



# Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

**Methuen**

# Acknowledgments



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



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

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

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

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The Planning Team would also like to thank the following individuals for participating in interviews and/or site walks during the planning process:

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Methuen Historical Society	Joy Stackelin Karpowicz, Board Member
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Valley Towing and East End Auto	Maureen Doherty & Rhonda Parrino

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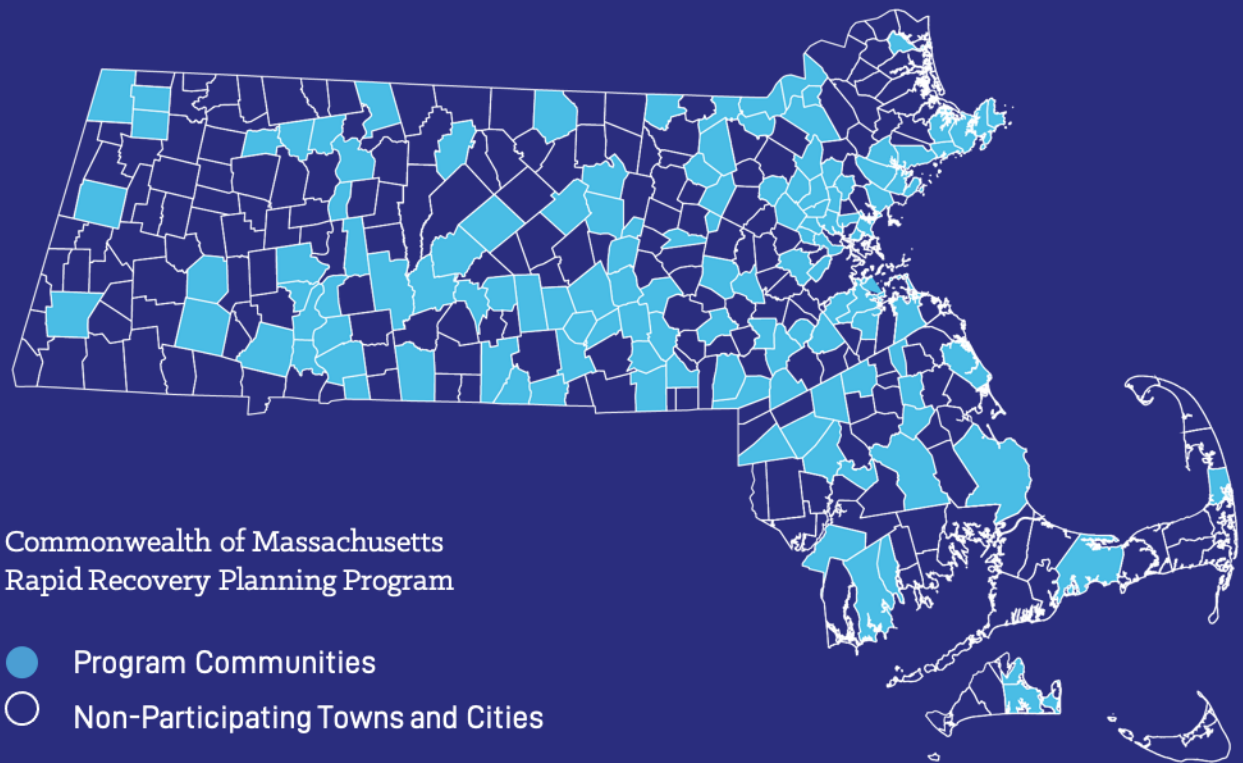
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## 125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



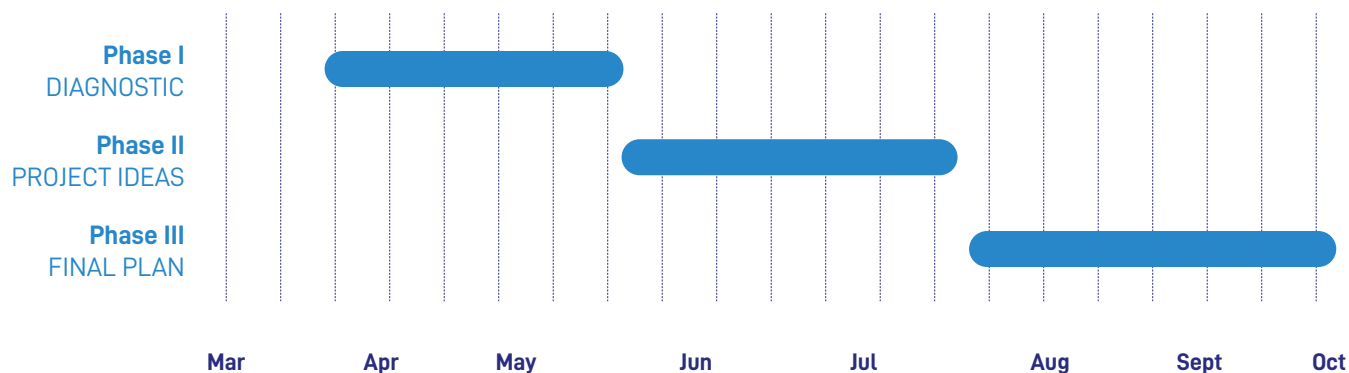
# Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

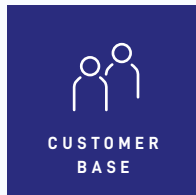
Each Rapid Recovery Plan was developed across three phases between February-August 2021. Phase 1 - Diagnostic, Phase 2- Project Recommendations, Phase 3 - Plan.



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

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

## Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



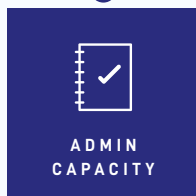
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue & Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

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## Executive Summary



# Executive Summary

## An Underutilized Corridor Rich in History

Merrimack Street is an important regional connector and has served that purpose for centuries. Historic buildings, some pre-Revolutionary, have been re-purposed over the years, but remain in their original locations. This area, known as Pleasant Valley or "the Valley," was home to dairy farmers who took in piecework from the Haverhill and Lawrence mills during the winter. Those families and some of the farms remain, but the scattered small grocery stores have been replaced with other businesses and the farms with housing. Pleasant Valley's more recent history of absorbing immigrant families is reflected in some of its businesses, including the restaurants scattered along the corridor.

Merrimack Street is the spine of an area bordered by the Merrimack River on one side and I-495 on the other. It enters the Valley as Route 113 and exits as Route 110 (over I-495), linking to the entrance to I-495 and exit 104 from I-495. Route 113 turns west at Pleasant Valley Street and continues as Pleasant Valley Street out of the corridor, crossing over I-495. Route 113 connects to Route 213, which further connects to both I-495 and I-93. The intersection of Merrimack Street and Pleasant Valley Street includes Ferry Road, but this road no longer leads directly to the Merrimack River.

The configuration of road and river isolates Merrimack Street and its neighboring residential streets from the rest of Methuen and its neighbors; all neighborhood streets connect eventually to either Merrimack Street or Pleasant Valley Street. This configuration means that everyone has to travel along Merrimack Street and past the businesses along the corridor. Despite the isolation, Merrimack Street is a regional connector with easy access to Haverhill and Lawrence. Traffic congestion is heavy at times, which makes turning onto Merrimack Street from the neighborhoods difficult. Traffic speed is of concern to residents; although the speed is posted at 35 mph, complaints about the speed were frequent during community interactions.

The right-of-way conditions also contribute to the dominance of the vehicle at the expense of the pedestrian. Sidewalks are narrow in places, in disrepair in others, and are made of various materials. There are few crosswalks, and only one with a ramp. Lighting is highway-oriented and there are few street trees and no public benches. Although Merrimack Valley Regional Transit runs a bus line along the corridor, all stops are flag stops with no official bus stop or shelter. Finally, the corridor has neither bike lanes nor bike storage; bicyclists must use the shoulder or, as one child was observed doing, ride on the already narrow sidewalk.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of outdoor activity became increasingly critical as it was identified as the safest way for people to interact. COVID-19 is an airborne virus that spreads less easily outdoors. In addition, people who had specific physical ailments, such as obesity and diabetes, were more likely to suffer from severe complications. Asthma, which can be exacerbated by poor air quality in areas of heavy travel, has been indicated as a concern for COVID-19 infections and results; however, the evidence is inconclusive.

This corridor does not support the outdoor activities – walking, biking, dining, and shopping – that became popular during the pandemic as methods for engaging in social and business activity at lower risk. The businesses along the corridor are primarily located in small shopping plazas, although a few businesses control their entire site. With the exception of one business, outdoor dining was not an attractive option, either because of the proximity to the street or the need to retain all parking for customers. Merrimack Street is under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, which does not allow on-street parking.



Map of LRRP Area  
Source: Innes Associates, ESRI, MassGIS

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As a result, the corridor's small businesses, like small businesses throughout Massachusetts, suffered negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. These impacts include a reduction in revenue, customers, and hours. Some businesses reported layoffs. Available traffic data suggests a drop of over 2,000 vehicle trips per day – a significant number for a corridor dependent upon customers who arrive by car. However, residents expressed concerns about walking to the nearby businesses; one family noted that their son is not allowed to ride his bike to a friend a few streets over because he would have to ride on Merrimack Street.

The corridor's businesses are diverse, and include restaurants, personal and professional services, auto sales, and agriculture. One person noted that the businesses do not reflect the diversity of the residential areas and few provide neighborhood goods and services. Some industries were harder hit than others; for example, one business owner mentioned that the dry cleaner was negatively impacted and one of the farms reported that they lost a growing season for a specialty crop when a local retailer canceled their order. Restaurants were able to shift to takeout, however, only one shifted to outdoor dining. Although there is no data on auto sales within the corridor, nationally there has been a significant demand for used cars.

The recovery from the pandemic has taken longer than expected; the Delta variant has made some people wary of eating or shopping indoors. Labor shortages have impacted businesses; one owner suggested having a jobs fair for local businesses. Part of the recovery effort should be focused on increasing visibility for the businesses in terms of the physical presence on the corridor and their online presence to continue to expand the regional customer base. Existing signage, façades, and site conditions are fair to poor, with some exceptions. Customers clearly know the anchors: Borrelli's Italian Deli and Piro's Bakery & Pizzeria were frequently mentioned as regional draws. Other businesses, set back from the road, are less easily identifiable.

At the beginning of the process, City staff identified a series of goals for the planning process to evaluate. The original goals, below, have been incorporated into the recommendations for this plan; other actions have been added as a result of public input and evaluation of best practices to address some of the challenges discovered during this process.

The City's **goals** for the planning process were stated at the beginning of the project and are as follows:

- Improve business visibility through upgrades to storefront façades and sidewalks.
- Install traffic calming measures and equipment.
- Install new signalized sidewalks.
- Create wayfinding signage to identify businesses.
- Connect businesses with pedestrian pathways (sidewalks, crosswalks, ADA ramps, and shared pathways).
- Increase green space, pocket parks, and sidewalk furniture.
- Create a neighborhood business association and business directory for this area.

The evaluation of existing conditions (the diagnostic stage of this planning process) and public engagement sought to confirm the needs suggested by the City's goals and establish other actions to help address the negative impacts felt by the corridor businesses and exacerbated by existing conditions.



The diagnostic process included two site walks, a survey of businesses, and research. The key findings from this process are grouped into four categories: customer base, physical environment, business environment, and administrative capacity. For Methuen, the four key findings are as follows:



Customers for corridor businesses are drawn from the region, not just nearby residents.



The condition of the public realm is a deterrent to local pedestrians and bicyclists. Conditions within the private realm should be updated.



Businesses are diversified. Synergies (restaurants, auto sales) exist but are not leveraged.



The businesses in the corridor do not have either an organization or City economic development liaison focused on their needs.

These findings are supported by input from a public site walk (June 3, 2021) and a virtual public meeting (July 19, 2021). Key issues discussed included traffic speed, lack of signalized crosswalks, maintenance of weeds and overgrown shrubs, cars overhanging the sidewalks from on-site parking, and the lack of trees to shade the sidewalks.

Individual businesses were contacted by email with few responses. A business-only meeting took place on September 15, 2021. Additional concerns included adding parking on side streets as businesses have limited space; developing a sign ordinance, including illuminated signs; incorporating wayfinding from The Loop to the corridor; connecting The Loop to the corridor with a complete streets project; shared marketing/branding with Methuen's downtown; adding residential density to the corridor; and using raised planters to soften the edges between parking and sidewalks instead of trees, which have had a hard time surviving without damage along the corridor.

In addition, Councilor Eunice Zeigler used a Google Forms to collect comments from constituents, which she forwarded for consideration during this planning process.

### Pleasant Valley Small Business Recovery Plan

**Sept. 15, 2021 from 9-10am**

Join us for the rollout of the plan that will highlight 3 key strategies to help the small businesses in The Valley recover from the Pandemic Crisis:

- Streetscape Improvements
- Sign and Façade Improvement
- Branding and Marketing Strategies

Your presence, participation, feedback and input are vital for the success of this plan!

Mayor Neil Perry has announced that the City of Methuen is participating in the LRAP Program.

Valley Small Business Owners and other stakeholders have responded to the Survey and participated in the Pleasant Valley Walking Tour. The Project Team has consulted with civil engineers, landscape architects and marketing experts and have arrived at a plan of recommended activities designed to enhance business activity and customer experience while shopping in The Valley.

