



REIMAGINE NORTH OF MAIN



Final Evaluation Report January 2015 to December 2020

Prepared for:

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Executive Summary



**GATEWAY TO
Arts & Culture**



Reimagine North of Main (RNoM) is an economic, neighborhood and community development initiative in Fitchburg, MA that involves a partnership with several local organizations to reimagine the North of Main as a neighborhood of choice, a “Gateway to Arts and Culture” providing a place where residents and business owners want to live, work, play, and invest. Over the past six years, with more than \$2.1 million in funding from The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, the RNoM team has successfully launched multiple efforts to improve the neighborhood and has coalesced a partnership that will continue to address the economic and housing needs of the area and build community engagement so that improvements reflect the needs and voice of the residents.

One key initiative – helping to make the North of Main neighborhood a “Gateway to Arts and Culture”- is the Fitchburg Arts Community pipeline project, which received planning board approval for a 68-unit housing development and \$750,000 in a short-term loan from UMass Memorial Health Alliance-Clinton Hospital to aid the pre-development phase of the project. Seventy percent of the units will be affordable to help draw artists to the area. The City also implemented a 40R zoning overlay district for the FAC project. Total development cost for FAC is now approximately \$33 million. Fitchburg State University’s Theater renovation project is the second pipeline project identified by RNoM. With an investment of \$2.0 million to date, it made significant progress over the six years with the opening of the IdeaLab, an interdisciplinary entrepreneurship space, computer lab, and state-of-the-art game design studio for FSU students. The involvement of City leadership on RNoM, led to the City’s \$23.5 million City Hall renovation as a third pipeline project, and plans for a \$31.2 million renovation of the city library as a fourth project. In total, RNoM resulted in \$87.7 million of direct and indirect investment.

Fitchburg State University (FSU) also launched the FSU Resident Leadership Institute, which trained 34 residents on leadership and placed graduates in leadership positions at local organizations. NewVue, a community partner, launched the Community Stewards training program, with a focus in specific areas such as health, education, and the arts. NewVue trained 244 Community Stewards, some of whom have

gone on to spearhead Inform Fitchburg, a group that helps parents to meaningfully participate in their children’s education; the Fitchburg Arts Collective, which advocates for affordable housing and community space for local artists; and a riverfront salsa multi-week event to promote active living. NewVue also launched Liabilities to Assets, a 121A corporation pilot project created in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development to renovate problem properties.

The results of RNoM’s efforts have paid off; not only did RNoM secured \$2.1 million in funding from THFCM, but they garnered another \$26.6 million for specific RNoM efforts, including development of the Fitchburg Arts Community artist housing and the renovation of City Hall, as well as another \$26.8 million in funding to the community that built on the collaboration and success of RNoM. In addition, neighborhood perceptions have improved, and residential vacancies and foreclosures have decreased while home values have increased in Fitchburg since 2014. Moreover, RNoM has supported new businesses in downtown such that there has been a net increase of four new business, with two additional businesses preparing to open soon. RNoM leaders expect the pipeline projects to attract additional new businesses to the area to serve the people living and working in the area. What’s next for RNoM?

