



**PRIVATE
REALM**

Best Practice Compendium

Private Realm v1.2
August 30, 2021



Brew Bar
COFFEE ROASTERS






Housing as a Complement to Local Businesses



Provided by SME Consultant Levine Planning Strategies, LLC

Location Biddeford, ME

Origin	City of Biddeford (ME)
Budget	 Low Budget – less than \$10,000
Timeframe	 Short Timeframe – 6 to 12 months
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Change in economic activity downtown; number of housing units produced; additional net tax revenue.
Partners & Resources	Planning Board; municipal officials; Select Board/Mayor/City Manager; Town Meeting or City Council; downtown and neighborhood organizations

Diagnostic

Too often, the zoning in downtown districts discourage development of housing. Sometimes, local zoning intentionally limits housing to preserve space for commercial activity. Just as often, housing may be permitted, but treated like housing in other areas of the community, requiring parking, setbacks and density limits that don't match downtown environments.

At the same time, the pandemic has been a challenge for downtown businesses, who may be used to serving workers downtown, or visitors from other communities. Having a population of local residents who can easily walk to downtown businesses builds another natural clientele into downtown. These residents can provide a boost to local businesses as they recover from the loss of business during COVID-19, as well as protect them from future shocks. Providing housing downtown is recommended by planning professionals as part of an overall economic development strategy, especially as a re-use strategy for B- and C-class commercial real estate.

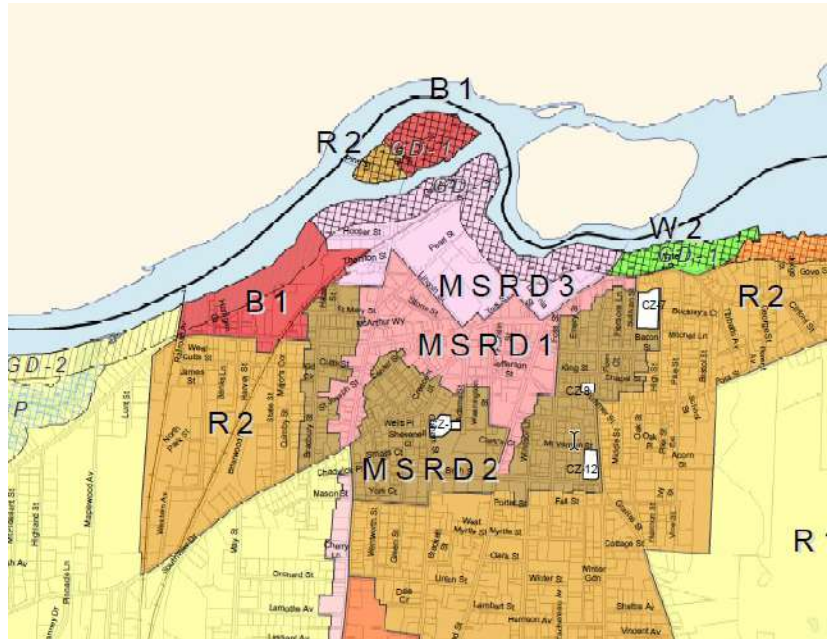
However, acknowledging the need for downtown housing is only the first step in producing that housing. The next step is to amend local zoning to allow for housing production appropriate for walkable, mixed-use areas such as downtown. Biddeford, Maine, provides a good model for how downtown zoning can acknowledge both the interest in housing production, as well as the density, mobility, and built environments specific to downtown locations.

Biddeford's example is particularly helpful because the zoning in the downtown district also avoids another common pitfall of being too specific as to the type and location of downtown housing. Often, when a community decides to allow for downtown housing, it adds limitations such as:

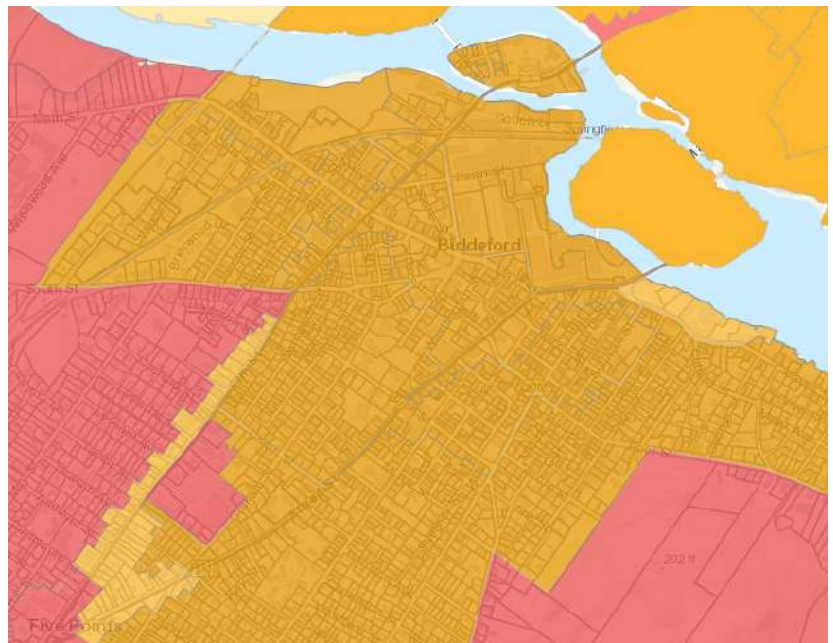
- Requiring that housing be only on upper stories;
- Requiring build-to lines (or maximum setbacks);
- Requiring minimum building heights; and
- Retaining extensive site plan and design review requirements that add cost and risk to a development.

These kinds of limitations are understandable but can reduce the interest in developing downtown housing. For example, limiting housing to upper stories is usually designed to create mixed-use buildings.

However, from a downtown business perspective, the goal is to increase the number of people living downtown. A vibrant, mixed-used downtown does not necessarily require mixed use buildings as long as the overall mix is vibrant.



Zoning in Downtown Biddeford (shown in the MSR D-1, MSR D-3 and B-1 districts) puts few limits on multifamily housing production, in part to help local businesses and cultural organizations in light of pandemic-related restrictions. In the long term, additional foot traffic from nearby housing will help downtown remain resilient and quickly recover from future shocks.



A study under way by the Greater Portland Council of Governments classifies the zoning in downtown Biddeford as some of the least restrictive for multifamily housing in the region

Action Item

Biddeford was traditionally a working class community centered on jobs located in downtown mills. French Canadian immigrants traditionally lived in multifamily homes away from the Saco River and walked downtown to work. Downtown storefronts provided services for local families, as well as lunch and after-work refreshment for employees of the mills. After most of the mills closed in the late 20th century, downtown Biddeford was left with a number of empty storefronts and large brick buildings. While the market was relatively strong regionally, downtown was held back by both the existing zoning, as well as a downtown trash incinerator that discouraged people from visiting the core of the city. Approximately 15 years ago, the city implemented a plan to remove the incinerator, and also took on the challenge of its downtown zoning.

While there have been several steps toward improving the potential for housing downtown, the most notable parts of downtown Biddeford's zoning include:

- Allowance for multifamily dwellings by right;
- Limited setback requirements (neither minimums nor maximums);
- Parking requirements that are flexible and based on actual need; and
- Flexible height requirements (buildings can generally be up to 6 stories tall, with a minimum height of two stories.)

In convincing the City Council to support this level of flexibility, City staff has emphasized the advantages of providing additional housing downtown, both in terms of tax base as well as for the benefit of downtown businesses. During the pandemic, housing production in downtown Biddeford has continued at a brisk pace, setting the stage for a faster post-pandemic recovery.

Process

Passing new zoning, especially more permissive zoning, must be done in a thoughtful and inclusive way. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, there is also some need to provide tangible tools for housing developers to utilize in the near term. Even if zoning is approved tomorrow, it will still take time for developers to acquire sites, find financing, develop construction documents, and actually build the housing.

In making any changes to allowances for housing downtown, a community should take the following actions:

1. Audit the current zoning and determine what aspects of it may be limiting downtown housing production. Contacting housing developers – both private and non-profit- and seeking their input will be helpful.
2. Determine what space existing downtown for housing production. Is it primarily upper stories of existing buildings? Vacant lots? Parking areas that are underutilized?
3. Reach out to downtown interests such as local business organizations to hear their thoughts about housing downtown.
4. Draft zoning amendments that can address the limits outlined in #1 above, in light of the physical opportunities identified in #2 and the concerns and interests in #3.
5. Develop clear communications materials that explain why you are looking to increase housing production downtown and how it will benefit the community and downtown coming out of the pandemic.
6. Begin the formal process of Planning Board and Town Meeting/City Council review. Be sure to budget time for ongoing communication and outreach with stakeholders. Be prepared to propose amendments if needed to address legitimate concerns that are raised.
7. Once new zoning is in place, make sure that housing developers know about it so they can look at opportunities it may unlock.



