



# Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Town of Princeton

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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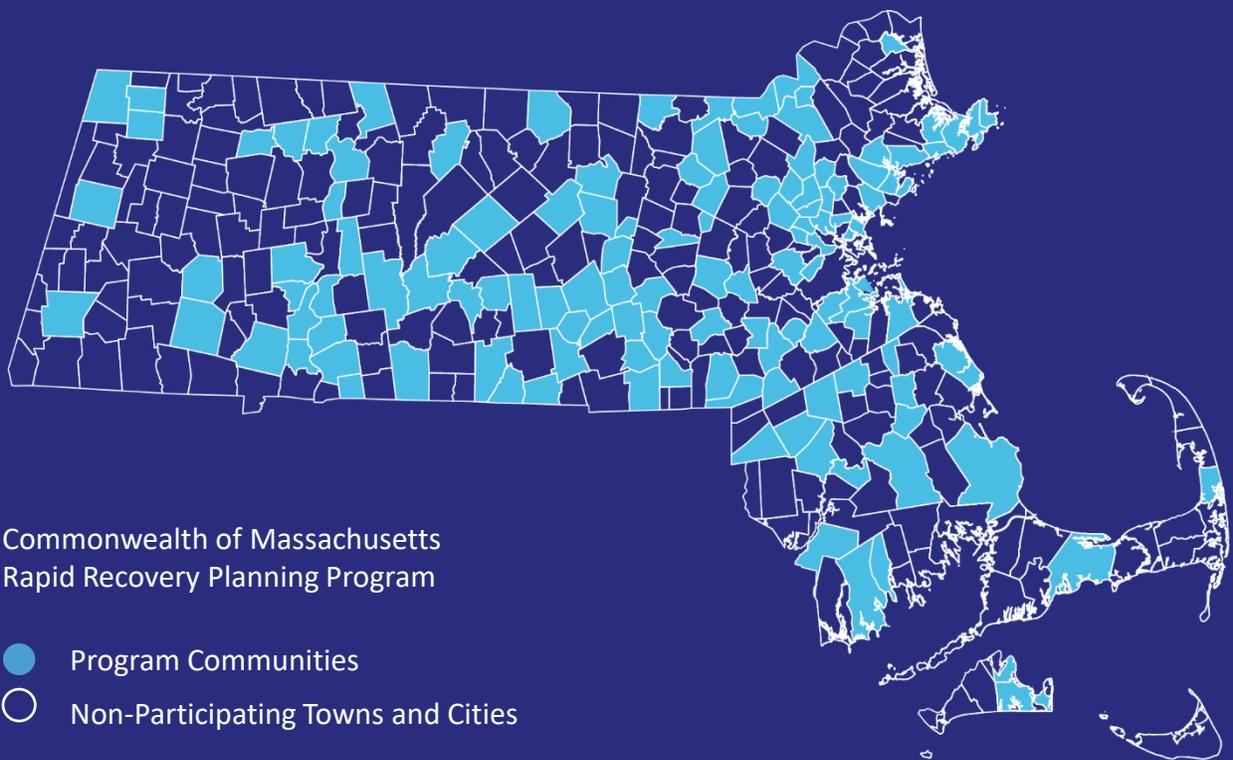
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## 125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



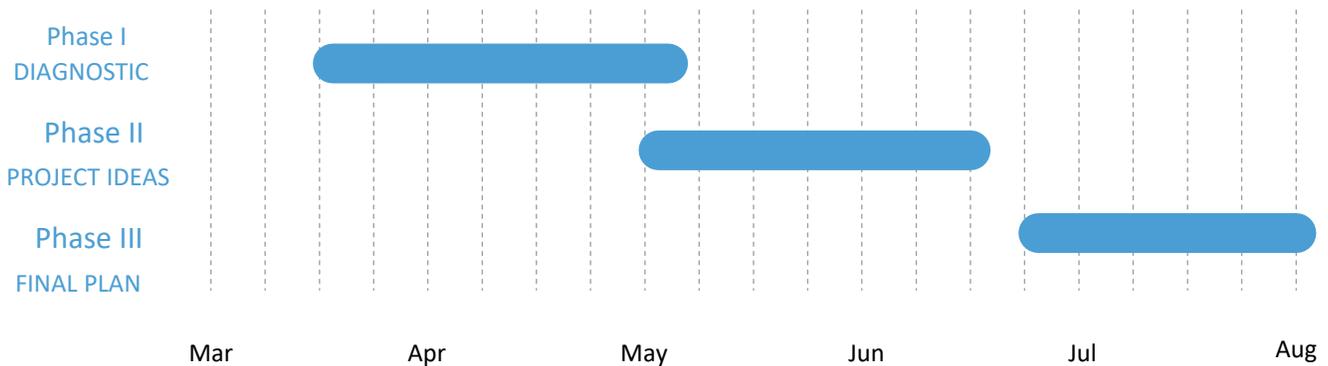
# Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

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

## Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue/Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

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# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary



## Building a Better, More Resilient Princeton

Since onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Town of Princeton has been working with businesses and community members on pandemic recovery strategies. In spring of 2021, the Town redoubled its efforts through participation in a statewide “Rapid Recovery Program” intended to help preserve and revitalize Massachusetts downtowns and commercial business areas. Aided by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC - Plan Facilitator) and other state and regional entities, the Town collected data to demonstrate the impacts of COVID-19 on downtown commercial activity; surveyed business owners and residents about their needs and priorities; and developed short, medium, and long-term recommendations based on community consensus and expert feedback. The findings and recommendations are included herein as the *Town of Princeton Rapid Recovery Plan*.

Princeton residents, business owners, and local government have been working together to help mitigate economic fallout from COVID-19. The *Town of Princeton Rapid Recovery Plan* builds on countless dialogues and measures to more formally quantify needs, establish community supported strategies, and help the town make the case for external project funding. The Planning Team (CMRPC and the Town) have developed a set of strategies for supporting business recovery in Princeton’s primary commercial area: the Route 31/ Worcester Road corridor. While this initiative focuses its attention on businesses within this target area, many of the strategies are applicable to businesses regardless of location. Similarly, the initiative prioritizes short-term projects. Accordingly, the project team focused in on projects that could be immediately implemented and were low-cost or free to implement. That said, medium and long-term projects and higher cost projects are included as well. Project identification followed a process prescribed by the Rapid Recovery Plan program, beginning with a diagnostic.

## DIAGNOSTIC PHASE

Phase I of the Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) process focused on diagnosing existing conditions in the target area. During Phase I, CMRPC gathered and reviewed information to identify findings and inform eventual project recommendations. The diagnostic phase was crucial for fully examining the current situation in the study area to allow for the development of prudent project recommendations. In order to accomplish this, CMRPC and other participating team members collected and analyzed a variety of data from sources such as the U.S. Census, CoStar, Esri Business Analyst, and a local business survey. Additionally, the CMRPC Drone Team conducted aerial photography of the Route 31/ Worcester Road Corridor, which aided in visual analysis.

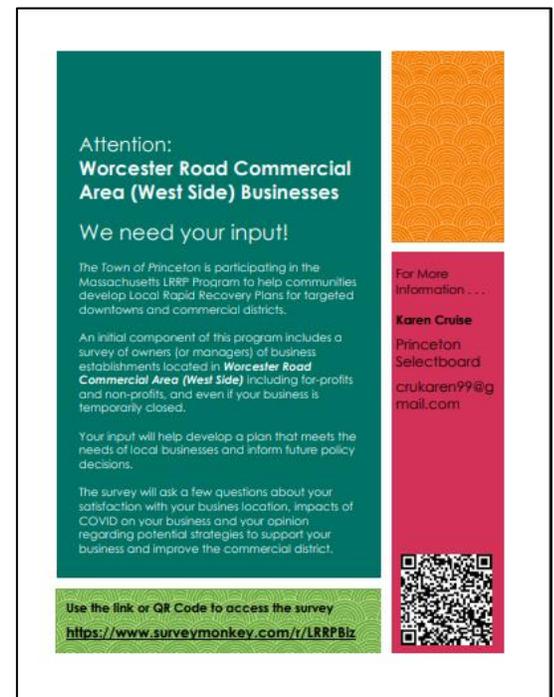
## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

During the Phase I (diagnostic phase), the RRP team developed a local business survey to collect information and input from local business owners. The local business survey covered several topics to better understand the existing business conditions in the study area. Some of the topics included questions about how COVID-19 has impacted respondents' businesses, questions about storefronts and facades, and respondents' opinions about potential strategies to support businesses in the study area.

A total of 14 surveys were received. Of the businesses surveyed, 93% reported being impacted by COVID-19 in some way (e.g., decline in revenue, employee layoffs, incurred expenses to implement safety measures). Furthermore, 57% of the surveyed business owners reported experiencing a loss of income. For 36% of businesses, revenue declined by more than 36%. A more detailed overview of the business survey results can be found in the Diagnostic Section, and the full business survey results can be found in Appendix A.

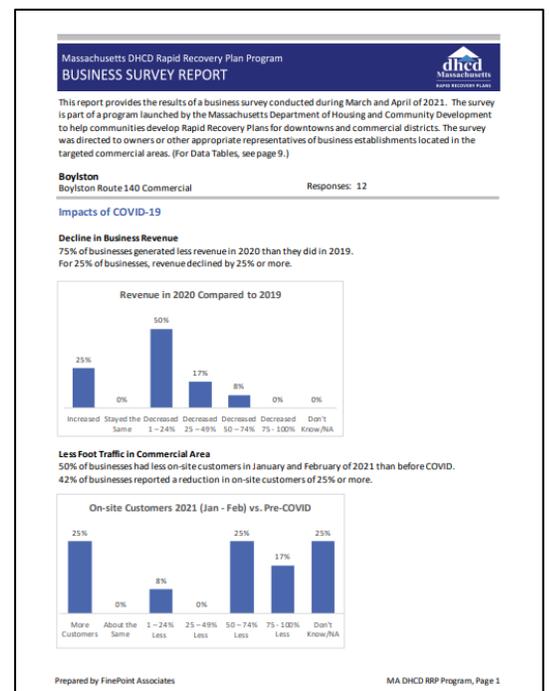
Additionally, CMRPC staff conducted stakeholder interviews with several business owners in the Route 31/ Worcester Road Corridor. The feedback, insight, and details gathered from these interviews were invaluable in providing perspective on the challenges business owners were facing and in formulating project recommendations.

Figure 1. RRP Outreach Flyer



Outreach for RRP Survey

Figure 2. RRP Business Survey Results



Princeton's Business Survey Report

## COMPLEMENTARY PLANNING EFFORTS

The Town of Princeton has undertaken several other planning efforts that inform and complement the themes present in this LRRP plan. Some of the major accomplishments over the last 20 years include: Princeton Master Plan (2007), Village Center District Project (2012), Hazard Mitigation Plan (2016), and Open Space and Recreation Plan (2020). The Town was designated as a Green Community in April of 2021 and completed a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) report the same year.

Elements of these prior planning efforts will supplement and inform some of the goals and strategies that are central to this RRP plan. Likewise, the findings and recommendations contained herein will be reflected in long-range plans such as the upcoming Princeton Master Plan update.

**Figure 3. Screenshots of prior planning efforts**



*Some previous planning efforts, including Princeton's 2020 Open Space and Recreation Plan and the 2012 Village District Project.*

## PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Worcester Road area lacks connectivity, making it a difficult place for residents and business alike. By building an identity for the area through placemaking and supportive strategies, Worcester Road could become more appealing to residents and visitors. Connecting existing businesses to outdoor gathering places such as trails and active and passive recreation spots, and improving multi-modal infrastructure, will encourage people to stay in the Worcester Road area once they've arrived. Getting visitors out of their cars and onto new shared-use lane and bike paths will encourage business growth and help restore the lost customer base. This Plan outlines a series of action steps to help Worcester Road businesses recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The following page contains project recommendations that have been carefully developed to help the Town advance such goals.

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## Project Recommendations

### **Project 1. Encourage formation of a business or merchants association**

Spearhead development of a business or merchants association to complement the Town's capacity to implement economic development projects, including those included in the RRP plan.

### **Project 2. Shared-use lane and bike path**

Pilot project to encourage multi-modal activity, calm traffic speeds, and improve safety in the target area. Using paint, vertical flex posts, and other temporary installations, establish separated shared-use Worcester Road, connected to bicycle lane loop on Jillian Drive/ Stagecoach Road. Reconfiguration and reduction of access points to commercial plaza will serve as supporting strategy.

### **Project 3. Placemaking through aesthetic enhancements**

Landscaping and other low-cost aesthetic improvements in support of comprehensive placemaking efforts. Reconfiguration and reduction of vehicle access points to 194 Worcester Road Plaza. General landscaping, defining gateways, visual and physical barriers, string lights and picnic tables between select buildings, improvements to signage and wayfinding.

### **Project 4. Placemaking through programming**

Hold reoccurring and pop-up events in target area to help brand the area as a destination, attract patrons, and complement physical placemaking activities.

### **Project 5. Permitting Guidebook**

A Permitting Guidebook will help prospective developers and business owners navigate the permitting process more easily and with fewer questions to staff and boards. The Town can design a guidebook that is user-friendly, either in a guided online question and answer format, or standard written document.

### **Project 6. Façade Improvement Program**

Establish a façade improvement program to incentivize investment in building exteriors and landscaping.

### **Project 7. Enhance municipal business development capacity**

Ensure municipal processes, procedures, and policies are conducive to economic development. Establish a single municipal point of contact to shepherd developers and prospective business owners through development processes; fine-tune municipal processes and procedures to streamline permitting; and ensuring regulations are supportive of desirable economic development.

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# Diagnostic

## Study Area Overview

The Town of Princeton is a Central Massachusetts gem. Its natural character, tremendous views, and outdoor assets make it unique within the region. Yet, the Town's unspoiled beauty presents some challenges for development. For years, the town has worked to balance necessary economic development with preservation. Concentrating development is a key strategy employed by the town; for several decades this strategy has focused on Route 31/ Worcester Road.

Accordingly, the Princeton Rapid Recovery Program focused its efforts on this area, too. The municipal planning team identified a segment of Route 31 /Worcester Road (West Side), as the business area most in need of economic planning and intervention. The Study Area can be seen in the map below. It extends for two miles from the Princeton Common to just north of intersection with Stagecoach Road.

The target area is home to an interesting mix of residences and businesses, including the Post Office, a deli, vintage market, recording studio, and other eateries and consumer-facing enterprises. These businesses, along with those outside the target area, have faced significant challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure 4. Map of the Study Area: Worcester Road, Princeton, Massachusetts**

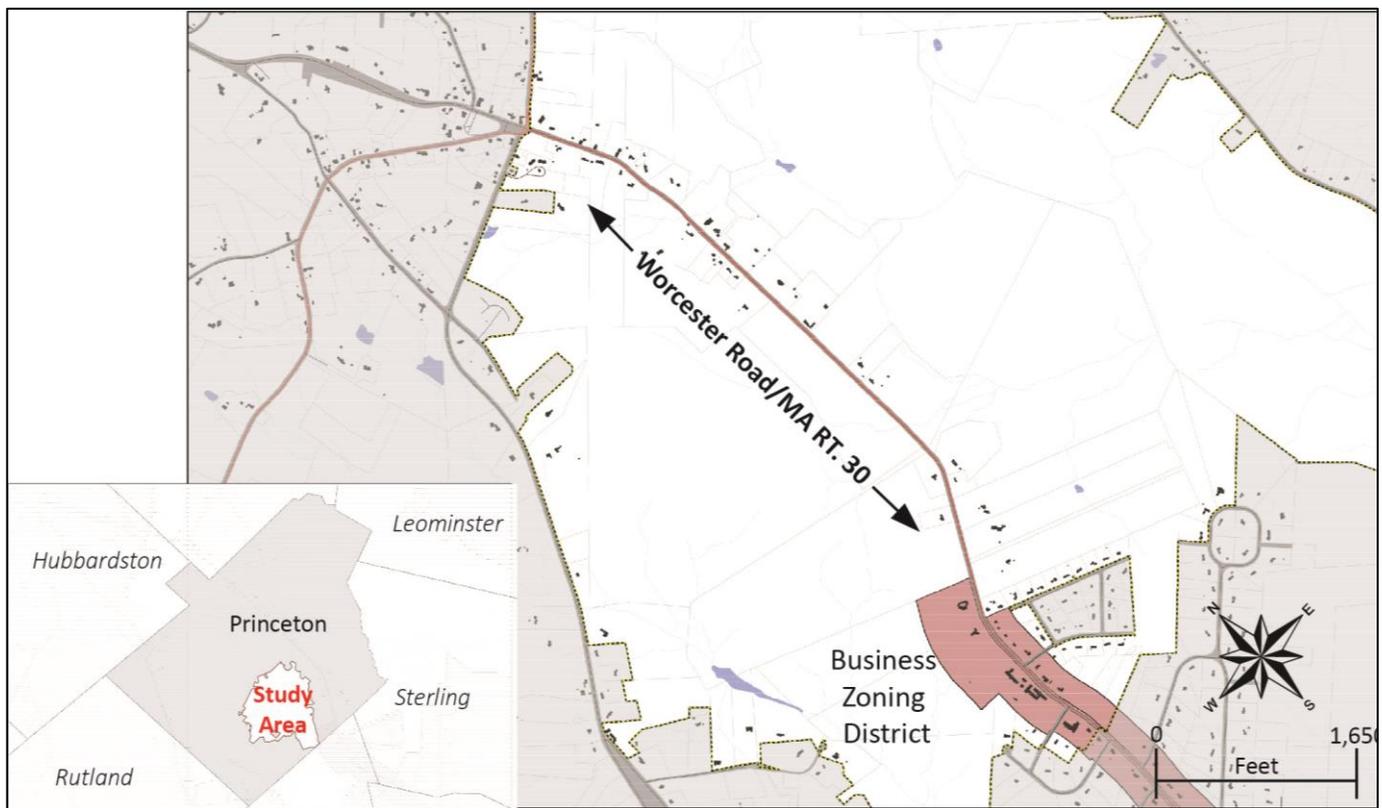


Figure 4 provides an overview of the study area.

**Figure 5. Aerial of Study Area: Worcester Road, Princeton, Massachusetts**



*Figure 5 provides an aerial overview of the study area.*

## Vision for the Area

The study area is consistent with Princeton’s Village Overlay District, which was established to encourage mixed residential and compatible business uses with a layout and architectural style that is consistent with Princeton’s history and character. It is set back from Worcester Road with internal pedestrian traffic, as an alternative use and pattern of land development. The Village Overlay District was designed to preserve the rural character of Princeton, provide alternative housing, and enhance economic development.

The overlay was intended to encourage the following:

“Smart growth” business development set back from Worcester Road, rather than a sprawl style of development typified by strip malls.

