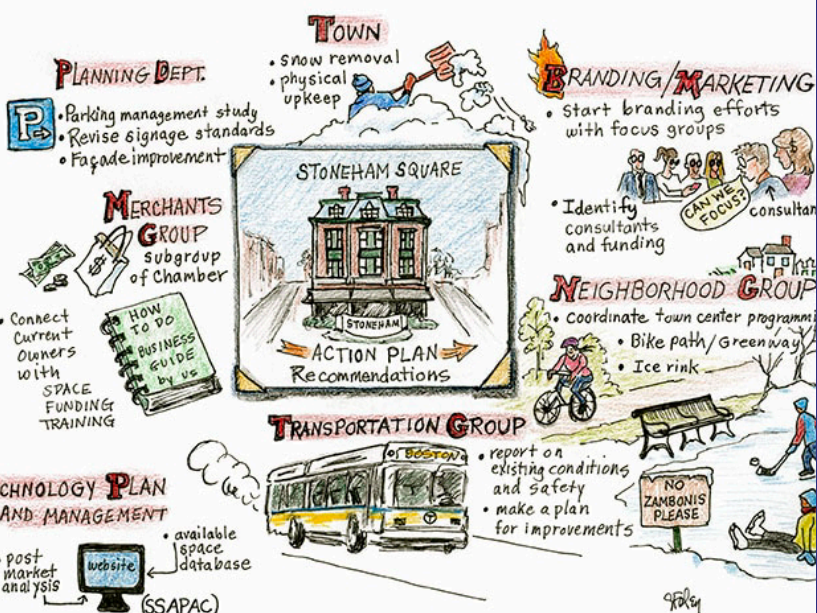




Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Stoneham, MA



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



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

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

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

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Acknowledgements



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Middlesex Investment Properties	Chris Senna
Re/Max Main Street Associates	John Veneziano, Laura Olifers, Monica Canova

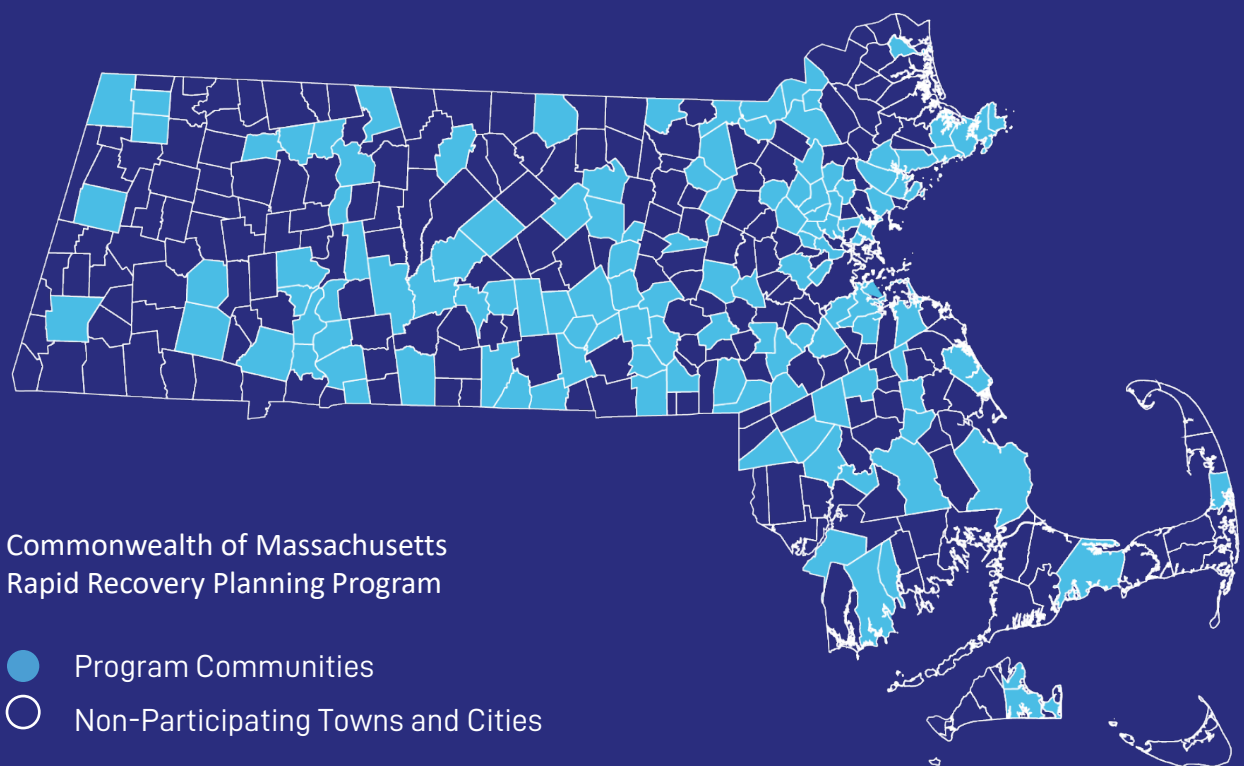
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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



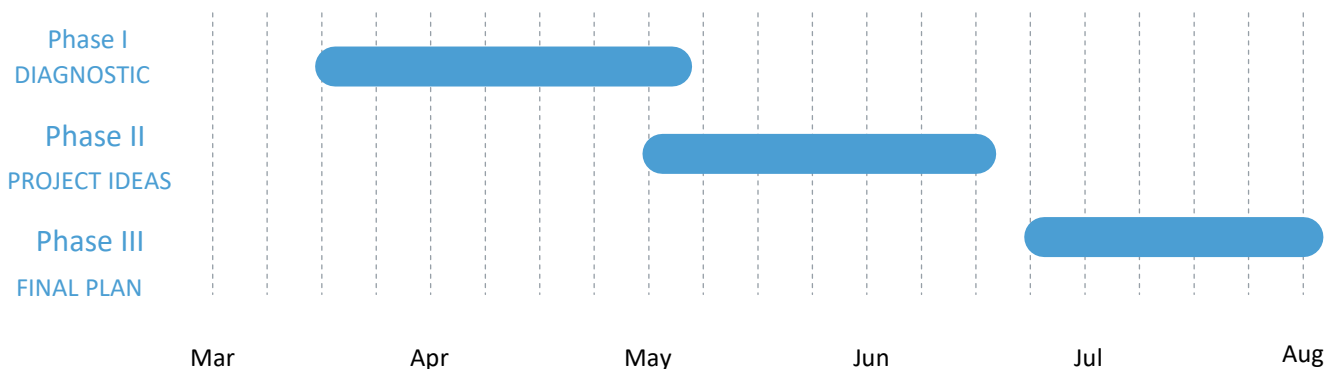
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

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

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



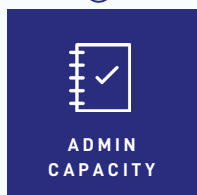
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue/Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

Executive Summary

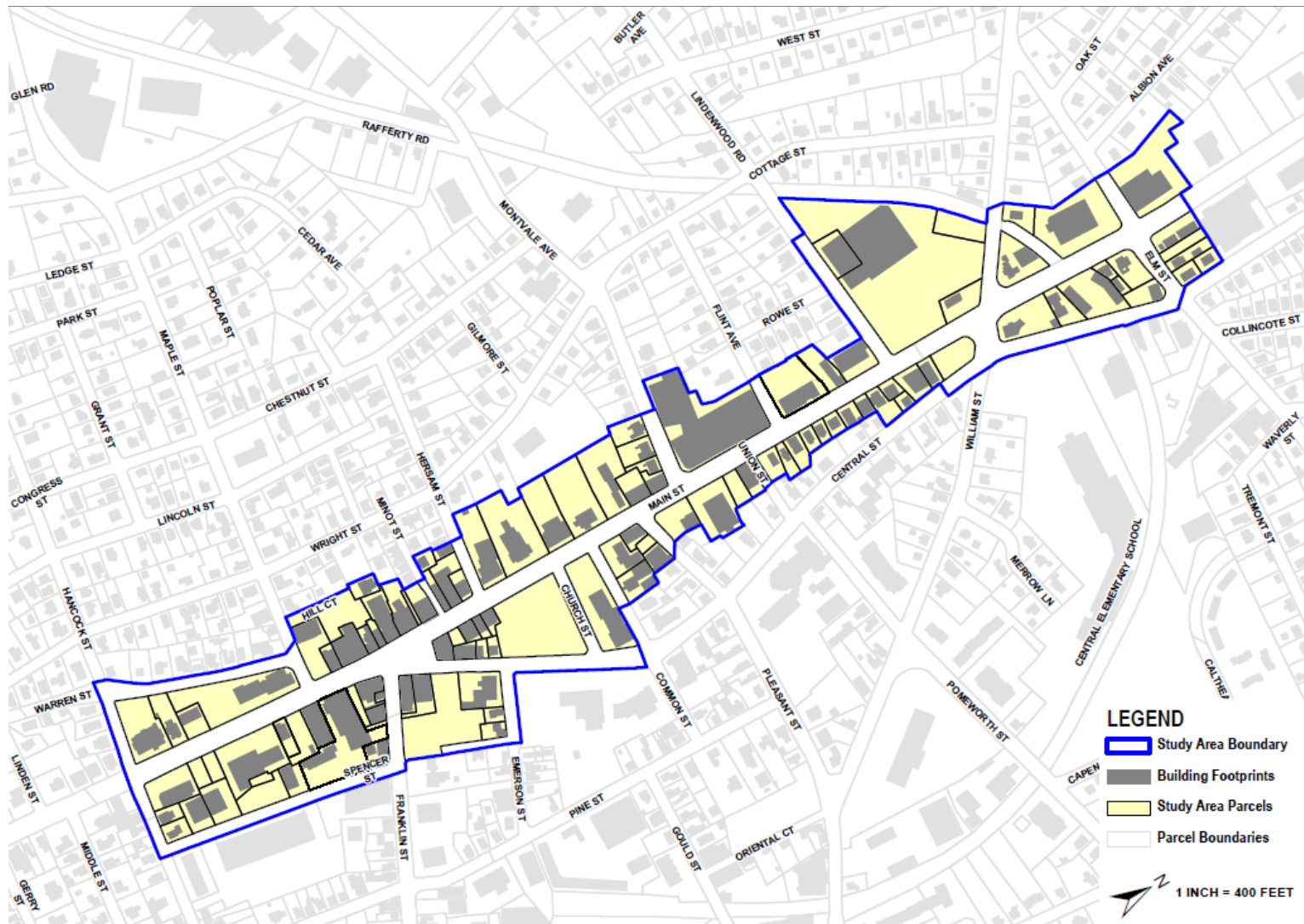
Executive Summary

A Town Center Developing Its Identity

Downtown Stoneham has a lot to offer. At its center are the Greater Boston Stage Co., a theater that sells over 44,000 tickets per year along with offering youth camps and other programs, and the Stoneham Town Common, host to a summer concert series, the Town's farmers market, annual Town Day, and more. In recent years, new restaurants and experience-oriented businesses have been added to downtown to complement the personal and technical/scientific services. Also located in downtown are Town Hall, the library, and the post office. The center of Downtown, near Stoneham Square and the Town Common, is well connected and maintained with cohesive landscaping, street lighting, and seasonal banners. At its northern extent is the Tri-Community Greenway, a recreational path connecting Stoneham, Woburn, and Winchester. Approximately 1 mile south of downtown are several population recreational destinations including Hall Memorial Pool and Splash Pad, Spot Pond, Middlesex Fells Reservation, and the Stone Zoo. Each of these are important components of the town's economic vitality.

However, despite being the historic civic and commercial nexus for the Town, downtown has seen market attrition with the rise of regional auto-oriented commercial centers. While nearby amenities are popular, foot traffic in downtown is generally low compared to neighboring areas. Consistently, downtown businesses comment that Main Street is a cut-through to reach other shopping areas like the Redstone Plaza which is host to national chains or to the recreational amenities south of the town. There is a need to convert the daily high traffic volumes from this pass-through to users who stop in Downtown.

Downtown benefits from a capable Town planner, an active chamber of commerce, and a diverse group of engaged downtown stakeholders including property owners, business owners, and real estate professionals. Just prior to COVID-19, the Downtown Merchants Group was forming to collectively identify and address improvement opportunities for downtown businesses and properties. COVID-19 diverted the attention of this group but many believe that existing administrative capacity is not sufficient to achieve all desired objectives for the downtown and that a formal downtown management entity could provide the structure and momentum needed to address longstanding issues. One challenge noted by these stakeholders is a lengthy and costly permitting process for new businesses which deters new entrepreneurs from the area and stymies use change and improvements for existing businesses.



LEGEND

- Study Area Boundary
- Building Footprints
- Study Area Parcels
- Parcel Boundaries

1 INCH = 400 FEET

0 200 400 800
Feet



STONEHAM STUDY AREA MAP

Map of Downtown Stoneham Study Area Source: BSC Group

The Town's Recovery will depend on a mix of infrastructure improvements and building organizational capacity

COVID-19's impacts on downtown Stoneham were varied. The majority of businesses experienced a decline in revenue and reduced their operating hours or capacity due to pandemic impacts. Many of these businesses continue to operate at reduced hours/capacity and to incur expenses to implement safety measures such as enhanced cleaning, personal protective equipment, and changes to physical layout. A smaller proportion of businesses experienced employee layoffs and temporary or permanent closures. 9 of 130 storefronts were vacant as of spring 2021.

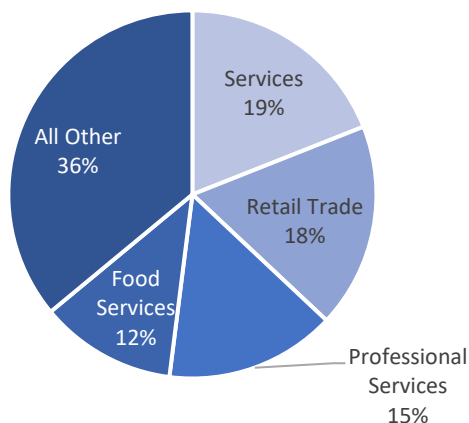
A multi-pronged approach to spurring the downtown's recovery has been identified that touches upon the following themes:

Improve the public realm and create more destinations to drive people into downtown. This includes improvements in the pedestrian experience, creating wayfinding connections to downtown from popular recreation, and enhancing downtown with branding. It also includes recommendations to fill downtown vacancies with pop-ups and promote greater space utilization that allows for passive recreation and more event programming in the downtown.

Make it easier for existing and new businesses to do business in Stoneham. Business surveys across the Commonwealth have shown that communities with district management entities were able to support businesses and navigate COVID's impacts greater than those that don't. They also help commercial districts pursue shared goals such as marketing, public realm improvements, and more. Recommendations related to this theme include building capacity through establishment of a business improvement district or similar management entity. This also includes identifying and removing zoning and permitting impediments creating a more streamlined process for new businesses to get established and for existing businesses to make changes.

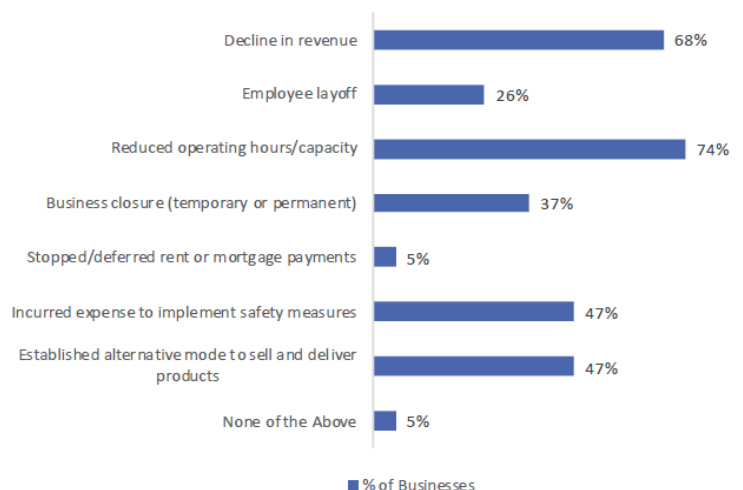
Provide small business technical assistance. Given impacts to business revenue, capacity, and additional costs incurred to respond to COVID, businesses are more constrained than ever to make needed improvements. Specific forms of assistance such as implementing a small businesses coaching program as well as expanding Stoneham's Commercial Improvement Program will help businesses implement changes that will help them recover and emerge from COVID stronger than before.

Downtown Businesses by Type



Source: Rapid Recovery Plan Field Visits, 2021

COVID Impacts Reported by Businesses



Source: Rapid Recovery Plan Survey of Downtown Stoneham businesses, 2021

Diagnostic

Key Findings



CUSTOMER BASE

Dense residential development surrounding the downtown

Stoneham is home to 23,059 residents. The population is well-educated with 47% of residents age 25+ having earned a bachelors degree or higher. Median household income is \$95,517 placing it roughly in the middle of neighboring communities of Melrose, Medford, Winchester, and Wakefield. The median age is 46.4. 20% of the population is under age 20 and 23% is 65 years or older. This makes Stoneham slightly older than its neighbors Melrose and Medford, both closer to Boston, and older than the state average. However, it has a similar age profile to other suburban neighbors including Winchester and Wakefield.

Stoneham's downtown was established prior to the advent of the automobile resulting in a relatively high residential density around the downtown and high number of residents within walking distance to the commercial core. This area was once served by a trolley line.

Anchor institutions within the downtown include Stop & Shop at the northern extent of the area and the Greater Boston Stage Company located in Stoneham Square. Over 44,000 tickets were purchased for events at the Greater Boston Stage Company in 2018. Multiple churches and the Stoneham Public Library are also located within the downtown and attract additional visitors.

Source: ESRI Demographic Indicators, 2020



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Downtown's proximity to amenities and major transportation can result in it being overlooked

Stoneham's Main Street is well-traveled with nearly 32,000 vehicles traveling the route daily (*MassDOT, 2019 Traffic Counts, Main Street at Montvale Ave*). Stakeholders comment that the route is frequently used as a local cut-through to avoid traffic around the I-93 and I-95 interchange. It is also used to reach Stop & Shop grocery store, at the far northern end of downtown as well as the Redstone Shopping Plaza, comprised of many national chains, just north of the downtown. To the south lie Spot Pond, the Stone Zoo, and Middlesex Fells Reservation, all popular recreational sites.

While the center of Downtown, near the Town Common and Stoneham Square, offer many benches, street trees, and seasonally rotating banners to create a sense of place, there are fewer of these amenities at the northern and southern ends of the downtown resulting in a downtown without a cohesive feeling. Similarly, the condition of sidewalks and condition/availability of crosswalks decline as one moves toward the northern and southern extents of the downtown. Field visits and stakeholder feedback agreed that the quantity and condition of crosswalks in the downtown was not sufficient and made pedestrian street crossing a challenge. The town has adopted a Complete Streets policy and is engaged in completing identified improvements; these improvements include two projects centered on downtown street renovations.

