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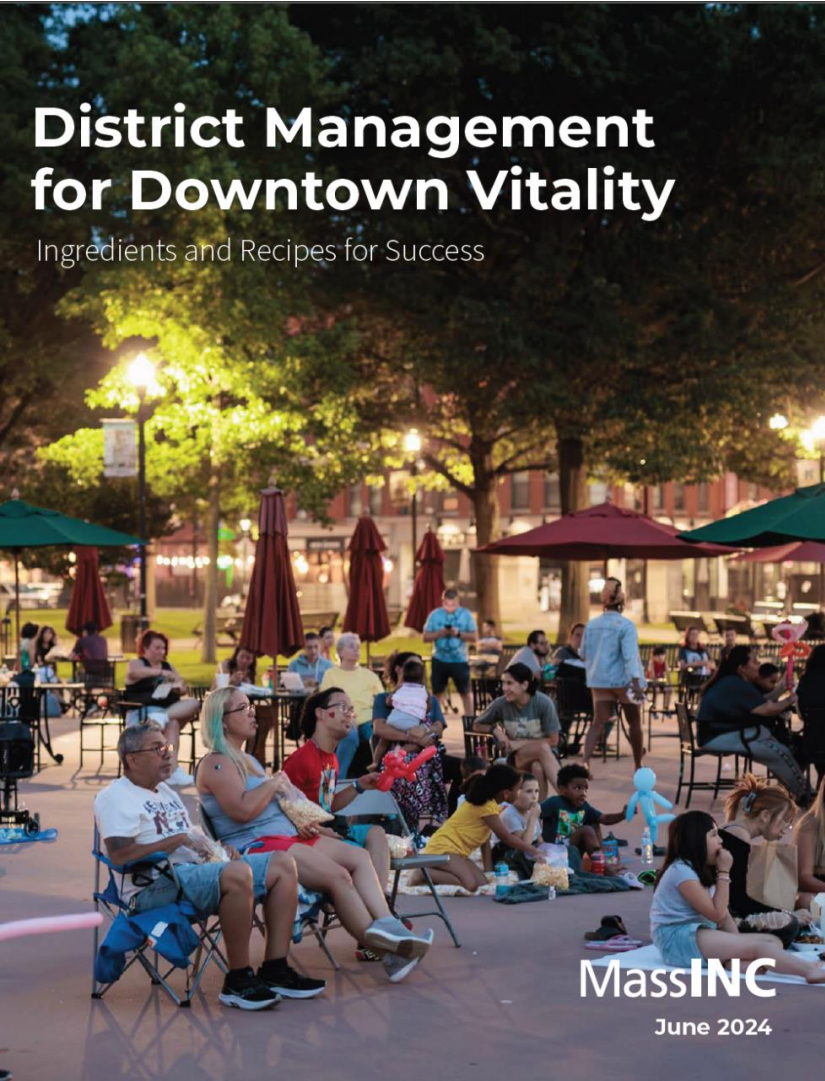
Gateway Cities

Innovation Institute

André Leroux

Director

MassINC Gateway Cities Innovation Institute



District Management for Downtown Vitality

Ingredients and Recipes for Success

MassINC
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Downtown New Bedford **September 30, 2025**

Presented by André Leroux

Gateway Cities Innovation Institute

aleroux@massinc.org

MassINC report link:

<https://massinc.org/research/district-management-for-downtown-vitality/>

District Management: Definition

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

Place Governance: Definition

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

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.

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

Caution!

Form Follows Function



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.

