

Northeastern University
Dukakis Center *for* Urban & Regional Policy

REPORT
JUNE 2014

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL (EDSAT)

RESULTS FOR THE TOWN OF
READING, MASSACHUSETTS
JUNE 2014



The Partners

About the Kitty and Michael Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy

The Kitty and Michael Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University conducts interdisciplinary research, in collaboration with civic leaders and scholars both within and beyond Northeastern University, to identify and implement real solutions to the critical challenges facing urban areas throughout Greater Boston, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the nation. Founded in 1999 as a “think and do” tank, the Dukakis Center’s collaborative research and problem-solving model applies powerful data analysis, a bevy of multidisciplinary research and evaluation techniques, and a policy-driven perspective to address a wide range of issues facing cities and towns. These issues include affordable housing, local economic development, workforce development, transportation, public finance, and environmental sustainability. The staff of the Dukakis Center works to catalyze broad-based efforts to solve urban problems, acting as both a convener and a trusted and committed partner to local, state, and national agencies and organizations. The Dukakis Center is housed within Northeastern University’s innovative School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs.

About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities is the nation’s oldest and largest organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership, and governance. NLC is a resource and advocate for more than 1,600 member cities and the 49 state municipal leagues, representing 19,000 cities and towns and more than 218 million Americans. Through its Center for Research and Innovation, NLC provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities, creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities, inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in tackling tough issues and opportunities for city and town leaders to connect with peers, share experiences, and learn about innovative approaches in cities.

For additional information about the Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT), please visit <http://www.northeastern.edu/dukakiscenter/econdev/edsat> or contact:

Nancy S. Lee, Ph.D.

Northeastern University
Dukakis Center for Urban & Regional Policy
310 Renaissance Park
360 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115
617-373-7868 (v)
617-373-7905 (f)
n.lee@neu.edu

Christiana McFarland

Center for Research and Innovation
National League of Cities
1301 Pennsylvania Ave, NW, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20004
202-626-3036 (v)
mcfarland@nlc.org

Report Authors: Nancy S. Lee, Ph.D., Tracy Corley, and Adam Katz

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
PROJECT OVERVIEW	1
Methodology	1
SUMMARY AND ORGANIZATION OF RELATIVE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES.....	4
Reading’s Strengths or Potential “Deal-Makers”	4
Reading’s Weaknesses or Potential “Deal-Breakers”.....	5
DETAILED ANALYSIS AND QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS.....	7
Section 1. Access to Customers/Markets.....	8
Section 2. Concentration of Businesses (Agglomeration)	13
Section 3. Cost of Land (Implicit/Explicit)	18
Section 4. Labor	21
Section 5. Municipal Process.....	24
Section 6. Quality of Life (Community).....	30
Section 7. Quality of Life (Site)	34
Section 8. Business Incentives.....	34
Section 9. Tax Rates	37
Section 10. Access to Information.....	40
SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS.....	44

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INTRODUCTION

A robust, sustainable, and adaptable local economy heavily depends on officials who can lead in the formulation and implementation of an economic development strategy. A thorough strategy is developed with an understanding of local business interests, regional resource availability, and a careful assessment of the community's ability to attract new business investment and jobs. The *Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool* (EDSAT) is an important step that public officials can take to assess their jurisdictions'¹ strengths and weaknesses with respect to expanding and sustaining economic growth. Through EDSAT, public officials and business leaders collaborate as a team, assessing each of their roles in creating a business-friendly climate.

By participating in this self-assessment, Reading will not simply better understand its economic development assets and challenges, but learn to build upon strengths and overcome weaknesses. This report contains a thorough analysis of the responses provided by Reading to the EDSAT questionnaire.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Since 2005, the Dukakis Center has sought to identify the “deal-breakers” impeding private investment in local municipalities. Based upon research on the resurgence of older industrial cities, the Dukakis Center has identified two of the crucial factors in economic development. First is a municipality's capability in responding to ever-changing market forces. Second is the ability of local government to work with regional agencies, business leaders, and academic institutions to work collaboratively to solve municipal weaknesses and market the city or town's strengths. These conclusions led to the development of EDSAT as well as the creation of an analytical framework for providing practical and actionable feedback to public officials. EDSAT is the first tool that resulted from the partnership between Northeastern University's Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy (Dukakis Center) and the National League of Cities (NLC).

Methodology

The foundation for the 200-plus questions that make up the EDSAT questionnaire was established when the Dukakis Center surveyed more than 240 members of the *National Association of Industrial and Office Properties*, now known as *NAIOP* and *CoreNet Global*. These leading professional associations represent site and location experts, whose members research new sites for businesses and other institutions. Members were asked to identify those factors that are most important to businesses and developers when evaluating locations. This process generated a set of 38 broad themes relevant to economic growth and development. Examples of themes include highway access, available workforce, and the timeliness of permit reviews. Based on rankings by these location experts, EDSAT themes are identified as “*Very Important*,” “*Important*,” or “*Less Important*” to businesses and developers.

¹ Jurisdictions are usually categorized as individual towns and/or cities. Each can be several small municipalities, a geographic region, or a county—as long as each plans and strategizes as a single entity in its economic development efforts.

EDSAT Themes

<p>Very Important ●</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highway Access Parking Traffic Infrastructure Rents Workforce Composition Labor Timeliness of Approvals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing Follow-Up Quality of Available Space Land Labor Cost Industry Sensitivity Sites Available Predictable Permits Fast Track Permits Citizen Participation in the Review Process Cultural and Recreational Amenities Crime Housing Local Schools Amenities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State Business Incentives Local Business Incentives Local Tax Rates Tax Delinquency <p>Less Important ○</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Airports Rail Water Transportation Proximities to Universities & Research Unions Workforce Training Permitting Ombudsman Jurisdiction's Website
<p>Important ◐</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Transit Physical Attractiveness Complementary/ Supplemental Business Services Critical Mass Firms Cross Marketing 		

Each question in EDSAT addresses a particular location factor and provides three ways to interpret that factor relative to the response in your own community:

1. The level of importance businesses and developers place on that location factor
2. How other jurisdictions participating in EDSAT have typically responded to that question
3. How your jurisdiction's response compares to the typical response and the importance of the location factor



FIGURE 1: IMPORTANCE AND PERFORMANCE LEVELS

For example, through the EDSAT analysis, officials may discover that the efficiency of the municipal permitting process is both *Very Important* to businesses and developers and that their jurisdiction is taking several months to review a permit application, rather than a few weeks as in the case of other jurisdictions. According to our location experts, this can be a serious weakness or potential “deal-breaker.” Knowing this, municipal officials may choose to hone in on the permitting process to understand where the inefficiencies lie and how the process could be improved and/or simplified. Even if a jurisdiction is quite efficient in reviewing permits, it may be worth the effort to further improve the process, as the timeliness of the process is of such significance to businesses and developers. Staff, review boards, or commissions could streamline their work or provide more technical support to applicants to streamline the process. This permitting example outlines the degree to which the EDSAT analysis provides an opportunity for revisiting and redeveloping a jurisdiction's economic development strategies and processes.

E. Airports			
		Report of	as compared to all jurisdictions
Question			Comparison Group
27: Do you have a local (municipal/ general aviation) airport?	yes		no

FIGURE 2: SAMPLE RESPONSE

The EDSAT analysis compares your jurisdiction’s response to that of Comparison Group Municipalities (CGM).² With regard to the aforementioned permitting process, your jurisdiction may offer significantly shorter review times than the CGM. In this case, the EDSAT analysis suggests that on this measure your jurisdiction may possess a relative advantage in what is a *Very Important* location factor. However, if permit reviews take significantly longer, then your jurisdiction may be at a disadvantage. While local and regional regulations or processes affect the review process, businesses are interested in “time-to-market” – the time it takes to get up and running in an ever-increasing competitive environment.

EDSAT assigns a color code to highlight the results of your jurisdiction compared to the median response among the CGM. Colors—green, yellow, and red—indicate a municipality’s relative strength on each specific location factor. Green indicates that your jurisdiction is quantitatively or qualitatively stronger than the CGM response; yellow indicates that your jurisdiction is average or typical; and red indicates a relative deficiency.

The interaction between the importance of a location factor and your jurisdiction’s relative strength yields powerful information. With respect to businesses and developers, a comparison yielding “red” for a *Very Important* factor represents the potential for a “deal-breaker,” while a comparison resulting in “green” for a *Very Important* factor represents the likelihood of a “deal-maker.” There are several important considerations to keep in mind when reviewing a jurisdiction’s EDSAT results:

1. If your jurisdiction is at a disadvantage in certain *Very Important* location factors, such as possessing a slow permitting process, a workforce that lacks the necessary skills, and infrastructure that lacks the capacity to support growth, it is considered to have three distinct “deal-breakers,” regardless of its geographic location.
2. Your jurisdiction should look at its EDSAT results as an overview, and not focus on a particular factor. One “deal-breaker” does not mean that your jurisdiction should abandon its economic development efforts. At the same time, your jurisdiction cannot solely rely on one or two “deal-makers.” Economic development is a dynamic process and should be managed in such a way that a community continually responds to the changing needs of local and prospective businesses.
3. The interpretation of comparisons and color assignments depends on your jurisdiction’s context in answering the question and its objectives for economic development. For example, if there are significantly more square feet of vacant commercial space than the CGM median, EDSAT assigns “red” because large amounts of space may indicate outdated facilities in a stagnant local economy. However, the empty space may actually be an asset if your jurisdiction is focusing on attracting businesses that would benefit from large spaces, such as a creative mixed-use complex. Thus, your jurisdiction’s context is important in understanding EDSAT results.

² The term Comparison Group Municipalities (CGM) is used in this report to represent jurisdictions that have completed the EDSAT.

For some questions, the red and green color assignments serve to highlight the response for further consideration within the context of your jurisdiction’s objectives and circumstances. Several questions have no comparison at all. They tend to be lists of potential incentives, resources, or regulations associated with the municipality and will be discussed in corresponding sections of the report.

SUMMARY AND ORGANIZATION OF RELATIVE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

This section highlights Reading’s primary strengths and weaknesses in the realm of economic development. EDSAT does not provide an overall grade for a jurisdiction, but rather assesses a jurisdiction’s unique set of strengths, weaknesses, and economic development objectives.

