



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

**Railroad Square/Main
Street Business District**

Pepperell, 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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The Planning Team would also like to thank the following individuals for participating as key stakeholders throughout the planning process:

LRRP Advisory Group

Margaret Scarsdale, Select Board Chair

Paula Terrasi, Conservation Agent

Jenny Gingras, Town Planner

Joyce Morrow, Economic Development Advisory Committee (Clerk), Master Plan Committee and Planning Board

Stephen Themelis, Economic Development Advisory Committee (Chair) and Board of Health

Ann-Marie Finn, Co-owner, The Lazy Bubble

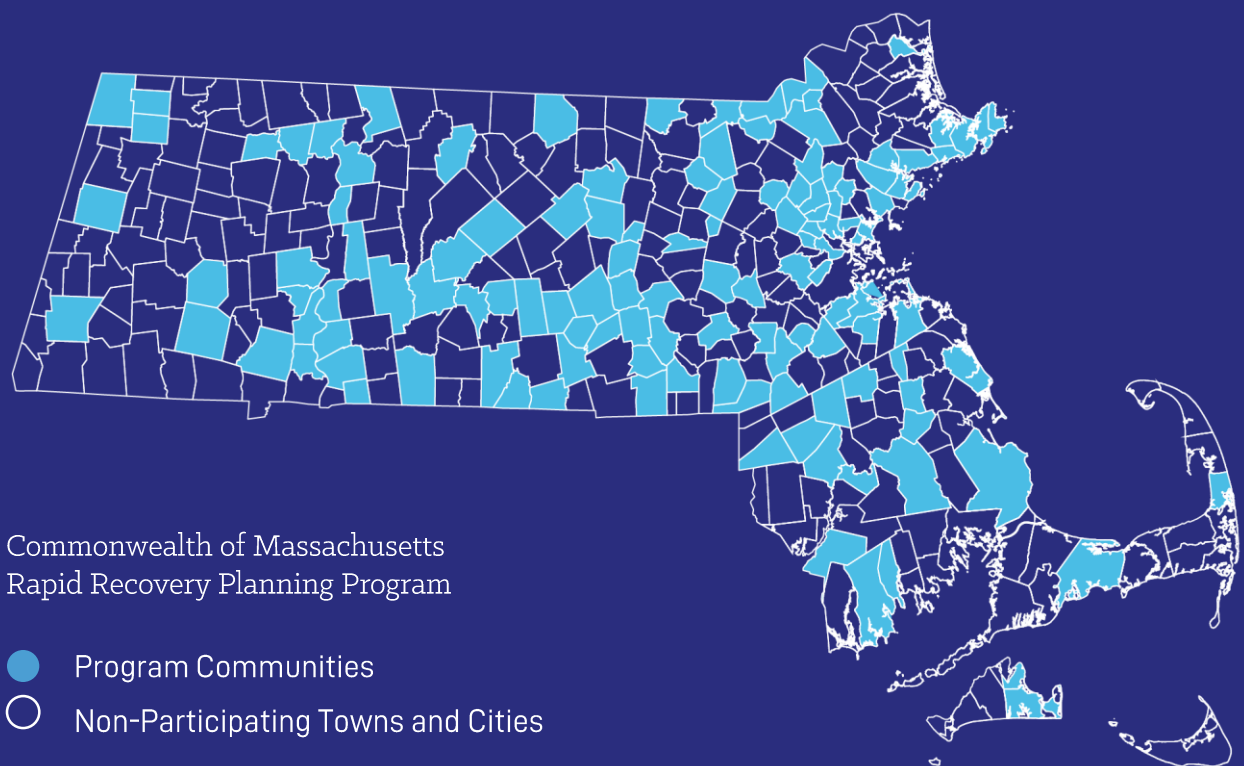
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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



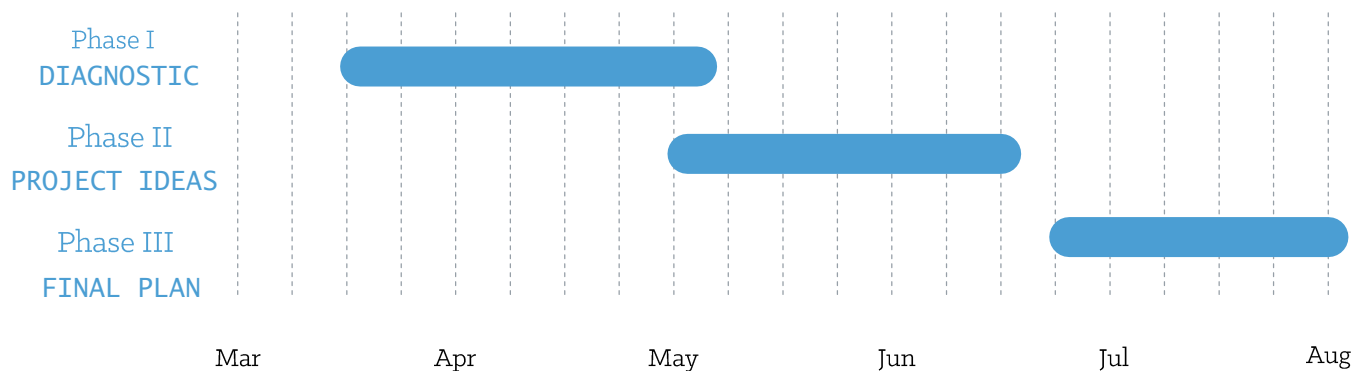
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

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

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue/Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Overview

The Town of Pepperell submitted a Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) application to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the businesses located in the Railroad Square/ Main Street Business District. The LRRP program analyzes and explores the challenges and barriers to economic recovery and identifies strategies and actions to help communities achieve their recovery goals. The program provides technical assistance through a Plan Facilitator assigned to each community and access to Subject Matter Experts to help seed ideas and further refine project recommendations through individual consultations. Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) was selected by DHCD as the Plan Facilitator for the Town of Pepperell and guided the plan development process for the Railroad Square/Main Street Rapid Recovery Plan. The Pepperell Select Board appointed an LRRP Advisory Team for the project and a kick-off meeting for the project was held on March 30, 2021. The meeting was conducted virtually in light of the pandemic. The PowerPoint presentations for all LRRP meetings were made available online and the recordings of the meetings were posted on the local cable website. All meetings conducted for this project were posted as public meetings in accordance with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Data specific to the study area was collected during the Diagnostic phase of the project. Demographic data relative to the Town of Pepperell and the study area was analyzed, including population, age, household income, household size, educational attainment and race and ethnicity. The physical attributes of the district were assessed and rated using criteria developed by DHCD. This assessment included both the public and private realms. The public realm included assets owned and controlled by the Town, such as streets, sidewalks, public parks and open spaces, and public parking areas. The private realm refers to buildings and storefronts that are generally owned and managed by private individuals or corporate entities. The business environment evaluation included the types of retail and service offerings located in the district, average commercial rents, the condition of the storefronts/facades, and other building attributes, such as windows, awnings, signs and lighting. An assessment of COVID-19 impacts on businesses within the district was conducted through a written survey distributed to each business in the district. Surveys were sent by email and hardcopies were also delivered in-person. Approximately, one-third of the businesses in the district responded to the survey. Every business indicated that it was negatively impacted by COVID-19 in some way.

The findings from the Diagnostic phase were presented to the LRRP Advisory Team on May 25, 2021. A Community Meeting was held on June 7, 2021 to present the data and findings to the town's residents and businesses. The meeting notice and agenda were made available through the town's website, social media and local cable. Flyers advertising the meeting were also distributed. The LRRP program and findings were also discussed at town board and committee meetings including meetings of the Select Board, Planning Board, and Economic Development Advisory Committee.

During the month of June, the LRRP Committee focused on developing five priority recommendations to address the COVID-19 impacts to the businesses as identified through the business survey. On July 7, 2021 a meeting was held with the Pepperell Business Association Executive Committee to present the diagnostic findings and receive feedback on draft project recommendations. On July 15, 2021, the full membership of the Pepperell Business Association was provided with an opportunity to weigh in on the proposed recommendations. On July 28, 2021, a Community Meeting was held to present the five draft recommendations and receive comments from the town's residents and businesses.

The LRRP Advisory Committee requested subject matter experts (SMEs) in the areas of Wayfinding and Marketing and Branding. The Committee met with the Wayfinding SME on September 14, 2021 and with the Marketing and Branding SME on September 16, 2021.

Findings and Recommendations

Findings

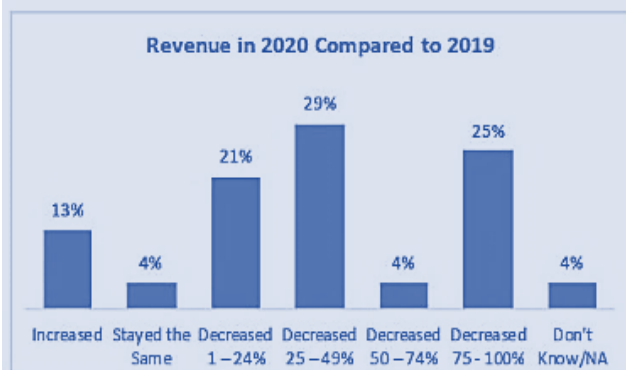
As highlighted in the business survey, every business located in the district was impacted by COVID-19 in some way. North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) data for 2020 and 2021 showed that five retail and service based businesses closed as a result of the pandemic. The following impacts were gleaned from the business survey:

- ❑ 83% of responding businesses reported a decline in revenue, with 56% indicating that revenues declined by 25% or more.
- ❑ 75% of businesses reduced their operating hours/capacity;
- ❑ 67% incurred expenses to implement safety measures to protect their workers and the public;
- ❑ 42% closed either temporarily or permanently;
- ❑ 42% transitioned to an alternative means of selling or delivering goods or services
- ❑ 21% stopped or deferred rent or mortgage payments; and
- ❑ 17% implemented employee layoffs.

The survey respondents reported that 68% of businesses had fewer on-site customers in January and February 2021 than before COVID-19 struck, with 51% reporting a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more.

Most physical infrastructure within the district is in fair to good condition. Improvements are needed to the sidewalk network to address ADA compliance issues, close some network gaps, and to provide pedestrian accommodations such as benches. While the Town has begun to address wayfinding through a legislative bond bill earmark, more work is needed in this area. There are nine vacant storefronts in the district that could host new business ventures.

Figure 1: Reported Business Revenue Trend- 2019 vs. 2020



Recommendations

The Railroad Square/Main Street Rapid Recovery Plan outlines five recommendations intended to assist the district businesses in addressing the economic impacts of COVID-19. The projects were identified by the LRRP Advisory Committee by analyzing the results of the business survey and the data provided through the Diagnostic phase of the LRRP planning process. The Committee also considered the recommendations set forth in the recently completed Pepperell Master Plan, as well as input and feedback provided by the Select Board, Planning Board, Economic Development Advisory Committee, the Pepperell Business Association, town staff and the public.

On July 28, 2021, a Community Meeting was held to present the following five recommendations and solicit comments from the town's residents and businesses:

1. Design and construct improvements to the sidewalk network throughout the district.
2. Develop and implement a façade improvement program for private building owners located in the district funded through grants and/or low-cost loans.
3. Develop a marketing and branding program for the district, in order to attract new businesses and support and promote existing businesses.
4. Undertake a Parking Management Study to assess current parking needs and utilization, and to better manage the existing parking supply within the district.
5. Implement a wayfinding system within district, building on the Town's recent accomplishments, and install kiosks at appropriate locations.

The Town finalized the above recommendations based on the input received. Each recommendation is described in greater detail in latter sections of this document.

The greatest challenges for businesses located in the district are to reverse the decline in customers and revenues resulting from the pandemic, and to attract new customers and visitors to the area. The recommendations in this plan are intended to market the district and improve the physical attributes that will enhance the experience of customers and visitors the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District.

About the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District

Railroad Square and Main Street function as the town's primary central business district. The eastern end of Main Street is comprised of numerous retail establishments, restaurants and businesses. The Nashua River Rail Trail runs in a general east-west direction through the Square paralleling Main Street and is popular with bicyclists, walkers, equestrians and other users. The district and study area boundaries are shown on the map on the following page.

As a town gathering place, Railroad Square hosts festivals, road races and other community events, and contains one of the few covered bridges in the Commonwealth. The Prudence Wright Memorial Bridge, located on Groton Street just north of the Square, is an attraction for visitors, artists and local tourists.

Below are some of the Town's economic development strategies relevant to the study area, as articulated through its recently completed Master Plan:

- Attract small-scale businesses to develop a sustainable economy.
- Support the revitalization of the Peter Fitzpatrick School.
- Explore the redevelopment of the former Pepperell Paper Mill site to support economic growth.
- Implement small-scale projects to maintain the small-town feel.
- Build upon the historic, recreational and agricultural assets of the community to attract businesses, visitors and private investment.

Encouraging reinvestment and mixed-use development in Railroad Square and along the Main Street corridor that respects the area's historic character is one of the Town's Top 10 Goals. The Master Plan recommends that a Village Center zoning district be considered for this area. The creation of such a zoning district would allow for mixed-use development with a set of uses (retail, residential and office) and dimensional requirements that are more consistent with nineteenth and early twentieth century town villages. Village Center zoning can be instrumental in allowing for a variety of housing options and new opportunities for businesses, thereby enhancing the vitality of the

area. Future efforts to implement such zoning revisions should be coordinated among the Planning Board, Historical Commission and the Economic Development Committee.

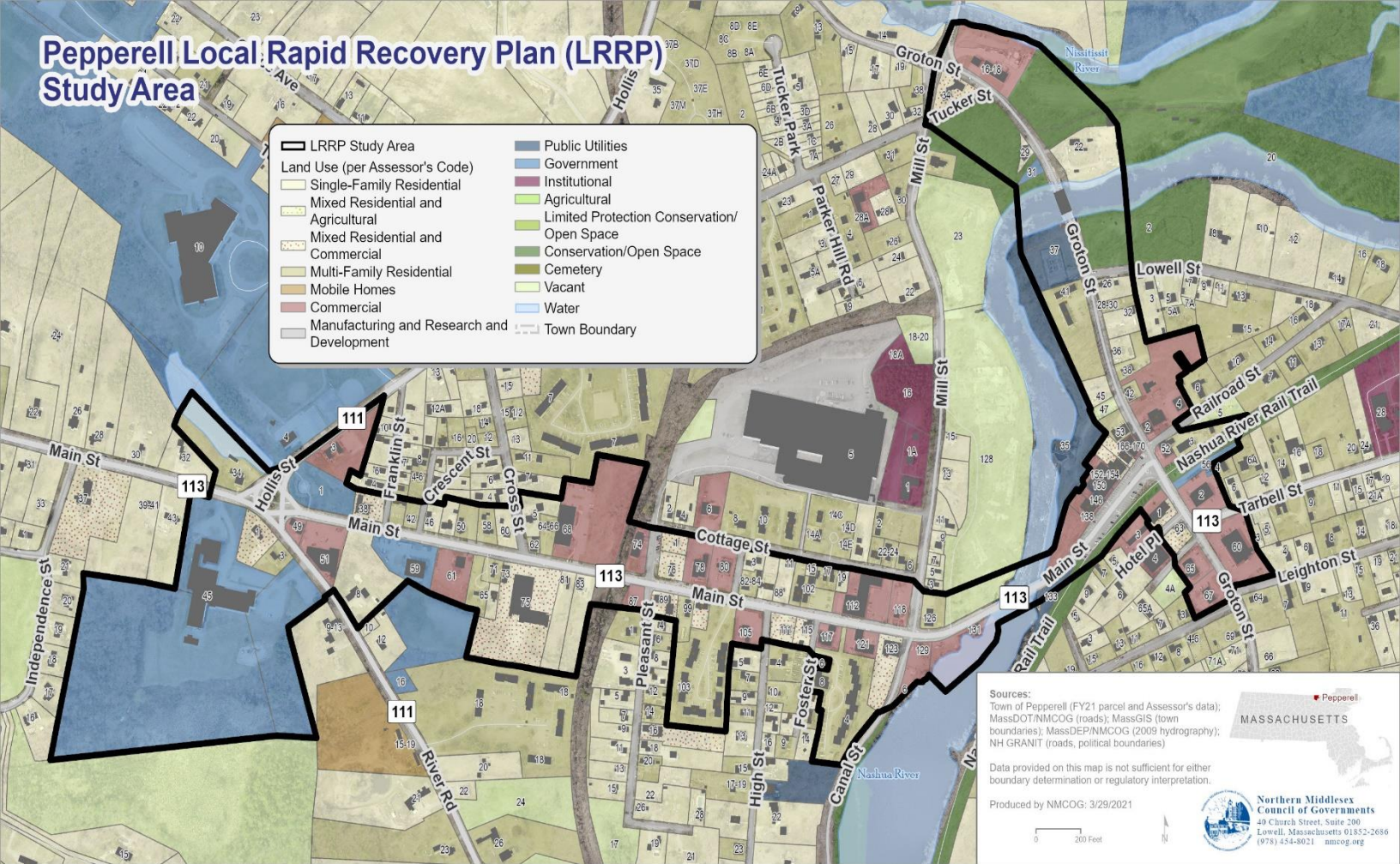
The reuse of the Peter Fitzpatrick School located at the west end of the district is a priority for the community. The Pepperell Master Plan states that zoning for the property should be reassessed to determine whether adaptive reuse needs to be better addressed. Many communities have put Adaptive Reuse Zoning in place to provide new life for vacant and underutilized structures. Such zoning changes could provide flexibility in use, dimensional requirements, and parking requirements to help facilitate a future reuse proposal for the property.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it an avalanche of change to the business district that required immediate response on the part of businesses, town government, and residents. This response has been difficult to implement, and in many cases costly, taking a significant toll on the businesses. Virtually every business in the district has been impacted negatively by the pandemic in some way.

