

# Commercial District Recovery Plan Check-In Meeting

RKG Associates



## Local Rapid Recovery Plan Program

The Commonwealth's Department of Housing & Community Development Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program is intended to provide every municipality in Massachusetts the opportunity to develop actionable, project-based recovery plans tailored to the unique economic challenges and COVID-19 related impacts to downtowns, town centers, and commercial areas across the commonwealth.

### Phase I

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#### Diagnostic

April - May

- Diagnosing conditions
- Cataloguing COVID-19 impacts
- Community outreach

### Phase II

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#### Project Recommendation

June - July

- Project identification
- Developing project details

### Phase III

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#### Plan Documentation

August - September

- Development of final rapid recovery plans

# Agenda

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- Summary of Phase I findings
  - Baseline Data Collection
  - Business Survey Report Results
  - Business Association Conversations
- Open Discussion
- Next Steps

# Baseline Data Collection

*Data was collected at the city level  
and by commercial district*

## Large Commercial Districts

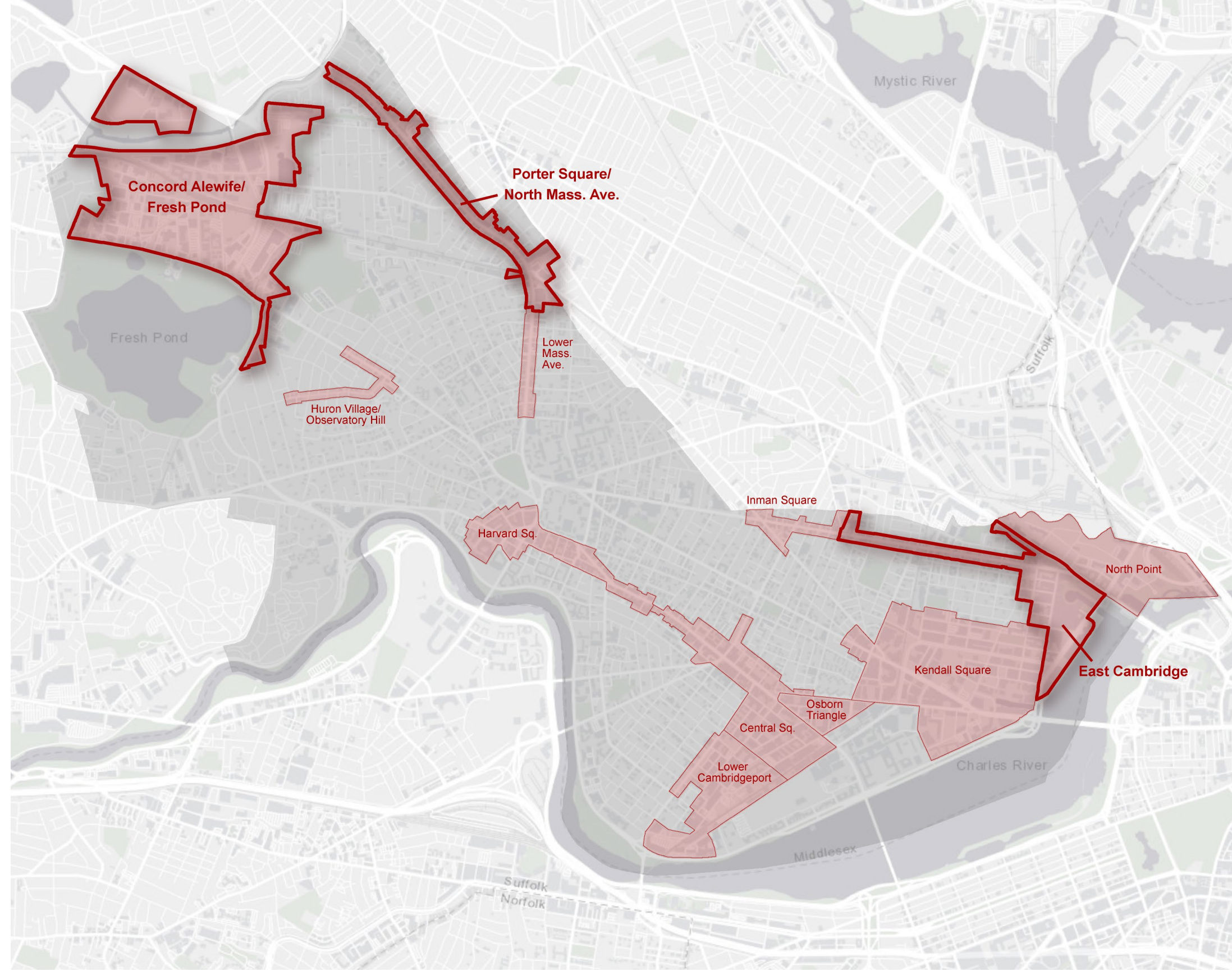
- Kendall Square/Osborn Triangle
- Central Square/Lower Cambridgeport
- Harvard Square
- Porter Square

## Neighborhood Districts

- Huron Village/Observatory Hill
- Lower Mass. Ave.
- Inman Square
- East Cambridge/Cambridge St.
- North Mass. Ave.

## Developing Districts

- Northpoint/Cambridge Crossing
- Concord Alewife / Fresh Pond



# Baseline Data Collection



## Market Information

Trends  
Consumer Profiles  
Demand



## Physical Environment

Public Realm  
Private Realm  
Access + Visibility



## Business Environment

Anchors/Destinations  
Asset Mix  
Nodes/Clusters



## Administrative Capacity

Partners  
Funding  
Regulations/Zoning



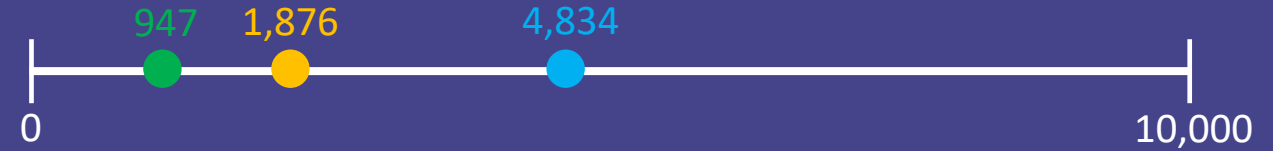
**CUSTOMER  
BASE**



**Citywide**

RESIDENT  
POPULATION

118,202



MEDIAN HH  
INCOME

\$99,021



MEDIAN  
AGE

32



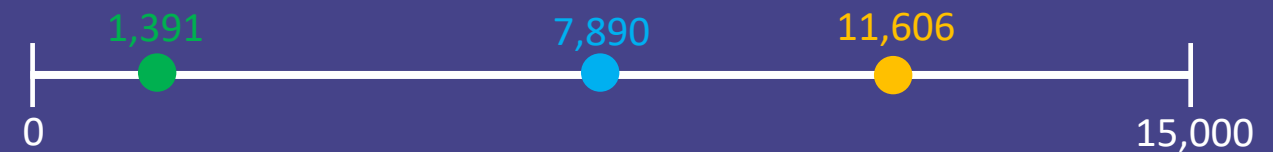
AVERAGE HH  
SIZE

2.03



EMPLOYEES

124,243



**Commercial Districts**

- Porter Square/ North Mass. Ave.
- East Cambridge
- Concord Alewife / Fresh Pond

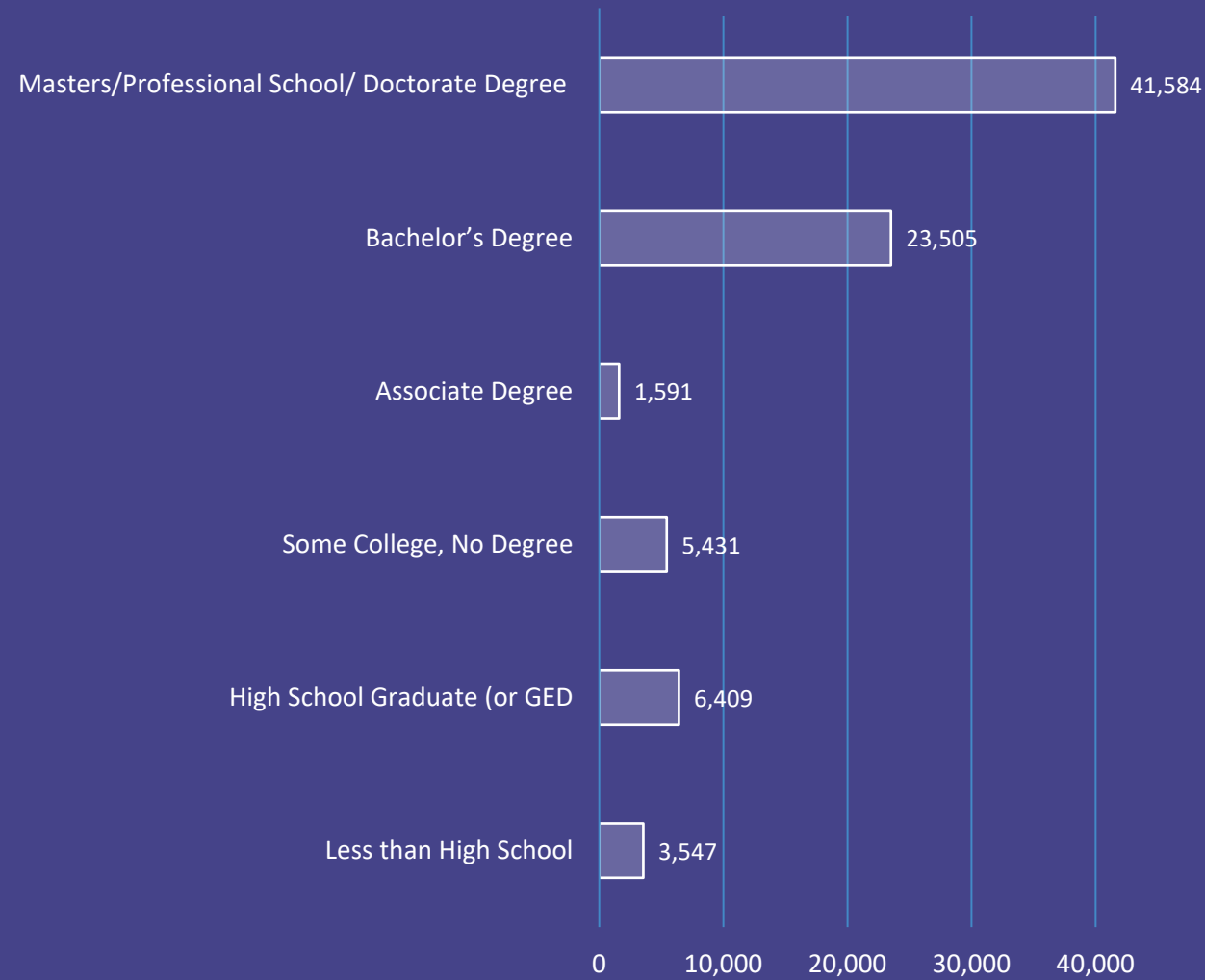
# EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



