



Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Pittsfield, MA

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



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

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

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

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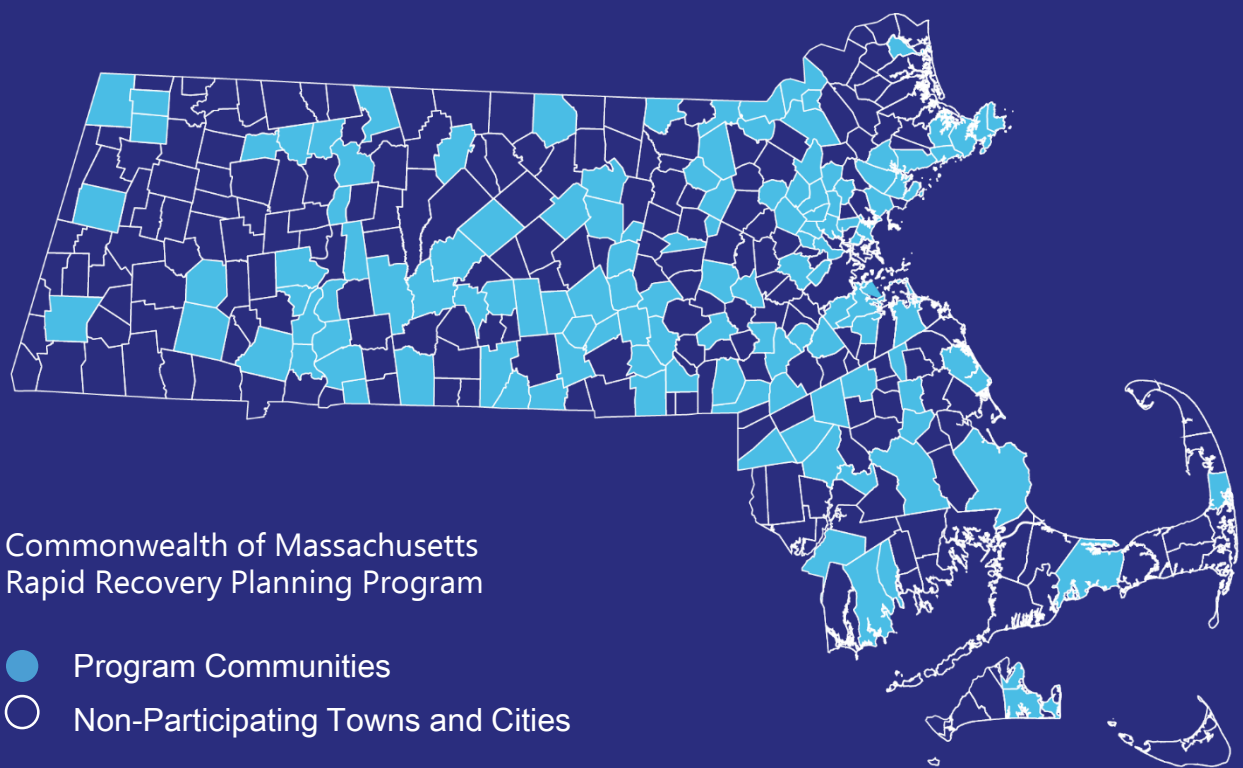
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125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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.



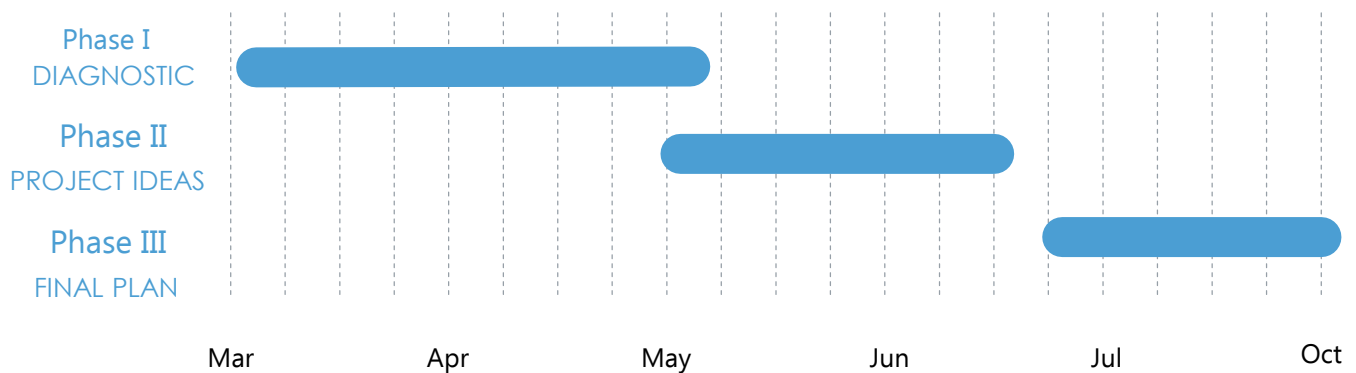
Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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-October 2021. Phase 1 - Diagnostic, Phase 2- Project Recommendations, Phase 3 - Plan.



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

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

Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue/Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Downtown Pittsfield – Long-term Recovery Still a Work in Progress

Pittsfield is located in the heart of the Berkshires, with a population of over 44,000 and its downtown is situated on Route 7 connecting it north to south with the rest of the county. For decades, Pittsfield was known as a home for a huge General Electric (GE) presence which peaked at over 13,000 employees in the 1940s. The 1990 closure of the power division was a difficult time for the city, and in many ways, the city is still recovering from the loss of GE. But in more recent years, Pittsfield has experienced revival and has become known for its creative economy, and widely-visited arts and culture institutions.

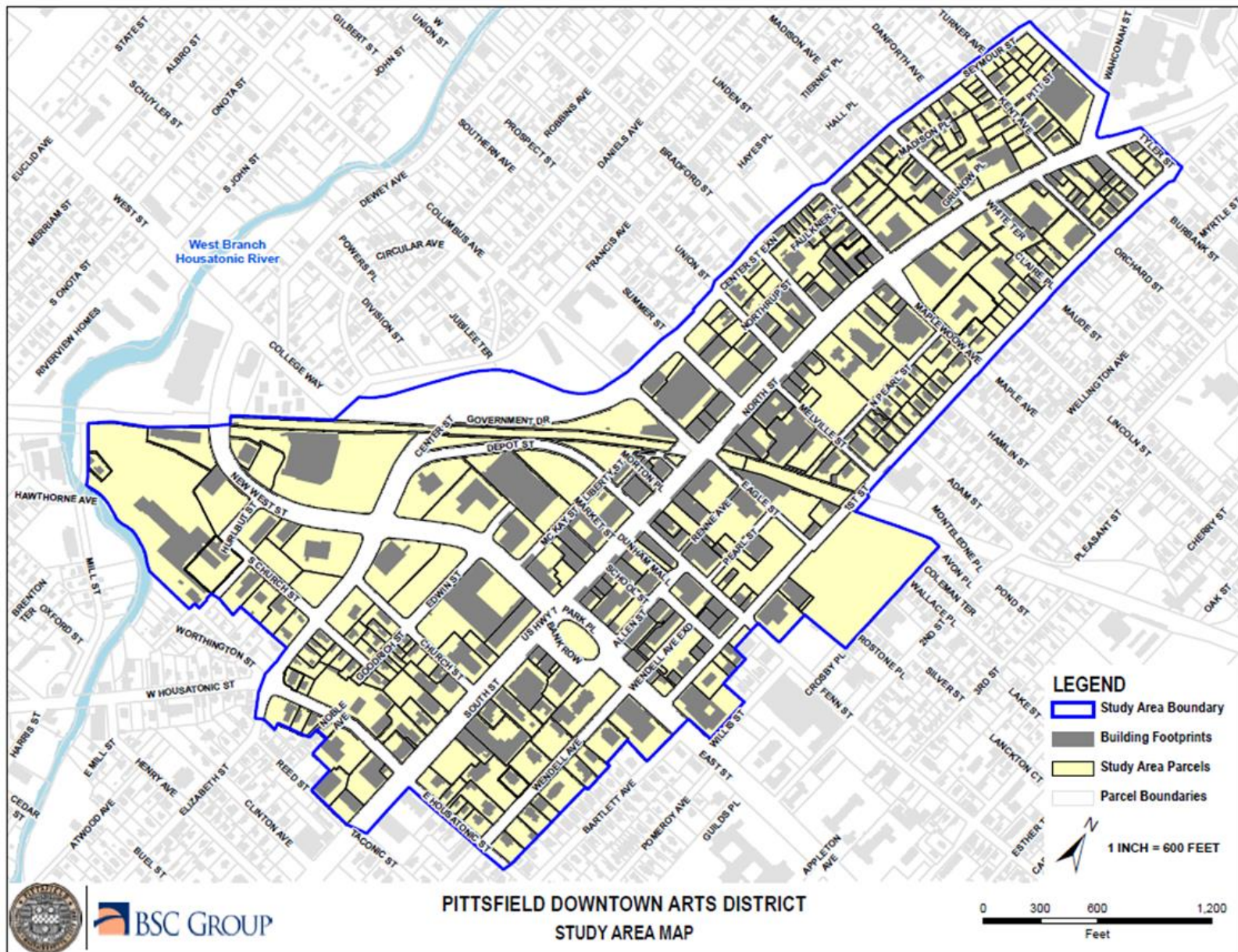
With downtown greatly improved over the past 10-15 years and showing signs of positive momentum, the COVID-19 pandemic came at just the wrong time for downtown revitalization, significantly dropping foot traffic, with over 70% of downtown businesses reporting a decline in sales revenue. On the plus side, there were relatively few business closures (less than 10 among 160 storefronts and 540 total businesses). But, 40% reported laying off workers and 81% reduced operating hours. The estimated 36 vacant storefronts is due to a number of reasons, but an overall goal of this downtown recovery plan is to activate more commercial spaces, grow the number of businesses operating downtown, and draw more residents and visitors to events and placemaking efforts with the arts, culture, outdoor spaces, restaurants, etc.

The Pittsfield Downtown Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) study area is home to approximately 1,000 residents though more live in the immediate surrounding area and there is evidence of growing demand for downtown living. See the map on the following page for the Pittsfield Arts District used as the study area for this plan. Median household income for people living downtown is less than half that of the citywide median. The downtown is anchored by strong cultural institutions including the Colonial Theater, the Berkshire Museum, and the Barrington Stage Company.

Downtown Pittsfield is a long, linear corridor following North Street, from Tyler Street, down to South Street at Reed St. While there are a mix of businesses, the downtown can feel broken up with some blocks having much less activity than others. Sidewalks, lighting, and roadbeds are in good condition; however, many downtown stakeholders comment that general improvements in cleanliness and aesthetics (e.g., façade improvements, plantings, pocket parks, etc.) would create a more attractive and inviting downtown. The downtown is also home to many social services which result in a concentration of people who are unhoused, have substance use disorders, or need other support.

Business owners' top ranked strategies for supporting the downtown recovery were: improvements in safety and/or cleanliness; changes in public parking availability, management, or policies; recruitment programs to attract additional businesses; more cultural events/activities; more opportunities for outdoor dining and selling; and marketing strategies for the district. Business expressed interest in receiving assistance for shared marketing/advertising (42%) and training on the use of social media (23%).

Downtown Pittsfield is a Massachusetts-designated cultural and arts district. In addition to its theaters and museums, the district boasts live music, dance, festivals, galleries, artists' studios, monthly art walks, and more. Pittsfield is well-known as the home of Herman Melville and the place where he wrote several works including Moby Dick. The Berkshire Historical Society is headquartered in Melville's Pittsfield farm, Arrowhead. Despite this literary history, there is no bookstore in Downtown Pittsfield though there is a fantastic public library (Berkshire Athenaeum). Community stakeholders have expressed an interest in developing this cultural asset into a literary hub in downtown.



Map of Pittsfield Downtown RRP Study Area Source: BSC Group

Downtown Pittsfield's recovery plan is focused on a mix of near-term public realm improvements, increased business support initiatives, and projects to enhance its creative economy and engage with residents

Twelve projects have been developed in great detail by Downtown Pittsfield, Inc., the City of Pittsfield and a wide-range of partners and stakeholders for this Rapid Recovery Plan:

Recommendation	Project Category
Enhancing and Sustaining Downtown Streetscape Maintenance	Public Realm
Downtown Placemaking – Enhancing Outdoor Spaces for Activation and Vibrancy	Public Realm
Gateways to the Gateway City – Signage and Wayfinding	Public Realm
Implement the Next Generation Parking Kiosk Interface	Public Realm
Implement Downtown Pittsfield Façade and Storefront Improvement Program	Private Realm
Enhance collaborative marketing for downtown Pittsfield and its businesses	Revenue/Sales
Create a Downtown Pittsfield online marketplace with commerce and social engagement	Revenue/Sales
Enhance Downtown Pittsfield Inc.'s capacity for business development, engagement, marketing and technical support	Administrative Capacity
Financial incentives and programs to fill vacant storefronts and underutilized spaces	Tenant Mix
Develop a Downtown Pittsfield Literary Hub	Tenant Mix
Installation of Proposed Mural Celebrating Pittsfield's History	Cultural/Arts
Develop Downtown Pittsfield Public Art Plan	Cultural/Arts
Initiate Youth Employment Corps	Other

Diagnostic

Key Findings



CUSTOMER BASE

The Berkshires' largest community with strong cultural anchors

Pittsfield is the largest city in Berkshire County with a population of 44,262 and a workforce of over 22,000. Like many Berkshire communities, the city's population is older than the statewide average with a median age of 44.4 years compared to the state's 39.5 years. Median household income (MHHI) is \$50,657, approximately 62% of the statewide MHHI. The three largest racial/ethnic groups within the community are White (84%), Hispanic or Latino (8%), and Black or African American (7%).

