



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Sunderland



Acknowledgements



Town of Sunderland, MA

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



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

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

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

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

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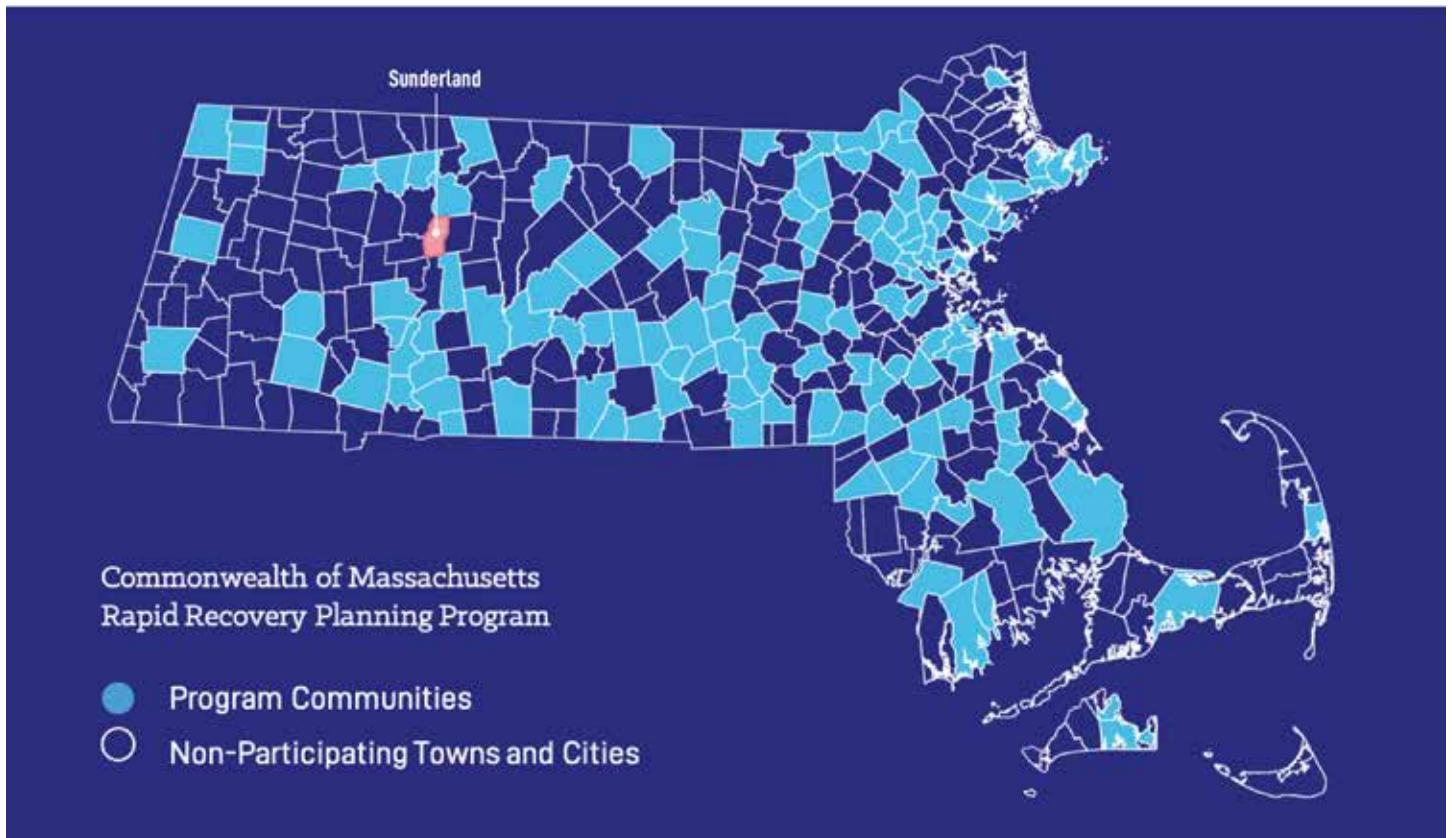
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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



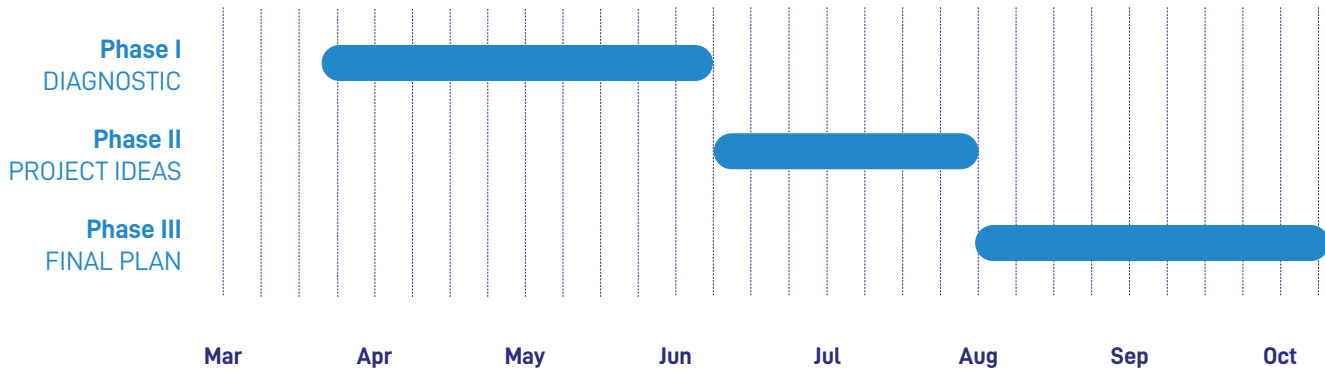
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

The framework was designed to ensure methodical diagnosis of challenges and opportunities in each community, and to identify strategies and projects that aligned with the interests

and priorities of each community. The framework looks at four areas of analysis: Physical Environment, Business Environment, Market Information, and Administrative Capacity - each equipped with guiding questions to direct research conducted by Plan Facilitators.

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



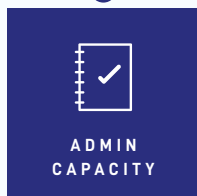
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue & Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Sunderland is a small town in the Pioneer Valley along the Connecticut River. The focus of this study is the downtown area, commonly known as the Village Center. Nestled in the valley, the Village Center sits within a picturesque rural setting, characterized by agricultural fields, red barns, historical residences, churches and municipal buildings. It is appreciated for its historic district along Main Street, its access to the river, its good connectivity to the region and its small town feel.

It also sits at the intersection of two state roads, one of which (Route 116) connects the much larger Town of Amherst to the only bridge across the river for many miles. This road is heavily trafficked, with vehicles rushing through the Village to avoid being caught at the stoplight. As a result, the Village has been described as "a pass through" downtown, rather than a destination.

The pandemic exacerbated these issues, further discouraging drivers from stopping while disincentivizing pedestrians from feeling safe in the Village Center. At the same time, it also placed significant financial strain on some of the Village Center businesses, especially those in the food and beverage sector. Combined these factors made the study area seem empty and moribund, and lacking in a clearly defined character.

The aim of this study is to prepare the town to address these issues as part of a comprehensive recovery effort, with the goal of making the village center a more vibrant and economically prosperous destination that is easy to get to, easy to get around, and well defined.

List of Recommendations

To that effort, and in consultation with the Village Center Committee and the Town Administrator, this report proposes a series of recommendations. It should be noted that the illustrations that support these recommendations should be viewed as initial possible suggestions that will require further development, and will likely change as a result.

1. Provide Support to Businesses in Need
 - Hire a Recovery Fund Coordinator
 - Assist in acquiring funds for cash-strapped businesses
 - Create a shared marketing program for existing businesses
 - Create a Storefront Improvement Program to enhance existing businesses
2. Use Branding to Solidify Village Center Identity
 - Create a comprehensive branding and signage system
3. Increase Pedestrian & Bike Connectivity
 - Conduct mobility research & design / implement temporary strategies
 - Implement permanent mobility strategies
 - Create connections to surrounding natural resources and trails
4. Target Desired Businesses
 - Develop Tenant Recruitment and Retention Plan
5. Utilize Zoning to Create the Desired Development
 - Review & Update Zoning Bylaws to encourage desired future development
6. Capitalize on Events to Draw Residents & Visitors
 - Streamline permitting processes to encourage outdoor activation
 - Create and market unique and vibrant events

Diagnostic Key Findings

Key Findings



The Town's customer base consists of two distinct groups: older, long-term homeowners and younger, mostly short-term renters.

For the most part, the houses that line Main Street are historic, beautiful, and home to an older cohort of homeowners who have lived in these single family residences for some time. At the same time, Sunderland is said to have more rental units per capita than any other municipality in the Commonwealth. As a result, a number of students and other groups looking for affordable rents also live in Sunderland, albeit, not in the Village Center, and usually, not for long durations. While visitors from other municipalities might come to the Village Center for a particular business (e.g. a special meal at Blue Heron, or a walk through Mike's Maze), it is not currently imagined that they would frequent other aspects of the Village Center at the same time. Consequently, one or both of the aforementioned groups residing in Sunderland constitute the customer base for most downtown businesses.



Many Village Center businesses are food establishments, which were particularly hit by the pandemic.

There is no disputing that all Village Center businesses were seriously affected by the pandemic, though not evenly. Some businesses were able to pivot easily during lockdown, and others were not. Food establishments were particularly hard hit, with many businesses yet to fully recover.



The volunteer-led Village Center Committee is a key steward of the study area.

Sunderland's Town Hall is reasonably well-staffed for a small community. The town administrator reports to the Sunderland Selectboard and communicates with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) to address regional issues. He also interacts with the various volunteer committees that are organized to address issues of import to the community. For this study, it is the Village Center Committee that is working closely with the Town Administrator to shape a post-pandemic recovery.



The Village Center has many historic and natural attractions, but lacks definition and a sense of place.

Historic Main Street is one of the town's highlights, as is the access to the Connecticut River, the numerous parks and natural spaces. And yet the Village Center is missing a sense of place. The two state roads intersect in the middle of town, one of which is heavily trafficked, and, as currently configured, discourages drivers from stopping and pedestrians from feeling safe to walk it freely, resulting in the impression that downtown is for driving through only.



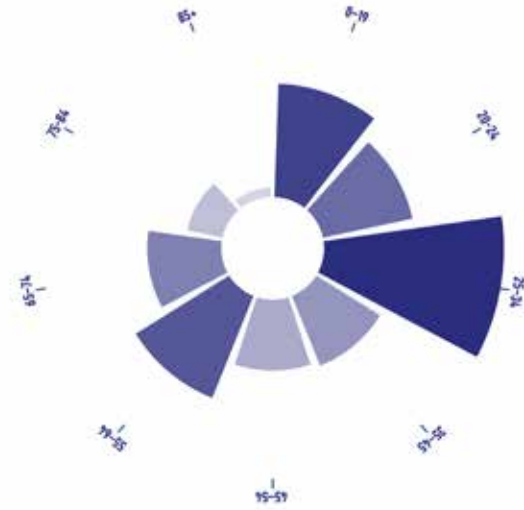
Highlights from the Customer Base

Population Age Group

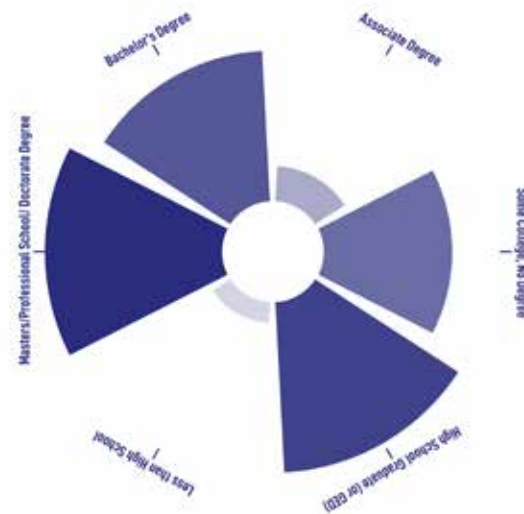
Recent Census Bureau information reveals that the largest age group in Sunderland is 25-34 year-olds, followed closely by 55-64 and 0-19 who are roughly equal to each other in percentage. One can assume that the former is composed of graduate students and recent graduates of local colleges and universities starting their professional careers. At the same time, the latter groups are those professionals approaching retirement, and school age children. Two other significant population groups are the recently retired (65-74), and the college age (20-24).

