



# Rapid Recovery Plan

October 8, 2021

**Downtown Lowell**

# Acknowledgements



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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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# Executive Summary







# Executive Summary

## Local Rapid Recovery on a Statewide Scale

Like thousands of communities across the United States, Massachusetts' cities and towns experienced months of significant financial loss during the COVID-19 pandemic as business districts had to temporarily close and then face extended periods of safety-related measures that limited visitation. For many businesses, this meant permanent closure. Others were aided by federal and state programs, working diligently to keep their livelihoods intact during a very difficult period. These difficulties were particularly notable in New England where historic village centers have defined communities for generations. More than 350 distinct jurisdictions make up the Commonwealth, and nearly every place has at least one village business district greatly impacted by COVID-19. Every one of these districts faces serious challenges recovering from the pandemic. Fortunately, the Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP) is a tremendous opportunity to leverage upcoming stimulus dollars for downtown benefits across the state.

While hundreds of distinct districts are a challenge to address systematically, this diversity is a natural strength for Massachusetts. Every affected downtown is the crossroads for its broader community—typically a compact and walkable place where vacancies may be readily visible but where every business knows each other and has come together to face the pandemic. The interdependencies are quickly evident when talking with local stakeholders who take ownership of their village centers. Working with municipal officials, LRRP Plan Facilitators have quickly leveraged the energy of downtown merchants, engaged residents, vested landowners and village organizations to create the solutions within this plan—solutions tailored to the unique character of this place. Downtown Lowell, like over 120 other communities in Massachusetts, now has a comprehensive recovery strategy and the momentum to implement lasting change, collectively supporting the entire Commonwealth.



## Why develop a Local Rapid Recovery Plan in Lowell?

Downtown Lowell is ripe for reinvestment, revitalization, and new life. The COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges and uncovered new problems. As Downtown Lowell, its residents, and business community begin to adjust to the new normal, the Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP) was a perfect opportunity to bring stakeholders together to discuss challenges and opportunities, brainstorm solutions, and identify priorities and projects to make an improved future reality.

Downtown Lowell has much to offer: a vibrant immigrant community opening new businesses and restaurants, numerous educational facilities that bring thousands of students to Downtown Lowell regularly, a relatively-low cost of living that is attractive to professionals who desire urban living but find Metro Boston unaffordable, many nonprofits and other organizations actively engaged in Downtown, and an excited and engaged business community that is already creating formal and informal networks to better support each other. However, resources are limited and many organizations are already overextended, so it can be difficult to initiate and maintain new programs. Some business owners and residents have become skeptical as programs are established and then flounder. The LRRP process is perfect for Lowell as it works to reinvent and revitalize its Downtown.

## What are the greatest needs and how do they align with the project goals?

The City of Lowell applied to the LRRP program with six specific goals:



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Through the planning process, these initial ideas were explored, expanded upon, and transformed based on the Phase I Diagnostic Findings, input from the public and business community, conversations with the project team, and input from subject matter experts.

Downtown Lowell has a variety of greatest needs. Since not all of the needs are directly related to the LRRP goals and available resources, the project team worked to balance the business community's concerns about increased homelessness and drug activity with economic development strategies, public facilities improvements, and policies that could contribute to an overall better environment including better support the business community and improving the public realm. The project team also explored social support programs and other services or facilities to better support the homeless population.

Many of the challenges in Lowell predate the COVID-19 Pandemic, but were exacerbated by pandemic impacts. Downtown Lowell's businesses and buildings are primarily locally-owned, but some building owners have not maintained their properties and there have been persistent vacancy issues. Some owners choose not to make their properties available for rent, while others regularly list their spaces, but never contract with a leasee. Ground level vacancies are common; upper-level vacancy rates are largely unknown. Some buildings have begun converting upper-story office space to residential units which has brought new residents to Downtown Lowell.

Even before the pandemic wreaked havoc on downtown businesses, many of Downtown Lowell's businesses had inconsistent operating hours and/or were closed on evenings and weekends. The number of businesses maintaining unpredictable hours has only increased since businesses have been allowed to reopen. Nearly 70% of respondents to the LRRP Business Survey (conducted Spring 2021) indicated that they had reduced operating hours or capacity due to the ongoing pandemic. Some business owners, residents, and visitors who provided input indicated that unpredictable hours impacted their decision to patronize a locally-owned Downtown business or businesses outside of the Downtown area.

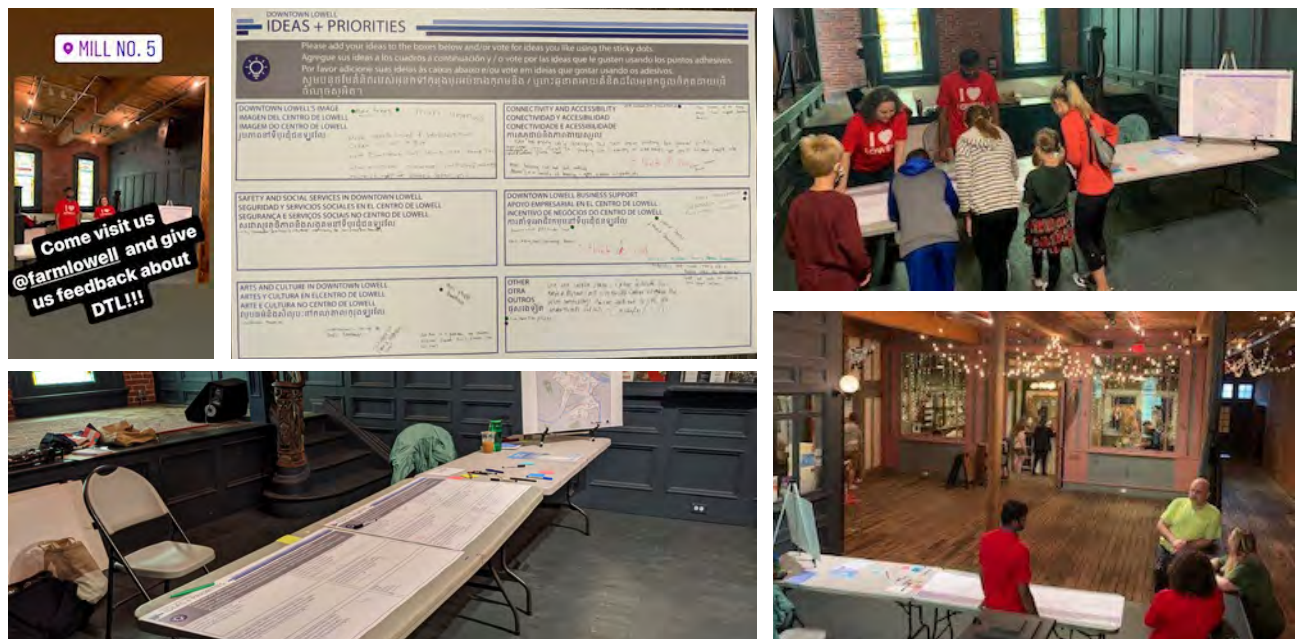
Though there is a concentration of businesses in Downtown Lowell, coordination and cooperation between business owners has been an ongoing challenge. There are a variety of organizations and programs that service Downtown Lowell's business community, but it seems that much of this activity is ad hoc and the area's nonprofits, volunteers, business owners, and other stakeholders are all working at or beyond their capacity. Business owners and others mentioned several programs and activities meant to bring customers to Downtown businesses, but were generally unaware of how the program(s) worked or who was administering them.

## How did the LRRP process engage the community?

The City's project team included municipal staff, nonprofit leaders, and members of the business community. This group met biweekly (weekly at times!) throughout the planning process, so continuous feedback was available as the priority projects were identified. In addition to the regular project coordination meetings, several outreach events were held during the LRRP process.

At the end of May, a public meeting was held to review the Phase I Diagnostic findings and begin the project identification process. The meeting was attended by the city's project team as well as several business owners and residents.

In July, members of the project team had a table at the Mill No. 5 Farmer's Market. Nearly 100 residents, business owners, visitors, and other stakeholders stopped by the table to share their thoughts on Downtown Lowell. Generally, comments received at this event were consistent with other feedback and recommendations. Members of the Downtown Lowell business community were invited to participate in the regular project coordination meetings, so the project had regular and ongoing feedback from business owners. In addition to inviting business owners to participate in project meetings, the project team presented Phase I Diagnostics and working project recommendations with a standing meeting of Downtown business owners organized by one of the business community's leaders and the Lowell Plan organization. Feedback from business owners was wide-ranging and incorporated into the subject matter expert requests and selected projects.



*Almost 100 Lowell residents and visitors shared their ideas and input on the proposed projects at a farmers market in July 2021.*

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## What are the priority projects that came from the plan?

The project team identified twenty-nine (29) projects in six categories. The City of Lowell's project categories are:

- Downtown Lowell Image
- Culture & Arts in Downtown Lowell
- Safety in & Social Services for Downtown Lowell
- Downtown Lowell Business Support
- Connectivity & Accessibility for All Modes
- Administrative Capacity

Six (6) projects were submitted for Subject Matter Expert (SME) consultations. These consultations resulted in a total of seven (7) project rubrics. The city's project team was excited about all of the projects that made this final list, but had several key priorities including developing a beautification task force / volunteer group to provide general cleaning, litter pickup, and basic maintenance services on key Downtown streets and public spaces. Though not specifically identified as a priority project by the Plan Faciliator and Community Applicant (City) project team, many of the suggestions and priorities that the business community brought to this process are activities frequently undertaken by business improvement districts (BIDs) or other downtown management entities, so the creation of such an organization in Downtown Lowell became a priority of this LRRP.

## What are the next steps for Lowell to implement this plan?

This plan provides the foundation for the City to begin implementation almost immediately. The project team worked to include both "low-hanging fruit" and more aspirational, longer-term projects. Project rubrics provide information necessary for the City and its partners to apply for grants, write scopes of work, and engage outside experts in project implementation.

Many of the ideas discussed throughout the LRRP process are best suited for implementation by a business improvement district (BID) or other downtown management entity so it is recommended that the City and its partners continue (and accelerate) that conversation and begin actively pursuing designation as a BID.



# Rapid Recovery Program Background







## 125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

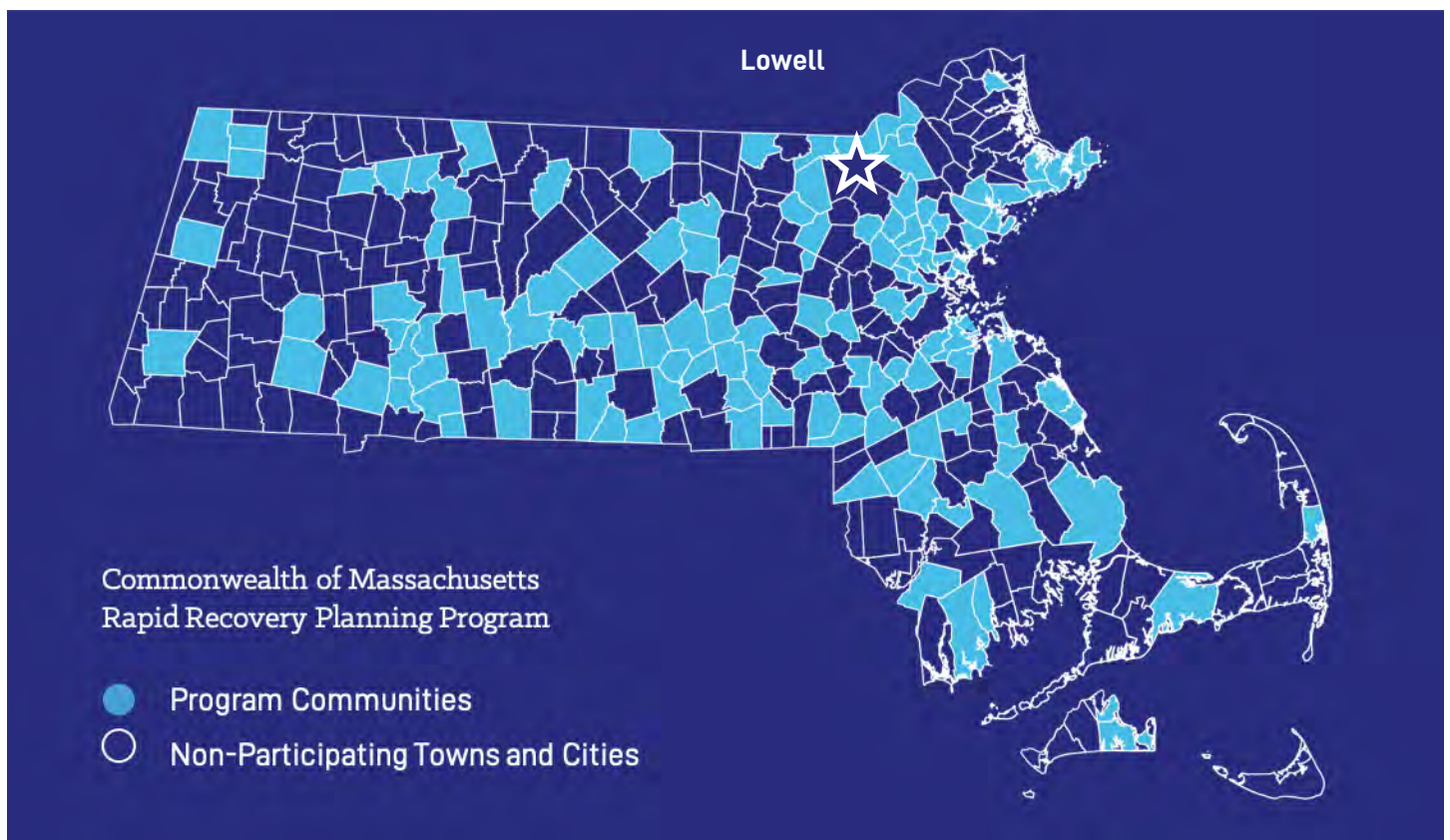
52 Small Communities

51 Medium Communities

**16 Large Communities (Lowell)**

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.



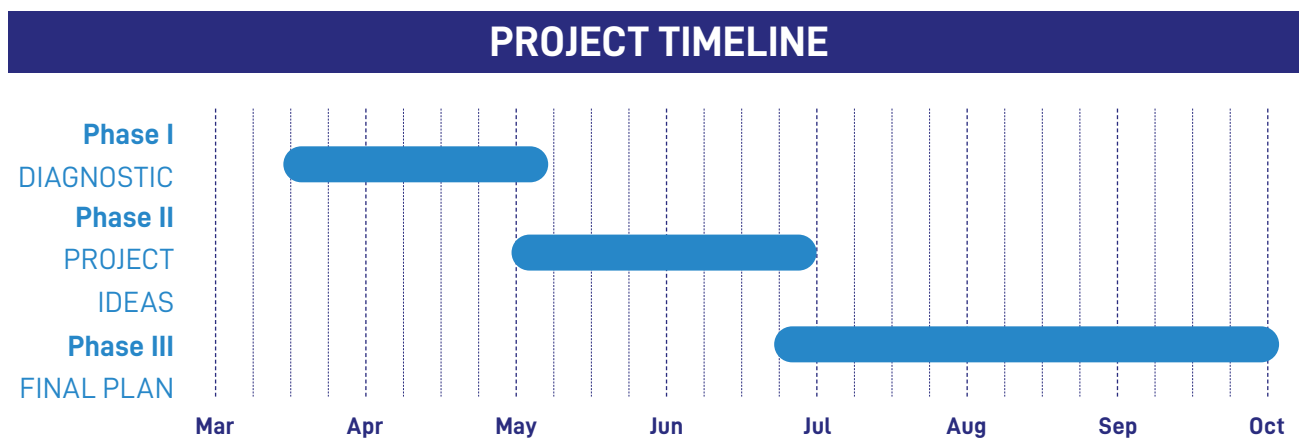
# Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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



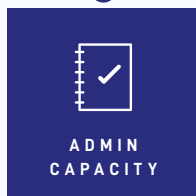
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



# Diagnostic Data Collection Methodology

## Data Collection Goals

Baseline data collected will be used by the Commonwealth to communicate overall program impact and to support future funding and resource allocations that may be used toward implementation of final projects across participating communities.

Baseline data sets a minimum expectation for data collection and only reflects what the Commonwealth is requesting from all Plan Facilitators such that it will enable the measurement of COVID impacts at the State level for all participating communities. Beyond the baseline data outlined in this guide, it is expected that Plan Facilitators (PFs) will glean additional insight from their analysis, observations and feedback from the community and businesses. Plan Facilitators should ensure that additional information collected through their own discretionary methods and processes will be integrated into the Diagnostic section of each final Rapid Recovery Plan and will be used to inform the unique Project Recommendations that emerge through this process.

## Diagnostic Asset Breakdown

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) worked with Larissa Ortiz, the Managing Director at Streetsense, to adapt the "Commercial DNA Framework" as published by the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) and Streetsense. The framework uses four major components – Market Demand (Customer Base), Physical Environment (Public and Private Realm), Business Environment, and Administrative Capacity – to assess the vitality of a commercial district. The Local Rapid Recovery Program team tailored this framework to align with the vision to develop plans and a comprehensive dataset that analyzes economic challenges to downtowns and town centers.

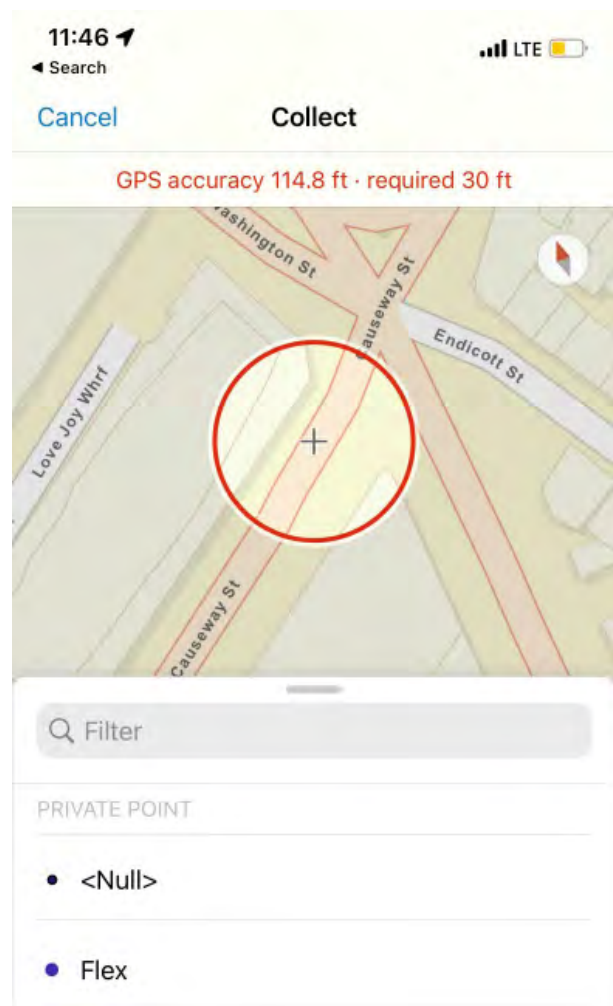
## Data Collection Process

In order to effectively capture public and private infrastructure, market demand data, and business environment statistics within the LRRP study area, the Plan Facilitator team developed a robust data collection structure. The team utilized platforms such as ArcGIS Field Mapping and Spatial tools, ESRI Business Analyst, and Co-Star Market Data software to collect data for each community and adhere to the Rapid Recovery Program requirements.

To gather the public and private realm physical environment data, the team deployed field collectors utilizing ArcGIS Collector software and hardware to conduct site visits lasting between four to eight hours to spatially document all physical environment data. The field collectors used the ArcGIS Collector tool to record field observations, take imagery for each public and private realm asset, and document various characteristics and assets within the defined LRRP study area. The ArcGIS Collector platform compiled all field data and business environment details such as vacancy rates and annual average rent into a spatial program that could be analyzed and mapped remotely.

Public and private realm characteristics collected in the field included elements such as the condition, width, placement/location, and presence of streetscape amenities, lighting, seating areas, and ADA-compliant infrastructure. Based on the observations and characteristics for each diagnostic category, the data collector determined an objective grade for each public and private realm asset, such as a crosswalk, sidewalk, awning, or facade. The collectors adhered to the grading system developed by the DHCD LRRP team, which ranged from A (highest grade) to Fail (lowest grade). More details on the field categories and type of data collected can be found on pages 22-23.

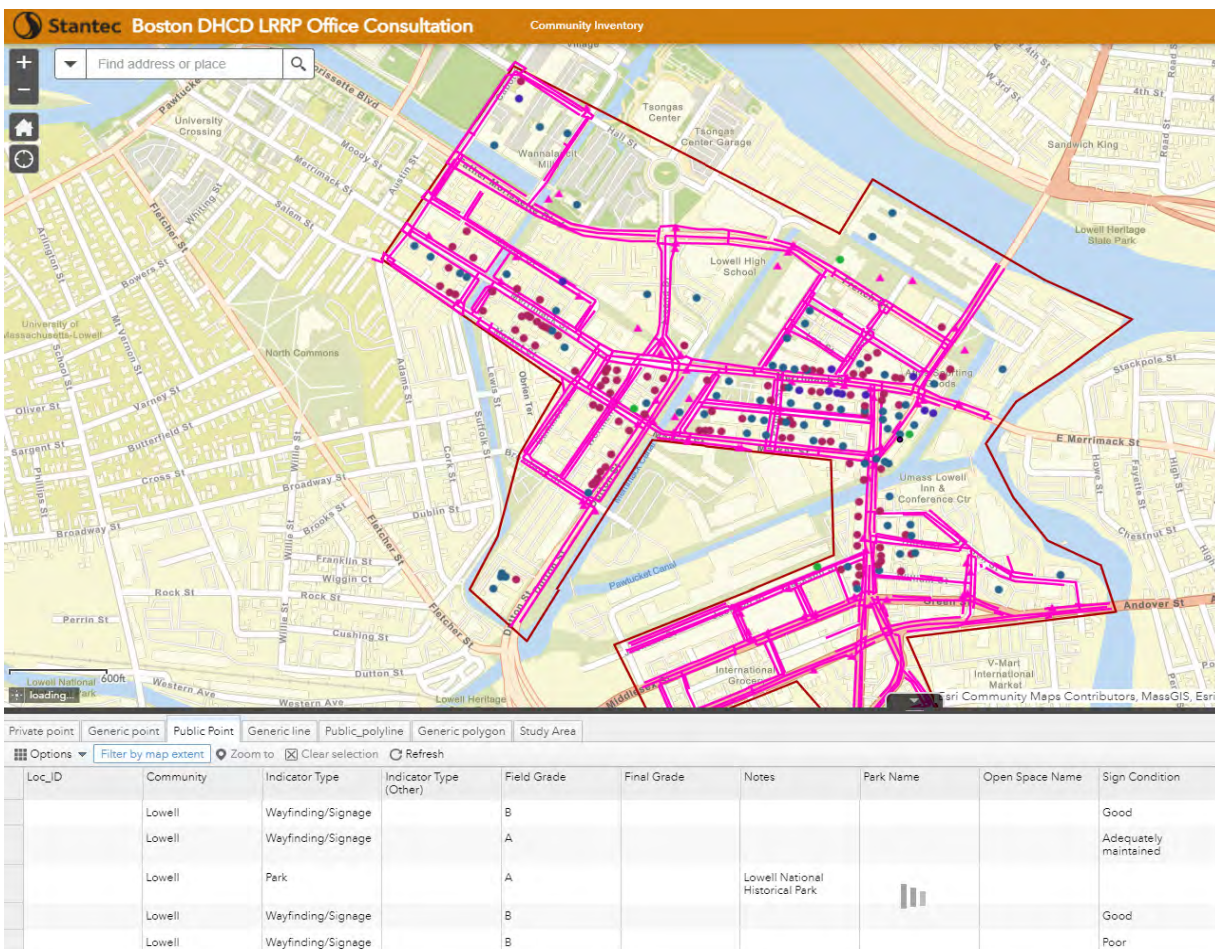
*The ArcGIS Collector tool allowed data collectors in the field to develop an online database for public and private realm data*



## Data Analysis & Outputs

Upon completion of data collection efforts for the public and private realm physical environment assets, Plan Facilitators used the spatial database and ArcGIS WebApp platform (as seen in the image below) to assess collected assets and their associated attributes and characteristics. The Plan Facilitator also reviewed each field grade determined by the data collector by comparing to the field imagery. Each asset received a final grade once the Plan Facilitator conducted a thorough review of each asset characteristic, image, and observations. For example, a crosswalk asset that received a "C" field grade could have a width between four to six feet, poorly maintained paint, and lack a detectable panel and/or curb ramp on either side. The Plan Facilitator confirmed or changed this grade after a final review of the asset attribute data and documented field image.

Developing a database for the spatial elements of the diagnostic data framework highlights major gaps within the commercial fabric of the business district, as well as issues areas that lack adequate streetscape amenities or connectivity infrastructure. Alternatively, the data gives communities the opportunity to capitalize on these challenges and promote projects that enhance their downtowns or town centers.



*The ArcGIS database platform allows Plan Facilitators to query data based on asset type, final grade, or condition/maintenance level.*

## Final Diagnostic Grade Analysis

The final stage of the data collection process included developing an aggregate score for each physical environment element. Plan Facilitators conducted an analysis that created an average score of "A" (highest), "B", "C", or "Fail" (lowest score) for diagnostic components based on the grades for each individual asset. For example, the public realm category "Sidewalks" received one final, overall grade for the study area, and the private realm category "Building Facades" received a study area grade as well (as seen in the image below).

As required by the Program, all Plan Facilitators presented the final diagnostic results to their communities through a public meeting. This forum allowed municipal representatives and the public to provide input on the program approach, diagnostic framework, and final results. Each Plan Facilitator ultimately submitted the entire database of all diagnostic categories to DHCD to be compiled with the results from all LRRP communities.

### ELEMENT: SIDEWALKS

GOAL IMPACT: MULTIMODAL CONNECTIVITY



#### How LOWELL rates:

A

More than 75% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned, well-maintained and accessible to multiple users across different ages and abilities.

B

**About 50% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned and well-maintained.**

C

More than 25% of sidewalks in the study area pose challenges to the pedestrian experience (including narrow sidewalks and lack of cleanliness/maintenance).

F

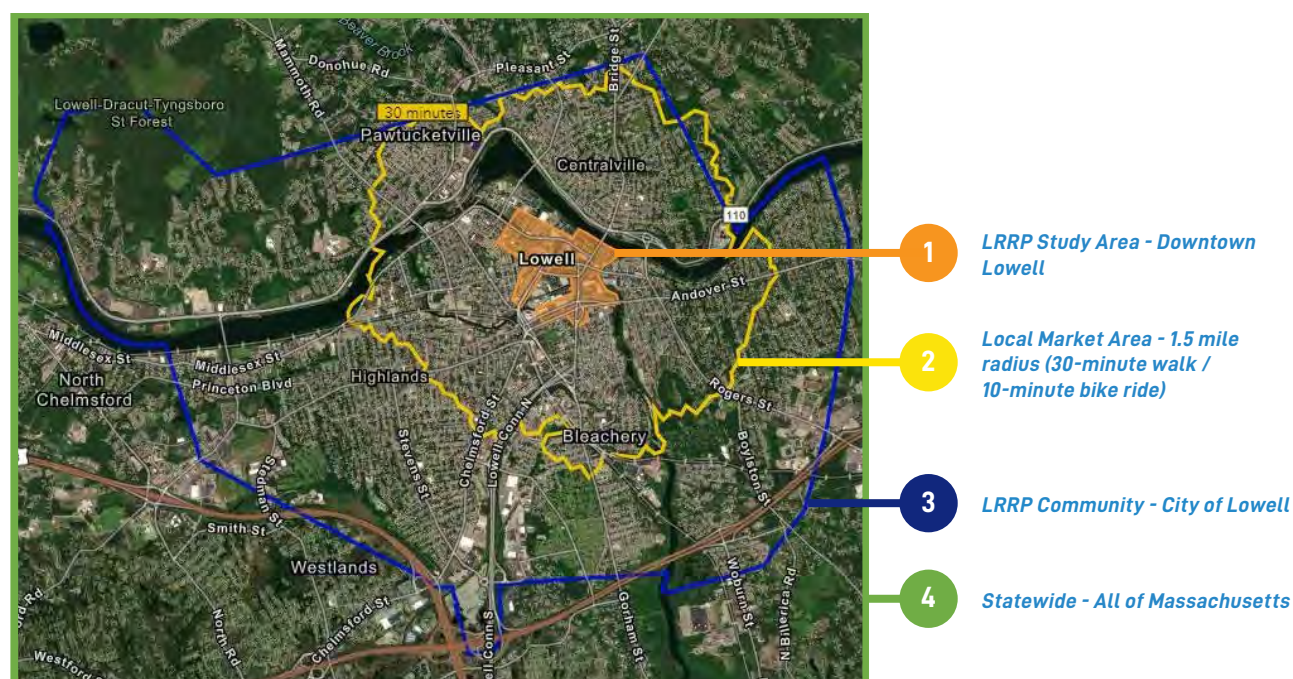
There are no sidewalks in the study area.



## Diagnostic Asset: Customer Base

The LRRP Plan Facilitator teams extracted market demand data (customer base data) from ESRI's Business Analyst tool to understand demographics, customer statistics, and market profiles. The data looked at customer base profiles for four regions: statewide, municipal-wide, "locally" (1.5 mile radius), and the LRRP study area. The following table provides more information on the specific data collected for this diagnostic category.

Customer Base Data	
Data	Data Description
Demographics	Population Trends, Age Distribution
Education	Educational Attainment
Customer Statistics	Average Household Size, Employment and Income Statistics, Jobs-to-residents ratio, Median Home Value, Home Value Growth
Retail Market Profile	Retail Leakage (total retail surplus), Grocery Store Leakage (total surplus), Restaurant Leakage (total surplus)
Other Statistics	Crime Index Vehicle Ownership, Poverty - unemployment status



## Diagnostic Asset: Physical Environment (Public Realm)



Physical Environment: Public Realm Diagnostic Fields	
Field	Field Description
Indicator Type	Wayfinding/Signage Park Open Space Other
Diagnostic Grade	A B C Fail
Image	Data Collectors took imagery of each asset
Signage Condition	Wayfinding/general signage condition/maintenance
Signage Icon	Presence of icons on signage (pedestrian for walking, arrows for direction, bus for transit stop)
Signage Point of Interest	Directions or distance of current location to Downtown points of interest
Signage Distance	Presence of walking/driving distances on signage
Signage Map Presence	Presence of Downtown map on signage
Signage Technology	Presence of smart technology/interactive screen on signage

Physical Environment: Public Realm Diagnostic Fields	
Field	Field Description
Indicator Type	Sidewalks Crosswalks Pedestrian Signals Roadbed Streetscape Amenities Lighting
Diagnostic Grade	A B C Fail
Image	Data Collectors took imagery of each asset
Sidewalk Assets	Width, condition, presence of a detectable panel and ADA ramp, material type
Crosswalk Assets	Width, condition, presence of a detectable panel and ADA ramp, material type, crosswalk type, presence of sign
Pedestrian Signal Assets	Presence of pedestrian signal
Roadbed Assets	Material type, condition, paint condition
Streetscape Amenities	Trees: number of trees, tree health, tree pit maintenance, tree shade cover Benches: number of benches, bench age, condition, cleanliness of bench
Lighting Assets	Condition of lighting structure, extent of light brightness

These tables provide details on the public realm physical environment elements collected during site visits to the LRRP study area. Data collectors created assets for each public realm component, and populated the fields with characteristics such as asset condition or dimensions. Each asset then received a grade (A, B, C, or Fail) based on field observations.

## Diagnostic Asset: Physical & Business Environment (Private Realm)



Physical & Business Environment: Private Realm Diagnostic Fields	
Field	Field Description
Property Type	Retail Office Industrial
Diagnostic Grade	A B C Fail
Occupancy	Number of businesses and number of vacant storefronts
Window Assets	Window size, transparency of window, maintenance/cleanliness
Outdoor Display & Dining	Storefront Displays: presence of storefront display, cleanliness of display, condition of display Storefront Dining: presence of outdoor dining facilities (chairs, benches, tables), outdoor dining protection from vehicles, canopies present, accessibility infrastructure (ADA ramps, detectable panels)
Storefront Signage Assets	Exterior signage present, visibility of signage from 10-feet away, condition/maintenance, signage branding (integration with storefront design)
Storefront Awning Assets	Storefront awning present, retractable capabilities, condition/maintenance, protection from weather events, awning design (integration with storefront design)
Storefront Facade Details	Building facade condition/maintenance, building facade material, building facade paint condition/maintenance
Storefront Lighting Assets	Exterior and interior lighting fixtures present, lighting present/turned on after standard working hours
Business Characteristics	Average asking price, average rent, average unit square footage, number of units, percentage vacant, property address, annual rent by square footage, zoning classification

This table provides details on the physical environment elements collected during site visits to the LRRP study area. While in the field, data collectors provided edits to existing storefront assets that assessed storefront infrastructure such as lighting, outdoor displays, and windows. Each asset then received a grade (A, B, C, or Fail) based on field observations. The private realm database also included business characteristics (for each storefront) such as average rent, number of units, and vacancy information.



# Diagnostic Key Findings





# LRRP Study Area

## Why focus on the commercial/retail core?

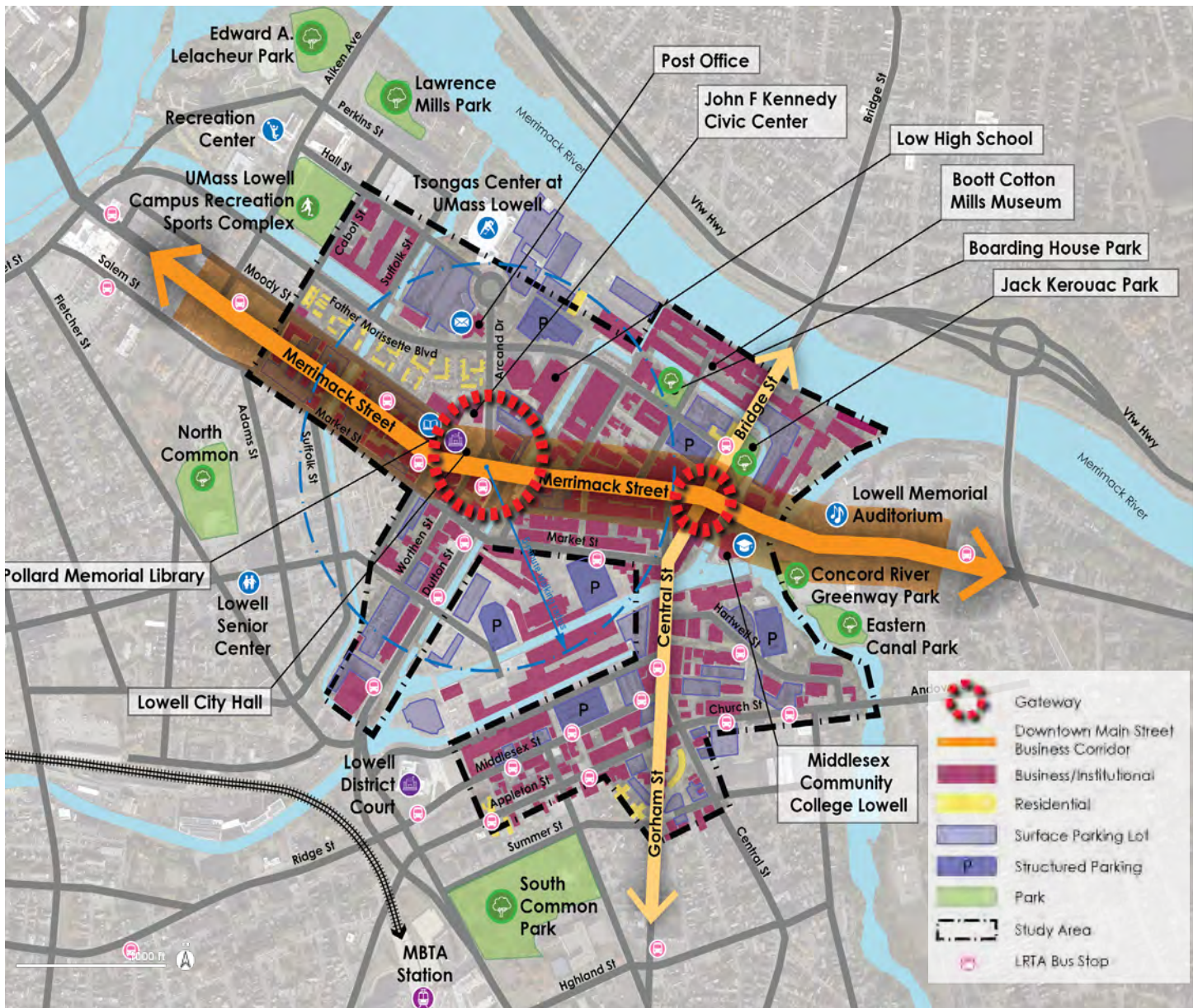
The Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP) targets downtowns, town centers, and commercial districts in order to assess the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on local businesses and downtown activity. LRRP study areas include concentrated areas of commercial and retail activity (i.e., “Nodes, Corridors, Town Centers or Commercial Areas”), therefore excluding significant areas of non-commercial, non-retail uses. This program did not look at residential zones or collect data related to residential infrastructure or local residential statistics. By focusing on the commercial/retail core, communities can use the LRRP plans and diagnostic data to implement data-driven, easily implementable solutions to revitalize a downtown.

## Downtown Lowell LRRP Study Area

To apply for the LRRP, the City of Lowell identified a study area that encompassed its downtown business core but excludes the Lowell National Historical Park. When the project started, the team confirmed the LRRP Study Area boundary. The Downtown Lowell LRRP study area includes streetscape amenities, core businesses and storefronts, public parks/plazas, and public and private parking facilities.







**Existing Conditions & Project Orientation Map of the Downtown Lowell LRRP Study Area**  
Source: Stantec



# Key Findings & Diagnostic Data Overview

Downtown Lowell needs a champion to bring businesses together, provide business support, encourage new businesses, and lead Downtown event planning, revitalization, and programming.

There are a variety of organizations and entities supporting Downtown Lowell's businesses and working to improve Downtown Lowell, but a single, coordinated effort is needed. The current organizations and programs are overextended and many have a wide focus area, so Downtown Lowell is only a portion of their effort. A Business Improvement District (BID) could bring additional resources to Downtown Lowell and provide dedicated support and programming for the area.

While most businesses survived the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic, some businesses have permanently closed. Businesses have identified regulatory limitations and permitting challenges as barriers to business growth. Most businesses are leaseholders and do not always have direct control over their spaces, this creates challenges when physical improvements are necessary or desired. Businesses expressed an interest in low-cost financing programs to help them purchase their spaces and shared marketing/advertising programs. These are all services and programs that BIDs typically provide.

**Downtown feels disconnected.**

Despite the recent development and other activities in Downtown Lowell, including projects like Mill No. 5 and wayfinding initiatives to connect cultural hubs to key destinations, Downtown Lowell feels disconnected from parking facilities, parks and recreational hubs, nearby residential neighborhoods, UMass Lowell, and other major destinations. In fact, in many ways, Downtown Lowell feels disconnected from itself. Though it's a relatively compact neighborhood, each part of Downtown feels separate from the others. The combination of auto-dominated infrastructure and a lack of a coordinated pedestrian wayfinding system creates an uninviting experience for Downtown Lowell visitors and perpetuates the perception that Downtown is not accessible for



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visitors, residents, or patrons. Though ample parking is available in Downtown Lowell, there is a strong preference for street parking and a perception that parking is lacking. Improved signage, wayfinding, and curbside management could address this incorrect perception.