Recommendations include traffic calming measures such as travel lane restrictions and new signalized crosswalks; widened sidewalks with improved landscaping that will increase customer safety and satisfaction; and wayfinding signage and a façade improvement program that will transform the business corridor into a "Top Ten" regional shopping destination.

**Meet us in Borelli's Parking Lot!**

For more information:  
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Coffee from Dunkin' Donuts

**dhcd**  
 Massachusetts  
 RAPID RECOVERY PLANS

## Summary of Actions for Recovery

**Recovery for the Merrimack Street Corridor requires physical improvements in both the and a redefined identity that attracts both local and regional customers and turns pass-through drivers into customers.**

This plan recommends a series of actions the City, with partners, can take to address the needs of the Merrimack Street Corridor/Pleasant Valley. In the short-term, these actions will focus on supporting the businesses as they recover from the negative impacts of the pandemic. Longer-term actions will address physical conditions that detracted from the businesses ability to operate successfully during the pandemic.

The categories with recommendations specific to Methuen are as follows: Admin Capacity, Public Realm, Private Realm, Revenue & Sales, Tenant Mix, and Cultural/Arts. While all actions are important, immediate priorities for City staff are in **bold** text.



### ADMIN CAPACITY

1. **Hire a City business liaison.** (page 25)
2. Support corridor businesses in forming a business-led organization to better collaborate on issues important to the corridor. (page 27)
3. Update the sign code to address the needs of corridor businesses. (page 31)
4. Update zoning to promote outdoor dining and retail display. (page 35)



### PUBLIC REALM

5. **Work with MassDOT to reconfigure Merrimack Street for pedestrian and bicyclist safety.** (page 39)
6. Incorporate local history and public art into a wayfinding program to promote the identity of the corridors. (page 45)



### PRIVATE REALM

7. **Develop a façade and site improvement program to address outdated signage, façades, and sites.** (page 50)
8. Establish design guidelines for the corridor. (page 55)



### REVENUE & SALES

9. Develop an integrated online marketing strategy tied to corridor identity based on its history and current business clusters. (page 61)



### TENANT MIX

10. Recruit appropriate tenants who will complement existing businesses for vacant spaces. (page 70)



### CULTURAL/ARTS

11. Increase cultural events in the corridor to draw local and regional customers. (page 73)



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## Diagnostic

# Key Findings



## Customers are regional.

### **CUSTOMERS FOR CORRIDOR BUSINESSES ARE DRAWN FROM THE REGION, NOT JUST THE NEARBY RESIDENTS.**

Pre-pandemic, the daily traffic count for Merrimack Street was over 17,600 vehicles per day; post-pandemic, the count had drop to just over 15,400. Many of these drivers are on their way somewhere else; Merrimack Street is an important regional connector. While businesses along the corridor clearly draw from beyond Methuen's borders, there appears to be additional opportunities to convert the pass-through drivers to customers.



## Current conditions are a deterrent to local pedestrians and bicyclists.

### **THE CONDITION OF THE PUBLIC REALM IS A DETERRENT TO LOCAL PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLISTS. CONDITIONS WITHIN THE PRIVATE REALM SHOULD BE UPDATED.**

Many people mentioned the speed of the traffic, and how unsafe it felt to either cross Merrimack Street as a pedestrian or turn onto Merrimack Street from a side street. There are no signalized intersections and few crosswalks along the length of the corridor.

Sidewalks are narrow and, in places, paved with several different materials. One participant in the site walk noted that it was near impossible to use a stroller on the sidewalks given the change in materials, the narrowness of the sidewalk, and the lack of ramps at a corner curb or crosswalk. In other areas, the sidewalk is either not differentiated from the parking or cars overhang the sidewalk, making passage difficult.

Sign, façade, and site conditions are either oriented toward vehicles, less visible, or out-of-date. Some site conditions, such as wide curb cuts and cars overhanging the sidewalks, are dangerous. In the business survey, the lowest satisfaction ratings were for the condition of public spaces, streets and sidewalks; next lowest was the condition of private buildings, storefronts, and signs.



## Businesses are diversified and isolated.

### **BUSINESSES ARE DIVERSIFIED AND ISOLATED. SYNERGIES (RESTAURANTS, AUTO SALES) EXIST BUT ARE NOT LEVERAGED.**

Just over 7,700 people live within a mile of the center of the corridor, but only 113 people work in the area. These employees work in a diverse business environment. Businesses are located in commercial plazas, commercial buildings, and houses that have been converted into commercial structures. Residences are interspersed among the businesses, changing the overall feel of the corridor.

Piro's Bakery & Pizzeria and Borrelli's Italian Deli are known as regional draws, and the corridor contains many other restaurants with a wide variety of dining types. Pleasant Valley Gardens is also known outside the corridor, and hosts an annual Farm-to-Table event (it was canceled in 2020). Merrimack Street is home to three used car dealers and a golf cart dealer; these businesses are also clearly regional draws.

The various restaurants and Pleasant Valley Gardens have a clear food-related theme that could be marketed to draw more people to the region. The three used auto businesses and the used auto parts dealer, with some upgrades to their sites, could also develop a joint marketing program, providing potential customers with options to search for a variety of vehicles in one location. For two of the dealers, who may have related owners or managers, the websites are more sophisticated than the physical sites.



## The City has no downtown organization overseeing recovery efforts

### **THE BUSINESSES IN THE CORRIDOR DO NOT HAVE EITHER AN ORGANIZATION OR CITY STAFF LIAISON FOCUSED ON THEIR NEEDS.**

City Planning staff, Kathleen Colwell, Director of the Planning Division, and Brian Keating, Senior Planner, have been actively engaged in this process as have two City Councilors, Eunice Zeigler and Jessica Finocchiaro, both of whom attended the site walk and the online meeting. Steven Saba, the Council Chair, who also attended the online meeting, and Councilor Zeigler both represent the area; Councilor Finocchiaro is a Councilor-at-Large but has a clear interest in engaging the area.

However, City staff, although committed to the successful implementation of the recommendations in this report, do not have the time available to drive the actions needed for implementation. The City should consider hiring a staff member who can focus on COVID-19 recovery, including the administration of the ARPA funding. Additional capacity could provide the liaison roles with MassDOT and the corridor businesses to address two major goals, the improvements to Merrimack Street and the organization of corridor businesses.



## Highlights from the Physical Environment

### ACCESS TO THE AREA

The Merrimack Street Corridor is isolated from the rest of Methuen and its neighbors. The Merrimack River separates the area from Haverhill to the north and east and North Andover to the east. Within the region, Route 495 crosses the Merrimack River three times and is the only river crossing between Lawrence (Union Street) and Haverhill (Route 125).

To the south and west, the Merrimack Street Corridor is isolated by I-495, which curves over the river, meets Route 213, which also connects to I-93, and curves back to the river.

Merrimack Street is Route 113 as it enters the area from the north (under I-495) and changes to Route 110 at the intersection with Pleasant Valley Street.

Pleasant Valley Street becomes Route 113 and continues west (over I-495) to the rest of Methuen, connecting to Route 213.

Merrimack Street, now Route 110, continues southwest and becomes East Street after the entrances/exits to I-495. All neighborhood roads between the Merrimack River and I-495 connect only to Merrimack Street or Pleasant Valley Street.

### ACCESS TO BUSINESSES

Businesses are primarily accessed from Merrimack Street. Many are clustered into plazas; a few have individual driveways. The driveways are frequently undefined and the separation of driveway from sidewalk and roadway is not always clear.

Both sides of Merrimack Street have sidewalks, but the sidewalks vary in conditions, materials, and width. The corridor has few crosswalks; most do not have ramps. Most of the intersections with side streets also do not have ramps, making mobility a challenge.

The Corridor has no formal amenities for bicyclists. The only bicyclist seen on the site walks was a child riding from a neighborhood street onto the sidewalk. Other bicyclists would need to use the shoulder of Merrimack Street.

### PARKING

Because Merrimack Street is under the jurisdiction of MassDOT, on-street parking is not allowed. Businesses must incorporate all parking on-site. For most parcels, this results in a significant amount of asphalt dedicated to parking. On smaller lots, this leaves little room for landscaping. As with driveways, some businesses have little differentiation between parking and sidewalk; creating dangerous conditions for pedestrians and drivers alike.

### PRIVATE REALM

Signage varies along the corridor. Most businesses are set back from the road, so signage must attract the attention of drivers at or above the posted speed limit of 35 mph.

The business signs have no consistency in terms of location on site or building, type or design. Public signage is limited to traffic signage; the Corridor has neither wayfinding nor identification signs.

Building storefronts and façades vary in style and quality. Because the corridor is oriented towards drivers, most storefronts are not designed to be seen by pedestrians. The quality of storefront displays is lower than that of a pedestrian-oriented area. This lower quality extends to site and building lighting.

Some businesses are exceptions; they have invested in the quality of the building's storefront and front-yard landscaping.

### PUBLIC REALM

Sidewalks and crosswalks, discussed earlier, are inadequate for a true pedestrian-oriented environment. The corridor also lacks street trees and street amenities, such as benches. Street lighting is highway-scale cobra head light fixtures; the corridor has no pedestrian-scale lighting. Utility poles disrupt the sidewalk and detract from the overall visual quality of the corridor.



SIDEWALKS

C

STREET LIGHTING

C

ROAD BEDS AND CROSSWALKS

F

STREET AMENITIES

N/A

WAYFINDING/SIGNAGE

N/A

Public Realm conditions on Merrimack Street  
Photographs: Innes Associates





FAÇADE

C

LIGHTING

C

SIGNAGE

C

WINDOW

C

AWNING

N/A

OUTDOOR DISPLAY/DINING

N/A



Private Realm conditions on Merrimack Street  
Photographs: Innes Associates

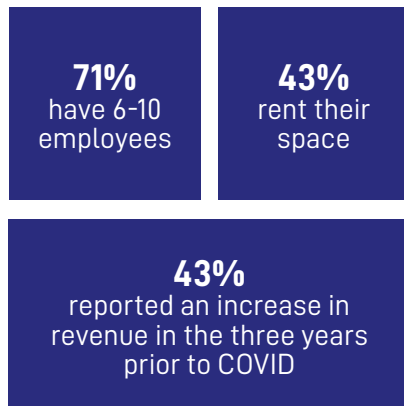


## Highlights from the Business Environment

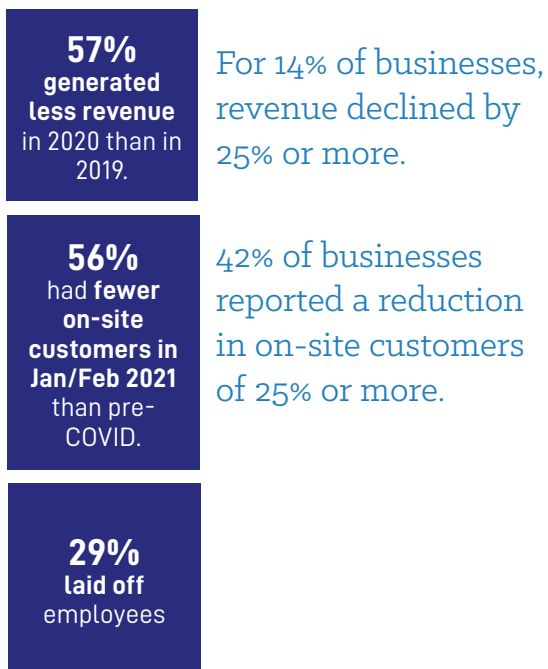
### IMPACT FROM COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Of the approximately 254 businesses within a one-mile radius of the corridor, seven businesses responded to the business survey developed for the RRP. Although the sample size was small, the information provided was helpful to this process. These businesses reported the following:

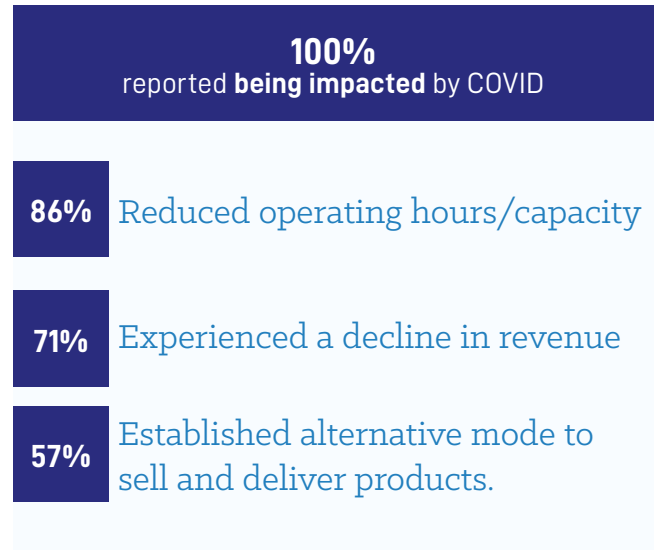
### BUSINESS CHARACTERISTICS



### CHANGES



### SPECIFIC IMPACTS



At the time of the survey, 43% of businesses reported they were operating at reduced hours/capacity or closed.

### SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT CONDITIONS

Condition	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Proximity to complementary businesses and uses	71%	14%
Access for customers and employees	71%	14%
Safety and comfort of customers and employees	57%	14%
Condition of public spaces, streets, and sidewalks	29%	14%
Condition of private buildings, storefronts, and signs	29%	14%

No businesses indicated that the regulatory environment poses an obstacle to business operation.

