

# Burlington Town Center Placemaking Playbook

## September Update - Existing Conditions and Precedents

Burlington, MA

DHCD Massachusetts Downtown  
Initiative



# Agenda

## Presentation

- Introduction, Project Goals, Process, Timeline
- Basemap and Existing Conditions
- Precedent Overview

# Project Goals

**The Town of Burlington would like to work with the community to create a ‘placemaking playbook’. This playbook will suggest creative, short-term ways of encouraging people to interact with each other and with downtown businesses.**

- Foster community and connections between people by engaging local businesses and residents.
- Build a sense of ownership and place for the residents and local businesses.
- Identify physical interventions and potential events to enliven the area and increase business traffic.

# Process

## TASK 1 & 2

### Existing Condition and Precedent Analysis

*September 2020*

- Map and Photographs Documenting Existing Conditions
- Precedents for Temporary Placemaking Playbook

## TASK 3

### Community Conversations

*Fall 2020*

- Community and Customer Survey
- Business Survey and Interviews
- Economic Vitality Task Force

## TASK 4 & 5

### Preparation of Draft and Final Playbook

*Late Fall 2020*

- Recommendations and Draft Placemaking Playbook
- Final Placemaking Playbook






# Basemap and Existing Conditions Overview



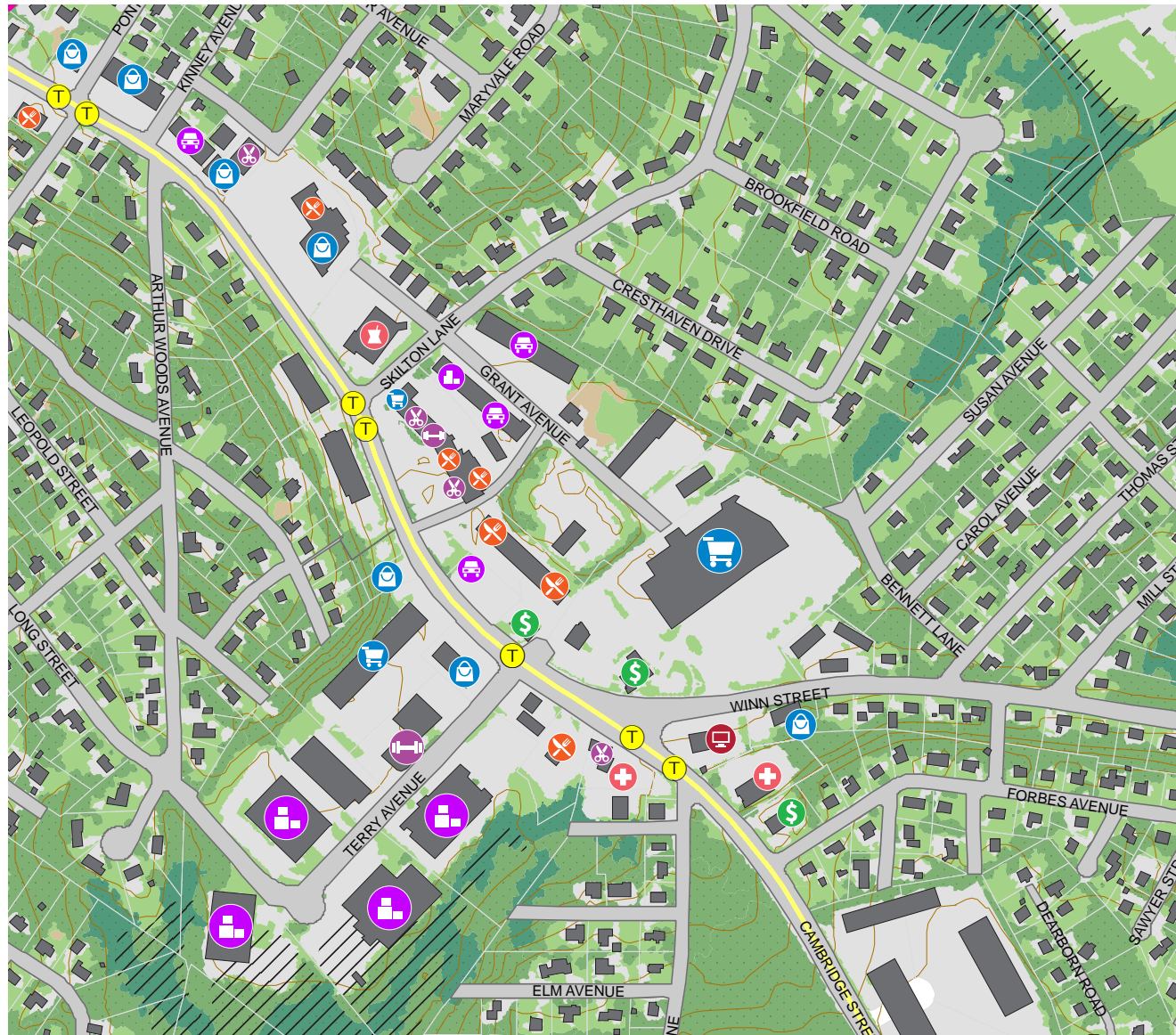
# Basemap of Town Center





















## Legend

-  MBTA Bus Route
-  100-year Flood Plain
- Open Space**
  -  Developed Open Space
  -  Forest
  -  Wetlands
  -  Forested Wetlands
- Businesses and Landmarks**
  -  Restaurants / Dining
  -  Retail/Grocery
  -  Personal Service
  -  Hotel/Lodging
  -  Bank/Insurance
  -  Government
  -  Gallery/Art/Museum
  -  Community/Religious
  -  Light Industrial/Storage
  -  Office
  -  Fitness
  -  Vacant

# Basemap - North Portion



## Legend

-  MBTA Bus Route
-  100-year Flood Plain
- Open Space**
  -  Developed Open Space
  -  Forest
  -  Wetlands
  -  Forested Wetlands
- Businesses and Landmarks**
  -  Restaurants / Dining
  -  Retail/Grocery
