



# Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Monson

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The Department of Housing and Community Development, through its community and business partners, provides affordable housing options, financial assistance, and other support to Massachusetts communities. We oversee different types of assistance and funding for consumers, businesses, and non-profit partners.

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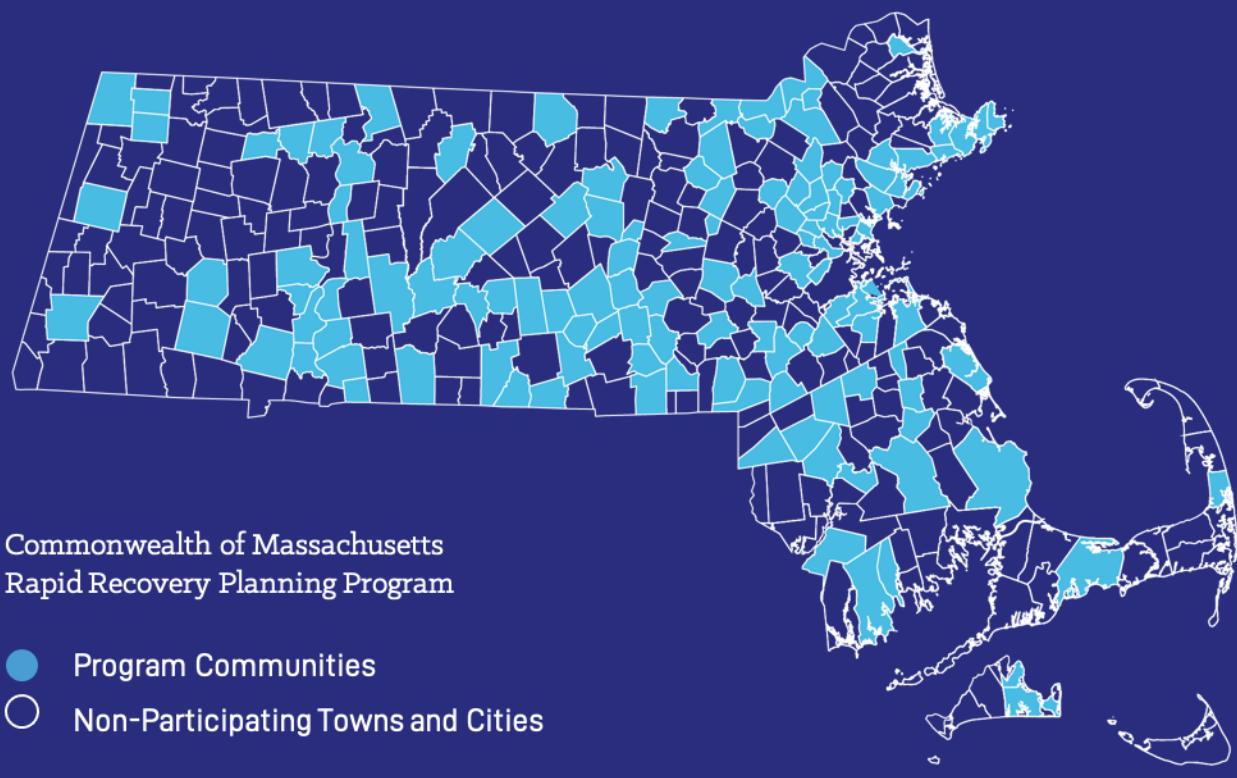
## Table of Contents

Rapid Recovery Program	6
Introduction	7
Approach/Framework	8
Executive Summary	9
Diagnostic Key Findings	13
Market Information	15
Physical Environment	16
Public Realm	17
Private Realm	18
Access & Visibility	18
Parks & Plaza	19
Business Environment	20
Administrative Capacity	22
Project Recommendations	23
Formation of a Monson Business and Civic Association	24
Development of a Town-wide Brand	28
Development of a Town-wide Signage and Wayfinding System	33
Develop and Beautify an Accessible, Connected and Walkable Town Center	41
Develop a Facade, Signage, and Physical Improvement Program	48

## 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.



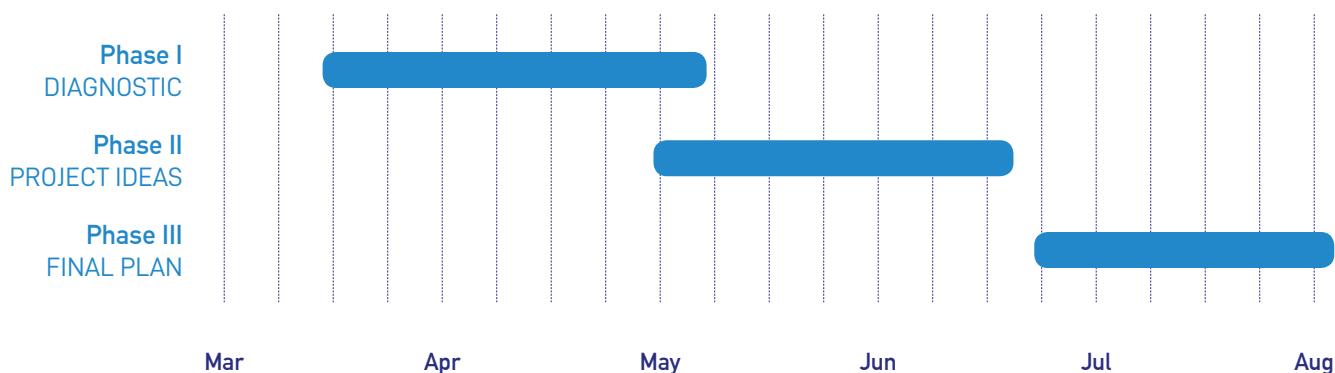
# Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

## A Recommitment to Renewal

Monson is a vibrant community with highly engaged civic leaders, business owners, and residents. The Town Center is a clearly defined area comprised of a diverse mix of retail and service businesses, restaurants, cultural organizations, government agencies and offices, recreational destinations, iconic churches, and residential neighborhoods. While this report is primarily focused on the Town Center, several of the recommendations and proposed projects could apply to businesses throughout Town.

The 2011 tornado was devastating to the Town Center, but at the same time presented an opportunity for renewal. The Town produced a significant addendum to the Town's Master Plan in 2012, titled "A Community Plan for Monson Center". While not all recommendations in that plan have been realized, significant progress has been made in the ensuing years and, most importantly, the goals expressed in that plan are still valid and continue to provide an excellent roadmap for continued growth. As was the case following the tornado 10 years ago, the pandemic and emergence from it offers an opportunity for the community to once again come together, recognize its strengths and weaknesses, and reaffirm its commitment to renewal.

As is the case in most communities, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on virtually all segments of life in Monson, including the business, nonprofit, and government sectors. While assistance from the federal government has helped to mitigate financial losses, there is much left to do as the Monson business and nonprofit sectors continue to move toward full recovery.

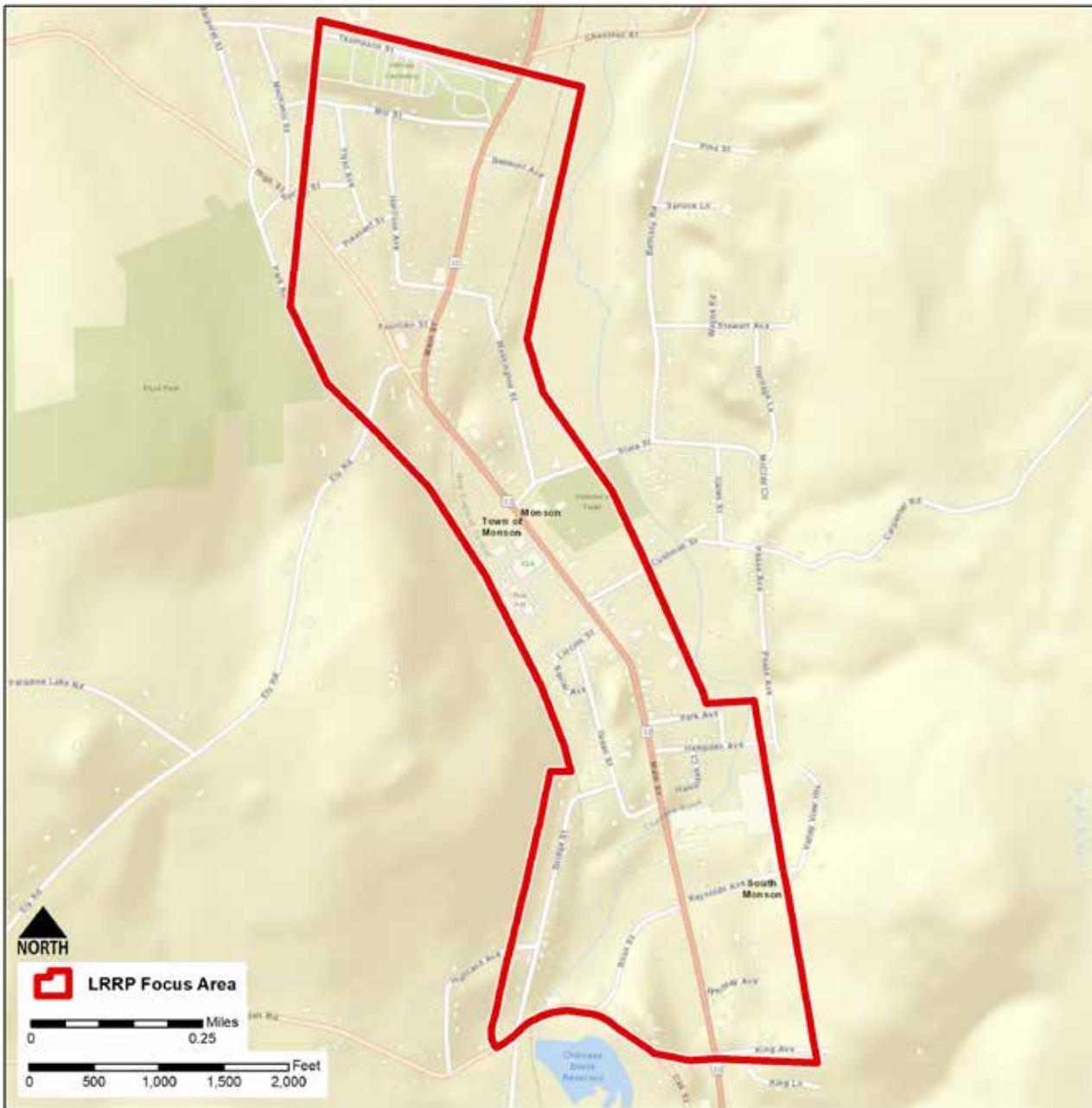
This report is the culmination of a 6-month process beginning with a Diagnostic Phase from March through June, followed by a Planning and Development Phase from July through September. The process involved a broad cross-section of community members, business owners, and government officials who came together to form the Monson Rapid Recovery Planning (RRP) Committee. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) met with the committee throughout the process to facilitate discussion and solicit feedback. Additional engagement included one-on-one meetings, walk-throughs, interviews, and presentations. Many committee members gave generously of their time throughout the process, carefully reviewing proposed projects and providing invaluable comments and suggestions.

As the Project Plans were formulated, DHCD provided the opportunity for interaction with approved Subject Matter Experts (SME). The SME's met with PVPC as Plan Facilitator, as well as the RRP Committee. Their feedback and guidance were a critical part of the process and helped to confirm that the recommendations contained in this report comport with SME experience and best practices.

The five suggested Project Plans contained in this report represent a consensus of the RRP Committee and offer an integrated approach where the successful implementation of one project will help to enhance the success of other projects. It is important to point out that all Project Plans are dependent upon funding, as well as the community's capacity to implement recommendations within a proposed timeframe. The dates identified in each plan assume a best-case scenario where funds are available and sufficient resources exist to achieve goals. The success of each of these plans envisions the participation and engagement of municipal staff with a broad representation of community volunteers, advocates, and stakeholders. Further, funding to expand administrative capacity through the assistance of consultants and design firms should be carefully considered.

The Projects Plans are identified in the following chart, and represent a balanced combination of initiatives in the Public Realm, the Private Realm, Revenue & Sales, Culture/Arts, Tenant Mix, and Administrative Capacity. The projects interact well together, and may be implemented in a sequential manner or, in some instances, simultaneously.

	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Private Realm</b>	<b>Public Realm</b>	<b>Administrative Capacity</b>	<b>Revenue Sales</b>	<b>Culture Arts</b>	<b>Tenant Mix</b>
1	<i>Formation of a Monson Business and Civic Association</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*
2	<i>Development of a Town-wide Brand</i>		*		*		
3	<i>Development of a Town-wide Signage and Wayfinding System</i>		*		*	*	
4	<i>Develop and Beautify an Accessible, Connected and Walkable Town Center</i>		*		*		
5	<i>Develop a Facade, Signage, and Physical Improvement Program</i>	*			*	*	*



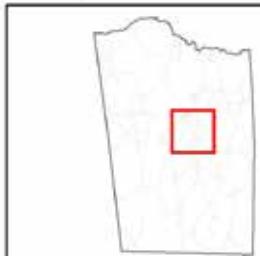
## Monson, Massachusetts

### Local Rapid Recovery Program Focus Area Map

Data Sources:  
Town of Monson Massachusetts,  
MassGIS, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission



### Municipal Locator Map



### Regional Locator Map



[Project Map](#)

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## Diagnostic

# Key Findings



## Monson's customer base is stable, its history is impressive, and its location is ideal for incremental, controlled growth

The Project Area serves a customer base of 8,898 fulltime Monson residents, 1,869 of whom live in the Town Center, along with several thousand additional annual visitors. Monson is located in southeastern Hampden County and is part of the Springfield metropolitan area. The Town is nestled between the Springfield suburbs of Wilbraham and Hampden to the west and the popular tourist and recreational towns of Brimfield and Sturbridge to the east. The Town is bordered on the north by a primary east-west road (Route 20) and crossed by Route 32, which extends from the Quabbin region of north central Massachusetts south to Stafford, CT.

Monson is known as a destination for recreational and cultural activity, and has a long proud history of agriculture, granite quarrying, and manufacturing. With a more defined, cohesive, and thoughtful marketing effort, Monson and its Town Center have the potential to attract more visitors, customers, and patrons. This increased activity would have the potential to provide support to Monson's current and future business and nonprofit community, ultimately benefiting all residents and stakeholders.



## Public infrastructure is in reasonably good condition with notable exceptions

Most sidewalks and crosswalks are in fair to good condition, but could be more creatively utilized to encourage business "spillover". Signage and wayfinding are sufficient for basic travel needs, however more strategic, consistent, and comprehensive signage would facilitate residents and visitors alike to discover or rediscover key assets and destinations. Street trees and benches are sporadic. As with signage and wayfinding, more consistent placement might result in more pedestrian activity.



## Monson Center's business mix is primarily retail and service oriented

The Town Center contains a relatively strong array of retail stores, services, and restaurants, including a few national/regional chain stores, and a healthy mix of locally owned business. Restaurant types include full service, breakfast/lunch, take-out, fast-food and bars. Retail businesses include grocery, pharmacy, liquor, hardware and lumber, gas stations, gift shops, and general merchandise. Service businesses include financial, legal, automotive, real estate, a variety of salons, a funeral home, and more. In addition to commercial business, the Project Area is home to several nonprofit, cultural, religious, and governmental entities.



## The Center has no downtown organization overseeing recovery efforts

Although there is no single organization in charge of the Project Area, several local and regional entities have interest in its future. The challenge for the Town will be to coordinate and collaborate with all of these entities to achieve shared goals. The formation of a business/civic association would have the potential to create greater synergy and sustainability for all stakeholders in the Town Center and beyond.

- Although Monson does not have a Business Association, a number of entities are well-positioned to make it a better place to live, work and shop.





## Highlights from the Market Information

### CUSTOMER BASE

Demographic data was gathered for the Town of Monson and for the Project Area, including a ½-mile radius around the actual project boundaries. The town-wide median household income is \$87,158, and is comprised of somewhat older, long-time residents, as well as newer individuals and families. The median Town-wide age throughout is 48 years old, but skews younger in the Town Center at 43.19 years of age. Median age is in line with other rural and suburban municipalities in the four western counties. Of the town-wide workforce of 1,508, roughly one fourth (360) live in the project area. The project area, like the rest of town, is predominantly non-Hispanic white, both at 93% (U.S. Census American Community Survey 2015-2019).

Based on discussion and feedback from members of the Rapid Recovery Planning Committee, residents are generally pleased with the mix of customer facing businesses in town, but would welcome incremental expansion in the business community, allowing for increased choice and competition in a variety of segments. Strong sentiment exists to provide more local products and services that would serve and continue to attract young families and children.





## Highlights from the Physical Environment

### OVERVIEW

Monson Center is formed by a valley with hilly terrain directly to the east and west. The Town Center begins roughly at the intersection of Route 32 Washington Street on the northern end and extends south to the intersection Route 32 and Hampden Avenue. The Project Area extends further to the south of the Town Center as far as the Chicopee Brook Reservoir and includes the 285,000 square foot Ellis Mills property, a former manufacturing facility that is more than 50% vacant. The property has come under new ownership in recent years and its future use, including mixed-use development, has been a topic of frequent discussion.

The Chicopee Brook defines the eastern edge of the Project Area, with vast forested area to the west. Significant recreational opportunities exist in and around Monson Center, including athletic fields, basketball and tennis courts, community pool, fitness trail, skate park, and disc golf course. The rolling and hilly terrain surrounding the Town Center generates extensive opportunity for hiking, road and mountain biking, off-road racing events, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, swimming, cross country skiing, and snowshoeing abound. A comprehensive and creative wayfinding program would have the potential to better connect these open space and recreational features to the core assets in the Town Center for residents and visitors alike.

The project area includes 49 properties that were counted as "storefronts" under the project guidelines. Some of these are not what one might traditionally think of as storefronts, such as office space or municipal buildings, but these entities were included as part of the project.

Total Storefronts	49
Vacant Storefronts	6
Total Active Businesses	43
# Public & Private Parking Spaces	Approximately 800
Permanent Parks and Plazas	Veterans Town Park Dave Grieve Park Flynt Park

All elements were evaluated according to a set of criteria established by the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) along with Streetsense. MDI notes that it is important to bifurcate the physical environment into the public and the private realm to acknowledge the fundamentally different nature of the tactics and funding mechanisms available for each.



## PUBLIC REALM

MDI specifies that the public realm includes common areas such as streets, sidewalks and public spaces that are typically under public ownership and may be managed and maintained by either the public sector or a nonprofit entity.

Sidewalks and crosswalks in most parts of Monson's Project Area are in fair to good condition, however certain locations could use some upgrading. A few older sidewalks are in poor condition. This is typical for most communities, given that there is limited public funding for sidewalk upgrades. Roads are generally in good condition, although additional crosswalks (and possibly bike lanes) are needed. Street trees are sporadic and as are benches. Signage is sufficient for basic travel needs, but does not identify or promote key assets and destinations for drivers and pedestrians. The expanded use of crosswalks, in combination with improved and more creative signage and wayfinding, would enhance enjoyment and safety for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.



## PRIVATE REALM

The private realm refers to buildings and storefronts that are typically owned by individuals or corporate entities. In Monson's project area, building facades are generally well-maintained. Most commercial signage is functional and in reasonably good condition, however some signage is weathered, outdated, or simply not immediately visible to passing motorists

As for "curb appeal," most stores do not have merchandise displays outdoors or significant visibility into their establishments. Restaurants do not generally offer outdoor dining, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most stores do not have awnings or outdoor lighting that illuminates the sidewalk.

## ACCESS & VISIBILITY

Access and visibility refer to the transportation network that offers customers convenient accessibility, whether by private vehicle, car share, foot, bike, or public transit, and the visibility of businesses to customers and passersby. Monson Center is easily accessible by car, bicycle and foot. There are currently no established public transportation routes, however the Council on Aging has recently expanded its customized van service to include adults of any age for a nominal fee. Some unsafe pedestrian conditions and street crossings exist, and some sidewalks do not meet ADA accessibility criteria. Businesses directly on the street are visible, but as stated previously, updates in wayfinding, signage, facades, and lighting would greatly enhance the ability for potential customers and patrons to discover hidden gems that abound.



## PARKS AND PLAZAS

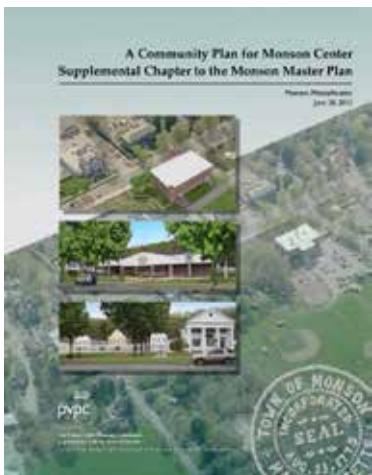
Parks and plazas identified in this program are permanent spaces that are available for use year-round by the public. They are typically owned, managed, and/or programmed by the local Parks Department and/or another public or quasi-public entity. Monson has hundreds of acres of open space, conservation land, and recreation areas. The Historic District includes property on both sides of Main Street, including Dave Grieve Park (1 acre), Memorial Hall, and the House of Art. Each of these adjacent locations combine to create open space in the downtown area, conducive for community gatherings, concerts, and a "slow traffic zone". Veterans Park (8 acres) is bordered by State Street, Chicopee Brook, Town Hall, and several Main Street businesses. The Park is very active, offering athletic fields, a playground, skate park, tennis courts, fitness equipment, pickle ball, and other recreational amenities. The larger Flynt Park, totaling 149 acres is immediately adjacent to the Project Area and offers an extensive network of wooded hiking trails and scenic views. Flynt Park also has athletic fields, playground equipment, a very popular disc golf course, one of the first in the area. The opportunity for additional pocket parks, parklets, and plazas exists throughout the Town Center.