Pittsfield is home to two higher education institutions, Berkshire Community College and Mildred Elley, a career training institute. 30% of residents age 25+ have earned an bachelors degree or higher compared to 43.7% statewide.

The Pittsfield Downtown Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) study area is home to approximately 1,000 residents though more live in the immediate surrounding area and there is evidence of growing demand for downtown living. Median household income for people living downtown is less than half that of the citywide median. The downtown is anchored by strong cultural institutions including the Colonial Theater, the Berkshire Museum, and the Barrington Stage Company, the latter of which attracts over 9,300 individuals per year.

Sources: ESRI Demographic Indicators, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, College Navigator



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Parking, safety, and cleanliness improvements needed to support growth

Pittsfield is located in the heart of the Berkshires and its downtown is situated on Route 7 connecting it north to south with the rest of the county. 25,000 vehicles travel East St. (Route 9) daily but traffic volumes declined by 34% during the COVID-19 pandemic (*MassDOT Road Inventory Database, 2019; MassDOT TDMS, 2020*).

There are 2,696 on- and off-street parking spaces; this represents approximately 3 spaces per 1,000 SF of commercial space. A paid parking system was recently implemented in downtown and businesses and customers note frustration with the system. Stakeholders note challenges using the kiosks, aggressive ticketing, and paid parking in areas with low demand. 60% of business owners participating in the 2021 RRP Downtown Pittsfield Business Survey noted parking regulations as an obstacle to doing business and making changes was the second highest rated physical environment strategy for supporting business recovery.

Downtown Pittsfield is a long, linear corridor following North Street, from Tyler Street, down to South Street at Reed St. While there are a mix of businesses, the downtown can feel broken up with some blocks having much less activity than others. Sidewalks, lighting, and roadbeds are in good condition; however, many downtown stakeholders comment that general improvements in cleanliness and aesthetics (e.g., façade improvements, plantings, pocket parks, etc.) would create a more attractive and inviting downtown. The downtown is also home to many social services which result in a concentration of people who are unhoused, have substance use disorders, or need other support. Many in the business community have expressed an interest to work with the City to support these individuals while improving overall safety and cleanliness of the downtown.



A diverse and engaged business community seeking to attract more customers and businesses

Pittsfield's downtown features 160 storefronts with a wide variety of businesses including retail, restaurants, arts and cultural venues, offices, and more. This represents about 888,030 square feet of first floor commercial space according to estimates using the Town's Assessor's database. 36 of the 160 storefronts (23%) were vacant during spring 2021 site visits. 6 business closures occurred in Downtown Pittsfield since the beginning of the pandemic.

Approximately 540 businesses in total operate within the study area. The three most common business types in downtown include professional, scientific, and technical services; health care and social assistance; as well as other services such as salons and barbers, each representing 14% of total businesses. Retail trade is the next highest represented business sector (11%) followed by accommodation and food services (7%). Stakeholders note that while there are some great dining options in downtown, they are spread out and the downtown lacks other typical urban amenities like a bookstore and more coffee shops.

Based on responses to the 2021 RRP business survey, a majority (59%) of businesses experienced a decrease in revenue during the pandemic and 55% of respondents noted a reduction in foot traffic by 25% or more. As of April 2021, 69% of the businesses responding continue to operate at reduced capacity/hours and 13% are temporarily closed.

In the same survey, business owners' top ranked strategies for supporting the downtown recovery were: improvements in safety and/or cleanliness; changes in public parking availability, management, or policies; recruitment programs to attract additional businesses; more cultural events/activities; more opportunities for outdoor dining and selling; and marketing strategies for the district. Businesses expressed interest in receiving assistance for shared marketing/advertising (42%) and training on the use of social media (23%).

Sources: ESRI Business Analyst; May/May 2021 Site Visits; Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. assessment



Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. poised to support recovery

Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. (DPI) is Pittsfield's downtown management entity. It is a membership organization consisting of property owners, businesses, residents, cultural institutions, non-profits, and others that promote downtown and work in partnership with the City. DPI's website hosts a strong online business directory and is the lead for marketing downtown Pittsfield. Among its programs, it manages the "Heart of the Berkshires" digital gift card accepted at more than two dozen downtown businesses. The program was launched in March 2020 in response to COVID-19 and within a few months had funneled \$21,000 into downtown businesses. In early 2021, DPI formed a recovery committee to survey the current state of businesses and help the district welcome people back following COVID restrictions.

Pittsfield Community Development is the city department responsible for housing, neighborhood, and economic development. They manage the City's Community Development Block Grant and lead or participate in many initiatives including open space, recreation, planning, energy planning, and climate resilience. The Office of Cultural development leads arts and cultural events in the downtown. The Office also manages the Pittsfield Tourism Commission and Pittsfield's destination website (www.DiscoverPittsfield.com) which includes a comprehensive calendar of events and a guide for visitors to Pittsfield. The Department of Public Services is the leader for downtown's public realm including landscaping, the new bike lane, and parking enforcement. The City recently instituted a new form-based code for zoning in Downtown Pittsfield to support a high-quality public realm.

Together, DPI and these City departments have the requisite authorities, relationships, and capabilities to work with the business community to recover from COVID-19's impacts.



Highlights from the Physical Environment

DOWNTOWN BEAUTIFICATION

Downtown Pittsfield boasts many classic and historic buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. These, along with the wide boulevards of North and South Streets, provide good bones for a beautiful and inviting downtown. However, across the board, business owners, patrons, and community members identify downtown beautification as a priority. When surveyed, business owners were least satisfied with the condition of public spaces, streets, sidewalks, and buildings/storefronts. Additionally, improvements in safety and/or cleanliness was the top-rated strategy for improving the atmosphere of downtown.

Recently, downtown partners including the City had to terminate their contract (due to non-performance) with the landscaping and maintenance contractor exacerbating the issue. Stakeholders have suggested additional plantings, street trees, and a façade improvement program among possible solutions to improve downtown's overall atmosphere.



SUSTAINING DOWNTOWN INFRASTRUCTURE

The City of Pittsfield has made numerous additions to the public realm in recent years most notably dedicated bike lanes to increase mobility options and safety for cyclists as well as parking kiosks to better manage vehicle turnover in front of busy areas of downtown. However, after implementation, both improvements have been met with resistance and frustration. Downtown businesses and visitors aren't uniformly opposed to either bike lanes or paid parking. Though many cite problems with the projects' implementation and maintenance. For example, the bike lanes were initially piloted in the winter when usage was low and businesses felt that it took away parking. Feedback on kiosks is that they are confusing and difficult to use.

As downtown and the City embark on public realm improvements as part of COVID recovery, the City is already working on improvements in these areas, and attention should be paid to inclusive planning and engagement and sustainability of projects such as those proposed in this RRP.



First Agricultural Bank Building at 100 North Street, built 1908 (above). Bike Lane on North Street (below). Source: Hodge Economic Consulting



Examples of Downtown's Historic Architecture. Clockwise from top left: Hotel on North (297 North St.), Pittsfield City Hall (70 Allen St.), Beacon Cinema (57 North St.), Businesses and residences (413 North Street), residences at former Berkshire Hotel (7 North St.)
Photos: Hodge Economic Consulting and Downtown Pittsfield, Inc.



Berkshire Museum Source: Hodge Economic Consulting

SOLIDIFYING PITTSFIELD'S IDENTITY AND SHARED SPACES

PUBLIC ART: AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD ON PITTSFIELD'S ARTS & CULTURE SCENE

Downtown Pittsfield is a Massachusetts-designated cultural and arts district. In addition to its theaters and the Berkshire Museum which serve as anchor institutions, the district boasts live music, dance, festivals, galleries, artists' studios, monthly art walks, and more. Currently, approximately 3% of downtown businesses are arts, entertainment, and recreation focused.

Pittsfield is well-known as the home of Herman Melville and the place where he wrote several works including *Moby Dick*. The Berkshire Historical Society is headquartered in Melville's Pittsfield farm, Arrowhead. Despite this literary history, there is no bookstore in Downtown Pittsfield. Community stakeholders have expressed an interest in developing this cultural asset into a literary hub in downtown which could support writers, provide retail opportunities for the public, and serve as an arts space.

As the city manages multiple goals centered on recovery, growth, safety, and beautification of the downtown, public art emerges as an opportunity to build on an existing strength, engage and educate the community, and attract visitors from the region and beyond.

OUTDOOR GATHERING PLACES

COVID-19 brought people outdoors, in ways not experienced in recent memory, for disease mitigation, to allow businesses a way to continue operating, and allow people to maintain community interactions. Dining, fitness classes, movies, and more suddenly moved into open air spaces.

Approximately 8 acres of downtown Pittsfield are open, public spaces including parks and plazas. During the COVID-19 state of emergency, Pittsfield received a Shared Streets and Spaces grant to increase outdoor space with the installation of parklets. The intent of the program was to fund quick implementation of improvements that supported public health, safe mobility, and commerce. Pittsfield installed eight parklets in downtown as an extension of the sidewalks to create outdoor dining space. The City was working under tight grant time constraints and originally installed only physical barriers to create protected space. Over time, the City has made improvements to add art, plantings, and further enhance the spaces.

Outdoor spaces are likely to continue to be important in downtowns post-COVID. Lessons learned from Pittsfield's initiatives, as well as those across the Commonwealth, can inform longer-term downtown enhancements.



Highlights from the Business Environment

FILLING STOREFRONT VACANCIES

With nearly a quarter of storefronts vacant in spring 2021, downtown vacancies are a noticeable feature in Pittsfield. Vacancies have been a standing issue that was further exacerbated by COVID-19 with an additional 6 business closures.

There is no single reason for downtown vacancies. In some cases, the small businesses that opened may have had the wrong business model for downtown Pittsfield. In other cases, developers have no problems filling residential units on upper floors, but it is more challenging to find viable ground-floor commercial tenants. A few remaining vacancies are large spaces and it is difficult finding the kind of long-term users who want and can succeed in these bigger spaces.

INCREASING FOOT TRAFFIC IN DOWNTOWN

A general goal for downtown Pittsfield is to increase foot traffic and vibrancy to support retail, restaurants, and overall feelings of safety, and it's recognized that supporting residential development in downtown is one strategy boost vibrancy.

BUSINESS IMPACTS FROM COVID-19

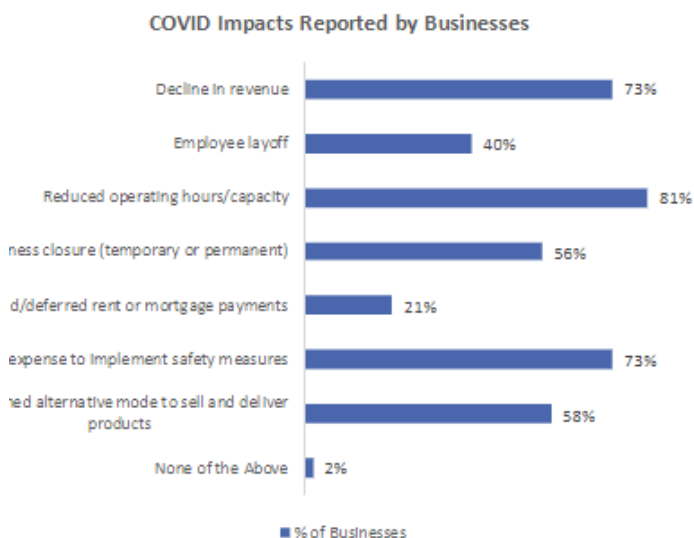
In the spring of 2021, Pittsfield businesses were surveyed to discover how they were impacted by COVID-19 and collect business owner input on various strategies that would support the district's recovery. 48 businesses participated in the survey.

The impacts from COVID-19 have been widespread and long-lasting. 73% of respondents reported a decline in revenue in 2020, compared to the previous year. Approximately one-quarter (27%) of respondents saw revenue decline by 50% or more. 42% of respondents noted a reduction in foot traffic by more than half since March 2020. Additionally, over half of respondents experienced a closure due to the pandemic. At the time of the survey, 81% of businesses reported they were still operating at reduced hours/capacity or were closed.

Businesses were additionally asked about existing regulations that pose an obstacle to business operations. The top three challenging regulations identified by businesses were parking regulations (60%), followed by licensing or permitting regulations (17%), and outdoor dining or selling regulations (15%).



