

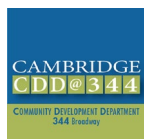
2023

EAST CAMBRIDGE

COMMERCIAL DISTRICT ASSESSMENT



Prepared by:
City of Cambridge
Community Development Department
Economic Opportunity and Development Division



Acknowledgments

Executive Office

Yi-An Huang, City Manager
Owen O’Riordan, Deputy City Manager

Business Association

East Cambridge Business Association

Survey by Agency Landscape and Planning

City Council

Sumbul Siddiqui, Mayor
Alanna M. Mallon, Vice Mayor
Burhan Azeem
Dennis J. Carlone
Marc C. McGovern
Patty M. Nolan
E. Denise Simmons
Paul F. Toner
Quinton Y. Zondervan

Community Development Department

Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager
Sandra Clarke, Deputy Director & Chief of Administration
Pardis Saffari, Director of Economic Opportunity and Development
Allyson Allen, Senior Economic Development Manager
Christina DiLisio, Economic Development Specialist
Lola Campos, Economic Development Specialist
Tyrone Fells, Small Business Specialist
Rona Abrahams, Administrative Assistant
Stinley Pierre, Economic Development Intern
Sarah Jane Huber, Associate Economic Development Specialist
Brendan Monroe, GIS Analyst

In this Report

Neighborhood Context	pp. 4-5
Key Findings	pp. 6-7
Business Landscape	pp. 8-9
Customer Outlook	pp. 10-11
Data Appendix	pp. 12-15

Existing conditions, business data, opportunities, and qualitative depictions of the East Cambridge neighborhood were gathered from 367 surveys of neighborhood businesses, customers, workers, and residents. Additional data was collected from a quarter-mile walking distance (“walk-shed”) around the commercial district. The boundaries of East Cambridge trade area data and the survey methodology can be found on p.12 of this report.



Purpose of the District Assessment

The purpose of the East Cambridge Commercial District Assessment is to highlight the neighborhood's existing business landscape and consumer characteristics. Understanding the current business landscape provides the City and local business associations with a better understanding of how East Cambridge 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 East Cambridge and help current business owners understand potential opportunities for growth.

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

ABOUT EAST CAMBRIDGE

Notable Places



Cambridgeside



Cambridge Crossing



Lechmere MBTA Station



Valente Branch Library

Background

The East Cambridge neighborhood is bounded by Somerville to the north, the Charles River to the east, and Kendall Square to the south. East Cambridge became a working-class neighborhood with a sizable immigrant population in the mid-nineteenth century, with the beginning of the industrial revolution. For many decades this neighborhood included a number of major manufacturing and industrial businesses. Since the early 1980's major changes in land use have transformed large manufacturing and industrial areas into commercial and retail developments with a vibrant business and commercial center.

East Cambridge features longstanding retail corridor along Cambridge Street, which is home a variety of restaurants and specialty shops. Inman Square lies to the west and Cambridge Crossing lies to the east of the neighborhood. The East Cambridge riverfront, beyond Lechmere Square, features the Museum of Science, hotels, apartment and condominium buildings, and high tech businesses. Recent redevelopment of First Street and Cambridgeside, the regional shopping mall, will add more retail, housing, and commercial spaces to the neighborhood.

Demographics

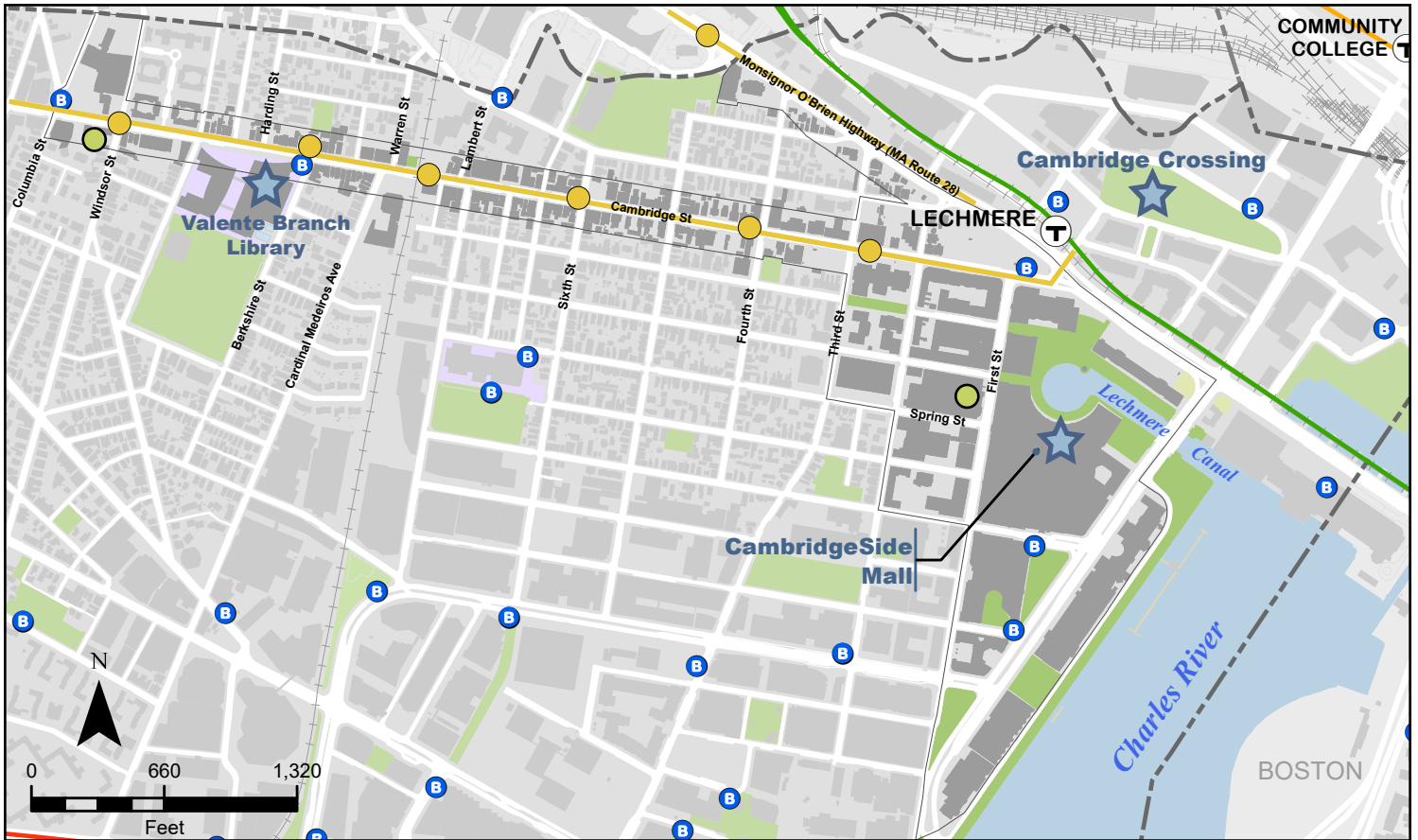
The East Cambridge Commercial District is home to a vibrant and diverse community, with more than 12,000 residents calling this area of Cambridge their home (see page 13 for the area boundary). The population of the district has been evolving, reflecting the dynamic nature of the neighborhood. As shown in the 2020 Census, the East Cambridge community saw an increase in diversity. Black or African American residents account for 9.4% of the population, Asian American residents 18.6%, and Latino or Hispanic residents 9.6%. For a more comprehensive view of the demographics of East Cambridge, please refer to page 15.