Image: Newburyport

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



Provided by SME Consultant	Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Innes Associates Ltd.
Location	Not Applicable

Origin	Innes Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Rapid Recovery Program sponsored by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Budget	 Low (less than \$50,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term (1-5 years)
Risk	 Medium
Costs	<p>Costs will include the consultant’s time, if a consultant is used. If the design guidelines are fully incorporated into the municipal zoning bylaw or ordinance, review by municipal counsel is recommended.</p> <p>The range for the consultant’s time is between \$20,000-\$50,000, depending on the level of public engagement and how illustrative the code is. Review by municipal counsel may be covered by the municipal on-call agreement or may need to be added to the cost of the project.</p>

Potential Sources of Funding

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

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. Creating or revising design guidelines may be linked to a façade/storefront improvement program. Possible impacts are addressed in the sections on Key Performance Indicators and Diagnostic.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth *Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000)* *Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)*

All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which would include developing the design guidelines. The MDI grant should be sufficient for the full project for a smaller community unless the community is looking for a more extensive set of illustrations or a significant public engagement process. A larger community may need additional funding.

Community Planning Grants (project limit \$25,000-\$75,000) *Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs*

A Community Planning Grant may be used for Zoning Review and Updates, which could include design guidelines if it is part of the municipality's zoning bylaws or ordinance. In 2021, the priorities for this grant included mitigation of climate change through zoning and other regulations; design guidelines and standards integrated into the municipality's zoning and incorporating elements to reduce the impact of climate change would qualify.

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

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

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

Survey and Planning Grant Program *Massachusetts Historical Commission*

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

Complete Streets Funding Program *Massachusetts Department of Transportation*

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

Risk: Explanation

The risk for this project is in part dependent on the form of government and whether the design guidelines will be an advisory document or incorporated into the zoning bylaw/ordinance as specific standards.

The highest risk would be a Town form of government in which the design guidelines become part of the zoning bylaws and municipal regulations have been controversial in the community.

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

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

Key Performance Indicators

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

KPIs for this project could include the following:

- Successful adoption of the new design guidelines.
- Increase in the number of applications that are consistent with the design guidelines.
- Decrease in the number of meetings dedicated to design in the site plan or special permit approval process.
- Increase in the number of buildings constructed, renovated, or rehabilitated that meet the design guidelines.

If this project is accompanied by a façade/storefront improvement project, additional KPI related to the number of façades or storefronts improved under the program could be added. Without such a program, changes will take more time as they will be dependent on applications for approval process that trigger the use of the guidelines. Without an application for site plan, special permit, and/or PUD approval, property owners are not obligated to meet the design guidelines.

Partners & Resources

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

Diagnostic

Creating or updating design guidelines and combining the update with financial assistance to property owners to update buildings and sites to be consistent with the new guidelines addresses several negative economic impacts of the COVID -19 pandemic.

Design guidelines can sometime be seen primarily as an aesthetic requirement. However, they can also have significant impacts on the economic and public health of an area, both of which are directly related to the continuing impacts of the pandemic:

- Small businesses in deteriorating downtowns, villages, and corridors are less likely to recover quickly because of a perception of a lack of safety or viability. Design guidelines that are responsive to community identity will reinforce a revitalized, vibrant area.
- Design guidelines that include landscape requirements can help improve air quality and reduce the heat island effect, improving public health for people who live, work, and shop in the target area.
- Design guidelines can also address accessibility for people with physical disabilities by requiring appropriate access that is well-integrated into the building and the site.
- Tools such as outdoor dining, outdoor retail display, serving windows, and upgraded HVAC systems can be integrated into the design guidelines to encourage permanent solutions that address the health and safety of the target area.

Action Item

Key actions include the following:

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

Process

The timeframe will vary depending on whether the municipality has a city form of government or requires Town Meeting to approve bylaw changes (and of course, whether the design guidelines are specifically incorporated into the zoning). From the kick-off to entering the municipal approval process, the project should take 8-12 months.

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

Example 3: Dedham Square Design Guidelines

Dedham, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Jeremy Rosenberger

Town Planner

jrosenberger@dedham-ma.gov

Consultant

Gamble Associates

Cost

\$30,000

Characteristics

- Advisory
- Applicable to Dedham Square and gateway streets
- Includes discussion of design elements for pocket parks and connections to open spaces.
- References historic development patterns.



Courtesy of the Town of Dedham and Gamble Associates

Example 4: Kendall Square Design Guidelines

Cambridge, Massachusetts

City Contact

Jeff Roberts

Zoning and Development Director

Community Development

Department

jroberts@cambridge.gov

Consultant

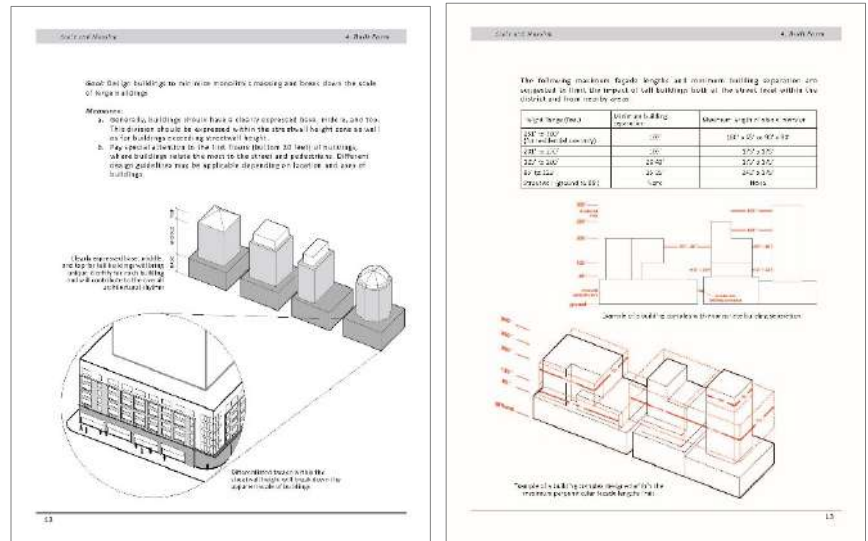
Goody Clancy

Cost

Unknown (part of larger project)

Characteristics

- Tied to zoning, including special permit and PUD applications
- Applicable to Kendall Square
- Addresses different building uses, including residential and academic buildings.



Courtesy of the City of Cambridge and Goody Clancy



Developing storefront guidelines to energize downtown



Provided by SME Consultant Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location Everett, MA

Origin	Mayor, City of Everett
Budget	 Low - \$35,000 for design fee + program to subsidize implementation for \$25,000
Timeframe	 Short- 10 -12 months
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Level of participation by landlords and merchants
Partners & Resources	City of Everett, Everett Building Department and Community Development Department, and landlords and merchants.

Diagnostic

The City of Everett is a primarily working class community just north of Boston. It has a large share of Brazilian, Latino and Italian first- and second-generation residents.

In the last few years, a very large casino has located there that gives the city some needed donations and fees for public improvements. There are two major retail enclaves in Everett: Everett Square and Glendale Square.

Everett Square, the larger of the two, is the traditional downtown where the public library and City Hall and many amenities are located.

Stores and restaurants are primarily locally-owned, family enterprises. Only a minority of Everett's business are national or regional chains.

In a bid to encourage the appeal of Everett's downtown to outside visitors, the year before the Pandemic, the Mayor directed the Community Development Director to create a framework to better guide merchants in enhancing their storefronts. A subsidy grant program was being developed to encourage merchant and landlord participation.

The Mayor also felt that a more restricted approach to storefront design be adhered to with similar sign details and limited awning colors. A study was commissioned to develop Guidelines for Signage and Storefronts. Following this, the guidelines were to be translated into the City of Everett's Building Code.

Action Items

- Photo-documentation of all commercial blocks and stores in both Everett Square and Glendale Square.
- Creating a panoramic view each block showing "existing" and "proposed."
- Thorough review of existing storefront improvement programs throughout the United States and Canada to recognize applicable precedents and best practices.
- Development of a City of Everett Guidelines format while exploring various cases for refinement and review.
- Drafting distinct pages referencing individual aspects of storefronts. These included wall signs, blade signs, awnings and window treatments.
- Review the drafted pages with Everett's planning staff, Building Department and representatives of the Mayor's office.
- Final approval of Storefront Guidelines.



Everett Square

Applicable Commercial Areas

The Everett Storefront Sign and Design Guidelines are applicable to any storefront located in the Everett Square neighborhood and the Glendale Square Neighborhood.

Everett Square

Everett Square is a prominent commercial corridor in the city center running along Broadway Street between Hancock Street in the north and Revere Beach Parkway in the south. The center of Everett Square is at the intersection of Broadway and Chelsea/Norwood streets.



The high number of vacant storefronts contributed to lack of vibrancy downtown.