Population By Educational Attainment

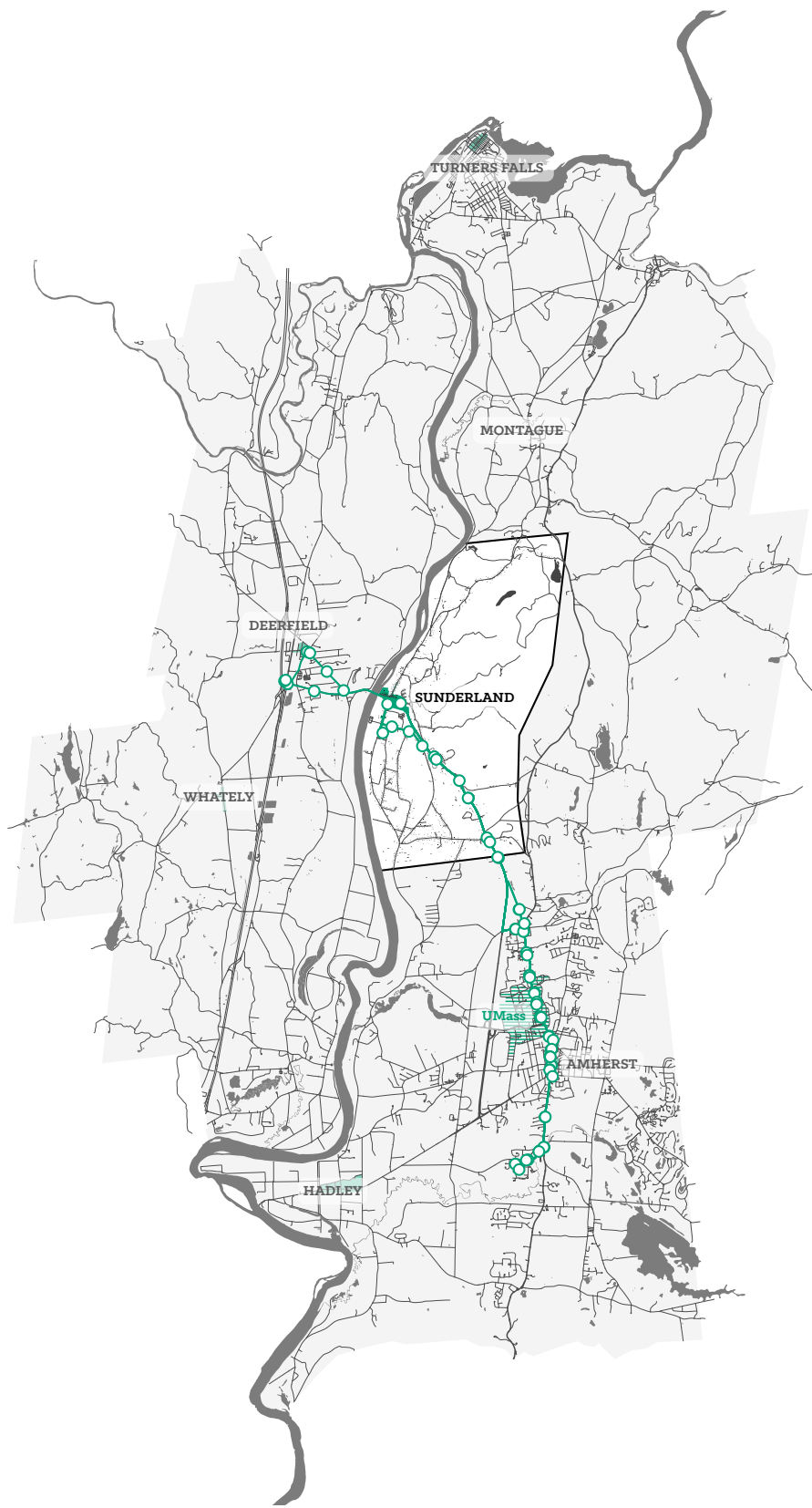
Sunderland is a remarkably well-educated population. The vast majority of the population possess at least some college level education, the largest sub-group of these have attained masters, professional school, and/or doctoral degrees. More than half of all adults have an advanced degree. Virtually all residents have achieved high school graduation or equivalent. These high levels of education should come as no surprise given the proximity of many universities and colleges.



Population by Age.
Source: 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Population by Educational Attainment.
Source: 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates



*Sunderland & surrounding communities, connected by public transportation.
Source: OverUnder*



Highlights from the Physical Environment

View from above

Sunderland Village Center is set within a picturesque rural landscape, characteristic of the Connecticut River Valley. When viewed from the top of nearby Mt. Sugarloaf, the patchwork of farms, barns, historic homes and the occasional church steeple suggest a quintessential New England town. Certainly there is much to support this idea, not least the majestic tree-lined Main Street with its historic residences, many of which predate the founding of the country. In fact, the Sunderland Center Historic District is in the National Register of Historic Places. This historic jewel is set within the larger context of an active rural landscape as well as numerous trails that connect the town to Mt. Toby to the north and east of the Village Center.



Sunderland Village Center is set within a picturesque rural landscape, characteristic of the Connecticut River Valley. Photo: AllTrails

View from the street

At the same time, the Village Center lacks the clear definition one expects of a quintessential New England town center. This is in large part due to the fact that two state roads intersect at its center. One of these, Route 116, connects points south to the other side of the Connecticut River across the Sunderland Bridge, the only connection for miles in either direction. Unsurprisingly, Rt 116 receives heavy traffic flows, making it unpleasant for drivers and pedestrians alike.

While an impediment to the character of the Village Center, the road network permits easy access to the region's highway system and bus routes. In particular, the public transportation system connects the Village to Amherst's colleges and universities. This makes it an easy place to get to, provided one is drawn to it in the first place, and it's an enjoyable pedestrian experience once there.

The study area does have some pleasant walking and/or biking paths: Main Street itself is very walkable, as the sidewalks are at some distance from the vehicles. The newly completed river walk is also popular, as is the Swampfield Drive path that links Main Street to the Sunderland Elementary School and points south. Unfortunately, these paths are not interconnected and as a result, cannot be considered part of a safe or enjoyable network to walk uninterrupted throughout the Village Center.

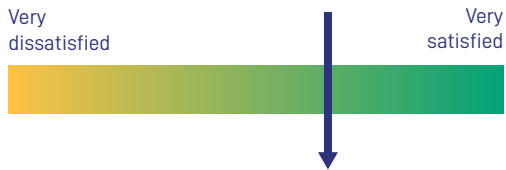


Sunderland Center Historic District is in the National Register of Historic Places. Photo: OverUnder



Sunderland Study Area.
Source: OverUnder

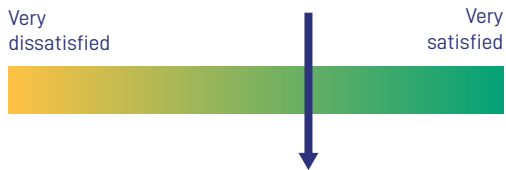
Condition of Public Spaces, Streets & Sidewalks



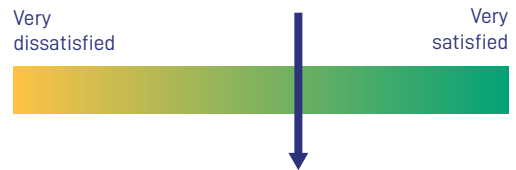
Safety and Comfort of Customers & Employees



Condition of Private Buildings Storefronts & Signs



Proximity to Complementary Businesses & Uses



Access for Customers & Employees



Satisfaction with the physical environment of the commercial district
Source: Sunderland Village Center Business Survey



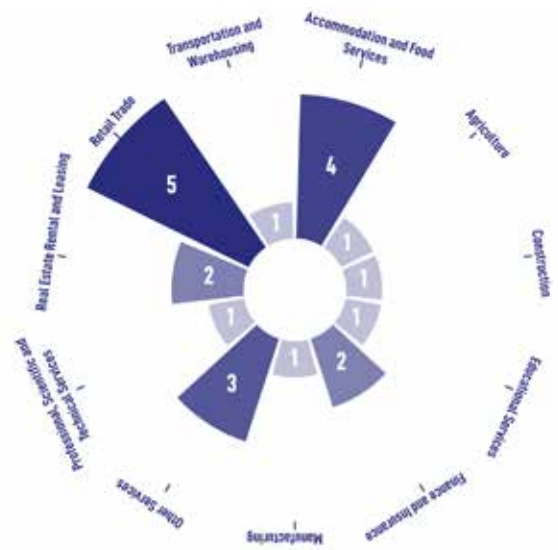
Highlights from the Business Environment

A mix of businesses

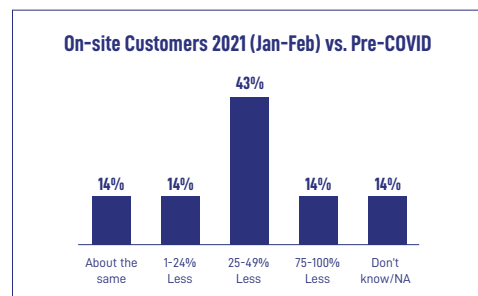
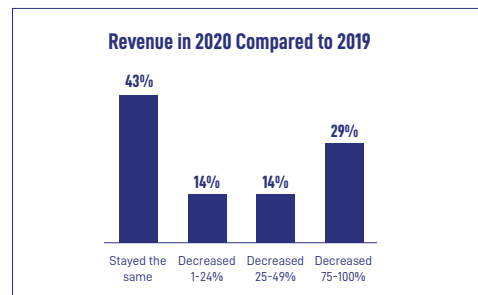
There are twenty two registered businesses located in the Village Center. While there is a wide spread of business types, a fifth of them are listed as "Accommodation and Food Services," which in downtown Sunderland are eating establishments. Another 22% are listed as "Retail Trade," or shops. Other businesses include a construction company, financial services company, two hair salons, a limousine service, and real estate. While all Village Center businesses were affected by the pandemic, the food and beverage sector was especially vulnerable.

The effects of the pandemic

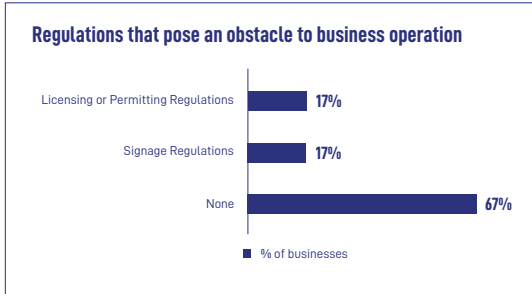
Of those responding to our survey, a majority of the businesses in the Village Center indicated that their revenue had fallen in 2020, in some cases quite dramatically. Unsurprisingly, even more businesses reported a substantial drop in on-site customers in 2021, as compared to pre-pandemic levels. While some have voiced frustration with Town Hall regulations--licensing, permitting and signage regulations in particular -- most expressed no issues with town regulations in a recent survey. When, in the same survey, they were asked to evaluate potential kinds of assistance, many expressed a support for a shared marketing campaign that would promote the businesses of the Village Center.



Study area businesses by type
 Source: Sunderland Village Center business directory provided by Town Administrator



Impacts of COVID-19 on Sunderland's Village Center businesses.
 Source: Sunderland Village Center Business Survey



Sunderland Village Center businesses' input on the regulatory environment and strategies for business support.
Source: Sunderland Village Center Business Survey



Highlights from Admin Capacity

Current capacity

Sunderland's Town Hall appears well-staffed for a small community. A (relatively new) town administrator and his staff carry out the day to day needs of the town, reporting directly to the Selectboard. Like most municipal workers, they have been extremely busy over the past two years adjusting to new—and changing—realities.

As is typical for small towns, the municipality looks towards the county level for support in certain areas, in this case the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG). FRCOG offers potential when trying to address issues at a regional level, and is also a possible source of financial support.

As is also typical in small towns, committees of volunteers do an enormous amount of civic work to move things forward. In the case of this study, it has been the Village Center Committee who have spearheaded the initiative. The plan facilitators and the subject matter experts (SMEs) have held numerous meetings with this group throughout the past four months to plan for the recovery effort.

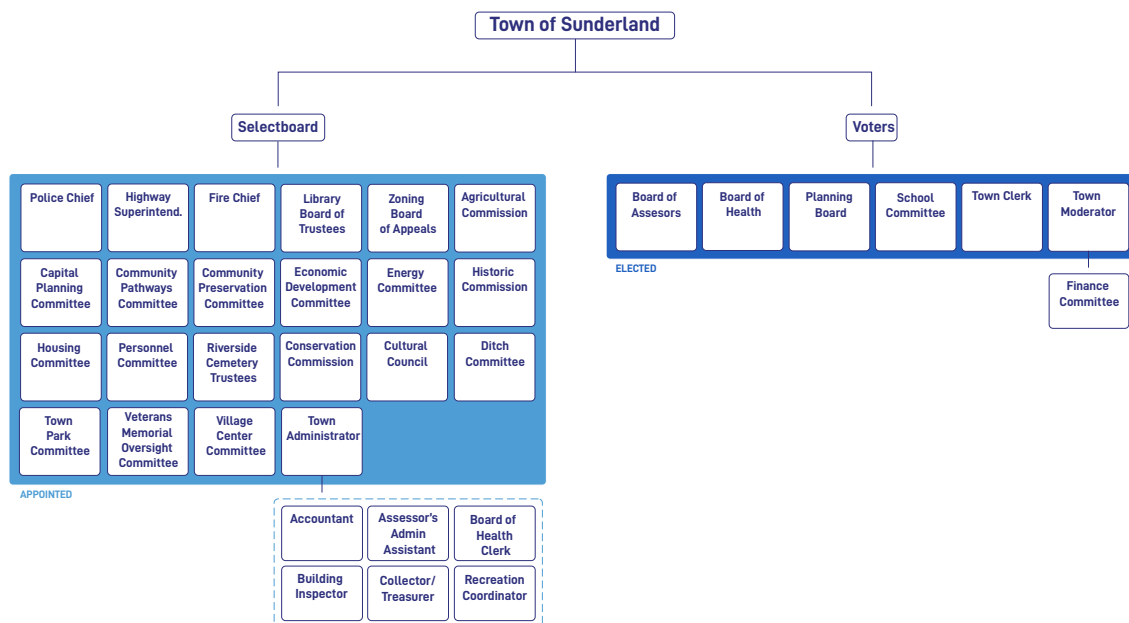
Future needs

While this group is committed to the effort, and the town administrator and staff are extremely capable, it is possible that some of the project recommendations will necessitate an increase in capacity to support implementation.