In the first few months of the pandemic, unemployment increased, customer and visitor volumes decreased, and sales dropped. Some businesses closed permanently, others closed temporarily, and many shifted their operating models to incorporate curbside orders, outdoor dining, delivery or mail orders. The workforce experienced significant turmoil in terms of where and how they were able to work, and employers continue to experience challenges in finding, recruiting, and retaining adequate staff. Most businesses in the district are small, owner-operated establishments with limited capacity for long-term planning.

This Local Rapid Recovery Plan is intended to provide the Town with five discrete strategies/recommendations to facilitate economic development and aid in the recovery of the businesses located within the district. Regular, effective communication and coordination between town government and the businesses in the district will be essential to ensuring that the recommendations are fully implemented and that long-term recovery and resiliency is sustained, even once the pandemic subsides.

Pepperell Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) Study Area



MAP 1: The Railroad Square/Main Street Business District Boundaries and Land Use Classifications

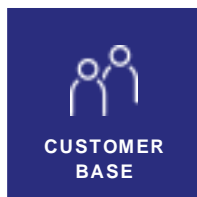
The most prevalent land use within the district is Commercial, with commercial businesses primarily concentrated along Main and Groton Streets. Both Suburban Residence (SR) and Urban Residence (UR) uses are located toward the outer edges of the study area. The former mill site located along the Nashua River is the only area in town to which the Mixed Use Overlay District (MUOD) Bylaw has been applied.



Outdoor dining in Railroad Square, Pepperell MA

Diagnostic

Key Findings



Land use within the district is primarily comprised of business uses, while only 239 individuals reside within the study area.

The potential customer base within the district includes those who work and live within the district, town residents, and those from out of town who visit the district. The median age of those living in the district is 43 years compared to 44 years for the town overall. In addition, median household income in this area is \$73,163, much lower than the \$98,294 average income figure for the overall town. Household size in the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District is 2.28 persons compared to 2.78 persons for the town overall. As shown in the table below, the age cohorts for the study area are fairly consistent with the age characteristics of the community in general.

Table 1: Population by Age Cohort for the Town and the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District

Age Cohort	Town Residents	% Town	District Residents	% District
0 to 19 years	2,818	22.9	50	20.9
20 to 24 years	628	5.1	13	5.4
25 to 34 years	1,525	12.4	36	15.0
35 to 44 years	1,326	10.8	26	10.9
45 to 54 years	1,816	14.8	31	13.0
55 to 64 years	2,135	17.3	41	17.1
65 to 74 years	1,370	11.1	26	10.9
75 to 84 years	511	4.2	12	5.0
85 years and over	174	1.4	4	2.1
Total	12,303		239	

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Attracting and accommodating additional residential development in the district would provide a larger local customer base, creating a market that better supports the commercial establishments located within the district. The Town's 2020 Master Plan recommended that the zoning in the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District be revised to allow mixed-use village-style development.

Key Findings



There is little racial or ethnic diversity among residents of the district or within the Town of Pepperell

Communities, businesses and the local economy work best when prosperity is widely shared, especially among historically marginalized populations or those who have faced barriers to opportunity. An inclusive economy engages majority and minority population groups, and women and men of every generation. Bringing about an inclusive economy requires an approach that fosters collaboration between local government, the private sector, and non-profit organizations.

Over the past two decades, researchers have worked to quantify the economic effects of workforce diversity. This research suggests that diverse work environments boost business profitability, culture, and public perception. A workforce comprised of people of different ethnicities with varied experiences has been shown to be a key driver of innovation and business performance.

Table 2: Race and Ethnicity of Pepperell Residents and Residents of the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District

Race/Ethnicity	Town	District
White Alone	11,634	221
Black or African American Alone	91	4
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	31	1
Asian Alone	240	6
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	2	0
Some Other Race Alone	63	2
Two or More Races	242	6
Hispanic or Latino	316	9
Not Hispanic or Latino	11,987	231

Source: ESRI Business Analyst



Key Findings



Educational attainment for residents of the district and for Pepperell overall exceeds state and national averages in terms of the percentage of residents with a high school diploma or better.

Educational attainment influences the types of positions for which Pepperell residents qualify, as higher-skilled, better paying jobs require more intensive training. Local communities cannot develop a skilled workforce without public investment in the education system. The level of educational attainment and the quality of education are key indicators of quality of life, workforce preparedness and economic potential. Approximately 95% of Pepperell residents have a high school degree or greater, compared to 90.9% of residents within the district.

Table 3: Educational Attainment

Education Level	Town	District
Less than High School	420 (4.7%)	16 (9.0%)
High School Graduate or GED	2,102 (23.7%)	54 (30.5%)
Some College, No Degree	1,624 (18.3)	33 (18.6%)
Associate Degree	898 (10.1%)	15 (8.5%)
Bachelor's Degree	2,340 (26.41%)	39 (22.0%)
Master's/Professional School/Doctorate Degree	1,473 (16.6%)	20 (11.3%)
	8,857	177

Source: ESRI Business Analyst





Highlights from the Public Realm

The public realm includes assets owned and controlled by the Town, such as streets, sidewalks, public parks and open spaces, and public parking areas. The study area includes 1,030 off-street and on-street parking spaces located on both public and private property. The vehicle traffic volume on Main Street is approximately 9,100 vehicles per day, while the volume on Groton Street south of Main Street is 9,500 vehicles per day. The Nashua River Rail Trail runs through Railroad Square parallel to Main Street. Counts taken on trail found that 1,000 users were observed from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM on a Saturday. The trail is owned and managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. Within the district, there is 512,000 square feet of open space, including parks, traffic islands, and public plazas.

The Town has made recent progress in installing wayfinding signage at a limited number of locations within the study area. Future installations should complement a marketing and branding campaign for the district.

Using a grading system developed by DHCD for the LRRP program, specific elements of the public realm were inventoried and rated. One average grade was assigned for the entire district for each element. In general, average grades (C) were assigned to the sidewalk network, street trees and benches, wayfinding and signage, roadbed and crosswalks. About half of the study area has street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety, therefore a grade of B was assigned to this element.



Recently installed wayfinding sign

Table 4: Public Realm Assessment

Public Realm Elements	Study Area Grades
Sidewalks	C-Pavement conditions vary, there is a lack of ADA compliance in some locations, as well as some gaps in the network
Street Trees and Benches	C- There is a limited number of street trees and benches, creating an uncomfortable pedestrian experience
Street Lighting	B-50% of the study area has street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety.
Wayfinding and Signage	C-Limited wayfinding signage, although recent progress has been made using state funding
Roadbed and Crosswalks	C-Condition varies depending on location and some crosswalks need repainting



Nashua River Rail Trail in Railroad Square



Highlights from the Private Realm

The private realm refers to buildings and storefronts that are generally owned and managed by private individuals or corporate entities. In Spring 2021, there were 75 storefronts within the study area of which 9 were vacant. The business district includes 129,061 square feet of ground floor retail space and 32,300 square feet of ground floor office space. The majority of storefronts are occupied by personal services and small retail establishments, followed by restaurants, real estate firms, financial businesses, insurance and healthcare providers.

A grading system developed by DHCD for the LRRP program was used to rate specific elements of the private realm, including store windows, outdoor displays/dining, signage, awnings, facades, and lighting. One average grade was assigned for the entire district for each element. Overall, most elements of the private realm are in fair to excellent condition. The awning element received a grade of F due to the fact that there are very few buildings with awnings. Awnings can provide shade during warmer months, enabling comfortable outdoor dining. However, they must be well-maintained and designed in coordination with other elements of the storefront.



Evening storefront lighting at C&S Pizza on Main Street

Table 5: Private Realm Assessment

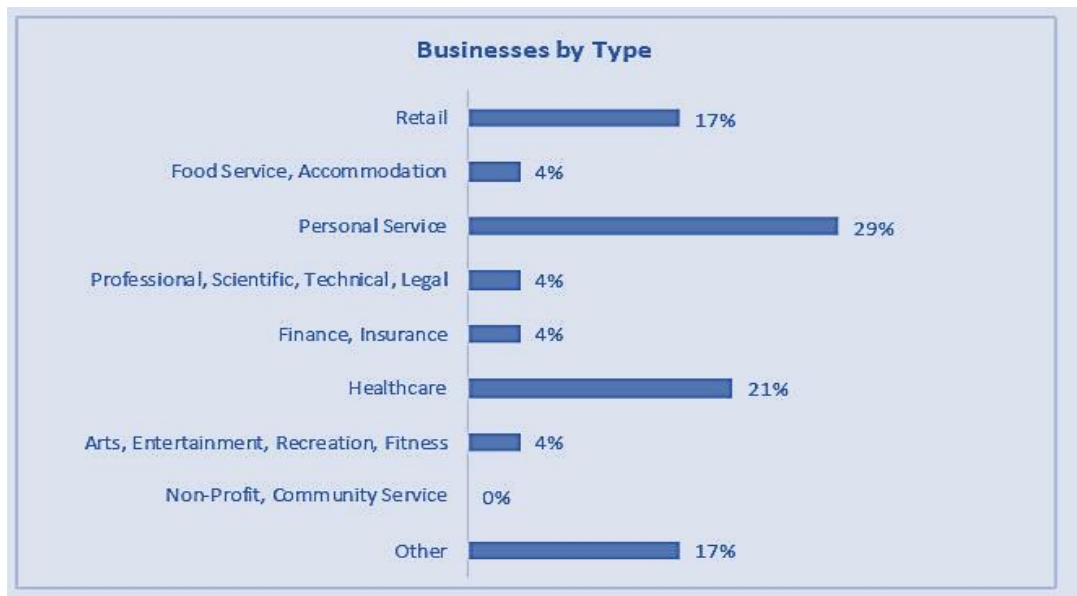
Private Realm Elements	Study Area Grades
Store windows	B-About 50% of storefront windows have 70% transparency that ensures clear lines of sight between the business and sidewalk.
Outdoor displays/dining	C-More than 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise displays or outdoor dining on the sidewalk or street.
Signage	A-More than 75% of storefront signs reflect the unique brand identity of the business and can be easily seen from more than 10 feet away.
Awnings	F-Most storefronts are not equipped with awnings.
Facades	B-Most properties in the study area have clean and well-maintained façades, but there is at least one property requiring structural façade improvements.
Lighting	C-More than 25% of storefronts do not have interior lighting after business hours.



Results of the Business Survey: Business Type and Employment

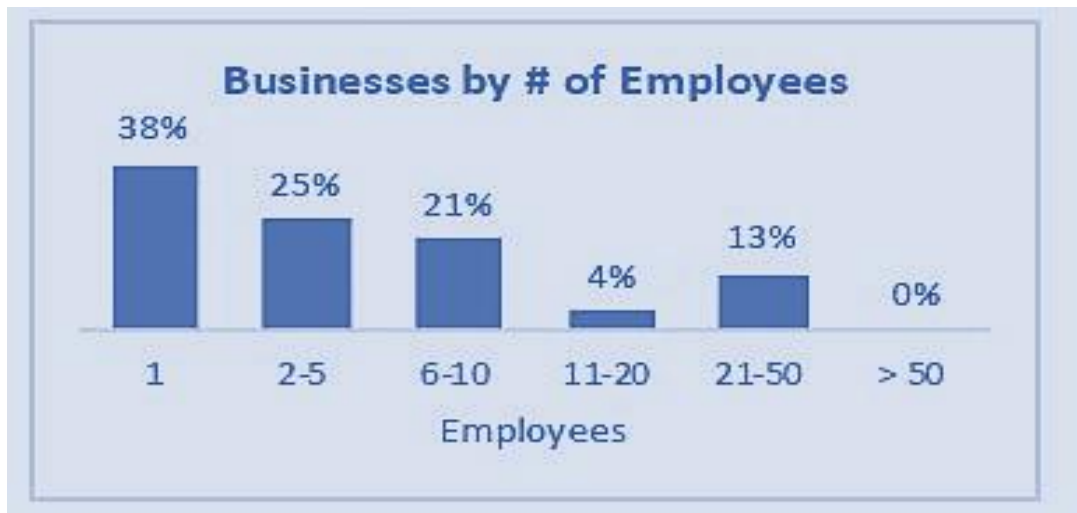
In Spring 2021, an online business survey developed by DHCD was distributed to the owners and managers of business establishments located within the district. One-third (24) of the 75 businesses within the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District responded. As shown in the figure below, many of the responding businesses were from the personal services (29%), healthcare (21%), and retail (17%) industries. Seventy-five percent of the businesses rent the space that they presently occupy.

Figure 1: Responding Businesses by Type



As shown in the figure below, 63% of the responding businesses were microenterprises employing five workers or less. Over one-third of the businesses were operated by a single individual. According to the U.S. Bureau, 1,582 people were employed within the Town of Pepperell in 2018, with 123 working within the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District.

Figure 2: Percent of Business by Number of Employees

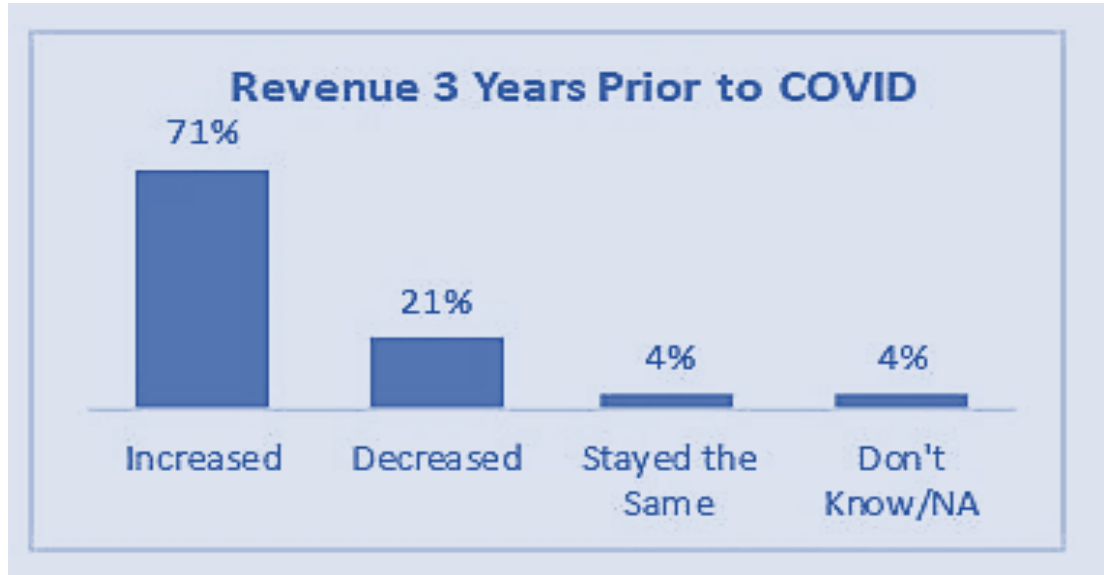




Results of the Business Survey: Business Revenues Prior to COVID-19

Seventy-one percent of businesses responding to the survey indicated that their revenues increased over the three-year period preceding COVID-19. Twenty-one percent stated that revenues decreased during that period, while 4% indicated that their revenues remained the same.

