District Impact Study
Assessment and Action regarding COVID-19 in Central Square, Cambridge, MA
March 15, 2020
Letter from Executive Director

At a Glance: District-Wide Statistics

Business by Business Impact
- Restaurants
- Arts & Culture
- Retail
- Non-Profit

Emergency Relief Recommendations

Protecting Our Vulnerable & Homeless

Contact
The numbers are clear. 60% of respondents will not survive another eight weeks at this rate. 72% are waiting for more direction from local and state government as to whether to stay open or close. To flatten the curve and protect our local business and arts economy, we must take decisive action and call for the closure of all non-essential businesses. Not only that, immediate financial relief must be made available.
The heart and soul of Cambridge, Central Square is a historic business district in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Home to mom and pop shops, social services, non-profits, academics, artists, activists, and entrepreneurs, Central’s storefronts and street art reflect the diversity of ideas, tastes, and talents of our city.

Estimated workforce employed by these types of businesses:

- **Hospitality Industry**
  - 83 Restaurants and Hotels

- **Arts & Culture**
  - 60 Organizations

- **Retail**
  - 86 Businesses

- **Non-Profit**
  - 48 Organizations

3,000

Estimated percentage of hourly workers: 94%
**District-Wide Statistics**

Has your business or organization felt the effects of COVID-19?

- Yes: 96%
- No: 4%

Are you waiting on more direction from city or state officials as to whether to close?

- Yes: 71.8%
- No: 28.2%

Describe the nature of impact.

- Sales Drop: 78%
- Staffing Issues: 40%
- Reduced Hours: 32%
- Closed Business: 16%
- Layoffs: 20%
- Cancellations of Development Events: 14%
- Decline in Philanthropic Giving: 12%
- Other: 2%

At this rate, could your business/organization operate for the duration of the state of emergency, assuming it goes until May?

- Yes: 40%
- No: 60%

*Charts show data from 50 Central Square BID respondents, collected between March 13 - March 15, 2020.*
Survey Responses

Hospitality
**Brookline Lunch**

is a mom and pop diner, serving casual Mediterranean and American fare in a cozy, brick-walled cafe.

- **Address:** 9 Brookline Street
- **Years in Central Sq.:** 30
- **Hourly Employees:** 2
- **Nature of Impact:** sales drop

“People are **fearful to go out**, so we’ve seen less customers coming in, therefore a **decrease in food sales.**”

Abeer Abu-Rubieh, Family Representative

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**Dunkin’ Donuts**

is a long-running chain serving signature donuts, breakfast sandwiches & a variety of coffee drinks.

- **Address:** 616 Massachusetts Ave.
- **Years in Central Sq.:** 40+
- **Hourly Employees:** 14
- **Nature of Impact:** sales drop

“The longer this crisis lasts, the greater the probability of restaurant failures or even worse - **bankruptcies.**”

David Carvalho, Owner
730 Tavern

is a one-of-a-kind experience in a friendly and diverse atmosphere. Our guests can look forward to socializing while enjoying good food, drink and the company of neighbors and friends, while celebrating New England’s awesome sport teams.

730 Massachusetts Ave.

Davidson Bettero, Owner

COVID-19 has caused a loss of 50% of our daily revenue.

Green Street

is a neighborhood fixture, with an award-winning A to Z cocktail menu, meticulously selected wines and craft beers, and a seasonal, local-based menu.

280 Green Street

Dylan Black, Owner

We are seeing a 50-75% drop in sales and a drastic change in kitchen staff and hours.

2.7 years in Central Sq.

9 hourly employees

nature of impact: cancellations

15 years in Central Sq.

17 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drop, staffing
Saloniki Greek
Is a tribute to the humble Greek sandwich shop, bringing the flavor and quality of the Greek kitchen to the US.
📍 181 Massachusetts Ave.

2.5 years in Central Sq.
35 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drop, staffing, reduced hours, layoffs

"It's not a snowstorm, it's not some event that can be “stopped,” we don’t know when it will be over. It’s paralyzing."

Jonathan Mendez, Owner

Abide
Serves inventive, handcrafted coffee & tea drinks with varied toppings in a cheerful space.
📍 317 Massachusetts Ave.

3 years in Central Sq.
9 hourly employees

nature of impact: closed business, sales drop, cancellations

"Small businesses like ours with thin margins and little to no access to cash reserves will surely die."

Jeffrey Yu, Owner
Craigie on Main
combines French-inspired nose-to-tail refined rusticity with no exceptions local, seasonal & organic ingredients.
📍 853 Main Street

12 years in Central Sq.
45 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drops, staffing, safety investments, reduced hours, layoffs

People are staying home and not going out. The impact is obvious and real.

