

# Topsfield Downtown Revitalization Plan

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**Prepared for:**  
Town of Topsfield  
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Topsfield, MA 01983

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# Topsfield Downtown Revitalization Plan 2020



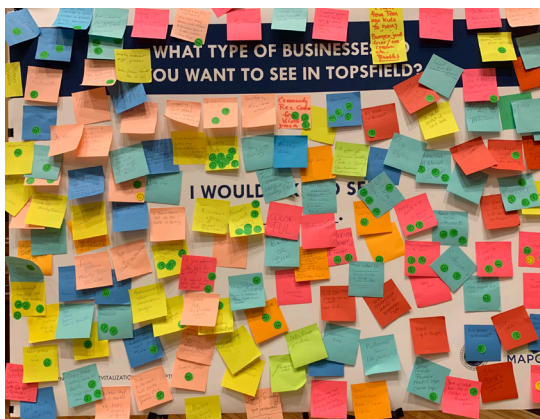
This plan was created by a volunteer Working Group with the support of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The plan will be implemented over the next 3-5 years using resources from the Town, state, private donations and volunteers. A detailed version of the plan is available on the Town of Topsfield website.

## Vision

**A welcoming downtown village where Topsfield residents and visitors of all ages can live, work, gather, and shop.**

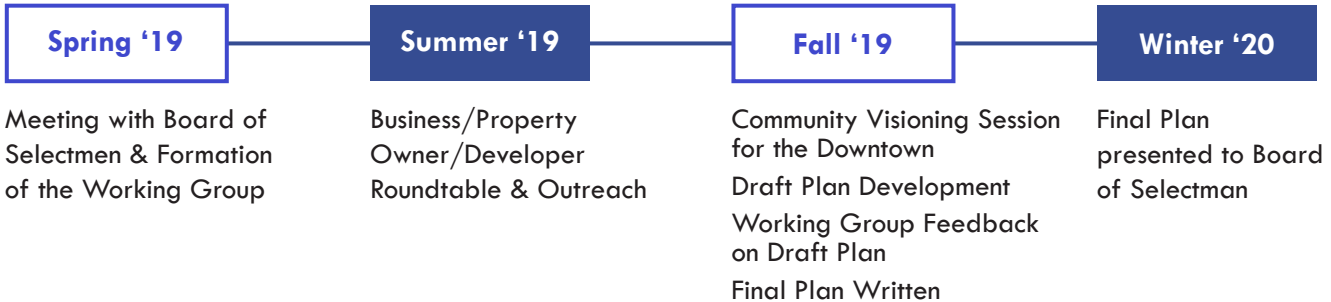
## Goals

- 1 Attract new businesses to the district to respond to the needs of Topsfield residents.
- 2 Increase the customer base in the district to support downtown businesses by adding housing and marketing the village to residents and visitors.
- 3 Enhance the look, feel, and safety of the district to maintain a vibrant and walkable downtown and create a sense of place where all can gather.
- 4 Increase community-building events in the district to create an energetic downtown with a strong sense of community.
- 5 Expand Town capabilities and resources to achieve these goals.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Timeline



## Strategies

**Attract new businesses to the district to respond to the needs of residents, residents from surrounding communities, and visitors to the area.**

- Review current zoning, licensing and permitting processes and explore updates.
- Improve district infrastructure
- Connect property owners with prospective business owners
- Evaluate financing incentives

**Increase the customer base in the district to support downtown businesses by adding housing and marketing the village to residents and visitors.**

- Add housing in the Business Village District
- Expand marketing
- Improve parking and traffic management
- Enhance the look, feel, and safety of the district to maintain a vibrant and walkable downtown and create a sense of place where all can gather.

**Develop and implement a public space improvement plan with design guidelines and establish key locations for improvements such as:**

