



# Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Navy Yard Business District

Dracut, MA

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



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

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

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

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# Acknowledgements



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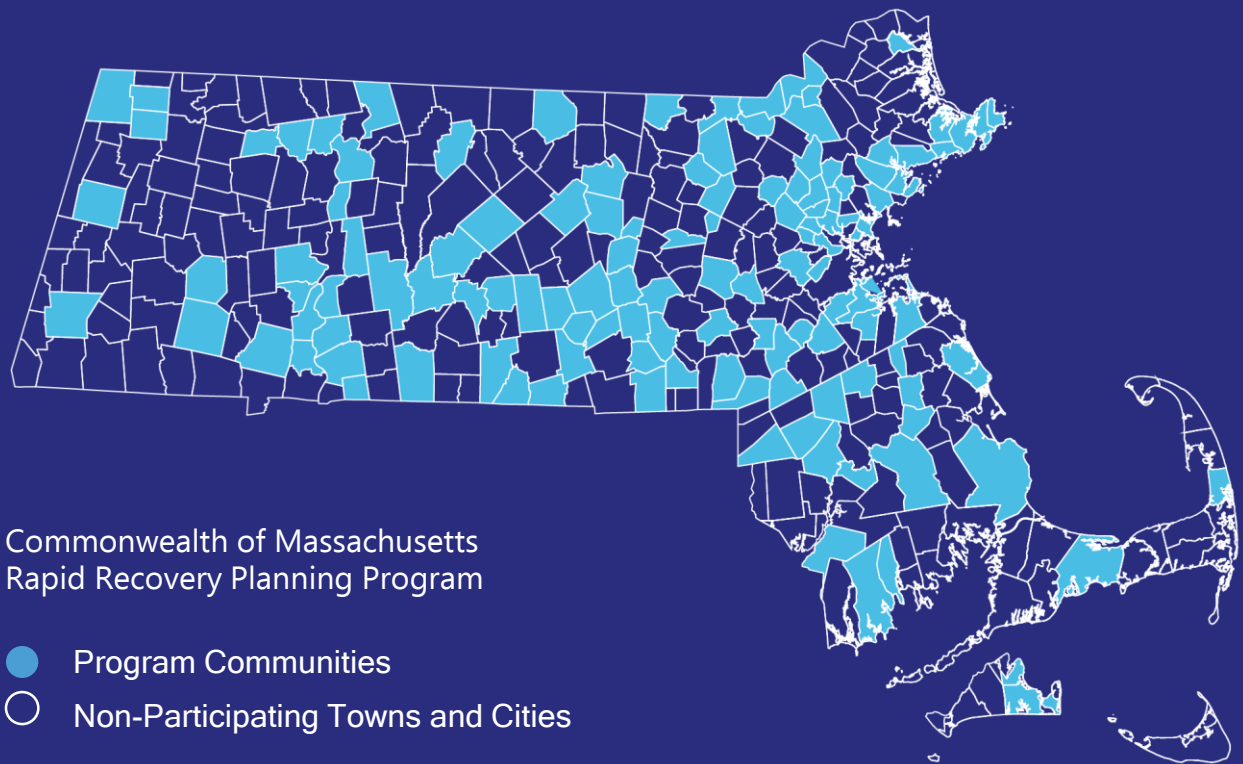
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## 125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



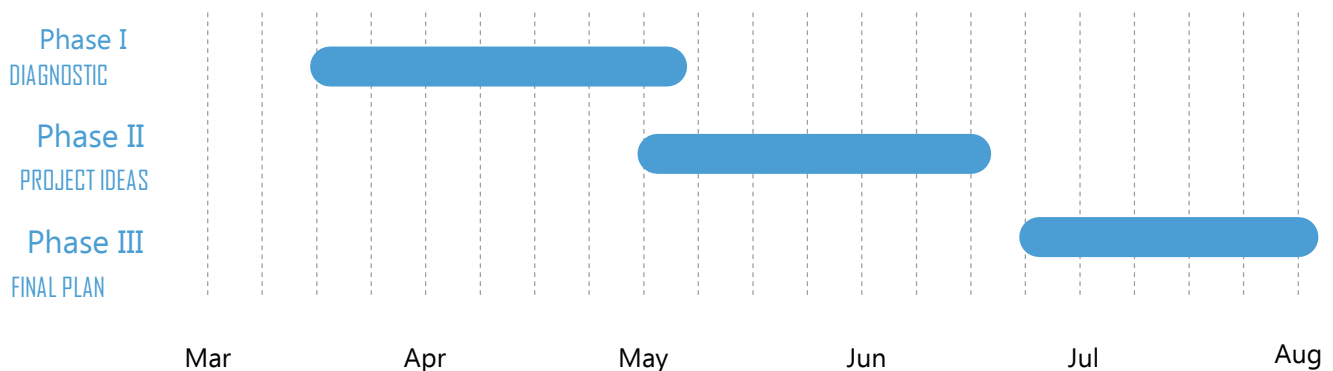
# Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

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

# Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



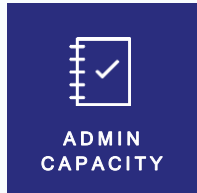
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue/Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

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# Executive Summary



# Executive Summary

## Overview

The Town of Dracut submitted a Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) application to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the businesses located in the Navy Yard Business District. The LRRP program analyzes and explores the challenges and barriers to economic recovery and identifies strategies and actions to help communities achieve their recovery goals. The program provides technical assistance through a Plan Facilitator (PF) assigned to each community and access to Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to help generate ideas and further refine project recommendations through individual consultations. The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) was selected by DHCD as the PF for the Town of Dracut and guided the plan development process for the Navy Yard Rapid Recovery Plan. The Town decided to utilize the Dracut Economic Development Committee (EDC) to oversee the LRRP project. The kick-off meeting for the project was held on April 7, 2021. The meeting was conducted virtually in light of the pandemic. The PowerPoint presentations for all LRRP meetings were made available online. All meetings conducted for this project were posted as public meetings in accordance with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Data specific to the study area was collected during the Diagnostic phase of the project. Demographic data relative to the Town of Dracut and study area was analyzed, including population, age, household income, household size, educational attainment and race and ethnicity. The physical attributes of the district were assessed and rated using criteria developed by DHCD. This assessment included both the public and private realms. The public realm includes assets owned and controlled by the Town, such as streets, sidewalks, public parks and open spaces, and public parking areas. The private realm refers to buildings and storefronts that are generally owned and managed by private individuals or corporate entities. The business environment evaluation included the types of retail and service offerings located in the district, average commercial rents, the condition of the storefronts/facades, and other building attributes, such as windows, awnings, signs and lighting. An assessment of COVID-19 impacts on businesses within the district was conducted through a written survey distributed to each business in the district. Surveys were sent by email and hardcopies were also delivered in person. Nine (9) businesses in the district responded to the survey. Most of the business indicated that they were negatively impacted by COVID-19.

The findings from the Diagnostic phase were presented to Dracut staff in early June. A Community Meeting was held on June 9, 2021 to present the data and findings to the town's residents and businesses. The meeting notice and agenda were made available through the town's website and local cable. Flyers advertising the meeting were also distributed. The LRRP Diagnostic findings were also discussed at the Dracut EDC meeting on June 15, 2021.

During the months of June and July, the Dracut EDC focused on developing five priority recommendations to address the COVID-19 impacts to the businesses identified through the business survey. On July 20<sup>th</sup>, a breakfast meeting with Navy Yard businesses was held at Dracut Town Hall. The Town Manager and Dracut EDC Co-chair reviewed the diagnostic presentation with the businesses and asked how the Town could be most helpful to the businesses in recovering from the negative COVID-19 impacts. On July 28, 2021, a Community Meeting was held via the Dracut EDC to present the five draft recommendations and receive comments from the town's residents and businesses.

The Dracut EDC requested subject matter experts (SMEs) in the areas of Marketing and Branding, Storefront Facades, Zoning, Transportation Improvements and Public Spaces. Committee members met with the Marketing and Branding SME on August 26, 2021, the Transportation Improvements SME on August 30, 2021, the Public Spaces SME on August 31, 2021 and the Storefront Facades and Zoning SME on September 7, 2021. The draft plan was made available on September 30, 2021.

# Findings and Recommendations

## Findings

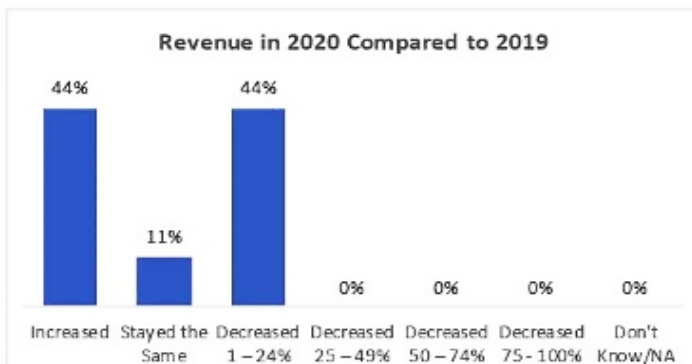
As highlighted in the business survey, most businesses located in the district were impacted by COVID-19 in some way. The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) data for 2020 and 2021 showed that no businesses closed as a result of the pandemic. Feedback from area businesses indicated that two businesses actually closed. The following impacts were gleaned from the business survey:

- ❑ 44% of responding businesses reported a decline in revenue between 1% and 24%;
- ❑ 44% of businesses reduced their operating hours/capacity;
- ❑ 56% incurred expenses to implement safety measures to protect their workers and the public;
- ❑ 22% closed temporarily;
- ❑ 56% transitioned to an alternative means of selling or delivering goods or services
- ❑ No businesses stopped or deferred rent or mortgage payments; and
- ❑ 22% implemented employee layoffs.

The survey respondents reported that 66% of businesses had fewer on-site customers in January and February 2021 than before COVID-19 struck, with 44% reporting a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more.

Most physical infrastructure within the district is in fair to good condition. Improvements are needed to the sidewalk network to address ADA compliance issues, close some network gaps, and to provide pedestrian accommodations such as benches. The Town has begun to address its infrastructure issues, although more work is needed in this area. There are seven vacant storefronts in the district that could host new business ventures.

**Figure 1: Reported Business Revenue Trend-2019 vs. 2020**



## Recommendations

The Dracut Navy Yard Rapid Recovery Plan outlines five recommendations intended to assist the district businesses in addressing the economic impacts of COVID-19. The projects were identified by the Dracut EDC by analyzing the results of the business survey and the data provided through the Diagnostic phase of the LRRP planning process. The Committee also considered the recommendations set forth in previous Navy Yard studies, the recently completed Dracut Master Plan, the Dracut Economic Development Strategy, as well as input and feedback provided by the Navy Yard businesses, town staff and the public.

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

1. Create and implement a storefront façade improvement program;
2. Detail and install improvements to public spaces that provide aesthetic enhancements and create locations for public gatherings;
3. Update the Dracut Zoning Bylaw to address parking requirements and accommodate mixed-use development in the Navy Yard;
4. Implement transportation improvements at the intersection of Lakeview Avenue and Pleasant Street to address safety and traffic flow and install ADA compliant sidewalks and cross walk ramps, bicycle lanes and other improvements that accommodate the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists and those with disabilities; and
5. Create a robust promotional program for the Navy Yard that incorporates marketing, branding, wayfinding and signage and builds upon the existing graphics and signage initiatives previously funded through the Town's MDI grant.

The greatest challenges for the Navy Yard businesses are to reverse the decline in customers and revenues resulting from the pandemic, and to attract new customers and visitors to the area. Attracting students from UMass Lowell will bring additional life to the district. The recommendations in this plan are intended to develop an identify for the Navy Yard, actively market the district and improve the physical attributes that will enhance the experience of customers and visitors in the Navy Yard Business Corridor.

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## About the Navy Yard Business District

The Navy Yard Business District is one of several commercial nodes in Dracut. Framed by Lakeview Avenue and Pleasant Street, the District emanates from the Navy Yard Mill, a former woolen mill located along Beaver Brook. The District is located close to the Lowell border, not far from the North Campus of UMass Lowell. The district and study area are shown on the map on the following page.

The Navy Yard Business District has been the focus of two comprehensive studies over the past four years. The *Dracut Navy Yard Business District* study completed by Finepoint Associates, LLC in November 2017 provided an analysis of the economic and market conditions in the Navy Yard. Through a combination of business surveys and interviews, the following improvements to the Navy Yard were identified:

- More outreach to the businesses by the Town;
- More flexibility with business signage;
- Increase walkability of the District;
- Improve Lakeview Avenue/Pleasant Street intersection – address traffic backups;
- Additional policing; and
- Improve the aesthetics of the area.

The study determined that additional markets were available to the Navy Yard businesses through the employees of the area businesses and the students and employees of UMass Lowell.

The *Navy Yard Comprehensive Design Strategy* completed by Harriman/Innes in June 2021 provided an overview of the design strategies supported by District and Town residents and businesses. The study also compared the level of shopping visits to Navy Yard businesses both pre- and post-COVID. The study concluded with its recommendations regarding:

- Short-term Strategies: Storefront improvement grants and green buffer along sidewalks;
- Long-term Strategies: Expanded sidewalks/street trees, green parking medians and wayfinding;
- Placemaking: Weekend market, temporary outdoor dining/beer patio, daylight and create access to brook, and educational signage: nature history; and
- Redevelopment Strategies: Town center mixed-use and Town Center Commercial.

The Town updated its Master Plan as of May 2020 and outlined the following recommendations in the Land Use and Economic Development sections that

would have an impact upon the Navy Yard:

### Land Use

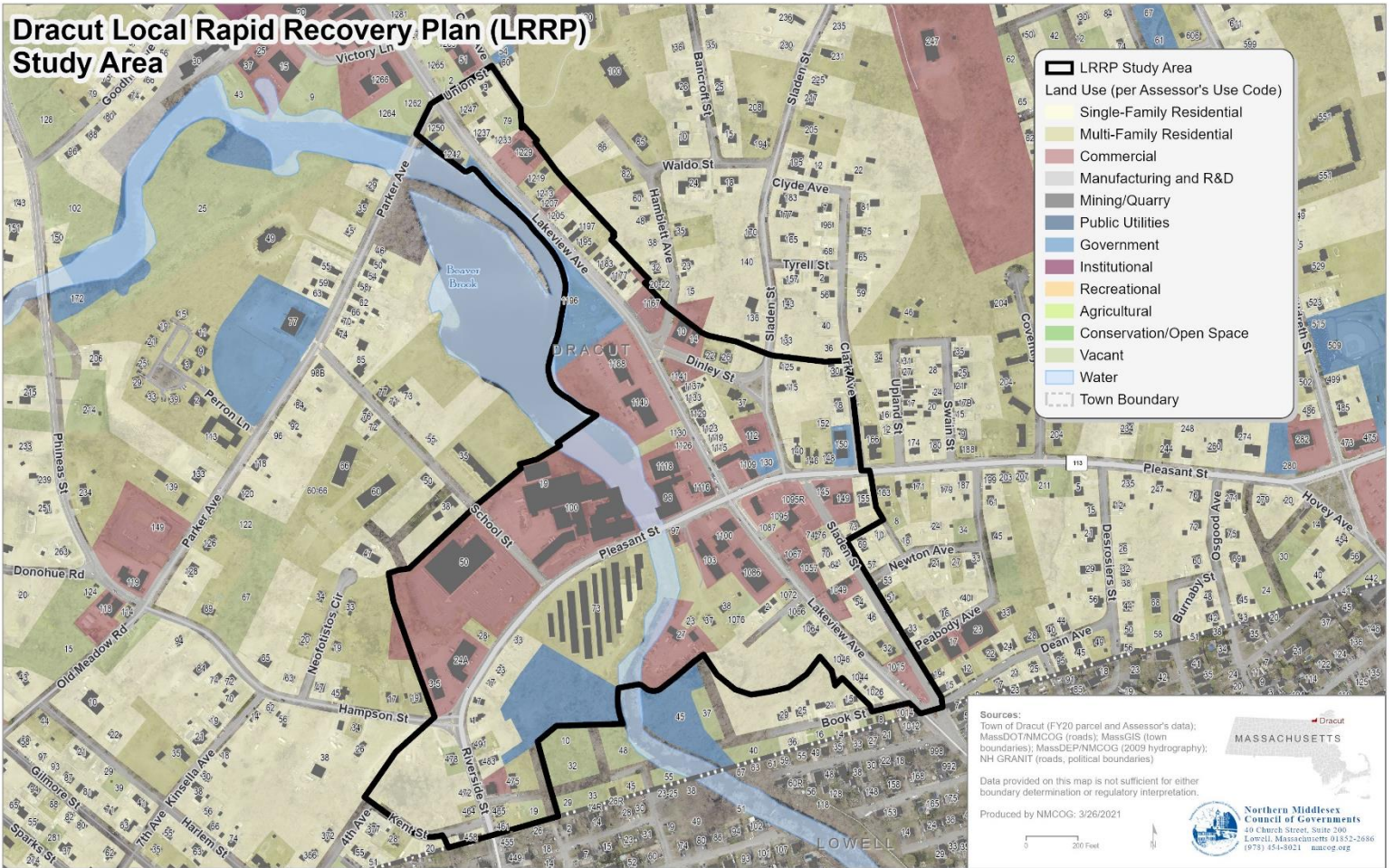
- Update and revise the Town's Zoning Bylaw to provide clarity and consistency, update uses, and add appropriate design standards, guidelines and performance standards, including updated standards for landscaping, lighting and signage. Conduct a comprehensive review of the town's Zoning Bylaw and development regulations every five years.
- Create design guidelines directed at improving the visual quality of commercial and industrial development. The guidelines will provide direction and suggestions for the development community relative to landscaping, signage, lighting, access and parking lot design, and façade treatments for projects of a certain size.
- Implement improvements in the Navy Yard business area that enhances walkability and create a more attractive and unified appearance, particularly for the gateway into Dracut. This work includes implementing the recommendations outlined in the Navy Business District study for improved signage, barriers, and branding, as well as zoning regulations to allow for mixed-use development and to address outdated parking requirements.

### Economic Development

- Re-establish the Economic Development Committee (EDC) to work with the Town Manager and Community Development Director.
- Establish an Economic Development position to support the activities of the EDC and work with the Town Manager and CD Director.
- Work with the local business community to establish a local business association.
- Develop a marketing program to reach out to local businesses and develop an evaluation and outreach program to attract new businesses to the community.
- Post available commercial and industrial properties on the Town's web site.
- Encourage mixed-use development in the Town Center and reuse opportunities at the Navy Mill Yard and the Beaver Brook Mills.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted virtually every business in the district. This Local Rapid Recovery Plan is intended to provide the Town with five discrete strategies/ recommendations to facilitate economic development and aid in the recovery of the businesses located within the district.

# Dracut Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP) Study Area



## MAP 1: The Navy Yard Business District Boundaries and Land Uses

The most prevalent land use within the district is Commercial. Commercial businesses are primarily concentrated along Pleasant Street and Lakeview Avenue. Both Single-Family and Multi-Family Residential land uses are located toward the outer edges of the study area. Beaver Brook cuts through the study area and provides the framework for the Navy Yard Business District.



Navy Yard Mill Building

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# Diagnostic

# Key Findings



Land use within the district is primarily comprised of business uses, while only 196 individuals reside within the study area.

The potential customer base within the district includes those who work and live within the district, town residents, and those from out of town who visit the district. The median age of those living in the district is 42 years compared to 42 years for the town overall. In addition, median household income in this area is \$76,694, much lower than the \$94,361 average income figure for the overall town. Household size in the Navy Yard Business District is 2.72 persons compared to 2.73 persons for the town overall. As shown in the table below, the age cohorts for the study area are fairly consistent with the age cohorts of the community overall.

**Table 1: Population by Age Cohort for the Town and the Navy Yard Business District**

Age Cohort	Town Residents	% Town	District Residents	% District
0 to 19 years	7,167	22.5	41	20.9
20 to 24 years	1,683	5.3	11	5.6
25 to 34 years	4,120	12.9	27	13.8
35 to 44 years	4,230	13.3	26	13.3
45 to 54 years	4,527	14.2	27	13.8
55 to 64 years	4,706	14.8	28	14.3
65 to 74 years	3,212	10.1	20	10.2
75 to 84 years	1,504	4.7	10	5.1
85 years and over	666	2.1	6	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,303</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100.1</b>

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Attracting and accommodating additional residential development in the district would provide a larger local customer base, creating a market that better supports the commercial establishments located within the district. The revision of the Zoning bylaw to allow mixed-use developments in the Navy Yard would add residents to the district.