## Highlights from the Business Environment

### The Community Plan for Monson Center

On June 1, 2011, a devastating EF-4 tornado struck Monson, resulting in major destruction in the Town Center. The Town received a planning grant from the Tornado Recovery Planning Assistance program of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. The result was the creation of a supplemental chapter to the 2004 Master Plan, titled "A Community Plan for Monson Center". The Plan contains numerous short-term and long-term recommendations and goals, some of which have been achieved and others that remain. The overriding goals of the plan involve creation of a more functional and accessible Town Center through re-creation of the Town Hall site, changes in zoning and regulation to encourage commercial and mixed-use development that reinforces downtown as a pedestrian and bicycle friendly place, connection of Chicopee Brook to the rest of the Town Center through the creation of a river walk, creation of new outdoor green spaces and plazas, and encouragement of further residential development in neighborhoods close to the Town Center. The Plan identifies all of these "business friendly" strategies that also seek to retain Monson's small-town rural character.



### ANCHORS/DESTINATIONS, ASSETS, AND BUSINESS MIX

The Town Center has a broad mix of commercial, public, and civic uses that meet a wide range of needs. Anchor businesses include the Monson Savings Bank corporate offices, Adams Hometown Supermarket, and Walgreen's Pharmacy. Most municipal buildings are in the Project Area, including the Town Hall, Police and Fire Departments, Monson Free Library, Senior Center, Highway Department, and Water and Sewer Department. The Center is also home to several nonprofits, cultural organizations, and beautiful and iconic churches with active congregations.

As mentioned, there are 49 storefronts with 43 businesses and 6 vacancies. The Town Center has approximately 800 public and private parking spaces. Businesses and other destinations are fairly spread out, and well-loved local venues are interspersed throughout the Town Center. Of the 43 active entities, 21% are retail stores, 19% are food and beverage establishments, 7% construction and manufacturing, and 53% are service organizations, including automotive, financial, legal, real estate, tourism, hair salons, a funeral home, optician, dance studio, among others. There is ample parking, however parking needs to be more clearly identified. Few businesses have permanently closed due to Covid-19, however many did close temporarily and/or have had significant restrictions on operations.

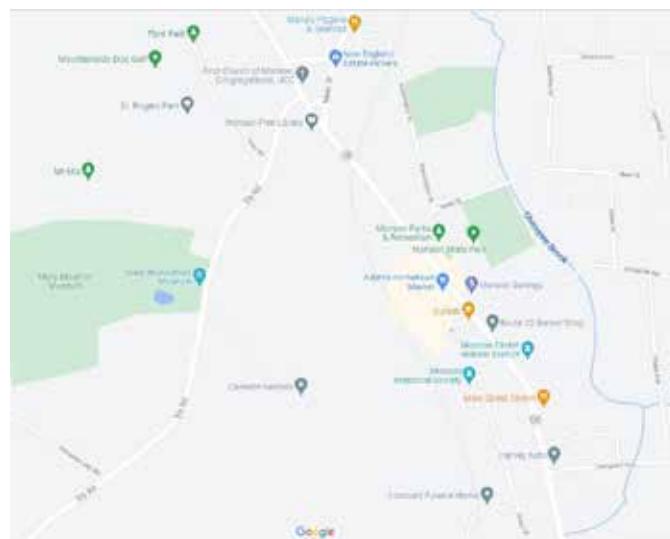
#### Business Mix

- How well does the business mix meet the needs of various customer groups?

Total # of Storefronts	49	A mix of commercial, public, and nonprofit entities meet a wide range of needs:
# of Vacant Storefronts	6	21% retail with many small and medium sized individual shops
Total # of Businesses	43	19% food and beverage primarily individually owned and operated
# of Parking Spaces (on and off-street)	Approx. 800	60% services including real estate, banking, financial, legal, insurance, construction, salons, a funeral home, and a dance studio. Independently owned lumber yard/hardware store Large legacy manufacturing facility with vacant space

## NODES/CLUSTERS

Main Street is a clear node and destination, connecting three distinct clusters comprised of the Monson Free Library, Congregational Church, and a handful of businesses at the northern end of the project area to the Monson Center Historic District at the southern end. The Ellis Mill property is immediately to the south of the Historic District and offers the potential to significantly expand this cluster, pending future development. It must be noted that development of this property will be no easy feat and would require significant cooperation on the part of local, State and Federal partners. In between these two bookends lies a central cluster which is home to Monson Savings Bank corporate headquarters, Adams Hometown Market and adjacent shopping center, Monson Town Hall, Senior Center, Veterans Park, and several other businesses. A mix of retail, service, and food service businesses can be found throughout the Project Area.





## Administrative Capacity Highlights

Administrative capacity in Monson is appropriate for its size. There is no business association serving the Town Center, although a number of organizations consider it part of their service area. See below for a list of partners. The Town Planning Department is led by a fulltime Community Development Director. Creative funding sources and strategies will be necessary to implement and sustain most, if not all, LRRP projects. Existing and future Federal and State grant funds, including those related to pandemic relief and recovery (CARES, ARPA, CDBG, etc.), should be considered to help in this effort and weighed against other pressing and competing municipal needs.

Partners and potential partners in Monson recovery work include:

- Monson Town Government and Civic Leaders
- Monson Historical Society
- Monson Arts Council
- Local Businesses & Nonprofits
- Town Residents and Property Owners
- Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce
- Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (CDC)
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development



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## Project Recommendations

# Form a Business and Civic Association (BCA) to Support the Monson Business Community that will positively influence successful aging, health, economic vitality, and overall livability.

<b>Category</b>	Private Realm; Public Realm; Administrative Capacity; Revenue Dales; Culture Arts; Tenant Mix
<b>Location</b>	Town of Monson
<b>Origin</b>	Monson Rapid Recovery Planning Committee with guidance from PVPC Plan Facilitators
<b>Budget &amp; Sources of Funding</b>	 <b>Low to Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$100,000)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• \$25,000-\$30,000 - Formation of and preliminary consultant/administrative support for BCA</li><li>• \$5,000-\$10,000 – Production of a Community Celebration/Festival to support the BCA and introduce it to the community</li><li>• \$5,000-\$10,000 – Walkability/Wayfinding project to demonstrate "proof of concept" as the community rethinks pedestrian connectivity and accessibility in the Town Center</li><li>• \$15,000-\$50,000 – Initial Placemaking Project to install a patio, outdoor furniture, and signage to encourage downtown visitors to spend more time in the historic area of the Town Center. This would be a project of the BCA, with guidance from municipal government staff. Budget dependent on scope of project.</li></ul> <b>American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</b> Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds could cover assistance with the formation and/or design of the BCA when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.  <b>Regional Economic Development Council of Western Mass (REDO)</b> \$5,000,000 was recently made available by DHCD to the 125 municipalities participating in the LRRP program. Monson submitted a \$50,000 grant application to the REDO on September 23, including \$25,000 to support formation of a BCA and \$25,000 to support ongoing projects of the BCA through 6/30/22.  <b>Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet Best Practices Program</b> The Community Compact is a voluntary, mutual agreement entered into between the Baker-Polito Administration and individual cities and towns of the Commonwealth. In a Community Compact, a community will agree to implement at least one best practice that they select from across a variety of areas. The community's chosen best practice(s) will be reviewed between the Commonwealth and the municipality to ensure that the best practice(s) chosen are unique to the municipality and reflect needed areas of improvement. Once approved, the written agreement will be generated and signed by both the municipality and the Commonwealth. The Compact also articulates the commitments the Commonwealth will make on behalf of all communities. The FY22 Best Practice program opened on August 15th, 2021 and will remain open until available funds are exhausted.  While the possibility of a grant from this source may be a stretch, and would require support from the municipality, it could be worth investigating. Potential Best Practice categories identified on the State website that could be investigated include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create Opportunities for Engaging Diverse Stakeholders in economic development efforts, such as to assist with identification of priority development projects, improve local permitting processes, and proactively address obstacles to housing accessibility and affordability as well as job creation.</li><li>• Create Cross-Sector Partnerships to help carry out community-driven responses to community-defined issues and opportunities for economic development.</li></ul>

	<p><u>Regional Business and Economic Development Associations</u>  Funding or in-kind support from regional business and economic development associations should be investigated. The Jacobs Ladder Business Association, Gateway Hilltowns Collaborative, and Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts should all be contacted for potential support and participation in the project.</p>
Timeframe	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• October 2021: Announce the formation of a Business &amp; Civic Association working group. The working group will be comprised of interested members of the RRP committee, as well as other interested stakeholders in the community. The working group will be responsible for establishment of the BCA and oversite of 3 preliminary projects to be completed by June 30, 2021</li> <li>• October 2021: Determine if there is a need to engage an outside consultant to assist with formation of the BCA. Confirm role of the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce (QHCC) in the process.</li> <li>• November 2021: Begin work to formalize the organization, including consideration for application as a nonprofit corporation and/or development of bylaws separate from the QHCC.</li> <li>• November 2021: Convene 3 subcommittees to work on the festival, walkability/wayfinding, and placemaking projects.</li> <li>• November-April: Planning, development, and execution of the walkability/wayfinding project</li> <li>• December-May 2021: Planning, development and execution of a community celebration</li> <li>• January-June 2021: Planning, development and execution of the placemaking project</li> <li>• December 2021: Begin work to create a website (or webpage on the QHCC or Town website) and social media platforms.</li> <li>• March-April 2022: Launch BCA website (or webpage) and social media.</li> <li>• April-June 2022: Formalize the BCA with clear goals and objectives for future activity.</li> </ul>
Risks	 <p>Low risk. Monson is a well-run town with highly engaged and enthusiastic leaders and stakeholders. The QHCC has demonstrated strong willingness and advocacy for this multipronged project, and is dedicated to assisting the Town to ensure a successful result. Government is very close to a large number of residents, and many people have a big stake in the successful completion of this project.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	<p>This project will be successful if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• several members of the RRP Committee continue to participate and there is a consistent increase in membership on the working committee, leading to awareness and interest in formation of the BCA</li> <li>• the BCA is successful with execution/implementation of at least two of the three projects prior to June 30, 2022</li> <li>• the BCA is established and continues to engage with municipal government to implement additional recommendations contained in the RRP Report</li> <li>• the BCA and a Town beautification project are positively received by the community</li> </ul>
Partners & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Monson Town Government and Civic Leaders</li> <li>• Monson Historical Society</li> <li>• Monson Arts Council</li> <li>• Local Businesses &amp; Nonprofit Organizations</li> <li>• Town Residents and Property Owners</li> <li>• Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (CDC)</li> <li>• Pioneer Valley Planning Commission</li> </ul>
Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts	<p>Monson is a small, but vibrant community, with significant synergy between business, nonprofit, cultural, recreational, agricultural, and governmental sectors. Impacts of COVID-19 have drastically and negatively impacted those businesses with much lower revenue, inability for expansion, and cancellation of most activities and events.</p> <p>The BCA will benefit Monson in several ways, including facilitation of better communication, collaboration, coordination, networking, and "buy-in" across a diverse group of community stakeholders. Further, Monson has somewhat limited administrative capacity within its municipal government structure to tackle additional projects. A newly formed BCA will enhance the ability for the Town to successfully execute the recommendations contained in this report.</p>

## Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts (cont'd)

The RRP Committee has clearly identified continued revitalization and development of the Town Center as the overriding goal of the RRP process. All of the projects contained in this report are intended to facilitate this goal, both in the public and private realm.

As mentioned in the Budget and Sources of Funding section of this plan, the Town was invited by DHCD to apply for funding to implement a portion of the recommendations in this report. The wayfinding and placemaking portions of this budget is in no way intended to address all needs, wants, and wishes. Rather, it is a small, but significant down-payment on the long-term goals for continued Town Center development. The PVPC submitted a grant application on September 23, 2021, on behalf of the RRP Committee, requesting \$50,000 in funding as follows.

- \$25,000 - Formation of and preliminary consultant/administrative support for BCA
- \$5,000 – Production of a community celebration to support the BCA and introduce it to the community
- \$5,000 – Organize a temporary walkability/wayfinding project to demonstrate "proof of concept" as the community rethinks pedestrian connectivity and accessibility in the Town Center
- \$15,000 - Install a patio, outdoor furniture, and signage to encourage downtown visitors to spend more time in the historic area of the Town Center. This would be a project of the BCA, with guidance from municipal government staff.

The total budget for this multipronged project could be greater than the amount envisioned in this grant application, particularly for the placemaking component, dependent on determination of the complete scope.

## Action Plan

The project(s) will involve the following steps, more precisely defined above under Timeframe and below under Process.

1. Identify who, in addition to RRP Committee members, should be involved in the project, including business and property owners, nonprofit and cultural organizations, local artists, civic leaders, and the community at large.
2. Develop the criteria for development, approval, and implementation.
3. Develop the funding and oversight structures.
4. Proceed with development and implement of the project(s).
5. Upon completion of the project, consider next steps.

## Process

### Phase 1: Planning

- **Convene a committee:** Identify and bring together key stakeholders.
- Identify key goals and confirm key performance indicators for the project.
- Identify up to \$25,000 of funding and in-kind support to assist with planning (Phase 1) and development (Phase 2) of the BCA.
- Identify up to \$25,000 of funding and in-kind support to assist with planning (Phase 1) and development (Phase 2) of the recommended short-term projects.
- **Research:** Investigate the structure, goals, activities, and results of other BCA's and VBP's
- **Present findings to the community:** Determine specific goals and desired improvements based on community feedback from a variety of constituencies (business, recreation, arts/culture, government). Invite community members to join the BCA and/or participate in the other projects.

### Phase 2: Project Development and Design (BCA)

- **Administrative capacity:** Develop the roles and responsibilities for the BCA, including how the association will engage and assist municipal government and what its relationship will be with the QHCC.
- **Create a BCA website/webpage** to function as a key resource to promote businesses, civic organizations, and community events. This will serve as a key resource for community-wide marketing and will integrate with social media platforms.
- **Identify additional RRP project opportunities:** Review other RRP project recommendations prioritized to receive support from the BCA
- **Determine the need for additional funding/resources:** How will the BCA become financially sustainable?

### Phase 2: Project Development and Design (VBP)

- **Identify RRP project opportunities:** RRP Projects supporting a community celebration, wayfinding/walkability "proof of concept" demonstration, and placemaking project should be reviewed by the BCA, discussed with municipal staff, appointed and elected municipal representatives, and prioritized to receive support from the BCA.
- **Administrative capacity:** Develop the roles and responsibilities for the BCA to assist with these preliminary projects, including how the association will engage and assist municipal government.

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**Process  
(cont'd)**

- **Determine the need for additional funding/resources:** Is additional funding needed to complete the project in the short-term (prior to 6/30/22). What longer term efforts should be considered? How might any of these considerations be integrated into other RRP plans (Façade Improvement, Branding, Signage and Wayfinding, Walkable and Accessible Town Center)?

**Phase 3: Programming to Encourage Development of the Town Center**

- **Host an inaugural community celebration:** The 200th anniversary of the White Church could be a possibility. Other ideas, such as a block party, public art activity, outdoor recreation meetup, music festival, community tag sale, and more, should be entertained. Community events should be sponsored by the BCA at least quarterly. Refer to the Walkable Town Center project plan for more detailed recommendations.

**Best Practices**

The LRRP Best Practices Compendia do not specifically detail formation of a BCA. Included below is a Best Practice outlining formation of a Business Improvement District, as well as a link to an example of a highly successful BCA in Hopkins, MN.



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



Provided by SME Consultant

Ann McFarland Burke, Downtown Consultant

Location

Hudson, MA

### Origin

Downtown Hudson Business Association, Town of Hudson, MA

### Budget



MDI Grant for Technical Assistance. Town staff provided support to Steering committee.

### Timeframe



Short term (<5 years). Planning, Signature campaign and Initiation took approximately 2 years

### Risk



Medium Risk – property owner, business and political support required for success.

### Key Performance Indicators

Formal vote by Board of Selectmen to formally establish the BID, corporate and tax filings completed, staffing and initiation of services

### Partners & Resources

Hudson Planning Dept, Property Owner Steering Committee, MDI, donated legal, graphic design

## Diagnostic

The Hudson BID was formed to capitalize on an emerging renaissance of downtown and sustain positive economic growth. New activities, cultural events and entrepreneurs had begun the positive momentum for the downtown and stakeholders believed a BID would help ensure sustainable success. The BID created a way for downtown Hudson to implement a BID Improvement Plan that included wayfinding, enhanced and well-managed parking, infrastructure improvements, marketing and event coordination. The BID services were designed to help the downtown continue to grow and thrive as a destination to shop, work, live and visit.

Hudson had an engaged business community, as well as property owner and town administration support for the effort.

The strong steering committee and town support resulted in overwhelming buy-in of property owners (80%) and the unanimous vote by the Board of Selectmen to approve the BID.

## Action Item

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 execute 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

## Process

Forming a Business Improvement District is four phase project. Resources to help a community organize and execute the strategies and legislative authorization process can be found in these publications :

[How To Form a BID in MA- Manual available at www.mass.gov/ MDI](http://www.mass.gov/MDI)

BID Case Studies available at [www.massdevelopment.com](http://www.massdevelopment.com)

Hudson began their BID formation process scratch.. A working committee that included stakeholder property owners and planning staff undertook the following steps to successfully build a BID in Hudson.

BID Formation

## Process (Continued)

### PHASE 1 - TEST THE FEASIBILITY

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

### PHASE 2 - CREATE THE BID IMPROVEMENT PLAN

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

### PHASE 3 - CONDUCT THE PETITION PROCESS

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



New entrepreneurs in Downtown Hudson



Gateway Rotary to Downtown

## Process continued

### PHASE 4 - INITIATE OPERATIONS

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

## The Legislative Authorization Process



## Early Highlights

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

- **Enhanced Downtown Appearance** - Implemented wayfinding signage, banners, hanging baskets, holiday lighting, benches and other physical enhancements to the district to create a more appealing experience for the visitors to downtown Hudson.
- **Rotary Gateway** - The BID has been active in the design, implementation and communication to property owners and tenants on the Gateway rotary project. These efforts help mitigate the disruption caused by construction by ensuring timely communication and execution of the project.
- **Business Support** - Actively working with property owners to retain and recruit tenants. Vacancy rates in the BID fell from 11% to 5% since its inception in 2017. Provided free TA on PPP and other financial relief programs during Covid.
- **Creating Collaborations** - Formed new collaborations with groups and organizations that were previously untapped resources.





Happenings ▾

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for **COMMUNITY EVENTS**  
within walking distance



# Development of a Brand with a Goal of Incorporating into Town-wide Signage, Wayfinding and Marketing Plans

Category	Public Realm; Revenue Sales
Location	Town Center with inclusion of outlying areas
Origin	Monson Rapid Recovery Planning Committee with guidance from PVPC Plan Facilitators
Budget & Sources of Funding	 <b>Low Budget (\$15,000-\$70,000)</b>  The budget can fluctuate based on the scope of services desired, needs of the Town, and the schedule for the deliverables. A budget for implementation of the new brand should be assessed as well, and most implementation costs are not included in what is outlined here (other than print or digital collateral). The new brand will have to be applied across a variety of different instances, including creation of new materials like stationery, infographics and signage. Should the Town decide to hire a consulting/design firm to assist with brand launch/implementation, a retainer agreement with the firm could be highly beneficial to a new brand launch.  Below is a list of services with an estimated range of associated costs to help with the estimation of cost for the project. Advice provided by Selbert Perkins Design (SME) suggests that the Town will likely be highly selective in determining the range of services to include in the budget. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brand Strategy \$5-10K</li><li>• Stakeholder engagement (interviews) \$5 – 15K</li><li>• Public Engagement (survey – online or in person) \$10K – 20K</li><li>• Logo/Identity Design \$15 – 25K</li><li>• City/Town Seal \$15 – 25K</li><li>• Brand extension – supporting visuals \$10K – \$20K</li><li>• Print or digital collateral - \$5K – \$50K</li><li>• Brand Guide - \$5 – \$20K</li></ul> In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:  <u>American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</u> Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or sign upgrades when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.  <u>Regional Economic Development Council of Western Mass (REDO)</u> \$5,000,000 was recently made available by DHCD to the 125 municipalities participating in the LRRP program. Monson submitted a \$50,000 grant application to the REDO on September 23, including \$30,000 for branding. Notification regarding approval of the request is expected in October, with funds available (if approved) in early November.  <u>Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and DHCD</u> District Local Technical Assistance Grant Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and may be used for planning projects. Each 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. Wayfinding/Signage and Façade Improvement projects are also contemplated in this report, among others. Should the Town engage PVPC for other LRRP projects, administrative assistance with branding may also make sense.

## Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet

#### Best Practices Program

The Community Compact is a voluntary, mutual agreement entered into between the Baker-Polito Administration and individual cities and towns of the Commonwealth. In a Community Compact, a community will agree to implement at least one best practice that they select from across a variety of areas. The community's chosen best practice(s) will be reviewed between the Commonwealth and the municipality to ensure that the best practice(s) chosen are unique to the municipality and reflect needed areas of improvement. Once approved, the written agreement will be generated and signed by both the municipality and the Commonwealth. The Compact also articulates the commitments the Commonwealth will make on behalf of all communities. The FY22 Best Practice program opened on August 15th, 2021 and will remain open until available funds are exhausted.

Potential Best Practice categories identified on the State website that could be investigated include:

- Create Opportunities for Engaging Diverse Stakeholders in economic development efforts, such as to assist with identification of priority development projects, improve local permitting processes, and proactively address obstacles to housing accessibility and affordability as well as job creation.
- Create Cross-Sector Partnerships to help carry out community-driven responses to community-defined issues and opportunities for economic development.

Funding related to regional business and economic development associations, as well as Town funds might also be investigated.