Informal Partnership

Example: Reviviendo Gateway Initiative (RGI), Lawrence

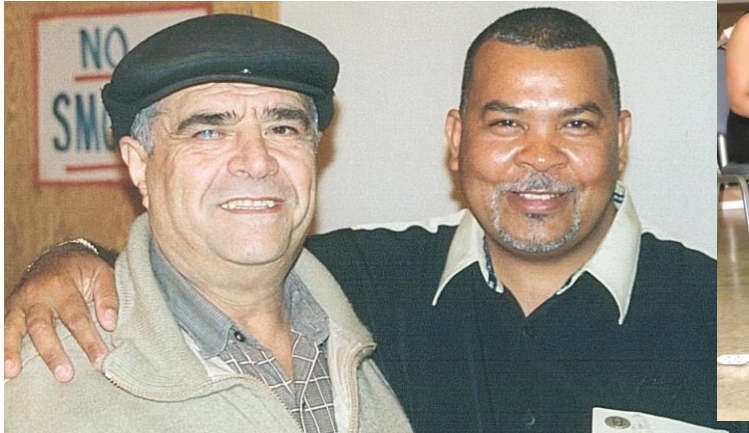


- Started as a community planning effort
- Co-led by two local nonprofits with strong resident membership
- Evolved into a revitalization coalition
- Supported by philanthropy
- Lasted about 5 years



Partnerships

“...it’s the work together, the struggles, the victories and the celebrations that teach us how to overcome our differences. We know we need all our people to succeed.”



Joining hands at the site of the former St. Lawrence O’Toole Church in Lawrence, (from left) Mary Young and Miguel Sánchez of Lawrence, Nonie Gravel of Pelham, N.H., and Pablo Urbaez are working to turn the empty piece of land into a family center. They are this week’s Bridge Builders.

“The place that brings us together”

By Fernando Santos
 Eagle-Tribune Writer

BRIDGE BUILDERS

It used to be the heart of the North Common neighborhood, a place where Irish, German and French Canadian families converged to worship God, share experiences and nurture friendships.

But the triangular corner lot where St. Lawrence O’Toole Church once stood now lies empty, covered only by a thin layer of grass and weeds that sprang up soon after the structurally unsound building was razed 21 years ago.

With the church’s demise, hundreds of parishioners moved out of the Immigrant City. And while many have never again returned to the neighborhood, others, like Ruth “Nonie” Gravel of Pelham, N.H., keep coming back and won’t rest until the lot at East Haverhill and Newbury streets becomes yet again “the place that brings us all together.”

Gravel and former St. Lawrence parishioner Mary Young, a 75-year-old Berkeley Street resident, have joined forces with newcomers Miguel Sánchez, 46, and Pablo Urbaez, 59, to turn the empty piece of land into a brotherhood of nations.

“We want to build a bridge there, a bridge that will connect the past with the future. Anglos with Latinos. It’s a bridge that will connect people with people,” said Gravel, 63.

The bridge already has a name — Our House/Nuestra Casa Family Learning Center — and if all goes as planned, it will be the epicenter of learning, socializing and sharing at North Common.

In Youne’s words. “It will mean just

what St. Lawrence meant to the neighborhood folks 40 years ago and will prove that we are all the same, (that) we are all God’s children.”