## PREFERENCES AND PRIORITIES

In terms of the physical environment, atmosphere, and access, respondents ranked the potential strategies in order of importance (items ranked by highest combined score):

Strategies	Important	Very Important
Improvements in safety and/or cleanliness.	<b>57%</b>	<b>29%</b>
Improvement/development of public spaces and seating areas.	<b>43%</b>	<b>29%</b>
Improvement of streetscape and sidewalks.	<b>14%</b>	<b>57%</b>
Renovation of storefronts/building façades.	<b>14%</b>	<b>29%</b>
Changes in public parking availability, management, or policies.	<b>29%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Amenity improvements for public transit/bike users.	<b>14%</b>	<b>14%</b>

In terms of attraction/retention of customers and businesses, respondents ranked the potential strategies in order of importance (percentages shown are important/very important):

Strategies	Important	Very Important
Implementing marketing strategies for the commercial district.	<b>43%</b>	<b>43%</b>
More cultural events/activities to bring people into the district.	<b>43%</b>	<b>29%</b>
Recruitment programs to attract additional businesses.	<b>43%</b>	<b>29%</b>
More opportunities for outdoor dining and selling.	<b>71%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Creation of a district management entity.	<b>5%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Changes to zoning or other local regulations.	<b>43%</b>	<b>0%</b>

**71%**  
expressed interest in receiving **some kind of assistance.**

### Assistance (top 3)

Participating in shared marketing/ advertising.	<b>71%</b>
Setting up an online store or other selling channel.	<b>29%</b>
Creating new services such as delivery.	<b>14%</b>
Low-cost financing for storefront/ façade improvements.	<b>14%</b>
Low-cost financing for purchasing property in the district.	<b>14%</b>
Training on the use of social media.	<b>14%</b>



## Highlights from the Customer Base

### SELECTED POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS WITHIN ONE-MILE RADIUS

About 15% of Methuen's population lives within a mile of the geographic center of the Merrimack Street Corridor (roughly St. Lucy Parish); the same areas has less than 1% of the workforce. Household incomes within this one-mile radius are slightly lower than the city overall. The average age is higher and the average household size is smaller.

	Methuen	LRRP area
Total Resident Population*	50,282	7,723
Working-Age Population* (20-64)	30,239	4,826
Median Household Income*	\$77,484	\$76,158
Median Age*	40.5	43.1
Avg. Household Size*	2.71	2.54
*ESRI Business Analyst (2021 estimate)		
	Methuen	LRRP area
Total Workforce**	16,135	113
**On the Map (2018 or later)		



## Highlights from Admin Capacity

### REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- The Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce includes the City of Methuen within its region.
- The regional planning agency for Methuen is the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission.







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## Project Recommendations



# Hire a City Business Liaison.

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		City Hall
Origin		City Planning staff
Budget		Medium: \$65,000-\$85,000 per annum.
Timeframe		Short-term: Within six months.
Risk		Low: Requires City Council approval and approval of the Mayor.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Position filled.</li><li>• Development of a city-wide contact list of businesses.</li><li>• Support for a business-led organization.</li><li>• Grants applied for, funds received, funds distributed.</li></ul>
Partners & Resources		Mayor, City Council, City Planning Staff



**Methuen City Hall**

Source: Cmh2315fl at Flickr; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cmhpictures/12274344036/in/photostream/>

<p><b>Action Item</b></p>	<p>Hire a City business liaison and coordinator to help with management of projects related to the LRRP program, including distribution of American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funds to meet City goals for COVID recovery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff member should have expertise in economic development and grant management.</li> <li>• Staff member should become a single point of contact for local businesses within the City.</li> <li>• Future duties could include applying for additional grants to supplement ARPA funds and support implementation of this plan.</li> <li>• Start up the business organization.</li> <li>• Create an online business strategy.</li> <li>• Work on regulations for outdoor seating and dining.</li> <li>• Work on business recruitment strategy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Diagnostic</b></p>	<p>The City does not have designated economic development staff to act as a liaison to the business community. Addressing the existing conditions will require someone who can coordinate the projects and work with businesses on a daily basis to increase communication.</p> <p>Existing City staff spent a lot of time reaching out to businesses during this process, but small business owners rarely have additional time. A dedicated staff member should be a liaison to the business community to support the development of a business-led association and act as a single point of contact for all business communication with the City.</p> <p>The Delta variant has created a retreat from indoor public gatherings in many communities. Should these conditions reoccur, or a series of lockdowns and reopenings become a normal pattern, consistent communication with City Hall will be critical to the continued survival of the businesses along the Merrimack Street corridor.</p>
<p><b>Process</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop roles and responsibilities for position.</li> <li>• Define goals for first six months - one year.</li> <li>• Research salary ranges.</li> <li>• Identify department and reporting structure.</li> <li>• Place ad in appropriate locations (traditional media, online hiring boards, appropriate professional organizations).</li> <li>• On-board new employee with introduction to City staff, area, key business owners.</li> <li>• Develop regular reporting of goals achieved.</li> <li>• Evaluate success of initiatives supported by this role and reconfigure position as necessary.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Budget</b></p>	<p>The budget for this action item is the salary and benefits for the person hired and will be dependent on whether the person hired is part-time or full-time, their responsibilities, and their experience.</p> <p>Funds from the <b>American Recovery Plan Act</b> may be used for the first few years of the position (see notes on funding in the Appendix). After 2026, this position could become a regular line item in the City's budget. If the person hired has grant-writing experience, a portion of their salary may be covered by future grants.</p>

# Support a business-led organization.

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Merrimack Street Corridor
Origin		City Staff SME Consultant: Perch Advisors
Budget		Low: Support may be part of duties of business liaison.
Timeframe		Short-term: <2 years.
Risk		Medium Risk: Businesses have not identified this as a high priority,
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• City facilitation of initial meetings to discuss the organization.</li><li>• Establishment of an organization with the capacity to independently raise funds for marketing, promotion and other activities related to the health of the Merrimack Street Corridor.</li><li>• Number of engaged stakeholders that have/maintain an active role in the information gathering and decision making processes.</li><li>• Ongoing, regular meetings of the organization.</li><li>• Achievement of other goals in this report requiring business support.</li></ul>	



Source: Innes Associates

<b>Action Item</b>	<p>Support corridor businesses in forming a business-led organization to better collaborate on issues important to the corridor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop Steering Committee and Identify Leadership</li> <li>• Establish a purpose for the merchants association.</li> <li>• Create an Information Database</li> </ul>
<b>Diagnostic</b>	<p>The businesses along the Merrimack Street Corridor are not ready to support a Business Improvement District or other district-based association. Given the impacts of the pandemic and the need for the City to quickly communicate to and receive input from businesses, an organization of business owners who can meet on a regular basis is critical.</p> <p>In addition, businesses who responded the survey identified some strategies and assistance that will require their cooperation to implement. An organization to provide that cooperation, particularly in terms of joint marketing, will be critical to the success of those efforts.</p>
<b>Budget</b>	<p>Funds from the <b>American Recovery Plan Act</b> may be used to help support the creation of this organization.</p>
<b>Risk Factors</b>	<p>City planning staff sees a strong benefit to having a business association to coordinate the joint marketing and other programs that are of interest to business owners. However, such an association was a low priority for the businesses who responded to the questionnaire.</p> <p>Mitigation of this risk factor could include the following options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of all businesses not just most engaged.</li> <li>• Sustain, engage and support leaders and other volunteers throughout the creation process.</li> <li>• Guaranteeing continued funding for programs and activities (annual dues, fundraising campaigns, merchandise).</li> <li>• Gaining the trust of businesses.</li> <li>• Engage with property owners when advocating for small businesses.</li> <li>• Buy-ins from district national/regional retailers.</li> </ul>



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## Process

Develop Steering Committee and identify leadership.

- Identify merchants capable of playing an active role in the formation and leadership of a merchants association.

Establish a purpose for the merchants association.

- Develop a set of goals that respond to the identified corridor needs and challenges.
- Solidify goals into a purpose or mission statement which can be communicated to neighborhood stakeholders.
- Articulate achievable goals
- Create Vision and Mission Statements.
- Create and seat interim/permanent leadership (i.e. Advisory Committee, Board of Directors).

Create an information database.

- Engage steering committee to assist in the development of a database containing property and business owners, and commercial vacancies.
- Creation of standing and ad-hoc committee as determined.
- Completed business and property survey with contact information and key data points (i.e., key retail groups and organizations, regular vacancy updates, property transactions, partner organizations with synergy).
- Calendared meetings (ideally quarterly); Agendas, Attendance records, Meeting minutes.
- Creation of organization by-laws.
- Determination and creation of a formal organization structure (501(c)3, 501(c)6, etc) dedicated to independently marketing and promoting the district.





Source: Ann Burke

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE ADMIN CAPACITY COMPENDIUM

# Formation of a Business Improvement District in Hudson, MA



Admin Capacity

Hudson, MA

SME Consultant: Ann McFarland Burke, Downtown Consultant

### Action Item





Note: Although this recommendation is not for the formation of a BID, the lessons learned from this Best Practice are applicable to this process.

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.

The Downtown Hudson Business Association, in partnership with the Town of Hudson, spearheaded activities to form a BID and executed the step-by-step process to successfully create a BID in Hudson. This included:

- Identification of staff and financial resources.
- Establishment of a strong property owner based steering committee.
- Creation of a property owner outreach strategy.
- Consensus among stakeholders on program priorities, fee structure, boundaries and budget.
- Execution of the petition process and formal approval by Board of Selectmen.
- Initialization of BID services.

# Update the sign code to address the needs of corridor businesses.

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Merrimack Street Corridor between Exit 46 at I-495 to Route 113/Pleasant Valley Street.
Origin		City staff, public input
Budget		Low: The range for the consultant's time is between \$35,000-\$60,000, depending on the level of public engagement and how illustrative the code is. Review by municipal counsel may be covered by the municipal on-call agreement or may need to be added to the cost of the project.
Timeframe		Short-term: 12-18 months
Risk		Medium: The risk for this project is in part dependent on whether the sign code will be an advisory document or incorporated into the zoning ordinance as specific standards. A sign code that is too restrictive will send a negative message to those who are considering investing in the community. Guidelines for sign design that are too subjective send a similar negative message in that applicants cannot be certain as to how the guidelines will apply to them.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful adoption of the new/updated code.</li> <li>• Compliance of code with legal precedents.</li> <li>• Implementation of streamlined process for approvals.</li> <li>• Number of noncomplying/ nonconforming signs replaced.</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources		City staff, City Council, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Property/business owners



*Signs on businesses along the corridor*  
Source: Innes Associates

## Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Understand why the sign code should be created/updated/replaced. What are the areas of greatest concern?
- Decide whether this is a project that can be done in-house or requires a consultant with appropriate expertise.
- Decide which funding source is appropriate and, if the source is a grant program, apply for funds.
- If a consultant is deemed appropriate, go through the Commonwealth's procurement process (unless the grant program has an on-call consultant).
- Identify the people/organizations who need to be part of this process.
- Develop an engagement process appropriate for the City and the required approval process.
- Once the code has been approved, consider a public education program to inform people on a regular basis about the code and its implications. Key targets for this campaign include business and property owners and commercial real estate brokers.
- Consider aligning the enforcement process with the new regulations to ensure the effort leads to the anticipated improvements.

## Diagnostic

Business owners who participated in the September meeting expressed an interest in seeing increased vibrancy in the area. At the same time, they noted that the City's signage requirements do not meet the needs of businesses located along a corridor. Signage is critical to attracting customers to help businesses recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This recommendation also supports the proposed façade and sign improvement program, and complements the recommended design guidelines.

Sign codes are important for several reasons:

- Visibility of businesses to potential customers/clients.
- Pedestrian and vehicular safety (reduction in distractions).
- Community aesthetics.
- Reduction in light pollution.

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

Challenges across municipalities include the following:

- Existing signage is outdated, inconsistent, or in disrepair.
- The sign code is inconsistent with current best practices, new sign technology, or legal decisions related to signage regulations (ex. Reed v. Town of Gilbert).
- The approval process is perceived as onerous and/or arbitrary, especially for a small business.
- Enforcement has become an issue and/or sign permits are regularly approved with waivers.
- Sign code decisions are regularly appealed.

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**Timeframe**

The timeframe will vary depending on when City Council approves changes to the ordinances. From the kick-off to entering the municipal approval process, the project should take 8-12 months.

- Months 1-2: Review existing code; develop sign inventory; interview municipal staff, boards with approval responsibility, former applicants, local land use lawyers, others with relevant experience and concerns.
- Months 3-4: Research appropriate precedents; develop public outreach/engagement program.
- Months 5-7: Engage with business/property owners and public on options and concerns; develop draft code; develop illustrations and decide whether illustrations are part of code or a separate document. Consider meetings with appropriate boards to introduce the draft code and receive feedback.
- Months 8-9: Revise the code to its final draft prior to the municipal approval process. Publicize the final draft prior to City Council review and approval.

**Budget**

In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:

- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
- Massachusetts Downtown Initiative
- District Local Technical Assistance Grant





Source: Innes Associates/Harriman/Steven Cecil Design & Planning

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE ADMIN CAPACITY COMPENDIUM

# Develop or update the municipality's sign code



Admin Capacity

Location

Dedham, MA

SME Consultant: Innes Associates Ltd.