Finally, the Tri-Community Greenway crosses Main Street at Elm Street. The crossing is well-utilized by school children, among others. Recent improvements have been made on the Greenway to slow down users as they approach Main Street; however, the crossing over Main Street is awkward and not intuitive.



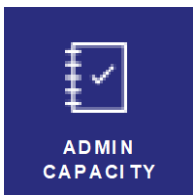
Study Area Business DNA

Stoneham's downtown is a multi-story commercial district that includes retail, restaurants, banks, and offices. Upper floors of buildings are often occupied by professional services such as health and wellness providers, architects, web designers, and more. Stoneham's 130 ground-floor storefronts represent approximately 250,000 square feet of commercial space according to the Town's Assessor's database. Nine of the 130 storefronts were vacant and two vacant developable lots were identified during April 2021 site visits.

182 businesses operate within Stoneham's downtown. Services such as personal care, laundry/dry-cleaning, pet care, etc. represent the highest proportion of businesses in the downtown at 19% followed by retail trade (18%), professional services including legal, accounting, architecture, and engineering (15%), and accommodation and food service (12%).

Developers comment that recently they have been working to attract complementary businesses to the downtown to encourage patrons to visit multiple downtown storefronts in a single visit. For example, locating a yoga studio and coffee shop in the same building or a paint studio and restaurant adjacent to one another.

In a survey of downtown business owners conducted in March 2021 for this Rapid Recovery Plan, business owners identified a variety of public realm improvements (safety, cleanliness, public spaces and seating areas, building facades, and streetscape) as important. More opportunities for outdoor dining and selling, as well as marketing strategies for the commercial district were identified as very important strategies regarding customer attraction and retention. More cultural events/activities to bring people into the district was another highly rated strategy.



Time and capacity constrain recovery efforts

Stoneham has an active Planning and Community Development Department with one full-time employee, the department director. The Stoneham Chamber of Commerce is also active within the community and is staffed by a full-time Executive Director and supported by a volunteer Board of Directors. Among the Chamber's activities are business networking opportunities as well as community events such as Town Day and the Summer Concert Series, both taking place on the Town Common, and Local Eats Week and "Keep the Cheer Here" which encourage community members to support local businesses.

The Downtown Merchants Group, an informal network of local business and property owners interested in downtown improvements, began to meet just prior to COVID-19 but momentum was impacted by the pandemic. The group is fledgling and has identified the need to show progress in order to maintain engagement.

While there are many capable and enthusiastic stakeholders in Stoneham's Downtown, they are not currently organized under shared recovery goals with identified roles and responsibilities.



Two Downtowns: Historic, Compact Development in the Center. Auto-Oriented Plazas to the North and South.

Clockwise from top left: Helaine Marie Salon and Stoneham Barber Shop (366-368 Main St.), Evergreen Florists (397 Main St.), Farm Hill Shopping Center (232 Main St.), 440 Main Street Commercial Building, Firicano Boxing Gym and Serenity In the City Salon & Spa (373-377 Main Street). Photos: BSC Group

Highlights from the Physical Environment

LOOKING FOR A “THERE” THERE

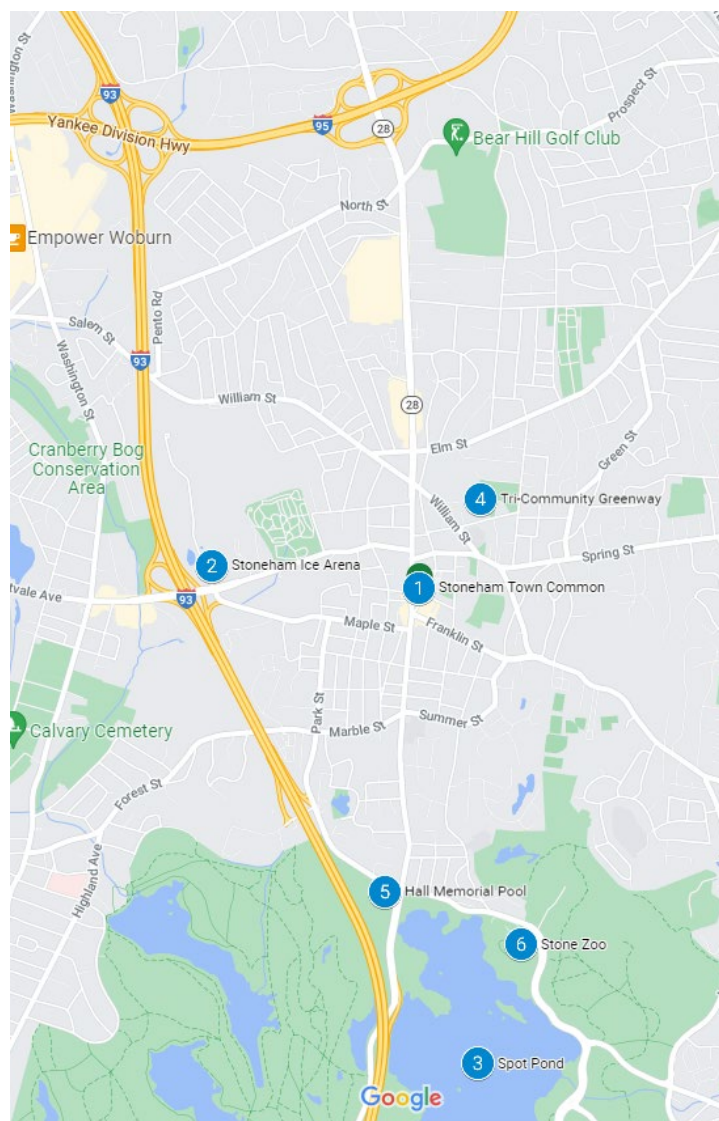
Downtown Stoneham is very accessible which creates both a strength and a weakness. It is located on Route 28 connecting it to downtown Reading in the north and Medford in the south. Franklin Street heading west connects to downtown Melrose. Downtown is also easily accessible from I-93 and I-95 which allows many to drive through downtown to avoid traffic on these major routes. While this level of traffic has the potential to support downtown businesses, it also results in a “drive-through” feel to the downtown as people head to other destinations.

Despite being central to many popular recreational attractions (see map), Stoneham’s downtown does not fully benefit from the high volume of visitors to these sites located less than 1 mile away. As discussed previously, local businesses state that many residents and visitors use downtown as a “drive-through” corridor to get to and from where they are going but do not stop.

When visiting these nearby attractions, there are few, if any indicators that Stoneham’s downtown is less than a mile away and one could find coffee, dining, local grocers, and other opportunities to extend their visit, add to their experience, or complete some errands. Contributing to this challenge is minimal branding in downtown, except for around Stoneham Square and the Town Common, which may result in visitors not realizing they are in downtown and could stop and explore.

Lastly, property owners and managers have observed that drinking and dining establishments are significant attractions for nearby communities. In Stoneham, the accommodation and food service industry is only 12% of total businesses, a smaller percentage than many other downtowns.

These observations present opportunities for improvements in wayfinding, branding, business mix, and bike and pedestrian connections into the downtown.



Map of Recreational Facilities close to Stoneham Town Common/Downtown
Source: BSC Group



Stoneham Town Common Photo: BSC Group

Cultivating Outdoor Spaces and Events for Social, Economic, and Health Benefits

WELL-MAINTAINED AND INVITING PARKS & PLAZAS

Stoneham's downtown is centered around Stoneham Square, at the intersection of Main, Central, and Franklin Streets, and the Town Common at Main and Church Street. This area features many inviting features including street trees and benches, plantings, and lampposts with seasonally rotating decorative banners. During field visits conducted in the spring, residents were observed outside enjoying these public spaces. The Town Common, the only green space within the downtown, plays host to many events including the farmers market, summer concert series, and annual Town Day celebration, among others.

SPACE CONSTRAINS OUTDOOR DINING AND SELLING

When surveyed in spring 2021, creating more opportunities for outdoor dining and selling was identified as a top strategy to support downtown recovery and customer attraction and retention. While some businesses with patios or parking lots have been able to offer outdoor dining, Stoneham's compact core doesn't offer this possibility in some locations. Other communities have used COVID-19 to create parklets for outdoor dining or create public gathering spaces with tables and chairs to allow patrons to enjoy take-out in downtown shared spaces.

STONEHAM'S 300th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION BRINGS OPPORTUNITY FOR DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENTS

In 2025, Stoneham will celebrate its 300th anniversary. Town officials noted that COVID-19 delayed planning for the celebration but in 2021 a committee was formed with several town boards and departments represented as well as a resident. The Stoneham Historical Commission is currently coordinating the efforts of the planning committee.

During focus group discussions, downtown business and property owners identified the 300th anniversary celebration as an opportunity for building momentum around downtown improvements and recovery as well as a target date for completing many of the recovery actions identified in this plan.



Highlights from the Business Environment

SUPPORTING DESTINATIONS AND EXPERIENCES IN DOWNTOWN

Downtown features several anchor institutions including O'Brien's Farm Hill and Stop & Shop at the north end of the district, Mass Eye & Ear Infirmary medical office building at Montvale Ave., the Greater Boston Stage Company in Stoneham Square, and several dining locations spread across the district. Despite work in recent years to attract complementary businesses, owners note challenges increasing foot traffic and getting people to stay once they've arrived in downtown.

Currently, there are a limited number of vacancies in downtown with several located in the heart of downtown near Stoneham Square. These vacancies provide an opportunity to act strategically to tie together destinations and create experiences that attract customers and support the downtown economy. Challenges navigating the permitting process result in long startup times and high costs for new businesses which can drive entrepreneurs to other locations.



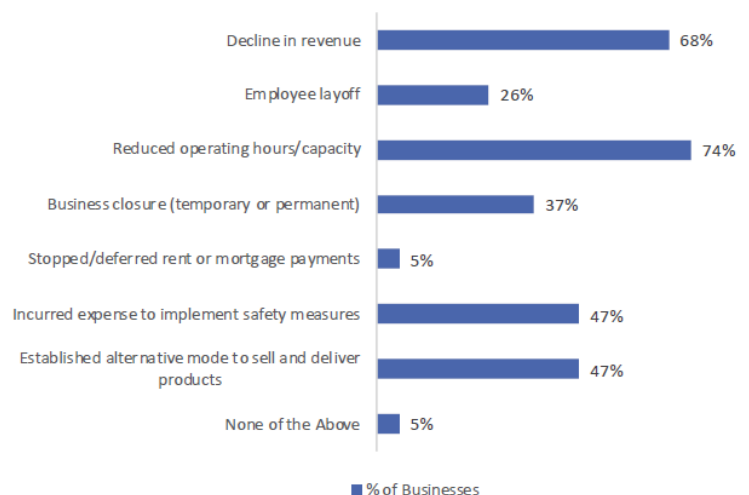
Greater Boston Stage Company Marquis. The theater is located in the heart of Downtown Stoneham. Source: Greater Boston Stage Company

IMPACTS FROM COVID-19

In March 2021, downtown Stoneham business owners were surveyed to understand impacts from COVID-19 and solicit input on strategies that could help the commercial district recover from those impacts. 19 business owners responded. Two-thirds (68%) reported a decline in revenue, and nearly three-quarters (74%) reported reduced operating hours/capacity. Nearly half (47%) made changes in their business operations to provide alternative ways to sell and deliver products during the pandemic.

When questioned about the types of support business owners would like to assist their recovery, top responses included: participating in shared marketing/advertising (44%), low-cost financing for storefront improvements (33%), and low-cost financing for purchasing properties in the district (28%).





COVID Impacts Reported by Businesses

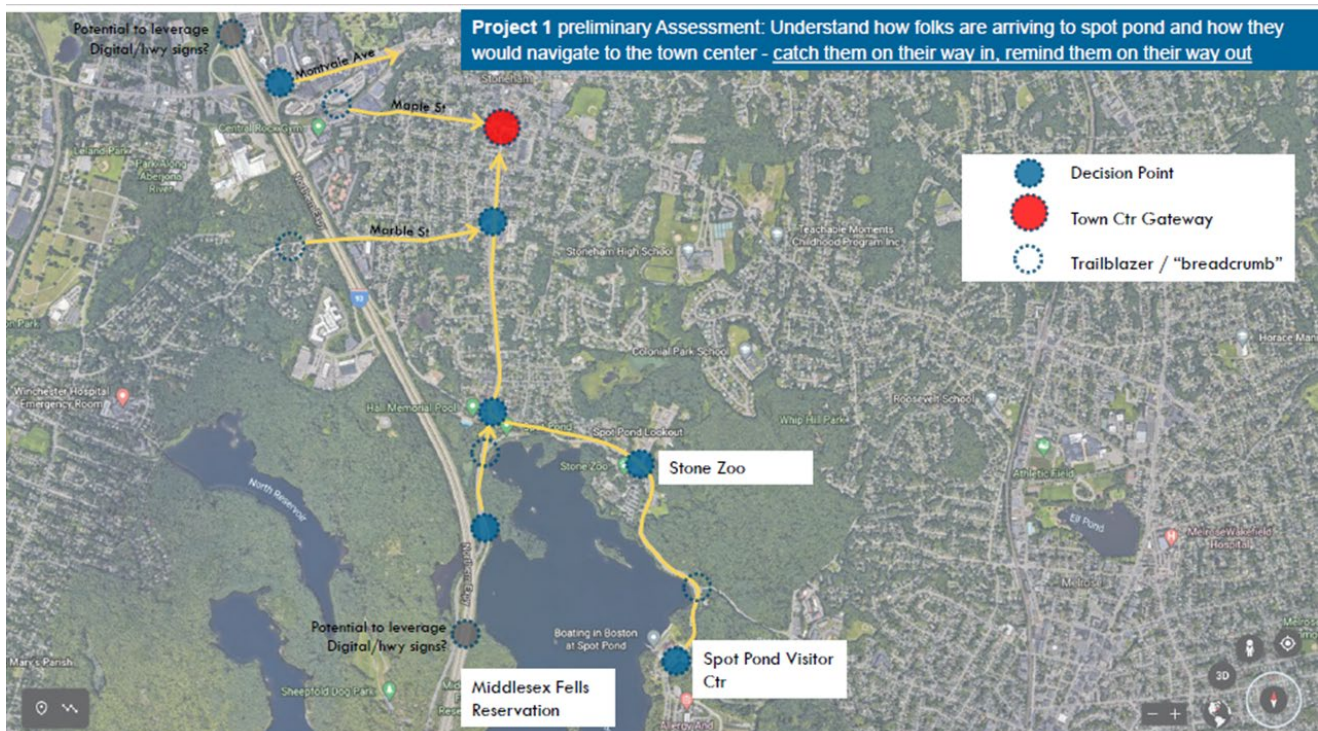


*COVID-19 Impacts Reported by Downtown Stoneham businesses
Source: Rapid Recovery Plan Program Business Survey, March 2021*

Project Recommendations

Create Connections Between Downtown and Spot Pond Recreational Amenities

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area & Area around Spot Pond to include Hall Memorial Pool and the Stone Zoo
Origin	Feedback at Phase I Community Presentation; Town Administrator
Budget	 Large Budget (>\$200,000) – Planning & Design: \$50K - \$150K; Fabrication & Installations: \$100K+ (could vary drastically depending on the number of signs, complexity of the design, materials costs, etc.)
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Medium Risk – requires coordination with the Commonwealth including DCR properties
Key Performance Indicators	# of signs installed; increase in downtown pedestrian activity; increase in downtown sales/receipts; collaborative marketing relationships with recreational venues
Partners & Resources	Town Administrator, Planning & Community Development, Recreation Department, MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (Middlesex Fells Reservation, Stone Zoo) Funding Sources: Mass DOT, Local Funds, Mass Trails, MOTT Travel & Tourism Recovery Grant



Preliminary assessment of entry points to Downtown Stoneham where wayfinding could be used. Source: Nina Harvey, Nelson/Nygaard

Diagnostic

Downtown businesses and property owners have noted that downtown can have a “drive-through” feel with potential customers and visitors traveling to the Redstone shopping center north of downtown and Interstate 93 south of downtown. It is felt that locals do not know where downtown is.

Several popular attractions, including Spot Pond, the Middlesex Fells Reservation, the Stone Zoo, and Hall Memorial Pool, are located less than a mile south of the downtown commercial district. This is approximately a 20-minute walk or a 5-minute bus ride on the MBTA's 132 bus route. COVID-19 brought more people outside making these destinations even more popular and creating an even greater lost opportunity for them to stop in Downtown and support the local economy.

New wayfinding could be installed to direct people who are already using these attractions to downtown businesses. Additional phases of this project could support pedestrian, bicycle, and mass transit connections between the recreational attractions to the downtown.

Additionally, there is a potential to coordinate with Stoneham Zoo and downtown businesses (e.g., business coupons, cross-marketing).



Mock-up of wayfinding signage for Stoneham. Source: Nina Harvey, Nelson/Nygaard

Action Item

Goal 1: Create a wayfinding signage plan that establishes a town identity, sense of arrival, and improves connectivity to town center from existing attractions.

