

Short-Term Steps to Business District Growth

Nate Edenfield, Deborah Tachiri, Matthew Takara
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Introduction

Forest Hills Borough is a community of roughly 6,500 residents located in the southeastern part of Allegheny County, situated along Ardmore Boulevard (Route 30), a corridor connecting the Mon Valley region to the broader Pittsburgh metropolitan area, including Bakery Square. Decades of deindustrialization and regional infrastructure shifts have contributed to population decline and reduced local business activity, transforming Ardmore Boulevard into a high-speed commuter throughway with limited pedestrian infrastructure and few safe crossing points. These conditions have made it difficult to attract and sustain businesses in the borough's main commercial district.

The Forest Hills Community Alliance (FHCA) is driving a broader revitalization vision through the Forest Hills Forward Vision Plan, which addresses business development, infrastructure improvement, and long-term environmental and socioeconomic sustainability. As FHCA works with consultants on these longer-term efforts, this report focuses on low-cost, short-term strategies for activating the Ardmore corridor that do not depend on major capital or infrastructure investment. Drawing on the Main Streets Approach, regional and national case studies, existing borough plans and ordinances, and close collaboration with Forest Hills Mayor Patty DeMarco, we identify opportunities in community placemaking, local business support, corridor events, and targeted streetscape improvements, actions that can make the district more welcoming to residents, businesses, commuters, and visitors while positioning Forest Hills to benefit from its location at the crossroads of Pittsburgh's eastern suburbs.

In addition to strategic recommendations, this report identifies assets Forest Hills can leverage for immediate action and includes two supplementary resources for FHCA's ongoing use: (1) a parcel report drawn from the Allegheny County real estate portal, including a list of vacant and absentee-owned properties; and (2) a business directory webpage to catalog local businesses and facilitate communication and engagement with business owners.

Background

Like much of the greater Pittsburgh region, Forest Hills developed around the steel industry and other industrial activity, most notably the Westinghouse Atom Smasher, which

brought jobs to the area and supported a vibrant business district along Ardmore Boulevard. During this period, Ardmore Boulevard also hosted a streetcar running down the center of the road, providing residents with a public transit connection to and from the borough. The collapse of the steel industry and the discontinuation of the streetcar line in the latter half of the 20th century had lasting effects on the community. Population declined, businesses closed, and the physical footprint of the streetcar rail was replaced by a center median. Over time, Ardmore Boulevard transitioned from a neighborhood main street into a commuter corridor primarily serving through traffic.

Figure 1. Ardmore Boulevard and the Atom Smasher



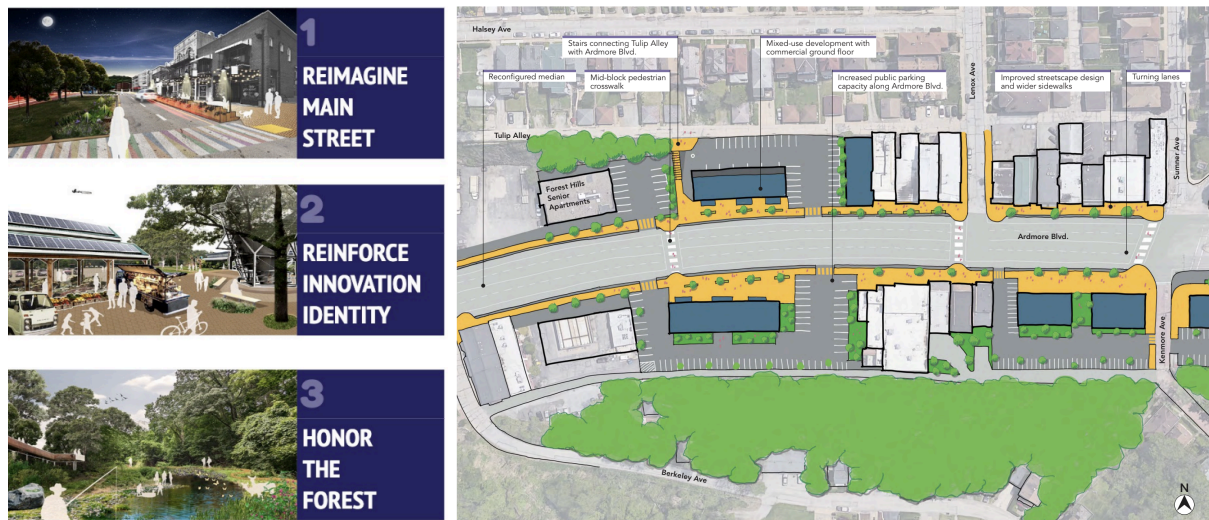
Google Maps, undated.

