Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Chester

This plan has been made possible with generous support from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

dhcd Massachusetts
RAPID RECOVERY PLANS

The Department of Housing and Community Development, through its community and business partners, provides affordable housing options, financial assistance, and other support to Massachusetts communities. We oversee different types of assistance and funding for consumers, businesses, and non-profit partners.

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The Planning Team would also like to thank the following individuals for participating as key stakeholders throughout the planning process:

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Jason Forgue, Board of Selectmen Clerk
Kathe Warden, Town Administrator
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Chester Rapid Recovery Committee

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Jessica Sakaske, Chester Historical Society
Emily Smith-Lee, President JLBA
Irv Williams, Littleville Fair

Table of Contents

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.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Rapid Recovery Planning Program

● Program Communities
○ Non-Participating Towns and Cities
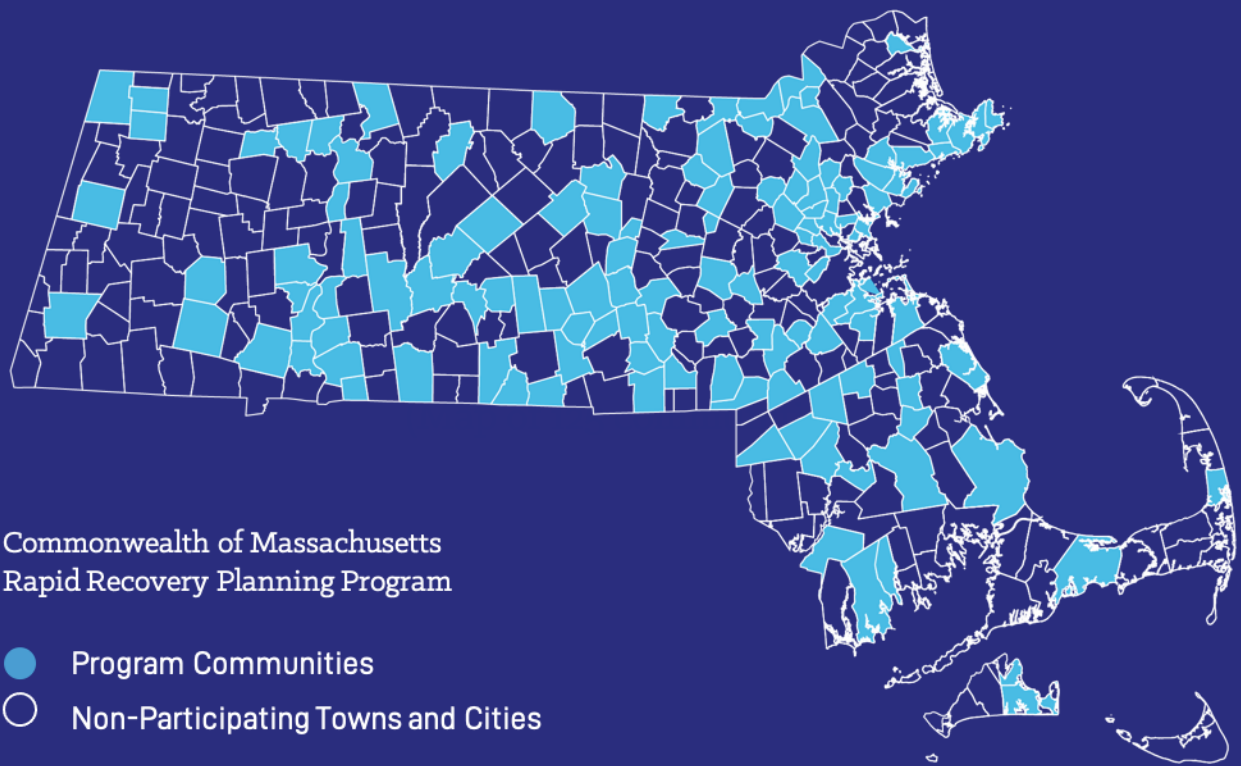
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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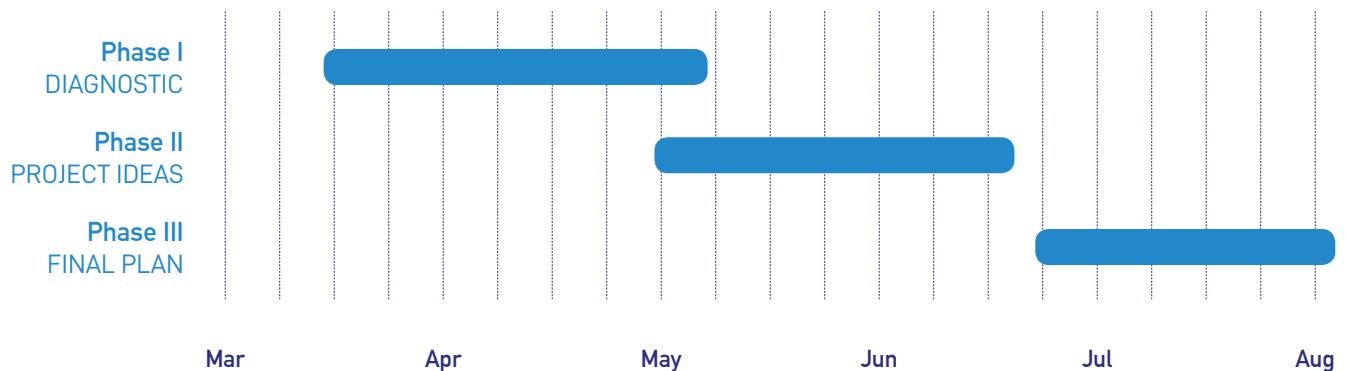
In Phase 1: Diagnostic, Plan Facilitators utilized the Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework that was adapted from the award-winning Commercial DNA approach as published by the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) in "Preparing a Commercial District Diagnostic", and authored by Larisa Ortiz,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

CUSTOMER BASE

Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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?

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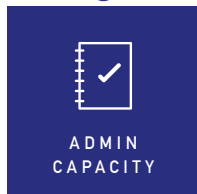
Who are the key stewards of the Study Area? Are they adequately staffed and resourced to support implementation of projects? Are the regulatory, zoning, and permitting processes an impediment to business activity?

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

Public Realm   Private Realm   Tenant Mix   Revenue & Sales   Admin Capacity   Cultural/Arts   Other

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

On Track for Growth

Chester is a small, but vibrant community with highly engaged civic leaders, business owners, and residents. The Village Center is a clearly defined area comprised of a diverse mix of retail and service businesses, restaurants, cultural organizations, government agencies and offices, recreational destinations, churches, and a residential neighborhood. While this report is primarily focused on the Village Center, several of the recommendations and proposed projects could apply to businesses throughout town.

Chester's railroad, mining, and agricultural history, along with its abundant outdoor recreation assets, form the foundation of the Town's identity. The Chester Downtown Walkability Assessment was completed in 2018, followed by a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness in 2021. This year also saw the Chester Railway Station and Museum, along with the Keystone Arches, receive the National Historic Landmark designation. For several years, the Town has been actively involved in discussions with Regional, State and Federal partners, and is poised to become a stop as part of the proposed East-West Rail development project. These important initiatives have converged to present a unique opportunity for transformative growth.

As is the case in most communities, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on virtually all segments of life in Chester, including the business, nonprofit, and government sectors. While assistance from the federal government has helped to mitigate financial losses, there is much left to do as the Chester business and nonprofit sectors continue to move toward full recovery.

This report is the culmination of a 6-month process beginning with a Diagnostic Phase from March through June, followed by a Planning and Development Phase from July through September. The process involved a broad cross-section of community members, business owners, and government officials who came together to form the Chester Rapid Recovery Planning (RRP) Committee. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) met with the committee throughout the process to facilitate discussion and solicit feedback. Additional engagement included one-on-one meetings, walk-throughs, interviews, and presentations. Many committee members gave generously of their time throughout the process, carefully reviewing proposed projects and providing invaluable comments and suggestions.

As the Project Plans were formulated, DHCD provided the opportunity for interaction with approved Subject Matter Experts (SME). The SME's met with PVPC as Plan Facilitator, as well as the RRP Committee. Their feedback and guidance were a critical part of the process and helped to confirm that the recommendations contained in this report comport with SME experience and best practices.

The five suggested Project Plans contained in this report represent a consensus of the RRP Committee and offer an integrated approach where the successful implementation of one project will help to enhance the success of other projects. It is important to point out that all Project Plans are dependent upon funding, as well as the community's capacity to implement recommendations within a proposed timeframe. The dates identified in each plan assume a best-case scenario where funds are available and sufficient resources exist to achieve goals. The success of each of these plans envisions the participation and engagement of municipal staff with a broad representation of community volunteers, advocates, and stakeholders. Further, funding to expand administrative capacity through the assistance of consultants and design firms should be carefully considered.

The Projects Plans are identified in the following chart, and represent a balanced combination of initiatives in the Public Realm, the Private Realm, Revenue & Sales, Culture/Arts, Tenant Mix, and Administrative Capacity. The projects interact well together, and may be implemented in a sequential manner or, in some instances, simultaneously.

	Project Name	Project Recommendation Category					
		Private Realm	Public Realm	Administrative Capacity	Revenue Sales	Culture Arts	Tenant Mix
1	*Formation of a Chester Business and Civic Association*	*	*	*	*	*	*
2	*Development of a Town-wide Brand*		*		*		
3	*Development of a Town-wide Signage and Wayfinding System*		*		*	*	
4	*Create a Historic and Cultural Walkway that Connects the Village Center*		*		*		
5	*Develop a Facade, Signage, and Physical Improvement Program*	*			*	*	*

NORTH

LRRP Focus Area 1 of 2

Feet
0   50 100 150 200

Miles
0   0.05

Chester, Massachusetts
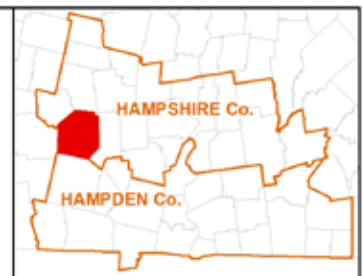
Local Rapid Recovery Program
Focus Area Map 1 of 2

Data Sources:
Town of Chester Massachusetts.
MassGIS, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

PVPC

Municipal Locator Map

Regional Locator Map

HAMPSHIRE Co.

HAMPDEN Co.

Project Map

Diagnostic

Key Findings

Chester Village's customer base is stable, but has the potential for growth

The Project Area serves a customer base of 1492 fulltime residents, 48 second homeowners, and several thousand annual tourists and visitors. The Town is located on a primary east-west road in the heart of the Berkshire foothills, connecting the Springfield metropolitan area with important Berkshire County destinations. Known as a destination for recreational, cultural, and historical activities, with a more defined and cohesive marketing effort, Chester has the potential to attract significantly more customers and support a wider range of business activity.

PHYSICAL
ENVIRONMENT
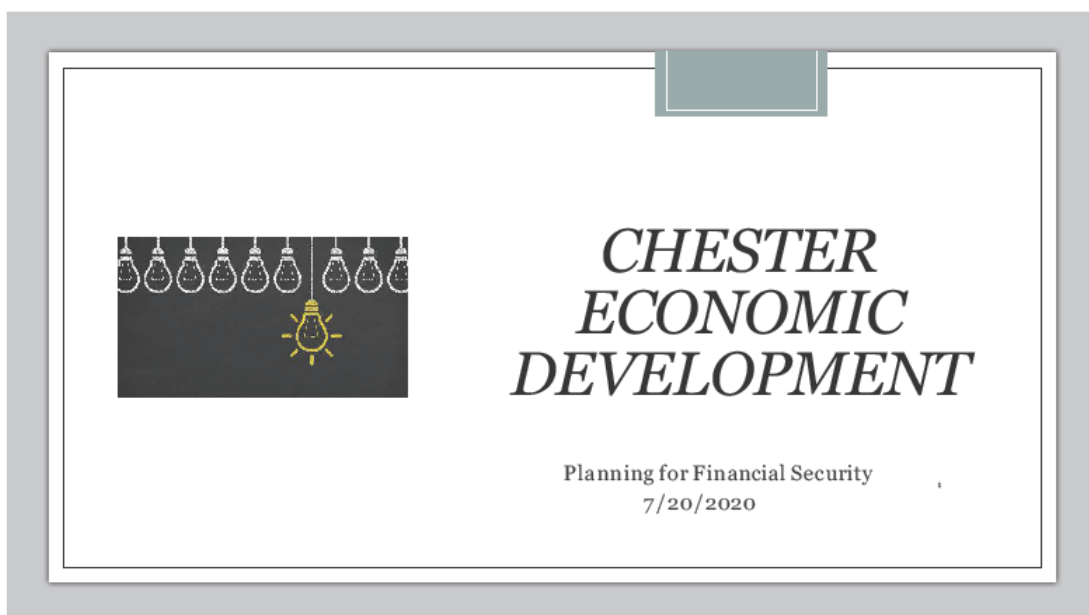
Public infrastructure is in reasonably good condition with notable exceptions

Sidewalks and crosswalks are in fair to good condition, but could be more creatively utilized to encourage business "spillover". Street trees and benches are sporadic. More consistent placement might result in more pedestrian activity. Signage and wayfinding are sufficient for basic travel needs, however more consistent and comprehensive signs would help to identify key assets and destinations. The Town received a Municipal Vulnerability Planning grant in September 2020 and released a Summary of Findings in June 2021. According to the report, the most pressing infrastructure deficiencies, related to climate change, are the need for redesign and improvements to culverts and bridges, including in the Village Center.

BUSINESS
ENVIRONMENT

Chester Village's business mix is primarily retail and service oriented

Most of the businesses in the Village Center are retail stores, services, and restaurants. Restaurant types include full service, breakfast/lunch, take-out, and bars. There are no fast-food establishments in the Project Area. There are no gas stations anywhere in Chester, with the closest gas or charging stations 10 miles to the east or 16 miles to the west of the Village Center. In addition to commercial business, the Project Area is home to

several nonprofit, cultural, religious, and governmental entities. Chester residents and other stakeholders have expressed an interest to better support existing businesses and look for opportunities to add new businesses, providing additional products and services. As the community grows, identified opportunities exist in retail, food service, tourism, and a broad range of services.

ADMIN
CAPACITY

The Center has no single downtown organization overseeing recovery efforts

Although there is no single organization in charge of the Project Area, several local and regional entities have interest in its future. There is currently tremendous synergy between Chester's stakeholders, including local business, nonprofits, the cultural and recreational communities, agriculture, and government. The opportunity and challenge for the Town will be to coordinate and collaborate with all of these entities to achieve shared goals. The formation of a business/civic association would have the potential to assist in that effort.

Key Stewards and Partners

- Although Chester does not have it's own Business Association, a number of entities are well-positioned to make it a better place to live, work and do business.

Highlights from the Market Information

CUSTOMER BASE

Demographic data was gathered for the Town of Chester and for the Project Area, which comprises the Village Center and includes a ½-mile radius around the actual project boundaries. The town-wide median household income is $84,248, and is comprised of somewhat older, long-time residents. as well as newer individuals and families. The median age is 45.8 years old, which is in line with other rural and suburban municipalities in the four western counties. Of the town-wide workforce of 103, approximately one third (33) live in the project area. The project area, like the rest of town, is predominantly non-Hispanic white (U.S. Census American Community Survey 2015-2019). No formal surveys were conducted, however most stakeholders interviewed wish for additional types of businesses, including general merchandise retailers, a grocery/general store, gift shops, a gas station, legal and financial services, small inns/lodges/motels, and additional food and beverage options. Strong sentiment exists to provide more local products and services that would attract families and children.

Highlights from the Physical Environment

OVERVIEW

The Chester Village Center physical environment begins roughly from Route 20 and the intersection with Maple Street on the eastern end to the intersection with Middlefield Road on the western end. The Project Area then continues back to the east along Main Street, past the Railway Station and Museum. The Chester Town Park to the east and the Hampden Street Park to the west form bookends and are both immediately adjacent to the Project Area. The Westfield River flows through the village, offering recreational opportunities. The residential neighborhood which is woven through the Village Center is largely comprised of modest homes that date back to the glory days of railroad development and mineral mining. The history of both of these industries is integral to Chester's past, present and future.

Project Area

The project area includes 21 properties that were counted as "storefronts" under the project guidelines. Many of them are not what one might traditionally think of as storefronts, such as office space or municipal buildings, but these entities were included as part of the project.

All elements were evaluated according to a set of criteria established by the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) along with Streetsense. MDI notes that it is important to bifurcate the physical environment into the public and the private realm to acknowledge the fundamentally different nature of the tactics and funding mechanisms available for each.

Total # 0f Storefronts	21
# of Vacant Storefronts	2
Total # of Businesses	19
# of Public & Parking Spaces	Approximately 400
Permanent Parks and Plazas	Chester Town Park Hampden Street park
Total Annual Visitors	About 10,000 (see below for details)

PUBLIC REALM

MDI specifies that the public realm includes common areas such as streets, sidewalks and public spaces that are typically under public ownership and may be managed and maintained by either the public sector or a nonprofit entity.

Sidewalks in most parts of Chester's Project Area are in fair condition, although some older sidewalks are in poor condition. This is typical for most communities, given that there is limited public funding for sidewalk upgrades. Sidewalk upgrades would accommodate better accessibility for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and families.

Roads are generally in good condition, although additional crosswalks (and possibly bike lanes) are needed. Signage is sufficient for basic travel needs, but does not identify or promote key assets and destinations for drivers and pedestrians. More consistent placement of street trees and benches, expanded use of crosswalks, and implementation of a more cohesive and creative signage and wayfinding program, would enhance and encourage pedestrian enjoyment and safety throughout the Project Area.

PRIVATE REALM

TThe private realm refers to buildings and storefronts that are typically owned by individuals or corporate entities. In Chester's project area, building facades are generally well-maintained. Most private signage is attractive and visible, however some signage is weathered and outdated and other locations are vacant or transitioning to new ownership, with new signage needed in the coming months.

As for "curb appeal," most stores and offices do not have outdoor displays or significant visibility into their locations.

Outdoor dining is limited primarily to the rear of restaurants, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most stores do not have awnings or outdoor lighting that illuminates the sidewalk.

A façade program, focused on exterior and interior physical improvements to private businesses and nonprofits, would complement proposed modifications and improvements in the public realm, and provide much needed assistance in stabilizing the private sector.

ACCESS & VISIBILITY

Access and visibility refer to the transportation network that offers customers convenient accessibility, whether by private vehicle, car share, foot, bike, or public transit, and the visibility of businesses to customers and passersby. Chester Village Center is easily accessible by car, bicycle and foot. There is currently no public transportation, however the Town has been actively promoting the Chester Railway Station as a passenger stop on the hoped for East West Rail project. Some unsafe pedestrian conditions and street crossings exist, and some sidewalks do not meet ADA accessibility criteria. Businesses directly on the street are visible, but it is difficult to distinguish between residences and businesses that are located in residential buildings. Updates in wayfinding, signage, facades, and lighting would greatly enhance the ability for potential customers and patrons to discover hidden gems that abound.