Tony Maws, Owner

PAGU
is a Japanese tapas restaurant located in Cambridge creating globally inspired homey food that speaks to the body and the soul.
📍 310 Massachusetts Ave.

3 years in Central Sq.
30 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drop, cancellations

If we close, how may we take care of our employees?

Tracy Chang, Owner
The Phoenix Landing

is part pub, part dance club. This multitasker offers modern Irish pub fare, DJs, and trivia night.

Kevin Treanor, Owner

512 Massachusetts Ave.

25 years in Central Sq.
16 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drops, staffing, reduced hours, layoffs, cancellations

La Fábrica Central

is a Latin Caribbean Cuisine restaurant, with nightclub open on the weekends with authentic Caribbean nightlife and live music right in downtown Cambridge.

Dennis Benzan, Owner

450 Massachusetts Ave.

3 years in Central Sq.
60 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drops, staffing, reduced hours, layoffs, cancellations

COVID-19’s effects on Central Square is a disaster.

Our business will not sustain a slowdown of more than two months without emergency loan relief.

Kevin Treanor, Owner

Dennis Benzan, Owner
Veggie Galaxy
is a contemporary vegetarian diner and vegan bakery.
450 Massachusetts Ave.

9 years in Central Sq.
51 hourly employees
nature of impact: sales drops, staffing, safety investments

"We are dealing with this hour by hour."
Adam Penn, Owner

Mariposa Bakery
is a quaint, brick-walled bakery serving homemade goodies, sandwiches & espresso drinks.
424 Massachusetts Ave.

16 years in Central Sq.
13 hourly employees
nature of impact: sales drops, reduced hours, cancellation of local farmer’s market

"This is usually a bustling thriving community and we are seeing a drastic reduction in people."
Suzanne Mermelstein, Owner
Darwin’s Ltd.
is a sandwich shop focused on coffee, sandwiches, and community.
📍 313 Massachusetts Ave.

28 years in Central Sq.
24 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drops, layoffs, reduced hours

“...A delay is not acceptable when they have rent to pay.”
Steven Darwin, Owner

907 Main
is a boutique hotel experience with onsite restaurant & rooftop bar on Central Square in Cambridge, MA.
📍 907 Main St.

1 year in Central Sq.
40 hourly employees

nature of impact: impact pending come opening in May

“COVID-19 has possibly impacted us for a May opening.”
Kathryn Vallier, Manager
Mâe Asian Eatery

Mâe Asian Eatery consists of three live-music performance rooms, two family-style restaurants with full-service bars, and an elegant restaurant named ZuZu.

Nabil Sater, Owner

45 years in Central Sq. 90 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drop, staffing, closed for business

Our customer base consists of dine-in and dine out, and we are getting hit on both fronts. People are working remotely and/or leaving the state.

Anil Rayasam, Owner

The Middle East Restaurant

The Middle East Restaurant consists of three live-music performance rooms, two family-style restaurants with full-service bars, and an elegant restaurant named ZuZu.

Nabil Sater, Owner

472-480 Massachusetts Ave.

We had to close the business because of COVID-19.
Little Donkey

is a global tapas restaurant in the heart of Central Square Cambridge.  
📍 505 Massachusetts Ave.

3.5 years in Central Sq.  
65 hourly employees  
💰 nature of impact: sales drops, staffing, reduced hours, layoffs, cancellations of development events

“We’ve seen a **40% drop** in dinner reservations and a **85% drop** in lunch sales **because of COVID-19.**”

Jamie Bissonette, Co-owner

Naco Taco

is a full-service taqueria in Central Square, featuring scratch made tacos and tortas in a casual setting, along with margaritas and cocktails, craft beer and wine.  
📍 297 Massachusetts Ave.

5 years in Central Sq.  
55 hourly employees  
💰 nature of impact: sales drop, staffing, layoffs, reduced hours, expected closure

“The effects of COVID-19 have been **devastating.**”

Alex Tannenbaum, Founder
Harding House
is a warm and homey bed and breakfast in Cambridge.
📍 288 Harvard Street

23 years in Central Sq.
10 hourly employees
💰 nature of impact: sales drops

“In hospitality we need travelers to visit and the work is very much in person.”

Briana Pearson, Owner

Dana Hill Liquors
is a package store in the Harvard/Central Square area.
Cambridge, MA.
📍 910 Massachusetts Ave.

