



# Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Middlesex Road  
Commercial Corridor

Tyngsborough, 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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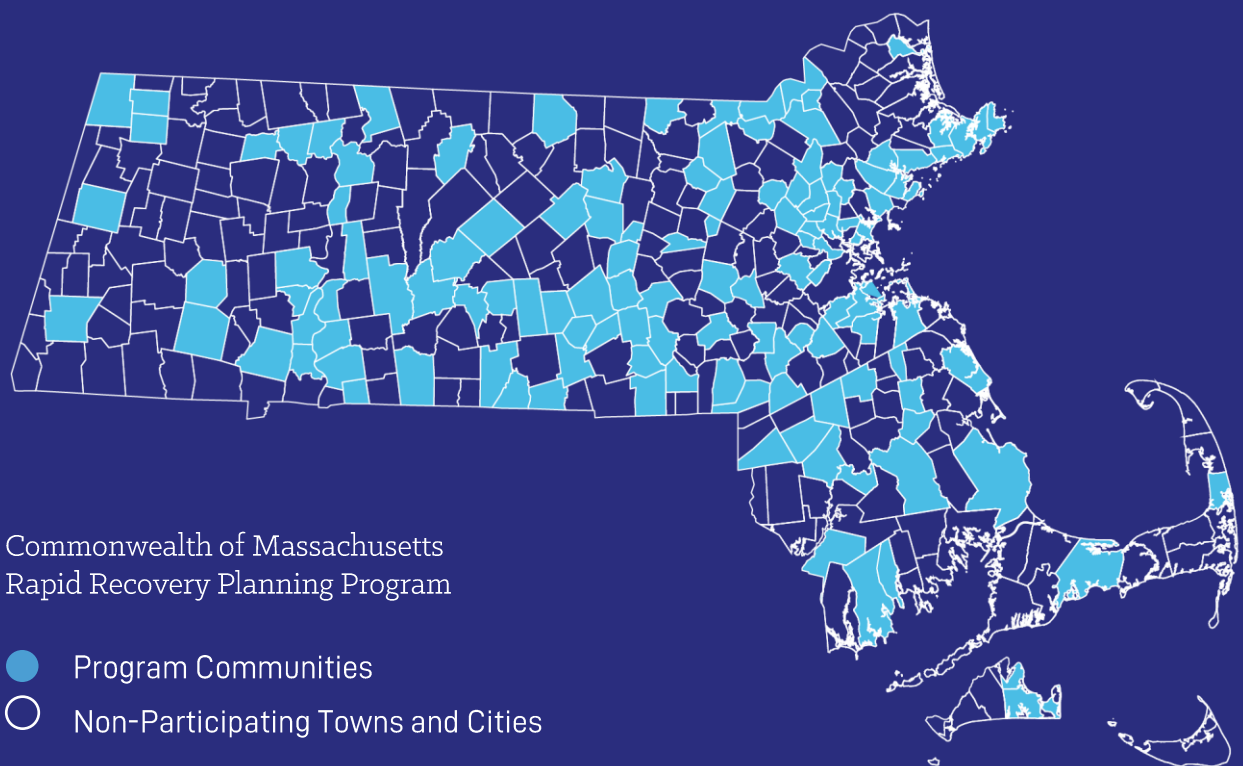
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## 125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



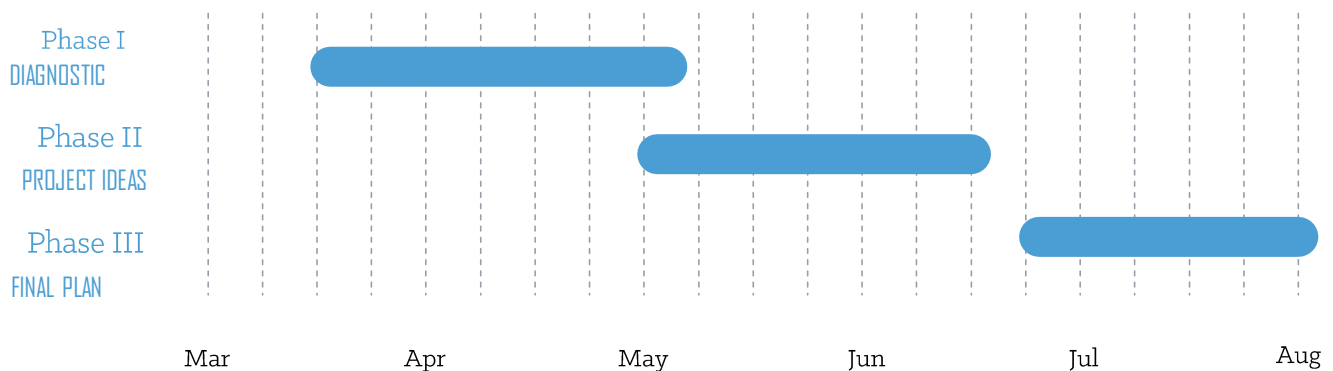
# Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

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

## Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue/Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

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## Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

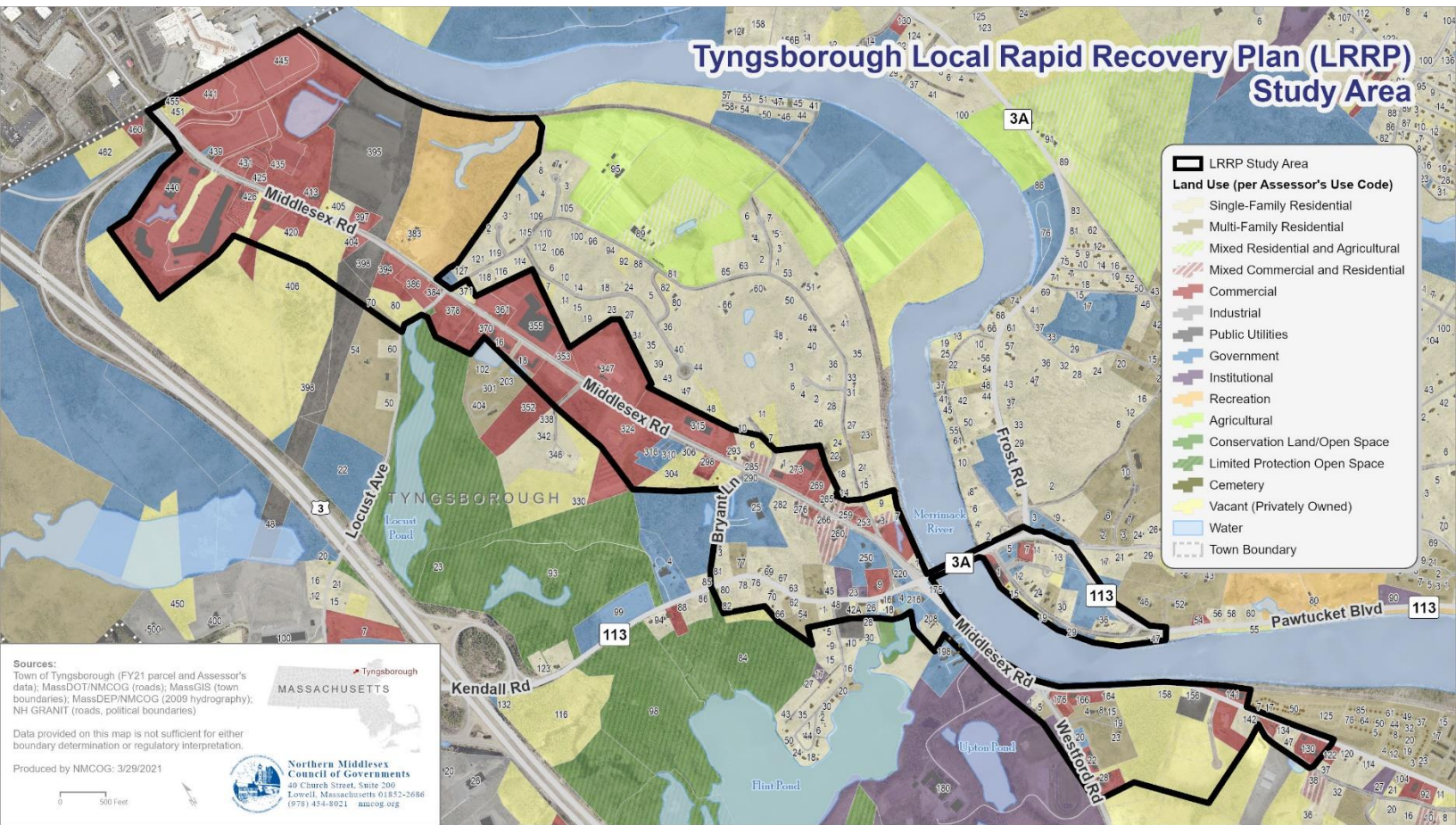
## Overview

The Town of Tyngsborough submitted a Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) application to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the businesses located in the Middlesex Road Commercial Corridor. The LRRP program analyzes and explores the challenges and barriers to economic recovery and identifies strategies and actions to help communities achieve their recovery goals. The program provides technical assistance through a Plan Facilitator assigned to each community and access to Subject Matter Experts to help seed ideas and further refine project recommendations through individual consultations. Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) was selected by DHCD as the Plan Facilitator for the Town of Tyngsborough and guided the plan development process for the Middlesex Road Commercial Corridor Rapid Recovery Plan. A kick-off meeting for the project was held on March 31, 2021. The meeting was conducted virtually in light of the pandemic.

Data specific to the study area was collected during the Diagnostic phase of the project. Demographic data relative to the Town of Tyngsborough and study area was analyzed, including population, age, household income, household size, educational attainment and race and ethnicity. The physical attributes of the district were assessed and rated using criteria developed by DHCD. This assessment included both the public and private realms. The public realm includes assets owned and controlled by the Town, such as streets, sidewalks, public parks and open spaces, and public parking areas. The private realm refers to buildings and storefronts that are generally owned and managed by private individuals or corporate entities. The business environment evaluation included the types of retail and service offerings located in the district, average commercial rents, the condition of the storefronts/facades, and other building attributes, such as windows, awnings, signs and lighting. An assessment of COVID-19 impacts on businesses within the district was conducted through a survey distributed to each business in the district. Twenty-nine percent of the businesses in the district responded to the survey, and 94% of survey respondents indicated being impacted by COVID-19.

A Community Meeting was held on June 8, 2021 to present the data and findings to the Town's residents and businesses. The meeting announcement was emailed to the Middlesex Road Commercial Corridor businesses and was made available through the town's website. Flyers advertising the meeting were also distributed. On July 28, 2021, a second Community Meeting was held to present the five draft recommendations developed to address COVID-19 impacts and to receive comments and suggestions from the town's residents and businesses.

Map 1: The Middlesex Road Commercial Corridor Boundaries and Land Uses



## The Study Area

The Middlesex Road Commercial Corridor study area includes the historic town center and Middlesex Road from the New Hampshire border to south of Westford Road. This area is within the Business-1, Business-2 and Business-3 zoning districts, and the most common land use is commercial.

Middlesex Road is the primary roadway in the commercial district, with most businesses and commercial properties in the study area located along this road. The on-ramp and off-ramp for US Route 3 intersect Middlesex Road just south of the New Hampshire border. Kendall Road (Route 113) runs through Tyngsborough's historic town center and is the main east-west road in the commercial district.

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## Findings and Recommendations

### Findings

The commercial district is largely auto dependent and pedestrian amenities such as sidewalks and benches are mainly restricted to the town center.