PARKS AND PLAZAS

Parks and plazas identified in this program are permanent spaces that are available for use year-round by the public. They are typically owned, managed, and/or programmed by the local Parks Department and/or another public or quasi-public entity. Chester has two parks in and adjacent to the project area. The Chester Town Park (4 acres) offers athletic fields and other recreational amenities. Hampden Street Park (9 acres) is a wooded parcel, offering a one-mile hiking loop, benches, picnic tables, and a pavilion. The trail connects to a much larger trail system.

The opportunity for additional plazas, pocket parks, and parklets exist throughout the Village Center.

Highlights from the Business Environment

The Town's draft Economic Development plan, prepared by the Finance Committee Chair in July 2020, identifies the following 5-year goals to improve the Town's financial security, including:

- Grow tax base by 20% by promoting business and residential growth

- Attract additional revenue sources, including cannabis facilities, solar fields, and Payment In Lieu Of Taxes from Littleville Lake

- Adopt a 5-year Capital Plan

- Revitalization of Main Street by assisting new and existing businesses

- Improved strategies to promote Chester attractions

- Ensure that Chester is included as a stop on an anticipated new east-west passenger rail line

ANCHORS/DESTINATIONS

There are no shopping centers, nationally recognized chain stores, or retail stores greater than 3000 square feet that typically attract customers from a wide area. Most visitors to Chester are attracted by the rich array of cultural, recreational, and historical attractions. The Town annually attracts more than 10,000 visitors, in addition to residents, to the Littleville Fairgrounds, Chester Theater Company, Chester Railway Station and Museum, Chester On Track, Chester Town Park, Littleville Lake, Westfield River, Keystone Arches and other hiking destinations, Chester Depot, Route 20 Visitor's Center, and Village Enterprise Center. All of these destinations are located in or near the Project Area. The Littleville Fairgrounds is host to the annual August fair and the Board of Directors is enthusiastic

about adding additional events to create a venue that is utilized year-round. The Railway Museum has a small but steady number of visitors, partly due to limited marketing and partly because it is unobtrusively tucked in on the opposite side of the train tracks from Main Street and does not have obvious signage directing visitors.

ASSET/BUSINESS MIX

Given the size of the Town, the Village Center has a broad mix of commercial, public, and civic uses that meet a wide range of needs. As mentioned, there are 21 storefronts with 19 businesses and 2 vacancies. Together these businesses provide approximately 400 parking spaces in the Town Center. Businesses are fairly spread out, and well-loved local venues are interspersed throughout the Village Center. Of the 21 active entities, 16% are small retail shops, 16% are owner operated food and beverage establishments, and 68% are service organizations, including automotive, tourism, a museum, hair salon, heating oil company, and law office. There is ample parking, however parking needs to be more clearly identified.

Three significant buildings at the intersection of Route 20, Middlefield Road, School Street, and Main Street are being actively discussed for potential alternative use and development. Town Hall is home to most municipal government activities and is also home to Chester Theater Company performances. The former Chester Elementary School is currently privately-owned, however property taxes are significantly in arrears and there is talk of the Town acquiring the building. One potential plan would be for municipal functions to be relocated and consolidated to the former school and for the current Town Hall to be sold to Chester Theater Company for their fulltime use. The third building is owned by the Hilltown Community Development Corporation and currently houses Hamilton Memorial Library, as well as 15 affordable housing units. The long-term plan for that building is not entirely determined, but could include additional businesses and/or residential apartments.

Total # 0f Storefronts	21
# of Vacant Storefronts	2
Total # of Businesses	19
# of Parking Spaces (on and off-sreet)	Approximately 400
Permanent Parks and Plazas	Chester Town Park Hampden Street park

It appears that no businesses have permanently closed due to COVID-19, although many did close temporarily and/or have had significant restrictions on operations. Two buildings, the A&L Market and Riverside Inn have been recently acquired for development. The A&L Market closed during Covid and did not reopen. The Riverside Inn has been vacant for decades, and is envisioned to be reopened as a bed and breakfast, as well as a venue for private functions.

NODES/CLUSTERS

Main Street is a clear node and destination, and connects the Railway Station and Museum at the eastern end of the project area to larger municipal buildings, churches, nonprofits, and mixed-use properties at the western end. The long-planned Chester Railway stop is becoming a reality. The Town has recently been informed by federal officials and Amtrak that a new station will be developed at the Chester site. A modern train station which recognizes the cultural history of Chester will completely change that area of town, spur business and economic development, and make Chester a primary destination for travelers, visitors and tourists.

A few of the buildings in the existing cluster at the western end of Main Street are in transition. The Town Hall, in addition to being the center of municipal government activity, is also the summer home to the Chester Theater Company. The historic former

Chester Elementary School is privately owned, however ownership is likely to revert back to the Town in the near future. As previously mentioned, Chester Commons is owned and managed by Hilltown Community Development Corporation and contains the Public Library and 15 affordable housing units. The Town and its stakeholders are in active discussion regarding future alternative uses of spaces in all three buildings.

Administrative Capacity Highlights

Administrative capacity in Chester is modest. There is no business association serving the Village Center, although a number of organizations consider it part of their service area. See below for a list of partners. Capacity is also limited within town government, with no town planner and minimal staff to take on additional projects. Creative funding sources and strategies will be necessary to implement and sustain most, if not all, LRRP projects. Existing and future Federal and State grant funds, including those related to pandemic relief and recovery (CARES, ARPA, CDBG etc.), should be considered to help in this effort and weighed against other pressing and competing municipal needs. The possibility of increasing administrative capacity through a regional or "shared services" arrangement with other municipalities should be seriously and carefully considered.

Partners and potential partners in Chester Recovery work include:

- Chester Town Government and Civic Leaders
- Chester Historical Society
- Local Businesses and Nonprofits
- Town Residents
- Jacobs Ladder Business Association
- Village Enterprise Center
- Gateway Hilltown Collaborative
- Hilltown CDC
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development
- Other municipalities through a regional or shared services arrangement

Project Recommendations

Form a Business and Civic Association (BCA) to Support the Chester Business Community, Facilitate a Village Center Beautification Project, and Provide Administrative Capacity to Assist Municipal Government

Category
Private Realm; Public Realm; Administrative Capacity; Revenue Sales; Cultural Arts; Tenant Mix

Location
Town of Chester

Origin
Chester Rapid Recovery Planning Committee with guidance from PVPC Plan Facilitators

Budget & Sources of Funding
Low Budget ($50,000)
- $10,000 - Formation of BCA
- $35,000 - Village Center Beautification Project
- $ 5,000 - To support ongoing efforts of the BCA, including Town branding

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
Assistance to small businesses includes loans, grants, in-kind assistance, technical assistance, or other services. These funds could cover assistance with the formation and/or design of the BCA when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regional Economic Development Council of Western Mass (REDO)
$5,000,000 was recently made available by DHCD to the 125 municipalities participating in the LRRP program. Chester submitted a $50,000 grant application to the REDO on September 23, including $10,000 to support formation of a BCA and $10,000 to support ongoing projects of the BCA through 6/30/22. Notification regarding approval of the request is expected in October, with funds available (if approved) in early November.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet
Best Practices Program
The Community Compact is a voluntary, mutual agreement entered into between the Baker-Polito Administration and individual cities and towns of the Commonwealth. In a Community Compact, a community will agree to implement at least one best practice that they select from across a variety of areas. The community's chosen best practice(s) will be reviewed between the Commonwealth and the municipality to ensure that the best practice(s) chosen are unique to the municipality and reflect needed areas of improvement. Once approved, the written agreement will be generated and signed by both the municipality and the Commonwealth. The Compact also articulates the commitments the Commonwealth will make on behalf of all communities. The FY22 Best Practice program opened on August 15th, 2021 and will remain open until available funds are exhausted.

While the possibility of a grant from this source may be a stretch, and would require support from the municipality, it could be worth investigating. Potential Best Practice categories identified on the State website that could be investigated include:

- Create Opportunities for Engaging Diverse Stakeholders in economic development efforts, such as to assist with identification of priority development projects, improve local permitting processes, and proactively address obstacles to housing accessibility and affordability as well as job creation.
- Create Cross-Sector Partnerships to help carry out community-driven responses to community-defined issues and opportunities for economic development.

Regional Business and Economic Development Associations
Funding or in-kind support from regional business and economic development associations should be investigated. The Jacobs Ladder Business Association, Gateway Hilltowns Collaborative, and Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts should all be contacted for potential support and participation in the project.

Timeframe	• October 2021: Announce the formation of a Business & Civic Association working group. The working group will be comprised of interested members of the RRP committee, as well as other interested stakeholders in the community. • November 2021: Determine if there is a need to engage a consultant to assist with formation of the BCA. • November/December 2021: Begin work to formalize the organization, including consideration for a possible application as a nonprofit corporation, development of bylaws, and/or partnership with the Jacobs Ladder Business Association. • December 2021: Begin planning for a Village Beautification Project to be completed by June 30, 2022. • December 2021: Begin work to create a website (or webpage on the JLBA or Town website) and social media platforms. • December 2021-June 2022: BCA to assist with Brand Development project. • March-April 2022: Launch BCA website (or webpage) and social media. • April-June 2022: Formalize the BCA with clear goals and objectives for future activity. • May 2022: Complete all or most of the Village Beautification project prior to the Chester On-Track festival.

Risk

Low risk. Chester is a small town with highly engaged and enthusiastic leaders and stakeholders. Government is very close to a large number of residents, and many people have a big stake in the successful completion of this project.

Key Performance Indicators

This project will be successful if:
• several members of the RRP Committee continue to participate and there is consistent increase in membership on the working committee, leading to awareness and interest in formation of the BCA
• the BCA is successful with execution/implementation of two projects prior to June 30,2022
• the BCA is established and continues to engage with municipal government to implement additional recommendations contained in the RRP Report
• the BCA and a Village beautification project are positively received by the community

Partners & Resources

• Chester Municipal Staff and Civic Leaders
• Chester Historical Society
• Chester Foundation
• Local Businesses and Nonprofit Organizations
• Town Residents and Property Owners
• Jacobs Ladder Business Association
• Gateway Hilltown Collaborative
• Village Enterprise Center
• Hilltown CDC
• Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

With a limited number of for profit and nonprofit businesses, Chester is a small, but vibrant community, with significant synergy between business, nonprofit, cultural, recreational, and governmental organizations. Impacts of COVID-19 have drastically and negatively impacted those businesses with much lower revenue, inability for expansion, and cancellation of most activities and events.

The BCA will benefit Chester in several ways, including facilitation of better communication, collaboration, coordination, networking, and "buy-in" across a diverse group of community stakeholders from the business, nonprofit, recreation, arts and culture, and agriculture sectors. Further, Chester has limited administrative capacity within its municipal government structure to tackle additional projects. A newly formed BCA will enhance the ability for the Town to successfully execute the recommendations contained in this report.

The RRP Committee has clearly identified continued revitalization and development of the Village Center as the overriding goal of the RRP process. All of the projects contained in this report are intended to facilitate this goal, both in the public and private realm. Focus on the nearly 200-year-old Railway Station and the looming return of an active rail stop in Chester after decades of dormancy is a key pillar of redevelopment. The Station, which now functions as a museum, and the associated Keystone Arches, were declared a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Park Service earlier this year. In recent years, and particularly in the last 18 months, significant media attention has been paid to Chester and its connection to railway history.

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts (cont'd)	Chester On Track, which celebrates Chester's railway history, is an annual springtime festival that attracts as many as 10,000 attendees in a single day. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival was cancelled in 2020 and was a virtual event in 2021. Planning has actively begun to bring the festival back in person in May 2022. Given the substantial attention paid to Chester in recent months and rebirth of a major festival in the near future, the RRP's decision to focus its energy and resources on a Village Beautification program is both timely and will serve send a strong message to residents and visitors that Chester is on the move.

As mentioned in the Budget and Sources of Funding section of this plan, the Town was invited by DHCD to apply for funding to implement a portion of the recommendations in this report. The beautification portion of this budget is in no way intended to address all needs, wants, and wishes. Rather, it is a small, but significant down-payment on the long-term goals for Village Center development. The PVPC submitted a grant application on September 23, 2021, on behalf of the RRP Committee, requesting $50,000 in funding as follows.
- $10,000 - Formation of BCA
- $35,000 - Village Center Beautification Project
- $ 5,000 - To support ongoing efforts of the BCA through 6/30/22

Action Item

The project(s) will involve the following steps, more precisely defined above under Timeframe and below under Process.
1. Identify who, in addition to RRP Committee members, should be involved in the project, including business and property owners, nonprofit and cultural organizations, local artists, civic leaders, and the community at large.
2. Develop the criteria for development, approval, and implementation.
3. Develop the funding and oversight structures.
4. Proceed with development and implement of the project(s).
5. Upon completion of the project, consider next steps.

Partners & Resources

Phase 1: Planning
- Convene a committee: Identify and bring together key stakeholders.
- Identify key goals and confirm key performance indicators for the project.
- Identify up to $10,000 of funding and in-kind support to assist with planning (Phase 1) and development (Phase 2) of the BCA.
- Identify up to $35,000 of funding and in-kind support to assist with planning (Phase 1) and development (Phase 2) of a Village Beautification Project (VBP).
- Research: Investigate the structure, goals, activities, and results of other BCA's and VBP's
- Present findings to the community: Determine specific goals and desired improvements based on community feedback from a variety of constituencies (business, recreation, arts/culture, government). Invite community members to join the BCA and/or participate in the beautification project.

Phase 2: Project Development and Design (BCA)
- Administrative capacity: Develop the roles and responsibilities for the BCA, including how the association will engage and assist municipal government.
- Create a BCA website/webpage to function as a key resource to promote businesses, civic organizations, and community events. This will serve as a key resource for community-wide marketing and will integrate with social media platforms.
- Identify additional RRP project opportunities: Review other RRP project recommendations prioritized to receive support from the BCA
- Determine the need for additional funding/resources: How will the BCA become financially sustainable?

Phase 2: Project Development and Design (VBP)
- Identify RRP project opportunities: RRP Projects supporting beautification of the Village Center should be reviewed by the BCA, discussed with municipal staff, appointed and elected municipal representatives, and prioritized to receive support from the BCA.
- Administrative capacity: Develop the roles and responsibilities for the BCA to assist with the VBP, including how the association will engage and assist municipal government.
- Determine the need for additional funding/resources: Is additional funding needed to complete the project in the short-term (prior to 6/30/22). What longer term beautification efforts should be considered? How might any of these considerations be integrated into other RRP plans (Façade Improvement, Branding, Signage and Wayfinding, Walkable and Accessible Village Center)?

Phase 3: Programming to Encourage Development of the Village Center
- Host an inaugural community celebration: Ideas, such as a block party, public art activity, outdoor recreation meetup, music festival, community tag sale, and more, should be entertained. Community events should be sponsored by the BCA at least quarterly. Refer to the Walkable Village Center project plan for more detailed recommendations.

Best Practices

The LRRP Best Practices Compendia do not specifically detail formation of a BCA. Included below is a Best Practice outlining formation of a Business Improvement District, as well as a link to an example of a highly successful BCA in Hopkins, MN.
Admin Compendium - Hudson - Form a Bid.pdf
https://www.thinkhopkins.com/

The following is a Best Practice idea that integrates storefronts and a culture/arts project that might be considered to support a beautification project. Storefront art could be a temporary short-term project (for instance as part of Chester On Track) or longer term.
C+A compendium - Worcester Interactive Storefronts.pdf

This example combines Branding, Placemaking and Public Art.
C+A compendium - Chelmsford Branding, Placemaking, Public Art.pdf

Development of a Brand with a Goal of Incorporating into Town-wide Signage, Wayfinding and Marketing Plans

Category	Public Realm; Revenue Sales
Location	Village Center with inclusion of outlying areas
Origin	Chester Rapid Recovery Planning Committee with guidance from PVPC Plan Facilitators
Budget & Sources of Funding	Low Budget ($5,000-$15,000 assuming this project is completed primarily in-house)

Low Budget ($5,000-$15,000 assuming this project is completed primarily in-house)
The budget can fluctuate based on the scope of services desired, needs of the Town, and the schedule for the deliverables. A budget for implementation of the new brand should be assessed as well, and most implementation costs are not included in what is outlined here (other than print or digital collateral). The new brand will have to be applied across a variety of different instances, including creation of new materials like stationery, infographics and signage.

Consensus on the RRP Committee indicates that the Town, with potential assistance from the newly formed Business and Civic Association (BCA), will likely choose to implement most or all of this project in-house without hiring a consultant. Should the Town decide to hire a consulting/design firm to assist with brand launch/implementation, a retainer agreement with the firm could be highly beneficial to a new brand launch.

Below is a list of services with an estimated range of associated costs to help with the estimation of cost for the project. Advice provided by Selbert Perkins Design (SME) suggests that the Town should be highly selective in determining the range of services (if any) to include in the budget.
- Brand Strategy $5-$10K
- Stakeholder engagement (interviews) $5 – $15K
- Public Engagement (survey – online or in person) $10K – $20K
- Logo/Identity Design $15 – $25K
- City/Town Seal $15 – $25K
- Brand extension – supporting visuals $10K – $20K
- Print or digital collateral - $5K – $50K
- Brand Guide - $5 – $20K

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 sign upgrades when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and DHCD
District Local Technical Assistance Grant
Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and 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. Wayfinding/Signage and Façade Improvement projects are also contemplated in this report, among others. Should the Town engage PVPC for other LRRP projects, administrative assistance with branding may also make sense.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet
Best Practices Program
The Community Compact is a voluntary, mutual agreement entered into between the Baker-Polito Administration and individual cities and towns of the Commonwealth. In a Community Compact, a community will agree to implement at least one best practice that they select from across a variety of areas. The community's chosen best practice(s) will be reviewed between the Commonwealth and the municipality to ensure that the best practice(s) chosen are unique

Budget & Source of Funding (cont'd)

to the municipality and reflect needed areas of improvement. Once approved, the written agreement will be generated and signed by both the municipality and the Commonwealth. The Compact also articulates the commitments the Commonwealth will make on behalf of all communities. The FY22 Best Practice program opened on August 15th, 2021 and will remain open until available funds are exhausted.

Potential Best Practice categories identified on the State website that could be investigated include:
- Create Opportunities for engaging diverse stakeholders in economic development efforts, such as to assist with identification of priority development projects, improve local permitting processes, and proactively address obstacles to housing accessibility and affordability as well as job creation.
- Create Cross-Sector Partnerships to help carry out community-driven responses to community-defined issues and opportunities for economic development.

Funding related to regional business and economic development associations, as well as Town funds might also be investigated.