*Future growth will require a business friendly town hall.
Photo: OverUnder*

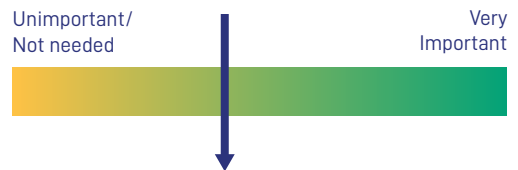
Finally, there were few frustrations expressed by existing businesses in the survey with respect to the regulatory, zoning, and permitting processes. Nonetheless, it may be possible that some of the proposed recommendations will flag certain processes as impediments to desired change, and consequently, will need to be revised.



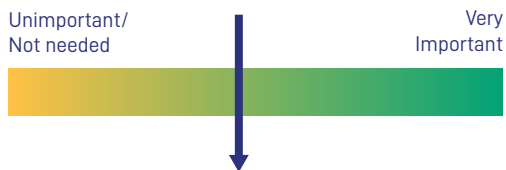
Renovation of Storefronts/ Building Facades



Improvements in Safety and/or Cleanliness



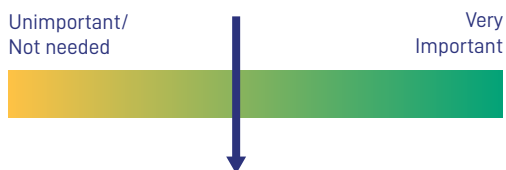
Improvement/Development of Public Spaces & Seating Areas



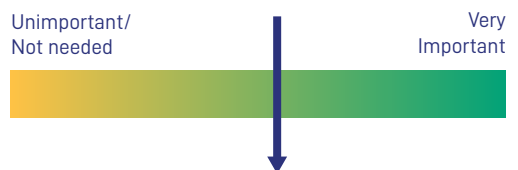
Changes in Public Parking Availability, Management or Policies



Improvement of Streetscape & Sidewalks

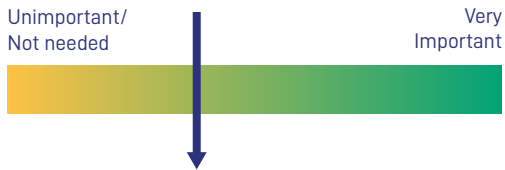


Amenity Improvements for Public Transit/ Bike Users

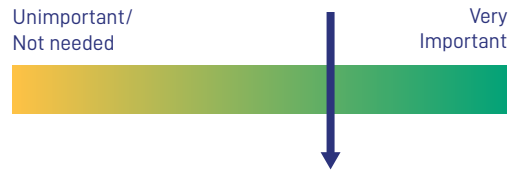


*Business input related to possible strategies.
Source: Sunderland Village Center Business Survey*

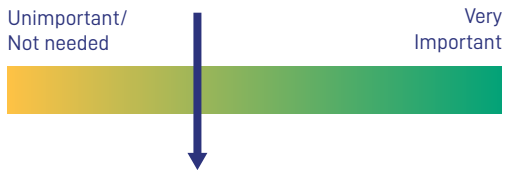
More Cultural Events/Activities to Bring People into the District



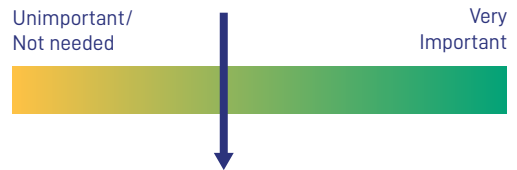
Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses



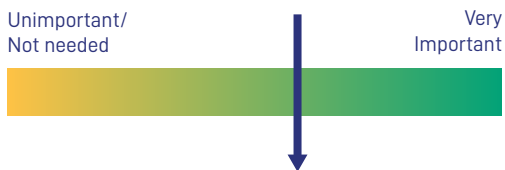
More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining & Selling



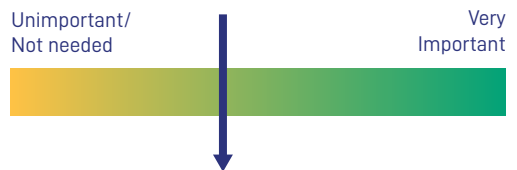
Changes to Zoning or Other Local Regulations



Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District



Creation of a District Management Entity



*Business input related to possible strategies.
Source: Sunderland Village Center Business Survey*

Better, consolidated & clearer signage is badly needed.

*The intersection is **unsafe for pedestrians as well as motorists.** I request that the decision about the intersection be based on **safety statistics.***

*More **activities for adults and families** in the winter months. A **farmer's market** is a great idea. It is in keeping with the flavor of Sunderland.*

*Zoning in Sunderland is flawed as is. The Town should get a **professional zoning review.***

*Communication in Sunderland is poor even with its own residents. A lot of **improvement in communication and new advertising ideas** are needed.*

*The current events are not coordinated with businesses, so it might help overcome concerns to first **get restaurants and others to participate with booths to sell food,** for example. Maybe some subsidies to get them to try it, or investment by the town in some **event tents?***

*The town needs a **framework and a vision for economic development.***

*The main intersection is **only three miles away from Mount Toby.** What draws people to Sunderland is recreation. Sunderland is an **incredible recreational hub between river and mountain.***


Select community feedback from the two public meetings.

Project Recommendations

1. Provide Support to Businesses in Need
 - Hire a Recovery Fund Coordinator
 - Assist in acquiring funds for cash-strapped businesses
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2. Use Branding to Solidify Village Center Identity
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1. Provide Support to Businesses in Need

Hire a Recovery Fund Coordinator

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000 – \$200,000) Potential Funding Sources: Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk – Need to secure Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
Key Performance Indicators		Successful administration of recovery funds, successful response to Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds reporting requirements
Partners & Resources		Town Administrator, Town Selectboard, Town Staff



*Sunderland Town Hall.
Source: OverUnder*

Diagnostic

There is no disputing that all Village Center businesses were seriously affected by the pandemic, though not evenly. Some businesses were able to pivot easily during lockdown, and others were not. Food establishments were particularly hard hit, with many businesses yet to fully recover. The federal government has allocated money to states intended to provide assistance for these businesses. In order to determine a fair and transparent means of identifying and supporting those in need, as well as a clear method to assess proper use of funds, the Town should hire a Recovery Fund Coordinator. This would be a temporary, contract position which will primarily be responsible for administering and managing COVID recovery grant programs, coordinating with eligible business and commercial property owners and administering program funding in coordination with the Town.

Action Item

This is to be a contract position and is to be funded through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Responsibilities would include administration of the Town's relief grant programming, preparation of written and graphic reports, and day-to-day administration of funding. This position would be responsible for oral presentations, performing field work, collaborating with other Town departments, and responding to requests for information from businesses and the general public. The Town could consider sharing this position with other regional municipalities who have taken part in the Rapid Recovery Process.

Process

- Confirm that grant money is available for dispersion to businesses in need
- Assess the best means by which to fill the position (e.g. Sunderland-only, or through a regional approach)
- Apply for grant to fund this position
- Hire suitable candidate
- Establish criteria for funding businesses in need of funds
- Determine caps for businesses
- Create an easy application process for businesses
- Publicize availability of funds and procedure
- Evaluate businesses
- Disperse funds
- Review correct use of funds

Assist in acquiring funds for cash-strapped businesses

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		Low Budget (less than \$50,000) Potential Funding Sources: Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, SBA's Restaurant Revitalization Funding Program, MGCC's BIZ-M-POWER and Small Business Technical Assistance Grant, or Massachusetts DHCD's Community Development Block Grant for municipalities with a population of under 50,000.
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low risk - technical assistance may be challenging due to capacity of small business owners
Key Performance Indicators		Increased business revenue, no business closures
Partners & Resources		Town Administrator, Town Selectboard



*Businesses along Route 116.
Source: OverUnder*

Diagnostic

The results of the business survey conducted in the Village Center during March and April of 2021 showed that 4 out of the 7 businesses that participated in the survey experienced a decline in revenue due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, 6 out of 7 businesses reported being impacted by the pandemic in some way, such as operating in reduced hours or capacity, having incurred expenses to implement safety measures, or establishing alternative modes to sell and deliver products.

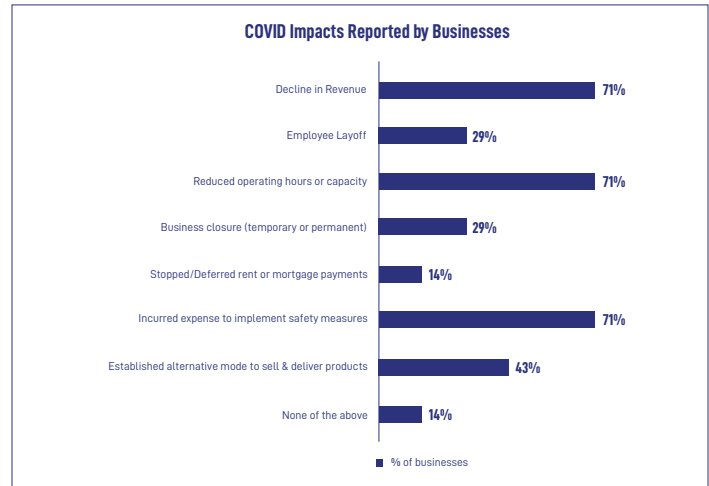
Following one-on-one conversations with business owners, it was clear that Village center businesses were unequally impacted by the pandemic, with one restaurant business reporting that "without a State grant, we would have closed at the end of 2020".

It is therefore important for the town to identify and assist businesses most affected by the pandemic in leveraging funds for local recovery coming from the federal Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, SBA's Restaurant Revitalization Funding Program, MGCC's BIZ-M-POWER and Small Business Technical Assistance Grant, or Massachusetts DHCD's Community Development Block Grant for municipalities with a population of under 50,000.

Action Item

The project will include:

- Business outreach and engagement to identify needs for capital or technical assistance
- Identification of grants and eligible uses that best correspond to business needs
- Administration of a grant program that provides small business assistance for those Sunderland Village Center businesses most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic
- Bringing on additional capacity by hiring a recovery fund coordinator is essential to the success of this program.



COVID Impacts Reported by businesses that participated in the business survey.

Source: FinePoint Associates



Restaurant business in the Village Center

Source: <https://www.bridgesidegrille.com/>

Process

- Conduct analysis of current business needs, through a business survey and individual business interviews.
- Research business assistance grants to determine which one best aligns with the needs identified through business engagement, as well as the town's capacity to match the grant and adhere to reporting requirements.
- Identify business eligibility criteria
- Create online application platform on the town's website
- Open application period, including information session
- Review of applications by town staff
- Notify applicants and execute grant agreements
- Complete procurement process for Technical Assistance providers (if applicable)
- Complete reimbursement requests.
- Collect reporting documentation and close out award requirements.

Best Practice

Provide Funding and Technical Assistance to Enable Business Viability During COVID-19

Provided by Revby LLC

Location Arlington, MA

Action Items

- Administering a relief program for Arlington businesses with twenty or fewer full-time-equivalent employees, including the owner.
- The program provides short-term working capital assistance and technical assistance to enable the viability of the business during the severe economic interruption related to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing restrictions

Process

- Conduct analysis of current needs that align with eligible use of CDBG funds.
- Complete a substantial amendment of CDBG Annual Action Plan, including public comment period and citizen participation process.
- Open application period (including information session).
- Review of applications by 4 members of the team.
- Notify applicants and execute grant agreements.
- Complete procurement process for Technical Assistance providers.
- Complete reimbursement requests.
- Technical Assistance sessions and workshops: Topics include digital marketing, website assistance, eCommerce, SEO, Bookkeeping, and business resilience.
- Collect reporting documentation and close out award requirements with HUD.

Create a shared marketing program for existing businesses

Category		Revenue & Sales
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		Low Budget (less than \$50,000) Potential Funding Sources: Regional Economic Development Organization (REDO) Grant Program, MA Downtown Initiative Program
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Medium Risk – the program needs a steward
Key Performance Indicators		Online/Social media engagement, residential and business community support, increased business revenue
Partners & Resources		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard, Village Center business owners, Marketing and Graphic Design Consultant



*Cluster of existing businesses in Sunderland Village Center.
Source: OverUnder*

Diagnostic

Potential visitors to the Village Center are likely to pass through the downtown area for many reasons, especially because of the speed in which drivers are ushered through two state roads. Partly due to this speed, people have no time to identify which or what kind of businesses are downtown. There is also no centralized directory for existing businesses, nor an attempt to advertise these businesses in any way more than individual storefronts. Existing businesses can be made stronger if presented as a collective attraction for the Village Center.

Action Item

The project will include engaging a graphic design/marketing firm to lead the effort. The Town would act as a liaison between the design firm and participating Village Center businesses. Priorities of this effort will be determining an appropriate design language for the marketing program, gathering information from participants to collect into a formal database, creating a web database for public access to this information, determining what kind of print collateral would be most appropriate and effective (banners on lamp posts, flyers as handouts, posters in storefronts, mailed postcards) and designing that collateral.

