

2020

**PORTER SQUARE
LOWER MASS AVE
CAMBRIDGE
COMMERCIAL DISTRICT ASSESSMENT**



Prepared by:
**City of Cambridge
Community Development Department
Economic Development Division**



Acknowledgments

Executive Office

Louis A. DePasquale, *City Manager*
Lisa Peterson, *Deputy City Manager*

City Council

Sumbul Siddiqui, *Mayor*
Alanna M. Mallon, *Vice Mayor*
Dennis J. Carlone
Marc C. McGovern
Patty M. Nolan
E. Denise Simmons
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler
Timothy J. Toomey, Jr.
Quinton Y. Zondervan

Community Development Department

Iram Farooq, *Assistant City Manager*
Khalil Mogassabi, *Deputy Director & Chief Planner*
Sandra Clarke, *Deputy Director & Chief of Administration*
Lisa Hemmerle, *Director of Economic Development*
Abigail Bliss, *Economic Development Intern*
Christina DiLisio, *Associate Economic Development Specialist*
Michael Rosenberg, *Economic Development Intern*
Pardis Saffari, *Senior Economic Development Manager*
Bonnie-May Shantz, *Economic Development Specialist*

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Existing conditions, business data, opportunities, and qualitative depictions of the Porter Square & Lower Massachusetts Ave. neighborhoods were gathered from roughly 452 surveys of neighborhood businesses, shoppers, workers, and residents. Additional data was collected from a quarter-mile walking distance (“walk-shed”) around the commercial district. The boundaries of trade area data and the survey methodology can be found on page 12 of this report.



Purpose of the District Assessment

The purpose of the Porter Square & Lower Massachusetts Ave. Commercial District Assessment is to highlight the neighborhoods' existing business landscape and consumer characteristics. This assessment provides the City, local businesses, and local property owners with a better understanding of how Porter Square & Lower Massachusetts Ave. visitors and residents utilize the district and how they would like the district to evolve in the future. Data in this report will also assist business owners seeking a location in Porter Square & Lower Massachusetts Ave. and help current business owners understand potential opportunities for growth.

Key issues and opportunities identified in this assessment will help prioritize the City's and local businesses' initiatives and serve as an informational and marketing resource for the neighborhood.

ABOUT PORTER SQUARE & LOWER MASSACHUSETTS AVE.

Background

Porter Square and Lower Massachusetts Ave. are lively neighborhood districts with a mix of academic, residential, and ground floor retail that contribute to a strong sense of neighborhood in the area. With links to the subway, bus, and commuter rail, Porter Square and Lower Massachusetts Ave. are both local and regional shopping destinations with a mix of large and small ground floor retailers and restaurants. Porter Square Shopping Center and Porter Exchange provide strong anchors for the area, with a variety of dining, personal services, and general merchandise needed for everyday life.

Porter Square and Lower Massachusetts Ave. border the residential neighborhoods of North Cambridge, Agassiz and Neighborhood Nine, and have a major academic presence from staff and students at Lesley University and Harvard University, who benefit from the neighborhood retailers, restaurants, and service providers located in the district.

Demographics

More than 20,000 residents of both Cambridge and Somerville call the Porter Square and Lower Massachusetts Ave. areas home (see page 12 for the area boundary). The districts' population continues to evolve, with African-American/Black (5%), Asian (16%), and Hispanic (4%) residents contributing to their diversity. The daytime population (9,029 workers)¹ and over 6,379 Lesley students² brings additional energy during the week to shop, dine, and work. For more information on Porter Square and Lower Massachusetts Ave. demographics, see page 12.

Future Opportunities

The growth of Porter Square and Lower Massachusetts Ave. as districts is tied to a unique set of characteristics that have been cultivated over time: a strong history, transit connectivity, and being an academic hub. In recent years, new hotel, academic, and residential development has brought new economic activity to the neighborhood, increasing the resident, student, and tourist populations. With this new growth, the community has an increased desire for new food and retail options. In order to accommodate the desire for new types of retail, Community Development Department's Economic Development Division staff works with neighborhood retailers and residents to support current businesses and new ground floor uses in the Porter Square and Lower Massachusetts Ave. commercial districts.

The City is committed to improving mobility for all. Starting in 2018, the City implemented multi-modal intersection safety improvements in Porter Square. The project included updated signal equipment, including bike signals and right turn signals, improved bicycle lanes on Massachusetts Ave. and Somerville Ave., updated lane markings to reduce driver confusion, and improved signal timing and coordination to reduce delay for businesses and vehicles. The City will continue to review and implement strategies to improve transportation throughout the neighborhood.