Buildings and infrastructure in Downtown Lowell are in need of maintenance and repair. Most buildings need facade improvements ranging from new paint to necessary structural repairs. Parts of Downtown have generous sidewalks, but other areas are lacking sufficient sidewalks or sidewalks are littered with obstruction. Most public infrastructure is oriented towards vehicular traffic, leaving pedestrians feeling like second-class users. The inconsistent infrastructure makes Downtown Lowell feel like a large, disconnected area but it is actually incredibly walkable. Residents, visitors, business owners, city staff and others routinely drive from place to place in Downtown Lowell instead of walking.

Persistent vacancy issues plague some Downtown blocks and some buildings could not acquire occupancy permits without significant investments. Other landlords keep their spaces vacant by choice. Though the majority of storefronts are occupied, some of the vacant storefronts are prominent and make Downtown Lowell feel less welcoming and vibrant.

## Placemaking activities are limited.

Though there are a number of parks, plazas, and other public spaces in Downtown Lowell, most are underutilized and some could use significant improvements. Challenges with unhoused populations and illicit drug use have influenced how public spaces are designed. There is need for more street trees, benches, lighting, and other pedestrian-friendly streetscape improvements. Placemaking activities like public art, activating public plazas and parks, establishing new parklets, and creating inviting alleyways public events would help bring visitors and others to Downtown Lowell, attracting more customers to Downtown businesses, and helping to improve Downtown Lowell's image.







## Highlights from the Customer Base Analysis

### What is the Customer Base Diagnostic?

Demographic data helps us to understand the local customer base, their spending habits, and the degree to which businesses are capturing customer dollars. Data such as a community's population trends, age and education profiles, household statistics, vehicle accessibility, and employment and income profiles help to tell a story on who is frequenting the town center or commercial district. It also highlights the demand for certain retail or commercial uses, therefore assisting in community-wide economic development efforts.

The Customer Base Diagnostic poses the question:

- Who are the customers of businesses in the LRRP Study Area?

### Customer Base Results in Downtown Lowell

Lowell's population is growing at a faster rate than the state and is younger and more diverse than the state's population. While Downtown Lowell residents tend to be younger than other areas, children are underrepresented. There are about as many residents who never finished high school as residents with college educations. Income plays a vital role in its customer base profile. Many Downtown Lowell residents are living below the poverty level and homelessness has become an increasing challenge.

Lowell is the first stop for many new immigrants. Some families stay in Lowell for generations, while other families establish themselves in Lowell before moving to the surrounding suburbs and beyond. Though many former residents have moved away from Lowell, the businesses throughout the city catering to the immigrant population keeps many people coming back to the city to get foods and goods not available elsewhere.



## RESIDENTS AND HOUSEHOLDS

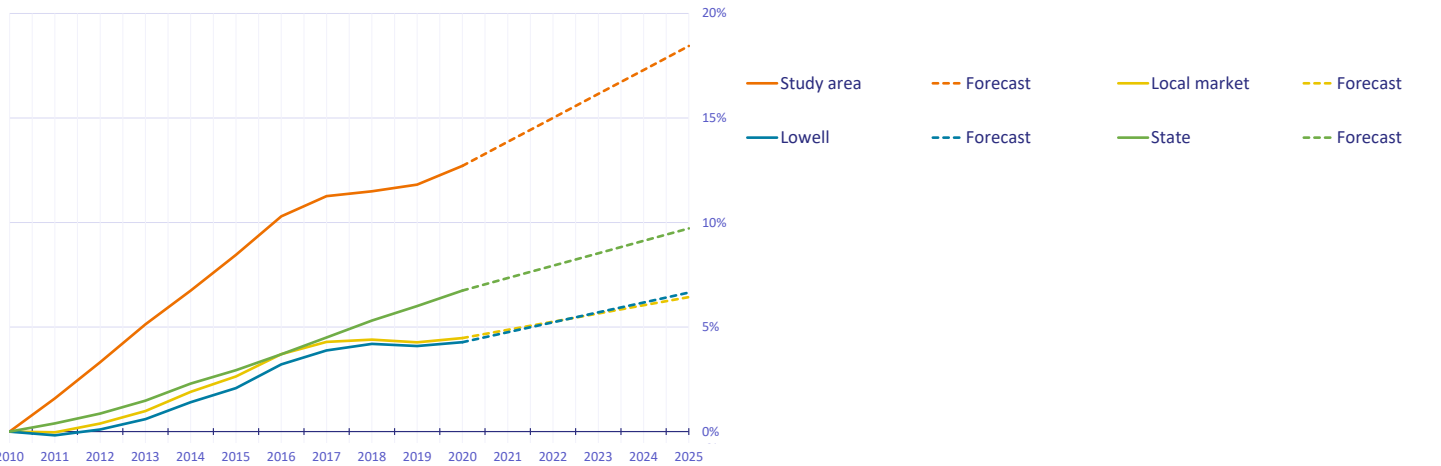
The residential population in Lowell's LRRP Study Area is growing at nearly twice the rate of the state, while the surrounding area's (both City of Lowell and Local Market Area) population is increasing at a slightly slower rate than the state.

By 2025, the Downtown Lowell LRRP Study Area is forecast to add 249 residents, representing a 5.1% increase. The number of households is forecast to increase by 5.5% or 136 households. Most households in Downtown Lowell are fewer than two people, this trend is expected to continue.

### Population Characteristics

Population	Study Area	Local Market	Lowell	State
Avg. household size	1.8	2.7	2.7	2.5
Residential population	4,895	66,283	110,927	6,993,463
Households	2,480	23,514	39,637	2,702,578
5-year forecast, population change	+249	+1,244	+2,527	+194,486
5-year forecast, household change	+136	+457	+871	+73,332
Median Age	35	32	34	40

### Population Trends: 2010 to 2025

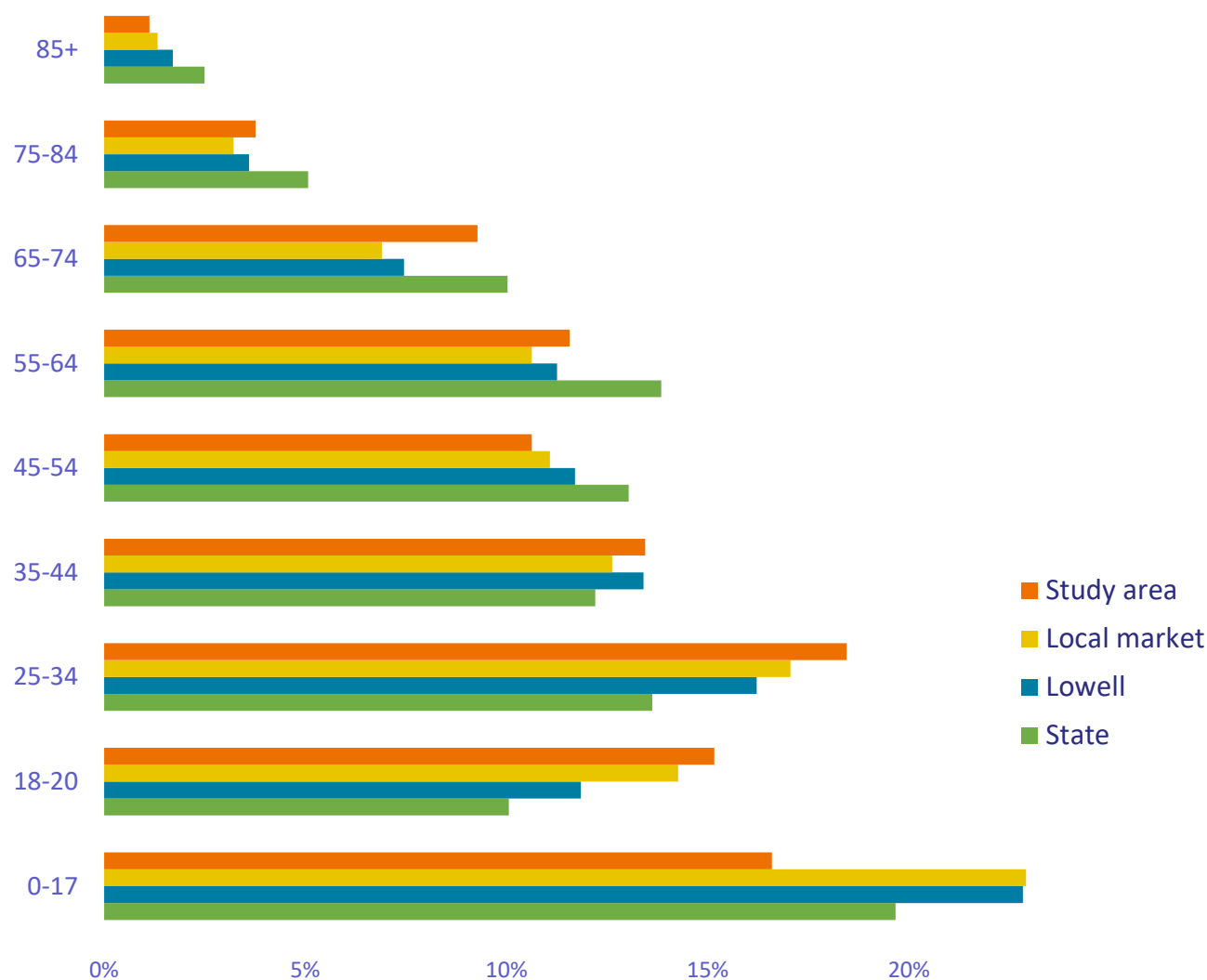




AGE

Age distribution in Lowell's LRRP Study Area is similar to the surrounding area, but young adults (18-34 year olds) are over-represented and children are under-represented. Lowell's LRRP Study area's residents are heavily skewed to younger adults than Massachusetts. The Downtown Lowell LRRP Study Area's median age is slightly higher than in the City of Lowell as a whole (34.9 in the Study Area and 24.4 in Lowell) but is significantly younger than Massachusetts (the statewide median age is 40.3).

Age Distribution



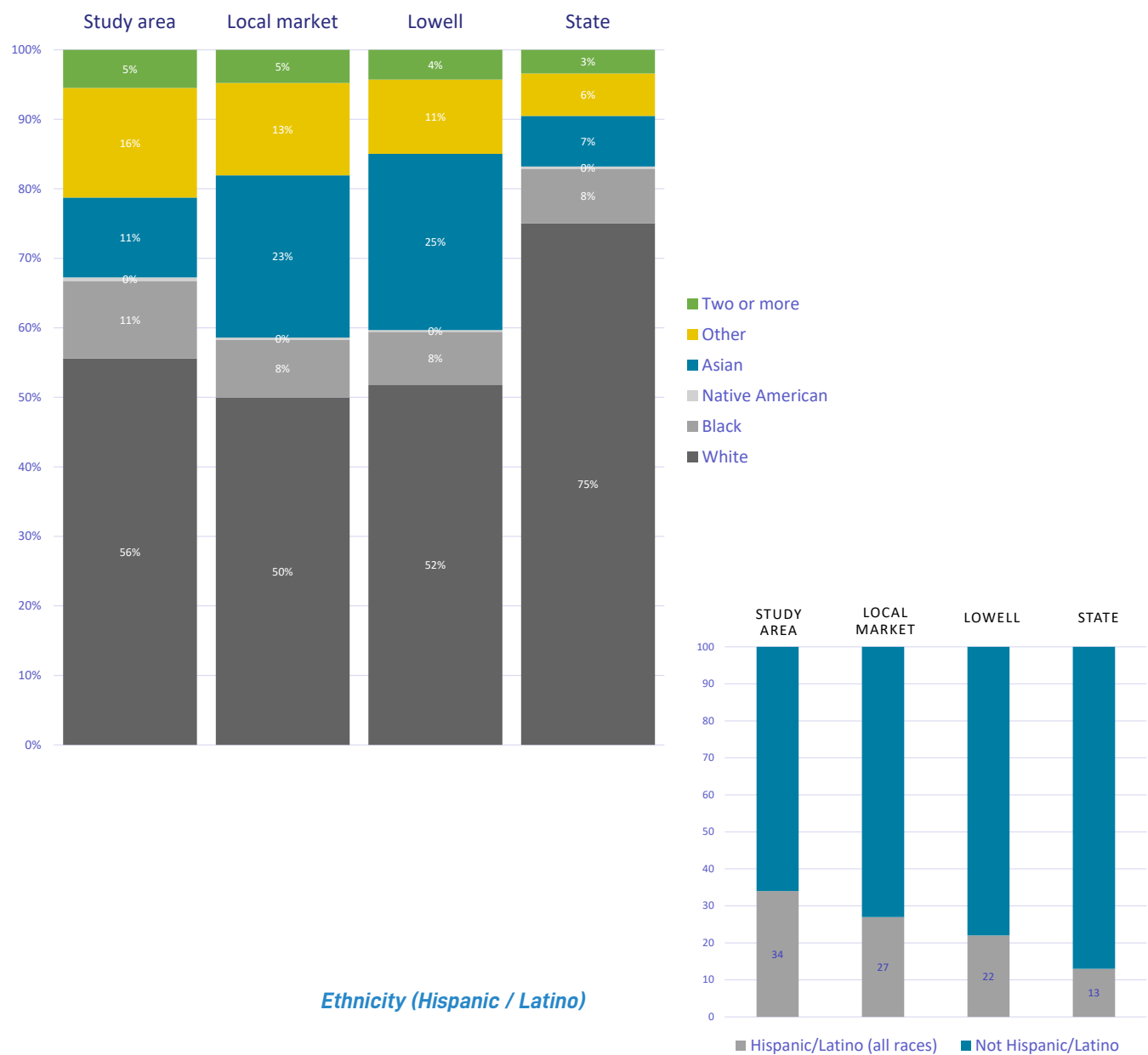




RACE AND ETHNICITY

Lowell, the local market, and the LRRP Study Area are all significantly more diverse than Massachusetts. However, while the LRRP Study Area's racial makeup is slightly less diverse than the City of Lowell or the local market area, more LRRP Study Area residents are of Hispanic or Latino heritage than in the local market area, City of Lowell, or State of Massachusetts.

Race





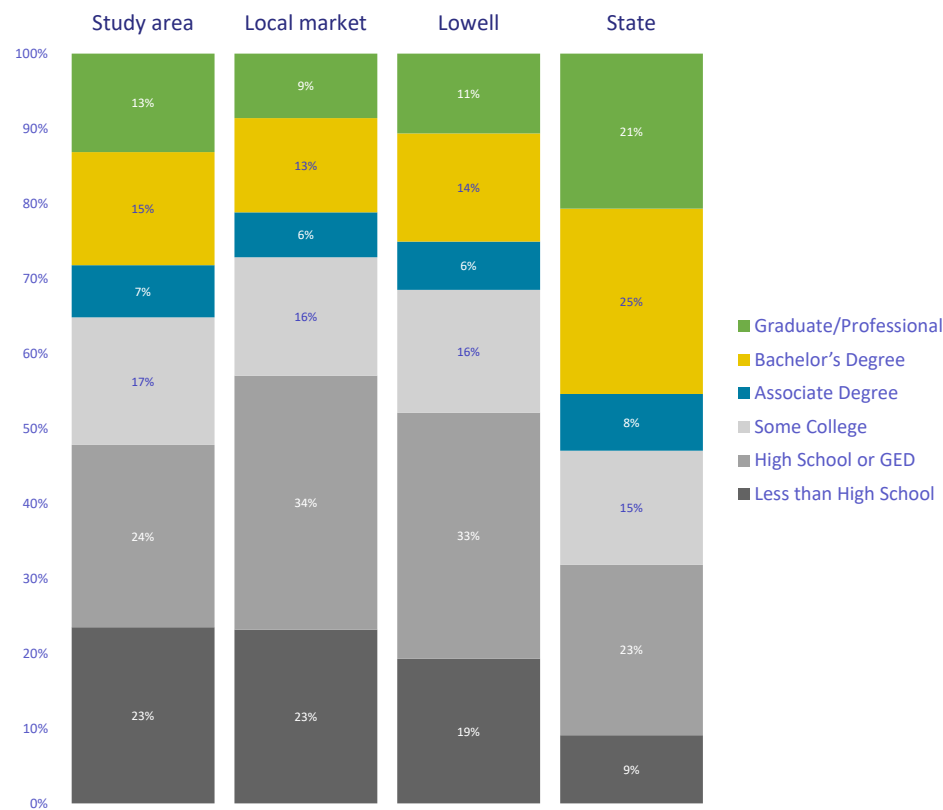
EDUCATION

The LRRP Study Area, local market area, and City of Lowell all lag the state average for educational attainment. Nearly a quarter of residents in the LRRP Study Area have less than a high school education. In Massachusetts, only nine (9) percent of the population has less than a high school education.

While there is a large proportion of the population in the LRRP Study Area who have not completed high school, the share of residents living in the LRRP Study Area who have completed a bachelor's degree or a graduate/professional degree is higher in the LRRP Study Area than in the local market area or City of Lowell. More than a quarter (28%) of LRRP Study Area residents have a bachelor's degree or graduate/professional degree. This is slightly higher than in the City of Lowell (25%) and local market area (22%).

The bifurcated educational attainment and over-representation of young adults in the LRRP Study Area indicates that Downtown Lowell is attracting young, professional residents who desire an urban lifestyle. This conclusion was reinforced when the LRRP team engaged with the public, many people who provided feedback at the farmers' market told us they were young professionals who had chosen Lowell because they could afford the lifestyle they desired. Many indicated that they had moved from communities like Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville.

Educational Attainment





EMPLOYMENT, HOME VALUE, AND POVERTY LEVEL

There are approximately as many jobs in Downtown Lowell as there are residents. The Downtown Lowell LRRP Study Area has a 1.0 jobs-to-residents ratio, which is much higher than in the local market area (0.3), City of Lowell (0.3), or State of Massachusetts (0.5). However, unemployment in Downtown Lowell is slightly higher (19%) than in the local market area (18%) or City of Lowell (17%). Unemployment in all the local geographies is higher than in Massachusetts where only 15% of residents are unemployed. Nearly thirty (30) of households in the LRRP Study Area are living below the poverty level. This is higher than in the local market area (24%), City of Lowell (22%), and State of Massachusetts (12%). Similarly, household median income in the Downtown Lowell LRRP Study Area is less than the local market area, city, or state. Downtown Lowell's population is making only about 40% of statewide median income and 60% of the median income in Lowell.

The vast majority (84%) of households in the Downtown Lowell LRRP Study Area are renter-occupied; homeowners make up a far smaller share of households in Downtown Lowell than in the local market area, City of Lowell, and State of Massachusetts. Median home value is also lowest in the LRRP Study Area but is forecast to increase the most (43%) over the next five years. Home values in the local market area, City of Lowell, and State of Massachusetts are only forecast to increase by 19%, 17%, and 17% respectively.

Employment and Financial Characteristics

Employment and income	Study Area	Local Market	Lowell	State
Median household income	\$34k	\$46k	\$55k	\$81k
Employees	4,921	19,986	37,262	3,384,476
Students (secondary & above)	1,039	12,097	17,717	933,098
Jobs-to-residents ratio	1.0	0.3	0.3	0.5
Unemployed (16+)	19%	18%	17%	15%
Households below poverty level	28%	24%	22%	12%

Housing

Median home value	\$222k	\$269k	\$281k	\$415k
5-year forecast, home value growth	43%	19%	17%	17%
Owner-occupied housing	16%	34%	44%	61%





## Highlights from the Physical Environment

### What is the Physical Environment Diagnostic?

The integrity of public infrastructure and private buildings and storefronts plays an important role in the experience of a downtown, town center, or commercial district. Accessibility from a parking lot to the sidewalk, comfortability while using streetscape amenities, and an inviting storefront window all have an impact on the vitality of a town center. It is important to bifurcate the physical environment into the public and the private realm to acknowledge the fundamentally different nature of the tactics and funding mechanisms available for each. The following public and private elements of Downtown Lowell's physical environment have been analyzed:

- **Public Realm:** Sidewalks, street trees & benches, lighting, wayfinding and signage, roadbed and crosswalks
- **Private Realm:** Storefront windows, outdoor display and dining, signage, awning, facades, and lighting

The Physical Environment Diagnostic poses the question:

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

### Physical Environment Results in Downtown Lowell

The existing public and private realm infrastructure in Downtown Lowell has a lot of character, but many of the buildings and infrastructure are suffering from deferred maintenance and are in need of significant repairs. The transportation infrastructure and signage is auto-oriented and some areas suffer from sign clutter. In addition to facade improvements, many buildings and businesses are lacking transparent windows and adequate signage. There is a variety of public infrastructure throughout Downtown Lowell. In addition to varying styles, some public infrastructure is well-maintained but other infrastructure is in significant need of repair.

The following section provides an overview of the physical environment grades and key findings.

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT GRADING FRAMEWORK: PUBLIC REALM

Physical Environment: Public Realm					
Element	Guiding Principles	A	B	C	FAIL
<b>Sidewalks</b>	Sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate both the flow of customers and spillover retail/dining activity. In addition, sidewalks should be clean and well-maintained to ensure the safety and comfort of pedestrians.	More than 75% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned, well-maintained and accessible to multiple users across different ages and abilities	About 50% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned and well-maintained.	More than 25% of sidewalks in the study area pose challenges to the pedestrian experience (including narrow sidewalks and lack of cleanliness/ maintenance).	There are no sidewalks in the study area.
<b>Street Trees &amp; Benches</b>	Sidewalks should facilitate a variety of activities, including resting, people-watching and socializing. Street trees and benches are key amenities that support such activities and should be made available without disrupting the flow of pedestrians.	Street trees and benches are readily available throughout the study area. They are well-designed, well- maintained, and offer shade and comfort to pedestrians.	Although street trees and benches are available across the study area, these amenities have not been cleaned or well-maintained, and require improvements.	Limited availability of street trees and benches creating uncomfortable pedestrian experience.	There are no street trees and benches in the study area.
<b>Lighting</b>	Street lighting improves pedestrian visibility and personal safety, as well as aids in geographic orientation.	More than 75% of the study area utilizes a range of lighting strategies to ensure safety of pedestrians and motorists, as well as highlight the identity and history of an area.	About 50% of the study area is serviced by street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety.	Street lighting on the primary street in the study area does not support pedestrian visibility and safety.	There is no street lighting in the study area.
<b>Wayfinding/ Signage</b>	A wayfinding system supports overall accessibility of a commercial district. It benefits pedestrians and bicyclists, and directs motorists to park and walk. Without clear visual cues, customers may find it difficult to park or may be less aware of local offerings.	There is a comprehensive and cohesive wayfinding system that offers geographic orientation to pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Signage reflect the brand and identity of the area.	Wayfinding in the study area is primarily geared towards directing motorists across the study area. There is limited signage to identify key assets and destinations to pedestrians.	Limited to no signage available throughout the study area.	There is no wayfinding/ signage in the study area.
<b>Roadbed &amp; Crosswalks</b>	Roads should be well-maintained to ensure safety of drivers and pedestrians. Crosswalks that are unsafe or inconvenient to customers may undermine accessibility between stores and overall shopper experience.	Roads are designed to balance the needs of motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians and create a safe environment for all users.	Roads are designed primarily to move motor vehicles across the study area efficiently, with limited crosswalks for pedestrians.	Roads are hazardous to all users.	The study area is not connected by any major roads.

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT GRADING FRAMEWORK: PRIVATE REALM

Physical Environment: Private Realm					
Element	Guiding Principles	A	B	C	FAIL
<b>Window</b>	Storefronts that maintain a minimum of 70% transparency ensure clear lines of sight between the business and the sidewalk to enhance attractiveness of storefront, as well as improve safety for the business, customers, and pedestrians.	More than 75% of storefronts maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.	About 50% of storefront windows maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.	More than 25% of storefronts have windows with limited transparency.	All storefronts are boarded up and/or have limited transparency.
<b>Outdoor Display/Dining</b>	Attractive window displays and spillover retail/restaurant activity on sidewalks or adjacent parking spaces can help contribute to overall district vibrancy.	More than 75% of storefronts feature an attractive window display and/or spillover merchandise and dining areas that align with the brand and identity of the district.	About 50% of storefronts maintain an attractive window display with limited spillover merchandise and/or dining areas.	More than 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise display and outdoor dining that pose challenges to the pedestrian experience.	There is no spillover retail/restaurant activity in the district.
<b>Signage</b>	Signage can help customers identify the location of storefronts and businesses from a distance. Signage should also reflect the visual brand and identity of tenants to help attract new customers.	More than 75% of storefront signs reflect the unique brand identity of tenants and can be easily seen from more than 10 ft distance.	About 50% of storefronts have clear signage that reflect basic business information and can easily be seen from adjacent sidewalks.	More than 25% of storefronts have signage that does not communicate names of business or types of products/services being offered.	Storefronts in the study area do not have signage.
<b>Awning</b>	Awnings can provide shade during warmer months, enabling comfortable outdoor dining arrangements for customers. However, they must be well-maintained and designed in coordination with other elements of the storefront.	More than 75% of properties in the study area have retractable awnings that have been well-maintained and cleaned.	About 50% of properties in the study area have functioning awnings that have been well-maintained and cleaned	More than 25% of properties in the study area do not have awnings and/or have awnings that are unusable or have not been cleaned and maintained.	Storefronts in the study area are not equipped with awnings.



## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT GRADING FRAMEWORK: PRIVATE REALM (CONTINUED)

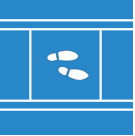




Physical Environment: Private Realm					
Element	Guiding Principles	A	B	C	FAIL
<b>Facade</b>	Storefronts that use high-quality and durable building materials, as well as paint and color to differentiate from other businesses, can dramatically improve the appearance of the commercial district to potential customers	More than 75% of properties have well-maintained facades. Limited structural enhancements are required.	Although most properties in the study area have clean and well-maintained facades, there is at least one significant property requiring structural facade improvements.	More than 25% of properties require significant building facades improvements, including power washing, painting, and structural enhancements.	All properties in the study area require significant facade improvements.
<b>Lighting</b>	Storefront interior lighting after business hours help enliven the corridor and boost security on the street.	More than 75% of storefronts have lighting that help illuminate sidewalks.	About 50% of storefronts have some interior lighting that help illuminate sidewalks.	More than 25% of storefronts do not have lighting.	All storefronts in the study area are shuttered and dark at night.



## DOWNTOWN LOWELL PUBLIC REALM GRADES

Most public realm elements in Downtown Lowell received a diagnostic grade of “B” based on the LRRP definitions. While there are some pedestrian-friendly elements throughout Downtown Lowell, the existing infrastructure is primarily to support vehicular users. The following takeaways provide an overview on the diagnostic grades and observations of Downtown Lowell’s streetscape and infrastructure environments.

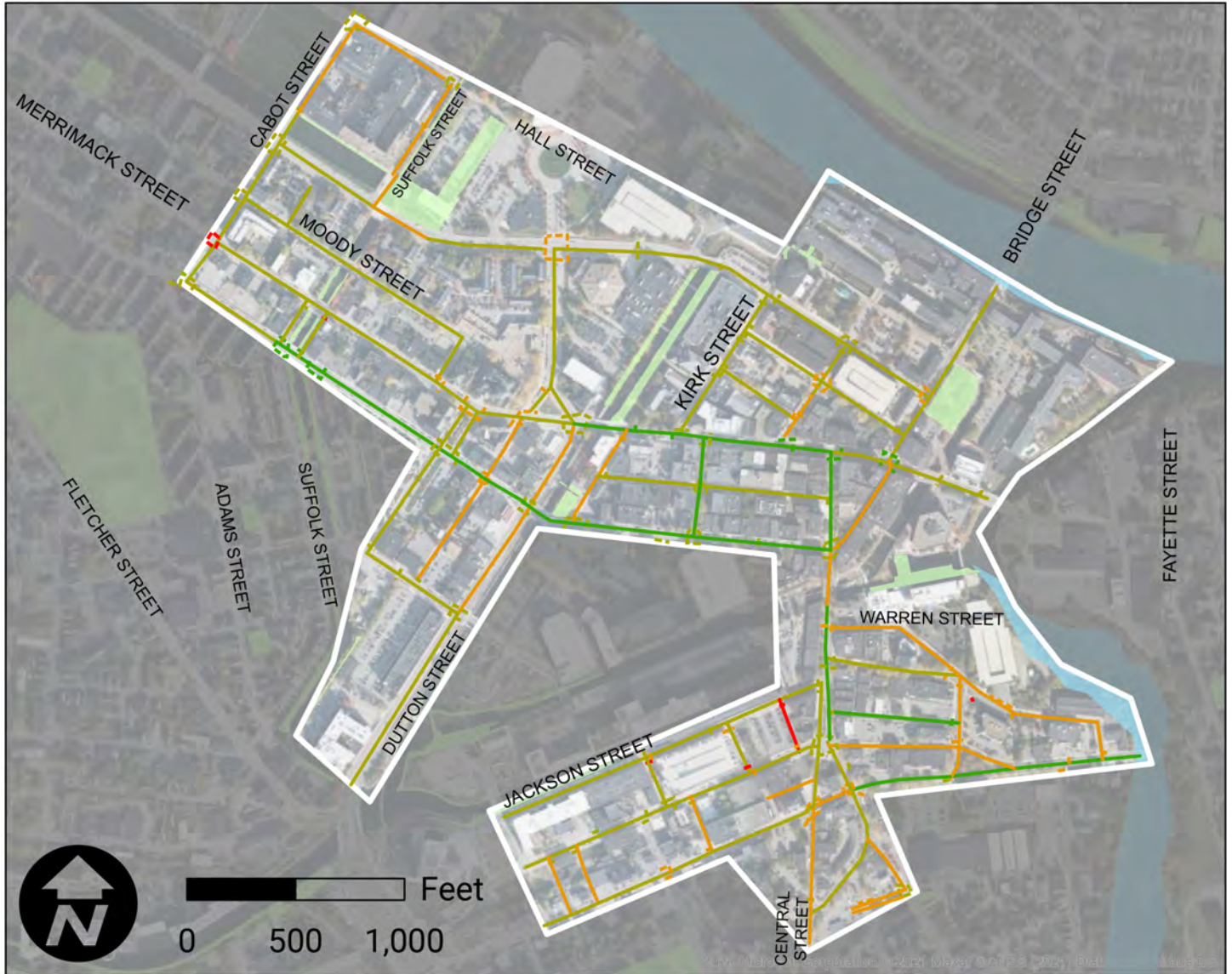
- **Downtown Lowell is disjointed creating a feeling of separate, district areas.** Downtown Lowell is a small, walkable area but feels much larger because the different areas are disconnected.
- **The sidewalk network is inconsistent in design and maintenance.** There are a variety of different types of sidewalks in Downtown Lowell and sidewalk widths are inconsistent. Some sidewalks are obstructed and/or narrow. While some sidewalks are well-maintained, others are in disrepair.
- **Roadways and sidewalks are varied.** Some areas have generous sidewalks, while others have broken and narrow sidewalks. Roadways are typically wide and auto-oriented, leading to the perception of Downtown as a place for motorists.
- **Crosswalks need to be more accessible and safer.** Most intersections have crosswalks, but many are faded and/or have long crossing distances. There is opportunity to build on the existing network of crosswalks by facilitating safer conditions near them and designing more accessible pedestrian crossing infrastructure.
- **Streetscape amenities are present, but unevenly distributed.** Pedestrian-scale lighting, street trees, and benches are available in some areas, but are missing in other parts of Downtown. Adding consistent streetscaping throughout Downtown Lowell would contribute to the establishment of a cohesive “feel” or identity which does not exist at present. Though Downtown Lowell is a small, easily-walkable neighborhood, it does not feel that way. Improved streetscape amenities would attract more people to Downtown Lowell and encourage people to linger.
- **A comprehensive wayfinding system is needed.** There are a wide variety of pedestrian- and vehicle-oriented signage in Downtown Lowell. Most signs are oriented towards vehicles. Cultural and pedestrian signage is available, but can get lost in the auto-oriented signage. Some areas suffer from excessive signage, or “sign clutter;” this clutter is confusing and can cause visitors to disregard signage. Many signs are in disrepair and since signs have been installed by different entities at different times, it is sometimes unclear who is responsible for maintaining each sign. Combined with strategic streetscape enhancements, a comprehensive signage and wayfinding program would contribute to an improved Downtown “image” and make Downtown Lowell more welcoming and inviting to visitors.
- **Placemaking opportunities are underutilized or absent.** Plazas and benches are disconnected from activity centers and underutilized. Some have been maintained and are attractive, while others are barren, empty, and uninviting.

Physical Environment: Public Realm Diagnostic Grades DOWNTOWN LOWELL			
	Element	Guiding Principles	Grade
	<b>Sidewalks</b> (see Map 1)	Sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate both the flow of customers and spillover retail/ dining activity. In addition, sidewalks should be clean and well-maintained to ensure the safety and comfort of pedestrians.	<b>B</b> About 50% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned and well-maintained.
	<b>Street Trees &amp; Benches</b> (see Map 2)	Sidewalks should facilitate a variety of activities, including resting, people-watching and socializing. Street trees and benches are key amenities that support such activities and should be made available without disrupting the flow of pedestrians.	<b>C</b> Limited availability of street trees and benches creating uncomfortable pedestrian experience.
	<b>Lighting</b> (see Map 2)	Street lighting improves pedestrian visibility and personal safety, as well as aids in geographic orientation.	<b>B</b> About 50% of the study area is serviced by street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety
	<b>Wayfinding/ Signage</b> (see Map 2)	A wayfinding system supports overall accessibility of a commercial district. It benefits pedestrians and bicyclists, and directs motorists to park and walk. Without clear visual cues, customers may find it difficult to park or may be less aware of local offerings.	<b>B</b> Wayfinding in the study area is primarily geared towards directing cars. There is limited signage to identify key assets and destinations to pedestrians.
	<b>Roadbed &amp; Crosswalks</b> (see Map 1)	Roads should be well- maintained to ensure safety of drivers and pedestrians. Crosswalks that are unsafe or inconvenient to customers may undermine accessibility between stores and overall shopper experience.	<b>B</b> Roads are designed primarily to move motor vehicles across the study area efficiently, with limited crosswalks for pedestrians.

Refer to page 36 for Public Realm Diagnostic Data Guidelines for grade descriptions (A, B, C, Fail) for each diagnostic element



**Map 1: Sidewalk and Crosswalk Grades Map**  
Source: Stantec



### Legend

#### Field Grade, Indicator

- A, Crosswalk
- A, Roadbed/Sidewalk
- B, Crosswalk
- B, Roadbed/Sidewalk
- C, Crosswalk
- C, Roadbed/Sidewalk
- Fail, Crosswalk
- Fail, Roadbed/Sidewalk

### PUBLIC REALM: SIDEWALK GRADE



About 50% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned and well-maintained.

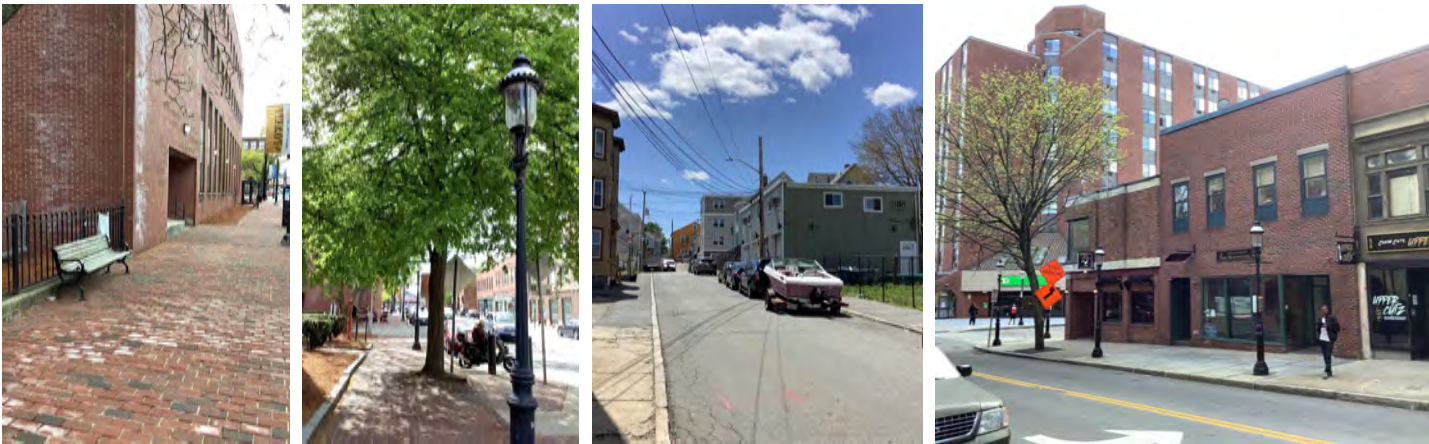


*Existing Sidewalk Infrastructure and Conditions*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery

### PUBLIC REALM: STREET TREES & BENCHES GRADE



Limited availability of street trees and benches creating uncomfortable pedestrian experience.



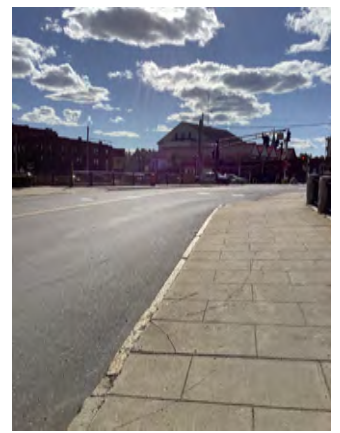
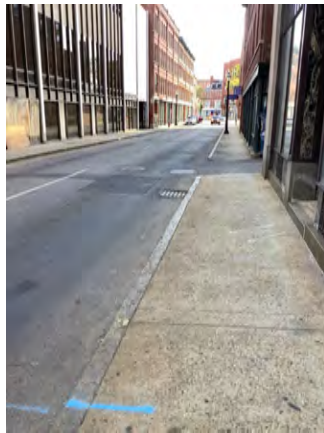
*Existing Street Trees & Benches / Streetscape Amenities*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery



## PUBLIC REALM: LIGHTING GRADE



About 50% of the study area is serviced by street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety.

