



# DOWNTOWN WINCHENDON REVITALIZATION STRATEGY 2014

Recreating Winchendon Village:  
A Distinct Destination in Toy Town

## ABSTRACT

This strategy for revitalization proposes recommendations for drawing upon Winchendon's history and assets to increase outdoor recreation opportunities, enhance downtown activity through development of varied businesses, cultural resources, and pedestrian amenities, and use these attractions to market Winchendon as a great place to live, work, and play.

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## Executive Summary

### Purpose

The following is a plan for the revitalization of the Central Street Corridor in Winchendon, Massachusetts. Comprised of six students from the fall 2014 Planning Studio course in the Masters of Regional Planning program at UMass Amherst, Carousel Consulting undertook the task of creating this revitalization plan with the objective of addressing declining investment and activity in the Central Street Corridor. As the “downtown” and commercial center of Winchendon, the strategy for the corridor focuses on generating reinvestment through the advancement of commercial development and diversity, infill development and cohesion, place-making and branding, open space and recreation, and circulatory functionality.

The goal of this revitalization plan is to not only rejuvenate the physical and commercial environment of the Central Street Corridor, but to also embrace the local character and emphasize the local residents’ and stakeholders’ important role in the revitalization of the downtown. To accomplish this goal, the plan proposes recommendations for drawing upon Winchendon's history and assets to increase outdoor recreation opportunities, enhance downtown activity through development of varied businesses, cultural resources, and pedestrian amenities, and use these attractions to market Winchendon as a great place to live, work, and play.

### Contextual Overview

Winchendon is located in north central Massachusetts, on the border of New Hampshire and near to the communities of Gardner, Athol, and Orange, Massachusetts. The study area for this revitalization plan encompasses the portion of Central Street south of Maple Street and north of Blair Square. This area will be referred to in this document as “the Central Street Corridor,” “the downtown,” and “the center.”

At the base of the study area, Routes 202 and 12 converge in Blair Square, from which point Route 202 turns north up Central Street and traverses the length of the corridor. The use of these routes as throughways for trucks and other heavy traffic has led to the area feeling more like a place to drive through than a destination. However, this was not always the case.

Winchendon was the home to a healthy industrial manufacturing base throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. During this time it earned its nickname, “Toy Town,” for being the world’s largest producer of toys. It was during this industrial era that Winchendon experienced significant growth and prosperity, its success due in large part to the convergence of two major rail lines in the center of town. Central Street became the location for many grand Victorian homes and thriving local businesses.

Things began to take a turn for the worse after World War II, when the regional trend of industrial decline manifested in Winchendon. Manufacturers left, the rail lines in town ceased operation, and auto-centric development began to erode the historic character of Toy Town's heyday. Many of the downtown's problems with disinvestment and decline can be linked directly or indirectly to these regional and local changes.

## General Findings

To better understand the problems in the Central Street Corridor, and what the causes were, Carousel Consulting underwent a rigorous investigation into the existing conditions in the study area. This investigation took the form of a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis and included independent research, consultation with the local planning agency and area regional planning agency, visual and spatial analyses, traffic counts, visual inventories, and market analyses.

The results of this SWOT analysis showed that there were many strengths and opportunities in local character such as historic buildings, regional and local resources such as the bike path and waterfront, social capital such as the historic society and Winchendon Enhancement Collaborative, and local policy such as the progressive planned development zoning and the upcoming update to the Master Plan. Conversely, the SWOT analysis showed that there were some weaknesses and threats when it came to zoning enforcement, local identity, traffic flow, development patterns, and regional connectivity.

Also part of the investigation into existing conditions was a public workshop in Winchendon run by Carousel Consulting to engage residents and stakeholders in the revitalization planning process. During this workshop, attendees identified several priority areas for the study; these included Blair Square traffic flow and safety, vacant storefronts and parcels, lack of business diversity, historic preservation, and the pervasiveness of through traffic without a reason to stop in town. These results were then incorporated into the larger SWOT findings and used to inform the plan's strategies for revitalization.

## Recommendations

To become the destination that the stakeholders would like it to be, Carousel Consulting recommends that the Central Street Corridor distinguish itself from the larger Toy Town theme and take on the identity and brand of Winchendon Village. This name represents the merging of downtown Winchendon's industrial heyday, when it was originally known as Winchendon Village, with its future as a distinct destination within Toy Town. Branding based on this identity can include way-finding and decorative signage bearing the Winchendon Village name as well as street art and design elements unique to the Village.

With this new identity and brand, Carousel Consulting recommends that Winchendon begin the process of encouraging reinvestment through the enhancement and promotion of its local assets. This includes extending the bike path, connecting with regional recreation amenities, preserving and strategically repurposing its historical buildings, and holding local events in the downtown to showcase its amenities. Intensive marketing to draw attention to these attractions and events should begin immediately.

During this initial phase, the recommendation is that the Town begin strictly enforcing its existing zoning and begin implementing piecemeal changes to further generate the dense infill development it desires. Then, once activity and interest in the downtown has picked up, the Town should begin the process of making more sweeping and comprehensive changes to the zoning so that new development matches its vision exactly.

In correlation with the enhancement of resources, marketing, and development standards, the Town should also focus on business retention and recruitment through public private partnerships and other support efforts such as a local business owners' group. Incorporation of regional market trends and spending data should be used to target businesses which not only fit the local character, but also supply goods and services for which there is enough demand for them to be successful. Local businesses and entertainment opportunities in the downtown are essential for creating a vibrant atmosphere and a sustained increase in activity and local investment.

To further support local businesses and encourage pedestrian activity in the downtown, Carousel Consulting recommends the redesign of Central Street and its sidewalks. This redesign proposes widened sidewalks with pedestrian amenities, themed crosswalk designs, safety lanes between on-street parking and travel lanes (which can also be used as bike lanes), and narrowed travel lanes. The combination of these elements aims to create a safer and more enjoyable pedestrian experience in the downtown while maintaining ease of navigation and convenience for car traffic. Making it easy to navigate the downtown as both a pedestrian and driver will make the area more inviting and help generate increased foot traffic to support businesses.

A similar design as the one for Central Street could also be implemented for Blair Square. In particular, wider sidewalks and strategically placed thematic crosswalks could be implemented to increase pedestrian comfort and safety. However, the traffic problems in Blair Square are more complicated, and should be analyzed as part of a wider traffic pattern study by a professional traffic engineer.

## **Conclusion**

Through this analysis and use of strategic recommendations, Carousel Consulting hopes to provide Winchendon with the tools and strategies it needs to transition the Central Street Corridor into a successful future as Winchendon Village. Although there are some potential roadblocks and

problems that might be encountered along the way, the Town has a great deal of power to make changes happen stored within its residents and stakeholders. Partnerships between the Town, its residents, and all the stakeholders in the downtown will be the backbone of this revitalization and should be utilized to their fullest extent. This wide base of support, a large supply of sweat equity, and a strong and consistent forward momentum are the elements needed to make Winchendon Village a success.

Note Bene: all photographs in this report were taken by team members during site visits unless noted otherwise. In addition, all GIS maps in the report were created by team members, unless noted otherwise.

## Introduction

### Context

#### Geography

Winchendon is located in north-central Massachusetts, on the border with New Hampshire. The Millers River runs through the town, and Lake Dennison forms another important geographic landmark. Although Winchendon was once a railroad hub, the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir to the south served to isolate the town somewhat from the major highways that were taking the place of the railroad at the time, including Route 2. Winchendon is also detached from major interstate highways, approximately 25 miles east of Interstate 91, and nearly 30 miles northwest of Interstate 495.

In spite of its geographic isolation, and although the town's population is dwarfed by some of the other cities in Worcester County, Winchendon is a crossroads for many commuters driving to and from New Hampshire, Vermont, and Boston due to its location at the junction of Routes 202 and 12. Route 12 connects Route 2 in Fitchburg with Keene, NH, approximately 22 miles northwest. Route 202 connects Route 2 in Athol to Rindge, Hillsborough, and eventually to Concord, NH. Route 140 also runs through the Town. However, the town's location has also resulted in some disadvantages; Winchendon's close proximity to tax-free New Hampshire puts local businesses in competition with big box stores in Rindge and Keene.

Figure 1: State Locus Map

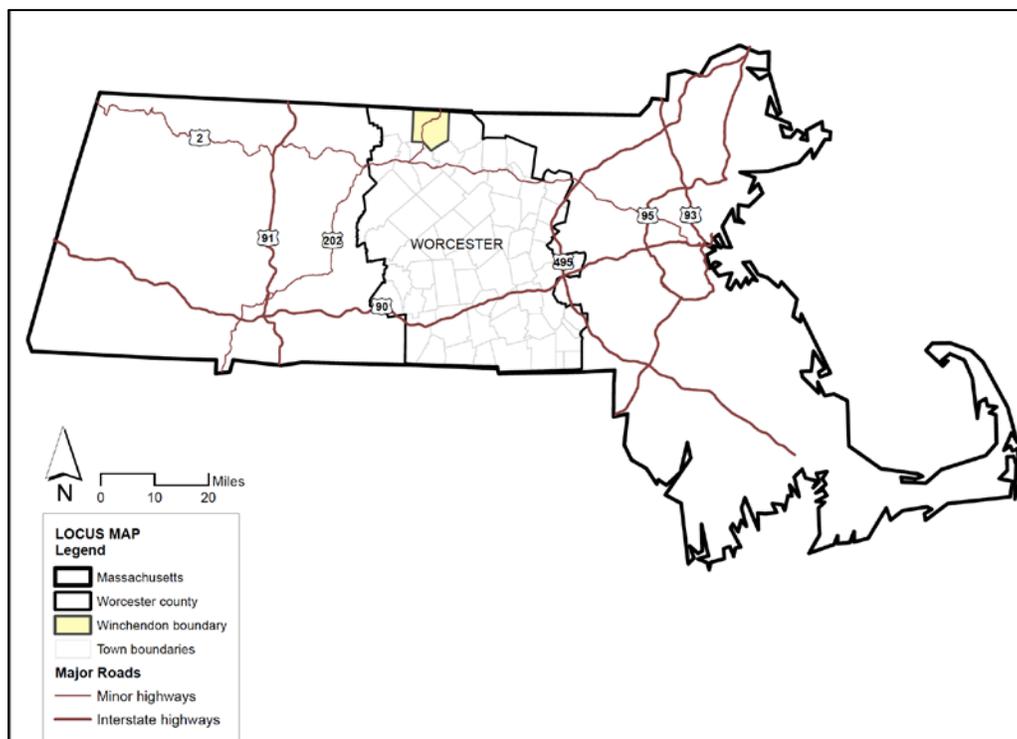
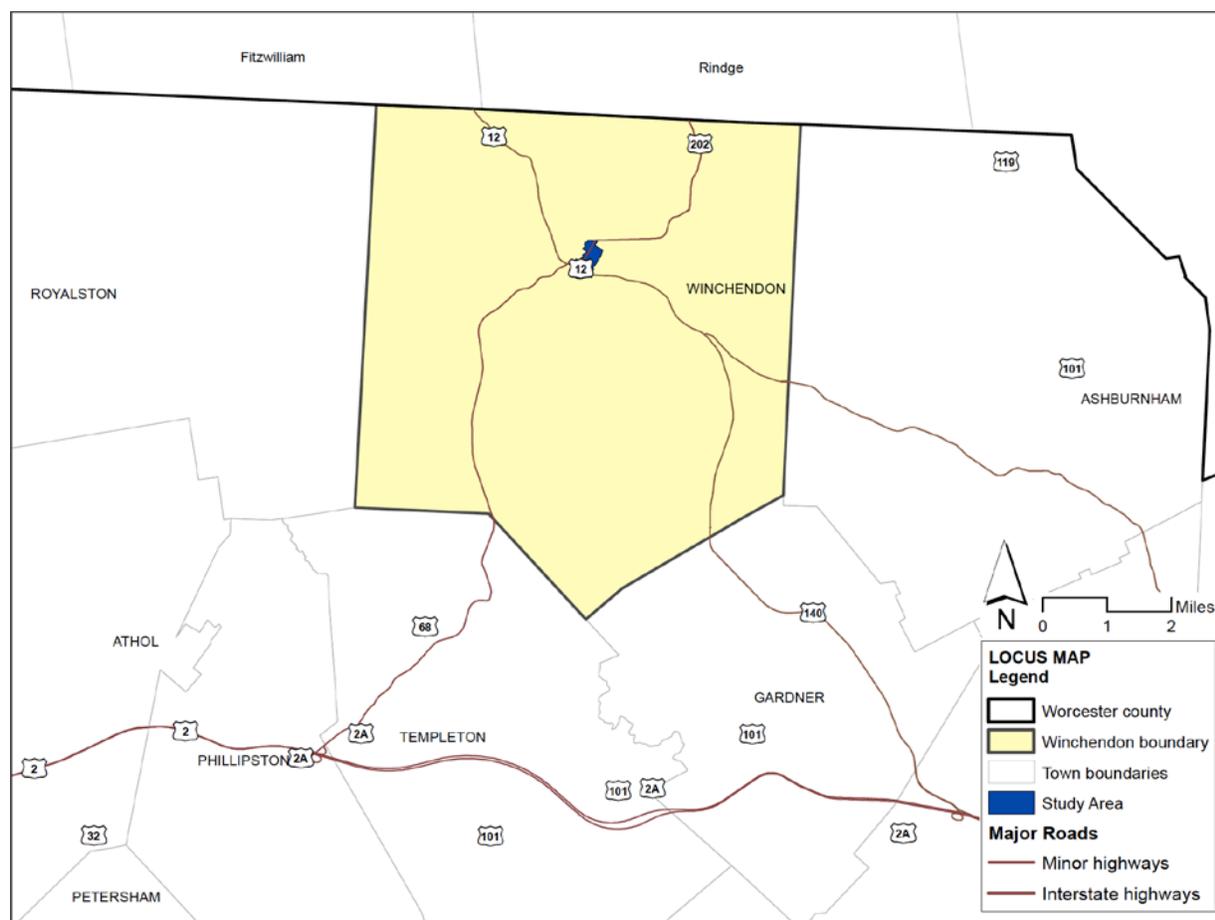


Figure 2: Regional Locus Map



## Historic

Like many New England communities, Winchendon has an industrial heritage dating back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Parts of the Millers River were dammed to form mill ponds, including Whitney Pond, Tannery Pond, and Whites Mill Pond; these ponds were used to power several mills in the town. Industry in Winchendon took many forms; all kinds of goods, from textiles to leather, from wood products to plastics, have been manufactured in town over the years. At its peak in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Winchendon was home to the Converse Toy Company, which was named the finest toymaker in the world in 1893, earning Winchendon the nickname “Toy Town”.

The development pattern in Winchendon owes its current form in large part to the development of the manufacturing industry; several major mill buildings were located on Whitney Pond and Tannery

Pond, and a thriving mill town formed around them. The downtown Winchendon of today is not nearly as lively as it was at its peak in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but residents still identify with the industrial heritage of the past. Many businesses have adopted the “Toy Town” moniker, and a twelve-foot hobbyhorse named Clyde holds a place of honor at the gateway to downtown.



*Winchendon's legacy as Toy Town manifests itself in surprising ways throughout town.*

As mentioned, Winchendon was once a railroad hub, but with the decline of the railroad came a decline in industry. The Converse toy factory closed its doors in the 1930s; today the only manufacturing company in Winchendon as of this writing is a plastics company far from downtown. However, this industrial heritage manifests itself in surprising ways throughout town.

### Socio-economic conditions

According to the 2010 Census, Winchendon’s population is 10,300; this figure represents a 7.1 percent growth in its population at the time of the 2000 census. This rate is similar to the growth rates in surrounding communities of Rindge, New Hampshire and Templeton and Ashburnham, Massachusetts (see Figure 3). However, Winchendon’s largest neighbor, Gardner, Massachusetts, saw a decline in its population from 2000 to 2010.

Like its neighbors and many suburban and rural New England towns, Winchendon’s population is largely white--95 percent as of the last census (see Figure 4). The median age of the population in Winchendon as of 2013 is 42.8 years old, compared to the Commonwealth’s median age of 39.1 years old, indicating a large percentage of older residents (US Census Bureau, ACS 5-year estimates, 2013). Additionally, this percentage is growing; between 2000 and 2010, the population of residents aged 65 and over increased by 32.8 percent, a much faster rate than the total population of the town. The next youngest age class (55 to 64 years) increased by more than 50 percent during the same time period, indicating that the number of seniors in town will continue to grow for at least the next ten years (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2013). Conversely, the population of children under the age of 5 decreased by more than 18 percent between 2000 and 2010, suggesting that Winchendon may face declining school enrollment in the near future (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2013).

Figure 3: Population Growth

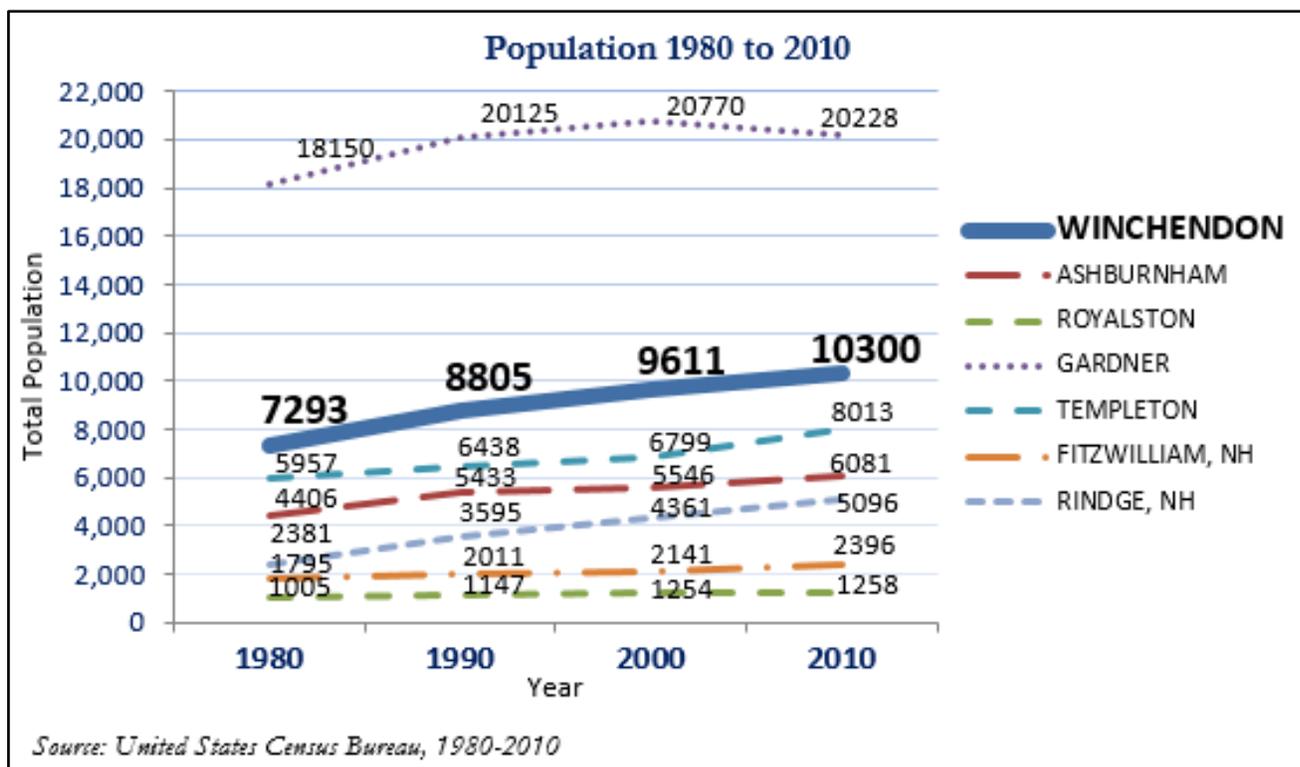
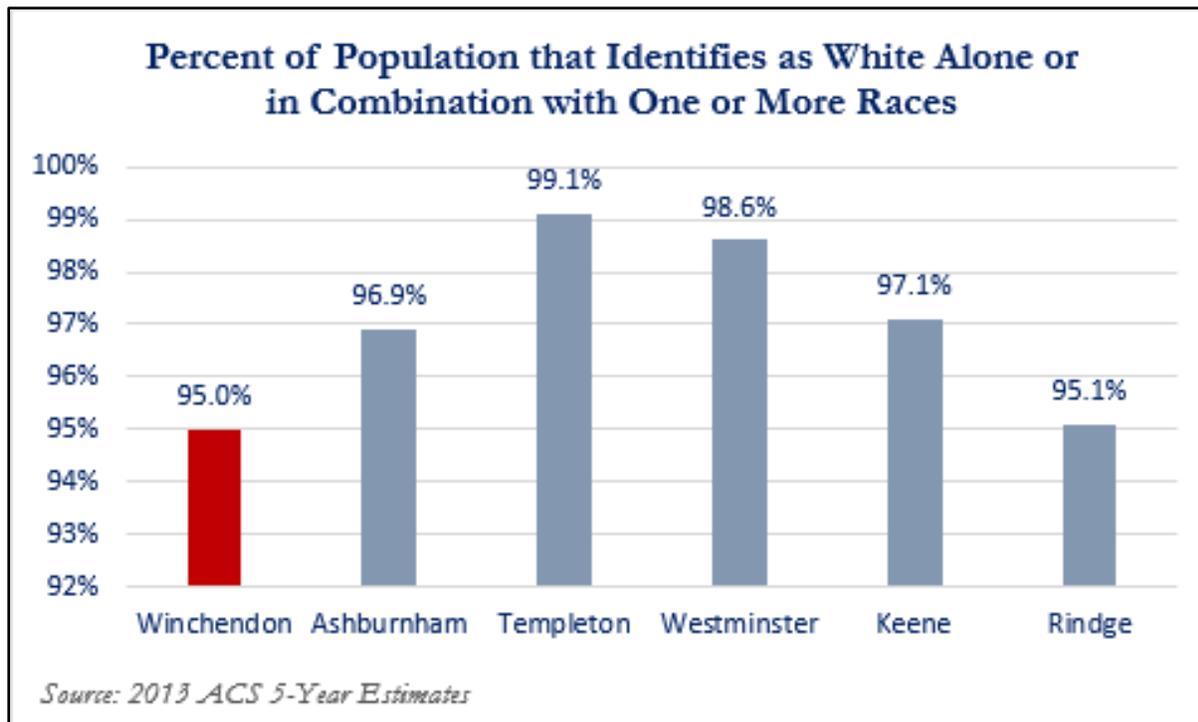


Figure 4: White Identifying Population in Winchendon and Surrounding Communities



Winchendon's average unemployment rate has stayed consistently higher than that of Massachusetts for a number of years. The most recent annual data shows that Winchendon's unemployment average for 2013 was 9.3 percent compared the Commonwealth's 7.9 percent (MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2013). In terms of employment, the educational, health, and social services industries led the way for employment in Winchendon, with over 25 percent of workers employed in this field; this industry is also the top employer statewide. Winchendon distinguishes itself from statewide employment patterns with its emphasis on manufacturing; nearly 20 percent of workers are employed in the manufacturing industry, compared to only 9.5 percent statewide (ACS, 5-year estimates, 2013). In a more regional context, Winchendon is also the leader in population employed in manufacturing (See Table 1).

|   | Winchendon | Ashburnham | Gardner | Templeton | Westminster | Keene | Rindge |
|---|------------|------------|---------|-----------|-------------|-------|--------|
| <b>Manufacturing</b>  | 20.4%      | 14.5%      | 18.5%   | 12.1%     | 19.4%       | 9.7%  | 12.4%  |
| <b>Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining</b>                                     | 2.6%       | 0.4%       | 0.1%    | 0.4%      | 1.3%        | 0.3%  | 0.8%   |
| <b>Construction</b>   | 3.6%       | 7.4%       | 6.2%    | 6.3%      | 8.0%        | 3.7%  | 11.6%  |
| <b>Wholesale trade</b>  | 3.2%       | 1.8%       | 2.4%    | 0.4%      | 2.2%        | 6.6%  | 2.5%   |
| <b>Retail trade</b>   | 10.5%      | 7.5%       | 11.6%   | 10.9%     | 8.7%        | 14.3% | 12.3%  |
| <b>Transportation and warehousing, and utilities</b>  | 3.4%       | 2.4%       | 1.8%    | 6.5%      | 4.1%        | 4.2%  | 3.6%   |
| <b>Information</b>  | 1.5%       | 2.6%       | 0.8%    | 2.0%      | 0.8%        | 1.9%  | 1.3%   |
| <b>Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing</b>                              | 5.3%       | 11.1%      | 3.7%    | 4.8%      | 6.1%        | 6.0%  | 2.8%   |
| <b>Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services</b> | 7.0%       | 9.9%       | 7.6%    | 10.4%     | 12.5%       | 5.4%  | 5.4%   |
| <b>Educational services, and health care and social assistance</b>                                | 25.3%      | 26.0%      | 28.6%   | 28.8%     | 20.7%       | 31.9% | 33.4%  |
| <b>Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services</b>                   | 5.1%       | 7.6%       | 11.3%   | 5.3%      | 7.1%        | 10.3% | 6.4%   |
| <b>Other services, except public administration</b>   | 5.4%       | 2.5%       | 3.4%    | 4.6%      | 5.1%        | 2.6%  | 4.2%   |
| <b>Public administration</b>  | 6.6%       | 6.4%       | 3.8%    | 7.5%      | 4.1%        | 3.1%  | 3.4%   |

Source: 2013 ACS 5-Year Estimates

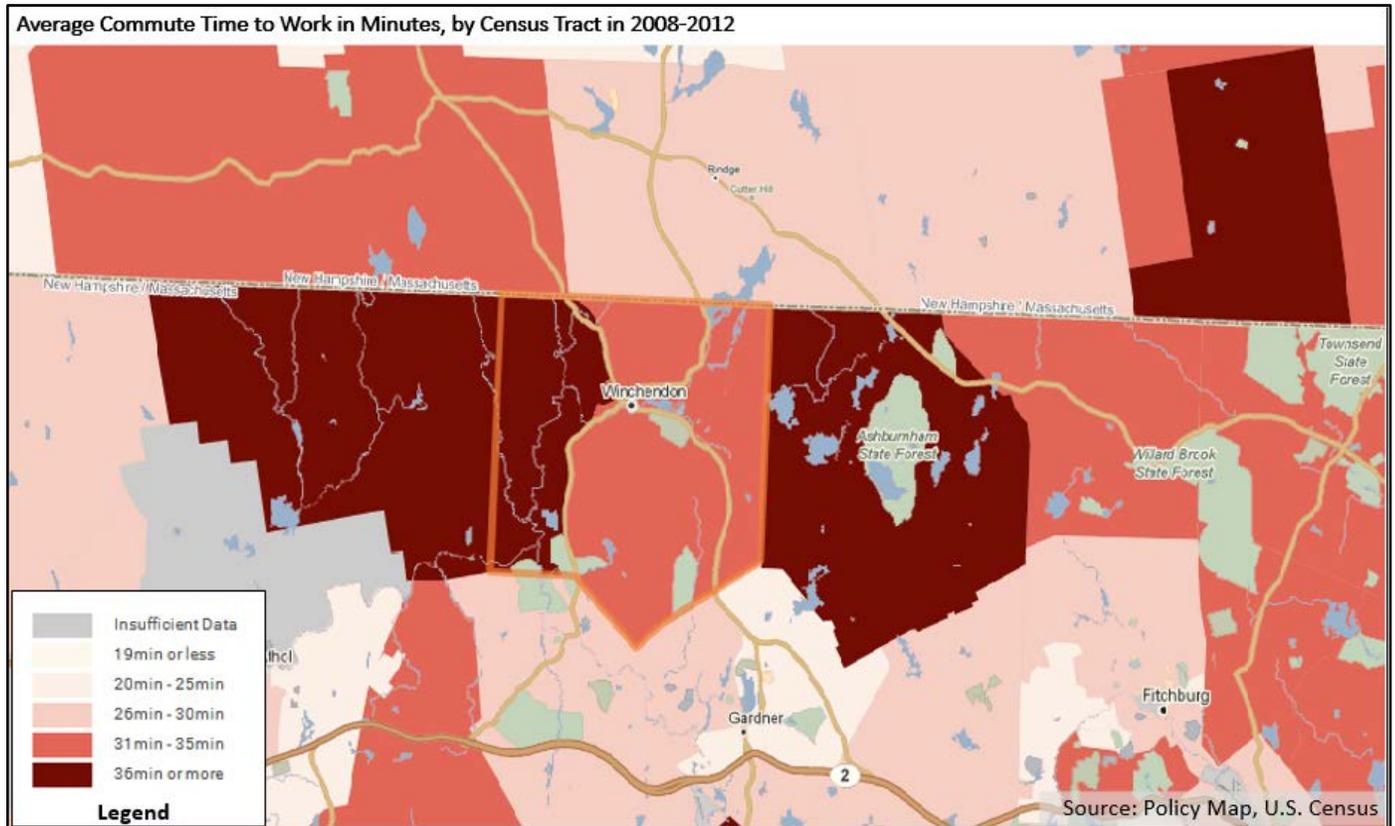
Table 1: Employment by Industry

Also significant in terms of residents’ employment in Winchendon is that the average commute time is over 30 minutes for much of the Town. Figure 5 shows by census tract the average commute time in minutes for Winchendon and surrounding communities. Although many surrounding communities, such as Ashburnham, have a similarly long average commute time, it is still higher than the state’s overall average of 27.7 minutes and the national average of 25.4 minutes (ACS 2013 5-Year estimates).

According to the American Community Survey 5-year estimates for 2009 to 2013, median household income is slightly less in Winchendon than the state median (\$61,937 compared to \$66,658 statewide). Per capita income in Winchendon is \$27,688, nearly \$8,000 less than the state average. Another indicator of income and poverty is the number of people using SNAP benefits, or food stamps; in Winchendon, nearly 500 residents rely on them. Given the town’s small population,

this means that a higher percentage of residents use food stamps than the state average (12.2 percent compared to 10.7 percent statewide) (ACS 2012 5-year estimates).

Figure 5: Average Commute Time in Minutes by Census Tract



## Description of Revitalization Area

Carousel Consulting has been asked to focus its revitalization efforts on the Central Street neighborhood of Winchendon, otherwise known as downtown Winchendon or Winchendon Village. This area was historically the “Main Street” of Winchendon and is home to many historic buildings, including several old mill buildings. Several buildings on the southern part of Central Street and along Front Street are part of a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. Further north on Central Street, a recently constructed bike path crosses Whitney Pond and continues east, with eventual connections to Gardiner. These are amenities noted by Carousel Consulting on the very first visit, and they contribute greatly to the character of the town.

Figure 6: Map of Revitalization Area



However, the town also suffers serious traffic issues and a high rate of vacancy and disinvestment downtown. Route 202 runs down Central Street to intersect with Route 12 at a notoriously congested intersection known as Blair Square. Even a casual observer will note the long line of cars waiting to turn off Central Street, the noise of semi-trucks passing through town on their way to New Hampshire, and the lack of pedestrian infrastructure in this neighborhood. Due to the large amount of through traffic, Central Street has suffered a certain amount of disinvestment, as most people passing through town do not stop to patronize the businesses downtown. Vacant storefronts and empty sidewalks pay testament to the decline of this once-vibrant manufacturing town.



*Top left: Blair Square, the ‘epicenter of town’ according to one Winchendon resident; Top right: Hungry4Pizza, once a popular downtown destination, closed recently, joining other vacancies on Central Street; Bottom: A view of Central Street corridor facing north from Blair Square.*

## Client's Requests

Recognizing that previous attempts to improve the condition and experience of downtown have fallen short, the Town of Winchendon has recruited Carousel Consulting to come up with a new revitalization plan. The Town has asked that the team consider and address various elements which they view as critical to the area's current condition and its future success. This includes elements related to the function, form, and uses of the downtown. Specifically, the six areas of focus are Land Use and Zoning, Vacant Parcels, Commercial Development, Market Trends, Aesthetics, and Traffic Flow. For more details on the existing conditions of Winchendon as they relate to each of these focus areas, see the Existing Conditions section below.

## Goals

Our ultimate goal has been to create recommendations that reduce the problems facing the downtown. These recommendations are meant to be comprehensive and strategic, contributing to the successful revitalization of the Central Street Corridor. We have structured these recommendations into focus areas which relate to the six areas of our scope of work. Our goal is that the Town will incorporate our work and recommendations into the upcoming update to their master plan. However, it is important that we make clear that our mission is to serve not only the Town government, but also the larger public. As such, the main goal of this report is to use the public's input to inform our process and recommendations as much as possible.

## Methodology Overview

### Workshop

To solicit input and insight from the community about its vision for a revitalized downtown, Carousel Consulting hosted a public workshop at the Winchendon Senior Center on September 29, 2014, from 5:30pm to 7:00pm. Altogether, twenty-two people attended, in addition to Planning Agent Tracy Murphy and Director of Development Gerry White, who helped facilitate the meeting. Various town organizations were represented, including the Winchendon Historical Society, the Redevelopment Authority, the Toy Town Partnership, the School Board, the Winchendon Enhancement Collaborative, and many others. Two town residents also attended, which provided a more apolitical perspective.

The twenty-two members of the public were divided into four focused table groups, each with a map of the Central Street study area designated for revitalization. Members of the Carousel Consulting team guided the participating residents through a dot voting exercise using these maps to solicit feedback about places valued by the community, as well as places that residents found problematic or on the verge of improvement. The dot voting exercise encouraged participants to use sets of green, yellow, red and blue dots to highlight meaningful downtown areas on their maps.

Participants also used pens and markers to write and draw on the maps to provide commentary on their dot placements. Volunteer note takers at each table recorded salient points in the group discussions. To conclude the activity, one person from each of the four table-groups presented their dot exercise map and general conclusions from the discussion.

Table 2: Dot Exercise Colors and Meanings

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Green Dot</b>  | Places or things you like and want to see more of  |
| <b>Yellow Dot</b> | Places that are in transition- either getting better or getting worse                                    |
| <b>Red Dot</b>    | Areas that are problematic or otherwise unfavorable  |
| <b>Blue Dot</b>   | Priority areas- can be areas that urgently need to be cleaned up, or areas that urgently need protection |

Following the workshop, Carousel Consulting compiled maps and notes and identified recurrent themes raised by the public. Three main priority areas for revitalization were identified to be (1) Blair Square, (2) North Central Street around Railroad Street, and (3) the Bike Path/Waterfront area to the east of the downtown (see Figure 7 below).

Figure 7: Workshop Map Indicating Priority Areas for Revitalization



According to a majority of residents, Blair Square could draw more people into the downtown once a series of revitalization strategies such as façade improvements, a change in permitted uses, and a redesign of the traffic intersection are realized. The Railroad Street area, which includes the vacant Rural Housing Improvement Building (RHI Building), was highlighted by all table-groups to indicate the need to fill current vacancies and to better integrate this section of Central Street into a cohesive downtown. Finally, the Bike Path and Waterfront area was commonly discussed as a valuable but underutilized resource that could be made more accessible to the downtown, potentially prompting more public access and a rise in local property values. More detailed results from the public workshop are outlined in Appendix A: Community Workshop.

## Research

### - Existing Conditions

There were various documents and sources we sought out to aid us in our understanding of the local conditions. The following is a partial list of these sources:

- Winchendon's 2001 Master Plan
- Winchendon Zoning Bylaws and Appendices
- Assessors data, including tax maps and parcel cards
- Housing Report prepared by the Montachusett Regional Planning Agency (MRPC)
- Developable Lands Report prepared by the Montachusett Regional Planning Agency (MRPC)
- GIS shapefiles, including land use, land cover, zoning, transportation, open space, etc.
- United States Census Bureau
- Massachusetts Bureau of Labor and Workforce
- ESRI Community Analyst data

Additionally, the team conducted personal interviews with Winchendon community members and leaders, including town planners, Planning Board members, Historical Society members, Redevelopment Authority leaders, Winchendon School staff, Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce members, state recreation area officials, and local real estate agents.

### - Recommendations

All of our recommendations are based on planning theory and literature, precedent studies, and our professional experiences. We have performed several different types of analysis to determine which recommendations to include; some examples of our methodology include Lynch analyses, GIS mapping analyses, and analysis of property tax yields based on acreage and development style.

## Tax Yield per Acre (TYPA) Analysis

Tax yield per acre (TYPA) analysis is a useful tool for examining which types of buildings yield the highest amount of property taxes. Comparing buildings based on tax yield *per acre*, rather than on tax yield *per parcel* or *per building*, normalizes the data to demonstrate the most financially efficient way to develop a single acre of land (from the Town's perspective, not the developer's). Tax yield per acre is calculated using a simple formula:

$$\frac{[(\text{Assessed value of the parcel}) \times (\text{Tax rate}/\$1000)]}{\text{Parcel acreage}}$$

Here's a basic example: the assessed value of the parcel is \$200,000 (including both the land value and the building value). The tax rate for that type of use is \$10/\$1000, or 0.01. The parcel has an area of half an acre. So the TYPA is calculated this way:

$$(200,000 \times 0.01) / 0.5 = \$4,000 \text{ in property taxes per acre}$$

TYPA can be an even more powerful tool when it is averaged and compared across different building typologies. Building typologies have less to do with the use of the building and more to do with its height, structure, and site design. Examples of building typologies might include big box, detached commercial, or multi-story mixed-use typologies. By calculating the TYPA for existing buildings that fit into these typologies and averaging them, planners can get a sense of the amount of property tax revenue they can expect to receive from, for example, a new big box store versus a new multi-story mixed-use building. That way, if the Town only has one acre of developable land, they can base their decision of what to put on that one acre in part on which option will provide the most property taxes. TYPA is more a measure of financial *efficiency* than of overall tax yield.

