

BACKGROUND REPORT

PLACEMAKING IN THE VILLAGE ON MAIN

APRIL 2021



Glossary

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

Business Improvement Districts (BID) refer to organizations formed by property owners inside the boundaries of a legally established district (PPS, 2009).

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

Community Improvement Districts (CID) are defined as a non-profit organization that provides public services within a defined geographic area. A CID aims to improve the community by investing in infrastructure and community improvement projects (WSU, 2019).

PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is an approach that thrives to create quality spaces within a community. Placemaking encourages human interactions, benefits the local economy and contributes to one's well-being (PPS, 2021).

STICKY STREETS

Sticky Streets refers to streets that are enticing, making people want to slow down and linger to enjoy the lively spaces and activities around them (Toderian, 2014).

Happy Spaces Team

The project team is made up of four Master of Planning students from Dalhousie's School of Planning. Together, Gail Armour, Anushree Banerjee, Ashley Gaudet, and Hayley Inglis, strongly believe in creating healthy, sustainable, accessible, and happy communities. Each team member brings a level of experience from her own background: Banerjee brings an international perspective and experience researching active transportation; Gaudet and Inglis have completed projects on creating more accessible cities, and Armour brings hands-on expertise with placemaking projects.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Executive Summary

The Village on Main Community Improvement District (CID) connected with the Happy Spaces team through the Dalhousie School of Planning Integrative Team Project class. The purpose of the project is to identify placemaking opportunities suitable for the Village on Main community. Due to the challenge of limited public space, largely stemming from plazas designed for parking, the area is dominated by concrete which creates a sense of coldness and is unwelcoming for pedestrians. The Village on Main CID asked Happy Spaces to deliver a cohesive placemaking plan which includes actionable items for the summer of 2021 to help support their vision of becoming a sustainable, inclusive and walkable community.

The Happy Spaces team produced an accessible, user-friendly Placemaking Guide that lays out the steps for implementing placemaking projects within the Village on Main. Because of the specific challenges the Village on Main faces in regards to incorporating placemaking, the Guide reflects the CID's capacity. The Placemaking Guide will include an introduction to placemaking and community engagement strategies; placemaking interventions; placemaking implementation strategy and an overview of basic planning considerations. This Background Report describes the strategy and methodology for creating the Placemaking Guide.



1.0 Introduction

1.1 PROJECT CONTEXT

The overarching goal of this project is to create a Placemaking Guide for the Village on Main. The Happy Spaces team began the project by consulting with Graziella Grbac, the Executive Director of the Village on Main and by doing site visits to the area. These site visits and consultation meetings enabled the team to develop a deeper understanding of the site and what type of placemaking intervention would be the most beneficial to the area. The team reviewed local, national and international best practices to find appropriate placemaking projects and have identified over 30 placemaking interventions suitable to the Village on Main environment.

The team produced two documents: a Background Report and a Placemaking Guide. The methodology for choosing locations, placemaking interventions, placemaking elements and other planning considerations is found in the Background Report. The Placemaking Guide is the product, developed from the Background Report. The Guide provides the steps required for the Village on Main to produce successful placemaking projects.