Today, Ardmore Boulevard is a 35 mile-per-hour corridor with roughly 13,000 to 16,000 commuters passing through daily. In addition, there is a lack of pedestrian infrastructure, with only 4 pedestrian crossings along the roughly half-mile stretch of Ardmore going through the main business district, making it both unsafe and unwelcoming for pedestrians. In addition, there are a number of empty lots and vacant properties (former businesses that closed which were never replaced by new businesses.) The already lacking business district, fast road, and lack of walkability has made it difficult to attract investment in new businesses in the area.

The Forest Hills Economic Development Corporation was formed toward the end of the 20th century to address deterioration in the business district. However, the organization eventually lost momentum and became inactive in the early 2000s. In recent years, renewed interest in the borough's future produced a new strategic vision, a climate study, and a transit plan, which together culminated in the formation of the Forest Hills Community Alliance. FHCA released the Forest Hills Forward Vision Plan in 2024, outlining three strategic priorities for revitalizing the borough: (1) reimagining the main street business district along Ardmore Boulevard as a vibrant, mixed-use destination; (2) reinforcing Forest Hills' identity and legacy of innovation and strengthening cultural and community infrastructure; and (3) preserving and highlighting the borough's existing green spaces and natural assets. Altogether, the plan reflects a comprehensive approach to economic development alongside environmental and social sustainability. FHCA is currently in the process of contracting consultants to help carry out these longer-term visions.

Many of the plan's strategies involve substantial infrastructure changes that will require PennDOT approval, potential policy changes, and significant time and capital investment. These include expanding sidewalks, adding pedestrian crossings, lowering the speed limit, modifying the center median, increasing mixed-use zoning, and increasing parking capacity. As a result, many of these improvements may take several years to come to fruition. With this in mind, our recommendations focus on near-term strategies that can be acted upon immediately by leveraging existing assets, rather than proposed infrastructure yet to be built. The goal is to lay the groundwork for long-term business development, attract visitors, and strengthen community identity and placemaking along the corridor.

Figure 2. Four Pillars of the Main Street Approach



Methodology

Main Street framework is utilized to provide recommendations focused on achieving Forest Hills’ goals of *supporting* and *growing* its business district.

Figure 3. Four Pillars of the Main Street Approach



The Main Street Approach: A Guide to Comprehensive Commercial District Transformation, National Main Street Center

Community and stakeholder input shows recommendations overlap with the requests of residents. Forest Hills can focus on providing services requested by residents in the Forest Hills Comprehensive Plan survey, such as “support public art” (pg 64 & 65). One resident asks for a “true coffee shop” (pg 70). One resident explains they have to leave FH to do a lot of things “shopping, eating out, better, more extensive, park experiences, cultural events” (pg 71)¹. The report will show that our recommendations align with some of the requests of residents. While attracting new customers and businesses is a goal, meeting resident and current business’ needs is also important.

Sources Leveraged

Interviews: conversations were held with Mayor Patricia DeMarco and council member An Lewis. Additionally, researchers met with the Forest Hills Community Alliance and attended a Forest Hills Rotary Club meeting.

¹“2019 Forest Hills Plan”.

<https://cms3.revize.com/revize/foresthills/Documents/Borough-of-Forest-Hills-Comprehensive-Plan-2019-Final.pdf>.