Retail businesses in the study area are challenged by the commercial district's border with the New Hampshire line, a state with no retail sales tax. However, Massachusetts has a lower tax rate for restaurants, presenting an advantage to the restaurants in commercial district. Restaurants are a large percentage of the district's businesses, and the pandemic had a significant adverse effect on them.

In addition, due to the pandemic newly constructed retail space has remained vacant, a Tax Increment Financing project was interrupted, and the redevelopment of a large retail center just south of the Route 3 off-ramp has been placed on hold, leaving un-inviting vacancies at the northern gateway to the district.

As highlighted in the Business Survey, 94% of survey respondents were impacted by COVID-19 in some way. Highlights from the survey also include:

- 69% of respondents reported a decline in revenue due to COVID, with 51% experiencing a revenue decline of 25% or more;
- 59% had fewer on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID, with 53% of businesses reporting a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more;
- 81% experienced reduced operating hours/capacity;
- there is a comparatively high level (34%) of dissatisfaction with the condition of private buildings, facades, storefronts, and signage;
- and signage regulations were identified by 44% of respondents as posing an obstacle to business operations.

### Recommendations

The Middlesex Road Commercial Corridor Rapid Recovery Plan outlines five recommendations intended to assist the district in addressing the economic impacts of COVID-19.

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

1. Update Tyngsborough's Sign Regulations
2. Develop a Branding and Marketing Plan for the Tyngsborough Commercial District
3. Implement a Wayfinding System and Install Signage at Appropriate Locations
4. Establish a Storefront and Signage Improvement Program
5. Determine the Feasibility of a District Management Organization or Business Association

Each of these recommendations is described in detail in the Project Recommendations of this document.

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## Diagnostic



## Highlights of the Physical Environment

### The Commercial District is Largely Auto Dependent

Despite the presence of sidewalks in Tyngsborough's town center near the junction of Middlesex Road and Kendall Road, customers visiting the commercial district are generally reliant on automobiles. The conditions of the existing sidewalks are generally fair to good, but sidewalks exist along less than 20% of the roads in the district, almost exclusively in or adjacent to the town center. The few public benches and street trees are mainly located within the town center as well.

Middlesex Road is the primary roadway in the commercial district, running from the New Hampshire border in the north to Westford Road and on beyond the commercial district in the south (see Map 1).

The on-ramp and off-ramp for US Route 3 intersect Middlesex Road just south of the New Hampshire border. The regional Pheasant Lane Mall has over 979,000 square feet of gross leasable area and is located immediately north of the border, with a portion of the mall parking lot located within Tyngsborough. In 2019 the Average Daily Traffic on Middlesex Road immediately south of the Route 3 off-ramp was 14,565 vehicles.

The volume of auto traffic using Route 3 off-ramp presents an opportunity for the district, though currently there is no real welcoming encouragement at this gateway for people to visit the Tyngsborough commercial area. Site visits identified few wayfinding signs for businesses within the study area, including less than three businesses identified on the signs along the Route 3 off-ramp. Presently, significant traffic using the off-ramp turns north onto Middlesex Road to immediately enter New Hampshire, or goes straight into the Pheasant Lane Mall parking lot.

Kendall Road (Route 113) runs through Tyngsborough's historic town center and is the main east-west road in the commercial district. In 2019 the Average Daily Traffic on Kendall Road east of Flint Road was 8,397 vehicles.

Physical Environment Elements	Commercial District Grades*
<b>Sidewalks</b>	<b>Average District Grade: C</b> Much of the area lacks sidewalks, though the condition of existing sidewalks were generally rated fair to good.
<b>Street Lighting</b>	<b>Average District Grade: B</b> Street lighting is generally adequate but does not highlight the identity of the area or fully support pedestrian visibility and safety.
<b>Street Trees and Benches</b>	<b>Average District Grade: C</b> Limited availability of street trees and benches, especially outside of the town center.
<b>Wayfinding and Signage</b>	<b>Average District Grade: C</b> Few wayfinding signs for businesses in the district.

\*Study area grades were determined during site visits using a grading system developed by DHCD for the LRRP program.



## Highlights of the Physical Environment

### Public and Private Parking

Parking in the commercial district is overwhelmingly off-street in parking lots provided by private businesses or property owners. On-street parking is limited to the town center and serves fewer than 10 businesses. The total number of parking spaces, both on-street and off-street, is approximately 2,960, not including Pheasant Lane Mall's parking in Tyngsborough. Parking availability does not appear to be a significant issue for most businesses.

### Quantity, Condition and Appearance of Retail and Office Space

The commercial district has approximately 521,985 square feet of retail floor space, or a little over half the area of the Pheasant Lane Mall. The commercial district also has 33,652 square feet of office space.

Site visits estimated that more than 75% of properties have façades that require limited or no structural enhancements. However, despite facades generally rating well for maintenance requirements, many could improve in design and attractiveness. Furthermore, site visits estimated that between 25% and 50% of storefronts lack attractive window displays, and there is little spillover retail or outdoor dining activity in the district.



## Highlights of the Business Environment

Data collection for the LRRP project identified 109 businesses in the commercial district, as well as 129 storefronts and 15 vacant storefronts. The number of active businesses and vacant storefronts do not add up to the total number of storefronts due to a handful of shared storefronts within the district. There were an estimated 10 business closures in the district between March 2020 and May 2021.

Table 2 shows the number of businesses by industry type in the district. Twenty of the businesses fall under the "Other Services" category which includes auto repair and salons, followed by 19 businesses, or 17% of all businesses in the district, that are retail establishments. Accommodations and food services are third with 17 businesses, and most of establishments in this category are food services rather than accommodations.

**Table 2: Industry of Businesses in the Commercial District**

Industry	Approximate Number of Establishments 2021	Percentage of Total Businesses
Other Services (e.g. auto repair, salon, tattoo parlor)	20	18%
Retail Trade	19	17%
Accommodation and Food Services	17	16%
Health Care and Social Assistance	11	10%
Construction	8	7%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	7	6%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	7	6%
Finance and Insurance	5	5%
Real Estate Rental and Leasing	4	4%
Manufacturing	3	3%
Educational Services	3	3%
Other	5	5%

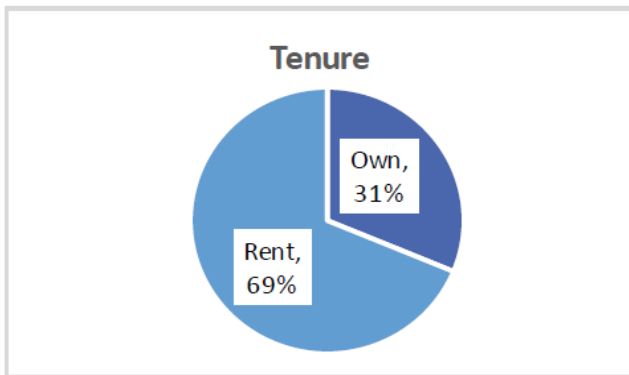


## Business Survey Results

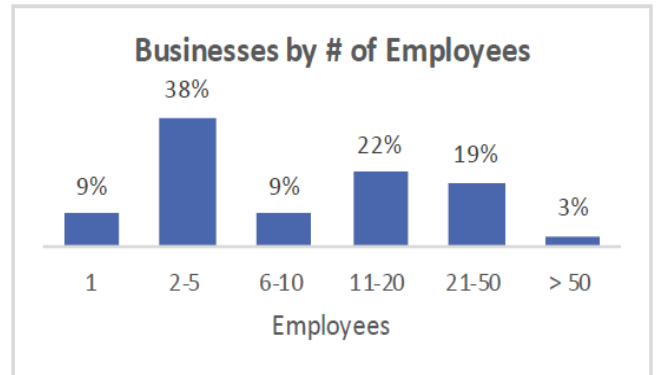
In Spring 2021, an online business survey developed by DHCD was distributed to the owners and managers of business establishments located within the district. Thirty-two, or 29%, of the 109 businesses within commercial district responded.

As shown in the tables below, approximately 69% of businesses that responded rent the space that they are utilizing, with 31% owning their space. Forty-seven percent (47%) of respondents were microenterprises with five employees or less.

**Figure 2: Business Tenure**

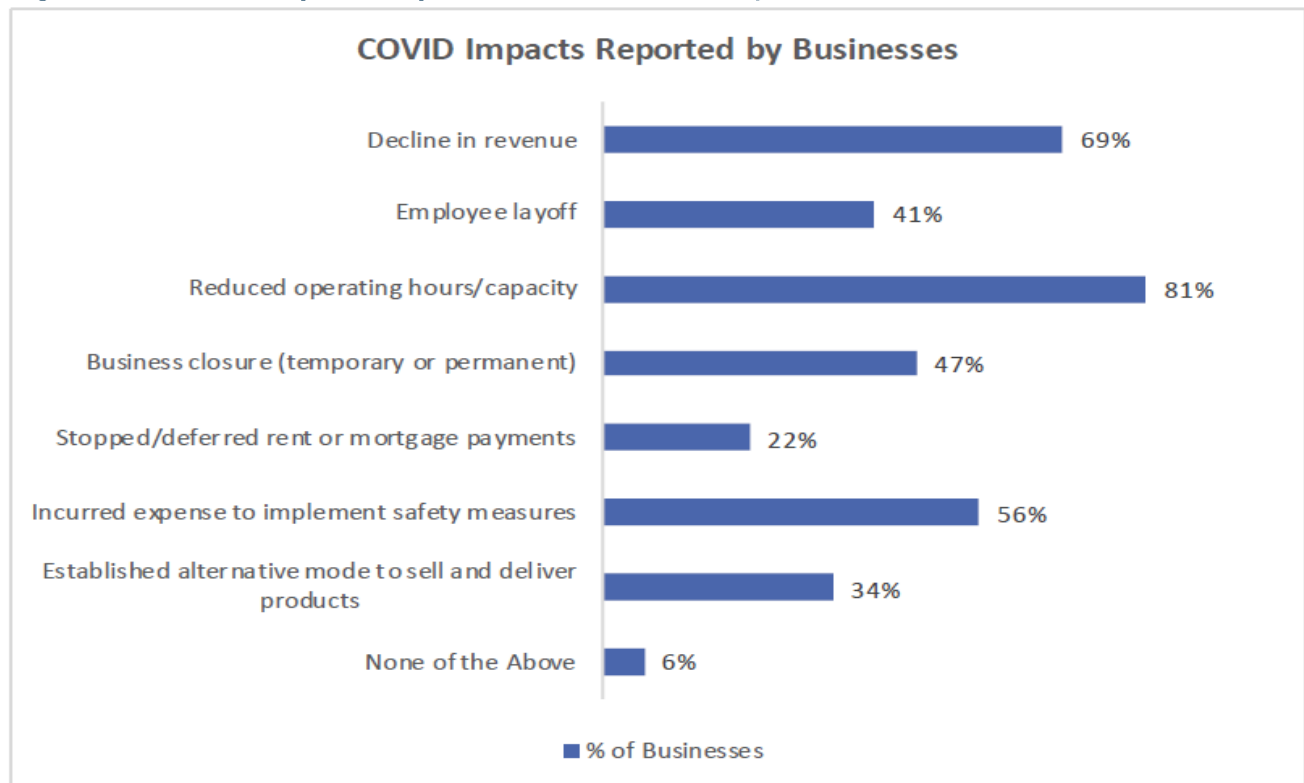


**Figure 3: Survey Responses by Business Size**



As Figure 4 below shows, 94% of survey respondents were impacted by COVID in some way. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of Business Survey respondents reported a decline in revenue due to COVID-19, and 81% reported experiencing reduced operating hours or capacity.

