



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Norwood, MA



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



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

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

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

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Acknowledgements



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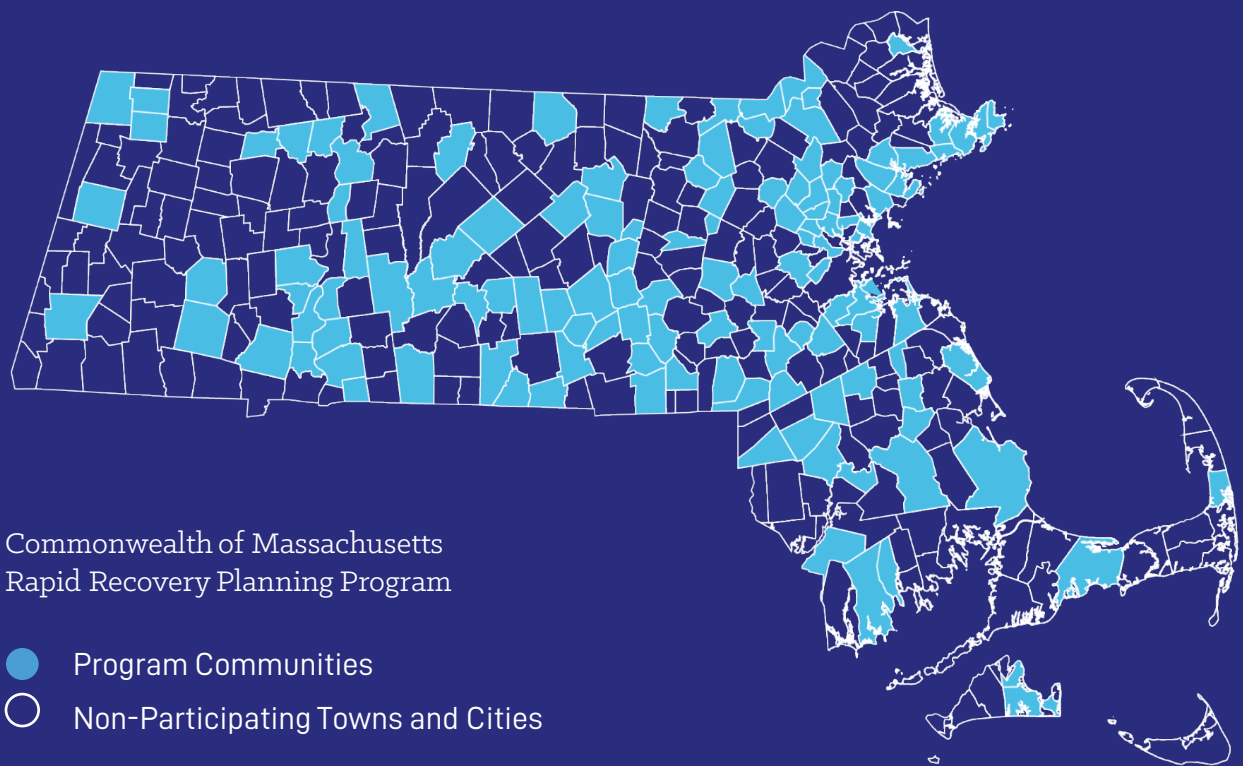
Table of Contents

Rapid Recovery Program	6
Introduction	7
Approach/Framework	8
Executive Summary	10
Diagnostic Key Findings	14
Physical Environment	15
Business Environment	15
Market Information	16
Administrative Capacity	16
Project Recommendations	20
Public Realm	21
Private Realm	36
Revenue and Sales	40
Administrative Capacity	45
Appendix	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.



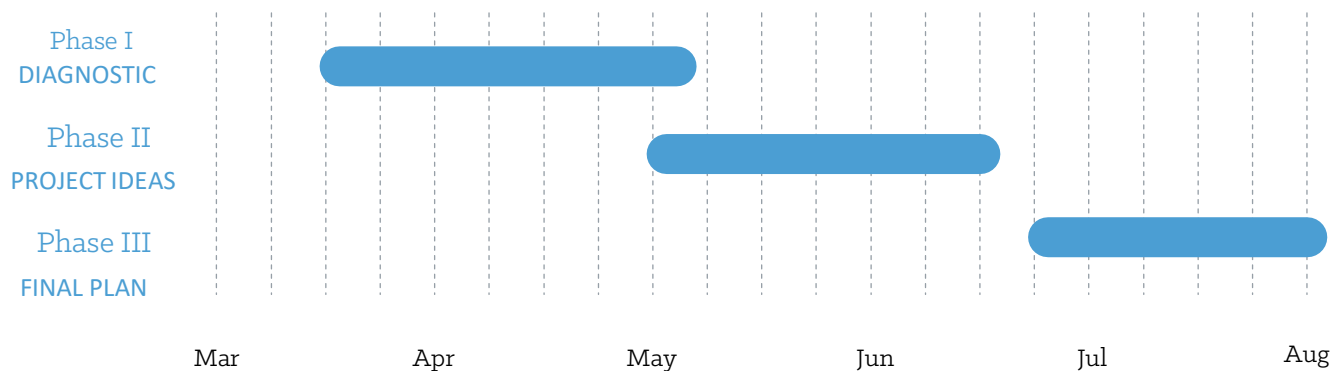
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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.

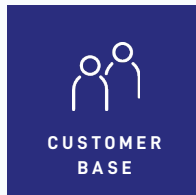
Each Rapid Recovery Plan was developed across three phases between February-August 2021. Phase 1 - Diagnostic, Phase 2- Project Recommendations, Phase 3 - Plan.



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

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

A Town with a Strong Center and Dedicated Business Owners

Norwood Center runs approximately 0.4 miles along Washington Street (Route 1A) from Guild Street to the southwest to Railroad Avenue to the north, and Broadway to the east. This area was settled over 100 years ago and maintains roughly the same layout. The building on Guild Street is built along a shallow angle, signifying there used to be a trolley route along Washington Street at one time. Most of the commercial buildings are two stories, with the first floor serving as restaurant or retail and the second story as professional services, including tax, insurance, or legal. Based on the MassDOT Road Inventory Database, traffic counts for Washington Street are over 16,000 vehicles/day and Nahatan Street is over 9,000 vehicles/day.

There are two Commuter Rail Stations nearby: Norwood Central to the south and Norwood Depot to the northeast of the LRRP study area. There is a large U.S. Postal Service office located just south of the study area, near Norwood Central Train Station. Norwood Center was re-zoned using an overlay district in 2019 with the intent to promote more walkable, mixed-use commercial development. However, no development has happened since the change.

There is approximately 264,000 square feet of retail and 66,000 square feet of office space in the Corridor. Per field data collection, 157 total businesses were documented. The mix of businesses includes, among others, restaurants/food services (24%), personal services (23%), and retail trade (18%). In addition, residential uses are scattered throughout the corridor. There are many opportunities for outdoor dining, and the temporary closure of Central Street nearly doubles the amount of public space for visitors of the area.

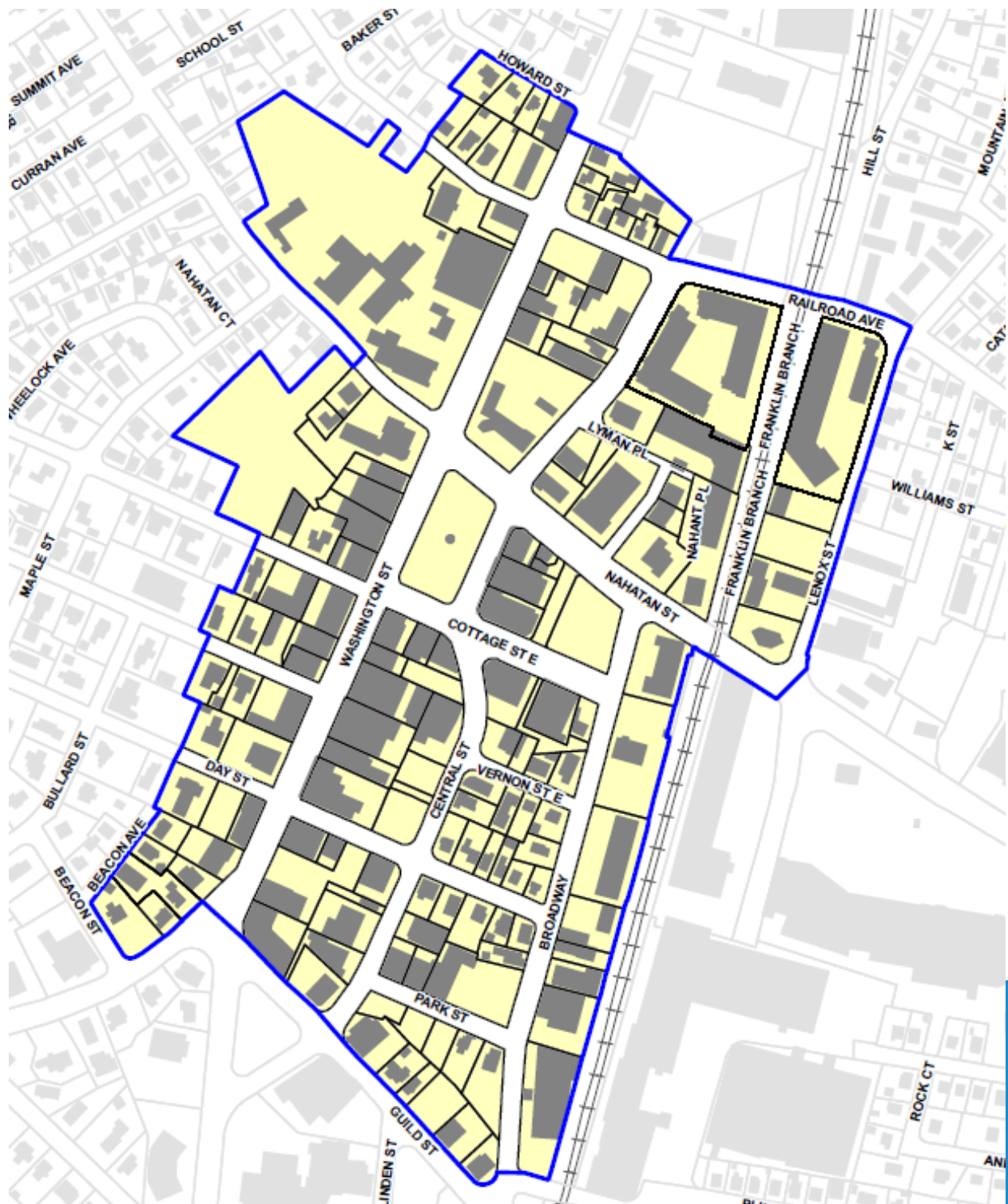
An assessment of the corridor's physical environment in spring 2021 included the following observations:

- Although there are four municipal parking lots throughout the district, there is a lack of awareness of parking supply and availability in Norwood Center.
- Many storefronts within the study area do not have accessible (ADA) entrances.
- Residents and visitors value the Town Common, and it draws many people to the area.
- Norwood Center's business corridor could benefit from improvements to storefronts and business signage.

Data collected through business owner surveys, interviews, and meetings revealed the impacts of COVID-19 on Norwood Center. Declines in revenue and reduced operating hours/capacity were commonly reported. Businesses were required to quickly respond to COVID, and many reported incurring additional, unanticipated expenses to implement safety measures and establish alternative modes to sell and deliver products. Although restaurants could gain access to outdoor dining space, other retailers and service providers were unable to take advantage of the use of public space as easily.



Temporary Public Seating Installation in front of Norwood Theatre, Central Street. Source: BSC Group



Source: BSC Group

Map of Norwood LRRP Study Area

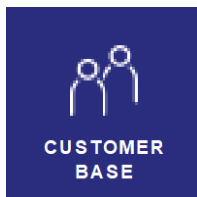
The Town's recovery will depend on increasing the awareness and the utilization of Norwood Center's public parking opportunities, further engaging with the business community to understand how the Town can help with local economic recovery, and continuing to invest in and promote the use of public spaces, including the Town Common.

Based on the economic development goals stated in Norwood's Downtown Master Plan, coupled with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Norwood Center business community and the findings of the LRRP diagnostic phase, the ten (10) project recommendations listed below will be discussed in greater detail later in this report.

Recommendation	Project Category
1. Elevate Parking Lot Visibility with Branding and Signage	Public Realm
2. Support Continued Outdoor Dining	Public Realm
3. Optimize Parking Management	Public Realm
4. Permanently Close Central Street	Public Realm
5. Create Norwood Outdoor "Living Rooms"	Public Realm
6. Address Storefront ADA Compliance	Private
7. Review Zoning to Spur New Development in the Downtown	Private
8. Adopt New Technology or Coaching for Business Owners to Increase Sales	Revenue/Sales
9. Local eCommerce Marketplace	Revenue/Sales
10. Outreach & Support for Downtown Business Community	Administrative Capacity

Diagnostic

Key Findings



The Town's customer base is young and well-educated

Norwood is home to 30,417 residents. The population is well-educated with 50% of residents age 25+ having earned a bachelors degree or higher. Median household income is \$90,202 which is like neighboring Canton and Walpole, but significantly less than Westwood and Sharon. Norwood's median age is 42.6. Twenty-two percent of the population is under 20 while 20% are 65 years and older. The town has a similar age profile to its other suburban neighbors. Approximately 80% of the population is white, while Black/African American and Hispanic residents account for approximately 7% of the population each. 5.4% of the population identifies as Asian.

There are no major higher education, sports, or performing arts venues that attract large crowds to Norwood. However, Norwood Hospital, a 215-bed acute care hospital, lies at the southern edge of Norwood Center bringing hundreds of staff and patients into Norwood each day. Despite a recent closure due to flooding, the Hospital has announced that it plans to stay and rebuild. Moderna, a leading global biotech company, announced its intention to invest approximately \$400 million in a significant expansion at its campus in Norwood, for clinical manufacturing, lab space, and offices.

Source: ESRI Demographic Indicators, 2020



Norwood Center is easily accessible and well-maintained

Norwood Center runs along Washington Street/Route 1A from north to south. It is minutes from Route 1 and I-95 and is served by three commuter rail stations on the Franklin Line. Further, it is less than two miles from the Norwood Regional Airport. Washington Street is well-traveled with 16,158 vehicles traveling the route daily (*MassDOT, 2019 Traffic Counts*).

Norwood Center is well-maintained and includes many inviting features including street trees and benches, wide sidewalks, and the Town Common. Some of these features do not extend to secondary streets. In a survey of business owners conducted for this Local Rapid Recovery project, business owners reported high levels of satisfaction with safety and comfort of customers and employees in the area, condition of public spaces, streets, and sidewalks, and access to the area for customers and employees.

Downtown parking is a significant area of focus in the community. There are 1,058 on- and off-street parking spaces in Norwood Center. Residents and businesses note that a variety of different parking zones can make downtown parking confusing. There are multiple free, public lots that are not as well utilized as on-street parking in front of businesses.

As part of the LRRP, Norwood Center's public realm was assessed and received the following scores (A, B, C, or Fail): Sidewalks: A; Street Trees and Benches: A; Lighting: A; Wayfinding: A; Roadbed and Crosswalks: A.



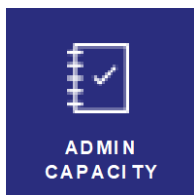
Norwood Center is a service-oriented economy

Norwood Center includes 157 storefronts including retail, restaurants, banks, and offices. According to the Town Assessor's database, this represents approximately 331,123 square feet of ground floor commercial space. Fourteen (14) of the 157 storefronts were vacant during April 2021 site visits. There were no permanent business closures identified that were related to the impacts of COVID-19.

