

# “The Ville” in Pawtucketville

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*“To start a business today is something that’s almost impossible to do unless you have some serious backing behind you...So that’s why these businesses have gone out, and they haven’t been replaced.”*

**Third-Generation Pawtucketville  
Business Owner**

## Project Description

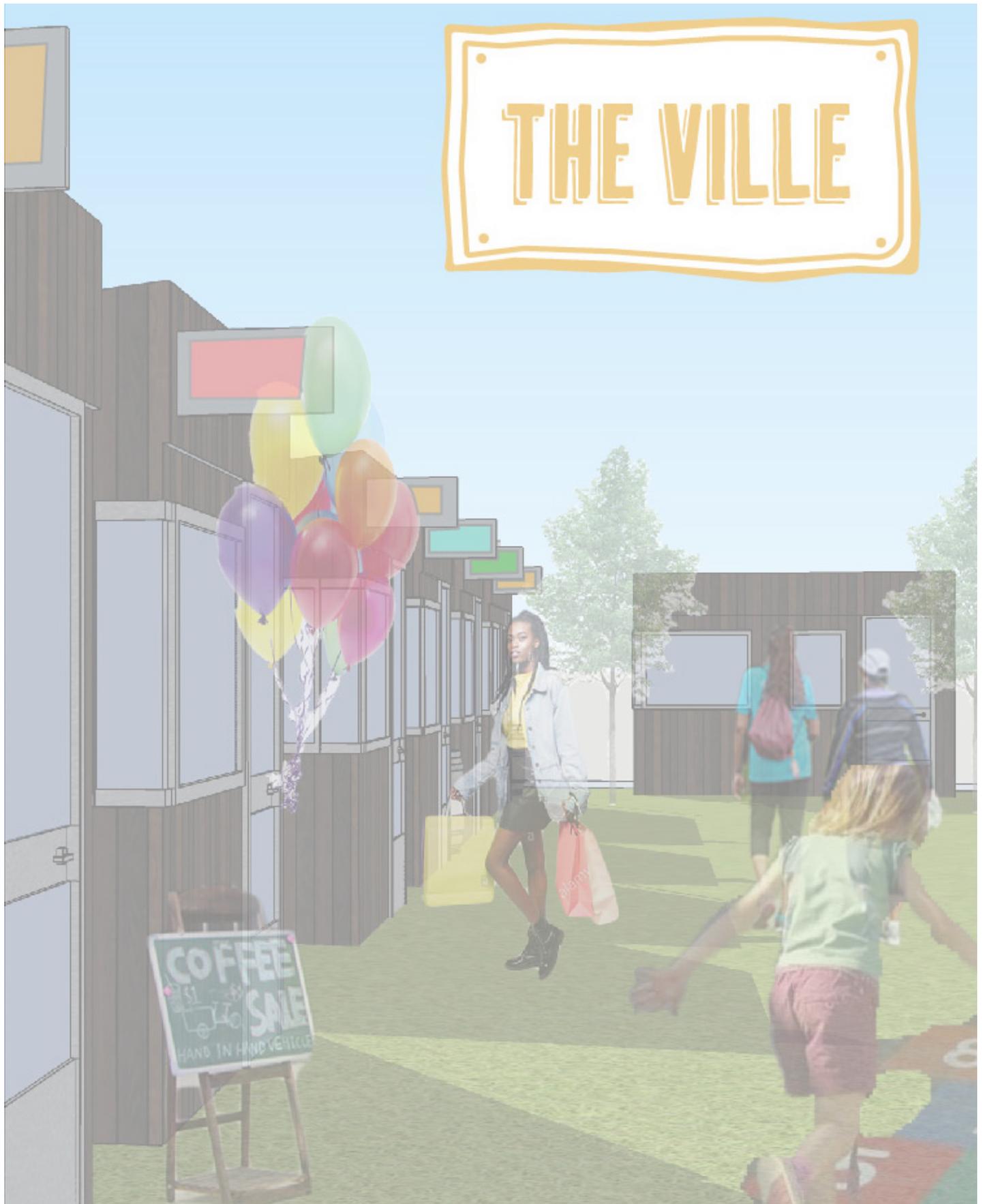
Our project proposes a Pop-Up Village, titled “The Ville”, in the neighborhood of Pawtucketville in the City of Lowell. This project is a result of a semester-long initiative in which students conducted research and engagement within Pawtucketville to develop various recommendations that addressed the needs of Pawtucketville. During this initiative, the world was faced with the threat of COVID-19, a virus which created an unprecedented pandemic leading to the shutdown of many businesses and a global state of suspended animation. We find that our project, “The Ville”, which seeks to provide a solution to the economic limitations in Pawtucketville, could be seamlessly reframed in the planning context of a Post-COVID-19 Pawtucketville.