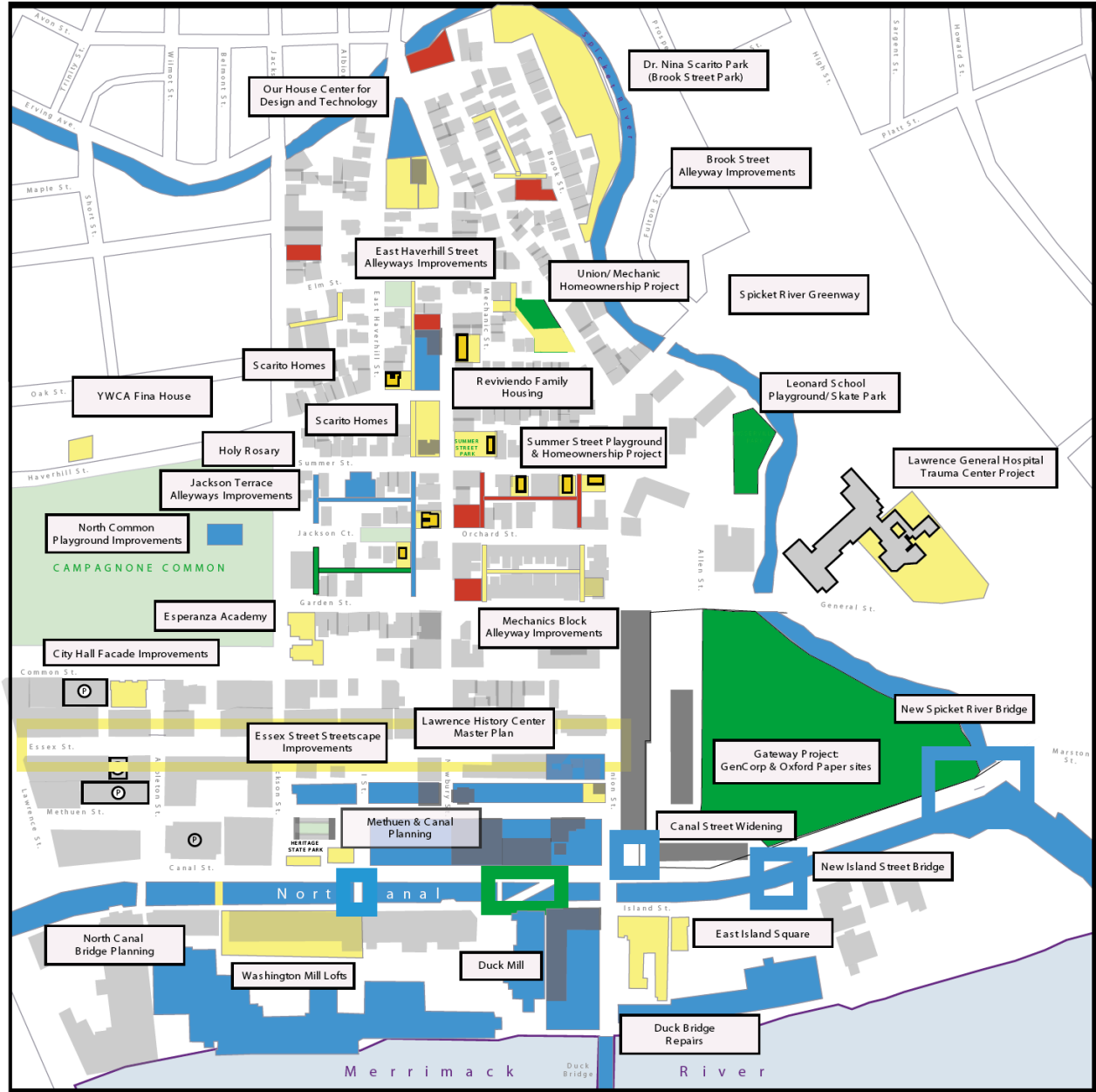
The goal is to offer, at Our House, English as a Second Language and Spanish classes, after-school programs, vocational training, as well as a library, computer room and gym to be used by local residents.

The project is the fruit of an effort by the North Common Neighborhood Association; Friends of St. Lawrence, a group of 400 parishioners and alumni of St. Lawrence Church and school; Merrimack College; and the nonprofit Lawrence Community Works.

“It has been the best experience I’ve had in my life,” Sánchez said. “It has changed the way Latinos think about Anglos, and vice versa, and that’s something we need here in Lawrence. And if we make this (project) happen, we can make many other good things happen in the city.”

Urbaez agrees, adding that Our House could be the first step toward turning the somewhat decaying North Common area into a place Lawrenceans can be proud of.

“This is a good neighborhood, it has good people, but it can be better,” he said. “A door closed, but we’re now opening another. We’re picking up the pieces of yesterday and using them to build tomorrow.”



NORTH COMMON NEIGHBORHOOD

COMMUNITY PLANNING INITIATIVES

- Emerging Priority
- Planning
- Happening
- Accomplished

Informal Partnership

Example: Love the Ave, New Bedford

THE **A**  **E**



- Launched by the Community Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) and small grant funding in 2014
- Neighborhood planning: partners and vision
- Secured more resources, including a 4-year TDI designation and Fellow from MassDevelopment

Formal Partnership

Example: Lawrence Partnership, Lawrence



- Led by a coalition of major institutions, both private, public, and nonprofit
- Members of the partnership help sustain the budget and align their work and investments
- Shared vision and principles
- Two full-time staff

