HENNEPIN COUNTY

COVID RESPONSE TOOLKIT:
Business Districts
These are challenging times. The spread of the COVID-19 virus and our society’s efforts to contain it have affected our main streets and their small businesses especially hard. Into this breach, this rapid response toolkit has been crafted to support commercial districts and help their small businesses navigate and survive the repercussions of COVID-19. The toolkit offers specific and creative ideas for businesses, processes and actions for those ideas, and resources and tips for how to overcome obstacles.

As the societal situations are constantly changing the toolkit will be released in iterative versions to remain relevant. This is Version 2.0 which expands on Version 1.0. A final 3.0 Version will be released in the coming months. As such we’ve created a short survey for those involved with business districts, BIDs, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies and small businesses to fill out and guide future toolkit editions.

Thank you to everyone out there who is supporting small businesses during this difficult time.

For more information go to: www.hennepin.us
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STRATEGY 1:
Community-Supported Businesses & Downs (CSB/CSD)

Q: How can we help struggling downtown businesses to survive and generate sales?
A: Create a subscription model to support your small businesses and entire downtowns.

OVERVIEW
For many businesses that can still operate, especially restaurants, take out and delivery has not yet provided enough sustainable revenue. Taking inspiration from Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), creating a subscription-based way for your community to rally around individual businesses provides them with more substantial upfront revenue and ongoing certainty of activity. Further, individual businesses could be clustered into CSD’s where people can buy subscriptions/shares in several businesses - granting them a rotating array of ready to eat dishes, specialty foods, gifts, classes, and more.

Your downtown is the heart of your community, a CSB/ CSD can be a powerful tool to unlock how much your community really cares.

PROCESS / ACTIONS
• Put a call out to businesses about this model and if they want to do their own or participate in a downtown-wide CSD.
• Determine different categories for participation “breweries, restaurants, self care, mystery CSB”.
• Work with merchants to identify what they could deliver on a weekly or monthly basis. Ensure that you make space for BIPOC-owned and immigrant-owned businesses to participate.
• Create the subscription bundles, consider: length of time, frequency of delivery/pick up, and size of order, size of household-Find a local packaging and delivery vendor to bundle items.
• If a CSD is pursued, create clear processes and tracking for flow of funds.
• Promote! With a heavy focus on how the “community supported” and highlighting every vendor involved.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS
Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:
• Our main street businesses are the heart of our community. We as a community need to come together to support them.
• Keep our cash within our community. Redirect online purchases to Community Supported Businesses and Downtowns the places that bring us together survive and thrive.

OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS
• Barn2Door: software for managing CSAs that can be used to support CSBs and CSDs
• Community Crate: example of a subscription service from Helena, MT
OVERVIEW

The classic drive-in movie provides the perfect setting for COVID-safe entertainment that can support multiple downtown businesses. Collaborate with shuttered theaters, music venues, and/or parks and rec departments who have blow-up outdoor screens, projectors, and audio equipment to create drive-in facilities within parking lots or closed off streets. Tickets can be sold by local theaters or arts groups with snacks and meals ordered and safely delivered to car windows.

PROCESS / ACTIONS

- Contact local movie theaters and/or arts groups to source the movie rights and sell tickets online.
- Secure a large parking lot or vacant lot in your downtown, or close a street.
- Partner with local restaurants to provide in-car dining options.
- Secure micro-radio audio capabilities.
- Be ready to jump-start cars that may run out of battery power during the showing.
- Establish Rules. Rules that have been established by other theaters who have recently started offering drive in services include:
  - People must stay inside their vehicle.
  - One person is allowed to leave their vehicle to pick up food and only 10 people are allowed in the concession line at a time, six feet apart.
  - Customers take their trash with them.
  - Restrooms are available, if absolutely needed, but there is a process.
  - Concessions must be ordered online.
  - Block off two out of every three parking spaces for cars and bikes to space properly.
  - Plan for volunteers to help direct attendees, remind people about distancing rules, and coordinate vendors on site.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:

- Fun, safe, and supporting our small businesses.
- Movies in the Park(ing lot).
- Permitting processes and fees should be expedited and reduced to allow these events to occur and provide much needed revenue to small businesses and arts groups.

OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS

- Water Gardens Theater
- Article on Water Gardens Theater
- Digital Drive-In
- FanFood App

STRATEGY 2: Pop-Up Drive-in and Bike-In Events

Q: How can we create COVID-safe programming that supports our downtown businesses?

A: Repurpose large, under-used parking lots and streets to host outdoor drive-in and bike-in movies and concerts with food delivered from local restaurants.
OVERVIEW

The guidelines and restrictions change by the week or even day. Profound shifts have occurred in the way we work, travel, shop, recreate, eat, dine, and socialize. Small businesses and downtowns are sprinting to adapt their models to respond to the needs of customers, the community, and covid-safe procedures. As they adapt, so too should local regulations and permitting.

One of the most essential ways that municipalities can support their small businesses in the coming months is to adapt their application of licenses, permits and regulations to allow flexible solutions while maintaining measures for public health and safety. The communities that make it easy and support their businesses adapt will dramatically increase the likelihood of their commercial districts surviving and thriving.

SPECIFIC REGULATORY ADAPTATIONS INCLUDE

- Reducing or eliminating parking minimums: allowing restaurants in particular to use their off street parking spaces for outdoor dining without penalty
- The use of public right of way for outdoor dining and retail sales for adjacent businesses, while still maintaining ADA accessibility
- Reducing or eliminating permit and license fees
- Reducing or eliminating restrictions on what types of business activities can be done in the same type of space. For example, allowing restaurants to sell groceries
- Expediting review and approval processes. Or, better, making certain activities as-of-right
- Reducing or eliminating restrictions on outdoor signage
- Allowing pop up and mobile based food and retail to locate in more areas, at more times, without much (if any) application process
- Allowing for more business activities to be conducted

Q: How can we help businesses and commercial districts to adapt, survive and thrive with regulatory support?

A: Make sure your community’s rules and regulations are allowing for and encouraging COVID-safe small-scale responses.
PROCESS / ACTIONS

- **Contact commercial district organizations.** Business licensing staff should connect with commercial district organizations and chambers to develop a list of what permit adaptations would be most helpful.

- **Contact licensing staff.** Associations and chambers should in turn reach out to licensing staff and elected officials around their needs and requests.

- **Use communication channels** set up for the COVID response to inform businesses about the changes.

- **Provide Ample Timing.** Consider putting an end or review date of 90-120 days for permit and licensing adaptations, providing enough time for the benefits to accrue and building in a natural schedule for review.

- **Find and promote stories** of how small businesses have effectively used new permitting allowances to thrive. Take photos to document new practices for future consideration.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

**From Advocates to Decision Makers**

- These policy changes are necessary to allow existing businesses to operate in a COVID-safe way under current guidance/restrictions by the state.

- The way our society uses indoor, outdoor, public, and private spaces has changed dramatically, and will stay this way for some time and thus warrents changes that would be in place for months or more.

**From Agency Staff**

- Our businesses are responding at an unprecedented pace, so we are speeding up our process too. We’re supporting business by removing barriers like (insert change in regulation or permitting).

- In an effort to support both our community’s health and the health of our small businesses, we are adjusting the following licences, permits, and regulations as follows accrue and building in a natural schedule for review.

- These changes are envisioned as temporary, but if successful, they provide us with the opportunity to explore making these adjustments permanent.

- For more information about the application of these changes call or email us.

OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS

- [Minneapolis Coronavirus Resources](#)
- [Temporary Outdoor Expansion](#)
OVERVIEW

The impacts of staying at home have caused a dramatic increase in pedestrian and bicycle activity in the metro area and nationwide. MnDOT has found a 51% increase in such activity in April 2020 with regional parks and parkways seeking increases between 140%-300%, paired with a 70% decrease in car traffic. With these increases most pronounced at regional parks, physical distances between people are shrinking to distances not deemed safe for COVID-19 containment.

More space for pedestrians and bikers needs to be created in order to reduce public health risks and support positive behaviors in doing so. This strategy should be applied both to existing regional destinations to handle current demand, as well as in more local contexts. This in turn will create more safe and appealing places that reduce the need to seek out regional destinations for walking and biking experiences.

STRATEGY 4:

Bike & Pedestrian Pathways

Q: How can we provide COVID-safe pathway space to accommodate all the new walkers, runners, and bikers?

A: Create and expand bike and pedestrian pathways along existing streets; close streets and/or or convert car traffic lanes to bike- and ped-only pathways.

PROCESS / ACTIONS

- For parkways and regional pathways: Convert one or more lanes designated for cars into bike and/or pedestrian pathways. If the street needs to still have car traffic, consider converting it into a one way street and/or removing a lane in each direction if there are 4 or more traffic lanes to start.
- For non parkways: Identify streets that have been in closed in the past for things like Open Streets, 5k fun runs, parades, and block parties as a starting point
- Try it for a weekend. If objections arise around public safety, advocate for a weekend specific pilot to test the concept on a route, rather than a longer closure
- Create and connect loops. Try to create pathways that are loops, connected to other loops (example: the Chain of Lakes and Grand Rounds). These are more enjoyable and get more use - at a safe distance! - than spur paths
- Connect destinations. Connect useful destinations such as your commercial cores, parks, school yards, libraries, parking facilities, and senior living facilities
PROCESS / ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

• **Post signs along the pathway.** Create and distribute signage (yard signs in the boulevard will do) about which users can use which parts of the new alignment all along the pathway. Use clear, direct messages about how you want users to use the space and why the street is open.

• **Post information online.** Post information about the new network either as a website link or as additional physical signs.

• **Clearly mark closed lanes.** Delineate closed traffic lanes and streets using construction cones.

• **Consider one-way routes.** On existing busy pedestrian trails, consider creating one way routes to direct the flow of traffic and reduce proximity.

• **Make your own signage.** If you don’t have your own sign shop, consider using lower cost alternatives to rented equipment, such as sand buckets with stakes that have caution tape between them.

• **Get input/feedback from residents.** Engage with residents about where they wish pathways would go.

• **Collect data,** even in a rudimentary way, as capacity allows. Perform user counts at multiple one-hour occasions. The CounterPoint app is an easy platform to track your count.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:

• If we don’t provide more public spaces for people to do things safely in, they may engage in even more risky behaviors.

• Going outside is a good way to stay healthy and we can provide accommodations to be safer while enjoying the outdoors.

• Creating more bike and pedestrian pathways is a public health measure to reduce the spread of COVID

• Initial lane and street closures will take place on streets that the public (and public works) are used to having closed for events

• Signage will be placed at frequent intervals to educate pedestrians, bikers, and drivers

• Local traffic and emergency vehicles will maintain their ability to access all areas as needed

• Equipment that is easy to move and remove will be used, so adjustments can be made quickly. Changes may be made when issues arise, conditions change, or in response to community input.

OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS

• List of street closures for COVID worldwide

• Minneapolis Parks and Recreation’s Parkway Closure guide

• City of Minneapolis’ Stay Healthy Streets

• Streetsblog: How to open streets right during COVID

• Tactical Urbanist’s Guide to Materials and Design

• NACTO: Guide to Temporary Street Closures

• NACTO: Rapid Response Tools for Cities

• Open Streets Initiative (Populus Street Manager)

• Oakland Slow Streets

• National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Resources

• America Walks
OVERVIEW

From annual celebrations to weekly performances, events serve as the touchstones for our community and calendars. Unfortunately, the COVID virus makes most of these gatherings unsafe in their traditional configurations, and has caused countless events to be cancelled.