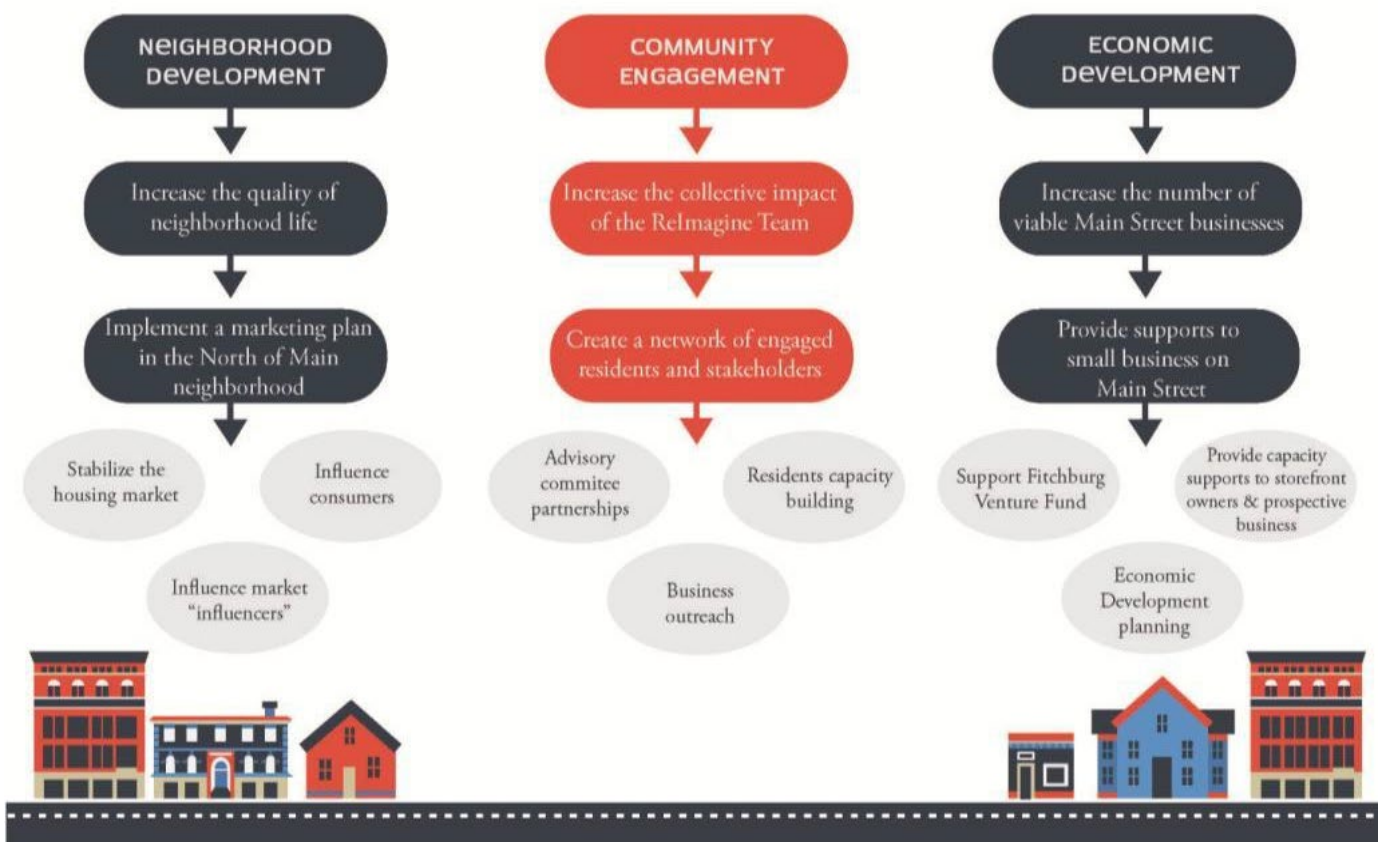


Overview

ReImagine North of Main (RNoM) is a partnership— involving local businesses, government, nonprofits and, most importantly, residents—committed to making a collective impact, and dedicated to improving the quality of life in the neighborhood. RNoM’s key partners include Fitchburg State University (FSU), Making Opportunities Count (MOC), NewVue Communities (NewVue), City of Fitchburg, Fitchburg Art Museum, Minority Coalition-Three Pyramids, and The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts. RNoM started with funding from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston in 2014 as part of their Working Cities Challenge. The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts (THFCM) then provided grants totaling more than \$2.1 million over the next six years (2015 to 2020).

During the 2015 to 2020 period THFCM funding, RNoM’s collaboration focused in three key areas: economic development, neighborhood development, and community engagement. Through resident and stakeholder engagement, policy and advocacy work, and responsible development, RNoM aimed to improve the quality of life in these three areas, with a goal of reimagining the North of Main as a neighborhood of choice, a “Gateway to Arts and Culture” providing a place where residents and business owners want to live, work, play, and invest.

This evaluation report, prepared by researchers from the Institute for Behavioral Health at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, reports on the activities and outcomes for RNoM for 2015 through 2020 in its three strategic areas.

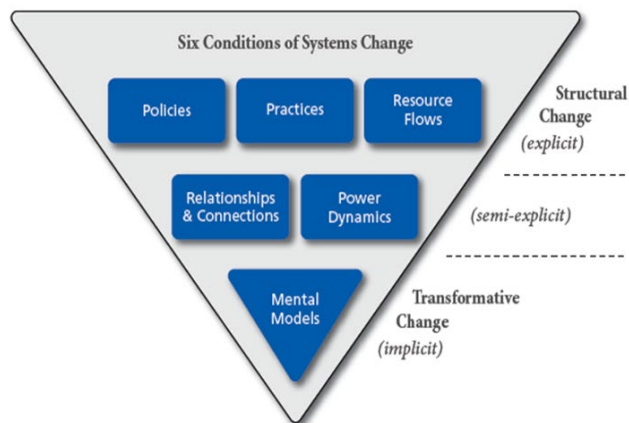


Evaluation Approach

RNoM works towards long-term systems change to improve the North of Main neighborhood and economy, with a collaborate approach to community development. RNoM takes a collective impact approach to address complex social problems, working with non-profit, education, government, business, philanthropy, and residents to change systems and make North of Main a community where people want to live, play, and work.

This type of work can be difficult to evaluate because change occurs at many levels and the desired outcomes often take many years to become visible. FSG, a mission-driven consulting firm supporting leaders in creating large-scale, lasting social change, offers a model to better understand and measure systems change (see Figure 1). Using this model, the RNoM evaluation tracks progress and outcomes within its three key areas of focus, neighborhood development, economic development and community engagement, and highlights changes at the structural, relational, and transformative levels. The Brandeis team has assessed these areas using data from participant observation, reports from RNoM team members, City repositories, NeighborWorks Community Impact Measurement (CIM) survey, and Policy Map, a compilation of public and private demographic, housing, and economic data by geographic area.

FIGURE 1. SHIFTING THE CONDITIONS THAT HOLD THE PROBLEM IN PLACE



SYSTEMS CHANGE CONDITIONS—DEFINITIONS

Policies: Government, institutional and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity's own and others' actions.

Practices: Espoused activities of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities targeted to improving social and environmental progress. Also, within the entity, the procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits that comprise their work.

Resource Flows: How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed.

Relationships & Connections: Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors in the system, especially among those with differing histories and viewpoints.

Power Dynamics: The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations.

Mental Models: Habits of thought—deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk.

Evaluation Findings

Neighborhood Development

RNoM’s neighborhood development strategy included stabilizing the housing market, influencing neighborhood perceptions and key influencers in the area, and investing in neighborhood development projects. Over the six-year effort, RNoM saw progress in designing the Fitchburg Arts Community; the creation of a pilot program, Liabilities to Assets, in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), to help communities stabilize neighborhoods by redeveloping deteriorated properties that are considered a blight; and neighborhood perceptions and the housing market.