Vacant former storefront of Ordinary Cycles, Pittsfield. Photo: Hodge Economic Consulting







COVID Impacts Reported by Downtown Pittsfield Businesses Source: Rapid Recovery Program Business Survey, March 2021

Project Recommendations

Recommendation	Project Category	Page
Enhancing and Sustaining Downtown Streetscape Maintenance	Public Realm	21
Downtown Placemaking – Enhancing Outdoor Spaces for Activation and Vibrancy	Public Realm	24
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Develop a Downtown Pittsfield Literary Hub	Tenant Mix	49
Installation of Proposed Mural Celebrating Pittsfield's History	Cultural/Arts	54
Develop Downtown Pittsfield Public Art Plan	Cultural/Arts	56
Initiate Youth Employment Corps	Other	60

Enhancing and Sustaining Downtown Streetscape Maintenance

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Downtown streets where planting beds are located; Downtown streets and sidewalks on South and North Streets between E/W Housatonic St and Wahconah St.
Origin	Business and stakeholder feedback, City of Pittsfield
Budget	 Medium Budget – estimated at \$120,000 / Year
Timeframe	 Short term - Start work spring of 2022 and continue through end of fall 2022.
Risk	 Low risk – with expanded funding this a well-defined project with known tasks; potential risk is securing the staff/professionals for downtown dedicated streetscape maintenance
Key Performance Indicators	Funding secured for dedicated downtown streetscape maintenance work; Successfully securing contractor to lead on trees and plantings; Customer / business / visitor feedback and perceptions on downtown cleanliness and visual appeal
Partners & Resources	City of Pittsfield as the lead, but multiple partner organizations with the city, including Pittsfield Beautiful, Downtown Pittsfield Inc and Dulye Leadership Group among other smaller groups. Financial Resources: Potential funding sources include Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), ARPA funding, MassDOT, Complete Streets



Downtown Cleanup , Pittsfield, MA Source: Downtown Pittsfield Inc.

Diagnostic

While the sidewalks and roadbeds are generally in good shape in downtown Pittsfield, the street trees and benches only scored a C in the diagnostic phase as the tree (canopy) in downtown is lacking in most sections, the plantings are inconsistent and sometimes are not maintained or cleaned regularly, and the overall cleanliness of downtown varies. Multiple business and stakeholder interviews revealed general concerns about the beautification and cleanliness of downtown, which has also been reported in the local media. During COVID-19, the importance of welcoming outdoor spaces has increased but meanwhile, the outside contractor hired by Pittsfield failed to do the basic maintenance work (related to overall shortage of contractors), thus leading to the decision to try have a more dedicated downtown streetscape maintenance team within the City and more specific (and limited) roles for a contractor and other partners.



South St., Pittsfield, MA Photo: Hodge Economic Consulting

Action Items

Beautification, cleaning, maintenance of plantings, greening of downtown by using dedicated city maintenance team to focus on downtown streetscapes.

Establish scope limits by determining the work to be performed by city personnel and the work to be performed by an outside contractor, specifically the activities which require applicator license.

Preliminary city staff scope:

- General street sweeping
- Power sweeping of all sidewalks on downtown corridor
- Removing and replacing mulch on planting beds
- Removal of litter and debris from planting beds
- Repairs to hardscape throughout downtown corridor, e.g. repairs to broken granite curbing, heaved sidewalk panels, uneven brick pavers, rain garden structures, etc.

Preliminary contracted (licensed) scope:

- Tree and plant maintenance, pruning, evaluation and health checks
- Tree and plant install (planting)
- Watering and fertilizing of all trees and plantings







Streetscape in Downtown Pittsfield Source: Hodge Economic Consulting

Process

1. Obtain funding for enhanced streetscape program of work, and trees/plantings
2. Staff up City team for dedicated downtown streetscape work
3. Hire outside contractor for tree/plant maintenance
4. Engage and communicate this project with local partners and stakeholders
5. Determine quality control process for all streetscape work

Downtown Placemaking – Enhancing Outdoor Spaces for Activation and Vibrancy

Category	 Public Realm
Location	City of Pittsfield, Downtown Pittsfield, Inc., stakeholder feedback
Origin	Downtown Pittsfield – Multiple locations
Budget	 Medium Budget – Initial estimate of approximately \$150,000; Potential funding sources include City of Pittsfield, MassDOT, MassDevelopment placemaking grants, Mass Downtown Initiative
Timeframe	 Short-term – within next 1-3 years. Planning and procurement can start in winter of 2022-2023 and installation can take place in spring of 2023.
Risk	 Low risk – a) procuring contractors to complete physical upgrade improvements; and b) organizing successful programming activities for outdoor spaces, such as dining, farmer's market, or other pop-up activities
Key Performance Indicators	External funding obtained to complete this work; Number of spaces (alleyways) upgraded; Number of visitors (customers) to programmed events, outdoor dining
Partners & Resources	City of Pittsfield as the lead partner, including the physical upgrades to these spaces, with Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. (DPI) and other local business partners and cultural institutions helping to lead the programming and organization of events for these spaces.
Diagnostic	<p>COVID-19 has placed increased emphasis on the importance of having attractive and inviting outdoor spaces for dining, socializing, and other events. But Pittsfield has a relative shortage of obvious outdoor dining options with a grade of C on that metric. And some of the most centrally located public (or public-private) spaces and alleyways have fallen into a state of disrepair. For example, the Dunham Mall pedestrian way (which connects from North Street to City Hall) has dilapidated pavers and sidewalks, limited plantings or trees, poor night-time lighting, etc. This, and other locations like it, are in desperate need of upgrade if Pittsfield would like to enhance its outdoor offerings for residents and visitors.</p>

Action Items

This project will upgrade the basic infrastructure (sidewalks, pavers, lighting, bollards, etc.) as the first step in outdoor placemaking to create more vibrant places downtown for a range of activities. The project will concentrate on a few select locations for activation, including alleys and pedestrian areas off of North Street. Objectives that are aligned with this project focus on:

- Creating additional space to be set aside to permit dining and vending in outdoor environments.
- Drawing foot traffic and creating focal points that encourage engagement with the street also helps to support businesses located downtown
- Landscaping, art, lighting, and shade in and around the activated spaces provide enclosure to help make spaces more inviting.
- The multiple locations will generally be built with an "interim" timeline in mind and can be removed and replaced seasonally.

There are multiple locations that can be activated in this manner. Specifically of interest are the two alleyways from North St to McKay St (Market Street and Burbank Place) and the Pedestrian mall space between North St and Allen St (Dunham Mall). The main goal is to create in these and other spaces, enhanced outdoor seating, gathering and plaza space along with enhancing pedestrian connection with lighting and landscaping as well as converting the space and making it ready for private and/or community organizations to utilize.

Process

Existing conditions assessment at Dunham Mall and other alleyways

- Specific to land ownership and use. One of the corridors is privately owned, another is partially private and the city is planning on entering into agreements with owners for this work.

Community engagement

- Maintain engagement with the community via online presence.

Planning and Design

Implementation of physical upgrades

Programming and event promotion for outdoor dining and other commercial and community events in these spaces

Evaluation and refinement of the spaces and activities, working towards regular annual programming to transition these downtown spaces into assets







Dunham Mall, Pittsfield, MA Photo: Hodge Economic Consulting



Downtown Pittsfield Parklet Photo: Downtown Pittsfield, Inc.

Gateways to the Gateway City – Signage and Wayfinding

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Street gateways at main transitions to the downtown areas. The specific locations are: Tyler St at Woodlawn Ave, North St at Rt 7 (Berkshire Medical Center entrance), East St at Elm St, West St at Center St, South St at W/E Housatonic St
Origin	Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. and City of Pittsfield
Budget	 High Budget - Projecting \$5 million for this project. Primarily for the roundabout design and construction at South and West streets. Wayfinding is estimated at \$500,000.
Timeframe	 Short-to-Medium-Term - Wayfinding can be completed within 6 to 12 months. Roundabouts will take more time, targeting 1 roundabout every 18 months will bring the overall duration to 90 months (about 8 years).
Risk	 Medium Risk – risks are relatively low to do enhanced signage and wayfinding at key gateway entrances but completing all physical infrastructure improvements (roundabouts) is a more expensive and complicated process.
Key Performance Indicators	Funding for roundabout design and construction; Funding for signage and wayfinding; Community engagement in gateway signage design; Completion of roundabout projects; Downtown visitation by adjacent neighborhoods
Partners & Resources	Likely funding sources and partners include MassDOT, City of Pittsfield, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and MassDevelopment.
Diagnostic	While the diagnostic phase found generally strong wayfinding and signage (grade of B), an area for improvement includes the gateway entrances to downtown. This ties into stakeholder interview findings which emphasized that overall visitation to downtown has been reduced due to COVID-19 and that the overall aesthetic appeal of downtown needs to be enhanced. And a disconnect has been noted between downtown and adjacent residential neighborhoods. Leveraging Pittsfield's ongoing plans to construct roundabouts at a number of gateway entrances, this project would: a) help advance that physical infrastructure work; and b) add improved signage and wayfinding, including community-informed design and art to the entrances.

Action Item

This project is focused on improving the gateway entrances to downtown Pittsfield (a Gateway City) at a number of locations, including improved and more artistic/designed signage, supported by new wayfinding signs (consistent with other wayfinding signage downtown) and physical infrastructure improvements to the roadways. In particular, the City is currently constructing and designing what will be a series of roundabouts at key gateway entrances to downtown. The intention is to include both: a) high-profile, high-traffic major roadway entrances; and b) smaller but vital gateway connections between downtown and local residential neighborhoods adjacent to downtown.

To implement this project, the City of Pittsfield will finalize locations based on traffic data combined with land use and economic/human activity, and develop conceptual design for roundabouts, wayfinding signage, landscape and streetscape. The City is currently constructing the roundabout at Tyler St; is in the process of designing to 100% the roundabout at North St and Rte 7; is working towards 25% design of the roundabout at East St; is in pre-conceptual design for the roundabouts at South St and at West St.

This project will require the onboarding of a design firm to begin designs for the roundabouts at West and at South streets as well as the contracting for the overall design and later procurement of wayfinding for all gateways.

Roundabout work breakdown and funding status:

- Under construction and funded:
 - Tyler St at Woodlawn Ave
- Under design and funded:
 - North St at Rt 7 (Berkshire Medical Center entrance)
- Under design and funding identified:
 - East St at Elm St
- Pre conceptual design and no funding identified:
 - West St at Center St (\$2M)
 - South St at W/E Housatonic St (\$2M)



Downtown Banners and Signage Source: North Adams Chamber of Commerce; North Adams Office of Tourism (<https://explorethenorthadams.com/>)



Existing Tyler Street Gateway Sign Photo: BSC Group

Process

The process for this project may vary between types of work. For instance, the wayfinding can be treated separately from the progress on the gateway roundabouts, and implementation could occur at least on an interim basis, before any one or more of the roundabouts are constructed given the costly nature and length of construction of the roundabouts.

Key steps will include:

- Existing conditions assessment
- Community engagement
- Planning and Design
- Implementation
- Evaluation

Current schedule for roundabout improvements at gateways to downtown is:

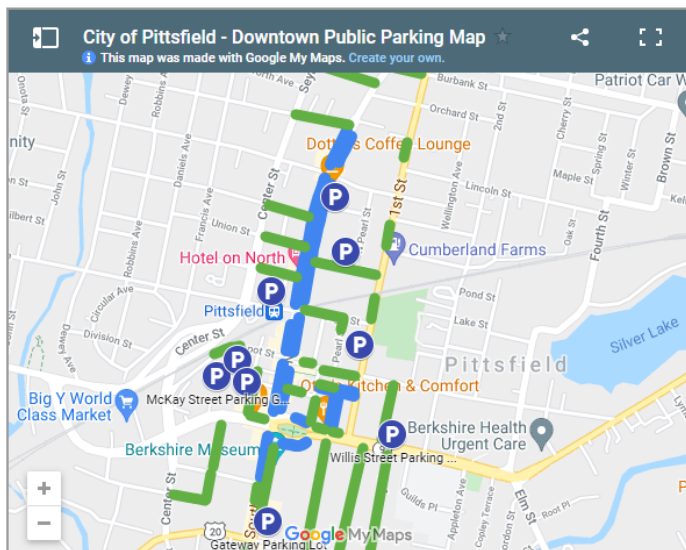
- 2021 - Tyler St at Woodlawn Ave
- 2023 - North St at Rt 7 (Berkshire Medical Center entrance)
- 2024 - East St at Elm St
- 2026 - West St at Center St
- 2028 - South St at W/E Housatonic St



Tyler Street Gateway, Pittsfield Photo: BSC Group

Implement the Next Generation Parking Kiosk Interface

Category	 Public Realm
Location	Downtown street parking along North St and Wahconah St
Origin	City of Pittsfield, Public Works
Budget	 High Budget: Current estimate is approximately \$300,000 - Potential funding sources include MassDOT, City of Pittsfield / ARPA for matching funds
Timeframe	 Short-term: Pilot the interface in first quarter of 2022! Procure and install by end of summer of 2022
Risk	 Low risk – improved interface at kiosks is a straight-forward project to implement
Key Performance Indicators	On-street parking use and revenue in downtown; Public / customer satisfaction with improved paid parking system
Partners & Resources	City of Pittsfield the lead partner to implement with Downtown Pittsfield Inc. (DPI) a supporting partner to help with communications about improved paid parking system.