Notable Places



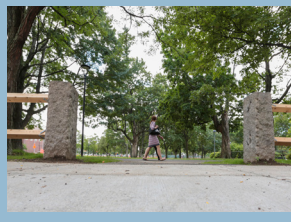
PORTER SQUARE T STOP



LUNDER ARTS CENTER



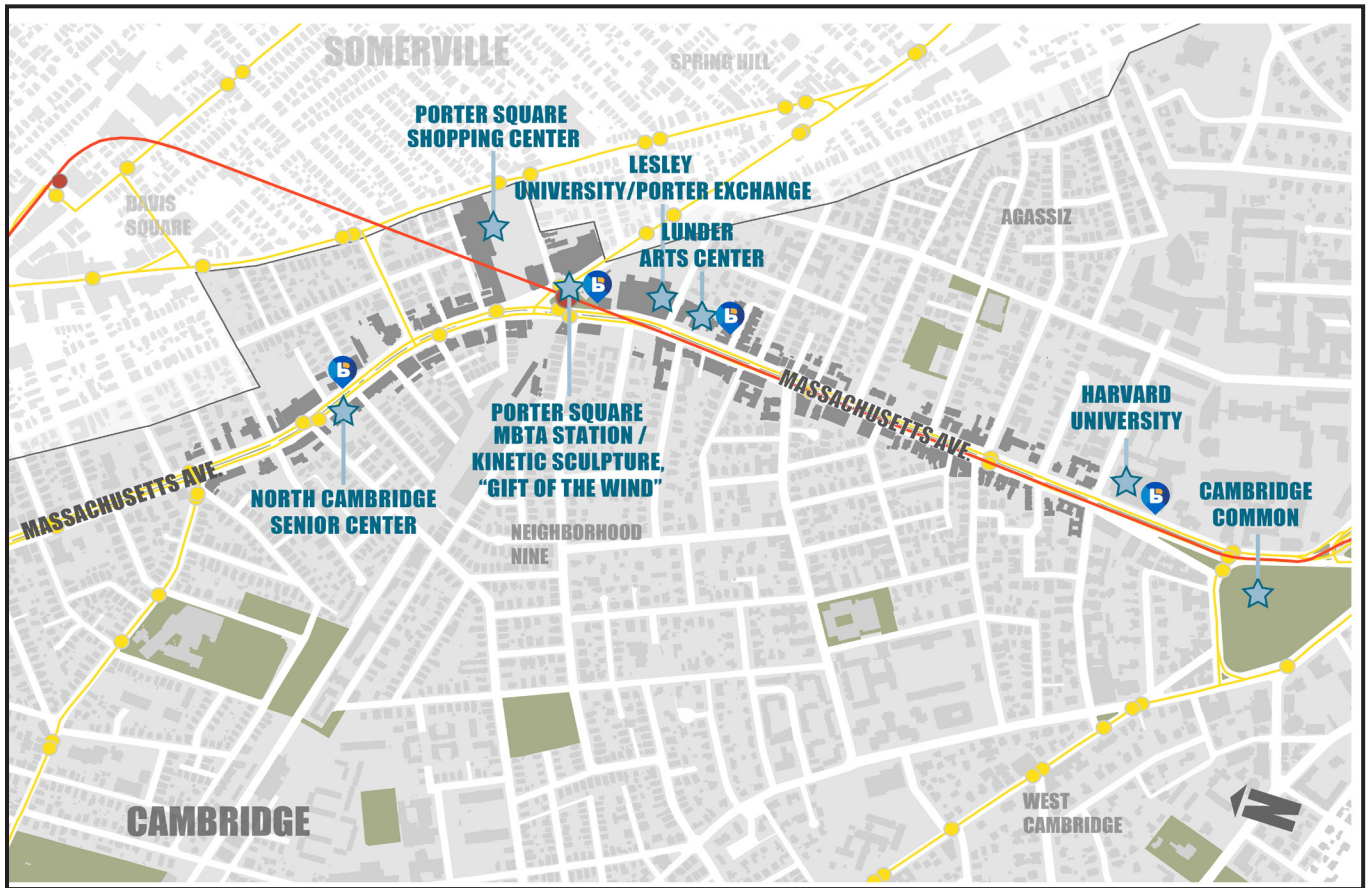
NORTH CAMBRIDGE SENIOR CENTER



CAMBRIDGE COMMON

1 - ESRI Community Analyst, (November 2019). 2- Town Gown Report (2019)
Photos: Nicolaus Czarnecki, Kyle Klein, Susan P. Pacheco

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT



Key Items

-  Point of Interest
-  T Stop
-  T Route
-  Bluebikes Station
-  Bus Stop
-  Bus Route

Transit Scores*

Bike Score

95 

Walk Score

92 

Transit Score

76 

*Note: These scores reflect how well a location is served by public transportation on a scale from 0 to 100.