- Mixed residential and compatible business uses in the same structures and on the same parcels so that there will be more businesses within Princeton available to provide goods and services to residents of Princeton.
- Traditional New England village character and land use pattern with mixed residential and compatible business uses.
- Greater density and intensity of use than are otherwise allowed under the Zoning By-Laws.
- Development consistent with Princeton’s Colonial and Nineteenth Century architectural styles.

The following sections explore the degree to which such a vision is being realized. This “diagnostic” examines the physical environment, business environment, and administrative capacity using the Commercial DNA framework established by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC).

## Worcester Road

An assessment of the physical environment in the target area reveals many opportunities to improve these town services. The study area consists of commercial and residential buildings dispersed along a two-lane highway. There are no sidewalks connecting commercial properties, and few public streetlights. Large parking lots separate businesses from the roadway. Worcester Road caters to customers with private cars and lacks amenities for pedestrians. Some areas also lack signage or features like outdoor seating, which might otherwise draw-in new customers.

**Figure 6. Worcester Road pedestrian infrastructure (1)**



Figure 6 depicts a southern portion of the target area. The lack of and need for sidewalks are underscored by the goat paths (foot paths created through use) shown above.

**Figure 7. Worcester Road pedestrian infrastructure (2)**



Photo of Worcester Road near the Hunt and Gather Building, demonstrating the limited pedestrian infrastructure and lack of wayfinding or other signage.

**Table 1. Physical Assessment, Public Realm**

	Study Area
Sidewalk Grade	Fail
Street Trees and Benches Grade	Fail
Lighting Grade	C
Wayfinding and Signage Grade	Fail
Roadbed and Crosswalks Grade	B

Table showing the assessed grade of public features in the Town.

**Table 2. Physical Assessment, Private Realm**

	Study area
Total # of storefronts	18
Total ground floor retail space	18,749
Total ground floor office space	179,497
Total ground floor manufacturing space	147,748
Window grade	A
Outdoor display/ dining grade	B
Signage grade	A
Awning grade	Fail
Facade grade	B
Lighting grade	C

Table showing assessment information for the private realm along Worcester Road.



## Business in Princeton

Princeton has a limited number of businesses. The 18 businesses documented in the study area include retail, food service, and finance/insurance companies, as well as several other industries. Monti Farms and Deli, the Thirsty Lab, the Post Office, Fidelity Bank, and Hunt and Gather Vintage Market are among popular target area businesses. The enterprises in this area primarily cater to town residents; however, a few restaurant and retail businesses such as the Mountain Barn (shuttered as of October 2021) may attract customers from surrounding towns or the broader region.

**Table 3. Physical Assessment, Private Realm**

	Study Area
Total No. of Businesses (Current/2021) – by NAICS categories*	18
Average Asking Rent for Ground Floor Retail Space (Current/2021)	16.20/sf
Average Asking Rent for Ground Floor Office Space (Current/2021)	14.38/sf
Total No. of Vacant Storefronts (Current/2021)	2

Table 3 presents data on the businesses within the study area.

**Figure 8. Monti Farms and Deli**



Figure 8 depicts Monti Farms and Deli, a popular sandwich shop and local institution.

**Figure 9. Hunt and Gather Vintage Market (194 Worcester Road)**



A unique destination in the heart of the target area, Hunt and Gather Vintage Market (194 Worcester Road) attracts visitors from Princeton and beyond. The building houses several other businesses, including Wachusett Recording. Several buildings share a parking lot with the market due to common ownership. 194 Worcester Road and adjacent businesses are a central focus of this study. Various aesthetic and circulation recommendations are outlined in the Project Recommendations section of this report.



## Organizational assets

Princeton currently lacks an existing, viable organization that could act as a steward for the businesses in the study area. There are no local Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Business or Merchants Associations, or Main Street chapters.

Business owners along Worcester Road currently pursue their own interests independently rather than through a local Chamber of Commerce. A business organization of some nature is alluded to in the Town's 2007 Master Plan, which calls for its re-establishment so that area businesses have a way to promote shared interests in matters such as reasonable zoning, adequate infrastructure, collaborative marketing, and other shared initiatives. At the municipal level, the town lacks administrative capacity. Most government functions are the purview of volunteer boards and committees, supported by a small number of professional, often part-time staff who each wear many hats. There is not an Economic Development Coordinator or Town Planner on staff, nor is there an Economic Development Committee or Industrial Development Committee. The Town is home to an active Open Space Committee, various outdoor groups, and the Princeton Arts Society.

**Figure 10. Princeton Arts Society function**



*The Princeton Arts Society is a nonprofit organization that encourages and supports a wide range of artists through exhibits, workshops, performances, and lectures. The organization is one of the more active community organizations with potential capacity to support or take part in implementing RRP of projects. Figure 10 depicts an event sponsored by the organization. Photo credit: Princeton Arts Society Facebook page.*

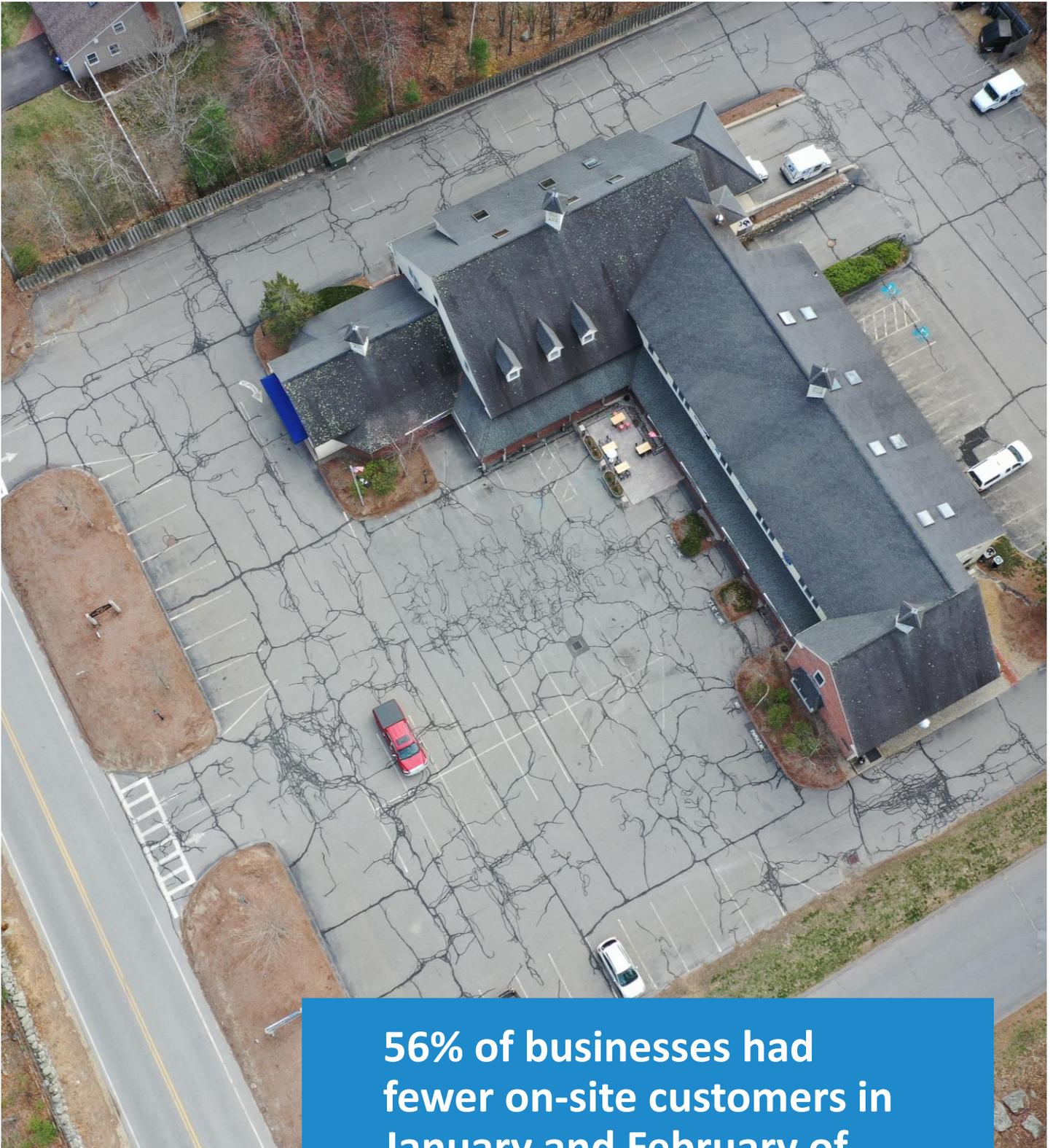
# Business Survey Results

The Planning Team distributed the business survey developed by the RRP Program Administrators and Consultants. Fourteen out of the eighteen businesses in the study area responded to the business survey. Most reported fewer on-site customers in January and February 2021 as compared to pre-COVID.

The below figures depict results of the survey for which there were more pronounced findings. The RRP Projects outlined later in this report are generally aligned with the expressed needs of the Worcester Road business community. Surveyed businesses supported strategies to enhance the public realm like renovating storefronts and improving sidewalks. Other ideas like marketing or changes to zoning were perceived as less necessary; however, the town is missing some best practices around these topics. Accordingly, the plan includes one project focused on this area.

**Figure 11. Business Survey Results**





*Aerial photo of Princeton business surrounded by a large, mostly empty parking lot. The wide parking lot separates the business from Worcester road. This property has a small outdoor dining area, though it also faces the parking lot.*

**56% of businesses had fewer on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID.**



## Market Information

The Town of Princeton is a rural bedroom community of affluent and highly educated residents. Although the resident population is small, local outdoor attractions draw large numbers of tourists to town every year.

Central to the Town’s ecotourism sector is Wachusett Mountain, which offers activities year-round. The Wachusett Mountain Ski Area is a major regional skiing facility. Its hiking trails and music festivals also attract many visitors during the summer. In the fall, it hosts Applefest and the Autumn Wine Celebration, and many activities for children. BluesFest, a weekend festival, draws nationally-acclaimed acts. The Town is also notable for its impressive arts community. Non-profit and private organizations promote the arts in Princeton and foster appreciation of the town’s cultural history. Wachusett Mountain offers educational programs such as “Science on the Slopes.” At the Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary, the Massachusetts Audubon Society also offers various programs, including content around nature and the history of Princeton farming. These visitors help support Princeton businesses.

**Table 4. Princeton demographic data (1)**

2020 Key Demographic Indicators	Town
Total Resident Population (Current/ 2021 estimates)	3,600
Median Household Income (Current/ 2021 estimates)	\$134,510
Median Age (Current/ 2021 estimates)	48.8
Average Household Size (Current/ 2021 estimates)	2.67
Total Workforce/ Employee (2018 or more recent)	2,062
2020 Total Population Age 18+ (Esri)	2,858
2020 Educational Attainment Base (Esri)	2,667
2020 Population Age 25+: Graduate/Professional Degree (Esri)	938
2020 Population Age 25+: Bachelor's Degree (Esri)	816
2020 Population Age 25+: Associate's Degree (Esri)	296
2020 Population Age 25+: Some College/No Degree (Esri)	279
2020 Population Age 25+: High School Diploma (Esri)	266
2020 Population Age 25+: GED/Alternative Credential (Esri)	26
2020 Population Age 25+: 9-12th Grade/No Diploma (Esri)	42
2020 Population Age 25+: Less than 9th Grade (Esri)	4

Table 4 presents demographic information for Princeton residents. The community is largely affluent and well-educated.

**Figure 12. Events at Mount Wachusett draw tourists**



Figure 12 highlights several of the events held annually at Mount Wachusett. Applefest is a local staple. For decades, the event has drawn visitors to Wachusett Mountain. Picture above are the Axe Women Loggers of Maine, a newer Mount Wachusett event. Such events expand the Princeton market by drawing patrons to businesses. Capturing such visitors and encouraging spillover activity at other businesses is important to Princeton economic development.



## Market Information continued

**Figure 13. Hunt and Gather Vintage Market**



Above: Hunt and Gather is one of the newer businesses in the study area. Its vintage market offers retail space for up to 40 vendors, within a large brick building that once housed a museum of antique automobiles.

**Table 5. Princeton demographic data (2)**

Population by Race/Ethnicity (Current/2021 estimates)	Municipality
2020 White Population (Esri)	3,444
2020 Black/African American Population (Esri)	29
2020 American Indian/Alaska Native Population (Esri)	3
2020 Asian Population (Esri)	67
2020 Pacific Islander Population (Esri)	0
2020 Other Race Population (Esri)	2
2020 Population of Two or More Races (Esri)	55
2020 Hispanic Population (Esri)	87

Above: Table of total population by race/ ethnicity in Princeton.

**Table 6. Princeton demographic data (3)**

2020 Total Population	Municipality
Age 0-19 (Esri)	807
Age 20-24 (Esri)	126
Age 25-34 (Esri)	287
Age 35-44 (Esri)	397
Age 45-54 (Esri)	540
Age 55-64 (Esri)	752
Age 65-74 (Esri)	487
Age 75-84 (Esri)	147
Age 85+ (Esri)	57

Above: Table showing the age breakdown in Princeton.

# Key Findings



## Physical Environment

The Worcester Road study area is oriented towards automobile traffic and is poorly suited for pedestrians. The businesses in the study area offer a wide variety of goods and services, but the lack of sidewalks and poor lighting may deter pedestrians from exploring these local shops. While the study area received good diagnostic scores for outdoor dining and building facades, survey respondents felt that these aspects should also be improved to attract customers.



## Transportation

In 2019, a traffic study in Princeton found the average traffic to be 2,184 cars per day, and one local stakeholder reported the traffic on this road to be relatively slow. There is no public transportation along Worcester Road. There also is no bike lane or road shoulder. Private vehicles are clearly the predominant mode of transportation for business customers in this study area.



## Demographics

Demographic data on the residential population within the Worcester Road study area is unknown. However, as the businesses have readily available parking and easy access to a main road, they may draw customers from other areas of Princeton and neighboring towns. Princeton has a relatively high median household income and a high proportion of residents with at least a 4-year college degree. This customer base should have some disposable income available to spend at the shops and restaurants in the study area.



## Business Survey Results

A small majority of businesses along Worcester Road observed a decrease in foot traffic and revenue after the COVID-19 pandemic began. However, 93% of businesses reported that Covid-19 impacted their business in some way. Overall, the businesses who responded to the business survey favored alterations to the physical environment of the study area over marketing strategies or regulatory changes.



## Organizing Body

There is not viable group acting as a steward for this area. Businesses in the area could benefit from a unifying organization, offering resources, support, and an information network. However, businesses who responded to the business survey did not clearly favor "creating a district management entity" as a response to COVID-19 impacts.

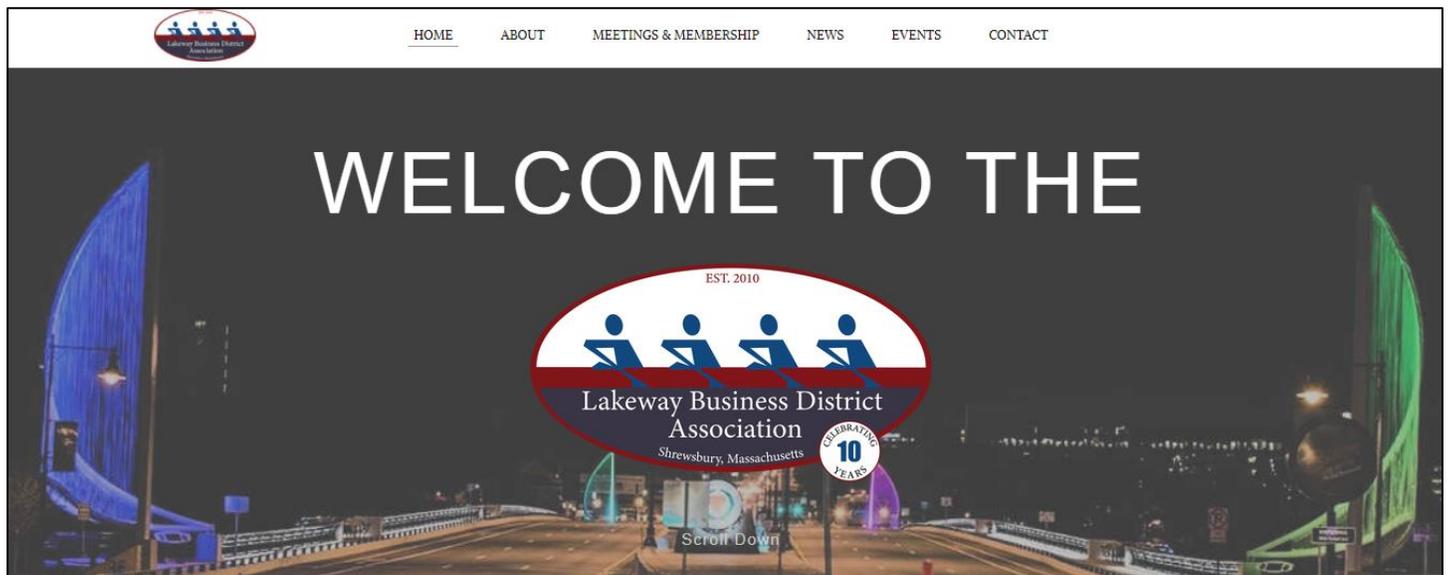
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# Project Recommendations

# Project 1. Establishment of a Princeton Business or Merchants Association

Category	 Public and Private Realm
Location	Town-wide
Origin	Town of Princeton; CMRPC
Budget	 Low budget
Timeframe	 Short Term (<1 year), ongoing
Risk	 Low risk
Key Performance Indicators	Establishment of a Business or Merchants Association that meets regularly; implementation of economic develop projects spearheaded or supported by association; increase in cooperative business activities such as events or joint marketing.
Partners & Resources	Board of Selectmen; other municipal boards, committees, and staff; non-residential property owners; business owners and liaisons (Chamber of Commerce).

**Figure 14. Shrewsbury Lakeway Business District Association website**



*Business associations are an ideal complement to municipal economic development capacity. Such associations serve as intermediaries between individual businesses and local government. They can bring an organized approach that maximizes impacts of marketing, events, and other business activities, as well as advocate for business interests and supplement municipal implementation capacity. Figure 14 depicts the website of Shrewsbury’s Lakeway Business District Association. The organization’s mission is "to create economic growth and prosperity for both new and existing businesses on Route 9 in Shrewsbury, while preserving and enhancing the landscape improvements, from the Burns Bridge to the Oak Street intersection."*

**Diagnostic:**

The Town of Princeton has a strong community identity. Its many festivals, fairs, and volunteer boards suggest an engaged and active residency. Yet, the Town is limited in terms of staff and implementation capacity. Town government is run by volunteer boards and a limited number of professional staff; wearing multiple hats and sitting on multiple committees is status quo. At the government level, little capacity remains for new projects.