Figure 3: Business Revenues Prior to COVID-19



Railroad Square at the intersection of Main Street (Route 113) and Groton Street



Results of the Business Survey: Business Satisfaction with Various Aspects of the District

As shown in the figure below, the majority of businesses indicated that they are generally satisfied with most aspects of the business district, including the condition of public spaces, streets and sidewalks, the safety and comfort of customers and employees, access for customers and employees, and the proximity of other businesses and uses. Business owners and managers were somewhat dissatisfied with the condition of private buildings, storefronts and signs.

Figure 4: Business Satisfaction with the District





Results of the Business Survey: Impacts of COVID-19

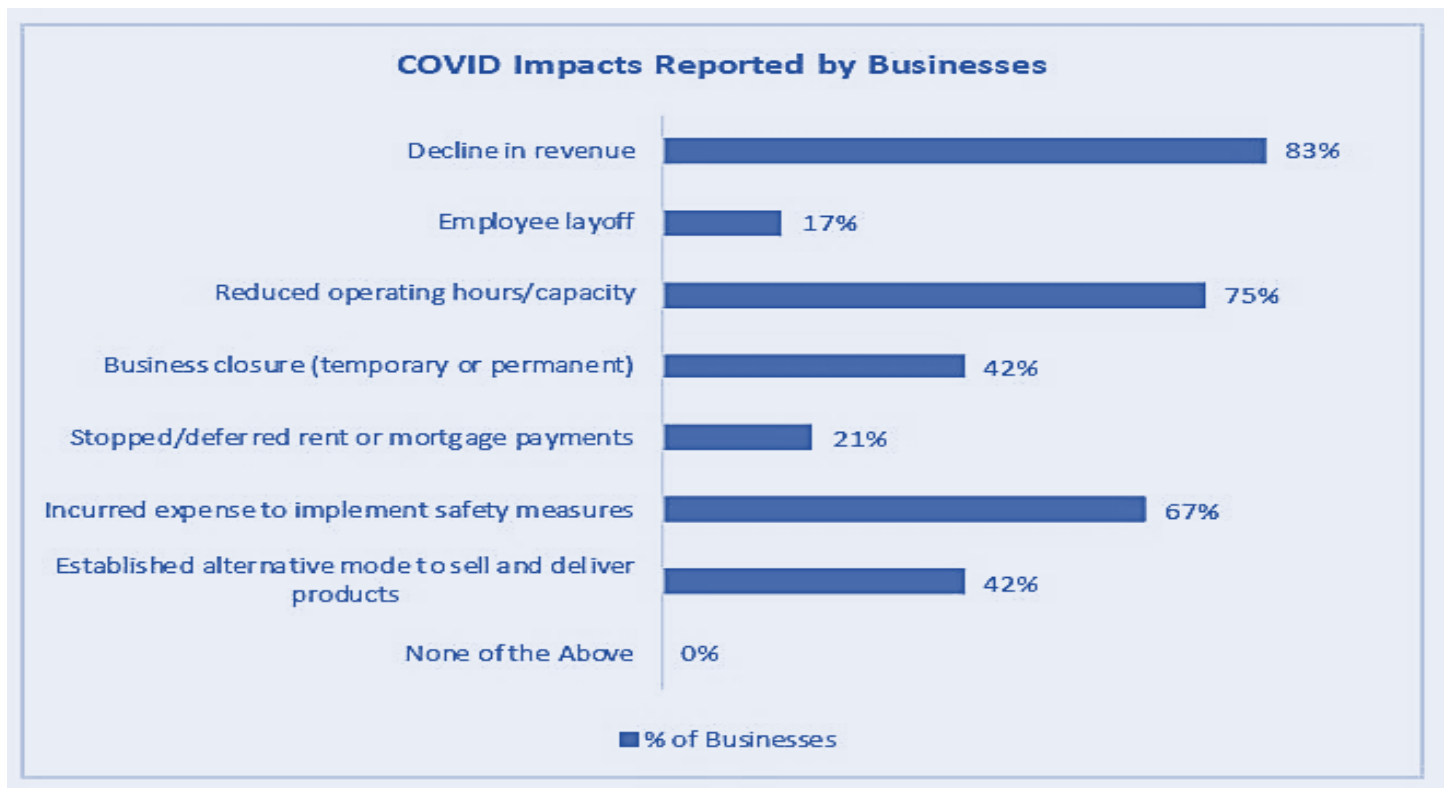
Every business responding to the survey was impacted by COVID-19 in some way. North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) data for 2020 and 2021 showed that five retail and service based businesses closed as a result of the pandemic.

As shown in the figure below, the impacts of the pandemic were felt in the following areas:

- ☐ 83% of responding businesses reported a decline in revenue, with 56% indicating that revenues declined by 25% or more;
- ☐ 75% of businesses reduced their operating hours/capacity;
- ☐ 67% incurred expenses to implement safety measures to protect their workers and the public;
- ☐ 42% closed either temporarily or permanently;
- ☐ 42% transitioned to an alternative means of selling or delivering goods or services
- ☐ 21% stopped or deferred rent or mortgage payments; and
- ☐ 17% implemented employee layoffs.

At the time of the survey in early 2021, 54% of businesses reported that they were still operating at reduced hours or capacity, while 4% were permanently closed.

Figure5: COVID-19 Reported by Respondents to the Business Survey

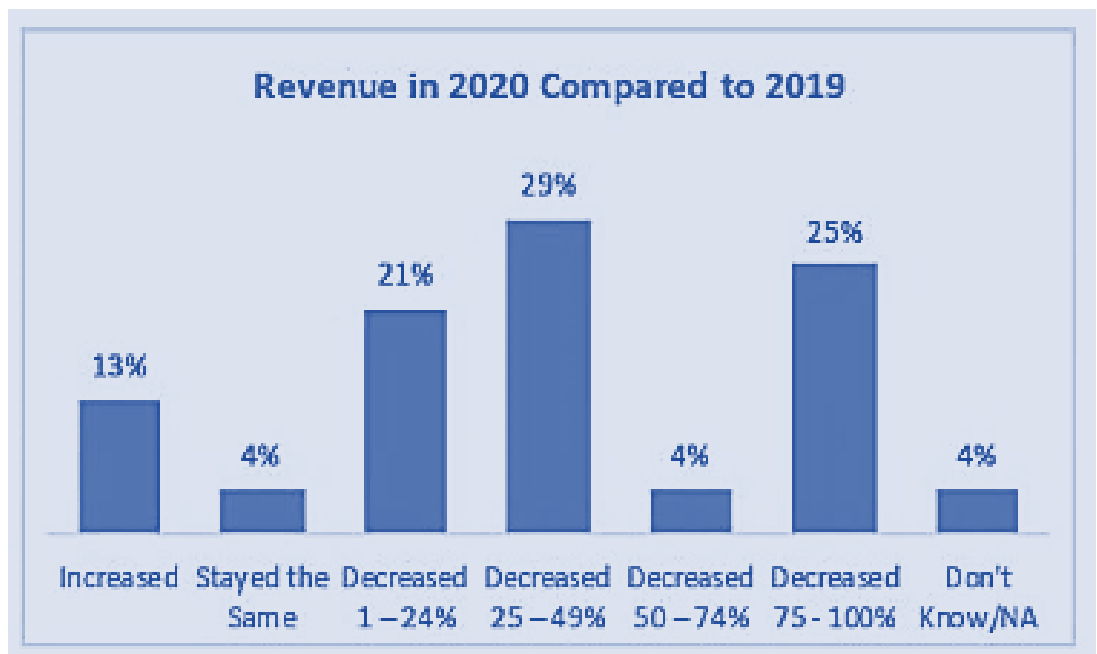




Results of the Business Survey: COVID-19 Related Business Revenue Impacts

As shown in the figure below, 79% of businesses responding to the survey generated less revenue in 2020 than in 2019. For 58% of businesses, revenues declined by 25% or more. Furthermore, 25% of businesses saw declining revenues that were at least 75% lower in 2020 when compared to 2019. While the researchers have found that mandatory closures and protective public health measures influenced the economy's decline, consumer avoidance behavior was also a significant factor. Nationally, the relative revenue losses among small businesses during the onset of the COVID-19 crisis was larger than among big businesses. Small businesses had less ability to quickly adjust to changes in regulations and demand when the pandemic hit. Due to high fixed costs and required knowledge, small businesses faced difficult barriers in increasing their web presence, expanding takeout services or adding delivery services, and coping with uncertainty during the public health emergency.

Figure 6: Business Revenue Changes from 2019 to 2020

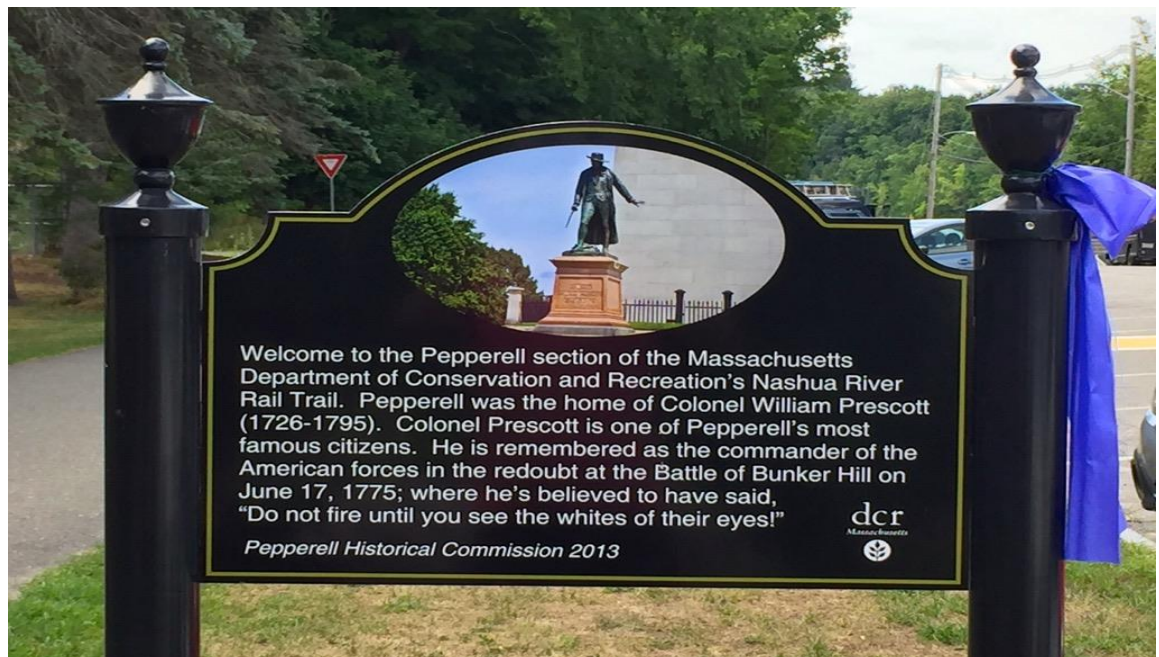
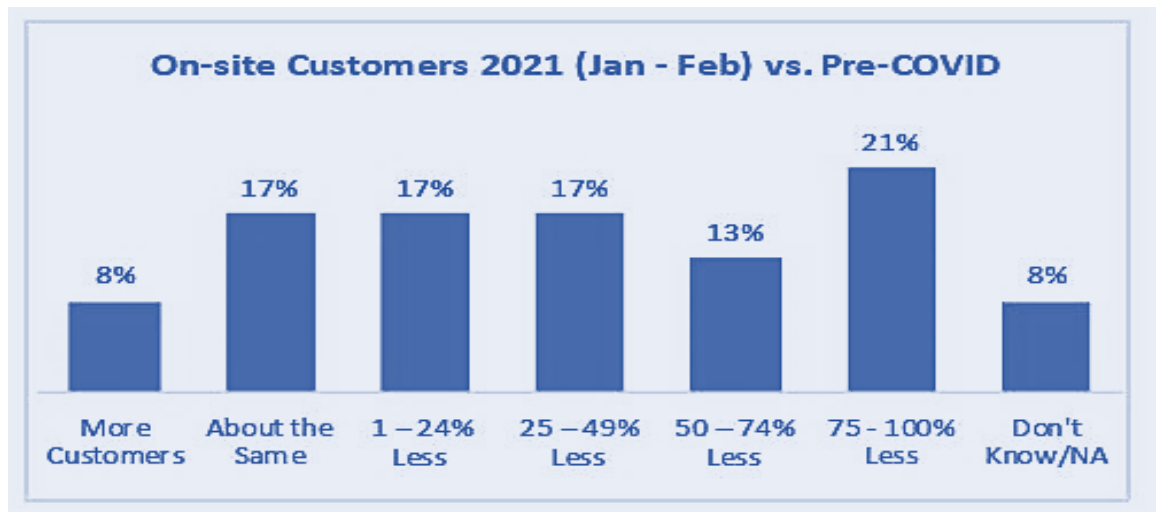




Results of the Business Survey: Onsite Customers and Visitors to the District in Early 2021 Compared to Pre-pandemic Conditions

Sixty-eight percent of businesses had fewer on-site customers in January and February 2021 than before COVID-19 struck. Furthermore, 51% reported a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more. The Nashua River Rail Trail brings approximately 1,000 visitors to the District on a typical Saturday and represents potential customers for the businesses. Outdoor activities such as walking and bicycling increased during the pandemic as an alternative to indoor, higher risk alternatives.

