



Rapid Recovery Plan

City of Worcester
October 2021

Acknowledgments



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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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Executive Summary



Photo Credit: Cejo Gutierrez (Instagram @caiogutierre)

Executive Summary

Local Rapid Recovery on a Statewide Scale

Like thousands of communities across the United States, Massachusetts' towns and cities experienced months of significant financial loss during the COVID-19 pandemic as business districts had to temporarily close and then face extended periods of safety-related measures that limited visitation. For many businesses, this meant permanent closure. Others were aided by federal and state programs, working diligently to keep their livelihoods intact during a very difficult period. These difficulties were particularly notable in New England where historic village centers have defined communities for generations. Over 350 distinct jurisdictions make up the Commonwealth, and nearly every place has at least one village business district greatly impacted by COVID-19. Every one faces serious challenges recovering from the pandemic. Fortunately, the LRRP is a tremendous opportunity to leverage upcoming stimulus dollars for downtown benefits across the state.

While hundreds of distinct districts are a challenge to address systematically, this diversity is a natural strength for Massachusetts. Every affected downtown is the crossroads for its broader community—typically a compact and walkable place where vacancies may be readily visible but where every business knows each other and has come together to face the pandemic. The interdependencies are quickly evident when talking with local stakeholders who take ownership of their village centers. Working with municipal officials, LRRP Plan Facilitators have quickly leveraged the energy of downtown merchants, engaged residents, vested landowners and village organizations to create the solutions within this plan—solutions tailored to the unique character of this place. Worcester, like over 120 other communities in Massachusetts, now has a comprehensive recovery strategy and the momentum to implement lasting change, collectively supporting the entire Commonwealth.

Why Develop a Local Rapid Recovery Plan for Downtown Worcester?

The City of Worcester is on the rise. Downtown Worcester is the heart of the city and an important community and business destination. Through years of planning and investment by the City of Worcester and private owners, the Downtown area has built growing momentum. The formation of the Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District (BID) in 2018 signaled a new era of leadership, advocacy, and promotion.

Soon after the BID's formation, however, the pandemic struck and halted progress. As office buildings emptied out and events were canceled, Downtown's bustling streets became eerily silent. The BID worked tirelessly to increase its cleaning and beautification efforts despite lockdowns and social distancing.

As public health restrictions have eased, signs of life are returning to Downtown. The

opening of Polar Park, a AAA baseball stadium in the adjacent Canal District, was a signature moment for the City and has been attracting crowds since spring 2021. "Julius Caesar on the Common," a live performance series of the Shakespeare play throughout August, was a huge hit with more demand than space to accommodate everyone. It was produced by the Hanover Theatre Repertory in partnership with the City of Worcester and the BID.

The Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) presents an unique opportunity to catalyze a series of improvements that will mark the next step in the growth of Downtown. The vision for a lively, walkable Downtown neighborhood is becoming more of a reality every day through collaborative partnerships of private, public, and non-profit actors. The LRRP is a critical tool to unlock the next series of transformative projects in Downtown Worcester.

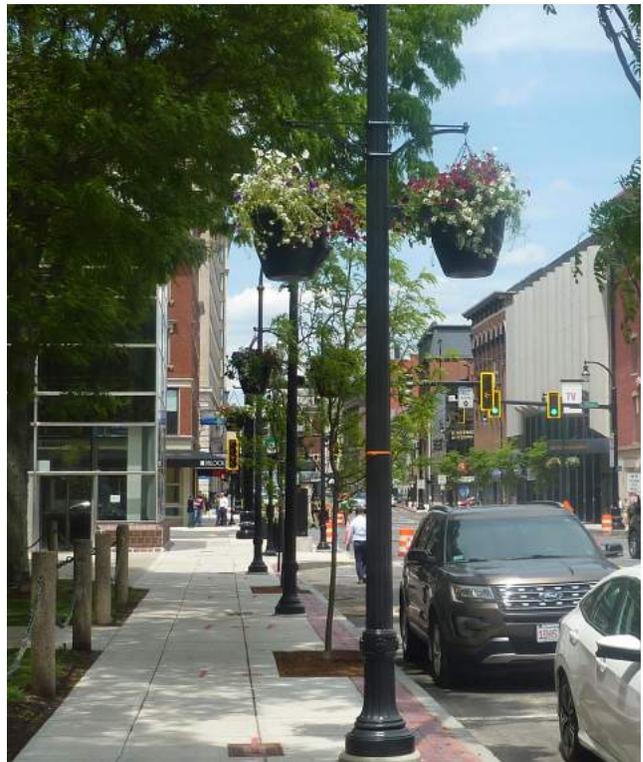


What are the Greatest Needs and How Do They Align with Project Goals?

While Downtown has been transformed in recent years, there is still progress to be made. The building momentum pre-pandemic was halted as public health restrictions shut down most activity. As Downtown re-emerges and seeks to regain that momentum, several areas of particular need were identified that will be crucial to address. Creating a more inviting nighttime atmosphere with improved lighting will help Downtown achieve its vision of becoming an 18-hour, 7-days-a-week neighborhood. Providing pedestrian wayfinding to direct visitors to Downtown's many civic and cultural destinations and unique businesses will boost economic development by improving the visitor experience. Continued progress to make Downtown more walkable are key—gateway improvements to link adjacent neighborhoods, filling vacant storefronts to create a continuous retail streetscape, and activating underused spaces throughout Downtown to create a variety of attractions that appeal to diverse audiences. These needs shaped the LRRP goals and recommended projects.

How Did the LRRP Process Engage with the Community?

The LRRP planning process built on the foundation of outreach and engagement that occurred during the BID's placemaking planning process in 2020 and early 2021. Two community meetings hosted by the BID, one early in the



LRRP process and another toward the end, invited people to learn more about the process and project recommendations. A community survey in September 2021 received more than 100 completed responses from Downtown residents, workers, and visitors that informed the project prioritization.

Throughout the LRRP planning process, the project team worked closely with Downtown Worcester BID and City staff to build on previous successes and chart a realistic path forward. Conversations with property owners and business organizations provided additional information about the needs and opportunities facing Downtown.

What are the Priority Projects That Came from the Plan?

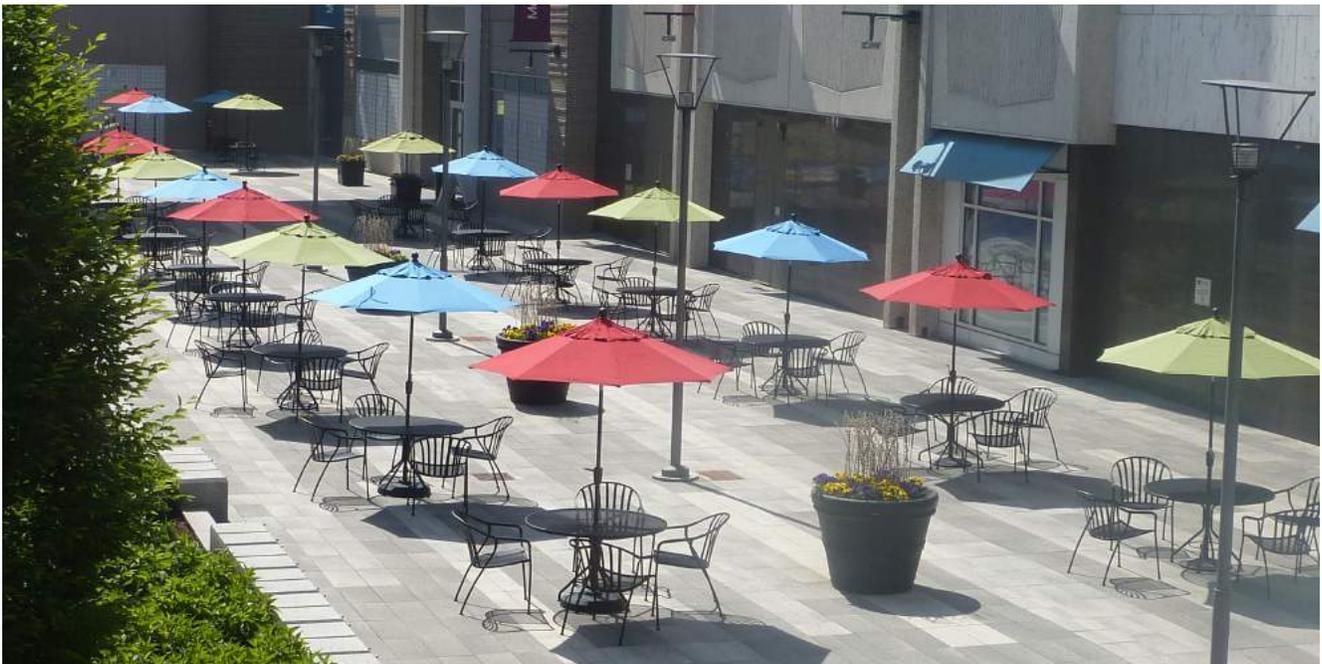
Project priorities were developed by aligning the needs identified in the diagnostic phase, public input, and guidance from Downtown Worcester BID and City staff. Recommendations from the BID's Placemaking Action Plan and Implementation Strategy, completed in spring 2021, also played an important role.

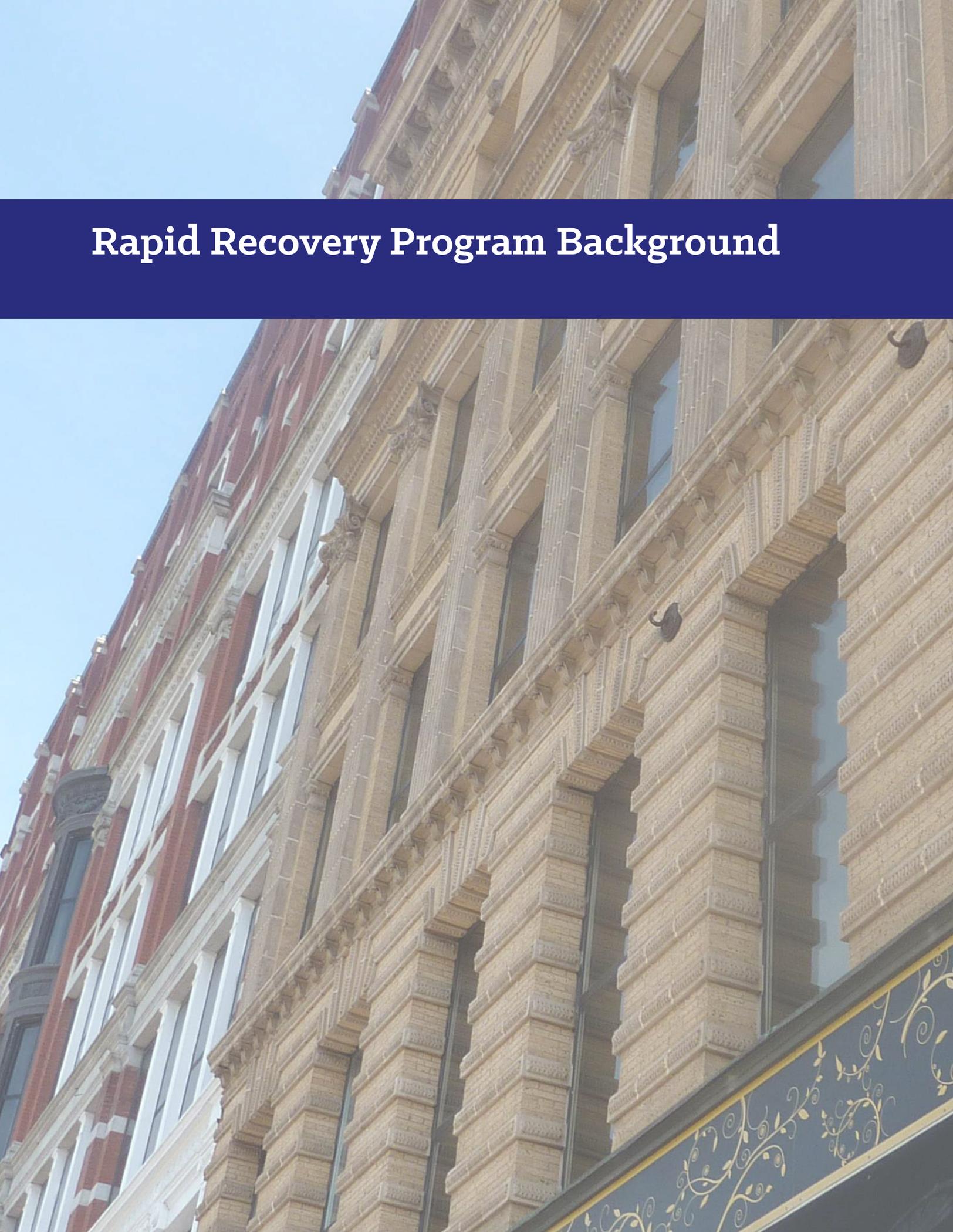
A group of projects emerged as shared priorities. Funding opportunities and partnerships will ultimately direct project implementation. Some of the projects with broad support include:

- Expand outreach to unsheltered population
- Activate underused spaces
- Expand outdoor dining
- Develop targeted tenant recruitment strategy
- Provide public restrooms
- Enhance lighting
- Install pedestrian wayfinding
- Provide DEI training
- Transform Allen Court

What are the Next Steps for Worcester to Implement This Plan?

A set of recommended projects has been developed that addresses Downtown vitality and business community support. Each proposed project description provides key information on project budget, potential timelines, partners and performance indicators, as well as critical action items and processes. Funding sources noted in the project rubrics are resources for the City, BID, and community groups to seek external funding and commence the next phase of project design and implementation. The projects include both short-term and longer-term priorities to address as funding and capacity allows. Worcester is encouraged to pursue funding opportunities immediately for many of these projects to help Downtown overcome COVID-19's impacts and recover its momentum toward becoming a more walkable, inviting, welcoming neighborhood for all.





Rapid Recovery Program Background

125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

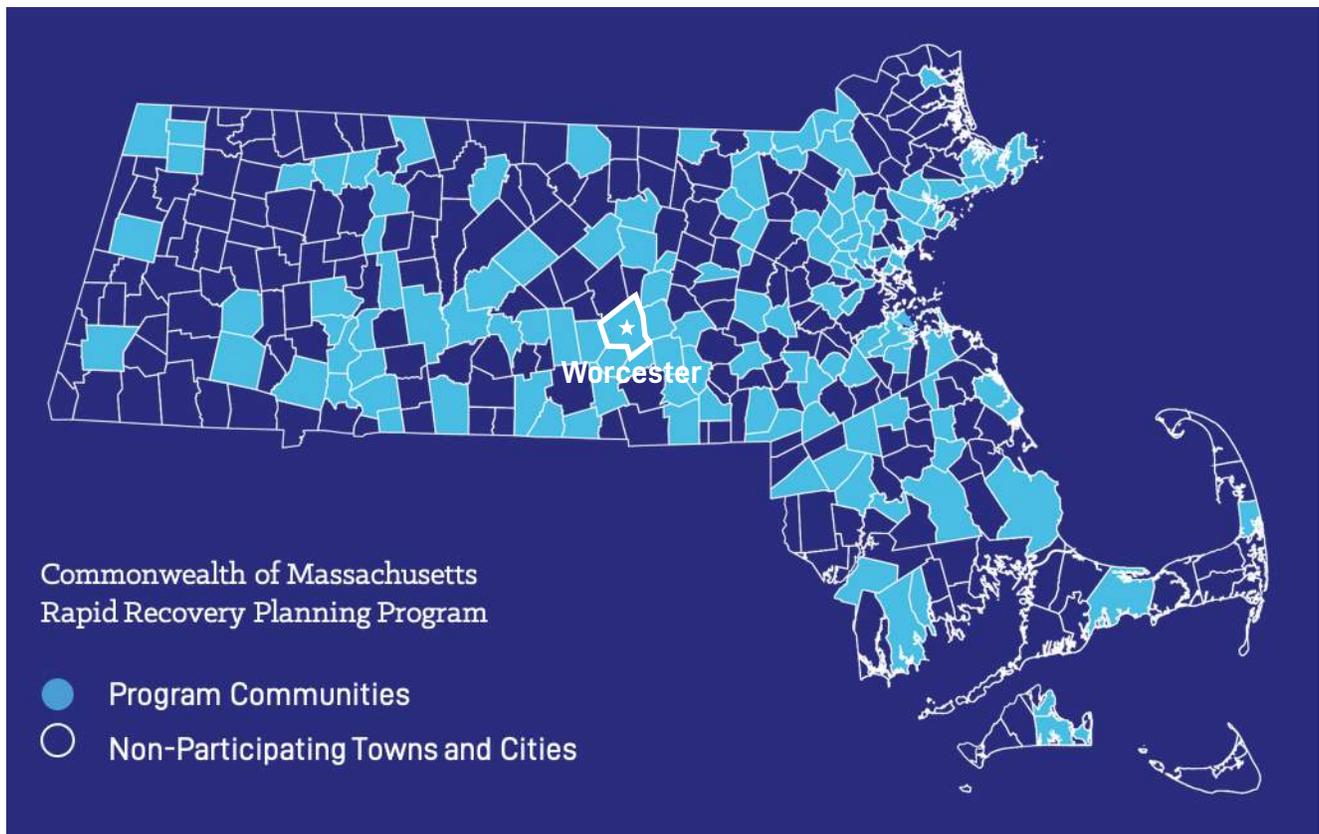
52 Small Communities

51 Medium Communities

16 Large Communities

6 Extra Large Communities (Worcester)

The 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 these downtowns, town centers, and commercial districts.



Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

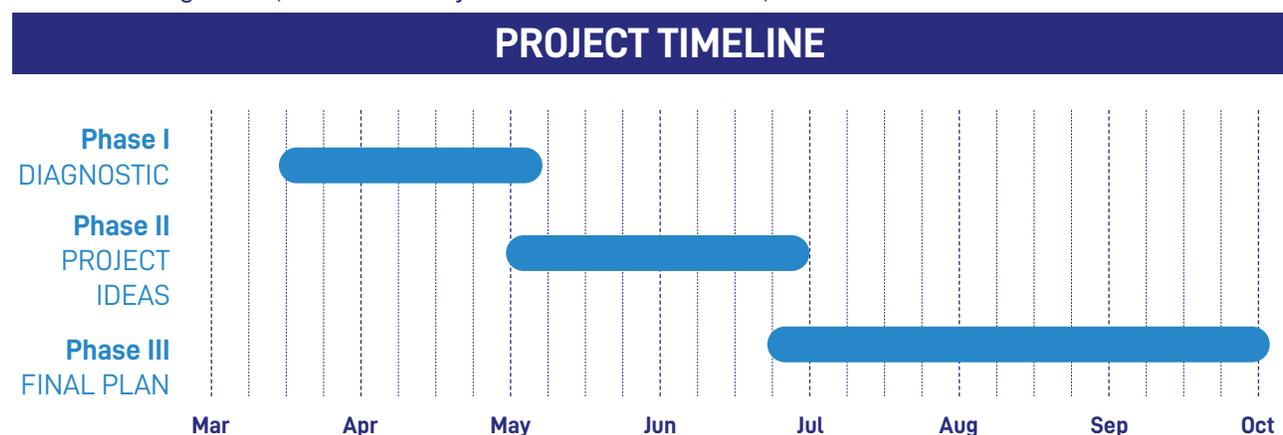
Introduction

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 Worcester Study Area.

Each Rapid Recovery Plan was developed across three phases between March and October 2021: Phase 1 - Diagnostic, Phase 2- Project Recommendations, and 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", authored by Larisa Ortiz, Managing Director, Streetsense (RRP Program Advisor).

The framework was designed to ensure a 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



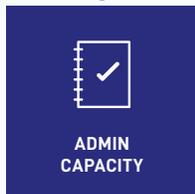
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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

Diagnostic Data Collection Methodology

Data Collection Goals

Baseline data collected will be used by the Commonwealth to communicate overall program impact and to support future funding and resource allocations that may be used toward implementation of final projects across participating communities.

Baseline data sets a minimum expectation for data collection and only reflects what the Commonwealth is requesting from all Plan Facilitators such that it will enable the measurement of COVID impacts at the State level for all participating communities. Beyond the baseline data outlined in this guide, it was expected that Plan Facilitators (PF's) would glean additional insight from their analysis, observations and feedback from the community and businesses. Plan Facilitators ensured that additional information collected through their own discretionary methods and processes would be integrated into the Diagnostic section of each final Rapid Recovery Plan and were used to inform the unique Project Recommendations that emerge through this process.

Diagnostic Asset Breakdown

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) worked with Larissa Ortiz, the Managing Director at Streetsense, to adapt the "Commercial DNA Framework" as published by the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) and Streetsense. The framework uses four major components – Market Demand (Customer Base), Physical Environment (Public and Private Realm), Business Environment, and Administrative Capacity – to assess the vitality of a commercial district. The Local Rapid Recovery Program team tailored this framework to align with the vision to develop plans and a comprehensive dataset that analyzes economic challenges to downtowns and town centers.

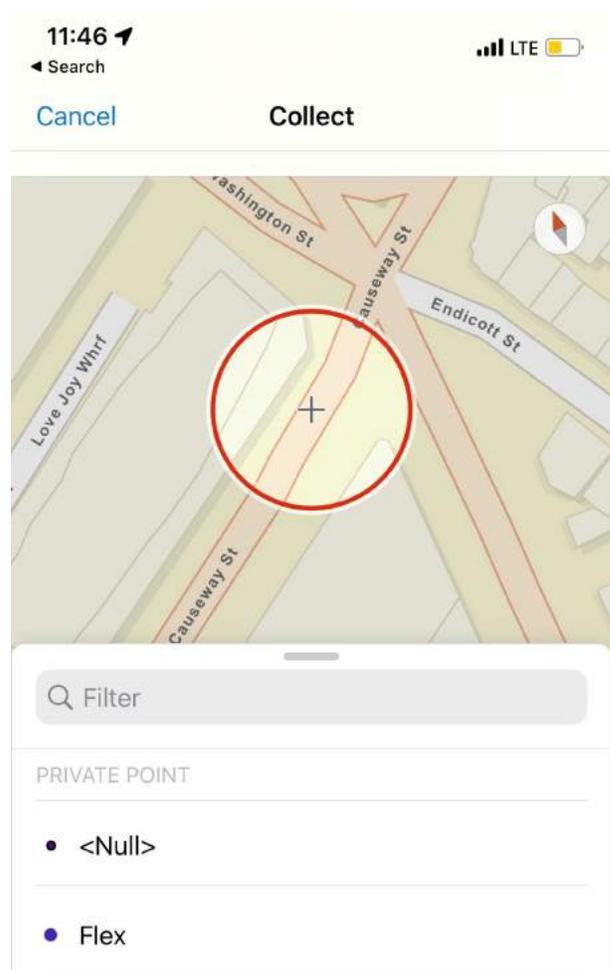
Data Collection Process

In order to effectively capture public and private infrastructure, market demand data, and business environment statistics within the Worcester study area, the Plan Facilitator team developed a robust data collection structure. The team utilized platforms such as ArcGIS Field Mapping and Spatial tools, ESRI Business Analyst, and Co-Star Market Data software to collect data for their community and adhere to the Rapid Recovery Program requirements.

To gather the public and private realm physical environment data, the team deployed field collectors utilizing ArcGIS Collector software and hardware to conduct site visits lasting between four to eight hours to spatially record all physical environment assets. The field collectors used the ArcGIS Collector tool to record field observations, take imagery for each public and private realm asset, and document various characteristics and assets within the defined LRRP study area. The ArcGIS Collector platform compiled all field data alongside other spatial information on business environment details such as vacancy rates and annual average rent into a geodatabase that could be analyzed and mapped remotely.

Public and private realm characteristics collected in the field included elements such as the condition, width, placement/location, and presence of streetscape amenities, lighting, seating areas, and ADA-compliant infrastructure. Based on the observations and characteristics for each diagnostic category, the data collector determined an

objective grade for each public and private realm asset, such as a crosswalk, sidewalk, awning, or façade. The collectors adhered to the grading system developed by the DHCD LRRP team, which ranged from A (highest grade) to Fail (lowest grade). More details on the field categories and type of data collected can be found on pages 14-15.

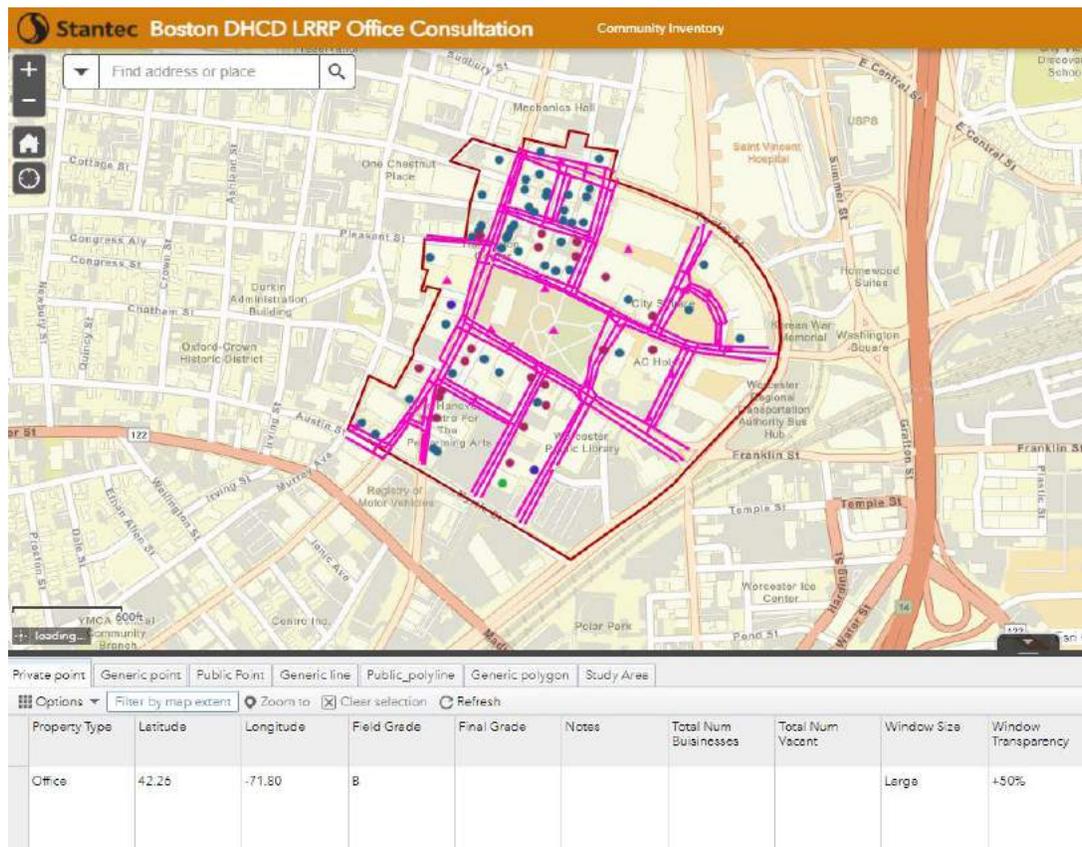


The ArcGIS Collector tool allowed data collectors in the field to develop an online database for public and private realm data

Data Analysis & Outputs

Upon completion of data collection efforts for the public and private realm physical environment assets, Plan Facilitators used the spatial database and ArcGIS WebApp platform (as seen in the image below) to assess collected assets and their associated attributes and characteristics. The Plan Facilitator also reviewed each field grade determined by the data collector by comparing to the field imagery. Each asset received a final grade once the Plan Facilitator conducted a thorough review of each asset characteristic, image, and observations. For example, a crosswalk asset that received a "C" field grade could have a width between four to six feet, poorly maintained paint, and lack a detectable panel and/or curb ramp on either side. The Plan Facilitator confirmed or changed this grade after a final review of the asset attribute data and documented field image.

Developing a database for the spatial elements of the diagnostic data highlights major gaps within the commercial fabric of the business district and identifies areas that lack adequate streetscape amenities or connectivity infrastructure. Ultimately, the data gives communities the opportunity to capitalize on these challenges and promote projects that enhance their downtowns or town centers.



The ArcGIS database platform allows Plan Facilitators to query data based on asset type, final grade, or condition/maintenance level.

Final Diagnostic Grade Analysis

The final stage of the data collection process included developing an aggregate score for each physical environment element. Plan Facilitators conducted an analysis that created an average score of "A" (highest score), "B", "C", or "Fail" (lowest score) for diagnostic components based on the collective grades for each individual asset. For example, the public realm category "Sidewalks" received one final, overall grade for the study area, and the private realm category "Building Facades" received a study area grade as well (as seen in the image below).

PUBLIC REALM: SIDEWALK GRADE



More than 75% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned, well-maintained and accessible to multiple users across different ages and abilities.



Example diagnostic grade for Worcester's "facade conditions" for all businesses within the LRRP Study Area.

As required by the Program, all Plan Facilitators presented the final diagnostic results to their communities during a public meeting. This forum allowed municipal representatives and the public to provide input on the program approach, diagnostic framework, and final results. Each Plan Facilitator ultimately submitted the entire database of all diagnostic categories to DHCD to be compiled with the results from all LRRP communities.



Diagnostic Asset: Physical Environment (Public Realm)

Physical Environment: Public Realm Diagnostic Geodatabase Fields	
Field	Field Description
Indicator Type	Wayfinding/Signage Park Open Space Other
Diagnostic Grade	A, B, C, Fail
Image	Data Collectors took imagery of each asset
Signage Condition	Wayfinding/general signage condition/maintenance
Signage Icon	Presence of icons on signage (pedestrian for walking, arrows for direction, bus for transit stop)
Signage Point of Interest	Directions or distance of current location to Downtown points of interest
Signage Distance	Presence of walking/driving distances on signage
Signage Map Presence	Presence of Downtown map on signage
Signage Technology	Presence of smart technology/interactive screen on signage

Physical Environment: Public Realm Diagnostic Geodatabase Fields	
Field	Field Description
Indicator Type	Sidewalks Crosswalks Pedestrian Signals Roadbed Streetscape Amenities Lighting
Diagnostic Grade	A, B, C, Fail
Image	Data Collectors took imagery of each asset
Sidewalk Assets	Width, condition, material type
Crosswalk Assets	Width, condition, presence of a detectable panel and ADA ramp, material type, crosswalk type, presence of sign (s)
Pedestrian Signal Assets	Presence of pedestrian signal
Roadbed Assets	Material type, condition, paint condition
Streetscape Amenities	Trees: number of trees, tree health, tree pit maintenance, tree shade cover Benches: number of benches, bench age, condition, cleanliness of bench
Lighting Assets	Condition of lighting structure, extent of light brightness

These tables provide details on the physical environment elements collected during site visits to the LRRP study area. Data collectors created assets for each public realm component, and populated the fields with characteristics such as asset condition or dimensions. Each asset then received a grade (A, B, C, or Fail) based on field observations.