## CUSTOMER BASE

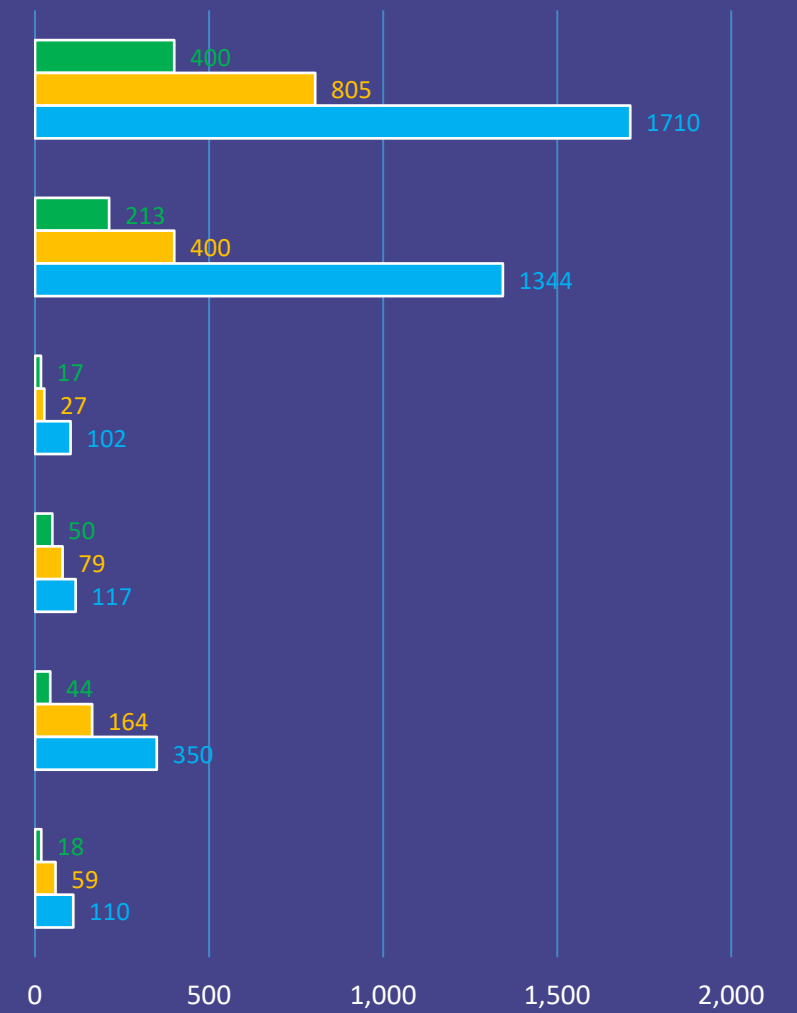


### Citywide



### Commercial Districts

- Porter Square/ North Mass. Ave.
- East Cambridge
- Concord Alewife / Fresh Pond



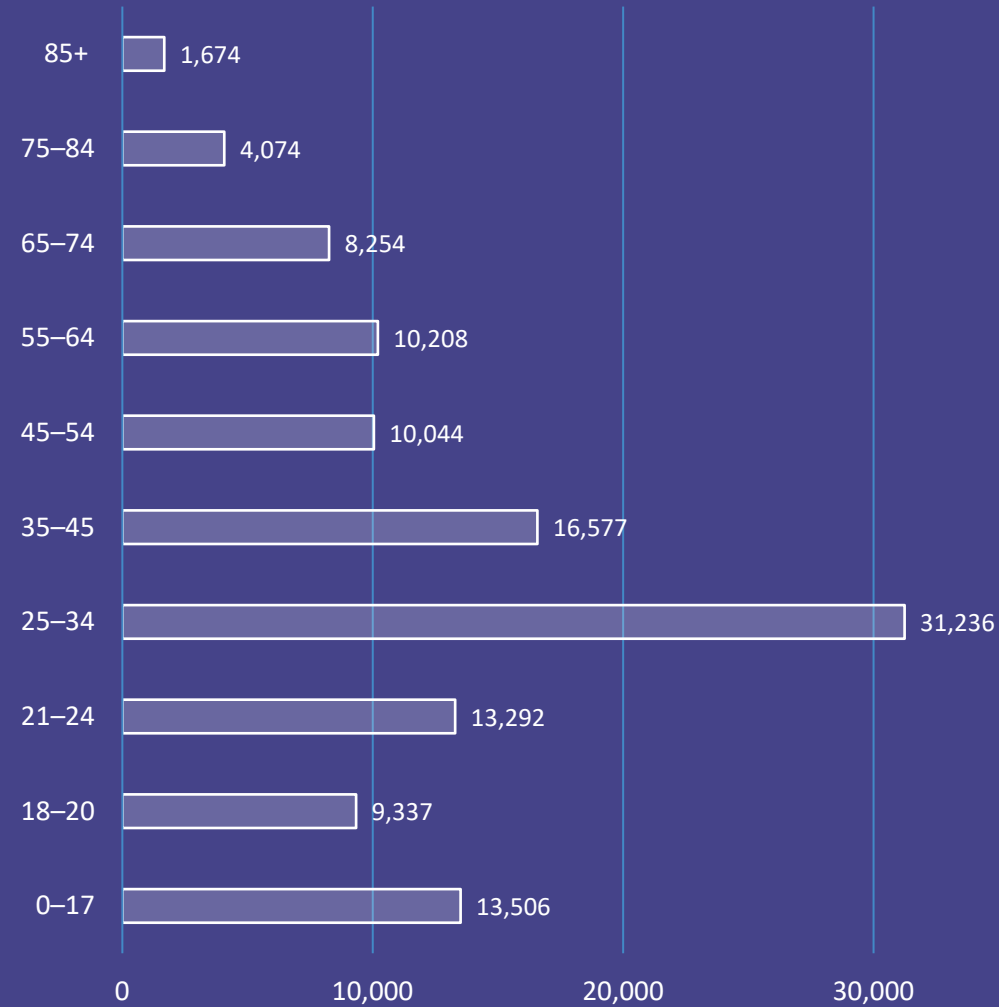
# AGE DISTRIBUTION



## CUSTOMER BASE

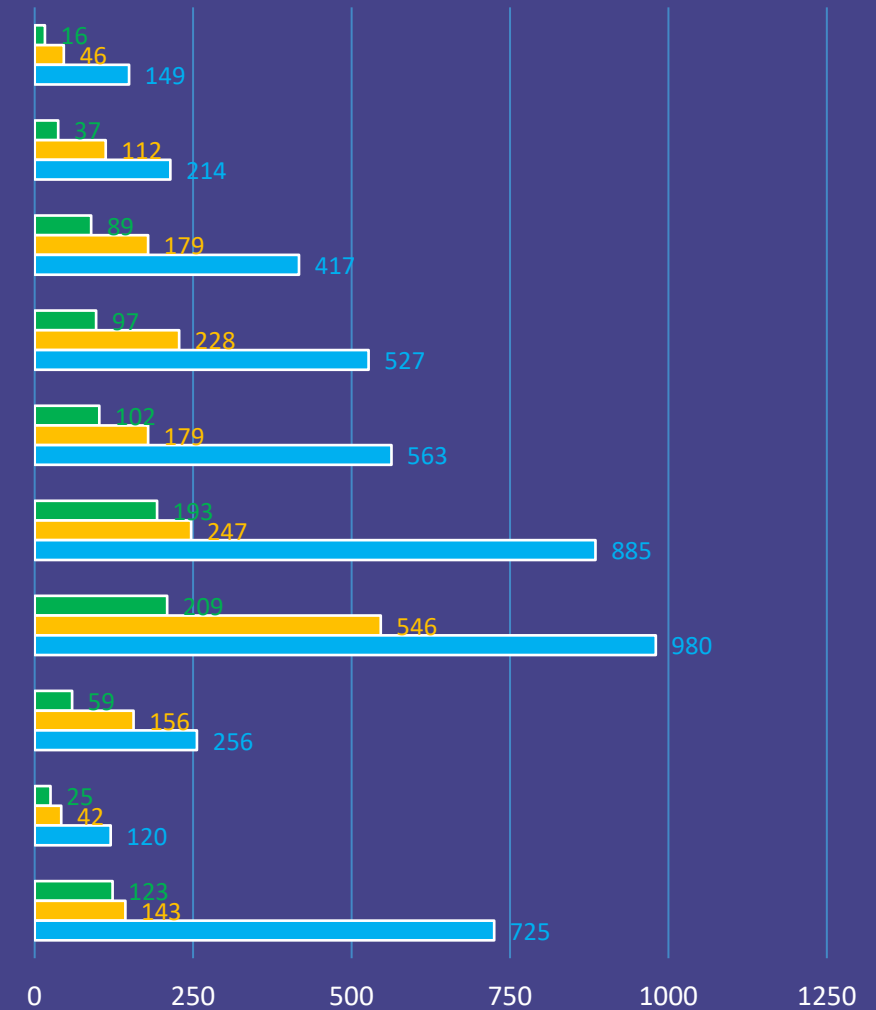


### Citywide



### Commercial Districts

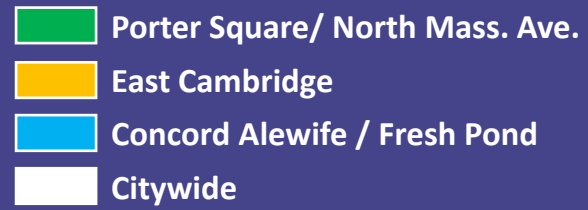
- Porter Square/ North Mass. Ave.
- East Cambridge
- Concord Alewife / Fresh Pond