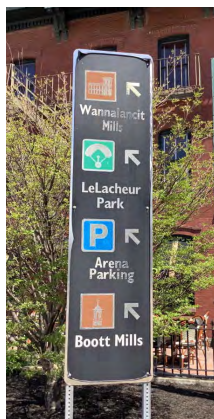


*Existing Lighting Structures*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery

## PUBLIC REALM: WAYFINDING/SIGNAGE GRADE



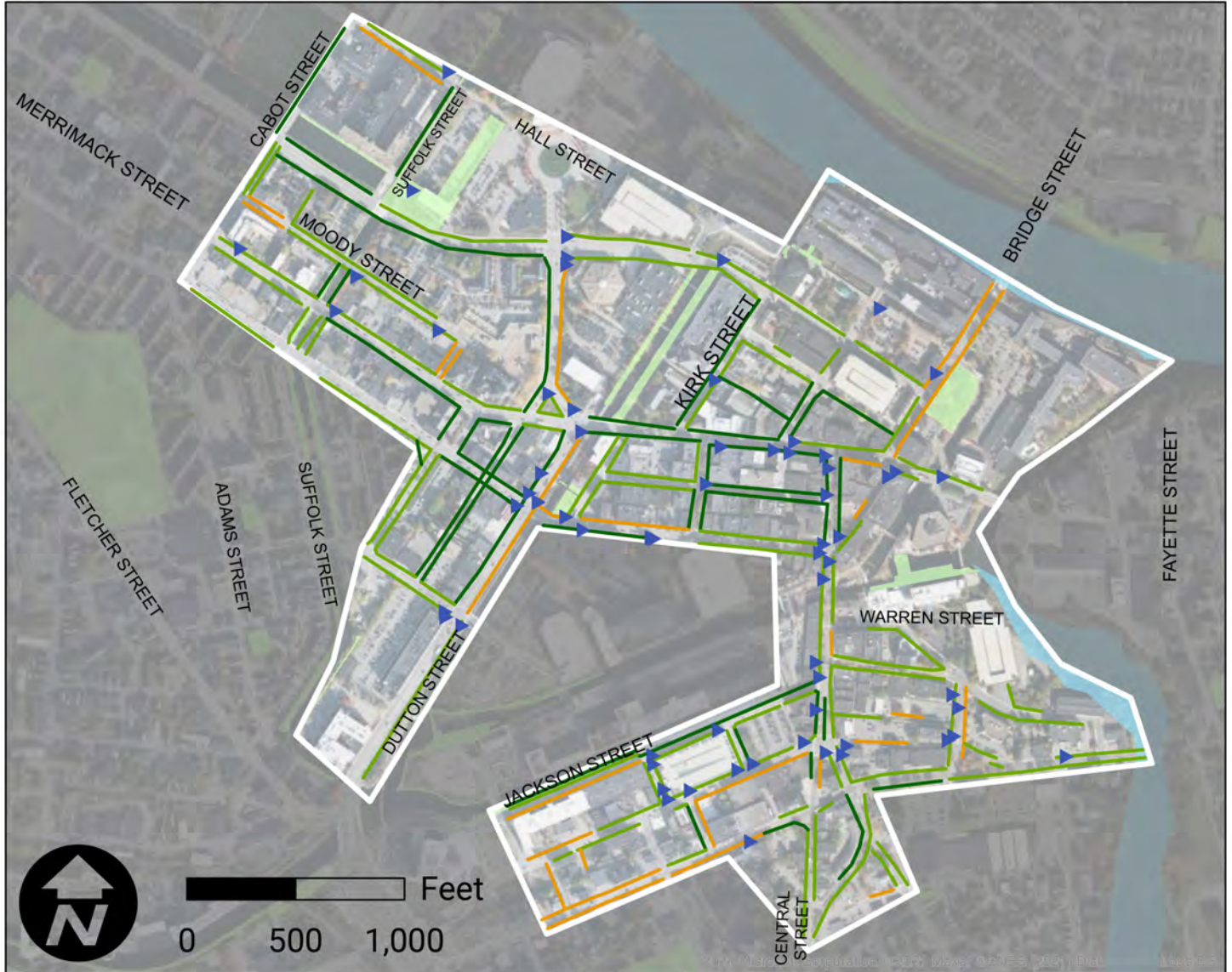
Wayfinding in the study area is primarily geared towards directing cars. There is limited signage to identify key assets and destinations to pedestrians.



*Existing Wayfinding and Signage Infrastructure*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery



**Map 2: Streetscape Infrastructure Grades Map**  
Source: Stantec



## Legend

### Trees/Lights/Benches

Field Grade

A

B

C

Fail

Wayfinding/Signage

PUBLIC REALM: ROADBED & CROSSWALKS GRADE



Roads are designed primarily to move motor vehicles across the study area efficiently, with limited crosswalks for pedestrians.



*Existing Roadway and Crosswalk Conditions*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery









## DOWNTOWN LOWELL PRIVATE REALM GRADES

Most private realm elements in Downtown Lowell received a diagnostic grade "B" or "C," illustrating that most buildings and businesses need pretty significant improvements and revitalization efforts to create a more inviting and business/customer-friendly area. The following takeaways provide an overview on the diagnostic grades and observations of Downtown Lowell's built environment.

- **Downtown Lowell has a lot of character.** There are "good bones" but a need for functional and aesthetic improvements ranging from minor maintenance activities (like a new coat of paint) to more major structural improvements (like full facade upgrades). While this assessment did not include interior conditions, many commercial units are in need of improvements. Some spaces are ineligible for occupancy permits and would require major upgrades and improvements before they would be able to receive an occupancy permit.
- **Sidewalks and on-street parking spaces are not well-utilized for outdoor dining or retail displays.** Though several restaurants installed outdoor dining facilities in 2020 and even more "streateries" were approved in 2021, many blocks did not have any outdoor displays or dining opportunities.
- **Many windows are dark or blocked.** Many buildings have pedestrian-scale windows, but most are not transparent. Many vacant storefronts have windows that are entirely blocked. The vast majority of businesses are closed on evenings and weekends, leaving significant stretches of Downtown dark.
- **Many properties are vacant or under-utilized.** Many properties appear to be vacant, have limited hours, and/or do not invite pedestrians into the business. Vacancy has been a persistent problem in Downtown Lowell, but has been exacerbated by the Pandemic. Some buildings are definitely vacant, but the status of other storefronts have unknown occupancy or very sporadic hours.
- **Building maintenance is an issue.** A lot of buildings require significant facade improvements.
- **There is a need for improved individual branding.** Many businesses have limited or inadequate signage which can make it difficult to determine if there is an active business in the space and, if there is an active business, what the business offers or what its opening hours are. During the LRRP planning process, some businesses complained that signage regulations in Downtown Lowell were a hindrance to providing adequate signage.



Physical Environment: Public Realm Diagnostic Grades			
	Element	Guiding Principles	Grade
	Window	Storefronts that maintain a minimum of 70% transparency ensure clear lines of sight between the business and the sidewalk to enhance attractiveness of storefront, as well as improve safety for the business, customers, and pedestrians.	<b>B</b> About 50% of storefront windows maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.
	Outdoor Display/ Dining	Attractive window displays and spillover retail/ restaurant activity on sidewalks or adjacent parking spaces can help contribute to overall district vibrancy.	<b>C</b> More than 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise display and outdoor dining that post challenges to the pedestrian experience.
	Signage	Signage can help customers identify the location of storefronts and businesses from a distance. Signage should also reflect the visual brand and identity of tenants to help attract new customers.	<b>C</b> More than 25% of storefronts have signage that does not communicate names of businesses or types of products/services being offered.
	Awning	Awnings can provide shade during warmer months, enabling comfortable outdoor dining arrangements for customers. However, they must be well-maintained and designed in coordination with other elements of the storefront.	<b>C</b> More than 25% of properties in the study area do not have awnings and/or have awnings that are unusable or have not been cleaned and maintained.
	Facade (see Map 3)	Storefronts that use high- quality and durable building materials, as well as paint and color to differentiate from other businesses, can dramatically improve the appearance of the commercial district to potential customers.	<b>C</b> More than 25% of properties require significant building facades improvements, including power washing, painting, and structural enhancements.
	Lighting	Storefront interior lighting after business hours help enliven the corridor and boost security on the street.	<b>F/NA</b> All storefronts in the study area are shuttered and dark at night.

Refer to pages 37-38 for Private Realm Diagnostic Data Guidelines for all grades (A, B, C, Fail) for each diagnostic element

### PRIVATE REALM: WINDOW GRADE



About 50% of storefront windows maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.



*Existing Window Conditions*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery

### PRIVATE REALM: OUTDOOR DISPLAY & DINING GRADE



More than 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise display and outdoor dining that pose challenges to the pedestrian experience.



*Existing Outdoor Display & Dining Facilities*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery

### PRIVATE REALM: SIGNAGE GRADE



More than 25% of storefronts have signage that does not communicate names of businesses or types of products/services being offered.



*Existing Identification Signage*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery

### PRIVATE REALM: AWNING GRADE



More than 25% of properties in the study area do not have awnings and/or have awnings that are unusable or have not been cleaned and maintained.



*Existing Storefront Awnings*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery



## PRIVATE REALM: FACADE GRADE



More than 25% of properties require significant building façades improvements, including power washing, painting, and structural enhancements.



*Existing Facade Conditions*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery

## PRIVATE REALM: LIGHTING GRADE



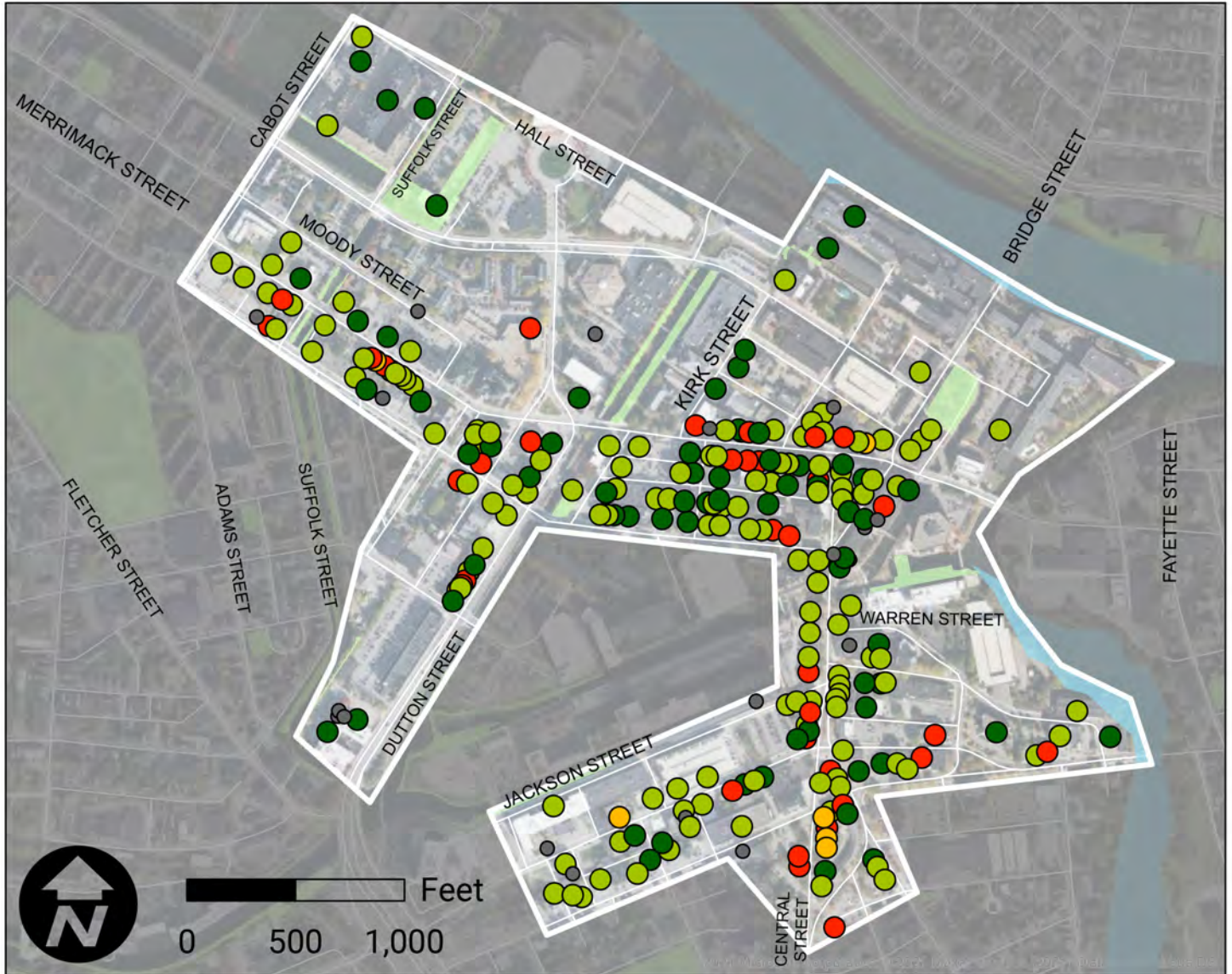
All storefronts in the study area are shuttered and dark at night.



*Existing Lighting Fixtures*  
Source: Stantec Field Imagery



**Map 3: Storefront Facade Conditions**  
Source: Stantec



### Legend

#### Facade Condition

- Maintained
- Adequately Maintained
- Deteriorating
- Poorly Maintained
- No Data Available



## Highlights from the Business Environment

### What is the Business Environment Diagnostic?

The conditions of the local business environment, including business density, quality, and type of offerings, play a critical role in how successful businesses are in meeting the needs of the district's customers. Collecting data related to the tenant mix and concentration of stores provides an insight into the health of local businesses, as well as highlights the presence (or lack of) major anchors and drivers that attract visitors and residents to frequent businesses in the district.

The Business Environment Diagnostic poses the question:

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

### Business Environment Results in Downtown Lowell

There are a wide array of businesses in Downtown Lowell, but some essential services are missing for Downtown residents. Though some businesses are thriving, expanding, and gaining regional attention, others are very small, struggling, and have irregular or unpredictable hours. Downtown Lowell's business community is beginning to reflect Lowell's diversity, but challenges remain between the "old guard" and "new guard." There is a need for a business improvement district or other district management entity to help support businesses and create more formal business networks. The majority of businesses lease their space and some have reported challenges working with their landlords to make necessary or desired upgrades and improvements.



## RETAIL LEAKAGE

There is a demand for retail in Downtown Lowell. Retail surplus and leakage are measured on a scale of -100 (maximum surplus retail) to +100 (maximum retail leakage). The higher the number, the more demand there is for general retail or a specific type of retail. A number closer to 0 indicates that the retail supply and demand are balanced.

- The Downtown Lowell LRRP Study Area has slightly more supply than demand for retail while the Local Market, City of Lowell, and state have slightly higher demand than supply.
- The Downtown Lowell LRRP Study Area has significant need for a grocery store.

### Employment and Financial Characteristics

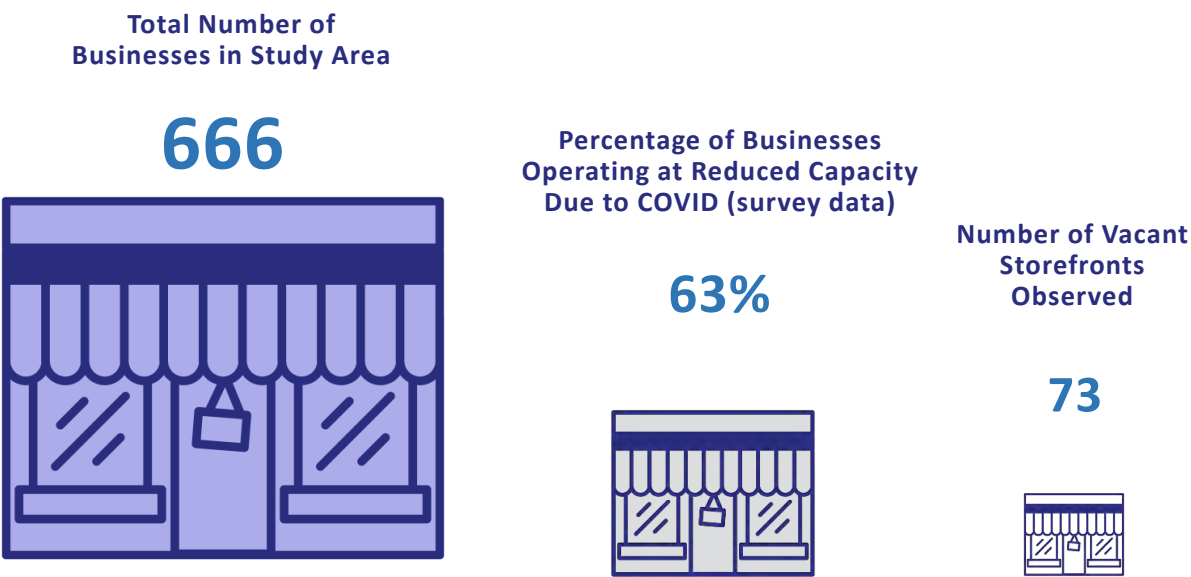
Retail Market	Study Area	Local Market	Lowell	State
Total Retail Surplus/Leakage	-18.8	+17.4	+9.7	+5.8
Grocery Store Surplus/Leakage	+51.3	-2.7	+7.6	+2.4
Restaurant Surplus/Leakage	-64.5	+1.0	-0.3	-0.7



## LRRP BUSINESS SURVEY

The RRP Business Survey aimed to obtain input to guide plan development, gain buy-in from the local business community, and collect data across all LRRP communities to inform statewide programs and policy. The survey addressed topics including business satisfaction (what are the aspects of Downtown Lowell's commercial district and what is the regulatory environment), business conditions and the impacts from COVID-19, and input from the business community regarding potential strategies and types of assistance.

- 58 businesses responded to the LRRP Business Survey
- 91% reported impacts due to COVID
- Downtown Lowell businesses experienced a reduction in revenue, reduced operating hours and/or capacity, incurred expenses to implement safety measures and/or experienced a temporary or permanent business closure
- 55% of businesses expressed interest in receiving assistance. The top types of assistance requested were: Participating in Shared Marketing/Advertising (38%), Low-Cost Financing for Purchasing Property in the District (29%), and Low-Cost financing for Storefront/Facade Improvements (21%)
- About half of business respondents indicated that they did not have issues with regulations; the other 50% indicated that parking regulations (41%), historic district regulations (21%), or signage regulations (7%) posed an obstacle to business operation.





**The top 4 business impacts due to COVID-19 were:**

- Revenue Decline (70%)
- Reduced Operating Hours/Capacity (67%)
- Incurred Expense to Implement Safety Measures (60%)
- Temporary or Permanent Business Closure (53%)

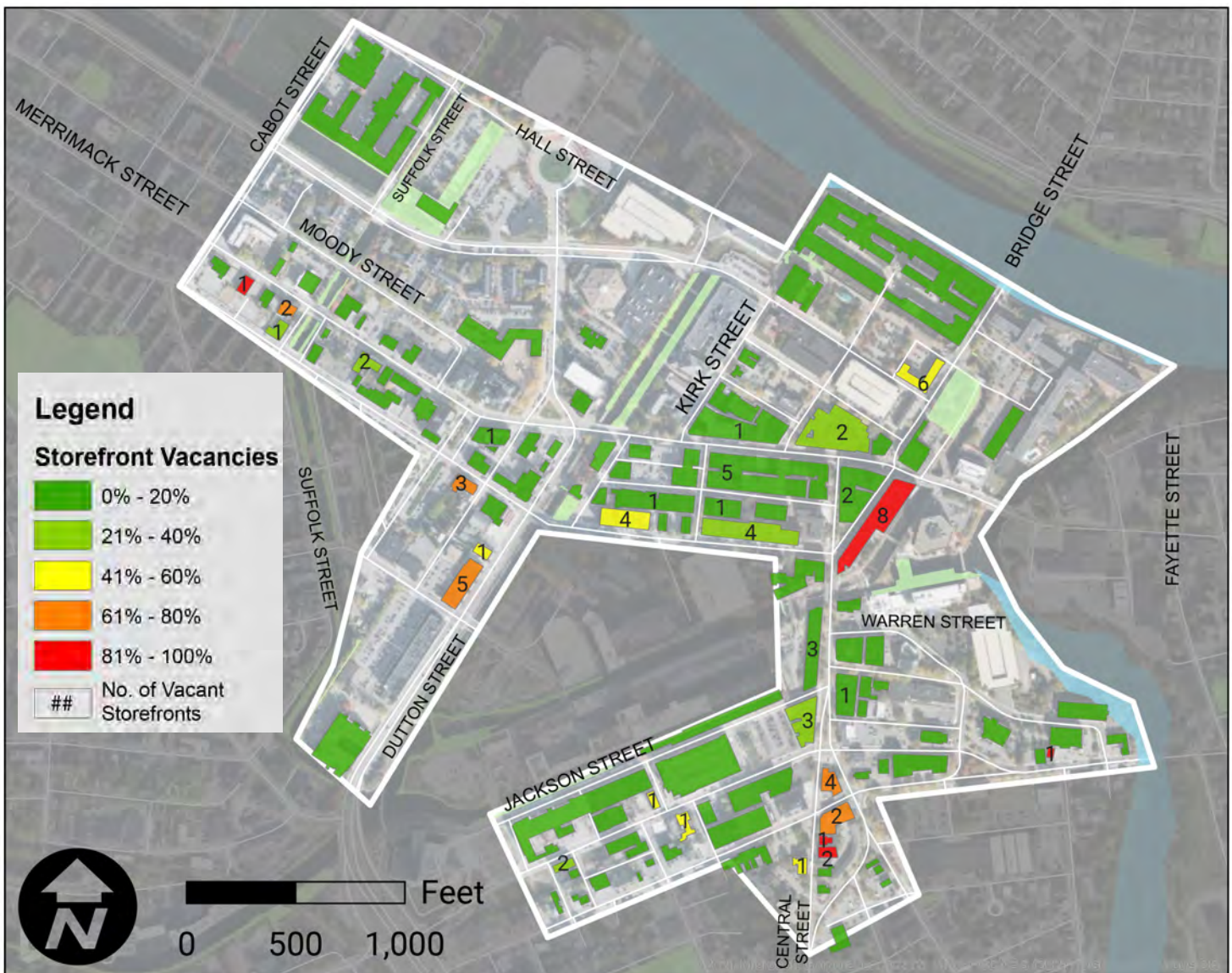
**79%** of businesses had fewer on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID.

**67%** of businesses generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019.  
For **48%** of businesses, revenue declined by 25% or more.

**44%** of businesses established alternative modes to sell and deliver products.

**60%** of businesses were still operating at reduced hours/capacity (March/April 2021)

**Map 4: Vacancy/Occupancy Profile**  
Source: Stantec





## Highlights from the Administrative Capacity Analysis

### What is the Administrative Capacity Diagnostic?

Administrative capacity refers to a combination of leadership, organizational capacity, resources, and regulatory and policy frameworks that enable catalytic investments and improvements to take root. Understanding leadership roles and champions as well as funding mechanisms and existing partnership are critical components to assessing the administrative capacity of a community.

The Administrative Capacity Diagnostic poses questions such as:

- Who are the key stewards of the LRRP Study Area? Are they adequately staff and resourced to support implementation of projects?
- Are the regulatory, zoning, and permitting process an impediment to business activity? Why or why not?
- How can the City better service the needs of businesses?
- What additional support could business owners use? What additional support could landlords use?
- If the area lacks a stakeholder entity, is a discussion needed on District Management?

### Business Environment Results in Downtown Lowell

Downtown Lowell businesses identified administrative challenges such as a lack of maintenance, inconsistent guidance/support from municipal staff, poorly maintained buildings/facades, and/or unresponsive landlords act as barriers to growth. There are a number of nonprofit organizations as well as informal networks that serve Downtown Lowell, but all are overextended and under resourced. The development of a business improvement district (BID) or other downtown management organization can provide additional resources and support for existing Downtown Lowell businesses, help attract new businesses, and provide much-desired programming, maintenance, and improvements within Downtown. The following section provides an overview of key findings from the administrative capacity analysis for the Downtown Lowell LRRP Study Area.



## Downtown Lowell needs a dedicated entity to focus on business support, marketing, and district improvement

Downtown Lowell has several organized and unofficial groups supporting downtown businesses and residents; however these organizations are strapped for resources and most organizations' impact reaches far beyond the boundaries of Downtown Lowell. The Lowell Plan, Lowell Development & Financial Corporation, and Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce all serve Downtown Lowell. There are many other organizations and informal networks supporting businesses, but efforts are not always well-coordinated and many programs do not have lasting impact. While generally appreciative of the various improvement efforts, some business owners expressed frustration at past implementation efforts. There was concern that programs are not sustained long enough that their full effect can be felt and that some programs are implemented without broad communication so businesses owners are caught off guard when they receive questions. A single entity working to coordinate all of these existing efforts and provide resources for new programs, events, and activities would be able to address these concerns and provide other much-needed support for local businesses.

Businesses and entrepreneurs need more support to continue growing. New businesses can benefit from incentives, support, and programs that would help them create a solid foundation in Downtown Lowell. A district management organization or business improvement district (BID) can increase access to resources that support new and existing businesses, provide maintenance and general improvements in Downtown, and support programming and events to draw new visitors to Downtown Lowell.



# Summary of Needs

## Key Findings

Though there are several new and exciting businesses in Downtown Lowell and some businesses are thriving, most businesses face challenges due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and other conditions in Downtown Lowell. Though some streetscape elements have been installed, much of the area is not attractive or welcoming for pedestrians and many businesses are closed on evenings and weekends, making it difficult to attract visitors to Downtown Lowell. Downtown Lowell is a relatively compact, walkable neighborhood, but the differing infrastructure makes the area feel like several distinct areas instead of one cohesive neighborhood.

Though the grades for public and private elements in Downtown Lowell were consistent with DHCD definitions, business owners generally felt that the grades were too high and that much improvement is needed in the streetscape, public facilities, and Downtown buildings. In addition to market and administrative forces making business difficult, increased homelessness and illicit drug use have made it difficult for businesses to attract new customers, or in some cases, retain existing customers.

There are a number of organizations that serve Downtown Lowell, but all have many responsibilities and limited resources. There are limited opportunities for business owners to connect and learn from one another. Some business owners find the regulatory environment challenging to navigate and others have expressed frustration in getting adequate response to complaints or requests for assistance.

Downtown Lowell has distinct character and a unique and important history, but the role of the Historic Board is not well-understood and is seen by many as an impediment to progress.

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## Alignment of Goals & Key Findings

Once a bustling hub of innovation and industry, Downtown Lowell has struggled to regain that energy. Following the mills' closures and the exodus of commercial retail to the suburbs, Downtown Lowell is ripe for revitalization and redevelopment. While devastating the COVID-19 Pandemic has created the opportunity for Downtown Lowell to rethink and reinvent itself.

The project team utilized the diagnostic grades and findings for the physical environment (public and private realm), business environment, customer base data, and administrative capacity observations to refine project goals and finalize a list of projects for inclusion in the LRRP.

Given the administrative and organizational capacity limitations in Downtown Lowell, many of the project focus on providing additional support for local businesses and entrepreneurs. A primary recommendation is that Lowell restart efforts to develop a business improvement district (BID) in Downtown Lowell.

Other projects focus on physical improvements that will support businesses and attract more visitors to Downtown Lowell. Recognizing the pervasive vacancy issues, some projects focus on activating these vacant or under-utilized spaces with either new businesses or artistic displays to add interest.

While outside of the scope of the available subject matter experts and a far more global issue than this project alone could address, the project team heard the business community's concerns about homelessness, illicit drug use, and loitering loud and clear and did not want to ignore these issues.



# Project Recommendations & Implementation





# Identification & Prioritization of Projects

## Integration of Project Goals & Recommendations

All project ideas developed through the LRRP program integrate the overarching goals of supporting business competitiveness, building vibrant communities, creating a trained and skilled workforce, and using technical assistance to create a defined and actionable project list. Lowell's community identified improving support and strengthening the business community, reducing ground-floor vacancies, improving public spaces, and maximizing available resources.

The project team worked with the plan facilitators, assigned subject matter experts, and community partners to brain storm a list of twenty-nine (29) projects focused on six three themes:

- Downtown Lowell Image
- Culture & Arts in Downtown Lowell
- Safety & Social Services for Downtown Lowell
- Downtown Lowell Business Support
- Connectivity & Accessibility for All Modes
- Administrative Capacity

The following section documents the project identification and prioritization process, explains how public input was used to refine and prioritize projects, and discusses the subject matter experts consultation process.



*Nearly 100 people provided feedback at a Farmers' Market held in July 2021.*

## Public Engagement Efforts

### PHASE I DIAGNOSTIC DATA PUBLIC MEETING

Following the close of the Phase 1 Diagnostic Analysis, the project team hosted a virtual public meeting on May 24, 2021. At this meeting, the Phase 1 Baseline Data and initial findings were presented. The project team also shared background on the LRRP program, goals, process, and schedule.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Downtown Lowell LRRP project team included a number of stakeholders, so stakeholder feedback was continuously collected and incorporated into the project on a rolling basis. The core project team was comprised of representatives from the City's Planning and Development Department, Lowell Plan/Lowell Development Finance Corporation, and Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce. This group met at least biweekly throughout the process. Downtown business owners and other nonprofit organizations were also included in the biweekly coordination meetings.

This regular contact with stakeholders was crucial to defining project goals and finalizing project recommendations.

### PHASE II PROJECT IDEA WORKSHOP

The project team had a table at the Mill No. 5 Farmers' Market on July 25, 2021 where nearly 100 people shared their ideas for Downtown Lowell and provided feedback on the draft project list. In addition to the in-person drop-in engagement opportunity, the project team also presented the project list and LRRP progress to at a regularly-scheduled Downtown businesses networking meeting on July 26, 2021.

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## Subject Matter Expert (SME) Guidance

The LRRP Program made subject matter experts (SMEs) available to each Plan Facilitator team to better define specific projects and create strong implementation rubrics. The Downtown Lowell LRRP Project Team met with six SMEs from a variety of backgrounds to support the project development process. These SMEs were experts in downtown revitalization, downtown management entity development and support, entrepreneurial ecosystems, placemaking, transportation and mobility, and municipal operations.

## Prioritization Process

Based on the initial data collection phases and feedback received from stakeholders and project partners, the Plan Facilitator team developed an initial list of recommended projects. This initial list was reviewed by the project team and broader stakeholder group before SME requests were submitted. Based on comments received from the project team and stakeholders, the project list was refined and edited.

The end result is the list of project ideas available in the following section. Twenty-nine (29) projects in six categories are included on the final project list.

The priority areas identified by the project team and stakeholders are:

- Downtown Lowell Image
- Culture & Arts in Downtown Lowell
- Safety & Social Services for Downtown Lowell
- Downtown Lowell Business Support
- Connectivity & Accessibility for All Modes
- Administrative Capacity

Of the twenty-nine (29) identified projects, six were submitted for SME consultations. These six consultations resulted in seven (7) project rubrics as the initial project ideas were refined and expanded.



# Project List

## Project Ideas

The following section provides an overview of the final project list developed by the Plan Facilitators and project team. This list includes twenty-nine (29) projects organized into six project goal categories: Downtown Lowell Image, Culture & Arts in Downtown Lowell, Safety & Social Services for Downtown Lowell, Downtown Lowell Business Support, Connectivity & Accessibility for All Modes, and Administrative Capacity.

Most of these projects also fall into one of the DHCD project categories: Physical Environment, Business Environment, Customer Base, and Administrative Capacity. As mentioned previously, Lowell's business community expressed concerns about increased homelessness, loitering, and illicit drug use in Downtown Lowell and its effect on attracting and retaining customers. Some of the projects identified to address this global issue do not fall neatly into any of DHCD's categories and, thus, did not have SME support available. Given how important these issues are to the Downtown Lowell business community, the project team determined that even though they were outside of the strict scope of the LRRP project, addressing these issues as best as the community can is an important facet of pandemic relief and recovery.

## DOWNTOWN LOWELL LRRP PROJECT IDEA LIST

Project Idea	Description	Project Theme	DHCD Category
<b>Coordinated Wayfinding Program</b>	<p>There are a lot of signs in Downtown Lowell with a variety of designs, colors, and owners. Many of the signs are aimed towards drivers, but there are pedestrian-scale signs posted by several different organizations. Some signs are in disrepair and the number of different signing programs can be confusing to people unfamiliar with Downtown Lowell. This project proposes a single, consistent signage and wayfinding program that intercepts visitors, directs visitors to parking and other destinations, and provides walking distances and times so pedestrians can more easily navigate Downtown Lowell. This program would consolidate existing wayfinding in Downtown to develop a coordinated and easily identifiable aesthetic.</p> <p>Expressive, appropriate, and strategic signage solutions are a valuable addition to the community. Distinctive wayfinding and signage can make a city more user-friendly to visitors, residents, and local employees. Implementing an innovative civic brand strategy can also create a more dynamic sense of place.</p>	Downtown Lowell Image	Physical Environment
<b>Downtown Block Party</b>	Create a pilot block party program that unites City departments, Historic Board, Downtown businesses and residents, and Downtown neighborhood associations while daylighting vacant storefronts and empty areas. Develop a set of goals for the block party and build a list of activities, volunteers, and storefronts to involve.	Downtown Lowell Image	Customer Base
<b>Beautification Task Force</b>	<p>Develop a team that provides general cleaning, trash pickup, maintenance, and ambassador services for key Downtown streets and parks. Explore programs with both paid and volunteer staff.</p> <p>In addition to general cleaning, litter removal, and trash collection, these ambassadors will provide additional eyes on the street, discouraging inappropriate behavior, and maintain public landscaping.</p>	Downtown Lowell Image	Physical Environment
<b>Revitalize &amp; Activate Downtown Parks/ Public Spaces</b>	Activate underutilized public facilities such as Kerouac Park for local events, such as farmers markets, concerts, movies, and outdoor dining.	Culture & Arts in Downtown Lowell	Customer Base
<b>Activate McDermott Way</b>	Work with local artists to add murals and art to McDermott Way. Attract people to underutilized spaces and connect Paige Street to Merrimack Street and adjacent parking facilities by adding signage, lighting, and art.	Culture & Arts in Downtown Lowell	Physical Environment
<b>Permanent Parklets</b>	Develop a process to evaluate and adjust (as necessary) temporary parklets and other popups to convert these spaces into permanent public improvements.	Culture & Arts in Downtown Lowell	Physical Environment
<b>Interactive Storefronts</b>	Reduce window clutter by engaging local artists and downtown businesses to implement temporary arts on storefront windows.	Culture & Arts in Downtown Lowell	Physical Environment
<b>Enhanced and Permanent Streatery Program</b>	Provide resources for Downtown businesses to solicit outdoor dining infrastructure, while also reducing zoning barriers to implement outdoor dining on sidewalks, alleys, and roadways.	Culture & Arts in Downtown Lowell	Business Environment

## DOWNTOWN LOWELL LRRP PROJECT IDEA LIST

Project Idea	Description	Project Theme	DHCD Category
<b>Outreach to Unsheltered Individuals</b>	Improving outreach to unsheltered individuals will enable more people to access the services, care, and support they need.	Safety & Social Services for Downtown Lowell	N/A
<b>Improved Lighting Structures</b>	Identify locations in Downtown Lowell that require additional lighting fixtures that are compliant with Historic Board design guidelines/standards and provide safety for those accessing residences, parking facilities, places of employment, and businesses after dark.	Safety & Social Services for Downtown Lowell	Physical Environment
<b>Public Restrooms/Facilities Improvements</b>	Provide public facilities in Downtown to prevent loitering in front of Downtown storefronts and provide public/free amenities for Downtown visitors.	Safety & Social Services for Downtown Lowell	Physical Environment
<b>Create a Business Improvement District (BID) Downtown Business Organization</b>	<p>Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are special assessment districts in which property owners vote to initiate, manage, and finance supplemental services or enhancements above and beyond the baseline of services already provided by their local city. Assessments are collected and expended within the district for a range of services and/or programs, including: marketing and public relations, improving the downtown marketplace or city center, capital improvements, public safety enhancements, special events. A BID creates a stable local management structure that provides a sustainable funding source for the revitalization and long-term maintenance of downtowns and city centers. The goal of a BID is to improve a specific commercial area by attracting customers, clients, shoppers, and other businesses. BIDs are authorized by M.G.L. Chapter 4000 and must be a contiguous geographic area in which at least 75% of the land is zoned or used for commercial, retail, industrial, or mixed uses.</p> <p>If a BID is not desired or feasible at this time, it may be possible to create a different type of downtown organization. While less robust, volunteers or existing organizations can take on some of the activities a BID typically provides.</p>	Downtown Lowell Business Support	Business Environment
<b>Financial Empowerment Center</b>	<p>The development of a Financial Empowerment Center would help increase financial literacy, provide better access to secure banking, and provide increased ability to develop personal and business financing for Downtown Lowell residents and businesses. Improving the financial health of Lowell residents will support the Downtown business economy because more stable finances allow residents to better recover from job losses or other emergencies and have more capital available to spend at local business.</p> <p>The Lowell Development &amp; Financial Corporation has already begun exploring programs and partnerships to offer these services, so this project dovetails perfectly with activities already underway in the city.</p>	Downtown Lowell Business Support	Customer Base



## DOWNTOWN LOWELL LRRP PROJECT IDEA LIST

Project Idea	Description	Project Theme	DHCD Category
<b>Regional Entrepreneurial Network</b>	<p>Develop a technical assistance program that will provide a "toolkit" or set of resources that will give developers and business owners resources to enhance branding, marketing efforts, financial management, and funding sources for capital and programmatic solutions.</p> <p>Many of the businesses in Downtown Lowell are locally-owned small businesses. More than three-quarters of businesses who responded to the LRRP survey indicated that they had twenty or fewer employees. Lowell has long been known as an immigrant community with many first-time business owners who may be unfamiliar with permitting and/or accessing capital. By creating an regional entrepreneurial network (similar to the Greater Rochester's Nexus i90), this project aims to provide the support that allows small, entrepreneurial enterprises to succeed. The SourceLink platform allows organizations to build networks that connect entrepreneurs with resources and funding, providing an online space for entrepreneurs to learn about opportunities, connect with similar businesses and/or suppliers, and explain the process of opening a business or microenterprise. In addition to the online platform, the Regional Entrepreneurial Network should establish training programs, support programs, and other ways to connect entrepreneurs with one another, the City, and the larger business community. In Rochester, the Regional Entrepreneurial Network has also committed to conducting a biennial small business climate and needs assessment survey.</p>	Downtown Lowell Business Support	Business Environment
<b>Integrated Business &amp; City Coordination</b>	Designate a city employee to act as primary liaison between businesses, City Boards and Departments, Lowell Downtown Neighborhood Association, Lowell Development & Finance Corporation, Lowell Plan, the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, and any future BID or district management entity.	Downtown Lowell Business Support	Administrative Capacity
<b>Facade Improvement Program</b>	Create a local facade improvement program with federal grants to work with local artists and businesses to revitalize storefronts, windows, and signage. Work with the Downtown Neighborhood Association, Zoning Department, and Historic Board to develop updated design guidelines for facades, signage, and windows (particularly in ground floor storefronts).	Downtown Lowell Business Support	Physical Environment
<b>Create a Vacant Storefront Program</b>	<p>Pilot a program to activate vacant storefronts with temporary/pop-up installations.</p> <p>Vacant first-floor commercial spaces is an ongoing challenge in Downtown Lowell a vacant storefront program could bring needed commercial and cultural activities to Downtown Lowell while reducing vacancies.</p>	Downtown Lowell Business Support	Business Environment
<b>Historic Board &amp; Downtown Integration</b>	Better educate the public on Historic Board regulations, processes, and requirements. Work with the Historic Board to streamline storefront design guidelines and provide flexibility for requirements for facades, awnings, windows, signage, etc.	Downtown Lowell Business Support	Administrative Capacity

## DOWNTOWN LOWELL LRRP PROJECT IDEA LIST

Project Idea	Description	Project Theme	DHCD Category
<b>Rapid Website Development &amp; Digital Marketing for Downtown Businesses</b>	Work with Downtown businesses (with a particular effort to engage small and minority/women owned businesses) to assist with development of online presence through websites, creation of online ordering/ecommerce integration, and monitoring of website traffic.	Downtown Lowell Business Support	Business Environment
<b>Downtown Zoning Design Guidelines Study</b>	Develop a study that analyzes Lowell's current zoning provisions related to flexible, mixed-use and urban development. This study should focus on restructuring zoning & design guidelines for reconstructions, renovations, infill, and new development to create opportunities for more flexible development, create opportunities for upper-story residential uses, and encourage developers to build in Downtown Lowell	Downtown Lowell Business Support	Physical Environment
<b>Pedestrian Safety &amp; Walkability Improvements</b>	Create a more pedestrian-oriented environment by installing improved crosswalks, sidewalks, pedestrian signage, ADA-compliant curb ramps, crossing islands, and curb extensions to make walking safer within Downtown and to better connect visitors and residents to their homes, parking garages, businesses, and offices.	Accessibility & Connectivity for All Modes	Physical Environment
<b>"Open Paige Street" Open Streets Concept</b>	Pilot an open street concept for Paige Street that provides outdoor dining spaces, benches, planters, and art installations to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment in Downtown and around public spaces such as Kerouac Park.	Accessibility & Connectivity for All Modes	Physical Environment
<b>Downtown Spatial Flexibility + Curbside Management</b>	This project grew from a business owner suggestion to create "floating" or temporary loading docks throughout Downtown to assist businesses receiving deliveries (particularly as some areas have been converted to streateries for nearby restaurants). With this in mind, this project considers many COVID and non-COVID related changes to curbside demand and management including services like Uber and Lyft, increased transit use, outdoor dining, and other demands for public right-of-ways previously dominated by automobiles.	Accessibility & Connectivity for All Modes	Physical Environment
<b>Operational &amp; Capacity Review and Improved Municipal Communication</b>	Review municipal staffing, organizational structure, management, and responsibilities to determine which departments require additional staffing, develop a long-term plan to address staffing shortages and distribution of responsibilities, particularly related to social services and Downtown development. Streamline and modernize the ways in which City Departments and staff communicate with the public.	Administrative Capacity	Administrative Capacity
<b>Apply for MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) Program</b>	The TDI Program supports locally-nominated strategic development districts in the Commonwealth's Gateway Cities. It is a comprehensive place-based accelerator designed to implement locally-initiated strategic revitalization activities and catalyze community co-investment. The program is based on local collaborative partnerships, a district focus, and enhanced community engagement. TDI Fellows are assigned to districts to provide dedicated support connected into a larger coalition of resources and support.	Administrative Capacity	Administrative Capacity

## DOWNTOWN LOWELL LRRP PROJECT IDEA LIST

Project Idea	Description	Project Theme	DHCD Category
<b>Increase Language Capacity at City Hall</b>	Many languages are spoken in Lowell and the City has made resources available in multiple languages, but City Hall is not well-equipped to handle phone calls or visits from residents who speak a language other than English. Some cities have hired (or contracted with) in-house translators to have language support available to non-English speakers in City Hall. Some cities who have implemented these programs have partnered with local hospitals (who typically have fairly robust translation services) or modeled their City Hall programs after hospital programs.	Administrative Capacity	Administrative Capacity
<b>Increase Residential Density</b>	Review and update zoning in Downtown Lowell to encourage the conversion of upper-stories to residential uses. Design guidelines and other development incentives should also be explored. The goal is to create a balance of affordable and market rate housing and homeownership and rental opportunities.	Downtown Lowell Image	Physical Environment
<b>Working with the City Communication + Outreach</b>	Regularly update and promote the Business Checklist Guide last published in 2008. The new version should include both dated printed materials and web-based information in a format that is easy-to-update. These documents will outline everything potential and current businesses owners/operators would need to know about working with the City, from first consultations about business ideas through permit timelines and compliance... and everything in between.	Downtown Lowell Business Support	Administrative Capacity
<b>Revise and Update Vacant Storefronts Registry</b>	The City of Lowell instituted a vacant and foreclosed property registry in 2008, but it does not seem to have had the impact of reducing vacancies. The existing ordinance should be revised and revisited. The process would focus first on the goal of the vacant and foreclosed property registry and craft revisions catered specifically to achieving the stated goals. Properties should be mapped and readily available to the public so people know which properties are available. The City could explore a vacancy tax if the registry alone does not decrease vacancies. The program should be evaluated and revised, as necessary, at least biannually. In addition to revising the ordinance and regulations, this project should explore the other reasons why the ordinance has not had the intended impact. Some of these reasons could be a lack of staff available for follow-up and enforcement, lack of political will, and or unclear process.	Administrative Capacity	Administrative Capacity



# Project Overview

## Project Categories



### **Physical Environment: Public Realm**

Projects for the public realm enhance streets and public spaces in communities to spur other investment and create opportunities for business activity and gathering that lead to community vitality. The recovery of Massachusetts downtowns, town centers, and business districts has relied on public spaces like these to extend the areas in which business communities and public life can operate.