The project encourages a partnership between the City of Lowell and the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, to develop an educational program for UMass Lowell Manning School of Business students to create a pop-up business village in Pawtucketville. We have identified the following goals for this type of local and intimate development in Pawtucketville.

## Project Goals

- 1 Support & encourage small business ownership & entrepreneurship
- 2 Create a destination to showcase local arts + culture
- 3 Increase commercial, entertainment, and recreational access
- 4 Retain local spending power
- 5 Strengthen sense of community and bridge gap between residents, students, and employees
- 6 Leverage UMass Lowell’s untapped institutional resources & knowledge





# Research & Engagement Findings

## Neighborhood Figures

29,561	population
5,092	job inflow
7,332	job outflow
4.1%	unemployment rate

## Pawtucketville Business Statistics

257	businesses
96%	small businesses
\$335,171	total sales

## Existing Economy in Pawtucketville

Pawtucketville is considered the most residential neighborhood in the City of Lowell. However, it houses three of the largest employers in Greater Lowell (Figure 1). Anchor institutions Lowell General and UMASS Lowell have almost a \$2 billion combined regional economic impact, bringing in diverse populations from neighboring regions and states. The dominant industry in Pawtucketville is the health care and social assistance industry, followed by educational services (Figure 2). The pop-ups would encourage a diversification of employment and industry within the area. A more detailed analysis of the existing economy and business climate is included in the general report.

## Engagement Findings

Engagement conducted within the neighborhood suggested that the Pawtucketville population is generally excited about increasing dining and retail options in the neighborhood, but hesitant towards large developments. Many expressed a desire for more dining, entertainment, retail and grocery shopping in the neighborhood, highlighting the lack of commercial amenities available (Figure 4). Only half of those surveyed and engaged believe Pawtucketville has a strong sense of community. Statistics of engagement are included within the engagement report.

## Strengths and Opportunities Leveraged through “The Ville”

The Ville would capitalize on the often overlooked commuter populations of Pawtucketville, from anchor institutions Lowell General and UMASS Lowell. Specifically, it will leverage the institutional knowledge and resources of UMASS Business School faculty and students to transfer skillsets into the community. The pop-up shops call for limited construction, which will maintain existing zoning and preserve and enhance the neighborhoods strong historic identity. The concentrated business corridors on University Ave and Mammoth Rd. would experience shared exposure and profits from the high foot traffic brought forth by the pop-up village.

## Threats and Weaknesses Mitigated through “The Ville”

The village would encourage a diversification of employment and industry within the area, while addressing the lack of commercial and entertainment access within the neighborhood. It would also address the overall lack of investment in infrastructure in Pawtucketville, including the deteriorating storefronts, by beautifying the corridor and increasing local profits. It would provide a space for populations to enjoy and engage, combating the rise of online retail and proximity to New Hampshire’s 0% sales tax (Figure 3).