## Timeframe



- 10/21-11/21: Form a committee comprised of municipal staff, local business owners, and nonprofit organizations to investigate and initiate a branding project for the benefit of the Town and all interested stakeholders.
- 10/21-11/21: Secure funding for the project
- 11/21: Determine the full scope of the project, and develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit the services of a design firm. This document serves as an important baseline for the project, identifying a timeline, budget, stakeholders, goals and deliverables for the branding exercise.
- 11/21: Advertise and hire a design firm to act as project manager and consultant.
- 11/21: Determine a Brand Manager. This person will be the representative from the community responsible for acting as liaison to the design firm, managing the project as it develops, and then evolving into directing brand users to the correct usage of files, and maintaining the brand standards. This person should be municipal staff, and should be at every meeting
- 12/21-5/22: Proceed through the branding process phases as described in the Process section of this report.
- 6/22: Conclude project with receipt of the brand guide from the design firm during a public presentation. The presentation should serve as preliminary training for key stakeholders to how the brand and brand guide are to be used.
- Ongoing: Once the project is completed, all municipal, commercial, and nonprofit entities in Town should be invited to utilize the brand as outlined in the brand guide.

## Risks



Low risk. Monson is a well-run town with highly engaged and enthusiastic leaders and stakeholders. Government is close to a large number of residents, and many people have a big stake in the successful completion of this project. The only plausible risk to a branding effort would be a negative public perception of a new municipal brand. This can be avoided by including the public in the process through surveys and public presentations.

## Key Performance Indicators

This branding project will be successful if:

- Monson's newly established brand, slogan, and logo are broadly used in all or most communication coming from local government, the business and nonprofit community, and the arts and recreation community, resulting in the majority of Monson's residents being able to identify and articulate the community's new identity.
- a creative and consistent wayfinding system is implemented, as part of a subsequent project, that incorporates all elements of the branding effort, including in-town and digital/online messaging.
- Brand elements are broadly and consistently used on community websites, contributing to more effective marketing efforts.

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## Key Performance Indicators (cont'd)

- there is a noticeable and quantifiable year over year increase in visitors to town beginning in the Fall of 2022.
- Inquiries from "out of towners" regarding visiting or potentially moving to town increase by at least 15% by Summer of 2023.
- year over year attendance at existing community-wide events and festivals increases beginning in 2022.
- there is an increase in the number of businesses in town, including the Town Center, beginning no later than 2023

## Partners & Resources

- Monson Town Government and Civic Leaders
- Monson Historical Society
- Monson Arts Council
- Monson Business and Civic Association (pending creation as an LRRP project)
- Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce
- Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (CDC)
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- Property & business owners
- Nonprofit organizations
- Local Artists or Cultural Organizations
- Town Residents

## Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

Monson is a small, but vibrant community, with significant synergy between business, nonprofit, cultural, recreational, agricultural, and governmental sectors. Impacts of COVID-19 have drastically and negatively impacted those businesses with much lower revenue, inability for expansion, and cancellation of most activities and events.

With a population of about 8,700 people, Monson is small enough to involve many of the townspeople in a process designed to achieve broad consensus around community identity and values. This "team building" exercise can then serve the community going forward to work in an effective and collaborative way toward achieving shared goals.

Given the town's priorities, a full-scale branding effort may or may not be required at this time, and a smaller audit may suffice. This would involve reviewing how the town is representing itself visually, and taking a look at the commonalities among the examples. From there, identifying a standard type treatment of the town name, as well as colors might be sufficient for the town's purposes. The Diagnostic and Process sections of this plan represent a complete branding process, but could be scaled back if desired.

Engaging with the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce may provide an avenue for a co-branded approach with other local towns. Representing a similar regional identity may produce a positive ripple effect for the area (i.e. visitors going from one town to the next as a day trip). The Berkshires are a great example of successful town/region co-branding.

Monson has a strong arts community, with some well-known artists that could be approached in any branding effort. This is encouraged, as Monson's identity should have elements that come from within.

With any branding effort, the goals of the town are of primary importance. The RRP Committee has been clear in its goal to attract visitors and tourists to town, but not necessarily new residents. The current residents want to balance Monson business growth and economic development with the desire to retain the community's small-town character.

This report contains a Signage & Wayfinding plan. A strong signage program starts with a foundation of confirmed brand identity

Any discussion with a prospective design firm should include an in-depth discussion about the public process. Once a firm is selected, the town should provide any relevant documentation to the selected design firm for review, and then meet following the review to ensure the design firm understands the future goals for the town.

Given the aging demographics of Monson, R&D based exclusively on a technology driven approach would likely omit a large population of the town. Surveys and communication should be done in a hybrid manner, utilizing in-person public gatherings as well as digital and virtual formats. The design schedule should outline when the firm plans on hitting major milestones. These milestones should correlate with public meeting schedules, and the design team

## Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts (cont'd)

should prepare presentations that facilitate various forms of engagement to collect feedback from the town.

Given the town's size and needs, a wordmark approach to the logo, as opposed to a logomark should be seriously considered. This means the town's effective "logo" would be a stylized version of the town's name. By isolating an approach to design prior to the process, the town can save some budget by not processing alternative approaches.

The identity that results from the design process should be done with the scale of the town in mind, first and foremost. Monson is small – and while its needs are not small the design team needs to constantly be mindful of this. The deliverables need to reflect the scale of the town to keep the budget low.

A successful branding process has the potential to serve the Town and its residents in several ways, including:

- engaging a broad cross-section of the community in achieving consensus about identity, values, and goals.
- heightening community pride and awareness among Town residents.
- providing a baseline of valuable graphic assets and marketing tools that can be used to achieve more impactful and successful signage, wayfinding, and marketing programs.
- assistance to businesses and organizations who choose to participate in some level of co-branding, thereby providing greater synergy and sense of community.
- effectively communicating to visitors and potential visitors what the Town is all about.

### Action Item

The project will involve the following steps, more precisely defined above under Timeframe and below under Process.

1. Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
2. Identify who needs to be part of this process and engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.
3. Develop the criteria for application, approval, and implementation.
4. Develop the funding and oversight structures.

### Process

With guidance from subject matter expert (SME) Cory DePasquale of Selbert Perkins Design, the following process guidelines are recommended and should be seriously considered.

#### The Process of Developing a Brand

Developing a brand for the town is a bold undertaking – one that requires a few standard elements to ensure a successful outcome. We'll start with identifying key players:

1. Identify Key Players
  - The Design Firm/Studio is the group contracted to complete the work. They can provide the Town with pricing proposals before officially contracted for work, and once signed to the project will complete the deliverables and be a valuable partner following completion of the brand project moving forward.
  - The Brand Project Manager This person will be the representative from the community responsible for acting as liaison to the design firm, managing the project as it develops, and then evolving into directing brand users to the correct usage of files, and maintaining the brand standards. This person could be either municipal staff or an individual who is highly engaged with the Business and Civic Association, and should be at every meeting.
  - Stakeholders are key members of the community and municipal staff that will have a larger impact when it comes to decisions. They should be included when the Design firm requests their input.
  - Constituents are residents of the community and should be considered throughout the entire process, but invited for input at key milestones. Too much feedback can be detrimental to the process.
  - PVPC, as the Regional Planning Agency, can work with the municipality on the program, as requested and subject to funding.

#### 2. Develop an RFP

The first step in the process of branding is developing a Request for Proposals (RFP). This document will serve as an important baseline for the project, identifying a timeline, budget, stakeholders, goals and deliverables for the branding exercise. Design firms will respond to your RFP with proposals for no fee. The Town will then review the proposals, and select a firm they are most comfortable with. The Town should look for firms with

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**Process  
(cont'd)**

strong client history, reasonable budgets, and a deliverable schedule that meets the requirements.

### 3. Going Through the Phases

Any design firm submitting a proposal will likely respond with an outline of how they intend to complete the project. The more detail in their proposal the better, but each proposal should outline the design phases, how many hours in each phase, and at least a rough schedule to illustrate how they intend to structure the project. Phases vary from firm to firm, but Selbert Perkins phase structure for a branding project looks like this:

- A. Research & Discovery – This phase will likely be one of the longest, but is the most important. Setting the stage with the right information, stakeholders, project team, communication standards and any recent reports or master plans gives the design firm a solid foundation to build on. The amount of time and budget required for this phase will be, in part, dependent on the amount of public participation the Town would like to accommodate.
- B. Concept Direction – After the research is pulled in and digested, the design firm will share a very basic idea of the potential directions the first phase has pointed them towards, and ask for validation. Feedback is very important in the early phases of this process, so open, direct communication and a transparent process are critical.
- C. Visual Language – The design team then develops the accessories to the new logo. Color, image style, copy tone/voice, tagline(s), are all the details that help make a brand succeed, and by determining them prior to the logo, the brand should start to have a feeling that is familiar and in line with the goals.
- D. Logo Design & Refinement – This phase takes all of the details and starts to put an identity to the community. The design firm should present a set number of options as reflected in their proposal. The brand concept that has the most potential should be selected for refinement.
- E. User Testing & Refinement – This phase of refinement should be based in sharing the concept with stakeholders and asking for commentary, all of which will be reviewed for integrity and relevance. The design team will weigh the feedback, and revise the brand concept accordingly and share another presentation of their findings.
- F. Brand Guide Development – Once a final logo has been selected from the refinement phase, the design team should then begin preparing the brand guide. This document is organic and will develop over time, but should include standards for how and when the brand is used. The guide should be issued in both digital and printed version is also recommended for the staff to use as a guide while the brand is starting to be used in communications.

A brand guide will vary in length, but should show at the least:

- Logo in color
- Logo in black & white/ high contrast
- Any variations in format
- Clear space to be maintained around the logo
- Any taglines that have been adopted for use with the logo, marketing efforts, stationary, or signage and wayfinding
- Colors in detail – codes, hex values or pantones to be accurately reproduced
- Applications of the logo being used appropriately
- Examples of applications of the logo being used incorrectly
- Index of files – a list of files of the logo in its different iterations and colors

After completion of the brand guide, the design firm should still be a valuable contact for the team. New use cases may sometimes require new logo types or your team may want additional resources (letterhead, digital seal, signage & wayfinding) that the design firm could continue to develop. The Town should pick a creative design firm that delivers professional presentation and can hold to a schedule. As is the case with more traditional construction projects, periodic maintenance and updating.

**Best Practice**

The following Best Practice projects represent good examples of branding projects.



# Create a way-finding theme based on the community's seaside location



Provided by SME Consultant

Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location

Well, ME

Origin

Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen

Budget



Medium-\$30,000 design fee + \$80,000 for implementation

Timeframe



Short- 8 months for design and planning

Risk



Low

Key Performance Indicators

Installation and use of signage, Functionality of signage

Partners & Resources

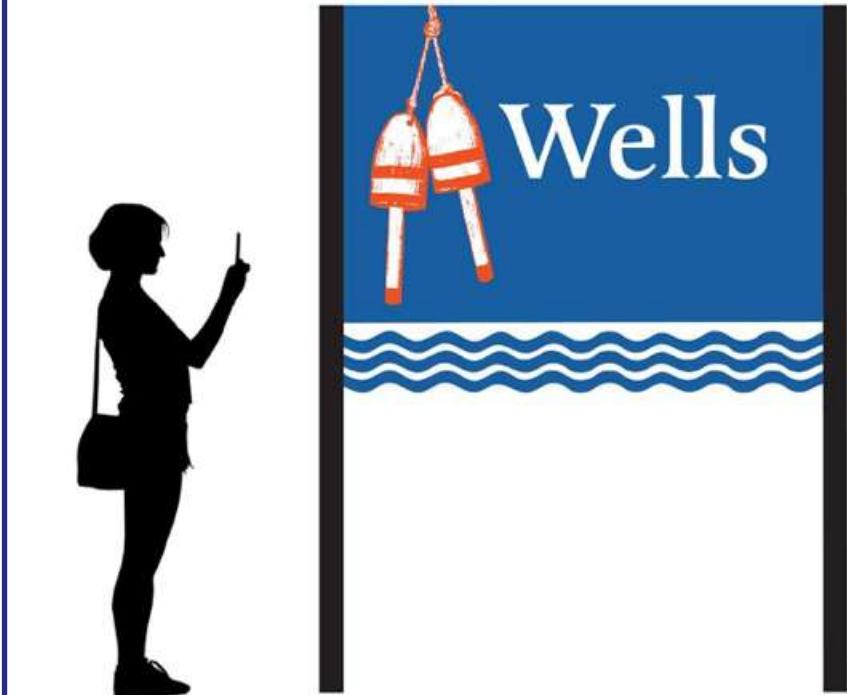
Town of Well, Maine

## Diagnostic

- Wells, Maine is a seaside community in Southern, Maine. It is located between the two more affluent communities of Ogunquit and Kennebunkport.
- Besides being a summer seaside resort , it is a fishing village and lobster boat harbor as well as being the site of the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge.
- There is no concentrated downtown area. Instead commercial businesses are spread along US Route 1 or Post Road in Wells.
- The town administration felt that the town needed a branding and wayfinding sign system that also had applications for internal communications and even street furniture and public art.
- A national competition was administered, and Favermann Design was designated the consultant.
- Our firm did a visual survey of the various parts of the community including ways to the beach, commercial activities and feeder streets and roads.
- Historic buildings, structures and various types of estates and campuses were reviewed.
- An advisory committee was appointed by the town administrator to discuss and review project components.

## Action Item

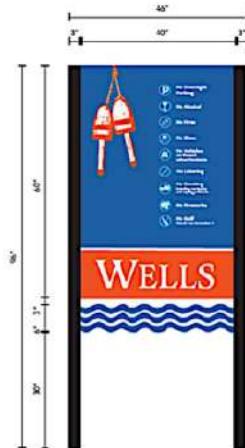
- Meetings with the Advisory Committee were scheduled over the next four (4) months.
- Utilizing existing conditions, community history and natural areas, each meeting looked at another aspect of the program.
- Locations were explored in terms of decision points and directional element considerations.
- After assessing 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



*Precedent: Lobster buoys.*

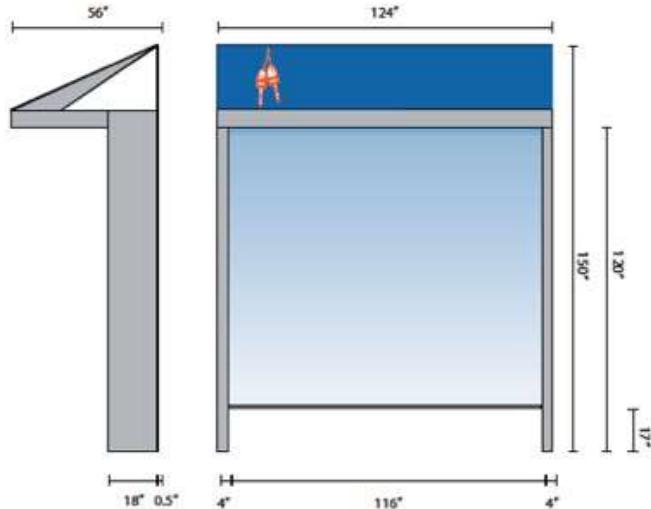
## Process

- After photo documentation, a comprehensive community design alternative element presentation was made to the advisory committee.
- This was followed up a few weeks later with a presentation of past case studies created and developed for other communities.
- An *Ideation Exercise* followed a few weeks later that thoughtfully looked at ways to describe the “brand” of Wells by words and phrases.
- The Advisory Committee fully participated in this ideation exercise. It fostered a sense of ownership by the participants.
- From the *Ideation*, a number of alternative designs were created. These were then presented to the Advisory Committee for review and refinement.
- Once a couple of design directions were approved, Creative development proceeded for a number of sign element examples including for “beach rules” and a number of studies for street furniture.
- Beach Rules included pre-season regulations that restricted activities that could endanger the threatened Plowing Plover who lays their eggs on the Wells beaches in the Spring.
- Dog regulations and horseback riding rules were also included in Beach Rules. Symbols were set parallel to word descriptions.
- Photoshop versions were set in place for discussion of signage, street furniture and public art markers.
- Street furniture explorations included themed benches, kiosk, bike racks and trolley stops.
- Design options were developed into families of elements.
- A vendor list was developed based on appropriate fabricator/installers in both Maine and Massachusetts.
- Cost estimates were developed in collaboration with fabricators/installers.
- Public art suggestions were scrutinized by the Advisory Committee.
- A map of locations for sign element placement was created in collaboration with the Advisory Committee.
- A full set of sign element and street furniture pieces fabrication specifications were created for bidding.



Favermann Design | March 2019

*Plowing Plover bird on Wells Beach in the springtime next to the beach rules on the sign.*



*The trolley stop between Ogunquit and Kennebunkport.*

## Process – Strategic Decisions

- The decision by Town of Wells to start the process
- The appointment of strategic stakeholders to the Advisory Committee representing a cross-section of strategic interests
- Review of commercial sign program sponsored by State of Maine found program uneven, not maintained and detracting from the environment/landscape
- The graphic design chosen by the advisory Committee was two lobster buoys set on the left side of the panel.
- The colors chosen for the system of wayfinding elements were a turquoise and a Cadmium Red.
- Street furniture and gateway/entrance sign elements was to have wavy elements symbolic of the ocean.
- Sculpture was to be made from polished aluminum or steel.
- The designs were shared in the Town administrator's weekly newsletter to residents and businesses.
- A presentation was made to the Wells Select board for discussion and tacit approval of the total design package.
- Recommendations were made for branding to be applied to Wells internal communication including newsletter, stationery, agendas, etc.
- A decision was made to develop elements that connected with the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge and significant historic structures in town.
- Discussion was held about a phased implementation of the Wayfinding and signage system.
- A thoughtful decision was made to use Maine-based vendors.



**J**  
INSTRUCTIONAL

### GRAPHICS

Dimensions: 4'0" x 6'0"  
Material: Aluminum panel 2mm thick (or per suggestion of fabricator)  
Print: Full color print on adhesive vinyl  
All major white vinyl lettering is reflective  
Anti-graffiti coating  
Colors: Red (Pantone 172C), Blue (Pantone 303C), Light Blue (Pantone 305C)  
Font: Latienne Pro Medium, Bicyclette Bold

### STRUCTURE

Posts: 3" square posts metal capped  
Baked Enamel Finish: Pantone Black C  
Paint applied to all sides; must have 8 year guarantee  
Sign Fabricator to make recommendations on installation to adhere to MaineDOT standards and specifications  
Must verify overall dimensions and orientation in the field  
Vendor will make recommendations to affix panel to posts  
Footings to be recommended by installer



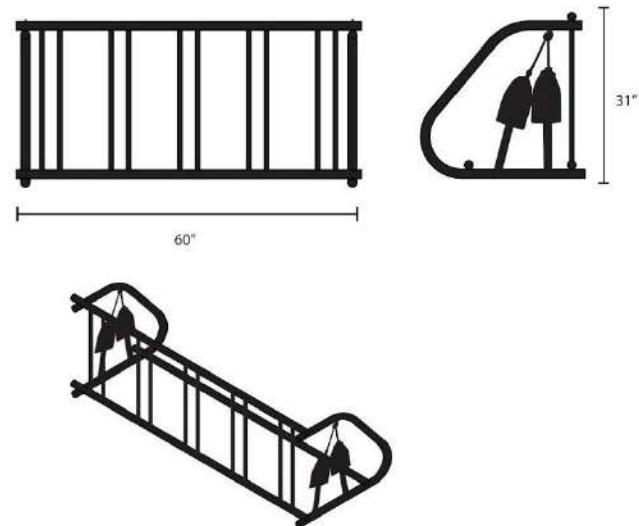
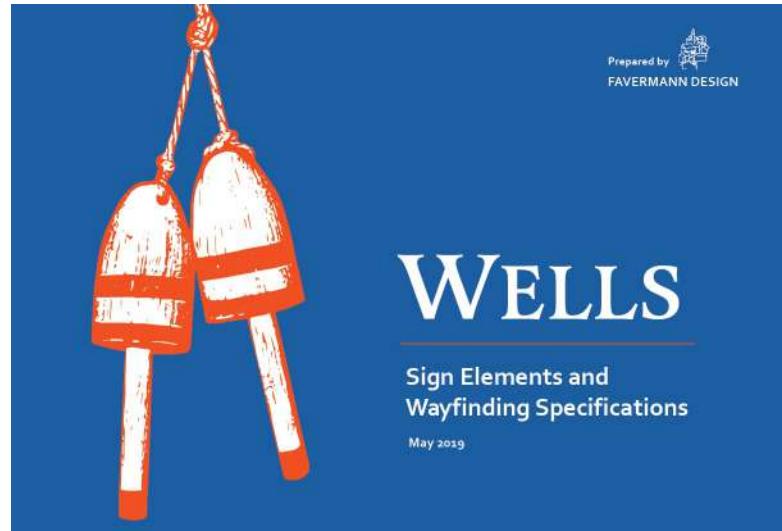
*To meet overall activation goals downtown, two locations were targeted for public space events and activities.*

## Desired Outcomes

- A full set of detailed fabrications specifications was created for vendors to make proposals and to fabricate wayfinding and sign elements as well as street furniture units.
- The wayfinding elements included sculpture as "landmarks" in a Kevin Lynch way that were to serve as external reference points.
- The themed street furniture also had sculptural qualities marrying form and function with aesthetics.
- The notion of the Wells brand was to make the town more of a destination than just a pass-through place on the Southern coast of Maine.
- The Wells brand visually spoke to the hominess of the community and hard-working residents.
- Signs were designed to be durable, easily maintained and cost-effective. Replacement if damaged was easily done as well.

## Add-ons

- The "brand" could be applied to many saleable objects such as T-shirts, mugs, sweatshirts, caps, etc.
- Revenue from the sale of these items could pay for the system of wayfinding and sign elements and/or maintenance.
- An expensive, but "brand" reinforcement piece could be a "Beach Pass" for residents. This would replace existing less colorful beach passes.
- Signs recognizing the line between Kennebunkport and Ogunquit and Wells could be strong identifiers for the community.
- A gateway sign leaving the Maine Turnpike and entering Wells would welcome and visually embrace visitors.
- The Wells branding and wayfinding and sign element program is only constrained by budget and community follow-through.