This gap in our community life offers the chance to examine the “why” around the purpose of the event itself. Why was it started in the first place? Do those needs and assumptions still hold? By rediscovering the why, empathizing with attendees, and reimagining the experience, we can unlock alternative event concepts and approaches that can serve the community during this time and bring new energy into the event once normalcy resumes.

PROCESS / ACTIONS

1. Gather your team. Gather your event team and stakeholders for a few hours to re-envision your goals for the event and make a plan of action.

2. Break your event down to its purpose.
   
   • Define your audience: who is your event for? Certainly attendees, but also vendors, governmental bodies, community groups, etc. We encourage you to review whether your event has successfully reached attendees/vendors who represent the full diversity of your city. If not, note the missing audience.
   
   • Relate to your audiences. Once you have defined your audiences, progress to empathizing with them. What benefits are they seeking, what would they lose if this event didn’t happen, what are their fears and obstacles, what is worrying them, what are their expectations about this event, what investments does an attendee make for this event beyond cost?
   
   • Map out your event experience journey. What moments of interaction are there before, during and after the event, how do each of these moments achieve your “why”? What are make or break moments during your event?
   
   • Define your desired impact. Events can change how we see things after we go home. What could that spark be for your attendees, vendors, or partners, that impacts them after the event is over?
3. Think creatively about how to achieve your goals.
After you’ve reexamined your event’s purpose, now it’s time to think creatively about how you can still achieve your goals, your re-clarified “why”. Some approaches to consider:

- **Rethink the model.** The traditional event model that draws people to a single location at one moment in time likely doesn’t work in COVID conditions, so how can event elements be adjusted so that they do?
- **Use this time to make your event more inclusive.** Invest time and effort into making the event even more welcoming for communities of color, older adults, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ people.
- **Turn event features around.** Have the event go to where people are, lengthen the duration of the event to lower densities of people, enlarge the event venue size...
- **Reimagine parades as a mode of celebration.** Bring the party to the people!
- **Consider curbside pickup.** Consider if your event can work as a curbside pickup only. Items can be purchased online before the event, and attendees can signup for pick-up and drop off times or entry times.
- **Consider drive-ins and bike-ins!** Events like movies or concerts could easily go outdoors as drive/bike-ins.
- **Manage traffic and density.** Rethink of your event as linear/one way where attendees move through the event while social distancing instead of lingering. When able to have gatherings again, manage density with a ticket system.
- **Create virtual awards/recognition.** If awards are given, can those people and organizations be honored through signage, digitally, or in public art.
- **Set it off with a bang!** Fireworks offer a compelling experience for large groups at COVID-safe distances.
- **Go 100% virtual.** Assess if your event can go virtual and achieve all of its goals.
- **Consider cancelling/postponing.** If you can’t reasonably meet your goals, think through whether you should cancel or postpone the event.

**COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

- Send out a community survey to community members and event vendors and stakeholders asking how people are doing and their thoughts on your event.
- Be empathetic in any cancellation/change messages to show you understand the impact of the event.
- Communicate with vendors, key event stakeholders first before sending out messaging to attendees, and be transparent and clear.
- Express that safety is a priority and that the guidelines from the governor will inform all decisions.
- Inform attendees that you are returning to the “why” and purpose of the event before you make decisions about moving forward.

**OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS**

- [Virtual event Resources](#)
- [WHO Mass Gathering Resources](#)
- [Eventbrite Coronavirus Event Tips](#)
- [CDC Event Planning Resources](#)
- [Event Design](#)
- [How the Minneapolis Farmers Market is Shifting](#)
- [Drive-in Brunch Concerts](#)
OVERVIEW

With guidance that we maintain 6ft distancing from each other likely in place for some time, small businesses and downtowns need to make adjustments to ensure the safety of patrons and staff. The most prevalent of these adjustments include:

- Longer lines (and wait times!) with people spaced at 6ft intervals
- Glass partitions at check out areas
- Pop-up tables to maintain distancing at service locations
- A proliferation of signage
- Additional cleaning equipment and facilities

These changes can be implemented in a way that communicates that this is a “necessary burden” or, better, that an institution and downtown takes both the health of its customers and true hospitality seriously. Transform what feel like constraints and turn them into an opportunity to showcase your creativity and care for your customers.

SOME WAYS TO TURN COVID-19 REQUIREMENTS FROM A BUG (PUN-SEMI INTENDED) INTO A BENEFIT, INCLUDE:

- Make the 6ft distancing floor decals an amenity by partnering with local artists to craft designs for them or having poems, stories or phrasing at each interval
- Enliven the waiting experience with live music, performances, signage with words of wisdom, chalk art, poems, or heartfelt messages, while people are waiting (longer) to get into your store or check out.
- For stores with lines that stretch outside, add elements that provide shade and protection from rain, such as umbrellas or 10x10 tents. Also consider giving out single pieces of chalk for kids (and adults) to use on the sidewalks and take with them when they go
- Use signage that both communicates how seriously you take the health and safety of your customers and staff, but also brings some humor and lightness into the experience
- Have downtown-wide signs that communicate a combination of: invitation, encouraging patience, gratitude for customer support, and ways to get additional information about the district and its response

STRATEGY 6:
Positive Physical Distance Experiences

Q: How can we make the physical distancing requirements a feature instead of a bug?
A: Create engaging experiences in store layouts and in the public realm that are COVID safe.
• **Turn on and off street parking spots into dedicated (and numbered) customer pick up locations** for cars, bikes, and pedestrians for those businesses that don’t have their own parking. Have the signage for these locations be more than just informational, but have something interesting designs, phrases, jokes, or poems.

• **Give them a feeling:** To make shoppers feel cared for and comfortable, you’re going to have to give them something that they can’t find online – a feeling! You will have to care for those in-store shoppers and provide a feeling of ‘going above and beyond’. Some ideas include opening the door, taking items out to curbside pickup, or talking out what you have in common to build a relationship, develop trust and help separate customers from thoughts of COVID doom and gloom that they may have felt outside the store. All of this adds to giving your customers a feeling of HOPE. (Sourced from Lansing’s TRUST kit)

• **Have one staff member serve as a “personal shopper.”** Having one individual dedicated to walking around with a customer (from a safe distance of course) not only adds a special touch and “VIP feeling” for your customers, but also allows staff to know what items were touched so they can clean items after the customer leaves. This should just be a recommendation, not a requirement as some people may be uncomfortable with this. (Sourced from TRUST Kit)

**PROCESS / ACTIONS**

• **Create a set of guidelines, standards and resources** that small businesses within your district can tap into

• **Business districts can help businesses connect with artists,** making the process easy for both parties. Artists can help create signage or mark 6ft distances creatively.

• **Create a simple RFP** if you are going to do an open call for artists. Make it easy to respond, enabling newer, emerging artists to participate.

• **Consider drive thru/pickup.** Consider if your event can work as a drive thru/pickup only. Items can be purchased online before, and attendees can signup for pick-up and drop off times.

• **Promote on social media and e-newsletters** how your entire district and individual businesses are both taking safety measures seriously and fostering an enjoyable customer experience.

• **Use signage** in the public realm to convey the district-wide approach and care for visitors.

• **Create visible safety measures:** Make sure to be wearing gloves and putting hand sanitizer at locations where customers may need it. Make sure you are cleaning off pens and any surface that is touched regularly. If you show your customers that safety and health is a priority for you, they will be sure to tell their friends to support your business.