Process

- Extensive research of other cities and towns guidelines and procedures.
- Based on best practices, create easily understandable illustrated storefront component pages that reference City of Everett regulations.
- Establish storefront element criteria through including specifically referenced dimensions, materials and placement.
- Photo-document good and bad examples of storefront elements.
- Create a City of Everett color pallet.
- Show by illustration approved and not approved ways of applying storefront elements.
- Circulate among town staff the drafts individual guideline pages for review and refinement.
- Organize whole Storefront Guidelines set of pages.
- After completion of Storefront Guidelines, during the Covid-19 shutdown, work with the Building Commission to rewrite Everett's Building Code to reflect the clearer storefront criteria.
- Others involved in the rewriting of Building Code include the city attorney and community development director.
- This sentence by sentence intense exercise gave focus to the Building Code while doing away with unnecessary zoning code criteria
- This Collaboration made a tedious set of tasks quite reasonable to complete.
- This process allowed an opportunity to address sign issues throughout the City such as non-conforming uses, public/private garages, etc..

Signs

Signs

Business signage is a very critical element to the storefront. Not only does it provide a first impression to customers, but it also helps convey the business' brand and character.

Signs should clearly communicate the business name, but not be overwhelming. The average person can only process four to seven words while passing by. Therefore keeping text and graphics to a minimum will make the most impact.



City Ordinance/Regulation:
Section 15.54b) of the City Ordinance further regulates the number and size of signs. See Technical Requirements for more information.

24

Signs and Technical Requirements

Awnings

Awnings can be a great addition to a storefront. Not only can they provide an area for signage, but they also help provide a visual cue on where the entrance is located. Awnings also provide shelter for customers in inclement weather and also provide shade for store items being displayed in the window.

City Ordinance/Regulation:
City Council Rule 74.B further regulates awnings.
Awning signs are also further regulated in City Ordinance Section 12A.



Awning Signs - Material

Awnings should be a solid color and made from a fabric or canvas material. Shiny, high gloss or translucent materials should be avoided.

Lettering and material should be consistent for all awnings on the same building.



This fabric awning is NOT shiny, high gloss or translucent. The awning frame also matches the black fabric.

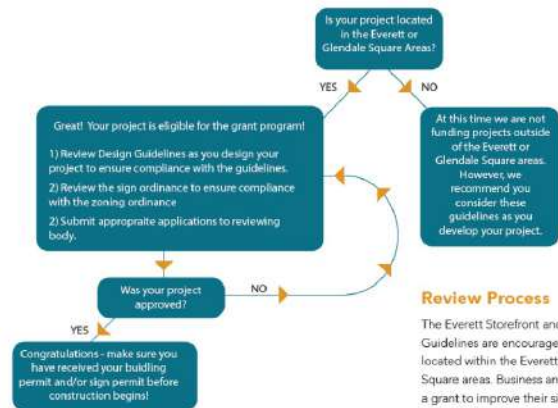


This awning is made of shiny vinyl and is not encouraged.

The block party was a near-term, easy action item in the overall implementation plan and was intended to support a good image for this area of the downtown and set up for larger and longer-term action items such as building redevelopment, wayfinding, and business recruitment for ground floor spaces.

Process- Strategic Decisions

- City of Everett deciding to create storefront guidelines
- Building Commission desiring to match new guidelines to City's Building code.
- Creation of a digital set of storefront criteria for use by merchants, landlords and fabricator/installers.
- Use of panoramic photo-montage to establish existing conditions.
- Use of photo-montages to act as baseline show proposed conditions using new storefront criteria.
- Collaboration between strategic City departments for ownership of the guidelines and shared development of the review process and grant applications.
- Creation of easily understandable and illustrated storefront criteria.



Review Process

The Everett Storefront and Facade Design Guidelines are encouraged for any storefront located within the Everett Square and Glendale Square areas. Business and property owners seeking a grant to improve their signage or awning shall demonstrate compliance with these guidelines and any applicable zoning regulations. This flow chart is meant to help you understand the process to get your project approved.

Review Process and Grant Application

Everett Square

Before



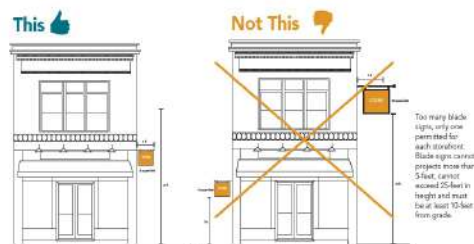
After





Projecting/Blade Signs

Projecting/blade signs should be limited one to a business entrance and should not contain more than two faces. To maintain the pedestrian feel of the corridor, projecting blade signs cannot project more than 5 feet from the building or be larger than 8 square feet. The sign should also not be placed higher than the following (whichever is the lowest): 25 feet above grade, the top of the sill of the first level of windows above the first story, or the height of the building at the building line.



Signs and Technical Requirements

Wall Signs

Wall Signs - Height

The top of wall signs should be higher than any of the following, whichever is lowest:

- 25 feet above grade;
- top of sills of the first level of windows above the first story; or
- the height of a building at the building line

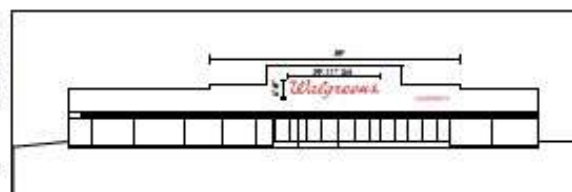


Everett MA Signage Case Study

The following depicts how signage is applied based on current and proposed regulations. The proposed regulations are depicted in Example 2. However, two additional renderings were provided to show alternative sign sizes.

Example 1
Allowed Under Current Regulations
Based on Sign Permit Documentation
Max Sign Size = 395 (158ft x 2.5 = 395, per sign permit)

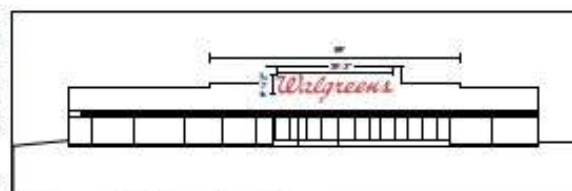
Main Sign As Shown = 199.77sf



Note - square footage is split up between the two signs "Walgreens" & "Pharmacy"

Example 2
Proposed Regulations
4 square ft per linear foot of wall which pertains to the sign, for facades set back more than 100 feet from the centerline of the road
Max Sign Size = 356 sf

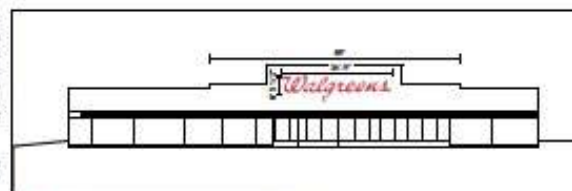
As shown = ~ 354 sf
Dimensions = 39.25' x 9.04'



Note - proposed regulations would not permit two wall signs on the same facade, therefore this example using all allotted sign size to the single wall sign.

Example 3
Comparison
3.5 sf per linear foot of wall which pertains to the sign, for facades set back from than 100 feet from the centerline of the road.
Max Sign Size = 311.5sf

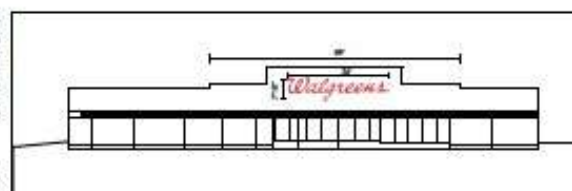
As shown = ~311.12sf
Dimensions = 36.75' x 8.47'



Note - proposed regulations would not permit two wall signs on the same facade, therefore this example using all allotted sign size to the single wall sign.

Example 4
Comparison
3 sf per linear foot of wall which pertains to the sign, for facades set back from than 100 feet from the centerline of the road.
Max Sign Size = 267sf

As shown = ~266.30'
Dimensions = 34' x 7.83'



Note - proposed regulations would not permit two wall signs on the same facade, therefore this example using all allotted sign size to the single wall sign.

FAVERMANN DESIGN | DECEMBER 2019

Downtown Manchester– Architectural Design Guidelines



Provided by SME Consultant

GOMAN+YORK Advisory Services

Location

Manchester, CT

Origin	GOMAN+YORK
Budget	 Low Budget - Consultant's Time for design standards
Timeframe	 Long-term – Post Covid
Risk	 Low Risk – setting guidelines/policies in place assures that any improvements done in the Downtown must be adhered to
Key Performance Indicators	Tenant Initiation of Recommendations, Tenant Traffic & Sales Growth
Partners & Resources	City/Town Economic Development, Business Owners
Diagnostic	<p>Changes in consumer behavior and a heightened appreciation for community and place made Downtown Manchester a competitive and desirable location. Prior to Covid-19 the town realized that the area's image, market potential, physical attributes and social connections needed to be maintained and improved. Covid-19 accentuated the need and importance of maintaining and strengthening the Downtown area to support the local tenant base.</p> <p>Architectural design guidelines were meant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhance the image of Downtown Manchester through the upgrade and maintenance of existing building façades; and• Encourage new construction which reinforces Downtown Manchester's historic development patterns. <p>Manchester's downtown district serves as a visual introduction to the town's character. An attractive image boosts commercial and community vitality when it successfully blends appearance and welcoming public spaces.</p> <p>Main Street's history is revealed in its diverse architectural styles. Each building is a unique record of its place in time. Therefore, building owners need to carefully evaluate the design of any proposed improvements to ensure they make a positive contribution to the collective Downtown environment.</p>

Action Items

Step 1. Define the area – this has already been done by the Plan Facilitators and the cities/towns.