Princeton lacks implementation capacity around economic development. The Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen do a tremendous job spearheading economic initiatives (such as RRP), but the Town does not possess many standard resources such as a dedicated economic development staffer (or even a Town Planner), Economic Development Committee, Industrial Development Committee, or Business Association. Without additional resources, the town is limited in its ability to undertake the projects outlined in this plan or elsewhere.

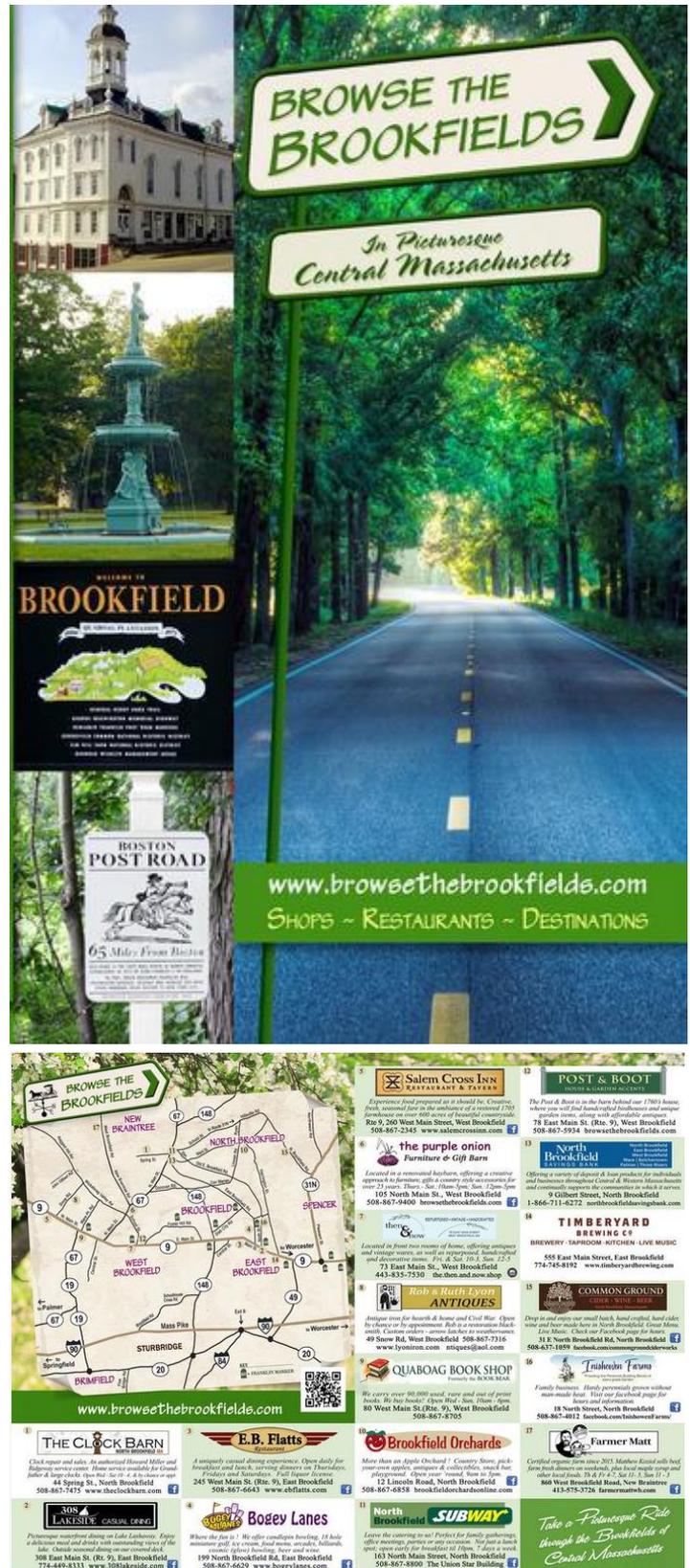
**Action items:**

The Town should help nurture a Princeton Business or Merchants Association, which can foster interest in and support for RRP projects and serve as a connection between municipal government and local businesses. The RRP Diagnostic process revealed momentum around and interest in collaboration among target area businesses. Stakeholder interviews revealed examples of collaborative activities such as music nights involving multiple businesses and shared events at the Thirsty Lab. At least one business owner in the target area indicated a need for coordination and interest in formalizing cooperative activities through a business association. Such an entity appears to have existed at one time, as Princeton’s 2007 Master Plan calls for reestablishment of a business organization.

**Process:**

- A Princeton Business or Merchants Association should be independent from, but have a close working relationship with, local government. As noted in the 2007 Master Plan, “Such efforts are usually most successful if the business association does not depend upon government support.” For the initial stages of implementation, the town can designate a staff or committee member as municipal point person. Once an association is up and running, the role of this point person can be reassessed.
- The municipal point person can begin by engaging with business owners who participated or expressed interest in collaborative business activities (Wachusett Recording, Monti Farms and Deli, the Thirsty Lab, etc.). The initiative requires a champion from the private sector who is willing to spearhead the project, ideally supported by the municipal point person.

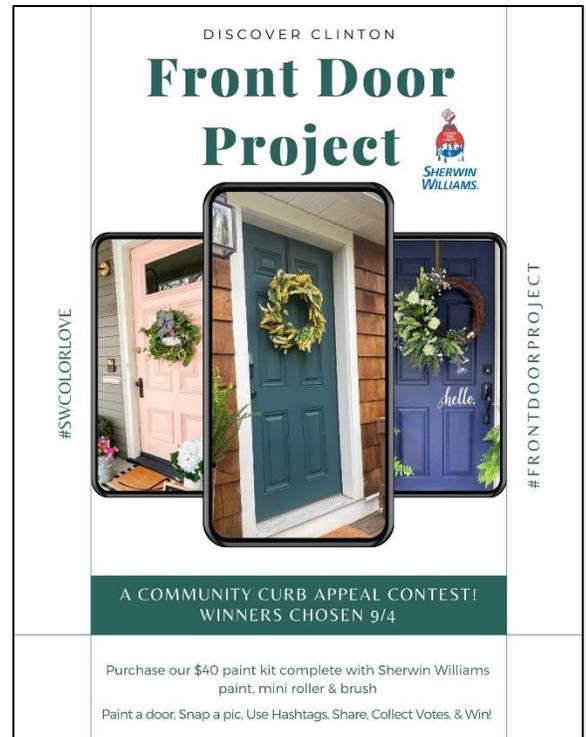
**Figure 15. Browse the Brookfields brochure**



Browse the Brookfields is a group of area businesses whose goal is to promote the history and beauty of the area to encourage tourism. The group includes restaurants, shops, destinations and services. Figures 15 depicts a marketing brochure produced by the organization. It includes a map promoting member businesses.

- The private sector champion should conduct outreach to identify and engage other members in formation of the association. The Town Clerk’s Office can provide a partial list of local businesses; others can be identified through call for members on social media, word of mouth, and other sources. A paid Facebook ad may be an effective way to target business owners.
- In terms of membership and focus, the 2007 Master Plan suggests promoting shared interests in matters such as reasonable zoning, adequate infrastructure, collaborative marketing and other strategic initiatives. RRP projects such as aesthetic improvements (Project 3) and programming (Project 4) would greatly benefit from buy-in of an organized group business owners. Membership should include merchants and property and business owners, with representation from eco-tourism, farming, home occupations, service, non-profit organizations, and other sectors.
- Once prospective members are identified and an association is formalized, a visioning session or series of facilitated discussions (formal or informal) could help get the association up and running. CMRPC or another planning entity can work with the group to help it articulate a vision, goals, and operational standards. Strategy development is aided by review of existing plans and studies, including the RRP, Master Plan and supporting community engagement materials.
- The projects included in this plan are ideally implemented through public/ private collaboration. Depending on the goals identified by the Business or Merchants Association, members can also undertake and support different projects. Common tasks include:
  - Helping the municipality implement aspects of economic development plans
  - Working with the Town Administrator to apply for grants
  - Organizing businesses roundtables
  - Joint marketing and events
  - Building local supply chains
  - Helping local entrepreneurs or aspiring business owners navigate processes and get established

**Figure 16. Discover Clinton promotional materials**



*Discover Clinton is a nonprofit volunteer group committed to taking action, making connections, and providing resources. The organization’s goal is to increase economic growth by promoting the great dining, shopping, arts, culture, and recreation in Clinton.*

**Figure 17. Southbridge Business Partnership**



*The Southbridge Business Partnership is a volunteer group of business owners and stakeholders who seek to enhance economic opportunities for businesses in Southbridge through organization, design, and promotion. Figure 17 showcases the group’s website.*

# Project 2. Shared-use lane and bike path

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Worcester Road (West side); Jillian Drive; Stagecoach Road
Origin	Town of Princeton; CMRPC
Budget	 Low budget: less than \$40,000
Timeframe	 Short Term (<1 year), ongoing
Risk	 Low risk: post-pandemic outlook for outdoor recreation appears strong and pilot intended to be low-cost
Key Performance Indicators	Number of pedestrians and bicyclists using the facilities. Entering and exiting the businesses in the target area from the roadway is safer measured via intercept surveys and through crash data.
Partners & Resources	Highway Department; Complete Streets Commission; Mass DOT Shared Streets and Spaces Program; Mass DOT Complete Streeting Funding Program;

**Figure 18. Aerial, target area**



*The target area has the potential to serve as more than a conventional highway district; however, strategies to increase non-vehicular travel are necessary.*

## Diagnostic:

Worcester Road, also designated as Route 31, runs through Princeton and the roughly 3-mile section between the Holden Town Line and Princeton's town center. The two-way arterial features no on-street parking, sidewalks, or accommodations for pedestrians and cyclists.

As part of MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces program, in 2020 the town used funds to put up jersey barriers and created a temporary shared-use path along 0.8 miles of road. The path was well-utilized but not favored by some nearby residents due to aesthetics. The town would like to build on the 2020 pilot and ongoing Complete Streets process to develop a connected multi-modal loop, as recommended in the Central Massachusetts region-wide bicycle plan and Princeton's Complete Streets Prioritization Plan. This project will differ from the initial pilot by extending geographic boundaries and amending materials to be more aesthetically pleasing than the previous iteration.

Recommended improvements include a shared use path, bike path, and reductions in the width of travel lane to slow vehicles and improve safety.

## Funding Sources:

The MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces program, which funded the original pilot project, is among the most likely funding sources for this retooled project. Should the second iteration of the project prove successful, permanent improvements can be pursued in a phased approach using funding from the MassDOT Complete Streets program. Shared Streets and Complete Streets can be pursued concurrently, as the former can be readily implemented, whereas Complete Streets requires additional preparatory tasks such as completion of assessments and a prioritization plan. Upon completion of these tasks, the town will be eligible for an initial \$400,000 for project implementation.

## Action Items:

- Worcester Road (West side), Post Office Place to Mountain Barn/ Cobb Brook Trails A shared-use, multi-modal lane is well-suited to the road segment due south of Post Office Place through to the area near Mountain Barn restaurant where Jakes Trail and Mountain Barn Spur (part of Cobb Brook Trails) begin, and beyond. The Cobb Brook Trails (see Figure 21) extend the length of the target area, adjacent to Worcester Road, and is an untapped economic resource. The Town can pilot a newly designed shared-use sidewalk/bike path between Post Office Place businesses and the trails by reclaiming a portion of the shoulder/ travel lane. The use of paint and removable vertical flex posts will be more aesthetically pleasing than the original (jersey barrier) iteration.
- Jillian Drive/ Stagecoach Road: In complement, the Town can create a bike path loop that intersects with the Worcester Road shared-use lane. Using paint and removable vertical flex posts, the Town can create a bike path that connects Jillian Drive and Stagecoach Road to Worcester Road (see Figure 22).

Together, these projects will help build out the bicycle, pedestrian, and trail network; improve overall pedestrian and bicyclist safety; encourage slower travel speeds vehicular through reclamation of a portion of the shoulder/ travel lane; and facilitate connectivity between housing, established businesses, and trail users, driving business patronage and visitorship.

## Process:

This project will retest the viability of separated shared-use and bicycle lanes in an extended geographic area, using materials and methods better suited to Princeton's character. The project includes painted lanes and

**Figure 19. Worcester Road area for shared-use lane (1)**



*A shared-use sidewalk/ bike path would help connect businesses in the target area with residents of nearby housing and help define the area as a destination. This could be implemented using paint and vertical flex posts.*

**Figure 20. Worcester Road area for shared use lane (2)**



*To extend multi-modal efforts, the town can extend the shared use lane northward, connecting to the Cobb Brook Trails loop near Mountain Barn.*

vertical flex posts within the buffer area between the vehicular travel lanes. The flex-posts can be installed with anchor cups that allow them to be screwed into the anchors for the spring, summer and fall seasons, and unscrewed during the winter to allow for plowing. Road cones can be substituted for vertical flex posts to reduce costs, although this would impact aesthetics. If the separated shared-use and bicycles lanes prove successful, the Town can pursue phased construction to make such facilities permanent. In support, the Town can monitor and record pedestrian and bicycle volumes along the project corridor and measure vehicle speeds using video cameras. It will need to maintain flex posts, pavement markings, and signage as needed.

**Figure 21. Cobb Brook Trails**

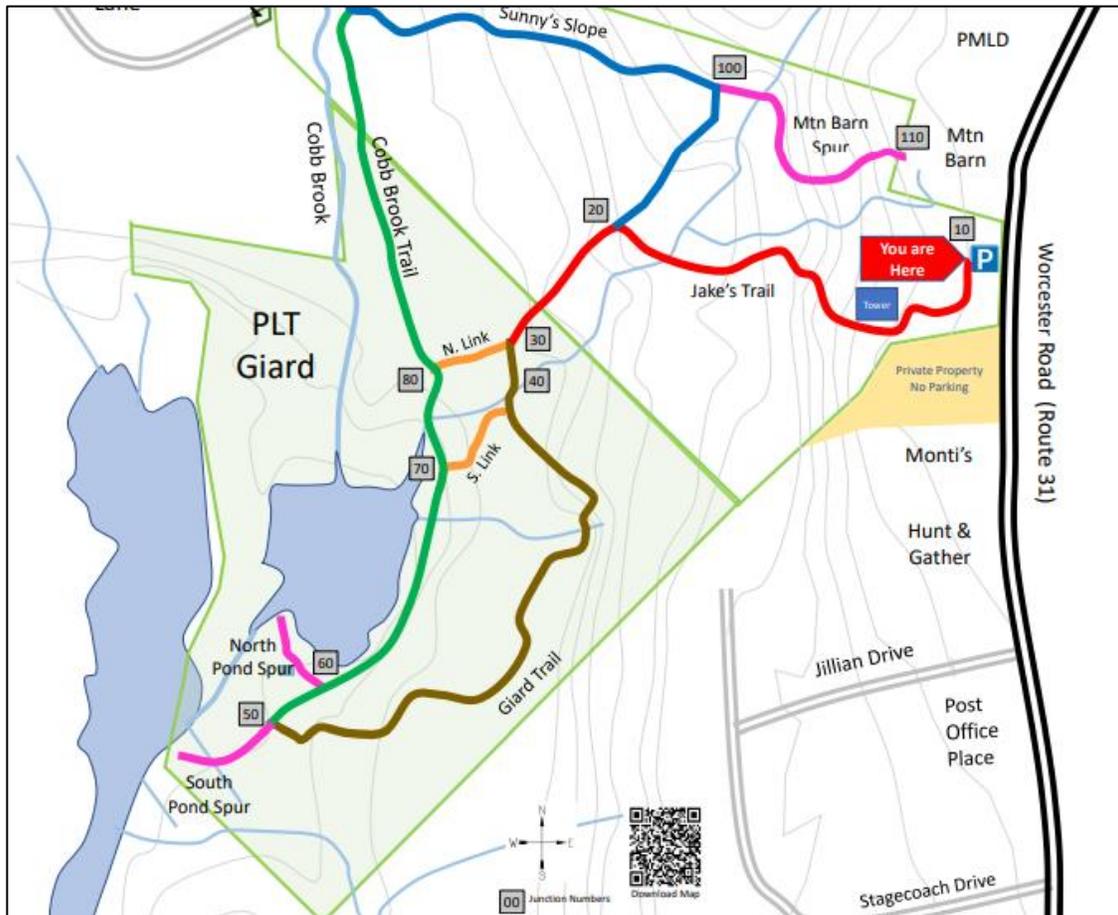


Figure 21 depicts Cobb Brook Trails, which run adjacent to and have trail heads within the target area. Creating connectivity between these trails and the Worcester Road businesses can help drive business patronage.

**Figure 22. Concept map, multi-modal loops**



Figure 23 depicts a multi-modal loop comprised of a shared-use lane beginning at Post Office Place and extending northward through to the entrance of Cobb Brook Trails (and beyond) and bike path loop on Jillian Drive/Stagecoach Road.

## Implementation suggestions

Implementation of the shared-use lane and bicycle path pilot can take a variety of forms. From painted lines, to road cones, to DIY planters (see Appendix B for planter build instructions) and decorative paths, communities are piloting multi-modal lanes in a variety of ways. Examples from Best Practices and elsewhere are illustrated below.

**Figure 23. Separated lane, temporary using cones**



*Photo Source: Dodson & Flinker, Best Practices Public Realm Compendium, Florence, Massachusetts*

**Figure 24. Separated lane, temporary using lines**



*Photo Source: Dodson & Flinker, Best Practices Public Realm Compendium, Florence, Massachusetts*

**Figure 25. Artistic zebra striping (1)**



*Photo Source: CMRPC, Bath Maine placemaking and pedestrian facility improvements.*

**Figure 26. Artistic zebra striping (2)**



*Photo Source: BETA Group, Inc. Project Watchemoket Square/1st Street Pilot Project – Protected Bike Lane Lincoln, RI East Providence, RI*

**Figure 27. Temporary lane, fully painted**



*Photo Source: BETA Group, Inc. Wayland, MA Route 30 Shared Winter Streets and Spaces Separated Bicycle and Shared-Use Lanes Project Lake Cochituate Wayland Natick Town Line Exist. Trail Connections Project Limits N Natick, MA*

# Project 3. Placemaking through aesthetic enhancements

Category	 Public and private Realm
Location	Worcester Road: Post Office Place to Montis / Hunt and Gather
Origin	Town of Princeton; CMRPC
Budget	 Low to medium budget, depending on number of elements implemented and materials used.
Timeframe	 Short Term (<1 year), ongoing
Risk	 Low risk: maintenance issues will be mitigated through use of self-watering planters. Other aesthetic elements will be designed not interfere with line of sight.
Key Performance Indicators	Number of pedestrians and bicyclists using the facilities and reduction of vehicle speeds
Partners & Resources	Highway Department; Planning Board; local landscape companies, local fabricators, local craftspeople and artists to help design and build project; Schools, vocational and arts students; Landlord, tenants; Princeton Art Society, Garden Club, Open space and trails group, Council on Aging.