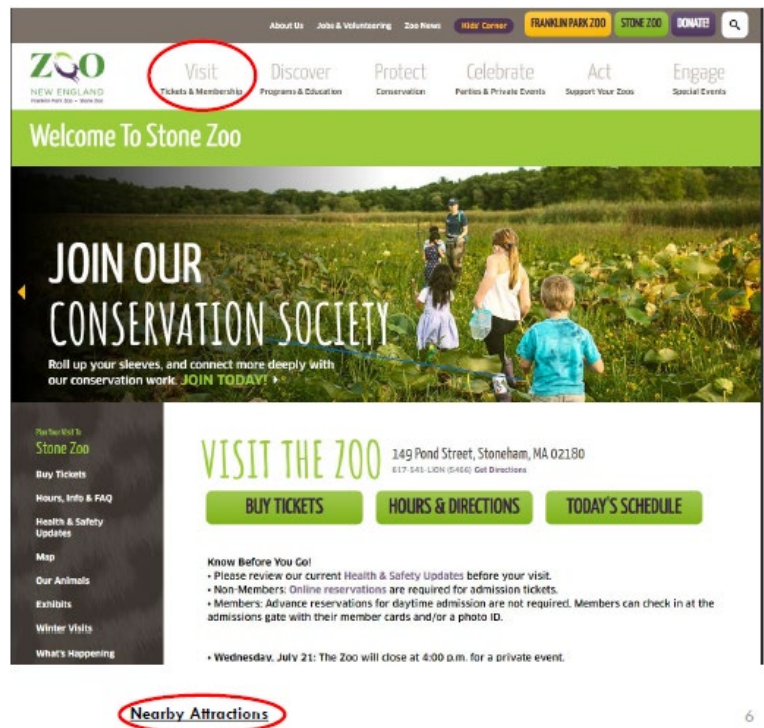
- Identify sign types, key destinations, and potential sign locations
- Develop conceptual sign type layouts
- Leverage existing highway signage (variable message signs and exist information signs)

Goal 2: Create and leverage social media presence to cross-market and attract visitors

- Establish social media accounts with a plan and calendar for regular postings
- Use regular hashtags to promote the district (#StonehamTownCtr; #StonehamTownDay, #StonehamSummers, etc.)
- Reach out to Stone Zoo and other major attractions for opportunities to cross-market

Goal 3: Create supplemental programs and resources to support visitors' experience

- Explore the addition of a trolley between Main Street and nearby recreational sites
- Develop a “Day in Stoneham” visitors itinerary highlighting opportunity to play, shop, dine, and get pampered



Stone Zoo website; explore opportunities for cross-marketing. Source: zoonewengland.org

Process

Goal 1: Wayfinding

1. Issue an RFP to develop a wayfinding system to include (Stoneham may be able to do some of the initial data gathering steps in-house before bringing on a designer):

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

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

Goal 2: Digital Presence (3-6 months)

- Determine best platform for messaging and create Town accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn)
- Create a plan and calendar for posting content regularly, leveraging existing holidays and recurring events
- Follow relevant accounts (area businesses, local food bloggers, tourism agencies, local paper, school sports teams etc.)
- Invest in Facebook ads
- Host community events (weekly morning yoga, food truck rally, toddler time) in parking lots or town common
- Reach out to Stone Zoo and other major attractions for opportunities to cross-market
- Use regular hashtags to promote the district (#StonehamTownCtr, #StonehamTownDay, #StonehamSummers?)
- Gather info from businesses for interviews, spotlights, profiles, etc. to promote
- Email local publications about upcoming events
- Create a town center visitor website

Goal 3: Create supplemental programs and resources to support visitors' experience

- Conduct a feasibility study for the addition of a trolley connecting Main Street to local recreational attractions
- Develop visitor guides, such as "A Day in Stoneham" itinerary that can be posted on the town center visitor website (above), and/or the Chamber of Commerce, a future Downtown Management Entity website, or similar locations.



Example of Wayfinding Signage, Newington, CT Photo: BSC Group

Additional detail on this recommendation can be found in the Appendix



Best Practice

Wayfinding on the Fairmount Greenway



Location

Boston, MA

Budget: Approximately \$10,000

Timeframe: Approximately 10 weeks

Risk: Low. Temporary installation requiring no major construction, low cost, no City approvals needed

Partners & Resources: Fairmount Greenway Task Force, Neighborhood Associations, DotBike, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, City of Boston Transportation Department, The Trust for Public Land, Civic Space Collaborative

Boston's nine-mile Fairmount Greenway is a life-changing development, connecting Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, and Hyde Park with a route that links parks, green space, on-street bike routes, trails, transit stations, and city squares. Since 2008, the Greenway's 10-member task force have been working with the City of Boston and multiple other organizations on this long-term vision to connect the Fairmount communities to the heart of Boston. More than 1,000 residents have joined in planning, designing, and implementing Greenway park, streets, and greenway projects.


In 2021, the Fairmount Greenway installed wayfinding signs to mark a 1.5-mile on-street route of the Fairmount Greenway in Dorchester near Four Corners and Codman Square. The wayfinding signs were updated to include key neighborhood destinations and mark the on-street route in February 2021. Twelve signs were printed on corrugated plastic and installed with residents in May 2021.

Process:

- 1) Fairmount Greenway concept development (2008-2010)
- 2) Signage branding, design, and placement (2013-2014)
- 3) Approval process
- 4) Finalizing wayfinding sign design (2021 – 4 weeks)
- 5) Installation: material acquisition, installation day, monitoring

For more information: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/public-realm-best-practice-sheets-compedium/download>

Improve Pedestrian Safety and Street Crossings

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area – Main Street from Elm Street to Hancock Street
Origin	Field visits; Community meeting; Business survey
Budget	 <p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) - Intermediate improvements related to pedestrian upgrades may include new signal equipment, reconstructed curb ramps and sidewalks, new crosswalks, and curb extensions. Large Budget (\$6-7 million) – Comprehensive, district-wide improvements to improve safety and the overall pedestrian experience.</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (<5 years) – coordinate with Complete Streets Downtown Reconstruction projects tentatively scheduled for 2023/2024.</p>
Risk	 <p>Low Risk – stakeholders have found consensus on this issue; beneficial to many throughout the study area; improvements can be coordinated with repaving and reconstruction projects in Downtown</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Reduction in the number of pedestrian/vehicle collisions; more pedestrian activity; enhanced pedestrian safety; reduced vehicular speeds.
Partners & Resources	<p>Town of Stoneham (Planning & Community Development, Public Works, Police, Bike and Greenway Committee); Stoneham Community Development Corporation</p> <p>Funding Sources: State Transportation Improvement Program; MA Complete Streets (via an update to Tier 2 Prioritization Plan); MA Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program; MassWorks funding (in conjunction with any future development projects in Stoneham); ARPA funding sources; Local funding sources and development agreements</p>



Main St. and Pleasant St. Intersection Photo: BSC Group

Diagnostic

COVID-19 brought people outside like never before after evidence of increased virus transmission indoors. This made providing a safe public realm with adequate space for pedestrians, cyclists, and others even more important. Safe and accessible street crossings can connect the commercial district, allow patrons to park once and visit multiple businesses, and improve overall safety. However, street crossings are not consistently available throughout the study area.

At the northern end, there are no crosswalks in the 3-block stretch from William St. to Montvale Ave. In the center portion of Downtown between Montvale Ave and Stoneham Square, the placement and visibility of crosswalks pose challenges for safe pedestrian crossings.

In Stoneham Square, there is no appropriate location for bus loading. This is needed, especially for student performances and camps at the theater.

In addition to changes to the quantity and location of pedestrian crossings, safety features such as curb bump-outs could provide co-benefits such as traffic calming and the creation of space for parklets or outdoor dining. This could enhance other town efforts to address the “drive through” feel of the downtown and create a stronger and more inviting sense of place in the downtown.



Crosswalk in Stoneham Square. Photo: BSC Group

Action Items

Assess appropriate locations for crosswalks and style/enhancements to improve pedestrian safety: Additional crosswalks may be needed and others, such as those around the Town Common, may be moved for more intuitive pedestrian flow. Assessment should include traffic calming, lights, and other features that could improve visibility and safety. Public input on location and design should occur. This phase could also include piloting new crosswalk locations or designs before making permanent installations.

Coordinate with downtown branding and placemaking efforts: Signage, colors, and other design features included as part of this effort should align with concurrent efforts to enhancing branding and placemaking throughout downtown.

Consider secondary resilience benefits: Stoneham's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness and Hazard Mitigation Plan identified street flooding, heat, and air quality as concerns in the downtown area. Opportunities for resilience benefits such as pervious pavers, light colored materials, or street trees and rain gardens to provide cooling, air quality, and stormwater benefits should be considered with any downtown improvements.



Enhanced crosswalks in Topsfield, MA encourage traffic calming in combination with other elements to make downtown more inviting and safer, particularly in the evening. Source: Rapid Recovery Program Best Practice Compendiums

Specific Improvements to Consider

Improved Cross Section: The existing cross section of Main Street throughout the Project area varies from a single wide lane in each direction in the south to two lanes in each direction in the north. The existing cross-section has the look and feel of an arterial highway and not a Downtown Main Street for most of its length. The curb-to-curb width is generally consistent between Hancock Street and William Street (approximately 48-feet). The Town should develop a consistent cross section for Main Street between Hancock Street and William Street to include the following:

- Stripe a single lane of travel in each direction and provide defined on-street parking along both sides of the roadway. Currently, areas of Main Street have wide lanes and it is unclear whether they are supposed to operate as two lanes or one lane with an adjacent parking lane. Based on a preliminary review of the curb-to-curb width, it may be possible to install bicycle lanes throughout the corridor. Further evaluation should be conducted to determine the most appropriate cross section based on the limitations of the curb-to-curb width. A defined single lane of traffic will improve safety and visibility for pedestrians and will allow for the installation of curb extensions throughout the corridor. The upgraded cross section should also serve to reduce vehicular speeds and eliminate weaving maneuvers along Main Street, which will improve safety for vehicles and pedestrians.
- The segment of Main Street north of Common Street consists of two travel lanes per direction. However, it appears that the outer lanes also serve as parking lanes, effectively creating a two-lane cross section. The usage of the outer lanes is poorly defined and should serve as on-street parking for the adjacent commercial uses. If there is a need for additional capacity through this segment, a three-lane cross section can also be considered to include two travel lanes and a center turn lane for the numerous curb-cuts.

Installation of Turn Lanes: Consider installing exclusive left-turn lanes at intersections (Hancock Street, Maple Street, Franklin Street/Central Street, Pleasant Street, Montvale Avenue, Lindenwood Road, Stop and Shop Plaza, and William Street). Provide better definition for the right-turn lane along Main Street southbound at Montvale Avenue. These recommendations will impact adjacent on-street parking and should be installed after further review of traffic volumes and operations at the intersections. Exclusive left-turn lanes will enhance safety for vehicles by separating turning vehicles from through traveling vehicles.

Consistent Crosswalk Treatments and Curb Extensions: Several crosswalks are located throughout the corridor and consist of three styles: two parallel white lines, “continental” style ladder crosswalks, and paver-style crosswalks at Stoneham Square. Crosswalk consistency is strongly recommended for the entire corridor to provide a more cohesive look and feel and to provide both pedestrians and motorists with the sense that they are on a Downtown Main Street. It is recommended that the Town use the Stoneham Square treatment for all crosswalks throughout the Main Street area. The Town can consider using stamped pavers instead of bricks for cost and maintenance issues.

Curb Extensions: The recommended changes to the cross section above will allow for the installation of curb extensions. Curb extensions serve several purposes including to shorten overall pedestrian crossings, to provide better visibility for motorists approaching crosswalks, and to better define on-street parking areas.

Improved Pedestrian Signage: New pedestrian warning signage should be provided in advance of the project area and at every crosswalk that is not located at a traffic signal. Signs should be high visibility fluorescent yellow-green in color (consistent with MUTCD standards). It is also recommended that the Town consider installing rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs) at mid-block crosswalks throughout the corridor.

Accessibility Upgrades: A review of existing curb ramps throughout the Project area should be conducted and new curb ramps with detectable warning panels should be installed where they are missing. New curb ramps with detectable warning panels should be installed at future curb extensions and new crosswalk locations.

New Crosswalks: Locations of new crosswalks should be considered at key pedestrian crossing points throughout the corridor. Specific locations to be considered include at Hersam Street/Winter Street, Common Street, Pleasant Street (south side of intersection), Montvale Avenue (north side of intersection), Flint Avenue, and Lindenwood Road.

Upgrades to Traffic Signal Equipment: Traffic signals are located at the intersections with Franklin Street/Central Street, Pleasant Street, Montvale Avenue, William Street, and Elm Street. The signal equipment is outdated and should be replaced. High-visibility backplates should be used on all traffic signal heads. Pedestrian signal equipment should be upgraded and should include audible indications for the hearing impaired. Traffic signal timing and phasing should be reviewed to ensure that pedestrian crossing times are appropriate and that signals are providing good coordination for efficient traffic flow through Main Street. Reduced congestion on Main Street will improve safety for all users.

Wayfinding for Parking Lots and Destinations: Visitors that travel to Main Street via personal vehicle should be directed toward public parking opportunities throughout Downtown. On-street parking should be clearly defined and public parking lots should be easy to locate for visitors. A wayfinding signage system for pedestrians should be considered to direct visitors between public parking areas to various destinations on Main Street (e.g., Stoneham Town Common, shops and restaurants, etc.).

Improved Bicycle Connectivity: The Tri Community Greenway connects the communities of Stoneham, Woburn, and Winchester and intersects with Main Street near the intersection with Elm Street. Based on the review of potential cross-section improvements listed above, the Town should consider enhancements to the intersection of the Greenway and Main Street to alert bicyclists that they are in proximity to Downtown Stoneham. Users of the Greenway can also become patrons of the various businesses and destinations in Downtown Stoneham with improved bicycle facilities and additional information. It is recommended that the Town work with local businesses to develop a kiosk where the bike path intersects with Main Street to provide information related to the Downtown businesses and recreational opportunities. Further, the Town should consider adding a bike lane from this intersection into Stoneham Square. A minimum shoulder width of five feet can accommodate bicycles. If additional width is available, consider installing buffered bicycle lanes.

Further Considerations: These recommendations should be implemented only after further study. Changes to the cross section will impact the overall capacity of the roadway and these impacts should be assessed through further traffic analysis and a review of the available curb-to-curb width. BSC also recognizes that Main Street serves as a regional arterial north-south roadway, carrying a significant amount of commuting traffic. Route 28 is an attractive route for traveling between Route 128/I-95 and I-93 to the south, serving as an outlet to handle traffic that should be using the Interstate highway system. Due to the lack of capacity along Route 128/I-95 and I-93 and the interchanges along those routes, additional pressure and demand is placed upon local roadways such as Main Street in Stoneham which in turn may create capacity issues during peak periods. The most ideal long-term solution is to improve the regional highway network to handle regional traffic while allowing Main Street to serve residents, local businesses, and visitors, but that is an unlikely scenario in the short- or mid-term without significant investment and improvements by the Commonwealth.

The goals of these recommendations are to address safety and pedestrian issues on Main Street in Stoneham and not to address the larger vehicular capacity issues that exist throughout the region. Some of these recommendations may exacerbate already poor capacity conditions while enhancing the character and safety of Downtown Stoneham.

Process

Implementation of this project involves the following steps:

1. Planning stage:

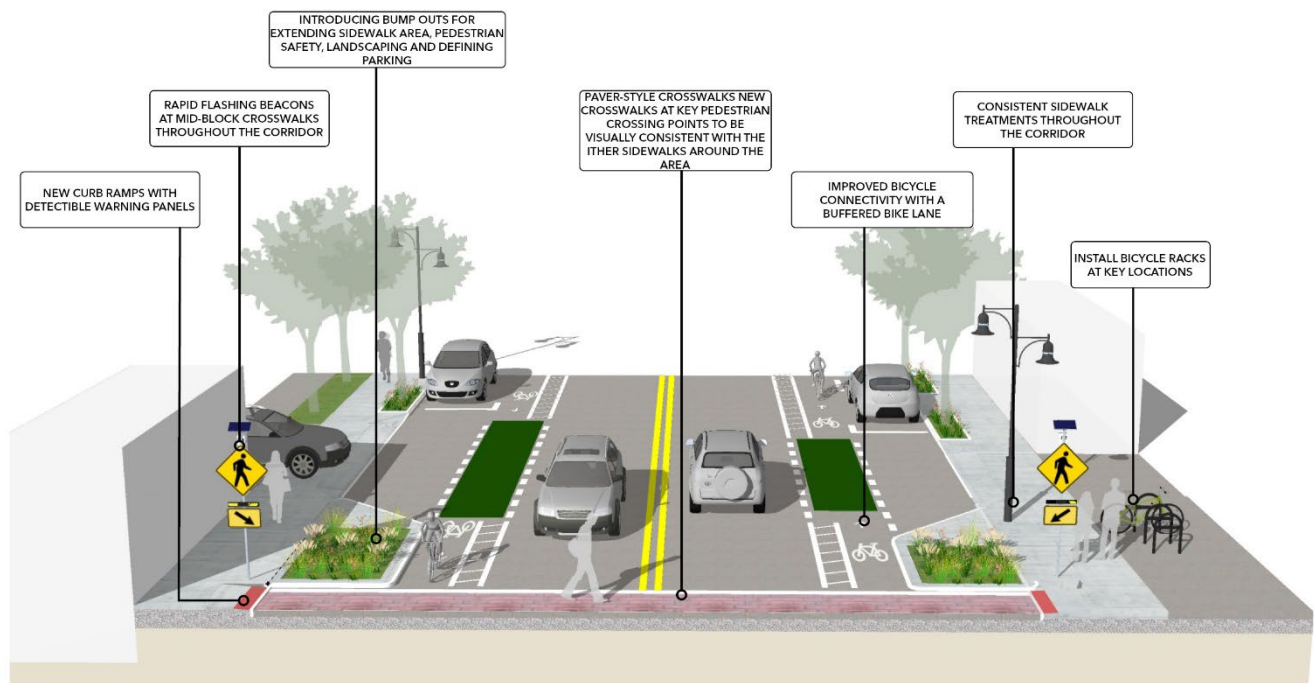
- Local stakeholders/steering committee develop plan for desired improvements. Given the downtown location, local businesses and property owners should be engaged.
- Develop list of recommendations and preferred alternatives.
- Consider temporary installations to pilot improvements before permanent installations.
- Involve Boston Regional Metropolitan Planning Organization and determine whether projects are appropriate for inclusion on the Transportation Improvement Plan.
- Develop timeline for installation of various projects; ensure coordination with Complete Streets and other planned downtown projects to minimize disruption and be efficient with funds.

2. Design stage

- Identify and pursue appropriate funding sources for identified projects.
- If external funding sources don't pay for design, advocate for Town funds.
- Develop project concepts and advance through 10-25% design, seek town review/public input, then complete 75%-final design.

3. Construction stage

- Determine which projects, if any, Town has capacity to complete internally.
- All other projects to be put out to bid.
- Select contractor and complete construction.



Mockup of potential Pedestrian Safety Improvements for Main Street Source: BSC Group

Enhance Downtown's Sense of Place with Improved Branding

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Downtown Stoneham, Main St/Rt 28 from Elm Street to Hancock Street
Origin	Downtown Merchants Group, a collection of downtown business owners, property owners, and real estate professionals. The Group is supported by the Stoneham Chamber of Commerce.
Budget	 Medium Budget – estimate \$40,000 - \$200,000 depending on scope of activities undertaken
Timeframe	 Short-Term (< 5 years) – no later than Stoneham's 350th Anniversary in 2025; Coordinate with Complete Streets Downtown Revitalization Projects (2023, 2024)
Risk	 Medium risk – dependent upon funding; will benefit from business participation/engagement and will be at risk without it
Key Performance Indicators	Inventory of downtown assets/imagery; Development of downtown brand/logo; Installation of banners, gateway art, etc.; Public feedback
Partners & Resources	Stoneham Planning & Community Development; Stoneham Chamber of Commerce; Stoneham Community Development Corporation Funding Sources: MOTT Travel & Tourism; ARPA Travel, Tourism, & Outdoor Recreation; National Endowment for the Arts Our Town Program, MassDevelopment



Mock up of potential physical branding interventions to implement in Downtown Source: Nina Harvey, Nelson/Nygaard

Diagnostic

Businesses report that downtown has a “drive-through” feel. Prior to COVID, drivers would often cut through downtown (Main St./Route 28) on their way to the Redstone Shopping Plaza (big box and national chains) or to avoid the 93/95 interchange. COVID changed driving and shopping behaviors, including a shift toward online shopping, delivery, and curbside pickup, programs that large national chains were able to utilize their considerable resources to quickly implement. In order to attract more people into the downtown and support small business recovery, local businesses would like people to know what is available in downtown and get more people to stop and patronize the businesses.