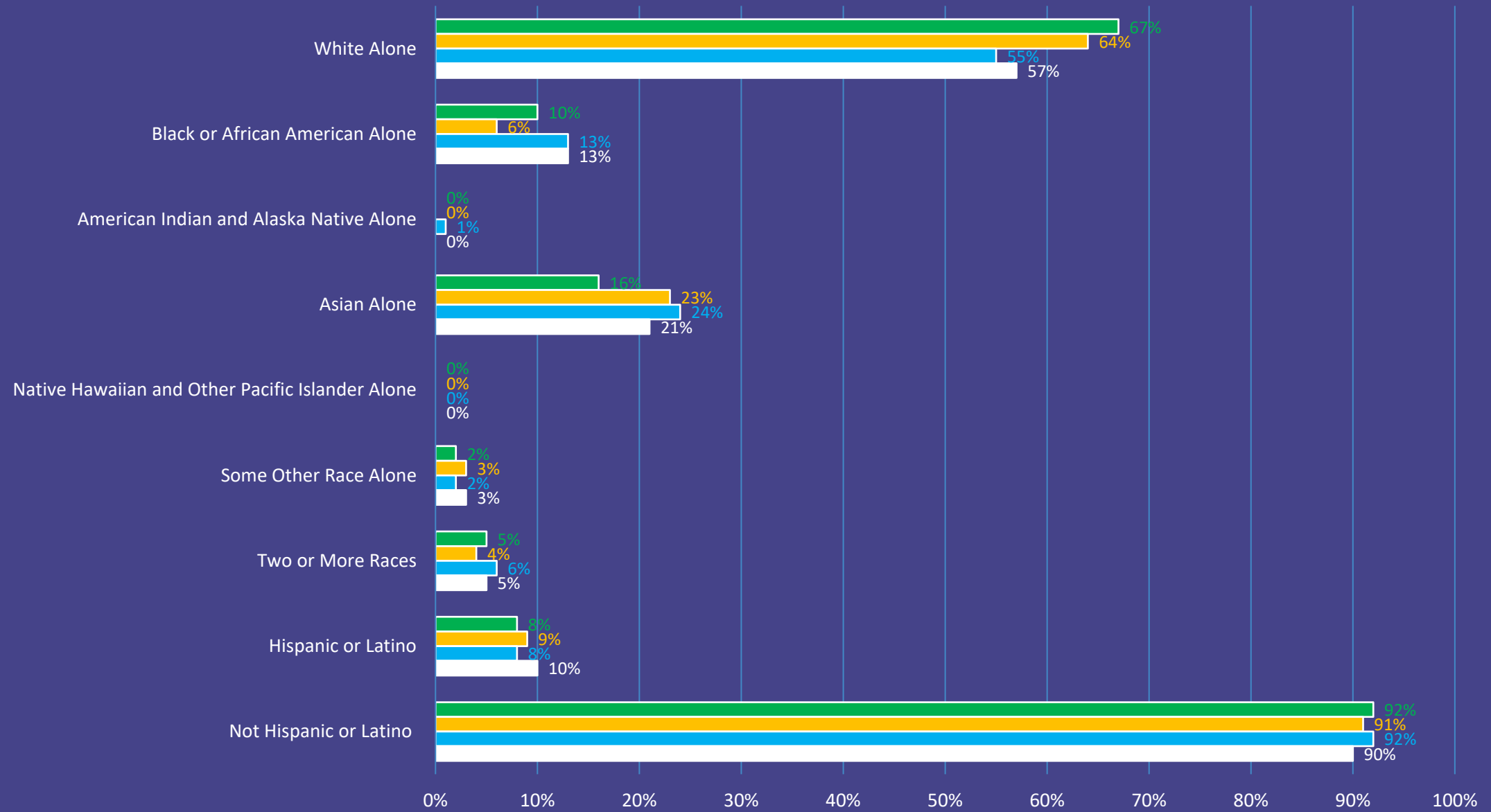
Sources: Esri Business Analyst, 2020



# RACE/ETHNICITY



## CUSTOMER BASE



Sources: Esri Business Analyst, 2020



# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

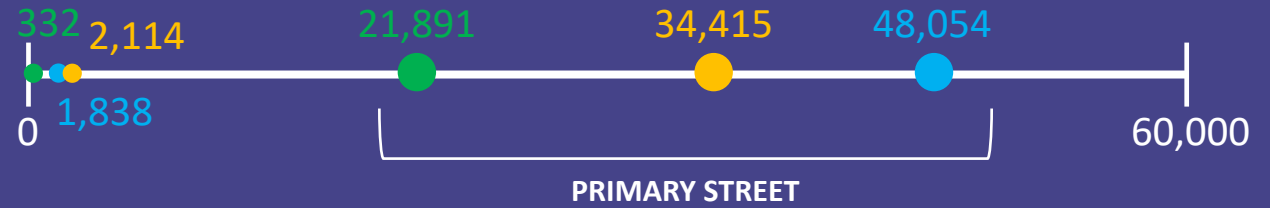


## Citywide

AVERAGE ANNUAL DAILY TRAFFIC



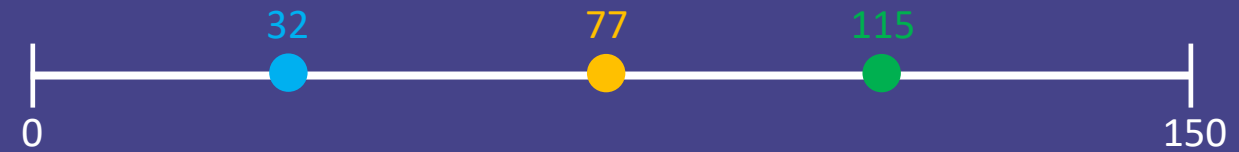
SECONDARY STREET



OPEN SPACE (ACRES) 888.2



STOREFRONTS 869



### Commercial Districts

- Porter Square/ North Mass. Ave.
- East Cambridge
- Concord Alewife / Fresh Pond

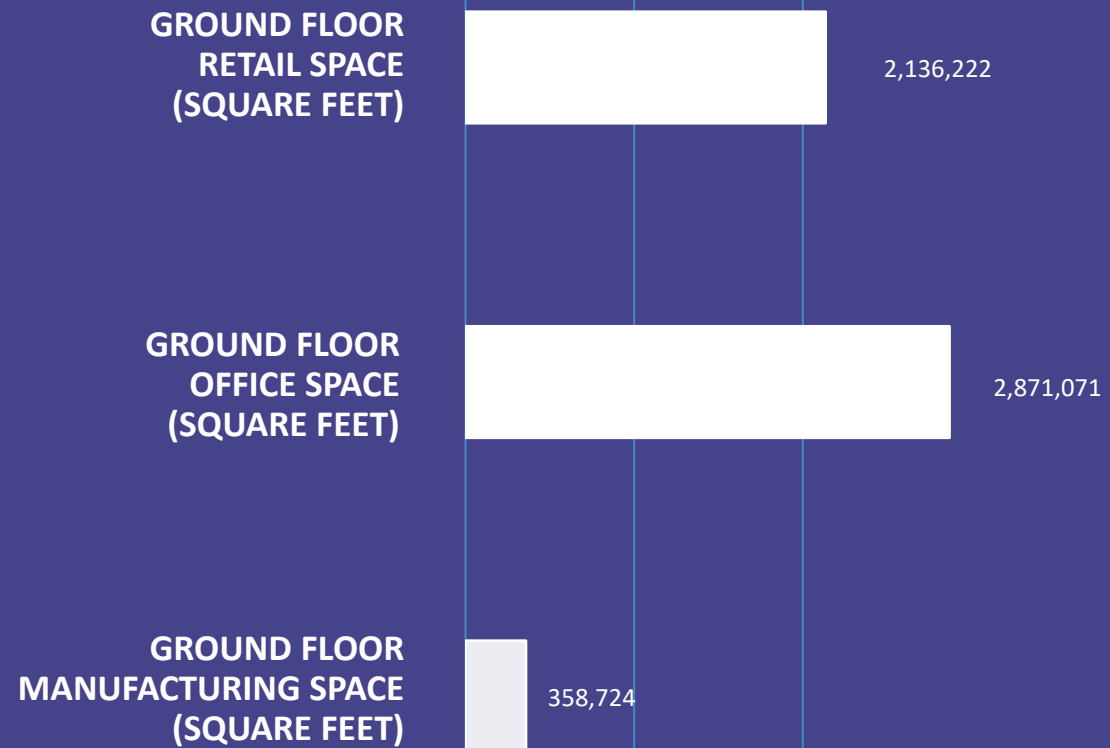
Sources: City of Cambridge, 2020  
 \* Traffic counts from MassDOT 2019 & Esri 2006 – 2013



# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

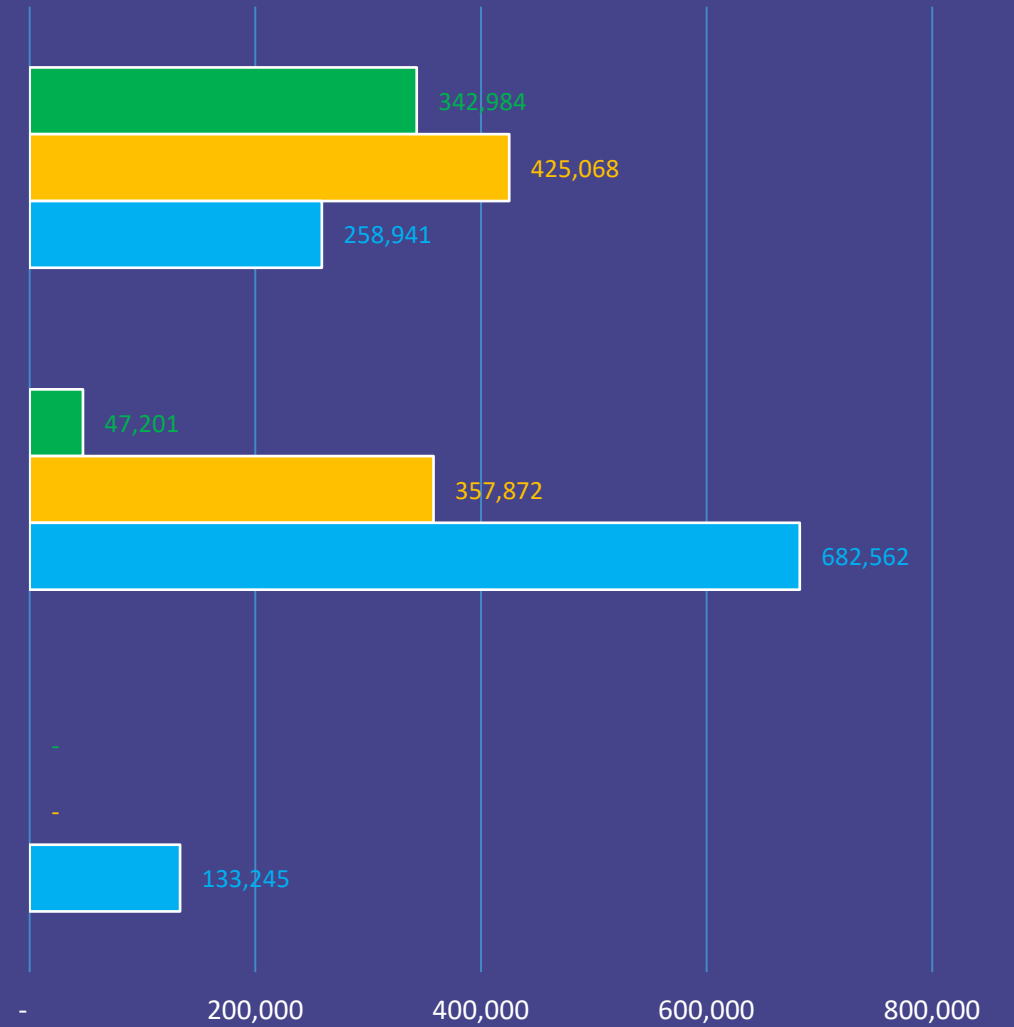


## Citywide



## Commercial Districts

- Porter Square/ North Mass. Ave.
- East Cambridge
- Concord Alewife / Fresh Pond



Sources: City of Cambridge, 2020



# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

## Public Realm Grades

Porter Square

East Cambridge

Concord Alewife /  
Fresh Pond

|                        |   |   |   |
|------------------------|---|---|---|
| SIDEWALK               | A | A | A |
| STREET TREES & BENCHES | C | B | C |
| LIGHTING               | B | A | B |
| WAYFINDING/<br>SIGNAGE | B | B | C |
| ROADBED & CROSSWALKS   | B | A | B |





# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



## Private Realm Grades

|                        | Porter Square | East Cambridge | Concord Alewife / Fresh Pond |
|------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| WINDOW                 | A             | A              | C                            |
| OUTDOOR DISPLAY/DINING | C             | B              | F                            |
| SIGNAGE                | A             | A              | C                            |
| AWNING                 | C             | C              | F                            |
| FACADE                 | A             | A              | B                            |
| LIGHTING               | C             | B              | C                            |



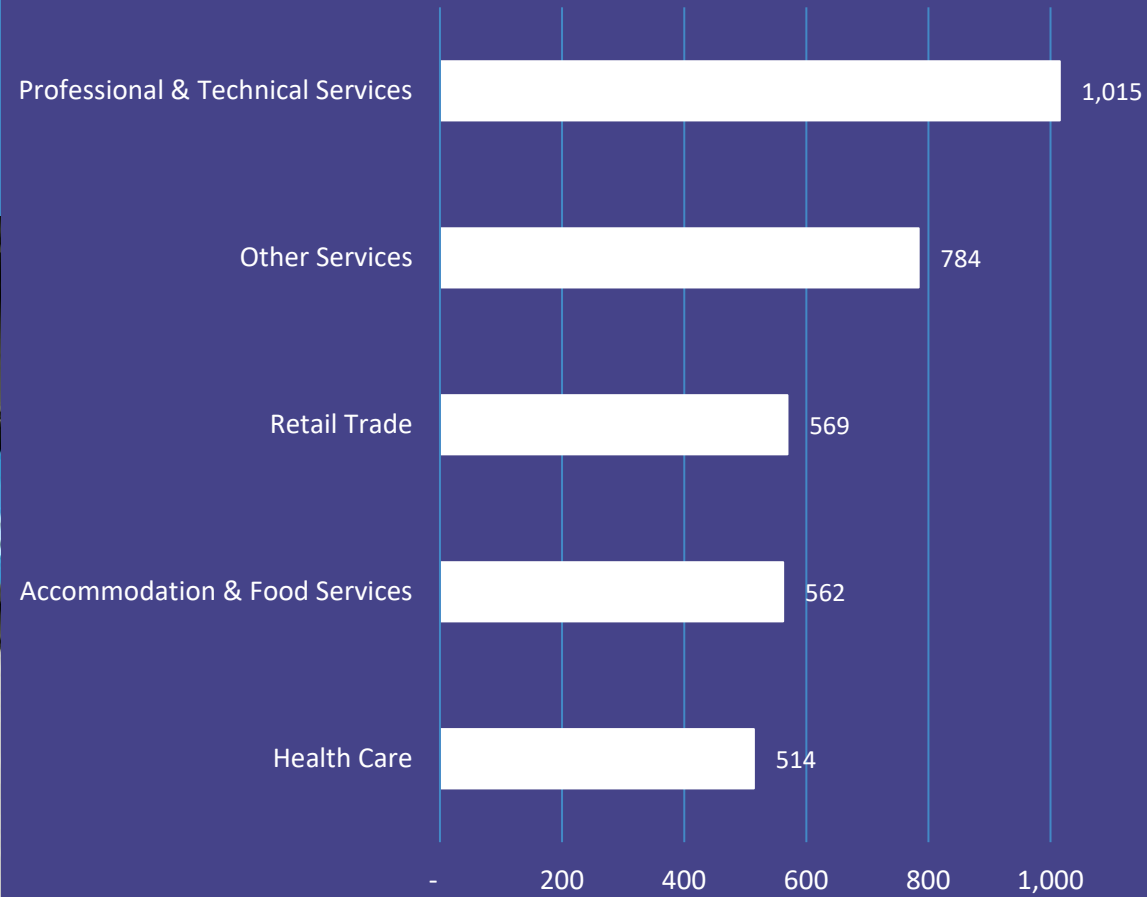


## BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

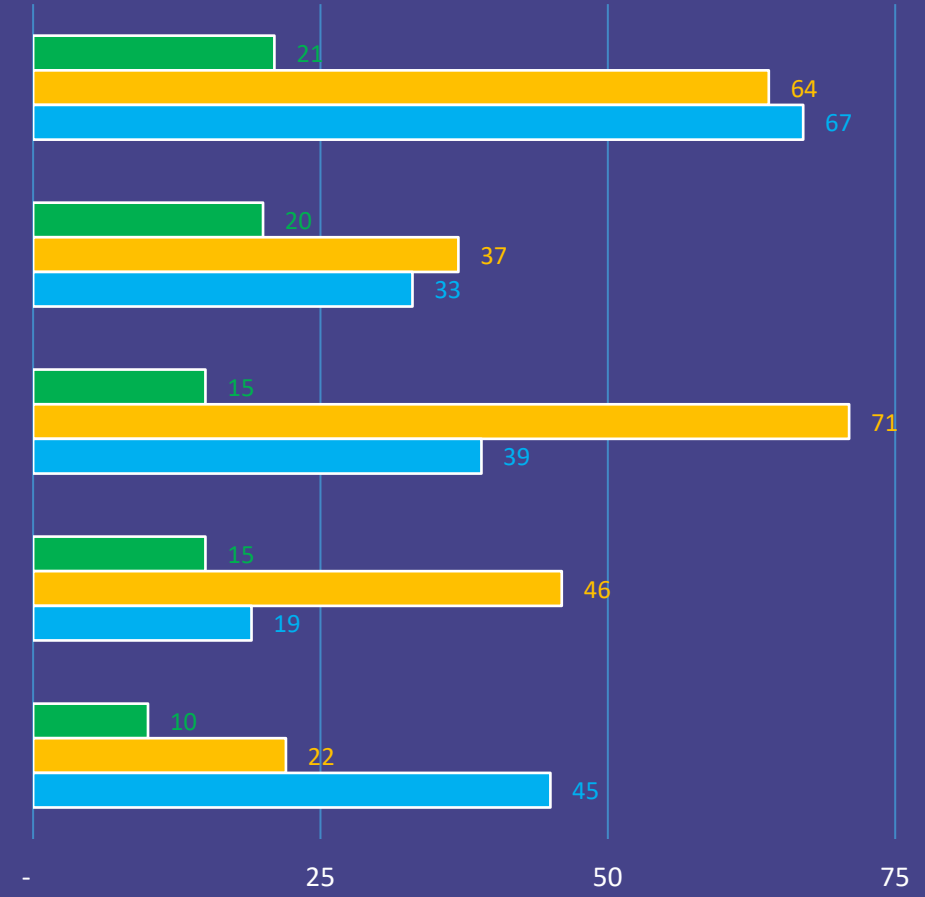
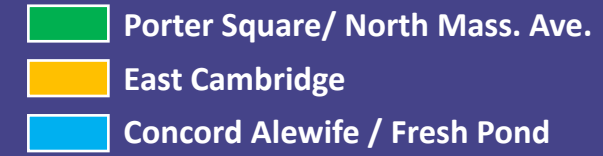


