

Partnerships for a Successful Downtown New Bedford

TOWN HALL MEETING

Agenda

- Welcome
  - Kim Goddard | AHA! NB
  - Elissa Paquette | dNB Inc.
- Project & Process
- Consultant Report – André Leroux
- Breakout Stations – Priority Input
- Wrap up

Project & Process

THE PROJECT

New Bedford Economic Development Council RFP

Awarded Spring 2025

Project Scope – Management Services

- Programming
- Marketing
- Placemaking & Enhanced Maintenance
- Community Engagement
- Planning

THE PROCESS

Community Engagement - Data, Input & Listening

- September 2025 - Town Hall: Kick Off
- Sept – Dec 2025 – Online Survey
- Fall 2025 – Community Conversations
- Winter 2025 - MDI Grant Awarded to City of New Bedford for DDM
- January 2026 - Project Team Established
- Winter/Spring 2026 - Focus Groups
- April 2026 - Town Hall: Update & Priority Setting

Spring | Summer 2026 - Advisory Group Meetings

July 2026 - District Management Recommendations

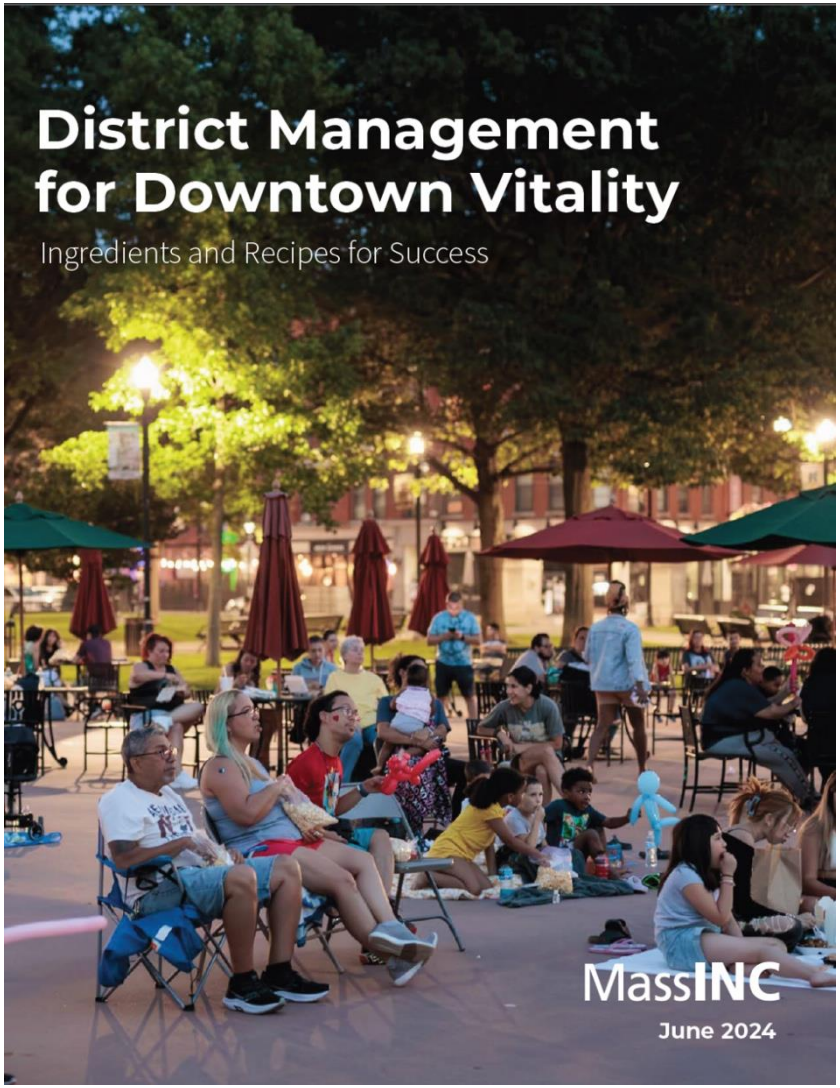
Downtown New Bedford

Project Status and Community Recommendations

April 27, 2026

Consultant Team:
André Leroux & Ann Burke
andre@leroux.solutions

District Management for Downtown Vitality



September 30th Public Meeting

MassINC report link:
https://massinc.org/research/district-management-for-downtown-vitality/

MassINC
Gateway Cities
Innovation Institute

District Management: Definition

Day-to-day operations of public spaces *with a defined scope of services and geographic boundary*.