Figure 1. Map of businesses in Pawtucketville along with the three anchor institutions in the neighborhood

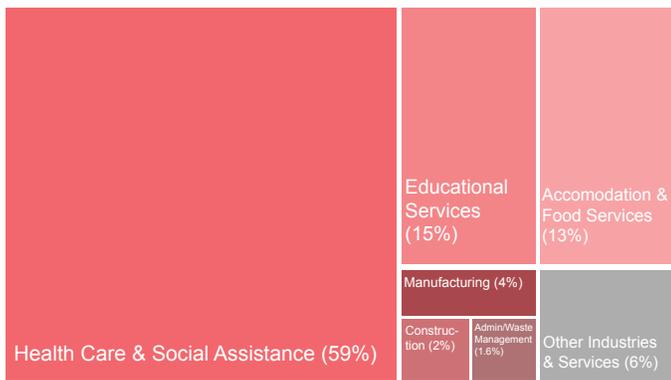


Figure 2. Employment by industry within Pawtucketville

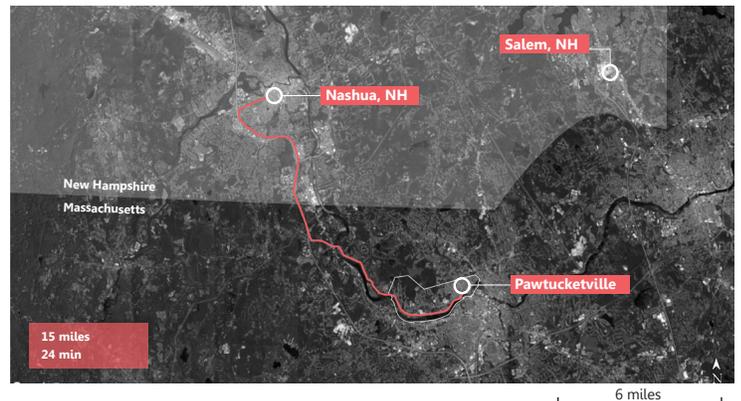


Figure 3. Distance to New Hampshire from Lowell

Engagement Findings

- 63% identified the need for places to **shop and dine** as an **imp. priority** in Pawtucketville
- 71% of homeowners wish they could **shop and dine more** in the neighborhood
- 50% believe Pawtucketville has a **strong sense of community**
- only 40% believe the quality of life in Pawtucketville will **increase** over time

- arts, recreation & Entertainment Center (1)
- full service restaurant (1)
- Fresh Food Market (2) (Market Basket Opening 2020)



Figure 4. Map of commerical amenities

## Why pop-ups may be the retail environment of the future

*The Tionesta Market Village—an experiment in self-reliance...  
Over 5 Years and still going strong!*

### Low-Cost Pop-up Shops Create Big Value in Muskegon, Michigan

Why Temporary, Limited Edition Pop-Up Shops are the Future of Shopping

The Future is Temporary: Retailing in A Pop-Up World

Pop-Up Shops Are Anything But A Temporary Trend

POP-UP STORES PROVIDE LUCRATIVE ALTERNATIVE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

by Marcia Wade Talbert © November 12, 2009

Figure 5. News Headlines collected from 2008-2020

## What is a Pop-Up?

A “pop-up” is basically a trend of opening short-term, temporary sales spaces. Pop-ups are so diverse and flexible in nature, they are an appealing option for small towns as well as urban epicenters. They can host a diverse array of businesses, from local, small artisan shops to well established brands like Louis Vuitton and Glossier. These spaces can vary from shipping container units to wooden sheds and collapsable tents.

Pop-ups gained popularity after the 2008 financial collapse, as they allowed businesses to “parachute” into neighborhoods without tying them to long-term leases. It pulled down barriers of entry for cash-strapped business owners to sell their products without the typical capital necessary, giving them a chance to experiment, test the market, and gain experience before making expensive and expansive investments. Pop-ups are a great stepping stone for businesses that could never afford their own storefronts, increasing accessibility and participation rates for low-income and minority populations.