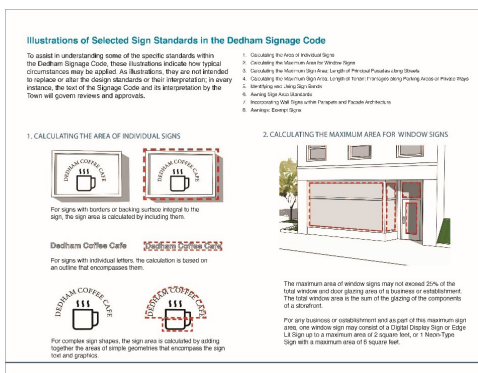
### Action Item

The Town of Dedham funded an update to their existing Sign Code, which is part of the Town's General Bylaws. The new Sign Code is text-based and will be hosted on eCode. However, illustrations of sign types, certain regulating dimensions, and positions relative to the site or building are contained in an accompanying PDF.

Actions for this project included the following:

- Full review of existing sign code and permitting process.
- Inventory of existing signs and analysis of compliance with existing sign code.
- Interviews with those who had gone through the sign permit approval process.
- Research into best practices, including changes required by Reed v. Town of Gilbert.
- Draft code and tests of existing signage against recommended changes.

The draft code will be submitted to Dedham's Town Meeting in Fall 2021.



Source: Innes Associates/Harriman/  
Steven Cecil Design & Planning

# Revise Zoning and Regulations for Outdoor Dining.

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Merrimack Street Corridor between Exit 46 at I-495 to Route 113/Pleasant Valley Street
Origin		City Planning Staff
Budget		Low: Approximately \$15,000-\$25,000
Timeframe		Short-term: Approximately 6-9 months.
Risk		Low: Use of the regulations would be voluntary.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Passage of the regulations.</li><li>• Number of restaurants with available outdoor space who install outdoor dining.</li></ul>
Partners & Resources		City Council, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, City Planning Staff, Owners of restaurants and other food-based businesses.



*Restaurant without outdoor dining*  
Source: Innes Associates Ltd.



<b>Action Item</b>	<p>Revise zoning and other regulations to allow outdoor dining on a permanent basis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage businesses, residents, and members of land use and boards with regulatory jurisdiction to understand benefits and obstacles.</li> <li>• Evaluate existing regulations to see what needs to be changed.</li> <li>• Consider licensing process (see Best Practice from Tyngsborough, below).</li> <li>• Educate public about the changes and the reasons, including supporting local business during recovery.</li> <li>• Map which businesses have the ability to have outdoor eating either on-site or in appropriate public spaces. Businesses with a need for outdoor dining may not be restaurants.</li> <li>• Consider design of outdoor dining (See Best Practice from Salem, below).</li> <li>• Take proposed changes through the City's approval process.</li> </ul>
<b>Diagnostic</b>	<p>Governor Baker declared a state of emergency on March 10, 2020 because of COVID-19 as [art of the measures to address the closure of brick-and-mortar places of business and the social distancing requirements; the state overrode local and state regulations for restaurant-sponsored outdoor dining, including the serving of alcohol. These permissions have been extended to April 1, 2022.</p> <p>Few restaurants in the Merrimack Street corridor took advantage of outdoor dining; most apparently relied on takeout and observations indicate that was successful. However, with additional project recommendations for improvements to façades and signage, outdoor dining and retail display would provide additional vitality to the area. Ensuring the City's regulatory structure allows such options is critical to encouraging businesses to take advantage of this opportunity.</p>
<b>Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate existing zoning regulations and City ordinances for requirements that might affect outdoor dining.</li> <li>• Consider allowable uses within setbacks, Board of Health regulations, liquor licenses, hours of operations, and restrictions on noise and lighting.</li> <li>• Conduct a survey of businesses who had or wanted outdoor dining to understand what worked and what were limitations.</li> <li>• Conduct a public survey to understand preferences for options.</li> <li>• Revise regulations; hire a consultant if City staff do not have capacity (time).</li> <li>• Consult with Planning Board, ZBA, and City Council.</li> <li>• Ask City Council to approve the changes.</li> </ul>
<b>Budget</b>	<p>If City staff have the capacity, this work may be done in-house and may only require funds for printing and one or more surveys (although there are free on-line survey options).</p> <p>If a consultant is required to assist city staff, then the cost is likely \$15,000-\$25,000 depending on the level of public engagement and the depth of regulatory review and changes required.</p>



Source: Northern Middlesex Council of Governments

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE ADMIN CAPACITY COMPENDIUM

# Tyngsborough: Expedite License Modifications for Outdoor Dining



Admin Capacity

Location

Tyngsborough, MA

SME Consultant: Northern Middlesex Council of Governments

### Action Item



**Cazadores Restaurante Mexicano Tent with Outdoor Seating**

Source: Jeff Owen, NMCOG

In June 2020, the Massachusetts Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission (ABCC) notified Local Licensing Authorities that due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in accordance with the Reopening Massachusetts Plan issued by Governor Baker, local authorities could streamline applications for temporary modifications to licenses for serving alcohol on premise.

In Tyngsborough, holders of licenses for on premise liquor consumption applied to the Board of Selectmen for a temporary modification of their premises to include a designated area outside. The application did not need to be reviewed during a duly posted public hearing, the selectmen did not need to advertise the hearing in a local newspaper and did not need to notify abutters. Additionally, the selectmen did not need to get ABCC approval prior to issuing the temporary modification. This changed the process of getting a modification from 60 days to a week.

The Board of Selectmen utilized this same application process to consider modifications to Common Victualler Licenses, which are the license required to serve food in Tyngsborough. If a business possessed both types of licenses, they were able to apply for both modifications with a single application.



Source: Civic Space Collaborative

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE PRIVATE REALM COMPENDIUM

# Provide Welcoming Outdoor Dining



Private Realm

Location

Salem, MA

SME Consultant: Civic Space Collaborative

### Action Item







Source: Civic Space Collaborative

- The outdoor dining program was a successful transformation of public and private spaces into outdoor "streeteries" for the benefit of restaurants and the Salem community, including residents and tourists.
- Over 50 restaurants participated in the program in 2020, and 56 have applied for the 2021 season.
- Local artists were employed to transform protective jersey barriers into works of art.
- With an eye towards making the program permanent, the design and implementation of these spaces has already evolved to be more safe, accessible, usable, and attractive.



# Work with MassDOT to reconfigure Merrimack Street.

Category		Public Realm
Location		Merrimack Street Corridor between Exit 46 at I-495 to Route 113/Pleasant Valley Street.
Origin		City staff, public input SME Consultant: William P. McGrath, P.E., BETA Group, Inc.
Budget		High: \$3 million–\$4.5 million, based on a linear foot estimate and under the control of MassDOT
Timeframe		Mid-term: 5 to 10 years
Risk		Medium: MassDOT participation will be required as Merrimack Street is a state road.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reduction in number of accidents.</li><li>• Increased pedestrian traffic from neighborhoods to local businesses.</li><li>• Increased bicyclist traffic from neighborhoods to local businesses.</li><li>• Reduction in temperature along surface of sidewalk.</li></ul>
Partners & Resources		City of Methuen, MassDOT



**Merrimack Street**  
**Source: Innes Associates**

### Action Item

- Conduct a traffic study to address resident concerns about speed of travel.
- Work with MassDOT to reconfigure Merrimack Street for pedestrian and bicyclist safety: widening and repaving the sidewalks, installing signalized crosswalks, installing ramps at crosswalks and side streets, and creating a bicycle lanes.
- Work with MassDOT to improve site conditions along the corridor, including adding street trees on the verge separating the sidewalk from traffic and placing utilities underground when the roadway is improved.
- Work with MassDOT and MVRTA to install two or more covered bus shelters on both sides of Merrimack Street that
- Work with MassDOT to establish responsibilities for maintaining the corridor, including weed removal and trimming of vegetation in the summer and prompt clearance of snow from sidewalks and street corners as well as from roadways.
- Incorporate historic elements into street furniture and signage (pair with recommended wayfinding program).

### Diagnostic

Merrimack Street is a historic area of Methuen (the Valley) with neighborhoods abutting the corridor and a mix of uses, including restaurants that are regional draws and a local farm.

However, the treatment of the road and streetscape indicate an area of neglect while the high speeds and lack of pedestrian amenities make the area uncomfortable for residents who could otherwise easily walk to local businesses.

A successful project would have a huge impact in creating a consistent identity for this corridor and increasing the number of people walking or biking rather than driving to the local businesses.

Businesses along the Merrimack Street Corridor experienced negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, including reduced hours or temporary shutdowns, reduced operating hours and capacity, and the need to find other options to attract sales and deliver goods.



**Merrimack Street**  
**Source: Innes Associates**



### Diagnostic *(continued)*

Opportunities to increase outdoor dining were few, and the development pattern of the corridor is not safe or attractive for pedestrians. Businesses set back from the street also have poor visibility. Respondents to the business survey indicated that the condition of public spaces, streets, and sidewalks was their biggest concern. This desire was strongly supported by attendees at the public site walk, who identified safety concerns such as the high traffic speed, lack of crosswalks and ramps, and varying width and condition of the sidewalks.

Among the strategies identified, the following were among the most desired:

- Renovation of storefronts/building façades
- Improvements in safety and/or cleanliness.
- Improvement/development of public spaces and seating areas.
- Improvement of streetscape and sidewalks.

The adjacent neighborhoods are not safely connected to the corridor. The lack of ramps at corners and crosswalks, the low number of crosswalks, and the poor condition of the sidewalks reduces the potential number of customers that local businesses should otherwise easily be able to draw. Business owners also wanted Complete Streets connections between the corridor and The Loop, another commercial shopping area in Methuen.

### Timeline

Merrimack Street is a state road under the jurisdiction of MassDOT. Any proposed improvements will need approval from MassDOT - Highway Division. If federal transportation funds are used for construction the project would need to be programmed into the Transportation Improvement Program TIP. Planning and design funding could be done through local or state funding sources. The project design will need to follow the standard Project Development process included in MassDOT's *1996 Project Development and Design Guide*. The project planning and design process could be expected to take 5+ years.



**Merrimack Street**  
**Source: Innes Associates**



## Process

The standard Project Development process included in MassDOT's *1996 Project Development and Design Guide* includes completion of a 25% Preliminary Design submission, holding a Design Public Hearing, completing 75%, 100% and PS&E Final Design submissions. Each submission milestone must be reviewed and approved by MassDOT. Any right of way required to accommodate the project design will need to be acquired in accordance with MassDOT guidance.

Considerations for the Complete Streets project, based on public input, include the following:

- Conduct traffic study to Identify appropriate Intersections/areas for signalized crosswalks and street-calming measures to reduce the speed of traffic.
- Facilitate community conversations/conversation about the right-of-way with property owners.
- Design roadway improvements.
- Install traffic signals at appropriate cross streets.
- Install signalized crosswalks with ramps, bump-outs, and planted areas.
- Widen and replace/repair sidewalks with consistent materials.
- Install ramps at all street crossings.
- Install street trees.
- Place utilities underground as part of full road reconstruction.



**Crosswalk without ramp on Merrimack Street**  
Source: Innes Associates



**MVRTA bus on Merrimack Street**  
Source: Innes Associates



Source: BETA Group, Inc.

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE PUBLIC REALM COMPENDIUM

# Route 30 Shared Winter Streets and Spaces: Separated Bicycle and Shared-Use Lanes



Public Realm

Location

Wayland and Natick, MA  
SME Consultant: BETA Group, Inc.

### Action Item



Source: Stantec

The Rt. 30 (Commonwealth Road) Shared Winter Streets and Spaces Project provides separated bicycle and shared-use lanes that improves safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and reduces vehicle speeds along the corridor. The project corridor is approximately 2/3rds of a mile long and is located in both Natick and Wayland, MA. The project links the Cochituate Rail Trail and an office development on the west side with Cochituate State Park and the Snake Brook Trail on the east side.

The project was initially developed as a Pilot Project but was ultimately planned as a permanent installation. Coordination between the Towns of Natick and Wayland, MassDOT, and DCR was a critical element of the project.





Source: Stantec

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE PUBLIC REALM COMPENDIUM

# Increase Outdoor Dining and Safe Bike/Pedestrian Connections

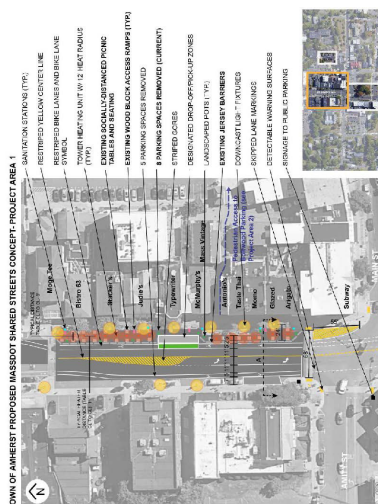


Public Realm

Location

Amherst, MA  
SME Consultant: Stantec Consulting

### Action Item







Source: Stantec

The key project elements included: installing expanded on-street dining areas and designated rideshare/pick-up areas by removing on-street parking; adding propane heating towers for diners; preservation of bicycle facilities by removing a turn lane; adding detectable warning surfaces for crosswalk ramps; adding new picnic tables in the Town Common; adding new pedestrian-scale streetlights; and installing heated bus shelters at two downtown stops.

Key action items included:

- Developing a detailed concept plan that could be used for installation as part of the grant application (aided by a Technical Assistance grant from the Barr Foundation).
- Obtaining letters of support from affected businesses.
- Identifying roles and responsibilities for the procurement, installation, and maintenance of various components of the project.
- Procuring and installing the project components.
- Developing a summary report for MassDOT as part of the requirements of the grant.