  -  Personal Service
  -  Hotel/Lodging
  -  Bank/Insurance
  -  Government
  -  Gallery/Art/Museum
  -  Community/Religious
  -  Light Industrial/Storage
  -  Office
  -  Fitness
  -  Vacant

# Existing Context - Storefronts and Parking Areas



Blank wall of Shaw's Supermarket that faces Cambridge Street.



Strip mall with many restaurants and storefronts.



True North Coffee Shop outdoor seating.



Additional restaurants and storefronts in strip mall.




Grant Avenue auto body and light industrial businesses.




Hello Brother: Indian Groceries & Bakery parking lot.

# Temporary Placemaking Opportunity Zones



 Temporary Placemaking Opportunity Zones: Under-utilized, shared parking lots for multiple businesses.

 Wayfinding/ Ground Mural Opportunities between placemaking zones.

# Existing Context - Streets and Surroundings



Route 3A / Cambridge Street.



Route 3A and Winn Street.



Route 3A and Winn Street, western side.



Route 3A and Murray Avenue.



Forested areas and alternate route in north part of Simonds Park.



Burlington Town Common.

# Community Programming and Events



2020 Summer “Silly Walks” Installation.



2018 Diwali Festival - Diwali lamp making.  
*Source: Geetha Patil, India Post.*



2018 Diwali Festival - IAB Rangoli drawing.  
*Source: Geetha Patil, India Post.*



Burlington 2014 Spooktacular Event at Simonds Park.  
*Source: Burlington Parks and Recreation.*



Burlington Sculpture Park.  
*Source: Burlington Parks and Recreation.*



2019 Concert Series at Town Common.  
*Source: Burlington Parks and Recreation.*

# Key Observations and Questions

## Observations

- Burlington Town Center appears to have **low vacancy rates** and consists of many **active businesses** catering to the **local community**.
- The area **lacks a cohesive identity** between the different “strip malls” and parking lots. Route 3A is a busy corridor and walking between different strip malls is **difficult and unpleasant for “trip chaining”** (visiting multiple places in one trip).
- **Existing programming and events** are focused at the Town Common and Simonds Park.