Diagnostic Asset: Physical & Business Environment (Private Realm)

Physical & Business Environment: Private Realm Diagnostic Fields	
Field	Field Description
Property Type	Retail Office Industrial
Diagnostic Grade	A, B, C, Fail
Occupancy	Number of businesses and number of vacant storefronts
Window Assets	Window size, transparency of window, maintenance/cleanliness
Outdoor Display & Dining	Storefront Displays: presence of storefront display, cleanliness of display, condition of display Storefront Dining: presence of outdoor dining facilities (chairs, benches, tables), outdoor dining protection from vehicles, canopies present, accessibility infrastructure (ADA ramps, detectable panels)
Storefront Signage Assets	Exterior signage present, visibility of signage from 10-feet away, condition/maintenance, signage branding (integration with storefront design)
Storefront Awning Assets	Storefront awning present, retractable capabilities, condition/maintenance, protection from weather events, awning design (integration with storefront design)
Storefront Facade Details	Building façade condition/maintenance, building façade material, building facade paint condition/maintenance
Storefront Lighting Assets	Exterior and interior lighting fixtures present, lighting present/turned on after standard working hours
Business Characteristics	Average asking price, average rent, average unit square footage, number of units, percentage vacant, property address, annual rent by square footage, zoning classification

This table provides details on the physical environment elements collected during site visits to the LRRP study area. While in the field, data collectors provided edits to the existing storefront assets that assessed storefront infrastructure such as lighting, outdoor displays, and windows. Each asset then received a grade (A, B, C, or Fail) based on field observations. The private realm database later incorporated business characteristics (for each storefront) such as average rent, number of units, and vacancy information.



Diagnostic Asset: Business Environment (Business Survey)

The DHCD LRRP program included a survey of local business owners located in the targeted Worcester LRRP study area. The purpose of the survey was to obtain business input to help guide strategy development, garner buy-in from the local business community and provide data from all LRRP participating districts for DHCD to inform programs and policy.

The LRRP team administered the survey online and via printed hard copies to representatives from for-and non-profit businesses (including temporarily closed businesses). The Plan Facilitators (PFs) and Worcester LRRP team promoted the survey to local businesses and distributed the link to encourage response. The business survey opened on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, and closed on Monday, April 12, 2021. DHCD developed the survey in both English and Spanish, and additional languages were accommodated through oral interview methods (with translators).

The DHCD LRRP team worked FinePoint Associates to finalize the design of the survey. After the survey closed, FinePoint developed a summary results report for each LRRP community. The report produced provided results in aggregate form only so that the results will be anonymous. These results contributed to the diagnostic phase data collection efforts and helped inform project idea and plan development.

The business survey included questions that addressed the following topics areas:

- Business characteristics and satisfaction with location
- COVID-19 impacts on businesses and their operations
- Potential strategies to support businesses and improve the commercial district



Local Rapid Recovery Plan Program - Business Survey

The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development has launched a program to help communities develop Rapid Recovery Plans for their downtowns and commercial districts.

The business survey was distributed online and via paper hard copies in each LRRP community. The PF team worked with the Worcester staff to distribute and promote the survey.

Sample Questions:

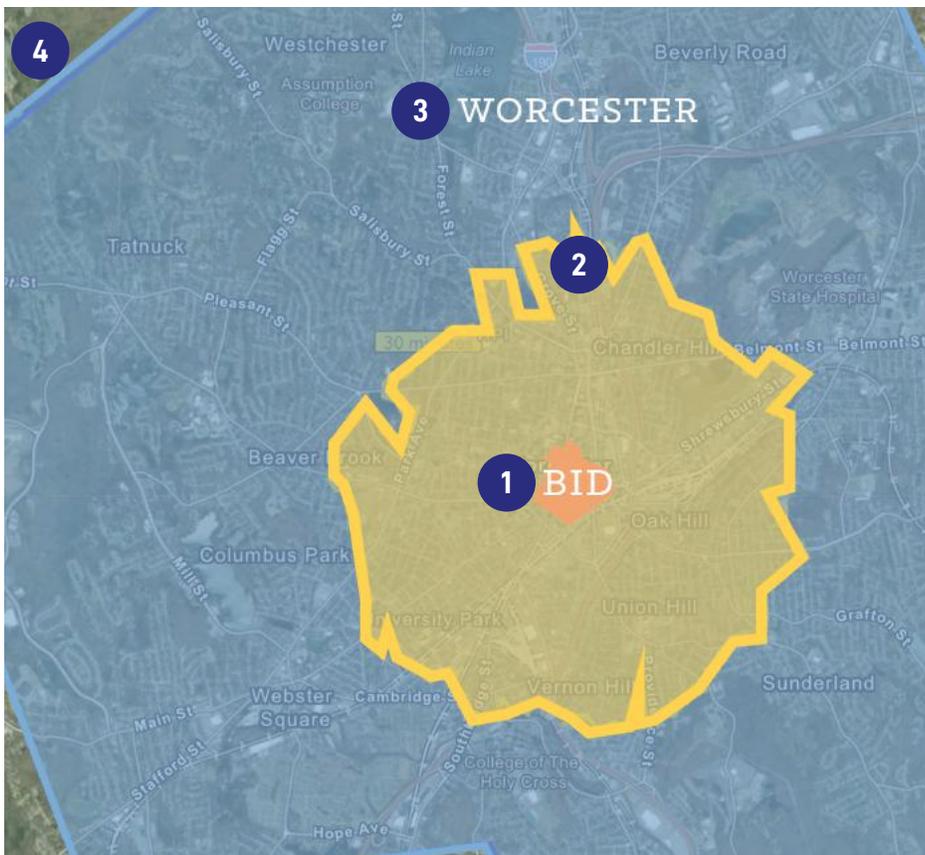
- **Do any local regulations (not related to COVID) pose an obstacle for your business operation?**
- **How did your 2020 business revenue compare to your 2019 revenue?**
- **Considering the conditions in your commercial area, how important to you are each of the following strategies that address Attraction and Retention of Customers and Businesses? (Strategies included more opportunities for outdoor dining, creation of a district management entity, and recruitment programs to attract businesses)**



Diagnostic Asset: Customer Base

To supplement DHCD's diagnostic data, the LRRP Plan Facilitator team extracted market demand data (customer base data) from ESRI's Business Analyst tool to understand demographics, customer statistics, and market profiles. The data looked at customer base profiles for four regions: statewide, municipal-wide, "locality" (1.5 mile radius), and the LRRP study area. The following table below summarizes the specific data collected for this diagnostic category.

Customer Base Data	
Data	Data Description
Demographics	Population Trends Age Distribution
Education	Educational Attainment
Customer Statistics	Average Household Size Employment and Income Statistics Jobs-to-residents ratio Median Home Value Home Value Growth
Retail Market Profile	Retail Leakage (total retail surplus) Grocery Store Leakage (total surplus) Restaurant Leakage (total surplus)
Other Statistics	Crime Index Vehicle Ownership Poverty - unemployment status



- 1** LRRP Study Area Boundary - Downtown area/commercial district
- 2** Local Market Area - 1.5 mile radius, which includes a 30-minute walk and 10-minute bike ride
- 3** LRRP Community-wide - encompasses all of the municipality
- 4** Statewide - encompasses all of Massachusetts

The above map highlights the four regions included in the Customer Base analysis

Diagnostic Key Findings



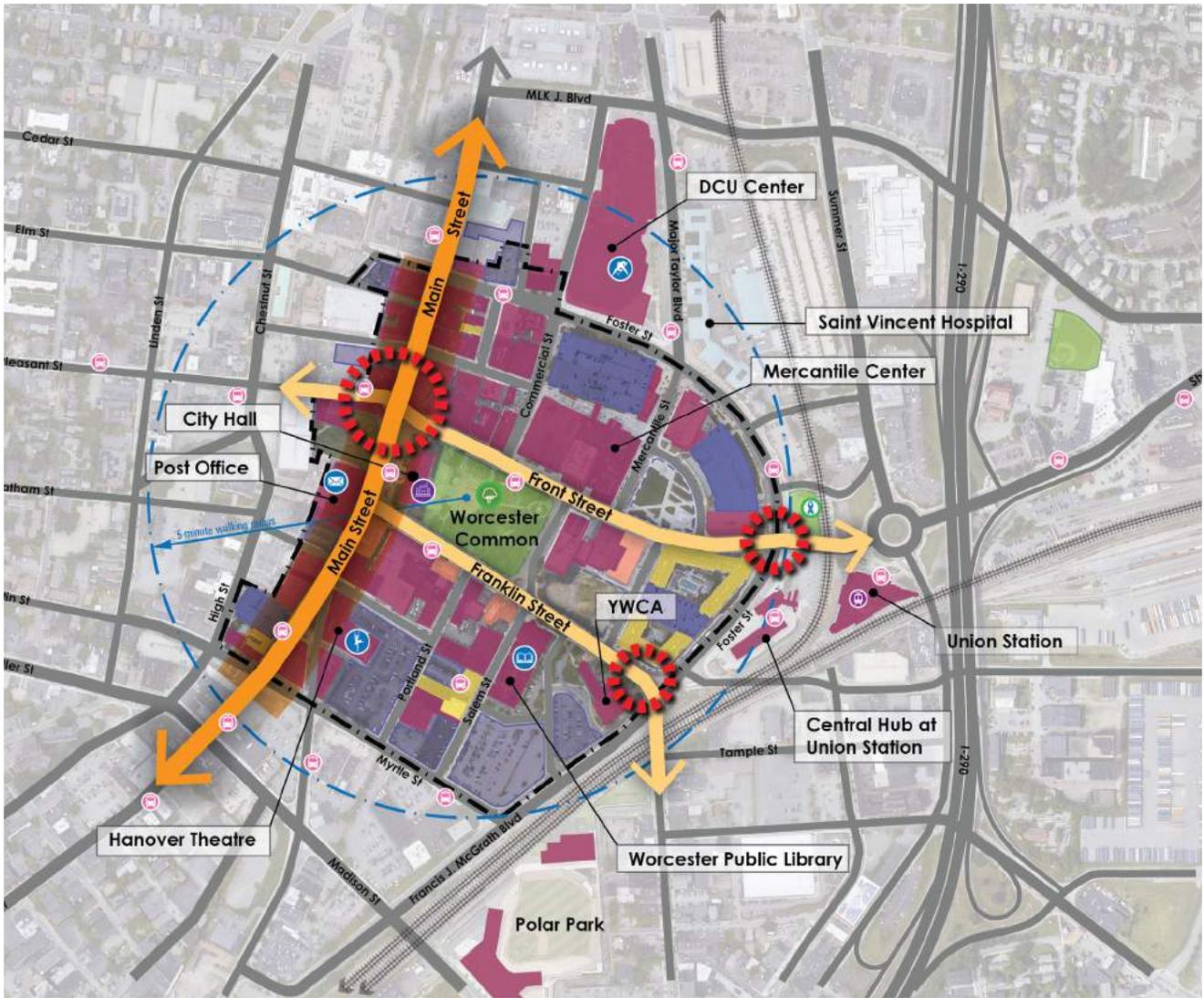
LRRP Study Area

Why focus on the commercial/retail core?

The Local Rapid Recovery Program targets downtowns, town centers, and commercial districts in order to assess the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on local businesses and downtown activity. LRRP study areas include concentrated zones of commercial and retail activity (i.e., "Nodes, Corridors, Town Centers or Commercial Areas"), therefore excluding significant areas of non-commercial, non-retail uses. This program did not look at residential zones or collect data related to residential infrastructure or local residential statistics. By focusing on the commercial/retail core, communities can use the LRRP plans and diagnostic data to implement data-driven, easily implementable solutions to revitalize a downtown.

Worcester LRRP Study Area

The Downtown Worcester LRRP study area corresponds to the BID boundaries. This area extends from Main Street to the railroad tracks and from Foster Street to Myrtle Street. Worcester Common is the heart of Downtown, flanked on either side by businesses and restaurants along Franklin and Front Streets. The Hanover Theatre is a major cultural attraction, drawing crowds throughout the year. Mercantile Center contains over 600,000 square feet of office and retail space that enliven Downtown.



Existing Conditions & Project Orientation Map of the Worcester LRRP Study Area
 Source: Stantec

-  Gateway
-  Downtown Main Street Business Corridor
-  Business/Institutional
-  Mixed-Use & Hotel
-  Residential
-  Surface Parking Lot
-  Structured Parking
-  Park
-  Future Development Parcel
-  Study Area
-  WRTA Bus Stop
-  MBTA Commuter Rail Station

Key Findings & Diagnostic Data Overview



Who lives and works here?

Downtown is a diverse, growing neighborhood. Residents tend to be younger than the City overall, with a much higher share of 25-44 year olds in particular but a relatively smaller share of children. Households are predominately 1- and 2-person households. Pre-Covid, there was a significant number of workers Downtown who helped support local businesses. Their return to the workplace will be important to Downtown's economy.



How do things get done?

The City of Worcester's Executive Office of Economic Development houses key staff areas including Planning and Regulatory Services, Business and Community Development, and Special Projects. Public Works and Parks staff and Cultural Development staff also contribute to many projects in Downtown.

The Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District (BID) was formed in 2018 to advocate for Downtown property owners and businesses and to provide clean and safe services. It has a three-person staff and an Ambassador program who work to keep improving Downtown for residents, employees, and visitors.



What are physical conditions like?

Public realm conditions are generally good due to ongoing City investment and the BID's work on beautification. Areas for improvement were identified in the diagnostic, in particular nighttime lighting, pedestrian wayfinding, and gateway locations connecting Downtown to adjacent neighborhoods. The private realm has likewise seen considerable private investment over the years. Several notable buildings remain to be renovated however, and vacant storefronts detract from the pedestrian experience. Outdoor dining was important to local restaurants during the pandemic but in many locations, sidewalks are too narrow to support it currently so alternate solutions are needed.



What are businesses like?

There are more than 300 businesses in Downtown Worcester employing approximately 3,000 people. Just over one-third are classified as 'professional, scientific, and technical services'. There were approximately 34 vacant storefronts as of April 2021. Respondents to the business survey rated storefront and building renovations as well as recruitment programs to attract new businesses very highly.



CUSTOMER
BASE

Highlights from the Customer Base Data

What is the Customer Base Diagnostic?

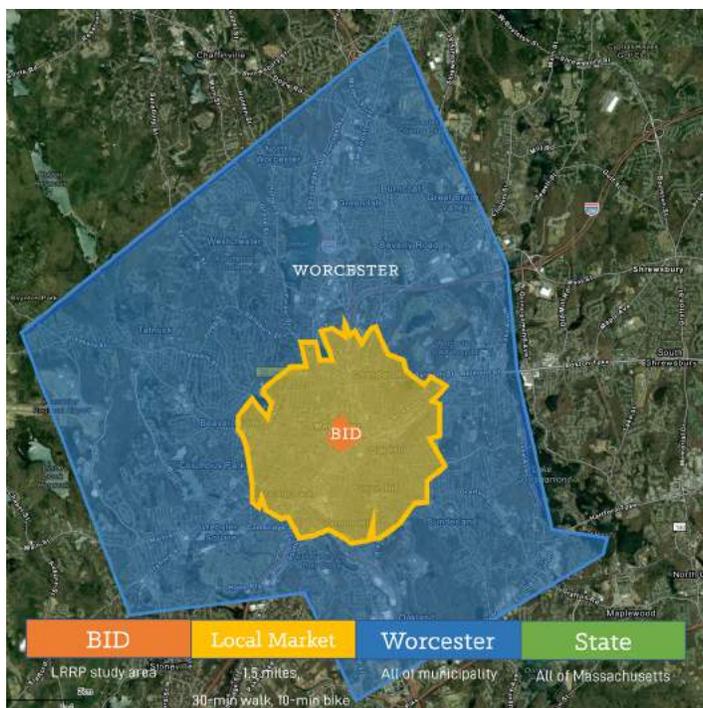
Demographic data from ESRI's Business Analyst software helps us to understand the local customer base, their spending habits, and the degree to which businesses are capturing customer dollars. Data such as a community's population trends, age and education profiles, household statistics, vehicle accessibility, and employment and income profiles help to tell a story on who is frequenting the town or a commercial district. It also highlights the demand for certain retail or commercial uses, therefore assisting in community-wide economic development efforts.

The Customer Base Diagnostic poses the question:

- Who are the customers of businesses in the LRRP Study Area?

Customer Base Results in Worcester

Downtown is a diverse, growing neighborhood. Residents tend to be younger than the City overall, with a much higher share of 25-44 year olds in particular but a relatively smaller share of children. Households are predominately 1- and 2-person households. Pre-Covid, there was a significant number of workers Downtown who helped support local businesses. Their return to the workplace will be important to Downtown's economy.



BID	LRRP Study Area
Local Market	1.5 mi, 30-min walk, 10-min bike
Worcester	All of Municipality
State	All of Massachusetts

The study area is the Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District (BID) boundaries. To understand the local market for Worcester, this analysis looks at the study area, a 1.5-mile ring (30-minute walk, 10-minute bike ride) around the study area dubbed the "Local Market", the entire municipality, and statewide.

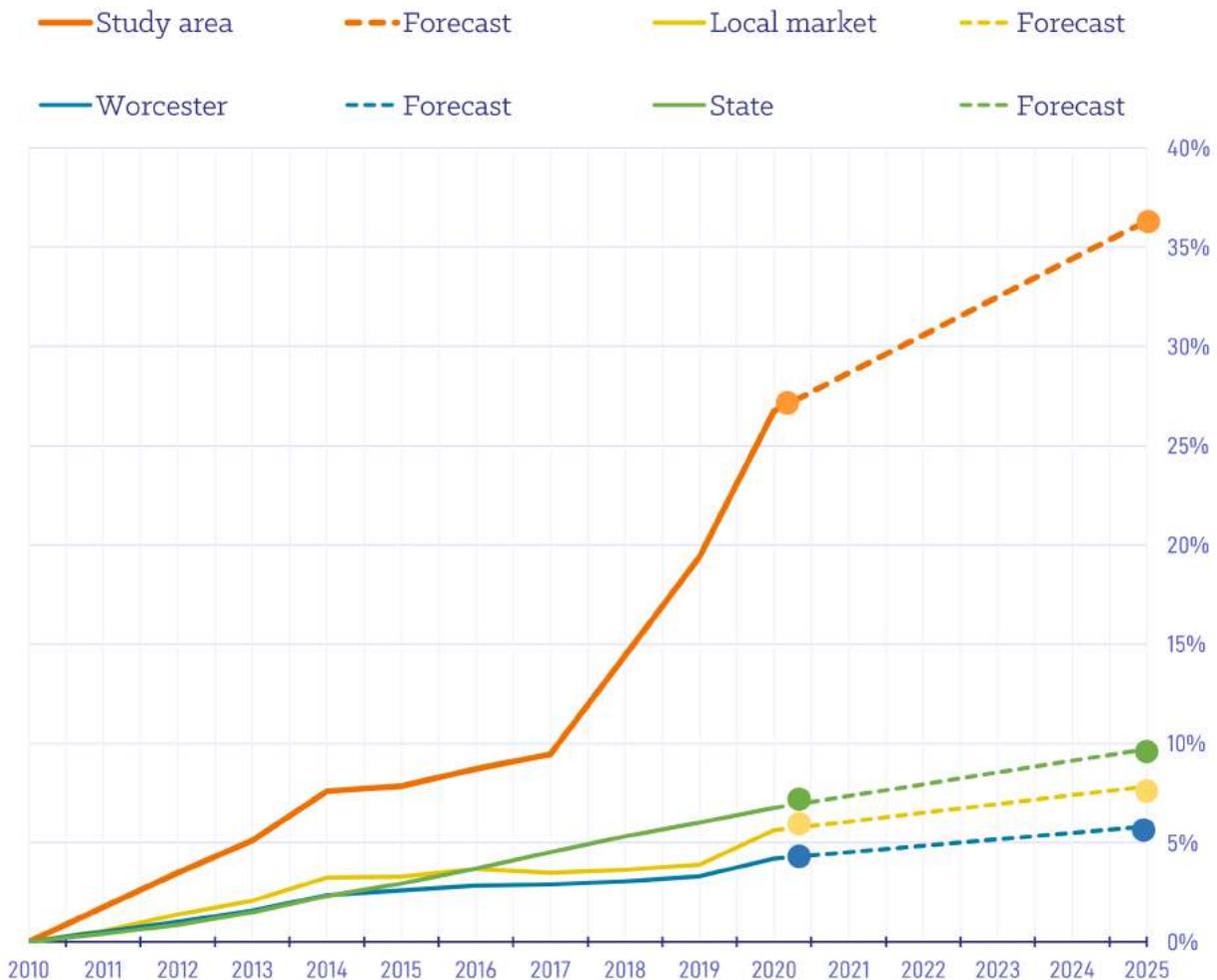


DEMOGRAPHICS

The Downtown study area has a growing population, adding to the local customer base within walking distance. New housing, both renovation of existing buildings and new construction, provide more options for potential residents. The City of Worcester grew by 14% since 2010, up to a population of more than 206,000 people according to 2020 Census data. The State grew by 7.4% during that same period.



Population Trend (2010 - 2025)



Source: ESRI Business Analyst, based on ACS 2015-2019 estimates.

* Census 2020 population: 206,518

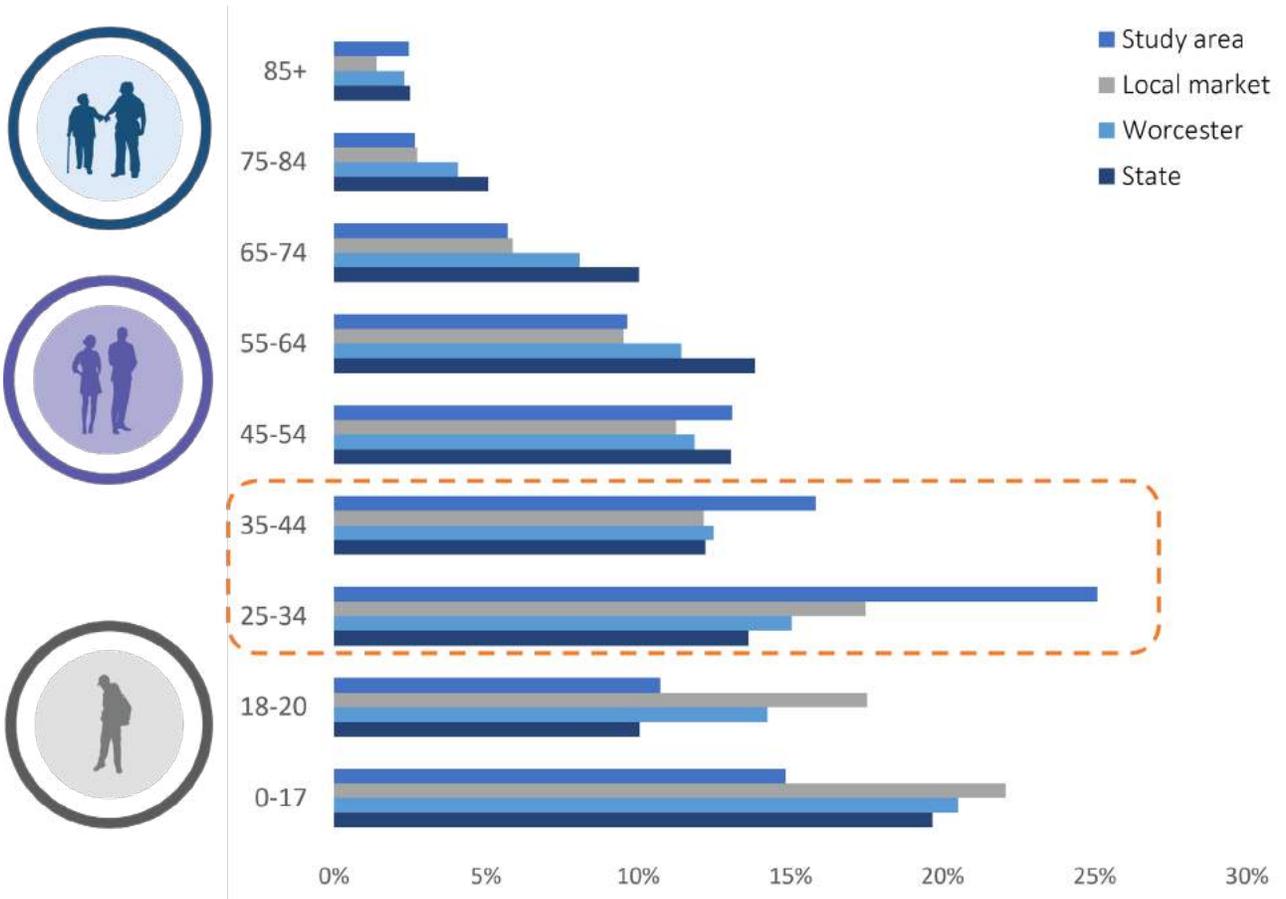
^ State's Census 2020 population: 7.03 mil



DEMOGRAPHICS

The Downtown study area has a much higher share of younger people (ages 25-44) than the comparison areas. The study area also has a lower share of children (ages 0-17).

Age Distribution



Study Area



Worcester

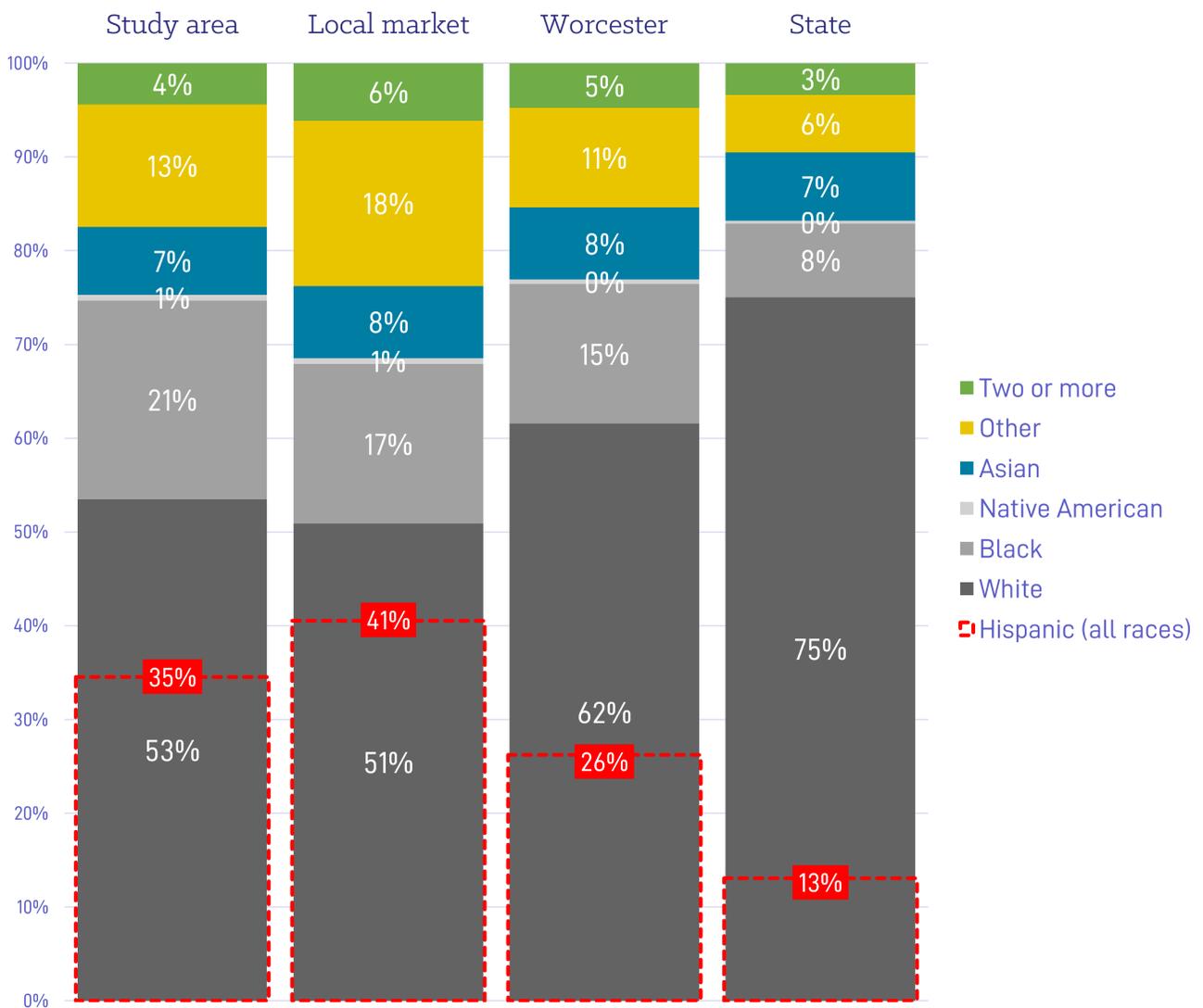




DEMOGRAPHICS

Downtown has a diverse population. The study area and local market are more diverse than the state or city. Downtown and the local market also have a higher proportion of people with Hispanic origin than the state.

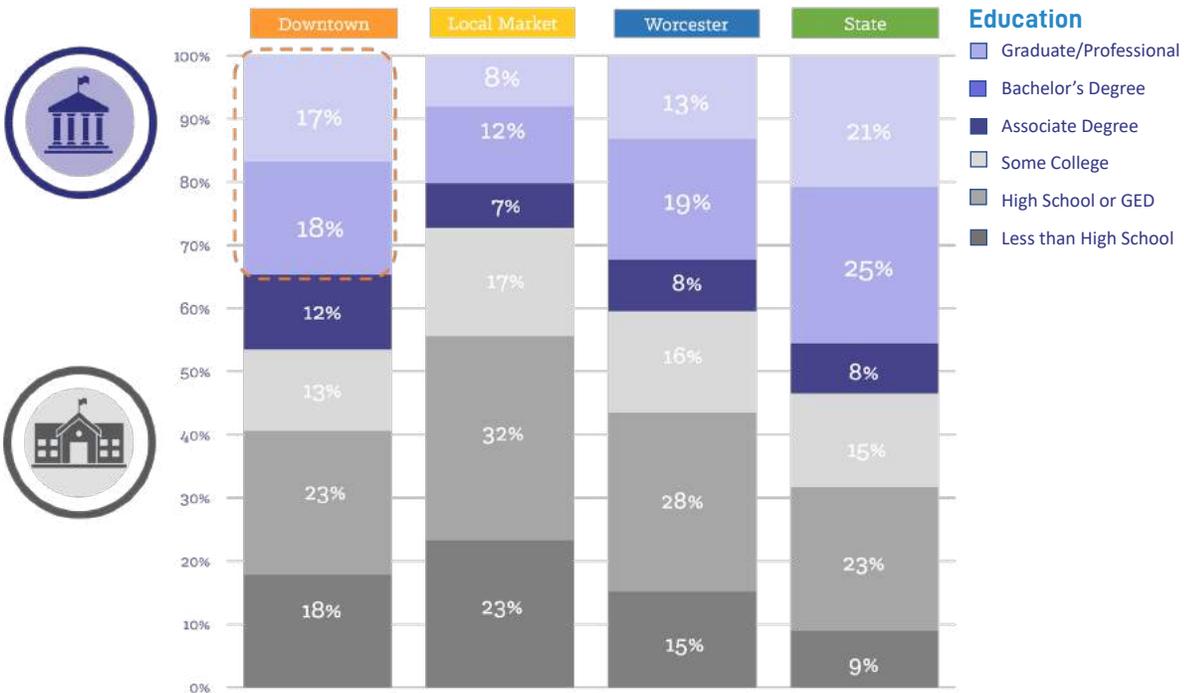
Race and Ethnicity





EDUCATION

The Downtown population is well-educated. More residents in the Downtown study area have at least a bachelor's degree than in the local market area or city.



EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Downtown has a significant worker population supporting local businesses. Median household income is lower than the city and state, in part due to having a younger population early in their careers.

Median household income	\$31k	\$34k	\$50k	\$81k
Employees	2,945	32,533	89,452	3,384,476
Students (secondary & above)	872	13,188	34,270	933,098
Jobs-to-residents ratio	2.6	0.5	0.5	0.5



POPULATION AND HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

The Downtown study area and local market are expected to add more than 500 households* over the next five years. This growth represents approximately half of the total growth forecast for the city. Housing in the Downtown study area is predominantly rental.

Downtown is a major job center. The number of jobs Downtown is more than double the residential population. Workers coming back to the office will be important to support local businesses.

Population	Downtown	Local Market	Worcester	State
Avg. household size	1.2	2.6	2.5	2.5
Residential population	1,019	65,110	188,757	6,993,463
Households	677	23,441	70,907	2,702,578
5-year forecast, population change	+77	+1,360	+2,930	+194,486
5-year forecast, household change	+62	+502	+1,038	+73,332
Median age	35	31	35	40

Housing	Downtown	Local Market	Worcester	State
Median home value	\$168k	\$219k	\$236k	\$415k
5-year forecast, home value growth	14%	12%	14%	17%
Owner-occupied housing	9%	19%	43%	61%



ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

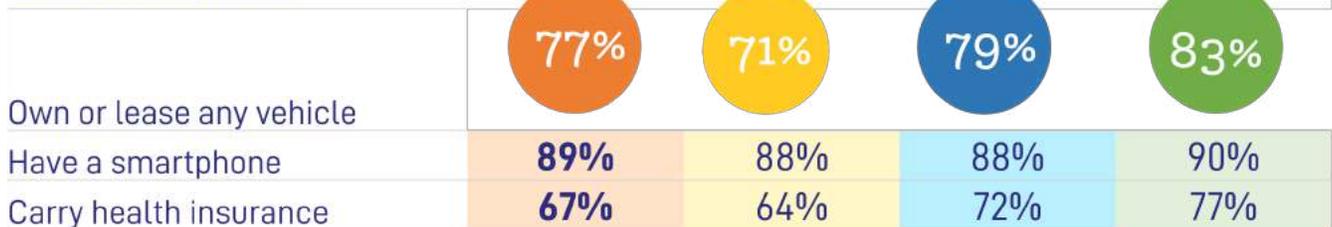
The proportion of households below the poverty level and unemployment in the Downtown study area is above the statewide average. Almost a quarter of residents do not own or lease a vehicle.



Poverty



Other indicators



[^] as of mid-2020

City of Worcester preliminary unemployment rate: 7.6% in March 2021 (latest available data)

Massachusetts preliminary unemployment rate: 5.9% in April 2021 (latest available data)

Recent estimates for BID and local market unavailable.

Highlights from the Physical Environment

What is the Physical Environment Diagnostic?

The integrity of public infrastructure and private buildings and storefronts plays an important role in the experience of a downtown, town center, or commercial district. Accessibility from a parking lot to the sidewalk, comfort while using streetscape amenities, and an inviting storefront window all have an impact on the vitality of a town center. It is important to bifurcate the physical environment into the public and the private realm to acknowledge the fundamentally different nature of the tactics and funding mechanisms available for each. The following public and private elements of Worcester's physical environment have been analyzed:

- **Public Realm:** Sidewalks, street trees & benches, lighting, wayfinding and signage, roadbed and crosswalks
- **Private Realm:** Storefront windows, outdoor display and dining, signage, awning, facades, and lighting

The Physical Environment Diagnostic poses the question:

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

Physical Environment Results in Worcester

Public realm conditions are generally good due to ongoing City investment and the BID's work on beautification. Areas for improvement were identified in the diagnostic, in particular nighttime lighting, pedestrian wayfinding, and gateway locations connecting Downtown to adjacent neighborhoods. The private realm has likewise seen considerable private investment over the years. Several notable buildings remain to be renovated however, and vacant storefronts detract from the pedestrian experience. Outdoor dining was important to local restaurants during the pandemic but in many locations, sidewalks are too narrow to support it currently so alternate solutions are needed.





PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT GRADING FRAMEWORK: PUBLIC REALM

Physical Environment: Public Realm					
Element	Guiding Principles	A	B	C	FAIL
Sidewalks	Sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate both the flow of customers and spillover retail/dining activity. In addition, sidewalks should be clean and well-maintained to ensure the safety and comfort of pedestrians.	More than 75% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned, well-maintained and accessible to multiple users across different ages and abilities	About 50% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned and well-maintained.	More than 25% of sidewalks in the study area pose challenges to the pedestrian experience (including narrow sidewalks and lack of cleanliness/maintenance).	There are no sidewalks in the study area.
Street Trees & Benches	Sidewalks should facilitate a variety of activities, including resting, people-watching and socializing. Street trees and benches are key amenities that support such activities and should be made available without disrupting the flow of pedestrians.	Street trees and benches are readily available throughout the study area. They are well-designed, well-maintained, and offer shade and comfort to pedestrians.	Although street trees and benches are available across the study area, these amenities have not been cleaned or well-maintained, and require improvements.	Limited availability of street trees and benches creating uncomfortable pedestrian experience.	There are no street trees and benches in the study area.
Lighting	Street lighting improves pedestrian visibility and personal safety, as well as aids in geographic orientation.	More than 75% of the study area utilizes a range of lighting strategies to ensure safety of pedestrians and motorists, as well as highlight the identity and history of an area.	About 50% of the study area is serviced by street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety.	Street lighting on the primary street in the study area does not support pedestrian visibility and safety.	There is no street lighting in the study area.
Wayfinding/ Signage	A wayfinding system supports overall accessibility of a commercial district. It benefits pedestrians and bicyclists, and directs motorists to park and walk. Without clear visual cues, customers may find it difficult to park or may be less aware of local offerings.	There is a comprehensive and cohesive wayfinding system that offers geographic orientation to pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Signage reflect the brand and identity of the area.	Wayfinding in the study area is primarily geared towards directing motorists across the study area. There is limited signage to identify key assets and destinations to pedestrians.	Limited to no signage available throughout the study area.	There is no wayfinding/signage in the study area.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT GRADING FRAMEWORK: PUBLIC REALM

Physical Environment: Public Realm

Element	Guiding Principles	A	B	C	FAIL
Roadbed & Crosswalks	Roads should be well- maintained to ensure safety of drivers and pedestrians. Crosswalks that are unsafe or inconvenient to customers may undermine accessibility between stores and overall shopper experience.	Roads are designed to balance the needs of motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians and create a safe environment for all users.	Roads are designed primarily to move motor vehicles across the study area efficiently, with limited crosswalks for pedestrians.	Roads are hazardous to all users.	The study area is not connected by any major roads.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT GRADING FRAMEWORK: PRIVATE REALM

Physical Environment: Private Realm					
Element	Guiding Principles	A	B	C	FAIL
Window	Storefronts that maintain a minimum of 70% transparency ensure clear lines of sight between the business and the sidewalk to enhance attractiveness of storefront, as well as improve safety for the business, customers, and pedestrians.	More than 75% of storefronts maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.	About 50% of storefront windows maintain windows with at least 70% transparency.	More than 25% of storefronts have windows with limited transparency.	All storefronts are boarded up and/or have limited transparency.
Outdoor Display/ Dining	Attractive window displays and spillover retail/restaurant activity on sidewalks or adjacent parking spaces can help contribute to overall district vibrancy.	More than 75% of storefronts feature an attractive window display and/or spillover merchandise and dining areas that align with the brand and identity of the district.	About 50% of storefronts maintain an attractive window display with limited spillover merchandise and/or dining areas.	More than 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise display and outdoor dining that pose challenges to the pedestrian experience.	There is no spillover retail/ restaurant activity in the district.
Signage	Signage can help customers identify the location of storefronts and businesses from a distance. Signage should also reflect the visual brand and identity of tenants to help attract new customers.	More than 75% of storefront signs reflect the unique brand identity of tenants and can be easily seen from more than 10 ft distance.	About 50% of storefronts have clear signage that reflect basic business information and can easily be seen from adjacent sidewalks.	More than 25% of storefronts have signage that does not communicate names of business or types of products/services being offered.	Storefronts in the study area do not have signage.
Awning	Awnings can provide shade during warmer months, enabling comfortable outdoor dining arrangements for customers. However, they must be well-maintained and designed in coordination with other elements of the storefront.	More than 75% of properties in the study area have retractable awnings that have been well-maintained and cleaned.	About 50% of properties in the study area have functioning awnings that have been well-maintained and cleaned	More than 25% of properties in the study area do not have awnings and/or have awnings that are unusable or have not been cleaned and maintained.	Storefronts in the study area are not equipped with awnings.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT GRADING FRAMEWORK: PRIVATE REALM

Physical Environment: Private Realm					
Element	Guiding Principles	A	B	C	FAIL
Facade	Storefronts that use high-quality and durable building materials, as well as paint and color to differentiate from other businesses, can dramatically improve the appearance of the commercial district to potential customers	More than 75% of properties have well-maintained façades. Limited structural enhancements are required.	Although most properties in the study area have clean and well-maintained façades, there is at least one significant property requiring structural façade improvements.	More than 25% of properties require significant building façade improvements, including power washing, painting, and structural enhancements.	All properties in the study area require significant façade improvements.
Lighting	Storefront interior lighting after business hours help enliven the corridor and boost security on the street.	More than 75% of storefronts have lighting that help illuminate sidewalks.	About 50% of storefronts have some interior lighting that help illuminate sidewalks.	More than 25% of storefronts do not have lighting.	All storefronts in the study area are shuttered and dark at night.



WORCESTER PUBLIC REALM GRADES

Most public realm elements in Downtown Worcester are in good condition. The recent reconstruction of Main Street through Downtown significantly enhanced pedestrian and bicycle amenities. However, there are areas for continued improvement. Major takeaways include:

- **Downtown lacks sufficient pedestrian wayfinding.** There is limited directional signage within the study area, especially for pedestrians, which makes it more difficult for visitors to get to their destination and discover all that Downtown has to offer.
- **Lighting should do more to make Downtown inviting at night.** Most Downtown street lighting is oriented to illuminate the streets for drivers and not enough is designed to create a welcoming pedestrian environment. Many storefronts go dark at night, contributing to an uninviting appearance.
- **Connections to nearby neighborhoods are uninviting.** The Green Street and Front Street bridges create visual and psychological barriers to walking between Downtown Worcester and adjacent neighborhoods like the Canal District and Shrewsbury Street. The City is starting to address this with a project to install colorful lighting under the Green Street bridge, but additional efforts will be needed to further enhance these gateways and encourage more pedestrian activity.

	Element	Guiding Principles	Worcester Grade
	Sidewalks (see Map 1)	Sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate both the flow of customers and spillover retail/ dining activity.	A - More than 75% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned, well-maintained and accessible to multiple users across different ages and abilities.
	Street Trees & Benches (see Map 2)	Sidewalks and street trees should facilitate a variety of activities, including resting, people-watching and socializing.	B - Although street trees and benches are available across the study area, these amenities have not been cleaned or well-maintained, and require improvements.
	Lighting (see Map 2)	Street lighting improves pedestrian visibility and personal safety, as well as aids in geographic orientation.	B - About 50% of the study area is serviced by street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety.
	Wayfinding/ Signage (see Map 2)	A wayfinding system supports overall accessibility of a commercial district. It benefits pedestrians and bicyclists, and directs motorists to park and walk.	B - Wayfinding in the study area is primarily geared towards directing motorists across the study area. There is limited signage to identify key assets and destinations to pedestrians.
	Roadbed & Crosswalks (see Map 1)	Roads should be well- maintained to ensure safety of drivers and pedestrians. Crosswalks that are unsafe or inconvenient to customers may undermine accessibility.	A - Roads are designed to balance the needs of motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians and create a safe environment for all users.



Map 1: Sidewalk and Crosswalk Grades Map

The map above portrays grades for public realm infrastructure including crosswalks, sidewalks, and roadways. These elements were rated A overall. Most are in good to excellent condition, reflective of recent investment in Downtown. In several areas, sidewalk widths limit outdoor dining or display opportunities for businesses.

Source: Stantec

Legend	
Field Grade, Indicator	
-----	A, Crosswalk
-----	A, Roadbed/Sidewalk
-----	B, Crosswalk
-----	B, Roadbed/Sidewalk
-----	C, Crosswalk
-----	C, Roadbed/Sidewalk
-----	Fail, Crosswalk
-----	Fail, Roadbed/Sidewalk



Map 2: Streetscape Infrastructure in the LRRP Study Area

The map above illustrates all streetscape infrastructure captured in the field within the Worcester LRRP study area. These elements were rated B overall. Lighting is generally more suitable for drivers than pedestrians. Several streets lack many trees to provide shade.

Source: Worcester BID

Legend

Streetscape Infrastructure

- ▲ Tree Pits
- ▲ Street Trees
- Street Lamps
- Street Furniture
- Planters



Map 3: Streetscape Infrastructure (Trees/Lights/Benches) in the LRRP Study Area

This map provides a combined grade per block based on the presence and condition of streetscape amenities like trees, benches, and street lights. Wayfinding signage, as shown, is limited and primarily designer for drivers and not pedestrians.

Source: Stantec





PUBLIC REALM: SIDEWALK GRADE



More than 75% of sidewalks in the study area are cleaned, well-maintained and accessible to multiple users across different ages and abilities.



Existing (left to right): 10'+ width along Front St; new sidewalks along Main St; Uneven surface and narrow width

Source: Stantec Field Imagery

PUBLIC REALM: STREET TREES & BENCHES GRADE



Although street trees and benches are available, these amenities have not been cleaned or well-maintained, and require improvements.



Existing Street Trees & Benches / Streetscape Amenities in Worcester

Source: Stantec Field Imagery



PUBLIC REALM: LIGHTING GRADE



About 50% of the study area is serviced by street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety.



Existing Lighting Structures in the Study Area

Source: Stantec Field Imagery

PUBLIC REALM: WAYFINDING/SIGNAGE GRADE



Wayfinding in the study area is primarily geared towards directing cars. There is limited signage to identify key assets and destinations to pedestrians.



Existing Wayfinding and Signage Infrastructure in the Study Area

Source: Stantec Field Imagery



PUBLIC REALM: ROADBED & CROSSWALKS GRADE



Roads are designed to balance the needs of motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians and create a safe environment for all users.



Existing Roadbed and crosswalks in the Study Area

Source: Stantec Field Imagery

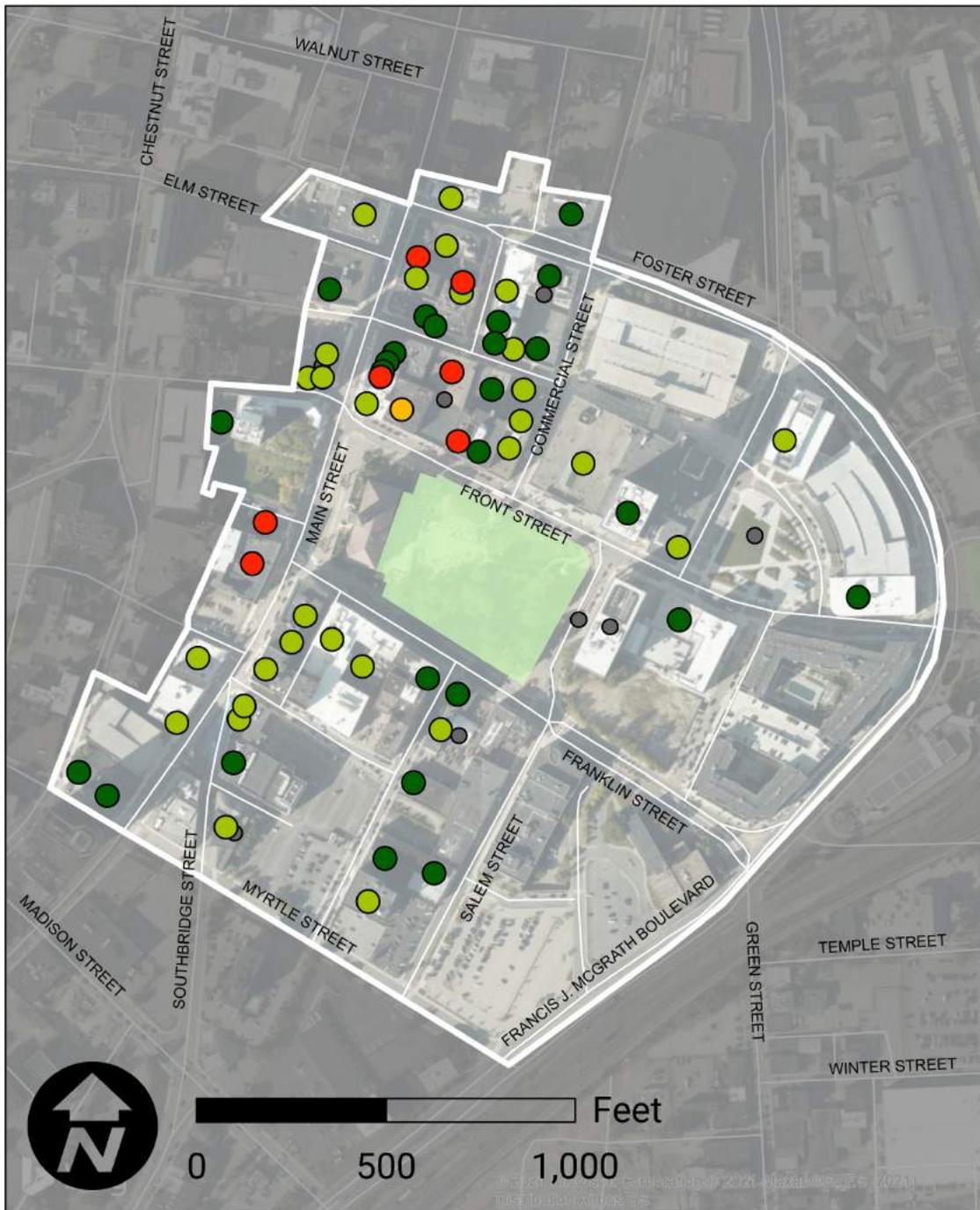


WORCESTER PRIVATE REALM GRADES

The private realm in Downtown Worcester has been steadily improving as owners make new investments in old buildings, but there is room for improvement in terms of visual aesthetics and placemaking efforts. Major takeaways from the diagnostic include:

- **Building exteriors need improvements to spark visual interest.** Many of the buildings are in good repair. Several notable buildings are not as well maintained and need investment to bring them to modern standards. At sidewalk level, many storefronts lack adequate transparency, lighting, or awnings to encourage pedestrians to “window shop” and improve safety for pedestrians, businesses, and customers.
- **Vacant storefronts and buildings detract from appeal.** Scattered vacant storefronts create gaps in the pedestrian experience and contribute to a perceived lack of vitality. The BID organized a campaign of local art in vacant windows to counter this perception on a short-term basis.
- **Outdoor dining opportunities are limited by sidewalk dimensions.** The sidewalks in many areas are too narrow to support both clear pedestrian movement and sidewalk dining. Creative solutions were employed during the pandemic but a more formalized system is needed to allow restaurants to expand their seating.

	Element	Guiding Principles	Worcester Grade
	Window	Storefronts that maintain a minimum of 70% transparency ensure clear lines of sight between the business and the sidewalk to enhance attractiveness of storefront.	C - More than 25% of storefronts have windows with limited transparency.
	Outdoor Display/Dining	Attractive window displays and spillover retail/restaurant activity on sidewalks or adjacent parking spaces can help contribute to overall district vibrancy.	C - More than 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise display and outdoor dining that pose challenges to the pedestrian experience.
	Signage	Signage can help customers identify the location of storefronts and businesses from a distance.	B - About 50% of storefronts have clear signage that reflect basic business information and can easily be seen from adjacent sidewalks.
	Awning	Awnings can provide shade during warmer months, enabling comfortable outdoor dining arrangements for customers.	B - About 50% of properties in the study area have functioning awnings that have been well-maintained and cleaned.
	Facade (see Map 4)	Storefronts that use high-quality and durable building materials, as well as paint and color to differentiate from other businesses.	B - Although most properties in the study area have clean and well-maintained façades, there is at least one significant property requiring structural façade improvements.
	Lighting	Storefront interior lighting after business hours help enliven the corridor and boost security on the street.	C - More than 25% of storefronts do not have lighting.



Map 4: Building Facade Condition in the LRRP Study Area

The map above illustrates all building facade data captured in the field within the Worcester LRRP study area. Most buildings are in good condition, including several recently constructed or renovated structures. There are several buildings, however, that are in need of repair and/or modernization.

Source: Stantec

Legend

Facade Condition

- Maintained
- Adequately Maintained
- Deteriorating
- Poorly Maintained
- No Data Available



PRIVATE REALM: WINDOW GRADE



More than 25% of storefronts have windows with limited transparency.



Existing Windows in the Study Area

Source: Stantec Field Imagery

PRIVATE REALM: OUTDOOR DISPLAY & DINING GRADE



Only about 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise display and outdoor dining limiting the pedestrian experience.



Existing outdoor displays and dining in the Study Area

Source: Stantec Field Imagery



PRIVATE REALM: SIGNAGE GRADE



About 50% of storefronts have clear signage that reflect basic business information and can easily be seen from adjacent sidewalks.



Existing signage in the Study Area

Source: Stantec Field Imagery

PRIVATE REALM: AWNING GRADE



About 50% of properties in the study area have functioning awnings that have been well- maintained and cleaned.



Existing awnings in the Study Area

Source: Stantec Field Imagery



PRIVATE REALM: FACADE GRADE



Most properties have clean and well-maintained façades, but at least one significant property requiring structural façade improvements.



Existing Façade Conditions in the Study Area

Source: Stantec Field Imagery

PRIVATE REALM: LIGHTING GRADE



More than 25% of storefronts do not have lighting



Existing Lighting Fixtures in the Study Area

Source: Stantec Field Imagery



BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Highlights from the Business Environment

What is the Business Environment Diagnostic?

The conditions of the local business environment - including business density, quality, and type of offerings - play a critical role in how successful businesses are meeting the needs of the district's customers. Collecting data related to the tenant mix and concentration of stores provides an insight into the health of local businesses, as well as highlights the presence (or lack of) major anchors and drivers that attract visitors and residents to frequent businesses in the district. In support of this diagnostic, the State sent out business surveys at the beginning of the LRRP and shared results with Plan Facilitators.

The Business Environment Diagnostic poses the question:

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

Business Environment Results in Worcester

There are more than 300 businesses in Downtown Worcester. Just over one-third are classified as 'professional, scientific, and technical services'. Retail, accommodation and food services, and arts, entertainment, and recreation account for about 15 percent of Downtown businesses. As of April 2021 there were approximately 34 vacant storefronts throughout the study area.

Total Number of Businesses (BID study area)

341



Number of Businesses closed since COVID (temporary or permanent)

14



8 accommodation and food services businesses

Number of Vacant Storefronts

Placemaking Action Plan Priority

34



Source: BID database



LRRP BUSINESS SURVEY

The RRP Business Survey aimed to obtain input to guide plan development, gain feedback from the local business community, and collect data across all LRRP communities to inform statewide programs and policy. The survey addressed topics including business satisfaction with various aspects of Downtown Worcester, business conditions and the impacts from COVID-19, and input from the business community regarding potential strategies and types of assistance.

Key findings from survey respondents include:

- Over 75 percent rated the renovation of storefronts and buildings as important or very important. A similar percentage support more opportunities for outdoor dining.
- Almost all respondents rated recruitment programs to attract new businesses as important or very important.
- Over half were satisfied or very satisfied with the condition of public spaces, streets, and sidewalks. Only five percent were very unsatisfied.
- Parking regulations pose an obstacle to business for almost half of respondents. A third identified licensing or permitting as an obstacle.

The top 3 business impacts due to COVID-19 were:

- Decline in revenue
- Incurred expenses for safety measures
- Established alternate mode to sell/deliver products

86%
of businesses
had fewer on-site
customers

81%
of businesses generated less
revenue in 2020 than they did in
2019, and **43%** saw revenues
decline by 25% or more



ADMIN
CAPACITY

Highlights from the Administrative Capacity

What is the Administrative Capacity Diagnostic?

Administrative capacity refers to a combination of leadership, organizational capacity, resources, and regulatory and policy frameworks that enable catalytic investments and improvements to take root. Understanding leadership roles and champions as well as funding mechanisms and existing partnership are critical components to assessing the administrative capacity of a community.

The Administrative Capacity Diagnostic poses questions such as:

- Who are the key stewards of the LRRP Study Area? Are they adequately staff and resourced to support implementation of projects?
- Are the regulatory, zoning, and permitting process an impediment to business activity? Why or why not?
- If lack a stakeholder entity, is a discussion needed on District Management?

Administrative Capacity Results in Worcester

The City of Worcester has strong staff support throughout its departments. The Executive Office of Economic Development houses Planning and Regulatory Services, Business and Community Development, and Special Projects staff. Public Works and Parks staff are responsible for streets, engineering, parking and other services. Cultural Development staff play a key role in many initiatives including wayfinding, events, and more. However, Downtown is not the City's only focus so staff has to balance time and resources dedicated to Downtown projects.

The Downtown Worcester is in its third year of operation. It is staffed by an executive director, program manager, and office administrator. A team of Ambassadors provide clean and safe services throughout the BID's boundaries. The BID has built strong relationships with City staff to work together on shared priorities. However, as a relatively new organization it is still working to build its staff capacity and increase funding to continue meeting stakeholder's expectations.

Summary of Needs

KEY FINDINGS

While Downtown Worcester has made great strides recently, there are several short, medium, and long term strategies and investments that can be employed to improve the area. Short term and low investment strategies such as community events to showcase businesses, temporary activation of underused spaces, and the installation of a tactical wayfinding strategy could help improve the experience in Downtown Worcester. However, for the study area to truly succeed in the future, public and private realm capital investments will be required to improve the area's connectivity, visibility, and overall attractiveness. These strategies could include enhancements to gateway bridges, investment in high-quality storefront improvements, and targeted efforts to improve the pedestrian experience Downtown.

TRANSLATING NEEDS INTO PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the identified needs for Downtown Worcester and previous studies like the BID's recent Placemaking Action Plan, the project team worked with BID and City staff to develop a list of potential projects. These projects, described in the next section, address the primary challenges facing the LRRP study area.

Project Recommendations & Implementation



Identification & Prioritization of Projects

Project Development

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

The project development phase built on the findings from the diagnostic phase to create a list of potential projects. Several ideas came from recommendations in the BID's recent Placemaking Action Plan. Others align with ongoing City priorities and several emerged from stakeholder discussions or conversations about how best to address a need. These ideas were discussed with BID and City staff to refine them and tailor to the unique characteristics of Downtown Worcester.

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT (SME) GUIDANCE

The project team worked with five SME's to take a focused look at six projects. These experts provided insights and advice from their specialized experience, recommended best practices to consider, and strengthened elements of the project rubrics.

Public Engagement Efforts



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The project team spoke with a variety of City staff, property owners, and business organizations to better understand the issues and opportunities Downtown. Approximately 20 conversations informed the planning process and provided on-the-ground insights about tenant recruitment challenges, public realm needs and possibilities, and local economic development.

KICK-OFF AND DIAGNOSTIC DATA COMMUNITY MEETING

Early in the planning process, the Downtown Worcester BID dedicated its May community meeting to introducing the LRRP process. At this virtual meeting, the project team presented the program goals and schedule, diagnostic approach, and key findings. Participants discussed several topics including the need for wayfinding, information about Downtown restaurants and events for visitors, and better connecting Downtown to nearby neighborhoods like the Canal District.

PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS COMMUNITY MEETING

As the project team was finalizing project recommendations, the Downtown Worcester BID dedicated its September community meeting to presenting the draft recommendations. This hybrid in-person and virtual meeting provided an opportunity to discuss potential priorities among the list of 19 projects.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

After the September presentation, an online survey was promoted to gather additional feedback about priorities. It was shared via the BID's email newsletter and directly with local apartment buildings and businesses. It received more than 100 completed responses that informed the prioritization process.

Project Overview

Project Categories

Physical Environment: Public Realm

Projects for the public realm enhance streets and public spaces in communities to spur other investment and create opportunities for business activity and gathering that lead to community vitality. The recovery of Massachusetts downtowns, town centers, and business districts has relied on public spaces like these to extend the areas in which business communities and public life can operate.

Physical Environment: Private Realm

These project focus on enhancements on private properties and buildings, improving the aesthetics and attractiveness of existing buildings but also helping new buildings to contribute to a commercial district's recovery in a positive way.

Business Environment: Revenue and Sales

Projects intended to increase revenue and sales can include strategic organizations such as task forces and business improvement districts, but also include more creative approaches that draw on attributes of the physical environment and special events to promote businesses in a downtown district and encourage increased visits and spending.

Business Environment: Tenant Mix

These project efforts are intended to diversify the types of businesses in communities. This can not only respond more closely to community needs, but also work toward a more resilient commercial fabric in business centers so that major disruptions like COVID-19 do not result in disproportionate closures and a lack of activity.

Administrative Capacity

Capacity-building projects help make local governments and their partner agencies more able to take on the other kinds of project efforts recommended in this Local Rapid Recovery Plan.