Transportation

 **4** Bluebikes Stations

 **4** Bus Routes (77, 83, 87, 96)



 **1** T Stop (Red Line/Commuter Rail)
7,968* Weekday Riders

*Note: This number does not include the Commuter Rail


Parking


210 Public Meter Spaces

Neighborhood Association

-  Agassiz Baldwin Community
-  Porter Square Neighborhood Association

Community Events

-  Annual Neighborhood Clean Up (August)
-  Late Night Shopping Madness (December)

Sources: MBTA, Walk Score, City of Cambridge Open Data, MBTA

KEY FINDINGS

Identified through District Assessment Surveys

Strengths

- ◆ Many local, longstanding businesses
- ◆ Accessible to a variety of residential neighborhoods in Cambridge and Somerville
- ◆ Excellent accessibility via foot, bus, subway, bicycle, and car
- ◆ Anchor institutions (Lesley University and Harvard University)
- ◆ Increase in tourism, encouraged by two new hotels
- ◆ Destination for daily conveniences (e.g. grocery store, pharmacy, etc.)

Challenges

- ◆ District navigation needs improvement
- ◆ Changing demographics and consumer preferences require longstanding businesses and district retail mix to adapt in order to better serve a changing clientele
- ◆ Competition from commercial districts nearby (Davis Square, North Cambridge, Harvard Square)



Photos: Molly Atkin, Nicolaus Czarnecki, Kyle Klein, Pardis Saffari, Blue Bikes



Opportunities

Identified through District Assessment Surveys

- ◆ Continue to support and offer services for business owners that plan on growing in place
- ◆ Improve pedestrian and cyclist safety, mobility, and transit operations along Massachusetts Ave., especially at the Massachusetts Ave./ Somerville Ave. intersection
- ◆ Review the district's zoning to expand the allowable uses in area to meet needs of consumers (i.e. more food options, art venues)
- ◆ Add wayfinding and beautification elements to the Massachusetts Ave. corridor

BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

Ground Floor Business Inventory

176

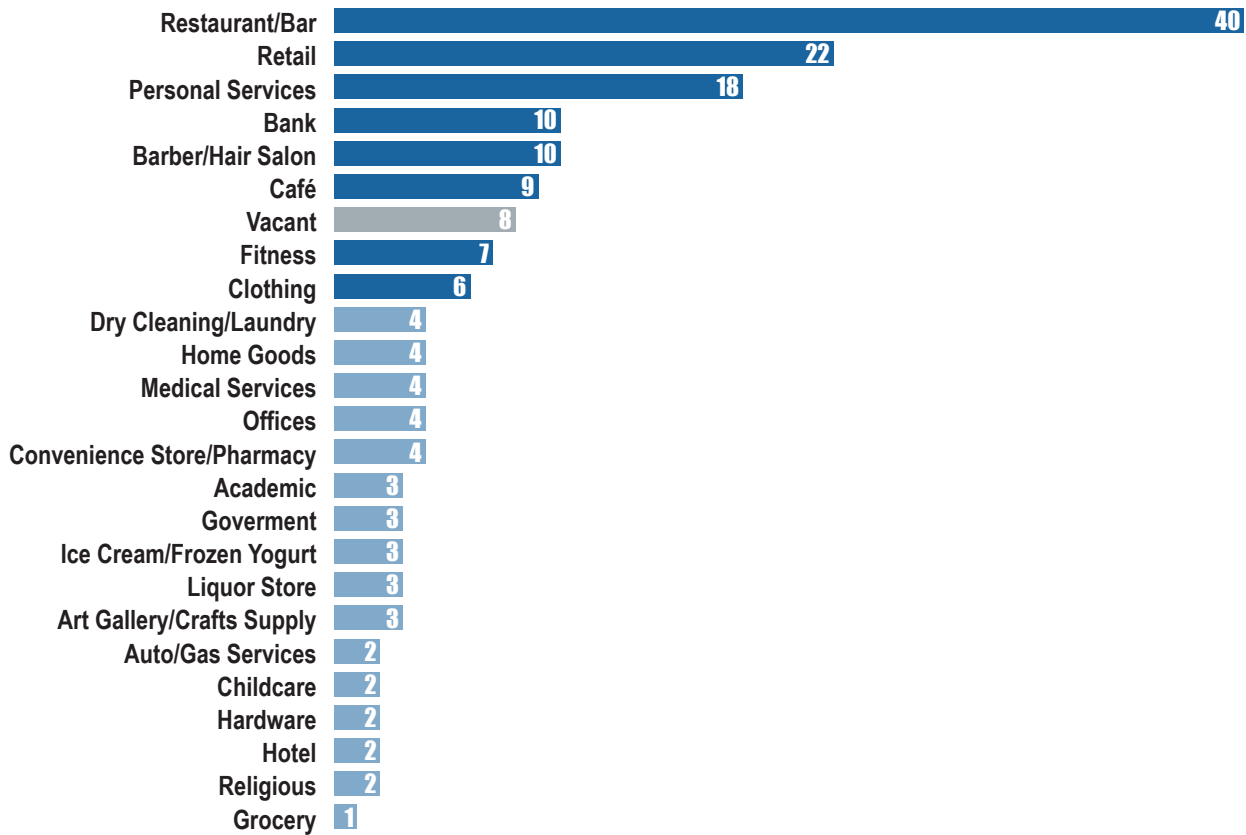
Total Number of Storefronts

5%*

Storefront Vacancy

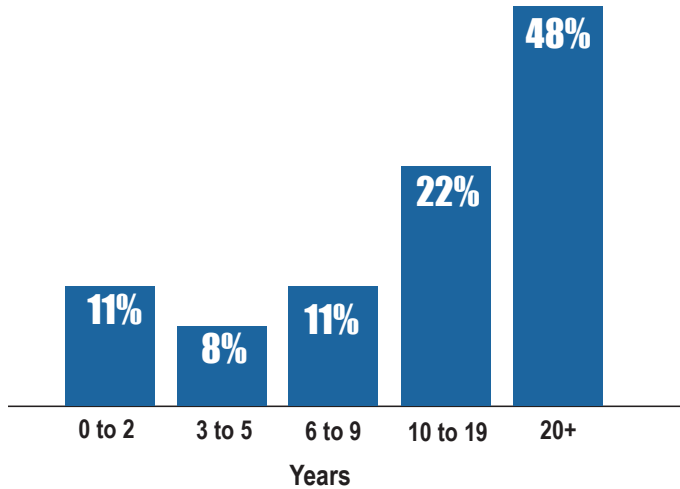
*Note: Numbers are based on a ground floor storefront survey conducted in August 2019. Some of the vacant properties were under lease negotiations at time of the survey. For a current list of vacancies, please go to www.cambridgema.gov/vacantstorefront

Storefront & Retail Mix



What We Heard From Porter Square & Lower Massachusetts Ave. Business Owners

How many years have you been in business here?



How many employees do you have?



Do you Own or Rent your property?



Over the past year, has your business improved, stayed the same, decreased?



What changes (if any) do you think need to occur on or around your corridor to attract more shoppers?*

	% Businesses
Parking	70%
Community Events/Marketing	33%
Storefront Improvements	22%
Safety	15%
Sanitation	11%
Business to Business Communication	11%

What kind of resources would help you grow your business?*

	% Merchants
Marketing Support	41%
Assistance with Regulatory Compliance	15%
Financing	15%
Training for Staff	11%
Parking	4%
Legal/Lease Support	4%

*Note: Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer, totals may be more than 100%

What changes would you suggest to improve Porter Square and Lower Massachusetts Ave. for residents, pedestrians, and shoppers?



SIGNAGE



DISTRICT VISIBILITY



PARKING



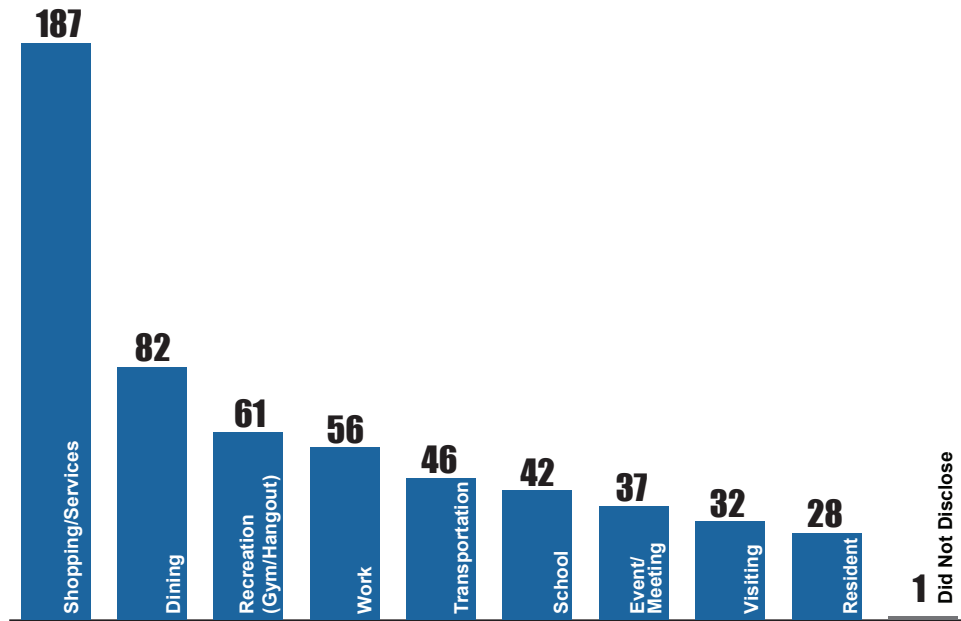
ACTIVE & DIVERSE STOREFRONTS

Source: Porter Square/ Lower Mass. Ave. Business Owner Survey - 27 Responses [18 Porter Square, 9 Lower Mass. Ave.](September 2019)

CUSTOMER OUTLOOK

What We Heard From Shoppers

What is your primary purpose for being in Porter Square/Lower Massachusetts Ave.?