**Figure 4: COVID-19 Impacts Reported in Business Survey**

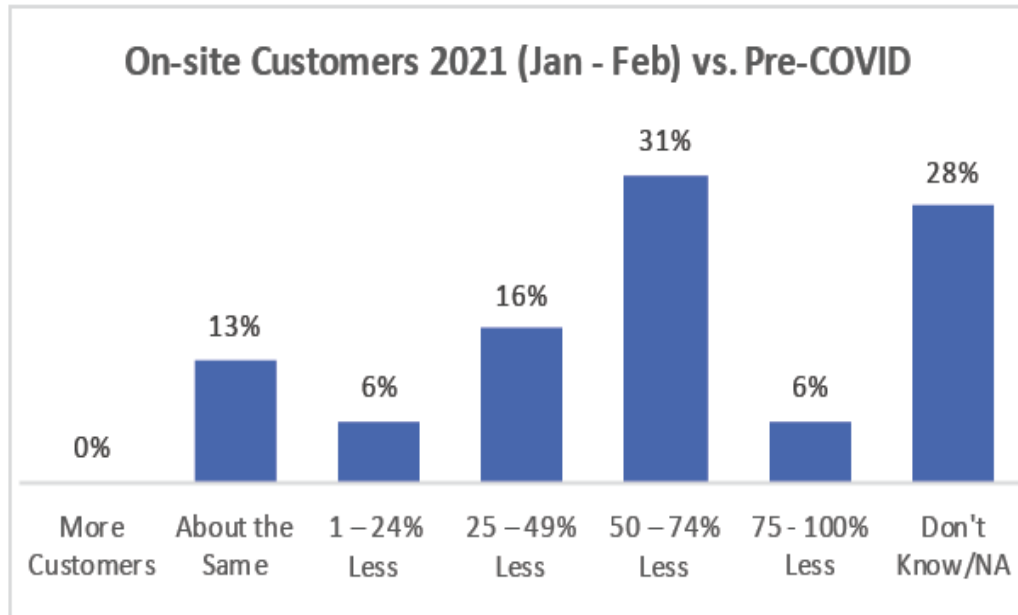




## Business Survey Results

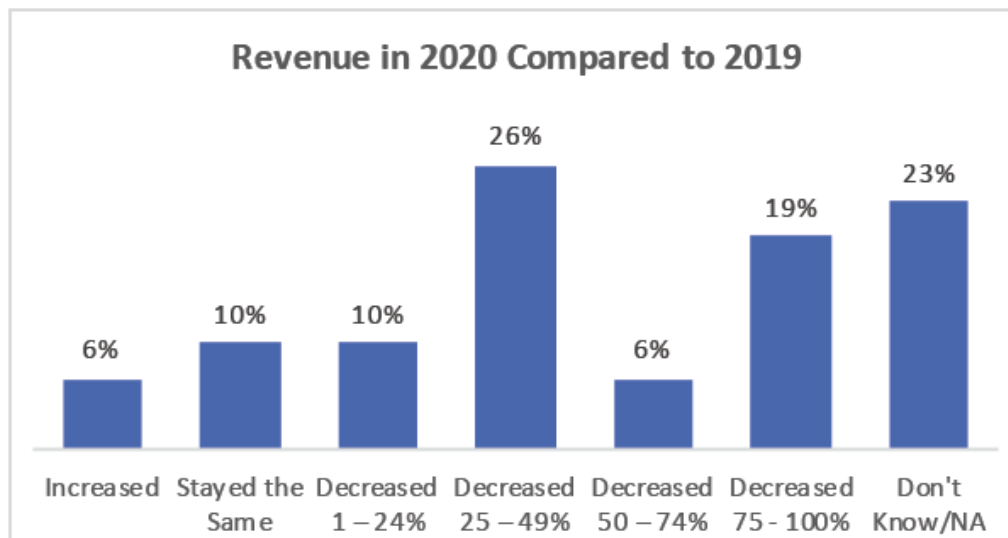
As shown in Figure 5 below, 59% of Business Survey respondents had fewer on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID, with 53% of businesses reporting a reduction of 25% or more. It should be noted that 28% of the respondents didn't know or indicated that the question was not applicable. Only 13% of respondents had about the same number of customers, and none had more customers.

**Figure 5: Decline In On-Site Customer Visits**



More than half (51%) of survey respondents experienced a revenue decline of 25% or more in 2020 compared to 2019. It should be noted here that 23% of respondents didn't know or indicated that the question was not applicable. Only 10% had revenues stay the same, while 6% experienced an increase.

**Figure 6: Revenue in 2020 Compared to 2019**

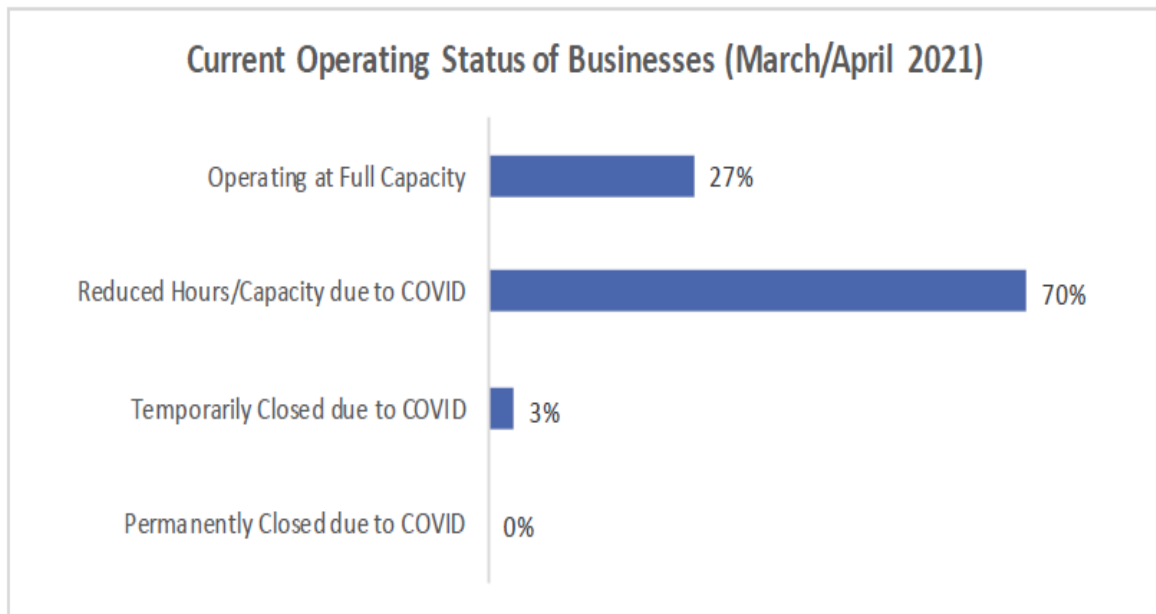




## Business Survey Results

At the time of survey 70% of businesses reported operating at reduced hours or capacity and 3% reported being temporarily closed due to COVID-19.

**Figure 7: Operating Status of Businesses in March and April of 2021**



## Business Interest in Receiving Assistance

The survey asked what types of assistance the businesses would be interested in receiving. Fifty-three percent (53%) of businesses indicated that they were interested in some type of assistance. The types of assistance are ranked below by level of interest with the percent of respondents selecting each type in parenthesis.

**Most  
Interest**



**Least  
Interest**

- Participating in shared marketing/advertising (34%)
- Low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements (34%)
- Low-cost financing for purchasing property in the commercial district (25%)
- Training on the use of social media (19%)
- Setting up an online store or other online selling channel (6%)
- Creating new services such as delivery (6%)

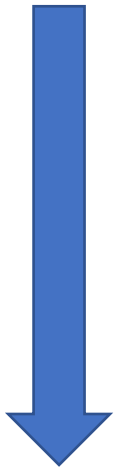


## Business Survey Results

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

Approaches for addressing issues in the commercial district were listed, and survey respondents were asked to identify the importance of each strategy. The strategies are listed below by the percentage of businesses that identified each as "Moderately Important", "Important" or "Very Important".

**Most  
Important**



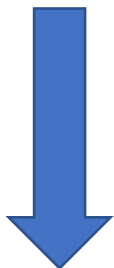
**Least  
Important**

- Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses (87%)
- Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District (85%)
- More Cultural Events/Activities to Bring People into the District (85%)
- Improvements in Safety and/or Cleanliness (81%)
- More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining and Selling (79%)
- Renovation of Storefronts/Building Facades (75%)
- Creation of a District Management Entity (Business Improvement District or other organization) (75%)
- Improvement/Development of Public Spaces & Seating Areas (72%)
- Improvement of Streetscape & Sidewalks (72%)
- Changes in Public Parking Availability, Management or Policies (68%)
- Changes to Zoning or Other Local Regulations (not related to COVID) (63%)
- Amenity Improvements for Public Transit Users and/or Bike Riders (56%)

### Dissatisfaction with Aspects of the Commercial District

The survey asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with five aspects of the commercial district. The aspects are below and are ranked by the percentage of respondents who answered that they were "Dissatisfied" or "Very Dissatisfied".

**Most  
Dissatisfied**



**Least  
Dissatisfied**

- Condition of Private Buildings, Facades, Storefronts, Signage (34%)
- Condition of public spaces, streets, sidewalks (22%)
- Proximity to Complementary Businesses or Uses (9%)
- Access for Customers & Employees (6%)
- Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees (3%)



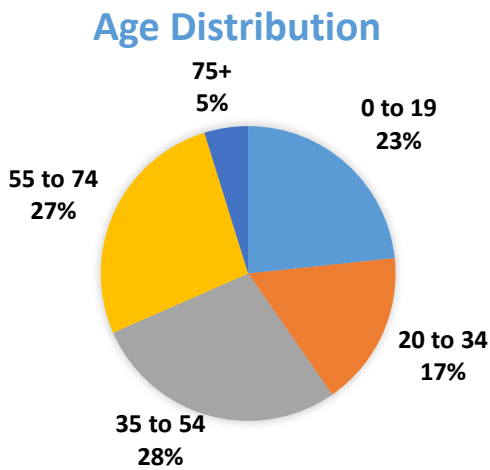
## Market Information / Overview of the Local Customer Base

### Tyngsborough's Population is Well Educated with a Comparatively High Level of Income

According to the US Census Bureau, the Town's population in 2020 was 12,380. Although less than 100 residents live within the commercial district, approximately 915 people worked within the district in 2018 and 4,881 people worked within the Town (US Census-OnTheMap 2018).

In 2019 the median household income in Tyngsborough was \$114,067, well above the \$81,215 for the State of Massachusetts and \$62,843 for the United States. Tyngsborough has a comparatively high level of education as well. Approximately 48.7% of Tyngsborough residents age 25 and above had a Bachelor's degree or higher in 2019, compared with 43.7% of the State and 32.1% of the nation (US Census, 2015-2019 American Community Survey). As shown in Table 1 below, the population of both the district and the town as a whole is overwhelmingly non-Hispanic whites.

