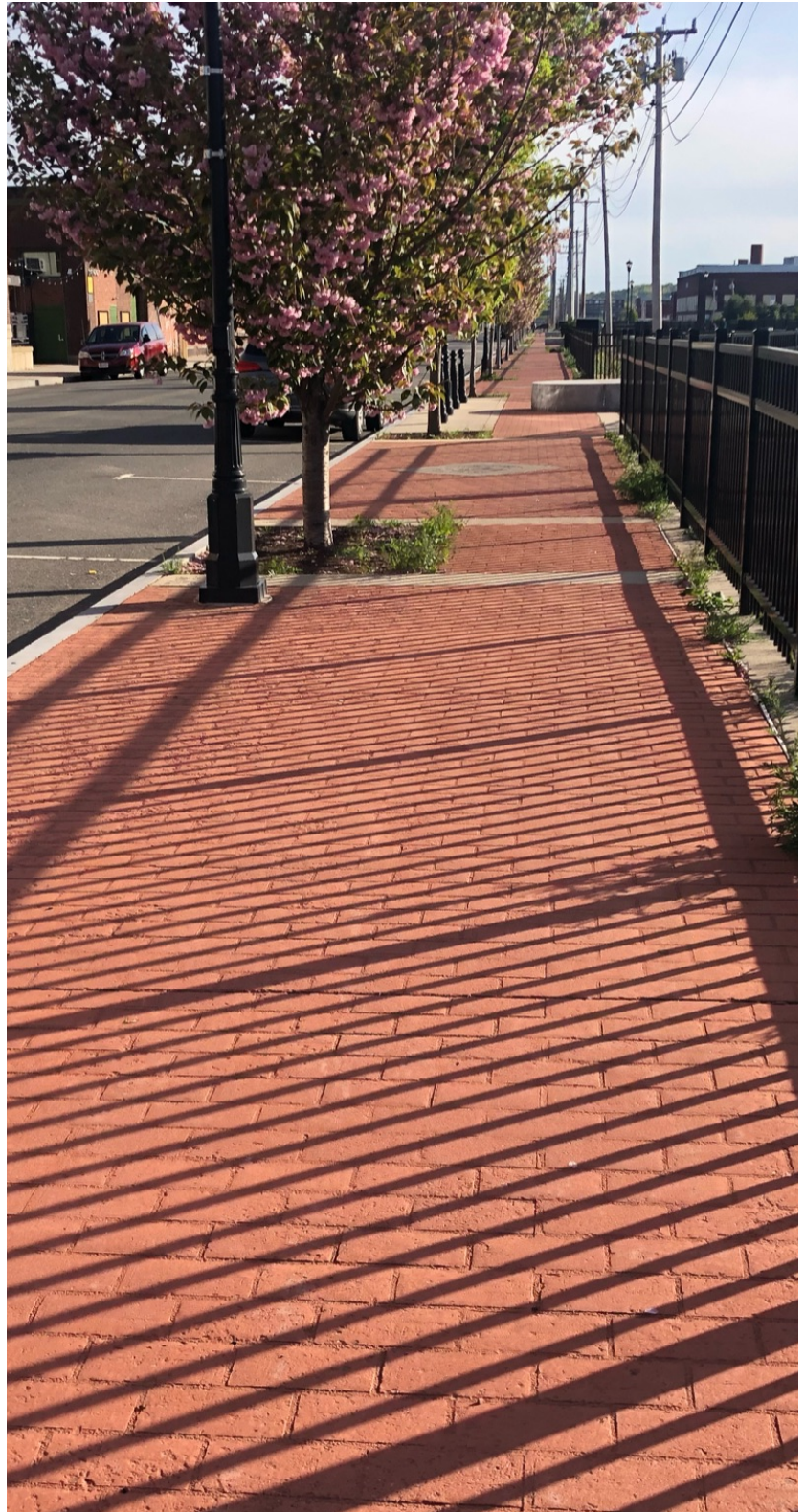
### Phase 2: Establish Goals for and new Cultural District

