

DOWNTOWN LAWRENCE
ACTION & ENGAGEMENT PLAN
ESTRATEGIA DE ACCIÓN PARA EL
CENTRO DE LAWRENCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FEBRUARY 2020



_INTERFACE STUDIO LLC



To see the full plan, please visit:
www.wearelawrence.org

project goals

- › Liven Up Downtown
- › Design Great Streets and Public Places
- › Encourage Mixed Use Development



Study area map

public engagement

During the course of the planning process, the project team heard from more than 500 community members about their vision for the future of Downtown Lawrence.

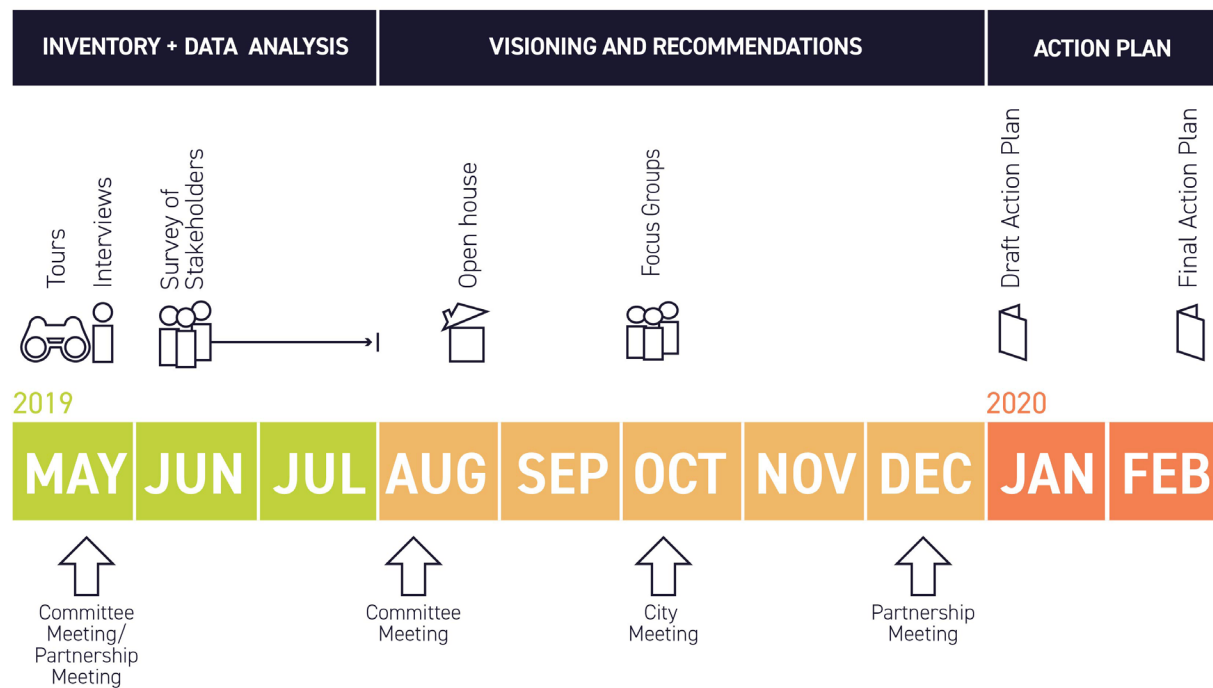
The public engagement process included:

8 Stakeholder Interviews

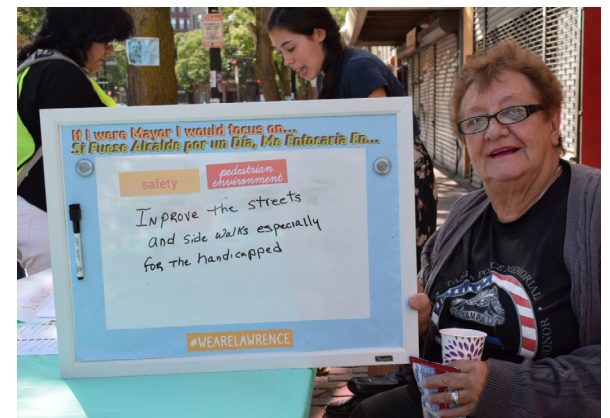
414 Survey Respondents

150+ Open House Participants

23 Focus Group Participants



Plan process



Activities from the Ciclovía Open House

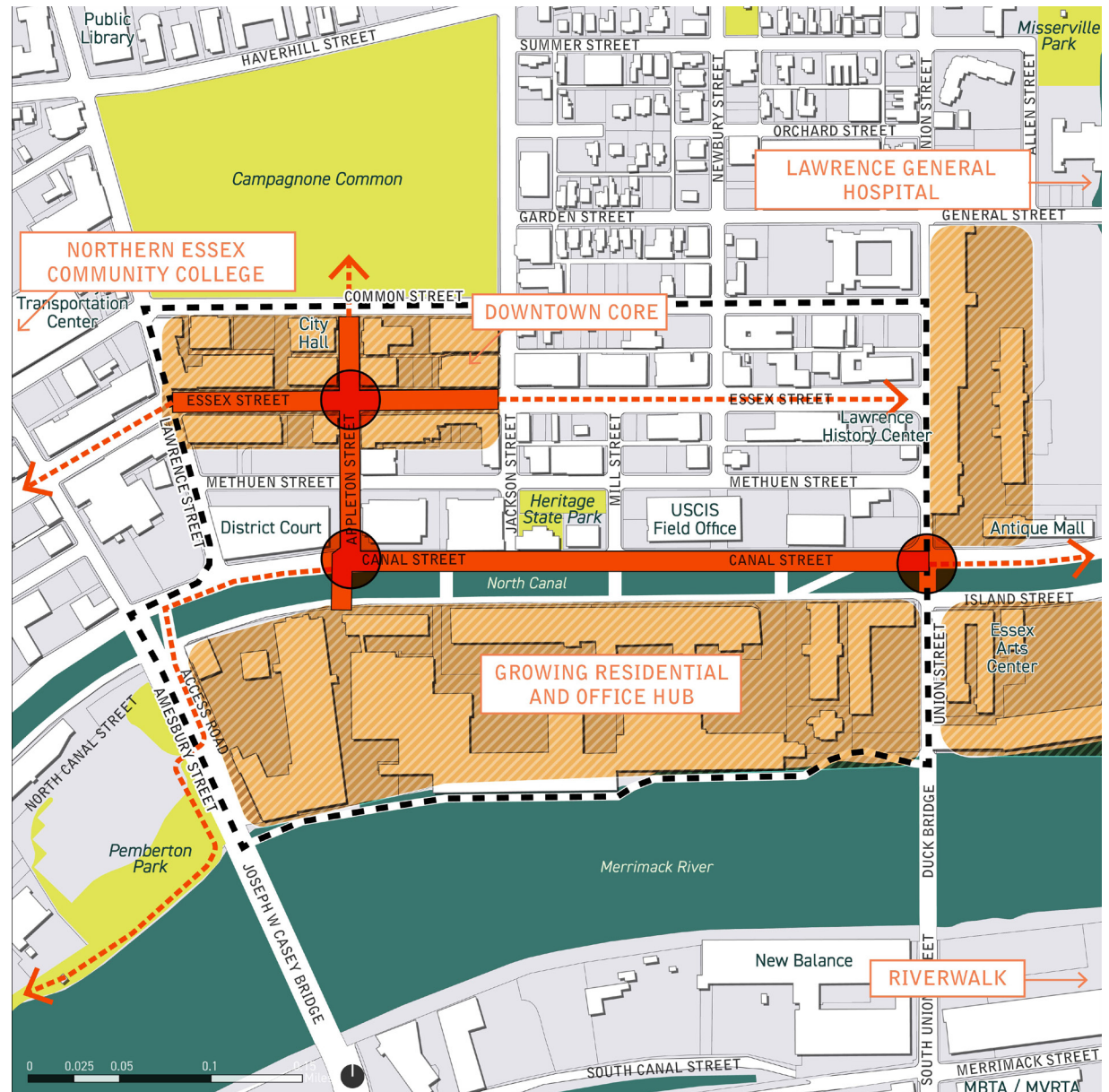
action strategies

The following 10 action strategies have been identified to activate Downtown Lawrence. While some are longer-term, requiring intensive coordination and fundraising, others can be accomplished relatively quickly. In evaluating these types of projects for early action implementation, their feasibility and level of impact were key considerations.

Three main projects were determined to be priority projects to be implemented in the coming year:

- › Wayfinding signage (strategy #2)
- › Summer Series weekly programming (strategy #3)
- › Canal fitness and heritage trail (strategy #6)

These early actions should be focused on Canal Street, Appleton Street and Essex Street to connect main hubs of activity as illustrated in the map at right.



Connecting activity hubs map

1 *Help Downtown Thrive*

Curb appeal strategies will help businesses and property owners improve their exteriors to enhance the overall look and feel of the commercial corridors, strategies include:

- › Storefront improvement grants and design assistance for facades and signage;
- › Technical assistance for branding, marketing, and window display;
- › Public art program to spearhead improvement projects, prototype ideas, and engage the community.

Diversification of businesses is important to make Downtown appeal to a broad range of customers and be active day and night, strategies include:

- › Retail recruitment and coordination beginning with an Essex Street catalyst project;
- › Vacant storefront program to encourage temporary reuse for installations or pop up stores.

Partnerships will be necessary to help small businesses start up and grow, as well as come together to tackle any issues that arise, strategies include:

- › Small business education and assistance with regard to the approvals process and regulations;
- › Nightlife management in the form of a task force, night mayor or night ambassadors to help mitigate the impacts of night clubs.

2 *Strengthen Downtown Identity with New Signage*