**Figure 28. Worcester Road street line**



*The target area can serve as more than rural thoroughfare but requires aesthetics enhancements to help brand it as a destination. Improved signage, landscaping, and better definition of potential use opportunities will help attract patrons and visitors.*

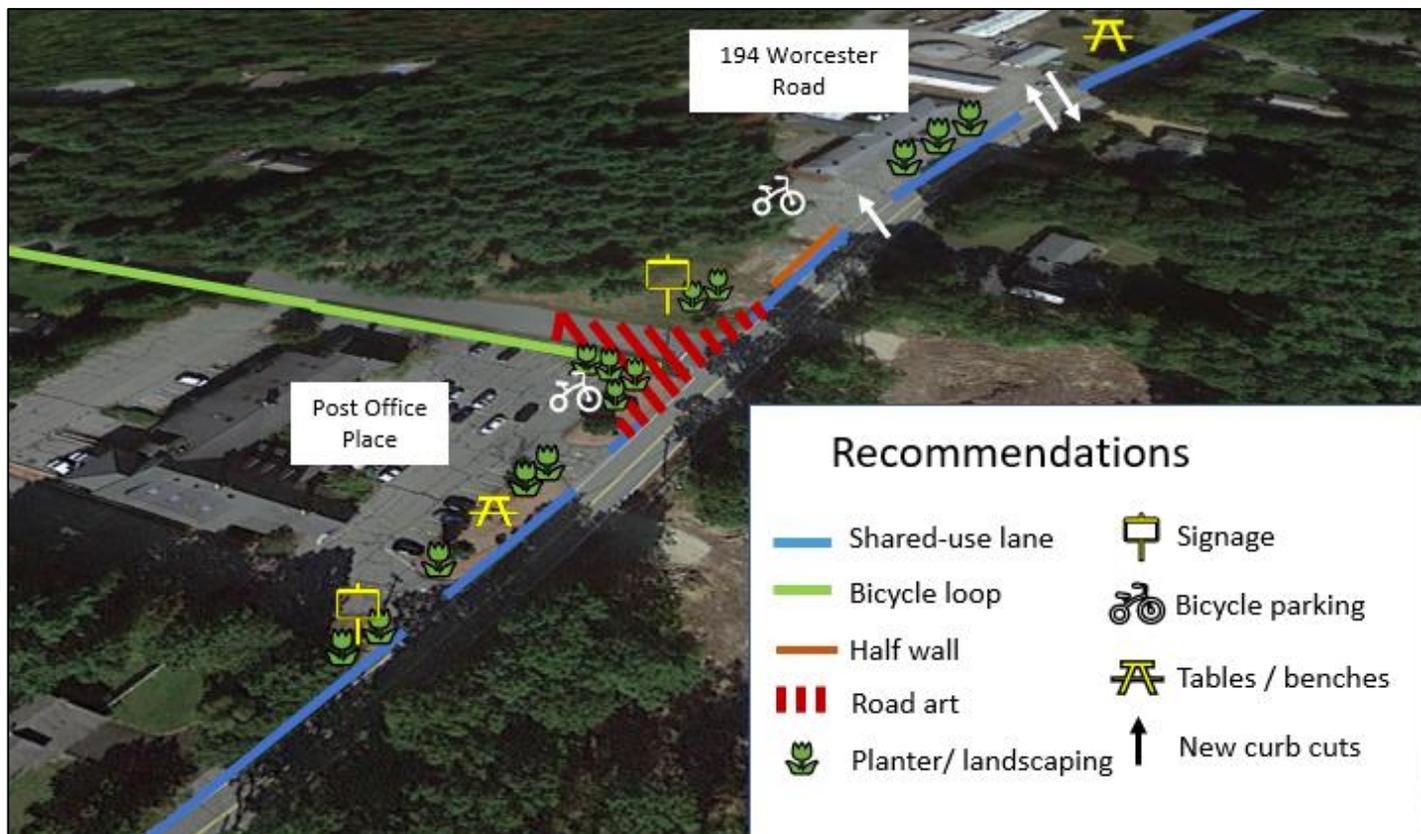
## Diagnostic:

Worcester Road contains an interesting mix of businesses and single-family homes. It possible to walk to many of the area businesses, such as the post office, retail, and eating/drinking establishments. Given this mix of uses, the area has the potential to serve as more than a rural thoroughfare.

Physical and programmatic strategies are recommended to slow traffic, attract patrons to existing businesses, and brand the area as a distinct place. Landscaping and other low-cost aesthetic improvements will contribute to placemaking efforts and have been discussed locally for more than a decade.

In 2012, the Town worked with CMRPC to facilitate a visioning process for a new village district in the Worcester Road area. Overall, residents highly favored the area's mix of uses while valuing the quiet, rural environment. In 2012, Princeton residents indicated they value and hoped to preserve that atmosphere; in 2021, such sentiments were echoed in the RRP process. As identified in RRP diagnostic and Village District report, these elements can be enhanced by the design of the street line, with a focus on landscaping and other elements that affect the perception of those travelling on Worcester Road.

**Figure 29. Overview of recommended aesthetic improvements**



Basic aesthetic improvements will help brand the target area as a destination and attract business patrons and visitors. Complementing the painted shared-use lane and bicycle loop, the Town can use low-cost measures such as painted road art, planters, string lights, and sitting amenities.

**Action Items:**

Landscaping and other low-cost aesthetic improvements are necessary to brand the area as a destination. Strategies include:

- **Defining the gateways of the target area:** In complement to Project 1 (shared-use lane and bicycle loop), the Town can encourage patronage of Worcester Road by defining the area’s gateways. Hanging banners, baskets, or string lights from gooseneck streetlights, self-watering planters (see Appendix B for a DIY guide), painted road art, picnic tables and benches, and other low-cost aesthetic improvements will make the area more inviting to visitors. High visibility areas such as the entryway to Post Office Place, intersection of Jillian Drive and Worcester Road, and 194 Worcester Road represent top priorities (see Figures 29 and 30).
- **Landscaping elements:** Islands between parking lots and roadways and other high visibility areas should be improved through general landscaping. DIY self-watering planters serve as attractive, movable, low-cost options for defining spaces, buffering unflattering views, and encouraging passive recreation (see Appendix B for build instructions). Longer-term, potential improvements can include the installation of brick paver stones instead of

painted or concrete sidewalks, decorative trash receptacles, benches, pedestrian information/location signs, decorative street and traffic signs, uniform property information and address signs, lighting.

- **Access management:** The commercial plaza at 194 Worcester Road lacks curbing or other features articulating egress and ingress. For safety and better definition of space, the Town should work with the property owner to create a plan for access management. Paint and DIY self-watering planters can be used to create a barrier that defines the space and acts as removable curbing. Curb cuts should be limited for driver clarity; a one-way (12 foot maximum) and two-way (24 foot maximum) access point should be sufficient to enable proper flow of traffic. Establishment of visual barriers and landscaping will also improve the aesthetics of the parking lot, which requires maintenance (see Figures 32, 33, and 34).
- **Develop uniform signage and wayfinding to clearly convey information to visitors and encourage exploration:** The target area lacks wayfinding and public realm signage. Adoption and distribution of attractive, branded signage would help further define the target area.

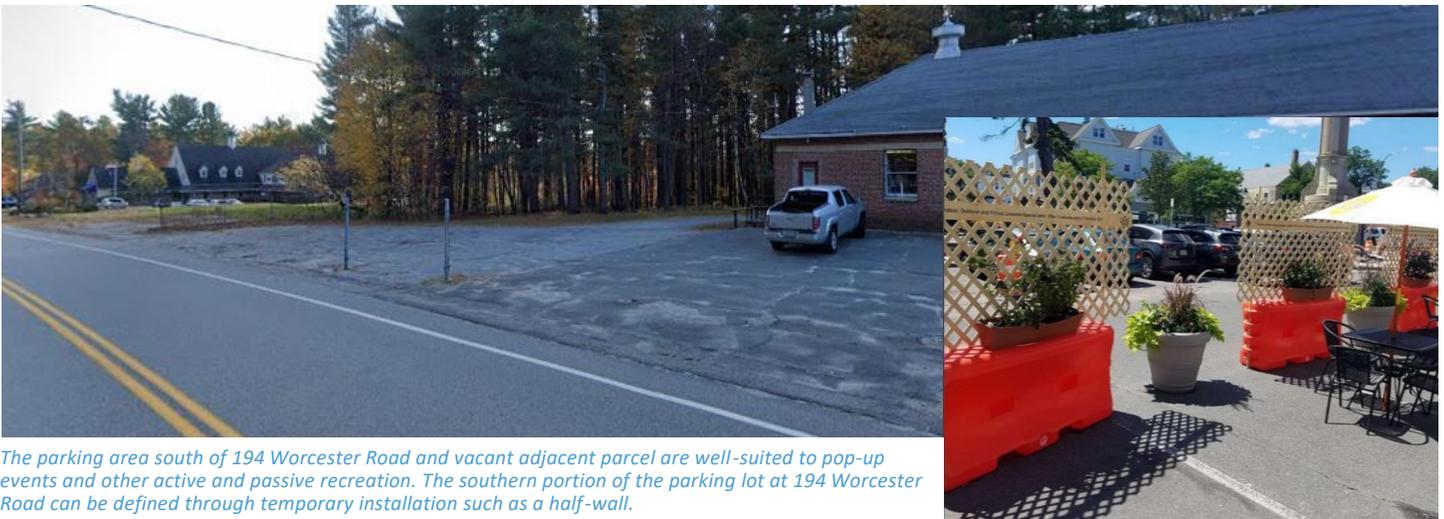
- **Creation of recreation spots in underutilized areas:** Several areas are currently underutilized and could be sites for passive or active/ pop-up recreation. At Post Office Place, tables or benches can easily be installed in the green spaces. At 194 Worcester Road, parking is oversupplied; the lot extends south and abuts a vacant corner parcel. The southern portion of the lot could be refined through installation of a half wall, which would help define the space and provide a sense of protection without compromising vehicle line of site. Basic landscaping, installation of picnic tables and bike racks would encourage use. Local vocational and arts students can be engaged for construction and painting of the half wall (see Figure 31). Similarly, the knoll adjacent to Monti Farms and Deli is suitable for picnic tables, yoga, self-programming, or other passive and active recreation. The Mountain Barn restaurant (shuttered as of October 2021) contains a large field that could be utilized for larger community events. The Town could also make use of the small, privately-owned grove of trees across Stagecoach from Post Office Place; the Senior Center could use more outside space; and sites may be suitable for a pocket park with tables and some activity areas (horseshoes, etc.).

**Figure 30. Intersection of Jillian Drive and Worcester Road and recommended intervention**



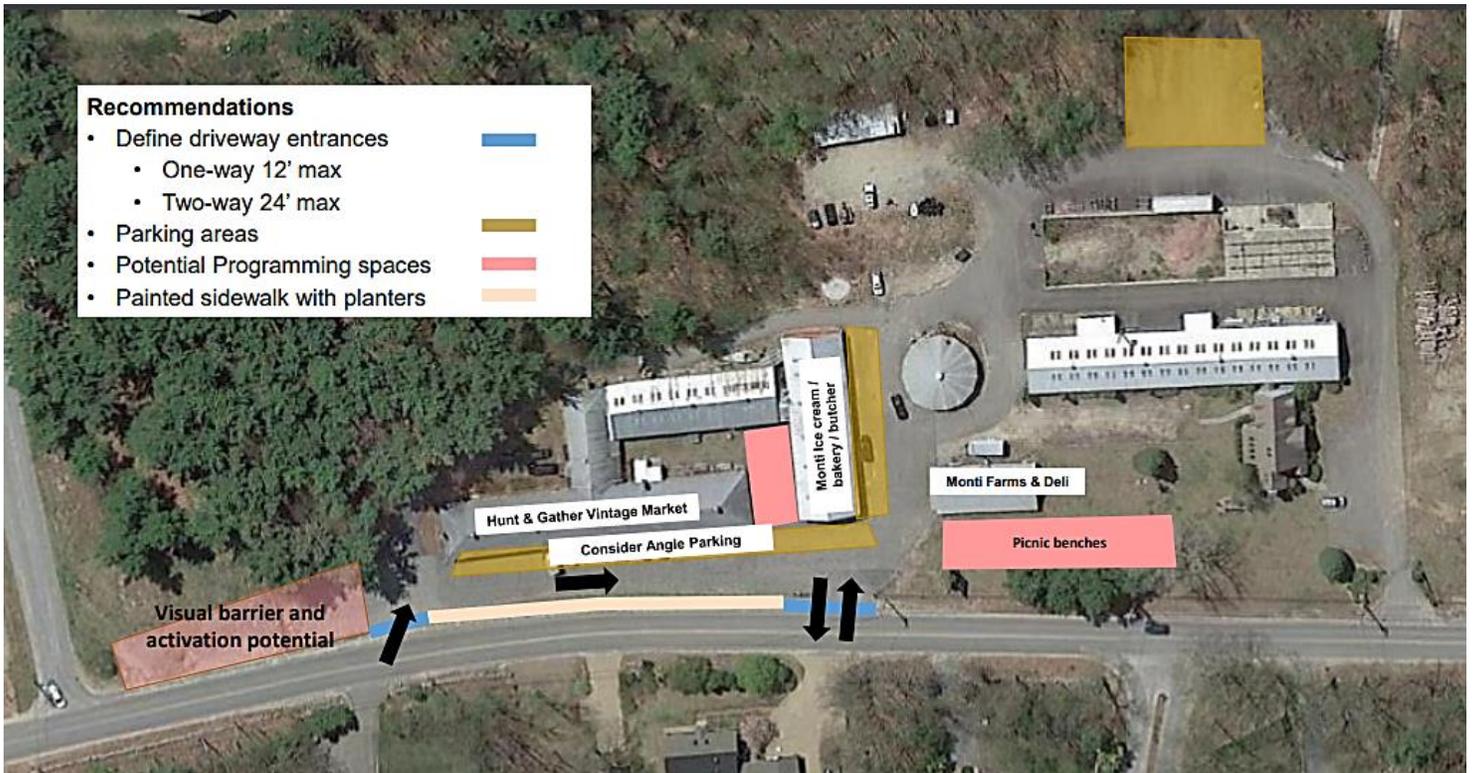
*The intersection of Jillian Drive and Worcester Road can be enhanced to help define the target area gateway. Decorative painted sidewalks can feed into shared-use lane and bike path. The Gove Street Crossing: Pop-up Park + Plaza in East Boston, a project by Civic Space Collaborative, provides inspiration. Paired with other aesthetic improvements, such an installation would help define the target area, encourage walking and biking, and encourage slower vehicular speeds.*

**Figure 31. Potential recreation areas and recommended implementation (2)**



*The parking area south of 194 Worcester Road and vacant adjacent parcel are well-suited to pop-up events and other active and passive recreation. The southern portion of the parking lot at 194 Worcester Road can be defined through temporary installation such as a half-wall.*

**Figure 32. Overview, access management and aesthetic measures at 194 Worcester Road**



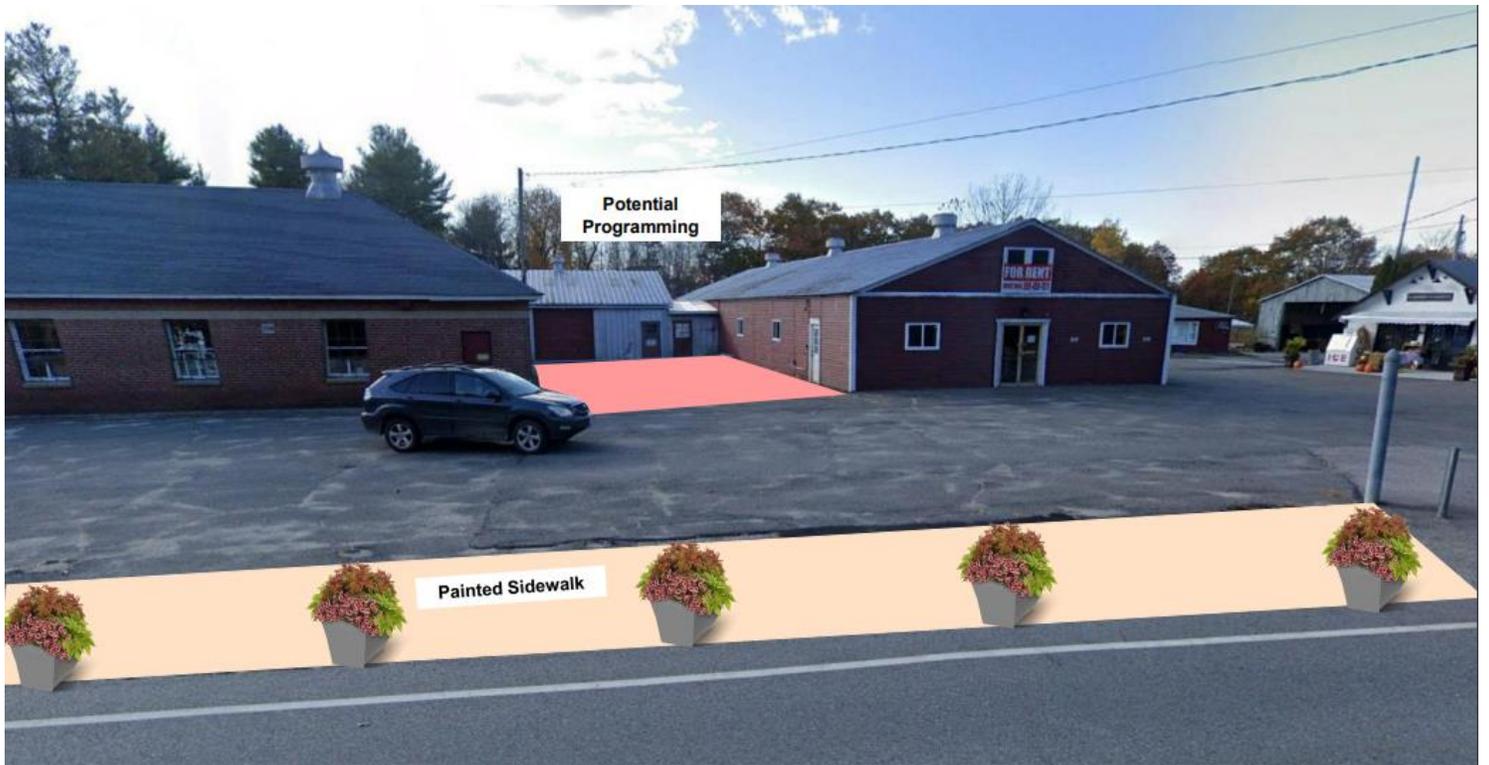
194 Worcester Road and business share a common parking lot that lacks defined paths for ingress and egress. Access management techniques such as establishing curbing (and curb cuts) through paint and placement of removable barriers can improve circulation, safety, and aesthetics. The plaza is a prominent focal point that can be further defined and activated through complementary strategies such as landscaping and programming.