Process

- Hire graphic design/marketing firm to lead effort
- Engage downtown businesses and communicate how it would benefit them
- Brainstorm what kind of message the collective wants to communicate, ideally something welcoming and vibrant
- Collect business information into formal database that can be accessed by public, hosted on the Town website, but also as a standalone website and/or web app
- Design print collateral — everything from banners on light poles, and posters in storefronts to mailed postcards and painted sidewalks.
- Devise some way to track Key Performance Indicators of each business
- Revisit marketing program after 6 months to determine effectiveness and adjust as needed

Best Practice

#IAMherst Welcome

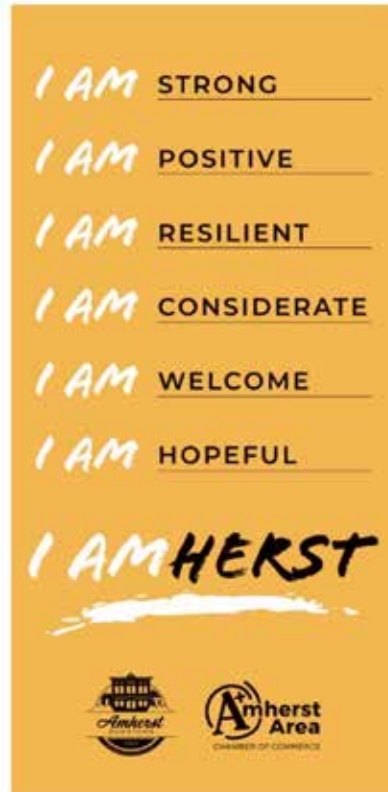
Provided by Amherst Business Improvement District

Location Amherst, MA

Amherst MA was effectively "shut down" 3 weeks prior to the Shelter in Place orders on March 13. The University and College within 48 hours closed and sent their students, faculty and staff home, effectively removing close to 40,000 residents of our community. Our downtown and surrounding areas became a ghost town overnight. We did not see the robust summer that the "summer vacation destinations" enjoyed while case numbers were relatively low. Amherst business hovered at around 20-25% of previous years and our unemployment at an all time high of 22% in the State today remains at one of the highest at 5.1%.

Process

- Identify the need for rebranding for Pandemic Life
- Bring Tiger Web design team on board
- Start with key elements of 1. Mask 2. Hand washing 3. Social Distance
- Look to how to "lighten" and make less threatening
- Establish "emoticons"
- #IAMherst – borrowed from incredible ad campaign seen in Amsterdam
- Brainstorm of who "we are": Strong! Resilient! Etc.
- Maintain thread that We, YOU, I am/are WELCOME – keep in mind that we want this campaign to go past COVID-19
- Be able to separate with ease the COVID related parts. IE: hand wash, mask, distance
- Distribution: 100+ Light post banners
- Wear a Mask, Wash Your Hands, 6' Distance Posters in over 200 Amherst wide storefronts, delivered with free PPE: masks, gloves, hand sanitizer

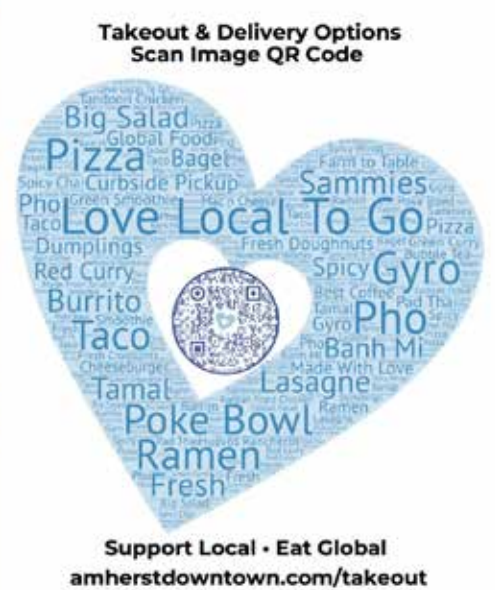


Source: Amherst Business Improvement District

- 12 Sandwich boards Amherst wide
- 8 – 12' tall window "Selfie wall" I AM & Welcome Back facing UMASS campus
- Continued Print and Social Media
- 20+ Town Ambassadors promoting mask awareness, health and safety wear the "I AMherst" shirts
- Continued messaging and support with and for businesses that Amherst businesses take this pandemic seriously, we take safety measures, we support you and are grateful that you support local business.

Post-pandemic

- The #IAMherst campaign will continue post pandemic with timeless messaging that our community both visitors, residents, students and passers through are WELCOME
- The Campaign serves this community through uncertain and certain times and maintains a positive, happy and heartening message for all when in our downtown.
- The mask, hands and distance signs will outlive their relevance but the #I AM signs will continue to serve our area with bright, open messaging



Source: Amherst Business Improvement District

Create a Storefront Improvement Program to improve existing businesses

Category		Private Realm
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) Potential Funding Sources: Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, T-Mobile's Hometown Grants, Local Banks, MA Downtown Initiative Program, Community Preservation Act
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Medium Risk - owners may be reluctant to participate. Early engagement with property owners is important.
Key Performance Indicators		Creation of the program; number of applicants over a specific timeframe; number of façades, storefronts, and/or sites improved within a specific timeframe; increase in visitors; increase in sales at the property/business improved and within the area
Partners & Resources		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, property and business owners



*Businesses along Route 116.
Source: OverUnder*

Diagnostic

Sunderland Village Center features a set of quirky Americana commercial buildings (Sugarloaf Frostie, Wild Roots) alongside the historic residences of North and South Main Street and a beautiful rural landscape. Despite this unique character, most business storefronts fail to attract foot traffic or activate the street as their outdoor spaces cater to cars rather than pedestrians.

Local small businesses do not have the resources—time, money, expertise—to address these issues. At the same time, properties turning their back on the street have a negative impact on people's perception of the business district and property owners are unable to make the improvements themselves.

Replacing asphalt with landscape, planters, outdoor dining and retail displays will help the recovery of businesses hit by the pandemic, enhance the impression of the Village Center towards residents, visitors and business patrons, and attract new ones. Additionally, site improvements can address the walkability and pedestrian level of comfort, encouraging walking and improving the overall health and well-being of town residents.

Action Item

The project will include:

- Identifying appropriate funding sources
- Engaging businesses and property owners
- Developing storefront design guidelines
- Developing criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance
- Developing the funding and oversight structures

Process

- Research funding sources and determine the appropriate ones for this program. Decide if the program will be administering grants, loans or a hybrid. 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 improvements are maintained is another option



Example of potential storefront improvement with addition of town-branded planters

- Conduct a current conditions assessment
- Engage business and property owners to get buy-in for the program. Differentiating between the responsibilities of the tenant and the landlord 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
- Determine eligibility and evaluation criteria, program length, maintenance requirements and enforcement (e.g. repayment of a grant or a lien on a property)
- Hire a consultant to develop storefront design guidelines
- Create online application platform on the town's website, including design guidelines
- Open application period, including information session
- Review of applications by town staff
- Notify applicants and execute grant or loan agreements
- Collect reporting documentation and close out award requirements

Best Practice

Sign and Façade Improvement Program

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

Location Ashland, MA

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)



Source: Town of Ashland, MA

2. Use Branding to Solidify Village Center Identity

Create a comprehensive branding and signage system

Category		Public Realm
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Community Pathways Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-200,000) Potential Funding Sources: MA Downtown Initiative, Regional Economic Development Organization Grant Program
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk - needs agreement among community stakeholders on the identity of the Village Center
Key Performance Indicators		Widespread deployment of brand identity, resident & business community embracing the Village Center brand
Partners & Resources		Village Center Committee, Community Pathways Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard, Village Center residents and businesses



*Recently designed sign for Sunderland Riverside Park.
Sign design by [Brent M. Hale](#)*

Diagnostic

Downtown Sunderland is perceived as a “pass-through” space in part because there is no sense of arrival or exit. Fast-moving traffic doesn’t have a chance to admire the landscape or survey the local businesses before they’ve moved on. There is very little signage indicating local attractions like the Buttonball Tree or Mike’s Maze. Simply put: the Village Center is visually undefined. Past efforts to brand Sunderland have been non-comprehensive and thus not widely adopted.

Action Item

Branding the Village Center would help define an area that is hindered by being located at the intersection of two state roads. There is enormous potential to draw from for a visual identity: the scenic and expansive farmland, Mt. Sugarloaf, the Connecticut River, not to mention emerging vibrant businesses like Wild Roots. This project would involve hiring a graphic design/marketing firm to lead the effort.

Process

- Hire graphic design/marketing/wayfinding firm to lead effort
- Engage downtown businesses and communicate how it would benefit them
- Brainstorm what kind of message the collective wants to communicate, ideally something welcoming and vibrant
- Hold community engagement meetings to solicit feedback from residents and business owners
- Coordinate with MassDOT to determine what signage will need approval along Routes 116 and 47
- Determine a brand roll-out strategy broken up into phases, soliciting feedback after each phase to determine if following pieces need modifying
- Selected brand identity should be deployed to social media and Town website
- Design concepts for wayfinding elements
- Develop preferred design into a family of sign types with materials, colors, etc.
- Create sign location plan and message schedule to include in bid package to fabricators

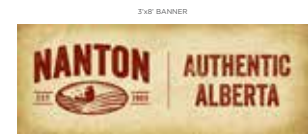
2.6 IDENTITY APPLICATIONS

DISPLAYS AND SIGNAGE

In order to maintain the style, tone and personality of the NANTON brand, we must establish a set of rules that will provide the framework for clear and consistent communication to our audience.

Displays and signage and all other marketing materials must all have a consistent look in order to ensure the brand's integrity.

Here are some examples of signage that align with the NANTON brand.



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2.3 IDENTITY APPLICATIONS

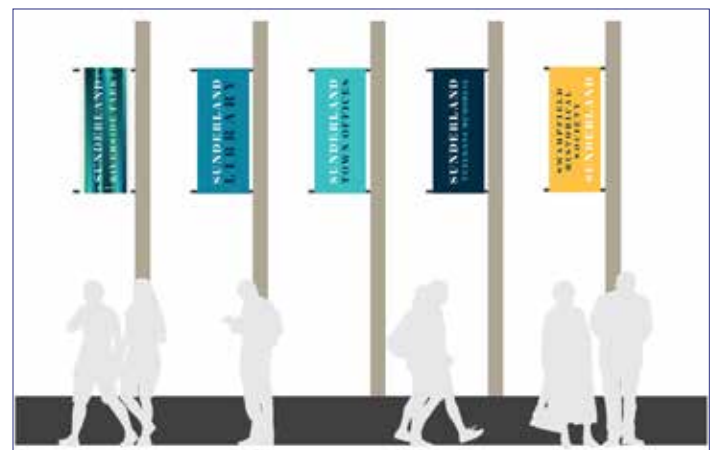
IMAGERY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC STYLES

Imagery and textures should reflect the personality and style of the NANTON brand. "Authentic Alberta" is a tagline associated with the town and all imagery should support this motto. Here are examples of the kinds of images that fit within the general style guideline that align with the NANTON brand and capture the spirit and distinctly western attitude of the town.



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*Example pages of brand guidelines for a rural town.
Source: Town of Nanton in Alberta, Canada*



*Additional proposed signage for the Village Center.
Sign design by Brent M. Hale*

Best Practice

Integrate Brand and Art into your Wayfinding System

Provided by Selbert Perkins Design

Location Worcester, MA

Process

- Understand who the stakeholders and decision-makers will be
- Hire a branding & wayfinding consultant
- Audit existing conditions
- Conduct a Wayfinding Analysis including; multi-modal circulation, main decision points, key destinations, etc.
- Identify opportunities for art/placemaking
- Research the history of the place, uncover stories that might inspire the design
- Engage with stakeholders and the public to understand needs and perceptions. If possible, create a survey 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 message schedule
- Create Design Intent drawings and a bid document to solicit pricing from fabricators
- Update the budget and project schedule
- Assist with communication between the fabricator and municipality
- Provide Construction Administration, Site Visits, and Punch List as needed



Source for both images: Selbert Perkins Design

3. Increase Pedestrian & Bike Connectivity

Conduct mobility research & design and implement temporary strategies

Category		Public Realm
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		<p>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)</p> <p>Potential Funding Sources: MassDOT Complete Streets or Shared Streets & Spaces funding is available for initial study plan and lower-scale implementation, which may help advance this project on the TIP.</p> <p>Alternative study/plan funding sources include DHCD's Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places, and upcoming grants from Massachusetts funded by the CARES and ARP Acts.</p>
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators		Pedestrian traffic; crash rate; multi-modal level of service; business revenues
Partners & Resources		Village Center Committee, Town Selectboard, MassDOT, DPW, Design Consultant, Transportation Consultant



*Aerial of intersection of Routes 116 and 47.
Source: OverUnder*

Diagnostic

Sunderland is located at the intersection of two state roads (MA-47 and MA-116). The two roads are very different in traffic volumes, walkability and land uses. Most businesses are located along 116, a heavily trafficked road with missing sidewalks and overall unsafe conditions for pedestrians. MA-47 is the town's Main Street featuring beautiful historic residences and pedestrian-friendly sidewalks that are separated from the road by a state-owned 25-foot buffer.