Plans: Forest Hills Comprehensive Plan², Climate Study³, Transit Plan⁴, and Forest Hills Forward Vision

Case Studies: Relevant case studies are cited next to the each recommendation

Ordinances: Forest Hills Code of Ordinances

Systems Engineering: Sustainability through time is incorporated in a few of our recommendations, for example, consistent promotion and digital presence.

Forest Hills Existing Assets

Forest Hills contains many existing assets for existing/new visitors and business (Table 1):

Table 1: Summary of asset types.

Infrastructure Type	Examples
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Large parking lots● Municipal building/are● Shopping Center● Park Pavillion● Westinghouse Facility● Pool Lodge facility rentals for residents
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Existing businesses● Business district can attract customers from nearby communities
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Existing Events (e.g. Farmers' Market, Community Day, Chili Cookoff)● History of Innovation● Branding as "Tree City"● Daily commuters
Civic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Forest Hills Community Alliance● Forest Hills Rotary Club

² "2019 Forest Hills Plan".

³ "Climate Action Plan." 2020.

<https://cms3.revize.com/revize/foresthills/Documents/How%20Do%20I/Climate%20Action%20Plan.pdf>.

⁴ "Forest Hills Borough Active Transportation Plan." 2021. Forest Hills Active Transportation Plan Report.pdf

Recommendations

Key Recommendation: Support and grow the business district with current assets and short-term solutions while building public support for long term vision. Attract with future infrastructure in mind, but with current infrastructure in practice. Lean into identity as a corridor to attract new business and customers.

Promotion

Impact of Marketing on Consumer Habits:

A 2018 Accenture Interactive study found that “91 percent of consumers” shop more with “brands that recognize, remember, and provide them with relevant offers and recommendations”⁵ Additionally, In an advertising study conducted between 2009 and 2011 by Nielsen’s Global Trust of 28,000 + internet respondents found that 70% trust customer reviews when making shopping decisions.⁶

Recommendation One: Utilize Summer Intern to Establish a Digital Marketing Footprint:

Phase One - Establish Platforms:

Verify Business Locations:

Utilizing the business directory, businesses on Ardmore should be contacted to verify the accuracy of current information on the directory. This outreach can also serve as an opportunity to encourage businesses to bolster their online presence (e.g. Google Maps or Yelp profiles) through the verification of different information, such as ensuring photos and videos, open hours, addresses, phone number, website, and ordering information are all accurate and up-to-date. Additional profile elements worth encouraging include consistent responses to reviews and noting unique amenities like parking or WIFI availability^{7 8}. Links to guides on optimizing Google and Yelp profiles are included in the citations^{9 10}.

⁵ “Widening Gap Between Consumer Expectations and Reality in Personalization Signals Warning for Brands, Accenture Interactive Research Finds,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://newsroom.accenture.com/news/2018/widening-gap-between-consumer-expectations-and-reality-in-personalization-signals-warning-for-brands-accenture-interactive-research-finds>.

⁶ “Reports and Insights | Global Trust in Advertising and Brand Messages | Nielsen,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2012/global-trust-in-advertising-and-brand-messages-2/>.

⁷ “Tips to Improve Your Local Ranking on Google - Google Business Profile Help,” accessed April 29, 2026, <https://support.google.com/business/answer/7091?hl=en#zippy=>.

⁸ “The Ultimate Guide to Google Business Profiles for Small Businesses,” accessed April 30, 2026, <https://knapsackcreative.com/blog/seo/google-business-profile-seo-guide>.

⁹ “Yelp for Business Owners | Tools to Grow Your Local Business,” accessed April 30, 2026, https://biz.yelp.com/?fwp=true&hl=en_US&msockid=3c63c009350c64ea16a7d6343487652f.

¹⁰ “(15) The Ultimate Yelp Profile Checklist for Business Owners | LinkedIn,” accessed April 30, 2026, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ultimate-yelp-profile-checklist-business-owners-rescuemarketing-wwd1f/>.

Expand Borough Accounts:

On Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook, create a single channel (e.g., @ForestHillsShops) dedicated to promoting all corridor businesses, events, and openings — lower cost and more effective than individual business accounts.

