



DOWNTOWN ESSEX PLACEMAKING PLAN

JUNE 2023



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FUNDER

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INTRODUCTION + BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Downtown Essex inhabits a mile-long stretch of unique cultural destinations that celebrates the town's creative arts and rich shipbuilding, clamming, and farming heritage. Residents and visitors are drawn to the downtown's museums, restaurants, retail stores, antique shops, and the natural beauty of the Great Marsh. Daily boat tours and special events such as wooden boat launches are opportunities that engage the town's culture and are welcoming to all Essex residents and visitors.

While downtown Essex maintains many attractions for residents and visitors alike, the public realm does not encourage people to linger and gather in public spaces. A Placemaking Plan is needed to create a holistic vision for public space in Essex that includes interventions from the ground up to the sky that can reinforce a sense of place and create a more welcoming environment for people of all ages and abilities.

The Downtown Essex Placemaking Plan is the outcome of a six-month planning process that brought the community together at an open house, online survey, and a co-design workshop to create a concept plan for 24 Martin Street. The placemaking projects include physical and programmatic interventions that:

- strengthen the downtown identity and experience,
- design spaces for events and community, and
- encourage residents and visitors to linger in the downtown, patronizing a wider variety of businesses.

This plan creates a holistic approach to placemaking improvements, identifying and locating character-defining elements, materials, and spaces. Lastly, the recommendations in this placemaking plan aim to enhance connections between places in downtown to create a vibrant, walkable downtown where residents and visitors can safely navigate to their destinations while exploring new stops along the way.

The Downtown Essex Placemaking Plan builds off earlier plans by the Town as well as the input collected from the community and Working Group over the six-month process. This process informed the four projects to develop further in this plan, including the following.

- Streetscape Furniture
- Wayfinding
- Park at 24 Martin Street
- Landscaping

The community input, recommendations, and practical guidance provide a solid foundation to enable many project ideas to come to fruition and continue to spark new and creative innovations in the coming years.



View of the Essex River from the Route 133/causeway bridge in downtown Essex.

BACKGROUND

The land encompassing Essex was farmed and fished by the Agawam people before 1634 when English colonists arrived. By 1668, the colonists set aside land for a shipyard that the Shipbuilding Museum currently occupies. Over the next two centuries, Essex became one of the most prolific builders of two-masted schooners in the world, and to this day the town supports an active wooden shipbuilding tradition. As wooden, masted ships gave way to metal, mechanically powered boats, shipbuilding in Essex declined from being the major employment opportunity in town to a cottage industry by the close of the 19th century. Now in the 21st century, seafood restaurants, home goods, and antique shops have become the primary commercial establishments in town (VisitEssexMa.com, 2023).

Essex encompasses 15.9 square miles, including approximately two square miles of water. In 2020, the population of Essex was 3,675 people (United States Census Bureau, 2020). The population is projected to grow by approximately 200 people over the next decade, with the population of seniors increasing (UMass Donahue Institute Population Projections, Vintage 2018).

There are many existing assets and strengths in Essex, as well as numerous working groups that are improving downtown such as the Strategic Planning Committee, Essex Merchants Group, Economic Development Committee, the Essex River Cultural District, and the Cultural Council. In 2021, the Town participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) where nine projects were identified, including one which was to create a placemaking plan. In 2022, the Town was awarded the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) Community One Stop for Growth Technical Assistance grant to create a Placemaking Plan. The goals of this plan include the following.

- Synthesize past recommendations for placemaking activities and programs.
- Engage residents, business owners, and property owners to identify their priorities.
- Create an action plan with clear guidelines.
- Identify placemaking priorities, clarify partnerships and roles, and estimate costs.

The downtown study area for the Downtown Essex Placemaking Plan further refines the area from the RRP to include Route 133/Main Street (aka the causeway) from Western Avenue to Southern Avenue, along Martin Street, connecting the Town Hall/T.O.H.P. Burnham Library and Memorial Park. The causeway crosses through the Great Marsh. The mile-long study area encompasses the walkable center of Town, and includes the Essex River Cultural District as well as a segment of the Essex Coastal Scenic Byway. It is also a major vehicular thoroughway that is traversed by approximately 14,000 vehicles per day (RRP, 2021). Many businesses along the causeway support vehicular traffic by offering parking in front of the building, while overhead wires raise utilities above the marsh surrounding downtown.



Main Street/Route 133 and Martin Street intersection in Downtown Essex.

OPEN SPACE + WATERFRONT

Downtown Essex has several open spaces within the study area, including Memorial Park and Paglia Park. Memorial Park is the largest park in downtown and is used regularly for baseball and softball games. Paglia Park is a pocket park that is in transition to becoming a welcoming open space as it has been the site of construction equipment supporting the reconstruction of the bridge over the Essex River. Across the street from Town Hall is 24 Martin Street, which was the site of the former fire station, and is currently a grass lawn with a shed.

One of the defining features of Essex is its exceptional access to the waterfront of the Essex River. The Town Landing recently transitioned to serve residents only, however visitors can enjoy the Essex River Fishing Charters, the Essex River Cruises and the privately owned marinas.

Outside the study area, there are several notable open and recreational spaces including Stavros Reservation, Cogswell's Grant, Conomo Point, Cox Reservation, and the Manchester Essex Conservation Trust, protecting nearly 1,600 acres of woodlands and wetlands.

One goal of the "Town of Essex Strategic Plan" (2022) includes the continued protection and management of conversation land and open spaces and an expansion of the range of recreational opportunities and assets. Expanding recreational opportunities includes identifying goals and plans to make biking and walking safer.

BIKING + PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

The "Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements in Town Centers" plan Central Transportation Planning Staff (2007) provides an overview of the existing conditions for sidewalks, crosswalks, and biking amenities. The plan recommends constructing sidewalks where they are absent, resurfacing sidewalks in disrepair, installing and improving signage, and installing bike racks.



View of Memorial Park, Essex's largest open and recreational space.



Causeway/Route 133 bridge overlooking Essex River.

RAPID RECOVERY PLAN: ESSEX/MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA (2021)

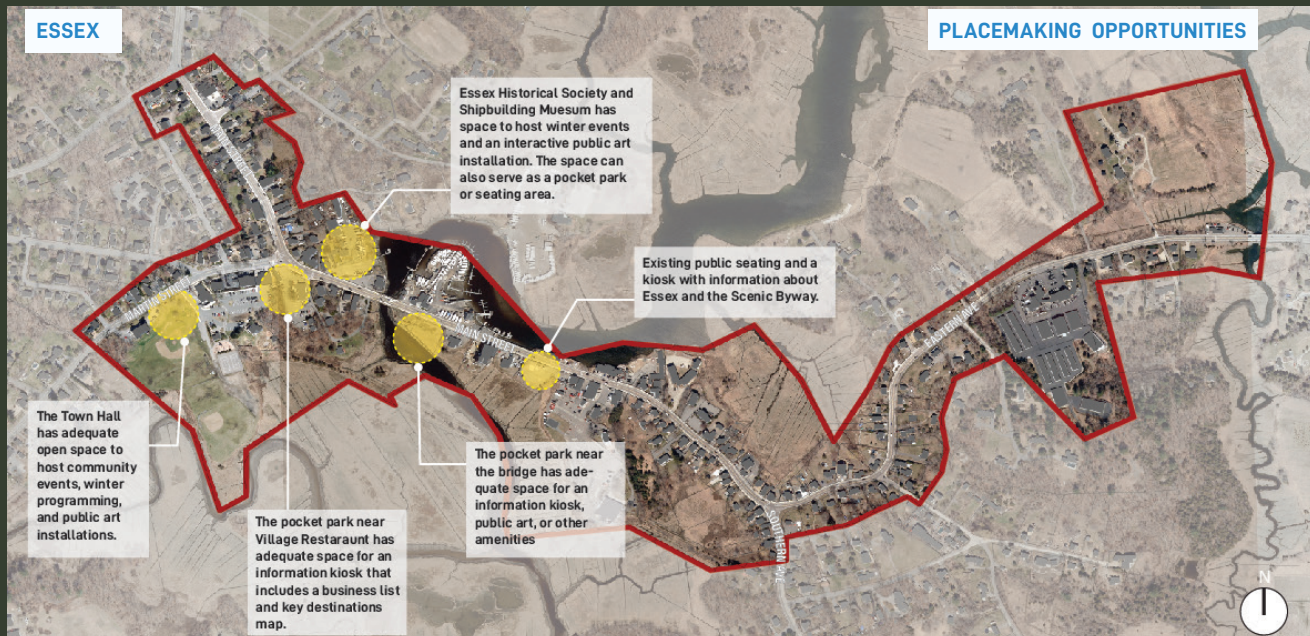
The Town of Essex participated jointly with Manchester-by-the-Sea in the Rapid Recovery Program (RRP) in 2021. The RRP was designed to support Massachusetts municipalities to develop project-based recovery plans to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. Customer base information, physical environment, business environment, and the administrative capacity were assessed to provide the diagnostic framework.

Project recommendations were made across the following categories: public realm, private realm, tenant mix, revenue and sales, administrative capacity, and cultural /arts.

For Essex and Manchester-by-the-Sea, the RRP process resulted in the following recommendations that pertain to placemaking:

- Create placemaking plans
- Improve outdoor lighting
- Improve wayfinding
- Provide public restrooms
- Establish an off-season event series

The downtown lighting and off-season events are underway in both communities. In 2022 the Towns were awarded an Urban Agenda Grant to establish an off-season event series. The Towns also received a Massachusetts Development Initiative grant for a placemaking plan.



Map of the RRP study area with placemaking recommendations. (image source: Essex/Manchester-by-the-Sea Rapid Recovery Plan, 2021)

DOWNTOWN ESSEX PLACEMAKING PLAN STUDY AREA MAP



METHODOLOGY

The Downtown Essex Placemaking Plan methodology consisted of four key phases that aimed to build on the previous plans for the area and to collect information that could inform placemaking recommendations. The Placemaking Working Group oversaw and led the direction of this work.

PHASE 1: EXISTING CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

As part of the first phase, documents that capture relevant placemaking-related projects were reviewed, and the existing conditions were assessed. This information was compiled into maps to help inform Phases 2 and 3 to identify gaps or opportunities for new locations and sites that are in need of improvement.

PHASE 2: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The goal of the public engagement phase was to hear residents and business owners' preferences on wayfinding elements and streetscape amenity themes and the future park at 24 Martin Street. The public was engaged through the following methods.