Parking Map of Downtown (left); Parking Kiosk in front of downtown business (right) Photo: Hodge Economic Consulting

Diagnostic

In recent years, the City of Pittsfield implemented a paid parking system for on-street parking along North Street and other select locations of downtown. Part of the original intentions were to avoid prolonged parking at key downtown locations (e.g., in front of a business), and secondarily, to collect parking revenue. During COVID-19, business and visitor/customer complaints about the parking kiosks (used to pay for parking) increased significantly, partly as some kiosks did not work reliably and parking customers too often were confused about how to easily use the kiosks. Making it as convenient as possible to visit downtown Pittsfield, including user friendly parking systems, has become a priority for the City and its residents/businesses as part of recovery from COVID-19.

Action Item

This project will install a pilot interface and evaluate impact to end user in terms of improved user friendly functionality. If deemed acceptable based on testing, the City will determine the specific procurement process, and purchase the next generation interface. The parking kiosk interface contractor will install the new interface, working closely with city staff. DPI will support this improved interface with communications with local businesses, including announcements in email newsletters, and potentially developing posters or similar materials to help guide visitors and parking customers through the paid parking system at kiosks.

Process

- Install pilot next generation interface at select parking kiosks for testing
- Evaluate the improvement and experience to the user at the kiosks
- If it demonstrates measurable improvement, move forward with funding and implementation of new parking kiosks
- Communicate the improved parking kiosks to businesses, residents and visitors

Implement Downtown Pittsfield Façade and Storefront Improvement Program

Category	 Private Realm
Location	Downtown Pittsfield Arts District
Origin	City of Pittsfield, Community Development
Budget	 Medium Budget – Estimated to be \$150,000
Timeframe	 Short-term – With funding, program could be implemented very quickly by the City
Risk	 Low Risk - Biggest risks are: a) obtaining new funding sources to support this program; b) securing contractors to complete the façade improvement program upgrades
Key Performance Indicators	Amount (\$) of external funding obtained for this program; number of business and property owners submitting applications; number of completed projects and private investment leveraged; number of vacant storefronts with new tenants
Partners & Resources	City of Pittsfield, Community Development; Downtown Pittsfield, Inc.; Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation (PERC) Funding sources could include: MassDevelopment, City of Pittsfield capital funds (ARPA)



Storefronts in Downtown Pittsfield Sources: Downtown Pittsfield Inc. and Hodge Economic Consulting

Diagnostic

The Phase 1 Diagnostic analysis revealed approximately 36 vacant storefronts in downtown Pittsfield, approximately 22 percent of all storefronts in downtown. In addition, grades of B for facades and C for business lighting identified a number of commercial buildings in need of exterior physical improvements. As documented throughout this plan, COVID-19 significantly reduced foot traffic in downtown and downtown businesses were significantly affected by the pandemic in terms of closures, reduced operating hours, and less sales revenue. All of these factors point to the importance of helping to improve the physical appearance of downtown overall, including the look and maintenance of ground floor storefronts, to help attract and retain more visitors and customers.

Action Items

This project will create a new façade and storefront improvement program for downtown Pittsfield, leveraging the City's experience developing a similar program for Tyler Street as part of the Transformative Development Initiative (TDI). That program created a detailed set of guidelines on eligibility, which included applications from property owners to improve currently vacant spaces, matching funds, etc. But that program was limited to the Tyler Street TDI area. This next phase of work would focus on North Street and the Downtown Pittsfield Arts District.

Eligible projects are focused on exterior improvements and will include façade renovations; window replacement; door replacement; exterior lighting (affixed to the building); lighting at the interior of the façade/windows in order to further provide vibrancy to the street; painting; awnings (new or replacements); and signs. Projects that trigger or include accessibility improvements are also eligible. The improvements must comply with all City zoning regulations and ordinances, and should be aligned with the city's design guidelines for storefront improvements. For more information, see: https://www.cityofpittsfield.org/city_hall/community_development/docs/Tyler%20St%20Storefront%20Improvement%20Program%20Final%208-25-17.pdf

Similar to the Tyler Street program, the City will establish maximum grant awards (\$15,000) and minimum matching funds (10%).

General Design Guidelines

- Restoration of architectural details, including removal of obstructions or elements which hide such detailing.
- Removal of design elements which are not consistent with the building's character.
- Installation or repair of awnings or canopies that are functional and visually appealing. Awnings and canopies made from vinyl or plastic and those that are lit internally are not eligible for funding.
- Improvement of façade conditions through cleaning, painting, repair and replacement.
- Design of façade improvements should complement or replicate a building's original materials.
- Doors should be primarily comprised of glass, compatible with the scale, material and shape of the overall façade.

Process

The first chronological step is to identify funding sources and apply for external funding to drive this program. With funds secured, the City of Pittsfield will update and refine their program guidelines based on the Tyler Street program. For applicants, they will need to complete an application form that includes:

1. Description of proposed improvements including proposed styles for improvements such as lighting and/or signage and color scheme, accompanied by specification sheets, architectural design drawing(s), or sketch(es) as appropriate;
2. Cost and identification of all required permits, including documentation of permits which have already been received;
3. Photos of the existing façade;
4. Total cost estimates from a licensed contractor - design costs, and permit fees may be included; and
5. A schedule for the proposed work to be completed. During the application review process, the City will verify that all municipal fees and real estate taxes are paid up to date.

All proposed work must be reviewed and approved by the program design review committee. Funds awarded for projects not commencing within six months of the date of award may be reallocated to other projects.

Options to Diversify Storefront Improvement Program Funding

- **General Fund** – Through an allocation from a municipality, this type of funding tends to offer the greatest flexibility for program structure with the least amount of reporting restrictions.
- **Local Municipal Funding (Set-Aside)** – Municipal allocation set-aside from a special revenue stream for a set amount of time (e.g. permit revenues, sales tax set-aside, special fees such as landfill tipping/disposal fees, etc.)
- **Special Taxing Bodies** – Business district designation (creating an additional sales tax) or special service area (additional property tax), TIF districts
- **Federal American Rescue Plan Funding** – Communities may use ARPA funding for small business assistance, such as to enhance outdoor spaces for COVID-19 mitigation (e.g., restaurant patios) or to improve the built environment of the neighborhood (e.g., façade improvements).
- **Federal CDBG** – Applicants must meet and adhere to federal requirements and compliance issues. The Massachusetts CDBG Program is a competitive program that is available to all municipalities that are not Entitlement Communities and encourages joint or regional applications. Communities may apply for funds for downtown or commercial district related projects including sign/facade programs.
- **Private/Nonprofit/Foundation funding** – Low-interest or no-interest loans or grants from private lenders, often those with a community focus or a small, local bank or nonprofit organization with community interest.
- **Historic funding** – Historic preservation and landmarks organizations such as Main Street America receive grant funding from the National Park Service specifically for rural “Main Street” communities.

Tyler Street Storefront Improvement Program



Location

Tyler Street, Pittsfield, MA

About

The Tyler Street Storefront Improvement Program is a recent effort to revitalize storefronts on Tyler Street. This program was funded by the City of Pittsfield and MassDevelopment. Business or property owners are eligible to apply for up to \$15,000 through the program, with a required match of 10%.

Applicants to the Tyler Street Storefront Improvement Program were encouraged to seek free professional business advice, related to the proposed storefront improvements or any other aspect of the applicant's business, from the Berkshire Regional Office of the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network. To assist in facilitating a coordinated permitting review process, applicants were also encouraged to discuss building improvements and signage with the City's Permitting Coordinator.

The maximum grant award for a storefront façade improvement project is \$15,000 with \$7,500 being awarded from the City of Pittsfield and \$7,500 awarded from MassDevelopment's TDI Local Small Business Acceleration Grants Program. Property and/or business owners are required to contribute a minimum of 10% of the total project costs. The program includes a set of design guidelines participants are required to follow.

More information at:

https://www.cityofpittsfield.org/departments/community_development/tyler_street_storefront_improvement_program.php

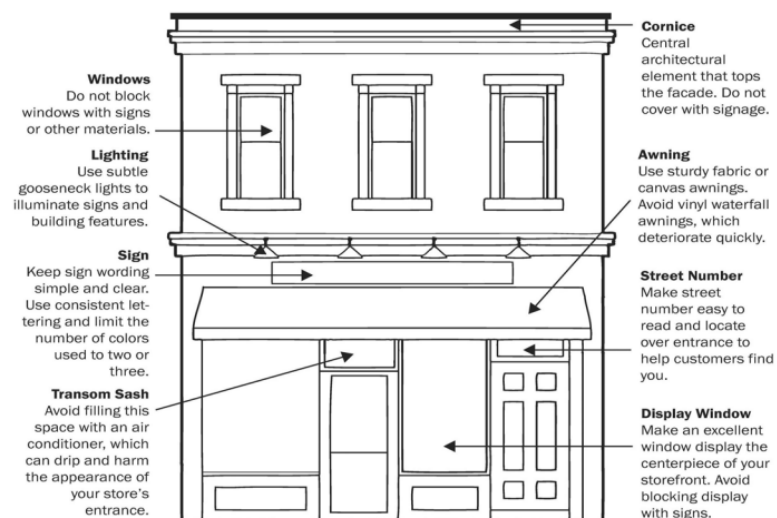



Diagram with Façade Improvement Design Guidelines Source: Tyler Street Storefront Improvement Program

Enhance collaborative marketing for downtown Pittsfield and its businesses

Category	 Revenue/Sales
Location	Throughout Pittsfield Downtown Arts District
Origin	Stakeholder survey, discussions with City of Pittsfield and Downtown Pittsfield Inc. (DPI)
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000) – Market research: \$30,000; Social media and website upgrades: \$50,000; Technical assistance: \$80,000
Timeframe	 Short Term (< 5 years)
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	See below
Partners & Resources	Partners include the City of Pittsfield, 1Berkshire and downtown businesses and cultural institutions, including possible ARPA funds. Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. would spearhead and manage the project but will need additional resources to conduct the analyses and create and distribute marketing material.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Sustainability

- Foot traffic and number of visitors/customers to downtown Pittsfield
- Number and diversity of types of businesses and entrepreneurs located in or serving downtown;
- Storefront occupancy rate; and
- Number of and rates of attendees at special events

Place Attachment and Brand

- Visibility of Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. and businesses and entrepreneurs (earned, owned, and paid media); and
- Positive media mentions of downtown Pittsfield, and businesses and entrepreneurs.

Multi-Platform Media

- Website and social media traffic for participating downtowns, businesses, and online marketplace; and
- Number of media impressions and social media mentions.



Downtown Pittsfield Stories: Steven Valenti's Clothing (includes video)

Blog, Downtown Stories • By Kimberly Gritman •
May 25, 2020

Steven Valenti and his store, Steven Valenti's Clothing, have been downtown Pittsfield institutions for 37 years. Steve hasn't slowed down in that time, working 6 days a week in his beloved store at 157 North Street, until the Coronavirus forced him to temporarily close his storefront. Steve misses his customers terribly, but he has found...

Spotlight on Valenti's Clothing, part of "Downtown Stories" initiative Source: Downtown Pittsfield, Inc.

Diagnostic

Stakeholder interviews revealed a need for improved collaborative marketing of downtown Pittsfield in various ways (overall promotion, highlighting unique retailers, addressing challenges from COVID, and marketing vacant spaces). This finding reflected the lower foot traffic volumes observed in downtown since COVID-19 and the need to find more creative and innovative ways to market downtown, improve perceptions, and support small businesses trying to grow and be sustainable ventures.

Background research:

The real estate market in Berkshire County has been steadily improving since June 2020. In December 2020, the number of properties sold was 44.3% greater than in December 2019 and prices were 127.2% higher. North, Central and South Berkshire County experienced an increase of between 13.3 to 109.1% in properties sold and between 66.8 and 207.6% in total value of those sales.

COVID-19 has shifted consumer preferences and behavior, with 76% of Americans either changing how they shop, brands they buy, and/or retailers and websites they frequent. Recovery may mean a new "normal" as 40% intend to continue shopping online post-COVID-19.

Monies spent locally recirculate locally. Across the U.S., independent retailers recirculate 48% of their revenue into the local community versus only 14% for chain stores. Independent restaurants recirculate 65% versus 35% by chains. Consumers shifting 10% of their spending to local retailers on Cape Cod would add \$112 million annually to their regional economy.

Sources:

- Berkshire County Board of Realtors. (2021, January). Berkshire Realtors Market Data Report December 2020. <http://berkshirerealtors.net/>
- Survey: US consumer sentiment during the coronavirus crisis. (2020, December 8). McKinsey.Com. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/survey-us-consumer-sentiment-during-the-coronavirus-crisis>
- Indie Impact Study Series. (n.d.). Civic Economics. Retrieved February 8, 2021, from <http://www.civiceconomics.com/indie-impact.html>
- love. live. local. (2020, April). Local Matters. <https://lovelivelocal.com/localmatters/>



Pledge card from the Amherst BID encouraging people to Shop Local. Photo: Amherst Business Improvement District

Action Items

DPI seeks to capture the attention of potential new downtown customers and visitors as well as reinforce support among prior customers and visitors through enhanced downtown marketing of its unique cultural and business assets. We will engage one or more consultants to:

- a) conduct market research utilizing quantitative online surveys and qualitative one-on-one interviews to characterize our consumer base;
- b) help develop and implement new online marketing content and 'storytelling' with use of social media and search engine optimization (SEO) of DPI's web site; and
- c) and providing technical assistance to DPI and local businesses to improve their marketing and increase the coordination and messaging of downtown assets.