Figure 7: Volume of Onsite Customers –January and February 2021 vs. Pre-COVID

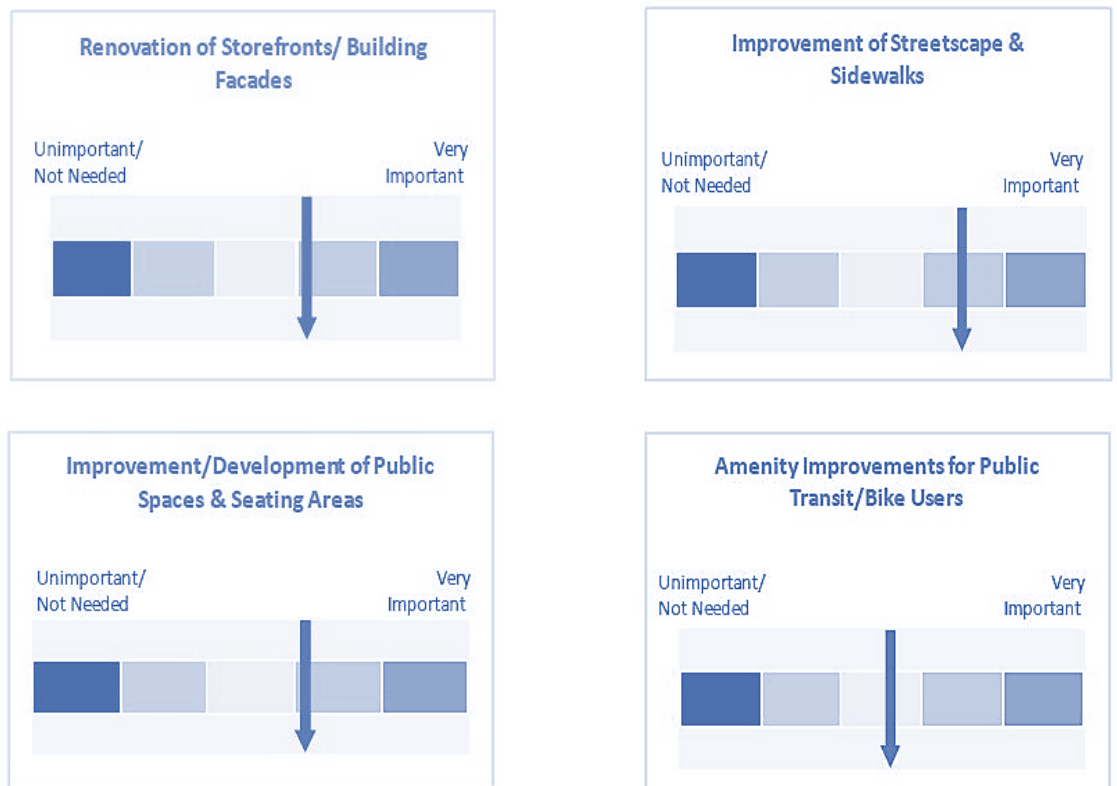




Results of the Business Survey: Identification and Rating of Potential Strategies – Physical Improvements

Survey respondents were asked to evaluate twelve potential strategies or approaches to improving conditions within the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District. These strategies were directed at physical improvements to the public and private realm, as well as measures that would attract and retain customers and businesses. Among the physical improvements strategies were the renovation of building facades, improvements to sidewalks and streetscape, development of public spaces and seating areas, and amenity improvements for bicyclists. Of these measures, improvement to the streetscape and sidewalk network was the highest priority, followed by renovation of building facades and the development of public spaces and seating, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 8: Rating of Potential Physical Improvement Strategies

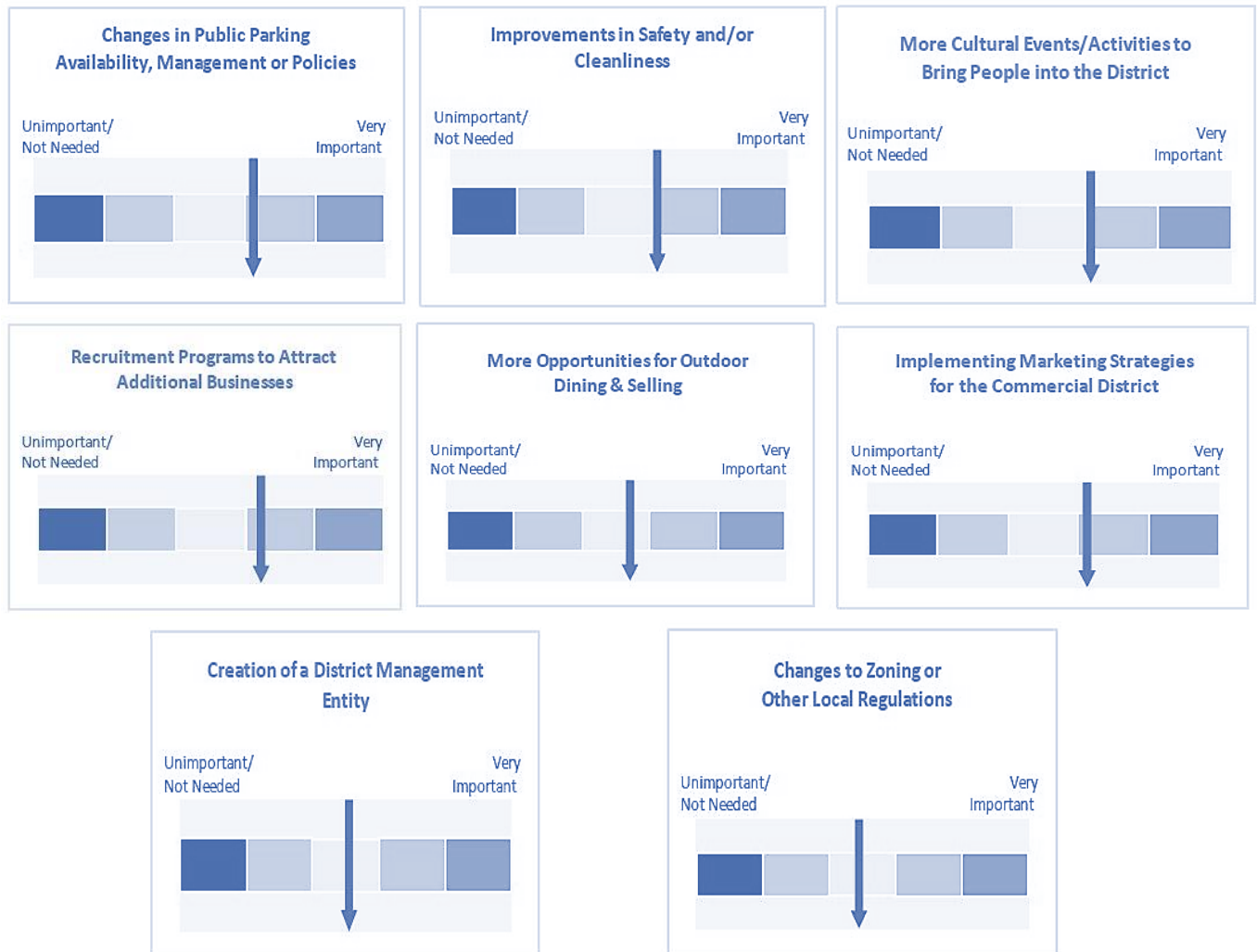




Results of the Business Survey: Identification and Rating of Potential Strategies – Measures to Attract and Retain Customers and Businesses

The eight strategies below were intended to put forth various actions that would potentially attract and retain customers. Among the strategies somewhat favored by the businesses in the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District were changes in public parking availability and management, improvements in safety and cleanliness, and bringing more cultural events and activities to the area. The addition of recruitment programs to attract additional businesses was the most favored strategy, closely followed by implementing marketing strategies for the business district. Respondents were neutral about providing additional opportunities for outdoor dining and sales, and did not identify a need for regulatory or zoning changes or the creation of a district management entity.

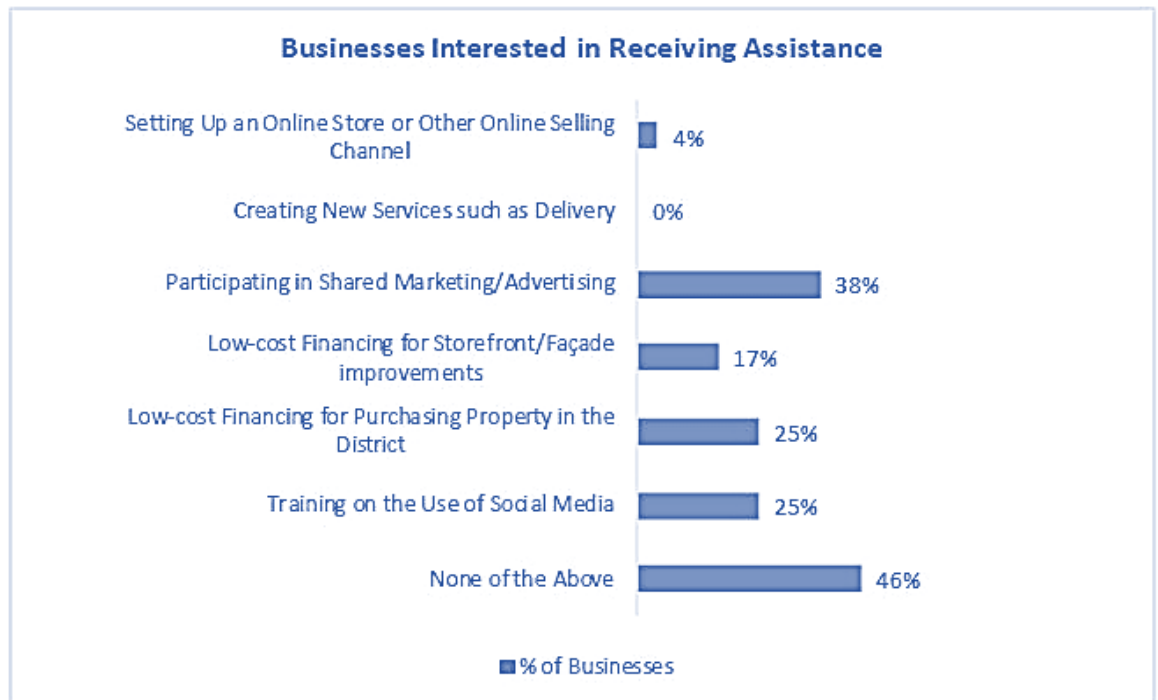
Figure 9: Rating of Other Strategies to Attract and Retain Customers and Businesses





Assistance to Businesses

Just over half (54%) of the business survey respondents in the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District expressed an interest in receiving assistance. Participation in a shared marketing/advertising program was identified as needed by 38% of the survey respondents, while 17% of respondents were interested in low-cost financing for façade improvements and 25% were interested in low-cost financing for purchasing property in the District. Another 25% desired to have training on the use of social media, as shown in the figure below.



Railroad Square/Main Street Business District looking west along Main Street



Administrative Capacity

Administrative capacity includes leadership, organizational capacity, resources, regulations and policies that can help achieve long-term growth and revitalization in a business district. Such capacity can enable catalytic investments and sustain economic recovery during times of stress such as that brought on by the pandemic. Identifying a responsible party to lead the implementation of improvement and economic recovery efforts will be essential in the future. Engaging other stakeholders will also be important. Such individuals should include those with the expertise, knowledge and skills to identify strategic opportunities and advocate for change and resources, and those possessing the ability to engage the businesses and residents.

Currently, there are no identified stewards of the business district nor is there town staff dedicated to providing assistance to the business community. Such a point person could be the newly-hired town planner, or a community development director or economic development specialist position could be created, should there be funding available.

Since 1968, the Pepperell Business Association (PBA) has provided community service, performed civic projects, and developed a forum for local businesses. The Association welcomes all business owners and area professionals. The PBA currently has 260 members and their website provides a business directory for the town organized by type of business. However, the organization is run by volunteers and does not have the bandwidth at this time to serve as the stewards of the district.

While there is currently no a single entity with the capacity to lead the recovery efforts for the district, the key stakeholders identified in the table to the right should collaboratively begin the process of identifying the resources needed to secure funding for implementation staff.

An in-depth analysis of the town's zoning bylaw was recommended in the recently completed 2020 Pepperell Master Plan. The LRRP business survey did not unveil any regulatory concerns on the part of the business community. NMCOG is assisting the Planning Board with developing design guidelines for the district through the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program.

Table 6: Key Partners and Stakeholders

Key Stakeholders and Project Partners

Pepperell Town Administrator and Select Board

Pepperell Economic Development Advisory Committee

Pepperell Business Association

Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce

Northern Middlesex Council of Governments



Covered Bridge Country Store

Project Recommendations

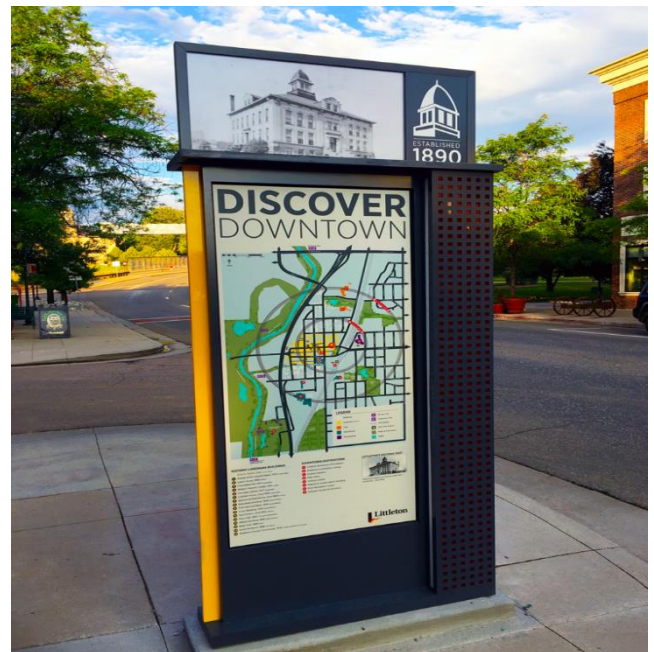
Development and Selection of Project Recommendations

The five recommendations outlined in this Rapid Recovery Plan were selected based on their potential effectiveness in assisting local businesses with recovering from the impacts of COVID-19. The Pepperell LRRP Advisory Committee formulated the recommendations based on the input provided through the business survey, the diagnostic findings generated through the LRRP process, the recommendations outlined in the town's recently adopted Master Plan, and the input provided through the public sessions and the Advisory Committee meetings. The draft recommendations were also discussed with the Pepperell Business Association on two occasions. On July 28, 2021, a Community Meeting was held to present the five draft recommendations and receive comments from the town's residents and businesses.

Using the project rubric created by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), detailed information regarding each recommendation is provided in the following pages. The information in the rubric includes a project budget and timeframe, key performance indicators, identification of project lead and partners, a list of action items, a process for implementation, and potential funding sources.





The five project recommendations analyzed include the following:

1. Design and construct improvements to the sidewalk network throughout the district.
2. Develop and implement a façade improvement program for private building owners located in the district funded through grants and/or low-cost loans.
3. Develop a marketing and branding program for the district, in order to attract new businesses and support and promote existing businesses.
4. Undertake a Parking Management Study to assess current parking needs and utilization, and to better manage the existing parking supply within the district.
5. Implement a wayfinding system within district, building on the Town's recent accomplishments, and install kiosks at appropriate locations



Wayfinding examples

Implement a wayfinding system within the district, building on the Town's recent accomplishments, and install kiosks at appropriate locations

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Railroad Square/Main Street Business District from Groton Street to the junction of Routes 113 and 111
Origin	Town of Pepperell – 2020 Master Plan recommendation
Budget	 <p>Low budget: Under \$50K for design concepts High budget: \$200K for design development, fabrication and installation</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (<5 years): Conceptual design-12 months; schematic design-6 months; design development-6 months; installation-6 months.</p>
Risk	 <p>Low Risk –The Town focused on wayfinding through a previous grant at a limited number of locations, primarily focusing on historic features. Design and location of new signs will need to be determined.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Number of visitors to the district; foot and bicycle traffic along Main Street; change in customer and visitor volumes at local business establishments and attractions.
Partners & Resources	<p>Town of Pepperell, Pepperell Business Association, Business Owners, Historical Commission, Economic Development Advisory Committee, Safety and Sign Committee, Building Department, DCR, Community Groups, Local Artists (potentially to provide additions such as accent inset panels, materials, glass, ceramic, metal, etc.).</p> <p>Possible funding sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MassDevelopment TDI Creative Catalyst or Commonwealth Places grants • DHCD MDI or Community Development Block grants • Upcoming ARPA programs (TBD) • Sponsorship & off-site advertising



Diagnostic

There are 75 storefronts located within the business district, of which 9 are currently vacant. Most businesses in this area are microenterprises with five or less employees, and the recent business survey showed that virtually every business has been impacted by COVID-19, with 83% reporting a decline in revenue and 75% reducing operating hours or occupancy. Nearly 60% of the businesses have stated that their revenues have declined by 25% or more since the pandemic struck. Approximately 75% of these establishments rent the space that they are utilizing.

Data collection activities show that over 1,000 people utilize the Nashua River Rail Trail in Pepperell on a typical Saturday. The trail passes through the heart of the business district but there is no signage, informational kiosks or other information directing trail users to the services and establishments available in the business district. The Pepperell 2020 Master Plan recommends adding informational kiosks and wayfinding signage to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist awareness of local destinations and events.