Timeframe

- 10/21-11/21: Form a committee comprised of municipal staff, local business owners, and nonprofit organizations to investigate and initiate a branding project for the benefit of the Town and all interested stakeholders.
- 10/21-11/21: Secure funding for the project
- 10/21-11/21: Determine the full scope of the project. This document serves as an important baseline for the project, identifying a timeline, budget, stakeholders, goals and deliverables for the branding exercise.
- 10/21-11/21: Determine if a design firm is needed. If the answer is yes, a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit the services of a design firm will be needed.
- 11/21-12/21: Advertise and hire a design firm to act as project manager and consultant (subject to funding and determination that a DF is needed).
- 11/21: Determine a Brand Manager. This person will be the representative from the community responsible for acting as liaison to all parties involved with the project, managing the project as it develops, and then evolving into directing brand users to the correct usage of files, and maintaining the brand standards. This person should be either municipal staff or an individual who is highly engaged with the Business and Civic Association, and should be at every meeting
- 12/21-5/22: Proceed through the branding process phases as described in the Best Practices Guide included with this report.
- 6/22: Conclude project with the creation of the presentation of the brand guide during a public meeting. The presentation should serve as preliminary training for key stakeholders to how the brand and brand guide are to be used.
- Ongoing: Once the project is completed, all municipal, commercial, and nonprofit entities in Town should be invited to utilize the brand as outlined in the brand guide.

Risk

Low risk. Chester is a very small town with highly engaged and enthusiastic leaders and stakeholders. Government is very close to a large number of residents, and many people have a big stake in the successful completion of this project. The only plausible risk to a branding effort would be a negative public perception of a new municipal brand. This can be avoided by including the public in the process through surveys and public presentations.

Key Performance Indicators

This branding project will be successful if:
- Chester's newly established brand, slogan, and logo are broadly used in all or most communication coming from local government, the business and nonprofit community, and the arts and recreation community, resulting in the majority of Chester's residents being able to identify and articulate the community's new identity.
- a creative and consistent wayfinding system is implemented, as part of a subsequent project, that incorporates all elements of the branding effort, including in-town and digital/online messaging.
- Brand elements are broadly and consistently used on community websites, contributing to more effective marketing efforts.
- there is a noticeable and quantifiable year over year increase in visitors to town beginning in the Fall of 2022.
- Inquiries from "out of towners" regarding visiting or potentially moving to town increase by at least 15% by Summer of 2023.
- year over year attendance at existing community-wide events and festivals increases beginning in 2022.
- there is an increase in the number of businesses in town, including the Village Center, beginning no later than 2023.

Partners & Resources

- Municipal staff (Town Administrator, Administrative Assistant, Planning and/or Economic Development)
- Chester SelectBoard and Civic Leaders
- Chester Business and Civic Association (pending creation as an LRRP project)
- Property & business owners
- Nonprofit organizations
- Local Artists or Cultural Organizations
- Jacobs Ladder Business Association
- Gateway Hilltowns Collaborative
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

Chester is a small, but vibrant community, with significant synergy between business, nonprofit, cultural, recreational, and governmental organizations. Impacts of COVID-19 have drastically and negatively impacted those businesses with much lower revenue, inability for expansion, and cancellation of most activities and events.

The Town "brand" has been evolving over a period of time, with various logos, colors and taglines in use on some platforms and media. The most prominent taglines in active use are "Gem of the Valley" and "Hub of the Hilltowns". With a population of about 1,400 people, Chester is small enough to involve most of the townspeople in a process designed to achieve broad consensus around community identity and values. This "team building" exercise can then serve the community going forward to work in an effective and collaborative way toward achieving shared goals.

If the Town decides to consider hiring a design firm, any discussion with a prospective firm should include an in-depth discussion about the public process. The town should provide any relevant documentation to the prospective firm for review, and then meet to ensure the design firm understands the future goals for the town.

Given the aging demographics of Chester, R&D based exclusively on a technology driven approach would likely omit a large population of the town. Surveys and communication should be done in a hybrid manner, utilizing in-person public gatherings as well as digital and virtual formats. The design schedule should outline when the firm plans on hitting major milestones. These milestones should correlate with public meeting schedules, and presentations should be prepared that facilitate various forms of engagement to collect feedback.

Given the town's size and needs, a wordmark approach to the logo, as opposed to a logomark should be seriously considered. This means the town's effective "logo" would be a stylized version of the town's name. By isolating an approach to design prior to the process, the town can save some budget by not processing alternative approaches.

The identity that results from the design process should be done with the scale of the town in mind, first and foremost. Chester is small – and while it's needs are not small the design team needs to constantly be mindful of this. The deliverables need to reflect the scale of the Town to keep the budget low.

A successful branding process has the potential to serve the Town and its residents in several ways, including:
- engaging a broad cross-section of the community in achieving consensus about identity, values, and goals.
- heightening community pride and awareness among Town residents.
- providing a baseline of valuable graphic assets and marketing tools that can be used to achieve more impactful and successful signage, wayfinding, and marketing programs.
- assistance to businesses and organizations who choose to participate in some level of co-branding, thereby providing greater synergy and sense of community.
- effectively communicating to visitors and potential visitors what the Town is all about.

Action Item

The project will involve the following steps, more precisely defined above under Timeframe and below under Process.

1. Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
2. Identify who needs to be part of this process and engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.
3. Develop the criteria for application, approval, and implementation.
4. Develop the funding and oversight structures.

Process

With guidance from subject matter expert (SME) Cory DePasquale of Selbert Perkins Design, the following process guidelines are recommended and should be seriously considered.

The Process of Developing a Brand
Developing a brand for the town is a bold undertaking – one that requires a few standard elements to ensure a successful outcome. We'll start with identifying key players:

1. Identify Key Players
   - The Design Firm/Studio is the group contracted to complete the work. They can provide the Town with pricing proposals before officially contracted for work, and once signed to the project will complete the deliverables and be a valuable partner following completion of the brand project moving forward. Note: At this time, there is consensus among Chester RRP Committee members that a design will not be needed to assist with most or all of this project.
   - The Brand Project Manager This person will be the representative from the community responsible for acting as liaison between all parties involved with this project, managing the project as it develops, and then evolving into directing brand users to the correct usage of files, and maintaining the brand standards. This person could be either municipal staff or an individual who is highly engaged with the Business and Civic Association, and should be at every meeting.
   - Stakeholders are key members of the community and municipal staff that will have a larger impact when it comes to decisions. They should be included when the Design firm requests their input.
   - Constituents are residents of the community and should be considered throughout the entire process, but invited for input at key milestones. Too much feedback can be detrimental to the process.
   - PVPC, as the Regional Planning Agency, can work with the municipality on the program, as requested and subject to funding.

2. Develop Plan Scope or RFP
   The first step in the process of branding is developing a Plan Scope (for in-house use) or Request for Proposals (RFP) (if a design firm is needed). This document will serve as an important baseline for the project, identifying a timeline, budget, stakeholders, goals and deliverables for the branding exercise. Design firms will respond to your RFP with proposals for no fee. The Town will then review the proposals, and select (or not) a firm they are most comfortable with. The Town should look for firms with strong client history, reasonable budgets, and a deliverable schedule that meets the requirements.

3. Going Through the Phases
   Any design firm submitting a proposal will respond with an outline of how they intend to complete the project. The more detail in their proposal the better, but each proposal should outline the design phases, how many hours in each phase, and at least a rough schedule to illustrate how they intend to structure the project. Whether the Town chooses to hire a design firm or replicate the project using primarily in-house resources, the following phases, with some variation, for a successful project are strongly suggested.

   A. Research & Discovery – This phase will likely be one of the longest, but is the most important. Setting the stage with the right information, stakeholders, project team, communication standards and any recent reports or master plans gives the design firm a solid foundation to build on. The amount of time and budget required for this phase will be, in part, dependent on the amount of public participation the Town would like to accommodate.
   B. Concept Direction – After the research is pulled in and digested, the design firm will share a very basic idea of the potential directions the first phase has pointed them towards, and ask for validation. Feedback is very important in the early phases of this process, so open, direct communication and a transparent process are critical.
   C. Visual Language – The design team then develops the accessories to the new logo. Color, image style, copy tone/voice, tagline(s), are all the details that help make a brand succeed, and by determining them prior to the logo, the brand should start to have a feeling that is familiar and in line with the goals.
   D. Logo Design & Refinement – This phase takes all of the details and starts to put an identity to the community. The design firm should present a set number of options as reflected in their proposal. The brand concept that has the most potential should be selected for refinement.

Process (cont'd)

E. User Testing & Refinement – This phase of refinement should be based in sharing the concept with stakeholders and asking for commentary, all of which will be reviewed for integrity and relevance. The design team will weigh the feedback, and revise the brand concept accordingly and share another presentation of their findings.

F. Brand Guide Development – Once a final logo has been selected from the refinement phase, the design team should then begin preparing the brand guide. This document is organic and will develop over time, but should include standards for how and when the brand is used. The guide should be issued in both digital and printed version is also recommended for the staff to use as a guide while the brand is starting to be used in communications.

A brand guide will vary in length, but should show at the least:
- Logo in color
- Logo in black & white/ high contrast
- Any variations in format
- Clear space to be maintained around the logo
- Any taglines that have been adopted for use with the logo, marketing efforts, stationary, or signage and wayfinding
- Colors in detail – codes, hex values or pantones to be accurately reproduced
- Applications of the logo being used appropriately
- Examples of applications of the logo being used incorrectly
- Index of files – a list of files of the logo in its different iterations and colors

After completion of the brand guide, the design firm should still be a valuable contact for the team. New use cases may sometimes require new logo types or your team may want additional resources (letterhead, digital seal, signage & wayfinding) that the design firm could continue to develop. The Town should pick a creative design firm that delivers professional presentation and can hold to a schedule. As is the case with more traditional construction projects, periodic maintenance and updating

Best Practice

Create a way-finding theme based on the community's seaside location

PUBLIC REALM

Provided by SME Consultant   Mark Favermann, Favermannn Design

Location   Well, ME

Origin	Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen
Budget	Medium–$30,000 design fee + $80,000 for implementation
Timeframe	Short- 8 months for design and planning
Risk	Low
Key Performance Indicators	Installation and use of signage, Functionality of signage
Partners & Resources	Town of Well, Maine

Diagnostic

- Wells, Maine is a seaside community in Southern, Maine. It is located between the two more affluent communities of Ogunquit and Kennebunkport.

- Besides being a summer seaside resort , it is a fishing village and lobster boat harbor as well as being the site of the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge.

- There is no concentrated downtown area. Instead commercial businesses are spread along US Route 1 or Post Road in Wells.

- The town administration felt that the town needed a branding and wayfinding sign system that also had applications for internal communications and even street furniture and public art.

- A national competition was administered, and Favermann Design was designated the consultant.

- Our firm did a visual survey of the various parts of the community including ways to the beach, commercial activities and feeder streets and roads.

- Historic buildings, structures and various types of estates and campuses were reviewed.

- An advisory committee was appointed by the town administrator to discuss and review project components.

Action Item

- Meetings with the Advisory Committee were scheduled over the next four (4) months.

- Utilizing existing conditions, community history and natural areas, each meeting looked at another aspect of the program.

- Locations were explored in terms of decision points and directional element considerations.

- After accessing needs, street furniture design versions were explored.

- Public art was looked at as potential focal point and visual markers.

- Local capability for fabrication was reviewed and discussed.

- New and existing public buildings, signage needs were considered

- Colors were tested and explored
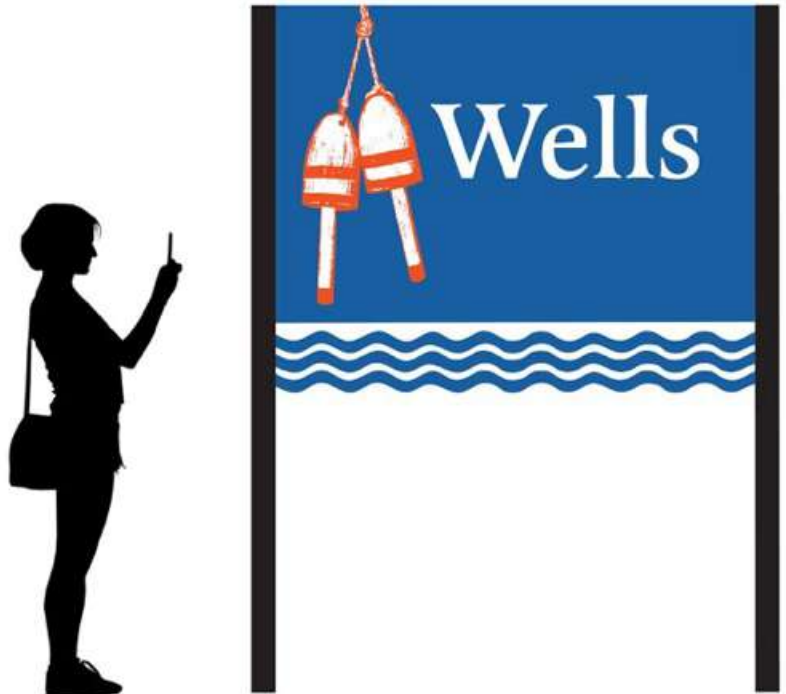
Precedent: Lobster buoys.

Process

- After photo documentation, a comprehensive community design alternative element presentation was made to the advisory committee.

- This was followed up a few weeks later with a presentation of past case studies created and developed for other communities.

- An *Ideation Exercise* followed a few weeks later that thoughtfully looked at ways to describe the "brand" of Wells by words and phrases.

- The Advisory Committee fully participated in this ideation exercise. It fostered a sense of ownership by the participants.

- From the *Ideation*, a number of alternative designs were created. These were then presented to the Advisory Committee for review and refinement.

- Once a couple of design directions were approved, Creative development proceeded for a number of sign element examples including for "beach rules" and a number of studies for street furniture.

- Beach Rules included pre-season regulations that restricted activities that could endanger the threatened Plowing Plover who lays their eggs on the Wells' beaches in the Spring.

- Dog regulations and horseback riding rules were also included in Beach Rules. Symbols were set parallel to word descriptions.

- Photoshop versions were set in place for discussion of signage, street furniture and public art markers.

- Street furniture explorations included themed benches, kiosk, bike racks and trolley stops.

- Design options were developed into families of elements.

- A vendor list was developed based on appropriate fabricator/installers in both Maine and Massachusetts.

- Cost estimates were developed in collaboration with fabricators/installers.

- Public art suggestions were scrutinized by the Advisory Committee.

- A map of locations for sign element placement was created in collaboration with the Advisory Committee.

- A full set of sign element and street furniture pieces fabrication specifications were created for bidding.
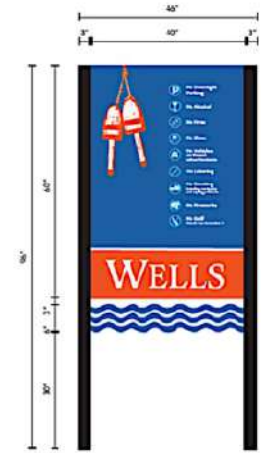
Plowing Plover bird on Wells Beach in the springtime next to the beach rules on the sign.
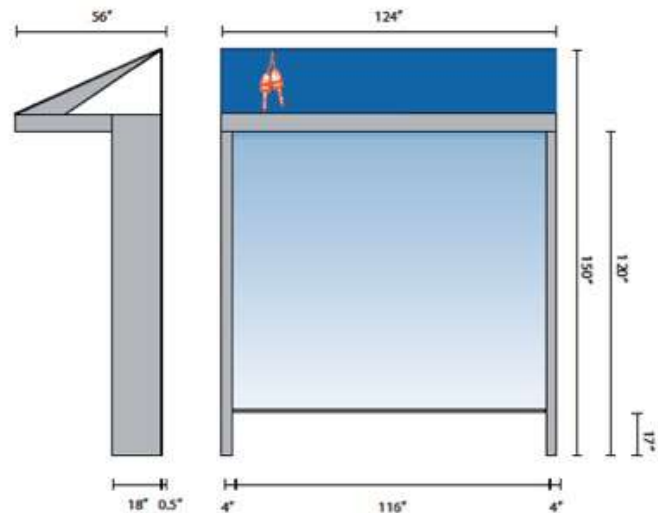
The trolley stop between Ogunquit and Kennebunkport.

Process – Strategic Decisions

- The decision by Town of Wells to start the process

- The appointment of strategic stakeholders to the Advisory Committee representing a cross-section of strategic interests

- Review of commercial sign program sponsored by State of Maine found program uneven, not maintained and detracting from the environment/landscape

- The graphic design chosen by the advisory Committee was two lobster buoys set on the left side of the panel.

- The colors chosen for the system of wayfinding elements were a turquoise and a Cadmium Red.

- Street furniture and gateway/entrance sign elements was to have wavy elements symbolic of the ocean.

- Sculpture was to be made from polished aluminum or steel.

- The designs were shared in the Town administrator's weekly newsletter to residents and businesses.

- A presentation was made to the Wells Select board for discussion and tacit approval of the total design package.

- Recommendations were made for branding to be applied to Wells internal communication including newsletter, stationery, agendas, etc.

- A decision was made to develop elements that connected with the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge and significant historic structures in town.

- Discussion was held about a phased implementation of the Wayfinding and signage system.

- A thoughtful decision was made to use Maine-based vendors.

J
INSTRUCTIONAL

GRAPHICS
Dimensions: 40" x 60"
Material: Aluminum panel 2mm thick (or per suggestion of fabricator)
Print: Full color print on adhesive vinyl
All major white vinyl lettering is reflective
Anti-graffiti coating
Colors: Red (Pantone 172C), Blue (Pantone 301C), Light Blue (Pantone 305C)
Font: Latienne Pro Medium, Bicyclette Bold

STRUCTURE
Posts: 3" square posts metal capped
Baked Enamel Finish: Pantone Black C
Paint applied to all sides; must have 8 year guarantee
Sign Fabricator to make recommendations on installation to adhere to MaineDOT standards and specifications
Must verify overall dimensions and orientation in the field
Vendor will make recommendations to affix panel to posts
Footings to be recommended by installer
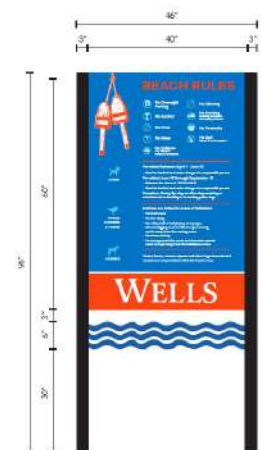
To meet overall activation goals downtown, two locations were targeted for public space events and activities.

Desired Outcomes

- A full set of detailed fabrications specifications was created for vendors to make proposals and to fabricate wayfinding and sign elements as well as street furniture units.

- The wayfinding elements included sculpture as "landmarks" in a Kevin Lynch way that were to serve as external reference points.

- The themed street furniture also had sculptural qualities marrying form and function with aesthetics.

- The notion of the Wells brand was to make the town more of a destination than just a pass-through place on the Southern coast of Maine.

- The Wells brand visually spoke to the hominess of the community and hard-working residents.

- Signs were designed to be durable, easily maintained and cost-effective. Replacement if damaged was easily done as well.

Add-ons

- The "brand" could be applied to many saleable objects such as T-shirts, mugs, sweatshirts, caps, etc.

- Revenue from the sale of these items could pay for the system of wayfinding and sign elements and/or maintenance.

- An expensive, but "brand" reinforcement piece could be a "Beach Pass" for residents. This would replace existing less colorful beach passes.

- Signs recognizing the line between Kennebunkport and Ogunquit and Wells could be strong identifiers for the community.

- A gateway sign leaving the Maine Turnpike and entering Wells would welcome and visually embrace visitors.