Project List & Map

Recommended Projects

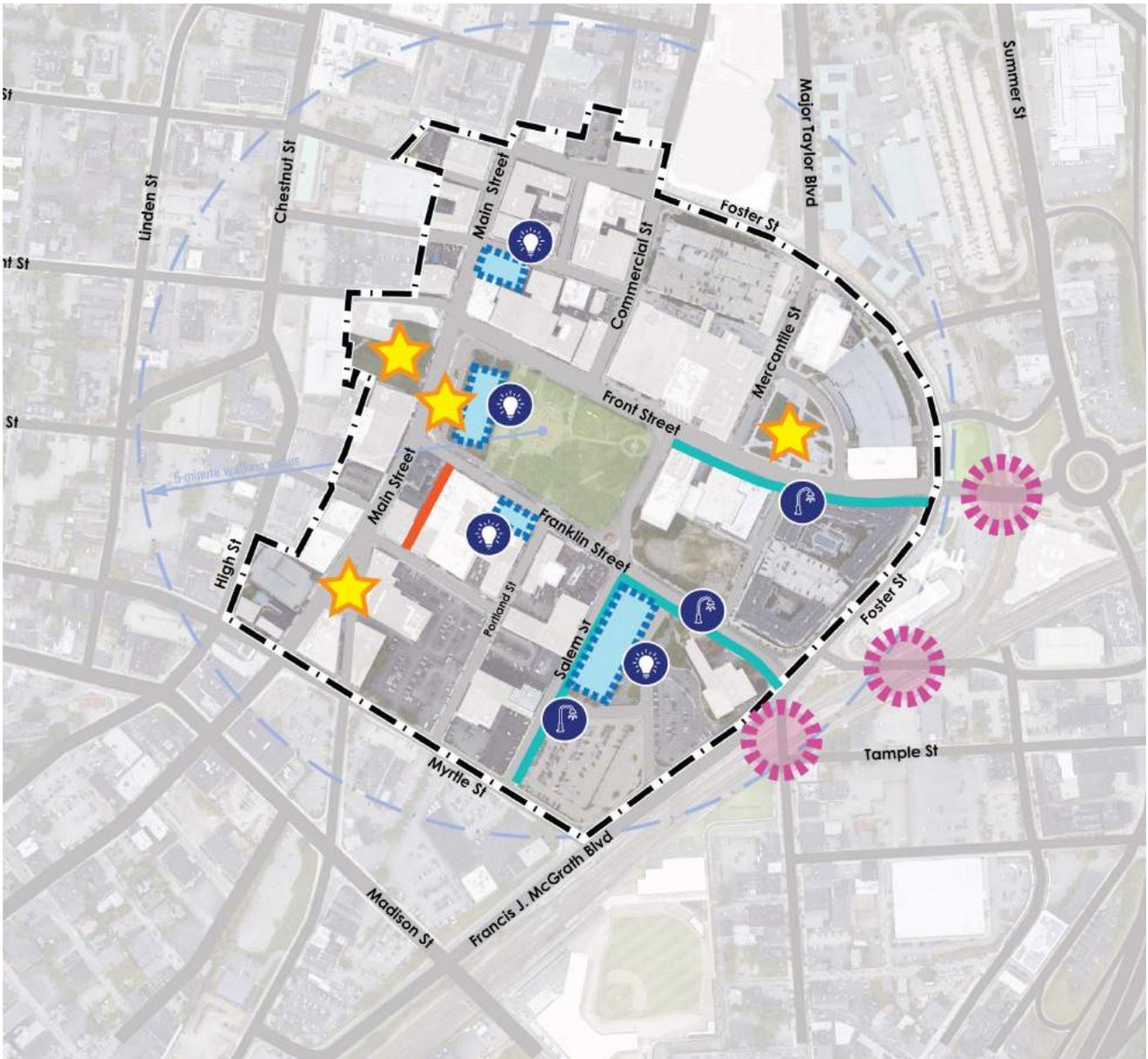
The following section provides an overview of the project prioritization results from the public engagement efforts and stakeholder feedback, along with a map that illustrates project locations at a site and district-level. Each project is categorized by the project theme, such as public realm or admin capacity.

The Worcester LRRP Report includes 19 projects, all of which fall within the DHCD categories including Physical Environment, Business Environment, Customer Base, and Administrative Capacity. Some of the projects with broad support include:

- Expand outreach to unsheltered population
- Activate underused spaces
- Expand outdoor dining
- Develop targeted tenant recruitment strategy
- Provide public restrooms
- Enhance lighting
- Install pedestrian wayfinding
- Provide DEI training
- Transform Allen Court

Worcester LRRP Project List				
Project Idea	Description	Project Theme	Implementation Time Frame	Budget Range
Enhance Lighting on Streets and Buildings	Increase nighttime lighting and add visual interest by illuminating trees, light poles, and buildings with a variety of decorative lighting.	Public Realm	Short-term (<5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50k - \$200K)
Expand Outdoor Dining Downtown	Develop a user-friendly outdoor dining permitting process and identify preferred locations, design options, and products to assist restaurant owners.	Public Realm	Short-term (<5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50k - \$200K)
Create Welcoming Gateway Experiences that Connect Downtown to Adjacent Neighborhoods	Install distinctive elements such as lighting, sculpture, public art, and/or signage at key connection points between Downtown and nearby neighborhoods.	Public Realm	Short-term (<5 years)	Large Budget (>\$200K)
Conduct a Downtown Parking Study	Optimize the use of Downtown on-street parking spaces by analyzing occupancy patterns and implementing parking management strategies.	Public Realm	Short-term (<5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50k - \$200K)
Provide a Public Restroom Solution to Improve the Downtown Visitor Experience	Adapt lessons from other cities that provide public restrooms and identify potential locations to best serve families, the elderly, those with medical conditions, and the unhoused.	Public Realm	Short-term (<5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50k - \$200K)
Transform Allen Court Alleyway into an Attractive, Flexible-Use Shared Space	Create a safe, attractive, flexible-use alley space between Franklin and Federal Streets that allows special events and pedestrian use as well as limited vehicular access.	Private Realm	Short-term (<5 years)	Large Budget (>\$200K)
Implement a Storefront Design Technical Assistance Program	Offer technical and design assistance to enhance the City's existing facade improvement program.	Private Realm	Short-term (<5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50k - \$200K)
Create a Pedestrian Wayfinding System	Develop an effective Downtown wayfinding strategy starting with sidewalk decals, storefront decals, and creative banners before continuing with a permanent system to direct visitors to local destinations.	Revenue and Sales	Short-term (<5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50k - \$200K)
Offer Business Assessments to Increase Sales and Improve Customer Experience	Offer comprehensive evaluations of the customer experience to retail business owners and identify improvements to the storefront, interior, and sales and marketing.	Revenue and Sales	Short-term (<5 years)	Small Budget (<\$50k)
Support a Local Business Owner Communication Network	Encourage Downtown business owners to share information and resources to improve business practices and promote bulk purchasing to reduce costs.	Revenue and Sales	Short-term (<5 years)	Small Budget (<\$50k)

Worcester LRRP Project List				
Project Idea	Description	Project Theme	Implementation Time Frame	Budget Range
Develop and Implement a Targeted Tenant Recruitment Strategy to Fill Vacant Storefronts	Recruit successful Worcester-area businesses to expand Downtown and attract new businesses without a local presence to locate Downtown.	Tenant Mix	Short-term (<5 years)	Small Budget (<\$50k)
Provide Assistance for Local Minority and Disadvantaged Business Owners	Offer culturally appropriate business assistance such as workshops, mentorship programs, and other training to minority, New American, women, and other disadvantaged entrepreneurs and business owners.	Tenant Mix	Short-term (<5 years)	Small Budget (<\$50k)
Activate Underused Spaces Downtown	Identify community partners to add seating, lighting, interactive art and games, and programming like live music to increase activity in underused spaces, especially during winter.	Arts & Culture	Short-term (<5 years)	Medium Budget (\$50k - \$200K)
Expand Outreach to Cultural/Arts Organizations to Host Events Downtown	Develop a signature Downtown event, grow existing events, and create new ones to offer events that appeal to everyone.	Arts & Culture	Short-term (<5 years)	Small Budget (<\$50k)
Increase the Downtown Worcester BID's Capacity	Align mission and resources to best serve Downtown by identifying high-impact projects, sponsorships, and partnerships.	Administrative Capacity	Short-term (<5 years)	Small Budget (<\$50k)
Provide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training	Work with community partners to develop educational offerings for Downtown businesses and organizations.	Administrative Capacity	Short-term (<5 years)	Small Budget (<\$50k)
Develop a Banner Program for Street Light Poles	Use light pole banners to promote Downtown's identity, highlight local events, and provide seasonal interest.	Administrative Capacity	Short-term (<5 years)	Small Budget (<\$50k)
Deploy a Pedestrian Counter System and Share Data to Promote Downtown	Understand daily activity patterns and event crowd size to assist business development and mobility planning.	Other	Short-term (<5 years)	Small Budget (<\$50k)
Expand Outreach to Unsheltered Population	Build on the City's effective Homeless Outreach Program to connect more people to additional resources like recovery coaches and workforce training.	Other	Short-term (<5 years)	Small Budget (<\$50k)



Worcester LRRP Project Locations Map

Source: Stantec

Recommended projects with a specific location in mind are mapped below. These are primarily public and private realm projects. Other projects such as business assistance and administrative projects would apply throughout the study area and are not mapped.

-  Public Space Activation
-  Gateway
-  Enhanced Street Lighting
-  Building Illumination
-  Allen Court Improvements
-  Study Area

Implementation / Next Steps

Project Action Plan

The Local Rapid Recovery Program gives communities a defined and implementable compilation of projects that have been vetted by the community, as well as a data-driven plan that can alleviate the impacts from COVID-19 pandemic. This report provides detailed information on the budget ranges, time frame, funding sources, action items, and key processes required to properly execute and implement the project ideas. The project ideas developed through this program serve as opportunities for communities to rapidly implement capital improvements and address administrative and economic development challenges. Municipal departments and planning entities can use the project ideas as a resource for internal or external funding opportunities.

Obtaining Funding

Considering the vast number of project ideas and differing budget ranges (less than \$50K to more than \$200K), it can be overwhelming and time-consuming for communities to seek assistance and find funding opportunities. The Department of Housing and Community Development provides extensive resources that contain information on existing local, state, and federal grant programs, organized by the diagnostic categories including physical environment, business environment, administrative capacity, and customer base.

The table in the previous pages organizes the 19 projects for the Worcester LRRP plan by implementation time-frame (short, medium, or long-term), as well as budget range (less than \$50K or greater than \$200K). Organizing projects by potential budget and time-frame can act as a resource for communities to assess projects that could be implemented quickly and cheaply, and which projects should be addressed at a later date due to funding, political, or administrative setbacks.

ENHANCE LIGHTING ON STREETS AND BUILDINGS

Description - Increase nighttime lighting and add visual interest by illuminating trees, light poles, and buildings with a variety of decorative lighting.

Category



Public Realm

Location

RRP study area, including:

- Street trees and medians throughout Downtown
- City Hall (455 Main St)
- Worcester Public Library (3 Salem St)
- Shack's Building (403 Main St)
- Bancroft Building (50 Franklin St)
- Dedholm Building (484 Main St)
- Other locations TBD

Census Tract 7317

Origin

City of Worcester, Downtown Worcester BID
Project would be led by City of Worcester Department of Public Works and Parks (public realm) in partnership with the BID and/or property owners (private realm)



Conceptual rendering showing ideas for LED lighting on the Salem Street facade of the Worcester Public Library.
Source: Stantec

Budget



Medium-Large (\$50k - \$200k+)

- Lighting design consultant
- Site/Civil Engineer & Electrical Engineer
- Lighting products
- Installation
- Electricity cost to operate

Potential funding sources: Creative Intersections (Greater Worcester Foundation), TDI Creative Catalyst, sponsorships

Timeframe



Short-term (< 5 years)

- Identify and confirm potential locations – 3 months
- Select and order lighting elements – 3 months
- Plan kick-off events for lighting of significant buildings – 3 months
- Install lighting – 1 month
- Operate and maintain – ongoing

Risk



Low risk

- Coordination with City and building owners

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of trees and landscape elements illuminated
- Number of buildings illuminated
- Public sentiment gauged via social media impressions
- Number of attendees at initial lighting events
- Local news coverage

Partners & Resources

- Lighting designer/fabricator
- Building owners
- Electric provider

Diagnostic

Business and venue closures and/or reduced hours set back Worcester's goal for creating an 18-hour downtown. The lack of people gave Downtown a vacant, dark, and unwelcoming feeling. Decorative lighting will increase nighttime illumination while creating opportunities for artistic, colorful lighting displays and to highlight architectural features in interesting ways. Additionally, lighting street tree, gateway, and median locations throughout Downtown will provide increased safety after dark, enable better wayfinding (seeing how to get from one location to another location), create a warmer welcome to residents, businesses, and visitors of Worcester, and increase curb appeal existing and future businesses in the BID.

Diagnostic:

- Public lighting received B grade in diagnostic, storefront/building lighting a C. Nighttime lighting is primarily provided via streetlights – minimal accent lighting on buildings or landscapes
- Enhanced lighting initiatives was the top-ranked beautification priority identified in the Placemaking Action Plan survey responses

Covid impacts:

- The wide-ranging impacts caused by Covid-related shutdowns and public gathering restrictions emphasize the importance of visitor experience to draw people back Downtown.
- Covid has severely impacted downtown and its businesses. Re-building excitement and interest in downtown is an important way to help attract visitors again by making downtown feel welcoming and inviting to everyone.

Action Item

This project will design, locate, engineer, and install decorative lighting along major pedestrian corridors. Lighting will highlight architectural features, wash building facades in color, and illuminate street trees and other landscape features. "Soft openings" of prominent building illumination may be combined with community events featuring music, arts, and/or food to publicize the program and attract visitors. Together, these installations will increase nighttime lighting levels in creative ways while adding visual interest downtown.

Action:

- Determine locations for initial lighting installations, both public spaces/elements and private buildings.
- Select lighting product(s) appropriate for each location.
- Install lighting and promote initiative.
- Assess additional locations for future lighting installations.

Process

Determine locations for initial lighting installations

- Evaluate primary pedestrian corridors and buildings in key locations with interesting features to highlight to develop an overall lighting plan for Downtown.
- Investigate electricity access in potential streetscape lighting locations.
- Discuss lighting installations with building owners and agree to terms. Consider starting with publicly owned buildings in first phase (City Hall, Library) and expanding to private buildings in second phase depending on interest.
- Determine cost structure for building illumination – who pays for electricity, lighting products, etc.

Select lighting product(s) appropriate for each location.

- Identify lighting provider and obtain cost estimates for product options. Consider bulb lifespan, electricity usage, ability to program and/or change colors.
- Obtain necessary permits.

Install lighting and promote initiative.

- Install lighting products.
- Plan and promote a kickoff lighting event to attract people to Downtown.
- Host 'lighting kickoff' community event.
- Operate and maintain lighting

Assess additional locations for future lighting installations.



BEST PRACTICE

Iluminación Lawrence: Illuminating downtown Lawrence to create wonder and attraction



CULTURAL/
ARTS

Provided by SME Consultant

Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location

Lawrence, MA

<p>Origin</p>	<p>City of Lawrence and Mass Development TDI Fellow in collaboration with a light artist plus partners developed the concept to focus on Downtown Lawrence.</p>
<p>Budget</p>	<p> High approximately \$225,000 + in-kind services. <i>Note:</i> budget increases as project elements are added to program.</p>
<p>Timeframe</p>	<p> Medium- planning and implementation 10-12 months and ongoing</p>
<p>Risk</p>	<p> Medium – Main risks included weather, and availability of technology and political will</p>
<p>Key Performance Indicators</p>	<p>Community and regional attention, number of participants at events</p>
<p>Partners & Resources</p>	<p>Light Artist John Powell, City of Lawrence, Lawrence Redevelopment Authority, Mass Development TDI, Essex Community Foundation (ECCF), Groundworks Lawrence, Lawrence Partnership and Lawrence DPW</p>

Diagnostic

Early on, the bridge and the clock tower, were the first concepts developed. After a devastating gas-main explosion and utility collapse in a number of the City of Lawrence neighborhoods, it was felt that an extension of the project be made to include other structures to underscore Lawrence as a rich historic, architecturally and vital community

Therefore, it was determined that the architecture of the magnificent mill buildings in and around Downtown should be "showcased" by artistic illumination to reinforce community pride and attract visitors and residents to Downtown Lawrence

Iluminación Lawrence was organized to create and develop a comprehensive program to allow Lawrence to be seen "in a different light"

Partner organizations and institutions were joined together to fund various projects. The budget was further developed with the assistance of Light Artist John Powell and the MassDevelopment TDI Fellow Jess Martinez to incorporate many Lawrence structures.

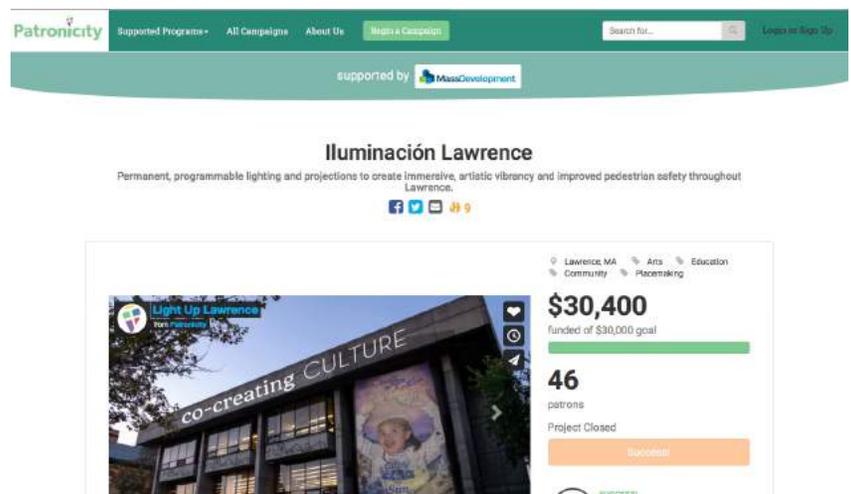
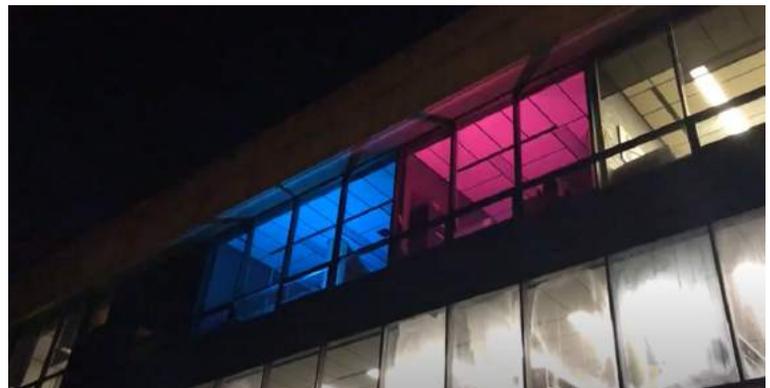
The Patronicity Funding amount was used as part of the overall funding.

Action Item

- To reinforce the program, an *Iluminación Lawrence* website was developed to communicate news of the project elements, schedule and related events
- A Patronicity funding project was developed to raise \$30,000 in matching money. The goal was met by raising \$30,400 which MassDevelopment matched to implement the project. Additionally, several other significant amounts were raised by other public and private sources.
- Local Press outlets, facebook and the City of Lawrence's official website as well as partners' websites were used to communicate the project to residents and businesses
- Phased tests and "soft openings" were created to reinforce community interest
- Music was part of the plan as well and was and is provided by
- In 2021, the Boston Architectural College will assist with rolling out other lighted structures in the Downtown



Iluminación website

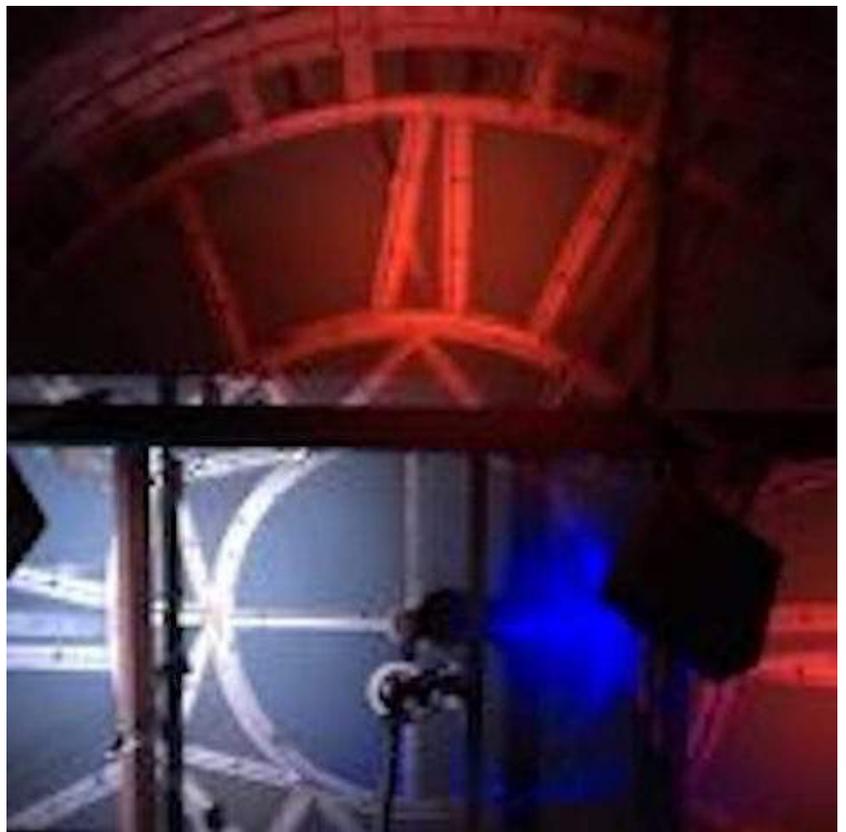


Process

- The artistic and technical aspects of the project were initially worked out by Light Artist John Powell who had extensive experience lighting buildings, bridges and other structures nationally and internationally. The initial concept of the project focused only on the Casey Bridge and then later on the Ayer Mill Clock Tower.
- Mr. Powell convinced various members off the community leadership that this concept needed to be expanded to incorporate many structures throughout the Downtown
- Unfortunately, he passed away in early 2020 and replacement artists have now taken his creative and technical place
- Needed permissions and permitting were ascertained from public and private building owners
- LuminArtz developed approaches to direct lighting facade of City Hall
- Internal illumination took place at the Lawrence Public Library
- "Soft Openings" were used as testing for technology. These in turn became community events that added excitement and energy to the program
- Organizations, agencies and individuals collaborated on every aspect of the program
- Individual budgets have been created for each event and each activity area.
- Throughout the projects program, a detailed implementation plan with timeline of tasks, roles was created and followed
- Document has been extensive throughout the total program
- This has and will assist with future project components programming
- During each programmed event, community celebrations have taken place, leading to continued community pride and joy.
- Businesses and residents have all positively responded to the overall program.



Lighting was used to emphasize significant architectural features and to enliven the downtown experience. .



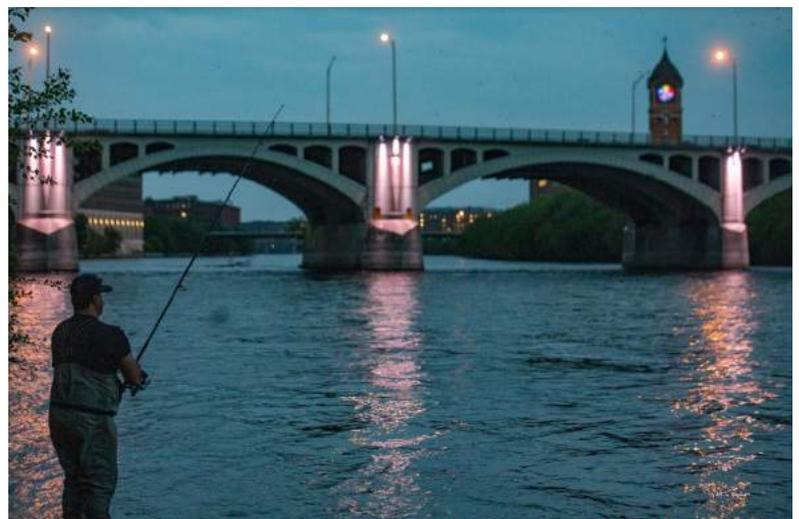
Internal view of Ayer Mill Clock Tower lighting..

Process- Strategic Decisions

- The initial project considered, for what eventually became *Iluminación Lawrence*, was only to light the Casey Bridge located in Downtown Lawrence over the Merrimack River
- After the Ayer Clock Tower lighting was added, it was clear that a much more extensive plan be initiated throughout the Downtown
- Now the plan incorporates several significant structures that add to the visual enrichment of Lawrence while recognizing the history, people and events that have gone into its social and cultural legacy
- Significant aspects of its history include perhaps the best physical master plan for a textile mill city in the United States, impact on child-labor laws by Lewis Hind's documentation and writings based on Lawrence child workers and the revolutionary Bread and Roses Workers' Strike of 1912
- *Iluminación Lawrence* speaks to this grand legacy of the history and resiliency of the City of Lawrence.
- Each new lighting of a structure becomes a community celebration



Iconic Casey Bridge over the Merrimack River



EXPAND OUTDOOR DINING DOWNTOWN

Description - Develop a user-friendly outdoor dining permitting process and identify preferred locations, design options, and products to assist restaurant owners.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Restaurants in RRP study area Census Tract 7317
Origin	City of Worcester, Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by City of Worcester Department of Planning and Regulatory Services in partnership with the BID
Budget	<p>Medium (\$50k - \$200k)</p> <p>Dining platform system, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archatrak StreetDeck Kit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Basic 20'x6'~\$5,900 » Complete 20'x6' ~\$16,500 • Hauser modular parklet system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Base + railings ~\$115+ PSF (~\$14,000 for 20'x6') » Base + planters ~\$150+ PSF (~\$18,000 for 20'x6') • Bison Innovative Products (Chasu Ramen pilot) • Outdoor furniture (tables, chairs, umbrellas, planters, heaters, etc.) <p>Potential funding sources: Shared Streets and Spaces, Commonwealth Places, Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation, restaurant contributions, sponsorships</p>



Downtown's first dining parklet was unveiled on Franklin Street in September 2021

Timeframe



Short-term (< 5 years)

- Work with City staff to determine permitting process – 4 months
- Identify dining platform system – 2 months
- Publicize program with downtown restaurants – 2 months
- Implement outdoor dining program - Spring 2022

Risk



Low risk

- Cost of dining platforms and outdoor furniture
- Physical constraints (sidewalk width, streets)
- Permitting

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of program applicants
- Number of restaurants offering new/improved outdoor dining
- Change in restaurant sales

Partners & Resources

- City of Worcester departments including Economic Development, Building and Zoning, Public Works & Parks, Streets, Police and Fire
- Downtown restaurant owners



Cafe seating on Franklin Street

Diagnostic

Diagnostic:

- Sidewalk dimensions in many areas are too narrow to accommodate adequate outdoor dining and maintain a clear path for pedestrians. Other alternatives will be needed.
- Outdoor dining was popular during the pandemic but the emergency orders that expedited the permit process expire December 2021. A streamlined permitting system is needed in time for the Spring 2022 outdoor season.
- Outdoor dining and display was rated a C.
- Three-quarters of business survey respondents rated more opportunities for outdoor dining and selling as important or very important.

Covid impacts:

- Restaurants were temporarily closed during the initial public health emergency and many reopened for takeout service only later. Inside dining was allowed months later with limited seating. Constantly changing restrictions on occupancy and operations for safety have added costs to business operations, in turn adding to losses and creating further disincentive to come Downtown
- The pandemic had a significant impact on revenues and threatened many restaurants. Increasing revenue quickly is critical to their ongoing success and outdoor dining can increase their available seating in a social distancing friendly way
- Outdoor dining was promoted as a safe alternative to add seating in a health-conscious way.

Action Item

This project will take lessons learned from the pandemic experience and the ongoing pilot project on Franklin Street to develop a permanent outdoor dining program. Three aspects are critically important: the location of outdoor dining (sidewalk or on-street parking areas), the cost of the platform or dining space where sidewalk dimensions do not allow traditional sidewalk dining, and the simplicity of the permitting process for restaurant owners. The goal is to create a user-friendly, cost-effective experience for restaurants to implement high-quality outdoor dining throughout downtown. This will add a new element to the downtown experience, attract new customers, and support local restaurants.

- Assess lessons learned from the past 18 months with outdoor dining and the Franklin Street pilot project.
- Develop a streamlined permitting process.
- Create outdoor dining design guidelines.
- Promote new permitting and guidelines.
- Monitor installations and adjust process as needed.

Process

Assess lessons learned from the past 18 months with outdoor dining and the Franklin Street pilot project.

- Talk with restaurant owners about what worked well with outdoor dining and what needs improvement.
- Discuss permitting process, regulatory issues, insurance and liability concerns with City (Buildings, Fire, Licensing, etc)
- Talk with other cities and towns to learn from their experience. Consult DHCD's Outdoor Dining/Retail Toolkit.

Develop a streamlined permitting process.

- Convene all City departments involved in the permitting and licensing process.
- Consolidate approvals to streamline process, reducing time and cost for applicant.

Create outdoor dining design guidelines.

- Determine outdoor dining options where sidewalk is too narrow for traditional sidewalk dining: parklets built in on-street parking spaces to maintain a clear sidewalk or sidewalk dining with accessible pedestrian route through adjacent on-street parking spaces.
- Research products and materials for each strategy: pre-fabricated dining platforms, DIY platforms, movable curb ramps, barriers, etc.
- Define storage requirements, maintenance agreement, ownership issues for dining platforms
- Identify funding to assist with dining product and furniture acquisition.
- Develop outdoor dining guidelines with recommended products, materials, DIY guidelines if needed, and permitting requirements and approval flowchart. Guidelines will establish a minimum quality yet allow creativity, and prohibit ideas that would be unsightly and detract from the appeal of Downtown.

Promote new permitting and guidelines.

- Promote new outdoor dining guidelines and funding assistance with local restaurants.
- Recruit new restaurants to participate in program.

Monitor installations and adjust process as needed.

- Track implementation and applicant experience – what's working well, what needs improvement?
- Adjust program guidelines as needed



**BEST
PRACTICE**

Providing Welcoming Outdoor Dining



Public Realm

Location: Salem, MA

Best Practice: Salem, MA's Welcoming Outdoor Dining Initiative

City of Salem's Mayor's Office worked with Salem Economic Development Rapid Recovery Task Force and Creative Collective to address the immediate need for increased outdoor dining capacity brought on by COVID-19. The program allowed restaurants to stay open and in business, and was a useful marketing tool for participating businesses.

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

Over 50 restaurants participated in the program in 2020, and 56 have applied for the 2021 season. Local artists were employed with to transform protective jersey barriers into works of art.

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

OPPORTUNITIES

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



Source: DHCD Best Practice Compendium

CHALLENGES

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

PROCESS

- Establish a core group of stakeholders to shepherd the project and to meet weekly to get the project started.
- Hire a project manager with restaurant community connections. In Salem, John Andrews, Owner / Chief Creative Officer of Creative Collective managed, coordinated, and helped implement the program for 2020 and the evolution of the program in 2021. Creative Collective was hired by the City of Salem. The project manager brings together the stakeholders from City departments, restaurants, and local artists to create functional, safe, community minded, and aesthetically pleasing installations for outdoor dining.