Future Opportunities

East Cambridge is a rapidly growing district in Cambridge, and several upcoming opportunities could help shape its future. In addition to the newly expanded Green Line extension and updated Lechmere Station and bus terminal, the Monsignor O'Brien Highway Reconstruction Project is a significant transportation initiative that aims to improve access to East Cambridge by upgrading the state road's infrastructure. The project involves the reconstruction of the bridge over the Charles River, which will create new opportunities for pedestrians, bikers, and public transportation users. The Monsignor O'Brien Highway will be widened to improve vehicular flow, and a new off-ramp will connect to Cambridgeside, one of the newest commercial developments in East Cambridge. These improvements will enhance accessibility to the district and facilitate economic growth.

One opportunity for East Cambridge lies in the potential for affordable housing. As identified in the Envision Cambridge citywide plan, Cambridge Street has the potential for sustainable growth to accommodate affordable housing and benefit from the small business community on Cambridge Street. The *Our Cambridge Street* Study builds on this goal through its recommendations around creating affordable commercial spaces for small businesses and developing strategies to increase affordable housing units in new and existing buildings. The Study highlights the importance of supporting a mix of vibrant, local, and small businesses that serve nearby residents, workers, and visitors' everyday needs. The diversity and density of these businesses can create a healthy business environment, attracting more people to the area and enhancing East Cambridge's vibrancy.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT



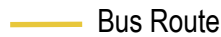
Key Items



Point of Interest



Parking Garage/Lot



Bus Route



Bus Stop



Bluebikes Station

Transit Scores

Bike Score

96



Walk Score

93



Transit Score

69



Transportation



8 Bluebikes Stations



4 Bus Routes (69,80,87,88)



29,304 Daily MBTA Riders

Parking



2 Parking Lots

and

348 Public Meter Spaces

Neighborhood Business Association

East Cambridge Business Association

Community Events

- Annual Smoke This Rib Fest
- Annual Chicken Run
- Cambridge Crossing Summer Nights

Sources: Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority; Walk Score, Inc.; City of Cambridge Open Data

KEY FINDINGS

Identified through Customer and Business Owner Surveys

Strengths

- ◆ Diverse local businesses and restaurants
- ◆ Well-maintained library
- ◆ Neighborhood activities and events foster a sense of community and togetherness
- ◆ New Lechmere MBTA station improves access to the district

Challenges

- ◆ Access to public transit is limited in some areas of the district
- ◆ Wary of more traffic disruptions and construction
- ◆ Concerns around car, bike, and pedestrian experience
- ◆ Need for more options for groceries, specialty items, and practical amenities