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Tyngsborough Residents



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Table 1: Race and Ethnicity of Tyngsborough Residents & Commercial District Residents

Race/Ethnicity	District	Town
White Alone	70	10,658
Black or African American Alone	1	177
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	0	17
Asian Alone	9	937
Some Other Race Alone	2	125
Two or More Races	2	245
Hispanic or Latino	5	446
Not Hispanic or Latino	79	11,713

Source: ESRI Business Analyst



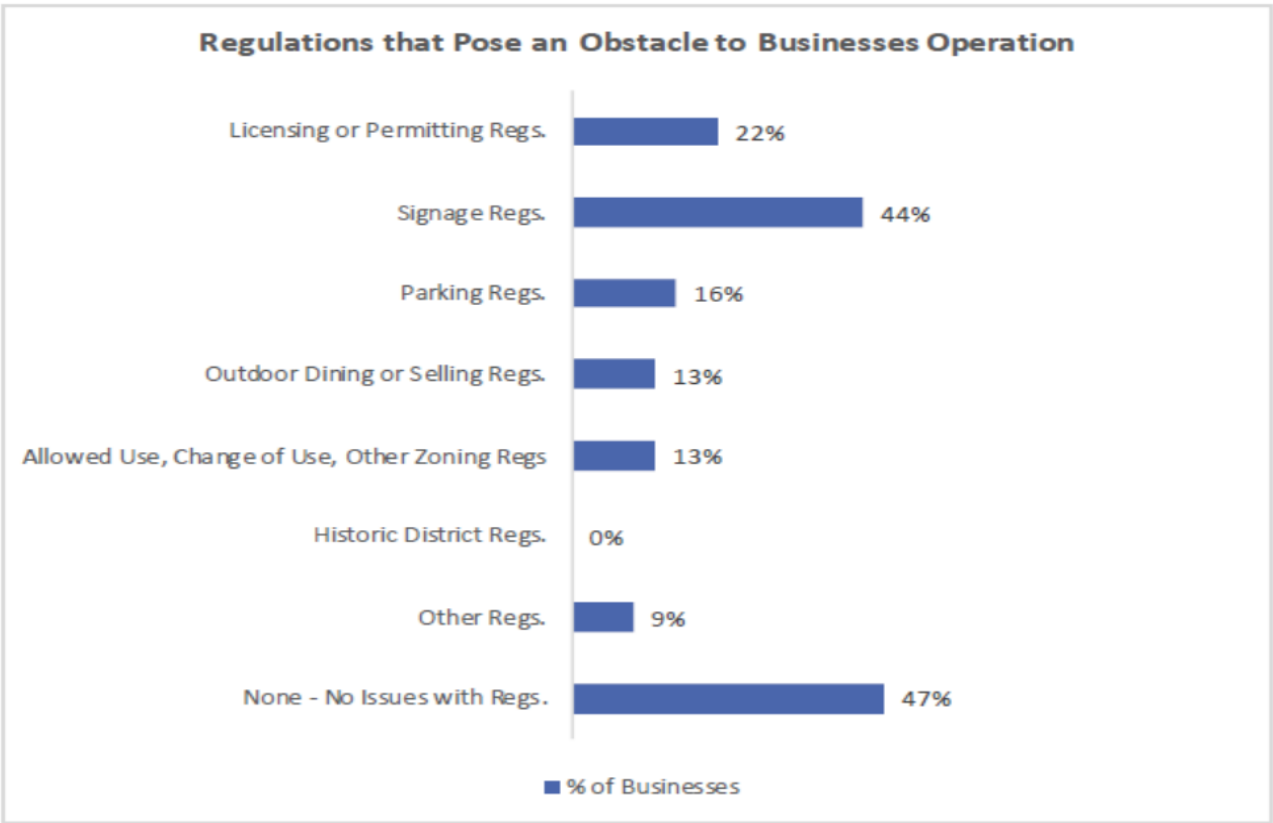
## Highlights of Administrative Capacity

Currently there is no commercial district association or town-wide business association. Tyngsborough hired a Town Planner/Director of Economic Development in 2018, but the Town provides no financial resources or specific programs directed at assisting businesses.

## Regulatory Obstacles to Business Operations

As illustrated in Figure 8, 53% of Business Survey respondents indicated that some Tyngsborough regulations pose an obstacle to business operation. Signage regulations were identified by 44% of respondents, the most commonly selected obstacle. The second most commonly identified obstacle, licensing or permitting regulations, was identified by 22% of respondents.

Figure 8: Regulatory Obstacles to Business Operations



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## Project Recommendations

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## Project Recommendations

### Recommendations

The Middlesex Road Commercial Corridor Rapid Recovery Plan outlines five recommendations intended to assist the district in addressing the economic impacts of COVID-19. On July 28, 2021, a Community Meeting was held to present the five recommendations and solicit comments from the Town's residents and businesses.

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

The five project recommendations are:

1. Update Tyngsborough's Sign Regulations
2. Develop a Branding and Marketing Plan for the Tyngsborough Commercial District
3. Implement a Wayfinding System and Install Signage at Appropriate Locations
4. Establish a Storefront and Signage Improvement Program
5. Determine the Feasibility of a District Management Organization or Business Association



# Update Tyngsborough's Sign Regulations

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Tyngsborough's commercial district, which is predominately in Census Tract 3131.01 with a small section in Census Tract 3131.02.
Origin	Town of Tyngsborough; Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
Budget	 Low Budget (Under \$50,000 range)
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years range)
Risk	 Low Risk - Failure to adopt draft changes at Town Meeting could be a risk if voters are not familiar with the proposed changes and the need for updating the sign regulations.
Key Performance Indicators	Number of applications for sign permits and number of permits issued.
Partners & Resources	Tyngsborough Planning Board, Town Administration, local businesses and landlords, and the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments.
Diagnostic	<p>Site visits determined that although signage met the criteria for the LRRP program (legible from 10 feet away), many were not noticeable for drivers along Middlesex Road. Middlesex Road has no sidewalks for approximately 85% of the study area, therefore legibility and visibility for drivers on the road is essential for business advertising.</p> <p>As described in the Diagnostic Key Findings above, 69% of Business Survey respondents reported a decline in revenue due to COVID, and 59% of respondents had fewer on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID, with 53% of businesses reporting a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more.</p> <p>Greater flexibility in the sign regulations along with expedited processing would help businesses to raise their profile, attract more customers, recover from lower revenues from COVID-19, and adapt to potential future pandemics.</p>

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## Diagnostic (continued)

Flexible signage requirements would also allow temporary signs to promote outdoor sales, outdoor dining and take-away, which have been crucial to the survival of many retail and restaurant businesses during COVID. In response to the Business Survey, "More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining and Selling" was identified as "Moderately Important", "Important" or "Very Important" by 79% of businesses.

In addition, the Business Survey asked which local regulations pose an obstacle to business operations. Signage regulations were identified by 44% of respondents, more than any other regulation. The sign regulations have not been updated recently and do not address some current technologies in signage that may be appropriate for Tyngsborough's commercial areas.

Flexible signage requirements must still maintain Tyngsborough's character. Middlesex Road is a principal roadway in Tyngsborough, a gateway for visitors from the north, and traverses Tyngsborough's historic town center. Similarly, Kendall Road is an important east-west connection to Route 3 and Lowell, and traverses both the historic town center and Tyngsborough's landmark bridge across the Merrimack River.

## Action Items

In order to develop sign regulations that allow for better visibility and modern technology while retaining the character of Tyngsborough's commercial district and historic town center, a Town body or consultant would review the existing sign regulations, perform a windshield survey of the study area, perform outreach to business owners and the public, and develop draft regulations.

Additional public outreach should be performed after the finalization of the proposed revisions to ensure that Town Meeting voters are aware of the need for the sign regulation updates.

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## Process

The process would include:

- Determine if the work will be performed in-house or by a consultant.
- Review the existing sign regulations.
- Perform a windshield survey of the study area.
- Research and review case studies, examples and precedents from other municipalities.
- Perform outreach to business owners and the public including forums and public meetings, a survey, discussion with municipal boards and staff involved in the approval process, and presentation of options to business owners and the public. Presentations of options should include illustrations, be available on the Town website, and have opportunities for feedback.
- Develop draft regulations. Options to consider include:
  - Varying the allowable size of signs based on their distance from the road to address the varying setbacks of buildings;
  - Promoting continuity in style, potentially through the use of incentives in Special Permits or a Revolving Loan Fund;
  - Allow greater flexibility along Middlesex Road outside of the town center (Zoning District Business-3) while maintaining comparatively stricter standards in the historic town center (Zoning District Business-2).
- Perform additional public outreach after the finalization of the proposed revisions to ensure that Town Meeting voters are aware of the need for the sign regulation updates.
- Following the finalization of the draft, present the regulations to the Town for adoption.

## Potential Funding Sources

### **Municipal Funding**

If another source is not available, the Town of Tyngsborough could undertake the sign regulation update itself.

### **Community One Stop for Growth - DHCD Community Planning Grants**

These planning grants can be used for zoning review and updates, and will fund projects up to \$75,000.

### **Community One Stop for Growth - DHCD Massachusetts Downtown Initiative**

This grant program can provide consultant technical assistance for sign programs. The program will fund up to \$25,000.

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

Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and may be used for municipal zoning review and updates. All municipalities are eligible to apply directly to their regional planning agency.



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## Lessons Learned – Updating Sign Regulations

\* Adapted from “*Develop or update the municipality’s sign code*” by Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Innes Associates Ltd.

### Challenges across municipalities include the following:

- Existing signage is outdated, inconsistent, or in disrepair.
- The sign code is inconsistent with current best practices, new sign technology, or legal decisions related to signage regulations (ex. Reed v. Town of Gilbert).
- The approval process is perceived as onerous and/or arbitrary, especially for a small business.
- Enforcement has become an issue and/or sign permits are regularly approved with waivers.
- Sign code decisions are regularly appealed.

### Sign codes are important for several reasons:

- Visibility of businesses who wish to attract customers/clients.
- Pedestrian and vehicular safety (reduce distractions).
- Community aesthetics.
- Reduction in light pollution.





### Selected Resources

The Signage Foundation, Inc. ([thesignagefoundation.org](http://thesignagefoundation.org)) has a research library of articles. Some of the links are broken, but the articles can be searched for by name using a search engine.

The following non-Massachusetts model sign codes are helpful but should be reviewed by municipal counsel to make sure the provisions are compatible with Massachusetts General Laws.

- The Pennsylvania chapter of the APA has a model sign code. The current link is [planningpa.org/wp-content/uploads/Model-Sign-Plan-2.pdf](http://planningpa.org/wp-content/uploads/Model-Sign-Plan-2.pdf)
- Also in Pennsylvania is the Model Sign Ordinance from the Montgomery County Planning Commission, 2014. The current link is [montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/7070](http://montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/7070)

# Develop a Branding and Marketing Plan for the Tyngsborough Commercial District

Category	 Revenues and Sales
Location	Tyngsborough's commercial district, which is predominately in Census Tract 3131.01 with a small section in Census Tract 3131.02.
Origin	Town of Tyngsborough; Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000 range)
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Risk	 Medium Risk - Requires buy-in from businesses and the Town, and may require dedicated funding for the program and staff to coordinate the program.
Key Performance Indicators	Change in sales; in-person visitors and online visitors. Changes in commercial tax revenues. Change in the number of businesses; new businesses opened since the beginning of the branding and marketing campaign; and number of vacancies. Use of web analytics to measure online aspects of the marketing campaign.
Partners & Resources	Local businesses and landlords; Town of Tyngsborough; Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce; Northern Middlesex Council of Governments, Merrimack Convention & Visitors Bureau, Middlesex 3 Coalition, MassDOT.
Diagnostic	<p>As described in the Diagnostic Key Findings above, 69% of Business Survey respondents reported a decline in revenue due to COVID-19, and 81% reported experiencing a reduced operating hours or capacity. In addition, 59% of Business Survey respondents had fewer on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID, with 53% of businesses reporting a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more.</p> <p>Improved marketing and an effective branding campaign will raise awareness about shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities in the district and draw on-site customers back to the area. Marketing and branding improvements would also help online sales, delivery, take-out and curb-side pickup sales. If COVID-19 variants or future pandemics threaten commerce in the district again, a coordinated marketing system could be utilized to showcase take-out, delivery, outdoor shopping and dining opportunities, as well as other adaptive steps taken by local businesses.</p>



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## Diagnostic (continued)

Forty-four percent (44%) of survey respondents identified "Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District" as "important" and an additional 25% identified the strategy as "very important". This combined 69% makes the approach the highest ranked approach identified in the survey.

"Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses", which would be an element of the Branding and Marketing Plan, received the second highest ranking in the survey (65% selected "important" or "very important"). Furthermore, 34% of the respondents were interested in receiving assistance for "Participating in shared marketing/advertising", making it tied for the assistance with the most interest from businesses.

## Action Items

The project would develop a marketing plan that identifies aspects of the commercial district to focus collective marketing efforts on. The plan would also identify the most effective places to target marketing, including the internet and other platforms, and steps to implement the plan. In addition, the project would develop a branding strategy including a style guide for use by the town, local businesses and organizations. This effort would support two goals: promoting existing businesses and attracting new establishments to the district.

- Create marketing plan that identifies marketing opportunities to raise awareness of the businesses and offerings in Tyngsborough's commercial district.
- Create a brand identity to add distinction to the area that welcomes people to Tyngsborough, separates it from New Hampshire, and can be utilized in various mediums such as social media, advertising, wayfinding, banners and signage. Branding should be based on the identity or theme of the district to create recognition with the intent of attracting visitors and increasing sales.
- Encourage business recruitment and growth of existing and new businesses through promotion and strengthening of awareness of the district.
- Coordinate and partner with MassDOT in any efforts that would be impacted by the fact that they own Middlesex Road – for example, banner programs and wayfinding signage.



UNIQUE · VIBRANT · HISTORIC



*Examples of municipal branding*

- Establish a steering committee. The committee should be comprised of key stakeholders from the Town: business owners, representatives of cultural organizations, and community leaders and/or municipal staff.
- Identify and secure funding for the development and implementation of the Branding and Marketing Plan.
- Define the scope and intent of the Branding and Marketing Plan. Identify how the brand and style guide will likely be utilized by businesses and organizations.
- Develop a Marketing and Communications Plan. This multi-year plan will be the roadmap for utilizing the brand year-round and communicating that Tyngsborough is a great place to be. Social media advertising should be a main focus. Incorporating geo-targeted advertising, or location based advertising, for the district would support the area restaurants in particular – for example if a customer is using their device in a nearby New Hampshire mall an ad would come up for dining options in Tyngsborough.
  - Build on and complement attractions in the area. Cultural and recreational amenities should be highlighted in marketing and social media efforts, in addition to businesses. Consider linking to and expanding the Town website with a tab or section that features dining and shopping in town, and a calendar for community events. Cultural and recreational events marketing programs will serve to promote of the district.
  - Delineate the role of the Town and the private sector in implementing the Branding and Marketing Plan. Identify opportunities for the Town to support marketing of the district as well as opportunities for the Town to promote businesses in industries that may be unlikely to benefit from traditional marketing.

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Process (continued)

- Hire graphic designer/branding consultant. The brand and style guide should be developed after determining how they will be utilized. They should be available in various formats and applications for use by area businesses and organizations. Consider identifying a tagline that fits the community. Include business owners in community meetings and other outreach throughout the development of the branding and marketing strategy.
- Brand Uses & Recognition – The completion of the brand and style guide should be seen as a starting point for several other projects recommended in the LRRP – i.e., wayfinding signage, banners, events, advertising, economic development and communications, as they work together in the promotion and recognition of the area.
- Form a district management entity, business association or advisory group to implement the marketing plan. A subcommittee of the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce consisting of Tyngsborough businesses could serve as an alternative to creating a new organization. In addition to spearheading implementation of the marketing plan, the group could provide support to local businesses for a variety of other issues. Supporting businesses in the implementation of the marketing plan will help to achieve the plan's goals and raise businesses' awareness of collaborative marketing opportunities. See the "Determine the Feasibility of a District Management Organization or Business Association" recommendation below.
- Evaluate marketing efforts through tracking and analytics, each effort should be critiqued for effectiveness and future marketing steps should be adjusted accordingly.

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## Potential Funding Sources

Costs include engaging a marketing/branding advisor. Further costs, including a project coordinator if necessary, will depend on the scope of the marketing and branding strategies, number of initiatives, complexities, and participating businesses. The marketing plan will tie directly to the budget development. After the first year, the costs should decrease as the project will not be engaging a design professional for the branding efforts.

Because of the value a business association would have in guiding and implementing the branding and marketing plan, establishing a steering committee and gauging the business community's interest in an association could be a component of this project. Municipal funds could cover a portion of Tyngsborough staff time to support the dual role of the steering committee.

### **Community One Stop for Growth - DHCD Massachusetts Downtown Initiative**

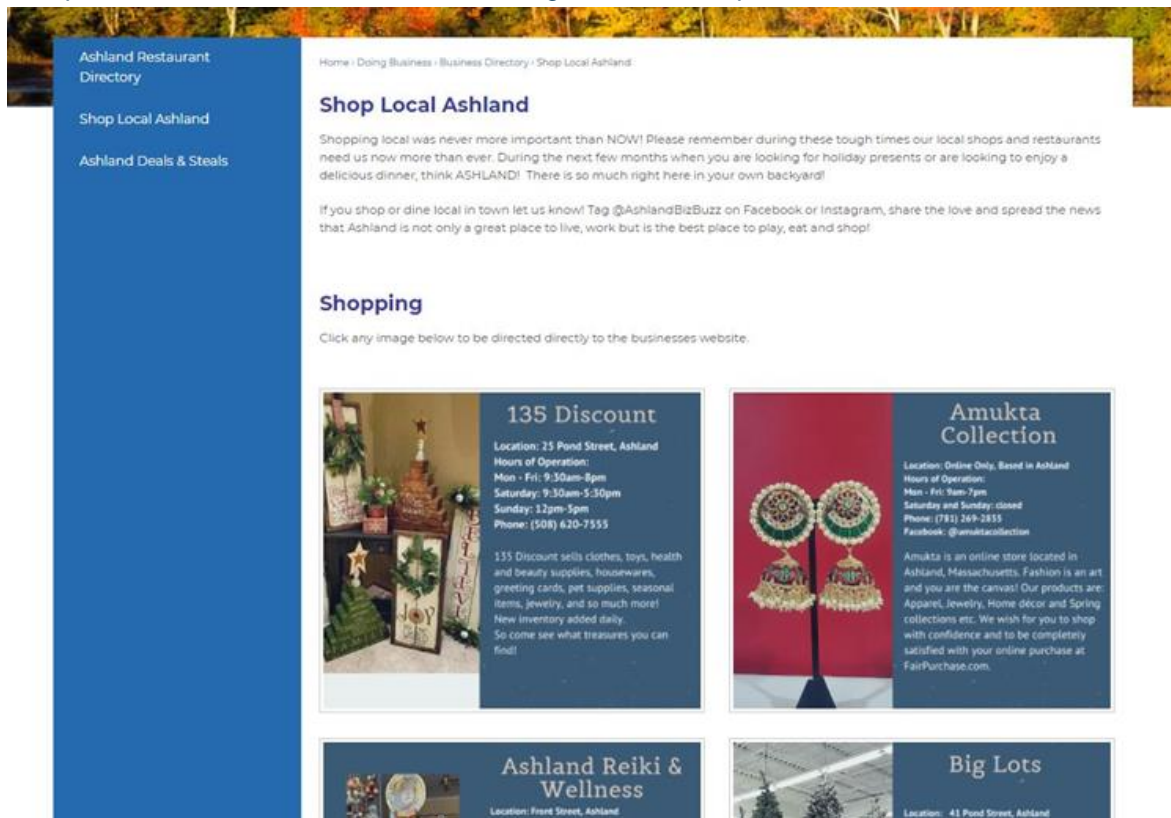
MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which may be used to address development of branding for the commercial district. The program will fund up to \$25,000 of technical services.

### **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) - Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (CLFRF)**

CLFRF provides funding to local governments and can be used to address economic impacts of COVID-19 including small business assistance and nonprofit assistance. CLFRF are a potential funding source for a temporary staff person or consultant for the branding and marketing plan and early staffing for a steering committee.