1.2 VILLAGE ON MAIN BACKGROUND

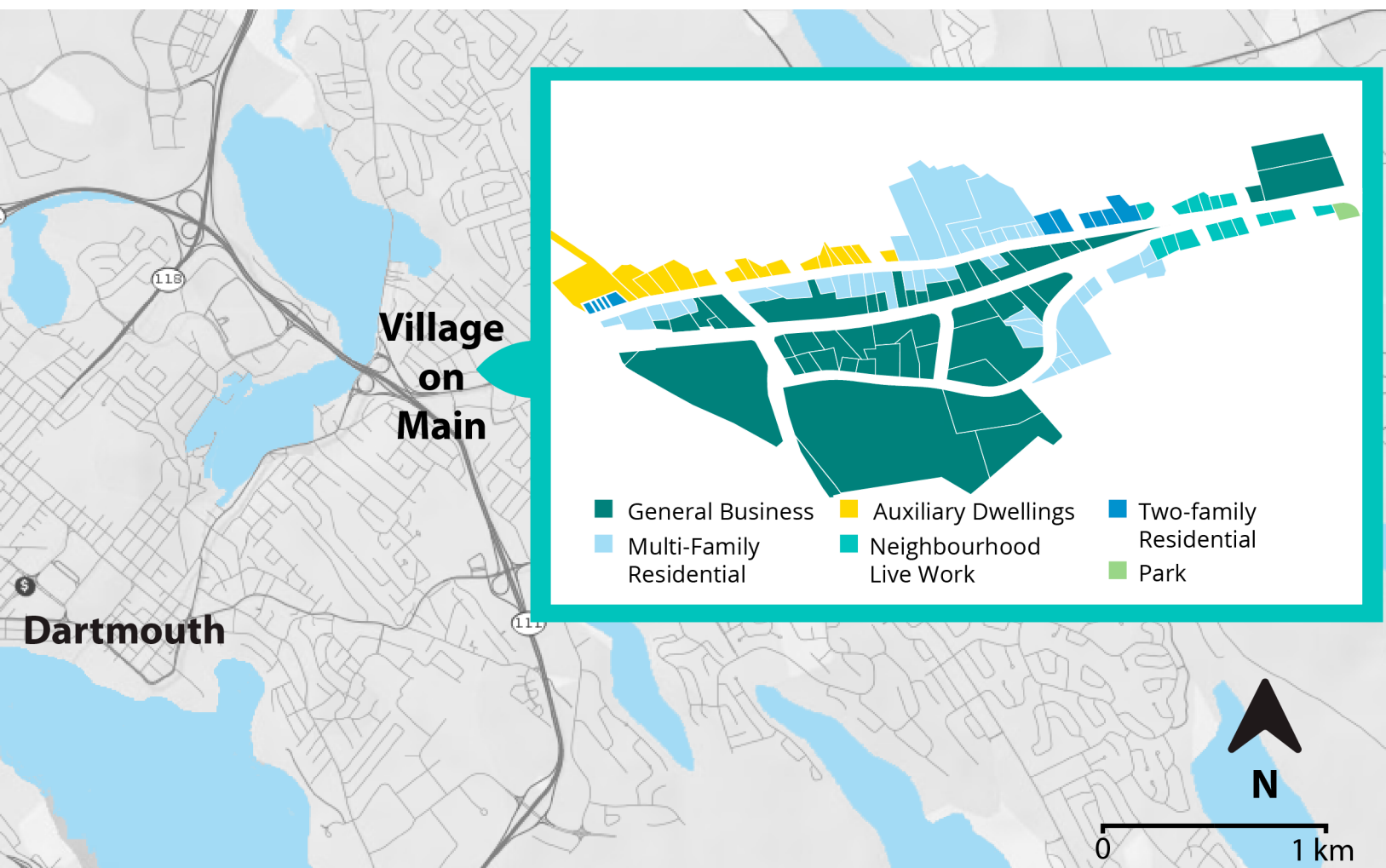
The village on Main aims to meet the needs of local businesses and community members through community improvement projects, planning consultation and community research. In 2015, the Village on Main changed its name to The Village on Main Community Improvement District (CID) (Village on Main, 2020). The Village on Main is still registered as a Business Improvement District: however, the Village on Main defines itself as a CID since the work they do supports local businesses and the community (Village on Main, 2020). The Village on Main strives to improve the community through thoughtful placemaking initiatives, community gatherings, and by maintaining street infrastructure (Village on Main, 2020). The vision of the Village on Main is to create an inclusive, sustainable, walkable, and connected community.

The Village on Main receives funding from businesses within the district through a tax levee, which is organized by the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). It also receives an annual grant



from the HRM of \$10,000 for improving public space. The Village on Main acknowledges that they will need additional funds from external sources to continue improving the community.

The Village on Main is located on Main Street in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. The Main Street is the heart of the Village on Main, and this includes adjacent commercial and residential neighborhoods. Currently, the community consists of a mix of residential and general business, with a limited amount of public space (see image below). The district is comprised of over 180 businesses and organizations including big box stores, independent shops, not-for-profit organizations and services (business services, restaurants, and doctors and clinics). Due to its suburban location, the Village on Main is vehicle and parking-focused. Trunk 7 Highway runs through the Village on Main, contributing to the car-focused and drive-through nature of the community. A small amount of green space or areas for community gatherings exists. The image below shows the land use zoning for the Village on Main. As seen in the map, the majority of the area is zoned General Business (Dark Green), and there is very little public park space (Light Green).