- **Open House:** On March 26, 2023, an in-person open house was hosted at Town Hall and at the Library. Participants could vote on the image boards for what they liked and did not like, as well as leave additional comments on post-it notes and discuss their ideas with the consultants.
- **Online Survey:** An online survey was distributed to residents via BlueDot, email lists, social media, and posters. The survey questions overlapped with the questions at the open house and included questions about demographics.

Guidance from the Placemaking Working Group informed the questions and images used in the community outreach phase.

PHASE 3: PROJECT DEVELOPMENT + CONCEPT DESIGNS

Phase 3 involved developing four project concepts further by creating concept designs or developing/advancing the project concepts further. The Placemaking Working Group selected the following placemaking projects:

1. Streetscape Furniture
2. Wayfinding
3. Park at 24 Martin Street
4. Landscaping

For the streetscape furniture and wayfinding, the Town and Working Group identified the deliverables that would be most useful for each project, including creating a map for new amenities, identifying materials, and developing a project budget.

For 24 Martin Street, a concept design was created for that site based on community input gathered at the open house, survey, and a co-design session with the Working Group, Town Planner and Selectman Pereen.

PHASE 4: PLACEMAKING PLAN

The final plan includes a summary of the community process, placemaking projects, and next steps. The plan showcases four projects concept designs and materials for project development.

COMMUNITY INPUT + KEY FINDINGS

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Community input was collected at the open house and through an online survey that shaped the overall direction of the placemaking project recommendations for the streetscape furniture, wayfinding, and park at 24 Martin Street. The results of community engagement activities were combined and are listed in the Appendix.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Open House

An in-person open house was held at the Town Hall and the Library on March 28th where 40 people attended – including children at the library. During the open house participants could vote on images they liked and did not like for the selected placemaking projects. The survey is included in the Appendix along with the combined survey and open houses results.

Placemaking Survey

The online placemaking survey was available for three weeks following the open house and yielded 70 responses, with nearly two-thirds from people living in Essex. The survey asked participants the same questions as the open house, plus additional demographic questions, and included fields for write-in comments. The online survey also allowed participants to select multiple options, whereas comments were accepted via notes in the open house. The survey is included in the Appendix along with the combined survey and open house results.



Placemaking Open House at Town Hall to collect community design preferences.



Open House at the library.

KEY FINDINGS

Several key findings and themes emerged based on input gleaned from the open house and in the survey results, which are summarized below.

Streetscape Furniture

Three distinct style streetscape furnishing design options were shared with the community.

- The most popular theme was “Ship-Shape: Emphasizing clean, curved lines with wood and metallic materials that are reminiscent of ships from Essex,” receiving approximately 76% of votes in favor.
- The “Existing Traditional” with a theme that included more historic metal style street furniture received the most votes not in favor of the design with approximately 55% of votes for “Ok” and “Not a fan.”
- There was a preference for a more neutral base, but still celebrating the history and character of Essex.

Wayfinding

Several different types of ground-based and vertical visual cues were presented for the community to vote on.

- For ground-based visual cues sidewalk decals and creative crosswalks were the most popular, receiving a combined 57% of the votes.
- For vertical visual cues winter lights and sculptures received 51% of the votes, with kiosks and murals receiving 31% of the votes.

Park at 24 Martin Street

For the park, questions about how you would use the site, who you would go with, and what you would like to do there were asked in the survey.

- At 24 Martin Street, the most popular amenities are benches (25% of votes), small gathering area (22%) and natural play materials integrated into the landscape (20%).
- For events and programs, survey and open house participants voted nearly equally across the five predetermined options: story time for children, other programs for children, small gathering space, fitness classes, and horticulture education programs.
- For landscaping, natural planting areas were by far the most popular, receiving 33% of votes. Participants also liked the great marsh planters, which received 24% of the votes.
- The existing planters received 11%, formal plant beds received 5%, and traditional planters received 7% of the votes.

“I think keeping a neutral theme and allow local businesses to add to that depending on the seasons.”

“Historic. Easy to maintain. Simple.”

“Interactive activities would invite more people to spend time there and for people just here to explore the town.”

“Curved, modern, ship-shape seating to extend the theme to 24 Martin Street. A nice contrast to the historic shingle-style architecture of Town Hall.”

PLACEMAKING PROJECTS

PLACEMAKING PROJECTS

The Placemaking Working Group selected four placemaking projects that work together to create a unified sense of place in downtown. The four placemaking projects include the following.

- Streetscape Furniture
- Wayfinding
- Park at 24 Martin Street
- Landscaping

These elements build off one another to support public space improvements from the ground up. The Downtown Essex Placemaking Plan identifies specific locations where each element may be placed and offers a vision for how this kit of parts may be deployed in other areas in the future.



Staircase connecting the public parking lot to Main Street, which presents an opportunity to improve wayfinding cues for pedestrians.

STREETSCAPE FURNITURE

The public realm, especially the streetscape, is important to creating a place for people to enjoy walking and visiting local businesses. The quality and quantity of amenities are often one of the first signs of vibrancy that visitors notice. The following streetscape amenities were considered to bring together a cohesive feel to downtown.

- Benches
- Tables
- Bike racks
- Trash cans

This section outlines the challenges and design recommendations for these streetscape amenities that provide a consistent style throughout downtown Essex.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

There are several different styles of streetscape amenities in downtown Essex's public space, resulting in a downtown without a cohesive feel.

Currently, there are three styles of public park benches downtown, including the most recent addition of traditional-style black metal benches along the causeway, modern composite plastic benches in the playground at Memorial Park, and overlooking the baseball field there are numerous wooden benches with concrete bases. Memorial Park has two kinds of trash receptacles with three different kinds of tops. By choosing a consistent theme and a set of furniture, Essex may add more elements in the same style as it continues to make enhancements to the public realm, including and beyond improvements at 24 Martin Street.

Adding streetscape amenities along the causeway has proven challenging for the Town since some of the metal benches were struck by vehicles and dislodged from their attachments to the ground within a year of being

installed. New curb cuts installed by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation may alleviate this issue.

The narrow sidewalk along the causeway limits the number of bike racks and trash cans that may be installed while maintaining good walking conditions.

Existing Streetscape Furniture



Metal benches on the causeway.



Composite plastic benches at the Memorial Park playground.



Wood and concrete benches at Memorial Park.



Bike rack at Memorial Park.

DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

The streetscape furniture design deck includes a set of streetscape and park furniture based on the preferred “Ship-Shape” with wooden and metal materials that are reminiscent of ships from Essex. The furniture selected has a more neutral base that complements the Great Marsh and celebrates the history and character of Essex.

The recommended streetscape products listed below align with the overall preferred streetscape theme. A limited number of vendors were identified that have a suite of similar products that align with the theme. These vendors are either on federal contracts or on the Massachusetts State Contract.

Streetscape Furniture

The streetscape furniture design deck includes a set of streetscape and park furniture based on the preferred “Ship-Shape” theme with wooden and metal materials that that are reminiscent of ships from Essex. The deck includes furniture from the same vendor, Landscape Forms, that offer similar styles that are consistent with the other elements in the Plan.

- Carousel Collection for picnic tables
- FGP Collection for the benches, trash receptacles, and bike racks.

The signature color selected for powder-coated furniture is green. Using a consistent color palette will tie together the public realm throughout downtown and create a cohesive feel. The chosen color should relate to the color(s) used in the crosswalk.

The streetscape furniture maps show the existing and proposed locations for streetscape furniture in downtown Essex. It is recommended that the metal benches on the causeway as well as the FGP bench be painted in the same signature color for Essex.

Trash + Recycling Receptacles

Additional trash and recycling receptacles should be installed along the causeway. The recommended trash and recycling station is the Litter Receptacle by Landscape Forms. The exterior wood slats will weather into

a pewter grey finish, further blending in with the marsh landscape. Trash and recycling bins may be distinguished by different powder colored metal tops (green for recycling).

The suggested locations include adjacent to public benches placed near takeout restaurants such as Woodman’s and Dunkin Donuts as well as in the parks.

Bike Racks

There is a need for additional bike racks throughout downtown. Bike racks are designed for one or two bikes per post and may be installed in multiples where space allows. The bike rack selected is the FGP Bike Rack. The rack is reminiscent of the frame of a bike and its soft curves allude to the ship-shape theme.

New site locations include Town Hall and Library, the Post Office, and the new park at 24 Martin Street.

In addition, the Town of Essex could create a program to allow private businesses to purchase bike racks to be installed on their property.

PRODUCTS + COST ESTIMATES

Item	Vendor	Name	Cost Estimate Range (per unit)
Bench with back	Landscape Forms	FGP Bench	\$1,900 - \$2,200
Bench without back	Landscape Forms	FGP Bench	\$1,400 - \$1,650
Tables with 2, 3, 4 and 5 seat options	Landscape Forms	Carousel Collection	\$3,200 - \$4,400
Trash + recycling receptacles	Landscape Forms	FGP Litter	\$850 - \$1,000
Bike rack	Landscape Forms	FGP Bike Rack	\$510