# Incorporate local history and public art into a wayfinding program to promote the corridor.

Category		Public Realm
Location		Merrimack Street Corridor between Exit 46 at I-495 to Route 113/Pleasant Valley Street.
Origin		City staff, public input
Budget		Medium: \$30,000 design fee + \$80,000 for implementation
Timeframe		Short-term: 8-10 months
Risk		Low: This is a public action, subject to funding by City Council.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Wayfinding plan complete.</li><li>Number of signs installed in key locations.</li><li>Increase in new customers to corridor.</li></ul>
Partners & Resources		City staff, City Council, Businesses, Methuen Historical Society, local arts community



Public transit on Merrimack Street  
Source: Innes Associates

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## Diagnostic

The Merrimack Street corridor does not have a unique visual identity and the history, culture, and businesses in the area are not reflected in its physical appearance. Business owners noted the lack of connection between the corridor and The Loop, a nearby shopping center. A wayfinding program that incorporates local history and public art to promote the identity of the corridor, including the variety of local businesses, would reinforce the other recommendations in this report.

Wayfinding tied to improvements to Merrimack Street by MassDOT would complement the investment in the public realm.

As with other recommendations, the goal is to off-set the loss of sales reported by corridor businesses and attract more customers, both local and regional, to the area.

## Action Item

Actions for this program include the following:

- Develop a working group including City staff, business owners and residents from the corridor, and representatives from the historic and arts communities in Methuen.
- Hire a wayfinding consultant to assist the working group with the development of the program.
- Identify which signs are needed (who is being directed to what from where) and locations for those signs.
- Develop a hierarchy of sign types based on the information being conveyed and how far the destination is from the sign location.
- Identify colors, logo, and photos or graphics for the different sign types. These should be coordinated with the marketing recommendation in this report.
- Work with the wayfinding consultant to develop designs for each sign type.

## Process

- Document existing signage in and around the corridor with photography and mapping.
- Identify relevant case studies from other communities.
- Develop sign hierarchy and identify locations.
- Develop design options for each sign type and overall program.
- Evaluate options for goals: directing people to businesses, incorporating the history of Pleasant Valley, and incorporating public art.
- Define a single package.
- Develop a vendor list and cost estimates.
- Choose a vendor and begin fabrication.
- Install new signs in coordination with MassDOT.



## Budget

Costs include the following:

- Staff time for review and management.
- Hire consultant to develop wayfinding and branding design and implementation plans.
- Hire local businesses to manufacture signs.
- Hire contractors install wayfinding signs.

In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:

- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).
- Massachusetts Downtown Initiative.
- District Local Technical Assistance Grant.
- Mass Cultural Council Project/ Local Cultural Council.



*Merrimack Street: Wayfinding signage limited to highway signs*  
*Source: Innes Associates*





Source: Favermann Design

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE PUBLIC REALM COMPENDIUM

# Create a wayfinding theme based on the community's seaside location



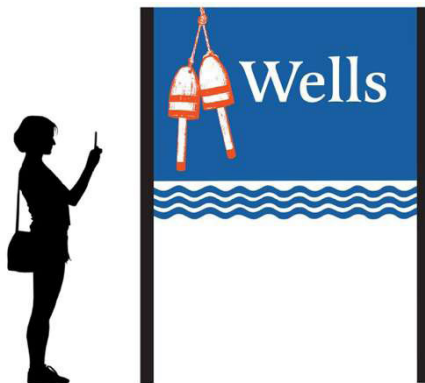
Public Realm

Location

Wells, ME

SME Consultant: Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

### Action Item



Source: Favermann Design

- Meetings with the Advisory Committee were scheduled over the next four (4) months.
- Utilizing existing conditions, community history and natural areas, each meeting looked at another aspect of the program.
- Locations were explored in terms of decision points and directional element considerations.
- After accessing needs, street furniture design versions were explored.
- Public art was looked at as potential focal point and visual markers.
- Local capability for fabrication was reviewed and discussed.
- New and existing public buildings, signage needs were considered
- Colors were tested and explored



Source: Selbert Perkins Design

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE PUBLIC REALM COMPENDIUM

# Integrate Brand and Art into your Wayfinding System



Public Realm

Location

Worcester, MA

SME Consultant: Selbert Perkins Design

### 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.



Source: Selbert Perkins Design

# Develop a façade and site improvement program.

Category		Private Realm
Location		Merrimack Street Corridor between Exit 46 at I-495 to Route 113/Pleasant Valley Street.
Origin		City staff
Budget		Medium: Total will depend on whether the City provides technical assistance, grants, or both.
Timeframe		Short-term: 1-3 years, may be extended if successful.
Risk		Medium: Some property owners may be reluctant to participate. Once funding is secured and a few projects have been successfully completed, this risk level is likely to drop. Early engagement with property and business owners will also reduce this level of risk.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creation of the program.</li><li>• Number of applicants over a specific timeframe.</li><li>• Number of façades, storefronts, and/or sites improved within a specific timeframe.</li><li>• Maintenance of the improvements after a set number of years.</li><li>• Increase in visitors to the target area.</li><li>• Increase in sales at the property/business improved and within the target area.</li><li>• Ability to extend the program to other commercial areas within the city (if appropriate).</li></ul>
Partners & Resources		City staff, City Council, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Property/business owners



*Businesses along the corridor*  
*Source: Innes Associates*

## Diagnostic

Business owners who participated in the September meeting expressed an interest in seeing increased vibrancy in the area. The City has already targeted public realm improvements for Merrimack Street itself. Along with the recommended comprehensive marketing program, improvements to the private realm will attract customers to help businesses recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Improvements as a result of this façade/site program include safety, accessibility, pedestrian comfort, and aesthetics. Over time, upgrades to façades and sites contribute to a perception that an area is vibrant, safe, and attractive to businesses and their customers. These improvements are critical to improving the walkability of the area; a goal expressed by most of the participants in this study. This recommendation makes permanent the beautification efforts desired by the attendees at the September meeting and works with the recommended design guidelines and update to the sign code.

Other elements this program can address the following:

- Requirements to address the transmissibility of COVID-19, such as new windows, doors, or HVAC system may be unaffordable to a small business owner and/or may have a negative impact on the façade if improperly sourced and installed.
- On-site parking spaces are poorly organized and, if reorganized, can provide room for outdoor dining or retail display.
- Local small businesses do not have the resources (time, money, expertise) to address substandard storefronts.
- Site improvements that reduce asphalt and add landscape can address public health issues by reducing the heat island effect, planting trees to address air quality, and using low impact design to manage stormwater onsite.

## Action Item

- Identify capacity within the city to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
- Develop an appropriate level of design guidelines.
- Engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.
- Develop the criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance.
- Develop the funding and oversight structures.
- Use program to support the recommended update of the sign code and the development of design guidelines.

## Process

### *Pre-program development*

- This program could be managed by City staff or the recommended new business-led organization. The entity managing this process does not have to be the City of Methuen. For example, a Community Development Corporation or other nonprofit could sponsor the program.
- If the City does not already have design guidelines for the area that are suitable for this program, then decide how those guidelines will be developed. Will the design guidelines be just for the façade improvement program, or will they be more broadly applicable?
- Discuss the potential focus of the program: components of a storefront, the entire storefront, the entire façade, all façades, the site? Will signage, lighting, awnings and other smaller elements be included? Will interior improvements to address accessibility be included? Will the City fund the design, all or some of the improvements, or both?



### **Process** *(continued)*

- Discuss what will not be eligible. Eligibility may also be determined by the funding source (for example, CDBG funds).
- Discuss the length of time that improvements must be maintained and the enforcement process for ensuring that improvements are maintained. Maintenance requirements could be tied to the length of the tenant's lease.
- Consider the funding structures. The program can provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. Grants may provide a greater incentive to participate while loans (no or low interest) provide a revolving fund to assist more properties. Forgiving loans after a certain time if the improvement are maintained is another option. If the property owners are less interested in the program, the City might consider offering grants to the first 3-5 to sign up (depending on resources) or through a lottery process and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the City to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area. This would need to be a highly transparent process.
- Decide whether the guidelines and program will be developed in-house or whether the City will seek outside help. The funding source may determine the type of outside assistance; for example, certain programs will assign on-call consultants. For others, the City may need to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP).

### *Developing the Program*

- Differentiating between the responsibilities of the tenant (often the small business) and the landlord (the property owner) is critical – a small business may be enthusiastic about the assistance, but the landlord may not. The City may need to consider parallel outreach processes.
- Decide on the application process and how applicants will be evaluated. Are certain property types or improvements given priority over others? Make sure the process of choosing participants is transparent.
- Develop the forms and train the people who will be evaluating the applications.

### *Implementation*

- Education of all people involved in the program needs to be an ongoing component. If the City is short on project management resources should consider hiring a dedicated staff member or consultant to manage this program.
- Finally, the City should consider streamlining approvals of projects under this program to reduce the time needed for implementation.

### **Budget**

In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:

- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
- Hometown Grants (T-Mobile)
- Local Banks and other Community Development Financial Institutions
- Massachusetts Downtown Initiative
- See additional funding sources for leveraging this program with funding sources for larger projects.





Private Realm

# Develop a façade/storefront/site improvement program

Location

Cambridge, MA

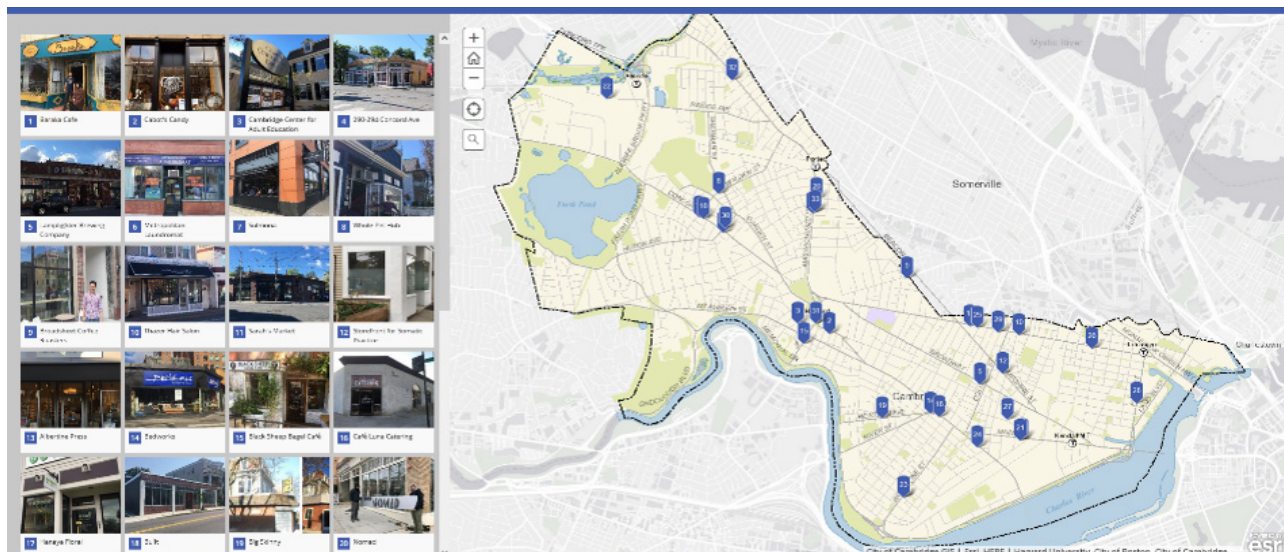
SME Consultant: Innes Associates Ltd.

## Action Item

The program is funded by capital funds from the municipal budget. Grants are tiered matching grants based on the type of improvement.

Other project components include the following:

- Increasing accessibility to the store (part of their Storefronts-for-All program).
- Improving or replacing windows and doors to address COVID-19 restrictions.
- Recommends tax credit programs to address accessibility, historic preservation, and energy efficiency.



Source: City of Cambridge



Source: Harriman/Innes Associates

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE PRIVATE REALM COMPENDIUM

# Windows Before Stores



Private Realm

Location

Great Barrington, MA

SME Consultant: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

### Action Item

The components of the Windows Before Stores program could be modified to suit sites along corridors. For example, the storefronts on Merrimack Street are set too far back for public art in storefronts to be visible to drivers. However, a combination of sculpture and landscape treatments could be highly visible.

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.



# Establish design guidelines for the corridor.

Category		Private Realm
Location		Merrimack Street Corridor between Exit 46 at I-495 to Route 113/Pleasant Valley Street.
Origin		City staff
Budget		Low: \$25,000-\$50,000, depending on the level of illustrations required.
Timeframe		Short-term: 12-18 months.
Risk		Medium: The risk for this project is in part dependent on whether the design guidelines will be an advisory document or incorporated into the zoning ordinance as specific standards.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Successful adoption of the new design guidelines.</li><li>• Increase in the number of applications that are consistent with the design guidelines.</li><li>• Decrease in the number of meetings dedicated to design in the site plan or special permit approval process.</li><li>• Increase in the number of buildings constructed, renovated, or rehabilitated that meet the design guidelines.</li></ul>
Partners & Resources		Municipal staff, City Council, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Property/business owners



Corridor property for sale in April 2021  
Source: Innes Associates

## Diagnostic

Business owners who participated in the September meeting expressed an interest in seeing increased vibrancy in the area. In addition, the corridor includes pre-Revolutionary War buildings that contribute to the history of the area. The City has already targeted public realm improvements for Merrimack Street itself. Along with the recommended comprehensive marketing program, improvements to the private realm will attract customers to help businesses recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This recommendation also supports the proposed façade and sign improvement program, and complements the update to the sign code.

