



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Town of West Brookfield



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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Town of West Brookfield Businesses

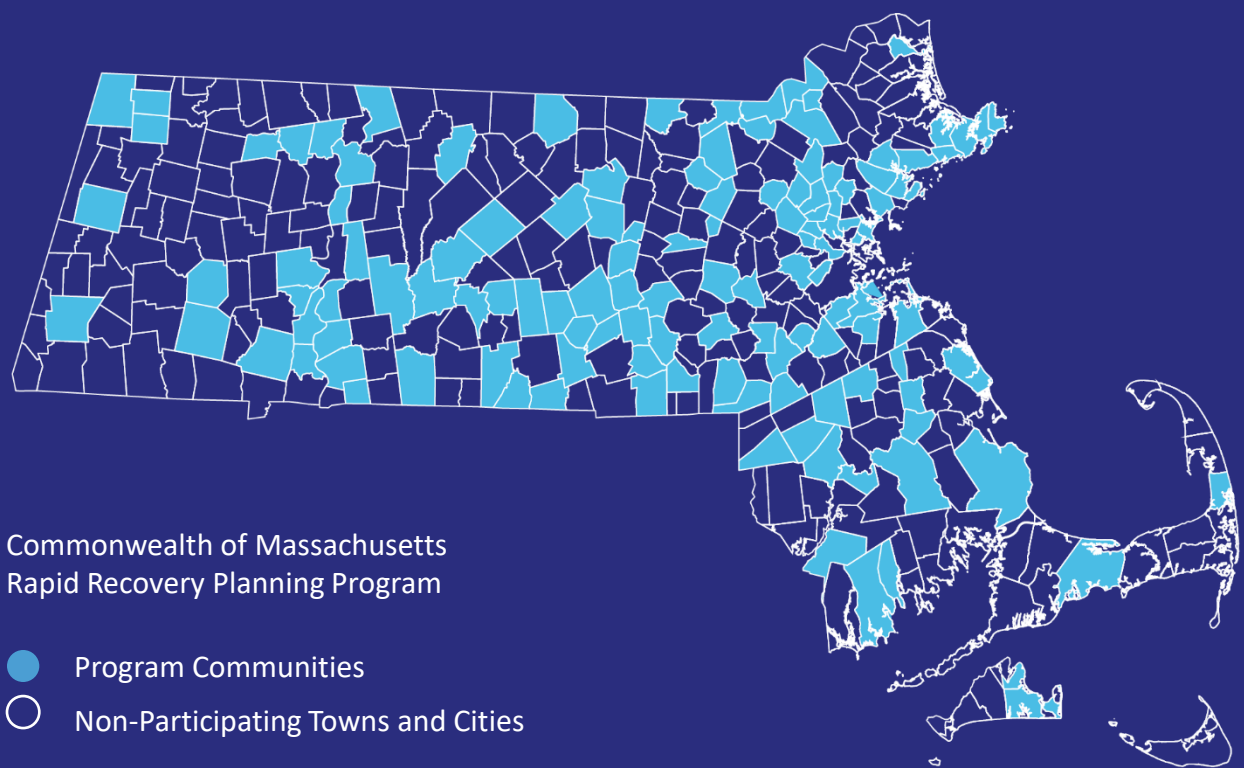
Table of Contents

Rapid Recovery Program	Page. 7
Introduction	Page. 8
Approach/Framework	Page. 9
 Executive Summary	 Page 9
 Diagnostic Key Findings	 Page. 13
Physical Environment	Page 15
Business Environment	Page 16
Market Information	Page 18
Administrative Capacity	Page 19
 Project Recommendations	 Page 21
Public Realm	Page 17
Private Realm	Page 24
Revenue and Sales	Page 26
Administrative Capacity	Page 28
Tenant Mix	N/A
Cultural/Arts Others	Page 36
 Appendix	 Page 40

125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



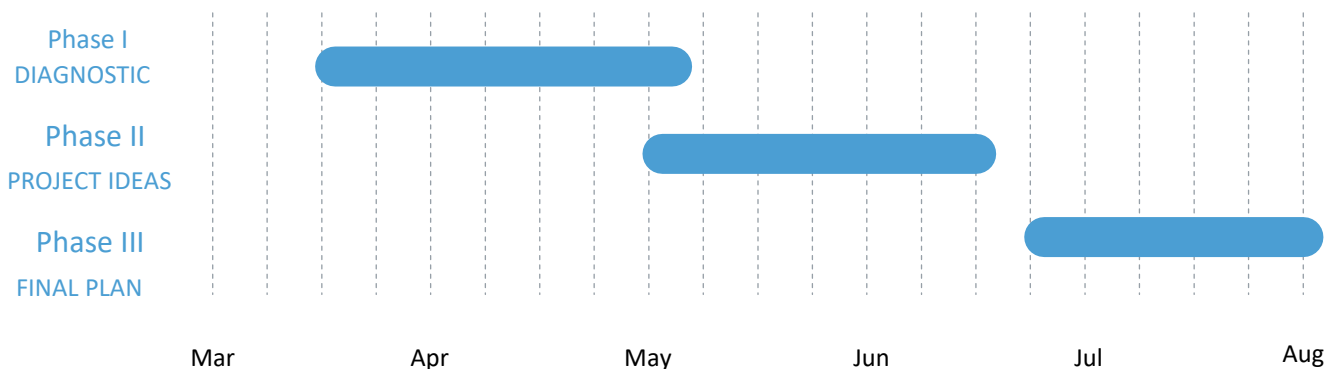
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

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

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



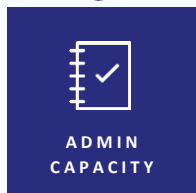
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue/Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Build Back West Brookfield

The COVID-19 pandemic was, and continues to be, an unprecedented experience for all of us. It's economic and personal impact are ongoing and have been felt across the Central Massachusetts region. In April 2020, the unemployment rate for the region reached 15.4%, up 12.5% from April 2019 (MA Department of Unemployment Assistance, Statewide Report Labor Force and Unemployment Rate, April 2020). Small and locally owned business faced the brunt of the economic impact in many places, including the Town of West Brookfield.

To address the hardships facing many small businesses, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) launched the Local Rapid Recovery program. As part of this program, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) and the Town of West Brookfield and various Town stakeholders worked together to identify a section of town most in need of support. For this area, we've worked together to develop short -, medium-, and long-term recommendations to help business in this area begin the process of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

West Brookfield is a small community characterized by its pastoral beauty, working farms, and rural charm. Regionally, it is best known for a handful of unique businesses that serve as a destination and draw visitors to the town.

The Local Rapid Recovery Plan for the town of West Brookfield focuses on the downtown area on Main

Street. The downtown area is currently undergoing complete street renovations which has impacted many of the small businesses . There is a notable lack of parking spaces that has been brought up in community meetings. By focusing on parking local businesses will be supported and there would be more time spent in the downtown area. As a result of the pandemic there has been an impact on the reopening of businesses and those that had to close their doors. The Town of West Brookfield and CMRPC we have put together five project recommendation that would help the town complete the goal of creating a municipal level, comprehensive strategy for supporting the business community.