- The Wells branding and wayfinding and sign element program is only constrained by budget and community follow-through.
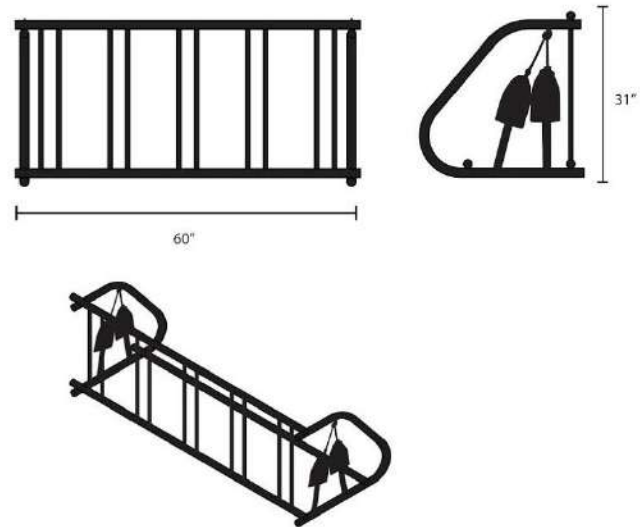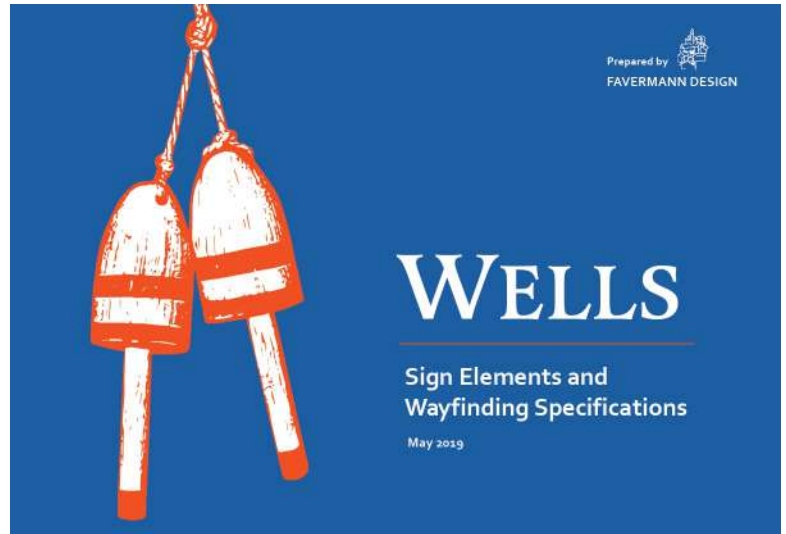
Create a way-finding system to help reinforce the downtown experience

PUBLIC REALM

Provided by SME Consultant   Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Location   Wakefield, MA

Origin	Town of Wakefield
Budget	Medium– approximately $80,000 (kiosk only; additional elements to cost $30,000)
Timeframe	Short – planning and implementation in 3-1/2 months
Risk	Medium --political will, lightning caused devastating fire, unjustified NIMBYism and lack of community transparency
Key Performance Indicators	Continued use by visitors and residents
Partners & Resources	Wakefield Main Streets, Town of Wakefield, Mass Legislature, Wakefield Police Department, Wakefield Public Library, Wakefield Historical Commissionand Wakefield DPW

Diagnostic

The Town of Wakefield is a north of Boston middle-income suburban community. Most residents work outside of Wakefield and commute to work. There are two MBTA Commuter rail stations in Wakefield—Wakefield Center and Greenwood.

There was no universally accepted brand or wayfinding system for the Town of Wakefield.

On the edge of Wakefield Center, Lake Quannapowitt is a popular setting for walkers, joggers, bikers, and in-line skaters off Route 128 in Middlesex County. It is the site of many organized races from 5Ks to Ultra Marathons. However, rarely do outside visitors travel beyond the lakeside the 200 yards to the Town of Wakefield's Downtown. This is a lost opportunity to support restaurants and shops in the Downtown.

With a vital mix of restaurants, goods and services, the downtown appeared robust. However, things could be improved by an effort for better direction and more on-street communication. Here was an opportunity to build on the downtown's commercial base and solidify Wakefield as a Northshore destination.

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

Action Item

The two overlapping programs took two different paths.

- Over an eight-month period, the branding and wayfinding design process went through a series of group meetings with a large Advisory Group of 24 representatives.
  - A month after the town landscape-based brand was approved by the Advisory Committee and presented in the local daily newspaper and to the Town Council, a devastating lightning-induced fire burned down the majestic church steeple. The loss of the church set back the discussion of whether or not the approved image should be brought forward as a historical image or changed to reflect the current conditions.
  - The designs and branding and wayfinding program were put on hold.
- Overseen by the Wakefield Main Streets Board of Directors and invited Town officials, the kiosk design program was mandated to have only 3.5 months to complete design, design review, put out for bidding and start implementation.
  - The kiosk program went fully ahead.
  - However, some community members felt left out of the design and placement of the project elements. Their concerns had to be integrated.

Joggers and runners around Crystal Lake , a target audience of non-residents as potential patrons to the downtown .

Old Band Stand adjacent to Lake Quannapowitt in Wakefield, MA

Process

- After a number of kiosk design alternatives were presented to the Wakefield Main Streets Board, one design was chosen to develop, locate and specify.

- Three (3) of the kiosks were to be two-sided and analog; the fourth was to be digital and four-sided. The digital one would be set closest to the lake.

- Historical town images and commentary was developed to fit around as a border around a business directory for one side of the directory.

- Set in an airtight locked Plexiglas window, this information could be easily changeable on the two-sided kiosks. On the opposite side was space for timely event posters and community announcements.

- The digital kiosk was designed to have a screen/monitor that was programmable from the town hall.

- There was much criticism around the placement and look of the digital kiosk. The town council eventually addressed the public and took a stand that the location, size and look of the kiosk was the best possible solution.

- Kiosk-opposing residents were invited to an expanded Branding and Wayfinding meeting to assist with eventual sign element placement on maps.

- Favermann Design was then hired by the Town administration to create a style guideline to reflect the iconic kiosk toppers.

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

- These guidelines were in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and further thought was given to the on-hold wayfinding program. It was decided that a new approach should be taken that abandoned the problematic landscape and instead visually reflected the kiosk and style of the Town of Wakefield.

- Utilizing the new design approach, plans are going ahead for a new directional sign for the Greenwood neighborhood. A test will take place during the Summer of 2021 to see how wayfinding can connect the Lake with downtown.

The Bandstand was the inspiration for the shape of the signage.

Besides interested citizens, town officials including the Town Planner, Police Officer, City Counselor, and Main Street board member are making decisions regarding locations.

Local Press Coverage of Controversial Town Council Meetings Occurred due to Kiosks

- Though carefully announced by the Main streets Board, controversy was caused by residents feeling left out of the process.

- Several Town council meetings addressed the size, content and location of the kiosks, especially the proposed digital one adjacent to the lake.

- All kiosk locations are on Town property and are at the best decision-point locations possible.

- The "waters" were eventually calmed and the process continued until a successful implementation of the program.

Previous Historical Landscape Design for Wakefield's Branding and Wayfinding Shelved

- Below is an image of the previous design that was affected by the destructive church fire.

- The "new" simpler design has found favor in the community.

- The Town of Wakefield is now creating a fully consistent "look" for all its official elements.

The Town of Wakefield "branded" elements and strictly adhered to style guidelines demonstrate how programs can build upon and even improve each other to reinforce a sense of place, a sense of arrival and a sense of shared experience.

Development of a Town-wide Signage and Wayfinding System that Utilizes the Chester Brand to Connect the Village Center with the Rest of the Town

Category

Public Realm; Revenue Sales; Culture Arts

Location

Village Center with inclusion of outlying areas

Origin

Chester Rapid Recovery Planning Committee with guidance from PVPC Plan Facilitators

Budget & Sources of Funding

Medium Budget (Under $50,000-$200,000)

For budgets related to signage and wayfinding, we advise to expect a range in cost. The following estimated cost schedule represents a wide range of costs based on the size of the community, scale of the signage program, the schedule for the deliverables and the cost of fabrication and installation.

Wayfinding Design $ 25K - $150K+
- Stakeholder engagement (interviews) $5 – 15K
- Public Engagement (survey – online or in person) $10K – $20K
- Wayfinding Analysis (Circulation Plans, Sign Location Plans, etc.) $8K – $18K
- Signage Standards or Master Plan Document (plus above services) $10K – $25K
- Concept Design $15K - $30K
- Design Development $15K - $30K
- Design Intent $10K - $20K
- Bidding + Negotiation $5K – $10K
- Construction Administration $10K – $25K

Fabrication $75 – $500K
- Simple metal or vinyl signage $5k – $25K
- Illuminated pylons/gateways $50K - $200K each
- Non-illuminated, freestanding signage $25K- $50K (each)
- General Conditions and Installation $20 – 175K
- Digital directories $25K- $100K
- Mapping $5K - $25K

In addition to municipal funds, the following are potential sources of funds.

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 sign upgrades when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Regional Economic Development Council of Western Mass (REDO)
$5,000,000 was recently made available by DHCD to the 125 municipalities participating in the LRRP program. Chester submitted a $50,000 grant application to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) through the REDO on September 23. Included in the grant application is $30,000 for a branding project, which will be necessary prior to initiating a signage and wayfinding project. The need for more effective and cohesive signage and wayfinding has been identified in other Hilltown communities, including neighboring Chester, which also received an LRRP grant. Discussion with the REDO may be helpful in order to determine regional applicability for this project.
https://www.westernmassedc.com/

T-Mobile
Hometown Grants
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

Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and DHCD
District Local Technical Assistance Grant
Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and 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. Branding and Façade Improvement projects are also contemplated in this report, among others. Should the Town engage PVPC for other LRRP related projects, administrative assistance with signage and wayfinding may also make sense.
http://www.pvpc.org/

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet
Best Practices Program
The Community Compact is a voluntary, mutual agreement entered into between the Baker-Polito Administration and individual cities and towns of the Commonwealth. In a Community Compact, a community will agree to implement at least one best practice that they select from across a variety of areas. The community's chosen best practice(s) will be reviewed between the Commonwealth and the municipality to ensure that the best practice(s) chosen are unique to the municipality and reflect needed areas of improvement. Once approved, the written agreement will be generated and signed by both the municipality and the Commonwealth. The Compact also articulates the commitments the Commonwealth will make on behalf of all communities. The FY22 Best Practice program opened on August 15th, 2021 and will remain open until available funds are exhausted.

Potential Best Practice categories identified on the State website that could be investigated include:

Housing and Economic Development Best Practices
Best Practice: Create Cross-Sector Partnerships to help carry out community-driven responses to community-defined issues and opportunities for economic development.

Active Transportation
Best Practice: Implement Complete Streets by joining MassDOT's Complete Streets Funding Program and demonstrating the integration of Complete Streets principles into regular planning and design practices on local roadways.

Funding related to regional business and economic development associations, as well as Town funds might also be investigated.
https://www.mass.gov/best-practices-program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program
A Quick-Launch/Quick-Build Municipal Funding Program
The Shared Streets and Spaces Program looks forward to accepting new applications beginning in January 2022. Details on future program operation including exact deadlines, application documents, and eligibility requirements will be published here as they become available.

Building on the success of the Shared Streets and Spaces Municipal Grant Program first launched during the summer of 2020 -- and later extended to address the particular challenges of winter -- the Massachusetts Department of Transportation is now announcing a new phase of the program. The new phase will operate similarly to previous iterations of the Shared Streets and Spaces Program by supporting municipalities and transit authorities to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. In light of recent increases in speeding-related crashes and fatalities, this new phase of the program will have an additional emphasis on safety, and is looking to fund projects that improve safety for all road users through interventions that achieve safer conditions and safer speeds.
https://www.mass.gov/shared-streets-and-spaces-grant-program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Complete Streets Funding Program
A Complete Street is one that provides safe and accessible options for all travel modes - walking, biking, transit and vehicles – for people of all ages and abilities. The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program provides technical assistance and construction funding to eligible municipalities. Eligible municipalities must pass a Complete Streets Policy and

Budget & Sources of Funding
(cont'd)

develop a Prioritization Plan. All Program news, guidance, and registration information are available through an online Portal.

Grant opportunities of up to $400,000 are available for Complete Streets projects, including Signage and Wayfinding projects, provided the Town has adopted a Complete Streets policy and the project includes walking and biking. The Chester Village Center Walk Audit Report, completed by Walk Boston in June 2021, provides and excellent resource for adopting such a policy in an expeditious manner.
https://www.mass.gov/complete-streets-funding-program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
One Stop for Growth Development Continuum
All grant programs within the One Stop for Growth fall into the Continuum.
The Community One Stop for Growth is a single application portal and collaborative review process of grant programs that make targeted investments based on a Development Continuum:

Preparing for Growth
Grants to support activities and initial steps by community-based actors to attract and guide private investment in a community.
  • Community Capacity Building
  • Planning & Zoning
  • Site Preparation
Catalyzing Specific Projects
Grants to support private, commercial, industrial, and residential investment projects that further the community vision.
  • Predevelopment & Permitting
  • Buildings (vertical)
  • Infrastructure (horizontal)
Continuum Detail – Community Capacity Building
Projects may focus on a geographic area (district, community, or region) or a target population. Preference for projects that demonstrate a clear vision and a leadership group that is effective and stable. For projects with a target population, preference for those with involvement of, or impact on, Black and Latino populations. Projects may fund consultants or, in certain cases, staff time.
Projects in the Community Capacity Building section of the Development Continuum include:
  • Technical Assistance for Improving a Downtown or Commercial Center
  • Early Stage Strategy Development
  • Strategy Implementation by an Existing Cross-Sector Consortiums or Coalition
Grant Type: Technical assistance or Implementation Grants. Projects may fund consultants or staff.
Grant Sizes: Potential for $25,000 to $100,000 awards. Downtown technical assistance grants will not exceed $25,000.
https://www.mass.gov/info-details/one-stop-for-growth-development-continuum#overview-

American Association of Retired Persons
AARP Community Challenge grant program
The AARP Community Challenge grant program is part of the nationwide AARP Livable Communities initiative that helps communities become great places to live for residents of all ages. The program is intended to help communities make immediate improvements and jump-start long-term progress in support of residents of all ages.
Since the program's debut in 2017, AARP has awarded $9.3 million through 800 grants. The projects have been completed across all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

  • In 2017, for the first-ever AARP Community Challenge, AARP received nearly 1,200 applications and distributed nearly $780,000 among 88 winning grantees.
  • In 2018, for the second challenge, AARP received almost 1,600 applications and distributed $1.3 million to fund 129 projects.
  • In 2019, the grant program received nearly 1,700 applications and distributed nearly $1.6 million among 159 grant winners developing "quick-action" projects.
  • In 2020, the program received over 2,800 applications and distributed more than $2.4 million among 184 grant winners (including projects specific to community needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic).
  • In 2021, the program received 3,560 applications and nearly $3.2 million is being distributed to 244 projects, including projects with a special emphasis on diversity and

Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

inclusion and supporting economic recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.

The AARP Community Challenge grant program is part of the nationwide AARP Livable Communities initiative, which helps cities, towns, villages and rural areas become great places to live for residents of all ages. As part of this effort, AARP staff and volunteers engage and mobilize residents, delivering technical assistance and expertise to local leaders and organizations, and supporting the work of the communities and states that have enrolled in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. Note: The Town is not required to hold the Ade-Friendly designation in order to qualify for a grant. https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/

Funding related to regional business and economic development associations, as well as Town funds might also be investigated.

Timeframe

On average, 4-8 months is advised for designing a wayfinding program, and another 3-6 months for fabrication and installation of signs. If a design firm is brought onboard to also oversee fabrication and installation, parts of the process can be run in parallel to shorten the overall timeframe. Signage is often subject to Town bylaws and zoning, so plan accordingly to allow for the permitting process.

The following timetable envisions a branding project that will be completed by June 2022 and a walk/bike project that would occur more or less concurrently with wayfinding. Given the Town's limited administrative capacity, a staggered, but somewhat overlapping, approach to tackling each project is recommended.

Finally, Chester approved a Complete Streets policy in 2016. If the Town wishes to become eligible for Complete Streets grant funds for a signage and wayfinding project or for further development of walkable/accessible pathways, the Town will first need to develop a Prioritization Plan. Grant funds are available to assist with this plan development, as well as up to $400,000 for project implementation.

Should the Town wish to pursue this funding route, the application and approval process would likely delay the following timeframe by 6-18 months.

- 1/22: Form a committee comprised of municipal staff (including DPW/Highway Department), civic leaders, and possibly local artists to investigate and initiate a signage and wayfinding project. The project will build on the creation of the Town brand and creation of a walkability project that connects assets throughout the Project Area/Village Center with outlying areas of the Town and region.
- 1/22-2/22: Determine the scope of the project, investigate potential funding sources, and develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit the services of a consultant. This document serves as an important baseline for the project, identifying a timeline, budget, stakeholders, goals and deliverables for the signage and wayfinding project.
- 3/22: Advertise and hire a consultant (subject to funding).
- 4/22-12/22: Proceed through the project phases as described in the Process section of this plan, culminating with fabrication and installation of signs.
- Ongoing: Once the initial project is completed, the plan should be periodically reviewed and updated, recognizing any changes to important destinations in the town or region, alterations to the branding program, and implementation of town-wide marketing efforts that might be supported with updated signage and wayfinding.

Risks

Signage and wayfinding projects are typically considered low risk. The biggest risks to a signage and wayfinding project usually occur during fabrication and implementation. Provided the design and fabrication teams have proper documentation regarding the location of the signage elements, installation risk can be mitigated early in the fabrication process. In some instances, signage cannot be fabricated as designed and will incur additional cost to the project. There is also an opportunity in this phase to value engineer signage, thus reducing cost of a signage style.

Signage that requires electricity for illumination, digital displays or interactivity require proper planning. Preliminary site surveys can mitigate the risk, as the need to run electrical to signage elements can adversely impact a budget. Other instances of risk come with installation, where unforeseen obstacles will prevent signage from being installed in a planned location, requiring a secondary solution to be found.

Key Performance Indicators

This Signage and Wayfinding project will be successful if:
- a creative and consistent wayfinding system is implemented, that incorporates elements of the Town's branding effort, including in-town and digital/online messaging.
- there is a noticeable and quantifiable year over year increase in visitors to various Town destinations and events beginning in the Spring of 2023.
- Inquiries from "out of towners" regarding visiting or potentially moving to town increase by at least 15% by Summer of 2023.
- there is an increase in the number of businesses in Town beginning in 2023.

Partners & Resources

- Municipal staff (Town Administrator, Administrative Assistant, Planning and/or Economic Development, DPW/Highway, Police/Fire/Emergency Management)
- SelectBoard, Planning Board
- Chester RRP Committee
- Chester Business and Civic Association (pending creation as an LRRP project)
- Property & business owners
- Local artists and cultural organizations
- Nonprofit organizations
- Jacobs Ladder Business Association
- Gateway Hilltowns Collaborative
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

Chester is a small, but vibrant community, with significant synergy between business, nonprofit, cultural, recreational, and governmental organizations. Impacts of COVID-19 have drastically and negatively impacted those businesses with much lower revenue, inability for expansion, and cancellation of most activities and events.

