

The Town of Amherst Bridges Digital Divide, Implements New Soofa Signs

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Amherst, MA, – The Town of Amherst is helping to bridge the digital divide by bringing Soofa Signs and charging cores to Amherst’s downtown. The signs will communicate COVID-19 updates, public health guidelines, Town updates, and local business offerings. The solar-powered charging cores will provide outdoor 24-hour access for people to charge their devices such as cell phones and laptop computers. Amherst is the first town in Western Massachusetts to incorporate Soofa Signs into its municipal infrastructure and is the twelfth municipality in the state of Massachusetts to adopt the use of this technology.

Three solar-powered signs will be placed strategically throughout its downtown area, breaking down barriers of access to technology by displaying up-to-the-minute information and emergency updates in high-traffic areas. In addition to Town municipal updates, COVID-19 announcements, community resources, and opportunities to support local businesses, the signs will contribute to Amherst’s larger wayfinding initiative throughout the Town. The sign’s external skin - a full-color sticker affixed to the back of each sign - is carefully designed to match Amherst’s upcoming wayfinding package, complementing the colors and design specs of the Town’s signage.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the inequalities in access to technology and the information that comes with it - also known as the “digital divide.” Amherst is tackling these inequities by bringing Soofa signs to public areas, displaying Town messaging and emergency updates for *all* people to see, regardless of device or WIFI access. In addition to the signs, Amherst will also be placing three solar-powered charging cores throughout the downtown to provide free, convenient places for community members and visitors to charge their devices. This is especially timely as other buildings that previously provided free charging services, such as libraries, remain closed.

“Our partnership with Soofa will allow us to communicate quickly and easily with our community, which is of huge importance as we continue to work through the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Brianna Sunryd, Amherst’s Communications Manager. “Our main goal is to make sure that every Amherst community member and visitor has access to the information they need to stay safe and informed.”

Town Manager Paul Bockelman added, “We are excited to bring Soofa’s cutting-edge technology to Amherst. Whether it’s checking the signs for a COVID-19 testing site or reading about local business specials, the signs will undoubtedly work to keep Amherst connected to both the Town and each other. We appreciate the Town Council’s support for locating these signs which will be evaluated in a year.” The project is supported with Federal CARES Act funds.

“After rapid growth in the Greater Boston area, we’re thrilled to work with Amherst to bring our technology to Western Massachusetts,” said Sandra Richter, Soofa’s co-founder and CEO. “The Town of Amherst has recognized and addressed the urgent need in providing equitable access to information and technology to its community, and we’re proud to work with the Town to ensure that all are being kept up to date on information needed to keep the town safe.”

Soofa, a female-founded startup out of the MIT Media Lab, builds the first of its kind, solar-powered digital sign with e-ink display. The signs display a combination of government updates, community-generated content, and local business information. The sign also updates the passersby on real-time transit information and local events while engaging users with poll questions relevant to their community. The Soofa Sign is accessible for anyone to use through an online, self-service platform called [Soofa Talk](#). The [Soofa Sign was featured by Engadget](#) as a finalist for Best Vision for the Future at CES and was [described by Curbed as the Facebook wall for the real world](#).