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Place Governance: Definition

The people, organizations, and processes involved in making decisions for a particular place.

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No One Can Do It Alone

- Collaboration is crucial.
- Frequently used civic spaces require more care than even local government can provide.
- Public – Private – Nonprofit – Resident Partnership
- Requires a collaborative framework, and structures that support that collaboration.

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No One Can Do It Alone



What are supplemental services?

Refers to services that go above and beyond what the municipality can provide as a baseline.

Common examples include:

- Cleaning and landscaping
- Branding, marketing, and promotion
- Special events; arts and culture programming
- Small business assistance
- Social service outreach to street population
- Beautification, signage, public art
- Additional safety and security

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Caution!

Form Follows Function



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Successful Collaborations

1. Representative and responsive governance;
2. A shared work plan, with long-term goals and metrics;
3. Sufficient and sustainable funding;
4. A backbone or quarterback organization.

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Comparison of Tools

Form	Representative Governance	Shared Goals and Metrics	Sustainable Financing	Backbone Org
Informal Partnership	Maybe	Maybe	No	Maybe
Formal Partnership	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Yes
Main Street Program	Maybe	Yes	No—Costs Money	Yes
Cultural District	Maybe	Maybe	No	Yes
Parking Benefit District	No	Spending plan	Yes	No
District Improvement Financing (DIF)	No	Spending plan	Yes	No
Business Improvement District (BID)	Maybe	Yes	Yes	Yes

Fall 2025:
AHA! Survey

216 total responses

- New Bedford Residents - 49.5%
- Downtown Residents – 9.3%
- Property Owners – 27.3%
- Business Owners – 19.4%
- Visitors – 12.5%
- “Other Relationship” – 30.5%

NOTE: Respondents could select more than one category

- 73% female
- 73% white
- 54% age 55 or older





Survey: Public Safety & Perception

- Of 160 respondents, 52.5% felt that downtown NB was welcoming, while 42% noted that it could be better and only 5% felt it was not welcoming
- While 96.8% of respondents feel safe during the day, only 65% feel safe at night



Local businesses, especially restaurants, represent main attraction for survey respondents



Percentage of respondents who travel to downtown to eat at restaurants

At least once a month - 92%

At least once a week – 41%

At least daily – 10%



80.1% of respondents attend an event downtown at least once per month



Nearly 70% of respondents shop downtown at least once per month

Survey: Desired Community Improvements

Top five categories (154 respondents) in terms of perceived importance:

- Increase in Cultural Events – 73%
- Increase in Public Art and Murals – 61%
- More Convenient Parking – 57%
- Longer Business Hours – 51%
- More Trash Barrels and Cleanups – 49%

Fall 2025: Community Conversations (SRPEDD)



The conversations identified the following top priorities for the downtown:

1. **Increasing the availability of affordable housing stock and the overall number of residents downtown**
2. **Physical improvements to the downtown while preserving the historical architecture and character**
3. **Repair and strengthen relationships among businesses, residents, community organizations, and the city. In other words, improve collaboration and reduce polarization around the downtown.**

Other topics mentioned multiple times:

- **Public restrooms**
- **Improved signage**
- **Establish walking trails**
- **Improvements to Parking Management**
- **Better Integration of the Commuter Rail Station to Downtown**
- **A Public Relations Campaign to Rehabilitate Downtown's Image**
- **A Grocery Store**
- **Finding a Dignified Approach to the Homeless Population**

“We have lived on the edge of downtown for 40 years and, candidly, it is unrecognizable - in a very positive way - from when we moved here. And, by association, it is more welcoming.” (Survey)