Formal Partnership

Example: The Lowell Plan, Lowell

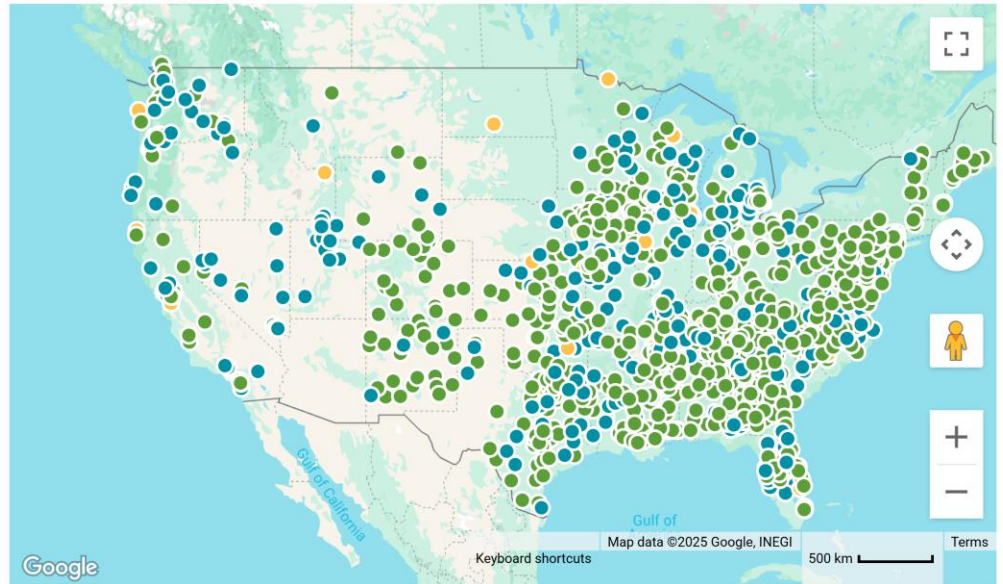


Committed to enhancing the economic vitality of Lowell



- Founded in 1980 to sustain a productive dialogue among the city's key leaders
- Clear vision: "Lowell will be the best city of its size in America"
- One staff; mostly private sector board

Main Street Organizations



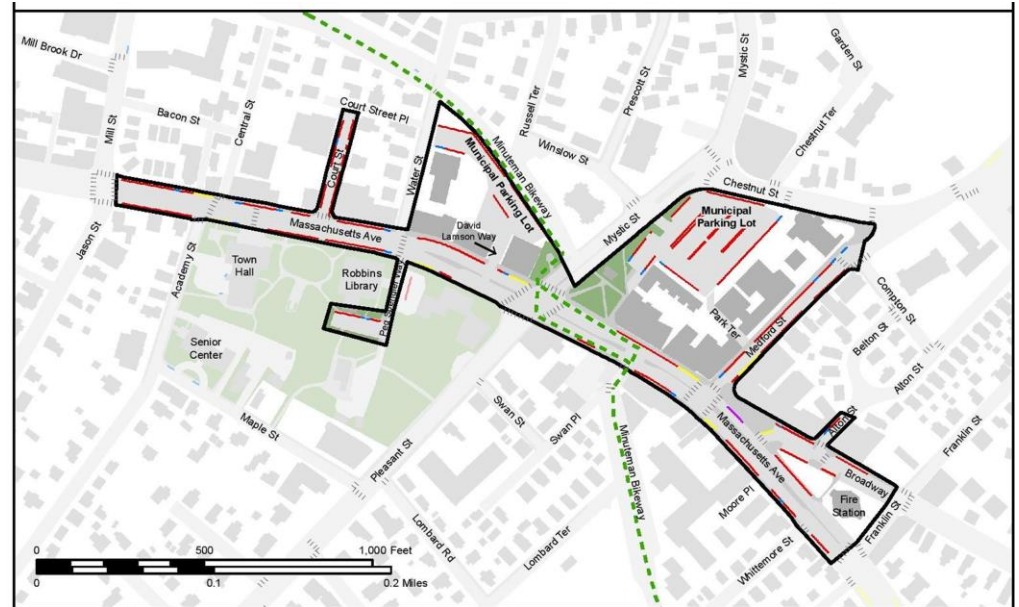
- Network of 1600 organizations across the country
- Proprietary material and intellectual property
- Membership dues
- “Four Step Process”