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



Provided by SME Consultant

Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location

Wakefield, MA

## Origin

Town of Wakefield

## Budget



Medium- approximately \$80,000 (kiosk only; additional elements to cost \$30,000)

## Timeframe



Short – planning and implementation in 3-1/2 months

## Risk



Medium --political will, lightning caused devastating fire, unjustified NIMBYism and lack of community transparency

## Key Performance Indicators

Continued use by visitors and residents

## Partners & Resources

Wakefield Main Streets, Town of Wakefield, Mass Legislature, Wakefield Police Department, Wakefield Public Library, Wakefield Historical Commission and Wakefield DPW

## Diagnostic

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

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

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

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

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

## Action Item

The two overlapping programs took two different paths.

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



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



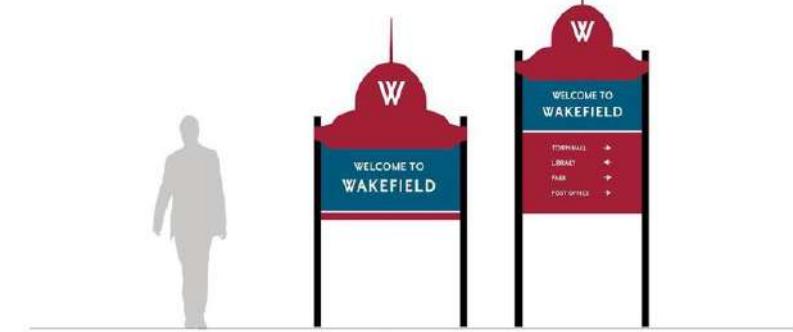
*Old Band Stand adjacent to Lake Quannapowitt in Wakefield, MA*

## Process

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



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



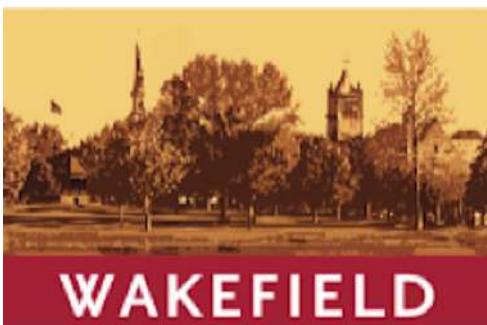
*Besides interested citizens, town officials including the Town Planner, Police Officer, City Counselor, and Main Street board member are making decisions regarding locations.*

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

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

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

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



**See our 2018 Wakefield Memorial High graduation supplement**

**WAKEFIELD ITEM HOURS**  
Monday - Thursday 7:30 - 4:00  
Friday 7:30 - 3:00

**RECYCLE COLOR: Blue • Tuesday, June 5, 2018 • 36 Pages**

**the Wakefield DAILY ITEM**

Family-owned publication serving Wakefield for 124 Years - 75¢ Newsstand, 80¢ Home delivery [www.wakefielditem.com](http://www.wakefielditem.com)

### Sailboat with cherries

A BLACK CHERRY tree (according to the Audubon Field Guide: New England) along the shore of Lake Quannapowitt. (Robert Pushkar Photo)

### Community Meeting and Open House: Hurd School future options

WAKEFIELD — The Town Council and Town Administrator Stephen P. Malo would like to give the public an update on the ongoing evaluation of the Hurd School located at 27 Cordis Street in the "Lakeside" neighborhood. The public is invited to a second Open

House and Community Meeting. The first floor will be open for public viewing at 6:15 p.m. followed by the community meeting in the auditorium at 7 p.m. on Wednesday June 20 at the school. The Town Administrator will lead the discussion and provide updates to the ongoing evaluation followed by a question and answer session about the building's future.

"After hearing from the public at our first meeting and evaluating our swing space and other needs, it is time to re-engage the neighborhood and community to discuss the best use of the building moving forward," according to the Town Administrator.

The Hurd School was declared excess property in 2005 by the Wakefield School Committee and

### Stolen credit cards reported

WAKEFIELD — A Winship Drive woman called police at about 11 a.m. yesterday to report that her credit cards had been stolen.

The woman noticed that the cards were missing over the weekend but was not sure when they were taken.

Police said that fraudulent charges were made using the credit cards at Home Depot in Dauphin and Target in Stoneham. The cards have been cancelled.

At about 3 p.m. yesterday, a caller reported that a UPS truck took down some wires at the corner of Oak Street and Orchard Avenue. Police confirmed that they were cable wires and made sure they

POLICE Page 9

HURD Page 7

### Kiosks coming to downtown

#### Town Council notebook

By MARK SARDELLA

WAKEFIELD — As part of the ongoing effort to revitalize the downtown area, four new kiosks will be installed at various locations offering "way-finding" and other useful information for visitors and residents. The Town Council approved the installation of the signs, one of which will have a digital component, at their meeting last week.

Bob Mailhot, president of Wakefield Main Streets, appeared before the Town Council along with Mark Faverman of Faverman Design to discuss the project. The kiosks will be paid for by Wakefield Main Streets through their private fundraising efforts. Faverman Design has been retained by the town to develop a branding and wayfinding program for the town's business district.

Two of the free-standing, two-sided kiosks will be located on sidewalk in the Square, and will be placed at Main and Water streets and Main and Albion streets. A third two-sided kiosk will be placed near Veterans Field on North Avenue. The digital kiosk will be three-sided and will be placed at the southern end of the Lower Common, near the corner of Common Street and Lake Avenue. One side of this kiosk will be digital and have a changeable screen.

Faverman talked about the design of the kiosks, which will incorporate the look of the iconic Bandstand, including a red top that

KIOSKS Page 7

KIOSKS LIKE THIS ONE will be installed at four key locations around town to help promote the downtown area. Conceived by Faverman Design, the kiosks will incorporate the look of the iconic Bandstand.

#### Kiosk Debate Dominates Town Council Meeting

Latest open effort to draw walkermen from Lake Quannapowitt to downtown meets no dice.

CITY COUNCIL

Published in the May 18, 2018 issue

Photo: Bob Holmes, Faverman Design

WAKEFIELD — It's a bit of irony very few people seem to care about the kiosks that are being proposed for the downtown area. The Town Council had the opposite reaction.

The kiosk debate of concern appears to be the station one of the proposed four kiosks, which would have a digital component.

The station kiosk would be placed at the corner of Main and Albion streets, near the intersection of the Lower Common and Albion Avenue.

If that May 21 meeting, the Town Council discussed the installation of the kiosks, the kiosks were to be placed at the corner of Main and Albion streets to welcome the downtown area.

The kiosks will be paid for by Wakefield Main Streets through their private fundraising efforts.

Two of the free-standing, two-sided kiosks will be located on sidewalk in the Square, and will be placed at Main and Water streets and Main and Albion streets. A third two-sided kiosk will be placed near Veterans Field on North Avenue. The digital kiosk will be three-sided and will be placed at the southern end of the Lower Common, near the corner of Common Street and Lake Avenue. One side of this kiosk will be digital and have a changeable screen.

The meeting to approve the kiosks at their May 21 meeting was adjourned.

But that Act 1 meeting, two local residents, Julie Scott of Main Street and Mark Faverman of Faverman Design, spoke up about the kiosks during the meeting.

Julie Scott, who is a member of the Friends of Lake Quannapowitt, said that the kiosks would be a good addition to the area of the lake.

The Friends of the lake are a group of individuals who are working to

raise money to purchase solar panels at the lake.

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**WINTER 2021**

#### UPGRADED DROP BOXES AT TOWN HALL



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

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

#### DATES TO NOTE

**Tax Collector**  
Third-quarter actual real estate bill due:  
**February 1, 2021**

Third-quarter actual personal property bill due:  
**February 1, 2021**

2021 motor vehicle excise bill commitment #1  
**Issued February 4, 2021 | Due March 8, 2021**

**Assessing Department**  
Abatement applications due:  
**February 1, 2021**

Statutory exemptions due:  
**April 1, 2021**



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

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

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

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

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

# Development of a Town-wide Signage and Wayfinding System that Utilizes the Monson Brand to Connect the Town Center with the Rest of the Town

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Category	Public Realm; Revenue Sales; Culture Arts
Location	Town Center with inclusion of outlying areas
Origin	Monson Rapid Recovery Planning Committee with guidance from PVPC Plan Facilitators
Budget & Sources of Funding	<p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)</p>  <p>For budgets related to signage and wayfinding, we advise to expect a range in cost. The following estimated cost schedule represents a wide range of costs based on the size of the community, scale of the signage program, the schedule for the deliverables and the cost of fabrication and installation.</p> <p>Wayfinding Design \$ 25K - \$150K+</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stakeholder engagement (interviews) \$5 – 15K</li><li>• Public Engagement (survey – online or in person) \$10K – \$20K</li><li>• Wayfinding Analysis (Circulation Plans, Sign Location Plans, etc.) \$8K – \$18K</li><li>• Signage Standards or Master Plan Document (plus above services) \$10K – \$25K</li><li>• Concept Design \$15K - \$30K</li><li>• Design Development \$15K - \$30K</li><li>• Design Intent \$10K - \$20K</li><li>• Bidding + Negotiation \$5K – \$10K</li><li>• Construction Administration \$10K – \$25K</li></ul> <p>Fabrication \$75 – \$500K</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simple metal or vinyl signage \$5k – \$25K</li><li>• Illuminated pylons/gateways \$50K - \$200K each</li><li>• Non-illuminated, freestanding signage \$25K- \$50K (each)</li><li>• General Conditions and Installation \$20 – 175K</li><li>• Digital directories \$25K- \$100K</li><li>• Mapping \$5K - \$25K</li></ul>

In addition to municipal funds, the following are potential sources of funds.

## American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or sign upgrades when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

**T-Mobile**  
**Hometown Grants**  
This program will fund up to \$50,000 per town and may be used to rebuild or refresh community spaces, including historic buildings.  
<https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/hometown-grants>

**Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and DHCD**  
**District Local Technical Assistance Grant**  
Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and may be used for planning projects. Each 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. Branding and Façade Improvement projects are also contemplated in this report, among others. Should the Town engage PVPC for other LRRP related projects, administrative assistance with signage and wayfinding may also make sense.  
<http://www.pvpc.org/>

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet Best Practices Program**  
The Community Compact is a voluntary, mutual agreement entered into between the Baker-Polito Administration and individual cities and towns of the Commonwealth. In a Community Compact, a community will agree to implement at least one best practice that they select from across a variety of areas. The community's chosen best practice(s) will be reviewed between the Commonwealth and the municipality to ensure that the best practice(s) chosen are unique to the municipality and reflect needed areas of improvement. Once approved, the written agreement will be generated and signed by both the municipality and the Commonwealth. The Compact also articulates the commitments the Commonwealth will make on behalf of all communities. The FY22 Best Practice program opened on August 15th, 2021 and will remain open until available funds are exhausted.

Potential Best Practice categories identified on the State website that could be investigated include:

### **Housing and Economic Development Best Practices**

**Best Practice:** Create Cross-Sector Partnerships to help carry out community-driven responses to community-defined issues and opportunities for economic development.

### **Active Transportation**

**Best Practice:** Implement Complete Streets by joining MassDOT's Complete Streets Funding Program and demonstrating the integration of Complete Streets principles into regular planning and design practices on local roadways.

Funding related to regional business and economic development associations, as well as Town funds might also be investigated.

<https://www.mass.gov/best-practices-program>

### **Commonwealth of Massachusetts Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program**

A Quick-Launch/Quick-Build Municipal Funding Program

The Shared Streets and Spaces Program looks forward to accepting new applications beginning in January 2022. Details on future program operation including exact deadlines, application documents, and eligibility requirements will be published here as they become available.

Building on the success of the Shared Streets and Spaces Municipal Grant Program first launched during the summer of 2020 -- and later extended to address the particular challenges of winter -- the Massachusetts Department of Transportation is now announcing a new phase of the program. The new phase will operate similarly to previous iterations of the Shared Streets and Spaces Program by supporting municipalities and transit authorities to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. In light of recent increases in speeding-related crashes and fatalities, this new phase of the program will have an additional emphasis on safety, and is looking to fund projects that improve safety for all road users through interventions that achieve safer conditions and safer speeds.

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

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## Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

### Commonwealth of Massachusetts

#### Complete Streets Funding Program

A Complete Street is one that provides safe and accessible options for all travel modes – walking, biking, transit and vehicles – for people of all ages and abilities. The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program provides technical assistance and construction funding to eligible municipalities. Eligible municipalities must pass a Complete Streets Policy and develop a Prioritization Plan. All Program news, guidance, and registration information are available through an online Portal.

Grant opportunities of up to \$400,000 are available for Complete Streets projects, including Signage and Wayfinding projects, provided the Town has adopted a Complete Streets policy and the project includes walking and biking. The MonsonTown Center Walk Audit Report, completed by Walk Boston in June 2021, provides an excellent resource for adopting such a policy in an expeditious manner.

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

### Commonwealth of Massachusetts

#### One Stop for Growth Development Continuum

All grant programs within the One Stop for Growth fall into the Continuum.

The Community One Stop for Growth is a single application portal and collaborative review process of grant programs that make targeted investments based on a Development Continuum:

#### **Preparing for Growth**

Grants to support activities and initial steps by community-based actors to attract and guide private investment in a community.

- Community Capacity Building
- Planning & Zoning
- Site Preparation

#### **Catalyzing Specific Projects**

Grants to support private, commercial, industrial, and residential investment projects that further the community vision.

- Predevelopment & Permitting
- Buildings (vertical)
- Infrastructure (horizontal)

#### **Continuum Detail – Community Capacity Building**

Projects may focus on a geographic area (district, community, or region) or a target population. Preference for projects that demonstrate a clear vision and a leadership group that is effective and stable. For projects with a target population, preference for those with involvement of, or impact on, Black and Latino populations. Projects may fund consultants or, in certain cases, staff time.

Projects in the Community Capacity Building section of the Development Continuum include:

- Technical Assistance for Improving a Downtown or Commercial Center
- Early Stage Strategy Development
- Strategy Implementation by an Existing Cross-Sector Consortiums or Coalition

**Grant Type:** Technical assistance or Implementation Grants. Projects may fund consultants or staff.

**Grant Sizes:** Potential for \$25,000 to \$100,000 awards. Downtown technical assistance grants will not exceed \$25,000.

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/one-stop-for-growth-development-continuum#overview->

### American Association of Retired Persons

#### AARP Community Challenge grant program

The AARP Community Challenge grant program is part of the nationwide AARP Livable Communities initiative that helps communities become great places to live for residents of all ages. The program is intended to help communities make immediate improvements and jump-start long-term progress in support of residents of all ages.

Since the program's debut in 2017, AARP has awarded \$9.3 million through 800 grants. The projects have been completed across all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- In 2017, for the first-ever AARP Community Challenge, AARP received nearly 1,200 applications and distributed nearly \$780,000 among 88 winning grantees.
- In 2018, for the second challenge, AARP received almost 1,600 applications and distributed \$1.3 million to fund 129 projects.

## Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

- In 2019, the grant program received nearly 1,700 applications and distributed nearly \$1.6 million among 159 grant winners developing "quick-action" projects.
- In 2020, the program received over 2,800 applications and distributed more than \$2.4 million among 184 grant winners (including projects specific to community needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic).
- In 2021, the program received 3,560 applications and nearly \$3.2 million is being distributed to 244 projects, including projects with a special emphasis on diversity and inclusion and supporting economic recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.

The AARP Community Challenge grant program is part of the nationwide AARP Livable Communities initiative, which helps cities, towns, towns and rural areas become great places to live for residents of all ages. As part of this effort, AARP staff and volunteers engage and mobilize residents, delivering technical assistance and expertise to local leaders and organizations, and supporting the work of the communities and states that have enrolled in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. Note: The Town is not required to hold the Ade-Friendly designation in order to qualify for a grant.

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/>

Funding related to regional business and economic development associations, as well as Town funds might also be investigated.

## Timeline



On average, 4-8 months is advised for designing a wayfinding program, and another 3-6 months for fabrication and installation of signs. If a design firm is brought onboard to also oversee fabrication and installation, parts of the process can be run in parallel to shorten the overall timeframe. Signage is often subject to Town bylaws and zoning, so plan accordingly to allow for the permitting process.

The following timetable envisions a branding project that will be completed by June 2022 and a walk/bike project that would occur more or less concurrently with wayfinding. Given the Town's limited administrative capacity, a staggered, but somewhat overlapping, approach to tackling each project is recommended.

Finally, Monson has registered to participate in the Commonwealth's Complete Streets program, but does not yet have an approved Complete Streets policy. If the Town wishes to fund all or a portion of a signage and wayfinding or bike/walk project with Complete Streets funding, the Town will first need to submit a Complete Streets policy, followed by development of a Prioritization Plan. Grant funds are available to assist with this plan development, as well as up to \$400,000 for project implementation.

Should the Town wish to pursue this funding route, the application and approval process could delay at least a portion of the following timeframe by 12-24 months.

- 1/22: Form a committee comprised of municipal staff (including DPW/Highway Department), civic leaders, and possibly local artists to investigate and initiate a signage and wayfinding project. The project will build on the creation of the Town brand and creation of a walkability project that connects assets throughout the Town Center with outlying areas of the Town and region.
- 1/22-2/22: Determine the scope of the project, investigate potential funding sources, and develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit the services of a consultant. This document serves as an important baseline for the project, identifying a timeline, budget, stakeholders, goals and deliverables for the signage and wayfinding project.
- 3/22: Advertise and hire a consultant (subject to funding).
- 4/22-12/22: Proceed through the project phases as described in the Process section of this plan, culminating with fabrication and installation of signs.
- Ongoing: Once the initial project is completed, the plan should be periodically reviewed and updated, recognizing any changes to important destinations in the town or region, alterations to the branding program, and implementation of town-wide marketing efforts that might be supported with updated signage and wayfinding.

## Risks



Signage and wayfinding projects are typically considered low risk. The biggest risks to a signage and wayfinding project usually occur during fabrication and implementation. Provided the design and fabrication teams have proper documentation regarding the location of the signage elements, installation risk can be mitigated early in the fabrication process. In some instances, signage cannot be fabricated as designed and will incur additional cost to the project. There is also an opportunity in this phase to value engineer signage, thus reducing cost of a signage style.

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**Risks  
(cont'd)**

Signage that requires electricity for illumination, digital displays or interactivity require proper planning. Preliminary site surveys can mitigate the risk, as the need to run electrical to signage elements can adversely impact a budget. Other instances of risk come with installation, where unforeseen obstacles will prevent signage from being installed in a planned location, requiring a secondary solution to be found.

**Key Performance Indicators**

This Signage and Wayfinding project will be successful if:

- a creative and consistent wayfinding system is implemented, that incorporates elements of the Town's branding effort, including in-town and digital/online messaging.
- there is a noticeable and quantifiable year over year increase in visitors to various Town destinations and events beginning in the Spring of 2023.
- Inquiries from "out of towners" regarding visiting or potentially moving to town increase by at least 15% by Summer of 2023.
- there is an increase in the number of businesses in Town beginning in 2023

**Partners & Resources**

- Municipal staff (Town Administrator, Administrative Assistant, Planning and/or Economic Development, DPW/Highway, Police/Fire/Emergency Management)
- Select Board, Planning Board
- Monson RRP Committee
- Monson Business and Civic Association (pending creation as an LRRP project)
- Property & business owners
- Local artists and cultural organizations
- Nonprofit organizations
- Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

**Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts**

Monson is a small, but vibrant community, with significant synergy between business, nonprofit, cultural, recreational, agricultural, and governmental sectors. Impacts of COVID-19 have drastically and negatively impacted those businesses with much lower revenue, inability for expansion, and cancellation of most activities and events.

Signage is sufficient for basic travel needs, but does not sufficiently identify or promote key assets and destinations for drivers and pedestrians. More consistent placement of street trees and benches, expanded use of crosswalks, and implementation of a more cohesive and creative signage and wayfinding program, would enhance and encourage pedestrian enjoyment and safety throughout the Project Area.

The Town anticipates beginning a branding process in the Fall of 2021, with a target date for completion of June 2022. The next steps in the Towns coordinated plan to revitalize the Town Center will be to identify more walkable and accessible connections and pathways, followed by the creation of a comprehensive and creative signage and wayfinding system designed to connect all important assets in the Town Center to outlying areas of Town, and beyond.

Monson has registered to participate in the Complete Streets program, but has not completed any of the remaining steps. Upon completion of these additional steps, up to \$400,000 is available to assist with projects encompassed by the Complete Streets program, including signage and wayfinding.

The Town completed a supplemental chapter to its Master Plan in 2012, entitled A Community Plan for Monson Center. This document contains information that should be helpful in implementing this project, as well as the walkability plan Develop and Beautify an Accessible, Connected and Walkable Town Center (see separate project plan contained in this report). At the same time, Town officials and community stakeholders will be seeking to successfully implement a façade and physical improvement program for all interested commercial and nonprofit property owners.

The confluence of all of the Community Plan, LRRP Plans, and other initiatives along the way has the potential to launch Monson into a phase of successive project implementation, having significant positive impact on the quality of life and financial vitality of the community.

The RRP Committee has identified support for culture and the arts, including public art, as being important to the community. Use of public art as a potential element in wayfinding design is discussed in the Best Practices examples.

- Given the layout of the town of Monson, the representatives for the town should identify the goals of any new wayfinding or signage from multiple perspectives. What do current residents need to be more aware of? Where do we want to direct visitors? Have a clear set of goals for a design firm to work around.
- Given the geographically strong downtown, the design team should focus on where pedestrians enter the district, and how signage can meet them. Typically, directory signage is incorporated where pedestrians enter, and includes a map with points of interest highlighted.
- Encourage local businesses to participate in sponsoring signage elements, like a banner program on the main thoroughfare through town. Often with town banner programs, planners can incorporate art from the local school system or local artists.
- Is there a need to point visitors to a specific area, like parking? Think about how visitors will enter the town from major highways, and point them to it! Signage along the way with any Monson branding will help encourage visitors they are traveling towards the right place. The design team can use this to their advantage to point them to an ideal place, like a large municipal parking lot, or take them on a scenic route to increase perception of the town as a beautiful place to visit.
- Visitors should be able to plan their day from informative directory signage, so think out of the box! Are there any natural hikes or trailheads a directory signage can point them to? As a small rural town, what features besides downtown businesses can you share with visitors

**Action Item**

The project will involve the following steps, more precisely defined above under Timeframe and below under Process.

1. Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
2. Identify who needs to be part of this process and engage business and property owners, local artists and cultural organizations, and the community at large to get buy-in for the program.
3. Determine the need for any design, façade, or sign code revisions.
4. Develop the criteria for approval and implementation.
5. Develop the funding and oversight structures.
6. Proceed with development and implement of the project.
7. Upon completion of the project, consider next steps with particular attention to periodic review of signage and wayfinding assets to ensure that elements remain current, relevant, and in good repair. The Town may consider adoption of a Sign/Wayfinding bylaw that provides for such oversight.

**Process**

With guidance from subject matter expert (SME) Cory DePasquale of Selbert Perkins Design, the following process guidelines are recommended and should be seriously considered.

**The Process of Developing Wayfinding & Signage**

**1. Gather Your Assets**

When it comes to making an impact with wayfinding, understanding the current state of your town's wayfinding signage is the first step. When the term "wayfinding" is attached to signage, it means the messaging on the sign is directing the viewer towards a destination.

Any maps indicating where current wayfinding signage exists will be very useful, and a beneficial first step. If you don't have this, an audit will likely be required.

Master planning documents that outline goals for the town/city are useful as well, as they will likely be referenced regarding planning around future goals and projects.

While a street sign could be considered wayfinding, the important distinction for this exercise should focus on sign types that include more information about destinations. Gathering a master list of Points of Interest, or POI is also a good decision. Once the list feels comprehensive for your town, a good idea to categorize or sort this list into groups based on popularity of the given POI as a destination. This should give the wayfinding team a clear idea of goals for the wayfinding program.

## 2. Layer the Data

Once the team has any maps, master plans, POI's and traffic maps, the goal should be to layer these sets of information over each other.

The data will begin to form a clear picture of how the wayfinding system should address the topography of your city/town. The team should be able to see major routes for vehicles & pedestrians, POI's, town limits, parking & points of entry and exit. Based on all this information, the wayfinding team can make an educated assessment on where signage can be placed to help specific users find their way through the city/town. Keep in mind that wayfinding users will have different objectives; visitors will have different destinations from residents.

Beyond this, the team should add locations that are instrumental in helping people navigate the environment in an ideal way. Selbert Perkins calls these decision points – they represent a point on a journey that can influence the user to take a more beneficial or easier route.

The resulting maps should outline locations that are likely underutilized for signage and wayfinding.

## 3. Identify the Sign Types

When it comes to identifying the signage elements, the first step will be looking at the needs of your wayfinding from a mapping perspective and assessing how those needs can be met with physical signs. Before picking visuals, really deliberate about the role of each sign in each instance.

Wayfinding information will be perceived differently based on context, as users driving have substantially less time to read signs than pedestrians.

Typically, the result of this exercise will lead to a set of signs that each have different roles. Selbert Perkins refers to this as a signage family. These are often shown at scale on a single page and compared to ensure each sign has a specific duty and avoids being redundant to users.

The most common sign would be a directory sign, which is designed for pedestrians. This is placed in high pedestrian traffic situations, normally where most traffic originates. Typically, a map is shown outlining all points of interest in within a certain walking distance. A best practice is to indicate the amount of time it would take to walk to each destination, either in time or distance.

Also commonly seen in wayfinding packages, a vehicular directional sign includes large text, and is meant to indicate direction for top tier destinations. This information is meant to influence wayfinding users that are driving vehicles, so text should read large. These signs should also be placed before users have to make turns in their journey – they should have enough time to interpret the signage, make decisions and have time to correct their course before an intersection.

## 4. Designing the Signage

Once the sign types have been identified, the visual design can be applied to the signage family. It's important to let the objectives of each sign type to lead in this phase, and not let visuals dictate the overall design. Here, form follows function.

Vehicular and bike signage should be large to allow for large type. All signage should be high contrast and use fonts that are highly legible. In some instances, signs are seen for less than five seconds, and have information on them that will be crucial, like indicating direction to a hospital.

Pedestrian signage can be smaller in size but should be more targeted. Vehicular signage is still relevant to people on foot, and a good directional sign in the proper location will be relevant to all users and can save the town/city money as a more efficient use of budget in the wayfinding package.

## 5. Fabrication Partners

When the wayfinding package has its locations and signs identified, a fabrication partner can be approached to help bring the project into reality.

Their first step should be coordinating base pricing to establish overall project costs, including installation. This allows the wayfinding design team to make changes in the wayfinding plan to save costs where they can and allow the fabrication team to pursue any discounts based on volume pricing.

A good fabrication team will be an invaluable partner. They can work with the city for any permitting, identify production methods that yield better pricing, and can complete a certain amount of design work. Always bid out to more than one fabricator to ensure even and fair pricing.

### Additional guidance from Civic Space Collaborative

In addition to the process recommendation above, guidance from Karl Alexander of Civic Space Collaborative is contained in the walkability project plan titled "Develop and Beautify an Accessible, Connected and Walkable Town Center". This guidance suggests that low-cost experimentation with temporary placement of corrugated (lawn) signs can help to visualize the plan prior to installation of permanent signage.

The following is an excerpt from CSC's guidance.

- Install 12"x24" pedestrian wayfinding signage at appropriate intervals along the walking route. A short-term, easy to implement sign option are corrugated plastic signs that can be affixed to utility poles for a temporary option, aluminum signage is intended to be permanent.
- Update existing public signage to incorporate new wayfinding elements.
- Extend wayfinding and branding efforts to trailheads and other recreational stop points to facilitate the walkability and connection between the Town Center and recreational activities.

### Best Practice

The following Best Practice projects represent good examples of wayfinding projects that integrate elements, such as Branding, Public Art, and Walkability, that are identified as important to the Town of Monson and included elsewhere in this report.

[Public Compendium - Somerville Wayfinding Neighborsway Design.pdf](#)

[Public Compendium - Melrose Wayfinding-Public Art Selbert Perkins.pdf](#)



# Connect Neighborhoods to Business Districts via Neighborways



Provided by SME Consultant

Neighborways Design

Location

Somerville, MA

## Origin

Neighborways Design, Students, Residents, City of Somerville

## Budget



\$10,000 - \$50,000 per mile for design and install – may include tactical traffic calming, wayfinding, branding, asphalt murals, and other placemaking features

## Timeframe



3-12 months - iterative program allows opportunities to upgrade designs each year

## Risk



Low. No to minimal parking removal, potential for contra-flow bicycling on one-way streets; selective use of diversion to reduce traffic

## Key Performance Indicators

**Safety:** Crash history, % vehicles traveling over 20mph (safety zone) or 25 mph

**Modal split:** increase walking and biking mode share to business districts

**Economic Impact** before and after studies of spending by mode

**User Feedback:** Surveys to capture user perceptions, behavioral changes in mode choice

## Partners & Resources

Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone, The Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Public Works, Police, Fire, City Council, Commission for Persons with Disabilities, Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee, Bicycle Advisory Committee, Somerville residents, Shared Street Stewards, and livable streets advocates, Neighborhood and Business Associations, organized local groups such as garden clubs, after school programs, churches, etc.

Received Somerville Arts Council Grant for street murals, and Solomon Foundation grant for shared streets funding support in 2020.

## Diagnostic

**Neighborways**, also known as neighborhood greenways or bicycle boulevards, are low stress, comfortable, designated biking and walking routes. They are typically local roadways that connect neighborhoods and destinations such as downtown business districts, transit stops, schools, and employment centers.

Somerville is the Boston Region's first Neighborway network which began in 2014 as student projects. The evolution of the program has grown each year to span 2+ miles of connected streets. The City developed guidelines for treatments based on research, testing, and implementing tactical traffic calming treatments.

In response to the pandemic, the City initiated the states largest "Shared Streets" network to increase access to essential services via walking and biking – modeled after and inspired by the Neighborways network.



- Midblock neckdown yield street via flexposts. Morrison Avenue, 2020



- Paint Day Block Party, Dimmick Street at Waldo Street 2017.

## Action Items

In 2021, Somerville plans to expand the Neighborways network of permanently marked roadways using existing and new treatments such as:

- **Gateways** to slow turning vehicles and provide wayfinding via painted tan curb extensions, painted red crosswalks, flexible posts at corners, and branding signs.
- **Contra-Flow Bicycle Streets** (One-way for people driving / two-way for people biking) to expand network accessibility via signs and pavement markings.
- **Midblock Traffic Calming** to slow speeds to 20 mph or less via speed humps / cushions, curb extensions, yield streets, flexpost neckdowns, one-lane yield conditions.
- **Vehicle Volume Reduction** to reduce conflicts and create lower stress, comfortable routes via regulatory signage, median islands / diverters, and one-way street direction changes.
- **Placemaking** to brand and engage the community via public art [sculpture, paint day block parties], stencils, lighting, planters and street trees, and rain gardens.

## Lessons Learned

**Keys to success:** invest in an iterative public engagement strategy that provides multiple opportunities for engagement. Door to door canvassing, public meetings to the street, and an open forum for ongoing feedback online engages a wider stakeholder group.

- Identify wide stakeholder group and tap into community leaders
- Table at existing events to build synergy.
- Create a Street Steward volunteer program to support ongoing monitoring of materials and feedback loops for improvements.

### Challenges / lessons learned:

- Provide multiple opportunities and advanced notice to engage the community, especially direct abutters to traffic calming treatments and public art installations.
- Work with emergency responders early in the process to support traffic calming treatments. Test layouts with fire and/or public works trucks. Use speed cushions vs speed humps and avoid emergency access routes if concerns about vertical deflection and delay.

## Process

**1. Project Initiation and Planning:** Identify goals and define success. Identify biking and walking network through network analysis / existing network plans. Start small and pilot routes that connect key destinations. Consider prioritization plan and phasing based on trip generators, popular destinations, demographics, underserved populations, crash history and traffic calming requests.

**2. Community Design Process:** Use iterative and ongoing engagement process including lemonade socials, walk and bike audits, canvassing and online feedback portals. DRAFT designs to get feedback and work with abutters to adjust as needed.

**3. Implementation:** estimate quantities and procure materials. Hire contractors or work with public works to install.

**4. Ongoing Monitoring / Maintenance:** develop feedback portal and maintenance plan. Coordinate volunteers (street stewards) to support monitoring and maintenance.

**5. Evaluation :** conduct before and after analysis including quantitative (e.g., speeds, volumes, revenue of businesses) and qualitative (e.g. photo, video, conversations, surveys) measures.



Shared Streets Gateway Treatment, 2020.



DRAFT Spring Hill Neighborhood Planning Network Map 2021



Wayfinding sign with times for walking and biking



## Launch a public art program

Provided by SME Consultant

Selbert Perkins Design

Location

Melrose, MA



<b>Origin</b>	City of Melrose, MA
<b>Budget</b>	 Medium Budget (\$70K) - with full build-out
<b>Timeframe</b>	 Short Term (1 years)
<b>Risk</b>	 Low Risk
<b>Key Performance Indicators</b>	Number of survey engagements and art commissions far exceeded expectations.
<b>Partners &amp; Resources</b>	Mayor, City Manager, Planning Department, DPW, Local Arts Organizations, Local Businesses, High School Students
<b>Diagnostic</b>	<p>Selbert Perkins Design collaborated with the City and community stakeholders to develop a wayfinding and creative placemaking master plan for the City of Melrose including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wayfinding Analysis</li> <li>• Preliminary Design Concepts</li> <li>• Art Opportunities</li> <li>• Call-for-Art</li> <li>• Art Program Logo</li> </ul> <p>The entire project, including was conducted during Covid-19 with over 700 participants. Community engagement was conducted in partnership with Civic Space Collaborative.</p> <p>In February of 2020, the City of Melrose extended a solicitation for quotes regarding a wayfinding study &amp; design services. The scope of work discussed in the solicitation described development of a multi-modal wayfinding system that speaks to the city's past and present that will provide wayfinding for pedestrians, cyclists &amp; vehicles. The City of Melrose received funding from the Massachusetts Marketing Partnership &amp; the Massachusetts Office of Travel &amp; Tourism for this effort.</p> <p>Selbert Perkins Design, in collaboration with Civic Space Collaborative, won the bid with the City of Melrose in March of 2020. The proposal submitted to the City of Melrose met all the conditions of the original solicitation and was modified after being awarded to include a larger outreach effort to the city's residents. In addition to the amplified outreach, public art would be an important element of the placemaking and wayfinding effort.</p> <p>In late March, the COVID-19 virus became a global pandemic. The project team adapted to the crisis, pivoting to web based resources for interviewing city residents, project meetings, committee and focus group meetings, as well as a virtual community meeting with the City's residents.</p> <p>"The selected art projects are unique and diverse and will enhance the vitality of the City's public spaces and promote economic development, which were goals of the initiative" says Mayor Brodeur. "I am excited to showcase and support the amazing talent in our community through this effort."</p> <p>Working closely with Mayor Paul Brodeur, the Planning Department, and project committee, we were able to successfully complete the project in 9 months.</p>

## Action Items

### Recommendations for signage and wayfinding include:

- Develop additional wayfinding as a placemaking element in Melrose to help residents and visitors find their way around the city.
- Create a signage pilot to roll out less expensive sign types throughout the city.
- Earmark funding for implementation over the next 1-2 years.
- Prioritize directing visitors and residents to downtown to support the local Melrose commerce.
- Install trail signage to help residents and visitors successfully utilize trails and greenspace in Melrose.
- Include walking distances on major signage to encourage walking as a method of transportation.
- Initiate outdoor seating, street narrowing, and other measures to support small business in the downtown and other commercial areas.
- Partner with local organizations to help envision and manage these programs to further support Melrose commerce.
- Consider a regular “open main street” program, closing streets to car traffic to encourage outdoor activity and support local downtown businesses.

## Process

- Understand who the stakeholders and decision-makers will be.
- Form a committee to oversee the process.
- Visit the site to audit of existing conditions.
- Conduct a Wayfinding Analysis including; multi-modal circulation, main decision points, and key destinations.
- Research the history of the place, uncover stories that might inspire the design.
- Identify opportunities for art/placemaking.
- Engage with stakeholders and the public to understand needs and preferences. If possible, create a survey and/or focus groups to get feedback from a larger cross-section of people.
- Develop project goals and a positioning statement to guide design efforts.
- Design concepts for brand and wayfinding elements.
- Develop the preferred design into a family of sign types with materials, colors, etc.
- Provide a sign location plan and order of magnitude budget.
- Create public art criteria and develop a call-for-art to identify qualified public artists.
- Release the call for art or bid and select artists/vendors.
- Oversee installation.
- Celebrate!



*Stakeholder engagement event outdoors*

# Develop and Beautify an Accessible, Connected and Walkable Town Center

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<b>Category</b>	Public Realm; Revenue Sales
<b>Location</b>	Town Center from Monson Free Library to Main Street Tavern to incorporate Veterans Field and sections of the Chicopee Brook, as well as residential collector streets
<b>Origin</b>	Monson Rapid Recovery Planning Committee with guidance from PVPC Plan Facilitators
<b>Budget &amp; Sources of Funding</b>	 <b>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$100,000)</b>  In addition to municipal funds, the following are potential sources of funds.  <b>American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</b> Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or sign upgrades when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.  <b><u>Commonwealth of Massachusetts</u></b> <b>Chapter 90 Program</b> Authorized through Massachusetts General Laws (M.G.L) Chapter 90, Section 34, the Chapter 90 Program provides funding to municipalities for the implementation of capital improvements on local public ways.  The purpose of the Chapter 90 Program is to provide municipalities with an annual funding source for improvements to and investments in local transportation networks. Every municipality in the Commonwealth is allocated a portion of total program dollars. The Chapter 90 Program allows municipalities to evaluate their unique transportation needs and goals and allocate funding dollars accordingly. A small portion of the Towns Chapter 90 funds could be considered for sidewalk and/or bikepath improvements.  <b>T-Mobile</b> <b>Hometown Grants (Placemaking)</b> This program will fund up to \$50,000 per town and may be used to rebuild or refresh community spaces, including historic buildings. <a href="https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/hometown-grants">https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/hometown-grants</a>  <b>Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and DHCD</b> <b>District Local Technical Assistance Grant</b> Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and may be used for planning projects. Each 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. Branding and Façade Improvement projects are also contemplated in this report, among others. Should the Town engage PVPC for other LRRP related projects, administrative assistance with signage and wayfinding may also make sense. <a href="http://www.pvpc.org/">http://www.pvpc.org/</a>  <b><u>Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet</u></b> <b>Best Practices Program</b> The Community Compact is a voluntary, mutual agreement entered into between the Baker-Polito Administration and individual cities and towns of the Commonwealth. In a Community Compact, a community will agree to implement at least one best practice that they select from across a variety of areas. The community's chosen best practice(s) will be reviewed between the Commonwealth and the municipality to ensure that the best practice(s) chosen are unique to the municipality and reflect needed areas of improvement. Once approved, the written agreement will be generated and signed by both the municipality and the Commonwealth. The Compact also articulates the commitments the Commonwealth will

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## Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

make on behalf of all communities. The FY22 Best Practice program opened on August 15th, 2021 and will remain open until available funds are exhausted.

Potential Best Practice categories identified on the State website that could be investigated include:

### **Age and Dementia Friendly Best Practices**

An Age-Friendly community is one that is livable for residents of all ages inclusive of older adults and those living with dementia. Age-friendly communities strive to be equitable and accessible with walkable streets, housing and transportation options, access to services, and opportunities for residents to participate in community activities.

### **Public Health Best Practices**

**Best Practice:** Healthy Community Design focuses on changing policies and practices to create conditions for people to eat better and move more where they live, learn, work, and play. Conduct a Built Environment Regulatory Review (BERR), a point-in-time evaluation of existing municipal policies/plans/regulations. The review will provide a baseline from which to prioritize strategies to promote walking and biking. This best practice can be combined with several other best practices that relate to municipal zoning and land-use.

**Best Practice:** Local boards of health (LBOH) can take a leadership role to advance health equity by: 1) building internal infrastructure, 2) working across government; 3) fostering community partnerships, and 4) championing transformative change. LBOH may adapt strategic practices to advance health equity in local health both internally within their departments and externally with communities and other government agencies. DPH Office of Local and Regional Health and Office of Health Equity staff are available for support.

<https://www.mass.gov/best-practices-program>

### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program A Quick-Launch/Quick-Build Municipal Funding Program (Traffic Calming)

The Shared Streets and Spaces Program looks forward to accepting new applications beginning in January 2022. Details on future program operation including exact deadlines, application documents, and eligibility requirements will be published here as they become available.

Building on the success of the Shared Streets and Spaces Municipal Grant Program first launched during the summer of 2020 -- and later extended to address the particular challenges of winter -- the Massachusetts Department of Transportation is now announcing a new phase of the program. The new phase will operate similarly to previous iterations of the Shared Streets and Spaces Program by supporting municipalities and transit authorities to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. In light of recent increases in speeding-related crashes and fatalities, this new phase of the program will have an additional emphasis on safety, and is looking to fund projects that improve safety for all road users through interventions that achieve safer conditions and safer speeds.

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

### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program

A Complete Street is one that provides safe and accessible options for all travel modes - walking, biking, transit and vehicles – for people of all ages and abilities. The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program provides technical assistance and construction funding to eligible municipalities. Eligible municipalities must pass a Complete Streets Policy and develop a Prioritization Plan. All Program news, guidance, and registration information are available through an online Portal.

Grant opportunities of up to \$400,000 are available for Complete Streets projects, including Signage and Wayfinding projects, provided the Town has adopted a Complete Streets policy and the project includes walking and biking. The Monson Town Center Walk Audit Report, completed by Walk Boston in June 2021, provides an excellent resource for adopting such a policy in an expeditious manner.

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

## Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

### Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth Development Continuum

All grant programs within the One Stop for Growth fall into the Continuum.

The Community One Stop for Growth is a single application portal and collaborative review process of grant programs that make targeted investments based on a Development Continuum:

#### **Preparing for Growth**

Grants to support activities and initial steps by community-based actors to attract and guide private investment in a community.

- Community Capacity Building
- Planning & Zoning
- Site Preparation

#### **Catalyzing Specific Projects**

Grants to support private, commercial, industrial, and residential investment projects that further the community vision.

- Predevelopment & Permitting
- Buildings (vertical)
- Infrastructure (horizontal)

#### **Continuum Detail – Community Capacity Building**

Projects may focus on a geographic area (district, community, or region) or a target population. Preference for projects that demonstrate a clear vision and a leadership group that is effective and stable. For projects with a target population, preference for those with involvement of, or impact on, Black and Latino populations. Projects may fund consultants or, in certain cases, staff time.

Projects in the Community Capacity Building section of the Development Continuum include:

- Technical Assistance for Improving a Downtown or Commercial Center
- Early Stage Strategy Development
- Strategy Implementation by an Existing Cross-Sector Consortiums or Coalition

**Grant Type:** Technical assistance or Implementation Grants. Projects may fund consultants or staff.

**Grant Sizes:** Potential for \$25,000 to \$100,000 awards. Downtown technical assistance grants will not exceed \$25,000.

[https://www.mass.gov/info-details/one-stop-for-growth-development-continuum#overview-](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/one-stop-for-growth-development-continuum#overview)

### U.S. Economic Development Administration

Travel, Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Program

Through the Travel, Tourism & Outdoor Recreation program, EDA is focused on accelerating the recovery of communities that rely on the travel, tourism and outdoor recreation sectors. \$240 million of EDA's American Rescue Plan funds are allocated to support the following efforts:

- Competitive Grants: \$240 million to help communities that have been hardest hit by challenges facing the travel, tourism and outdoor recreation sectors to invest in infrastructure, workforce or other projects to support the recovery of the industry and economic resilience of the community in the future.