# Key Findings



## There is little racial or ethnic diversity among residents of the district or within the Town of Dracut.

Communities, businesses and the local economy work best when prosperity is widely shared, especially among historically marginalized populations or those who have faced barriers to opportunity. An inclusive economy engages majority and minority population groups, and women and men of every generation. Bringing about an inclusive economy requires an approach that fosters collaboration between local government, the private sector, and non-profit organizations.

Over the past two decades, researchers have worked to quantify the economic effects of workforce diversity. This research suggests that diverse work environments boost business profitability, culture, and public perception. A workforce comprised of people of different ethnicities with varied experiences has been shown to be a key driver of innovation and business performance.

**Table 2: Race and Ethnicity of Dracut and Navy Yard Business District Residents**

Race/Ethnicity	Town	District
White Alone	27,324	171
Black or African American Alone	1,072	5
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	49	0
Asian Alone	2,020	9
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	9	0
Some Other Race Alone	622	6
Two or More Races	719	5
Hispanic or Latino	1,848	17
Not Hispanic or Latino	29,967	179
Source: ESRI Business Analyst		





# Key Findings



Educational attainment for residents of the district and for Dracut overall exceeds state and national averages in terms of the percentage of residents with a high school diploma or better.

Educational attainment influences the types of positions for which Dracut residents qualify, as higher-skilled, better paying jobs require more intensive training. Local communities cannot develop a skilled workforce without public investment in the education system. The level of education attainment and the quality of education are key indicators of quality of life, workforce preparedness and economic potential. Approximately 92% of Dracut residents have a high school degree or greater, compared to 93.1% of residents within the district.

**Table 3: Educational Attainment**

Education Level	Town	District
Less than High School	1,845 (8.0%)	10 (6.9%)
High School Graduate or GED	7,256 (31.6%)	40 (30.5%)
Some College, No Degree	4,348 (18.9)	27 (18.7%)
Associate Degree	2,333 (10.2%)	22 (15.3%)
Bachelor's Degree	4,301 (18.7%)	20 (13.9%)
Master's/Professional School/Doctorate Degree	2,882 (12.5%)	25 (17.4%)
Total	22,965 (99.9%)	144 (100.0%)

Source: ESRI Business Analyst





# Highlights from the Public Realm

The public realm includes assets owned and controlled by the Town, such as streets, sidewalks, public parks and open spaces, and public parking areas. The study area includes 800 off-street and on-street parking spaces located on both public and private property. The vehicle traffic volume on Pleasant Street is approximately 16,600 vehicles per day, while the volume on Lakeview Avenue is 8,600 vehicles per day. Within the district there is 51,830 square feet of open space including parks, traffic islands, and public plazas.

The Town has made some recent progress in installing wayfinding signage at a limited number of locations within the study area. Future installations should complement a marketing and branding campaign for the district.

Using a grading system developed by DHCD for the LRRP program, specific elements of the public realm were inventoried and rated. In general, average grades (C) were assigned to the sidewalk network, street trees and benches, and wayfinding and signage. About half of the study area has street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety, therefore a grade of B was assigned to this element. Roadbed and crosswalks was also assigned a grade of B.



Mill Dam

Table 4: Public Realm Assessment

Public Realm Elements	Study Area Grades
Sidewalks	C-Pavement conditions vary, there is a lack of ADA compliance in some locations, as well as some gaps in the network.
Street Trees and Benches	C- There is a limited availability of street trees and benches creating uncomfortable pedestrian experience.
Street Lighting	B-50% of the study area has street lighting that supports pedestrian visibility and safety.
Wayfinding and Signage	C-Limited wayfinding signage, although recent progress has been made.
Roadbed and Crosswalks	B-Condition varies depending on location and some crosswalks need repainting



Matthew C. Boule Memorial Park



# Highlights from the Private Realm

The private realm refers to buildings and storefronts that are generally owned and managed by private individuals or corporate entities. There were 75 storefronts within the study area of which 7 were vacant. The business district includes 138,545 square feet of ground floor retail space, 17,189 square feet of ground floor office space, and 8,000 square feet of manufacturing space. The majority of storefronts are occupied by personal services and small retail establishments, followed by restaurants, real estate, finance, insurance and health care.

A grading system developed by DHCD for the LRRP program, was used to rate specific elements of the public realm, including store windows, outdoor displays/dining, signage, awnings, facades, and lighting. One average grade was assigned for the entire district for each element. Overall, most elements of the private realm are in fair to excellent condition. The awning element received a grade of F due to the fact that there are very few buildings with awnings. Awnings can provide shade during warmer months, enabling comfortable outdoor dining. However, they must be well-maintained and designed in coordination with other elements of the storefront.



Life Storage facility

Table 5: Private Realm Assessment

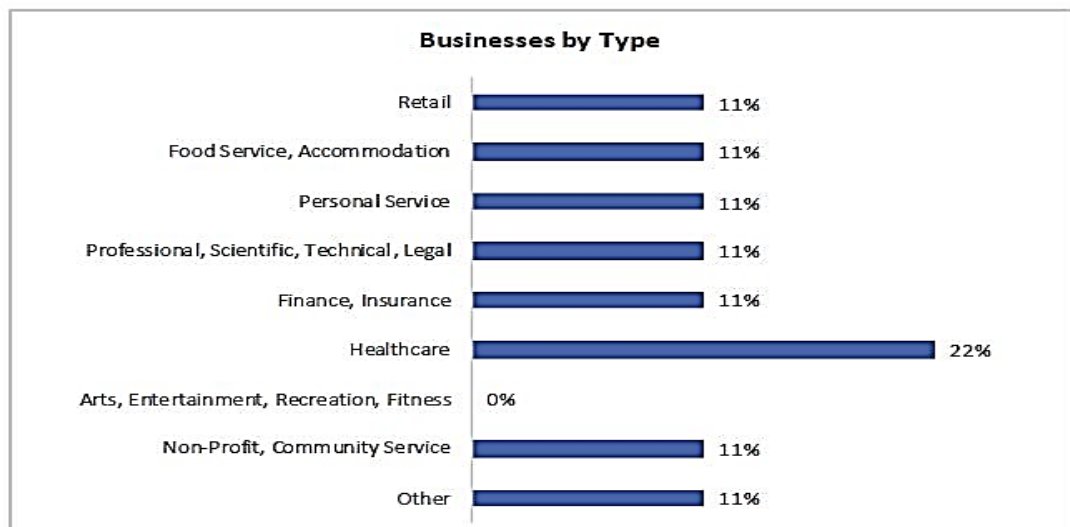
Private Realm Elements	Study Area Grades
Store windows	B-About 50% of storefront windows have 70% transparency that ensures clear lines of sight between the business and sidewalk.
Outdoor displays/dining	C-More than 25% of storefronts have spillover merchandise displays or outdoor dining on the sidewalk or street.
Signage	A-More than 75% of storefront signs reflect the unique brand identity of the business and can be easily seen from more than 10 feet away.
Awnings	F-Most storefronts are not equipped with awnings.
Facades	B-Most properties in the study area have clean and well-maintained façades, but there is at least one property requiring structural façade improvements.
Storefront Lighting	C-More than 25% of storefronts do not have interior lighting after business hours.



## Results of the Business Survey: Business Type and Employment

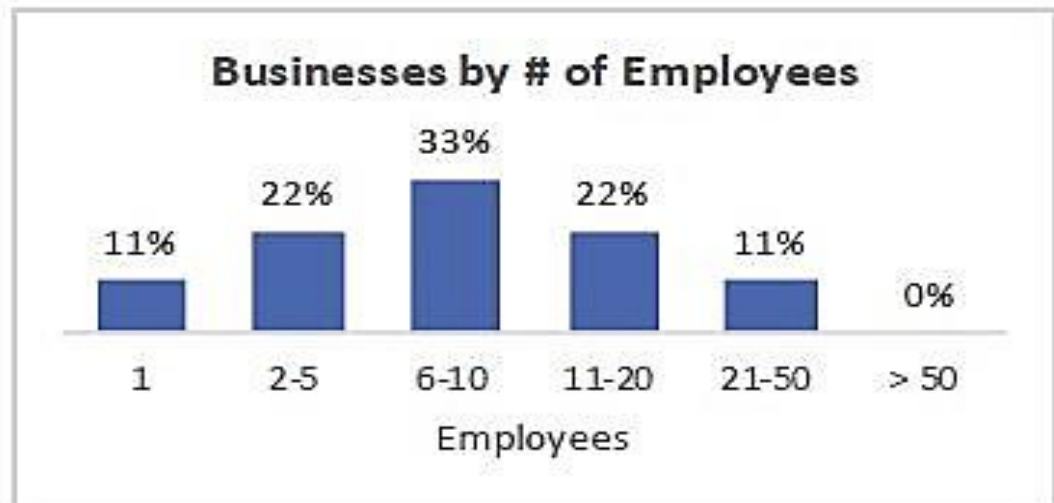
In Spring 2021, an online business survey developed by DHCD was distributed to the owners and managers of business establishments located within the district. Only nine (9) of the 84 businesses within the Navy Yard Business District responded. As shown in Figure 1 below, many of the responding businesses were from the health care (22%), retail (11%), food service, accommodation (11%), personal services (11%), professional, scientific, technical, legal (11%), and finance, insurance (11%) industries. Sixty-seven percent of the businesses rent the space that they presently occupy.

Figure 1: Responding Businesses by Type



As shown in Figure 2 below, 33% of the responding businesses were microenterprises employing five workers or less. One-ninth of the businesses were operated by a single individual. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 6,479 people were employed within the Town in 2018, with 213 working within the Navy Yard Business District.

Figure 2: Percent of Business by Number of Employees

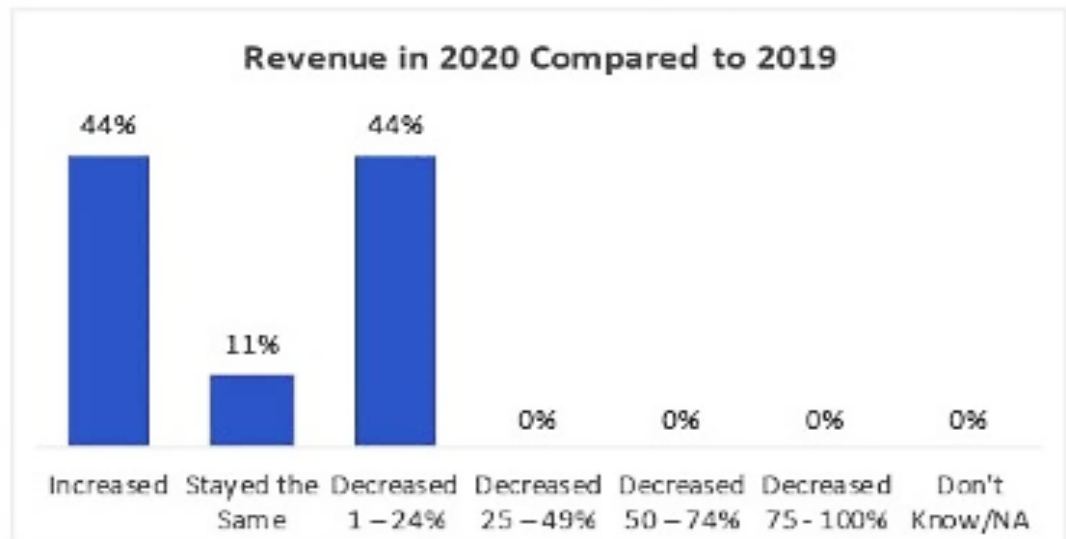




## Results of the Business Survey: Business Revenues Prior to COVID-19

Forty-four percent of businesses responding to the survey indicated that their revenues increased from 2019 to 2020.. Forty-four percent stated that revenues decreased during that period, while 11% indicated that their revenues remained the same.

Figure 3: Business Revenues Prior to COVID-19



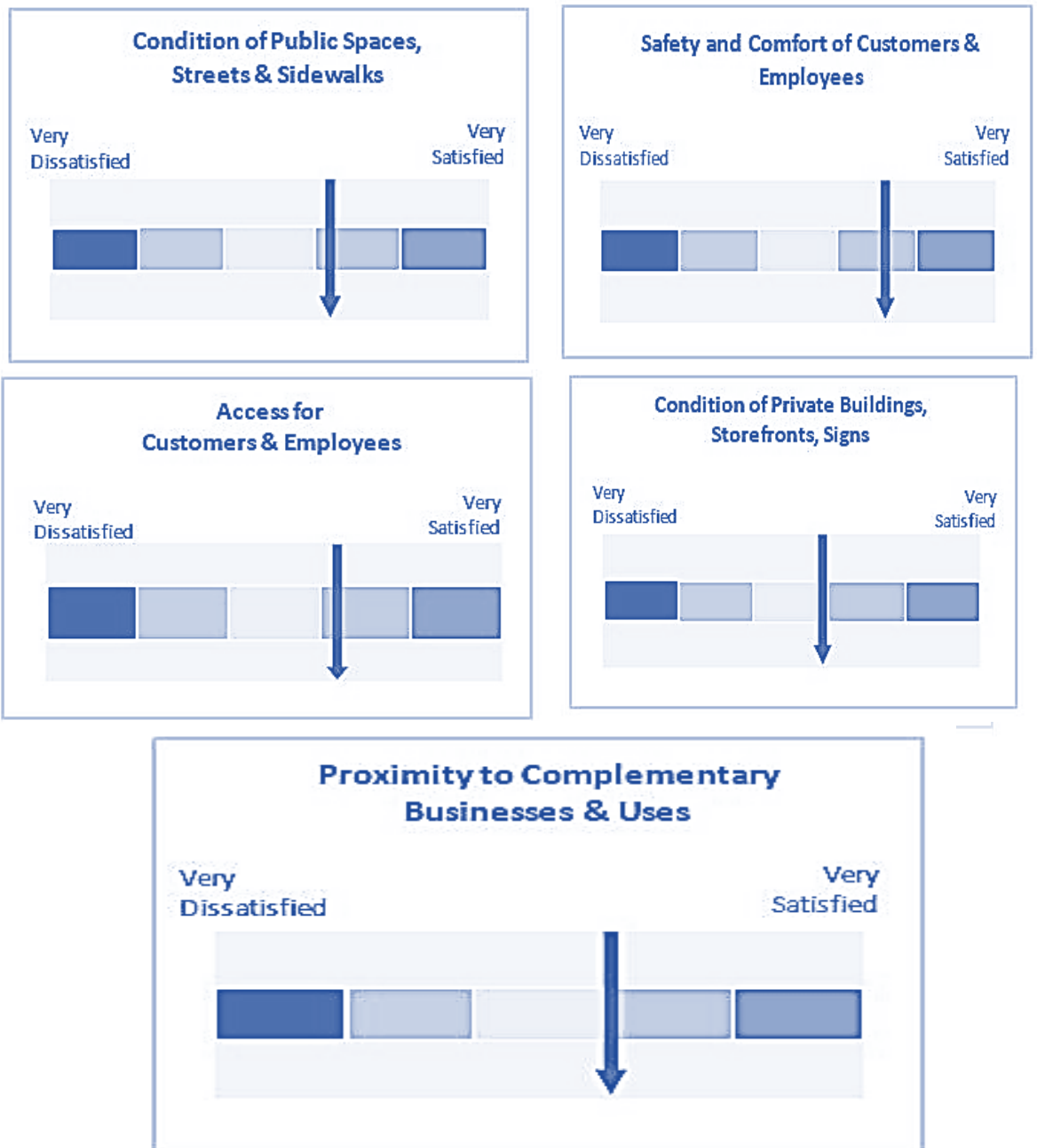
Enterprise Bank



## Results of the Business Survey: Business Satisfaction with Various Aspects of the District

As shown in Figure 4 below, most businesses indicated that they are generally satisfied with most aspects of the business district, including the condition of public spaces, streets and sidewalks, the safety and comfort of customers and employees, and access for customers and employees. Business owners and managers were somewhat less satisfied with the condition of private buildings, storefronts and signs and proximity to complementary businesses and uses.

Figure 4: Business Satisfaction with the District





## Results of the Business Survey: Impacts of COVID-19

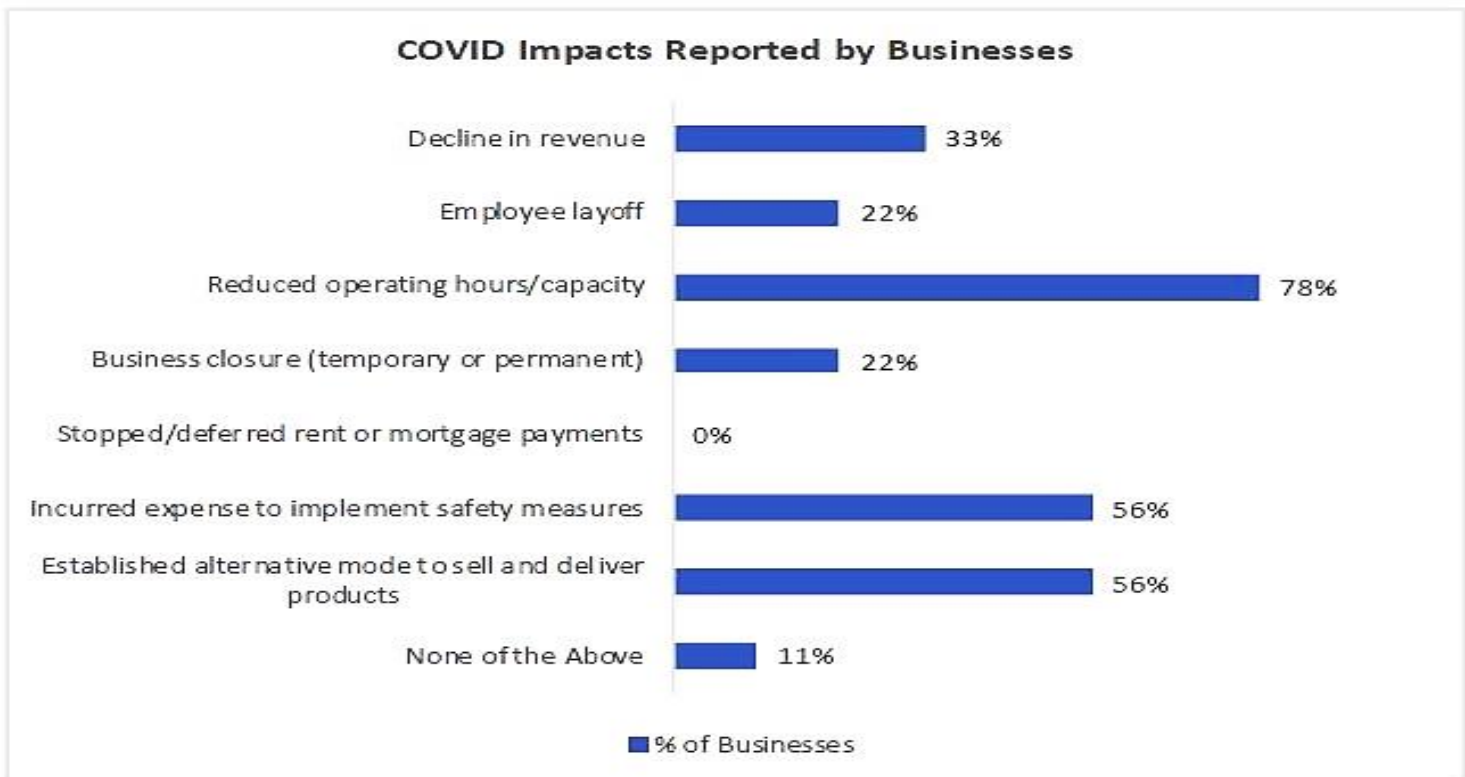
Every business responding to the survey was impacted by COVID-19 in some way. North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) data for 2020 and 2021 showed that five retail and service based businesses closed as a result of the pandemic.