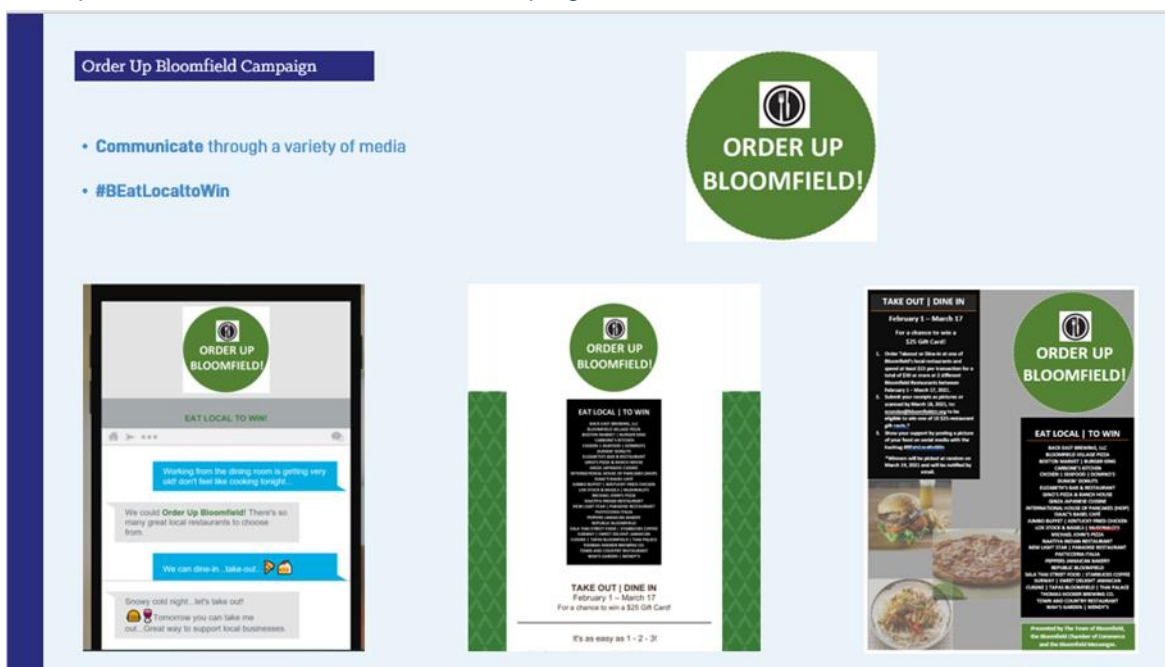


## Example of a Town-Owned Website Promoting Local Retail Options



Credit: <https://www.ashlandmass.com/842/Shop-Local-Ashland>

## Example of a Town-Wide Promotional Campaign for Restaurants



Credit: Goman+York

# TOWN OF BUCKSPORT

MARKETING PLAN 2021



Best Practice

## Marketing a Small Town

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Location

Bucksport, ME



REVENUES  
& SALES

# Developing a Strategic Marketing Plan for a Small Town

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



## Diagnostic

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

## Action Item

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



## Process





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



Signs promoting Bucksport's waterfront and history



# Implement a Wayfinding System and Install Signage at Appropriate Locations

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Focus on destinations and businesses in the commercial district but include destinations and businesses throughout town that attract visitors and customers to the area.
Origin	Tyngsborough Economic Development Director; Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000 range)
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk - Failure to fund signage installations or other implementation steps due to financial limitations or lack of buy-in.
Key Performance Indicators	Number of visitors to district; change in customer and visitor volumes at local business establishments and attractions; and changes in commercial tax revenues.
Partners & Resources	Local businesses and landlords; the Town of Tyngsborough's Recreation and Parks Department, Historical Commission, Agricultural Commission, and Planning Department; and arts and cultural organization including the Tyngsborough-Dunstable Historical Society.
Diagnostic	<p>As discussed in the Diagnostic Key Findings section above, the volume of auto traffic using the Route 3 off-ramp presents an opportunity for the district, though currently there is no real identity for the district or welcoming encouragement for people to visit the Tyngsborough commercial area. Presently, significant traffic using the off-ramp turns north onto Middlesex Road to immediately enter New Hampshire, or goes straight into the Pheasant Lane Mall parking lot.</p> <p>Site visits for the LRRP program identified almost no wayfinding signage for destinations within the commercial district - one sign each for the Town Hall and the library, signs with names of two public squares, and some signage for destinations outside of the study area.</p> <p>Furthermore, issues with the high cost and long wait times for businesses to be included on state road signs on Route 3 and the Route 3 off-ramp was raised during LRRP public meetings.</p>

## Diagnostic (continued)

Thirty-four percent (34%) of the Business Survey respondents were interested in receiving assistance for "Participating in shared marketing/advertising", making it tied for the assistance with the most interest from businesses. As discussed in the Diagnostic Key Findings section above, 69% of survey respondents reported a decline in revenue due to COVID-19, and 59% had fewer on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID.

An effective wayfinding system would draw visitors' attention to shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities in the district. Similarly, the wayfinding system's online component would work to draw potential visitors back to the area and should help online sales, delivery, take-out and curbside pickup business.

## Action Items

Develop a wayfinding system with an online component to highlight businesses and destinations, including family-friendly experiences such as mini-golf, pick your own farms, movies theaters and restaurants, to attract and guide visitors' to local establishments.

Mobile-friendly (internet and smartphone) wayfinding components should also be included. A wayfinding interactive map would allow for inclusion of attractions and businesses into the overall wayfinding program. QR Codes could help visitors access information through scanning technology, connecting to Information about dining, shopping, attractions and events.



## Wayfinding Examples

## Process



- Establish a steering committee that includes representatives from the business community, local cultural organizations, and the Tyngsborough Historical Commission, the Tyngsborough Agricultural Commission and/or the to-be-established Tyngsborough Business Committee. Using the same steering committee for both the branding and marketing plan and for the wayfinding plan is recommended.
- Retain a consultant or MDI technical assistance provider.
- Identify destinations in Tyngsborough, including public destinations such as parks and private destinations such as restaurants, family recreation, theaters and farms with pick your own opportunities.
- Perform a wayfinding audit and signage inventory. Analyze existing circulation patterns. Identify decision points (e.g. the end of Route 3 off-ramp, the intersection of Route 113 and Middlesex Road, and the turn for Parlee Farm), the commercial district's gateways, and other locations where signage would be most effective (e.g. municipal parks and playing fields). Examine barriers to additional signage, including cluttered or distracting excess of signs and state ownership of the roadway.
- Develop the wayfinding plan focusing on design, materials and placement of signage, kiosks, and online electronic/technology applications. Focus on drawing people to the district from the other areas in the town and region, paying attention to who's driving through the area and their destinations – i.e., Parlee Farms, the riverfront, parks, trails and nature center.
- Secure any necessary permits. Fabricate and create signage, kiosks, maps, and digital applications (apps). Install/activate elements of the program as resources/funding permits.

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## Potential Funding Sources

### **DHCD Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (Community One Stop for Growth)**

MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which may be used to address developing a wayfinding plan. The program will fund up to \$25,000.

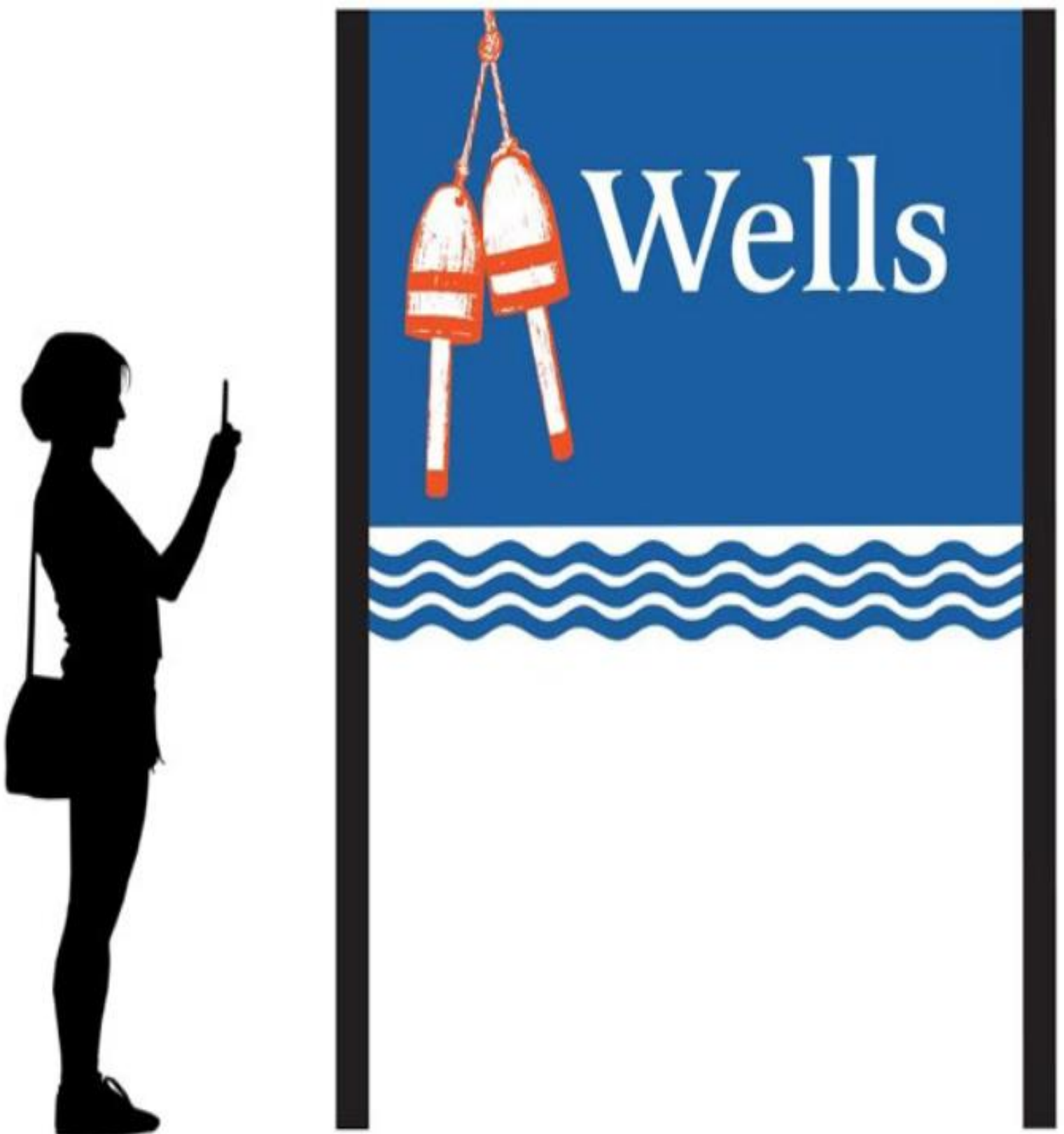
### **Private Funds and Sponsorships**

Private businesses and cultural and recreational organizations could pay for the installment of shared wayfinding signage with multiple sponsors included on each sign.

### **Municipal Funding**

If other sources are not available, the Town of Tyngsborough could undertake the wayfinding program with municipal funds.