Carousel Consulting uses TYPA analysis to make recommendations on the types of development Winchendon should be encouraging to increase its property tax revenue. Of course, TYPA is not a silver bullet, nor should it be the Town's only consideration when deciding what type of development to attract. However, it can provide a useful tool for comparing building typologies and may inform the Town's decision as it sets its development priorities.

## Site Visits

In order to fully appreciate Winchendon and what it has to offer, we conducted several site visits. These visits included trips to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, such as observing traffic and pedestrian activity, counting parking spaces, and taking visual surveys of buildings and parcels. Through these visits, we were able to better understand some of the problems that downtown

Winchendon is facing, and to also identify its many assets such as the bike path, waterfront, and historic buildings.

### - **Spatial Analysis**

The team's major tool for spatial analysis was a computer program known as Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Datalayers from the Massachusetts GIS website were downloaded and compiled. Information was extracted from attribute tables for physical characteristics and ownership of town roads, protected areas, property owners, and buildings. The team's analysis of these data allowed us to get a more complete picture of Winchendon's physical and socio-economic attributes as well as those of the surrounding region.

### - **Lynch Analysis**

The term "Lynch analysis" is shorthand for a method of spatial analysis developed by urban planner Kevin Lynch in his 1960 book *The Image of the City*. In this book, Lynch proposed that users of any given space use the following five elements to orient themselves:

- **Paths**- These are the passageways which people travel through and upon, such as sidewalks, streets, or trails. They can be planned (such as sidewalks), or spontaneous (such as trails).
- **Edges**- Places where borders are perceived, such as boundaries created by fencing, walls, or large buildings.
- **Nodes**- Focal points or places where people or other traffic intersect, such as a rotary or busy corner.
- **Landmarks**- Easily identifiable places or objects which can be used as points of reference and orientation.
- **Districts**- Larger sections of a town or city that share a common identity and character which distinguishes them from other parts of the city.

A Lynch analysis involves the identification of these elements in a given space, and the elements will vary with the scale of the space. Carousel Consulting used Lynch analyses to analyze the way people use certain areas of Winchendon, especially Central Street and Blair Square. These analyses have informed the team's recommendations in all aspects of our work, but especially as they relate to circulation.

### - **Visual Survey**

A major part of the team's research involved walking around and counting things: crosswalks, parking spaces, vacant storefronts, occupied storefronts, pedestrians, cars, and even businesses bearing the moniker "Toy Town" (too many to count!). Our own personal observations have augmented the information we gathered from town documents, planning reports, GIS data, peer-reviewed literature, precedent studies, and other sources.

## Existing Conditions: Land Use

### Strengths

#### Progressive Zoning

One major strength of Winchendon in terms of land-use is its proactive zoning bylaws. The entire study area is zoned for Planned Development. Per the zoning bylaws, this zone is designed to encourage a walkable, mixed-use development pattern for downtown Winchendon. Mixed-use development, with offices or retail stores on the first floor and housing on the second and third floors, is allowed by right in this zone, as are restaurants, bed and breakfasts, small retail stores, and banks. As shown in Table 3 below, this zone also requires small setbacks (five feet in the front for non-residential uses; twenty feet for residential), relatively small lot frontage (75 feet), and a maximum building height of three stories. These requirements, along with bylaws that encourage (but don't require or incentivize) shared parking and street parking for businesses downtown, should make for a relatively compact, mixed-use downtown development.

Table 3: Dimensional Regulation for the Planned Development Zone

| Zoning District         | PD Except Res. | PD 1 and 2 Family Res. | PD Other Res. |
|-------------------------|----------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Min Lot Area (ft)       | 5,000          | 10,000                 | 10,000        |
| Frontage (ft)           | 75             | 75                     | 75            |
| Front Setback (ft)      | 5              | 20                     | 20            |
| Side Setback (ft)       | 0              | 20                     | Total 30      |
| Rear Setback (ft)       | 0              | 20                     | 50            |
| Max. Height (floors)    | 3              | 2.5                    | 3             |
| Max Height (ft)         | 45             | 35                     | 45            |
| Max Impervious Area (%) | 70             | 25                     | 70            |

*Source: Winchendon Zoning Bylaws*

#### Existing Mixed-use development

According to the zoning bylaws, 'planned development' is defined as "a form of development usually characterized by a unified site design for a number of housing units, clustering buildings and providing common open space, density increases and a mix of building types and land uses" (Town of Winchendon, 2014, pg. 19). Of the 205 parcels in the study area, land uses range from warehouses to residential, churches, banks and commercial. Thus, a mix of uses already exist in a

densely developed area, both of which support the goal of this zoning district. Most buildings on both sides of the street are ‘close to the street’ and sidewalks already exist on both sides of the street. The zoning also states that parking should be to the side or rear of buildings. For several buildings on the north side of Central Street, parking lots already exist beside, and in some cases, behind buildings. Thus, the pattern of existing development already partially conforms to the intent of this district. The groundwork already exists to realize the goals of the planned development zone, and the next step may be to redevelop these buildings, and allow the zoning in place to fulfill the town’s vision for this area.

## Weaknesses

### Zoning Enforcement

Unfortunately, the standards laid out in the zoning bylaws have not been consistently applied to Central Street. In spite of the town’s relatively stringent and comprehensive zoning bylaws, the development pattern that exists is somewhat inconsistent. For example, both CVS and Rite Aid occupy large lots with the buildings situated far back from the street, with parking in front. Buildings like these lend an empty, uncomfortable air to an otherwise compact downtown. With better enforcement of its existing zoning bylaws, the Town could achieve a more cohesive and walkable aesthetic downtown.

### Low tax yield per acre (TYPA) downtown

As explained in the Methodology section above, tax yield per acre (TYPA) analysis is a tool to measure the spatial efficiency with which different types of buildings generate property tax revenue for the Town. As explained further in the Land Use-Team Findings section below, building typologies with low TYPA, such as big box stores and one-story strip commercial developments, are abundant in Winchendon. These typologies may not have an especially low *total* tax yield, but they are spatially inefficient; a larger (or taller) building on the same parcel would generate higher tax revenue *per acre*. The take-away message is that Winchendon is not currently collecting as much revenue in property taxes as might be possible if Central Street were developed differently; see *Focus Area: Land Use* below for a more thorough analysis of this issue.

### Lot size and other development requirements are counter-intuitive

Minimum lot frontage in Planned Development is 75 feet for non-residential structures, with a minimum setback of five feet and 70 percent maximum impervious surface (p.83 of the zoning bylaws). While these criteria could result in denser development, building typologies such as historic multi-story mixed use buildings, like Joseph’s, (which occupies almost 100 percent of its lot) or single-story strip commercial buildings like Duggan’s (whose frontage is only 30 feet) would not be

allowed under these dimensional requirements. While Duggan's would be grandfathered, smaller lots allow for smaller (and less expensive) development. Reducing the minimum lot area and frontage might generate more compact development. Also, denser development may require that entire lots be developed, or greater than 70 percent of the lot. Article 7.3 'Reduced Frontage Lots' allows for residential lots to obtain a Special Permit for less than stated frontage, but the same concession is not available for businesses. The result may be that larger businesses need to be developed, and this limits the pool of developers who are financially able to invest more money. For a more thorough discussion of this issue, see the *Focus Area* chapter.

### Outdated Master Plan

The Town's 2001 Master Plan reflects an outdated economic reality and growth challenges that are less relevant today than when the plan was written. Thus, the goals and policy initiatives it promotes are out-of-sync with the current economic situation in the region. The early 2000s were a time of growth and increased residential construction. The 2001 plan highlights a goal of small, dense village centers scattered around Winchendon, but it provides little guidance on how to achieve that goal. An update to the Master Plan in 2007 added an implementation section detailing projects completed since the last writing, but failed to provide a more comprehensive look at progress and changes since that writing.

Furthermore, amendments to the zoning in 2006, 2011, and 2014 appear to be in accordance with the vision stated in the 2001 Master Plan without reflecting any significant changes occurring during the intervening years. New goals that reflect the slower housing market and methods of obtaining dense, compact development would enable the Town to better identify zoning changes and policies to enact that vision. In addition to updated goals, more recent theory and practice about compact, walkable neighborhoods should be applied to the upcoming update to the Master Plan.

### Lack of Third Spaces

A 'third space' may be described as a place for people to go when they are not at home or at work. It is usually a public place and often outdoors; it is a place for people to go and 'hang out.'

Winchendon is lacking in these spaces; while many residents spend time at the YMCA or at one of the many pizza shops on Central Street, there is a definite need for more destinations for residents and visitors in the downtown area. This concept is addressed further in the *Focus Area: Economic Development Strategies* section of this report.

## Opportunities

### Master Plan Update

The Master Planning process currently taking place presents an important opportunity for Winchendon to update its visions and goals for the town. The current Master Plan was released in 2001; a 2007 revision provided updates as to what projects had been completed since 2001 without substantially updating the goals or visions of the 2001 Plan. The 2001 Plan did contain goals that relate directly to Carousel Consulting's work on Central Street; in particular, the Master Plan addresses elements such as strategies to improve sustainability and walkability in the downtown.

On the other hand, some strategies in the Plan are rather outdated. For example, much of the Plan concerns itself with growth management, an issue which affected the town at the time the Plan was written but that now has receded somewhat as a threat; the town only saw a growth of 689 people, or 7.1 percent from 2000 to 2010 (2000 and 2010 U.S. Census American Community Survey)<sup>1</sup>. As the Town updates its Master Plan, it will be important to consider the current population and housing trends in order to inform a more contemporary set of goals and values.

### Better enforcement of zoning

As mentioned above, one of Winchendon's great strengths is its proactive zoning bylaws, but one of its great weaknesses is the Town's failure to enforce these bylaws. A major opportunity exists to make the pattern of development on Central Street conform to the Town's goals simply by enforcing the existing zoning bylaws.

### Infill development

Another opportunity for Winchendon to create a more walkable downtown is to develop more mixed-use buildings along Central Street in the gaps between existing buildings. The advantage of infill development as opposed to increasing development on the outskirts of the downtown area is that a more densely settled "Main Street" lends itself more easily to pedestrian uses for reasons of safety, visual interest, and aesthetic cohesion. Although Central Street is already fairly densely developed compared to other areas of town, there are still a lot of gaps and empty spaces that could be enlivened with infill development.

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<sup>1</sup> See Figure 3: Population Growth for more information on population changes over time.

## Threats

### Lack of investment

While the existing zoning recommends a dense, walkable downtown, these policies are only realized when new businesses and property redevelopment take place. Vacant buildings and properties in disrepair reflect a lack of investment in the downtown, and threaten the realization of the proactive zoning bylaws. Investment in these properties, whether from existing property owners or from new developers, will enact the zoning laws, and realize the dense development, active streets, and green spaces that the bylaws seek to create.

### Zoning Implementation

In order to promote the type of land uses and walkable aesthetic the town seeks, zoning bylaws should be enforced. If parking for a project in the Planned Development zone should be located ‘to the side or to the rear of the main building,’ then the plan approved during the Site Plan Approval process should reflect this requirement. If the bylaw states that a development requirement includes “street trees along the entire lot frontage typical of those on Central Street between Blair Square and Peterson Square” (Town of Winchendon, 2014, p.49), then the permit granting board should enforce those requirements. Plans that deviate from these requirements only compromise the integrity of the bylaws.

### Fear of losing businesses

While the recent recession has likely slowed the rate of growth and new business ventures in Winchendon, the economy is starting to rebound. Rather than drive businesses away, proactive zoning has the potential to enhance the value and desirability of property (McMahon, 2011). By allowing concessions in the zoning bylaws to appease would-be developers, permit-granting authorities may actually be doing a disservice to the town down the road. Instead, setting a bar higher and asking businesses to meet those expectations may result in development that will entice developers to build and re-build more of these desirable projects.

## Existing Conditions: Traffic Flow

### Strengths

#### A comfortable Main Street

Apart from the long queuing times for traffic turning left from Central Street onto Front Street, Central Street is relatively free of traffic issues, at least for vehicular traffic. The street is wide, with free parallel parking on both sides and crosswalks at frequent intervals. There are a total of eleven crosswalks on Central Street, with more than one crosswalk per block. Although the bicycle and pedestrian amenities leave something to be desired, Central Street is generally a comfortable main street in terms of traffic.

### Weaknesses

#### Blair Square

A major issue in Winchendon is traffic flow, especially at the intersection known as Blair Square. This junction of Routes 202 and 12 sees a volume of almost 2,000 cars per hour during peak times and is the site of long traffic delays and frequent minor accidents (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2005). The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission has performed several traffic studies of Blair Square and the surrounding area; the two most relevant were performed in 1995 and 2005. Each study rated Blair Square on safety and traffic flow, and each found that the level of service at the intersection rated poorly enough to warrant the installation of a traffic signal. However, in the ten years since the release of the last study, no significant changes have been made to the intersection, and drivers routinely wait up to twelve minutes to make a left turn during peak times (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2005).

#### Parking along Front Street

The section of Front Street that follows Route 12 is also a hub of commercial activity, with several multi-story commercial buildings on the south side of the street and several community buildings and smaller businesses on the north side. There is parallel parking on the south side of the street to service several businesses, including a large dance studio. However, during peak travel times, drivers heading east on Front Street often run into delays because cars turning left from Front Street onto Central Street block the entire lane of travel. There is no room to pass a car turning left because of the cars parked in parallel spaces on Front Street. This issue was noted during site visits by Carousel Consulting as a contributor to the traffic woes of Blair Square.

#### Lack of Pedestrian and Bicycle Amenities on Central Street

Pedestrian and bicycle amenities, such as smooth, wide sidewalks, curb cuts, and bike lanes, are absent from all of Central Street. The existing 8' sidewalks, while sufficiently wide for pedestrian use,

lack places for people to gather, sit down or rest. There are no benches for the entire length of Central Street, and no parks apart from the recreation fields behind the YMCA. Sidewalks exist on most of Central Street, but their condition is inconsistent. Many are narrow or not clearly demarcated as being separate from vehicular infrastructure; this is the case in the area near the Rite Aid parking lot, where an extremely wide driveway could be interpreted as either a sidewalk or an entrance for cars. This lack of an appropriate buffer between pedestrians and automobile traffic makes walkers feel less safe and may cause them to be less likely to walk along this part of the road. Many sidewalks are also cracked, making them unsafe for elderly people or those with disabilities or strollers.

## Parking Issues

Although parking is plentiful along Central Street, there are not enough spaces located near Town Hall and the other businesses on Front Street (Murphy, personal communication, October 9, 2014). The Town Hall's parking lot also serves the Police Station, Library, and a small park and is not meeting the current demand. The parallel parking along Front Street is also problematic because it reduces visibility of traffic flowing into and out of Blair Square, particularly when the sun is low in the sky. The Dance Center and other businesses need more parking than they currently have with both on and off street spaces, and they need spaces which are safely configured.



*Blair Square (left) and Central Street (right) are the location of some of Winchendon's auto and pedestrian traffic issues.*

## Opportunities

### Capitalize on Through-Traffic

In spite of the traffic issues surrounding Blair Square, Winchendon's location at this major junction of two state highways presents an opportunity for the Town to capitalize on the high volume of through-traffic it sees every day. There is parking available to accommodate drivers who stop to run

errands. According to the MRPC study (2005), over 15,000 vehicles travel through the Blair Square intersection daily. About half of those vehicles travel between 9am – 4pm, and are presumably not traveling to and from work. If only 10 percent of those cars were to stop to run an errand in Winchendon, 750 cars would be stopping on Central Street to shop in local stores, eat at local restaurants, and take advantage of Winchendon's natural and cultural amenities.

### Take Advantage of Underutilized Space

Another opportunity exists in the abundance of unused parking lots that are privately owned by the businesses adjacent to them. These lots are problematic because the expanses of parking make the downtown feel less human-scale and therefore less walkable, both aesthetically and practically. These spaces, instead of being an expanse of static pavement, could be turned into dynamic spaces; vertical elements such as trees and lights would help the areas feels less vast and open. Softer landscape elements such as vegetation would create buffers between the street and parking areas. Benches and other design elements could encourage more interaction with the space. Since many of these parking area were empty during site visits, they could be redeveloped with infill development to increase tax revenue and improve walkability.

## Threats

### Perception of Winchendon as just a place to 'Drive-Through'

The traffic volumes in Blair Square, especially during rush hour, may discourage drivers from traveling through this intersection. If drivers attempt to find another route than Central Street, they are also less likely to stop to run an errand or spend money on Central Street. In proposing solutions and alternatives to address the traffic problems in Blair Square, it's necessary to be cautious of applying alternatives that may reduce traffic along Central St, or would discourage drivers from traveling through the intersection, and thus avoiding the main street.

## Existing Conditions: Aesthetics

### Strengths

#### Historic Buildings

Winchendon's history is one of its greatest assets. The beautiful historic buildings in the downtown area stand as a reminder of Winchendon's as a thriving mill legacy. Buildings such as Town Hall, Joseph's Candy Store and the Historical Society add a charming dash of historic character to Central Street. Though somewhat dilapidated, the mills buildings recall an era of prosperity and vitality for Winchendon Village. These historic buildings are an asset to the Town that should be preserved and capitalized upon as much as possible.



*The historic Town Hall, built in 1840 (left), and the Goodspeed Machine Company building, built in 1820 (right), add historic charm to the Central Street corridor.*

#### Waterfront Views

As a former mill town, Winchendon is located along the Millers River, and two dammed mill ponds lie just east of downtown: Tannery Pond and Whitney Pond. Although the view to the waterfront is blocked by buildings in many parts of downtown, a passerby may occasionally catch a glimpse of these ponds that played such a large role in Winchendon's history. The most beautiful view of the water can be gained from the recently constructed bike path that runs from the Winchendon YMCA all the way west to Gardner, MA. This lovely waterfront area is an asset that Winchendon should take advantage of as it redevelops the Central Street area.



*The view of Whitney Pond adds natural beauty to Winchendon Village.*

## Weaknesses

### Inconsistent Development Styles

In spite of its historical and natural assets, Winchendon is plagued by inconsistent development styles. There is no strong aesthetic theme evident on Central Street; historic Victorian houses are located across the street from modern grocery stores, while one-story commercial strips abut multi-story mixed-use developments. Although Winchendon's current zoning is relatively proactive about preserving neighborhood character and promoting a fairly uniform style of development along Central Street, not enough attention has been paid to enforcing design standards or preserving historic buildings.

### Lack of Decorative Elements, Points of Visual Interest

Winchendon is lacking in decorative elements such as public art, planters, fountains, and other pieces that can serve as points of visual interest. Apart from one small mural on the side of a building, the only example of public art in Winchendon is a twelve-foot hobby horse named Clyde, who does not even reside in downtown Winchendon, but rather is just outside on Route 12. The addition of decorative elements could improve the pedestrian experience by providing areas of visual interest and a more beautiful aesthetic downtown.

### Maintenance of Facades and Some Properties

One major symptom of Winchendon's recent decline is the poor condition of many of its buildings. The owners of many prominent buildings downtown, discouraged by the economic downturn and

the lack of interest in renting space downtown, have invested less in those buildings in recent years. The result of disinvestment is many facades that look dilapidated or in poor repair. This contributes to a cycle wherein neighboring properties are less appealing to renters because of the poor condition of the building next door, thus worsening disinvestment throughout the downtown area. Façade improvements should be a major part of Winchendon’s revitalization and beautification plans.

## Opportunities

### Decorative Signage

Winchendon's unique history as a prominent manufacturer of toys provides a distinctive opportunity for thematic signage and public art that tie in with the town's heritage. Signage would also improve way-finding for visitors and residents alike and highlight the Town’s historic and natural amenities.

### Streetscaping

As stated before, the Central Street Corridor currently does not adequately provide a reason to linger. The amount of parking lots and lack of pedestrian amenities only reinforces the downtown status as a drive through, rather than a destination. Streetscaping would not only be a low cost option but is a project that could be implemented relatively soon. Aaron Hurton, in his article “Grey vs. Green Infrastructure Evaluation: What is the Most Cost Effective Solution?” provides several case studies about how green infrastructure has spurred downtown revitalization efforts.

### Sidewalk Update

Winchendon is currently in the process of updating its sidewalks downtown. This could prove to be the perfect opportunity to redesign sidewalks for a more comfortable and aesthetically pleasing pedestrian experience as well as an opportunity for the Town to add green infrastructure. As of this report, the Central Street corridor has several unique crosswalk entrances. Unfortunately, these brick designs are not uniform and many of the crosswalk entrances are in a state of shambles.

Figure 8 showcases the existing conditions of Winchendon’s sidewalks.

*Figure 8: Current Condition of Brick Crosswalk Entrances*

## Redevelopment/Infill Development

Given the number of vacant properties and storefronts, there are many opportunities for new businesses, developers, and other investors to come in and make beautiful new buildings or rejuvenate existing buildings. Both new infill development and revitalization of current development will help uplift the overall look of the downtown. Another opportunity is for the Town or some charitable entity to use vacant parcels as small parks or other publically available, landscaped space. This may not even require the purchase of the land, but rather an agreement with the owner to allow the land to be landscaped and used by the public instead of sitting vacant.

## Local Partnerships

Working with landowners, landlords, residents, businesses, and other private entities in the downtown is something in which the Town and other local groups should be actively engaged. Creating strong relationships and developing partnerships are critical to the Town accomplishing its revitalization goals because it will need the cooperation of many stakeholders. Additionally, local banks and other institutions could be solicited for help in supporting loans associated with revitalization efforts.

## Threats

### Absentee and Inattentive Property Owners

Landlords and landowners who do not actively maintain or otherwise monitor their properties can be a threat to the improvement of the downtown landscape. The majority of fully vacant and partially vacant buildings in the study area are owned by people with out-of-town addresses. While non-resident landlords may be successful property owners, they may not have the same level of interest in keeping buildings occupied and active as local owners. Although it would be ideal to have all property owners take on their own share of the responsibility of improving them, it is not necessarily realistic to expect that to happen. In this case, the Town or interested party will need to accept the situation, or make an effort themselves by doing their own improvement with the



permission of the owner.

### **Lack of Public Support and Stewardship**

Similar to absentee land owners, a disinterested or opposing public can be a roadblock to making aesthetic and other improvements to the downtown. If the public does not actively support and act as stewards of revitalization efforts, then new elements such as parks, decorations, and other upgrades will not be integrated as well and will not be as well maintained and respected. Having appreciation for the investment that goes into making the downtown beautiful can go a long way in making that beauty last.

### **Neither Having nor Committing to a Clear Vision**

The last major threats, independent of roadblocks of support and commitment to beautification, are ambiguity about what kind of look the downtown should have and a failure to follow through with implementing decided upon aesthetic standards in a consistent way. In other words, it will be extremely difficult to achieve a vision of a visually stunning downtown if that vision is not clear, and even if it is clear, it must be stringently followed or the vision will never come to fruition. This is an area where the Town has struggled before; developers must not be allowed to build based on what is cheapest or easiest, but must rather conform to a clear vision of what the Town wants laid out in its zoning and Master Plan.

## Existing Conditions: Commercial Development

### Strengths

#### Local Amenities and Resources

Downtown Winchendon is conveniently located close to Whitney and Tannery Ponds, a bike path, and many other recreation opportunities including Lake Dennison Recreation Area and Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire. In addition to its recreational assets, downtown Winchendon also has cultural assets in the form of historic buildings and landscapes. Places such as the Fairbanks House and Joseph's Candy Store lend charm and character to the downtown and make it more attractive to visitors, developers, and businesses—all key players in commercial development.

#### Winchendon Redevelopment Authority

The redevelopment authority works in many different ways to help existing and potential residents, property owners, and businesses maintain a presence in town by offering them various means of assistance. The authority offers services such as a listing of available properties for commercial and residential development, assisting in the obtainment of grants and funding for development projects, and the purchase and sale of developable properties. An example of their commitment to commercial and economic development in the downtown is their offering a large grant for the conversion of the upper level of the Rural Housing Improvement Building (RHI Building) into affordable housing. Although this offer was rejected by the owner, it serves as an indication of the ability and willingness of the Redevelopment Authority to play a key role in financing the revitalization of Central Street.

### Weaknesses

#### Lack of Foot Traffic

Unfortunately, despite the historic charm, scenic vistas, and recreational opportunities in and around the downtown, there is not a lot of foot-traffic in the area. The majority of the activity along the Central Street Corridor consists of people quickly going from their car to their specific destination. The current abundance of on-site parking and on-street parking eliminates the need for drivers to walk from their parking spot past other businesses and properties in order to get to their destination. Without people milling about and passing by storefronts, the downtown does not feel lively and businesses do not attract as many customers who came to the downtown without the express purpose of visiting their store.

## Lack of Diversity in Commercial Offerings

Workshop attendees identified that they were less than satisfied with the commercial offerings in the downtown. This was not surprising, as our site visits revealed the business landscape was dominated by places of convenience. Banks, public institutions, retail chains, takeout food, and personal care stores line Central Street and are mostly uninterrupted by more experience-based shopping opportunities. Clothing stores, local wares, and other interesting retail offerings were noted as missing during the workshop, and this indeed proved to be true at the time of our visual survey of the downtown.

## Opportunities

### Vacant Buildings and Parcels

As has been mentioned, vacant buildings and parcels along and around Central Street provide many opportunities for new and exciting development. The range of spaces available also expands the opportunities for this by giving interested parties the chance to choose the property that best fits their needs. For example, a former restaurant space is already suited for another food-related business, whereas a small storefront is better suited for a small retail store. By having these diverse spaces, there is less need for retrofitting or total remodeling to serve the needs of the new occupant if the former use was similar. If there were only one kind of space available in the downtown, it would be much less likely for various businesses to find a space well-suited for their needs.

### Social Capital

The value of local support and investment in downtown ventures cannot be underestimated. Many residents interviewed by the consulting team expressed a strong desire to help with Winchendon's revitalization, and we are confident that this desire exists in residents across town. Even if the investment is not directly financial, people can still do their part in supporting businesses by talking about them, choosing to patronize them over chain stores, and helping to keep the downtown a clean and safe place to do business. In some cases, nothing more than volunteer time and energy is needed to help a business successfully establish itself.

### Promotion

In addition to encouraging local people to spread the word and advocate for new and existing businesses, more formal promotion could do a lot to help commercial activity in the downtown area. Currently the Redevelopment Authority has a listing of available commercial properties and works with interested parties, but it is simply not enough. In the same vein, the current promotional brochure for the Town is not directed specifically at the downtown or economic development. A

more targeted marketing document or campaign could really increase interest and activity in the downtown.

## Threats

### No Comprehensive Strategy

By not having a strategy or plan in place to encourage and direct commercial development, the Town is allowing development to take the path of least resistance. In this case, this path results in either less than ideal development or no development at all. It is difficult for the Town to get the kinds of investment and businesses they want in the downtown if they have not come to a consensus on what exactly that is and how to go after it. While it is not productive to be very particular or selective, it is important to have a vision of the commercial development that will thrive and contribute to the vitality of the downtown.

### Disinvestment

One of the reasons offered to us by a local resident and stakeholder as to why new commercial development in town has not conformed to the walkable, unique character that is so desired was that too much push back and too many requirements will cause investors to look elsewhere. This was the explanation for why CVS was allowed to knock down an historic house and build a large parking lot in its large setback from the street, despite zoning that is supposed to result in walkable development. The pattern of disinvestment and loss of interest in the area has caused the Town to become wary of losing any investment it can get. However, by lowering the standards, the Town is further distancing itself from achieving its vision.

### Regional Competition

Rindge, New Hampshire, is just a 15 minute drive from Winchendon and has several big box stores such as Walmart, Dollar Tree and Market Basket and a (tax-free) liquor and wine store. During a visit by the consulting team to Rindge, it was clear that this area is busy with activity, and the prevalence of Massachusetts license plates along this commercial strip attests to the fact that many people from nearby travel across the border to make purchases. The combination of untaxed and nearby shopping has no doubt hurt downtown Winchendon in the past and present, and can be considered a threat for future businesses. Winchendon is also within an hour's drive to the larger cities of Keene, New Hampshire and Worcester and Fitchburg in Massachusetts, which also offer a wider range of retail stores.

## Existing Conditions: Market Trends

### Strengths

#### Surplus of Sales in Furniture and Building Materials

According to ESRI Community Analyst reports from 2014, Winchendon has a surplus of retail sales in the Furniture and Home Furnishings, and Building Materials and Supply Stores industry groups (Dun and Bradstreet Inc., Winchendon, 2014). Having a surplus means that these industry groups are not only meeting the spending potential of local residents, but they are also surpassing it by attracting the spending of people outside the Town. This is not surprising, as downtown Winchendon has two notable examples of these kinds of stores: The Winchendon Furniture Company, and Belletetes. Winchendon also has a slight surplus of spending in Personal Care Stores (Dun and Bradstreet Inc., Winchendon, 2014). This is also not surprising due to the presence of two large drug stores in the downtown.

### Weaknesses

#### Lost Sales in Clothing, Food, and Merchandise

Winchendon is severely lacking in industry groups including: Clothing and Accessory stores, Food and Beverage stores, General Merchandise stores, and Food Services and Drinking places. Each of these industry groups accounts for a loss of potential sales spending to outside communities in the range of 3 million to 9.7 million dollars per group. Over two million dollars of potential retail sales in each of the following industry groups is also being lost to other places: Motor Vehicle and Parts dealers, Electronics and Appliance stores, and Sporting Goods, Hobby, Books, and Music stores (Dun and Bradstreet Inc, 30 Central Street, 2014).

### Opportunities

#### Regional Demand

When the retail spending potential is observed for a 15 mile radius around downtown Winchendon, the leakage in different industry groups rises significantly (see Table 4). This means that Winchendon has the potential to expand its offerings to meet some of the supply that does not exist or does not suffice in the region. For example, the ESRI Community Analyst report from 2014 shows that there is approximately an 80 million dollar gap in the spending potential on goods provided by food and beverage stores (Dun and Bradstreet Inc., 30 Central Street, 2014). In other words, that 80 million dollars is leaking out of the 15 mile region around downtown Winchendon. Should Winchendon open more businesses related to food and beverage sales, it could recoup some of that 80 million dollars.

## Recapturing Leaking Business

Other big opportunities for Winchendon are to recapture some of the retail spending potential in the 15 mile region include expanding its offerings in the industry groups of Food Services and Drinking Places (63.7 million dollar spending gap), General Merchandise Stores (41 million dollar spending gap), Motor Vehicle and Parts dealers (142 million dollar gap), Clothing and Accessories Stores (88 million dollar spending gap), and Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, and Music Stores (20 million dollar spending gap) (Dun and Bradstreet Inc, 30 Central Street, 2014). These different industry groups have several different store types and services that new or existing businesses could pursue and attempt to capitalize upon the current deficit in the immediate region.

## Threats

### Regional Competition

As discussed previously, Winchendon's close proximity to tax-free New Hampshire poses a competition problem for local businesses. The impact of New Hampshire and other regional competition can be seen when a 30 mile radius is put around downtown Winchendon and the gaps in retail sales potential drop in some industry groups from the corresponding gaps in the 15 mile radius data (See Table 4). One notable example is in Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, and Music Stores, where the retail sales potential gap is only 11.5 million dollars, compared to 20 million dollars in the 15 mile radius (Dun and Bradstreet Inc., 30 Central Street, 2014). However, it should be noted that the gaps in actual sales and spending potential in the majority of the industry groups only continues to grow in the 30 mile radius, suggesting the regional threat is relatively minor.

Table 4: Retail Sales Demand, Supply, and Gap in a 15 and 30 Mile Radius around Winchendon

| Industry Group                                 | Radius   | Demand          | Supply          | Gap            |
|--|----------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers                  | 15 Miles | \$289,241,987   | \$147,176,967   | \$142,065,020  |
|  | 30 Miles | \$1,689,094,744 | \$1,213,701,999 | \$475,392,745  |
| Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores            | 15 Miles | \$35,585,988    | \$19,483,902    | \$16,102,086   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$213,783,646   | \$133,353,722   | \$80,429,924   |
| Electronics & Appliances Stores                | 15 Miles | \$44,973,921    | \$18,179,024    | \$26,794,897   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$256,022,073   | \$120,920,834   | \$135,101,239  |
| Bldg. Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply Stores | 15 Miles | \$46,677,941    | \$26,279,644    | \$20,398,297   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$285,435,932   | \$291,683,379   | -\$6,247,447   |
| Food & Beverage Stores                         | 15 Miles | \$280,246,592   | \$199,950,626   | \$80,295,966   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$1,590,192,812 | \$1,449,690,563 | \$140,502,249  |
| Health & Personal Care Stores                  | 15 Miles | \$134,988,561   | \$167,298,380   | -\$32,309,819  |
|  | 30 Miles | \$754,225,040   | \$604,166,596   | \$150,058,444  |
| Gasoline Stations                              | 15 Miles | \$128,698,578   | \$105,326,948   | \$23,371,630   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$744,816,140   | \$485,972,613   | \$258,843,527  |
| Clothing & Accessories Stores                  | 15 Miles | \$100,775,461   | \$12,741,973    | \$88,033,488   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$592,156,355   | \$236,913,799   | \$355,242,556  |
| Sporting Goods, Hobby, Books, & Music Stores   | 15 Miles | \$38,774,816    | \$18,613,635    | \$20,161,181   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$228,487,675   | \$216,938,243   | \$11,549,432   |
| General Merchandise Stores                     | 15 Miles | \$168,594,671   | \$127,522,862   | \$41,071,809   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$1,030,069,579 | \$742,862,175   | \$287,207,404  |
| Miscellaneous Store Retailers                  | 15 Miles | \$37,810,835    | \$23,047,119    | \$14,763,716   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$223,800,654   | \$194,597,824   | \$29,202,830   |
| Non-store Retailers                            | 15 Miles | \$113,674,617   | \$90,876,856    | \$22,797,761   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$681,181,338   | \$1,104,077,566 | -\$422,896,228 |
| Food Services & Drinking Places                | 15 Miles | \$160,240,380   | \$96,476,424    | \$63,763,956   |
|  | 30 Miles | \$953,489,268   | \$587,763,980   | \$365,725,288  |

Source: ESRI Community Analyst and Dun & Bradstreet. 2014

## Existing Conditions: Vacant Parcels

### Strengths

#### Vacancies Provide Opportunities for Redevelopment

A visitor to Central Street will simultaneously notice a concentration of healthy entrepreneurial activity in the downtown area alongside a great number of storefront and parcel vacancies. A visual inventory conducted by Carousel Consulting on October 10 revealed at least fourteen vacant buildings and storefronts on Winchendon's downtown corridor. In addition to these empty buildings, a number of vacant or underused parcels devoid of any built structures currently contribute to a sense of vacancy in the downtown. Underdeveloped parcels include parking lots, which, according to some Town residents and confirmed by Carousel Consulting's field observations, are chronically underutilized in many cases and are rarely more than half full. Particularly stark are the empty parking lots near Railroad Street on the northern half of Central Street. These parcels, though currently degrading the aesthetic and economic value of the downtown, can be opportunities for revitalization and renewed activity in the heart of Town.

### Weaknesses

#### Poor Condition of Vacant Buildings

In many cases, little is currently known about the built structures, conditions, and ownership patterns of these vacant spaces and parcels. In some cases, vacant buildings are so deteriorated that renovation costs are prohibitive for new investors. These empty spaces, while expensive to prospective investors, are also expensive for the Town in terms of the missed property tax revenue that would come from new or renewed, occupied buildings on these lots. Currently dismaying to the Town is the long-term status of several vacancies, including the RHI Building, Joseph's Candy Shop, and the old mill buildings that have been vacant for several years.

### Opportunities

#### Opportunities for Infill and Increased Tax Revenue

These parcels, when developed or remodeled and occupied will provide central sites for more businesses, community spaces, new buildings or pocket parks. Developing or restoring currently empty buildings or lots can generate new property tax revenues to be reinvested in revitalization efforts that can fuel continued improvement as time passes.

## Threats

### Haphazard Approach to Historic Preservation

A potential barrier to rapid revitalization of some downtown parcels could be a lack of a strategic approach to historic preservation. An inflexible prioritization of historic preservation can potentially stifle the activation of vacant buildings on Central Street, losing potential tax revenue for the Town and contributing to vacancy blight in what could be the buzzing hub of Winchendon Village. A more strategic approach to historic preservation should couple conservation of Winchendon's historic resources with a vibrant, planned revitalization of key parcels in the downtown.