“While I understand most of the businesses Downtown are struggling, shops should be open at least through 8pm for AHA Night.” (Survey)

“I grew up here and have always felt welcome downtown. The challenge is having a reason to go there.” (Survey)

“I work downtown so I'm used to the people. While they argue loudly (daily) and often have physical confrontations, they don't engage with strangers or act aggressive to strangers. I completely understand how people who are not used to the area would have reservations walking by the front steps of the library.” (Survey)

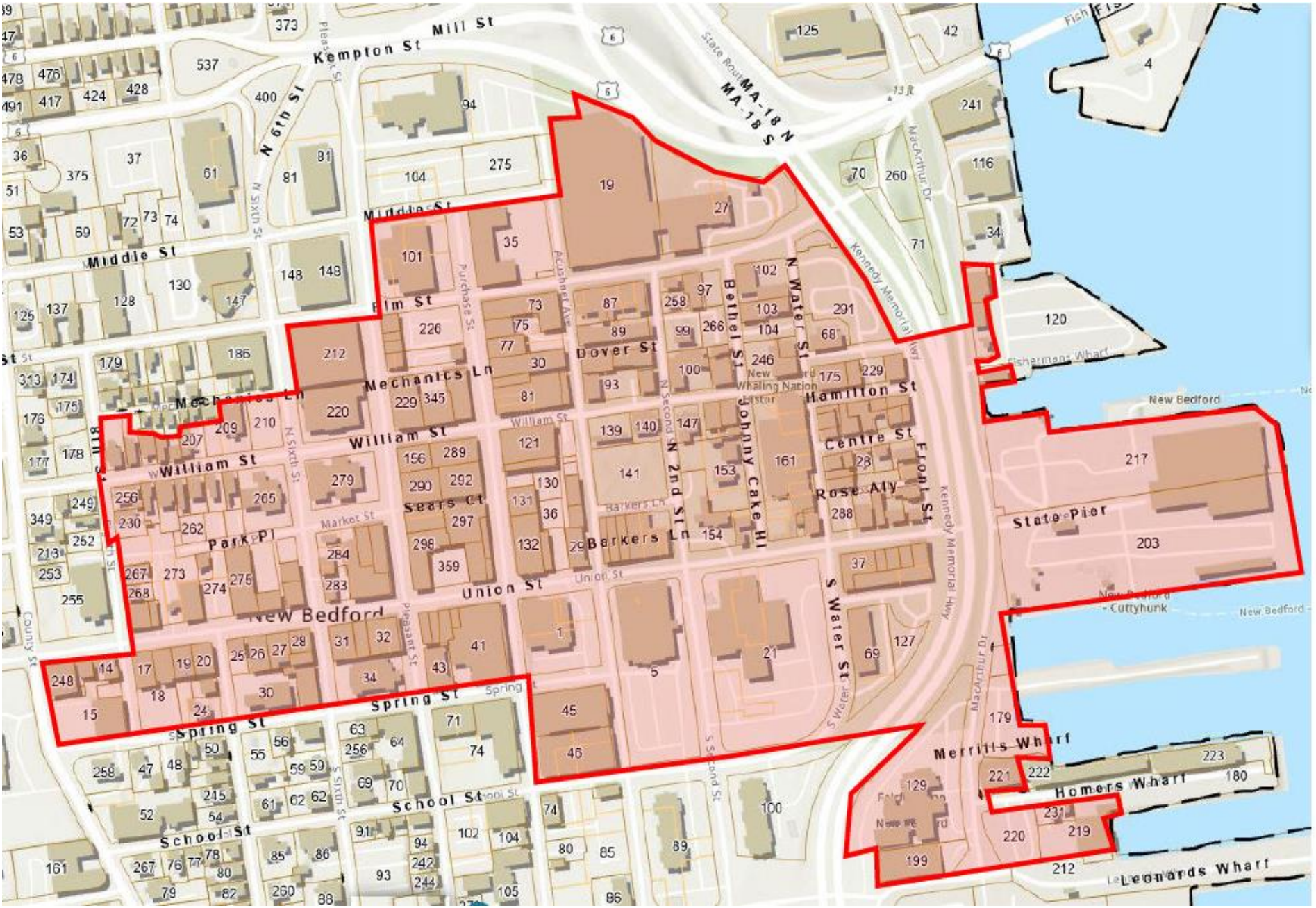
Current Phase of Downtown Project

- Consultant team: Andre Leroux & Ann Burke
- Funds: $30,000
- Grant provided by: The state via the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI)
- Project coordination partners:
  - AHA!
  - Downtown New Bedford Inc.
  - City of New Bedford
  - New Bedford Economic Development Council

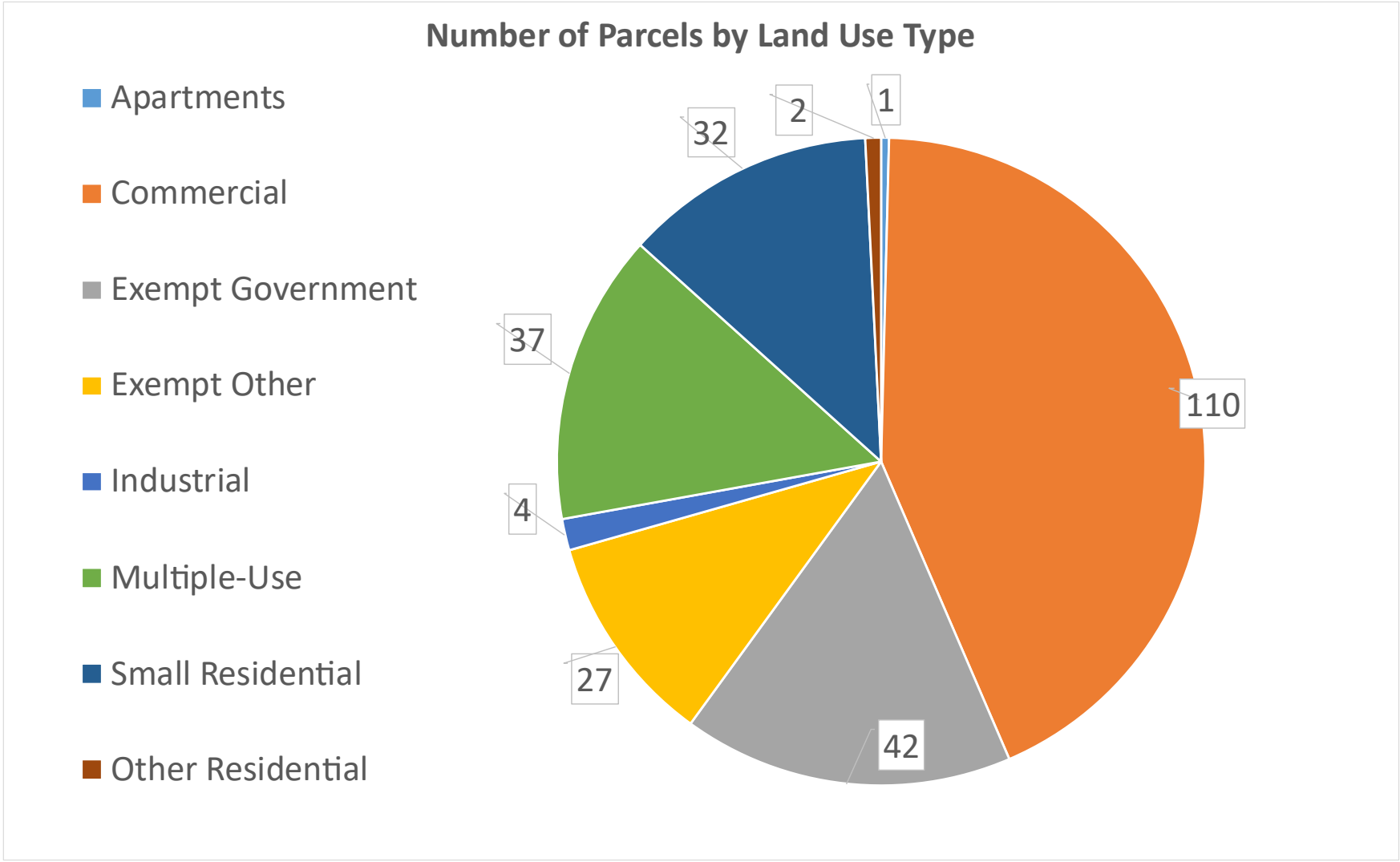
Downtown NB Project Goals Between Now and July 2026