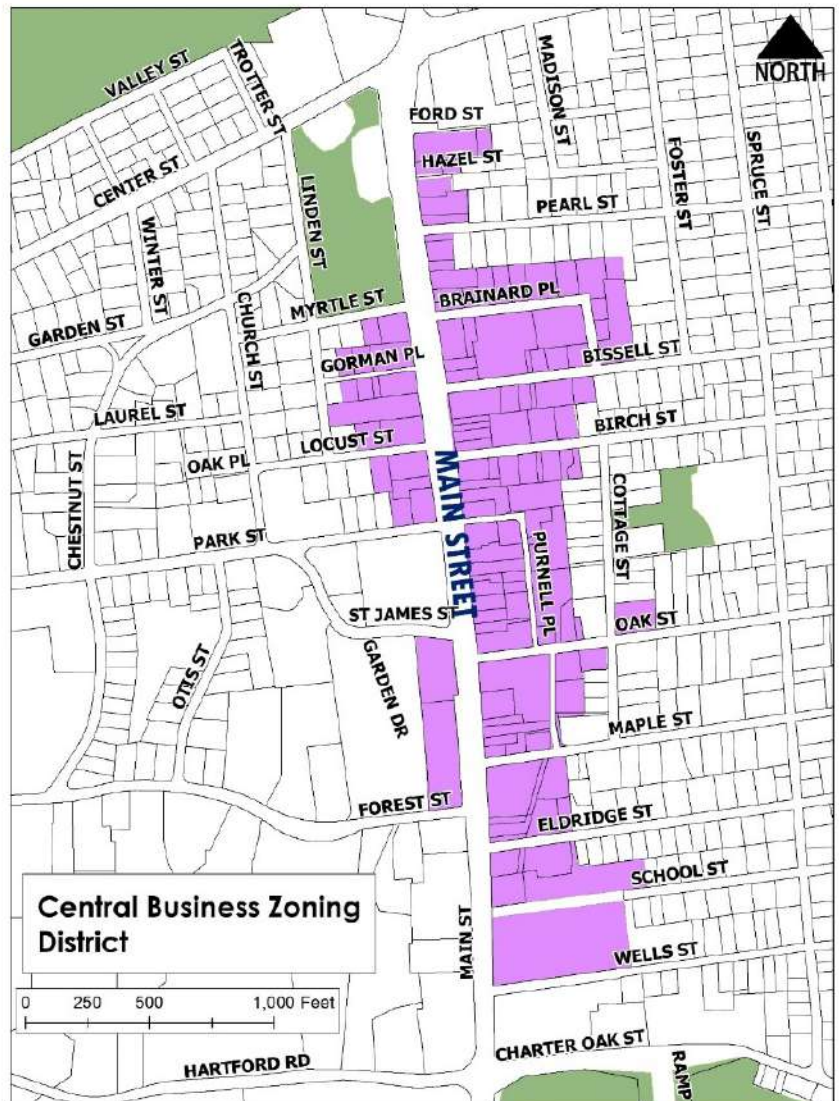
Step 2. Conduct a current conditions assessment –physical, governmental, private, character of the district. Some examples of disruptive alterations include:

- Blocking out windows, which is typically uninviting
- Replacing original architectural detailing with substandard or non-sustainable materials
- Covering original details with aluminum siding or random placement of wood paneling
- Introducing new design elements which were not in keeping with the original design
- Random placement with no coordination of ornamentation, lighting fixtures or signage
- Oversized signage creating visual confusion and blocking architectural details of upper floors

Step 3. Identify main key stakeholders (including but not limited to; Building Owners, Tenants, Residents, Clients and Customers) must preserve and highlight what makes this downtown unique: eclectic structures, public spaces, community facilities, ample parking, and an enjoyable pedestrian experience.

Step 4. Development & Implementation

Reminder: A vibrant, healthy and attractive downtown must be clean, safe and aesthetically pleasing. This relies on quality design and positive public-private relationships.



Define the Downtown Area

Ground Floor Tenant Storefronts

The storefront is the most significant feature of most commercial buildings. Its appearance plays a critical role in how a business is perceived and contributes to the pedestrian experience from the sidewalk. Building owners are expected to acknowledge critical elements of a building when redesigning a storefront.

Traditionally, the storefront is set into an opening in the building, framed by a building's columns or piers on either side, and sometimes includes a cornice or lintel along the top. Decorative elements of the storefront are definitive characteristics that ground the upper portions of the building to the sidewalk. When possible, these decorative elements should be retained in their original material, color and finish. The window area is generally large in contrast to the smaller windows on the upper stories to visually communicate and display the products and services offered within. The entranceway is often asymmetrical and recessed to increase display window area, provide weather protection, and allow clearance for the door swing.

When planning to renovate a storefront, its proportion in relation to the entire façade should be considered. Renovations should be done with durable and sustainable materials and retain existing modules, proportions, and structure



Urban Lodge Brewery – photo: Patch.com

Display Windows

Lighting: Night lighting is encouraged as it extends the pedestrian experience, makes a building façade more welcoming, and adds consistency to the downtown district. Lighting plans should be sensitive to potential impacts on vehicular traffic.

Temporary signage, seasonal displays and window seating: Products, furnishings or activities placed within a display window become part of the pedestrian experience. Merchants should consider the visual and messaging impact when designing displays, as they reflect the character of the business and affect the integrity of Downtown Manchester.

Cleanliness of windows – interior & exterior – sometimes it's that simple!

Awnings and Canopies

Storefront awnings and canopies are both functional and decorative. They are functional because they provide sun protection for merchandise, weather protection for visitors, and signage for the business (see "Signage" section for guidelines). These structures also add decorative color, patterns or graphics to the streetscape.

Both commercial grade, exterior fabric, retractable and permanent awnings have been successfully integrated in the past. The color or stripe chosen for the awning should complement the general color scheme of the building. Building owners are discouraged from using metal awnings because of their susceptibility to weather damage and fading.



Display Windows



Awnings and Canopies



Image: Andover

Develop a façade/storefront/site improvement program



Provided by SME Consultant

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

Location

Not Applicable

Origin	Innes Associates Ltd.
Budget	<div><div></div>Low (less than \$50,000)<div><div></div>Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000)</div></div>
Timeframe	<div><div></div>Short Term (1-5 years)</div>
Risk	<div><div></div>Medium</div>
Cost	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop design guidelines for the façade elements to be improved.• Develop the structure of the program.• Manage the program over time.• Design assistance.• Implementation, including construction.• Displacement protection programs.</div>

Potential Sources of Funding

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

Funding Sources for All Façade Improvement Programs

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

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

Hometown Grants

T-Mobile

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

Local Banks and other Community Development Financial Institutions

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

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth

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

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

Business Improvement District or Other Downtown District

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

Funding Sources that May be Leveraged

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

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

Potential Sources of Funding

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth: Underutilized Properties Program

MassDevelopment

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

Municipal Vacant Storefronts Program

Economic Assistance Coordinating Council

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

Collaborative Workspace Program

MassDevelopment

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

Community Preservation Act

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

Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund

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

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

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

Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit

Massachusetts Historical Commission

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

Risk: Explanation

The risk level depends on the community and the relationships of the property owners with the municipality. The highest level of risk occurs in conversations with property owners; for various reasons, the owners of the most distressed properties may be reluctant to participate. Once funding is secured and a few projects have been successfully completed, this risk level is likely to drop. Early engagement with property and business owners will also reduce this level of risk.

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

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

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

Key Performance Indicators

Improvements as a result of these programs include safety, accessibility, pedestrian comfort, and aesthetics. Over time, upgrades to façades and sites contribute to a perception that an area is vibrant, safe, and attractive to businesses and their customers. The increase in value attracts investment and contributes to a higher tax base.