## Questions

- How can **temporary physical interventions and events** reimagine existing assets such as parking lots and low-traffic streets?
- How can these **interventions improve foot traffic** between existing businesses? How can these interventions draw more people to the area and entice them to stay and run errands or browse at multiple businesses in one trip?



# Precedent Research

## Temporary and Creative Placemaking

# Moving Beyond “Creative Placemaking”

- **Placemaking** can sometimes imply that no one was there before, but Burlington Town Center is a community of many active, local businesses.
- Instead of just “placemaking”, consider: **Place-Knowing, Place-Affirming, and Public-Making.**
- **Goal:** Discover who is here today and foster community-driven ideas to amplify the Town Center community. Amplify existing voices. Build physical, cultural, and social connections. Create spaces that are welcoming to all.
- **Precedents** focus on transforming street spaces and parking areas through temporary interventions and special events.

# “Lighter Quicker Cheaper” - Project for Public Space

## Temporary Placemaking Guide

### Key Takeaway

“Lighter Quicker Cheaper” (LQC) interventions can help pilot new ideas quickly to spur long-term change.

### Details

The compendium of strategies advocates the following:

- Year-round programming of seasonal/one-off events.
- Integrating art.
- Community-driven ideas.
- Repurposed existing public spaces.
- Developing a management structure (Friends/BID/Volunteers).



Examples of LQC interventions. Source: PPS.

Link: <https://www.pps.org/article/lighter-quicker-cheaper>

# Asphalt Art Guide by Street Plans Collaborative

## Temporary Placemaking Guide

### Key Takeaway

Asphalt art murals can dramatically transform parking lots and streets into public space for people rather than cars.

### Details

- Asphalt Art can be used as temporary event-based placemaking, a pilot project for future transformation, traffic calming, creative wayfinding, and community building.
- The guide discusses how funding, design, community process, artist selection, and material selection affect the success of an asphalt art project.



*Temporary mural on Coxe Avenue in Asheville, NC.*



*Same Same, but Different. Wayfinding art mural at airport. Pittsburgh, PA.*

# Parklets and Strategies to Activate Parking Lots

## Temporary Placemaking Guide

### Key Takeaway

Parking lots can be temporarily repurposed to create public space, hosting weekend events such as farmer's markets or semi-permanent interventions.

### Details

- Shade and comfort are crucial to transform unappealing concrete into pleasant spaces.
- Repainting surfaces or building a temporary deck help to distinguish public space from the parking lot.

[Link: Sample Outdoor Gym Permit Application from Palo Alto, CA.](#)

[Link: Sample Parklet Application, Battleground WA.](#)



*“Traffic Garden” Playspace teaches kids cycling traffic rules in Washington DC. Source: George Mason University.*



*The Annex-Open Air Gym, a temporary gym set up in Brookfield, WI due to the pandemic. Source: Bobby Tanzilo, OnMilwaukee.*



*Parklet Pilot Program in Alexandria, VA*



*289 Derby Community Design Party to reimagine a vacant lot in Salem, MA, Salem Public Space Project.*

# Seasonal Placemaking

## Temporary Placemaking Guide

### Key Takeaway

Cold weather and darkness make enjoying outdoor spaces more challenging during the winter. Summer can make parking lot areas too hot.

### Details

- To deal with temperature, find creative ways to embrace it or mitigate it.
- Winter sports or a beach party are examples of embracing the cold or heat.
- Fire pits (winter) and shade and fans (summer) help create comfortable resting zones.



*World of Winter Festival, Paint the Park event in Grand Rapids, MI.*



*Thematic winter light festival uses animal sculptures to brighten up early evenings at Franklin Park Zoo in Boston, MA.*



*Eagle Street Beach Party in North Adams, MA.*



*Firepit at Burtonsville Placemaking Festival in Montgomery County, MD.*

# Placemaking Festival - Burtonsville, Maryland

## Temporary Public Space in Parking Lot

### Key Takeaway

Combining different placemaking strategies creates a complete public space experience.