Per NAICS classification, "personal service" businesses (147 businesses) were the dominant business type operating within Norwood Center. Broken down further, "accommodation and food services" represented the highest proportion by business type in the downtown, followed by "retail trade," "healthcare and social assistance," and lastly "arts, entertainment, and recreation."

The Norwood Local Rapid Recovery business survey, which garnered 21 responses, revealed that the regulatory environment is not considered a significant obstacle to business operations in Norwood. Those respondents who identified challenges cited parking regulations, licensing or permitting regulations, and signage regulations as top obstacles. Changes in public parking availability, management, or policies was the top-rated strategy to improve the physical environment and access. Overall, business owners were satisfied with the proximity to complementary businesses and uses and were slightly less satisfied with the condition of private buildings, storefronts, and signs. Business owners identified more opportunities for outdoor dining/selling, recruitment programs to attract additional businesses, and marketing strategies for Norwood Common as preferred strategies to support the business community as it recovers from the impacts of COVID-19.

As part of the LRRP, Norwood Center's private realm was assessed and received the following scores (A, B, C, or Fail): Storefront windows: B; Outdoor displays/dining: A; Signage: B; Facades: A; Storefront lighting: A.



Very active business community needs additional resources

The Friends of Norwood Center (FONC) is a local business association run primarily by volunteers, with one or two part-time staff. This group was instrumental in getting the business survey distributed and filled out by businesses. In total, Norwood received 21 responses.

Last summer, at the height of COVID restrictions on the business community, Town staff and the FONC helped to spread the word about outdoor dining permitting. These efforts led to the Town's success in taking swift action to address restrictions on occupancy at most restaurants.

However, Town staff did not have a comprehensive list of all businesses and owners within Norwood Center. Restaurants were able to be helped, but many personal service businesses, such as nail, salons and spas were unable to take advantage of outdoor spaces. One solution to support small business efforts would be to create a business "ombudsman" position housed within the Town's Planning & Economic Development Office.



Highlights from the Physical Environment

Walkability and a Natural Center

Norwood Center is strategically located between two commuter rail stations and a State Road (Route 1A). It has a Town Common located across the street from Town Hall and across from the 730-seat Norwood Theatre.

The Town has made improvements to sidewalks and crosswalks, with paint and flashing beacons to aid in the pedestrian experience. However, slight elevation changes along some of the storefronts need to be addressed from a disability perspective.

A Parking Perception Problem

A complaint of many visitors and business owners is that there is not enough parking in Norwood Center. However, during the Phase 1 Diagnostic, over 1,000 parking spaces were counted in this area. There are four municipal public parking lots in the area, free to the public. There are several ways the Town can encourage higher use of these public lots through increased signage, education, and technology.



Parking along Cottage Street E. Source: BSC Group



Town Common Gazebo. Source: BSC Group

The Town Common

The Literal Center

The location of the Town Common is across the street from Town Hall, bounded by Nahatan St., Washington St., Cottage St., and Central Street. It serves as an important communal space where residents and visitors can sit with a snack, listen to a concert, run free, or enjoy the picturesque white gazebo constructed in the 1990s that replaced an evergreen tree that served in the center of the Common for decades.

At night, the area is lit with outdoor string lights and music is played softly over several speakers.

Proximity to Central Street

Central Street is located to the East of the Common connecting Nahatan Street to the North and Cottage Street to the South. Since its closure during COVID-19, the Town Common is seamlessly connected to one of the commercial buildings along Central Street, expanding the public gathering space and making it much safer for visitors to enjoy without coming into conflict with a vehicle.



Veteran's Memorial, Town Common. Source: BSC Group

Veterans Memorial

A 20-foot-tall statue is located at the Northwestern corner of the Town Common at the intersection of Washington Street and Nahatan Street. Called the "Protectors of the American Way," it was gifted by a Norwood resident, and was dedicated on September 15, 1991.



Highlights from the Business Environment

Growing Tension between Restaurant and Retail/Service Providers

In terms of business mix, restaurants (36) were the most prominent business type located within Norwood Center. Personal care (hair, nails, skin) businesses were nearly as predominant, with a total of 35. The tension between these types of businesses is growing in part due to the robust outdoor dining that the Town has permitted. Restaurants can set up tables and chairs in on-street parking spaces, taking away valuable front-door access to retailers and salons. Additionally, a complaint of business owners is that their customers then have trouble finding parking. Outdoor dining and special events that occur also provide an accommodation for one specific business over another, creating an unintended equity concern.

Dense, Compact, Walkable

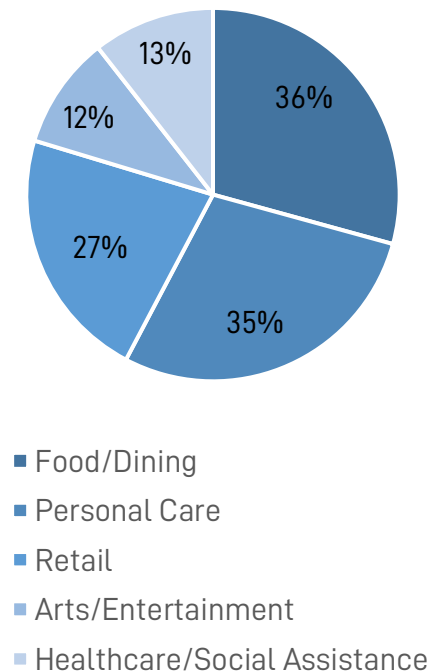
According to ESRI data, there are 238 businesses in Norwood Center. The variety of businesses range from food service to veterinary services, and candlepin bowling to immigration and employment services. The Center is walkable, and it takes approximately 15 minutes to walk from one end of the district to the other.

Although there are many ground floor businesses, many multi-story buildings in Norwood Center still have underutilized upper floors. The emphasis of this LRRP study was on ground floor storefronts, so this would be an area for further study.

Low number of vacancies means Norwood is doing something right

There were 14 total vacancies as of May 2021. Spread throughout the district, these empty storefronts were recent, and turnover is swift - indicative of a healthy business environment.

Types of Businesses







Mix of business by NAICS category. Source: BSC Group



Sign in vacant storefront. Source: BSC Group

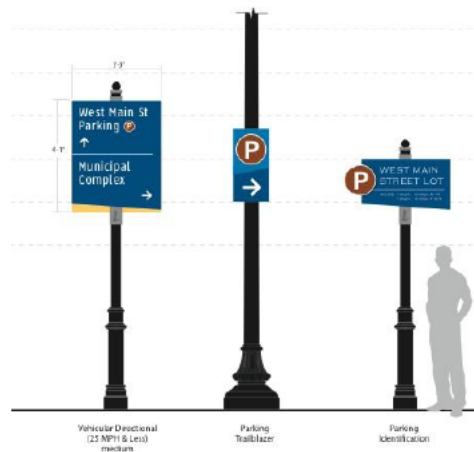
Project Recommendations

Elevate Parking Lot Visibility with Branding and Signage

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Norwood Center
Origin	Town Staff, Stakeholders
Budget	 Medium Budget: Planning & Design: \$20K - \$60K; Fabrication & Installation: \$100K+
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Medium Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Increased use of off-street parking lots, reduction in business owner and patron complaints
Partners & Resources	Norwood Planning and Economic Development, Friends of Norwood Center (FONC), Property Owners, Business Owners, Funding: Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, MassDevelopment Real Estate Technical Assistance Program, or ARPA funds (if tied to implementing COVID recovery activities).
Diagnostic	<p>In 2020, the Town of Norwood was featured as the poster child for other communities when it successfully shut down a portion of Central Street, between Cottage Street and Nahatan Street for communal dining and pedestrian access.</p> <p>Central Street became an extension of the Town Common, with rolled out artificial grass, picnic tables, decorative hanging lights, music, plants, and artwork. In addition, the Town encouraged many restaurants to create outdoor dining experiences using on-street parking spaces. With the recapture of on-street parking spaces as public space for these two reasons, concerns arose over the availability of parking in Norwood Center.</p> <p>As part of Phase I Diagnostic, one of the metrics captured were number of parking spaces within the study area. Norwood has approximately 1,000 parking spaces in the study area. There are four (4) off-street lots of within the district that are frequently underutilized.</p> <p>There is parking, but patrons don't realize it because there is lack of signage and direction.</p> <p>In one of the webinars put on by the MA Department of Housing and Community Development, a subject matter expert eloquently stated, "There isn't a parking problem per se, there is a parking perception problem."</p>

Create a town center parking signage plan

- Identify sign types, key destinations, and potential sign locations
 - Vehicular directionals to parking
 - Parking trailblazer
 - Parking Lot ID signs
- Conceptual sign type layouts
 - Final sign design, locations, and fabrication details to be completed subsequently to this project



Considerations

- Create a “Visitors” tab on town of Norwood website to include key destinations and a parking map
- Consider adding branding/town identity element to wayfinding
- Include some pedestrian trailblazers to key destinations to encourage a “park once” strategy
- Identify parking lots with a unique name, or label based on closest landmark



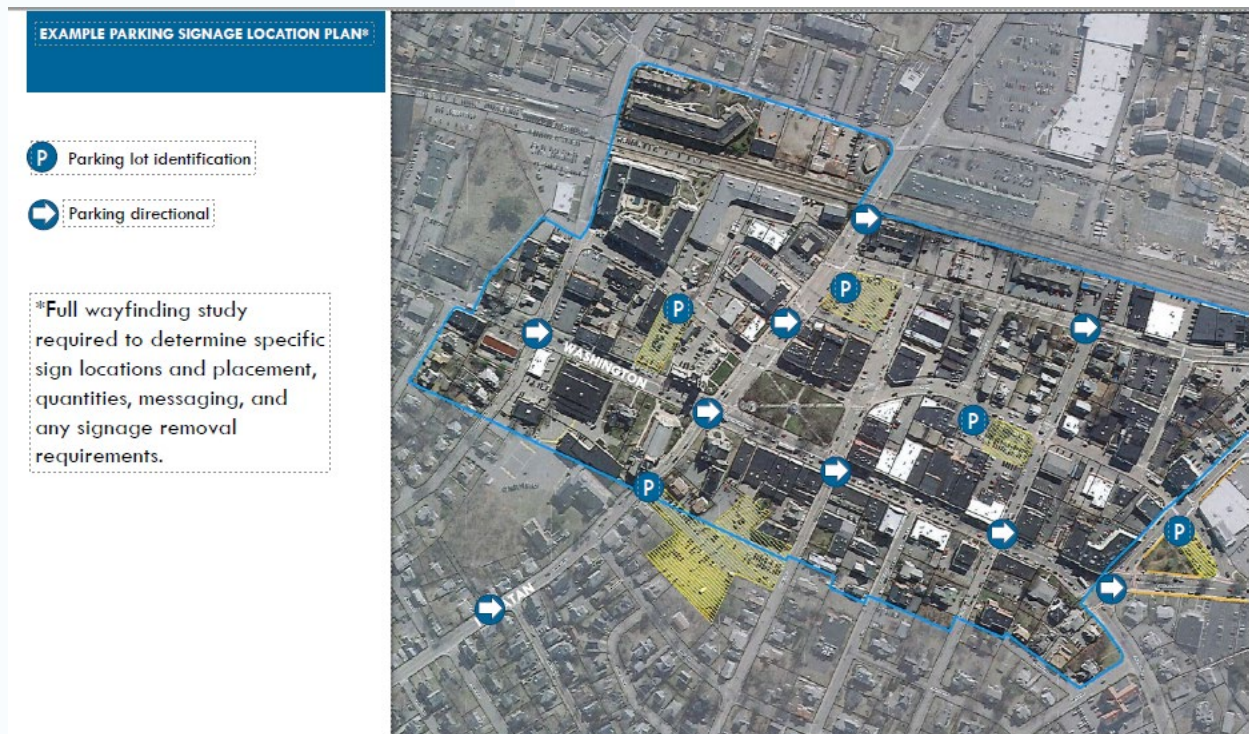
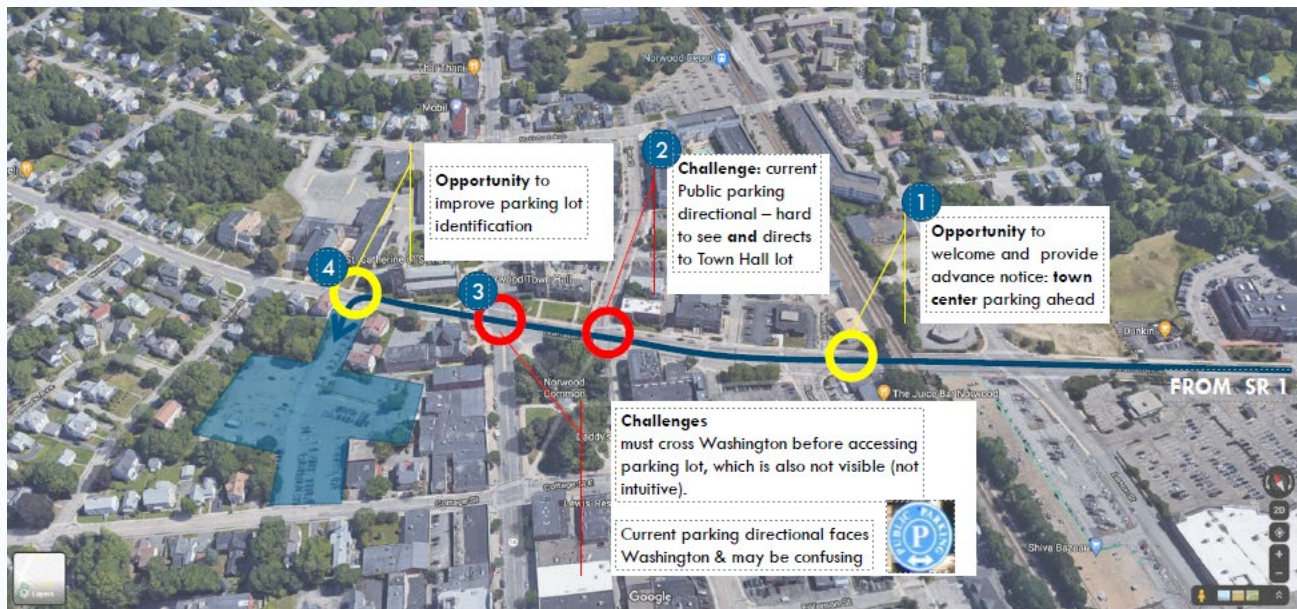


Image: Nelson\Nygaard

Process

Issue an RFP to develop a wayfinding system to include:

1. Audit of existing signage

- Establishment of clear wayfinding goals and objectives, and agreement on project boundaries
- Stakeholder engagement
- User identification and journey mapping
- A family of wayfinding sign types
- Key parking destinations to be included in the sign program
- A sign location plan
- A signage message schedule with consistent nomenclature
- Conceptual and final sign design concepts
- Materials and mounting recommendations
- A design intent bid package that can be issued to signage fabricators for pricing and installation
- Sign fabrication and installation oversight (review shop drawings, answer RFIs, develop punch lists, etc.)
- Bid package to sign fabricators should include developing and installing prototype signage at one or two locations before rollout of the full system.

2. Town Coordination: Identify responsibilities for each relevant Town department for installation, maintenance and periodic updating of signage system.

Best Practice

Burlington Wayfinding

The City of Burlington, VT implemented an innovative "hairpin" sign system and graphic identity in 1986. This comprehensive wayfinding system differentiated neighborhoods and districts and identified parking and visitor destinations. After more than 20 years, Burlington's wayfinding consultant, LandWorks continues to work with the City to update the system and integrate new technologies.