In addition, DPI will re-vamp its existing marketing committee to expand its responsibilities to match best practices, such as the Dupont Circle BID marketing committee: "The purpose of the DPI Marketing and Branding Committee is to advise the Board on crafting the organization's marketing message, so that stakeholders have a clear impression of DPI's overall vision. The Committee will also be responsible for brainstorming opportunities and/or methods to increase awareness of the Downtown Pittsfield brand to potential partners, government agencies and community members."

Specific initiatives will focus on highlighting downtown Pittsfield's existing and emerging strengths such as cultural institutions, creative economy and the arts, restaurants, and nearby parks and outdoor amenities. We seek to create new imagery and 'story telling' content around topics such as:

- Murals, parklets
- Pop-ups and cafes
- Leverage local talent / Arts & culture gig folks
- Opportunity for businesses, organizations, and individuals to collaborate

DPI has branded downtown Pittsfield as the "Heart of the Berkshires" and in 2020 launched a "Heart of the Berkshires" e-gift card in 2020 with Yiftee. <https://app.yiftee.com/gift-card/downtown-pittsfield> The City of Pittsfield's Office of Cultural Development is developing a "Love Pittsfield" campaign. We seek to implement a coordinated campaign to promote downtown Pittsfield. This includes effective use of social media, increasing earned media, and evaluating additional paid media opportunities.

Create a Digital Marketing Playbook:

- Attention is needed to on DPI Website content and SEO. Current site needs SEO improvement. For example, most pages lack important metadata such as page descriptions and alternate text for images. Events and other pages lack social share links and images.
- Organic and paid social strategy combined with traditional/print marketing: <https://www.sendwithscout.com/article/welcome-to-modern-direct-mail-marketing>
- Place-based branding with a marketing toolkit for local small business owners; Support for business level digital marketing improvements to coordinate with municipal level efforts.



Pittsfield Heart of the Berkshires Campaign Photo: Downtown Pittsfield, Inc.

Process

- Seek funding for DPI to increase its marketing resources and budget, including 1Berkshire, city of Pittsfield ARPA funds, etc.
- Develop an RFP for consultant marketing support (see best practice example)
- Discuss and agree to enhancements for DPI's marketing committee
- Implement proposed project actions including website search optimization, creating new story content and imagery, etc.
- Develop marketing toolkit for local small business owners

Best Practice/Resource: RFP Scope of Work for Consultant Marketing Support





Scope of work from City of Linden, NJ RFP for consultant marketing support

"The firm will assist the City in generating a marketing plan and strategy, the procurement of marketing and communications support services, creation of selected marketing materials, support services for public outreach activities, and other related marketing functions and work products, to enhance the integrity of the City's image. Services and deliverables may include the development and the marketing of the City's brand.

The objective of this RFP is to procure marketing and communications support services, creation of selected marketing materials, support services for public outreach activities, and other related marketing functions and work products. Services to be performed include:

- A. Provide strategic marketing support for special projects including special projects related to municipal promotions and City events. This will include developing and providing a variety of promotional, publicity and advertising plans, communication and informational materials consistent with specifications provided by the City.
- B. Provide advice and recommendations to City managers or City officials for development and implementation of designated marketing projects. Assist City entities and departments as assigned to provide approved marketing services (agencies include: City Council, Office of the Mayor, Department of Public Works, Department of Parks and Recreation, Linden Cultural & Heritage Committee, Linden Mayor's Youth Commission, etc.).
- C. Design, develop, and deliver promotional materials for designated City initiatives and events.
- D. Provide advice and recommendations for citywide marketing strategies and improving citywide brand awareness.
- E. Provide advice and recommendations for City managers or officials to successfully design, develop and implement marketing projects and sponsorship projects by creating vehicles to share ideas, knowledge, and success stories.
- F. Provide media training and consulting as requested."

Create a Downtown Pittsfield online marketplace with commerce and social engagement

Category	 Revenue/Sales
Location	Throughout Pittsfield Downtown Arts District
Origin	Downtown Pittsfield Inc. (DPI)
Budget	 Low Budget (< \$50,000) – Multi-vendor marketplace: up to \$25,000; Community directory with social media engagement: up to \$13,000; Education and communications: up to \$10,000
Timeframe	 Short-Term (< 5 years) – Within the next 2-3 years
Risk	 Medium Risk - Potential risks include: a) obtaining funding to set up an online marketplace and the technical support needed to implement related programs; b) finding sufficient commitments from local businesses to participate in an online marketplace; c) sustaining momentum for this initiative over time; and d) promotion and visibility to ensure that it is used and findable online by customers / visitors.
Key Performance Indicators	Website and social media traffic for participating downtowns, businesses, and online marketplace; Number of local businesses participating in an online marketplace; Sales revenue from purchases of goods/services via marketplace; Number of local businesses certified in education programming
Partners & Resources	Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. would spearhead and manage the project but will need additional resources to lead these tasks. Partners include the City of Pittsfield, 1Berkshire and downtown businesses.
Diagnostic	<p>The impact of the pandemic, combined with changing consumer behavior and competitive business operational efficiencies, have had negative consequences for many small businesses. The net impact, if unaddressed, could be a potential threat to local economies. We recognize that recent advances in technology and its utilization can not only help to address these short-term challenges, but can also help our communities to survive and thrive in a future in which greater reliance on and incorporation of digital technologies will be endemic. It is in our interest to leverage the capabilities of a “digital downtown”, to recover from the impacts of the pandemic and to prepare for an increasingly competitive future economy in which “online” will be table stakes for all competitive businesses and communities.</p> <p>COVID-19 led to lower foot traffic volumes observed in downtown and therefore fewer in-person customers for businesses. At the same time, shopping at Amazon and other online retailers skyrocketed as people avoided in-store shopping and flocked to the convenience of online shopping. COVID-19 has shifted consumer preferences and behavior, with 76% of Americans either changing how they shop, brands they buy, and/or retailers and websites they frequent. Recovery may mean a new “normal” as 40% intend to continue shopping online post-COVID-19.¹</p> <p>Spurred by COVID-19, DPI has made great strides in developing its online directory of downtown businesses (https://downtownpittsfield.com/2021/05/local-online-shopping-guide/) but more work is needed to add functionality for online sales/commerce opportunities and to make it easier for customers to search products (beyond searching individual business web sites) and engage in interactive social/community discussions about downtown.</p> <p><small>¹Survey: US consumer sentiment during the coronavirus crisis. (2020, December 8). McKinsey.Com. https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/survey-us-consumer-sentiment-during-the-coronavirus-crisis</small></p>

Action Items

DPI would like to create a dynamic online marketplace of businesses and services that will be a “stroll down main street” where buying and selling products and services online is an extension of the downtown and entrepreneurial community: community-driven social e-commerce. Entrepreneurs from EforAll Berkshires will connect with the “brick and mortar” small businesses for synergistic promotions and sales. “Word of mouth” will go digital as consumers will participate beyond their purchase and generate social media content. The platform and associated social media marketing will help drive customers back downtown for in-person experiences, shopping, and dining.

We plan to increase the capacity of small businesses and entrepreneurs from a “Basic” level of digital engagement to an “Intermediate” level or higher so that they may participate in the Berkshire Downtowns Online Marketplace. We will engage a network of locally based “on call” expert advisors to provide one-on-one technical assistance. Following outreach to the business and entrepreneurial community to identify specific technical capacities and needs, we will “match” them with subject-matter experts to help develop or optimize websites, social media presence, quality digital content (e.g., photos, graphics, video, text), and safe and efficient fulfillment processes (e.g., payment, delivery, cybersecurity, regulatory requirements). More specifically, this project will include a few key components:

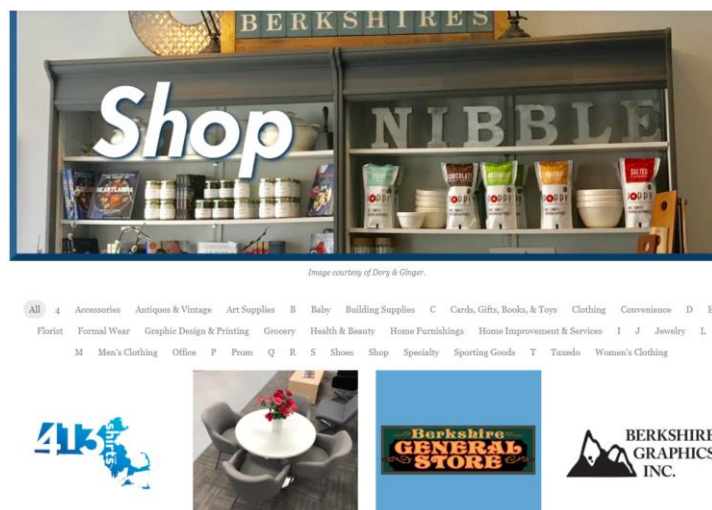
Local-Search enabled Multi-Vendor Marketplace – Our proposed project is to provide a local-search enabled multi-vendor marketplace of the community’s vendors. This approach would create an online presence that can compete with the large e-tailers by offering broad product selection and the convenience of online shopping, while enabling online sales directly with local retailers. An advantage of this approach is that transaction services are provided by the platform but processing is directly between shopper and vendor. The marketplace can be built as a part of a large local-search enabled platform, as a Pittsfield-only marketplace, or as a combination of the two. By leveraging already existing technologies and platforms, the cost – in dollars, manpower, and administration – are reduced to the customization costs of geographic market segmentation and, if desired, establishing a URL-redirect capable sub-domain on the marketplace server.

Community Directory – Providing a centralized website that facilitates other types of community engagement, easy information access, and meaningful links to other aspects of the community. Examples of these other links would include a business directory which can provide a Yellow Pages-like guide to local businesses, community calendar, links to municipal services, etc.

DPI has an existing website that has a substantial head start over many other communities efforts to implement a “digital downtown” directory offering. So the goal would be to improve user experience, increase “sticky” functionality (modify features and increase update frequency to encourage engagement and returning), and build solutions that encourage “future enhancements” as new technologies evolve.

Coordinated Communications Program – This recommendation is for the establishment of an intentionally designed organization (people and activities) which will, collectively, create and promote messaging to create awareness of the DPI programs (Marketplace, Directory, events, goals, etc) and encourage enthusiasm and participation in both DPI’s activities and the long-term goal of digitally enabling the Pittsfield economy.

Education and Certification program – To implement a “digital downtown” community that can fully leverage the on-going changes in technology, the community would benefit from an education, or community enrichment, program. A DPI managed program could offer a structure for different levels of proficiency. The courses could be offered either via internally developed content or through external content which has been reviewed & approved by DPI. To provide motivation, each level could come with a DPI digital competence certification. Proposed certification levels: Internet Practitioner, Internet Manager, and Internet Master.



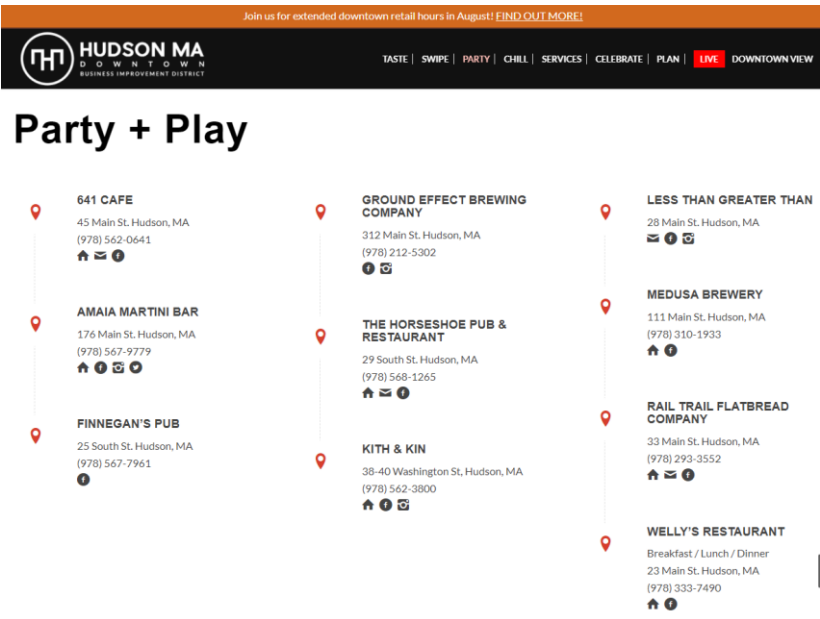
Screenshot of Downtown Pittsfield Directory

Source: Downtown Pittsfield, Inc.

Process

To be effective, this online marketplace would need to on-board a minimum number of retailers, upload their inventory, train them in the management and administration of their e-store, and discuss strategies to leverage their new online sales capability. Additionally, a local marketplace would benefit greatly from a coordinated outreach and engagement messaging project.