KPI for this project could include the following:

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

Partners & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal staff (planning and economic development, building and/or zoning inspector) • Municipal boards (City Council/Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Economic Development Committee) • Property/business owners • Downtown organizations
Diagnostic	<p>Reasons for undertaking a façade or storefront improvement program may include one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements to address the transmissibility of COVID-19, such as new windows, doors, or HVAC system may be unaffordable to a small business owner and/or may have a negative impact on the façade if improperly sourced and installed. • On-site parking spaces are poorly organized and, if reorganized, can provide room for outdoor dining or retail display. • Local small businesses do not have the resources (time, money, expertise) to address substandard storefronts. • Distressed properties have a negative impact on people's impression of the viability and/or safety of a business district and property owners are unable to make the improvements themselves. • Storefronts are not accessible to those who have problems with mobility, whether temporary or permanent. • Historic downtowns often have empty upper floors because of the lack of accessible elevators. A major improvement project could provide grants to address both interior and exterior accessibility. • Historic properties may have been "improved" with inappropriate materials or repairs. <p>Site improvements that reduce asphalt and add landscape can address public health issues by reducing the heat island effect, planting trees to address air quality, and using low impact design to manage stormwater onsite.</p>
Action Item	<p>The municipality needs to make certain decisions prior to and during the creation of this program. If the municipality already knows the answers, then staff can proceed with developing the program. If not, the municipality can work the decision points into a scope of work for assistance in development and perhaps managing the program. See Process for some of these questions.</p> <p>If starting from scratch, the municipality will need to accomplish the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity. • Develop an appropriate level of design guidelines. • Engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program. • Develop the criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance. • Develop the funding and oversight structures.

Pre-program development

1. Identify who in the municipality will manage this program: municipal staff, existing downtown committee/organization, volunteer committee, or a hybrid.
2. If the municipality does not already have design guidelines for the area that are suitable for this program, then decide how those guidelines will be developed. Will the design guidelines be just for the façade improvement program, or will they be more broadly applicable?
Note that the entity managing this process does not have to be the municipality. For example, a Community Development Corporation or other nonprofit could sponsor the program.
3. Discuss the potential focus of the program: components of a storefront, the entire storefront, the entire façade, all façades, the site? Will signage, lighting, awnings and other smaller elements be included? Will interior improvements to address accessibility be included? Will the municipality fund the design, all or some of the improvements, or both?
4. Discuss what will not be eligible. Eligibility may also be determined by the funding source (for example, CDBG funds).
5. Discuss the length of time that improvements must be maintained and the enforcement process for ensuring that improvements are maintained. Maintenance requirements could be tied to the length of the tenant's lease.
6. Consider the funding structures. The program can provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. Grants may provide a greater incentive to participate while loans (no or low interest) provide a revolving fund to assist more properties. Forgiving loans after a certain time if the improvement are maintained is another option.
If the property owners are less interested in the program, the municipality might consider offering grants to the first 3-5 to sign up (depending on resources) or through a lottery process and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area. This would need to be a highly transparent process.
7. Decide whether the guidelines and program will be developed in-house or whether the municipality will seek outside help. The funding source may determine the type of outside assistance; for example, certain programs will assign on-call consultants. For others, the municipality may need to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP).

Developing the Guidelines

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

Developing the Program

1. Decide the following:
 - a. Grant, loan, or hybrid
 - b. Which elements will the program fund and which are the responsibility of the property owner?
 - c. What are the eligibility requirements for participating in the program?
 - d. What is the length of the program?
 - e. How long will property owners be required to maintain the improvements?
 - f. What is the enforcement procedure for maintenance? (This could be repayment of a grant or a lien on a property.)
 - g. Will the responsibility for maintenance transfer to a new owner if the property is sold?
2. Differentiating between the responsibilities of the tenant (often the small business) and the landlord (the property owner) is critical – a small business may be enthusiastic about the assistance, but the landlord may not. The municipality may need to consider parallel outreach processes.
3. Decide on the application process and how applicants will be evaluated. Are certain property types or improvements given priority over others? Make sure the process of choosing participants is transparent.
4. Develop the forms and train the people who will be evaluating the applications.

Implementation

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

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

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

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

Example 1: Sign & Façade Improvement Program

Ashland, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Beth Reynolds
Economic Development Director
breynolds@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.

Courtesy of the Town of Ashland

Example 2: Storefront Improvement Program

Cambridge, Massachusetts

City Contact

Christina DiLisio
Project Manager
cdilisio@cambridgema.gov

Funding by:

Municipal capital funds

Structure

Tiered matching grants based on improvement type

Characteristics

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

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



Courtesy of the City of Cambridge

Example 3: NPS Main Street Façade Improvement Grant

Main Street America

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

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

Example 4: Historic Commercial District Revolving Fund

Main Street America

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

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

Conduct Business Assessments – An Outside-In Approach



Provided by SME Consultant

GOMAN+YORK Advisory Services

Location

New England

Origin	GOMAN+YORK
Budget	 <p>Low Budget - Consultant's Time</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (1-day site visit, consultation and evaluation)</p>
Risk	 <p>Low Risk</p>
Key Performance Indicators	No. of completed business storefront improvements; Self-reported tenant traffic & sales growth
Partners & Resources	City/Town Economic Development, Chamber, Landlord. Tenants
Diagnostic	<p>Like other recessionary periods, Post Covid-19 is a time to reassess the way businesses are presenting themselves to consumers.</p> <p>A business assessment takes an impartial look at businesses and offers a critique that will hopefully offer low-cost solutions for improvement.</p> <p>Think of storefronts, signs and window displays as your introduction to potential consumers and clients. As such, the storefront comprises a major portion of the business assessment process. The process can be done for an individual storefront or an entire business district.</p> <p>In the next case study presented we will go into more depth on exterior improvement programs that were developed for Downtown Manchester, CT. Improvement programs – such as grant funding & community matching funds, are sources that can be utilized to help offset costs to businesses.</p>

Action Item

A Business Assessment can help to transform a struggling business or a long-term successful business that needs a refresh. A critical look at the business from the outside in is important not only from the customer's perspective, but for the business to grow and be a vibrant contributor to the community.

The Outside Assessment is a quick response to aid tenants in the process of reviewing their business from the consumer's perspective. This process is usually done as a whole business assessment. However, in this best practice sheet we will speak to assessing the physical components of a business - its storefronts, display windows and signs.

The site assessment begins with the exterior of a business. An honest assessment of a business will help the business owner to recover from the effects COVID-19 has had on their business. Consumers are venturing out more with the positivity rates declining and vaccinations increasing.

How we work with communities Bloomfield, CT – Economic Development Advisory and other municipalities

As Economic Development Advisors to the Town of Bloomfield, our team at GOMAN+YORK has worked for several years not only with their large businesses, but the Town's small businesses. We offer business assessments and consultations that encompass the whole business – that includes assessing the interior, exterior, marketing, business planning, funding sources and more.

It is important to note that while these are primarily done to help existing businesses, we also assist new and potential small businesses that are looking to enter the market.

Business assessments are funded through a variety of sources. The GOMAN+YORK team has worked with individual tenants at their request, at the request of a town as an ongoing Economic Development consultant and throughout our careers in the commercial real estate industry.

Our business consultants have provided business assessments for a variety of public and private clients including, the Town of Bloomfield, CT; the CT *Trail* Property Management and Utilities Unit, Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) shopping center and local retail tenants.



In the above examples we are looking at how vacancies are handled. The one on the right portrays activity and fun – enticing people to want to bring a business here. The example to the left is closed off and leaves nothing to the imagination for its potential as a new business.



Bad



Good



Good



Good



Bad

Exterior improvements to storefronts and signage can totally transform a single business or an entire area.

Process

Site Visit: 1- 2 hours

Report/Evaluation: 2 hours

Tenant Consultation: 1 – 2 hours

Implementation: short-term and ongoing

The Report

Be direct as to what needs to be done

- “Take down the handwritten signs”
- ✓ Producing printed easy to read signs
- “Clean your windows”
- ✓ Allows customers to see what you have to offer and entices them to enter, portrays cleanliness
- “Window displays should feature what you have to offer”
- ✓ Customers will want to walk in to see more!

The Consultation

- ✓ Be direct
- ✓ Be sympathetic
- ✓ Be honest
- ✓ Always offer suggestions
- ✓ Do an outside-in walkthrough
- ✓ Be open to questions
- ✓ Share your findings with key stakeholders



Conducting Business Assessments; Consider the storefront from a customer's perspective

Step outside and look at your storefronts
from a customer's perspective

- Are the windows clean?
- Are there handwritten signs?
- Are there exterior security grates?
- What are the façade conditions – peeling paint, damaged awnings, etc?
- Are you highlighting who you are and what you have to offer
- Are you communicating a positive or negative image to customers?
- Is your storefront signage readable as patrons are walking down the sidewalks or driving by?

Supporting the Implementation of Recommended Storefront improvements

- Signage improvement programs – grant funding, community matching funds, are sources that can be utilized to help offset costs to businesses.
- Work with the town to streamline a zoning process to change sign criteria, including storefront signs, blade signs and awnings. Adjust code language and regulations pertaining to storefront improvements to support improvements.