Best Practice

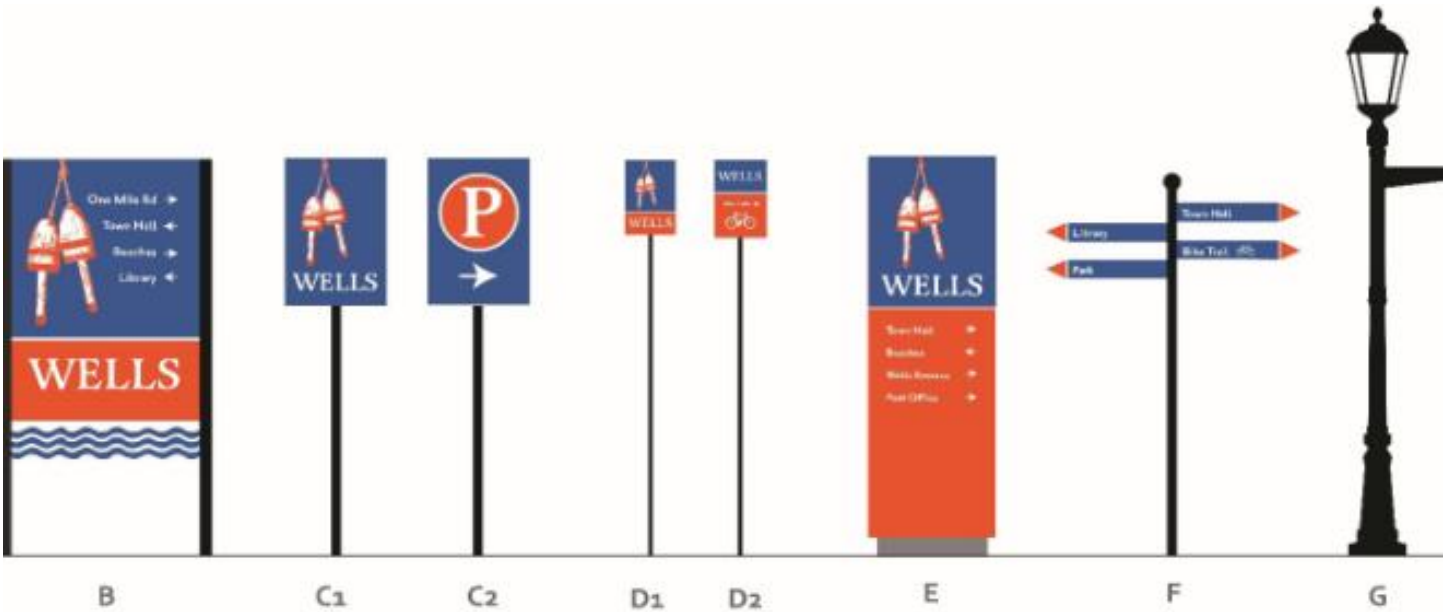
## Wayfinding Theme for a Suburban Town

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

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



## Diagnostic

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

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

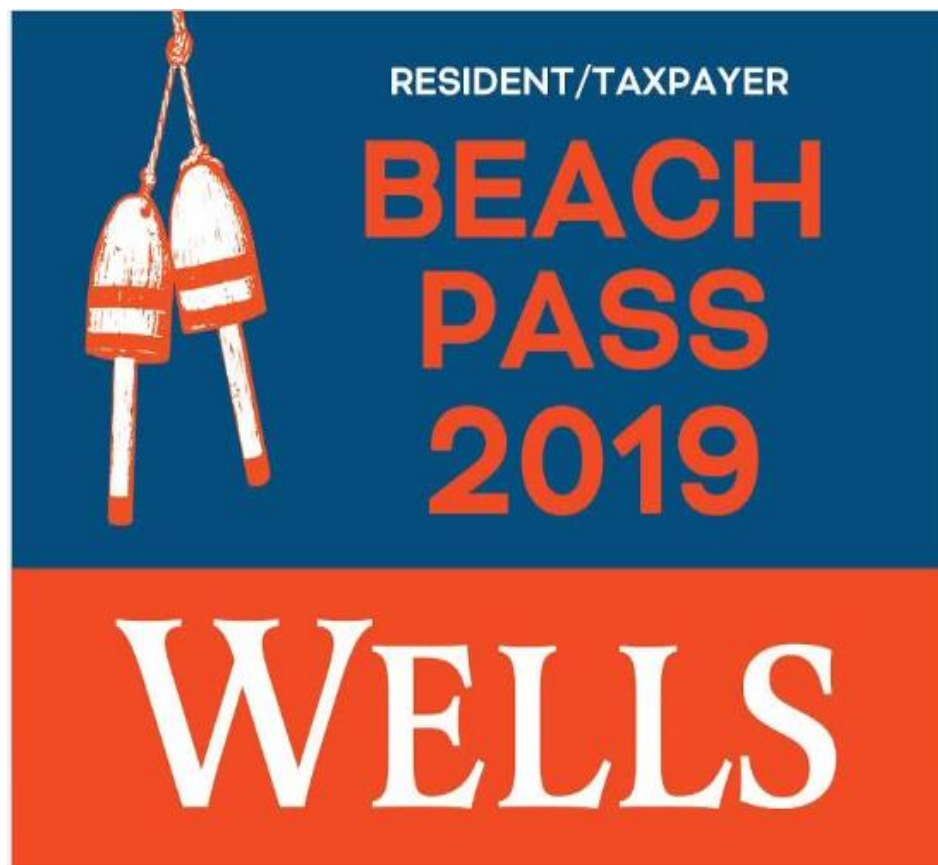
To assist in the recovery efforts the town has implemented a wayfinding program which was tied to the town's branding initiative. A visual survey of the business corridors was performed and a presentation was developed to explore various design options, Wayfinding signs, street furniture, and public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

## Action Item

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



*Public Art installed as part of the wayfinding and branding programs*



## Process





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



### *Kiosk and Sign bracket design concepts*



# Establish a Storefront and Signage Improvement Program

Category	 Private Realm
Location	The program should be made available to businesses located anywhere within the Town of Tyngsborough. Census Tracts 3131.01 and 3131.02 encompass the entire town.
Origin	Tyngsborough Economic Development Director; Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
Budget	  Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000 range) to High Budget (\$200,000+ range)
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk - Failure to repay loans would limit the availability of revolving loan funds and a lack of interest from businesses and property owners would make the program less impactful.
Key Performance Indicators	Creation of the program. Number of applications for loans or grants. Number of loans and grants provided by the fund. Number of façades, storefronts and signs updated or replaced. Repayment rate of outstanding loans.
Partners & Resources	Municipal staff including Planning Department, Building Department and economic development staff; Municipal boards including the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeal, Tyngsborough Historical Commission; local banks and other community development financial institutions; and business and property owners.
Diagnostic	As described in the Diagnostic Key Findings above, newly constructed retail space in the district has remained vacant due to the pandemic, and the pandemic has delayed some planned redevelopment projects. These vacancies decrease the commercial district's attractiveness to shoppers, diners and potential new business. Distressed properties have a negative impact on people's impression of the quality of a business district, and decreased rents payments due to vacancies and tenant hardships reduce property owners' ability to make improvements themselves.



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## Diagnostic (continued)

Requirements to address the transmissibility of COVID-19, such as new windows, doors, or HVAC system may be unaffordable to a small business owner and/or may have a negative impact on the façade if improperly sourced and installed. Many local small businesses and landlords do not have the resources (time, money, expertise) to address substandard storefronts.

"Low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements" was tied for receiving the most interest of any potential assistance listed in the Business Survey, with 34% of respondents interested. Furthermore, respondents to the survey expressed more dissatisfaction with the "Condition of Private Buildings, Facades, Storefronts, Signage" than with any other option offered, with 31% dissatisfied and 3% very dissatisfied. Half (50%) of survey respondents identified "Renovation of Storefronts/Building Facades" as important or very important, with an additional 25% identified the strategy as moderately important.

Low cost loans or grants for storefront and signage improvements would allow more businesses and property owners to implement improvements and could have a significant positive impact on the district's appearance. Furthermore, site improvements that reduce asphalt and add landscape, if allowed by the fund, can address public health issues by reducing the heat island effect, planting trees can improve air quality, and using low impact design can help to manage stormwater.

## Action Items

Create a program that provides funding in the form of grants, loans and/or forgivable loans for commercial property owners and tenants to finance façade improvements, signage improvements and replacements, landscaping, and other storefront items including lighting.

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## Process

- Research existing sign and storefront improvement programs in other communities along with their guidelines, application forms and program management structure.
- Contact local banks and other community development financial institutions to learn about their interest and capacity to participate in such a program.
- Engage businesses, property owners and the community to build buy-in for the program.
- Determine if the municipality or a third party will administer the program.
- Establish eligibility requirements, allowed and disallowed uses of the funds, and minimum and maximum loan and grant amounts.
- Determine appropriate level of design guidelines, if any. In lieu of design guideline requirements, consider developing a non-binding design handbook, guide or other guidance to offer building owners and businesses ideas and concepts for storefront improvements. A design charrette as part of the design guidance/guideline development process can provide property owners with ideas for their storefronts and create buy-in.
- Develop the criteria for application and approval. Ensure that the process of awarding funding is transparent. Create a scoring system or other system with clear rules and determine who will be doing the scoring. A group or committee performing the scoring is recommended over a single individual.
- For grants, if any, determine the length of time that improvements must be maintained. Maintenance requirements could be tied to the length of the tenant's lease.

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## Potential Funding Sources

Costs include capitalizing a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) and or grant program, development of design criteria for sign and storefront improvements, and program management.

### **EDA Revolving Loan Fund Grant Program**

This program provides grants to communities to capitalize a Revolving Loan Fund. As part of the Economic Adjustment Assistance Program, EDA regional offices award competitive grants to units of local government to establish RLFs.

### **Local Banks and other Community Development Financial Institutions**

Consortiums of local banks have funded RLFs for façade improvements in other Massachusetts communities and are a potential source of funding for Tyngsborough. In addition, local banks with a community development financing program for small businesses may be able to provide low or no interest loans directly to small businesses for a storefront or sign upgrade. The focus of the program at each bank is different; contact local bank(s) to learn how they could participate in investing in the community.

### **DHCD Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (Community One Stop for Growth)**

MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which could include developing the sign and storefront program.

### **Municipal Funding**

If other sources for funding are not available, municipal funds could also be used to capitalize the RLF and/or grant program. Depending on the structure and size of the fund, program management for the RLF may be covered by Town staff.

### **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) - Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (CLFRF)**

CLFRF provides funding to local governments to respond to the public health emergency caused by COVID-19. CLFRF funds can be used to address economic impacts of COVID-19 including small business assistance and nonprofit assistance.





## Lessons Learned – Establishing a Storefront and Signage Improvement Program, Pre-Program Development

\* Adapted from “*Develop a façade/storefront/site improvement program*” by Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Innes Associates Ltd.

### Pre-Program Development

1. Identify who will manage the program.
2. If the municipality does not already have design guidelines for the area that are suitable for this program, and design guidelines will be part of the program, decide how those guidelines will be developed.
3. Discuss the potential focus of the program: components of a storefront, the entire storefront, the entire façade, all façades, the site? Will signage, lighting, awnings and other smaller elements be included? Will interior improvements to address accessibility be included? Will the program fund the design, all or some of the improvements, or both?
4. Discuss what will not be eligible. Eligibility may also be determined by the funding source (for example, CDBG funds).
5. Discuss the length of time that improvements must be maintained, if any, and the enforcement process for ensuring that improvements are maintained. Maintenance requirements could be tied to the length of the tenant's lease.
6. Consider the funding structures. The program can provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. Grants may provide a greater incentive to participate while loans (no or low interest) provide a revolving fund to assist more properties. Forgiving loans after a certain time if the improvement are maintained is another option.
7. If the property owners are less interested in the program, the municipality might consider offering grants to the first 3-5 to sign up (depending on resources) or through a lottery process and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area. This would need to be a highly transparent process.

# Determine the Feasibility of a District Management Organization or Business Association

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	The focus of a district management organization's feasibility would be on the commercial district. A less formal business association's feasibility would be examined town-wide.
Origin	Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
Budget	 Low Budget (Under \$50,000 range)
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk - Lack of interest from businesses is the largest threat to the feasibility of forming a business organization. For the creation of a Business Improvement District, support from a majority of property owners would also be required.
Key Performance Indicators	Establishment of a sustainable organization with a defined program; number of businesses joining the organization.
Partners & Resources	Town of Tyngsborough; Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce; Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau; Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
Diagnostic	<p>As described in the Diagnostic Key Findings above, 69% of Business Survey respondents reported a decline in revenue due to COVID-19, and 81% reported experiencing a reduced operating hours or capacity. Similarly, 59% of Business Survey respondents had fewer on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID, with 53% of businesses reporting a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more.</p> <p>A district management organization or town-wide business association could coordinate collaborative marketing, implement a branding and marketing plan, and organize events to draw more visitors. A subcommittee of the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce consisting of Tyngsborough businesses could serve as an alternative to creating a new organization. The organization could also provide a collective voice for businesses in Tyngsborough. Recognizing the value of a business organization, 75% of the Business Survey respondents identified "Creation of a District Management Entity (Business Improvement District or other organization)" as "Moderately important", "Important" or "Very important".</p>

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## Diagnostic (continued)

Furthermore, "Participating in shared marketing/advertising" was tied for the assistance with the most interest from businesses responding to the Business Survey, and a business association or district organization could lead shared marketing efforts. Similarly, 69% of Business Survey respondents identified "Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District" as "important" or "very important", the highest ranked strategy on the survey.

Tyngsborough's 2015 Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT) report completed by Northeastern University's Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy includes these recommendations to encourage private investment:

- "Establish a volunteer economic development organization to craft an updated economic development strategy. Engage local businesses to assist in marketing the community and targeting specific industries."
- "Establishing a volunteer economic development organization that works closely with both the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce and the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments would help the town to develop a strategy that aligns with regional development goals and caters to the specific potential contributions."
- "Existing firms and local business organizations can work together with public officials to attract targeted industries through cross-marketing efforts. The business community can greatly improve a town's ability to tailor its marketing plan and development strategy."