Forge a Downtown identity through new signage. Three main types of signage have been identified. Wayfinding with a map of Downtown and attractions can help visitors navigate the area. Heritage trail signs are a great way to highlight Lawrence history. The existing The Path/El Sendero signs can be refreshed and expanded upon. Finally, parking signs as part of a Downtown parking strategy will help improve the visitor experience.



3 Launch Summer Series Weekly Programming at Various Sites

It is recommended the City and its partners **launch a pilot series of weekly events** Downtown that incorporate and build off existing summer events that can all be marketed under a “Summer Series” umbrella. Such a series could be bookended by popular annual events such as *Semana Hispana* at the start of the season and closing out the summer with the *Bread and Roses Labor Day celebration*. Weekly outdoor programming in the summer would be a good way to test out a variety of programming in key public spaces to generate more activity. The public process unearthed a variety of ideas including salsa dancing and music, food tastings and tours, kids activities, games, bike rides, and movies to name a few. Temporary street closures, such as occurs with *Ciclovia*, could also be incorporated on streets such as *Appleton Street* and *Canal Street*. A dedicated effort will be needed to organize and sustain activities, and if successful, the program can be expanded to include year-round activities.



Programming opportunities map

4 Make Essex Street A Great Main Street Experience

A **cleaning, greening, beautification program** will focus on the cleanliness and attractiveness of the public realm and combine public services with contributions from the private sector for corridor-wide improvements. Strategies include: sidewalk repair, street lights, tree planting and maintenance targeting empty tree pits, daily cleaning, decorative lighting, planters and maintenance.

Right-of-way redesign is important for traffic calming and multimodal safety. Strategies include:

- › Right-of-way option 1: change one westbound travel lane to two-way cycletrack.
- › Right-of-way option 2: change one westbound travel lane to back-in angled parking, adding on-street parking and allowing for curb bumpouts at intersections. Raised crosswalks are another improvement that can make pedestrians more visible.
- › As prior plans have recommended, Common, Lawrence, and Amesbury Streets should be converted to two-way streets to improve Downtown circulation and alleviate traffic on Essex Street.