Figure 1: Overview of the Commons

Town of West Brookfield Study Area

The Study area of West Brookfield focuses on the commons and downtown area. It stretches down Main Street. The study area includes notable town businesses such as the Salem Cross Inn, Ye Olde Tavern, and the West Brookfield Public Library. This is the only study area chosen for contains varying zoning districts such as general commercial, light industrial, Village Center Business, and Village Residential.



Figure 2: Overview oriented towards West Main Street

Town of West Brookfield Study Area Map, 2020

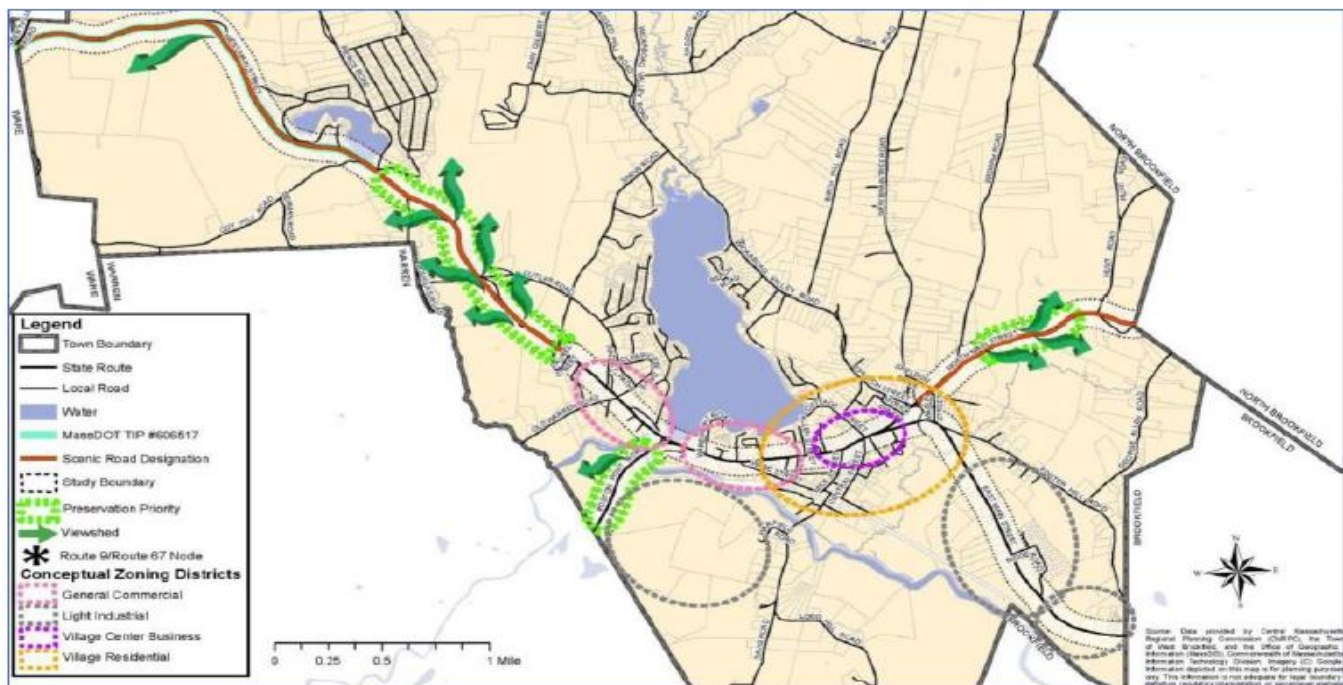


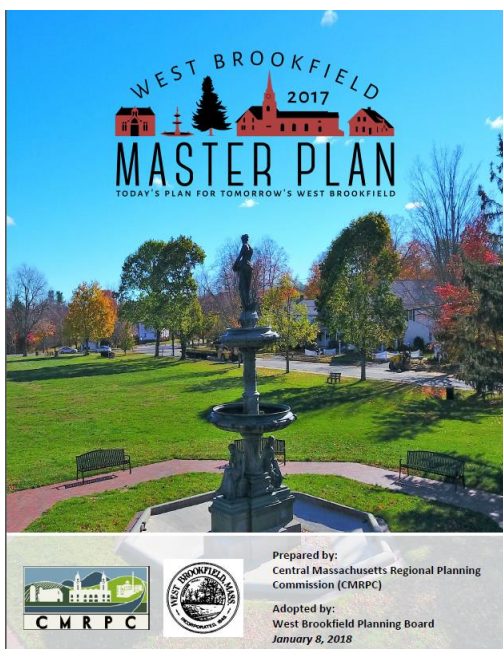
Figure 3 Map of the study area

Diagnostic

Executive Plan

Prior Plans

The town of West Brookfield has gone through extensive work to focus on downtown Development. Prior to the pandemic, West Brookfield was exploring an economic development strategy focused on using agricultural tourism and niche retail to drive visitor ship and spillover spending. This strategy becomes even more necessary, and viable, in the COVID-19 era. Consistent with the recommendations of our 2017 Master Plan, now is the time to create a "town brand" focused on quality of life, food and farms, active and passive outdoor recreation, and physical placemaking. More recently the town has been working on their Village Center District Bylaws. The purpose was to create a sense of place, promote a mixture of residential, office, commercial and mixed use, and tie in a sense of history to the area and community. In 2020, the town underwent a Zoning Review and Revision. This work was impacted by COVID-19 so that is why the recommendations include themes mentioned in prior plans.



Village Center District Bylaw – Town of West Brookfield



Figure 6: Cover for the 2017 West Brookfield Masterplan

Figure 7: Village Center District Bylaw 2019

Physical Environment Overview:

We used a grading system to understand where there are areas of need in West Brookfield. The average grade for the physical area was a C with notable areas of improvement on wayfinding/signage, Outdoor Display/ Dining, and Awning. The physical Environmental Access table showed that sidewalk grades were graded 'B' in comparison to the 'f' for their Awning grade. These grades are useful in understanding what physical aspects has higher priority for the town.

Sidewalks	B
Street Trees and Benches	C
Lighting	C
Wayfinding / Signage	FAIL
Window	C
Outdoor Display / Dining	FAIL
Signage	A
Awning	FAIL
Façade	A
Lighting2	C

Table 1: Grading system of the physical environment

Figure 8: Image of the Ye Olde Tavern



Physical Environment (Access)	Average Annual Daily Vehicular Traffic (2019 or earlier) - Primary Street	9944	N/A
Physical Environment (Access)	Average Annual Daily Vehicular Traffic (2019 or earlier) - Secondary Street		N/A
Physical Environment (Public Realm)	Sidewalk Grade*	B	N/A
Physical Environment (Public Realm)	Street Trees and Benches Grade*	C	N/A
Physical Environment (Public Realm)	Lighting Grade*	C	N/A
Physical Environment (Private Realm)	Total No. of Storefronts	64	N/A
Physical Environment (Private Realm)	Total Ground Floor Retail Space	148496	N/A
Physical Environment (Private Realm)	Total Ground Floor Office Space	355482	N/A
Physical Environment (Private Realm)	Total Ground Floor Manufacturing Space	266996	N/A
Physical Environment (Public Realm)	Wayfinding/Signage Grade*	FAIL	N/A
Physical Environment (Public Realm)	Roadbed and Crosswalks Grade*	B	N/A
Physical Environment (Private Realm)	Window Grade*	C	N/A
Physical Environment (Private Realm)	Outdoor Display/Dining Grade*	FAIL	N/A
Physical Environment (Private Realm)	Signage Grade*	A	N/A
Physical Environment (Private Realm)	Awning Grade*	FAIL	N/A
Market Information (Customer Base)	Total Resident Population (Current/2021 estimates)	1372	4117

Table 2: Physical Environmental Access Table



Business Overview

The Town of West Brookfield has a diverse set of businesses. However, there are notable sectors that have not been tapped into yet. These are Clothing/Accessory businesses, Health and Personal Care Businesses, and Utilities. Within the study area there are 65% number of businesses. There is opportunity for more business diversity in town. It's clear that there are a lot of gaps in businesses.