STREETSCAPE FURNITURE PALETTE



Landscape Forms: FGP Bench



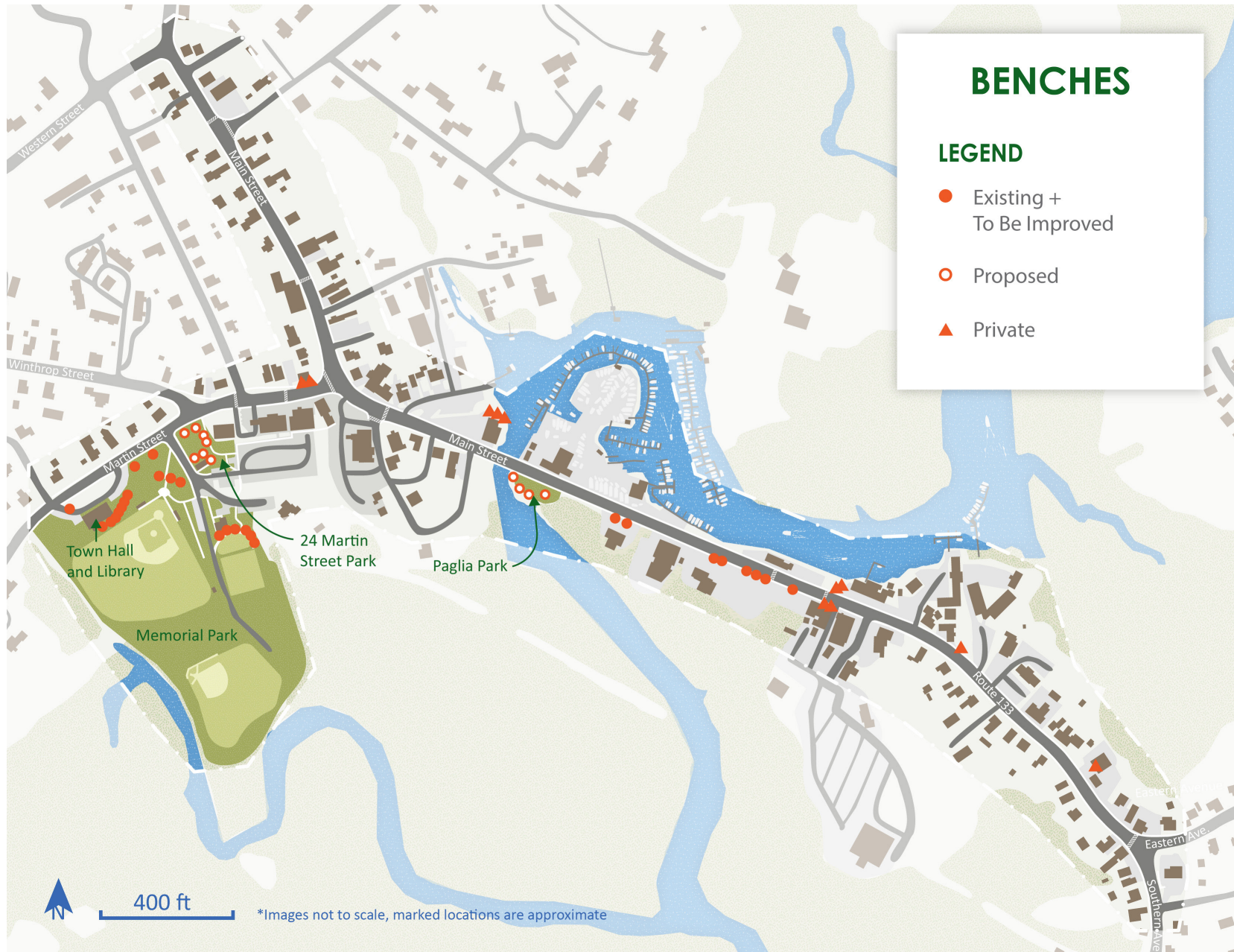
Landscape Forms: Carousel Collection table with hoop seating with options for 2, 3, 4, and 5 seats



Landscape Forms: FGP Litter



Landscape Forms: FGP Bike Rack



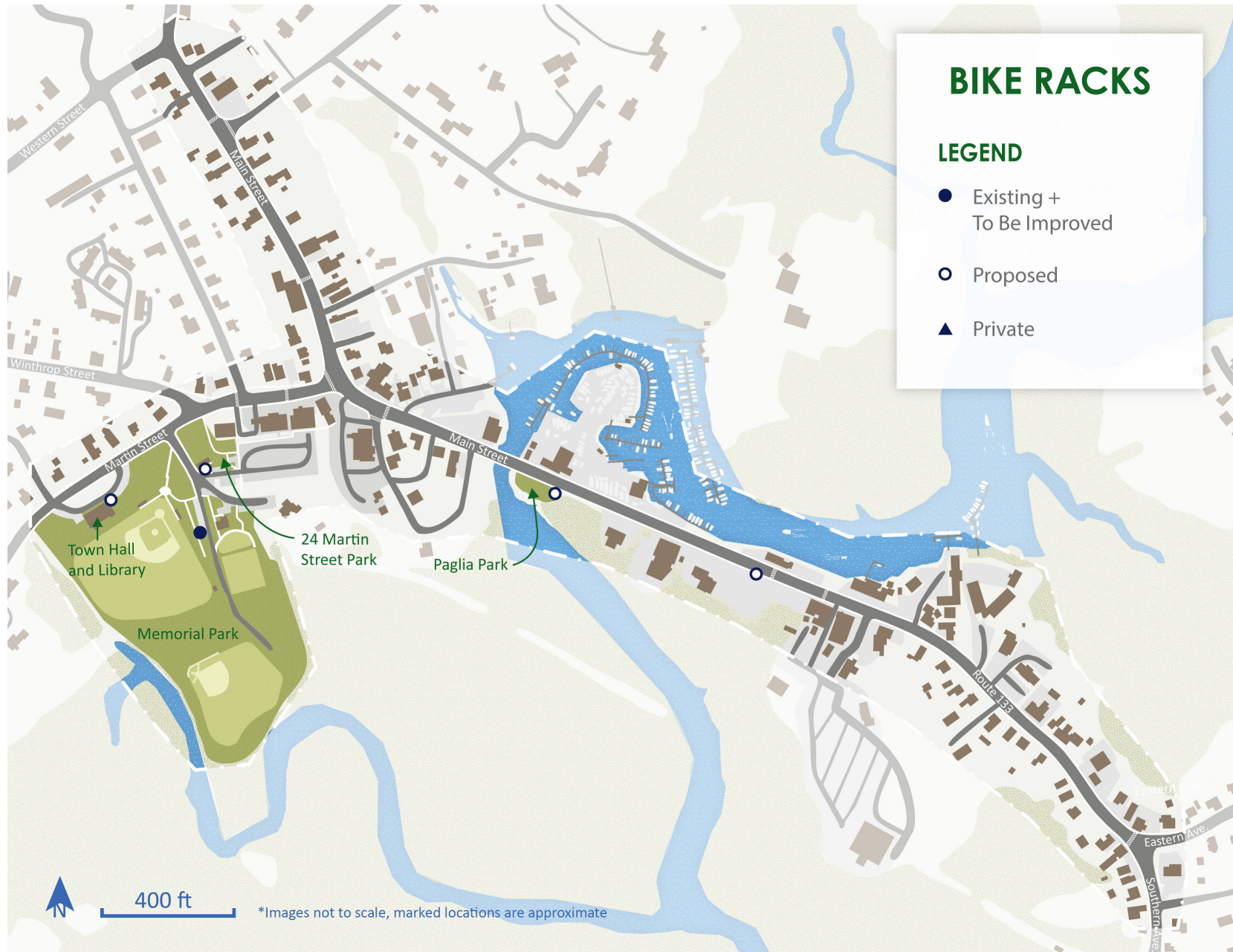
Existing and proposed bench locations throughout the study area.



Existing and proposed table locations throughout the study area.



Existing and proposed trash can locations throughout the study area.



Existing and proposed bike rack locations throughout the study area.

CASE STUDY

ROSE KENNEDY GREENWAY SITE FURNISHINGS + ADDING CHARACTER

The Rose Kennedy Greenway in Downtown Boston was opened to the public in 2008 above the buried highway 1-93 after the “Big Dig” was completed. Since 2009, the Greenway Conservancy has maintained the 1.5 miles of parkland. The Greenway hosts a wide variety of programming, including artisan markets, food trucks, beer and wine gardens, concerts, and public artwork.

The Greenway consists of several districts with distinct park designs and site furnishings. The park furniture selected reflects the overall design intentions of each district.

- **North End Parks:** These parks restored the street connections and views that were previously obstructed by the elevated highway. A large pergola acts as a gateway to the North End neighborhood. Seating under the pergola includes benches with a metallic powder coat that matches the pergola and movable bistro sets with a contrasting color.
- **Wharf District:** The Wharf District parks are near the Central Wharf Plaza and the Christopher Columbus Waterfront Park. The benches are wooden, with powder-coated grey metal structural supports. White Adirondack chairs and movable bistro sets are near the Carousel and Rings Fountain.
- **Fort Point Channel:** This district of the Greenway has a rich plant palette and feels like a garden. Classic metal benches are located along the stone dust paths, and movable bistro metal chairs and plastic Adirondack chairs are placed on the lawn.
- **Chinatown:** The Auntie Kay & Uncle Frank Chin Park in Chinatown is a Chinese inspired design with a large plaza and small garden area. There are tables with green umbrellas, Mahjong tables, and fountains with stone walls to sit on.

Since the Greenway was installed, the furniture has been adjusted to meet the park visitor needs. For example, after residents had used the space in Chinatown more shade was requested for the plaza area of the park, so the Conservancy installed new tables with umbrellas.

After 15 years of people visiting and enjoying the Greenway, the Conservancy is replacing the original furniture with new pieces that are in a similar style to the original site furnishing palette. In 2015, the Conservancy replaced the benches and installed new metal benches and swings under the pergola.



New plantings at the North End Parks. (image source: Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy)

WAYFINDING

Downtown Essex is mainly encompassed by Main Street which forms a mostly straight causeway through the Great Marsh. Visitors do not have an issue navigating the downtown town area; but they often drive from location to location rather than walk downtown because the streetscape has not been welcoming to pedestrians.

To create a more inviting environment for walking, reinforce a sense of place, and incentivize safe pedestrian activity, it is recommended that the Town of Essex install a variety of visual cues that can create landmarks that will guide people through downtown. The recommended projects include the following types of wayfinding elements.

- Signature Crosswalks
- Embedded Art in the Sidewalks
- Art on the Stairs
- Murals
- Sculptures
- Winter Lights

Together these projects help to achieve the goal of establishing a network of visual cues that will encourage people to walk around downtown. It's important to consider how all these projects fit together to avoid creating visual clutter that will compete with natural views of the marsh.



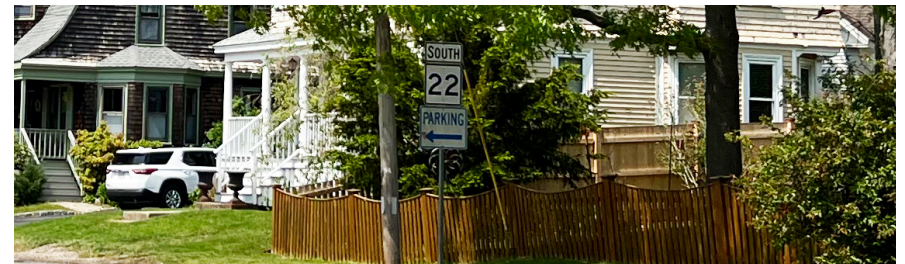
The staircase between the parking lot and Martin Street has a sign about maintenance and lacks welcoming visual wayfinding cues for pedestrians.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Visitors are guided to Essex by a variety of signs. There is a sign to the Essex River Cultural District on the Southern Avenue and Main Street traffic island. Visitors are greeted by newly refurbished “Welcome to Essex” signs on the approach to downtown from Ipswich and Gloucester. However, a “Welcome to Essex” sign on Southern Avenue coming from Manchester-by-the-Sea and/or Route 128 is missing. Posting the distance to downtown on that sign could help draw people further.