Significant Accomplishments

A key focus of RNoM from the outset has been the Fitchburg Arts Community (FAC), a project led by NewVue Communities and the Fitchburg Art Museum. FAC will create 68 units of affordable rental artist live/workspace and be located on a campus of three distinguished historical buildings adjacent to the Art Museum in downtown Fitchburg: the Fitchburg Academy (1869), City Stable (1889), and B.F. Brown Middle School (1923). RNoM moved the Fitchburg Arts Community (FAC) pipeline project forward with significant milestones.

- Secured funding for FAC and purchased the building.
- Completed roof construction for FAC after a significant fire jeopardized the entire project.
- Obtained an easement that provides for parking and access to the site and parking for the nearby Lowe Park.
- Received Planning Board approval for the project.
- Completed preliminary design for a 68-unit project with a mix of one, two, and three-bedroom apartments, 70 percent of which will be designated affordable.
- UMass Memorial Health Alliance-Clinton Hospital invested \$750,000 in the FAC as a short-term loan to aid the pre-development phase of project while permanent funding is secured.
- NewVue applied for historic and affordable housing tax credits to fund most of the project, which is estimated to cost about \$25 million.

Additionally, FAC was the first project approved in the City’s new 40R Smart Growth zoning overlay district. The city will receive a \$75,000 payment tied to the FAC project and a \$3,000 payment per unit produced in the district will also be available. Total development cost for FAC is now approximately \$33 million.



ICON Architecture's rendering of a restored and repurposed B.F. Brown building, part of the planned Fitchburg Arts Community.

RNoM partner, NewVue, opened NewVue Liabilities to Assets, a 121A corporation pilot project created in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and the Governor's office to convert problem properties into homeownership opportunities. Liabilities to Assets is now collaborating with the City, using its Nexus program, to identify and address problem properties. Liabilities to Assets will transform 35-40 properties in the greater Fitchburg area, including 4-5 properties in the North of Main neighborhood in Fitchburg. In addition, NewVue completed renovation and construction projects on properties in the neighborhood and helped residents access a down payment assistant program and other loan opportunities over the six-year initiative. NewVue also facilitated sales of seven properties to quality investors, helping to improve the overall commitment to and condition of the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Perceptions

In partnership with NeighborWorks, NewVue implemented three rounds of the Community Impact Measurement (CIM) Survey in 2013, 2016 and 2019, providing RNoM with cross-sectional data across those years. Note since the data are cross-sectional and there were changes to the profile of respondents to the survey over the three CIM periods, the community must be careful in drawing conclusions about the findings from one period to another. However, the data do provide a way to gauge changes in community perceptions. From 2013 to 2019, the North of Main area in Fitchburg saw an increase in the overall satisfaction with living in the community, with 32% reporting being "very satisfied" in 2013, 34% in 2016 and 38% in 2019 (a statistically significant increase from 2013 to 2019). Additionally, there were statistically significant improvements from 2013 to 2019 in the proportion of respondents who:

- Would "definitely recommend" the community as a good place to live (29% in 2013, 28% in 2016, and 38% in 2019).
- Reported recent involvement in multiple community activities (16% in 2013, 21% in 2016, and 40% in 2019).

- Were “very willing” to become involved in the community (26% in 2013, 18% in 2016, and 42% in 2019).
- Reported that they believed they could make “a great deal” of difference in their community (28% in 2013, 18% in 2016, and 37% in 2019).
- Reported that they felt “somewhat safe” or “very safe” walking in the community at night (46% in 2013, 54% in 2016, and 56% in 2019).
- Reported that the community has “improved a lot” over the past three years (15% in 2013, 18% in 2016, and 30% in 2019).
- Reported that they believe the community “will improve a lot” over the next three years (18% in 2013, 18% in 2016 and 38% in 2019).

In contrast, the proportion of respondents who reported that they felt safe walking in the community during the day declined from 69% feeling “very safe” in 2013 to 51% in 2016, and 50% in 2019 (a statistically significant decrease from 2013 to 2019). Additionally, the proportion of respondents who reported community neighborliness fluctuated between 2013, 2016, and 2019, with 19% reporting high neighborliness levels in 2013, 25% in 2016, and 15% in 2019. The change from 2013 to 2019 was not statistically significant, but the change from 2016 to 2019 was significant.

Housing Market

North of Main’s housing market has been mixed in the past few years. Using data from the City of Fitchburg and Policy Map¹, there was an increase in median and mean home sale prices, as well as a decrease in foreclosures, all good indicators. However, other housing indicators are mixed with fewer home sales in 2019 and one of the three North of Main census tracts showing an increase in the percent of all residential addresses vacant.

Housing sales in the North of Main neighborhood have fluctuated since 2014, but home values have risen to a mean price of \$204,628 in 2019 (see Table 1).

- Both the mean and median home prices fluctuated from year to year but increased overall from \$116,830 in 2014 to \$204,628 in 2019 for mean home prices and from \$94,500 in 2014 to \$205,000 in 2019 for median home prices.
- In comparison, the median total Fitchburg home price in 2019 was \$211,857.

Table 1. Home Sales in North of Main Neighborhood

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of Sales	60	69	58	52	73	67
Mean Price	\$ 116,830	\$ 195,002	\$ 129,027	\$ 144,831	\$ 150,009	\$204,628
Median Price	\$ 94,500	\$ 95,630	\$ 116,000	\$ 140,000	\$ 154,900	\$205,000

Data reported by Fitchburg Registrar of Deeds

¹ Policy Map by Reinvestment Fund compiles public and private data across the U.S. to provide demographic, housing, economic and other data. This analysis used data that were available free to the public.