Related to this project recommendation, the town has identified the need to add/improve street crossings to improve the pedestrian experience as well as extend some of the public realm features (e.g., benches, street trees, light post banners) to the northern and southern extends of the study area. Currently, these features are around the Town Common and Stoneham Square (center of the study area) only. These complementary actions contribute to the overall downtown experience.



Downtown Banners and Signage Source: North Adams Chamber of Commerce; North Adams Office of Tourism (<https://explorethenorthadams.com/>)

Action Items

Branding and marketing campaign – Create a consistent visual identity for Stoneham and the town center to be seen as a destination, rather than a collection of individual businesses.

Banners and street lighting - Increase the frequency and visibility of banners using pedestrian-scale street lighting where possible to create a consistent sense of place in the town center.

“Asphalt Art” – In coordination with existing pedestrian enhancements, use tactical urbanism (low cost) treatments to experiment with placemaking and street design changes to create a town center destination that prioritizes people.

Gateway art – Utilize gateway art to identify the town center, welcome visitors, and create an arrival moment.

Flexible street furniture – Create a sense of place where people can gather and feel like they have a place to rest as needed while passing through the town center. Colorful furniture and umbrellas also enhance the streetscape.

Other considerations - Showcase faces of local business owners, Use local artists/students to design banners; Highlight local assets (e.g., Town Common, Spot Pond), Showcase events or upcoming activities.



East Boston created a pop-up plaza on Grove Street with asphalt paint and flexible street furniture. Photo: Civic Space Collaborative

Process

Branding Campaign (3-6 months)

- Engage businesses/residents to identify key town imagery/assets/events
- Engage a branding agency to create a logo, color palette and font, as well as standards for application. Consider leveraging local art students!
- Identify existing assets and opportunities to apply brand
- Fabricate and install branding elements

Banners & Street Lighting (3-6 months)

- Identify core town center boundary
- Conduct site audit of existing banners, including placement and visibility for pedestrians and vehicles, as well as night-time visibility
- Identify gaps and infrastructure needs
- Work with Chamber of Commerce and residents to develop schedule for sign updates and design

"Asphalt Art" (3-6 months)

- Engage community to identify locations for street art
- Work with local artists and designers to develop design concepts
- Complete review and approval from local public works and other agencies as required
- Create a community event out of installation day where residents can come paint

Gateway Art

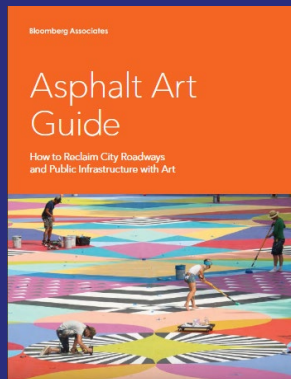
- Leverage the redesign of Main Street/Franklin Street intersection to include a gateway treatment and opportunity to gather
- Hire a landscape architect or designer to develop a gateway concept, or work with local design schools
- Engage community to select a preferred concept
- Issue concepts to fabricator for costing and installation

Flexible Street Furniture (<3 months)

- Reach out to local business owners to understand appetite for placing flexible street furniture (folding tables, chairs, umbrellas) on the sidewalk outside of their business or using 1-2 parking spaces
- Develop a program where town purchases street furniture and businesses maintain (i.e., store them at night, place out in morning)
- Business owners apply and agree to take ownership of maintenance
- Periodic (quarterly) check-in on program and conditions

RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

Asphalt Art Guide: How to Reclaim City Roadways and Public Infrastructure with Art

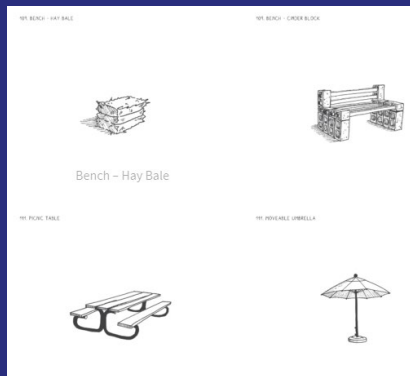


Contains many examples including project timeframes, cost, potential materials.

Source: The Street Plans Collaborative

<https://issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative/docs/asphalt-art-guide>

Tactical Urbanist's Guide to Getting it Done



Contains sample materials, guides, and news articles on various installations

Source: Tactical Urbanist's Guide

<http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/materials/>

Additional detail on this recommendation can be found in the Appendix

Branding Resources and Examples



Location

Various

A potential hurdle to implementing municipal branding campaigns can be initial stakeholder buy-in. Being able to describe the costs, benefits, and process can help projects get the green-light to proceed. The following links are intended to provide context and examples from other municipal branding efforts.

Sample Municipal Branding Project Budget

Franklin, Wisconsin

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/communities/south/news/franklin/2019/04/17/franklin-rebranding-project-cost-city-officials-81-000/3176620002/>

Item	Cost
Logo design	\$7,500
Surveys, Audits, Benchmarking	\$28,000
Brand Profile, Look & Feel, Brand Usage Guide	\$44,500
Marketing Plan	\$9,000
Total	\$81,500

RFP Examples





Puyallup Branding and Destination Marketing Campaign, Puyallup, WA, \$40,000 Budget <https://www.cityofpuyallup.org/DocumentCenter/View/14675/REQUEST-FOR-PROPOSALS-Destination-Marketing-Campaign-FINAL?bidId=>

Economic Development Marketing Campaign, New Rochelle, NY, \$30,000 Budget <https://www.newrochelleny.com/DocumentCenter/View/3221/RFP-NR-5004-Marking-and-Branding-Suite?bidId=>

Article

Are Municipal Branding Campaigns Worth the Price?, Governing, November 29, 2012. <https://www.governing.com/archive/gov-municipal-branding-campaigns-worth-price.html>

Conduct a Parking Management Study

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Study Area
Origin	Planning & Community Development
Budget	 Low Budget (<\$50,000) - Approximately \$20,000 for consultant to conduct study, public survey, and parking management plan; Additional funds will be required for implementation phase
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) - Estimate no more than one year to complete study and parking management plan; implementation to follow in a future phase
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Completion of study; Creation of Parking Management Plan; # of recommendations implemented
Partners & Resources	Stoneham Planning & Community Development, Downtown Businesses and Patrons, Stoneham Planning Board, Stoneham Police Department, Stoneham Department of Public Works Funding Sources: Community Compact Grant; ARPA Economic Adjustment Assistance
Diagnostic	<p>Adequate and well-designed parking is crucial for commercial districts. Even when the area supports a large number of pedestrians and cyclists, well-designed parking promotes safety and mobility for all users. COVID-19 changed parking demands in many downtowns such as increasing demand for short-term parking for takeout and curbside pickup or eliminating parking to make space for parklets, widened sidewalks, and outdoor dining. It is worthwhile for communities to assess parking needs in this new environment to support downtowns that meet current and future demands and support a healthier, more accessible downtown.</p> <p>Downtown Stoneham has nearly 1,200 parking spaces, or 5 per 1,000 square feet of first floor commercial space. There are three public parking lots in the vicinity of Stoneham Square and the Town Common. Street parking exists throughout the downtown as well as several private lots and one garage.</p> <p>In 2021, Stoneham conducted a public survey regarding parking in the downtown. While official analysis and results are still pending, a preliminary review suggests that downtown visitors utilize on-street parking and off-street public lots nearly equally. Respondents generally felt that they were able to find parking when needed. Common challenges cited with parking in downtown included no nearby crosswalk after parking, insufficient sidewalks, inadequate street lighting, and unclear signage regarding parking regulations.</p>

Action Item

Key action items for this recommendation include:

Include signage clarity and walkability among study goals. In many communities, parking studies reveal that there is sufficient parking to meet demand and that other factors (regulations, signage, crosswalks and sidewalks) require changes. Assuring that people understand where parking is, what regulations apply, and that people have clear and safe pathways from their parking spot to their destination(s) are likely to make significant improvements. Establishing a “park once” environment where people can park once and visit multiple destinations has the potential to improve parking and traffic congestion in the area.

Consider reducing time restrictions on underutilized streets to allow for longer downtown visits. Preliminary analysis shows that there is adequate parking in downtown; however, on-street parking is limited to 2 hours. Time limits on under utilized streets could be increased to support the community’s goals for more downtown foot traffic and longer visits.

Engage key stakeholders. Business, property owners, and visitors to the downtown should be consulted to understand parking preferences and challenges. This study should also consider other means of access (e.g., bike, transit) into downtown and how current conditions support or hinder this. Businesses and property owners can provide insight on preferred parking management approaches. Key municipal stakeholders (e.g., Planning Board, Public Works, Police Department) should be engaged to ensure buy-in and facilitate implementation of identified improvements following the study.

Process

- 1) Secure funding and consultant to complete study.
- 2) Assess known parking challenges and set study goals.
- 3) Measure parking inventory, utilization, and local circulation issues.
- 4) Engage key stakeholders including the public, local businesses, and Town staff and officials.
- 5) Conduct land use and zoning analysis. Specifically, assess Stoneham’s zoning and parking requirements compared to regional and national models.
- 6) Develop Parking Management Plan with recommendations and implementation steps for addressing identified issues.
- 7) Work with local public and private stakeholders to implement Parking Management Plan recommendations.



Street Parking in front of 380 Main St., Downtown Stoneham Photo Credit: BSC Group

Creating a “Park Once” District



Location

Various

Strategies developed by MAPC - <https://www.mapc.org/resource-library/creating-a-park-once-district/>

LESS DRIVING, MORE WALKING

Even in places where most people drive to their destinations, the most successful downtowns will feature sidewalks full of pedestrians, walking between the barber and the bank, the doctor's office and the post office, stopping for lunch and doing some shopping. Many trips but only one parking space. This is sometimes called a “park once” district, because people are encouraged to park in one place and then make stops on foot rather than driving from one destination to another within the district, as you would with a car-oriented strip mall area. Creating the type of environment where it's easy for people to walk between destinations involves both good urban design and parking policies. If each destination is required to provide its own off-street parking, and each building may have parking on all sides, dead zones of surface parking lots are created between destinations that make walking distances longer and walking experiences less pleasant, so that people have every incentive to get back in the car to go a few stores down.

Strategies





Reduce scattered surface parking lots:

- Centralize parking facilities by allowing or requiring developers to pay into a fund to be used for building public parking rather than providing their own on-site parking (see fees-in-lieu).
- Allow redevelopment of surface parking lots if the spaces are not needed or if developers / property owners pay into a fund to be used for building public parking in the future (see fees-in-lieu).
- Reduce or eliminate minimum parking requirements for some or all uses downtown.
- Count on-street parking towards minimum parking requirements (see flexible minimum requirements).
- Establish maximum allowances for how much parking may be built by use and/or by neighborhood (see parking maximums).
- Establish flexible parking requirements based on:
 - alternative mode access (especially proximity of transit, but also pedestrian and bicycle facilities)
 - expected demographics of residential developments (age, income, other auto-ownership factors)
- parking studies providing data to support requests to reduce or increase parking
- implementation of programs to reduce the need for parking spaces, such as parking cash out, un-bundled parking, shared parking, priority parking for carpools, or car sharing (see parking and transportation demand management)
- Make parking fit better with a pedestrian environment:
 - Prohibit developers from siting parking between the building and the street (see locating parking strategically).
 - Build parking structures combined with retail or other commercial uses on the ground floor (see wrapping parking structures in active uses).
 - Limit curb cuts so that there are fewer places where cars are crossing the sidewalk.
 - Provide safe, convenient, and comfortable walkways to access parking facilities.
 - Set a high standard for pedestrian protection where vehicles from parking structures exit onto the street.
 - Require screening and/or landscaping in any surface parking lots visible from pedestrian-oriented streets (see landscaping for shade and air quality).

Improve the pedestrian environment generally:

- Invest in street trees, benches, landscaping, etc.
- Establish design standards for buildings in the district.
- Keep streets and sidewalks free of litter.
- Provide adequate lighting and police / security that people feel safe walking on the street at any time while stores are open.

Encourage Private Realm Improvements through Enhanced Commercial Improvement Program

Category	 Private Realm
Location	Downtown Stoneham
Origin	Stoneham has administered a Commercial Improvement Program since 2015. The program offers \$3,000 in matching funds for façade, window, sign, and lighting improvements.
Budget	 Low Budget (<\$50,000) to Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) – One-time costs: staff/consultant to conduct engagement, develop and implement program updates, and conduct advertising. On-going costs: staff to manage program, design assistance (if provided), program funds for projects
Timeframe	 Short-Term (< 5 years) – can implement within months provided updated program guidelines and allocation of funds
Risk	 Medium Risk – ability to secure and sustain program funding; relationship between property owners and town; businesses/property owners may be concerned about rise in property values and subsequent rise in rent/property taxes
Key Performance Indicators	Adoption of new program and program advertising; Increase in # of applications; Increase in # of completed projects; # of projects maintained over time; Increase in business sales; Increase in property values; Increase in visitors to the target area
Partners & Resources	Town of Stoneham (Planning & Community Development, Select Board, Planning Board), Property Owners, Business Owners, Chamber of Commerce Funding: ARPA Small Business Support; Community Development Block Grants; Revolving Loan Funds; Community Preservation Act (see text box in recommendation for additional ideas)
Diagnostic	<p>A major theme repeated by downtown Stoneham stakeholders is the need to create a physical environment in the downtown that brings people in, lets them know they have arrived, and encourages them to stay. While downtown access, safety, and proximity to complementary business uses are rated highly by downtown business owners, they are least satisfied with the condition of private buildings, storefronts, and signs. As part of its COVID-19 recovery strategy, Stoneham is focused on both public and private realm improvements that will encourage the appeal of downtown to residents and visitors alike. This includes a combination of tenant mix initiatives, placemaking, cultural/arts initiatives, and physical environment improvements. This is especially important as downtown's small, locally owned businesses compete with more resourced national chains in nearby commercial districts.</p> <p>Stoneham Planning and Community Development has administered a Commercial Improvement Program since 2015. The program offers \$3,000 in matching funds for façade, window, sign, and lighting improvements. (Sentence about utilization/total # projects/total \$\$ dispersed). COVID-19 increased the need for businesses to make improvements that would attract customers - 53% of downtown businesses reported fewer on-site customers during January/February 2021 than before COVID – while at the same time further constraining resources they have to participate in such programs -58% generated less revenue in 2020, compared to before COVID-19. Low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements was the second-highest scoring (33%) request for technical assistance among surveyed downtown business owners (Source: <i>RRP Business Survey, March 2021</i>).</p> <p>As an enhancement to its existing Commercial Improvement Program, Stoneham would like to identify and adopt best practices for these types of private realm improvement programs, increase participation, and incorporate options for funding art on commercial properties along with other façade improvements.</p>

Storefront Improvement Program Highlights

As Stoneham explores enhancements to its Commercial Improvement Program, the following highlights can inform decision makers.

Benefits

Successfully implemented storefront/façade improvement programs have been found to:

- Strengthen locally owned businesses – Increase sales and attract new businesses and customers
- Contribute to area revitalization – Increase property values and higher tax bases, improve marketability of a space, motivate other property owners/businesses to make improvements
- Contribute to a sense of community/enhance character of community – Improve the public realm, increase safety, accessibility, pedestrian comfort
- Provide a more attractive retail environment/commercial corridor and stimulate additional private investment

Key Features

- Administration – most are developed and managed by organizations with a vested interest in civic improvements, including municipalities, business district management entities, community development corporations, chambers of commerce, and others
- Funding structure – depending on the source of funding, the program can be structured as a grant or a loan. There are various options including: Matching grant (e.g., 1:1 grant is a dollar-for-dollar match), Grant with set dollar amount per improvement (e.g., \$1,000 allowance for signage), Loan (low/zero-interest establishes revolving fund to enable future funding cycles upon payback, forgivable loans create incentives to maintain improvements over time), and mixed funding options.
- Funding amounts – Amounts vary based on program, but programs researched ranged from \$2,500 - \$35,000.
- Types of Improvements – Most programs allow for improvements to signage, lighting, windows, doors, entryways, roof, awning/canopy, and paint. Other eligible improvements may include design fees, landscaping, and parking lot improvements. HVAC, interior renovation, non-permanent fixtures, security systems, and equipment purchases are generally ineligible. Some funding programs allocate additional monies for improvements to historic restoration.



Oro Salon & Spa. The business used Stoneham Commercial Improvement Program funds for a façade sign and design upgrade. Photo: Wicked Local Stoneham

North Carolina FIP Economic Impact

Best Practice	Percentage of best practice utilization
Community Provides 1-1 to 1-3 Match grant	83%
Provide Design Services as Needed	78%
Ensure Good application Design Choices	83%
Communicate 1-on-1	33.3%
Easy Application	89%

Source: Sherrill, Scott (2014). More than face value: façade improvement grants in North Carolina. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

NC Factors that Might Prevent Business Participation in the FIP

Factors	Communities' issues
Bad Economy	88.9%
Lack of Knowledge	55.6%
Businesses Undertake Improvements on Own	50%
Facades Redone Already	50%
Grants Too Small	33.3%

Source: Sherrill, Scott (2014). More than face value: façade improvement grants in North Carolina. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Façade Improvement Program Best Practices and Factors that Might Prevent Business Participation Source: Sherrill, Scott. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Action Items

When developing enhancements to the Commercial Improvement Program (CIP), program proponents should strongly consider:

Community Support – Seek to build relational capital to gain credibility and community support as program enhancements are developed. Stakeholders should be involved early in the process and the program should take into consideration small business' needs and identify specific ways the program can help.

Funding Enhancements – The current program was provided a one-time funding allocation and next steps will be determined when the funds run out. Additionally, current funding is provided at \$3,000 per project, on the lower end of other programs researched. Funding amounts must be adequate such that the cost to participate does not outweigh the funding provided. Diversifying the funding stream can increase and sustain the total funds available to the program which will allow for a higher funding limit to be offered for projects.

Art Inclusion – The inclusion of art into the CIP can enhance the overall character and experience in the public and private realm. External, art-focused improvements visible to the public right of way should be considered for inclusion. Atlanta's BeltLine façade improvement program partners local artists/makers with businesses to complete capital improvements. In Turners Falls, MA, a publicly support mural program is available for artists and businesses to participate in. Lessons from these could be incorporated into Stoneham's CIP. More detail on these can be found in the best practices.