- Communicate with each individual restaurant owner or manager to establish their needs and possible contribution (materials or labor).
- Communication with any available channels (from email to social media to going door to door) is key.
- Create a marketing strategy with a mix of different communication methods. Examples: posting to Facebook groups, direct messaging on social media, door to door campaign, and phone calls.
- Communicate design guidelines for best practices related to public health, universal design, and building code compliant design.
- Determine if pedestrian right-of-way needs redesign, new accommodation.
- Ensure full accessibility with universal design.
- In 2021, obtain City approval based on an automated application under the viewpoint portal.
- Aid and assist as needed in the buildout of individual spaces.
- Determine items to be provided by the City. In Salem, the City provided jersey barriers heaters, and the City also provided labor and material support on an individual restaurant basis.
- Coordinate with Department of Public Works on delivery and placement of jersey barriers and heaters.
- Hire local artists to paint barriers and coordinate mural with aesthetic input from individual businesses. The City of Salem hired the artists.
- Create a plan for storage and winterization.
- Meet with core stakeholders to iterate for the following season, learn from mistakes, and evolve the program.



Source: DHCD RRP Compendium

Guidance from DHCD's Outdoor Dining Toolkit: Streamlining the Outdoor Dining Permitting Process

When we say "streamline the process," it can include all or some of the following goals:

1. Offer a single application for businesses to apply for permits and licenses to provide outdoor dining and retail.
2. Offer an online application to help businesses save time.
3. Provide a checklist of all requirements.
4. Provide a liaison at City or Town Hall to guide businesses through the outdoor dining and retail rules and requirements.
5. Create a short-track or condensed timeline for permitting and approvals by coordinating Town or City inspections and reviews.
6. Provide clear design guidelines and other requirements that take the guesswork out of providing outdoor dining and retail.
7. Offer bulk purchasing of common items needed for outdoor dining and retail to get better prices for businesses and standardize select items that may be hard or confusing to source.

These approaches aren't mutually exclusive and you may choose to combine various methods of streamlining applications. For instance, some communities will offer a single, online application and also provide a short-tracked permitting and inspections process. If they offer design guidelines and a complete Toolkit for businesses (using this Toolkit as a guide, of course!), that's one more way to streamline the entire process for businesses.

A summary guide to these approaches follows. Further details can be found in the LRRP Outdoor Dining Guide, as can information about providing design and materials guidelines to

businesses and making temporary outdoor dining regulations permanent.

Offer a single application for businesses to apply for permits and licenses to provide outdoor dining and retail.

Creating a single application makes a simple process for businesses and municipal staff. A single application replaces all other permit and license forms that would typically be required for outdoor dining or retail. One required application also gives assurances to businesses that they are not missing any key steps.

Elements to include in a single application:

- Offer application by seating type/location/space ownership
- Offer an online option
- Provide a checklist of all requirements
- List any separate permits that may be required
- Provide design guidelines
- Offer guidance regarding alcohol sales and service
- Provide key dates and timeline for review and approvals

Some municipalities opt to incorporate all types of outdoor seating into a single application and others have a different application depending on the type. For example, Brookline, MA has a single application on which the applicant selects their proposed outdoor dining type classified by location. Categorizing applications by the proposed location or by ownership of the space (public or private) makes good sense as different considerations (and different municipal permits and review) come into play if seating is proposed for the street or a sidewalk.

Provide a checklist of all requirements.

To help businesses organize all of the materials and information they will need to successfully apply for an outdoor dining or retail permit, it is useful to provide a checklist of required items. A clearly defined checklist will decrease chances for confusion and enable the applicant to organize the proper materials in advance, rather than having to start and stop the application to seek out necessary documentation. The checklist should be as succinct and easy to understand as possible.

It is important to explicitly identify any required or optional elements that need a separate permit application from the business. It is up to the discretion of the municipality to decide which elements to include as part of the primary application and which require separate permitting. When possible, streamline the process by designating pre-approval for certain equipment and models that have been vetted to remove uncertainty on the part of the businesses. Common examples of things that may require separate municipal approval/permitting include:

- Tents/Canopies
- Outdoor Heaters
- Platforms
- Sidewalk Use/Obstruction

Offer an online application.

Online applications help ease the process for businesses and can be done two ways: If your municipality already has an online form center or portal for submitting permit applications, this is a streamlined way to allow applicants to attach any necessary uploads directly to their application and submit all in one place.

If you don't have a public portal for applications and other submittals, an alternative option is to provide fillable PDFs that applicants can submit by email along with any other necessary attachments.

Hard copy applications should also be available upon request for applicants who may lack internet access or proficiency.

Provide a liaison at City Hall.

Designating someone as the single point person at City or Town Hall can help ease the process for businesses that have questions about outdoor dining permitting and provide one stop shopping. This liaison can also serve as the coordinator of staff and department requirements, providing a consistent presence and source of information. The liaison can also report back on barriers or challenges in the permitting process and initiative changes in response to real time feedback from businesses and public sector collaborators.

Create a short-track or condensed timeline for permitting and approvals.

By coordinating Town or City inspections and reviews, and possibly eliminating or shortening some public review processes, the overall timeline from application to permit approval can be shortened, helping restaurants make quick pivots to retain customers and staff. In addition, providing clear timelines for permitting, from application submittal through inspections and approvals, helps businesses stay on track and prevents misunderstandings and missed deadlines. Time is money for businesses; important information to include in the timeline includes:

- Date the application process opens (if applications are seasonal)
- Overall estimated time from submission to municipal decision

-
- Outline any public review periods that are required

The application deadline and any intermediary deadlines, such as site inspections, municipal grants, or materials for loan (if applicable)
When the outdoor dining/retail season begins and ends (if applicable)

Provide clear design guidelines and other requirements including alcohol licensing checklist of all requirements

Businesses have expertise in menus, food, dining experiences for customers, service, and in the case of outdoor retail, displays and signage. The design and construction of outdoor dining and retail can stymie the most sophisticated business owner...it's just not part of their expertise and experience. Guidelines can help!

Previously, an application to extend the licensed premises to serve alcohol in a new outdoor area had to be approved by both a municipality's local licensing authority (LLA) and the ABCC. However, per Bill S.2475, An Act relative to extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the state of emergency, LLA's have been granted the authority to approve the extension of licensed premises until April 1, 2022 without the need for ABCC approval. This means allowing alcohol service in a public outdoor space, including a space across the sidewalk, is fully at the discretion of the LLA. After approval, the LLA must notify the ABCC of the amended license.

As with outdoor dining in general, businesses that have been granted an outdoor extension of their premises for alcohol service through this expedited process are presently scheduled to revert to their pre-approval status after April 1, 2022. If a business is seeking to extend their premises for outdoor alcohol service beyond April 1, 2022, they must follow the ABCC's usual regulations for Alteration of Premises/Change of Location. This consists of submitting an application to the LLA for approval, which then gets forwarded to the ABCC for approval.

Offer bulk purchasing of common items needed for outdoor dining and retail.

Some equipment or materials may be specialized and also need to meet safety requirements. Items such as outdoor heaters have to meet fire safety or electrical codes, and the storage of propane fuel, if used, can be complicated. Additionally, items such as platforms to raise on-street parking spaces to sidewalk height are fairly standardized but require construction knowledge and structural design. To get better prices for businesses and standardize select items that may be hard or confusing to source, towns and cities may choose to bulk purchase items on behalf of businesses.



CREATE WELCOMING GATEWAY EXPERIENCES THAT CONNECT DOWNTOWN TO ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS

Description - Install distinctive elements such as lighting, sculpture, public art, and/or signage at key connection points between Downtown and nearby neighborhoods.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	RRP Study area, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Street bridge (Green St and McGrath Blvd) - gateway to/from Canal District and Polar Park • Franklin Street bridge (at Foster St) - gateway to/from Union Station • Front Street bridge (Front St and Foster St) - gateway to/from Shrewsbury Street and Union Station Census Tract 7317
Origin	City of Worcester, Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by City of Worcester Department of Public Works and Parks in partnership with the BID



Conceptual rendering of potential additional enhancements like signage and public art to the Green Street bridge looking toward Downtown, complementing the City's ongoing lighting project.
Source: Stantec

Budget



Large (>\$200,000)

- E.g., Green Street bridge lighting: \$216,000

Potential funding source: MDI, MassWorks

Timeframe



Short- to Medium-term (0-10 years)

- Develop RFP and solicit bids for gateway design team – 2 months
- Select and contract with design team – 2 months
- Create design committee (City, BID, Stakeholders) to manage and review the design process
- Contact railroad to discuss idea and identify critical issues – 2 months
- Conduct public outreach to solicit ideas and review concepts - ongoing
- Complete design process from conceptual to construction drawings – 9 months
- Install gateway elements – 4-6 months

Risk



Medium risk.

- Coordination with railroad (bridge owner)
- Project costs
- Technical considerations (structural, electrical, etc.)

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of gateway designs completed and installed
- Public sentiment gauged via social media impressions
- Change in pedestrian movement between neighborhoods
- Local news coverage

Partners & Resources

- City of Worcester Special Projects
- City of Worcester Cultural Development
- Local artists
- Other stakeholders



The Green Street bridge is the primary link between Downtown and the Canal District.

Diagnostic

Downtown is a growing neighborhood with an array of cultural and civic attractions, dining options, and community gathering spaces. It is adjacent to other popular neighborhoods for dining, nightlife, and attractions like Polar Park. However, there is minimal signage that makes visitors aware of the proximity of these areas to Downtown.

Diagnostic:

- Signage and wayfinding connecting Downtown to and from the adjacent Canal District and Shrewsbury Street is lacking.
- Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods are often perceived as being too far to walk between. However, it would take 10-15 minutes to walk from the Common to the Worcester Public Market in the Canal District or to the middle of the Shrewsbury Street dining district, a distance many people will walk if it feels safe, interesting, and enjoyable.
- Gateway signage is identified in the Placemaking Action Plan as one of four projects the BID can support working with the City. Connecting Downtown to Union Station is also highlighted.

Covid impacts:

- The wide-ranging impacts caused by Covid-related shutdowns and public gathering restrictions emphasize the importance of visitor experience to draw people back Downtown.
- Covid has severely impacted Downtown and its businesses. Re-building excitement and interest in downtown is an important way to help attract visitors again by making Downtown feel welcoming and inviting to everyone.

Action Item

This project will design and install gateway elements at major pedestrian and vehicular access points. These three bridges are distinctive thresholds separating Downtown from nearby attractions like Shrewsbury Street, the Canal District, and Polar Park. Gateway installations on both sides of these bridges will encourage people to explore Downtown and nearby neighborhoods on foot. Colorful lighting and/or public art may be used to create visually interesting projects ('instagrammable' appeal) that contribute to Downtown's sense of place. Improvements will minimize any physical impact on the railroad bridges to reduce potential issues.

Action:

- Convene a gateway working group with City staff and BID
- Develop conceptual sketches to promote ideas and gather initial feedback.
- Obtain cost estimates and refine designs.
- Install gateway improvements.

Process

Convene a gateway working group with City staff and BID.

- Discuss potential art and/or cultural partners that could contribute ideas.
- Create an RFP for a gateway design and installation team – engineers, lighting experts, artists, etc. Agree to contract with preferred design team.

Develop conceptual sketches to promote ideas and gather initial feedback.

- Contact railroad to discuss potential projects near bridges and identify critical concerns.
- Engage community and local artists for design ideas for gateway locations.
- Develop initial concept designs for gateway installations.
- Share concepts with public for feedback.

Obtain cost estimates and refine designs.

- Work with fabricators to develop cost estimates and inform design process.
- Revise design concepts based on feedback.
- Share revised concepts for additional feedback.

Install gateway improvements.

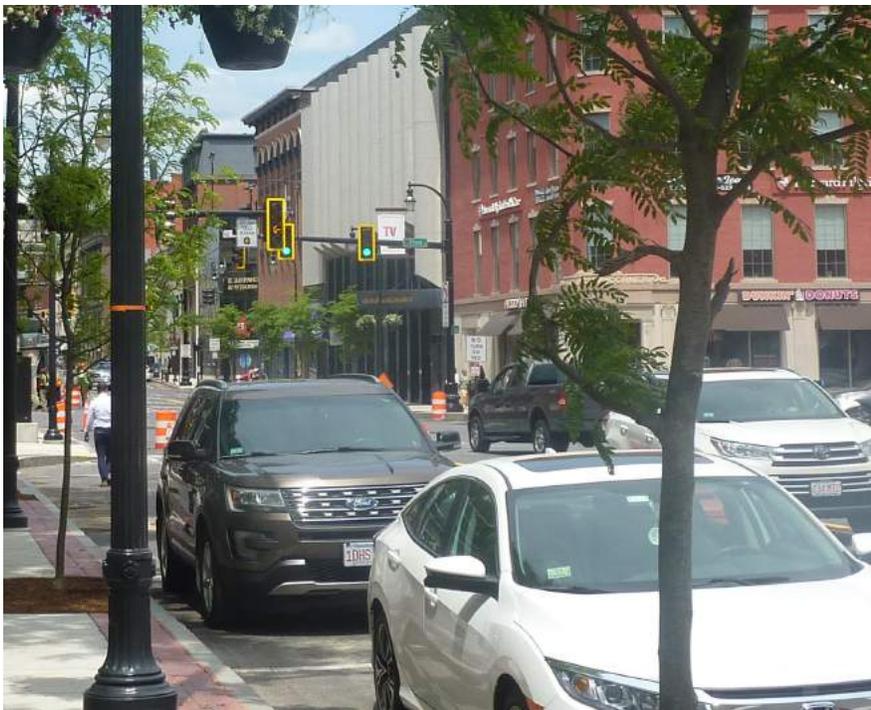
- Finalize design and complete construction documents.
- Solicit bids for installation (if needed).
- Install gateway elements.
- Publicize installation via social and print media to raise awareness and create buzz.



CONDUCT A DOWNTOWN PARKING STUDY

Description - Optimize the use of Downtown on-street parking spaces by analyzing occupancy patterns and implementing parking management strategies.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	RRP study area Census Tract 7317
Origin	City of Worcester, Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by City of Worcester Department of Public Works and Parks
Budget	 Medium (\$50,000-200,000) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely \$75,000 - \$100,000 depending on scope of study Sources include: MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places, DHCD Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI), City general fund
Timeframe	 Short-term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop RFP for parking study – 2 months Solicit bids, select consultant, and contract – 3 months Conduct parking study – 6-8 months Implement recommendations - ongoing



Left: Parking along the newly reconstructed Main Street. Right: Digital parking kiosks are being installed Downtown.

Risk



Low risk

- Changing parking expectations
- Adopting parking management changes

Key Performance Indicators

- Increased parking availability
- Increased parking revenue
- Improved user experience
- Change in business sales

Partners & Resources

- Parking Enforcement
- Owners of private parking lots Downtown
- WRTA



Diagnostic

Diagnostic:

- Some parking areas are often near capacity while others are underused.
- Parking wayfinding is provided by limited signage and undersized light pole banners.
- Almost three-quarters of business survey respondents rated changes in parking availability, management, or policies as important or very important.
- Cities are looking at ways to utilize and repurpose the curbside to better support restaurants and retail. Extending sidewalks into parking spaces has created the possibility for curbside dining, and cities are taking the opportunity to reassign parking spaces on a more permanent basis to support pedestrians and cyclists.

Covid impacts:

- Parking needs declined sharply during the pandemic but have been building back since. Since fewer people are taking transit, parking needs may have even increased.
- Covid-19 is driving change in consumer behavior and parking is used differently. As one example: restaurant take-out/delivery zones.
- The changes to parking presented by Covid-19 gives cities a chance to implement new projects and initiatives and begin to shift parking away from vehicle storage to mobility management.

Action Item

The City is in the process of revamping its on-street parking program. It recently implemented a new parking system using payment kiosks in the Canal District and will expand this to Downtown in late 2021. Taking advantage of the newly available data, a parking study should carefully evaluate parking patterns, regulatory controls, enforcement protocols, off-street regulations and controls, future development impacts and local administrative capacity for the existing and proposed program. It should include outreach to City and private stakeholders, residents, tourists, landowners, merchants, and other key users of the Downtown parking system. The preferred program should address on- and off-street policy, management, controls, regulations and other strategies in a phased approach.

Key actions include:

- Inventory analysis and mapping
- Use analysis.
- Operations, management and administrative review
- Plan for investments in equipment and infrastructure
- Regulatory changes analysis of parking.
- Management recommendations
- Marketing, information, wayfinding, etc. improvements

Process

Define study area: This should include primary public parking areas associated with commercial activity and extend a block beyond the limit of associated activity to determine if spill-over parking exists.

Identify a working group: An oversight committee comprised of municipal staff, BID representation, the business community, merchants and residents is recommended to define study goals, focus analysis, support outreach activities, and review recommendations.

Collect available data: Amassing information about parking activity, parking demand, land uses, multi-modal conditions, etc. in advance of beginning a study will help reduce costs by more clearly defining the need.

Scope study: A study sufficient to understand supply, demand and the regulatory, land use and network factors influence parking patterns should include the following steps:

- Detailed parking inventory
- Parking activity analysis
- Operational & financial management analysis
- Parking demand & zoning analysis
- Public engagement process
- Strategies & recommendations
- Final plan

Identify study lead: While typically a consultant is hired as an outside, objective and professional resource, a parking study can be done by the municipality or a local organization if objectivity and sufficient capacity is available.

Study advertising & initiation: For consultant studies, an RFP with the recommended scope should be prepared and advertised, followed by an approved selection process. The start of a study by a consultant or in-house resources should be advertised and promoted to get broad input, especially if public surveys, interviews, etc. are expected.

Working group engagement and finding a champion: An active working group representing the fully array of parking interests is recommended to participate throughout the study and to provide continuity after the study is complete. Ideally a champion(s) can be found to guide implementation of recommendations and report back to working group members.

Study Outcomes: A variety of possible outcomes may help Worcester improve its parking system, all of which may be on the agenda for a committed champion.

These may include:

- Changes to on-street regulations, such as adjusting time-limits, adjusting span of regulation/pricing, commercial loading changes, or changes to pricing;
- Enforcement changes, including adjustment of hours, routes, staffing, handheld technologies, and protocols;
- Curbside management changes, including reserving spaces for different uses at different times of day (commercial loading, rideshare or delivery pick-up/drop-off, time-limited visitor parking, etc.)
- Wayfinding improvements, including static and electronic signs, as well as online mapping for lots, walkways, remote parking, and short & long term options;
- Payment technologies, including pay-by-cell, kiosks, smart meters, reservation systems, parking gates, and more;
- Demand management solutions, such as parking cash-out programs, market-rate parking pricing, transit & bikeshare subsidies, traveler information programs, etc.
- Parking permit changes, including modifications to on- and off-street residential programs, employee permits, and commuter parking;
- Supply enhancements, including re-striping on-street spaces, new on-street spaces, lot reconfigurations, and parking garages;
- Parking access solutions, such as improvements to sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting, landscaping, security features, etc.;
- Parking design improvements, such as landscaping, screening, garage fenestration, walkways, plantings, green infrastructure, and more.

**BEST
PRACTICE**



Source: Wickedlocal

Establish Parking Benefit District to Better Manage Parking Resources and Enhance Village Vitality



**PUBLIC
REALM**

Provided by SME Consultant

Stantec Consulting, Inc.

Location

Brookline, Massachusetts

Origin	Town of Brookline
Budget	 <p>Low – No cost to the Town to establish a Parking Benefit District (PBD) and supporting committee. Administrative responsibilities are conducted by existing departments/employees.</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (<5 years) – The establishment of the Parking Benefit District and formal allocation of meter funds took approximately one year.</p>
Risk	 <p>Medium Risk – Political buy-in and support from local businesses and public for increase in parking prices</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Net new parking meter revenues
Partners & Resources	Parking Benefit District Advisory Board, Department of Public Works, Arts Commission, Select Board, Transportation Board, Local Businesses
Diagnostic	<p>The creation of the PBD was intended to help Brookline respond to the commercial decline of Brookline Village and an increase in vehicle congestion. Through the creation of a PBD, funds from meters in a Parking Meter Zone could be allocated to expenditures and Town budgets used to create improvements that continue attracting visitors and businesses, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility improvements to sidewalk infrastructure • Public art recommendations from the Arts Commission • Parking and traffic operational improvements (related to needs identified by the Transportation Board and/or DPW)
Action Item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brookline Parking District Advisory Board was established and is comprised of local businesses and residents. • The BVPBDAB defined the area of the parking benefit district. • The BVPBDAB ongoing tasks include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommending an annual budget; • Reviewing and adjusting parking rates, as necessary, and expenditures in the PBD to the Select Board for approval; and • Making recommendations related to parking/traffic operations and temporary or permanent physical changes to the Transportation Board and/or DPW as appropriate and making recommendations related to public art to the Arts Commission.

Process

In 2016, the Massachusetts General Court enacted the Municipal Modernization Act. One of the provisions of that law authorized the creation of parking benefit districts (PBDs).

The Town approved the article to create a PBD in Brookline Village and an associated Brookline Village Parking Benefit District Advisory Board (BVPBDAB). The BVPBDAB is composed of nine members appointed by the Select Board, at least five of whom shall be business/commercial owners and managers in the district.

The BVPBDAB recommends an annual budget, parking rates, and expenditures in the PBD to the Select Board for approval. The Advisory Board will also develop and propose recommendations that will be funded by the PBD fund.

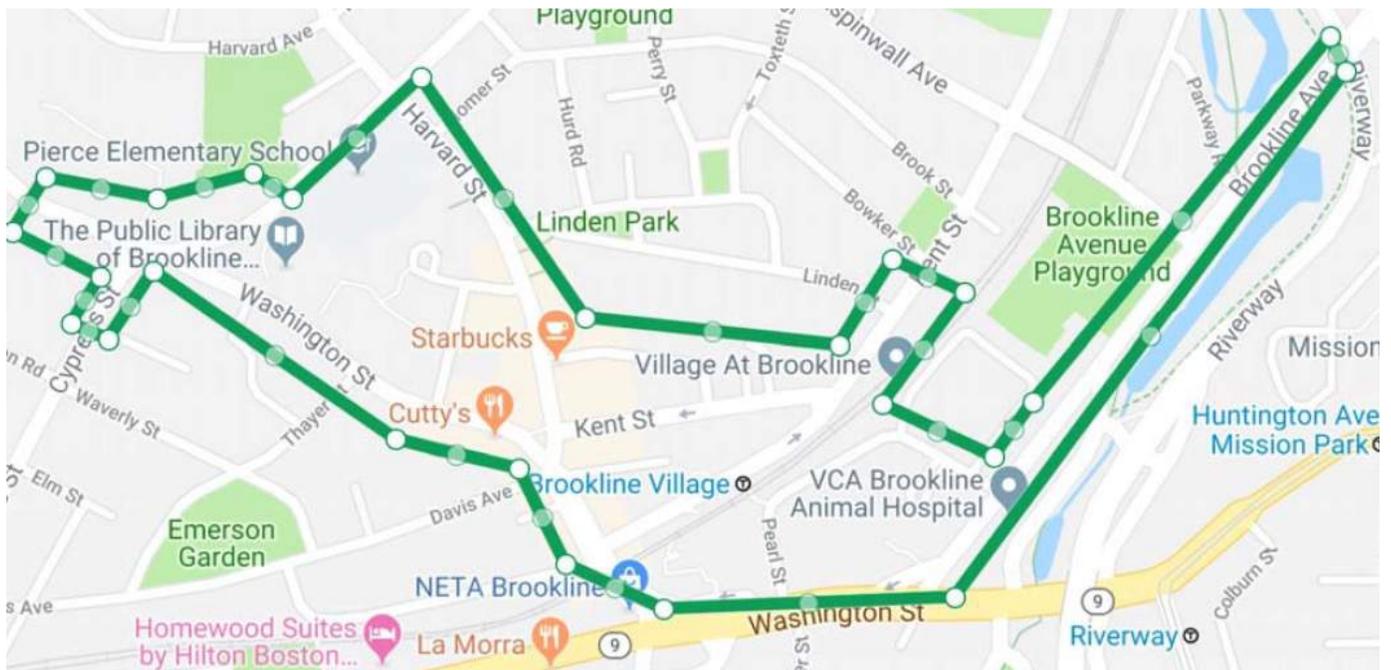
Once the area had been defined, a portion of parking meter revenues only is transferred into the Parking Benefit District Revolving fund.

Fund revenues are the increment above previous parking revenues, which continue to flow into the General Fund. Incremental increases in revenue are based on a parking pricing rate increase from \$1.25 to \$1.50/hour. This does not include revenue from parking violations or parking permits.

Success Story

Since the establishment of the PBD, \$1M has been invested to support a range of improvements and associated administrative oversight.

Brookline was awarded a MassDOT Shared Streets & Spaces Grant and installed many temporary dining areas, drop-off zones, and bike lanes. The Town intends to use PBD funds to make many of these improvements permanent.



Brookline's PBD Map. Source: May 2019 Annual Town Meeting

PROVIDE A PUBLIC RESTROOM SOLUTION TO IMPROVE THE DOWNTOWN VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Description - Adapt lessons from other cities that provide public restrooms and identify potential locations to best serve families, the elderly, those with medical conditions, and the unhoused.

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Downtown location(s) TBD Census Tract 7317
Origin	Project idea from Worcester Together Working Group, Downtown Worcester BID. Project could be led by City of Worcester in partnership with the BID and/or other partners.
Budget	 <p>Medium (\$50,000-200,000) The Portland Loo is used by many cities. Costs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$90-100,000 for Loo purchase • \$25-40,000 for installation (if near water/sewer) • \$15-25,000 for maintenance annually <p>Potential funding sources include: Foundations, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), City general fund</p>



A Portland Loo installed on the street in Victoria, B.C.

Timeframe



Short-term (less than 5 years)

- Convene task force to discuss issue – 1 month
- Complete research about how other cities have addressed issue – 2 months
- Engage business and property owners, residents, social service providers, and unsheltered individuals – 3 months
- Discuss potential courses of action, costs, responsible partners, etc – 3 months
- Build coalition of business and property owners, residents, social service providers, and unsheltered individual – 3 months
- Recommend preferred course of action – 2 months
- Implement recommendations – 6-12 months

Risk



High risk

- Decision-making about location(s)
- Property/business owner cooperation
- Cost to install and maintain
- Building community support and political will to implement solutions

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of daily users of public restroom
- Public sentiment as determined by user surveys and social media impressions
- Improved cleanliness of Downtown environments
- Reduction in human feces reported by Ambassadors
- Reduction in public urination

Partners & Resources

- Department of Public Works
- Private property owners
- BID Ambassadors
- Social service providers

Diagnostic

During Covid, an increase in public urination and human waste found downtown was reported as many publicly-accessible restrooms were closed. This has significant impacts on the perception of Downtown and public health and welfare. It is an important issue not only for the unsheltered population but also for visitors, families with young children, those with medical conditions, seniors and everyone who needs to quickly find a public restroom sometimes.

Diagnostic:

- Downtown Ambassadors reported more human waste found during pandemic – 84 incidents between April 2020 and early May 2021
- Downtown business owners reported more urination in entryways during the pandemic.
- Over 80 percent of business survey respondents rated improvements in safety and/or cleanliness as important or very important.

Covid impacts:

- Public health restrictions during Covid closed most spaces that had provided publicly-accessible restrooms such as City Hall, the Worcester Public Library, and local businesses. As a result, the unsheltered population had far fewer options to use a restroom and were forced to use outdoor locations.
- Covid exacerbated this pre-existing issue and exposed the underlying problem. A renewed focus on public health increased attention paid to the amount of public urination and human waste downtown.
- City Council passed two unanimous resolutions to explore solutions to the lack of restrooms during the pandemic.

Action Item

This initiative will explore solutions to the need for public restrooms, consult with stakeholders to build buy-in, and implement recommended actions to address this important issue. It will listen to people's ideas and concerns while also moving quickly to provide a timely response. The free-standing Portland Loo is one possible solution that will be explored to provide a safe, hygienic, easier to maintain facility for the general public.

- Convene task force
- Engage w community to discuss issues and build support
- Recommend pilot project solution, implement, and adjust as needed

Process

Convene task force to discuss issue and potential solutions.

- Confirm roster including key City staff and elected officials, property and business owners, and social service providers.
- Outline charge and establish a timeline that both allows time to build support but also is aggressive enough to address issue quickly.
- Review prior research and conduct follow-up research to better understand possible solutions as implemented in other communities.
- Discuss potential courses of action, costs and funding sources, responsible parties, etc.
- Discuss potential locations considering: site ownership; existing water, sewer, and electricity access; high-visibility locations used by a variety of people throughout the day and evening; and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.

Engage with business and property owners, unsheltered individuals, visitors, and Downtown residents.

- Educate stakeholders about the issue and solicit their input throughout process.
- Discuss potential solutions and locations with stakeholders and request their feedback.
- Build buy-in and support for preferred solution.

Recommend preferred solution and implement

- Based on community input and research findings, the task force will recommend a preferred course of action, including location(s), initial capital investment, ongoing maintenance costs and responsibilities, and partnership among parties.
- Secure funding and implement solution. Promote new amenity for Downtown visitors.
- Monitor use over time and respond quickly to any issues that arise.

Location, Location, Location

Where can you go when you need to go? This question faces everyone at some point as they're enjoying a day or evening Downtown. Families with young children, the elderly, and those with medical conditions are often acutely aware of this. Those who are unsheltered often lack convenient access to something many people take for granted.

Cambridge, Massachusetts is one place that tackled this challenge several years ago. The City installed its first Portland Loo, a toilet specifically designed to be durable, low-maintenance, and vandal-resistant, in the heart of historic Harvard Square. It soon installed a second one in Central Square.

The People for Fairness Coalition has been conducting an extensive research and legislative process to add public restroom facilities in Washington, D.C. One approach they're taking is a Community Restroom Incentive Pilot Program which will test an approach first taken in the UK to encourage private businesses to provide unrestricted access to their restrooms for everyone.