Main Street Organizations



- Boston Main Streets: 20 independent organizations
- City of Boston established a Main Streets Foundation to help support local groups
- Spends \$1.5 million in CDBG funds

Parking Benefit Districts



- \$200,000 generated in FY2023
- Used for public space improvements, pedestrian safety
- Advisory Committee

Cultural Districts

Example: Seaport, The Ave, The Point

new bedford
creative



- Full-time coordinator
- Budget funded by philanthropy and the City (about \$100k from local lodging tax)
- Staffs other programs and projects as well
- More behind the scenes; works with consortium of groups

District Improvement Financing (DIF) Example: Downtown Brockton



- New property tax revenue over a baseline level gets generated for investments in a district
- Brockton's DIF revenue (about \$400K) goes into the general fund and the City Council allocates about \$250-350K back to downtown work

District Improvement Financing (DIF)

Example: Shirley Ave, Revere

- Planning stage: estimate the increase in property value during the next 25 years over today's baseline
- Determine how much of the “increment” to assign to district reinvestment: anywhere from 5%-50%
- For example, \$200-300 million in new property value could generate \$1.8 to \$22 million over those 25 years
- Could be used to support a district management organization and infrastructure improvements



Business Improvement Districts (BID)

Example: Worcester



- Cultural placemaking
- Ambassador program (contracted with Streetplus)
- Cleaning, safety, hospitality
- Marketing & public relations



- 100 properties, 78 acres
- 501(c)3
- 4 staffers



Business Improvement Districts (BID)

Example: Taunton



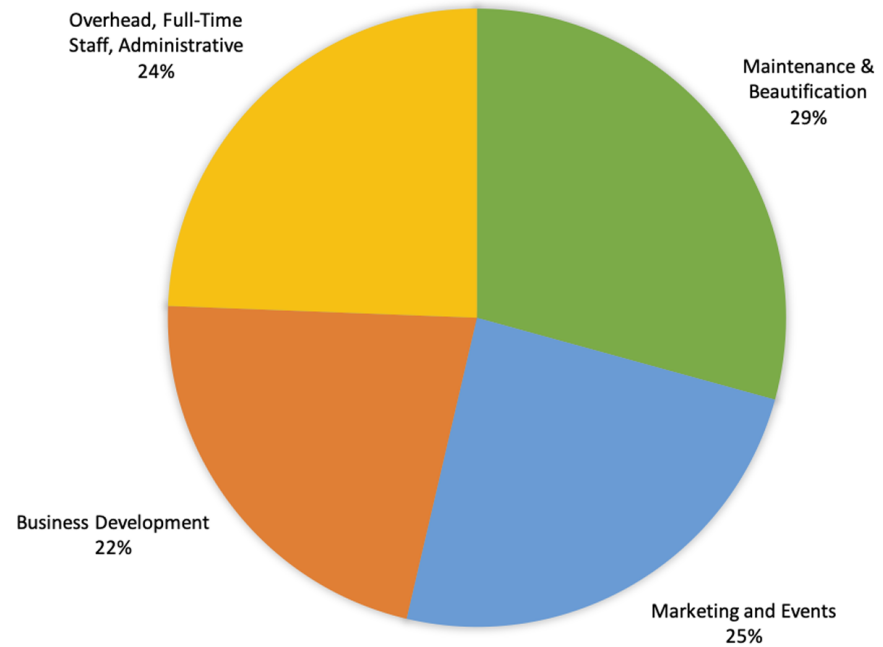
DOWNTOWN **taunton**
FOUNDATION

- BID formed in 2010 as 501(c)6 membership organization
- Foundation formed in 2011 as 501(c)3 nonprofit
- .5% of assessed property value funds operations
- Activities: daily sidewalk cleaning, storefront window washing, supplemental snow plowing, beautification, collaborative marketing, and public safety enhancements

Business Improvement Districts (BID)