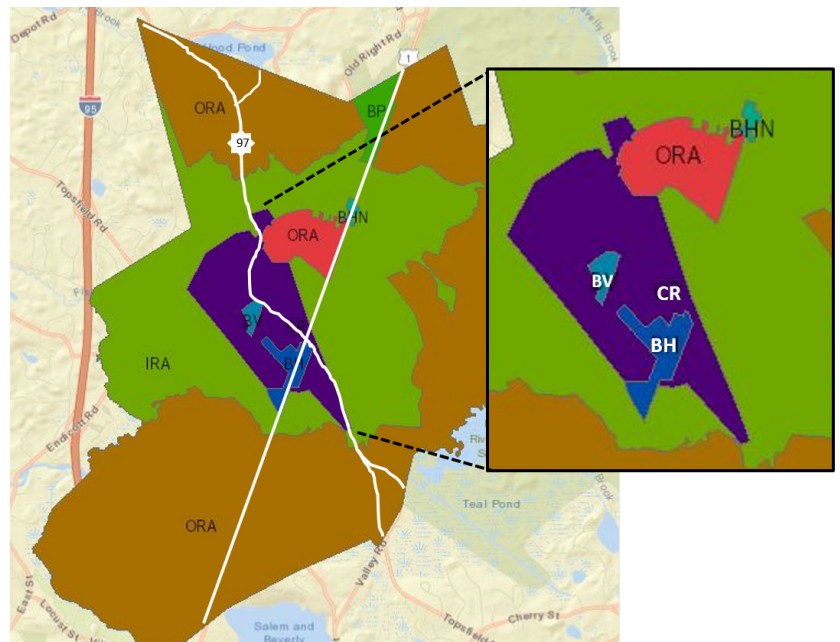
1. Streetscape improvements
2. Façade and signage improvements
3. Lighting, landscaping, district decorations, and other improvements

**Increase community-building events in the district to create an energetic downtown with a strong sense of community.**

- Host community events for residents and visitors.

**Expand Town capabilities and resources to achieve these goals.**

- Hire a part-time Town Planner
- Establish a Downtown Revitalization oversight group made up of Topsfield residents, business owners, and Town officials to ensure momentum continues.
- Work with the Topsfield Community Partnership to help support funding for projects in the downtown.
- Facilitate the creation of a Topsfield business group to assist with joint promotion and downtown revitalization efforts.



Topsfield Zoning Map: Business Village (BV) in inset

# Executive Summary

This plan was created by a volunteer Working Group with the support of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The plan will be implemented over the next 3-5 years using resources from the Town, state, private donations and volunteers.

This document presents the vision for downtown Topsfield and the key strategies and activities necessary to achieve that vision. A detailed version of the plan is available on the Town of Topsfield website.

## Vision:

A welcoming downtown village where Topsfield residents and visitors of all ages can live, work, gather, and shop.

## Goals:

- 1 Attract new businesses to the district to respond to the needs of Topsfield residents.
- 2 Increase the customer base in the district to support downtown businesses by adding housing and marketing the village to residents and visitors.
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## 1 Attract new businesses to the district to respond to the needs of residents, residents from surrounding communities, and visitors to the area.

### A. Review and update zoning

- i. Explore re-zoning the town common and abutting lots to create a new Common District. Such a zoning district should preserve the character of the common, but expand permitted uses to include selected businesses such as guest houses, restaurants, and business offices.
- ii. Explore modifying existing zoning regulations to:
  1. Adjust required setbacks for downtown development since most buildings are currently non-compliant, and any building changes/new construction requires ZBA review.
  2. Permit 3-story buildings (commercial and residential) in the Business Village District (BVD) to spur investment and increase the financial viability of such projects.
  3. Increase parking flexibility through the following actions:
    - a. Reconsider parking minimums for businesses and residents in downtown
    - b. Allow shared parking to meet requirements—Esp. in mixed-use developments
    - c. Allow change-of-use below a certain threshold
    - d. Require bicycle parking
    - e. Design considerations
    - f. Limit curb cuts
    - g. Minimum/maximum widths for driveways
- iii. Review and update licensing and permitting procedures for businesses, such as the one-day liquor license.

### B. Improve district infrastructure

- i. Evaluate the need to expand sewer capacity in the district; investigate the capacity of several key parcels to determine development options; based on findings, investigate scope, options, feasibility, and costs.
- ii. Review needed streetscape improvements such as crosswalks and other pedestrian amenities.

### C. Connect current property owners and developers with prospective business owners, developers, and industry representatives of key needed and desired businesses to discuss options for adding housing, bringing in new businesses, and expanding current businesses that are reflective of the community vision

### D. Evaluate opportunities to help finance future development of new businesses utilizing District Increment Financing in the re-zoned area around the commons and abutting lots

## 2 Increase the customer base in the district to support downtown businesses by adding housing and marketing the village to residents and visitors.