Because Main Street is also a state road (Route 133), allowable signage along the causeway is limited. Therefore, Essex must employ a variety of other means to accomplish their goals of helping people navigate through downtown and linger at its establishments.

Pedestrian activity is currently discouraged by dead zones formed by private parking in front of businesses that have little visual interest. However, the newly planted medians as well as the streetlamps that the Town is prepared to install present additional opportunities to add wayfinding cues in the new concrete pads that will be poured around the new streetlights.



Existing parking signage beneath the Route 22 South sign on Martin Street.

DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the wayfinding design goals is to consider visual cues on atypical surfaces such as on the ground, stairs, in crosswalks, and on the causeway bridge wall to create visual interest for pedestrians and indicators for drivers to slow down. The wayfinding design recommendations include a set of non-traditional wayfinding projects that are described below. These wayfinding elements will help encourage people to walk downtown by creating markers that will guide people to key locations and increase visual interest along the way.

Signature Crosswalks

Painting signature crosswalks throughout downtown may address concerns for pedestrian safety raised in the survey and open house. Crosswalks direct pedestrians to ideal places to traverse Main Street, and alert people in vehicles to slow down when they enter downtown. It is recommended to use a minimal palette of colors and a consistent approach to painting the crosswalks, rather than specifying artistically designed multi-colored crosswalks. A signature crosswalk color that is reinforced by colorful streetscape furniture would create more cohesion downtown, and the limited color palette would enable the Town to invest in higher-quality materials that would last longer.

Embedded Art in the Sidewalks

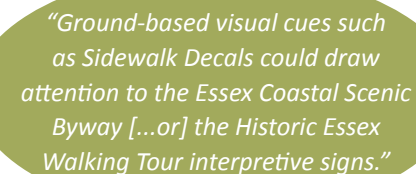
The new light poles along Main Street present an opportunity to embed a ground-based visual cue in the new concrete pad surrounding the lights. Because these lights will be evenly spaced throughout downtown, they will create a rhythm that could reinforce a narrative surrounding the ship-shape theme. It has been proposed to embed in the concrete the names and dates of prominent ships that have been created in Essex. Distance-markers may also be installed at each location, using the Essex Shipbuilding Museum as the focal point, and forming a walking loop to encourage people to use the downtown streets for leisurely exercise.

Art on the Stairs

There is an underutilized pathway from Main Street to the public parking lot that passes over a staircase. Currently a sign at the top and bottom of the stairs notes that it is not maintained over the winter and that people may pass at their own risk. This plan recommends that the Town invite more people to use the stairs by commissioning an artist to encourage further use of this asset and create visual interest along the way. Art could be placed on the ground surface (the run) so it could be seen going downstairs. A lower maintenance solution is to paint the risers so it would be seen walking up the stairs. Artwork may be visual in nature forming a narrative to draw people upwards.

Murals

Downtown Essex has limited surfaces for murals, and even fewer options for painting on public buildings. However, the concrete bridge over the causeway between CK Pearl, a local restaurant, and the parking lot for Essex River Fishing Charters presents an opportunity to add visual interest that reinforces the presence of the marsh. A mural here would have a natural theme to encourage awareness and preservation of the environment.



“Ground-based visual cues such as Sidewalk Decals could draw attention to the Essex Coastal Scenic Byway [...] the Historic Essex Walking Tour interpretive signs.”

Sculptures

On the approach to downtown from Southern Avenue, visitors are greeted by a collection of steel giraffes made by local sculptor, Chris Williams. Although Essex is home to numerous sculptors like him, and the survey showed that sculpture was the second-highest voted vertical visual cue desired, there are currently no three-dimensional public artworks downtown. This report recommends that the Town invest in a signature work of art made by a local sculptor that could pay homage to the history of Essex and its future. This work of art could be located in Memorial Park, 24 Martin Street or Paglia Park.

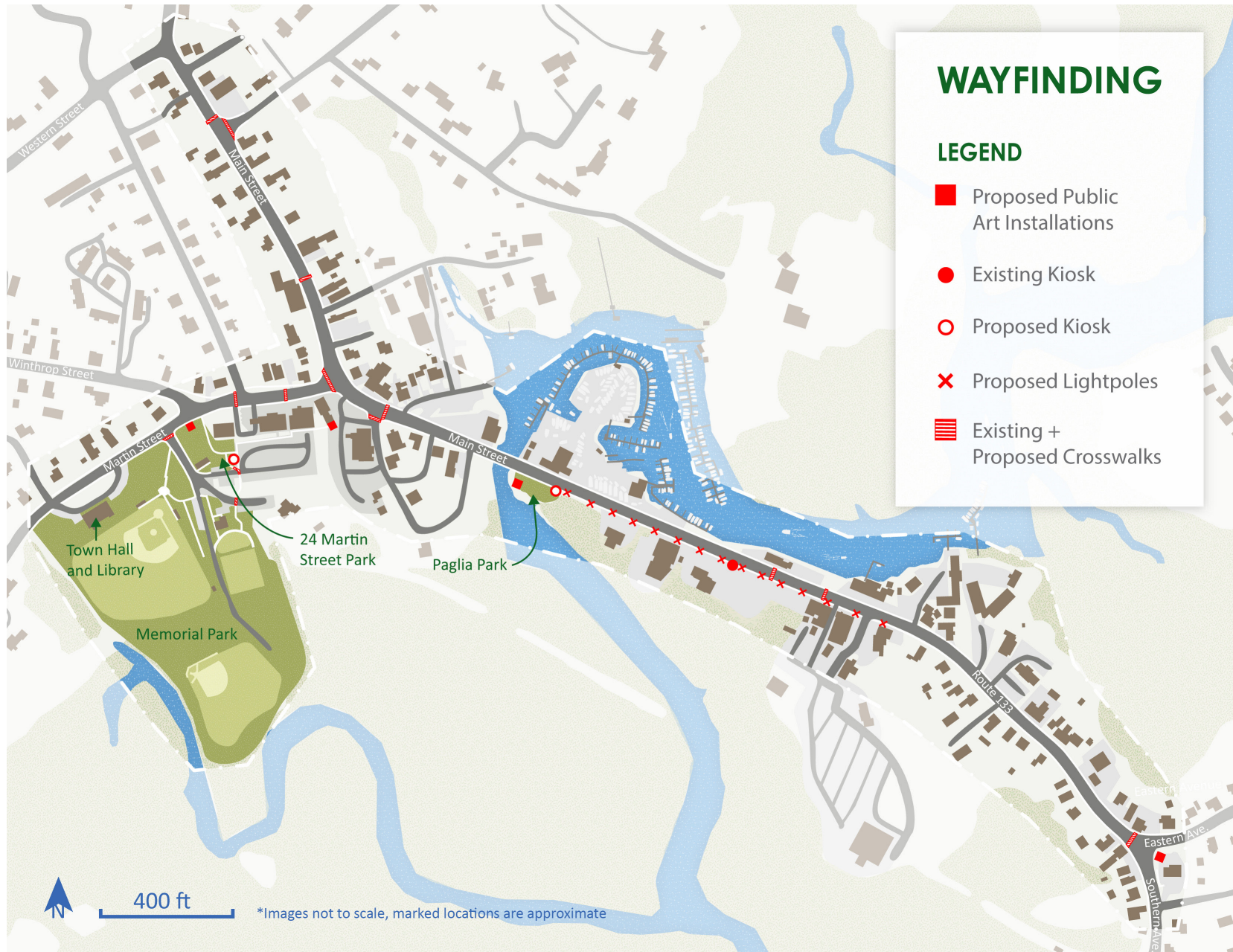
Winter Lights

The Town of Essex is in the process of installing new downtown street light fixtures. Currently, local businesses rely on street lighting and small storefront fixtures. The survey showed that the highest-rated vertical visual cue is for seasonal and/or holiday lighting. The new streetlights will have outlets that will allow for easy electrical access. Adding creative lighting is an opportunity to increase foot traffic downtown, foster a sense of cultural identity and creativity, and improve visibility at night.

Some examples of lighting installations include lights in trees, along the streetlight fixtures, and along the bridge. Lighting could provide additional ambient attention to local businesses and could also be used as a wayfinding element to draw attention to the underutilized pathway and staircase from Main Street to the public parking lot.

PROJECTS + COST ESTIMATES

Item	Cost Estimate Range (per unit)
Information kiosk	\$5,000 - \$10,000
Creative crosswalks: Street paint	\$5,000 - \$10,000
Embedded art in the sidewalks	\$100 - \$1,000
Sculpture	\$3,000 - \$25,000
Art on the stairs	\$2,000 - \$5,000
Mural	\$10,000 - \$25,000



Wayfinding elements throughout the study area

CASE STUDY “FISH NET” PAVEMENT ART IN GLOUCESTER

In 2013, James Owen Calderwood was one of three artists selected for the HarborWalk Public Art Challenge. The street mural “Fish Net” is an example of a site-specific artwork that can act as wayfinding.

The pavement mural is located in Gloucester, MA and runs the entire length of Parsons Street, from Rogers Street to Main Street. The netting pattern connects to Gloucester’s history in the fishing industry. The artwork helped revitalize an underutilized alleyway and helps visually direct pedestrians from the center of the city to the harbor.

The City of Gloucester’s Mayor’s Office and Committee for the Arts commissioned “Fish Net.” The Seaport Council provided funding.



The “Fish Net” Pavement Art in downtown Gloucester helps guide pedestrians between downtown and the waterfront. (image source: Good Morning Gloucester)

PARK AT 24 MARTIN STREET

24 Martin Street is a Town-owned property that has the potential to become a signature gathering space for the public. The site is located at a prominent location adjacent to the Town Hall and the Library, overlooking Memorial Park.