As shown in Figure 5 below, the impacts of the pandemic were felt in the following areas:

- 33% of responding businesses reported a decline in revenue;
- 78% of businesses reduced their operating hours/capacity;
- 56% incurred expenses to implement safety measures to protect their workers and the public;
- 22% closed temporarily;
- 56% transitioned to an alternative means of selling or delivering goods or services; and
- 22% implemented employee layoffs.

At the time of the survey in early 2021, 44% of businesses reported that they were still operating at reduced hours or capacity.

Figure 5: COVID-19 Reported by Respondents to the Business Survey

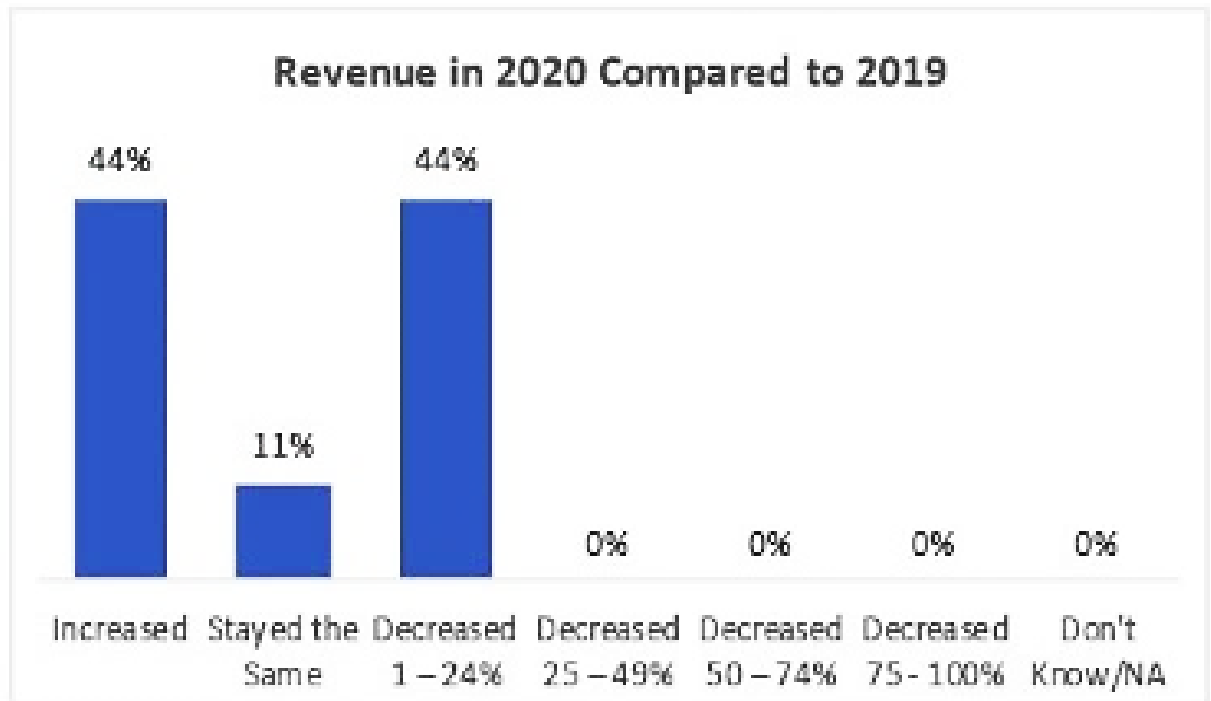




## Results of the Business Survey: COVID-19 Related Business Revenue Impacts

As shown in Figure 6 below, 44% of businesses responding to the survey generated less revenue in 2020 than in 2019. For these businesses, revenue declined by 24% or less, while revenues increased for an additional 44% of the businesses. While researchers have found that mandatory closures and protective public health measure influenced the economy's decline, consumer avoidance behavior was also a significant factor. Nationally, the relative revenue losses among small businesses during the onset of the COVID-19 crisis was larger than among big businesses. Small businesses had less ability to quickly adjust to changes in regulations and demand when the pandemic hit. Due to high fixed costs and required knowledge, small businesses faced difficult barriers in increasing their web presence, expanding takeout services or adding delivery services, and coping with uncertainty during the public health emergency.

Figure 6: Business Revenue Changes from 2019 to 2020



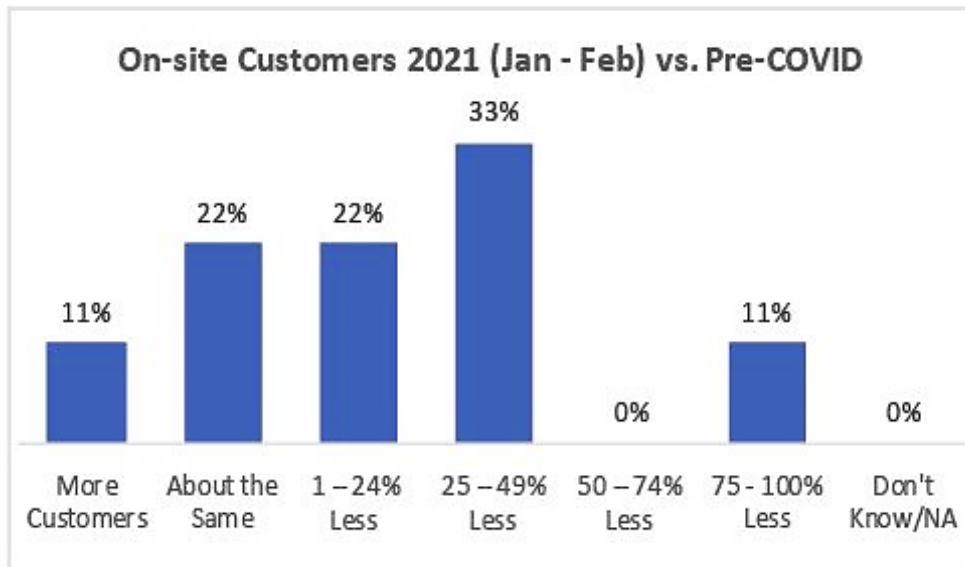




## Results of the Business Survey: Onsite Customers and Visitors to the District in Early 2021 Compared to Pre-pandemic Conditions

Sixty-six percent of businesses had fewer on-site customers in January and February 2021 than before the COVID-19 struck. Furthermore, 44% reported a reduction in on-site customers of 25% or more. Outdoor activities, such as walking and bicycling, increased during the pandemic as an alternative to indoor, higher risk alternatives.

Figure 7: Volume of On-site Customers –January and February 2021 vs. Pre-COVID



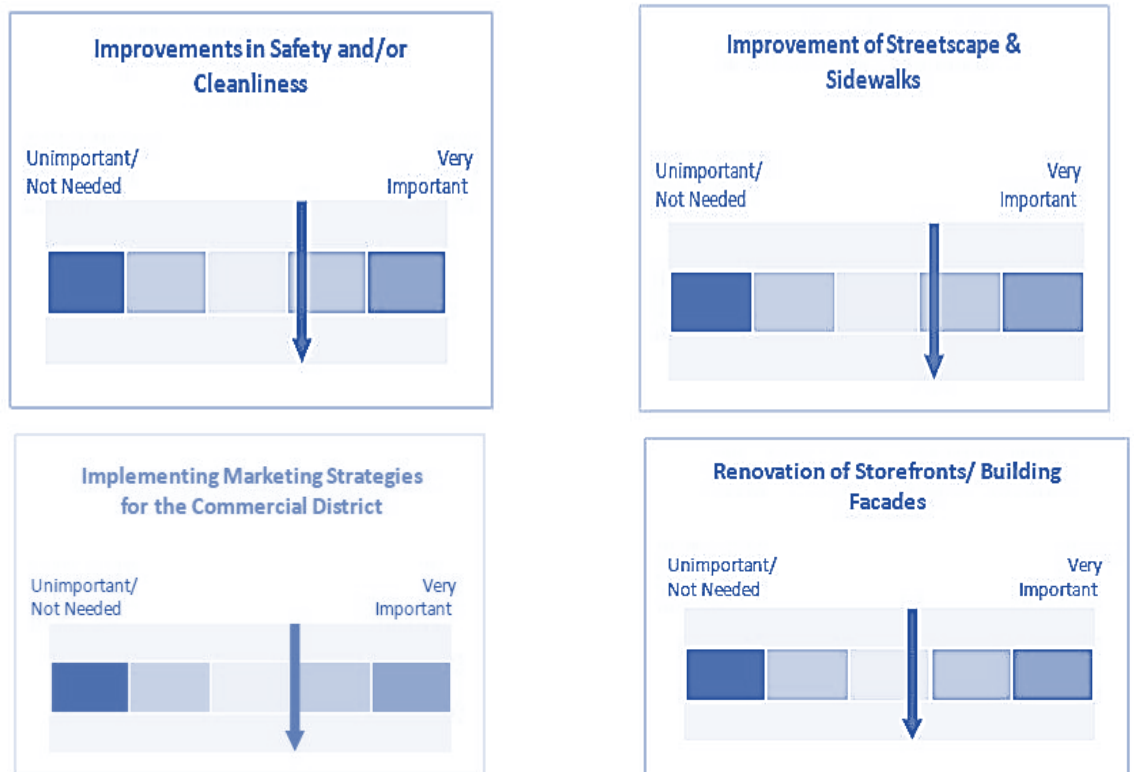
Matthew G. Boule Memorial Park



## Results of the Business Survey: Identification and Rating of Potential Strategies - Physical Improvements

Survey respondents were requested to evaluate twelve potential strategies or approaches to improving conditions within the Navy Yard Business District. These strategies were directed at physical improvements to the public and private realm, as well as measures that would attract and retain customers and businesses. Among the physical improvements strategies were the renovation of building facades, improvements to sidewalks and streetscape, development of public spaces and seating areas, and amenity improvements for bicyclists. Of these measures, improvements in safety and/or cleanliness, and streetscapes and sidewalks were the highest priority, followed by implementing market strategies and the renovation of building facades, as shown in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8: Rating of Potential Physical Improvement Strategies

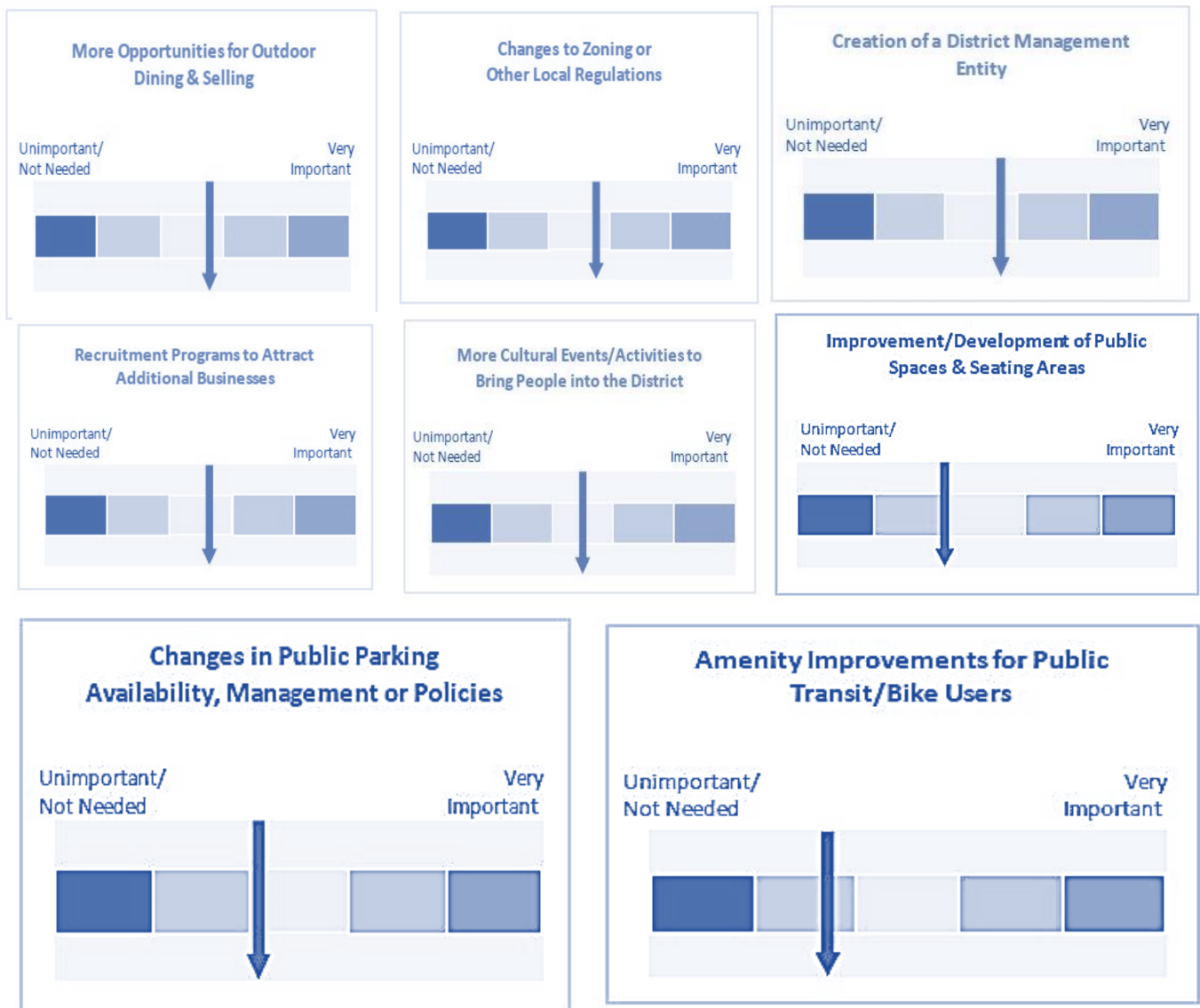




## Results of the Business Survey: Identification and Rating of Potential Strategies - Measures to Attract and Retain Customers and Businesses

The eight strategies below were intended to put forth various actions that would potentially attract and retain customers. The Navy Yard businesses were somewhat neutral on the following strategies: opportunities for outdoor dining, creation of a district management entity, changes to zoning, recruitment programs to attract businesses, more cultural events/activities and changes in public parking availability. Respondents were negative about providing amenity improvements for public transit/bike lanes.

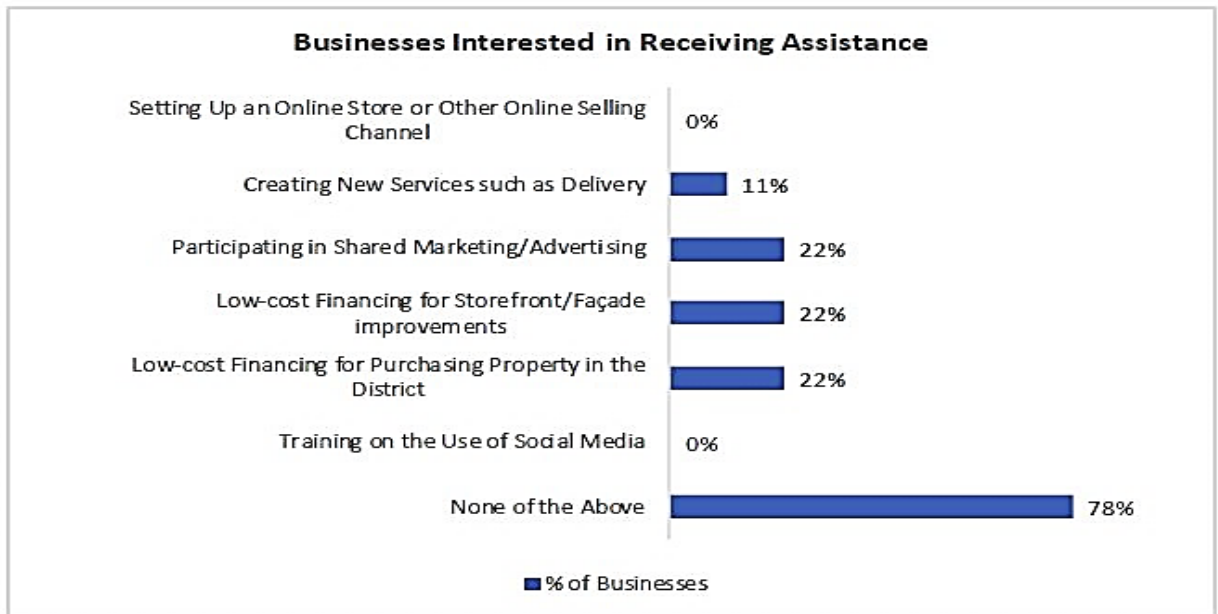
Figure 9: Rating of Potential Physical Improvement Strategies





## Assistance to Businesses

Just twenty-two per cent (22%) of the business survey respondents in the Navy Yard Business District expressed an interest in receiving assistance. Participation in a shared marketing/advertising program was identified as needed by 22% of the survey respondents, while 22% of respondents were interested in low cost financing for façade improvements, while 22% of respondents were interested in low cost financing for purchasing property in the District. No businesses were interested in training on the use of social media, as shown in Figure 10 below.



Brite-Kleen Cleaners



## Administrative Capacity

Administrative capacity includes leadership, organizational capacity, resources, regulations and policies that can help achieve long-term growth and revitalization in a business district. Local capacity can enable private investments and sustain economic recovery during times of stress to the local economy, such as that brought on by the pandemic. Identifying a responsible party to lead the implementation of improvement and economic recovery efforts will be essential in the future. Engaging other stakeholders will also be important. Such individuals should include those with the expertise, knowledge and skills to identify strategic opportunities, advocate for change and resources, and possessing the ability to engage the businesses and residents.

Currently, the Dracut Economic Development Committee serves as the steward of the Navy Yard Business District with the active support of the Dracut Community Development Director and the Dracut Economic Development Planner. Both the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce and the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments is represented on the Economic Development Committee.

While currently there is no a single entity with the capacity to lead the recovery efforts for the district, the Dracut Economic Development Planner has begun to focus on the specific needs of the business community. The key stakeholders identified in the table to the right should collaboratively begin the process of identifying the resources needed to secure funding for additional implementation staff.

An in-depth analysis of the town’s zoning bylaw was recommended in the recently completed 2020 Dracut Master Plan. The LRRP business survey did not unveil any regulatory concerns on the part of the business community. The Town has secured state and local funding to update its zoning bylaw.

**Table 6: Key Partners and Stakeholders**

Key Stakeholders and Project Partners
Dracut Town Manager and Board of Selectmen
Dracut Economic Development Committee
Dracut Community Development Director and Economic Development Planner
Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce
Northern Middlesex Council of Governments



Dracut Town Hall

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# Project Recommendations

## Development and Selection of Project Recommendations

The five recommendations outlined in this Rapid Recovery Plan were selected based on their potential effectiveness in assisting local businesses with recovering from the impacts of COVID-19. The Dracut EDC formulated the recommendations based on the input provided through the business survey, the diagnostic findings generated through the LRRP process, the recommendations outlined in the town's recently adopted Master Plan, the two previous Navy Yard studies, and the input provided through the public sessions and the Dracut EDC meetings. The draft recommendations were also discussed with Navy Yard businesses. On July 28, 2021, a Community Meeting was held via the Dracut EDC to present the five draft recommendations and receive comments from the town's residents and businesses.





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

The five project recommendations analyzed include the following:

1. Develop a marketing program for the Navy Yard that will build on the branding program.
2. Create and implement a storefront façade improvement program.
3. Update the Zoning Bylaw to address parking requirements and accommodate mixed-use development.
4. Implement transportation improvements at Lakeview Avenue and Pleasant Street that increase traffic flow and safety, while accommodating pedestrians, bicyclists and those with disabilities.
5. Design and install improvements to public spaces that provide aesthetic enhancements and create locations for public gathering.