3+ years in Central Sq.
6 hourly employees
💰 nature of impact: sales drops, cancellations

“Decline to almost $0 in corporate business.”

Charles Marquardt, Owner
Viale
features seasonal dishes and a rotating wine list.
📍 502 Massachusetts Ave.

5.5 years in Central Sq.
27 hourly employees

nature of impact:
sales drops, reduced hours, loss of future events

“Decline in guests by 20% the last couple days, expecting a 70% drop next week.”
Mark Young, Owner

The Mad Monkfish
is passionate about ethnic flavors & jazz. They offer a unique take on sushi & Asian specialties.
📍 524 Massachusetts Ave.

9 years in Central Sq.
32 hourly employees

nature of impact:
sales drops, reduced hours, cancellations

“The entire square looks empty, and our business has been cut by 75%.”
Jamme Chantler, Owner
1369 Coffeehouse offers the best coffees, teas, pastries, and accompaniments, and strive to serve them in a friendly, warm atmosphere.

- 757 Massachusetts Ave.

25 years in Central Sq.
29 hourly employees

Our greatest concern is for our staff, who need paychecks to survive.

Joshua Gerber, Owner

nature of impact: sales drops, staffing issues, reduced hours
The Studio at 550
is an artist exchange center designed to promote cross disciplinary exchange through classes, workshops, professional development events, networking events, performances, and opportunities through programming and space rental.

- Location: 550 Massachusetts Ave.
- Years in Central Sq.: 4
- Hourly Employees: 0
- Nature of Impact: Closed business

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Cambridge Community Television
provides media production and computer training and access to production equipment and facilities to residents, non-profits and businesses.

- Location: 438 Massachusetts Ave.
- Years in Central Sq.: 32
- Hourly Employees: 5
- Nature of Impact: Closed business

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_due to the nature of the business combined with a 1 person on staff to man the extensive cleaning protocol, we will choose to suspend operations for the health protection of the community._

Callie Chapman, Director

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_I fear the loss of small businesses that run on a shoestring in the best of times._

Susan Fleischmann, Executive Director
Red Fox Escapes

is an Escape Room in Cambridge MA with 100% original puzzles and movie-quality sets.

📍 614 Massachusetts Ave.

1 years in Central Sq.

0 hourly employees

$ nature of impact: sales drops, layoffs, and cancellations

"COVID-19 is catastrophic for our business today. We’ve only just paid off our build-out costs, and have no cushion to weather months of zero revenues."

Marie Huber, Co-founder

Central Square Theater

the collaboration between two non-profit professional theater companies with a combined track record of over 50 years of excellence in producing theater and educational programming for the Greater Boston community.

📍 450 Massachusetts Ave.

12 years in Central Sq.

30 hourly employees

CLOSED nature of impact: closed business, sales drop, staffing, cancellations, declines in philanthropic giving

"Cultural organizations are critical to the lifeblood of Central Square. Please don’t let this health scare put those organizations out of business."

Catherine Carr Kelly, Executive Director
The Dance Complex
is a volunteer based, artist run organization dedicated to
promoting, advancing, and sponsoring artistic endeavors,
creative work and education in dance and the movement arts.

📍 536 Massachusetts Ave.

28 years in Central Sq.
9 hourly employees

Nature of impact:
sales drops, layoffs,
and cancellations

“With Covid-19 and a minimum of four weeks away from business,
we are at risk to exist.”

Peter DiMuro, Executive Artistic Director
HMart
is an Asian grocery store chain supplying imported packaged foods & housewares plus ready-to-serve meals.
📍 581 Massachusetts Ave.

6 years in Central Sq.
59 hourly employees
nature of impact: increased panic purchasing

“We don’t know when/if we will be closed down due to quarantine.”
Will Wood, Owner

Great Eastern Trading Co.
is a unique and magical shopping experience and personal styling for special occasions or everyday wear.
📍 49 River Street

50 years in Central Sq.
4 hourly employees
nature of impact: sales drop

“The impact is palpable. I fear for my business’s future.”
Nephtaliem McCrary, Owner
Target
is a retail chain offering home goods, clothing, electronics and more, plus exclusive designer collections.

Zach Torrin, Owner
Lucky’s Tattoo & Piercing
is a custom body art studio with locations in Northampton and Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Danielle Morine, Store Director
Sales are clearly not sustainable and will dip significantly in the coming days.

Zach Torrin, Owner
The situation can so rapidly evolve. If we have to shut down, things will look very different for us.
University Stationery
is a Veteran, family-owned stationery store stocking office supplies, rubber stamps & novelties.
📍 296 Massachusetts Ave.