- Review this project recommendation and consider the goals listed above under Actions Items. Identify available opportunities for their attainment.
  - What are the problems or challenges to be solved by creating a cultural district?
  - Who are potential partners?
  - What are some available opportunities?
  - Are there other cultural districts that we can use as a model as we move forward?
- Inventory and map the cultural assets in the district including:
  - Cultural organizations
  - Public art
  - Destinations
  - Educational institutions
  - Creative businesses
  - Food and dining
  - Events and activities
  - Public spaces and parks
  - Historic buildings and narratives
- For an outsider perspective on the existing and expanded district, consider searching online visitor sites such as Trip Advisor for useful information about image, messages conveyed to potential travelers and tourists before they arrive, etc.
- Consider options for meeting the compact and walkable requirement by developing some possible boundaries for the district for further discussion and review.

### Phase 3: MCC application

The MCC application requirements are located on the MCC website. In brief, the application must include the following broad steps:

- Creating and submitting a map of the proposed district. Developing an asset key.
- Completing an online application. In addition to the map, requirements include:
  - Letter of Endorsement from Chief Elected Official
  - Copy of a Resolution from City Council or Board of Selectmen



*Image of the streetscape on Race Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network*



## Process

### Phase 3 continued...

- Evidence of resources and planning for the district using the Municipal Resources Sheet
  - Third party agreement for management of the district, if relevant
  - Audited accounts of third-party organization, if applicable
  - Proof of 501c3 non-profit status if a third-party organization is used
  - Official legal documents on zoning overlays or ordinances relevant to the cultural district
  - Relevant marketing materials for the cultural district
  - Reports, feasibility studies, results from visioning activities, and/or news articles regarding a proposed district, if available
- Submit supplemental documents by mail.
  - Coordinate and conduct a site visit.

Assuming the new district is approved by the MCC, the subsequent steps include:

### Phase 4: Create a Cultural District Master Plan

A new cultural district requires a vision, and a roadmap with strategies, resources, and partners to achieve goals. A master planning process can explore possibilities and needs, building public support, identify funding options and partners, and set a path for moving forward. As part of the MCC application process, quite a bit of work will have been done to understand partners, how the district will be managed, and an overall vision. A master plan takes this one step further to set out a detailed agenda (e.g., 5 to 10 years) with actionable goals and strategies.

Answer questions:

- Does the City of Holyoke and the Working Group, as well as any district management entity have the capacity and expertise to complete a master plan for the district?
- If so, what is the timeline and what are roles and expectations?
- Is professional assistance needed for any parts of the plan? The entire plan?
- If help is needed, consider State resources.



*Image of city signage near Jackson Street. Photo Credit: Third Eye Network*

## Process

### Phase 4 continued...

- If a professional consultant is needed, prepare an outline for the work plan and request proposals. Interview candidates, and contract for assistance.
- A strategic master planning process should take 7 to 12 months and the plan should include:
  - Reason for the plan
  - Context (e.g., existing assets, urban design analysis of district, opportunities for public art, as well as local and regional histories, political and economic environment)
  - Needs assessment (e.g., stakeholder outreach and community input – what is needed, what are challenges, aspirations?)
  - Vision statement and themes for the plan – in this case, articulation of the character of the three areas of the proposed district
  - Goals and recommendations
  - Implementation plan with priorities, roles, funding sources, best practices, metrics for success

### Phase 5: Action

- Leverage the Passport Holyoke website.
- Implementation of the plan will require additional resources including:
  - Staff
  - Marketing
  - Fundraising/grant writing
  - Events coordinator

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



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



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# Appendices

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## Summary of Attachments

### PUBLIC REALM

- A. Places in the Making - How Placemaking Builds Places and Communities

### PRIVATE REALM

- B. Revby Memo - Creative Capital Solutions Development
- C. A Guide to Kiva Rochester Small Business Loans
- D. Article - 'WE Fund Credit' Offering Affordable Lines of Credit to Women Entrepreneurs

### REVENUE AND SALES

- E. Shop Where I Live - Information Booklet
- F. Shop Where I Live - Site Success Plan
- G. Pitch Deck - Klosebuy

### CULTURAL/ARTS

- H. Pitch Deck - MIFA Victory Theatre