

Fostering Municipal Support for Legacy Businesses through Worker Cooperative Conversions:

Strategies for Boston

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Abstract

This research paper explores the fields of small business support, anti-displacement strategies, and worker cooperative support in part to make the case that co-op conversions are a relevant strategy with great potential to not only maintain local economic engines in neighborhoods facing gentrification, but also to play a part in promoting economic democracy. This thesis focuses on Boston as a convener, since it represents a progressive champion in local government that has aspects of all the aforementioned topics and the potential to convene these silos to promote community wealth building. Synthesizing findings from a literature review, policy scan, and interviews I find a series of recommendations that range from direct support for worker cooperative conversions to long-term strategic plans for community wealth building in part to foster worker cooperative conversions for legacy businesses.

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Glossary

WCC - Worker Cooperative Conversion

Co-op - Worker Cooperative

BIPOC - Black Indigenous People of Color

CoB - City of Boston

ADAP - Anti-Displacement Action Plan

BCCO - Boston Center for Community Ownership

DAWI - Democracy at Work Institute

CLT - Community Land Trust

CWB - Community Wealth Building

PAC - Planning Advisory Council

SBD - Small Business Department

MOIA - Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement

SBAN - Small Business Anti-Displacement Network

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Ch. 1: Introduction

This thesis explores how worker cooperative conversions could be promoted to support legacy businesses through support levers in the City of Boston. Boston has hosted their Legacy Business Program for three years, promoting long-standing enterprises across all 23 neighborhoods to preserve their presence in their community. The City provides some technical assistance for succession planning but worker cooperative conversions as a solution are widely unknown. By evaluating existing policies and programs in the realms of worker cooperatives, legacy businesses, and commercial & community preservation in addition to contextualizing the business transition process, this research outlines pathways for Boston to support conversions as an anti-displacement strategy for legacy businesses.

Minority-owned businesses in ethnic enclaves serve as cultural anchors, provide local employment opportunities, connect residents to local goods and services, and retain spending within one's neighborhood.^{1,2} However, gentrifying neighborhoods attract upscale "boutique" businesses catered to middle- and upper-class residents which drastically change the customer base. The stark contrast in income patterns and spending triggers a rise in commercial rents, taxes, and predatory leasing practices.³ Employment opportunities are impacted by this shift, since low-income workers may no longer afford to live in the neighborhood or lose their job as employment needs change.⁴ Attempts by minority-owned businesses to maintain their storefronts are thwarted by systemic discrimination in lending practices, limited capital resources, and narrow operating margins.⁵ Commercial renters, in particular, are subject to landlord exploitation and do not have the same protections as residential renters.⁶ As minority-owned businesses close

¹ Small Business Anti-Displacement Network (SBAN). "Keeping Small Businesses in Place"

² Enders. "Preventing Small Business Displacement in Austin's East Riverside Neighborhood."

³ Gonzalez et al. "Traditional Retail Markets: The New Gentrification Frontier?"

⁴ Meltzer. "Gentrification and Small Business: Threat or Opportunity?"

⁵ Huck et al. "Small business finance in two Chicago minority neighborhoods."

⁶ SBAN. "Commercial Tenant Protections."

up shop, their vital economic and cultural support in vulnerable communities is lost, reinforcing patterns of disinvestment and displacement. Although municipalities have made recent efforts in response to the COVID19 pandemic to fill the aforementioned gaps, there is still a question as to how to best support entrepreneurs in times of crisis.

In tandem with the rise of gentrification is the wave of business owners at or around retirement age, also known as the “silver tsunami”.⁷ These legacy businesses are vital to the neighborhoods they serve and to the broader economy as a whole, yet may struggle navigating leadership transitions to the next generation. Formal succession planning is rising in popularity, with over 75% of small business owners considering some transfer of ownership.⁸ However, only 30% of businesses will successfully pursue a formal transition due to the lack of a succession plan in place.^{ibid}

An emerging strategy under the business transition umbrella is worker cooperative conversions (WCC), where a traditional business transitions to ownership by its workers as a worker cooperative. A worker cooperative is democratically governed by worker-owners to benefit the worker, the company, and the local economy.⁹ WCCs present a unique model to not only retain a business and its economic power in a community, but to also redistribute its power and potential to workers who already have intimate knowledge of the business and are hoping to preserve and build on the legacy of a business. Worker cooperatives are an emerging and promising model of ownership since they decrease the precarity of jobs by providing decent pay, guarantee job longevity, and provide positive outcomes for the surrounding community.^{10,11} They are independent, people-centered enterprises that are democratically owned and controlled by

⁷ Morris et al.. “Retirement of entrepreneurs”

⁸ King. “Examining the Relationship Between Succession Planning and Small Business Failure.”

⁹ Gutierrez & Davis. “Identifying Key Metrics for Successful Conversions to Worker Cooperatives”.

¹⁰ Berry & Bell. “Worker Cooperatives: alternative governance for caring and precarious work.”

¹¹ Perotin. “Worker Cooperatives: Good, Sustainable Jobs in the Community”.

their workers who invest and co-own the company through a one-person one-vote decision-making process.¹² Worker cooperatives are driven by values, not just by profit and center the communities where they are established. They can serve to close the racial wealth gap, address woes typically faced by minority small businesses, and promote economic democracy for all. By incorporating WCCs in the succession planning for legacy businesses in neighborhoods subject to displacement, communities can retain a vital economic and cultural resource for their residents.

Municipalities in the US are increasingly wielding their “city power” in the face of growing constrictive legislation at the state and federal levels to support more progressive and innovative agendas.¹³ Currently, the Wu administration in the City of Boston is working on an Anti-Displacement Action Plan (ADAP) anticipating a Winter 2025 release. The administration is also conducting the 3rd year of the Legacy Business Program supporting businesses that have been operating for 10+ years and collaborating with the Boston Center for Community Ownership (BCCO) to create a home health aide cooperative for Haitian immigrants. On the other hand, there is a pattern of seemingly groundbreaking programming stalling or fading with shifts in city staff and administration.¹⁴ Although city efforts including worker cooperative support have ebbed and flowed over time, the cooperative ecosystem requires sustained aid that can be created by leveraging progressive city power.

City government serves not only as a host for more progressive policies, but also as a convener - bringing together different stakeholders, disciplines, and approaches to feed into one another, creating a sum greater than its parts.. From luxury housing developments in historically disinvested neighborhoods displacing residents and businesses from their homes to climate

¹² International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). “What is a cooperative?”

¹³ Schragger. “City Power: Urban Governance in a Global Age.”.

¹⁴ Li. “Cooperatizing Boston”.

change exacerbating flooding and heating events that impact historically redlined neighborhoods most - city residents are facing a myriad of issues that build on one another to create more complex problems. To combat this, local government as a convener has the power to harness and fund grassroots and community based organizations, use its purchasing power as an anchor institution to funnel investments to disinvested communities, loop in other anchor institutions such as universities and hospitals in public-private partnerships to create jobs, and execute public services equitably and accessibly.¹⁵ The city can coordinate across all stakeholders to streamline and provide direction towards economic democracy.

Economic democracy, also called solidarity economy, represents a shift in ownership and decision-making power from corporate shareholders to the hands of consumers, workers, and communities who collectively manage assets such as food and housing.¹⁶ Worker cooperative conversions are an integral piece to transitioning from market economics to economic democracy, directly transferring assets from a corporate entity to all of its workers.

The path to execute economic democracy as a vision in local government is through community wealth building: the need to redistribute and retain wealth in a post-capitalist society in which communities have control over their assets.¹⁷ This economic model centers equity by valuing communal ownership, justice, and shared wealth rather than conventional models that center maximizing shareholder profit, incentivizing large corporations, and using trickle down economics. Concepts such as worker cooperatives and community land trusts are vehicles to this end goal, yet are currently siloed into their own niches due to the sheer amount of effort needed to validate and create successful examples. However, taking a comprehensive planning approach to economic democracy as a way to build and achieve community wealth is key to ensure these

¹⁵McInroy et al. "A New Era for Community Wealth Building".

¹⁶ Center for Economic Democracy. "Home".

¹⁷ The Democracy Collaborative. "Community Wealth Building".

concepts and case studies can thrive. Harnessing city power to execute a comprehensive, coordinated strategy is a key component of community wealth building.

Cities are already prime to serve as conveners for community wealth building and facilitate growth of solidarity economy. The City of Chicago launched their *Community Wealth Building Initiative* in 2022 to advance institutional change for racial equity by operationalizing co-created solutions with community leaders.¹⁸ They noted that “the work to build a reparative and solidarity economy was already happening. Our job was simply to notice, uplift, and use government levers to propel these efforts without co-opting them in the process. The City of Boston is already supporting solidarity economy ideas to attach to their aforementioned progressive policies, such as funding the Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network¹⁹ and launching the Office of Participatory Budgeting, so there is potential for implementing a community wealth building vision in the municipality. City support for solidarity economies is already in motion, and has great potential to enhance their efforts for a community wealth building ecosystem.

With all of this in mind, my thesis explores how the city can further champion worker cooperatives and integrate into existing programs, namely their legacy business program. My research questions are as follows:

How can the City of Boston work as a convener to better support worker cooperative conversions as part of a means to address commercial gentrification and build community wealth in Boston’s minority neighborhoods?

- What are best practices to support worker cooperatives, legacy businesses, and community stabilization efforts as seen in other cities?

¹⁸City of Chicago. “Community Wealth Building Initiative”.

¹⁹Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust. “Community Investment Plan”.

Statement of Motivation

My interest in worker cooperatives comes from being raised by immigrant entrepreneurs in NYC who built community and support systems through their storefronts. I had the opportunity starting last summer to work at the City of Boston in the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement. There, I have supported the development of a home health aide worker cooperative for Haitian immigrants and evaluated the City's support of immigrants and refugees through the Certified Welcoming process with a focus on economic development and equitable access. My exposure to the just transition framework drives my goals to foster interdisciplinary, collaborative, and equitable solutions that address systemic inequalities and climate change. These experiences led me to explore municipalities as an actor in worker cooperative ecosystems and in redistributing wealth to systemically disinvested communities.

Methods

In order to answer these questions, I conducted a thorough literature review establishing research done thus far in the fields of commercial gentrification, succession planning for retiring businesses, and the role municipalities play in supporting small businesses and community preservation. I make the case that legacy businesses in minority neighborhoods face displacement pressures and that the worker cooperative conversion model has potential to not only preserve storefronts serving communities of color but also to promote economic democracy.