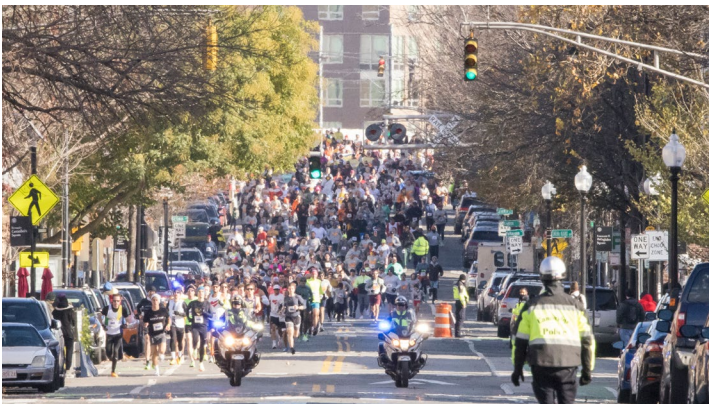


Photo Credits: Kyle Klein Photography



Opportunities

- ◆ Continue to celebrate the neighborhood's unique history and culture through public art and diverse cultural events
- ◆ Grocery and restaurant options at more price points
- ◆ More housing that is affordable and lower cost commercial spaces for small businesses
- ◆ Infrastructure and streetscape improvements
- ◆ More spaces for entertainment and nightlife
- ◆ Greater variety of retail stores

BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

Ground Floor Business Inventory

158

Total Number of Storefronts

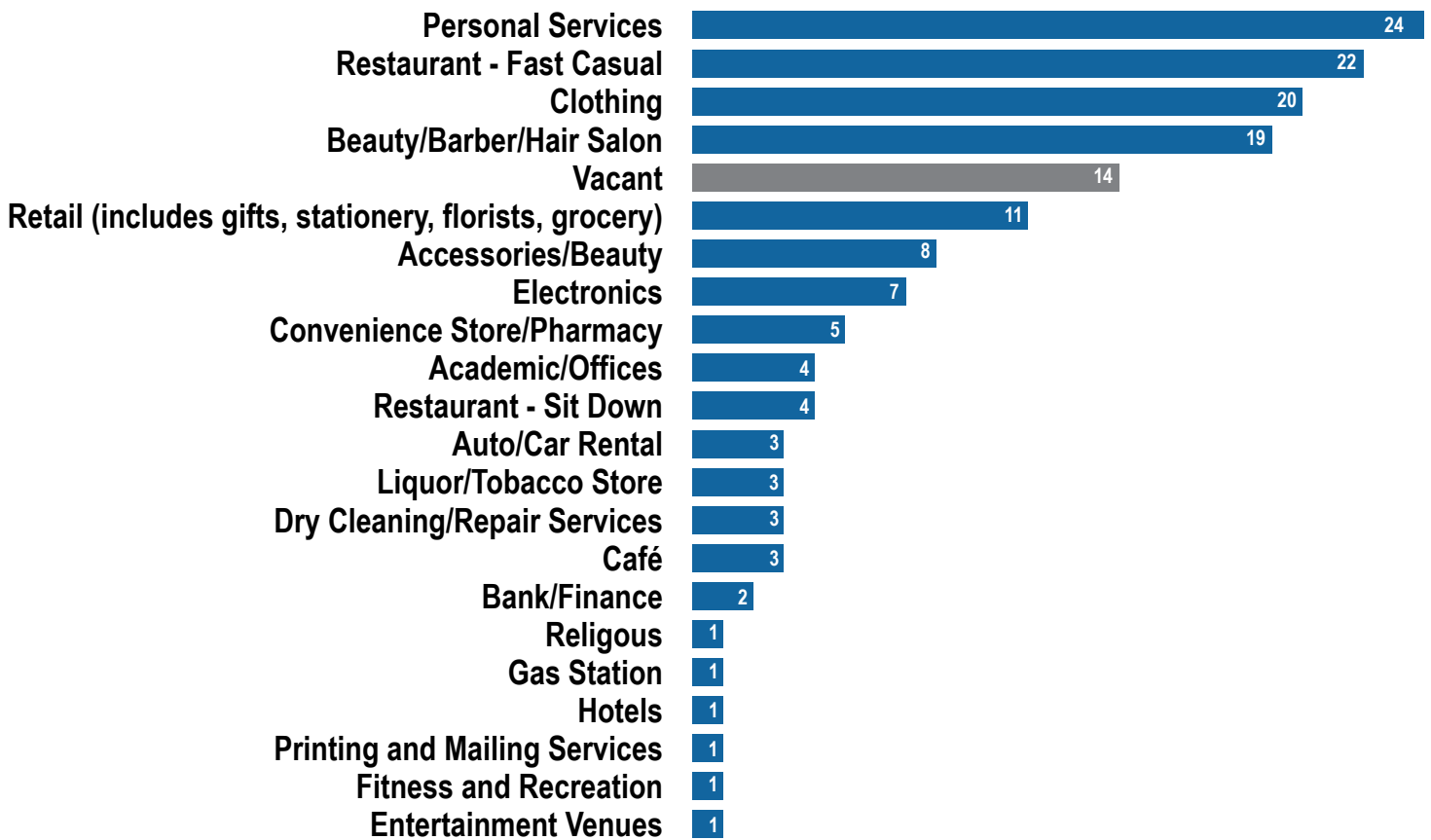
9%*

Storefront Vacancy

*Note: Numbers are based on a ground floor storefront survey conducted in September 2023. Some of the vacant properties were under lease negotiations at time of the survey. For a current list of vacancies, please go to:

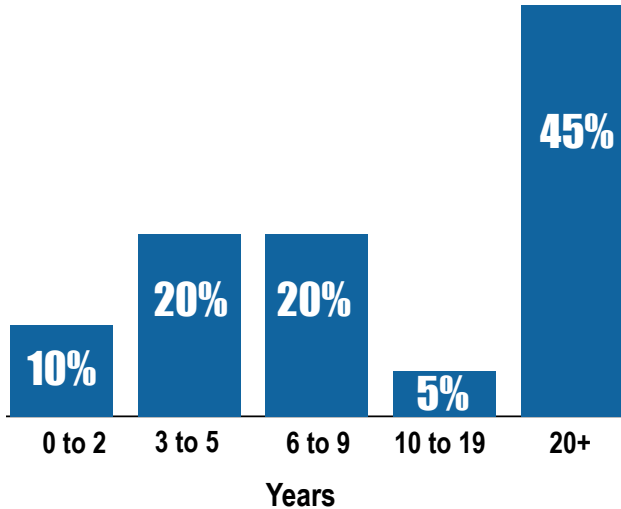
<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/economicopportunityanddevelopment/vacantstorefrontresources>

Storefront & Retail Mix



What We Heard From East Cambridge Business Owners

How many years have you been in business here?