### Total # of Businesses (Top 5 Industries)

#### Citywide



#### Commercial Districts



# Business Closures

## Citywide

58

50% in Accommodation & Food Services  
33% in Retail

## Porter Square/ N. Mass. Ave

5

40% in Accommodation & Food Services  
40% in Retail

## East Cambridge

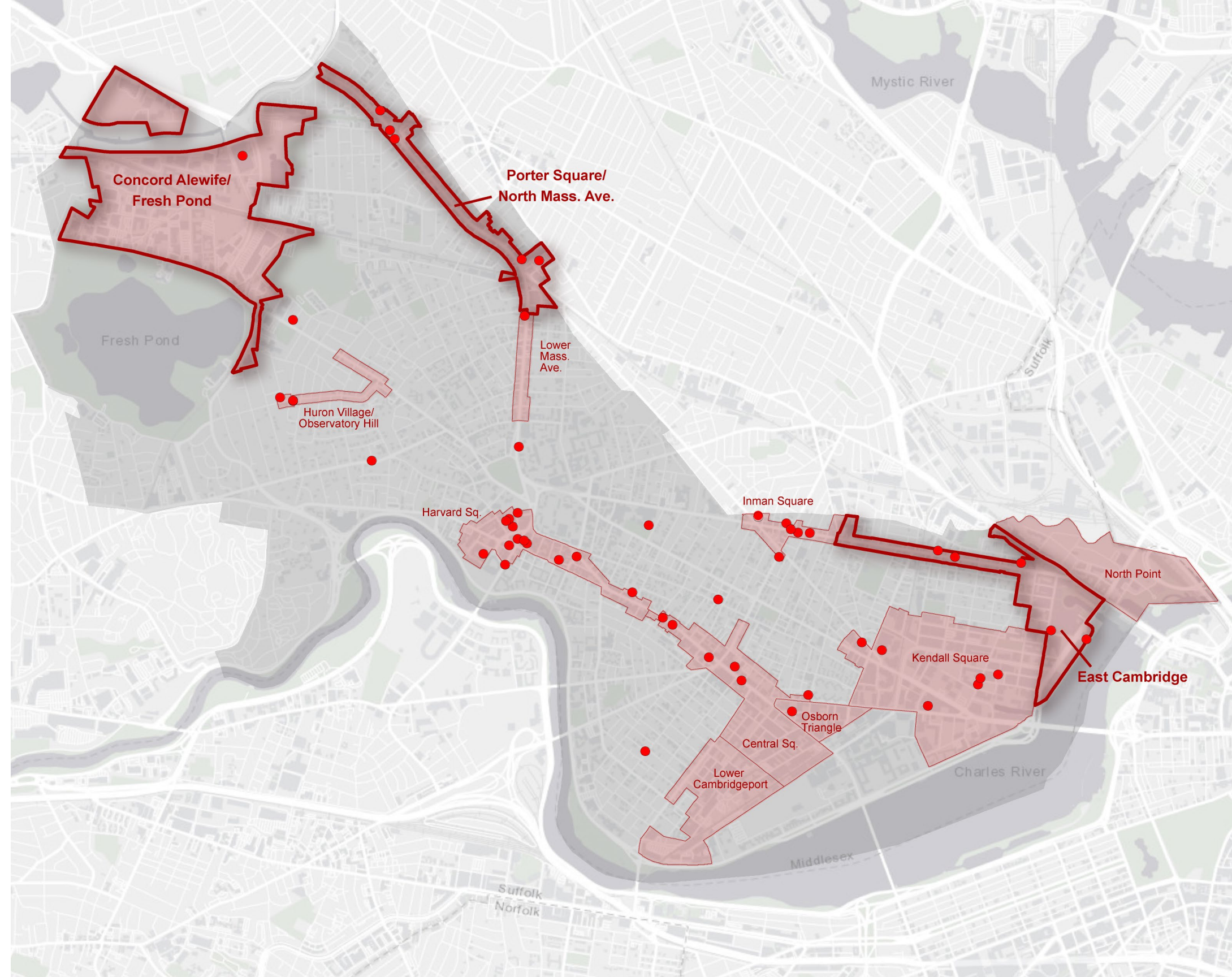
4

25% in Accommodation & Food Services  
25% in Retail

## Concord Alewife/Fresh Pond

2

100% in Accommodation & Food Services



# Vacant Storefronts

Citywide

132

Porter Square/ N. Mass. Ave

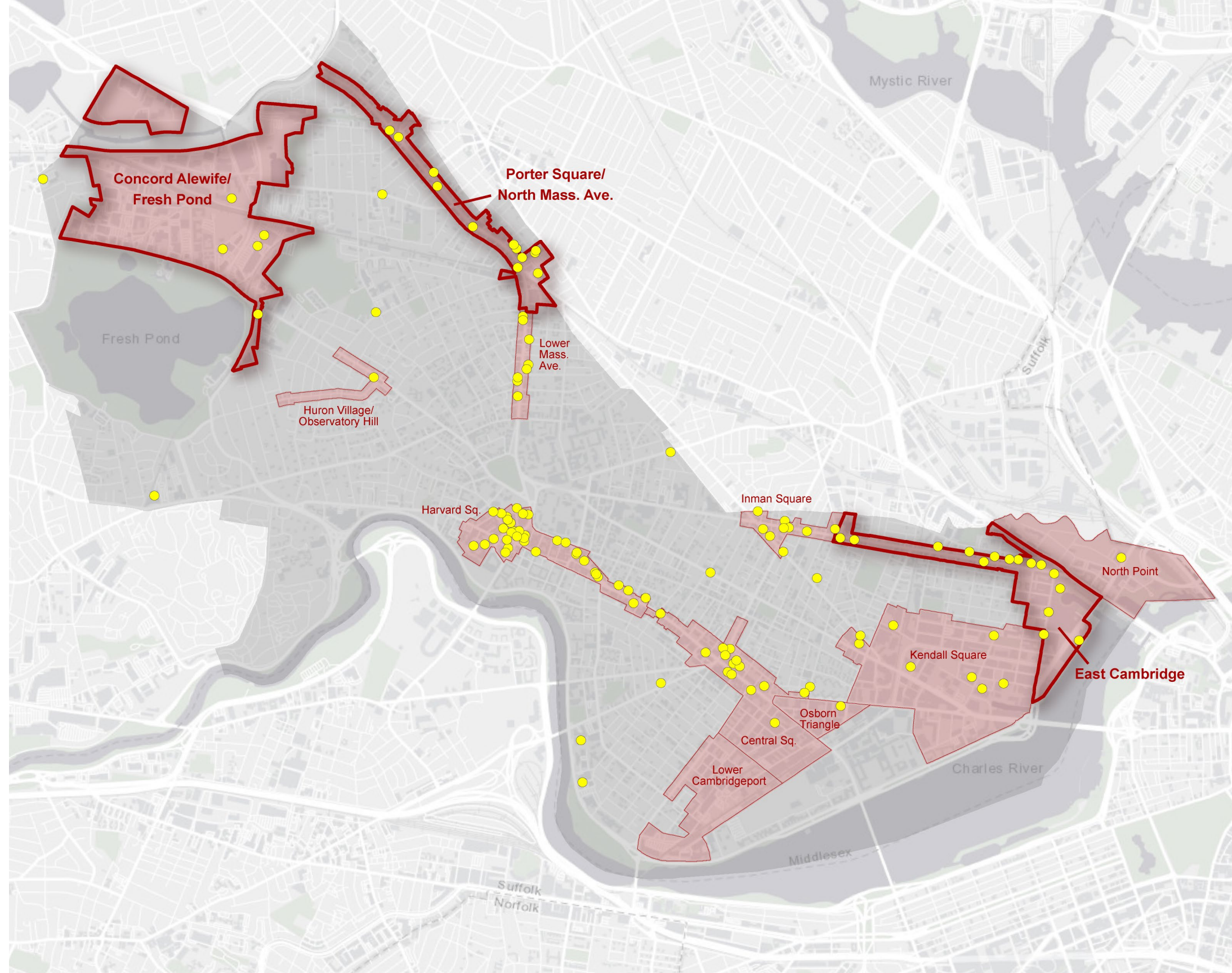
13

East Cambridge

14

Concord Alewife/Fresh Pond

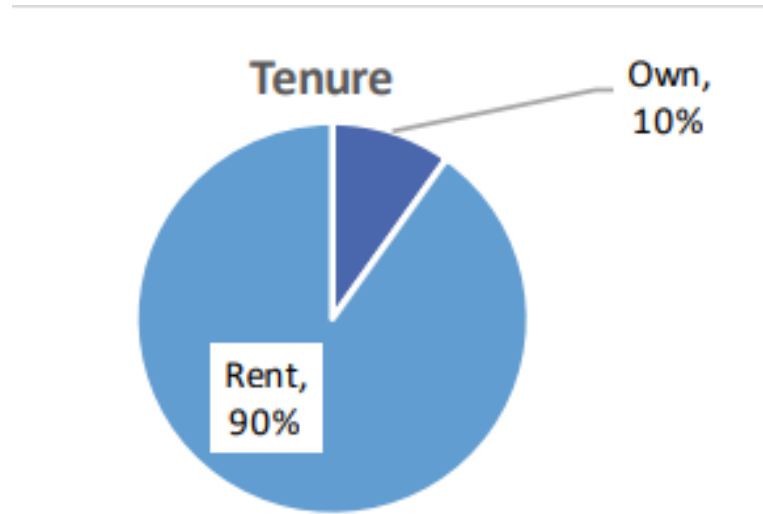
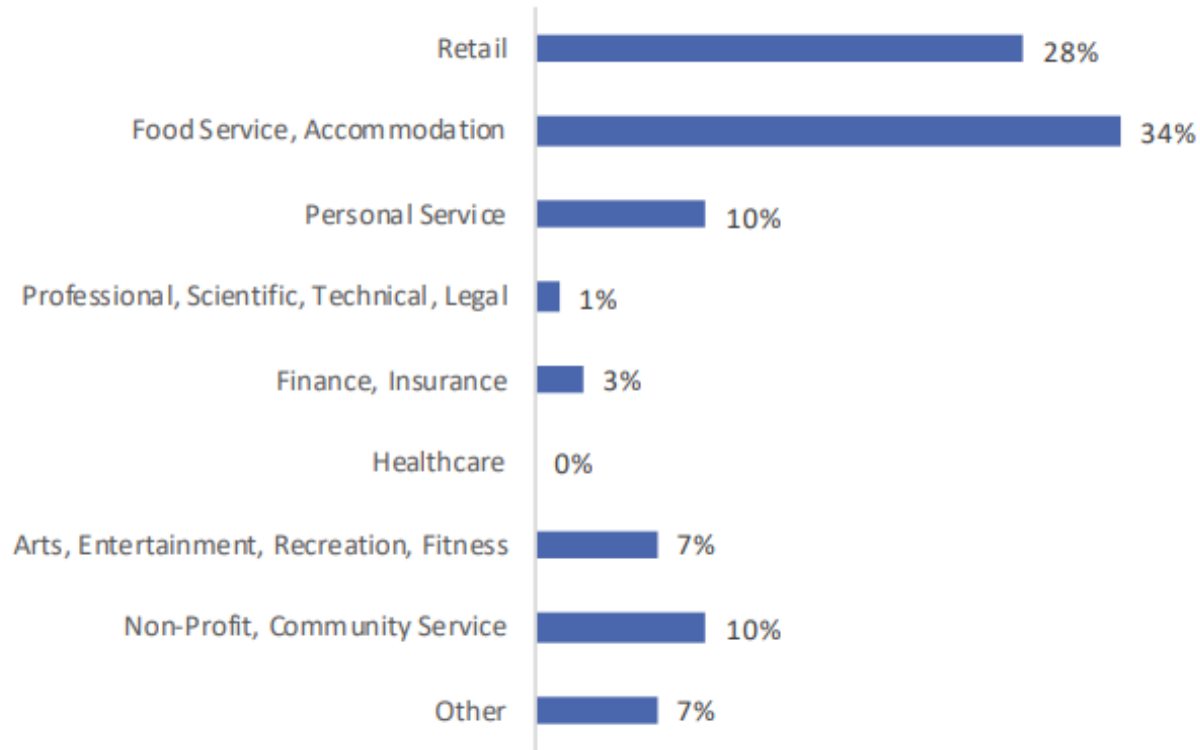
5



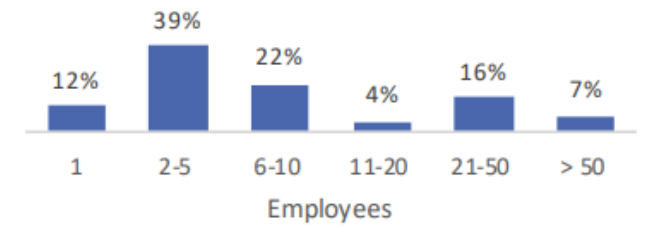
Sources: City of Cambridge (data as of March 2021)



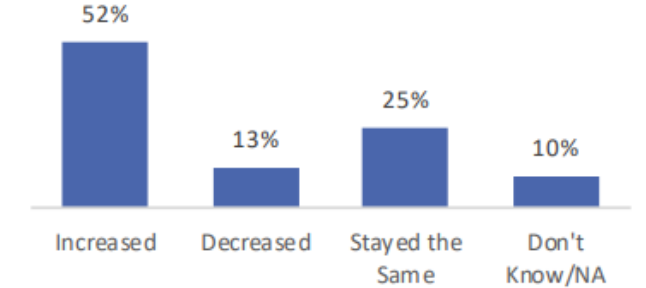
**Businesses by Type**



**Businesses by # of Employees**



**Revenue 3 Years Prior to COVID**



## ***Business Characteristics***

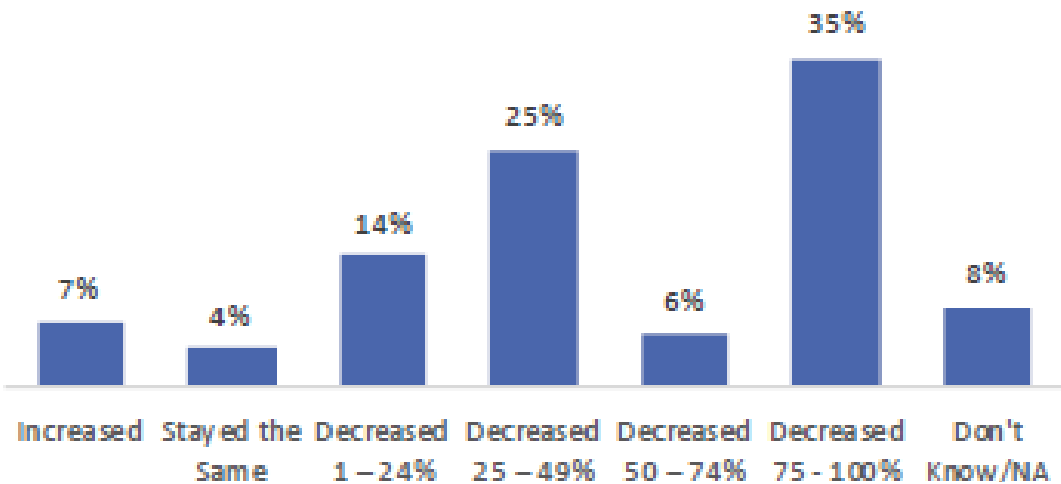