Properties along Merrimack have already been developed, and as shown in the image on the first page of this recommendation, more development is likely to occur. One business owner suggested that increasing the density of housing along Merrimack Street might also be a good strategy. Appropriate guidelines for future development are important for supporting the identity of the Merrimack Street corridor as developed under other Project Recommendations. Design guidelines that are responsive to community identity will reinforce a revitalized, vibrant area.

Creating or updating design guidelines and combining the update with financial assistance to property owners to update buildings and sites to be consistent with the new guidelines addresses several negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Design guidelines can sometime be seen primarily as an aesthetic requirement. However, they can also have significant impacts on the economic and public health of an area, both of which are directly related to the continuing impacts of the pandemic: Tools such as outdoor dining, outdoor retail display, serving windows, accessibility upgrades, and upgraded HVAC systems can be integrated into the design guidelines to encourage permanent solutions that address the health and safety of the corridor.

## Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Understand why the municipality feels that design guidelines are necessary. Is this part of a façade/sign improvement program, a new local historic district, and/or to control new development in an existing area? What are the areas of greatest concern?
- Decide whether this is a project that can be done in-house or requires a consultant with appropriate expertise.
- Decide which funding source is appropriate and, if the source is a grant program, apply for funds.
- If a consultant is deemed appropriate, go through the Commonwealth's procurement process (unless the grant program has an on-call consultant).
- Identify the people/organizations who need to be part of this process.
- Develop an engagement process appropriate for the municipality and the required approval process.
- Once the design guidelines have been approved, consider a public education program to inform people on a regular basis about the new requirements and their implications. Key targets for this campaign include property owners and real estate brokers.



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## Process

The timeframe will vary depending on when City Council approves changes to the ordinance (and of course, whether the design guidelines are specifically incorporated into the zoning). From the kick-off to entering the municipal approval process, the project should take 8-12 months.

- Months 1-2: Review existing zoning ordinances for embedded design guidelines and standards; develop inventory of historic and current buildings and site treatments; interview municipal staff, boards with approval responsibility, former applicants, local land use lawyers, others with relevant experience and concerns.
- Months 3-4: Research appropriate precedents; develop public outreach/engagement program. Consider a public kick-off/charrette, depending on the needs of the community. Discuss the thresholds for use and the appropriate review body and process.
- Months 5-7: Engage with business/property owners and public on options and concerns; develop draft guidelines; develop illustrations. Decide (with municipality) whether design guidelines are a separate, advisory document or part of the zoning ordinance. If the guidelines are integrated into the zoning, decide whether illustrations are part of the zoning or a separate document. Consider meeting with the appropriate boards to introduce the draft design guidelines and receive feedback.
- Months 8-9: Revise the design guidelines to its final draft prior to the municipal approval process. Publicize the final draft prior to City Council/Town Meeting review and approval.

## Risk

Design guidelines help reinforce a community's identity and provide a clear message that the municipality is balancing the needs of the community with a streamlined approval process for new development. Codifying community values about the physical environment into the guidelines allows applicants to present proposals for new construction, rehabilitation, or adaptive reuse that are consistent with those values.

In general, experienced developers and builders like the predictability of a clear set of design guidelines which is consistently applied by a municipality. Property owners with less development experience are likely to have more concerns.

However, creating design guidelines that are too restrictive is also a risk. This sends a negative message to those who are considering investing in the community. Guidelines that are too subjective send a similar negative message in that applicants cannot be certain as to how the guidelines will apply to them.

## Budget

In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:

- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
- Massachusetts Downtown Initiative
- Community Planning Grants (if part of larger zoning revision)
- District Local Technical Assistance Grant
- Survey and Planning Grant Program; Massachusetts Historical Commission
- Complete Streets Funding Program; Massachusetts Department of Transportation



*Adaptive reuse of building on Merrimack Street  
Source: Innes Associates*

BUILDING ORIENTATION



A | Short Façade Faces Street



B | Long Façade Faces Street



C | Angled Building



D | L-Shaped building

Source: Harriman/Innes Associates

BEST PRACTICE FROM THE PRIVATE REALM COMPENDIUM

Create or update design guidelines for a downtown, village center, or commercial corridor.



Private Realm

Location

Sterling, MA  
SME Consultant: Innes Associates Ltd.

Action Item



- Rehabilitation**
- Changes to a building facade should be consistent with the original architectural style and the principles of composition that are typically associated with that style as evidenced in precedents and relevant examples.
  - Contemporary materials and components may be appropriate if they are visually compatible with the historic components.
  - Additions should be distinguishable from the original building, although roof forms should be compatible with the original building.
  - Building cornice lines should be maintained, preserved, or recreated to define building facades and create facade components consistent with historic parapet or cornice lines, as originally designed and built in the Town Center (see page 25 for definitions).



- Storefront Composition**
- Storefronts should clearly indicate the function of the business, whether retail, restaurant, or service. Windows should be large and not blocked by signs or shades at eye level. Both windows and entry should have appropriate lighting. Elements that be the street to the building, such as awnings, window boxes, and projecting signs, are strongly encouraged.
- Materials should be selected to be compatible with or complementary to the Town Center. Storefronts should be within the building frame as formed by columns, piers, and cornices.
  - Where it is appropriate for the existing or proposed architectural style, a base panel and sill course should be provided; the base panels and sill course should continue across the entire width of the storefront bay and terminate at doors or the vertical elements framing the bay.
  - Storefronts with recessed entryways to ground floor commercial spaces should be preserved or restored to their original format. The recess should remain open for the full height of the ground floor store; signs, panels, or other features should not shorten the height of the recess.
  - Storefront windows and doors should be transparent. They should not be mirrored, use tinted glass, or be obstructed by curtains or shades.

22 Town Center Design Guidelines, Town of Sterling June 2021

Source: Innes Associates/Harriman

Funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, the purpose of this project was to develop a set of advisory design guidelines to help guide decision-making on new construction and rehabilitation in the Town of Sterling's Historic Town Center.

Actions included the following:

- Develop a photographic inventory of existing buildings.
- Analyze current architectural and site design to understand historic development patterns, architectural styles and features, and relationships among existing buildings.
- Survey and engage members of the public to understand critical preferences for the future physical characteristics of the Town Center.
- Interview members of the Historic Commission to understand past history of development.
- Develop design guidelines that help protect elements critical to the identity of the Town Center but provide flexibility to address the variations of building types and site layouts.



Source: Favermann Design

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE PUBLIC REALM COMPENDIUM

# Developing storefront guidelines to energize downtown



Private Realm

Location

Everett, MA

SME Consultant: Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

### Action Item

#### 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(f) of the City Ordinance letter requires the number and size of signs. See Technical Requirements for more information.

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Signs and Technical Requirements

- 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.

Source: Favermann Design



# Develop an integrated online marketing strategy tied to corridor identity.

Category		Revenue & Sales
Location		Merrimack Street Corridor between Exit 46 at I-495 to Route 113/Pleasant Valley Street.
Origin		City staff, public input SME Consultant: Perch Advisors
Budget		Medium: See breakdown below.
Timeframe		Short-term: Six to twelve months.
Risk		Medium: Require participation from businesses who have been difficult to reach and are not used to working with each other.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in awareness of the Valley brand.</li> <li>• Increase in business activity along the corridor.</li> <li>• Implementation of historic trail.</li> <li>• Installation of historic banners/public art.</li> <li>• Regular meetings of business association.</li> <li>• Regular updates of business directory.</li> <li>• Increased number of people living in Methuen hired by businesses in the corridor.</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources		Local historic commission, business owners, property owners, City staff, Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce, local arts community



**Merrimack Street**  
Source: Innes Associates

## Action Item

- Develop strategy to promote the historic identity of "the Valley."
- Incorporate signage, public art, historic trail, and street banners into a Valley-wide identity and promotion.
- Develop a marketing campaign to brand the businesses as being part of the Valley and promote them, especially as clusters (e.g., food-oriented, auto sales).
- Consider integrated website and social media to support marketing campaign.
- Encourage businesses to form a neighborhood businesses association.
- Create a neighborhood business directory.
- Sponsor a job fair to connect local businesses with potential local employees.
- Encourage local arts and history groups to become involved in branding and public art installations to showcase local talent.

## Diagnostic

This area, known as Pleasant Valley or the Valley, does not feel like a destination. However, there are several businesses that draw from outside the borders of the corridor, including a local farm (with a CSA) and several food-oriented businesses, including a bakery, a deli, and restaurants. This food-themed cluster provides an opportunity to consider joint branding and marketing. A secondary cluster is auto sales and services, which could provide efficiencies for consumers. Tapping into the history of the Valley and adding contributions from members of the local arts community would give this corridor an identifiable sense of place that would encourage repeat visitors to patronize more than one business.

Such a branding campaign could also exert peer pressure on the businesses who take less care of their sites by setting a district-wide standard.

Businesses along the Merrimack Street Corridor experienced negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, including reduced hours or temporary shutdowns, reduced operating hours and capacity, and the need to find other options to attract sales and deliver goods.

Businesses set back from the street also have poor visibility. Respondents to the business survey indicated a desire for marketing strategies for the district.

Among the strategies identified, the following were among the most desired after the upgrades to the streetscape:

- Participating in shared marketing/advertising
- Setting up online store or other online selling channel.

Businesses also desired more cultural events and activities, but with no publicly owned space in the area, such event would require joint communication and participation among the businesses.

## Budget

Funds for this coordinated series of projects could come from the American Rescue Plan Act, as the actions are a direct response to the losses suffered by businesses beginning with the shutdowns in the spring of 2020.

Asset Mapping	\$2,500
Project and Event Planning/Campaign	\$12,500-\$20,000
Establish Communications Platforms:	\$7,500 per month

## Process

### *Asset Mapping*

Determine which elements of the corridor are the most successful to market. A process to identify district/regional assets will aid in prioritizing a unique selling proposition that may differentiate it from other locales. This process can also elevate marketable themes.

1. Identify and convene stakeholders for inclusive participation and consensus building.
2. Survey residents, businesses for perception/attitude of city/region.
3. Market Analysis: What are others (municipalities/regions) doing? Are they successful?

Specific challenges for asset mapping include the following:

- Focus on diversity and inclusion: age, tenure (legacy/new business), resident status (new/generational).
- Language and other access barriers .

Specific Key Performance Indicators for asset mapping:

- Number of participants, engagements.
- Number of survey responses collected.
- Findings report with both qualitative and quantitative data.

### *Establish Communication Platforms/Digital*

A marketing/communications plan making use of a unified identity/brand, a logo, and social media for advertising will aid in communicating the purpose and benefit of the Merrimack Street Corridor and maintain stakeholder awareness.

4. Logo and Slogan creation
  - Engage with local artists; community-based slogan contest with prizes or cash award.
  - Leverage findings from "asset mapping."



*Field for Pleasant Valley Farm*  
*Source: Innes Associates*



### Process *(continued)*

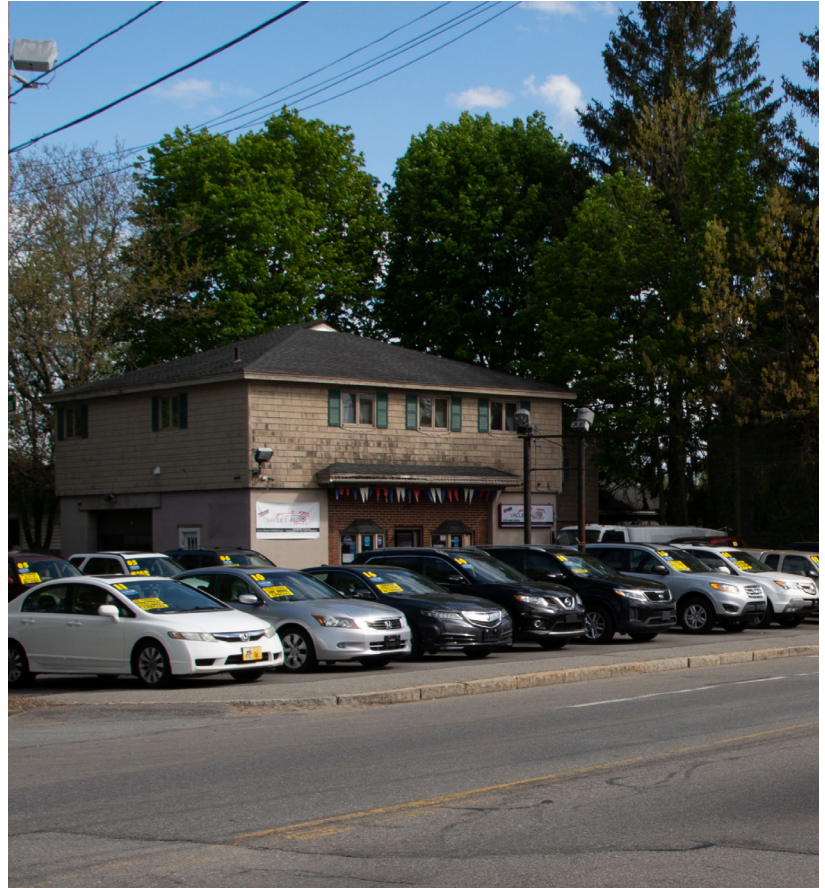
2. Determine best platforms for presence and messaging and create accounts (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn)
  - Time and skill may be required to help individuals develop comfort with online platforms; build consensus on platform choice.
  - Maintenance and content updates required for website and social media may require personnel or contractors.
3. Create internal communications platform for businesses to communicate freely with each other. Maintain engagement with regular posts and interactive messaging. Access to technology may be different for some businesses. Options include:
  - Facebook Page.
  - Corridor Listserv.
  - Whats App.
4. Create digital platforms for the corridor and encourage/assist individual businesses to create and maintain an online presence to communicate with community using multiple digital platforms, such as:
  - Merrimack Street Corridor website .
  - Social media.
  - Slogans, logo, hashtags, QR codes displayed on all written promotional materials.