Signage is sufficient for basic travel needs, but does not sufficiently identify or promote key assets and destinations for drivers and pedestrians. More consistent placement of street trees and benches, expanded use of crosswalks, and implementation of a more cohesive and creative signage and wayfinding program, would enhance and encourage pedestrian enjoyment and safety throughout the Project Area.

The Town anticipates beginning a branding process in the Fall of 2021, with a target date for completion of June 2022. The next steps in the Towns coordinated plan to revitalize the Village Center will be to identify more walkable and accessible connections and pathways, followed by the creation of a comprehensive and creative signage and wayfinding system designed to connect all important assets in the Village Center to outlying areas of Town, and beyond.

Chester adopted a Complete Streets policy in 2016 and is eligible to apply for funding to complete a Prioritization Plan. Grant funds are available to assist with this plan development, as well as up to $400,000 for project implementation. A signage and wayfinding project is eligible for inclusion in Complete Streets planning and implementation.

The Town completed a Downtown Walkability Assessment in 2018. This assessment should act as the blueprint to quickly complete a plan for a historic and cultural walkway in the Village Center (see separate project plan contained in this report). At the same time, Town officials and community stakeholders will be seeking to successfully implement a façade and physical improvement program for all interested commercial and nonprofit property owners.

The confluence of all of these significant reports, LRRP plans, and initiatives has the potential to quickly launch Chester into a phase of successive project implementation, having significant positive impact on the quality of life and financial vitality of the community. The RRP Committee has identified support for culture and the arts, including public art, as being important to the community. Use of public art as a potential element in wayfinding design is discussed in the Best Practices examples.

The following recommendations are based on feedback from Cory DePasquale and Sheri Bates from Selbert Perkins Design.

- Given the layout of the town of Chester, the representatives for the Town should identify the goals of any new wayfinding or signage from multiple perspectives. Where is awareness among current residents lacking with regard to Town/regional assets and destinations? Where do we want to direct visitors? Have a clear set of goals for a design firm to work around.
- Identify common Points of Interest (POI) across the Town/region and organize them into categories; municipal, business, nonprofit, tourist attractions and so on. Think about how

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts (cont'd)	these tiers of POI will be interacted with by different groups of people identified in the previous exercise.

• Take the time to plan out various user's paths through town. What does a day in the life of a resident look like versus a visitor planning to spend a few hours or an entire day in Chester? From arrival to departure, plot these idealized journeys on a map, and then identify key locations where signage would positively impact their journey. These key locations are called decision points and can be used to plot potential locations for signage.
• When it comes to the information on any signage, think about the user. Are they in a car, on a bicycle or on foot? Signage that intends to be useful to people in transit needs to be big and brief. Signage for pedestrians can be more nuanced and informative.
• After examining the map and discussing with residents, SPD would recommend signage to direct people to and from the Village Center, as it is not entirely intuitive to visitors from out of town.
• Signage with any town branding on it will serve as a lighthouse to visitors. Use this brand equity to pull people into a directory sign, and then inform them about the POI's (points of interest) to the key locations around town.

Partners & Resources

Action Item

The project will involve the following steps, more precisely defined above under Timeframe and below under Process.

1. Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
2. Identify who needs to be part of this process and engage business and property owners, local artists and cultural organizations, and the community at large to get buy-in for the program.
3. Determine the need for any design, façade, or sign code revisions.
4. Develop the criteria for approval and implementation.
5. Develop the funding and oversight structures.
6. Proceed with development and implement of the project.
7. Upon completion of the project, consider next steps with particular attention to periodic review of signage and wayfinding assets to ensure that elements remain current, relevant, and in good repair. The Town may consider adoption of a Sign/Wayfinding bylaw that provides for such oversight.

Process

With guidance from subject matter expert (SME) Cory DePasquale of Selbert Perkins Design, the following process guidelines are recommended and should be seriously considered.

The Process of Developing Wayfinding & Signage

1. Gather Your Assets
When it comes to making an impact with wayfinding, understanding the current state of your town's wayfinding signage is the first step. When the term "wayfinding" is attached to signage, it means the messaging on the sign is directing the viewer towards a destination.

Any maps indicating where current wayfinding signage exists will be very useful, and a beneficial first step. If you don't have this, and audit will likely be required.

Master planning documents that outline goals for the town/city are useful as well, as they will likely be referenced regarding planning around future goals and projects.

While a street sign could be considered wayfinding, the important distinction for this exercise should focus on sign types that include more information about destinations.
Gathering a master list of Points of Interest, or POI is also a good decision. Once the list feels comprehensive for your town, a good idea to categorize or sort this list into groups based on popularity of the given POI as a destination. This should give the wayfinding team a clear idea of goals for the wayfinding program.

2. Layer the Data
Once the team has any maps, master plans, POI's and traffic maps, the goal should be to layer these sets of information over each other.

The data will begin to form a clear picture of how the wayfinding system should address the topography of your city/town. The team should be able to see major routes for vehicles & pedestrians, POI's, town limits, parking & points of entry and exit. Based on all this information, the wayfinding team can make an educated assessment on where signage can be placed to

Process (cont'd)

help specific users find their way through the city/town. Keep in mind that wayfinding users will have different objectives; visitors will have different destinations from residents.

Beyond this, the team should add locations that are instrumental in helping people navigate the environment in an ideal way. Selbert Perkins calls these decision points – they represent a point on a journey that can influence the user to take a more beneficial or easier route.

The resulting maps should outline locations that are likely underutilized for signage and wayfinding.

3. Identify the Sign Types
When it comes to identifying the signage elements, the first step will be looking at the needs of your wayfinding from a mapping perspective and assessing how those needs can be met with physical signs. Before picking visuals, really deliberate about the role of each sign in each instance.

Wayfinding information will be perceived differently based on context, as users driving have substantially less time to read signs than pedestrians.

Typically, the result of this exercise will lead to a set of signs that each have different roles. Selbert Perkins refers to this as a signage family. These are often shown at scale on a single page and compared to ensure each sign has a specific duty and avoids being redundant to users.

The most common sign would be a directory sign, which is designed for pedestrians. This is placed in high pedestrian traffic situations, normally where most traffic originates. Typically, a map is shown outlining all points of interest in within a certain walking distance. A best practice is to indicate the amount of time it would take to walk to each destination, either in time or distance.

Also commonly seen in wayfinding packages, a vehicular directional sign includes large text, and is meant to indicate direction for top tier destinations. This information is meant to influence wayfinding users that are driving vehicles, so text should read large. These signs should also be placed before users have to make turns in their journey – they should have enough time to interpret the signage, make decisions and have time to correct their course before an intersection

4. Designing the Signage
Once the sign types have been identified, the visual design can be applied to the signage family. It's important to let the objectives of each sign type to lead in this phase, and not let visuals dictate the overall design. Here, form follows function.

Vehicular and bike signage should be large to allow for large type. All signage should be high contrast and use fonts that are highly legible. In some instances, signs are seen for less than five seconds, and have information on them that will be crucial, like indicating direction to a hospital.

Pedestrian signage can be smaller in size but should be more targeted. Vehicular signage is still relevant to people on foot, and a good directional sign in the proper location will be relevant to all users and can save the town/city money as a more efficient use of budget in the wayfinding package.

5. Fabrication Partners
When the wayfinding package has its locations and signs identified, a fabrication partner can be approached to help bring the project into reality.

Their first step should be coordinating base pricing to establish overall project costs, including installation. This allows the wayfinding design team to make changes in the wayfinding plan to save costs where they can and allow the fabrication team to pursue any discounts based on volume pricing.

A good fabrication team will be an invaluable partner. They can work with the city for any permitting, identify production methods that yield better pricing, and can complete a certain amount of design work. Always bid out to more than one fabricator to ensure even and fair pricing.

Process (cont'd)

Additional guidance from Civic Space Collaborative
In addition to the process recommendation above, guidance from Karl Alexander of Civic Space Collaborative is contained in the walkability project plan titled "Create a Historic and Cultural Walkway that Connects the Village Center with Historic Route 20". This guidance suggests that low-cost experimentation with temporary placement of corrugated (lawn) signs can help to visual the plan prior to installation of permanent signage.

The following is an excerpt from CSC's guidance.
- Install 12"x24" pedestrian wayfinding signage at appropriate intervals along the walking route. A short-term, easy to implement sign option are corrugated plastic signs that can be affixed to utility poles for a temporary option, aluminum signage is intended to be permanent.
- Update existing public signage to incorporate new wayfinding elements.
- Extend wayfinding and branding efforts to trailheads and other recreational stop points to facilitate the walkability and connection between the Village Center and recreational activities

Best Practice

The following Best Practice projects represent good examples of wayfinding projects that integrate elements, such as Branding, Public Art, and Walkability, that are identified as important to the Town of Chester and included elsewhere in this report.

Connect Neighborhoods to Business Districts via Neighborways

Provided by SME Consultant   Neighborways Design

Location   Somerville, MA

PUBLIC REALM

Origin	Neighborways Design, Students, Residents, City of Somerville
Budget	$10,000 - $50,000 per mile for design and install – may include tactical traffic calming, wayfinding, branding, asphalt murals, and other placemaking features
Timeframe	3-12 months - iterative program allows opportunities to upgrade designs each year
Risk	Low. No to minimal parking removal, potential for contra-flow bicycling on one-way streets; selective use of diversion to reduce traffic
Key Performance Indicators	**Safety:** Crash history, % vehicles traveling over 20mph (safety zone) or 25 mph **Modal split:** increase walking and biking mode share to business districts **Economic Impact** before and after studies of spending by mode **User Feedback:** Surveys to capture user perceptions, behavioral changes in mode choice
Partners & Resources	Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone, The Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Public Works, Police, Fire, City Council, Commission for Persons with Disabilities, Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee, Bicycle Advisory Committee, Somerville residents, Shared Street Stewards, and livable streets advocates, Neighborhood and Business Associations, organized local groups such as garden clubs, after school programs, churches, etc. Received Somerville Arts Council Grant for street murals, and Solomon Foundation grant for shared streets funding support in 2020.

Diagnostic

Neighborways, also known as neighborhood greenways or bicycle boulevards, are low stress, comfortable, designated biking and walking routes. They are typically local roadways that connect neighborhoods and destinations such as downtown business districts, transit stops, schools, and employment centers.

Somerville is the Boston Region's first Neighborway network which began in 2014 as student projects. The evolution of the program has grown each year to span 2+ miles of connected streets. The City developed guidelines for treatments based on research, testing, and implementing tactical traffic calming treatments.

In response to the pandemic, the City initiated the states largest "Shared Streets" network to increase access to essential services via walking and biking – modeled after and inspired by the Neighborways network.

- Midblock neckdown yield street via flexposts. Morrison Avenue, 2020

Action Items

In 2021, Somerville plans to expand the Neighborways network of permanently marked roadways using existing and new treatments such as:

- **Gateways** to slow turning vehicles and provide wayfinding via painted tan curb extensions, painted red crosswalks, flexible posts at corners, and branding signs.
- **Contra-Flow Bicycle Streets** (One-way for people driving / two-way for people biking) to expand network accessibility via signs and pavement markings.
- **Midblock Traffic Calming** to slow speeds to 20 mph or less via speed humps / cushions, curb extensions, yield streets, flexpost neckdowns, one-lane yield conditions.
- **Vehicle Volume Reduction** to reduce conflicts and create lower stress, comfortable routes via regulatory signage, median islands / diverters, and one-way street direction changes.
- **Placemaking** to brand and engage the community via public art (sculpture, paint day block parties), stencils, lighting, planters and street trees, and rain gardens.

- Paint Day Block Party, Dimmick Street at Waldo Street 2017.

Lessons Learned

Keys to success: invest in an iterative public engagement strategy that provides multiple opportunities for engagement. Door to door canvassing, public meetings to the street, and an open forum for ongoing feedback online engages a wider stakeholder group.

- Identify wide stakeholder group and tap into community leaders
- Table at existing events to build synergy.
- Create a **Street Steward** volunteer program to support ongoing monitoring of materials and feedback loops for improvements.

Challenges / lessons learned:
- **Provide multiple opportunities and advanced notice to engage the community**, especially direct abutters to traffic calming treatments and public art installations.
- **Work with emergency responders early in the process** to support traffic calming treatments. Test layouts with fire and/or public works trucks. Use speed cushions vs speed humps and avoid emergency access routes if concerns about vertical deflection and delay.

Process

1. **Project Initiation and Planning:** Identify goals and define success. Identify biking and walking network through network analysis / existing network plans. Start small and pilot routes that connect key destinations. Consider prioritization plan and phasing based on trip generators, popular destinations, demographics, underserved populations, crash history and traffic calming requests.
2. **Community Design Process:** Use Iterative and ongoing engagement process including lemonade socials, walk and bike audits, canvassing and online feedback portals. DRAFT designs to get feedback and work with abutters to adjust as needed.
3. **Implementation:** estimate quantities and procure materials. Hire contractors or work with public works to install.
4. **Ongoing Monitoring / Maintenance:** develop feedback portal and maintenance plan. Coordinate volunteers (street stewards) to support monitoring and maintenance.
5. **Evaluation :** conduct before and after analysis including quantitative (e.g., speeds, volumes, revenue of businesses) and qualitative (e.g. photo, video, conversations, surveys) measures.

Shared Streets Gateway Treatment , 2020.

DRAFT Spring Hill Neighborhood Planning Network Map 2021
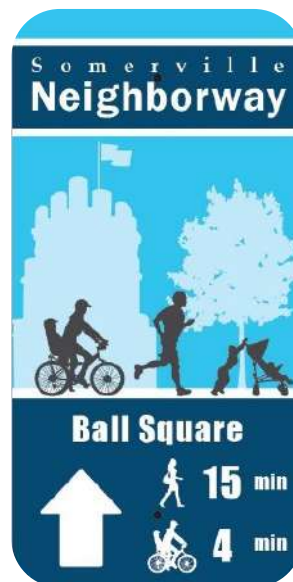
Wayfinding sign with times for walking and biking

Launch a public art program

Provided by SME Consultant   Selbert Perkins Design

Location   Melrose, MA

PUBLIC
REALM

Origin	City of Melrose, MA
Budget	Medium Budget ($70K) - with full build-out
Timeframe	Short Term (1 years)
Risk	Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	Number of survey engagements and art commissions far exceeded expectations.
Partners & Resources	Mayor, City Manager, Planning Department, DPW, Local Arts Organizations, Local Businesses, High School Students
Diagnostic	

Selbert Perkins Design collaborated with the City and community stakeholders to develop a wayfinding and creative placemaking master plan for the City of Melrose including:

- Wayfinding Analysis

- Preliminary Design Concepts

- Art Opportunities

- Call-for-Art

- Art Program Logo

The entire project, including was conducted during Covid-19 with over 700 participants. Community engagement was conducted in partnership with Civic Space Collaborative.

In February of 2020, the City of Melrose extended a solicitation for quotes regarding a wayfinding study & design services. The scope of work discussed in the solicitation described development of a multi-modal wayfinding system that speaks to the city's past and present that will provide wayfinding for pedestrians, cyclists & vehicles. The City of Melrose received funding from the Massachusetts Marketing Partnership & the Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism for this effort.

Selbert Perkins Design, in collaboration with Civic Space Collaborative, won the bid with the City of Melrose in March of 2020. The proposal submitted to the City of Melrose met all the conditions of the original solicitation and was modified after being awarded to include a larger outreach effort to the city's residents. In addition to the amplified outreach, public art would be an important element of the placemaking and wayfinding effort.

In late March, the COVID-19 virus became a global pandemic. The project team adapted to the crisis, pivoting to web based resources for interviewing city residents, project meetings, committee and focus group meetings, as well as a virtual community meeting with the City's residents.

"The selected art projects are unique and diverse and will enhance the vitality of the City's public spaces and promote economic development, which were goals of the initiative" says Mayor Brodeur. "I am excited to showcase and support the amazing talent in our community through this effort."

Working closely with Mayor Paul Brodeur, the Planning Department, and project committee, we were able to successfully complete the project in 9 months.

Action Items

Recommendations for signage and wayfinding include:

- Develop additional wayfinding as a placemaking element in Melrose to help residents and visitors find their way around the city.

- Create a signage pilot to roll out less expensive sign types throughout the city.

- Earmark funding for implementation over the next 1-2 years.

- Prioritize directing visitors and residents to downtown to support the local Melrose commerce.

- Install trail signage to help residents and visitors successfully utilize trails and greenspace in Melrose.

- Include walking distances on major signage to encourage walking as a method of transportation.

- Initiate outdoor seating, street narrowing, and other measures to support small business in the downtown and other commercial areas.

- Partner with local organizations to help envision and manage these programs to further support Melrose commerce.

- Consider a regular "open main street" program, closing streets to car traffic to encourage outdoor activity and support local downtown businesses.

Process

- Understand who the stakeholders and decision-makers will be.

- Form a committee to oversee the process.

- Visit the site to audit of existing conditions.

- Conduct a Wayfinding Analysis including; multi-modal circulation, main decision points, and key destinations.

- Research the history of the place, uncover stories that might inspire the design.

- Identify opportunities for art/placemaking.

- Engage with stakeholders and the public to understand needs and preferences. If possible, create a survey and/or focus groups to get feedback from a larger cross-section of people.

- Develop project goals and a positioning statement to guide design efforts.

- Design concepts for brand and wayfinding elements.

- Develop the preferred design into a family of sign types with materials, colors, etc.

- Provide a sign location plan and order of magnitude budget.

- Create public art criteria and develop a call-for-art to identify qualified public artists.

- Release the call for art or bid and select artists/vendors.

- Oversee installation.

- Celebrate!

Stakeholder engagement event outdoors

Create a Historic and Cultural Walkway that Connects the Village Center with Route 20

Category

Public Realm; Revenue Sales

Location

Village Center including Main Street, Maple Street, and Route 20 to Middlefield Road

Origin

Chester Rapid Recovery Planning Committee with guidance from PVPC Plan Facilitators

Budget & Sources of Funding

Medium Budget ($50,000-$100,000)

In addition to municipal funds, the following are potential sources of funds.

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 sign upgrades when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Chapter 90 Program
Authorized through Massachusetts General Laws (M.G.L) Chapter 90, Section 34, the Chapter 90 Program provides funding to municipalities for the implementation of capital improvements on local public ways.

The purpose of the Chapter 90 Program is to provide municipalities with an annual funding source for improvements to and investments in local transportation networks. Every municipality in the Commonwealth is allocated a portion of total program dollars. The Chapter 90 Program allows municipalities to evaluate their unique transportation needs and goals and allocate funding dollars accordingly. A small portion of the Towns Chapter 90 funds could be considered for sidewalk and/or bikepath improvements.