For the coordinated communications program, the first step in this process is recognizing that there are multiple constituencies in the community – businesses, residents, municipal government, community organizations, the media (traditional media and social media), and that they each have their own agenda, mindset, and messages. The second step is establishing the resources and processes to get these different constituencies to collaborate and message their respective audiences in a coordinated and complementary manner. The strength of this project is not in creating a single powerful marketing group, but in leveraging the combined strength of many voices to create a unified and effective communication ecosystem.



Screenshot of Downtown Hudson Business Directory Source: www.DiscoverHudson.org



Optional Other Search Parameters

Location:

☒ Search near me

☐ Search near

Search near me

☐ Ignore location

Search radius:

15 miles



Search

Best Practice

Local eCommerce Market Place



REVENUES
& SALES

Location

Online – Ashland, MA marketplace is in process

Budget: Many of the tools are free. Planning and organization may benefit from an educational seminar, training, and consultations, at a nominal fee. Training is also widely available online for many of the tools

Timeframe: Individual retailers can create accounts in ~1 hour. Community efforts to coordinate should be ~6 weeks, and a community-centric marketing effort, is an ongoing activity, > 6 months.

Risk: The potential benefit, leveraging internet technologies to steer shoppers to local stores rather than distant, online-only websites, is great. The financial and structural risks are minimal.

Every porch-delivery – by FedEx, UPS, Amazon, etc. – is potentially a purchase that was made online and shipped from a distant retailer. Most of these purchases are items that could be purchased from local retailers. Providing a “shop local online, buy local online” capability, mindset, and awareness can strengthen the local economy, and help local retailers.

Even local retailers that have their own websites from which they can sell, are at a competitive disadvantage to large eCommerce platforms that present thousands of products in dozens of product categories. A local multi-vendor eCommerce marketplace combines the community’s total product selection and creates a comparable selection of products to large eCommerce companies, making the community an eCommerce destination.

This approach should also promote the store, provides a map to their location, and strengthen the relationship between shoppers and local businesses. Retailer identification and branding reinforces the shopper retailer relationship and encourages repeat business.

The recommended course of action is an initial outreach to community stores to present the benefits of a coordinated community-centric online marketplace technologies. This may require some collateral materials, and an outreach effort.

Many of the technologies and platforms are already built and no development or customization activity is required. Awareness of the technologies and how to apply and integrate them will also benefit from a community sponsored publicity effort and/or outreach campaign.

More information: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/revenue-sales-best-practice-sheets-compendium/download> (see page 34).

Enhance Downtown Pittsfield Inc.'s capacity for business development, engagement, marketing and technical support

Category	 Administrative Capacity
Location	Throughout Pittsfield Downtown Arts District
Origin	Discussions with City of Pittsfield and Downtown Pittsfield Inc. (DPI); interviews with local businesses
Budget	 Medium Budget (\$50 - \$200K) - Proposed: 1.0 FTE for DPI to increase capacity to provide marketing assistance, and lead a business retention and recruitment program
Timeframe	 Short-Term
Risk	 Low Risk - Primary risk is obtain funding as current financing limitations constrain the capacity of DPI to implement this project absent additional resources. The willingness of property owners and businesses to engage in a new initiative is a secondary risk.
Key Performance Indicators	See below
Partners & Resources	Partners include DPI (as lead), City of Pittsfield, Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation, EforAll Berkshire County, downtown property owners and landlords, downtown businesses, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, 1Berkshire, Mass Downtown Initiative, and regional "on-call" experts. MassDevelopment as a potential key partner and funder if selected for a downtown TDI district.



Key Performance Indicators

- Number and mix of businesses:
 - receiving technical assistance by expert category and increasing their consumer capacity; and
 - participating in an "on-call" expert program; and
 - locating in previously vacant storefronts; and
 - relocating to or locating in downtown.
- Place Attachment and Website
 - Visibility of DPI, downtown Pittsfield, and participating businesses and entrepreneurs (publicity, social media and peer reviews); and
 - Positive media mentions of DPI, downtown Pittsfield, and participating businesses and entrepreneurs.
 - Development and maintenance of new online resource on currently available commercial real estate offerings and vacant spaces.

Diagnostic

A key challenge to implement this project is insufficient resources. DPI has strong working relationships with the partners identified above and provides some of these services on a limited and sometimes ad-hoc basis. To achieve greater benefits for downtown, however, will require an intensive effort that will only be possible with additional resources and staffing.

A key opportunity to retain existing businesses and recruit new businesses is that Berkshire County and Pittsfield have had an influx of new residents – and potential customers - over the course of the pandemic. The real estate market in Berkshire County has been steadily improving since June 2020. In December 2020, the number of properties sold was 44.3% greater than in December 2019 and prices were 127.2% higher. Despite the positive developments for our residential market, downtown is estimated to have approximately 36 ground floor vacancies while lacking dedicated resources to help with downtown business development or to engage with commercial property owners about creative ways to market spaces for new uses or small businesses.

Action Items

DPI would like to hire a new business development coordinator (or similar title) at DPI to serve as liaison to prospective, new, and long-standing businesses in downtown Pittsfield and provide one-on-one technical, permitting, and marketing support and services to increase their capacity for in-person and digital consumer engagement. Alternatively, DPI is also in the process of applying to MassDevelopment for downtown Pittsfield to be a new Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) district. If selected, downtown Pittsfield would benefit from a combination of TDI programs such as a full-time TDI Fellow focused on small business development along with programs such as TDI Local to help provide resources to Pittsfield's small businesses.

One point of emphasis for this role will be helping to fill vacant storefronts, linking partners, commercial property owners and resources to increase the businesses located downtown. Related, this position is expected to establish an online, searchable database of available commercial spaces in downtown to help make it easier for prospective businesses and other stakeholders to see options for physical space. We also anticipate starting a program with "on-call" experts to provide specialized business technical assistance and mentoring, as well as coordinating and implementing the range of programs and initiatives recommended in this Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) such as a new storefront façade program, enhanced marketing and other business support projects.

Key tasks for this position are anticipated to include:

- Serve as the point-person for business engagement and business development for downtown Pittsfield
- Focus on business engagement to understand local business needs, issues, and opportunities; helping to devise strategies, create partnerships, etc.
- Work with property owners and real estate leaders to seek new business opportunities for vacant storefronts
- Devise business promotion events, sustained marketing/promotion of downtown Pittsfield

Process

Within six months:

- Establish job description for business development position
- Hire Business Liaison (or Business Development Coordinator) at DPI
- Identify and enter into agreements/contracts with “on-call” experts
- Develop themes and scope of marketing / promotional materials
- Identify key permitting processes for new and existing businesses
- Evaluate “rotating” business and entrepreneurial use of downtown storefronts

Within nine months:

- Partner with EforAll Berkshire County to “match” brick-and-mortar businesses and entrepreneurs with “on-call” experts
- Create videos and promotional materials
- Develop FAQs on key permitting processes
- Develop online tool for searching available commercial spaces downtown

Within twelve months:

- Host downtown tours and open houses for prospective businesses
- Establish
- Offer one-on-one assistance with permits






Downtown Pittsfield Businesses Photo: Downtown Pittsfield Inc.



Scenes from Downtown Pittsfield Source: Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. Strategic Plan 2016-2020

Financial incentives and programs to fill vacant storefronts and underutilized spaces

Category	 Tenant Mix
Location	Throughout Downtown Arts District, with emphasis on North Street, South Street between Park Square and East/West Housatonic Street, and Park Square
Origin	Stakeholder interviews, discussions with City of Pittsfield and Downtown Pittsfield Inc. (DPI)
Budget	 High Budget (>\$200,000) – Funds needed for both pop-up stores, rental rebates and staffing resources to support this initiative
Timeframe	 Short Term (< 5 years) – hoping to start within next 6-12 months
Risk	 Medium Risk - Even with a variety of financial subsidies, activation programs and more staff technical support, it's uncertain how many 'brick and mortar' businesses are ready and willing to locate in downtown Pittsfield. Plus, it may be challenging to find financial resources to support (or sustain) these initiatives.
Key Performance Indicators	Number of vacant storefronts filled with new tenants; SF of upper floor space brought onto market for residential or commercial uses; number of new businesses using programs
Partners & Resources	City of Pittsfield, DPI, building and property owners, arts community, EforAll Berkshire County
Diagnostic	<p>The diagnostic phase revealed an estimated 36 vacant storefronts in downtown Pittsfield, and this number has increased due to COVID-19 (with some recent business closures or relocations out of downtown Pittsfield not reflected in those numbers). There is a variety of reasons for vacant storefronts ranging from sub-standard physical spaces, buildings currently being redeveloped for upper floor residential with empty ground floor units, and shorter-term vacancies that reflect natural churn within the local market. But the number of vacancies combined with the overall goal of increasing vibrancy and foot traffic in downtown Pittsfield point to the importance of increasing the number of 'activating' small businesses such as coffee shops, retail, restaurants, and art/creative economy ventures. These themes came through during all stakeholder interviews, with the need to do more to add businesses to downtown and find creative ways to activate vacant storefronts.</p>

Action Items

The overall goal of this project is to lower the costs to businesses to locate in vacant storefronts, and pilot innovative programs and technical assistance to encourage more start-up businesses to try locating in downtown Pittsfield. To the extent possible, these programs will attempt to include minority and women-owned small businesses to help downtown business ownership better reflect the actual demographics of Pittsfield. Similar to the Vacant Storefront Initiative in Cambridge, MA, this project will be a multi-pronged effort with four areas of focus:

Low-cost pop-up store initiative

Similar to the initiative underway in Adams, MA, this new initiative will try to find regional start-up businesses to try locating in downtown Pittsfield vacant storefronts. It will require cooperation and partnership with commercial landlords (with vacant spaces) along with funding subsidies to provide low (or no) cost space to start-up businesses that are willing to try a 3-6 month location. The idea is both help businesses trial physical spaces with the hope that some will succeed and want to stay (or find another downtown space), while limiting the number and duration of vacant spaces.

Rental rebate program

Mimicking an established program in Taunton, MA, this initiative will provide rental rebates to new private businesses occupying vacant spaces in downtown Pittsfield to lower the costs of establishing and sustaining a business.

Technical assistance resources

To be led by Downtown Pittsfield Inc. (contingent on resources), new technical assistance and business support should include: a) an online searchable database of vacant spaces available to lease; b) outreach to commercial landlords to help connect them to potential resources and funding; c) small business technical support to help start-ups be better positioned for a physical location; and d) promoting the City of Pittsfield's (existing) permitting liaison who should be the first contact for businesses thinking about downtown locations.

Creative design and art displays in vacant storefronts

Similar to past efforts in Pittsfield and a creative design contest Cambridge, this task will link local artists to commercial landlords with vacant storefronts. The idea is to develop an 'inventory' of selected (or awarded) local art that is then available for landlords to review and choose to display in their vacant windows and storefronts.



Vacant Storefronts in Downtown Pittsfield Source: Hodge Economic Consulting

Process

- Organize a team of DPI, City of Pittsfield (Community Development), EforAll, and other stakeholders to refine these project ideas, explore the most viable funding opportunities, and prioritize the tasks/programs to initiate under this project.
- Initiate a multi-pronged fund-raising campaign to: a) obtain more resources for DPI to lead this overall project; b) local funding to cover the costs of the pop-up store activities; c) obtain city approval for the rental rebate program; and d) apply for relevant state, federal and foundation grant opportunities.
- Conduct small business and entrepreneur outreach, partnering with EforAll, to develop a set of possible small businesses / start-ups for these activation strategies.
- Conduct commercial landlord engagement to develop an inventory of vacant spaces (for the online database) as well as possible participation in the art display and pop-up store programs.

Best Practice Example: Pop-Ups in the Retail Mix

Adams, MA

Adams faced challenges with downtown occupancy prior to COVID-19. The pandemic only accelerated economic hardships, leading approximately 15 retail spaces to become vacant out of 50 with a storefront presence. The town is highly dependent on the recreation and hospitality sectors, both of which receded in the past year, creating a snowball-effect decline in economic activity more broadly. Because of its many older residents, the town has difficulty attracting businesses that appeal to younger audiences. Many of those leading local economic development efforts do so as volunteers, which limits their ability to provide a full range of services and technical assistance to incoming businesses.

Among the town's attractions are the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum, a historic home listed on the Register of Historic Places, and the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, whose north end starts in Adams. The town is located near many natural resources, including Greylock Glen, which recently received state funding to develop a world-class outdoor recreation and environmental center. For outdoor enthusiasts, the town is famous for hosting in the 1930s the Thunderbolt Ski Run, which attracted top skiers from the United States and Europe during its heyday. Today the tradition continues with an annual winter celebration called ThunderFest. Adams is within easy driving and public transit distance to an internationally-recognized museum (Mass MoCA) and is centrally located along the Berkshire corridor stretching from Bennington, Vermont to Sheffield, Massachusetts.

The project will attract small businesses to Adams that address local's day-to-day needs and provide amenities for visitors who are there to explore the region. To accomplish this, the project will build on local boosterism and capture residents' pride while identifying new and under-represented voices the town may not have previously engaged. Years of disinvestment have led many to give up hope on Adams' potential to provide good local jobs. By bringing positive attention to Adams, the project hopes to re-inspire residents challenged by poverty. Pop-up stores, while unfamiliar, can build a following, so long as residents take an active role in choosing those selected and see their success as providing benefits to neighbors.