LandWorks has worked to update and expand the system to address gateways, pedestrian and bicycle environments, and the overall visual landscape of the city. A key goal of the sign system is to guide people to downtown parking facilities and to make more aesthetically pleasing, efficient, and user-friendly facilities.

New "smart signs" that employ electronic messaging to guide motorists to public parking facilities with available spaces is being explored. Wayfinding elements and graphics for inside garages are being developed, and a pedestrian sign system and wayfinding map are being designed to facilitate walking throughout downtown, the Church Street Marketplace, and the waterfront to support a seamless visitor experience from the Interstate to the desired destination.

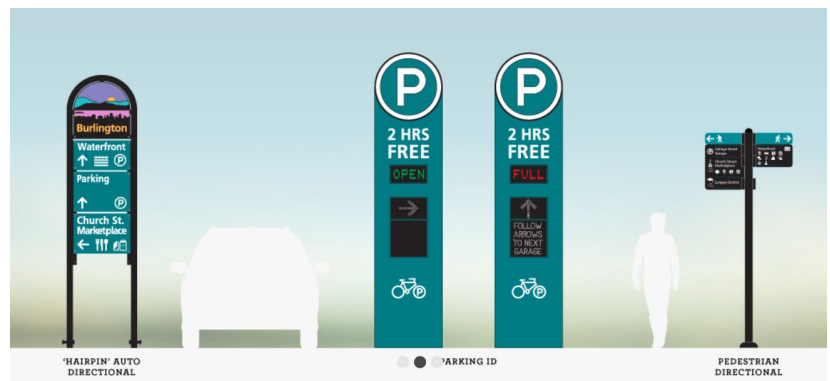
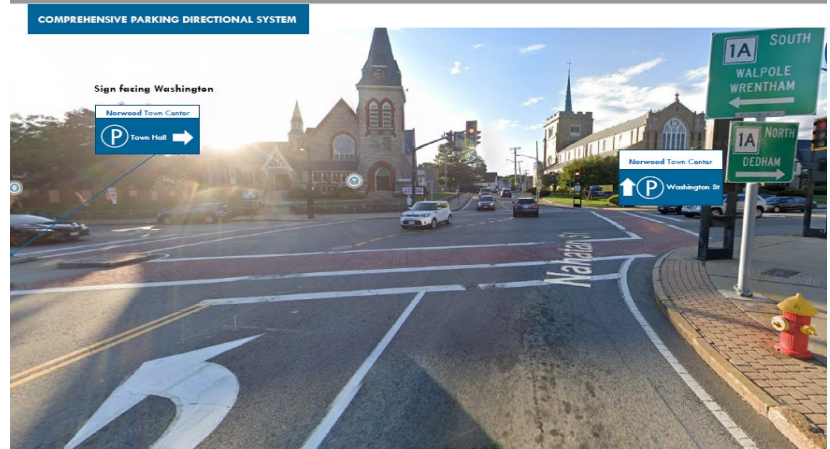


Image: Nelson\Nygaard

Optimize Parking Management

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	Town Staff
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) – Depends on if further studies are needed or desired, or technology, like an app, is needed
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk – Many business owners have complaints about parking, so everyone is motivated to address this issue
Key Performance Indicators	Decrease in number of complaints, increase in number of visitors to businesses, increase in parking space utilization in Town's public parking lots
Partners & Resources	Norwood Planning & Economic Development, Business Community, Friends of Norwood Center



Photo Credit: BSC Group

Diagnostic

During Phase 1 of the diagnostic, approximately 1,000 parking spaces were counted within the study area. However, not all parking is created equal in the eyes of many, if not all, drivers. With a desire to park in front of an entrance, customers have an aversion to parking in a place where you cannot see the entrance to the store.

The Town of Norwood currently does not charge for parking, meaning all parking both in on-street spaces and off-street is free. While there are time limits in certain location, enforcement is lax.

The Town has considered parking management options, such as installation of a pay-to-park system, in the past. It would benefit the Town to weigh its options on parking management and the implementation of a pay-to-park system in some locations moving forward.

Action Item

Hold public forums relative to parking. Solicit feedback as to whether those parking in Norwood Center have concerns or issues. Topics to address include parking availability, pay-to-park systems, business impacts/concerns, parking time limits, etc.

Create a parking strategy based on the feedback received.

Present to Select Board.

Process

- Public input process
- Pursue a Parking Demand Management Study for the downtown area.
- Consider parking restrictions/time limits.
- Select a strategy and implement.
- Evaluate after implementation.



On street and off-street parking options. Photo Credit: BSC Group.

Support Continued Outdoor Dining

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Norwood Center
Origin	Stakeholder discussions, Planning & Economic Development
Budget	 Low – No additional cost to Town; cost for outdoor dining amenities (e.g., tents, tables) varies by business
Timeframe	 Short-term – Implementation can begin immediately
Risk	 Low Risk – recommendations describe measures meant to lower investment and risk to interested businesses
Key Performance Indicators	# of additional businesses offering outdoor dining; # of permits approved; increase in customers
Partners & Resources	Norwood Planning and Economic Development, Friends of Norwood Center, Property Owners, Business Owners, Funding: MOTT Travel, Tourism, & Outdoor Dining; MassDOT Shared Streets
Diagnostic	<p>In 2020, the Town of Norwood closed a portion of Central Street from Cottage Street to Nahatan Street and converted it into an extension of the Town Common, with artificial grass, picnic tables, decorative string lighting, music, plants, artwork. The Town encouraged many restaurants to create outdoor dining experiences using on-street parking spaces.</p> <p>The Town wants to expand upon this already successful program by encouraging other businesses to utilize the opportunity available.</p> 

Outdoor Dining at Byblos Restaurant. Source: BSC Group

Action Item

While outdoor dining is not prohibited in any part of the study area provided it meets existing building, fire, and health codes, it does require approval from the Board of Selectmen. Norwood is supportive of additional outdoor dining and seeks to help businesses safely and efficiently obtain the necessary approvals.

Key action items for this recommendation include:

Planning session with health agent: Implement an initial step in the outdoor dining approval process where businesses will be encouraged to conduct a planning session with the health agent to discuss desired capacity, layout concepts, and food safety topics. The business and health agent can collaboratively address anticipated issues prior to the business investing money in a certified plot plan. This step is applicable for businesses seeking to add temporary or permanent outdoor dining.

Amend zoning bylaw for recurring, temporary outdoor dining: Amendment should address process for yearly permit and administrative review for temporary outdoor dining that is installed year after year. This also includes amendments to the business license agreement to accommodate outdoor seating between certain dates.



Temporary Outdoor Dining, Lewis' Restaurant Photo: BSC Group



The following information is being provided for the **2021 Outdoor Dining Season in Nashua** which begins March 15th and continues through November 15, 2021.

Due to COVID-19, the process, rules and regulations have been adjusted to reflect New Hampshire's protocols and guidance. Nashua's local rules and regulation have been adjusted as well.

Permits are currently being issued for the upcoming season and we want to help you navigate the process should you have an interest in outdoor dining. We understand a one size fits all approach is not going to work for all applicants and will do our best to work cooperatively with you while always adhering to the latest guidance and recommendations from Public Health professionals.

Below are resources and contacts to assist you, including the Outdoor Dining Permit application and rules and regulations from the various departments with authority over this matter. You may also email OutdoorDining@nashuanh.gov.

For ALL Outdoor Dining Establishments on Public, Private or Commercial Property:

- [Outdoor Dining Permit Application - Updated for COVID-9](#) (pdf)
- [Fire Marshal's Outdoor Dining Requirements](#) (pdf)
- [Public Health Department Rules for Outdoor Dining](#) (pdf)
- [Public Health Restaurant Signage](#) (pdf)
- [Guidance for Canopies](#) (pdf)
- [Building and Land Use Permit Application](#) (pdf)

For Outdoor Dining on PRIVATE or COMMERCIAL Property:

- [Checklist for Admin Review of Outdoor Dining on Private Property](#) (pdf)
- [Application for Administrative Review](#) (pdf)

Enable Google Translate

Seasonal Outdoor Dining Information Page, City of Nashua, NH Website
<https://www.nashuanh.gov/1389/Outdoor-Dining>

Process

- 1) Norwood Building, Fire, Health, and Planning and Economic Development Departments draft zoning bylaw language for annual approval of temporary outdoor dining.
- 2) Provide public comment period.
- 3) Zoning bylaw amendment reviewed/approved by selectmen.
- 4) Norwood Building, Fire, Health, and Planning and Economic Development Departments develop tools and information to assist with efficient annual permitting for seasonal outdoor dining in temporary structures. This information should be easily accessible on the Town of Norwood website.

[See example from Nashua, NH.](#)

Outdoor Dining/Retail Community Toolkit



REVENUES
& SALES

Toolkit made available by MA Department of Housing and Community Development, MA Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development and prepared by Civic Moxie

Toolkit available at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/outdoor-dining-retail-toolkit/download>

Outdoor dining and retail options in local commercial districts blossomed during the early days of the COVID-19 Pandemic as towns and cities made a quick pivot to respond to the needs of businesses and residents.

Understanding potential benefits to long-term community and economic development, many businesses and communities now seek to make permanent the temporary outdoor dining and retail options that have sprouted up in their commercial areas.

This Toolkit responds to this need. In the Local Rapid Recovery Program, questions of outdoor dining and retail – enacting permanent bylaws, providing clear design guidelines, helping on use of materials and perhaps even bulk purchasing, compliance with ADA, and navigating local and state regulations – have been among the most common issues raised during the planning process.

Businesses want certainty before investing capital in furniture, construction, and equipment.

Communities want to ensure outdoor dining and retail options are created with some semblance of aesthetic order and that they meet safety standards.

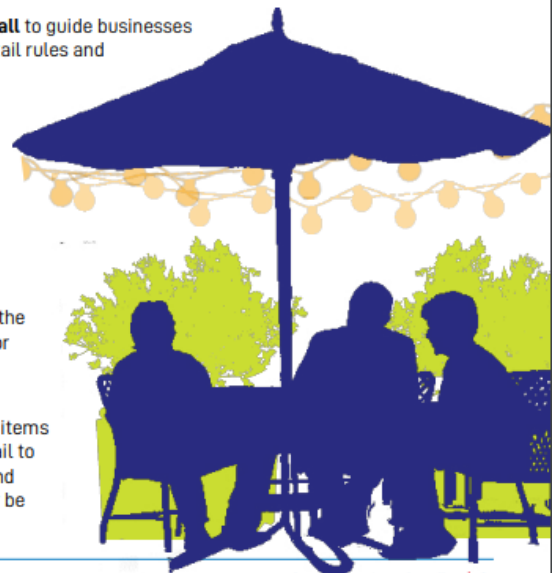
This Toolkit presents the most common questions in the LRRP and provides a guide for each community to move forward in creating its own set of guidelines for businesses and internal streamlining of requirements. The Toolkit is available at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/outdoor-dining-retail-toolkit/download>

We want to...

STREAMLINE THE PROCESS FOR BUSINESSES TO CREATE OUTDOOR DINING/RETAIL UNDER EXISTING STATE REGULATIONS.

When we say “streamline the process,” it can include all or some of the following goals:

- (A)** Offer a **single application** for businesses to apply for permits and licenses to provide outdoor dining and retail.
- (B)** Offer an **online application** to help businesses save time.
- (C)** Provide a **checklist of all requirements**.
- (D)** Provide a **liaison at City or Town Hall** to guide businesses through the outdoor dining and retail rules and requirements.
- (E)** Create a **short-track or condensed timeline** for permitting and approvals by coordinating Town or City inspections and reviews.
- (F)** Provide **clear design guidelines and other requirements** that take the guesswork out of providing outdoor dining and retail.
- (G)** Offer **bulk purchasing** of common items needed for outdoor dining and retail to get better prices for businesses and standardize select items that may be hard or confusing to source.



Outdoor Dining/Retail Toolkit | 9

Permanently Close Central Street

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Central Street near Norwood Theater
Origin	Town Staff, public feedback
Budget	 Low Budget (\$50,000) – fixed assets such as tables, planters, lighting
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk – Town controls the area, however, access to businesses may be impacted, especially for patrons with disabilities, emergency vehicle access, political support, community buy-in/support
Key Performance Indicators	Frequency of use by patrons and the public
Partners & Resources	Planning Department, Friends of Norwood Center, business owners, open space advocates Funding: MassDOT Shared Streets; AARP Community Challenge

Diagnostic



Norwood Theatre at night along Central Street. Source: BSC Group

In 2020, due to COVID-19 and its devastating impacts, Central Street was converted into an extension of the Town Green, with astroturf, picnic tables, lighting, music, plants, artwork. It became a gathering place for residents and visitors to enjoy take-out food and time outside. The Town encouraged many restaurants to create outdoor dining experiences using on street parking spaces.

As part of the Phase I Diagnostic, one of the metrics captured were the number of parking spaces within the study area. Norwood has approximately 1,000 parking spaces in the study area. There are four (4) off-street parking lots that are frequently underutilized.

In one of the webinars conducted by the MA Department of Community Development, a subject matter expert eloquently put Norwood's predicament, "There isn't a parking problem per se, there is a parking perception problem." There is plentiful parking, but patrons may not realize it because there is lack of signage and wayfinding.

With the closure of Central Street, the Norwood Theatre benefits from the opportunity to bring indoor events outside, and nearby restaurants can increase take-away food sales, while attracting more visitors to the area to enjoy a vibrant public space.

Action Items

It is recommended that Norwood look to other communities that have successfully closed all or a portion of a street to provide additional public space. Some actions those communities have taken:

- Outreach to businesses to determine interest in participating in an Open Streets program
- Determine timing of proposed Open Streets (once a week, every weekend)
- Secure support and needed permits from local Department of Transportation to close streets
- Determine staffing and fundraising plan (Paid staff will require a higher level of fundraising, while volunteers will require a higher level of management and coordination)
- Coordinate deployment of barriers and cones to close streets and indicate bike lanes -- either from DPW or privately purchased
- Determine seasonality of Open Streets -- does it take place all year long? Only in the spring and summer?

Create long-term goals, in partnership with the local Department of Transportation's 10-year goals:

- Does the community seek to reduce or eliminate car usage? Encourage public transit? Long term plans might work in partnership with other town transportation objectives, such as building out public transportation and bike infrastructure
- Long term goals: Permanent Open Streets – Use the temporary Open Streets program and outcomes as a model for a permanent closed street setting

Hold Public Hearing to discuss permanently closing Central Street- Allow members of the public to provide comment on whether they prefer the outdoor space (especially year-round) or if they are concerned about parking. Allow business owners to provide feedback on whether they have concerns about the reduction in on-street parking.

Build into Operational Budget: Review maintenance and capital costs associated with the maintenance and closure of Central Street.

Generate ideas for season changes or modifications: What types of changes can be made as the weather changes that will entice people to enjoy the space year-round?

Explore strategies/change regulations to allow for permanent closure:. Understand related impacts of a permanent closure. Work with impacted local businesses.

Process

Considerations in implementing such a program:

Open Streets programs should take place with some level of regularity, even if closure is only once a week

- Make sure businesses have equitable access to open space.
- Alternating sides of bike route so that businesses on one side of the street do not consistently lose the space for business. Businesses should pay proportionately to the amount of space they access.
- Make sure any program can be sustained.

Activation of more permanent solutions to operating Open Streets are likely to be funded through use of federal COVID relief funds that are intended for permanent pedestrian accommodations, staffing, and operations.

- Activate underutilized space in the Open Street with arts and cultural programming.