Share the Directory Prominently & Aggressively:

The newly created business directory should be utilized by including links to it across Forest Hills' Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn accounts as well as the borough website. More information on how the directory can be utilized is found later in this report.

Phase Two - Build content**Feature Local Owners:**

After business information is verified and owners begin building their Google and Yelp profiles, inquiry for remarkable testimonials of businesses who are doing well. The Federal Trade Commission provides guidance on the legality surrounding reviews and testimonials.¹¹ Short, thirty second to one minute once a month mini “interviews” should identify and share information about businesses/owners and products they uniquely offer. As more businesses participate, this can build momentum to encourage other businesses to participate and be highlighted

Deploy Commuter Hooks:

Time sensitive, location based ads, tailored for the Route 30 driver can be utilized. For example, “limited time offer ; shop in Forest Hills on your way home from work.” Content can be specifically relevant and tailored to product offerings by current and new businesses soon coming to Forest Hills.

Engage the Community:

Encourage businesses to list the Forest Hills directory on their google maps profile. This will standardize and increase use of the directory. Encourage businesses to upload photos and videos of their products to the appointed individual(s) who have administrative access to the directory. Encourage residents and customers to leave reviews on businesses platforms and post their experiences with businesses on social media. In a 2026 study by Brightlocal of 1,000 individuals, 65% of people requested to review, left a review in that year. Additionally, 94% of customers are

¹¹ “The Consumer Reviews and Testimonials Rule: Questions and Answers | Federal Trade Commission,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/consumer-reviews-testimonials-rule-questions-answers>.

“open to writing reviews.”¹² Encourage consistent response and reaction from businesses to all customer experiences and reviews with an emphasis on customer service. This encourages further interaction with businesses and customers. Better Business Bureau provides guidance on business response to reviews.¹³

Recommendation Two: Sustain Digital Marketing Over Time

Phase 1: Expand

Launch Location-Based Ads:

Facebook has a location feature that can allow this borough to target Facebook users in Forest Hills and in surrounding boroughs. Cost: Because cost of ads varies, cost estimates have wide lower and upper limits. In essence, you pay when users engage with your ads. According to Facebook, cost is affected by quality and relevance of the ad, target audience, age, location, and interests. Additionally, performance goals impact cost. Goal-based, focused on higher conversion rates v. spend-based ads, focusing on lower cost per conversion may vary in costs.¹⁴ Budget: Facebook offers budget options and resources, such as daily v. lifetime budgets to accommodate different budget goals. Quality Metric: "real-time data," from Facebook allows regular access to ad performance.¹⁵ Further guides from LinkedIn and Facebook on step by step implementation are included.^{16 17}

Deploy Physical-Digital Bridges:

Install physical QR codes on vacant storefronts. These should direct the scanner to Forest Hills resource page on starting a business in Forest Hills, or the listing for the building, which includes price and process of becoming an owner. This code may also include contact information for directed guidance on buying or renting the property. This will streamline the contact process for prospectively interested new owners and businesses. increase accessibility and information. Cost to Consider: Depending on the kind of QR code organization used, scanning limitations,

¹² “LCRS 2026: Study Shows Reviews Matter More Than Ever- BrightLocal,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.brightlocal.com/research/local-consumer-review-survey/#trust>.

¹³ “BBB Business Tip: Why Responding to Your Customer Reviews Matters,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.bbb.org/article/business/27841-bbb-business-tip-why-responding-to-your-customer-reviews-matters>.

¹⁴ “Facebook and Instagram Ads: Budgets, Costs & Schedules | Meta for Business,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/business/ads/pricing/>.

¹⁵ “(19) Using Facebook Ads to Drive Local Traffic: A Step-by-Step Guide By Digital Builder Marketing Service | LinkedIn,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/using-facebook-ads-drive-local-traffic-juf9f/>.

¹⁶ “About Location Targeting in Meta Ads Manager | Meta Business Help Center,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/business/help/202297959811696?id=176276233019487>.