The continuous, steady increase of pop-ups across the globe suggest that pop-ups are not just a trend, but a new way of shopping that is here to stay. The significant positives and limited negatives associated with the pop-up industry point to a sustainable and enjoyable new way of conducting business.

## Pop-Ups in a Post COVID-19 Pawtucketville

Pop-ups would provide a chance for Pawtucketville residents to regain a sense of agency lost after the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 epidemic. A pop-up village can act as a catalyst for the greater Pawtucketville community, drawing traffic in and creating shared exposure for the existing businesses in the area. It provides an experience and destination that online retail is unable to provide. It will draw in and bridge the gap between the diverse populations that live and frequent the Pawtucketville area, including residents, students, and employees. A pop-up village will create a physical space to rebuild community by providing an attractive, outdoor public space open to all. Its inherent flexibility also allows vendors to rotate and adjust to the ever-changing consumer-base, which is especially important in Pawtucketville, due to the heavy influx of students during the school year, high summer traffic from the Merrimack River, and changing populations from anchor institutions like Lowell General and UMASS Lowell.

## Precedents

Page 6 provides a brief overview of three small-towns who have embraced the pop-up model in diverse ways after experiencing trying economic times.



Precedent I | Anchor Square

Anchor Square in Pascagoula, Mississippi opened in 2011 in response to the devastating Hurricane Katrina. The site consists of 16 cottages repurposed from leftover Hurricane Katrina housing structures. The cottages revitalized downtown Pascagoula and reconnected downtown with the riverfront. To date, Anchor Square has seen the transition of several businesses, including Zeal Boutique, Alan Hinkel Photography, Gourmet Gurl, and Whimsey Books & Toys to permanent establishments. The success of the site garnered national and state attention, winning the 2011 Mississippi State Community Economic Development Award.



Precedent II | The Market Village

The Market Village in Tionesta, Pennsylvania opened in 2013, after a devastating fire destroyed a group of buildings in downtown in 2003 in an already stalled economy. Overlooked by developers as too small, the community took matters into their own hands and began to build the marketplace with support from the county’s Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). The village consists of 11 Victorian-style storefronts in 120 square foot buildings. The village, which has successfully operated over the past several years, showcases how arts and culture tourism can kickstart a stalled economy.



Precedent III | The Western Market Chalets

The Western Market Chalets in Muskegon, Michigan opened in 2017 in attempt to revitalize and reactivate the vacant and abandoned strips of land in downtown Muskegon. The City decided to use a small-scale approach - building 12 small wooden structures - to create more long-term opportunities for local businesses and bring life back into the declining downtown area. The chalets have been a serious success, appealing to tourists and residents alike and prompting the construction of 5 more chalets. The chalets helped Muskegon win the 2018 National “Strongest Town” contest.



# Programming & Partnerships

Development of The Ville would be led by UMASS Lowell and sponsored by the City of Lowell. This endeavor falls directly within the five pillars of UMASS Lowell’s 2020 Strategic Plan, and can be done in concert with several existing initiatives undertaken by UMASS Lowell - specifically the Wilson Center for Entrepreneurship at the Manning School of Business as well as thend Center for Community Research & Engagement (outlined below). It would heighten the University’s status as a welcome and contributing entity in Pawtucketville.

Through the sites’s programming, outlined on Page 8, students would have ample opportunity to engage in the development of The Ville throughout every stage, from planning to construction to oversight. It encourages a positive, mutually beneficial relationship between small business owners/entrepreneurs and students. It also provides a means and opportunity post-construction and development for students to continue to benefit from the site through competitions and mentorship programs.

## UMass Lowell’s 2020 Strategic Plan - 5 Pillars

- 1 Continue to create innovative curriculum and programs that foster academic excellence
- 2 Continue to build opportunities for students to participate in experiential learning and community engagement
- 3 Pursue innovations in teaching and learning to foster student success
- 4 Respond to economic and workforce development needs by expanding access to the university’s high-quality programs on campus, at satellite sites and online.
- 5 Integrate sustainability and climate change literacy in learning and research



The Wilson Center for Entrepreneurship works collaboratively with several entrepreneurship activities and initiatives to make valuable contributions to university-wide efforts and initiatives. It serves as a critical resource for students, faculty, alumni and the local business community. The Center will become an internationally recognized organization in promoting innovation in entrepreneurship education and research.