Design Services – Stoneham's CIP encourages but does not require properties to engage design professionals for projects. Many programs include design services as a benefit of program participation. During this period of COVID recovery, funds may be available to include this type of small business assistance.

COVID-19 Impacts – Improvements to help reduce the transmissibility of the virus should be considered as eligible for funding. The flexibility could afford improvements such as replacement of doors or window systems, outdoor seating structures, the installation of a walk-up service window, and additional signage, markings, or partitions needed for social distancing and directional purposes.

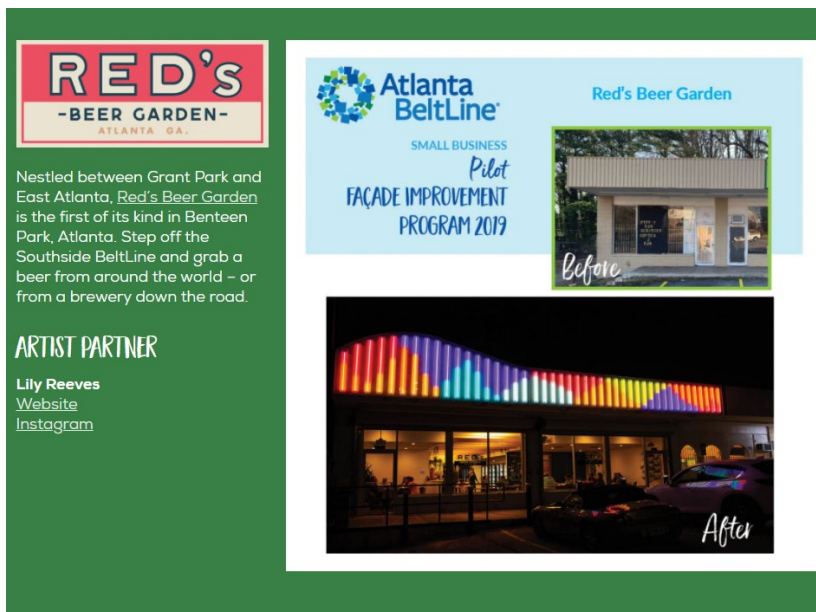
Advertising the Program – PSAs, social media, and a prominent location on the Town's/partners' websites can increase awareness of the program and participation. Word of mouth has been shown to be one of the most important ways to promote these programs.

Permitting Process – A separate recommendation in this plan discusses removing impediments to the permitting process in Stoneham. Completion of this recommendation will be important to encourage greater participation in the Commercial Improvement Program.

Options to Diversify Storefront Improvement Program Funding

- **General Fund** – Through an allocation from a municipality, this type of funding tends to offer the greatest flexibility for program structure with the least amount of reporting restrictions.
- **Local Municipal Funding (Set-Aside)** – Municipal allocation set-aside from a special revenue stream for a set amount of time (e.g. permit revenues, sales tax set-aside, special fees such as landfill tipping/disposal fees, etc.)
- **Special Taxing Bodies** – Business district designation (creating an additional sales tax) or special service area (additional property tax), TIF districts
- **Federal American Rescue Plan Funding** – Communities may use ARPA funding for small business assistance, such as to enhance outdoor spaces for COVID-19 mitigation (e.g., restaurant patios) or to improve the built environment of the neighborhood (e.g., façade improvements).
- **Federal CDBG** – Applicants must meet and adhere to federal requirements and compliance issues. The Massachusetts CDBG Program is a competitive program that is available to all municipalities that are not Entitlement Communities and encourages joint or regional applications. Communities may apply for funds for downtown or commercial district related projects including sign/facade programs.
- **Private/Nonprofit/Foundation funding** – Low-interest or no-interest loans or grants from private lenders, often those with a community focus or a small, local bank or nonprofit organization with community interest.
- **Historic funding** – Historic preservation and landmarks organizations such as Main Street America receive grant funding from the National Park Service specifically for rural "Main Street" communities.

For additional funding options, see best practice sheets and resources attached to this recommendation.



Red's Beer Garden façade improvement completed in partnership with artist, Lily Reeves.
Source: Atlanta BeltLine; <https://beltline.org/the-project/economic-development-commercial-real-estate/business-facade-partnership-grant-program/>

Process

1. **Engage:** Collect feedback on the current Commercial Improvement Program and solicit input on what property owners and businesses would like moving forward. This is the time to discuss eligible projects, the application process, funding models and limits, and any assistance awardees might need.
2. **Plan:** Explore feasibility of program enhancements identified by the Town, downtown stakeholders, and best practices. Arrange for new funding mechanisms (e.g., allocation of ARPA funds, if applicable), update program guidelines and paperwork, and engage any new program partners such as artists or design professionals.
3. **Advertise and Implement:** Update town webpage containing program information. Cross market with partners such as Stoneham Chamber of Commerce, on social media, and through PSAs. Solicit project participants and administer the program.
4. **Evaluate and Decide Future:** Determine program metrics (e.g., business sales, property value, vacancy rate, public/private investment) and measure at appropriate time intervals. Seek feedback from program participants; utilize feedback to improve and market the program.

Top 10 Important Features of a Façade Improvement Program

Stage 1: Plan

1. Develop a budget for the program
2. Dispense funds recommended by reimbursement
3. Pilot in a target area
4. Easy understandable application & include measurement indicators
5. Free design assistance with application

Stage 2: Advertise & Implement

6. Marketing e.g. flyers, chamber of commerce, grocery store, utility bill
7. Implementation Plan:

Stage 3: Evaluate & Decide Future

8. Gather data each month before and after implementation: Multiple-time series evaluation design; alternate Time series evaluation design
9. Analyze possible long-term impact e.g. every 4-5 years
10. Decide on future of the program

Recommended Stages and Features of a Façade Improvement Plan Source: Osunbunmi O., Gula M., Elahmr N. (2016) Façade Improvement Programs: A Report to Centreville, OH. Wright State University.

455 Pleasant Street



Before







After



Cleaning Brick, Repainting, Window Addition, Awnings, Signage

*Before and After Photos for 455 Pleasant Street, Worcester, MA: participant in Worcester Façade Improvement Program.
Source: Worcester Executive Office of Economic Development*

Implement Coaching Program for Business Owners

Category	 Revenue/Sales
Location	Study Area
Origin	LRRP Best Practices
Budget	 Low Budget (<\$50,000) - Funding Sources: ARPA Small Business Technical Assistance; ARPA Economic Adjustment
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) – planning through implementation can occur in 1-6 months
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	# of businesses participating; change in businesses behavior following coaching (e.g., businesses with online ordering, businesses using email marketing, improvements in in-store displays); change in revenue for participating businesses
Partners & Resources	Stoneham Planning & Community Development, Stoneham Planning Board, Stoneham Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Merchants Group



E-Commerce Training. Photo Credit: PcMag India

Diagnostic

COVID-19 changed the way customers interact with businesses and many of these changes, such as more online interaction or curbside pickup provided conveniences that are likely to remain post-pandemic.

During the pandemic, many communities launched business coaching programs to help time and cash-strapped businesses adapt and thrive in the new normal. Locally, downtown businesses identified marketing strategies, improvements to the private realm, and providing goods and services that would attract customers as among their chief challenges.

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

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

Action Item

Create/update database of downtown businesses. Knowing what businesses exist in Downtown and having a complete, up-to-date database with contact information supports direct outreach and engagement of businesses.

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

Conduct a resource audit – Conducting an audit of existing resources or strategic partners would aid in increased efficiencies and cost-savings, build alliances and partnerships, and streamline execution. Results of this audit would be a publicly available database of resources to guide coordinated efforts as well as to allow businesses to access resources on their own. Consider resources outside of the region that can be accessed online.

Create programming to fill gaps in technical assistance offerings - Programming can come in many forms including formal programs, one-on-one coaching, peer-to-peer best practice sharing, and more. Programming will also have to consider access. For example, will digital or in-person offerings be more effective, will programs offer dynamic or static content, what timing, frequency, or platform is best, and whether there are other barriers to access such as language.

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

Following up with local business promotion - Promote downtown businesses and any new improvements via local media and social media.

Process

1. Create/update database of Downtown businesses (business, contact information) to support direct outreach and engagement with businesses.
2. Work with the Stoneham Chamber of Commerce to assess the coaching needs of the business community. The LRRP Business Survey can also serve as a source of information.
3. Determine available resources/technical assistance available. Where there are gaps, create programming to fill gaps. It may be necessary to funding through a grant or fees collected from participating businesses.
4. Determine baseline data point to collect (e.g., # of businesses with online marketplace, with email marketing) based on coaching to be provided.
5. Develop a coaching schedule, likely to include a combination of workshops and one-on-one assistance.
6. Collect post-coaching data to measure impact.
7. Town, Chamber, and businesses collaborate to promote businesses and new improvements.

Lowell Business Recovery Task Force



REVENUES
& SALES

Location

Lowell, MA

Lowell Business Recovery Task Force:
Small Business Marketing Webinars and
Grant Program

<https://www.lowellma.gov/1457/Lowell-Business-Recovery-Task-Force>

The City of Lowell Economic Development Office convened the Lowell Business Recovery Task force to centralize resources for our business community and to effectively assist our local businesses during these uncertain times. The mission of the Lowell Business Recovery Task Force is to provide support, technical assistance, and communicate, in multiple languages and across various platforms, state and federal guidelines to assist our local businesses re-open.

One component of the Task Force's work includes the Small Business Marketing Webinars and Grant Program (webinar slides available at: <https://www.lowellma.gov/1471/Small-Business-Marketing-Webinars-Grant->).

The City of Lowell's Economic Development Office created a marketing grant program available to Lowell's small, independently owned businesses that were most significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Grant awards of up to \$2,000 were available to eligible businesses until funds were depleted. Eligible applicants were required to participate in at least 2 free webinars (up to 4 total) in order to receive funding.

The Task Force additionally launched a website to provide a central resource for businesses with information about financial resources, provide information for specific sectors, and link to other programs organizing small business assistance and marketing campaigns.

Online Marketing Strategy



Screenshot from Small Business Marketing Webinar Source: Tomo360 and Lowell Business Recovery Task Force

Identify and Correct Zoning and Permitting Impediments

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Study Area
Origin	LRRP Grant Application; Downtown Merchants Focus Group; Business Survey
Budget	 Low budget (< \$50,000) – consultant and/or staff time; Funding sources include: Local Funding, Mass Planning Grants, ARPA Economic Adjustment, One Stop for Growth, DHCD
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Reduce the time to issue permits; change in # of permits issued; change in # of new businesses opened in a year; reduction in vacant storefronts
Partners & Resources	Stoneham Planning & Community Development; Stoneham Planning Board, Board of Selectmen Stoneham Building Department; Stoneham Board of Health



Example of Form-Based Code Design Source: Dietz & Co Architects for Town of Montague, MA

Diagnostic

COVID-19 required that businesses adapt quickly to a changing environment, whether outdoor dining, to-go alcohol sales, curbside pickup, implementing physical changes to accommodate safety measures, or something else. In Stoneham, half of downtown businesses report adapting the way they sold and delivered to customers during the pandemic. Local zoning and by-laws that support flexibility and streamlined permitting processes that don't pose undue financial burdens on new and existing businesses were important during the pandemic and will continue to be as local economies recover.

The following observations were made regarding Stoneham zoning, permitting, and bylaws:

- Downtown merchants identified challenges with the local signage bylaw. Zoning was recently changed to allow A-frame signs and businesses would like it to also allow projecting signs.
- More outdoor dining and retail was desired. Stoneham should consider expanding current permissions and making them by-right. The Rapid Recovery Program has developed an Outdoor Dining Toolkit that provides municipalities with useful planning information on a variety of issues: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/outdoor-dining-retail-toolkit/download>.
- Town Common restrictions and permitting process may preclude certain activities and events that add to the vitality and vibrance of the downtown and its branding efforts.
- It was estimated that a comprehensive zoning review has not occurred since 1985. As such, many amendments have been made in an additive fashion creating organizational deficiencies.
- Local business and property owners shared that the time to complete permitting can take too long creating deterrents for new businesses or changes to businesses. In one instance, a business noted that it took years and thousands of dollars to obtain a permit to install a handicap accessible ramp. The Board of Selectmen performs Site Plan Review on most development including those requiring special permits by the Planning Board Zoning Board of Appeals.
- The frequency of Town committee/board meetings was cited as a main driver of the long process with some meeting on monthly or bi-monthly schedules. Increased meeting frequency to bi-weekly is recommended to reduce the time.



*Projecting Signs, Portsmouth, NH
PNH_SignsAwnings_2016-03a.pdf*

Source: City of Portsmouth, NH – Guidelines for Signs & Awnings; <http://files.cityofportsmouth.com/files/planning/drt/11->

Action Items

Key components of this recommendation include:

- Add a table of uses to the Stoneham Zoning By-Law.
- Eliminate duplicative permitting reviews by both the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen.
- Review the restrictions and permitting process for activities and events on the Town Common.
- Perform an audit of the Zoning Bylaw as a first step in eliminating duplicative provisions and improved organization.
- Consider certain zoning amendments to address issues raised and to promote vision of LRRP process
- Review and simplify Signage Requirements
- Allow projecting (blade signs) signs in Downtown Stoneham
- Merge the Business and Central Business districts
- Consider expanding the permitted uses in the downtown to explicitly include:
 - **ARTISANAL MANUFACTURING:** Application, teaching, making, or fabrication of crafts or products by an artist, artisan or craftsperson either by hand or with minimal automation and may include direct sales to consumers. This definition includes uses that employ activities and processes such as small-scale fabrication, welding, and coating, that are typically not permitted in non-industrial zoning districts. This definition shall not include Artisan Food and Beverage preparation or sales.
 - **ARTISANAL FOOD AND BEVERAGE:** Small-scale production or preparation of food made on site with limited to no automated processes involved and may include direct sales to or consumption by consumers. This definition includes uses such as small-batch bakeries, micro-breweries (manufacturing 15,000 barrels per year or less), artisan distilleries (manufacturing 10,000 barrels per year or less) as regulated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, small-batch candy shops, and local cheese makers. This use may or may not have outdoor seating or patio as an accessory use depending on the zoning district in which it is located.
 - **SMALL SCALE INDOOR RECREATION** An Indoor Recreational Facility is an establishment that provides amusement, entertainment, or physical fitness services that occur indoors for a fee or admission charge such as rock climbing, arcades, laser tag, indoor golf simulation, ax throwing.



Indoor Rock Climbing Source: Getty Images



Planning Discussions Photo: Town of Stoneham

Process

For Zoning Updates:

- Hire consultant to perform a zoning audit
- Conduct robust public engagement
- Establish transparent and predictable zoning provisions and process
- Enhance the special permit requirements by adopting site plan review provisions and criteria

For Permitting Process Updates:

- Identify duplicative review requirements that increase the permitting time
- Eliminate site plan review requirement for projects that require special permits
- Determine the appropriate responsible entity for special permits (Select Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals)
- Determine if additional staff is required to support expedited permitting
- See best practice sheet on next page for additional guidance.



Public Engagement Session Photo: Town of Stoneham

Zoning & Permitting Best Practices



Location

Burlington, VT

Zoning for a Resilient Downtown

More detail on Burlington, VT's experience and process available at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/admin-capacity-best-practice-sheets-compedium/download> (Page 5)

Develop or Update the Municipality's Sign Code

More detail and suggested funding sources available at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/admin-capacity-best-practice-sheets-compedium/download> (Page 9)

Streamlining Special Event Permitting

More detail on Osceola, FL's experience available at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/admin-capacity-best-practice-sheets-compedium/download> (Page 26)

An important step to help businesses post-COVID is to think about zoning requirements as a small business might. What if a record store wanted to add a small bookstore in the back of their space? Would that be allowed? Would they have to somehow provide additional parking? Would it require a public process with the risk and cost of being denied? If so, communities should think about whether that is their goal. In some cases, it may make sense to keep zoning restrictions on certain uses. For example, drive thru restaurants often have negative externalities, especially in a downtown location. On the other hand, a walk-up window for pedestrians is likely to have few of those negative effects and can help drive local businesses as visitors continue to be wary of going indoors. Once you have a sense of how your zoning affects business decisions, it would be advisable to check in with some local businesses to get their thoughts as well.

With that data in hand, communities can use their plans to guide how to change their zoning. A few small steps may make a big difference. These could include:





- Reducing or removing regulations on outdoor dining in zoning. Licensing and other municipal processes can usually suffice;
- Revising parking requirements for new uses downtown. Re-tenanting an existing space, or changing from one use to another, should not generally trigger any new parking requirements; and
- Streamlining the review process for changes in use. Either reduce the number of use groups in zoning so small changes don't trigger zoning review or allow more uses by right. If some public review is appropriate, rely on staff-level administrative review as much as possible.

Updating a sign code and combining the update with financial assistance to small businesses to bring their signs into compliance can help address negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Signs are critical information to identify active businesses to customers. Outdated signs may suggest that a business is no longer in operation. Signs in disrepair may be dangerous or may contribute to a perception that a business area is not safe, discouraging potential customers.

The following Best Practices can be used to improve communication between stakeholders and the community about the local permitting process for special events. For this best practice, the Osceola County Board of County Commissioners utilizes these techniques to ensure an expedient, open permitting process for their special events.

- Single Point of Contact
- Users' Guide to Permitting with Permitting Flow Charts & Checklists
- Clear Submittal Requirements • Concurrent Applications
- Combined Public Hearings, if needed
- Pre-Application Process
- Development Review Committee (DRC)
- Regularly scheduled inter-departmental meetings
- Physical proximity of professional staff to review

Organize & Support Capacity of the Downtown Business Community

Category	 Administrative Capacity	
Location	Study Area	
Origin	Downtown Merchants Group	
Budget		Low (<\$50,000) to Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) for staff member/consultant to conduct outreach, engagement, and BID formation. Funding: Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, Mass Development Real Estate Technical Assistance Program, or ARPA funds (if tied to implementing COVID recovery activities).
Timeframe		Short Term (<5 years) – BID formation is feasible in 18-24 months
Risk		Medium Risk – long-term sustainability
Key Performance Indicators	# Businesses & property owners participating; Program model/objectives defined; Financial sustainability model and appropriate staff support.	
Partners & Resources	Stoneham Planning & Community Development, Stoneham Chamber of Commerce, Property Owners, Business Owners	
Diagnostic	<p>The COVID pandemic significantly impacted downtown businesses. Business surveys have verified that downtown small businesses, dining, cultural attractions, residential developments, and tourist destinations experienced loss of employment, revenue, customer base and foot traffic. Downtowns with active downtown organizations were able to pivot and respond to this crisis to help their small businesses weather the storm. Many downtowns have realized that a sustainable district management entity is positioned to help downtowns recover from COVID and prepare for the future.</p> <p>The Stoneham Downtown Merchants Group is comprised of downtown business owners and property owners. The group was just getting together when COVID-19 hit and understandably redirected participants' attention. There is significant knowledge and skill among the Group's participants, including many who have experience in neighboring communities and can bring lessons from those communities into Stoneham.</p> <p>Participants shared that visible progress is needed to maintain participation and momentum. The group has identified several initiatives they would like to pursue; however, they lack the capacity or structure to execute given the many commitments already on the plates of these business and property owners. Given COVID impacts and businesses' need to recover, time and resources to volunteer for these kinds of initiatives is even more constrained.</p> <p>The Downtown Merchants group has the potential to organize shared events and marketing focused on the downtown and be a unified voice to work with the Town to remove obstacles for businesses and promote economic development. It is strengthened by the presence of both businesses and property owners.</p>	

Action Items

Getting Started - Use this project recommendation to form a BID as the launching point for stakeholder engagement.