1.3 PROJECT RATIONALE

The Village on Main faces the challenge of creating a sense of community, stemming from a busy highway (Main Street) that subdivides commercial and residential areas. The speed of traffic, coupled with limited public space, creates challenges for hosting events due to liability concerns. Furthermore, all properties in the Village on Main, particularly plazas, have open front parking limiting the amount of interaction between building and shop fronts and pedestrian zones. Placemaking provides the perfect opportunity to address these challenges because it creates opportunities for socialization and interaction with place. Furthermore, the versatility of placemaking projects means they can be applied at a range of scales (small to large) and timelines (seasonal to permanent).

The COVID-19 pandemic has only enhanced the need for placemaking initiatives. Public health protocols often discourage gathering, especially indoors. Despite these restrictions, people still want to socialize, and placemaking can enable people to gather safely. The report, *Rapid Placemaking to Bring Back Main Street, A Pandemic Recovery Toolkit for Local Communities* (2020), provides numerous suggestions for how placemaking can support physical distancing and social needs (e.g. outdoor seating) during the pandemic. Other pandemic-related projects include a ground mural for physical distancing, an outdoor reading room, and outdoor hand washing stations (Canadian Urban Institute, 2020). By implementing placemaking projects that are fun, safe, and that follow public health guidelines, community members can continue to engage in social connections.



2.0 Project Objectives

The goal of this project is to deliver a Placemaking Guide to the Village on Main that will inform placemaking strategies and interventions within the Village on Main. Through this project, Happy Spaces identified challenges to placemaking and present appropriate interventions for the Village on Main.

- 1** To develop, describe and tailor placemaking interventions to the Village on Main.
- 2** To provide the Village on Main with a community engagement strategies for placemaking.
- 3** To describe, and develop, a list of placemaking interventions for Village on Main staff to initiate, which includes placemaking elements.
- 4** To give a broad overview of relevant plans, policies, permits and other considerations that would be relevant to placemaking projects in the Village on Main.



3.0 Approach & Method

The Placemaking Guide contains placemaking interventions tailored to the specific conditions and capacity of the Village on Main. The Guide includes an introduction to placemaking and community engagement strategies; placemaking interventions; an implementation strategy ; and an overview of basic planning considerations. The Happy Spaces team has identified the steps taken to create the Placemaking Guide.

3.1 DEVELOP UNDERSTANDING OF SITE

Happy Spaces created a list of potential locations for the placemaking interventions. The potential locations were determined based on the following steps:

INITIAL SITE VISIT

- The initial site visit, on January 18th, 2021 was used to gain a broad understanding of the character, topography and layout of the community. During the site visit, Happy Spaces team members took photos of potential placemaking sites and took notes about the community.

CLIENT CONSULTATION

- During the first site visit, Happy Spaces communicated with the Executive Director of the Village on Main to further understand the character of the space. Happy Spaces asked questions about the area to gain a deeper understanding of the Village on Main.

FOLLOW-UP SITE VISIT

- During the follow-up site visit (February 2021), team members identified potential locations for placemaking interventions. Selected locations consider land ownership, walkability, area size, and physical site condition. Coordinates were recorded for each potential location, and photos were taken of the sites.

MEETING WITH THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- After identifying potential placemaking options, Happy Spaces organized a meeting with the Board of Directors of the Village on Main. During this session, Happy Spaces confirmed with the board that selected placemaking projects are aligned with the board's aspirations.



DOCUMENT REVIEW

- Happy Spaces reviewed documents provided by the Village on Main and identified (1) areas of potential overlap with past research (to be avoided), and (2) relevant information for placemaking projects. The information from this document review ensures project deliverables produce new information for the client, and that identified placemaking interventions will be appropriate for the Village on Main community.

Objective: To tailor the placemaking options to the site.

3.2 SELECT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Happy Spaces created an overview of public engagement strategies suitable for placemaking through the following steps:

BEST PRACTICE REVIEW ON ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- A thorough review of best practices focused on identifying 1) methods of conducting public engagement, and 2) ways engagement can be approached in a pandemic. Happy Spaces identified suitable engagement methods that are appropriate to the budget, demographic, size and availability of spaces, in the Village on Main.

IDENTIFY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- Happy Spaces selected a collection of engagement strategies and ideas to provide a resource for the Village on Main as they move forward with implementing placemaking initiatives. Wherever possible, the Village on Main should conduct community engagement as it helps to ensure that the needs of the public are heard and met.

Objective: To give the Village on Main an understanding of how to engage the community for placemaking projects.