Maintenance and engagement will require assistance from staff, government partners or contractors

An "Asset File" will encourage consistent use of images and design elements.

Specific challenges for communications platforms include the following:

- Digital infrastructure capacity.
- Broadband access.
- Reach and inclusion: Aim for widest reach; do not overlook any potential user-base/population/demographic/ community.



*One of the auto dealerships*  
*Source: Innes Associates*



### Process (continued)

Specific Key Performance Indicators for communications platforms:

- Ad-hoc committee created to oversee process.
- Creation of a brand / logo and a slogan / motto based on Methuen's historic identity or other unique characteristics.
- Identified engaged platforms.
- Number of businesses engaging with social media.
- Number of "followers" over specific timelines (30 days, 90 days, 1 year).
- Number of likes, comments, other responses.
- Post frequency by individual businesses.
- Success stories of user engagement.
- Creation of multi-platform media (website, social media, billboard) specifically for promoting the Merrimack Street corridor and communicating with customer base(s).
- Track use of links to/from municipal website) for attracting businesses and offering resources to new and existing businesses.

### Project & Event Planning/Campaign

Rally stakeholders to work together to build relationships and achieve immediate desired outcomes. Successful event execution builds organizational foundations that can be leveraged for further merchant organizing.

1. Rally businesses around a specific shared concern or objective, such as the following:
  - Asset Mapping.
  - Beautification.
  - Clean Streets/Clean Up Days.
  - Marketing.
  - Increased engagement with local institutions/potential partnerships.
  - Needed physical improvements.
2. Connect seasonal and annual events in Methuen to the Merrimack Street corridor using sponsorships. Consider joint events with the downtown.



**Piro's Italian Bakery & Pizzeria**  
**Source: Innes Associates**

### Process *(continued)*

Considerations and challenges for events/campaigns include the following:

- Plan and host events that leverage merchant participation with community involvement benefiting both businesses and residents.
- Events should highlight the added services that are available to the community residents/target audience through the merchants in the commercial corridor.
- Seek synergies among clusters of businesses (food, clothing, recreation, family-oriented, etc)
- Scan of external media (think hashtags on your event locations, public spaces, businesses) What does the external world use to describe your city?
- Artist recruitment.
- Engagement with local institutions/regional partners.

Key measurable impacts include the following:

#### Physical

- Geography impacted.
- Quantity of plantings.
- Quantity of garbage collected.
- Quantity of lots cleaned.

#### Social

- Strategic partner participation (business sponsors, schools, local non-profits, elected officials funding).

#### Digital engagement

- Increased Google/Yelp hits.
- Increased views/likes/followers on social media.

#### Economic Impacts

- Funds raised.
- Local multiplier effect (local purchasing for execution).
- Reported income increases on event days.

### Additional Resources

<https://www.pitkinavenue.nyc/real-estate>

<https://www.hudsonsquarebid.org/business-resources/>

<https://makemusicny.org/>

*Source: Perch Advisors*



Source: CivicMoxie

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE REVENUE & SALES COMPENDIUM

# Host a block party to support ground floor activation efforts downtown



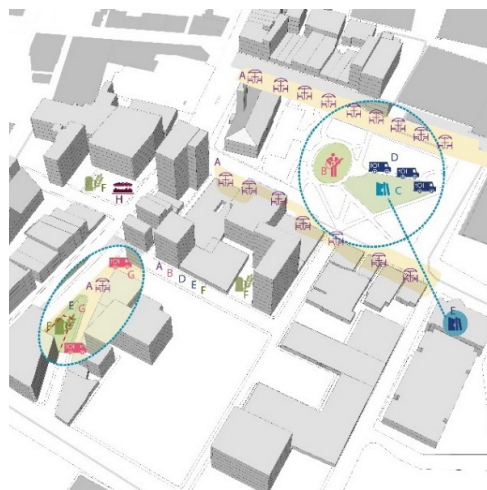
Revenue & Sales

Location

Worcester, MA

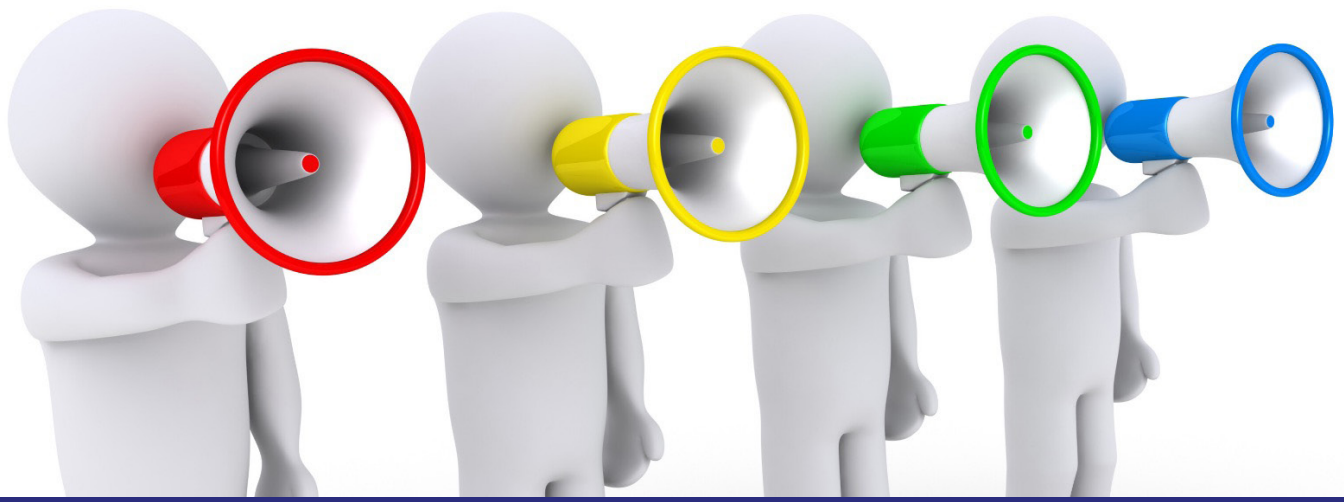
SME Consultant: Susan Silverberg, CivicMoxie

### Action Item



Source: CivicMoxie

The Block Party was a means to test the "collaborative muscle" of various partners, including MassDevelopment, The City of Worcester, Worcester Business Development Corp, and the Hanover Theatre, as well as shift the perception of downtown. The partners came together to divide tasks based on skills and capacity and reached out to others in the community to provide entertainment, food, and drink. The City was a key partner in streamlining permitting and providing public safety and sanitation services the day of the event. To ensure good turnout and a diversity of participants the block party was planned in conjunction with a ribbon cutting ceremony for the new Hanover Theatre Conservatory. Combining the events allowed organizers to highlight positive change and investment in the downtown. The block party included music, a beer garden, food trucks, and ribbon cutting ceremony. Interactive activities encouraged attendees to share their desires for downtown and offer ideas for improvements. Over 500 people attended the block party, meeting the goals set by the organizers.



Source: Bench Consulting

BEST PRACTICE FROM THE REVENUE & SALES COMPENDIUM

# Coordinated Social Media Marketing



Revenue & Sales

Location

Online

SME Consultant: Cepheid Solutions

## Action Item

- Initial planning session (1hr – one time).
- Training (ongoing – but i2.5 hour initial self-paced training course).
- Interview Stakeholder(s) (1hr – one time).
- Setup Social Media Accounts (3 hrs one time).
- Content Development (1-10 hrs monthly).
- Operate Program (4hrs monthly – assuming weekly posts).
- Planning & Coordination (1 hr weekly).
- Program Reporting (1 hr monthly).



# Rapid Website Development



Revenue & Sales

Location

Boston, MA

SME Consultant: Cambridge Retail Advisors

## Process

### Onboarding Phase

1. Explain the simple design process and benefits of the end website.
2. Purchase the desired domain name.
3. Set manageable goals with clear timeframes.

### Discovery Phase

1. Gather content and determine look/feel for the website.
2. Collect media such as photos and video (Schedule photographer if required).
3. Link Social Media (if applicable).
4. Link online selling platforms (if applicable).

### Review/Finalization Phase

1. Review website with business owner prior to publishing live.
2. Publish site and encourage business owner to incorporate their new website into their marketing plan.
3. Hand off website to business owner and encourage frequent edits!

# Recruit appropriate tenants who will complement existing businesses for vacant spaces.

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		Merrimack Street Corridor between Exit 46 at I-495 to Route 113/Pleasant Valley Street.
Origin		City staff, public input, site observations SME Consultant: Perch Advisors
Budget		Low: Database can be part of the job duties of the business liaison recommended earlier.
Timeframe		Short-term: 6 months to 2 years
Risk		Low: This is a City-led program, with assistance from the recommended business liaison and the recommended business-led organization.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creation of a quarterly retail report that can be mailed to multiple potential lessees and commercial real estate brokers and live online on the website.</li><li>• Plan and Execute "Roll Up the Gates" events to show multiple vacant properties to prospective lessees on a single day.</li><li>• Comprehensive and regularly updated database.</li><li>• Determined map outputs.</li><li>• Marketing support templates for available sites.</li></ul>
Partners & Resources		City Council, City staff, landlords, real estate brokers, existing businesses



*Signs on businesses along the corridor*  
*Source: Innes Associates*

<b>Diagnostic</b>	<p>According to business owners, many business on the corridor have existed for decades; some have retained the same names while gaining new owners. At least two clusters exist now: food (restaurants and agriculture) and auto sales. The corridor has a variety of other businesses, including professional services and convenience retail. However, the corridor is starting to show signs of change: a mixed-use development with retail space vacant as of April 2021 and empty lots that have been for sale or recently sold.</p> <p>The City can be a valuable partner to landlords as properties become available for lease by helping to identify uses complementary to those that exist now and working with landlords, real estate brokers, existing businesses and potential tenants to find the right mix.</p> <p>Many of the recommended public and private realm improvements will also assist the attraction and retention of tenants in the corridor.</p>
<b>Action Item</b>	<p>Engage real estate community and use their input to create and maintain an up-to-date database. Knowing industry personnel and creating substantive relationships with brokers can produce enhanced outcomes. Knowing where development opportunities and vacancies are, how long they exist, and when they lease is a powerful tool in knowing district's strengths and weaknesses</p>
<b>Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify real estate stakeholders and determine compelling and best scenario for engagement             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Broker's Breakfast" at an onsite venue or online with a PowerPoint presentation on the benefits (local amenities, testimonials, retail market opportunities) of locating a business along the Merrimack street corridor.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Survey and tally vacancies within the district on a monthly (or at least a quarterly) basis.</li> <li>Gather information from property owners and brokers about square footage (SF), prices, amenities (kitchens, backyards)</li> <li>Create maps using proprietary or open-source data showing vacancies with other landmarks and assets in downtown.</li> <li>Key considerations:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include relevant data points (i.e., vacant properties with SF, price per SF, broker info, etc.).</li> <li>Avoid saturation of the market while attracting complimentary businesses.</li> <li>Legwork and time required for surveying.</li> <li>Engagement with property owners on asking prices for leases (bringing down the price for the best long term outcome).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Budget</b>	<p>In addition to municipal funds, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) could be a funding source for additional staffing required for the project.</p>



Source: Perch Advisors

## BEST PRACTICE FROM THE TENANT MIX COMPENDIUM

# Supporting Entrepreneurs and Commercial Landlords with Pop Up Business Activations



Tenant Mix

Location

New York, NY

SME Consultant: Jeanette G. Nigro, Perch Advisors

### Action Item

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.

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 wi-fi) or if a landlord would be willing to provide short term access to these services.

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.



# Increase cultural events in the corridor to draw local and regional customers.

Category		Cultural/Arts
Location		Merrimack Street Corridor between Exit 46 at I-495 to Route 113/Pleasant Valley Street.
Origin		City staff, public input, site observations Additional input from SME Consultant: Christine Moynihan, RetailVisioning
Budget		Low: \$5,000 per event for volunteers and posters, decorations, entertainment, prizes
Timeframe		Short-term: Several events over 18 to 24 months.
Risk		Low: This is a City-led program, with assistance from the recommended business liaison and the recommended business-led organization.
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of events held.</li><li>• Attendance at each event.</li><li>• Increase in sales during and shortly after each event.</li></ul>
Partners & Resources		City Council, City staff, property and business owners, arts community



*Two potential event centers: Pleasant Valley Gardens (left) and St. Lucy Parish (right). They are a short walk from each other and close to the center of the corridor.  
Source: Innes Associates*

### Diagnostic

Businesses suffered a loss in revenue as a result of the shutdowns in 2020 and the continuing impacts of the Delta variant of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Outdoor events are a way to draw new customers, both local and regional, who may have lost the habit of going to brick-and-mortar businesses as a result of social-distancing requirements.