[Travel, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation - American Rescue Plan | U.S. Economic Development Administration \(eda.gov\)](#)

### American Association of Retired Persons

AARP Community Challenge grant program

The AARP Community Challenge grant program is part of the nationwide AARP Livable Communities initiative that helps communities become great places to live for residents of all ages. The program is intended to help communities make immediate improvements and jump-start long-term progress in support of residents of all ages. Since the program's debut in 2017, AARP has awarded \$9.3 million through 800 grants. The projects have been completed across all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- In 2017, for the first-ever AARP Community Challenge, AARP received nearly 1,200 applications and distributed nearly \$780,000 among 88 winning grantees.
- In 2018, for the second challenge, AARP received almost 1,600 applications and distributed \$1.3 million to fund 129 projects.
- In 2019, the grant program received nearly 1,700 applications and distributed nearly \$1.6 million among 159 grant winners developing "quick-action" projects.

## Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

- In 2020, the program received over 2,800 applications and distributed more than \$2.4 million among 184 grant winners (including projects specific to community needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic).
- In 2021, the program received 3,560 applications and nearly \$3.2 million is being distributed to 244 projects, including projects with a special emphasis on diversity and inclusion and supporting economic recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.

The AARP Community Challenge grant program is part of the nationwide [AARP Livable Communities](#) initiative, which helps cities, towns, towns and rural areas become great places to live for residents of all ages. As part of this effort, AARP staff and volunteers engage and mobilize residents, delivering technical assistance and expertise to local leaders and organizations, and supporting the work of the communities and states that have enrolled in the [AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities](#). Note: The Town is not required to hold the Ade-Friendly designation in order to qualify for a grant.

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/>

Regional public or private funding related to regional development agencies and business associations, as well as Town and local business funding might also be investigated. Certain components of the project will likely be executed by volunteer in-kind contributions.

## Timeline



The following timetable envisions a walkability project that will be completed in phases over a period of 12-24 months and roughly synchronized with the signage and wayfinding project. Given the Town's limited administrative capacity, and desire to complete several related projects more or less concurrently, this timeframe could vary.

- 1/22-4/22: Phase 1 - Planning
  - Form a committee
  - Research relevant materials
  - Identify key destinations
  - Review existing conditions
  - Present findings to the community
  - Determine goals and desired improvements
- 4/22-12/22: Phase 2 – Project Development and Design
  - Identify project opportunities
  - Infrastructure
  - Wayfinding
  - Placemaking
  - Additional Walk Audits
  - Summary of findings
  - Administrative capacity
  - Apply for funding
- 1/23-6/23: Phase 3 – Design Implementation and Evaluation
- 12/22-ongoing: Phase 4 Programming

Finally, this report recommends that the Town consider when it wishes to complete the steps necessary for participation in the Complete Streets program, thereby qualifying it for program funding. If the Town decides to apply to the Complete Streets program as part its funding strategy of this particular project, the application and approval process will delay all or part of this timeframe by 12-24 months (or more), and will require the following steps.

1. Create a Complete Streets policy and submit to the State for approval.
2. Apply for and receive a grant to hire a consultant to assist with the Prioritization Plan.
3. Complete the Prioritization Plan and submit for approval.
4. Submit for and receive a Complete Streets grant to implement wayfinding and/or walkability plans.

## Risks



Medium risk. Monson is a small town with highly engaged and enthusiastic leaders who have exemplified strong capacity to promote outdoor recreation and fitness.

Government is very close to a large number of residents, and people have a big stake in the successful completion of this project. Stakeholders include advocates for the recreation and fitness, arts and culture, history, business, and nonprofit communities.

<b>Key Performance Indicators</b>	This project will be successful if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the project is embraced by multiple Monson constituencies, including seniors, families, outdoor recreation advocates, businesses, and the arts community.</li> <li>upon completion, there is a noticeable and quantifiable year over year increase in activity in the Town Center.</li> <li>increased activity and use of assets in the Town Center results in business expansion, as well as an increase in the number of community-wide events beginning in 2023.</li> <li>there is surveyed change in resident perception of the walkability and vibrancy of the town center.</li> <li>the number of pedestrian-related traffic incidents remains constant or decreases.</li> </ul>
<b>Partners &amp; Resource</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Municipal staff (Town Administrator, Administrative Assistant, Planning and/or Economic Development, DPW/Highway, Police/Fire/Emergency Management)</li> <li>Select Board, Planning Board, Recreation Committee, Board of Health</li> <li>Monson RRP Committee</li> <li>Monson Business and Civic Association (pending creation as an LRRP project)</li> <li>Property &amp; business owners</li> <li>Local recreation and fitness advocates</li> <li>Arts and Culture organizations</li> <li>Nonprofit organizations</li> <li>Pioneer Valley Planning Commission</li> </ul>
<b>Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts</b>	Monson is a small, but vibrant community, with significant synergy between business, nonprofit, cultural, recreational, agricultural, and governmental sectors. Impacts of COVID-19 have drastically and negatively impacted those businesses with much lower revenue, inability for expansion, and cancellation of most activities and events.
<b>Action Item</b>	The Monson Master Plan was completed in 2004, and an addendum titled <a href="#">A Community Plan for Monson Center</a> , was added in 2012. The documents make several recommends to advance improvements in infrastructure, wayfinding, placemaking/street furniture, programming and administrative capacity while encouraging use and development in the Town Center.  Impacts of COVID-19 drastically and negatively impacted businesses and organizations with much lower revenue, inability for expansion, cancellation of most activities and events.
<b>Process</b>	<p>The project will involve the following steps, more precisely defined above under Timeframe and below under Process.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Appoint a committee to oversee the project The committee will identify who needs to be part of this process and engage business and property owners, local artists and cultural organizations, and the community at large to get buy-in for the program, and Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity. Determine if the charge of the Signage &amp; Wayfinding Committee should be expanded to include walkability, or if a separate committee should be formed.</li> <li>2. Interview and hire a consultant/SME to guide the project</li> <li>3. Develop the criteria for approval and implementation.</li> <li>4. Develop the funding and oversight structures.</li> <li>5. Identify all assets in the study area that would contribute to a walkable, accessible, and enjoyable route.</li> <li>6. Proceed with development and implement of the project, incorporating physical elements, such as infrastructure and street furniture, and social elements, such as programming and administrative capacity, in one cohesive implementation.</li> <li>7. Upon completion of the project, consider next steps, including the possible establishment of a standing committee to advocate for pedestrian and nonvehicular mobility. The Town may consider adoption of a bylaw that provides for such advocacy.</li> </ol> <p>With guidance from subject matter experts, Karl Alexander and Claudia Lafontaine, the following process guidelines are recommended and should be seriously considered.</p> <p><b>Phase 1: Planning (1-3 months)</b></p> <p>Conduct relevant preparations to identify the project's scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Convene a committee:</b> Bring together key stakeholders committed to overseeing the duration of the project. Identify key goals and confirm key performance indicators for the project. Identify up to \$20,000 of readily available funds to assist with planning (Phase 1) and developing (Phase 2) the project.</li> </ul>

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## Process (cont'd)

- **Research:** Collect relevant maps, surveys, data, previous reports, and any other materials that might be helpful.
- **Existing Conditions:** Capture baseline data for measures listed in the Key Performance Indicators section. Then, conduct a walk audit of the Town Center with key stakeholders and capture the following data:
  - Types of signage at each pedestrian crossing
  - An inventory of blocks that do and do not have publicly-accessible benches/places to sit
  - An inventory of blocks that do and do not have publicly-accessible shade structures
  - An inventory of blocks that do and do not have publicly-visible arts/culture features
  - The number of curb cuts leading into driveways and parking lots
  - Number of commercial lots with parking located between the sidewalk and buildings
    - Present findings and prioritize improvements with a community design charette (online or in-person): Introduce project goals and stakeholders; present research and findings from the existing conditions walk audit; ask attendees to share what projects they would like to see for improving conditions in the Town Center.

### Development (3-6 months)

Select and advance preferred projects for development

- Identify project opportunities: Projects supporting the walkability and vibrancy of the Downtown should be categorized into infrastructure, wayfinding placemaking and programming. Projects considered should include those identified during the charette, as well as the following discussed during the LRRP process:

#### Infrastructure



- Painted curb extensions using MUTCD-compliant colors (beige), flex-posts and planters (low cost)



- Pilot a creatively-painted crosswalk on a municipally-owned side street (low cost)
- Improve cautionary signage at crosswalks for motor vehicles (low cost)
- Install additional rapid flash beacons at crosswalks with low visibility, high pedestrian volumes and/or crash rates (high cost)



- Install pedestrian flags at crosswalks (low cost)



- Replace curb cuts at driveways and parking lots with raised crossings
- Amend zoning for setbacks to disallow the creation of parking spaces between buildings and the pedestrian ROW

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**Process  
(cont'd)**

Wayfinding

- Install 12"x24" pedestrian wayfinding signage on each block using corrugated plastic or aluminum signage.
- Update existing public signage to incorporate wayfinding elements and tie into wayfinding brand

Placemaking

- Install publicly accessible shade structures on every block (e.g. awnings, cantilever umbrellas, trees)
- Install publicly accessible benches or seating on every block
- Update existing public signage to incorporate wayfinding elements and tie into wayfinding brand
- Install thematic arts/culture features on every block (e.g. painted benches, giant hat planters, sidewalk games for youth)
- Install one or two seasonal parklets in underutilized parking spaces
- Install and Wi-Fi hotspots throughout the downtown

Programming

Conduct a pedestrian-oriented event (e.g. block party, holiday party, giant yard sale, fun runs, historical walks) in the Town Center at least six times annually.

- **Summary of findings and letters of support:** Prepare a summary of findings that led to the selection of projects. Using the summary, obtain letters of support from organizations listed in the Partners and Resources section.
- **Community stories:** Compile a collection of anecdotes, photos and documents promoting the importance of the projects selected.
- **Apply for implementation funding:** Using resources generated from the project's planning (Phase 1) and development (Phase 2), prepare an application to fund the implementation of the selected projects.

**Phase 3: Implementation and Evaluation (6 months)**

Based on the projects selected, implementation could require some or a combination of tasks, such as (but not limited to):

- Traffic engineering design
- Volunteer coordination
- Identifying a stewarding group or organization. The formation of a business association could greatly support these efforts.
- Developing a plan for ongoing operations and maintenance
- Assessing ongoing costs

Upon implementation, track measures of success as they are listed in the Key Performance Indicators section.

**Best Practice**

The following Best Practice projects represent good examples of Walkability projects that integrate elements, such as Branding, Public Art, and Wayfinding, all of which are identified as important to the Town of Monson and included elsewhere in this report.

[Public Compendium - Melrose Wayfinding-Public Art Selbert Perkins.pdf](#)

[Public Compendium - Somerville Wayfinding Neighborsway Design.pdf](#)

[Public Realm - Walkability - CSC - Wayfinding on Fairmount Greenway.pdf](#)

The following links detail a low-cost project undertaken in Bethel, VT funded by AARP

[Pop-Up Demonstration Project: Main Street, Better Block Bethel, Vermont \(aarp.org\)](#)

[Getting Rural America Back on Its Feet \(planning.org\)](#)



# Wayfinding on Fairmount Greenway



PUBLIC  
REALM

Provided by SME Consultant

Civic Space Collaborative

Location

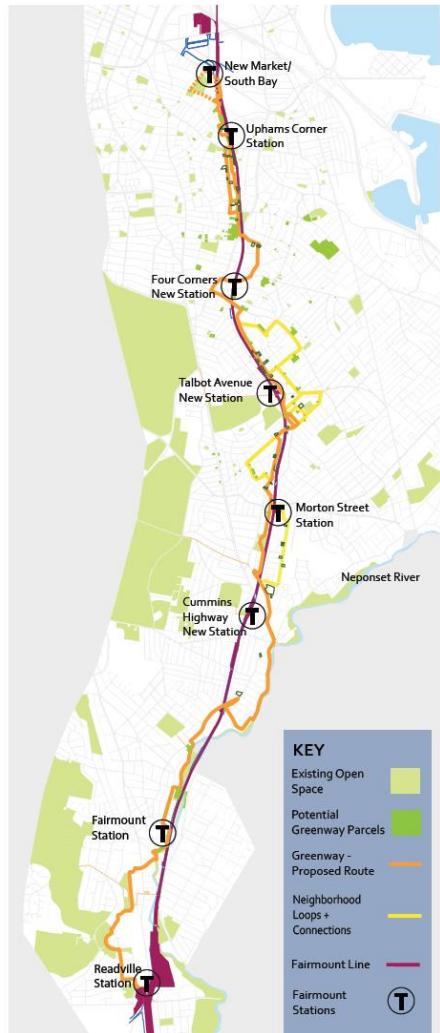
Boston, MA

Origin	Fairmount Greenway Task Force
Budget	 Low Budget (approximately \$10,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term (approximately 10 weeks)
Risk	 Low Risk: Temporary installation requiring no major construction, low cost, no City approvals needed
Key Performance Indicators	Installation of twelve wayfinding signs to mark 1.5 miles of the Fairmount Greenway route. Increase usage of bike share programs, pedestrian walkways, and T-ridership.
Partners & Resources	Fairmount Greenway Task Force, Neighborhood Associations, DotBike, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, City of Boston Transportation Department, The Trust for Public Land, Civic Space Collaborative
Diagnostic	<p>The Fairmount Greenway is an on-street cycling and walking route, also known as a “neighborhood greenway” or “neighborway”, that links MBTA stations, business districts, open space, and other developing neighborhood amenities along the MBTA’s Fairmount/Indigo Rail Line. Currently, along the Fairmount Corridor in Dorchester residents fear cycling and walking in their neighborhoods due to a lack of safe infrastructure. Wayfinding signs, combined with on-street improvements part of the Boston Transportation Department’s Slow Zone program such as shared lane markings (“sharrow”), district signage, speed humps, and bulb-outs, comprise the treatments for the Greenway. In addition, Blue Bike Stations have been installed further south in Dorchester with four stations along this 1.5-mile stretch.</p> <p>During the pandemic, we have seen a rise in cycling across the nation, in Boston, and especially among Black and Brown people. With the increase in people cycling and walking, the Fairmount Greenway route signs are incredibly timely. This summer, we anticipate seeing an increase in walking and cycling along the Fairmount Greenway to reach business districts, the Fairmount Line, and recreation to reach regional parks and greenways, such as the Neponset River Greenway, Franklin Park, the Emerald Necklace, and Southwest Corridor.</p>
Action Item	<p>Boston’s nine-mile Fairmount Greenway is a life-changing development, connecting Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, and Hyde Park with a route that links parks, green space, on-street bike routes, trails, transit stations, and city squares. Since 2008, the Greenway’s 10-member task force have been working with the City of Boston and multiple other organizations on this long-term vision to connect the Fairmount communities to the heart of Boston. More than 1,000 residents have joined in planning, designing, and implementing Greenway park, streets, and greenway projects.</p> <p>In 2021, the Fairmount Greenway installed wayfinding signs to mark a 1.5-mile on-street route of the Fairmount Greenway in Dorchester near Four Corners and Codman Square. The wayfinding signs were updated to include key neighborhood destinations and mark the on-street route in February 2021. Twelve signs were printed on corrugated plastic and installed with residents in May 2021.</p>

## Process

### Planning + Design

- Fairmount Greenway concept development (2008 – 2010):** The Fairmount Greenway concept first emerged in 2008 for an on-street walking and biking route that loosely follows the MBTA Fairmount Rail Line. In 2011, the Fairmount Greenway Concept Plan was published, outlining 10 to 20 years of phased developments, portions of which were incorporated into the Mayor’s Go Boston 2030 plan.
- Signage branding, design, and placement (2013 – 2014):** The Fairmount Greenway Task Force (FGTF) worked with MAPC to create a wayfinding system, utilizing existing street poles to attach signs. The FGTF worked on branding the Greenway sign design process and solicited feedback from the City of Boston’s transportation department. Based on the City’s comments, additional destinations were added to the signs to create wayfinding signs.
- Approval Process:** The original request to the City was to install metal signs, but due to lack of funding for the required CAD drawings, the signs were not installed.
- Finalizing wayfinding sign design (2021 – 4 weeks):** In 2020, the FGTF received funding for temporary signs through a grant from The Trust for Public Land. The temporary signs did not require approval from the City as they were made of corrugated plastic. The wayfinding signs design were updated for 1.5 miles on Fairmount Greenway to include the route directions, Fairmount Station, and local parks.



Key spaces to connect and a Fairmount Greenway map



Process, continued

### Installation

- Material Acquisition:** The wayfinding signs PDF were sent to a local, minority-owned print shop in Mattapan. A test sign and twelve final signs were printed on 12 x 18-inch corrugated plastic sheets for \$250. Additional materials needed include zip-ties to attach the signs to street poles and a drill to add holes to the signs.
- Installation Day:** A group of 4-6 volunteers will install the signs in May.
- Monitoring:** WOW members will monitor the conditions of the signs and let the project team know if any are damaged and need to be replaced.



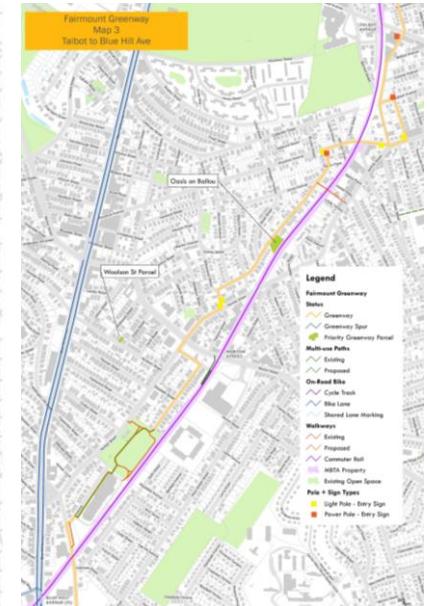
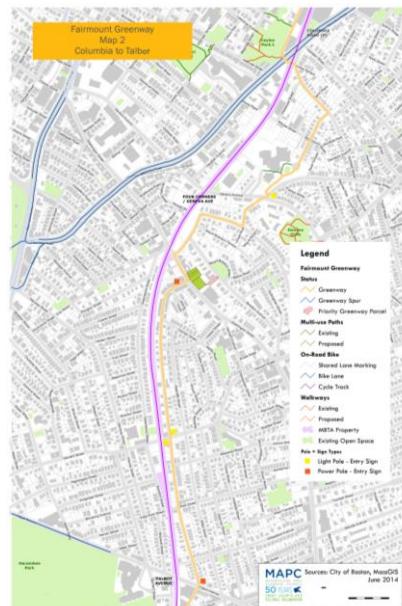
### NEIGHBORWAY Mamelon Circle, Mattapan

*Neighborway on Mamelon Circle, Mattapan*



### PLAY STREET Magnolia Street, Dorchester

*Play street programming concept along Fairmount Greenway Route in Dorchester*



*Fairmount Greenway Map with sign locations and types (Columbia to Talbot) and Map 3 (Talbot to Blue Hill Ave)*

## Publications and Resources



### Pop-Up Project: Bethel Better Block

A Vermont Main Street is temporarily transformed to show its potential

by Kelly Stoddard Poor/AARP Vermont, Andrew Howard/Team Better Block, [AARP Livable Communities \(/livable-communities/\)](#)



PHOTO BY TEAM BETTER BLOCK

Main Street, Bethel, Vermont, during the Bethel Better Block pop-up demonstration project.

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*Don't miss the Bethel Better Block video at the end of this article.*

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## THE GOAL

Not all towns have the staffing, experience and resources needed to identify and take action on livability measures. Because of that, AARP Vermont piloted an alternative approach to improving livability by challenging communities to take immediate action using do-it-yourself methods pioneered by the Better Block Project.

## BACKSTORY

In March 2016, **AARP Vermont** (<http://states.aarp.org/region/vermont/>) put out a request for proposals asking communities to submit an application to participate in a demonstration project in partnership with AARP and **Team Better Block** (<http://www.teambetterblock.com/>). The revitalization-focused project would temporarily transform a single block into a vibrant destination, thereby illustrating the potential for new businesses, safer streets and improved livability.

### Visit Bethel



- Check out the slideshow [Main Street Gets a Makeover \(/livable-communities/toolkits-resources/info-2017/bethel-better-block-slideshow.html\)](#)

The opportunity was exactly right for **Bethel, Vermont** (<http://townofbethelvt.com/>), at exactly the right time. A small rural town of just over 2,000 people (median age: 43), Bethel has a compact, historic downtown center and four additional village centers scattered across 45 square miles of hills and valleys in the Green Mountains of central Vermont.

Bethel was once a bustling industrial town, but over time the large employers dwindled, leaving empty storefronts and limited employment opportunities. Nearly 20 years ago, a downtown revitalization plan for Bethel called for a riverwalk, streetscaping, a renovated Town Hall, parking lot improvements, and more. Some of those elements were built; most were forgotten.

In 2011, Bethel hit a low point when [Tropical Storm Irene](https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/irenes-impact-on-vermont-a-crowdsourced-map-of-storm-photos-and-videos-updated-91/Content?oid=2178259) (<https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/irenes-impact-on-vermont-a-crowdsourced-map-of-storm-photos-and-videos-updated-91/Content?oid=2178259>) devastated the downtown and surrounding community. After Irene, there was a sense that Bethel had little to offer. One critical success was an ad hoc community group called [Bethel Revitalization Initiative](http://bethelrevitalizationinitiative.org/) (<http://bethelrevitalizationinitiative.org/>), which describes itself as a "do-ocracy," meaning "people show up with good ideas and then do them."

At the time of Bethel's application to participate in the AARP project, five historic buildings and businesses in the community's core downtown block were for sale. Some of the buildings were vacant and in need of significant repairs. Investors were interested in the properties but hesitant to commit without a sense of the town's future possibilities. A Better Block demonstration would help townspeople and investors see and experience Bethel's potential in real life.