What are the most common items you purchase in Porter Square/Lower Massachusetts Ave.??*

	% Shoppers
Food/Groceries	84%
Books/Gifts	28%
Home Goods	28%
Beauty/Personal Care Products	26%
Wine/Beer/Spirits	24%
Arts/Crafts	20%
Clothing	10%
Accessories	6%

What are the most common services you use in Porter Square/Lower Massachusetts Ave.??*

	% Shoppers
Restaurant (Sit-Down)	62%
Restaurant (Take-Out)	50%
Pharmacy	38%
Hair Salon/Barber	14%
Other	13%
Dental	11%
Music/Performing Arts Venue	7%
Medical	7%

*Note: Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer, totals may be more than 100%

If not Porter Square/Lower Massachusetts Ave., where do you shop?



Elsewhere in Cambridge
29%



Somerville
23%



Online
23%



Other Communities
18%



Boston
8%

Note: Percentages for these categories are based on the 53% of survey respondents who responded to this question. 47% Did not respond to this question.

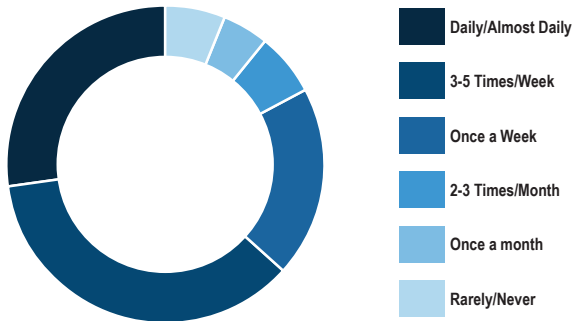
Source: Porter Square/Lower Mass. Ave. Customer Intercept Survey (September 2019)

What We Heard From Shoppers

How do you usually travel to get to Porter Square/Lower Massachusetts Ave.??*

	% Shoppers
Walk	62%
MBTA	35%
Bus	19%
Subway	16%
Drive	33%
Alone	24%
Carpool	5%
Uber/Lyft/Taxi	3%
Bike	16%
Own	14%
Bluebikes	3%
Company Shuttle	0%

How often do you usually go shopping in Porter Square/Lower Massachusetts Ave.??



When do you usually go shopping in Porter Square/Lower Massachusetts Ave.??*

	% Shoppers
Weekdays	40%
Weekday Nights	19%
Weekends	24%
Weekend Nights	7%
No Set Time	31%

What new businesses would you like to see?



More Food Options
35%



Local Diverse Retail
18%



Grocery/Specialty Food
12%



Clothing
10%



Café
7%

Did not Respond
33%

Note: Percentages for these categories are based on the 66% of survey respondents who responded to this question. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer, totals may be more than 100.

What would make you shop here more??



Diverse Local Retail Mix
25%



More Food Options
(Quick Service and Sit-Down)
14%



Affordable Options
13%



Grocery
12%

Did not Respond
40%

Note: Percentages for these categories are based on the 66% of survey respondents who responded to this question. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer, totals may be more than 100.

What changes would you like to see??



Improve Pedestrian Experience
(Parks/Sidewalks/Seating/Trees)
18%



None/
Happy As Is
15%



Less Traffic/
Safer Roads
13%



Better Bike Infrastructure
12%

Did not Respond
41%

Note: Percentages for these categories are based on the 59% of survey respondents who responded to this question. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer, totals may be more than 100.

*Note: Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer, totals may be more than 100%

Source: Porter Square/Lower Mass. Ave. Customer Intercept Survey (September 2019)

DATA APPENDIX

Survey Methodology

A variety of City staff and volunteers surveyed people in Porter Square/Lower Massachusetts Ave. over two weeks in September 2019 during peak times: morning, mid-day, and evening. We received 452 surveys from this effort. Additionally, City staff conducted a merchant survey. The merchant survey was conducted online and in person, and was available for 4 weeks, beginning in mid-August. We received 27 responses to the business owner survey.