At the same time, the 4-way intersection is a difficult and unsafe crossing point for pedestrians, and to make matters potentially worse, MassDOT is proposing to place a roundabout here.

During the pandemic the desire to eat and shop locally in Western Massachusetts has increased, as has the desire to walk and bike to these locations. These are trends the residents wish to maintain as they come out of the pandemic.

Action Item

The project will include planning of a more pedestrian-friendly intersection of 116 and 47. The plan will examine the intersection in the context of its intersecting roadway corridors and consider each corridor's interaction with each other and the surrounding context, including considerations of factors influencing vehicle speeds in advance of the intersection, such as land use, curb cuts, pedestrian activity, speed zones, lateral friction, vertical profile, sidewalks, shoulders, bike lanes, visibility, etc.

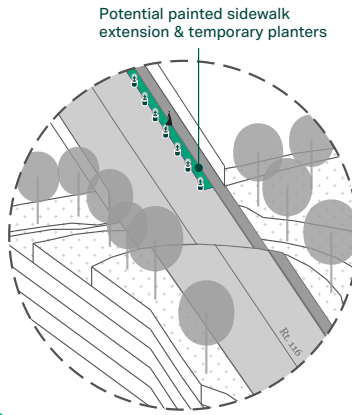
Factors to consider include future land uses, planned walking and biking infrastructure, public realm / streetscape plans, unmet walk desire lines, access management opportunities, and other features of each corridor and how they influence the intersection. A number of options for improvement should be considered, including a state-proposed roundabout as well as alternatives more conducive to creating town center feel (e.g. bulb outs and curb extensions, gateway and traffic calming treatments in advance of the intersection, additional crossing opportunities, new biking facilities and road diets, as well as the use of landscaping, signage and other public realm enhancements).

Process

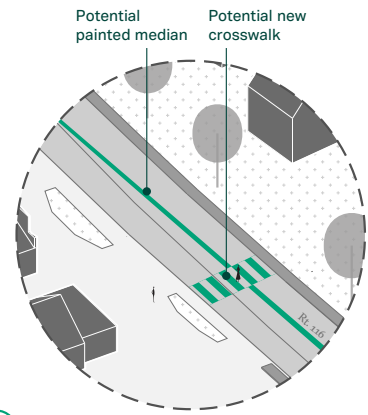
- Collect and analyze data about traffic movements by mode, speeds, crashes, delays, roadway layout, rights of way, property lines and local and State regulatory environment
- Conduct mobility study to assess existing and future conditions and to support evaluation of design alternatives
- Implement temporary strategies to test alternatives
- Conduct engagement process to receive community/abutters' input
- Evaluate all community-supported design options for the redesign of the intersection and/or each corridor in advance of the intersection
- Conduct community workshop(s) to identify a preferred alternative

Potential temporary traffic-calming strategy along Route 116

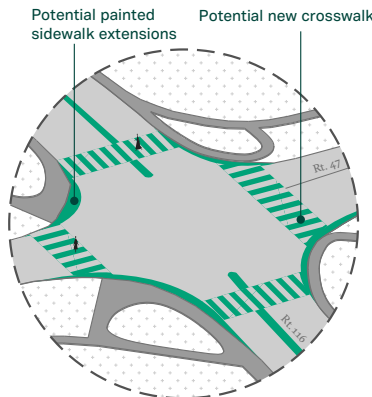
Numerous brightly-painted crosswalks along Route 116 encourage drivers to slow down as they approach the intersection of Route 116 and 47. Demarcating a temporary pedestrian way on the bridge will narrow the drive lanes and make the pedestrian experience safer and more enjoyable.



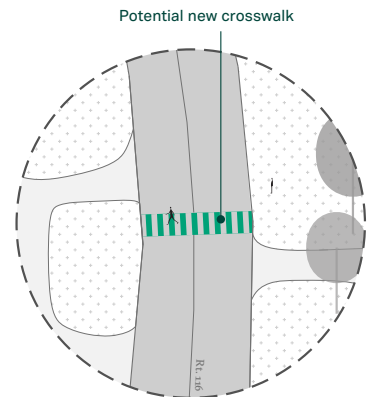
A SIDEWALK AT BRIDGE



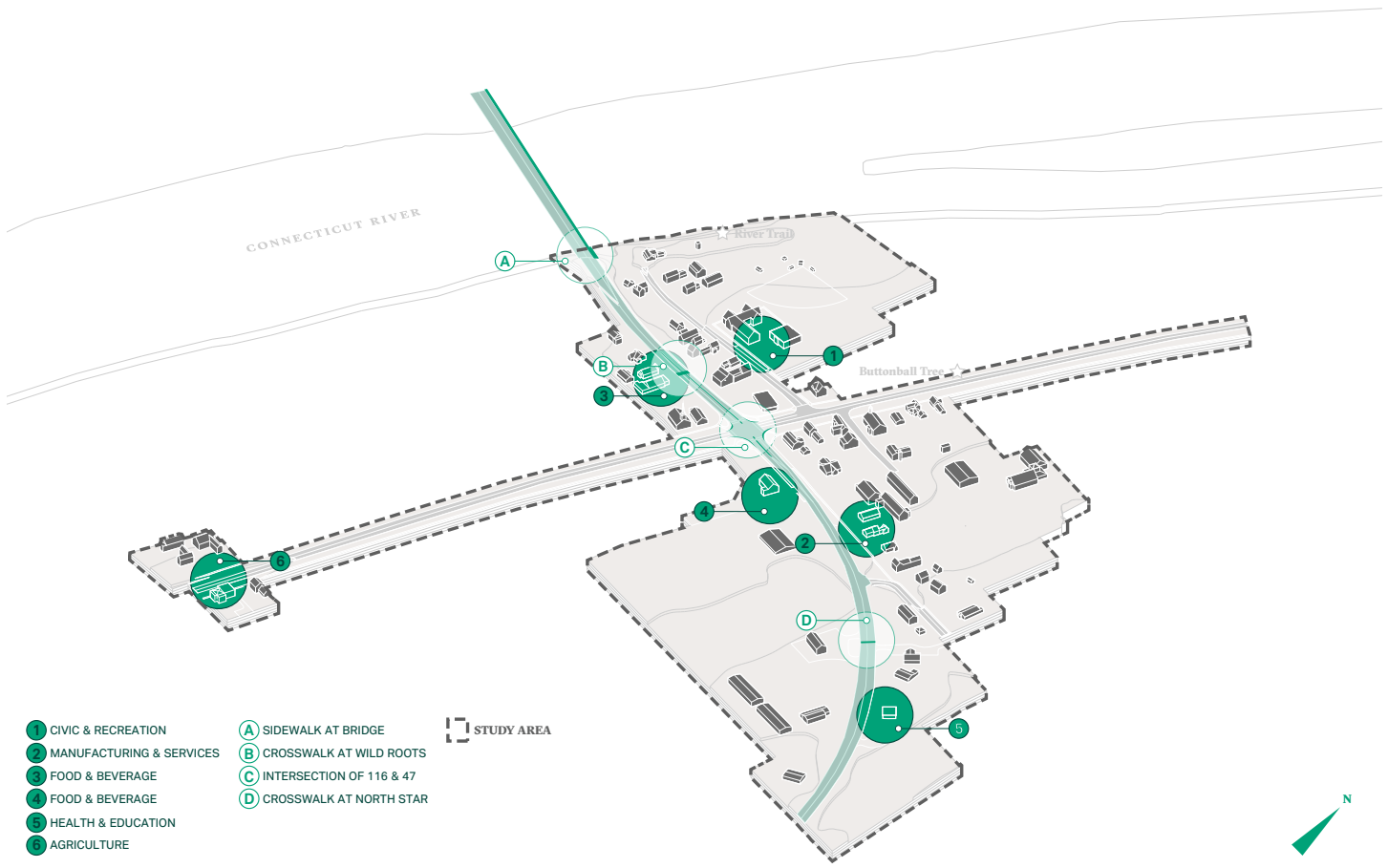
B CROSSWALK AT WILD ROOTS



C INTERSECTION OF 116 & 47



D CROSSWALK AT NORTH STAR



- 1 CIVIC & RECREATION
 - 2 MANUFACTURING & SERVICES
 - 3 FOOD & BEVERAGE
 - 4 FOOD & BEVERAGE
 - 5 HEALTH & EDUCATION
 - 6 AGRICULTURE
- A SIDEWALK AT BRIDGE
 - B CROSSWALK AT WILD ROOTS
 - C INTERSECTION OF 116 & 47
 - D CROSSWALK AT NORTH STAR

STUDY AREA



Before and after of potential strategy at the bridge

Permanently widening the sidewalk on the bridge creates many opportunities. It narrows the drive lane to discourage driving at high speeds. It makes the pedestrian experience more enjoyable, while encouraging a connection to Mount Sugarloaf. The buffer between the road and sidewalk can be utilized for wayfinding, some additional planting, or simply some art or color to enliven the experience for both driver and pedestrian.



Source: OverUnder

Before and after of potential strategy to redefine the intersection of Routes 116 and 47

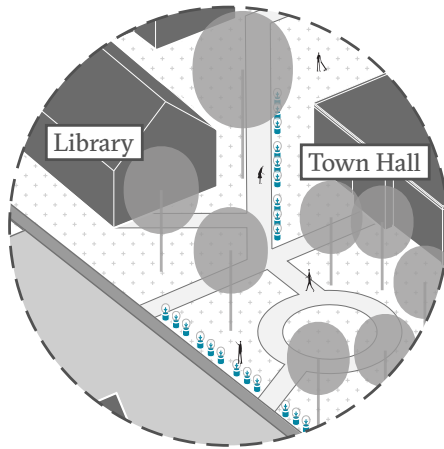
Colorful and more permanent street painting of both the crosswalks and the center of the intersection itself forces drivers to pay attention and further highlights any pedestrians that may be crossing. It's also an opportunity to visually define the nexus of the Village Center.



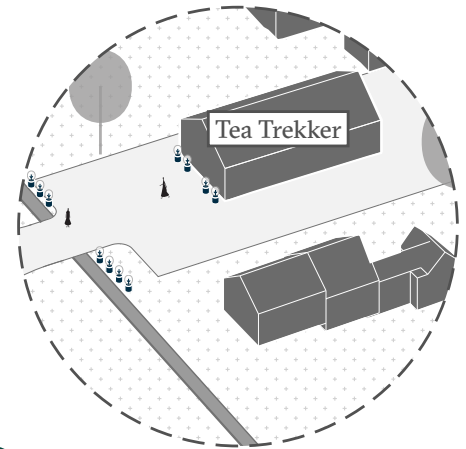
Source: OverUnder

Potential temporary off-street strategies on Routes 116 and 47.

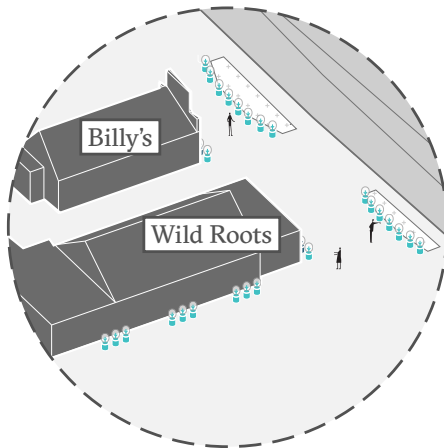
Planters create a buffer between pedestrians and the road, while also serving as a branded element that enlivens the front doors to businesses or civic spaces.



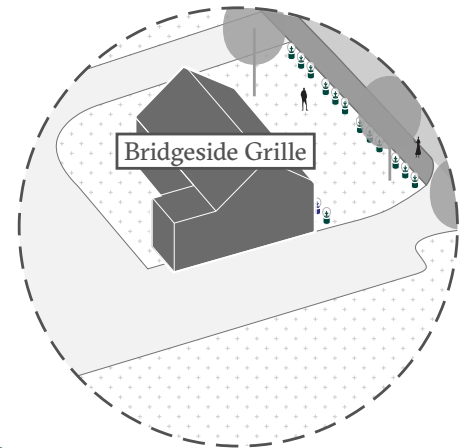
1 CIVIC & RECREATION



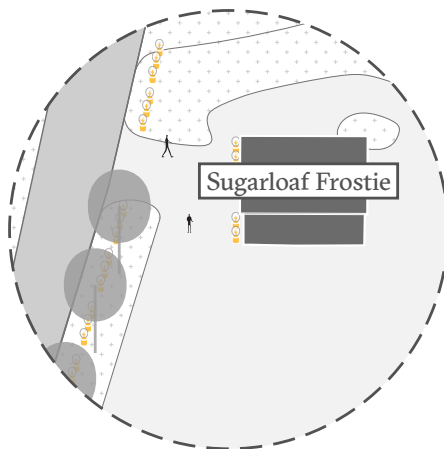
2 MANUFACTURING & SERVICES



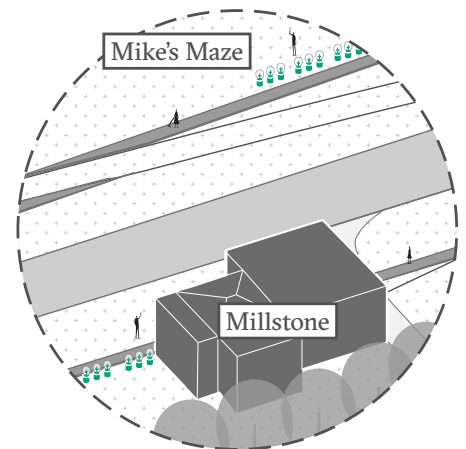
3 FOOD & BEVERAGE



4 FOOD & BEVERAGE



5 HEALTH & EDUCATION



6 AGRICULTURE





Before and after
of potential
temporary
strategies to area
in front of Wild
Roots.