T-Mobile
Hometown Grants
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

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and DHCD
District Local Technical Assistance Grant
Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and 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. Branding and Façade Improvement projects are also contemplated in this report, among others. Should the Town engage PVPC for other LRRP related projects, administrative assistance with signage and wayfinding may also make sense.
http://www.pvpc.org/

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet
Best Practices Program
The Community Compact is a voluntary, mutual agreement entered into between the Baker-Polito Administration and individual cities and towns of the Commonwealth. In a Community Compact, a community will agree to implement at least one best practice that they select from across a variety of areas. The community's chosen best practice(s) will be reviewed between the Commonwealth and the municipality to ensure that the best practice(s) chosen are unique to the municipality and reflect needed areas of improvement. Once approved, the written agreement will be generated and signed by both the municipality and the Commonwealth. The Compact also articulates the commitments the Commonwealth will make on behalf of all communities. The FY22 Best Practice program opened on August 15th, 2021 and will remain open until available funds are exhausted.

Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)	Potential Best Practice categories identified on the State website that could be investigated include:

Age and Dementia Friendly Best Practices
An Age-Friendly community is one that is livable for residents of all ages inclusive of older adults and those living with dementia. Age-friendly communities strive to be equitable and accessible with walkable streets, housing and transportation options, access to services, and opportunities for residents to participate in community activities.

Public Health Best Practices
Best Practice: Healthy Community Design focuses on changing policies and practices to create conditions for people to eat better and move more where they live, learn, work, and play. Conduct a Built Environment Regulatory Review (BERR), a point-in-time evaluation of existing municipal policies/plans/regulations. The review will provide a baseline from which to prioritize strategies to promote walking and biking. This best practice can be combined with several other best practices that relate to municipal zoning and land-use.
Best Practice: Local boards of health (LBOH) can take a leadership role to advance health equity by: 1) building internal infrastructure, 2) working across government; 3) fostering community partnerships, and 4) championing transformative change. LBOH may adapt strategic practices to advance health equity in local health both internally within their departments and externally with communities and other government agencies. DPH Office of Local and Regional Health and Office of Health Equity staff are available for support.

https://www.mass.gov/best-practices-program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program
A Quick-Launch/Quick-Build Municipal Funding Program

The Shared Streets and Spaces Program looks forward to accepting new applications beginning in January 2022. Details on future program operation including exact deadlines, application documents, and eligibility requirements will be published here as they become available.

Building on the success of the Shared Streets and Spaces Municipal Grant Program first launched during the summer of 2020 -- and later extended to address the particular challenges of winter -- the Massachusetts Department of Transportation is now announcing a new phase of the program. The new phase will operate similarly to previous iterations of the Shared Streets and Spaces Program by supporting municipalities and transit authorities to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. In light of recent increases in speeding-related crashes and fatalities, this new phase of the program will have an additional emphasis on safety, and is looking to fund projects that improve safety for all road users through interventions that achieve safer conditions and safer speeds.

https://www.mass.gov/shared-streets-and-spaces-grant-program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Complete Streets Funding Program
A Complete Street is one that provides safe and accessible options for all travel modes - walking, biking, transit and vehicles – for people of all ages and abilities. The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program provides technical assistance and construction funding to eligible municipalities. Eligible municipalities must pass a Complete Streets Policy and develop a Prioritization Plan. All Program news, guidance, and registration information are available through an online Portal.

Grant opportunities of up to $400,000 are available for Complete Streets projects, including Signage and Wayfinding projects, provided the Town has adopted a Complete Streets policy and the project includes walking and biking. The Chester Village Center Walk Audit Report, completed by Walk Boston in June 2021, provides an excellent resource for adopting such a policy in an expeditious manner.

https://www.mass.gov/complete-streets-funding-program

Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth Development Continuum
All grant programs within the One Stop for Growth fall into the Continuum.

The Community One Stop for Growth is a single application portal and collaborative review process of grant programs that make targeted investments based on a Development Continuum:
Preparing for Growth
Grants to support activities and initial steps by community-based actors to attract and guide private investment in a community.
- Community Capacity Building
- Planning & Zoning
- Site Preparation
Catalyzing Specific Projects
Grants to support private, commercial, industrial, and residential investment projects that further the community vision.
- Predevelopment & Permitting
- Buildings (vertical)
- Infrastructure (horizontal)
Continuum Detail – Community Capacity Building
Projects may focus on a geographic area (district, community, or region) or a target population. Preference for projects that demonstrate a clear vision and a leadership group that is effective and stable. For projects with a target population, preference for those with involvement of, or impact on, Black and Latino populations. Projects may fund consultants or, in certain cases, staff time.
Projects in the Community Capacity Building section of the Development Continuum include:
- Technical Assistance for Improving a Downtown or Commercial Center
- Early Stage Strategy Development
- Strategy Implementation by an Existing Cross-Sector Consortiums or Coalition
Grant Type: Technical assistance or Implementation Grants. Projects may fund consultants or staff.
Grant Sizes: Potential for $25,000 to $100,000 awards. Downtown technical assistance grants will not exceed $25,000.

https://www.mass.gov/info-details/one-stop-for-growth-development-continuum#overview-

U.S. Economic Development Administration
Travel, Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Program

Through the Travel, Tourism & Outdoor Recreation program, EDA is focused on accelerating the recovery of communities that rely on the travel, tourism and outdoor recreation sectors. $240 million of EDA's American Rescue Plan funds are allocated to support the following efforts:
- Competitive Grants: $240 million to help communities that have been hardest hit by challenges facing the travel, tourism and outdoor recreation sectors to invest in infrastructure, workforce or other projects to support the recovery of the industry and economic resilience of the community in the future.

Travel, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation - American Rescue Plan | U.S. Economic Development Administration (eda.gov)

American Association of Retired Persons
AARP Community Challenge grant program
The AARP Community Challenge grant program is part of the nationwide AARP Livable Communities initiative that helps communities become great places to live for residents of all ages. The program is intended to help communities make immediate improvements and jump-start long-term progress in support of residents of all ages. Since the program's debut in 2017, AARP has awarded $9.3 million through 800 grants. The projects have been completed across all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- In 2017, for the first-ever AARP Community Challenge, AARP received nearly 1,200 applications and distributed nearly $780,000 among 88 winning grantees.
- In 2018, for the second challenge, AARP received almost 1,600 applications and distributed $1.3 million to fund 129 projects.
- In 2019, the grant program received nearly 1,700 applications and distributed nearly $1.6 million among 159 grant winners developing "quick-action" projects.

Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

- In 2020, the program received over 2,800 applications and distributed more than $2.4 million among 184 grant winners (including projects specific to community needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic).
- In 2021, the program received 3,560 applications and nearly $3.2 million is being distributed to 244 projects, including projects with a special emphasis on diversity and inclusion and supporting economic recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.

The AARP Community Challenge grant program is part of the nationwide AARP Livable Communities initiative, which helps cities, towns, villages and rural areas become great places to live for residents of all ages. As part of this effort, AARP staff and volunteers engage and mobilize residents, delivering technical assistance and expertise to local leaders and organizations, and supporting the work of the communities and states that have enrolled in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. Note: The Town is not required to hold the Ade-Friendly designation in order to qualify for a grant.

https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/

Regional public or private funding related to regional development agencies and business associations, as well as Town and local business funding might also be investigated. Certain components of the project will likely be executed by volunteer in-kind contributions.

Timeframe

The following timetable envisions a walkability project that will be completed in phases over a period of 12-24 months and roughly synchronized with the signage and wayfinding project. Given the Town's limited administrative capacity, and desire to complete several related projects more or less concurrently, this timeframe could vary.

- 1/22-4/22: Phase 1 - Planning
  o Form a committee
  o Research relevant materials
  o Identify key destinations
  o Review existing conditions
  o Present findings to the community
  o Determine goals and desired improvements
- 4/22-12/22: Phase 2 – Project Development and Design
  o Identify project opportunities
  o Infrastructure
  o Wayfinding
  o Placemaking
  o Additional Walk Audits
  o Summary of findings
  o Administrative capacity
  o Apply for funding
- 1/23-6/23: Phase 3 – Design Implementation and Evaluation
- 12/22-ongoing: Phase 4 Programming

Finally, this report recommends that the Town capitalize on its prior approval of a Complete Streets policy by developing a Prioritization Plan, thereby qualifying it for Complete Streets grant funding. If the Town decides to apply to the Complete Streets program in order to fund this particular project, the application and approval process will delay this timeframe by 12-24 months, and will require the following steps.

1. Apply for and receive a grant to hire a consultant to assist with the Prioritization Plan.
2. Complete the Prioritization Plan and submit for approval.
3. Submit for and receive a Complete Streets grant to implement wayfinding and/or walkability plans.

Risk

Medium risk. Chester is a small town with highly engaged and enthusiastic leaders who have exemplified strong capacity related to the promotion of walkability in the Village Center and beyond. Government is very close to a large number of residents, and many people have a big stake in the successful completion of this project. Stakeholders include advocates for the recreation and fitness, arts and culture, history, business, and nonprofit communities.

Key Performance Indicators

This project will be successful if:
- the project is embraced by multiple Chester constituencies, including seniors, families, outdoor recreation advocates, businesses, and the arts community.
- upon completion, there is a noticeable and quantifiable year over year increase in activity in the Village Center.
- increased activity and use of assets in the Village Center results in business expansion, as well as an increase in the number of community-wide events beginning in 2023.
- there is surveyed change in resident perception on the walkability and vibrancy of the town center.
- the number of pedestrian-related traffic incidents remains constant or decreases.

Partners & Resources

- Municipal staff (Town Administrator, Administrative Assistant, Planning and/or Economic Development, DPW/Highway, Police/Fire/Emergency Management)
- SelectBoard, Planning Board, Recreation Committee, Board of Health
- Chester RRP Committee
- Chester Business and Civic Association (pending creation as an LRRP project)
- Western Mass Hilltown Hikers
- Village enterprise Center
- Property & business owners
- Local recreation and fitness advocates
- Arts and Culture organizations
- Nonprofit organizations
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Diagnostic/COVID-19 Impacts

Chester is a small, but vibrant community, with significant synergy between business, nonprofit, cultural, recreational, and governmental organizations. The town is centrally located in the Berkshire foothills, and is known for a diverse array of recreational, historic and cultural opportunities. The Village Center contains some significant assets including the Chester Town Park, Chester Railway Station & Museum, Town Hall, and Chester Theater Company.

The Chester Downtown Walkability Study, published in 2018 with support from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and Healthy Hampshire, produced recommendations for improving pedestrian access and connectivity, as well as a map of nine walking routes, throughout the community. This document makes numerous recommends to advance improvements in infrastructure, wayfinding, placemaking/street furniture, programming and administrative capacity while encouraging use and development in the Village Center.

Impacts of COVID-19 drastically and negatively impacted businesses and organizations with much lower revenue, inability for expansion, cancellation of most activities and events.

Action Item

The project will involve the following steps, more precisely defined above under Timeframe and below under Process.

1. Appoint a committee to oversee the project The committee will identify who needs to be part of this process and engage business and property owners, local artists and cultural organizations, and the community at large to get buy-in for the program, and Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity. Determine if the charge of the Signage & Wayfinding Committee should be expanded to include walkability, or if a separate committee should be formed.
2. Interview and hire a consultant/SME to guide the project
3. Develop the criteria for approval and implementation.
4. Develop the funding and oversight structures.
5. Proceed with development and implement of a cultural walkway, incorporating physical elements, such as infrastructure and street furniture, and social elements, such as programming and administrative capacity, in one cohesive implementation.
6. Upon completion of the project, consider next steps, including the possible establishment of a standing committee to advocate for pedestrian and nonvehicular mobility. The Town may consider adoption of a bylaw that provides for such advocacy.

Process

With guidance from subject matter experts, Karl Alexander and Claudia Lafontaine, the following process guidelines are recommended and should be seriously considered.

Phase 1: Planning (3-6 months)
Conduct relevant preparations to identify the project's scope.
- Convene a committee: Bring together key stakeholders committed to overseeing the duration of the project. Identify key goals and confirm key performance indicators for the project. Identify up to $20,000 of available funds to assist with planning (Phase 1) and developing (Phase 2) the project.
- Research: In addition to the Walkability Study and walking route map, collect relevant maps, surveys, data, previous reports, and any other materials that might be helpful.
- Existing Conditions: Update findings from the 2018 Walkability Assessment to include recent improvements and inventory all continued gaps in pedestrian infrastructure. Audit and map all existing wayfinding signage and trail blazes.
- Develop routing alternatives using civic engagement: Host a community design charette to develop options for routing of the walkway, including key destinations. Clearly share information on findings from Research and Existing Conditions to help inform participant ideas. Prepare a summary of findings on the route alternatives for utilization during the project's development (Phase 2)

Phase 2: Development (3-6 months)
Advance a preferred walkway route towards full funding.
- Select a route: Vet the design alternatives using criteria that includes accessibility, propensity for economic activity, number of historical sites highlighted, cost, and difficulty of implementation. Select the highest scoring route after a final period for community review and comment.
- Letters of support: Utilize the summary of findings to obtain letters of support from organizations listed in the Partners and Resources section.
- Community stories: Compile a collection of anecdotes, photos and documents promoting the cultural and historical features that will be highlighted by the walkway.
- Apply for design-build funding: Using resources generated from the project's planning (Phase 1) and development (Phase 2), prepare an application for either the MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces (up to $300,000) or EDA Travel, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation grant programs.

Phase 3: Design (6 months)
Request proposals and hire a firm to prepare conceptual (25%) and final (100%) designs of the cultural walkway that consider the following physical and social elements:
- Infrastructure: Ensure all sidewalks included in the cultural walkway are ADA-accessible. On-street components and crosswalks should be well-marked using paint, as well as flexpost delineators or permanent bollards where potential conflicts with turning motor vehicles may occur. Consider the creation of new designated parking areas near the walkway's entrance.
- Placemaking and Street Furniture: Ensure public seating and shade, either provided by trees or building awnings, is available on each block of the cultural walkway. Identify locations with excess asphalt and/or underutilized spaced which can be transformed into a small park or public space. Consider installing a scavenger hunt-style game for youth which encourages them to look for different features along the cultural walkway.
- Wayfinding: Develop a consistent brand for wayfinding signage that clearly demarcates the cultural walkway's directionality and duration (time and distance) to destinations. 12"x24" signage can be easily affixed to utility poles and printed on either corrugated plastic, which last 2-4 years) or aluminum, which is permanent. Signage may also be accompanied by on-the-ground stencils or demarcations which playfully tie into the theme of the cultural walkway.
- Administrative Capacity: Develop the roles and responsibilities for the organization and their staff who will be responsible for overseeing the cultural walkway's implementation and ongoing efforts, such as programming, maintenance and evaluation. Identify additional funding if existing capacity does not match the intended scope of the project.
- Programming: Build upon existing strengths by reviewing events that bring people to Chester Village Center. Develop a strategy incorporate the cultural trail into them as a welcoming facility for pedestrians to explore. Ensure that events happen on no less than a quarterly basis to ensure momentum for economic activity and historical/cultural appreciation.

Process

Phase 4: Implementation and Evaluation (6 months)
Request proposals and hire a firm to install the cultural trail during warmer months. Appropriate consideration should be made for impact to motor vehicle and pedestrian movement. Upon implementation, track measures of success as they are listed in the Key Performance Indicators section.

Best Practices

The following Best Practice projects represent good examples of Walkability projects that integrate elements, such as Branding, Public Art, and Wayfinding, all of which are identified as important to the Town of Blandford and included elsewhere in this report.

This document incorporates plans that already exist in Chester with several Best Practices from other communities that would serve to enhance existing Chester plans.
CSC_Chester Walking Loop.pdf

The following links detail a low-cost project undertaken in Bethel, VT funded by AARP
Pop-Up Demonstration Project: Main Street, Better Block Bethel, Vermont (aarp.org)
Getting Rural America Back on Its Feet (planning.org)

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Pop-Up Project: Bethel Better Block

A Vermont Main Street is temporarily transformed to show its potential

by Kelly Stoddard Poor/AARP Vermont, Andrew Howard/Team Better Block, **AARP Livable Communities (/livable-communities/)**

PHOTO BY TEAM BETTER BLOCK

Main Street, Bethel, Vermont, during the Bethel Better Block pop-up demonstration project.

Don't miss the Bethel Better Block video at the end of this article.

THE GOAL

Not all towns have the staffing, experience and resources needed to identify and take action on livability measures. Because of that, AARP Vermont piloted an alternative approach to improving livability by challenging communities to take immediate action using do-it-yourself methods pioneered by the Better Block Project.

BACKSTORY

In March 2016, **AARP Vermont** (http://states.aarp.org/region/vermont/) put out a request for proposals asking communities to submit an application to participate in a demonstration project in partnership with AARP and Team Better Block (http://www.teambetterblock.com/). The revitalization-focused project would temporarily transform a single block into a vibrant destination, thereby illustrating the potential for new businesses, safer streets and improved livability.

Visit Bethel

BETHEL BETTER BLOCK

Main Street, Bethel VT

- **Check out the slideshow Main Street Gets a Makeover (/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2017/bethel-better-block-slideshow.html)**

The opportunity was exactly right for Bethel, Vermont (http://townofbethelvt.com/), at exactly the right time. A small rural town of just over 2,000 people (median age: 43), Bethel has a compact, historic downtown center and four additional village centers scattered across 45 square miles of hills and valleys in the Green Mountains of central Vermont.

Bethel was once a bustling industrial town, but over time the large employers dwindled, leaving empty storefronts and limited employment opportunities. Nearly 20 years ago, a downtown revitalization plan for Bethel called for a riverwalk, streetscaping, a renovated Town Hall, parking lot improvements, and more. Some of those elements were built; most were forgotten.

In 2011, Bethel hit a low point when Tropical Storm Irene (https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/irenes-impact-on-vermont-a-crowdsourced-map-of-storm-photos-and-videos-updated-91/Content?oid=2178259) devastated the downtown and surrounding community. After Irene, there was a sense that Bethel had little to offer. One critical success was an ad hoc community group called Bethel Revitalization Initiative (http://bethelrevitalizationinitiative.org/), which describes itself as a "do-ocracy," meaning "people show up with good ideas and then do them."

At the time of Bethel's application to participate in the AARP project, five historic buildings and businesses in the community's core downtown block were for sale. Some of the buildings were vacant and in need of significant repairs. Investors were interested in the properties but hesitant to commit without a sense of the town's future possibilities. A Better Block demonstration would help townspeople and investors see and experience Bethel's potential in real life.

THE PROJECT

From Friday, September 30, to Sunday, October 2, 2016, a downtown block of Bethel's village was temporarily transformed by the following pop-up demonstration projects (the "recipes" for which can be found here (/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2017/BethelBetterBlockPopUpRecipes.pdf)):

- **The Blue Lane**: By removing parking on one side of the street, the project created a dedicated 700-foot lane for people to walk, bicycle, push baby strollers, use a wheelchair or walker, or even ride a horse.

A blue poster describes the Blue Lane and three tricyclists, both older and young, show how the lane can be used.

COURTESY BETHEL BETTER BLOCK

Rules (and users) for the Bethel Better Block Blue Lane, a temporary, dedicated, blue-painted bike-walk lane.