Example: Hyannis

2023 BID and DHCDC Total Expenditures

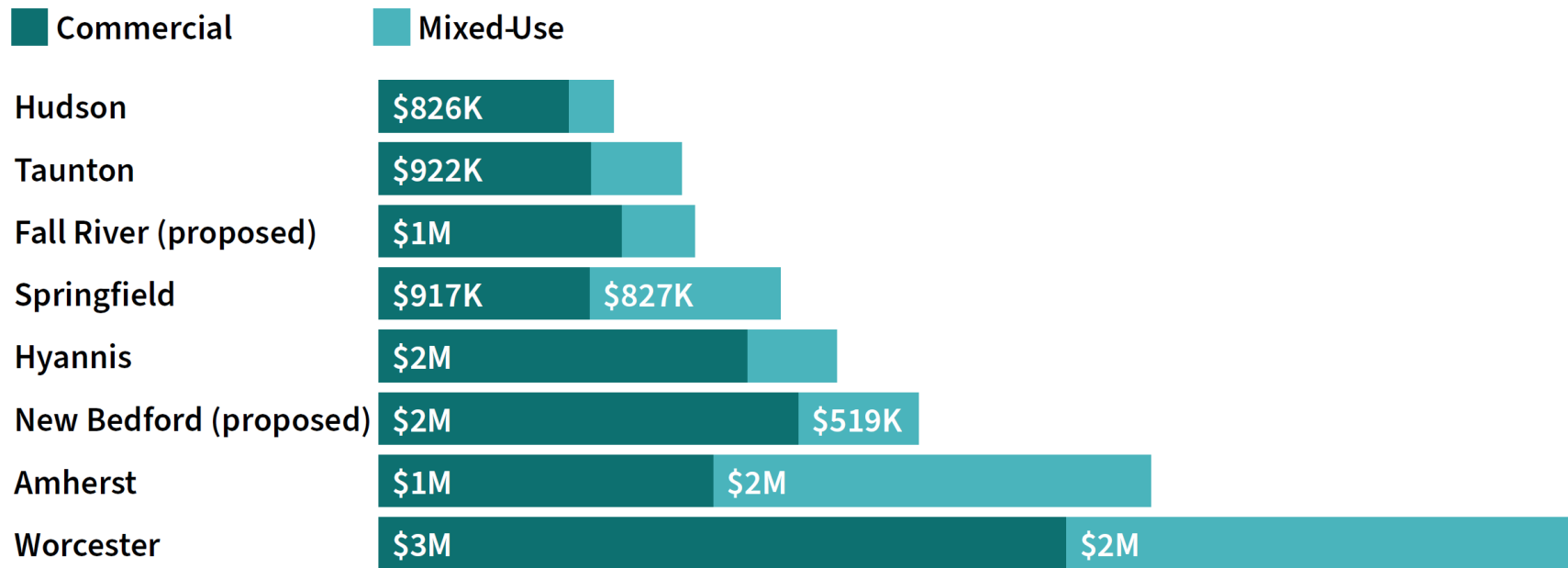


**Representing \$485,000 in total spending in 2023*

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

Figure 4: Total commercial and mixed-use valuation per acre in selected BIDs



Source: Authors' analysis of MassGIS parcel data

How Much Revenue Does a District Management Organization Need?

- A strong Gateway City downtown DMO would ideally spend \$300k for staffing and other fixed costs, which could include: rent, insurance, accounting, supplies, etc.
- Downtown Worcester BID spends only \$200k on staffing and fixed costs; Downtown Boston spends more than \$1 million
- A strong Gateway City downtown DMO would ideally spend \$400k on programmatic costs. How these funds get allocated would depend on the district's priorities, but could include: events, cleaning and landscaping, marketing, cultural placemaking, small business assistance, and more
- Springfield and Worcester BIDs seem to spend more than \$400k annually on cleaning and maintenance
- District start-up costs likely between \$75-150k

Putting Together a Robust DMO Budget

- Starting a downtown DMO requires \$150,000. The state offers grants to cover half of this expense.
- Operating a robust DMO that provides the full suite of services requires a budget of at least \$700,000 annually.
- The community can initially generate \$350,000 annually from BID assessments, and these proceeds will increase at 2.5 percent per annum.
- DIF produces \$25,000 in Year 2 and grows at 2.5 percent per annum from generalized appreciation in the district;
- DIF proceeds jump by \$75,000 in Years 6 and 8, as redevelopment projects bring additional value to the tax rolls.
- Private fundraising raises \$75,000 in Year 1 and increases by 10 percent per annum.
- State resources cover half the start-up costs. And in each year, state grants provide sufficient resources to ensure
- the DMO has a budget of at least \$700,000.