The Dukakis Center staff creates a list of significant or notable responses for each of the *Very Important*, *Important*, and *Less Important* location factors, emphasizing strengths and “deal-makers,” which are not organized in any particular order of importance. Dukakis Center staff suggests that your municipality review these lists and use them to highlight, enhance, and market your city or town’s strengths.

Tasks on the weakness and “deal-breaker” lists, however, are prioritized to emphasize the importance of their mitigation. The Dukakis Center staff arranges the tasks according to feasibility, with consideration of the latitude and abilities of local, county, or regional levels of government. For example, in a jurisdiction with limited highway access, building a new highway interchange or connector would likely be cost-prohibitive, time-consuming, and an inefficient use of local resources. However, other tasks are more feasible with modest investments in time and resources. For example, streamlining the permitting process and making related development information readily accessible to both location experts and businesses can be accomplished without significant capital investments. Although location experts rank both highway access and the timeliness of permitting as *Very Important* location factors, in the prioritized list of potential “deal-breakers,” the permitting process is given a higher priority due to its feasibility in implementation.

Reading’s Strengths or Potential “Deal-Makers”

The following lists of Reading’s strengths are its powerful economic development assets. The town should build upon these assets and promote them to prospective businesses and developers. Reading should first consider those in the *Very Important* group, then the *Important*, and finally the *Less Important* group. Please note that strengths are **not listed in any particular order** within the three lists.

Strengths among Very Important Location Factors

- **Highway Access:** Reading has excellent highway access with 75 percent or more of all available sites within two miles of a limited access major highway.
- **Traffic:** Traffic in Reading is comparable to the Comparison Group Municipalities (CGM), but unlike the CGM, the town has regular access to a traffic engineer or transportation planner.
- **Infrastructure:** Not only does Reading have sufficient capacity for growth and reliable service for all of its utilities, but the cost for electricity is roughly half the cost of CGM respondents.
- **Rents:** Reading’s mix of office space includes more Class A and Class B space than the CGM, indicating better overall quality office space.
- **Workforce Composition:** Reading has a much higher percentage of managerial and professional workers than the CGM.
- **Labor (available):** More than half of Reading’s available labor has earned at least a bachelor’s degree.

Strengths among Important Location Factors

- **Public Transit:** Reading has a transit-oriented development strategy to attract new firms within a quarter mile of public bus or rail rapid transit.
- **Physical Attractiveness:** Reading takes more vigorous measures to maintain the physical attractiveness than the CGM, has a higher percentage of parks, and involves the arts community in the design of open space.
- **Quality of Office Space:** Reading has a lower percentage of contaminated/brownfield sites than the CGM and more experience with redevelopment of such sites.
- **Sites Available:** Reading has a readily-accessible, up-to-date list of sites that are available for development.
- **Predictable Permits:** Reading provides a development handbook to prospective developers.
- **Citizen Participation in the Review Process:** In Reading, organized neighborhood groups slow the permitting process less than CGMs. In addition, elected officials expedite development by facilitating community group dialogues and have stepped in to rescue development proposals that were endangered by community opposition in the past 5 years.
- **Cultural and Recreational Amenities:** Unlike the CGM, Reading features a professional repertory theater company and a symphony orchestra.
- **Crime:** Crime is lower for all categories in Reading than the CGM.
- **Housing:** The home ownership rate in Reading is higher than the CGM.
- **Local Schools:** Students in Reading have a higher percentage of English and Mathematics proficiency and a higher percentage of high school graduates go on to attend a four-year college. The town also uses assessment/proficiency tests as a measure of performance for teacher assessments and evaluation.
- **Local Tax Rates.** Reading uses a local meals tax to pay for local services and has a flat tax rate that is four percent lower than the CGM for commercial and industrial property.

Strengths among Less Important Location Factors

- **Airport:** Reading features a local airport and is closer to its nearest regional and international airports than the CGM.
- **Rail:** Reading has a commuter rail stop within its jurisdiction.
- **Proximity to Universities and Research:** Four major four-year institutions of higher education are located within 10 miles of Reading.
- **Permitting Ombudsman:** Reading's town manager plays a significant role in facilitating the permitting process, and the town features local licenses for specific businesses.
- **Website:** Reading's website includes more information related to economic development and municipal process than the CGM.

Reading's Weaknesses or Potential "Deal-Breakers"

Despite sizable advantages, Reading has a number of apparent weaknesses which can pose a challenge to successful development. The factors in the *Very Important* group are the ones that the town should consider addressing first because they are the most critical potential "deal-breakers." Again, the town should next consider those in the *Important* group, and finally the *Less Important* group.

Unlike the strengths or deal-makers, the list of weaknesses is **arranged in order of priority**. It is suggested that Reading review the prioritized lists and the detailed narrative about all location factors, while keeping in mind its

economic development objectives and the resources available for addressing “deal-breakers” and other weaknesses. This report is an opportunity for an informed dialogue among colleagues and for establishing a roadmap to turn “deal-breakers” into “deal-makers.”

Weaknesses among Very Important Location Factors

- **Timeliness of Approvals:** Site plan reviews, zoning variances, and the appeals process take an average of four weeks longer in Reading than in the CGM.
- **Rents:** Rents in Reading for all asset types and classes other than the cost for Class A office space is higher than the CGM.
- **Parking:** A smaller proportion of Reading’s available sites for retail and office sites have long-term on-site parking than do sites in the CGM.

Weaknesses among Important Location Factors

- **Critical Mass Firms:** Reading lacks an up-to-date economic development plan or strategy, has targeted no specific industry sectors, and does not have an industrial attraction policy.
- **Cross Marketing:** Reading does not have a cross-market strategy and, unlike the CGM, does not at present engage regional planning and development organizations to participate in marketing the town.
- **Quality of Available Space:** Reading has a much smaller percentage of vacant/underutilized shopping centers and open land (greenfield) sites than the CGM, which limits opportunities for large developments.
- **Land (space):** Reading has very little land available for development, including a much lower percentage of parcels over 5 acres than can be industrial or commercial development.
- **Sites Available:** The town of Reading does not own sites that it markets for development.
- **Predictable Permits:** Reading does not have a checklist of permitting requirements for prospective developers.
- **State Business Incentives.** Though the state of Massachusetts offers a variety of special tax incentives, the town of Reading does little to help firms take advantage of them.
- **Local Business Incentives:** Reading does not use Tax Increment Financing or other tax breaks. It does not participate in or offer a brownfield revolving loan fund.
- **Housing:** Reading’s high cost of housing and low vacancy rates indicate housing challenges for the workers of prospective firms.
- **Amenities.** Reading has a lower proportion of fast food restaurants, fine dining, day care facilities, and retail shops than the CGM.

Weaknesses among Less Important Location Factors

- **Workforce Training:** Reading does not support public-private partnerships or adult education programs to provide workforce training.
- **Website:** Reading does not have a designated webmaster or staff person for maintaining its website.
- **Proximities to Universities and Research:** The town does not have a vocational/technical school within its jurisdiction like the CGM.
- **Rail:** Reading does not have freight rail service available whereas most of the CGM does.

The weaknesses that surfaced in the EDSAT analysis provide guidelines to where Reading could exert more effort to improve its ability to attract business and build its tax base.

DETAILED ANALYSIS AND QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The following is a section-by-section analysis of the EDSAT results comparing Reading’s self-reported responses to both the overall importance of each location factor and the median response among the CGM. Within each section are several related themes, where the symbols ●, ◐, and ○ indicate the relative importance of the theme to developers and businesses, as ranked by NAIOP and CoreNet Global location experts. The shaded circle (●) denotes a *Very Important* factor, the half-shaded circle (◐) denotes an *Important* factor, and the unshaded circle (○) denotes a *Less Important* factor.

Importance To Market			Your Performance Relative To Peers		
● Very Important	◐ Important	○ Less Important	■ Strong	■ Average	■ No Comparison
			■ Weak		

This section of the report presents a tabular printout from the EDSAT. The results are displayed in four primary groupings of information:

- **Group 1** identifies location themes, such as Highway Access, and questions about specific location factors related to that theme. At the top of each table is a circle that represents the relative importance of a theme to location experts and businesses. A filled circle (●) indicates “Very Important,” a half-filled circle (◐) indicates “Important,” and an unfilled circle (○) indicates “Less Important.”
- **Group 2** shows Reading’s responses to the EDSAT questions.
- **Group 3** is the median or majority (for yes/no questions) response among the municipalities that have completed the EDSAT questionnaire (the comparison group or CGM).
- **Group 4** is a series of green, yellow, or red blocks indicating how Reading compares to the CGM. There is a built-in function in EDSAT that allows a municipality to compare itself against a subset of the CGM by other criteria such as population, median income, or size of operating budget. For purposes of this analysis, however, Reading is compared with all the CGM. For this report, Your Performance Relative to Peers has been indicated by a letter and a color:
 - **G** Strong
 - **Y** Average
 - **R** Weak

Section 1: Access to Customers/Markets

● A. Highway Access					
Report of Ludlow as compared to all jurisdictions					
Question					Comparison Group
1: What percentage of available sites for retail trade, including your central business district, are within 2 miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway?	75%+	■	75%+		75%+
2: What percentage of available sites for manufacturing are within 2 miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway?	75%+	■	75%+		75%+
3: What percentage of available sites for general office space are within 2 miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway?	75%+	■	75%+		75%+
4: Does your jurisdiction impose weight restrictions on streets or access roads?	yes	■	yes		yes

Legend:

Importance To Market			Your Performance Relative To Peers		
● Very Important	◐ Important	○ Less Important	■ Strong	■ Average	■ Weak

Annotations: Group 1 points to the importance symbol (●). Group 2 points to the response (75%+). Group 3 points to the comparison group (75%+). Group 4 points to the performance block (■).

Section 1. Access to Customers/Markets

In order to minimize transportation costs and time-to-market, businesses want adequate access to uncongested transportation corridors for their shipping needs, customers, and employees. Highway access, congestion, and parking are *Very Important* factors in location decisions. Public transportation is *Important*, while proximity to airports, rail, and water transport are *Less Important*. The overall physical attractiveness of public spaces, enforcement of codes, and condition of housing and commercial real estate are *Important*, as they are indications of general economic health and quality of life in a community.