Table 3: 2020 Business Summary

2020 Business Summary by NAICS	Number of Businesses
2020 Total (NAICS11-99) Businesses	64
2020 Agric/Forestry/Fish/Hunting (NAICS11) Businesses	2
2020 Mining (NAICS21) Businesses	0
2020 Utilities (NAICS22) Businesses	0
2020 Construction (NAICS23) Businesses	1
2020 Manufacturing (NAICS31-33) Businesses	3
2020 Wholesale Trade (NAICS42) Businesses	1
2020 Retail Trade (NAICS44-45) Businesses	11
2020 Motor Vehicle/Parts Dealers (NAICS441) Businesses	1
2020 Furniture/Home Furnishings (NAICS442) Businesses	0
2020 Electronics/Appliances (NAICS443) Businesses	0
2020 Bldg Material/Garden Equip&Suppl (NAICS444) Businesses	2
2020 Food & Beverage Stores (NAICS445) Businesses	3
2020 Health/Personal Care (NAICS446) Businesses	0
2020 Gas Stations (NAICS447) Businesses	1
2020 Clothing/Accessories (NAICS448) Businesses	0
2020 Sports/Hobby/Book/Music (NAICS451) Businesses	1
2020 General Merchandise Stores (NAICS452) Businesses	0
2020 Misc Store Retailers (NAICS453) Businesses	3
2020 Nonstore Retailers (NAICS454) Businesses	1
2020 Transportation/Warehouse (NAICS48-49) Businesses	1
2020 Information (NAICS51) Businesses	2
2020 Finance & Insurance (NAICS52) Businesses	3
2020 Central Bank/Crdt Intermediatn(NAICS521-522) Businesses	1
2020 Securities/Commodity Contracts (NAICS523) Businesses	0
2020 Insur/Funds/Trusts/Other (NAICS524-525) Businesses	2
2020 Real Estate/Rental/Leasing (NAICS53) Businesses	2
2020 Prof/Scientific/Tech Srv (NAICS54) Businesses	3
2020 Legal Services (NAICS5411) Businesses	2
2020 Mgmt of Companies/Enterprises (NAICS55) Businesses	0
2020 Admin/Support/Waste Mgmt&Remediatn (NAICS56) Businesses	0
2020 Educational Services (NAICS61) Businesses	1
2020 Health Care/Social Assistance (NAICS62) Businesses	9
2020 Arts/Entertainment/Recreation (NAICS71) Businesses	1
2020 Accommodation/Food Services (NAICS72) Businesses	5
2020 Accommodation (NAICS721) Businesses	1
2020 Food Srv & Drinking Places (NAICS722) Businesses	4
2020 Other Srv excl Public Admin (NAICS81) Businesses	9
2020 Automotive Repair & Maint (NAICS8111) Businesses	1
2020 Public Administration (NAICS92) Businesses	5
2020 Unclassified Establishments (NAICS99) Businesses	3



Business Survey Report

This report provides survey results of a business survey conducted during March and April of 2021. The survey was separated into 3 different sections. Sections asked surveyed businesses how they feel about the walkability, façade improvements, and general business characteristics.

Business Input Related to Possible Strategies (cont'd)

Attraction/Retention of Customers and Businesses
The charts below illustrate the average rating among respondents regarding importance of various strategies.



Figure 9: Business Very Results

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	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	1	33%
Satisfied	2	67%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Condition of Private Buildings, Facades, Storefronts, Signage		
Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%
Satisfied	3	100%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Access for Customers & Employees		
Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%
Satisfied	3	100%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees		
Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	1	33%
Satisfied	1	33%
Very Satisfied	1	33%
Total	3	100%

Proximity to Complementary Businesses or Uses		
Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	2	67%
Satisfied	1	33%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Figure 10: Business Survey results

Less Foot Traffic in Commercial Area

33% of businesses had less on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID.

33% of businesses reported a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more.

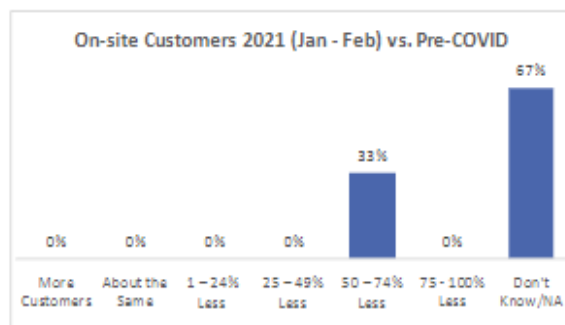


Figure 11: Business Survey Results



Customer Base in West Brookfield

Consumer Overview

When we look at the consistent consumer demographics for the town of West Brookfield we can see that most of the population is in 50 and up Category. The Median age since the 2010 census has gone up two years demonstrating the continuously aging population. Most of the population within our study area has at least a high school diploma, the next largest demographic has Bachelor Degrees.



Figure 12: Asparagus Festival 2012

2020 Key Demographic Indicators (Esri)		
2020 Average Household Size (Esri)	2.33	2.41
2020 Educational Attainment Base (Esri)	1047	3,127
Graduate/Professional Degree (Esri)	73	333
Bachelor's Degree (Esri)	235	734
Associate's Degree (Esri)	89	261
Some College/No Degree (Esri)	138	444
High School Diploma (Esri)	371	983
GED/Alternative Credential (Esri)	33	124
9-12th Grade/No Diploma (Esri)	82	174
Less than 9th Grade (Esri)	26	74

Table 4: 2020 Key Demographics Indicator

2020 Key Demographic Indicators (Esri)	
2020 Total Population (Esri)	4,117
2020 Median Household Income (Esri)	\$70,073
2010 Age: 5 Year Increments (U.S. Census)	
2010 Median Age (U.S. Census)	46.7
2020 Median Age (Esri)	48.9
2020 Total Population Age 18+ (Esri)	3,405
2020 Median Household Income (Esri)	\$70,073
2010 Age: 5 Year Increments (U.S. Census)	
2010 Median Age (U.S. Census)	46.7
2020 Median Age (Esri)	48.9
2020 Total Population Age 18+ (Esri)	3,405

Table 5: 2020 Key Demographic Indicator

Key Findings



Potential for Physical Development Improvements

West Brookfield received the highest grade for its signage and façade. However, it failed its wayfinding, outdoor dining, and its awnings. Overall, the average grade for West Brookfield was a C and leaves room for improvements to be made. Specifically, focusing on the façade of the town and potentially unifying the awnings.