90 years in Central Sq.
0 hourly employees
💰 nature of impact: sales drop

Gail Seidman, Owner

COVID-19 has caused a 80% revenue drop to date.

Teddy Shoes
is a family-owned shoe store that specializes in dance shoes and apparel, family footwear, wide widths, boots, hats, dyeables, lingerie, high heels and large sizes.
📍 548 Massachusetts Ave.

63 years in Central Sq.
3 hourly employees
💰 nature of impact: sales drop, reduced staffing

Steve Adelson, Owner

The dropoff is alarming. We can’t stay in business if no one comes in.
Cheapo Records

is a Veteran music store stocking a vast range of used vinyl, cassettes & CDs in an array of genres.

📍 538 Massachusetts Ave.

43 years in Central Sq.
3 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drop, staffing, cancellations

“A low interest loan could make the difference in our survival.”

Robert Perry, Owner

Heartbreak Hill Running Company

is your headquarters for all things running: personalized gait analysis shoe fittings, the best apparel and accessories, expert coaching, proven programming, and a state-of-the-art treadmill studio.

📍 294 Massachusetts Ave.

10 years in Central Sq.
28 hourly employees

nature of impact: closed business, sales drop, staffing, cancellations, reduced hours

“We are heavily dependent on the Boston Marathon, runners and events. I estimate $200,000 to $300,000 in loss.”

Justin Burdon, Owner
Central Square Florist

is a trusted and family-owned local florist, delivering flowers and gifts to Boston and surrounding areas.

Anne Shuhler, Owner

Classic Graphx

offers a full design service, offset printing, on demand digital printing, digital copying, cutting, folding, bookletmaking, padding, bindery.

Jackie Levine, Owner

COVID-19 has directly affected us in the cancellation of corporate and social events.

We will all be adversely impacted by this.

Anne Shuhler, Owner
Seven Stars
is a metaphysical bookstore, specializing in Religious traditions and New Age Material.
📍 731 Massachusetts Ave.

30 years in Central Sq.
5 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drop

We’ve seen fewer customers and tighter disposable income.

Stuart Weinberg, Owner

Revolutionary Clinics
is a medical marijuana experience.
📍 541 Massachusetts Ave.

1 year in Central Sq.
20 hourly employees

nature of impact: staffing issues, cancellations of development events

We’ve seen fewer customers and a shortage of product.

Keith Cooper, Owner
Hilton’s Tent City

is New England’s number one source for outdoor gear and apparel, serving Cambridge since 1947.

📍 565 Massachusetts Ave.

50 years in Central Sq.
4 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drop, staffing issues

“We’re experiencing a massive drop in sales volume; could make or break the company.”

David Kramer, Owner

POP! Central

is a pop-up shop feat. vintage fashion, streetwear, music and art.

📍 596 Massachusetts Ave.

>1 years in Central Sq.
3 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drop, staffing issues, layoffs

“We’re experiencing a massive drop in sales volume; could make or break the company.”

Robert Perry, Owner
Blick Art Materials is a chain stocking an extensive selection of art supplies, including sketchbooks, paints & canvases.

📍 619 Massachusetts Ave.

10 years in Central Sq. 17 hourly employees

nature of impact: staffing issues, cancellations of development events

"Student sales have dropped off completely."

Meg Nichols, Manager
Non-Profit Survey Responses

Non-Profit
Food For Free

rescues fresh food—food that might otherwise go to waste—and distributes it within the local emergency food system where it can reach those in need.

11 Inman Street

39 years in Central Sq.
14 hourly employees

nature of impact: safety investment, increased investment to support families in need

People want to DO something.

Sasha Purpura, Executive Director

Cambridge YMCA

is a family facility that has many things to offer the Cambridge Community.

820 Massachusetts Ave.

155 years in Central Sq.
82 hourly employees

nature of impact: sales drop

Members [are] canceling memberships and putting them on hold.

Nancy O’Brien, President & CEO
We had to make the difficult decision to **suspend all regular operations**. We are concerned about the well-being of the children and families we serve, our senior community members, and our staff.

Darrin Korte, Executive Director
Emergency Relief Recommendations

In order for our local business and arts economy to recover from this crisis, we need relief and resources now.