A-Frame Signs allowed by regulation without permits



Unique and historic identifying signs allowed by regulation

Reopening Soon

Retail Reboot: Updating retail store design *(With COVID 19 implications in mind)*



Provided by SME Consultant

Christine Moynihan, RetailVisioning

Location

Westfield, Lincoln, Agawam, Walpole, Lowell, North Adams + other MA communities

Origin	Technical Assistance model from innovative HUD program Cambridge (2002) and continuing as part of MDI, Boston Main Streets, and other TA programs
Budget	 One on one consultations and implementation funds averaged \$2000-\$3000 per store. Recommended to engage 8-10 stores per session
Timeframe	 Short term engagement – usually 2-3 months.
Risk	 Recruiting for retailer participation when time constraints and budget constraints were a challenge. Language facility - - engaged Korean and Portuguese interpreters.
Key Performance Indicators	Successful implementation of recommended improvements. More retailers asking to be involved in a subsequent session. Survey indicating satisfied retailers
Partners & Resources	Funding partners, Dept of Economic Development or BID for commercial district.

Diagnostic



Small independent businesses were severely impacted by COVID 19. There were very few if any, customers and with no school or childcare, many business owners themselves could not attend to managing their stores. As sales decreased, worries about staying afloat persisted. Some were able to file for emergency government assistance to help keep personal bills paid, but stores were increasingly neglected, and many closed for good.

Upon consideration to re-open, there was little money to make improvements on these neglected properties. There also were new challenges on how to meet new regulations for distancing, in-store capacity, sanitizing, etc.

The need to update stores, welcome back customers and re-boot business was real. Taking a technical assistance model and adding in solutions for these new challenges seemed to be a good solution.

Action Item

- Identify business owners who are in need of assistance to reopen businesses safely
- Communicate a program to help businesses update their businesses and implement store design improvements required by Covid 19 mitigation requirements. This could include signage inside and out, sanitization materials and protocols for shared space like dressing rooms, acrylic panels, creating extra space in stores among other considerations.
- Create application for participation in program



Process

- Secure grant funding to provide consultant and help private businesses with improvements
- Retain a store design consultant
- Schedule one-on-one meetings with retailers who have been approved for the program
- Provide recommendations for improvements
- Assure compliance and implementation within timeframe prescribed in application.
- Reimburse expenses for making improvements



Main St. Activation Program

A post-Covid 19 downtown recovery plan






Provided by SME Consultant

Christine Moynihan, RetailVisioning

Location

Brockton, MA

Origin	MassDevelopment TDI Program for Brockton
Budget	 <p>\$19,000 for the retailer workshop, one-on-one consulting, store improvements and 2 day event to show off stores and re-activate block. Separate budget for community investment of Streetscape Improvements</p>
Timeframe	 <p>5 months for workshop, consulting, improvement implementation and planning. 2 day event at the end of 5 months.</p>
Risk	 <p>Risks would include maintaining interest and momentum. Coordinating schedule with streetscape improvements and weather (plan a rain date)</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Increased traffic and revenue during and after the event. Continued public and private investment. New relationships among retailers on this block, with city officials and customers.
Partners & Resources	Merchant Association, individual business owners, DPW, volunteers.. RetailVisioning and MassDevelopment TDI fellow, George Durante. Additional funds by Chamber and DIF Brockton Original. Initial funding by MassDevelopment

Diagnostic

It was noted that the potential for this block was greater than the current shopping traffic and that without change, businesses would stagnate or deteriorate further. This is true in many shopping districts now, where foot traffic has dropped off and shopping online has become more popular due to Covid 19.

Realizing that the business owners had no connection with one another except for their street address was another factor and an important reason to bring them together. Business closures and personal isolation due to Covid 19 quarantining also was a problem.

Recognizing that businesses all lost money during Covid 19 and would therefore be unable to self-fund necessary improvements would be a third reason to reach out and offer a comprehensive improvement program and share efforts to revitalize this shopping block.

Action Items/Process

January – May:

WORKSHOP

After selecting the block and hiring a retail consultant to provide expertise with the business community, the first step would be to deliver a 1 hour workshop “Best Practices in Retail Presentation” for the business owners. The workshop covers facade, signage, interiors – look/feel and functionality, marketing & customer service. It helped to build excitement and onboard participants for the program, its process, and participation requirements.

ONE-ON-ONE CONSULTING WITH EACH BUSINESS

On site: Consultant and downtown coordinator would meet with the business owner in his or her place of business for an open and forward- looking discussion about opportunities for the business.

- Take a brief history of successes and challenges, review the current conditions, discuss solutions and offer new ideas.
- Take a lot of photos of the business inside and out and collect information on their marketing.

Off site: The consultant would prepare recommendations, research sources and develop strategies for implementing improvements. They would then be documented in a report for each business.

On site: Within 2-3 weeks, the downtown coordinator and the consultant would return to share the report with the owner and develop an implementation plan for putting agreed changes/improvements in place.

The downtown coordinator would work on implementation planning with each business owner to gain momentum for the “event” goal.

The downtown coordinator would also secure streetscape improvements with other resources.

Process (Continued)

BLOCK-SHINE / EVENT COORDINATION

- All parties would attend "Check In" meetings to see how everyone in the program is doing. Share initiatives, identify possibilities for working together, encourage support for one another, drive the group to a deadline for completion and the "reveal event".
- Plan an "event" to re-introduce these businesses and celebrate this block. Each business would host a special sale and send an invitation to their database of customers.
- Identify co-marketing /cross-selling programs and create appropriate tools. Decorate all shops, leverage social media, PR, government officials and community interest.
- Design & order, invitations, fliers, marketing tools, manage participation by stores, decorations, write press releases.
- Prepare drawing cards, collection boxes, etc. for prize drawing.
- Coordinate city contributions. Install parklet, Install banners, plants in dedicated containers on the street, set time and attendee list for ribbon cutting for newly updated store.
- Follow up press release with photos – ribbon cutting, prize winner.



Continuing Education: Workshop on how to be better retailers in order to welcome customers back downtown.



Ready to celebrate Brockton's "Block Shine" event



Our Big "Block Shine" Reveal!

Thursday & Friday,
May 18 & 19
Noon to 4pm

Elvera's Café
Tuxedos by Merien
The Brockton Visitors' Center
Main St Variety
K's Clique
Health and Home Care
Training of New England

132-262 Main St. Brockton, MA

Come Back to the Block!

... & be entered to win a flat screen TV!



May 22 - June 18



Collect a stamp from at least 3 of these businesses between
May 19 2017 DRAWING HELD ON JUNE 21ST!

Main St. Variety	K's Clique
Health & Home Care Training Center of NE	Downtown Brockton Visitor Center

name, email and/or cell phone number on the lines below
card (with 3 stamps) at one of these businesses.

Cell # _____

COME ON DOWNTOWN

Components of a Main St. Activation Event



Windows Before Stores



PRIVATE
REALM

Provided by SME Consultant

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Location

Great Barrington, MA

Origin

Town of Great Barrington, Great Barrington Cultural District, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Budget



The project has a proposed budget of \$20,000 to \$35,000. The budget will be used to pay 14 artists (\$1K each) and building owners (\$1K each @ 7 sites). Money will also be applied toward stipends for docents (\$500 for 7), public relations/publicity, and a website. Funds will be sought from MCC, local philanthropies that support the arts, youth, and economic development projects, and in-kind donations from larger businesses, including community lenders.

Timeframe



Strategic Planning: 2-3 months; Artist Solicitation: 1 month; Storefront Design/Marketing: 1-2 months; Implementation: 2 months

Risk



Owner interest/willingness to participate; Legal and building code barriers and costs; Public fatigue and lower engagement post-COVID-19.

Key Performance Indicators

The project will improve public perceptions of downtown Great Barrington as a place to do business. The project will highlight the town's commitment to economic and creative revitalization and increase public interest in supporting a downtown creative economy. The project will increase interest in small businesses establishing a foothold in Great Barrington for longer-term tenancy.

Partners & Resources

Public: Town of Great Barrington; Downtown Great Barrington Cultural District; **Nonprofit:** Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce; Local arts organization; **Private:** Bard College at Simon's Rock, artists, building owners, neighboring retail and restaurant tenants.

Diagnostic

Challenges facing the project include a depressed commercial landscape in Great Barrington due to COVID-19-induced business closures. There are currently over 10 vacant stores downtown following the pandemic out of 150 businesses overall.

In one BRPC-LRRP survey, for example, 74% of respondents reported earning less revenue in 2020 than in 2019 and 61% stated they had to reduce their business' hours; 57% reported a reduction in foot traffic. Parking regulations are frequently cited as an obstacle to business growth, as are a lack of public amenities such as bathrooms.

Many businesses in downtown Great Barrington are small, with over half having less than 10 employees. Businesses also report needing help with online sales and marketing. Business owners say they would like more cultural events and activities to help draw people downtown.

Working in the area's favor is the presence of a cultural district led by an active stakeholder group that includes government, business, and arts partners. The downtown underwent a major renovation in 2011 that dramatically improved accessibility and appearance. The downtown has a strong visual presence and includes buildings on the National Register of Historic Places (e.g., Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center). In March 2021, *Boston Magazine* rated Great Barrington as one of its top places to live in the state.