Context Area

The Porter Square/Lower Massachusetts Ave. area is defined in two ways in this report. The “Context Area” outlined in the map below refers to the commercial district boundaries identifying the greatest concentration of businesses in the area. The data presented in the Ground Floor Business Inventory on p.8 refers to businesses located in the Context Area; all surveys were distributed and taken within this boundary. The “Trade Area” represents the location of the residents who live within a quarter mile from the Context Area and are most served by the commercial district. Demographic responses are reflected in the report’s Appendix, pages 14-15.



Trade Area Demographics

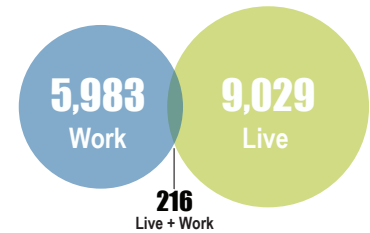
Total Population

20,464	Porter Square/ Lower Massachusetts Ave.
117,146	Cambridge
6,958,093	Massachusetts

Average Household Size

1.94	Porter Square/ Lower Massachusetts Ave.
2.02	Cambridge
2.50	Massachusetts

Commuting Patterns



5,983	Work in Porter Square/ Lower Mass. Ave., live elsewhere
216	Live & Work in Porter Square/Lower Mass. Ave.
9,029	Live in Porter Square/ Lower Mass. Ave., work elsewhere

Source: OnTheMap data 2017
Data based on Origin Destination Employer
Statistics

Median Household Income*

\$80,774	Porter Square/ Lower Mass. Ave.
\$84,738	Cambridge
\$77,518	Massachusetts

Source: ESRI Community Analyst: US Census 2010 ESRI 2019 Estimates (November 2019), City of Cambridge Open Data, City of Somerville Open Data.
*Data does not include people who live in group quarters.

Porter Square & Lower Mass. Ave. Retail Opportunity

\$525 M

spent by residents on goods and services each year

\$238 M

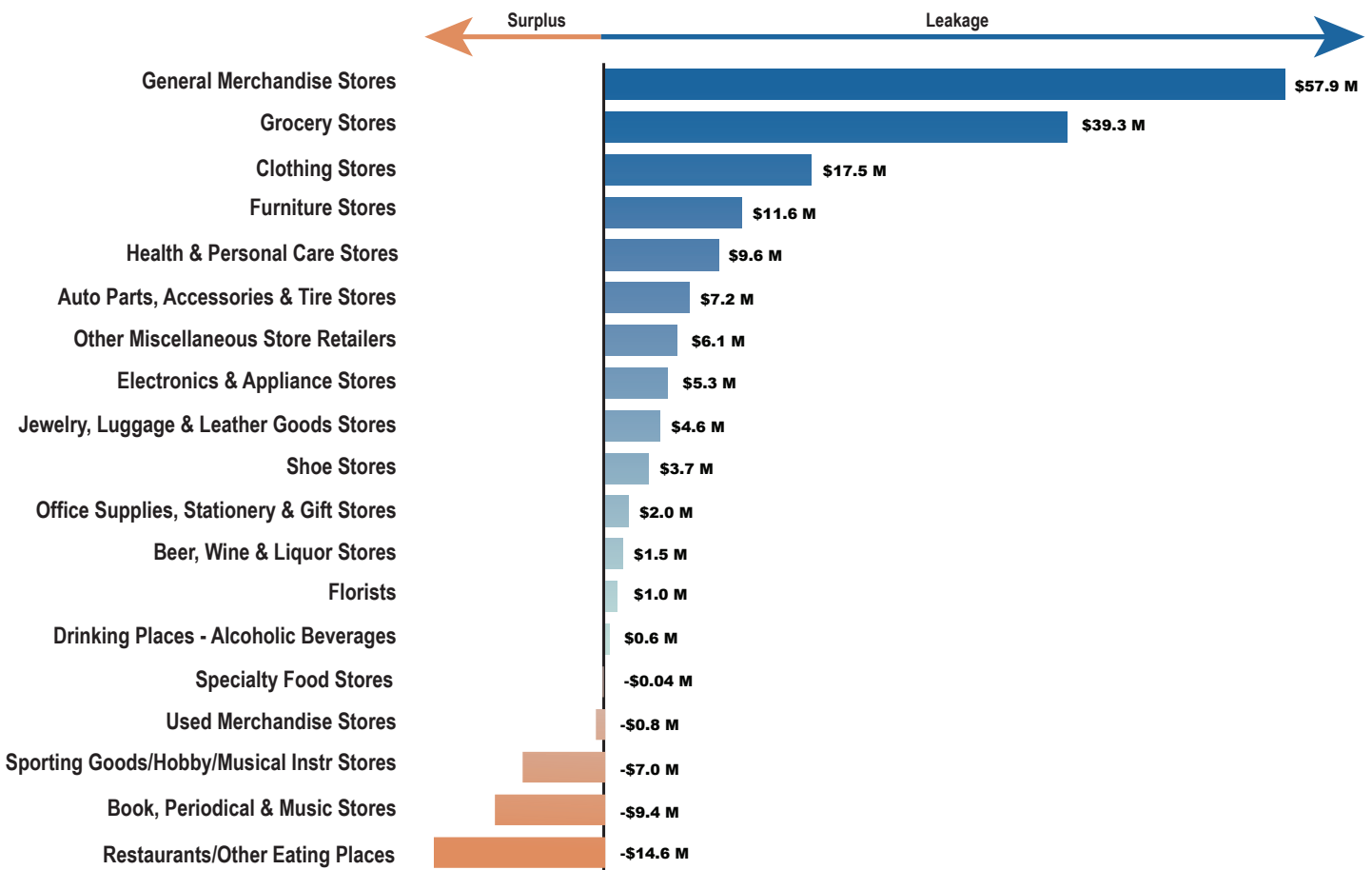
made in retail sales by local businesses each year