### Details

- Weekend festival was held in a shopping center parking lot. Co-sponsored by Better Block Foundation and Montgomery County Planning Department.
- Distinct zones define different types of activities.
- A ground mural helps to tie the different spaces together.



# Starlight Square - Cambridge, MA.

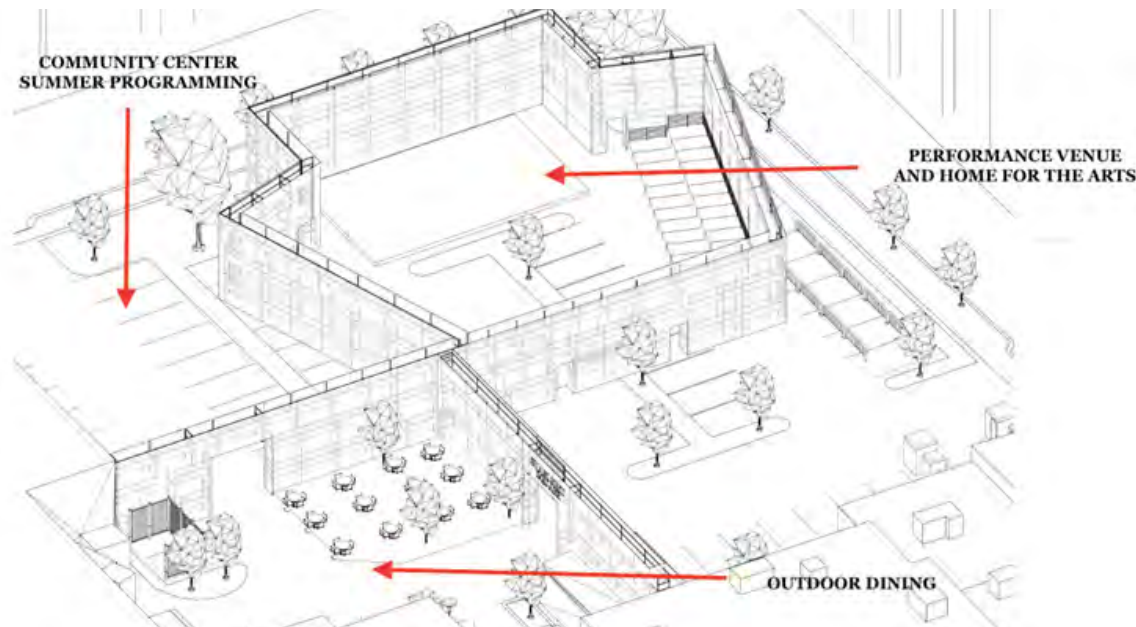
## Temporary Public Space in Parking Lot

### Key Takeaway

Temporary transformation of a parking lot to create distinct “living rooms” provide existing businesses affected by the pandemic with outdoor spaces.

### Project Details

- Municipal lot in Central Square
- Proposal to turn parking lot into a center with dedicated quadrants with different programs.
- Initiative led by Central Square BID - currently crowdsourcing for \$250k .



<https://www.centralsquaretheater.org/starlight-2020/#.X0AR08hKhPY>

# Arlington Cultural District

## Temporary Public Art and Events

### Key Takeaway

Public spaces were reimagined by public art created by the local arts community.

### Project Details

- Increased visibility of local arts and culture community.
- Coordination between all aspects of arts - visual, performance, music, literature, and historical.
- Managed by Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture.
- Focus on re-imagining underutilized spaces, such as yarn-bombing trees and an outdoor concert at a service station.



*Knitted sleeves by 57 local knitters on Minuteman Bikeway - "Ripple."*  
Source: Rose Lincoln, Boston Globe.