### **Business Survey**

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A city-wide business survey was conducted during March and April of 2021. The survey received 71 responses from owners or other appropriate representatives of business establishments located in Cambridge.

- 51% of the businesses surveyed have 5 or fewer employees
- 90% rent their space
- 52% reported increases in revenue during the 3 years prior to COVID

Revenue in 2020 Compared to 2019



COVID Impacts Reported by Businesses

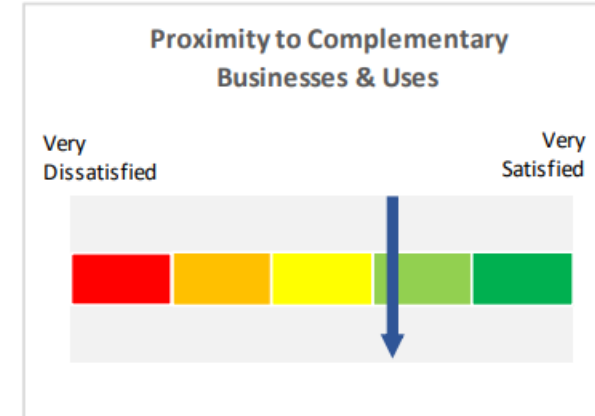
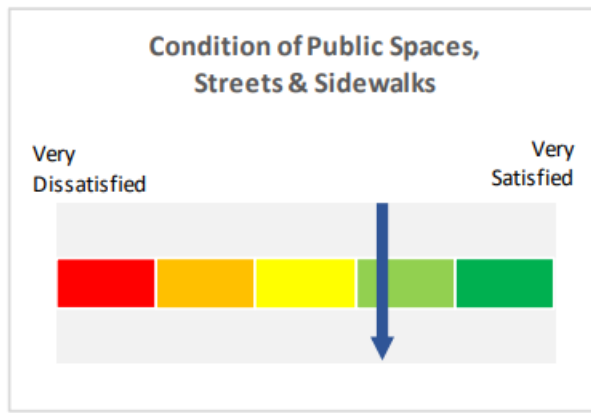


**Business Survey**

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*Impacts of COVID-19*

- 80% of businesses generated less revenue in 2020 than they did in 2019
- 96% of businesses reported being impacted by COVID
- 81% of businesses had less on-site customers in January and February of 2021 than before COVID
- 83% of businesses reported they were operating at reduced hours/capacity or closed at the time of the survey