*Table 5: Partially Vacant Buildings*

| Building Name              | Street Address     | Owner                   | Owner City   | State | Zip Code | Use        | Year Built |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------|-------|----------|------------|------------|
| Winchendon Family Pharmacy | 111 Central St     | Mizhir, John A.         | Winchendon   | MA    | 01475    | OFFICE     | 1978       |
| N/A                        | 87-91 Central St   | Doyle, Patrick E.       | Great Falls  | VA    | 22066    | COMM BLOCK | 1907       |
| Family Dollar Plaza        | 5-49 Central St    | Winchendon Plaza, LLC   | Boston       | MA    | 02127    | SHOP CTR   | 1960       |
| N/A                        | 255-257 Central St | Giannetos, John L.      | West Chatham | MA    | 02669    | STORE      | 1989       |
| N/A                        | 206-210 Central St | Stewart, William C. Jr. | Winchendon   | MA    | 01475    | COMM BLOCK | 1900       |
| N/A                        | 196-202 Central St | KAB Realty Corp         | Winchendon   | MA    | 01475    | COMM BLOCK | 1900       |
| Hungry 4 Pizza             | 48-60 Central St   | Winchendon Park LLC     | Grafton      | MA    | 01519    | REST.      | 1830       |

*Table 6: Fully Vacant Buildings*

| Building Name | Street Address     | Owner Name              | Owner City | State | Zip Code | Use        | Year Built |
|---------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------|-------|----------|------------|------------|
| Courthouse    | 78-86 Central St   | Winchendon Court LLC    | Grafton    | MA    | 01519    | OFFICE     | 1900       |
| RHI Building  | 212-220 Central St | James R Caton           | Gardner    | MA    | 01440    | COMM BLOCK | 1850       |
| N/A           | 102 Front St       | Lighter Restaurant, LLC | Barre      | MA    | 01005    | REST.      | 1900       |
| Joseph's      | 22 Central St      | Catherine Drudi         | Worcester  | MA    | 01615    | STORE      | 1875       |
| N/A           | 306 Central St     | Richard Gordon          | Winchendon | MA    | 01475    | COMM BLOCK | 1900       |
| N/A           | 18 Railroad St     | Vasilios Halkiadakos    | Townsend   | MA    | 01469    | STORE      | 1965       |

## Focus Area: Land Use and Zoning

### Context/Background

#### Goals and Values from the Master Plan and Zoning Bylaws

As mentioned in the *Existing Conditions* chapter, Winchendon is in the process of updating its Master Plan. The Plan was last updated in 2007, but that update provided only additional information on which elements of the last iteration of the Plan, the 2001 version, had been implemented. The goals and visions have not changed substantially since the Plan's 2001 iteration. These goals are articulated here:

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*In the expenditure of Town funds, town planning and regulatory efforts, Winchendon's governing and related organizations will endeavor to preserve and protect vital Town interests. Among these are our rural character, our natural resources, our educational system, our labor, our historic heritage, our existing agricultural operations, and our downtown/main street. (2001 Master Plan, pg. 2)*

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For the most part, the zoning bylaws (which were last updated earlier this year) seem to reflect these values.<sup>2</sup> The Planned Development zone, which encompasses the revitalization area, is particularly reflective of the Master Plan's goals and values. The Planned Development zone actively encourages and allows for the preservation and protection of natural resources, historic heritage, and downtown character, all of which are listed as priorities in the Master Plan's vision. It uses a sticks and carrots approach to encouraging what the Town wants, and discouraging what it does not by allowing uses such as mixed-use development and restaurants by-right, and requiring places such as fast food and convenience stores to have a special permit. However, some of the development that exists on Central Street is in conflict with the Master Plan's vision and is non-conforming with the zoning, having been built prior to their enactment.

### Conflicting Developments

Although downtown Winchendon is much more densely developed and has more mixed-use buildings than the rest of town, this development is inconsistent within the Central Street corridor; many buildings, and some entire parcels, lie vacant or are underutilized. Big box stores and the seas

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<sup>2</sup> See the *Existing Conditions* chapter for more analysis of zoning strengths and weaknesses

of pavement that accompany them interrupt the pedestrian experience and detract from the town's historic character. Moreover, although a significant portion of the study area lies within a historic district that is registered on the National Register of Historic Places, some historic buildings are threatened by development or have already been demolished. A major challenge moving forward will be to use the goals stated in the Master Plan and zoning bylaws to shape the future redevelopment of the downtown area.

## Team Findings

### At First Glance

At first glance, the Town's zoning bylaws do not seem to be problematic. The Planned Development Zone, which encompasses all of the developable land in the Central Street corridor, promotes mixed-use, walkable development styles with requirements such as street trees and sidewalk improvements. All of the elements desired by the Town and its residents are encouraged directly in the zoning bylaws.

As discussed in the *Existing Conditions* section of this report, dimensional requirements in the Planned Development Zone are generally consistent with the Town's stated goal of promoting walkability and dense downtown development. The zoning bylaws require a front setback of only five feet for non-residential uses (including mixed-use), with no side or rear setback. This should encourage the development of buildings that are close to the street and densely packed on either side. The bylaws allow non-residential uses to be up to three stories tall, which also encourages dense development. However, some dimensional requirements may be too restrictive; for example, non-residential uses must have at least 75 feet of frontage and may only cover 70 feet of the lot with impervious surface, which may preclude developers from replicating certain building typologies (such as that of Joseph's Candy Store) that already exist in town and are valued by residents.

The Town has also been relatively proactive in determining what uses are allowed by right or by special permit in the Planned Development Zone. Mixed-use development is allowed by right, as are restaurants, bed and breakfasts, retail stores, and certain types of agricultural and conservation uses. Less desirable types of development, including fast food and take-out restaurants, larger retail stores, and convenience stores, are allowed by special permit only, which does not preclude developers from building them but may serve as a hindrance and give the Town more control over site design. However, it may be that the Town is inadvertently scaring developers away with its complex table of permitted uses, or that certain desirable uses, such as indoor entertainment facilities, are currently restricted when they should be allowed by right.

## Encouraged vs. Required

Although Winchendon’s zoning bylaws are generally very comprehensive and proactive, they are not resulting in the type of development the Town desires. One reason for this is that, in order for the new zoning to take effect, there must be investment and redevelopment of parcels in the downtown. Most of the existing buildings are pre-existing non-conforming uses; in other words, these buildings do not match the zoning because they were built before the current zoning was adopted and as a result were “grandfathered.” Without any new construction or redevelopment of buildings taking place, the current zoning cannot be enforced.

The other reason why the current zoning is not generating the type of development it encourages is because it is *encouraged* but not *required*. This is important because it means that a developer is the one that brings the model of what they plan to build, while the Town must negotiate to get more of what it wants and what follows its vision. However, if the zoning is written to have required standards for development, the Town is creating the building model which the developer must then negotiate on. The difference is that, in the latter scenario, the Town is starting the conversation to which the developer must respond, not the other way around.



*A comparison of the types of development encouraged by the zoning bylaws (left) and the type of development actually allowed by the Town (right).*

## Implications of Weak Enforcement

The implications of letting developers start the conversation and start with their own development model are very problematic. In the case of the CVS at 301 Central Street, the developers were able to get away with having a large setback from the street and with tearing down an existing historic building. As the most recent development in the downtown, this set a precedent for future development projects because it took place under the existing zoning.

Figure 9: CVS



A similar situation might occur with Cumberland Farm's and the former Joseph's Candy Store. Cumberland Farms has proposed to purchase the candy store in order to expand their operations onto that lot. This will involve the demolition of the candy store, a historic icon in the downtown area. Allowing Cumberland Farms to do this will mean that the Town is losing an historic asset and allowing a gas station to further undermine the historic character and charm that the Town is working so hard to preserve and enhance in its downtown. The Town will also stand to lose property tax revenue if this demolition and expansion takes place, despite the common fear that they

will lose revenue if it does not take place.<sup>3</sup> Even if the Town cannot stop Cumberland Farms from purchasing and tearing down the candy store, it could at least have the zoning written in such a way that Cumby's must redevelop the lot in a way that is consistent with the previous use.



*Joseph's Candy Store is a historic building threatened with demolition.*

## Outdated Bylaws

A close examination of the bylaws reveals that a couple of outdated sections have not yet been removed. For instance, Article 11: Residential Development was passed in 2011 to set guidelines for new development and preservation of open space; however, Article 13 Section 7, which was passed in 2002 and was enacted for a duration of 6 years, is still in the bylaws. This bylaw placed growth limits on development whereby a developer was only allow to apply for building permits for a limited number of units in a given year. While the Town may have felt this was a necessary restriction prior to the recession and when they were concerned about growth, that concern should

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed analysis, see Table 8: Joseph's and Cumberland Farms Tax Analysis, in the *Aesthetics* Chapter

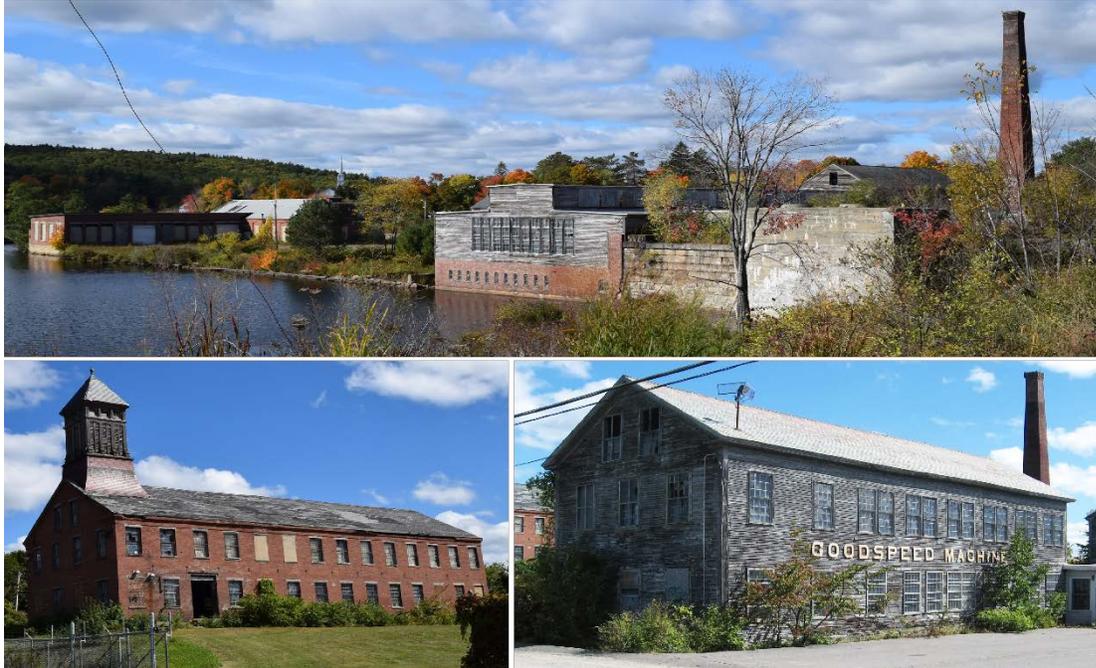
have largely faded given the modest 7 percent growth in population from 2000 to 2010.<sup>4</sup> The presence of the bylaw, expired or otherwise, is significant because a developer reading through the bylaws may be concerned that such a bylaw would be enacted again. Even the suggestion of this bylaw may cause developers to hesitate before committing to redevelop a downtown parcel. It's a relatively easy change to remove this outdated bylaw from the zoning and emphasize more redevelopment-positive approaches.

### Options for Underutilized Mill Buildings

The revitalization area is home to two large mill buildings: the Doody Vaults building and the Goodspeed building, located in the eastern portion of the revitalization area off of Summer Street and on the edge of Whitney and Tannery Ponds. Each of these buildings is privately owned but largely underutilized; the Goodspeed building is primarily used for storage, and only one floor of the Doody building is used for the vault factory (White, personal communication, October 9, 2014). Anecdotal information from town planning staff indicates that many developers have considered redevelopment projects for the buildings; as many as several per week met with town staff prior to the recession (White, 2014). However, the real estate market has cooled significantly over the past five years, and instances of developers contacting the Town to inquire about the parcels are less frequent. Those who have inquired tended to be interested in using part of the buildings for residential uses (White, 2014). However, real estate agents and town officials both indicate that cost barriers exist to redeveloping these parcels.

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<sup>4</sup> See Figure 3 in the Socio-Economic Context section of the *Introduction* chapter



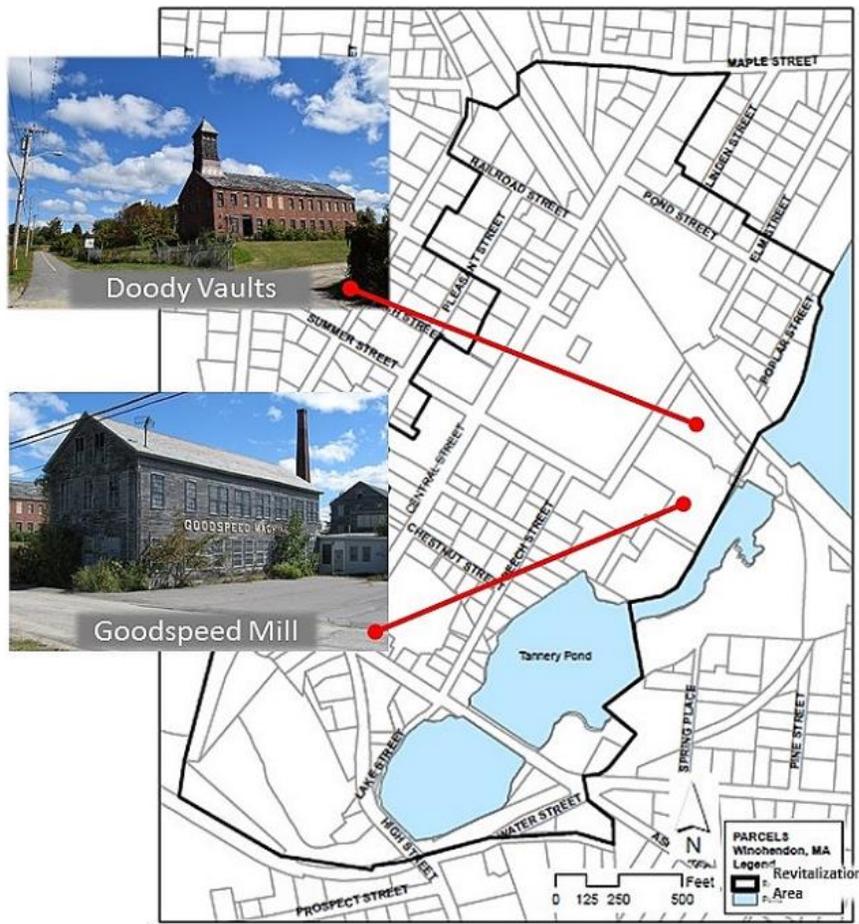
*Two historic mill buildings are a valuable resource downtown, but could be costly to redevelop.*

### Mill Conversion Overlay District Bylaw

Two of the three mill properties that comprise the Mill Conversion Overlay District (MCO) are within the revitalization area, the aforementioned Goodspeed Machine Company and Doody Burial Vaults mills (see Figure 10). The goals in the MCO are multi-fold and include preservation and re-use of the mill buildings, and the augmentation of the diversity of housing options in Winchendon. The MCO was last updated in 2007, prior to the weak housing market that took place during the recent recession of 2007-2013.

The MCO bylaw established a review process which includes a Special Permit application for redevelopment of the mill properties. Permitted uses include various forms of housing, commercial space such as restaurants and offices, and institutional space such as museums or charitable organizations. However, there are a few restrictions on the use of the buildings: 25 percent of the floor area must be used for residential uses, with a maximum of 10 percent designated as 3-bedroom units. Furthermore, 20 percent of the residential units are required to be affordable and to remain affordable in perpetuity. This is the only example of inclusionary zoning in Winchendon, which is a point of pride for some, but which may be inappropriate for this particular location.

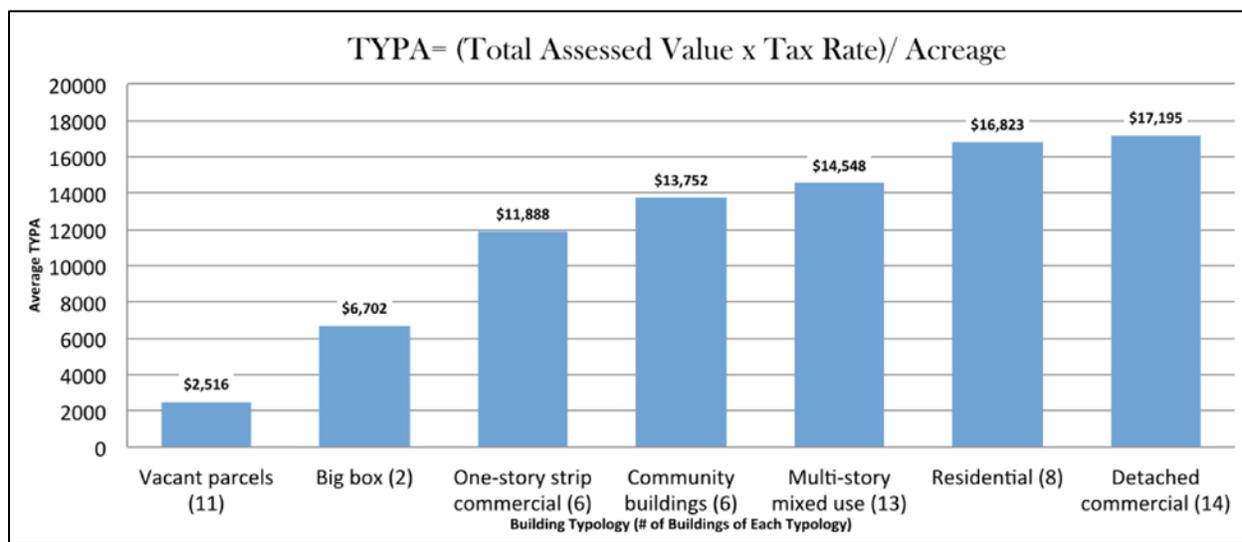
Figure 10: Doody Vaults and Goodspeed Machine Co.



### TYPA Analysis of Development Styles: Density pays; parking does not

When it comes to tax revenue, density pays! As explained in the Methodology section of this report, tax yield per acre (TYPA) is a useful tool for comparing building typologies in terms of the relative amount of property tax revenue the Town gains from each. As seen in Figure 11 below, the Town currently makes an annual average of only \$2,500 per acre from vacant, undeveloped parcels in the downtown area. The two big box stores in the study area, Rite Aid and Belletetes, together average only \$6,700 per acre in property taxes each year. At over \$17,000, the detached commercial typology has the highest tax yield per acre; buildings that fit this typology include the Athol Savings Bank and CVS. Close behind are residential and multi-story mixed-use typologies.

Figure 11: A Histogram of Typologies and Their TYPA's



The story that these data are telling is that the Town has a financial incentive to fight for the types of development that brings in more tax revenue. In downtown Winchendon, this means that detached commercial, residential, and multi-story mixed-use developments bring in higher tax revenue than one-story strip developments or big box stores. These data also prove that large parking lots are inefficient both in terms of space and in terms of tax revenue; a dense pattern of development yields higher property taxes than a more spread-out, auto-oriented development pattern. Simply put, density pays; parking does not.

Of course, increasing revenue from property taxes should not be the Town's only consideration when planning for redevelopment downtown. For example, multi-story mixed-use buildings can provide other benefits in addition to a high TYPA, such as improved walkability and opportunities for rental housing downtown; these considerations can and should influence the Town's preferences when it comes to the type of development it seeks. For a more thorough application of TYPA analysis to actual redevelopment areas in Winchendon, see *the Land Use Assessment/Recommendations* section in this chapter.

## Literature

### Introduction

Existing land uses in downtown Winchendon present many challenges to revitalization efforts. Underutilized mill buildings, inconsistent development patterns and unenforced dimensional and design standards may be compromising revitalization efforts in the town. The following articles

highlight some considerations the Town should weigh when reviewing their zoning bylaws and devising a strategy for redevelopment downtown.

### Mill Redevelopment: “Mill Town Roots”

This article by John Mullin (1998) highlights the important role mills historically played in smaller New England towns, and the economic struggles these towns have faced since the mills started closing in the 1960s. While the article highlights a success story of mill redevelopment in Maynard, MA, it also identifies the challenges towns grapple with in finding new uses for old mill buildings. Specifically, Mullin notes that isolated mill towns are particularly challenged to re-use mills. He also identifies other key factors in mill redevelopment: the integrity of the structure should be maintained; not all mill buildings are worth preserving (he posits that only 10 percent of vacant mills are ‘economically recoverable’); often owners need to address regulatory challenges to redevelopment (such as ADA and OSHA standards, floodplain proximity, etc.); public-private partnerships may assist with funding; tax relief is necessary to entice developers; local developers are better candidates (few mills are redeveloped by firms from away); and finally, it’s necessary to think about a long-term strategy (mill redevelopment is a slow process) (Mullin, 1998).

The key message from this article is that mill revitalization will be a challenge. As an isolated community, with little tourism in the surrounding area, the social and financial feasibility for redeveloping the mills is an obstacle. Particularly in light of the recent recession, redevelopment far from metropolitan areas is less likely. The Town may need to consider alternative strategies to make use of the mills. Rather than emphasize housing in the mills, the Town may instead look at ways to integrate the mills into the recreation opportunities in town, or offer more incentives to entice developers to take a second look at the mill buildings.

### Massachusetts Smart Growth ‘Village Overlay District Model Bylaw’

This document from the Smart Growth Toolkit identifies steps that may be taken by a smaller, older downtowns to promote revitalization and walkability (Massachusetts Department of Energy and Environmental Affairs, 2014). This model bylaw proposes numerous by-right uses, including multifamily dwellings, apartments, pharmacies, cafes, grocery stores, art galleries, taverns, artist live/work spaces, business and professional offices, and retail sales and services. Permitted uses include less dense and slightly larger-scale developments such as movie ‘houses,’ liquor stores and two-family and multifamily houses. Reduced on-site parking and offsite parking are recommended elements. Specific design standards for buildings, signs and site layout which emphasize the pedestrian experience are included (e.g., no blank walls along pedestrian walkways, lighted paths, front-lit signs, etc.). Reduced frontage (minimum 40 feet) is also recommended by permit.

Winchendon includes some of these concepts in their Planned Development zoning district. The Town may draw on the list of by-right uses in this article to encourage smaller-scale establishments in its downtown. They may also compare the recommended dimensional requirements to their dimensional requirements and site design standards, such as no blank walls, when considering future site plans. Some of these specific design standards may be adopted to establish stated and explicit design standards for future development

## Conclusion

Certain considerations need to be made when planning specific revitalization efforts in downtown. Active, inhabited buildings add vibrancy to the area. Encouraging creative uses for some of the vacant and underused buildings will encourage a sense of activity. The mill buildings may need economic incentives and more flexible development standards to entice developers. Smart Growth concepts such as varied housing types and alternative parking requirements may encourage walkability and more residents to live along Central St. Lastly, a village center overlay district (or adjustment of existing bylaws to match the effect of a VCOD) may serve to encourage the types of businesses essential to Central Street's renaissance.

## Precedents/Case Studies

### Introduction

Each of the three Massachusetts cities and towns in this section—Greenfield, Northampton, and Dalton—has faced challenges similar to those currently facing Winchendon. Whether confronted with a declining downtown, decaying mill buildings, or a need for more density, each city or town found creative solutions in the form of zoning reform, zoning overlay districts, or public-private partnerships. These precedents have informed Carousel Consulting's work in Winchendon as it relates to land use and zoning.

### Greenfield Downtown Master Plan

After experiencing a period of disinvestment, the town of Greenfield, Massachusetts implemented a Main Street Overlay District as part of its Downtown Master Plan (Greenfield Downtown Master Plan Committee, 2003). The Overlay District was designed to encourage dense, mixed-use development in the urban core while preserving the residential character of neighborhoods just outside the downtown area. The overlay also restricted first-floor space to retail use only, relegating office and residential uses to upper floors for an uninterrupted shopping experience. Another recommendation was to reduce barriers to residential development by modifying parking requirements; the zoning at the time required two parking spaces per unit, a requirement that was

not feasible or even necessary for certain types of residential developments. Parking for residents could also be located in dedicated spaces in public lots, which might help to further ‘populate’ downtown. A final component of the Main Street Overlay District was the implementation of design guidelines which would lend a more cohesive aesthetic to downtown Greenfield, encouraging more window shopping and pedestrian traffic.

Greenfield’s Main Street Overlay District could serve as a model for Winchendon in its revitalization process. Both towns have faced similar challenges: rising vacancy rates, disinvestment in the downtown, and underutilized parking areas. Rather than making sweeping changes to the zoning for the entire town, Winchendon could utilize a zoning overlay district in the downtown area to encourage dense, mixed-use development, reduce parking requirements, and implement design standards for a more cohesive aesthetic.

### Northampton, MA Zoning Bylaws

The city of Northampton, Massachusetts is a destination for people from all over the state because of its beautiful historic buildings, its dynamic and vibrant Main Street, and its diverse array of commercial destinations. The aspects of Northampton’s zoning bylaws that are most relevant to Winchendon relate to the dimensional regulations in the Central Business District (CBD). The City requires no minimum setbacks, no minimum street frontage, and no minimum parking (City of Northampton, 2014). This lack of dimensional and parking requirements, along with a *minimum* building height of 30 feet, have contributed to a pattern of extremely dense development downtown, which creates an exceptionally vibrant atmosphere. The City also allows 100 percent of a lot in the Central Business District to be covered with impervious surface (unless it abuts a residential use), which further contributes to density and walkability in the downtown area.

Although Winchendon has only a third the population of Northampton and lacks certain amenities that draw people to Northampton (i.e., a prestigious university), certain aspects of Northampton’s zoning bylaws may serve to inform Winchendon’s standards. The Town should not be afraid to experiment with progressive zoning standards such as those implemented in Northampton.

### Crane Mill Redevelopment, Dalton, MA

One somewhat recent redevelopment project in Dalton, Massachusetts aims to transform an old paper mill on 3.1 acres into a mixed-use building with a grocery store and micro-brewery (Lindsay, 2013). The buildings will also house a carousel, gift shop, and café; the former is a local historic feature which has been seeking a place to operate. The carousel operators are seeking a rent-free agreement. At the time this article was published, the plan had just been presented to the town Select Board, which responded favorably to the hope of an economic boost from the project (Lindsay, 2013).

Like Dalton, Winchendon is a small town that is located somewhat “off the beaten path.” The location of Winchendon's mills on the river near a scenic dam seems ideal for a restaurant, an environmental learning center, or even a toy museum. Allowing for a broader palette of uses than the zoning currently allows may lead developers to re-consider the options available for the Winchendon mills. Also, some amount of rent-subsidy may also attract developers and encourage mill conversion. Demolition or decay of the mills may be costly from an insurance standpoint, and it may be advantageous to do whatever is necessary to encourage developers to invest in the mills in their current state.

## Conclusion

These precedent studies provide valuable insight into possible solutions that the Town of Winchendon might implement as part of its revitalization plan. A zoning overlay district like Greenfield's could allow the Town to target the downtown area for redevelopment, while making zoning changes such as those implemented in Northampton would help Winchendon encourage dense commercial development on Central Street. The example of Dalton may provide some creative inspiration for Winchendon as it struggles to redevelop its underutilized mill buildings. Each of these cities and towns has implemented successful revitalization strategies that could provide a model for Winchendon.

## Assessment/Recommendations

### Incremental Change

There are several small changes the Town can make to the zoning bylaws to encourage more of the type of development it wants.

#### - **Dimensional Regulations**

Although the dimensional regulations for the Planned Development Zone are generally well thought-out and effective for promoting dense, mixed-use development, some slight changes might spur redevelopment in the downtown area (see Table 7 below). For example, 75 feet is too large for a minimum frontage requirement for non-residential uses. Many important and highly valued buildings in town, including Dugan's hair salon and Joseph's candy store, are located on parcels with less than the minimum required frontage; under current zoning, undersized parcels like these can be developed only for single-family residential uses, not for the mixed-use and commercial uses the Town is trying to encourage. Reducing the minimum street frontage for non-residential uses, or at least providing a workaround for landowners with small lots, could help spur development of more mixed-use and commercial uses on these lots.

The Town’s limit on impervious surface in the Planned Development Zone may also be too restrictive. Limiting impervious surface to 70 percent of the lot is a strategy designed to encourage on-site management of storm water, so the Town’s sewers are not overloaded every time it rains. However, as demonstrated by the precedent studies in this section of the report, many cities allow developers to cover 100 percent of the lot with impervious surface. In a rural town such as Winchendon, this is unlikely to have negative effects on a watershed scale, and the addition of pocket parks and bump-outs along the street (described in the *Circulation* chapter of this report) can mitigate any storm water effects on a more local scale. The advantage of increasing the amount of impervious surface is that small lots, such as the one that Dugan’s hair salon is located on, will be more viable candidates for redevelopment. The Town should consider changing zoning bylaws so that lots smaller than a certain square footage are allowed a higher percentage of impervious surface.

*Table 7: Recommended Zoning Changes for the Planned Development Zone*

| Zoning Feature          | Existing Conditions | Proposed changes |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Min Lot Area (ft)       | 5,000               | 2,500            |
| Frontage (ft)           | 75                  | 35               |
| Front Setback (ft)      | 5                   | 0                |
| Height (floors)         | Min 0, Max 3        | Min 2, Max 3     |
| Max Impervious Area (%) | 70                  | 100              |

Other zoning changes that would encourage the type of lively street atmosphere desired by the Town include implementing maximum setbacks, reducing parking requirements, and allowing more than one building on each parcel (See Figure 13 and Figure 14). If the zoning had included maximum setbacks when CVS was still in the permitting process, the Town might have had more control over where CVS located its building in relation to the street; again, it is important that the Town be the one to begin the conversation about the type of development it wants, not the developer. Reducing parking requirements would have the dual effect of reducing the amount of empty space in the downtown and forcing people to walk a little further from their cars, both of

which would contribute to an atmosphere of vitality on Central Street.<sup>5</sup> Finally, allowing more than one building on a lot would encourage denser development of large lots like the one Rite Aid is located on (for more detail on recommended redevelopment strategies around Rite Aid, see below).

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<sup>5</sup> For more detailed recommendations regarding parking, see the *Circulation* Chapter of this report.

Figure 12: Current Development Standards

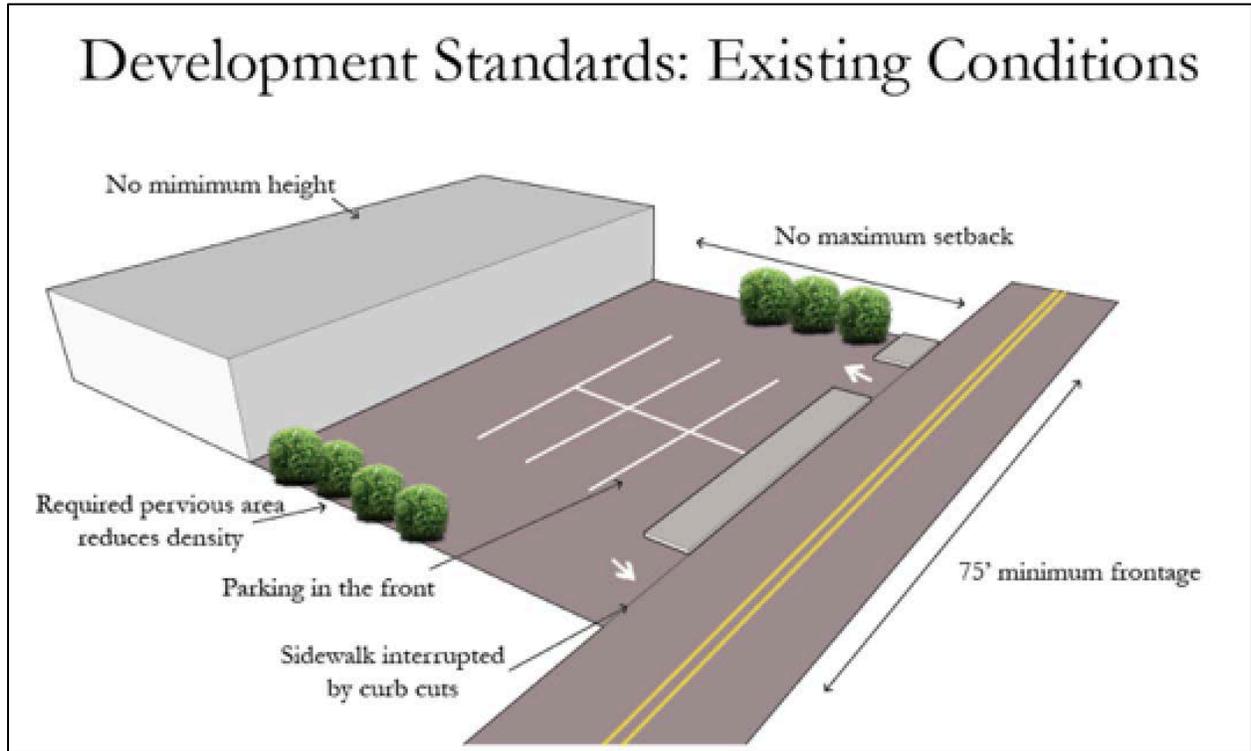


Figure 13: Development Standards Alternative 1

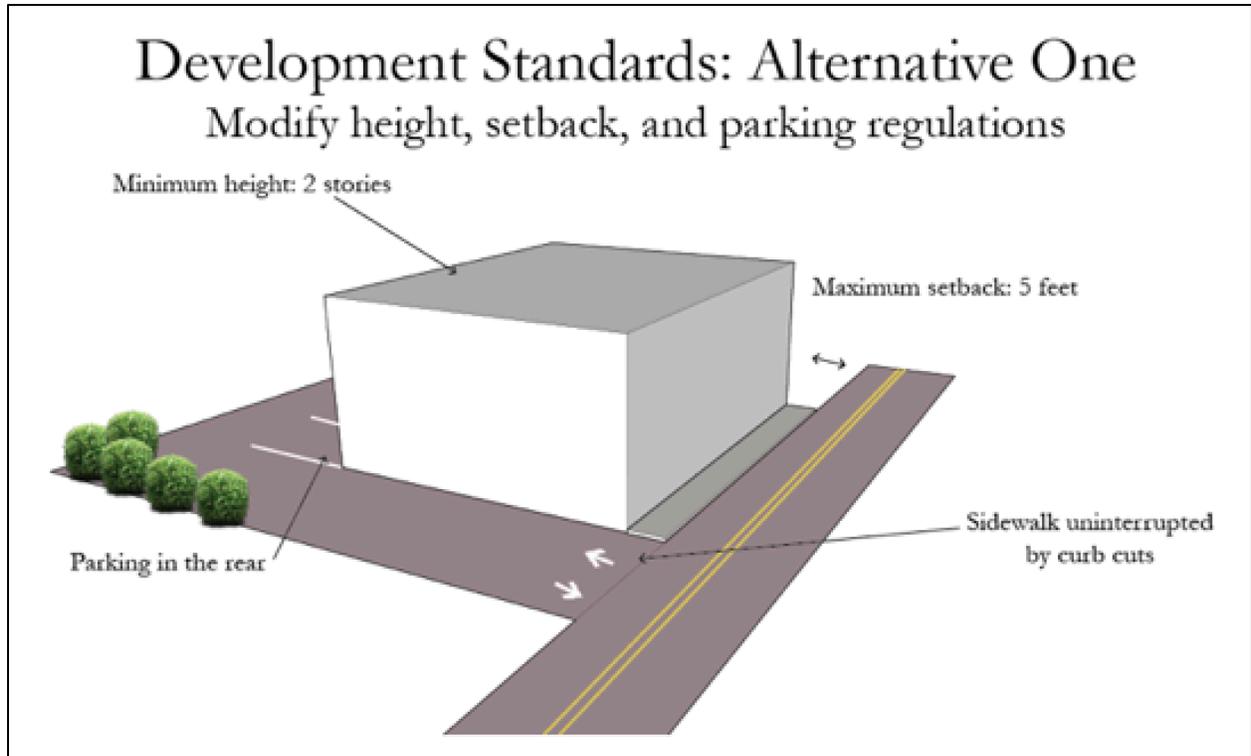
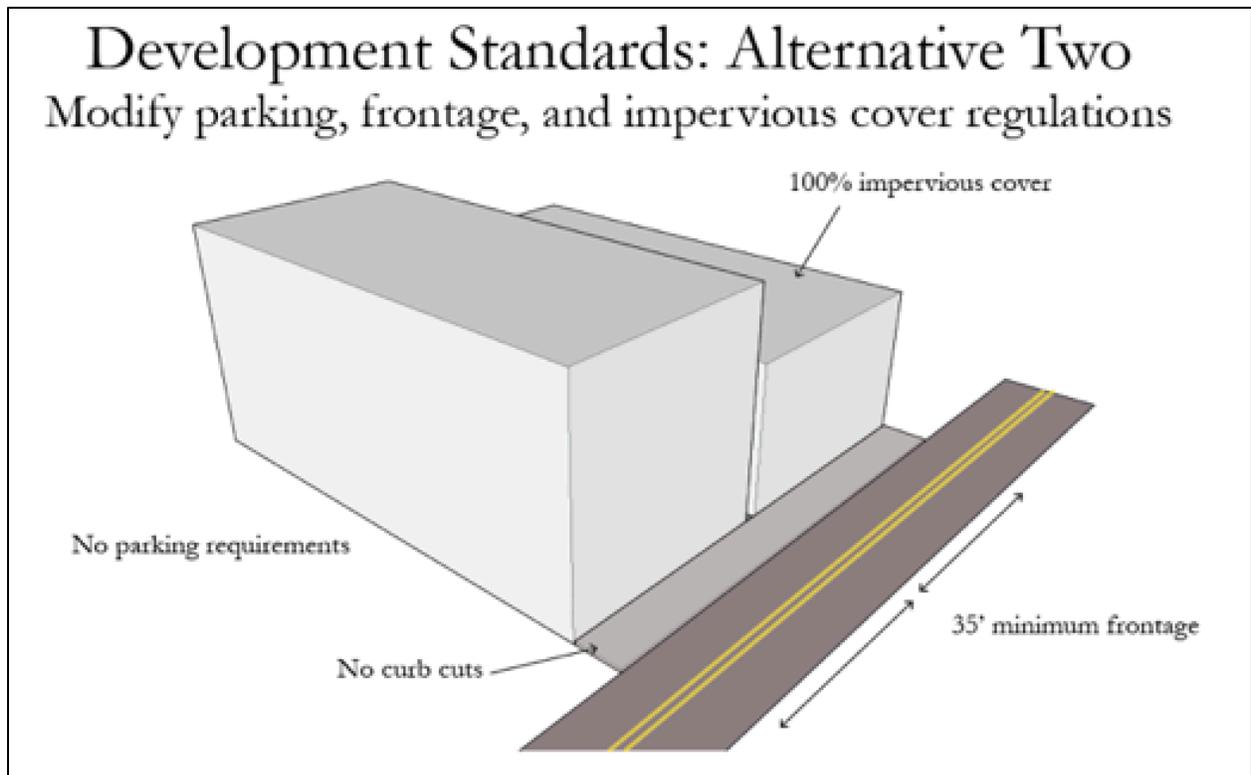


Figure 14: Development Standards Alternative 2



- **Streamlining Zoning Bylaws**

With the newest iteration of the Master Plan, the Town should also update its zoning to reflect the type of development it wants on Central Street. The table of permitted uses should be reevaluated and streamlined as much as possible in order to provide developers a clear outline of which types of development are allowed, which are prohibited, and which require extra permitting. Outdated zoning bylaws that have expired or been repealed should also be removed from the list of bylaws in order to avoid confusing developers. The Town should also consider producing some resources for developers to refer to apart from the official zoning bylaws that explain what is and isn't allowed on Central Street.