¹⁷ F“(21) LinkedIn Marketing Mastery: A Step-by-Step Guide to Building Your Brand | LinkedIn,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/linkedin-marketing-mastery-step-by-step-guide-building-dilip-kheni-bh5hf/>.

analytics, tracking and management capabilities, cost may vary¹⁸. Additionally, the cost of physically printing and stationing physical QR codes on vacant store costs should be considered.

Highlight Cradle of Innovation:

While building professional relationships with prospective future business owners on LinkedIn, utilize your page to highlight available spaces for rent or purchase. Market/promote business incentives digitally: “how to start a business in Forest Hills”

Phase 2: Sustain

Document the System:

Create physical and/or digital login credentials, so relevant individuals have access to the social media accounts. A consistent posting schedule is necessary because it builds brand awareness, boosts engagement, and enhances visibility through algorithms.¹⁹ A study by Buffer, a social media management platform, of 100,000 + users found that those with moderate to highly consistent posting receive 4 to 5 times more engagement, such as likes, comments and shares.^{20 21}

Identify Long-Term Oversight:

Begin thinking now about who may be best fit to continue the work of the intern regarding digital presence. It is essential that one or many individuals be given formal responsibilities to stay on top of postings and testimonial interviews.

Evaluate Impact:

Measure return on ad spend and consumer interaction.

Recommendation Three: Utilize Physical Marketing & Design

Phase 1: Standardize Branding

Standardize Marketing Materials

¹⁸ “How Much Does a QR Code Cost in 2026? | QR Library Blog,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://qr-library.com/blog/how-much-does-qr-code-cost>.

¹⁹ “Why Consistent Social Media Posting Is Crucial for Modern Marketing Success - All Advertising,” accessed May 1, 2026,

<https://www.alladvertising.co.uk/why-consistent-social-media-posting-is-crucial-for-modern-marketing-success/>.

²⁰ “Consistent Posting Means 5x More Likes, Comments, and Shares: Study,” accessed May 1, 2026,

<https://buffer.com/resources/consistent-posting-study/>.

²¹ “The Importance of Consistent Posting for Social Media Creators,” accessed May 1, 2026,

<https://www.adobe.com/express/learn/blog/consistent-posting-creators>.

A suite of standard marketing logos, designs, and color palettes should be built out. Standardized materials will build association and brand awareness of the borough among residents and prospective businesses.

Standardize Themes

Consistent themes such as "Culture of Innovation" and "Tree City" should be promoted throughout. What should be clear is that Forest Hills is a place where businesses are cultivated and supported by the government, and where nature and trees are treasured.

Coordinate Use of Sandwich Boards by Businesses

The use of reusable sandwich boards should be promoted and standardized as a way to reach individuals who are not reached through digital ads. Businesses can utilize these to advertise on sidewalks (§ 27-803), attracting walking and passing individuals. The adaptability of sandwich boards ensures businesses can provide up-to-date promotions as needed.

Build Up Physical Platforms

A physical print version of the Tree City Times dedicated to current and new businesses in the district should be considered, left in areas accessible to visitors and walkers. Although a digital version is already emailed to residents, the physicality of a print edition allows reach of individuals not reached through digital means, as well as bypassers. Forest Hills postcards should also be designed through a sponsored postcard contest at Forest Hills High School, with a possible fundraising tie-in for prom. Additionally, the entrance gate and other visible, well-lit areas should be utilized to advertise upcoming events, as use of the gate may increase the capture rate of commuters passing through Forest Hills.

Recommendation Four: Develop a Formal Marketing Strategy Based on Main Street Template²²

Creation of a formal, living, and adaptable marketing strategy brings the previous recommendations together. Adaptability is important because it accounts for future realizations and allows for changes based on what quality metrics reveal. The formal marketing strategy should contain the following components: a mission statement and objectives, a market and

²² F“TEMPLATE_Marketing_Strategy_MSA_v1.2023.Docx,” accessed May 1, 2026, https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fcdn.mainstreet.org%2Fmedia%2FResources%2FKnowledge-Hub%2FTEMPLATE_Marketing_Strategy_MSA_v1.2023.docx%3Fv%3D1721078415&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK.

environment analysis, identification of target audiences and markets, a value proposition, a marketing mix, marketing channels, a budget, and metrics.