### A. Add housing in the Business Village District (BVD)

- i. Meet with property owners to explore interest in adding housing to their current properties, building on current structures or building new structures), and gather input on the height and density needed to make housing and mixed-use development financially viable.
- ii. Explore new zoning regulations to encourage housing and mixed-use development in the downtown. To encourage this development, new regulations will need to be more flexible. The following changes should be considered:
  1. Reduced minimum lot area, lot frontage, lot depth, parking requirements, and minimum yard requirements to make it possible to develop on smaller parcels resulting in housing that is of a smaller scale and more naturally affordable.
  2. Increased height, potentially up to three stories, to allow for more density that makes it possible to build the number of housing units needed to make a project financially viable and attractive to developers.

3. Include development standards and design guidelines in the zoning to ensure the architecture and style of new housing developments are consistent with the rural character of the Town.
  4. Apply 40B Guidelines (in development) to the extent possible in order to meet state requirements with acceptable, affordable housing options.
  5. Evaluate the feasibility of revising current zoning regulation to allow for occupancy of accessory dwelling units by non-family members to increase housing options within the BVD.
- iii. Require new housing developments in the downtown to set aside a portion of units as deed-restricted Affordable Housing units to ensure new housing is affordable to the workforce needed to support economic growth in the downtown, and provide housing for seniors and others currently priced out of the housing market
1. This requirement should be based on the size of the housing development and should be carefully drafted, so it does not discourage overall housing development by requiring too many Affordable Units.
  2. Offer a density bonus allowing more market-rate units in exchange for more deed-restricted Affordable Housing beyond what is required to make projects more financially viable.
  3. This requirement should also look at possible configurations of deed-restricted and other types of naturally affordable housing options.
- iv. Pursue a Housing Production Plan for Topsfield
1. If the Town would like to prepare an HPP, some funding may be available from MAPC through the technical assistance program.

**B. Expand marketing efforts**

- i. Work with business owners to create joint marketing materials and initiatives and strategy for advertising.
- ii. Coordinate with Topsfield Fairgrounds to market downtown activities to Fairground event attendees. This could include:
  1. Direction and promotional signage
  2. Downtown parking arrangements for Fair attendees to attract them to businesses in the downtown

**C. Improve parking and traffic management**

- i. Implement the recommendations of the Downtown Parking Study to improve parking management in the district.
  1. Add signage and wayfinding tools
    - a. Add sign on Main Street directing to Public Lot on School Street—Add sign at Public Lot
    - b. Add sign near MBTA lot directing to downtown Topsfield
    - c. Consider signage for MBTA lot near the rail trail
    - d. Create a parking map for the town website
  2. Pursue shared parking agreements
    - a. Pursue shared parking agreements with Topsfield Shopping Center, St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, and local shop owners.
    - b. Agreements can be for:
      - i. Select groups, i.e., residents or employees
      - ii. General public
      - iii. Limited hours
    - c. Provide services in exchange for open parking (i.e., plowing, signage, striping, signage, plantings, etc.)

3. Explore establishing time limits for Main Street
  - a. Create 2-hour time limits for parking spaces in front of Post Office and between Central and School Street
    - i. Must be coupled with long-term parking option
    - ii. Monitor and adjust
  - b. Enforce time limits
    - i. Considerations
      1. First Ticket Free
      2. Provide a parking map with tickets so drivers know where they can park
4. Implement multimodal improvements
  - a. Make a pedestrian-friendly walkway to the public lot on School Street
  - b. Add lighting to the public lot on School Street
  - c. Add a crosswalk to Main Street, north of Central Street
  - d. Add drop-off Post Office box to alleviate congestion on-street
  - e. Bicycle racks
- ii. Explore traffic calming measures that are conducive to community building such as road and sidewalk design, pavement murals and stencils
- iii. Determine traffic management needs and potential solutions (signage, lane design, and markings, signalization, etc.)

## 3

### **Enhance the look, feel, and safety of the district to maintain a vibrant and walkable downtown and create a sense of place where all can gather.**

#### **A. Develop a public space improvement plan with design guidelines and establish key locations for improvements to ensure coordination**

#### **B. Implement streetscape improvements**

- i. Conduct a study to investigate the feasibility of grounding overhead utilities to improve the appearance and function of downtown spaces.
- ii. Make aesthetic improvements to sidewalks at key locations, including amenities such as benches, tables, trash receptacles, attractive warm lighting, kiosks, etc.
- iii. Evaluate opportunity for additional sidewalks in key locations determined to have high foot and vehicular traffic through collaboration with Topsfield Police Department
- iv. Commission local artists to paint murals on key sites in the district
- v. Work with Topsfield Public Works to explore the feasibility of installing Bigbelly solar-powered trash compactor bins that reduce hours spent on collection and maintain a vibrant downtown district
- vi. Install bike racks