A. Highway Access ●

Reading features excellent highway access, a factor that is very important to location specialists. Similar to the CGM, at least 75 percent of Reading’s available sites for retail trade, manufacturing, and general office space are within two miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway. Reading can attribute this high level of accessibility to its proximity to I-93 along its western border and I-95 along its southeastern border. Reading does not impose weight restrictions on roads, which reduces transport costs for shipping-reliant industries.

Question	Reading		CGM
1: What percentage of available sites for retail trade, including your central business district, is within 2 miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway?	75% or greater	Y	75% or greater
2: What percentage of available sites for manufacturing is within 2 miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway?	75% or greater	Y	75% or greater
3: What percentage of available sites for general office space is within 2 miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway?	75% or greater	Y	75% or greater
4: Does your jurisdiction impose weight restrictions on streets or access roads?	no	Y	no

B. Public Transit ◐

Reading is on par with or at an advantage with its public transit system. As an MBTA community, Reading is served by the Haverhill commuter line and two bus routes: Rout 136 along highway 129, and Route 137 along Washington and Main Streets. Both routes converge on Woburn Street and terminate at Reading Station. Fifty to 74 percent of available sites for retail and general office space are within 1/4 mile of public bus or rapid rail transit. For available manufacturing sites, that amount increases to greater than 75 percent.

The town’s transit-oriented development strategy puts it at an advantage by catalyzing smart growth around identified commercial and industrial areas. Reading does not offer shuttle services to a public commuting station, which is on par with the CGM, but makes Reading Station inaccessible to public transit by residents within the western and northern parts of town. The bus routes primarily serve the southeast sector of the community. The available bus routes do offer limited night and weekend service. The town should consider a town shuttle van or bus services to connect more residents with public transit opportunities.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
5: What percentage of available sites for retail trade is within 1/4 mile of public bus or rail rapid transit?	50-74%	Y	between 50-74% and 75% or greater
6: What percentage of available sites for manufacturing is within 1/4 mile of public bus or rail rapid transit?	75% or greater	G	50-74%
7: What percentage of available sites for general office space is within 1/4 mile of public bus or rail rapid transit?	50-74%	Y	50-74%
8: Is there a transit-oriented development strategy in your plans for attracting new firms?	yes	G	no
9: Is there a commuter rail or bus stop within 5 miles of your jurisdiction's boundaries?	yes	Y	yes
10: Do you offer any shuttle services to other public commuting stations?	no	Y	no
11: Is public transit service available on nights and weekends?	yes	Y	yes

C. Parking ●

Parking is a problem for residents of Reading, and the questionnaire results only show part of the problem. Fifty to 74 percent of available retail sites and just 26 to 49 percent of available general office space sites feature on-site parking. These figures are well below the CGM's 75 percent or greater. The percentage of available sites for manufacturing is on par with the CGM at 75 percent or greater, but Sections 3.C and 3.D show that few sites are available, which also explains why the town does not offer parking facilities near development sites.

Residents report that though parking is free and plentiful, parking is limited to two hours. This restriction does encourage turnover of spaces for those who wish to shop in retail areas. However, those who work in these retail establishments (retail is the largest industry sector in the town) and the surrounding businesses, more long-term parking is needed to attract more employers. The town could consider using state or federal infrastructure grants to develop parking facilities for long-term parking needs.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
12: What percentage of available sites for retail trade has on-site parking?	50-74%	R	75% or greater
13: What percentage of available sites for manufacturing has on-site parking?	75% or greater	Y	75% or greater

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
14: What percentage of available sites for general office space has on-site parking?	26-49%	R	75% or greater
15: Does your jurisdiction offer parking facilities near development sites?	no	Y	no
16: Have you used state or federal infrastructure grants to improve parking in your jurisdiction?	no	Y	no
17: How much is typically charged for parking in your central business district? \$ Hourly	0	Y	0
18: How much is typically charged for parking in your central business district? \$ Daily	0	Y	0
19: How much is typically charged for parking in your central business district? \$ Monthly	0	Y	0

D. Traffic ●

Reading matches or outperforms the CGM in all traffic considerations. Residents rate the town's traffic as moderately congested, and the average speed of commuter rush hour traffic matches the CGM at 26–35 mph. Reading has regular access to a traffic engineer and a transportation planner, routinely uses the services of a transportation consultant, and has access to traffic count data. Traffic mitigation is required by firms and developers, and large-scale developments must conduct a traffic impact analysis.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
20: Do you have regular access to a traffic engineer or transportation planner, such as one who is on staff or with a regional organization to which your jurisdiction is a member?	yes	G	no
21: Do you routinely use the services of a transportation consultant?	yes	Y	yes
22: Do you have access to traffic count data for the major roadways in your jurisdiction?	yes	Y	yes
23: Do you require firms or developers to provide traffic mitigation beyond the streets adjacent to the site? (e.g. installing traffic signals, metering flow)	yes	Y	yes
24: How would you rate traffic into and out of your jurisdiction during a typical weekday rush hour?	Moderately congested	Y	Moderately congested

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
25: What is the average speed of automobile commuter traffic during a typical weekday rush hour?	26–35 mph	Y	26–35 mph
26: Do you require a traffic impact analysis for large-scale development or redevelopment projects?	yes	Y	yes

E. Airport **O**

Reading is conveniently located less than 20 miles from Boston’s Logan International Airport, which also serves as its closest regional airport. This proximity to Logan and exceptional highway access make a local airport unnecessary for attracting most industry sectors. Logan is accessible by public transit and takes anywhere from 21 to 60 minutes by car, depending on the time of day.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
27: Do you have a local (municipal/ general aviation) airport?	no	Y	no
28: The closest regional airport is how many miles away?	11-20 miles	Y	11-20 miles
29: The closest major/international airport is how many miles away?	11-20 miles	G	20-30 miles
30: Is the major/international airport accessible by public transportation?	yes	Y	yes
31: How long does it take to drive to the major/international airport from your downtown?	21 minutes to 60 minutes	Y	21 minutes to 60 minutes

F. Rail **O**

Reading has an advantage in that it has a commuter rail stop at Reading Station; however it lacks an intercity or interstate rail system like Amtrak. Unlike other jurisdictions, the town does not have freight rail service available which puts it at a disadvantage for industries that require rail freight service to transport bulky, heavy goods. Reading’s highway access, however, is preferable for transporting perishable or fragile goods by truck.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
32: Do you have rail freight service available?	no	R	yes
33: Do you have intercity passenger rail service? Check all that apply.			

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
- Commuter	yes	G	no
- Intercity/Interstate(Amtrak)	no	Y	no
- no	no	R	yes

G. Physical Attractiveness

Reading is an attractive, well-maintained New England community. The town is very vigorous in enforcing codes and regulations on abandoned properties, abandoned vehicles, and trash/rubbish disposal. In addition, the town very vigorously maintains streets, sidewalks, parks, and other features near available development sites. Though the town has a process for reporting code violations, a quick-feedback interface for reporting public works issues (like a citizen connect application or a prominent email submittal button or phone number on the website home page) has not yet been implemented. Like other jurisdictions, the town also does not have a system for measuring the timeliness and quality of responses to reported violations. The community can receive alerts using the Reading Community Alerts system, but no system exists for reporting issues to the public works department.

Among other factors on which the town outperforms the CGM, the town involves the arts community in the design of open space, and a large percentage of land is reserved for parks due to the large conservation areas in the north part of town. These conservation lands include the town forest along the Ipswich River, swamplands along the Aberjona River, and other wetland areas along various waterways.

Reading is at a disadvantage to other communities in that five percent or less of commercial space is vacant. Though this might at first glance seem advantageous, a lower percentage of developable sites makes other jurisdictions more attractive to location experts. Like other communities, the percentages of housing stock considered dilapidated, commercial and industrial buildings boarded up or closed down, and vacant industrial space is five percent or less.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
34: To what extent do you enforce codes and regulations on abandoned properties / abandoned vehicles / trash and rubbish disposal within your jurisdiction?	Very vigorously	G	Moderately
35: To what extent does your jurisdiction maintain streets, sidewalks, parks, etc., near available development sites?	Very vigorously	G	Moderately
36: Is there a hotline available for reporting code violations and maintenance needs within your jurisdiction?	no	Y	no
37: Is there a system for monitoring the timeliness and quality of responses to reported violations within your jurisdiction?	no	Y	no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
38: Do you involve the arts community in the design of open space (street furniture, murals, etc.)?	yes	G	no
39: What percentage of the acreage within your jurisdiction is reserved for parks?	16-20%	G	6-10%
40: What percentage of your housing stock is considered dilapidated?	0-5%	Y	0-5%
41: What percentage of your commercial buildings are boarded up or closed down and would need renovations to reopen?	0-5%	Y	0-5%
42: What percentage of commercial space is presently vacant (not currently occupied)?	0-5%	R	6-10%
43: What percentage of your industrial buildings are boarded up or closed down and would need renovations to reopen?	0-5%	Y	0-5%
44: What percentage of industrial space is presently vacant (not currently occupied)?	0-5%	Y	0-5%

H. Water Transportation **O**

Reading does not have water-based transportation facilities.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
45: Do you have water based transportation facilities within your jurisdiction? Check all that apply.		Y	

Section 2. Concentration of Businesses (Agglomeration)

Agglomeration refers to the number of complementary and supplemental services and related firms—including academic institutions—that are available within a jurisdiction to support new or existing companies. A concentration of similar or supporting companies creates a critical mass of businesses within an industry, making it easier for that industry to thrive in the local community, regionally, or on the state level. The scale of agglomeration within a jurisdiction can be enhanced by the intensity of its efforts to attract companies, its coordination of marketing plans with regional or state efforts, cross marketing among stakeholder organizations, and follow-up with existing and potential businesses.

A. Complementary/Supplemental Business Services **◀**

Reading is strong in its offerings of complementary and supplemental business services. The Reading-North Reading Chamber of Commerce is moderately involved, which is similar to local chamber activity across the CGM. The town also features an active volunteer economic development committee.