Available storefront in Great Barrington

Action Items

Windows to Stores will engage four stakeholders -- local government, building owners, visual arts organizations and artists, and community members -- to activate vacant stores by employing local artists to create dynamic sculptural and movement-oriented pieces inside windows that the public can view from the street. Artwork will be highlighted in "Opening Night" evenings. Following increased interest in spaces, potential commercial tenants can request access to stores from business owners to evaluate their fit for commercial tenancy.

Key actions for the project include identifying willing building owners; having local government serve as a matchmaker between building owners and visual arts organizations and artists; and streamlining legal, zoning, and/or regulatory challenges that hinder short-term activation (e.g., insurance, certificate of occupancy).

Community members will be invited to play a central role in the project to ensure local buy-in. As an example, high-school youth and college students will be provided stipends to serve on art selection committees and act as docents in front of store windows.

Process

- Identify a dedicated and diverse group of partners who are committed to lead the project from start to finish. We will recruit people who are known in the community and have earned public trust and put out a call to newcomers and under-served audiences who can bring an outside perspective to the project's implementation.
- Outline the resources (funding, knowledge, relationships) needed to succeed and determine how these items will be acquired. We will seek funding through grants and fundraising from local sponsors and patrons. Funding will be used to support artists and compensate building owners, pay stipends to youth docents, and market and promote the project.
- Secure building owner participation through an outreach campaign that includes showcasing examples of successful window-to-store projects in other towns of similar scale. We will focus outreach on vacant stores located in a walkable radius to create a sense of momentum and energy in the downtown corridor.
- If building owners need to address interior or exterior code issues to qualify, we will work with them to streamline the permit and approval process and provide incentives in the form of grants or low-interest loans in partnership with local lenders where possible. We will also seek to negotiate reduced pricing from private construction and trade companies to assist with improvements in exchange for publicity.
- Organize a public call for art through a public relations, press, and social media campaign. We will select artists and artwork reflective of the community's identity and diversity. Youth will be involved in the selection process. Art that showcases community pride will take precedence.
- Work with a local college to create a social media campaign for the project and reward community-generated social media postings during the project in the form of gifts from local businesses. Have high-school and college students act as docents during the event. Docents will be asked to take an active role in championing the project, artwork, artist, and building. Docents will be mentored to establish longer-term relationships with the building owner, artist, or tradespeople as part of career exploration.
- Run the window-to-store event over a series of eight weeks during a less-touristed period of the year with displays changed every two weeks. "Opening Nights" will take place each Thursday or Friday with local merchants encouraged to plan promotions to coincide.
- Use "Opening Nights" as opportunities to gather feedback about broader community needs, most importantly to identify gaps in retail and business services.
- After the event, we will hold a partner and public closing conversation to assess impact and decide on next steps for securing new commercial tenants.



Creative empty storefront treatments by Newton Community Pride's WindowArt






Provided by SME Consultant

Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location

City of Newton (in two Villages)

Origin	Community group, artists collaborating with landlords to revitalize store closures due to impacts of COVID-19
Budget	 Low (<\$50,000)—utilization of existing artwork
Timeframe	 Medium-term – planning and implementation took 6 months
Risk	 Low Risk for project execution. However, connecting with absentee landlords will present difficulties.
Key Performance Indicators	Perceived street enhancements; No. of potential tenants engaged; No. of tenants signing leases
Partners & Resources	Town Administrators, City Departments of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts—including the Cultural Division, the Planning and Economic Development Department and the Department of Public Works, local landlords, potential tenants, arts organizations and artists

Diagnostic

Though the Covid-19 Pandemic more finely focused on the dilemma of empty storefronts, this is a continuous, if sometimes only temporary, negative situation in downtowns and commercial districts. Vacant stores are a glaring or at least front and center visible loss to a commercial area, block or building. And most landlords do the least effort to re-lease—simple signs, ads or word of mouth to existing tenants.

The issue is how to combine the needs of the commercial district to the resources available to be creative and commercially reinforcing. One thoughtful solution was by Newton Community Pride, a non-profit organization building community for all to enjoy through arts and culture programming.

The Newton Community Pride staff and board recognized the empty storefront needs of the City of Newton commercial districts. They also had an inventory of artwork by local resident artists.

They wanted to install artwork in as many empty storefronts as possible. However, it was challenging to ascertain landlord ownership especially with absentee landlords, as they are a subgroup of landlords with less incentive to visually enhance their empty properties. They focused on identifying and working with various owners that they could,

After a short few weeks, Newton Community Pride installed a number empty storefronts with art.

Context

- No matter how beautiful or historic a façade is, an empty storefront makes it an eyesore.
- Empty Storefronts are distractions from a vital commercial area or downtown.
- With no rent, revenue or relief, unless enlightened or visionary, a landlord usually does the least expensive solution like just paper in the windows, standard for lease signs, etc.
- Arts organizations, student artists and community artists have all assisted to make the empty stores more visually appealing.



Vacant ground floor uses were mapped and space characteristics noted.



The vacant storefronts contributed to lack of vibrancy in the City of Newton's commercial districts.

Action Items/Process

- Document the empty storefronts in a particular commercial area. In the City of Newton's case, there are 13 separate villages with some commercial district located in eight (8) of them.
- Select focus areas. In Newton's case, focus was centered upon the greatest concentration of stores and empty storefronts.
- Identify landlords and reach out to landlords through cold calls, e-mails, and online and print publications. Persistence in reaching out seemed to payoff the most.
- To augment the "Call for Interested Landlords," Newton Community Pride used local media through press releases including [The Boston Globe](#), local online publications, social media and their own website to communicate the program.
- Discuss and agree with landlords on the organization's approach to the empty storefront. Individual property managers made final decisions about what went where.
- Develop an approach to the installations or create an inventory of existing artwork by local artists. In this case, the artwork already existed and had been used as part of the previously funded Newton Community Pride program, FenceArt. FenceArt produced a juried "call to artist" that generated an inventory of artwork.
- All art was previously printed on vinyl banners, and this allowed for an easy installation behind storefront windows..
- The results of the initial effort were disappointing to the organization who desired much more landlord participation. However, the lessons learned here allow for future project application.



Even the most beautiful block architecturally with wonderful historic detailing looks bad when the empty storefronts are empty.



Empty storefronts in a beautiful commercial block is like the missing tooth in the beautiful smile.

Process – Strategic Decisions

- Establishment of a collaborative network to discuss and share resources.
- Decide who are the key decision-makers of each project be they landlords, business associations, arts organizations, city agency, etc.
- Think innovatively, out of the box. In this case, the decision to utilize existing and available artwork allowed for several steps to be skipped in the process.
- Learning from this experience, in the future it would be desirable to have a City of Newton official agency to identify landlord ownership. In-turn, this would facilitate greater numbers of cooperating storefronts.
- Publicizing the successful projects to encourage more landlord/building owner involvement.
- Decision that the installed program should have a time limit for elements to be replaced.
- It was determined that this WindowArt Project was a part of the overall Covid-19 Program titled “Newton Al Fresco” that also included artist-decorated Jersey barriers, painted cable spools as side tables for benches for outdoor eating and individual murals.
- A related project to WindowArt and another creative Covid-19 response is an innovative new pilot program partnered by the City of Newton, the Town of Needham and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Project: Pop-Up*.
 - This will allow small retailers to access 1-3 storefronts in Needham and 4-5 storefronts in Newton at a significantly reduced cost.
 - The retailers, many of whom are currently operating primarily online, will have access to the commercial space for 2-3 months to introduce their businesses to a wider audience and will have access to a wide range of support services.



Newton Community Pride Artwork Installation in Empty Storefronts



Newton Community Pride energizing empty storefronts with artists' work (above); Articles about the program (below).

Community Corner

WindowART To Fill Vacant Windows Around Newton

Newton Community Pride is trying something a little different this year and repurposing its FenceART project.

Jenna Fisher, Patch Staff
 Posted Tue, Apr 20, 2021 at 10:09 am ET | Updated Tue, Apr 20, 2021 at 12:46 pm ET

Like 15 Share Reply

Newton Community Pride is trying something a little different this year and repurposing its FenceART project. (Gloria Gavris, courtesy)

NEWTON, MA — If you've ever walked past a vacant storefront and felt a little hopeful about the potential that space has, you're not alone.

Newton Community Pride, a nonprofit volunteer group with a mission that includes beautification projects that support the community, decided to fill vacant windows with art.

Summary

- Think of the empty storefront as an opportunity for creative artistic expression to energize a storefront, block or commercial area.
- This allows the commercial building or district to take a negative and make it into a positive through visual enhancement while generating provocative conversation or even by creating a temporary art gallery.
- Partners are necessary so that collaboration can take place smoothly between the community agencies, business and arts communities.
- Publicize the activity. This draws community interest, reinforces artists' involvement and attracts potential landlord participants.

WICKEDLOCAL.com

Jobs Cars USA TODAY Weather Legals

NEWTON-TAB

Newton Community Pride announces WindowART to fill vacant windows

COURTESY OF NEWTON COMMUNITY PRIDE
 Published 9:11 a.m. ET Apr. 16, 2021

Facebook Twitter Email Print

Newton Community Pride will host WindowART, a public art initiative to bring art to Newton's commercial districts.