With 68% of the businesses reporting that they have had fewer customers, clients or visitors since COVID-19, there is an opportunity to attract the untapped market of rail trail users who visit the area on a daily basis. Walking and bicycling has increased during the pandemic nationally. Pepperell should take advantage of the increased volume of potential customers by directing them to local businesses.

Traffic count data shows that nearly 10,000 vehicles per day utilize Main Street and Groton Street within the business district. Improved wayfinding signage would increase awareness of the types of attractions, businesses and resources that are available in the area.

Action Items

Develop a standardized wayfinding plan that includes messaging, locations, and uniform design that incorporates the town's recent initiative. Implementation should include fabrication and installation of consistent and visible signs with directional information. Mobile-friendly (internet and smartphone) wayfinding components could also be included.

A wayfinding interactive map would allow for inclusion of attractions and businesses into the overall wayfinding program. QR codes could help visitors access information through scanning technology, connecting to information about dining, shopping, attractions and events.

The wayfinding program should reinforce the sense of place and promote the Main Street/Railroad Square Business District as an area that is easy to navigate for first-time and frequent visitors. Each element should be designed based on functional purpose and on the conditions of its placement. Scale legibility, accessibility and engineering requirements must be considered. Gateway signage, pedestrian directional signage, information kiosks, interpretative signage and trail signage should be incorporated into the program. An inventory of existing signage is needed prior to commencing the work on the wayfinding plan.

A multi-phased wayfinding design process is recommended. Key actions include:

- Develop a design working group, comprised of key stakeholders supportive of improved wayfinding as well as town staff responsible for its management, design plan execution, installation, and upkeep.
- Review plans and documents for the previous wayfinding plan and other relevant plans
- Include all interested entities for design plan input and to understand how wayfinding plan will integrate with similar programs
- Identify the wayfinding "needs" and desired outcomes by developing a prioritized list of key destinations, needed identification, potential gateways, and key directional needs
- Review/create map of existing wayfinding signage systems
- Evaluate where the "gaps" are for wayfinding signs and current conditions/remaining lifespan for existing signs. Determine if the new system will be a conscious extension or evolution of the previous system, or install a new design and completely extract signage from the previous plan (to avoid signage clutter and confusion)
- Ensure that the proposed design adheres to all required design guidelines, including ADA-compliance for font size, size, and contrast. Encourage design considerations to meet multi-lingual needs.
- Develop aesthetic design options, working with community, businesses, and potentially local artists.
- Identify and obtain conceptual design funding
- Identify locations for sign placement and confirm that the town owns or controls these locations..

A Wayfinding Plan Guide developed by Stantec for the LRRP program is included in the appendix of this report.

Process

Key Steps to Consider:

Schematic Conceptual Design (35% of project efforts)

- Identify the project goal and wayfinding needs
- Identify required signage types and create a Sign Inventory
- With understanding of the local aesthetic in hand, explore two – three different design options for consideration to ensure that the design is unique and appropriate for the community
- Develop a few representative sign types and analyze them and how they would fit in the built environment and in the downtown area
- Develop preliminary signage locations and messaging, with an understanding of the various contexts for the signs (i.e., freestanding, pole-mount, wall mount, projecting, etc.)
- Develop a target budget for infrastructure
- Identify the audience for signs, their information hierarchy, signing types
- Identify applicable code requirements
- A Sign Fabricator should be consulted for Raw Order of Magnitude (ROM) price estimates. These ROM numbers will help inform the decision of which design direction to pursue (and identify any Value Engineering measures).

Design Development Process (30% of project efforts)

- Desired design option (or hybrid of) to be applied to all sign types
- Develop Location Plans and Message Schedules
- Confirm design compliance with rules and regulations
- Circulate design package to Town staff for input
- Issue design package to prospective Sign Fabricators for Preliminary Bids and reveal possible Value Engineering moves that might be required to meet budget.

Design Intent (25% of project efforts)

- Add/include all specifications and fabrication details necessary to solicit competitive bids from capable Fabricators

- Finalize Location Plans and Message Schedules
- Circulate design intent package (bid document) to entire Team for final sign-off

Bid Assistance (5% of project efforts)

- Identify recommended/capable Fabricators
- Issue Design Intent Package, field all questions and issue responses to all bidders
- Review bids and select fabricator

Artwork Coordination (Sign Fabricator efforts, shop drawings, material sample submittals)

- Hand-off of all specific, unique art, icons, symbols and logos.
- Development of all required templates for Sign Fabricator's use in building out sign messages (Including but not limited to one-line, two-line and multi-line variations, side A and side B layouts, flush left and flush right variations, etc.)

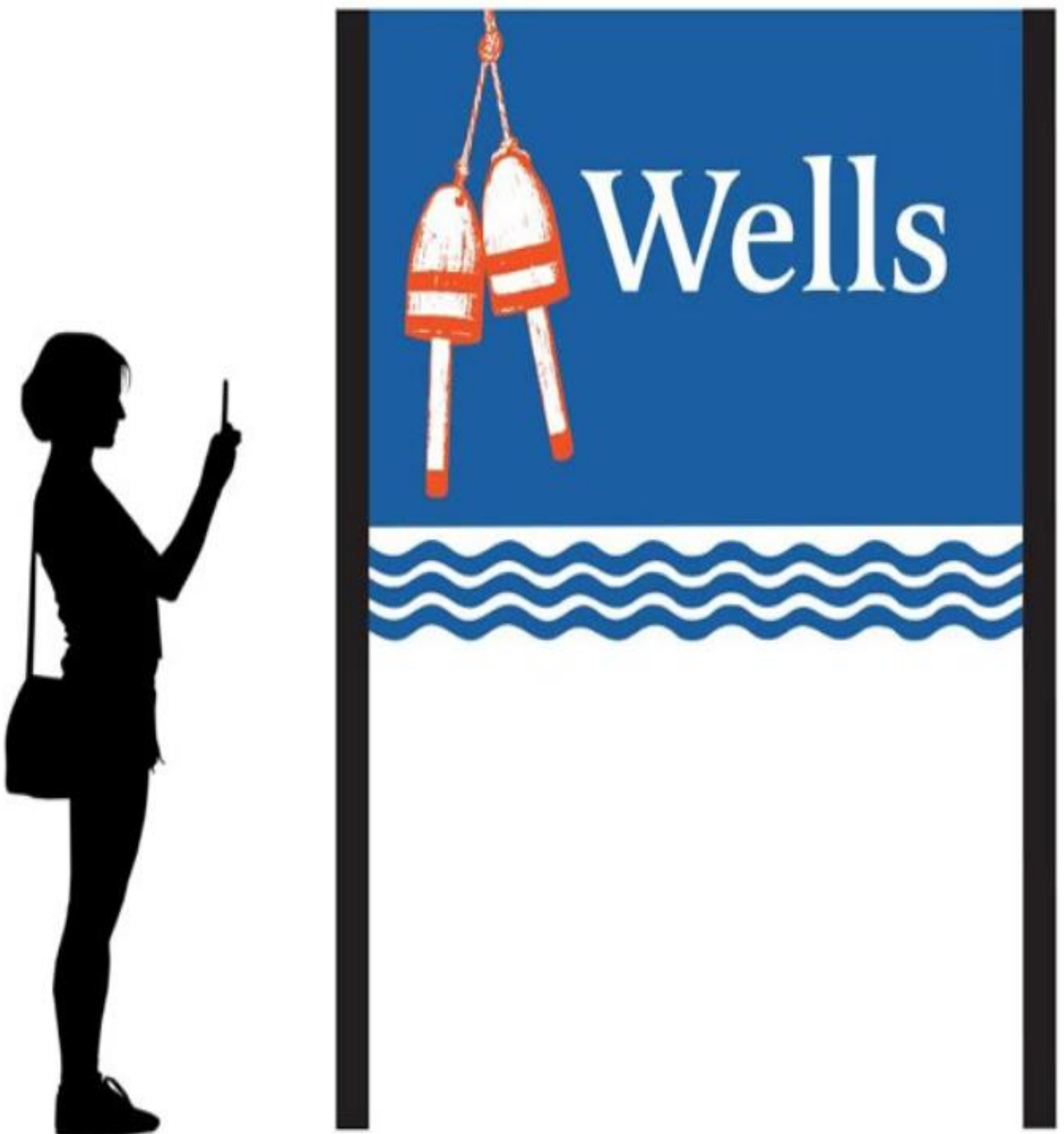
Construction Observation (5% of project efforts)

- Review and approve Fabricator's Shop Drawings
- Review and approve Fabricator's paint finish and material sample submittals
- Conduct a shop visit mid-fabrication if desired/required before completion.

Post-Installation (Punch Review)

- Once installed, Designer is to review each sign installation to ensure its completion, quality and adherence to the Design Intent
- This review should be summarized in a document to be issued to the Town (proof of completion)









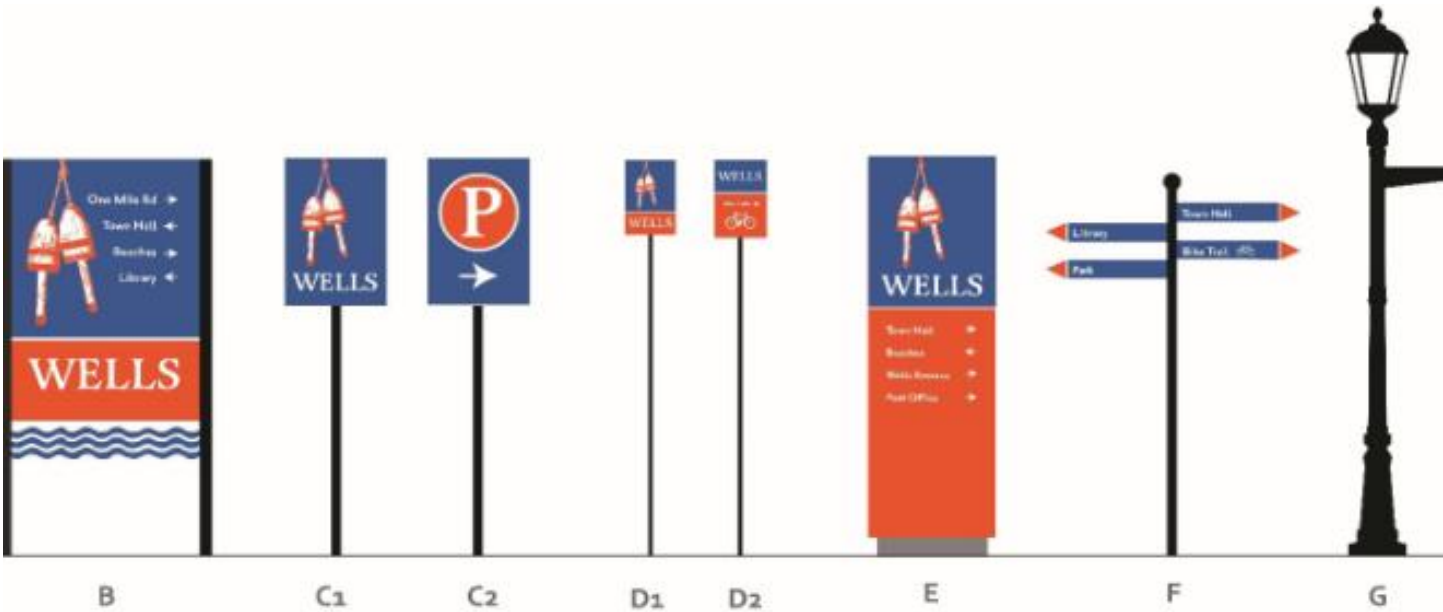
Best Practice

Wayfinding Theme for a Suburban Town



Creating a wayfinding theme for a seaside location: Wells, ME (population 9,800)

Category	<div>  <div>Public Realm</div> </div>
Location	Wells, ME along Route 1 and Post Road
Origin	Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen
Budget	<div>  <div>Medium budget: \$30,000 design fee and \$80,000 for implementation</div> </div>
Timeframe	<div>  <div>Short Term (<5 years): 8 months for design and planning.</div> </div>
Risk	<div>  <div>Low Risk</div> </div>
Key Performance Indicators	Number of visitors to the district; foot and bicycle traffic; change in customer and visitor volumes at local business establishments and attractions.
Partners & Resources	Town of Wells, Maine



Diagnostic

Wells, Maine is a seaside community and summer resort with a year-round population of 9,800 residents and a summer population of 40,000. Commercial businesses are primarily located along U.S. Route 1 or Post Road. There is no formal downtown or central business district.

Early on in the pandemic, the Town of Wells closed all beaches to the public in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19. A year later, the beaches and resorts were able to reopen but businesses in the community are still trying to recover from the impacts of the pandemic on their revenues.

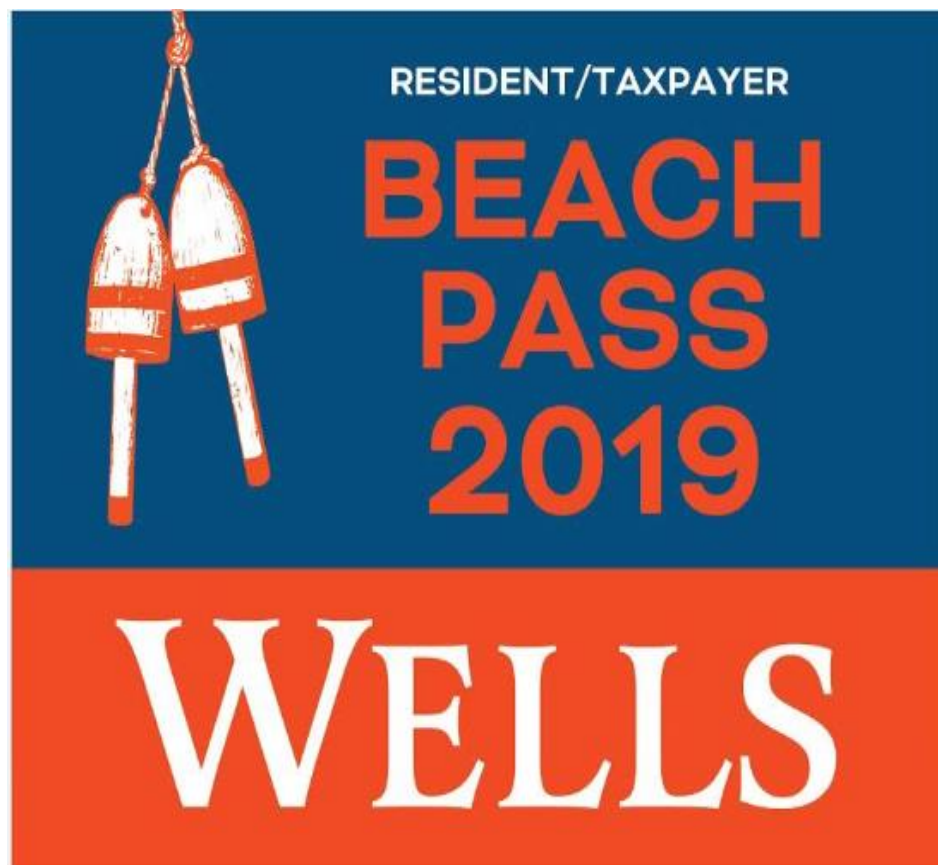
To assist in the recovery efforts the town implemented a wayfinding program which was tied to the town's branding initiative. A visual survey of the business corridors was performed and a presentation was developed to explore various design options, Wayfinding signs, street furniture, and public art were ultimately incorporated into the program.

Action Item

- Established a project advisory committee which met over a four-month period.
- Locations were explored in terms of navigating decision points and directional elements
- Street furniture design options were considered prior to selecting the final design
- Public art features were included as focal points and visual markers, and to add interest to the area.
- Signage needs for public buildings were considered and design and placement decisions were made
- Colors were explored and tested for readability and aesthetic desirability.