Foreclosures in North of Main decreased for the second straight year in 2019, while foreclosures in Fitchburg overall have been declining since 2017 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Foreclosures in North of Main and Fitchburg							
North of Main Foreclosures				Fitchburg Foreclosures			
	Number	Change Year to Year	% Change Year to Year		Number	Change Year to Year	% Change Year to Year
2014	17	--	--	2014	64	--	--
2015	7	-10	-59%	2015	76	12	19%
2016	15	-8	-114%	2016	99	23	30%
2017	16	1	6.6%	2017	89	-10	-10%
2018	8	-8	-50%	2018	68	-21	-24%
2019	4	-4	-50%	2019	40	-25	-38%

Data reported by Fitchburg Registrar of Deeds

The percent of all residential addresses vacant decreased in two of the three North of Main census tracts while increasing in the third tract (see Table 3).

- In Fitchburg, the percent of all residential addresses vacant increased from 6.53% in 2014 to 6.59% in 2019.
- In census tract 10700 (known locally as 7107), the percent of all residential addresses vacant decreased from 13.7% in 2014 to 13.04% in 2019. Despite this five-year improvement, tract 10700's vacancy rate increased from 2018 to 2019.
- In census tract 10800 (known locally as 7108), the percent of all residential addresses vacant decreased from 9.49% in 2014 to 6.23% in 2019.
- In census tract 11000 (known locally as 7110) the percent of all residential addresses vacant increased from 6.6% in 2014 to 9.76% in 2019. However, tract 11000's vacancy rate improved from 2018 to 2019.

Table 3. Percent of All Residential Addresses Vacant (Q. 3 each year)							Change 2014 to 2019
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
MA	3.24%	2.57%	2.93%	2.65%	1.62%	2.46%	-.78%
Wor County	3.13%	2.87%	3.04%	3.14%	3.27%	2.89%	-.24%
Fitchburg	6.53%	6.5%	6.37%	6.4%	7.22%	6.59%	+.06%
Tract 10700	13.7%	13.38%	12.96%	11.8%	12.66%	13.04%	-.66%
Tract 10800	9.49%	7.95%	7.88%	7.61%	8.04%	6.23%	-3.26%
Tract 11000	6.6%	6.84%	6.54%	6.33%	11.1%	9.76%	+3.16%

Data from Policy Map – pulled February 2021

Rents in two of the three North of Main census tracts rents increased similarly with Fitchburg overall (see Table 4).

- In Fitchburg, rents from 2015-2019 averaged \$1,016 per month; in 2010-2014 they averaged \$860 per month, a 18% increase, keeping up with the state median.
- In census tract 10700, rents from 2015-2019 averaged \$421 per month; in 2010-2014 they averaged \$599 per month, a 30% decrease.
- In census tract 10800, rents from 2015-2019 averaged \$1,024 per month; in 2010-2014 they averaged \$765 per month, a 34% increase.
- In census tract 11000, rents from 2015 - 2019 averaged \$1,006 per month; in 2010-2014 they averaged \$896 per month, a 12% increase.

Table 4. Median Gross Rent				
	2010 - 2014	2015 - 2019	Change 2010 - 2019	% Change
MA	\$1,088	\$1,282	+194	+18%
Wor County	\$ 927	\$1,060	+133	+14%
Fitchburg	\$ 860	\$1,016	+156	+18%
Tract 10700	\$ 599	\$421	-178	-30%
Tract 10800	\$ 765	\$1,024	+259	+34%
Tract 11000	\$ 896	\$1,006	+110	+12%

Data from Policy Map – pulled February 2021

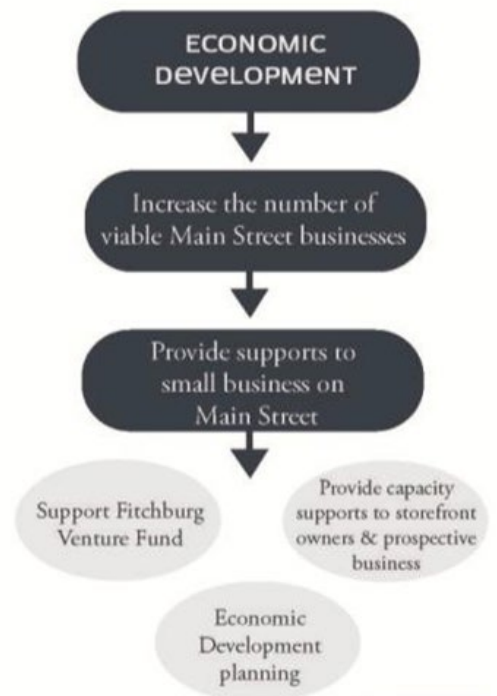
Economic Development

RNoM’s economic development work focused on incentivizing business development and supporting existing businesses, promoting arts and culture, and promoting pipeline projects. Although there was a net gain of only 4 new businesses, and 2 new business soon to open, significant progress on pipeline building projects is expected to attract new businesses to the area to serve the people living and working on these new/renovated properties.

Significant Accomplishments

To incentivize business development, RNoM provided staff and community support for pipeline projects:

- FSU Theater Block completed phase 1 and held a ribbon cutting ceremony in 2018.
 - In Phase 1 FSU renovated 7,000 square feet of space on the second floor of 717 Main St. The renovated space includes an



IdeaLab with interdisciplinary entrepreneurship space, a computer lab, flexible event and meeting space, and a state-of-the-art game design studio for FSU students, which is the first of its kind in a public institution in the Northeast.