Then, I completed a policy scan to evaluate municipal strategies in supporting legacy businesses, worker cooperative conversions, and community wealth building models. These case studies were chosen based on efforts that paralleled or exceeded Boston's current efforts. The municipalities I gathered examples from include San Francisco, New York, Chicago, St. Paul, Los Angeles, and Washington DC. I analyzed city publications such as websites, program

descriptions, news articles, and both grey and peer-reviewed literature, and used grounded theory to inform my approach. Grounded theory uses inductive reasoning to analyze data that gets categorized to synthesize, explain, and understand data, and identify patterns and relationships in the literature.²⁰

Following the policy scan, I conducted two rounds of interviews: one with worker cooperative developers and one with City of Boston staff who are working on anti-displacement or small business efforts. The interviews with WCC practitioners captured their efforts with legacy businesses, the role municipalities play in hindering or supporting their work, and how conversions are felt in the broader community context of the businesses they work with.

The interviews with City of Boston staff captured related efforts the City is working on and the knowledge they have on commercial gentrification, legacy business issues, and worker cooperative conversions to assess gaps and potential pathways for WCC support. I interviewed staff at the Office of Small Business Development (SBD) who conduct the Legacy Business Program, a member of the Planning Advisory Council leading the City's Anti-Displacement Action Plan, and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement with their pilot project initiating a home health aide worker cooperative. I conducted a total of 10 interviews.

Interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and were conducted either in-person or via video call, with an open-ended semi-structured format. Conversations were recorded and transcribed. I approached the analysis similar to my policy scan with grounded theory but with an altered set of categories to better reflect interview results.

To synthesize my results, I used my policy scan and interviews to inform a list of recommendations for the City of Boston to implement.

²⁰ Charmaz. "Grounded Theory".

Table 1: Interviewee Descriptions

Interviewees	Job Description
Emily Patrick	Senior Neighborhood Business Manager: Charlestown, Jamaica Plain, Roslindale, West Roxbury since 2018
Joy Armstrong	Policy Advisor since 2024
Monique Tu Nguyen	Executive Director of the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Advancement since 2022
Elijah Miller	Director of Policy since 2022
Frank Cetera	Director of Conversions at the Democracy at Work Institute
Zen Trenholm	Director of Policy at the Democracy at Work Institute
Mike Sandmel	Senior Strategist for Worker Ownership at ICA Group
Allison Curtis	Director of Business Consulting and Conversions at ICA Group
Shelley Miller	Director of New Ownership Opportunities and Outreach at ICA Group
Stacey Cordeiro	Co-op Organizer and Founder of Boston Center for Community Ownership

This thesis begins with a literature review examining worker cooperative conversions as an anti-displacement tool for legacy businesses, and the different pathways cities can serve as a convener for WCC support. Then, chapter three provides an overview of common strategies addressing commercial and cultural displacement as a baseline for typical small business support systems through common policy and planning mechanisms. Chapter four synthesizes key information from interviews with co-op developers and the resources they shared to provide an in-depth overview of how WCCs work. Chapter five explores policies and plans across the US and Canada in relation to legacy businesses, worker cooperatives, and anti-displacement efforts. Chapter six provides an overview of Boston's current efforts to support worker cooperatives, implement anti-displacement strategies, and assist legacy businesses. Chapter seven gives recommendations for City of Boston staff to implement as part of expanding the worker cooperative ecosystem and furthering anti-displacement measures. Lastly, chapter eight synthesizes reflections and future research in these realms.

Ch. 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review provides an overview of small business displacement triggers, emerging stabilization solutions, succession planning and worker cooperative conversions, and how municipal governments leverage their “city power” to promote progressive policies. This review synthesizes academic articles and reports from non-profit organizations and city agencies to provide foundational information on the different facets of this research question.

Commercial Gentrification in Minority Neighborhoods

Small businesses in minority-majority neighborhoods are a key facet of a community’s ecosystem. Not only do they provide niche goods and services to serve a culture's particular needs and generate local economic activity, but also act as a communal gathering space for residents and other folks within their ethnic enclave to build social capital. When clustered in Main Streets, a hub of daily social interactions, commerce, and neighborhood identity flourish beyond individual storefronts, creating a whole greater than the sum of its individual pieces.²¹ However, minority-owned businesses face unique barriers such as discriminatory lending practices, limited capital resources, and narrow operating margins.²² Commercial renters in particular are subject to landlord exploitation and do not have the same protections as residential renters.²³ With an already precarious situation, threats of gentrification enhance instability for business owners.

Although gentrification debates typically center residents, displacement of commercial properties is a pressing issue that feeds into the dynamics of residential displacement. The causes

²¹ Mehta. “Small Business and the Vitality of Main Street”.

²² Klein. “We protect individuals from predatory lending practices - why not small businesses too?”

²³ TLC & CEP. “Commercial Leases 101”.

and effects are largely parallel due to the neighborhood-wide impacts gentrification has on a community, so this synthesis will capture gentrification as a whole. Gentrification at its simplest is economic change coupled with cultural displacement.²⁴ These shifts occur most commonly in large metropolitan areas due to their concentration of wealth and wealth-building investments.²⁵ The aforementioned economic change is triggered by a variety of neighborhood shifts, such as policy decisions to upgrade services and amenities, private developers making capital investments, and individuals moving into a neighborhood.²⁶ Displacement occurs along not only the class differences between high and low income groups, but also results in neighborhood segregation and creates conditions for racial discrimination in mortgage credit access and zoning decisions.²⁷ Gentrification is a complex issue where political, economic, and social factors converge to displace minority neighborhoods, requiring innovative solutions that address the multiple actors at play.

Succession Planning: Legacy Businesses

Legacy businesses are a subset of small, main street businesses and play a pivotal role in not only serving their community but also capturing a unique history and footprint of the neighborhood. The term is derived from a series of local government programs denoting a subset of businesses that have existed in a neighborhood for a long period of time.²⁸ The number of years to qualify as a legacy business varies, with Boston setting 10 years as the minimum and with San Francisco setting 30 years as the minimum.²⁹ Legacy business programs provide grant funding, technical assistance, and city contracts to support improvements such as physical

²⁴ National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC). “Shifting Neighborhoods: Gentrification and cultural displacement in American cities”.

²⁵ Rankin & McLean. “Governing the Commercial Streets of the City”.

²⁶ Zuk et al. “Gentrification, displacement and the role of public investment”.

²⁷ Rothstein, Richard. “The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America”.

²⁸ SBAN. “Keeping Small Businesses in Place”.

²⁹ City and County of San Francisco. “Legacy Business Program”.

storefront renovations, rental assistance, and succession planning.³⁰ Since these long-standing businesses have proven success with their sustained presence, discussing a strategy for ownership transition is key.

Succession planning manifests through a variety of iterations, but the baseline involves a shift in ownership of a business from a retiring owner to someone else, be it an employee, a relative, or external partner. Traditional succession planning typically includes a financial payout for the previous owner and can have a formal or informal agreement to transition. A formal agreement assists in addressing technical issues such as legal transfer, tax implications, and financing.³¹ Owners can utilize technical assistance providers for support with the aforementioned list, and with other overlooked soft issues such as goal-setting, visioning, and how the previous owner will play a role (or lack thereof) after succession. The lack of formal planning stems from emotional attachment, fear of retirement, and conflict avoidance from owners to delay any succession discussions.³² The results of succession plans, formal or informal, are largely undocumented in US literature.

Worker Cooperative Conversions

An emerging approach to succession planning is the transition of a traditional business with one owner into a worker cooperative. That model is defined as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.”³³ Worker cooperatives are especially beneficial and common in traditionally precarious industries characterized by unpredictable work schedules and hours, workplace hazards, stressful

³⁰ Abello. “Atlanta is the Latest Big City to Support Legacy Businesses”.

³¹ Bruce & Pickard. “Making Succession a Success”.

³² King. “Examining Succession Planning and Small Business Failure.”

³³ ICA. “What is a cooperative?”

psychosocial conditions, and little to no benefits such as insurance coverage or paid sick leave.³⁴ The cooperative model is conducive to decrease the volatility of industries such as home health aide work by altering relationships between the business and other stakeholders involved in the industry. This business model can benefit both worker-owners and the communities they operate in by potentially offering stable, local employment and internalizing externalities of the firm's operation such as unemployment benefits, social services, and improving public health by contributing to the local economy.³⁵

Worker cooperatives have emerged throughout history, serving as a vehicle for economic stability and political expression in response to economic distress such as the Great Depression and in tandem with social justice movements such as in the 1960s and 70s.³⁶ They are used as a vehicle for worker empowerment and autonomy, in contrast from capitalist values that can harm communities. As of 2023, there are an estimated 1300 worker cooperatives in the US with more than 15,000 workers. About 30% of co-ops are conversions, and the top five industries for co-ops are restaurants, business support services, agriculture, cleaning services, and engineering & manufacturing.³⁷ The US cooperative field is still relatively new in its development, and garners inspiration from abroad, such as the Mondragon Cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain. Founded in 1956, the network began with an industrial worker cooperative manufacturing kitchen appliances that just a few years later expanded to three worker co-ops and one consumer co-op. The first secondary co-op was created in 1959 to connect the associated entities into a network and create more co-ops through regulating the governance and internal organization of associated firms. The entity also serves as a bank, providing savings deposit accounts and social

³⁴Berry & Bell. "Worker Cooperatives: alternative governance for caring and precarious work."

³⁵ Perotin. "Worker Cooperatives: Good, Sustainable Jobs in the Community."

³⁶ Baskaran. "Introduction to Worker Cooperatives and their Role in the Changing Economy".

³⁷ DAWI. "State of the Sector 2023".

security benefits. In the 1960s as cooperatives grew in size and reached self-sufficiency in a product line, the Mondragon Network created spinoff firms to “deter the emergence of bureaucratic, corporate-like structures”.³⁸ To increase the Network’s research and development capacity, an applied industrial research cooperative was added to Mondragon in 1977. To this day, the Complex consists of 70,000 people distributed across 81 self-governing cooperatives and 12 R&D centers conducting sales in more than 150 countries.³⁹ Mondragon’s evolution over time has set the precedent for the cooperative field, reflecting the potential to replicate its model globally.

European countries have piloted and studied worker cooperative conversions for the past few decades, yielding mixed results. Ireland had launched a government initiative in the 1990s to promote family firm transfers into cooperatives, with varying results. Two major barriers identified were finances and lack of willing staff. To address the former, businesses were split into a holding company held by the family and a trading company structured as a worker cooperative with 51% of ownership held by worker-owners and 49% held by the family.⁴⁰ Everyone still held one vote and worker-owners only had to raise 51% of capital rather than the full amount.