### **Physical Environment: Private Realm**

These project focus on enhancements on private properties and buildings, improving the aesthetics and attractiveness of existing buildings but also helping new buildings to contribute to a commercial district's recovery in a positive way.



### **Business Environment: Revenue and Sales**

Projects intended to increase revenue and sales can include strategic organizations such as task forces and business improvement districts, but also include more creative approaches that draw on attributes of the physical environment and special events to promote businesses in a downtown district and encourage increased visits and spending.



### **Business Environment: Tenant Mix**

These project efforts are intended to diversify the types of businesses in communities. This can not only respond more closely to community needs, but also work toward a more resilient commercial fabric in business centers so that major disruptions like COVID-19 do not result in disproportionate closures and a lack of activity.



### **Administrative Capacity**

Capacity-building projects help make local governments and their partner agencies more able to take on the other kinds of project efforts recommended in this Local Rapid Recovery Plan.



### **Culture / Arts**

Culture and Arts projects contribute to a neighborhood's sense of place as well as attract visitors, patrons, and tourists to the area. These projects can include visual and performance art, both in the public realm and freely-available or as part of artist's studios, performance spaces, or indoor installations.



### **Other**

Some projects do not fit neatly into one of the other pre-defined categories. For Lowell, these projects are primarily focused on outreach to the homeless population and other social services support and coordination.

Other



# Coordinated Wayfinding Program

Category	Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Business Owners Plan Facilitators
Budget	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000)
Timeframe	Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	Medium Risk  Will require support from City, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and property owners. It may be challenging to identify all owners of current signage and build consensus among key stakeholders on desing, locations, and destinations/features to highlight Ongoing maintenance and signage upgrades/updates will be required
Key Performance Indicators	Business and Visitor Feedback Continued Use by Visitors and Residents Inter Organizational Cooperation and Coordination Increased Foot Traffic Number of Signs Installed/Replaced
Partners & Resources	<b>Partners</b> Parking Department Department of Planning and Development Historic Board Nonprofit Partners Downtown Business Organization Consultant  <b>Resources</b> Municipal funding Private Grants (MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places Grants, DHCD MDI or Community Development Block Grants, ARPA Programs, etc.) Nonprofit Organizations  The Historic Board and Economic Development Department both have programs available to support signage programs. Wihle these programs are not extensive enough to support large-scale projects, small projects may be funded this way.

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## Continued: Coordinated Wayfinding Program

### Diagnostic

The Phase I diagnostics identified many different sign types and placements with no widely accepted or established signage and wayfinding program. Some areas of Downtown are suffering from sign clutter while others are lacking signage to direct drivers and pedestrians to their destinations.

Though Downtown Lowell is a compact, very walkable area, many people do not think to walk from one part of Downtown to another. A signage and wayfinding program that includes popular destinations with walking approximate walking distances and times could encourage more people to walk between Downtown destination. People traveling on foot between destinations are more likely to make impromptu stops and have been shown to spend more money in walkable, Downtown districts, benefiting the local businesses.

Many business owners and patrons say that they have a hard time finding parking in Downtown Lowell, but the recent parking study found an excess of parking available in Downtown. A comprehensive signage and wayfinding program would help increase the visibility of available parking. A comprehensive signage and wayfinding program would also contribute to the sense of place and increase the feeling of cohesiveness in Downtown Lowell.

The City has already begun to address this diagnostic. City departments have been meeting internally and have identified some funding to support a coordinated signage and wayfinding program. This project would supplement and support this group's existing effort.

### Action Items

Convene a working group including necessary City departments and boards as well as nonprofit partners to identify ownership of existing signage and develop a coordinated plan. The planning process could be broken into two phases: initial, quick-launch wayfinding campaign using sidewalk decals, light pole banners, storefront window displays, and A-frame signage and a fixed-permanent wayfinding program

Identify funding sources and/or apply for grant funding.



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## Continued: Coordinated Wayfinding Program

### Process

Determine scope and scale of signage and wayfinding program. Some communities use informational kiosks that include a map and business/destination listings while others combine street and directional signage in their comprehensive signage and wayfinding program. It is recommended that Lowell undertake a comprehensive program that includes informational signage, street and directional signs, kiosks, and interpretive signage at a minimum.

Establish budget and timeline, coordinate with City budget, solicit private donations, and apply for grants/technical assistance programs.

Hire a consultant to develop the signage and wayfinding program. The consultant's scope will likely include signage design as well as a comprehensive wayfinding analysis of existing signage, multi-modal circulation, main directional decision points, and identifying key destinations.

Analyze program development, implementation, and impact.

## Best Practice Example: Coordinated Wayfinding Program



### Create a way-finding system to help reinforce the downtown experience



Provided by SME Consultant

Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location

Wakefield, MA

Origin	Town of Wakefield
Budget	 Medium— approximately \$80,000 (kiosk only; additional elements to cost \$30,000)
Timeframe	 Short – planning and implementation in 3-1/2 months
Risk	 Medium --political will, lightning caused devastating fire, unjustified NIMBYism and lack of community transparency
Key Performance Indicators	Continued use by visitors and residents
Partners & Resources	Wakefield Main Streets, Town of Wakefield, Mass Legislature, Wakefield Police Department, Wakefield Public Library, Wakefield Historical Commission and Wakefield DPW

# Best Practice Example: Coordinated Wayfinding Program

## Diagnostic

The Town of Wakefield is a north of Boston middle-income suburban community. Most residents work outside of Wakefield and commute to work. There are two MBTA Commuter rail stations in Wakefield—Wakefield Center and Greenwood.

There was no universally accepted brand or wayfinding system for the Town of Wakefield.

On the edge of Wakefield Center, Lake Quannapowitt is a popular setting for walkers, joggers, bikers, and in-line skaters off Route 128 in Middlesex County. It is the site of many organized races from 5Ks to Ultra Marathons. However, rarely do outside visitors travel beyond the lakeside the 200 yards to the Town of Wakefield's Downtown. This is a lost opportunity to support restaurants and shops in the Downtown.

With a vital mix of restaurants, goods and services, the downtown appeared robust. However, things could be improved by an effort for better direction and more on-street communication. Here was an opportunity to build on the downtown's commercial base and solidify Wakefield as a Northshore destination.

The Town's administration allotted funding to design a branding and wayfinding system. Seven months later a Massachusetts Legislative Earmark was granted to the Wakefield Main Streets Program for the design and fabrication of informational kiosks.

## Action Item

The two overlapping programs took two different paths.

- Over an eight-month period, the branding and wayfinding design process went through a series of group meetings with a large Advisory Group of 24 representatives.
  - A month after the town landscape-based brand was approved by the Advisory Committee and presented in the local daily newspaper and to the Town Council, a devastating lightning-induced fire burned down the majestic church steeple. The loss of the church set back the discussion of whether or not the approved image should be brought forward as a historical image or changed to reflect the current conditions.
  - The designs and branding and wayfinding program were put on hold.
- Overseen by the Wakefield Main Streets Board of Directors and invited Town officials, the kiosk design program was mandated to have only 3.5 months to complete design, design review, put out for bidding and start implementation.
  - The kiosk program went fully ahead.
  - However, some community members felt left out of the design and placement of the project elements. Their concerns had to be integrated.



*Joggers and runners around Crystal Lake, a target audience of non-residents as potential patrons to the downtown.*



*Old Band Stand adjacent to Lake Quannapowitt in Wakefield, MA*

# Best Practice Example: Coordinated Wayfinding Program

## Process

- After a number of kiosk design alternatives were presented to the Wakefield Main Streets Board, one design was chosen to develop, locate and specify.
- Three (3) of the kiosks were to be two-sided and analog; the fourth was to be digital and four-sided. The digital one would be set closest to the lake.
- Historical town images and commentary was developed to fit around as a border around a business directory for one side of the directory.
- Set in an airtight locked Plexiglas window, this information could be easily changeable on the two-sided kiosks. On the opposite side was space for timely event posters and community announcements.
- The digital kiosk was designed to have a screen/monitor that was programmable from the town hall.
- There was much criticism around the placement and look of the digital kiosk. The town council eventually addressed the public and took a stand that the location, size and look of the kiosk was the best possible solution.
- Kiosk-opposing residents were invited to an expanded Branding and Wayfinding meeting to assist with eventual sign element placement on maps.
- Favermann Design was then hired by the Town administration to create a style guideline to reflect the iconic kiosk toppers.
- After a period of about four months the guidelines have resulted in the establishment of a consistent Town of Wakefield visual brand for internal communication, the official website, e-mails, business cards, interior town hall signage, newsletters and even drop boxes.
- These guidelines were in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and further thought was given to the on-hold wayfinding program. It was decided that a new approach should be taken that abandoned the problematic landscape and instead visually reflected the kiosk and style of the Town of Wakefield.
- Utilizing the new design approach, plans are going ahead for a new directional sign for the Greenwood neighborhood. A test will take place during the Summer of 2021 to see how wayfinding can connect the Lake with downtown.



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



*Besides interested citizens, town officials including the Town Planner, Police Officer, City Counselor, and Main Street board member are making decisions regarding locations.*



# Best Practice Example: Coordinated Wayfinding Program

## Local Press Coverage of Controversial Town Council Meetings Occurred due to Kiosks

- Though carefully announced by the Main Streets Board, controversy was caused by residents feeling left out of the process.
- Several Town council meetings addressed the size, content and location of the kiosks, especially the proposed digital one adjacent to the lake.
- All kiosk locations are on Town property and are at the best decision-point locations possible.
- The "waters" were eventually calmed and the process continued until a successful implementation of the program.

## Previous Historical Landscape Design for Wakefield's Branding and Wayfinding Shelved

- Below is an image of the previous design that was affected by the destructive church fire.
- The "new" simpler design has found favor in the community.
- The Town of Wakefield is now creating a fully consistent "look" for all its official elements.



## Best Practice Example: Coordinated Wayfinding Program





**TOWN OF WAKEFIELD**



**WINTER 2021**

**UPGRADED DROP BOXES AT TOWN HALL**



With safety a top priority for Town Hall employees and guests, residents are strongly encouraged to conduct their Town transactions virtually. Payments can be made online at [www.wakefield.ma.us/cdn-cgi/github.com](http://www.wakefield.ma.us/cdn-cgi/github.com) for many services, including taxes, water bills, white-goods stickers, refuse bags, cemetery services, and more. Many forms and applications can also be accessed on the Town's website [www.wakefield.ma.us](http://www.wakefield.ma.us).

Town Hall has installed new drop boxes to make submitting documents to staff quick and easy. These boxes are clearly marked and located near the accessible parking spaces and sidewalk ramp, to the left of the Town Hall entrance.

**DATES TO NOTE**

**Tax Collector**  
Third-quarter actual real estate bill due:  
February 1, 2021  
Third-quarter actual personal property bill due:  
February 1, 2021  
2021 motor vehicle excise bill commitment #1  
Issued February 4, 2021 | Due March 8, 2021

**Assessing Department**  
Abatement applications due:  
February 1, 2021  
Statutory exemptions due:  
April 1, 2021



In 2015, Wakefield lifted its December-to-April on-street parking ban and now enforces parking limitations on an emergency basis.

When preparing for a snow event, the Town often initiates a temporary restriction of on-street parking. This allows plowing crews and public safety vehicles to safely access the roads and perform curb-to-curb cleanup. Parking ban announcements and other emergency notifications are made via our CodeRED e-alert system.

All parked cars must be removed from the roadways during a parking ban. If your residence does not have a driveway, connect with your landlord for parking options or coordinate with a neighbor who has extra driveway space. Vehicles that interfere with snow operations or emergency-vehicle access may be towed.

1 Lafayette Street Wakefield, MA 01880 | [wakefield.ma.us](http://wakefield.ma.us)

*The Town of Wakefield "branded" elements and strictly adhered to style guidelines demonstrate how programs can build upon and even improve each other to reinforce a sense of place, a sense of arrival and a sense of shared experience.*



## Best Practice Example: Coordinated Wayfinding Program



### Integrate Brand and Art into your Wayfinding System



Provided by SME Consultant

Selbert Perkins Design

Location

Worcester, MA

## Best Practice Example: Coordinated Wayfinding Program

### Integrate Brand and Art into your Wayfinding System



Provided by SME Consultant

Selbert Perkins Design

Location

Worcester, MA

Origin	City of Worcester, MA
Budget	 High Budget (\$200k+) - with full build-out
Timeframe	 Medium Term (5-10 years)
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Ownership and longevity of brand/system, amount of development/investment
Partners & Resources	Mayors, City Planning Departments, Marketing & Communications Departments
Diagnostic	<p>SPD created a unified brand identity and wayfinding master plan for the City of Worcester, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• City-wide Logo</li><li>• District Identity</li><li>• Storytelling and Interpretive Elements</li><li>• Signage Design</li><li>• Art Opportunities</li></ul> <p>SPD collaborated with the project team to increase awareness and tourism, and to improve the overall image of the City by creating an iconic brand and functional wayfinding system for visitors and residents.</p>



## Best Practice Example: Coordinated Wayfinding Program

### Diagnostic (continued)

As a large City, it was important to create consistency but also provide distinctions between districts to help people navigate and understand the unique character and stories of each area.

The brand reflects the colors of each district and creates a scalable kit-of-parts still in use some 15 years later. Worcester implemented a sampling of signs and landmarks to raise capital for the larger system, which is being installed now.

### Action Item

As this project continues to roll out it will be important to look at it in light of current development, updating locations and messages as-needed.

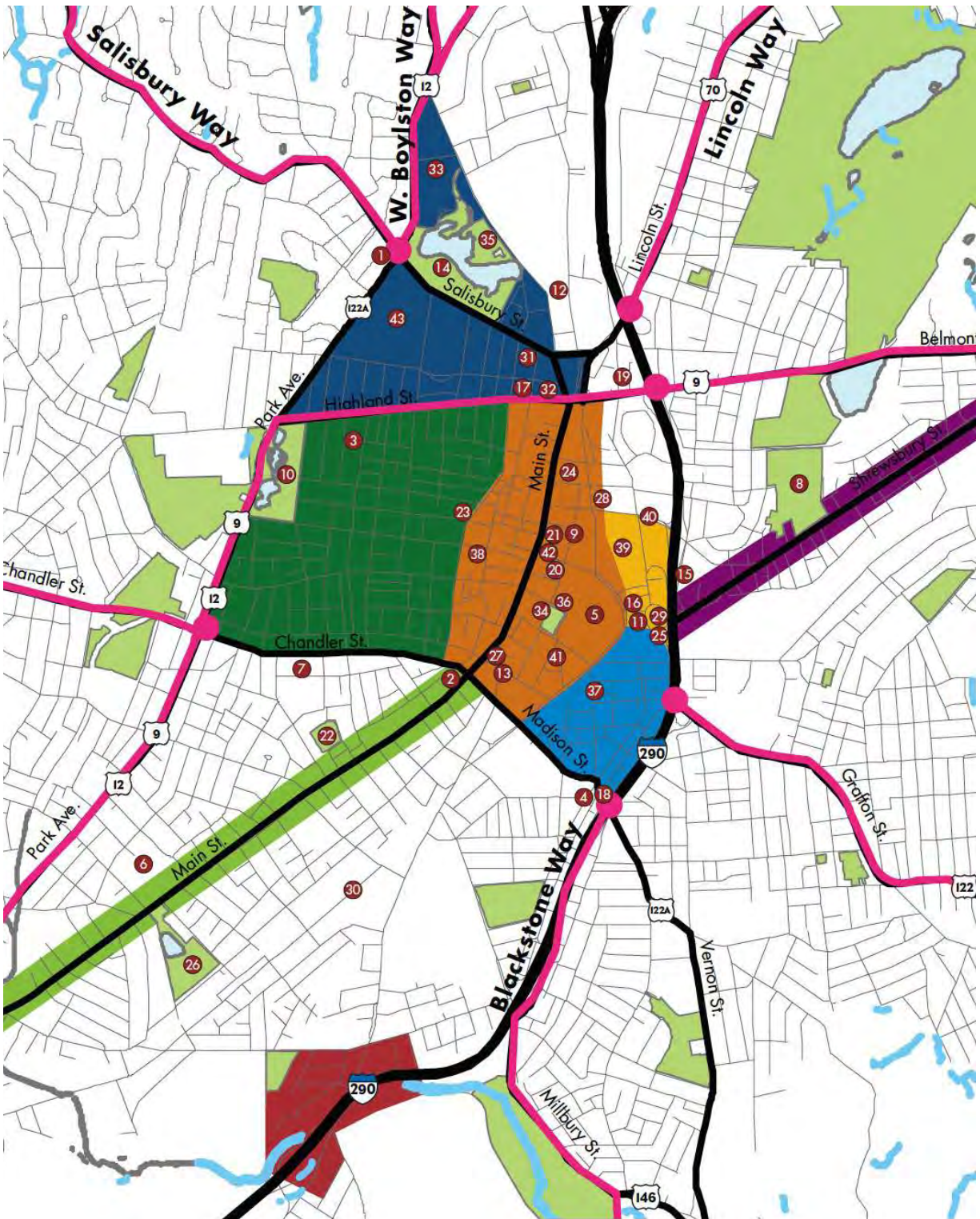
Things to consider adding in the future:

- Dynamic signage
- Walking distances
- Sculptural landmarks
- Integrated elements to reinforce District stories
- Revenue generation

### Process

- Understand who the stakeholders and decision-makers will be.
- Visit site to audit of existing conditions.
- Conduct a Wayfinding Analysis including; multi-modal circulation, main decision points, key destinations, etc.
- Identify opportunities for art/placemaking
- Research the history of the place, uncover stories that might inspire the design.
- Engage with stakeholders and the public to understand needs and perceptions. If possible, create a survey to get feedback from a larger cross-section of people.
- Develop project goals and a positioning statement to guide design efforts.
- Design concepts for brand and wayfinding elements.
- Develop the preferred design into a family of sign types with materials, colors, etc.
- Provide a sign location plan and message schedule.
- Create Design Intent drawings and a bid document to solicit pricing from fabricators
- Update the budget and project schedule
- Assist with communication between the fabricator and municipality.
- Provide Construction Administration, Site Visits, and Punch List as-needed.
- Celebrate!

## Best Practice Example: Coordinated Wayfinding Program



Districts and Wayfinding analysis



# Beautification Task Force

<b>Category</b>	Public Realm Private Realm Administrative Capacity Other
<b>Location</b>	Study Area
<b>Origin</b>	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Business Community Resident Feedback Plan Facilitators
<b>Budget</b>	Low Budget (< \$50,000) or Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) Depending on program structure
<b>Timeframe</b>	Short Term (<5 years)
<b>Risk</b>	Low Risk  Requires ongoing commitment, financial support, and program management
<b>Key Performance Indicators</b>	Number of task force/ambassadors recruited (paid and/or volunteer) Number of trash barrels emptied Amount of litter collected Decrease in inappropriate behavior and/or loitering Increased pedestrian presence Graffiti removed (depending on program scope/budget) Removal of needles, human waste, and other biohazards (depending on program scope/budget) Regular street sweeping (depending on program scope/budget)
<b>Partners &amp; Resources</b>	<b>Partners</b> City of Lowell Department of Public Works Nonprofit Organizations Downtown Business Association or BID Residents Business Community Community Volunteers

---

## Continued: Beautification Task Force

### Partners & Resources (Continued)

### Resources

Community Development Block Grant  
Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation  
DHCD Programs  
MDI Programs

Likely also include additional private sources, municipal funding, and private donations

### Diagnostic

The business managers and owners who responded to the LRRP Business Survey indicated that improvements in safety and/or cleanliness were very important to business success in Downtown Lowell. Many business owners and residents who provided feedback during the LRRP process indicated that loitering, overflowing trash barrels, litter, needles, and other waste made Downtown Lowell less inviting and welcoming. Several business owners indicated that these conditions had made them lose customers and/or staff. While this issue existed prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, improved cleanliness in Downtown Lowell has become a more important issue as businesses work to lure customers and visitors back to Downtown.

An active beautification task force/downtown ambassadors program will provide more eyes on the street. Simply having more people actively on the street in Downtown Lowell will help prevent inappropriate behavior and make Downtown Lowell more welcoming to outsiders.

The development of a Beautification Taskforce would help the City of Lowell focus on community character and create a sense of place. A team focused on cleaning, trash pickup, and maintenance services can lead to more interactions among neighbors from diverse backgrounds, more neighborhood life, and a neighborhood look and feel that attracts new residents and businesses and supports both economic development and a sense of community.

Most businesses would prefer to move to areas that are attractive and where residents and other businesses take care of their priorities, and living in pleasant surroundings improves daily life for residents. By maintaining surrounding areas and cleaning up trash, residents will feel a greater sense of pride in their communities and feel happier and more relieved overall.



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## Continued: Beautification Task Force

Action Items	Identify project partners and secure initial funding. While the program could be staffed by volunteers, programs with paid staff are more sustainable and effective.
Process	<p>A beautification task force or set of downtown ambassadors are very commonly offered by downtown management entities or business improvement districts (BID).</p> <p>Absent the development of such an entity in Downtown Lowell or in the interim as a BID is formed, existing nonprofit organizations, business partners, building owners, residents, and/or the City's government can come together to create a program that serves a similar purpose. Depending on the partners' capacity, the program could be run entirely by one organization/entity or by a leadership board comprised of individuals representing multiple groups.</p> <p>Ideally, funding would be secured to hire paid ambassadors to collect trash, remove litter, empty trash barrels, and have a visible presence in Downtown Lowell. With enough funding, larger projects like street sweeping, biohazard removal, landscaping, and graffiti removal could be handled by task force members. It is possible to supplement paid staff with volunteer ambassadors or have an all-volunteer team, but sustainability and consistency are more challenging with volunteers.</p> <p>Funding will likely come from a combination of sources, including private donations, grants, local businesses, and/or the city's operating budget.</p> <p>Local staff and/or volunteers should be recruited to ensure that the ambassadors have first-hand knowledge of the area. Local schools, religious organizations, and other philanthropic groups may be able to provide more reliable volunteer staffing.</p> <p>The program should provide seasonally-appropriate attire that is distinctive and easily-recognizable as well as materials and equipment to help the ambassadors collect trash and litter, empty trash barrels, etc. Ambassadors should have direct access to Lowell's Department of Public Works and Police Departments as well as be trained in conflict management and downtown resources.</p>



# Revitalize & Activate Downtown Parks/ Public Spaces

## Also Includes:

- Activate McDermott Way
- Permanent Parklets
- “Open Paige Street” Open Streets Concept

Category	Public Realm Culture and Arts
Location	Study Area Parks, Plazas, and Alleyways McDermott Way Paige Street Kerouac Park
Origin	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Business Community Resident Feedback Plan Facilitators
Budget	Low (< \$50,000) to High (> \$200,000)  Depending on number and size of projects. Projects can range from simple, temporary paint installations (low cost) to complete park/plaza redesigns (high cost) - or anything in between! Placemaking projects are incredibly flexible and can be tailored to available budget, time, and other resources.
Timeframe	Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	Low Risk to Medium Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Number of People Frequenting Parks, Plazas, Parklets, etc. Number of Public Spaces Improved Increase in Children in Downtown Lowell Increased Revenues at Nearby Businesses Number of Events Held + Number of Event Attendees Downtown Foot Traffic

## Continued: Revitalize & Activate Downtown Parks/Public Spaces

### Partners & Resources (continued)

#### Partners

Planning and Development Department  
Department of Public Works  
Parks Department  
Historic Board  
Nonprofit Partners  
Business Improvement District / Downtown Organizations  
Local Businesses  
Property Owners

#### Resources

Community Development Block Grant  
Community Preservation Act Funding  
Municipal Funding  
MassDOT Complete Streets  
MassDOT Shared Streets & Spaces funding is available for initial study and planning (and smaller-scale implementation)  
DHCD Massachusetts Downtown Initiative  
MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places  
CARES and ARP Acts  
Private Grants and Donations  
Neighborways Program

### Diagnostic

The COVID 19 Pandemic has greatly affected how we use public spaces. Public spaces are in high demand as people choose to gather and meet outdoors. Vibrant public spaces have been linked to increased revenue and sales at nearby businesses since pedestrians are more likely to linger and promptly stop at businesses in addition to their intended destination.

Cafes and restaurants with easily-portable to-go food and beverages can benefit as people choose to spend more time in public spaces. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the City of Lowell piloted a Streateries Program that allowed restaurants to provide additional outdoor seating - this project is right in line with the goals of that program. The City is working with the business community to make the Streatery Program permanent and expand it. In fact, more restaurants opted to have outdoor seating in 2021 than had originally participated in 2020.

### Action Items

Identify partners and potential funding sources.

Grants and community support are key to implementing successful placemaking activities. The City would like to incorporate both active and passive uses into Downtown parks, plazas, and parklets with a focus on artistic installations that also serve as play structures.

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## *Continued: Revitalize & Activate Downtown Parks/Public Spaces*

### Process

Well-designed parks, plazas, alleyways, and parklets have captured the imagination of municipalities across the Commonwealth. Communities have embraced proactive outreach strategies to support the identification of new parklets as well as identify existing public spaces for upgrades and redesigns.

Key implementation steps include:

Identifying working groups that include City staff (often Departments of Public Works and Planning Departments), elected officials, property owners, residents, and local businesses.

Identify and analyze project sites.

Secure funding.

Outreach to local business owners.

Design Concept Development including thorough public outreach including design meetings, website updates, posters/fliers, and door-to-door outreach.

Continue to engage the working group and additional stakeholders as project design evolves.

Implement project design. Include a schedule for events and activities to draw people to the new or newly-redesigned public spaces.

Plan for and implement longer-term management and design updates as well as a process for ongoing feedback and public engagement. Be prepared to adjust the design and amenities based on feedback over the coming years.

*For Downtown Parks/Public Spaces Best Practice  
Examples, See Appendix F*



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## *Continued: Revitalize & Activate Downtown Parks/Public Spaces*

### Market Street Plaza



Today

### Rendering of Possible Future Design + Activation





## Continued: Revitalize & Activate Downtown Parks/Public Spaces

### McDermott Way

Rendering of Possible Future Design + Activation



# Outreach to Unsheltered Populations

<b>Category</b>	Other
<b>Location</b>	Study Area
<b>Origin</b>	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Business Community Resident Feedback Plan Facilitators
<b>Budget</b>	Medium (\$50,000 - \$200,000)
<b>Timeframe</b>	Short Term (<5 years)
<b>Risk</b>	Medium Risk  Project success will require outside partnerships, social service provider partner availability, funding, and relationship building with unsheltered population(s) as well as a willingness to accept help and support among the unsheltered population
<b>Key Performance Indicators</b>	Number of interactions with unsheltered residents Number of service or program referrals Ongoing participation in support programs and services A reduction in complaints about loitering and other related issues Number of social service providers serving Downtown Lowell's population
<b>Partners &amp; Resources</b>	<p><b>Partners</b>  Lowell Director of Homelessness Initiatives  Lowell Police Department  Social Workers  Local Social Services and Recovery Program Organizations including shelters, supportive housing providers, emergency services (food, clothing, etc.), day program providers, food pantries, soup kitchens, etc.  Community and business leaders  City leadership  Nonprofit Partners  Business Improvement District or other Downtown organization</p> <p><b>Resources</b>  Private donations and grants  Municipal funding  Likely also include additional private sources, municipal funding, and private donations</p>



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## Continued: Outreach to Unsheltered Populations

### Diagnostic

Business owners identified an increase in homelessness, illicit drug use, loitering, and other related issues as a major impediment to attracting and retaining customers. The COVID-19 Pandemic has had an outsized, often devastating, impact on at-risk populations including unsheltered populations and those at risk of becoming unsheltered. The unsheltered population is at great risk of negative effects of COVID and related impacts due to a lack of access to reliable shelter, weather exposure, and other health factors such as mental health and/or addiction issues. At the same time as the community's needs greatly increased, many organizations had to reduce their capacities and/or operational footprint to comply with pandemic restrictions.

Furthermore, COVID has a disproportionate impact on the nonwhite population in terms of health outcomes, unemployment, and other metrics. Among Black non-Hispanic males in Massachusetts, the confirmed opioid-related overdose death rate increased the most (by 69%) from 32.6 to 55.1 per 100,000 people, the highest increase of any ethnic or racial group in 2020 (Massachusetts Department of Health).

Homelessness has been a long-standing problem in the City of Lowell. The City's Director of Homelessness brought stakeholders and service providers together to create a task force. This task force is working well.

While servicing the unhomed population, homelessness prevention, and ensuring that people are able to access the services they need is far larger than any one program or organization could handle, it is important that this LRRP address the issues present in Downtown Lowell.

### Action Items

Bring service providers, social workers, the Lowell Police Department, and others together to create a Homeless Outreach Team that can build relationships with unsheltered individuals and help connect them with available resources.

The program will need to identify funding and partnership opportunities to help tackle the complicated, multifaceted problems facing unsheltered populations. Priority needs include: recovery coaches with lived experience, particularly BIPOC individuals; establishing dedicated warming and cooling centers; connecting individuals with food and other necessities; and providing access to restrooms, showers, and safe storage facilities.



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## Continued: Outreach to Unsheltered Populations

### Process

Organize a steering committee or leadership team to bring the necessary partners together.

Identify and secure sources of funding. These sources will likely include grant programs, private donations and contributions, municipal funding, state funding, and other sources.

Recruit and train recovery coaches with lived experiences, particularly BIPOC individuals. Provide workforce training for interested individuals; a variety of training opportunities should be available - to serve those interested in becoming recovery coaches, social workers, or other service providers and for unsheltered individuals intending to rejoin the workforce.

Establish a dedicated warming and cooling center with trained staff. Identify potential locations, develop culturally-appropriate training for staff with previous experience working with people experiencing homelessness.

Address the need for restrooms, showers, and safe storage facilities. This will include exploring public restroom access, providing mobile showers, and evaluating locations for secure storage lockers so that people can safely leave their belongings.

These programs are often organized and led by business improvement districts (BIDs).

Some local and relevant examples include:

- Worcester Health & Human Services Quality of Life Task Force, Worcester Police Crisis Intervention Team, and Navigator Program
- Downtown Boston BID collaboration with social service providers
- Newmarket Business Association and Newmarket Community Partners (Boston)
- Central Square BID Ambassador Outreach, BID Contracts With City (Cambridge)
- Atlanta Downtown Improvement District Social Impact Safety Team and Community Resource Card



# Public Restrooms / Facilities Improvements

Category	Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Business Community Resident Feedback Plan Facilitators
Budget	Medium (\$50,000 - \$200,000) to Large (> \$200,000)  If Portland Loo system is selected (\$90,000 - \$100,000 per Loo, \$25,000 - \$40,000 for installation, \$15,000 - \$20,000 annual maintenance)
Timeframe	Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	High Risk  Challenges include building political and community support; determining appropriate location(s); securing funding to purchase, install, and maintain; politics; and property/business owner support/cooperation
Key Performance Indicators	Reduction in human waste in Downtown Lowell Reduced number of complaints about public urination/defecation Number of daily restroom uses
Partners & Resources	<b>Partners</b> Lowell Department of Public Works Private Property Owners BID or other Downtown Organization Nonprofit Partners  <b>Resources</b> Private donations and grants Municipal funding  Likely also include additional private sources, municipal funding, and private donations

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## Continued: *Public Restrooms / Facilities Improvements*

### Diagnostic

An increase in the unsheltered population in Downtown Lowell has led to issues of public urination and defecation as well as increased reports of human waste on Downtown's streets. As the COVID-19 Pandemic closed many publicly accessible restrooms and many service providers had to reduce their operations, leaving unsheltered populations few options for sanitary facilities. This has impacted business owners, residents, employees, customers, and visitors.

Access to sanitary facilities is not only an issue for unsheltered populations, it is necessary for many visitors, families with young children, those with medical conditions, senior citizens, and anyone else who needs to be able to quickly find a restroom. Public toilets are preferable to port-a-potties and are available throughout the year, instead of just during large events.

While many Downtown businesses allow non-patrons to use their public toilets, it is hard to know which facilities are available for public use and which are limited to patrons only and many people (including visitors, unsheltered populations, and others) are embarrassed to ask if a toilet is available. Some of the Downtown businesses who have previously made their restrooms publicly available have expressed frustration at the increased need.

### Action Items

This initiative would make public toilets more widely-available in Downtown Lowell, expanding on the existing program. It will be important to consult with stakeholders to build buy-in, explore possible solutions, programs, and toilet facilities, secure funding, and implement recommended actions.

The standalone Portland Loo is one option, others include the Sanisette toilet system and EXELOO.

A potential timeline could be: convene task force (1 month); research programs in other cities (2 months); ongoing engagement engage residents, business and property owners, and unsheltered individuals (3 months); discuss potential courses of action, costs, responsible partners, funding, etc. (3 months); recommend preferred course of action (2 months); implement recommendations (6 months - 1 year, following funding allocation).

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## Continued: *Public Restrooms / Facilities Improvements*

### Process

Establish a task force and confirm task for participation from City staff and elected officials, business and property owners, social service providers, and others.

Convene task force to outline charge and establish timeline.

Review prior research and conduct follow-up research to better understand the issue, learn how other cities have address the problems, and understand possible solutions as implemented in other communities.

Conduct initial stakeholder outreach to business and property owners, unsheltered individuals, visitors, and Downtown residents to learn more about needs, concerns, and ideas.

Discuss potential courses of action, costs, responsible parties, etc. Some communities rely on technology to maintain and provide access to public restrooms, while other cities have found that staffing the public restrooms is the best approach. Staffed restrooms are more expensive, but many cities have found the extra cost to be worthwhile. For example, San Francisco found that vandalism, drug use, and prostitution was significantly reduced or even eliminated by extending public toilets' operational hours and adding staff (one attendant during the daylight hours and two attendants overnight).

Follow up with stakeholders to share the task force's research and ideas and to gauge stakeholder response. The task force may need to conduct additional research and/or adjust their plan to win over stakeholders, politicians, and other policymakers.

Using their research and stakeholder feedback, the task force will recommend a preferred course of action and conduct additional outreach to stakeholders including business and property owners, unsheltered individuals, downtown residents, elected officials, nonprofit partners, and others to get their buy-in and build support for the preferred course of action. Implement the program and assess its impact.





# Create a Business Improvement District (BID) or Downtown Business Organization

<b>Category</b>	Administrative Capacity Revenue/Sales Public Realm Private Realm
<b>Location</b>	Study Area (or a subset of the Study Area)
<b>Origin</b>	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Business Community Plan Facilitators
<b>Budget</b>	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000)
<b>Timeframe</b>	Short Term (<5 years)
<b>Risk</b>	Medium Risk – building consensus and creating a business organization is a large effort and comes with some risk.
<b>Key Performance Indicators</b>	Business/Property Owner Support, Steering Committee Participation, Organizational Development, Pilot or Demonstration Program(s), Adoption of a Business Organization or Improvement District
<b>Partners &amp; Resources</b>	<p><b>Partners</b> Steering Committee comprising of stakeholders and interested partners (including members of the previous steering committee and new partners/individuals) Lowell Plan Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce City of Lowell Economic Development Department</p> <p><b>Resources</b> Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (technical assistance) MassDevelopment Real Estate Technical Assistance Program (technical assistance) American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds (if the organization's development is tied to implementing COVID recovery activities) Local donations from institutions, foundations, and key stakeholders/individuals</p>

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## *Continued: Create a Business Improvement District (BID)*

### *Downtown Business Organization*

#### Diagnostic

The COVID pandemic significantly impacted downtown businesses. Business surveys have verified that downtown small businesses, dining, cultural attractions, residential developments, and tourist destinations experienced loss of employment, revenue, customer base, and foot traffic. Downtowns with active downtown organizations were able to pivot and respond to this crisis to help their small businesses weather the storm. Many downtowns have realized that a sustainable district management entity is positioned to help downtowns recover from COVID and prepare for the future.

In Lowell, there is interest in reactivating efforts to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) that was begun approximately 10 years ago but did not move forward. The LRRP Project is an opportunity to relaunch this effort with an expanded group of stakeholders and interested partners. Business owners and managers who responded to the LRRP survey indicated that the creation of a district management entity was important to attracting and retaining customers and businesses.

Through the Diagnostic Phase of the LRRP Project, stakeholders and participants mentioned a variety of programs and activities in other cities that they would like to see in Downtown Lowell - many of these programs and activities were organized by local BIDs and other downtown organizations.