How many employees do you have?



Outlier of 80 employees was removed from the average and median calculation

Do you own or rent your property?



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



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

	% Businesses
Parking	80%
Storefront Improvements	30%
Community Events/Marketing	20%
Sanitation	20%
Safety	10%
Business to Business Communication	5%
Not Applicable (No Storefront)	10%

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

	% Businesses
Marketing Support	65%
Financing	50%
Assistance with Regulatory Compliance	35%
Legal/Lease Support	30%
Training for Staff	10%
More Grant Support	5%

As a business owner, what changes would you suggest to improve East Cambridge for residents, pedestrians, and shoppers?



PARKING



MORE COMMUNITY EVENTS



MORE TREES



CLEANER STREETS

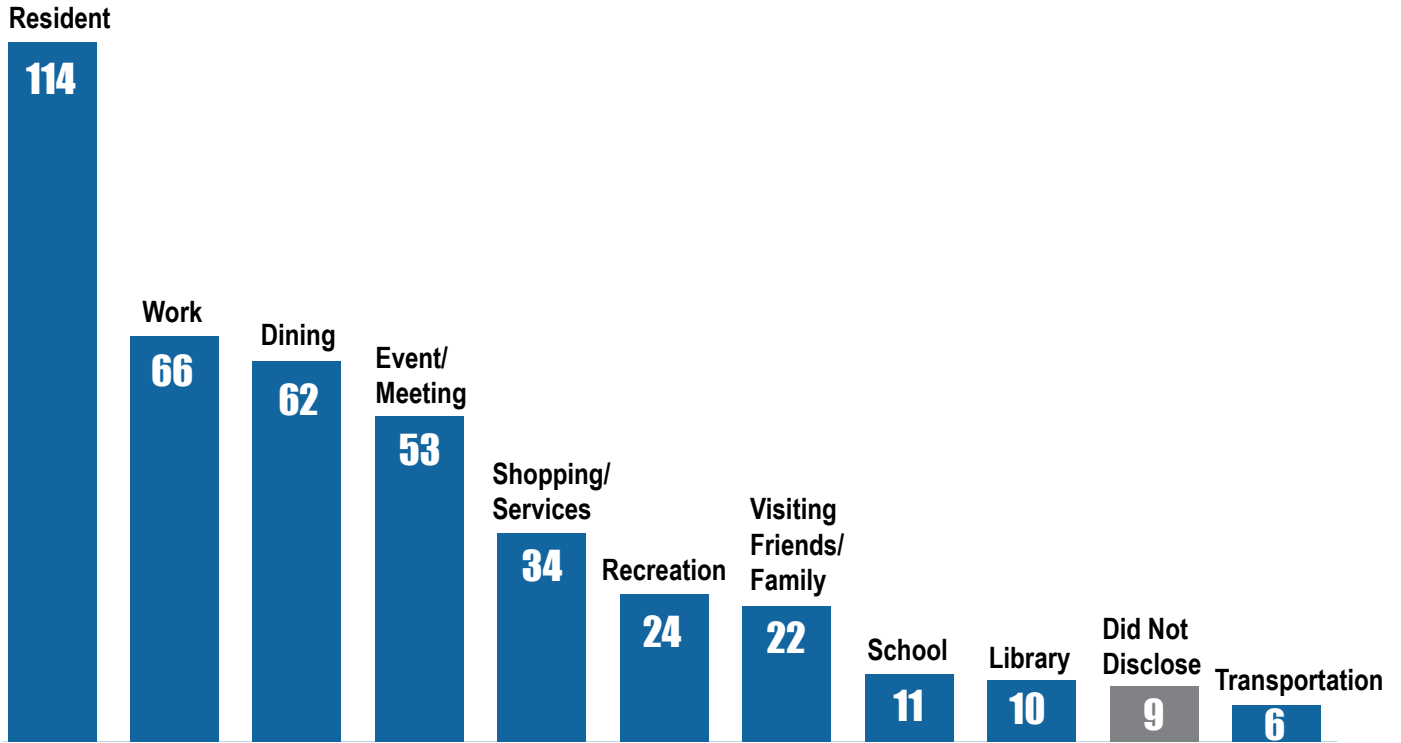
Source: East Cambridge Business Owner Survey (August 2023)

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

CUSTOMER OUTLOOK

What We Heard From Customers

What is your primary purpose for being in East Cambridge?*



What are the most common items you purchase in East Cambridge*

Item	% Customers
Food/Groceries	87%
Wine/Beer/Spirits	30%
Home Goods	14%
Arts/Crafts	11%
Beauty/Personal Care Products	12%
Accessories	6%
Clothing	13%
Electronics/Gifts	4%