# Develop a marketing program for the Navy Yard that will build on the branding program.

Category	 Revenue and Sales
Location	Navy Yard Business District – Census Tract 3142
Origin	Dracut Economic Development Committee
Budget	 Medium budget: Est. cost \$100,000 A marketing consultant can be engaged to design the action plan - the consultant or Town staff person can implement the program.
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years): 1-2 years to complete the marketing survey, build upon the existing graphics and signage initiatives, develop the marketing and branding programs and encourage business owners to utilize the program.
Risk	 Existing businesses have expressed an interest in a branding and marketing campaign, as reflected in the business survey results and follow up meetings with businesses.
Key Performance Indicators	Knowledge of businesses in the area and shopping options provided; increased traffic in visitors and shoppers; increased sales for area businesses; use and recognition of the Navy Yard brand in advertising and business promotions; increased economic development activity and use of web analytics.
Partners & Resources	<p>Town of Dracut, Dracut Economic Development Committee, Business Owners, Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, key stakeholders (property owners) and area businesses.</p> <p><b>Possible funding sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MassDevelopment TDI Creative Catalyst or Commonwealth Places grants</li> <li>• DHCD MDI or Community Development Block grants</li> <li>• Upcoming ARPA programs (TBD)</li> <li>• Other funding programs targeted to support economic development, business revitalization and small business development.</li> </ul>



## Diagnostic

There are 75 storefronts located within the business district, of which 7 are currently vacant. Two businesses closed due to COVID-19. It was expressed that the Navy Yard District, like other districts in Dracut, are identified by defined names. However, the areas lack a visual delineation for customers and visitors to identify with. A branding initiative has been undertaken, but not fully implemented.

One-third of the businesses in the area are microenterprises with five employees or less. The business survey indicated that 89% of the businesses were impacted by COVID-19 in some way. 44% of businesses experienced a loss in revenue and had reduced hours of operation. 67% of these businesses rent their space.

The total secondary/post-secondary population was 19,277. There is an opportunity to create a heightened awareness of the Navy Yard businesses to UMass students and employees, as well as other Lowell residents.

There is an opportunity to attract the untapped market of workers who visit the area on a daily basis. Walking and bicycling has increased during the pandemic nationally. Dracut should take advantage of the increased volume of potential customers by directing them to local businesses.

Traffic count data shows that the average daily traffic in the Navy Yard was 16,600 ADT on Pleasant Street and 8,600 ADT on Lakeview Avenue. There is a goal to open up the area to more walking and biking through other projects. Defining and creating an identity for the Navy Yard area will help to promote it and its businesses.

## Action Items

**Implementation of the Brand** - The Town has developed logo graphics and taglines for use within the commercial districts of Dracut. The brand that has been drawn on the area's historic origin (see below) Implementing and utilizing the brand in multiple medias will require buy-in from both the public and private sectors to be recognized, effective and successful in promoting the Navy Yard area. Gateway signage, wayfinding, advertising, events, social media and economic development use of the brand will solidify its recognition by the public and potential businesses. This project, along with other key projects, will build upon the initial work and assist in elevating the Navy Yard into a destination for Dracut residents and those in the region.

The Navy Yard got its name from timber floating down river making it look like a "Navy Yard", as well as parachutes that were made here in WWII. While the physical space may change in the next five years, the water going between the buildings has enough history to safely use it as a symbol.

**Design marketing program that build off the Brand** – A marketing program designed for the Navy Yard is needed to support and promote existing businesses and attract new businesses and customers to the area.

The Town and the current businesses will need to develop activities to attract visitors to the Navy Yard and give them a reason to shop there. Shopping, dining and entertainment can contribute to the vibrancy of the Navy Yard.

**Design a marketing program that is two-fold** – The focus is on both supporting the current businesses and driving economic growth in the area.

## Process

**Identify funding sources and select a consultant** –

Determine the consultant's role and if they or a Town staff person will implement the marketing plan. The consultant will help to build the budget.

**Create a committee** to work with the consultant that includes Town leaders, businesses, property owners and other key stakeholders. Hold a series of public meetings for Navy Yard business and property owners to gather input for the plan.

**Identify goals for the marketing program** – These will be your goals for the overall district, including those that were outlined in the *Navy Yard Comprehensive Design Strategy*, prepared by Harriman:

- Create a sense of place and promote walkability of the district through branding, signage, streetscape, intersection, and public realm improvements.
- Promote outdoor dining and businesses to increase vitality and customer traffic.
- Encourage mixed-income residential development and consider allowing housing on upper floors. Currently, zoning restricts two units per parcel and has high parking requirements. This builds your area customer base that supports local businesses.
- Attract new businesses to the area, especially uses that are not currently offered in the area – i.e. coffee shop, restaurant, recreation/entertainment, food and healthcare.
- Conduct a market survey to determine who visits, who shops, who travels through the area (this can be done with a geo-fencing survey for the area along with other identified characteristics of the current visitors and residents to determine who to target.

Process (continued)

**Develop a multi-year Marketing and Communications Plan** – Outline an action plan and budget that addresses the branding, marketing and economic development uses. This multi-year plan will be the roadmap to enhance the brand year-round and should incorporate how you communicate that the “Navy Yard is a great place to be” – i.e. continue to use the “Make it in Dracut” campaign and develop Navy Yard hashtags for social media. Determine what sources can be utilized for messaging for businesses, to the public and the surrounding communities. Social media advertising should be a main focus as less print publications are utilized. Utilizing geo-targeting advertising for the district would support the area businesses – for example, if a goal is to attract students from UMass Lowell, you would geo-target that area (see examples below).

Economic Development marketing efforts should focus on the successes in the area when attracting businesses for the area. Utilize the working and partnering method with the property owners that have vacancies to fill. Consider collaterals focusing on the benefits of the Dracut neighborhoods that have development opportunities for small and large businesses.

Encourage more businesses to populate the business directory on the Town website. Consider a Visit Dracut tab on the home page and moving the business directory and Things to Do there and adding points of interest in the Navy Yard and other areas of Dracut.

**Brand Uses & Recognition** – Implement the brand developed to create an identity for the Navy Yard – it can be used in various applications – this should be seen as a starting point for other projects that were proposed through the LRRP initiative – i.e. wayfinding signage, banners, events, advertising, economic development, and communications, as they work together in the promotion and recognition of the area.

Banners have been used to promote the types of businesses in Dracut – recommendations would be to offer this program to businesses in the Navy Yard with an “Adopt a Banner” program – each banner would have the business name at the bottom for an adoption fee and the banner would be hung outside their business, instead of the current generic banners. Work within your other projects, such as wayfinding and gateway signage, and streetscapes to implement the Navy Yard brand.

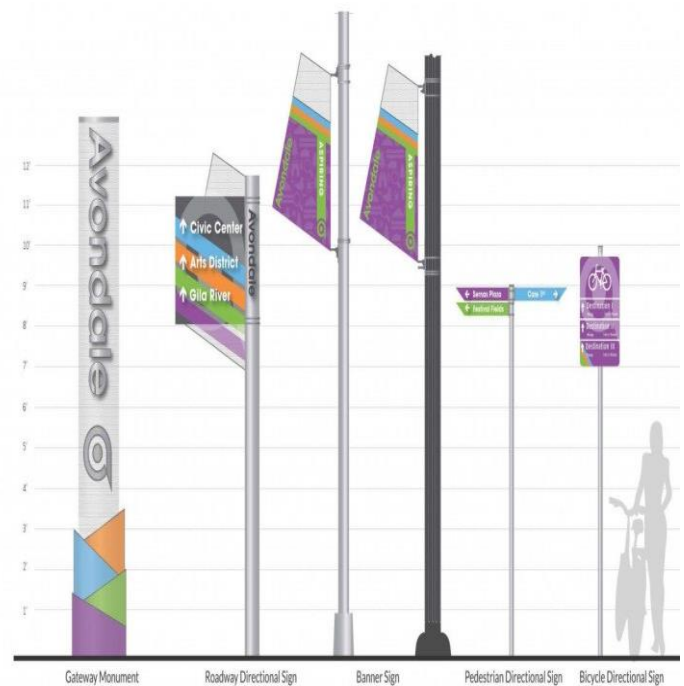
**Concentrate on the Excitement in the area** - Focus should be on new and existing businesses, not what’s wrong with the area, but what’s great and unique about it and its businesses, history and culture. What’s new, what’s here and what’s to come??

**Provide training and support to local businesses for marketing their businesses individually and in a shared format.**

Enabling businesses with the ability to self-promote and better market their businesses will serve to draw more traffic to the area. Business workshops are a great tool, not only for the businesses, but a way to form a sense of cohesiveness within the business community. If there are local businesses that can host these workshops, all the better!! The Chamber may be able to facilitate some sessions/webinars for district businesses on social media and marketing/promotion.

#### Evaluation

Evaluate your marketing efforts through tracking and analytics - each effort should be critiqued for effectiveness. You should have a plan in place to pivot, delete or add.



# TOWN OF BUCKSPORT

## MARKETING PLAN 2021



Best Practice







REVENUES  
& SALES

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Location

Bucksport, ME

# Developing a Strategic Marketing Plan for a Small Town

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

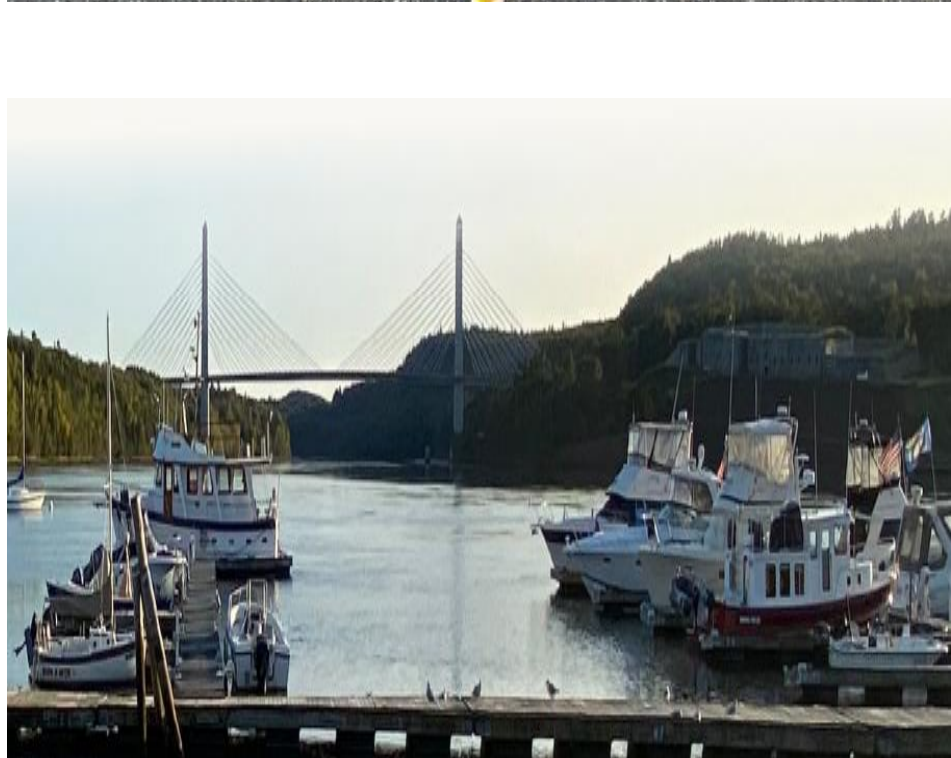


## Diagnostic

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

### Action Item

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



## Process





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



Signs promoting Bucksport's waterfront and history



# Create and implement a storefront façade improvement program.

Category	 Private Realm
Location	Navy Yard Business District – Census Tract 3142
Origin	Dracut Economic Development Committee
Budget	 Low cost budget: \$50,000 to start and could be expanded over time.
Timeframe	 Short Term (<5 years): A year to develop the program and two years to establish the program.
Risk	 Medium risk if Town Meeting approval is required. Existing businesses have expressed an interest in the program. The funds would be issued as either a loan or a matching grant depending on the program criteria.
Key Performance Indicators	Number of businesses accessing the façade revolving loan/grant fund. Visual improvements to building entries and facades and more attention to buildings within the study area. Increase in foot traffic, number of customers and sales increase.
Partners & Resources	<p>Area businesses and property owners, Dracut Community Development Director, Dracut Economic Development Planner, Dracut Economic Development Committee, Dracut Land Use Boards, and Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce.</p> <p><b>Possible funding sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private foundations and limited municipal funds</li> <li>• DHCD MDI or Community Development Block grants</li> <li>• ARPA programs (TBD)</li> <li>• Other funding programs targeted to support economic development, business revitalization and small business development.</li> </ul>

## Diagnostic

There are 75 storefronts located within the business district, of which 7 are currently vacant. At least two businesses closed due to COVID-19. One-third of the businesses in the area are microenterprises with five employees or less. The business survey indicated that 89% of the businesses were impacted by COVID-19 in some way. 44% of businesses experienced a loss in revenue and had reduced hours of operation. 67% of these businesses rent their space. The Navy Yard received a B grade for the quality of facades in the neighborhood.

Due to COVID-19, the businesses lost revenues and were not able to invest in their properties. The façade program will provide funding to encourage them to meet the design guidelines for the Navy Yard and improve the overall aesthetics of the neighborhood. This program will encourage other businesses to make their own improvements to their businesses as well.

## Action Items

The Town of Dracut seeks to establish a storefront façade improvement program in the Navy Yard. The Town will work on design guidelines for the neighborhood and identify funding to start a revolving loan/grant pool for façade improvements. The adoption of design guidelines for the Navy Yard could ensure consistency of the treatment of building and site design for new/rehabilitated buildings. The guidelines need to balance flexibility in their expression with clear direction about what is preferred.

Once the funding is secured, the Town will work out the eligibility requirements for the program and will examine similar programs in other communities to determine how best to establish the program. The program may include the restoration of architectural details, better windows and doors, and well-proportioned signage and lighting. The Town will reach out to the Navy Yard businesses and property owners to identify prospective applicants. The revitalization of a commercial district can begin with improvements to a single building or storefront, resulting in spin-off private investments that further enhance the aesthetics of the area.

## Process

The process for the implementation of the storefront façade program is as follows:

- Reach out to the business and property owners initially;
- Schedule public meetings at Town Hall and in the Navy Yard to discuss the storefront façade improvement program;
- Provide visuals of before and after pictures of properties that have been rehabilitated;
- Develop design guidelines;

- Identify funding to establish a revolving loan/grant program for façade improvements;
- Develop eligibility requirements for Navy Yard businesses and property owners;
- Reach out to the Navy Yard businesses and property owners to identify prospective applicants;
- Establish the program and award the initial loans/grants for façade improvements; and
- Celebrate updated sites/storefronts on social media and address concerns of property owners with properties in poor condition..





# Storefront Facade

Best Practice



PRIVATE  
REALM

Location

# Dracut Navy Yard



Andover

## Develop a façade/storefront/site improvement program.



Provided by SME Consultant

Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Innes Associates Ltd.

Location

Any downtown, commercial corridor, or village center.

Origin	Innes Associates Ltd.
Budget	 Low (less than \$50,000)  Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term (1-5 years)
Risk	 Medium
Budget: Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop design guidelines for the façade elements to be improved.</li> <li>• Develop the structure of the program.</li> <li>• Manage the program over time.</li> <li>• Design assistance.</li> <li>• Implementation, including construction.</li> <li>• Displacement protection programs.</li> </ul>

In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:

#### **Funding Sources for All Façade Improvement Programs**

##### American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or site improvements when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Possible impacts are addressed in the sections on **Key Performance Indicators** and **Diagnostic**.

##### Hometown Grants

###### *T-Mobile*

This program will fund up to \$50,000 per town and may be used to rebuild or refresh community spaces, including historic buildings.

<https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/hometown-grants>

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

Local banks with a community development financing program for small businesses may be able to help provide low or no interest loans to small businesses for their share of the improvements, especially for a storefront or sign upgrade. The focus of the program at each bank is different; contact your local bank(s) and discuss how they could participate in investing in the community.

##### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth

###### *Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000)*

All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which could include creating the program, developing the design guidelines, and providing conceptual designs for improvements, depending on the complexity of the project. This program could be used to develop the design guidelines for the façade improvement program.

##### Business Improvement District or Other Downtown District

Funds from a BID may be used for a façade improvement program.

#### **Funding Sources that May be Leveraged**

A façade improvement program may be used to address components of the façade (including awnings and signs), a storefront system, accessibility, the entire façade or façades visible from a public way, and/or components of the site (including signage, planters, restriping for outdoor dining or retail display, or adding more permanent landscaping). However, within a target area such as a downtown, corridor, or other commercial area, some buildings may have more extensive needs. For example, many historic buildings require elevators for access to upper floors. Other buildings may require structural repairs to the façade or interior.

The sources on the next page are examples that can work in tandem with a façade improvement program to address buildings with larger needs.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth:  
Underutilized Properties Program

*MassDevelopment*

As with the historic tax credits below, this funding source is for a much larger project. It could be used to help address larger buildings in a target area that have more significant issues. Bundling this program and a few of the other more specialized grants could help a municipality address smaller properties with the façade improvement program and larger ones with these more targeted funds.

Municipal Vacant Storefronts Program

*Economic Assistance Coordinating Council*

This program will not fund façade improvements. The municipality would form a district. Businesses in the district then apply for the funds to address vacant storefronts while the façade improvement program addresses accessibility, deferred maintenance, and design issues on the exterior or the site.

Collaborative Workspace Program

*MassDevelopment*

This grant provides another option to address both the exterior and the interior of this space while also helping to support local jobs and job creation.

Community Preservation Act

This source only applies in those communities that have adopted the CPA. CPA funds may be used to acquire, preserve, and rehabilitate and/or restore historic assets. A municipality could tie this to the design guidelines for a façade improvement program and consider, for example, acquiring a downtown historic building, updating the façade and ground floor for commercial use, and adding an elevator to allow for housing on the upper floors.

Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund

*Massachusetts Historical Commission (project limit \$3,000-\$100,000, depending on project type)*

This is a 50% reimbursable matching grant for preserving properties, landscapes, and sites listed in the State Register of Historic Preservation.

Applicants are limited to municipalities and nonprofits. Many downtown and village centers include nonprofit and municipal anchors. This grant could be used to ensure that all properties in a target area are brought, over time, to the same standard of repair. The program does have limitation on allowable costs. A preservation restriction is required.

Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit

*Massachusetts Historical Commission*

This is available for significant rehabilitation of historic buildings and may help supplement a larger project in a downtown. This is included in this best practice sheet because the guidelines developed for the municipal façade/storefront improvement program could be incorporated into the review of larger projects.

## Risk: Explanation

The risk level depends on the community and the relationships of the property owners with the municipality. The highest level of risk occurs in conversations with property owners; for various reasons, the owners of the most distressed properties may be reluctant to participate. Once funding is secured and a few projects have been successfully completed, this risk level is likely to drop. Early engagement with property and business owners will also reduce this level of risk.

Some communities have indicated that that owners will not want to participate in programs funded by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds because of the number of requirements. Communities using these funds should consider helping with the paperwork and providing a list of local designers and contractors who meet the program's eligibility requirements.

Façade improvements can also be about community values relative to the physical space; a third level of risk occurs within the community conversations around the design standards for the program. In some communities, a façade improvement program may be an implementation step in an earlier planning process. In others, developing a community vision for the area before creating the program will be necessary to receive support for the program.

The final risk is the displacement of smaller businesses as property values, and rents, increase to match the upgrades to the physical environment. Since many smaller businesses are often also local businesses, improvements without protection for those small businesses may result in attractive, but empty, storefronts. Municipalities should consider structuring the criteria for participation in their façade improvement programs to reduce the risk of displacement.

## Key Performance Indicators

Improvements as a result of these programs include safety, accessibility, pedestrian comfort, and aesthetics. Over time, upgrades to façades and sites contribute to a perception that an area is vibrant, safe, and attractive to businesses and their customers. The increase in value attracts investment and contributes to a higher tax base.

KPI for this project could include the following:

- Creation of the program.
- Number of applicants over a specific timeframe.
- Number of façades, storefronts, and/or sites improved within a specific timeframe.
- Maintenance of the improvements after a set number of years.
- Increase in visitors to the target area.
- Increase in sales at the property/business improved and within the target area.
- Ability to extend the program to other commercial areas within the municipality (if appropriate).
- If anti-displacement measures are included in the program:
  - Number of local businesses within improved properties that are still there after a set number of years.
  - Number of new local businesses that have started or relocated to the target area within a set number of years.