Planters create a buffer
between patrons and Route
116, while a brightly-painted
crosswalk encourages
drivers to slow down as they
enter the Village Center.



Source: OverUnder

Implement permanent mobility strategies

Category		Public Realm
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		Large Budget (\$200k +), Potential funding sources: Final construction cost could range from \$250k to \$1.5M. Therefore, it is recommended that this project advances to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Initial concept, 30% design and PS&E required to get on the TIP (consulting fees approximately \$50-150k).
Timeframe		Medium Term (5-10 years)
Risk		Medium Risk: Community Interests; funding approvals process (TIP) bond financing limitations (if municipally-funded)
Key Performance Indicators		Pedestrian traffic; crash rate; multi-modal level-of-service; business revenues
Partners & Resources		Village Center Committee, Town Selectboard, MassDOT, DPW, Design Consultant, Transportation Consultant



*Current condition of sidewalks on 116.
Source: OverUnder*

Diagnostic

Sunderland is located at the intersection of two state roads (MA-47 and MA-116). The two roads are very different in traffic volumes, walkability and land uses. Most businesses are located along 116, a heavily trafficked road with missing sidewalks and overall unsafe conditions for pedestrians. MA-47 is the town's Main Street featuring beautiful historic residences and pedestrian-friendly sidewalks that are separated from the road by a state-owned 25-foot buffer.

At the same time, the 4-way intersection is a difficult and unsafe crossing point for pedestrians, and to make matters potentially worse, MassDOT is proposing to place a roundabout here.

During the pandemic the desire to eat and shop locally in Western Massachusetts has increased, as has the desire to walk and bike to these locations. These are trends the residents wish to maintain as they come out of the pandemic.

Action Item

The project will include implementation of a more pedestrian-friendly intersection of 116 and 47, including factors influencing vehicle speeds in advance of the intersection, such as land use, curb cuts, pedestrian activity, speed zones, lateral friction, vertical profile, sidewalks, shoulders, bike lanes, visibility, etc.

Process

- Develop 30% design and PS&E submission
- Identify and secure funding (municipal bond or TIP project)
- Obtain approvals from MassDOT
- Complete final 100% design
- Bid project and hire contractor(s)
- Implement redesign



*Example of a permanent mobility strategy
Source: Pottery Road crossing in Toronto, ON*



Various examples of permanent crossing solutions.

Best Practice

Creating Safe Pedestrian Access in a Rural Village Center

Provided by Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Location Whately, MA

The Whately Historic District Complete Streets project included the construction of new sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure on the town's main street, Chestnut Plain Road – e.g. construction of a new section of sidewalk in front of the Whately Inn, a vibrant local restaurant, where there was no sidewalk. Some of the parking for the Whately Inn was located next to the road in the space where a sidewalk would be located. The town worked cooperatively with the Whately Inn to redesign and relocate the parking area to allow for the construction of a sidewalk. By relocating the entrance to the parking area, additional parking was created and the sidewalk was constructed.

The project also improved pedestrian connections between the Whately Inn and the recently renovated old Town Hall, which is now a community center and local history museum. As in-person events begin to be held again at the old Town Hall, residents and visitors can safely and easily park and walk to and from the Whately Inn and the event.

Process

- Completion of a conceptual design process that included broad participation.
- Adoption of a Complete Streets Policy.
- Development of a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, facilitated by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments.
- Approval of Complete Streets Prioritization Plan by the Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program so that the community is eligible to apply for complete streets implementation funding.



Source: Franklin Regional Council of Governments

- Application to the Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding
- Program for project implementation funding.
- Approval of implementation funding through the Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program for the project.
- Completion of the final design for the project which includes collaboration with businesses and abutters so as to address needs for parking, outdoor dining, and pedestrian facilities.
- Temporary construction or permanent easements were identified and sought
- Conduct procurement process to hire a contractor.
- Contractor completes project construction.



Source: Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Create connections to surrounding natural resources and trails

Category		Public Realm
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Community Pathways Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		Medium Budget (\$50,000-200,000) Potential Funding Sources: MassTrails Grants
Timeframe		Medium Term (5-10 years)
Risk		Medium Risk – Need to engage with property owners to create connections through private agricultural land
Key Performance Indicators		Comprehensive trail system; new pedestrian paths; increased pedestrian activity
Partners & Resources		Village Center Committee, Town Selectboard, Community Pathways Committee, DPW, DCR, landscape and wayfinding consultant



*River Trail at Sunderland Village Center.
Source: OverUnder*

Diagnostic

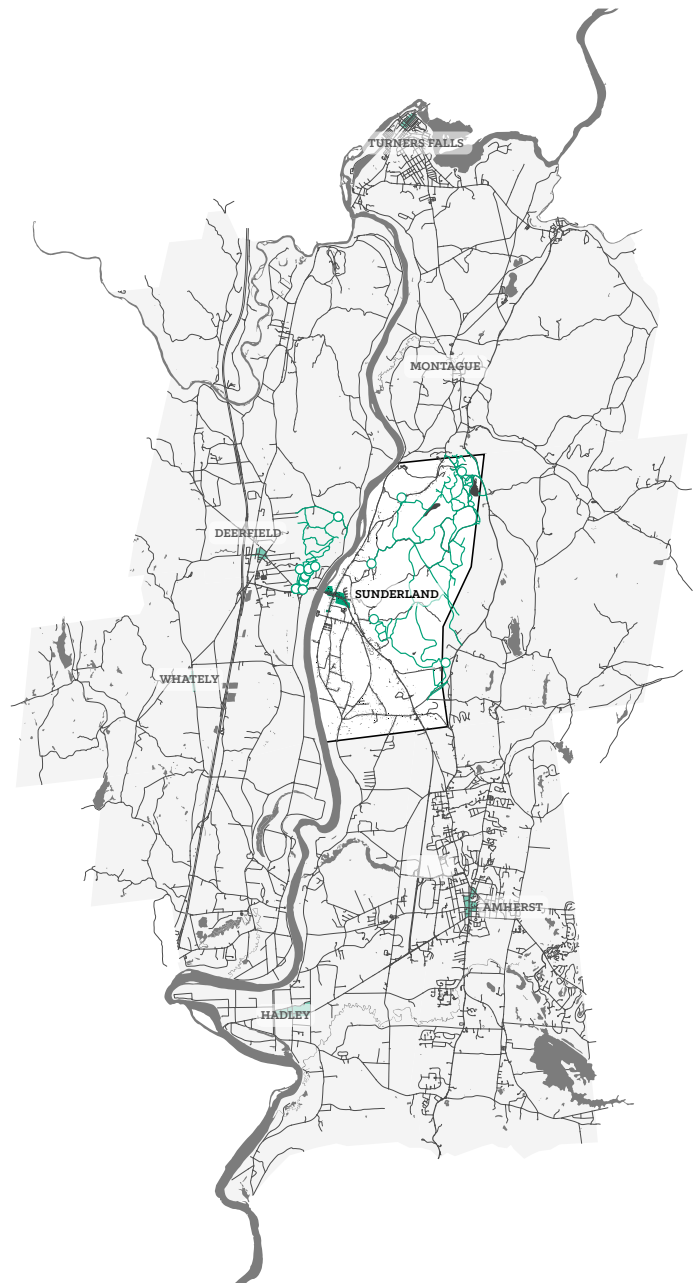
While Sunderland has plentiful and beautiful recreational space, much of it is not well-connected to the Village Center. Not only is it crucial to point the way to prominent spaces from downtown, attracting individuals from those spaces is key to helping the downtown thrive. Mount Sugarloaf is within walking distance, while Mount Toby is just a short drive or bike ride away. There are also hidden gems like the Riverside Cemetery that a visitor would never have even realized existed. Visual connections should be made to the existing and proposed bike and walking trails, which Berkshire Design Group is currently developing.

Action Item

Signage is the key element to making this project successful. A wayfinding consultant would be hired to help determine a signage master plan to properly locate signs. Actual signage design can involve any number of creative solutions, from formal permanent signage to road and sidewalk paint to art/placemaking pieces. Building off of Berkshire Design Groups trails map, there could be ways to inform pedestrians and driver of your proximity (in walking time and/or driving distance) from the Village Center to prominent open spaces. On the other side of that, key signage should be located from those prominent open spaces to direct visitors back to the Village Center.

Process

- Hire a wayfinding consultant
- Brainstorm design concepts for connecting the Village Center to prominent open spaces
- Create a signage master plan
- Design wayfinding elements
- Produce bid package for fabricators



Sunderland Nearby Trails & Trailheads
Source: OverUnder



Existing signage along the Connecticut River.
Sign design by [Brent M. Hale](#)



Phasing of Village Center multi-use path loop and potential connections to nearby attractions.
 Source: OverUnder

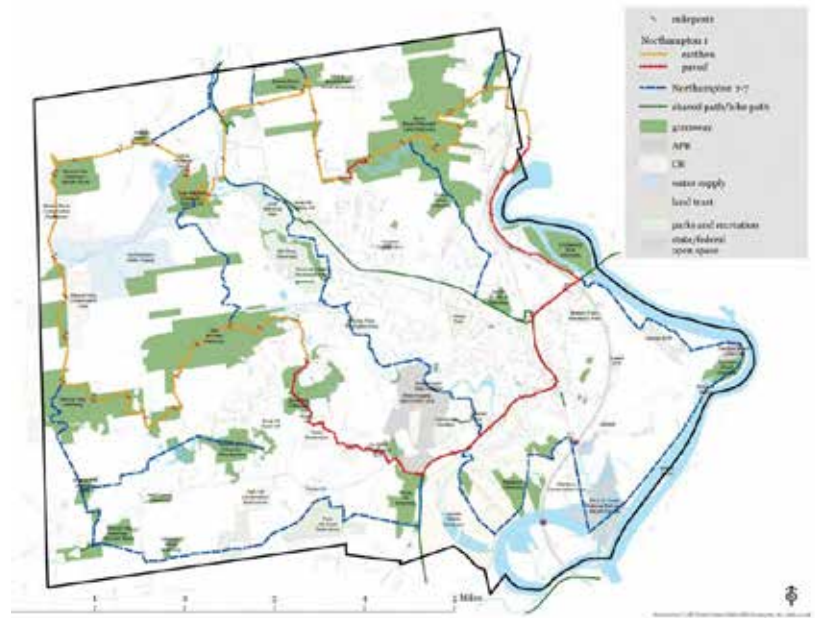
Best Practice

ONE Northampton

Location Northampton, MA

The Northampton [Open Space, Recreation, and Multi-Use Trail Plan](#) included a recommendation to "Develop a ONE Northampton trail that encircles the city, building on existing trails, adding trails where there are gaps, with a good treadway, consistent signing. ONE Northampton should be an easily identifiable trail and attract more people."

The City of Northampton will use a \$50,000 [MassTrails](#) grant to fund the development of this long distance walking and mountain biking trail.



Source: Northampton Open Space, Recreation, and Multi-Use Trail Plan

4. Target Desired Businesses

Develop Tenant Recruitment and Retention Plan

Category		Tenant Mix
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget	 	Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) Potential Funding Sources: Community Development Block Grant, MA Downtown Initiative Program, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Planning Assistance Grants, Regional Economic Development Organization Grant Program
Timeframe		Medium Term (5-10 years)
Risk		Medium Risk – needs a coherent strategy that will be supported by all community interests while also being responsive to consumer needs and preferences.
Key Performance Indicators		New business openings; increased pedestrian traffic downtown; increased tax revenue.
Partners & Resources		Town Administrator, Village Center Committee, Village Center business and property owners, Economic Development Consultant,



*Existing succesful mix of businesses in the Village Center
Source: OverUnder*

Diagnostic

COVID has not only hurt existing businesses in the Village Center, but has further discouraged new businesses from starting for fear of failure. Additionally, because the center of Sunderland is defined by a busy intersection of two state roads, it doesn't feel like much of a commercial center.

A tenant recruitment and retention plan is needed to help existing businesses, address potential inadequacies with the town government, come up with new lures for businesses, and explore the possibility of entirely new areas of development that would support new businesses. This effort could help the Village Center after the pandemic with a clear vision for business recruitment and retention, with a chance to capture more of the emerging market.

Action Item

This program would be designed to help the Village Center achieve a mix of businesses that are viable in the long-run, while also growing creative industries. One factor in program design is the relatively small size of the town and its distance from larger communities. While that is in some ways a disadvantage, it can also be an advantage in some situations.

The project will include the following:

- Collect and Analyze Data
- Receive Community Input
- Identify Resources
- Develop Tenant Recruitment and Retention Plan
- Conduct Community Workshop to Refine Policies and Program
- Finalize Plan
- Obtain Approval from Town Boards

Process

- Determine what the Town is hoping to accomplish with a tenant recruitment and retention program. What businesses should be attracted? Which ones would leave a gap if they left?
- Meet with existing businesses to hear what they think would be complementary businesses to what they provide.
- Analyze (or hire a consultant to analyze) what the consumer capacity is for downtown. This will involve determining disposable income within certain distances as well as what competition exists in that area.