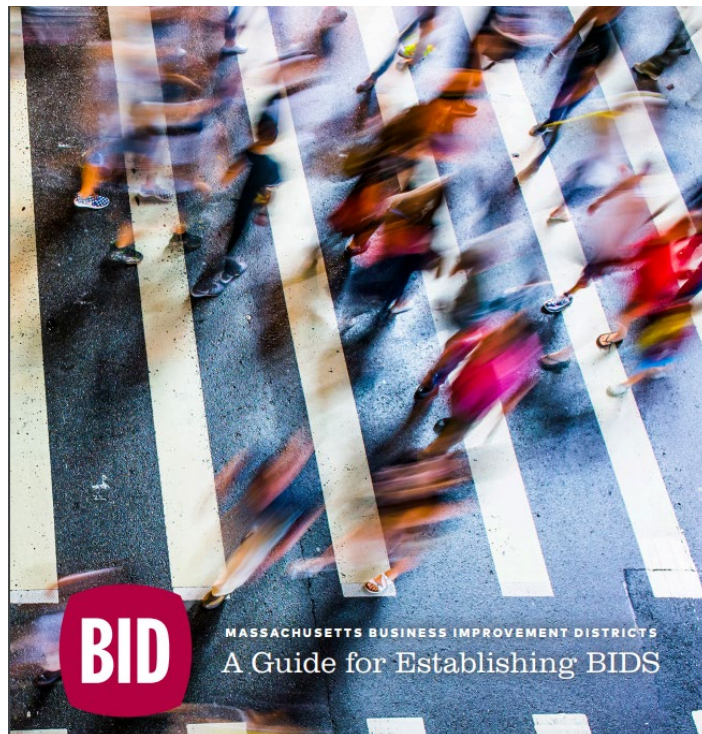
Develop the Value Proposition/Communication - It will be essential to develop the value proposition for investing human capital and the financial resources into a BID and communicate to the Town and private stakeholders the impact of their investment. The long-term goal of a BID is to build a destination that is attractive to potential developers, businesses, residents, and visitors. In the near term, a BID can play an important role in COVID recovery. More on BID value and key talking points included in Appendix.

Stakeholder Engagement/ Leadership and Partnerships - Launching the organizational efforts to form a BID in Stoneham should be an intentionally inclusive process that welcomes new as well as long term property and business owners, volunteer organizations, Town, and other key downtown stakeholders to develop the organizational and leadership infrastructure to be successful. The goal of this effort would be to form a strong, diverse, and inclusive steering committee to guide the development of a BID in Stoneham, identify key champions and build a solid coalition around the concept. The Town may convene this effort but should quickly transition to a private sector led working steering committee with strong public sector support. The clear demonstration of a public / private partnership will help move this effort forward.

Create a Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy - The Steering Committee should undertake efforts to engage media, businesses, property owners, nonprofits, cultural organizations, visitor attractions, volunteer groups, and interested residents to continue to identify and refine needs and priorities for the downtown. Engagement examples can be found in the Appendix.

Confirming BID Organizational Model - Once organizers have established the downtown priorities/ proposed supplemental programs and budget, it will be important to confirm that there is consensus that a BID is appropriate for Stoneham. Organizers should seek support letters / statements from key stakeholders.

Resources for Startup and Sustainability - Seed money is required to start a BID. Sources include technical assistance through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, MassDevelopment Real Estate Technical Assistance Program, or ARPA funds (if the development of the organization is tied to implementing COVID recovery activities). Additionally, local Institutions, foundations and key stakeholders/individual contributors may be sources for seed money to launch an effort to form a BID. Careful attention should be given to developing a realistic budget, and a variety of revenue opportunities for the organization. In addition to BID fees, additional sources to leverage BID revenue may include sponsorships, event revenue, grants or contracts, foundations, and individual giving. If the Municipality approves the formation of a BID, property owners will reauthorize the organization every 5 years.



Massachusetts Business Improvement Districts, A Guide for Establishing BIDs Source: MA DHCD; <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2020-revised-business-improvement-district-manual/download>

Alternatives to a Business Improvement District?

Consider a Voluntary Based Downtown Organization

An alternative to forming a BID may be to start building support for a downtown organization by forming a 501c3 to cultivate stakeholder involvement around the concept of creating a downtown organization. The community and stakeholder engagement process described at left would apply to identify priorities, budget, and revenue sources to begin the work of a downtown organization.

Process

The following process is recommended to build support for a BID in Stoneham.

- Create property owner and business databases using information provided by the Town as the official property owner database for the BID process and proposed boundaries.
- Confirm threshold for forming a BID is met.
- Create a downtown partnership with Town, key property owners, new developers, key businesses, cultural and tourist destinations, residential groups, nonprofit, and Chamber of Commerce to launch the effort. Create list of potential Steering committee members
- Form a broad-based advisory committee to provide input and feedback
- Secure seed funding for TA for BID formation through Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (now part of the One Stop), Mass Development Real Estate TA program, ARPA, Foundations and other stakeholder support
- Create community outreach events, widely distribute surveys, and utilize other engagement tools to develop program priorities.
- Hold Community forums on BID model.
- One on one conversations with stakeholders to secure support and engagement in process.
- Consensus building with stakeholders on BID model /programming /budget/fee structure.
- Create communication/marketing materials
- Organizers may consider executing a demonstration project that could "show" potential programs and services provided to the downtown through a BID. Possible funding sources may include MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places.
- Develop the BID Petition components.
- Develop MOU with Town for support of BID.
- Develop petition signature campaign strategy, timelines, and benchmarks
- Basic outline of approval requirements: Undertake a petition process under direction of the steering committee to secure support of 60% of property owners representing, 51% of the assessed valuation of the district. The petition will include:
 - Map and legal description of BID boundaries,
 - BID improvement Plan - programs and services
 - Fee Structure
 - Budget
 - Hardship Provisions
 - ID Management
 - Property owner signatures of support
- Formal Local Legislative Approval - Public hearing and formal vote by Select Board to establish the BID.
- Organizers complete 501c3 and Articles of Organization filings
- Approval of bylaws
- Establishment of a Board of Directors; hire staff.
- Initiation of supplemental services
- Reauthorization by property owners every 5 years.

Additional detail on this recommendation can be found in the Appendix

Forming a BID: “Reimagine Reading”



Location

Reading, MA

<https://www.readingma.gov/public-services/economic-development/pages/reimagine-reading-survey> and <https://www.mass.gov/doc/admin-capacity-best-practice-sheets-compendium/download> (pg. 34)

About

Reimagine Reading is a privately lead, Town & state supported initiative to create a public/private partnership and non-profit organization that will provide supplemental services and continued investment for a more vibrant Town.

Collectively, the initiative has identified the following key initiatives:

- Placemaking
- Business support and development
- Marketing and branding
- Downtown Access
- Advocacy
- COVID-19 business support and economic development recovery



Planning Process/Timeline

2018 Town Economic Development Forum - Public identified the need for multi-stakeholder group to be a champion for downtown.

Spring 2019 - Town applied for and received a technical assistance grant, from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Program through the Department of Housing and Community Development, to hire a consultant to provide technical assistance in the exploration of a downtown district management organization to provide supplemental services to the community.

Summer/Fall 2019- Town provided staff support to build community capacity, strengthen partnerships, and lead a robust and on-going public engagement process.

September 10, 2019- Presentation on District Management Types - On September 10, 2019, technical consultant, Ann Burke, presented to the working group to talk about different kinds of organization models and considerations for each type: [Finding the Right Fit-Structures of Downtown Organizations](#)

September 18, 2019- Ice Cream Social Event - On September 18th, the Town sponsored a Pizza and Ice Cream Social at the Pleasant Street Center. Over 100 people came including many new faces. We were also excited to have some really great participation from families and kids in the community. [Reimagine Reading Ice Cream Social Presentation](#).

September 9-October 15, 2019 - Community Survey- The Town provided staff support, marketing, and coordination for a community wide-survey. The purpose of this survey was to gather information from the public to help share the future of this future organization and its initiatives and was one of many public engagement tools used to gather information. Thank you to business partners, organization members, and residents for spreading the word! We had 1,538 respondents!

November 11, 2019- Community Survey Results [Reimagine Reading Downtown Initiative Survey Results 2019](#)

Winter 2019- Working group meetings, peer-to-peer conversations, analysis of public engagement data to develop a vision and preliminary action plan for a future organization.

Spring/Summer 2020- Town applied for and received a second technical assistance grant, from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Program through the Department of Housing and Community Development to provide technical assistance in support of ongoing public/private partnership and development of a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

Update to Select Board by Town staff at the September 15, 2020 Select Board meeting. [See document for more detailed background information HERE.](#)

Fall/Winter 2020- Town continues to provide grant supported technical assistance to support ongoing public/private partnership and development of a [business improvement district](#) organization.

Spring-Fall 2021- A private group of property owners, business owners, and residents are actively working together with a grant supported technical consultant to continue to develop a business improvement district organization.

Increase Local Administrative Capacity

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Study Area
Origin	Downtown Merchants Group
Budget	 High Budget (>\$200,000) – Assuming a permanent, full-time position with benefits continuing for multiple years; a part-time position or student interns may also increase capacity at lower cost
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) – Depending on source of funding, position could begin within months. Should begin within 1 year or less to assist with COVID recovery programs
Risk	 Medium Risk – Must secure approval and funding for new positions
Key Performance Indicators	Depending on focus of employee/intern, KPIs may include # of additional grants applied for and won, # of additional programs implemented, or similar.
Partners & Resources	Town Administrator, Planning & Community Development, Local higher education (e.g. Northeastern University Co-Op program) Funding: ARPA; Town Operating Budget; Community Development Block Grants



Bikers enjoy the Tri-Community Greenway through Stoneham, Woburn, and Winchester.
Source: tricomcommunitygreenway.org



Community members share preferences at Complete Streets Workshop.
Source: *Stoneham Complete Streets Strategy Final Report*

Diagnostic

Stoneham Planning and Community Development Department is well-regarded by the local business community; however, business stakeholders felt that with only one staff member, it was understaffed in order to achieve the COVID-19 recovery and economic development goals of the downtown and downtown business stakeholders. Additional support for grant writing and economic development were specifically noted. Staff may also provide capacity for more direct engagement with downtown stakeholders, managing COVID recovery program implementations, and downtown activities.

Action Item

As an immediate source of funding, the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) has provided funding to states, counties, and local governments to respond to the public health emergency with respect to COVID-19 or its negative economic impacts. Additional competitive funding opportunities are also available through ARPA.

The cost of administering an eligible project under ARPA is an eligible expense, therefore, payroll costs for programs and projects that respond to the negative economic impacts of COVID would be eligible. Expenses must be obligated by December 31, 2024, but actual payments can lag to December 31, 2026. For short-term projects, ARPA funds may cover payroll costs through completion of the project. For ongoing projects, ARPA may provide the initial payroll costs. Stoneham or other project partners can then use this time to secure ongoing funding through municipal, private, or other sources of funding so that sustainable ongoing funding is in place by the end of 2026.

Apart from ARPA funding, Community Development Block Grants allow for “activity delivery costs.” Therefore, staff costs associated with carrying out a CDBG activity would be eligible. As one example, some communities use CDBG funds for façade improvement programs and activity delivery costs associated with the programs are allowable.

The Town of Stoneham has also discussed leveraging relationships with area higher-education to create internships or course projects related to downtown economic recovery and development projects.

Process

1. Confirm and document project eligibility under available grant programs (e.g., ARPA, CDBG).
2. Develop detailed program scopes and budgets including program delivery/payroll costs.
3. Seek to build a full-time staff position by combining 2 or more projects. In some cases, where a staff position is “substantially” (>50%) committed to program delivery, the entire position can be funded.
4. Apply for/allocate relevant funding programs for each project.
5. Following program implementation, develop plans to transition payroll costs to sustainable, longer-term funding streams once grant funds expire.

Develop Pop-up Project to Fill Downtown Vacancies and Support Entrepreneurs

Category	 Tenant Mix
Location	379-383 Main Street
Origin	LRRP Application; Planning & Community Development; Chamber of Commerce
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000 - \$200,000) – Budget varies on amount of space used and includes portion of rent covered by program for duration of pop-up project as well as grants provided to property owners to make improvements/address code violations, public relations/website, program administration Financial Resources: MA Office of Business Development Pilot Project Program; ARPA Travel, Tourism, & Outdoor Recreation
Timeframe	 Short-Term (< 5 years) – Pop-ups can be arranged in a matter of months if key partners are on board
Risk	 Low – The temporary nature of pop-ups provides a low-risk environment
Key Performance Indicators	Increase in foot traffic, Increase in sales and revenue at neighboring food/retail businesses; Long-term commercial tenancy at market rate in formerly vacant properties; Increased perception of downtown as a destination
Partners & Resources	Stoneham Planning & Community Development, Stoneham Chamber of Commerce, Greater Boston Stage Co., Property Owners with Vacancies, Artists, Entrepreneurs, Businesses Pop-up managing partner (e.g., UpNext or similar)



Vacant storefronts in Stoneham Square Photo: BSC Group

Diagnostic

One goal of Stoneham's COVID-19 recovery is to recover and increase foot traffic in the downtown. A part of this strategy is driving more travel and tourism into the downtown and creating more destinations for locals and visitors alike. Pop-ups, whether retail, food, or arts/culture-based provide novel, time-limited experiences for patrons.

Fortunately, downtown Stoneham has a relatively low vacancy rate with only 7% of storefronts currently vacant. Some of these vacancies are located in Stoneham Square in the heart of downtown and near the theater and Town Common. There are an additional 2 vacant, developable lots in the downtown. Stakeholder interviews identified the potential for additional vacancies in the coming years as some small business owners may seek to retire and close shop.

In the previously completed *Stoneham Square Strategic Action Plan*, advisory group members identified that there was little to do in the downtown after 5pm beyond eating or the theater. Depending on the focus of the pop-ups, they could begin to fill this gap and provide evening experiences in downtown. When surveyed for this Rapid Recovery Plan, downtown business owners identified the following strategies as "very important" to attracting and retaining customers and businesses:

- more cultural events/activities to bring people into the district
- recruitment programs to attract additional businesses,
- implementing marketing strategies for the commercial district

All three of these strategies would be addressed by a pop-up program.

Finally, stakeholder discussions have further revealed challenges, including length of time it takes to open a new business in Stoneham (this is being discussed in depth in a separate recommendation). Pop-ups could provide an opportunity for businesses to operate temporarily and begin to generate revenue while they pursue a permanent location in Stoneham. In a time of continued uncertainty as the economy recovers from COVID, pop-ups mitigate some of the risk of opening a new business and provide proof of concept for entrepreneurs.

Action Items

Develop project team – A project team, representing the Town, business, cultural/arts, potential funders, and property owners, should be engaged to advise on the project. Depending on the funding source, certain stakeholders may be required to be involved.

Determine desired format of pop-ups – Communities across the Commonwealth have implemented a variety of pop-up formats. The Jean McDonough Arts Center "JMAC" in Worcester offers a permanent pop-up for local artists and organizations to organize events, performances, and classes. Project: Pop-Up, currently operating in Newton, Needham, and Melrose, provides commercial space for up to 3 months for food and retail entrepreneurs at significantly reduced costs. Finally, Ashland has created "The Corner Spot" which provides an outdoor community gathering place and a 300 square foot building for pop-up businesses (more details on each in best practices).

Plan for implementation – The planning phase should include planning to recruit entrepreneurs/creatives to occupy pop-up spaces, determining how applicants will be selected, how occupancy will be managed (e.g., set up and cleaning of space before/after occupancy, specific rules for utilizing the space, etc.), and managing logistical hurdles for occupants such as determining which permitting requirements can be assumed by the project proponent (e.g., parking) and which must be assumed by the tenant (e.g., health inspections for food service).

Process

1. **Lessons Learned** – Speak with colleagues in Melrose, Needham, and Newton, participants of Project: Pop-Up, to hear lessons learned from the projects implemented in their communities.
2. **Develop Partnerships & Vision** - The project proponent should engage stakeholders (e.g., property owners, businesses, entrepreneurs, artists, Chamber of Commerce) to discuss needs, possibilities, and ultimately a scope and vision for pop-ups in Stoneham. This may include identifying specific properties, determining the type of pop-up tenants desired, and roles for key stakeholders. If a permanent pop-up model is identified, a long-term lease or property purchase may follow a pilot period.
3. **Clear Regulatory Hurdles** - Discuss with Town staff and boards how permitting will apply to different types of businesses. As much as possible, the project proponent should take responsibility for permitting the space.
4. **Secure Funding** – Secure funding, likely through available grant opportunities. Once funding is secured, staff can be brought on to administer the program. As the pop-up progresses, a diversified and more sustainable funding stream should be sought.
5. **Implement** – Advertise the availability of pop-up space and select tenants. Work with tenants to collaboratively market the pop-up stores/events.
6. **Evaluate and Iterate** - Collect feedback from patrons and tenants. Adjust processes and approach as applicable. Discuss future phases of the project with key stakeholders including potential expansion or the possibility of long-term pop-up program.



Rou-Mi Candles founder Prisca Mbiye at her pop-up shop in Melrose organized through Project: Pop-Up. Source: Project: Pop-Up, <https://www.project-pop-up.com/12-essex-st>



Pop-up event at JMAC in Worcester. Source: JMAC, <https://www.jmacworchester.org/popup.html>

Pop-Up Models



Location

Ashland, Newton, Needham, Melrose, and Worcester, MA

The Corner Spot

<https://thecornerspotashland.com/>

The Corner Spot is a place in downtown Ashland where businesses can test-drive their market and residents can come together. This space was created as a shared, sustainable community gathering place and incubator for pop up businesses. The Corner Spot is intended to stimulate economic activity, attract new developers and business owners, and increase foot traffic downtown to help support existing and future business.

The Corner Spot serves as the home for new businesses to "pop up" every week (or more), allowing residents to enjoy a variety of potential additions to the Ashland business community. Local sponsors provide donations for upkeep and may donate equipment or other amenities for the space. The Corner Spot is run by a volunteer committee and organized by the Town Economic Development Director.