THE HEIGHTS
 Est. 1919 Independent Since 1920

TO CREATOR HEIGHTS | CORONAVIRUS UPDATES | NEWS | SPORTS | ARTS | OPINIONS

Home » Newton Community Pride Fills Vacant Storefronts With Artwork

Newton Community Pride Fills Vacant Storefronts With Artwork

By Julia Riemick
 April 25, 2021 | Updated April 25, 2021 at 11:19 pm

A photograph of a vibrant red artwork in Mexico next to a red "for rent" sign draws public attention to an otherwise empty Newtonville storefront window. As a part of a new public art initiative sponsored by Newton Community Pride, vacant Newton storefronts will display professional artwork in an effort to beautify the city.

"It's a lovely opportunity to have shoppers and diners and pedestrians stumble across a beautiful piece of artwork as opposed to brown paper cardboard or a for lease sign, so it makes a nice addition to our villages," Gloria Gavris, board chair of Newton Community Pride, said.

The project, called WindowART, incorporates the pieces from Newton Community Pride's annual FenceART project, including local artist Howard Plummer's "Nested Arches, Mexico." This public art initiative is a submission-based competition that displays winning artists' work on fences throughout Newton, such as at the Newton Free Library and the Newton Senior Center. A jury of professional artists selects 20 submissions to be printed on vinyl banners and displayed throughout the year.

Newton Community Pride rotates the art among five Newton fences every 10 weeks, beginning in October and November, Gavris said. Submissions to the competition were open to artists who reside, work, or participate in art classes in Newton.



Provide Welcoming Outdoor Dining



Provided by SME Consultant

Civic Space Collaborative

Location

Salem, MA

Provide Welcoming Outdoor Dining



Provided by SME Consultant

Civic Space Collaborative

Location

Salem, MA

Origin

City of Salem Mayor's Office; Salem Economic Development Rapid Recovery (EDRR) Task Force; John Andrews & Creative Collective

Budget



Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000 paid for by individual restaurants owners with City of Salem support to install custom outdoor dining spaces)

Timeframe



Short (4 months)

Risk



Medium (Uncertainty over upcoming state laws)

Key Performance Indicators

Allowed restaurants to stay open and stay in business. Beneficial marketing for the restaurants. Beneficial marketing for the downtown district. Facilitated sense of social connection and community.

Partners & Resources

Creative Collective, City departments (Mayor's Office, Planning + Community Development, and Department of Public Works), individual restaurants owners/manager, and artists

Diagnostic

Opportunities

- Initial quick roll-out showed the community it is possible to transform underutilized public spaces into vibrant outdoor dining.
- Restaurant owners and managers are keen to keep the outdoor dining.
- Most community leaders and members love the program as demonstrated by several surveys conducted during 2020.

Challenges

- The transition from temporary to permanent will require significant investments in design and construction.
- Parking is a real and perceived loss for businesses and people driving into Downtown Salem.
- Considerations related to universal design, public health, and building codes.

Action Item

The outdoor dining program was a successful transformation of public and private spaces into outdoor “streeteries” for the benefit of restaurants and the Salem community, including residents and tourists.

Over 50 restaurants participated in the program in 2020, and 56 have applied for the 2021 season.

Local artists were employed with to transform protective jersey barriers into works of art.

With an eye towards making the program permanent, the design and implementation of these spaces has already evolved to be more safe, accessible, usable, and attractive.

Process

- Establish a core group of stakeholders to shepherd the project and to meet weekly to get the project started.
- Hire a project manager with restaurant community connections. In Salem, John Andrews, Owner / Chief Creative Officer of Creative Collective managed, coordinated, and helped implement the program for 2020 and the evolution of the program in 2021. Creative Collective was hired by the City of Salem. The project manager brings together the stakeholders from City departments, restaurants, and local artists to create functional, safe, community minded, and aesthetically pleasing installations for outdoor dining.
- Communicate with each individual restaurant owner or manager to establish their needs and possible contribution (materials or labor). Communication with any available channels (from email to social media to going door to door) is key.
- Create a marketing strategy with a mix of different communication methods. Examples: posting to Facebook groups, direct messaging on social media, door to door campaign, and phone calls.
- Communicate design guidelines for best practices related to public health, universal design, and building code compliant design.



Outdoor Seating at Rockafellas Restaurant on Washington Street in Salem, MA



Sidewalk seating and tent seating at Ledger Restaurant on Washington Street

Process (Continued)

- Determine if pedestrian right-of-way needs redesign, new accommodation. Ensure full accessibility with universal design.
- In 2021, obtain City approval based on an automated application under the viewpoint portal.
- Aid and assist as needed in the build-out of individual spaces.
- Determine items to be provided by the City. In Salem, the City provided jersey barriers heaters, and the City also provided labor and material support on an individual restaurant basis.
- Coordinate with Department of Public Works on delivery and placement of jersey barriers and heaters.
- Hire local artists to paint barriers and coordinate mural with aesthetic input from individual businesses. The City of Salem hired the artists.
- Create a plan for storage and winterization.
- Meet with core stakeholders to iterate for the following season, learn from mistakes, and evolve the program.



Outdoor Seating at Brother's Taverna on Derby Street



Outdoor Seating for Bambolina Restaurant with new pedestrian right-of-way on Derby Street

(Photo credit: Pamala Joye)

Redeveloping Underutilized Commercial Space



Provided by SME Consultant

Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Location

Various locations

Origin

Chris Kuschel, AICP and Ralph Willmer, FAICP

Budget



Low (staff time)

Timeframe



Long (3-5 years)

Risk



High (financial)

Key Performance Indicators

Adoption of zoning by City or Town Council/Town Meeting; assuming zoning is adopted, the transition of the site to new residential and commercial space

Partners & Resources

Municipal government planning staff, elected officials, licensing/permitting staff; local property owners, local residents, developers, attorneys, architects, engineers, landscape architects

Diagnostic

Within the Greater Boston region, there are 3,100 sites covering approximately 10.5 sq. miles in area. These sites are currently occupied by strip malls and related auto-centric retail, some of which can be redeveloped into more productive properties. As single-story, single-use structures with abundant parking, they are often under-utilized. Factors that are driving this condition include various demographic shifts, changes in personal shopping preferences, environmental considerations, and an increased attention to equity. COVID-9 has accelerated these changes.



Diagnostic

These under-utilized developments present opportunities to activate the sites by creating a more vibrant place with multi-use structures that include both residential and commercial uses. Frequently, zoning changes are required to permit that more expansive range of allowable land uses. These sites can be further enhanced through design guidelines that encourage streetscape improvements, public open spaces and plazas, and landscaping.

The process for amending and updating zoning bylaws and ordinances can be a challenging one. The more successful efforts involve a robust community engagement process that includes a wide variety of stakeholders. These stakeholders can include municipal government planning staff, elected officials, local property owners, local residents, developers, and business owners.



Action Item

In its role as the regional planning agency, MAPC regularly works with communities to promote Smart Growth and identify sites that have redevelopment potential. Once a site has been identified, it is important to review the existing zoning to ascertain if there are any barriers to redevelopment such as the uses allowed in the specific zoning district, dimensional regulations, parking standards, etc. In many cases, zoning amendments are required to encourage more efficient use of a site and better design than what had been previously allowed.

Impact

Redevelopment could revitalize existing businesses, provide much-needed housing and enhance the surrounding neighborhoods.

Redevelopment offers the following potential benefits:

Preserving existing businesses

- Preserving active, vibrant businesses during the redevelopment is crucial

Ease of redevelopment

- Parcels are typically small enough that they can be redeveloped in a relatively short amount of time
- It can be easier politically to change uses and forms than single-family districts

Creating cohesive neighborhoods

- Multiple contiguous parcels can be redeveloped incrementally to enhance or create cohesive neighborhoods over the long term

Dior – Dedham near Legacy Place



Mashpee Commons

Key to Success

Local creativity

- Use local help: using local architects and attorneys allow a developer to navigate local politics and know what is expected
- Activate outdoor space: overcapacity of parking can allow surplus space to be used for food vendors and seating to activate space
- Break up big box space: breaking down large anchor space allows for more small local businesses

Work with what exists

- When possible, work within existing zoning: proposing a development aligned with existing zoning could remove roadblocks
- Leverage existing planning studies: planning studies can provide a vision and market analysis for the area
- Have patience: long lead time and red tape can be daunting for a developer

Process

Local government

- Provide education to local property owners regarding opportunity and potential
- Help identify locations for updated planning and zoning for mixed-use development
- Work with property owners to identify barriers
- Connect developers with property owners on sites that help achieve the municipality's goals
- Ensure that there is a robust public outreach process to explain and advocate for the zoning changes including the use of graphic material that helps to visualize the proposed changes

State government

- Incorporate analysis as part of scoring for various grant programs
- Utilize that analysis for infrastructure investments