- **Mill Conversion Overlay District**

The existing MCOB bylaw seems to reflect the development pressures that may have existed prior to the recent recession. With 8.4 percent affordable housing, Winchendon is close to the state affordable housing mandate of 10 percent (MRPC, 2013). There may be other locations in town which would provide lower cost affordable housing than the mills do. The mill buildings, which are currently in use, may be used and redeveloped more extensively if fewer restrictions were placed on their uses.

One recommendation is to adjust the bylaws to the current real estate market. Housing may not be the most financially viable option for developers. The existing MCOB bylaw may be revised to prohibit any redevelopment from reducing the effective amount of affordable housing in town, without actually requiring that a certain percentage of the mill floor area be used for housing. Thus, if a developer is interested in adding apartments, and they want to put in ten units, at least one unit must be affordable. However, if the developer doesn't want to add any housing, this would also be an acceptable use; removing the residential element from the redevelopment requirement gives the developer this freedom.

Removing the housing requirement may also encourage more institutional uses, such as maker spaces (described in *Economic Development Strategies* chapter) and museums. A visitor's center for bike path users that introduces visitors to outdoor opportunities of the area may also be a good option for this location. Recreational opportunities such as a rock gym or indoor skate park may also be feasible.<sup>6</sup> A large space such as a mill may also provide a good location for a small movie theatre (since the old movie theatre in Winchendon burned down decades ago), or indoor performance

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<sup>6</sup> For a cost comparison of these options, see *Economic Development Strategies* chapter.

space. As Mullin emphasizes, it may be necessary to provide as many incentives as possible to developers when the location is out-of-the-way (1998).

## Required Standards

A more stringent solution would be to implement *required* design standards in the Planned Development Zone, as opposed to *suggested* design guidelines. Design standards might include requirements on where parking is located, an aesthetic theme for facades of new or renovated buildings, or even a color palate for the downtown area. For more detailed recommendations on design standards, see the *Aesthetics* chapter of this report.

Another issue is enforcement. Although the Town's current zoning is relatively proactive, the Town has not been quite as proactive about enforcing its own bylaws. CVS is a prime example; had the Town been able to hold its ground in negotiations rather than granting the developer a variance, the CVS building might complement the historic, rural character of the surrounding area a little better. Although it is difficult for a town experiencing decline and disinvestment to feel they have the clout to negotiate with developers this way, the section below reveals that it is, in fact, in the Town's best interest to fight for the type of development they want.

## Revitalization Overlay District

Overlay Districts are a way that the Town can incorporate requirements that are specific to each area of the downtown. For instance, the Town might want more density and a certain style of development for southern Central Street, but might want a little less density in the northern end of Central Street where it approaches a residential area.

Having overlay districts is beneficial because it allows the Town to be very specific about what it wants and where without needing to change underlying zoning. Also, an overlay district can be less intimidating to developers than other development standards, such as form-based code. The zoning changes outlined in the *Incremental Change* section of this chapter could even be incorporated into a Revitalization Overlay District, rather than incorporating them one-at-a-time into the zoning bylaws.

## Redevelop Underutilized Areas with Dense, Mixed-Use Development

As mentioned previously, tax yield per acre (TYPA) is a tool that makes the connection between development typologies and the relative property taxes generated by each. To demonstrate the utility of TYPA analysis, and to make the case for encouraging a denser pattern of development on Central Street, two redevelopment areas are showcased here: the Railroad Street neighborhood and the parcel at 111 Central Street.

Figure 15: Railroad Street and 111 Central Street



Both areas were selected for TYPA analysis because they are both underutilized spaces that contribute to the feeling of emptiness that overwhelms northern Central Street. The Railroad Street redevelopment area consists of four parcels, including the two underutilized parking lots north of the Winchendon Furniture Company, the parcel where Rite Aid is located, and an old car lot to the north of Rite Aid. The redevelopment area at 111 Central Street consists of only one parcel and currently contains only one building, which is vacant except for an attorney’s office. This type of analysis could be performed on any parcel, or group of parcels, in Winchendon, but these two areas were selected by Carousel Consulting as prime candidates for redevelopment.

Figure 16: Rite-Aid Existing Development

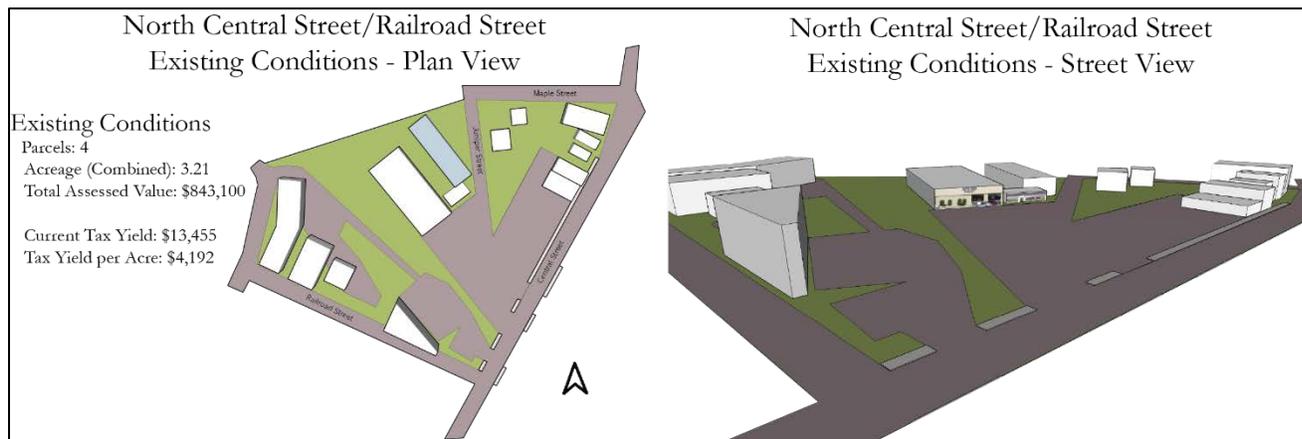
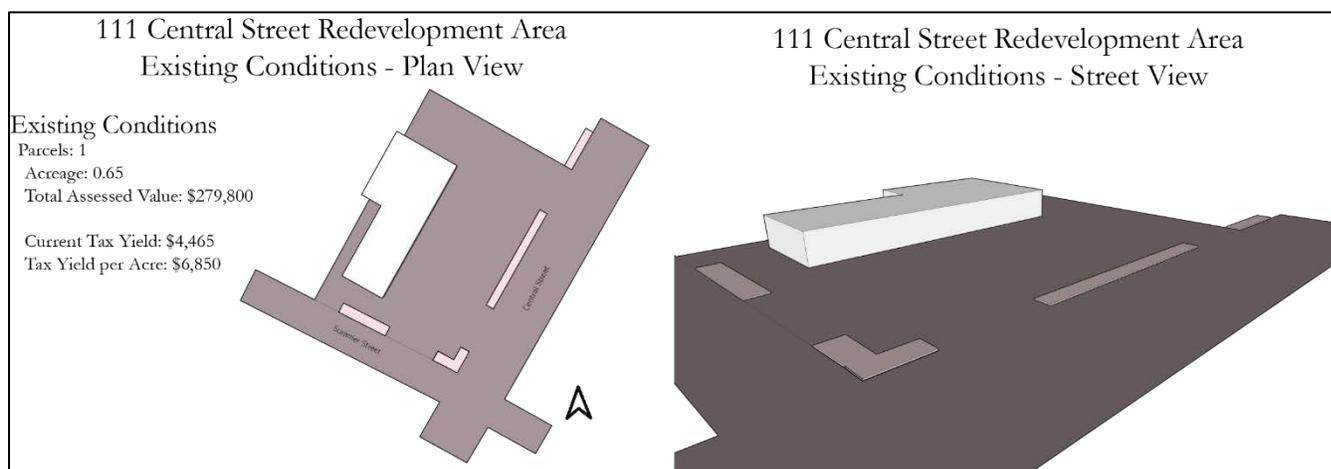


Figure 17: Winchendon Family Pharmacy Parcel Existing Development



In terms of property taxes, neither of these properties is ‘pulling their weight.’ As is seen in Figure 16 and Figure 17, both of these properties contain large parking lots, which do not generate much in property taxes. In the case of the Railroad Street area, the Rite Aid building stands alone in a sea of parking, and the building footprint is only a small fraction of the area of the parcel. Rite Aid also fits into the big box typology, which, as explained above in the *Focus Area: Land Use-Team Findings* section, has the lowest average tax yield per acre of any building typology in downtown Winchendon. Currently, the four parcels around Rite Aid bring in only \$13,455 in property taxes each year, or \$4,192 per acre. The redevelopment area at 111 Central Street is also dominated by parking, with just a small building at the back of the lot; this parcel currently brings in just \$4,465 in property taxes, or \$6,850 per acre.

Figure 18: Rite-Aid Redevelopment

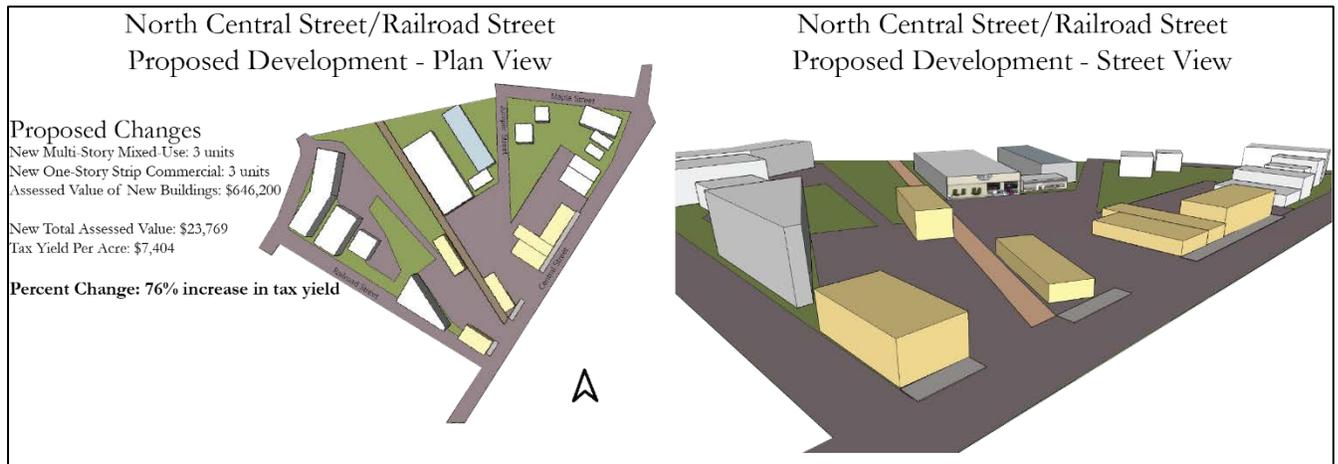


Figure 19: Winchendon Family Pharmacy Parcel Redevelopment

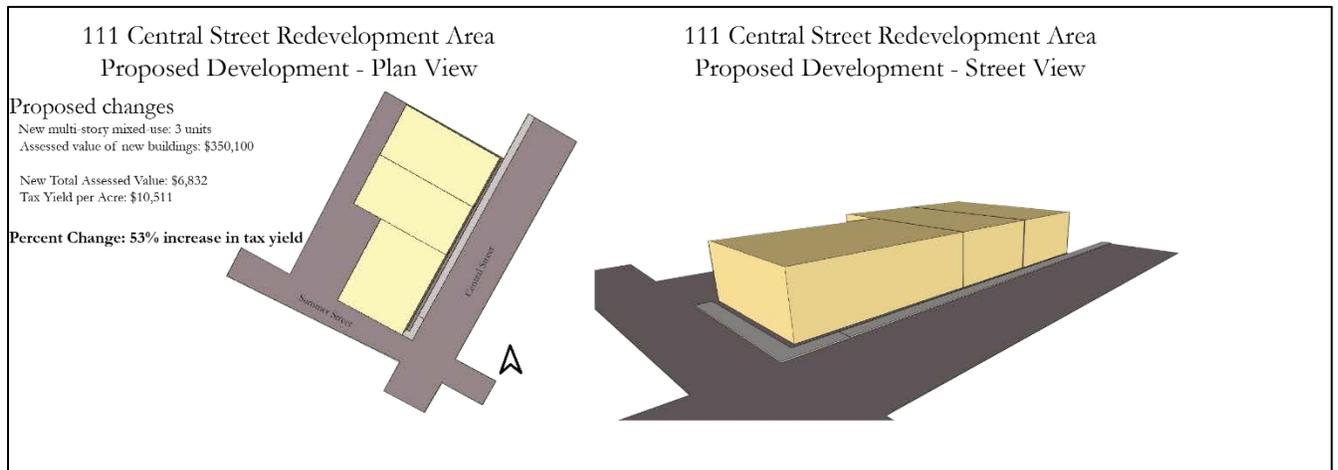


Figure 18 and Figure 19 envision a redevelopment strategy for these two areas that not only increases tax revenue for the Town, but that also promotes walkability and contributes to an atmosphere of vitality in Winchendon Village. The parcel at 111 Central Street is in a prime location for mixed-use development and could provide an opportunity for the Town to increase its stock of rental and affordable housing on the upper levels while also adding attractive retail and commercial spaces to the downtown core. The Railroad Street area abuts the railroad right-of-way, which, in this

vision for Winchendon's future, has been transformed into a bike path to link New Hampshire trails with the North Central Pathway.<sup>7</sup> With the addition of this amenity come some intriguing opportunities for businesses along the bike path; examples might include an outdoor recreation store or bike shop, or even an ice cream stand or café.

Using tax yield per acre analysis gives the Town a strong financial incentive to fight for more attractive styles of development than the big box typology it has settled for in the past. In this redevelopment scenario, the Town would collect 76 percent more in property tax revenue from the Rite Aid redevelopment, and 53 percent more from the redevelopment area at 111 Central Street. This analysis also provides strong arguments for increasing density and walkability downtown; after all, density pays, but parking does not. The Railroad Street area and the parcel at 111 Central Street were identified as prime candidates for redevelopment, but this type of analysis could be used anywhere in Winchendon as a factor in determining the best direction for development to take.<sup>8</sup>

## Funding and Partnership Opportunities

- **MassWorks Infrastructure** money can be utilized to make infrastructure improvements needed to support increased development and density, such as redesigned streets and sidewalks. Should the demand arise, the money could also be used to create more Town-owned parking, such as a municipal parking lot.<sup>9</sup>
- **Community Development Block Grant** money originates in the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. From there it is distributed to municipalities and state governments. With a population well under the 50,000 cap, Winchendon is eligible to receive CDBG funding from the state. This money be used to help improve existing development make it more in conformance with the zoning. For example, the grant money could be used by the Town or Redevelopment Authority to purchase and redevelop foreclosed properties. CDBG money can also be applied for by the Town on behalf of a specific developer or property owner.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For more recommendations on extending the bike path, see *Local Open Space Amenities* chapter of this report.

<sup>8</sup> For more discussion of tax yield per acre as it relates to Cumberland Farms and Joseph's Candy Store, see *Economic Development* chapter of this report.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the Massworks Infrastructure Program, go to:  
<http://www.mass.gov/hed/economic/eohed/pro/infrastructure/massworks/>

<sup>10</sup> Read more about the CDBG program at:  
[http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/comm\\_planning/communitydevelopment/programs](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/communitydevelopment/programs)

- The **Winchendon Redevelopment Authority** serves as an opportunity to bridge the Town and private property owners' interests and needs regarding development. The authority has a history of purchasing foreclosed properties for rehabilitation and pairing with private land owners to secure the funds they need to improve their buildings.
- **Low-Interest Loans** through partnership with local banks can make redevelopment more economically feasible for private investors and property owners.

## Timeline for Implementation

Land use and zoning are at the heart of the existing conditions of the downtown and are inseparable from its future. Being vigilant in enforcing the current zoning and improving upon it to advance the Town's vision for walkable, mixed-use, dense development will be integral to the realization of its revitalization goals. The following is a summary of our recommendations in this chapter, organized into phases of implementation.

### Six Months to Two Years

- In the short-term, the best thing Winchendon can do is enforce its current zoning more stringently. The Town should avoid settling for development typologies that do not contribute to the vitality of Central Street and to the historic, rural character of the town in general.
- Incremental changes to the zoning such as those outlined in the chapter (decreasing minimum frontage, implementing maximum setbacks, etc.) can also be a short-term measure to prevent future development that is not consistent with Winchendon's goals and vision.
- The Town should also begin taking steps to encourage the types of development it desires; the first step will be to clearly articulate these typologies and to take a stand with developers to fight for these typologies.
- Tax yield per acre analysis provides the Town with a real financial incentive to fight for dense, mixed-use development with minimal parking.

### Two to Five Years

- On a longer timeline, the Town should consider implementing a Revitalization Overlay Zoning District. With this tool, the Town can implement zoning changes in a very specific, targeted way to encourage redevelopment on Central Street.
- The Town should also begin planning for the extension of the bike path and the redevelopment of underutilized areas, including Railroad Street and 111 Central Street.

### Five Years or More

- As the redevelopment of Railroad Street and 111 Central Street are completed, the Town should be constantly reevaluating its values and vision for the future of Winchendon. The type of development desired by the Town and its residents may change over time, and the Town should be vigilant in updating its zoning to encourage and incentivize the typologies it wants.

# Focus Area: Economic Redevelopment Strategies

## Context/Background

### A Self-Perpetuating Problem

Winchendon's downtown has suffered from the loss of local businesses and an overall lack of vitality. Activity is limited primarily to people running errands or picking up takeout, hastily walking the short distance from their car to their destination. The lack of points of interest, gathering spaces, and retail diversity has eliminated both the opportunity and the desire to linger when out in the downtown. The empty storefronts and inconsistent development styles along Central Street make an otherwise charming place feel bleak and detract from the experience to be had in the area. The problem, then, is self-perpetuating: people do not frequent the downtown because there are not enough interesting things to do and see or places to gather, and businesses have a hard time staying open because there is not enough foot traffic and people patronizing them. There must be a reason for people to go and spend time in the downtown, and there must also be a reason for them to look forward to returning.

### “Third Places”

One way to describe the types of businesses Winchendon needs is “third places”. These are the places where people go when they are not at home (“place one”), or at work (“place two”). Third places are venues that people go to when they want to meet up with friends, have a cup of coffee and read a book, have a night out with their significant other, have a play date, or do some activity for the sake of the experience. These are the kinds of places that will make the downtown more interesting and will make people want to visit and come back soon. Businesses which provide patrons a novel or enjoyable experience are also more likely to be sustainable because they offer something that the big-box stores and other competitors cannot.

## Team Findings

### Promotion and Branding

The Town has a very well-designed marketing brochure, but it is not seasonally updated or redistributed to showcase local events. The brochure also does not actively target an audience that is specific to the downtown, whether that audience is visitors or potential businesses.

The “Toy Town” moniker is an important homage to Winchendon's heritage, a heritage of which it is very proud and fond. However, “Toy Town” does not refer specifically to the downtown, but rather the town overall. In other words, the downtown does not have its own unique identity to distinguish it as a particular destination within Winchendon.

Also, insofar as being a destination, the downtown has few points of interest despite its close proximity to the waterfront and its rich history. The waterfront is largely hidden behind buildings and only visible from select vantage points. It is, however, showcased beautifully on the bike trail. Yet the problem there is that the bike trail is also somewhat hidden from view off Central Street and not properly promoted. Signage and other ways of directing people to local assets and increasing the awareness and enjoyment of those assets is sorely lacking.

Ultimately and unfortunately, the waterfront and select historical features in the downtown are not enough to make downtown Winchendon a stimulating place to be. There are few opportunities to have fun and interesting experiences in and around the Central Street Corridor. Thematic events, art displays, music, and other community and culture based events are missing, along with more permanent points of importance such as unique businesses and beautiful buildings.

### Organizational Leadership Vacuum

In terms of the local government and other local institutions, it is not plainly apparent that there is a willingness to support and help current and potential businesses. This is the result of the non-existence of a formally organized, locally-based economic development task force or plan. There are no local resources for owners; there are no volunteer days to help clean, paint, or otherwise make the area more inviting; there are no local marketing campaigns. In other words, there is not enough outreach to new businesses and active promotion of existing businesses because there is no manpower specifically assigned to it.

A full-blown economic development strategy is probably more than town officials can take on alone, but together with a strong community base of will power, sweat equity, and dedication, Winchendon has what it needs for enduring success. At the end of the day, the biggest asset Winchendon has at its disposal are the people who live and work there, and they should not be undervalued for the role they can play in the revitalization of the downtown. With just a small amount of increased organization and leadership, town residents can make the changes they want to see happen.

Ultimately, the Town and stakeholders need to invest more of their own time and energy into improving the downtown before they can expect to see any significant outside investment from businesses and consumers. Investors want to be in a place that people care about and are eager to maintain because it suggests that people will treat their investment similarly.

## Market Potential

### - **Workshop Responses: "No more pizza places!"**

According to residents who attended the public workshop help by Carousel Consulting, people would like to see more diversity in the business offerings downtown. The current prominence of shops selling pizza or necessities such as personal care items, hardware, or haircuts, is believed by residents to be the result of other businesses getting pushed out by big-box stores and tax-free shopping in New Hampshire. The suggestion proposed to us at the workshop was that the types of stores that residents desire and the types that could survive downtown are niche stores offering unique goods and services.

The interest in diversity and uniqueness seems to imply a desire for shopping and consumption opportunities that provide a novel, enjoyable environment and service. Take-out food and prescriptions are goods and services offered for convenience and/or necessity. A niche store or cafe offers goods and services for the experience. It is the experiential opportunities, the aforementioned “third places,” which Winchendon does not have and which it needs in order to become a destination.

### - **ESRI Community Analyst Market Data<sup>11</sup>**

According to data provided by Dun and Bradstreet Inc. via the ESRI Community Analyst reports, in a 15 mile radius around downtown Winchendon, there is a potential of 1.5 billion dollars in retail sales (Dun and Bradstreet Inc., 30 Central Street, 2014). Of that 1.5 billion dollars, only 1 billion dollars are being served in that 15 mile radius (*ibid*, 2014). This translates to a retail supply gap of 500 million dollars. In the Town of Winchendon alone, there is a 111.7 million dollar potential for retail sales, with only 69 million dollars of that potential being met (*ibid*, 2014). The other 42+ million dollars of potential retail spending is not being tapped and is leaking to other locations.

Winchendon has few retail industry groups that are drawing in outside spending and considered to be have a surplus of retail sales. Some of these groups include furniture stores, building materials and supplies dealers, and electronic shopping houses (Dun and Bradstreet Inc., 30 Central Street, 2014). Just about every other industry group designated by the ESRI Community Analyst software shows that there is a leakage of retail sales going to other communities (*ibid*, 2014). A similar pattern

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<sup>11</sup> See Table 4: Retail Sales Demand, Supply, and Gap in a 15 and 30 Mile Radius around Winchendon Table 4 in the *Existing Conditions Market Trends* chapter

can be found within the 15 mile radius of downtown Winchendon; only liquor stores, health care stores, and a few other industry groups are considered to have a surplus of retail stores (*ibid*, 2014).

Large retail sales gaps, or leakage, in both Winchendon alone and the larger 15 mile radius exist in the following industry groups: motor vehicle and parts dealers; food and beverage stores; food services and drinking places; clothing and clothing accessory stores; and sporting goods, hobby, music, and book stores (Dun and Bradstreet Inc., 30 Central Street, 2014). Notably, in the 15 mile radius, there is a leakage of about 80 million dollars for food and beverage stores, and a leakage of 88 million dollars for clothing and clothing accessory stores (*ibid*, 2014). In comparison, Winchendon alone has a leakage of 9 million dollars and 6.3 million dollars of retail sales at food and beverage stores and clothing and accessory stores, respectively (Dun and Bradstreet Inc., Winchendon, 2014).

Also of note is the retail spending gap in entertainment sales; there is 20 million dollar leakage of retail spending on sporting goods, hobby, music, and book stores in the 15 mile radius around downtown Winchendon (Dun and Bradstreet Inc., 30 Central Street, 2014). Another form of entertainment or leisure that the area lacks is going out to eat or for drinks. In the Food Services and Drinking Places industry group, there is a leakage of 63.7 million dollars in the 15 mile radius around downtown Winchendon (*ibid*, 2014). The leakage in the industry groups of clothing and accessories stores, food services and drinking places, and sporting goods, hobby, music, and book stores illustrates that these offerings are limited in the area, or the quality is such that people choose to go elsewhere. The leisure and entertainment retail market is severely lacking; it is failing to provide for the local residents and failing to draw in people from outside.

Finally, moving out to the 30 mile radius, which includes Keene, New Hampshire and Fitchburg, Massachusetts, the data continues to show increasing gaps between the retail sales potential and the actual amount of that spending being captured in the local market (Dun and Bradstreet Inc., 30 Central Street, 2014). The only notable exception is that there is decline of about a 10 million dollars in the sales gap in spending in Sporting Goods, Hobby, Books, and Music Stores from the 20 million dollar gap found in the 15 mile radius (*ibid*, 2014). Otherwise, the expanded regional market still has many opportunities for capturing more local spending.

It is important, however, to take into account how this data is collected and other variables that might have implications for spending patterns. The ESRI Community Analyst uses credit card data to generate its figures. This is significant because credit card spending often occurs online, in which case the money spent, or the “demand”, is not leaking to other nearby communities, instead it is leaking to online retailers. Competing with online shopping can be difficult; however, retail goods and services that are experience based, such as clothing and food, are not as likely to be sought out online. Another significant variable to consider is commuting patterns, and how that plays into where people shop and spend money. Given that most of Winchendon commutes an average of

over 30 minutes to work,<sup>12</sup> it should be assumed some of those commuters do their shopping near their place of employment, which could account for some of this leakage.

#### - **Conclusions**

The vast amount of retail sales money in the community and in the surrounding region is being spent elsewhere. Despite concern about tax-free shopping in New Hampshire, and the proximity of big-box stores, there is still a large amount of retail spending that is not being captured by these commonly mentioned threats. This means that even if Winchendon has been losing local business to nearby retail destinations, all hope is not lost for recapturing a share of the local market. Goods and services like dining, music, and clothes are experience-based and cannot be fully enjoyed in a big-box store or online, and the data show that the retail sales potential for these goods and services is largely untapped in the regional market. This is particularly good news regarding the residents' desire for more retail diversity because it means that the market for this already exists, and does not have to be created from scratch.

### Redevelopment Potential

#### - **Vacant Buildings**

There are a number of semi-vacant or entirely vacant buildings in downtown Winchendon which previously housed a variety of different businesses including restaurants, a pharmacy, and offices. The diversity of spaces available opens the downtown up to many different development and use opportunities. If storefronts were occupied, empty lots were filled, and seas of pavement were minimized, downtown Winchendon would begin to feel much more vibrant and inviting.

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<sup>12</sup> See Figure 5 in the *Socio-Economic Context* section of the *Introduction*



*Vacant buildings located on Central Street and in Blair Square, such as these buildings shown above, currently lend an air of emptiness to the downtown, but could be redeveloped to reenergize the street.*

#### **- Vacant Parcels**

There are several entirely vacant parcels in downtown Winchendon, many of which have frontage on Central Street. Almost all of these parcels are privately owned and, for various and sometimes unclear reasons, have not been developed or have been abandoned. Some of these undeveloped parcels are simply green space that appears largely untouched, while others are paved or have clearly been modified in some way. Whether they are in mostly natural condition or somewhat altered, these vacant parcels create many opportunities for infill development or open space. See Figure 20: Vacancies Map for a map of vacant buildings and parcels.

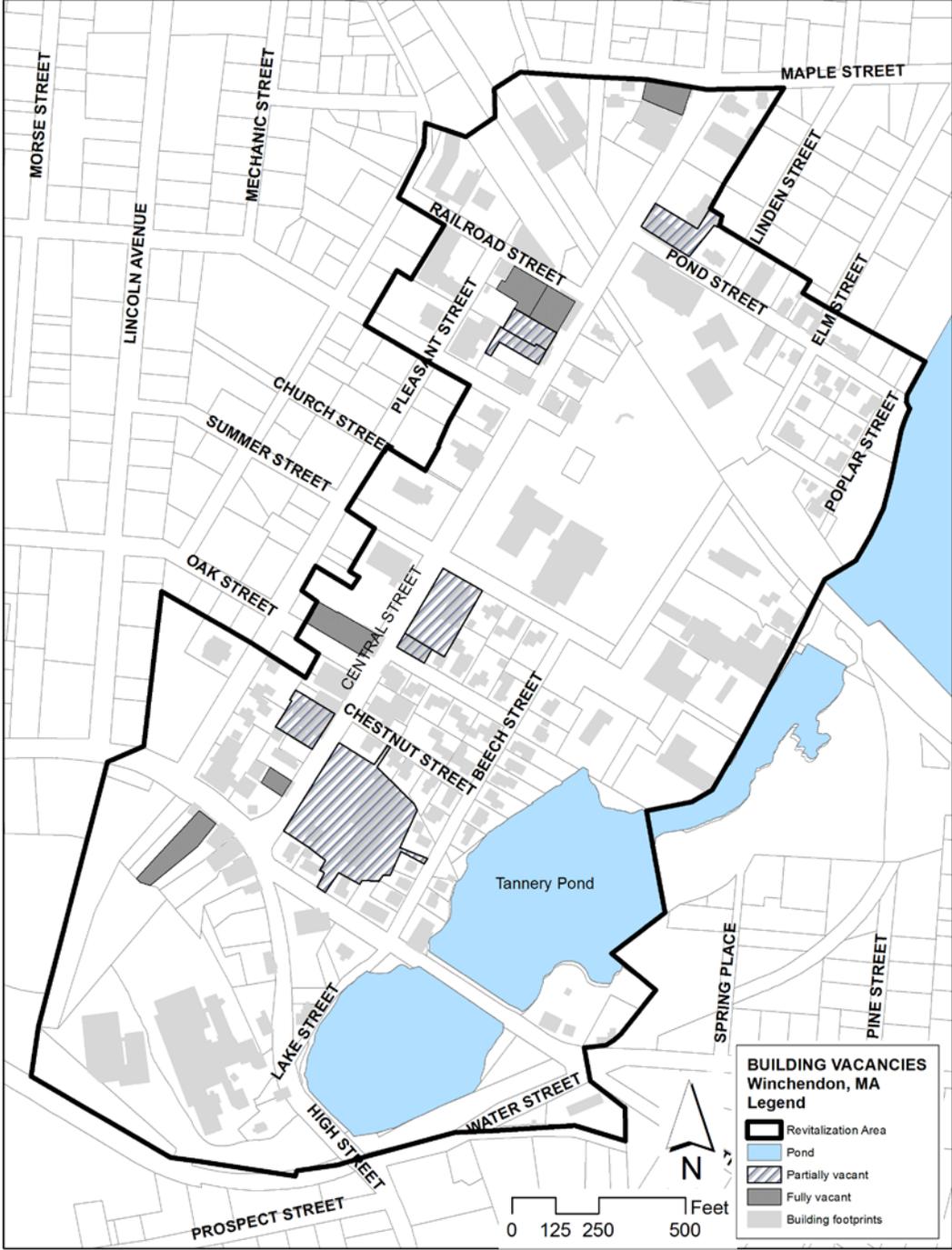


Figure 20: Vacancies Map

## Literature

### Introduction

Each of these articles provides recommendations that could be relevant to Winchendon in its economic redevelopment process. As the Town moves forward with its revitalization, it will have to consider employing strategies such as public-private partnerships, harnessing social capital, and finding creative ways to fill vacant buildings. Using evidence from peer-reviewed articles like these can provide the Town with credible sources for its own policies and actions, or at least with some creative ideas, for its own revitalization.

### “The Main Street Approach to Downtown Development”

This article by Kent Robertson presents the findings of an empirical study to measure how participating communities use the four elements of the National Institute for Historic Preservation’s Main Street Program (2004). The Main Street Approach is a four-point revitalization tool that aims to integrate cultural and historic preservation with downtown revitalization efforts for smaller towns. The four elements of the program are organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring (Robertson, 2004). This article highlights four case studies of small towns that implemented the Main Street program to show the specific ways they incorporated the four points.

Winchendon has many of the characteristics of other established Main Street cities – a historic district as well as a need and desire for economic and cultural reinvestment. The case studies presented in Robertson’s article highlight low-cost actions and policies Winchendon could adopt to revitalize its downtown, such as the Façade Squad in Tupelo, MS, which recruited retirees and volunteers to improve facades along the main street, or having a festival or large event to draw foot traffic downtown (Robertson, 2004).

### “Main Street Partnering”

Kent Robertson uses the case studies of Danville, Kentucky, and St. Charles, Illinois, to demonstrate the value of public-private partnerships in downtown revitalization projects (2002). Robertson outlined five major reasons to utilize partnerships in revitalization efforts: partnerships can broaden the support base for a project, increase the number of stakeholders who care about downtown, increase the amount of resources available for downtown revitalization, promote efficiency and avoid duplication of efforts, and increase the number of people available to work on downtown projects and events (Robertson, 2002). Danville and St. Charles both witnessed partnerships between city officials and agencies, chambers of commerce and other business groups, non-profit community groups, schools and universities, the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Main Street program, and many other groups as part of their revitalization efforts (ibid, 2002). Robertson

argued that these strong partnerships contributed to the designation of both cities as Great American Main Street Award winners by the National Main Street Center.

Expecting the local government in Winchendon to take on all the roles and responsibilities involved in a comprehensive economic development plan is not reasonable. The Town government will need the help and willpower of the local citizens to make the changes and improvements needed for a successful revitalization. As Robertson mentions, public-private partnerships increase the resource base for revitalization projects, in terms of time, energy, and money (2002). Having a wider support base will serve to help Winchendon's revitalization efforts be more feasible in the short term and more sustainable in the long term. Also, by creating partnerships, Winchendon residents, businesses, and public officials will be fostering the intangible elements of revitalization: community togetherness and pride.

### “Social Capitalism Begins at Home”

Social Capitalism, Inc. (SCI) is a group that has worked to join together organizations and individuals in Woburn, Massachusetts to increase social capital and civic engagement in that city (Crowley, 2005). David Crowley, its founder, recognized that Woburn officials, like those of many other places, did not have the time or resources to commit to promoting community involvement and the growth of social capital. His solution was to create SCI, a group specifically dedicated to improving community life in Woburn through projects such as a youth leadership program, a local concert series, and a weekly email chain of upcoming events. Crowley believes that SCI has helped Woburn by fostering local leadership, inspiring a movement towards positive change, and being a catalyst for community building. SCI aims to bridge the gap between race, age, and other social barriers so that the community can come together in a genuinely holistic way and have a sense of mutual interest and pride (Crowley, 2005).

Crowley explains that events such as neighborhood clean-up and local concerts bring people together, generate stewardship, and improve the overall reputation and outward character of the community (Crowley, 2005). Winchendon could benefit greatly from increased social capital and organization culminating in local events like the ones Crowley highlights. All of the positive changes and efforts that result from building social capital translate into a community that is happier, more vibrant, and more inviting, all of which are at the foundation of what Winchendon needs for its own revitalization.