Campus-wide program under the Wilson Center that engages UMass Lowell students in creative problem solving, innovation and entrepreneurship. Student teams will be asked to develop real solutions to real problems. They will then be coached and guided to present a concept proposal for a needed service, product or business that addresses a real world challenge such as education, climate change, access to health care, support for the arts, cyber security, regional unemployment, etc. \$50,000 in prizes will be awarded to UMass Lowell student teams that present the best solutions and strategies for addressing these timely social and business challenges.



“We believe that the university is a resource to communities.” In this regard, we seek to maximize relationships between the university and community to ensure equal justice and equal rights, including equal access to health and education opportunities. To accomplish this mission, the Center is engaged in research to increase understanding of the welfare of residents across cultures in urban areas, and create and then test methods that may initiate and sustain changes and improvement.



**Recruit** lead faculty member from UMass Lowell Manning School of Business

**Receive** institutional approval for course and establish curriculum and credits

**Form** a steering committee comprised of CCRE, Wilson Center for Entrepreneurship, and local community members

**Conduct** workshops to provide business owner support and training and partner students with local business owners/entrepreneurs to create business and marketing strategies

**Develop and Host** a business model competition for UMass Lowell students to enter the chance to operate their own business in a reserved stall within the Ville



## Course Sequencing

### YR 1

Conduct a feasibility study

### YR 2

Create a comprehensive & sustainable business plan

### YR 3-4

Identify and apply for sources of funding; negotiate lease and maintenance agreement with City of Lowell; draft and release RFP

### YR 5-6

Select winning proposal; oversee site construction; establish vendor guidelines; conduct vendor outreach; establish social media presence and website

### YR 7 +

Ribbon cutting ceremony; connect businesses with students; develop metrics to track progress



Figure 6. Map of site

## Design

The Ville would allow the creation of an economic destination for Pawtucketville frequenters and residents that is not only novel and unique, but most importantly modest in scale. The site identified above is a parking lot owned and operated by the City of Lowell housing 36 parking spots less than 500 feet from the Manning School of Business on University Ave., a major business corridor in Pawtucketville with heavy foot traffic. It is in close proximity to the Merrimack River, and can be accessible via University Ave Bridge to tourists.

The site can be configured to house over 10 units 100-150 square feet in size. The units will surround an open, green entertainment space fixed with tables, chairs, art installations, and activities for all ages. Each unit can come with a simple wood frame or in a pre-fabricated vanilla box setup which would include HVAC, electrical

and complete furnishings including lighting fixtures. Parking spots will remain on the southwest side of the site for greater accessibility. A space on the north-west side of the site is reserved for up to two-food trucks to increase versatility and options within the site. The centralized open space will provide ample opportunity to showcase local public art and music.

## Cost & Funding

Costs are dependent on materials chosen and construction costs at the time of development, but are estimated to be about \$300,000 at the time of this report. Local, state and funding opportunities for site development and small business support are outlined below.