#### Action Items

Developing a BID or other type of downtown organization can be broken into several phases:

**Getting Started - Relaunching the BID Effort**

**Developing Value Proposition/Communication Tools**

**Stakeholder Engagement**

**Create a Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy**

**Identifying Downtown Priorities**

**Confirming the BID Organizational Model**

**Securing Resources for Startup and Sustainability**

## Continued: Create a Business Improvement District (BID)

### Downtown Business Organization

#### Process Overview

#### Getting Started - Relaunching the BID Effort

Use the LRRP planning process and Project Recommendation to form a BID as the launching point for stakeholder engagement. A core group of (old and new) stakeholders should begin meeting regularly to build on momentum developed during the LRRP process.

#### Developing Value Proposition/Communication Tools

It will be essential to develop the value proposition for investing human capital and financial resources into a BID and to communicate the impact of investment to the City of Lowell and private stakeholders. The long-term goal of a BID is to build a destination that is attractive to potential developers, businesses, residents, and visitors. In the near term, a BID can play an important role in COVID recovery. A successful BID can help achieve increased property values, improved sales and meals taxes, stronger tenancy, a vibrant cultural scene, and a destination where people want to shop, locate a business, dine, and live. A well-managed and sustainable BID will undertake strategic supplemental programs and services that will help achieve that goal. Key talking points include:

- Ability to collectively and cost effectively purchase priority supplemental programs and services to achieve impact/scale.
- Provide a unified voice / "seat at the table" for district priorities
- Professional management and staff dedicated to implementing programs and services in the district.
- Produce and execute cultural and event programming
- Ability to respond to crises (like COVID)
- Leverage resources and build collaborations

#### Stakeholder Engagement

Relaunching the organizational efforts to form a BID in Lowell should be an intentionally inclusive process that welcomes new as well as long term property and business owners, the Downtown Neighborhood Association, City, Lowell Plan, and other key downtown stakeholders to develop the organizational and leadership infrastructure to form a BID. The goal of this effort would be to form a strong, diverse, and inclusive steering committee to guide the development of a BID in Lowell, identify key champions, and build a solid coalition around the concept. The City of Lowell may

## Continued: Create a Business Improvement District (BID) Downtown Business Organization

### Process Overview

convene this effort but should quickly transition to a private sector-led working steering committee with strong public sector support. The clear demonstration of a public/private partnership will help move this effort forward.

#### **Create a Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy and Identifying Downtown Priorities**

The Steering Committee should undertake efforts to engage media, businesses, property owners, nonprofits, cultural organizations, visitor attractions, and interested residents to continue to identify and refine needs and priorities for the downtown. This work will be used to inform the BID Improvement Plan. Additionally, these outreach efforts provide the opportunity to educate stakeholders on the BID model and identify needs and opportunities as well as potential leadership. Community engagement can happen in a variety of ways including:

- Community Forums - fun, engaging, and informational visioning sessions held in accessible, approachable locations such as a local business, restaurant, park, libraries, or community gathering space.
- Peer Learning Panels - invite executive directors from BIDs in similar communities to present on the work of their BIDs.
- Visits to other communities with BIDs to see programs in action
- Surveys of needs and priorities (although this has recently been done through the LRRP process, but would include a broader distribution to other stakeholders)
- Focus groups with key interest groups
- Websites and social media

#### **Confirming the BID Organizational Model**

Once organizers have established the downtown priorities / proposed supplemental programs and budget, it will be important to confirm that there is consensus that a BID model is appropriate for Lowell. Organizers should seek support letters / statements from key stakeholders like neighborhood associations, Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, Lowell Plan, and other important groups.



## Continued: Create a Business Improvement District (BID) Downtown Business Organization

### Process (Specific Steps)

#### Securing Resources for Startup and Sustainability

Seed money is required to start a BID. Sources include technical assistance (TA) through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, MassDevelopment Real Estate Technical Assistance Program, or ARPA funds (if the development of the organization is tied to implementing COVID recovery activities). Additionally, local institutions, foundations, and key stakeholders/individual contributors may be sources for seed money to launch an effort to form a BID. Careful attention should be given to developing a realistic budget and identifying a variety of revenue opportunities for the organization. This may include assessment/fees, sponsorships, event revenue, grants or contracts, foundation, and individual giving. If the City approves the formation of a BID, property owners will reauthorize the organization every five (5) years.

The following process is recommended to build support for a BID in Lowell:

- Review original materials/property owner and business databases, plans, proposed boundaries, fee structure, and other background information for history of past work and relevance to the new effort.
- Update maps, property owner database, and business lists.
- Create a downtown partnership with City, key property owners, new developers, key businesses, cultural and tourist destinations, residential groups, nonprofit organizations, and the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce to relaunch the effort.
- Create a list of potential steering committee members
- Form a broad-based advisory committee to provide input and feedback
- Secure seed funding for TA for BID formation through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (now part of the One Stop), MassDevelopment Real Estate TA Program, ARPA, foundations, and other stakeholder support
- Create community outreach events, widely distribute surveys, and utilize other engagement tools to develop program priorities
- Hold community forums on BID model
- Hold one-on-one conversations with stakeholders to secure support and engagement in the process
- Consensus building with stakeholders on BID model / programming / budget / fee structure
- Organizers may consider executing a demonstration project that could

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## *Continued: Create a Business Improvement District (BID)*

### *Downtown Business Organization*

#### Outline of Approval Requirements

"show" potential programs and services provided to the downtown through a BID

- Develop the BID Petition components
- Develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with City for support of BID

Undertake a petition process under direction of the steering committee to secure support of 60% of property owners representing 51% of the assessed valuation of the district.

The petition will include:

- Map and legal description of BID boundaries
- BID Improvement Plan (outlines the programs and services)
- Fee Structure
- Budget
- Hardship Provisions
- Identify Management Structure
- Property Owner Signatures of Support

Formal Local Legislative Approval - a public hearing and formal vote by City Council to establish the BID

Organizers complete 501c3 and Articles of Organization filings

Approval of bylaws

Establishment of a Board of Directors

Initiation of supplemental services

Reauthorization by property owners every five (5) years.

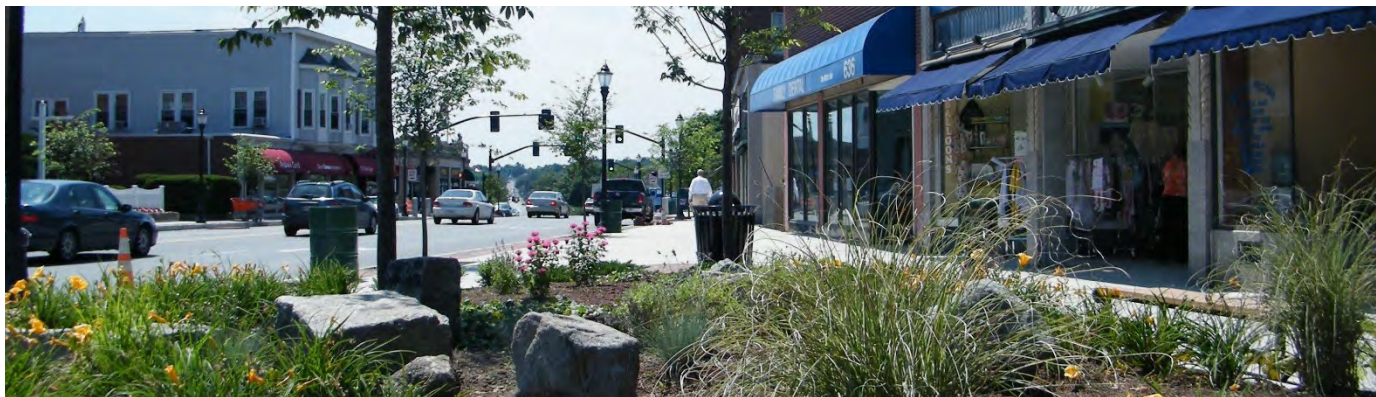
Organizers should be able to form a BID in 18-24 months (or even sooner) for a district of this size.

*Continued: Create a Business Improvement District (BID)*  
*Downtown Business Organization*

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT MODELS IN MASSACHUSETTS		
Management Entity	District Delineation	Revenue Sources
Business Improvement Districts	Contiguous area within which property owners pay to develop, fund, and execute supplemental services to benefit the economic and social vitality of the district.	Self-sustainable through fees; reauthorized every 5 years Grants and fundraising
Voluntary Downtown Organizations	Volunteer program model addressing design, organization, promotion, and economic vitality	Not self-sustaining; state grants, municipal contributions, and fundraising
Community Development Corporations	Engage residents and businesses to undertake sustainable community development efforts in rural, urban, and suburban areas. Geared to benefit low/moderate income areas.	Not sustaining; state grants, foundations, and donations
Parking Benefit Districts	Geographically defined district in which parking revenues are dedicated to related improvements. Can be stand-alone or part of existing downtown organizations.	Self-sustaining through parking revenue fees

Source: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2020-revised-business-improvement-district-manual/download>

## Best Practice Example: Business Improvement District (BID)



### Determining a District Management Model for Downtown Reading



ADMIN  
CAPACITY

provided by SME Consultant

Ann McFarland Burke , Downtown Consultant

Location

Reading, MA

Origin

Town of Reading, MA

Budget



A Massachusetts Downtown Initiative grant provided Technical Assistance. The Town provided staff support and early coordination.

Timeframe



The process took approximately 18 months. This timeframe was expanded due to the pandemic and extensive community education undertaken as part of the process.

Risk



Political , property owner, tenant and other stakeholder consensus for preferred organization model is required to successfully establish a downtown organization

Key Performance Indicators

Establishment of a sustainable downtown organizations with a real defined program , sustainability model and appropriate staff support.

Partners & Resources

Town of Reading, downtown advisory and steering committee and other downtown stakeholders



## Best Practice Example: Business Improvement District (BID)

### Diagnostic

The creation of a downtown management organization was intended to establish a dedicated organization that would provide supplemental programs, services and advocacy for the downtown. The downtown organization would undertake activities to attract businesses, investment, customers and residents to downtown. These could include marketing, placemaking, business development and advocacy.

Determining the appropriate downtown management organization model was a unique process for the Reading community, downtown property owners and businesses. The process included extensive outreach and community education to explore program priorities, financial sustainability, organizational models and champions from both the private and public sector.

### Action Item

Economic Development Plans for downtown Reading had included the recommendation to establish a sustainable downtown organization to support the economic and social health of the downtown. The Town of Reading spearheaded activity to launch the process of community and property owner engagement to explore what model would be appropriate for downtown Reading. This included:

- Identification of staff and financial resources
- Creating a Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy
- Research to identify community priorities / recommendations
- Peer learning from other communities
- Consensus building among stakeholders
- Transition of leadership to private sector

### Process

- The Town of Reading secured Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Technical Assistance funding and committed staff to initiate and support
- A large broad-based community advisory/working group was formed to provide input and feedback
- A survey was widely distributed to community residents, businesses and other stakeholders - 1600 responses were received providing insight into program priorities and community preferences

## Best Practice Example: Business Improvement District (BID)

### Process (Continued)

- **Community Outreach Event** - A Pizza/ Ice Cream Social brought over 150 residents to provide input
- **3 Community Forums** – Panels featuring executive directors of different types of downtown organizations described their programs, challenges and models.
- **Working sessions with Advisory committee** to discuss specific model alternatives / cost and benefits
- **One on one conversations** with key stakeholders
- **Consensus building** with stakeholders and recommendation of preferred model and next steps.
- **Transition from city led effort to Steering committee** comprised of property owners, businesses, and other stakeholders to lead organizational effort. City staff continued staff support. TA support continued through additional MDI grant.
- **BID Steering Committee.** BID organizational process underway

Town of Reading Sponsored Pop-Up Event

*ReImagine Reading*  
*Pizza and Ice Cream Social*



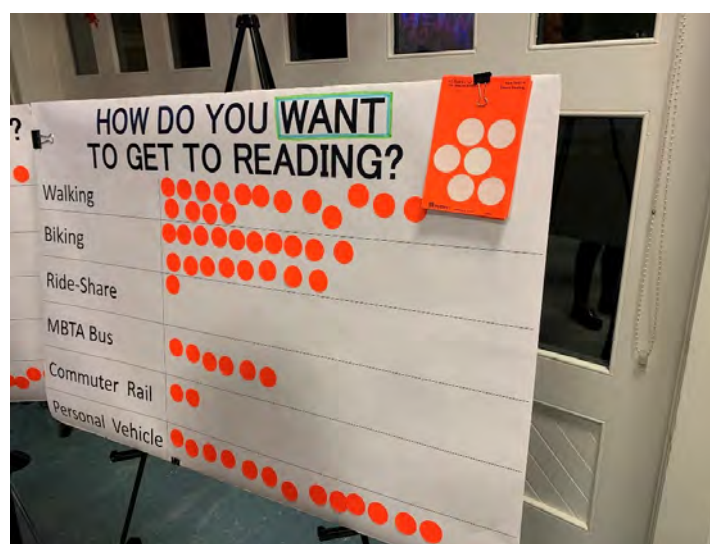
**September 18th from 6 pm to 8pm**  
**Pleasant Street Center**  
**49 Pleasant Street**

A pop-up public event to help launch a downtown organization featuring local businesses, free pizza, ice cream, photo booth and more

Please RSVP on Eventbrite by 9/16: [https://ice\\_cream\\_social.eventbrite.com](https://ice_cream_social.eventbrite.com)

**ALL ARE WELCOME!**

For more information, please contact Andrew MacNichol, Staff Planner at [amacnichol@ci.reading.ma.us](mailto:amacnichol@ci.reading.ma.us)



*Stakeholder engagement process*

## Best Practice Example: Business Improvement District (BID)



### Formation of a Business Improvement District in Hudson, MA



Provided by SME Consultant

Ann McFarland Burke, Downtown Consultant

Location

Hudson, MA

Origin	Downtown Hudson Business Association, Town of Hudson, MA
Budget	 MDI Grant for Technical Assistance. Town staff provided support to Steering committee.
Timeframe	 Short term (<5 years). Planning, Signature campaign and Initiation took approximately 2 years
Risk	 Medium Risk – property owner, business and political support required for success.
Key Performance Indicators	Formal vote by Board of Selectmen to formally establish the BID, corporate and tax filings completed, staffing and initiation of services
Partners & Resources	Hudson Planning Dept, Property Owner Steering Committee, MDI, donated legal, graphic design

## Best Practice Example: Business Improvement District (BID)

<b>Diagnostic</b>	<p>The Hudson BID was formed to capitalize on an emerging renaissance of downtown and sustain positive economic growth. New activities, cultural events and entrepreneurs had begun the positive momentum for the downtown and stakeholders believed a BID would help ensure sustainable success. The BID created a way for downtown Hudson to implement a BID Improvement Plan that included wayfinding, enhanced and well-managed parking, infrastructure improvements, marketing and event coordination. The BID services were designed to help the downtown continue to grow and thrive as a destination to shop, work, live and visit.</p> <p>Hudson had an engaged business community, as well as property owner and town administration support for the effort.</p> <p>The strong steering committee and town support resulted in overwhelming buy-in of property owners (80%) and the unanimous vote by the Board of Selectmen to approve the BID.</p>
<b>Action Item</b>	<p>To form a BID, a community must have the support of 60 % of the property owners representing 51% of the assessed within the proposed district. Hudson is a small BID with 120 parcels in the district.</p> <p>The Downtown Hudson Business Association in partnership with the Town of Hudson spearheaded activities to form a BID and execute the step- by- step process to successfully create a BID in Hudson. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identification of staff and financial resources</li><li>• Establishment of a strong property owner based steering committee</li><li>• Creation of a property owner outreach strategy</li><li>• Consensus among stakeholders on program priorities, fee structure, boundaries and budget</li><li>• Execution of the petition process and formal approval by Board of Selectmen</li><li>• Initialization of BID services</li></ul>
<b>Process</b>	<p>Forming a Business Improvement District is a four phase project. Resources to help a community organize and execute the strategies and legislative authorization process can be found in these publications :</p> <p><a href="#">How To Form a BID in MA</a>- Manual available at <a href="http://www.mass.gov/MDI">www.mass.gov/MDI</a></p> <p><a href="#">BID Case Studies</a> available at <a href="http://www.massdevelopment.com">www.massdevelopment.com</a></p> <p>Hudson began their BID formation process scratch.. A working committee that included stakeholder property owners and planning staff undertook the following steps to successfully build a BID in Hudson.</p> <p><a href="#">BID Case</a></p>



### Best Practice Example: Business Improvement District (BID)

### Process (Continued)

## PHASE 1 - TEST THE FEASIBILITY

1. Verify minimum baseline conditions
2. Develop a case statement for the BID.
3. Introduce the BID concept to stakeholders
4. Recruit the steering committee.
5. Find the resources.
6. Establish preliminary boundaries.
7. Create a property owner database.
8. Develop a plan outline and timeline.

## PHASE 2 - CREATE THE BID IMPROVEMENT PLAN

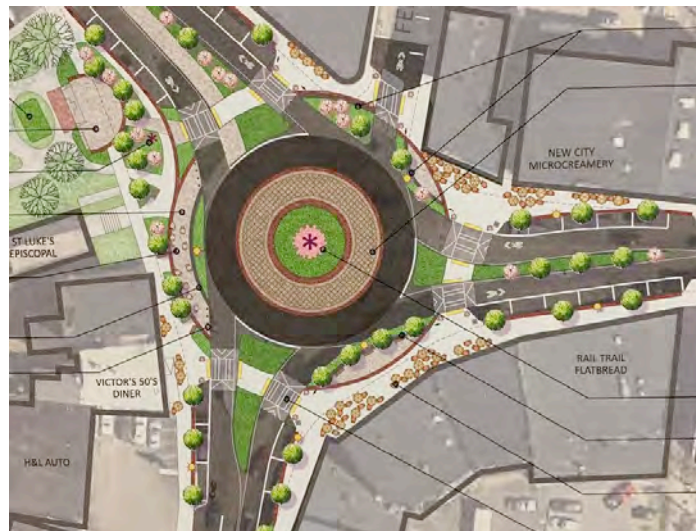
1. Conduct a needs assessment.
2. Outreach to the community.
3. Write the BID Improvement Plan.
4. Determine the budget.
5. Establish a fee formula.
6. Develop the Memorandum of Understanding.
7. Establish a billing mechanism.

### PHASE 3 - CONDUCT THE PETITION PROCESS

1. Prepare the BID Petition.
2. Organize the Petition Signature Campaign.
3. Mail information package to property owners.
4. Conduct the signature campaign.
5. Organize the legislative authorization process



## New entrepreneurs in Downtown Hudson



## Gateway Rotary to Downtown

# Best Practice Example: Business Improvement District (BID)

## Process continued

### PHASE 4 - INITIATE OPERATIONS

1. Form Bylaws and Articles of Organization.
2. Establish the initial Board of Directors.
3. Apply for nonprofit status.
4. Communicate with members.
5. Hire staff.
6. Select vendors.
7. Formally launch services.

## Early Highlights

**A Seat at the Table / Partnership with the Town of Hudson-** The BID provides a unified voice and effective advocacy for downtown businesses and property owners.

- **Enhanced Downtown Appearance** - Implemented wayfinding signage, banners, hanging baskets, holiday lighting, benches and other physical enhancements to the district to create a more appealing experience for the visitors to downtown Hudson.

- **Rotary Gateway** - The BID has been active in the design, implementation and communication to property owners and tenants on the Gateway rotary project. These efforts help mitigate the disruption caused by construction by ensuring timely communication and execution of the project.

- **Business Support** -Actively working with property owners to retain and recruit tenants. Vacancy rates in the BID fell from 11% to 5% since its inception in 2017 . Provided free TA on PPP and other financial relief programs during Covid.

- **Creating Collaborations** - Formed new collaborations with groups and organizations that were previously untapped resources.

## The Legislative Authorization Process





# Financial Empowerment Center

Category	Tenant Mix Revenue and Sales Other
Location	Study Area (but would likely be expanded to the entire city and/or region)
Origin	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Plan Facilitators Assigned Subject Matter Expert
Budget	High Budget (> \$200,000)
Timeframe	Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	Low Risk  Requires public and philanthropic investment and knowledgeable staff
Key Performance Indicators	Number of clients served Client outcomes (increased savings, reduced debt, improved credit scores, accounts opened, cars/homes/businesses purchased/opened, mortgage approvals, foreclosures/ evictions prevented, etc.)
Partners & Resources	<b>Partners</b> Lowell Development & Financial Corporation Lowell Mayor's Office + City Council Lowell Housing Authority and other Low-Income Housing Providers Social Service Organizations Business Community  *lead partner must be 501c3 organization. Other partner categories include physical site partners, referral partners, and full program partners  <b>Resources</b> Community Development Block Grant Regional Pilot Project Grant Program Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund (Start-Up Grant, Capacity Grant, Integration Grant, Innovation Grant)  Likely also include additional private sources, municipal funding, and private donations

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## Continued: *Financial Empowerment Center*

### Diagnostic

The COVID-19 Pandemic has had an out sized impact on Lowell's most vulnerable residents. Residents and business owners already struggling to keep up with monthly and emergency bills have been disproportionately impacted by job losses, reductions in hours, and other pandemic impacts. Increased financial literacy and access to safe/secure banking will help mitigate these impacts.

### Action Items

Establish a financial empowerment coalition

Work through the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund to expand the Financial Empowerment Center Replication Initiative to Lowell



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## Continued: Financial Empowerment Center

### Process

Partnership with the BankOn program can help streamline implementation and provide funding for the financial empowerment center. BankOn programming supports the development of financial empowerment centers by providing funding and technical assistance to mayors, their teams, and partners. Focused on asset building, banking access, consumer financial protection, and financial education/counseling, BankOn-supported programs are helping residents and business owners across the United States to build a more secure financial future.

Apply for a financial empowerment planning grant.

Convene principal collaborators to begin taking inventory of related programs and resources across the area.

Prepare a report synthesizing fact finding activities.

Apply to expand the Financial Empowerment Center Replication Initiative to Lowell

Convene principal collaborators to identify/secure funding sources

Select a vendor via a Request for Proposals (RFP) to operate and run the program


Administer the program

- The City will: raise funds, promote the program, periodically convene and expand partnerships, run reports, and approve payments

- The vendor will: hire and train financial empowerment center counselors, provide counseling services, promote the program partnership, run reports, and submit invoices

Solicit and onboard additional financial empowerment center counselors and program partners

## Best Practice Example: Financial Empowerment Center




[About](#)
[Partners](#)
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[t](#)
[@](#)
[Donate](#)

**Whether you are a Black business owner seeking resources or a partner seeking to support Together We Thrive, tell us a little bit about yourself and how you'd like to get involved.**

[I'm a Business](#)
[I'm a Volunteer/Partner/Donor](#)

# Launch an Equitable Technical Assistance Network for COVID Pandemic Relief and Beyond



**Provided by SME Consultant** Jeanette Nigro, Principal – Perch Advisors LLC

**Location** New York City

Origin	Led by: United Way of New York City in partnership with Perch Advisors, Hester Street (Community Development NFP), MoCaFi (FinTech), Greater Jamaica Development Corporation (CDFI) and CDC – With technical support from PACE Small Business Development Center, New York City Department of Small Business Services and in partnership with local and national CDFI's such as LISC and TruFund
Budget	 <p>Program's current budget – HIGH (\$200K+)</p> <p>Program was launched with only in-kind support and technical assistance services</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (Less than 5 years) – Program was planned and launched in under 9 months</p>
Risk	 <p>Low Risk: In general, support for helping small businesses recover and grow after COVID is at an all time high. Work in this space has the capacity to received a high level of support and public will. Enhanced services would require additional investment, but work in this area can be launched with little upfront financial resources.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Number of Businesses enrolled; Total services and referral partners; Neighborhood peer networks created; Total successful mentorship matches; Capital access (loan and grants awarded); jobs created/retained
Partners & Resources	Key partners could include: Municipalities and government agencies offering small business support, neighborhood and business organizations including Business Improvement Districts, Chambers of Commerce, Black business organizations; technical assistance partners offering no-cost services such as federal Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), PTAC's, colleges and universities, business services organizations serving Black businesses such as Project Hope, Minority Business Development Agency, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI's), minority business associations

# Best Practice Example: Financial Empowerment Center

## Diagnostic

This project was launched in response to the lack of coordinated support to inform and reach NYC Black-Owned businesses on available technical assistance and loan and grant program to support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Without immediate resources available at the start of the pandemic, the lead partner -- United Way of New York City (UWNYC) -- quickly identified resources that were no-cost or already offered through their programs, and collaborative partners who would be willing to contribute time and knowledge to reach and help Black-owned businesses.

By leveraging its wide reach of vendors, community and neighborhood-based organizations, and corporate partners, the UWNYC was able to pull together a collaboration of 8 organizations in under 3 weeks. The partners agreed to share information, resources, and networks and meet weekly to plan and develop the program including marketing and outreach strategy, technical assistance programming, and business intake, referrals and follow up.

In the following months, a comprehensive clearing house and network of technical assistance providers were built; a website with business intake forms to identify specific needs and priorities of Black businesses was launched, and a triage and referral process for businesses was created, with United Way of New York City managing and tracking businesses and technical assistance providers throughout the process.

Additional volunteer partners and technical providers were continually added to the collaboration to improve the range of services and supports to Black-owned businesses. The program continues to market support to businesses and seeks to build out community peer to peer business networks in 2021 to further support Black businesses at the neighborhood level.

## Action Items

The project began with UWNYC identifying, engaging, and coordinating technical assistance partners and organizations that could advise on challenges small businesses were experiencing and technical assistance solutions, with a focus on equity and inclusion specifically for Black-Owned businesses. A key component of the work was gaining the commitment of organizations to ongoing collaboration.

The group then worked with NYC agencies to better understand Black-owned businesses through data which enabled the group to target neighborhoods and industries with higher concentration of Black-owned businesses.

Simultaneously, technical assistance partners were structured and organized around key themes, among them: financing and grants, pandemic operating and regulatory support, marketing/social media, e-commerce, reengineering business offerings and operations, and legal support.

A business intake portal was built through UWNYC's existing platform, which did not incur any additional investment. Co-lead staff were assigned at UWNYC to manage incoming businesses and volunteer signups and assess and refer businesses to technical assistance partners. Partner teams met with neighborhood groups to share information on the program and support street-level outreach to Black-owned businesses, particularly those in retail, hospitality, and services.

United Way and several partners reviewed business intake weekly; conducted phone consultations, made appropriate referrals, conducted follow up, and directed businesses to additional services as needed.

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## Best Practice Example: Financial Empowerment Center

### Process

- Identify lead partner with available resources (staff time, technology, sufficient public-private networks) to initiate building a collaboration, leading meetings, developing a small business resource pipeline, and coordinating business outreach and neighborhood engagement.
- Identify organizations to collaborate with that have resources to lend – staff, expertise in small business technical assistance, business outreach, infrastructure, technology, social media reach.
- Formally create coalition – set parameters of engagement, project goals and milestones, meeting schedule, project management processes.
- Organize available business services and define how they apply to Black-owned businesses.
- Identify high priority needs through engagement – surveys, door to door outreach, partner interviews.
- Create marketing and outreach strategy; create business intake that aligns with needs identified and service offerings.
- Engage organizations that reach Black-owned businesses and conduct door to door outreach.





# Regional Entrepreneurial Network

<b>Category</b>	Revenue & Sales Tenant Mix
<b>Location</b>	Study Area (but would likely be expanded to the entire city and/or region)
<b>Origin</b>	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Business Owners Plan Facilitators Assigned Subject Matter Expert
<b>Budget</b>	Large Budget (> \$200,000)
<b>Timeframe</b>	Short Term (<5 years) With the understanding that it may take longer to get the program funded  SourceLine Pro Implementation: approximately 7 months Network Expansion: approximately 12 months Network Enhancement: 24+ months
<b>Risk</b>	Low Risk  Requires public and philanthropic investment, socio political will and active collaboration among the entrepreneur support community
<b>Key Performance Indicators</b>	Network Collaborations (number of partners and referrals, funds raised, engagement rates) Network Commerce (number of businesses/jobs created or retained, number and percentage of goals achieved) Ecosystem Enhancements (number of new offerings/improvements, impact of policy changes)

## Continued: Regional Entrepreneurial Network

### Partners & Resources

#### Partners

Economic Development Department  
Downtown Business Association or Business Improvement District  
Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce  
Lowell Plan  
Lowell Development & Financial Corporation  
Business Community  
External Consultant  
UMass Lowell

#### Resources

Municipal funding  
Community Compact IT Grant  
Regional Pilot Project Grant Program  
MA Downtown Initiative Program  
Living Cities (City Accelerator Catalytic Capital Grant)  
JP Morgan Chase (Matching & CRM Expansion Grants)  
MassDevelopment Programs  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts Office of Business Development  
Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development

Likely to also include other private sources, grants, and/or low/no interest loans

### Diagnostic

Reduction in municipal budget/finances and limited staffing capabilities to manage projects and implementations has been hindered by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Business owners/managers who responded to the LRRP survey indicated that market strategies and recruitment programs to attract additional businesses were important or very important to attracting and retaining customers and businesses in Downtown Lowell. Nearly 40% of businesses who responded to the LRRP survey said that they would be interested in shared marketing/advertising opportunities.

### Action Items

Bring partners together, identify funding sources, and develop project goals/scope

Begin to develop toolkits and other resources

Facilitate the adoption of the resource network

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## Continued: *Regional Entrepreneurial Network*

### Process

Organize partners to coordinate and manage the development of the regional entrepreneurial network.

Secure funding: complete grant applications, solicit private donations, advocate for allocations in the City's budget, etc.

Develop toolkits, webinars, and other resources for inclusion on the site (this step can occur in any order. This effort will likely span all other steps in the process and will continue once the network has launched).

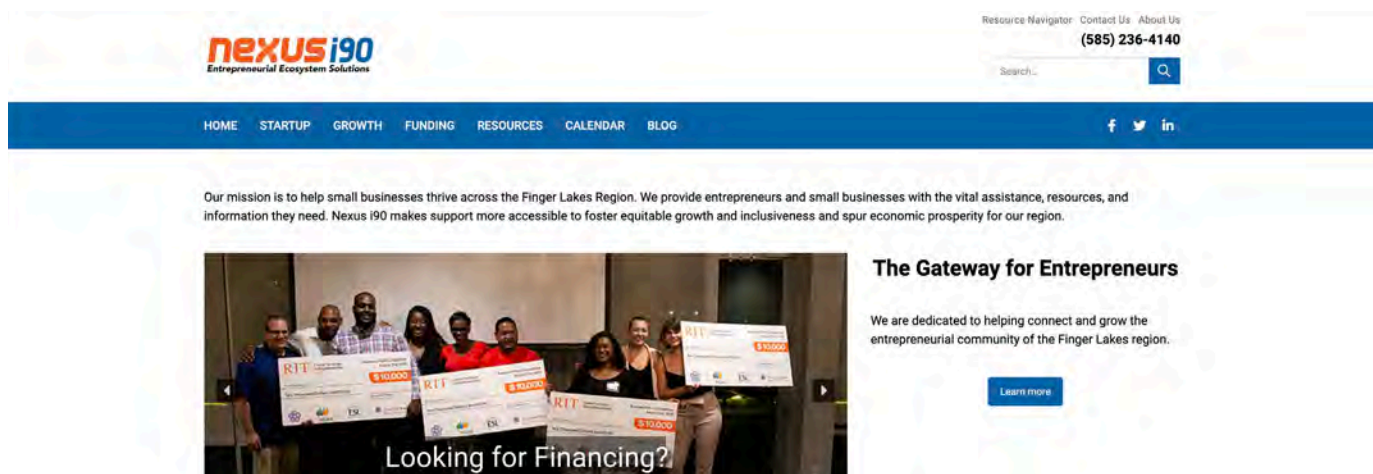
Contract with SourceLink and construct the site platform.

Actively promote and manage the resource network. This will include identifying and soliciting all entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs) in the area or region to get listed in the resource navigator. Listing all of the ESOs centralizes information in one place. ESOs are generally nonprofit organizations, governmental entities, and academic institutions that offer at least one service to small businesses at low or no cost. Incubators, accelerators, and coworking facilities may also be ESOs, but are not always nonprofit entities.

The partnership may want to hire a consultant or designate a staff person to oversee implementation and manage the network following its launch. Dedicated staff time will make implementation and management easier as there will be ongoing roll outs, updates, and new materials/programs to be managed/implemented. Without dedicated staff time, the partner organizations will need to collaborate more closely to ensure continuity, keep information updated, and run associated programming. In Rochester, a regional leadership team was formed with representation from local government and multiple nonprofit resource partners. This group worked to build shared ownership and distributed the load of managing the platform between several partners.

If/when the partnership decides to add in-person trainings, conduct surveys, and/or develop focus groups/peer support networks, these efforts will require additional funding, coordination, management, and leadership.

# Best Practice Example: Regional Entrepreneurial Network



## Facilitating Inclusive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building and Enhancement



Provided by SME Consultant

Third Eye Network, LLC

Location

Rochester, New York/Finger Lakes Region

Origin	City of Rochester – Mayor’s Office of Community Wealth Building Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) Center for Urban Entrepreneurship Rochester Economic Development Corporation (REDCO)
Budget	 \$417.5k Digital Infrastructure; \$1.5M Ecosystem Enhancement
Timeframe	 28 Weeks <i>(SourceLink Pro Implementation)</i> ; 12 Months <i>(Regional CRM Expansion)</i> ; 24 Months/cohort <i>(Ecosystem Enhancement)</i>
Risk	 Requires public and philanthropic investment, socio-political will and actively engaged collaboration among the entrepreneur support community
Key Performance Indicators	Network Collaborations ( <i># of partners &amp; referrals, funds raised, engagement rates</i> ), Community Commerce ( <i># of businesses/jobs created/retained, # and % of goals achieved</i> ), Ecosystem Enhancements ( <i># of new offerings/improvements, impact of policy changes</i> )
Partners & Resources	Collaborators: City of Rochester Mayor’s Office of Community Wealth Building, RIT Center for Urban Entrepreneurship, REDCO, Rochester Public Library Business Insight Center, JustCause, Monroe County Economic Development Dept., Urban League of Rochester, IBERO-American Action League, M&T Bank Foundation, ESL Foundation, Rochester Downtown Development Corporation, SCORE Greater Rochester, PathStone Enterprise Center, Small Business Administration Rochester Chapter  Sponsors: Living Cities – City Accelerator Catalytic Capital Grant (\$100k); JPMorgan Chase – Matching & CRM Expansion Grants (\$137.5k, \$180k); Empire State Development/New York State – Ecosystem Enhancement Grant (\$1.5M)



# Best Practice Example: Regional Entrepreneurial Network

## Diagnostic

### Strategy Feasibility Planning

- Biennial small business climate and needs assessment survey; allot three to four months for planning and execution at \$10k – \$15k
- 4 – 5 culturally-specific, peer-led focus groups (*e.g.*, *Black-owned, Latinx-owned, and women-owned businesses, businesses earning over \$100k annually, and those who had prior dealings with the "Organizational Hub"*); 6 to 10 participants per group at \$15k – \$20k total
- Findings: Bureaucracy was a barrier; universal monocultural approaches fail; support resources and pathways were unclear, decentralized, and disjointed; little capital access and know-how

### Anti-Racist Community Building

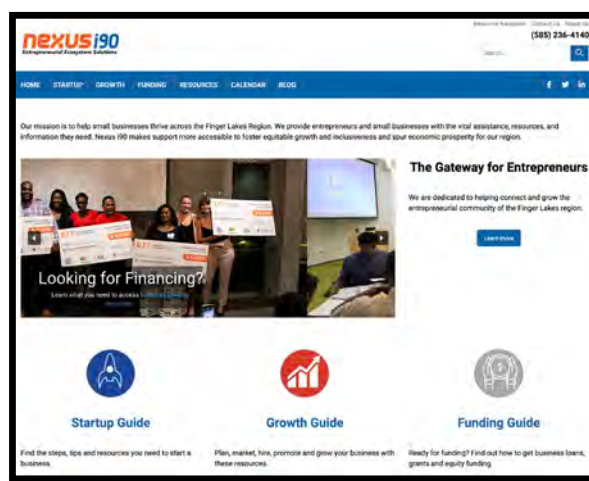
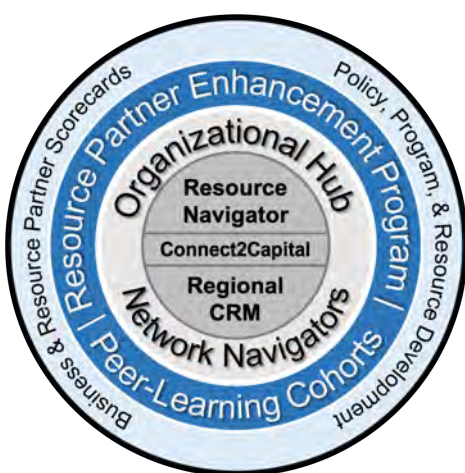
- Host 3 – 5 three-day Undoing Racism® Workshops with The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond ([www.pisab.org](http://www.pisab.org)) for resource partners, small businesses, influencers, and other stakeholders; allot three to four months for planning and execution at \$13.5k/workshop, when hosting 2 or more
- Attend Kauffman Foundation's ESHIP Summit, join networks, and invest in related learning materials to plug into the global entrepreneurial ecosystem movement; allot up to \$2k/person

## Action – Facilitating Nested “Hub and Spoke” Model Development

- Co-created the scale of proposed digital asset development activities (consider hyper-local versus regional approaches) with REDCO
- Spearheaded SourceLink implementation with key collaborators
- Hosted resource partner gathers during project kick-off and launch events
- Prepared and released resource partner enhancement program RFPs
- Selected cohort participants by committee
- Publicly launched and currently administering the inaugural cohort

*Campbell's Nested "Hub and Spoke" Model for Inclusive Ecosystem Building and Enhancement*

*Nexusi90.org home page*



# Best Practice Example: Regional Entrepreneurial Network

## Process - Digital Asset Development (*phased*)

### Resource Navigator Implementation (Nexusi90.org)

Select a vendor like SourceLink ([joinsourcelink.com](http://joinsourcelink.com)), establish a project team, and maintain a weekly meeting schedule to identify and map resources, develop site content, create social media pages and a hotline, participate in train-the-trainer workshops, and convene regional resource partners for project kick-off and pre-public launch meetings; allot four to six months at \$75k for implementation and \$15k for annual maintenance (*prices may vary by vendor, number of counties, population size, and/or features*)

### Custom CRM Development and Platform Integration

Determine the scope of work based on community needs (*Rochester was interested in expanding access to SourceLink's CRM so any resource partner in the region that wanted to adopt the platform as a system of record or integrate their organizational system with the shared platform*); allot 12 months of planning and execution at \$180k (*future SourceLink clients would not incur this expense*)

Connect2Capital is a collaborative online lending network created by Community Reinvestment Fund USA; allot four months for planning and execution (*in progress*) at an unknown cost due to a third-party sponsor