<https://pffcdc.org/what-we-do/public-restrooms/>

**BEST
PRACTICE**

Providing Public Restrooms

Location: Various

OPINION • Opinion, Opinion Columnist

Kristof: America needs public toilets



Jan Buchczik/The New York Times

"Sure, we need investments to rebuild bridges, highways and, yes, electrical grids, but perhaps America's most disgraceful infrastructure failing is its lack of public toilets. As Biden pushes for an infrastructure package, let's fix our scandalous lack of public



Source: <https://portlandloo.com/gallery/>



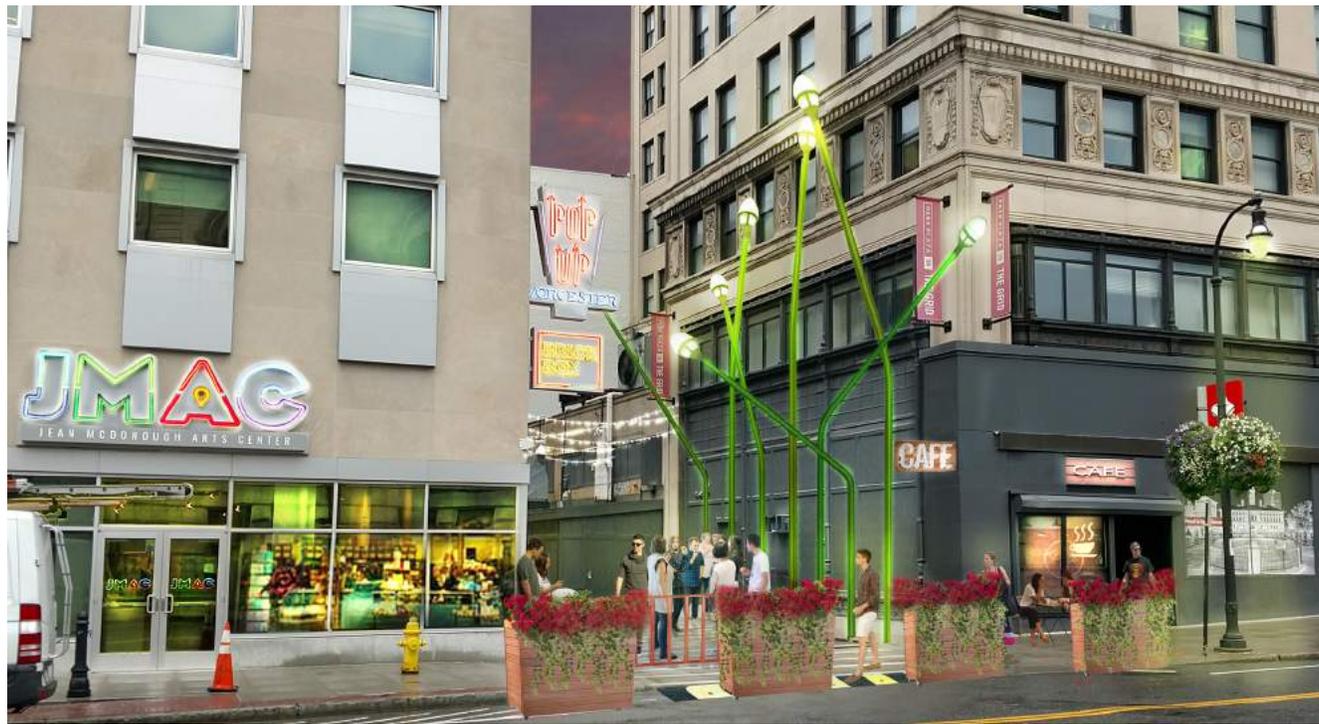
Public Realm



TRANSFORM ALLEN COURT ALLEYWAY INTO AN ATTRACTIVE, FLEXIBLE-USE SHARED SPACE

Description - Create a safe, attractive, flexible alley space that allows special events and pedestrian use between Downtown attractions.

Category	 Private Realm
Location	Allen Court (between Franklin and Federal Streets) Census Tract 7317
Origin	Worcester Business Development Corporation (WBDC), Theatre District Master Plan Project would be led by the Worcester Cultural Coalition in partnership with the PopUp/JMAC and WBDC.
Budget	High (>\$200,000) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artistic street lamps (Worcester Cultural Coalition and the Worcester PopUp at the JMAC) • Alley re-paving (WBDC) • Planters • Traffic control measures Sidewalks, curbing, streetscape expansion Funding committed for artistic lighting and re-paving.



Conceptual rendering illustrating evening conditions in the alley, open for special events and pedestrians but closed to vehicles. Source: Stantec

Timeframe



Short-term (< 5 years)

- Continue discussions with adjacent property owners (6-12 months)
- Confirm final alley design (3-6months)
- Revise MOU and sign (2 months)
- Revise design and engineering documents for installation (6 months)
- Install new alley design elements (1-3 months)

Risk



High risk

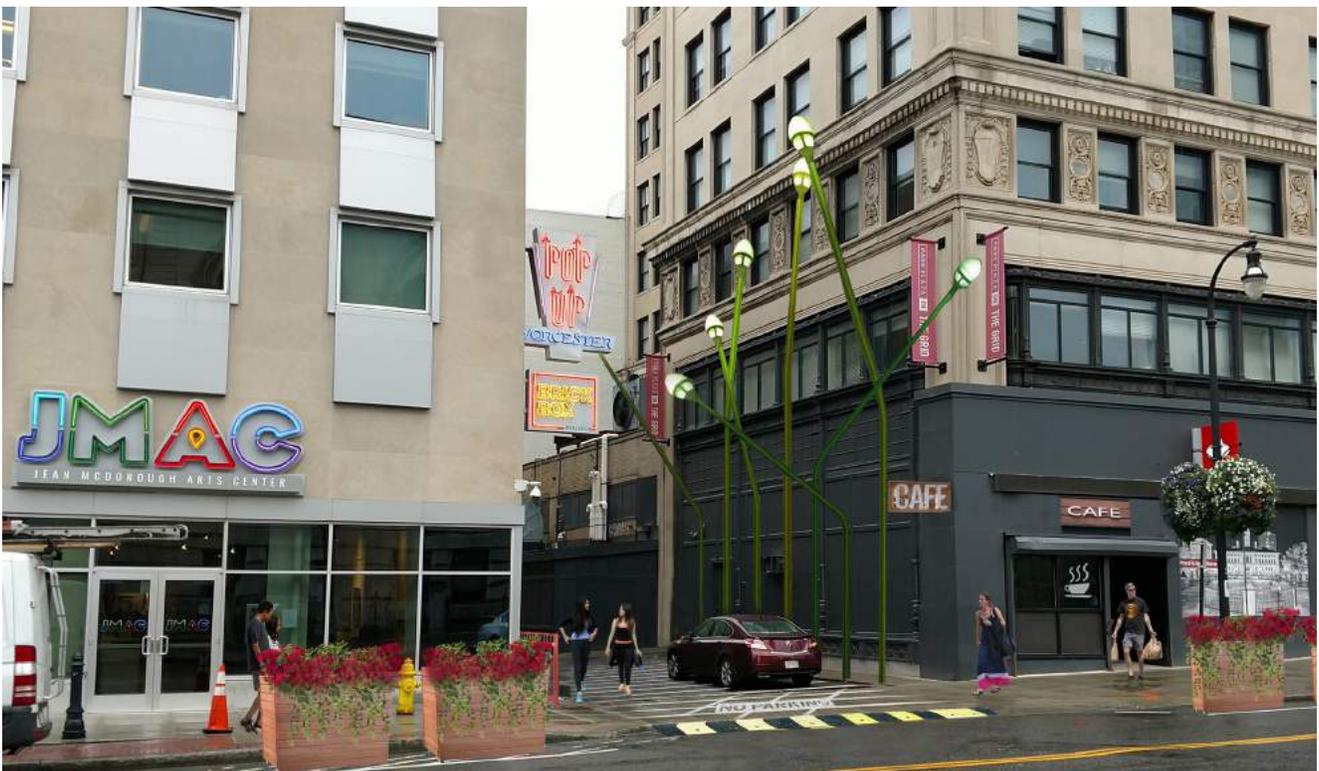
- Negotiations with adjacent property owners - current lack of consensus
- Changing long-standing behavior - property owners and maintenance staff, delivery drivers, contractors, trash pick-up, and tenants
- Accommodating competing uses in one space: vehicles for maintenance staff, deliveries, etc; pedestrians; and special events.

Key Performance Indicators

- Daily/weekly pedestrian counts
- Daily/weekly vehicular counts
- Number of events hosted in space
- Number of event attendees
- User sentiment via social media and intercept surveys

Partners & Resources

- Adjacent property owners
- City of Worcester Cultural Development



Conceptual rendering illustrating daytime conditions in the alley, open for vehicles and pedestrians to share space.
Source: Stantec

Diagnostic

Allen Court is a desired pedestrian route downtown identified in several plans. It is currently used as a service alley for parking, loading, and trash, creating an unattractive and unsafe location in the heart of downtown.

Diagnostic:

- Paving and sidewalks in alley are in poor condition
- Trash collection is obtrusive, unattractive, produces odors, and creates a generally unwelcome entry to the alley

Covid impacts:

- Pedestrian traffic greatly declined during the pandemic
- Allen Court saw an increase in human and pet waste due to inactivity
- The adjacent black box theatre was closed during the pandemic and lost significant revenue

Covid influence:

- Covid exacerbated this issue and exposed the underlying problem. A renewed focus on public health increased attention paid to the amount of public urination and human waste downtown

Action Item

This project will create a long-desired pedestrian route connecting Worcester Common to the Hanover Theatre. This space will be transformed to accommodate special events and programming, particularly in support of the adjacent black box theatre. It will do so while also accommodating the necessary service and delivery requirements of adjacent businesses through coordinated scheduling and access management. When complete, the alley will be transformed into an attractive, flexible space that celebrates art, hosts a variety of programming, provides outdoor seating, and serves as an amenity for nearby residents and businesses while also meeting the functional needs of abutting property owners. Elements include artistic light poles providing illumination and whimsy, planters (both fixed and movable), new paving and new signage.

- Complete planning and design process
- Finalize design and install improvements.
- Monitor use and adjust as needed.

Process

Complete planning and design process

- Continue discussions with adjacent property owners to confirm design features and scheduling needs.
- Revise alley designs to reflect agreed-upon elements.
- Draft a memorandum of understanding (MOU) among the abutting property owners to clarify scheduling, maintenance, and other critical operational elements.

Finalize design and install improvements.

- Sign MOU and finalize design.
- Construct alley improvements.
- Publicize improvements via social media.
- Host kick-off event to raise awareness of new pedestrian space and encourage use.
- Implement programming schedule.

Monitor use and adjust as needed.

- Communicate regularly among adjacent owners to identify any issues early and work collaboratively to resolve them.
- Monitor use and adjust programming, scheduling, and/or features as agreed upon by adjacent owners.

BEST PRACTICE



Origin	City of Tipton, Tipton Main Street Association, Chamber of Commerce, Tipton County Economic Development Organization
Budget	 \$39,000
Timeframe	 Two to three months to build and install most components and artwork.
Risk	 Low risk assuming you can get buy in from local property owners and those who use the alley. Low investment costs makes this a low risk, high reward proposition.
Key Performance Indicators	Visitor counts, "stopping and staying time," events and attendees at programmed events. Change in area vacancy rates and, if you have willing businesses, sales numbers before and after intervention.
Partners & Resources	Tipton Main Street, Local economic development corporation, the area Chamber of Commerce and local artists and youth organizations. Funding was provided through a combination of crowdfunding and matching grant dollars from a state government grant program.

Tipton Alley



Provided by SME Consultant

Bench Consulting (from Patronicity)

Location

Tipton, Indiana

<p>Diagnostic</p>	<p>Issues arose around pedestrian safety crossing the alley space. Located in the heart of Main Street this space was an obstacle to a safe, inviting pedestrian experience. In addition, there was a startup Main Street organization looking to develop space, build support for its work, but more importantly, the Main Street district as a whole. The street itself was extremely car oriented with more traffic than pedestrians on the streets. An improved sense of place was needed to get drivers out of their cars and on foot, a proven tactic for increasing spending opportunity. The proximity to existing businesses, the town square, and the need for a gathering space made this alley ideal for investment and improvement.</p>
<p>Action Item</p>	<p>The intention with Tipton Alley was to develop a space that could serve as the hub of the Main Street. A space, built on a human scale, that provided a respite from the busy traffic on the street while enticing people to 1) visit downtown safely and 2) extend their stays while visiting downtown, and 3) create community connections.</p> <p>As with any placemaking project, the process is as important as the outcome. How do you ensure this space will be something that residents embrace and enjoy? Have them engaged in the planning and implementation process as much as possible. Because collaboration is key and here, local artists help design the mural installations on one wall and others worked to transform the entry way of the alley to incorporate historically contextual photographs.</p> <p>Early on, it was important to have proper permissions in place to use the alley and eliminate vehicle access from the main street on a permanent basis. Enjoy maintenance plans and activation and programming plans are also in place at the start.</p> <p>It was important to not just plan for how the space would be transformed but activated so a community wide "farm to table" dinner was planned as part of the planning and fundraising. This project focused on programming of the space in the design phase and clarified the needs for ongoing maintenance and support.</p>
<p>Process</p>	<p>LOCATE: Find a space that you have reasonable site control over or a permission agreement in place that is centrally located within your main street or commercial district. Consider spaces that need care and attention.</p> <p>PARTNER: The more local representation that's involved in planning and implementing these projects, the more successful they will be. Here, local Chamber of Commerce was involved, engaging the business community, artists helped to design the public art and residents volunteered to implement.</p> <p>PLAN: Ensure site control is in order, insurance is in place and proper permissions to use any alley space have been granted before beginning to build your project. Define the potential uses for space, the more variety, the better. Consider local vendors and source products locally.</p> <p>IMPLEMENT: Consider adding elements in stages, celebrating at each milestone. Be sure your site is supervised. Communication with all contractors, artists, and volunteers is important so be sure to plan ahead. Getting community investment is critical, ask for the financial support you need locally first.</p> <p>FEEDBACK: Public comments can be typical and predictive, often they include questions about government waste, maintenance and use. Prepare your responses before hearings and reach out personally when possible. Also, prepare to preemptively share the most compelling project elements.</p> <p>ITERATE: Additional features can be added based on use, one example is WiFi. If there is a high demand for the space, ensure there is a process for renting and reserving the space.</p>



IMPLEMENT A STOREFRONT DESIGN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Description - Offer technical and design assistance to enhance the City's existing facade improvement program.

Category	 Private Realm
Location	Businesses in RRP Study area Census Tract 7317
Origin	City of Worcester, Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by City of Worcester Business and Community Development
Budget	 Medium (\$50,000-200,000) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for external design consultant(s) • Funding for improvement grants/loans • Staffing - Program Manager, Technical Assistance Coordinator Potential funding sources: Local banks, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), Community One Stop (Underutilized Properties Program), City general fund



Storefront facades along Main Street.

Timeframe



Short-term (< 5 years)

- Identify project team, including design consultants and staff advisors – 2 months
- Secure additional funding sources for program – 4-6 months
- Release application for technical assistance – 1 month
- Project application review period – 2-3 months
- Select businesses, and secure agreements – 2 month
- Design and implement improvements – 4-12 months (or longer, depending on the scope of improvements)

Risk



Low risk

- Recruiting and educating business owners to undertake improvements
- Business owners' interest in participating does not always align with building owners' willingness to cooperate.
- Potential displacement of small businesses as property values increase to reflect improvements and rents rise accordingly.

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of applicants
- Number of completed storefront renovations
- Number of new business signs installed
- Diversity of business owner applicants
- Change in business foot traffic and sales
- Maintenance of improvements over time
- Number of businesses retained

Partners & Resources

- Executive Office of Economic Development
- Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals
- Historical Commission
- Business and property owners
- Design assistance consultant(s)



Diagnostic

Downtown Worcester has a mix of attractive, well-designed and -maintained storefronts and storefronts that have been poorly maintained or not updated in years.

Diagnostic:

- Cluttered display windows and dated/deteriorating storefronts detract from physical appearance and pedestrian experience of Downtown, and contrast sharply with well-designed, well-maintained storefronts.
- Lighting and windows graded C, signage and awnings graded B.
- Three-quarters of business survey respondents rated the renovation of storefronts and/or building facades as important or very important.
- Worcester's current facade program is funded by CDBG which imposes requirements on projects that limit its appeal to business and property owners.

Covid impacts:

- Fourteen businesses closed during Covid leaving newly vacant storefronts. Many will need improvements for new tenants.
- 81% of business survey respondents generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019, and 43% saw declines of more than 25%. Decreased business revenue leaves many business owners unable to fund any storefront improvements that could boost sales.
- Recent business closures combined with long-standing storefront vacancies have set back the BID's goal of creating an 18-hour downtown and lend the impression of a vacant, dark, and unwelcoming area. Fresh, updated storefront design and window displays will convey a new sense of energy and momentum to help businesses rebuild their customer base.

Action Item

This project builds on the City's existing Facade Program to offer technical and design assistance with storefront and facade improvements, including business signage. Many business owners lack the knowledge, time, and/or funding to design and install high-quality storefront improvements that contribute to the district.

- Identify design assistance resources to help business and property owners create high-quality, cost-effective improvement plans.
- Identify funding sources for improvements that have fewer requirements (such as income limits, job creation, or prevailing wages) to help appeal to a broader range of owners and simplify the process for businesses.

Process

Identify target properties and engage with business and building owners

- Discuss needs and what would make this program more attractive to them.

Identify design assistance lead(s) to assist with concept development.

- These are likely external consultants like local designers, sign fabricators, and general contractors.

- Develop a request for proposal (RFP) for on-call design assistance.

- Market RFP, select group of consultants, and complete contracting.

Identify technical assistance lead(s)—likely City staff—to assist with necessary approvals, etc.

- Identify implementation funding sources with fewer restrictions/broader applicability than CDBG.

- Amend City's storefront application to include design and/or technical assistance request

Publicize design assistance opportunity.

- Select businesses to work with.

- Consult with owners to develop plans, estimate costs, and determine approvals.

- Implement storefront and facade improvements.

Track progress and make program adjustments as needed.

APPLICATION FOR SIGN & FAÇADE PROGRAM

Purpose:
The sign & façade program was established to provide financial and technical assistance to small businesses seeking physical improvements to their public storefronts. The program matches up to half the project cost or \$10,000 whichever is less for facade and signage improvements on historic buildings through the Ashland Economic Development and Revitalization Program. Funding is for those areas for preservation and historic preservation and is subject to the approval of the Board.

Eligibility Requirements:
The program is open to all businesses in Ashland but is limited to properties located in Ashland's historic district and Main Street. Properties located in the 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800, 900, 1000, 1100, 1200, 1300, 1400, 1500, 1600, 1700, 1800, 1900, 2000, 2100, 2200, 2300, 2400, 2500, 2600, 2700, 2800, 2900, 3000, 3100, 3200, 3300, 3400, 3500, 3600, 3700, 3800, 3900, 4000, 4100, 4200, 4300, 4400, 4500, 4600, 4700, 4800, 4900, 5000, 5100, 5200, 5300, 5400, 5500, 5600, 5700, 5800, 5900, 6000, 6100, 6200, 6300, 6400, 6500, 6600, 6700, 6800, 6900, 7000, 7100, 7200, 7300, 7400, 7500, 7600, 7700, 7800, 7900, 8000, 8100, 8200, 8300, 8400, 8500, 8600, 8700, 8800, 8900, 9000, 9100, 9200, 9300, 9400, 9500, 9600, 9700, 9800, 9900, 10000, 10100, 10200, 10300, 10400, 10500, 10600, 10700, 10800, 10900, 11000, 11100, 11200, 11300, 11400, 11500, 11600, 11700, 11800, 11900, 12000, 12100, 12200, 12300, 12400, 12500, 12600, 12700, 12800, 12900, 13000, 13100, 13200, 13300, 13400, 13500, 13600, 13700, 13800, 13900, 14000, 14100, 14200, 14300, 14400, 14500, 14600, 14700, 14800, 14900, 15000, 15100, 15200, 15300, 15400, 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CREATE A PEDESTRIAN WAYFINDING SYSTEM

Description - Develop an effective Downtown wayfinding strategy starting with sidewalk decals, storefront decals, and creative banners before continuing with a permanent system to direct visitors to local destinations.

Category		Revenue and Sales
Location		RRP study area Census Tract 7317
Origin		City of Worcester, Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by the BID (initial tactical phase) and the City of Worcester Public Works and Parks as well as Cultural Development (longer-term permanent phase)
Budget		Medium (\$50,000-200,000) <ul style="list-style-type: none">The BID has \$10,000 allocated for the initial tactical wayfinding program.
Timeframe		Short-term <ul style="list-style-type: none">Tactical wayfinding phase: 2-6 months (targeting spring 2022 installation)Permanent wayfinding phase: 6-14 months
Risk		Low/Medium risk <ul style="list-style-type: none">Required coordination with City and other stakeholders re: design, locations, relation to citywide wayfinding plan.Budget constraints for permanent wayfinding.



Potential sidewalk decal designs.
Source: Stantec

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of wayfinding decals installed
- Number of wayfinding signs installed
- Number of permanent signs installed
- Public sentiment/brand recognition gauged via social media impressions
- Change in business revenue

Partners & Resources

- Worcester Cultural Coalition

Diagnostic

Clear directional signage will improve the visitor experience and make it easier and more inviting to spend time Downtown. A citywide wayfinding plan was developed in 2006 by Selbert Perkins Design, updated in 2012, and is continuing to be implemented in phases. The Downtown area has some wayfinding signage but not enough that directs visitors to attractions, local businesses, parking, etc. There is a renewed interest in wayfinding now that Polar Park has opened in the Canal District and many visitors are parking Downtown and walking.

Diagnostic:

- Wayfinding/signage graded a B in diagnostic. Few pedestrian wayfinding signs downtown or directional signage to destinations like Hanover Theatre and Polar Park.
- Tactical wayfinding is identified as a short-term need in the Placemaking Action Plan and installing wayfinding signage is listed as 1 of 8 recommendations in the plan.
- Pedestrian signage was the top-ranked signage priority identified through the Placemaking Action Plan survey responses.

Covid impacts:

- The wide-ranging impacts caused by Covid-related shutdowns and public gathering restrictions emphasize the importance of visitor experience to draw people back downtown.
- The limitations on public gathering and in-person dining/shopping during Covid has severely impacted downtown and its businesses. Clear wayfinding will make the visitor experience easier to navigate and more inviting.

Action Item

This initiative will develop in two phases: an initial tactical/quick-build wayfinding campaign followed by a fixed, permanent wayfinding program.

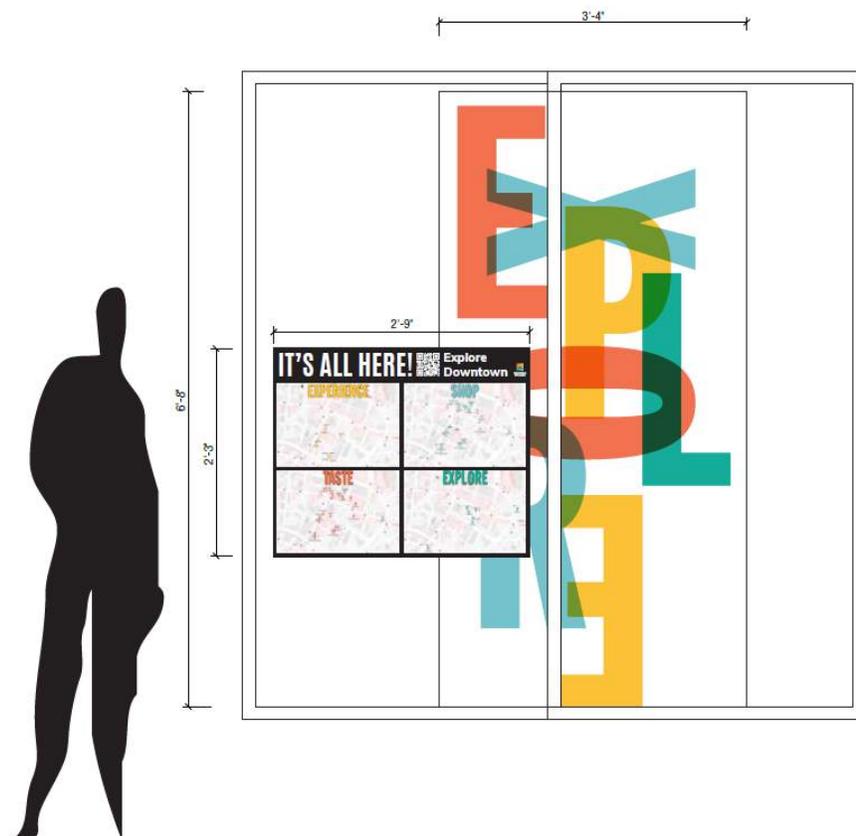
The initial phase will create designs for a system of temporary sidewalk decals, storefront window decals/displays, and light pole banners. A location plan will identify where these elements should be placed along the user journey at key decision points. The eye-catching decals are meant to direct visitors to attractions such as the Hanover Theatre, Worcester Common, Downtown restaurants, parking locations, and the recently-opened Polar Park (AAA baseball stadium) in the Canal District. This campaign is meant to have a fun, whimsical quality to it and to be quickly fabricated and installed.

The second phase will build on the tactical program to create a coordinated permanent wayfinding system that may include pedestrian and vehicular signage, digital kiosks, and other elements. It will coordinate with the citywide wayfinding plan while updating key aspects to reflect changes since the original plan was completed.

Action:

Develop tactical wayfinding designs for sidewalk decals, storefront installations, and banners.

Develop strategy for permanent wayfinding in Downtown.



Potential vacant storefront wayfinding installation design. Source: Stantec

Process

Develop tactical wayfinding designs

- Create design options for initial phase of sidewalk decals, storefront decals, and banner signs.
- Identify primary wayfinding points of interest: attractions, retail and dining areas, parking, etc.
- Map key decision points for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists navigating Downtown where wayfinding signage would have greatest impact.
- Review designs and locations with City staff and revise as necessary.
- Identify any necessary permits for installation.
- Select vendor for decals and banners.
- Fabricate and install decals and banners Downtown in time for the 2022 AAA baseball season.
- Track user perception via intercept surveys and/or social media impressions.

Develop strategy for permanent wayfinding system

- Form a Downtown wayfinding committee to guide the second phase, comprised of key City staff and BID representation.
- Revisit citywide plan and tactical installation to determine what elements to keep and what new ideas to introduce.
- Set a budget for design work and product/installation costs.
- Identify a signage fabricator and request cost estimates.
- Identify signage product options and select those that fit with overall vision and cost parameters.
- Fabricate and install signage throughout downtown.
- Maintain signage, update as needed
- Track user perception via intercept surveys and/or social media impressions.

The Bandstand was the inspiration for signage shape.
Source: DHCD



There was no universally accepted brand or wayfinding system for the Town of Wakefield. With a vital mix of restaurants, goods and services, the downtown appeared robust. However, things could be improved by an effort for better direction and more on-street communication. Here was an opportunity to build on the downtown's commercial base and solidify Wakefield as a Northshore destination.

The Town's administration allotted funding to design a branding and wayfinding system. Seven months later a Massachusetts Legislative Earmark was granted to the Wakefield Main Streets Program for the design and fabrication of informational kiosks.



Wayfinding System to Help Reinforce the Downtown Experience



Location: Wakefield, MA

The two overlapping programs took two different paths.

Over an eight-month period, the branding and wayfinding design process went through a series of group meetings with a large Advisory Group of 24 representatives.

Overseen by the Wakefield Main Streets Board of Directors and invited Town officials, the kiosk design program was mandated to have only 3.5 months to complete design, design review, put out for bidding and start implementation.

PROCESS

After a number of kiosk design alternatives were presented to the Wakefield Main Streets Board, one design was chosen to develop, locate and specify. Three (3) of the kiosks were to be twosided and analog; the fourth was to be digital and four-sided.

Historical town images and commentary was developed to fit a border around a business directory for one side of the directory. Set in an airtight locked Plexiglas window, this information could be easily changeable on the two-sided kiosks. On the opposite side was space for timely event posters and community announcements. The digital kiosk was designed to have a screen/monitor that was programmable from the town hall. Favermann Design was then hired by the Town administration to create a style guideline to reflect the iconic kiosk toppers.

After a period of about four months the guidelines have resulted in the establishment of a consistent Town of Wakefield visual brand for internal communication, the official website, emails, business cards, interior town hall signage, newsletters and even drop boxes.

These guidelines were in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and further thought was given to the on-hold wayfinding program. It was decided that a new approach should be taken that abandoned the problematic landscape and instead visually reflected the kiosk and style of the Town of Wakefield. Utilizing the new design approach, plans are going ahead for a new directional sign for the Greenwood neighborhood. A pilot project will take place during the Summer of 2021 to see how wayfinding can connect the Lake with downtown.



From wayfinding signage to printed informational materials and the Town's website, the Town of Wakefield "branded" elements and strictly adhered to style guidelines demonstrate how programs can build upon and even improve each other to reinforce a sense of place, a sense of arrival and a sense of shared experience. Source: DHCD



OFFER BUSINESS ASSESSMENTS TO INCREASE SALES AND IMPROVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Description - Offer comprehensive evaluations of the customer experience to retail business owners and identify improvements to the storefront, interior, and sales and marketing.

Category		Revenue and Sales
Location		RRP study area Census Tract 7317
Origin		City of Worcester, Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by City of Worcester Business and Community Development
Budget		Small (<\$50,000) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• \$2,000-3,000 per businesses for assessment• Implementation varies Potential funding sources: Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (assessments); Worcester Microloan and Small Business Grant Programs (improvement costs)
Timeframe		Short-term <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage business owners to determine needs – 3 months• Solicit consultant to conduct assessments – 3 months• Complete business assessments – 3-6 months• Business owners to implement improvements – 2-6 months
Risk		Low risk <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business owner interest and follow-through• Promoting opportunity
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of completed assessments• Number of recommendations implemented by business owners• Change in business foot traffic and sales
Partners & Resources		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business owners• Building owners• Business assessment consultant

Diagnostic

Downtown businesses range from new, trendy spots to well-established businesses and those struggling to get by. Interior store design, exterior storefront appearance, signage, and digital marketing capabilities vary widely across these businesses.

Diagnostic:

- Business signage, awnings, and facades received a B grade overall
- Storefront windows, lighting, and outdoor display received a C grade overall

Covid impacts:

- Public health restrictions during Covid limited in-person shopping and reduced sales. Over half of business survey respondents saw on-site customers decline by 50% or more compared to pre-Covid.
- The number of downtown visitors also dramatically decreased and public events were canceled, limiting foot traffic and drop-in store patrons.
- Post-Covid recovery is an ideal time to reassess the way downtown businesses present themselves to returning patrons and new visitors

Action Item

This project will provide a comprehensive, impartial evaluation of downtown businesses and recommend a range of lower-cost improvements. Targeted businesses will include established businesses in need of a refresh and struggling businesses looking for help, with the goal of promoting business growth and positive contributions to the vibrancy of downtown.

An outside assessment will evaluate window displays, signage, and overall storefront appearance from a customer's perspective. An interior assessment will evaluate the flow of the space, merchandise display, and overall customer experience. A marketing assessment will evaluate physical and digital marketing material and business communications. The assessments will spell out how businesses can change store operating weaknesses, a timeline for recommended improvements, and what the anticipated cost will be to implement improvements.