Partners & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipal staff (planning and economic development, building and/or zoning inspector)</li> <li>• Municipal boards (City Council/Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Economic Development Committee)</li> <li>• Property/business owners</li> <li>• Downtown organizations</li> </ul>
Diagnostic	<p>Reasons for undertaking a façade or storefront improvement program may include one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requirements to address the transmissibility of COVID-19, such as new windows, doors, or HVAC system may be unaffordable to a small business owner and/or may have a negative impact on the façade if improperly sourced and installed.</li> <li>• On-site parking spaces are poorly organized and, if reorganized, can provide room for outdoor dining or retail display.</li> <li>• Local small businesses do not have the resources (time, money, expertise) to address substandard storefronts.</li> <li>• Distressed properties have a negative impact on people’s impression of the viability and/or safety of a business district and property owners are unable to make the improvements themselves.</li> <li>• Storefronts are not accessible to those who have problems with mobility, whether temporary or permanent.</li> <li>• Historic downtowns often have empty upper floors because of the lack of accessible elevators. A major improvement project could provide grants to address both interior and exterior accessibility.</li> <li>• Historic properties may have been “improved” with inappropriate materials or repairs.</li> </ul> <p>Site improvements that reduce asphalt and add landscape can address public health issues by reducing the heat island effect, planting trees to address air quality, and using low impact design to manage stormwater onsite.</p>
Action Item	<p>The municipality needs to make certain decisions prior to and during the creation of this program. If the municipality already knows the answers, then staff can proceed with developing the program. If not, the municipality can work the decision points into a scope of work for assistance in development and perhaps managing the program. See Process for some of these questions.</p> <p>If starting from scratch, the municipality will need to accomplish the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.</li> <li>• Develop an appropriate level of design guidelines.</li> <li>• Engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.</li> <li>• Develop the criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance.</li> <li>• Develop the funding and oversight structures.</li> </ul>

### Pre-program development

1. Identify who in the municipality will manage this program: municipal staff, existing downtown committee/organization, volunteer committee, or a hybrid.
2. If the municipality does not already have design guidelines for the area that are suitable for this program, then decide how those guidelines will be developed. Will the design guidelines be just for the façade improvement program, or will they be more broadly applicable?  
Note that the entity managing this process does not have to be the municipality. For example, a Community Development Corporation or other nonprofit could sponsor the program.
3. Discuss the potential focus of the program: components of a storefront, the entire storefront, the entire façade, all façades, the site? Will signage, lighting, awnings and other smaller elements be included? Will interior improvements to address accessibility be included? Will the municipality fund the design, all or some of the improvements, or both?
4. Discuss what will not be eligible. Eligibility may also be determined by the funding source (for example, CDBG funds).
5. Discuss the length of time that improvements must be maintained and the enforcement process for ensuring that improvements are maintained. Maintenance requirements could be tied to the length of the tenant's lease.
6. Consider the funding structures. The program can provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. Grants may provide a greater incentive to participate while loans (no or low interest) provide a revolving fund to assist more properties. Forgiving loans after a certain time if the improvement are maintained is another option.  
If the property owners are less interested in the program, the municipality might consider offering grants to the first 3-5 to sign up (depending on resources) or through a lottery process and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area. This would need to be a highly transparent process.
7. Decide whether the guidelines and program will be developed in-house or whether the municipality will seek outside help. The funding source may determine the type of outside assistance; for example, certain programs will assign on-call consultants. For others, the municipality may need to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP).

### Developing the Guidelines

1. If the municipality already has design guidelines that can be used for the façade improvement program, skip to the next section.
2. For developing the guidelines, review the Best Practices for Design Guidelines.

### Developing the Program

1. Decide the following:
  - a. Grant, loan, or hybrid
  - b. Which elements will the program fund and which are the responsibility of the property owner?
  - c. What are the eligibility requirements for participating in the program?
  - d. What is the length of the program?
  - e. How long will property owners be required to maintain the improvements?
  - f. What is the enforcement procedure for maintenance? (This could be repayment of a grant or a lien on a property.)
  - g. Will the responsibility for maintenance transfer to a new owner if the property is sold?
2. Differentiating between the responsibilities of the tenant (often the small business) and the landlord (the property owner) is critical – a small business may be enthusiastic about the assistance, but the landlord may not. The municipality may need to consider parallel outreach processes.
3. Decide on the application process and how applicants will be evaluated. Are certain property types or improvements given priority over others? Make sure the process of choosing participants is transparent.
4. Develop the forms and train the people who will be evaluating the applications.

### Implementation

The program can provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. Grants may provide a greater incentive to participate for reluctant property owners, while loans (no or low interest) provide a revolving fund to assist more properties. Some communities have indicated that requiring a match from the property owner may create longer-term support of the program.

If the property owners are less interested in the program, the municipality might consider offering grants to the first 3-5 participants to sign up (depending on resources) and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area.

Education of all people involved in the program needs to be an ongoing component. A municipality that is short on project management resources should consider hiring a dedicated staff member or consultant to manage this program.

Finally, the municipality should consider streamlining approvals of projects under this program to reduce the time needed for implementation.



**Note: Many existing programs use CDBG funds. Examples 1 and 2 both use municipal funding sources. Examples 3 and 4, which are both Main Streets Programs, provide a model for using historic preservation funds.**

**Example 1: Sign & Façade Improvement Program**

Ashland, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Beth Reynolds  
Economic Development Director  
breynolds@ashlandmass.com

Funding by:

Home Rule petition for annual appropriation and Home Rule petition for revolving fund – both approved by Town Meeting.

Structure

50% match up to \$5,000

Characteristics

- Preferred target area (high traffic streets) but is open to all businesses in Ashland.
- Includes building improvements (accessibility, signs, awnings, painting).
- Includes site improvements (parking lots, planters, landscaping)

<https://www.ashlandmass.com/669/Business-Incentive-Programs>

**APPLICATION FOR SIGN & FAÇADE PROGRAM**

**Purpose:**  
The purpose of this program is to assist in the improvement of the appearance of the town of Ashland by providing grants to businesses for the improvement of their signs and façades. The program is designed to be a revolving fund program. The program is designed to be a revolving fund program. The program is designed to be a revolving fund program.

**Eligible Locations:**  
The program is available to all businesses located in the town of Ashland. The program is available to all businesses located in the town of Ashland. The program is available to all businesses located in the town of Ashland.

**Eligible Improvements:**  
The program is available to all businesses located in the town of Ashland. The program is available to all businesses located in the town of Ashland. The program is available to all businesses located in the town of Ashland.

FUNCTION
2017-2018 Allocation
2018-2019 Allocation
2019-2020 Allocation
2020-2021 Allocation
2021-2022 Allocation
2022-2023 Allocation
2023-2024 Allocation
2024-2025 Allocation
2025-2026 Allocation
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2097-2098 Allocation
2098-2099 Allocation
2099-2100 Allocation

Courtesy of the Town of Ashland

**Example 2: Storefront Improvement Program**

Cambridge, Massachusetts

City Contact

Christina DiLisio  
Project Manager  
cdilisio@cambridgema.gov

Funding by:

Municipal capital funds

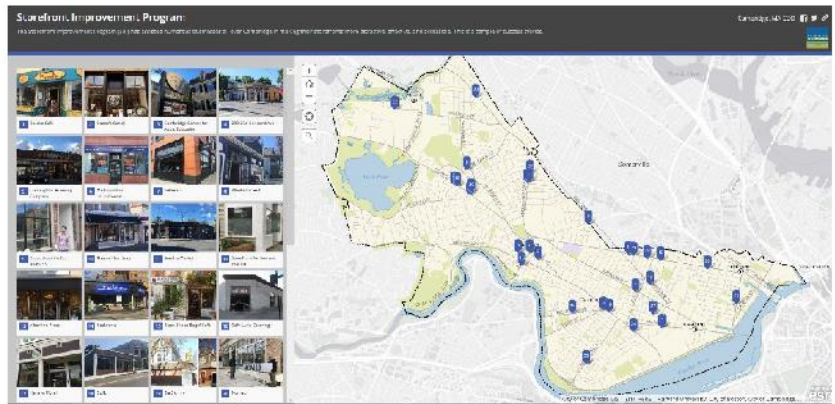
Structure

Tiered matching grants based on improvement type

Characteristics

- Includes increasing accessibility to the store (part of their Storefronts-for-All program) and improving or replacing windows and doors to address COVID-19 restrictions.
- Also recommends tax credit programs to address accessibility, historic preservation, and energy efficiency

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/economic-development/assistance/small-business/storefront>



Courtesy of the City of Cambridge

**Example 3: NPS Main Street Façade Improvement Grant**

Main Street America

<https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/projectspotlight/facadeimprovements/npsgrant>

- Main Street America announced a façade improvement grant program using funds from the Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program, now the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants Program. This grant is sponsored by the National Park Service.
- This example is not given as a funding source, rather, it is an option for using historic preservation funds, such as CPA funds, to create a façade improvement program that would address the historic buildings in a target area. This option is provided because some communities were looking at non-CDBG sources for a façade improvement program. This may be a useful model for a local program.
- The site provides a link to each of the communities chosen for this program. The awards are expected to be \$25,000 per project, and the site has the preservation covenants, grant agreements, and two webinars which may be useful.

**Example 4: Historic Commercial District Revolving Fund**

Main Street America

<https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/projectspotlight/facadeimprovements/hcdf>

- State-by-state program – in 2016, it was Texas and in 2019, it was Maine.
- This is not a funding source, but an example of a program that could serve as a model for communities with a significant number of historic buildings in their commercial centers.
- The Texas program includes a PDF of before-and-after pictures, the scope of work, and the cost for each building.
- This program also serves as a reminder that historic photos of a downtown can be used to as a base for developing design guidelines for the program, reinforcing characteristics specific and unique to each community.

# Update the Dracut Zoning Bylaw to address parking requirements and accommodate mixed-use development in the Navy Yard.

Category	 Admin Capacity
Location	Navy Yard Business District – Census Tract 3142
Origin	Dracut Master Plan Committee, Dracut Economic Development Committee, and Navy Yard businesses
Budget	 Medium budget: Est. cost \$100,000
Timeframe	 Short Term (approximately 2-3 years to hire a zoning consultant, develop revisions to the Zoning Bylaw and for adoption by Town Meeting).
Risk	 Existing businesses have expressed an interest in these changes to the Zoning Bylaw. The parking requirements appear excessive to the business owners.
Key Performance Indicators	Newer mixed-use and multi-story development projects in the Navy Yard. Increased pedestrian traffic from mixed-use development pattern. Redevelopment of existing sites that are obsolete. Decrease in the number of paved parking areas and impervious surface. Creation of an expanded customer base from the residential components of mixed-use projects.
Partners & Resources	Town of Dracut Land Use Boards, Dracut Board of Selectmen, Zoning Bylaw Review Committee, Dracut Economic Development Committee, Business Owners, Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, key stakeholders (property owners) and area businesses.  <b>Possible funding sources:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grants, such as the DHCD Community Housing Grant. The Town applied for \$75,000 in Spring 2021 to implement significant updates to the Dracut Zoning Bylaw.</li> <li>• Community Compact funds.</li> <li>• Local and ARPA funds.</li> <li>• Other funding programs targeted to upgrading local Zoning Bylaws.</li> </ul>

## Diagnostic

There are 75 storefronts located within the business district, of which 7 are currently vacant. Two businesses closed due to COVID-19. One-third of the businesses in the area are microenterprises with five employees or less. The business survey indicated that 89% of the businesses were impacted by COVID-19 in some way. 44% of businesses experienced a loss in revenue and had reduced hours of operation. 67% of these businesses rent their space.

The total secondary/post-secondary population was 19,277. There is an opportunity to create a heightened awareness of the Navy Yard businesses to UMass students and employees, as well as other Lowell residents.

Public transit ridership declined during COVID-19, with residents and business owners relying more heavily on personal vehicles. New housing and mixed-use starts were down due to zoning and the impact of COVID-19 on the cost of building materials.

Traffic count data shows that the average daily traffic in the Navy Yard was 16,600 ADT on Pleasant Street and 8,600 ADT on Lakeview Avenue. There is a goal to open up the area to more walking and biking through other projects.

## Action Items

The Town of Dracut wishes to amend the Zoning Bylaw to address parking requirements and mixed-use development in the Navy Yard. The Town will need to consider whether the zoning is a new district or an overlay district and whether the format is traditional zoning, a form-based code, or a hybrid code. Once the funds are available the Town will hire a zoning consultant to work with the Planning Board. Public meetings will be held with the Zoning Bylaw Review Committee, the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen. Decisions will be made on the appropriate density for mixed-use developments and the appropriate revisions to the parking requirements of the bylaw. Upon approval by Town Meeting, the approved warrant articles will be submitted to the Attorney General for final approval.

## Process

If the Town wants to include design guidelines, there should be a public workshop on design for the area. The Navy Yard Comprehensive Design Strategy could provide a base, but the recommendations would need to be translated into regulations. The new zoning should be tested with 2-D and 3-D models to ensure that the proposed dimensional and parking standards can work with the smaller lots and irregular parcel sizes found in the Navy Yard.

Outlined below are the steps in the Zoning Bylaw Update process:

- Hire a zoning consultant to work with the Planning Board;
- Hold a series of Public Meetings with the Zoning Bylaw Review Committee, Planning Board and Board of Selectmen;
- Determine the appropriate density for mixed-use developments and the appropriate revisions to the parking bylaw, using ITE and other professional standards;
- Finalize language and bring to Town Meeting for final approval; and
- Send approved articles to the Attorney General for final approval.



# Zoning Components - Design Guidelines and Best Practice Signage



Location

## Dracut Navy Yard



Newburyport

## Create or update design guidelines for a downtown, village center, or commercial corridor.



Provided by SME Consultant

Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Innes Associates Ltd.

Location

Any downtown, commercial corridor, or village center.

Origin	Innes Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Rapid Recovery Program sponsored by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Budget	 Low (less than \$50,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term (1-5 years)
Risk	 Medium
Budget: Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Costs will include the consultant's time, if a consultant is used. If the design guidelines are fully incorporated into the municipal zoning bylaw or ordinance, review by municipal counsel is recommended.</li> <li>The range for the consultant's time is between \$20,000-\$50,000, depending on the level of public engagement and how illustrative the code is. Review by municipal counsel may be covered by the municipal on-call agreement or may need to be added to the cost of the project.</li> </ul>

In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or site improvements when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Creating or revising design guidelines may be linked to a façade/storefront improvement program. Possible impacts are addressed in the sections on Key Performance Indicators and Diagnostic.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth  
Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000)  
Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which would include developing the design guidelines. The MDI grant should be sufficient for the full project for a smaller community unless the community is looking for a more extensive set of illustrations or a significant public engagement process. A larger community may need additional funding.

Community Planning Grants (project limit \$25,000-\$75,000)  
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

A Community Planning Grant may be used for Zoning Review and Updates, which could include design guidelines if it is part of the municipality's zoning bylaws or ordinance. In 2021, the priorities for this grant included mitigation of climate change through zoning and other regulations; design guidelines and standards integrated into the municipality's zoning and incorporating elements to reduce the impact of climate change would qualify.

District Local Technical Assistance Grant  
Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) and DHCD

Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies. These funds may be used for planning projects. Each RPA has a different focus on how these funds may be used to meet the state's funding goals.

All municipalities are eligible to apply directly to their RPA. The RPA will work with the municipality on the program; a separate consultant is not usually required.

Survey and Planning Grant Program  
Massachusetts Historical Commission

This grant is a 50/50 matching program that support planning activities that help preserve significant historic resources. For communities, whose target area contains significant resources, this source may help fund design guidelines that include specific requirements for the preservation of significant historic resources. Interested communities are encouraged to reach out to the Massachusetts Historic Commission directly about this grant; it may be tied to the creation of a local historic district.

Complete Streets Funding Program  
Massachusetts Department of Transportation

Design guidelines do not have to be limited to the private realm. Creating consistency in a downtown, village, or corridor is an important part of defining its identity both within and beyond the community. As part of a Complete Streets Project, a municipality should identify the specific materials, street furniture, trees, and public signage (including wayfinding) that will be used in the target area. These choices can be incorporated into the overall design guidelines to address both public and private realms.

#### Risk: Explanation

The risk for this project is in part dependent on the form of government and whether the design guidelines will be an advisory document or incorporated into the zoning bylaw/ordinance as specific standards.

The highest risk would be a Town form of government in which the design guidelines become part of the zoning bylaws and municipal regulations have been controversial in the community.

In general, experienced developers and builders like the predictability of a clear set of design guidelines which is consistently applied by a municipality. Property owners with less development experience are likely to have more concerns.

A second risk category is creating design guidelines that are too restrictive. This sends a negative message to those who are considering investing in the community. Guidelines that are too subjective send a similar negative message in that applicants cannot be certain as to how the guidelines will apply to them.

#### Key Performance Indicators

Design guidelines help reinforce a community's identity and provide a clear message that the municipality is balancing the needs of the community with a streamlined approval process for new development. Codifying community values about the physical environment into the guidelines allows applicants to present proposals for new construction, rehabilitation, or adaptive reuse that are consistent with those values.

KPIs for this project could include the following:

- Successful adoption of the new design guidelines.
- Increase in the number of applications that are consistent with the design guidelines.
- Decrease in the number of meetings dedicated to design in the site plan or special permit approval process.
- Increase in the number of buildings constructed, renovated, or rehabilitated that meet the design guidelines.

If this project is accompanied by a façade/storefront improvement project, additional KPI related to the number of façades or storefronts improved under the program could be added. Without such a program, changes will take more time as they will be dependent on applications for approval process that trigger the use of the guidelines. Without an application for site plan, special permit, and/or PUD approval, property owners are not obligated to meet the design guidelines.

#### Partners & Resources

- Municipal staff (planning and economic development, building and/or zoning inspector)
- Municipal boards (City Council/Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Economic Development Committee)
- Property/business owners
- Downtown organizations



Creating or updating design guidelines and combining the update with financial assistance to property owners to update buildings and sites to be consistent with the new guidelines addresses several negative economic impacts of the COVID -19 pandemic.

Design guidelines can sometime be seen primarily as an aesthetic requirement. However, they can also have significant impacts on the economic and public health of an area, both of which are directly related to the continuing impacts of the pandemic:

- Small businesses in deteriorating downtowns, villages, and corridors are less likely to recover quickly because of a perception of a lack of safety or viability. Design guidelines that are responsive to community identity will reinforce a revitalized, vibrant area.
- Design guidelines that include landscape requirements can help improve air quality and reduce the heat island effect, improving public health for people who live, work, and shop in the target area.
- Design guidelines can also address accessibility for people with physical disabilities by requiring appropriate access that is well-integrated into the building and the site.
- Tools such as outdoor dining, outdoor retail display, serving windows, and upgraded HVAC systems can be integrated into the design guidelines to encourage permanent solutions that address the health and safety of the target area.

## Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Understand why the municipality feels that design guidelines are necessary. Is this part of a façade/sign improvement program, a new local historic district, and/or to control new development in an existing area? What are the areas of greatest concern?
- Decide whether this is a project that can be done in-house or requires a consultant with appropriate expertise.
- Decide which funding source is appropriate and, if the source is a grant program, apply for funds.
- If a consultant is deemed appropriate, go through the Commonwealth's procurement process (unless the grant program has an on-call consultant).
- Identify the people/organizations who need to be part of this process.
- Develop an engagement process appropriate for the municipality and the required approval process.
- Once the design guidelines have been approved, consider a public education program to inform people on a regular basis about the new requirements and their implications. Key targets for this campaign include property owners and real estate brokers.

## Process

The timeframe will vary depending on whether the municipality has a city form of government or requires Town Meeting to approve bylaw changes (and of course, whether the design guidelines are specifically incorporated into the zoning). From the kick-off to entering the municipal approval process, the project should take 8-12 months.

- **Months 1-2:** Review existing zoning bylaws for embedded design guidelines and standards; develop inventory of historic and current buildings and site treatments; interview municipal staff, boards with approval responsibility, former applicants, local land use lawyers, others with relevant experience and concerns.
- **Months 3-4:** Research appropriate precedents; develop public outreach/engagement program. Consider a public kick-off/charrette, depending on the needs of the community. Discuss the thresholds for use and the appropriate review body and process.
- **Months 5-7:** Engage with business/property owners and public on options and concerns; develop draft guidelines; develop illustrations. Decide (with municipality) whether design guidelines are a separate, advisory document or part of the zoning bylaw/ordinance. If the guidelines are integrated into the zoning, decide whether illustrations are part of the zoning or a separate document. Consider meeting with the appropriate boards to introduce the draft design guidelines and receive feedback.
- **Months 8-9:** Revise the design guidelines to its final draft prior to the municipal approval process. Publicize the final draft prior to City Council/Town Meeting review and approval.