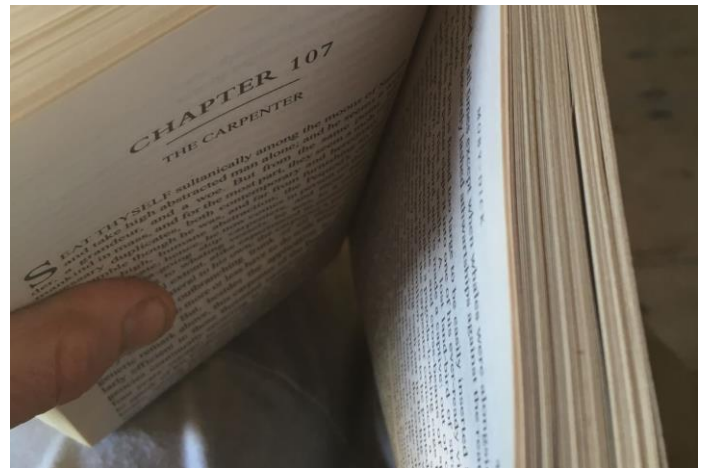
The project is in planning phases and has not been implemented. The project has a proposed budget of \$125,000. The budget will be used to cover rent for seven vendors who establish pop-ups in storefronts under 1K s.f. for three months (est. @ \$3.50* per s.f. = \$65,625) and short-term loans to business owners to address code violations or building repairs (\$5K each @ \$35,000). The remaining budget will be directed to press and public relations, including a website designer, website, and signage. *The proposed rent is 50% of market rate.

For more information: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/tenants-mix-best-practice-sheets-compendium/download> (see pg. 26-28).



Develop a Downtown Pittsfield Literary Hub

Category	 Tenant Mix
Location	Downtown Pittsfield – site TBD but one potential location is at corner of 1st and Fenn streets, near City Hall
Origin	Mastheads (https://www.themastheads.org/)
Budget	 High Budget (Estimated at > \$400,000) - Potential sources include: National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Mass MOCA, Barrington Stage Company, the Feigenbaum Foundation, Berkshire Athenaeum, Mass Humanities, City of Pittsfield
Timeframe	 Medium Time Frame (5-10 years) – it's possible this project could happen in less than 5 years but realistically, it may take a few years to complete feasibility studies, do fundraising, attract private investment, secure a site / building, finish construction on all project elements, etc.
Risk	 Medium Risk – Risks include: 1) obtaining sufficient upfront funding to build this literary hub concept; 2) identifying the 'right' mix of activities, programming and spaces for this hub; 3) creating a financially sustainable business model based on the set of uses at the literary hub.
Key Performance Indicators	Private, public, and non-profit funding commitments; Acquisition of site and start of construction of literary hub; Number of bookstore and coffee/wine bar customers and sales revenue; Occupancy and rental revenue for the proposed five residential boarding rooms; Local community support and engagement at literary hub
Partners & Resources	The Mastheads, Berkshire Historical Society at Melville's Arrowhead, Downtown Pittsfield, Inc., Berkshire Athenaeum, Barrington Stage Company, approximately about \$200,00 in-hand donations



View over Herman Melville's Arrowhead farm towards October Mountain, c. 1870 (left); Moby Dick (right) Photos: Berkshire Historical Society

Diagnostic

The diagnostic phase revealed that while Pittsfield has a deep and proud literary history, led by authors such as Melville and Hawthorne, there are zero bookstores in downtown Pittsfield. There briefly was a specialty bookstore (focused on the arts) on North Street in downtown, but that bookstore has closed recently and is relocating to Great Barrington. COVID-19 has forced some literary initiatives, such as the Mastheads writers in residence program to be conducted virtually (2020) or shortened (2021). The Berkshire Historical Society at Melville's Arrowhead is a critical asset for Pittsfield but doesn't have a downtown presence. This is a forward-looking project to link literary and arts to a physical hub in downtown.

Action Items

This project would establish a physical hub at one or more buildings in downtown Pittsfield to create a multi-faceted literary hub that would include a bookstore, coffee and wine bar, community event and programming space, and residential boarding rooms for artists. Initial concepts for this literary hub were developed by The Mastheads as part of a start-up business planning series led by EforAll.

This included:

- An initial site search in downtown, with one promising location at the corner of 1st and Fenn Street.
- Initial architectural design drawings of this hub, including identification of spaces for the bookstore, wine/coffee bar, community space, and residential boarding units.
- Initial business and financial planning, including funding, revenue, construction costs, and operating costs for the different elements of the hub.
- Initial partnerships and donation commitments.

Due to COVID-19, the business planning for this concept stalled. However, the overall core ideas still have full relevancy to:

1. Establish a well-rounded bookstore in downtown Pittsfield, supported financially by other revenue generating opportunities like coffee/wine bar, merchandise sales, programming events, and rental income from residential units.
2. Leverage Pittsfield's strong literary heritage to sustain and grow its position as a leading location for writers and the development of literary works across all genres, tying into visitor interest in Melville (Moby Dick) and other local strengths.
3. Envision creative literary and artistic uses and programming at a physical hub beyond those listed here. For example, a focus group discussion on this topic revealed possible uses as including recording studios for music and audio production, linking to local artists and the potential expansion of Mass MOCA's Assets for Artists program, etc.

Process

Next step for this literary hub project is to re-visit the draft concepts and initial business plans developed by The Mastheads for EforAll and initiate a more detailed feasibility study. This new study would need a refreshed and updated assessment by experts on:

- a. the financial plans, fundraising opportunities, and partnerships;
- b. the site location opportunities in Pittsfield and the assessments of construction and acquisition costs, as well as any local permitting or regulations; and
- c. refining the proposed uses at the literary hub, including examination of how the community event spaces could be used to the benefit of local Pittsfield residents, and whether any other uses (e.g., recording studios, artist displays) should be integrated into the hub concept.

The feasibility study should then lead to fundraising and acting on site acquisition and building construction activities, followed by a range of marketing and promotion, finding tenants (writers) for the boarding rooms, etc.



Mural of Langston Hughes by artist Mia Duvall at Busboys and Poets' Baltimore location. Busboys and Poets is a restaurant, bar, bookstore, and community gathering place with multiple locations around the Washington D.C. area. Its name refers to American poet Langston Hughes who was a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel in the 1920s, prior to gaining recognition as a poet. Photo: www.busboysandpoets.com



Best Practice

The Spotty Dog Books and Ale



Location

Hudson, NY

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

The C.H. Evans firehouse is located at 440 Warren Street in Hudson New York. Currently, it houses Spotty Dog Books & Ale, which has operated at this location since 2005 by a bonafide descendant of the Evans' clan. The firehouse epitomizes the old and new in Hudson – a modern, diversified business which caters to the local community, housed in a building entrenched in local history.

In 2004, the Evans Firehouse underwent renovations to transform it from firehouse to retail space. In renovating the building, the utmost care was taken to not undermine the well-preserved architectural elements. Period-appropriate doors replaced the garage door on the truck floor, with chandeliers and a bar (with a surface made from reclaimed bowling alley) acquired from architectural salvage. The upstairs of the building remains almost entirely intact, including the mahogany mantle. The renovation was completed early June 2005. In 2006, Historic Hudson awarded the building with a Preservation Award, commemorating the "distinctive contribution to preservation of the historic property."

The repurposing of the Evans Firehouse reflects a simultaneous break and continuation from the traditions of old Hudson. One can still drink a pint of Evans' Ale in the Evans' firehouse, though the beer is now brewed in Albany under direction of Cornelius H. Evans IV. As Hudson's small business reconfigure to address the boutique needs of weekend residents of NYC, so does the transformation of the firehouse to boutique establishment, which also serves the community. Members of the Evans Hook & Ladder Co. can sometimes be found at the bar, offering fond reminiscences of the building's previous life as firehouse and community center. As Hudson reorients itself from industrial whaling port to arts enclave, the development of the C.H. Evans Firehouse embodies this shift.



Photo: Eileen Hoffmire <https://www.bookstoreinlenox.com/about/#get-lit>

Best Practice

The Bookstore and Get Lit Wine Bar



Location

Lenox, MA

The Bookstore

The Bookstore, a fixture in the Town of Lenox for well over 40 years, was actually born in the neighboring town of Stockbridge, in the living room of a small rented house behind an alley that housed a then little-known café that later came to be known as Alice's Restaurant. The date of the move to Lenox is lost to antiquity, but it is safe to assume it happened in the late 1960s or early 1970s. So much of what happened in those days is lost in memory, eh? Yours, mine, ours?

It was (appropriately) on April Fool's Day in the year of our republic's bicentennial that the store legally passed from its owner/founder David Silverstein to current owner and sole proprietor Matt Tannenbaum. The anecdotal purchase and sale agreement happened a month or so earlier, the details of which can be found on web sites not on this plane. One thing is for sure, though, a good time has been had by all since 1966. Ten years was enough for David, but Matt has kept the place alive and thriving for over 40.

Get Lit Wine Bar





The name says it all, doesn't it? A book or two, a glass of wine, a summer evening . . . a winter afternoon. . . The possibilities, though not endless, do appear wider than if there was no bar at The Bookstore, yes? The bar is open whenever the bookstore is, and sure enough the bookstore stays open later some nights when the bar is open as well, especially Friday or Saturday nights. But if it's a Monday through Thursday afternoon, say around 2 or 2:30, for instance, and you happen to inquire whether you can get lit, the answer most assuredly is yes you can! Some restrictions may apply. But they usually won't.

Shade Gallery

Shade Gallery was launched the summer of 1976 by three young South County artists, Jim Youngerman, Alan Silverstein, and Michael Ansell, as part of the newly purchased Bookstore. The idea was to exhibit artists whose work we knew and liked and respected. We sought out interesting new work from LA, Boston, and New York and brought it to the Berkshires. We wanted to offer curated exhibitions to the kinds of people who would come to a gallery that was inside (downstairs, in those days) a bookstore. And it worked!

Source: <https://www.bookstoreinlenox.com/about/>

Installation of Proposed Mural Celebrating Pittsfield's History

Category	 Cultural/Arts
Location	Downtown Pittsfield
Origin	Artists David Richardson and John Neiner have presented a mural proposal with several possible downtown Pittsfield locations. Champions of the project include the City of Pittsfield Office of Cultural Development and Downtown Pittsfield, Inc.
Budget	 Low Budget (<\$50,000) - Potential funding sources include Massachusetts Cultural Council, Pittsfield Cultural Council, New England Foundation for the Arts, Mass Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, and local business donations.
Timeframe	 Short Term (< 5 years) - Fall 2021 Design Concept Finalized; Spring 2022 Installation
Risk	 Low Risk
Key Performance Indicators	This mural is a part of several public art installations in Pittsfield over a 3-year period including: electrical load boxes (aka Paintboxes); sculptures and other murals. These public art installations all become part of the downtown Pittsfield footprint and will ultimately increase the foot traffic in Pittsfield as they will become destinations.
Partners & Resources	Downtown Pittsfield, Inc.; City of Pittsfield Office of Cultural Development; Artscape; Private Building Owners
Diagnostic	The Office of Cultural Development has been working for years at developing public art installations and cultural programming in downtown Pittsfield. But there remains more spaces and buildings to activate and beautify. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Pittsfield had to pause many of its activities that attracted groups of visitors and residents to downtown Pittsfield. Working outdoors on art projects was one area of work that could continue and new murals area a great way to advance new public art during this continuing and evolving pandemic. Public art has the ability to continue attracting people to downtown and adds life and vitality in all seasons.

Action Items

The artists have a proposed design for this mural with 30' x 22' dimensions. The hand painted mural will celebrate Pittsfield, its history and all of its beauty. The image tells the story of our city and its bright future. A place where green spaces abound, abandoned lots return to fields, and beauty prevails.

In the forefront of the scene, a woman, who the artists are calling "Beauty", (Mother of the Berkshires) floats across a bountiful land. She stands tall and divides the seasons (summer and winter) which comprise the background. At her feet is a red fox, momma bear with two cubs, a fawn and buck, and many other inhabitants of the land. She harvests from the fields beautiful old parts, gears, and remnants of the past.

The process of creating public art has been a very safe way for artists to continue working during Covid-19. Public art is generally outside and involves very few people and it's easy to socially distance. Knowing this, we will continue public art projects into the foreseeable future, including this Pittsfield Mural Project.

We plan on funding this project through grants and private donations from regional businesses.



Mural on North Street Building Façade Source: Downtown Pittsfield, Inc.





Process

- Artist concept finalized.
- Partners and funding (in kind and financial) secured.
- Artist installation date finalized.
- Installation.