\$287 M

spent outside of Porter Square/Lower Mass. Ave. by residents each year

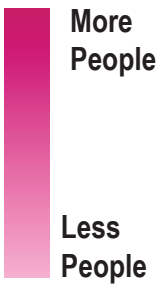
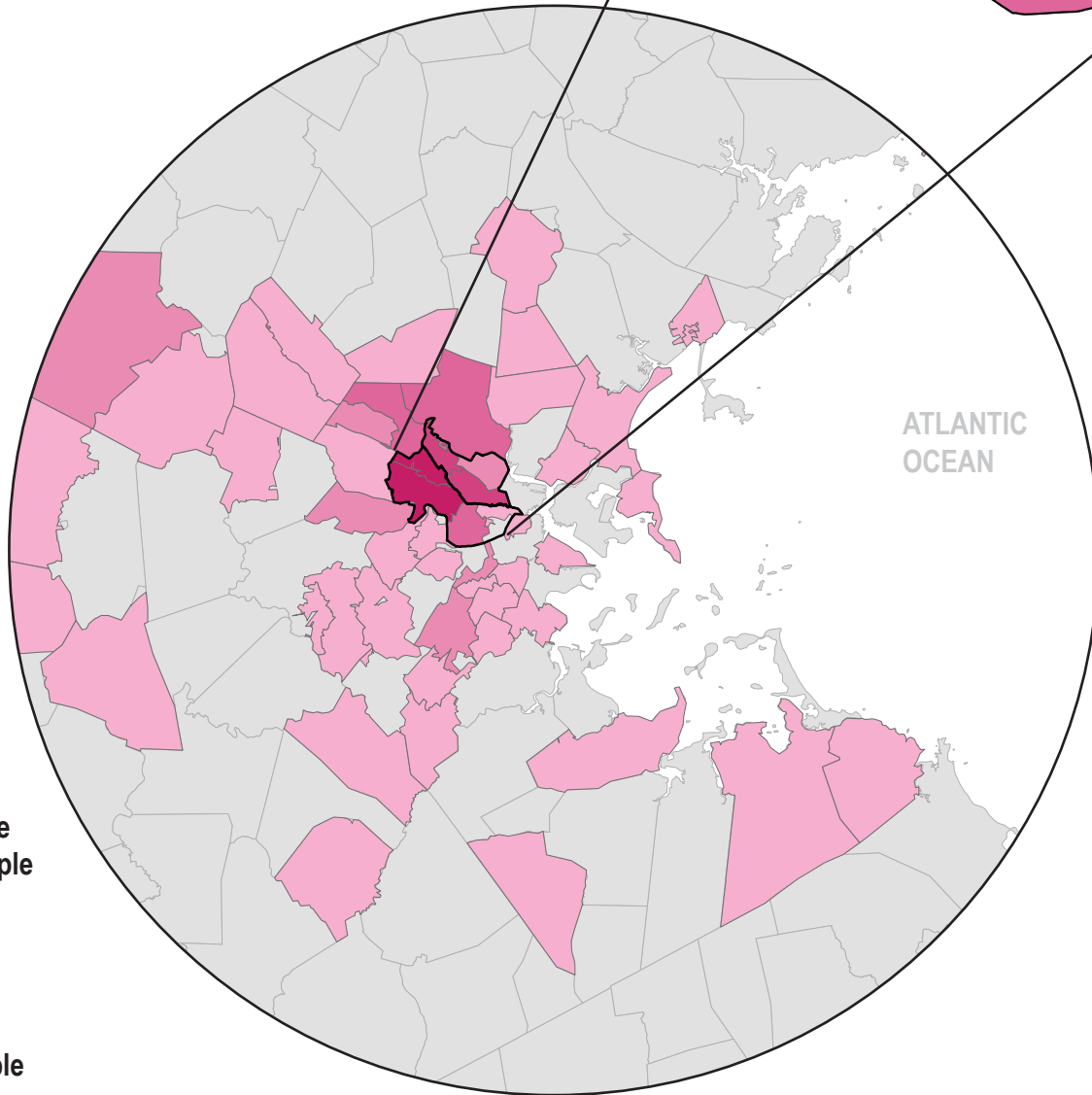
Retail Leakage & Surplus