Transportation

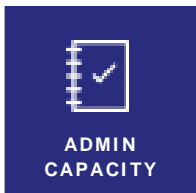
In 2019, a study was done in West Brookfield that found the average traffic to be 6,817 cars per day. The highest traffic recording showed that there were 9,944 cars per day. The number of cars traveling to West Brookfield proves that there is an opportunity to invest in streets and parking. There is currently complete streets development down main street that is encouraging seamless walkability in the town. When speaking with residents many raised concerns about the dwindling parking spaces as the complete streets work has been continuing.





An Aging Population

The total number of residents that live in the study area is 66 % of the total population in West Brookfield. Most of the population is between the ages of 50-64. While the second highest age demographic is between the ages of 65-69. This impacts the type of development that would be best suited for the study area. Future improvements should be focused around accessibility and walkability. It should also focus on ways to help bring in younger adults into the town.



There is a Gap in Admin capacity

There is no formal organization in our study area that provide resources and support to the local businesses. Some may be a part of the business group through the Quaboag valley CDC, but there are many businesses who are still not a part of a formal group or committee. There are many different sub-committee, but a lack of capacity for small businesses development.



Diversify and Aid Local Businesses

The business survey was taken by three business in West Brookfield. This is not a full representation of all the businesses wants or needs, but it's a start to recognize the various needs and improvements for them. Businesses were impacted by the complete streets construction that has been in the works. They are largely impacted by the lack of parking spaces available.

Project Recommendations

Complete a Parking Study in the Downtown





Category	 Public Realm
Location	Downtown West Brookfield
Origin	Planning Board, CMRPC
Budget	 Low (<\$15,000)
Timeframe	 Short (6 months-1 year)
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Number of actions taken up by the town that were recommended by the study.
Partners & Resources	Planning Board, Highway Department, EMS, CMRPC



Figure 13: Overview of the West Brookfield Study Area



Figure 14: Parking example

Diagnostic

A key to providing better foot traffic to stores in and around the downtown area is to understand and provide adequate parking for residents outside of a walkable area. Instead of having vehicles go from store to store, as was the case during the COVID pandemic, finding new parking each time, having a centralized public parking area is key to reducing vehicles on the road while maximizing shoppers, visitors, and residents at one of the many cultural and civic landmarks in the downtown. The goal of the parking study is to understand where the parking currently exists, where the demand is, and recommendations on how to meet future demand in a sustainable manner. Parking studies engage businesses, residents, town officials, and other stakeholders to understand the shortfalls and excess parking needs. A study will also look at available land for potential public parking lots that can handle vehicles during the workday and the weekend.

Process

Completing a Parking Study can be done in-house or for less than \$15,000 with a contractor. Steps to complete a parking study include:

- Complete initial field work, counting existing parking spots of all types within a project area
- Complete traffic counts of vehicles at various points along a defined corridor.
- Engage with multiple stakeholders on parking concerns and future needs.
- Analyze data and outreach to form recommendations for parking improvements
- Complete plan with project recommendations for future actions and get final approval from the Select Board and/or Planning Board.

Implement a Façade Improvement Program

Category	 Public & Private Realm
Location	West Brookfield Downtown
Origin	West Brookfield LRRP Study Group, Business Owners
Budget	 Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe	 Medium (<5 years)
Risk	 Medium
Key Performance Indicators	Increased foot and bicycle traffic in the downtown, increased patrons in nearby businesses and downtown overall.
Partners & Resources	Town Boards and Committees, Residents, Business and Property Owners, Town Staff



Figure 15: Streetview of Study Area

Diagnostic

West Brookfield received a “A” for its signage, but “failed” its awning review. This highlights the need for a new uniformed façade program. West Brookfield is home to a diverse set of businesses and mixed-use buildings .

Creating a façade improvement program will find an affordable way for general improvements, while still preserving the character of the town. By utilizing state funding, West Brookfield will be able to benefit from façade improvements. Attractive Facades are important to placemaking

Process

To establish a façade improvement the Town of West Brookfield should begin by:

- The first thing is to identify who will manage the implementation of a new façade program. Whether that be someone apart of town government, or a subcommittee of volunteers
- Develop Design Guidelines and decide if they will be using an outside contractor. Figure out which property owners would want to take part in the program. Utilize community input and open forums to ensure that residents are being heard.
- Identify funding sources to be able to develop the program. Some examples of funding sources are:
- Utilize the Community One Stop for Growth for funds.
- Utilize the Massachusetts Historical Tax Credit for funds.

Create a Local Business Group





Category	 Revenue & Sales
Location	Throughout Downtown West Brookfield
Origin	West Brookfield Business Owners, CMRPC
Budget	 Small
Timeframe	 Short (less than one year for group start-up)
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Number of businesses joined, Number of employees retained, and Annual revenues
Partners & Resources	Town of West Brookfield, Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce, South Central Worcester Chamber of Commerce



Figure 16: Streetview of Main Street In West Brookfield

Action Items

The formation of a local business group for West Brookfield business owners will allow for greater communication and identification of area wide needs throughout the business environment in town. The group would be made up primarily by business owners but could also include property owners and a representative from the town. A town representative is key to conveying the needs of the group to elected officials.

Action Items for the Local Business Group include:





- Launching a business support website
- Collaborate on marketing efforts
- Develop outdoor seating and shopping initiatives.
- Identify present and future needs of local businesses and lobby for change at the local level.

Process

Process:

- Establish the Local Business Group and provide the group an initial place to meet while going through the formation process
- Create a web page and communication strategy using multiple platforms and languages to effectively reach businesses and residents.
- Create a shared marketing strategy
- Leverage local government and business partnerships to meet unprecedented business needs relative to outdoor dining, curbside pickup, and implementation of public health efforts
- Advertise available resources, such as local, state, and federal grant programs and assistance available from area financial institutions.

Create an Economic Development Committee

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Town Hall
Origin	West Brookfield Planning Board, West Brookfield 2017 Master Plan, CMRPC
Budget	 Small (limited budget for resources may be required)
Timeframe	 Short (2-3 months for committee formation)
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Number of events planned by the committee
Partners & Resources	CMRPC, Planning Board, Select Board, Local Business Owners (North Brookfield Downtown Development Committee for initial assistance)

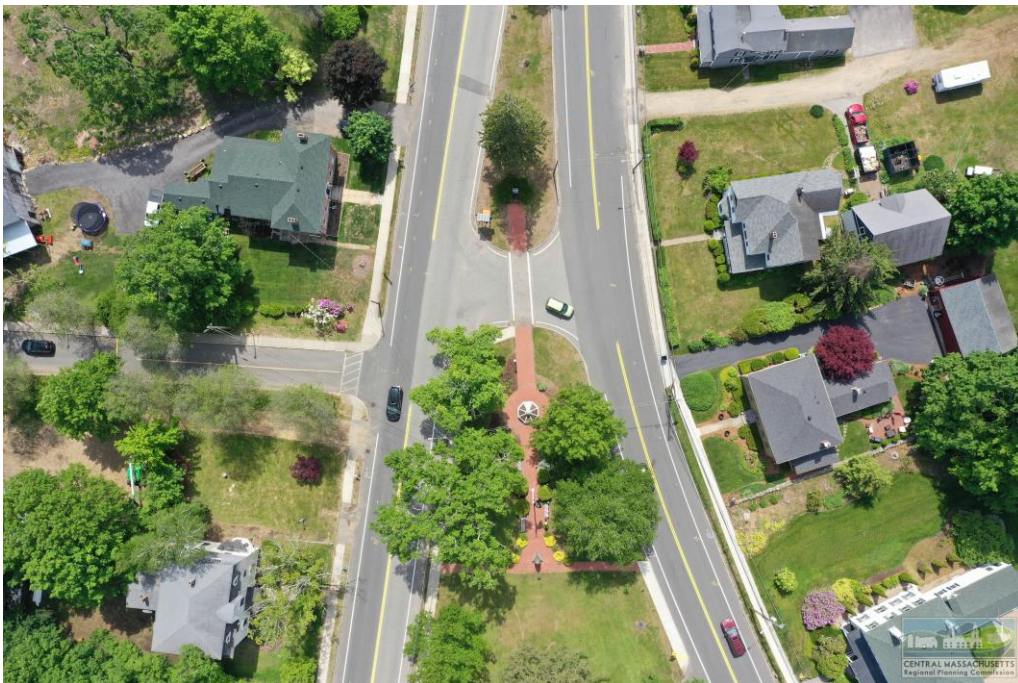


Figure 17: Overview of the commons in West Brookfield

Action Items

:

- An Economic Development Committee, or a Downtown Development Committee, which is separate from the Planning Board is a vital tool in the ongoing covid recovery efforts and for long-term economic development planning in town. Comprised of town volunteers from the business and residential sectors will meet monthly and can discuss and plan, among other things, the following:
- Town-Wide Events
- Writing and submitting development/cultural/art related/ and other grant applications
- Review of economic development opportunities at the state and federal level
- Conduct reviews and analysis of existing business environment and submit recommendations for improvements to the Select Board

Process

- To establish an Economic Development Committee or Downtown Development Committee, the Town should go through the following process:
- Conduct outreach to businesses and residents to gauge interest in an EDC or DDC
- Review existing town committees such as the Planning Board and Select Board to determine which roles and responsibilities best fit an EDC or DDC.
- Decide whether this will be an Ad-hoc committee or if members will be appointed by the Select Board.
- Once the committee is formed, their first task should be to develop a plan on how the committee will operate, what their main objectives are, and what projects and goals to focus on.

Website and Communication Improvements

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Town Hall
Origin	Select Board, Planning Board, CMRPC
Budget	 Low (<\$50,000)
Timeframe	 Short (<1 year)
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Website and newsletter engagement
Partners & Resources	Town boards and committees



Figure 18: The current West Brookfield Website



Figure 19: West Brookfield Bulletin in front of Town Hall

Diagnostic

With more public events opening back up, greater public participation in public meetings, and greater awareness of important business improvement opportunities available in town, it's more important than ever to have a functioned and well-maintained website and social media presence to communicated with businesses and residents alike. While the only financial costs associated with increased communication efforts would be to operate a website, considerable work needs to be done to maintain and regularly update the website and social media. This can be completed by having multiple department heads or administrative assistants have access to the website, social media, and have completed training on how to operate the platforms. Having a social media presence will allow for residents to gain up-to date information on town matters, and a well maintained website can provide the public and businesses with official resources, documents, and other matters pursuant to Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Process

The process of improving website and communication efforts is easy:

- Determine internally who will be responsible for website updates and maintenance. Consider hiring an outside firm to either re-design the existing town website or utilize an existing government website platform (such as CivicsPlus).
- Once list of staff responsible for website maintenance is determined, form a website committee who will meet, discuss changes, and implement changes.
- Create a maintenance plan for regular updating and maintenance by a group of employees, not a single employee responsible for all updates.
- Create a social media account(s) to serve as the official town social media page (consider Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).
- Regularly update social media account(s) with pertinent dates, events, meetings, and information.

Update Zoning Bylaw

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Town Wide
Origin	West Brookfield 2017 Master Plan
Budget	 Low (minimal budget required)
Timeframe	 Short (~1 year)
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Adoption of Zoning Bylaw Amendments at Town Meeting
Partners & Resources	Planning Board, Select Board, CMRPC



Figure 20: Streetview of the study area



Diagnostic

Many of the improvements to the public and private realm throughout the pandemic involved providing more space for shoppers, diners, and pedestrians to maintain health and wellness requirements. Many building uses changed as well, as office workers increasingly worked from home, shoppers ordered online, restaurants offered curbside delivery, and even church communions were served outside. Now as the town transitions to a 'new normal,' it's important the town address within its zoning bylaw the changes that were well received and remove those that did not seem effective. Changes to what uses are allowed in the downtown, design requirements, and what can or can't be done without special permit should reflect a new way of living, working, and playing in West Brookfield's downtown. Completing this will also support a goal of the 2017 Master Plan.

Process

- The Planning Board can either complete the following in-house or by hiring a consultant to review and propose changes.
- Discussions with town, business, and residential officials should take place to determine what does and doesn't work with the existing zoning by-laws.
- Review the bylaw to determine which, if any, sections conflict with one another, and determine which to amend.
- Consult with stakeholders to determine what changes should be made for the good of the public and private realms.
- Revise zoning bylaws and present to the town at a town meeting for approval or rejection.
- Once the bylaw has been approved at Town Meeting, submit the revised bylaw for approval by the State Attorney's Office.

Create an Economic Development Strategy

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Town Wide
Origin	West Brookfield 2017 Master Plan
Budget	 Low (<\$50,000)
Timeframe	 Short (<1 year)
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Adoption of the strategy by the Select Board and/or Planning Board and the number of recommendations implemented by the Town
Partners & Resources	Planning Board, Select Board, CMRPC, Quaboag Hills CoC, South Central Worcester CoC



Figure 21: First Congregational Church in West Brookfield



Figure 22: Overview of the commons oriented towards town hall

Diagnostic

An Economic Development Strategy (EDS) can be completed before or after the creation of an economic development committee/downtown development committee. The purpose of an EDS is to create a vision for the economic vitality of West Brookfield and to propose improvements to drive sustainable growth and change in town. It should be seen as a more detailed and wider reaching sequel to this RRP plan. The plan, when developed, would give the Economic Development Committee/Downtown Development Committee, Select Board, and Planning Board a direction for how best to continue recovery efforts, growth efforts, and how to best provide the right type of improvements in town that match the town's Master Plan and other planning efforts.

Process

This can either be completed in-house by a number of committees or by a consultant.

- Assemble a group of 6-12 key stakeholders from town hall, local businesses, and residents to serve as a steering committee of the strategy.
- Create a list of key milestones to follow in the development and implementation of the plan.
- Weigh economic and demographic data through research, field work, analysis, and important forecasting.
- Look at the natural assets of the town that can weigh in and influence the goals of the strategy.
- Look at previous growth in the town and existing needs of the residents to influence the vision for the future.
- Complete a SWOT analysis to ensure that all goals and weaknesses in town are captured.
- Public input and community meetings should be held throughout the strategy process.
- Present the final plan at a Select Board meeting for final approval.

Festival Revival





Category		Public, Private Realms, and Cultural
Location	Downtown West Brookfield, Town Common	
Origin	Planning Board, Business Owners	
Budget		Low (<\$50,000)
Timeframe		Short (2-3 months of preparation per festival)
Risk		Low
Key Performance Indicators	Increased revenue from sales at local businesses, attendance at the festivals	
Partners & Resources	Town boards and committees, Business owners	



Figure 22: Asparagus Festival 2012



Figure 23: Asparagus Festival 2012










Diagnostic

- Re-instating cultural and/or holiday related festivals in the downtown, particularly with an open-door component for businesses, is an excellent opportunity for increased foot traffic and sales of downtown businesses. Festivals such as the Asparagus Festival and White Christmas have been well attended with wide appeal from residents and business owners in the past. In a post-COVID environment, care will need to be taken to ensure the health and safety of all involved, but it is possible to hold events like these and to include open-door business opportunities.