Ensure that members of the local artistic community have equal access to the opportunity to perform, create, and install art.

Programming should be:

- Diverse and inclusive
- Last a reasonable amount of time (30 - 90 minutes)
- Take place at reasonable hours (not when neighbors may be sleeping)
- Family friendly
- Reasonable volume so as not to disturb neighbors



Outdoor Dining on Central Street. Source: BSC Group

Create Norwood Outdoor “Living Rooms”





Category	 Public Realm
Location	Norwood Center
Origin	Town Staff, Business owners
Budget	 Medium Budget
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk –Risks will be minimized as much as possible by promoting effort as a temporary intervention. If issues with spaces chosen are insurmountable after installation, it is moveable and can be relocated to alternative sites.
Key Performance Indicators	How do users feel about Norwood Center? Is it a place for a single errand or to spend time? Do visitors make more trips? Do they venture further away from the Common? Do visitors consider Norwood Center as a destination as opposed to a single stop and go?
Partners & Resources	<p>Having a tangible project with a clear goal can serve as the catalyst to get more people involved in improving the Downtown and patron area businesses. Ensure stakeholders (like area businesses and residents) are engaged from the earliest phases of the planning process. Loop in area workers to find out what they would want and continue to engage those groups through the planning and implementation stages even if it is just keeping them in the loop on progress or group email blasts. If more people feel like a part of the development team, they are more likely to adopt and embrace the finished spaces.</p> <p>Patronicity's website offers many examples of sortable placemaking projects for inspiration. Resources include: NEFA Grants, Art Place America, Mass Development Placemaking grants, among others.</p> <p>Area property owners and small businesses could sponsor equipment and event infrastructure. Crowdfunding is an option, as dozens of communities have done across Massachusetts for similar placemaking projects.</p>

Image of X. Photo Credit: Flickr

Diagnostic

With an emphasis on the creative use of public space during COVID-19, Norwood Center could benefit by implementing additional public gathering space throughout the district.

While Norwood Center has a vibrant Town Common and has created successful outdoor dining spaces because of COVID, an opportunity exists for additional placemaking activities to further enhance the efforts already underway.

There are overlooked and uninviting spaces throughout the district that could host shared use space but also assist in wayfinding and encouraging walkability throughout the district.

The Town should look to identify potential locations for placemaking including but not limited to alleyways and bridges.



Early Engagement

Bring together a team of engaged business owners, property owners, creatives and residents from the area early in this planning process so they can feel as much of the planning process as possible and are more likely to stay engaged throughout this first iteration and hopefully beyond. Have an easy way to engage feedback from others involved in planning through in person and online methods so they can remain a part of the process.



Capacity

Build early partnerships with area organizations, stores, restaurants, fitness groups, school groups, non-profits, affinity groups etc and let them take some of the burden of event planning (which can be some of the most cumbersome of this whole project) off your plate. Develop an easy to use sign up process for groups interested in activating any of these spaces and actively encourage all different types of local groups to sign up for and use the space to create early energy and adoption. This isn't always an "if you build it, they will come" proposition.



Feedback

Have an online survey always open combined with in person surveys of attendees to events and users of the space as well as direct outreach to abutting residents and businesses. This will cut down on the ability for negative responses to overpower positive by more passive sentiment.



Flexibility

Any equipment purchased for these projects should be viewed as portable, meaning it can be reused in a different space in town should this space not become widely adopted and can be packed up and reused to activate another public space throughout the rest of town.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCATIONS

Plaza at Broadway / Nahatan



The existing plaza sits on a very busy intersection and may need some "protection" from the heavy traffic at the corner of the intersection using landscaping elements. Adding tables, chairs, bistro lighting, wifi and more will help turn this space into more of a viable destination.



Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, lighting, benches, landscaping and wifi equipment to turn this space into a downtown destination. Online signup form to allow groups to reserve the space for meetings and "meetups" to encourage adoption.

Day & Washington St.



This stretch of Washington St. is fairly long without much space for a pedestrian respite. Using 1 corner parking space at Day and Washington, we propose creating a mini parklet space with multiple, tables, seating elements and landscaping. This is very much a tactical intervention that could be easily moved elsewhere based upon feedback.



Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, a low decking, planters and landscaping elements

"Breadcrumbs" of Public Art

We encourage developing a plan to install a number of public art installations throughout the Downtown as a way to create new landmarks and display some of the vibrant arts and cultural elements of Norwood. These could serve as destinations and identifiers of some of the more nondescript portions of downtown. In addition, where possible, adding seating elements to these spaces makes them not only markers to walk past but encourages stopping and staying and hopefully improved user sentiment of the Downtown. Incorporate this into any downtown wayfinding plan along with walk times.



Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs (get creative here and look to local makers and craftspeople for innovative designs and fabrication) umbrellas, planters and temporary landscaping, lighting, paint, wifi.

PROCESS

Powered by Patronicit



Location

After our conversations we learned that there was a desire to build upon the success of outdoor space created in response to the pandemic and expand it throughout the downtown core. Our proposal is 3-fold and focuses on improving the identity of different sections of Downtown while also creating little respites or spaces for people to gather that can be a part of a hub and spoke encouraging movement away from the Common into the rest of Downtown.

Identify Inspiration

We've provided two sample projects that encapsulate components of our recommendations for implementation here. Please feel free to explore other inspiration projects as you seek to implement programming here.

Plan & Implement

A key piece of the success of this or any placemaking project is early stakeholder engagement. Not just approval but actively seeking out their input in the planning of this project. Identify groups who could host events in the space later on and seek out their input on what they'd like to see in these spaces.

Feedback

This piece is often overlooked but one of the single most important things you can do to ensure success. Get ahead of any complaints with a constructive outlet where stakeholders can leave positive or negative but constructive feedback through in person surveying at events and an online forum.

Iterate

What worked? What didn't work? Adapt your project based on user feedback. Did residents benefit? Did area businesses benefit. How could things be improved and could another location be more appropriate for this intervention if it becomes apparent location is an issue.

Examples of Best Practices

Activate Mill Street, Fitchburg, MA



Activate Mill Street used low-cost, flexible design solutions to create a temporary, unique space for concerts, downtown events, or just a quiet lunch-hour with some friends. The project incorporated local artists to create panels of art work, develop bench seating built into the street and lighting to encourage activation at night. The space was built to give a large, cold plaza more of a human, local, warm and inviting feel encouraging further utilization.

BUDGET: \$90,000 all in

IMPLEMENTATION: 6-10 weeks

TIMELINE: 3-months w/ expansion opportunities

MATERIALS: stage, planters, bistro lighting & supports, paint, storage container, art panels, custom seating

Beyond Walls, Lynn, MA



Beyond Walls used murals and public art to build upon the vibrancy of Downtown Lynn. Our goal is to ensure Lynn is a hub, buzzing with energy, enterprise, arts and culture. It was important that it also retains the voice, integrity, and pride of its residents while attracting visitors from near and far and encouraging residents and visitors to get out and explore the entirety of the downtown to see each piece of artwork.





BUDGET: \$100,000+ for all components

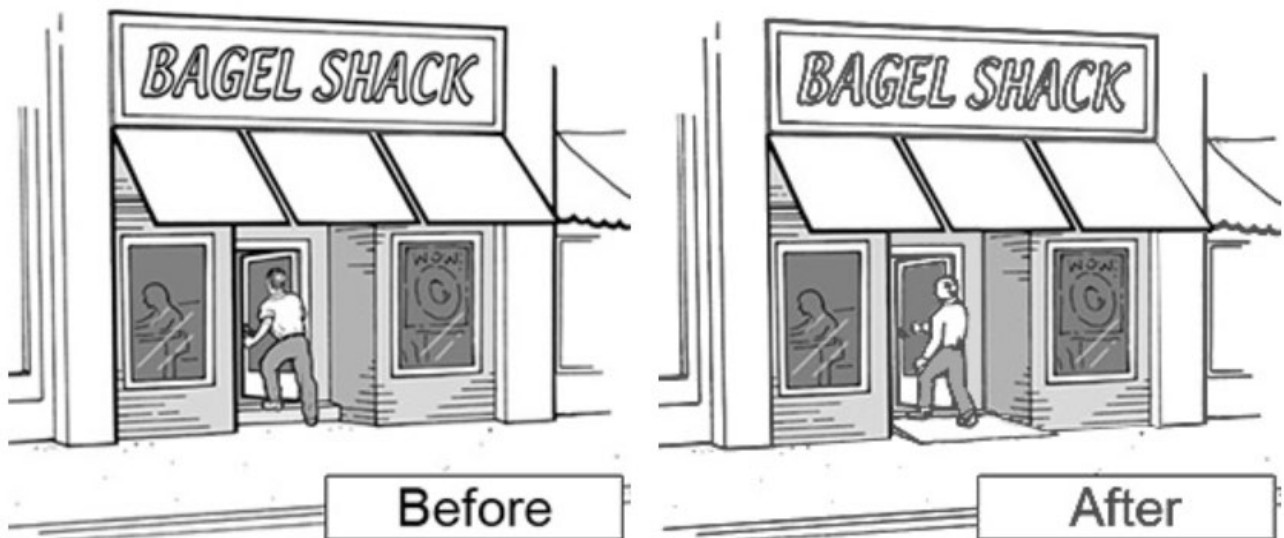
IMPLEMENTATION: 8-12 weeks

TIMELINE: year round programming and passive use

MATERIALS: paint, tables & chairs

Address Storefront ADA Compliance

Category	 Private Realm
Location	Storefronts in Norwood Center
Origin	Visitors
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) – Physical upgrades
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk – upgrades are simple, budget is main issue
Key Performance Indicators	Every business has at least one accessible entrance
Partners & Resources	Town ADA Coordinator, Disability Commission, Building Department, Businesses Owners, Patrons Potential Funding: ADA funding, AARP Livable Communities



Removing barriers, such as a step to an entrance, is required when readily achievable.

Photo Credit: ADA Update for Small Business, U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section

Diagnostic

- Buildings are a step or two above the sidewalk.
- This condition may be a single building with multiple storefronts or several buildings.
- The trigger for any improvement would be sidewalk improvements.
- DPW used a ramp over the curb for outdoor dining and relocated the sidewalk to the street during the last year.

Actions & Process:

Addressing Accessibility

To address accessibility, the Town should consider the following process:

- Require businesses to make their storefronts accessible within updated zoning (including a revision of the form-based code) so this requirement will become automatic with site plan review.
- Provide technical assistance to property owners and businesses for the design of a temporary ramp and address any implications for the entry door and the interior. The StopGap program mentioned below is an interesting temporary solution.
- If the Town addresses the entry levels as part of a sidewalk improvement program, the design assistance should be included for all businesses affected.
- The Town should also consider grants or no-interest, forgivable loans for any business that wish to make significant interior changes.



Inaccessible store entrances on Washington Street. Photo Credit: BSC Group

Review Zoning to Spur New Development in the Downtown

Category	 Private Realm
Location	Norwood Center
Origin	Planning and Economic Development Department
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) – Possible RFP required to hire consultant
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) – Consultant can execute review in under 5 years, however, it may take longer to see development increase
Risk	 Medium Risk – The Town created an overlay district in 2019, but little development has happened, a consultant may be able to recommend additional measures to increase development
Key Performance Indicators	Increased development and/or investment in the downtown
Partners & Resources	Town Planning Department, Planning Board, Property Owners, Developers Potential Funding: ARPA, OneStop Community for Growth



Mixed-use building in study area. Photo Credit: BSC Group

Diagnostic

As communities look to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are competing to attract private investment and additional development opportunities. Norwood adopted a form-based code overlay in 2019 but has yet to see any additional development as a result of it. Additionally, concerns about the language led to some provisions related to height being changed prior to approval.

Feedback has indicated that the zoning is too restrictive in terms of height. One developer had difficulty understanding how to comply. Some Town Meeting members were also unsure about how a form-based code works.

Local, small-scale developers may find the form-based approach confusing and challenging to understand, as opposed to larger, seasoned, intuitive owners/developers/investors who have experience with form-based approaches.

Other factors to consider:

- The owners and the local engineering consultants they engage are familiar with form-based code and are hesitant to undertake a project under Norwood's Mixed Use Overlay District (MUOD).
- COVID-19 has stalled development appetite.
- Lenders and financiers have seen tighter underwriting for commercial and mixed-use projects during this period.
- Properties within the area tend to be small and irregularly shaped. The application of the dimensional regulations (set-backs, landscaping, parking, and height) to these lots makes the permitted density difficult to achieve.
- First-floor commercial use is primarily related to personal services and restaurants in downtown Norwood, which competes with the Route 1 commercial corridor.
- The underlying zoning and what is permitted by-right may better satisfy a developer's needs and involve less risk. This may explain why the form-based zoning was adopted as an overlay district as there would have been push back to remove the current underlying zoning and replace it with a form-based code.



Form Based Code Rendering Source: Form Based Code Institute

Action Item

- Perform an analysis of the MUOD as it applies to development/redevelopment of smaller, irregular shaped lots and compare whether the dimensional requirements allow densities in conformance with the stated permitted densities.
- Based on the findings of the analysis of the MUOD, formulate amendments to address any shortcomings or conflicts between permissible densities and barriers posed by dimensional requirements.
- Conduct informational sessions/seminars with downtown property and business owners, local attorneys, and design professionals on the application of form-based zoning.
- Determine whether the existing underlying zoning offers greater transparency and predictability for development/redevelopment.
- Examine increasing the allowable height in the MUOD.
- Consider the elimination of a Special Permit requirement for the MUOD and allow it as a by-right option with Site Plan Review.

Process

- Prepare a Request for Proposals for services to evaluate, analyze, and formulate solutions to the MUOD lack of utilization.
- Select qualified consultant and engage services.
- Create an advisory committee comprised of local officials, business interests, property owners, and other stakeholders to oversee the process.
- Conduct community outreach in order to garner support for any zoning recommendations to be brought before town meeting.





Recommendations

- The MUOD form-based zoning needs to be fully examined to address the lack of interest it has garnered since its adoption.
- The Town should embark on an analysis and evaluation of its provisions to determine/confirm the reasons for its lack of utilization since its adoption.
- This process should include the participation of the downtown property owners, businesses, developers, and community in the process.
- The process should include the services of a consultant experienced with development and form-based zoning.



Public Engagement, Photo Credit: BSC Group

Adopting New Technology or Coaching for Business Owners to Increase Sales

Category	 Revenue & Sales
Location	Norwood Center
Origin	LRRP Business Survey and Best Practices
Budget	 Low - Projects can be customized to work within a range of budgets. The typical configuration per location cost is ~\$5,200
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) - Onboarding of a consultant or expert to devise strategy will be short-term; implementing strategy and identifying funding needed may require more time
Risk	 Medium Risk – Need businesses to participate, there may be language barriers, internet service is critical for this technology implementation
Key Performance Indicators	# of businesses participating; change in business' behavior following coaching (e.g., businesses with online ordering, businesses using email marketing, improvements in in-store displays); change in revenue for participating businesses
Partners & Resources	Friends of Norwood Center, business owners, consultants, internet providers
Diagnostic	<p>Many of the businesses in downtown Norwood have no online presence. There are few storefront retail establishments, but the Town wants to encourage more of these and to retain the ones that are there. It is difficult for these retailers to compete with online retailers, but if they have an online presence or an ability to use technology at the point of sale, they could be more successful at attracting and retaining customers.</p> <p>COVID-19 changed the way customers interact with businesses and many of these changes, such as more online interaction or curbside pickup provided conveniences that are likely to remain post-pandemic.</p> <p>During the pandemic, many communities launched business coaching programs to help time and cash-strapped businesses adapt and thrive in the new normal. Locally, downtown businesses identified marketing strategies, improvements to the private realm, and providing goods and services that would attract customers as among their chief challenges.</p>

Diagnostic

Workshops and one-on-one technical assistance could assist business owners with:

- Marketing and social media strategies
- Inventory selection and management
- Technology strategies – e.g., online ordering, improved website experience
- Physical appearance and layout to increase foot traffic and sales
- Retail best practices
- Funding application technical assistance
- Understanding how business improvements help the whole downtown

Action Item



Planning for this activity should include:

Assessing the coaching needs and preferred information delivery format for downtown businesses.