## Process – Resource Partner Enhancement Program

### Peer-learning Cohort Program

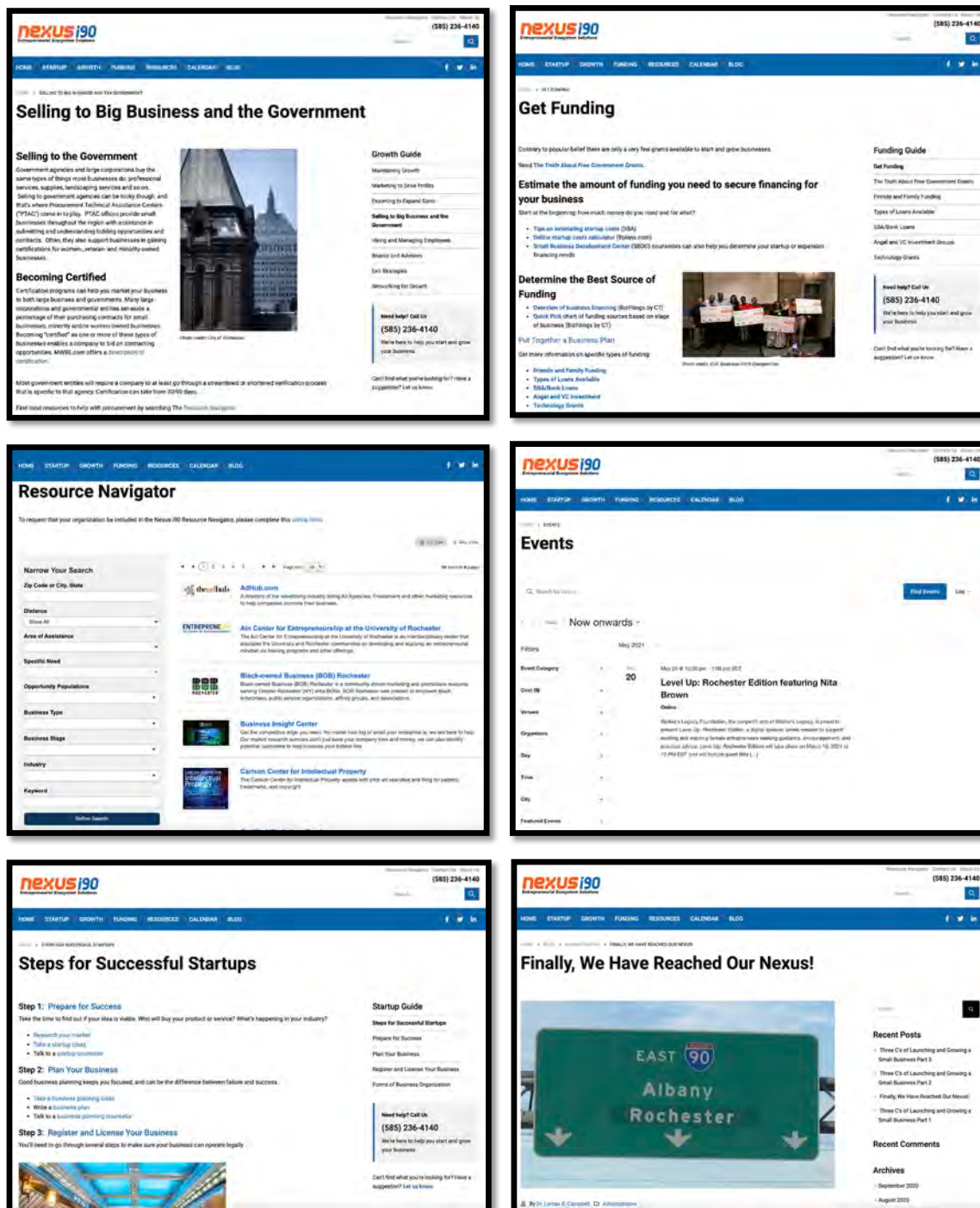
**Program Planning:** Determine target cohort size based on funds raised for the program; prepare requests for proposals for prospective resource partner and organizational coaches cohorts; responses should articulate proposed enhancement plans from resource partners, and demonstrate coaches' expertise and commitment to support the cohort and program; and establish a selection committee and develop scoring rubrics before releasing both requests for proposals, conduct candidate selection and matching processes, and notify program participants; allot six months at \$750k – \$2M total for three to six resource partners (*\$150k – \$200k grants each*) and three to six organizational coaches (*\$100k – \$150k grants each*)

**Program Convenings:** Host two day convenings (*virtual or in-person*) to kick-off and receive major progress updates at the beginning, middle, and end of the program; these events should include culturally-relevant music, soul checks (*check-ins*), opening remarks from dignitaries and program administrators, a keynote speaker, relevant panels, team presentations, engaging activities, and breakout rooms/groups; allot six to nine months for planning and execution at varying costs based on delivery format (*virtual vs. in-person*), refreshments and parking fees according to the number of participants, insurance requirements, interpretation and translation service needs, entertainment, decorations, and honorariums; these costs should be equitably deducted from the funds awarded to the resource partners and organizational coaches cohorts

**Program Management:** Resource partners should meet with their assigned coaches at least bi-weekly throughout the program, all coaches should meet with program administration at least once monthly for check-ins, an "all-cohort" meeting should be conducted monthly with both cohorts for updates and cohort collaboration, and resource partners should meet with program administration for an individual onboarding session at the beginning of the program and periodically as warranted throughout the program

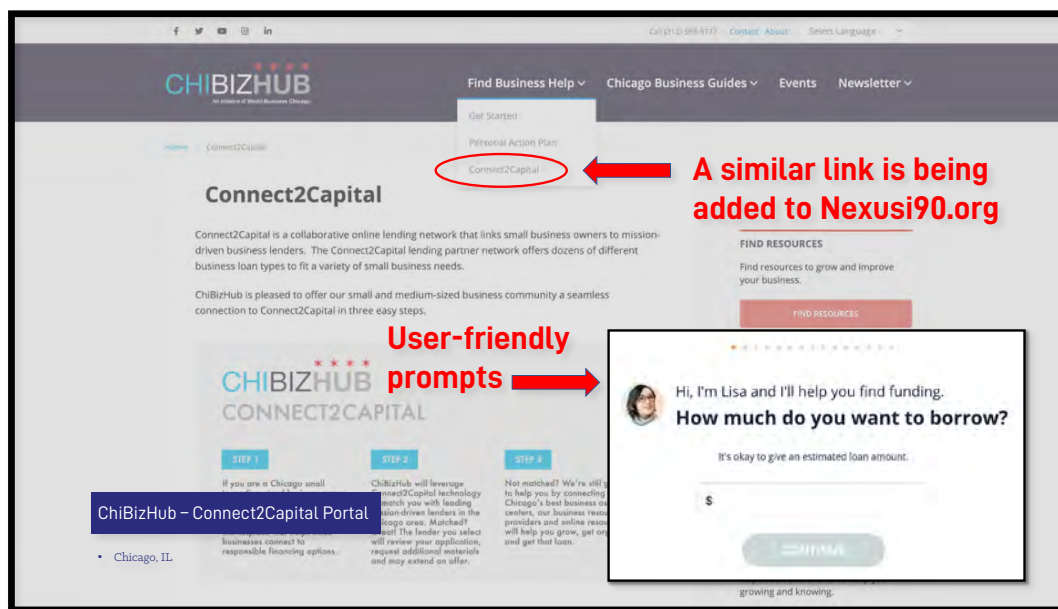
**Program Workshops:** All cohort members should be required to participate in an Undoing Racism® Workshop early in the program to inform their work, and principals and tools should be regularly revisited; two to three months for planning and execution at costs equitably deducted from the funds awarded to the resource partner and organizational coaches cohorts

# Best Practice Example: Regional Entrepreneurial Network



Nexus i90 screenshots

## Best Practice Example: Regional Entrepreneurial Network



SourceLink affiliate ChiBizHub demonstrates how the Connect2Capital portal will integrate into Nexusi90.org

Resource Partner Enhancement Program – Cohort I Member Organizations



Urban League of  
Rochester, N.Y., Inc.



IBERO  
AMERICAN ACTION LEAGUE, INC.



Each Cohort I member above focuses on different entrepreneurial cultural communities: Black-owned, Latinx-owned, Women-owned businesses, low-to-moderate income residents, previously incarcerated and justice system involved residents, and food-based businesses (including new ventures and those who previously operated informally)





# Facade Improvement Program

Category	Private Realm Tenant Mix Revenue and Sales
Location	Study Area
Origin	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Business Community Resident Feedback Plan Facilitators
Budget	Medium (\$50,000 - \$200,000) to High Budget (> \$200,000) depending on program scope
Timeframe	Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	Medium Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Number of buildings improved Number of completed projects Number of applications to the program Number of new or relocated businesses in improved buildings Decrease in vacant storefronts
Partners & Resources	<p><b>Partners</b> Community Preservation Committee Historic Board Planning and Development Department Nonprofit Partners Business Improvement District or other Downtown organization</p> <p><b>Resources</b> Community Development Block Grant Community Preservation Act Funding</p> <p>Likely to also include additional private sources, municipal funding, and private donations.</p> <p>The Historic Board and Economic Development Department both have programs available to support facade improvements. While these programs are not extensive enough to support large-scale projects, small projects may be funded this way.</p>

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## Continued: Facade Improvement Program

### Diagnostic

Downtown Lowell has a large concentration of historic buildings, but many have not been maintained. The Phase I diagnostic analysis found that most of the area's private realm features were in need of repair. Facades and signage both received a grade of C based on DHCD's grading definitions. In the case of facades, a grade of C means that "more than 25% of properties require significant building facade improvements, including power washing, painting, and structural enhancements." In the case of Downtown Lowell, buildings can be found requiring one or more of these improvements. Some buildings need only a fresh coat of paint, but others are in more major states of disrepair. Some are not eligible for an occupancy permit due to their deterioration.

Business owners and managers who responded to the LRRP survey also indicated a need for support to improve Downtown's buildings. They indicated that renovations to storefronts/facades would be an important improvement and 21% of respondents said that they would be interested in access to low-cost financing for storefront/facade improvements.

### Action Items

Identify design assistance resources to help businesses and property owners identify high-quality, cost-effective improvements.

Secure funding to support low- or no-cost financing for businesses and property owners to implement their projects. When possible, identify funding sources that have fewer requirements (such as income limits, job creation, or prevailing wages) to help make the program appeal to a wider range of businesses and property owners.

Develop a simple application and reporting process to simplify the program for businesses and property owners.

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## Continued: Facade Improvement Program

### Process

Many businesses and/or property owners lack the knowledge, time and/or funding to design and implement storefront and facade improvements. A facade improvement program can support both businesses and property owners to afford, design, and complete these projects.

The program's design needs to be as simple as possible so that businesses and property owners do not need to invest significant amounts of time to understand the program and complete the application. Secure funding to support the program, both initial funding for program development and implementation and ongoing funding to support individual projects.

Engaging landlords has been an ongoing challenge in Downtown Lowell. Most businesses lease their spaces and some have indicated that they want to make investments in their spaces, but have not been able to garner landlord support. A successful facade improvement program in Lowell would need to clearly articulate the benefits to both businesses and property owners. As funding is secured and the program is developed, it would be helpful for program organizers to engage business and building owners to determine what would make the program most attractive to them.

Business owners identified historic district requirements as a challenge to building and facade improvements. Explanation of the Historic Board's responsibilities, processes, and policies should be part of this process. Ongoing coordination with the Historic Board would strengthen the program; it may be possible to identify pre-approved improvements, projects, and other activities. Even if updated policies and requirements are not possible, the facade improvement program could handle or assist participating businesses/property owners in securing all necessary permits.

Identify design assistance professionals. These experts will include engineers, local designers, sign fabricators, general contractors, historic preservations, and others. A request for proposal (RFP) will need to be prepared and issued to solicit on-call design assistance. Market the RFP, select a group of consultants, and complete contracting.

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## *Continued: Facade Improvement Program*

### **Process (continued)**

Launch and publicize the facade improvement program. Recruit businesses and property owners to participate in the first round. Pair businesses/property owners and design professionals to develop plans, estimate costs, determine required permitting, secure permitting, and finalize funding partnerships. Implement the selected storefront and facade improvements.

Track and measure progress, survey participants, and prepare for the next funding round. Make program adjustments as necessary to better serve the business community and property owners.



## Best Practice Example: Facade Improvement Program



### Developing storefront guidelines to energize downtown






Provided by SME Consultant

Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location

Everett, MA

Origin	Mayor, City of Everett
Budget	 Low - \$35,000 for design fee + program to subsidize implementation for \$25,000
Timeframe	 Short- 10 - 12 months
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Level of participation by landlords and merchants
Partners & Resources	City of Everett, Everett Building Department and Community Development Department, and landlords and merchants.

# Best Practice Example: Facade Improvement Program

## Diagnostic

The City of Everett is a primarily working class community just north of Boston. It has a large share of Brazilian, Latino and Italian first- and second-generation residents.

In the last few years, a very large casino has located there that gives the city some needed donations and fees for public improvements. There are two major retail enclaves in Everett: Everett Square and Glendale Square.

Everett Square, the larger of the two, is the traditional downtown where the public library and City Hall and many amenities are located.

Stores and restaurants are primarily locally-owned, family enterprises. Only a minority of Everett's business are national or regional chains.

In a bid to encourage the appeal of Everett's downtown to outside visitors, the year before the Pandemic, the Mayor directed the Community Development Director to create a framework to better guide merchants in enhancing their storefronts. A subsidy grant program was being developed to encourage merchant and landlord participation.

The Mayor also felt that a more restricted approach to storefront design be adhered to with similar sign details and limited awning colors. A study was commissioned to develop Guidelines for Signage and Storefronts. Following this, the guidelines were to be translated into the City of Everett's Building Code.

## Action Items

- Photo-documentation of all commercial blocks and stores in both Everett Square and Glendale Square.
- Creating a panoramic view each block showing "existing" and "proposed."
- Thorough review of existing storefront improvement programs throughout the United States and Canada to recognize applicable precedents and best practices.
- Development of a City of Everett Guidelines format while exploring various cases for refinement and review.
- Drafting distinct pages referencing individual aspects of storefronts. These included wall signs, blade signs, awnings and window treatments.
- Review the drafted pages with Everett's planning staff, Building Department and representatives of the Mayor's office.
- Final approval of Storefront Guidelines.



Everett Square

### Applicable Commercial Areas

The Everett Storefront Sign and Design Guidelines are applicable to any storefront located in the Everett Square neighborhood and the Glendale Square Neighborhood.

### Everett Square

Everett Square is a prominent commercial corridor in the city center running along Broadway Street between Hancock Street in the north and Revere Beach Parkway in the south. The center of Everett Square is at the intersection of Broadway and Chelsea/Norwood streets.



*The high number of vacant storefronts contributed to lack of vibrancy downtown.*

# Best Practice Example: Facade Improvement Program

## Process

- Extensive research of other cities and towns' guidelines and procedures.
- Based on best practices, create easily understandable illustrated storefront component pages that reference City of Everett regulations.
- Establish storefront element criteria through including specifically referenced dimensions, materials and placement.
- Photo-document good and bad examples of storefront elements.
- Create a City of Everett color pallet.
- Show by illustration approved and not approved ways of applying storefront elements.
- Circulate among town staff the drafts individual guideline pages for review and refinement.
- Organize whole Storefront Guidelines set of pages.
- After completion of Storefront Guidelines, during the Covid-19 shutdown, work with the Building Commission to rewrite Everett's Building Code to reflect the clearer storefront criteria.
- Others involved in the rewriting of Building Code include the city attorney and community development director.
- This sentence by sentence intense exercise gave focus to the Building Code while doing away with unnecessary zoning code criteria
- This Collaboration made a tedious set of tasks quite reasonable to complete.
- This process allowed an opportunity to address sign issues throughout the City such as non-conforming uses, public/private garages, etc..

## Signs

### Signs

Business signage is a very critical element to the storefront. Not only does it provide a first impression to customers, but it also helps convey the business' brand and character.

Signs should clearly communicate the business name, but not be overwhelming. The average person can only process four to seven words while passing by. Therefore keeping text and graphics to a minimum will make the most impact.



**City Ordinance/Regulation:**  
Section 12.54(c) of the City Ordinance further regulates the number and size of signs. See Technical Requirements for more information.

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Signs and Technical Requirements

### Awnings

Awnings can be a great addition to a storefront. Not only can they provide an area for signage, but they also help provide a visual cue on where the entrance is located. Awnings also provide shelter for customers in inclement weather and also provide shade for store items being displayed in the window.

**City Ordinance/Regulation:**  
City Council Rule 7.8.9 further regulates awnings.  
Awning signs are also further regulated in City Ordinance Section 12.54.



### Awning Signs - Material

Awnings should be a solid color and made from a fabric or canvas material. Shiny, high gloss or translucent materials should be avoided.

Lettering and material should be consistent for all awnings on the same building.



This fabric awning is NOT shiny, high gloss or translucent. The awning frame also matches the black fabric.



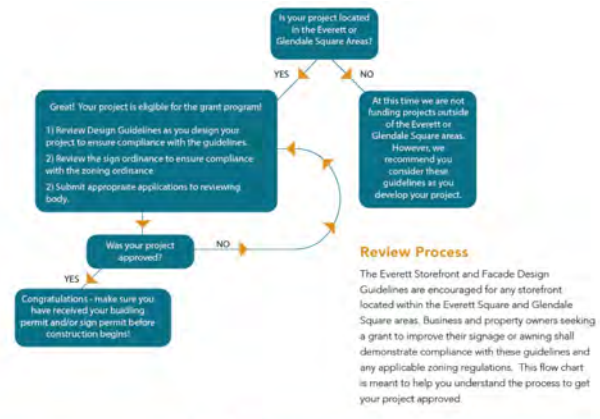
This awning is made of shiny vinyl and is not encouraged.

*The block party was a near-term, easy action item in the overall implementation plan and was intended to support a good image for this area of the downtown and set up for larger and longer-term action items such as building redevelopment, wayfinding, and business recruitment for ground floor spaces.*

# Best Practice Example: Facade Improvement Program

## Process- Strategic Decisions

- City of Everett deciding to create storefront guidelines
- Building Commission desiring to match new guidelines to City's Building code.
- Creation of a digital set of storefront criteria for use by merchants, landlords and fabricator/installers.
- Use of panoramic photo-montage to establish existing conditions.
- Use of photo-montages to act as baseline show proposed conditions using new storefront criteria.
- Collaboration between strategic City departments for ownership of the guidelines and shared development of the review process for design and grant applications.
- Creation of easily understandable and illustrated storefront criteria.



Review Process and Grant Application

## Everett Square

### Before

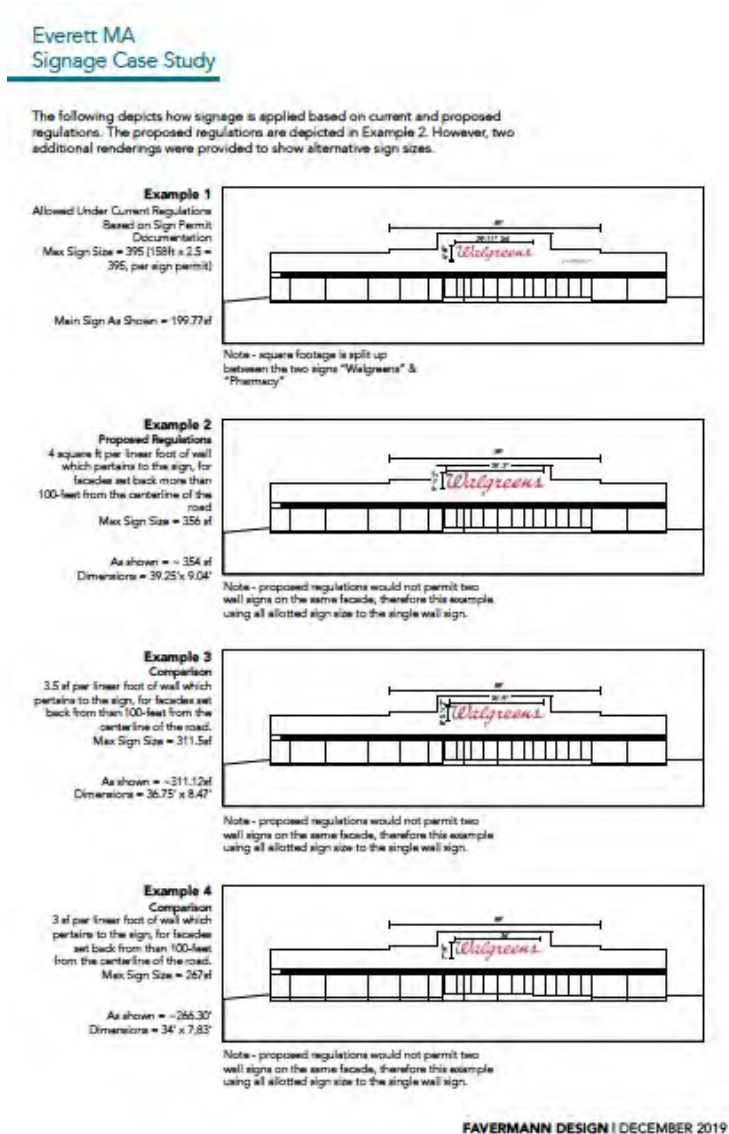


### After





# Best Practice Example: Facade Improvement Program



Examples of City of Everett's Storefront Guideline Pages.

Case Study of Walgreen's non-conforming storefront signage on set-back shopping strip façade.

## Best Practice Example: Facade Improvement Program

# Downtown Manchester– Architectural Design Guidelines



Provided by SME Consultant

GOMAN+YORK Advisory Services

Location

Manchester, CT

Origin	GOMAN+YORK
Budget	 Low Budget – Consultant’s Time for design standards
Timeframe	 Long-term – Post Covid
Risk	 Low Risk – setting guidelines/policies in place assures that any improvements done in the Downtown must be adhered to
Key Performance Indicators	Tenant Initiation of Recommendations, Tenant Traffic & Sales Growth
Partners & Resources	City/Town Economic Development, Business Owners
Diagnostic	<p>Changes in consumer behavior and a heightened appreciation for community and place made Downtown Manchester a competitive and desirable location. Prior to Covid-19 the town realized that the area’s image, market potential, physical attributes and social connections needed to be maintained and improved. Covid-19 accentuated the need and importance of maintaining and strengthening the Downtown area to support the local tenant base.</p> <p>Architectural design guidelines were meant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enhance the image of Downtown Manchester through the upgrade and maintenance of existing building façades; and</li><li>• Encourage new construction which reinforces Downtown Manchester’s historic development patterns.</li></ul> <p>Manchester’s downtown district serves as a visual introduction to the town’s character. An attractive image boosts commercial and community vitality when it successfully blends appearance and welcoming public spaces.</p> <p>Main Street’s history is revealed in its diverse architectural styles. Each building is a unique record of its place in time. Therefore, building owners need to carefully evaluate the design of any proposed improvements to ensure they make a positive contribution to the collective Downtown environment.</p>

# Best Practice Example: Facade Improvement Program

## Action Items

**Step 1. Define the area** – this has already been done by the Plan Facilitators and the cities/towns.

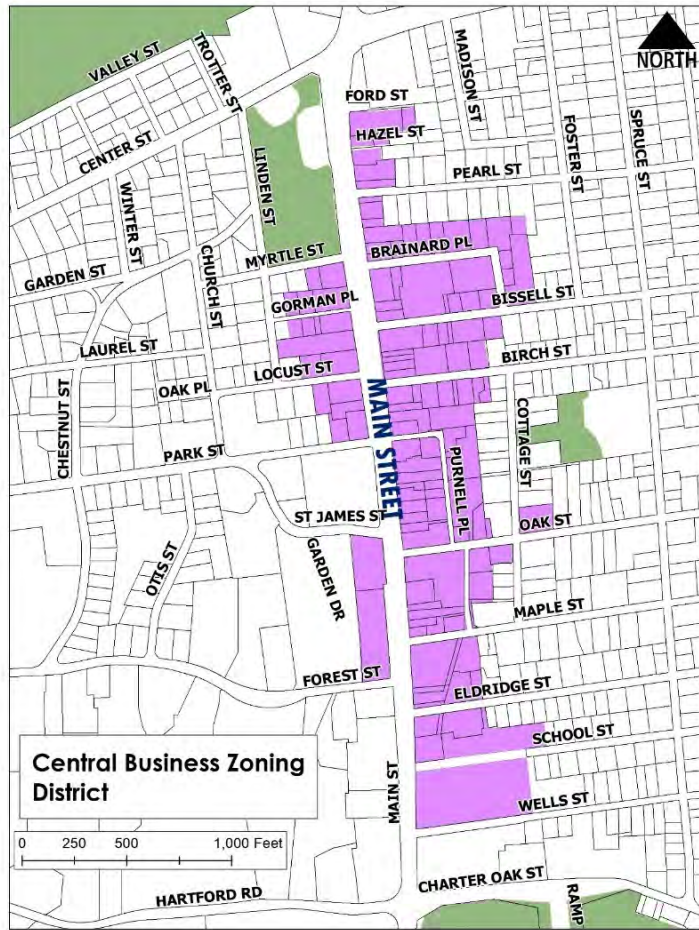
**Step 2. Conduct a current conditions assessment** –physical, governmental, private, character of the district. Some examples of disruptive alterations include:

- Blocking out windows, which is typically uninviting
- Replacing original architectural detailing with substandard or non-sustainable materials
- Covering original details with aluminum siding or random placement of wood paneling
- Introducing new design elements which were not in keeping with the original design
- Random placement with no coordination of ornamentation, lighting fixtures or signage
- Oversized signage creating visual confusion and blocking architectural details of upper floors

**Step 3. Identify main key stakeholders** (including but not limited to; Building Owners, Tenants, Residents, Clients and Customers) must preserve and highlight what makes this downtown unique: eclectic structures, public spaces, community facilities, ample parking, and an enjoyable pedestrian experience.

## Step 4. Development & Implementation

**Reminder:** A vibrant, healthy and attractive downtown must be clean, safe and aesthetically pleasing. This relies on quality design and positive public-private relationships.



Define the Downtown Area

# Best Practice Example: Facade Improvement Program

## Ground Floor Tenant Storefronts

The storefront is the most significant feature of most commercial buildings. Its appearance plays a critical role in how a business is perceived and contributes to the pedestrian experience from the sidewalk. Building owners are expected to acknowledge critical elements of a building when redesigning a storefront.

Traditionally, the storefront is set into an opening in the building, framed by a building's columns or piers on either side, and sometimes includes a cornice or lintel along the top. Decorative elements of the storefront are definitive characteristics that ground the upper portions of the building to the sidewalk. When possible, these decorative elements should be retained in their original material, color and finish. The window area is generally large in contrast to the smaller windows on the upper stories to visually communicate and display the products and services offered within. The entranceway is often asymmetrical and recessed to increase display window area, provide weather protection, and allow clearance for the door swing.

When planning to renovate a storefront, its proportion in relation to the entire façade should be considered. Renovations should be done with durable and sustainable materials and retain existing modules, proportions, and structure.



Urban Lodge Brewery – photo: Patch.com



# Best Practice Example: Facade Improvement Program

## Display Windows

**Lighting:** Night lighting is encouraged as it extends the pedestrian experience, makes a building façade more welcoming, and adds consistency to the downtown district. Lighting plans should be sensitive to potential impacts on vehicular traffic.

**Temporary signage, seasonal displays and window seating:** Products, furnishings or activities placed within a display window become part of the pedestrian experience. Merchants should consider the visual and messaging impact when designing displays, as they reflect the character of the business and affect the integrity of Downtown Manchester.

**Cleanliness of windows** – interior & exterior – sometimes it's that simple!

## Awnings and Canopies

Storefront awnings and canopies are both functional and decorative. They are functional because they provide sun protection for merchandise, weather protection for visitors, and signage for the business (see "Signage" section for guidelines). These structures also add decorative color, patterns or graphics to the streetscape.

Both commercial grade, exterior fabric, retractable and permanent awnings have been successfully integrated in the past. The color or stripe chosen for the awning should complement the general color scheme of the building. Building owners are discouraged from using metal awnings because of their susceptibility to weather damage and fading.



Display Windows



Awnings and Canopies

# Best Practice Example: Facade Improvement Program

## Signage

Signage provides scale, color and interest to the streetscape. A sign has a positive effect on business and community atmosphere when it is appropriately placed, well designed, and in scale with its architectural surroundings.

A poorly designed sign results in visual confusion, harming both the streetscape and the value of the sign. While these guidelines provide structure for what signs are appropriate, the Town of Manchester's zoning regulations mandate what signs can and cannot be used in the Downtown district.

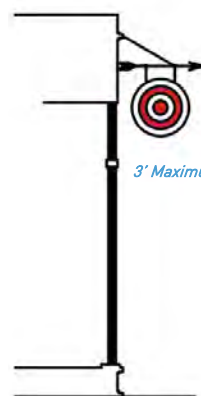
Information on a sign should be simple, clear and concise. The type face and graphic symbols should convey only the name of the business and its main product or service. The color should be coordinated with the building and storefront, and the letters or logo should contrast with the background, so the sign is readable. Light box signs should not be used. In some instances, simpler is better. Channel cut letters or flat metal signs lit with goose neck lighting are encouraged.

Signage to serve multiple tenant storefronts within the confines of a single building should be well coordinated to fit within the pre-described signage area defined by the building's architecture.

Before beginning any signage project, refer to Zoning Regulations for specific restrictions. Special regulations can be adopted for the Downtown district.



*Restaurant Menu Boards*



*3' Maximum width from storefront*

*Blade or Hanging Bracket Signs*

*Exterior-Mounted & Painted on Glass*



# Create a Vacant Storefront Program

## Category



Tenant Mix

## Location

Subarea of Study Area

## Origin

City of Lowell  
Nonprofit Leaders  
Plan Facilitators  
Public Feedback/Suggestions

## Budget



Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)  
Project Requires staff time and project subsidies

## Timeframe



Short Term (<5 years)

## Risk



Medium Risk

## Key Performance Indicators

This list includes a variety of possible performance indicators. Through program development, specific performance indicators will be determined:

- Change in the number of underutilized/vacant parcels
- Number of participating businesses
- Number of patrons/visitors to the spaces
- Revenue generated
- Change in revenue at neighboring storefronts
- Number of community activations
- Community perception of Downtown Lowell

It is recommended a minimum of 10% of vacant storefronts as participation goal (6) with an ideal of 10 participants as an initial pilot of a larger program.

## Partners & Resources

### Partners

Surrounding businesses and community organizations that may use or benefit from the space activations.

- Nonprofit Partners
- Theaters
- Office Buildings
- UMass Lowell and/or Middlesex Community College

### Resources

- BID and/or Parking Fees
- Donations from Private Companies
- Community Organizations
- MA Development Grants
- Art Grants

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## Continued: Create a Vacant Storefront Program

### Diagnostic

Vacant, first-floor storefronts have remained a challenge in revitalizing Downtown Lowell. The COVID Pandemic has increased the number of vacancies. To help address chronic vacancies and breathe new life into Downtown Lowell, a Pop-Up Storefronts and Art Works Program will help match vacant spaces with occupants.

Activating these vacant storefronts can breathe new life into Downtown Lowell, attracting new and different customers to the area. A combination of new commercial activity, art installations, and community uses would attract the largest variety of visitors and customers as well as create new destinations for local residents. Additionally, the temporary nature of popup programs creates buzz and excitement - encouraging people to visit locations that interest them so they do not miss out.

### Action Items

Creating a Vacant Storefront Program can be broken into three phases:

**Phase 1: Creating the Structure of the Vacant Storefront Program  
(Estimated Timeline: 1-2 months)**

**Phase 2: Attracting Property Owners/Selecting Locations and Funding  
Activations (Estimated Timeline: 2-4 Months)**

**Phase 3: Implementation**



## Continued: Create a Vacant Storefront Program

### Process Overview

#### **Phase 1: Creating the Structure of the Vacant Storefront Program (Estimated Timeline: 1-2 months)**

##### Defining Goals:

The Project's goals will drive implementation and activities. Possible goals include: bringing more people to Downtown, supporting existing businesses, seed new businesses in vacant spaces, creating work/studio space for community organizations or artists, or creating gathering spaces for community events.

##### Identifying Target Audience:

The public should be at the heart of any vacant storefront program. Understanding who will want to visit the spaces and who you want to attract will direct the project's decision-making and help identify the type(s) of businesses/organizations to invite to participate in the program (both as landlords and types of activations/stores).

##### Defining Key Metrics and Establishing Baseline Data:

Similar to defining project goals, the key metrics will help inform project implementation. Possible metrics include: decrease in underutilized/vacant parcels, the number of participating businesses, number of patrons/visitors to the spaces, revenue generation, increased revenues in neighboring businesses, number of community activations, and the community's perception of Downtown Lowell.

Baseline data (both readily available and that can be easily/quickly collected) can help determine the metrics most valuable to Downtown Lowell.

The project's SME recommends that project organizers set a minimum goal of 10% participation with an ideal goal of 10 participants in an initial pilot of a larger program. Lowell's vacancies are spread throughout Downtown, to create impact, the sites identified for the pilot program should be clustered in a small area.

##### Determining Target Locations for Activations:

The Project's goals will help drive the location(s) selected for the vacant storefront program. Pop-ups in vacant storefronts near struggling businesses will help boost those struggling businesses whereas pop-ups near thriving businesses will benefit from the existing foot traffic drawn to these popular businesses. The project team will need to balance these impacts to benefit everyone, allowing visitors to experience the thriving businesses and support Downtown's businesses that are struggling.

## Continued: Create a Vacant Storefront Program

### Process Overview

Again, it is important to note that the project (or at least the initial pilot) is concentrated in one area of Downtown Lowell to ensure the greatest impact. Following the pilot, the program could be expanded to other areas of Downtown.

#### Gathering Project Partners:

In addition to the primary project partners, there are a variety of other organizations that can help move the vacant storefront program forward. These potential partners include existing businesses and community organizations that may use or benefit from the activations. Depending on the pilot's target location, partner organizations could include nearby businesses, non-profits, arts organizations, offices buildings, UMass Lowell, and/or Middlesex Community College. Any organization that has a stake in the program's success, or could benefit from the program, is a potential partner.

#### Determining Funding Incentives:

An important Phase I activity is identifying and securing funding sources. Providing adequate funding allows the program to incentivize owners of vacant storefronts to participate in the program. It is advised that the program start with the soft incentives of marketing spaces to permanent tenants and improving the district.

#### Documenting Program Plan:

Program documentation should include all program information, partners, duration, goals, key metrics, etc. It should also include the marketing strategy used to reach out to businesses and property owners as well as outlining the way the program and activations/spaces will be marketed at launch.

### **Phase 2: Attracting Property Owners/Selecting Locations and Funding Activations (Estimated Timeline: 2-4 Months)**

#### **Phase 2A: Attracting Property Owners (Estimated Timeline: 2-4 months, depending on existing relationships with property owners)**

##### Attracting Partners - Go Local:

Popup activations and vacant storefront programs are most successful in recruiting locally-owned properties. There is a higher likelihood of participation from property owners who are also members of the community. Using collective-action centric messaging (we are all in this together, the district's reputation and appeal is not a zero sum game) can help encourage participation. Downtown activation benefits the entire

## Continued: Create a Vacant Storefront Program

### Process (Specific Steps)

community. Communicate that the program is a way to meaningfully enhance the building/landlord's reputation as one who cares about and supports Downtown Lowell.

#### Pitch the Program as Marketing Their Leasable Space:

Successful popup and vacant storefront programs undo themselves - that is, the temporary uses boost foot traffic, generating new leads for tenants, and resulting in new leases. The value statement to property owners for why they should allow low- or no-cost use of their spaces is that this use does not preclude them from seeking permanent tenants; in fact, it can help attract permanent tenants and temporary activations may convert to permanent uses. Additionally, the popup/vacant storefront program activates spaces that are not generating revenue.

#### Window-Only Activations Are An Option:

There are several reasons a vacant storefront program would consider window-only activations. The interior space may not be up to code and/or the building owner/landlord may be hesitant to provide access to the inside. Window-only activations are a great way to add life and vibrancy to the street and can be installed with little risk to the building/property owner.

### Window-Only Activations

Window activations can create interest in the street, bring more people to Downtown Lowell, and encourage them to walk further down the street to see more! This increases foot traffic to open stores and businesses.

Ideas include: artist installations, promotion of community-wide events or building projects, advertising space for local businesses and organizations, and community message boards.

For a more complex/multi-storefront installation, the program could develop (or work with an artist to complete) a connected piece of artwork spanning multiple storefronts. It can tell a story or create a riddle or scavenger hunt to get people to visit additional storefronts throughout Downtown Lowell.

## Continued: Create a Vacant Storefront Program

### Process (Specific Steps)

#### Keep Costs Low and Simplify Logistics:

Particularly as the program is launching, it is important to make it easy for businesses, artists, community groups, building/property owners, and others to participate in the program. The submission/application form should request contact information, level and type of activity they are interested in (including whether they will need a closed storefront or space that is open to visitors, operating hours/times, days of the week, etc.). The form can outline the financial incentives available to support the business/property owners. Identifying the incentives for participation may be particularly important for attracting the first few business/property owners. These early participants can serve as proof of concept to attract others. The program should clearly communicate implementation and management strategies to make sure that businesses, artists, community groups, building/property owners, and other participants feel comfortable.

#### **Phase 2B: Finding Activations (Estimated Timeline: 2-4 months)**

##### Find Spaces Before Activations:

The recruitment of building/property owners should occur before activations are recruited. Recruiting the spaces first allows project organizers to know the types of spaces and availability of these spaces to help match the activations with the spaces. There is an added benefit to having an early understanding of what landlords are willing to host. It is important to have spaces committed to participation before starting to recruit the activations.

##### Community Needs Survey:

Conduct a community needs survey to identify the amenities/activities missing from Downtown Lowell. It may be possible to incorporate these amenities and activities into vacant storefronts as part of the pilot program

### Financial Incentives

May include: \$500+ bonus for the first building/property owner who signs up, lump sum payments to each building/property owner to help ready their interior for use, waiving permitting fees, rent-pass through vouchers for artists/entrepreneurs to procure space from landlords in agreements that look more like traditional leases.



## Continued: Create a Vacant Storefront Program

### Process (Specific Steps)

#### Curate Downtown Lowell:

A popup or vacant storefront program can help balance the mix of business offerings to increase the types of goods and services available. Consider the activation types and how they will complement existing businesses. More people will come to Downtown Lowell if there is a greater variety of attractions and things to do/buy.

*For example... Don't have a hardware store in the area? Try to recruit a popup tool library or fix-it clinic. If the program is successful, it might help attract a business to Downtown Lowell.*

#### **Phase 3: Implementation**

**(Estimated Timeline: 2-4 months)**

#### Timeline:

A pilot program should run at least two months, especially if interior activations and popup stores are planned. The time and effort necessary to prepare a property and start a business, create/install an artistic installation, or other activation should be balanced with the length of stay to make the project worthwhile. At the same time, the building/property owner will want assurances that if a lease becomes available, they will not be tied into this temporary activation. A minimum 2-month contract followed by a month-to-month arrangement can serve both parties.

#### Program Management:

For vacant properties and interior activations, consider a third-party

### **It doesn't have to be an active program...**

Simply upgrading a building's facade can have a big impact on how the street feels. A full activation is not always necessary or possible. Colorful paint, window displays, art, and decals can be very effective and provide a high return on investment! If there is space for outdoor seating, that also provides a high return on investment. Outdoor space improvements provide dual benefit (both to vacant storefronts and struggling businesses) to businesses and the streetscape, which increases foot traffic and business.

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## Continued: Create a Vacant Storefront Program

### Process (Specific Steps)

management entity. Given the low revenue generating potential, having a third-party management entity with a master use agreement or lease for the vacant properties can simplify the process and provide use of their existing insurance capacity.

The third-party should enter into use agreements with the users of the vacant spaces that defines rules and regulations, but does not put the logistical or insurance burden on the users who are likely unfamiliar or ill-equipped to take on logistical hurdles for short term uses.

The third-party acts as the recipient of the sublease and uses existing organizational insurance and capacity to navigate any permitting needs and building owner requirements.

The third-party could also cover utilities to lessen the burden even more for the building/property owners and short-term use tenants.

The use agreement should stipulate the minimum and maximum operational hours needed to produce the activation goals of the program. However, at the beginning/as you're trying to build demand, flexibility is probably best.

The use agreement should have clauses about what would trigger immediate termination of the agreement, such as prohibited uses. This is a strategy to mitigate activity that the building/property owner or third-party master agreement holder believes will significantly increase their liability. Examples for public open spaces (i.e. retail stores with customers) would be hosting non-standard events in the space, making unapproved modifications to the space, etc.