Process

- In order to improve the permitting and approval process to hold such events, it is recommended that a streamlined 'Events and Festival Committee' comprised of representatives from Highway Department, Planning Board, Police, Fire, Board of Health, and a Downtown Development or Economic Development Committee be formed to meet when a festival or pop-up event is being planned.
- The Events and Festival Committee will coordinate with Town officials managing the town's website and social media to properly advertise the events.
- Coordinate with local businesses to properly plan and prepare for an influx of residents and visitors during the festival operating times.

Where a placeholder image box has been included for an icon on a page, please replace with one of the following appropriate icons listed below. Select icon and ‘Copy’. Go to placeholder icon box on the template page, right click and ‘Paste’ directly into placeholder box.

Budget			
	Low	Medium	High
Timeframe			
	Short	Medium	Long
Risk			
	Low	Medium	High

Other

Diagnostic
Category



CUSTOMER
BASE



BUSINESS
ENVIRONMENT



PHYSICAL
ENVIRONMENT



ADMIN
CAPACITY

Project
Category



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue/Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

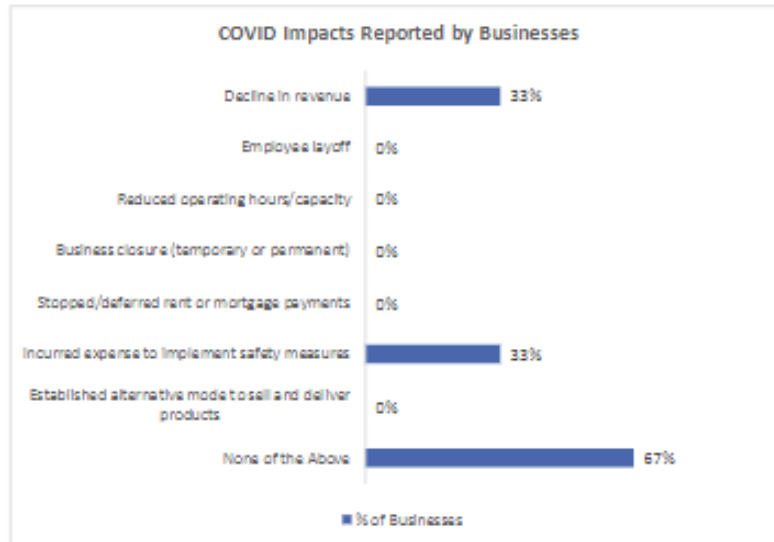
Appendix

Business Survey Results

Impacts of COVID-19 (cont'd)

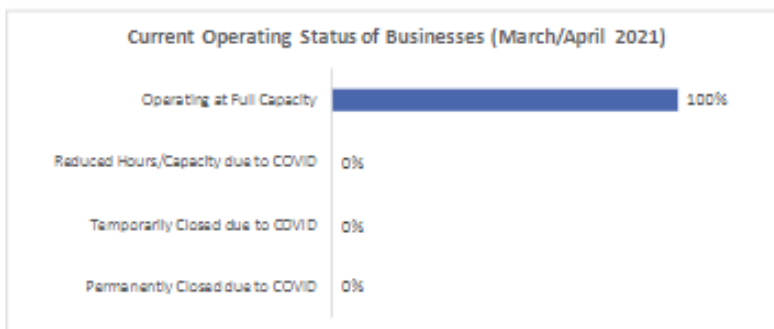
Reported Impacts

33% of businesses reported being impacted by COVID.



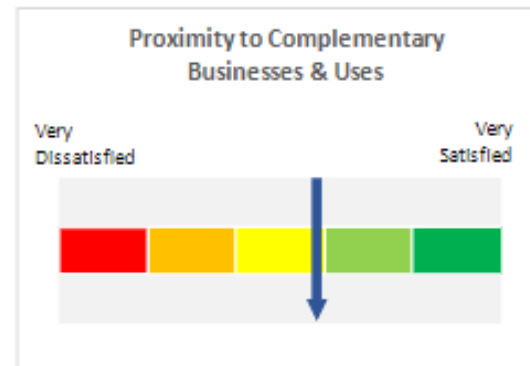
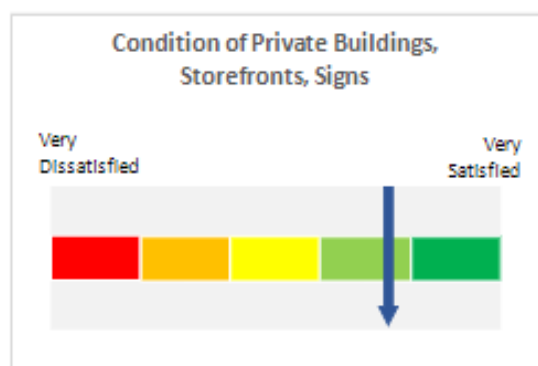
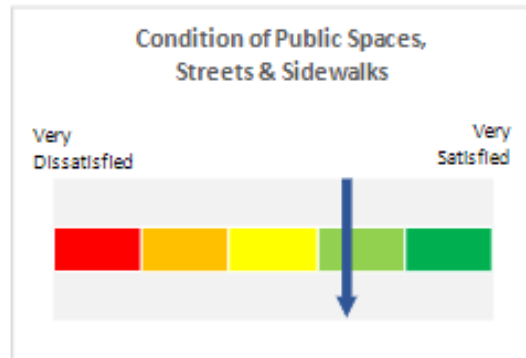
Operating Status

At the time of the survey, 0% of businesses reported they were operating at reduced hours/capacity or closed.