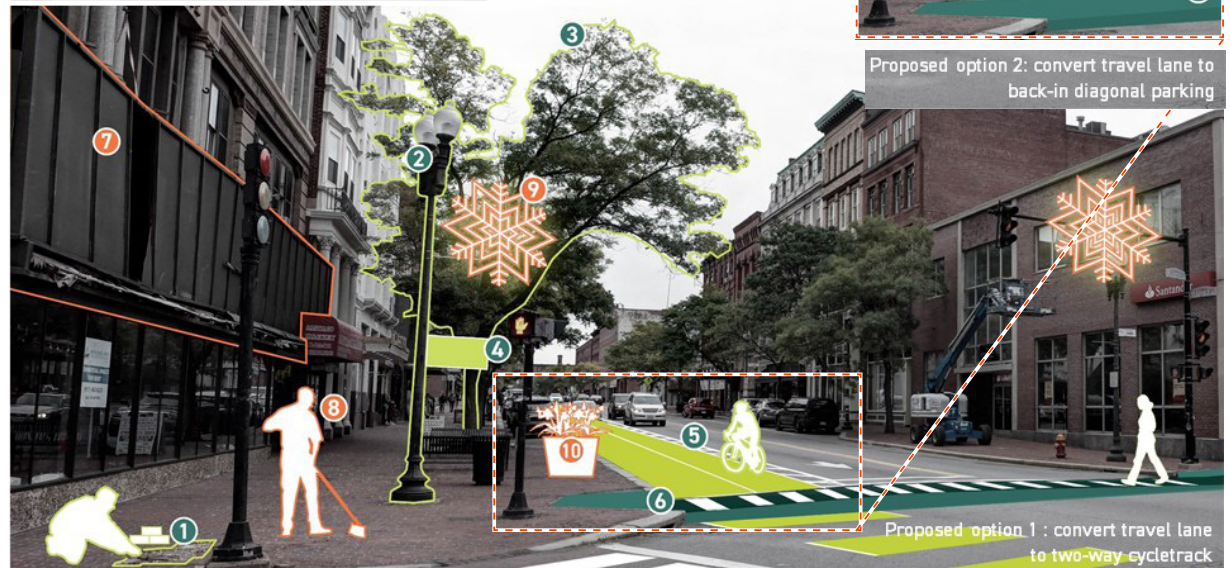


CITY RESPONSIBILITY	
1	Sidewalk repair
2	Streetlights
3	Tree planting & maintenance
4	Wayfinding signs
5	Two-way cycletrack or parking
6	Raised crosswalk

PRIVATE RESPONSIBILITY	
7	Storefront improvement
8	Daily cleaning
9	Decorative lighting
10	Planters & maintenance



Proposed option 2: convert travel lane to back-in diagonal parking



Proposed option 1: convert travel lane to two-way cycletrack

Diagram of potential Essex Street improvements

5 *Reimagine Appleton as a Shared Street for People*

Cleaning, greening, beautification program as described for Essex Street.

Public art to signal a shift to a more pedestrian-oriented shared street. Strategies

include: colored asphalt, murals or sculpture on sites including the parking garage, District Court plaza, and back of the bank building.

Programming to generate activity in an area that has a significant number of residents and workers nearby. Appleton Street is a good site for Summer Series activities and temporary street closure for events.

Diagram of potential Appleton Street improvements



6 *Expand and Program Canal Trail as Fitness and Heritage Trail*

The City and its partners should improve conditions along the North Canal in phases, starting with a series of pilot improvements that can be accomplished in the short-term, followed by long-term capital improvements to the trail.

Pilot improvements can focus on programming and light physical improvements. Programming could include a focus on group fitness classes. Physical improvements could include asphalt art, installations along the existing fence, and artistic lighting that builds on the recent Illuminacion Lawrence event.