Italy and France both commonly see worker buyout operations that use the worker cooperative model for the business transfer. In Italy, Law 49 created in 1985 established the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, creating a revolving fund to promote and develop worker cooperatives.⁴¹ This 40-year-old legislation has supported 342 workers’ buyout operations, which is Italy’s equivalent term to a worker cooperative conversion. In addition to the Italian

³⁸ Iuvene et al. “Sustainable Economic Democracy: Worker Cooperatives for the 21st Century”.

³⁹ Mondragon Corporation. “Mondragon Corporation”.

⁴⁰ Murphy et al. “No Heir apparent?”

⁴¹ The Italian Republic. Law 27 no. 49.

government, other actors have coalesced to support WBOs including institutional investor Cooperazione Finanza Impresa (Business Finance Cooperation), mutual funds, cooperative associations, and co-op friendly private credit institutions.⁴² France, on the other hand, conducts WBOs through a leveraged management buyout (LMBO) where employees create a holding company to buy the business, or through a worker cooperative conversion model.⁴³ Legislation has followed to help facilitate business transfers through tax exemptions and status recognition as a business type. WBOs in both countries are initiated by the potential worker-owners, and success comes from reliable relationships with external stakeholders and general confidence in the cooperative model.⁴⁴ As reflected across all three countries, knowledge and awareness of worker cooperative conversions paired with financial and technical assistance from a variety of sources leads to higher rates of success in converting a business.

Success factors for a cooperative include proximity to other worker coops and sufficient capital, as reflected in the Wellspring Collaborative which is creating an “engine for new, community-based, worker-owned companies in inner-city Springfield, Massachusetts”.⁴⁵ The Wellspring Upholstery Cooperative (WUC), is the “first of a planned network of worker-owned companies” aiming to harness the \$1.5 billion stable market anchor institutions such as universities and hospitals create.⁴⁶ WUC aims to create entry-level, middle-skill jobs for hard-to-employ residents that are being trained by successful and retiring businesses in the community, creating a succession-like model and community of practice amongst entrepreneurs. Since its 2013 inception, the Collaborative has 10 co-ops connected through the Wellspring Network and community initiatives connecting them to the solidarity economy network. The

⁴² Fi-Compass. “ESF+ Study on Workers’ Buyout - Italy - Country Report”.

⁴³ Fi-Compass. “ESF+ Study on Workers’ Buyout - France - Country Report”.

⁴⁴ Di Steffano. “The Business Transfer through the Cooperative Model. A Comparative Analysis Italy-France.”

⁴⁵ Wellspring Cooperative. “Home”.

⁴⁶ Rose. “Bringing Wealth Creation Closer to Low-Income Communities”.

Wellspring Collaborative directly pulls its inspiration from networks such as Mondragon, reflecting a growing worker cooperative ecosystem in the US. Incorporating worker cooperative models as a part of succession planning has the potential to shift local economies from relying on large, major employers to a more communal model centering the neighborhood.

Municipal Support

US cities in recent years have leveraged “city power” to advance progressive policy and planning agenda items, such as anti-displacement, small business support, and community economic development especially in contradiction to hostile state and federal administrations.⁴⁷

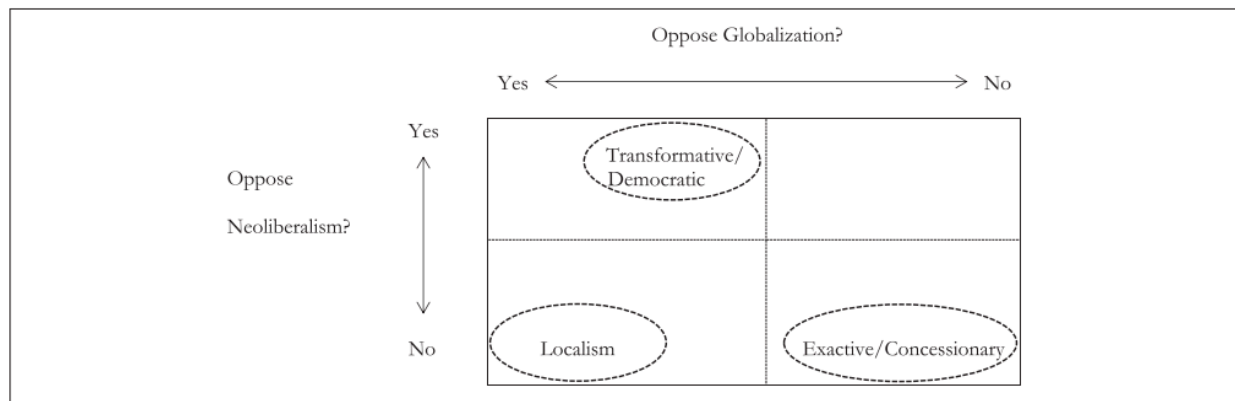


Figure I. Community economic development’s three emergent sub-fields/logics.

Cities reflect dense areas with an intensity of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic conditions that create “enabling environments” for a range of strategic activities in opposition to hostile state and federal administrations.^{48,49} Researchers have described the gradual advancement of progressive policy and planning agendas in US cities through a variety of models. Cities are striated into three logics with respect to neoliberal globalization: exactive/concessionary, localist, and transformative/democratic. The framing is in part to capture traditional US urban and

⁴⁷ Spicer & Casper-Futterman. “Conceptualizing US Community Economic Development”.

⁴⁸ Sutton. “Cooperative cities: Municipal support for worker cooperatives in the United States”.

⁴⁹ Safri et al. “Solidarity Cities: Confronting Racial Capitalism, Mapping Transformation.”

regional economic development where “cities are competing with other cities, both around the country and sometimes the world, for capital investment by profit-maximizing firms, as they seek to develop a comparative regional advantage” with limited social welfare benefits and labor commodification for a more compliant workforce. The three logics are defined as follows:

- **Exactive/concessionary:** multinational and global, profit-maximizing businesses and developments are tolerated so long as they “pay up” to benefit marginalized communities
- **Localist:** resists global enterprises through building local alternatives, promoting a “made here” ethos and placing value in conducting activity nearby
- **Transformative/Democratic:** seeks to remake market/economic relations into a democratic model that explicitly promotes and privileges forms centering economic democracy and community control

Sutton creates a cooperative cities typology to reflect the range of municipal activities in support of worker cooperatives based on the enabling environment theory.⁵⁰ She captures “crucial exogenous factors that influence the development and sustainability of worker-owned enterprises in which the public sector can play a role”, highlighting key players and political levers. The three types of cities are as follows:

- **Developer Cities:** top-down, civic, and municipal institution led
- **Endorser Cities:** bottom-up, led by grassroots and advocacy organizations, city validates and endorses
- **Cultivator Cities:** bottom-up and top-down, led by grassroots and advocacy organizations, city invests in the capacity of worker cooperatives

This mapping captures the importance of municipal support for worker cooperatives to sustain grassroots work by increasing public awareness, broker institutional relationships and legitimize

⁵⁰ Sutton. “Cooperative cities: Municipal support for worker cooperatives in the United States”.

worker cooperatives, and leverage patient capital to incubate cooperatives. Sutton’s analysis includes a warning to grassroots organizations collaborating with municipalities to “not become dependent on political champions, maintain autonomy, center member-owners, and uphold cooperative principles”.

The “solidarity cities” framework “evoke[s] an alternative spatial imaginary highlighting solidarity relations as definitional features of urban life”.⁵¹ The term brings to light the temporal, spatial, and social dimensions of creating postcapitalist solidarity economies that shape cities in response to racial capitalism. Mapping out the geographies of cooperatives, community gardens, mutual aid efforts, and other alternatives effectively de-silos individual efforts into a shared network “capable of transforming cities and ways of urban living”. This directly opposes the piecemeal, small niches that alternative models are seen to fulfill in a capitalist society and instead recognizes both formal and informal economies and social practices. Capturing the current state of solidarity economies in cities creates a foundation for envisioning both historical cases and future possibilities of this realm. This model also prioritizes recognizing the racial politics currently at play in solidarity economy spaces, and seeks to “decolonize the solidarity economy” especially in cities heavily influenced by a deep history of racial and class-based segregation. The racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic conditions in cities create grounds for intense settings for discrimination, but also curate possibilities to co-create emergent futures of goodwill, reciprocity, and care.

Reviewing these three frameworks reveals the potential for city government to center community control and democratic ownership, and evaluation methods to identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities to do so. Spicer & Casper-Futterman evaluate the growing presence of progressive policy and planning agendas that explicitly run counter to conservative

⁵¹ Safri et al. “Solidarity Cities: Confronting Racial Capitalism, Mapping Transformation.”

federal and global politics. Sutton on the other hand evaluates how the public sector interacts with worker cooperatives, reflecting potential scenarios where municipalities can co-opt the concept or cooperate with co-ops. Finally, Safri et al. models futures of solidarity economies in cities, centering community wealth building regardless of local government's presence and power. Applying these frameworks can evaluate how cities currently support WCCs and legacy businesses, and set pathways to understand alternative approaches.

Conclusion

This literature review captures an overview of commercial gentrification in ethnic enclaves, succession planning for legacy businesses and worker cooperative conversions, and different iterations of progressive municipal support. The small business realm contains a wide range of business types such as worker cooperatives, legacy businesses, and minority-owned businesses that all overlap and interface with one another. They all face a myriad of issues, which municipalities have the potential to address. Cities can cater their efforts to both support a particular type of business and all small businesses. This foundational content creates a lens to evaluate Boston's current stages of addressing the aforementioned topics and approaches to integrate them with one another. The literature review informs the policy scan, interviews, and recommendations.