Business Satisfaction with Commercial District

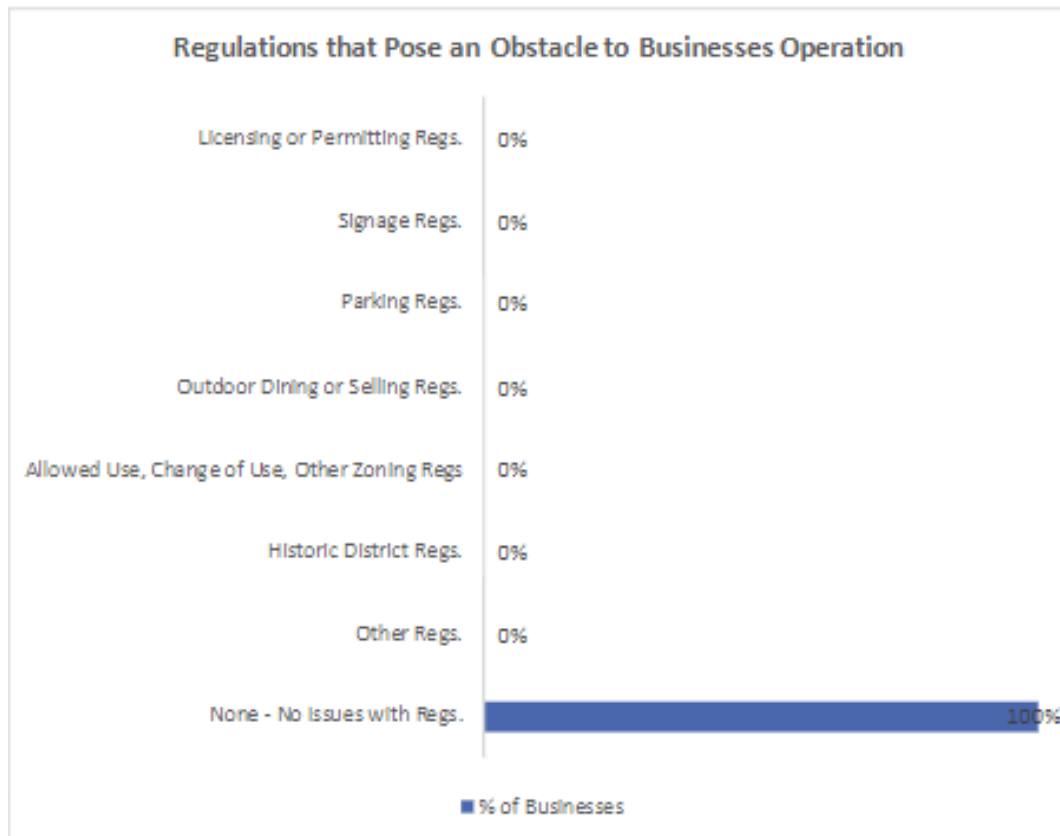
The charts below illustrate the average satisfaction rating among respondents regarding various elements.



Business Satisfaction with Commercial District (cont'd)

Regulatory Environment

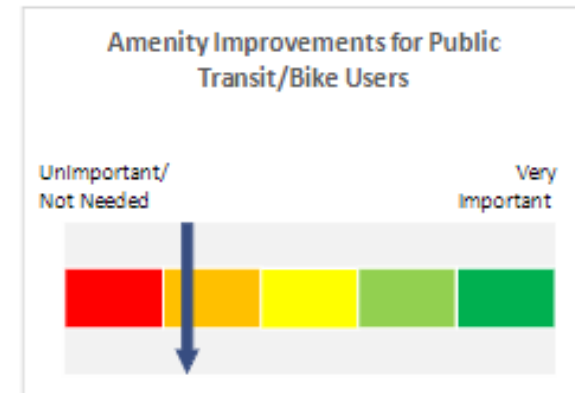
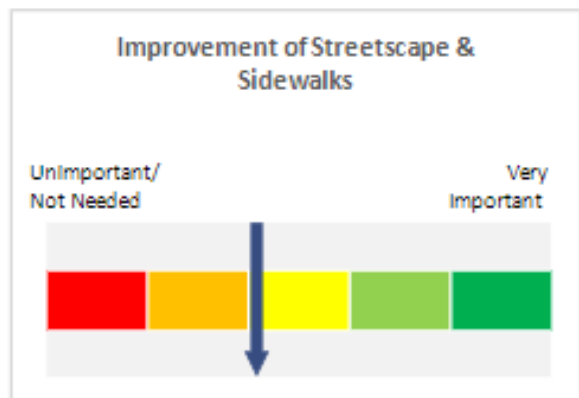
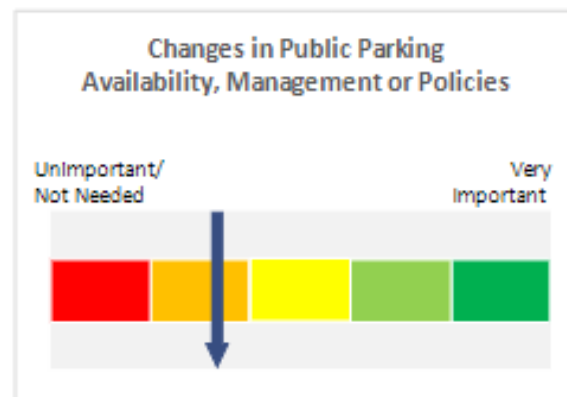
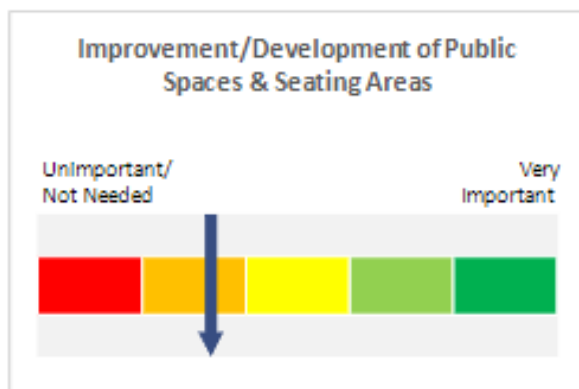
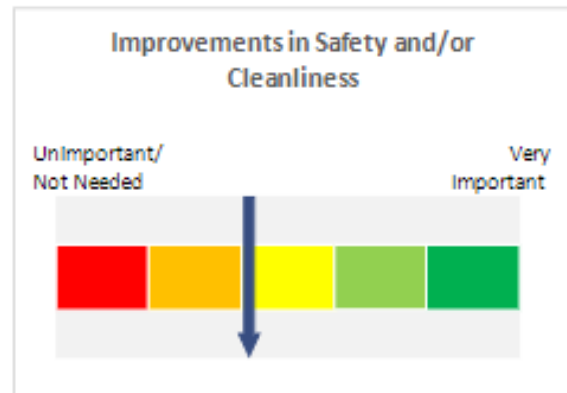
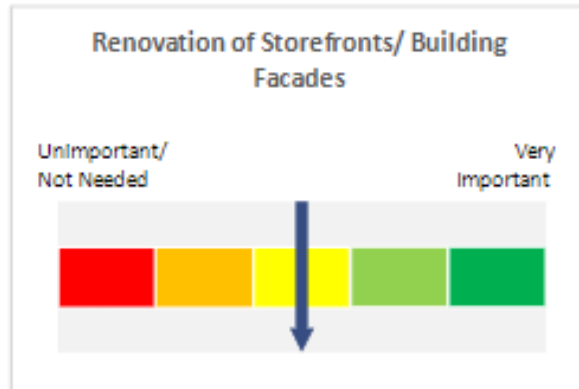
0% of businesses indicated that the regulatory environment poses an obstacle to business operation.



Business Input Related to Possible Strategies

Physical Environment, Atmosphere and Access

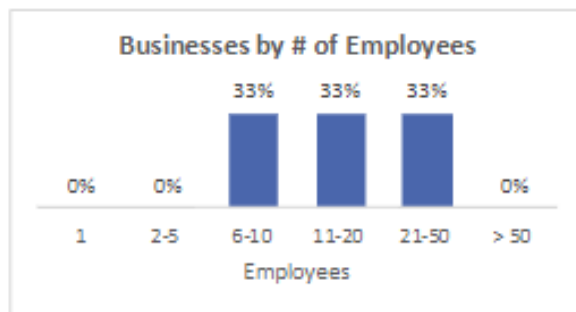
The charts below illustrate the average rating among respondents regarding importance of various strategies.