- A \$25 million construction cost is anticipated for further renovations for retail space on the first floor (phase 2) and the theater renovation (phase 3).
- Construction is set to begin in 2023, with an anticipated opening in 2025.
- The \$23.5 million City Hall renovations began in the summer of 2019 and were completed in fall 2020. The renovation includes a two-story parking garage behind City Hall.



- The Fitchburg Public Library is moving forward with plans for a \$31.2 million renovation and expansion.
 - The City is currently 11th on a wait list for a \$12.5 million grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.
 - The City will have to raise the remaining \$18.9 million by the time the grant is awarded

The City of Fitchburg, with significant input from RNoM and other partners, completed its Economic Development Strategic Plan in September 2018. A focus on downtown and the North of Main neighborhood are seen in two key goals:

- Make Fitchburg's Downtown a vibrant, attractive, mixed-use destination that is active throughout the week and into the evening.
- Maintain an attractive, high quality housing stock.

Further, RNoM's role is called out in both these goal areas, as well as for other goals within the plan.

RNoM also supported economic development in the NoM area by:

- Supporting the MassDevelopment Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) Application, which awarded three years of funds for a TDI fellow and technical assistance.
- Hiring a downtown coordinator to connect with businesses.
- Supporting Smart Growth/Complete Streets infrastructure in NoM.
- Supporting the Farmer's Market and helping it to relocate to Boulder Drive in NoM and providing resources for the market to go mobile during the COVID pandemic.

With support from RNoM, the City also accelerated its plans to be more flexible with businesses in its permitting to encourage economic growth.

Finally, with funding from THFCM and MassDevelopment, the City of Fitchburg was one of the first communities in the state to implement a small business grant program during the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of the program, they will have distributed \$250,000 in small business grants; funding from THFCM of \$35,000 supported 5 businesses.

Economic Development Outcomes

Since 2016, 10 new businesses opened and currently remain open; another 8 businesses opened but closed as of February 2021, and another 6 existing businesses closed, for a net gain of 4 new businesses in North of Main. Additionally, two new businesses will be opening soon but have been delayed due to the COVID pandemic. NewVue helped to open three businesses in the neighborhood. Also of note, Fidelity Bank was considering a move off Main St., but initially opted to remain due to the development work going on. However, in February 2020 Fidelity merged with Family Federal Savings Bank and relocated to that property at 130 Whalon St. in Fitchburg because of its proximity to Route 2 and the ability to better serve customers. But Fidelity remains a partner with the City and RNoM as they donated the Main St. property to FSU but have retained naming rights to the building and will continue to have a voice in how the building is used. Although many would have liked to see the bank remain on Main St., RNoM partners see this as an opportunity to add to the revitalization of Main St.

RNoM brought significant resources into the North of Main area. Within the economic development area specifically, RNoM's worked contributed to leveraging \$23.5 million for the renovation of City Hall and \$770,000 for early development work on the Fitchburg Arts Community.

Community Engagement

RNoM’s Community Engagement work focused on empowering community members to address issues of concern in the neighborhood and developing leadership and capacity among residents. RNoM partners developed several innovative community engagement and leadership training programs to build capacity among residents.

Significant Accomplishments

To empower community members to address issues of concern in the neighborhood, develop leadership and capacity among residents, and bring diversity to local boards, FSU developed a Resident Leadership Institute and ran three cohorts with a total of 34 graduates.

In further support of community engagement and leadership development, NewVue Communities created its Community Stewards program. This program is designed to meet shared interests and needs as voiced by those involved in community engagement. NewVue ran trainings for Community Stewards, Junior Stewards, Health Stewards, Public Education Stewards, Art Stewards, Financial Freedom Stewards, and Community Organizing Stewards. Trainings to date have resulted in residents leading several initiatives:

- **Public Education Stewards:** The Public Education Stewards developed a parent outreach and educational project for parents and by parents called Inform Fitchburg. Inform Fitchburg trains, educates, and mobilizes parents whose children attend public school in Fitchburg to meaningfully participate in their children’s education. These Stewards successfully collaborate with the Fitchburg Public Schools.



- **Art Stewards:** Developed the Fitchburg Arts Collective to promote the Fitchburg Arts Community that will bring affordable housing to artists and to advocate for affordable studio spaces and community space for local artists in the downtown Fitchburg area.
- **Health Steward Emmanuella Demosthenes and Marissa Monteiro,** Salsa Instructor, developed Salsa on the Riverfront, a multi-week event focused on promoting active living and use of our local parks.

The Fitchburg Art Museum (FAM) has partnered with the Fitchburg Public Schools to develop the Supporting the Neighborhood Arts After School Program. Under RNoM, FAM developed the concept, curriculum, and partnership with the Fitchburg Public Schools. Implementation of the pilot program has been postponed until 2021.



Community Engagement Outcomes

FSU held three cycles of its Resident Leadership Institute and trained 34 community members. NewVue ran 6 cycles of Community Stewards trainings and trained 244 community members (see Table 5). Together, FSU and NewVue networked with organizations and projects to place graduates in leadership positions. To date, they have successfully placed 2 graduates in leadership positions with local organizations and have 25 to 30 graduates supporting 12 of 15 major projects in the area (at least 2 graduates per project). For example, stewards serve on the Fitchburg Cultural Council (co-chair of the Board), Fitchburg Cultural Alliance (President, Assistant Treasurer, Member), NewVue Communities Board (4 Members), Growing Places (Staff), Fitchburg Special Education Parent Advisory Council (4 Members), and Abolitionist Park Board (2 Members). Additionally, as noted above, some of the Community Stewards have gone on to develop their own community initiatives.