**Figure 33. Access management strategies at 194 Worcester Road (1)**



Overview of access management techniques recommended for 194 Worcester Road.

Figure 34. Access management at 194 Worcester Road (2)



*Access management can address safety and aesthetics concurrently through methods such as paint and planters.*

# Project 4. Placemaking through programming

Category	 Public and private Realm
Location	Worcester Road
Origin	Town; CMRPC
Budget	 Low Budget (<\$50,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term (<1year) and ongoing
Risk	 Low Risk. Risks include perceived liability related to public use of private property; project outcomes contingent upon private property owners
Key Performance Indicators	Regular pop-up events and installations held. Additional foot traffic and patronage to businesses in the target area and town. Increase in number of people engaged.
Partners & Resources	Municipal staff, boards, and committees (BOS, Planning Board, highway, public safety, recreation, alcohol permitting, etc.); future Business Association; organizations, landlords, and tenants interested in offering programming; nonprofits (e.g., garden clubs, arts societies and artists, cultural council); Council on Aging and Senior Center; Schools; Chamber of Commerce; banks; large local employers.

**Figure 35. Apple Fest at Wachusett Mountain**



*Beyond aesthetic and infrastructure improvements, successful placemaking typically includes programming to draw people to the target area. Pop up events, cultural programming, passive and active recreation opportunities, and self-programming are all methods to encourage visitors and patronage or nearby businesses. Figure 35 depict Apple Fest, an annual festival held at Wachusett Mountain. Princeton has many such events and should utilize a similar strategy for drawing visitors to Worcester Road.*

## Diagnostic:

The RRP Survey of Worcester Road businesses indicated that cultural events and activities are a top priority. In that same survey, 56% of businesses reported a drop in on-site customers compared to pre-COVID-19 conditions; of these, 42% said the drop was 25% or more.

The impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Princeton require a recovery plan that improves the image of the Worcester Road corridor and provides a magnet for customers. Defining the area as a destination and hub for activity necessitates not just physical but also programmatic placemaking. An overall space activation strategy will support businesses by encouraging increased foot traffic and providing strategies to help overall vibrancy.

Worcester Road is home to a few areas that could be actively or passively programmed. For example, 194 Worcester Road and adjacent businesses are oversupplied with parking. Most of the buildings in the plaza share a common owner; hence, the parking lots that serve these buildings are also connected. These connected parking lots could serve as an excellent location for events and programming. The street-adjacent parking is well-suited to active events such as food trucks and pop-up markets and shows. Recessed space between the buildings could be set up for passive recreation/ programming. Improvements such as picnic tables, string lights, and murals are low-cost measures that would activate such spaces. Finally, the knoll adjacent to Monti Farms and Deli is sizable enough to support more active programming. Beyond picnic benches, the grassy area could support yoga, fitness, dance and self-guided activities (e.g., Scarecrow Alley).

## Funding Sources:

### Community One-Stop for Growth:

- **Rural and Small Town Development Fund Capital Grant Program:** This new grant program to provide communities funding for capital projects in Rural and Small Towns - towns with populations less than 7,000 or with a population density of less than 500 persons per square mile (measured by the 2010 US Census). This program funds capital projects exclusively for qualifying Rural and Small Towns. Eligible expenditures are detailed below under the "Use of Funds" section. Grants in this category will likely be \$50,000-\$400,000.
- **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 complexity.

Figure 36. Princeton Antique Auto Show at Hunt and Gather



*The Princeton Antique Auto Show, typically held at 194 Worcester Road, is a popular local event. Such events are important components of placemaking and can be used to help define the target area as a destination.*

Figure 37. Scarecrow Alley at Town Common



*Scarecrow Alley is an annual self-guided activity sponsored by the Princeton Parks and Recreation Department. The competition has residents create their own scarecrow for display on the Town Common. Such activities, especially when held as a series or ongoing rotation of events, are an excellent way to draw patrons to an area and establish a destination. Photo Credit: Town of Princeton Parks and Recreation Department Facebook page.*

## Action Items

- Create a cultural and events strategy and implement the same. The events/cultural activation strategy would be guided by a dedicated staff member guided by an events committee.
- This project will require significant collaboration and coordination, particularly regarding partners and sponsors, marketing efforts (including an online events calendar and regional efforts), and business partnerships to ensure that both of these goals are met: activation and improved image of the corridor and increased revenues for businesses (and new business locations).
- Establish and inspire events to draw patrons and visitors to the western segment of the target area and its businesses. Encourage and enable a variety of events so that use is ongoing- activity should be such that community members anticipate and seek out the area for new, reoccurring, and self-guided programming.

## Process:

- Initiate dialogue with property owners and tenants to generate support and buy-in for on-site programming.
- Establish a working group or committee to oversee programming. Notify and engage local groups, residents, and tenants to inspire programming elements such as:
  - Food trucks, farmers' markets, music events
  - Kids events – tie dye workshops, face painting, book walks, chalk art events,
  - Collaborate with local organizations for programming (Council on Aging, Garden Club, Historical Society, antique auto groups)
  - Winter events- ice castles, hayrides, snow shoeing, cross country, hot chocolate, cider, donuts, snow suit soiree, ice skating rink
  - Arts, Horribles' parade, yoga, fitness, dance
  - Informal music events on Friday and Saturday nights
- Establish agreements with property owner regarding public use of private property.
- Apply for and secure funding from external sources from Town (grants, State, private foundations, etc.)
- Develop DRAFT and FINAL "site plans for review" by key stakeholders
- Graphic design and branding work is needed to create an overall brand or name for the events program. Develop logo, and project graphics.

## Additional considerations:

- Streamlined permitting can enable and help speed up implementation of events.
- There may be a risk that events provide short-term vitality to the downtown but don't contribute to increased business revenue or new businesses. Careful planning of the location and type of events, as well as involvement of local businesses can mitigate this risk.
- If events are held on privately-owned property, private owners may be concerned about liability and the Town should consider if it can provide a blanket liability protection for these situations or indemnification agreement.

## Required inputs:

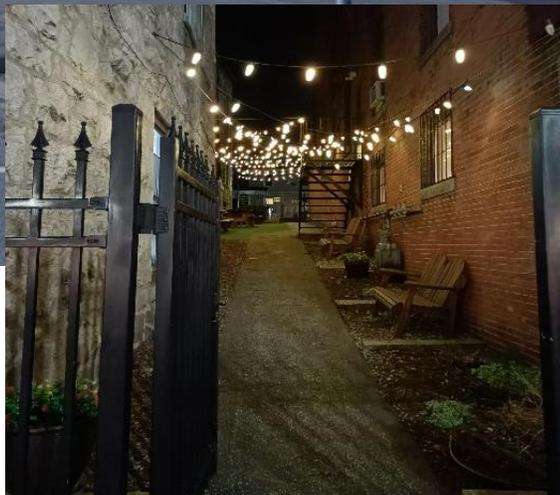
- Town staff time (recreation, planning, highway, public safety).
- Marketing/branding to highlight program and spaces – social media, signs/banners, possible sidewalk signs. Payment for musicians, performers, other contributors to event.
- Marketing materials (banners, flyers, social media manager)
- Materials for temporary events such as sidewalk chalk and pavement paints, rentals, etc.

**Figure 38. Easter Egg Hunt at Krashes Field**



*Programming is an essential component of placemaking and space activation. Figure 38 depicts Princeton's annual Easter Egg Hunt, typically held at Krashes Field. Hosting similar activities in the target area would help brand it as a destination. Photo Credit: Town of Princeton Parks and Recreation Department Facebook page.*

**Figure 39. Potential passive recreation area (1) and recommended implementation**



*Underutilized areas between buildings such as shown above can serve as passive recreation areas. Low-cost measures such as installation of tables and benches, string lights, and murals can easily define such spaces. A pocket park in Hudson, MA (depicted right) demonstrates the concept. Photo credit: CMRPC.*

**Figure 40. Potential recreation area adjacent to Monti Farms and Deli**

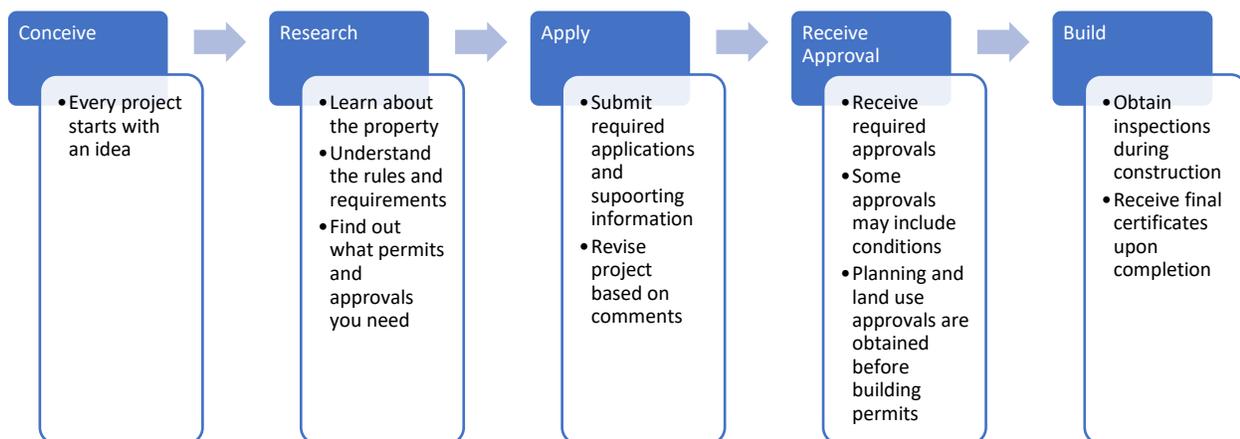


*The grassy area behind Monti Farms and Deli is large enough to support active or passive recreation, such as fitness (yoga, dance, tai chi), self-guided events like "create your own snowman," or informal music nights. Photo Source: RRP SME Compendium.*

# Project 5. Development of a Princeton Permitting Guide

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Town-wide
Origin	Town of Princeton; CMRPC
Budget	 Low budget
Timeframe	 Short Term (<1 year), ongoing
Risk	 Low risk
Key Performance Indicators	Development of a user-friendly permitting guide will provide clear guidance to developers, design professionals and property owners to navigate the permitting process.
Partners & Resources	Board of Selectmen; Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, other municipal boards and commissions; municipal staff; property owners; design and environmental professionals.

**Figure 41. Steps in the development process**



Whether a project involves a home renovation, a new subdivision or a commercial development, it will require approvals from the Town. Factors such as the proposed use, site zoning, traffic, utilities and environmental conditions will determine what approval process is required. Figure 41 depicts the five general steps to take you from an idea to approvals to construction.

**Diagnostic:**

A Permitting Guidebook will help prospective developers and business owners navigate the permitting process more easily and with fewer questions to staff and boards. The Town can work with CMRPC to design a user-friendly guidebook, which can take the form of an online guided question-and-answer tool, or a PDF available digitally or in-person at Town Hall.

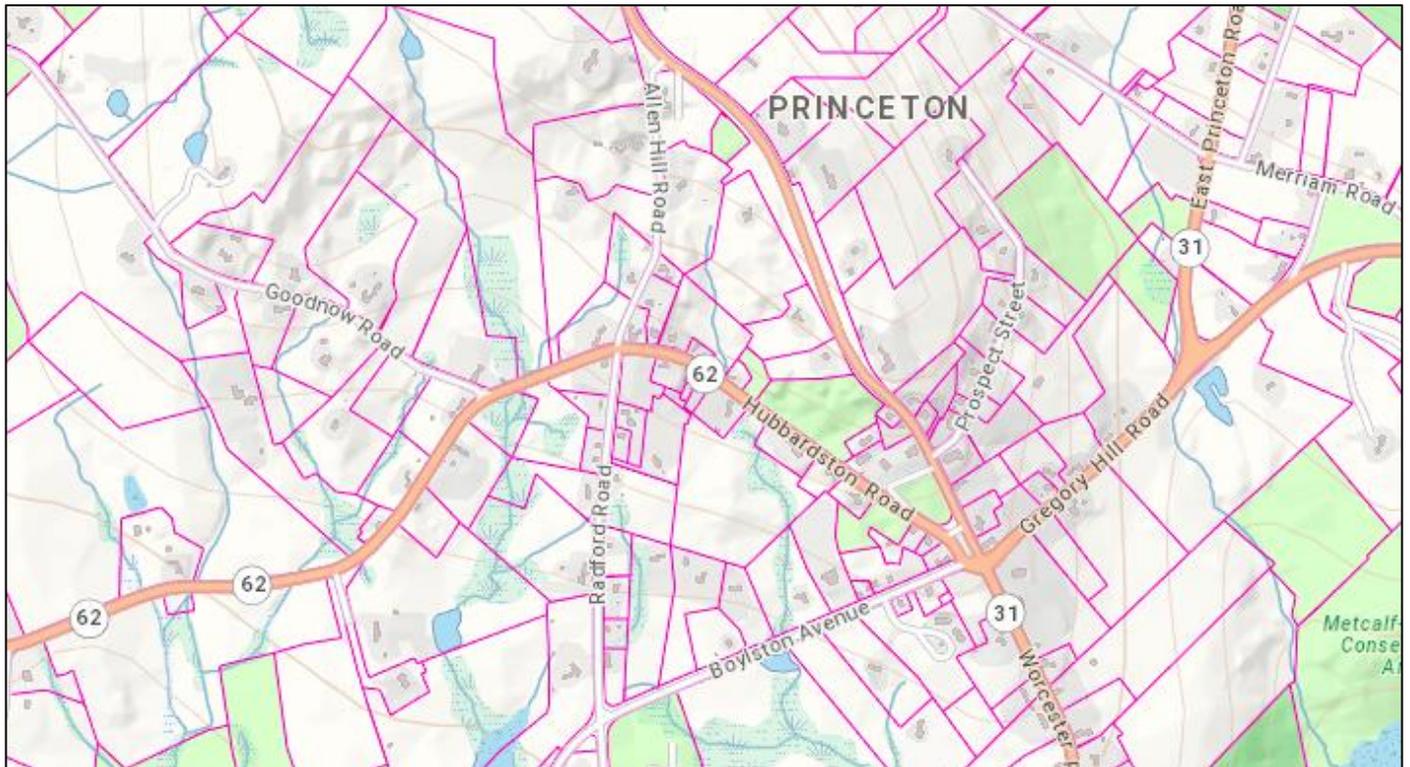
**Action items:**

Work with CMRPC to design a permitting guidebook, designed as either a guided online question and answer format or a standard written document. A Permitting Guidebook will help prospective developers and business owners navigate the permitting process more easily, generating fewer inquiries to municipal staff and boards.

Departments involved in the permitting process
Building Department
Fire Department
Water and Sewer
Town Administrator

Boards involved in the permitting process
Planning Board
Zoning Board of Appeals
Conservation Commission
Complete Streets Committee
Selectboard

**Figure 42. GIS map of Princeton, MA showing parcels**

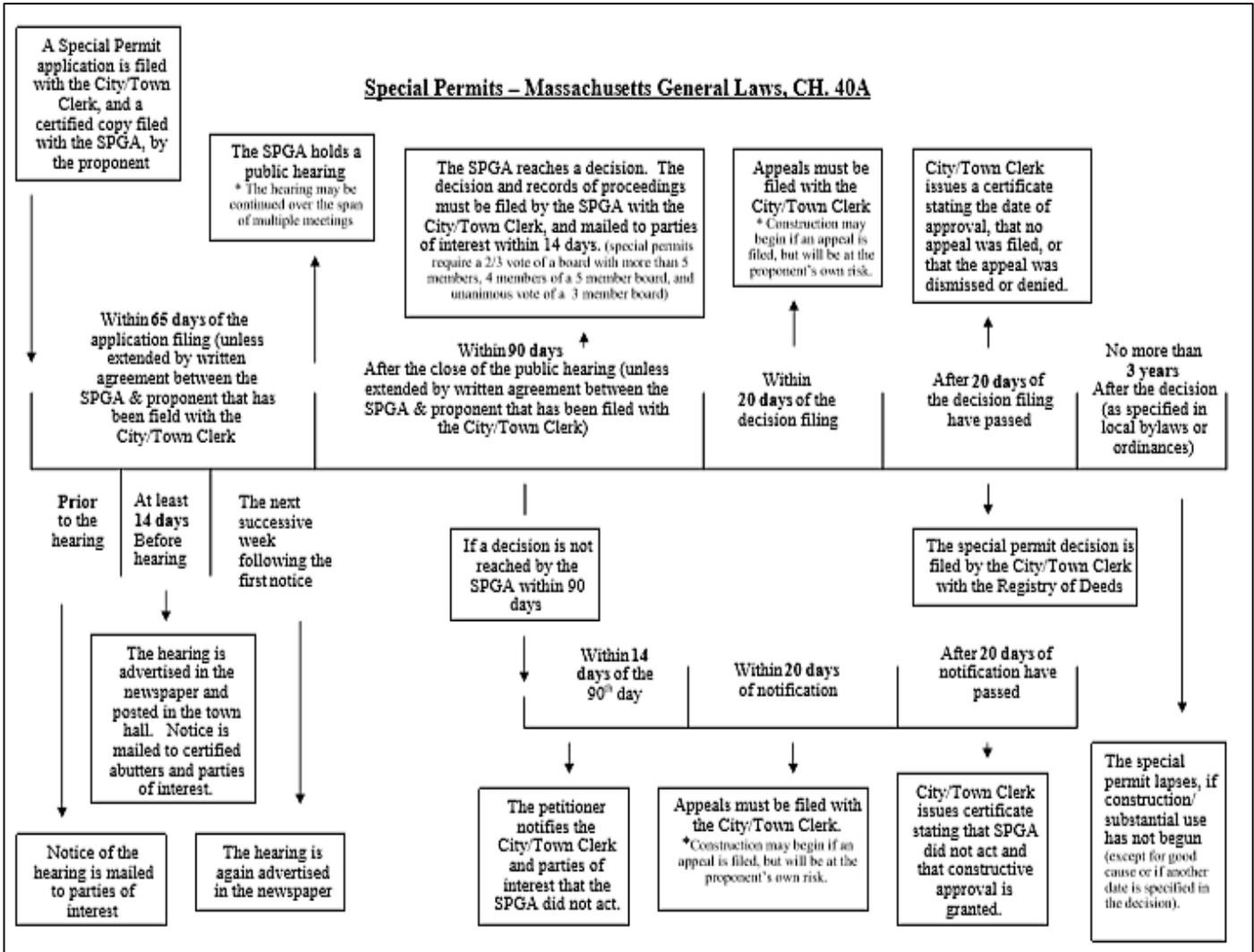


Access to a permitting guide will facilitate development of parcels in Princeton, reducing inconsistencies and unnecessary questions to boards and staff.  
Source: [http://maps.massgis.state.ma.us/map\\_ol/princeton.php](http://maps.massgis.state.ma.us/map_ol/princeton.php)

**Process:**

To develop the permitting guide, the authors will meet with relevant municipal staff, boards, and committees to review existing forms, documents, and processes. The authors will utilize state resources and example permitting guides from other communities as a template to guide development.