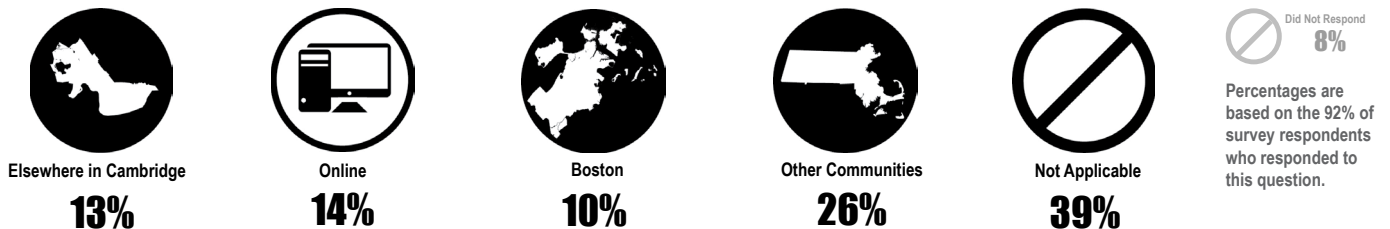
Did Not Respond 6% Percentages are based on the 94% of survey respondents who responded to this question.

What are the most common services you use in East Cambridge?*

Service	% Customers
Restaurant (Sit-Down)	63%
Restaurant (Take-Out)	65%
Pharmacy	25%
Music/Performing Arts Venue	9%
Medical	13%
Dental	11%
Hair Salon/Barber	15%
Other	7%

Did Not Respond 7% Percentages are based on the 93% of survey respondents who responded to this question.

If not East Cambridge, where do you shop?



Percentages are based on the 92% of survey respondents who responded to this question.

Source: East Cambridge Customer Intercept Survey (June 2023)

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

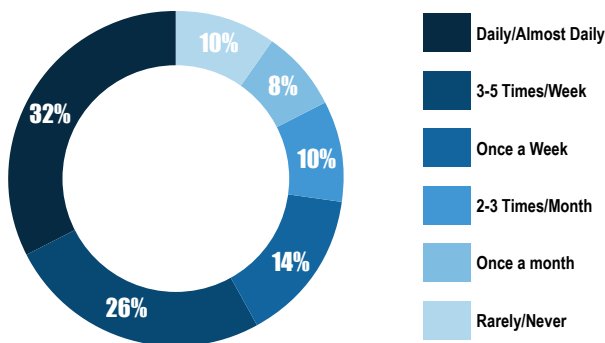
What We Heard From Customers

How do you usually travel to get to East Cambridge?*

	% Customers
Walk	57%
MBTA	36%
Bus	23%
Subway	19%
Bike	32%
Own	22%
Bluebikes	10%
Drive	21%
Alone	19%
Uber/Lyft/Taxi	9%
Carpool	2%
Company Shuttle	1%

Did not Respond **3%** Percentages are based on the 97% of survey respondents who responded to this question.

How often do you usually go shopping in East Cambridge?



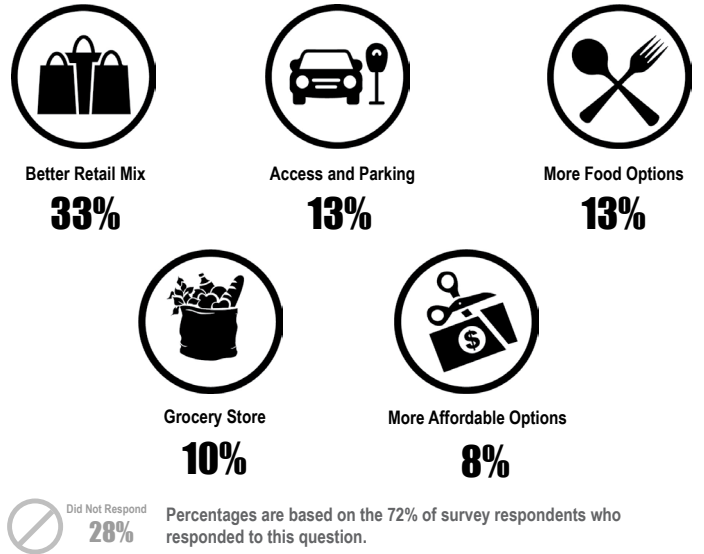
Did not Respond **3%** Percentages are based on the 97% of survey respondents who responded to this question.

When do you usually go shopping in East Cambridge*

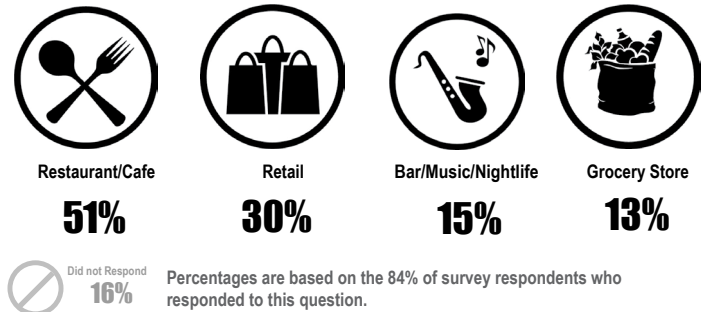
	% Customers
Weekdays	28%
Weekday Nights	19%
Weekend Days	27%
Weekend Nights	10%
No Set Time	35%

Did not Respond **4%** Percentages are based on the 96% of survey respondents who responded to this question.