Reading aligns with the CGM in that business services (venture capital, specialized recruiting, business consulting, etc.) within the town are moderately capable of working with emerging technical and scientific firms. Moreover, with CPA, business advisory and specialized law and financial firms conveniently located within the city’s boundaries, businesses are able to conduct their operations without leaving Reading. The town does not have an incubator or cooperative space for start-up businesses, which is on par with the CGM.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
1: Is your local chamber of commerce or business association actively involved in the economic development activities of your jurisdiction?	Moderately	Y	Moderately
2: Does your jurisdiction have an active volunteer economic development committee or nonprofit center for economic development?	yes	Y	yes
3: Is there an incubator or other form of cooperative and supportive space for start-up businesses in your jurisdiction?	no	Y	no
4: Are there CPA, business advisory and financial services firms in your jurisdiction?	yes	Y	yes
5: Are there law firms in your jurisdiction specializing in commercial law, intellectual property rights, and patents?	yes	Y	yes
6: Are there branches of major commercial banks in your jurisdiction?	yes	Y	yes
7: To what extent are the business services (e.g. venture capital, business planning, specialized recruiting, etc.) in your jurisdiction capable of working with emerging technical and scientific firms?	Moderately capable	Y	Moderately capable

B. Critical Mass Firms

Reading does not have an up-to-date development strategy, overall economic development plan (OEDP), or an economic development plan within its master plan. The current plan was written in 2006, prior to the Great Recession. An updated plan would reflect the change in the business climate since the 2008 to 2009 recession. A fresh plan can also help Reading to leverage applicable state and federal grants, benefit from state and regional business recruiting efforts, and increase collaboration with local and regional economic development stakeholders. As part of the North Suburban Planning Council (NSPC), state and regional resources are available to help you target appropriate industry and implement an industrial attraction policy.

Reading has not identified any specific industry types or sectors as part of its economic development strategy. The town successfully attracted a hospital within the past decade. The town would benefit from targeting industry sectors that align with the state’s development strategy. Such planning can direct and shape the town’s growth so that it reflects the character and goals of Reading. This activity would involve taking a business inventory, looking for industry clusters already within the town, and using regional, county, and state development specialists could reveal opportunities for manageable growth. New commercial and light industrial expansion would create jobs, increase tax revenue, and diversify Reading’s economy.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
8: Does your jurisdiction have an up-to-date development strategy, overall economic development plan (OEDP), or an economic development plan within your community master plan?	no	R	yes
9: Is your jurisdiction part of a county or regional OEDP or Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs)?	yes	Y	yes
10: Does your state have a development strategy or economic development plan?	yes	Y	yes
11: If yes, are there firms within specific industry types or sectors that are targeted in your jurisdiction's, your county's or your state's development strategy?	no	R	yes
12: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your municipality's development strategy? (Your Municipality)	No Targets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your municipality's development strategy? Other, please specify (Your Municipality)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your region/county's development strategy? (Regional/County)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your region/county's development strategy? Other, please specify (Regional/County)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your state's development strategy? (State)	Alternative Energy; Travel and Tourism; Traditional Manufacturing; Other Life Sciences, including Biotech; Healthcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your state's development strategy? (State)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18: Which of the following jurisdictions have development specialists to assist in interpreting the needs of these clusters? (Choose all that apply)	State; Regional/County	Y	State; Regional/County
19: How aggressive is your industrial attraction policy?	Don't have one	R	Moderate

C. Cross Marketing ◀

Reading engages local and regional business, planning, and development organizations to participate in marketing the town. The town does not actively enlist resident firms to participate in such efforts, which matches the CGM. The local chamber hosts events and participates in multi-chamber activities. Existing firms are vested in the community and have an awareness of local market needs, business climate, and local and regional business resources. This local knowledge can be an extremely valuable resource for advising new and prospective firms on site locations and the marketplace, share methods with town officials to recruit and grow firms, and help Reading enhance marketing efforts.

Reading currently does not engage NSPC or any regional planning and development organizations to participate in marketing the town. However, it does work with state agencies. The NSPC has a wider reach of potential investors and resources than Reading. The NSPC also has a strong commitment and local knowledge of the communities in the Boston metro area, so it would be advantageous to collaborate with them to bolster the town’s marketing efforts and better compete with the CGM.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
20: Do you actively enlist the services of firms already resident in your jurisdiction to assist in attracting new firms?	no	Y	no
21: Do you engage local and regional business organizations to participate in marketing your jurisdiction?	yes	Y	yes
22: Do you engage regional planning and development organizations to participate in marketing your jurisdiction?	no	R	yes
23: Do you engage state agencies and organizations to participate in marketing your jurisdiction?	yes	Y	yes

D. Marketing Follow-up ◀

Mirroring the CGM, Reading does not conduct any marketing follow-up with firms or inquire about their satisfaction levels. Marketing follow-up, just like cross-marketing (Section 2.C), can yield valuable first-hand information. Through formal de-briefings, such as meetings and focus groups, your town can learn the reasons firms decided to locate in or outside Reading. Town administrators can not only use this new knowledge to shape marketing and branding campaigns, but for the improvement of town operations, customer relations, and recruitment strategies. Thoughtfully considering and acting on input from these firms can help make the town more business-friendly, foster businesses growth, and become more attractive to prospective firms. This puts Reading in control of the cognitive maps associated with doing business there.

Additionally, Reading may want to establish a formal procedure to intervene when negative news surfaces about firm dissatisfaction. This will be increasingly important as the town’s commercial and industrial base grows. Addressing this news early may alleviate the source of dissatisfaction, minimize damaging public relations, and open lines of communications—all factors that both enhance the business-friendliness of a municipality and build relationships with firms.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
24: Is there a formal de-briefing process with firms that chose to locate in your jurisdiction about what made the difference?	no	Y	no
25: Is there a formal de-briefing process with firms that chose <u>not</u> to locate in your jurisdiction about what made the difference?	no	Y	no
26: Do you have a formal procedure for contacting existing local firms about their satisfaction with your jurisdiction?	no	Y	no
27: Do you have a formal procedure for intervening when early news surfaces about firm dissatisfaction with your jurisdiction?	no	Y	no

E. Proximity to Universities and Research O

Reading has considerably more proximate higher education institutions than the CGM. The town has four major public or private four-year colleges/universities within ten miles. Although the town itself lacks a vocational/technical school within its borders, the town works closely with Northeast Metro Tech vocational school, which is less than 5 miles away in neighboring Wakefield.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
28: How many major public or private four-year college or universities are located within your jurisdiction?	0	Y	0
29: How many major public or private four-year college or universities are located within 10 miles of your jurisdiction?	4	G	2
30: How many community colleges are located within your jurisdiction?	0	Y	0
31: How many vocational/technical schools are located within your jurisdiction?	0	R	1

Section 3. Cost of Land (Implicit/Explicit)

The cost of land to a firm includes two *Very Important* factors: Infrastructure and Rent. Updating civil, utility, and telecommunications infrastructure represents significant expenses for a firm to incur. Therefore, if a municipality does not already have adequate capacity in place, a potential firm could decide to locate in another municipality with adequate capacity. Rents are *Very Important* as they contribute heavily to operating expenses. Location experts consider the quality of available space and amount of available land for development *Important* factors.

A. Infrastructure ●

Reading has excellent infrastructure. All of the core infrastructure needs of location specialists—water supply, public sewer, wastewater treatment, natural gas, electric power, and all forms of data/communications—currently have sufficient capacity for growth and deliver reliable service. This strength allows all types of firms and industries to situate in Reading with neither the hindrance of limited infrastructure capacities nor the necessity to invest in costly, new infrastructure.

In addition, Reading Municipal Light’s utility rates are much lower than the CGM in all three rate categories (residential, commercial, and industrial). Commercial and industrial rates per kilowatt hour (6.766 cents) are less than the residential rate (8.98 cents). Lower utility rates gives Reading a competitive advantage that makes opening and operating a business cost-effective for ones that rely heavily on electricity to sustain operations.

Question	Reading		CGM
1: Are there significant limitations to any of your existing infrastructure systems? - Water Supply	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service	Y	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
2: Public Sewer	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service	Y	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
3: Wastewater Treatment	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service	Y	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
4: Natural Gas	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service	Y	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
5: Electric Power	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service	Y	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
6: Data/Telecommunications - Land Lines	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service	Y	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
7: Data/Telecommunications - Cellular	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service	Y	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
8: Data/Telecommunications - Fiber optic / Cable / DSL	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service	Y	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
9: What is the average cost in cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for residential, commercial, and industrial end users in	8.98	G	16.23

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
your municipality? Residential			
10: What is the average cost in cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for residential, commercial, and industrial end users in your municipality? Commercial	6.766	G	15.20
11: What is the average cost in cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for residential, commercial, and industrial end users in your municipality? Industrial	6.766	G	13.03

B. Rents ●

Nearly all industrial and commercial rents in Reading are significantly higher than in the CGM, representing a potential “deal-breaker.” Retail space is \$8 to \$9 more per square foot in the central business district and highway business district, respectively. The town’s limited manufacturing space is 75 cents more per square foot. Office space in the central business district runs from \$2.25 more per square foot for Class C office space to \$7 more per square foot for Class A office space (Class B space is \$4 higher). In the highway business district, Class A office space matches the CGM, but Class B space is \$7.25 more per square foot, and Class C space is \$4 more.

