



CITY OF EASTHAMPTON • MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

**Nicole LaChapelle**

December 18, 2020

Department of Housing and Community Development  
MA Downtown Initiative Program

RE: City of Easthampton – Local Rapid Recovery Planning Application

Dear Ms. Hahn,

The City of Easthampton and the Greater Easthampton Area Chamber of Commerce seek technical assistance from the Department of Housing and Community Development through the MA Downtown Initiative (MDI) Local Rapid Recovery Planning program. Both the City of Easthampton and Greater Easthampton Area Chamber of Commerce have actively supported local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our request seeks consulting services to assist Easthampton with the following tasks:

- **Convene** various business stakeholders to understand better what efforts have been effective
- **Listen & document** the impacts and needs of local businesses and compile them into a cohesive document
- **Articulate** a sector-based action plan understanding that a bar/restaurant's needs are different from an office/service.

The City and Chamber have identified the following priorities that we aim to have our Local Recovery Planning process address:

- ***Top Priority Short Term*** – Support the completion of and launch the Chamber's "Shop Where I Live" hyper-local online shopping platform.
- ***Second Priority Short Term*** – Create distinct sector-based actions, identify geographic areas for, and identify participants to convert parking and other outdoor spaces for restaurants, retail, or events.
- ***Third Priority Short Term*** – Provide enhanced Technical Assistance to business owners for navigating loan funds, pivot plans, and marketing/promotion.

- ***Top Priority Medium or Long Term*** – Implement essential wayfinding elements focused on directing visitors to our core downtown areas swiftly upon completion of the ongoing MDI Downtown Initiative wayfinding project.
- ***Second Priority Medium or Long Term*** – Grow business participation in Blueprint Easthampton, a recent initiative to expand available resources to support small business owners and entrepreneurs in the City of Easthampton.
- ***Third Priority Medium or Long Term*** – Convert the Chamber’s brick and mortar office into a small-scale co-working space and create other pop-up opportunities in vacant storefronts.

The City of Easthampton Planning Department, the Mayor, and the Chamber of Commerce value formulating specific action plans to ensure we can be adaptive and responsive. Over the past nine months, our accomplishments with the City and Chamber’s effective relationship demonstrate our ability to implement community-based action steps. We are focused on actions best accomplished by existing Chamber staff, City boards or committees (such as the Economic Development and Industrial Committee) for recovery planning. We can align other action items with other funding sources and technical support with other ongoing projects such as business growth (Blueprint Easthampton) or infrastructure (2021 Union Street TIP) with technical support. To implement specific action items derived from the Recovery Plan the City and Chamber with representatives from the EDIC, Blueprint Easthampton, and City Council will convene as a steering committee to initiate suitable short term projects. The City Planner and Executive Director of the Chamber will act as staff support to further manage funding or administrative functions to initiate, complete, and promote projects.

The City and Chamber are eager to partner together again to the benefit of our local economy. Both entities’ track record to cultivate businesses tools is strong, but a bit siloed, as detailed below. Our core downtown area (Cottage Street, Union Street and Main Street) with the adjacent Mill District contain hundreds of small and medium sized businesses. This concentration of commerce, a consultant convening stakeholders, public and private, will result in an achievable Recovery Plan to best leverage.

Since March 2020, the City and the Chamber are proud of the supports offered to local businesses listed below:

**Greater Easthampton Area Chamber**

- Extensive member/community communications aimed at providing information on state mandates, legislation, programming, resources, and available funding
- As a team member of The Hampshire County Regional Tourism Council, The Chamber in partnership with the Northampton and Amherst Area Chamber’s has convened with the focus to develop a strategic marketing plan that can be ready for launch as soon as it is safe to do so
- Participated in meetings with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency
- Sharing and promoting the state’s #MyLocalMA campaign and free toolkits local businesses can use in their promotion and marketing

- Participated in a public/private partnership with the City of Easthampton and private donors to provide \$30,000 to 31 local qualifying businesses to help with reopening costs associated with COVID-19
- Partnered with Easthampton City Arts in creating the “Greater Easthampton Holiday Gift Guide” listing artisans, retailers, and service providers and has allowed both groups to highlight members outside of their organizations
- Refocused efforts to nurture, maintain and promote the Chambers Easthampton Gift Card program especially as part of our overall Shop Local initiative in response to COVID-19

### **City of Easthampton**

- Planning Department put forth an amendment to zoning in the Downtown Business District to remove lengthy land use permitting processes
- The Mayor’s office and Planning created a mechanism to allow the conversion of on-street parking spaces to dining
- Easthampton City Arts allocated funds and received donations to create a successful Artist Grant program
- In partnership with PVPC, Easthampton was the lead community to apply for and received \$900,000 through the Community Development Block Grant program for microbusiness grant program with seven other municipalities
- The Mayor’s Office partnered with the Attorney General, Chamber, and private donors to provide \$30,000 to 31 local qualifying businesses to help with reopening costs associated with COVID-19
- The City with the Kauffmann Foundation, Schmidt Futures, and the National League of Cities (NLC) launched “[Blueprint Easthampton](#),” a dynamic resource map for micro and small business to find support
- As a part of NLC’s City Innovation Ecosystem project, the City has committed to help informal entrepreneurs evolve into formal entrepreneurs within Easthampton
- The Mayor formed a reopening task force conducted an Easthampton Business Impact Survey in July/August, identifying significant impacts on local businesses
- The CPA committee allocated \$300,000 towards the creation of a residential rental relief program
- Easthampton City Arts held a COVID-compliant outdoor concert at the municipal parking lot. They will be seeking funding from MassDOT Shared Streets program to turn this into a spring series

Our small businesses fuel Easthampton’s creative and innovator ecosystems. We are eager to have professional consulting to formulate a Recovery Plan to protect these assets in real-time.

Sincerely,

---

Nicole LaChapelle  
Mayor

---

Moe Belliveau  
Chamber Executive Director

---

Jeff Bagg  
City Planner