	Sp 2019	Su 2019	Fa 2019	Sp 2020	Su 2020	Fa 2020	Total
Community Stewards	14	6	0	0	0	0	20
Health Stewards	15	0	0	0	0	0	15
Junior Stewards	11	13	25	0	0	0	49
Public Ed Stewards	0	5	10	6	13	25	59
Art Stewards	0	0	11	19	15	15	60
Financial Freedom Stewards	0	0	0	11	0	0	11
Comm Organizing Stewards	0	0	0	0	23	7	30
Total	40	24	46	36	51	47	244

Sustainability and Moving Forward

The RNOM project enhanced existing programs and initiatives and created new ones. Over the six-year initiative, RNOM has become a known-entity and trusted partner in the City and community. They bring people together - residents, entrepreneurs, business owners, artists, property owners, institutional leaders, and grassroots leaders - to advance their work. We reflect on RNOM's sustainability and ways they can move forward by assessing the structural, relationship, and transformational changes they have created.

Structural Changes

RNoM has identified structural changes that they expect to continue beyond the grant funding, particularly in the areas of staffing and program implementation. First, FSU continues to support the Project Coordinator position and has applied for and been awarded an Urban Agenda grant from the MA Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, which will support operational sustainability, including the work of the RNoM Project Coordinator. In addition, RNoM expects that the Fitchburg Plan and the City, using funds from the Community Development Block Grant, will continue to fund the Downtown Events and Marketing Coordinator. Further, about half-way through the six-year initiative, the City hired RNOM's Project Coordinator as Executive Director of Planning and Community Development, which also bodes well for the institutionalization of RNOM strategies through the city's policy and systems change.

In terms of programmatic changes, the NewVue Liabilities to Assets pilot program will improve 35 to 40 properties in the greater Fitchburg area, including 4 to 5 properties in the North of Main neighborhood in Fitchburg. Permanent adoption of this pilot by the Commonwealth could offer further improvements for Fitchburg and NoM.

Early in the RNoM effort, RNoM partnered with the Fitchburg Public Schools to fund Footsteps2Brilliance, a bilingual digital solution that connects school and home and involves parents in their children's education to promote literacy. With just one year of data demonstrating its benefits, the Fitchburg Public Schools were able to leverage the Footsteps to Brilliance investment from RNoM to apply for and receive grant funding to acquire a 5-year, \$200,000 license, which covers access to Footsteps2Brilliance's app-based reading activities for anyone living in the city of Fitchburg. The Fitchburg Public Schools continue to use this program.

RNoM also anticipates that the Resident Leadership Institute and the Community Stewards Trainings offered by FSU and NewVue, respectively, will continue to operate and be sustained by each program's host organization. Additionally, the Fitchburg Art Museum will implement the arts-based after-school program, in partnership with the Fitchburg Public Schools, that was developed under RNoM.

Relationship Changes

One of the key features of RNoM’s sustainability is relationships. First, RNoM has built strong partnerships among key organizations within the Fitchburg community. RNoM expects these partnerships will remain even when regular team meetings cease. Leadership Team members have proven themselves to be strong, dedicated collaborators and trusted advisors to each other and to the Mayor. Second, RNoM’s resident engagement strategy was designed to bring residents together so that social cohesion remains in the neighborhood even after project-supported programming ends. Additionally, FSU and NewVue have worked to place Resident Leadership Institute and Community Stewards graduates in community organizations and on community projects to continue their input and engagement in the community. However, recognizing that community engagement can change over time, RNoM partners will continue resident engagement and training programs, as described above, to preserve the bonds formed among neighbors and continue to build the capacity of community members. Through the RNoM partners and the community members trained and engaged in the project, people now know each other and have a history of working successfully together. Consequently, when a new opportunity for a grant arises or when a team is trying to gather the necessary capacity to execute a project in the neighborhood, both residents and other stakeholders now have a larger network of relationships from which to draw.

Transformative Changes

RNoM has resulted in several approaches that stand to bring transformative changes to NoM and the broader area.

In February 2017, RNoM was invited by the Kresge Foundation, to take part in its Capital and Collaboration Workshop. RNoM members who attended the workshop included Mayor

DiNatale, President Lapidus and Jay

Bry from Fitchburg State University, Tricia Pistone from Making Opportunities Count, and Marc Dohan from NewVue. RNoM partners also invited banking and nonprofit executives representing the Fitchburg Plan to join them. This workshop focused on infusing capital investment in cities working through the “Capital Absorption Framework”, a framework developed by the Initiative for Responsible Development. The Framework involves three key pillars: developing a shared vision, creating an enabling environment that supports investment, and creating a shared agenda of pipeline projects. The RNoM team brought decision makers who could implement the framework locally.

RNoM built on its strong partnerships among key organizations within the Fitchburg community and developed a shared vision that has the potential to continue bringing significant change to the North of Main area in Fitchburg. A key part of the shared vision is the adoption of Fitchburg, generally, and North



of Main/Main Street, specifically, as a “Gateway to Arts and Culture.” The “Gateway to Arts and Culture” was identified by RNoM as a strategy to build an identity for North of Main that would be attractive to residents and investors and that would encourage the City to target resources to the area. This shared vision changes the narrative about the North of Main area and brings an implicit sense of value to an area that has been challenged economically. The aim is to continue building the partnerships and vision throughout the community to bring sustained change to the North of Main area in Fitchburg.