Design

Recommendation One: Facilitate Artistry for Beautification & Placemaking

Volunteers should be utilized to build momentum by delivering immediate placemaking results. A similar approach is taken by Space Works Tacoma in Washington, an organization that works to revitalize spaces using arts²³. A similar program in Pittsburgh may be beneficial for Forest Hills. Outreach should be directed toward local artists as well as interested and willing students from neighboring high schools and universities and volunteers from senior centers.

Recommendation Two: Modernize Storefronts

Storefront improvements can signal to commuters and residents that the business district is active and open for business. The borough has several levers it can utilize toward this end. The first step is to identify potential updates by working with business owners to audit, modernize, and beautify storefronts along Ardmore Boulevard to meet code standards. Enforcement of sign removal for closed businesses should also be prioritized to reduce negative appearances along the corridor. Finally, Recommendation One should be extended to business storefronts by engaging local artists with local businesses, which will simultaneously engage commuters and residents passing through Ardmore Boulevard.

Recommendation Three: Amend Ordinance to Manage Signs in Ardmore Boulevard Median

Activating the median provides several strategic benefits. It increases visibility by connecting commuters to local side-street commerce, enhances identity by using art and wayfinding to define the Forest Hills brand, and improves traffic safety by reducing speeds through intentional environmental design. Borough Council retains stewardship over the median, preventing abuse through mandated approval of aesthetics and location, verified safety standards for every placement, and a prohibition on any private entity installing signage independently. Median activation can serve as an opportunity to show off Forest Hills through event banners, an "Innovation" sculpture series, blade signs on street lights, off-grid solar illumination, and historical narrative wraps.

Organization

Recommendation One: Provide Businesses with Immediate Resources

²³ "Spaceworks Tacoma - Cultivating Creative Communities," Spaceworks, accessed April 7, 2026, <https://www.spaceworkstacoma.com/>.

The Forest Hills Borough office can be marketed as a support hub for businesses, where local business owners can go for resources, discussions, and support. While the Forest Hills website currently includes a "Resident Resources" section, a dedicated "Business Resources" section should be created as well. This section can include guides on business financial relief programs and external funding sources, general business opportunities, and a welcome toolkit with key contacts and local vendors and contractors. This page could also be included on the business directory website to encourage broader use and make it more of a business hub, encouraging use by business owners as well. The borough should also look to streamline its license and permit process, as seen in Etna²⁴, where improved business regulation has benefited the local economy and enabled businesses to operate more efficiently²⁵. Additionally, a business liaison or point of contact should be appointed to conduct one-on-one meetings with business owners, facilitate parking lot share agreements, and carry out a survey of business owners similar to the Comprehensive Plan Survey done on residents, in order to better understand businesses' perspectives.

Recommendation Two: Provide Active Leadership to Build Trust Through Action Over Time

One-on-one merchant chats should be conducted with merchants to identify quick-win fixes that demonstrate borough support. A shoppers newsletter, tied with digital marketing efforts, should be developed to create a community "club" that highlights businesses and provides deals to participants. The borough should also work to coordinate shared agreements that facilitate mutually beneficial arrangements such as parking, snow removal, and sandwich sign use. Local businesses should be invited to community events and given space to promote their services to residents. Finally, bank-backed micro-grants of \$5,000 to \$10,000 in bank-led CRA funds should be secured for signage and permits to de-risk investment for small businesses.

Economic Vitality

Recommendation One: Activate the Forest Hills Shopping Center Parking Lot

The amount of space the parking lot offers, combined with its proximity to the business district, should be leveraged to host existing and new events, short-term businesses, and pop-ups such as food trucks and art shows. Examples include Scoops & Songs, a family-friendly pop-up event worked out with I Scream Cream featuring music and themed activities; food truck days that invite a collection of local food trucks to target commuters and residents alike; and monthly car shows, drive-in films, or other recurring events that signal vibrancy around the business district.