**Figure 43. Sample Special Permit Process Flow Chart**



Source: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/permittingbestpracticesguidepdf/download>

## Potential Sources of Funding

### **District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA)**

Recognizing the tremendous need area planners, town board and commission volunteers, and municipal officials must continually stay up to date on ever-changing topics related to planning, CMRPC offers technical assistance through its District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program. Since 2006, this program has enabled CMRPC to provide technical assistance to member communities on eligible projects. Typically, proposed projects must fall into one of the following four general priority categories to be considered eligible for technical assistance: 1. "Planning Ahead for Housing" 2. "Planning Ahead for Growth"; 3. Technical Assistance to support Community Compact Cabinet Activities; and 4. Technical Assistance to support Regional Efficiency.

### **EEA Planning Assistance Grants**

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) offers Massachusetts cities and towns technical help to improve their land use practices. Grants are available to the Commonwealth's municipalities, and Regional Planning Agencies acting on their behalf to support their efforts to plan, regulate (zone), and act to conserve and develop land consistent with the Massachusetts' Sustainable Development Principles. These Planning Assistance Grants are part of an effort to encourage municipalities to implement land use regulations that are consistent with the Baker-Polito Administration's land conservation and development objectives including reduction of land, energy, and natural resource consumption, provision of sufficient and diverse housing, and mitigation of/preparation for climate change. Funds help communities retain appropriate technical expertise and undertake the public process associated with creating plans and adopting land use regulations.

### **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 can be used to fund development of design guidelines.

Community Planning Grant Program: Community Planning grants may be used for a variety of activities related to land use, such as but not limited to development. Activities may include the development of a Master Plan, Housing Production Plan, Zoning Review and Updates, Urban Renewal Plan, Land Use Plan, Downtown Plan, Parking Management Plan, Feasibility Study, or Other Strategic Plans. These are planning grants, and projects must use the funds to produce a planning document. Grants in this category will likely be \$25,000-\$75,000.

# Project 6. Façade Improvement Program

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Route 140
Origin	CMRPC
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Medium Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Increased foot and bicycle traffic in the area. Increased patrons in nearby businesses and area overall.
Partners & Resources	Municipal Boards and Committees; Residents, Property owners; Municipal Boards and Staff

**Figure 44. Post Office Place façade**



Attractive façades are an important part of placemaking. Areas with even the most interesting business mixes can suffer if building aesthetics fall short. Figure 44 depicts Post Office Place, a complex with a noteworthy façade. In Central Massachusetts, this building is sometimes used as a positive example when towns are considering creating design guidelines for buildings and landscaping.

## Potential Sources of Funding

### 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.

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

**Potential Sources of Funding  
Continued**

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.

## Diagnostic

Reasons for undertaking a façade or storefront improvement program often include the following:

- Requirements to address the transmissibility of COVID-19, such as new windows, doors, or HVAC system may be unaffordable to a small business owner and/or may have a negative impact on the façade if improperly sourced and installed.
- On-site parking spaces are poorly organized and, if reorganized, can provide room for outdoor dining or retail display.
- Local small businesses do not have the resources (time, money, expertise) to address substandard storefronts.
- Distressed properties have a negative impact on people’s impression of the viability and/or safety of a business district and property owners are unable to make the improvements themselves.
- Storefronts are not accessible to those who have problems with mobility, whether temporary or permanent.
- Historic downtowns often have empty upper floors because of the lack of accessible elevators. A major improvement project could provide grants to address both interior and exterior accessibility.
- Historic properties may have been “improved” with inappropriate materials or repairs.
- Site improvements that reduce asphalt and add landscape can address public health issues by reducing the heat island effect, planting trees to address air quality, and using low impact design to manage stormwater onsite.

## Action items

- 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.
- Consider connecting artists, entrepreneurs, and makers/crafters with landlords to fill vacant storefronts and change target area image.

## Process

### Pre-program development

1. Identify who in the municipality will manage this program: municipal staff, volunteer committee, or a hybrid.
2. Decide how guidelines will be developed. Will the design guidelines be just for the façade improvement program, or will they be more broadly applicable?
3. 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.
4. 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

Decide the following:

1. Grant, loan, or hybrid
2. Which elements will the program fund and which are the responsibility of the property owner?
3. What are the eligibility requirements for participating in the program?
4. What is the length of the program?
5. How long will property owners be required to maintain the improvements?
6. What is the enforcement procedure for maintenance? (This could be repayment of a grant or a lien on a property.)
7. Will the responsibility for maintenance transfer to a new owner if the property is sold?

*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.*

*Decide on the application process and how applicants will be evaluated. Are certain property types or improvements given priority over others? Make sure the process of choosing participants is transparent.*

*Develop the forms and train the people who will be evaluating the applications.*

### Implementation

The program can provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. Grants may provide a greater incentive for reluctant property owners to participate, 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](mailto: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.*

Figure 45. Ashland Sign & Façade Improvement Program

**APPLICATION FOR SIGN & FAÇADE PROGRAM**

**Purpose:**  
The town of Ashland has established this program to provide technical and financial assistance to businesses to improve their appearance and attract customers. The program is designed to help businesses improve their appearance and attract customers by providing financial assistance for sign and facade improvements. The program is open to all businesses in Ashland. The program is designed to help businesses improve their appearance and attract customers by providing financial assistance for sign and facade improvements. The program is open to all businesses in Ashland.

**Eligibility Requirements:**  
The program is open to all businesses in Ashland. The program is designed to help businesses improve their appearance and attract customers by providing financial assistance for sign and facade improvements. The program is open to all businesses in Ashland.

**Project Description:**  
Please describe the scope of work for the proposed improvement project.

**Business Information:**  
Name of Business: \_\_\_\_\_  
Business Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone/Fax/Website: \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of Business: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate the estimated cost of the proposed improvement project: \_\_\_\_\_

Does the proposed project also qualify for other forms of financial assistance? \_\_\_\_\_

Photo Source: Town of Ashland

## Example 2: Storefront Improvement Program

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Contact: Christina DiLisio

[cdilisio@cambridgema.gov](mailto: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/econdev/smallbusinessassistance/smallbusinessprograms/storefront>

Figure 46. Cambridge Storefront Improvement Program



Photo Source: City of Cambridge

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

Main Street America:

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

### Example 4: Historic Commercial District Revolving Fund

Main Street America:

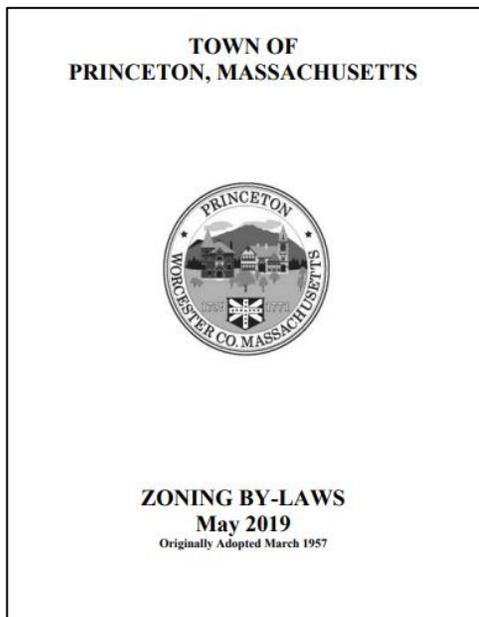
<https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/projects/spotlight/facadeimprovements/hcdrf>

- 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.
  
- State-by-state programs 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.

## Project 7. Expand municipal economic development capacity

Category	 Admin Capacity
Location	Town-wide
Origin	Town of Princeton; CMRPC
Budget	 Low budget
Timeframe	 Short Term (<1 year), ongoing
Risk	 Low risk
Key Performance Indicators	Appointment of municipal business liaison; regulatory and permitting requirements adjusted; processes and procedures reviewed and fine-tuned; use of new tools and policies such round table review, vacancy registry, and business lead tracking.
Partners & Resources	Town Administrator; Planning Board; Board of Selectmen; various staff including Building Inspector, Town Engineer, Police, Fire, Conservation, other permitting and review staff; future Princeton Business Association; business owners and developers.

**Figure 47. Princeton Zoning Bylaws**



*Fine-tuning municipal processes, procedures, and policies can improve economic development conditions. Princeton can review its zoning as a component of a comprehensive strategy to enhance its municipal economic development capacity.*

### Diagnostic:

Although the Town has limited staff and volunteer capacity, there are several steps it can take to ensure its municipal processes, procedures, and policies are conducive to economic development. Among the many variables that impact business development, towns have the most control over municipal operations. Adjustments to processes, procedures, and policies are among the lowest-cost strategies a town can undertake to foster a business-friendly environment. Priority strategies include establishing a single municipal point of contact to shepherd developers and prospective business owners through development processes; fine-tuning municipal processes and procedures to streamline permitting; and ensuring zoning bylaws are supportive of desirable economic development.

### Action items:

Establish a single municipal point of contact / business liaison to shepherd businesses through the development and permitting processes: Best practices in economic development suggest establishing a single municipal contact to help guide developers and prospective business owners through various processes and procedures. This practice tends to facilitate economic development as follows:

## Action items continued

1. It positions the town as overtly business friendly. Whether a town is easy to do business in and supportive of business development is a key factor developers look at when considering where to site developments. Here, perception is as important as reality.
2. It improves the actual likelihood that developments and new businesses reach fruition. With a dedicated and accountable staff liaison, potential opportunities are less likely to fall through the cracks. Phone calls are promptly returned, and someone is on hand to answer questions and think creatively about the town's existing resources and opportunities. The liaison will have familiarity with vacant parcels, municipal development goals, and how to accomplish things at the town level. Developers and applicants benefit from having a municipal advocate with first-hand knowledge of local processes, procedures, preferences, norms, and personalities.

Roundtable review: This tool is a favorite of economic development practitioners and developers alike. Round Table Review is a procedure in which permitting staff from all departments make themselves available to developers at any stage of application. It is most effective when held at predictable, regularly scheduled intervals (i.e., bi-weekly or monthly). In practice, staff such as planning, building, fire, town engineer, conservation, and other personnel that review development plans hold a standing meeting that developers can drop-in on at any stage (initial concept through to site plan review). Such meetings expedite permitting timeframes as well as provide more desirable development outcomes. They reduce the number of times applicants go before boards, reduce the number of documents revisions, and allow the town to help shape applications so that they better meet town goals.

Ease / fast track some permitting and regulatory requirements: During COVID-19, Princeton worked closely with local businesses to help them adapt to changing circumstances. The Town took new approaches to permitting to allow continued business operations, such as outdoor dining. Relaxed permitting and regulatory requirements that were effective during the pandemic should be assessed for possible long-term use. Many communities are finding that the more flexible frameworks piloted during COVID-19 are yielding desirable results that they would like to see continued long-term.

## Process

### **Single municipal point of contact / business liaison:**

Given funding constraints, explore existing staff positions that could be expanded to include business liaison activities. Establish key priorities for the role, and development goals to support desired outcomes. As the Town expands its economic development work and a Princeton Business Association gets established (see Project 1), a dedicated Economic Development position may be warranted. Longer-term, the town can explore intermunicipal job sharing for a part-time economic development coordinator, a position which could be piloted through Community Compact Cabinet Efficiency and Regionalization funding.

Tasks that the business liaison could undertake to help build up the town's economic development capacity, perhaps with support of a high school intern or senior volunteer, include:

- Business lead tracking: As development and planning staff receive inquiries from potential business owners, these leads should be tracked. In most municipal settings, municipal employees will often receive calls about specific

## Process continued

- *(continued from previous page)* business ideas but cannot immediately match the interested party with a suitable property. Formally tracking business leads will ensure that opportunities are not overlooked when they emerge later-on. It will also ensure that staff is actively reviewing leads.
- Vacant parcel inventory: Typically, municipal employees possess a working knowledge of vacant commercial properties. Maintaining a formal list of vacancies ensures that all development employees possess up-to-date information on current and upcoming vacancies. It also streamlines distribution of property information to prospective business owners, real estate agents, Chambers of Commerce, and real estate websites (another important strategy).
- Vacancy Registry: In complement to vacant parcel inventories, require property owners to notify the Town within a defined period after a property becomes vacant. Such registries help municipal staff stay apprised of commercial vacancies and are a means of establishing constructive dialogue with property owners. Once a landlord has registered a vacancy, the Town should work with the property owner to identify and address the cause of the vacancy.
- Create a business roster: Identify and create a roster/ contact list of all existing businesses. Business owners, tenants, and commercial / industrial property owners should be included. The Town Clerk can provide basic information on most town businesses through Doing Business As certificates. Information for additional businesses can be collected using windshield surveys, google, social media, and other means. All businesses, when registering or updating their information with the Town, should mandatorily include their email addresses and phone numbers.

### **Ease / fast track permitting and regulatory requirements:**

- Consider waiving time limits / roll-over for permits to minimize the need to re-apply to continue an approved action.
- Enact a temporary or permanent reduction in parking requirements to provide additional outdoor dining and gathering in areas currently used for parking.
- Relax signage requirements to allow temporary signs to promote outdoor sales and dining properties.
- Adopt a pop-up retail ordinance that allows and streamlines temporary uses, especially Worcester Road (west side). The area's limited number of businesses means that, one prominent vacancy could diminish the area's vitality. Temporary uses allow storefronts to remain active in the absence of long-term tenants. Common temporary uses include art galleries, seasonal retail, pilot businesses, and cause-based uses.

### **Round Table Review:**

In some ways, implementation of Round Table Review is more complicated in a small town. Princeton primarily relies on part-time staff, some of whom do not hold regular office hours. Identifying a regular time for all essential review staff to convene presents some challenges. Yet, lack of proximity and limited face time make Round Table Review all the more important in Princeton; it presents an opportunity to ensure review personnel are aligned in terms of vision, goals, technical requirements, and processes. At a minimum, the Town should pilot this process for 6 months to 1 year as a means of testing assumptions about alignment and fostering dialogue about how processes might be enhanced.

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## Appendix A: Business Survey Results

This report provides the results of a business survey conducted during March and April of 2021. The survey is part of a program launched by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development to help communities develop Rapid Recovery Plans for downtowns and commercial districts. The survey was directed to owners or other appropriate representatives of business establishments located in the targeted commercial areas. (For Data Tables, see page 9.)

**Princeton**

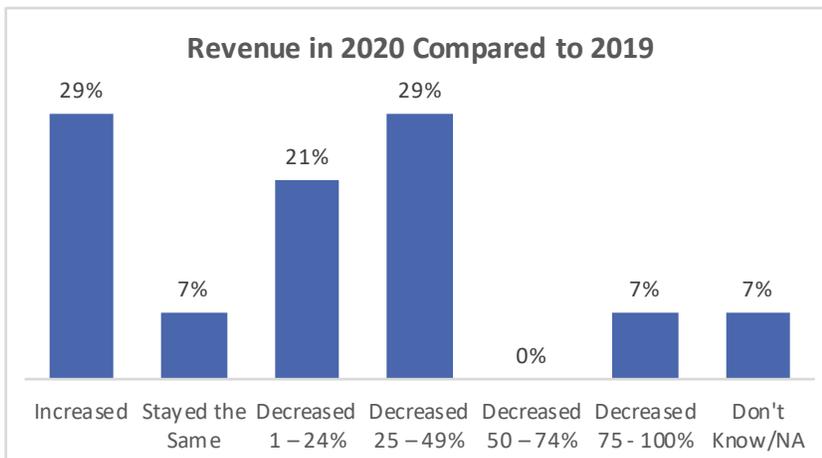
Worcester Road Commercial Area

Responses: 14

**Impacts of COVID-19**

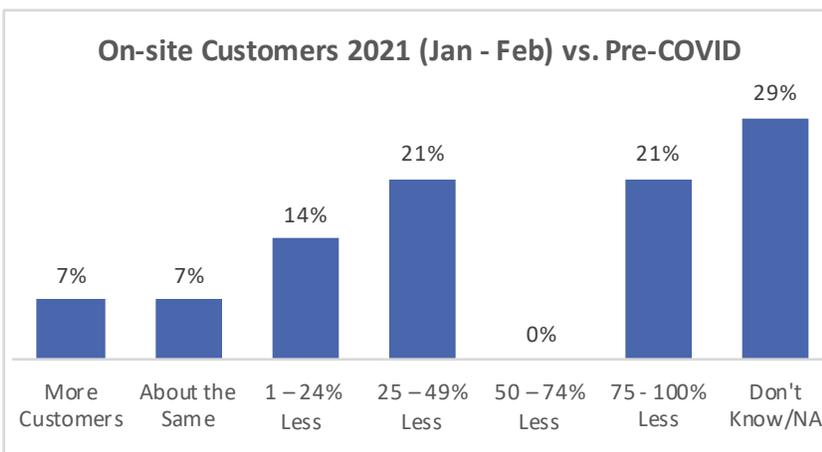
**Decline in Business Revenue**

57% of businesses generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019. For 36% of businesses, revenue declined by 25% or more.