To promote an enabling environment that supports investment, RNoM focused on creating an inviting, inclusive atmosphere that fosters accessible, walkable, and people-centered public spaces. This included significant placemaking efforts that promoted the arts and engaged the community and work to improve infrastructure and walkways. Through the Smart Growth work in the downtown area, RNoM devoted time and energy toward advocating for denser, compact development in NoM, the most urban, transit-oriented neighborhood in the City. RNoM has also led the support for the City’s implementation of Complete Streets, Shared Streets, Main Street and Boulder Drive recirculation and modernization, and the Water Street Bridge replacement and modernization.

As the third pillar, RNoM and its partners agreed to focus on three transformative pipeline projects directly related to the RNoM initiative: B.F. Brown/Fitchburg Arts Community, the Theater Block, and Old City Hall redevelopments. Throughout RNoM’s six-year effort all three of these pipeline projects have progressed significantly and RNoM and the City have brought in a fourth project with the renovation of the library. By using this pipeline strategy, RNoM and its partners can continue to revitalize the downtown area bringing more business to Main Street, increasing investment in housing in the North of Main, and creating a place where residents, visitors and business owners want to live, work, play, and invest.

As other evidence of transformative change, NewVue’s Liabilities to Assets program expects to rehabilitate 35 to 40 residential properties over the course of three years, resulting in a significant change in the housing market in North Central Massachusetts, and potentially throughout the Commonwealth. Furthermore, with NewVue’s expansion from serving the twin cities of Fitchburg and Leominster to serving 22 municipalities across North Central Massachusetts, its Community Stewards training program could be replicated throughout the region. The evaluators from Brandeis University have agreed to evaluate the impact of the Community Stewards program for RNoM to help NewVue replicate this model.

Finally, RNoM has established itself within and outside the City such that it has been able to leverage significant funds from the initial investment in RNoM (see Table 6). In total, The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts invested \$2.13 million in the RNoM effort. With this funding, RNoM leveraged another \$26.0 million in investment for RNoM efforts specifically, \$26.8 million for community projects that built on the RNoM work and partnerships, and \$32.1 million in capital funds for the pipeline projects connected to RNoM. Thus, the \$2.13 million investment yielded a total of \$85 million in additional investment in NoM and related projects. Through this project, the RNoM team has developed strong relationships and a narrative of partnership and impact that is attractive to funders. To continue bringing in resources to the community and further the goals of RNoM, the RNoM partners, and particularly FSU and the City, should consider funding a grant writer to continue taking advantage of this narrative.