1. Develop a set of actions to improve the downtown informed by the people who live, work, and invest there;
2. Put together a realistic budget for those priorities; and
3. Make our best recommendations for how to raise the money and carry out the agenda.

Downtown Boundary for Study Purposes (2026)



Number of Parcels by Land Use Type



*small residential includes multi-house, single family, two family, three family, residential condos, and small transient group quarters

Source: Assessor Data; MA DLS Property Type Classification Codes (2019)

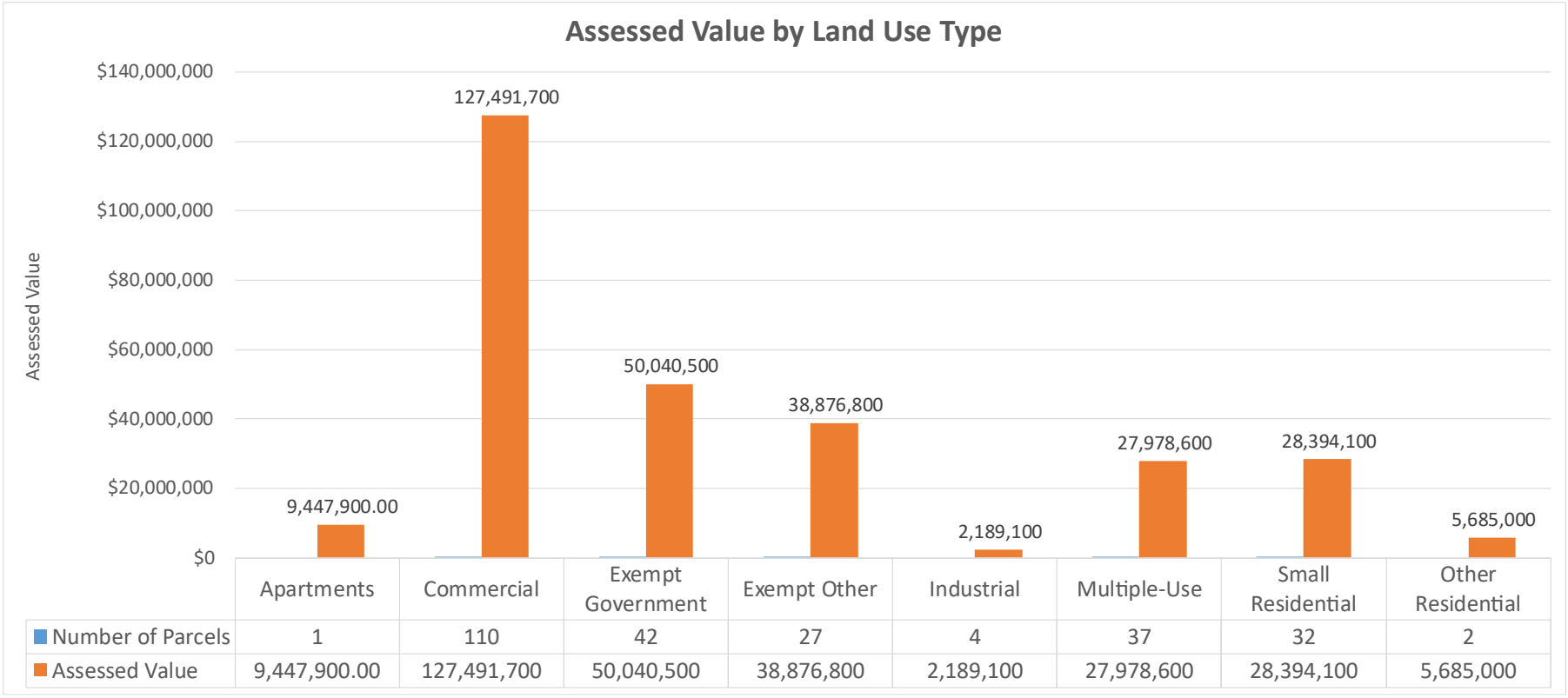
Downtown New Bedford

Total Number of Parcels:
255

Total Assessed Value:
$ 290,103,700

Total Distinct Owners: 175

Assessed Value by Land Use Type



Focus Groups & Interviews (Thank you to hosts)

1. Residents (YMCA)
2. Large property owners (Whaling Museum)
3. Small property owners (No Problemo)
4. Food & hospitality (Tia Maria's)
5. Business tenants (Bristol Community College)
6. Arts and culture (NB Whaling National Historical Park)
7. Nonprofits (Greater NB Community Health Center)

Recommendations: Top 10 Themes

1. More community policing in general and security presence around key locations like the parking garages, Custom House Square, and bus station
2. Social service outreach to the street population and facilities for the unhoused
3. Cleaning, landscaping, maintenance, pick up garbage
4. Better coordination among downtown groups including unified messaging and one place to find event and business information
5. Improve parking solutions, including safe, discounted off-street parking for employees and making it easier to make quick visits to downtown businesses
6. Public restrooms
7. Activate first-floor storefronts and reduce vacancies
8. Improve connections with the train station, waterfront, and parking areas with a free trolley or shuttle, safer crossings of Route 18, and better signage and wayfinding
9. Safe, fun spaces for families and youth to hang out and visit
10. Better teamwork, including a positive, “can-do” attitude from everyone and better coordination among departments and boards at City Hall

Public Safety