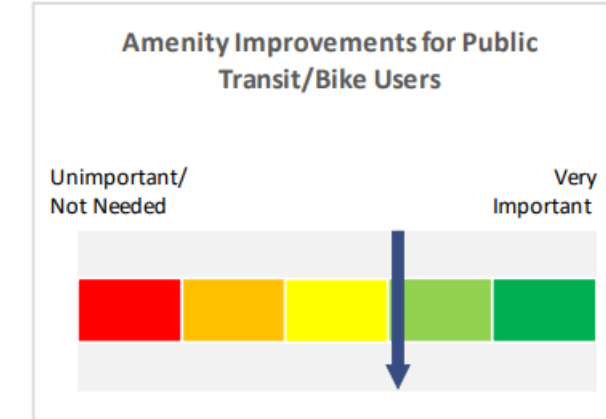
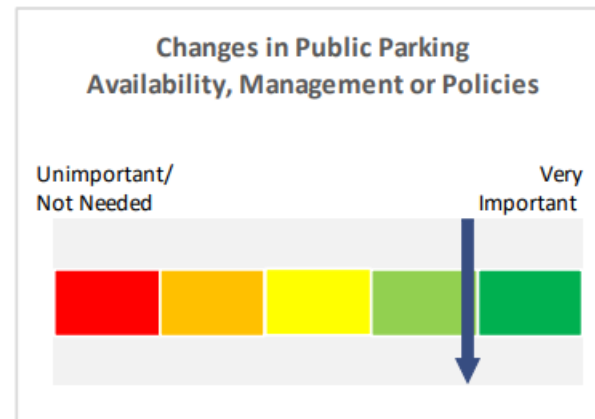
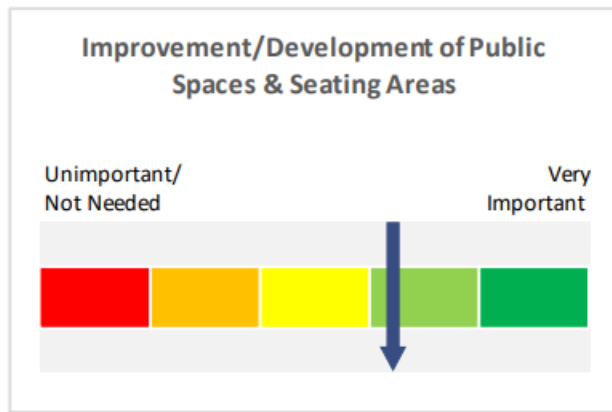
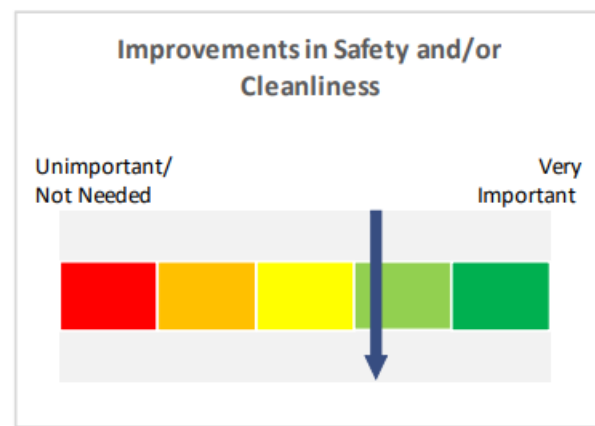
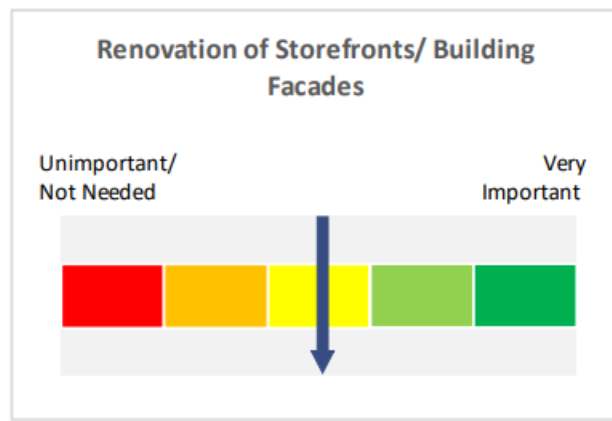


## ***Business Satisfaction with Commercial District***

### **Business Survey**

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- Average satisfaction rating among respondents are positive across all categories



## ***Business Input Related to Possible Strategies***

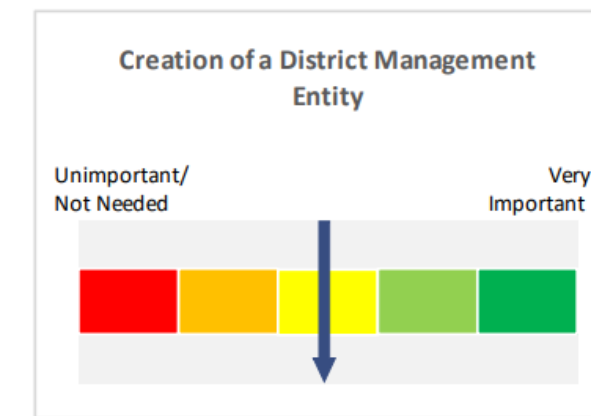
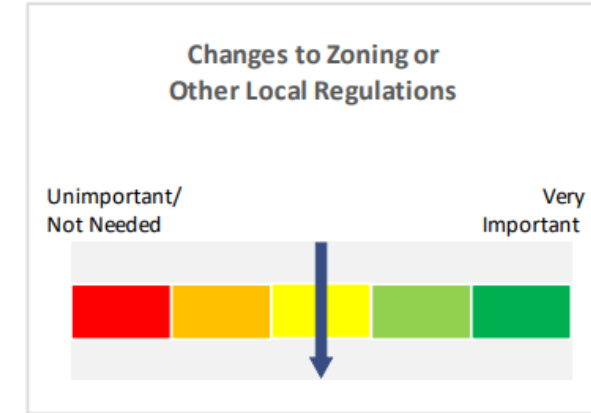
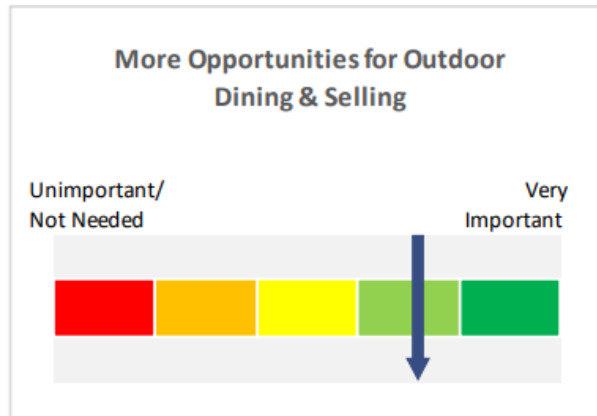
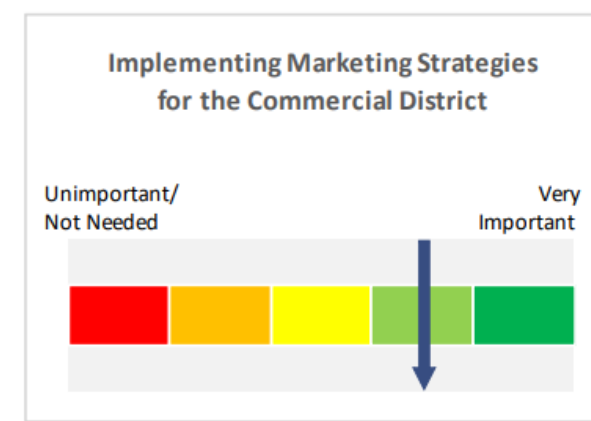
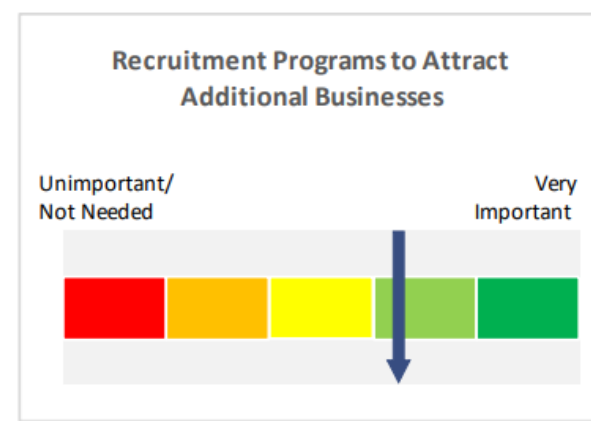
### **Business Survey**

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#### **Physical Environment, Atmosphere, and Access**

Average ratings among respondents regarding importance of various strategies reveals:

- There is not much interest in investing in exterior building renovations
- The highest level of interest is in changes related to public parking



## ***Business Input Related to Possible Strategies***

### **Business Survey**

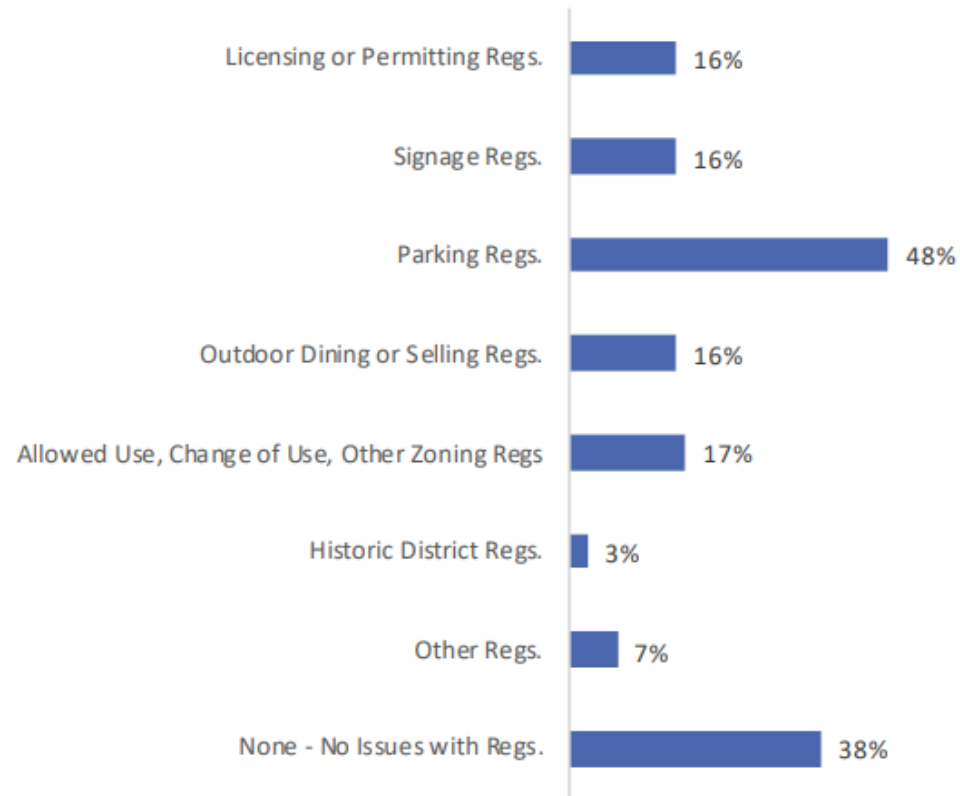
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#### **Attraction/Retention of Customers and Businesses**