The town however features a better mix of office space classes than the CGM. Not only does Reading have 5 percent more Class A space than the average CGM respondent: it also has 20 percent more Class B space, and only 20 percent is Class C. The higher percentage of better-quality space in part compensates for the higher rents. However, the costs differences between the CGM and Reading could be driven the limited availability of overall office, retail, and manufacturing space in the town. To attract a stronger business tax base, Reading is encouraged to increase the supply of commercial and industrial facilities through development incentives.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
12: What is the current average square foot cost for existing retail space in your central business district (Triple Net/Lease)?	20	R	12
13: What is the current average square foot cost for existing retail space in your highway business district (Triple Net/Lease)?	20	R	11
14: What is the current average square foot cost for existing manufacturing space (Triple Net/Lease)?	6.75	R	6
15: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your central business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS A	21	R	between 13 and 15
16: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your central business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS B	16	R	12
17: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your central business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS C	11	R	between 8.50 and 9

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
18: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your highway business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS A	21	Y	21
19: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your highway business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS B	16	R	between 8.5 and 9
20: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your highway business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS C	11	R	7.00
21: Of all the available office space in your jurisdiction, what percentage is: CLASS A	20	G	15
22: Of all the available office space in your jurisdiction, what percentage is: CLASS B	60	G	40
23: Of all the available office space in your jurisdiction, what percentage is: CLASS C	20	G	40

C. Quality of Available Space

Compared to the CGM, Reading has a significantly smaller proportion of contaminated or brownfield sites (1–10 percent instead of 21–35 percent). The town has moderate experience redeveloping contaminated or brownfield sites. Reading’s disadvantage lies in the small percentage of vacant or underutilized shopping centers and no unused open land or greenfield sites. Such a small supply of developable land will make it difficult to attract large developments or employers. The town might consider rezoning existing parcels in areas where increased density would fit with the town’s character and needs. The town might also consider attracting satellite offices or industries with a high percentage of telecommuters/mobile workforces to encourage office and commercial development on smaller parcels.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
24: Approximately what percentage of available sites in your jurisdiction would be considered contaminated or brownfield sites?	1-10%	G	21-35%
25: What experience does your jurisdiction have with the redevelopment of contaminated or brownfield sites?	Moderate	G	Limited
26: Approximately what percentage of available sites in your jurisdiction would be considered vacant or severely underutilized shopping centers?	1-10%	R	11-20%
27: Approximately what percentage of available sites in your jurisdiction would be considered unused open land or greenfield sites?	0%	R	21-35%

D. Land (space) ¶

Reading aligns with the CGM in the amount of vacant developable land is zoned for commercial/industrial uses. It also aligns with the amounts of vacant usable industrial, warehouse, and office space. However, in the EDSAT workshop, we discussed that the amount of vacant space lies on the lower end of the range, close to zero. This also holds true for the proportion of parcels available for large scale industrial or commercial developments of 5 acres or more. As stated in Section 3.D, this limited amount of space, given the current zoning and land use, is a major constraint. In order to develop a strategy that promotes a strong commercial and industrial tax base, the town might consider ways to increase the supply of space for expansion and growth. This might include designating density improvement zones and encouraging mixed use developments to deliver retail, office, and light industrial space within walking distance to transportation hubs or denser residential areas. This will minimize the impact of traffic and congestion on the city’s streets and reduce the need for increased parking in the current downtown zone.

Question	Reading		CGM
28: Approximately how much vacant developable land in your jurisdiction is currently zoned for commercial/industrial uses?	0 acres	Y	0 acres
29: Approximately how much vacant useable industrial or warehouse space exists in commercial/industrial buildings in your jurisdiction?	1-250,000 sq. feet	Y	1-250,000 sq. feet
30: Approximately how much vacant useable office space exists in commercial/industrial buildings in your jurisdiction?	1-250,000 sq. feet	Y	1-250,000 sq. feet
31: What proportions of the parcels available for industrial development or large scale commercial development are of 5 acres or more?	0-10%	R	11-20%

Section 4. Labor

The effect of labor factors on location decisions runs somewhat contrary to popular belief. An available labor force that is adequately trained (Workforce Composition) is a *Very Important* factor, while the cost of labor is *Important* and the presence of strong unions is *Less Important*. Conventional wisdom often holds that municipalities with higher labor costs and stronger unions negatively impact a firm’s location decision. However, if the workforce is adequately skilled, these factors are not as strong “deal-breakers” as the general belief holds.

Employers are willing to pay for the necessary skills. Workforce training resources is *Less Important* relative to other location factors. However, having a technically trained workforce whose skills align with industries a municipality wants to attract is a valuable selling point.

A. Labor Costs ¶

All of Reading’s labor costs, including average hourly wages for both semi-skilled and mid-level clerical workers, average public high school teachers’ salaries, and lack of a living wage, are on par with the CGM.

Question	Reading		CGM
1: What is the prevailing average hourly wage rate for semi-skilled, blue-collar manufacturing workers?	\$17.26 - \$22.25	Y	\$17.26 - \$22.25

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
2: What is the prevailing average hourly wage rate for mid-level clerical workers?	\$17.26 - \$22.25	Y	\$17.26 - \$22.25
3: What is the prevailing average annual salary for public high school teachers?	\$60,001- \$70,000	Y	\$60,001- \$70,000
4: Is there a local minimum or living wage statute?	no	Y	no

B. Workforce Composition ●

Reading’s higher percentage of managers and professionals represents an advantage over the CGM and signifies a highly educated workforce. The proportion of managerial and professional workers makes up for the lower percentage of technically skilled workers. However, Reading could increase its advantage over other municipalities by promoting programs that improve the skills of the town’s unskilled and semi-skilled workers.

Reading may want to consider this advantage, as well as available labor (Section 4D) when choosing industries to target. Certain industries require highly educated professionals, such as the scientific and technical sectors, which also happen to be state targets (Section 2B). Reading is also on par with the CGM in that 10 percent or less of its workers are English language learners.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
5: What percentage of your workforce is Unskilled?	1-25%	Y	1-25%
6: What percentage of your workforce is Semi-skilled	1-25%	Y	1-25%
7: What percentage of your workforce is Technically skilled	1-25%	R	26-49%
8: What percentage of your workforce is Managerial	26-49%	G	1-25%
9: What percentage of your workforce is Professional	26-49%	G	1-25%
10: What percentage of your workforce are current English language learners?	0-10%	Y	0-10%

C. Unions ○

Reading has unfortunately experienced a work stoppage in the past three years due to a strike at Verizon. Fortunately, union presence and impact is a low priority for location specialists. Further, the town is on par with the CGM in that union organizing drives and labor unions do not have a significant presence in the town.

Question	Reading		CGM
11: Have any employers in your jurisdiction had a major strike or work stoppage within the last three years?	yes	R	no
12: Has there been a major union organizing drive among public or private workers in the last 3 years?	no	Y	no
13: Do labor unions have a significant presence in the labor market of your jurisdiction?	Not at all	G	Somewhat

D. Labor (Available) ●

According to the 2012 ACS estimates, 97.3 percent of Reading residents age 25 or older have a high school diploma, and 55.6 percent have a bachelor's degree. With high proportions of professionals and managers in the workforce (Section 4A) and residents age 25 and older with at least a bachelor's degree, the town is especially attractive to firms in the scientific and technical sectors.

Question	Reading		CGM
14: What percentage of residents age 25 or older has earned at least a high school diploma?	85% or greater	Y	85% or greater
15: What percentage of residents age 25 or older has earned at least a bachelor's degree?	51% or greater	G	21-35%

E. Workforce Training ○

The town of Reading has a few resources for workforce training. The town works with area high schools, Northeast Metro Tech vocational school, and human service nonprofit training centers like EMARC to address the skill development needs of firms. To the town's disadvantage, it does not support public-private partnerships to provide specific workforce training, nor is there a workforce-focused adult education program that is readily available to town residents. This low level of workforce training involvement is no doubt connected to the small number of industries currently sited in Reading.

Question	Reading		CGM
16: Which of the following workforce training resources do you interact with to respond to skill development needs of firms?			
- Regional employment board or state employment services department	no		

Question	Reading		CGM
- Area High schools	yes		
- Voc-tech schools or community colleges	yes		
- Human service or nonprofit career training centers	yes		
17: Do you support public-private partnerships to provide specific workforce training?	no	R	yes
18: Is there an adult education program readily available to residents of your jurisdiction?	no	R	yes

Section 5. Municipal Process

The municipal process section covers several themes of marketing and permitting. When it comes to marketing themselves, jurisdictions that are aggressive and collaborate with local firms may be at an advantage in attracting new investment. Those firms can speak to interested companies and investors about first-hand experiences and market conditions, and advise municipal leaders about industries with which they are intimately familiar. Additionally, a municipality needs to establish a transparent and efficient permitting process to minimize business startup time and costs. Among the factors examined in this theme, timeliness of approvals is *Very Important* to location experts, and the remaining themes are *Important* with the exception of the Permitting Ombudsman, which is *Less Important*.

A. Industrial Sensitivity

Like most of the CGM respondents, Reading does not yet have an industry sensitivity strategy. As a result, it does not have a marketing program based on location specialist needs, core strengths, identified opportunities, or industry concentrations. Without an industry attraction policy and plan, such a marketing program has most likely not been a priority. The town also does not have a quick response team to counteract negative publicity, does not engage local businesses to speak on its behalf, and does not have a strategy for using local culture to attract niche shopping.

Reading should consider creating an industry sensitivity strategy. Creating such a strategy would help you take advantage of your strengths, like having sufficient infrastructure to accommodate new firms, great access to customer and markets, and a highly skilled workforce. Deliberate cultivation of this strategy will direct an accurate depiction of Reading's cognitive map (or perceived image/reputation) as a good place to live and do business.

Question	Reading		CGM
1: Does your jurisdiction have a marketing program based on the needs identified by industrial or office location specialists?	no	Y	no
2: Does your jurisdiction have a marketing program based on existing core strengths, identified opportunities, or industry concentrations?	no	Y	no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
3: Do you have a quick response team available when negative data, stories, or incidents about your jurisdiction make the news?	no	Y	no
4: Do you actively engage local business spokespersons to speak on behalf of your jurisdiction?	no	Y	no
5: Do you have a strategy for engaging your jurisdiction's racial or ethnic populations in unique businesses, festivals, etc., as a way to attract regional niche shopping?	no	Y	no

B. Sites Available

Reading has few available sites. Unlike the CGM, it has no sites that are owned by the jurisdiction that it is currently marketing for development. As mentioned in Section 3.C and 3.D, few available sites are available for development. This is a disadvantage for Reading. Fortunately, the town does have a readily accessible, up-to-date, and complete list of sites that are available for development, which is better than the CGM. For all other considerations, Reading matches the CGM. It maintains active relationships with commercial real estate industry players, has land use regulations that protect industrial lands from incompatible uses, and does not have strategies for reclaiming/ land banking tax delinquent properties or underutilized shopping centers.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
6: Does your jurisdiction own sites that it is currently marketing for development?	no	R	yes
7: Is there a readily accessible, up-to-date, complete list of sites that are available for development in your jurisdiction?	yes	G	no
8: Do you maintain an active relationship with commercial real estate brokers, developers, or agents with sites in your jurisdiction?	yes	Y	yes
9: Do your land use regulations protect land currently zoned industrial from encroachment by residential or other incompatible uses?	yes	Y	yes
10: Do you have an active strategy for reclaiming or land banking tax delinquent and tax title properties?	no	Y	no
11: Do you have an active strategy for reclaiming vacant or underutilized shopping plazas?	no	Y	no

C. Timeliness of Approvals ●

Reading’s permitting process is on par with the CGM in some areas, but takes longer in others. Site plan review, zoning variances, and the appeals process take an average of 4 weeks longer than the CGM. Special permits typically take 9–12 weeks, whereas building permits take less than four weeks. Special permits and building permits align with the median CGM respondent.