Successful coaching programs have been implemented in multiple communities with different focus points – some with online presence and technology only, others on physical stores and inventory. Online workshop models might be more convenient and reach a broader audience while 1:1 technical assistance can assure implementation of recommendations. Many programs have utilized multiple simultaneous delivery methods for maximum effect. Business owners must be engaged in this assessment.

Obtaining funding for a coach.

Funding for the program may be available through a grant, town funds, or businesses may contribute a modest amount to pay collectively for coaching services.

Promote the program to businesses.

Coaching offered should take minimal time for businesses to participate in and should clearly communicate what they will get out of participating.





Following up with local business promotion.

Promote downtown businesses and any new improvements via local media and social media.

Process

1. Work with Friends of Norwood Center to identify the coaching needs of the business community. The LRRP Business Survey can also serve as a source of information.
2. Obtain funding through a grant or fees collected from participating businesses.
3. Determine baseline data point to collect (e.g., # of businesses with online marketplace, with email marketing) based on coaching to be provided.
4. Develop a coaching schedule, likely to include a combination of workshops and one-on-one assistance.
5. Collect post-coaching data to measure impact.
6. The Town and Friends of Norwood Center should promote businesses and the new program.

Local eCommerce Marketplace

Category	 Revenue & Sales
Location	Norwood Center
Origin	Stakeholder Engagement
Budget	 Low Budget (<\$50,000) - Many of the tools are free. Organizations may benefit from an educational seminar, training, and consultations, at a nominal fee. Training is also widely available online for many of the tools.
Timeframe	 Short-Term -- Individual retailers can create accounts in approx. 1 hour. Community efforts to coordinate should be approx. 6 weeks, and a community-centric marketing effort, is an ongoing activity, > 6 months.
Risk	 Low Risk – The potential benefit, leveraging internet technologies to steer shoppers to local stores rather than distant, online-only websites, is great. The financial and structural risks are minimal.
Key Performance Indicators	Total sales, total online sales, total number of transactions, total number of Buy Online/Pickup in Stores (BOPIS) sales, Buy Online, Pickup Curbside (BOPAC) sales, and local deliveries, # of customers, # of new customers
Partners & Resources	The core technologies – SEO, mapping, marketplaces, etc. already exist and mostly free, An effective program will also integrate with other projects, such as business websites, email campaigns (CRM), Facebook, Etsy, etc. Additional resources: community business directory, community outreach resources, group discussion for the purposes of planning, organizing, and coordination with other LRRP projects and teams to incorporate the benefits of those programs into store, community, and marketplace operations.
Diagnostic	<p>Every porch-delivery – by FedEx, UPS, Amazon, etc. – is potentially a purchase that was made online and shipped from a distant retailer. Most of these purchases are items that could be purchased from local retailers. Providing a “shop local online, buy local online” capability, mindset, and awareness can strengthen the local economy, and help local retailers.</p> <p>A leading metric of this phenomenon is Decreasing Total Retail Sales. In the absence of decreasing population, this is an indicator that sales dollars are being spent outside the community.</p> <p>Decreasing retail employment is generally an early indication that revenue/employee is insufficient to maintain employee headcount. Technology can be a force multiplier which can increase sales per employee, and create a need for additional employees, and increase the needs for other supporting businesses that provide training, equipment, communications, and connectivity services.</p> <p>Even local retailers that have their own websites from which they can sell, are at a competitive disadvantage to large eCommerce platforms that present thousands of products in dozens of product categories. A local multi-vendor eCommerce marketplace combines a community’s total product selection and creates a comparable selection of products to large eCommerce companies, making the community an eCommerce destination.</p> <p>This approach also promotes the physical store, providing a map to their location, and strengthening the relationship between shoppers and local businesses. Retailer identification and branding reinforces the shopper-retailer relationship, encouraging repeat business.</p>

Action Items

The recommended course of action is an initial outreach to stores in a community to present the benefits of a coordinated community-centric online marketplace technology system. This may require some collateral materials, and an outreach effort.

As with the “Coordinated Communications” project, the “Local eCommerce Marketplace” project is effectively a coordinated and integrated process. This means that the project results will benefit greatly from identifying a point person to coordinate the discussion and efforts.

The community of retailers may also benefit from a group presentation on the creation of a marketplace, websites, a local online business directory, local search technologies, and how integrating the various technologies and platforms can create a powerful “local online” alternative to the major eCommerce websites.

Many of the technologies and platforms are already built and no development or customization activity is required. Awareness of the technologies and how to apply and integrate them will also benefit from a community sponsored publicity effort and/or outreach campaign.

In some cases, integrating the various technologies may require some outside specialists or training, depending on the specific groups of technologies selected. Retailers can and should sign up for accounts on various platforms and establish omni-channel strategies. Communities can and should build directories. Directories and websites can and should be integrated with marketplace platforms. Retailers should also leverage cross-platform inventory management tools

Process

The process for implementing this project begins by identifying whether this should be a consultant-led project, a DIY project, or some combination of the two. The community should identify the community point person on the project who will centralize communications, set a project schedule, and monitor the key metrics in monitoring its success. This should be someone that can speak for the community and with local retailers.

Next, it is recommended that the community schedule a discussion/presentation to present the project, describe the implementation, and enroll participants.

Each enrollee should receive an email that provides links to information, tools, and tutorials to help them create vendor accounts on various platforms. Emphasis should be placed on these activities being coordinated on a community level and integrated to create a “the community is a marketplace” result. Ideally, this should also include a community retail business directory and local-search enabled marketplace platform.

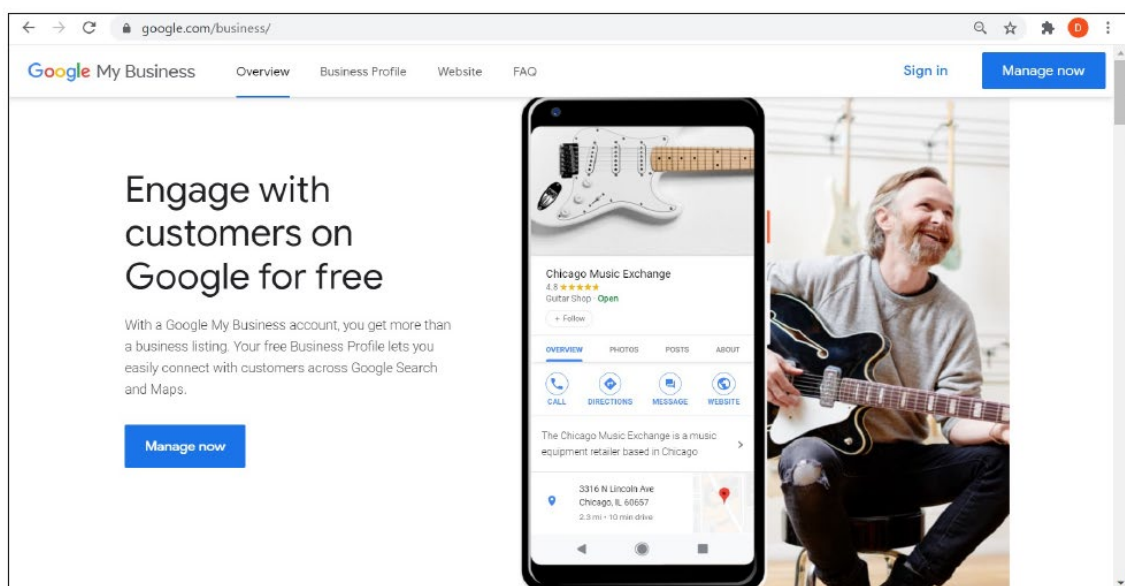
With vendors accounts created and products uploaded, the marketplace is effectively fully operational. However, note that merely creating the capability does not automatically mean that customers will begin using it.

It is recommended that the marketplace project be implemented in conjunction with a marketing or communications project. This can take many forms, from community communications to a fully coordinated social media marketing project.

It is also recommended to integrate the directory and marketplace with other online retail initiatives, facilitating an omni-channel solution for those retailers engaged in selling via multiple online marketplaces.

The last component in the process is to collect data on the project progress and integrate it with other community communications. This will keep residents and businesses engaged and informed about the community’s efforts to strengthen the local economy and invested in a positive outcome.

To be competitive with major eCommerce websites, the community marketplace will need to provide a comparable level of product selection and convenience features. But the project can gain a competitive advantage by emphasizing those dimensions of competition which eCommerce sites cannot match, such as: Customer Service, Product Demonstrations, shopping as an experience, personal relationships, proximity, and location-based fulfillment options (BOPIS, BOPAC, local delivery, etc.)



Credibility gained from Google is enough to sway people to be 38% more likely to visit your store, and 29% more likely to buy something. Research finds that 88% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.

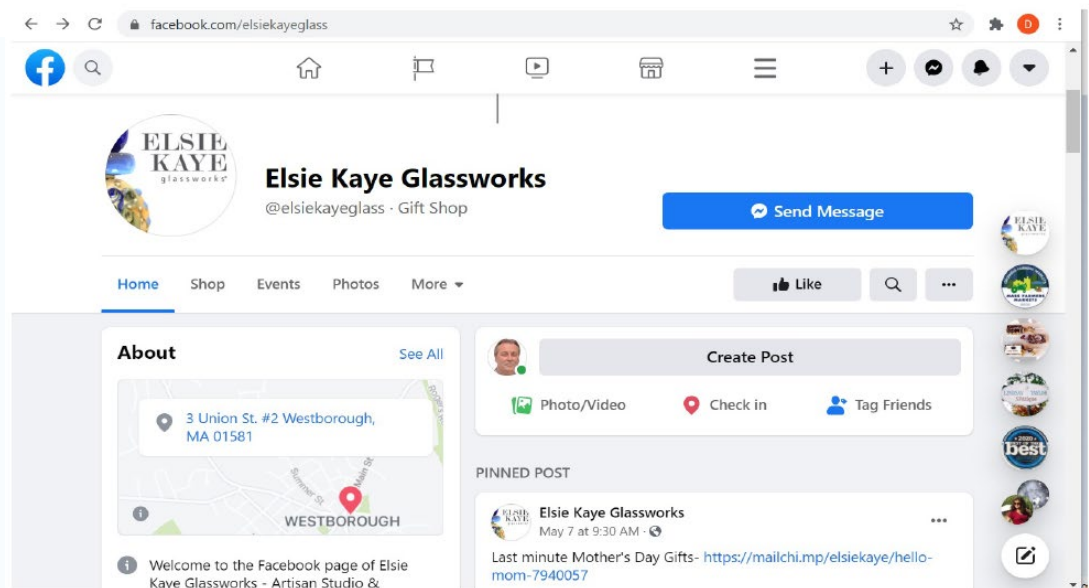
Online Marketplace



REVENUES
& SALES

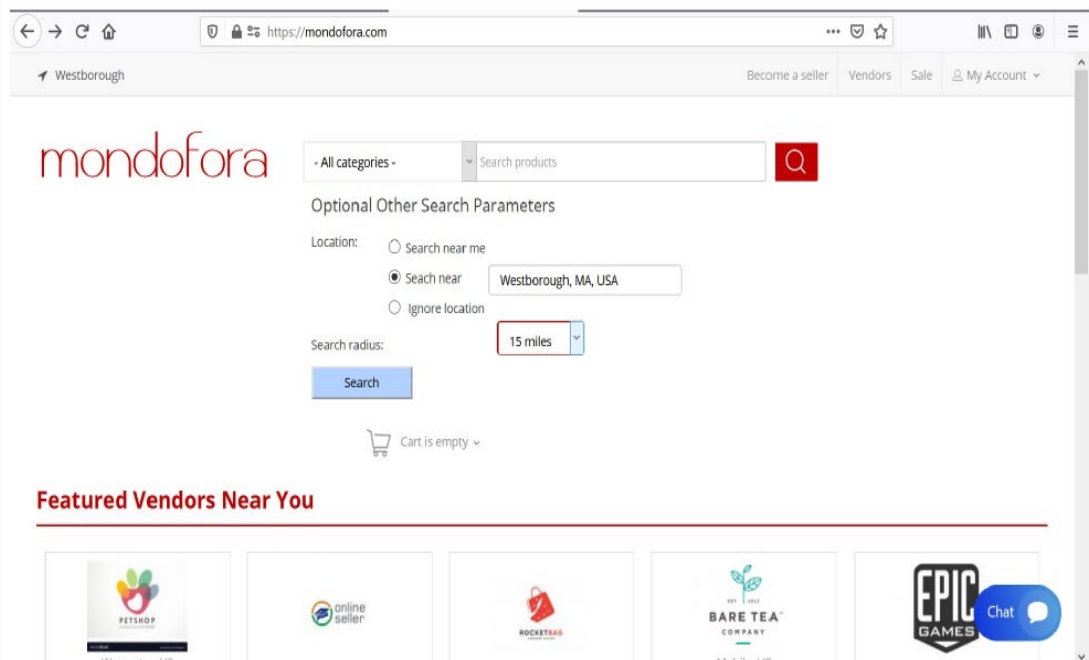
Facebook

A Facebook Page connects businesses with customers and offers key information about a business, products, and services. It also creates a "feed" of information that is presented to customers, helping to solidify the shopper-store relationship, and keeping them informed about news and upcoming events.







Mondofora

Mondofora is a local-search enabled marketplace, that allows shoppers to identify their location, a radius of search, and keywords of the product that they are shopping for. A home page also provides vendors that might be of interest to shoppers.



Organize & Support Capacity of the Downtown Business Community

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Norwood Center
Origin	Stakeholder Engagement
Budget	 Low Budget (<\$50,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) – Recruitment can start immediately
Risk	 Medium Risk – long-term sustainability
Key Performance Indicators	# Businesses Participating; increased engagement among diverse groups; Increased awareness of the organization
Partners & Resources	Planning and Economic Development, Friends of Norwood Center, Property Owners, Business Owners Funding: Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, MassDevelopment Real Estate Technical Assistance Program, or ARPA funds (if tied to implementing COVID recovery activities).
Diagnostic	<p>The Friends of Norwood Center (FONC) has a robust list of participating businesses and was critical at getting the word out about the business survey despite COVID-related business closures. Norwood ended up with over 20 responses because of the outreach done by the FONC. However, during Phase I of the LRRP Program Diagnostic, it became evident that not all businesses are members of the FONC, and the Town did not have its own independent complete list of all businesses, making the swift distribution of information to the Norwood Center business community challenging.</p> <p>During stakeholder interviews, it became clear there are several prominent business owners in town and initiatives that exist, however, there lacks coordination amongst various groups. The FONC is the largest organization by membership but is underrepresented when it comes to non-service or the food and beverage industry.</p> <p>At this time, there are no staff dedicated to the outreach and recruitment of bringing new businesses to the downtown. There should be a staff member identified to act as a “one-stop shop” for all businesses that may need questions answered or clarification on how to navigate regulations.</p>

Action Items

Getting Started – Identify all businesses in Norwood Center. Create a list of the business name, industry, name of owner, contact information, and how long they have been in operation.