## Example 1: Town Center Design Guidelines

Sterling, Massachusetts

### Town Contact

Domenica Tatasciore  
Town Planner  
dtatasciore@sterling-ma.gov

### Consultant


Innes Associates Ltd./Harriman

### Cost

\$15,000 (Massachusetts Downtown Initiative)

### Characteristics

- Advisory
- Applicable to Town Center only
- Includes discussion of design elements for public right-of-way
- References historic buildings as context for new development.




**Rehabilitation**

- Changes to a building façade should be consistent with the original architectural style and the principles of composition that are typically associated with that style as evidenced in precedents and relevant examples.
- Contemporary materials and components may be appropriate if they are visually compatible with the historic components.
- Additions should be distinguished from the original building, although roof forms should be compatible with the original building.
- Building cornice lines should be maintained, preserved, or recreated to define building façades and create façade components consistent with historic parapet or cornice lines, as originally designed and suited in the Town Center (see page 25 for definitions).

**Storefront Composition**

Storefronts should clearly indicate to passersby the function of the business, whether retail, restaurant, or service. Windows should be large and not blocked by signs or shades at eye level. Both windows and entry should have appropriate lighting. Elements that tie the street to the building, such as awnings, window boxes, and projecting signs, are strongly encouraged.

- Materials should be selected to be compatible with or complementary to the Town Center. Storefronts should fit within the building frame as formed by columns, piers, and cornices.
- Where it is appropriate for the existing or proposed architectural style, a base panel and sill course should be provided; the base panels and sill course should continue across the entire width of the storefront bay and terminate at doors or the vertical elements framing the bay.
- Storefronts with recessed entryways to ground floor commercial spaces should be preserved or restored to their original format; the recess should remain open for the full height of the ground floor story; signs, panels, or other features should not shorten the height of the recess.
- Storefront windows and doors should be transparent. They should not be mirrored, use tinted glass, or be obstructed by curtains or shades.



Storefront: Base, Middle, Top

22 Town Center Design Guidelines, Town of Sterling June 2021

Courtesy of the Town of Sterling, Innes Associates, and Harriman

## Example 2: Residential Design Guidelines

Arlington, Massachusetts

### Town Contact

Jenny Raitt  
Director  
Department of Planning and  
Community Development  
jraitt@town.arlington.ma.us

### Consultant

Harriman

### Cost

\$49,000

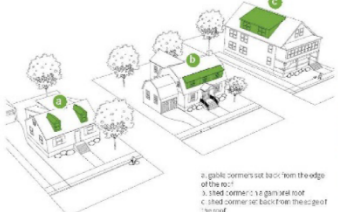
### Characteristics

- Advisory
- Applicable to Residential zoning districts
- Included analysis of neighborhood characteristics
- Included in-depth public outreach

**Principle C-1 (continued)**

Building elements such as entrances, roofs, dormers, and windows should be used in a way to help the house to feel welcoming and active.

**Dormers and other Roof Elements**




a. gable dormer set back from the edge of the roof  
b. shed dormer set back from the roof  
c. shed dormer set back from the eaves

**Definition**


A dormer is a roofed structure that projects vertically beyond the plane of a pitched roof. It usually has a window or multiple windows and is used to increase usable space in the attic or roof space. Two common types of dormers are **gable** and **shed**. Other roof elements include chimneys and other defining features of certain styles, such as turrets.

**Encourage**

- Well-proportioned dormer: Dormers should be a detail on the roof rather than the dominant feature.
- Consistent dormer types: Use similar dormer types and level of detailing to dormers on surrounding houses, if applicable. Match dormer type to roof type and pitch.
- Setback from the roof: To reduce their appearance, dormers, especially larger shed dormers, should be set back. Existing eye line to remain continuous. Small wall dormers are acceptable to be flush with the front wall.
- Dormer alignment: Line up dormers and windows with existing elements on the wall below.



Dormers set back from the roof and are built with the same materials as the house.



Large dormer that is not set back from the roof and is built with different materials than the house.

**Discourage**

- Large dormers: Inconsistent dormers can disrupt the streetscape pattern. Dormers should not occupy more than half the width of the roof.
- Inconsistent dormer types: Multiple, conflicting styles of dormers.
- Undersized windows: Small windows and lack of detailing on dormers can create too much blank space. Windows should extend from the top to bottom of the dormer.

© Arlington Residential Design Guidelines

Courtesy of the Town of Arlington and Harriman



Lenox

Marblehead

Methuen

## Develop or update the municipality's sign code.



Provided by SME Consultant

Emily Keys Innes, AICP, LEED AP ND, Innes Associates Ltd.

Location

Any downtown, commercial corridor, or village center.

Origin	Innes Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Rapid Recovery Program sponsored by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts	
Budget	Low (less than \$50,000)	Medium (\$50,000-\$200,000)
Timeframe	Short Term (1-5 years)	
Risk	Medium	
Budget: Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Costs will include the consultant's time and legal review by the municipality's counsel.</li> <li>The range for the consultant's time is between \$35,000-\$60,000, depending on the level of public engagement and how illustrative the code is. Review by municipal counsel may be covered by the municipal on-call agreement or may need to be added to the cost of the project.</li> </ul>	

Budget: Sources

In addition to municipal funds, the following are appropriate sources:

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds should cover assistance with the design of façade, storefront, or site improvements when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Creating or revising the sign code may be linked to a façade/storefront improvement program. Possible impacts are addressed in the sections on **Key Performance Indicators** and **Diagnostic**.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth  
Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000)  
Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

All communities are eligible to apply. Some of the funding for this program is reserved for non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities. MDI staff will assign a consultant to assist the community with the technical services, which would include developing the sign code. The MDI grant may be sufficient for the full project for a smaller community unless the community is looking for a more extensive set of illustrations or a significant public engagement process. A larger community may need additional funding.

Community Planning Grants (project limit \$25,000-\$75,000)  
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

A Community Planning Grant may be used for Zoning Review and Updates, which could include the sign code if it is part of the municipality's zoning bylaws or ordinance. All Massachusetts communities are eligible to apply for this grant.

District Local Technical Assistance Grant  
Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) and DHCD

Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies. These funds may be used for planning projects. Each RPA has a different focus on how these funds may be used to meet the state's funding goals.

All municipalities are eligible to apply directly to their RPA. The RPA will work with the municipality on the program; a separate consultant is not usually required.

Diagnostic

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

Challenges across municipalities include the following:

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

#### Risk: Explanation

The risk for this project is in part dependent on the form of government and whether the design guidelines will be an advisory document or incorporated into the zoning bylaw/ordinance as specific standards.

The highest risk would be a Town form of government in which the design guidelines become part of the zoning bylaws and municipal regulations have been controversial in the community.

In general, experienced developers and builders like the predictability of a clear set of design guidelines which is consistently applied by a municipality. Property owners with less development experience are likely to have more concerns.

A second risk category is creating a sign code that is too restrictive. This sends a negative message to those who are considering investing in the community. Guidelines for sign design that are too subjective send a similar negative message in that applicants cannot be certain as to how the guidelines will apply to them.

#### Key Performance Indicators

Sign codes are important for several reasons:

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

KPI for this project could include the following:

- Successful adoption of the new/updated code.
- Compliance of code with legal precedents.
- Implementation of streamlined process for approvals.
- Number of noncomplying/ nonconforming signs replaced.

If this project is accompanied by a façade/storefront improvement project, additional KPI related to the numbers of signs upgraded to meet the new code could be added. Without such a program, new applications will be dependent on changes in tenants or on enforcement of noncomplying/ nonconforming signs.

#### Partners & Resources

- Municipal staff (planning and economic development, building and/or zoning inspector)
- Municipal boards (City Council/Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Economic Development Committee)
- Property/business owners
- Downtown organizations

## Action Item

Key actions include the following:

- Understand why the sign code should be created/updated/replaced. What are the areas of greatest concern?
- Decide whether this is a project that can be done in-house or requires a consultant with appropriate expertise.
- Decide which funding source is appropriate and, if the source is a grant program, apply for funds.
- If a consultant is deemed appropriate, go through the Commonwealth's procurement process (unless the grant program has an on-call consultant).
- Identify the people/organizations who need to be part of this process.
- Develop an engagement process appropriate for the municipality and the required approval process.
- Once the code has been approved, consider a public education program to inform people on a regular basis about the code and its implications. Key targets for this campaign include business and property owners and commercial real estate brokers.
- Consider aligning the enforcement process with the new regulations to ensure the effort leads to the anticipated improvements.

## Process

The timeframe will vary depending on whether the municipality has a city form of government or requires Town Meeting to approve bylaw changes. From the kick-off to entering the municipal approval process, the project should take 8-12 months.

- **Months 1-2:** Review existing code; develop sign inventory; interview municipal staff, boards with approval responsibility, former applicants, local land use lawyers, others with relevant experience and concerns.
- **Months 3-4:** Research appropriate precedents; develop public outreach/engagement program.
- **Months 5-7:** Engage with business/property owners and public on options and concerns; develop draft code; develop illustrations and decide whether illustrations are part of code or a separate document. Consider meetings with appropriate boards to introduce the draft code and receive feedback.
- **Months 8-9:** Revise the code to its final draft prior to the municipal approval process. Publicize the final draft prior to City Council/Town Meeting review and approval.

### Example 1: Sign Code Bylaw Study

Dedham, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Jeremy Rosenberger

Town Planner

[jrosenberger@dedham-ma.gov](mailto:jrosenberger@dedham-ma.gov)

Consultant

Innes Associates Ltd., Harriman, and Steven Cecil Design & Planning

Cost

<\$50,000

Status

Draft code will go to Town Meeting in Fall 2021.

Characteristics

- Sign Code is part of the General Bylaws.
- Code is text-based and will be hosted on eCode
- Illustrations are in a separate document.

### Example 2: Sign Regulations Update

Arlington, Massachusetts

Town Contact

Jenny Raitt

Director

Department of Planning and Community Development

[jraitt@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:jraitt@town.arlington.ma.us)

Consultant

Lisa Wise Consulting, San Luis Obsipo, CA

Cost

<\$50,000

Status

Bylaw adopted by Town Meeting in 2019.

Characteristics

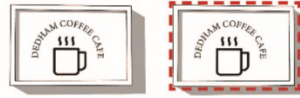
- Sign Code is part of the Zoning Bylaws.
- Code is primarily text-based but includes illustrations.
- The Zoning Bylaws are provided in a stand-alone PDF.

#### Illustrations of Selected Sign Standards in the Dedham Signage Code

To assist in understanding some of the specific standards within the Dedham Signage Code, these illustrations indicate how typical circumstances may be applied. As illustrations, they are not intended to replace or alter the design standards or their interpretation; in every instance, the text of the Signage Code and its interpretation by the Town will govern reviews and approvals.

1. Calculating the Area of Individual Signs
2. Calculating the Maximum Area for Window Signs
3. Calculating the Maximum Sign Area: Length of Potential Facades along Streets
4. Calculating the Maximum Sign Area: Length of Potential Frontages along Parking Areas or Private Ways
5. Identifying and Using Sign Bands
6. Awning Sign Area Standards
7. Incorporating Sign Signs within Parapets and Facade Architecture
8. Awnings: Exempt Signs

##### 1. CALCULATING THE AREA OF INDIVIDUAL SIGNS



For signs with borders or backing surface integral to the sign, the sign area is calculated by including them.

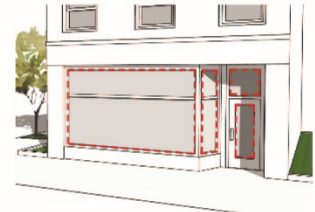


For signs with individual letters, the calculation is based on an outline that encompasses them.



For complex sign shapes, the sign area is calculated by adding together the areas of simple geometries that encompass the sign and graphics.

##### 2. CALCULATING THE MAXIMUM AREA FOR WINDOW SIGNS



The maximum area of window signs may not exceed 25% of the total window and door glazing area of a business or establishment. The total window area is the sum of the glazing of the components of a storefront.

For any business or establishment and as part of this maximum sign area, one window sign may consist of a Digital Display Sign or Edge Lit Sign up to a maximum area of 2 square feet, or 1 Neon-Type Sign with a maximum area of 6 square feet.

Courtesy of the Town of Dedham, Innes Associates, Harriman, and Steven Cecil Design & Planning

A-10 - STANDARDS																			
D. Standards for All Permanent Building-Mounted Sign Types. The following sign types are allowed, subject to the criteria listed under each sign type.																			
(1) Awning Sign. Awning signs must comply with the standards provided in the table below.																			
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Awning Sign Standards</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Standard</th> <th>Requirements</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Sign Area<sup>1</sup></td> <td>1 sq. ft. of sign area per linear foot of awning width.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mounting Height</td> <td>Min. of 8 ft. from the bottom of the awning to the sidewalk.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sign Placement</td> <td>Only above the doors and windows of the ground or second floor of a building. Must not project above, below, or beyond the edges of the face of the building wall or architectural element on which it is located. Sign width shall not be greater than 60% of the width of the awning face or surface on which it is displayed.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Setback from back of curb</td> <td>Min. 2 ft.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Illumination</td> <td>Non-Illuminated or Illumination under the awning.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Permitting</td> <td>Sign permit required. See Section 6.2.2(A).</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Awning Sign Standards		Standard	Requirements	Sign Area <sup>1</sup>	1 sq. ft. of sign area per linear foot of awning width.	Mounting Height	Min. of 8 ft. from the bottom of the awning to the sidewalk.	Sign Placement	Only above the doors and windows of the ground or second floor of a building. Must not project above, below, or beyond the edges of the face of the building wall or architectural element on which it is located. Sign width shall not be greater than 60% of the width of the awning face or surface on which it is displayed.	Setback from back of curb	Min. 2 ft.	Illumination	Non-Illuminated or Illumination under the awning.	Permitting	Sign permit required. See Section 6.2.2(A).		
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Town of Arlington Zoning Bylaw																			

Courtesy of the Town of Arlington and Lisa Wise Consulting



### Example 3: Sign Audit & Recommendations Report

Portland, Maine

#### City Contact

Christine Grimando, AICP  
Director, Planning & Urban  
Development Department  
[cdg@portlandmaine.gov](mailto:cdg@portlandmaine.gov)

#### Consultant

ReCode and Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc.

#### Cost

\$50,000

#### Characteristics

- Sign Code is part of the Zoning Bylaws.
- Code is primarily text-based but includes illustrations.
- The Zoning Bylaws are provided in a stand-alone PDF.

#### Selected Resources


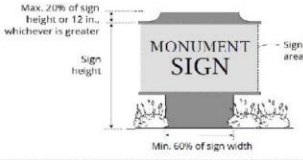


TABLE 20-11. STANDARDS FOR MONUMENT SIGNS<sup>1</sup>

Sign District	Standard Sign District	Residential Sign District*	Small Mixed-Use Sign District	Large Mixed-Use Sign District	Downtown Sign District	Industrial Sign District	Open Space Sign District
Sign area (max.)	50 SF	50 SF	50 SF	140 SF	50 SF	70 SF	20 SF
Height (max.)	8 ft.	8 ft.	8 ft.	18 ft.	6 ft.	16 ft.	5 ft.
Base width (max.)	The base of a monument sign must be at least 60% of the width of the sign.						
Illumination	Non-illuminated, internal illumination, or external illumination						
Special provisions	Elements to enhance the design of a sign structure may extend above the sign to a max. of 20% of the sign's allowed height, or 12 inches, whichever is greater.						



Max. 20% of sign height or 12 in., whichever is greater

Sign height

MONUMENT SIGN

Sign area

Min. 60% of sign width

<sup>1</sup>The minimum sign area and sign height standards may be further limited by the standards established in Table 20-8. If no value is included in the table below, then a monument sign is not allowed in that sign district.

<sup>2</sup>Allowed for institutional uses in residential zones only.

20-21 | CITY OF PORTLAND LAND USE CODE





Courtesy of the Town of Dedham and Gamble Associates

Signage Foundation, Inc. ([the signagefoundation.org](http://www.signagefoundation.org)) has a great research library of articles. Some of the links are broken, but you may be able to search for the articles on another search engine.

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

- The Pennsylvania chapter of the APA has a model sign code. The current link is <https://planningpa.org/wp-content/uploads/Model-Sign-Plan-2.pdf>
- Also in Pennsylvania is the Model Sign Ordinance from the Montgomery County Planning Commission (Pennsylvania), 2014. The current link is <http://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/7070>
- Scenic Michigan produced the Michigan Sign Guidebook: The Local Planning and Regulation of Signs. The second edition, published in 2021, is available here: <https://scenicmichigan.org/sign-regulation-guidebook/>

# Implement transportation improvements at Lakeview Avenue and Pleasant Street that increase traffic flow and safety, while also accommodating pedestrians, bicyclists and those with disabilities.

Category	 <b>Public Realm</b>
Location	Navy Yard Business District - Census Tract 3142 - Intersection of Lakeview Avenue and Pleasant Street
Origin	Dracut Master Plan Committee, Dracut Economic Development Committee, and Navy Yard businesses
Budget	 High budget: Phase 1 - Low cost tactical driveway access management. Phase 2: \$2.55 million for high improvement costs.
Timeframe	 Long Term: Phase 1 (short-term) Conduct pilot and demonstration project for access management of driveways. Phase 2 (long term)- Follow the TIP process to secure funding for intersection improvements, sidewalks and bicycle lanes.
Risk	 Medium risk - Existing businesses have expressed concern about pedestrian and safety improvements that are needed at the intersection. The signal hardware and design elements of the intersection are woefully inadequate.
Key Performance Indicators	Improvements increase pedestrian and vehicular safety and decrease vehicle accidents based on MassDOT crash reporting. Better traffic flow and reduced congestion based on travel times and NMCOG congestion system monitoring. Increased pedestrian and bicycle activity in the intersection area.
Partners & Resources	Town of Dracut, area businesses, Dracut Economic Development Committee, NMMPO, MassDOT, and local walking, bicycle and trail groups. <p><b>Possible funding sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TIP funds and MassWorks grants.</li> <li>• Private foundations.</li> <li>• Local funds for limited work, such as sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and design work.</li> <li>• Potential infrastructure funds from the federal government.</li> </ul>

## Diagnostic

There are 75 storefronts located within the business district, of which 7 are currently vacant. Two businesses closed due to COVID-19. One-third of the businesses in the area are microenterprises with five employees or less. The business survey indicated that 89% of the businesses were impacted by COVID-19 in some way. 44% of businesses experienced a loss in revenue and had reduced hours of operation. 67% of these businesses rent their space.

Traffic count data shows that the average daily traffic in the Navy Yard was 16,600 ADT on Pleasant Street and 8,600 ADT on Lakeview Avenue. There is a goal to open up the area to more walking and biking through other projects.

## Action Items

The Town of Dracut seeks to implement its Complete Streets program, specifically in the Navy Yard at the intersection of Lakeview Avenue and Pleasant Street, to improve traffic flow and public safety. In addition, this project will address other modes of transportation for bicyclists, pedestrians and disabled residents.

The implementation of the Complete Streets program in the Navy Yard is critical to traffic flow, safety and infrastructure improvements. Roadbeds and crosswalks vary depending on location, while some crosswalks just need repainting. Pavement conditions for sidewalks vary with the lack of ADA compliance in some locations and gaps in the network. The lack of bicycle lanes provides an opportunity for improvement.

The SME recommended phases are as follows:  
1) Develop project phasing and prioritization plan for the intersection, including immediate/short-term tactical safety improvements via access management of driveways in the intersection and longer-term full depth construction. 2) Develop scope and cost estimate to secure TIP funding or outside sources for full depth reconstruction of the intersection - upgrading signal equipment, sidewalk and curb ramp reconstruction, relocation of utility and signal poles, restriping pavement markings and signage upgrades, including bicycle facilities, landscaping, transit amenities, and beautification elements, and parking.

The physical appearance of the Navy Yard has an impact upon the willingness of visitors to shop at area businesses. Parking has been identified as a major issue for local businesses. There is a need to identify the traffic concerns in the area and then develop an overall action plan to address these concerns. The improvements need to be identified on a phased basis so that the sidewalks and bicycle lanes can be addressed initially, while the upgrade of the Lakeview Avenue/Pleasant Street intersection will need to be designed and placed on NMMPO's TIP. Funding for these improvements will need to be identified and the Town will need to set aside design funds to move the project forward.