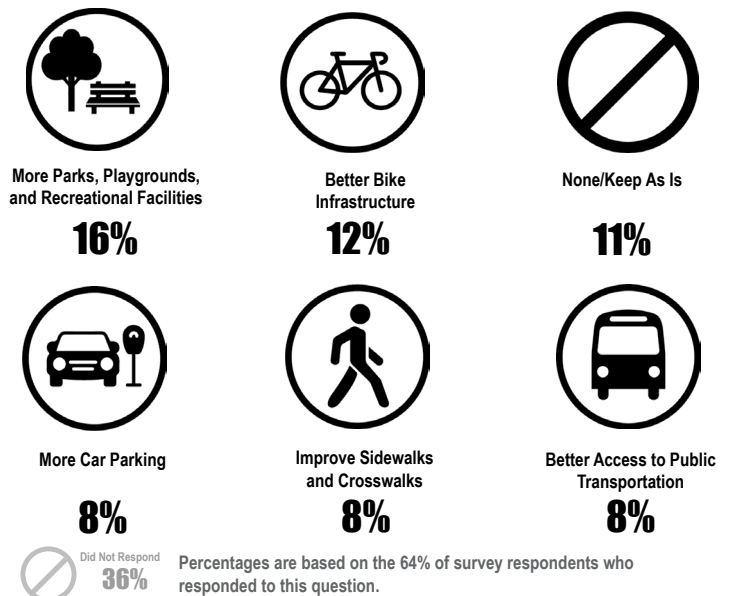
What would make you shop here more?*



What new businesses would you like to see?*



What changes would you like to see?*



Source: East Cambridge Customer Intercept Survey (June 2023)

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

DATA APPENDIX

Survey Methodology

A variety of City staff and volunteers surveyed people in East Cambridge over two weeks in June 2023 during peak times: morning, mid-day, and evening. We received 347 surveys from this effort. Additionally, City staff and the East Cambridge Business Association conducted a business owner survey. The merchant survey was conducted online and in person, and was available for 4 weeks, starting in mid-August. We received 20 responses to the business owner survey.

Trade Area and Context Area Demographics

Total Population

12,370	East Cambridge
116,892	Cambridge
7,029,917	Massachusetts

Average Household Size

1.89	East Cambridge
2.09	Cambridge
2.41	Massachusetts

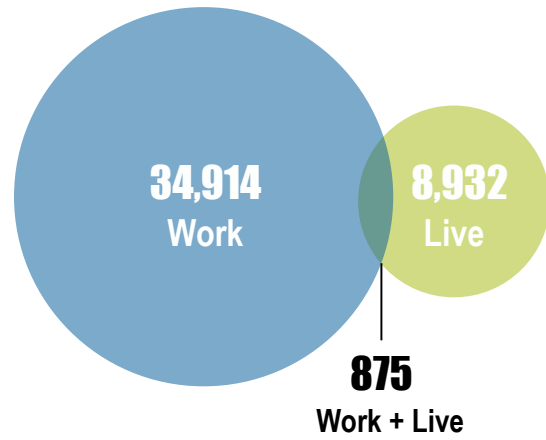
Median Household Income*

\$110,156	East Cambridge
\$112,152	Cambridge
\$94,488	Massachusetts

*Data does not include people who live in group quarters

Population and Household data is based on the context area.

Commuting Patterns



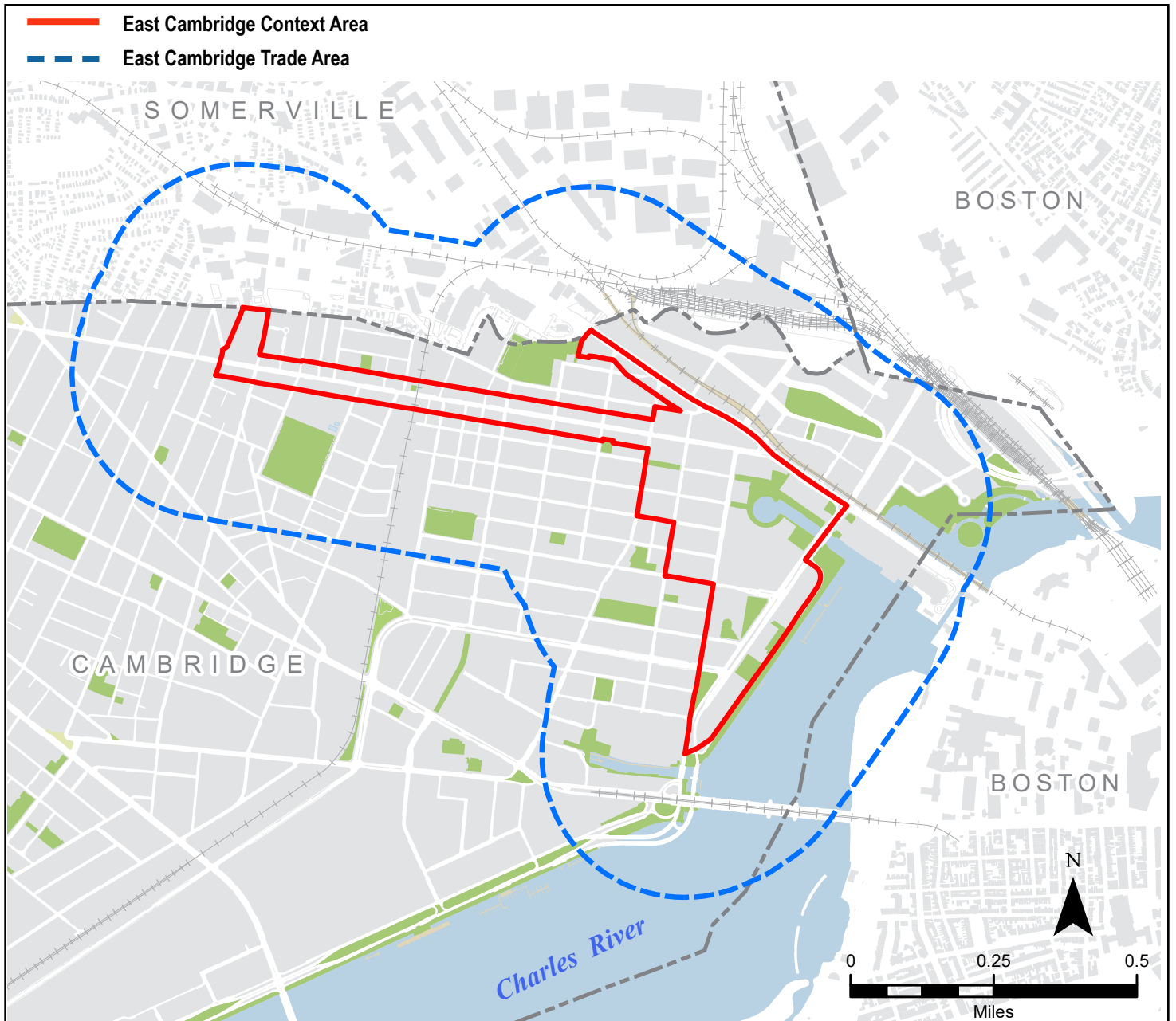
34,039	Work in East Cambridge, live elsewhere
875	Live and work in East Cambridge
8,057	Live in East Cambridge, work elsewhere