- Analyze (or hire a consultant to analyze) what gaps appear to be in the market downtown. Are there missing types of retail, service, or business uses that could be supported?
- Determine what aspirational or "basic" industries (that might attract other businesses and visitors beyond basic needs) are of interest.
- Research the economics of these aspirational industries to understand what subsidies or other public or non-profit actions might be needed to make them relevant.
- Interview key stakeholders, including property owners; business owners and visitors to downtown about what potential they see for additional businesses.
- Survey residents to hear what they would like to see downtown.
- Determine what resources (local, regional, state or private) exist to fund an effort and whether they are sufficient for such a program.
- Explore interest in funding for regional recruitment efforts.
- Create a draft set of policies based on data and brainstorming that would guide a program.
- Given the policies and resources identified, and the market realities and aspirations documented, design a program that works within those constraints and opportunities
- Develop a draft workplan for the program, including any staffing needs and unknowns, as well as metrics to gauge success.
- Present these draft policies to stakeholders such as business leaders and residents for response.
- Structure feedback to suggest constructive changes to draft policies and program.
- Check in with boards that will need to approve the effort in 7. (below) to receive interim feedback.
- Revise the draft policies as needed and finalize a set of guiding policies.
- Revise program as needed to implement revised policies.
- Provide opportunities for media to learn about the program and/or policies and provide coverage.
- Based on program components, determine what approvals are needed and
- Audit Town codes and bylaws and propose amendments as necessary for consistency with tenant recruitment and retention policies.

5. Utilize Zoning to Create the Desired Development

Review & Update Zoning Bylaws to encourage desired future development

Category		Private Realm
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		Low Budget (under \$50,000) – staff time and funds for a Zoning Consultant Potential Funding Sources: Community Development Block Grant, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Planning Assistance Grants
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk – community interests, site ownership
Key Performance Indicators		Increased pedestrian traffic downtown; increased number of businesses; increased business revenue
Partners & Resources		Town Administrator, Village Center Committee, Zoning Consultant, FRCOG



Sunderland's rural development pattern.
Source: [City-Data](#)

Diagnostic

With restrictions on indoor dining during the Covid-19 pandemic, restaurants shifted to takeout and outdoor dining to remain in business. The state temporarily loosened several permitting requirements for outdoor dining and adjustments were made in Sunderland to provide outdoor venues on a temporary basis. As the pandemic continues, businesses need certainty in terms of the consistency of temporary bylaws and other regulations so that they can make investments in construction, equipment, and furniture for outdoor dining and retail. In addition, more permanent measures will allow for a closer look at impacts on the public realm. Simplifying outdoor dining requirements and permitting, providing clear regulations and shortened review and permitting timelines, and assistance with design and other elements of outdoor dining/retail will ensure that businesses get the support they need to stay open. Clear outdoor dining/retail design requirements will also help create the best possible public realm and commercial district experience to assist all businesses in the study area.

Related to this, the Pandemic brought to light the vulnerability of the Village Center to disruptions and the need for more diversified uses and greater density to support the environment, experiences, and range of available goods and services residents and visitors desire. A review of the central village zoning to ensure that it matches Town goals is required.

Opportunities

- Town-owned properties (town hall, library, Riverside park)
- Historic residential district
- Walkable historic Main Street (aka rt 47-primarily residential)
- Active businesses along 116 & 47
- Several parcels in study area ready for increased development, some owners interested in redevelopment

Challenges

- Commercial district lacks definition
- Poor walkability
- COVID led to decrease in business revenue
- COVID led to less foot traffic in the Village Center
- COVID led to need for more opportunities for outdoor dining, events & retail

Action Item

Phase 1:

The LRRP Outdoor Dining/Retail Toolkit is a resource to assist Sunderland in understanding how it can facilitate the creation and ongoing success of outdoor dining and/or retail in the Village Center; the kit offers project examples from other communities as well as space guidelines that adhere to good design practices and ADA requirements. After decisions are made, Sunderland can provide its own business toolkit for restaurants and retail, if it chooses, to help take the guesswork out of outdoor dining/retail design, permitting, and construction.

Work should begin with an assessment of Sunderland's current outdoor dining and/or retail program using the key findings found in the process list below. The process should include a Task Force or Working Group composed of public sector (planner, DPW, transportation, public health, fire department, etc.) and private sector (business representatives, civic advocates) to help assess work and move the process along.

The recommended process is listed below in the process section.

Phase 2:

Work also includes a review of Sunderland's zoning bylaws to identify ways to improve the bylaws to encourage desired future development and increased vitality in the Village Center by allowing increased density and cultural uses as of right.

Process

Phase 1: Outdoor Dining and Retail Zoning Changes

Step 1 (2 - 4 weeks)

- Conduct an internal needs assessment by reviewing the Toolkit, conducting an internal meeting with planner, DPW, transportation, public health, and others, about current state of outdoor dining and/or retail and feedback on effectiveness and challenges with current status.
- Get feedback from businesses about their needs and feedback on how any current program is going (what works/what doesn't) using one or more of the following:
 - Conduct focus group(s)
 - Issue online survey
 - Conduct a larger meeting

Questions should include: desire for winter dining, storage challenges, permitting process feedback, interest in bulk purchasing, financial assistance, etc.

- From internal meeting and business survey, identify focus areas for making a permanent program.
- Create a Task Force or Working Group representative of the focus areas for your Outdoor Dining/Retail program. Suggested members include:
 - Planner or Economic Development staff, DPW, parks, health dept, transportation
 - Business district representatives (BID, business association, chamber, etc.)
 - Business representatives
 - Others as needed
- Set an overall schedule for this project and regular meeting dates.
- Create a presentation template to use during project including:
 - History of what municipality has done to support outdoor dining/retail during pandemic

Step 2 (4 weeks)

- Review Toolkit and research info on focus areas for program. Develop draft guidance for each focus area and list pros and cons
- Get internal input and input from businesses
- Conduct public meeting to get feedback on draft ideas

Step 3 (4 weeks)

- Revise program elements as necessary based on feedback.
- Write up draft regulations and requirements
- Prepare educational materials/presentations for boards/commissions/public/businesses
- Conduct outreach

Step 4 (10 – 24 weeks or longer)

- Institute changes, obtain agreement on concepts, bylaw votes, etc.

Phase 2: Other Zoning Changes to encourage density and remove barriers for arts and cultural uses in the Village Center.

Review and update zoning and permitting processes to identify and remove barriers that may prohibit desired types of arts and cultural uses from locating in the Village Center. Strategies to explore include:

- simplifying the code
- creating more robust definitions for artistic and cultural uses
- developing incentives for arts and cultural uses development and operation
- and simplifying the process to host and permit events and Village Center activities, including sale and service of alcohol at events.

Step 1: (2-4 weeks)

- Conduct an internal needs assessment using the suggestions listed here regarding areas of the zoning that could better support cultural uses and more density in the Village Center:
- In development:
 - Provide density bonuses for arts and cultural uses in new development:
 - Gathering space
 - Performing arts or black box spaces
 - Cinema spaces
 - Artist work and live/work space
 - Maker space/production space for crafters
 - Entertainment/music with dining
 - Hotel or other visitor economy uses (conference space, meeting space, event space)
 - Allow artist live/work and work spaces as of right
 - Consider requiring front lot line setbacks on ground floor in the Village Center to provide outdoor space for seating and dining. Spaces can compensate for parts of the Village Center that have limited or no space on the sidewalk or street for outdoor dining.
 - Planning Board approval is needed for multifamily projects and Special Permit approval is needed for apartments on upper floors of commercial uses. Consider allowing these as of right up to certain unit/project size limits.
 - Hotels support visitors which is good for businesses including restaurants, main visitor attractions, and other uses. Consider changes to the zoning to change hotels from Planning Board approval to allowing hotels at the size and type desired. Requirements

could include allowing hotels as infill in the Village Center with parking behind, a maximum number of keys/rooms, and requiring certain amenities such as function space.

- Most commercial districts would welcome a community theatre or cinema. Consider allowing theaters up to a certain size and allowing as infill with parking behind. Require associated uses on the ground floor (restaurant or bar space).
- Consider allowing live entertainment in bars and restaurants as accessory uses.
- Set an overall schedule for this project. Decide who will be involved and set a Working Group (can be same as Phase 1 work) .
- Create a presentation template to use during project including:
 - Goals for the Village Center, info on the Outdoor Dining and Retail zoning bylaw work, what benefits will be for residents and businesses.
- Make initial community presentations to get feedback, ask for residents and businesses to envision their ideal Village Center.

Step 2: Weeks 5 – 8

- Draft zoning changes to achieve goals and respond to community feedback.

Step 3: Weeks 9 – 18:

- Prepare build-out renderings to illustrate desired development and prepare educational materials and presentations for boards/commissions/public conduct outreach.

Weeks 19 – 36 (or longer):

- Refine recommendations and draft zoning bylaw changes based on public review and comment
- Obtain agreement on recommendations, bylaw votes, etc.

Ongoing:

- After successful adoption: prepare marketing and business/developer recruitment package.

Note: Phase 2 steps include best practices put forth by the MAPC in its Arts & Culture Toolkit.

Business clusters

Each of the highlighted sectors below represent a "cluster" with its own character and function. Future development should adhere to and enhance the quality of these clusters.



Source: OverUnder

Best Practice #1

Zoning for a Resilient Downtown

Provided by Levine Planning Strategies, LLC

Location Burlington, VT

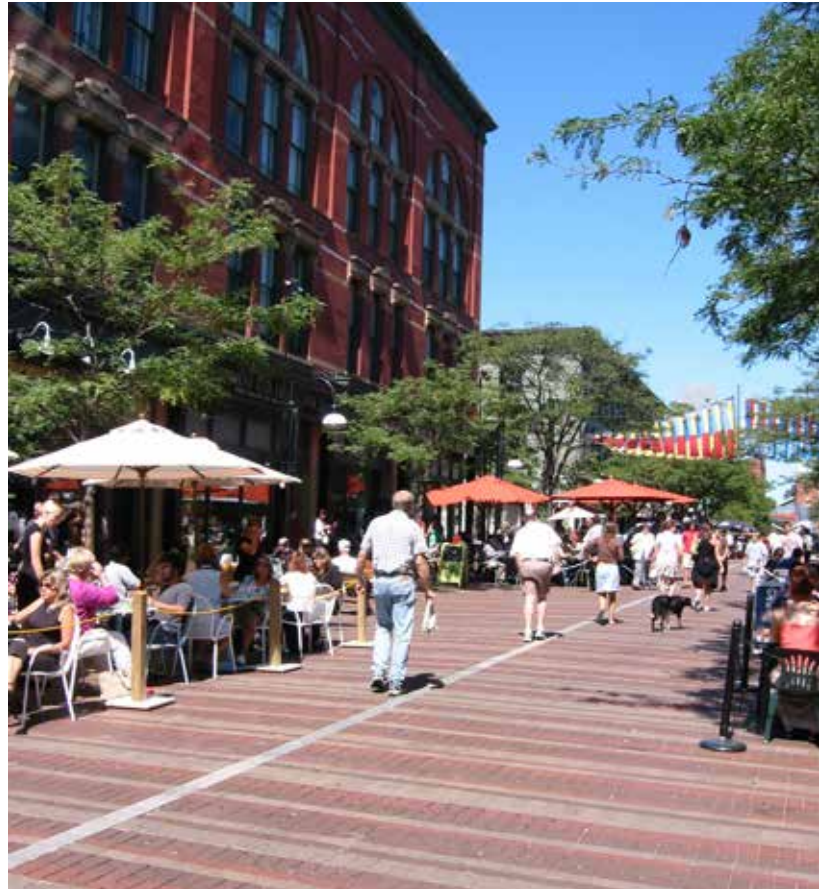
Once you have a sense of how your zoning affects business decisions, it would be advisable to check in with some local businesses to get their thoughts as well. With that data in hand, communities can use their plans to guide how to change their zoning. A few small steps may make a big difference.

These could include:

- Reducing or removing regulations on outdoor dining in zoning. Licensing and other municipal processes can usually suffice;
- Revising parking requirements for new uses downtown. Re-tenanting an existing space, or changing from one use to another, should not
- generally trigger any new parking requirements; and
- Streamlining the review process for changes in use. Either reduce the number of use groups in zoning so small changes don't trigger zoning review or allow more uses by right. If some public review is appropriate, rely on staff-level administrative review as much as possible.

Burlington's planning process began in 2010 when the city received a Sustainable Communities Challenge Grant. The new zoning reduced the number of uses downtown by 50%. More importantly, it made it easier for a business to modify their use category by significantly reducing the timeframe and risk to the business. Most recently, city planners have worked to update the definitions and uses for food and beverage uses to recognize the rise of new dining and drinking options.

Not every community needs to have as extensive a process as Burlington. Simply auditing the use table, streamlining the list of uses, and making it easier to change from one use to another, would be helpful for downtown businesses post-pandemic. That process could be done at a much lower cost and much more quickly.