Many businesses along the Merrimack Street corridor have large parking lots as does St. Lucy Parish. With some creative shared parking arrangements, a weekend festival, tied to some of the corridor's clusters (food, auto, culture, history) could help launch some of the other programs recommended in this report, including the online marketing and the façade and site improvement program.

### Action Item

- Working with the recommended business liaison and business-led organization, create and market a few "Welcome to Pleasant Valley/Merrimack Street Corridor" events and put them on public calendars.
- Consider a joint event with Methuen's Downtown, as suggested by members of the business community.
- Tie events to online marketing efforts, also recommended in this report.

### Process

- Build Capacity
  - All items below require management, administration, and leadership. A paid coordinator may well be needed to oversee events and projects that require integration among departments, tenants, landlords, and over a duration of time.
  - The business liaison in the first Project Recommendation can fulfill this role; ARPA funds can pay for this role through 2026 if funds are committed by 2024.
- Define event.
- Engage a committee and find pro bono designers to help with communications.
  - Select dates approximately 3 months in advance of event.
  - Announce event.
  - Engage retailers to look their best and participate fully. Ask them what they are going to do that is special.
- Encourage retailers to bring their business outside to the customer, clear out inventory with deep discounts, offer coupons for return trips to the business, give away small items, create attractive displays, and add fun to their space.
- Advertise in local papers, on social media, local airways, fliers, etc.

### Budget

In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:

- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) as a funding source for the staffing required for the project.
- Grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council or Methuen' Cultural Council.



Source: FRACC

## Host a downtown cultural event to support businesses and show positive change



Revenue & Sales

Location

Worcester, MA

SME Consultant: Susan Silverberg, CivicMoxie

### Best Practice from Cultural/Arts Compendium

#### Action Item



Source: CivicMoxie

The Winterbridge cultural events (running Fridays and Saturdays for six weeks in the Winter of 2021) at Gromada Plaza downtown was planned to build on the MassDevelopment TDI work on South Main Street and to showcase the collaborative power of FRACC, a 40-member diverse group of arts and culture, business, community nonprofit, philanthropic, and public sector stakeholders. FRACC is charting new territory in the scope of its goals and Winterbridge was meant as a way to:

- Bring the community together and engender city pride (begin to take back the narrative of the city).
- Demonstrate the power of collaboration (put the power of FRACC to work).
- Provide community activities and spaces during winter under Covid-19 guidelines.
- Winterbridge included music, fire pits, evergreen trees, live painting, community partners providing grab n go services, dancing/Zumba sessions, live entertainers (costume characters, singers, and musicians), and a We Love Fall River window display competition.

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# Appendix



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## List of Funding Opportunities

This appendix contains more information about each of the funding opportunities listed in the Project Recommendations above. Information for each opportunity is based on information provided directly from the grant program's website and supplemented, where appropriate. Additional funding sources can be found on the RRP website, under Funding: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rapid-recovery-plan-rrp-program>

Funding cycles and requirements will vary by source and some funding sources are competitive. The information in the Project Recommendations is designed to assist in the preparation of grant applications. Best Practice Compendiums for each project category (Admin Capacity, Public Realm, Private Realm, Revenue & Sales, Tenant Mix, and Cultural/Arts) are provided as separate documents. The information in the compendiums can also help in the preparation of grants. One or more relevant best practices are identified with each of the Project Recommendations above.

The primary source of funding for most of the Project Recommendations is the **American Rescue Plan Act**, or ARPA. ARPA funding must be committed by 2024 and expended by 2026. These funds may be used for the following purposes:<sup>1</sup>

- a. To respond to the public health emergency or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality;
- b. To respond to workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 public health emergency by providing premium pay to eligible workers;
- c. For the provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue due to the COVID-19 public health emergency relative to revenues collected in the most recent full fiscal year prior to the emergency; and
- d. To make necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

The Project Recommendations in this report meet the requirements of a., above. Each recommendation has as its primary purpose the need to assist local businesses with recovery. Certain projects focus on short-term interventions, designed to bring customers into businesses as quickly as possible through technical assistance and skills-building, marketing support, and/or community events designed to attract new and repeat customers.

Other projects address systemic changes: for example, reconfiguring streets or reducing the need for parking to allow space for outdoor dining and/or retail, a critical survival strategy for certain businesses during 2020-2021. Some recommendations address regulatory changes designed to assist with the visibility of businesses to potential customers. Such changes include design guidelines, sign codes, municipal regulations for outdoor dining; many of these are also paired with façade, site, and sign improvement programs to assist small businesses with implementation. Such programs can also address accessibility and public health, by creating physical changes (the removal of barriers, addition of ramps, planting of trees) that address those who have been negatively impacted by the effects of the pandemic.

While municipalities have many claims upon the use of ARPA funds, this report provides guidelines for the strategic disbursement of those funds to assist those with the most negative impacts and reinvigorate the local economy. Municipalities should designate a portion of their funds towards these recommendations and use other funding sources to leverage the ARPA funds. Short descriptions of other funding sources mentioned in this report follow this page.

For more information:

[https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-resources-and-guidance-for-municipal-officials#american-recovery-plan-act-\(arpa\)-](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-resources-and-guidance-for-municipal-officials#american-recovery-plan-act-(arpa)-)

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2021/07/12/the-american-rescue-plan-can-be-a-lifeline-for-business-districts/>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/FRF-Interim-Final-Rule.pdf>

## Community One Stop for Growth

<https://www.mass.gov/guides/community-one-stop-for-growth>

This source is probably the second most important funding source for Project Recommendations. In 2021, the commonwealth of Massachusetts rolled the application process for ten grant programs into a single process. The programs are as follows:

- Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development
  - **MassWorks**
  - Urban Agenda
  - 43D Expedited Permitting
- Department of Housing and Community Development
  - Housing Choice Community Capital Grants
  - **Massachusetts Downtown Initiative**
  - **NEW Community Planning Grants**
  - NEW Rural Development Fund
- MassDevelopment
  - Brownfields
  - Site Readiness
  - **NEW Underutilized Properties**

Many of these grants are competitive. The process has two stages: the first is for the municipality to submit an Expression of Interest, which will be reviewed. In 2021, this submission period was February 8-April 2. The full application cycle was open from May 3-June 4. Communities are notified of the award in October/November.

Grants highlighted in bold are appropriate for several Project Recommendations and will be discussed in more depth in this appendix.

## MassWorks

<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massworks>

MassWorks provides funding for infrastructure and is particularly useful in supporting private development with public infrastructure improvements. This funding source may be used to leverage some of the longer-term Project Recommendations.

## Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (\$25,000)

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-downtown-initiative-mdi>

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/business-improvement-districts-bid>

The focus of this grant is downtown revitalization. The Technical Assistance program provides a consultant and funding for that consultant's work to communities who need help with specific problems. Project Recommendation for which this grant would be appropriate include the development of design guidelines, revision of a sign code, a wayfinding study, a pilot project or projects for façade improvements, design for streetscape improvements, economic development studies (including housing), and parking studies. MDI also provides assistance with the development of a Business Improvement District, or BID.

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**Community Planning Grants**  
(\$25,000-\$75,000)

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/planning-and-zoning-grants>

This is a new program and provides funding for planning projects at a larger scale than the MDI program. Project Recommendation for which this grant would be appropriate might include zoning changes, particularly those that support density, studies for development within a 1/2-mile of a commuter rail station or a multi-town corridor that look at both density and multimodal connections, or other similar planning processes.

As with the MassWorks grant, this grant is appropriate for leveraging Project Recommendations as part of longer-term or larger projects.

**District Local Technical Assistance Grant (DLTA)**  
**Regional Planning Agencies and DHCD**

Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies. These funds may be used for planning projects. Each Regional Planning Agency (RPA) has a different focus on how these funds may be used to meet the state's funding goals.

All municipalities are eligible to apply directly to their RPA. The RPA will work with the municipality on the program; a separate consultant is not usually required.

**Survey and Planning Grant Program**  
**Massachusetts Historical Commission**

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhchpp/surveyandplanning.htm>

This grant is a 50/50 matching program that support planning activities that help preserve significant historic resources. For communities, whose target area contains significant resources, this source may help fund design guidelines that include specific requirements for the preservation of significant historic resources. Interested communities are encouraged to reach out to the Massachusetts Historic Commission directly about this grant; it may be tied to the creation of a local historic district.

**Complete Streets Funding Program**  
**Massachusetts Department of Transportation**

<https://www.mass.gov/complete-streets-funding-program>

This program provides funds to municipalities who have adopted a Complete Streets Policy and created a Prioritization Plan. Any street infrastructure recommended in this report should be added to the Prioritization Plan. This grant program can help address recommended improvements for pedestrian and bicyclist mobility, safety, and comfort.

This grant can also assist with a design guidelines; these do not have to be limited to the private realm. Creating consistency in a downtown, village, or corridor is an important part of defining its identity both within and beyond the community. As part of a Complete Streets Project, a municipality should identify the specific materials, street furniture, trees, and public signage (including wayfinding) that will be used in the target area. These choices can be incorporated into the overall design guidelines to address both public and private realms.

This program could potentially be leverage with the municipality's funding under Chapter 90 to ensure that multimodal infrastructure is connected, over time, throughout the community.

**Hometown Grants**  
**T-Mobile**

<https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/hometown-grants>

This program will fund up to \$50,000 per town and may be used to rebuild or refresh community spaces, including parks and historic buildings. The grant is awarded to up to 100 towns per year.

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**Mass Cultural Council**

<https://massculturalcouncil.org/organizations/cultural-investment-portfolio/projects/>

The Mass Cultural Council has one-year project grants for specific public programming.

Projects are for public programming, which Mass Cultural Council defines as activities that engage with the public.

The municipality's own Local Cultural Council may have additional grants to support local arts and culture; this could include partnering on those Project Recommendations that support the integration of local arts, history, and culture into the LRRP area.

**Commonwealth Places  
MassDevelopment**

<https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/real-estate-services/commonwealth-places/>

This program is another source of funding for place-making strategies with a unique twist. MassDevelopment matches funds raised by the municipality through crowd-sourcing for projects that help improve the quality of public spaces.

**Shared Streets and Spaces  
Massachusetts Department of  
Transportation**

<https://www.mass.gov/shared-streets-and-spaces-grant-program>

This program provides funds to support the improvement of "plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other public spaces." The focus is on public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce.

In the new funding round, starting in January 2022, the program will emphasize safety, funding "projects that improve safety for all road users through interventions that achieve safer conditions and safer speeds."

This program would partner well with other programs to support mobility and outdoor spaces for gathering and dining.



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**Sources specifically to leverage façade/site/sign improvement programs**

A façade improvement program may be used to address components of the façade (including awnings and signs), a storefront system, accessibility, the entire façade or façades visible from a public way, and/or components of the site (including signage, planters, restriping for outdoor dining or retail display, or adding more permanent landscaping). However, within a target area such as a downtown, corridor, or other commercial area, some buildings may have more extensive needs. For example, many historic buildings require elevators for access to upper floors. Other buildings may require structural repairs to the façade or interior.

The sources below are examples that can work in tandem with a façade improvement program to address buildings with larger needs.

**Underutilized Properties Program**

<https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/real-estate-services/underutilized-properties-program>

As with the historic tax credits below, this funding source is for a much larger project. It could be used to help address larger buildings in a target area that have more significant issues. Bundling this program and a few of the other more specialized grants could help a municipality address smaller properties with the façade improvement program and larger ones with these more targeted funds

**Municipal Vacant Storefronts Program  
Economic Assistance Coordinating  
Council**

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-vacant-storefronts-program-mvsp>

This program will not fund façade improvements. The municipality would form a district. Businesses the district then apply for the funds to address vacant storefronts. This could help reduce the number of vacant storefronts while the façade improvement program addresses accessibility, deferred maintenance, and design issues on the exterior or the site.

**Collaborative Workspace Program  
MassDevelopment**

<https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/financing/grants/collaborative-workspace-program>

This grant provides another option to address both the exterior and the interior of this space while also helping to support local jobs and job creation.

**Community Preservation Act**

<https://www.communitypreservation.org/about>

This source only applies in those communities that have adopted the CPA. CPA funds may be used to acquire, preserve, and rehabilitate and/or restore historic assets. A municipality could tie this to the design guidelines for a façade improvement program and consider, for example, acquiring a downtown historic building, updating the façade and ground floor for commercial use, and adding an elevator to allow for housing on the upper floors. The use of these funds will be dependent on each municipality's state goals and process.

**Massachusetts Preservation Projects  
Fund  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
(*\$3,000-\$100,000, depending on project  
type*)**

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcmppf/mppfidx.htm>

This is a 50% reimbursable matching grant for preserving properties, landscapes, and sites listed in the State Register of Historic Preservation.

Applicants are limited to municipalities and nonprofits. Many downtown and village centers include nonprofit and municipal anchors. This grant could be used to ensure that all properties in a target area are brought, over time, to the same standard of repair. The program does have limitation on allowable costs. A preservation restriction is required.

**Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation  
Tax Credit  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhctax/taxidx.htm>**

This is available for significant rehabilitation of historic buildings and may help supplement a larger project in a downtown. This is included in this best practice sheet because the guidelines developed for the municipal façade/storefront improvement program could be incorporated into the review of larger projects.