Process

- Develop communications material to promote business assessment opportunity
- Write RFP for on-call economic development assistance to perform business assessments. Include in the RFP, additional calls for retail interior design firms, consultants that specialize in merchandising and display, and marketing and business communications consultants.
- Solicit proposals and select consultant(s)
- Identify businesses to receive assessment
- Conduct business site visits and complete evaluations
- Consult with business owner to review recommendations and potential funding assistance
- Business owner to implement improvements (potential financial assistance from facade and storefront improvement program, small business assistance, etc)



Source: Adobe Stock



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

Conduct Business Assessments – An Outside-In Approach



Provided by SME Consultant

GOMAN+YORK Advisory Services

Location

New England

Action Item

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Process

Site Visit: 1- 2 hours

Report/Evaluation: 2 hours

Tenant Consultation: 1 – 2 hours

Implementation: short-term and ongoing

The Report

Be direct as to what needs to be done

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

The Consultation

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



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

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

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



A-Frame Signs allowed by regulation without permits

**Supporting the Implementation of
Recommended Storefront
improvements**

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



Unique and historic identifying signs allowed by regulation



SUPPORT A LOCAL BUSINESS OWNER COMMUNICATION NETWORK

Description - Encourage Downtown business owners to share information and resources to improve business practices and promote bulk purchasing to reduce costs.

Category		Revenue and Sales
Location		RRP study area (online/in-person) Census Tract 7317
Origin		City of Worcester, Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by Worcester Business Resource Alliance (WBRA)
Budget		Small (<\$50,000) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff/administrative time for program start-up• Cost for marketing/email software, events, etc. Potential funding sources: Grassroots Fund Seed Grant, in-kind donations, business contributions
Timeframe		Short-term <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruit participants - 3-6 months• Develop communications strategy - 2-4 months• B2B communications: ongoing



Source: Adobe Stock

Risk



Low-Medium risk

- Publicizing opportunity and getting business owners to participate.

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of businesses in network
- Improved B2B relationships
- Cost sharing initiatives

Partners & Resources

- Business owners
- Greater Worcester EforAll

Diagnostic

Diagnostic:

- Procurement challenges
- Increased business costs

Covid impacts:

- 81% of business survey respondents generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019, and 43% saw declines of more than 25%.
- Businesses struggled to procure PPE, outdoor dining furniture, and other supplies during pandemic.
- Social distancing and other factors decreased opportunities for networking and relationship-building among business owners.

Action Item

This project will foster improved communications between Downtown business owners. It will establish a communication network among owners and then turn it over to be largely self-led. The goal is for owners to share ideas and resources, identify potential partnerships to boost sales or reduce costs, and support a collaborative business environment Downtown.

Process

- Identify communication strategy and tools.
- Evaluate online and in-person opportunities to foster communication and share knowledge.
- Promote opportunities and recruit participants.
- Host kickoff networking event to introduce B2B communications network to local owners.
- Provide additional support as needed to help owners establish their own schedule and opportunities that meet their needs.

**BEST
PRACTICE**

Entrepreneurship for All (EforAll) is accelerating economic and social impact in communities nationwide through inclusive entrepreneurship. Greater Worcester EforAll began operating in 2020. It offers a business accelerator and pitch contest to help local entrepreneurs throughout the region. Volunteer mentors work with program participants to strengthen their business operations. Entrepreneur stories highlight case studies while virtual workshops offer a range of programming.



Source: Adobe Stock



DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A TARGETED TENANT RECRUITMENT STRATEGY TO FILL VACANT STOREFRONTS

Description - Recruit successful Worcester-area businesses to expand Downtown and attract new businesses without a local presence to locate Downtown.

Category	 Tenant Mix
Location	RRP study area Census Tract 7317
Origin	Property owners, Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by City of Worcester Economic Development and the Worcester Chamber of Commerce
Budget	 Small (<\$50,000) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop recruitment strategy• Funds to incentivize moves (fit-out, lease provisions, etc.)• Sources: American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Build Back Better Regional Challenge, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), tax credits, MA Downtown Initiative Program, Restaurant Revitalization Fund, Biz-M-Power, Small Business Matching Grant



Space for lease in recent mixed-use construction.

Timeframe



Short-term (<5 years)

- Convene working group - 2 months
- Develop business recruitment strategy – 2-6 months
- Implement strategy - ongoing (2-3 years)

Risk



Low risk

- Market risk – rent difference between Downtown and other locations, traffic counts (auto, pedestrian, bikes)
- Market perceptions held by potential tenants
- Market perceptions held by potential customers

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of businesses new to Worcester (leading indicator)
- Number of Worcester businesses expanding to new location Downtown (leading indicator)
- Number of jobs created (leading indicator)
- Business and job retention rates (lagging indicator)
- Diversity of new business owners and workers
- Collective impact (e.g. grants/loans made, training/coaching hours provided by partners, partnerships formed/maintained, effectiveness of marketing and promotion)

Partners & Resources

- Property owners/developers (Menkiti Group, etc.)
- Commercial real estate brokers
- Downtown business owners
- Greater Worcester Chamber of Commerce



Space for lease in an older building undergoing renovation.

Diagnostic

Recent business closures combined with long-standing storefront vacancies have set back the BID's goal of creating an 18-hour downtown and lend the impression of a vacant, dark, and unwelcoming area. Tenant recruitment is complicated by misperceptions about the Downtown market: insufficient foot traffic after work hours, parking issues, etc.

Diagnostic:

- 34 vacant storefronts downtown (as of April 2021), many in prominent locations.
- Ninety percent of business survey respondents rated new recruitment programs to attract additional businesses as important or very important.
- Interview with local developer reporting difficulty in recruiting "new to Worcester" businesses. Tenant recruitment is complicated by misperceptions about the Downtown market: insufficient foot traffic after work hours, parking issues, etc.

Covid impacts:

- Approximately 14 downtown businesses closed during Covid, adding to previously existing vacant storefronts
- Covid exacerbated this problem by driving some businesses to close and limiting tenant recruitment efforts.

Action Item

This initiative will develop a two-pronged storefront tenant recruitment strategy to help fill vacant storefronts Downtown. (1) Identify successful Worcester-area businesses in other parts of the city that are ready to grow into a new location Downtown. (2) Identify successful businesses not currently located in the Worcester area and recruit them to a Downtown storefront.

Action items:

- Convene a working group of staff, property owners, commercial brokers, and other stakeholders.
- Develop a culturally and contextually appropriate recruitment strategy to attract new downtown tenants.
- Determine what types of financial assistance, business training, and co-marketing opportunities may be needed to enhance recruitment efforts.
- Implement the strategy locally, regionally, and beyond.
- Monitor progress and adjust as needed.

Process

Convene a working group of staff, property owners, commercial brokers, and other stakeholders.

- The working group should include one or two small business owners to ensure the “voice of the customer” is at the table by design and at least one entrepreneur support organization that focuses on helping small businesses transition into commercial spaces.
- Create a program/project charter and plan clarifying recruitment strategy goals and key project management considerations (determine what the scope of work will be, create task lists along with RACSI and Gantt charts, identify detailed resource needs and obtain estimates to develop a realistic operating budget, leverage voice of the customer to outline quality requirements, incorporate risk management planning, set working group communications schedule, and administer procurement management procedures)
- Gather rental comps for other business districts to understand how Downtown compares.

Develop a culturally and contextually appropriate recruitment strategy to attract new downtown tenants.

- Create or update business recruitment tools such as videos, brochures, target market information, and websites.
- Consider key factors such as where to promote, key messages under the promotion strategy, the look and feel of materials created, how to deploy them relative to the target audiences' historical, social, and cultural backgrounds, and priorities.

Determine what types of financial assistance, business training, and co-marketing opportunities may be needed to enhance recruitment efforts.

- Identify storefronts with long-term vacancies and determine need for major physical improvements to increase marketability. Identify storefronts with shorter-term vacancies and assess readiness to market with little or no improvements.

Implement the strategy locally, regionally, and beyond.

- Identify relevant credible partners and spokespersons to assist with implementation.
- Recruit existing Downtown business owners to participate in program through story-telling-demonstrating the value they see to prospective tenants.

Monitor progress and adjust as needed.

- Track KPI over time.
- Conduct follow-up interviews with program participants about experience and areas for improvement.



PROVIDE ASSISTANCE FOR LOCAL MINORITY AND DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS OWNERS

Description - Offer culturally appropriate business assistance such as workshops, mentorship programs, and other training to minority, New American, women, and other disadvantaged entrepreneurs and business owners.

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		RRP study area Census Tract 7317
Origin		City of Worcester Economic Development Project would be led by City of Worcester Economic Development.
Budget		Low (<\$50,000) Potential funding sources: Worcester Microloan and Small Business Grant Programs, Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (Biz-M-Power, Small Business Technical Assistance Grant), American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
Timeframe		Short-term (< 5 years) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify existing resources and potential partners – 3 monthsTalk with business owners to determine common needs – 2 monthsDevelop new tools, programs, and resources to address needs – 3 monthsRecruit business participants – 1 monthProvide assistance and track results – ongoing
Risk		Low risk <ul style="list-style-type: none">Promoting opportunityBusiness owner interest and follow-throughFunding
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Number of businesses receiving training and assistanceChange in business revenue, sales, and foot trafficDiversity of business applicants
Partners & Resources		<ul style="list-style-type: none">City of Worcester Executive Office of Diversity & InclusionGreater Worcester Chamber of CommerceSoutheast Asian CoalitionLatino Business AssociationMassachusetts Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) Business CenterAscentria Care AllianceBusiness ownersSBA's Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil RightsGreater Worcester EforAll

Diagnostic

Diagnostic:

- The City of Worcester and downtown have a diverse population:
 - 15% of the City and 21% of downtown's population is Black, 8% and 7% respectively are Asian, and 16% and 17% respectively self-report as other or two or more races.
 - 26% of the City and 35% of downtown's population is Hispanic.
- The City maintains a Diverse Business Directory with 187 listed businesses citywide

Covid impacts:

- Covid has had a disproportionate impact on the nonwhite population in terms of health outcomes, unemployment, and other metrics.
- Covid-19 has worsened persistent and deep inequalities impacting women and minority businesses. A recent national analysis of minority- and women-owned businesses estimated significant percentages of Black-owned, Latino-owned, and Asian American-owned businesses closed either temporarily or permanently, while a much lower percentage of white-owned businesses closed.
- Minority-owned businesses, of all vulnerable small businesses, may be most at risk. Numerous minority-owned businesses were in financially precarious positions before Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions. Minority-owned small businesses are often in service industry sectors more susceptible to disruption like accommodation and food services, personal and laundry services, and retail.

Action Item

This project will support Worcester's diverse population to support minority- and immigrant-owned business at all stages. The goal is to make Downtown a more welcoming, supportive place to do business. Working with trusted community partners, targeted and culturally-appropriate communications efforts will reach out to these business owners Downtown to discuss their needs and alert them to opportunities.

Supportive programs may include:

- Workshops on topics like legal requirements and accessing legal advice, accounting practices, accessing credit, negotiating with landlords or creditors, marketing, and other business skill development;
- Networking to connect business and property owners with available storefronts;
- Mentorship program matching experience entrepreneurs and business owners with recent start-ups;
- Programs specifically addressing language barriers and cultural differences that business owners may encounter.

Process

- Identify existing educational/training resources and potential community partners
- Working with trusted community partners to arrange and facilitate discussions, meet with minority, disadvantaged, and immigrant business owners and entrepreneurs to discuss their needs
- Develop culturally-sensitive programs, tools, and services that address those needs
- Recruit minority, disadvantaged, and immigrant business owners to participate in programs
- Track participant outcomes and adjust programs as needed



[Donate](#)



Is your business or organization:

- ✓ Black-Owned,
- ✓ Black-Operated,
- ✓ Black-Oriented?

If so...

Get Listed! Its FREE!

Origin	Susu Management Group, LLC <i>(d/b/a Black-owned Business Rochester)</i> Niche Market Insights Foundation, Inc. <i>(501(c)3 not-for-profit organization)</i> InfoWorks Development
Budget	 Portals: \$25k – \$75k ea (implementation); \$12k – \$15k/year ea (maintenance) APIs: \$5k ea (implementation); \$1k+/year ea (maintenance)
Timeframe	 Portals: 3 – 6 months ea (implementation and training) APIs: 1 – 3 months ea (implementation and training)
Risk	 Requires a regional organizational affiliate or sponsoring agency, socio-political will and actively engaged community collaboration; the digital divide
Key Performance Indicators	Engagement Rates <i>(# of niche listings, # of user accounts, # of pageviews, # of new visitors);</i> Community Commerce <i>(# of paid subscriptions, niche market sales, non-niche revenues);</i> Community Impact <i>(funds raised, # of reinvestments, grants awarded, # of businesses/jobs)</i>
Partners & Resources	Dr. Lomax R. Campbell, Matthew T. Bain, The BOB Squad SM , and NMI Foundation Board; Proprietary Database, Niche Market Portals, Directory APIs, CalendarWiz API <i>(discontinued)</i>

Sponsoring Culturally-specific Portals for Digital Marketing and Promotion



REVENUES & SALES

Provided by SME Consultant

Third Eye Network, LLC

Location

Rochester, New York/Finger Lakes Region

Diagnostic

Backgrounder

- BOB Rochester was launched in late 2014 as an anti-racist response to the untimely deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown Jr., and others at the hands of police; inspired by the legacy of Victor Hugo Green who published *The Green Book* (1936 – 1966)
- By design, it is a community-driven marketing and promotion resource for area BOBs intended to empower Black enterprise, public service organizations and affinity associations; this social enterprise has organically amassed over 700 listings since its public launch

Pandemic Effects

- Site statistics demonstrate community participation runs parallel with crises (i.e., civic unrest, COVID-19 pandemic)
- Renewed interest in BOBs evidenced by 26.5k in new users (a 723.99% increase) with 36.5k sessions; average monthly pageviews have increased from 1,600 (pre-pandemic) to 6,900 (post-pandemic); pageviews spiked during the summer of 2020: 4.2k (May), 83.2k (Jun), 17.5k (Jul), 6.9k (Aug), 7.6k (Sept)
- Local community gifts surpassed \$50k

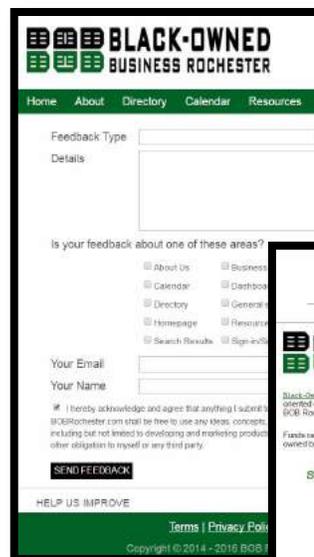
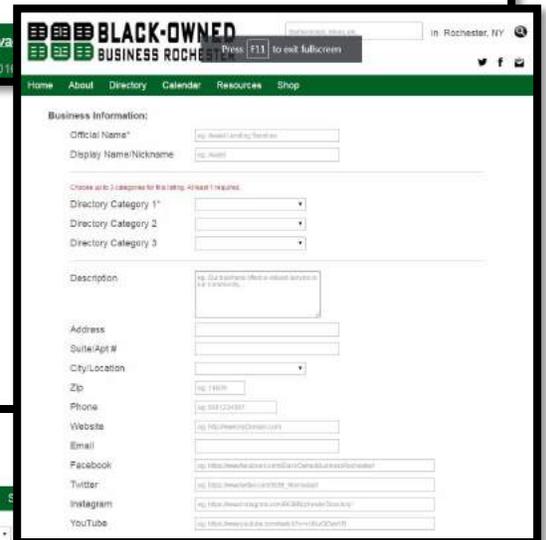
Actions – Pandemic-related Pivots

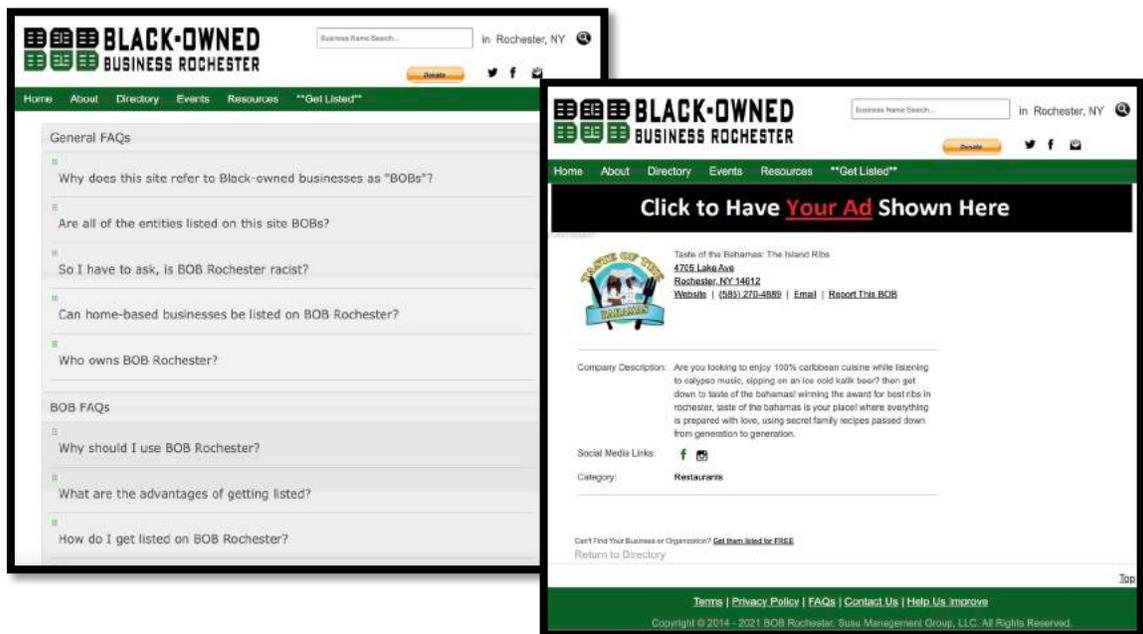
Platform Development

- Developed an API to expand network reach, BOB promotion, and the data warehouse; allot 1 – 3 months at \$5k
- New brand development is underway, LocalBOBs.com (Fall 2021), for national expansion; allot 6+ months at ≤\$75k
- Create niche-specific platforms centering Latinx-, Asian-, and Native American-owned businesses; can filter by women-, disadvantaged-, LGBT-, and veteran-owned, as well as certification statuses (including MBE, WBE, DBE, LGBTBE, SDVOB/VOSB, and Section 3 businesses); allot 4 months at \$25k – \$75k each and \$12k – \$15k for annual maintenance
- New features will include check-ins, profile administration, crowdsourcing, job boards, ratings, reviews, eCommerce, a request for responses feature, custom APIs, niche-specific reporting, free and paid subscription levels, and more
- Connect a community reinvestment fund



BOBRochester.com screenshots





Sample Pages Documentation

Ready for technical detail	Page	Description
4/23/20XX	About	Information page. A billboard of sorts to suggest the purpose of the site to the user in greater detail than the Home page.
	Add a BOB	(See Get Listed)
7/18/20XX	Calendar	A calendar display of events entered into the system. These events can be 'downloaded' to a user's device at will.
	Contact Us	A form to allow users to engage BOB Rochester administrators.
2/7/20XX	Directory	Listing of BOBs. Displayed in multiple ways to afford a comfortable user experience.
	FAQs	Frequently asked questions of users.
	Get Listed	A form interface that allows a user to request that a BOB get listed.
	Header (Search)	Used to search for BOB-records in the system by category, name, or tags. This should support partial string search. This page persists across all pages used in the site except for error-pages.
	Help Us Improve	A form to allow users to suggest ideas through the existing website.
	Home	An informational page. A billboard of sorts to suggest the purpose of the site to users, and highlight recent news and upcoming events.
	Privacy Policy	Static governing terms of privacy afforded to users of the BOB Rochester website.
	Resources	A listing of culturally-relevant books, movies, podcasts and other media focused on skill building and cultural community development.
	Shop	A listing of products for sale to support/sustain the efforts of BOB Rochester.
	Terms	Static terms of service provided by BOB Rochester to users of this website and system.
	Page (search results)	Resulting page of search or BOB Directory selection.
10/10/20XX	Profile	Static result of specific BOB listing.
	Media	Links to news articles, audio-visual files, and BOBR press kit items

Sample page documentation list for describing the purpose of each page and managing platform development

Process

Regional Integration Strategy

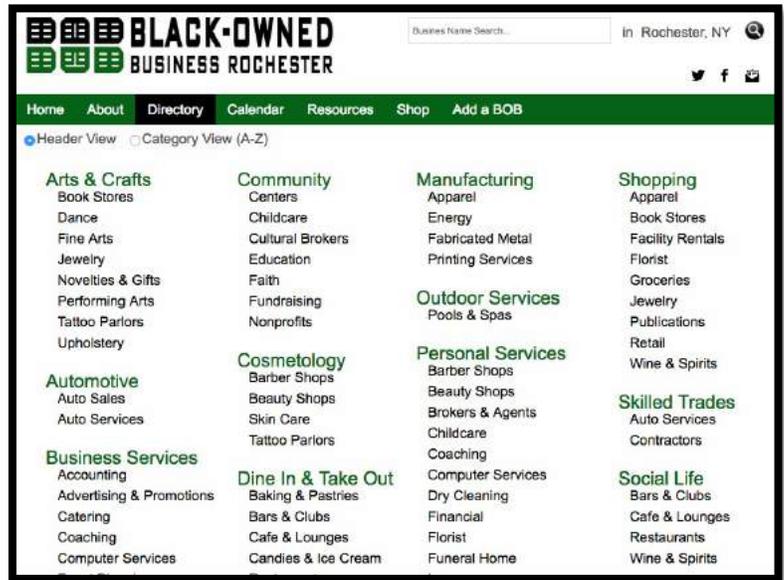
- Decide whether or not to partner with NMI Foundation, Inc. a new national non-profit (501c3) community wealth building organization to support these and related efforts within the regional context
- Identify an economic development or non-profit organization to serve as the *Organizational Affiliate* for the territory or region; they would spearhead network development and implementation with the software vendor and administer the network post-implementation, including onboarding and managing paid staff and/or volunteers (see the next bullet)
- Cultivate *Niche Market Ambassadors* (e.g., the BOB SquadSM) to perform outreach focused on deepening cultural community engagement through technical assistance and network navigation (budgetary considerations can include stipends, interns or co-ops, part-time, and full-time jobs)

Strategic Resource Development

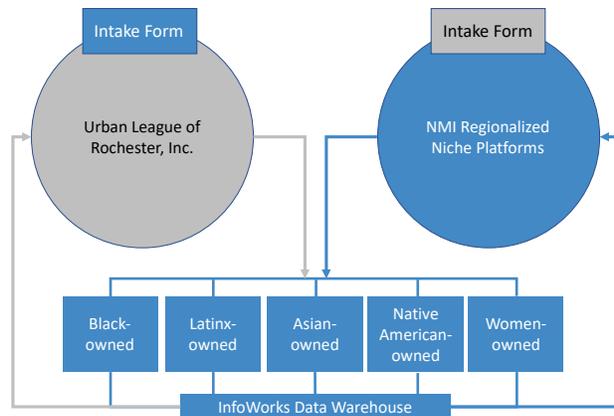
- Conduct outreach to the private sector, government, philanthropy, and the general community to garner financial support for the project; private sector incentives may include tax credits
- Establish a community fund connected to the network for garnering financial support and through which to allocate revenues for community reinvestment

Platform Implementation

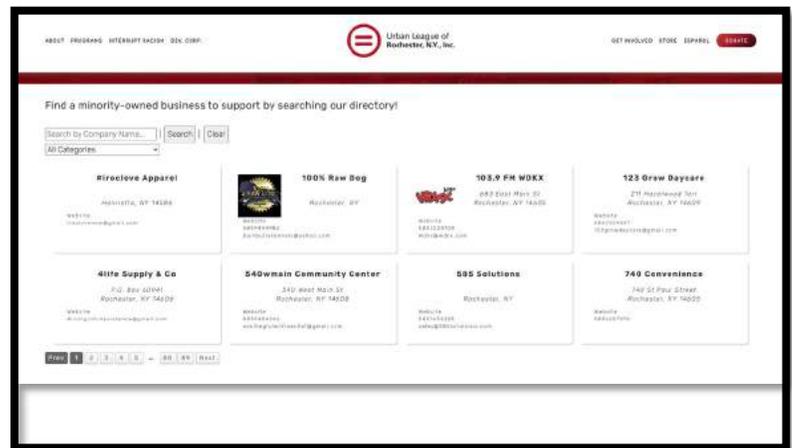
- Determine whether to sponsor one or more integrated culturally-specific portals and custom APIs in support of cultural communities of interest (keep in mind that prices may vary by vendor, number of counties, population size, and/or features)
- Select a vendor like InfoWorks and collaborate with the community to determine the desired scope of work
- Form a 3 – 7 person project team and maintain a weekly meeting schedule with the vendor
- Develop site content, create social media pages, pilot site developments, participate in training workshops, and identify niche directory listings with the community; celebrate wins publicly
- Prepare a rollout strategy with actions



Original BOB Rochester directory screenshot in header view



API conceptual model for NMI regionalized platforms and Urban League of Rochester (client)



New LocalBOBs.com API on client's website (www.urbanleaguero.org)

ACTIVATE UNDERUSED SPACES DOWNTOWN

Description - Identify community partners to add seating, lighting, interactive art and games, and programming like live music to increase activity in underused spaces, especially during winter.

Category	 Culture and Arts
Location	Carroll Plaza City Hall Plaza Worcester Plaza (440-446 Main St)
Origin	Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by the BID and City of Worcester Cultural Development
Budget	 Medium (\$50,000-200,000) Programming: Variable. Sources include: American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) grants, Art Place America, Mass Development Placemaking grants, crowdfunding



*Conceptual rendering showing ideas to activate Worcester Plaza across from City Hall, for example colorful lighting, a variety of seating, lawn games, etc.
Source: Stantec*

Timeframe



Short term

- Identify potential partners (2 months)
- Develop activation and event concepts (2 months)
- Identify event location and duration (1 month)
- Identify needed permits, approvals, and any insurance requirements (1 month)
- Publicize upcoming installations/events (1 month)
- Implement programming (Winter activation Jan-Mar)

Risk



Low risk

- Coordination with City, various organizations, stakeholders, and private property owners
- Weather conditions

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of spaces activated
- Number of visitors to activated spaces
- Number of new/expanded events hosted
- Number of event attendees
- Local news coverage
- User sentiment gathered through surveys

Partners & Resources

City of Worcester Cultural Development, Worcester Arts Council, Worcester Cultural Coalition, local artists, cultural organizations, business and property owners (to sponsor equipment and event infrastructure)



*Winter City design principles include sources of warmth, ways to screen winds like repurposed evergreen trees, and lighting installations to brighten public spaces
Source: DHCD Compendium*

Diagnostic

Downtown has a number of underused spaces of varying size that detract from its vitality and could be better used. It also hosts numerous community events throughout the year but very few during the winter months. Worcester has an active and engaged arts community and diverse cultural organizations that could contribute to programming and activation that would appeal to a broad range of visitors.

Diagnostic:

- Business and venue closures and/or reduced hours set back Worcester's goal for creating an 18-hour downtown. The lack of people gave downtown a vacant, dark, and unwelcoming feeling.
- Downtown has a growing population, especially young people 25-44, who would be drawn to new programming and events.
- The top-ranked placemaking priorities in the Placemaking Action Plan survey are events, outdoor seating, performances, and parklets.
- Opportunities to host more cultural events and to expand the event season to include more fall and winter programming are identified in the Placemaking Action Plan.

Covid impacts:

- Covid canceled many popular events which led to a quiet, dark downtown feeling. With fewer visitors, businesses that benefit from event attendees lost that revenue.
- Covid exacerbated this issue by eliminating or restricting public events and forcing any type of gathering to occur outdoors.
- As downtown emerges from public health restrictions, creative new programming and events, both large and small, will help draw people back downtown

Action Item

This initiative will bring more life, energy, and excitement to downtown by focusing on two types of programming: the temporary/short-term activation of underused public and private spaces, and the creation or expansion of events held downtown especially in the fall and winter seasons. Building on existing relationships and identifying new organizations to partner with will leverage the unique resources of the artistic and cultural community in Worcester. It will also broaden the audiences that are served and provide a welcoming atmosphere to all residents, kids and families, and visitors.

Activation strategies may include: busker performances, solo or small group music performances, outdoor fitness classes, market days, an outdoor library collection, and entertainment options like lawn games, interactive art, or pop-up play features for children. Spaces designed for use in cold weather will include Winter City design elements that block prevailing winds, maximize access to sunlight, and provide warmth. Ice sculptures, hot food and drink vendors, outdoor markets, winter beer (and wine) garden, winter sports like curling and ice skating, and lighting that extends beyond the traditional holiday season are some of the strategies that will be explored.

Expanded programming will look to partner arts and cultural organizations to diversify the range of events. "New to downtown" cultural and arts events will be prioritized to accomplish this goal. Intersectional events that combine the two will further broaden audiences. Programming may be coordinated with the initial lighting of significant buildings to publicize the program and attract/engage visitors.

Action:

Identify and confirm underused spaces for activation strategies.

Identify arts and cultural partners to develop new events and programming

Process

Build Partnerships

- Bring together a team of engaged business owners, property owners, creatives and Downtown residents early in this planning process.
- Identify inspiration and ideas for activation strategies, programming, and locations.
- Meet with City staff and property owners to confirm locations, responsibilities of each party, and define shared goals.

Plan and Implement

- Seek input from event partners and other stakeholders throughout planning process.
- Identify groups that could host events in the spaces and/or assist with project installation. Develop an easy to use sign up process for groups interested in activating any of these spaces and actively encourage all different types of local groups to sign up for and use the space to create early energy and adoption.
- Identify physical improvements that will be needed to implement ideas, obtain cost estimates, and procure materials. Any equipment needed should be portable so that it can be relocated if needed.
- Identify necessary permits or licenses with City staff.
- Install temporary public space activations.
- Promote activations via social media and partner organizations to broaden audience, both before and after installation.