Ch. 3: Review of Strategies

In gentrifying neighborhoods across the US, local government, community organizations and businesses have convened to address cultural and commercial displacement through a variety of efforts from providing financial support to transforming ownership models and zoning codes. No singular approach is the ultimate solution; rather a variety of solutions can create a multifaceted approach to support small businesses that have an array of additional benefits for the broader community. Many of the strategies draw upon the Small Business Anti-Displacement Network’s 2024 toolkit: “Small Business Anti-Displacement Toolkit: A Guide for Small Business Advocates” and expand on their guidance with additional resources. The following section will provide a brief overview:

- Financing Small Businesses
 - Government Grant Opportunities

Many municipal governments have small business offices that host a variety of programming, from direct technical assistance to grant programming. Common programs include facade improvements, commercial space renovations, and more.⁵²

- Organizing Businesses
 - Main Street Organizations

Main Street America is a national non-profit supporting and organizing main street organizations to build place-based economic development and community preservation across the US through technical assistance, grant opportunities, and educational resources for over 40 years. They designate locales as “Main Street” through a series of requirements outlined in their Community Evaluation Framework that includes a self-assessment, standardized reporting, and

⁵² Alvarez et al. “Small Business Anti-Displacement Toolkit: A Guide for Small Business Advocates”.

bi-annual onsite visits.⁵³ Non-profit organizations are typically created by a community to support a concentrated area of businesses within a district through programming that attracts financial investment, customers, and other resources to the neighborhood. Common strategies include placemaking initiatives, events and festivals, and beautification projects that unify not just the individual businesses but also the entire street. Individual technical assistance may also be provided through the non-profit depending on the annual budget. Main street organizations provide direct services to small businesses within a given neighborhood, sustaining the corridor as a local economic engine for the community.

- Business Improvement Districts (BID)

BIDs are privately directed and publicly sanctioned organizations that provide public services for a designated area such as security, sanitation, and capital improvements and are funded by a special tax assessment billed to the property owners within a district.⁵⁴ There are over 1000 in the US, requiring state-level enabling legislation that typically requires approval from stakeholders within the proposed district and needs renewal every few years. Common critiques of BIDs include potentially attracting new development and customers to an area which can trigger displacement through rent hikes, and the organizations lobbying for policies excluding street vendors, buskers, and unhoused people from public spaces.⁵⁵ With the right precautions, BIDs can serve to curb commercial and cultural displacement.

- Commercial Community Land Trust

Community land trusts are nonprofit organizations that acquire land for communal ownership in perpetuity. Traditionally used as an affordable housing and ownership model, the structure could also center business owners through a long-term ground lease or a lease-to-own

⁵³ Main Street America. “Overview: Community Evaluation Framework”.

⁵⁴ Federal Highway Administration. “Business Improvement Districts”.

⁵⁵ Alvarez et al. “Small Business Anti-Displacement Toolkit”.

structure.⁵⁶ In a more cooperative approach, business owners could hold partial ownership of a property to either share the space or have other stakeholders connected to the location and business. CLTs commonly leverage public and private investment while centering BIPOC communities, but commercial properties are especially expensive and difficult to maintain.

- Community Investment Trusts

Community investment trusts are for-profit entities that support residents and other stakeholders in pooling funds to invest in community projects, small businesses, and other cooperative projects.⁵⁷ CITs make investing accessible to local residents, by building equity and wealth through a positive social venture that they can see the direct outcomes of. The trust can be put towards purchasing property, providing loans, and more. However, state regulations may limit the power of investment trusts.

- Policy Regulations

- Commercial Tenant Protections

Residential tenant protections provide safeguards to avoid exploitative landlords and unsafe living conditions. However, commercial tenant protections are limited to what is set forth in the lease agreement.⁵⁸ Implementing state or local policies regulating commercial rent prices and passing a commercial tenant’s bill of rights can protect small businesses from predatory landlords.⁵⁹

- Rezoning

- Cultural Districts

⁵⁶ Grounded Solutions Network. “Agricultural and Commercial Community Land Trusts”.

⁵⁷ Community Investment Trust. “Home”.

⁵⁸ TLC & CEP. “Commercial Leases 101”.

⁵⁹ SBAN. “Commercial Tenant Protections”

Cultural districts leverage not only the presence of ethnic enclaves in a city but also the historic presence it carries for a neighborhood. The designation typically offers support for cultural festivals and activities, coordinating marketing and business hours, and identifying both physical and intangible sites that make the district unique. Some municipalities include curbing gentrification and displacement pressures through strategic planning and resource allocation as part of a district's work.^{60,61} Cultural districts support culturally relevant businesses and can be paired with a legacy business program as part of honoring historical significance.

- Other Rezoning Designations

Zoning plays a significant role in physically creating street make-up. To preserve small businesses, cities can implement store size caps that limit the expansion of a space to curb big-box chains. They can also streamline permitting and licensing for small businesses - not only for traditional storefronts but also for emerging models such as street vendors, pop-ups, and more.

Reviewing these strategies provides an overview of the different existing mechanisms available for municipalities, community organizations, and other stakeholders to support small businesses. They inform parameters for the policy scan, interview questions, and recommendations to serve as a baseline of commonly discussed approaches.

⁶⁰ City & County of San Francisco. "The San Francisco Cultural Districts Program".

⁶¹ Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity. "Illinois State Designated Cultural Districts 2025 NODO".

Ch. 4: Worker Cooperative Conversions Overview

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed overview of worker cooperative conversions, including the typical conversion process, common issues, and gaps in the WCC field. WCCs are traditional businesses that transition into a worker cooperative: a democratically governed business by worker-owners to benefit the worker, the company, and the local economy.⁶² They present a unique model to not only retain a business and its economic power in a community, but to also redistribute its power and potential to workers who already have intimate knowledge of the business and are hoping to preserve and build on the legacy of a business.

Organizational Overview

The following section is largely informed by reports from and interviews with the Boston Center for Community Ownership, the Democracy at Work Institute, and the ICA Group. They are all leaders in the worker cooperatives realm and serve as developers for businesses interested in transitioning to a co-op and for folks interested in creating and sustaining a co-op.

Boston Center for Community Ownership (BCCO)

BCCO is a non-profit organization dedicated to creating cooperative enterprises for a “just, sustainable, and humane economy built on cooperation” by providing practical tools needed by co-op entrepreneurs. Their work is grounded in the Boston region, hosting public workshops and customized trainings for prospective worker-owners and supporting worker cooperative-specific inquiries through Boston’s Small Business Department’s Technical Assistance Program. BCCO’s TA includes general small business skills such as bookkeeping and back-office services and cooperative skills such as participatory budgeting and co-governance. Notable co-ops they’ve helped with include CERO Co-op and Boston Cleaning Collective.

⁶² Gutierrez & Davis.

They're currently working in collaboration with Boston's Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement to launch a home health aide cooperative for Haitian women through DAWI's Rapid Response Cooperative Development Project and are working with Massachusetts Clean Energy Center on the PowerUP! Incubator initiative to foster MWBE cooperatives in green workforce development.

Democracy at Work Institute (DAWI)

DAWI is a national non-profit organization dedicated to building the field of worker cooperative development. Their mission is to “support low-income people to create and sustain worker cooperatives that build wealth in communities exploited and abandoned by traditional business models”. They are a movement-based think-and-do tank. They train co-op developers and support professionals, facilitate education and skill-sharing among existing co-ops, conduct research to better understand and inform the co-op ecosystem, and educate partners and the public on democratic worker-ownership. DAWI notably hosts the Rapid Response Cooperative Development Project which aims to use worker cooperatives as a pathway for DREAMers and undocumented individuals.⁶³ DAWI also convenes the Workers to Owners Collaborative (W2O) - a nationwide community of practice made up of technical assistance providers, professional services, and funders/financers, is part of NYC's Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative, and hosts the Shared Equity in Economic Development (SEED) Fellowship.

ICA Group

ICA Group is a national nonprofit organized as a worker cooperative and founded in 1977 to bring strategic analysis and industry-focused support to the worker ownership sector.⁶⁴ They aim to advance businesses and institutions centering worker voices, growing worker

⁶³ DAWI. “Our Work”.

⁶⁴ ICA Group. “Home”.

wealth, and building worker power through serving low-wage workers and communities of color for a new economy. ICA group notably facilitates cooperative models in the home care and child care industries, and works with existing businesses to convert to an employee-owned model. They are a key organization in NYC's Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative and administer the Massachusetts Center for Employee Ownership.

What can a Business Conversion look like?

Business conversions take many forms, from an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) to a worker cooperative. ESOPs are a type of retirement plan that invests primarily in company stock and holds its assets in a trust for employees.⁶⁵ ESOPs are a well established model in preserving jobs and building wealth for workers, anchoring production and services in communities and growing the local tax base. Democratic ESOPs take the model a step further by implementing a voting structure for employees to select the board of directors on a one-person-one-vote basis. An example of an ESOP is Sun Light & Power. This Berkeley-based company has been operating for over 45 years with 85 employees that designs, installs, and maintains commercial solar panels and solar thermal systems for commercial, nonprofit, municipal, and residential clients.⁶⁶ The company explored employee ownership in 2016 with the ICA Group, and created a hybrid model where all stock shares are shared equally, the employee-owners elect the board of directors on a one-person one-vote basis, and all employee-owners could become cooperative members. Co-op members must work at SLP for one year, state interest in being a member, and complete a few classes in topics such as financial literacy and how an ESOP works. Once designated, they can nominate candidates to be on the Board of Directors ballot. This co-op piece of SLP is part of the founder's succession plan to "give employees with lower salaries greater

⁶⁵DAWI & NLC. "The Municipal Playbook for Employee Ownership".

⁶⁶ Staubus. "The Cooperative/ESOP Hybrid: The Best of Both!"

voting power”, paralleling a democratic ESOP.⁶⁷ Sun Light & Power initially transitioned to an ESOP, and later incorporated additional elements to disperse decision-making power amongst its employees.

Table 2: Types of Shared Ownership Business Models

Category:	Employee Stock Ownership Plans	Democratic ESOPs	Worker Cooperatives
Definition:	A type of retirement plan, similar to a 401(k) plan, that invests primarily in company stock and holds its assets in a trust for employees	ESOP with a voting structure that provides for election of the board of directors by the entire workforce ⁶⁸	Businesses owned and governed by workers, with the profits shared based on labor contribution and democratic decision-making
Business Size	10-100 employees	10-100 employees	5-100 employees
Common Business types	Consulting, design firms, manufacturing	Consulting, design firms, manufacturing	Child & Elderly care, middle-skill enterprises, food services, retail establishments

⁶⁷ Walsh et al. “Why the US Needs More Worker-Owned Companies”.

⁶⁸ Kerr. “A brief, visual guide to understanding “Employee Ownership Structures”.

Some industries are more popular for WCCs than others, such as consulting firms and care services. Consulting firms operate with higher margins and lower turnover compared to other small businesses, so they tend to have the financial capital to initiate a conversion internally. The care service industry on the other hand is rapidly growing in the US, attracting financial and political support to make home care more profitable and overall easier to run. ICA Group consults with over 50 child care businesses every year, and has three dedicated staff to home care. Conversions are commonly seen in cities such as New York and Boston that champion the model in their community economic development approach and have close working relationships with cooperative developers.⁶⁹ Industry and governmental partnerships with co-op developers allow for smooth outreach and educational opportunities for prospective businesses.