*Garage Band at the Arlington Service Station. Source: Johnny Lapham, ACAC.*

[Link: http://artsarlington.org/cultural-district/](http://artsarlington.org/cultural-district/); <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/regionals/west/2017/09/29/where-arts-culture-take-root-and-thrive/eKu4rH8A0YSQFtf8OxUD4H/story.html>

# Natick Center Cultural District

## Temporary Public Art and Events

### Key Takeaway

Community-driven arts helps to elevate local artist community and Town Center image among local community.

### Project Details

- Mix of funding - MAPC and Barr Foundation, National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), Creative Placemaking Knowledge-Building grant (APA).
- Successes include:
  - Engaged Community and Partnerships
  - Emerging Artist Platform.
  - Innovation.
  - Inspired other projects.



Examples of emerging artist artwork. Source: Natick Center Cultural District.



Natick Nights, Jo-Animal's Fitness. Source: Athena Pandolf.

# Bow Market - Somerville

## Micro-retail spaces and Coordination | Shared Public Space

### Key Takeaway

Business coordination is key to successful shared public spaces.

Local businesses housed in former storage facility work together to activate a shared public space.

### Project Details

- Located in Union Square.
- Home to 32 small businesses, all nestled around an intimate, public courtyard. Diverse businesses include restaurants, comedy club, craftsman, and other creatives.
- Courtyard is a shared gathering space for eating, art, and music. Hosts farmer market and other community events.



*Bow Market Courtyard. Source: Bow Market.*



*Porchfest Community Concert. Source: Do167.*

<https://www.bowmarketsomerville.com/>

# Potential Uses of Under-utilized parking areas

## Summary of Potential Ideas

### 1. Temporary Event

- Farmer and Crafts Market.
- Cultural Festival.
- Outdoor Movie Screening.
- Outdoor Concert or 'Porchfest'.
- Community Design or Art Event (as part of another planning process).

### 2. Semi-permanent Installation

- Parklets for seating, dining, greenery, or recreation.
- Outdoor fitness space (temporary tents and astroturf to installed outdoor gym equipment)
- Ground Murals.
- Temporary Art/Sculpture installation.

### 3. Seasonal Installation

- Ice skating rink and related creative uses (e.g., paint the park).
- Fire pits or other heating elements for winter.
- Shade and fans for summer.
- Summer Beach Festival.

# Next Steps and Community Engagement

- **Business and Public Survey, Business Interviews**
  - Focus on active engagement and encouraging creativity and visual ideas
  - Business survey and follow-up interviews will focus on understanding needs of local businesses and what the Town Center identity might look like.
  - Public survey will focus on the existing image of Town Center and generating creative ideas. Public Survey format can be designed to be more engaging and for all ages.
- **Economic Vitality Task Force Meetings**
  - Meeting will convene stakeholders to evaluate feedback from community survey and prioritize ideas.

# Creative Survey Formats for All Ages



## Fill-in-the-blank

Ahoy Shipbuilders! It's time to build a new future for this old ship. Fill in the blanks to help the planning and design team craft a vision statement for the project.

I remember Morse High School as the place where 17 happened. MHS has always been a 18 in the community. In the future I hope it still 19. In 2025, it should be a place where people come for 20-a and 20-b. My favorite part of the building is 21-a; it would be great if it was used for 21-b. The grounds surrounding the building have potential to be used for 22-a or 22-b. I am mainly concerned that 23-a might lead to 23-b. I think 24-a is the most important thing to keep the same, and 24-b is the most important thing to change. In a few years, I look forward to walking past Morse High School on High Street and seeing 25.

Mad-Libs example.



1. Historical House that you would like to preserve.



2. Recently Built House that you think sets a good example for future houses.



3. Renovated House that you think sets a good example for future renovations.



4. Smaller House that you wouldn't want to see go away.



5. Larger House that feels right for the neighborhood.



6. Best represents the character of your neighborhood.



7. Seems a bit out of place.

Photo Scavenger Hunt example.



## Library Square Vision Plan Coloring Book



Coloring Book example.



# Questions and Discussion