## Process

- Secure funding and hire a consultant to conduct a planning study, including a survey and traffic analysis to develop a conceptual plan for improvements. Plans should identify phasing and costs for recommendations.
- Implement short-term improvements, such as reducing the number of conflicts in the intersection via access management of the driveways.
- Hold a series of Public Meetings with Town staff, residents and business owners to engage in pilot and demonstration projects, gather feedback and identify and address traffic concerns in the area.
- Secure funding for the preliminary design of the Lakeview Avenue/Pleasant Street intersection.
- Submit a project initiation request to MassDOT and qualify to be placed on the TIP and/or secure MassWorks funding for the transportation improvements.
- Complete the design and permitting for the proposed improvements.
- Implement the transportation improvements for this key intersection within the Navy Yard District.



# Transportation Improvements

Best Practice



PUBLIC  
REALM

# Peabody-Salem Corridor Concept Action Plan - Transportation Improvements

Category



Public Realm

Location

Peabody and Salem, MA

Origin

Cities of Peabody and Salem and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

Budget



High budget - \$2.5 million (est.)

Timeframe



Long Term (5 -10 years): Need to go through TIP process

Risk



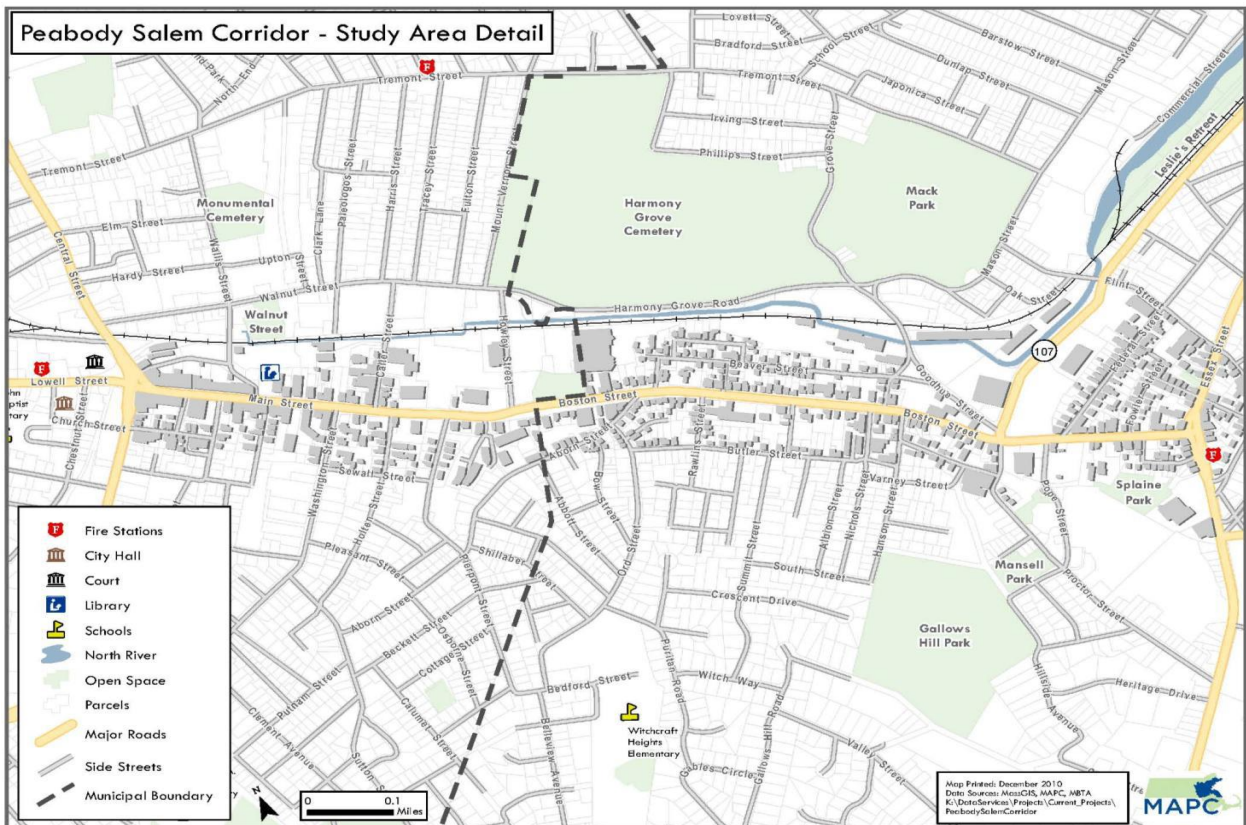
Medium Risk

Key Performance Indicators

Number of visitors and tourists; vehicular, foot and bicycle traffic; change in customer and visitor volumes at local business establishments and attractions; better traffic flow and reduced congestion; and increased pedestrian and vehicular safety.

Partners & Resources

Cities of Peabody and Salem, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), Boston MPO and MassDOT.



## Diagnostic

The Peabody-Salem Corridor Action Plan is a collaboration between the Cities of Peabody and Salem, MA and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). The focus of the study was to address the land use, economic development and transportation components of a shared roadway corridor that connects the two communities. MAPC developed a set of recommendations that were designed to make Main Street in Peabody and Boston Street in Salem a more vibrant, livable and attractive community corridor. The focus of this Best Practice is on the transportation improvements for the corridor.

### Action Item

- Address context sensitive roadway improvements
- Improve bike and pedestrian access on the corridor
- Improve pedestrian facilities by upgrading sidewalks
- Upgrade signalized intersections
- Add bicycle lanes and facilities to the Main Street and Boston Street Corridor
- Address transit service access by workers and residents
- Improve traffic safety related to truck traffic
- Make streetscape improvements to enhance the aesthetics in the area

### Process

- Advance a two lane cross-section with a center left turn lane/median and on-street parking
- Mill and resurface the corridor
- Reconfigure the intersection of Aborn Street and Boston Street
- Mark on-street parking spaces along Boston Street in Salem



Photo looking east on Main Street, Peabody

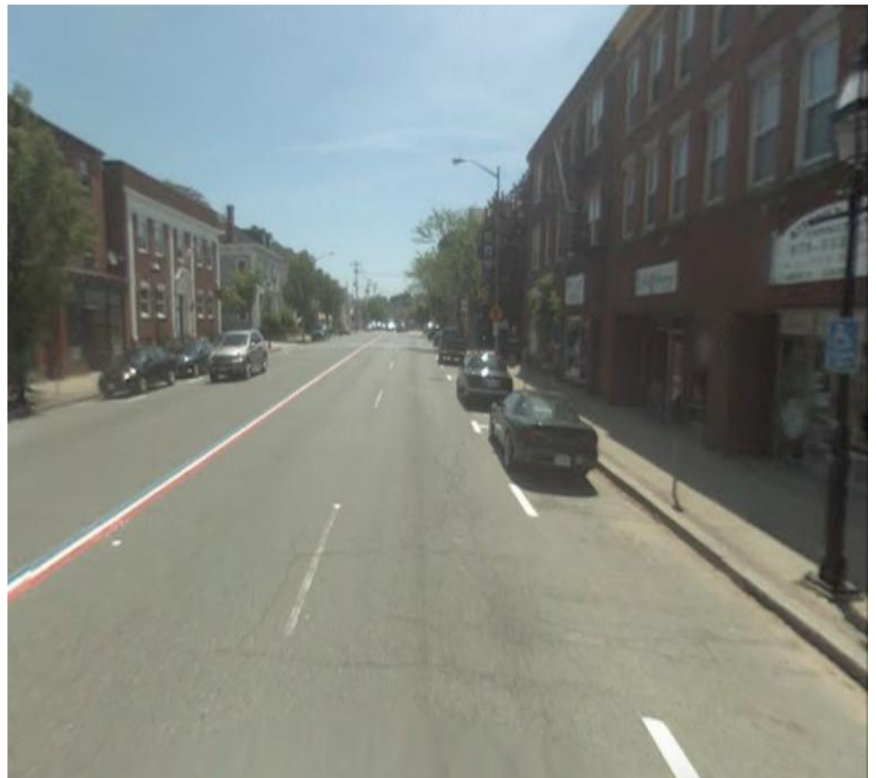


Photo looking east on Boston Street, Salem

## Process (cont.)

- Install modern roundabouts along Grove Street
- Reset curbing on Boston Street
- Enhance roadway guide and regulatory signage
- Enhance striping and markings for the traveled way
- Mitigate Gateway Center traffic
- Manage truck traffic
- Install pedestrian refuge islands on Boston Street
- Enhance crosswalk markings
- Install shared lane markings and bicycle warning signage along shared travel lanes
- Install bicycle route signage
- Advance the proposed Riverwalk shared use path
- Install bicycle accommodations on Walnut Street/Harmony Grove/Mason Street
- Improve sidewalk on Boston Street, east of Nichols Street
- Install pedestrian scale lighting on Boston Street
- Upgrade pedestrian signal heads and pedestrian push buttons
- Identify potential locations and install bicycle racks
- Install additional pedestrian warning signage
- Utilize the Regional Bicycle Plan and the Regional Pedestrian Transportation Plan
- Install amenities at bus stops on Main Street and Boston Street
- Highlight transfer locations
- Conduct a street tree inventory and replacement program
- Investigate installation of bio-retention features in proposed curb cuts
- Encourage joint driveways and cross-access easements
- Require pedestrian connections from sites to existing sidewalk network
- Maintain continuity of sidewalks across driveways







Example of a three-lane cross-section in a town center



Example of shared lane markings

# Design and install improvements to public spaces at the Navy Yard to enhance the overall aesthetics of the area and create locations for public gathering.

Category	 <b>Public Realm</b>
Location	Navy Yard Business District - Census Tract 3142
Origin	Dracut Economic Development Committee and Navy Yard businesses
Budget	 Low cost (less than \$500,000)
Timeframe	 Short Term: 1-2 years (July 1, 2024) to identify the public space improvements, design the improvements, secure funding and install the upgrades.
Risk	 Low risk - Existing businesses have expressed interest in public open space to offset the visual, aesthetic and environmental impacts of the buildings and concrete in the Navy Yard.
Key Performance Indicators	Change in the amount of open space, pocket parks, benches and other amenities. Improvements to public realm through additional street trees and pedestrian scale lighting. Increase in visitors and shoppers to the Navy Yard.
Partners & Resources	<p>Area businesses, Dracut Public Works and Recreation Department, Dracut Economic Development Committee, Dracut School Department and Library, and community groups.</p> <p><b>Possible funding sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MDI and MassTrails Grants</li> <li>• PARC grants and Land and Recreation grants and loans</li> <li>• MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places and MassDOT Shared Street Shared Space</li> <li>• Private foundations.</li> <li>• Community Preservation Committee (CPC) funds</li> </ul>



## Diagnostic

There are 75 storefronts located within the business district, of which 7 are currently vacant. Two businesses closed due to COVID-19. One-third of the businesses in the area are microenterprises with five employees or less. The business survey indicated that 89% of the businesses were impacted by COVID-19 in some way. 44% of businesses experienced a loss in revenue and had reduced hours of operation. 67% of these businesses rent their space.

According to the public realm assets survey, there are 51,830 square feet of open/public spaces, consisting of parks, traffic islands, and public plazas in the Navy Yard study area. This open space includes the Matthew G. Boule Memorial Park. There is limited availability of street trees and benches (Grade C), which creates an uncomfortable pedestrian experience.

Open space and public realm improvements would allow residents and business owners to get out of the COVID-19 “lockdown” mindset and begin walking and enjoying the Navy Yard area, Beaver Brook and area businesses. In addition, enhanced public spaces build community and neighborhood pride, bring people together, enhance civic engagement, and allow for a more active lifestyle.

## Action Items

Design and install improvements to public spaces in the Navy Yard. Identify public space needs in the District and secure funding to address those needs. Review opportunities to establish a “green way” through the Navy Yard District that complements the bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Plan for streetscape improvements through established partners working with the DPW and Community Development Department on securing grants and implementing physical improvements to the area.

## Process

- Schedule Public Meetings at Town Hall and the Navy Yard with town staff, residents and business owners to identify the public space needs in the District.
- Determine the options available to provide more green space and encourage more people to participate. Coordinate this effort with streetscape improvements.
- Identify the level of support in the business community to make these improvements to increase patronage at the Navy Yard restaurants and stores.
- Install the improvements, and
- Maintain the public open space improvements through the Town and with the support of the local businesses.

## Process (cont.)

If the community decides to secure new open space in the Navy Yard District, here's a summary of the process:

Phase 1: Secure funding for planning and development.

Phase 2 : Identify New Sites and Hire Consultant

- Identify a staff person and committee to oversee the planning design and implementation process.
- Determine existing or possible site options to provide more open space, as well as existing parks that need upgrading in the study area.
- Create a map of the possible sites for new open space that could be a future park, playground, greenway, trail or other types of public space.
- Collect information about the key features of each parcel, including lot size, site conditions, slope, drainage concerns, etc.
- Engage business community to make these improvements to increase patronage at the Navy Yard restaurants and stores, identify the level of support and interest in future open space sites.
- Schedule Public Meetings at Town Hall and the Navy Yard with town staff, residents and business owners to identify the public space and programming needs and potential sites in the District.
- Issue an RFP to hire a landscape architect to oversee the design process for a new or existing open space site.

Phase 3: Open Space Design Process

- Collect ideas through community vision sessions, online surveys and/or engaging youth at school or at the library.
- Develop conceptual design options and receive feedback from the community.
- Create final conceptual design and then construction drawing.

Phase 4: Open Space Implementation

- Hire contractor to construct the new open space.
- Inform the public and conduct site prep work as needed.

Phase 5: Maintenance and Programming for Open Space

- Maintain public open space improvements through the Town and with the support of the local businesses. Organize clean-up days with local residents and property owners.
- Encourage community groups and business owners to host small events onsite to help increase foot traffic.



# Public Spaces

Best Practice



PUBLIC  
REALM

# Beyond traditional measures: Examining the holistic impacts of public space investments in three cities

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Flint, Michigan, Albuquerque, New Mexico and Buffalo, New York
Origin	Brookings Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking and Project for Public Spaces
Budget	 Low budget - \$50-100,000 (est.)
Timeframe	 Short term (less than 5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Positive economic, social and civic benefits to the community.
Partners & Resources	Cities of Flint, Michigan, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Buffalo, New York and the Brookings Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking and Project for Public Spaces

## Defining “public space”

Although public spaces are commonly conceived of as parks or other green spaces, this series defines public spaces as those spaces in which people take part in public life—including parks, plazas, streetscapes, waterfronts, other permanent cultural assets such as museums or historical sites, as well as publicly accessible socioeconomic assets such as farmers’ markets, “streeteries,” and pop-up cafes.[\[iv\]](#) This series posits that public spaces are inherently interconnected with their surrounding neighborhoods—impacting the people and small businesses beyond immediate park boundaries and impacted in turn by broader issues of power and access that determine who is able to use and benefit from a public space.[\[v\]](#)

## Diagnostic

While public spaces have long been known to provide positive economic, social and civic benefits, the COVID-19 pandemic made these benefits increasingly evident. The Brookings Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking and Project for Public Spaces conducted interviews in Flint, Michigan, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Buffalo, New York to assess the economic, social and civic benefits accruing from public spaces. Each of these cities has higher poverty rates than the country as a whole, lower performing downtowns compared to national trends, downtown populations with higher poverty rates than the city at large (Figure 1), and a significant population of residents of color citywide and living downtown (Figure 2).

Each of these communities has a major public space: Flint Farmers Market in Flint, Civic Plaza in Albuquerque and Canalside in Buffalo. Outlined below is a brief summary of each public space:

Flint Farmers Market is more than 100 years old and moved into a former newspaper printing plant in the downtown in 2011. This facility is part of a Health and Wellness District that has attracted more than \$36 million in new investment. The new Market opened in 2014 with space for more vendors.

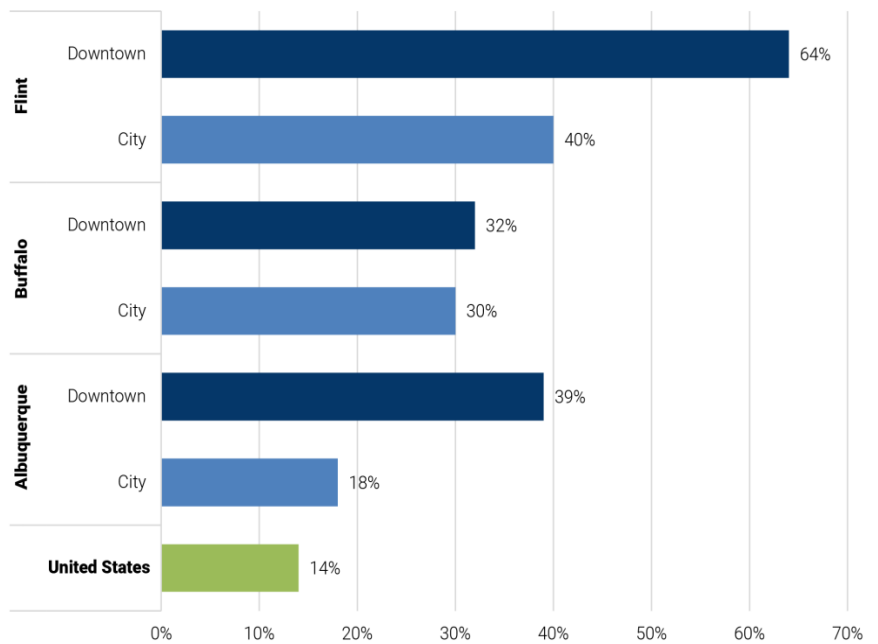
Civic Plaza was created in 1974 to host large outdoor events and was managed by the city until 2015 when DowntownABQ MainStreet took over. The Plaza has been transformed into a community-oriented gathering space and hub for downtown activity.

Canalside is part of the City's effort to turn its postindustrial waterfront into a mixed-use development and entertainment district. The Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) developed a Master Plan for a mixed-use urban entertainment hub, that Canalside is part of.

### Action Item

- Address who is benefiting from the value that public spaces produce
- Determine how these benefits are allocated across residents of different races, incomes, ability statuses, and tenures in a community
- Determine whether public spaces produce additional benefits that traditional measures are not capturing
- Assess how to harness the power of public space investments to benefit more people in more places
- Explore the role that public spaces can play in supporting locally owned small businesses, connecting underserved residents to entrepreneurship and other opportunities, and strengthening communities' local assets.
- Analyze the ways that public spaces can either bridge or exacerbate social divides, promote social cohesion, and reflect the culture and history of communities.
- Examine how the place governance entities that steward public spaces can leverage their roles to enhance the capacity of other local organizations, offer community-centered programming, and nurture public spaces as hubs for civic engagement.

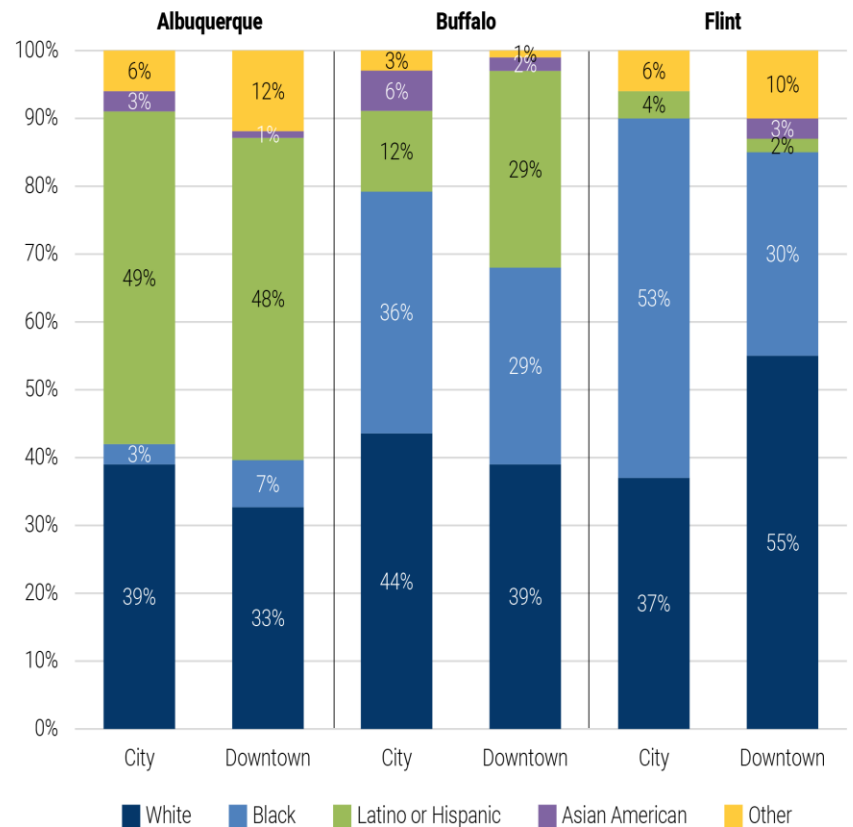
Figure 1. Poverty rates in case study cities and downtowns, 2018



Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2014-2018 5-Year Estimates.