• **Provide hands free payment options:** The less a customer needs to touch in your store, the better. Making sure your business is able to do “tap” payments through smart phones instead of sliding their credit card will make customers feel more comfortable. If you have to have them use a pin pad, make sure that you are wiping down that surface frequently. We don’t advise going cash free, since some people don’t have access to credit/debit cards.

• **Create new menus:** Can your menus be online, disposable, or can they easily be cleaned and reused?

**COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

• Our downtown cares about the safety of our customers, businesses, and staff.

• This is a stressful time for us all, so while we implement procedures to keep us all safe, we also are rolling out features to keep us all smiling too.

• Physically distant, but still connected as a community

**OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS**

• [The Signs of Coronavirus](#)

• [Downtown Ferndale Signage](#)

• [Building Customer Trust Kit](#)

• [Street Factory Media Safe Serve Door](#)
OVERVIEW

While e-commerce was already a fast growing pattern of retail business, its importance skyrocketed during the COVID pandemic. Many small brick and mortar businesses have not made the full transition to omnichannel - or the combination of an in store offering with online sales. A full omnichannel sales system can handle traditional in store purchases, delivery to the customer, and order at home and pick up at the store. Many small businesses need help making this transition ASAP in order to survive this crisis and to adapt to customer preferences that may be long-lasting shifts.

PROCESS / ACTIONS

• Send a survey to your member businesses to gauge their use of e-commerce technology, business needs, and any best practices they can share with fellow downtown merchants. Alternatively, proactively reach out to businesses who are not operating online to assess the best next steps.

• Find e-commerce consultants (or other business owners) who can set up these systems quickly for other merchants.

• Provide grant or matching funds to subsidize the investment in this technology for small businesses.

• Create a platform for peer support via messaging apps like Google Chat, Slack, or even basic email threads.

• Promote businesses that offer online fulfillment.

• Put out a call for volunteers with experience in e-commerce to offer technical assistance if funding is not available for consultants.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:

• Put out a call out to your community for volunteers.

• Our small businesses, as the heart of our community, need our support in order to survive this tumultuous time.

OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS

• Tech for America: free web development and e-commerce support for small businesses

• Catch a Fire: matching non profits with experienced tech-savvy professional volunteers

• Square: in-store and e-commerce payment system

• Shopify: e-commerce platform, offering 90-day free trial during COVID

• Article about selling pantry items
General Resources

The best of what we have found to help you navigate this transition:

BUSINESS SUPPORT

- [Open for Business - Hennepin County](#) An existing program that provides free consulting, low cost financing, and grants to small businesses and communities to support entrepreneurship
- [Streetsense Toolkit for Restaurants & Bars](#) A toolkit to help restaurants and bars relaunch during the pandemic.
- [Strong Towns Local Leader Toolkit](#)
- [Main Street Approaches](#)
- [Hennepin County’s Reopening After 2019 Closure](#)
- [Hennepin County COVID-19 Response](#)
- [US Chamber Reopening Resources](#)
- [Customizable Business Flyer](#)
- [Guidelines for what can and cannot be open](#)
- [CDC Reopening Guidelines](#)
- [Minneapolis Business Guidelines](#)
- [Design Tip Sheet](#)
- [Small Business Owner Tip Sheet](#)
- [Twin West Coronavirus Resources](#)
- [MN Chamber of Commerce Business Toolkit](#)

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE RESOURCES

- [Twin West Chamber of Commerce Coronavirus Resources](#)
- [Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce COVID-19 Best Practices](#)

PLACEMAKING & DESIGN

- [Placemaking for Main Streets Toolkit - The Musicant Group](#) A step by step guide to generate positive social and commercial activity for any type of commercial center. With its focus on process, it provides useful frameworks that can help navigate this time of COVID and afterwards.
- [Friendly Storefronts Toolkit - The Musicant Group](#) A step by step guide to transform storefronts into activity centers that support businesses and community life. Similar to the Main Street Toolkit, its focus on process makes it relevant for these times of COVID and afterwards.