### “Clustering Micro-Restaurants”

This article proposes an alternative to the food truck that still maintains its great food, small menu, and low cost backbone (Macht, 2014). Crafty entrepreneurs have found that larger one-story buildings can be purchased cheaply, divided into smaller units, and rented to micro-restaurateurs. The model benefits everyone because the rents are cheaper than for a standalone facility and so are

attractive to restaurateurs, but all the rents combined add up to more income for the building owner than a single use would generate. This article points out that these facilities work well in the reuse of empty buildings like car-dealerships or otherwise flexible spaces. (Macht, 2014)

Finding economical ways to fill vacant buildings in downtown Winchendon poses a problem for many reasons, and it is important to identify realistic business opportunities that will not only be able to survive, but will contribute to the vibrancy of the community. Something creative like a cluster of micro-restaurants presents an opportunity to diversify the food choices in Winchendon while also giving local entrepreneurs a much lower risk option for starting up their own small business in Town. Micro-restaurants would also increase the diversity of restaurant types in Winchendon and satisfy the desire of residents for a greater variety of food options. The affordability of the actual food product is another selling point; making delicious food available to people of a broad spectrum of incomes is a great way to bring people in the community together and to ensure a steady customer base. Additionally, the novelty of such a restaurant cluster could help generate outside interest in Winchendon and perhaps make it more of a destination.

## Conclusions

These articles provide useful examples for Winchendon to follow. Incremental changes, such as forming public-private partnerships and beginning to build and harness social capital, are the low-hanging fruit of Winchendon's revitalization. More comprehensive approaches, such as the Main Street approach with its four-point revitalization strategy (organization, promotion, design, economic restructuring), may also be an option for the future. Finding creative ways to fill vacancies, like micro-restaurants, is another strategy the Town should consider.

## Precedents/Case Studies

### Introduction

As part of our research, the consulting team examined plans and documents from towns and cities facing issues similar to Winchendon's: downtown disinvestment, high vacancy rates, and traffic issues. Each of the precedents we looked at employed creative solutions to these problems that were largely successful; Winchendon may have a lot to learn from these case studies.

### Village of Hamburg, New York Economic Development Strategy

Much like Winchendon, the Village of Hamburg, New York had been experiencing years of disinvestment and decline of local business activity. Its commercial center is traversed by Route 62, much like Winchendon's downtown being in the path of Routes 202 and 12. Understanding that many of the problems in the Village were due to the busy Route 62, regional trends of industrial decline, and the growth of large shopping centers nearby, the local government decided to hire

consultants to come up with an economic development strategy that coordinated with the upcoming redesign of Route 62.

### - **Promotion & Branding**

In their approach to promoting the commercial corridor on Route 62, the consultant creating the Economic Development Strategy for Hamburg cited the need for “tireless promotion” and “relentless effort” in publicizing the changes that would be coming with the redesign of Route 62, including roundabouts and streetscaping measures (Graves & Kempner, 2004). Essentially, the community needed to create as much buzz as possible, even reaching out to real estate agents to keep them updated on the reconstruction so they could communicate optimally with potential buyers. Also included in their recommendations is the adoption of a local tourism model that focused on the Village’s culture and character. They cite that this might include businesses working together to create special events, creating Village promotions, starting a buy local campaign, and tying in the local water body, Eighteen Mile Creek (Graves and Kempner, 2004).

### - **Organization**

When it came to their recommendations, the consultants put emphasis on the need for local organization and leadership to get revitalization efforts off the ground (Graves and Kempner, 2004). They state that the initial efforts on economic development should focus on strengthening existing businesses by creating more activities and events which bring people into the Village and in the vicinity of businesses. Support during the construction phase of the Route 62 project could include a low-interest loan pool for owners who are struggling financially, and the creation of a local business owners' group so that they could cross-promote their services. The consultants also point out that a local business owners' group will provide an outlet for coordination and communication outside of the official setting, which can hinder comfortable and candid conversation (Graves & Kempner, 2004).

### - **Redevelopment and Market Potential**

As for business growth and recruitment, the consultants suggest that long term strategies should include business trend monitoring, working closely with landlords to monitor potential new businesses, and utilizing a preferred list of business types (Graves & Kempner, 2004). However, the planners also suggest that property owners and local policies be open to “diverse uses” to keep the market from becoming saturated with any one use, and to allow for residential uses to intermingle with retail and commercial uses. They translate this to a more tangible recommendation: review and update the zoning to reflect the desire and opportunity for diverse building and land use.

### - **Conclusions**

With their Economic Development Strategy, the Village of Hamburg was able to follow a series of recommendations that served as a practical and effective means of generating renewed investment

and interest in its downtown. Winchendon can follow their lead on placing importance on promotion and organization as ways to catalyze more tangible revitalization efforts such as the road redesign and beautification. The legwork in the background and the support of the community can make a big difference in places like Hamburg and Winchendon where there is a need for reinvestment that is not only financial but also physical and emotional.

### Gardiner, Maine Revitalization Plan

When Gardiner completed its Downtown Revitalization Plan in 1999, the town shared many parallels with Winchendon: a small town located at the intersection of two state highways, with an underutilized waterfront area and a high rate of vacancies downtown. The Plan sought to encourage business growth downtown, create design standards, and implement needed public infrastructure improvements. It proposed to accomplish these goals through formation of public-private partnerships and business incentives and emphasized ‘brick and mortar’ results (Kent Associates and Casey & Godfrey Design Engineers, 1999).

Some of strategies that may be drawn from Gardiner's plan include: TIF financing may assist beautification efforts; CDBG funds may be used to renovate old buildings; design standards employed in Gardiner may be applicable to Winchendon; and public-private partnerships may be forged to address parking lot redevelopment. Lastly, Winchendon may seek to employ the Main Street model, as Gardiner did, to help mobilize revitalization efforts; participation in the program may be beyond the town’s current capacity, but the structure of the Main Street program may prove useful as a catalyst to revitalization efforts in the town.

### Main Street, Libertyville, Illinois

In this article, Pam Hume, the executive director of the non-profit organization Mainstreet Libertyville of Libertyville, Illinois, introduces the non-profit that has helped to spur the successful revitalization of the small town over the past 25 years (2013). The non-profit is mostly volunteer-supported, but has additionally benefitted from its network within both the Illinois Main Street and National Main Street revitalization support programs. The program has achieved its success through historic preservation efforts, special attention to small business development, and the establishment of over 50 community and retail events in the downtown area every year (Hume, 2013).

Libertyville, Illinois is similar to Winchendon in its simultaneous remoteness and placement on a busy commercial corridor, possession of a historic main street, and proximity to several lakes and other recreational destinations. Winchendon could do something similar to Libertyville and integrate recurring public events to attract foot traffic and commercial activity in downtown. There is the opportunity to capitalize upon and highlight the significant volunteer community base that has already shown great interest in the downtown revitalization efforts. It is possible that a sustained,

coherent and citizen-led program could play a key role in implementing the goals and strategies that Winchendon identifies as part of its future revitalization plan.

### Greenfield, MA Downtown Master Plan

As Greenfield, MA, struggled with a high rate of vacancies downtown, one of the major recommendations of the city's Downtown Master Plan is the redevelopment of vacant parcels in a strategic and targeted way (Greenfield Downtown Master Plan Committee, 2003). The plan identifies several key storefronts and upper-story units that, if redeveloped, would have a significant impact on lowering the vacancy rate as well as residents' perception of the vacancy rate. To accomplish this goal, the plan recommends that public-private partnerships be forged to assist building owners with tenant recruitment, marketing, financial plans, and loans for renovation. The plan is realistic about the feasibility of redeveloping these properties; recommendations include aggressive outreach to a diverse mix of tenants as well as working with property owners to offer building space at less than the assessed value to produce a higher return on investment for developers. The plan recognizes that targeting these key buildings would spur redevelopment in surrounding areas and bring a renewed vibrancy to the entire downtown area.

In spite of the small size of the Central Street corridor, several distinct neighborhoods can be identified: Blair Square, southern Central Street, and northern Central Street. The lack of density in the northern portion of our study area on Central Street and the prominence of vacant storefronts around Blair Square and southern Central Street means that these areas have different development needs. Winchendon would benefit from doing something similar to Greenfield by creating specific goals and targeting specific parcels in each area in order to create synergy and maximize the effect of the redevelopment projects. The impact of redevelopment efforts will be diluted if those efforts are haphazard and piecemeal, rather than geographically concentrated.

### Lemoore, CA Downtown Revitalization Plan

This article briefly reviews the highlights of a 1995 APA-award-winning plan (Gallagher, 1995). Lemoore, CA, located 40 minutes south of Fresno, is a small town which sought to reinvigorate its historic downtown in a way that acknowledged competition from nearby malls and 'big box' stores by offering alternative attractions. Plan proposals included encouraging niche businesses for specialty retail, entertainment and recreation. The town is located near a naval base, and so a Naval Air Museum was proposed to attract tourists. The plan also emphasized the preservation of historic buildings and the need for future projects to honor the architectural context of the town. A 'downtown commercial' district was added to the local zoning ordinance to foster a mix of land uses; the district also prohibits "low-end commercial" enterprises such as pawn shops. Overlay zones for housing and entertainment were also added to the zoning ordinance (Gallagher, 1995).

The plan set forth by Lemoore mirrors many of the issues and desires expressed by Winchendon officials and residents. Historic preservation is important to residents. Winchendon businesses are competing with big box stores in NH, so specialty shops and other features that would enhance the town's 'uniqueness, specialty and cache' should be emphasized. Town planners in Winchendon are aware that recreation is an avenue to pursue and the town's proximity to a state forest, a popular campground, and trails for hiking and biking lay the groundwork for an economic development plan for Winchendon. While Lemoore has a built-in feature (the naval base) on which to base tourism, Winchendon may seek to capitalize on its natural and historic amenities with hiking trails, outdoor recreation destinations, or a Toy Town museum.

## Conclusions

Each of these cities—Hamburg, Gardiner, Greenfield, and Lemoore—faced challenges relating to disinvestment and a declining downtown. Each found creative solutions to these issues, ranging from specific targeting of high-priority vacancies and encouraging niche businesses to rebranding the downtown area and harnessing social capital. These solutions will prove informative and will inform Carousel Consulting's recommendations for Winchendon.

## Assessment/Recommendations

### Promotion and Branding

Looking to the successes of places like Hamburg, New York and Gardiner, Maine, it is clear that their strategies for economic development and revitalization relied heavily on promoting what their towns had to offer. We recommend that Winchendon follow their lead and take an aggressive stance on promoting and marketing itself as a great place to live and do business. However, before Winchendon can begin a marketing campaign, it needs to create a local brand.

#### - **Sense of Place**

Branding and creating a sense of place will help Winchendon, and especially downtown Winchendon, seem like more of a unique place and destination. People tend to be attracted to places which offer some sort of unique experience, and by increasing visitor and consumer interest in those experiences, Winchendon is also making itself more appealing to businesses and investors. Our recommendation is that Winchendon have a brand and sense of place that is specific to the downtown while also part of the larger "Toy Town" theme. Doing this will aid in directing and attracting people to the downtown by making it seem like more of a specific destination.

Our recommendation for a place branding theme is the reestablishment of the downtown's historic name, "Winchendon Village," to describe and market the downtown. We believe that "Winchendon Village" suggests a new era for the downtown, while also respecting and honoring its past and

heyday. Using the word “village” instead of “downtown” for formal marketing and identification also seems more appropriate for the scale and character of the Central Street Corridor; it is a historic commercial district within a small-town with a lot of historic character and charm. Also, promoting the quaintness and small-town character of the area will help protect and maintain that character as new development and improvements begin to take place.

### - **Increasing Visibility and Drawing Attention**

Under the renewed "Winchendon Village" moniker, the Town can begin to create promotional materials and host events that draw attention to the downtown and what it has to offer. We recommend that the Town create and distribute fliers or pamphlets that highlight upcoming events, available buildings, local businesses, and new improvements and investment in the downtown. These fliers would need to be updated seasonally to reflect up-to-date information and be more engaging. We recommend that they direct readers to the Town website for more information and up-to-the-minute updates about events and opportunities. The webpage and materials should be vibrant and attractive, and can be placed or referenced throughout Town, including inside local businesses, at town kiosks, and at local events and gathering places.

Promotional materials and events can help to spur private investment and increase tourism to the downtown by making it more visible and seem more accessible. The seasonal pamphlet could highlight the waterfront, bike path, historic buildings, or other cultural and recreational assets in downtown that people might be interested in coming to visit and see. Local events such as a low-cost street-art event, music festivals, community picnics, car shows and other fun things in the downtown will draw people who might not otherwise visit and will make them aware of Winchendon's more permanent entertainment, recreation, and business opportunities.

Some more examples and recommendations for events include:

- **Maker Faire**  
These can showcase local talent and sell locally created wares.<sup>13</sup>
- **Sidewalk-Chalk Art Event/Crosswalk-Chalk Design Event**<sup>14</sup>  
These encourage the community to interact with the downtown and have a stake in it by contributing their own artwork and designs.

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<sup>13</sup> See more about Maker Spaces and Maker Faires under *Market Opportunities* in this section.

<sup>14</sup> See an example in Pasadena, California at <http://www.pasadenachalkfestival.com/>

- **Community Clean-Up Days**  
These days get the community involved in the downtown and establish a stake in it while helping the Town and landlords maintain the area and make it more beautiful.
- **Monthly Food Truck Days**  
This is an opportunity to have more diverse food offerings that are convenient and affordable, while also being a novel and interesting addition to the downtown's offerings.
- **Antique Toy Collector Events**  
These themed events capitalize upon the town's history, promote community through shared heritage, and attract a wide range of visitors to the downtown.

## Organization

### - **Social Capital**

The amount of time, energy, and overall dedication involved in revitalizing the downtown is going to require outsourcing some of the work to local stakeholders. Given the amount of passion and interest in improving the downtown that we have witnessed, we feel this local social capital would be best used if it was channeled and organized in some way. Our recommendation is that the Town aid in the creation of taskforces, organizations, committees, and similar groups of local stakeholders charged with a specific mission or goal related to the economic development strategies and the revitalization of the downtown. By directing their energy to more concentrated elements of the revitalization process and plan, stakeholders can make sure that their achievements and impacts are less sporadic and diluted. In other words, fewer but more significant changes are more impactful than many slight changes.

One of our recommendations for a local taskforce is an event organizing committee that works solely to plan and promote local events that will draw people to the downtown. By focusing only on local events, the committee can make sure those events are well thought-out and advertised and thus more likely to be successful. Another recommendation is a local business coalition that works together on things ranging from cross-promotion of their products and services to trading amongst each other rather for goods and services to arranging consistent opening and closing times. This kind of coalition would provide business owners and managers a platform to communicate and cooperate with each other without the oversight or interference that can come in a public setting. Also, such an organization would allow local businesses to support one another and better coordinate for a more synergistic effect.

The Town could also solicit the formation of groups related to the physical appearance of the downtown more attractive. Typically this is the responsibility of town maintenance personnel or other official town departments and private landlords. However, the current visual cohesion and quality suggests that the Town and local landlords would benefit from the support of the

community in making the downtown a visually appealing place. An example of a group that could take on some of this responsibility is a "Façade Squad." This group could organize façade improvement activities such as cleanup and painting days, while also coordinating with town officials on façade improvement grants and other forms of public funding. Their goal would be to show local commitment and support for the downtown while upgrading its aesthetic appeal in order to make it more attractive and spur reinvestment.<sup>15</sup>

### - **The Main Street Program**

We recommend that Winchendon adopt the National Historic Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program as a model for implementing our revitalization and economic development recommendations. Having its own official Main Street Program would require the Town to go through the formal process of becoming a member and establishing an administrative committee for the local program in order to get the full benefit of the national program's branding, marketing and other support. If the Town is not prepared to take this step immediately, it could still be a consideration for Winchendon's future. In the meantime, Winchendon could follow the program's general model.

The Main Street Program is arranged into a four point approach, with the four points being Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Restructuring. Many of our recommendations fall roughly into these categories and follow their strategy: capitalizing upon existing resources and assets to uplift the Town socially, economically, and environmentally. In particular, the Main Street Program focuses on maintaining and showcasing local character, such as historic architecture, artists and musicians, unique businesses, and other elements of what make the place special. As mentioned previously, Winchendon's approach to historic preservation to date has been somewhat haphazard; important historic buildings have been sacrificed to developers. The Main Street approach would give Winchendon a more comprehensive strategy for historic preservation to give the downtown a lift without compromising local values and assets in the process.

Adopting this particular program or at least following its model is also one of our recommendations because it has a proven record of success. The Main Street Program has been around for over 30 years and has been implemented in more than 2,000 communities (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2014). Since its beginning, the program has generated almost 60 billion dollars in investment and, in 2013, had an average reinvestment ratio of 33.28 dollars for every one dollar spent on the operations of the local programs (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2014). Given that

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<sup>15</sup> See more about a Façade Squad and Façade Improvement in the *Aesthetics* chapter.

one of downtown Winchendon's biggest problems has been disinvestment, it would be strategic to follow a model that promotes reinvestment.<sup>16</sup>

### - **Rental and Lease Agreements**

The common sight of empty storefronts and vacant buildings along the Central Street Corridor is not only hurting the walkability and general pedestrian experience, but it is also sending a message to potential businesses and investors that many have tried and failed to successfully occupy those spaces. Our recommendation to help alleviate this problem is to encourage landlords to negotiate rents in order to recruit and keep tenants. The theory is that some rent is better than no rent, and that the building is less likely to suffer from problems associated with neglect if it is occupied.

Additionally, by having their storefronts and buildings occupied, even at a low rent, landlords are setting themselves up for more success in the long run. The appearance of occupation and maintenance of buildings makes each building and the area around it seem more desirable and attractive to investors, consumers, and potential tenants. Although the rents may start very low, if the area begins to feel more lively and attractive, the demand for space in the downtown will rise and so will the rents. We are not advocating for gentrification; rather we are suggesting that landlords make an initial compromise in order to have a more successful and sustainable record of tenancy and rental income in the long run. If storefronts and entire buildings continue to stay vacant, interest and investment in the downtown is going to continue to decline and landlords will be taking even bigger losses than reduced rent.

### - **Public/Private Partnerships**

Ultimately, not all of the revitalization strategies we are recommending can be accomplished entirely through social capital and private investment. The Town will need to support and coordinate with local task groups, businesses, landlords, and other stakeholders in the process. These partnerships can be beneficial for all parties because they make funding projects more feasible and lessen some of the burden and responsibility for either party.

One role that can be played by the Town, a committee, or some other quasi-public group in a partnership with the private sector is to apply for grants and offer other financial assistance to businesses or landowners, who can use it for their own needs in a way that ultimately benefits the downtown. An example where this is already happening is the Winchendon Redevelopment Authority. We recommend that the Town and other entities expand and follow the Redevelopment

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<sup>16</sup> For more information on The National Main Street Program, visit: [www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/](http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/)

Authority's model of collaborating with the private sector and connecting people with the resources they need in order to play a part in making downtown Winchendon a vibrant and inviting place to live, work, and do business.

Part of public-private partnerships is also deal-making. We recommend that the Town incentivize development and investment by offering tax agreements which allow the property owner to not pay the increase in their property taxes that may result from their investment into the property for a certain number of years.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the Town is still getting the original property tax revenue, and can expect a rise in the revenue once the agreement period runs out. On the other side, the property owner can better afford the investment because it will not be in conjunction with a large tax hike.

## Market Opportunities

Taking advantage of existing resources and capitalizing upon them via related businesses and ventures is one of the most reliable ways that Winchendon can create a vibrant and sustainable local market that is able to hold its own against the regional competition. As mentioned in the *Team Findings* of this section of the report, the spending data generated by ESRI's Community Analyst shows that Winchendon has the potential to fill in some of the many spending gaps that exist in the 30 mile region. Our recommendation is that the Town use this regional spending data to attract businesses and investors, and steer them in the direction of specific development and business models.

Based on ESRI's 2014 numbers, we recommend that the Town target the market for food services and drinking places, sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores, and other experience-based goods and services. We believe doing this will provide residents with the diversity they have asked for, help the Town capitalize upon local resources, and make Winchendon Village more appealing to visitors by offering not just goods, but an experience.

### - **Recreational and Eco-Tourism**

A key theme throughout many of our recommendations is the opportunity to fully utilize and take advantage of the various natural resources in and around downtown Winchendon. The following recommendations relate specifically to using those resources as the basis for growing recreational and eco-tourism related markets in Winchendon.

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<sup>17</sup> This is known as District Improvement Financing- see the *Funding Opportunities* of this section of the report for more details.

- Recreational Supplies:

The confluence of water activities, biking, hiking, and camping in and very near to downtown provides a great opportunity for a business to sell recreational supplies related to those activities. The ESRI Community Analyst marketplace data shows that there is a gap in sporting goods stores, and thus the market does exist even without increased promotion and use of recreational resources in Winchendon. The market can only be expected to grow when promotion and usage does increase, and the Town or other business promotion groups should consider seeking out this type of business.

Business offerings for recreational goods could include locally produced goods in addition to brand name supplies. Rentals of more expensive or cumbersome supplies, such as kayaks, could also be offered to make recreating more accessible to visitors and other individuals who do not have the means to own or bring their own supplies. It is also likely that the business would generate more profit from renting a kayak repeatedly than from the sale of an individual kayak, and thus rentals might help to make the business more successful and stable.

- Lodging:

An important element of tourism that is missing in downtown Winchendon is lodging. We have been informed that visitors to large hockey tournaments in another part of town stay in neighboring communities (G. White, personal communication, September 29, 2014), and that campers at nearby Lake Dennison State Park have nowhere to go in town should the weather turn bad or if they are tired of tent living (Trazaglini, 2014). We recommend that with the proposed increase in recreational and eco-tourism in town, Winchendon establish some form of lodging to make visiting and recreating easier, and to keep more of visitors' money in the local economy.

It is our recommendation that the Fairbanks House (see Figure 21) be considered for conversion into a bed and breakfast. The historic nature of the house, the beautiful character and architecture, the size, and the location make it opportune for providing the charm and convenience of an inn or bed and breakfast. Converting the house to a new, more practical use while still preserving its original character is also a good way to protect it from being lost to new development like so many other historic homes in the downtown have over the years.

- Skate Park or Rock Climbing Gym:

From the workshop attendees and in other conversations with community members and officials, the possible development of a city skate park has been a topic of interest for some time. This could, although not definitively, be a lost opportunity to develop more businesses complementary to the goal of developing an eco-tourism, recreation based location for both locals and possible visitors. However, a skate park would require significant front-end investment by the city as well as

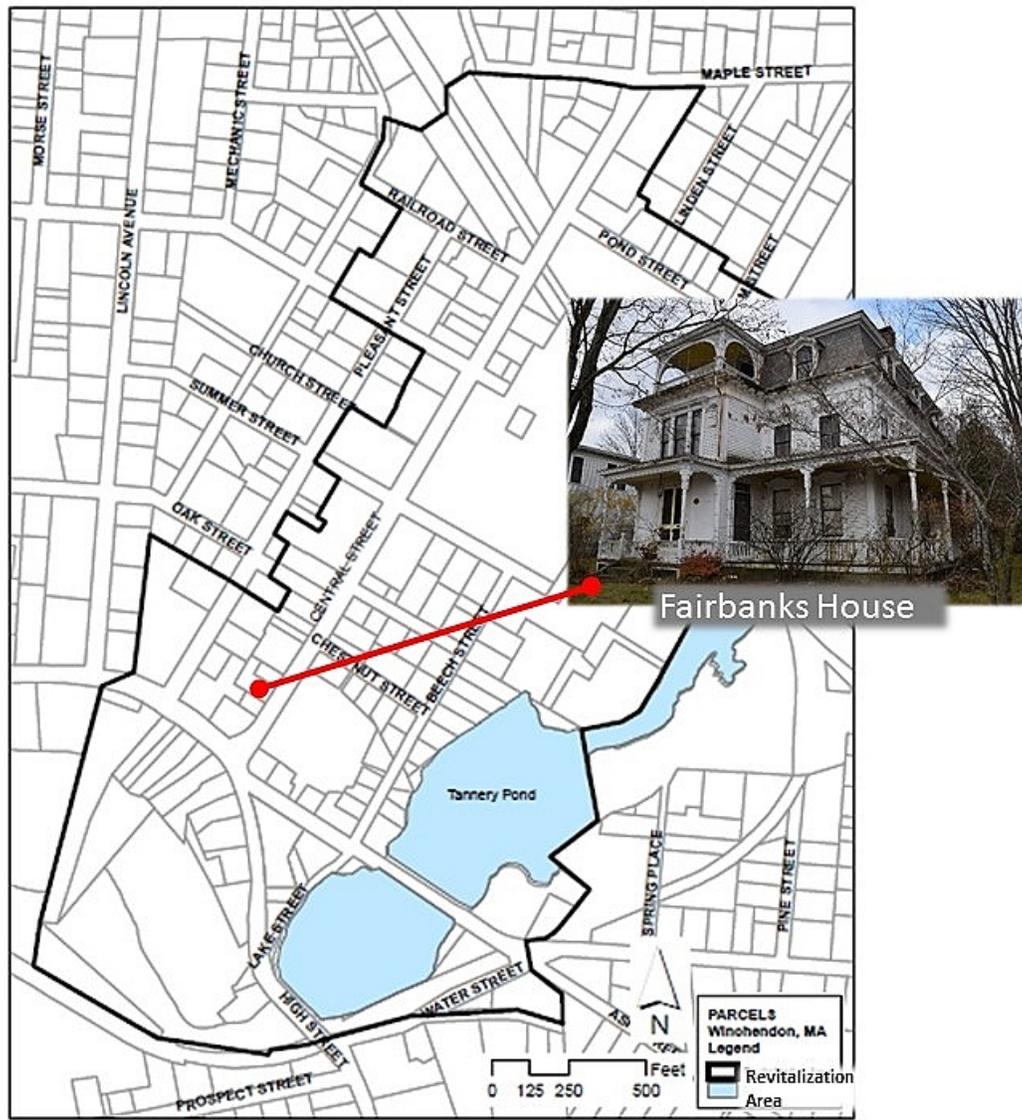
maintenance costs in perpetuity. We recommend that the city look into possible opportunities to utilize the mills for rock climbing walls, and possibly a gym.

With their considerable ceiling heights and large open spaces, mills are particularly well-suited for conversion to rock climbing walls, with little renovation required to accommodate this use. Two possible business models include a for-profit rock gym and a non-profit cooperative. In the former, there is the development of a rock climbing gym as a business within the mill. The latter would encourage the mill owners to open their spaces up to non-profit/community groups to build walls as funding and volunteer work permit. An example of this second business model is Sandpoint Rock Gym, a non-profit, co-operative bouldering gym in the Old Grain Mill.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> More information can be found at: [www.bonnercountydailybee.com/sports/article\\_b14f0910-6105-5eae-9774-abe17e48df40.html](http://www.bonnercountydailybee.com/sports/article_b14f0910-6105-5eae-9774-abe17e48df40.html)

Figure 21: Fairbanks House



Converting the Fairbanks House into a bed and breakfast would provide much-needed lodging in town and preserve the historic character of Central Street

### - Cultural Tourism

- Events:

As we mentioned in the *Organization* section of this chapter, we believe that local events are a great way for Winchendon to attract more people to the downtown. More specifically, we recommend that many of the events revolve around cultural interests; these might include arts and crafts, antiques, music, and performances. Ultimately, this relates back to the need for Winchendon to have more experience-based businesses and opportunities in order to make the downtown a destination.

- Makerspaces:

Makerspaces have started to become more common throughout the country, in both large urban areas and small towns, as a way of simultaneously enlivening vacant commercial spaces while providing a valuable resource to the surrounding community. A makerspace can be defined as "a physical location where people gather to share resources and knowledge, work on projects, network, and build" (Educause Learning Initiative, 2013). Makerspaces fulfill several of the defined objectives of downtown Carousel Consulting's downtown economic revitalization recommendations. They could provide active "third spaces" for community members, activate the downtown corridor, and create a locus of engaged community members. Kylie Pepler and Sophie Bender identify some of the distinct benefits of makerspaces for communities:

Maker activities organically invite cross-generational and cross cultural participation, ranging from parents with expertise in fixing or modifying cars, to grandparents who sew or crochet, to aunts and uncles who carve at home in a woodshop. Makerspaces are places for individuals with a range of expertise to share their passions, connecting them to historical and cultural traditions important to their families (Pepler and Bender, 2013, p. 27).

Makerspaces vary greatly in scale and we recommend that they be integrated into Winchendon's downtown fabric in a scalable fashion. We recommend that Winchendon start with a low-cost cultural activity called a "maker faire." This event, conceived of by Make Magazine, is intended to "celebrate arts, crafts, engineering, science projects and the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) mindset" (Margalus, 2014). Make Magazine also described the process of developing a makerspace in smaller towns. We believe Winchendon could follow their suggestions, including putting an emphasis on forging local partnerships with institutions such as local libraries, schools and other non-profits (ibid, 2014). They also suggest that makerspaces be located in the highest density area of town, accessible by public transport, and recommend utilizing a vacant building to be able to negotiate cost effective rates for the physical makerspace (ibid, 2014).

Outreach to the maker community would be essential for the success of this kind of movement in the Winchendon. Makerspaces have proven themselves to be successful throughout the country and we suggest that Winchendon explore the benefits of developing this community as a way to broaden its unique offerings and character. Even if a maker space does not directly generate considerable property-tax revenues to the Town, it would be a local attraction that creates secondary benefits by increasing local foot traffic and improving the value of surrounding properties.

- Historic Tours:

Promoting local history is one important way that Winchendon can also preserve it. Raising awareness of historic assets such as heritage landscapes and iconic or otherwise special buildings will translate into increasing support and stewardship of those historic assets. We recommend that

Winchendon, in conjunction with the local historical society, arrange tours that educate the listener and viewer about the sites they are seeing.

Tours could include outside walking tours and tours of the inside of historic buildings in Winchendon, such as the Historical Society's property. If there is not enough demand for a guide-lead tour walking tour, way-finding signs could be placed around the downtown and provide textual and visual descriptions of the evolution and significance of various historic places.

It has also been brought to our attention by the historic society that their building is periodically sought out by people interested in paranormal activity. If this is something the Town and its residents feel comfortable advertising, they might consider using it to market the downtown, especially during the Halloween season.

*Winchendon Historical Society (source: toytownweb.com)*



- Lodging:

As with recreational and eco-tourism, cultural tourism also comes with the demand for local lodging accommodations. This reinforces our previous recommendation for the consideration of the Fairbanks House as a bed and breakfast to meet the existing needs of visitors to the Town, and to serve the potential increase of visitors to the downtown as a result of tourism and marketing efforts.

## - Diversity of Local Food Offerings

- Micro-Restaurants:

We believe the micro-restaurant model of food service can solve multiple problems in the downtown. A cluster of micro-restaurants could fill a vacant building in the downtown and diversify local food offerings while offering an affordable alternative to pizza and Chinese, which currently dominate the downtown food scene. A cluster of micro-restaurants in a downtown building would be a fresh idea for the area and would contribute to the uniqueness of downtown Winchendon. We also believe that the likelihood that such a business model could be successfully adopted in Winchendon is good because there are a number of vacant buildings available, and the interior of such a place would need only to be open and well decorated, meaning remodeling costs could be kept to a minimum.

It is also important to note that micro-restaurants are a good business model for the restaurant owners and the landlord of the space. Would-be restaurateurs who are reluctant to take the risk of starting their own place, or who lack the capital, will be better able to afford a space in a micro-restaurant cluster because the cost of utilities, customer amenities, and even some equipment can be shared amongst multiple restaurants. However, despite being more affordable for each micro-restaurateur, their combined rent is likely to be more than the landlord would get for renting the space out to one individual business.<sup>19</sup>

- Food Trucks:

Another affordable and convenient restaurant model that could diversify downtown Winchendon's food scene is the food truck. Food trucks have become a very popular way for entrepreneurs to sell unique, quick food with a low overhead cost; in this way, they are similar to micro-restaurants. An added advantage of food trucks is that they can follow the customer base. This mobility, combined with the lower overhead cost, makes them lower-risk than traditional restaurant models.

We recommend that Winchendon contact the owners of food trucks in the region and ask for them to come on a weekday afternoon or night, once or twice a month. The day should be one that does not interfere with the trucks' schedule at busier, more reliable locations. Instead, by starting on an off day, and allowing word to spread about the food truck's scheduled visits, the food truck owner will be more likely to keep coming and people will be more apt to patronize their business.

- Niche Markets:

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<sup>19</sup> For more information on micro-restaurants, visit <http://urbanland.uli.org/development-business/clustering-micro-restaurants>

In addition to a large gap in food service demand and supply, the ESRI Community Analyst Data also showed a significant gap in food stores demand and supply. Our recommendation is to encourage smaller, niche-food markets to open up shop in the downtown. We do not want a new business to compete with the Central Supermarket on Central Street, but rather to offer more unique food goods. The store could offer items such as locally prepared baked goods and local produce, or could be more of a delicatessen offering prepared foods such as soups, sandwiches, meats, and cheeses.

Regardless of the type of food store, we recommend that it fit in with local needs and demand. It is possible that such a store might come later in the revitalization process when there is more demand for unique foods and more expensive locally produced edible goods.

## Redevelopment Opportunities

There are two primary options for redevelopment in downtown Winchendon: vacant or semi-vacant parcels, and vacant or semi-vacant buildings. The focus here will be on vacant or semi-vacant buildings.<sup>20</sup>

Regarding partially or entirely vacant buildings, we have identified two locations which we believe are prime for redevelopment: the former Hungry 4 Pizza restaurant (48 Central Street), and 87-91 Central Street which is adjacent to the Winchendon Family Pharmacy building, both identified in Figure 22. These spaces were chosen due to their close proximity to one another, and due to their location at the busier end of downtown. We are following Greenfield's strategy of concentrating redevelopment efforts for maximum effect.

Our recommendation is that the owner of the property at 87-91 Central Street be contacted and given a suggestion to negotiate for lower rents, as was recommended above, or to go one step further and follow the model of "pop-up markets" used in Gardiner, Maine. Pop-up markets involve making an arrangement with landlords to allow businesses to occupy a vacant storefront, rent free, for a short period of time. While this may sound like an unprofitable prospect for the landlord, the agreement would be that the tenant would still be responsible for covering the cost of utilities and would be required to leave a damage deposit. The reason this benefits the landlord is because they are not responsible for the cost of heating and other expenses they would incur if the space were vacant, and there is a chance that the business will be successful and decide to stay and begin paying

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<sup>20</sup> For more recommendations about vacant or underutilized parcels, see the *Existing Conditions: Vacancies*, and *Focus Area: Land Use* chapters.

rent. By taking advantage of a low-stakes, low-cost opportunity to pilot business ideas, entrepreneurs may be more likely to take the chance and see quicker gains from their front-end investment.

However, even if the business leaves after the rent-free period, the landlord also has the benefit of the space appearing more vibrant and functional when it is occupied, and another businesses might then find it more attractive and be more compelled to rent it. Similar to the benefit of the individual landlord, stakeholders in the downtown would benefit from having the storefronts occupied and contributing to a livelier atmosphere. In a sense, the positive outcomes of temporary, or pop-up businesses, regardless of rent paid, come full circle to benefit landlords of more permanent businesses who get the increased foot traffic and interest in their businesses and storefronts.

The other vacant building space we identified as prime for redevelopment, Hungry 4 Pizza, is a prime location for a micro-restaurant cluster. This space is suitable because it already has the infrastructure of a restaurant and is located in the busier section of downtown where Town Hall employees and other workers can stop in for lunch on their break or grab dinner on their way home.

Figure 22: Vacant Parcels for Potential Development



## Funding and Partnership Opportunities

- **District Improvement Financing** is a means by which the Town can incentivize private investment by abating the property tax increase which results from the property's higher assessment after the investment. This agreement is made between the town and property owner, and is for a specified number of years, after which the town begins collecting property taxes on the full value of the property. During the specified years, the town only collects property taxes on the pre-investment value of the property.<sup>21</sup>
- **Community Development Block Grant and MassWorks Infrastructure Program** money can be used for street-level aesthetics improvements such as a community based façade improvement program. The team's recommended "Façade Squad" or other local façade improvement program to partner with local businesses could finance its projects with CDBG money.
- A **Business Improvement District**, or BID is a specified district in which property owners are charged an additional fee on their local property taxes. The money generated from that fee is used to fund additional services and improvements which are specific to that district.<sup>22</sup>
- **Low-Interest Loan** funds can be negotiated with local banks to help existing businesses keep their doors open and make any needed improvements, while also helping potential businesses get the start-up capital they need to open their doors.
- **Historic Preservation Tax Incentives** are offered by both the state and federal governments for the preservation and reuse of historic buildings for income generating purposes. These tax incentives are only available to private developers and property owners. These are an option that could be explored to help fund the conversion of the Fairbanks House into a bed and breakfast.<sup>23</sup>
- A **Business Owners Group** is a partnership among business owners that can be used a means of trading goods and services and providing mutual support. Members of the group can cross-promote services and goods to create a synergistic effect in the downtown. The group could also collaborate on hours of operation, local events, and other issues and opportunities so that they are better organized and coordinated.