For companies with lower margins and higher turnover such as food services, a transition may be complicated “because so much of the company’s long term financial solvency is reliant on a landlord’s whims which just makes financing the transactions, long term planning, and budgeting exceptionally difficult”.⁷⁰ Although not impossible, these businesses may need additional support such as financial capital, rent control, and a willing staff to conduct a transition.

How does a business transition into a coop?

Business transitions require three main groups:

- An **owner** willing to part with their business or change their ownership structure
- A **group of employees** willing to purchase the business and adopt a shared ownership model
- An **advisor** well-knowledged in cooperative conversions, usually found through a nonprofit that provides WCC consulting

⁶⁹ Allison Curtis, Director of Business Consulting and Conversions at ICA Group, Virtual Interview, April 26, 2025.

⁷⁰ Allison Curtis, Interview.

Transitions typically follow a 5-step process, known as EASES:⁷¹

- **Explore:** owners and workers learn about employee ownership, ideally with a local champion to address concerns and learn from previous transitions.
- **Assess:** cooperative developers or other trained professionals will advise the interested parties in assessing the financial value of the enterprise, the best legal structure, and organizational capacity of existing workers. This step determines feasibility and timeline of the transition.
- **Structure:** establish a transition team consisting of interested employees and train them to better understand what purchasing the business entails and learn other entrepreneurial skills. Trainings can include financial literacy, co-governance, conflict & negotiations, culture of entrepreneurial mindset, governance design, and running meetings. Advisors will structure bylaws, help secure capital, and address other concerns.
- **Execute:** all legal, financial, and organizational activities are finalized and synthesized to transition the business. Tasks include signing purchase agreements, ratifying new legal entities, and launching new management structures.
- **Support:** worker-owners develop ownership practices and business literacy to solidify team dynamics and roles. Additional training to fill knowledge gaps is facilitated by advisors.

The EASES process covers the basic framework of a cooperative conversion.

Conversions can take anywhere from a couple of years to over a decade depending on the business's approach. There are three sectors where barriers may arise: legal, financial, and organizational. Although there are no explicit legal barriers preventing co-ops from forming today, there is also no uniform cooperative code in the US. Some states have co-op incorporation

⁷¹ Becoming Employee Owned. "What are the Stages of a Transition to Employee Ownership for a Small Business?"

codes such as Massachusetts and California, but places that don't will incorporate as a C Corporation, S corporation, LLC, flexible purpose corporation, or others that may be adapted to still uphold cooperative principles. Even if the co-op incorporation code is available, some groups may prefer other models. For example, DAWI's Rapid Response Cooperative Development model uses LLCs to include members regardless of immigration status. Much of the policy advocacy co-op developers and other stakeholders take on is to incorporate recognition and financial support for co-ops on all levels of government. Boston did exclude worker cooperatives from a lending program since businesses with an owner that had more than 20% in equity in the enterprise could not qualify for a loan from the City.⁷² The stipulation was amended by Jason Ewas, Director of the Economic Mobility Lab during the Walsh Administration.

Financial issues may include an existing owner over-valuing their business due to their personal and emotional ties to the enterprise. To combat this, ICA Group and other co-op developers will conduct the business valuation in-house or with a third party. Another common problem is that potential worker-owners do not have the capital to purchase the business. A growing number of lenders are interested in investing in worker cooperatives, and will erase discriminatory practices such as not requiring personal guarantees or collateral. Prominent examples include the Local Enterprise Assistance Fund, a nonprofit CDFI funding the cooperative economy and the Seed Commons, also a nonprofit CDFI creating a cooperative network for non-extractive finance. For ones who require a guarantor, the co-op developer or worker-owners will have a reliable party such as a government entity or foundation step in. Another common strategy to assist worker-owners in securing a loan is by planning to have the former owner stay on-board as additional insurance by self financing part of the deal, holding

⁷² Li. "Cooperatizing Boston".

generally 20-40% of the selling price as own debt to ensure a smooth transition and successful profit model.

Organizational issues may include internal conflict between potential worker-owners and sustaining the potentially long transition process. Solutions require relationship building amongst the worker-owner cohort and their partners, through formal and informal programming such as conflict-negotiation training, co-governance guidance, and informal gatherings to socialize.

Typically, transitions are owner-initiated due to the power they have to sell their business. However, a small yet growing number of transitions are worker-initiated and have potential to yield successful results since it reflects inherent interest in the potential worker-owners to continue the business, whereas owner-initiated transitions might struggle to retain the next generation. New Era Windows in Chicago is a prime example of a worker-initiated transition. In 2008 the owner closed the factory after filing for bankruptcy and fired all of its workers.⁷³ Family members of the owners simultaneously opened new factories across Chicago at the same time, hiring workers through temp agencies instead of those recently laid off. Workers occupied the factory in protest since they had not received their contractually obligated back pay or severance. With community support the occupation was successful. Serious Energy, a green construction company had stepped in to partially reopen the windows factory but closed it up since it only served a tertiary role. In response, the workers decided to start a worker cooperative in 2012 with the help of the United Electrical Workers Union, The Working World, and the Center for Workplace Democracy.

Another worker-initiated example is with White Electric Coffee in Rhode Island. The original owners had been operating the business for 20 years when the workers had unionized under the Collaborative Union of Providence Service-workers to advocate for more diverse

⁷³New Era Windows. "Our Story".

hiring practices and paid time off.⁷⁴ The founders announced their intention to sell shortly after, and the union stepped in to create a worker cooperative.

WCC Needs and Gaps

Beyond supporting individual transitions, the field of worker cooperative conversions is a growing yet rapidly evolving realm that can operate more smoothly by investing in and expanding the WCC pipeline. Conducting additional WCC research to study both individual business transitions and the ecosystem of conversions can help contextualize, articulate, and identify needs, best practices, and more. Economic democracy can be integrated into existing institutionalized actors such as labor unions and worker centers, which are both integrated in traditional economic development mechanisms but also play a part in disrupting market economics. Labor unions can include a right of first refusal in their contract to transfer the sale of a business to its workers. Worker centers can funnel people into a potential worker cooperative and include other cooperative models into their suite of tools. A missing business type within the WCC pipeline is businesses with low margins and high turnover, which are common in main streets and in minoritized communities. Helping them to incorporate as worker cooperatives, supporting commercial rent stabilization, and advocating for property ownership by commercial tenants are a few mechanisms to consider.⁷⁵ In general, expanding outreach to potential conversions through existing economic development actors and addressing typical small business concerns can round out the WCC pipeline and ecosystem.

There are a few needs within the WCC developer space which aim to fortify the pipeline. Many cooperative developers come into the space interested in changing current economic systems, but may not have experience in business skills such as bookkeeping and

⁷⁴ Rhode Island Small Business Development Center. “White Electric Coffee Co-Op”.

⁷⁵ Zen Trenholm, Director of Policy at DAWI. Virtual Interview, February 21, 2025.

entrepreneurship. On the other hand, small business developers are unfamiliar with worker cooperatives. To support a WCC, developers should be well-versed in both traditional small business operations and in cooperative models. Another knowledge gap is contextualizing how time intensive and expensive cooperative conversions can be. Personnel costs, financing, relationship-building, and training add up to the span of years and costs to the tens of thousands of dollars. Finding government grants willing to take on those bills such as New York’s Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative or from private foundations can convert businesses operating with lower margins.⁷⁶ Streamlining the co-op creation process itself such as DAWI’s Rapid Response Cooperative Development model can both save time and include those with precarious status.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ NYC Department of Small Business Services. “Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative”.

⁷⁷ DAWI. “Our Work”.

Ch. 5: Policy Scan

Introduction

This section explores policy & programs across the US and Canada in the realms of legacy business programs, worker cooperative support, and anti-displacement strategies. These approaches outline new and/or improved approaches that the City of Boston might adapt to support legacy business transitions into worker cooperatives as part of community preservation. They were gleaned from case studies \ from the Small Business Anti-Displacement Network and examples shared by interviewees, with supplementary evidence from a general online search. SBAN is a project of the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education at the University of Maryland that shares knowledge across their network members to collaborate and “advance innovative policies and practices that keep small businesses in place”.⁷⁸ They publish annual toolkits serving as guides for small business advocates that highlight a myriad of approaches to combat commercial gentrification. Reviewing other cities’ policies and programs reveals political, economic, and social levers to potentially replicate or adapt to Boston’s context.

Legacy Business Programs

Legacy business programs are a common strategy for cities to provide continual support for long-standing enterprises, mitigating displacement of historically and culturally significant businesses. Municipalities typically highlight awardees on a registry to promote them and provide technical assistance, and some even offer financial support.

⁷⁸ SBAN. “Home”.

Table 3: Legacy Business Programs Summary

City	Years	Funding for businesses?	# of businesses served	Services Provided	Co-op or Gentrification mentioned?
San Francisco	2015 - present	Business Stabilization Grant, Rent Stabilization Grant	400+	Educational and promotional assistance	Toolkit for Transitioning to Employee Ownership
Los Angeles	2022 - present	Legacy Business Recovery Grant	488	Technical and marketing assistance	none
DC	2019 - 2020	Legacy Business Grant	unknown	funding	none
Vancouver	2021 - present	Grant allocation varies each year	12+	Space renovation and business support	Anti-displacement named in the purpose of the program

San Francisco

San Francisco is the first US city to implement a Legacy Business Program, setting a blueprint for the rest of the country. Implemented in 2015, the program hosted by the Office of

Small Business aims to highlight 30+ year old enterprises that have contributed to the city’s history or identity.⁷⁹ Businesses must acquire a nomination by the Board of Supervisors or by the Mayor along with their application to qualify. Once accepted, the business will be on a registry and gain access to marketing help, technical assistance, and grants. Grants include a Business Stabilization Grant which provides long-term leases for legacy businesses and Rent Stabilization Grants for landlords to receive rental assistance.⁸⁰ San Francisco also hosts legislation protecting legacy businesses, such as Resolution 532-24 that requires Conditional Use authorization before replacing a legacy business and Ordinance 273-18 which allows legacy businesses to merge commercial spaces.⁸¹ Technical assistance includes one-on-one consulting along with toolkits on becoming employee-owned and on succession planning.⁸² The Office also hosts promotional events such as Heritage Happy Hour, Legacy Walks, and a Legacy Business Mixer. Added in 2019 is the Neighborhood Anchor Business (NAB) Registry which is a separate pool of businesses in operation for 15+ years and that have been nominated by a local merchants association, the Small Business Commission, or recommended by a petition signed by 25+ residents who live within a mile radius of the business.⁸³ Community organizations can also nominate a business if the Executive Director of Small Business grants that power. NABs are prioritized for grant or loan programs related to recovery from COVID-19, for commercial lease assistance, or commercial eviction defense programs. The expansion of the Legacy Business Program to include NABs is likely due to historic inequities preventing businesses in marginalized communities from remaining open for the 30+ years required to qualify.⁸⁴ San

⁷⁹ City & County of San Francisco. “Legacy Business Program”.