Metropolitan Policy Program  
at BROOKINGS

Figure 2. Race and ethnicity in case study cities and downtowns, 2018



Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2014-2018 5-Year Estimates.

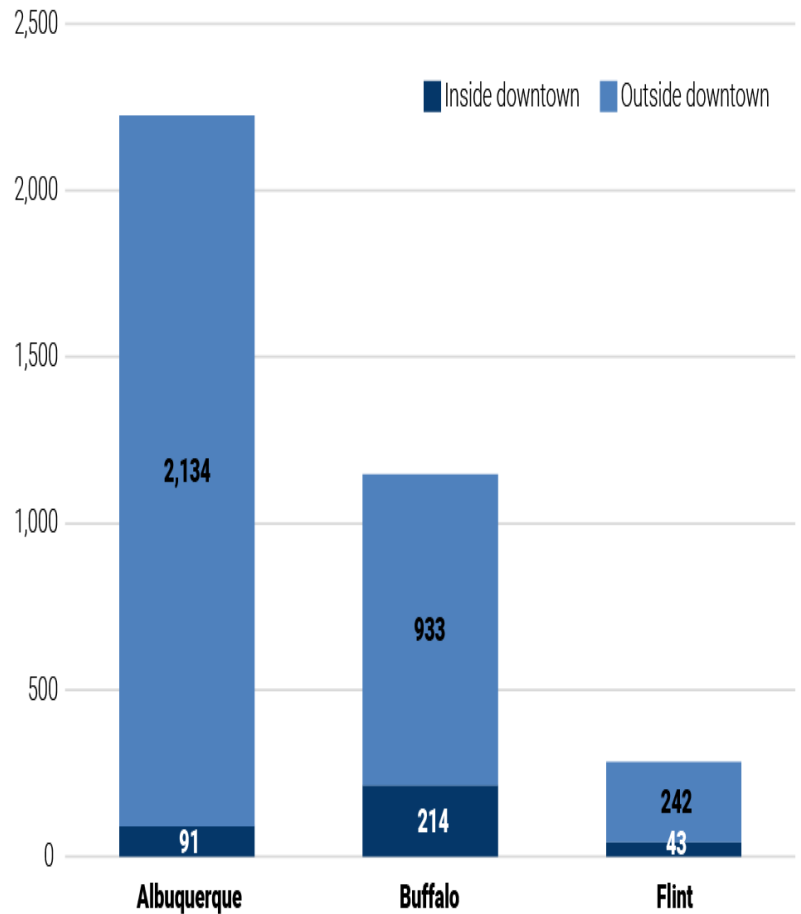
Metropolitan Policy Program  
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## Process

- Conducted in-depth interviews with 78 residents, small business owners, public sector officials and other key stakeholders, as well as the three supplemental focus groups with residents and public space vendors, between February and March 2020.
- Examined the extent to which public space investments can help foster downtown economic ecosystems that are:
  1. Locally empowering: Supporting local small businesses and local investment priorities
  2. Innovative: Fostering creativity and entrepreneurship opportunities
  3. Regionally connected; Connecting residents and small businesses to regional markets and networks.
- Finding #1: Public spaces can play a critical role in shifting perceptions of place
- Finding #2: Public space investments can catalyze overdue infrastructure improvements and ‘pave the way’ for additional private sector development
- Finding #3: Public spaces themselves can be powerful incubators for entrepreneurs and small businesses –but achieving that goal requires intentionality.

**Figure 3. Leisure and hospitality businesses in downtown Albuquerque, Buffalo, and Flint make up 4%, 23%, and 18%, respectively, of leisure and hospitality businesses citywide**

Leisure and hospitality business downtown compared to city, 2019



Source: Brookings analysis of Esri Business Analyst data.

**B** Metropolitan Policy Program  
at BROOKINGS

Example of shared lane markings

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# Appendix



**PUBLIC  
REALM**



Town of Dracut  
SME Consultation

**neighborwaysdesign**

**Improve safety and reduce delay at  
Lakeview Avenue and Pleasant Street**



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## Goals / Performance Indicators

### Goals

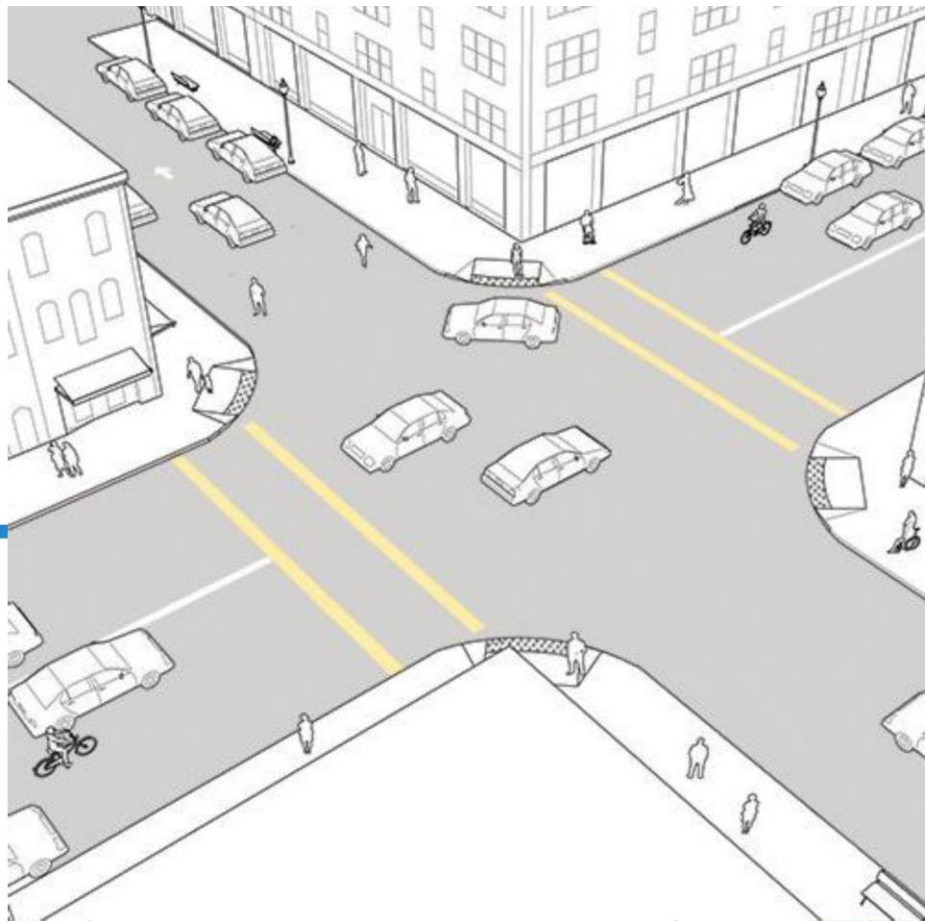
- Focus on SAFETY for all modes
- Upgrade all sidewalks and crossings to meet ADA compliance
- Reduce Delay

### Performance indicators

- Reduction in crashes
- Improved multimodal level of service
- Increase in people walking and biking
- *Placemaking?*
- *Fill vacant store fronts?*
- *Community participation - # of folks engaged in surveys and community meetings?*

## ADA Transition Plan

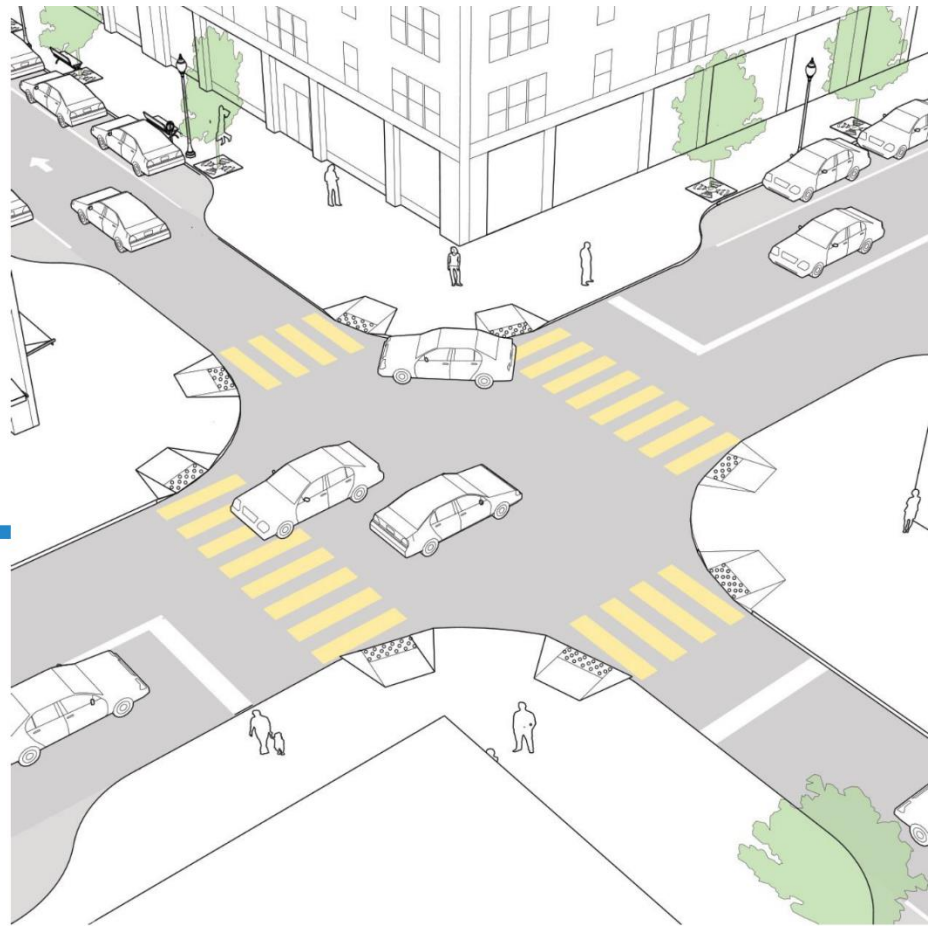
- Provide curb ramps for each direction of travel
- Relocate utilities and obstructions out of pedestrian path of travel





## ADA Transition Plan

- Provide curb ramps for each direction of travel
- Relocate utilities and obstructions out of pedestrian path of travel

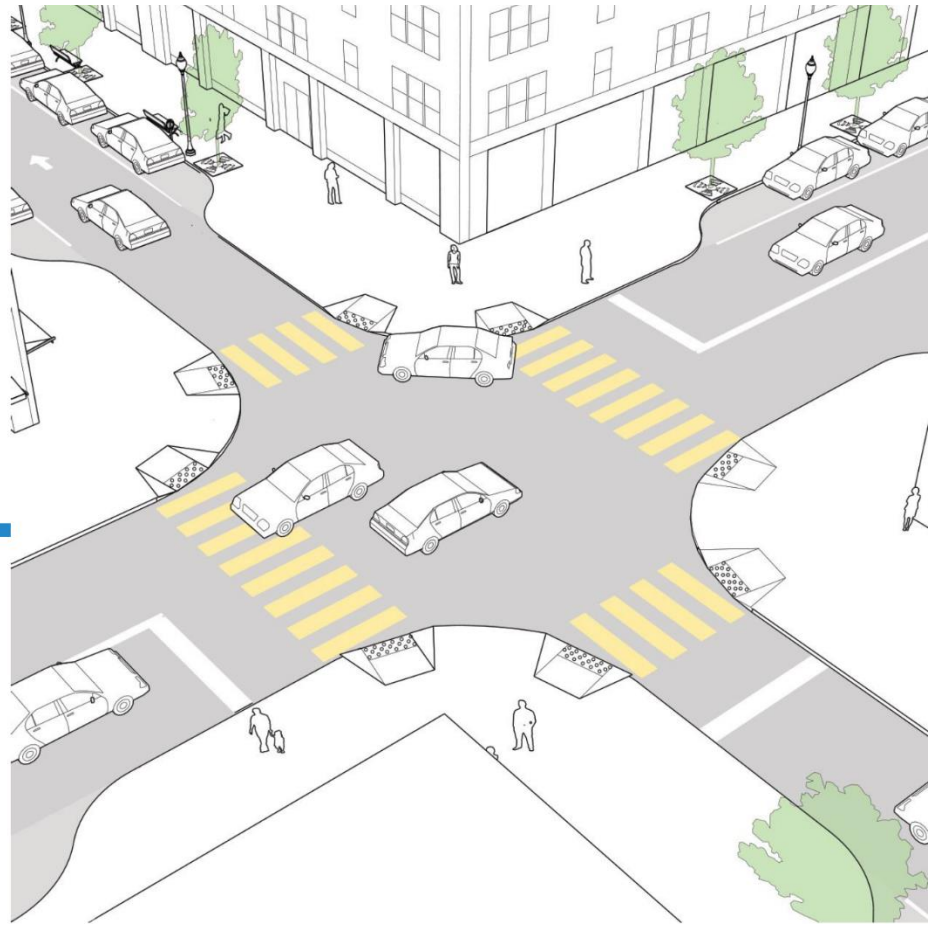


## Driveway and Access Management

- Reduce # of conflicts in intersection
- Close redundant driveways via planters and paint in short term,
- Long term reconstruct sidewalks
- Reduce turning radii via bike lanes

## ADA Transition Plan

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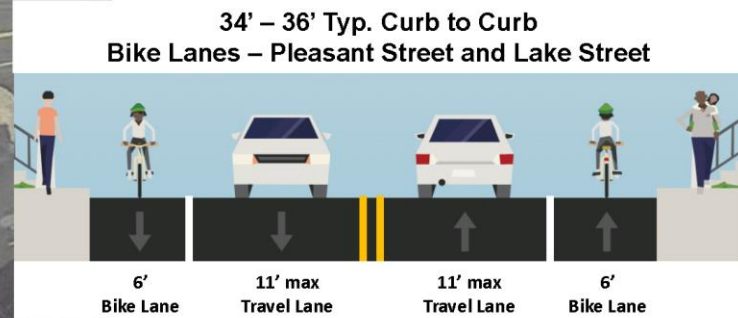
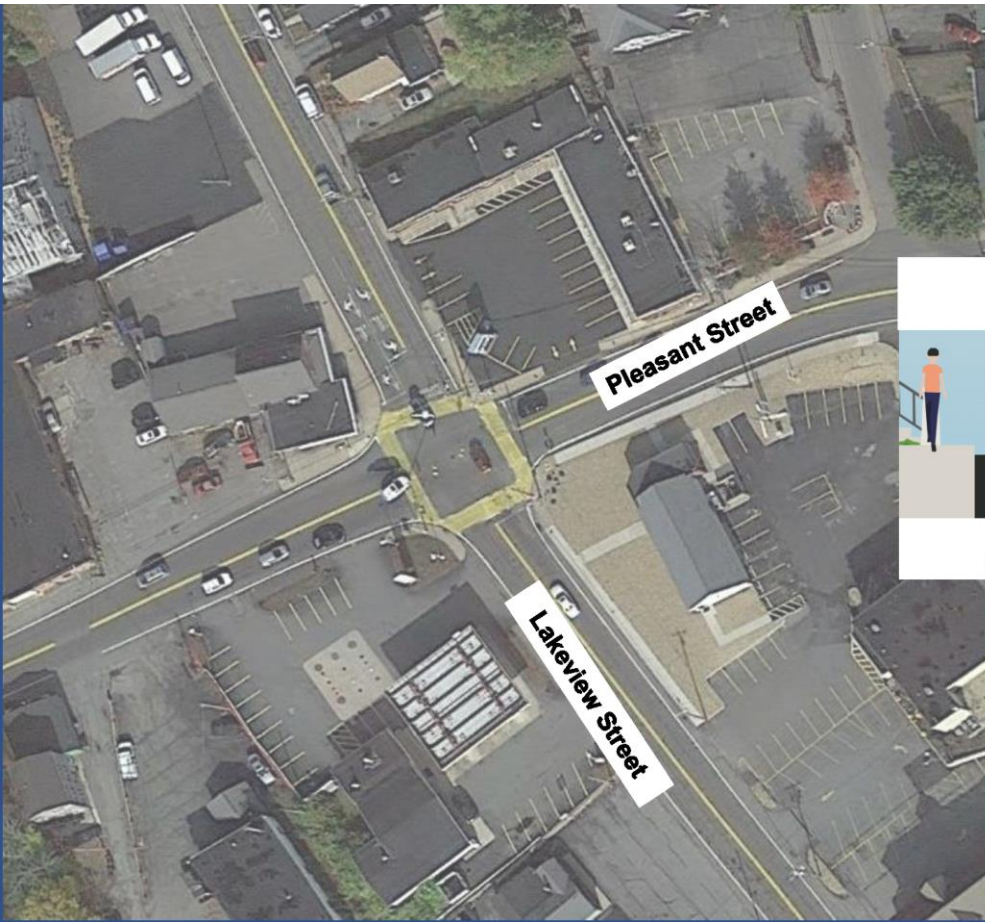
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## Signal Improvement Recommendations

- Update signals
  - Upgrade equipment and meet accessibility standards
  - Synchronize with signals along Lakeview Ave
  - Minimize cycle lengths to reduce delay for all modes
  - Evaluate turning movements and phases
  - Provide leading pedestrian intervals if concurrent phasing
  - Provide automatic detection for people walking, biking, and driving

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## Pavement Marking Recommendations

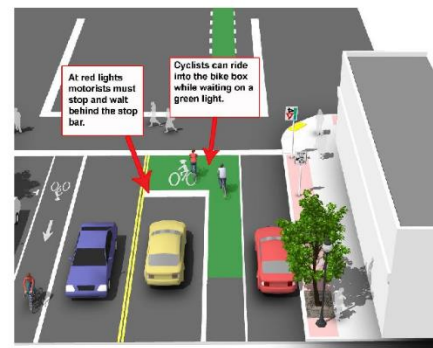
- Update Crosswalks to high visibility ladder style crosswalks or MUTCD compliant colored crosswalk
- Install bicycle lanes on approaches using maximum 11' travel lanes, minimum 4.5' bike lanes.
- Maintain dedicated bicycle facility through intersection where feasible
- Consider bicycle boxes and turn queue boxes
- Consider tan painted temporary sidewalks across driveway closures

## Partners and Resources

- Partners
  - Local walking and bicycle advocacy and trail groups
  - Main streets businesses / associations / chamber of commerce – **working on forming some type of Dracut Business Association**
  - Internal departments – tap into existing projects, maintenance contracts
- Resources
  - Federal Grants – ARPA.
  - [MassDOT](#)
    - [Statewide bicycle and pedestrian plans Update](#)
    - Complete Streets Grant program
  - MassDevelopment Grants
  - Massworks Grants
  - Developers
  - [LRRP Funding Resources](#)



Combined Bike lane / Turn lane



Bike Box at Intersection

## Examples of Roadway treatments for Traffic calming at intersections

Image Sources: Google Maps; Streetsblog SF; BikePGH

# Safety and Speeds



Source: FHWA's [Achieving Multimodal Networks Applying Design Flexibility & Reducing Conflicts](#), 2016



Shared Lane Marking with Green Box



Buffered Bike Lane where previously stopping lane

## Examples of Roadway treatments for cycling facilities

Image Sources: Google; Corvallis (OR)

**Thank you!**

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**neighborwaysdesign**