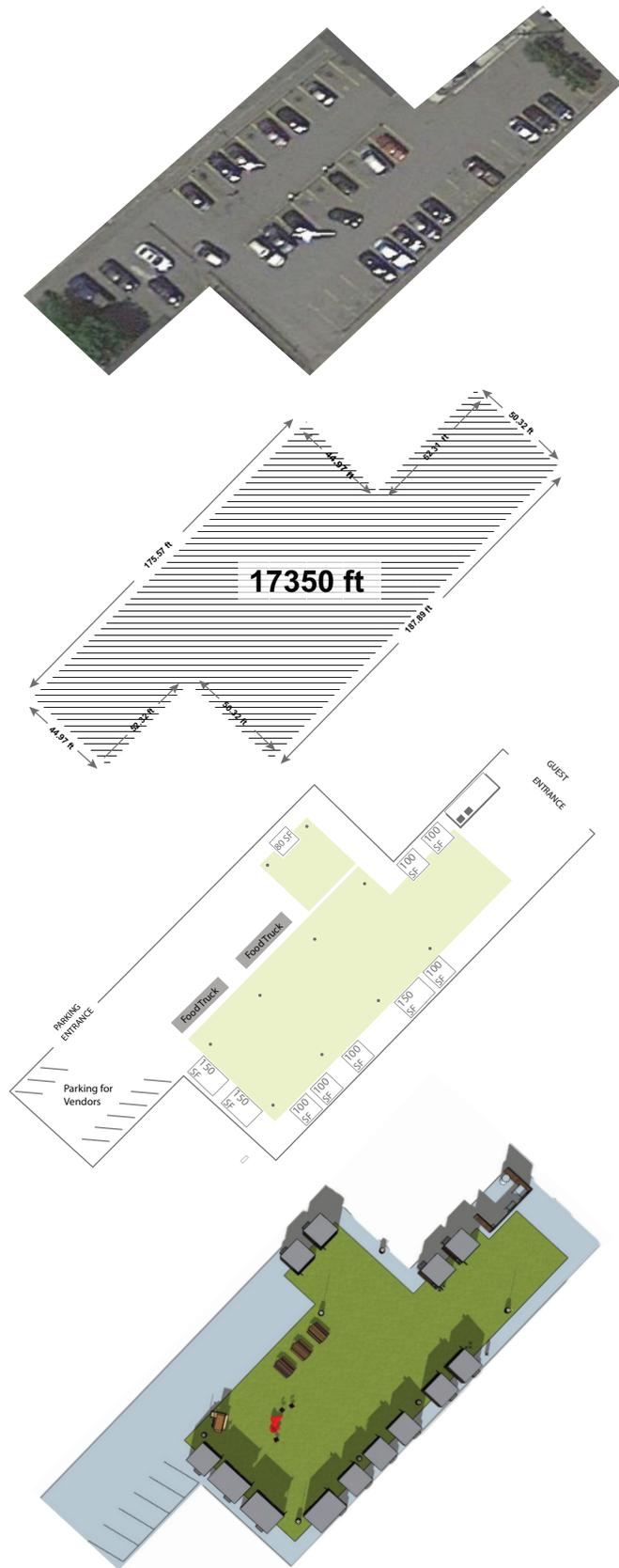
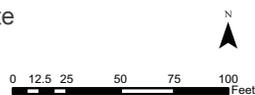


Figure 6. Visual descriptors of the site



## Pawtucketville's Pop-Up Village

### Funding Opportunities for Site Development

- Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP)
- Sponsorships
- Donations (outdoor furniture, materials, etc.)
- HUD Block Grants
- Lowell Development & Financial Corporation (LDFC)
- New access to stimulus money for small businesses/economic development
- Lowell Chamber of Commerce

### Funding Opportunities for Small Businesses

- Community Teamwork's Entrepreneurship Center
- Lowell's Small Business Retention Program
- MassDevelopment
- Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation
- Workforce Training Fund
- Lowell Downtown Venture Fund
- New access to stimulus money for small businesses/economic development



Figure 7. Visual representation of the potential of The Ville





## Conclusion

The Ville presents an unparalleled opportunity to increase the economic potential of Pawtucketville, while empowering the community and small business owners. The project leverages Pawtucketville's strengths and opportunities and mitigates the weaknesses and threats identified in this report, and further detailed in the general plan. The Ville has the potential to create a resilient and sustainable economic hub within Pawtucketville that can withstand global catastrophes and revitalize areas facing major economic downturn, while still preserving and enhancing Pawtucketville's identity.

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