**Less Foot Traffic in Commercial Area**

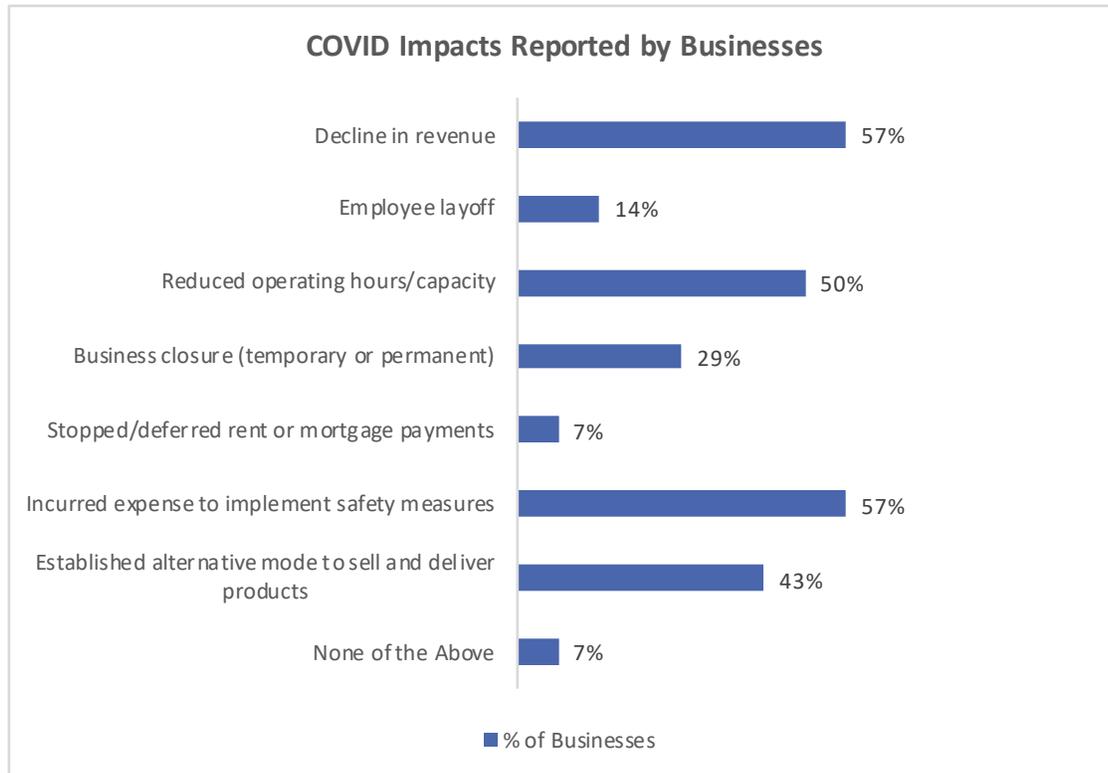
56% of businesses had less on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID. 42% of businesses reported a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more.



## Impacts of COVID-19 (cont'd)

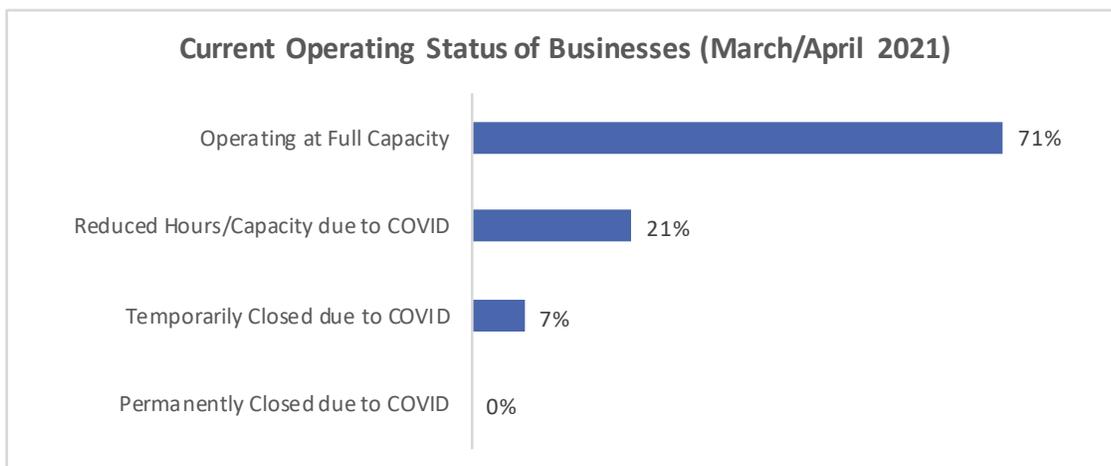
### Reported Impacts

93% of businesses reported being impacted by COVID.



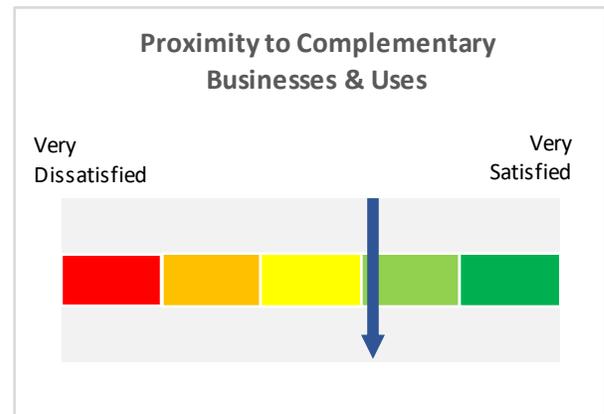
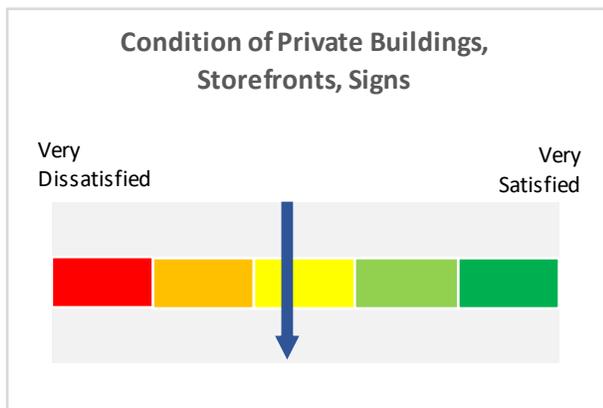
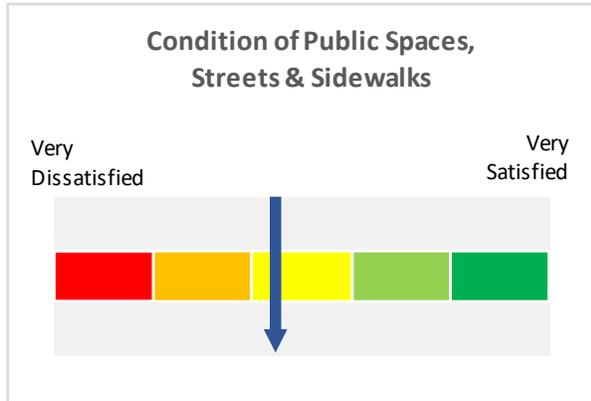
### Operating Status

At the time of the survey, 29% of businesses reported they were operating at reduced hours/capacity or closed.



## Business Satisfaction with Commercial District

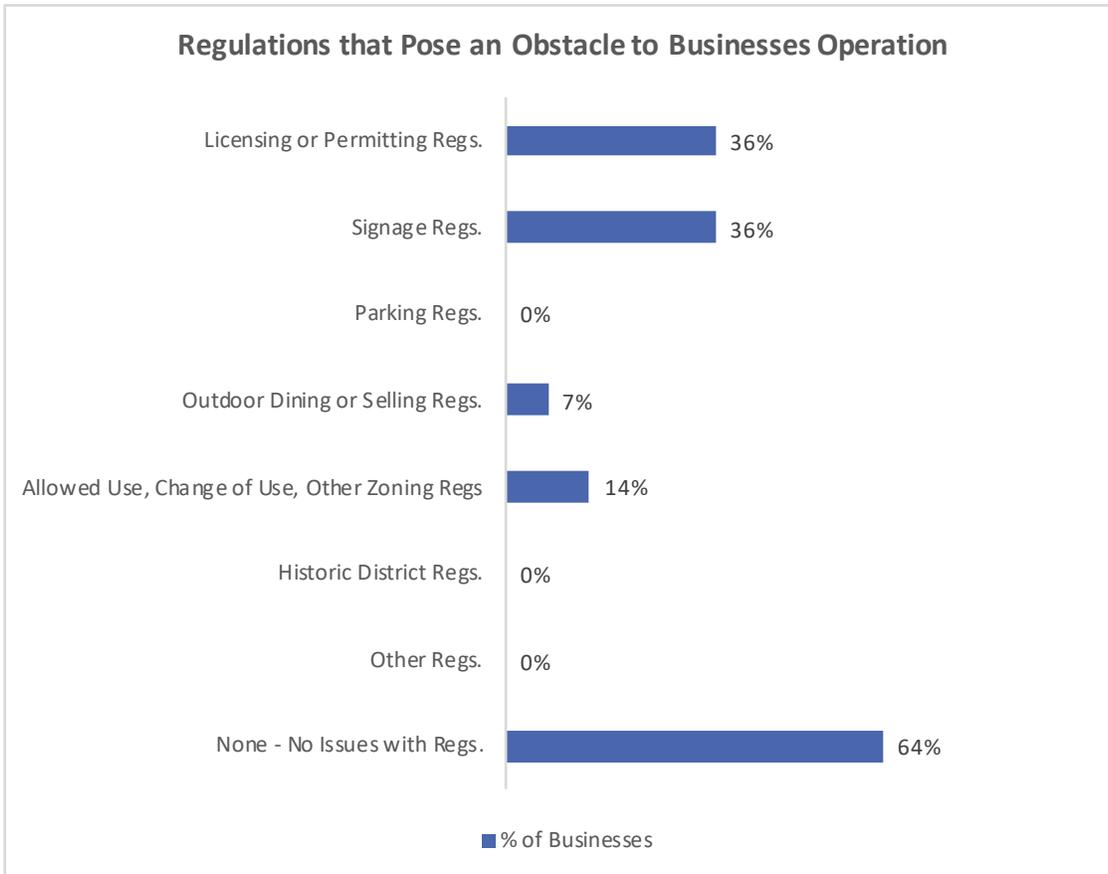
The charts below illustrate the average satisfaction rating among respondents regarding various elements.



## Business Satisfaction with Commercial District (cont'd)

### Regulatory Environment

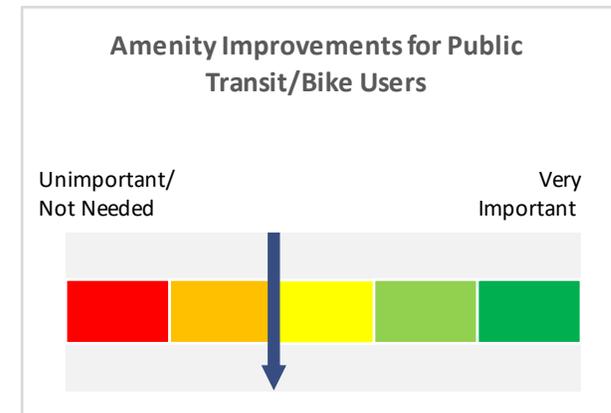
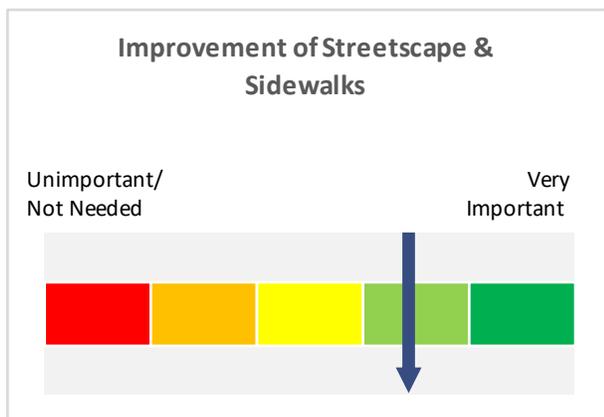
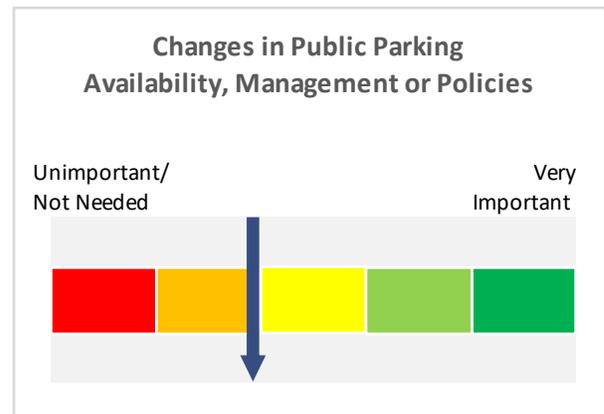
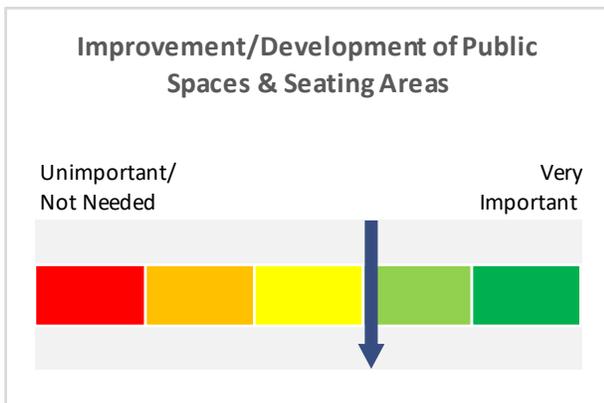
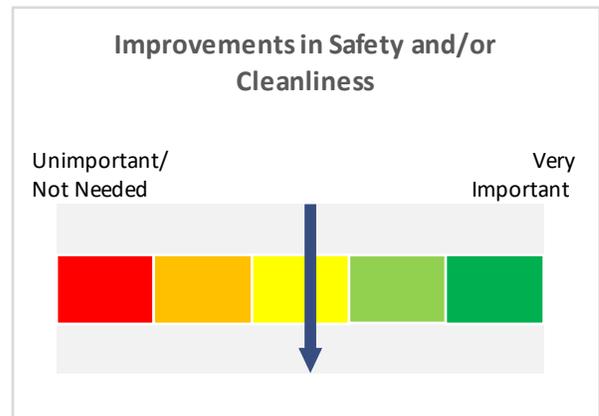
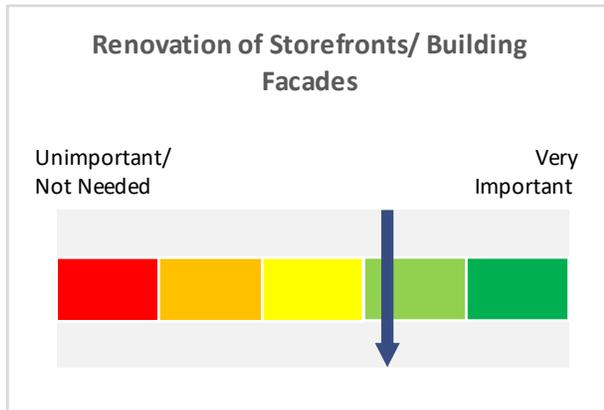
36% of businesses indicated that the regulatory environment poses an obstacle to business operation.



## Business Input Related to Possible Strategies

### Physical Environment, Atmosphere and Access

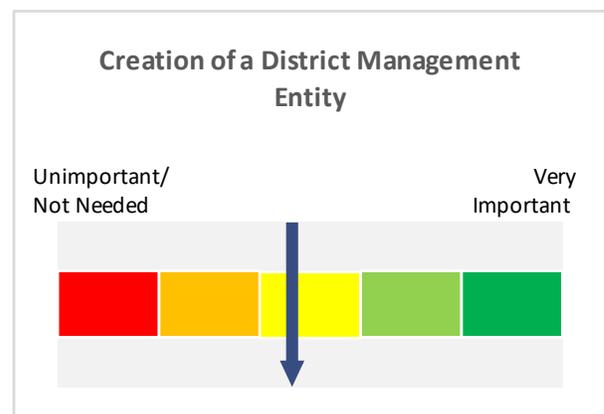
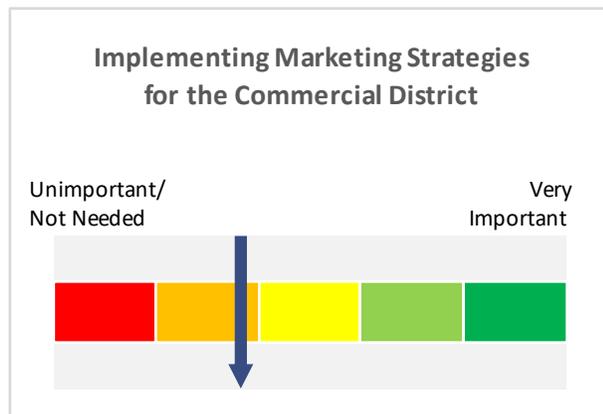
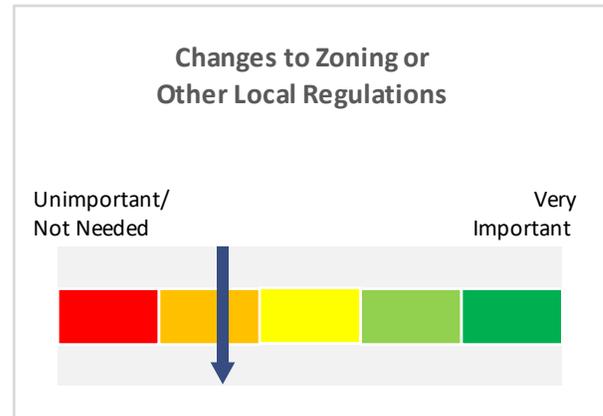
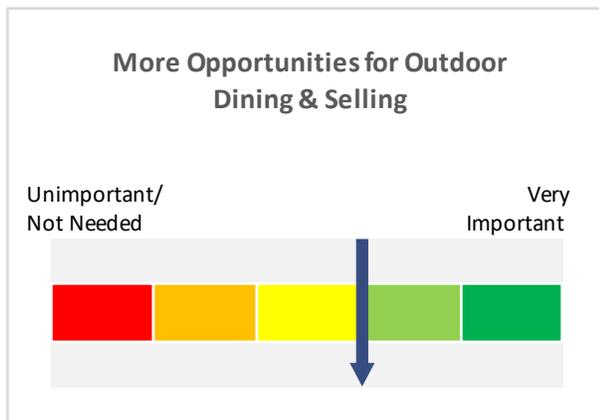
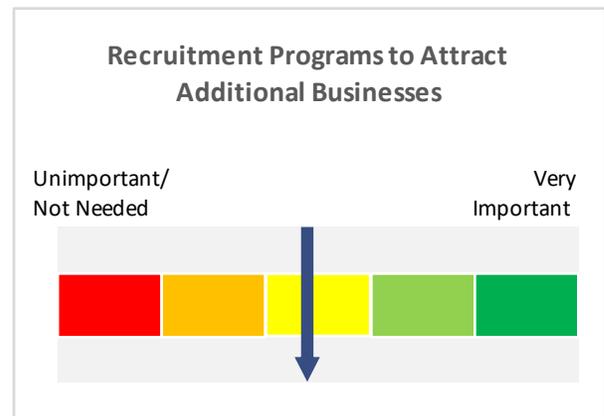
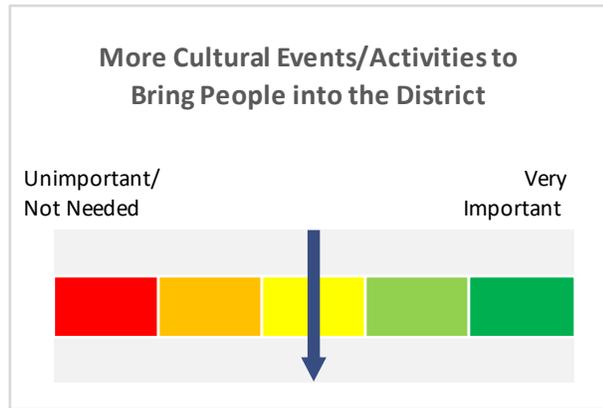
The charts below illustrate the average rating among respondents regarding importance of various strategies.