⁸⁰ City & County of San Francisco. “Business Stabilization Grant”.

⁸¹ City & County of San Francisco. “Legislation that supports Legacy Businesses”.

⁸² SF Office of Small Business & DAWI. “Becoming Employee Owned: A Small Business Toolkit for Transitioning to Employee Ownership”.

⁸³ SEC. 2A.244. Neighborhood Anchor Business Registry.

⁸⁴ SBAN. “Keeping Small Businesses in Place”. Pg. 23.

Francisco’s Legacy Business Program and Neighborhood Anchor Business Registry outlines a robust program providing a wide variety of services for culturally and historically relevant businesses in part to preserve marginalized communities across the city.

Los Angeles

Los Angeles launched their Legacy Business Program in 2022, uplifting enterprises operating for at least 20 years that contributes to community history and identity, cultivates distinctive cultural traditions and practices, and provides goods and services in a language and manner that’s culturally accessible. The designation provides awardees with technical assistance, marketing help, and government referrals for processes, programs, and contracts. The city also launched a grant program for legacy businesses in 2024 funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), dispersing \$10-20k for legacy businesses facing gentrification. Their goals for the program are to help businesses deal with technological changes, shifting consumer preferences, narrow profit margins, exposure to rent increases, encroaching gentrification, and succession planning. LA’s Legacy Business Program is a newer installment in the city’s small business support, and is expanding its reach with financial assistance.

Washington DC

DC’s legacy business support is through supplemental microgrants. The first installment was in 2019 through the Legacy Business Grant distributing \$1.5 million.⁸⁵ The second installment was created as a result of \$3.25 million in remaining funds from the Small Business Recovery Micro-grants Program made in response to COVID19.⁸⁶ Awardees were chosen among ones that already applied for other grants and met the “legacy business” qualifications. The money could be used for wages, benefits, accounts payable, fixed costs, inventory, rent, and

⁸⁵ Government of the District of Columbia. “FY19 Legacy Business Grant Request for Applications (RFA)”.

⁸⁶ Government of the District of Columbia. “Legacy Business Supplemental Microgrants”.

utilities. In response, the DC Preservation League released a report inventorying and advocating for legacy businesses to launch a formal program similar to other US cities.⁸⁷ DC’s approach to legacy business support as explicitly run through COVID relief funding is indicative of many other cities’ starts to their parallel programs, such as Laurel, MD and Los Angeles.⁸⁸

Vancouver, Canada

Vancouver’s Special Enterprise program serves Downtown Eastside, a neighborhood at the core of the city facing aggressive gentrification threats, high homelessness populations, and contains ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown and Japantown. The 5-year pilot launched in 2021 to “preserve and strengthen the cultural diversity, long-term viability, and economic opportunity of heritage businesses, social enterprises, and non-profit organizations”.⁸⁹ The program collaborates with community partners, known as “implementers” to support capacity building, affordable spaces, and community-serving businesses. Funding is distributed to implementers that help eligible organizations and businesses with space renovations (ex: furnishings, tenant improvements) and business supports (ex: marketing, succession planning). Eligible groups include heritage businesses that share values with the communities who frequent the area, community serving social enterprises that reinvest at least half of their profits back to community values, and nonprofit properties with a social purpose that hold the property for critical community services and neighborhood stabilization. The pilot began with a \$350k grant pool in year 1, a \$310k grant pool in year 2, and a \$845k grant pool for year 3. Vancouver’s Special Enterprises Program is a unique approach to supporting legacy businesses with their neighborhood-specific approach and inclusion of non-profits.

Worker Cooperative Support

⁸⁷ DC Preservation League. “Legacy Businesses”.

⁸⁸ SBAN. “Laurel Legacy Small Business Program”.

⁸⁹ City of Vancouver. “Special Enterprises Program”.

Worker cooperative support from city government manifests in a variety of forms - anything from explicit programming and legislation providing funding and technical assistance for cooperatives. The following section documents examples of co-op support from a few US cities.

New York City

New York is well-known in the cooperative space for their municipal support in incubating and accelerating co-op development. Launched in 2015, the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative is a collaboration between the NYC Department of Small Business Services and the NYC Council to provide funding for training and technical assistance for co-op creation and co-op conversions. Services are provided by a network of 13 co-op developers located throughout the city to give long-term support for prospective worker-owners. They're able to provide pro bono work for lower income and less profitable models funded by WCBDI's \$3.768 million budget, diversifying the field.^{90,91} Part of WCBDI is the Owners to Owners Initiative (OtO), including a hotline which had extensive airtime during Mayor DeBlasio's press conferences, which drummed up interest and overflowed the phone lines. OtO creates educational materials catering to industries such as hospitality and legacy retail, and worker empowerment that cater to both retiring business owners and workers. One testimonial about the program is from Linda Diaz, a former worker and now co-owner of Brooklyn Stone and Tile who worked with The Working World, one of the TA providers to transition the 30+ year old business.^{92,93} Funded by the city council, the program has carried over across mayoral administrations, highlighting a promising tactic for longevity.⁹⁴ In FY24 about 44 businesses and

⁹⁰ Mike Sandmel, Senior Cooperative Business Consultant, Virtual Interview, March 14, 2025.

⁹¹ NYC SBS & MOCS. "FY22: A report on the eighth year of the WCBDI".

⁹² Owners to Owners. Home page.

⁹³ DAWI. "Testimonial: Brooklyn Stone and Tile".

⁹⁴ Mike Sandmel interview.

organizations contacted WCBDI for assistance, reflecting the number of potential WCCs the program has facilitated.⁹⁵ NYC’s Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative is a hub for providing worker cooperative projects free technical assistance with marketing.

St. Paul, MN

The City of St. Paul’s Office of Financial Empowerment launched the Shared Ownership Center hosted under Nexus Community Partners in 2024. Under the Center is the LOCAL Fund - a \$2.5 million pool for building community wealth, anchoring jobs locally, and growing the local economy.⁹⁶ Nexus Community Partners provides technical services to start up a worker cooperative and to transition a business into a co-op model, and connects banks, community development financial institutions, and other capital providers to serve as funders. The investment by the City was in response to the effects of COVID19 on Minnesota’s businesses and that over half of those enterprises are owned by baby boomers.⁹⁷

Berkeley, CA

The City of Berkeley’s worker cooperative support stems from a collaboration with the Sustainable Economies Law Center, kicked off by the 2016 Resolution in Support of Worker Cooperative Development. Much of the work since has weaved into existing programs and economic development agendas such as procurement incentives for co-ops, tailoring their revolving loan fund to target co-ops and conversions, and catering technical assistance to co-ops and conversions.⁹⁸ Conversion-specific support includes reviewing business tax and land use incentives for transitions and developing educational materials. In addition, the City has worked closely with Project Equity which provides TA for co-ops and researched the desire for

⁹⁵ The number was calculated by subtracting the “Number of Businesses and Organizations Served” by the “Number of Worker Cooperatives” served to capture non-worker cooperative entities that contacted WCBDI for assistance. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/sbs/downloads/pdf/about/reports/worker_coop_report_fy24.pdf

⁹⁶ Saint Paul Minnesota. “City of Saint Paul Engages Nexus Community Partners on LOCAL Fund”.

⁹⁷ Nexus Community Partnerships. “Shared Ownership Center @ Nexus”.

⁹⁸ Eskandari-Qajar, Jasmine. “Berkeley Sets the Bar for Municipal Support of Worker Cooperatives”.

conversions in Berkeley. 1200 businesses in the municipality may need succession planning in the next 15 years, 23 businesses explored succession planning, and 4 of those firms are in the midst of transitioning to worker ownership.⁹⁹

Strategic Plans

Strategic plans are a common strategy used in municipalities to set a vision and mission for a particular topic that typically involves a wide swath of departments and agencies

Chicago, IL

The City of Chicago's *Community Wealth Building Initiative* is a report championing the need for "alternative strategies that create inclusive, sustainable economies built on locally rooted and broadly held ownership" that places power and assets in the hands of systemically excluded communities.¹⁰⁰ They champion four priority models: worker-owned cooperatives, limited-equity housing cooperatives, community land trusts, and community investment vehicles.¹⁰¹ With a \$15 million investment spread across three phases, the City hopes to usher community wealth ecosystem building, pipeline growth, and pilot projects for a variety of existing and emerging stakeholders. This effort has so far supported 48 non-housing cooperative enterprises, collaborated with 25 technical assistance providers, and hosted 32 emerging community wealth building projects. Chicago's convening and hosting of CWBI shows the possibility for shifting to alternative economic systems through local government. Although the project is still in its early stages, CWBI sets the bar for municipalities in participating in shifting wealth from the individual to the communal.

Community Opportunity to Purchase Act

San Francisco, CA

⁹⁹ City of Berkeley Office of the City Manager. "Referral Response: Further Supporting Worker Cooperatives".

¹⁰⁰ City of Chicago. "Community Wealth Building Initiative".

¹⁰¹ Chicago Community Wealth Building Ecosystem. "Community Wealth Building: The Chicago Way".

COPA gives the right of first offer and right of first refusal to any qualified non-profit for certain buildings. San Francisco designates qualified buildings as ones with 3+ residential units and vacant lands that could be developed into 3+ residential units. Paired with COPA in SF is a Small Sites Program hosted by the city to support property acquisition and renovation. SSP guidelines include a clause stabilizing small businesses and commercial tenants for mixed-use properties acquired, minimizing relocation. If relocation is necessary as part of the acquisition, a relocation agreement must be signed and include a rent suspension, lump sum for relocation, and assistance from the city to help with relocation and commercial improvements.¹⁰²

¹⁰² City & County of San Francisco. “Small Sites Program Guidelines.”