²⁴ Joyce Hanz TribLive Share Copy Link Facebook Twitter LinkedIn Send SMS WhatsApp Reddit Like, "Etna's Business Boom: New Brewery, Shops, and Community Center Revitalize Borough," accessed April 7, 2026, <https://community.triblive.com/c/shaler-journal/news/8c0a4b60342b9b79d6675f83ac198f8e>.

²⁵ "Improved Business Regulation Systems Can Benefit State Economies," accessed April 7, 2026, <https://pew.org/3q1JQML>.

Recommendation Two: Focus Business Development Efforts on Destination and Industry

Business development efforts should target two broad categories: destinations and industries. On the destination side, this includes third spaces such as independent coffee shops or breweries that serve as local community gathering spots; stop-and-go businesses like drive-throughs and quick meal or errand options that serve commuters; and pop-ups such as food trucks, artisan vendors, and marketplaces that are temporary in nature. On the industry side, focus should be placed on startups such as tech-focused firms that provide high-value daytime employment; professional studios such as boutique agencies and creative firms requiring professional office suites; and research labs such as university spin-offs and small labs looking for affordable, modern office space.

Recommendation Three: Match Forest Hills Strengths with Business Demands

The first step in matching Forest Hills' strengths to business demand is conducting market research. This includes updating the Comprehensive Plan survey and expanding it to commuters to understand specific restaurant, retail, and service demands, as well as leveraging Forest Hills and university connections to identify the conditions entrepreneurs seek. The next step is to identify available spaces by mapping retail and service locations according to square footage, parking, and visibility to identify locations ready for high-traffic shops and services, and by identifying spaces and owners well suited for modernization to accommodate prospective businesses such as co-working spaces or labs. Finally, targeted outreach should be conducted using a data-based pitch that presents spaces to businesses aligned with survey results showing customer demand, and a space-based match approach that connects prospective entrepreneur pools to spaces with a plan for modernization.

Quality Measures

This recommendation can be utilized in all four of the Main Street Approach aspects, however, what is measured depends on what kind of program and goal of that program.

Consumer Interaction²⁶

Social media platforms already track customer engagement such as likes, views, and shares. This data provided by these platforms should be utilized, but growth of interaction should also be documented monthly or quarterly, whichever staff constraints allow, through Excel or similar inexpensive platforms. Virtual consumer interaction can be measured by utilizing this data over time.

²⁶ “Digital Marketing Success: Definition & Measurement,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://imcprofessional.medill.northwestern.edu/blog/what-is-digital-marketing-success>.

Conversion Rate²⁷

Measuring the physical conversion rate of drivers who stop and make a purchase because of an ad is difficult to quantify. Qualitative means should be utilized instead, such as brief and casual surveys during events asking customers what brought them to the event.

Average Transaction Value

Businesses may be encouraged to record whether the average spend per customer is increasing over time. This is measured by dividing total revenue by number of transactions.

Revenue Growth

Revenue growth may be measured qualitatively by surveying businesses on how their businesses are doing once or twice a year, if staff constraints permit. Anonymity may be promised to incentivize business owners to be more willing to speak candidly about their economic situation. Growth of perceived revenue by business owners should then be tracked and measured over time.

Return on Ad Spend (ROAS, aka MER)²⁸

Qualitatively, this can be measured by whether business owners report an increase in customers after the use of ads. For businesses willing to participate, though prone to human error, a count of customers by available staff may be conducted, with data collected and evaluated over time. Quantitatively, for community events hosted by the borough, the Marketing Efficiency Ratio (MER) — which is total revenue from ads divided by total marketing spend — can be used to identify the effectiveness of ads.

Metrics should be project dependent and relevant to minimize time cost. Each metric should have a purpose, relate back to marketing objectives, and should intentionally measure data to contribute relevant information for borough decision making.