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<sup>21</sup> Read more about District Improvement Financing at: [www.mass.gov/hed/business/funding/infrastructure/dif/about-the-district-improvement-financing-dif.html](http://www.mass.gov/hed/business/funding/infrastructure/dif/about-the-district-improvement-financing-dif.html)

<sup>22</sup> For more information on BIDs go to: [http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart\\_growth\\_toolkit/pages/mod-bid.html](http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/pages/mod-bid.html)

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcabout.htm> for more about MA historic tax credits, and see <http://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm> for more on federal historic tax incentives.

- **Private Funding-** In addition to public funding options, there are a number of private funding opportunities that can be pursued. These include local donations and benefactors, fund raising efforts, private investment and loans, and more.

## Timeline for Implementation

There are many recommendations in this chapter which should be considered for the improvement of economic development in the downtown. They range from small-scale marketing efforts to the reuse of buildings and storefronts for pop-up markets and micro-restaurants. All of these recommendations may seem overwhelming, but the following list places them into three implementation phases to make tackling them a little easier.

### Six Months to Two Years

#### - **Organization:**

- In the short-term, task forces or other organizations and programs should be created to handle the various economic development strategies recommended. These might include: a marketing and event planning committee, a local clean-up committee, a business owners group, façade improvement committee, and a buy-local campaign.

#### - **Marketing:**

- The local marketing and event planning committee should work on the creation of flyers to promote existing recreation opportunities for visitors (bike trail, state and local parks and hiking trails).
- A seasonal brochure should be created to promote local and Town-sponsored events, recreation opportunities, local businesses, and other news to generate activity in the town. This brochure can also be showcased on the town website.

#### - **Cultural Events:**

- The event planning committee, in conjunction with the Town and other stakeholders, should plan and coordinate a low-cost on-going event that would draw people to Central St and generate interest in downtown. An example that was presented to the team was a ‘Windows on Winchendon,’ where storeowners decorate their windows for the holiday.
- The committee should also plan a larger event that might become an annual event for downtown. For example, in Bar Harbor, Maine, before shops close for the season, stores participate in ‘Pajama Day,’ where customer get 10% off their purchases if they show up in their pajamas.

- Coordinate a once-a-month or bi-weekly food truck day, such as ‘Food-truck Friday’, with food trucks in the area. The intent being that this will encourage people to visit the downtown and sample local offerings.

## Two to Five Years

### - **Marketing:**

- Develop a marketing strategy, such as the Main Street Program or Business Improvement District, to promote Winchendon to tourists in nearby towns.
- Continue to organize events that will draw visitors from the entire region. An antique toy convention or a maker faire that sells locally-produced crafts would both build on the Town’s history and also draw tourists to the area.
- Larger events would place Winchendon ‘on the map.’ Rather than be a place that people have ‘been through,’ Winchendon can become a destination by hosting events that draw people in from out of town. A larger event could also increase name recognition of Winchendon across the region.

### - **Vacant Parcels:**

- Identify appropriate uses for underused buildings so that they contribute more in taxes to downtown.
- Identify funding sources to redevelop vacant parcels and improve unused buildings.
- Develop public-private partnerships to both improve unused buildings and recruit tenants to occupy these buildings, even if temporarily.
- After generating interest in downtown, strategies to increase investment in downtown are the next step. While it might take a couple of years to encourage residents to visit downtown and to re-connect with the area, longer-range investment is needed to boost economic activity along the Central Street corridor. Building occupancy is one key to increasing activity downtown. Seasonal occupancy, such as during the holiday shopping season could boost the economic vitality, if only for a short while.

## Five Plus Years

- Identify funding opportunities to develop maker spaces.
- Promote public-private partnerships that continue to forward economic development

- Continue to develop elements of a Main Street program, including administration, marketing strategies, organization of historic preservation efforts, and business development.
- Depending upon the momentum generated by activities in the first five years, a stronger formal structure may be needed to coordinate economic development efforts downtown. Initial activities such as events and marketing strategies lay the groundwork for further and longer-term economic development activities, such as ongoing coordination with business owners.

## Focus Area: Circulation

### Context/Background

Winchendon is located at the intersection of two state highways: Route 12 and Route 202. The intersection of these two highways, known as Blair Square, is the main intersection in town and serves thousands of cars and trucks each day. This function as a busy road for both commercial and passenger vehicles can cause conflicts with the function of Central Street as a ‘cultural epicenter’ for the town. Older residents remember Central Street as a tree-lined avenue where they stopped to buy penny-candy. Historic photographs of Central Street paint an idyllic picture of horse-drawn carriages and well-cared-for Victorian homes. The western side of Central Street contains many older buildings and much of the town’s national Historic District. Attempts are made to maintain a walkable downtown with sidewalks and storefronts adjacent. Town Hall (built in 1850) and United Parish Church (built in 1849) helped to define the ends of downtown (White, personal communication, September 10, 2014).

In its manufacturing heyday of the mid-1800s, Winchendon was a railroad hub. Beginning in 1847, railroad lines were built in Winchendon that brought goods to and from Boston, Keene (NH), Concord (NH) and Palmer (MA), Albany (NY). While these lines eventually ceased operations by the 1970s, the railroad beds still exist, and have gained a second life as bike paths connecting Winchendon to nearby towns in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

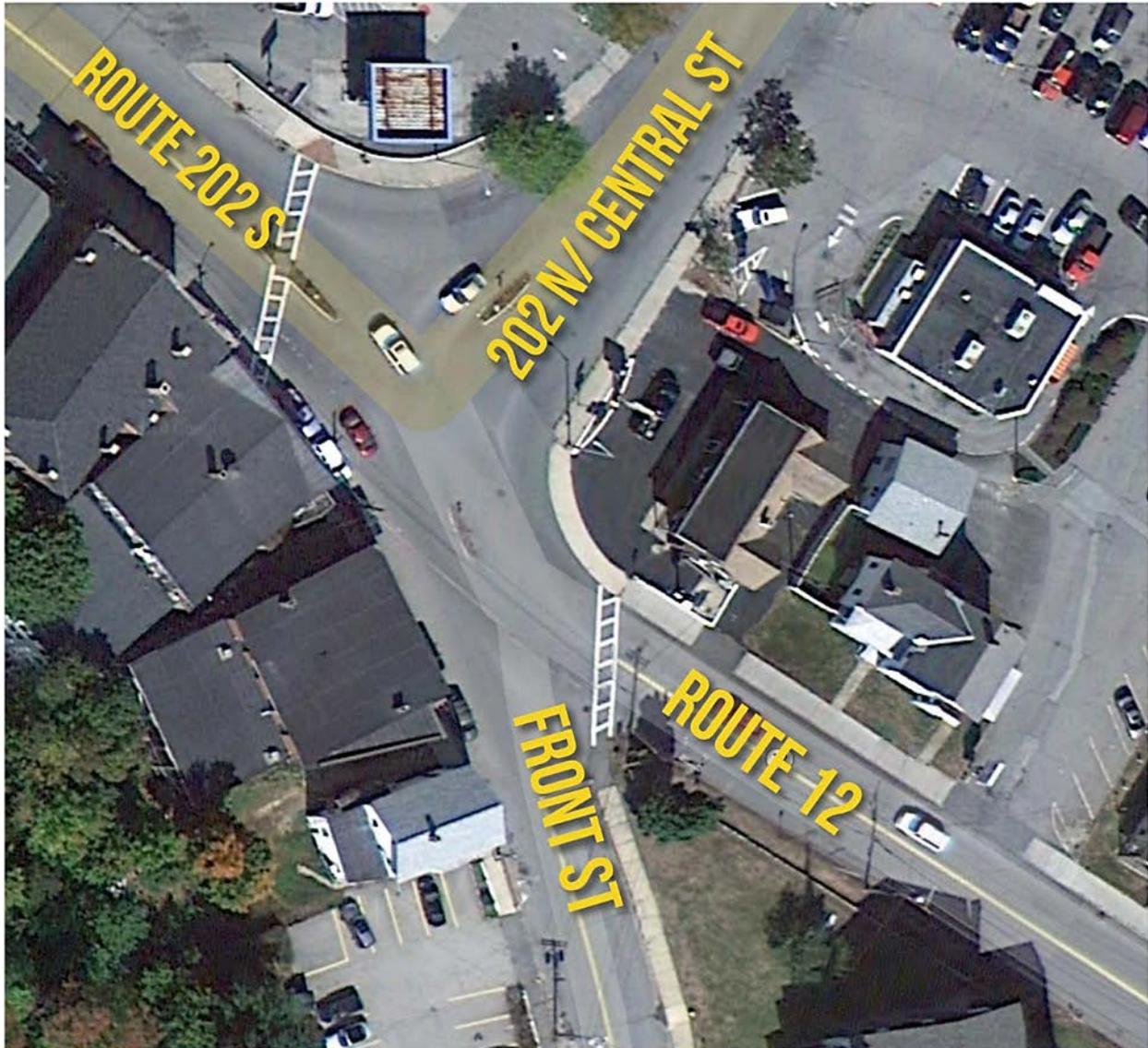
### Team Findings

#### Pedestrian and Vehicular Traffic around Blair Square

Historically, Blair Square has been the ‘epicenter’ of cultural life in Winchendon (Master Plan, 2001). Today, in addition to significant passenger vehicle traffic, many commercial trucks pass through the intersection heading to or from New Hampshire and Vermont. While there is heavy traffic flowing through this area, there is no traffic signal or stop signs. Instead, cars have established an unspoken right of way. During the public workshop, Blair Square was identified as a significant problem by many attendees, who cited wait times, frustrated drivers, and traffic back-ups. Workshop participants also noted the conflicts between the volume of traffic and the presence of pedestrians crossing Front Street.

While the actual number of traffic accidents is few, wait times to make left turns are long, and driver frustration has been observed in the form of horn-blowing and aggressive driving. Previous studies have found that the traffic situation warrants a signal; however, vertical alignment issues at the intersection pose a challenge to traffic signal implementation (Montachusett Regional Planning Agency, 2005). The following discussion outlines the findings of two major traffic studies completed

by the Montachusett Regional Planning Agency (MRPC) and field observations, as well as a brief discussion of potential solutions and an assessment of the effectiveness and potential benefits of these solutions. These suggestions are merely potential alternatives. Further engineering studies will need to be conducted to explore the feasibility each scenario.



*The intersection of Routes 202 and 12, also known as Blair Square, services almost 2,000 cars per hour during peak times.*

### - **Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) Traffic Study Findings**

The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission has conducted two studies of traffic in Blair Square – one in the mid-1990s and the second in 2004-05. Both studies found that a traffic signal was warranted due to traffic volumes and levels of service. In the 2005 study, the level of service for traffic making right and left turns from Central Street was very low (D and F respectively). Traffic volumes are also very high at this intersection. Table B3 of the 2005 study indicated that traffic flow through Blair Square exceeded 1,500 cars per hour (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2005). Surprisingly, only six accidents occurred at the intersection in 2004, one more than is necessary to meet the warrant for a traffic signal.

This study also notes several other factors that may affect traffic flow in Blair Square. First, it should be noted that four of the six accidents took place at either dusk or after dark, suggesting that lighting and visibility may be contributing factors. Second, no ‘stop’ or ‘yield’ signs exist at the intersection to warn drivers to slow down. Third, both the centerlines and stop lines are disappearing; this was noted in the 2005 study and also on site visits in 2014 (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2005, p. 3). A lack of pavement markings means drivers have less guidance as to their speed and also in gauging their proximity to parked cars, road edges and other cars in the roadway.

### - **Field observations**

Since the most recent data available for Blair Square was almost ten years old, the consulting team gathered more recent data. Team members made traffic observations at Blair Square on three different days, all during peak hours. Traffic counts were taken, traffic flow patterns were observed and pedestrian circulation was observed.<sup>24</sup> Generally, Carousel Consulting's observations supported those of the MRPC studies. Field observations on two occasions found that afternoon traffic is predominantly traveling on route 12 (northbound and southbound). Most problematic are left turns onto Central Street from Route 12 southbound (crossing northbound traffic) and left turns from Central Street onto Route 12 southbound (also crossing northbound traffic); cars sometimes wait up to twelve minutes to make these turns during peak hours (2005).

Other field observations of rush-hour traffic in Blair Square suggest that drivers have little patience for the situation, and aggressive driving results. During site visits, several vehicles were observed in parking spaces along Front Street. These parked cars make it difficult for through traffic vehicles on Route 12 southbound to pass vehicles turning left onto Central Street. Horn-blowing, engine revving and other behaviors were observed from cars waiting to pass turning vehicles. Similarly,

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<sup>24</sup> Data from these observations, as well as a discussion of Carousel Consulting's methodology, can be found in Appendix II.

vehicles making a left turn from Central Street onto Route 12 often waited up to a minute or more to be able to find a break in both lanes of traffic to make the turn. Vehicles making a left turn would ‘creep’ into the intersection, effectively blocking northbound traffic until there was a break in the southbound traffic, and they could enter the traffic stream. This behavior was also observed in the 2005 study. All of these observations suggest the need to identify a solution to the wait times and car queueing that takes places at this intersection.

- **Lynch analysis**<sup>25</sup>

The Lynch analysis revealed that, although Blair Square is a major node of traffic in town, the amount of traffic coming from each direction is not equal (see Figure 23 below). Vehicles travelling along Route 12 dominate the intersection, making it difficult for vehicles turning to or from Route 202/Central Street to find an opening. During the afternoon rush hour (4-5pm), approximately 600 cars per hour travel northbound on Route 12. The southbound volume is less at 400, while approximately 150 cars each turn right or left out of Central Street.

The Lynch analysis also illustrated the role that the Cumberland Farms plays in this intersection. Cumberland Farms has two entrances – one on Central Street and one on Front Street. Cars entering and exiting this corner lot add to the complexity of traffic flow in the square. Additionally, there is a Dunkin Donuts (with drive-through) on the south side of Central Street, whose entrance is opposite the Cumberland Farms entrance. Traffic has not been observed during the morning rush hour, but the donut shop likely adds additional traffic to this area.

Limited pedestrian traffic was observed in this area (see Figure 24). There are two crosswalks on Front Street; one goes from the Cumberland Farms to the Dance Studio, the other is located in front of the United Parish church. In general, pedestrian paths exist on the sidewalks; only intermittent use of the crosswalks was observed. Most foot traffic was observed walking to or from the Cumberland Farms.

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<sup>25</sup> For more information about Lynch analysis, see Methodology section.

Figure 23: Lynch Map Blair Square, Vehicle

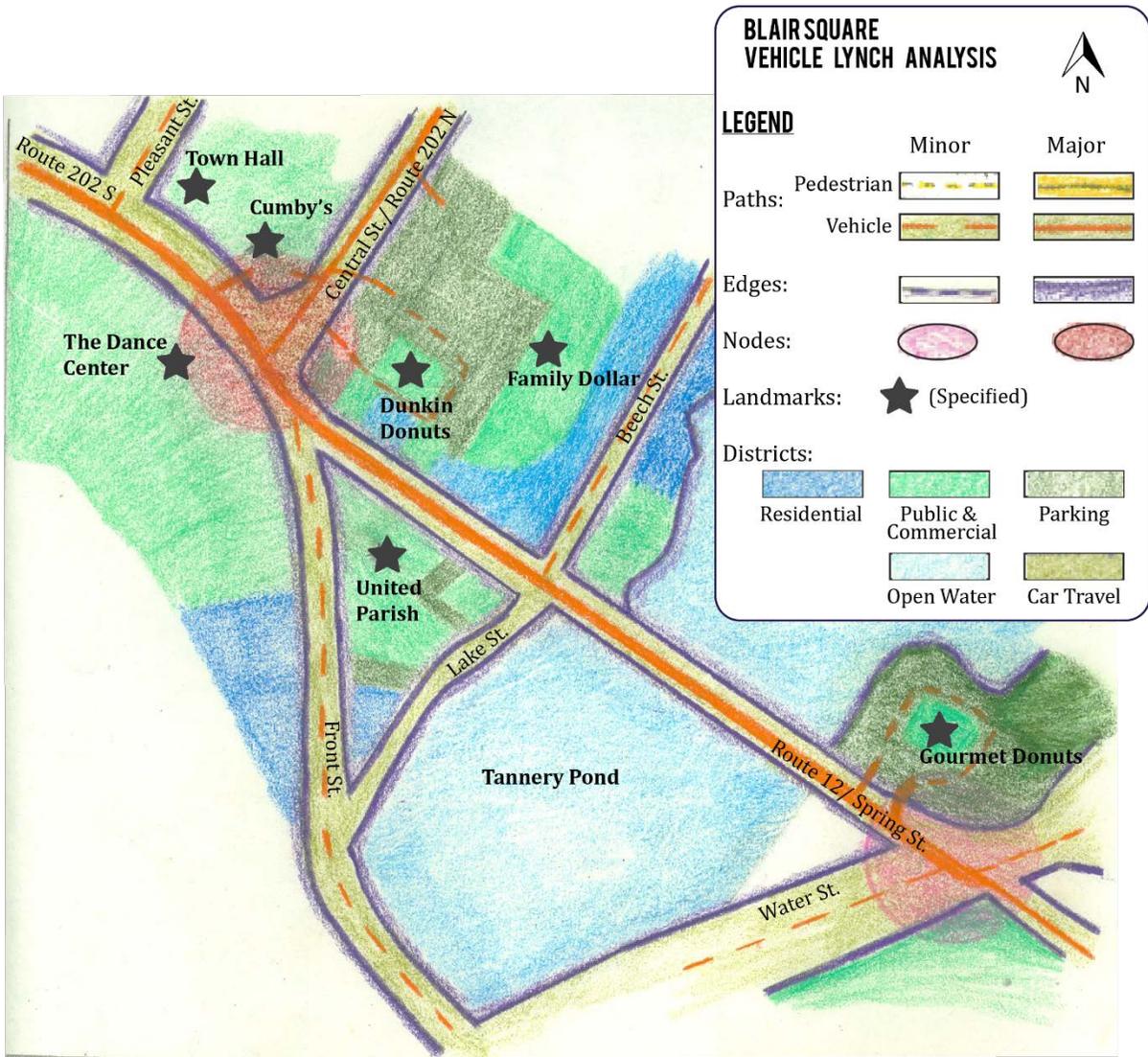
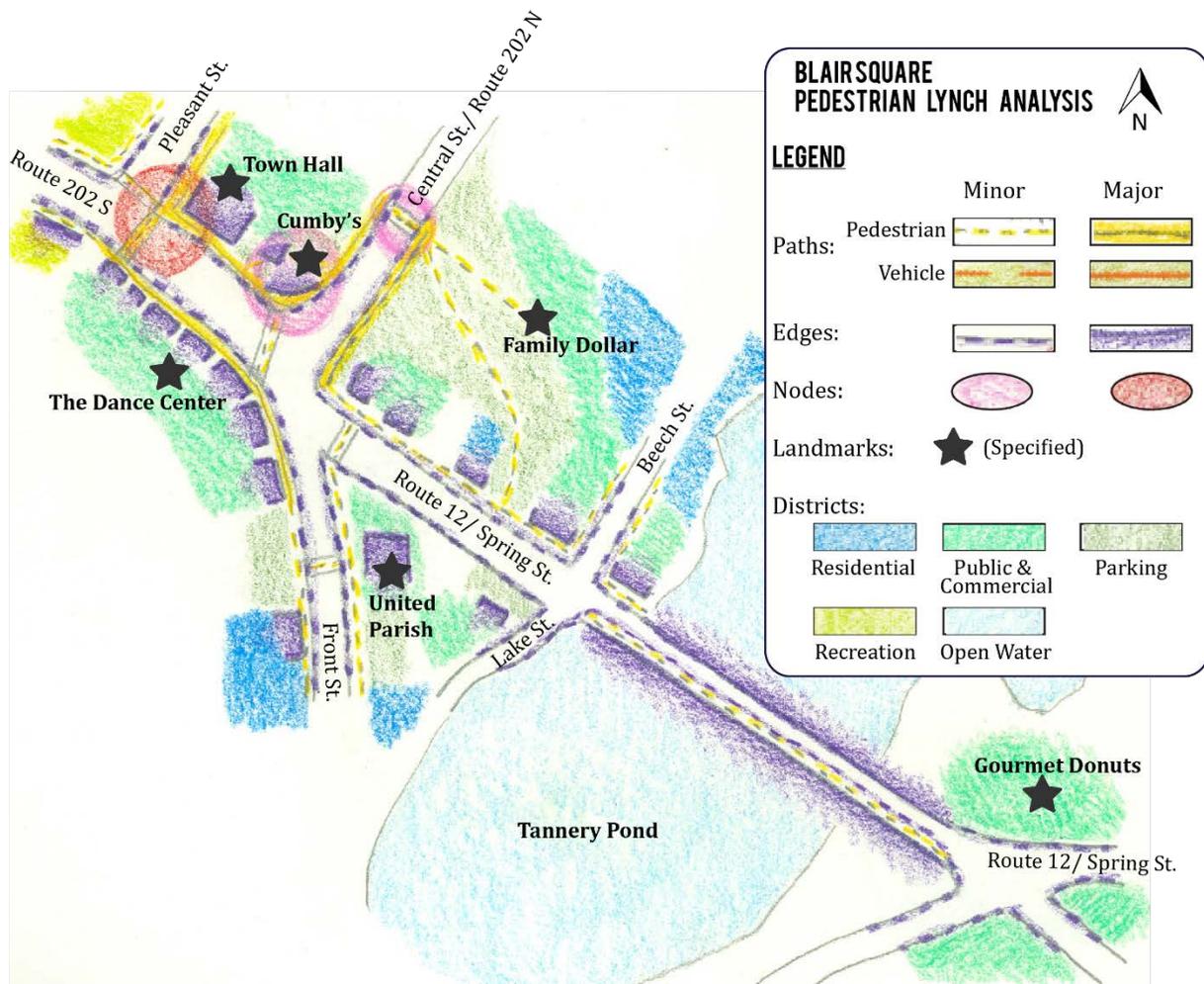


Figure 24: Lynch Map Blair Square, Pedestrian



**- Horizontal and vertical street alignments**

In proposing alternative solutions to the traffic problems in Blair Square, another consideration is the horizontal and vertical alignment of the streets approaching the intersection. Central Street, Spring Street, and Route 12 southbound all have relatively even approaches. According to topographical maps, the slope on these approaches is less than five percent. The Route 12 northbound approach, however, is much steeper. According to contours from Massachusetts GIS datalayers, the Route 12 northbound approach is approximately fifteen percent slope, which is

relatively steep for most urban arterial roads (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials [AASHTO], 2001).



*The slope on Spring Street (Route 12), shown above, presents a challenge for many traffic solutions, including the installation of a traffic signal.*

#### **- Interviews**

The consulting team met with two transportation engineering faculty to better understand the design criteria of several potential alternatives. Mike Knodler, Director of MassSafe and Associate Professor in the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, highlighted several baseline design criteria, including the following: roundabouts work best for traffic volumes under 1,200 cars per hour, and with relatively level approaches from all angles; traffic signals have become ‘smarter’ and can sense when heavy trucks are approaching and can change relatively quickly to prevent these vehicles from stopping on a hill. Dr. Knodler also recommended modeling traffic flow at the intersection to better understand how various alternative solutions would affect traffic flow.

Lastly, the team received many informal comments from residents that a traffic signal would not be an effective solution because the vertical alignment of the Spring Street approach would require trucks to stop, then start, on a relatively steep hill. There has also been discussion of a roundabout for this area, but no formal plans have been undertaken to investigate this alternative.

## Pedestrian Amenities and Vehicular Traffic on Central Street

### - Field observations

Central Street, which overlaps with Route 202 as it runs through downtown, has wide lanes and lighting scaled for car and truck traffic, but does not include lighting for pedestrians or bicyclists. There are eleven crosswalks on the section of Central Street within the study area, and these are generally well-respected by motorists despite the high volume of through traffic. However, aside from the copious crosswalks on this half-mile stretch, other pedestrian amenities are sorely lacking. Many sidewalks are cracked or broken, and they are often interrupted by wide curb cuts for driveways and entrances to commercial businesses. Although the town is in the process of updating sidewalks downtown (White, personal communication, September 24, 2014), there is currently no plan or set of design standards guiding this construction process. The lighting on Central Street is scaled for cars and trucks traveling down a state highway, not for pedestrians walking along a main street. Moreover, there are no benches or places to rest along the street, which poses a challenge for older residents or people with disabilities.

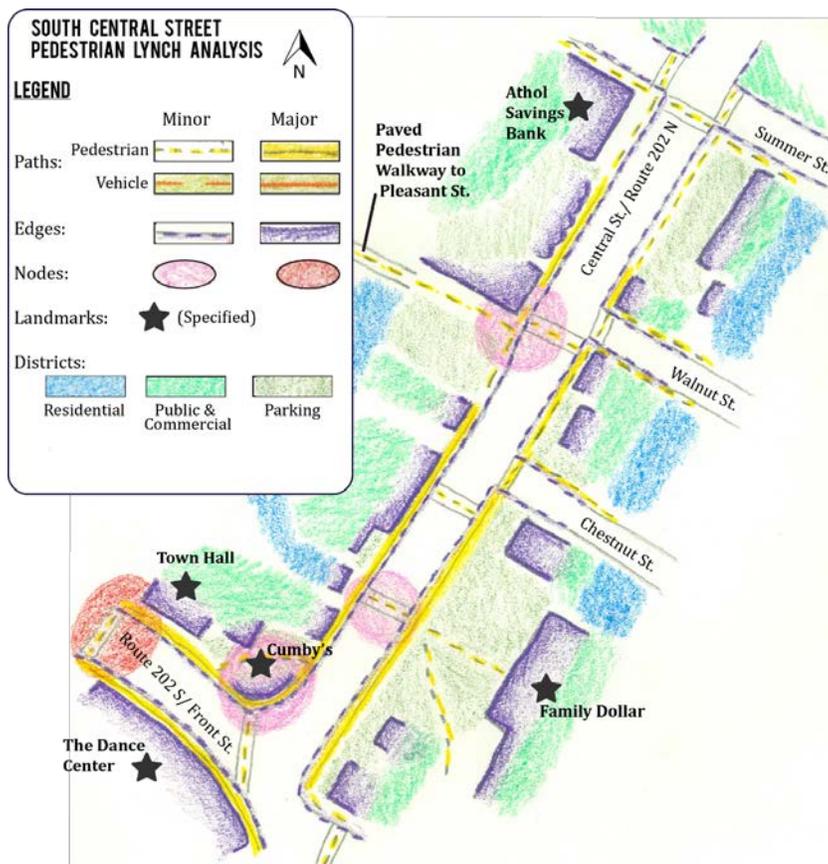


*There is a wide range in sidewalk quality throughout Winchendon. Uneven sidewalks replete with curb-cuts and other interruptions are a common sight on Central Street.*

- **Lynch Analysis**<sup>26</sup>

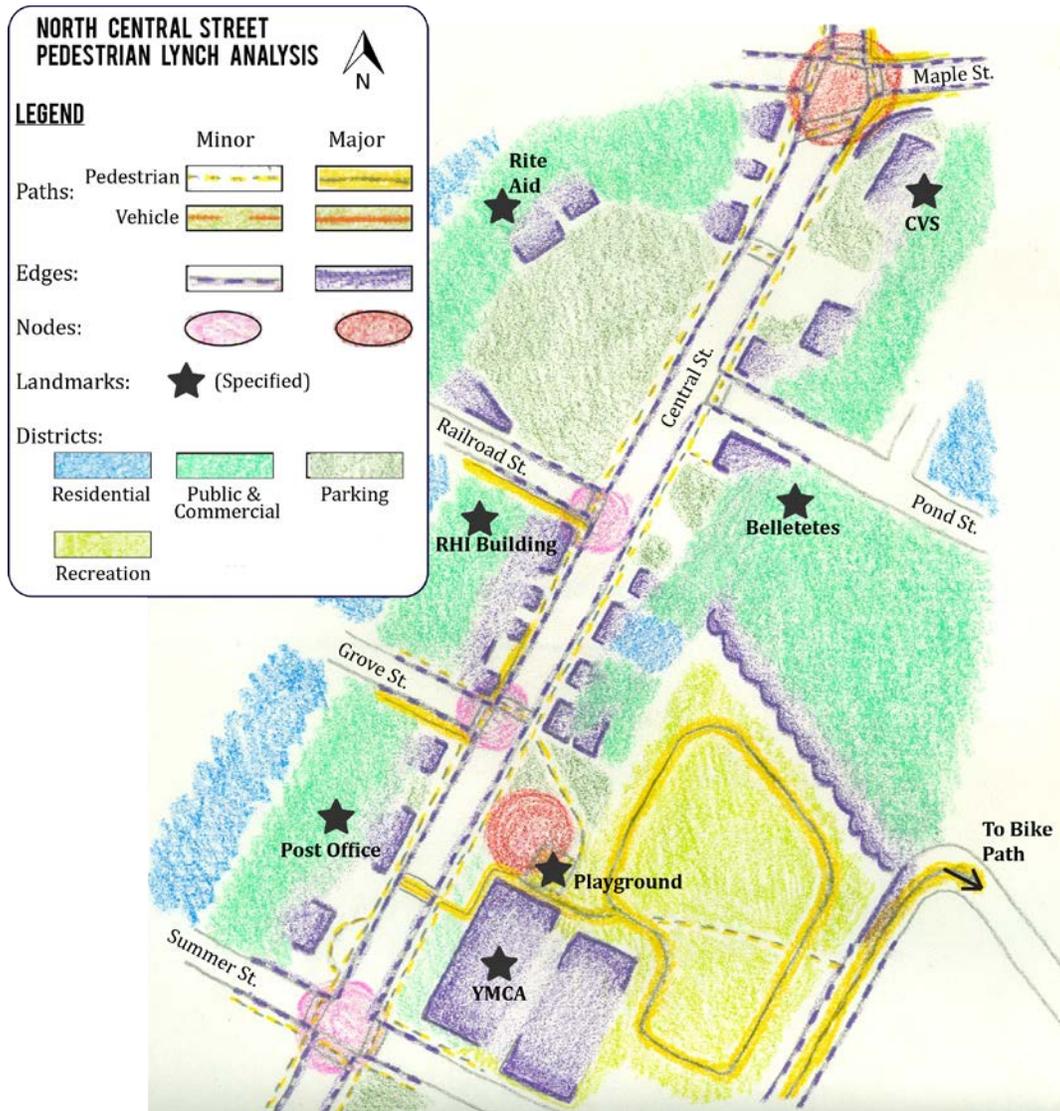
The Lynch analysis of pedestrian and vehicular traffic on Central Street revealed that cars and trucks dominate the corridor. As shown in Figure 25 and Figure 26, pedestrian traffic is generally concentrated in three main areas: on the sidewalks along the southern end of Central Street, near the YMCA and its recreation fields, and on the bike path. It makes sense that people would congregate around the fields behind the YMCA and on the bike path, as these two areas are the only places in town that exclude cars and are specifically designed for pedestrian use. As for the concentration of pedestrians around the southern end of Central Street, the reason may be that northern Central Street lacks interesting destinations to draw people there. The notable lack of pedestrians around northern Central Street may also reflect the uninviting surroundings; large expanses of paved areas lend an air of emptiness to the neighborhood.

Figure 25: Lynch Map of Pedestrian Uses on South Central Street



<sup>26</sup> For more information about Lynch analysis, see Methodology section.

Figure 26: Lynch Map of Pedestrian Uses on North Central Street



**- Public Workshop**

The results of the public workshop supported the findings of the Lynch analysis; residents repeatedly brought up both the YMCA and the bike path as valued destinations for walking, biking, and dog walking. Many of the places most valued by residents are located in southern Central Street; these included the library, Town Hall, the Unitarian Universalist church, and the Post Office. This finding supports the results of the Lynch analysis that pedestrian traffic is concentrated in this area. Workshop participants also identified northern Central Street as a prime candidate for redevelopment, and several residents made the connection between redeveloping that area and improved walkability.

## - **Conclusions**

Improving pedestrian and bicycle amenities is an extremely important aspect of Winchendon's revitalization. A major barrier to economic redevelopment is the lack of foot traffic; a large part of the reason that many businesses have been unable to survive in Winchendon is that people are disinclined to get out of their cars and walk around (J. Bellina, personal communication, October 17, 2014). However, it may also be argued that residents and visitors would be more likely to explore downtown Winchendon by foot if there were greater diversity of businesses downtown; thus, improving pedestrian amenities and incentivizing economic redevelopment must go hand-in-hand in order to break this cycle of disinvestment. Both the Lynch analysis and the public workshop revealed that northern Central Street is a prime candidate for this type of redevelopment.

In terms of vehicular traffic, Blair Square is the main hotspot of traffic congestion. This traffic does affect Central Street at rush hour in that vehicles turning left from Central Street to Front Street experiences long wait times. However, for the most part, Central Street does not experience major safety issues with vehicular traffic. Bike lanes would improve safety for cyclists in this busy area.

## Parking on Central Street

### - **Field observations**

Free street parking is available on both sides of Central Street as well as on the south (eastbound) side of Front Street. There are also several large parking lots scattered throughout the study area, which, according to the observations of team members and several residents, are underutilized. These parking lots include a small lot south of Town Hall, the Rite Aid parking lot, the YMCA parking lot, and a *de facto* parking lot near the intersection with Railroad Street that used to be a car dealership.

Several of these off-street lots are located in front of or next to the building. The proximity of these wide open spaces to the sidewalk contributes to a feeling of emptiness and inactivity. The most noticeable areas, including the Rite Aid parking lot, are near the intersection of Railroad Street with Central Street. Redeveloping some of these parking lots with either buildings or green spaces could contribute substantially to a renewed feeling of vitality and activity. As explained in the *Focus Area: Land Use* section of this report, these parking lots are also not “pulling their weight” in terms of

property taxes; the town could bring in 76 percent additional tax revenue from these four parcels every year by redeveloping the parking lots surrounding Rite Aid alone.<sup>27</sup>

### - Conclusions

In light of the high vacancy rate for buildings downtown, the existing parking spaces are more than sufficient for the current needs of residents and visitors to the downtown area. However, if Winchendon is successful in its revitalization, additional parking may be needed to accommodate the additional visitors to downtown. Nevertheless, Winchendon should consider the future of these parking lots; creative solutions could help to balance the parking demand while also creating a cohesive and attractive downtown.



*Free on-street parking is available in abundance on Central Street. In some areas of the corridor, these parking spaces are regularly used, but in other areas the spaces are chronically unoccupied.*

## Literature

### Introduction

The traffic issues that Winchendon faces around Blair Square and Central Street are complex and unique to the site. However, lessons may be taken from articles, previous studies, and government resources. Finding a creative solution to Winchendon's traffic issues will necessitate creative use of all available resources.

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<sup>27</sup> For more information about tax yield per acre (TYPA) analysis, see the Methodology section.

## Parking Regulation Strategies

In his thesis for the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, Ryan Lundergan examines how Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is hampered by parking policies that produce abundant on-street parking. He studies land uses surrounding transit-oriented-developments and postulates that ample parking competes with and compromises the goals of TOD. Using Somerville, MA as a focus area, Lundergan employs a mixed methods approach to analyze how TOD can better serve pedestrians, not cars. The author studies areas within a half-mile radius of transit stations and builds upon results from previous traffic studies. The thesis concludes that parking subsidies exacerbate the problem and that planners should be more cognizant of land use changes surrounding TODs to promote transit use integral to these developments.

While the Somerville is significantly different than Winchendon and this thesis is more of a policy recommendation than a success story, some lessons for Winchendon can be pulled out of this paper. Lundergan mentions changes in zoning as an effective parking control, as well as the return of investment a town can see from parking meters. He also mentions how charging for parking can absorb most of the development cost for TODs. Hopefully, by providing the Select Board and the Planning department with information about the limits of auto dependency, Carousel Consulting can help Winchendon better negotiate with developers when it comes to parking.

## Institute of Transportation Engineers and the Congress for New Urbanism

This manual from the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) and the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) provides technical guidance for practitioners in all facets of road design. This manual aims to improve streetscapes to better integrate multi-modal transportation and increase walkability of sidewalks. Specifically, it provides guidance for an Avenue in an Urban Core (C-4 on the Congress for New Urbanism urban-rural gradient).

This manual contains a table of Recommended Roadside Zone Dimensions that includes sidewalk widths to promote walkability (ITE, 2006, p.109). The sidewalk would include the following zones: an ‘edge zone’ (recommended width of 1.5 feet for an avenue like Central Street), which allows for a buffer between the cars and pedestrians (and for cars to open their doors without hitting pedestrians); a ‘furnishings zone’ (6 feet), which allows for benches, tables and other amenities; a ‘throughway zone’ (6 feet), the main path pedestrians use to walk along the street; and a ‘frontage zone’ (2.5 feet), the part of the sidewalk closest to the buildings.

The gist of the manual is to provide guidelines for increased sidewalk areas in places where residents would like more pedestrian activity and to allow more space for amenities such as benches, street trees, bike racks, and other design elements. Winchendon may seek to draw on residents’ memories of the historical, tree-lined streets to form a comparison to the current pedestrian experience. Wider sidewalks might provide space for benches and street trees, which could improve the pedestrian

experience. Wide sidewalks might also provide spaces for eating establishments to have outdoor seating in warmer months and could provide area for bike facilities such as bike racks. Wider sidewalks might also enhance the walkability of the town by allowing room for drivers to open their doors without blocking the path of pedestrians.