Source: Levine Planning Strategies, LLC

Best Practice #2

Incorporate development standards into zoning to address public realm

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

Location Arlington, MA

The process involved a parallel analysis of the existing zoning bylaws for the industrial district and the existing market conditions for industrial development given new trends for industrial areas. Community engagement included a steering committee and public meetings to discuss the current conditions and community values and vision for the future of this area.

Fit studies tested the amount of development volume that could fit on selected sites while pro forma analysis identified whether such volumes would be profitable enough to support community desires for sustainable development and a pedestrian-focused public realm. Such studies should be included in the public engagement process for discussion and can be checked by working with the local real estate community to understand potential impacts.

Zoning changes incorporated development standards that matched community values for new development and provided a menu of options for required amenities. Such a menu allows for a flexible response from projects of varying sizes, densities, and uses.

Process

- The post-study implementation process are as follows:
- Develop the draft zoning language (see Process, below).
- Discuss draft language with appropriate land use boards and modify as needed to address concerns.
- Submit the draft language to the municipal approval process which will vary by municipality but will include the Planning Board and either City Council/Ordinance Committee or Select Board/Finance or Bylaw Review Committee/Town Meeting.
- (If the zoning change is successful) Publicize the new zoning broadly prior to new applications for development.
- Track and evaluate the applications and which public realm components were most successful in terms of implementation.
- Evaluate whether the development standards need to be modified to address changing conditions.

6. Capitalize on Events to Draw Residents & Visitors

Streamline permitting processes to encourage outdoor activation

Category		Admin Capacity
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		Low Budget (under \$50,000) Potential Funding Sources: Community Development Block Grant, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Planning Assistance Grants, Shared Streets & Spaces Grant
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators		Number of event and outdoor dining permits issued; length of permitting and approval process; event attendance; increased restaurant business revenue
Partners & Resources		Town Administrator, Village Center Committee, Zoning Consultant, Town Selectboard, potential event organizers



Outdoor Dining in the Village Center
Source: [Greenfield Recorder](#)

Diagnostic

The pandemic led to a renewed interest in the use of public space to meet and interact with others in the community safely. Public outdoor events can activate public spaces and provide an environment for safe community gathering. However, currently, there is a lack of event programming in the Village Center.

Action Item

Sunderland needs to first identify potential suitable locations for events, review all processes for issuing of permits for public and privately organized events in these locations, solicit feedback from organizations, companies or individuals that are interested in holding public events within the Village center and develop recommendations and for removing barriers and encouraging outdoor events.

Process

- Designate specific areas "pre-approved for events" and choose these areas to also benefit Village Center businesses
- Review processes for issuing of permits for events within the Village Center
- Solicit feedback from community stakeholders on opportunities and challenges

For events and festivals:

- Streamline permitting and applications processes and allow an online process with checklist for submittals. Include the following in streamlined process (and consider reduced fees):
 - Public safety
 - Sanitation
 - Basic Event permit
 - Public health
 - Alcohol
- Allow alcohol service and consumption at public events and festivals and streamline permitting for the same.
- Consider allowing and implementing street closures on a regular basis for events

Best Practice

Strategy Guide for Activating Public Spaces

Provided by Central Massachusetts Regional
Planning Commission

Location Worcester, MA

Outreach and background research

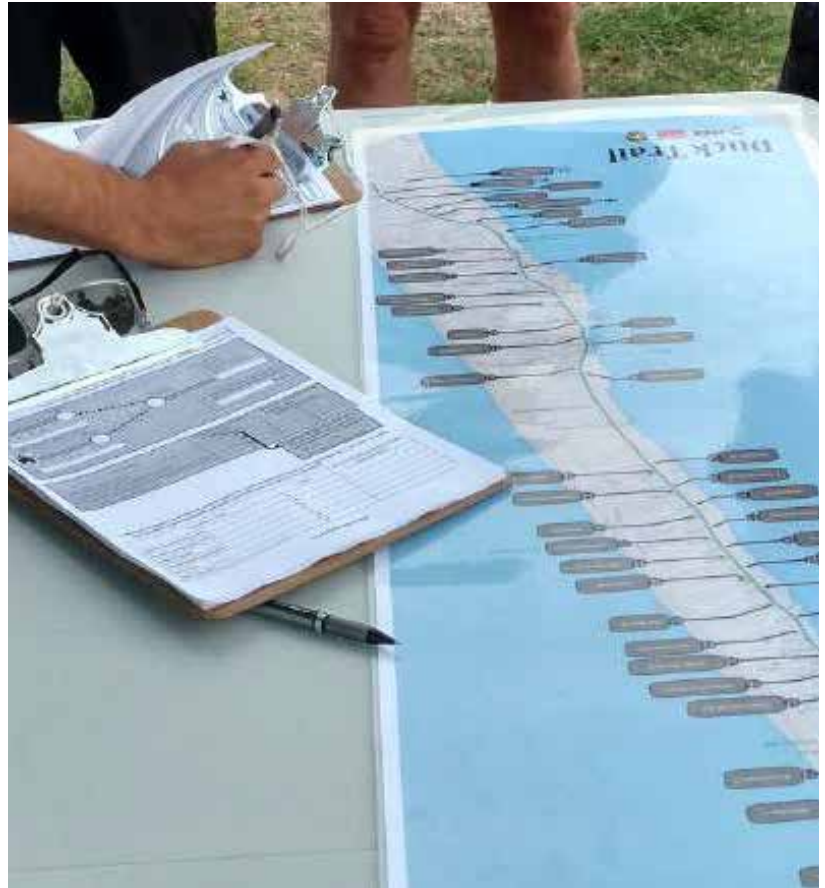
- Identify the location and basic characteristics of all public spaces within the study area, including access, ownership and suitability for public activities
- Review all processes for issuing of permits for public and privately organized events within public spaces
- Identify and solicit feedback from organizations, companies and individuals that have in the past held public events or showed interest in holding public events within the town or study area
- Analyze potential opportunities and challenges around utilization of public spaces
- Research similar communities in the state and region and create a catalogue of realistic, achievable activities
- Solicit feedback on existing processes, paying special attention to what has worked, where friction points may be
- Solicit feedback from community stakeholders on opportunities and challenges
- Summarize all community feedback and develop recommendations for reducing friction points

Develop draft materials and visuals

- Strategy Guide Development and Review
- Summary and analysis of existing processes
- Opportunities and Challenges
- Case Studies
- Recommendations for streamlining the permitting process


Municipal review and revision

- Review all recommendations with municipality and incorporate recommended edits



Source: Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission

Create unique and vibrant events

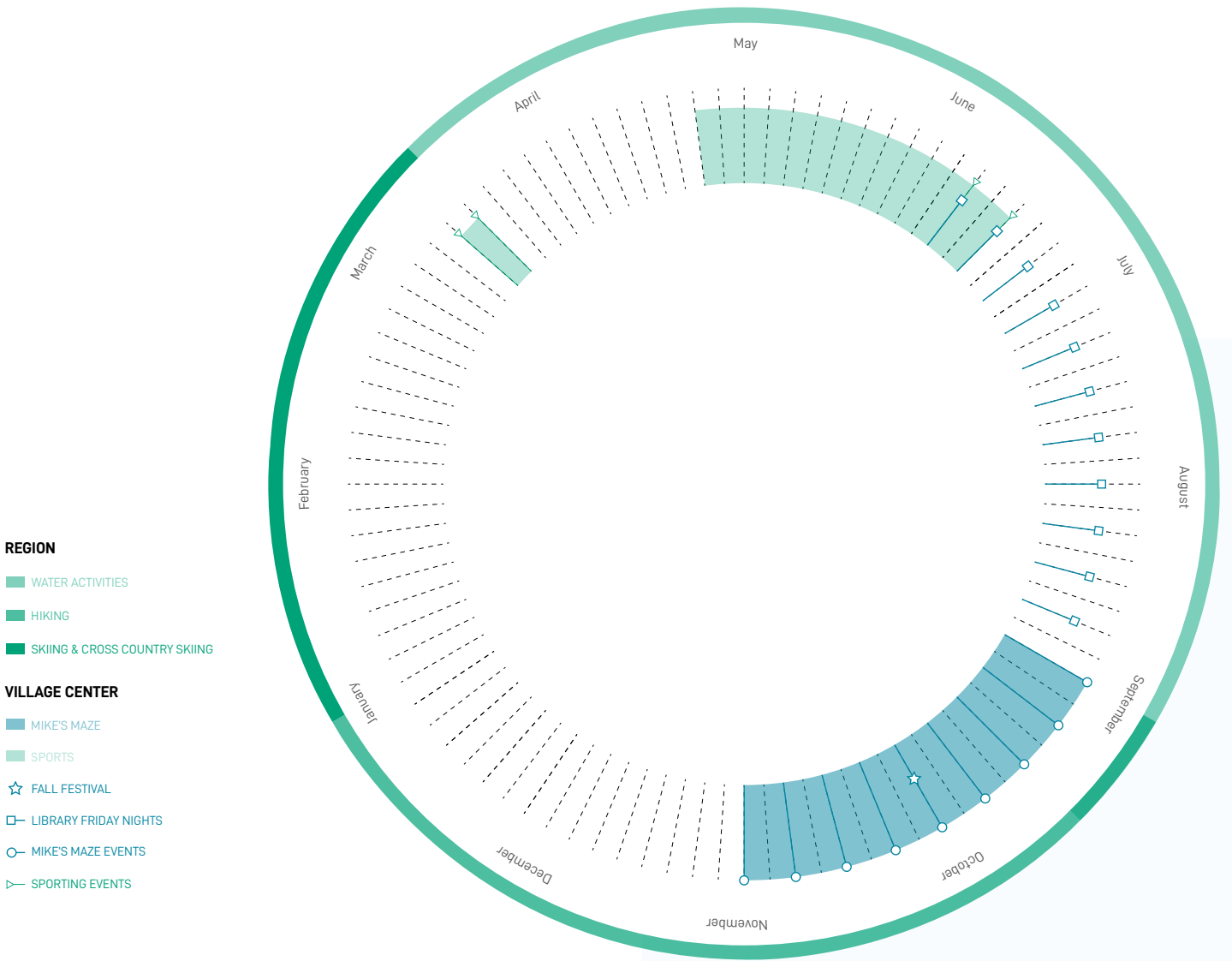
Category		Public Realm
Location		Sunderland Village Center
Origin		Village Center Committee, Town Administrator, Town Selectboard
Budget		Low Budget (under \$50,000) Potential Funding Sources: MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places Grant, Hometown Grant Program
Timeframe		Short Term (less than 5 years)
Risk		Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators		Increased number of events in the area, event attendance, community & business participation
Partners & Resources		Town Administrator, Village Center Committee, Sunderland Public Library, Village Center business & property owners



Sunderland Tricentennial Celebration Event (2018)
Source: Daily Hampshire Gazette

Diagnostic

The significance of outdoor space, and by extension outdoor activities, has been given new life by the pandemic. Because capacity at Town Hall is limited, any existing outdoor events occur infrequently, and having events year-round is difficult. Potential visitors are likely turned off by the lack of downtown activity. Existing draws to the downtown, while quite successful, are either static (the Buttonball Tree), mostly indoors (the Blue Heron restaurant), or confined to one season (Mike's Maze)



Existing events in the Village Center mapped over a typical year. Source: OverUnder

Action Item

A few key areas in Sunderland can be utilized for outdoor events: Riverside Park behind Town Hall, the Library courtyard, the strips of greenery lining South Main Street, and Mike's Maze itself, especially outside of the fall season. Each of these areas has a different character and scale, which help to determine the type of programming that might happen there.



Process

- Select point-person at Town Hall to lead effort, or create new position to handle events as part of their work responsibilities
- Solicit volunteer work
- Investigate funding sources for event programming
- Engage local student groups and businesses for potential fundraising events
- Engage Town Library administration for assistance in planning
- Explore large temporary structures that can be deployed as needed; something more bespoke would be more of a draw and make the downtown unique
- Explore smaller individual structures like sheds that can be used as market stalls or artist work spaces; these can be deployed in multiple locations
- Review zoning by-laws to determine if there are any hindrances to large events
- Explore ways to market events, not only on Town website, but also on social media and mailers to local residents



Moonlight Magic at Shelburne Falls
Source: Dan Little of the Greenfield Recorder



Winterbridge Pop-Up Cultural Event space in Fall River, MA

Best Practice

The Corner Spot

Provided by Bench Consulting (from Patronicity)

Location Ashland, MA

The Corner Spot is a placemaking opportunity for downtown Ashland where businesses can test drive the market and residents can come together to increase the sense of community and help revitalize the downtown area. The Corner Spot is intended to stimulate economic activity in Ashland, attract new developers and business owners as well as increase foot traffic downtown to help support existing and future business. You'll need to locate a prime site for this, ideally on a property controlled by the town. Once you have the space determine any initial permitting issues that may preclude or hinder you from using the site for certain passive or commercial activities. Develop a site layout plan and a rough preliminary budget and allocate any funding opportunities including grants and private donations that may be available. Ensure you have an adequate programming plan and maintenance plan lined up for the site. Maintenance could require some funding so ensure you have long term funding set aside to operate the site.



Source: Bench Consulting

Process

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



Source for all photos: Bench Consulting

Appendix

1. Outdoor Dining/Retail Community Toolkit
(prepared by CivicMoxie)
2. Mobility Plan Guide
(prepared by Stantec)
3. Sunderland Business Survey