Section of Summit Street Mural, Worcester, MA Source: <https://www.milb.com/worcester/ballpark/summit-street>

Develop Downtown Pittsfield Public Art Plan

Category	 Cultural/Arts
Location	Study Area: throughout the downtown target area, as well as connecting to Tyler Street (TDI focus area).
Origin	The City of Pittsfield's Cultural Development Department and Downtown Pittsfield Inc.
Budget	 Low Budget (< \$50,000) - Massachusetts Cultural Council such as Cultural Facilities Funds or Local Cultural Council Program
Timeframe	 Short-Term (< 5 years) – Likely within the next 1-3 years
Risk	 Low Risk - As a wider variety of stakeholders and the public are brought into discussions about public art, the challenge will be balancing the different opinions and preferred directions. In addition, if a public art effort is seen as taking away from more urgent city support needs (e.g., housing, business development, etc.), negative reactions could undermine the overall effort.
Key Performance Indicators	Plan development: Number of partners engaged, Public input supporting plan strategies Implementation: # of projects completed that were identified in plan; Annual revisiting of plan with partners; # of funding partners in projects; # of people attending art events; # new partners engaged in plan strategies
Partners & Resources	Partners: Office of Cultural Development, Downtown Pittsfield, Inc, Downtown Pittsfield Cultural Association, Programmatic: ArtScape, Berkshire Lightscapes, CozQuest, 10 x 10 Festival, Cultural Organizations throughout Pittsfield (not exclusive to downtown) Private Sector: Blue Q, Property Owners Financial Resources: Massachusetts Cultural Council such as Cultural Facilities Funds or Local Cultural Council Program



Artistic Storefront Installation, Worcester, MA Photo: Civic Space Collaborative

Diagnostic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Pittsfield had to pause many of its activities that attracted groups of visitors and residents to downtown Pittsfield. Public art openings, since they took place outdoors, continued with some modifications. Well-planned and exciting public art has the ability to continue attracting people well beyond the opening, and adds life and vitality to the downtown in all seasons. Public art can be a destination in itself, while also providing whimsy and surprise for those visitors not expecting it. A well-planned, multi-year public art program can have the ability to continue accomplishing all of these goals, while maximizing investment and ensuring that efforts by different parties are in synch.

Action Items

Lead Entities will begin the planning process.

The City of Pittsfield's Cultural Development Department, Downtown Pittsfield Inc., and many other partners have engaged in wide-ranging public art activities for decades, with many more projects on the horizon. These entities will commission and lead the development of a strategic plan about public art in the downtown. This plan will engage stakeholders, coordinate numerous efforts, and outline objectives and implementation strategies over the next five years.

There is a burgeoning interest in further developing murals in prime locations, continuing recent efforts to design and paint "parklets," and advance the work of the Pittsfield Lightscape program. In addition, there is a growing interest in fostering the literary arts in Pittsfield, in part where written and spoken word blends into public art.

There is interest in supporting an effort to organize, strategize and solicit public and stakeholder input to formulate a clear plan for public art in downtown Pittsfield over the next 5-7 years.

The lead entities will convene an advisory committee, with representation from major stakeholders. The leads will develop an RFP for consulting services, refined with the input of the advisory committee. The leads, with the support of the advisory committee, will publicize the RFP and solicit proposals and review submissions.

Refine and begin scope of work with consultant. Once the consultant is selected, they should finalize a scope of services with the lead entities, to include some or all of the following:

1. Inventory of current and existing projects by type, location, condition
2. Inventory of stakeholders, partners and relationships
3. Inventory of funding sources
4. Stakeholder outreach and interviews
 - a. Confirm inventory results
 - b. Summarize upcoming projects of interest and those that are in the planning stages
 - c. Identify new initiatives, collaborations, and funding sources
5. Preliminary findings related to inventory and stakeholder interests
6. Public outreach / presentation of preliminary findings / feedback
7. Final plan development including an implementation strategy



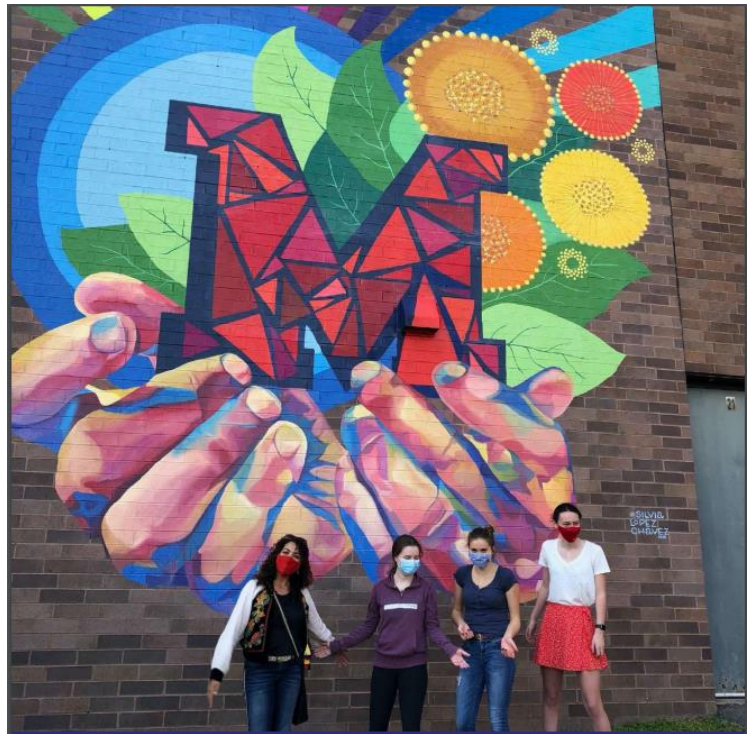
Painted Utilities on Tyler Street, Pittsfield Photo: Bench BSC Group

Process

The City of Pittsfield's Cultural Development Department and Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. Will lead the development of a plan to for public art in downtown Pittsfield over the next 5-7 years.

The lead entities will work with an advisory committee throughout the process of hiring a consultant to ensure the final plan meets broad goals for public art. The lead consultant will engage the committee, other stakeholders, and the public in understanding the history, current efforts, and next possibilities for public art in the downtown.

The final plan will identify and prioritize locations for next installations and implementation strategies for each major project area.



Mural in Melrose, MA Photo: Selbert Perkins



Best Practice

Conduct Arts & Culture Needs Assessment



Location

Various locations (Arlington, Beverly, Boston, Franklin MA)

Key Partners: Municipal government planning staff, elected officials, licensing/permitting staff; local artists, cultural organizations, and creative businesses.

The pandemic hit as municipalities in Massachusetts were investing in arts and culture as an important element of civic life and a thriving local economy. MCC-designated cultural districts have been growing across the state, and municipalities were beginning to invest in planning initiatives to document and support their arts and culture assets.

The pandemic's impact on arts and culture hit fast and hard and has lingered for over a year. By March 2021, non-profit and municipal cultural organizations across the state reported over \$588 million in losses; with individual artists and creatives reporting more than \$30 million in lost income. As reopening guidelines ease restrictions on arts and culture activities, municipalities are looking for strategies and tactics to revive arts and culture in their local communities.





Strategies that support arts and culture in municipalities strengthen local government's responsiveness to constituents, establish critical partnerships for revitalization, and builds resilience of local businesses and cultural organizations. Providing multi-layered assessments of arts and culture can help improve support for artists, creative enterprise, and civic vitality.

Action Items:

- Build relationships and collect data on arts & culture
- Identify barriers to cultural equity
- Conduct direct outreach to artists and creatives
- Foster partnerships

More information: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/cultural-arts-best-practice-sheets-compendium/download> (see page 2)

Initiate Youth Employment Corps

Category	 Other
Location	Throughout the downtown target area and the broader Pittsfield community
Origin	Downtown Pittsfield Inc., the City of Pittsfield and discussion with Literary Hub focus group participants on the importance of finding more ways for the youth/teens of Pittsfield to connect positively with downtown
Budget	 Low Budget – Expected to be less than \$20,000
Timeframe	 Short- to Medium-Term - It will take time to better determine the feasibility of this idea, identify partners (employers) and implement
Risk	 Low Risk - Generally, the risk is low. A preliminary study of the opportunities will help to engage stakeholders and employers, assess opportunities and interest, and develop preliminary funding and support strategies.
Key Performance Indicators	Number of interested partners and employers; Identification of lead partner; Funding resources requested to implement/operationalize this program and subsidies to participating employers to help pay wages of youth employees; Number of youth (teens) placed into downtown jobs; Number of teens retained to live, work and attend school in Pittsfield post-high school
Partners & Resources	See below



Crew Orientation 2021 Photo: Roots Rising;
<https://www.rootsrising.org/>

Partners & Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Larger entities / organizations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Pittsfield / Community Development Department Pittsfield Public School Department Other Schools, such as Berkshire Arts & Technology School (BART) Downtown Pittsfield Inc. Cultural organizations with existing youth programs, e.g., Barrington Stage Company, Berkshire Theatre Group, Berkshire Museum Existing youth development organizations, e.g., Roots Rising, Greenagers 1Berkshire Youth Leadership Program Berkshire Regional Employment Board Berkshire Community College Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Private sector: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. Business Members Other business owners in Pittsfield

Diagnostic

The effects of COVID-19 created extreme challenges for the youth of our community. Many families were under extreme stress, schooling and education was challenging to deliver in a virtual setting, students were isolated from each other, and issues of equity were, and still are, magnified.

Children and teens are in a particularly vulnerable place. Supportive programs are essential to help them transition from this isolated state, toward engaging in their communities once again.

Prior to the pandemic 20% of Pittsfield children age 17 and under live in poverty. The connection to a youth-focused employment and life skill training program can provide an opportunity to earn money and learn strategies for success. Model programs also address emotional wellness, financial literacy, job skill building, and community development. Particular attention should be given to marginalized neighborhoods and individuals, most adversely affected by COVID-19, with the broader goal of helping local youth and teens gain meaningful employment opportunities in downtown Pittsfield and thus increase the positive experiences and relationship of nearby residents to downtown.

Action Items

The proposed project is a first step in establishing a youth employment corps for the City of Pittsfield, focusing on a connection between youth and employers / businesses in the City. This initial feasibility phase will identify and assess:

- Potential opportunities including the willingness of downtown businesses and employers to engage in this project, the types of jobs that youth can take on, and the community partner organizations that can help ensure it is a positive and desired program for youth/teens in Pittsfield;
- Challenges and obstacles to implementing this program idea, including funding and staff resources needed, and whether or not participating employers should receive some kind of subsidy (or matching pay) to help cover wages for youth employees, and
- Specific action steps toward implementation.

The lead entity for this feasibility phase, the City of Pittsfield and DPI, will bring together a broader range of stakeholders to provide input and direction on the program. Together they will identify the lead partners for implementation and strategy steps. This part of the process may result in a full implementation study, or move directly to a test pilot project.



Photo: US Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/youth>

Process

1. The lead partners will identify 3-4 major stakeholders, and initiate the process with them to review the project need and approach, stakeholder list, and potential resources. Following this feedback the lead partners will:
 - a. Refine the project statement and stakeholder / advisory committee list.
 - b. Develop a working draft of the project need statement and program potential.
 - c. Generate a list of questions for advisors/stakeholders.
 - d. Convene advisors/stakeholders to flesh out the project idea and approach, identify potential employers, and other project advisors/stakeholders.
 - e. Define the funding, staffing and implementation resources needed to initiate this program
 - f. Identify and start working with the local / community organizations to help link youth employment opportunities to Pittsfield's local youth residents
 - g. Initiate, monitor and refine the program as it is implemented



Roots Rising Crew at the Pittsfield Farmers Market – the first Teen Run Farmers Market in the Region Photo: Pittsfield Farmers Market, <https://www.farmersmarketspittsfield.org/>

It's Your Life. Your Story. Your Art. YOUR project.



Best Practice

Youth Employment and Skill Building



Other

Location

Pittsfield, MA

Roots Rising
<https://www.rootsrising.org/>

Roots Rising is an award-winning nonprofit organization whose mission is to empower youth and build community through food and farming. RR's vision is to lift up teens as community changemakers and to strengthen the local food system through the transformational power of meaningful work.

RR Youth Crews hire Pittsfield teens to work on farms and in food pantries throughout the region, as well as at our own farmers market. It's not just a job. It's an opportunity for teens to engage in meaningful work—work that needs to be done and that contributes to a larger social good. Roots Rising believes that meaningful work is transformational. It leaves youth feeling purposeful, capable, and connected.

RR runs three seasonal Farm Crews a year: Summer, Fall, and Spring, as well as Market Crew, which is a graduate level Crew. These Crews are both employment and youth development programs. In addition to their hours working in the farm fields or in the farmers market, youth also participate in educational workshops, culinary and financial literacy lessons, and feedback circles.

Barrington Stage Co. Playwright
Mentoring Program

<https://barringtonstageco.org/education-bsc/playwright-mentoring-project/>

PMP is an intensive, six-month, out-of-school activity that uses theatre as a catalyst to help young people learn valuable life skills that will aid them in developing positive self-images. Over the course of the program, teens are enabled to create an original performance piece based on their own stories in a safe and confidential environment where they can express themselves, develop conflict/resolution skills and, together, create a supportive community. PMP gives participants focus and discipline that is often missing in their day-to-day lives while teaching them to develop solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems. Conflict resolution skills introduced and reinforced by the program empower participants to make positive long-term life choices and act as leaders among their peers. A stipend is paid to those who participate.