Public Art installed as part of the wayfinding and branding programs



Process





- Following photo documentation, a comprehensive community design alternative presentation was made to the advisory committee.
- Past case studies of similar programs in other communities were explored by the committee.
- An Ideation Exercise was undertaken to explore possible brands and icons for Wells. From this a number of alternative designs were created.
- Photoshop versions of signs were created, along with street furniture designs and public art markers.
- Themed benches, kiosks, bike racks and trolley stops were designed.
- The designs were shared with the community through the Town Administrator's weekly newsletter.
- A presentation was made to the Select Board which approved the design package.
- A vendor list was developed based on fabricators and installers in Maine and Massachusetts.
- Cost estimates were developed in collaboration with fabricators and installers.
- Public art locations were analyzed by the advisory committee.
- Locations for signs placement were identified by the advisory committee and mapped.
- A full set of sign and street furniture fabrication specifications were developed for public bidding and procurement.



Kiosk and Sign bracket design concepts



Develop a branding and marketing program for the district, in order to attract new businesses and support and promote existing businesses

Category	 Revenue/Sales
Location	Railroad Square/Main Street Business District from Groton Street to the junction of Routes 113 and 111
Origin	Town of Pepperell – 2020 Master Plan recommendation
Budget	 Medium: \$50K to \$100K
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years): 12-18 months
Risk	 Low Risk –Existing businesses have expressed an interest in a branding and marketing campaign for the district, as demonstrated from the business survey. The issues that could hinder the project include a lack of champions and funding challenges, both public and private.
Key Performance Indicators	Number of visitors to the district; change in customer and visitor volumes at local business establishments and attractions; use of the brand in advertising and promotions by individual businesses, response on social media
Partners & Resources	Town of Pepperell, Pepperell Business Association, Business Owners, Historical Commission, Economic Development Advisory Committee, Community Groups, Visitor Bureaus, Local Artists

brand noun

\ 'brand \

a public image, reputation, or identity conceived of as something to be marketed or promoted

marketing noun

mar·ket·ing | \ 'mär-kə-tīŋ

the process or technique of promoting, selling, and distributing a product or service

Diagnostic

There are 75 storefronts located within the business district, of which 9 are currently vacant. Most businesses in this area are microenterprises with five or less employees, and the recent business survey showed that virtually every business has been impacted by COVID-19, with 83% reporting a decline in revenue and 75% reducing operating hours or occupancy. Nearly 60% of the businesses have stated that their revenues have declined by 25% or more since the pandemic struck. Approximately 75% of these establishments rent the space that they are utilizing.

Data collection activities have shown that over 1,000 people utilize the Nashua River Rail Trail in Pepperell on a typical Saturday. The trail passes through the heart of the business district. There are opportunities to develop a brand unique for the district and to promote the services and establishments available in the business district. Traffic count data shows that nearly 10,000 vehicles per day utilize Main Street and Groton Street within the business district. Branding and marketing would help encourage motorists to take an interest in the area.

Action Item

The Town of Pepperell seeks to develop a marketing and branding program for the Main Street/ Railroad Square Business District to ensure that businesses are retained and to attract new customers, visitors and business establishments to the area.

The brand can consist of a tagline or a logo, while the marketing strategy should detail *how* to communicate the brand promise to those that the district is attempting to attract. In addition to being distinct, the brand needs to be authentic. It needs to speak to the people who already live in town as well as to potential newcomers. It needs to be an expression or reflection of the history, heritage, and character that already exists. The brand will require initiative and investment by both the public and private sectors, and will be built through public relations. What is said about the business district by the press or via social media is what will create and sustain the brand.

Understanding its identity, the Town hopes to seek out markets where it can hold strong appeal. To make the district a destination will require gathering places, activity generators, at least a few businesses that attract customers from outside of town, and activities that take place during the evening and on weekends. Shopping, dining and entertainment will all contribute to the vibrancy of the district.



UNIQUE · VIBRANT · HISTORIC



Examples of municipal branding

Process

- Identify funding and retain a consultant
- The Mass Downtown Initiative (MDI) is a potential funding source.
- Establish a brand development team/committee that includes community leaders, businesses and property owners.
- Conduct a marketing study for the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District that considers the current business environment within the district and the potential for growing the economy and attracting additional investment.
- Create a contextually relevant brand/identity for the District that builds upon the area's natural and recreation assets, and its rich Revolutionary War history and historical assets.
- Formulate a branded marketing campaign for the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District that leverages the area's assets and strengths (e.g. the Nashua and Nissitissit Rivers, the Nashua River Rail Trail, the Covered Bridge and the area's rich Revolutionary War history). Include a launch plan and identify metrics for monitoring and measuring the success of the program (e.g. visitors to the area, customers and sales, business retention and attraction, etc.).
- The Launch Plan should identify targeted groups such as local residents, businesses, visitors and tourists, outdoor recreation organizations and enthusiasts, and historical organizations.
- Develop an event calendar, business directory, and a "Visit and Shop Pepperell" website, social media pages and app.
- Create an action plan with specific recommendations for both branding and marketing
- Seek implementation funding for the recommendations based on priorities and sequencing identified in the action plan
- Implement the action plan as resources allow.



Rail Trail Users enjoying some refreshments at a local restaurant



Outdoor recreation assets available near the District

TOWN OF BUCKSPORT

MARKETING PLAN 2021



Best Practice

Marketing a Small Town



Location

Bucksport, ME



REVENUES
& SALES

Developing a Strategic Marketing Plan for a Small Town

Category	<div>  Revenue/Sales </div>
Location	Bucksport, ME
Origin	Town of Bucksport leadership
Budget	<div>  Medium budget: \$100K-\$150K </div>
Timeframe	<div>  Short Term (<5 years): 3 years for full implementation. </div>
Risk	<div>  Low Risk </div>
Key Performance Indicators	Number of visitors and tourists; vehicular, foot and bicycle traffic; change in customer and visitor volumes at local business establishments and attractions; increase in population and commercial and residential development.
Partners & Resources	Bucksport, Maine funded the project and partners included town leaders and staff, local businesses and business organizations and tourism agencies and organizations.



Diagnostic

Bucksport, Maine is a seaside community with a year-round population of 5,000 residents. Since the closure of a paper mill in 2014, the town has diversified its economic base by taking advantage of new opportunities in aquaculture, marine training and tourism. It continues to work on attracting new businesses and residents, and on diversifying development on Main Street. Its proximity to local tourist attractions creates untapped opportunities for growth, but the decline in travel and tourism due to the pandemic has been an obstacle to leveraging such opportunities.

Action Item

- Establish internal and external partnerships for collaboration
- Develop a Bucksport logo and tagline
- Launch a new website
- Continue broadband expansion
- Create a brochure, new resident welcome package, developer prospectus, and banners for use at community events and local businesses
- Install a wayfinding sign system, town kiosk and digital communication board
- Promote entrepreneurialism and business establishment
- Invest in tourism-focused communication and outreach, launching a “Day by the Bay” marketing campaign promoting a schedule of activities and coupon booklet for local businesses
- Improve the town’s profile on travel websites such as Trip Advisor, and on search engines and social media
- Develop a promotional video and visitors guide
- Place a QR code on local signage to bring visitors to the new website
- Promote the town’s history as a tourism attraction



Process

- Identify markets and local competition
- Rebrand the town through a tag line and new logo
- Seek grants and technical assistance opportunities
- Deploy brand across digital platforms, town communication materials, banners, kiosks and signs
- Create developer prospectus, 30 second spotlight videos, new resident welcome package, and social media messages
- Develop strategic partnerships with local businesses and business organizations
- Structure new website to focus on marketing goals
- Create a business directory
- Partner with local arts, cultural and historic organizations to promote the town's assets and quality of life
- Encourage entrepreneurship to improve the mix of downtown retail
- Expand local event offerings to attract additional visitors to the area
- Increase social media presence and advertising on tourism and arts and entertainments sites
- Revisit the marketing plan on an annual basis and adjust as needed based on results



Signs promoting Bucksport's waterfront and history



Develop and implement a façade improvement program for private building owners located in the district funded through grants and/or low-cost loans.

Category	<div>  <div>Private Realm</div> </div>
Location	Railroad Square/Main Street Business District from Groton Street to the junction of Routes 113 and 111
Origin	Town of Pepperell – 2020 Master Plan recommendation
Budget	<div>  <div>Medium: \$50K-\$150K</div> </div>
Timeframe	<div>  <div>Short Term (<5 years): 1-5 years</div> </div>
Risk	<div>  <div>Medium risk associated with a possible loan program</div> </div>
Key Performance Indicators	Number facades improved; customer and visitor volumes at local business establishments and attractions; maintenance of improvements after five years
Partners & Resources	<p>Town of Pepperell, Pepperell Business Association, Business Owners, Historical Commission, Economic Development Advisory Committee</p> <p>Potential funding sources include American Rescue Plan Act funds that allow for assistance to small businesses, local banks and financial institutions, and the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative.</p>



Diagnostic

There are 75 storefronts located within the business district, of which 9 are currently vacant. Most businesses in this area are microenterprises with five or less employees, and the recent business survey showed that virtually every business has been impacted by COVID-19, with 83% reporting a decline in revenue and 75% reducing operating hours or occupancy. Nearly 60% of the businesses have stated that their revenues have declined by 25% or more since the pandemic struck. Approximately 75% of these establishments rent the space that they are utilizing.

The business survey conducted for this project showed that there is a desire to improve the condition of storefronts located within the district. Most buildings do not have awnings, outdoor display areas, or windows that meet the LRRP transparency standards.

Action Item

The project will improve the public's perception of the Railroad Square/Main Street Business District as a thriving and vibrant area in which to do business. This initiative highlights the town's commitment to economic revitalization and growth, and will support local small businesses that dominate the area and attract new business to the area. It also has the potential to increase property values and contribute to the restoration and preservation of historic buildings.

Key actions for the project include identifying interested building owners, seeking the needed funding for the program, establishing eligibility criteria, creating the program guidelines and application, establishing review criteria, and formulating a mechanism to ensure the improvements to properties are maintained for a given period of time in order to protect the town's financial investment.



Process

- Identify an appropriate entity to oversee and manage the program
- Establish design guidelines for facades in the district
- Establish eligibility criteria and determine funding source and whether assistance to business will be in the form of a grant or loan. Some communities elect to forgive loans after a certain period of time.
- Develop legal agreement language protecting the town's investment so that property owners are required to maintain any improvements for a specified period of time.
- Develop program guidelines and application, making sure that evaluation and selection criteria are clear.
- Train staff on the program and process.
- Advertise the launch of the program, outlining the eligibility criteria, application process and schedule.
- Host a meeting with interested property owners and businesses to provide an overview of the program and field questions from interested entities.
- Accept applications, review submittals and make award decisions based on the criteria for the program and availability of funding.
- Announce awards and notify property owners and businesses
- Execute signed agreements with awardees.
- Inspect improvements upon completion of work.
- Monitor the property to ensure that improvements are maintained per the signed agreement.





Best Practice

Developing a Façade Improvement Program



Developing a Façade Improvement Program

Origin	Innes Associates Ltd.
Budget	 Low (less than \$50,000)  Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term (1-5 years)
Risk	 Medium
Cost	<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.

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:

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

Structure

50% match up to \$5,000

Characteristics

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

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

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

APPLICATION FOR SIGN & FAÇADE PROGRAM

Project:

The purpose of this program is to assist local businesses in improving the appearance of their storefronts and signage. The program is designed to provide a revolving fund to businesses that have been approved by the Town Meeting. The program is designed to provide a revolving fund to businesses that have been approved by the Town Meeting.

Eligible Businesses:

Businesses that are located in the Town of Ashland, Massachusetts, and are engaged in a business that is open to the public. The program is designed to provide a revolving fund to businesses that have been approved by the Town Meeting.

The program is designed to provide a revolving fund to businesses that have been approved by the Town Meeting. The program is designed to provide a revolving fund to businesses that have been approved by the Town Meeting.

A number of other requirements must be met before the program will be approved.

- Green building improvements (e.g. energy efficient lighting)
- Accessibility
- Signage (e.g. awnings, signs, etc.)
- Landscaping
- Planters
- Exterior lighting
- Exterior painting
- Exterior cleaning
- Exterior repairs
- Exterior improvements (e.g. new awnings, etc.)

PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Name:

Project Address:

Project Phone:

Project Email:

Project Website:

Project Description:

Project Budget:

Project Status:

Project Contact:

Project Date:

Project Notes:

Project Comments:

Project Attachments:

Project Photos:

Project Documents:

Project History:

Project Settings:

Project Permissions:

Project Audit:

Project Logs:

Project Reports:

Project Tools:

Project Help:

Project About:

Project Contact:

Project Support:

Project Feedback:

Project Privacy:

Project Terms:

Project Disclaimer:

Project License:

Project Copyright:

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Courtesy of the Town of Ashland

Example 2: Storefront Improvement Program

Cambridge, Massachusetts

City Contact

Christina DiLisio

Project Manager

cdilisio@cambridgema.gov

Funding by:

Municipal capital funds

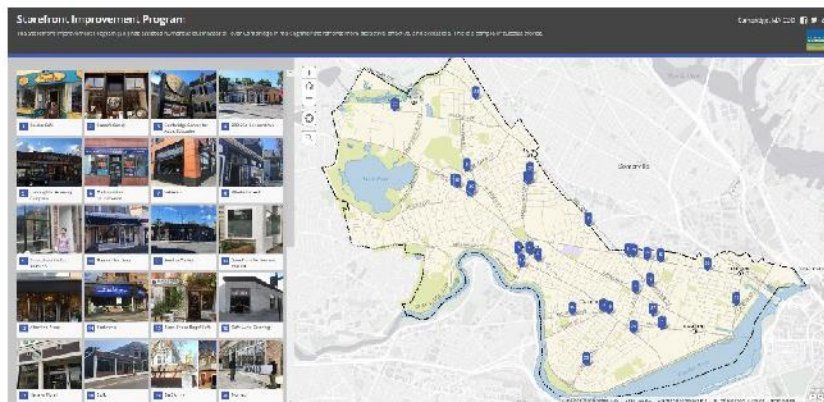
Structure

Tiered matching grants based on improvement type

Characteristics

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

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/economic-development/smallbusinessassistance/smallbusinessprogram/storefront>