Commuting Patterns data based on the trade area.

This report does not include a retail opportunity section. In previous reports the retail opportunity section included information on retail supply and demand data. This data helps us understand if residents in the neighborhood are leaving the district to spend money outside of the square. We are not able to provide this data set because ESRI Community Analyst does not provide data after 2019.

Context Area

East Cambridge 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 East Cambridge area. The data presented in the Ground Floor Business Inventory on p.8 refers to businesses located in the Context Area and 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. Responses from this demographic are reflected in the report’s Appendix, pp.14-15.

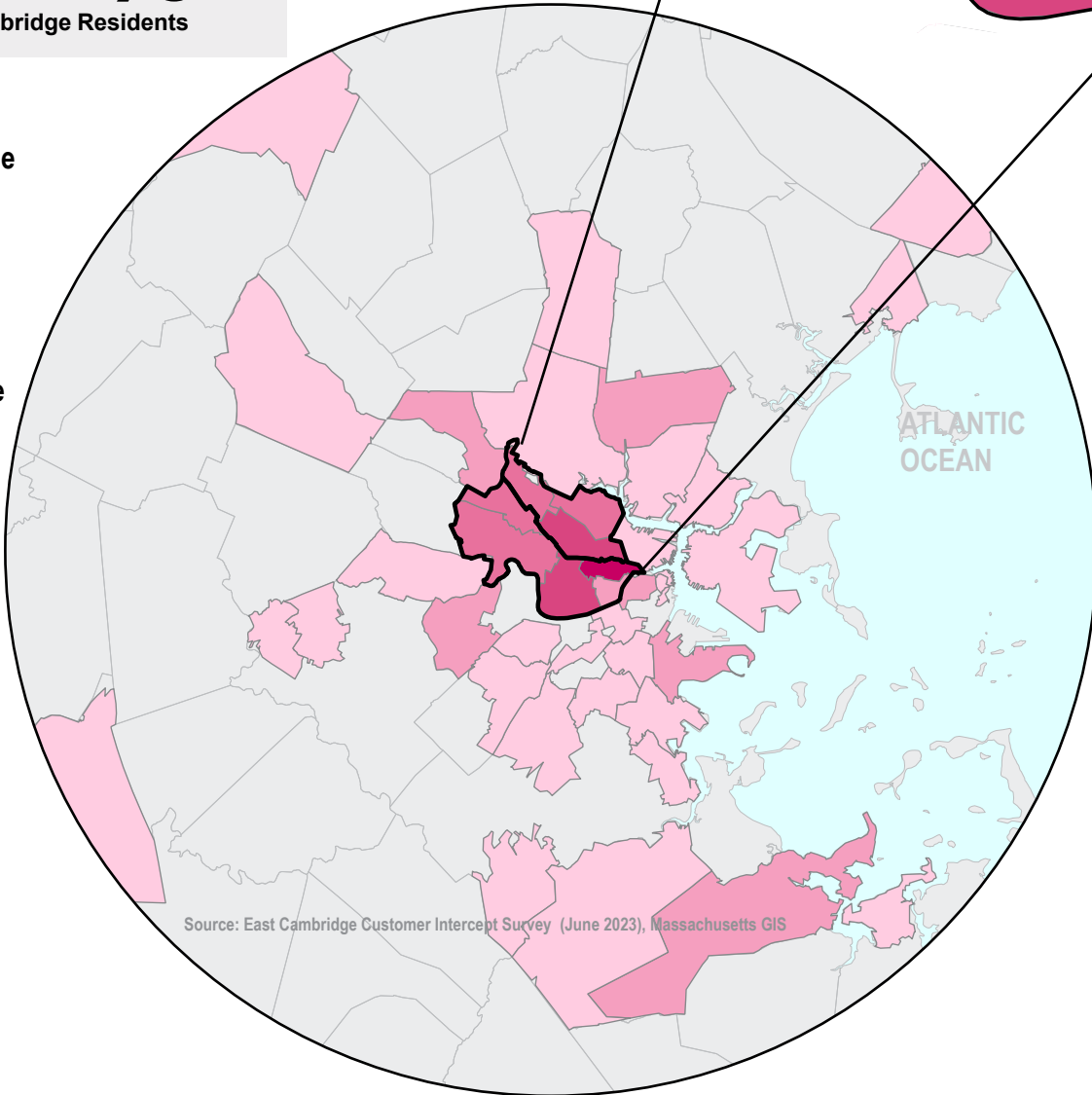
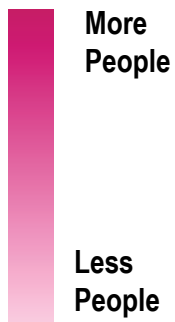