Before 2021, this site was the Town's fire station. When a new public safety facility was constructed, the Town obtained a cost estimate to convert the old fire station into a community space or to construct a new building. It was determined that renovating the old building would cost double compared to new construction. The building was torn down and the site is currently a grassy lawn space. Until a final decision is reached by the community on the best long-term use of the site, a solution is sought to use placemaking to create a park that can be an asset to the community in the near-term.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Currently, most of the site is sloped with a flat area on the southernmost side. There are existing trees on the eastern portion of the site adjacent to the parking lot. In addition, there is a sidewalk on both sides of the site. One of the site's notable features is the small building with a garage door and driveway. The building houses a 1921 fire wagon pump. There is an electrical hook-up at the building. In addition, in the summer there is a cool breeze at the top of the slope adjacent to Martin Street.

DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a park that maximizes the location's community value in the short-term, until the site's long-term use is decided and able to be funded. The park contains the following key elements.

Gathering Space

- Gathering areas for people to sit, eat, and relax in direct sunlight and under shade.
- Leisure activities are available on site for people to enjoy, including low-intensity lawn games.
- Preserve views of the marsh.

Signage

- Install a plaque explaining the historical significance of the fire wagon inside the building.
- Add an informational kiosk on the site to orient visitors to Essex and to promote its walkability.
- Create a sign at the corner of Martin Street and Shephard Drive to direct people to public parking and Memorial Park

Landscaping

- Plant natural landscaping areas.
- Minimal terracing only where necessary to establish different zones in the park while keeping installation costs down.



"I would like downtown Essex to be pedestrian friendly and have inviting gathering spots with activities to engage the community."

Existing Conditions Images



View of 24 Martin Street from Main Street.



View of 24 Martin Street from the public parking lot.

Example Images



Example of a ship themed custom bench. (image source: Clinker Boat Bench, Axis)



Example of a natural planting area. (image source: HappySprout)

CONCEPT DESIGN

The concept design uses the natural topography of the site to work with the slope as much as possible. The design specifies low lying plants along the edge of the park with a row of larger canopy trees along the north side, and stone dust paths traversing the site. There are spaces for people to gather on comfortable seats and at picnic and game tables.

- **The Overlook:** There is a flat area at the top of the site that draws people from Martin Street into the park to take a seat and enjoy the view of the marsh. This area could also be used for events and communal gatherings with a space that is large enough for pop-up tents. The retaining wall and stairs that lead down to the Grounds offer additional informal seating.
- **The Grounds:** The gently sloped grounds may be used as a central planting area with seating, and even sculptures.
- **The Arcade:** Along the path there is a line of trees with benches nestled in the shade overlooking the park.
- **The Courtyard:** There is a fixed seating area and gathering space by the shed with shade trees.
- **The Patio:** A seating area is on the southernmost side of the shed with a concrete deck underneath a shade sail where bistro furniture and lounge seating may be installed. The recommended seating here may have chess boards permanently painted onto the tables by the fabricator.
- **The Basin:** This is a low-lying, flat area with scattered boat-themed seating areas and space for lawn games such as bocce, croquet, and cornhole.

COST ESTIMATE

Item	Cost Estimate Range (per unit)
Landscape Architecture Services	\$20,000 - \$40,000

CONCEPT DESIGN SITE PLAN

Park at 24 Martin street



Concept design for a park at 24 Martin Street that includes seating, shade, landscaping, and open space.

CASE STUDY

THE POCKET PARK TOOLKIT: TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

The “Pocket Park Toolkit” was developed by professionals across the U.S. for the Trust for Public Land. It provides a structure for a community-based approach to designing a park.

The Toolkit lays out steps to organize a team’s stakeholders and residents, engage the broader community, and determine a suitable location for the park. It recommends that park design processes should incorporate cultural elements and accessibility needs. Community engagement around this process might include pop-up events, surveys, public meetings, community review of the survey, and design charrettes. The toolkit also provides guidance on financial planning, including a sample capital investment budget, factors to consider for an operations and maintenance plan, and potential funding sources.

The “Pocket Park Toolkit” was created to complement previously published toolkits by the Trust for Public Land. The Toolkit was funded by the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation partnering with the U.C.L.A. Luskin School of Public Affairs.



The Pocket Park Toolkit report cover. (source: Trust for Public Land)

LANDSCAPING

There are many existing landscaping buffers along the causeway and plant beds at the local parks in downtown. The Town's Department of Public Works (DPW) maintains the parks and public spaces. Previously plant beds along the causeway and in planters in the traffic islands are often maintained by dedicated volunteers. Starting 2023, the Town of Essex hired a local landscape to install and maintain the plant beds.

Improving and adding new landscaping throughout downtown Essex would help DPW create a more enjoyable environment with improved walking conditions..

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Downtown Essex has several existing plant beds and planters placed along Main Street that include the following locations.

- Main Street and Martin Street: corner plant beds
- South side of Main Street: plant beds
- Front of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church: plant bed
- Main Street at Martin Street, Spring Street, and Southern Street traffic islands with planters

The existing plant beds along Main Street face several challenges, including general maintenance, salt from the roads in the winter, and people in cars driving over the plant beds. The existing planters are in poor condition and are not consistent throughout downtown, in addition they are sometimes hit by vehicles and need to be replaced.

In spring 2023, the existing planting beds were replanted with the recommended plant palette list developed with local landscape designer, Robyn Kanter, as shown in the plant palette.



The existing ship planter in the Spring Street median.



Existing planters on Main Street near the Martin Street intersection.

DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Landscaping, plants, and planters add an additional layer to bring the overall downtown together to create a consistent and unique feel. To help guide the landscape design recommendations the following criterion was used: the design is to create a consistent and cohesive planting plan that is harmonious with the marsh/river background.

- Create a coherent plant palette throughout downtown for the plant beds on Main Street and the new park at 24 Martin Street to create continuity and a sense of place throughout downtown.
- Select perennials that are fairly low-maintenance and hardy to withstand the challenging conditions. See the plant criteria list for additional details.
- Install new planters that are very durable, but easy to source and replace.
- The survey results show that there was a strong interest in more natural planting beds.

Site Locations

The landscaping map shows the existing locations where new planters can be located without site improvements. Additional landscaping opportunities in downtown include the following sites for planters and plant beds.

- Memorial Park with improved plant beds.
- Town Hall with improved plant beds.
- New Park at 24 Martin Street with plant beds and trees that are appropriate to the site.
- Causeway to install new plant beds.
- Traffic medians to replace old planters with new ones.
- The landscaping for the new park at 24 Martin Street can use the palette developed as part of this plan, and the Town can use a similar palette in other Town-owned properties in Essex.

Plant Palette

The plants selected in the plant palette are from a consistent color palette that will provide seasonal interest throughout the year. They are drought and salt resistant perennials so they will need minimal maintenance. The plants shown are in full bloom for reference. The plant palette was developed by Robyn Kanter.

Planter Selection

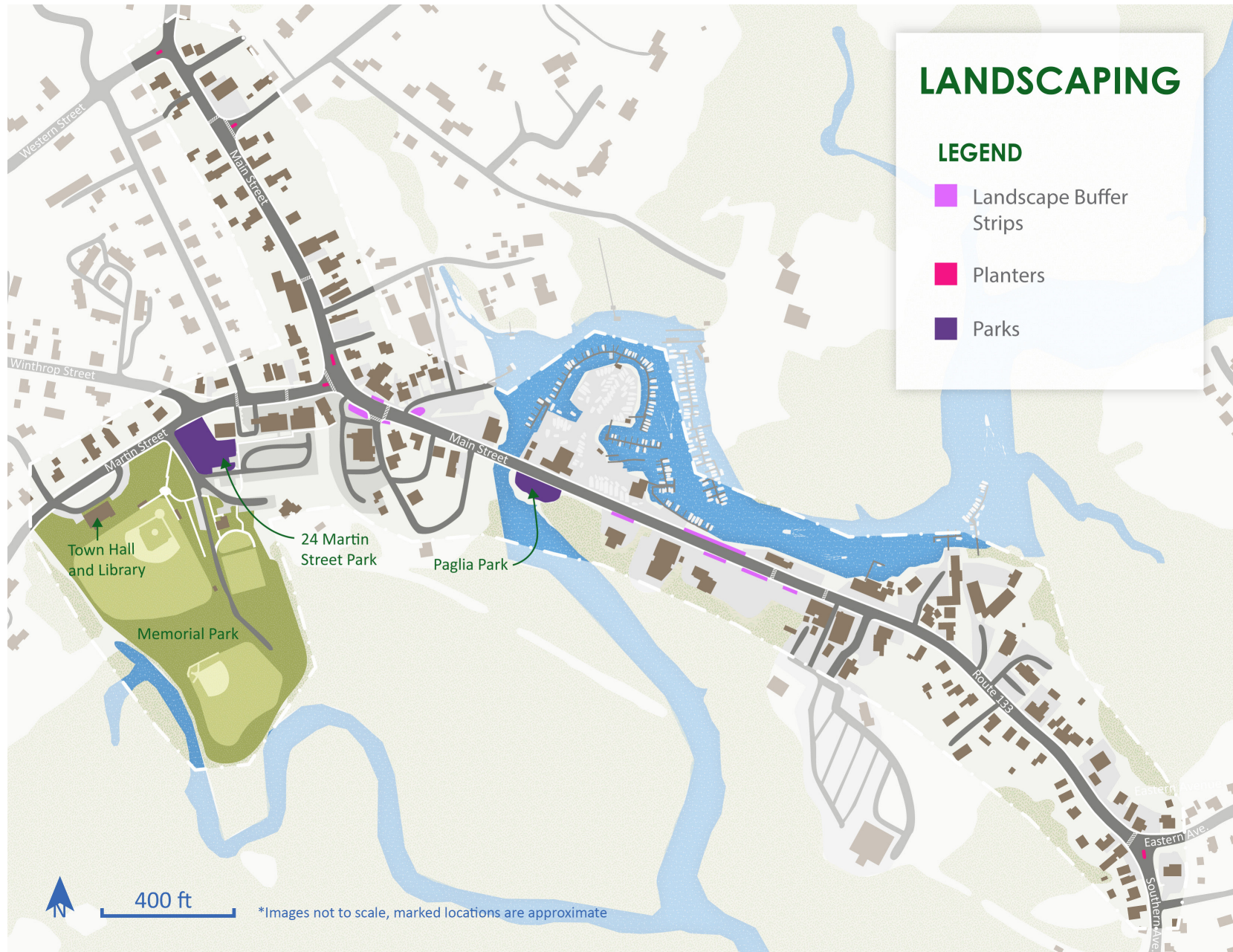
Custom ship-shaped planters are recommended for use on the traffic islands marking the entrances to downtown Essex. Having a signature planter at highly visible locations will serve as gateways to the Cultural District and may alert drivers to slow down while providing a distinctive feature for the town. The planters should be lined with plastic to prevent decomposition, they should be painted a signature Essex green, and they should have rocks at the base to appear as if they have been beached on a rocky outcropping.