Ch. 6: City of Boston as a Convener for Cooperative Support

City government is uniquely positioned to convene a whole host of actors to coordinate, fund, and plan to support community wealth creation, including cooperative conversions for legacy businesses and connecting with minority neighborhoods to encourage cooperative creation. Drawing on interviews with four City of Boston staff, this chapter provides an overview of the past and current landscape of city support for worker cooperatives, cultural and commercial anti-displacement strategies, and challenges and opportunities to improve and expand on this work.

Context

Small Businesses & Worker Cooperatives Landscape in Boston

There are 58,000 small businesses operating in Boston, supported by 200 business support organizations such as Main Streets, trade associations, and anchor institutions; and 500 capital providers such as banks, microlenders, CDFIs, and impact investors.¹⁰³ Micro-enterprises are concentrated in West Roxbury, Mattapan, and Dorchester with an average of 10 employees per establishment, whereas Fenway/Kenmore and Back Bay have the largest businesses with an average of over 100 employees.¹⁰⁴ 35% of the private sector in Boston are employed by small businesses, generating more than 200,000 jobs and \$29.5 billion in gross regional product.¹⁰⁵

Worker cooperatives are a comparative drop in the bucket in contrast to the well-established small business landscape in Boston. There are about 26 worker cooperatives within the City, supported by seven Boston-based co-op support organizations: the Center for Economic Democracy, Boston Center for Community Ownership, Boston Impact Initiative,

¹⁰³ City of Boston. “Strengthening the Heartbeat of Boston: Integrating Strategies to Support a Thriving Small Business Community”. Published May 2025.

¹⁰⁴ Lima, Alvaro. “The Importance of Small and Micro Businesses in Boston”.

¹⁰⁵ Lima. “The Importance of Small and Micro Businesses in Boston”.

Local Enterprise Assistance Fund, Ownership Associates, ICA Group, and Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity.¹⁰⁶

Figure 2: City of Boston Organizational Overview

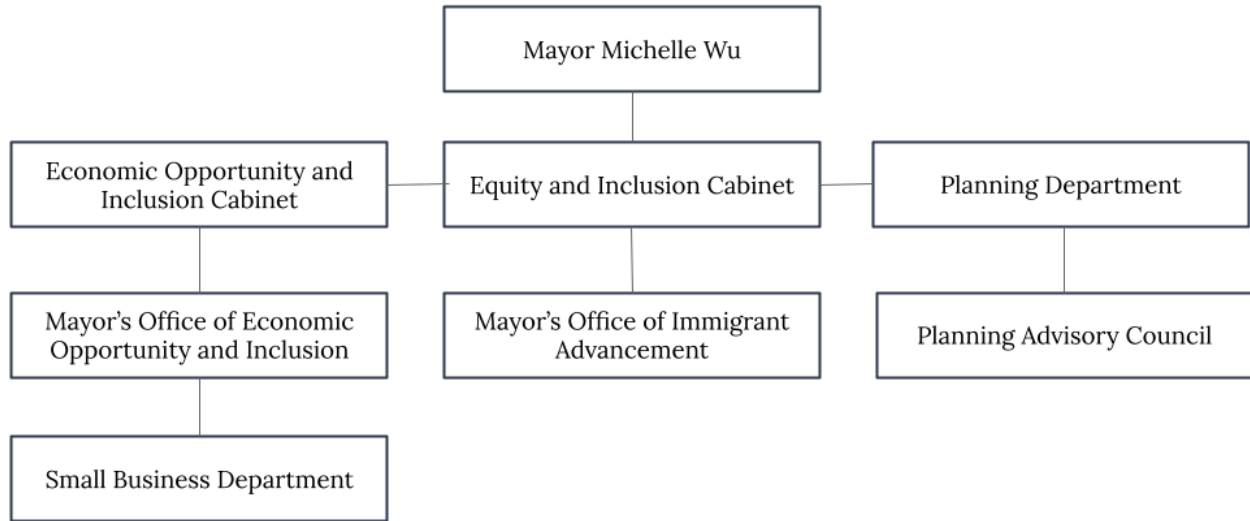


Figure 2 is a simplified organizational chart capturing the relevant offices at the City of Boston that are included in this research through the interview process. They are all represented since they play a role in shaping the City to further support worker cooperative conversions for legacy businesses as an anti-displacement strategy. The following section provides a brief overview of each group’s role at the City and their relevant work.

Office of Economic Opportunity & Inclusion (EOI)

Boston’s Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion (EOI) helps businesses launch, grow, and thrive in the City. They aim to create a model of economic equity for working people, entrepreneurs, businesses, and investors through strengthening partnerships, building sustainable practices for generational wealth, and establishing equitable procurement strategies.¹⁰⁷ The Office consists of 97 staff covering topics such as consumer affairs and licensing; tourism,

¹⁰⁶ City of Boston. “Employee Ownership Help”. Numbers were updated to include CCDS, the worker cooperatives they work with (6 total), and Dorchester Food Co-op.

¹⁰⁷ City of Boston. “Economic Opportunity and Inclusion”.

sports, & entertainment; nightlife economy; and more. Their annual budget for FY2025 was \$7,044,047, 60% of which was dedicated to contractual services such as technical assistance.¹⁰⁸

Small Business Department (SBD)

The Small Business Department is housed under EOI, supporting “small business owners and entrepreneurs with the tools and guidance to successfully start, grow, and build a business in Boston.”¹⁰⁹ Their work primarily concerns microenterprises: businesses with less than \$500,000 in revenue and less than 10 employees. Core programming includes their Main Streets Initiative working closely with and funding the 20 nonprofit main street organizations in Boston, the Technical Assistance Program which hires outside consultants or subject matter experts to work with businesses in a one-on-one capacity to address any needs a business may have, and the Legacy Business Program which highlights the achievements of the longer-established businesses in the City. The Department has a total of 19 staff.

Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Advancement (MOIA)

The Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Advancement (MOIA) is housed under the Equity & Inclusion Cabinet, striving to “strengthen the ability of immigrants to fully and equitably participate in economic, civic, social, and cultural life in Boston.”¹¹⁰ Their work includes free immigration consultations, the Weaving Well-being grant program supporting immigrant community-driven wellness and mental health, and Immigrants Lead Boston: a 10-week program empowering immigrants to become leaders in their community.^{111,112} MOIA is also piloting a home health aide worker cooperative in collaboration with the Democracy at Work Institute and

¹⁰⁸ City of Boston. “FY25 Operating Budget”.

¹⁰⁹ City of Boston. “Small Business”.

¹¹⁰ City of Boston. “Immigrant Advancement”.

¹¹¹ City of Boston. “Weaving Well-Being”.

¹¹² City of Boston. “Immigrants Lead Boston”.

the Boston Center for Community Ownership, utilizing the Rapid Response Cooperative Development Project. The office is staffed by 15 and has a budget of \$3,382,987 in FY25.

Planning Advisory Council (PAC)

The Planning Advisory Council (PAC) is an “internal body that guides a shared vision for a green, growing, family-friendly Boston and coordinates investments in the built environment to realize that vision.”¹¹³ It was created in 2023 by the Mayor and consists of the following cabinet chiefs: Planning; Arts and Culture; Energy, Environment, and Open Space; Economic Opportunity and Inclusion; Equity and Inclusion; Finance; Housing; Operations; and Streets. Their work includes making the Anti-Displacement Action Plan, improving public progress reports, and implementing mechanisms to systematically track progress on community plans.¹¹⁴ The Council also includes four full-time staff.

Worker Cooperative Support in the City

The first big wave of cooperative support from the City of Boston was through the Economic Mobility Lab created in 2017 under the Mayor’s Office of Policy with support from the Rockefeller Foundation and 100 Resilient Cities.¹¹⁵ Although the Lab’s foci were placed in early childhood & childcare, transition to college and career, and pilot programming for low- and moderate-income Bostonians, the Lab’s executive director Jason Ewas promoted worker ownership as it fit under the office’s work.¹¹⁶ Ewas facilitated working groups with worker co-op leaders and used existing programs within CoB to support cooperatives, convening a few hundred thousand dollars in funding from 2017-2020. As noted by Emily Patrick, Senior Neighborhood Business Manager:

¹¹³ City of Boston. “Planning Advisory Council”.

¹¹⁴ City of Boston. “Planning Advisory Council Year One Highlights”.

¹¹⁵ City of Boston. “Economic Mobility Lab”.

¹¹⁶ Li. “Cooperatizing Boston”.

“I can remember a time where we hosted community meetings educating folks about cooperatives and trying to talk to boomers and the silver tsunami about the cooperative model as being a potential outlet for them to put their business into that model as they were seeking to retire. And that hasn't happened for a number of years. I mean certainly since then the pandemic came and a lot of things changed...our work dramatically changed.”

Although the EML did not roll over into new administrations, its legacy is still present to this day through the Office of Early Childhood Education, Boston Saves, and the prioritization of cooperatives in the Small Business Department.

Anti-Displacement Efforts

The City of Boston published in 2025 *A Place to Thrive*: a two-year plan “for City departments to help stabilize residents, small businesses, and cultural organizations that may face either direct or economic displacement”.¹¹⁷ Led by the Planning Advisory Council, this interdisciplinary team of nine City cabinets related to the built environment outlined a coordinated approach to strengthen existing anti-displacement tools and create new initiatives to fill persistent gaps. Their unique approach evaluated existing feedback from Bostonians accumulated over the last three years from a variety of other community engagement efforts, reflecting a de-siloing of different departments’ efforts and addressing the over-engagement many marginalized communities have experienced.¹¹⁸ The plan categorizes its approach into two buckets: residential stabilization and commercial/cultural stabilization. The latter intertwines commercial and cultural to reflect the goods and services pertinent to a particular community, framing displacement as a neighborhood-wide issue. With its release, the PAC is opening a 45-day comment period and hopes to have the plan be a living document:

¹¹⁷ City of Boston. “City of Boston Releases Anti-Displacement Action Plan”.

¹¹⁸ City of Boston. “Laying the Foundation: Community Anti-Displacement Priorities”.

“And we've sort of been talking about it as let's not have perfect be the enemy of the good. Let's get something out there... And so we've sort of taken that mindset of there's going to be changes we're going to need to update this. We're going to need to do new things and change our approaches and we expect that and we also expect that when people publish this, people are going to have a lot of feedback and we don't expect that we've gotten it right.”¹¹⁹

CoB's *A Place to Thrive* reflects the city's role as a convener in pursuing interdisciplinary, collaborative work.