Develop the Value Proposition/Communication – Learn from existing members of FONC how best to communicate with other business owners. Are there concerns about joining an association? Are there avenues to get before business owners such as at houses of worship or at festivals? Think about what the value that the Town or FONC brings to a business owner. There is a wealth of resources and intuitional knowledge a call or email away.

Stakeholder Engagement/ Leadership and Partnerships - Find the places where business owners already go. Is there a popular print shop? Is there a coffee shop that everyone uses on their way into work? Is there a newspaper that everyone reads? Is there a specialty grocery store that serves these groups? Go to them, don't make them come to you.

Create a Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy – Once the Town or the FONC understands how to best communicate with its intended audience, create materials to send. These materials may need to be translated into several languages. Find two or three trusted leaders within the community to disseminate the information.

Resources for Startup and Sustainability – Recruit members for a special committee specifically on non-food-related businesses, appoint them, and set them up for success.



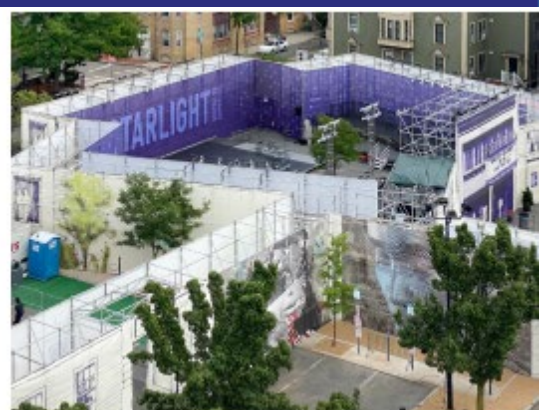
Process

Develop a relationship chart for each business owner. Would the business owner make a great champion for the FONC?

- Does the owner own more than one business in the Town?
- Is the owner close with any other owners?
- Could they be helpful in attracting other businesses into Norwood Center?
- Establish a Town point person as the liaison to the business community to foster a stronger relationship and encourage better communication.
- Develop a long-term strategy around a variety of business types, diversification of membership, and equity.



Norwood Theatre [top], Window of SPoT! [bottom]. Source: BSC Group



Photos: Central Square (Cambridge) BID's facilitated "return to Central Square" marketing and event programming during COVID-19

Best Practice

Business Improvement District Case Studies



REVENUES & SALES

Location

Hudson, Cambridge, Hyannis

Hudson, MA



THE BASICS

Organizational Model	501c3
Formally Authorized	2017; Renewal, 2022
Budget	\$172,700
Revenue Sources	BID fees, grants and events
Property Parcels	120; Voting entities, 84
FEE FORMULA:	
Property owners pay for the BID services based on the following fee formula:	
• Commercial	0.035% X assessed value
• Residential	0.02% X assessed value
• Mixed-use	Commercial - 0.035% X assessed value
	Residential - 0.02% X assessed value
• Nonprofits/Public	Negotiated agreements/MOU
Size	47.8 acres
2017 Vacancy Rate in BID	11%
2019 Vacancy Rate in BID	5%

Central Square (Cambridge, MA)



THE BASICS

Organizational Model 501c3
Formally Authorized June 2019; Renewal, 2024
Budget \$1,448,000
Sources: BID fees, grants, event revenue, contracts

Property Parcels 98; Voting entities, 73

FEE FORMULA:

Commercial property owners pay for BID services on a formula determined by assessed value based on size, type and ownership.

Charitable, religious, educational, government and other properties exempt from taxation have a Memorandum of Understanding or other negotiated agreements. Residential properties are exempt from fee. (Refer to page 6 for a complete description of the fee formula.)

Size83 acres

Vacancy and Value
Vacancy Rate when formed in 2019 0.01%
2019 Assessed Value in BID \$1,489,000,000

Hyannis, MA



THE BASICS

Organizational Model501c6, 1999; 501c3
Community Development Corporation, 2019
Formally Authorized 1999; Renewal, 2023
Budget\$300,000
(Sources: BID fees, grants and event revenue)
Property Parcels 110 votes, 133 properties

FEE FORMULA:

Property owners pay for BID services based on the following formula:

- All real properties are assessed at .003 percent X assessed value.
Cap of \$4,000 on any property.
- Residential and nonprofit properties are exempt from the fee.

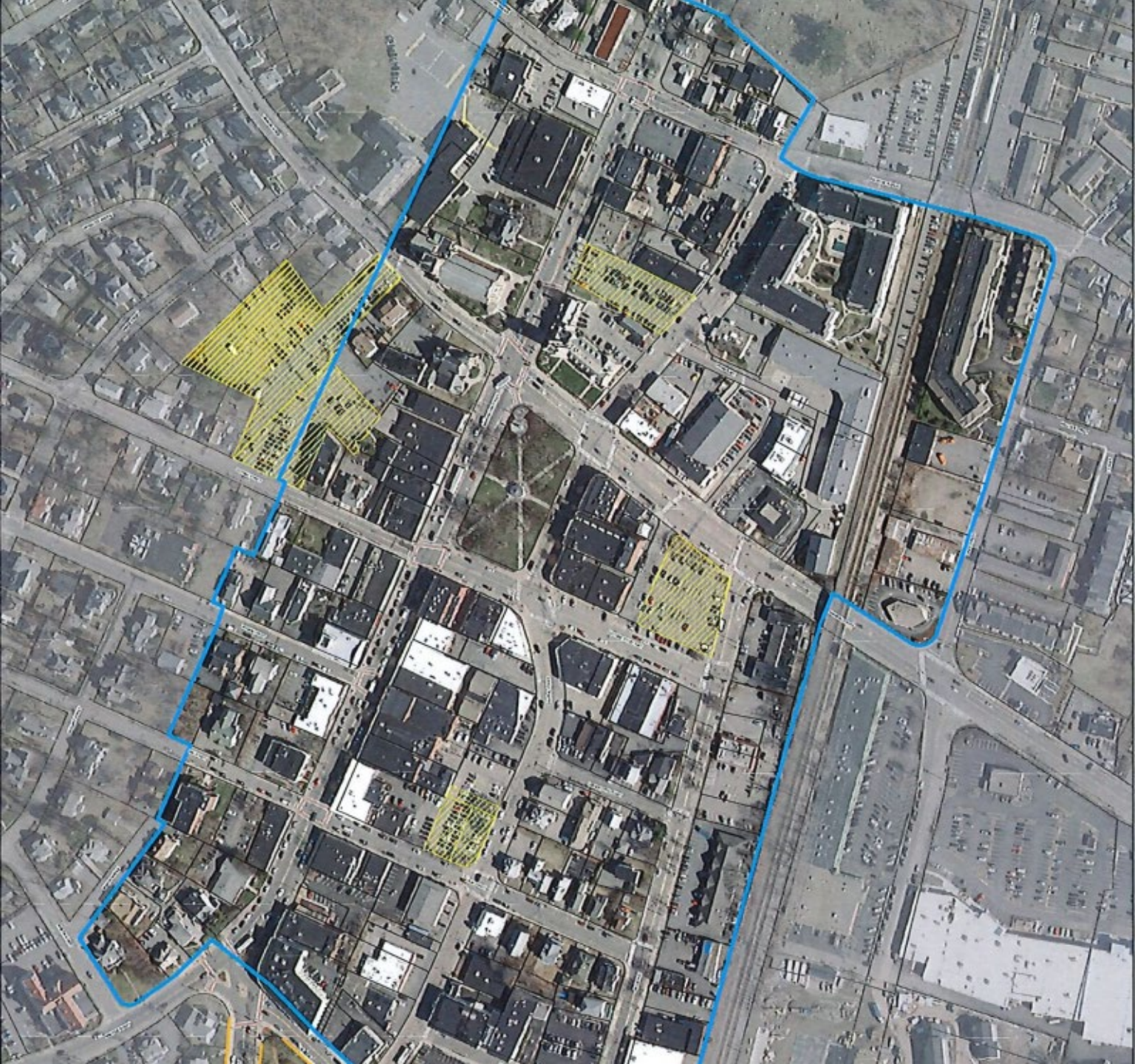
Size: 82 acres

VACANCY AND VALUE

1999 Vacancy Rate in BID, 18%
2019 Vacancy Rate in BID, 5%
1999 Assessed Value in BID, \$60,000,000
2019 Assessed Value in BID, \$107,000,000

https://www.massdevelopment.com/assets/what-we-offer/BID/HowToCreateABID_2020_CaseStudy_Hudson.pdf
https://www.massdevelopment.com/assets/what-we-offer/BID/HowToCreateABID_2020_CaseStudy_CentralSquare.pdf
https://www.massdevelopment.com/assets/what-we-offer/BID/HowToCreateABID_2020_CaseStudy_Hyannis.pdf

Appendix



Town of Norwood

Elevating parking lot visibility

August 2021



Goals

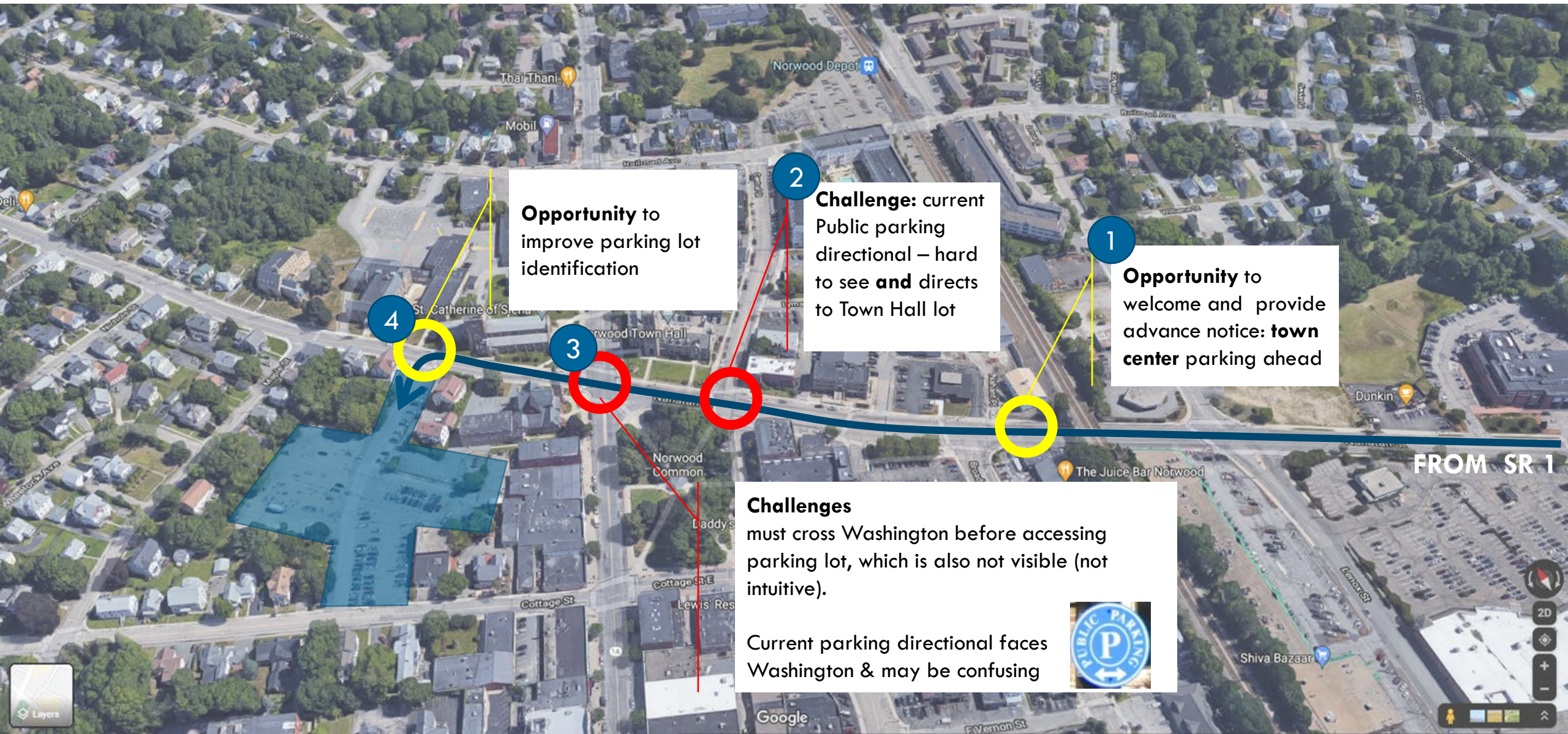
- Improve visibility of available surface lot parking (~1,000 free parking spaces available!)
- Consider a more comprehensive wayfinding and signage strategy for the CBD
- Increase visitor awareness of parking options
- Improve pedestrian connectivity from parking lots to Washington. Consider use of alley?

Questions

Do you have to have a permit to park in a municipal lot (i.e. only for residents?)

Current Conditions

- Experience traveling towards Town Center/CBD lots of traffic lights and signage, can be confusing and lead people to miss the existing signage
 - Esp. along Nahatan and Washington from Westwood
- Theater is clearly visible but Talbot lot hidden / difficult to see
- Surface lots recently repaved and in good condition
- Some social media presence- opportunity to inform about parking in advance.





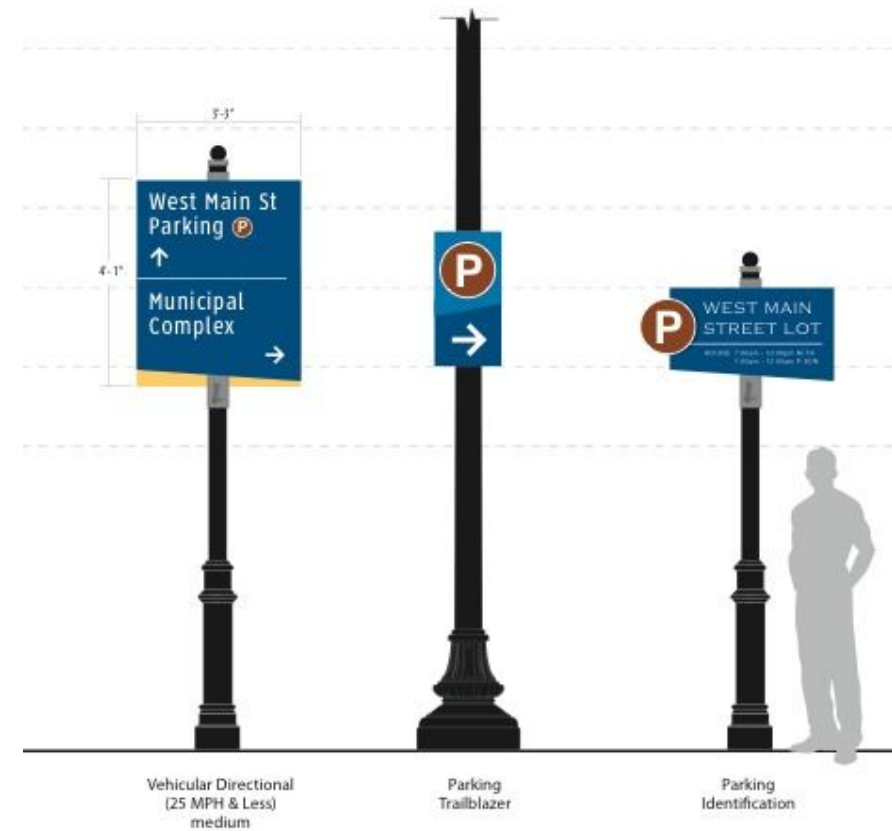






Create a town center parking signage plan

- Identify sign types, key destinations, and potential sign locations
 - Vehicular directionals to parking
 - Parking trailblazer
 - Parking Lot ID signs
- Conceptual sign type layouts
 - Final sign design, locations, and fabrication details to be completed subsequently to this project