1. Call for immediate closure of non-essential businesses
2. Adopt Rent Rebate Tax Credit program
3. Waive Meals and Sales Tax
4. Institute anti-eviction protections, commercial and residential
5. Avail more relief funds and resources to focus on protecting our most vulnerable neighbors
6. Establish emergency relief fund for businesses, organizations, and employees affected by closures:
   - Waiver on earnings related to crisis response for the unemployed
   - Liquidate Participatory Budgeting and use funds to provide immediate temporary assistance to the newly unemployed
7. Offer mortgage relief for property owners who can’t make payments either through a city-backed guarantee or bond
8. Establish centralized food delivery for seniors with local partners in hospitality industry
9. Call on us for help. We can help inform, disseminate, and carry out new procedures and relief programs.
Recommendations for Protecting Our Vulnerable and Homeless Neighbors

Assessment and Action Regarding COVID-19 in Central Square, Cambridge, MA

March 15, 2020

Overview

Currently, we have about 600 homeless in Cambridge. We need to quickly rethink how this community has access to clean water, food, and health care. As well as how outreach workers can safely continue to do their job. It is essential that new spaces be secured or temporarily erected to accommodate social distancing precautions now and medical treatment in the future.

I humbly offer these suggestions to the City of Cambridge and offer my expertise in finding solutions for these pressing issues of public safety.

Jessie Morton

Jessie Morton is the Central Square BID’s Outreach Coordinator. She brings over a decade’s worth of experience running medical and outreach programs to our community. She previously built programs at places like Johns Hopkins Medical School in Baltimore and Bridge Over Troubled Waters here in Boston. She is an integral part of our team, and works daily to navigate the social service landscape on behalf of our at-risk and homeless neighbors.
COVID-19 Recommendations

1. Public Hand-Washing Stations
   This measure went into place immediately and is absolutely the right idea. I understand that sourcing these will be ever-more difficult. The BID can continue to support those efforts, so this resource is available city-wide.

2. Hydration Stations
   Similar to hand-washing stations, we must provide access to clean water. Again, we can help with sourcing and identifying the most impactful places to put in the district and city.

3. Additional Sites for Meals
   Currently, meals in shelters are large gatherings in small rooms. We recommend finding additional sites to serve and increasing the hours food is available, so fewer people are accessing the space at one time.

4. Hygiene Packs for the Homeless
   Ideally these are distributed weekly to unhoused and at-risk individuals. Kits should contain travel-sized hand sanitizer, antibacterial soap, hand wipes, face masks, and medical gloves. It should also include information on how to stop transmission of the virus, what the symptoms are, and what to do if experiencing those symptoms. I have created a booklet for this, but am happy to disseminate other resources if the City prefers.

5. Extra Protections for Social Workers
   Many providers are having difficulty accessing cleaning supplies and hand sanitizer. If the City can leverage purchasing power to provide kits, it would be much appreciated.

6. Increase Capacity of Care by Hiring More Outreach Workers
   As front line staff is requesting to stay home due to confirmed or potential contact, relief staff will need to be hired. We can help by writing a job description for this position and suggesting how it might work operationally.

7. Additional Sleeping Space
   This is an absolute priority to comply with the recommended 6 foot social distancing protocol. What now-empty city-owned property can we use for something like this? Are there gyms, hotels, dorms available? Our team has even discussed exploring what it would take to set up large tents for temporary housing and field clinics on surface-level parking lots.

8. Emergency Transportation
   Programs similar to First Step Outreach should be implemented to provide transportation to the additional shelter options once set up. They should focus only on transportation to food and shelter, not the hospitals, to limit spread and protect workers who don’t have training and/or the personal protective equipment that PraEMS will.

9. Protective Equipment and Training for Outreach Workers
   Service providers like outreach workers are in close proximity to people all day. That is the nature of care. There is a risk of spread even when complying with social distancing protocols. Employees need training and supplies for Droplet Protection including a hair net, face shield/eye protection, front facing gowns, gloves, booties and N95 masks, which are fit tested to the individual. These masks are rated to withstand COVID-19.

10. Training and Monitoring of Frontline Staff
    Frontline staff needs to understand when referral to further care is needed. They should also have access to thermometers with sheaths, remembering to still sanitize thermometers after each use. Their health should be closely monitored too. All health care professionals at any new shelter locations must be checked for symptoms. This is an absolute priority.

11. Public Information
    We need PSA billboards, electronic or otherwise, similar to the one in City Hall. At bare minimum there should be A-frames throughout the city explaining how to protect oneself and others, what the symptoms are, and what/where to go and do if presenting symptoms.
If this report and associated survey can be of service to your community, please reach out to:

Nina Berg
Communications and Creative Director
nina@centralsq.org
617.945.2184

For up-to-the-minute updates regarding COVID-19 in Cambridge, please refer to the city’s dedicated online resource:

http://www.cambridgema.gov/covid19