- **Enhanced Crosswalks and a Pedestrian Island**: Painted stripes were added to the existing crosswalks to make them more visible. Curb extensions were created by using landscaping and "bulb-outs" (/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2015/13-short-range-livability-solutions.html) (which were constructed by using straw wattles) reduced the crossing distance from one side of Main Street to the other. The pedestrian island, which was also made of straw waddles and landscaping, narrowed the travel lanes in order to reduce the speed of vehicle traffic through the location.

- **Parklet**: By replacing two parking spaces with café seating and a food stand, the project provided another traffic-calming (/livable-communities/info-2014/livability-fact-sheet-traffic-

calming.html) measure and contributed to the local economy.

- **Beer Garden**: Temporarily transforming a vacant, underutilized parking lot into a beer garden with live music created a place for people to gather and socialize.

- **Pop-Up Shops**: Vacant and underutilized building spaces were temporarily transformed into viable, active retail space.

- **Beautification**: Volunteers used paint, seating and flowers to decorate vacant spaces on Main Street.

- **Temporary Bus Shelter**: Placed in a centralized downtown location, the bus shelter provided adequate sidewalk space, seating and shade. Stagecoach, a transit company, ran a circulator route during the event.

Creating a Better Block

The Better Block Project (https://teambetterblock.com/) promotes the use of simple modifications that can powerfully alter the economic, social, and ecological value of a community by gathering designers, community residents and volunteers together to create a weekend intervention.

The process takes a bottom-up approach to planning that allows community residents to be directly involved with the rapid build-out and construction of revitalization projects. The goal is to inspire and educate community leaders and residents to make streets safer and communities more vital and livable.

THE LOGISTICS

On-the-ground work between Bethel Revitalization Initiative volunteers, AARP and Team Better Block began with a June 2016 "Walk and Talk" during which residents pointed out favorite places, troubled spots, and areas where the town could use some improvement.

More than 75 people participated in roundtable conversations, brainstorming ideas for what Bethel could look like in the future. Residents mapped the community assets and needs, focusing on preserving town history, providing public spaces and safe pedestrian crossings, and encouraging speed-reductions and less noise. Community members stepped up to lead workshops, take on projects, organize pop-up shops, clean public spaces and lead events.

COSTS and CREW

The Bethel Better Block weekend was executed by a core team of 25 volunteers and three staff members from AARP Vermont and Team Better Block. Materials, permits and insurance for the event cost about $4,000.

OUTCOMES and NEXT STEPS

In one weekend, Bethel's downtown came alive with hundreds of visitors. People waited excitedly in long lines for food at the pop-up taco stand. Families enjoyed new spaces for kids to play and socialize. Enhanced crosswalks and planters led to safer conditions for pedestrians. Local artists sold their wares in once vacant buildings. Visitors sat around an outdoor table in a new pocket park, formally an overgrown lot.

The pop-up shops (http://www.vnews.com/Bethel-organizes-pop-up-stores-in-effort-to-promote-Main-Street-revitalization-5112340) demonstrated how retail and service-sector jobs could operate in Bethel. Within a year of the Better Block Bethel weekend:

- A vacant building on Main Street was purchased and the owner is committed to rehabbing it and has supported continuing the pop-up shops

- The Bethel Revitalization Initiative secured an animating infrastructure grant that will create a permanent mural on the retaining wall downtown and permanent outdoor seating is in the works

- The transit provider is adding a deviated fixed route that will service Bethel with local transit options

- The traffic calming demonstrations throughout the downtown improved walkability and livability and made such a good impression that the city and state are examining ways to calm the traffic permanently

The project was a tipping point for building enthusiasm and commitments to make Main Street Bethel thrive again.

LEARN MORE:

- **Bethel Better Block Report (http://www.blurb.com/b/7735945-bethel-better-block-report)**
- **Bethel Better Block Slideshow (/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2017/bethel-better-block-slideshow.html)**
- **Bethel Better Block Pop-Up Recipes (/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2017/BethelBetterBlockPopUpRecipes.pdf)**

UPDATE:

Among the long-term results of the Better Block Bethel demonstration project:

- *Two vacant downtown buildings were purchased and renovated as mixed-use properties with retail on the first floor and housing on the second*

- *A bus route was established connecting the downtown with amenities and services elsewhere in the area*

- *Bulb-outs were installed at two crosswalks to improve pedestrian safety*

- *Beautification efforts were stepped up (thanks to grant funding from the Vermont Arts Council) to use for public art. (See image 16 in the Bethel slideshow for one example.)*

Page published January 2017 | Updated October 2019

Video: *Better Block Bethel*

▶ **YOUTUBE**

Bethel, VT Better Block

▶

Kelly Stoddard Poor (http://states.aarp.org/new-outreach-director-joins-aarp-vt/) is the associate state director of outreach for AARP Vermont.
Andrew Howard (http://www.teambetterblock.com/#ourteam) is an urban planner, cofounder of Better Block and principal at Team Better Block.

AARP.org/Livable

Planning December 2019

IN THIS ISSUE:

Getting Rural America Back on Its Feet

Getting Rural America Back on Its Feet

Yes, rural residents want to walk — and small towns see pedestrian traffic as a way to revitalize their downtowns.

Residents in Bethel, Vermont, teamed up with AARP Livable Communities and Team Better Block to test bulb-outs, crosswalks, a mobility lane, and a parklet. The experiment led to permanent street changes and the revitalization of several downtown buildings. Photo courtesy Team Better Block.

By Jay Walljasper

American life has always been characterized by distinct differences between city and country — this has provided rich material for generations of comedy routines, from vaudeville gags about naive hayseeds and shady city slickers to the 1960s sitcoms *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Green Acres* to the reality TV adventures of Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie in *The Simple Life.*

But these differences don't seem so funny today as the gap widens between rural and urban dwellers in terms of economics, politics, and social attitudes. This incites widespread misconceptions. People living outside metropolitan areas feel insulted by charges that they are backward, bigoted, and unambitious. Urbanites bristle at insinuations they are somehow less American or virtuous than rural residents.

These misconceptions even color how many of us think about planning issues. At a recent national rural livability workshop sponsored by AARP, a roomful of midwesterners were asked what myths about rural America they would most like to dispel. "The idea that our communities are not walkable," was the first response, which drew an immediate round of yeses and head nods.

In many people's minds, rural Americans only walk the few steps between a parking space and their destination.

But a quick look at the facts tells a different story. A 2018 AARP national survey of U.S. adults over the age of 18 found that 30 percent of rural residents walk regularly for at least some trips.

More detailed U.S. Department of Transportation data shows that 7.2 percent of trips in towns with populations between 2,500 and 10,000 are made on foot. That figure rises to 8.5 percent in communities with populations of 10,000 to 50,000. These figures outpace those for suburbs outside the urban core, where just 6.7 of trips are pedestrian. And they are not so distant from the 12 percent of trips on foot in the urban core (defined as cities and close-in suburbs).

Another federal DOT survey suggests that rural residents strongly desire access to walking infrastructure. It found that 95 percent of them rate sidewalks as important to their community, a higher figure than for major roads, adequate parking, and airport access.

While distances can be a challenge for people walking in the countryside itself, small towns and cities seem well-suited for pedestrian transportation. Many boast extensive sidewalk networks, short distances to and around shopping districts, and less car traffic on local streets, which makes walking feel safer and less stressful.

Surprisingly, the Census Bureau noted in 2012 that the three U.S. cities with the highest percentage of people walking to work all have populations under 50,000: Ithaca, New York (pop. 20,000 — 42 percent); Athens, Ohio (pop. 25,000 — 37 percent); and State College, Pennsylvania (pop. 42,000 — 36 percent). Indeed, the only city over 100,000 in the top 15 was Cambridge, Massachusetts (pop. 111,000 — 24 percent). It's true that all but one of the 15 top listed towns were home to colleges or military bases, but it nonetheless shows the high potential to make smaller communities more walkable.

Small-Town Strategies to Connect Communities on Foot

Safe Routes to School programs find ways to get kids on their feet — especially when schools are built on the outskirts of town. Photo by Eddie Moore/*Albuquerque Journal*/Zumapress.com.

For a long time, pedestrians — like bike couriers — have been viewed as a city thing. But as the health and economic benefits of walkable communities become more apparent, rural communities don't want to be left behind.

Here are two approaches that have been embraced by many small towns to improve their walkability.

COMPLETE STREETS. Complete streets principles take into account the needs of all road users — pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, children, the disabled and the elderly, not just motorists. Thirty-three states and more than 1,300 municipalities and counties have adopted complete streets legislation to guide their planning efforts, including places as small as Far Hills, New Jersey (pop. 887), Corinth, Kentucky (pop. 187), and Burt Township, Michigan (pop. 680).

The passage of a complete streets ordinance in Warsaw, Missouri (pop. 2,300) came about as part of decade-long campaign to build a multiuse trail system linking the riverfront parks to downtown, historic sites, and recreational facilities.

For more information, contact the National Complete Streets Coalition (https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/).

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS. Half of all kids walked or biked to school in 1969. Now it's less than 15 percent, but that number is going back up thanks to the rise of Safe Routes to Schools programs — including those in a number of the communities mentioned in this story.

These projects directly tackle the particular obstacles in a community that keep kids off their feet, which in many places includes schools built away from town in the countryside. That problem was solved in two Iowa towns by creating the off-road Turkey River Recreational Corridor, which connects an elementary and middle school campus within the towns of Clermont (pop. 562) and Elgin (pop. 724).

For more information contact the Safe Routes to Schools Partnership (https://saferoutespartnership.org/).

Bringing life back to Main Street

Tapping this potential offers a prime opportunity to reverse the economic and population decline engulfing many rural communities. That's because there is growing evidence that walkability is a key way to stimulate economic development and attract young people to a place. Still, fewer rural residents walk than would like to.

So how do we help more people get back on their feet in rural America? "The first thing to do is make it seem OK to walk," says Dallas-based Andrew Howard, director of Team Better Block, who grew up in Altus, Oklahoma (pop. 19,000). He points to the example of his brother, who still lives in a small town and drives a short distance to work every day. His brother told him, "If I walked, every person who drove past would stop and offer me a ride."

Team Better Block, a group specializing in tactical urbanism, recommends organizing events that excite people about walking as a legitimate way to get around. "The Saturday afternoon can influence the Monday morning," Howard explains. "Get someone to try something at a special event, and they will realize, hey, walking is not that hard."
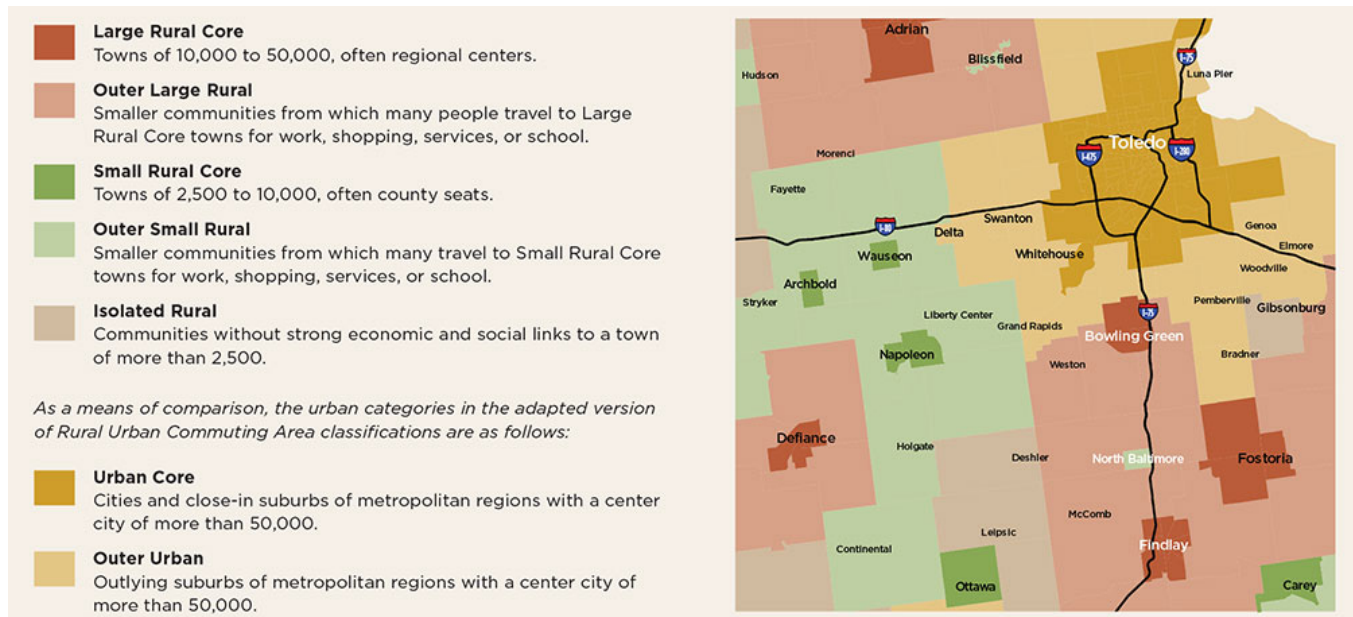
And make it fun, Howard advises. He fondly remembers a project in McAlester, Oklahoma (pop. 18,000) — hometown of country singer Reba McIntire — where people crowded the streets, all wearing red-haired wigs.

In Bethel, Vermont (pop. 2,000), Team Better Block worked with community volunteers and AARP Vermont to put on a fall festival, which included temporary curb bump-outs and painted crosswalks to slow vehicle speeds on the highway cutting through town. It was such a hit that these traffic calming measures were made permanent. That brought more businesses and people downtown, which further slowed traffic speeds. An important lesson learned, says local volunteer Rebecca Stone: "Say yes to new ideas, and then experiment to see if they work."

AARP has put a spotlight on making walking more safe and convenient in communities of all sizes because many older people are among the one-third of Americans who don't drive — a category that also includes children, people with various disabilities, and those too poor to own a car.

Rural Diversity All Over the Map

Anyone who thinks rural communities are all alike doesn't spend much time in the countryside. At a national view, isolated rural areas seem to dominate the map. But look more closely at a region — in this case, Toledo, Ohio — and you'll see a range of community types that are developing a greater interest in walking and biking. Visit the TrADE website (https://trade.railstotrails.org/community_data) for an interactive map of your area.

Large Rural Core
Towns of 10,000 to 50,000, often regional centers.

Outer Large Rural
Smaller communities from which many people travel to Large Rural Core towns for work, shopping, services, or school.

Small Rural Core
Towns of 2,500 to 10,000, often county seats.

Outer Small Rural
Smaller communities from which many travel to Small Rural Core towns for work, shopping, services, or school.

Isolated Rural
Communities without strong economic and social links to a town of more than 2,500.

As a means of comparison, the urban categories in the adapted version of Rural Urban Commuting Area classifications are as follows:

Urban Core
Cities and close-in suburbs of metropolitan regions with a center city of more than 50,000.

Outer Urban
Outlying suburbs of metropolitan regions with a center city of more than 50,000.

Source: RTC Beyond Urban Centers Report.

Honey, I shrunk the highway

Battle Lake, Minnesota (pop. 735) downsized a highway running through town. When hearing of the Minnesota Department of Transportation's plans to resurface Highway 78 — the town's Main Street — local citizens persuaded the agency to do a road diet, narrowing the roadway from four lanes to three, and widening the sidewalk through downtown.

The results were immediate. Twenty-one new businesses have opened in town, including a hotel and bakery, since the project was completed in 2014, reports MnDOT. "Downtown is thriving," says resident Reba Gilliand. "There is always something interesting going on."

The region's summer tourists appreciate the improvements, but the reason for doing it was to attract new families and jobs to Battle Lake. "We didn't want to become another small town on the prairie that loses people, loses our school, and becomes a ghost town," adds resident Dan Malmstrom.

Road diets reduce crashes by 29 percent, according to the Federal Highway Administration, and have been sanctioned by the agency as a "proven safety countermeasure." They address one of the biggest road safety problems in small towns — the fact that high-speed federal, state, and county highways frequently run past stores, schools, churches, offices, and other destinations frequented by pedestrians, including children.

Until recently, most planning protocols emphasized a "one-size-fits-all" uniformity along the entire stretch of a highway. That meant many Main Streets were widened — losing parking, sidewalk and amiable small-town character in the process — to accommodate motorists who would never set foot in town. (This helps explain why 50 percent of all traffic fatalities occur in rural areas, although they account for only 23 percent of the U.S. population, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.)

MnDOT, along with FHWA and many other state transportation departments, has endorsed the idea of road diets as part of an approach known as Context Sensitive Solutions, in which planners are encouraged to "exercise more flexibility in highway design."

CSS helped defuse a standoff between citizens in Grand Marais (pop. 1,200) — a scenic Minnesota harbor town on Lake Superior — and MnDOT engineers about a makeover of US Highway 61. Locals wanted curb bump-outs and other amenities to make it more hospitable to residents and tourists on foot. The engineers contended that heavy truck traffic coming in and out of Canada made that impractical.

"We were at loggerheads for the better part of the year," remembers Cook County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jim Boyd, until a new plan was hammered out that reduces each travel lane by a foot while adding bump-outs, painted crosswalks, 140 new trees, a public plaza, and public art. A multiuse bike/walk path will run alongside the highway, and new sidewalks will be built in some stretches currently lacking them. The debate also spurred Grand Marais to draft its own pedestrian plan, emphasizing new sidewalks on other city streets and better snow removal.

Extruded curb treatments, like these in Kuna, Idaho, are used in Emmett and other rural areas to create safe pedestrian walkways without the full cost of sidewalks. Photo by Don Kostelec.

Where the sidewalk ends

A frequent obstacle to making small towns more walkable is money — because road and sidewalk improvements cost big bucks. But don't despair, says Dan Burden, director of innovation for Blue Zones, which focuses on walkability as a key element in making communities healthier. Burden is a pioneering walkability expert who was the country's first official state pedestrian coordinator in Florida.

"Small towns don't need to replicate what big cities do" he says. "They can do things in their own way."

Adding sidewalks on already built blocks can ignite homeowner wrath because of expensive assessments, lost street trees, and the sense that their property is being taken (even though it is technically a public right-of-way). A less costly, less controversial alternative, Burden says, is "marking out a pedestrian lane on the side of residential streets with low traffic volumes and speeds — all you need is paint." He notes that small towns streets are generally wide with plentiful parking, so these lanes don't antagonize residents or motorists.

He points to a plan in Immokalee, Florida (pop. 26,000) — an unincorporated community outside Naples whose residents are 97 percent people of color — to create a walking lane from a school to a nearby lake. "They don't have the money to do sidewalks, so this will really help."

Emmett, Idaho (pop. 6,600) — an economically struggling town — just opened a three-quarter-mile pedestrian lane, making it safer for kids to walk to an elementary school located on a street with no sidewalks. Three flashing lights have been installed to alert cars and make pedestrian crossings easier. This is the first link of an eventual two-mile route connecting downtown, all three schools, and the main city park.

The lane is a five-foot asphalt extension to the road shoulder with a raised divider providing extra protection from moving traffic (periodic cuts in the divider handle storm drainage). The project cost 10 percent of a traditional sidewalk, notes designer Don Kostelec, AICP, of Boise-based Vitruvian Planning, who calls the approach "an extruded curb treatment." He says this can even work on gravel roads using railroad ties.