Business Characteristics

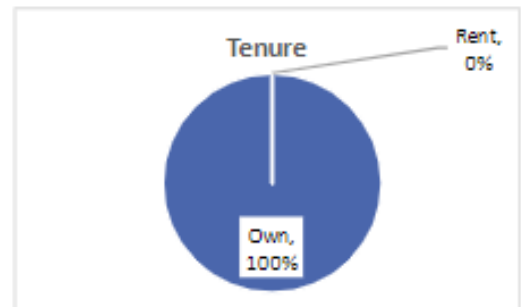
Business Size

0% of businesses are microenterprises (≤ 5 employees).



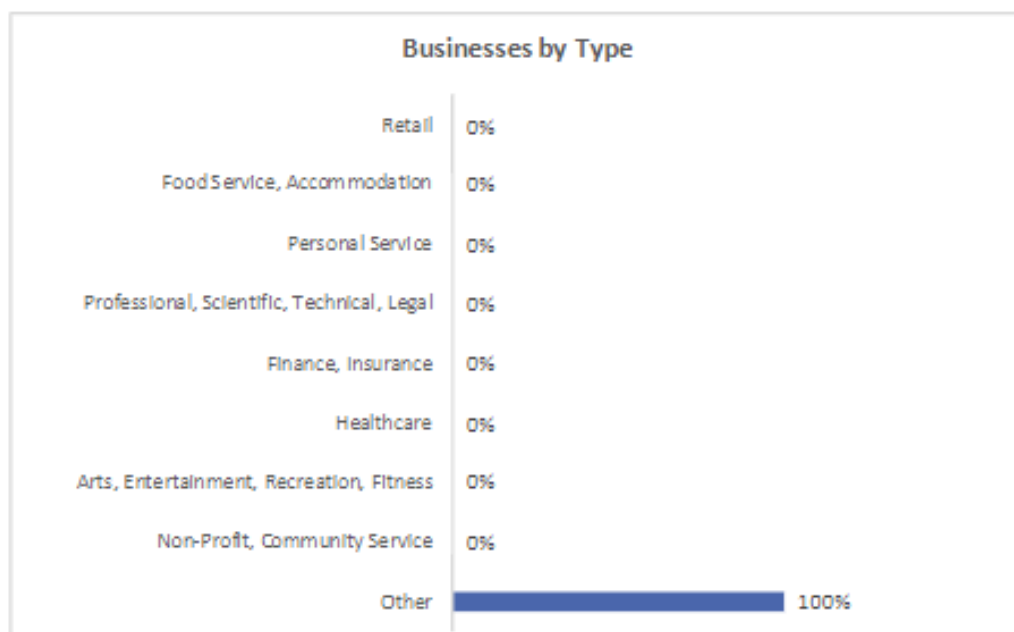
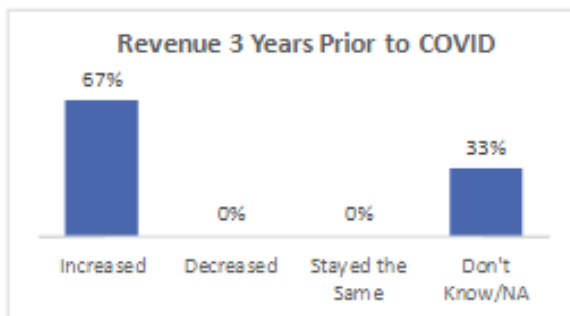
Business Tenure

0% of businesses rent their space.



Revenue Trend Prior to COVID

67% of businesses reported increase in revenue during the 3 years prior to COVID.



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	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	1	33%
Satisfied	2	67%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Condition of Private Buildings, Facades, Storefronts, Signage

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%
Satisfied	3	100%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Access for Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%
Satisfied	3	100%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	1	33%
Satisfied	1	33%
Very Satisfied	1	33%
Total	3	100%

Proximity to Complementary Businesses or Uses

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	2	67%
Satisfied	1	33%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

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

Condition of public spaces, streets, sidewalks

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	1	33%
Satisfied	2	67%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Condition of Private Buildings, Facades, Storefronts, Signage

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%
Satisfied	3	100%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Access for Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%
Satisfied	3	100%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	1	33%
Satisfied	1	33%
Very Satisfied	1	33%
Total	3	100%

Proximity to Complementary Businesses or Uses

Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Neutral	2	67%
Satisfied	1	33%
Very Satisfied	0	0%
Total	3	100%

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

Licensing or permitting regulations	0	0%
Signage regulations	0	0%
Parking regulations	0	0%
Outdoor dining or selling regulations	0	0%
Allowed uses, change of use or other zoning regulations	0	0%
Historic District regulations	0	0%
Other regulations (not related to COVID)	0	0%
None - No Issues with regulations	3	100%

Impacts of COVID

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

Decline in revenue	1	33%
Employee layoff	0	0%
Reduced operating hours/capacity	0	0%
Business closure (temporary or permanent)	0	0%
Stopped/deferred rent or mortgage payments	0	0%
Incurred expense to implement safety measures	1	33%
Established alternative mode to sell and deliver products (on-line platforms, delivery, etc.)	0	0%
None of the Above	2	67%

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

Increased compared to 2019	1	33%
Stayed about the same as 2019	0	0%
Decreased 1 – 24% compared to 2019	1	33%
Decreased 25 – 49% compared to 2019	0	0%
Decreased 75 - 100% compared to 2019	0	0%
Decreased 50 – 74% compared to 2019	0	0%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	1	33%
Total	3	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	0	0%
1 – 24% less customers than before COVID	0	0%
25 – 49% less customers than before COVID	0	0%
50 – 74% less customers than before COVID	1	33%
75 – 100% less customers than before COVID	0	0%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	2	67%
Total	3	100%

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

Operating at full capacity	3	100%
Operating at reduced hours/capacity due to COVID	0	0%
Temporarily closed due to COVID	0	0%
Permanently closed due to COVID	0	0%
Total	3	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	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	3	100%
Important	0	0%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Improvement/Development of Public Spaces & Seating Areas

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	33%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	2	67%
Important	0	0%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Improvement of Streetscape & Sidewalks

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	33%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	1	33%
Important	1	33%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Improvements in Safety and/or Cleanliness

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	33%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	1	33%
Important	1	33%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Changes in Public Parking Availability, Management or Policies

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	33%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	2	67%
Important	0	0%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Amenity Improvements for Public Transit Users and/or Bike Riders

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	50%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	1	50%
Important	0	0%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	2	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	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	3	100%
Important	0	0%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	100%

More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining and Selling

Unimportant/Not Needed	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	0	0%
Moderately Important	3	100%
Important	0	0%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	33%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	33%
Moderately Important	1	33%
Important	0	0%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	100%

Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses

Unimportant/Not Needed	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	1	33%
Moderately Important	2	67%
Important	0	0%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	100%

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

Unimportant/Not Needed	1	33%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	67%
Moderately Important	0	0%
Important	0	0%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	100%

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

Unimportant/Not Needed	0	0%
Of Little Importance or Need	2	67%
Moderately Important	1	33%
Important	0	0%
Very Important	0	0%
Total	3	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	0	0%
Creating new services such as delivery	0	0%
Participating in shared marketing/advertising	0	0%
Low-cost financing for storefront/façade improvements	0	0%
Low-cost financing for purchasing property in the commercial district	0	0%
Training on the use of social media	0	0%
None of the above	3	100%