## THE PROJECT

From Friday, September 30, to Sunday, October 2, 2016, a downtown block of Bethel's village was temporarily transformed by the following pop-up demonstration projects (the "recipes" for which can be found [here \(/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2017/BethelBetterBlockPopUpRecipes.pdf\)](#)):

- **The Blue Lane:** By removing parking on one side of the street, the project created a dedicated 700-foot lane for people to walk, bicycle, push baby strollers, use a wheelchair or walker, or even ride a horse.

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A blue poster describes the Blue Lane and three tricyclists, both older and young, show how the lane can be used.

COURTESY BETHEL BETTER BLOCK

Rules (and users) for the Bethel Better Block Blue Lane, a temporary, dedicated, blue-painted bike-walk lane.

- 
- **Enhanced Crosswalks and a Pedestrian Island:** Painted stripes were added to the existing crosswalks to make them more visible. Curb extensions were created by using landscaping and "bulb-outs" ([/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2015/13-short-range-livability-solutions.html](#)) (which were constructed by using straw wattles) reduced the crossing distance from one side of Main Street to the other. The pedestrian island, which was also made of straw waddles and landscaping, narrowed the travel lanes in order to reduce the speed of vehicle traffic through the location.
  - **Parklet:** By replacing two parking spaces with café seating and a food stand, the project provided another [traffic-calming \(/livable-communities/info-2014/livability-fact-sheet-traffic-](#)

[calming.html](#)) measure and contributed to the local economy.

- **Beer Garden:** Temporarily transforming a vacant, underutilized parking lot into a beer garden with live music created a place for people to gather and socialize.
- **Pop-Up Shops:** Vacant and underutilized building spaces were temporarily transformed into viable, active retail space.
- **Beautification:** Volunteers used paint, seating and flowers to decorate vacant spaces on Main Street.
- **Temporary Bus Shelter:** Placed in a centralized downtown location, the bus shelter provided adequate sidewalk space, seating and shade. Stagecoach, a transit company, ran a circulator route during the event.

## Creating a Better Block

The [Better Block Project](https://teambetterblock.com/) (<https://teambetterblock.com/>) promotes the use of simple modifications that can powerfully alter the economic, social, and ecological value of a community by gathering designers, community residents and volunteers together to create a weekend intervention.

The process takes a bottom-up approach to planning that allows community residents to be directly involved with the rapid build-out and construction of revitalization projects. The goal is to inspire and educate community leaders and residents to make streets safer and communities more vital and livable.

## THE LOGISTICS

On-the-ground work between Bethel Revitalization Initiative volunteers, AARP and Team Better Block began with a June 2016 "Walk and Talk" during which residents pointed out favorite places, troubled spots, and areas where the town could use some improvement.

More than 75 people participated in roundtable conversations, brainstorming ideas for what Bethel could look like in the future. Residents mapped the community assets and needs, focusing on preserving town history, providing public spaces and safe pedestrian crossings, and encouraging speed-reductions and less noise. Community members stepped up to lead workshops, take on projects, organize pop-up shops, clean public spaces and lead events.

## COSTS and CREW

The Bethel Better Block weekend was executed by a core team of 25 volunteers and three staff members from AARP Vermont and Team Better Block. Materials, permits and insurance for the event cost about \$4,000.

## OUTCOMES and NEXT STEPS

In one weekend, Bethel's downtown came alive with hundreds of visitors. People waited excitedly in long lines for food at the pop-up taco stand. Families enjoyed new spaces for kids to play and socialize. Enhanced crosswalks and planters led to safer conditions for pedestrians. Local artists sold their wares in once vacant buildings. Visitors sat around an outdoor table in a new pocket park, formally an overgrown lot.

The [pop-up shops](http://www.vnews.com/Bethel-organizes-pop-up-stores-in-effort-to-promote-Main-Street-revitalization-5112340) (<http://www.vnews.com/Bethel-organizes-pop-up-stores-in-effort-to-promote-Main-Street-revitalization-5112340>) demonstrated how retail and service-sector jobs could operate in Bethel. Within a year of the Better Block Bethel weekend:

- A vacant building on Main Street was purchased and the owner is committed to rehabbing it and has supported continuing the pop-up shops
- The Bethel Revitalization Initiative secured an animating infrastructure grant that will create a permanent mural on the retaining wall downtown and permanent outdoor seating is in the works
- The transit provider is adding a deviated fixed route that will service Bethel with local transit options
- The traffic calming demonstrations throughout the downtown improved walkability and livability and made such a good impression that the city and state are examining ways to calm the traffic permanently

The project was a tipping point for building enthusiasm and commitments to make Main Street Bethel thrive again.

### LEARN MORE:

- [Bethel Better Block Report](http://www.blurb.com/b/7735945-bethel-better-block-report) (<http://www.blurb.com/b/7735945-bethel-better-block-report>)
- [Bethel Better Block Slideshow](/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2017/bethel-better-block-slideshow.html) (</livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2017/bethel-better-block-slideshow.html>)
- [Bethel Better Block Pop-Up Recipes](/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2017/BethelBetterBlockPopUpRecipes.pdf) (</content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2017/BethelBetterBlockPopUpRecipes.pdf>)

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### UPDATE:

*Among the long-term results of the Better Block Bethel demonstration project:*

- *Two vacant downtown buildings were purchased and renovated as mixed-use properties with retail on the first floor and housing on the second*
- *A bus route was established connecting the downtown with amenities and services elsewhere in the area*

- *Bulb-outs were installed at two crosswalks to improve pedestrian safety*
- *Beautification efforts were stepped up (thanks to grant funding from the Vermont Arts Council) to use for public art. (See image 16 in the Bethel slideshow for one example.)*

*Page published January 2017 | Updated October 2019*

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## **Video: Better Block Bethel**

 YOUTUBE

Bethel, VT Better Block



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Kelly Stoddard Poor (<http://states.aarp.org/new-outreach-director-joins-aarp-vt/>) is the associate state director of outreach for AARP Vermont.

Andrew Howard (<http://www.teambetterblock.com/#ourteam>) is an urban planner, cofounder of Better Block and principal at Team Better Block.



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## Planning December 2019

IN THIS ISSUE:

Getting Rural America Back on Its Feet

▼

## Getting Rural America Back on Its Feet

Yes, rural residents want to walk — and small towns see pedestrian traffic as a way to revitalize their downtowns.



Residents in Bethel, Vermont, teamed up with AARP Livable Communities and Team Better Block to test bulb-outs, crosswalks, a mobility lane, and a parklet. The experiment led to permanent street changes and the revitalization of several downtown buildings. Photo courtesy Team Better Block.

By Jay Walljasper

American life has always been characterized by distinct differences between city and country — this has provided rich material for generations of comedy routines, from vaudeville gags about naive hayseeds and shady city slickers to the 1960s sitcoms *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Green Acres* to the reality TV adventures of Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie in *The Simple Life*.

But these differences don't seem so funny today as the gap widens between rural and urban dwellers in terms of economics, politics, and social attitudes. This incites widespread misconceptions. People living outside metropolitan areas feel insulted by charges that they are backward, bigoted, and unambitious. Urbanites bristle at insinuations they are somehow less American or virtuous than rural residents.

These misconceptions even color how many of us think about planning issues. At a recent national rural livability workshop sponsored by AARP, a roomful of midwesterners were asked what myths about rural America they would most like to dispel. "The idea that our communities are not walkable," was the first response, which drew an immediate round of yeses and head nods.

In many people's minds, rural Americans only walk the few steps between a parking space and their destination.

But a quick look at the facts tells a different story. A 2018 AARP national survey of U.S. adults over the age of 18 found that 30 percent of rural residents walk regularly for at least some trips.

More detailed U.S. Department of Transportation data shows that 7.2 percent of trips in towns with populations between 2,500 and 10,000 are made on foot. That figure rises to 8.5 percent in communities with populations of 10,000 to 50,000. These figures outpace those for suburbs outside the urban core, where just 6.7 of trips are pedestrian. And they are not so distant from the 12 percent of trips on foot in the urban core (defined as cities and close-in suburbs).

Another federal DOT survey suggests that rural residents strongly desire access to walking infrastructure. It found that 95 percent of them rate sidewalks as important to their community, a higher figure than for major roads, adequate parking, and airport access.

While distances can be a challenge for people walking in the countryside itself, small towns and cities seem well-suited for pedestrian transportation. Many boast extensive sidewalk networks, short distances to and around shopping districts, and less car traffic on local streets, which makes walking feel safer and less stressful.

Surprisingly, the Census Bureau noted in 2012 that the three U.S. cities with the highest percentage of people walking to work all have populations under 50,000: Ithaca, New York (pop. 20,000 — 42 percent); Athens, Ohio (pop. 25,000 — 37 percent); and State College, Pennsylvania (pop. 42,000 — 36 percent). Indeed, the only city over 100,000 in the top 15 was Cambridge, Massachusetts (pop. 111,000 — 24 percent). It's true that all but one of the 15 top listed towns were home to colleges or military bases, but it nonetheless shows the high potential to make smaller communities more walkable.

## Small-Town Strategies to Connect Communities on Foot



Safe Routes to School programs find ways to get kids on their feet — especially when schools are built on the outskirts of town. Photo by Eddie Moore/Albuquerque Journal/Zumapress.com.

For a long time, pedestrians — like bike couriers — have been viewed as a city thing. But as the health and economic benefits of walkable communities become more apparent, rural communities don't want to be left behind.

Here are two approaches that have been embraced by many small towns to improve their walkability.

**COMPLETE STREETS.** Complete streets principles take into account the needs of all road users — pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, children, the disabled and the elderly, not just motorists. Thirty-three states and more than 1,300 municipalities and counties have adopted complete streets legislation to guide their planning efforts, including places as small as Far Hills, New Jersey (pop. 887), Corinth, Kentucky (pop. 187), and Burt Township, Michigan (pop. 680).

The passage of a complete streets ordinance in Warsaw, Missouri (pop. 2,300) came about as part of a decade-long campaign to build a multiuse trail system linking the riverfront parks to downtown, historic sites, and recreational facilities.

For more information, contact the [National Complete Streets Coalition](https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/) (<https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/>).

**SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS.** Half of all kids walked or biked to school in 1969. Now it's less than 15 percent, but that number is going back up thanks to the rise of Safe Routes to Schools programs — including those in a number of the communities mentioned in this story.

These projects directly tackle the particular obstacles in a community that keep kids off their feet, which in many places includes schools built away from town in the countryside. That problem was solved in two Iowa towns by creating the off-road Turkey River Recreational Corridor, which connects an elementary and middle school campus within the towns of Clermont (pop. 562) and Elgin (pop. 724).

For more information contact the [Safe Routes to Schools Partnership](https://saferoutespartnership.org/) (<https://saferoutespartnership.org/>).

### **Bringing life back to Main Street**

Tapping this potential offers a prime opportunity to reverse the economic and population decline engulfing many rural communities. That's because there is growing evidence that walkability is a key way to stimulate economic development and attract young people to a place. Still, fewer rural residents walk than would like to.

So how do we help more people get back on their feet in rural America? "The first thing to do is make it seem OK to walk," says Dallas-based Andrew Howard, director of Team Better Block, who grew up in Altus, Oklahoma (pop. 19,000). He points to the example of his brother, who still lives in a small town and drives a short distance to work every day. His brother told him, "If I walked, every person who drove past would stop and offer me a ride."

Team Better Block, a group specializing in tactical urbanism, recommends organizing events that excite people about walking as a legitimate way to get around. "The Saturday afternoon can influence the Monday morning," Howard explains. "Get someone to try something at a special event, and they will realize, hey, walking is not that hard."

And make it fun, Howard advises. He fondly remembers a project in McAlester, Oklahoma (pop. 18,000) — hometown of country singer Reba McIntire — where people crowded the streets, all wearing red-haired wigs.

In Bethel, Vermont (pop. 2,000), Team Better Block worked with community volunteers and AARP Vermont to put on a fall festival, which included temporary curb bump-outs and painted crosswalks to slow vehicle speeds on the highway cutting through town. It was such a hit that these traffic calming measures were made permanent. That brought more businesses and people downtown, which further slowed traffic speeds. An important lesson learned, says local volunteer Rebecca Stone: "Say yes to new ideas, and then experiment to see if they work."

AARP has put a spotlight on making walking more safe and convenient in communities of all sizes because many older people are among the one-third of Americans who don't drive — a category that also includes children, people with various disabilities, and those too poor to own a car.

### **Rural Diversity All Over the Map**

Anyone who thinks rural communities are all alike doesn't spend much time in the countryside. At a national view, isolated rural areas seem to dominate the map. But look more closely at a region — in this case, Toledo, Ohio — and you'll see a range of community types that are developing a greater interest in walking and biking. Visit the [TrADE website](https://trade.railstotrails.org/community_data) ([https://trade.railstotrails.org/community\\_data](https://trade.railstotrails.org/community_data)) for an interactive map of your area.

**Large Rural Core**

Towns of 10,000 to 50,000, often regional centers.

**Outer Large Rural**

Smaller communities from which many people travel to Large Rural Core towns for work, shopping, services, or school.

**Small Rural Core**

Towns of 2,500 to 10,000, often county seats.

**Outer Small Rural**

Smaller communities from which many travel to Small Rural Core towns for work, shopping, services, or school.

**Isolated Rural**

Communities without strong economic and social links to a town of more than 2,500.

*As a means of comparison, the urban categories in the adapted version of Rural Urban Commuting Area classifications are as follows:*

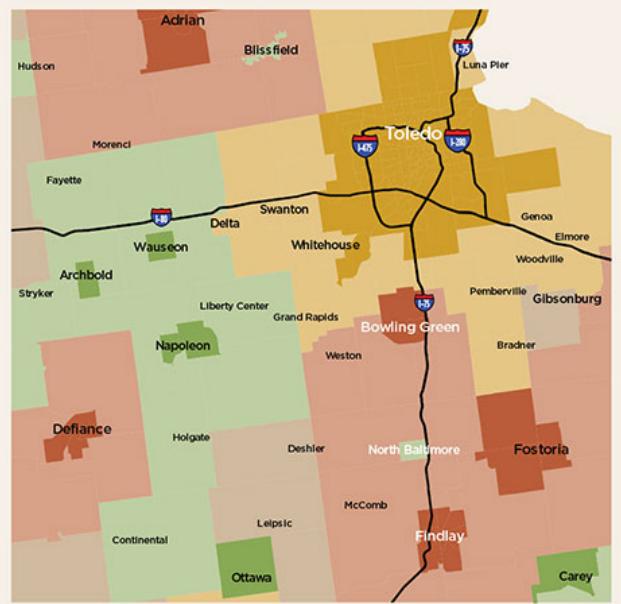
**Urban Core**

Cities and close-in suburbs of metropolitan regions with a center city of more than 50,000.

**Outer Urban**

Outlying suburbs of metropolitan regions with a center city of more than 50,000.

Source: RTC Beyond Urban Centers Report.



### Honey, I shrunk the highway

Battle Lake, Minnesota (pop. 735) downsized a highway running through town. When hearing of the Minnesota Department of Transportation's plans to resurface Highway 78 — the town's Main Street — local citizens persuaded the agency to do a road diet, narrowing the roadway from four lanes to three, and widening the sidewalk through downtown.

The results were immediate. Twenty-one new businesses have opened in town, including a hotel and bakery, since the project was completed in 2014, reports MnDOT. "Downtown is thriving," says resident Reba Gilliland. "There is always something interesting going on."

The region's summer tourists appreciate the improvements, but the reason for doing it was to attract new families and jobs to Battle Lake. "We didn't want to become another small town on the prairie that loses people, loses our school, and becomes a ghost town," adds resident Dan Malmstrom.

Road diets reduce crashes by 29 percent, according to the Federal Highway Administration, and have been sanctioned by the agency as a "proven safety countermeasure." They address one of the biggest road safety problems in small towns — the fact that high-speed federal, state, and county highways frequently run past stores, schools, churches, offices, and other destinations frequented by pedestrians, including children.

Until recently, most planning protocols emphasized a "one-size-fits-all" uniformity along the entire stretch of a highway. That meant many Main Streets were widened — losing parking, sidewalk and amiable small-town character in the process — to accommodate motorists who would never set foot in town. (This helps explain why 50 percent of all traffic fatalities occur in rural areas, although they account for only 23 percent of the U.S. population, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.)

MnDOT, along with FHWA and many other state transportation departments, has endorsed the idea of road diets as part of an approach known as Context Sensitive Solutions, in which planners are encouraged to "exercise more flexibility in highway design."

CSS helped defuse a standoff between citizens in Grand Marais (pop. 1,200) — a scenic Minnesota harbor town on Lake Superior — and MnDOT engineers about a makeover of US Highway 61. Locals wanted curb bump-outs and other amenities to make it more hospitable to residents and tourists on foot. The engineers contended that heavy truck traffic coming in and out of Canada made that impractical.

"We were at loggerheads for the better part of the year," remembers Cook County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jim Boyd, until a new plan was hammered out that reduces each travel lane by a foot while adding bump-outs, painted crosswalks, 140 new trees, a public plaza, and public art. A multiuse bike/walk path will run alongside the highway, and new sidewalks will be built in some stretches currently lacking them. The debate also spurred Grand Marais to draft its own pedestrian plan, emphasizing new sidewalks on other city streets and better snow removal.



Extruded curb treatments, like these in Kuna, Idaho, are used in Emmett and other rural areas to create safe pedestrian walkways without the full cost of sidewalks. Photo by Don Kostelet.

### Where the sidewalk ends

A frequent obstacle to making small towns more walkable is money — because road and sidewalk improvements cost big bucks. But don't despair, says Dan Burden, director of innovation for Blue Zones, which focuses on walkability as a key element in making communities healthier. Burden is a pioneering walkability expert who was the country's first official state pedestrian coordinator in Florida.

"Small towns don't need to replicate what big cities do" he says. "They can do things in their own way."

Adding sidewalks on already built blocks can ignite homeowner wrath because of expensive assessments, lost street trees, and the sense that their property is being taken (even though it is technically a public right-of-way). A less costly, less controversial alternative, Burden says, is "marking out a pedestrian lane on the side of residential streets with low traffic volumes and speeds — all you need is paint." He notes that small towns streets are generally wide with plentiful parking, so these lanes don't antagonize residents or motorists.

He points to a plan in Immokalee, Florida (pop. 26,000) — an unincorporated community outside Naples whose residents are 97 percent people of color — to create a walking lane from a school to a nearby lake. "They don't have the money to do sidewalks, so this will really help."

Emmett, Idaho (pop. 6,600) — an economically struggling town — just opened a three-quarter-mile pedestrian lane, making it safer for kids to walk to an elementary school located on a street with no sidewalks. Three flashing lights have been installed to alert cars and make pedestrian crossings easier. This is the first link of an eventual two-mile route connecting downtown, all three schools, and the main city park.

The lane is a five-foot asphalt extension to the road shoulder with a raised divider providing extra protection from moving traffic (periodic cuts in the divider handle storm drainage). The project cost 10 percent of a traditional sidewalk, notes designer Don Kostelet, AICP, of Boise-based Vitruvian Planning, who calls the approach "an extruded curb treatment." He says this can even work on gravel roads using railroad ties.

"You can't come into a small town with the same tool kit you'd use in Boise or Portland," notes Kostelet, who has worked in more than 20 rural Idaho communities.

Mayor Gordon Petrie — a retired judge and Iraq war veteran — champions better walking conditions in Emmett as a key plank of his limited-government philosophy. "The fundamental bottom line of why cities exist is to protect people and property — and to create the infrastructure so people can protect themselves. This includes protection from chronic disease — and walking is one of the best ways to prevent us from chronic disease."

Petrie cites the school principal as another influence on his thinking. "He's a former football player at Boise State, and he says if we get the kids' hearts pumping on the way to school, they will do better on tests and be better behaved."

Mayor Petrie walks his talk. As part of the Idaho Mayor's Walk Challenge he once covered 650 miles in a single month (averaging 21 miles a day), winning prize money to invest in pedestrian projects around town.

While budgets are constrained in rural communities, it's often easier to get things up and running, Kosteleg observes. When his firm proposed a pedestrian lane marked with a painted line in Mackay, Idaho (pop. 444), one city council member — who was also the fire chief and coach of the local baseball team — piped up, "We can get the money for that at the next school fundraiser, and I can use the line marker from the baseball diamond to apply the paint."

*Jay Walljasper — author of The Great Neighborhood Book and America's Walking Renaissance — writes, speaks, and consults about creating better communities. See more of his work at [JayWalljasper.com](http://JayWalljasper.com) (<http://JayWalljasper.com/>).*

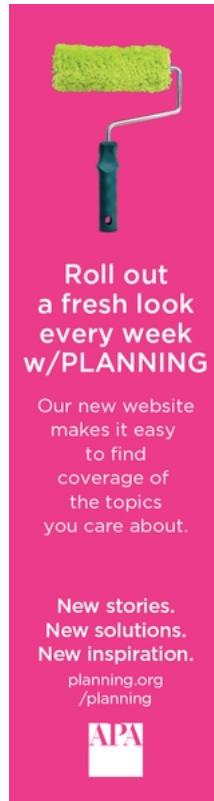
## RESOURCES

### **APA Learn: Tactical Urbanism: People and Pavement**

([https://learn.planning.org/local/catalog/view/product.php?globalid=LRN\\_S533](https://learn.planning.org/local/catalog/view/product.php?globalid=LRN_S533)): Learn how to set up a program for community-initiated demonstration projects to test ideas for improving walking and biking.

**Highway 61 Revisited:** The scenic harbor town of [Grand Marais, Minnesota](#), goes on a road diet (<https://youtu.be/CrC0xsVWFVI>) and gets a highway makeover after teaming up with MnDOT on a context-sensitive solution.

**AARP: Rural Livability** (<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/archives/info-2014/rural-livability.html>) resources include videos, articles, slideshows, presentations, and more. Visit AARP's [Livable Communities newsletter](https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/) (<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/>) online.