Examples for private space activation (i.e. artist studios, other uses with a limited number of authorized occupants) would be inviting unauthorized users who cause damage to the property, consumption of illegal substances on site, etc.

Examples for closed storefront displays (i.e. art displays or community engagement/education) would be the display of nudity or profanity that is not removed within 24 hours of request.

The use agreement should also define what the landlord will provide (access to the building, furniture, fixtures, equipment etc.) and what the master agreement holder and end user will be responsible for providing.

In the case of vacant storefront activations, it is important to promise at least 60 days of occupation to make it worthwhile for the short-term user and then have a rolling 30 day expulsion clause (without cause) going

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## Continued: Create a Vacant Storefront Program

<b>Process (Specific Steps)</b>	<p>forward to allow for the space to be rented and temporary uses to cease.</p> <p>It is common for challenges to arise from a lack of communication or overly reactive building/property owners, so relationship building at the program's start (and before) is critical to the success and stability of storefront activations.</p>
<b>Regulatory/Permitting Considerations</b>	<p>The program may include two broad categories of use: exterior and interior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- It can be challenging to use a vacant building that does not have a certificate of occupancy. If that is the case, target this location as an exterior-only activation (facade improvements, art installations, community messaging, local business highlights, etc.)</li><li>- If the building/property owner/landlord is looking to rent space but cannot because of the economy or other outside force, a short-term internal-use can be a win for both the landlord and community.</li></ul> <p>The time burden of a difficult regulatory process can prevent efforts like these from getting off the ground. From the city's perspective, they should work to create as easy of a permitting process as possible that still ensures people's safety. Programs that are able to access blanket permitting - that is, once the permitting is done at the start, it is set for a period of time instead of the program or its participants needing to file separate permits for each engagement.</p> <p>If the program has a third-part management organization or is otherwise able to establish a master use agreement/lease, they can take responsibility for permitting.</p>

## *Continued: Create a Vacant Storefront Program*

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### **Different Types of Activations**

The quickest route to implementation is a pop-up retailer that already has online sales or artists who have already created work that can be displayed while they use the space for ongoing creation.

**Small Business Pop-Ups:** Retailers, artists, creators, and other goods and services that have already developed a customer base are good groups/individuals/organizations to reach out to. Appropriate businesses uses will vary based on context, but food businesses are not recommended unless they already have a large operations basis. The food industry has significant barriers to entry and the first three months of a new food business are turbulent. Sharing kitchens is a frequent source of conflict. If the space would require a significant build out to house a food business, that could create a financial and permitting barrier to a rapid-implementation project.

**Artists:** Art installations, connected pieces spanning multiple storefronts that tell a story or is a riddle/scavenger hunt (particularly great to get people exploring!), promoting community events, rotating series of artworks or decorations.

**Community Spaces:** Installation promoting community events, community meeting spaces, maker spaces, community message boards.

**Non-Artist Activations:** Local business spotlight



## Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program



### Supporting Entrepreneurs and Commercial Landlords with Pop Up Business Activations




Provided by SME Consultant

Jeanette G. Nigro, Perch Advisors

Location

Various Locations ((New York City )

## Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program

Origin	Project was created within ideation of the NYC Department of Small Business Services and ChaShaMa, property owners, and business owners, along with community orgs such as BIDs
Budget	 Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000) – Project required dedicated staff and project subsidies
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) – Program launched within 90 days; space is generally tenanted for 30 – 60 days maximum
Risk	 Low Risk – Landlords with existing empty space offer short term opportunities with no permanent build out or commitment
Key Performance Indicators	Temporary commercial vacancy reduction; business increase in sales; businesses accessing space
Partners & Resources	NYC Department of Small Business Services, ChaShaMa
Diagnostic	<p>With an increased amount of vacant space in New York City during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City partnered with ChaShaMa, a not-for-profit that generally offers space to artists, to create short term opportunities for businesses to test out a brick-and-mortar location in commercial areas across the city.</p> <p>This creates opportunity to liven commercial districts with new, short-term businesses, helping landlords to activate their unused space, make the street feel more alive, create increased opportunities for commerce for small, minority and women-owned businesses, and provide no-cost space to businesses otherwise unlikely to be able to afford commercial rents in high traffic commercial corridors.</p> <p>Challenges of this program currently being addressed are ensuring businesses have commercial storefront opportunities once the no-cost space has ended; supporting businesses with technical assistance such as access to capital and finding affordable, permanent space, and sustainable resourcing of the project for the long term success of small minority and women-owned businesses.</p>
Action Item	<p>Storefront Start-Up is a partnership between a not-for-profit community organization that typically supports artists in accessing work and exhibit space and the NYC Department of Small Business Services to support minority and women-owned businesses in accessing free storefront space (avg 30 days) in high traffic commercial areas.</p> <p>The non-profit or municipal partner can begin by evaluating vacant space in their commercial corridors and contacting property owners to determine their interest in short term space leases. The organization will have to determine if they can cover necessities for opening a commercial space (such as utilities and wifi) or if a landlord would be willing to provide short term access to these services.</p> <p>Simultaneously, the lead partner can connect with local businesses in need of space through social media marketing (no to low cost), partnerships with local business serving organizations (such as SBDC's, chambers of commerce) and begin to create a database of businesses interested in short term commercial leases. Essentially, building both the space and potential tenants together will help launch the matches efficiently and quickly.</p> <p>The lead organization should also determine business priority – is the program focused on women entrepreneurs? People of color? Create an evaluation tool to match businesses with respective spaces based on a set of priorities.</p> <p>Businesses should receive operating guidelines, a MOU to discuss what they can and can't do with the space, their responsibility to the program, and how long the term of the space use is.</p> <p>The lead organization should provide as much support to both the landlord and tenant as possible and consider connecting with a local technical assistance provider to help the business leverage the storefront opportunity to their long-term growth.</p>

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## Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program

### Process

- Determine the strategy to support businesses – are you focused on serving a specific demographic (ex. Women-owned businesses) or sector (retail, design)
- Decide on a criteria on how businesses will be selected for space
- Research and identify vacant storefront properties in communities, particular those commercial corridors that may have high current vacancy rates. Local BIDs or DIDs can help identify vacant properties.
- Connect with property owners of vacant spaces to determine their interest in short-term no-cost lease opportunities, and if so, their terms of use.
- Create a database with notes and updates on available properties and interested businesses.
- Create a standard Memorandum of Understanding to be used as a baseline of agreement between the organization, the property owner, and the business owner. For example: how long will the space be used? Who will pay for buildout costs (if any)? Who will cover utility costs?
- Begin to match businesses with potential vacant spaces. Determine how far in advance businesses would need to be “occupancy ready” and how long landlords would need for the property to be considered “move in condition”
- Support both the business and property owner with the transition into the space; troubleshoot any issues in real time to mitigate any future problems or miscommunications
- Create social media and marketing opportunities to businesses to let people know they will be in the activated space, with plenty of lead up marketing prior to the move in date
- Determine further support for the business after the space agreement has expired, if any

## *Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program*



### Pop-Ups in the Retail Mix



Provided by SME Consultant




Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Location

Adams, MA



## Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program

Origin	ProAdams, Downtown Adams, Town of Adams, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
Budget	 <p>The project has a proposed budget of \$125,000. The budget will be used to cover rent for seven vendors who establish pop-ups in storefronts under 1K s.f. for three months (est. @ \$3.50* per s.f. = \$65,625) and short-term loans to business owners to address code violations or building repairs (\$5K each @ \$35,000). The remaining budget will be directed to press and public relations, including a website designer, website, and signage. * <i>The proposed rent is 50% of market rate.</i></p>
Timeframe	 <p>The project is in the planning phase and has not yet been implemented. Strategic Planning: 6 months; Pop-Up Vendor Solicitation: 3 months; Pop-Up Build-Out: 3 months; Implementation: 3 months</p>
Risk	 <p>Small business owners have been hurt financially by the pandemic and may be wary of short-term ventures that cannot guarantee success. Building owners may be less than inclined to engage short-term tenancy if it reduces incentive for a long-term tenant to commit. Building owners may not wish to start building repairs that expose them to legal or regulatory oversight.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Increase in foot traffic; Increase in sales and revenue at neighboring food and retail businesses; Long-term commercial tenancy at market rate in formerly vacant properties; Perceived improvement in appearance of the downtown streetscape.
Partners & Resources	ProAdams, Downtown Adams, Town of Adams, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, 1Berkshire
Diagnostic	<p>Adams faced challenges with downtown occupancy prior to COVID-19. The pandemic only accelerated economic hardships, leading approximately 15 retail spaces to become vacant out of 50 with a storefront presence. The town is highly dependent on the recreation and hospitality sectors, both of which receded in the past year, creating a snowball-effect decline in economic activity more broadly. Because of its many older residents, the town has difficulty attracting businesses that appeal to younger audiences. Many of those leading local economic development efforts do so as volunteers, which limits their ability to provide a full range of services and technical assistance to incoming businesses.</p> <p>Among the town's attractions are the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum, a historic home listed on the Register of Historic Places, and the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, whose north end starts in Adams. The town is located near many natural resources, including Greylock Glen, which recently received state funding to develop a world-class outdoor recreation and environmental center. For outdoor enthusiasts, the town is famous for hosting in the 1930s the Thunderbolt Ski Run, which attracted top skiers from the United States and Europe during its heyday. Today the tradition continues with an annual winter celebration called ThunderFest. Adams is within easy driving and public transit distance to an internationally-recognized museum (Mass MoCA) and is centrally located along the Berkshire corridor stretching from Bennington, Vermont to Sheffield, Massachusetts.</p>

## Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program

<b>Action Items</b>	<p>The project will attract small businesses to Adams that address local's day-to-day needs and provide amenities for visitors who are there to explore the region. To accomplish this, the project will build on local boosterism and capture residents' pride while identifying new and under-represented voices the town may not have previously engaged.</p> <p>Years of disinvestment have led many to give up hope on Adams' potential to provide good local jobs. By bringing positive attention to Adams, the project hopes to re-inspire residents challenged by poverty.</p> <p>Pop-up stores, while unfamiliar, can build a following, so long as residents take an active role in choosing those selected and see their success as providing benefits to neighbors.</p>
<b>Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organize a small group of stakeholders representing local government, economic development, small business, real estate, tourism, marketing, and design/web/social media sectors to spearhead the project. Ensure representation from diverse and often under-represented communities such as low-income, minority, women, and LGBTQ residents and business owners as part of the steering committee.</li><li>• Initiate a fundraising campaign to cover three months of rent for seven pop-up vendors. Build relationships with building owners to <b>negotiate reduced rent in vacant stores for a specified period (ideally 90 days) with graduated rent for the first year made available to pop-ups that agree to stay into Year 2.</b></li><li>• Engage internal marketing/design/web/social media experts or engage a pro bono consultant to create a website and social media campaign to promote the project. Include demographic, economic, infrastructure, and tourism data about Adams (i.e., availability of broadband, utility rates, etc.) in marketing materials to help vendors understand community dynamics and ensure a good fit between their products or services and local resident and visitor interests.</li><li>• Select pop-up applicants through an open competition that attracts media attention. Choose winners based on pre-determined criteria (e.g., financial need, community-identified service gaps, qualifications) and with lead stakeholder input. Select at least two businesses through a public "audience favorite" process to build community excitement. Select pop-ups that offer similar or complementary services in a single location to create a market "district" feel.</li><li>• Include one-on-one S.C.O.R.E. or business mentoring to winners and provide ongoing marketing support during the project to support pop-up owners' interest in making a long-term commitment to downtown Adams.</li><li>• Involve community members early in the process to increase buy-in around the project. As part of that, appoint a community ambassador to each location that can acquaint incoming business owners with neighbors, resources, and town amenities.</li><li>• Create a social media campaign once pop-ups are in place and encourage businesses to offer incentives to stimulate repeat and returning patronage. Examples include coupons, sale days, promotions, and experiential offerings.</li><li>• Gather regular feedback from consumers and vendors about the pop-ups' presence and impact on local culture, so that changes can be made in real time to respond to consumer demands and vendor needs. Use surveys that include rewards for respondents, and which can be activated at pop-up shops, to increase response rate.</li><li>• Incentivize successful pop-ups to permanently relocate by adding a pitch competition that would bring additional funding to projects after the pilot period ends.</li></ul>

## Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program



### Windows Before Stores



Provided by SME Consultant

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Location

Great Barrington, MA

Origin	Town of Great Barrington, Great Barrington Cultural District, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Budget	 <p>The project has a proposed budget of \$20,000 to \$35,000. The budget will be used to pay 14 artists (\$1K each) and building owners (\$1K each @ 7 sites). Money will also be applied toward stipends for docents (\$500 for 7), public relations/publicity, and a website. Funds will be sought from MCC, local philanthropies that support the arts, youth, and economic development projects, and in-kind donations from larger businesses, including community lenders.</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Strategic Planning: 2-3 months; Artist Solicitation: 1 month; Storefront Design/Marketing: 1-2 months; Implementation: 2 months</p>
Risk	 <p>Owner interest/willingness to participate; Legal and building code barriers and costs; Public fatigue and lower engagement post-COVID-19.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	The project will improve public perceptions of downtown Great Barrington as a place to do business. The project will highlight the town's commitment to economic and creative revitalization and increase public interest in supporting a downtown creative economy. The project will increase interest in small businesses establishing a foothold in Great Barrington for longer-term tenancy.
Partners & Resources	<b>Public:</b> Town of Great Barrington; Downtown Great Barrington Cultural District; <b>Nonprofit:</b> Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce; Local arts organization; <b>Private:</b> Bard College at Simon's Rock, artists, building owners, neighboring retail and restaurant tenants.

# Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program

## Diagnostic

Challenges facing the project include a depressed commercial landscape in Great Barrington due to COVID-19-induced business closures. There are currently over 10 vacant stores downtown following the pandemic out of 150 businesses overall.

In one BRPC-LRRP survey, for example, 74% of respondents reported earning less revenue in 2020 than in 2019 and 61% stated they had to reduce their business' hours; 57% reported a reduction in foot traffic. Parking regulations are frequently cited as an obstacle to business growth, as are a lack of public amenities such as bathrooms.

Many businesses in downtown Great Barrington are small, with over half having less than 10 employees. Businesses also report needing help with online sales and marketing. Business owners say they would like more cultural events and activities to help draw people downtown.

Working in the area's favor is the presence of a cultural district led by an active stakeholder group that includes government, business, and arts partners. The downtown underwent a major renovation in 2011 that dramatically improved accessibility and appearance. The downtown has a strong visual presence and includes buildings on the National Register of Historic Places (e.g., Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center). In March 2021, *Boston Magazine* rated Great Barrington as one of its top places to live in the state.



*Available storefront in Great Barrington*



# Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program

## Action Items

Windows to Stores will engage four stakeholders -- local government, building owners, visual arts organizations and artists, and community members -- to activate vacant stores by employing local artists to create dynamic sculptural and movement-oriented pieces inside windows that the public can view from the street. Artwork will be highlighted in "Opening Night" evenings. Following increased interest in spaces, potential commercial tenants can request access to stores from business owners to evaluate their fit for commercial tenancy.

Key actions for the project include identifying willing building owners; having local government serve as a matchmaker between building owners and visual arts organizations and artists; and streamlining legal, zoning, and/or regulatory challenges that hinder short-term activation (e.g., insurance, certificate of occupancy).

Community members will be invited to play a central role in the project to ensure local buy-in. As an example, high-school youth and college students will be provided stipends to serve on art selection committees and act as docents in front of store windows.

## Process

- Identify a dedicated and diverse group of partners who are committed to lead the project from start to finish. We will recruit people who are known in the community and have earned public trust and put out a call to newcomers and under-served audiences who can bring an outside perspective to the project's implementation.
- Outline the resources (funding, knowledge, relationships) needed to succeed and determine how these items will be acquired. We will seek funding through grants and fundraising from local sponsors and patrons. Funding will be used to support artists and compensate building owners, pay stipends to youth docents, and market and promote the project.
- Secure building owner participation through an outreach campaign that includes showcasing examples of successful window-to-store projects in other towns of similar scale. We will focus outreach on vacant stores located in a walkable radius to create a sense of momentum and energy in the downtown corridor.
- If building owners need to address interior or exterior code issues to qualify, we will work with them to streamline the permit and approval process and provide incentives in the form of grants or low-interest loans in partnership with local lenders where possible. We will also seek to negotiate reduced pricing from private construction and trade companies to assist with improvements in exchange for publicity.
- Organize a public call for art through a public relations, press, and social media campaign. We will select artists and artwork reflective of the community's identity and diversity. Youth will be involved in the selection process. Art that showcases community pride will take precedence.
- Work with a local college to create a social media campaign for the project and reward community-generated social media postings during the project in the form of gifts from local businesses. Have high-school and college students act as docents during the event. Docents will be asked to take an active role in championing the project, artwork, artist, and building. Docents will be mentored to establish longer-term relationships with the building owner, artist, or tradespeople as part of career exploration.
- Run the window-to-store event over a series of eight weeks during a less-touristed period of the year with displays changed every two weeks. "Opening Nights" will take place each Thursday or Friday with local merchants encouraged to plan promotions to coincide.
- Use "Opening Nights" as opportunities to gather feedback about broader community needs, most importantly to identify gaps in retail and business services.
- After the event, we will hold a partner and public closing conversation to assess impact and decide on next steps for securing new commercial tenants.

## Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program



### Creative empty storefront treatments by Newton Community Pride's WindowArt



Provided by SME Consultant

Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location

City of Newton (in two Villages)

Origin	Community group, artists collaborating with landlords to revitalize store closures due to impacts of COVID-19
Budget	 Low (<\$50,000)—utilization of existing artwork
Timeframe	 Medium-term – planning and implementation took 6 months
Risk	 Low Risk for project execution. However, connecting with absentee landlords will present difficulties.
Key Performance Indicators	Perceived street enhancements; No. of potential tenants engaged; No. of tenants signing leases
Partners & Resources	Town Administrators, City Departments of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts—including the Cultural Division, the Planning and Economic Development Department and the Department of Public Works, local landlords, potential tenants, arts organizations and artists

# Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program

## Diagnostic

Though the Covid-19 Pandemic more finely focused on the dilemma of empty storefronts, this is a continuous, if sometimes only temporary, negative situation in downtowns and commercial districts. Vacant stores are a glaring or at least front and center visible loss to a commercial area, block or building. And most landlords do the least effort to re-lease—simple signs, ads or word of mouth to existing tenants.

The issue is how to combine the needs of the commercial district to the resources available to be creative and commercially reinforcing. One thoughtful solution was by Newton Community Pride, a non-profit organization building community for all to enjoy through arts and culture programming.

The Newton Community Pride staff and board recognized the empty storefront needs of the City of Newton commercial districts. They also had an inventory of artwork by local resident artists.

They wanted to install artwork in as many empty storefronts as possible. However, it was challenging to ascertain landlord ownership especially with absentee landlords, as a they are a subgroup of landlords with less incentive to visually enhance their empty properties. They focused on identifying and working with various owners that they could,

After a short few weeks, Newton Community Pride installed a number empty storefronts with art.

## Context

- No matter how beautiful or historic a façade is, an empty storefront makes it an eyesore.
- Empty Storefronts are distractions from a vital commercial area or downtown.
- With no rent, revenue or relief, unless enlightened or visionary, a landlord usually does the least expensive solution like just paper in the windows, standard for lease signs, etc.
- Arts organizations, student artists and community artists have all assisted to make the empty stores more visually appealing.



*Vacant ground floor uses were mapped and space characteristics noted.*



*The vacant storefronts contributed to lack of vibrancy in the City of Newton's commercial districts.*



# Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program

## Action Items/Process

- Document the empty storefronts in a particular commercial area. In the City of Newton's case, there are 13 separate villages with some commercial district located in eight (8) of them.
- Select focus areas. In Newton's case, focus was centered upon the greatest concentration of stores and empty storefronts.
- Identify landlords and reach out to landlords through cold calls, e-mails, and online and print publications. Persistence in reaching out seemed to payoff the most.
- To augment the "Call for Interested Landlords," Newton Community Pride used local media through press releases including [The Boston Globe](#), local online publications, social media and their own website to communicate the program.
- Discuss and agree with landlords on the organization's approach to the empty storefront. Individual property managers made final decisions about what went where.
- Develop an approach to the installations or create an inventory of existing artwork by local artists. In this case, the artwork already existed and had been used as part of the previously funded Newton Community Pride program, FenceArt. FenceArt produced a juried "call to artist" that generated an inventory of artwork.
- All art was previously printed on vinyl banners, and this allowed for an easy installation behind storefront windows..
- The results of the initial effort were disappointing to the organization who desired much more landlord participation. However, the lessons learned here allow for future project application.



*Even the most beautiful block architecturally with wonderful historic detailing looks bad when the empty storefronts are empty.*



*Empty storefronts in a beautiful commercial block is like the missing tooth in the beautiful smile.*



## Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program

### Process – Strategic Decisions

- Establishment of a collaborative network to discuss and share resources.
- Decide who are the key decision-makers of each project be they landlords, business associations, arts organizations, city agency, etc.
- Think innovatively, out of the box. In this case, the decision to utilize existing and available artwork allowed for several steps to be skipped in the process.
- Learning from this experience, in the future it would be desirable to have a City of Newton official agency to identify landlord ownership. In-turn, this would facilitate greater numbers of cooperating storefronts.
- Publicizing the successful projects to encourage more landlord/building owner involvement.
- Decision that the installed program should have a time limit for elements to be replaced.
- It was determined that this WindowArt Project was a part of the overall Covid-19 Program titled "Newton Al Fresco" that also included artist-decorated Jersey barriers, painted cable spools as side tables for benches for outdoor eating and individual murals.
- A related project to WindowArt and another creative Covid-19 response is an innovative new pilot program partnered by the City of Newton, the Town of Needham and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Project: Pop-Up*.
  - This will allow small retailers to access 1-3 storefronts in Needham and 4-5 storefronts in Newton at a significantly reduced cost.
  - The retailers, many of whom are currently operating primarily online, will have access to the commercial space for 2-3 months to introduce their businesses to a wider audience and will have access to a wide range of support services.



*Newton Community Pride Artwork Installation in Empty Storefronts*

# Best Practice Example: Vacant Storefront Program



Newton Community Pride energizing empty storefronts with artists' work (above); Articles about the program (below).

Community Corner

## WindowART To Fill Vacant Windows Around Newton

Newton Community Pride is trying something a little different this year and repurposing its FenceArt project.

**Jenna Fisher, Patch Staff**

Posted Tue, Apr 20, 2021 at 10:09 am ET | Updated Tue, Apr 20, 2021 at 12:46 pm ET

Like 15 Share Reply

Newton Community Pride is trying something a little different this year and repurposing its FenceArt project. (Gloria Gavris, courtesy)

NEWTON, MA — If you've ever walked past a vacant storefront and felt a little hopeful about the potential that space has, you're not alone.

Newton Community Pride, a nonprofit volunteer group with a mission that includes beautification projects that support the community, decided to fill vacant windows with art.

## Summary

- Think of the empty storefront as an opportunity for creative artistic expression to energize a storefront, block or commercial area.
- This allows the commercial building or district to take a negative and make it into a positive through visual enhancement while generating provocative conversation or even by creating a temporary art gallery.
- Partners are necessary so that collaboration can take place smoothly between the community agencies, business and arts communities.
- Publicize the activity. This draws community interest, reinforces artists' involvement and attracts potential landlord participants.

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NEWTON, MA

## Newton Community Pride announces WindowART to fill vacant windows

COURTESY OF NEWTON COMMUNITY PRIDE

Published 6:13 a.m. ET Apr 16, 2021

Newton Community Pride will host WindowART, a public art initiative to bring art to Newton's commercial districts.

THE HEIGHTS

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## Newton Community Pride Fills Vacant Storefronts With Artwork

By Julia Benick

April 25, 2021 Updated April 25, 2021 at 11:19 pm

A photograph of a vacant storefront window in Newton next to a red "For rent" sign draws public attention in an otherwise empty Newton storefront window. As a part of a new public art initiative sponsored by Newton Community Pride, vacant Newton storefronts will display professional artwork in an effort to beautify the city.

"It's a lovely opportunity to have shoppers and diners and pedestrians stumble across a beautiful piece of artwork, as opposed to brown paper cardboard or a for lease sign, so it makes a nice addition to our village," Gloria Gavris, board chair of Newton Community Pride, said.

The project, called WindowART, incorporates the pieces from Newton Community Pride's annual FenceART project, including local artist Howard Fleeman's "Nested Arches, Mexico." This public art initiative is a submission-based competition that displays winning artists' work on fences throughout Newton, such as at the Newton Free Library and the Newton Senior Center. A jury of professional artists selects 20 submissions to be printed on vinyl banners and displayed throughout the year.

Newton Community Pride rotates the art among five Newton fences every 10 weeks, beginning in October and November. Gavris said. Submissions to the competition were open to artists who reside, work, or participate in art classes in Newton.



# Downtown Spatial Flexibility + Curbside Management

Category	Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Business Community Resident Feedback Plan Facilitators Assigned Subject Matter Expert
Budget	Medium (\$50,000 - \$200,000)
Timeframe	Short Term (<5 years)  Activities include: stakeholder engagement, data collection & analysis, pilot program, and phased implementation
Risk	Medium Risk  Challenges include building political and community support; buy-in or opposition from the business community; available funding; capacity to manage/organize/implement the program; enforcement (capacity, signage maintenance, technology, etc.); development of code/policies in zoning (if implemented)
Key Performance Indicators	Increased multimodal counts Parking utilization impact (primarily on-street) Decrease in traffic accidents and pedestrian/cyclist/vehicle conflicts New, "flex" curb signage Number of alleyways converted Number of businesses expanding into nearby alleyways Changes to existing loading docks Increased sales/revenues Number of pedestrians/cyclists patronizing businesses Feedback from patrons and business community
Partners & Resources	<b>Partners</b> City of Lowell Local Organizations Downtown Businesses Department of Public Works Parking Department Zoning Division Economic Development

## Continued: Downtown Spatial Flexibility + Curbside Management

### Partners & Resources (continued)

### Resources

Municipal Funding  
MassDOT Complete Streets  
MassDOT Shared Streets & Spaces funding is available for initial study and planning (and smaller-scale implementation)  
DHCD Massachusetts Downtown Initiative  
MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places  
CARES and ARP Acts  
Private Grants and Donations

### Diagnostic

The COVID 19 Pandemic has greatly affected how we use public spaces. Businesses need increased flexibility in order to adapt their business operations to new customer demands. At the same time as businesses need more access to public spaces, the City is adapting to new transportation modes and advancing technology. This is creating even more demand for the limited curbside.

In addition to business needs, the COVID 19 Pandemic has led to increased public demand for outdoor spaces, a comprehensive curbside management program could help activate underutilized parts of Downtown Lowell.

### Action Items

Identify partners and potential funding sources.

Develop a method/approach to study the use of public space in Downtown Lowell and identify creative ways to repurpose space, including reviewing businesses' needs. Ideas like "floating" or temporary loading docks, centralized trash collection, and other ways to free up alley space for business or public use should be considered.

Questions to consider:

- Who is involved in the curbside management process? Who is left out and who needs to be at the table?
- What will the City's districts/neighborhoods look like in 5, 10 years? how will the role of the curb interact with the City's long-term goals and vision?
- Are policies flexible enough to accommodate changes in near-future technology? What is a realistic timeline of planning and transitioning to be future-ready?
- Who/what are the City's current and potential resources to make curbside management work both on paper and on the ground?



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## Continued: Downtown Spatial Flexibility + Curbside Management

### Process

#### Determine potential demand

- Compile raw curb utilization data
- Conduct turnover study of all vehicular activity at locations of highest curb utilization
- Conduct doorway activity counts in turnover study locations on both sides of the street with notation of customer and delivery origins
- Map data for all zones and hours of activity

#### Assess curbside suitability

- Summarize key periods of curb and doorway demand by user group, identifying curbside versus non-curbside user counts
- Compare curbside demand to turnover results and establish threshold when curbside space is insufficient

#### Identify candidate locations

- Map top space insufficiencies in Downtown
- Triage list to top two pilot locations

#### Work with partners for validation

- Create maps and share results with businesses at pilot locations
- Adjust potential zones as needed

#### Finalize flexible curbside pilot

- Establish span for use and impacts on existing regulations
- Develop hybrid regulations as necessary, including base regulation with exception, variable spans by day of week, priced loading, etc.
- Prepare formal regulatory changes

#### Pilot managed approaches

#### Evaluate and monitor

## Continued: Downtown Spatial Flexibility + Curbside Management

### Process

Analyze and monitor

Potential Outcomes/Goals:

- Reduce congestion for competing vehicle needs at the curb
- Improve safety by implementing a system that reduces conflicts with pedestrians, vehicles, and bicyclists
- Improve multimodal connection by making it easier for drivers and passengers to find each other
- Support the local economy by ensuring businesses have the space they need for their customers and goods to get to Downtown Lowell



## Continued: Downtown Spatial Flexibility + Curbside Management

### CURBSIDE MANAGEMENT AS A CYCLE

**While context is key, these 7 best practice process steps can guide a multitude of tailored solutions for curbside management that are guaranteed to be effective**



### GUIDANCE FOR TAMPA MOVING FORWARD

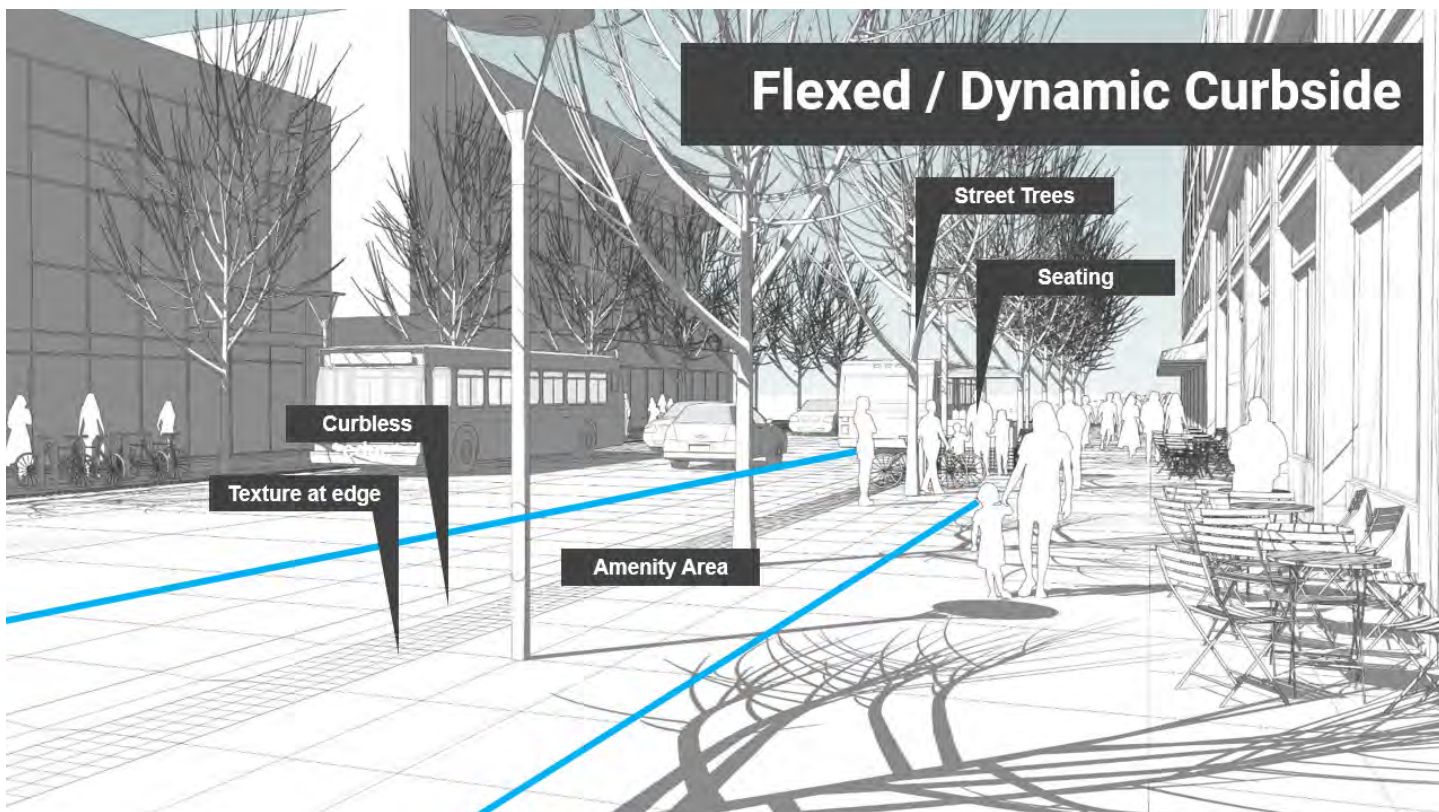
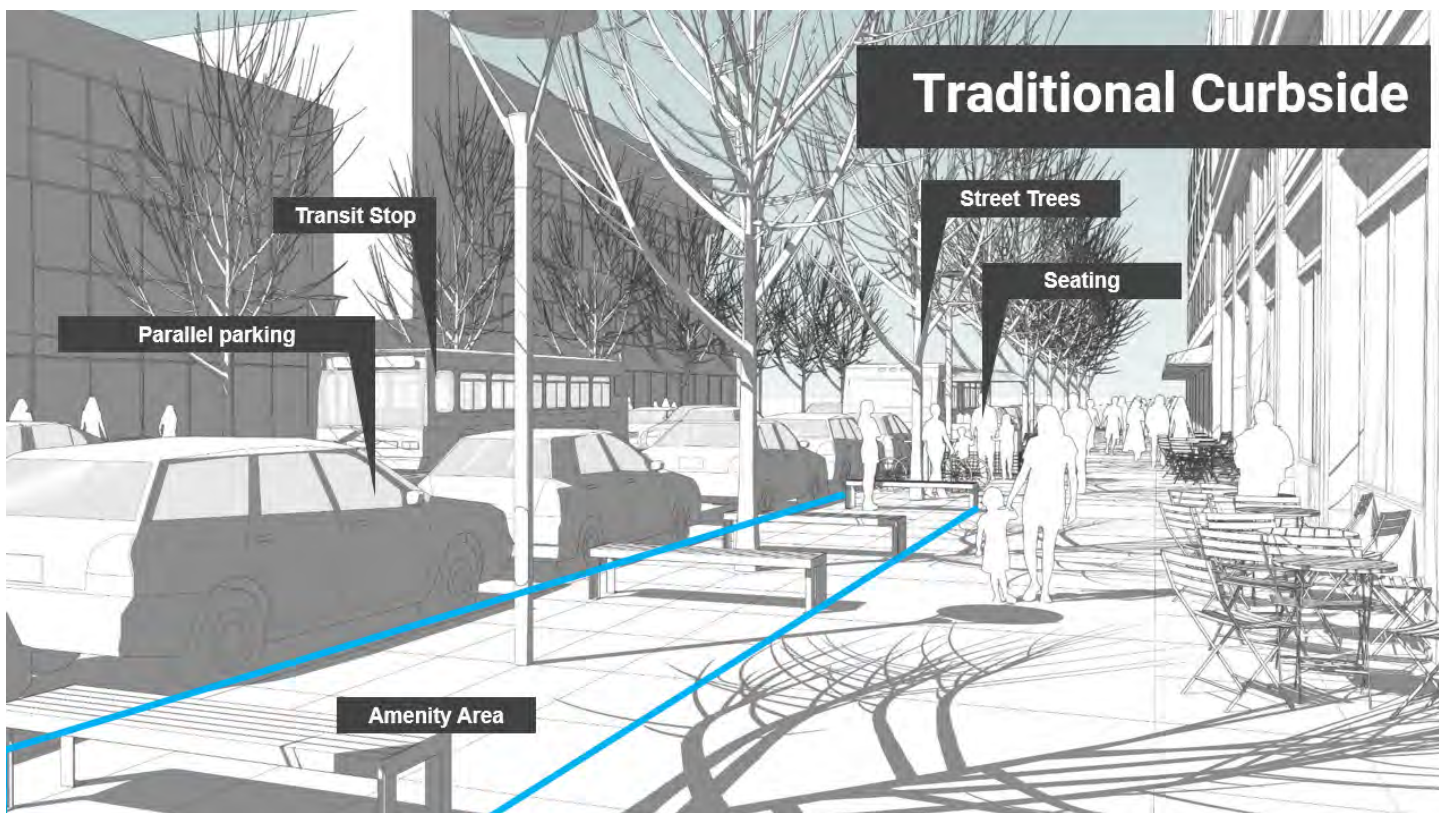
#### Next steps and key questions

The case studies demonstrated that, especially when integrating new technology-centered demands into the mobility network, it is best to plan based on realistic, data-driven anticipations rather than to immediately react to the unexpected. Based on the best practice case studies, the City should ask the following questions:

- Who is involved in the curbside management process? Who is left out and needs to be at the table?
- What do emerging districts of the City, such as Water Street Tampa or neighborhood centers like Hyde Park, look like in 5, 10 years? How will the role of the curb interact with the City's long-term goals and vision?
- Are policies flexible enough to accommodate changes in near-future technology? What is a realistic timeline of planning and transitioning to be future-ready?
- Who/what are the City's current and potential resources to make curbside management work both on paper and on the ground?



## Continued: Downtown Spatial Flexibility + Curbside Management





## Continued: Downtown Spatial Flexibility + Curbside Management





Continued: Downtown Spatial Flexibility + Curbside Management





# Operational & Capacity Review and Improved Municipal Communications

Category	Administrative Capacity
Location	Study Area and City of Lowell
Origin	City of Lowell Plan Facilitators
Budget	Low Budget (< \$50,000) Assuming changes are initiated by City Staff, would be more if an outside consultant is hired
Timeframe	Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	Medium Risk Requires support from senior leadership and elected officials
Key Performance Indicators	Improved internal and external communication Increased responsiveness to citizen/business owner requests Increased interdepartmental coordination Facilitated customer service Fewer citizen/business owner complaints
Partners & Resources	<p><b>Partners</b> City Manager City Council Municipal Employee Unions Group Leaders within each Department Local Universities with Public Policy or Governmental Management Programs</p> <p><b>Resources</b> Municipal funding Private Grants Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) Senior Advisor Program International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Technical Assistance</p> <p>The process could be led by internal senior staff, consultants, on a university graduate program such as the Kennedy School at Harvard (potential contacts: Linda Bilmes and Mark Fagan)</p>

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## Continued: Operational & Capacity Review and Improved Municipal Communications

### Diagnostic

The Planning and Development Department has identified the need to enhance the customer experience and capacity relative to residents and business owners who call to seek clarification on rules and regulations surrounding zoning, permitting, compliance, preservation, and other topics. The Department needs a clear communication plan to help refer external questions to the correct section/person within the Department or other City staff, and also improve internal communications.

The Department is requesting guidance and examples of how to better align staff time and responsibilities to meet current needs and streamline services. Multiple unions, representing different staff within the Department, have different union agreements and conditions with the City, creating a challenge for consistent and uniform changes to staffing responsibilities. One area of immediate concern is a lack of understanding and lack of information regarding the Historic District and how the Historic Commission and staff disseminate information.

### Action Items

**Optimize Staffing:** Review organizational chart and job descriptions to ensure activities are in line with departmental responsibilities and workload.

**Revise Website:** Analyze and modify the Department's information on the City website to make it more streamlined and user friendly; less click-through pages, less text, more infographics.

**Customer Service:** Select a training program and implement customer service education for all existing and new employees to improve the delivery of information and services to the public, and include a component on internal communication also.

**Communications Plan:** Develop a clear communication plan for both internal and external communication responsibilities. An info-graphic may help communicate who is responsible for answering certain questions or addressing certain topics of concern.