Most workshop participants agreed that Reading is reasonably efficient and oftentimes is an easy town with which to do business. Unfortunately, larger development projects take longer and require public hearings. In addition, potential commercial development often abutts residential and conservation areas, which require additional documentation, meetings, and hearings. When appeals are challenged, the process can extend into many years.

Since timeliness of approvals is one of very important considerations for location specialists, Reading is advised to examine ways in which it can improve this process. Minimizing startup costs and time are essential for businesses and developers, and thus, regardless of the outcome of the permit application, they would prefer to hear a quick no than a slow yes. Longer review and permitting periods can tip the decision in favor of more timely municipalities. Streamlining the approvals process would make Reading even more business-friendly and enhance its attractiveness to prospective firms.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
12: What is the average time from application to completion of the review process for the following?: Site plan review	9-12 weeks	R	5-8 weeks
13: What is the average time from application to completion of the review process for the following?: Zoning variance	9-12 weeks	R	5-8 weeks
14: What is the average time from application to completion of the review process for the following?: Special permit	9-12 weeks	Y	9-12 weeks
15: What is the average time from application to completion of the review process for the following?: Building permit	0-4 weeks	Y	0-4 weeks
16: What is the average time from application to completion of the review process for the following?: Appeals process	9-12 weeks	R	5-8 weeks

D. Predictable Permits ◀

Like timely approvals, predictable permits make a municipality attractive to prospective firms. Reading has a few strengths and weaknesses in this area. The town does not provide a checklist of permitting requirements or provide flow charts of the permitting process to prospective developers. However, the town does provide individual booklets for different permits, which assist developers in initializing the permitting process and provides an advantage over the CGM.

In addition, Reading does not allow for a single presentation of a development proposal to all review boards and commissions. The current pre-review team does provide initial guidance so that developers can know early where compliance gaps may exist. However, adding a checklist of permitting requirements, a flow chart of the permitting process, and a single permitting presentation opportunity to all review boards would make Reading more

competitive in relation to similar communities to attract prospective firms. Promoting these advantages through the town’s website and through other marketing channels will also position Reading as a great place to do business.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
22: Do you provide a checklist of permitting requirements to prospective developers?	no	R	yes
23: Do you provide a flowchart of the permitting process to prospective developers?	no	Y	no
24: Do you provide a development handbook to prospective developers?	yes	G	no
25: Do you allow for a single presentation of a development proposal to all review boards and commissions with relevant permit authority?	no	Y	no

E. Fast Track Permits

Reading mirrors the CGM for all fast track permitting considerations. Your town neither pre-permits developments in certain districts nor has publicly or cooperatively-owned industrial parks that have their own expedited permitting. Additionally, the town does not market a fast track permitting option. The lack of an overlay district most likely corresponds to the low percentage of vacant and underutilized commercially-zoned land in the town (see Section 3.D). However, Reading is in the process of creating a Cultural District, for which fast track permitting could be implemented to attract desirable firms. It is recommended that once an updated economic development plan and industrial attraction strategy have been agreed upon, the town should implement fast track permitting in the Cultural District and in other areas that can support commercial and industrial development.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
26: Do you pre-permit development in certain districts?	no	Y	no
27: Are there any publicly or cooperatively owned industrial parks in your jurisdiction that have their own expedited permitting authority?	no	Y	no
28: Do you have an "overlay" district that allows expedited permitting of certain uses?	no	Y	no
29: Do you market "fast track" permitting to potential developers or firms?	no	Y	no

F. Citizen Participation in the Review Process

Reading has a slight advantage over the CGM in terms of citizen participation in the review process. Like competing jurisdictions, abutters only slow the permitting process somewhat, the town has an established a specific timeframe

and procedure for community response, and parties get multiple opportunities for feedback during review. The advantage lies in that elected officials do more than the CGM to expedite development by facilitating dialogue with community groups (rated “somewhat” instead of “very little”). Officials have intervened to rescue a proposal that was endangered by opposition within the past five years, indicating a commitment by officials to serve as an intermediary between the town and developers.

Though Reading seems to have an advantage in that organized neighborhood groups slow the permitting process “very little”, the reality is that the community has few organized neighborhood groups. Workshop attendees reported that residents band together informally to oppose development projects. Reading can address this issue by developing a comprehensive economic development strategy, then working together with existing businesses and community leadership to communicate that strategy and plan to residents. Communicating the importance of business to a viable community will shape the cognitive maps that residents have of economic development efforts, minimize resistance, and potentially empower them to facilitate the process.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
30: To what extent do abutters slow the permitting process in your jurisdiction?	Somewhat	Y	Somewhat
31: To what extent do organized neighborhood groups slow the permitting process?	Very little	G	Somewhat
32: To what extent do elected officials in your jurisdiction expedite development by facilitating dialogue with community groups?	Somewhat	G	Very little
33: Do you establish a specific time frame and procedure for abutter or neighborhood response in the initial stage of the process?	yes	Y	yes
34: Do interested parties get multiple opportunities for review and comment during the various development review processes?	yes	Y	yes
35: Has a development proposal in your jurisdiction been stopped by abutter or neighborhood opposition in the past 5 years?	yes	Y	yes
36: Have officials from your jurisdiction intervened to rescue a development proposal that was endangered by abutter or neighborhood opposition in the last 5 years?	yes	G	no

G. Permitting Ombudsman O

Reading is similar to the CGM, but also has advantages when it comes to serving as a problem-solving liaison for potential firms. Like the CGM, local officials are empowered to ensure the efficiency of the local permitting process. Reading’s “development cabinet” convenes to review major developments, and the town gets involved in the process and provides technical assistance for businesses that require state or federal permits and licenses.

The local licensing process is 4 weeks or less (like the CGM). Reading’s use of local licenses puts it ahead of the CGM since the licensing process slows time to market to potential competitors. Local licenses for all businesses with special licenses for auto dealerships, bars/taverns, restaurants, and A-frame signs are required in Reading.

Reading's most important advantage is that the town manager plays a significant role in ensuring the efficiency of the permitting process. Like the participation of officials in mitigating citizen participation in the review process, the town manager's active role as part of the permitting ombudsman team signals that Reading wants to do business with prospective firms. Reading could further its advantage by establishing a training program for development staff, boards, commissions, authorities, districts, and elected officials that identifies critical adjustments in policy and regulation to accommodate the changing needs of existing and potential firms. Relationships matter in Reading.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
37: Does the chief executive officer of your jurisdiction play a significant role in ensuring the efficiency of your local permitting process?	yes	G	no
38: Are there other local officials empowered to ensure the efficiency of your local permitting process?	yes	Y	yes
39: Is there a "development cabinet" or "development team" that is convened to review major developments?	yes	Y	yes
40: Do you have an established training program for development staff that regularly identifies critical adjustments in policy or regulation to accommodate changing needs of firms?	no	Y	no
41: Do you have an established training program for boards, commissions, authorities, districts, and elected officials that regularly identifies critical adjustments in policy or regulation to accommodate changing needs of firms?	no	Y	no
42: If yes, approximately how long (in weeks) is your local licensing process for businesses?	0-4 weeks	Y	0-4 weeks
43: Is your jurisdiction involved in the process for businesses that require state or federal permitting or licensing?	yes	Y	yes
44: Do you provide technical assistance for businesses in the state or federal permit or license application process?	yes	Y	yes
45: Does your jurisdiction require any local licenses for specific businesses or industries?			
- General license for all businesses	yes	G	no
- Auto dealership	yes	G	no
- Barber shop	no	Y	no
- Bar/Tavern	yes	G	no

Question	Reading		CGM
- Beauty salon	no	Y	no
- Child care services	no	Y	no
- Construction contractor	no	Y	no
- Home health care	no	Y	no
- Massage therapist	no	Y	no
- Real estate agent/broker	no	Y	no
- Restaurant	yes	G	no
- Skilled Trades (electrician, plumber, etc.)	no	Y	no
- Other, please specify	yes	G	no
46: other:	A Frame Signs	Y	A Frame Signs

Section 6. Quality of Life (Community)

The quality of life within the community is an *Important* location factor because companies want to be able to offer employees a safe community with affordable housing, good schools, and a rich selection of cultural and recreational opportunities.

A. Cultural and Recreational Amenities ◀

Compared to communities of similar size, Reading is home to more cultural and recreational amenities. These features, like the Reading Symphony Orchestra, Reading Community Singers, and the Quannapowitt Players, are part of the advantages that make Reading an attractive and desirable place to live and work.