While Massachusetts has a strong district management toolset, the Downtown Vitality Act provides a key missing ingredient.

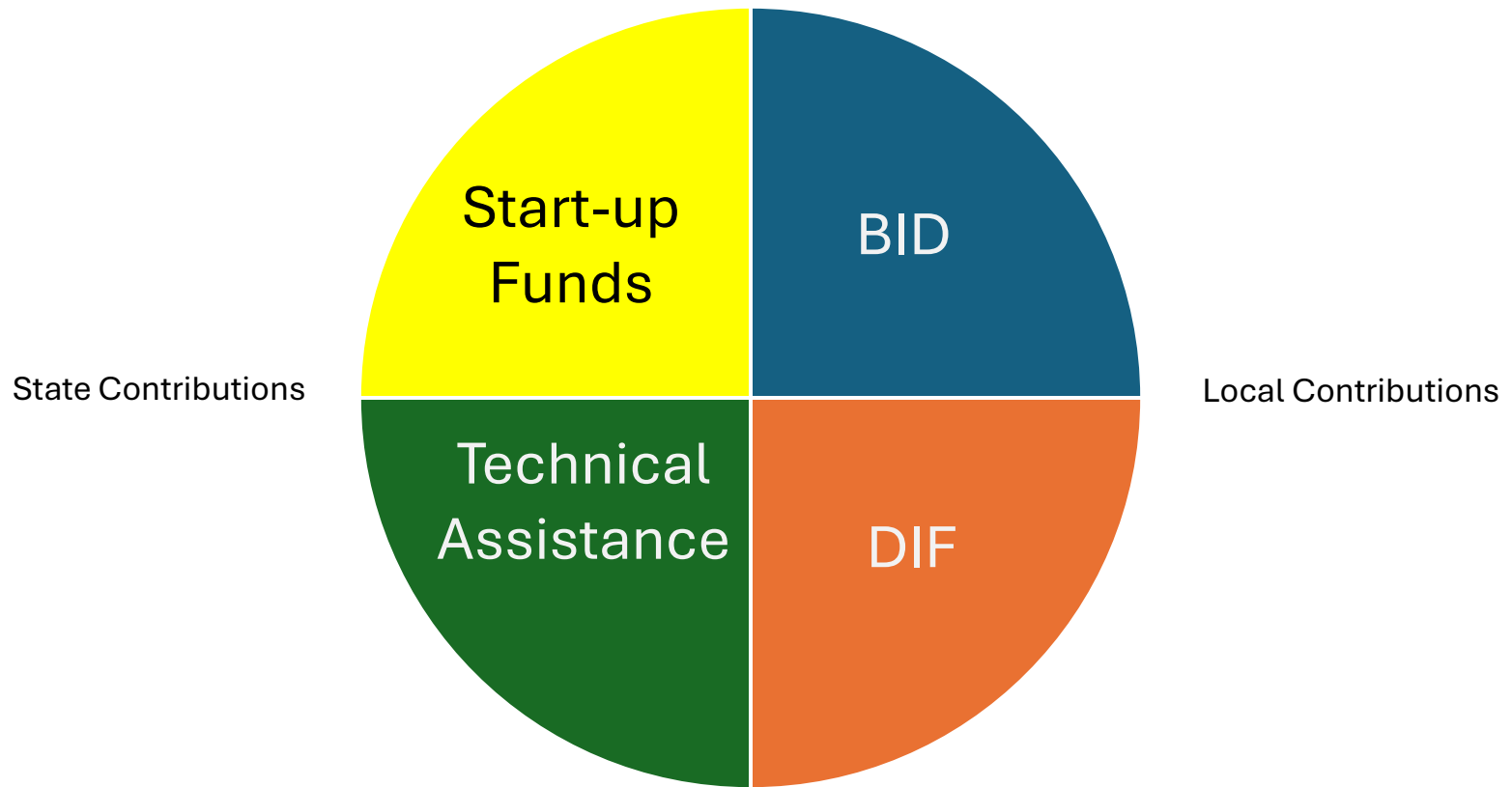


Figure 7: Funding structure for hypothetical neighborhood/town center DMO from start-up to Year 10