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>

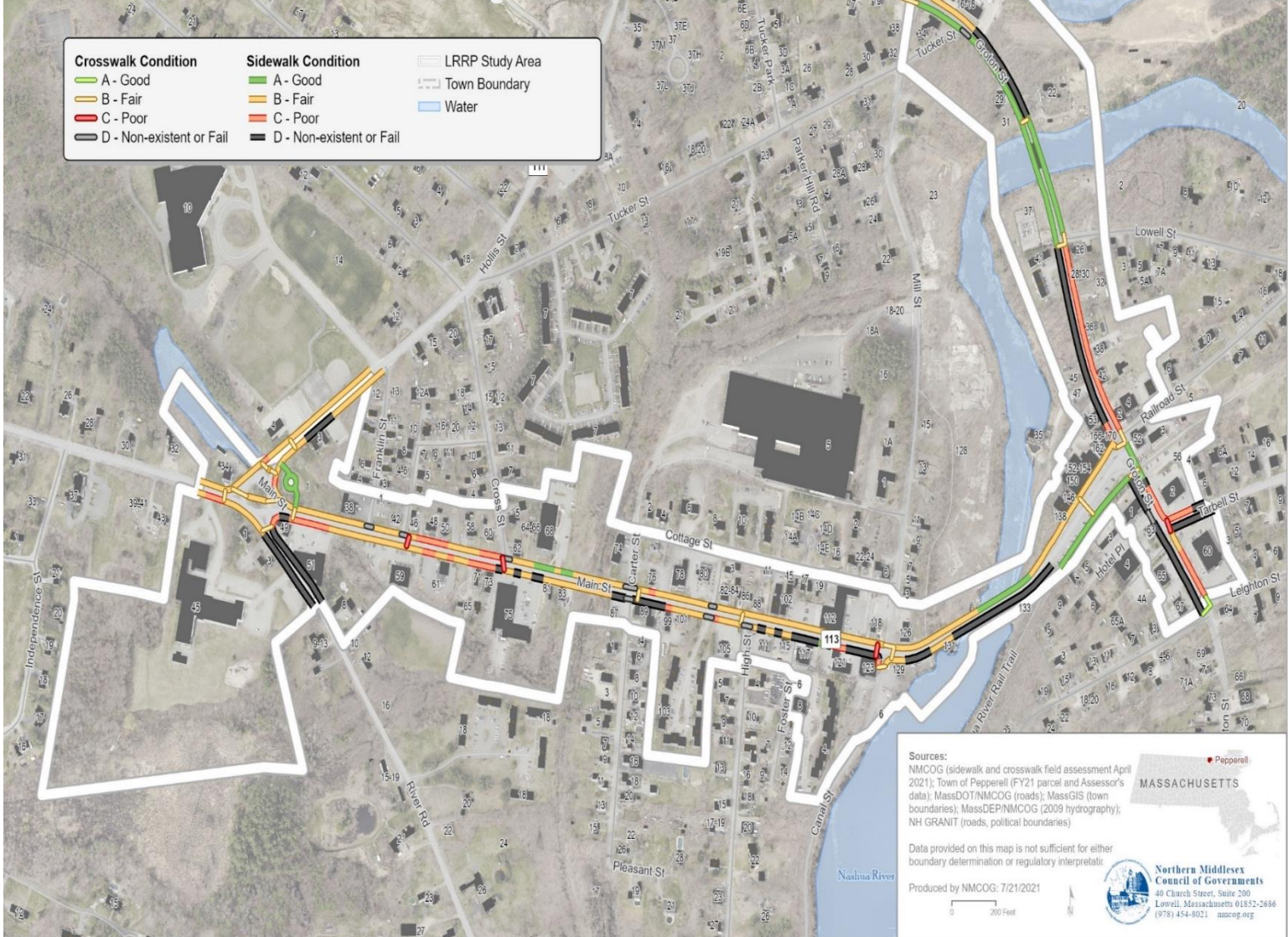
- State-by-state program – in 2016, it was Texas and in 2019, it was Maine.
- This is not a funding source, but an example of a program that could serve as a model for communities with a significant number of historic buildings in their commercial centers.
- The Texas program includes a PDF of before-and-after 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.

Design and construct improvements to the sidewalk network throughout the district

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Railroad Square/Main Street Business District from Groton Street to the junction of Routes 113 and 111
Origin	Town of Pepperell – 2020 Master Plan recommendation and Railroad Square Transportation Study
Budget	 Medium: \$200K
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years): 3 years
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Number of visitors to the district; change in customer and visitor volumes at local business establishments and attractions; number of pedestrians observed in the district
Partners & Resources	<p>Pepperell Select Board and DPW, Economic Development Advisory Committee, NMCOG, Friends of the Nashua River Rail Trail</p> <p>Potential funding sources include the MassDOT Complete Streets Program, Safe Routes to School program, and the MPO TIP process (if part of a larger construction project)</p>



Pepperell Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) Sidewalk and Crosswalk Conditions April 2021



MAP 2: Sidewalk Network and Condition

Diagnostic

There are 75 storefronts located within the business district, of which 9 are currently vacant. Most businesses in this area are microenterprises with five or less employees, and the recent business survey showed that virtually every business has been impacted by COVID-19, with 83% reporting a decline in revenue and 75% reducing operating hours or occupancy. Nearly 60% of the businesses have stated that their revenues have declined by 25% or more since the pandemic struck. Approximately 75% of these establishments rent the space that they are utilizing.

Data collection activities have shown that over 1,000 people utilize the Nashua River Rail Trail in Pepperell on a typical Saturday. The trail passes through the heart of the business district. There are opportunities to better connect businesses in district and improve pedestrian safety through an enhanced sidewalk network. Traffic count data shows that nearly 10,000 vehicles per day utilize Main Street and Groton Street within the business district. There are some gaps in the sidewalk network and segments that are in poor condition. The network is not entirely ADA compliant and there are crosswalks that need painting. Creating an enhanced sidewalk network was identified as a priority through the business survey.

Action Item

NMCOG performed a traffic study of the Railroad Square Business District in 2015 and made the following recommendations:

- Enhance street furniture, such as benches and bike racks, around the trail and near the Groton Street covered bridge to accommodate walkers and bicyclists;
- Add an informational kiosk and wayfinding signage to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist awareness of local destinations and events;
- Add bicycle racks, improve crosswalks, add parking bump-outs, and make general streetscape improvements;
- Design and construct all sidewalk facilities to meet ADA standards;
- Modify the Nashua River Rail Trail crosswalk at Groton Street to include in-roadway lighting to alert motorists to the presence of trail users preparing to cross.

These recommendations remain valid and the field work performed for the LRRP project has confirmed that the improvements are still needed.



Process

- Undertake a detailed inventory and analysis of sidewalk conditions throughout the district
- Develop a sidewalk improvement plan to address segments with poor pavement conditions and/or lack of ADA compliance, and work to close gaps in the network
- Consider using sidewalk paving materials other than asphalt in Railroad Square, such as brick or concrete, to create a more distinctive character for the area
- Take into consideration the desire to utilize sidewalks for outdoor dining or display of merchandise when determining appropriate sidewalk width
- Resolve any right-of-way or ownership/management issues that might impede completion of the project
- Complete the conceptual design process and initiate permitting.
- Submit an application to the Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program for project implementation funding. Alternatively, sidewalk improvements could be included within a larger construction project through the MPO's TIP process.
- Complete final design for the project.
- Secure all need easements and right-of way needed for construction
- Finalize all needed permits
- Initiate contractor procurement
- Award construction contract
- Begin construction









Best Practice

City of Concord, NH Pedestrian Master Plan



Category	 Public
Location	Concord, New Hampshire
Origin	The Plan supplements the City's Transportation Chapter of its Master Plan 2030
Budget	 Medium budget: \$100K-\$150K
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years): 1 year for plan preparation and 5 years for implementation.
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Number of pedestrians including customer and visitors to downtown business establishments and attractions; reduction in accidents involving pedestrians
Partners & Resources	<p>Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission prepared the plan under direction of the Pedestrian Subcommittee of the Concord Transportation Advisory Committee and in collaboration with the City of Concord Planning and Engineering Services Divisions.</p> <p>The plan was funded through CNHRPC Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) funding from the NH Department of Transportation.</p>



Diagnostic

Fostering a walkable, livable community is a component of a viable economic development strategy. It can help create a vibrant downtown and draw people to local businesses. Walkable environments take advantage of some of Concord's existing unique opportunities including its historic structures and a economically vibrant Main Street. Concord is a "Complete Streets" community, having adopted a Comprehensive Transportation Policy in 2010 which was then updated in 2015.

Sidewalks in downtown locations including on and around Main Street and Village Street in Penacook offer amenities such as outdoor seating, planters, street art, and other street furniture. Best practices call for a 6 or more foot clear zone in busy downtown areas with a minimum of 4 feet. A typical sidewalk cross section may include a distinct furniture zone, a clear pedestrian through zone, and a storefront zone. These width requirements are now being reconsidered to accommodate outdoor dining and sales in order to address the impacts of COVID.

Action Item

- Establish project goals and outline the process for plan development.
- Secure the needed resources and seek technical assistance from either a consultant or the regional planning agency.
- Ensure that an inclusive public process is utilized in the development of the plan by seeking input from local officials, downtown businesses, residents, and workers.
- The Final Plan should include an implementation strategy and timeline that considers the time required for design, permitting, any needed right-of-way acquisition and construction.





Note the furniture zone, through zone, and storefront zone

Process

- Secure funding resources and contract with a consultant or the regional planning agency
- Form a project working group comprised of municipal staff, local officials and interested stakeholders
- Hold a project kick-off meeting to discuss the project scope and schedule and outline goals
- Conduct a public meeting to introduce the project to residents and local business interests
- Develop and issue a written and online survey for residents, businesses and workers
- Hold a public visioning session to identify pedestrian issues and needs within the downtown
- Formulate recommendations based on input received
- Hold a public meeting to review draft recommendations
- Prepare Draft Pedestrian Plan
- Present the draft plan to local officials and the public
- Prepare final plan document and post to the municipal website



Undertake a Parking Management Study to assess current parking needs and utilization, and to better manage the existing parking supply within the district

Category	<div>  <div>Public Realm</div> </div>
Location	Railroad Square/Main Street Business District from Groton Street to the junction of Routes 113 and 111
Origin	Town of Pepperell
Budget	<div>  <div>Low: \$50K</div> </div>
Timeframe	<div>  <div>Short Term (<5 years): 18 months</div> </div>
Risk	<div>  <div>Low Risk</div> </div>
Key Performance Indicators	Number of visitors to the district; change in customer and visitor volumes at local business establishments and attractions
Partners & Resources	<p>Pepperell Select Board and DPW, Economic Development Advisory Committee, NMCOG, local businesses</p> <p>Potential funding sources include District Local Technical Assistance, Mass Downtown Initiative, and UPWP funding through NMCOG</p>



Downtown concept with an island that providing pedestrian refuge from traffic

Diagnostic

There are 75 storefronts located within the business district, of which 9 are currently vacant. Most businesses in this area are microenterprises with five or less employees, and the recent business survey showed that virtually every business has been impacted by COVID-19, with 83% reporting a decline in revenue and 75% reducing operating hours or occupancy.

Public parking in Railroad Square is primarily located on the east- and westbound sides of Main Street, and at the rail trail parking area east of Groton Street. The entire study area includes 1,030 off-street and on-street parking spaces located on both public and private property. The majority of the public parking within the Square is comprised of head-in, sixty-degree, angled on-street parking stalls. Main Street westbound has 32 parking spaces with two spaces dedicated for drivers with handicapped plates or placards. Ten (10) of the 32 spaces are 90-degree parking stalls. Main Street eastbound has approximately 36 parking stalls, none of which are designated for individuals with disabilities. Site visits conducted on weekdays showed that the majority of the street parking is utilized, especially during the afternoon and early evening hours, although it was never observed to be completely full. Weekend site visits did show an increase in the number of people using the parking on Main Street and an increase in a number of people parking on Main Street to access the rail trail.

A small privately-owned parking area is located behind the businesses on Main Street and is used for deliveries and employee parking for certain businesses. The driveway to this parking lot is located between 162 and 164 Main Street. The private parking area is gravel and does not have marked spaces, however, it is estimated to accommodate approximately thirty six (36) vehicles.

The Nashua River Rail Trail runs through Railroad Square parallel to Main Street. Counts taken on trail found that 1,000 users were observed from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM on a Saturday. The trail and its associated 30-vehicle parking area is owned and managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, and is generally underutilized. Data collection activities have shown that over 1,000 people utilize the Nashua River Rail Trail in Pepperell on a typical Saturday. Business owners have indicated the trail users often park in public parking spaces intended for customers.

Action Item

A parking assessment and management plan is needed examining parking supply and demand, parking utilization, and the turnover of parking spaces. Strategies for better managing the supply are to be developed and recommendations should meet the needs of businesses, residents and visitors. The draft management plan should be presented to the residents and business in the community, and comments should be considered and addressed in the final management plan document.



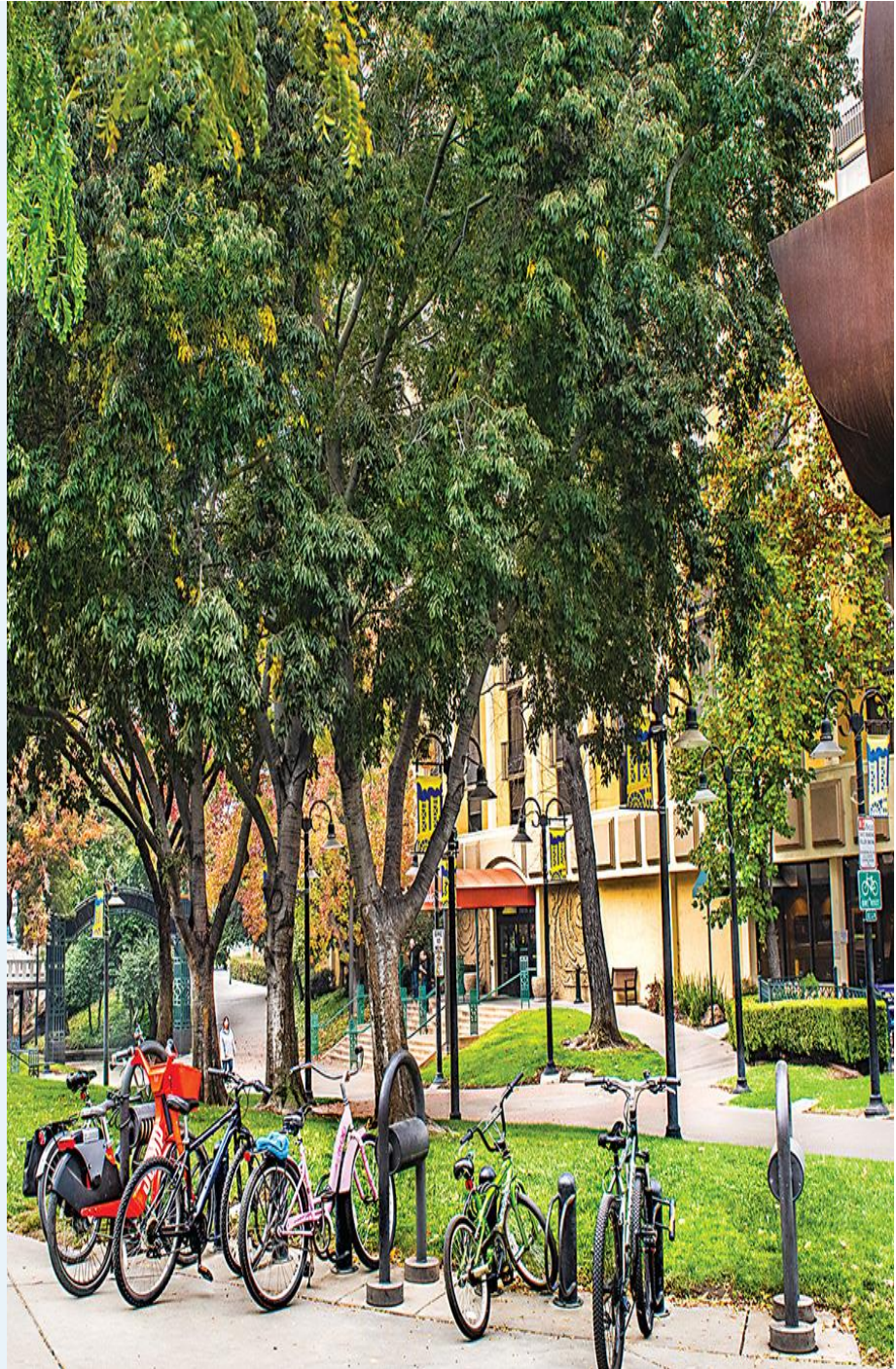
Angle parking in Railroad Square



DCR Rail Trail Parking Lot

Process

- Secure funding for consultant services/technical assistance
- Contract with selected consultant
- Analyze existing conditions: inventory and map parking supply, analyze parking demand
- Examine turnover and parking utilization under weekday and weekend conditions
- Inventory bicycle parking assets in the study area and identify additional locations for adding capacity
- Undertake an online survey of businesses, customers and visitors on parking issues
- Examine the parking requirements contained in the town's zoning and development regulations and outline any needed changes
- Develop potential management strategies for further analysis
- Formulate recommendations for better managing existing parking supply and identify any deficiencies in the current supply
- Prepare Draft Parking Management Plan
- Present the draft plan to local officials, residents and businesses for review and comment
- Respond to comments received and prepare final plan
- Seek funding to implement the recommendations contained in the Plan



Bicycle parking in Downtown Seattle



Downtown Woburn Parking Management Plan

City of Woburn, Massachusetts

Best Practice

Developing Parking Management Plans



Category	 Public Realm
Location	Downtown Woburn, MA
Origin	Woburn Planning Board and Redevelopment Authority
Budget	 Medium budget: \$100K
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years): 1 year
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Number of customers and visitors frequenting the downtown area, sale volumes for local businesses, and parking space availability for business patrons
Partners & Resources	<p>Police Department, Public Works staff, Engineering and Planning Departments, downtown businesses</p> <p>The plan was funded through a DHCD Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Grant.</p>



Diagnostic

The City of Woburn recognized that the accessibility of Woburn Square played an important role in its economic future. Woburn Square is located at the intersection of several major traffic arteries and is served by bus routes which provide convenient access to various destinations. Perceived or actual parking constraints were believed to be limiting customers and visitors to the area. Merchants and employees appeared to be utilizing the on-street parking closest to their business. Business owners also felt that many of the spaces were being taken by commuters. As a result, drivers found it difficult to find parking in order to patronize restaurants and other businesses during the day. There was also concern about displacing commuters to residential streets in surrounding neighborhoods.