Funding

The first funding opportunity for the borough is Marketing to Attract Business Grant (MTAB). The eligibility criteria for this is described as “Pennsylvania-based non-profit organization whose core mission is business attraction, retention and expansion”²⁹

The second funding opportunity for the borough is Marketing to Attract Tourists (MTAT). The eligibility criteria is described as “individual destination marketing organizations, tourism-related

²⁷ “Digital Marketing Success: Definition & Measurement.”

²⁸ “Digital Marketing Success: Definition & Measurement.”

²⁹ F“Marketing to Attract Business - PA Department of Community & Economic Development,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://dced.pa.gov/programs/marketing-attract-business/>.

businesses“ may use funds to “support event operations that attract visitors and result in significant economic impact, respective to the region.”³⁰

The third funding opportunity for the borough is the Main Street Matters Grant, which was also utilized by the Borough of Etna.³¹ The eligibility criteria is described as local government or non profits in designated Elm of Main Street seeking to utilize these funds for “planning activities, façade grant programs, business improvement grant programs, accessible housing programs, and district development grants.”³²

The fourth funding opportunity for the borough is the Implementation Grants for Municipalities by Allegheny Together. The eligibility criteria is described as “strategic planning, technical assistance, implementation support, and financial aid” for business districts through Allegheny County.³³

Future Work & Challenges

The challenges to short term recommendations include, but are not limited to the following. It may prove difficult to identify project champions that will respectfully, yet persistently advocate for initiatives. It is important to “divide the labor” among various champions to limit burnout. Additionally, competing attention between events at the municipal grounds and business district may negatively impact turnout for both events.

Another aspect that needs to be considered is the need for synchronization between FHCA and Borough Council. While both are working towards similar, if not the same goals, further collaboration will impact efficiency.

Due to cost and budget constraints, incorporating a consultant with immediate next steps may prove difficult. Although the Summer Intern may be tasked with certain activities pertaining to promotion, the full scope of our recommendations will require many individuals working toward common goals. This may mean hiring a consultant, long term liaison, or allocating this responsibility to an existing staff member. Limited collaboration (or competition) with neighboring boroughs may result in limited results due to competing attention of boroughs for customers’ spending and time.

³⁰ “Marketing to Attract Tourists - PA Department of Community & Economic Development,” accessed May 1, 2026, <https://dced.pa.gov/programs/marketing-to-attract-tourists/>.

³¹ “Home,” accessed April 7, 2026, <http://etnalive.org/>.

³² “Main Street Matters,” *PA Department of Community & Economic Development*, n.d., accessed April 7, 2026, <https://dced.pa.gov/programs/main-street-matters/>.

³³ “Home | Allegheny Together | Allegheny County,” Allegheny Together, accessed April 7, 2026, <https://www.alleghenytogether.com>.<https://www.alleghenytogether.com>

There are ongoing economic development efforts within the region, such as the Allegheny County Comprehensive Plan and Mon Valley Forward. While Forest is one municipality of many, there are possible synergizes to large integrations with these projects and surrounding communities.

Funding (e.g. grants) with uncertain future fiscal environment may cause inability to access funds. Additionally, because many communities apply for grant funding, the probability of not receiving funding despite eligibility should be taken into consideration during budgetary planning.

Challenges to long term vision include PennDOT control of Ardmore Blvd, cost of infrastructure changes, resistance of current property/business owners, lack of engagement with absentee owners, and considerable time, resources, and or limited public support for long-term recommendations.

Conclusion

The Forest Hills Business District is a corridor with numerous assets to leverage in the near term to further develop. We recommend Forest Hills focus its efforts by promoting the District, via both physical and digital means. Likewise, Forest Hills should enhance the design, or physical appearance of the District by amending the ordinance that prevents signage in the Ardmore Blvd. median. Forest Hills should also create a supportive business environment by creating business resources that are easily accessible, building trust through one-on-one engagements with business owners, and connecting existing properties with business interests and residents/commuter demands. Together, these recommendations will help market and grow the Forest Hills Business District.

Use of AI Acknowledgement:

The authors made use of generative AI tools for the purposes of formatting and editorial refinement. No substantive content (including analysis, findings, or recommendations) was generated by AI. All such content is original work of the authors.