As discussed in section 1.G, the town's open spaces include large tracts of conservation land along with multiple creeks and rivers for water recreation. The proximity to ocean beaches plus a golf course within town provide many options for residents and visitors to enjoy the natural features of Reading. The town's proximity to other

jurisdictions with professional sports teams, museums, opera and ballet companies, and major concert halls make these amenities abundant to those living and working in Reading.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
1: Is there a professional sports team resident within your jurisdiction?	no	Y	no
2: Is there a major art, science or historical museum?	no	Y	no
3: Is there a professional repertory theater company?	yes	G	no
4: Is there a civic center, arena or major concert hall?	no	Y	no
5: Is there a golf course within your jurisdiction?	yes	Y	yes
6: Is there a symphony orchestra, opera, or ballet company?	yes	G	no
7: Are there public beaches or boating activities within 5 miles of your jurisdiction?	yes	Y	yes

B. Crime

In regards to crime, Reading is considerably safer than the CGM. In 2011, the residential burglary rate was almost 32 percent lower, the auto theft rate was over 55 percent lower, the robbery rate was nearly 70 percent lower, and the homicide rate was 100 percent lower by being non-existent. With so few crimes committed in Reading, residents, businesses, and developers will have few safety concerns about situating in your jurisdiction.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
8: What was the residential burglary rate per 100,000 last year in your jurisdiction?	206	G	between 300 and 306
9: What was the auto theft rate per 100,000 last year?	45	G	100
10: What was the robbery rate per 100,000 last year?	12	G	between 38 and 39
11: What was the homicide rate per 100,000 last year?	0	G	3

C. Housing

Housing concerns may put Reading at a disadvantage when compared to the CGM. The ranges for median sale price of a single family home and rent for a two bedroom apartment are relatively high. The town reported that the median sale price is greater than \$450,000, and median rents for a two-bedroom apartment exceeded \$1,250 per month. The U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey estimated median home prices at \$443,700 and median rent for a two-bedroom apartment at \$1,315 in 2012 (ACS, 2008-2012). Home ownership, however, exceeds the CGM (76 percent or greater). Rental vacancies and available homes for purchase are less than 3 percent of the housing stock. Added together, these factors indicate that it might be difficult for potential firms to find places for their workers to live in your town.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
12: What was the median sale price of a single family home in your jurisdiction last year?	\$451,000 or greater	R	\$251,000-\$350,000
13: What was the median rent for a two bedroom apartment in your jurisdiction last year?	\$1251 or greater	R	\$801-\$1000
14: What is the home ownership rate?	76% or greater	G	66-75%
15: What is the vacancy rate for rental housing?	Less than 3%	G	3-5%
16: What percent of homes are for sale?	Less than 3%	Y	Less than 3%
17: Approximately what proportion of the major officers of firms located in your jurisdiction live in the community?	Some	Y	Some

D. Local Schools

Schools in Reading matched or outperformed the CGM in all factors. Like the CGM, the town spent \$10,001–\$12,000 per pupil, had 25 percent or less of its K–12 students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch last year, had a dropout rate of 25 percent or less, graduated 95 percent or more of its high school students within five years, and had no underperforming schools. The state mandates an assessment or proficiency test as a prerequisite for high school graduation, which are used as a measure of performance for teacher assessments/evaluations. Reading outperformed other jurisdictions in that more than 80 percent of students tested proficient in English and Mathematics (compared to 66–80 percent for the CGM). Further, 75 percent or more of high school graduates from last year’s class went on to a four-year college. It’s no wonder, with average SAT scores of 1643 and ACT scores of 24.4.

Though Reading does not have any charter schools, the town is home to two private schools: Austin Preparatory School and Reading Montessori. The town does not have any parochial or boarding schools.

Question	Reading		CGM
18: What is the average K-12 per pupil expenditure in your jurisdiction last year?	\$10,001-\$12,000	Y	\$10,001-\$12,000
19: Does your state mandate an assessment or proficiency test as a prerequisite for high school graduation?	yes	Y	yes
20: If yes, what percent of students in your jurisdiction tested at least <i>proficient</i> in English?	81% or greater	G	66-80%
21: If yes, what percent of students in your jurisdiction tested at least <i>proficient</i> in Mathematics?	81% or greater	G	66-80%
22: If yes, are the tests used as a measure of performance within your local school district for teacher assessments or teacher evaluations?	yes	G	no
23: What percentage of your jurisdiction's K-12 students are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch last year?	1-25%	Y	1-25%
24: What was the average combined (reading, math, and writing) SAT score last year?	1643	■	■
25: What was the average composite score (English, math, reading, and science) for the ACT last year?	24.4	■	■
26: What percentage of high school freshmen normally graduate within 5 years?	95% or more	Y	95% or more
27: What is the high school dropout rate last year?	1-25%	Y	1-25%
28: Are there any schools in your jurisdiction that are currently deemed <i>underperforming</i> ?	no	Y	no
29: What percentage of high school graduates from last year's class went on to a four-year college?	75% or greater	G	50-74%
30: Are there any charter schools in your jurisdiction?	no	Y	no
31: What types of private schools are there in your jurisdiction?			
- Parochial	no	■	■
- Non-sectarian	yes	■	■
- Boarding	no	■	■

Section 7. Quality of Life (Site)

This section reviews the amenities and services available within one mile of existing development sites. Having a variety of amenities, restaurants, stores, and services near employment centers enhances the location, adds convenience, and allows employees more social opportunities.

A. Amenities

Reading is home to few site amenities within one mile of existing development sites. Though the town has “some” retail shops, it has few fast food restaurants, fine dining establishments, or day care facilities. The low proportion of these amenities, particularly day care options, could be a deterrent for location specialists, whose firms will need such services to support a productive workforce. This puts Reading at a disadvantage when compared to the CGM.

Question	Reading		CGM
1: What proportion of existing development sites within your jurisdiction have the following within 1 mile?: Fast food restaurant	Few	R	Most
2: What proportion of existing development sites within your jurisdiction have the following within 1 mile?: Fine dining	Few	R	Some
3: What proportion of existing development sites within your jurisdiction have the following within 1 mile?: Day care	Few	R	between Most and Some
4: What proportion of existing development sites within your jurisdiction have the following within 1 mile?: Retail shops	Some	R	Most

Section 8. Business Incentives

Business incentives (e.g. tax and financial) are *Important* factors when companies are evaluating jurisdictions for location. However, contrary to conventional wisdom, these incentives are not the first factors on which an investor makes a location decision. Factors such as infrastructure, workforce composition, and timeliness of permitting have the highest levels of importance, representing “deal-breakers.” A municipality must be at least adequate in these areas before a business will advance negotiations. Therefore, investors value a broader portfolio of business incentives as possible “deal-closers”, but might not be initially attracted by them.

A. State

With more special state tax incentive eligibility for Reading’s businesses than those in the CGM, your municipality is at an advantage. However, Reading’s businesses take very little advantage of them. The town may want to consider promoting these incentives in marketing materials and offering technical support to help firms obtain them, especially to smaller businesses that may not have resources or relevant experience. These actions will convey to businesses that Reading is invested in their success.

Question	Reading		CGM
1: Are businesses in your jurisdiction eligible for any of the following special state tax incentives? Check all that apply.			
- Investment tax credits	yes	G	no
- Job training tax credits	yes	G	no
- Research and development (R&D) tax credits	yes	G	no
- Low (subsidized) interest loans	yes	G	no
- Loan guarantees	yes	G	no
- Equity financing	no	Y	no
- Workforce training grants	yes	G	no
- Other, please specify	yes	G	no
2: Are businesses in your jurisdiction eligible for any of the following special state tax incentives? Other, please specify	Film industry	Y	Film industry
3: To what extent does your jurisdiction actively take advantage of any special state business incentives?	Very little	R	Somewhat
4: Does your state allow for priority funding for distressed economic areas?	yes	Y	yes

B. Local

Like the CGM, Reading has few local business incentives. It does not offer property tax abatements or provide incentives for businesses to locate in the town. The town also does not actively try to attract governmental facilities in town and does not have a designated Enterprise Zone. The town does assist in securing financing for businesses with commercial lenders and state industrial finance mechanisms. Reading does not use TIFs or other programs to provide tax breaks for businesses, but this seeming disadvantage might not be so given the town's favorable local tax environment (see Section 9.A). Unlike the CGM, the town has secured grants, including a Massachusetts Downtown Initiative grant to improve way-finding and branding of downtown Reading, and a Cultural Grant that will build a path toward designating a cultural district.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
5: Does your jurisdiction offer existing or new businesses property tax abatement? Existing businesses	no	Y	no
6: If yes, what proportion of existing businesses is offered abatements?		Y	
7: Does your jurisdiction offer existing or new businesses property tax abatement? New businesses	no	Y	no
8: If yes, what proportion of existing businesses is offered abatements?		Y	
9: Who negotiates the tax abatement?	Legislative	Y	Legislative
10: Does your jurisdiction offer any of the following incentives for businesses to locate in your jurisdiction? (Check all that apply)			
- Revolving loan fund	no	Y	no
- Loan guarantees	no	Y	no
- Revenue bonds	no	Y	no
- Equity participation	no	Y	no
- Business district group loans	no	Y	no
- None	no	Y	no
- Investment tax credits	no	Y	no
- Job training tax credits	no	Y	no
- Research and development (R&D) tax credits	no	Y	no

Question	Reading		CGM
- Low (subsidized) interest loans	no	Y	no
- Workforce training grants	no	Y	no
- Other, please specify	yes	G	no
11: other:	Building Facade Program	Y	Building Facade Program
12: Does your jurisdiction actively pursue federal and/or state programs designed to assist in attracting and retaining businesses?	yes	Y	yes
13: Does your jurisdiction use Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or other programs to provide tax breaks to businesses?	no	R	yes
14: Does your jurisdiction grant TIFs or similar programs for retail development?	no	Y	no
15: Does your jurisdiction assist in securing financing for businesses with commercial lenders or state industrial finance mechanisms?	yes	Y	yes
16: Do you actively try to attract local, state, and federal facilities, including post offices, to your jurisdiction?	no	Y	no
17: Is any part of your jurisdiction in a designated Enterprise Zone?	no	Y	no
18: Do you participate in a regional brownfield revolving loan fund or offer your own?	No brownfields funds utilized	R	Regional

Section 9. Tax Rates

A tax rate is another cost factor that has traditionally been considered a business “deal-breaker.” Municipalities often thought that if tax rates were too high, then it would have difficulty attracting businesses. However, like business incentives, the tax rate is not one of the *Very Important* location factors. If the *Very Important* factors are satisfied, a business will likely ask for a more favorable tax rate during later stage negotiations. However, negotiations are unlikely to get to that point if the *More Important* location factors have not been satisfied.

A. Local

Reading’s local tax climate is business-friendly—perhaps even more so on some factors when compared to other jurisdictions. The local meals tax helps pay for local services. The single property tax rate is 4 percent lower than the

CGM average. The town does not impose impact fees on new commercial and industrial development and has 10 percent or less of its commercial and industrial property tax revenue abated.