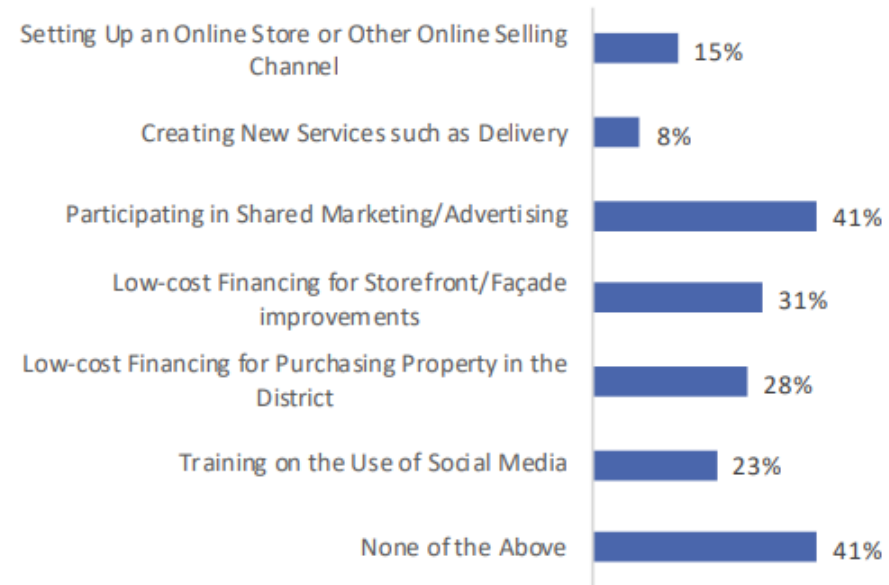
Average ratings among respondents regarding importance of various strategies reveals:

- There is not much interest in zoning or district management changes
- The highest level of interest is in an implementation of coordinated district-specific marketing strategies and continuing to allow outdoor dining

### Regulations that Pose an Obstacle to Businesses Operation



### Businesses Interested in Receiving Assistance



### *Business Input Related to Possible Strategies*

### Business Survey

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- 62% of businesses indicated that the regulatory environment poses an obstacle to business operation
- 59% of businesses expressed interest in receiving some kind of assistance, with shared marketing receiving the most interest

# City of Cambridge Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant Impact Assessment

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The City performed its own survey since September 2020 to study how COVID-19 Relief Grants have affected business viability or operations, as well as how the City can better support small business throughout the pandemic.

The survey received 100 responses from 150 contacted businesses. Nearly half of the businesses were minority-owned (42%)

## Key Themes:

- The most common measures taken as a result of the pandemic were purchasing safety supplies or equipment (73 percent), reducing hours (73 percent), and increasing online presence (45 percent)
- Restaurant respondents reported a significant increase in the percent of business revenue coming from takeout or delivery after the grant
- Retail respondents reported a moderate increase in the percent of business revenue coming from online sales or delivery since the grant
- The most common application for grants was paying for mortgage, rent and other bills (utilities, accounts payable)

## Most helpful areas for further assistance:

- More financial assistance
- Rent relief/landlord assistance
- Managing parking shortage
- Mask enforcement
- Communications and networking
- Delivery fees relief
- Tax relief
- Collective marketing and promotion
- Individual business digital marketing
- Help with driving foot traffic
- Trash and recycling services
- Outdoor dining support

## Business Association Input Related to Possible Strategies

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- Increase communication channels between business owners citywide (across districts)
- Streamline permitting/licensing process
- Increase district branding/marketing efforts
- Improve wayfinding systems to promote movement between districts
- Standardize protocols for future outdoor events
- Extend certain temporary regulations (dependent on state laws)
  - Outdoor dining
  - To-go alcohol sales
  - Cap on third-party restaurant delivery fees



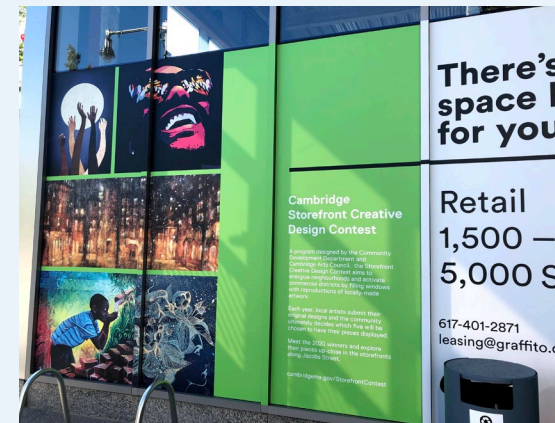
# Open Discussion

## Potential Project Recommendation Areas:

### Address vacant storefronts:

- Connect artists, entrepreneurs, and makers/crafters with landlords to set up temporary “pop-up storefronts” in vacant properties (potentially becoming long-term tenants)

- Increase landlord participation of the City’s Vacant Storefront Design Program, installing local artists work into vacant storefronts



# Open Discussion

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## Potential Project Recommendation Areas:

### Outdoor Dining Enhancements:

- Employ local artists to transform outdoor dining spaces to make more welcoming, usable, and attractive with an eye towards making them permanent
- Increase awareness of Cambridge's new outdoor dining design guidelines

- “Streeteries” aimed towards serving multiple businesses

- Consider an open streets pilot (open pedestrian plazas), similar to shared streets but temporarily closing off traffic for pedestrian and restaurant/retail use



# Open Discussion

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## Potential Project Recommendation Areas:

### Additional pop-ups/outdoor events:

- Pop-up parks & plazas
- “Social Zones” (designated areas allowing alcohol consumption)



- Activate alleys at specified times



- Pop-up retail & community space in city-owned and privately-owned lots and underutilized spaces (like Starlight Square)



- Pop-up retail in vacant stores (partnering with landlords for short-term leases)

# Open Discussion

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## Potential Project Recommendation Areas:

### Enhanced marketing/branding/wayfinding efforts:

- District or City-wide multi-platform marketing campaign
- Coordinated social media marketing
- Wayfinding systems to promote movement between squares (with integrated branding/art)



- Pledge to support local business (through city construction mitigation programs like “Shop Inman” and “Shop Harvard”)



# Current City Efforts

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- **Doing Business with the City**

- Small Business Portal - first-stop website for doing business with the City (e.g. where to find common permits and licenses, zoning information, and small business resources)
- Interdepartmental collaboration around licensing and permitting

- **Financial & Technical Assistance**

- Individual Business Grant Programs (HUD/CDBG and Tax Funded):
  - **City:** Storefront Improvement, Retail Interior Accessibility, and Small Business Enhancement
  - **Current/future state federal funding programs:** American Rescue Plan Act, SBA/Restaurant Revitalization Fund, and Mass Growth Capital Programs
- Commercial District Grant Program – Small Business Challenge
- Technical Assistance:
  - Free workshops for city entrepreneurs and business owners on such topics as social media and e-commerce
  - Small Business Coaching – Offering free one-on-one assistance with experts in financial planning, marketing, interior design, and more
  - Inspectional Services and CDD Small Business Office Hours
  - One-on-one meetings with city staff

City of Cambridge  
**Permit Process for Business Sidewalk Obstruction Permits**  
*A-Frame and Outdoor Display of Merchandise*



**pre-application**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Measure out your sidewalk area to make sure it complies with the requirements</b><br>Remember: on sidewalks that are 6 ft. wide or less, signs and displays of merchandise are not allowed                            |  |
| <b>Prepare a drawing/plan</b><br>Create a drawing/plan that indicates proposed location of the sign or display of merchandise with distances from the curb, building and other street furniture (this can be hand-drawn) | <b>Take a photograph</b><br>Take a representative photograph of the sidewalk area in front of premises.  |
| <b>Have an electronic copy of your certificate of insurance</b>  | <b>Get a \$5,000 bond and a bond form that indemnifies the City</b><br>The bond form can be found at <a href="https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/licensecommission/Forms/sidewalkbusinessusebondform.pdf">https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/licensecommission/Forms/sidewalkbusinessusebondform.pdf</a> |

**application**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Apply for an Annual Sidewalk Business Use permit</b><br>Apply for an Annual Sidewalk Business Use permit through the City of Cambridge's permitting website: <a href="https://cambridgema.viewpointcloud.com/categories/1101/record-types/6722">https://cambridgema.viewpointcloud.com/categories/1101/record-types/6722</a>  |   |
| <b>DPW permit application review</b><br>The DPW will review the permit application for completeness and to ensure that the application meets necessary City regulations.   |   |
| <b>For first time applicants, a sidewalk petition will be forwarded to the City Clerk's office on your behalf by the DPW.</b><br>The City Clerk's Office will then place the petition on the City Council's agenda. If the petition is approved by City Council, it will be forwarded to the City Manager's Office.<br><i>*Please note - City Council meetings are open to the public.</i> |   |
| <b>DPW issues permit</b><br>After a final review the DPW will issue a permit for applications that receive the necessary approvals and meet City regulations.  |   |
| <b>Permittee pays \$75 fee</b>   | <b>Permittee receives approval sticker</b><br>The permittee will receive an approval sticker that must be affixed to their a-frame sign and must be updated annually by <b>March 31st</b> every year. |

Updated: October 28, 2020

# Open Discussion

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Potential Project Recommendation Areas:

- **Address vacant storefronts**
- **Outdoor Dining Enhancements**
- **Additional pop-ups/outdoor events**
- **Enhanced marketing/branding/wayfinding efforts**

Feedback on current city efforts

## Next Steps

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- **Assess feedback**
- **Finalize project recommendations**
- **Public meeting in the fall**

# Thank You!

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