The Corner Spot is a small park space with a shed / bathroom that is open from dawn to dusk, and wifi is available. Rental to use the space is \$100 a week to cover utility and rental fees. Residents can also rent the space for the day at \$50 (outdoor use), or \$100 (use of 300 sq. ft. space with bathroom).

Project: Pop-Up

www.project-pop-up.com

Project: Pop-Up is a partnership piloted in [Newton](#) and [Needham](#), powered by [UpNext](#) (organizes / rents spaces) to support local innovation and entrepreneurship. Thanks to its immediate traction, Project: Pop-Up is expanding to Melrose and beyond.

UpNext has a variety of Pop-Up spaces available throughout Massachusetts for daily, seasonal, or longer-term rentals. Spaces may be anywhere from 300 sq. ft. to 4,000 sq. ft., and rentals vary depending on location, duration, or may include a percentage of sales.

JMAC





www.jmacworchester.org

The Jean McDonough (JMAC) Arts Center is a public-private partnership with the Worcester Cultural Coalition, and runs two programs that foster art and culture in Worcester.

The BrickBox is a performance venue which is rented four hours, one day, four day, or weekly. Prices vary for members, nonprofits, and corporate / commercial rates, with additional \$350 fee per public performance, \$350 streaming / recording fee, a 10% facility fee, and a 10% handling fee. The exclusive use of the PopUp space may be rented at the same time for an additional \$100 per hour.

The Pop-Up space is available for free public events or classes thanks to sponsorships. A refundable \$100 security deposit must be placed to secure the date and use the space. 25% of proceeds of any event which sells products or tickets and 15% of food items or small arts / crafts sold go to the Worcester Cultural Coalition. The space also available for private rental.

Promote Greater Space Utilization and Support Event Programming that Increases Foot Traffic in Downtown

Category	 Culture/Arts
Location	Town Common; Study Area
Origin	Stoneham Planning and Community Development; Stoneham Chamber of Commerce
Budget	 Medium (\$50,000 - \$200,000) - depends on size/number of spaces activated – similar projects have been implemented for \$50,000 - \$75,000 not including staff time
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years) – community-driven planning and pilot projects could be launched within months
Risk	 Low Risk – will need to secure spaces which may include private property or use of street parking spaces; community engagement is essential to planning and ongoing usage and success of spaces
Key Performance Indicators	Event attendee numbers, number of events, number of different groups using the space for events, average users per day, change in sales at area businesses during events, time spent in Downtown, user sentiment obtained through polling, additional trips to Downtown, visitor sentiment about downtown as a destination as opposed to a single errand
Partners & Resources	Partners: Downtown businesses, Chamber of Commerce, local artists, area non-profits, school groups, contractors, landscapers Funding: ARPA Funding, NEFA Grants, Art Place America, Mass Development Placemaking Grants, Build In with KaBOOM!, AARP Community Challenge
Diagnostic	<p>Stakeholders want to attract residents and customers into the downtown district. Events are a way to bring people into the downtown and patronize businesses before, during, or after the event. COVID-19 brought many business activities outdoors including outdoor dining, classes and workshops, and more. As the community recovers from COVID-19, a preference for outdoor activities may remain.</p> <p>While downtown Stoneham is the site of several events including the farmers market, concerts on the Common, and Town Day, among others, there are a limited group of people and organizations who organize these events. Limited capacity must be considered when planning additional events and activities in the downtown.</p>

Action Item

Stoneham can take a hybrid approach to activating the downtown and supporting more event programming.

Passive Space - Passive space is available for residents to enjoy on a daily basis. This could include a series of seating areas including outdoor game equipment like ping pong, corn hole, large chess, etc.

Support for Programming - Currently, each downtown event starts from scratch with event organizers coordinating layouts, equipment, and infrastructure for the event. Stoneham can make additional use of passive space that allows for more substantial programming with a smaller infrastructure lift than planning and coordinating an event from scratch. By providing infrastructure to host concerts, movie nights, places for food to vend out of, etc., Stoneham can create a lower barrier to entry that allows more groups to host events in the downtown.

Early Engagement - Early engagement of downtown businesses, local artists, creatives, area non-profits, school groups, contractors, landscapers, and others will be important to support the development and expansion of what the new activated downtown spaces will become. If these parties are involved in the formation and design of these spaces early, even minimally, they are more likely to remain part of the activation long term. Broad community engagement is vital to the ongoing success of these new spaces.

Kerouac Park, Lowell, MA



Lowell was seeking to activate an underutilized downtown park to serve as a space to hold community gatherings and small events. A shipping container was purchased and fit out as a stage alongside tables, chairs, a sound system, lawn games and more were incorporated into this "park in a box." Partnerships with area organizations ensure continuous activation of the space bringing new visitors to enjoy the park and surrounding community.

BUDGET: \$50,000 for all components

IMPLEMENTATION: 8-12 weeks

TIMELINE: year round programming

MATERIALS: shipping container fit out w/ a stage, sound equipment, tables, chairs, benches, umbrellas & games

MAINTENANCE: staffing, maintenance & repairs.

Project Inspiration: Kerouac Park, Lowell, MA Source: Jonathan Berk, Bench Consulting

Corner Spot, Ashland, MA



Ashland was seeking to create a community hub in the Downtown that would be a passive place for residents to gather, grab a meal or enjoy take out from town while also hosting small recurring events. The retail space serves as a way for area businesses to test the viability of a brick & mortar retail presence while also serving as an activator for the space itself.

BUDGET: \$65,000 for all components

IMPLEMENTATION: 8-12 weeks

TIMELINE: year round programming and passive use

MATERIALS: landscaping, swings, tables, chairs, shade sails, shed fitted for retail use, audio equipment, games

MAINTENANCE: moderate- cleaning, landscaping, repairs, event programming.

Project Inspiration: Corner Spot, Ashland, MA Source: Jonathan Berk, Bench Consulting

KEYS TO SUCCESS



Early Engagement

Bring together a team of engaged business owners, property owners, creatives and residents from the area early in this planning process so they can feel as much of the planning process as possible and are more likely to stay engaged throughout this first iteration and hopefully beyond. Find your one "leader" who will drive the project forward and have an easy way to engage feedback from others involved in planning through in person and online methods.



Capacity

Build early partnerships with area organizations, stores, restaurants, fitness groups, school groups, non-profits, affinity groups etc and let them take some of the burden of event planning (which can be some of the most cumbersome of this whole project) off your plate. Develop an easy to use sign up process for groups interested in activating spaces.



Feedback

Have an online survey always open combined with in person surveys of attendees to events and users of the space as well as direct outreach to abutting residents and businesses.



Flexibility

Any equipment purchased for this project should be viewed as portable, meaning it can be reused in a different space in town should this space not become widely adopted and can be packed up and reused to activate another public space throughout the rest of Springfield. The benefit of this sort of low cost, tactical and iterative project is that you can maintain these resources to test in other spaces before making expensive municipal investments and to help inform those investments.

Process

Location

Use a number of large and small spaces in downtown including the vacant lot at 450 Main Street as a base for larger installations and events similar to the Corner Spot example provided. Space around the Town Common can provide seating areas, games, and equipment to support occasional event series in this location.

Identify Inspiration

See two sample projects (page 60) that encapsulate components of the recommendations for implementation. Additional concepts and components may be identified through engagement of key community stakeholders identified in the action items section of this recommendation.

Plan & Implement

Obtain funding through one of the identified funding programs.

Stakeholder engagement should actively seek out stakeholders' input in the planning of this project, not just their approval. Planning should include identifying groups who could host events in the space later on and seek out their input on what they'd like to see in these spaces.

Work with Town departments or property owners for permission to use identified locations. The projects may start on a temporary basis, a few months for example, before making more permanent installations. This may be an appropriate approach to allow for feedback and adjustments, especially if the spaces would take any parking offline. Community organizations, placemaking consultants, or landscape architects can help with space design concepts. Purchase outdoor equipment (see Downtown Branding recommendation on page 31 for example materials). Develop streamlined process for organizations and businesses interested in hosting events and using the provided equipment and infrastructure.

Feedback

Get ahead of any complaints with a constructive outlet where stakeholders can leave positive or negative but constructive feedback through in person surveying at events and an online forum. This is an oft overlooked but important part of the process.

Iterate

Assess what worked and what didn't work. Adapt your project based upon user feedback. Did residents benefit? Did area businesses benefit? How could things be improved and could another location be more appropriate for this intervention.



Vacant Lot at 450 Main

Using the vacant lot, we propose developing an active programmed space for residents and visitors of the Downtown Stoneham area to gather, a place to host more actively programmed events and a space for food trucks to park OR local food vendors to serve prepared food and drink from.

A base of crushed gravel with scattered planter boxes, tables, chairs, umbrellas, Adirondack chairs along with a small shed space fit out to enable prepared food service from area restaurants (alternatively a food truck) and outdoor movie equipment including a screen, projector and speaker system.

Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, umbrellas, storage unit, crushed stone temporary landscaping, lawn games, sound equipment, storage shed converted into retail space for prepared food service, temporary lighting.



Winter OR Church Streets Adjacent to Common

Using similar branding to the materials chosen for 450 Main, the activations on the edge of the Common will be intended as more passive uses but also tie into any branding and programming at the 450 Main lot. Chairs, tables, games and space for local vendors and food distribution that can be brought in at nights and on weekends. Food trucks can be pulled into the parking lots and equipment for more active play in the common itself can be installed for loan to residents. In winter months, sleds, hot chocolate and smores kits can be used to encourage year round park use.

Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, umbrellas, planters and temporary landscaping, gravel. Small, wooden storage container for equipment storage and place to hold activities for loan to community.

Appendix



Town of Stoneham

Placemaking + Wayfinding ideas

9/1/2021

Project Idea Goals and Challenges

Project 1: Create wayfinding between downtown and Spot Pond recreational amenities (trails, zoo, pool)

Project 2: Placemaking in town center

Ideas

- Make visitors aware of downtown, on their way **to** and **from** their visit to Spot Pond and Zoo.
- Create a comprehensive wayfinding system for the town
- Cross-marketing / digital presence

Challenges

- Town Center Identity
- Proximity to Town Center from Spot Pond / Stone Zoo
- Auto-oriented (limited transit, pedestrian, bicycle connections)
 - Can we leverage the Stoneham greenway?

Create a wayfinding signage plan that establishes a town identity, sense of arrival, and improves connectivity to town center from existing attractions

- Identify sign types, key destinations, and potential sign locations
 - Gateway / Identification signs
 - Banners
 - Shopping plaza directory / directional signs
 - Stoneham map (for website, social media, print etc.)
- Conceptual sign type layouts
- Leverage existing highway signage (variable message signs and exit information signs)



1. Issue an RFP to develop a wayfinding system to include (Stoneham may be able to do some of the initial data gathering steps in-house before bringing on a designer):

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

Rough order of magnitude costs:

- Planning & Design: \$50K - \$150K
- Fabrication & Installation: \$100K+*

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

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

Goal: Create and leverage social media presence to cross-market and attract visitors

- Determine best platform for messaging and create Town accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn)
- Create a plan and calendar for posting content **regularly**, leveraging existing holidays and recurring events
- Follow relevant accounts (area businesses, local food bloggers, tourism agencies, local paper, school sports teams etc.)
- Invest in FaceBook adds
- Host community events (weekly morning yoga, food truck rally, toddler time) in parking lots or town common
- Reach out to Stoneham Zoo and other major attractions for opportunities to cross-market
- Use regular hashtags to promote the district (#StonehamTownCtr, #StonehamTownDay, #StonehamSummers?)
- Gather info from business es for interviews, spotlights, profiles, etc. to promote
- Email local publications about upcoming events
- Create a town center visitor website

(Links to Branding and Marketing project recommendation on slide 10)

Timeframe: 3 – 6 months, Cost: Low

The screenshot shows the Stone Zoo website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: About Us, Jobs & Volunteering, Zoo News, Kids' Corner, FRANKLIN PARK ZOO, STONE ZOO, and DONATE!. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links: Visit (circled in red), Discover, Protect, Celebrate, Act, and Engage. The 'Visit' link is highlighted with a red circle. Below the navigation bar is a large banner with the text 'Welcome To Stone Zoo' and 'JOIN OUR CONSERVATION SOCIETY'. Below the banner is a section titled 'VISIT THE ZOO' with the address '149 Pond Street, Stoneham, MA 02180' and phone number '617-541-LION (5466)'. There are three buttons: 'BUY TICKETS', 'HOURS & DIRECTIONS', and 'TODAY'S SCHEDULE'. Below these buttons is a section titled 'Know Before You Go!' with bullet points about health and safety updates, reservations, and member check-in. At the bottom, there is a note about the zoo closing at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 21.

Notes & considerations from wayfinding check-in

- Town has done its part to add wayfinding from town center to other recreational amenities
- Vehicular signage – Stoneham blue, white print direct to: Golf courses, Stoneham arena, Middlesex Fells, Hall Memorial pool, Stone zoo, Public parking (electronic signage)
- Historic district signage in the works
- Downtown parking study- would like to encourage visitors to park once. Plentiful parking but safety concerns (traffic speeds, crosswalks, enforcement).
- **Challenges/opportunities:**
 - Stoneham zoo and spot pond are controlled by the State.
 - Print with ticket- discount with zoo membership ... starting a dialogue with DCR to establish mutual cross-marketing.
 - Can we leverage Highway Boards on 93 – local business logos on highway signs? Ways to leverage new interstate exit numbering?
 - Town owns skating rink – potential origin for visitors particularly during tournaments.
 - Upcoming pedestrian projects: Mystic Highland greenway – Malden-melrose-wakefield-stoneham, DCR feasibility study for continuous loop around spot pond.
 - North border south intersection...? Redesigning with DOT and DCR with phase 2 to road diet to. Bike/ped access.
 - Montvale Ave used by visitors – directional / welcome signage opportunity
 - Currently have town center banners sponsored by the business community – Chamber of Commerce
 - 350th anniversary of the town.
 - Challenges with Public Works supporting large banner poles. Affixed to buildings rather than poles... Opportunity with new PW staff
 - Stoneham square... upgrade the existing “police box” signage. Redding 128 – flexible signage for messaging!
 - Websites to add to: Theater, Hall Memorial pool...
 - Summer concert series downtown in conjunction with food pop-up concept. Farmers market + email blast + social to advertise
 - More food and retail would be nice

Project Idea Goals and Challenges

Project 1: Create wayfinding between downtown and Spot Pond recreational amenities (trails, zoo, pool)

Project 2: Placemaking in town center

Identify Physical interventions to implement town center identity, such as:



CROSSWALK + CURB EXTENSIONS

GATEWAY IDENTITY
OPPORTUNITY

CREATIVE PAVEMENT MARKINGS AT ALL CROSSWALKS

INCREASE BANNER FREQUENCY & PEDESTRIAN-SCALE LIGHTING

BUS STOP ENHANCEMENTS
(SEATING, SHADE, TRASH RECEPTACLES, SIGNAGE)

"ASPHALT ART" PAINTED INTERSECTION

SHARED STREET DESIGN

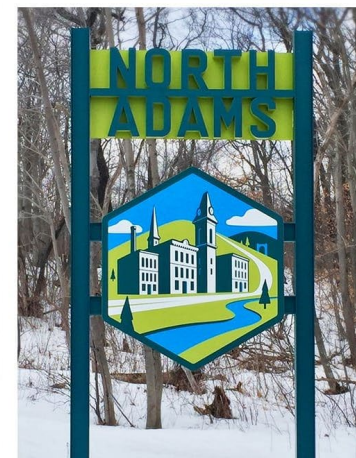
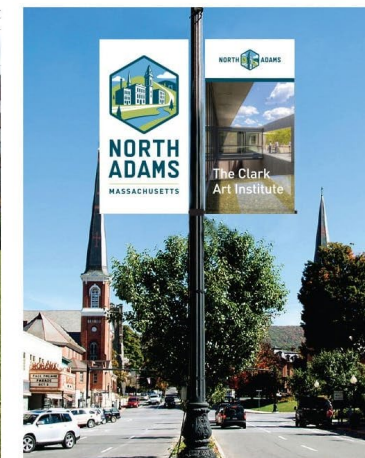
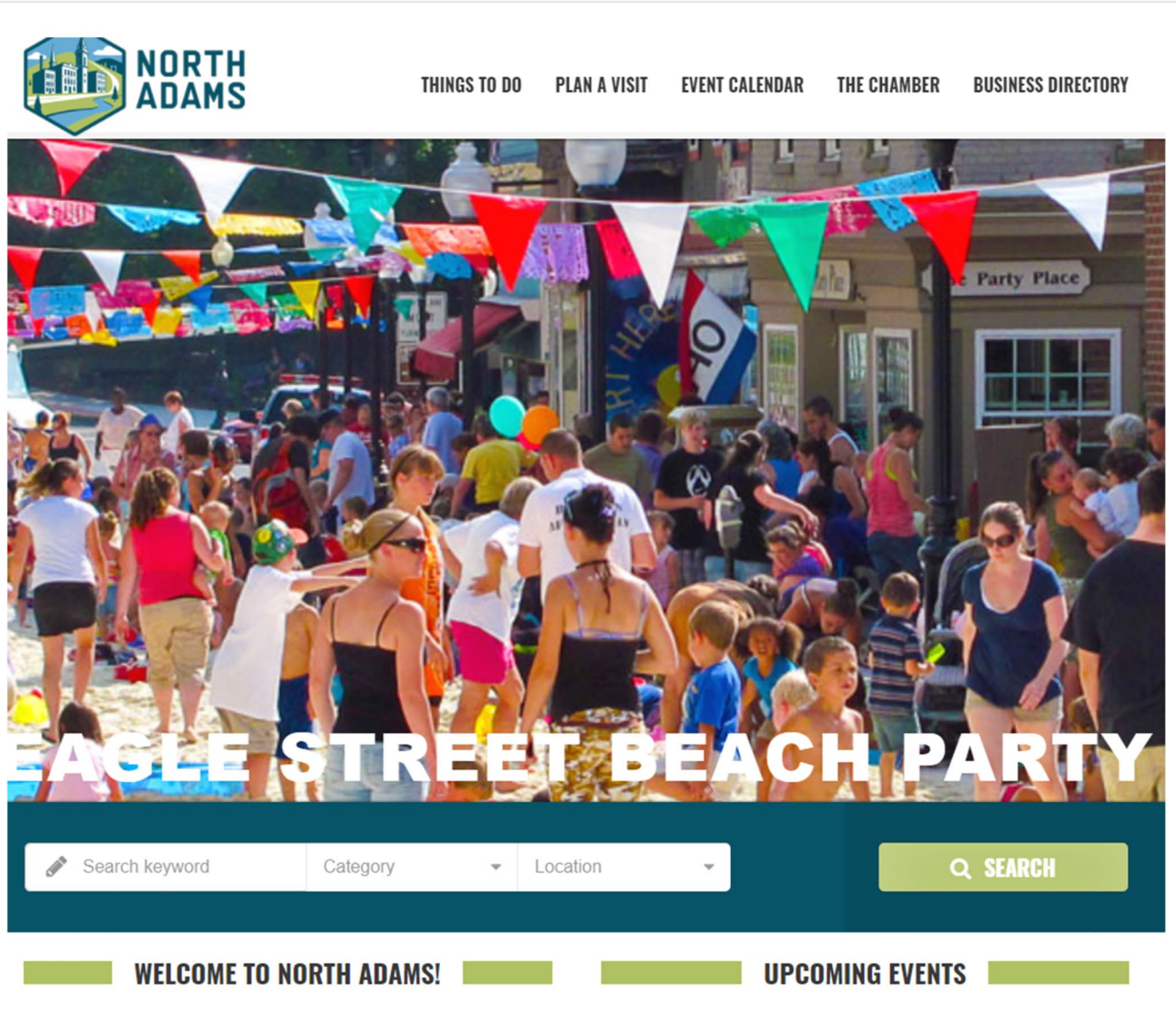
Town Center Banners