## Action Items

Determine business owner interest in establishing a district management organization, a less formal business association, or a subcommittee of the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce consisting of Tyngsborough businesses. If feasible, initiate the establishment of the organization, association or Chamber subcommittee to coordinate collaborative marketing, implement the branding and marketing plan, and organize events to draw more visitors. The organization would also provide a collective voice for businesses in Tyngsborough.

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## Process

- Identify required staff and financial resources. Determine if Massachusetts Downton Initiative technical assistance will be sought, a consultant or temporary staff person will be hired, or if the work will be done in house. If a consultant or temporary staff will be hired, identify funding. Apply for Massachusetts Downton Initiative technical assistance or hire temporary staff or consultant, as determined.
- Work on the feasibility analysis should coincide with the commencement of work on the branding and marketing plan, and should build on that plan to create an organization that plays a lead role in marketing of the commercial district.
- Establish a broad-based steering committee for the branding and marketing plan and the wayfinding system. The steering committee should include business owners, property owners, community representatives, and municipal staff. Eventually the organizational leadership may transition to entirely private sector, but in the early stages municipal staff and community representatives can help to initiate the process.
- Review case studies illustrating different types of business associations, district management organizations, and downtown/main street organizations.
- Develop a comprehensive database of businesses within the Town and the commercial district.
- Perform community outreach including forums for business owners and a survey to gauge interest in various options for district management organization options and a less formal business association. A subcommittee of the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce consisting of Tyngsborough businesses could serve as an alternative to creating a new organization.
- Support consensus building among stakeholders, development of final recommendations, and identification of next steps.
- If practical, transition leadership to a private sector steering committee or similar structure.



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## Potential Funding Sources

Because of the value a business association would have in guiding and implementing the branding and marketing plan recommended above, establishing a steering committee and gauging the business community's interest in an association could be a component of that project. Municipal funds could cover a portion of Tyngsborough staff time to support the dual role of this steering committee.

Technical assistance from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) for consultant services is available for up to \$25,000, as described below. If the determination is made to hire a temporary staff person or consultant separately from the MDI technical assistance, Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (CLFRF) are a potential funding source, also described below. Development of a Business Improvement District would require additional administrative costs for the organization and management.

### **DHCD Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) (Community One Stop for Growth)**

This grant program can provide consultant services to determine the most appropriate management model for Tyngsborough's commercial district, including a Business Improvement District or a volunteer-based organization. Technical assistance is available for the development of a local strategy for implementation of a district management option.

### **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) - Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (CLFRF)**

CLFRF provides funding to local governments and can be used to address economic impacts of COVID-19 including small business assistance and nonprofit assistance. CLFRF are a potential funding source for a temporary staff person or consultant for the feasibility analysis and early staffing for a steering committee.

# Case Study – Determining a District Management Model for Downtown Reading

\* Adapted from “*Determining a District Management Model for Downtown Reading*” provided to DHCD by Ann McFarland Burke.

## Funding

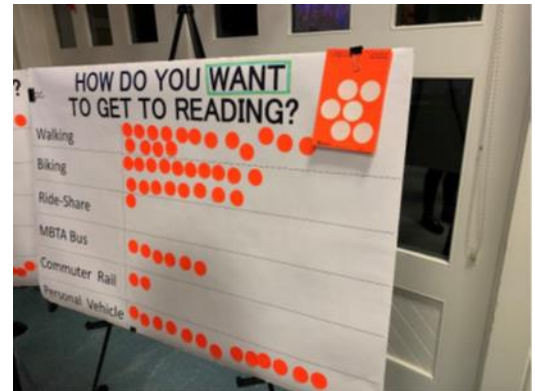
A Massachusetts Downtown Initiative grant provided Technical Assistance. The Town provided staff support and early coordination.

## Background

Economic Development Plans for downtown Reading had included the recommendation to establish a sustainable downtown organization to support the economic and social health of the downtown.

The Town of Reading spearheaded activity to launch the process of community and property owner engagement to explore what model would be appropriate for downtown Reading. This included:

- Identification of staff and financial resources
- Creating a Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy
- Research to identify community priorities / recommendations
- Peer learning from other communities
- Consensus building among stakeholders
- Transition of leadership to private sector



## Process

The process included extensive outreach and community education to explore program priorities, financial sustainability, organizational models and champions from both the private and public sector.

- A large broad-based community advisory / working group was formed to provide input and feedback
- A survey was widely distributed to community residents, businesses and other stakeholders
- Community Outreach Event - A Pizza / Ice Cream Social brought over 150 residents to provide input
- 3 Community Forums – Panels featuring executive directors of different types of downtown organizations described their programs, challenges and models
- Working sessions with the Advisory Committee to discuss specific model alternatives / cost and benefits
- One on one conversations with key stakeholders
- Consensus building with stakeholders and recommendation of the preferred model and next steps
- Transition from city-led effort to steering committee comprised of property owners, businesses, and other stakeholders to lead organizational effort. City staff continued staff support. Technical assistance support continued through additional MDI grant.
- BID organizational process underway

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# Appendix

# Appendix A: Business Survey Data Tables

## Business Survey Results - Data Tables

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

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

Tyngsborough	32
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### Business Characteristics & Satisfaction with Commercial Area

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

1	3	9%
2 to 5	12	38%
6 to 10	3	9%
11 to 20	7	22%
21 to 50	6	19%
More than 50	1	3%
Total	32	100%

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

Own	10	31%
Rent	22	69%
Total	32	100%

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

Increased	15	47%
Decreased	4	13%
Stayed about the Same	7	22%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	6	19%
Total	32	100%

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

Retail (NAICS 44-45)	5	16%
Food Service (restaurants, bars), Accommodation (NAICS 72)	10	31%
Personal Service (hair, skin, nails, dry cleaning) (NAICS 81)	3	9%
Professional Scientific, Technical, Legal (NAICS 54)	1	3%
Finance, Insurance (NAICS 52)	1	3%
Healthcare (medical, dental, other health practitioners) (NAICS 62)	2	6%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Fitness (NAICS 71)	3	9%
Non-Profit, Community Services	2	6%
Other	5	16%
Total	32	100%

# Appendix A: Business Survey Data Tables

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

## Condition of public spaces, streets, sidewalks

Very Dissatisfied	3	9%
Dissatisfied	4	13%
Neutral	9	28%
Satisfied	13	41%
Very Satisfied	3	9%
Total	32	100%

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

Very Dissatisfied	1	3%
Dissatisfied	10	31%
Neutral	6	19%
Satisfied	13	41%
Very Satisfied	2	6%
Total	32	100%

## Access for Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	2	6%
Neutral	7	22%
Satisfied	17	53%
Very Satisfied	6	19%
Total	32	100%

## Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied	1	3%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	8	25%
Satisfied	18	56%
Very Satisfied	5	16%
Total	32	100%

## Proximity to Complementary Businesses or Uses

Very Dissatisfied	1	3%
Dissatisfied	2	6%
Neutral	17	53%
Satisfied	10	31%
Very Satisfied	2	6%
Total	32	100%

# Appendix A: Business Survey Data Tables

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

Licensing or permitting regulations	7	22%
Signage regulations	14	44%
Parking regulations	5	16%
Outdoor dining or selling regulations	4	13%
Allowed uses, change of use or other zoning regulations	4	13%
Historic District regulations	0	0%
Other regulations (not related to COVID)	3	9%
None - No Issues with regulations	15	47%

## Impacts of COVID

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

Decline in revenue	22	69%
Employee layoff	13	41%
Reduced operating hours/capacity	26	81%
Business closure (temporary or permanent)	15	47%
Stopped/deferred rent or mortgage payments	7	22%
Incurred expense to implement safety measures	18	56%
Established alternative mode to sell and deliver products (on-line platforms, delivery, etc.)	11	34%
None of the Above	2	6%

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

Increased compared to 2019	2	6%
Stayed about the same as 2019	3	10%
Decreased 1 – 24% compared to 2019	3	10%
Decreased 25 – 49% compared to 2019	8	26%
Decreased 75 - 100% compared to 2019	2	6%
Decreased 50 – 74% compared to 2019	6	19%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	7	23%
Total	31	100%

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

More customers than before COVID	0	0%
About the same number as before COVID	4	13%
1 – 24% less customers than before COVID	2	6%
25 – 49% less customers than before COVID	5	16%
50 – 74% less customers than before COVID	10	31%
75 – 100% less customers than before COVID	2	6%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	9	28%
Total	32	100%

# Appendix A: Business Survey Data Tables

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

Operating at full capacity	8	27%
Operating at reduced hours/capacity due to COVID	21	70%
Temporarily closed due to COVID	1	3%
Permanently closed due to COVID	0	0%
Total	30	100%

## Strategies for Supporting Businesses and Improving the Commercial District

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

### Renovation of Storefronts/Building Facades

Unimportant/Not Needed	4	13%
Of Little Importance or Need	4	13%
Moderately Important	8	25%
Important	11	34%
Very Important	5	16%
Total	32	100%

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

Unimportant/Not Needed	4	13%
Of Little Importance or Need	5	16%
Moderately Important	9	28%
Important	9	28%
Very Important	5	16%
Total	32	100%

### Improvement of Streetscape & Sidewalks

Unimportant/Not Needed	5	16%
Of Little Importance or Need	4	13%
Moderately Important	7	22%
Important	10	31%
Very Important	6	19%
Total	32	100%

### Improvements in Safety and/or Cleanliness

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	6%
Of Little Importance or Need	4	13%
Moderately Important	9	28%
Important	8	25%
Very Important	9	28%
Total	32	100%

# Appendix A: Business Survey Data Tables

## Changes in Public Parking Availability, Management or Policies

Unimportant/Not Needed	7	23%
Of Little Importance or Need	3	10%
Moderately Important	14	45%
Important	3	10%
Very Important	4	13%
Total	31	100%

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

Unimportant/Not Needed	6	19%
Of Little Importance or Need	8	25%
Moderately Important	8	25%
Important	7	22%
Very Important	3	9%
Total	32	100%

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

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

Unimportant/Not Needed	2	6%
Of Little Importance or Need	3	9%
Moderately Important	9	28%
Important	12	38%
Very Important	6	19%
Total	32	100%

## More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining and Selling

Unimportant/Not Needed	3	9%
Of Little Importance or Need	4	13%
Moderately Important	5	16%
Important	12	38%
Very Important	8	25%
Total	32	100%

## Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	3%
Of Little Importance or Need	4	13%
Moderately Important	5	16%
Important	14	44%
Very Important	8	25%
Total	32	100%

# Appendix A: Business Survey Data Tables

## Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	3%
Of Little Importance or Need	3	9%
Moderately Important	7	22%
Important	11	34%
Very Important	10	31%
Total	32	100%

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

Unimportant/Not Needed	4	13%
Of Little Importance or Need	8	25%
Moderately Important	7	22%
Important	9	28%
Very Important	4	13%
Total	32	100%

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

Unimportant/Not Needed	5	16%
Of Little Importance or Need	3	10%
Moderately Important	12	39%
Important	8	26%
Very Important	3	10%
Total	31	100%

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

Setting up an online store or other online selling channel	2	6%
Creating new services such as delivery	2	6%
Participating in shared marketing/advertising	11	34%
Low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements	11	34%
Low-cost financing for purchasing property in the commercial district	8	25%
Training on the use of social media	6	19%
None of the above	15	47%