PRODUCT + COST ESTIMATES

Item	Vendor	Cost Estimate Range (per unit)		
Boat Planter	Custom	\$450	-	\$900



Example of a boat-shaped planter. (image source: Little Piece of Me)



Landscaping and open space in the study area

PLANT PALETTE

DESIGN OBJECTIVE

To create a consistent and cohesive planting plan that is harmonious with the marsh/river background.

PLANT SELECTION CRITERIA

- Low maintenance/drought tolerant
- Can survive parking lot conditions
- Wind and salt resistant- chosen for sustainability in harsh coastal environment
- Reclaim and rehab any existing suitable plant material
- Essex color scheme as defined in placemaking plan with various greens, various shades of blues, white, yellow, etc.
- Plan for planters on median strips 22/133 and 133/School Street
- Disease and pest resistant
- Bee, bird, and butterfly friendly
- Plan for areas of seasonal color

Plant list created by Robyn Kanter

PLANT COLOR PALETTE



NARCISSUS
"THALIA"



NARCISSUS
"CARLTON"



MUSCARI
ARMENIACUM

BULBS



MISCANTHUS
SINENSIS
"GRACILLIMUS"



PENNISETUM
ALOPECUROIDES
"HAMELN"



MISCANTHUS
SINENSIS
"MORNING
LIGHT"

GRASSES



COREOPSIS
VERTICILLATA
"ZAGREB"



PEROVSKIA
ATRIPLICIFOLIA



NEPETA X
FAASSENII
"JUNIOR
WALKER"



AGASTACHE
FOENICULUM
"BLUE
FORTUNE"



ALLIUM X
"SERENDIPITY"

PERENNIALS



CLETHRA
ALNIFOLIA
"RUBY SPICE"



CLETHRA
ALNIFOLIA
"HUMMINGBIRD"



ROSA RUGOSA
"ALBA"



ROSA
KNOCKOUT
"SUNNY"



PINUS MUGO
VAR. PUMILIO



JUNIPERUS
HORIZONTALIS
"BAR HARBOR"



ILEX GLABRA
"SHAMROCK"

SHRUBS

NEXT STEPS

NEXT STEPS

Guided by the recommendations in this plan, the Town can work to identify funds to implement solutions that can have an impact on making downtown friendlier and more welcoming to pedestrians. The following next steps may be implemented within the next 1-3 years, while other recommendations in this plan may be implemented on a longer timeline.

Park at 24 Martin Street

1. Hire a landscape architect to finalize plans, develop a more robust cost estimate, and create a bid package for construction. The plant beds and planters should match the landscaping palette.
2. Identify and secure funding for the construction.
3. Put the construction project out to bid and build the new park.

Streetscape Furniture

1. Purchase a limited number of varied streetscape amenities to gauge a response from the public.
2. Create continuity with existing streetscape elements by painting the traditional-style benches along the causeway as the same color as the new furniture.

Wayfinding

1. Collaborate with the Shipbuilding Museum and local artists to develop ground-based stencils to be installed in the new concrete pads that will be poured around the new street light poles
2. Commission the painting of colored crosswalks along the causeway and across Shephard Drive.
3. Develop a budget and put out a call for artists to create specialty winter lights for downtown Essex
4. Purchase and install a kiosk at 24 Martin Street to orient visitors who arrive at the Town parking lot.
5. Commission an artist to develop artwork for the stairwell between the parking lot and Main Street.

Landscaping

1. Purchase four new ship-shape planters for the street islands along the Main Street intersections of Western Avenue, Spring Street, Martin Street, and Southern Avenue.
2. Continue to use the plant palette in this Plan to make further improvements to existing plant beds throughout downtown.

REFERENCES

Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements in Town Centers, Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2007 https://www.ctps.org/bp_improvements_town

Clinker Boat Bench, Tim Norris, 2014 <https://www.axisweb.org/p/timnorris/workset/217708-clinker-boat-bench/>

Fish Net, James Owen Calderwood, 2013 HarborWalk Public Art Challenge, Gloucester, MA <http://gloucester.harborwalk.org/fish-net/>, <https://goodmorninggloucester.com/tag/james-owen-calderwood/>

Gorgeous ways to get the natural garden of your dreams, HappySprout, <https://www.happysprout.com/inspiration/natural-garden-design/>

Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Essex/Manchester-by-the-Sea, Dodson & Flinker, 2021 <https://www.mass.gov/doc/essex-manchester-by-the-sea-rrp-final/download>

Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy, <https://www.rosekennedygreenway.org/>, <https://www.rosekennedygreenway.org/history/>, <https://www.ggnltd.com/north-end-parks>, <https://www.rosekennedygreenway.org/new-plantings-in-the-north-end-parks/>

The Pocket Park Toolkit, The Trust for Public Land https://www.tpl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Pocket-Park-Tool-Kit_FINAL.pdf

Town of Essex Strategic Plan, Essex Strategic Planning Committee, 2022 https://www.essexma.org/sites/g/files/vyhli4406/f/uploads/essex_strategic_plan_working_draft_2023-2028_final.pdf

UMass Donahue Institute Population Projections, Vintage 2018 <https://pep.donahue-institute.org/>

United States Census Bureau, 2020 <https://data.census.gov/profile?g=060XX00US2500921850>

VisitEssexMa.com, Essex Merchants Group, 2023 <https://www.visitessexma.com/essex-history>

10 Ideas with boat planters, Little Piece of Me, <https://www.littlepieceofme.com/garden/boat-planters/>

APPENDIX A: ONLINE SURVEY

Essex Placemaking



We want to hear your from you – Essex residents, workers, and visitors – how you want to improve public spaces in downtown Essex, MA.

In this survey you'll find images to spark your imagination. We encourage you to be creative as you imagine how Essex can enhance its uniqueness and sense of arrival in downtown.

This survey is part of the Town of Essex's 6-month planning process for the Downtown Essex Placemaking Plan. The plan is funded through the Community One Stop for Growth Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Grant funds.

Theme for Downtown Streetscape and Park Improvements

The following questions ask you to rate the following themes which may guide the selection of downtown streetscape improvements in the highlighted areas.



1.

Ship-Shape

Emphasizing clean, curved lines with wood and metallic materials that are reminiscent of ships from Essex.



Please rate the "Ship-Shape" theme:

- Excellent!!
- Great!
- Good
- Ok
- Not a fan
- I don't know

2.

Existing Traditional

Building on the existing traditional streetscape elements using ornate components with an historic feel



Please rate the "Existing Traditional" theme:

- Excellent!!
- Great!
- Good
- Ok
- Not a fan
- I don't know

3.

Great Marsh

Focusing on natural materials and decorative elements that reinforce downtown Essex's setting in the Great Marsh.



Please rate the "Great Marsh" theme:

- Excellent!!
- Great!
- Good
- Ok
- Not a fan
- I don't know

4. Are there any streetscape elements that are not shown that you would like to be considered?

5. Please add other additional comments or questions here.

Wayfinding + Public Art

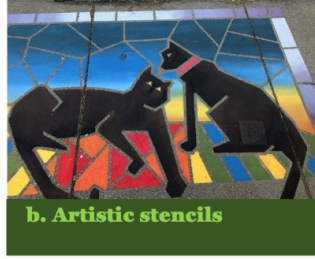
Wayfinding refers to visual cues that help people find their way through space. In Essex, MA Route 133 limits the Town's ability to install directional signage, so let's envision other ways to can help people get around and enhance the sense of arrival downtown.

Where would you like to see ground-based and vertical visual cues installed to help people navigate?



6.

What kinds of ground-based visual cues would you most like to see in downtown Essex?



Check all the kinds of **ground-based visual cues** you would like the Town to create to help people navigate through downtown.

- a. Sidewalk Decals
- b. Artistic Stencils on the Ground
- c. Art on the stairs
- d. Creative crosswalk

Other (please specify)

7.

Where would you like to see **ground-based visual cues** installed to help people navigate?



Check all locations you would like **ground-based visual cues** to be installed.

- a. 24 Martin Street
- b. Stairs to Parking Lot
- c. Pedestrian Islands
- d. Landing Entrance
- e. Paglia Park
- f. Sidewalk Medians
- Other (please specify)

8.

What kinds of vertical visual cues would you most like to see the Town create to help people navigate through Essex?



Check all the kinds of **vertical visual cues** you would like the Town to install to help people navigate downtown.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a. Sculpture (e.g. Town Landing, Paglia Park, or private property) | <input type="checkbox"/> d. Mural (e.g. On storefronts, bridge walls or other vertical surfaces) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> b. Kiosk (eg. At 24 Martin Street) | <input type="checkbox"/> e. Iconic Essex photo station |
| <input type="checkbox"/> c. Art on the stairs | <input type="checkbox"/> f. Winter lights |

9.

Where would you like to see vertical visual cues?



Check all locations where would you like **vertical visual cues** installed.

a. 24 Martin Street

e. Paglia Park

b. Stairs to Parking Lot

f. Sidewalk Medians

c. Pedestrian Islands

g. Seawall on Route 133

d. Landing Entrance

10. Please add any other ideas for additional wayfinding or public art elements or locations.

11. Please add any other comments or questions here.

New Park at 24 Martin Street

What kind of park do you want to see at 24 Martin St.?



12.

How would you like to use the park at 24 Martin St.?



Check the ways you would use a park at 24 Martin Street.

- a. Sitting / passive use
- b. Meeting friends or family
- c. Picnicking
- d. Going to an event or program
- e. Learning / educational space

f. Other (please specify)

13.

What type of events and/or programs would you like to see here?



Check the types of **events and/or programs** would you like to see here.

- a. Storytime for children
- b. Other programs for children
- c. Small gatherings for family or friends (this could be a rental)
- d. Fitness classes
- e. Horticulture educational programs
- f. Other educational programs

g. Other (please specify)

14.