3.3 IDENTIFY PLACEMAKING INTERVENTIONS

The majority of the Placemaking Guide will consist of placemaking interventions. These interventions were selected through a best practice review, and conversations with the Village on Main to ensure suggestions are relevant to the scale of the project. Interventions will be developed through the following steps:

DETERMINE PLACEMAKING INTERVENTIONS FOR THE VILLAGE ON MAIN

- Not all placemaking interventions discovered in the best practice review were suitable for the Village on Main. Placemaking options that did not meet the constraints (financial capacity, land-ownership, location or organizational abilities) of the Village on Main were omitted.

DEVELOP PLACEMAKING INTERVENTION ELEMENTS

- Placemaking elements form the foundation for each placemaking intervention in the final guide. The purpose of the elements is to provide information “at a glance,” enabling the Village on Main to easily compare and contrast different placemaking projects. Seven elements have been identified:

LOCATION

- Happy Spaces identified potential locations for placemaking over the course of a site visit and recorded locations using GPS coordinates. Sites were classified as “small” “medium” or “large” based on their capacity to host different placemaking interventions and events. Small spaces are suitable for placemaking interventions that will take up less than one foot of space, or for projects that are attached to existing surfaces. Medium spaces are suitable for placemaking interventions one to eight square feet in size. Large spaces are suitable for placemaking interventions requiring more than 8 square feet of space. The relative small scale of these location sizes is due to limits of public space in the Village on Main.

DURATION

- Duration refers to the time an intervention could be in place for i.e days, months and years. Duration was determined based on whether the placemaking



intervention was intended to be only a couple days (such as an event), a couple months (such as a temporary installation), or years (for a permanent installation).

COST

- Cost refers to the anticipated project expense. Three levels will be represented by dollar symbols in the Guide (\$, \$\$, \$\$\$). Each symbol corresponds with a price range (\$0-\$999; \$1,000-\$7,999; \$8,000+) and the price range has been determined by creating basic budget estimates for each report. The budgets developed takes into account labour, materials and promotion.

Materials: For each placemaking intervention, materials were calculated based on prices for items in 2021. Note that material costs fluctuate from year to year, so it is important to determine up-to-date costs when planning the placemaking project.

Labour: Labour has been calculated for each placemaking intervention at a rate of \$18 per hour for approximately the amount of hours that it would take to complete all aspects of the project including promotion, coordination with property owners, project execution, and project take down. In cases where the Village on Main has wage subsidies for staff (typically through the summer months), then labour costs may be reduced.

Promotion: Promotion was budgeted at a rate of \$100 for interventions that are anticipated to require it.

ACTIVATE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

- Wherever possible, locations have been identified for the placemaking interventions. This pairing of intervention and location helps the Village on Main engage with and build on pre-existing projects. Opportunities for activation were determined by matching placemaking interventions to locations identified through site visits.

BENEFITS

- The Placemaking Guide identifies four important values that align with the key principles of Village on Main to incorporate into placemaking interventions. By highlighting which values an intervention addresses—and in combination with



public consultation—the Village on Main can better tailor its placemaking projects to the desires of the community.

Sustainability and Environment: Refers to interventions that highlight environmental principles.

Arts & Culture: Refers to interventions that support creative endeavours and align with community values.

Accessibility & Inclusion: Refers to interventions that support and encourage people of all capabilities and ages to participate and enjoy.

Sticky Streets: Refers to interventions that encourage community members to linger in a given place.

MATERIALS

- Each placemaking intervention includes a list of materials for the reader to quickly grasp the scope of a given project. Wherever possible, materials were identified based on the literature review completed for each placemaking intervention.

EFFORT

- Effort refers to the anticipated work (project planning, coordination etc) that needs to be put into implementation of an intervention. Effort was determined through scoring each intervention's in terms of the following categories: maintenance, partnership development, application for funding, regulations/permissions and liability. The scores for each category were added together, and then they were put into three categories; high effort, medium effort and low effort.

Objective: To describe, and develop, a list of placemaking interventions for Village on Main staff to initiate, which includes placemaking elements.



3.4 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Several other factors play a role in developing and implementing placemaking interventions, but the most important are outlined below.

PLANNING BYLAWS AND PERMITS

- Review HRM website and relevant documents to understand planning by-laws and permits that would be required to conduct placemaking in the Village on Main.

COVID RULES AND PROTOCOLS

- Review Covid-19 rules and protocols as they relate to outdoor public spaces to provide the Village on Main with a basic understanding of public health considerations related to placemaking.

Objective: To give a broad overview of relevant plans, policies, permits and other considerations that would be relevant to placemaking projects in the Village on Main.



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