"You can't come into a small town with the same tool kit you'd use in Boise or Portland," notes Kostelec, who has worked in more than 20 rural Idaho communities.

Mayor Gordon Petrie — a retired judge and Iraq war veteran — champions better walking conditions in Emmett as a key plank of his limited-government philosophy. "The fundamental bottom line of why cities exist is to protect people and property — and to create the infrastructure so people can protect themselves. This includes protection from chronic disease — and walking is one of the best ways to prevent us from chronic disease."

Petrie cites the school principal as another influence on his thinking. "He's a former football player at Boise State, and he says if we get the kids' hearts pumping on the way to school, they will do better on tests and be better behaved."

Mayor Petrie walks his talk. As part of the Idaho Mayor's Walk Challenge he once covered 650 miles in a single month (averaging 21 miles a day), winning prize money to invest in pedestrian projects around town.

While budgets are constrained in rural communities, it's often easier to get things up and running, Kostelec observes. When his firm proposed a pedestrian lane marked with a painted line in Mackay, Idaho (pop. 444), one city council member — who was also the fire chief and coach of the local baseball team — piped up, "We can get the money for that at the next school fundraiser, and I can use the line marker from the baseball diamond to apply the paint."

Jay Walljasper — author of The Great Neighborhood Book *and* America's Walking Renaissance *— writes, speaks, and consults about creating better communities. See more of his work at JayWalljasper.com (http://jaywalljasper.com/).*
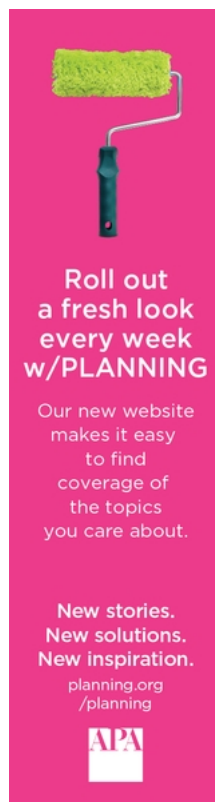
RESOURCES

APA Learn: Tactical Urbanism: People and Pavement (https://learn.planning.org/local/catalog/view/product.php?globalid=LRN_S533): Learn how to set up a program for community-initiated demonstration projects to test ideas for improving walking and biking.

Highway 61 Revisited: The scenic harbor town of Grand Marais, Minnesota, goes on a road diet (https://youtu.be/CrC0xsVWfVI) and gets a highway makeover after teaming up with MnDOT on a context-sensitive solution.

AARP: Rural Livability (https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/archives/info-2014/rural-livability.html) resources include videos, articles, slideshows, presentations, and more. Visit AARP's Livable Communities newsletter (https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/) online.
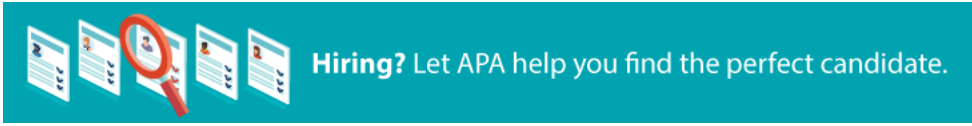
f (https://www.facebook.com/AmericanPlanningAssociation) ▶ (https://www.youtube.com/user/AmericanPlanningAssn) 🐦 (https://twitter.com/APA_Planning)

📷 (http://instagram.com/americanplanningassociation) **in** (https://www.linkedin.com/company/24456/)

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Develop a Facade, Signage, and Physical Improvement Program

Category

Private Realm; Revenue Sales; Culture Arts; Tenant Mix

Location

Village Center including Main Street, Maple Street & Route 20

Origin

Chester Rapid Recovery Planning Committee with guidance from PVPC Plan Facilitators

Budget & Sources of Funding

Medium Budget ($50,000-$200,000)

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 sign upgrades when tied to a specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

T-Mobile
Hometown Grants
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 or 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 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 creating the program, developing the design guidelines, and providing conceptual designs for improvements, depending on the complexity of the project.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Community Planning Grants (project limit $25,000-$75,000)
A Community Planning Grant may be used for Zoning Review and Updates, which can include the sign code and design guidelines if they are part of the municipality's zoning bylaws or ordinance.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and DHCD
District Local Technical Assistance Grant
Funds for this program are allocated to the regional planning agencies and 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.

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

Budget & Sources of Funding (cont'd)

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 following sources 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: MassDevelopment
Underutilized Properties Program
As with the historic tax credits below, this funding source is for larger projects. It could be used to help address larger buildings in a target area that have more significant issues. The Board of Directors of the Chester Fair, along with the Town, has strong interest in increasing and diversifying utilization of the Fairgrounds. Bundling this program and a few of the other more specialized grants could help the municipality address smaller properties with the façade improvement program and larger ones, such as the Fairgrounds, with these more targeted funds.

MassDevelopment
Collaborative Workspace Program
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.

Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit
This is available for significant rehabilitation of historic buildings and may help supplement a larger project in a downtown. This is included here because the guidelines developed for the municipal façade/storefront improvement program could be incorporated into the review of larger projects.

Massachusetts Cultural Council
Various Grant Programs possibly available to the Chester Fairgrounds
The Chester Fairgrounds seeks to broaden its reach through additional programming, festivals, and events. As the property becomes increasingly available to host cultures and arts activity, the organization will become increasingly eligible to apply for MCC grants.

The MCC offers a wide portfolio of grant programs that could assist with building and infrastructure improvements, operating expenses, and specific programming. Grant programs include Cultural Facilities grants, Festivals grants, Project grants, Gateway grants, Portfolio grants, and Local Cultural Council grants.

The following excerpt is taken from the MCC website:
Culture provides.
Our cultural life thrives because of the work of countless arts, humanities, and sciences organizations across the Commonwealth. Programs and initiatives like the Cultural Facilities Fund, Universal Participation, and EBT Card to Culture have been designed to help such organizations innovate, take on new challenges, and expand access to previously underserved audiences. We invest in ambition and imagination, with returns that improve our quality of life, create economic opportunity, and engage more people in cultural expression.
https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/who-we-are/sources-of-funding/

Timeframe

10/21-3/22: Engage a committee of local businesses and nonprofits, and a consultant, to establish a program to provide grants and/or loans for physical exterior and interior improvements throughout the Project Area, including the Littleville Fairgrounds.

4/22-12/23: Administer a grant program to assist interested businesses and nonprofits to refresh storefronts, structures, and displays. Further, almost all property owners in the Project Area have identified the desire to address Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) needs.

01/24-ongoing: The town could consider expanding the program beyond 12/23 if it is successful.

Risk

Low risk. Chester is a small town with highly engaged and enthusiastic leaders and stakeholders. Government is very close to a large number of residents, and many people have a big stake in the successful completion of this project. Participation in this program will be voluntary and based on financial need.

Key Performance Indicators

This project will be successful if:
- the project is embraced by multiple businesses and nonprofits.
- upon completion, participating businesses show a clear and quantifiable increase in customer visits and/or revenue.
- the Littleville Fairgrounds are open to the public at least 12 days per year and used to host a minimum of 4 major seasonal events per year.

Partners & Resources

- Municipal staff (Town Administrator, Planning and/or Economic Development, Building Inspector)
- Municipal boards (SelectBoard, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals)
- Chester Business and Civic Association (pending creation as an LRRP project)
- Village Enterprise Center
- Property & business owners
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- Hilltown Community Development Corporation

Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts

Chester is a small, but vibrant community, with significant synergy between business, nonprofit, cultural, recreational, and governmental organizations. Included in the Project Area asset mix is the Chester Railway Station & Museum, Chester Theater Company, municipal buildings, churches, several retail and service businesses, and restaurants. The Village Center encompasses a walkable residential neighborhood, and is enhanced by important recreational assets, including the Westfield River, Hampden Street Park, and the Chester Town Park.

The diagnostic phase revealed that several businesses and nonprofits have outdated or deteriorating infrastructure, signage, and/or façades. Others have been engaged in long-term planning and implementation to improve their properties, but have had to delay further action as a result of the impacts of COVID-19.

Additionally, 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 or installed. Further, improved ADA accessibility is a goal that has been expressed by all stakeholders in the Project Area.

The Littleville Fair is a 4-day regional agricultural fair, drawing several thousand attendees to Town every summer. The Fair will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2022. The fairgrounds are owned and operated by a volunteer nonprofit organization and have undergone significant renovations in the past few years. Nonetheless, assistance with buildings and grounds is still needed to allow the organization to fully achieve its goal of ensuring sustainability with a more diverse array of public and private events throughout the year.
The Fairgrounds is located 8 miles from the Village center, and is centrally located between several Hilltowns.

Important and iconic pillars in the Village Center are The Chester Railway Station & Museum and the Chester Theater Company. Both attract thousands of people to the Village Center each year, and attract significant media attention.

The A&L Market building and Riverside Inn have recently been purchased by the same person and are planned for redevelopment. Various uses for the Market building are under consideration. The Inn, which has been vacant for more than 30 years, is going to be renovated and restored to once again be used as a B&B and private event space. Carm's Restaurant, which opened in 2019, Chester Common Table, and the Blue Note Café are established businesses, but all have been significantly impacted by C the pandemic. A mix of other businesses, appropriate for the size of the Town, exists throughout the Project Area, however there is certainly room for additional choices for residents and visitors alike.

Given the financial losses during the pandemic, small business owners and nonprofit organizations do not have all of the resources necessary to address building needs in a timely manner. This situation is not for lack of trying. Without exception, all businesses and organizations in the Chester Project Area demonstrate a creative, "can do" attitude with regard to implementing physical improvements on their property.

Other plans and recommendations contained in this report identify the desire and need for Public Realm projects such as branding, beautification, and signage and wayfinding projects. A Private Realm project, facilitating physical improvements to commercial and nonprofit properties, will comport well with similar efforts on public property.

Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts (cont'd)

<u>Littleville Fairgrounds Notes and Recommendations</u>
Cassandra Holden and Kyle Holmstead from Laudable Productions specialize in producing community based cultural events in western Massachusetts. They conducted a site visit of the fairgrounds (at no charge) and, based on their findings, the following recommendations are offered.

LOCATION
The Littleville Fairgrounds is a beautiful property located adjacent to the Chester Wildlife Management Area, the Littleville Lake, and a branch of the Westfield River. While the site feels "remote", it is actually quite convenient to a western Massachusetts population base of more than 500,000. The site is centrally located within a 15-minute drive of 4 local Hilltowns, and within 45 minutes (or less) of most major western Massachusetts population centers, including Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee, Westfield, Northampton, and Pittsfield. There is very little signage directing travelers to the Fairgrounds. An effective signage and wayfinding system, emanating from the Village Center and perhaps other adjacent towns, would have a major impact in raising awareness of the Fairgrounds.

LAYOUT, STRUCTURE AND INFRASTRUCTURE
The layout of the Fairgrounds is highly suitable to host a more diverse variety of programming and events than currently exist. Existing structures and utilities are in place with a few notable exceptions. The Fair has several buildings suitable for hosting different types of events. Both the structures and the power infrastructure are in very good condition. The buildings are grouped in such a way as to leave large open spaces for audiences to spread out. The property can easily accommodate multiple activities within one event, i.e. simultaneous performances, workshops, meetings, competitions, etc.

Onsite parking of 700-1000 cars is possible, with significantly more available potentially available at the adjacent boat launch area, subject to agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers. Further, parking at Littleville could alleviate parking issues in the Village Center during large events (such as Chester On Track) through the use of shuttle busses. The reverse could also be possible, shuttling people from satellite parking in the Village Center during Fairgrounds events. Successful implementation of such a strategy would have a positive impact on business development in the Village Center.

The property is overall accessible to a person in a wheel chair. Minor changes would make the existing restrooms handicapped-accessible, however a more significant upgrade or replacement of those facilities is the highest priority item for the Board of Directors (see below for a list of the top 5 remaining projects.) This upgrade, along with the addition of a fire suppression and ventilation system in the kitchen are the two most important upgrades that would enhance the ability for the Fairgrounds to sponsor a or host additional events.

CURRENT AND FUTURE EVENTS
The Fairgrounds currently hosts 3 events annually. They are the Littleville Fair (August), Snowmobile Races (February), and Camping (May) in conjunction with Chester on Track.

Ideas for potential future activities include, but are not limited to, destination multi-day events, music/art festivals, cultural festivals, horse shows, sporting events, summer camps, retreats (writing, yoga, dance, meditation), rustic weddings, RC Flying/drone competitions, fishing events.

PROCESS
The first step should be to thoroughly document the site and complete the parking/traffic/safety studies required to understand the logistics of hosting various types of events there. Creating an easily shareable portfolio will enable presenters and event organizers to envision using the space and make critical planning decisions. The following is a more complete list of items to include in such a portfolio.
- drone photography
- photos of all buildings with measurements/drawings
- map of entire property
- parking study
- traffic study (police detail, road closure)
- emergency vehicle access
- safety plan in the event of severe weather
- trash removal options
- documentation of power infrastructure
- documentation of cooking facilities

Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts (cont'd)

- information about local permitting procedures and timelines

Historically, music has lasted until 11pm or 12am. While there is generally a positive relationship with neighbors, they should not be overlooked and invited to be a part of the process from the start.

Site improvements necessary to enable the property to host the type of events envisioned in this report are:
- Upgrade bathrooms and make ADA compliant
- install showers (essential for multi-day events)
- bring kitchen into compliance (fire suppression system / ventilation)
- power for mobile stage at edge of field, adjacent to entrance (not first priority)

A demonstration project should be created that will catalyze a regional audience and demonstrate "proof of concept". The project should be documented with professional photography and videography. Feedback from event organizers, attendees, volunteers, neighbors, municipal officials, and civic leaders should be solicited through a variety of surveying tools, meetings, and discussions. This will be vital to inform future improvements and planning processes, and catalyze public imagination and memory. Word will spread quickly once events begin to happen at the Littleville Fairgrounds.

Outreach will be important to capitalize on momentum and should include:
- Develop mailing list of event attendees
- Develop mailing list of potential event organizers
- Develop social media strategy to promote space utilization as well as existing events

Top 5 projects identified by Littleville Fair Board of Directors

Littleville Fair top 5 projects for grant funding: Fiscal years 2021 thru 2026

1. New Building with Handicap Bathrooms
   a. Demolish existing building
   b. Build new 32ft x 28ft structure
      i. 6 urinals/13 toilets/4 showers/9 sinks/ 2 heaters
2. Rebuild Snack bar area
   a. Demolish existing structure
   b. Install new cement floor
   c. Build new walls with Fiberglass Reinforced Plastic Panels (FRP)
   d. Install new roof
   e. Install new grill
   f. Install 3 bay sink
   g. Install Ansel Fire suppression system
3. Upgrade Dining Hall/ Dining Hall Kitchen
   a. Install Ansel Fire suppression system
   b. Install FRP walls dining room area
   c. Install new ceiling in kitchen and dining area
   d. Install new windows
   e. Install 4 new doors
   f. Install 3 Bay sink
   g. Install new floor
   h. Install/ Repair foundation under whole building
4. Build new front and back entrances/replace fencing around the fair grounds
   a. Demolish existing structures
   b. Build new entrance structures
   c. Replace existing fence and entrance gates
   d. Pave road way from entrance to fair ground main buildings
   e. Install new lighting and electrical throughout the fair grounds
5. Expand parking areas
a. Excavate selected areas to increase usable space for addition parking

6. Project Points of Contact:
   Maurice Boisseau Sr.,
   President, Littleville Fair
   785 Pochassic Rd, Westfield, MA 01085
   Phone: (413) 364-4411
   Email: thelittlevillefair@gmail.com

Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts (cont'd)

7. Organization to Receive Funds:
     The Community Fair Association of North Chester,
     Chester Hill and Littleville Inc.
     15 Kinnebrook Road
     Chester MA 01011

Action Item

The project will involve the following steps:
1. Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
2. Identify who needs to be part of this process and engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.
3. Determine the need for any design, façade, or sign code revisions.
4. Develop the criteria for application, approval, and implementation.
5. Develop the funding and oversight structures.

With guidance from subject matter expert (SME) Emily Innes of Innes Associates, Ltd, the following process guidelines are recommended and should be seriously considered.
Pre-program development
1. Identify who in the municipality will manage this program: municipal staff, existing nonprofit committee/organization, volunteer committee, or a hybrid. PVPC, as the Regional Planning Agency, can work with the municipality on the program, as requested and subject to funding.
2. Decide whether the design guidelines will be just for the façade improvement program or more broadly applicable.
3. Discuss the potential focus of the program: components of a storefront, the entire storefront, the entire façade, all façades, the entire site? Will 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.
6. Consider the funding structures. The program, once established, could 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. Another option is to forgive loans after a certain time if the improvements are maintained. The Town might consider offering grants to early adopters (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 program
1. Decide the following:
   a. Grant, loan, or hybrid
   b. Which elements will the program fund and which are the responsibilities 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. 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.
3. Develop the forms and train the people who will be evaluating the applications.

Acion Item (cont'd)

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.

Best Practice

Admin Capacity, Private Realm - Innes Associates - Facade Storefront Programs -REVISED.pdf The following are links to specific façade improvement programs in Ashland and Cambridge. Ashland, Massachusetts is conducting a Sign and Façade Improvement Program that provides a 50% match up to $5,000. This program is a revolving loan fund, but this can also be done with grants. The preferred target area is high-traffic streets but it is open to all businesses in Ashland.

The program includes building improvements (accessibility, signs, awnings, painting) and site improvements (parking lots, planters, landscaping).
https://www.ashlandmass.com/669/Business-Incentive-Programs

Cambridge, Massachusetts property owners or tenants can access financial resources to renovate or restore commercial building exterior facades through the Storefront Improvement Program. The Program improves the physical appearance of independent businesses and enhances Cambridge's commercial districts.

https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/econd ev/smallbusinessassistance/smallbusinessp rograms/storefront

Andover

Develop a façade/storefront/site improvement program.

ADMIN CAPACITY

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	• Develop design guidelines for the façade elements to be improved.
	• Develop the structure of the program.
	• Manage the program over time.
	• Design assistance.
	• Implementation, including construction.
	• Displacement protection programs.

Budget: Sources

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.

Budget: Leveraging Other Sources

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 the district then apply for the funds to address
vacant storefronts. This could help reduce the number of 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	• 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
Diagnostic	Reasons for undertaking a façade or storefront improvement program may include one or more of the following: • 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. • On-site parking spaces are poorly organized and, if reorganized, can provide room for outdoor dining or retail display. • Local small businesses do not have the resources (time, money, expertise) to address substandard storefronts. • 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. • Storefronts are not accessible to those who have problems with mobility, whether temporary or permanent. • 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. • Historic properties may have been "improved" with inappropriate materials or repairs. 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.
Action Item	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. If starting from scratch, the municipality will need to accomplish the following: • Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity. • Develop an appropriate level of design guidelines. • Engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program. • Develop the criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance. • Develop the funding and oversight structures.

Process

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

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/econdev/smallbusinessassistance/smallbusinessprograms/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/hcdrf

- State-by-state program – in 2016, it was Texas and in 2019, it was Maine.
- This is not a funding source, bur 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.