With whom will you go to the Park?



Check who you might go to this new park with.

- a. Myself
- b. My pet
- c. Friends or Co-workers
- d. Children 0-13
- e. Teenagers 13-18
- f. Family

i. Other (please specify)

15.

What type of activity amenities would you want to see here?



Check all the **activity amenities** you would most like to see at the 24 Martin Street Park.

- a. Chess tables
- b. Bocce court
- c. Natural play materials integrated in landscape
- d. Library swap for books and/or games
- e. Small gathering area
- f. Scattered benches and picnic tables

g. Other (please specify)

16. Please add any other comments or questions about the new park space here.

17. Landscaping

What type of landscaping + planters would you like to see?



Check all the **plants, landscaping, and seasonal decorations** you would most like to see.

- a. Keep existing planters
- b. Natural planting area
- c. Formal plantings
- d. Ship-Shape planters
- e. Traditional planters
- f. Great Marsh planters

g. Other (please specify)

18. Other

What do you currently do in downtown Essex?

19. What would you like to do in downtown Essex's public spaces?

20. Please share any additional comments about how to improve public space in downtown here.

21. **About**

How do you spend your time in Essex? (check all that apply)

- I live in Essex
- I work in Essex
- I visit Essex

22. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18 - 29
- 30 - 39
- 40 - 49
- 50 - 59
- 60 - 69
- 70 - 79
- 80 and up

23. How do you self-identify by race and/or ethnicity? (check all that apply)

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- North African / Middle Eastern
- Other

24. How do you self-identify by gender?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to answer

25. If you want to be informed about the project, please add your email address. (This survey will be confidential).

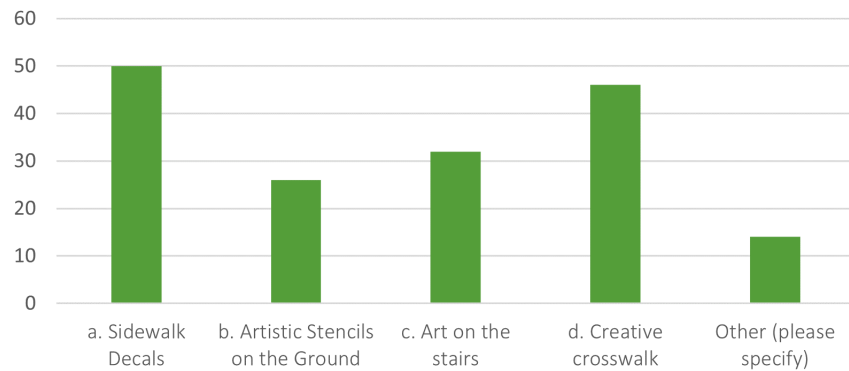
APPENDIX B

SURVEY + OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

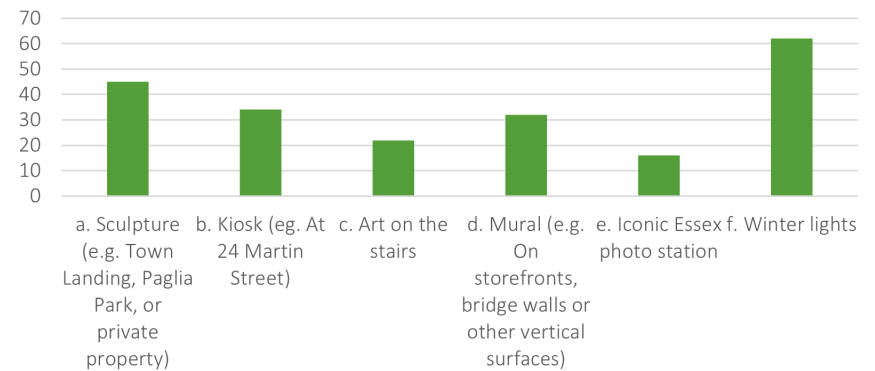
SURVEY + OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

WAYFINDING + PUBLIC ART

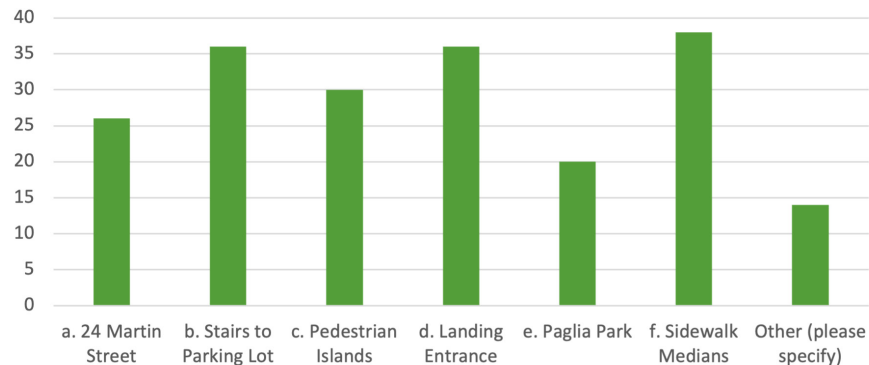
Check all the kinds of ground-based visual cues you would like the Town to create to help people navigate through downtown.



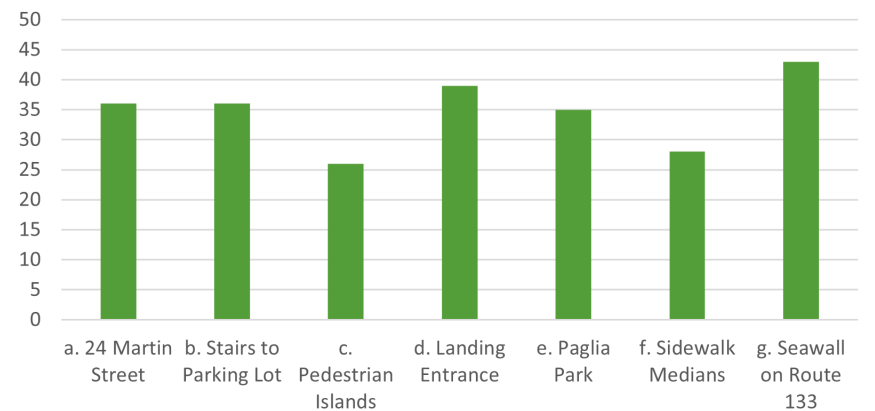
Check all the kinds of vertical visual cues you would like the Town to install to help people navigate downtown.



Check all locations you would like ground-based visual cues to be installed.



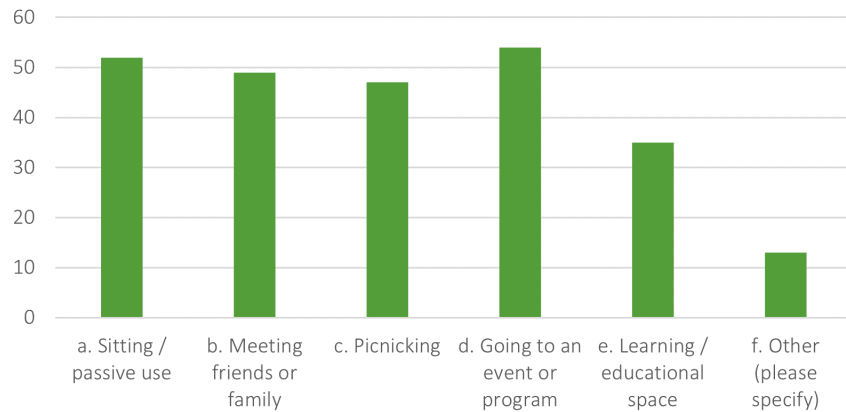
Check all locations where would you like vertical visual cues installed.



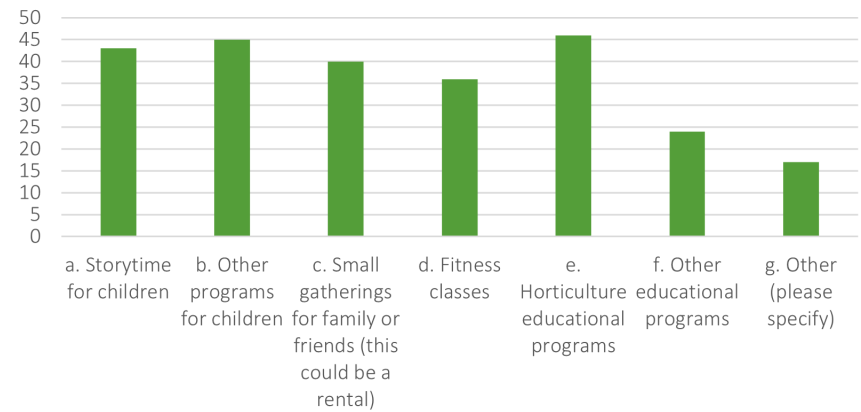
SURVEY + OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

TEMPORARY PARK AT 24 MARTIN STREET

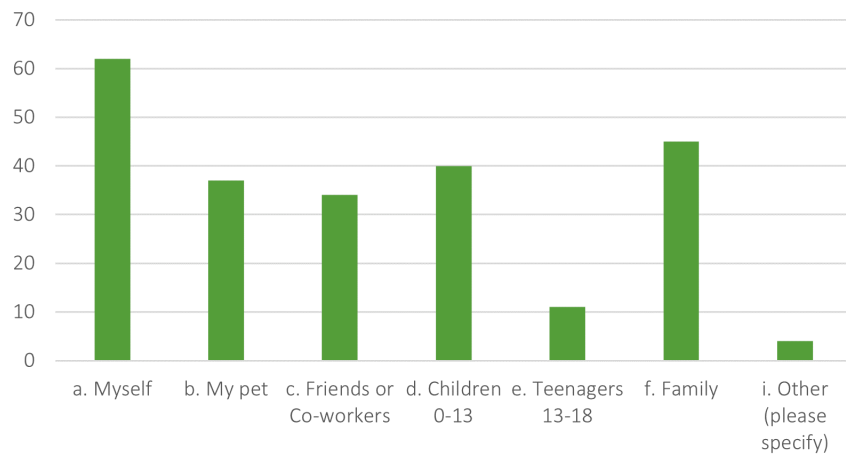
Check the ways you would use a park at 24 Martin Street.