- Increase community policing
  - Dedicate at least two beat cops to downtown
  - Bring back bike cops
- Increase security presence and social service outreach in key locations that feel unsafe, including:
  - the bus station
  - Custom House Square
  - in front of the Bank of America
- Improve lighting and visibility in these areas and corridors connecting Purchase Street and lower Union
- Expand police substation at the bus station
- Enforce local ordinances to address vacant and problem properties

Parking

- Make it clear to visitors where to park downtown and provide wayfinding for getting to key destinations from there
- Provide more security presence at the garages, especially at night
- Establish dedicated, discounted off-street parking for downtown employees
- Leverage private lots for other users at off-peak times (example: employee parking during the day, resident parking at night)
- Make it easier to pay for on-street parking with a credit card
- Provide some free pick-up/delivery spaces for restaurants
- Make short visits easier by charging only 25 cents for the first 30 minutes
- Stop ticketing expired inspection stickers when there is no parking violation
- Be clear and consistent with parking hours of enforcement
- Establish a new downtown garage
  - Move bus station and turn it into a garage
  - Deck over the YMCA parking lot

Services & Amenities

- Cleaner streets, sidewalks, pick up garbage
- Snow removal for all sidewalks and intersections
- Better landscaping, more trees and flowers
- Provide more public toilets to serve families, visitors, and the unhoused
- Establish a drop-in facility for the unhoused to be able to access services, charge phones, take a shower
- Provide more social service outreach on the streets to address mental illness, addiction, and homelessness
- Establish a new visitor center, or work with the National Park to provide more local information about businesses and activities
- Allow businesses to store outdoor dining furniture and materials off-season at City/DPW facilities and assist with removal and installation
- Identify appropriate locations for tour buses to drop-off, pick-up, and park