Norwood Town Center

P ↑ Washington St
→ Town Hall

3

Sign facing Washington

Norwood Town Center

P

Town Hall

→

Norwood Town Center

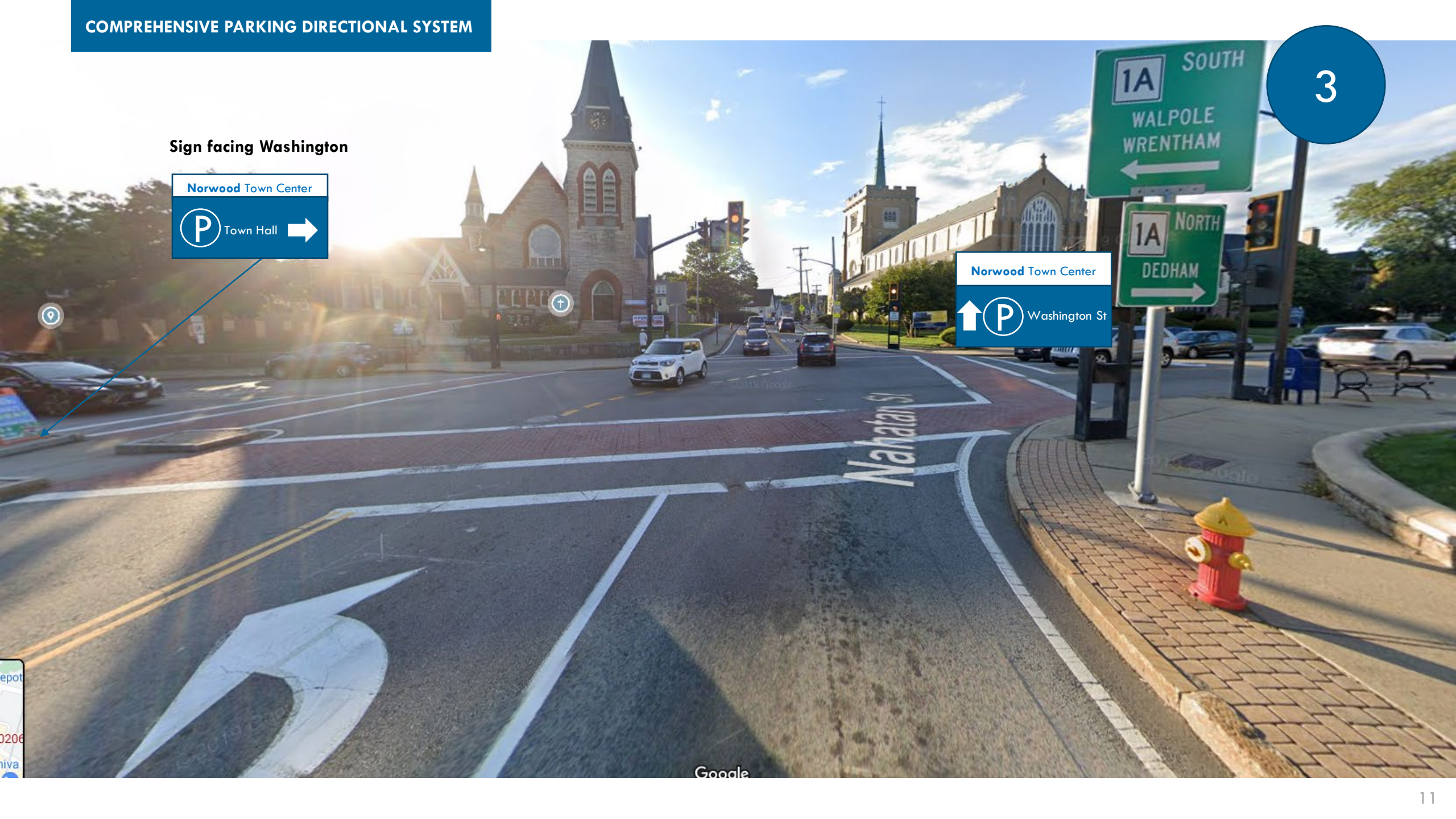
↑

P

Washington St

1A SOUTH
WALPOLE
WRENTHAM
←

1A NORTH
DEDHAM
→





Considerations

- Create a “Visitors” tab on town of Norwood website to include key destinations and a parking map
- Consider adding branding/town identity element to wayfinding
- Include some pedestrian trailblazers to key destinations to encourage a “park once” strategy
- Identify parking lots with a unique name, or label based on closest landmark

Precedent Examples:


<https://landworksvt.com/project/burlington-wayfinding/>


<https://www.readingma.gov/home/news/branding-and-wayfinding-plan-moves-to-next-phase>

<https://www.lincolntown.org/941/Wayfinding-Signage>

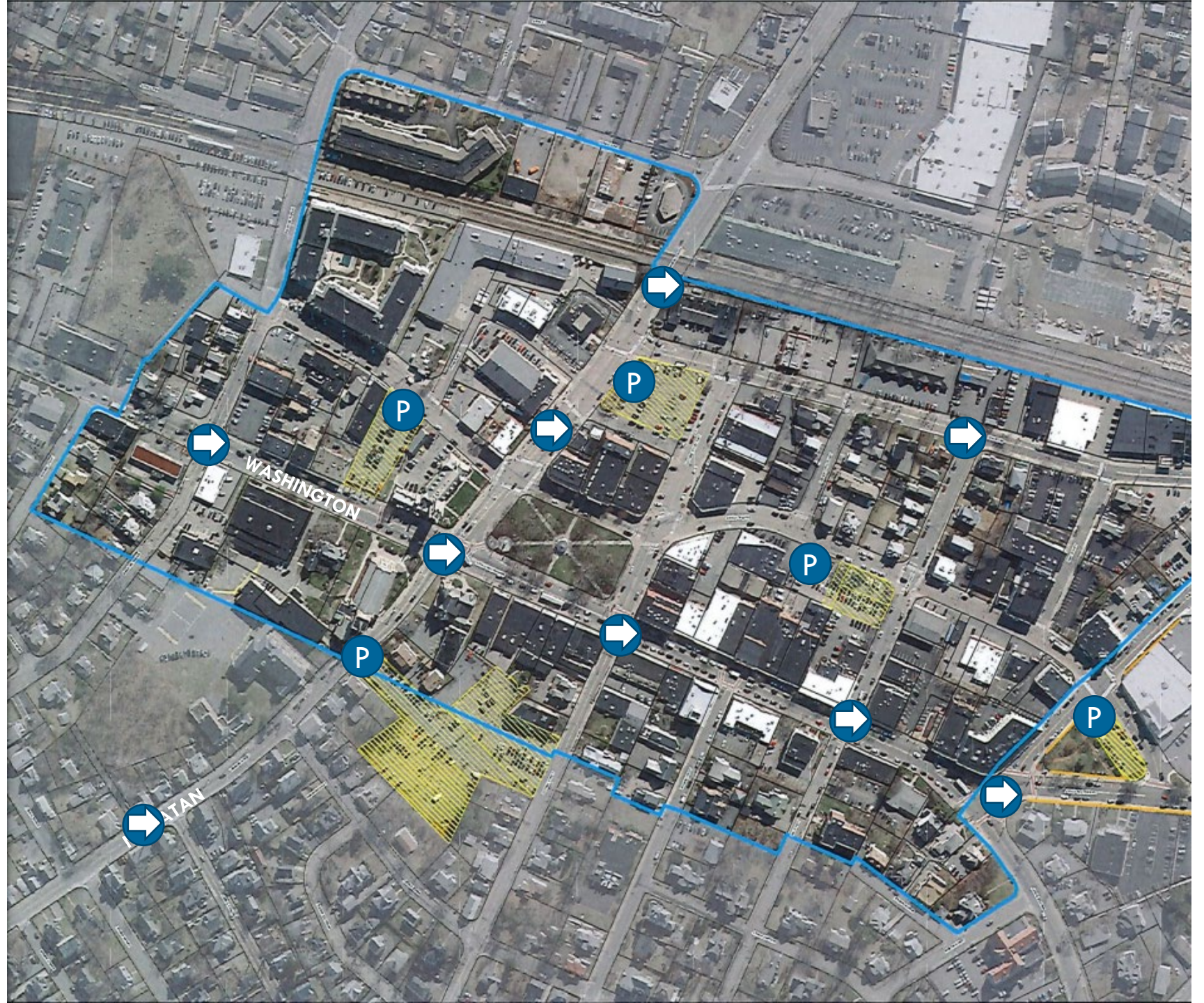


EXAMPLE PARKING SIGNAGE LOCATION PLAN*

 Parking lot identification

 Parking directional

*Full wayfinding study required to determine specific sign locations and placement, quantities, messaging, and any signage removal requirements.



1. Issue an RFP to develop a wayfinding system to include:

- Audit of existing signage
- Establishment of clear wayfinding goals and objectives, and agreement on project boundaries
- Stakeholder engagement
- User identification and journey mapping
- A family of wayfinding sign types
- Key parking destinations to be included in the sign program
- A sign location plan
- A signage message schedule with consistent nomenclature
- Conceptual and final sign design concepts
- Materials and mounting recommendations
- A design intent bid package that can be issued to signage fabricators for pricing and installation
- Sign fabrication and installation oversight (review shop drawings, answer RFIs, develop punch lists, etc.)
- Bid package to sign fabricators should include developing and installing prototype signage at one or two locations before rollout of the full system.

Rough order of magnitude costs:

- Planning & Design: \$20K - \$60K
- Fabrication & Installation: \$100K*

*could vary drastically depending on the number of signs, complexity of the design, materials costs, etc.

2. Identify what Town department(s) will be responsible for installation, maintenance and periodic updating of sign system.

DIAGNOSTIC

While Norwood Center has a vibrant Common and has created successful outdoor public spaces because of COVID, an opportunity exists for additional placemaking activities to further enhance the efforts already underway. There are overlooked and uninviting spaces throughout the district that could host shared use space but also assist in wayfinding and encouraging walkability throughout the district. The Town is looking to identify potential locations for placemaking including but not limited to alleyways and bridges.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

Our project proposal is an attempt to build upon the energy and success of the new public space created outside of the Norwood Theatre and, utilizing that space and the adjacent Town Common as a hub, create "breadcrumbs" in the form of new, activated and occasionally programmed public spaces in more sections of Downtown. We recommend exploring a combination of "breadcrumbs" through the installation of small scale street art throughout the downtown encouraging people to explore while having programmed spaces for residents and visitors to stop, stay and enjoy the day in downtown. We'd also encourage partnerships with area affinity groups and businesses to ensure activation and adoption of these spaces through an easy to use, digital sign up form.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Having a tangible project with a clear goal can serve as the catalyst to get more people involved in improving the Downtown and patron area businesses. Ensure stakeholders like area businesses and residents are engaged from the earliest phase of this planning process. Loop in area workers to find out what they'd want and continue to engage those groups through the planning and implementation even if its just keeping them in the loop on your progress on group email blasts. If more people feel like a part of the development team, they're more likely to adopt and embrace the finished spaces.

RESOURCES

- [Patronicity's](#) website of 100's of sortable placemaking projects for inspiration.
- LRRP Project Sheets for ideas and inspiration
- NEFA Grants, Art Place America, Mass Development Placemaking grants.
- Area property owners and small businesses to sponsor equipment and event infrastructure.
- Crowdfunding as dozens of communities have done across Massachusetts for similar placemaking projects.

PROJECT INSPIRATION

Activate Mill Street, Fitchburg, MA



Activate Mill Street used low-cost, flexible design solutions to create a temporary, unique space for concerts, downtown events, or just a quiet lunch-hour with some friends. The project incorporated local artists to create panels of art work, develop bench seating built into the street and lighting to encourage activation at night. The space was built to give a large, cold plaza more of a human, local, warm and inviting feel encouraging further utilization.

BUDGET: \$90,000 all in

IMPLEMENTATION: 6-10 weeks

TIMELINE: 3-months w/ expansion opportunities

MATERIALS: stage, planters, bistro lighting & supports, paint, storage container, art panels, custom seating

Beyond Walls, Lynn, MA



Beyond Walls used murals and public art to build upon the vibrancy of Downtown Lynn. Our goal is to ensure Lynn is a hub, buzzing with energy, enterprise, arts and culture. It was important that it also retains the voice, integrity, and pride of its residents while attracting visitors from near and far and encouraging residents and visitors to get out and explore the entirety of the downtown to see each piece of artwork.

BUDGET: \$100,000+ for all components

IMPLEMENTATION: 8-12 weeks

TIMELINE: year round programming and passive use

MATERIALS: paint, tables & chairs

"NORWOOD LIVING ROOMS"

Norwood, Massachusetts



PROCESS



Location

After our conversations we learned that there was a desire to build upon the success of outdoor space created in response to the pandemic and expand it throughout the downtown core. Our proposal is 3-fold and focuses on improving the identity of different sections of Downtown while also creating little respites or spaces for people to gather that can be a part of a hub and spoke encouraging movement away from the Common into the rest of Downtown.

Identify Inspiration

We've provided two sample projects that encapsulate components of our recommendations for implementation here. Please feel free to explore other inspiration projects as you seek to implement programming here.

Plan & Implement

A key piece of the success of this or any placemaking project is early stakeholder engagement. Not just approval but actively seeking out their input in the planning of this project. Identify groups who could host events in the space later on and seek out their input on what they'd like to see in these spaces.

Feedback

This piece is often overlooked but one of the single most important things you can do to ensure success. Get ahead of any complaints with a constructive outlet where stakeholders can leave positive or negative but constructive feedback through in person surveying at events and an online forum.

Iterate

What worked? What didn't work? Adapt your project based on user feedback. Did residents benefit? Did area businesses benefit. How could things be improved and could another location be more appropriate for this intervention if it becomes apparent location is an issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCATIONS

Plaza at Broadway / Nahatan



The existing plaza sits on a very busy intersection and may need some "protection" from the heavy traffic at the corner of the intersection using landscaping elements. Adding tables, chairs, bistro lighting, wifi and more will help turn this space into more of a viable destination.



Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, lighting, benches, landscaping and wifi equipment to turn this space into a downtown destination. Online signup form to allow groups to reserve the space for meetings and "meetups" to encourage adoption.

Day & Washington St.



This stretch of Washington St. is fairly long without much space for a pedestrian respite. Using 1 corner parking space at Day and Washington, we propose creating a mini parklet space with multiple, tables, seating elements and landscaping. This is very much a tactical intervention that could be easily moved elsewhere based upon feedback.



Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, a low decking, planters and landscaping elements

"Breadcrumbs" of Public Art

We encourage developing a plan to install a number of public art installations throughout the Downtown as a way to create new landmarks and display some of the vibrant arts and cultural elements of Norwood. These could serve as destinations and identifiers of some of the more nondescript portions of downtown. In addition, where possible, adding seating elements to these spaces makes them not only markers to walk past but encourages stopping and staying and hopefully improved user sentiment of the Downtown. Incorporate this into any downtown wayfinding plan along with walk times.



Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs (get creative here and look to local makers and craftspeople for innovative designs and fabrication) umbrellas, planters and temporary landscaping, lighting, paint, wifi.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

User Sentiment;

- How do users feel about Downtown? Is it a place for a single errand or to spend time.
- Do visitors make more trips Downtown and do they venture further away from the common?
- Do visitors consider Downtown more of a destination as opposed to a single errand.
- Do visitors spend more time in the Downtown?