**Multi-lingual Communication:** Perform an analysis of language access obstacles when accessing forms and services, and implement recommended improvements.



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## Continued: Operational & Capacity Review and Improved Municipal Communications

### Process

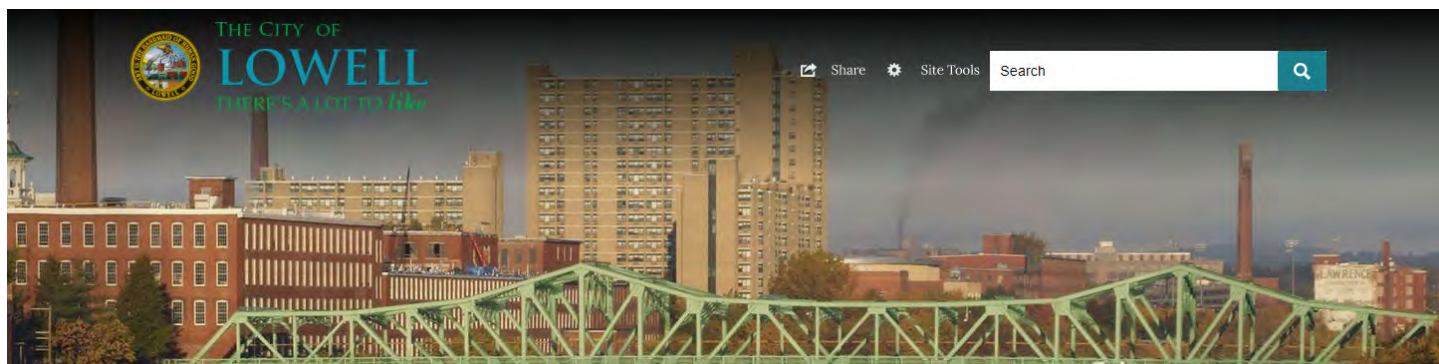
Addressing the action items will require a multi-pronged process and a variety of resources. Proposed initiatives include the following.

- The American Planning Association produced a document entitled the "Principles of Organization for Planning Agencies". The document provides a great overview, recommendations, and a process for assessing how to organize a Planning Department based on a variety of principles and priorities. <https://www.planning.org/pas/reports/report146.htm>
- Engage a local university graduate program to complete a detailed documentation of the Department's current organizational structure, staff responsibilities and recommend appropriate changes. Students should be asked to interview and summarize input from: key Department staff to assess current functions; key City officials who frequently interact with the Department to assess communication effectiveness and coordinate on tasks; and key community stakeholders who frequently interact with the Department, such as attorneys, contractors, non-profits and social service agencies to assess challenges. The interview process should encourage ideas for recommended improvements. As a result of the interview, the final recommendations should include possible organizational restructuring, modification of job descriptions/responsibilities, and examples from other municipalities (in addition to the examples provided below). The final report should also describe the benefits of making the recommended changes, including improved efficiency, communication and possible financial benefits.
- As an alternative to above, the City may wish to engage a consulting firm to complete this evaluation and provide recommendations. This cost of a consultant would be much higher than the cost of engaging a graduate student program.

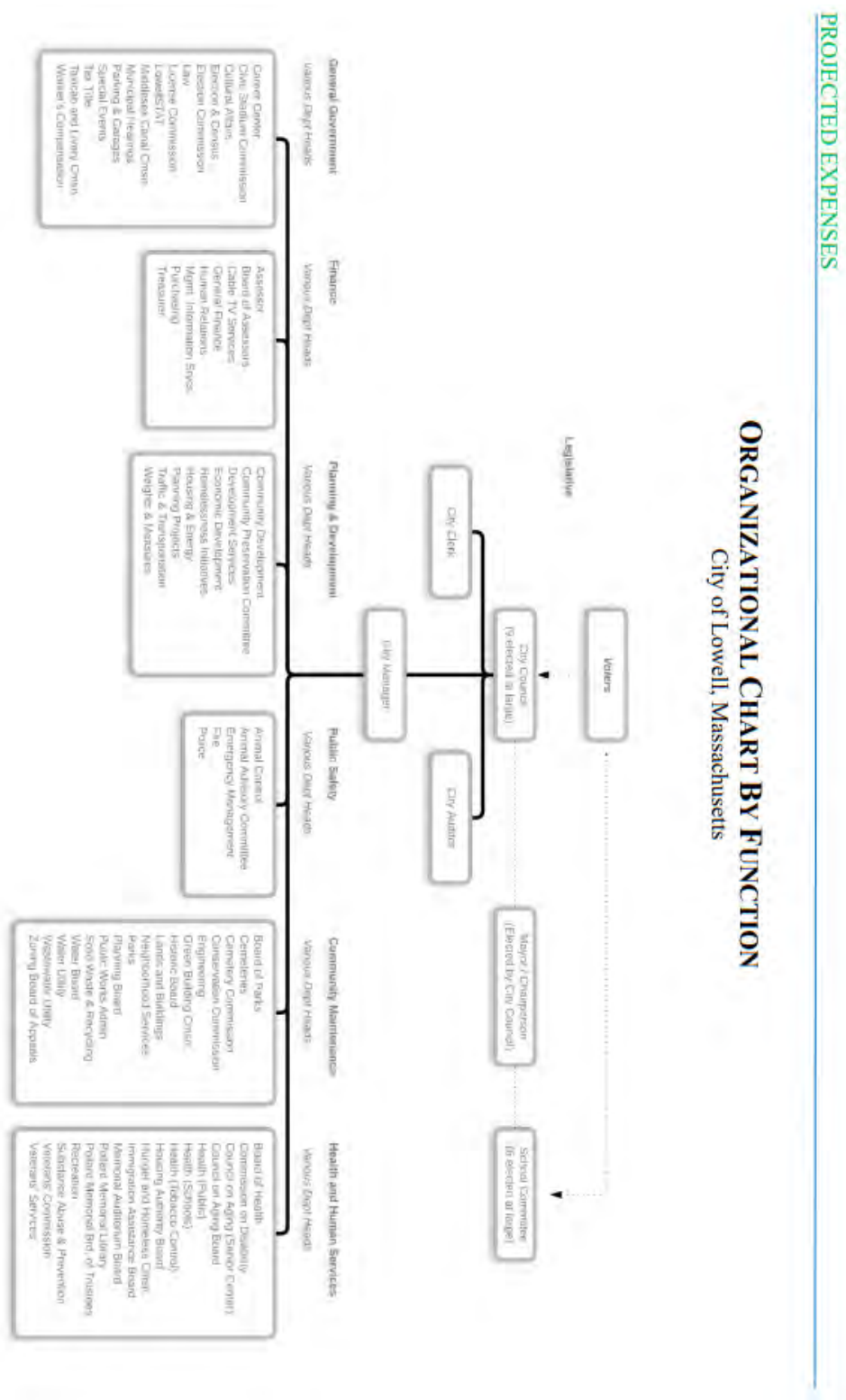
## Continued: Operational & Capacity Review and Improved Municipal Communications

### Process

- Review websites from other municipalities that provide information on the organization of departments that support similar planning and development functions. Examples include:
  - Somerville – The City of Somerville web site is easy to navigate. Similar to Lowell, many functions are the responsibility of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, but the Department's the separate divisions are still listed separately on the web site which helps users easily navigate the web site and find the department or topic of interest. The Somerville web site also has a pop-up box that immediately asks for feedback regarding the user's experience navigating the web site. This helps provide immediate feedback to the City on the effectiveness and functionality of the web site. However, asking for such feedback means someone needs to monitor the comments and be prepared to make changes as appropriate. The web site also has a list of all department staff with their title which help the public locate the person related to a specific question or issue they may need to call about. <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/departments-boards-commissions-and-authorities>
  - Framingham - The City of Framingham has a nice landing page for its planning and Community Development Department. The landing page succinctly describes the Department's responsibilities, with links to additional information and permitting processes. The link to the Historic District Commission proves easily understandable information about their role, responsibilities and regulations. <https://www.framinghamma.gov/2865/Planning-and-Community-Development>

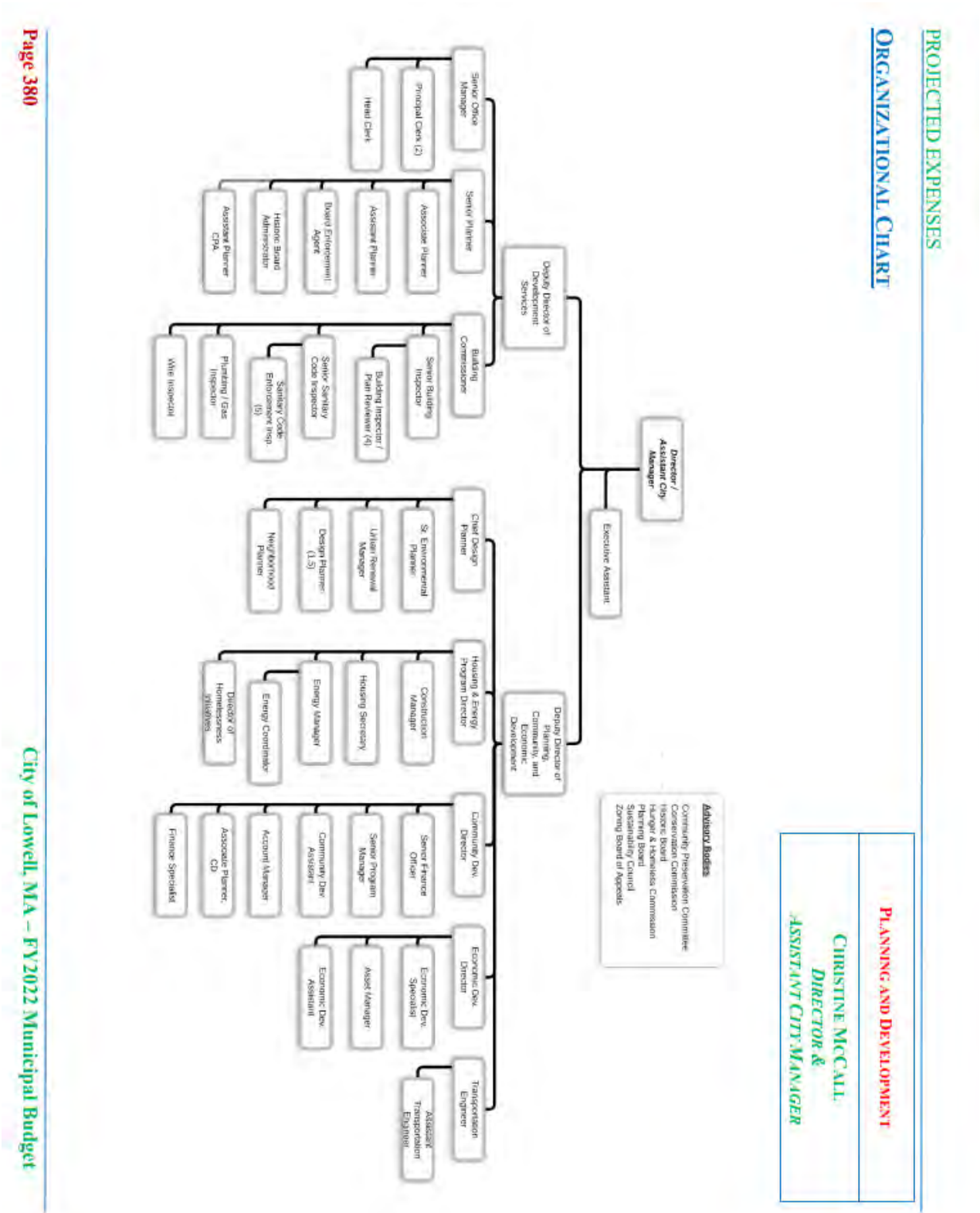


## City of Lowell Department Functions



Continued: Operational & Capacity Review and Improved Municipal Communications

City of Lowell Department of Planning and Development Organizational Chart







# Working with the City Communication + Outreach

Category	Administrative Capacity
Location	City of Lowell
Origin	City of Lowell Nonprofit Leaders Business Community Resident Feedback Plan Facilitators
Budget	Low (< \$50,000)
Timeframe	Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Increased Business Applications Customer Satisfaction Improved Business-City Relationships Reduction in Enforcement Actions Improved Compliance with City Ordinances and Regulations
Partners & Resources	<b>Partners</b> City of Lowell Local Organizations Downtown Business Organization or BID Department of Public Works Parking Department Zoning Division Economic Development  <b>Resources</b> Municipal Budget Private Grants/Donations MassDevelopment

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## Continued: Working with the City Communication + Outreach

### Diagnostic

The COVID 19 Pandemic uprooted almost everything about city life and residents and businesses needed to adjust to a brand new way of doing everything. Businesses had to quickly change their operations, adjust business hours, and in some cases, entirely change their business models. While the City's Economic Development Department works hard to address the concerns of businesses and assist them with any permitting issues, their staff is small and not all businesses know who to call or even what they would need to call the City about.

The City of Lowell used to produce a guidebook outlining the different permits and processes business owners and potential business owners may require. The most recent version of this document appears to be from 2008. This was a printed guidebook the City was able to distribute. While printed communications are likely still part of this strategy, a web-based guidebook would be the most flexible as it would allow for regular updates when changes need to be made.

The City also has a Who To Call Infographic, these materials could be combined into a single document or series of web-based documents to streamline communication within the City and between the City and businesses.

During outreach for this LRRP project, several business owners indicated that they did not know who in the City they should contact for different requests or permits.

### Action Items

Convene a group to re-instate the Working with the City Guidebook. Coordinate within City Hall Departments and with the business community to ensure their common questions are included.

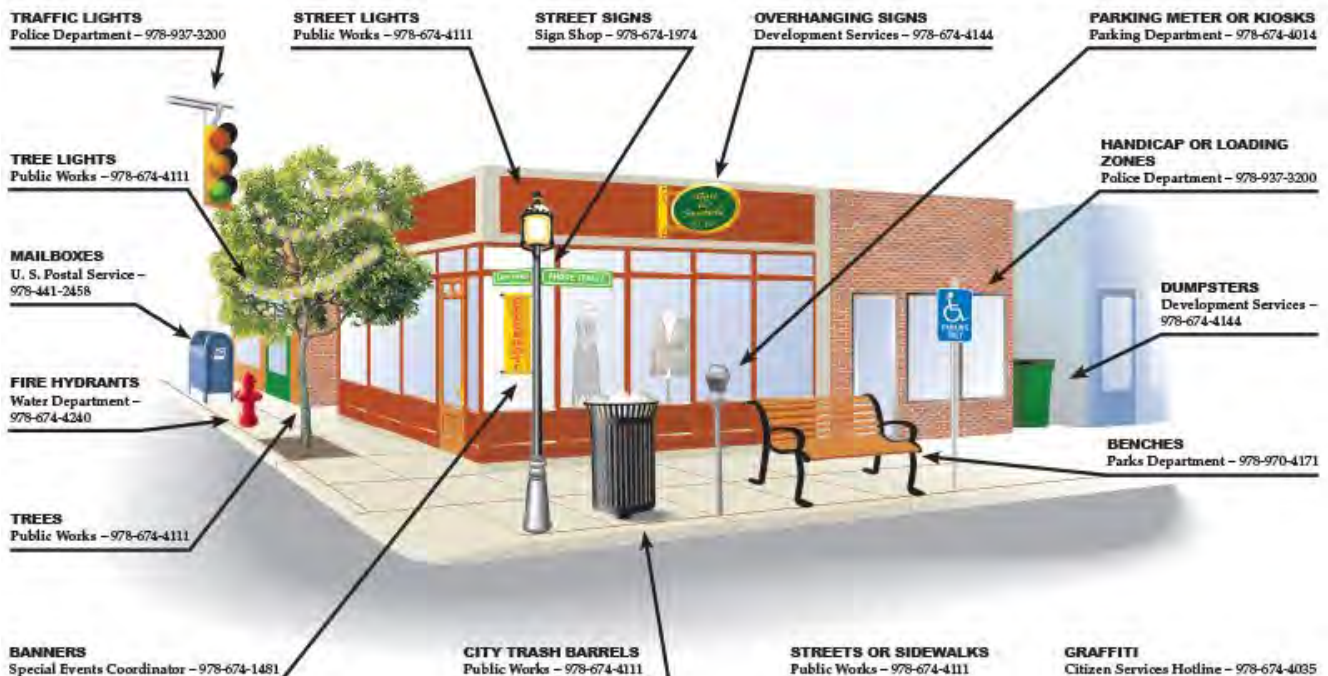
## Continued: Working with the City Communication + Outreach

### Process

Work with City Departments to identify which departments someone starting or operating a business in Lowell would need to interact with. Outline the different permits, approvals, processes, and timelines. As business owners what issue(s) they have had working with the City to ensure the common questions and concerns are addressed.

Develop a web-based platform to host the guidebook and associated infographics. It may be prudent to work with a marketing and communications firm to develop the materials to ensure they are easily understood by the lay person. Whenever possible, images and graphics should be used to reduce language barriers. The City has already completed projects like this (see image below), but should expand these materials to include general doing business with the city information for current and potential business owners.

### See Something — Say Something Who should I call in Lowell if I see a problem with...?



Truancy Reporting  
Police Department  
978-937-3200

MORE RESOURCES  
Other City Issues  
Citizen Services Hotline  
978-674-4035

[www.egovlink.com/lowell/](http://www.egovlink.com/lowell/)

Damaged Bus Shelters  
LRTA  
978-452-6161



### Existing See Something Say Something Materials

## Continued: Working with the City Communication + Outreach

The City's current Doing Business With the City business guide is outdated. It can serve as a resource for the updated version. The new version should be web-based, with a link distributed in hard copy so people can always access the most recent version.

The City of **LOWELL** *Alive. Unique. Inspiring.*

### Welcome to Lowell!

#### A step-by-step guide to getting your business up and running

Thank you for choosing to bring your business here. Please find helpful information in this packet to make you feel at home in Lowell. We hope you will consider supporting other local businesses by visiting our shops and restaurants, and exploring our exciting entertainment venues and cultural institutions. We look forward to working with you and to helping your business grow in Lowell!

#### **City Manager**

Kevin J. Murphy

#### **Mayor**

Edward J. Kennedy

#### **City Council**

Daniel P. Rourke (Vice Chair)  
Corey Belanger (Council)  
Rodney M. Elliott (Council)  
John J. Leahy (Council)  
James D. Leary (Council)  
Rita Mercier (Council)  
James L. Milinazzo (Council)  
William Samaras (Council)



#### BUSINESS CHECKLIST





# Revise and Update Vacant Storefronts Registry

<b>Category</b>	Tenant Mix Administrative Capacity Private Realm Public Realm
<b>Location</b>	Study Area, potentially entire City of Lowell
<b>Origin</b>	Plan Facilitators Assigned Subject Matter Expert
<b>Budget</b>	Small (< \$50,000) to Medium (\$50,000 - \$200,000)  Depending on project scope and scale
<b>Timeframe</b>	Short Term (<5 years)
<b>Risk</b>	Medium Risk  Challenges include revising and changing existing ordinance; administrative capacity to effectively implement the project/program; political will/support; community support
<b>Key Performance Indicators</b>	Reduced Number of Ground Floor Vacancies Increased Leasing Activity New Businesses Opened in Previously-Vacant Spaces Interactions With Online Map Number of Inquires About Vacant Properties on the Registry
<b>Partners &amp; Resources</b>	<b>Partners</b> City of Lowell Department of Planning and Development Building Inspector's Office Inspectional Services Downtown Business Owners Downtown Property Owners Building/Property Managers  <b>Resources</b> Municipal Funding Private Grants or Donations MassDevelopment Programs Downtown Organization or BID

## Continued: Revise and Update Vacant Storefronts Registry

### Diagnostic

Similar to the economic crisis the precipitated the original vacant and foreclosed properties registry, the COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated the issue of vacant storefronts and properties in Downtown Lowell. Businesses have closed, but new businesses have not been as quick to replace them.

Vacant storefronts has long been a challenge in Downtown Lowell. Some property owners have legacy properties, others have unrealistic expectations for rent, and some have indicated that it is more financially feasible for them to leave the properties vacant than to rent the space out. The goal of this project would not be to penalize property owners actively marketing and working to lease their spaces.

### Action Items

Identify project partners and identify the goals of the vacant property registry.

Review the history and implementation of the existing vacant and foreclosed properties registry. Determine if/how objectives were met.

## Vacant Registry + Taxes Best Practices

Cities across the United States have implemented vacant property registries to reduce vacancies and encourage owners to lease their spaces. San Francisco (CA), Cambridge (MA), and New York City (NY) all require commercial property owners whose spaces are vacant to register with the City. In addition to listing the vacant properties, some cities also charge a vacancy tax to further incentivize property owners to lease their buildings. Many of these cities also have dedicated staff assigned to manage and enforce the vacant property registries, help match people looking for commercial leases with appropriate vacant spaces, assist building owners to access grants and other capital to make needed improvements to increase a building or space's desirability, and organize other efforts to activate vacant commercial spaces.

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## *Continued: Revise and Update Vacant Storefronts Registry*

### Process

Convene a working group to address the issue of vacant commercial spaces in Downtown Lowell. Ensure representation from relevant city departments, including (but not limited to): Inspectional Services, Building Commissioner/Inspector, Planning and Development, Mayor's Office, City Council, etc. While the working group may initially be formed by city staff, as the project progresses towards recommendations and specific language, the community should be included. Nonprofit organizations like the Lowell Plan, LDFC, the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, and/or other organizations with significant involvement with the business community and Downtown property owners should be included in the working group.

The working group should be charged with understanding the current regulations, how they have been implemented, and what the impact of the existing vacant and foreclosed properties registry has been. In addition to understanding the status quo in Lowell, the working group should research best practices, find out what other communities (across the United States) have implemented, and identify specific goals for the revised vacant storefronts registry.

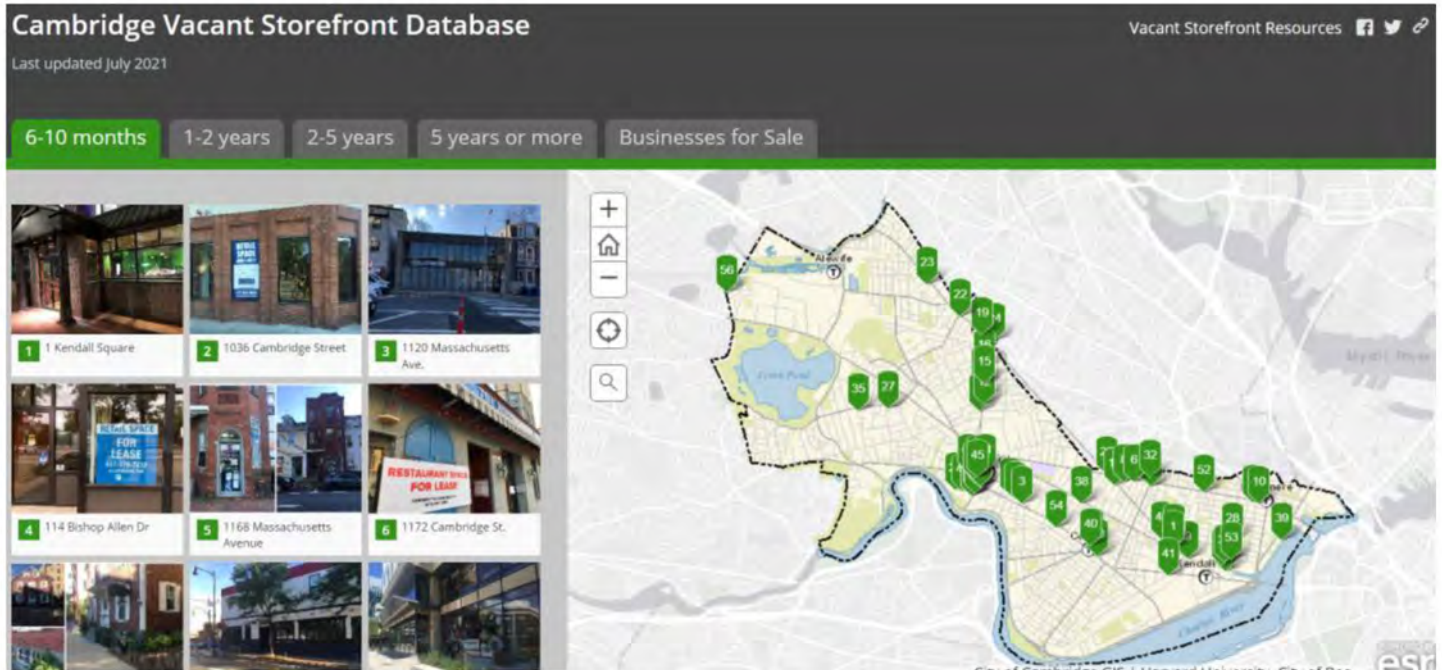
It may be useful for the working group to secure funding to support their work. Funding to support the vacant storefronts registry program revision could be included in the City's annual budget or grants/donations may be sought. Using an outside consultant to support this work could make the process more efficient and would bring significant outside knowledge to the process.

The working group should review best practices and identify several options for the Lowell community to evaluate. Public outreach and engagement should be undertaken to gauge the public's support of the working group's identified goals and proposed actions. Outreach should also occur within City Hall and to Downtown partners, businesses, and property owners.

City Council would adopt the revised ordinance and city departments would take responsibility for implementation and enforcement.

## Continued: Revise and Update Vacant Storefronts Registry

*Cambridge, MA has a Vacant Storefront Database that is searchable online and includes a variety of information about the available properties.*



*If the City of Lowell finds that a revised and reinvigorated vacant storefronts registry is not effective enough in reducing the number of vacancies in Downtown Lowell, it could explore a vacancy tax on commercial spaces. New York City implemented a vacant storefront tax.*



New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said he would propose a vacancy tax to prod landlords to lease to small businesses. This storefront at West 94th Street and Broadway, formerly a Blockbuster location, has been vacant since 2010.

Photographer: David 'Dee' Delgado/Bloomberg

### NYC Mayor Pushes Vacant-Storefront Tax to Aid Small Business

Feb. 6, 2020, 12:00 PM

Listen

Facebook LinkedIn Twitter



# Implementation / Next Steps

## Project Action Plan

The Local Rapid Recovery Program gives communities a defined and implementable compilation of projects that have been vetted by the community, as well as a data-driven plan that can alleviate the impacts from COVID-19 pandemic. This report provides detailed information on the budget ranges, timeframe, funding sources, action items, and key processes required to properly execute and implement the project ideas. The project ideas developed through this program serve as opportunities for communities to rapidly implement capital improvements and address administrative and economic development challenges. Municipal departments and planning entities can use the project ideas as a resource for internal or external funding opportunities.

## Obtaining Funding

Considering the vast number of project ideas and differing budget ranges (less than \$50,000 to greater than \$200,000), it can be overwhelming and overly time-consuming for communities to seek assistance and find funding opportunities. The Department of Housing and Community Development provides extensive resources that contain information on existing local, state, and federal grant programs, organized by the diagnostic categories including physical environment, business environment, administrative capacity, and customer base.

The tables on the following pages organize the twenty-nine (29) Downtown Lowell LRRP projects by implementation timeframe (short, medium, or long term) as well as by budget range. Low budget projects are estimated to cost less than \$50,000 to implement; medium budget projects are estimated to cost between \$50,000 and \$200,000 to implement; and high budget projects are estimated to cost more than \$200,000 to implement. Organizing projects by potential budget and timeframe can act as a resource for communities to assess projects that could be implemented quickly and cheaply, and which projects should be addressed at a later date due to funding, political, or administrative setbacks.

## DOWNTOWN LOWELL LRRP PROJECT IDEA LIST

Project Idea	Description	Timeline	Budget
<b>Coordinated Wayfinding Program</b>	<p>There are a lot of signs in Downtown Lowell with a variety of designs, colors, and owners. Many of the signs are aimed towards drivers, but there are pedestrian-scale signs posted by several different organizations. Some signs are in disrepair and the number of different signing programs can be confusing to people unfamiliar with Downtown Lowell. This project proposes a single, consistent signage and wayfinding program that intercepts visitors, directs visitors to parking and other destinations, and provides walking distances and times so pedestrians can more easily navigate Downtown Lowell. This program would consolidate existing wayfinding in Downtown to develop a coordinated and easily identifiable aesthetic.</p> <p>Expressive, appropriate, and strategic signage solutions are a valuable addition to the community. Distinctive wayfinding and signage can make a city more user-friendly to visitors, residents, and local employees. Implementing an innovative civic brand strategy can also create a more dynamic sense of place.</p>	Short Term (< 5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000)
<b>Downtown Block Party</b>	Create a pilot block party program that unites City departments, Historic Board, Downtown businesses and residents, and Downtown neighborhood associations while daylighting vacant storefronts and empty areas. Develop a set of goals for the block party and build a list of activities, volunteers, and storefronts to involve.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000)
<b>Beautification Task Force</b>	<p>Develop a team that provides general cleaning, trash pickup, maintenance, and ambassador services for key Downtown streets and parks. Explore programs with both paid and volunteer staff.</p> <p>In addition to general cleaning, litter removal, and trash collection, these ambassadors will provide additional eyes on the street, discouraging inappropriate behavior, and maintain public landscaping.</p>	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000) to Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) depending on program structure
<b>Revitalize &amp; Activate Downtown Parks/ Public Spaces</b>	Activate underutilized public facilities such as Kerouac Park for local events, such as farmers markets, concerts, movies, and outdoor dining.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000) to High Budget (< \$200,000) depending on program structure
<b>Activate McDermott Way</b>	Work with local artists to add murals and art to McDermott Way. Attract people to underutilized spaces and connect Paige Street to Merrimack Street and adjacent parking facilities by adding signage, lighting, and art.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000) to Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) depending on program structure

## DOWNTOWN LOWELL LRRP PROJECT IDEA LIST

Project Idea	Description	Timeline	Budget
<b>Permanent Parklets</b>	Develop a process to evaluate and adjust (as necessary) temporary parklets and other popups to convert these spaces into permanent public improvements.	Short Term ( 5 years)	Low Budget ( \$50,000) to Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) depending on program structure
<b>Interactive Storefronts</b>	Reduce window clutter by engaging local artists and downtown businesses to implement temporary arts on storefront windows.	Short Term ( 5 years)	Low Budget ( \$50,000)
<b>Enhanced and Permanent Streatery Program</b>	Provide resources for Downtown businesses to solicit outdoor dining infrastructure, while also reducing zoning barriers to implement outdoor dining on sidewalks, alleys, and roadways.	Short Term ( 5 years)	Low Budget ( \$50,000)
<b>Outreach to Unsheltered Individuals</b>	Improving outreach to unsheltered individuals will enable more people to access the services, care, and support they need.	Short Term ( 5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000)
<b>Improved Lighting Structures</b>	Identify locations in Downtown Lowell that require additional lighting fixtures that are compliant with Historic Board design guidelines/standards and provide safety for those accessing residences, parking facilities, places of employment, and businesses after dark.	Short Term ( 5 years)	Low Budget ( \$50,000)
<b>Public Restrooms/ Facilities Improvements</b>	Provide public facilities in Downtown to prevent loitering in front of Downtown storefronts and provide public/free amenities for Downtown visitors.	Short Term ( 5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) to High Budget ( \$200,000) depending on program structure

## DOWNTOWN LOWELL LRRP PROJECT IDEA LIST

Project Idea	Description	Timeline	Budget
<b>Create a Business Improvement District (BID) Downtown Business Organization</b>	<p>Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are special assessment districts in which property owners vote to initiate, manage, and finance supplemental services or enhancements above and beyond the baseline of services already provided by their local city. Assessments are collected and expended within the district for a range of services and/or programs, including: marketing and public relations, improving the downtown marketplace or city center, capital improvements, public safety enhancements, special events. A BID creates a stable local management structure that provides a sustainable funding source for the revitalization and long-term maintenance of downtowns and city centers. The goal of a BID is to improve a specific commercial area by attracting customers, clients, shoppers, and other businesses. BIDs are authorized by M.G.L. Chapter 4000 and must be a contiguous geographic area in which at least 75% of the land is zoned or used for commercial, retail, industrial, or mixed uses.</p> <p>If a BID is not desired or feasible at this time, it may be possible to create a different type of downtown organization. While less robust, volunteers or existing organizations can take on some of the activities a BID typically provides.</p>	Short Term (< 5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000)
<b>Financial Empowerment Center</b>	<p>The development of a Financial Empowerment Center would help increase financial literacy, provide better access to secure banking, and provide increased ability to develop personal and business financing for Downtown Lowell residents and businesses. Improving the financial health of Lowell residents will support the Downtown business economy because more stable finances allow residents to better recover from job losses or other emergencies and have more capital available to spend at local business.</p> <p>The Lowell Development &amp; Financial Corporation has already begun exploring programs and partnerships to offer these services, so this project dovetails perfectly with activities already underway in the city.</p>	Short Term (< 5 years)	High Budget (< \$200,000)



## DOWNTOWN LOWELL LRRP PROJECT IDEA LIST

Project Idea	Description	Timeline	Budget
<b>Regional Entrepreneurial Network</b>	<p>Develop a technical assistance program that will provide a "toolkit" or set of resources that will give developers and business owners resources to enhance branding, marketing efforts, financial management, and funding sources for capital and programmatic solutions.</p> <p>Many of the businesses in Downtown Lowell are locally-owned small businesses. More than three-quarters of businesses who responded to the LRRP survey indicated that they had twenty or fewer employees. Lowell has long been known as an immigrant community with many first-time business owners who may be unfamiliar with permitting and/or accessing capital. By creating an regional entrepreneurial network (similar to the Greater Rochester's Nexus i90), this project aims to provide the support that allows small, entrepreneurial enterprises to succeed. The SourceLink platform allows organizations to build networks that connect entrepreneurs with resources and funding, providing an online space for entrepreneurs to learn about opportunities, connect with similar businesses and/or suppliers, and explain the process of opening a business or microenterprise. In addition to the online platform, the Regional Entrepreneurial Network should establish training programs, support programs, and other ways to connect entrepreneurs with one another, the City, and the larger business community. In Rochester, the Regional Entrepreneurial Network has also committed to conducting a biennial small business climate and needs assessment survey.</p>	Short Term (< 5 years)	High Budget (< \$200,000)
<b>Integrated Business &amp; City Coordination</b>	Designate a city employee to act as primary liaison between businesses, City Boards and Departments, Lowell Downtown Neighborhood Association, Lowell Development & Finance Corporation, Lowell Plan, the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, and any future BID or district management entity.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000)
<b>Facade Improvement Program</b>	Create a local facade improvement program with federal grants to work with local artists and businesses to revitalize storefronts, windows, and signage. Work with the Downtown Neighborhood Association, Zoning Department, and Historic Board to develop updated design guidelines for facades, signage, and windows (particularly in ground floor storefronts).	Short Term (< 5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) to High Budget (< \$200,000) depending on program structure
<b>Create a Vacant Storefront Program</b>	<p>Pilot a program to activate vacant storefronts with temporary/pop-up installations.</p> <p>Vacant first-floor commercial spaces is an ongoing challenge in Downtown Lowell a vacant storefront program could bring needed commercial and cultural activities to Downtown Lowell while reducing vacancies.</p>	Short Term (< 5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000)
<b>Historic Board &amp; Downtown Integration</b>	Better educate the public on Historic Board regulations, processes, and requirements. Work with the Historic Board to streamline storefront design guidelines and provide flexibility for requirements for facades, awnings, windows, signage, etc.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000)

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<b>Rapid Website Development &amp; Digital Marketing for Downtown Businesses</b>	Work with Downtown businesses (with a particular effort to engage small and minority/women owned businesses) to assist with development of online presence through websites, creation of online ordering/ecommerce integration, and monitoring of website traffic.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000) to Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) Depending on program structure
<b>Downtown Zoning Design Guideline Study</b>	Develop a study that analyzes Lowell's current zoning provisions related to flexible, mixed-use and urban development. This study should focus on restructuring zoning & design guidelines for reconstructions, renovations, infill, and new development to create opportunities for more flexible development, create opportunities for upper-story residential uses, and encourage developers to build in Downtown Lowell	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000) to Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) Depending on program structure
<b>Pedestrian Safety &amp; Walkability Improvements</b>	Create a more pedestrian-oriented environment by installing improved crosswalks, sidewalks, pedestrian signage, ADA-compliant curb ramps, crossing islands, and curb extensions to make walking safer within Downtown and to better connect visitors and residents to their homes, parking garages, businesses, and offices.	Medium Term (5 - 10 years)	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) to High budget (< \$100,000) Depending on program structure
<b>"Open Paige Street" Open Streets Concept</b>	Pilot an open street concept for Paige Street that provides outdoor dining spaces, benches, planters, and art installations to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment in Downtown and around public spaces such as Kerouac Park.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000)
<b>Downtown Spatial Flexibility + Curbside Management</b>	This project grew from a business owner suggestion to create "floating" or temporary loading docks throughout Downtown to assist businesses receiving deliveries (particularly as some areas have been converted to streateries for nearby restaurants). With this in mind, this project considers many COVID and non-COVID related changes to curbside demand and management including services like Uber and Lyft, increased transit use, outdoor dining, and other demands for public right-of-ways previously dominated by automobiles.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000)
<b>Operational &amp; Capacity Review and Improved Municipal Communication</b>	Review municipal staffing, organizational structure, management, and responsibilities to determine which departments require additional staffing, develop a long-term plan to address staffing shortages and distribution of responsibilities, particularly related to social services and Downtown development. Streamline and modernize the ways in which City Departments and staff communicate with the public.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000)

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<b>Apply for MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) Program</b>	The TDI Program supports locally-nominated strategic development districts in the Commonwealth's Gateway Cities. It is a comprehensive place-based accelerator designed to implement locally-initiated strategic revitalization activities and catalyze community co-investment. The program is based on local collaborative partnerships, a district focus, and enhanced community engagement. TDI Fellows are assigned to districts to provide dedicated support connected into a larger coalition of resources and support.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000)
<b>Increase Language Capacity at City Hall</b>	Many languages are spoken in Lowell and the City has made resources available in multiple languages, but City Hall is not well-equipped to handle phone calls or visits from residents who speak a language other than English. Some cities have hired (or contracted with) in-house translators to have language support available to non-English speakers in City Hall. Some cities who have implemented these programs have partnered with local hospitals (who typically have fairly robust translation services) or modeled their City Hall programs after hospital programs.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000)
<b>Increase Residential Density</b>	Review and update zoning in Downtown Lowell to encourage the conversion of upper-stories to residential uses. Design guidelines and other development incentives should also be explored. The goal is to create a balance of affordable and market rate housing and homeownership and rental opportunities.	Medium Term (5 - 10 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000) to Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) Depending on program structure
<b>Working with the City Communication + Outreach</b>	Regularly update and promote the Business Checklist Guide last published in 2008. The new version should include both dated printed materials and web-based information in a format that is easy-to-update. These documents will outline everything potential and current businesses owners/operators would need to know about working with the City, from first consultations about business ideas through permit timelines and compliance... and everything in between.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000)
<b>Revise and Update Vacant Storefronts Registry</b>	The City of Lowell instituted a vacant and foreclosed property registry in 2008, but it does not seem to have had the impact of reducing vacancies. The existing ordinance should be revised and revisited. The process would focus first on the goal of the vacant and foreclosed property registry and craft revisions catered specifically to achieving the stated goals. Properties should be mapped and readily available to the public so people know which properties are available. The City could explore a vacancy tax if the registry alone does not decrease vacancies. The program should be evaluated and revised, as necessary, at least biannually. In addition to revising the ordinance and regulations, this project should explore the other reasons why the ordinance has not had the intended impact. Some of these reasons could be a lack of staff available for follow-up and enforcement, lack of political will, and or unclear process.	Short Term (< 5 years)	Low Budget (< \$50,000) to Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) Depending on program structure