## Business Input Related to Possible Strategies (cont'd)

### Attraction/Retention of Customers and Businesses

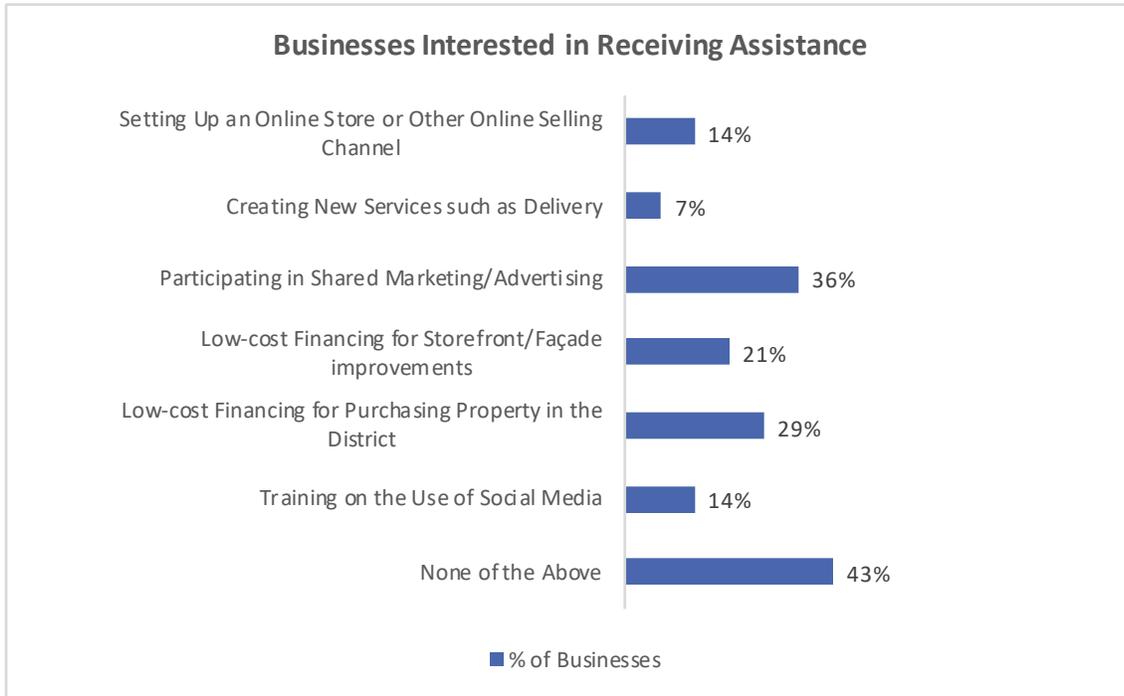
The charts below illustrate the average rating among respondents regarding importance of various strategies.



## Business Input Related to Possible Strategies (cont'd)

### Businesses Support

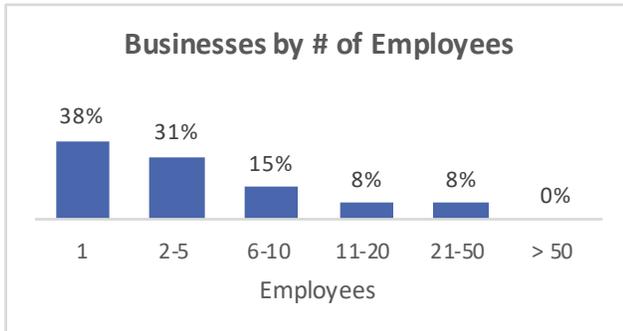
57% of businesses expressed interest in receiving some kind of assistance.



## Business Characteristics

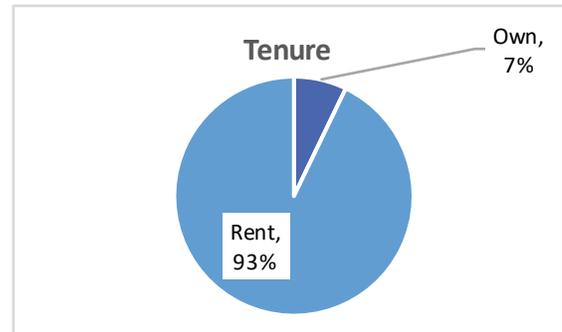
### Business Size

69% of businesses are microenterprises ( $\leq 5$  employees).



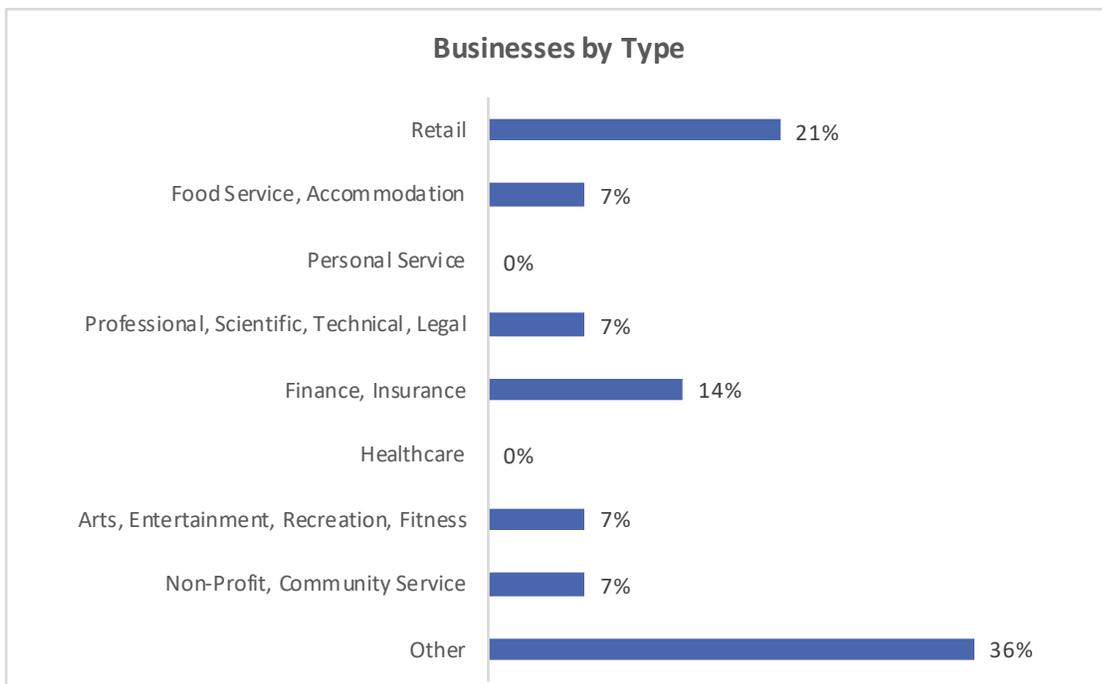
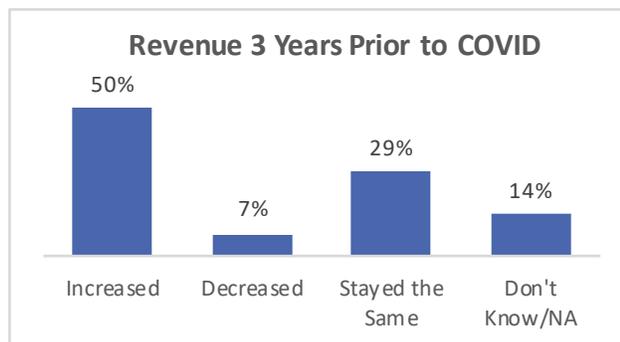
### Business Tenure

93% of businesses rent their space.



### Revenue Trend Prior to COVID

50% of businesses reported increase in revenue during the 3 years prior to COVID.



## Business Survey Results - Data Tables

### Community Where Targeted Downtown or Commercial District is Located

1. Please select the community where your business is located.

Princeton	14
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### Business Characteristics & Satisfaction with Commercial Area

2. Including yourself, how many people did your business employ prior to COVID (February 2020), including both full-time and part-time?

1	5	38%
2 to 5	4	31%
6 to 10	2	15%
11 to 20	1	8%
21 to 50	1	8%
More than 50	0	0%
Total	13	100%

3. Does your business own or rent the space where it operates?

Own	1	7%
Rent	13	93%
Total	14	100%

4. During the 3 years prior to COVID, had your business revenue . . . ?

Increased	7	50%
Decreased	1	7%
Stayed about the Same	4	29%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	2	14%
Total	14	100%

5. Please select the category that best fits your business.

Retail (NAICS 44-45)	3	21%
Food Service (restaurants, bars), Accommodation (NAICS 72)	1	7%
Personal Service (hair, skin, nails, dry cleaning) (NAICS 81)	0	0%
Professional Scientific, Technical, Legal (NAICS 54)	1	7%
Finance, Insurance (NAICS 52)	2	14%
Healthcare (medical, dental, other health practitioners) (NAICS 62)	0	0%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Fitness (NAICS 71)	1	7%
Non-Profit, Community Services	1	7%
Other	5	36%
Total	14	100%

**6. Please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of the Downtown or Commercial District where your business is located.**

**Condition of public spaces, streets, sidewalks**

Very Dissatisfied	3	21%
Dissatisfied	2	14%
Neutral	5	36%
Satisfied	3	21%
Very Satisfied	1	7%
Total	14	100%

**Condition of Private Buildings, Facades, Storefronts, Signage**

Very Dissatisfied	1	7%
Dissatisfied	6	43%
Neutral	2	14%
Satisfied	4	29%
Very Satisfied	1	7%
Total	14	100%

**Access for Customers & Employees**

Very Dissatisfied	1	7%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	5	36%
Satisfied	7	50%
Very Satisfied	1	7%
Total	14	100%

**Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees**

Very Dissatisfied	1	7%
Dissatisfied	1	7%
Neutral	4	29%
Satisfied	5	36%
Very Satisfied	3	21%
Total	14	100%

**Proximity to Complementary Businesses or Uses**

Very Dissatisfied	1	7%
Dissatisfied	2	14%
Neutral	2	14%
Satisfied	7	50%
Very Satisfied	2	14%
Total	14	100%

**7. Do any local regulations (not related to COVID) pose an obstacle to your business operation?**

Licensing or permitting regulations	5	36%
Signage regulations	5	36%
Parking regulations	0	0%
Outdoor dining or selling regulations	1	7%
Allowed uses, change of use or other zoning regulations	2	14%
Historic District regulations	0	0%
Other regulations (not related to COVID)	0	0%
None - No Issues with regulations	9	64%

**Impacts of COVID**

**8. Did your business experience any of the following due to COVID? Select All that apply.**

Decline in revenue	8	57%
Employee layoff	2	14%
Reduced operating hours/capacity	7	50%
Business closure (temporary or permanent)	4	29%
Stopped/deferred rent or mortgage payments	1	7%
Incurred expense to implement safety measures	8	57%
Established alternative mode to sell and deliver products (on-line platforms, delivery, etc.)	6	43%
None of the Above	1	7%

**9. How did your 2020 business revenue compare to your 2019 revenue?**

Increased compared to 2019	4	29%
Stayed about the same as 2019	1	7%
Decreased 1 – 24% compared to 2019	3	21%
Decreased 25 – 49% compared to 2019	4	29%
Decreased 75 - 100% compared to 2019	0	0%
Decreased 50 – 74% compared to 2019	1	7%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	1	7%
Total	14	100%

**10. Please estimate how the number of customers that physically came to your business in January and February 2021 compares to before COVID.**

More customers than before COVID	1	7%
About the same number as before COVID	1	7%
1 – 24% less customers than before COVID	2	14%
25 – 49% less customers than before COVID	3	21%
50 – 74% less customers than before COVID	0	0%
75 – 100% less customers than before COVID	3	21%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	4	29%
Total	14	100%

**11. At the current time, what is the status of your business operation?**

Operating at full capacity	10	71%
Operating at reduced hours/capacity due to COVID	3	21%
Temporarily closed due to COVID	1	7%
Permanently closed due to COVID	0	0%
Total	14	100%

**Strategies for Supporting Businesses and Improving the Commercial District**

**12. A few approaches to address Physical Environment, Atmosphere and Access in commercial districts are listed below. Considering the conditions in your commercial area, in your opinion, how important are each of the following strategies?**

**Renovation of Storefronts/Building Facades**

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	8%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	5	42%
Important	3	25%
Very Important	3	25%
Total	12	100%

**Improvement/Development of Public Spaces & Seating Areas**

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	8%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	8%
Moderately Important	4	31%
Important	5	38%
Very Important	2	15%
Total	13	100%

**Improvement of Streetscape & Sidewalks**

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	17%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	2	17%
Important	3	25%
Very Important	5	42%
Total	12	100%

**Improvements in Safety and/or Cleanliness**

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	17%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	17%
Moderately Important	2	17%
Important	5	42%
Very Important	1	8%
Total	12	100%

### Changes in Public Parking Availability, Management or Policies

Unimportant/Not Needed	4	31%
Of Little Importance or Need	3	23%
Moderately Important	2	15%
Important	3	23%
Very Important	1	8%
Total	13	100%

### Amenity Improvements for Public Transit Users and/or Bike Riders

Unimportant/Not Needed	5	38%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	8%
Moderately Important	3	23%
Important	2	15%
Very Important	2	15%
Total	13	100%

**13. A few approaches to address Attraction and Retention of Customers and Businesses in commercial districts are listed below. Considering the conditions in your commercial area, in your opinion, how important are each of the following strategies?**

### More Cultural Events/Activities to Bring People into the District

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	17%
Of Little Importance or Need	3	25%
Moderately Important	2	17%
Important	3	25%
Very Important	2	17%
Total	12	100%

### More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining and Selling

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	14%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	7%
Moderately Important	2	14%
Important	7	50%
Very Important	2	14%
Total	14	100%

### Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District

Unimportant/Not Needed	6	46%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	3	23%
Important	3	23%
Very Important	1	8%
Total	13	100%

**Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses**

Unimportant/Not Needed	4	33%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	3	25%
Important	3	25%
Very Important	2	17%
Total	12	100%

**Changes to Zoning or Other Local Regulations (not related to COVID)**

Unimportant/Not Needed	6	46%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	8%
Moderately Important	2	15%
Important	4	31%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	13	100%

**Creation of a District Management Entity (Business Improvement District or other organization)**

Unimportant/Not Needed	5	36%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	3	21%
Important	4	29%
Very Important	2	14%
Total	14	100%

**14. Are you interested in receiving assistance for your business in any of the following areas? Select All that Apply.**

Setting up an online store or other online selling channel	2	14%
Creating new services such as delivery	1	7%
Participating in shared marketing/advertising	5	36%
Low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements	3	21%
Low-cost financing for purchasing property in the commercial district	4	29%
Training on the use of social media	2	14%
None of the above	6	43%







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## Appendix C: Neighborways Planters Presentation



“Self Watering” Planters  
that can be made for  
under \$20

These only need watering  
about once a week.



55 gallon drums can be had  
for free with some  
sleuthing; or \$20 on  
Craigslist. Each drum makes  
two planters.

Drum in hand: Drill a pilot hole and  
cut your drum with a jig saw.

If you want a perfectly straight line  
pre-tape drum with masking tape

## Supplies Needed

½ barrel or other large water tight container. Cost: free to \$10

2" or larger PVC [pipe for fill pipe](#). Cost: free to \$1.35

½" PVC [male terminal adaptor](#) for drainage hole (while it says half inch, the drilled hole that it screws into is ¾"). Cost: 15 cents

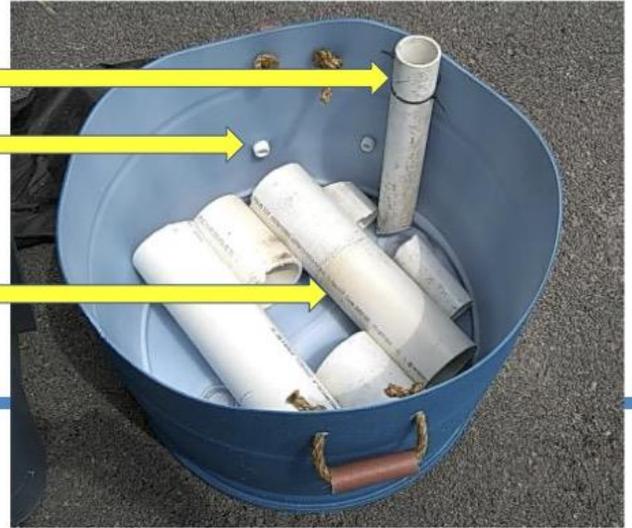
Pipe or other water proof material to hold soil out of reservoir. Shown is 4" PVC pipe. You can also use old 16 ounce [plastic deli containers](#) with holes drilled in the top of them. Or [perforated pipe](#) which is quite inexpensive and great for this. Cost: free to \$4.

Landscape cloth (shown later) to keep soil out of reservoir. Cost: \$1.30 when purchased as part of a 50 foot role.

Rope and old hose for handles. Free/ Salvage

## Tools

- ¾" Drill bit for drilling handle holes and drain/ overflow hole
- 1/8" drill bit for holes to secure top of filling pipe. Ziptie. nylon string or electrical wire are all great to secure the pipe!
- Jigsaw to cut barrel
- Hacksaw, angle grinder or circular saw to cut PVC
- Sharp knife or scissors to cut rope and old hose for handles



## Tips

Line the drain hole up with the handles when drilling it so that if you want to move the planter you can empty the reservoir. To do this lift the handle opposite the drain hole and the water will drain making the barrel much lighter to move.

Note placement of landscape cloth to keep soil from building up around the bottom of the filling pipe.

Place fill pipe so that it will empty quickly into a cavity. Don't have it up against the side of your reservoir piping, but against an open hole.





### More Tips!

- Keep the watering hole drain holes covered or plugged between waterings so that mosquitos don't breed in your reservoir.
- When you add soil to the planter for the first time, make sure to wet it down so that it forms a wicking action to the reservoir. Dry soil will not wick!