RISKS

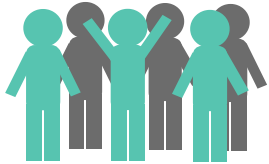
Risks will be minimized as much as possible by promoting this as a temporary intervention. If there are issues with spaces chosen that are insurmountable after installation this can be moved to alternative sites with most materials purchased intended to be able to be moved elsewhere.

KEYS TO SUCCESS



Early Engagement

Bring together a team of engaged business owners, property owners, creatives and residents from the area early in this planning process so they can feel as much of the planning process as possible and are more likely to stay engaged throughout this first iteration and hopefully beyond. Have an easy way to engage feedback from others involved in planning through in person and online methods so they can remain a part of the process.



Capacity

Build early partnerships with area organizations, stores, restaurants, fitness groups, school groups, non-profits, affinity groups etc and let them take some of the burden of event planning (which can be some of the most cumbersome of this whole project) off your plate. Develop an easy to use sign up process for groups interested in activating any of these spaces and actively encourage all different types of local groups to sign up for and use the space to create early energy and adoption. This isn't always an "if you build it, they will come" proposition.



Feedback

Have an online survey always open combined with in person surveys of attendees to events and users of the space as well as direct outreach to abutting residents and businesses. This will cut down on the ability for negative responses to overpower positive by more passive sentiment.



Flexibility

Any equipment purchased for these projects should be viewed as portable, meaning it can be reused in a different space in town should this space not become widely adopted and can be packed up and reused to activate another public space throughout the rest of town.

MEMORANDUM

To	Heather Gould, AICP Director of Planning, BSC Group Plan Facilitator for Norwood
From	Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Principal
Date	August 24, 2021
Project	RRP – Town of Norwood
Subject	SME Request for Addressing Accessibility
Cc:	

The following information is intended to enhance and/or supplement the Project Rubric you submitted in your request for SME services for Addressing Accessibility. I have provided you with some thoughts, analysis, and resources that I hope will be useful for you and the Town.

Based on our conversation and our subsequent meeting with Paul Halkiotis and Sarah Bouchard, I understood the following concerns related to accessibility:

- Buildings are a step or two above the sidewalk.
- This condition may be a single building with multiple storefronts or several buildings.
- The trigger for any improvement would be sidewalk improvements.
- DPW used a ramp over the curb for outdoor dining and relocated the sidewalk to the street during the last year.

Project Rubric: Addressing Accessibility

To address accessibility, I would consider the following process:

- Require businesses to make their storefronts accessible within updated zoning (including a revision of the Form-Based Code) so this requirement will become automatic with site plan review.
- Provide technical assistance to property owners/businesses for the design of a temporary ramp and address any implications for the entry door and the interior. The StopGap program mentioned below is an interesting temporary solution.

- If the Town addresses the entry levels as part of a sidewalk improvement program, the design assistance should be included for all businesses affected.
- The Town should also consider grants or no-interest, forgivable loans for any business that has to make significant interior changes.

I am also providing you with a best practices sheet on a façade improvement program. Some of the façade improvement programs I researched for this sheet specifically discuss accessibility as an issue to be addressed. Tied to a sidewalk improvement program, assistance to change doors and doorways to address accessibility might be very useful. Both Cambridge and Ashland, identified as examples, address accessibility as part of their programs and they both use municipal funds for the program. The ARPA funds should also qualify as a funding source.

You probably will not need the rest of the sheet, but you are welcome to use whatever you need! You may find some additional language that could be used for addressing the changes the property owners/businesses need to make to be consistent with any public improvements.

Review of Selected Buildings in Norwood's Downtown

710 Washington Street

This is an interesting problem because it is the only storefront in this building that has this problem – the storefront next door is a level entry, and it has more steps than any of the other storefronts I reviewed. Without seeing the interior, it is hard to judge whether the steps could be removed. In this case, I would suggest investigating whether the exterior of the entry could be level with the sidewalk and the change in level be accommodated in the interior. There does not appear to be enough room on the sidewalk to create an exterior ramp/platform without a negative impact to the corner. Another alternative might be to create an accessible side entry on Day Street, after the storefront window. In theory (because I can't review the interior), the interior could include a ramp or wheelchair lift.

696 Washington Street

This example is another individual entrance within a larger building. This doorway doesn't have the width that the storefront to the left has to allow a ramp to the door. Again, the solution may be the remove the granite threshold and allow for a sloping entry into the building. 692 Washington and the storefront to the left have similar problems, but more room for an exterior ramp to begin the sloped entrance into the building. In both cases the raised entry needs to be removed for a permanent solution. If these improvements are combined with sidewalk repairs, the Town could take care of the exterior slope and provide funds to integrate the slope into the interior space, if needed. The doorways may also need to be replaced – perhaps with a no touch entry – to allow for access by someone in a wheelchair or using a walking frame. 642 Washington Street looks as though it has a sloped entrance, but the two storefronts to the left have one-step entries similar to 696 and 692.

Multiple Storefronts

On the opposite side of the street, 683, 679, 677A, and 677 Washington Street all have one-step entries, while the two corner storefronts do not. If the sidewalk were wider, it might be possible to elevate the sidewalk to match the entries for most of the block. I'm not sure this will work given the width of the sidewalk and design of the base of the majority of the storefronts.

Resources:

[https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/One_Step_Project_Packet_\(Digital\).pdf](https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/One_Step_Project_Packet_(Digital).pdf)

- This is a useful guide from Pittsburgh – few illustrations but discusses the steps to address the problem, including a streamline permitting process and local designers willing to work pro bono.
- With funding, this could be a useful program for Norwood.

<https://stopgap.ca/get-involved/request-a-ramp/>

- Canadian foundation that creates temporary ramps for storefronts. This could be an interesting local project prior to any permanent changes.
- I saw another source on this project that suggested that the ramps were free to businesses, which is a great idea for temporary project.
- This company, which works with StopGap, has some cool photos of colorful examples with a local flavor:
<https://waterlooarchitecture.com/bridge/blog/2018/01/11/stopgap-ramps-in-cambridge/>
- The examples I've seen from US sources aren't as creative.

<https://www.findlaw.com/legalblogs/small-business/do-your-storefronts-steps-violate-the-ada/>

- 2014 ruling that states that storefronts must have 60% of their public entrances be accessible.
- Articles states that ADA requirement is that steps be removed "if achievable."

<https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/smallbusiness/smallbusprimer2010.htm>

- This guide, shows the exact condition I referred to above, with a single step going into a building and then the added ramp. Sadly, the document does not have page numbers, but look for the Bagel Shack illustrations.
- The next illustration is closer to 710 Washington Street and recommends curbside service, which I'm not sure is a long-term solution for Norwood's needs.

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/32-accessibility.htm>

- This is a more technical article on how to make historic properties accessible, but the images don't address either the one-step problem or downtown storefronts.



Andover

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	<div>  Low (less than \$50,000)  Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000) </div>
Timeframe	<div>  Short Term (1-5 years) </div>
Risk	<div>  Medium </div>
Budget: Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

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.

Budget: Leveraging Other Sources

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>Reasons for undertaking a façade or storefront improvement program may include one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>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.</p>
Action Item	<p>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.</p> <p>If starting from scratch, the municipality will need to accomplish the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

breyolds@ashlandmass.com

Funding by:

Ashland Economic Development Incentive Program; funds appropriated by Town of Ashland

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>

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-dev/smallbusinessassistance/smallbusiness-programs/storefront>

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 external improvements to their establishments. This program matches up to half of the project's cost or \$5,000 (whichever is less) for facade and/or sign improvements with town funding through the Ashland Economic Development Incentive Program. In doing so, the town seeks to promote local businesses and enhance the physical appearance of Ashland.

Eligibility Requirements:

This program is open to all businesses in Ashland but targeted to properties located on viable or high-traffic areas such as Main Street, Pleasant Street, Route 125, Ford Street. The applicant must either own the property in question or have a letter of authorization for the project from the owner. Moreover, if a property is involved, there are no existing obligations to the Town (i.e., no back taxes owed, town liens, 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, paving or signs that are being modified.

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

- Accessibility improvements (i.e., handicapped accessible ramp)
- Exterior signs
- Awnings
- Lighting energy conservation for windows & doors
- Painting
- Surface Parking lots
- Planters and landscaping
- Correction of leaks
- Program funds may not be used for improvements to the interior of the business or to sidewalks or public walkways.

APPLICATION:

BUSINESS INFORMATION:

Name of Business:

Business Address:

Contact Name:

Contact Phone:

Contact Email:

Hasse incidents if the business is new or existing:

Type of Business:

PROJECT INFORMATION:

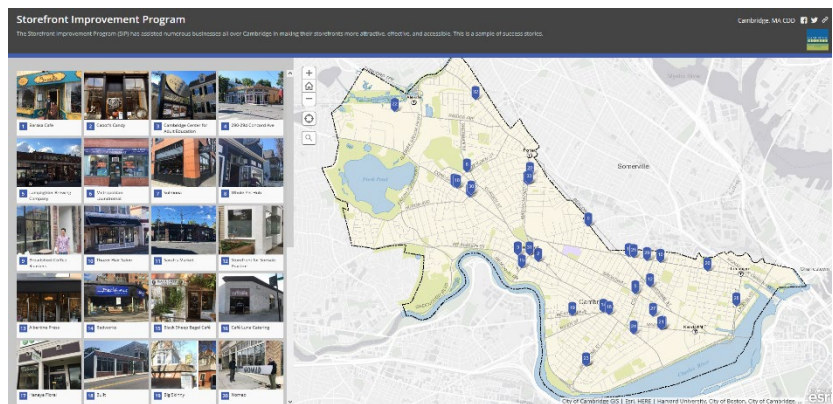
Please describe the scope of work for the proposed renovation project:

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



Courtesy of the City of Cambridge

Example 3: NPS Main Street Façade Improvement Grant

Main Street America

<https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/projectspotlight/facadeimprovements/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/projectspotlight/facadeimprovements/hcdrf>

- 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.

MEMORANDUM

To	Heather Gould, AICP Director of Planning, BSC Group Plan Facilitator for Norwood
From	Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Principal
Date	August 24, 2021
Project	RRP – Town of Norwood
Subject	SME Request for Zoning/Permitting Assessment - Residential Capacity in Downtown Core
Cc:	

The following information is intended to enhance and/or supplement the Project Rubric you submitted in your request for SME services for Zoning/Permitting Assessment - Residential Capacity in Downtown Core. I have provided you with some thoughts, analysis, and resources that I hope will be useful for you and the Town.

Based on our conversation and our subsequent meeting with Paul Halkiotis and Sarah Bouchard, I understood the following concerns related to the current form-based code:

- The Form-based Code overlay was adopted in 2018 but concerns about the zoning meant that some of the provisions related to height were changed prior to approval.
- Since then, no projects have used this bylaw, except a small one that was not built.
- Feedback has indicated that the zoning is too restrictive in terms of height.
- One developer had difficulty understanding how to comply.
- Some Town Meeting members also unsure about how a form-based code works.

I reviewed relevant portions of the document you sent, including the public presentation, the map of downtown Norwood, the MUOD form-based code, the Norwood Design Guidelines, the LRRP business survey, the zoning map for the downtown showing the overlay, and the draft project rubric.

I give a (relatively) quick analysis below, but I think the answer to the question may not be a single “right” number for a residential density, but rather an analysis of how the standards work with or against each other given the Downtown’s unique combination of parcel sizes and existing development patterns.

Project Rubric: Zoning Analysis

I understand that the main question concerns the residential density and whether it should be higher than the proposed 32 units per acre. One of the problems with using a density limit is that the interaction of the dimensional requirements may inadvertently reduce the ability to achieve the maximum density.

The Town is also concerned that no one has successfully permitted a development through the MUOD overlay. I've called out a few issues below that may contribute to developer concerns about the zoning.

Note that this is an overview, so I use standard dimensions and quick measurement to indicate areas for consideration. This should not be read as an extensive analysis of the zoning, simply a quick overview of possible areas of concern.

The overlay requires a special permit for residential and mixed-use development, which includes new construction, adaptive reuse, and any increase in floor area through an addition or accessory structure.

- In general, as-of-right permitting is a better option unless the Town is providing an incentive for using the special permit process. I did not review the underlying zoning to know if that is the case here, but I assume the overlay provides additional density, reduced parking requirements, or other options that make the use of the overlay more attractive than the underlying zoning.

The ground floor in the Commercial Frontage Zone requires specific uses within 60 feet of the street right-of-way line.

- A specific depth can be difficult to meet because it depends on the depth of the existing building (if a renovation) and parcel. If new construction, 60 feet is a little shallow. The Town might consider providing a range of acceptable depths to allow applicants more flexibility in meeting this requirement.

A Transitional Buffer Zone is required along one edge of the overlay. This buffer requires a 50-foot setback from the edge of the MUOD, with a requirement for an upper-floor setback starting at a minimum height of 25 feet. This setback/stepback appears to be from the rear lot line. This zone also requires a 20-foot landscaped buffer, within the 50-foot setback.

- A review of the location of the Transitional Buffer Zone suggests that the width and depth of some of the parcels may not be able to accommodate this buffer. For example, multifamily residential buildings typically have a depth of 60-64 feet, to allow for units on either side of a corridor. Retail depths can be from 80 to 110 feet. At a minimum, a mixed-use building would require a depth of 130 feet (80-foot retail plus 50-foot buffer). Some of the existing parcels do not have the depth and would therefore be unlikely to be redeveloped under the new zoning.
- I assume parking is allowable within the Transitional Buffer Zone. A standard parking bay (space, travel way, space) is 60 feet wide. If onsite parking is needed, then the required parcel depth (for a standard development) would be 160 feet

(80-foot retail plus 60-foot parking bay, plus 20-foot landscape buffer). Fewer parcels now qualify within the Transitional Buffer Zone.

Building Stepbacks are required front the street right-of-way line.

- Stepbacks from the principal façade reduce the square footage on the upper floors which may be a restriction on the number of dwelling units that can be achieved at a given density limit. The ability to use stepbacks successfully also depends on a having a deeper parcel depth available.

Dimensional Requirements

- Development relies on a balance between building, parking, and landscaping on the ground plane. If the percentage requirements do not work with each other, especially on irregular parcels, new construction or significant renovations/additions may be difficult.
- Dimensions are defined by building type and include lot standards and design standards. Both include dimensions in feet and percentage of lot. Design standards govern the height of buildings by both feet and number of stories. Some building types also define the maximum building footprint in terms of square feet and maximum residential density in terms of number of dwelling units. These dimensions are absolute and not tied to parcel size.
- An example is the Mixed-use Building, which is limited to a maximum building footprint of 10,000 SF, a maximum height of 4 stories, 45 feet, and a maximum number of dwelling units of 24. The ground floor is commercial which leaves three floors for residential use or a maximum of 30,000 SF. At 900 SF per dwelling unit and 85% efficiency, the theoretical number of dwelling units would be 28. At a lower efficiency rate and high square feet per unit, the theoretical number of dwelling units would drop closer to the maximum (without the bonus). The Town should consider asking developers how they are calculating the number of units they can achieve.

Residential Density

- I think the questions here is not what the correct standard is but whether the combination of lot and building requirements allows a developer to achieve an appropriate level of development (both commercial and residential) to make the construction of the building profitable while still meeting community requirements for development.
- One concern is whether the residential density limit is working against the dimensional limits. The increase in density in exchange for a public benefit provides potential relief, but not if the cost of the public benefit does not match the additional number of units. For example, certification of LEED buildings is quite costly. Additional outdoor amenity space may be difficult to achieve on existing lots; assembly of lots and demolition of some or all of the existing buildings may be costly given current real estate prices.