#### **C. Implement improvements to the facades and signage of businesses in prominent locations**

#### **D. Install street banners to enhance the look of downtown to promote events**

#### **E. Improve district lighting**

- i. Improve the lighting near Town Hall, around the Common and in the Municipal Parking Lot.
- ii. Consider closer-spaced, lower-wattage warm LED lighting in pedestrian areas.
- iii. Explore the possibility of converting streetlights to solar-powered lights.
- iv. Use string lighting over the street or other decorative lighting to enhance the sense of place in downtown.
- v. Consider installing decorative or historical street lamps along downtown Main Street.

**F. Install directional and promotional signage**

- i. Install signage at key locations in Topsfield to direct visitors to the downtown
  - 1. Rte. 1 at South Main St. and Central St.
  - 2. Rte. 97
- ii. Install signage in the downtown with directions to key locations (parking, key amenities)
  - 1. Intersection in front of Town Hall/Library
  - 2. Other locations
- iii. Install a prominent town kiosk that can be a central information space for the community including historical information about Topsfield

**G. Add plantings to the district with continued watering and maintenance, while ensuring that choice of plantings and watering procedures support and abide by water conservation guidelines**

- i. Add potted aerial plants and planters with flowers in key locations throughout the downtown.
- ii. Add groundcover plantings in front of or between key businesses in the district.
- iii. Incentivize improved landscaping at private properties through small grants & low-key competitions/exhibitions for attractive displays.

**H. Install community amenities to create a sense of place and attract residents and visitors to the downtown**

- i. Install benches at key locations in the business district to increase gathering spaces for community members and visitors
- ii. Evaluate the feasibility of creating a dog park in or adjacent to the business district
- iii. Explore areas where pocket parks (approx. 100-600 sf) could be added to bring more activity to downtown.
- iv. Make improvements to Emerson Field
- v. Explore the feasibility of expanding recreational areas/facilities:
  - 1. Community Pickle Ball Court/BBall
  - 2. Hockey Rink
  - 3. New nets on Proctor Field
  - 4. Mountain Biking Trail
  - 5. Rec Center

**I. Collaborate with the Congregational Church to improve the entrance to Emerson Center near the intersection of Rt 97 and Main St. across from the library and explore improvements to Emerson Field**

**J. Develop a plan for enhancing landscaping to allow sight of key historic buildings along Main St. (Town Hall, Proctor School, Library) to create a more attractive and pedestrian-scale feel**

**K. Fix the town hall clock to highlight its historic value and accuracy, and add night lighting**



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**Increase community-building events in the district to create an energetic downtown with a strong sense of community.**

- A. Explore the idea of having town-sponsored regular food truck events at the Essex Coop, which already hosts food trucks, or possibly downtown, along the Common, Park St parking lot adjacent to the Rail trail, etc. Gazebo/Giant backyard games on common
- B. Kids Events
- C. Mini Golf
- D. Road races
- E. Concerts
- F. Pop Up Events
- G. Festivals

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**Expand Town capabilities and resources to achieve these goals.**

**A. Hire a part-time Town Planner with the goal of:**

- i. Coordinating town-wide planning efforts. This includes:
  - 1. Leading the implementation of the Downtown Revitalization Plan, in partnership with a Downtown Oversight Group.
  - 2. Leading efforts to address housing needs, such as a Housing Production Plan, and a review of affordable housing options beyond 40B. The planner should also incentivize housing options through a clear and easy permitting process that ensures the Town's development goals are achieved.
  - 3. Serving as a town Development Officer charged with attracting and engaging potential new businesses and activities, and with facilitating smooth, efficient processes for applicants working with various Town Departments.
  - 4. Developing an easy to follow guide to facilitate opening or expanding a business in Topsfield
- ii. Developing new funding sources through grant applications and other efforts.
  - 1. Consider creating a part-time grant-writing position to assist in the timely application for available assistance with the state and others.

**B. Establish a Downtown Revitalization oversight group made up of Topsfield residents, business owners, and Town officials to ensure momentum continues**

- i. Create a volunteer Downtown maintenance group to provide continued care to the downtown (landscaping, other improvements)

**C. Work with the Topsfield Community Partnership to help support funding for projects in the downtown**

**D. Facilitate the creation of a Topsfield business group to assist with joint promotion and downtown revitalization efforts**