Table 6. ReImagine North of Main Funding and Leveraged Funding 2014 to 2020

Funder	Strategy	Award								Total to Date
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020		
Initial RNoM Funding										
The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts	RNoM Initiative	\$0	\$350,000	\$450,000	\$394,734	\$341,950	\$388,401	\$170,243	\$2,095,328	
The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts	HFCM Supplemental Funding due to COVID-19	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$35,000	\$35,000	
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston	RNoM Initiative	\$400,000	\$0	\$150,000	\$75,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$625,000	
Leveraged Funding Direct to RNoM										
Greater Worcester Community Foundation	RNoM Initiative	\$0	\$0	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$40,000	
Neighborworks America	Neighborhood Development - Marketing Plan	\$0	\$0	\$100,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$100,000	
Growing Places (local Farmers Market sales from SNAP users)	Garden Box Competition	\$0	\$0	\$4,500	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$4,500	
North Central MA CRA Coalition	Neighborhood Development - Financial Inclusion (Minority Coalition)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,600	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,600	
Smart Growth America (Re) Building Downtown Workshop	RNoM Initiative	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$15,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$15,000	
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)	Economic Development - Small business/FSU	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$50,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$50,000	
Neighborworks America Project ReInvest	Neighborhood Development - Housing and Sidewalk Improvements	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$500,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$500,000	
North Central MA CRA Coalition	Neighborhood Development - Home Buyer Assistance Program	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$10,000	\$8,000	\$3,000	\$0	\$21,000	
City of Fitchburg CDBG Funds	Neighborhood Development - Home Buyer Assistance Program	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$30,000	\$0	\$0	\$30,000	
The Fitchburg Plan	Economic Development - Next Street Strategic Plan	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$40,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$40,000	
Neighborworks America	Liabilities to Assets (Fitchburg)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$25,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$25,000	
DHCD Capital	Liabilities to Assets (Fitchburg)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$300,000	\$0	\$0	\$300,000	
Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development	Urban Agenda: Activate Fitchburg	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$59,350	\$0	\$59,350	
MassDevelopment Grant - Commonwealth Places - Activate Mill Street	Placemaking in NoM	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$40,000	\$0	\$40,000	
Patronicity - Crowdsourcing - Activate Mill Street - 111 donations including FSU, RNoM, CRA Coalition, Enterprise Bank, private businesses and individual donors	Placemaking in NoM	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$40,296	\$0	\$40,296	
The Fitchburg Plan	FY20 Downtown Events & Marketing Coordinator	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$23,750	\$0	\$23,750	
FSU	FY20 Downtown Events & Marketing Coordinator	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$23,750	\$0	\$23,750	
City of Fitchburg CDBG Funds	FY20 Downtown Events & Marketing Coordinator	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$30,000	\$0	\$30,000	
Private Foundation	Fitchburg Arts Community	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$100,000	\$0	\$100,000	
MassDevelopment -- TDI Local	Economic Development -- Storefront Improvement(s) and Lease Subsidy	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$65,000	\$0	\$65,000	
Umass Memorial Health Alliance -- Clinton Hospital	Neighborhood Development - Fitchburg Arts Community (FAC) pre-development loan	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$750,000	\$0	\$750,000	
MassDevelopment - Brownfields Redevelopment Fund	Neighborhood Development - Fitchburg Arts Community (FAC) pre-development	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$20,000	\$0	\$20,000	
MassDevelopment -- TDI Local COVID Small Business and Artist Relief	Economic Development, Community Engagement, Arts & Culture	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$65,000	\$65,000	
MassDevelopment - Resurgent Places Grant	Placemaking in NoM	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$10,000	\$10,000	
City of Fitchburg	Renovation of Old City Hall (completed Dec. 2020)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$23,500,000	\$0	\$0	\$23,500,000	
FSU	FY21 Downtown Events & Marketing Coordinator	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$29,928	\$29,928	
City of Fitchburg CDBG Funds	FY21 Downtown Events & Marketing Coordinator	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$35,000	\$35,000	
MassDevelopment -- TDI Local COVID Small Business Relief	Local Business Gift Card and Relief Grants	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$60,000	\$60,000	
Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development	Urban Agenda: ReImagine North of Main (RFP response Dec. 2020, Awarded Jan. 2021)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$100,000	\$100,000	
Total RNoM Direct										
Leveraged Funding to Community Due to RNoM										
Community Compact	City Economic Development Plan by Umass Boston Collins Institute	\$0	\$0	\$50,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$50,000	
Local Foundations (United Way, The Community Foundation, and The Fitchburg Public School Foundation)	Fitchburg Public Schools to Expand Footsteps to Brilliance	\$0	\$0	\$200,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$200,000	
Crossroads, FSU, New Vue	Annual Beautification Day - three years of programming	\$0	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$30,000	
North Central Chamber of Commerce	Economic Development - Loan Loss Reserve	\$0	\$0	\$100,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$100,000	
Complete Streets	Upper Common Improvements	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$210,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$210,000	
Complete Streets	Main St. & Boulder Dr Improvements	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$315,000	\$315,000	
Mass Development	TDI Fellow Salary and Benefits	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$155,000	\$0	\$0	\$155,000	
Barr Foundation	Operational and Development Support to Fitchburg Arts Museum	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$300,000	\$0	\$0	\$300,000	
Clement Family Charitable Trust	FAM Education Fellow	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$90,000	\$90,000	
Cathedral Fund	FAM support for underserved populations, education, and community service	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$600,000	\$600,000	
40R Overlay District Funds from State to City of Fitchburg	Target Lowe Park improvements to benefit FAC	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$180,000	\$0	\$180,000	
Private donors	Leverage Building Block funds	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$11,000	\$0	\$11,000	
State & Federal LIHTC and Historic Tax Credits, City HOME funds, and other sources	Housing: Moran Square Redevelopment - 44 new rental units	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$20,000,000	\$20,000,000	
Commonwealth Historic Tax Credits	FSU Theater Block Project	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$600,000	\$0	\$600,000	
The MA Office of Business Development (MOBD) and Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) – MA Vacant Storefront Program (MVSP)	Economic Development: Received Vacant Storefronts District Designation. Two businesses awarded \$10,000 in tax credits each: Dario's Ristorante at 655 Main Street and a commercial kitchen concept at 35 Main Street	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$20,000	\$20,000	
Building Donation to FSU: 675 Main Street, Fidelity Bank	FSU Theater Block, Downtown Revitalization	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$700,000	\$700,000	
MassWorks Commonwealth of Massachusetts	Infrastructure - Two-way Main Str. & Boulder Dr.	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,000,000	\$0	\$3,000,000	
MassDevelopment - Collaborative Workspace Program	Economic Development - Downtown Revitalization	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$160,000	\$160,000	
Bay Colony Development Corporation	NewVue Small Business Assistance Program	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$10,000	\$10,000	
MassDOT - Shared Streets	Infrastructure - Two-way Main Str. & Boulder Dr., space activation, placemaking	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$53,249	\$53,249	
Cathedral Fund	Fitchburg Families First! A COVID-19 Relief program led by FAM, in partnership with FPS and RNoM for the benefit of families in NOM and students within FPS	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$50,000	\$50,000	
Capital Funds for Pipeline Projects										
Fitchburg State University	Theatre Block Development	\$0	\$0	\$475,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$475,000	
City Insurance Settlement	NewVue for Fitchburg Arts Community	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,600,000	\$0	\$0	\$1,600,000	
City of Fitchburg	Library Renovation	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$30,000,000	\$0	\$0	\$30,000,000	
Total Leveraged Funding to Community Due to RNoM										
Grand Total										



FITCHBURG FAMILIES FIRST

Event: February 20, 2021
9 am to noon or while supplies last



All are welcome to pick up a free Market Basket gift card to supplement meals, limit one gift card per household. Also available will be a free bag of school supplies, a gift card to a local restaurant, and an art activity for the family. Fitchburg stands together!

Drive-by pick-up at the Fitchburg Art Museum parking lot:
185 Elm Street, Fitchburg

Fitchburg Families First will also be distributing free Market Basket gift cards on March 6. Snow date the following Saturday.

MILL STREET MUSIC SERIES

FEATURING SEAN DALEY
TONIGHT (9/12) 6-9PM