Legacy Business Program

The Small Business Department initiated the Legacy Business Program in Fall 2022 to support longstanding businesses operating in Boston for at least 10 years. The program promotes awardees, provides targeted technical assistance with a focus on succession planning and employee ownership, and distributes a plaque of recognition.¹²⁰ The goals of LBP are to ensure that these businesses avoid displacement, grow their influence, keep residents employed, and enrich the cultural vibrancy of Boston. They solicit community nominations, then send a list of all eligible businesses to the City Council who select up to five businesses for consideration that are invited to apply. The applications are sent to the review committee who select 25 recommendations for the Mayor to approve. Added to the program in 2024 is the Legacy Business Support Grant for nonprofit organizations who support small businesses in Boston to help at least 30 businesses meet legacy business qualifications such as technical assistance for stabilization and growth, financial support, and mentorship from peer business owners.

¹¹⁹ Joy Armstrong, PAC Policy Advisor. Virtual Interview, February 25, 2025.

¹²⁰ City of Boston. “Legacy Business Program”.

Ch. 7: Recommendations

Recommendations

The following section is a guide for the City of Boston to build on their existing programs and policies to bolster their support for Boston’s worker cooperative ecosystem and commercial anti-displacement measures. The recommendations are a synthesis of information gleaned from the literature review, interviews, and policy scan to create a balanced representation across academia, worker cooperative developers, city staff, and other cities’ strategies. This section also serves as a roadmap to prepare the City to serve as a convener for community wealth building paired with the right political climate, financing, and partnerships.

Making Boston a Cultivator City

Boston is considered an “Endorser City” where grassroots efforts lead worker cooperative advocacy that the municipality validates and endorses. The worker cooperative ecosystem in Boston includes the co-ops themselves, cooperative developers such as Boston Center for Community Ownership and Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity facilitating the creation of co-ops, and internal municipal champions incorporating cooperatives in existing policies and programs. The City of Boston currently provides free technical assistance to worker cooperatives, includes them as a priority in many of their grant programs, and is piloting new cooperative models as a job and ownership opportunity. Boston is a few steps away from becoming a “Cultivator City”, which it can achieve by investing in the capacity of worker cooperatives by implementing the following strategies:

- **General Small Business Support:** strategies supporting all small businesses, including worker cooperatives

- ***Conduct a Small Business Census:*** The census will serve as an opportunity to conduct a needs survey and the landscape of business types (ex: MWBE, industry, # of operating years). This will evaluate the effectiveness of current city programs and inform the creation of future programs, and can track patterns to extrapolate larger trends at hand. The project will be a collaboration across the Economic Opportunity and Inclusion Cabinet, the Planning Department, and the Office of Neighborhood Services.
- ***Expand the Legacy Business Program by:***
 - Incorporating promotional events such as walking tours and happy hours to increase foot traffic and awareness about legacy businesses
 - Hosting a secondary program supporting long-standing community organizations facing displacement issues. This could be hosted under the Mayor’s Office of Arts & Culture or the Office of Neighborhood Services who have existing, long-standing relationships with community organizations
- **Strategies to support worker cooperatives and conversions**
 - ***Hire a full-time worker cooperative business manager:*** Cultivating a fruitful environment in a city for worker co-ops requires dedicated staff and resources to both advocate for and support businesses and developers in this realm. Their work would include championing initiatives such as both public and internal education campaigns, convening a task force of existing municipal champions to further their co-op support efforts, and advocating for policy and programmatic changes

to enhance both the visibility and viability of the cooperative model. The position could fit well in the Economic Opportunity & Inclusion Cabinet.

- ***Increase education and awareness on worker cooperatives:*** Run supplementary training hosted by worker cooperative developers and other experts to share the prevalence of co-ops and its relation to different offices' work. It will prioritize outreach to offices who directly interface with and have potential to support worker cooperatives such as the Planning Advisory Council, Community Engagement, and Economic Opportunity and Inclusion. Workshops will be open to all city staff and be formatted so trainings are attended with a mix of offices attending, rather than for one department to cross-pollinate ideas and serve as a hub for creating coordinated, collaborative efforts.
- ***Update Technical Assistance Program to promote worker cooperative support:*** Advertise the technical assistance available for potential and existing worker cooperatives as an educational campaign. The TA program already covers costs to hire external consultants and has a running contract with BCCO so costs will only go towards creating educational materials. Include information on different financing options available such as the Local Enterprise Assistance Fund (LEAF) and the Cooperative Fund of the Northeast (CFNE) for co-op transitions to expand long-term support options that may be outside of the City's capabilities. Having the City explicitly share their support for co-ops will drum up interest, paralleling NYC's WCBDI.
- ***Add worker cooperatives to the Certified Business Directory:*** Encouraging worker cooperatives to register under the Certified Business Directory will open

city procurement opportunities to them, wielding spending power to support co-ops. This initiative will be a collaboration between Procurement and Small Business to conduct outreach to worker cooperatives.

- ***Implement the Worker Opportunity to Purchase Act:*** This law can either be implemented at the state level or the City can file a home rule petition to implement. WOPA will give workers the right of first offer and right of first refusal to purchase the business they work for when it is up for sale. Community organizations can be involved to facilitate the sale, similar to a Community Opportunity to Purchase Act, to make the transactions more feasible. The worker cooperative model can be encouraged either directly within the law by including a priority sale to a group of employees forming a worker cooperative, or with supplemental education and outreach for workers to consider a cooperative model.

Preventing Commercial Displacement

The City of Boston's Anti-Displacement Action Plan outlines 15 commercial/cultural stabilization tools such as Accessory Commercial Unit Zoning, Commercial Acquisition Assistance Program, and Residential Tax Relief Impact Offset for Small Businesses. The following recommendations will add to the City's toolbox to curb commercial displacement:

- ***Community Opportunity to Purchase Act:*** This law grants community organizations and current tenants the right of first offer and right of first refusal to purchase the property they are currently leasing on. Community organizations are included as potential buyers since they help to organize current tenants of a building and can create a trust for the neighborhood to keep rents low.

Long Term Strategy: Community Wealth Building Strategic Plan

The City of Boston is primed to adopt community wealth building as an overarching driver of their work. Internally, the City has set a goal to close the racial wealth gap, hosts the Office of Participatory Budgeting, and established the interdisciplinary Planning Advisory Council to coordinate efforts across different silos. Externally, Boston has a thriving solidarity economy network, with the Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network, the Coalition for Worker Ownership and Power, and the Massachusetts Center for Employee Ownership at the state level. By convening and coordinating across the myriad of stakeholders and initiatives, the City can parallel its Anti-Displacement Action Plan process to create a Community Wealth Building strategic plan. With the right political and financial climate, this plan can set a vision for the City to serve as a convener for redistributing wealth to systematically disinvested communities through initiatives such as worker cooperative conversions, community land trusts, and participatory budgeting.

Ch. 8: Conclusion

This research paper explores the fields of small business support, anti-displacement strategies, and worker cooperative support in part to make the case that co-op conversions are a relevant strategy with great potential to not only maintain local economic engines in neighborhoods facing gentrification, but also to play a part in promoting economic democracy. This thesis focuses on Boston as a convener, since it represents a progressive champion in local government that has aspects of all the aforementioned topics and the potential to convene these silos to promote community wealth building. Synthesizing findings from a literature review, policy scan, and interviews I developed a series of recommendations that range from direct support for WCCs to long-term strategic plans for CWB in part to foster worker cooperative conversions for legacy businesses.

Reflecting on the research process, this chapter summarizes reflections in how worker cooperative conversions, city government, and community stabilization play a role in community wealth building, and future research.

Community Wealth Building

Community wealth building serves as a goal post to transform extractive conditions in the work environment and housing, and transitions towards centering equity and shared wealth. Worker cooperative conversions play a key role in transferring local economic power from the silver tsunami: a majority white population to women and BIPOC worker-owners. It decentralizes the profits a company makes across all of its workers who can reap the benefits they sow, promoting a more democratic model of wealth distribution. Businesses do not exist in vacuums; rather they are closely tied to the communities they are located in whether it be their physical location, the tax base they contribute to, or the customers they regularly interact with. If

the community as a whole is unstable due to gentrification pressures and active displacement of people, small businesses, and community organizations, then a singular strategy will not suffice and the neighborhood will eventually disperse. Ensuring businesses are cohesive with other facets of a neighborhood requires comprehensive planning to ensure community wealth building strategies and principles are implemented without unintended consequences.

Future Research

A few topics of interest emerged while conducting this thesis that were outside of the scope of the research question but are relevant to supporting worker cooperative conversions. Chapter 4: Worker Cooperative Conversions Overview is a brief summary on what WCCs are and how they work. However, the field on its own is largely under-researched. Capturing case studies of different types of conversions, studying different funding sources, and gathering data on WCCs in the US can greatly benefit the field in creating toolkits, educational materials, and informing their work. A common sentiment amongst interviewees was bridging traditional economic actors such as economic development agencies, worker centers, and chambers of commerce with worker cooperative spaces to increase the pipeline for potential conversions. All in all, the realm of WCCs is an emerging yet timely realm of work that can bolster its work with further research.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Round One Interviews: Worker Cooperative Conversion Developers

Introductions:	Name, pronouns, # of years in the WCC space What role do you play in the worker cooperative conversions space? What drew you to WCC work?
Overview:	What does your organization do? How does it support small businesses? What is the most difficult part of your job? What does it take to convert an existing business into a worker cooperative?
Field Evolution:	How has the WCC space evolved over the last two decades? - How has your organization changed over time? What are the strengths of your organization's approach to conversion? - What are areas for improvement? - How do you see those improvements being made?
Community Engagement	What is the spatial scope of your organization? Describe the communities your organization serves. What are the overarching demographics? What other entities does your organization collaborate with? What does community preservation mean for your work?
Municipal Role	How do the government entities in your spatial scope play a role in the WCC work you do? Do you view them as a contributor or hindrance to WCCs?
Final Thoughts	Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Round Two Interviews: City of Boston Staff

Introductions:	Name, pronouns, # of years at the City What role do you play in the City of Boston? What drew you to this work?
Overview:	What does your office do? How does it support [small businesses, commercial gentrification, worker cooperatives]? [question about specific programs if applicable]
Field Evolution:	How has your work evolved over time? - How has [small businesses, commercial gentrification, worker

	<p>cooperatives] shown up over time?</p> <p>What are the strengths of your organization’s approach to [small businesses, commercial gentrification, worker cooperatives]?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are areas for improvement? - How do you see those improvements being made?
Community Engagement	<p>Describe the communities your office serves. What are the overarching demographics?</p> <p>What other entities does your organization collaborate with?</p> <p>What does community preservation mean for your work?</p>
Final Thoughts	<p>Is there anything else you’d like to share?</p>