Long-term, the City, State and partners should renovate and widen the trail to allow space for active recreation and seating, punctuated by wider plazas that project over the canal at key locations along the trail.

Diagram of potential pilot improvements (left) and long-term transformation (right) of the Canal trail



7 Design Safe and Visually Impactful Gateway Intersections

Gateway intersections at Canal and Union and Amesbury can be redesigned to improve safety and increase their visibility. Curb extensions to decrease crossing distance, raised and painted crosswalks to increase pedestrian visibility, and pedestrian signaling are options. In the example of Union and Canal, the wide turn radius needed to accommodate trucks can be mitigated by using painted curb extensions to square off the intersection. The curb extensions will encourage cars to make tighter turns, but they will still allow trucks to make wider turns. A feasibility study and data collection would be necessary first steps to improving these intersections.



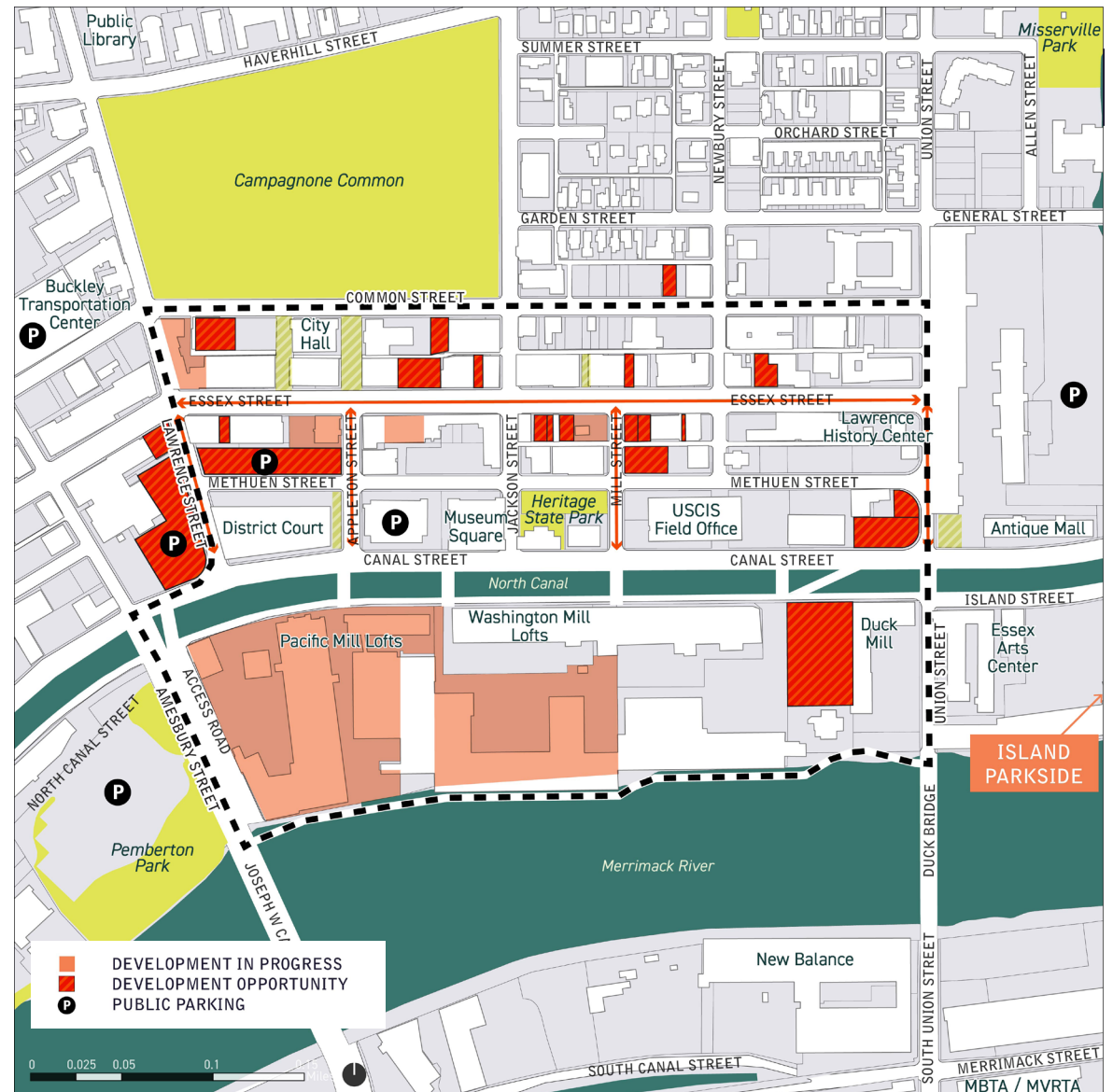
Diagram of conditions (top) and proposed safety improvements (bottom) at Union and Canal Streets

