



# Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

Ware



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



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

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# Acknowledgements



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

Town of Ware Community Development Authority

Town of Ware Downtown Improvement Committee

Ware Business and Civic Association

Quaboag Valley Community Development Authority

Workshop 13

Ware Grange

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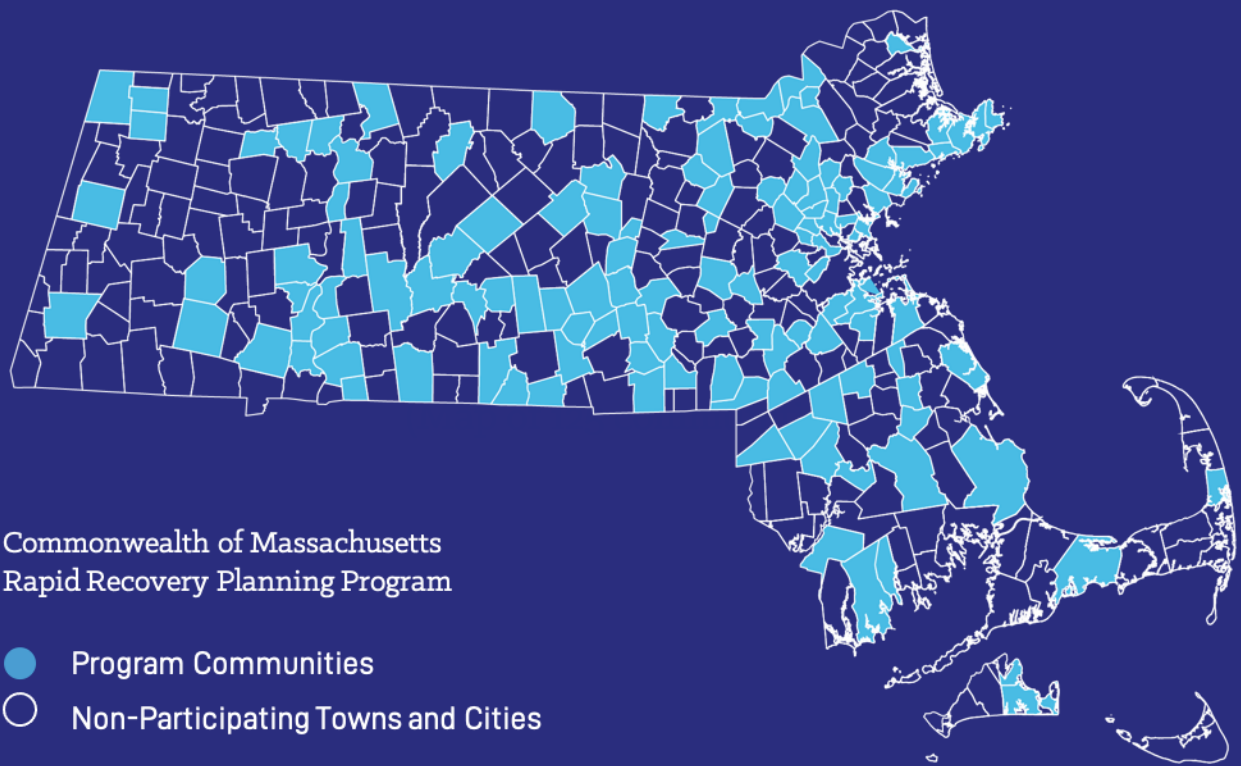
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## 125 communities participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan Program

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

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



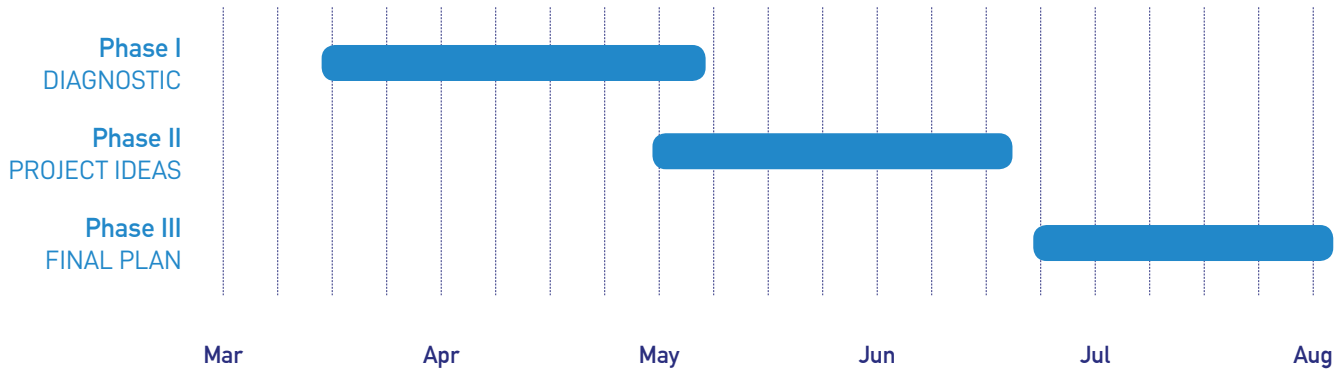
# Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program

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

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

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

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



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

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



## Rapid Recovery Plan Diagnostic Framework



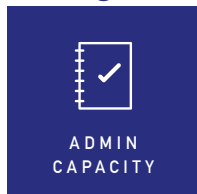
Who are the customers of businesses in the Study Area?



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



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



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

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



Public Realm



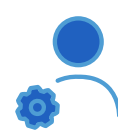
Private Realm



Tenant Mix



Revenue & Sales



Admin Capacity



Cultural/Arts



Other



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# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

## Continued Renewal

The Town of Ware is the commercial hub of the Quaboag Region. The Region is situated between the larger commercial centers of the cities of Springfield and Worcester. The Town of Ware, particularly its downtown and commercial center, provides the region with a place to do business, shop, and enjoy a range of restaurants.

The Town Center is a clearly defined area comprised of a diverse mix of retail and service businesses, restaurants, cultural organizations, government agencies and offices, recreational destinations, iconic churches, and residential neighborhoods. The commercial district extends south from the Town Center and includes numerous options for shopping, eating, and other amenities. The main focus of this report is on the Town Center (consisting primarily of Main Street and surrounding neighborhoods), and the commercial district running along West Street.

In support of town businesses and the community as a whole, the Town of Ware has been making a concerted effort to upgrade infrastructure throughout the Town Center and study area. Ware has used multiple funding sources (Chapter 90, CDBG, TIP, and more recently ARPA funds) in order to achieve this. For example, Community Development Block Grant funds have targeted the "Northside Neighborhood," a residential neighborhood starting one block north of downtown. Further, at the time of this report, Ware was in the midst of a comprehensive overhaul of the Main Street infrastructure, including sidewalks, new paving, and downtown lighting.

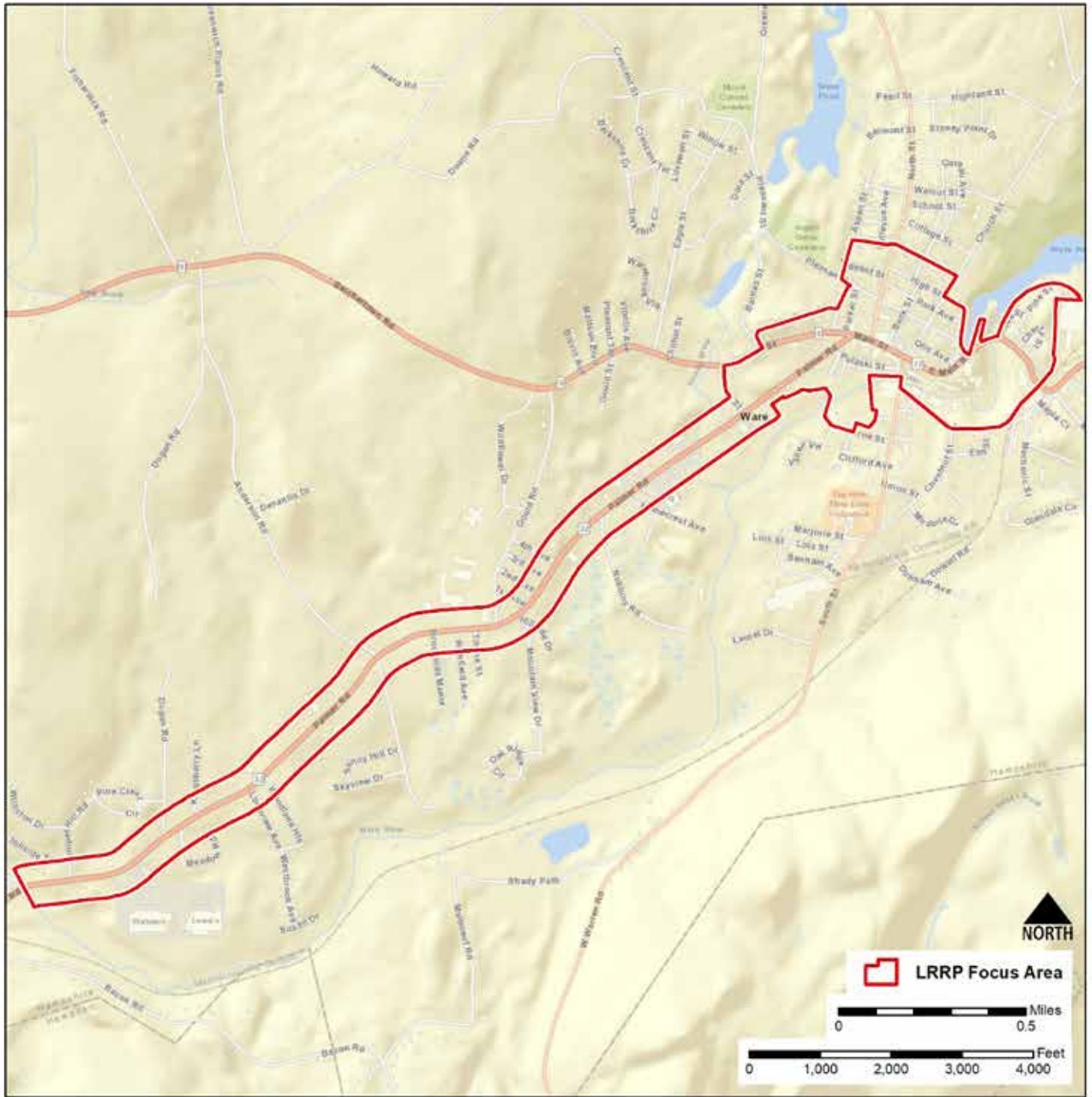
Like all communities throughout the Commonwealth, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted the business, nonprofit, and government communities in town. While assistance from the State and Federal governments has helped to mitigate financial losses, the collected data suggests significant work remains. Even before the pandemic, the Ware business community, and the Town itself, were struggling. The pandemic exacerbated these struggles.

This report is the culmination of a 7-month process beginning with a Diagnostic Phase from March through June, followed by a Planning and Development Phase from July through September. The process involved a broad cross-section of community members, business owners, and government officials who met and gave valuable input to the planning process. In particular, the Ware Community Development Authority (CDA), led the public process along with staff from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC).

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

The five suggested Project Plans contained in this report represent the potential projects that the CDA, the Town and business community felt would directly benefit economic development and downtown revitalization. However, they are not meant to be completed in a vacuum, and should be viewed as part of a larger focus on economic development that the Town has committed to.

The projects recommended in this Rapid Recovery Plan aim to assist businesses both directly and indirectly, through façade and design improvements, increased parking awareness, and a greater connectedness between downtown, the commercial section on West Street, and surrounding neighborhoods. Along with the ongoing work and improvements the Town is currently engaged in, these projects show the Town's support of the business community. All Project Plans are dependent upon funding, as well as the Town's capacity to implement recommendations within a proposed timeframe. However, the Town has made a committed effort in identifying projects that are both impactful and achievable.



## Ware, Massachusetts

### Local Rapid Recovery Program Focus Area Map

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



Municipal Locator Map



Regional Locator Map



[Project Map](#)

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# Diagnostic

# Key Findings



## Ware is the business center of the Quaboag Region

The Town of Ware is the commercial hub of the Quaboag Region. The Region is situated between the larger commercial centers of the cities of Springfield and Worcester. The Town of Ware, particularly its downtown and commercial center, provides the region with a place to do business, shop, and enjoy a range of restaurants.



## Ware is focused on upgrading public infrastructure

The Town of Ware has been making a concerted effort to upgrade infrastructure throughout the town, including in the downtown area. Ware has used multiple funding sources (Chapter 90, CDBG, TIP, and more recently ARPA funds) to upgrade and improve infrastructure in and around Main Street. CDBG funds have been targeted at the "Northside Neighborhood," a residential neighborhood starting one block north of downtown. The Town is in the midst of upgrading Main Street infrastructure through TIP funding. A greater focus has also begun to be placed on West Street, the commercial hub of the Town.



## Ware Center's business mix is primarily retail and services

Nearly half of the businesses in the Center are retail stores or food, providing many options for local residents, including full-service restaurants in the Project Area. There are few "specialized options" (coffee, pastries, breakfast) available in the Project Area. be placed on West Street, the commercial hub of the Town.



## Ware has a small but committed downtown organization assisting recovery efforts

The Ware Business and Civic Associations acts as the main downtown revitalization organization. The Town also has other entities that work to improve the downtown and focus on recovery efforts. These include municipal committees (the Community Development Authority and the Downtown Improvement Committee), as well as regional organizations like the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (based in Ware), and the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce. Although these groups often work together, there is always a challenge of coordination and collaboration to achieve shared goals.



## Highlights from the Market Information

### CUSTOMER BASE

Demographic data was gathered for the Town of Ware and for the Project Area, which comprises the Town Center business district as well as the West Street commercial district. The town-wide median household income is \$59,000, while the project area median is \$49,500. Approximately 2,500 (25% of the total population) live in the project area. The project area, like the rest of town, is predominantly non-Hispanic white (both about 89%) (U.S. Census American Community Survey 2015-2019). Downtown residents are slightly older than the Town population as a whole and 30% of downtown residents have an associate's degree or higher compared with 36% Town-wide.

There is a strong perception from both business owners and town residents that lack of parking is a major issue and impediment to a stronger downtown environment. While there is free parking along Main Street, a large municipal parking lot a block north of Main Street, plus commercial parking for business owner along West Street, the fact that a "lack of parking" was pinpointed many times and by multiple people, is significant.

Public Parking Total Approx. 280			
Main Street	77	Bank	13
Parker	13	Church	11
West Street	6	Pleasant Street Public Parking	88
Pulaski	31	Veterans Park Public Parking	23
North	18		



## Highlights from the Physical Environment

### OVERVIEW

The physical environment of the Ware Study Area, which includes Main Street (Route 9) and West Street, generally is conducive to meeting the needs and expectations of business owners and customers. Sidewalks and crosswalks are wide and mostly accessible, signage and wayfinding exists and extends beyond the downtown. In general, vehicle access is good, although residents and business owners perceive a lack of parking. Pedestrian access is good in the Town Center, but diminishes significantly moving south on to West Street.

There are a few noteworthy issues. For example, street trees and benches are sparse or non-existent. Building facades need improvement and/or rehabilitation. Curb appeal is limited as only a few stores have merchandise displays and there are no outdoor dining opportunities. Vacant properties are a significant presence in the study area

The project area includes 102 properties that were counted as "storefronts" under the project guidelines. Many of them are not what one might traditionally think of as storefronts, such as 6 Berkshire Ave in Carriage Grove or a medical office building, but these entities were included as part of the project.

<b>Total # of Storefronts</b>	<b>67</b>
# of Vacant Storefronts	17(25%)
Total # of Businesses	50
# of Parking Spaces (on and off-street)	At least 600

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





## PUBLIC REALM

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

In Ware, sidewalks and crosswalks are wide in design. Most of these crosswalks and sidewalks are accessible in nature. On the other hand, the presence of street trees and public benches are sparse. Signage and wayfinding extend beyond the downtown area into other areas such as the Ware Millyard.



## PRIVATE REALM

The private realm refers to buildings and storefronts that are typically owned by individuals or corporate entities. In Ware's project area, most building facades need rehabilitation. Some signs that exist in downtown are attractive and easily visible but most need upgrades as well. In terms of curb appeal, only a few stores have any merchandise displayed outdoors. There are currently no outdoor dining opportunities in downtown Ware. The study area overall has a significant presence of vacant properties a lot of which are on Main and West Streets.



## ACCESS & VISIBILITY

Access and visibility refers to the transportation network that offers customers convenient accessibility, whether by private vehicle, car share, foot, bike, or public transit, and the visibility of businesses to customers and passersby. Ware's study area has good vehicle access however the residents have a concern that there is a lack of parking. Pedestrian access is good in the downtown but diminishes along west street. This street in particular lacks sidewalks in certain sections. In terms of bicycle access, there is practically none in the study area.



## Highlights from the Business Environment

As mentioned, there are 67 storefronts with 50 businesses and 17 vacancies. Together these businesses provide nearly 600 parking spaces in the study area.

### ANCHORS/DESTINATIONS

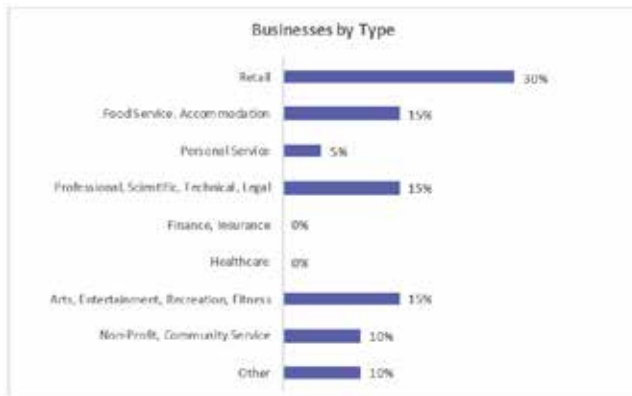
Most of the major commercial enterprises exist along West Street in the Town of Ware. The main private sector anchors on Main Street include Holyoke Community College and the businesses at the Ware Millyard. Holyoke Community College is the only higher education institution in the Town of Ware. The Millyard is the location for redevelopment efforts for large scale commercial and industrial uses. On West Street, the major anchors include Walmart and Big Y.

In the public and nonprofit sectors, the main anchors in the study area include the Young Men's Library and the Pleasant Street Dog Park. The Young Men's Library is located on East Main Street while the Dog Park is not too far from the intersection of Pleasant and Main Streets.



## ASSET/BUSINESS MIX

The study area has a broad mix of commercial, public, and civic uses that meet a wide range of needs. There are 50 active entities, of which more than half (28) are retail, including many small shops, and about one third (17) in services such as real estate, financial, insurance, law offices, mechanics, barbershops, etc. The smallest category is restaurants, cafes, and prepared food (7).



It appears that no businesses have permanently closed due to COVID-19, although many did close temporarily and/or have had significant restrictions on operations. Most of the existing vacant spaces have been there for several years.

## BUSINESS SURVEY

A local Business Survey conducted in April 2021 resulted in twenty (20) responses. According to the survey, 90% reported being negatively affected by COVID while 60% of businesses generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019. Further, for 50% of businesses, revenue declined by 25% or more.

Other highlights from the survey indicated that:

- Less foot traffic and ongoing concerns about parking
- Support for all proposed improvements to the physical environment, including façade improvements for businesses

- Moderate dissatisfaction with the district-condition of public/private space, safety, accessibility and compatible uses
- Interest in marketing, cultural events, and business recruitment programs

## NODES/CLUSTERS

The main node and destination in Ware is Main Street, from Pleasant Street to Eddy Street. This is also Route 9 and has a steady flow of automobile traffic throughout the day. The Main Street section of town is home to many businesses, restaurants and stores, as well as a branch of the Holyoke Community College. It also has had the misfortune of empty storefronts and fires that have ravaged two buildings. This section of town is also home to the Millyard that offer both occupied buildings, as well as significant potential for cleanup, revitalization and further growth. A new dog park just off of Main Street and adjacent to the public parking lot, provides a destination for dog owners in town.

West Street, running off of Main Street, is the other node and is highly commercialized. There are restaurants, a pharmacy and the town's grocery store. While there is a sidewalk that runs down both sides of the street, it is not ADA compliant and needs significant repair. Further, lighting for pedestrian and bicycle traffic in this section of town is severely limited.





## Administrative Capacity Highlights

Administrative capacity in Ware is robust for a town of its size. There is a Ware Business and Civic Association that serves the Town. While very active through mainly volunteer efforts, the WBCA is on the lookout for funding. A number of organizations consider Ware part of their service area. See below for a list of partners. Capacity is also limited within town government, where staffing is limited to one town planner and the Town Manager.

Partners in Ware Recovery work include:

- Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce
- Workshop 13
- Town of Ware Downtown Improvement Committee
- Town of Ware Community Development Authority
- MassDevelopment
- Quaboag Valley CDC

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# Project Recommendations



# Design Guidelines for Downtown Ware

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Category



Public Realm

Location

Ware Downtown (Main Street/Route 9)Town of Ware

Origin

Community Input – including business community and residents  
Ware Community Development Authority

Budget & Sources of Funding



**Low (less than \$50,000)**

- Costs will include the consultant's time. If the design guidelines are fully incorporated into the municipal zoning bylaw or ordinance, review by municipal counsel is recommended
- The range for the consultant's time is between \$20,000-\$50,000, depending on the level of public engagement and how illustrative the code is. Review by municipal counsel may be covered by the municipal on-call agreement or may need to be added to the cost of the project.

Possible Sources of Funding:

- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
- Massachusetts One Stop for Growth
- District Local Technical Assistance Funding
- Survey and Planning Grant Program
- Complete Streets Funding Program

Fabrication \$75 – \$500K

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

Timeframe



Short to long-term (1-5 years)

Risks



Medium – buy-in from the business community, town officials and residents. Higher if incorporated into Zoning bylaw

Key Performance Indicators

Possible Performance Indicators Include:

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

Partners & Resources

Ware Business and Civic Associations, Selectboard, local businesses and community leaders;  
Ware Community Development Authority

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## Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts

Creating or updating design guidelines and combining the update with financial assistance to property owners to update buildings and sites to be consistent with the new guidelines addresses several negative economic impacts of the COVID -19 pandemic. Design guidelines can sometime be seen primarily as an aesthetic requirement. However, they can also have significant impacts on the economic and public health of an area, both of

## Action Item

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

## Process

The timeframe will vary depending on whether the municipality has a city form of government or requires Town Meeting to approve bylaw changes (and of course, whether the design guidelines are specifically incorporated into the zoning). From the kick-off to entering the municipal approval process, the project should take 8-12 months. • **Months 1-2:** Review existing zoning bylaws for embedded design guidelines and standards; develop inventory of historic and current buildings and site treatments; interview municipal staff, boards with approval responsibility, former applicants, local land use lawyers, others with relevant experience and concerns. • **Months 3-4:** Research appropriate precedents; develop public outreach/engagement program. Consider a public kick-off/charrette, depending on the needs of the community. Discuss the thresholds for use and the appropriate review body and process. • **Months 5-7:** Engage with business/property owners and public on options and concerns; develop draft guidelines; develop illustrations. Decide (with municipality) whether design guidelines are a separate, advisory document or part of the zoning bylaw/ordinance. If the guidelines are integrated into the zoning, decide whether illustrations are part of the zoning or a separate document. Consider meeting with the appropriate boards to introduce the draft design guidelines and receive feedback. • **Months 8-9:** Revise the design guidelines to its final draft prior to the municipal approval process. Publicize the final draft prior to City Council/Town Meeting review and approval.

## Best Practices

Town Center Design Guidelines (Sterling, Massachusetts)





### Cost

\$15,000 (Massachusetts Downtown Initiative)

### Characteristics

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

# Engage community vendors, organizations and residents via cultural events programming

Category		Cultural Arts, Public Realm
Location		Downtown Commercial District
Origin		Town of Ware; Community Input; Ware Business & Civic Association (WBCA)
Budget & Sources of Funding		<p><b>Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)</b></p> <p>Budget will depend on length and scope of project (see below for Short vs. Long-Term components). Possible funding sources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mass Cultural Council (Festivals; Cultural Organization Economic Recovery Program)</li> <li>• New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA)</li> <li>• MassDevelopment: Commonwealth Places</li> <li>• Patronicity: Crowdfunding</li> <li>• MassDOT: Shared Streets and Spaces</li> <li>• Mass Humanities</li> </ul>
Timeframe		<p>Short- and Long-Term components. Put on one, relatively simple, event in the fall of 2021 to help connect community to the idea of events/programming and then create a framework and network that makes it easier to put on future events. Ongoing support for future events (booking, permits, etc).</p>
Risks		<p>Medium Risk - another spike of COVID or delta variant could derail programming that relies on people gathering safely. Due to a lack of existing event space, there will need to be significant buy-in from the Selectboard and community to create spaces by changing parking and land use patterns in the streets.</p>
Key Performance Indicators		Successful event programming, attendance counts, momentum for future events.
Partners & Resources		WBCA, Selectboard, local businesses and community leaders Workshop 13 The Grange
Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts		<p>The pandemic shut down almost all cultural activities and venues. Now the community needs events and gatherings to bring everyone back together and celebrate the Town's history, culture and community spirit. The project area is in need of community activity and presence to help bring customers back. Lifted restrictions mean that events can be held outside and inside so that existing businesses downtown can open their doors during event times. There are a number of existing events and programming in Ware that include the annual fair, BBQ dinner, concerts, Rock the Park, Workshop Elves, Northeast Art Show, events at galleries. This is addition to passive programs with outdoor art displays such as "Where's Ware" in empty storefronts and galleries. (Source: Stakeholder meeting)</p>
Action Item		<p>Develop community-wide strategies and policies that guide and support the planning, organizing, and execution of cultural events/programming. Plan at least one event. Provide plans for creating the space to host events downtown.</p> <p>Create list of past and recurring events and programs and program partners.</p> <p>Support WBCA to develop events calendar and promote the calendar when it's live.</p>

**Phase 1: Evaluation**

Ware has a number of existing cultural and events programming that are organized active community groups. To build on existing efforts first evaluate what already exists, determine the gaps, and brainstorm new event and program Ideas.

- Events Summary: Create a list of past cultural and events programming and project coordinators to review and determine gaps. If known, create timeline for planning, budget, funding sources, and range of the number of participants. Below are a few gaps to look for.
  - Program type
  - Time of day
  - Location
  - Age group
  - Season
- Stakeholder Engagement: Convene stakeholder to review events summary, discuss past efforts, and brainstorm new Ideas and to prioritize programming. The group should consider the following.
  - Passive programming (e.g., outdoor art Installations)
  - Organization capacity for Implementation
  - Funding available for active and passive programming
- Permitting: Review and update the permit for events by stakeholder familiar with the permit and those who may be Interested In applying.
- Roadmap: Create and provide ongoing support for the program and create a cultural event roadmap to help community carry out future events.

**Phase 2: Planning for New Events**

- Increase capacity: There may be a need to Increase capacity for passive and active programs and events. One option may be to hire a consultant to support the day-to-day planning required for events programming or to support with grant writing to free up time for an existing staff member. Another option is to form a new municipal committee for events that convenes on a regular basis.
- Increase the available spaces for outdoor and indoor events: Work with Town to create/ implement new land use patterns that will be conducive to public events.

**Phase 3: Funding**

Securing funding may happen prior to or simultaneously with Phase 1 and 2.

- Grants: For more passive and cultural programming, such as art Installation there a number of grants to support these efforts. Below is a list of potential grants to look into further.
  - MassDOT: Shared Streets and Spaces
  - Mass Tourism
  - Mass Cultural Council
  - New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA)
  - MassDevelopment: Commonwealth Places
  - Patronicity: Crowdfunding
- Sponsorship: Events typically maintain sponsorship programs to fund the organization and implementation of large events. Develop a sponsorship guide with three tiers of sponsorship for local businesses and organizations to consider. Offer opportunities for both passive sponsorship opportunities (e.g. logos on event materials) and active sponsorship opportunities (e.g. promotional events and programming). Consider match-funding opportunities to help incent sponsors to partner.

**Phase 4: Implementation and Evaluation**

- Event preparation: Convene event stakeholders weekly in the month leading up to each event to discuss day-of operations and contingency plans.
- Marketing: Create a marketing campaign leveraging social media, local media outlets, leveraging Town Hall community connections and reaching out to adjacent communities. Promotional pushes should begin one month prior and recur two weeks out, one week out and daily the week of the event.
- Implementation: Host a successful event by checking in frequently with volunteers and vendors, as well as monitoring for changes needed to program locations and attendee orientation.
- Evaluation: Capture measures listed in the Key Performance Indicators section, administer surveys as needed, and capture lots of photos and videos!

**Special Events Committee (Sturbridge, MA)**

Not dissimilar from other town committees, municipalities throughout the Commonwealth will often have an events committee whose missions are to support the establishments of events and oversee their fundraising and operations. By sitting under the purview of the municipal government, they are privy to general and specific public funds that an ad-hoc community group may not necessarily have an opportunity to access.

The Town of Sturbridge has formed a temporary Special Events Committee that meets on a routine basis in a public forum. Their members include members of the general public as well as administrative and elected officials. Each meeting is recorded via documented minutes which are located on the town's website, which also includes photos of past events and information on upcoming events.

Website: <https://www.sturbridge.gov/special-events-committee>

# Ware Downtown Façade Improvement Program

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## Category



Private Realm

## Location

Downtown Commercial District

## Origin

Town of Ware, Community Input, Ware Community Development Authority

## Budget & Sources of Funding



**Low (less than \$50,000) to Medium Budget (\$50,000-\$200,000)**

Costs include:

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

Possible Sources of funding:

- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
- T-Mobile Hometown Grants (<https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/hometown-grants>)
- Local Banks and other Community Development Financial Institutions
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth: Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000).
- Business Improvement District or Other Downtown District
- Regional Economic Development Organization Grant Program
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

## Timeframe



Short term (1-5 years)

## Risks



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

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

Another area of risk occurs within the community conversations around the design standards for the program. In some communities, a façade improvement program may be an implementation step in an earlier planning process. In others, developing a community vision for the area before creating the program will be necessary to receive support for the program.

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

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## Key Performance Indicators

Possible Performance Indicators Include:

- Creation of the program
- Number of applicants over a specific timeframe.
- Number of façades, storefronts, and/or sites improved within a timeframe.
- Maintenance of the improvements after a set number of years.
- Increase in visitors to the target area.
- Increase in sales at the property/business improved and within the target area.
- Ability to extend the program to other commercial areas within the municipality

## Partners & Resources

Ware Business and Civic Associations, Selectboard, local businesses and community leaders, Quaboag Valley CDC; Ware Community Development Authority

## Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts

Reasons for undertaking a façade or storefront improvement program may include one or more of the following:

- Requirements to address the transmissibility of COVID-19, such as new windows, doors, or HVAC system may be unaffordable to a small business owner and/or may have a negative impact on the façade if improperly sourced and installed.
- On-site parking spaces are poorly organized and, if reorganized, can provide room for outdoor dining or retail display.
- Local small businesses do not have the resources (time, money, expertise) to address substandard storefronts.
- Distressed properties have a negative impact on people's impression of the viability and/or safety of a business district and property owners are unable to make the improvements themselves.
- Storefronts are not accessible to those who have problems with mobility, whether temporary or permanent.
- Historic downtowns often have empty upper floors because of the lack of accessible elevators. A major improvement project could provide grants to address both interior and exterior accessibility.
- Historic properties may have been "improved" with inappropriate materials or repairs.
- Site improvements that reduce asphalt and add landscape can address public health issues by reducing the heat island effect, planting trees to address air quality, and using low impact design to manage stormwater onsite.

## Action Item

As the Town of Ware is starting from scratch on this project, the following pre-project items should be addressed:

- Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
- Develop an appropriate level of design guidelines.
- Engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.
- Develop the criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance.
- Develop the funding and oversight structures.

## Process

### Pre-program development

Identify who in the municipality will manage this program: municipal staff, existing downtown committee/organization, volunteer committee, or a hybrid.

If the municipality does not already have design guidelines for the area that are suitable for this program, then decide how those guidelines will be developed. Will the design guidelines be just for the façade improvement program, or will they be more broadly applicable? Note that the entity managing this process does not have to be the municipality. For example, a Community Development Corporation or other nonprofit could sponsor the program.

Discuss the potential focus of the program: components of a storefront, the entire storefront, the entire façade, all façades, the site? Will signage, lighting, awnings and other smaller elements be included? Will interior improvements to address accessibility be included? Will the municipality fund the design, all or some of the improvements, or both?

Discuss what will not be eligible. Eligibility may also be determined by the funding source (for example, CDBG funds).

Discuss the length of time that improvements must be maintained and the enforcement process for ensuring that improvements are maintained. Maintenance requirements could be tied to the length of the tenant's lease.



Consider the funding structures. The program can provide grants or loans to property owners/businesses for the improvements. Grants may provide a greater incentive to participate while loans (no or low interest) provide a revolving fund to assist more properties. Forgiving loans after a certain time if the improvement are maintained is another option. If the property owners are less interested in the program, the municipality might consider offering grants to the first 3-5 to sign up (depending on resources) or through a lottery process and transitioning later applicants to a loan program. This method would also allow the municipality to assist specific properties as catalysts for the rest of the target area. This would need to be a highly transparent process.

Decide whether the guidelines and program will be developed in-house or whether the municipality will seek outside help. The funding source may determine the type of outside assistance; for example, certain programs will assign on-call consultants. For others, the municipality may need to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP).

### **Developing the Guidelines**

If the municipality already has design guidelines that can be used for the façade improvement program, skip to the next section.

For developing the guidelines, review the Best Practices for Design Guidelines.  
Developing the Program

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

### **Implementation**

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

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

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

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

Sign & Façade Improvement Program (Ashland, MA)





Funding by:

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

Structure: 50% match up to \$5,000

Characteristics: Preferred target area (high traffic streets) but is open to all businesses in Ashland. Includes building improvements (accessibility, signs, awnings, painting). Includes site improvements (parking lots, planters, landscaping)  
<https://www.ashlandmass.com/669/Business-Incentive-Programs>

# Develop a comprehensive parking implementation communication program to promote public knowledge of parking assets and policies

<b>Category</b>		Public Realm; Private Realm; Administrative Capacity
<b>Location</b>	Downtown Commercial District	
<b>Origin</b>	Town of Ware, Community Input – including business community and residents, Ware Community Development Authority, Ware Business and Civic Association	
<b>Budget &amp; Sources of Funding</b>		<p>Low (less than \$50,000)</p> <p>In addition to municipal funds, the following are potential sources of funds.</p> <p>Costs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing downtown parking map</li> <li>• Creating/maintaining a database of parking facilities</li> <li>• Improve wayfinding and signage to guide visitors to and from parking</li> <li>• Conduct routine parking counts</li> </ul> <p>Possible Sources of funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</li> <li>• Local District Technical Assistance</li> <li>• Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth: Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (project limit \$25,000).</li> <li>• MassDOT: Shared Streets and Spaces</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>		Short term (1 year)
<b>Risks</b>		Low/Medium – buy-in from the business community and residents
<b>Key Performance Indicators</b>	<p>Possible Performance Indicators Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of knowledge of available parking</li> <li>• Amount of foot traffic at downtown businesses</li> <li>• Number of cars parked during business hours</li> </ul>	
<b>Partners &amp; Resources</b>	Ware Business and Civic Associations, Selectboard, local businesses and community leaders, Quaboag Valley CDC; Ware Community Development Authority	
<b>Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts Impacts</b>	<p>Many business owners in town believe that the best way to get people back in their shops is to provide more parking options. Town staff commented that conversion of parking spaces to outdoor dining locations was not pursued by many restaurants because of limited capital availability, and not a desire to retain parking. There is consistent availability of on-street spaces both on Main Street and on connecting side streets. Better marketing and wayfinding can change perception, especially in the middle of Main Street between Church and North Street. This will allow for confidence in providing outdoor dining, as it will not be taking away from parking.</p>	
<b>Action Item</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness of public off-street parking options on Bank Street, including the large facility at Pleasant Street and behind Country Bank.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Develop downtown public parking map for retail stores and restaurants to hand out with delivery or pickup orders (e.g. Town Hall lot available after 5pm)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

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**Action Item (cont'd)**







- Create a database of private parking facilities/parcels with ownership, total parking, and existing use (e.g. customer, worker, resident, etc.)
  - Create two categories: Town-Managed Shared Opportunities (20 or more space lots); Private Shared Opportunities (Under 20 spots)
- Improve wayfinding and signage to intuitively guide visitors to, from, and between parking and downtown attractions and amenities
  - Implement high visibility and consistent gateway signage in key locations, such as:
    - Main Street at Pleasant Street
    - South Street northbound crossing the river
    - Main Street at Storrs Street
    - West Street at Pulaski Street
  - Install parking wayfinding signage at Church Street and North Street to direct drivers on Main Street to spaces on Bank Street, given one-way inbound to Main Street orientation of Bank Street.
  - Identify trouble spots of outdated or faded signage and prioritize them for implementation of improved signage.
- Conduct routine parking counts to track utilization and inform future parking system changes.

**Process****Pre-program development**

## Process steps:

- Develop communication protocols (e.g. Town contact, press release guidelines, press requests, constituent inquiries/complaints, etc.)
- Develop informational materials highlighting parking facilities for dissemination with information about recent downtown infrastructure improvements
  - Highlight how improved lighting, pedestrian infrastructure, and other safety amenities on Main Street sidewalk reconstruction make it easier to find parking
- Continue to engage key downtown stakeholders during the implementation process
- Improve crosswalks on Main Street and ensure that sidewalks are well maintained.

# Connecting Downtown Ware

Category		Public Realm; Private Realm; Administrative Capacity
Location		Village Center with inclusion of outlying areas
Origin		Town of Ware, Community Input – including business community and residents, Ware Community Development Authority, Ware Business and Civic Association
Budget & Sources of Funding		<b>Low to High Budget, depending on the scope of the project (\$10,000-\$500,000+)</b>
		<b>Minimal budget of \$10,000-\$25,000:</b> A low budget project would create a clearly defined walking and biking route through the Project Area. This budget would not support any significant infrastructure improvement, such as rebuilding or expansion of sidewalks.
		<b>Median budget of \$25,000-\$100,000:</b> A project in this range could include some sidewalk work, and perhaps additional placemaking amenities as described in the smaller budget.
		<b>High budget of \$500,000+:</b> This would include all the items mentioned above, but also significant improvements (e.g. ADA improvements) to West Street.
		<b>Possible Sources of funding:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)</li> <li>• Local Banks and other Community Development Financial Institutions</li> <li>• Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community One-Stop for Growth</li> <li>• Regional Economic Development Organization Grant Program</li> <li>• Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)</li> <li>• District Local Technical Assistance</li> <li>• Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet</li> <li>• Massachusetts Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program</li> <li>• Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program</li> </ul>
Timeframe		Short to long-term (1-5 years) – dependent on level of program. For physical improvements, timeframe should be considered long-term.
Risks		Low to High – buy-in from the business community, town officials and residents.
Key Performance Indicators		<b>Possible Performance Indicators Include:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• project is embraced by Ware residents, including seniors, families, and businesses.</li> <li>• upon completion, there is a noticeable and quantifiable year over year increase in activity in the Downtown Ware and West Street.</li> <li>• increased activity and use of assets in the Ware Downtown results in business expansion, as well as an increase in the number of community-wide events beginning in 2023.</li> <li>• surveyed change in resident perception on the walkability and vibrancy of the town center.</li> </ul>
Key Performance Indicators		Ware Business and Civic Associations, Selectboard, local businesses and community leaders, Quaboag Valley CDC; Ware Community Development Authority
Diagnostic/ COVID-19 Impacts		Connecting Downtown Ware with the West Street commercial district, and surrounding neighborhoods, will increase pedestrian traffic, supporting local businesses.

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**Action Item**

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

1. Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program and bring on additional capacity.
2. Identify who needs to be part of this process and engage business and property owners, local artists and cultural organizations, and the community at large to get buy-in for the program.
3. Develop the criteria for approval and implementation.
4. Develop the funding and oversight structures.
5. Proceed with development and implement of the project.
6. Upon completion of the project, consider next steps, including the possible establishment of a standing committee to advocate for pedestrian and nonvehicular mobility. The Town may consider adoption of a bylaw that provides for such advocacy.

**Process****Phase 1: Planning**

- **Convene a committee:** Bring together key stakeholders committed to overseeing the duration of the project. Identify key goals and confirm key performance indicators for the project.
- **Research:** Collect relevant maps, surveys, data, previous reports, and any other materials that might be helpful. Identify key destinations to highlight and map the main walking route through the Downtown Ware.
- **Existing conditions:** Review the LRRP diagnostic, Master Plan, and the Visioning, Branding, Wayfinding & Business Development Plan
- **Present findings to the community:** Determine specific goals and desired improvements based on community feedback from a variety of constituencies (business, recreation, arts/culture, government).

**Phase 2: Project Development and Design**

- **Identify project opportunities:** Projects supporting the development and beautification of an accessible and connected Downtown Ware should be categorized into infrastructure, wayfinding, placemaking, and programming. These projects should be considered with the goal of highlighting and improving the connection between key destinations in Ware.
- **Infrastructure**
  - o Pilot a painted crosswalk on a municipally owned street; consider refreshing state-owned crosswalks with compliant designs.
  - o Improve cautionary signage at crosswalks for motor vehicles. The painted crosswalks could either be artistic or a solid paint color between the two white lines. The enhanced crosswalks will create a safer and more pleasant walking experiences, as well as tie together the downtown.
  - o Fix sidewalks in poor condition particularly along West Street. Ensure all sidewalks are ADA accessible.
- **Wayfinding**
  - o Review current wayfinding signs and whether others need to be installed.
  - o Update existing public signage to incorporate new wayfinding elements.
  - o Extend wayfinding and branding efforts to parking throughout the town, particularly in the Downtown area.
- **Placemaking**
  - o Install additional publicly accessible seating or benches.
  - o Install street trees, trees on private property, awnings, or pavilions to improve the public realm.
  - o Install planters and / hanging baskets to create a sense of destination and provide a positive pedestrian experience in Downtown Ware.
  - o Install additional banners on street poles.
  - o Install additional lighting on the Downtown area
- **Additional Walk Audits and site selection:** To help build community support and identify other walking improvements consider hosting Walk Audits, to engage groups, such as business owners, in thinking about improvements in their town and provide an educational opportunity to assess conditions safely.
- **Summary of findings:** prepare a summary of findings that led to the selection of those projects and provide it to the organizations listed in the Partners and Resources section.
- **Administrative capacity:** Develop the roles and responsibilities for the partnering organizations and their staff who will be responsible for overseeing Downtown Ware project implementation and ongoing efforts, such as programming, maintenance, and evaluation.
  - o Identify additional funding if existing capacity does not match the intended scope of the project.

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**Process (cont'd)**

- **Apply for implementation funding:** Using resources generated from the project's planning (Phase 1) and development (Phase 2), prepare an application to fund the implementation of the selected projects.

**Phase 3: Programming to Encourage Walking Downtown Ware**

- Host a pedestrian oriented event, such as block party, outdoor recreation meetup, yard sale, or historical walk, in the Downtown at least quarterly to attract people to the area.
- Engage the Ware Business and Civic Association (WBCA) to host a kick-off event and plan for subsequent event planning.

**Phase 4: Implementation**

- Based on the projects selected, implementation could require some or a combination of tasks, such as (but not limited to):
  - o Volunteer coordination
  - o Event coordination in the Village Center
  - o Identifying a stewarding group or organization. The formation of a business association could greatly support these efforts.
  - o Developing a plan for ongoing operations and maintenance
  - o Assessing ongoing costs
- Upon implementation, track measures of success as they are listed in the Key Performance Indicators section.

**Best Practice**

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

[Public\\_Realm\\_CivicSpaceCollaborative.pdf](#)

[Pop-Up Demonstration Project: Main Street, Better Block Bethel, Vermont \(aarp.org\)](#)

[Getting Rural America Back on Its Feet \(planning.org\)](#)