Action Item

Develop a parking management plan that addresses optimization, pricing and parking rules and regulations. The plan recommendations should focus on on-street and off-street parking areas, examine signage directing motorists to appropriate locations and ensure safe pedestrian access to the parking areas. An implementation plan is needed that addresses cost, timeframes and a monitoring plan. The management plan should consider the town's desire to encourage investment in the downtown, produce additional residential units, and enhance its business climate. An appropriate balance of well-managed parking can preserve the character and attractiveness of the downtown while ensuring convenient and efficient access that promotes commercial growth.



Process

- Secure funding resources and contract with a consultant
- Form a project working group comprised of municipal staff, local officials, businesses and interested stakeholders
- Hold a project kick-off meeting to discuss the project scope and schedule and outline goals
- Conduct a public meeting to introduce the project to residents and local business interests
- Outline boundaries of the study area
- Inventory parking supply and analyze utilization and turnover
- Analyze existing parking management practices and regulations
- Develop and issue a written and online survey for residents, businesses, workers and commuters
- Hold a public visioning session to identify parking issues and needs within the downtown
- Formulate recommendations based on input received
- Hold a public meeting to review draft recommendations
- Prepare Draft Parking Management Plan
- Present the draft plan to local officials and the public
- Prepare final plan document and post to the municipal website
- Take appropriate steps to implement any regulatory changes necessary per the recommendations



Appendix

Wayfinding Plan Guide

Mobility SME Toolkit



Table of Contents

- Why Develop a Wayfinding Plan?
- Key Components of a Wayfinding Plan?
- Tips for Successful Outcomes
- Best Practice Wayfinding Strategies



Why Develop a Wayfinding Plan?

Wayfinding in any municipality is complex and often exhibits evolution of different approaches/solutions layered over one another over time. This means that signage is often inconsistent, both in design and placement.

A comprehensive wayfinding plan considers both signage design and placement. A wayfinding package not only helps people get where they want to go, but in doing so supports economic development and creates community identity.

Wayfinding traditionally focuses on signage, but can also comprise other elements that help orient people such as roadway markings, street light fixtures, street furnishings (trash, furniture, fixtures, equipment, landscape), handrails transit stops, roadway markings, printed maps, and lighting.

It is important to note that there are three types of signage. A typical wayfinding plan focuses on #1, 2 and 3 (to right). Often identification designs (#1) are already existing and/or controlled by another party.



Tip

There are many types of wayfinding signage. A typical Wayfinding Plan should focus on Informational and Directional signage as outlined below.

Signage Types:

1. **Identification** (circulation such as streets and trails, or facility such as garages, transit stops, and restrooms).

2. **Informational** (directory, banners)

3. **Directional** (vehicular, pedestrian, temporary/movable)

4. **Placemaking** (icons/landmarks, thematic repetition i.e. banners - optional)

5. **Promotional** (advertising, sponsorship, events)

Included in
municipal
wayfinding
plan

Key Components of a Wayfinding Plan



Discovery and Design Brief

- Fact-finding meeting
- Identification of locations for signage to direct to (destinations)
- Familiarization with the site
- Target budget for infrastructure
- Audience, information hierarchy, etc.
- Applicable code requirements



Bid Consultation

- Identify recommended fabricators
- Support for municipality through bid process



Schematic Design

- Draft design direction drawings
- Preliminary drawings for major sign types
- Preliminary location identification
- Design work session



Signage Artwork

- Prepare specific, unique art/icons/symbols/logos
- Prepare templates for sign types
- Fabricator does layout for all signs



Design Development

- More detailed drawings ("50% complete")
- Messages
- Location plans
- Review with fabricators to compare to initial budget
- Compliance with design guidelines (local & state)



Fabrication / Installation Observation

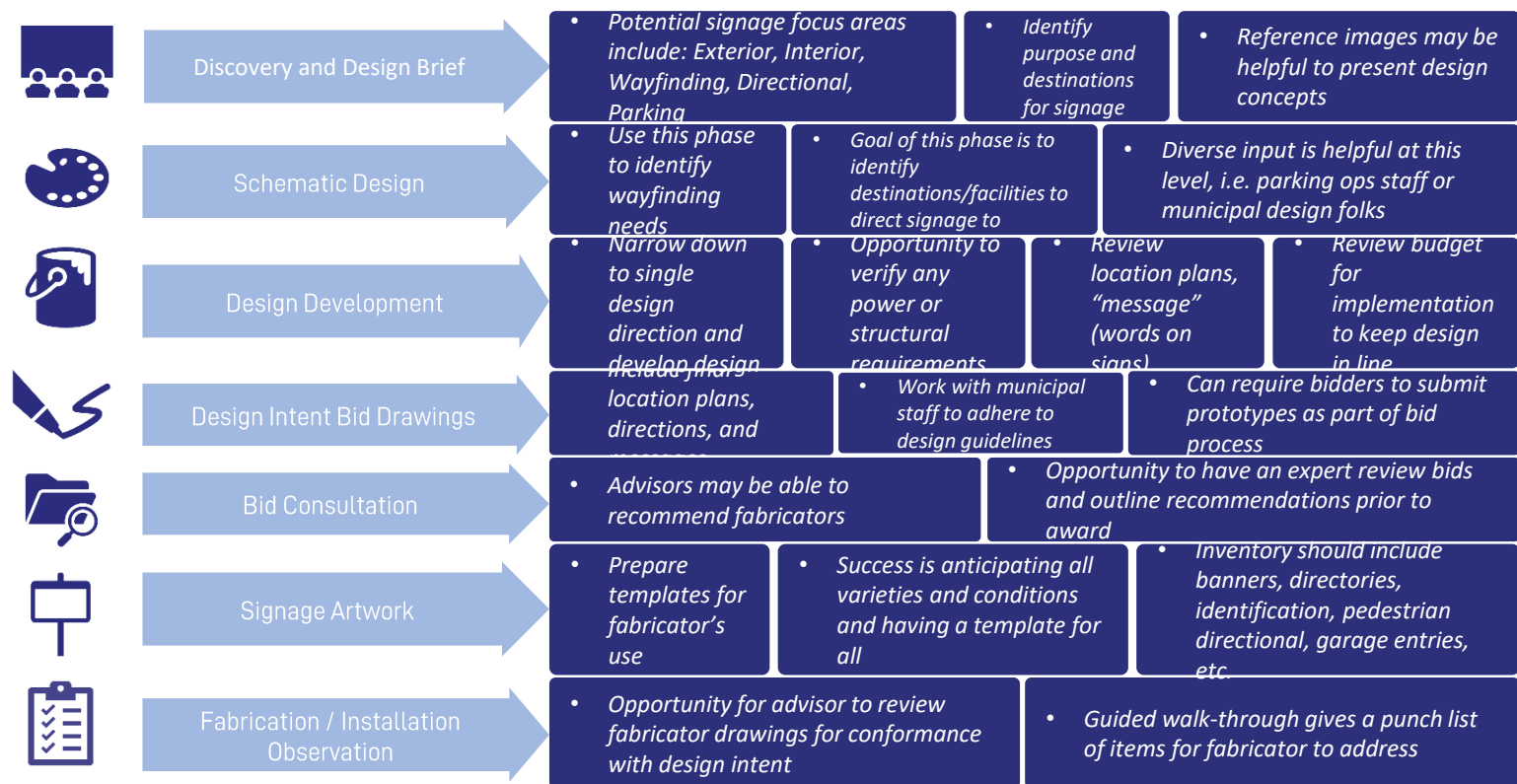
- Review shop drawings
- Review fabricator details
- Walk-through of installation



Design Intent Bid Drawings

- Design intent drawings ("100% complete")
- Develop signage bid document
- Incorporate local codes, including ADA guidelines
- Coordinate with state agencies to confirm compliance and potential sign locations

Wayfinding Plan Tips for Successful Outcomes



Sign Inventory: Identification



MA Rail Trail: Trail Signage

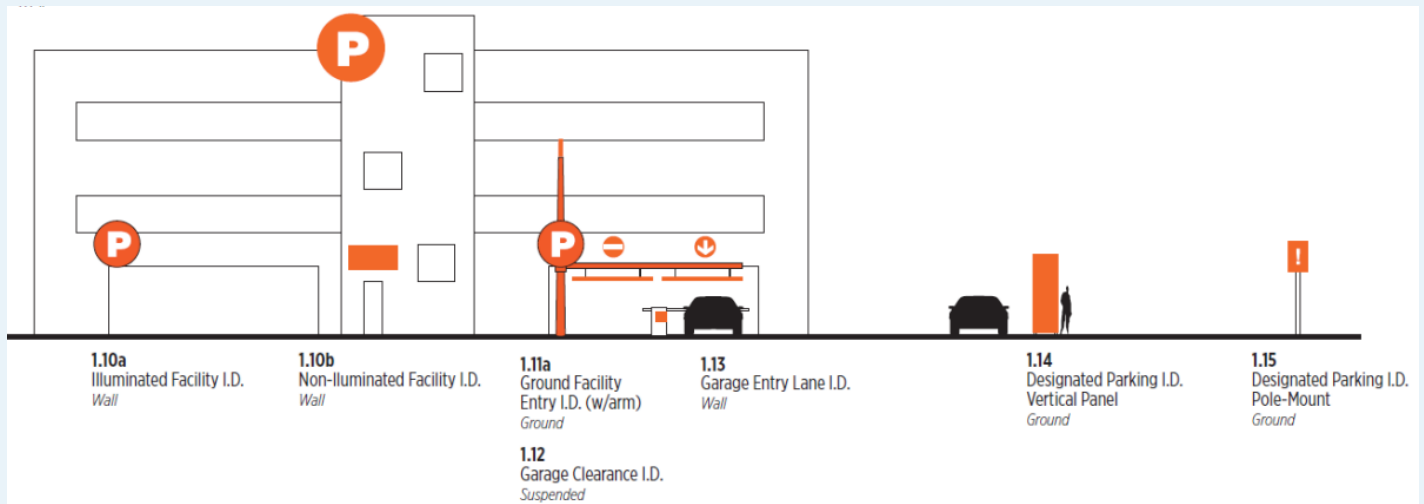


Shuttle Service: Shuttle Stop Signage at Alewife Station, MA



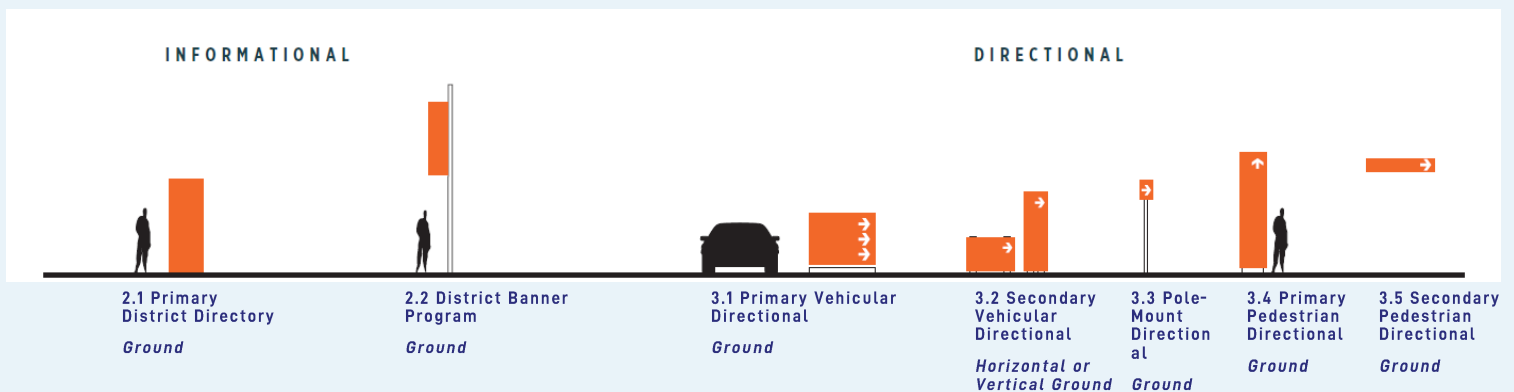
MBTA: Commuter Rail Station

Sign Inventory: Identification



Parking Facility Identification: Garage Wayfinding Design Plan (Identification)

Sign Inventory: Informational and Directional



2. Informational		
Project Directory	Primary, neighborhood, district (other neighborhoods)	Freestanding, wall-mount. Interactive/Dynamic
Facility Informational	Rules/Rates/ Information	Overhead, wall-mount, tabletop. Interactive/Dynamic
Entry Door Information	Vinyl application, typ.	Hours of Operation, services, destinations
Life Safety	Wall-mount, Pole-mount,	Max Occupancy, In Case of Fiire, Evacuation Plans, Stairwell Info, Fire Lane, Prohibitive Messages (No Skating..)
IRD Stanchion Upgrade		
Temporary/Moveable Informational		Sandwich signs, events, seasonal
Misc. Informational		
3. Directional		
Vehicular Directional	Primary, Secondary	"Windshield View", scaled for fast/slow speeds, many messages/single message
Pedestrian Directional	Primary, Secondary	Overhead for crowded conditions, eye level as required, many messages/single message
Temporary/Moveable Directional		As required

Best Practices: Parking Wayfinding



Pittsfield, MA – Integrated

- Blue "P" is universally understood
- Overall wayfinding scheme includes parking
- Ped-level signage helps you **return to your car** as well as find a place to park



Beverly, MA – Signage for Zones

- Signage matches pricing zone
- Actual price not on sign (easy to change)
- More info: <https://www.parkbeverly.com/visitors>



Hanover, NH & Beverly, MA – Short- and Long-Term Guidance

- Wayfinding includes options for short and long-term
- Intercept people before they get to the heart of Downtown

Best Practices: Pedestrian Wayfinding



South Boston – Walking Times

- Pedestrian-oriented signage providing key destinations, direction, and walking time
- More info: <https://www.boston.gov/news/new-pedestrian-wayfinding-signs-coming-south-boston-waterfront>



Minneapolis – Directional

- Directional signage with visual iconography & directional arrows
- Includes multiple languages for accessibility



Kendall Square, Cambridge – Destination Map

- Easily readable map highlighting major destinations, public facilities, and transit stations
- Provides context on walking distances, street layout, and identification of signage for orientation

Best Practices: Unique Wayfinding Signage



Adelaide, Australia- Bicycle Wayfinding

- Bicycle-oriented signage located on bikeway facilities, with destination distances and icons
- More info: <https://www.studiobinocular.com/projects/adelaide-city-cycle-wayfinding/>



Lakewood Gulch – Directional

- Multi-lingual directional painted directional "signage" on walkways
- More info: <https://westcolfaxbid.org/portfolio/candy-cane-lane/>



Rochester, NY

- Pedestrian and directional signage that provides QR codes, icons directing to key destinations, and walking/biking times