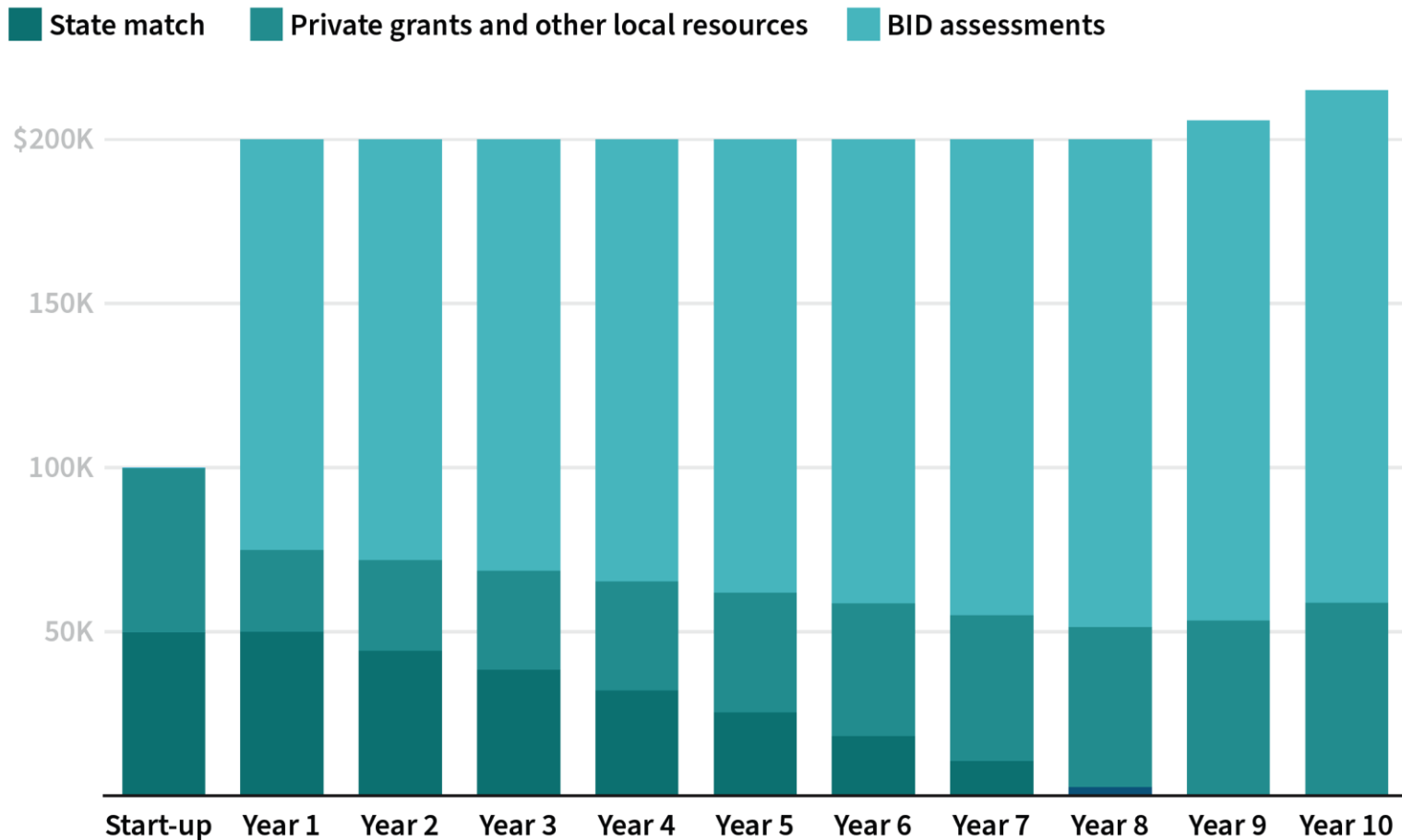


Figure 5: Funding structure for hypothetical downtown DMO from start-up to Year 10 districts