- Showcase faces of local business owners
- Local artists / art students to design banners
- Highlight local assets- Town Common, Spot Pond, Zoo, etc.
- Showcase events or upcoming activities
- Add additional poles along main street with flags on both sides of street oriented for both pedestrians and vehicles



Recommendation- what is it	Action / process	Cost, Timeframe
<p>Branding and marketing campaign- Create a consistent visual identity for Stoneham and the town center to be seen as a destination rather than a collection of individual businesses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage businesses and residents to identify key town imagery / assets / landmarks / major events that represent Stoneham Engage a branding agency to create logo, color palette and font, as well as standards for application. Consider leveraging local art students! Identify existing assets and opportunities to apply brand, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical signage Banners Trash can wraps Social media / digital presence Building facades Pavement markings Brochures / coupons from local businesses to be distributed at businesses and other major attractions (Spot Pond, Zoo, etc.) Fabricate and install branding elements 	<p>Planning/design: 3-6 months Cost: Low (can leverage local freelance designers)</p>
<p>Banners & street lighting – Increase the frequency and visibility of banners using pedestrian-scale street lighting where possible to create a consistent sense of place in the town center</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify core town center boundary Conduct site audit of existing banners, including placement and visibility for both pedestrians and vehicles, as well as night-time visibility Identify gaps and infrastructure needs- number of new pedestrian-scale light poles. Work with Chamber of Commerce and residents to develop schedule for sign updates and design 	<p>3 – 6 months Cost: Medium (depending on number of new poles)</p>

Recommendation- what is it	Action / process	Cost, Timeframe
<p>“Asphalt Art” – in coordination with existing pedestrian enhancements, use tactical urbanism (low cost) treatments to experiment with placemaking and street design changes to create a town center destination that prioritizes people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage community to identify locations for street art (intersections, crosswalks, alleys, parking lots, etc.) Work with local artists and designers to develop design concepts Review and approval from local public works department and other agencies as required Create a community event out of installation day where residents can come paint! 	<p>LOTS of Precedent examples including timeframe, cost, potential materials</p> <p>https://issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative/docs/asphalt-art-guide</p> <p>Cost: Low</p> <p>Timeframe: 3-6 months</p>
<p>Gateway art – to identify the town center, welcome visitors and create an arrival moment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage the redesign of the Main Street / Franklin St intersection to include a gateway treatment and opportunity to gather. This could be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water feature Sculpture or art installation Banners across the intersection Light feature Hire a landscape architect or designer to develop a gateway concept, or work with local design school to develop concepts Engage community to select a preferred concept Issue concepts to fabricator for costing and installation 	<p>Cost: Low – Medium (depending on the type of treatment and installation complexity)</p>
<p>Flexible street furniture – can create a sense of place where people can gather and feel like they have a place to rest as needed while passing through the town center. Colorful furniture and umbrellas also enhances the streetscape</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach out to local business owners to understand appetite for place flexible street furniture (foldable tables and chairs, umbrellas, etc.) on the sidewalk outside of their business, or using one or two parking spaces. Develop a program where town purchases street furniture and businesses maintain (i.e. store them at night, place them on the sidewalk in the morning). Business owners to apply and agree to take ownership of maintenance. Periodic (quarterly) check-in on program and conditions. 	<p>Low-cost street furniture and other materials:</p> <p>http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/materials/</p> <p>Cost: Low</p> <p>Timeframe: 3 months or less</p>



Thank You!

Nina Harvey

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Ann McFarland Burke
Consultant Vibrant downtowns,
healthy communities.



SME Administrative/Organizational Capacity

Consultation

To: Russell Burke
Plan Facilitator -Stoneham

From: Ann McFarland Burke

**RE: SME Consultation on development of a Business Improvement District
in Stoneham MA in response to COVID recovery efforts.**

Thank you for the opportunity to collaborate with you on your BID development project for Stoneham MA. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Notes and recommendations are below.

Overview - The COVID pandemic significantly impacted downtown businesses. Business surveys have verified that downtown small businesses, dining, cultural attractions, residential developments, and tourist destinations experienced loss of employment, revenue, customer base and foot traffic. Downtowns with active downtown organizations were able to pivot and respond to this crisis to help their small businesses weather the storm. Many downtowns have realized that a sustainable district management entity is positioned to help downtowns recover from COVID and prepare for the future.

Project Understanding

In Stoneham, there is interest in establishing a Business Improvement District. The LRRP Project is an opportunity to launch this effort with the support of the Town and a group of downtown stakeholders and interested partners. Downtown Stoneham is a linear district located along the Route 128 Corridor. At its heart is the Greater Boston Stage Company, a local cultural institution that serves as a key destination driver for the district. The Theater is a historical landmark and key cultural attraction for the downtown and the vibrant business community surrounding it. It offers Main stage performances, a robust educational regional K-12 arts series and other arts and cultural programming. The theatre collaborates with other organizations to support community events to create a year-round calendar of activities.

Stoneham also has an active Chamber of Commerce that is spearheading many of the downtown events and supports the merchants group. COVID had a significant impact on the Theater and business community. The Town and business community are aligned in their economic development goals for the downtown. The Town has identified some institutional and property owner support for the concept of forming a BID and is interested in advancing the conversation.

Action Items: The PF may consider these action items when developing the project rubric for creating a BID in downtown Stoneham:

- Getting Started - Launching the BID effort
- Develop the Value Proposition/ Communication Tools
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Create a Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy
- Identify Downtown Priorities
- Confirming BID Model
- Secure Resources for Sustainability
- Executing A Petition Signature Campaign and Legislative Approval Process

Getting Started - Use the LRRP planning process and project recommendation to form a BID as the launching point for stakeholder engagement.

Develop the Value Proposition/Communication - It will be essential to develop the value proposition for investing human capital and the financial resources into a BID and communicate to the Town and private stakeholders the impact of their investment. The long-term goal of a BID is to build a destination that is attractive to potential developers, businesses, residents, and visitors. In the near term, A BID can play an important role in COVID recovery. A successful BID can help achieve increased property values, improved sales and meals taxes, stronger tenancy, a vibrant cultural scene, and a destination where people want to shop, locate a business, dine, and live. A well-managed and sustainable BID will undertake strategic supplemental programs and services that will help achieve that goal. Key talking points include:

- Ability to collectively and cost effectively purchase priority supplemental programs and services to achieve impact /scale
- Provide a unified voice / "seat at the table" for district priorities
- Professional management and staff dedicated to implementing programs and services in the district.
- Produce and execute cultural and event programming
- Ability to respond to crisis - COVID
- Support new and existing businesses
- Leverage resources and build collaborations

Stakeholder Engagement/ Leadership and Partnerships - Launching the organizational efforts to form a BID in Stoneham should be an intentionally inclusive process that welcomes new as well as long term property and business owners, volunteer organizations, Town, and other key downtown stakeholders to develop the organizational and leadership infrastructure to be successful. The goal of this effort would be to form a strong, diverse, and inclusive steering committee to guide the development of a BID in Stoneham, identify key champions and build a solid coalition around the concept. The Town may convene this effort but should quickly transition to a private sector led working steering committee with strong public sector support. The clear demonstration of a public / private partnership will help move this effort forward.

Create a Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy - The Steering Committee should undertake efforts to engage media, businesses, property owners, nonprofits, cultural organizations, visitor attractions, volunteer groups, and interested residents to continue to identify and refine needs and priorities for the downtown. This work will be used to inform the BID Improvement Plan. Additionally, these outreach efforts provide the opportunity to educate stakeholders on the BID model, identify needs and opportunities as well as potential leadership. Community engagement can happen in a variety of ways including:

- Community Forums - fun, engaging and informational visioning sessions held in accessible, approachable locations such as a local business, restaurant, park, libraries, or community gather space.
- Peer Learning Panels - Invite Executive Directors from BIDs in similar communities to present on the impact of their organizations.
- Visits to other communities with BIDs to see programs in action.
- Distribute surveys to a broad cross section of downtown stakeholders to identify needs and priorities.
- Focus groups with key interest groups
- Websites/social media.

Confirming BID Organizational Model - Once organizers have established the downtown priorities/ proposed supplemental programs and budget, it will be important to confirm that there is consensus that a BID is appropriate for Stoneham. Organizers should seek support letters / statements from key stakeholders like the Theater, neighborhood associations, merchant groups, Chamber of commerce, volunteer organizations involved in the downtown, and other important groups.

Resources for Startup and Sustainability: Seed money is required to start a BID. Sources include TA through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, MassDevelopment Real Estate Technical Assistance Program, or ARPA funds (if the development of the organization is tied to implementing COVID recovery activities). Additionally, local Institutions, foundations and key stakeholders/individual contributors may be sources for seed money to launch an effort to form a BID. Careful attention should be given to developing a realistic budget, and a variety of revenue opportunities for the organization. In addition to BID fees, additional sources to

leverage BID revenue may include sponsorships, event revenue, grants or contracts, foundations, and individual giving. If the Municipality approves the formation of a BID, property owners will reauthorize the organization every 5 years.

PROCESS

The following process is recommended to build support for a BID in Stoneham.

- Create property owner and business databases using information provided by the Town as the official property owner database for the BID process and proposed boundaries.
- Confirm threshold for forming a BID is met.
- Create a downtown partnership with Town, key property owners, new developers, key businesses, cultural and tourist destinations, residential groups, nonprofit, and Chamber of Commerce to launch the effort. Create list of potential Steering committee members
- Form a broad-based advisory committee to provide input and feedback
- Secure seed funding for TA for BID formation through Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (now part of the One Stop), Mass Development Real Estate TA program, ARPA, Foundations and other stakeholder support
- Create community outreach events, widely distribute surveys, and utilize other engagement tools to develop program priorities.
- Hold Community forums on BID model.
- One on one conversations with stakeholders to secure support and engagement in process.
- Consensus building with stakeholders on BID model /programming /budget/fee structure.
- Create communication/marketing materials
- Organizers may consider executing a demonstration project that could "show" potential programs and services provided to the downtown through a BID. Possible funding sources may include MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places.
- Develop the BID Petition components.
- Develop MOU with Town for support of BID.
- Develop petition signature campaign strategy, timelines, and benchmarks
- Basic outline of approval requirements:
Undertake a petition process under direction of the steering committee to secure support of 60% of property owners representing, 51% of the assessed valuation of the district.
The petition will include:
 - # Map and legal description of BID boundaries,
 - # BID improvement Plan - programs and services
 - # Fee Structure
 - # Budget

Hardship Provisions
ID Management
Property owner signatures of support

- Formal Local Legislative Approval - Public hearing and formal vote by Select Board to establish the BID.
- Organizers complete 501c3 and Articles of Organization filings
- Approval of bylaws
- Establishment of a Board of Directors; hire staff.
- Initiation of supplemental services
- Reauthorization by property owners every 5 years.

Alternative B -

Voluntary Based Downtown Organization - An alternative to forming a BID may be to start building support for a downtown organization by forming a 501c3 to cultivate stakeholder involvement around the concept of creating a downtown organization. The community and stakeholder engagement process described above would apply to identify priorities, budget, and revenue sources to begin the work of a downtown organization.

Timeframe: Organizers should be able to form a BID in 18-24 months or sooner for a district of this size.

Resources:

How to Form a BID In Massachusetts: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2020-revised-business-improvement-district-manual/download>

Best practice rubric -Forming a BID in Hudson

Case Studies https://www.massdevelopment.com/assets/what-we-offer/BID/HowToCreateABID_2020_CaseStudy_Hudson.pdf

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

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

Other BIDs in Massachusetts: Hyannis, Worcester, Hudson, Springfield, Boston, Central Square Cambridge, Taunton, Amherst

DIAGNOSTIC

Stakeholders want to attract residents and customers into the downtown district. Events are a way to bring people into the downtown and patronize businesses before, during, or after the event. COVID-19 brought many business activities outdoors including outdoor dining and fitness classes. As the community recovers from COVID-19, a preference for outdoor activities may remain. In addition, we were informed that the business community hasn't always been engaged in past events and limited capacity makes continuous events series difficult.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

We'd encourage a hybrid project here that includes both passive space for residents to enjoy on a daily basis but also allows for more substantial programming to be included at the project locations with a smaller infrastructure lift than planning and coordinating an event from scratch. We'd recommend a series of seating areas including outdoor game equipment like ping pong, corn hole, large chess etc but also infrastructure in place to host concerts, movie nights, place for food to vend out of etc.

PROJECT PARTNERS

It's going to be important to try and engage early on with downtown businesses, local artists, creatives, area non-profits, school groups, contractors, landscapers etc to get behind these initiatives and support the development and expansion for what these spaces will become. If you can keep all of those parties involved, even minimally, in the formation and design of the physical spaces they're more likely to remain part of the activation long term. A vital resource to ensure the success of Stoneham Squares.

RESOURCES

- Patronicity's website of 100's of sortable placemaking projects for inspiration.
- ARPA funding, NEFA Grants, Art Place America, Mass Development Placemaking grants.
- Area property owners and small businesses to sponsor equipment and event infrastructure.

PROJECT INSPIRATION

Kerouac Park, Lowell, MA



Lowell was seeking to activate an underutilized downtown park to serve as a space to hold community gatherings and small events. A shipping container was purchased and fit out as a stage alongside tables, chairs, a sound system, lawn games and more were incorporated into this "park in a box." Partnerships with area organizations ensure continuous activation of the space bringing new visitors to enjoy the park and surrounding community.

BUDGET: \$50,000 for all components

IMPLEMENTATION: 8-12 weeks

TIMELINE: year round programming

MATERIALS: shipping container fit out w/ a stage, sound equipment, tables, chairs, benches, umbrellas & games

MAINTENANCE: staffing, maintenance & repairs.

Corner Spot, Ashland, MA



Ashland was seeking to create a community hub in the Downtown that would be a passive place for residents to gather, grab a meal or enjoy take out from town while also hosting small recurring events. The retail space serves as a way for area businesses to test the viability of a brick & mortar retail presence while also serving as an activator for the space itself.

BUDGET: \$65,000 for all components

IMPLEMENTATION: 8-12 weeks

TIMELINE: year round programming and passive use

MATERIALS: landscaping, swings, tables, chairs, shade sails, shed fitted for retail use, audio equipment, games

MAINTENANCE: moderate- cleaning, landscaping, repairs, event programming.

PROCESS



Location

We'd propose using a number of large and small spaces mentioned in the conversations with the plan facilitator and town including the vacant lot at 450 Main St as a base for larger installations and events similar to the Corner Spot and space around the Common for seating, games, and equipment to support occasional events series.

Identify Inspiration

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

Plan & Implement

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

Feedback

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

Iterate

What worked? What didn't work? Adapt your project based upon user feedback. Did residents benefit? Did area businesses benefit. How could things be improved and could another location be more appropriate for this intervention. .

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCATIONS



Vacant Lot at 450 Main

Using the vacant lot, we propose developing an active programmed space for residents and visitors of the Downtown Stoneham area to gather, a place to host more actively programmed events and a space for food trucks to park OR local food vendors to serve prepared food and drink from.

A base of crushed gravel with scattered planter boxes, tables, chairs, umbrellas, Adirondack chairs along with a small shed space fit out to enable prepared food service from area restaurants (alternatively a food truck) and outdoor movie equipment including a screen, projector and speaker system.

Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, umbrellas, storage unit, crushed stone temporary landscaping, lawn games, sound equipment, storage shed converted into retail space for prepared food service, temporary lighting.



Winter OR Church Streets Adjacent to Common

Using similar branding to the materials chosen for 450 Main, the activations on the edge of the Common will be intended as more passive uses but also tie into any branding and programming at the 450 Main lot. Chairs, tables, games and space for local vendors and food distribution that can be brought in at nights and on weekends. Food trucks can be pulled into the parking lots and equipment for more active play in the common itself can be installed for loan to residents. In winter months, sleds, hot chocolate and smores kits can be used to encourage year round park use.

Suggested Materials:

tables, chairs, umbrellas, planters and temporary landscaping, gravel. Small, wooden storage container for equipment storage and place to hold activities for loan to community.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

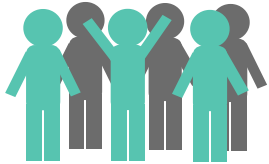
- Event attendee numbers
- Number of events
- Number of different groups using the space for events
- Average users per day
- Change in sales at area businesses during events
- Time spent in Downtown
- User sentiment obtained through polling
- Do visitors make more trips Downtown?
- Do visitors consider Downtown more of a destination as opposed to a single errand.

KEYS TO SUCCESS



Early Engagement

Bring together a team of engaged business owners, property owners, creatives and residents from the area early in this planning process so they can feel as much of the planning process as possible and are more likely to stay engaged throughout this first iteration and hopefully beyond. Find your one "leader" who will drive the project forward and have an easy way to engage feedback from others involved in planning through in person and online methods.



Capacity

Build early partnerships with area organizations, stores, restaurants, fitness groups, school groups, non-profits, affinity groups etc and let them take some of the burden of event planning (which can be some of the most cumbersome of this whole project) off your plate. Develop an easy to use sign up process for groups interested in activating spaces.



Feedback

Have an online survey always open combined with in person surveys of attendees to events and users of the space as well as direct outreach to abutting residents and businesses.



Flexibility

Any equipment purchased for this project should be viewed as portable, meaning it can be reused in a different space in town should this space not become widely adopted and can be packed up and reused to activate another public space throughout the rest of Springfield. The benefit of this sort of low cost, tactical and iterative project is that you can maintain these resources to test in other spaces before making expensive municipal investments and to help inform those investments.