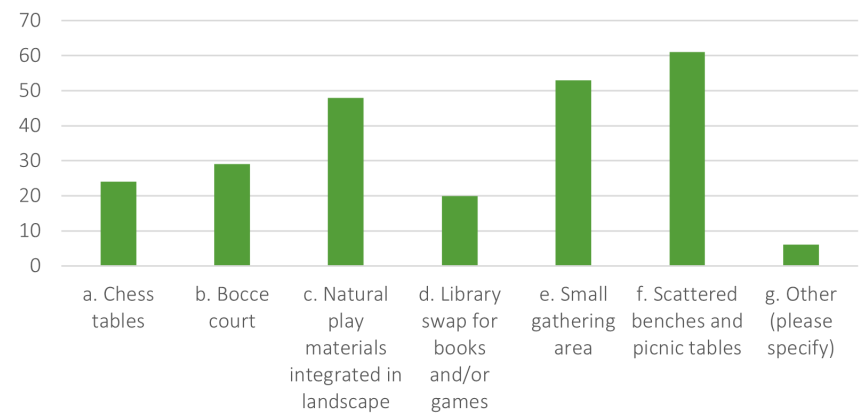
Check the types of events and/or programs would you like to see here.



Check who you might go to this new park with.



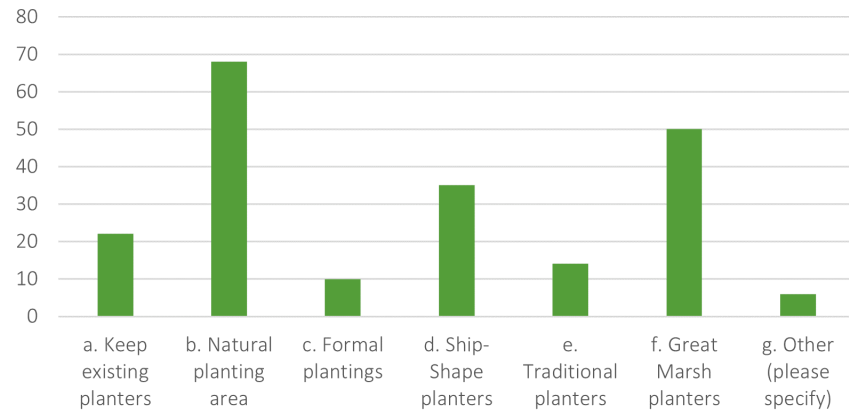
Check all the activity amenities you would most like to see at the 24 Martin Street Park.



SURVEY + OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

LANDSCAPING

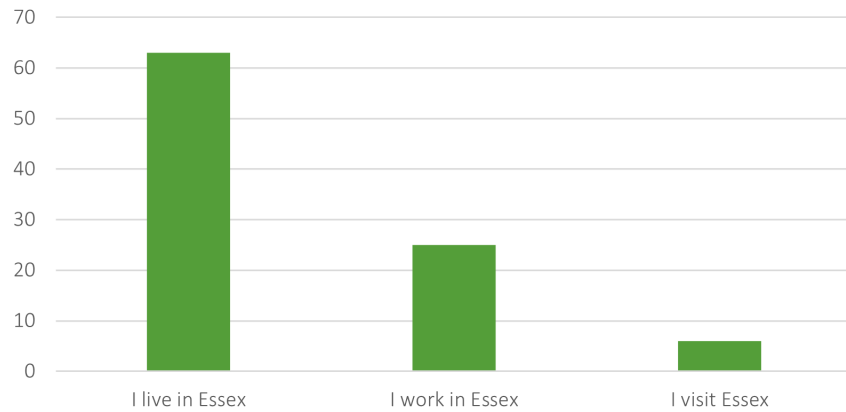
Check all the plants, landscaping, and seasonal decorations you would most like to see.



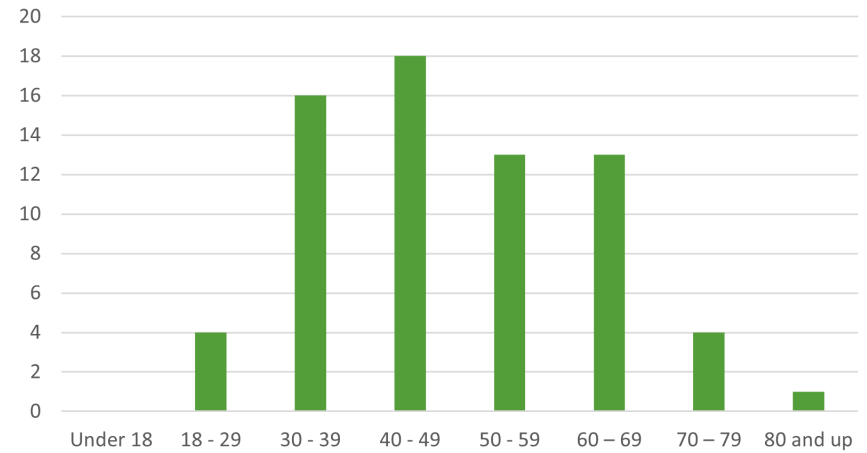
SURVEY + OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

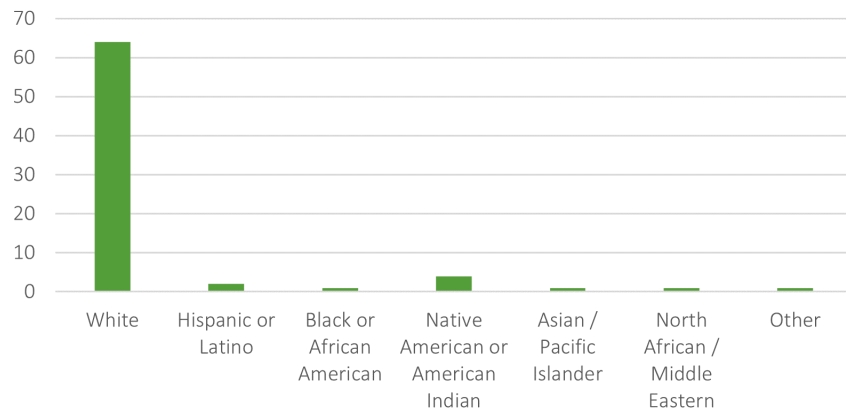
How do you spend your time in Essex?
(check all that apply)



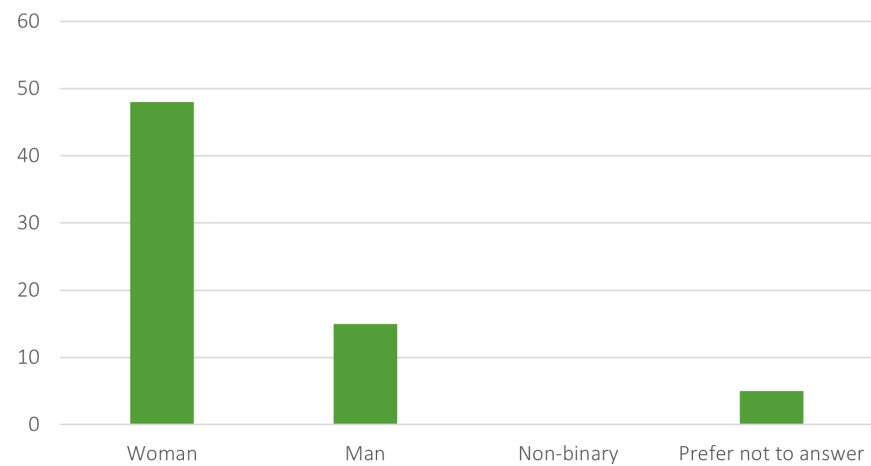
What is your age?



How do you self-identify by race and/or ethnicity?
(check all that apply)



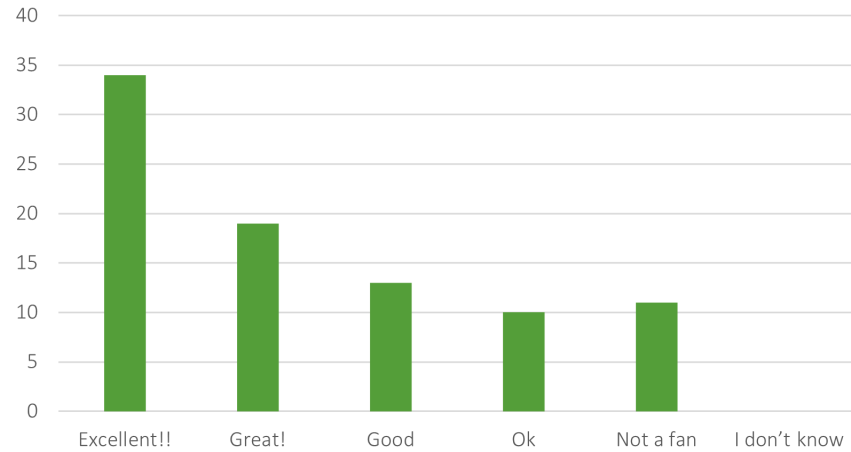
How do you self-identify by gender?



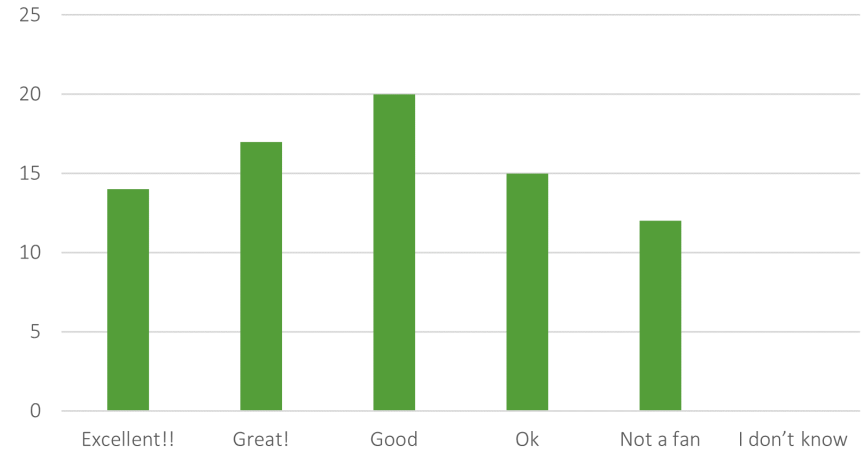
SURVEY + OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

STREETSCAPE AMENITIES

Please rate the "Ship-Shape" theme:



Please rate the "Great Marsh" theme:



Please rate the "Existing Traditional" theme:

