



# Rapid Recovery Plan

2021

**City of Fall River**

# Acknowledgements



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

The Local Rapid Recovery Planning (RRP) program is a key part of the Baker-Polito Administration's Partnerships for Recovery Plan, the strategy established to help communities stabilize and grow the Massachusetts economy as a result of the economic impacts brought on by COVID-19. The plan invests \$774 million in efforts to get people back to work, support small businesses, foster innovation, revitalize downCitys, 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, Citys, 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 DownCity Initiative Program. These plans address the impacts of COVID-19 on local downCitys and small businesses by partnering with Plan Facilitators and Subject Matter Experts to pursue locally-driven, actionable strategies.



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# Executive Summary



# Executive Summary

## Local Rapid Recovery on a Statewide Scale

Like thousands of communities across the United States, Massachusetts' towns and cities experienced months of significant financial loss during the COVID-19 pandemic as business districts had to temporarily close and then face extended periods of safety-related measures that limited visitation. For many businesses, this meant permanent closure. Others were aided by federal and state programs, working diligently to keep their livelihoods intact during a very difficult period. These difficulties were particularly notable in New England where historic village centers have defined communities for generations. Over 350 distinct jurisdictions make up the Commonwealth, and nearly every place has at least one village or downtown business district greatly impacted by COVID-19. Every one faces serious challenges recovering from the pandemic.

Fortunately, the LRRP is a tremendous opportunity to leverage upcoming stimulus dollars for downtown benefits across the state. While hundreds of distinct districts are a challenge to address systematically, this diversity is a natural strength for Massachusetts. Every affected downtown is the crossroads for its broader community—typically a compact and walkable place where vacancies may be readily visible but where every business knows each other and has come together to face the pandemic. The interdependencies are quickly evident when talking with local stakeholders who take ownership of their village centers. Working with municipal officials, LRRP Plan Facilitators have quickly leveraged the energy of downtown merchants, engaged residents, vested landowners and village organizations to create the solutions within this plan—solutions tailored to the unique character of this place. Downtown Fall River, like over 120 other communities in Massachusetts, now has a comprehensive recovery strategy and the momentum to implement lasting change, collectively supporting the entire Commonwealth.

## Addressing Top Priorities for Economic Recovery in Fall River

Downtown Fall River faces challenges that are detrimental to the economic fabric and vitality of the City overall. The City and key stakeholders are passionate about the revitalization of their community; a planning initiative such as the Local Rapid Recovery Program can act as a vital step to move closer to economic recovery. The program and plan serve as a resource for the City to prioritize rapidly implementable solutions that provide

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tangible solutions which can address economic recovery impediments right away. It also creates a toolkit for the City realm needs, as well as programs to increase business resilience and business diversity to implement long-term recommendations and programs that address public and private within Downtown Fall River.

## **Fall River Faces Notable Challenges for Recovery**

The LRRP diagnostic framework provides a comprehensive database of market demand profiles specifically generated for the LRRP Fall River study area, as well as an assessment of public and private infrastructure conditions and administrative hurdles and challenges. This database serves as a resource for Fall River champions to apply for future external funding opportunities and justify project recommendations. Key challenges and needs in the Fall River community that arose from the public engagement process, diagnostic data collection and analysis, and project idea development include:

- Fall River needs a champion to unite businesses and spur and maintain street-level revitalization.
- Fall River would benefit from streetscape improvements to make navigating and spending time in Downtown more comfortable and desirable for all.
- A lack of wayfinding and signage is keeping visitors and residents from accessing parts of Downtown they otherwise might be interested in.
- Fall River businesses and destinations face many below-average physical conditions and several vacancies.

## **Developing Solutions in Partnership with the Fall River Community**

Public outreach efforts for the Rapid Recovery Program involved both interactive, open house workshops as well as virtual, COVID-19-friendly meetings. During Phase I of the project - focused on robust data collection and analysis efforts - the project team worked with the City to engage key stakeholders to better understand Downtown issues. The project team also hosted a virtual meeting at the initial stage of the project to discuss project goals and key findings. The project team and City hosted an open house event at Heritage State Park that gave the public and business community the opportunity to provide input on preliminary project ideas. Materials from the Open House were then displayed at City Hall to solicit additional in-person feedback from those who could not attend the Open House.

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## Priority Projects

The Fall River RRP project team, in partnership with the City and stakeholders, developed a set of project ideas that addressed a range of solutions focused on short-term recovery and long-term vitality in Downtown Fall River. Public engagement efforts revealed that projects recommending walkability and accessibility safety improvements, wayfinding improvements, and administrative and financial support programs all ranked highly on the list of RRP projects. Final project ideas are part of a comprehensive set of solutions that implemented together can facilitate Fall River's recovery.

## Implementing Strategies for Recovery and Revitalization in Fall River

The plan developed for Downtown Fall River through the Local Rapid Recovery Program is based on from a robust diagnostic assessment of public and private infrastructure, business community needs, market demand statistics, and administrative gaps and challenges. A comprehensive set of recommended projects vetted by the community and institutional leaders has been developed that addresses economic vitality solutions and revitalization efforts for the Downtown Fall River business community. Within the overall program, each proposed project provides detailed information on project budget, potential timelines, key partners and performance indicators, as well as critical action items, processes, and considerations. Funding sources noted in the project rubrics are resources for the City and community groups to seek external funding and commence the next phase of project design and implementation. The comprehensive and diverse set of project recommendations both aide in immediate recovery for Downtown Fall River and offer long-term solutions that improve the overall economic, commercial, and social health of Downtown. Fall River is encouraged to pursue grant funding immediately for many of these projects to help Downtown overcome COVID-19's challenges with smart and resilient solutions that can be deployed quickly.



**Existing conditions**  
Source: Stantec

# Project List

Category	Project	Description	Timeframe	Budget	Priority Project
Public Realm	Create Pop-Up Parklets and Improve Existing Parklets	Develop parklets to add outdoor seating, shade, and other amenities downtown. Target funds to add amenities and programming to existing parklets.	Short	Medium	✓
	Develop a Comprehensive, Cohesive Wayfinding System	Building on previous wayfinding and branding campaigns, develop a cohesive plan in two phases: Initial, quick-build wayfinding campaign and fixed, permanent wayfinding program, first for the study area and then expanded through Fall River.	Medium	Medium	
	Initiate a Parking Study	Initiate a parking study to understand issues and develop recommendations.	Short	Small	✓
Private Realm	Develop Storefront Design Guidelines and Program	Develop storefront design guidelines and encourage uptake through a municipal program, providing assistance to small businesses with funding eligibility requirements and streamlining permitting process.	Short	Small	
	Develop Facade Design Guidelines and Program	Develop guidelines for downtown facades, addressing windows, awnings, and signage.	Short	Small	
	Develop Outdoor Dining Program and Guidance	Take lessons learned from the pandemic experience to develop a permanent outdoor dining program that is affordable for restaurants to implement.	Short	Medium	
Arts and Culture	Highlight Local Artists through a Collaborative Public Art Program	Assemble a public art task force to lead curation and installation of public art around downtown and beyond. Use a unified public art master plan to identify short-, medium-, and long-term strategies.	Short	Medium	
	Collaborate with Creative Community to Activate Underused Spaces	Collaborate with the local creative and cultural community to temporarily activate underused public and private spaces with performances, interactive art, games, food vendors and expand downtown events.	Short	Medium	
Tenant Mix	Develop Vacancy Tracking Tool and Tenant Recruitment Strategy	Build a tool around the existing vacancy database so that LRRP data might be used to match new tenants with vacant storefronts, as a means of diversifying Downtown's tenant mix and activating empty properties.	Short	Medium	✓
	Create a Vacant Storefront Program	Create a pop-up storefront program to match makers, artists, and other tenants with temporary commercial space.	Short	Medium	
Revenue and Sales	Develop Business Support Program	Build on work of MassDevelopment through TDI initiative to support existing businesses and new entrepreneurs at every stage to build a cluster of retail activity downtown.	Short	Medium	✓
Admin. Capacity	Build Administrative Capacity of the City and Supporting Organizations	Build on previous efforts to continue addressing administrative gaps to improve Downtown experience. Specifically, consider: New roles, new funding mechanisms, incubation of a new downtown organization.	Medium	Medium	✓