Business Activity

- Create one consolidated events calendar and downtown map with businesses and destinations
- Develop walking paths that highlight different themes (i.e. history, culture, fashion, fishing industry, world culture, etc.)
- Maintain consistent opening hours
- Re-establish a downtown farmer's market
- Attract a small grocery store and full-service pharmacy
- Create more frequent programming bringing people downtown and extend the duration to include more businesses and partners
- Activate vacant ground-floor storefronts
- Encourage more "pop-ups" and art installations
- Provide grants to independent artists and local festivals
- Convene a "downtown reinvention" group to address how to support a stronger retail sector, and how to attract companies downtown
- Extend business hours into evenings and throughout week
    - Have a café open after 4 pm

Transportation & Wayfinding

- Establish a free shuttle that loops through the downtown and includes the train station
- Slow down Route 18 for safer pedestrian crossings
- Have buses for UMass-Dartmouth students to visit downtown on weekends, especially evenings
- Make sure all street corners have signs
- Make it easier to find attractions
- Create a system for clearing all sidewalks and intersections of snow
- Better manage street and sidewalk construction
  - Advise businesses and property owners at least 3 months in advance
  - Convene a working group to mitigate local impact
  - Post signs saying that businesses are still open
- Move the bus station to the train station area to create a “multimodal hub”

Housing & Development

- Develop more housing downtown for a mix of incomes
- Promote housing above existing first-floor uses
- Assign a liaison to work with each property owner to work with city departments and abutters on redevelopment projects to smooth process
- Assign a liaison to work with businesses on permitting and other issues
- Avoid surprise fees and requirements with a more consolidated permitting process
- Modernize municipal systems and speed up permits and applications
- Reduce favoritism among developers and property owners
- Support the efforts of smaller developers to access local and state grant funding
- Incorporate artists into the planning and design process for infrastructure improvements

Families & Youth

- Work with local nonprofits and businesses to develop more “drop-in” activities for young people, or time they can reserve for self-directed activities with friends.
- Recruit more family destinations and activities to the downtown
- Support independent artists to work with young people on transforming underutilized spaces
- Make public spaces downtown more family friendly and generate activity that increases foot traffic
- Develop more welcoming green spaces and safe spaces to “hang out”

Connection to Waterfront

- Improve the Route 18 pedestrian crossing at Union Street
- Encourage downtown pedestrians to visit the waterfront and vice versa through clear walking paths and signage; make clear where visitors are welcomed and where they should respect active working areas
- Explore feasibility of local marina improvements
- Provide directions and opportunities for visiting downtown to cruise ship visitors
- Work with fishing industry to identify opportunities to tell story of the working waterfront and make it live for visitors and New Bedford residents, especially local youth

Marketing & Branding

- Create a unified online portal with AHA!, DNB Inc, City Tourism Office and others that provides a “one stop” for event and programming information
- Create itineraries and walking trails through online maps, printed brochures, artist-designed stickers for buildings, QR codes, or painted lines or symbols on sidewalks.
- Market the city via the MBTA to bring more visitors on the train—and make it easier to get from the station to downtown with signage, shuttles, a safe and well-marked pedestrian pathway
- Hire a PR firm to promote positive media stories about New Bedford’s downtown to compete with peer communities like Plymouth and Quincy
- Develop positive shared messaging and materials for all community partners to use
- Take inspiration from places like Portland, Maine

District Management & Coordination

- Establish an integrated email list to share information among all downtown stakeholders
- Hire an experienced full-time professional to manage the downtown effort
- Get more people on the street, whether that is an ambassador program, the police, social workers, or partnerships with local organizations
- Be transparent about what the City already collects in fees and taxes and how that money is spent, and how any new revenue collected would add value on top of that
- Promote better coordination, teamwork, and a positive “can-do” attitude among everyone involved

Additional Interviews & Focus Groups Welcome

1. Renters
2. Youth
3. Families
4. Ethnic businesses & communities

Contact: Andre Leroux at andre@leroux.solutions

Next Project Steps

1. Today's meeting video, presentation materials, and community feedback will be posted online
2. Consultant team will assemble an advisory group to build a budget for community priorities
3. Opportunities to learn from district management leaders from other cities
4. Consultants will issue a report in July with recommendations for how to raise revenue and organize local partners
5. Advisory group will shift to implementation