Survey Respondent Locations

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. 331 (95%) of survey respondents shared their zip code.

60%

Cambridge Residents

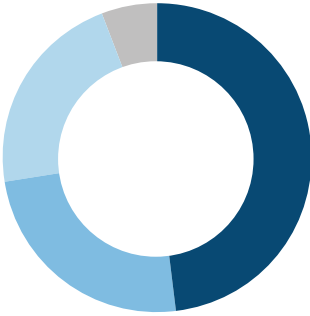


Source: East Cambridge Customer Intercept Survey (June 2023), Massachusetts GIS

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

Customer Demographics

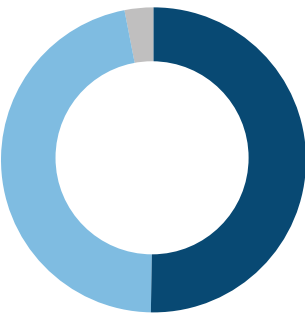
What is your relationship to East Cambridge?



	% Customers
Resident	51%
Other	26%
Worker	23%
Did not Disclose	6%

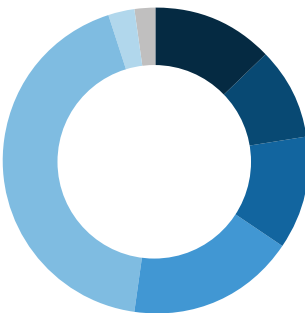
Customers were able to select more than one answer, so total will be more than 100%.

What is your gender?



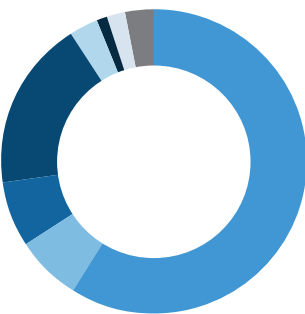
	% Customers
Female	50%
Male	46%
Other	< 1%
Did not Disclose	3%

What is your age?



	% Customers
60+	13%
50-59	10%
40-49	12%
30-39	18%
20-29	43%
<19	3%
Did not Disclose	2%

What is your race or ethnicity?



	% Customers	% East Cambridge	% Cambridge
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<1%	0.4%	0.4%
Asian	18%	18.6%	17.4%
Black/African American	7%	9.5%	10.8%
Caucasian/White	59%	68.5%	68.4%
Latino/Hispanic	7%	9.6%	8.3%
Mixed/Multi-racial	3%	2.9%	3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0%	0.2%	0.1%
Other	2%	X	X
Did not Disclose	3%	X	X

East Cambridge/Cambridge Source: U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap Application. East Cambridge data based on trade area.

Source: East Cambridge Customer Intercept Survey (June 2023); U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2021)

EAST CAMBRIDGE

The Community Development Department is the planning agency for the City of Cambridge. Our mission is to foster a livable, sustainable, just, and equitable community. We work to enhance the character and diversity of the city's neighborhoods, preserve and increase affordable housing, create and promote accessible and sustainable mobility, build environmental resilience, and support sustainable economic growth. Through these initiatives, we strive to enrich the lives of residents, expand their opportunities, and contribute to a healthy urban environment. CDD takes an interdisciplinary approach to manage and guide evolution of our urban environment in a manner consistent with the City's priorities. We engage and collaborate with community partners, other government agencies, businesses and residents to make Cambridge a desirable place to live, work, learn, play, and innovate.

The Economic Opportunity and Development Division is committed to building an inclusive and sustainable economy in the City of Cambridge. The Division is responsible for a wide range of activities designed to meet the City's need for a vibrant, innovative, diverse, and thriving economic base that ensures economic opportunity for all. 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:

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/economicopportunityanddevelopment>

Sources

City of Cambridge Open Data

City of Cambridge Neighborhood Statistical Profile (May 2023)

East Cambridge Customer Intercept Survey (June 2023)

U.S. Census Bureau 2020 Decennial Census

U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (2022)

U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (2021)

Walk Score, Inc.

Photo Credits: Kyle Klein Photography; Nicolaus Czarnecki; Nikul Patel; Pardis Saffari;
Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority

[cambridgema.gov/CDD](https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD)