## United States Department of Transportation

The US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration issued a “Guidance Memorandum on Promoting the Implementation of Proven Safety Countermeasures” (Office of Safety, 2012). This document offers nine potential solutions for an intersection such as Blair Square. Most of these solutions are either not applicable or already exist (such as medians and crossing islands), or they require a signal. However, one solution that might be feasible is a road diet, which may allow lanes to be reconfigured to create a separate central lane for turning traffic, while lanes exist on either side for thru-traffic (Office of Safety, 2012). Generally, road ‘diets’ refer to the conversion of a four-lane road to a three lane road (two travel lanes and one turning lane), with the width of the fourth lane used to create bicycle lanes or provide parked cars on the side of the road with a buffer from moving traffic. Road diets help to reduce rear-end and sideswipe collisions, improve speed limit compliance and may increase bicycle access to the road by providing a safer riding environment (*ibid*).

All of the roads approaching the Blair Square intersection are two-lane roads. Front Street has on-street parking on the south side of the road, and this appeared problematic during peak traffic times. Rather than reduce the number of lanes, these parking spaces may be re-allocated (during rush hours) to travel lanes. This effect is almost the opposite of a road diet, but does serve to separate turning from thru-traffic.

## The State of Florida Department of Transportation

The State of Florida Department of Transportation sponsored a study in 2008 entitled “Innovative Operational Safety Improvements at Unsignalized Intersections” (Freeman et al., 2008). Eighteen treatments were assessed, including LED raised pavement markers, lights embedded in signs, post-mounted flashing beacons, roadside markers (to help drivers assess speed of other vehicles), indirect left-turns (which prohibit left turns and create a location further down the road to make a U-turn), and off-set left-turns (which create a separate lane for turning traffic) (Freeman et al., 2008).

Since most of the accidents at Blair Square occurred at night, lighting features may be especially relevant. Reflective markers along the pavement might assist turning traffic in gauging the speed of oncoming traffic and of the traffic with which they are trying to merge. Indirect left turns and off-set left turns may also be lower-cost, viable solutions to relieve back-ups for left-turning traffic in Blair Square. Post-mounted flashing beacons would signal drivers to slow down and look for pedestrians.

LED-lighted signs would also signal drivers to enter the intersection with caution and to be aware of pedestrians and turning traffic.

## Conclusions

The complexity of vehicular and pedestrian traffic issues in Blair Square requires integration of many solutions. Analyzing the best solution to facilitate left turns at the intersection is paramount to other issues at the intersection. Indirect left-turns and off-set left turns are two potential solutions (Freeman et al., 2008) to accomplish this goal. Adding lighting to alert night drivers to turning traffic and the presence of pedestrians may also provide solutions to the evening accidents that take place. Any improvements to the road alignment will likely be costly, but may also help to improve this intersection.

ITE guidance on context sensitive solutions provides good baseline targets for sidewalk and bike lane improvements. Specifically, wider sidewalks would create more space for pedestrian amenities such as benches, and for bicycle amenities such as bike racks. Street trees might also enhance the character of the street, while providing traffic calming and shade.

## Precedents/Case Studies

### Introduction

A traffic solution to Blair Square will likely require a coordinated effort between several entities (the town, the state and business owners at the intersection). Alternatives may also need to draw from non-traditional solutions. The following precedent studies first highlight a coordinated effort to reduce negative economic impacts of a road redesign and secondly, the highlights a creative approach to a very busy intersection. Both studies integrate vehicle traffic with pedestrian and bicyclists to create effective and functional solutions for all users.

### Hamburg, New York Route 62 Redesign

With an upcoming major redesign and reconstruction of Route 62, the Village of Hamburg New York recognized that they were at a critical point in their planning and management of future economic success. Route 62 is a major artery in the Village that flows through its commercial center and provides a heavily utilized truck route through the Village. The purpose of the plan was to make the best of the Route 62 project by predicting and preparing for the negative impacts of the construction process, and by identifying the ways in which the project can be used as a catalyst to the revitalization of the Village's commercial center (Gaffney, 2013). Although it was triggered by the Route 62 project and incorporates it throughout, the plan also recognizes broader trends and takes a more comprehensive look at local economic development strategies for the area.

The redesign of Route 62 included traffic calming measures and improved pedestrian and bicycle amenities, including bike lanes (Schlossberg, Rowell, Amos, & Sanford, 2013). The major lesson for Winchendon that may be taken from this precedent is to be opportunistic with state and local partnerships; Hamburg was able to accomplish these positive changes only by partnering with the New York state Department of Transportation. One of the major challenges facing Winchendon, especially relating to Blair Square, is the lack of funding to overhaul this area. Partnering with the state as well as other local agencies can provide Winchendon the opportunity to make the changes the Town wants to see in this busy corridor.

### Poynton Regenerated

This 15-minute video<sup>28</sup> illustrates an innovative double-rotary solution implemented in the small town of Poynton, England (Cassini, 2013). While large trucks go rumbling through a small village center with cobblestone streets, and cars eagerly queue up at the intersection, the video pans to show that cars, pedestrians and bicyclists are all using the intersection with few conflicts. Before the new traffic configuration, bicyclists were fearful of erratic traffic maneuvers by cars, pedestrians were extremely cautious crossing the streets, and traffic was often bottle-necked. The double rotary, serves to make right-hand turns (the equivalent of left-hand turns in the US) a two-step process; vehicles enter the intersection and wait in the queue around one of the rotaries for a break in thru-traffic, and then make the turn. This procedure appears to keep traffic moving more so than a stop light or stop signs on either end of a long intersection (Cassini, 2013).

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<sup>28</sup> Watch video at: <http://youtu.be/-vzDDMzq7d0>

Blair Square, with its heavy volume of traffic, limited area in which to construct a roundabout, and long intersection, seems to have a comparable situation as Poynton. In the roundabouts shown in the video, large trucks easily traverse the intersection because there are no curbs to the central circles – the stonework is raised and angled in the center to discourage cars from driving over them, yet large trucks can simply drive right over these features, perhaps slowing a bit to maintain their balance. This seems to provide an elegant solution to the otherwise large diameter a roundabout would require to accommodate tractor-trailers.

## Conclusions

Hamburg, NY highlights the aspects of a road redesign projects that produced a favorable result – coordination with local businesses, thinking of the redesign as a revitalization effort, and accessing funding from the state DOT. Poynton, while a European example, highlights the success of unconventional problem-solving. Blair Square, as a long intersection, with traffic approaching at odd angles, is similar to Poynton. This video illustrates how drivers can ‘learn’ a new traffic pattern, and that, despite strong skepticism, an innovative solution may actually work. Such a mindset may be necessary when considering alternatives to the existing traffic patterns in Blair Square.



*Poynton's creative approach may be inspiring to the residents of Winchendon as they consider merging various alternatives into a truly innovative solution.*

## Assessment/Recommendations

### Pedestrian and Vehicle Traffic around Blair Square

#### - **Status Quo**

One alternative for the intersection is to leave it as is. It does function, and few accidents actually take place at the intersection. One criterion that warrants a traffic light is the number of accidents that take place at an intersection that are a direct result of a lack of a traffic light. According to the 2005 Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission study, only six accidents took place in 2004, and of those, four took place at either dusk or after dark. This suggests that improved lighting at the intersection may help visibility and improve safety.

Additionally, heavy trucks have been observed by-passing this intersection and taking Glenallen Street to travel between Route 140 and Route 202N. Glenallen Street was due for improvements as of the 2005 MRPC report, and it appears that those road improvements have since taken place. This informal observation may suggest that larger vehicles find it easier to travel in the wider and less busy Glenallen Street, which may be helping to alleviate some of the traffic congestion witnessed in 2004. However, even with this *de facto* redirection of traffic, Blair Square is still an extremely frustrating intersection for Winchendon residents and visitors alike.

#### - **Roundabout**

A roundabout would eliminate the need for vehicles to cross oncoming traffic to make left turns from Central Street and Front Street. However, roundabouts have minimum radii to accommodate the design vehicle (in this case, a tractor-trailer truck). They also require fairly level approach grades, and single-lane roundabouts can only effectively accommodate 1,200 vehicles per hour (Knodler, 2014). Due to the volume of traffic at this intersection, the approach grades from Spring Street and the amount of available space, a traditional roundabout would likely not be the best solution for this intersection.

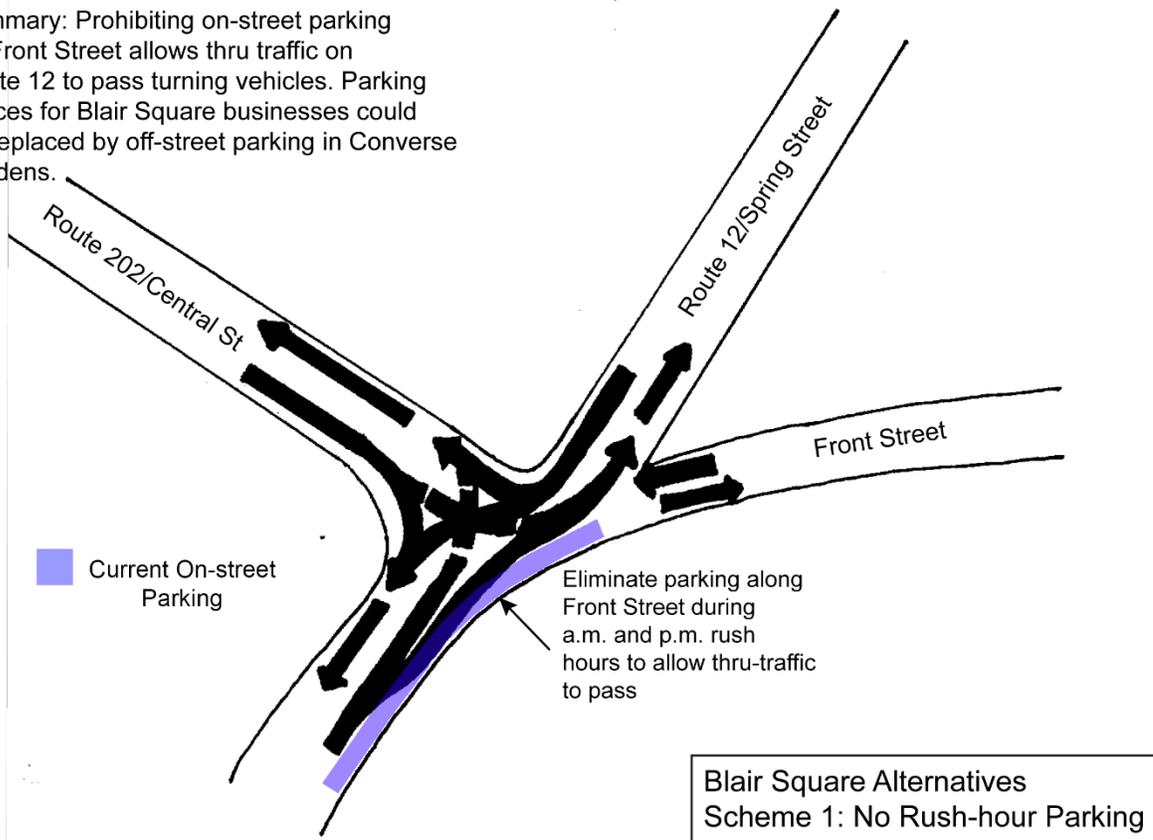
#### - **Lane and Parking Reconfiguration**

Lane and parking reconfiguration is another potential solution to the congestion issue. In order to determine the effectiveness of this solution, street width, traffic counts and sign requirements will need to be assessed. Parking along Front Street could be prohibited during morning and afternoon peak travel times (7-9am and 4-6pm). This extra space on the right hand side of the road would allow through traffic to pass turning traffic, and prevent cars from forming a line behind the turning vehicle. While some businesses might object to the removal of parking, it is likely that these vehicles would be able to find parking elsewhere in town. Cooperation with the local police or parking enforcement would be necessary to enforce this parking restriction. This solution is low-cost but

may not be enough to relieve all traffic issues at Blair Square is low-cost but may not be enough to relieve all traffic issues at Blair Square.

Figure 27: Blair Square Scheme 1, No Rush-Hour Parking

Summary: Prohibiting on-street parking on Front Street allows thru traffic on Route 12 to pass turning vehicles. Parking spaces for Blair Square businesses could be replaced by off-street parking in Converse Gardens.

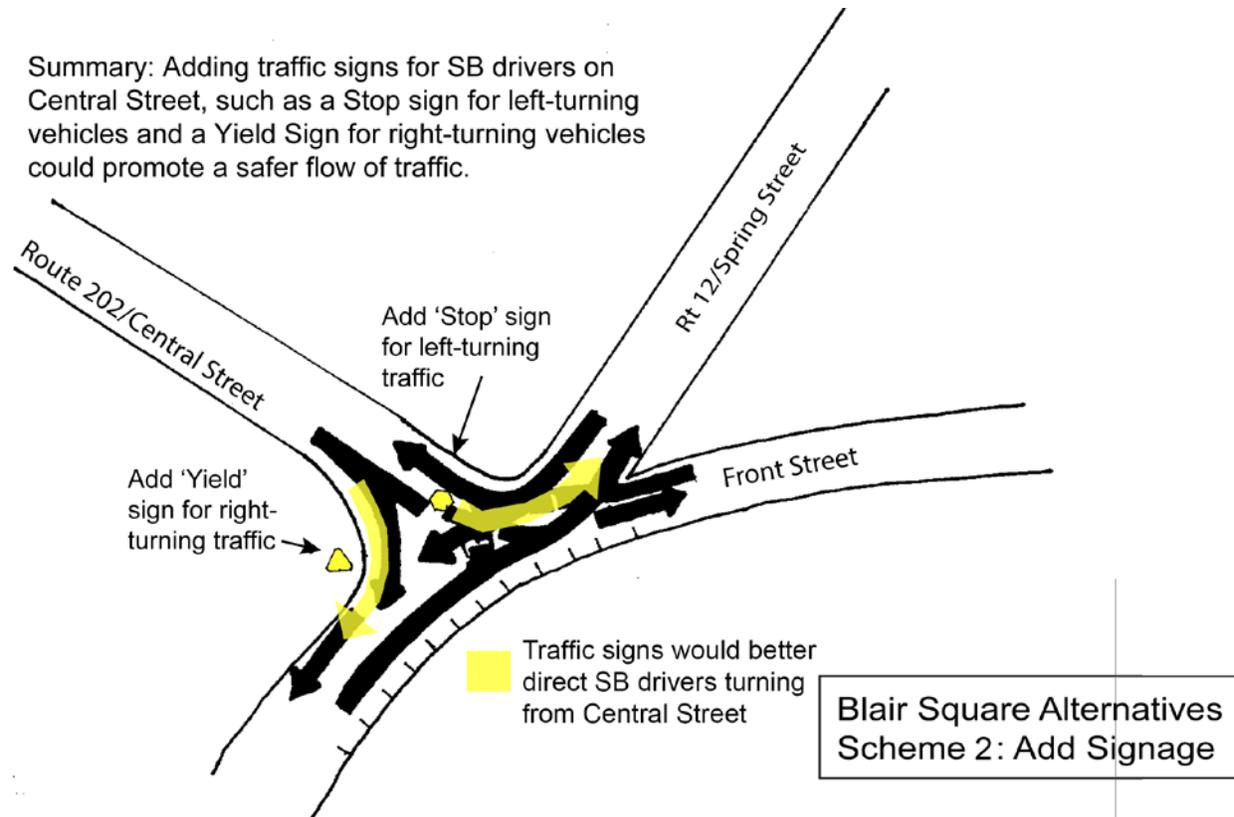


**- Signage**

A fourth alternative is to implement stop and yield signs. Again, traffic counts can assess whether signs are warranted and how they will improve traffic flow, and coordination with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) will need to take place. There is currently no signage on Central Street or on either approach from Route 12. Stop signs and yield signs may help to caution drivers as they approach the intersection. In particular, drivers traveling from Central Street would be required to stop before continuing into the intersection. This may be useful to drivers who are navigating the intersection for the first time, and it may reduce the ‘creeping’ in the intersection that currently takings place.

Similarly, a yield sign for those turning right from Central Street onto Spring Street/Route 12 northbound would encourage caution for the benefit of merging with oncoming traffic and for the safety of pedestrians using the crosswalk between Cumberland Farms and the dance studio. Unfortunately, this solution doesn't facilitate left-turns from Central Street. Instead, it might give cars a longer wait times. Adding signage would solve traffic issues for some roads, but worsen them for others.

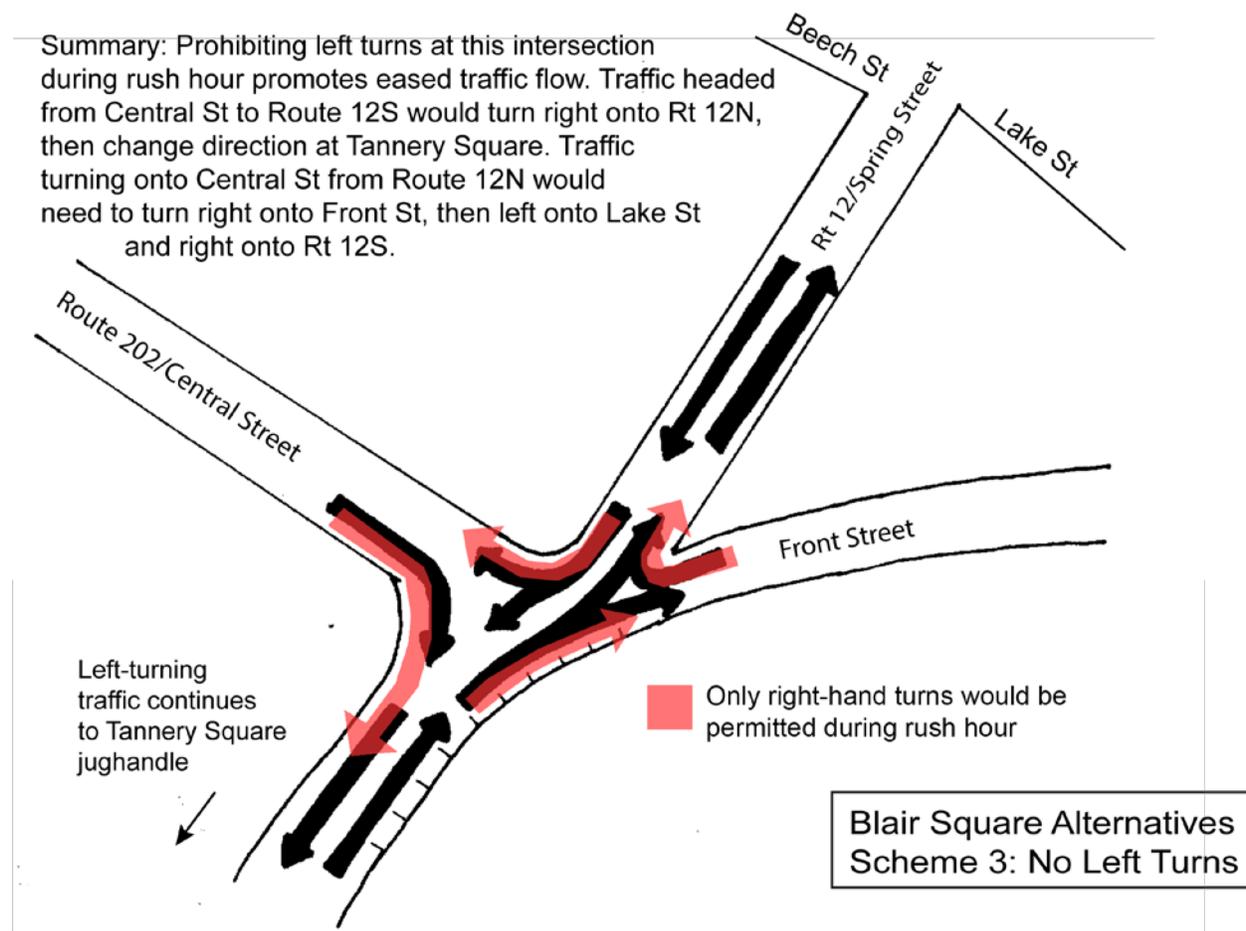
Figure 28: Blair Square Scheme 2, Add Signage



### - Eliminate Left Turns

Another solution is to eliminate left turns at the intersection during peak traffic hours. Instead, traffic would need to be re-routed through other side streets to allow cars to get to their destination. While this may be a simple fix, this solution generally works best when it is initiated and enforced by the local police (Knodler, 2014). Vehicles needing to turn left from Central Street or onto Central Street would be required to seek an alternate route. While this would eliminate the potential for accidents and vehicle 'creep' into intersection, it may simply move the problem to another intersection. Also, drivers may begin to avoid the intersection if it's too time-consuming to navigate the alternate route, which would hurt Winchendon's revitalization efforts.

Figure 29: Blair Square Scheme 3, No Left Turns



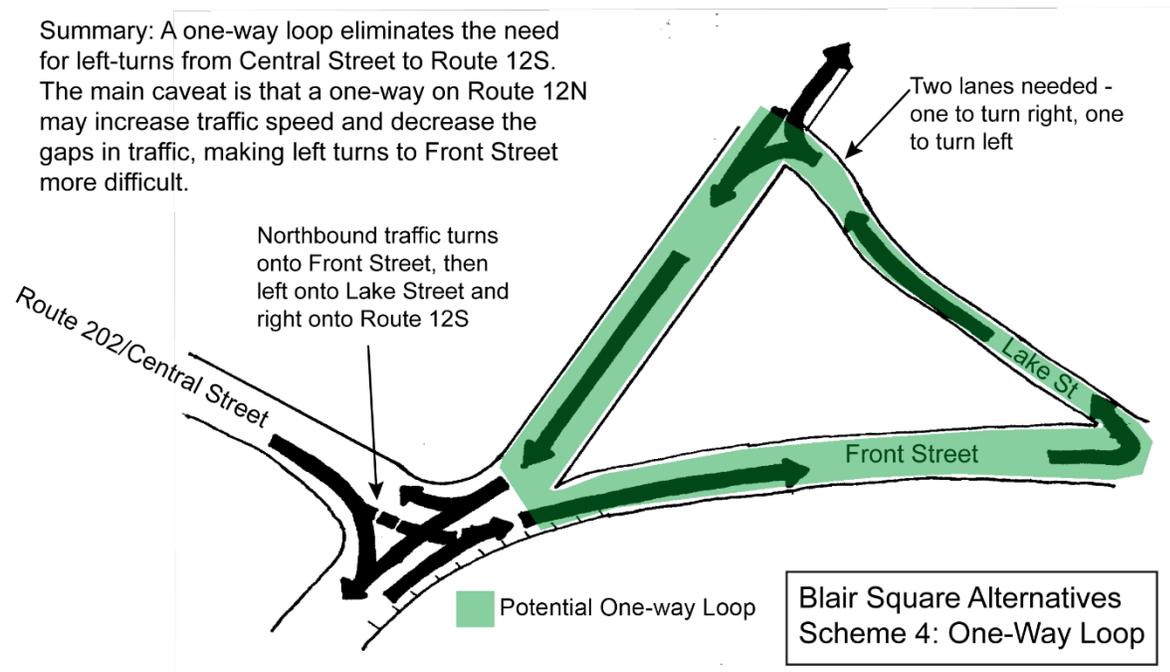
- **One-Way**

One potential solution is to create a one-way road between Front Street, Spring Street and Lake Street (see Figure 30 below). If traffic travelling south on Route 12 were forced to take Front Street to Lake Street, then turn right onto Spring Street, left hand turns from Route 12 to Central Street would be avoided. While this solves some of the traffic tie-ups in Blair Square, it only solves one of the issues. Traffic turning left from Central Street onto Route 12 South would still need to cross northbound traffic.

There are several other potential problems with this scenario: 1) the time required to travel from Route 12 south to Route 202 would increase by several minutes, and may prompt drivers to seek alternate routes to avoid the intersection altogether, 2) drivers trying to get to Central Street would need to merge with one-way traffic, then switch lanes in a matter of a 300 feet going up a hill – this scenario is not ideal; 3) Turning the section of Spring Street between Lake Street and Blair Square

into a one way may encourage traffic driving up the hill to speed up towards the intersection (Knodler, 2014). This increased traffic speeds would make it more difficult for drivers turning left out of Central St find a suitably-sized break on the traffic during which to turn.

Figure 30: Blair Square Scheme 4, One-Way Loop



### - Traffic Light

Level of service and traffic volumes at Blair Square warrant signalization (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2005). However, the northbound intersection approach (Route 12, Spring Street) is far from optimal for the implementation of a traffic signal. The Federal Highway Administration guidelines for a signalized intersection provide guidance for design of these intersections. Specifically, it states avoid approach grades ... greater than 6 percent” (U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, 2004). The approach from Spring Street, as mentioned previously, has approximately a 15 percent grade. Informal discussions with town residents have also supported this limitation, and the consulting team has been told that MassDOT is not in favor of a signal for this very reason.

Each of these alternatives for Blair Square has its advantages and its drawbacks. Some are more costly than others, but it seems that none of them alone will solve all the issues for Blair Square. When considering creative solutions to this problem, the following criteria must be considered: 1)

Traffic solution must accommodate volumes exceeding 1,500/hour at afternoon rush hours; 2) the solution should accommodate existing buildings located on parcels adjacent to the square, many of which curve inward towards the intersection, and therefore place space constrictions; 3) pedestrian safety and potential bicycle safety are paramount concerns; 4) the solution proposed should not discourage cars from traveling to the downtown by increasing wait times, or creating difficult traffic maneuvers; 5) the solution should be cost-effective and offer the greatest improvement to traffic flow at the lowest cost.

## Pedestrian Amenities, Parking, and Traffic Flow on Central Street

### - **Improve sidewalks, lighting, and other pedestrian amenities on Central Street**

Winchendon should develop design standards for its sidewalks and begin renovating them to ensure that all sidewalks in the downtown area are wide, smooth, and even.<sup>29</sup> Additional street lights should be added to improve pedestrian safety at night; these lights should be human-scale and their design should contribute to the historic and thematic character of the town. Other pedestrian amenities might include planters that add a little color to the street and tie in with the aesthetic theme of Winchendon Village. Zoning bylaws should also be modified to limit curb cuts in the downtown area to facilitate a safer and more pleasant pedestrian experience.

Wider sidewalks, especially along the more historic side of Central Street would create more spaces for pedestrians, and also allow space for amenities such as benches and bike racks. Street trees on this side of the road may also soften the existing spaciousness of the landscape, and serve to slow cars and cue drivers to the presence of pedestrians and bicycles. Street trees would also provide shade in the summer, which would further improve the pedestrian experience. Wider sidewalks would not necessarily mean less roadway. If, for instance, sidewalks were increased on the north side of the street, but decreased on the south side of the street (where there are fewer street-level businesses). For example, the existing right-of way of 60' could be re-distributed according to the cross-sections below.

Figure 31 shows the existing conditions on Central Street. Travel lanes are wide and sidewalks are narrow and uneven. No bike lanes exist.

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<sup>29</sup> For more detailed recommendations regarding design standards, see the *Aesthetics* chapter.

Figure 31: Central Street Cross-Section, Existing Conditions

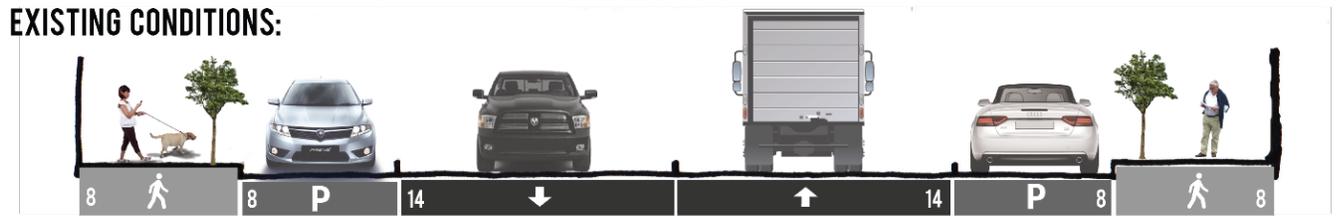


Figure 32 demonstrates our short-term recommendations for Central Street. A low-hanging fruit for this area is to narrow the travel lanes, which would make space for a three-and-a-half-foot safety buffer between parked cars and moving traffic. This would serve to calm traffic, provide more safety for people getting in and out of parked cars, and provide more room for bicyclists and other non-vehicular users on Central Street.

Figure 32: Central Street Short Term Recommendation, Narrow Travel Lanes

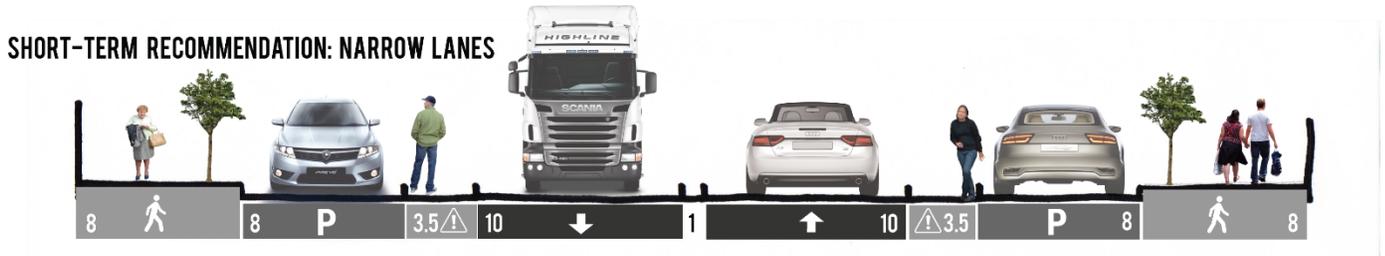


Figure 33 shows our long-term recommendations for Central Street. The sidewalk on the southbound side of the street has been expanded to consume the space previously occupied by on-street parking; parking still exists on the northbound side of the street. Bike lanes have been added on both sides to accommodate bikers and pedestrians.

Figure 33: Central Street Long Term Recommendation, Expand Sidewalks



Figure 34: Central Street Sidewalk Expansion and Pedestrian Scale Design



- **Add benches, pocket parks, bump-outs, or other gathering spaces**

Pedestrians on Central Street are in need of gathering spaces. Benches should be installed at regular intervals to accommodate elderly people, people with disabilities, parents with young children, and

others who may need to rest. Benches also serve as a gathering space and will be appreciated by all visitors to downtown on warm summer days.

Pocket parks and bump-outs can serve as gathering spaces as well, and they also provide much-needed green space in a densely settled downtown area. These spaces can be small, but the fresh air and shade they provide will make for a much more comfortable pedestrian environment. They also serve as a buffer between the sidewalk and vehicular traffic, which may provide a little relief from the noise of truck traffic on Central Street.<sup>30</sup>

- **Replace some underutilized parking spaces with open space or infill development**

Although parking will be an important resource as Winchendon revitalizes, the large number of empty parking lots facing Central Street are hurting the town's ability to generate a vibrant, exciting atmosphere that makes people want to get out of their cars and walk around. Some parking must be sacrificed now in order to facilitate the long-term revitalization of the town. Some on-street parking spaces can be turned into bump-outs or pocket parks, with small street trees marking their location so snow plow drivers can avoid them. Larger parking lots, such as the Rite Aid lot and the former used car lot, should be used for infill development.

As explained in the *Land Use* chapter of this report, the Town is losing potential tax revenue by not redeveloping these parking lots. When it comes to property taxes, dense, mixed-use development pays; parking does not.

- **Amend zoning bylaws to reduce parking requirements, incentivize shared parking, and require rear setback parking behind buildings**

As Winchendon revitalizes and the commercial vacancy rate drops, parking demand will likely increase. However, rather than allowing developers to build large parking lots that face the street, the town should be proactive about parking requirements that preserve the historic aesthetic of the town and provide a pleasant pedestrian experience. This might include more provisions in the zoning bylaws to encourage shared parking or require parking lots to be located behind the building. The town should also limit curb cuts to provide a safer, more uninterrupted pedestrian experience (see Land Use section for more detail about parking).

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<sup>30</sup> For pocket park design suggestions, see the *Aesthetics* chapter.

- **Integrate green infrastructure elements with sidewalk redesign and open space infill development**

Green infrastructure is a broad term that incorporates the low-impact development strategies recommended in the town zoning bylaws (Section 4.7(J)). The Environmental Protection Agency uses the following description:

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Green infrastructure uses vegetation, soils, and natural processes to manage water and create healthier urban environments... At the scale of a neighborhood or site, green infrastructure refers to storm-water management systems that mimic nature by soaking up and storing water (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2014).

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In general, green infrastructure practices use natural infiltration capacity of soil and plants to treat and absorb storm-water runoff. While use of these features serves a practical purpose, adding vegetation and preserving native soils in an area also serves to improve the aesthetics of an area, and creates a more dynamic environment that recharges local groundwater supplies and reduced urban heat island effects (City of Lancaster, PA, 2011). If sidewalks are to be redesigned and widened, and already paved areas are to be re-naturalized, it is an ideal time to incorporate more natural ecosystem functions into this redesign.

A number of green infrastructure practices may be appropriate to both sidewalk projects and conversion of paved areas. As systems comprised of living organisms, green infrastructure does require ongoing maintenance and care; however, upfront installation costs are generally lower than comparable 'gray infrastructure' upgrades, which frequently involve excavation, road work and heavy machinery. Suitable green infrastructure applications are described below, along with a brief overview of the benefits as well as the maintenance and installation costs of each feature.

- 1) Storm-water Planter – These features collect and infiltrate water from both roads and sidewalks. Planters look like sunken gardens, where the difference between the surrounding land elevation and the planted area allow water to collect and slowly infiltrate into the ground. This function requires permeable soils underneath the structure. However, storm-water planters can reduce the amount of water diverted to storm sewers, while also providing a place for trees, shrubs or grasses.

Installation costs for planters are moderate at about \$8/square foot, and may be more or less depending upon the construction and plant materials used. Maintenance costs are relatively inexpensive at about \$1/square foot annually, depending upon the size of the planter (National Association of City Transportation Officials, 2008).

Figure 35: Storm-water Planter

## Stormwater Planter



Source: *Philadelphia Green Streets Design Manual*, Philadelphia Water Department

- 2) Storm-water Tree/Tree Trench – At first glance, a tree trench looks like an average street tree installation. However, the trees are connected underground by a sewer-like system. Essentially, tree trenches add an infiltration mechanism between the storm sewer inlet on the street and the storm sewer line, whereby the water flows underneath the trees and some is absorbed by the roots of the trees. This additional infiltration process removes some of the pollutants from the water and also reduces the water the sewers need to attenuate.

Again, these systems work best when existing soil is somewhat permeable (as it is along the Central Street corridor). Also, conflicts with underground utilities will need to be assessed and mitigated prior to installation.

Due to the amount of excavation and extensive excavation work these systems require, installation costs for tree trenches are higher at about \$10-15/square foot. The pre-fabricated system which includes the plant material and filter fabric, runs between \$8,000-10,000 (City of Lancaster, PA, 2011). Maintenance costs generally average \$100-500 per year for each trench.

Figure 36: Storm-water Trees and Trenches



Source: Philadelphia Green Streets Design Manual, Philadelphia Water Department

- 3) Vegetated Curb Extension – These features are lower in cost, but provide moderate storm-water infiltration. If sidewalks along Central Street are extended two to four feet, some of this additional space may be used to treat the runoff from the sidewalk. Vegetated curb extensions offer a green space between the sidewalk and the street, and may be planted with non-woody plants, such as grasses or flowering plants.

Installation costs are relatively inexpensive, if combined with planned sidewalk extension. At \$30/square foot, they may have a higher upfront cost, but have very low maintenance in the long-term. Ongoing maintenance includes making sure that inlets are clear.

Figure 37: Green Infrastructure Bump-outs

#### Corner Bump-out



#### Mid-Block Bump-out



Source: Philadelphia Green Streets Design Manual, Philadelphia Water Department



## Funding and Partnership Opportunities

The state and federal government have a variety of funds available to aid towns in the redevelopment or improvement of their infrastructure, this includes roadways. Among these opportunities are MassWorks, the TIGER grant program, and District Improvement Financing.