Retail leakage and surplus occurs when there is a difference between the estimated spending by local residents on goods/services and the estimated sales by local businesses. **Retail leakage** is when the local consumer demand for goods exceeds the supply in the trade area. This results in residents leaving the trade area for these goods, or seeking another source to obtain it (see “if not Porter Square/Lower Mass. Ave., where do you shop?” pg. 10). **Retail surplus** is when the local supply exceeds demand in the trade area. This can signify that businesses are attracting consumers from outside the trade area.



Survey Respondent Locations

The map below shows the home location of survey participants. They provided their home location by zip code and the most frequent are mapped here. 434 (96%) survey respondents shared their zip code.



49%
Cambridge Residents

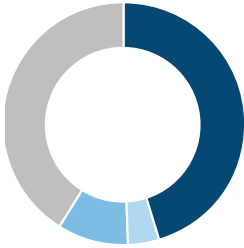
NOT PICTURED:
Respondent home zip codes located in other areas of MA, CA, and NY

Source: Porter Square/Lower Mass. Ave. Customer Intercept Survey (September 2019), Massachusetts GIS

Demographics

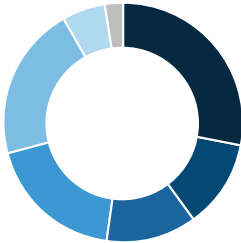
Shoppers | Porter Square & Lower Mass. Ave. | Cambridge

What is your relationship to Porter Square/Lower Mass. Ave.?



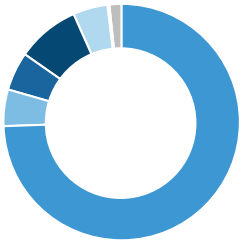
	% Shoppers
Resident	45%
Worker	11%
Other	4%
Did not Disclose	40%

What is your age?



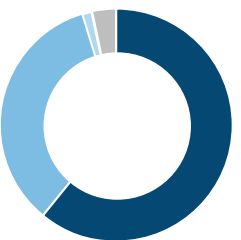
	% Shoppers	% Porter Square	% Cambridge
60+	28%	16%	16%
50-59	12%	8%	9%
40-49	12%	10%	10%
30-39	19%	25%	20%
20-29	21%	31%	29%
<19	6%	10%	16%
Did not Disclose	2%	X	X

What is your race or ethnicity?



	% Shoppers	% Porter Square	% Cambridge
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%	0%	0%
Asian	9%	16%	20%
Black/African American	5%	5%	13%
Caucasian/White	72%	73%	59%
Latino/Hispanic	5%	2%	4%
Mixed/Multi-racial	5%	4%	4%
Did not Disclose	4%	X	X

What is your gender?



	% Shoppers	% Porter Square	% Cambridge
Female	34%	53%	51%
Male	61%	47%	49%
Other	2%	X	X
Did not Disclose	3%	X	X

Source: ESRI Community Analyst: US Census 2010 ESRI 2019 Estimates (November 2019), Porter Square/Lower Mass. Ave. Customer Intercept Survey (September 2019)

PORTER SQUARE LOWER MASS AVE CAMBRIDGE

The Community Development Department (CDD) is the planning agency for the City of Cambridge. With five programmatic divisions, Community Planning, Housing, Economic Development, Environmental and Transportation Planning and Zoning and Development, CDD takes an interdisciplinary approach to manage and guide physical change in a manner consistent with the City's priorities, engaging and collaborating with community partners and other government agencies to make Cambridge a desirable place to live and work.

CDD's Economic Development division is responsible for a wide range of activities designed to meet the City's need for a diversified and thriving economic base. We promote Cambridge's commercial districts; cultivate a supportive environment for small businesses and women and minority-owned businesses; and market Cambridge as a desirable business location. We offer a variety of resources and services, including site search and selection assistance, one-on-one meetings with staff, business workshops and classes, expert consulting services, and grants for accessibility, interior, and storefront improvements.

For more information:

cambridgema.gov/business

Sources

ESRI and Infogroup, Inc. November 2019 ESRI Retail MarketPlace Profile.

ESRI and U.S. Census Bureau. November 2019 ESRI Community Profile.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2017. OnTheMap Application.

Photo Credits: Nicolaus Czarnecki, Gretchen Ertl Photography; Kyle Klein Photography; Molly Akin Photography; Susan P. Pacheco, Pardis Saffari

cambridgema.gov/cdd