Reading's tax base is 90.9 percent derived from residential property, 7.7 percent from commercial, 0.3 percent from industrial, and 1.1 percent from personal property.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
1: What types of taxes are collected by your jurisdiction to pay for local services?			
- Property tax	yes	Y	yes
- Local sales tax	no	Y	no
- Local income tax	no	Y	no
- Hotel room tax	no	Y	no
- Meals tax	yes	Y	no
2: Of the potential commercial and industrial property tax revenue your jurisdiction could collect, what percent is currently abated?	1-10%	Y	1-10%
3: Does your jurisdiction tax property in industrial or commercial uses at a different rate than residential properties?	no	G	yes
4: If yes, what is the tax rate on industrial/commercial property? \$ /\$1,000		G	between 15.22 and 15.47
5: If yes, what is the tax rate on residential property? \$ /\$1,000		G	between 7.80 and 8.21
6: If no, what is the tax rate on all property?	14.74	Y	14.74
7: What % of your tax revenue is derived from: Industrial %	.2536	■	■
8: What % of your tax revenue is derived from: Commercial %	7.7416	■	■
9: What % of your tax revenue is derived from: Residential %	90.8536	■	■
10: Does your jurisdiction impose impact fees on new commercial or industrial development?	no	Y	no

B. Tax Delinquency

Reading mirrors the CGM for most tax delinquency considerations. Only 0–3 percent of residential, commercial, and industrial properties are more than one year tax delinquent. Since less than 50 percent of properties are tax defaulted or subject to the power of sale Reading is doing a little better than the GGM. Though the town does not have an organized process for conducting tax title properties, the small quantity of available space (Section 3.D) makes it unnecessary for now, but should be considered in the future.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
11: What proportion of residential property in your jurisdiction is more than one year delinquent in taxes?	0%-3%	Y	0%-3%
12: What proportion of commercial property in your jurisdiction is more than one year delinquent in taxes?	0%-3%	Y	0%-3%
13: What proportion of industrial property in your jurisdiction is more than one year delinquent in taxes?	0%-3%	Y	0%-3%
14: How many properties are tax defaulted or subject to the power of sale?	0-50	Y	between 0-50 and 50-100
15: When do you choose to auction tax title properties?		Y	
16: Do you have an organized and defined process for conducting such auctions and ensuring that they are successful?	no	R	yes
17: Do you auction the "right to foreclose" on tax delinquent properties?	no	Y	no
18: Do you seek tax abatement on tax title properties to allow the liens to clear for new owners?	no	Y	no
19: If a tax delinquent or tax title property serves as an impediment to development, does the property receive special attention?	no	Y	no

Section 10. Access to Information

While a municipality’s website may rank as *Less Important* in terms of decision making, it can be the initial source of information that entices a location expert to probe deeper and contact a municipality’s economic development department for further information. At that point, an appropriate municipal staff member has an opportunity to step in and develop a personal relationship with the developer or company representative. If the necessary data are not easily accessible and understandable, the researcher may reject the municipality as a candidate, opting instead to consider others with easily accessible data.

A. Website O

Reading’s website features more information that goes beyond general information about the town than the CGM. Unlike the comparison group, the town’s website lists all local development policies and procedures, includes an economic development tool, has a development permit checklist, allows for downloading of date-certified applications and forms, and provides a list of available land and buildings sites. The site also includes a current list of available hearings and pending applications as well as makes it easy for prospective firms to find contact information for current review board, staff members, and key officials.

It is recommended that the town address the issue of site usability. The advantage of making such good information available can be a deterrent if location decision makers find it difficult to quickly find what they seek. The site is updated weekly, though responsibilities for the updates are shared by multiple staff members. Reading should consider designating one person to manage site updates to ensure accuracy and consistency.

The website does offer links to state permitting agencies, economic development agencies, chambers of commerce, arts and cultural organizations, nonprofits, and sports/recreation venues. Reading can continue to leverage this tool, which serves as the first impression to location specialists, by including more links to business-related organizations like state finance, regional planning, and workforce training agencies as well as other financing resources and links to convention and/or tourist information.

Question	Reading		CGM
1: Does your jurisdiction’s website list all local development policies and procedures?	yes	G	no
2: Does your website have contact information for key officials?	yes	Y	yes
3: Does your website have general information about your jurisdiction?	yes	Y	yes
4: How frequently is your website updated?	Weekly	Y	Weekly
5: Does your website include an explicitly designed economic development tool aimed at businesses and developers?	yes	G	no
6: Is there a development permit checklist or flow chart on the website?	yes	G	no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
7: Are permit applications available for downloading on the website?	yes	Y	yes
8: Are applications and other forms date certified to ensure that they are the most recent versions (i.e. the same versions that you would get in person)?	yes	G	no
9: Is it possible to file a permit application electronically?	no	Y	no
10: Is there a list of available land and building sites on the website?	yes	G	no
11: If yes, check the types of information available about each site. (Check all that apply)			
- : Owner	no	Y	no
- Square footage of vacant land	yes	G	no
- Square footage and quality of existing buildings and structures	yes	G	no
- Abutters	no	Y	no
- Zoning	yes	G	no
- Assessed value	no	Y	no
- Tax rate	no	Y	no
- Current tax status (e.g. paid up, delinquent)	no	Y	no
- Contamination	no	Y	no
- Aerial photos	no	Y	no
- GIS links	no	Y	no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
12: Other, please specify	Broker contact info.	G	between Planned developments, projects permitted or under review are posted in the Business, Nonprofit & Community Guide. and
13: Is there a posting of current hearings available on the website?	yes	Y	yes
14: Is there a posting of pending applications available on the website?	yes	G	no
15: Is there a listing of current members of development review boards and staff contact information?	yes	Y	yes
16: Are there links to other local development resources? (Check all that apply)			
- State finance agencies	no	Y	no
- State permitting agencies	yes	G	no
- Regional planning agencies	no	Y	no
- Regional development organizations	no	Y	no
- Workforce training organizations	no	Y	no
- Local public or quasi-public financing resources	no	Y	no
- Demographic information	yes	Y	yes
- Economic development agencies	yes	G	no
17: Other, please specify		Y	

<i>Question</i>	<i>Reading</i>		<i>CGM</i>
18: Are there links to other locally-based private or non-profit organizations?			
- Colleges and universities	no	Y	no
- Chambers of Commerce	yes	Y	yes
- Community development corporations	no	Y	no
- Arts and cultural organizations	yes	Y	yes
- Sports and recreation venues	yes	G	no
- Convention and tourist organization	no	Y	no
19: Other, please specify	Non-profit community organizations	Y	Non-profit community organizations
20: Is there a designated webmaster or staff person responsible for maintaining the website?	no	R	yes

SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS

Reading, Massachusetts is a desirable community of nearly 25,000 people. According to 2012 ACS estimates, 6,576 of the 13,643 residents in the workforce actually work in Reading. The Massachusetts Office of Labor and Workforce Development report in September 2013 that the majority of the local job opportunities are in the Retail Trade industry (1,979 jobs), followed by Health Care and Social Assistance (1,006 jobs) and Accommodation and Food Services (840 jobs). Nearly 91 percent of the town's tax revenue comes from residential properties. These statistics demonstrate that the town of Reading has room to expand local jobs and diversify its tax revenues by attracting more commercial and industrial employers.

Reading's many advantages over the CGM include excellent highway access, sufficient infrastructure capacity for expansion, low electricity costs, more Class A and B office space as well as higher proportions of managers and professionally-skilled workers with at least bachelor's degrees. The town also has access to public transit. A high percentage of conservation land and parks as well as involving artists in the design of open space contribute to the physical attractiveness of the town, which vigorously enforces codes and regulations on blight and violations. Crime is low, home ownership rates are high, and Reading features more cultural and recreation amenities than the CGM. Further, more high school students demonstrate English and Mathematics proficiency and go on to attend a four-year college than the CGM.

Reading does have some weaknesses, however, that inhibit economic growth. Chief among them are a relatively slow permitting and appeals process, high commercial rents, very low supply of industrial and commercial space, as well as lack of economic development, industrial attraction, and marketing strategies.

As the development process for most permits and appeals averages four weeks longer than the CGM, Reading may want to **investigate and streamline the permitting process**. Identifying bottlenecks and implementing fast track permitting would be extremely beneficial to helping developers make decisions more quickly and improve Reading's image as a great place to do business.

The cost and amount of available space is a significant barrier to economic growth in Reading. Relatively high rents are no doubt tied to the low availability of space for commercial or industrial development. Reading should consider **identifying properties for redevelopment, then rezone and/or create a special overlay district** to encourage development in appropriate areas across town.

Allowing for more commercial and industrial development should fit with **an updated economic development plan**. An updated plan would reflect the change in the business climate since the 2008–2009 recession as well as help Reading to leverage applicable state and federal grants, benefit from state and regional business recruiting efforts, and increase collaboration with local and regional economic development stakeholders. The plan could define the economic development and industrial attraction strategy and the steps needed to reach strategic goals. The plan should also include a strategy and plan for marketing and cross-marketing activities that outlines how the town can better leverage state tax incentives. Collaborating with stakeholders, including residents and businesses, to craft the plan will help alleviate opposition and allow the entire community to help shape the future of Reading.

The town of Reading can also address some of its other weaknesses by designating more long-term parking near existing office and retail developments, establishing a workforce-related adult education program, and designating a single staff person or webmaster to coordinate website updates and ensure site accuracy. The town should also create a checklist of permitting requirements to ease the process for developers.

All of these issues are ones which the town of Reading has the authority to address. By eliminating these barriers to economic growth and leveraging town strengths, Reading will be well on its way to diversifying its tax base while preserving the beauty, character, and livability of this lovely mature suburban community.

Recommendations	Priority
Investigate and streamline the permitting process	High
Craft a comprehensive economic development plan with a strong industrial/commercial attraction policy and marketing strategy using input from stakeholders	High
Identify and rezone appropriate properties to increase available sites for commercial and industrial development	High
Designate longer times for on-site and street parking at existing retail and office sites	Medium
Establish workforce related adult education program	Low
Create a checklist of permitting requirements for developers	Medium
Designate a webmaster or single staff person to manage the website	Medium