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# Develop a Façade, Signage, and Physical Improvement Program

<b>Category</b>	Private Realm; Revenue Sales; Culture Arts; Tenant Mix
<b>Location</b>	Town Center from Monson Free Library to Main Street Tavern to incorporate Veterans Field and sections of the Chicopee Brook, as well as residential collector streets
<b>Origin</b>	Monson Rapid Recovery Planning Committee with guidance from PVPC Plan Facilitators Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)
<b>Budget &amp; Sources of Funding</b>	 <b>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)</b>  In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:  <u>American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</u> Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or sign upgrades when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.  <u>T-Mobile</u> Hometown Grants This program will fund up to \$50,000 per town and may be used to rebuild or refresh community spaces, including historic buildings. <a href="https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/hometown-grants">https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/hometown-grants</a>  <u>Local Banks or Community Development Financial Institutions</u> Local banks with a community development financing program for small businesses may be able to help provide low or no interest loans to small businesses for their share of the improvements, especially for a storefront or sign upgrade. The focus of the program at each bank is different; contact your local bank(s) and discuss how they could participate in investing in the community  <u>Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth</u> Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000) Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which would include creating the program, developing the design guidelines, and providing conceptual designs for improvements, depending on the complexity of the project.  <u>Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs</u> Community Planning Grants (project limit \$25,000-\$75,000) A Community Planning Grant may be used for Zoning Review and Updates, which can include the sign code and design guidelines if they are part of the municipality's zoning bylaws or ordinance.  <u>Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and DHCD</u> District Local Technical Assistance Grant Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and may be used for planning projects. Each 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.

### Funding Sources that May be Leveraged

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

#### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth:

MassDevelopment

Underutilized Properties Program

As with the historic tax credits below, this funding source is for larger projects. It could be used to help address larger buildings in a target area that have more significant issues.

MassDevelopment

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.

#### Massachusetts Historical Commission

Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit

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

The MCC offers a wide portfolio of grant programs that could assist with building and infrastructure improvements, operating expenses, and specific programming. Grant programs include Cultural Facilities grants, Festivals grants, Project grants, Gateway grants, Portfolio grants, and Local Cultural Council grants.

The following excerpt is taken from the MCC website:

Culture provides.

Our cultural life thrives because of the work of countless arts, humanities, and sciences organizations across the Commonwealth. Programs and initiatives like the Cultural Facilities Fund, Universal Participation, and EBT Card to Culture have been designed to help such organizations innovate, take on new challenges, and expand access to previously underserved audiences. We invest in ambition and imagination, with returns that improve our quality of life, create economic opportunity, and engage more people in cultural expression.

<https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/who-we-are/sources-of-funding/>

### Timeframe



10/21-3/22: Engage a committee of local businesses and nonprofits, and a consultant, to establish a program to provide grants and/or loans for physical exterior and interior improvements throughout the Project Area.

4/22-12/23: Administer a grant program to assist interested businesses and nonprofits to refresh storefronts, structures, and displays. Further, almost all property owners in the Project Area have identified the desire to address Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) needs.

01/24-ongoing: The town could consider expanding the program beyond 12/23 if it is successful.

### Risks



Low risk. Monson is a small town with highly engaged and enthusiastic leaders and stakeholders. Government is very close to a large number of residents, and many people have a big stake in the successful completion of this project. Participation in this program will be voluntary and based on financial need.

<b>Key Performance Indicators</b>	This project will be successful if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the project is embraced by multiple businesses and nonprofits.</li> <li>upon completion, participating businesses show a clear and quantifiable increase in customer visits and/or revenue.</li> </ul>
<b>Partners &amp; Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Municipal staff (Town Administrator, Administrative Assistant, Planning and/or Economic Development)</li> <li>Select Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals</li> <li>Monson RRP Committee</li> <li>Monson Business and Civic Association (pending creation as an RRP project)</li> <li>Property &amp; business owners</li> <li>Local artists and cultural organizations</li> <li>Nonprofit organizations</li> <li>Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>Pioneer Valley Planning Commission</li> <li>Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation</li> </ul>
<b>Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts</b>	<p>Monson is a small, but vibrant community, with significant synergy between business, nonprofit, cultural, recreational, agricultural, and governmental sectors. Impacts of COVID-19 have drastically and negatively impacted those businesses with much lower revenue, inability for expansion, and cancellation of most activities and events. Given the financial losses during the pandemic, small business owners and nonprofit organizations do not have all of the resources necessary to address building needs in a timely manner.</p> <p>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 or installed. Further, improved ADA accessibility is a goal that has been expressed by many stakeholders in the Project Area.</p> <p>Included in the Project Area asset mix are dozens of storefronts and restaurants, most of the Town's municipal buildings, several churches, and other nonprofit buildings. Commercial building types include free-standing structures, multiuse building blocks, and a strip shopping center. The Town Center encompasses a wide Main Street, walkable residential neighborhoods, and is enhanced by important recreational assets, including the Chicopee Brook, Veteran's Town Park, Dave Grieve Park, and Flynt Park.</p> <p>The diagnostic phase revealed that most commercial and nonprofit buildings are in reasonably good condition, but some have outdated or deteriorating infrastructure, signage, and/or façades. Others have been engaged in long-term planning and implementation to improve their properties, but have had to delay further action as a result of the impacts of COVID-19.</p> <p>Important anchors and pillars in the Town Center include Adams Hometown Market, Monson Savings Bank headquarters, iconic churches built with Monson granite or traditional clapboards, Memorial Hall (also granite construction), the Monson Arts Council, and previously mentioned parks and recreational attractions.</p> <p>The following are brief observations from Subject Matter Expert (SME) Emily Innes of Innes Associates Ltd. These observations help to confirm and inform the recommendations contained throughout this plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monson has a strong interest in clarifying its identity, as it seeks to brand and market the community, including the Town Center.</li> <li>This interest includes defining whether to position the Town Center as a local or tourist draw or both.</li> <li>Main Street (Route 32) is wide with a clearly defined business community.</li> <li>The town has iconic buildings that are the result of the Monson granite quarries.</li> <li>Some buildings were damaged and reconstructed because of the 2011 tornado.</li> <li>Initial improvements could build on existing efforts, including benches and planters.</li> <li>Vacant storefronts offer an opportunity to integrate the work of local artists.</li> <li>Active storefronts could also include public art – an art walk. This could be expanded to include stories and local history.</li> <li>Some businesses need updated signage.</li> <li>The MAC (Monson Arts Council) building needs some upgrades; other buildings in the town center may need upgrades as well.</li> <li>Some pre-1990 buildings have one or more steps at the ground level, limiting accessibility.</li> </ul>

- This program offers the opportunity to be creative – perhaps starting with addressing temporary installations in vacant storefronts and small site improvements, such as permanent planters, bike racks, or benches.
- Committee members expressed concerns about the use of public funds for improvements without upgrading accessibility. Addressing connections and accessibility sounds like the next step in the program, after confirming which improvements can be done without triggering Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) and ADA requirements. The goal is to make smaller improvements initially and then address the larger and more expensive projects as funds and comfort with the program increase.
- Crowdfunding for certain types of improvements, perhaps sponsored planters like the pavers around Mac the Dragon, might also be a good way to start and then build to a full façade improvement program.
- Addressing signage is another way to start small but still have a real impact.

Finally, other plans and recommendations contained in this report identify the desire and need for Public Realm projects such as branding, beautification, and signage and wayfinding projects. A Private Realm project, facilitating physical improvements to commercial and nonprofit properties, will comport well with similar efforts on public property.

#### Action Item

The project will involve the following steps:

1. Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
2. Determine if the Monson sign code should be amended to facilitate implementation of this program.
3. Identify who needs to be part of this process and engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.
4. Determine the need for any design, façade, or sign code revisions.
5. Develop the criteria for application, approval, and implementation.
6. Develop the funding and oversight structures.

#### Process

With guidance from subject matter expert (SME) Emily Innes of Innes Associates, Ltd, the following process guidelines are recommended and should be seriously considered.

#### Pre-program development

1. Identify who in the municipality will manage this program: municipal staff, existing nonprofit committee/organization, volunteer committee, or a hybrid. PVPC, as the Regional Planning Agency, can work with the municipality on the program, as requested and subject to funding.
2. Decide whether the design guidelines will be just for the façade improvement program or more broadly applicable.
3. Discuss the potential focus of the program: components of a storefront, the entire storefront, the entire façade, all façades, the entire site? Will lighting, awnings and other smaller elements be included? Will interior improvements to address accessibility be included? Will the municipality fund the design, all or some of the improvements, or both?
4. Discuss what will not be eligible. Eligibility may also be determined by the funding source (for example, CDBG funds).
5. Discuss the length of time that improvements must be maintained and the enforcement process for ensuring that improvements are maintained.
6. Consider the funding structures. The program, once established, could 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. Another option is to forgive loans after a certain time if the improvements are maintained. The Town might consider offering grants to early adopters (depending on resources) or through a lottery process and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area. This would need to be a highly transparent process.
7. Decide whether the guidelines and program will be developed in-house or whether the municipality 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 municipality may need to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP).

### **Developing the program**

1. Decide the following:
  - a. Grant, loan, or hybrid
  - b. Which elements will the program fund and which are the responsibilities of the property owner?
  - c. What are the eligibility requirements for participating in the program?
  - d. What is the length of the program?
  - e. How long will property owners be required to maintain the improvements?
  - f. What is the enforcement procedure for maintenance? (This could be repayment of a grant or a lien on a property.)
  - g. Will the responsibility for maintenance transfer to a new owner if the property is sold?
2. 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.
3. Develop the forms and train the people who will be evaluating the applications.

Education of all people involved in the program needs to be an ongoing component. A municipality that is short on project management resources should consider hiring a dedicated staff member or consultant to manage this program.

Finally, the municipality should consider streamlining approvals of projects under this program to reduce the time needed for implementation.

### **Best Practices**

[Admin Capacity, Private Realm - Innes Associates - Facade Storefront Programs -REVISED.pdf](#)

The following are links to specific façade improvement programs in Ashland and Cambridge.

Ashland, Massachusetts is conducting a Sign and Façade Improvement Program that provides a 50% match up to \$5,000. This program is a revolving loan fund, but this can also be done with grants. The preferred target area is high-traffic streets but it is open to all businesses in Ashland.

The program includes building improvements (accessibility, signs, awnings, painting) and site improvements (parking lots, planters, landscaping).

<https://www.ashlandmass.com/669/Business-Incentive-Programs>

Cambridge, Massachusetts property owners or tenants can access financial resources to renovate or restore commercial building exterior facades through the Storefront Improvement Program. The Program improves the physical appearance of independent businesses and enhances Cambridge's commercial districts.

[https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/econdev/smallbusinessassistance/  
smallbusinessprograms/storefront](https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/econdev/smallbusinessassistance/smallbusinessprograms/storefront)



## Develop a façade/storefront/site improvement program.



Provided by SME Consultant

Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Innes Associates Ltd.

Location

Any downtown, commercial corridor, or village center.

Origin

Innes Associates Ltd.

Budget



Low (less than \$50,000)



Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000)

Timeframe



Short Term (1-5 years)

Risk



Medium

Budget: Costs

- Develop design guidelines for the façade elements to be improved.
- Develop the structure of the program.
- Manage the program over time.
- Design assistance.
- Implementation, including construction.
- Displacement protection programs.

## Budget: Sources

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

### Funding Sources for All Façade Improvement Programs

#### American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or site improvements when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Possible impacts are addressed in the sections on **Key Performance Indicators** and **Diagnostic**.

#### Hometown Grants

##### *T-Mobile*

This program will fund up to \$50,000 per town and may be used to rebuild or refresh community spaces, including historic buildings.

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

#### Local Banks and other Community Development Financial Institutions

Local banks with a community development financing program for small businesses may be able to help provide low or no interest loans to small businesses for their share of the improvements, especially for a storefront or sign upgrade. The focus of the program at each bank is different; contact your local bank(s) and discuss how they could participate in investing in the community.

#### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth

##### *Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000)*

All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which could include creating the program, developing the design guidelines, and providing conceptual designs for improvements, depending on the complexity of the project. This program could be used to develop the design guidelines for the façade improvement program.

#### Business Improvement District or Other Downtown District

Funds from a BID may be used for a façade improvement program.

### Funding Sources that May be Leveraged

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 on the next page are examples that can work in tandem with a façade improvement program to address buildings with larger needs.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth:

Underutilized Properties Program

*MassDevelopment*

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*

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*

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

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.

Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund

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

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*

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.

## Risk: Explanation

The risk level depends on the community and the relationships of the property owners with the municipality. The highest level of risk occurs in conversations with property owners; for various reasons, the owners of the most distressed properties 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.

Some communities have indicated that that owners will not want to participate in programs funded by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds because of the number of requirements. Communities using these funds should consider helping with the paperwork and providing a list of local designers and contractors who meet the program's eligibility requirements.

Façade improvements can also be about community values relative to the physical space; a third level of risk occurs within the community conversations around the design standards for the program. In some communities, a façade improvement program may be an implementation step in an earlier planning process. In others, developing a community vision for the area before creating the program will be necessary to receive support for the program.

The final risk is the displacement of smaller businesses as property values, and rents, increase to match the upgrades to the physical environment. Since many smaller businesses are often also local businesses, improvements without protection for those small businesses may result in attractive, but empty, storefronts. Municipalities should consider structuring the criteria for participation in their façade improvement programs to reduce the risk of displacement.

## Key Performance Indicators

Improvements as a result of these programs 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. The increase in value attracts investment and contributes to a higher tax base.

KPI for this project could include the following:

- Creation of the program.
- Number of applicants over a specific timeframe.
- Number of façades, storefronts, and/or sites improved within a specific timeframe.
- Maintenance of the improvements after a set number of years.
- Increase in visitors to the target area.
- Increase in sales at the property/business improved and within the target area.
- Ability to extend the program to other commercial areas within the municipality (if appropriate).
- If anti-displacement measures are included in the program:
  - Number of local businesses within improved properties that are still there after a set number of years.
  - Number of new local businesses that have started or relocated to the target area within a set number of years.

## Partners & Resources

- Municipal staff (planning and economic development, building and/or zoning inspector)
- Municipal boards (City Council/Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Economic Development Committee)
- Property/business owners
- Downtown organizations

## Diagnostic

Reasons for undertaking a façade or storefront improvement program may include one or more of 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.
- Distressed properties have a negative impact on people's impression of the viability and/or safety of a business district and property owners are unable to make the improvements themselves.
- Storefronts are not accessible to those who have problems with mobility, whether temporary or permanent.
- Historic downtowns often have empty upper floors because of the lack of accessible elevators. A major improvement project could provide grants to address both interior and exterior accessibility.
- Historic properties may have been "improved" with inappropriate materials or repairs.

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

The municipality needs to make certain decisions prior to and during the creation of this program. If the municipality already knows the answers, then staff can proceed with developing the program. If not, the municipality can work the decision points into a scope of work for assistance in development and perhaps managing the program. See **Process** for some of these questions.

If starting from scratch, the municipality will need to accomplish the following:

- Identify capacity within the municipality 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.

**Pre-program development**

1. Identify who in the municipality will manage this program: municipal staff, existing downtown committee/organization, volunteer committee, or a hybrid.
2. If the municipality 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?  
Note that the entity managing this process does not have to be the municipality. For example, a Community Development Corporation or other nonprofit could sponsor the program.
3. 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 municipality fund the design, all or some of the improvements, or both?
4. Discuss what will not be eligible. Eligibility may also be determined by the funding source (for example, CDBG funds).
5. 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.
6. 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 municipality 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 municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area. This would need to be a highly transparent process.
7. Decide whether the guidelines and program will be developed in-house or whether the municipality 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 municipality may need to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP).

**Developing the Guidelines**

1. If the municipality already has design guidelines that can be used for the façade improvement program, skip to the next section.
2. For developing the guidelines, review the Best Practices for Design Guidelines.

### **Developing the Program**

1. Decide the following:
  - a. Grant, loan, or hybrid
  - b. Which elements will the program fund and which are the responsibility of the property owner?
  - c. What are the eligibility requirements for participating in the program?
  - d. What is the length of the program?
  - e. How long will property owners be required to maintain the improvements?
  - f. What is the enforcement procedure for maintenance? (This could be repayment of a grant or a lien on a property.)
  - g. Will the responsibility for maintenance transfer to a new owner if the property is sold?
2. 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 municipality may need to consider parallel outreach processes.
3. 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.
4. Develop the forms and train the people who will be evaluating the applications.

### **Implementation**

The program can provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. Grants may provide a greater incentive to participate for reluctant property owners, while loans (no or low interest) provide a revolving fund to assist more properties. Some communities have indicated that requiring a match from the property owner may create longer-term support of the program.

If the property owners are less interested in the program, the municipality might consider offering grants to the first 3-5 participants to sign up (depending on resources) and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area.

Education of all people involved in the program needs to be an ongoing component. A municipality that is short on project management resources should consider hiring a dedicated staff member or consultant to manage this program.

Finally, the municipality should consider streamlining approvals of projects under this program to reduce the time needed for implementation.

## Example 1: Sign & Façade Improvement Program

Ashland, Massachusetts

### Town Contact

Beth Reynolds

Economic Development Director

breyndols@ashlandmass.com

### Funding by:

Home Rule petition for annual appropriation and Home Rule petition for revolving fund – both approved by Town Meeting.

### Structure

50% match up to \$5,000

### Characteristics

- Preferred target area (high traffic streets) but is open to all businesses in Ashland.
- Includes building improvements (accessibility, signs, awnings, painting).
- Includes site improvements (parking lots, planters, landscaping)

<https://www.ashlandmass.com/669/Business-Incentive-Programs>

**Note: Many existing programs use CDBG funds. Examples 1 and 2 both use municipal funding sources. Examples 3 and 4, which are both Main Streets Programs, provide a model for using historic preservation funds.**

### APPLICATION FOR SIGN & FAÇADE PROGRAM

#### Purpose:

The Sign & Façade Program was established to provide technical and financial assistance to Ashland businesses making general improvements to their establishments. This program can help up to 50% of the project cost or \$5,000 (whichever is less) for facade and/or sign improvements such as the ones being done through the Ashland Economic Development Scenic Program, as done in other towns to promote beautification and enhance the visual appearance of Ashland.

#### Eligibility Requirements:

This incentive is available to businesses in Ashland that are located in eligible locations (i.e. high-traffic areas and/or Main Street, Pleasant Street, Route 128, Rose Street). The applicant must either own the property in question or have a letter of authorization for the project from the owner. Moreover, the permit must state how any outside disruptions to the exterior, no back have moved, trees, etc.).

The project must have all required town approvals and permits. There is no permit required for basic landscape improvements but please consult the building department if any structures, parking, signs that are being modified.

#### Examples of eligible improvements that are eligible under this program include:

- Accessibility improvements (i.e. handicapped accessible ramps)
- Braille signs
- Awnings
- Signage
- Energy conservation for windows & doors
- Painting
- Exterior lighting
- Planters and landscaping
- Conversion of roofs
- Finger-painted murals may not be used for improvements to the exterior of the business or to sidewalks or public walkways.

#### APPLICATION

##### BUSINESS INFORMATION

Business Address:

Contact Name:

Contact Phone:

Contact Email:

Please indicate if this business is new or existing:

##### PROJECT INFORMATION

Please describe the scope of work for the proposed renovation project:

Please indicate the estimated total project cost of the total amount budgeted for improvements:

Does the project require you to obtain a building permit? Attach copies of permits.

5

Courtesy of the Town of Ashland

## Example 2: Storefront Improvement Program

Cambridge, Massachusetts

### City Contact

Christina DiLisio

Project Manager

cdilisio@cambridgema.gov

### Funding by:

Municipal capital funds

### Structure

Tiered matching grants based on improvement type

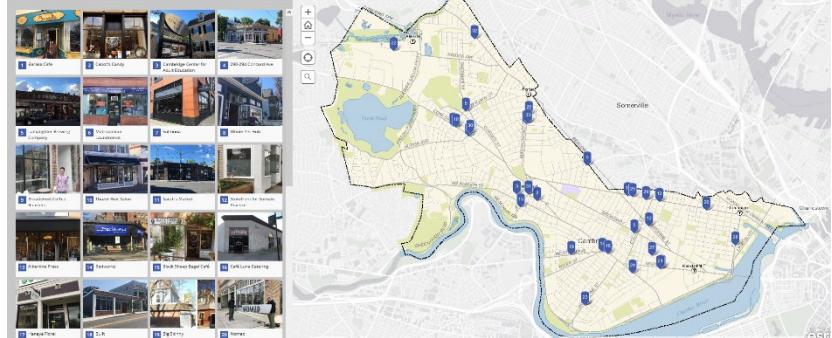
### Characteristics

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

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/economic/smallbusinessassistance/smallbusinessprograms/storefront>

### Storefront Improvement Program

This storefront improvement program provides cosmetic funding for businesses all over Cambridge in making their storefronts more attractive, efficient, and accessible. This is a sample of successful stores.



Courtesy of the City of Cambridge

### **Example 3: NPS Main Street Façade Improvement Grant**

Main Street America

<https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/projects/spotlight/façadeimprovements/npsgrant>

- Main Street America announced a façade improvement grant program using funds from the Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program, now the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants Program. This grant is sponsored by the National Park Service.
- This example is not given as a funding source, rather, it is an option for using historic preservation funds, such as CPA funds, to create a façade improvement program that would address the historic buildings in a target area. This option is provided because some communities were looking at non-CDBG sources for a façade improvement program. This may be a useful model for a local program.
- The site provides a link to each of the communities chosen for this program. The awards are expected to be \$25,000 per project, and the site has the preservation covenants, grant agreements, and two webinars which may be useful.

### **Example 4: Historic Commercial District Revolving Fund**

Main Street America

<https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/projects/spotlight/façadeimprovements/hcrf>

- State-by-state program – in 2016, it was Texas and in 2019, it was Maine.
- This is not a funding source, but an example of a program that could serve as a model for communities with a significant number of historic buildings in their commercial centers.
- The Texas program includes a PDF of before-and-after pictures, the scope of work, and the cost for each building.
- This program also serves as a reminder that historic photos of a downtown can be used to as a base for developing design guidelines for the program, reinforcing characteristics specific and unique to each community.