Pedestrian Scramble

Painted Curb Extension

8 *Make Downtown a Great Place to Live*

The conversion of the Middle Island mill buildings to new residential and commercial space is almost complete, which has added hundreds of new residents. There are still opportunities to fill in the gaps Downtown with mixed use development that includes housing with a diversity in size and tenure options. Incentives can be explored to encourage employees of Downtown employers to live closer to their work. Additionally, the growth of educational institutions in and around Downtown brings the possibility of student housing. A primary focus of infill and redevelopment should be creating continuous active frontage on Essex Street and north-south connector streets. This will necessitate a parking strategy to concentrate parking and unlock underutilized surface lots on these streets.



Development opportunities map

9 *Coordinate Downtown Marketing*

Coordinate a Downtown marketing strategy that draws visitors locally and throughout the region. The City of Lawrence has already begun to take action on this by creating a centralized marketing initiative called We Are / Somos Lawrence, which consists of website and social media channels with a community calendar, storytelling effort, and information about special events or issues.

These efforts are helpful both to promote events to a wide audience, but also to help counter negative perceptions by highlighting positive things happening in the City.

The marketing effort should be done in coordination with efforts to program Downtown and improve streets, public spaces, and businesses. This will ensure

that Downtown has the place-based assets to host programs and events, and that Downtown Lawrence creates a positive first impression when visitors come Downtown.

10 *Make Sure Regulations Support the Downtown Vision*

The City should **encourage development consistent with the principles of the Downtown Smart Growth Overlay** (DSGO). While the design guidelines in the DSGO are calibrated to produce good urban development, the overlay currently allows the applicant to choose between either the underlying zoning or the overlay when seeking approval. By either revising portions of the underlying zoning to be consistent with the DSGO, or by editing the DSGO to incentivize use of the overlay, the City can encourage use of the design guidelines.

The City can further encourage good urban development by **revising parking minimums** to reduce overly onerous parking requirements, in coordination with exploring a **shared parking structure** and consolidation of underused lots as recommended in the parking study. Shared parking is currently allowed under certain circumstances in the City's zoning code.

The City should also create a **standardized permitting process** that is easier and more predictable for programming partners, non-profits, and small businesses to navigate. This could take the form of a set of standard permit applications for things such as outdoor seating and events that are approved by an entity within City government.

Diagram of design principles and guidelines for Essex Street

BUILDINGS

1. Entrance awnings
2. Signage
3. Clear entranceways with minimal signage
4. Unobstructed frontage windows with high level transparency
5. Secondary frontage and upper floor window transparency
6. External lighting
7. Quality building materials

BUSINESS ZONE

8. Cafe seating
9. Outdoor vending display
10. A-frame signage
11. Planters

PEDESTRIAN ZONE

12. Pedestrian clearance

AMENITIES ZONE

13. Pedestrian-scaled street lighting
14. Benches
15. Bike racks
16. Street trees