Feedback

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

Iterate

- Adapt projects based on user feedback.
- What worked? What didn't work? Did residents benefit? Did area businesses benefit?
- How could things be improved? Could another location be more appropriate for this intervention? (if it becomes apparent location is an issue)



**BEST
PRACTICE**

The Corner Spot



**PUBLIC
REALM**

Provided by SME Consultant

Bench Consulting (from Patronicity)

Location

Ashland, MA

Origin	Town of Ashland, Area business owners, resident volunteers.
Budget	 <p>Total project budget was \$59,000 with funding provided through a MassDevelopment grant, online Patronicity crowdfunding campaign and in kind donations.</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Implementation timeframe is just a few weeks. Since most placemaking is iterative, changes and improvements to both the site and programming occur over the years of its lifetime.</p>
Risk	 <p>As is the nature with more tactical interventions like this, risks are diminished since this is initially a temporary installation with a far lower budget than many municipal projects.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Number of businesses to use the space. Number that go on to expand operations in town. The number of attendees at different events and pedestrian counts in downtown. Area business increase on days of events or activations.
Partners & Resources	Local landscape companies, local fabricators, local craftspeople and artists to help design and build components of project.
Diagnostic	<p>The town had a small, municipally owned lot with a structure slated for demolition on the edge of downtown, between the center of Town and the MBTA station. A local diner had closed depriving the town of the key “third space.” With an increasing number of storefront vacancies in the Downtown Area, there was a need to draw people back into the downtown while also encouraging stopping and staying activities. This need for a central gathering space and a place for small businesses to develop more of a foothold in the community made a project like the Corner Spot the perfect opportunity to create a “town square” like atmosphere for residents to create a public heart and hub of the community.</p>
Action Item	<p>The Corner Spot is a placemaking opportunity for downtown Ashland where businesses can test drive the market and residents can come together to increase the sense of community and help revitalize the downtown area. The Corner Spot is intended to stimulate economic activity in Ashland, attract new developers and business owners as well as increase foot traffic downtown to help support existing and future business. You’ll need to locate a prime site for this, ideally on a property controlled by the town, whether municipal parking lot, vacant lot or centrally located space. Once you have the space determine any initial permitting issues that may preclude or hinder you from using the site for certain passive or commercial activities. Develop a site layout plan and a rough preliminary budget and allocate any funding opportunities including grants and private donations that may be available. Ensure you have an adequate programming plan and maintenance plan lined up for the site. Maintenance could require some funding so ensure you have long term funding set aside to operate the site.</p>

Process

1. **LOCATE:** Find a suitable location for the project. This could be a vacant lot, an alley, a parking lot space or street space currently devoted to vehicles. Ensure its centrally located within walking distance of numerous other commercial opportunities.
2. **PARTNER:** Identify a strong base of supporters to help plan and implement any placemaking project from community groups to business owners, artists and other stakeholders.
3. **PLAN:** Determine the different major component parts of this project to begin to formulate a vision for the site. Do you want a mix of passive and active recreation opportunities? Seating to encourage takeout dining from area restaurants. Wifi to encourage outdoor remote workers to the area? If there's a retail opportunity, what does the physical space look like, do you to be able to conduct light food prep which will require plumbing. Determine any ADA and other accessibility issues early on as well. Obtain necessary permitting and insurance on the site.
4. **IMPLEMENT:** Demolition of the existing structure was donated by a local contractor and grading & landscaping labor was donated by another. From there, local makers were used for the swings and table seating and a local contractor fit out an old tool shed to design and develop the Corner Spot's central retail space.
5. **FEEDBACK:** The Town conducted numerous resident surveys during the first years of the Corner Spot and continues to solicit feedback from residents and businesses about how the space can better fit their needs. Use a combination of electronic and in person survey tools to engage constructive feedback.
6. **ITERATE:** Over the years, new components have been added to the site based on resident donations and new types of events based on requests of area businesses and residents. Event schedule

The space has become the "heart and soul" of the community allowing a passive space for community gathering in the heart of Downtown while also providing a space expose the community to area small and startup businesses.



Family events at The Corner Spot are popular including story time, concerts and fitness classes.



Nu3Kidz was one a nearly 50 businesses that have popped up for a week at a time at the Corner Spot.



EXPAND OUTREACH TO CULTURAL/ARTS ORGANIZATIONS TO HOST EVENTS DOWNTOWN

Description - Develop a signature Downtown event, grow existing events, and create new ones to offer events that appeal to everyone.

Category		Culture and Arts
Location		RRP study area Census Tract 7317
Origin		Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by City of Worcester Cultural Development and the BID
Budget		Small (<\$50,000) Potential funding sources: Mass Cultural Council, Barr Foundation, sponsorships
Timeframe		Short-term <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify potential partners - 2 months• Develop event concepts - 2 months• Identify event location and duration - 1 month• Plan event logistics - 2 months• Identify needed permits, approvals, and any insurance requirements - 1 month• Publicize upcoming events - 2 months• Implement events
Risk		Low Risk <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordination with city, cultural and arts organizations• Weather conditions
Key Performance Indicators		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of new/expanded events hosted• Number of event attendees (community awareness)• Local news coverage
Partners & Resources		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural and arts organizations• Community groups• Local businesses• Discover Central Massachusetts

Diagnostic

Worcester benefits from an active arts community and diverse cultural organizations that could sponsor exciting new events that would appeal to a broad range of visitors.

Diagnostic:

- Business and venue closures and/or reduced hours set back Worcester's goal for creating an 18-hour downtown. The lack of people gave downtown a vacant, dark, and unwelcoming feeling.
- Downtown has a growing population, especially young people 25-44, who would be drawn to new events.
- Opportunities to host more cultural events and to expand the event season to include more fall and winter programming are identified in the Placemaking Action Plan.
- Ninety percent of business survey respondents rated more cultural events/activities to bring people Downtown as important or very important.
- Some of the top-ranked placemaking priorities in the Placemaking Action Plan survey are events and performances.
- Downtown lacks a signature event that could become a defining citywide experience.

Covid impacts:

- Covid canceled many popular events which led to a quiet, dark downtown feeling. Businesses that benefit from event attendees lost that revenue. Constantly changing restrictions on occupancy and public health requirements have added costs to business operations, in turn adding to losses and creating further disincentive to come downtown.
- Covid exacerbated this issue by eliminating or restricting public events. As downtown emerges from public health restrictions, creative new events, both large and small, will help draw people back downtown.

Action Item

This initiative will bring more life, energy, and excitement to downtown by focusing on the creation or expansion of events held downtown especially in the fall and winter seasons. Building on existing relationships and identifying new organizations to partner with will leverage the unique resources of the artistic and cultural community in Worcester. It will also broaden the audiences that are served and provide a welcoming atmosphere to all residents, kids and families, and visitors.

Expanded programming will look to partner arts and cultural organizations to diversify the range of events. "New to downtown" cultural and arts events will be prioritized to accomplish this goal. Intersectional events that combine the two will further broaden audiences. Programming may be coordinated with the initial lighting of significant buildings to publicize the program and attract/engage visitors.

Action:

- Define shared goals for Downtown event calendar.
- Identify arts and cultural partners to develop new events and programming.
- Develop and refine event concepts with event leaders and partners.
- Host event and welcome people Downtown.

Process

Meet with City staff and community partners to define shared goals.

- Consider goals such as desired audience or event partners, how event can help businesses, implement a pilot project to test feasibility, etc.
- Determine how the event will achieve the goals.
- Answer these questions: 1) Who is the audience? 2) What message to convey? 3) How does this align with municipal and business district goals? 4) What does success look like? 5) What would cause everyone to smile the day after the event?

Engage with community to shape event ideas and identify potential partners.

- Ask Downtown residents and workers what types of events they'd like to see.
- Work back from the goals to identify people, organizations, and/or agencies that could be event leaders or partners.
- Gather parties with similar interests, complementary resources and expertise.

Develop and refine event concept with partners.

- Think carefully about branding. How does the event fit with overall branding and marketing for Downtown?
- Identify location and determine how space will be used for different activities.
- Link program activities with partners/volunteers.
- Create an event schedule including: pre-event promotion, event planning and setup, event execution, clean up.
- Create a budget sheet for event and identify potential sponsors or in-kind providers.
- Create a detailed implementation plan with timeline of tasks and roles.
- Identify and obtain any necessary permits or licenses.

Host event and welcome people Downtown.

- During the event, include ways to capture information from the attendees (raffle that requires zip code, ideas wall that asks what else people want to see Downtown, etc.)
- Do a debrief immediately after the event to document lessons learned and improve efforts for the future. Ask local businesses for their input.
- Document what is done and consider how to make the effort sustainable in the long run. How can this event be a pilot project for ongoing programming?

BEST PRACTICE



Host a downtown cultural event to support businesses and show positive change



CULTURAL/
ARTS

Provided by SME Consultant

Susan Silberberg, CivicMoxie

Location

Fall River, MA

Origin	Collaborative effort growing out of MassDevelopment TDI project and including other FRACC members involved in Viva Fall River (the Arts, Culture and Creative Economy Master Planning effort for the city)
Budget	 Low – \$37,000 plus in-kind donations
Timeframe	 Short – planning and implementation in 3-1/2 months
Risk	 Low
Key Performance Indicators	Number of attendees, Number of partners working together successfully, Good press
Partners & Resources	One SouthCoast Chamber of Commerce, Fall River Arts + Cultural Coalition (FRACC), MassDevelopment TDI, BayCoast Bank, We Love Fall River, Fall River Public Schools, City of Fall River – main partners

Diagnostic

Fall River has many outstanding attributes but is lacking in a collaborative vision and image that can pull all the great things together. There are many different efforts and activities with no central organizing force to advocate, market, and lead the way in business support, tourism development, and arts and cultural coordination across the city.

Key challenges include high turnover and legal issues for City Hall leaders in recent years that have grabbed headlines and stolen the narrative of the good things happening in the city. In addition, there is a fragmented approach to solving problems and building momentum for positive change. The downtown has significant vacancies and the geographic spread of the city, as well as its hilly topography, make connections and focus a challenge. However, the diversity of the city, including its residents and cultural traditions, food and restaurant offerings, and presence of a small but strong “making” economy offer some unique opportunities. The city’s location on the water, proximity to Boston and Providence, and abundance of relatively affordable housing and workspaces, and a sizeable inventory of old mill buildings provide many opportunities.



Live painting was part of the event.

Action Item

The Winterbridge cultural events (running Fridays and Saturdays for six weeks in the Winter of 2021) at Gromada Plaza downtown was planned to build on the MassDevelopment TDI work on South Main Street and to showcase the collaborative power of FRACC, a 40-member diverse group of arts and culture, business, community nonprofit, philanthropic, and public sector stakeholders. FRACC is charting new territory in the scope of its goals and Winterbridge was meant as a way to:

- Bring the community together and engender city pride (begin to take back the narrative of the city)
- Demonstrate the power of collaboration (put the power of FRACC to work)
- Provide community activities and spaces during winter under Covid-19 guidelines

Winterbridge included music, fire pits, evergreen trees, live painting, community partners providing grab n go services, dancing/Zumba sessions, live entertainers (costume characters, singers, and musicians), and a We Love Fall River window display competition.



Source: for all photos: FRACC

There were over 36 businesses, nonprofits and individuals who came together to provide staff, funding, programming, marketing, and other needs for the events.

Process (Continued)

The Winterbridge cultural events grew out of the desire for an early “win” and demonstration of the power of collaboration including the MassDevelopment TDI and FRACC. Planning goals focused on attracting people to downtown and exposing them to music, dance, live painting, and other cultural elements...showing what the future can look like. The steps to plan and execute this type of event include:

- Set goals such as: 1) desired audience; 2) how to help businesses attract customers downtown; 3) change image of downtown; 4) practice collaboration or implement a pilot project to see feasibility, etc.
- Gather parties with similar interests, complementary resources and expertise.
- Brainstorm ways to achieve the core goals. Develop criteria to select one strategy to move forward: 1) Is there someone who has done an event before? 2) Does someone have paid staff that can lend a hand? 3) Who has graphics and marketing expertise? Can this strategy tag onto another event or a milestone in the community?
- Answer these questions: 1) Who is the audience? 2) What message to convey? 3) How does this align with municipal and business district goals? 4) What does success look like? 5) What would cause everyone to smile the day after the event? Keep the answers to these questions in mind throughout planning
- Work back from the goals to identify people, organizations, agencies available to help: chart interests, capacity, resources, contacts.
- What location best supports the goals? Create a plan of the area.
- List and draw activity areas, block party elements
- Link program activities with partners/volunteers.
- Refine event: what happens, time, day, activities
- Create a budget sheet for overall event, each activity area.
- Think carefully about branding...what to call it? How does this fit with overall branding and marketing for the downtown or commercial district?
- Create a detailed implementation plan with timeline of tasks, roles.
- Document what you do and think about how to make the effort sustainable in the long run. How can this event be a pilot project for ongoing programming?
- During the event, try to include ways to capture information the attendees (raffle that requires their zip code, ideas chalk wall that asks what people want to see in the district, etc.)
- Do a debrief immediately after the event to improve efforts for the future. Ask businesses for their input and reactions.



Volunteers helped build the “set” for the weekend activities.



Winterbridge was a success and led to increased “buzz” about what is possible downtown and also the power of collaboration and FRACC’s work.



INCREASE THE DOWNTOWN WORCESTER BID'S CAPACITY

Description - Align mission and resources to best serve Downtown by identifying high-impact projects, sponsorships, and partnerships.

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Study area
Origin	Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District (BID) Project would be led by the BID
Budget	 Low (<\$50,000) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Costs include staff/administrative time and contractor fees Potential funding sources include MDI, BID funds (for capacity assessment); sponsorships, City contracts (for increased funding sources)
Timeframe	 Short-term (<5 years) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify BID strategic consultant (2-3 months)• Conduct strategic assessment (3-4 months)• Develop recommendations and gain buy-in (3-4 months)• Implement changes (Ongoing)
Risk	 Low Risk <p>Primary risk is from BID property owners who maintain high expectations and expect broad range of services despite limited staff resources and COVID-19's impact reducing BID funding.</p>
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sustainable increase in BID funding over next 3 years.• Dollar amount of new sponsorships• Dollar amount of new City contracts• Social media engagement• Media coverage of Downtown and BID events• Re-affirmation of BID by members after initial 5-year period.
Partners & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• BID Board• BID members• City of Worcester leadership and staff



Downtown Worcester

Diagnostic

Diagnostic:

- The Downtown Worcester BID represents the owners of 140 properties within approximately 78 acres. It seeks to provide hospitality and safety, beautification, and cultural placemaking Downtown as well as marketing, public relations, and advocacy.
- The BID was established in November 2018 after a short two-year formation process. Since Downtown had no predecessor organization before the BID, it is essentially a start-up organization. A broad mandate and high expectations for services set during the formation process did not fully account for the reality of a start-up organization.
- The BID's Ambassador Program has had a positive impact on the appearance and perception of Downtown. Cleaning efforts and beautification like planters have made the BID's service area increasingly evident on Downtown streets.

Covid impacts:

- Public health considerations increased the demand for BID services like enhanced cleaning.
- BID dues collected in 2020 were slightly lower than projected, likely due to economic uncertainty and business revenue decreases.
- As the economy reopens, the BID needs a strategy to fully fund a balanced budget and align services with funding sources and capacity.

Action Item

The Downtown Worcester BID will benefit from a strategic assessment to increase its organizational capacity as it grows and matures. The strategic assessment should be a collaborative effort between BID staff, its Board, and its members so that realistic expectations and priorities can be created together and informed by everyone's input.

1. Secure resources for the BID's sustainability
2. Continue building effective working relationships
3. Promote the BID's value proposition

Process

Determine approach to strategic assessment

- Identify whether a BID or organizational consultant is needed to assist with evaluation and prioritization process.
- Conduct interviews with BID staff, Board, members, City leadership and staff, and other stakeholders to understand issues and opportunities.
- Hold a facilitated half-day Board retreat to review findings and create enthusiasm for the plan.

Secure resources for the BID's sustainability

- Review BID financials to understand impacts of Covid and non-payment of dues, evaluate additional fundraising and staffing needs related to member expectations.
- Develop a sponsorship program to leverage BID fees. Create a catalogue of opportunities for media, product providers, vendors, and in-kind trades. Evaluate sponsorships for cultural programming and events, BID meetings, social media, and the light pole banner program. Consider whether selling sponsorships is done by current staff or through a contract position.
- Secure grants to support BID priorities and Covid recovery. Identify projects that align with grant funding opportunities and are "shovel-ready". Identify funding partners to assist with grant writing, and/or consider contracting with a grant writer. Cultivate relationships with foundations and other funding providers.
- Explore the use of ARPA funds for Covid-recovery projects like those recommended in this Rapid Recovery Plan.

Continue building effective working relationships

- Establish a regular CEO-level conversation with City leadership, BID Board members, and key BID property owners. Meet at least quarterly to review key projects and initiatives and nurture the partnership.
- Arrange City leadership meetings with BID peer cities like Springfield and Cambridge. Explore models for effective partnerships between City and BID.
- Get a "seat at the table". Establish the BID as the voice for Downtown and be proactively involved in conversations about issues and opportunities facing the area.

Promote the BID's value proposition

- Use metrics to promote positive impact of BID's work
- Create and widely distribute an Annual Report that highlights the BID's impact and members.
- Leverage traditional and social media. Cultivate local media coverage by providing stories of interest that focus on the BID's work and its businesses. Schedule regular social media posts to promote events and feature local businesses.



BEST PRACTICE

Springfield Business Improvement District

The BID has an extensive sponsorship program. Opportunities include the street banner program, Live After Five music series, Downtown Farmers' Market, Court Square Concert Series, and Cruise Nights.

2021 Sponsorship Opportunities: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/horztaqFOJluZ/>



PROVIDE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI) TRAINING

Description - Work with community partners to develop educational offerings for Downtown businesses and organizations.

Category		Administrative Capacity
Location		RRP study area Census Tract 7317
Origin		Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by the BID with community partners
Budget		Low (<\$50,000) Potential funding sources: Action for Racial Equity Grants (Greater Worcester Foundation), sponsorships, BID funds
Timeframe		Short-term <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify existing resources and potential partners – 3 months• Develop DEI educational program and schedule – 3 months• Offer DEI training and resources to BID members - ongoing
Risk		Low risk <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business owner interest• DEI partner availability/capacity



Source: Adobe Stock

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of training participants
- Feedback surveys after trainings

Partners & Resources

- DEI community partners: City of Worcester Executive Office of Diversity & Inclusion, YWCA, Massachusetts Minority Business Development Agency, NAIOP Massachusetts, others to be identified
- Business owners
- BID Board
- BID members

Diagnostic

Diagnostic:

- The City of Worcester and Downtown have a diverse population:
 - » 15% of the City and 21% of Downtown's population is Black, 8% and 7% respectively are Asian, and 16% and 17% respectively self-report as other or two or more races.
 - » 26% of the City and 35% of Downtown's population is Hispanic.
- The City maintains a Diverse Business Directory with 187 listed businesses citywide

Covid impacts:

- Covid has had a disproportionate impact on the nonwhite population in terms of health outcomes, unemployment, and other metrics.
- Covid-19 has worsened persistent and deep inequalities impacting women and minority businesses. A recent national analysis of minority- and women-owned businesses estimated significant percentages of Black-owned, Latino-owned, and Asian American-owned businesses closed either temporarily or permanently, while a much lower percentage of white-owned businesses closed.
- Covid has influenced people's behavior—xenophobia, racism, and other "isms" are on the rise during the pandemic.
- Biases are more likely to affect our decisions when people are feeling pressure, time limits, fatigue or other stresses—all factors people are facing during the pandemic.
- Stigmatized groups are particularly vulnerable during pandemics. Decades of research show discrimination is associated with poorer health and mental health among LGBTQ, Asian American, African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, Muslim American and Latinx populations (American Psychological Association).

Action Item

The BID's mission is to create a unique sense of place through enhanced investment and development, establishing and sustaining a vibrant, welcoming, and economically viable district for all stakeholders. This project will offer diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training and resources to Downtown business owners, BID board members, and staff to make Downtown an even more welcoming neighborhood for everyone. It will highlight the value of increasing the number of minority-owned businesses in Downtown Worcester, as well as the value of diversifying offerings to attract new consumers and enhance the overall customer experience. The BID will work with community partners to provide local perspective and will adapt previously created content to the extent possible to offer more training sooner and to minimize costs. The project scope may include two components: in-person educational and training sessions together with an online resource library. Sessions will educate people on DEI issues and common barriers and provide training to proactively mitigate negative impacts and create a more welcoming customer and business environment.

Process

Identify DEI training partners and training program

- Identify potential community partners and existing educational/training resources
- Develop scope of DEI educational program and schedule
- Develop content for in-person trainings
- Collect resources for online library

Promote training and refine based on feedback

- Promote training and resources with Downtown business owners.
- Offer DEI training and resources to Downtown business owners, BID board members and staff.
- Solicit feedback from participants and refine programming as needed.
- Develop additional programming as needed

Populate online library of resources and training



POTENTIAL PROVIDERS

Disruptive Equity Education Project (DEEP)

- Diversity, Belonging, Inclusion, and Equity Assessments
- Professional development training
- Consulting packages

DEEP offers strategic long-term partnerships for individuals, teams and organizations seeking personal, professional and culture changes related to diversity, belonging, inclusion and equity.



Inspiration Zone LLC: Multicultural consulting



[https://www.inspirationzonellc.com/
consulting-services/multicultural-consulting/](https://www.inspirationzonellc.com/consulting-services/multicultural-consulting/)

<https://digdeepforequity.org/services/>



DEVELOP A BANNER PROGRAM FOR STREET LIGHT POLES

Description - Use light pole banners to promote Downtown's identity, highlight local events, and provide seasonal interest.

Category		Administrative Capacity
Location		RRP study area Census Tract 7317
Origin		Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by the BID in partnership with the City of Worcester Department of Public Works & Parks and Cultural Development
Budget		Low <ul style="list-style-type: none">• \$1,000-5,000 each• Installation, repair, removal Potential funding sources: sponsorships, City general fund, BID funds
Timeframe		Short-term (<5 years) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create banner program parameters - 3-6 months• Fabricate banners - 2-4 weeks• Market sponsorships - ongoing
Risk		Low risk



Existing banners Downtown could be larger and better used to promote Downtown's energy and identity

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of banners installed
- Number of seasonal installation cycles
- Number and value of sponsorships secured
- Application fees and/or sponsorships

Partners & Resources

- City of Worcester Cultural Development
- Department of Public Works
- Local businesses and organizations
- Discover Central Massachusetts

Diagnostic

Diagnostic:

- The BID recently assumed charge of the banner program within its footprint.
- Many current banners are used for parking wayfinding, a functional use that could be better accomplished with signage. Banners are undersized and have minimal visual impact.
- Banners need to be revisited to maximize their positive impact on downtown.

Covid impacts:

- The wide-ranging impacts caused by Covid-related shutdowns and public gathering restrictions emphasize the importance of visitor experience, event promotion, and business awareness to draw people back downtown.
- Covid has severely impacted Downtown and its businesses. 81% of business survey respondents generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019, and 43% saw declines of more than 25%. Over half saw on-site customers decline by 50% or more compared to pre-Covid.
- Recent business closures combined with long-standing storefront vacancies have set back the BID's goal of creating an 18-hour downtown and lend the impression of a vacant, dark, and unwelcoming area.

Action Item

This project will develop a coordinated banner program for Downtown light poles. Banners are a highly-visible opportunity to promote downtown's identity and major events, highlight local businesses or organizations, or provide seasonal interest. An improved banner program will add to the vitality and success of Downtown.

- Establish banner program parameters.
- Explore sponsorship opportunities.
- Implement program.

Process

Establish banner program parameters

- Meet with City staff to define elements of a successful banner program including:
 - Program objectives: seasonal interest, event promotion/sponsorship, historic, local businesses, etc.
 - Banner locations and quantity
 - Banner size(s)
 - Fabrication requirements
 - Installation and removal procedures
 - Maintenance agreements
 - Banner design guidelines
- Identify seasonal cycles and major events

Explore sponsorship opportunities

- Develop application for third party banner requests and a review/approval process
- Define sponsorship levels and market opportunities to local businesses and organizations

Implement new banner program

- Vet full program with City staff and secure approval
- Implement banner program
- Maintain banners as needed
- Adjust program parameters as needed based on feedback



ADMIN
CAPACITY

DEPLOY A PEDESTRIAN COUNTER SYSTEM AND SHARE DATA TO PROMOTE DOWNTOWN

Description - Understand daily activity patterns and event crowd size to assist business development and mobility planning

Category	 Other
Location	Various downtown locations
Origin	Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by the BID
Budget	 Low (<\$50,000) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility data purchase and analysis: \$25-35k • Pedestrian/bicycle counter cameras: \$2.5-5k per week of data collection
Timeframe	 Short-term (<5 years) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and evaluate data vendors and counter systems - 3-6 months • Request proposals and demonstrations from short-list - 2-4 months • Select provider and implement system - ongoing
Risk	 Low risk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of mobility data in Downtown Worcester



Source: Adobe Stock

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of daily pedestrian/bike counts
- Number of special event pedestrian/bike counts
- Business recruitment/retention

Partners & Resources

- Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), Discover Central Massachusetts, other BIDs

Diagnostic

Diagnostic:

- Pedestrians are beginning to return Downtown, drawn by the inaugural season of Triple A baseball at nearby Polar Park, major events like Shakespeare's Julius Caesar on the Common, and the full re-opening of restaurants and other businesses.

Covid impacts:

- Covid has severely impacted Downtown and its businesses. Over half of business survey respondents saw on-site customers decline by 50% or more compared to pre-Covid.
- Downtown events were canceled during Covid, contributing to the impression of a sparsely populated, unwelcoming area.
- Covid impacts have set back the BID's goal of creating an 18-hour Downtown.

Action Item

After a steep decline in pedestrian traffic during the pandemic, Downtown would benefit from a way to measure daily foot traffic and event visitors. This data would help to document the success of events and better understand daily patterns downtown. This information can be shared with local business owners, prospective business tenants, and event organizers to promote Downtown's accessibility and visibility as part of economic development. It can also be used in mobility planning to identify major pedestrian routes for streetscape and safety improvements.

1. Define key objectives
2. Research available products and select a system
3. Analyze and package data for target audiences

Process

Define key objectives.

- Create a clear purpose statement for collecting pedestrian and bicycle counts.
- Define how the data will be collected, analyzed, and packaged to promote Downtown.
- Evaluate data providers and counter systems that could provide the desired data and analysis.

Process

Research available products and select a system

- Compare product offerings and costs among potential systems like Streetlight, Springboard, Placer, EcoCounter. One key question for vendors is market penetration rate to assess the quality and robustness of the data they are selling - how many unique observations do they have in Downtown?
- Talk to other BIDs that use pedestrian counters about their user experience.
- Request demonstrations of the top 3 products.
- Select a system and begin collecting data.

Analyze and package data for target audiences

- Identify key metrics to track in data
- Package data analysis and metrics for different target audiences: economic development, tenant recruitment, event organizers, general Downtown impact.
- Promote data via social media, BID newsletters, and Annual Report to highlight Downtown vitality and opportunity.

Potential data providers:

- StreetLight - big data for mobility harnessing smartphones as sensors
- Moovit - first/last mile data for transit
- AirSage - location intelligence solutions
- Placer - location intelligence and foot traffic insights
- Springboard - retail data analytics

Potential counter systems:

- Miovision - video detection using AI
- Eco-Counter - automated pedestrian and bicycle counters



Mobility data visualization showing activity hotspots over time (AirSage platform).



EXPAND OUTREACH TO UNSHELTERED POPULATION

Description - Build on the City's effective Homeless Outreach Program to connect more people to additional resources like recovery coaches and workforce training.

Category	 Other
Location	RRP study area
Origin	Worcester Together, Downtown Worcester BID Project would be led by City of Worcester Quality of Life Task Force (Health and Human Services)
Budget	 Low (<\$50,000) Potential funding sources: HUD Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), CARES Act, foundation grants
Timeframe	 Short-term (<5 years) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruit and train recovery coaches: 6-24 months• Create dedicated warming/cooling center: 9-36 months• Address restroom, shower, and storage issues: 6-36 months
Risk	 Medium risk <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social service provider partner availability• Funding• Time to build relationships with unsheltered population• Willingness to accept help among unsheltered population
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of interactions with unsheltered population• Number of referrals for services• Percent maintaining long-term participation in programs/ services• Number of social service providers working together
Partners & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worcester Police Department's Crisis Intervention Team• Local social service providers including shelters, mental health and addiction counselors, supportive housing providers, emergency services (food, clothing, shelter), etc• Community and business leaders

Diagnostic

Diagnostic:

- More people experiencing homelessness congregated Downtown during the pandemic.
- Job loss, housing instability, and health issues created more people with unstable housing situations.
- Worcester is a social service provider hub for much of the region, drawing people in need from a wide area.
- Rising housing costs, transportation obstacles (cost, availability, reliability, etc), employment challenges, and health care are structural issues that need to be addressed as root causes of housing instability.

Covid impacts:

- Covid has had a disproportionate impact on the unsheltered population due to their lack of access to reliable shelter, exposure to weather, and other health factors like mental health and/or addiction issues.
- Covid has had a disproportionate impact on the nonwhite population in terms of health outcomes, unemployment, and other metrics. Among Black non-Hispanic males in Massachusetts, the confirmed opioid-related overdose death rate increased the most – by 69 percent – from 32.6 to 55.1 per 100,000 people, the highest increase of any ethnic or racial group in 2020 (MA Dept of Health).

Action Item

The City of Worcester's Homeless Outreach Team is a successful operation to build relationships with unsheltered individuals and help connect them to available resources. It works in concert with the City Manager's Quality of Life Taskforce and the Worcester Police Department's Crisis Intervention Team to humanely address the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

This project will identify additional funding and partnerships to expand the City of Worcester's Homeless Outreach Team and connect to additional resources and service providers to tackle the multifaceted problem of homelessness.

Priority needs include recruiting and training more recovery coaches with lived experience, especially BIPOC individuals; creating a dedicated warming and cooling center with trained staff; and addressing the need for restrooms, showers, and storage facilities.

Process

Recruit and train more recovery coaches with lived experience, especially BIPOC individuals.

- Provide workforce training for interested individuals.

Create a dedicated warming and cooling center with trained staff.

- Identify potential locations with transit access.
- Develop culturally appropriate training for staff with previous experience with people experiencing homelessness.

Address the need for restrooms, showers, and storage facilities.

- Explore public restroom access.
- Consider expanding mobile showers.
- Evaluate locations for secure storage lockers for individuals to safely leave belongings.



CASE STUDIES

Downtown Boston BID collaboration with social service providers

The BID employs a full-time outreach specialist to connect homeless people with housing or social services, similar to the City of Worcester's Homeless Outreach Team. The BID also contracts some services to Project Place, an organization that provides transitional employment programs.

New Market Business Association and Newmarket Community Partners

These two organizations collaborate to address challenging issues of homelessness and addiction in the Newmarket neighborhood of Boston. NCP has two current initiatives of particular interest:

- Work initiative for homeless and/or addicted individuals
<https://www.newmarketcommunitypartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Work-Initiative-for-homeless-and-or-Addicted-Individuals.pdf>
- Addiction recovery in a campus setting
<https://www.newmarketcommunitypartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Addiction-Recovery-in-a-Campus-Setting-a-proposed-model-for-success-1.pdf>

Northampton, MA Storage Lockers

Northampton recently installed 24 electronic storage lockers in a downtown parking garage for unsheltered individuals to securely leave their belongings. The installation followed discussions with people experiencing homelessness about their needs. A local community partner manages the locker program for the City.

Atlanta Downtown Improvement District Social Impact Safety Team and Community Resource Card

The ADID Social Impact Director is charged with helping to build a more inclusive city by leading and convening stakeholders to promote solution-focus strategies to address quality of life. A mobile response pilot program, Atlanta Social Impact Safety Team (ASIST), launched in late 2020 to build capacity in the homeless service system.

<https://www.atlantadowntown.com/adid/areas-of-focus/social-impact>