- **Chapter 90** (roadways and traffic control devices) is a reimbursable program operated by the State of Massachusetts Highway Department. It disperses funds for road maintenance, repair, construction and improvement. Funds are available for landscaping, sidewalks, right-of-way acquisitions, street lighting and traffic control.<sup>31</sup>
- **MassWorks Infrastructure** money can be used to help fund infrastructure improvements related to roadway safety, such as signage and sidewalks. It can also be used for other infrastructure improvements which are related to revitalization and economic development, such as road redesign and the improvement of public parks.
- **District Improvement Financing** is used by towns as a way to finance and incentivize projects that aim to “increase industrial, commercial and residential activity” in an area by providing investors with a property tax abatement on the increased value of the property which results from their investment. This agreement lasts for a specific number of years and during that time allows towns to continue collecting the property tax revenue on the property’s pre-investment value. Once the specified number of years is over, the town then begins to collect property taxes on the full value of the property.
- **TIGER** grants are discretionary grants offered through a federal Department of Transportation program that invests funds in road, rail and transit projects that forward an established set of national objectives. Grant money from this program could be sought by the Town for improvements to Blair Square and Central Street.<sup>32</sup>
- **Section 108 Loan Guarantee** is a component of the Community Development Block Grant program which provides communities with a federally guaranteed source of financing for economic development and large-scale physical development projects. Eligible activities include but are not limited to the acquisition of real property, rehabilitation of publically owned real property, and public works and site improvements. A large-scale redesign of Blair Square and/or Central Street could be financed through this loan program under the eligible

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<sup>31</sup> Find more information about Chapter 90 at:  
<http://www.mass.gov/hed/economic/eohed/pro/infrastructure/massworks/>

<sup>32</sup> For more on TIGER grants, visit: <http://www.dot.gov/tiger>

activity of “construction, reconstruction, or installation of public facilities (including street, sidewalk, and other site improvements”.<sup>33</sup>

## Timeline for Implementation

### Blair Square

As we have discussed in this chapter, there are a number of hurdles and roadblocks to creating a comprehensive solution for Blair Square. A traffic patterns study completed by a professional traffic engineer will be necessary to find a feasible, successful solution. There are, however, some smaller scale changes that can be implemented to make traveling through Blair Square safer for pedestrians and cars alike. The following is a list of all our recommendations in order of implementation:

#### - **Six months to Two Years**

- Secure funding for an alternatives and traffic patterns analysis by a professional traffic engineer. Alternatives considered in the analysis should include: roundabout, traffic signals, creation of a one-way to reduce the number of points traffic can enter the intersection, and the creation of turning lanes.
- To enhance pedestrian safety and improve visibility, the Town should consider prohibiting parking on Front Street during rush hour. The parking currently creates blind spots for drivers headed northeast up Route 202 as they approach the intersection. This would require nothing but signage detailing the restricted times and enforcement by local police.
- To create more clarity about what traffic has the right of way, what traffic must stop, and what traffic must yield, the Town could ‘yield’ and ‘stop’ signs at the various entrances to the intersection. For example, cars traveling south down Central Street into the intersection should have a stop sign and cars traveling northwest up Route 12 into the intersection should have a yield.

#### - **Two to Five Years**

- Ideally, during this time, the Town should have commissioned and received a traffic patterns analysis by a professional traffic engineer. Upon receiving the study, the Town should review

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<sup>33</sup> See: <https://www.hudexchange.info/section-108/section-108-program-eligibility-requirements> for more info on Section 108 component of the CDBG program

its recommendations and identify the best solution for traffic management and for the economic vitality of the area.

- Having identified the best solution, the Town should then begin applying for funding to implement this solution.

- **Five Years or More**

- By the five year mark, the Town should have begun the implementation process for its chosen solution.
- Upon completion of the implementation process, the Town should analyze the results for effectiveness.

### Pedestrian Amenities, Parking, and Traffic Flow- Central Street

To improve pedestrian safety and the general accessibility and ease of navigation on Central Street, we have proposed a number of recommendations. These recommendations present a variety of improvements, large and small, which will combine to have a very significant impact on the appearance and atmosphere of Central Street. The following is a list of these recommendations and their various phases of implementation:

- **Six months to Two Years**

- Before it can move forward with anything related to pedestrian safety and amenities, the Town must complete a thorough walkability study of Central Street and the connecting side streets.
- Using the walkability study, the Town should identify specific priorities to improve the pedestrian experience, such as illuminated crosswalk signs, resting places, and visual stimuli.
- In addition to a walkability study, a parking study of available off-street parking, parking area use and projected parking need should be conducted to determine short and long-term parking improvements.
- The process of securing funding for the redesign of Central Street should begin. This initial phase and funding would be to re-paint centerlines and stop lines along Central Street. The new center lines will improve the clarity of road organization and automobile right of ways.

- **Two to Five Years**

- If not completed already, the repainting of centerlines and stop lines on Central Street should be finished.
- In this time period, the Town should apply for funding for the expansion of downtown sidewalks.

- The Town should also seek funding for pedestrian-scale amenities such as street trees, new lighting, and benches.
- Using the results from the parking study, the Town should identify parcels to maintain for parking and those which could be redeveloped.
- The process of implementing the sidewalk expansion and/or sidewalk bump-outs should begin.

- **Five Years or More**

- In the long term, the Town should continue with the implementation of sidewalk expansion/improvements, and see them through to their completion

## Focus Area: Local Open Space Amenities

### Context/Background

The town of Winchendon is located in a rural setting, and nearby protected open space is abundant. Almost 30 percent of the land in town (8,047 of 28,222 acres) is managed as either conservation or recreation land. Significant undeveloped areas are held by the Army Corps of Engineers (2,546 acres), Massachusetts Fish and Game (3,855 acres) and the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (950 acres) (MassGIS). In addition, the Otter River State Forest and the Lake Dennison Recreation Area are two campgrounds that are heavily used by residents and visitors. In sum, open space is one of Winchendon's major assets and is highly valued by town residents and regional tourists.

One of Winchendon's hidden gems is its network of hiking and biking trails. One of these trails, the North Central Pathway, began construction in 1997 in the nearby city of Gardner and was intended to connect with Winchendon's paved bike trail in 2002. The Bike Path will extend about 10 miles southeast to Gardner, MA, once finished. Currently 1 mile of this path is complete and provides public amenities such as park benches, a pet waste receptacle, and a parking lot at the eastern limit. Anecdotal evidence exists that this and other trails are used by recreational walkers and bikers; however, little signage exists to help visitors find these trails from the town center.

Figure 39: Map of Open Space



## Team Findings

### Existing Amenities

#### - **Field observations**

Winchendon's rural character is evident to even the most casual observer; outside of the downtown area and a few small villages, most of the town is forested. The concentration of natural resources is unique to Winchendon, and may serve to draw tourists from surrounding communities. Two busy campgrounds, a popular bike path, and the historic Converse Gardens are all valued open space amenities that the Town should develop and capitalize on to make Winchendon an outdoor recreation destination.

Though the completion of the bike path is behind schedule, the section available as an open space and recreation destination has been well used by town residents of all ages for various uses including running, biking, walking pets, and meeting friends. However, the path is currently the only bicycle amenity available in Winchendon; there are no bike lanes on the streets, no bike racks, and no lighting on the path. Also lacking is signage; there are no signs directing bicyclists from downtown Winchendon towards the bike path, and no signs on the path indicating where it goes or what other trails or destination connect to it.

Field observations also revealed that two bike trails, in addition to the North Central Pathway, pass directly through the downtown corridor. Winchendon sits at the intersection of these historic rail trails, namely the Monadnock Branch Rail Trail and the Cheshire Rail Trail, which extend north into New Hampshire and continue south as well. The Monadnock Branch Rail Trails extends over 13 miles from Jaffrey, NH to Winchendon. The Cheshire Rail Trail extends north about 43 miles to terminate in Walpole, NH, passing through the New Hampshire towns of Fitzwilliam, Keene, and Troy. However, these trails are not paved, nor is there signage to direct bicyclists from downtown Winchendon onto the trails.

The path passes by some of Winchendon's most beautiful historic and natural assets, including Whitney Pond and Tannery Pond. Nearby, there is also a partially preserved historic railway bridge. However, these assets are underutilized and under-valued; for example, although the bike path does cross both ponds, there are additional waterfront views along side streets and trails branching off the path that most cyclists would miss. The railway bridge is located off a trail that branches from the bike path; this presents an opportunity for some educational signage about Winchendon's history as a railroad hub. Thus, although the bike path is well-used and valued by Town residents, there are opportunities to better integrate it with the Winchendon's existing natural and historic assets.

### - Public Workshop

During the public workshop, town residents identified the Bike Path as a priority area to develop for open space recreation. This path has informal links to trails in New Hampshire and planned links to Gardner, MA, and is heavily used by town residents and visitors for dog walking, bicycling, and other forms of recreation and exercise. Town residents also mentioned Whitney Pond and Tannery Pond as valuable amenities, especially for the waterfront views that can be obtained from the bike path or certain parts of Central Street. The existence of the path presents an opportunity to better connect downtown Winchendon with the waterfront, a valuable but underutilized asset of the Town.



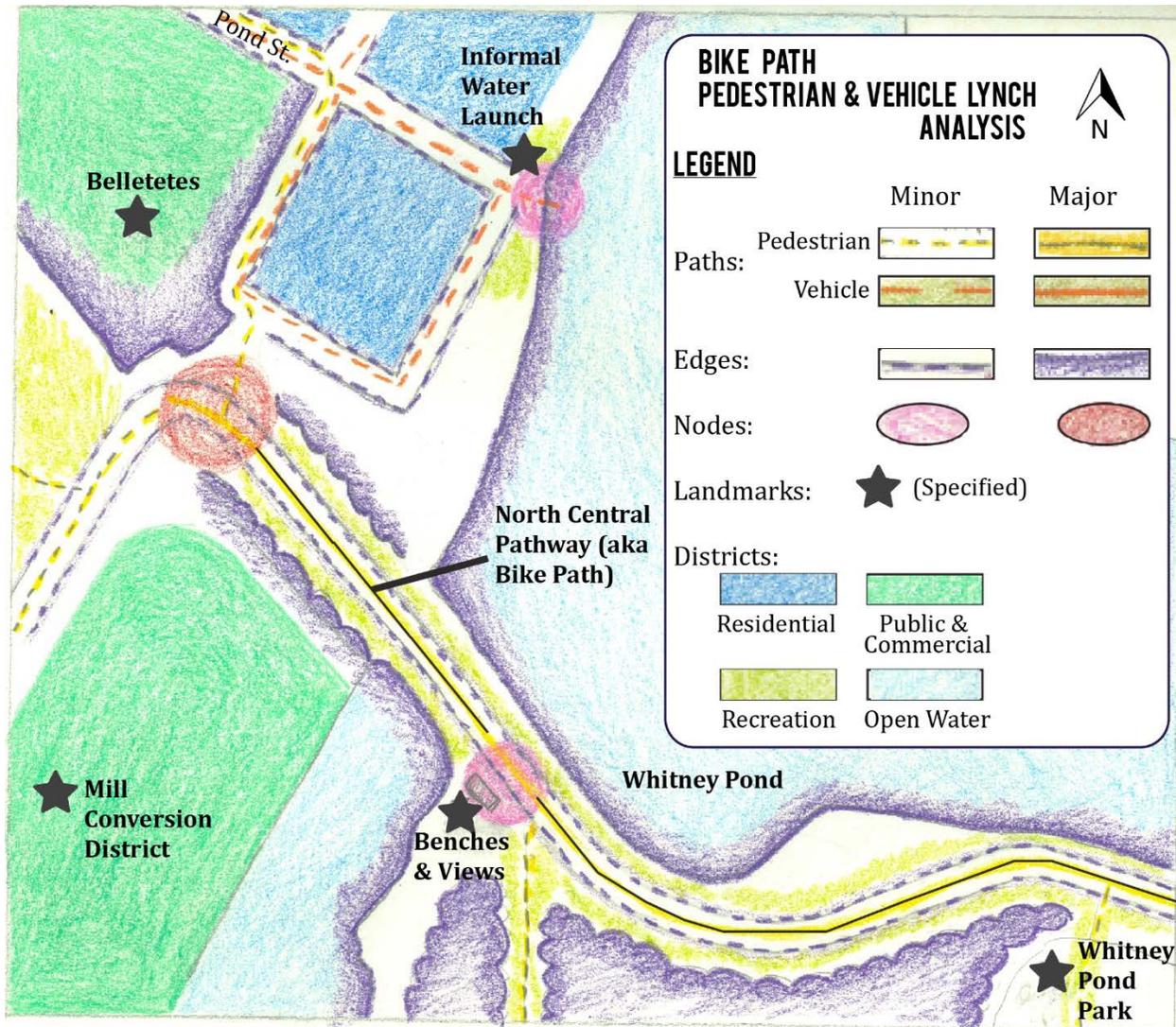
*The North Central Pathway, or simply ‘the Bike Path’ as it is known by Winchendon residents provides open space access close to the downtown and is highly used by locals as a destination for exercise and pet walking.*

### - Lynch Analysis

The bike path has various points of access from the eastern and western sides, but all access points require passing through residential neighborhoods without way-finding signage. For this reason, the consulting team concludes that the bike path has limited accessibility overall. Approaching from the

downtown area, the bike path is accessible from two side road entrance points, both of which require the cyclist to navigate residential areas without assistance from directional signage. In spite of this lack of signage, the bike path is heavily used by both pedestrians and cyclists. However, installing signage could encourage new users, and help non-residents find and access this valuable amenity.

Figure 40: Lynch Map of Bike Path



### - Interviews

In addition to the bike path, Winchendon is also home to two busy campgrounds: Otter River State Forest and Lake Dennison Recreation Area. An interview with the campground supervisor revealed that both areas are generally full on weekends during the summer months (Trazaglini, personal

communication, October 22, 2014). The patrons of these campgrounds, as well as the cyclists and pedestrians who use the bike path, are potential visitors to the downtown, yet there seems to be little connection between the downtown and these recreational sites; signage is absent, and it's unclear that downtown stores provide the campers, hikers and bikers with equipment they might need.

## Opportunities for Open Space Planning

### - Interviews

The Town is in the process of creating a plan to develop several town-owned parcels at the outskirts of the study area into parks (White, personal communication, October 20, 2014). This plan, known as the Winchendon Loop, promotes a comprehensive vision of Winchendon as a destination for outdoor recreation enthusiasts (Winchendon Planning and Development Department, 2013). In all, four parks are proposed that connect to existing bike trails and conserve recreation areas. Whitney Pond Park, located off the bike path, would include a waterfront park with performance space. Converse Garden is adjacent to the study area, and would provide walking and fishing opportunities. Webster Park, located north of Rite Aid, would be the keystone link between the North Central bike path extension and the Cheshire Bike Path. These recommendations, which are within reach, since many of the parcels are already owned by the town, should be seriously considered as a strategy for developing and promoting Winchendon as an outdoor recreation destination.

Currently, the Town is also working with a local citizen group known as the Winchendon Enhancement Collaborative to raise funds to purchase a 51 acre piece of land known as Ingleside (Murphy, personal communication, September 29, 2014). This property, located on Whitney Pond and currently owned by the Winchendon School, is extremely close to downtown and would provide a great opportunity to improve the connection between Central Street and the waterfront. If the town were to purchase this property, it would likely be used for outdoor recreational activities. Although this plan may not come to fruition for several years, it does indicate that momentum exists in Winchendon to develop these open space resources as an economic revitalization catalyst for the Town.

### - ESRI Market Data

As mentioned in the *Economic Development Strategies* chapter of this report, a preliminary market analysis reveals that money is leaking out of Winchendon. One example of this may be seen at the two campgrounds in town; campers looking for a bite to eat do not often venture into downtown Winchendon, and when they need supplies, they generally drive to Rindge, New Hampshire (Trazaglini, 2014). This suggests that the market exists for more recreation and service-related businesses in the downtown.

## Literature

### Introduction

Each of these articles highlights a different aspect of open space planning. Pollock et al. (2012) examine the economic impact that outdoor recreational amenities can have on rural communities, while Kresge (2011) investigates the optimum balance of land-centric and people-centric approaches to open space planning. The take-home message is that strategic open space planning can boost rural towns in their revitalization efforts and facilitate economic development as well.

### Recreational Tourism

This study was conducted during the summer of 2006 at six different sections of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, which runs from western New York to northern Maine (Pollock et al., 2012). Many rural areas have encouraged ecotourism industry, since it is relatively low-impact yet creates jobs. This paper found that the economic impact of recreational tourism on rural economies varied widely due to several factors: the number of visitors, whether visitor were local or not, the quantity and pattern of expenditures, and how long they stayed. Presence of local services (guide services, especially) and restaurants and hotels increased amount spent in a location (*ibid*, 2012).

The study estimates that about 90,000 people use the areas around the trail and generate 8.8 million dollars million in revenue annually; however, the distribution of wealth varied greatly. Areas that received primarily local groups or had fewer amenities received less revenue. Local users averaged about \$5 per person per day in expenses, while larger groups on multi-day excursions spent an average of \$6 per person per day on goods and services in the local economy (Pollock et al., 2012). This study focused on a canoe trail, but also referenced studies on bike trails and hiking trails such as the Appalachian Trail.

Winchendon is situated in a rural area of the state, and in close proximity to several recreation areas (Lake Dennison camping area, Otter River State forest, Winchendon State Forest, and the popular Monadnock and Rhododendron state parks in southern New Hampshire). The recent construction of the bike path is another feature in Winchendon, which may become part of the town's revitalization plan. In order to understand how significant these attractions are, it's useful to know their economic potential for tourism. Since there are also no existing accommodations in downtown (such as B&B) and limited restaurant options, visitors are more likely to spend money elsewhere, even though they may be traveling to Winchendon to hike and bike. This article provides support for improving tourist amenities in the downtown and for developing a tourism economy related to hiking, biking, and even paddling (since the Millers River is adjacent to downtown).

## Resource-Centric versus People-Centric Open Space Planning

The author of this Master's project sought to better understand how land preservation and open space planning occur at the local level, given differing systems of inventory-based planning and community-centered planning (Kresge, 2011). For this thesis, Kresge investigates the difference between two major approaches to land protection: a demand-based or resource-centric approach, and a supply-based or people-centric approach. A major method the author used to examine this issue is a case study analysis in the community of Jaffrey, NH; the major finding is that a multi-faceted approach to open space planning that centers on both existing land packages (land-based approach) and community demands (people-based approach) can deliver optimal results.

This article is useful to Carousel Consulting as Winchendon has proposed various sites for open space preservation for public use and recreation. One site is the bike path and waterfront area to the northeast of the Winchendon study area, and another is the more comprehensive proposal for a 'Winchendon Loop' trail to link current and potential open spaces for both residential and seasonal users. Kresge's findings support the establishment of a planning process that takes into account both the land parcels available and the public wishes for the use of the land rather than an approach that favors just one of these data inputs.

## Conclusions

Although each of these articles takes a different spin on open space planning, a common theme is that strategic development of recreational amenities can facilitate economic development in rural areas. When planning for open space and recreation, the Town of Winchendon should try to attract large tourist groups from out-of-town and provide them with amenities such as restaurants, retail stores, and outdoor recreation opportunities (Pollock et al., 2012). In addition, the Town should balance the opportunities provided by the inventory of land available for open space with the desires of town residents (Kresge, 2011); the balance of these two approaches can already be seen in the planned Winchendon Loop, which utilizes town-owned land to realize the desires and visions of residents. It is essential that Winchendon take advantage of its wealth of open space resources to facilitate the town's revitalization.

## Precedents/Case Studies

### Introduction

Two towns that have dealt with similar open space planning challenges are Greenfield, MA, and Wyandanch, NY. Both towns were experiencing disinvestment and decline in their downtowns, and both recognized the opportunity for revitalization provided by their natural and recreational amenities. Each of these precedent studies may provide lessons that can be applied to Winchendon as it moves forward with its open space planning process.

## Greenfield, MA Downtown Master Plan

The Greenfield Downtown Master Plan listed improving connections to surrounding amenities, especially open space, as a major opportunity for revitalization (Greenfield Downtown Master Plan Committee, 2003). Walking trails starting in downtown and extending to surrounding parks and the river could provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Lack of advertising for these natural amenities was identified in the plan as a major hindrance to recreational use of these areas, so implementing signage and other marketing techniques was identified as a low-hanging fruit. Accompanying this recommendation were various marketing and programmatic recommendations; hosting events in downtown Greenfield and marketing those events to people in surrounding communities would bring people in from out of town, which would support existing businesses and might also attract new ones.

Winchendon is faces similar challenges to Greenfield's in terms of open space; the Town is rich in open space resources and facilities, but they are disconnected from each other and from the downtown. An easy first step for Winchendon would be to install signage directing people to the bike path, the waterfront, Converse Gardens, and other important outdoor recreation amenities in town. Making the connection between open space amenities and opportunities for outdoor events is also an important take-away from Greenfield's plan; hosting events will highlight Winchendon's rich natural resources and bring visitors and revenue into the town.

## Wyandanch Rising

This is quite a short article that gives an overview of the Wyandanch Rising project in Wyandanch, NY (Taylor, 2013). It focuses specifically upon the completion of a community water park adjacent to a lake. Wyandanch, NY is a town of approximately 11,500 in Suffolk County, New York. In 2001, the Suffolk County planning department named Wyandanch the most distressed community on Long Island. In response, local leaders banded together to realize their vision of a “walk-able community where residents could live, shop, work and play in one compact, attract, family-friendly space” (Taylor, 2013, p. 14). They developed a project, “Wyandanch Rising”, an extensive public-private partnership aimed at revitalizing the hamlet community.

One of the main components of the project was rebuilding Geiger Lake Park. In the rebuilding of the park they added a spray park, centered on a “Tree of Life” theme, with other features such as slides, fountains, and benches. The five dollar fee per visit for community residents helps maintain the park as well as contributing money to Wyandanch’s long term plan. A similar project could be undertaken in Winchendon with the possibility of public-private partnership with relocated manufacturing companies that continue to offer the town support (i.e. Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation).

## Conclusions

Each of these precedents has take-home lessons that may be applied to Winchendon. Greenfield, recognizing the need for better connection between downtown and the surrounding natural amenities, implemented signage to improve way-finding and safety for users of these outdoor spaces; this strategy could represent a low-hanging fruit for Winchendon as the Town starts its open space planning process. Additionally, although a spray park like the one in Wyandanch may not be the best option for Winchendon, the concept of building a recreational facility and charging a small entrance fee to cover costs should be investigated, especially if the Town acquires the Ingleside property. The Town should make improvements to its existing outdoor amenities and use them to host outdoor events in order to draw people in from out of town and catalyze the Town's revitalization.

## Assessment/Recommendations

### Parking for the Bike Path and Bicycle Amenities

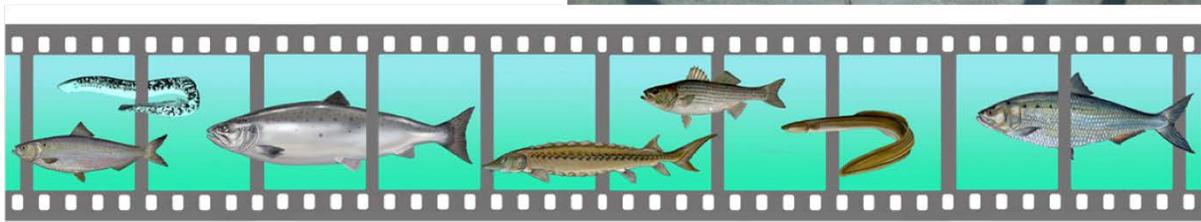
Currently most bike path users park in the YMCA parking lot, but there is no parking area specifically designated for the path. The addition of designated parking for the bike path might make it more attractive to people who need to drive to the bike path. Having convenient parking is something that cannot be undervalued. Additionally, having designated parking will reduce concern over users of the bike path taking up spaces for other downtown visitors.

In order to increase bike traffic on and around Central Street, the Town must increase the safety and accessibility of the downtown by providing bike lanes and additional amenities like bike racks for the public to use. Fortunately, Central Street is a wide road that would be able to accommodate a bike lane addition with some reconfiguration.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the development of bike racks can provide an opportunity for the Town to showcase its branding.

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<sup>34</sup> See *Circulation* chapter for more detail about reconfiguring Central Street.

*Winchendon could incorporate thematic design elements into new bike rack and crosswalk designs, as has been done in the community of Turner's Falls. Turner's Falls' thematic designs for bike racks and downtown crosswalks, developed in part through community design competitions, are shown here. Images from [turnersfallsriverculture.org](http://turnersfallsriverculture.org).*



## Way-Finding Signage

People will not use the bike path if they do not know it is there! Currently, there is no signage for the bike path, and its location behind the YMCA makes it even less visible. The signage could not only direct people to the bike path, but it could also educate residents and visitors on Winchendon's history and serve as a catalyst for promoting the downtown village.

Signs to direct both foot and bike traffic should be installed along all streets leading users to the several bike paths available close to the downtown. Streets that should have these signs could include, in order of importance: Central Street, Summer Street, Summer Drive, the Blair Square intersection, and Beech Street. Figure 41 below shows an example sign that Winchendon could adapt for its own trails.

Figure 41: Sample Bike Path Signage



Image from [bicyclegermany.com](http://bicyclegermany.com)

### Increased Retail, Service, and Lodging Options

Tapping into and capturing the market of retail, restaurant, and lodging options that are being lost to surrounding communities is critical. This is a low-hanging fruit because the demand already exists, rather than the Town and businesses needing to create the demand from scratch. As explained in the *Existing Conditions: Market Trends* chapter and shown in Table 4, there are currently hundreds of millions of dollars in retail spending potential in the industry groups of Food Services and Drinking Places, General Merchandise Stores, and Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, and Music Stores. Winchendon should capitalize on visitors who come to town for the bike path, campgrounds, and other amenities and recapture some of this lost retail potential by developing commercial activities that cater to pedestrians and cyclists; these might include outdoor sporting goods stores, ice cream stands and cafes, or even a rock climbing gym in one of the mill buildings.<sup>35</sup> An outdoor

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<sup>35</sup> See *Economic Development Strategies* chapter for more possibilities regarding the mills.

performance space such as an amphitheater would also serve to draw people in and would accent Winchendon's natural assets, especially if it were located near the waterfront.

## Marketing

Way-finding signage is not going to be enough to fully realize the potential of Winchendon to be a hub for recreation activities. Promotional events like the Fall Festival should be expanded and utilized to increase the visibility and awareness of Winchendon's recreational opportunities. The Town could also work with the Gardner Regional Chamber of Commerce or start its own task force to create and distribute promotional materials. Winchendon already has a wide array of recreational amenities; marketing these to regional visitors will draw people in and further the Town's revitalization goals.

## Interstate Trail Connections

With its abundance of open space amenities and its location on the border with New Hampshire, Winchendon has an excellent opportunity to extend its hiking and biking trails to the north to form an interstate network. The Cheshire Rail Trail begins near the border of New Hampshire and Vermont and runs southwest through the New Hampshire towns of Keene, Troy, and Fitzwilliam before crossing the border into Massachusetts in Winchendon. Cyclists can access this trail in Winchendon on Lincoln Avenue and follow the rail bed all the way to New Hampshire. The Monadnock Branch Trail begins in Jaffrey, NH, near Monadnock State Park, and runs south through Rindge, NH, crossing the border into Massachusetts in Winchendon. This trail connection is also on Lincoln Avenue in Winchendon, on the other side of the street.

These trail connections are a good basis for marketing the town as a recreation destination. Cyclists already use these trails, indicating that the demand exists and these trails are 'on the map'; improving them and adding amenities may boost usage and visitation. If the town extends the bike path past Rite Aid on the railroad right-of-way, or past Belletetes on the other side of Central Street, the connection to the New Hampshire trails would be safer and more obvious to casual cyclists and pedestrians. However, if this option is not feasible, the town should at least improve signage directing cyclists from Central Street to Lincoln Avenue, and from Lincoln Avenue onto the trails. This option might also include bike lanes on Central Street and Lincoln Avenue to make the route safer and clearly indicate the route to cyclists and pedestrians.

Figure 42: Rendering of Extended Bike Path Facing East



Figure 43: Rendering of Extended Bike Path Facing West



The opportunity to draw in cyclists and outdoor recreation enthusiasts from out-of-state is one the Town shouldn't pass up. Extending the bike trail along the railroad right-of-way near Rite Aid is the best option for the long-term because it provides additional opportunities for redevelopment in the relatively empty Railroad Street neighborhood; the Town could capitalize on the through-traffic by developing amenities along that corridor that cyclists might use, such as an outdoor recreation store, an ice cream stand, or a small park with benches.<sup>36</sup> However, if this is not feasible in the short-term, the town should at least improve signage and safety for the cyclists that are already accessing the trail via Lincoln Avenue.

## Funding and Partnership Opportunities

- **Community Development Block Grant** money can be used to make public amenities, such as the bike path and waterfront, more accessible to the public through the addition of parking and accessibility infrastructure such as paved walkways and ramps leading from the street and parking areas.

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<sup>36</sup> For a recommended redevelopment scheme for the Railroad Street neighborhood, see *Land Use* chapter.

- **Section 108 Guaranteed Loan** program component of the CDBG program can be used to finance the acquisition of real property and the improvement of publically owned real property. In Winchendon, this might be an opportunity to finance the bike path and bike path extension.<sup>37</sup>
- The **Land and Water Conservation Fund** is a federal program through the National Park Service which provides matching grants to states and local governments for the creation of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. Money from this fund could be used to help the Town acquire and manage the additional land proposed for the bike path.<sup>38</sup>
- A **local organization** involved in the maintenance of open space amenities would help keep them clean and safe for users while the community-based support enhances stewardship of the amenities.

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<sup>37</sup> See more about Section 108 of the CDBG program in the *Circulation* chapter and online at <https://www.hudexchange.info/section-108/section-108-program-eligibility-requirements>

<sup>38</sup> Find additional information about the Land and Water Conservation Fund at: <http://www.nps.gov/lwcf/index.htm>

## Timeline for Implementation

With the bike path, waterfront, and other open space amenities in close proximity to the downtown, Winchendon has ample opportunity to become a recreation destination. The following is a list of the previous recommendations for open space, broken up into three implementation phases:

### Six Months to Two Years

- In the short-term, the Town should identify a potential parking area for the bike path. This will likely be adjacent to Summer Street.
- Also in the short term, the Town should begin designing way-finding signage for the bike path and waterfront, and identify locations for the signage so that it directs people in the downtown and general area to these amenities.
- To further enhance the bike path and recreation opportunities in the downtown, the feasibility of adding a bike lane or lanes to Central Street should be investigated.
- The Town should also investigate the feasibility of extending the bike path as recommended in this chapter, and identify funding opportunities for it.
- Funding sources should be identified for the development of the Winchendon Park Loop plan; focusing on Converse Gardens, which is closest to downtown.

### Two to Five Years

- In the mid-term, the Town should identify on-road bike connections between the North Central Bike Path and Cheshire and Monadnock Branch bike paths, and begin installing signage to help bicyclists navigate between the two paths.
- Also during this intermediate phase, the Town should continue with the development of the Winchendon Loop park system by seeking funding sources to develop park facilities such as landscaping, seating, signage, etc. at Whitney Pond Park and Webster Park.
- In conjunction with further developing its outdoor amenities, the Town should also market these opportunities in Winchendon throughout the central Massachusetts and southwestern New Hampshire region.
- Funding should be pursued for the completion of the North Central Pathway, creating a bike path connection between Winchendon to Gardner.
- Using the results of its feasibility analysis, the Town should choose the best option for implementing bike lane additions on Central Street and move forward with that project.
- Amenities such as bike racks, trash bins, and benches should be installed for pedestrians and cyclists on Central Street.

## Five Years or More

- In the long term, the Town should encourage the creation of accommodations and amenities for recreation-related activities such as a bed and breakfast, bicycle shops, and outdoor goods stores.
- The location of a boat ramp into Whitney pond should be identified to increase access to and use of the pond. This location could potentially be off of Poplar Street.
- Opportunities to fully take advantage of Whitney Pond Park should be taken, including the development of an outdoor performance space.
- Bike path extensions and improvements should be implemented and completed, and a strategy for their maintenance should be in place.

## Focus Area: Aesthetics

### Context/Background

Numerous buildings along Central Street are over one hundred years old, and lend a charm and sense of history to this main street. Joseph's Store and the Fairbanks house. These two structures, which are 'central to the streetscape' (Massachusetts Heritage Inventory Landscape Program, 2006, p. 6), illustrate a design aesthetic the town emphasizes in its bylaws, and which might set the standard for future development. Instead, impervious areas and inconsistent design standards are pervasive in Downtown Winchendon. The result is a mix of low and high density development and unpredictable building styles. As of this writing, there is a reliance on automobiles to get around in town, and the downtown caters more to cars and drivers than pedestrians. Despite a small and compact downtown area, the roadways are wide, parking lots expansive, and sidewalks cracked, inconsistent, and narrow. Important human-scale amenities such as benches, bike racks, and trash receptacles are few or missing entirely. What's more, points of visual interest to engage pedestrians and make the surroundings more appealing are also notably sparse.

To encourage pedestrian activity, infill development, and overall reinvestment in the downtown, the following analysis and recommendations propose ways to make the Central Street corridor more aesthetically pleasing and connected to its history.

### Team Findings

#### Cohesion

The most immediate and obvious aesthetic issue along the Central Street corridor is the inconsistency of development styles. The downtown experienced growth in two common and distinct phases: pre-World War II and post-World War II. These phases are illustrated in the juxtaposition of historic buildings with little or no setback and mixed uses against the more modern-looking strip malls and big-box stores with large setbacks that are occupied by sizeable parking lots. The problem posed by this mix of development styles is that it hinders the walking experience the Town desires for Central Street because it not only makes walking inconvenient, it also fails to create an adequate sense of enclosure and separation between cars and pedestrians that make a place feel inviting and safe for walking.

In addition to not providing a sense of safety and separation between pedestrians and cars, large parking lots and setbacks are not as visually pleasing as storefronts and facades that are right on the sidewalk. Brick facades and large windows provide points of visual interest for visitors and make them more likely to stop and linger. Large cement boxes set behind rows of cars are considerably less attractive and interesting, and can have the effect of making visitors feel exposed. The generic

form that strip malls and big-box stores take in downtown Winchendon is unfortunate because it is a direct affront to the historic aesthetic offered by the older buildings, and for which residents and stakeholders have expressed a preference.

## Pedestrian-Scale Amenities and Design

### - Benches

Related to the lack of structural cohesion in the downtown is the absence of attractive and practical pedestrian amenities. Independent of the car-oriented design and unstimulating atmosphere, the downtown is failing to encourage walkability and more lively streets by not having basic amenities such as benches for people to stop and rest. An important part of encouraging people to spend time in and linger in the area is to provide them with the amenities to do so. By not having benches, people are even more likely to get in and out of the downtown as quickly as possible.

### - Gathering Spaces

Similar to benches and other places to sit, gathering spaces are also important in encouraging people to stay in the downtown area. There are few public spaces that provide people living, visiting, working, or doing business in the downtown with an opportunity to gather and socialize. Although there is a small park next to the town hall, it is not centrally located enough to be a viable option. The same is true for the bike path and surrounding open spaces, they are either too hidden from the downtown or too open and exposed to provide intimacy for social interaction.

### - Sidewalks

As is mentioned in the Circulation section, the sidewalks require repair and do not follow a consistent construction or design. This is problematic for reasons related to safety and convenience. Cracked and uneven sidewalks are dangerous for the able-bodied, let alone for those who require wheelchairs, walkers, or other implements. Narrow sidewalks and missing sidewalks discourage walking because create spaces are appear either unsafe or uncomfortable.

### - Crosswalks

While the sidewalks are not consistently uniform, the downtown has plenty of clearly marked crosswalks. Pedestrians have over a dozen opportunities to cross Central Street in a crosswalk. While these crosswalks are conveniently located, they are not as attractive or obvious as they could be. Plain white paint is functional, but it doesn't necessarily reflect the historic nature of the street. The crosswalks could be more playful and dynamic and cue pedestrians and drivers that they are in both a historic area and an area frequented by pedestrians. Such alternate designs may also encourage drivers to pay attention and slow down for potential crossers.

- **Signage and Lighting**

The signage and lighting in the downtown are tall and have not been designed with the pedestrian in mind, in terms of both its form and function. Both elements take on a utilitarian role, rather than accentuate the uniqueness of the architecture and layout of the downtown area. The lighting is located at fairly consistent intervals, but there are still dark places along the road and the poles and lights are not all the same style, aside from looking like lights that could be present along any highway or road. The signage for businesses does not follow a constant color scheme, size, or illumination; neon lights exist alongside wooden shop signs. Signage for town functions, way-finding, and decoration are limited, do not draw ample attention to destinations, and do not do a lot to beautify the downtown. To put it simply, there is no theme amongst these visual and practical elements; historic context is missing and visual consistency is absent.

- **Artwork and Decoration**

During our visits to Central Street and our time walking around, we had a chance to admire the holiday and seasonally themed decorations that filled many storefronts. These elements made the downtown feel lived in and loved. The scale of these decorations was small, however, and were personal touches by the tenants and not part of a larger organized effort. It seems there is an opportunity for businesses and residents to coordinate and decorate lightposts and storefronts to lend a stonger feeling of vibrancy and activity, to draw people to the downtown and make the experience more engaging. One notable exception to this observation is the side of 87-91 Central Street, which is adorned by a small mural. Tasteful and fresh-looking additions such as these reinforce the fact that downtown Winchendon is active and changing today.

*Current Public Art: 87-91 Central Street Mural*



## Historic Values

### - Regulation

The Winchendon Historical Society's dedication to preserving memory of the Town's heritage and their depth and breadth of knowledge about the past is impressive and valuable. Unfortunately, the physical remnants of the past are slowly disappearing as developers replace historic buildings with new construction or property owners allow their historic buildings to fall into disrepair. As a non-governing body, there is only so much that a local historical society can do to prevent the destruction of historic assets. Without legally binding regulations that specify otherwise, owners of historic properties have no responsibility to preserve their property. In Massachusetts, a local historic district enacted through zoning is the only way to protect properties without purchasing them or having the property owner agree to a preservation restriction. Winchendon has neither of these regulatory frameworks in place.

It is our understanding that a group of Winchendon residents, including members of the historical society, would like to see a local historic district enacted. This would help to protect the remaining historic assets located within the specified district. However, even if the district does not come to fruition, the Town needs to continue to be vigilant in protecting its historic properties. One very urgent example is Joseph's Candy Store on Central Street. This vacant property takes center stage in many residents' fond memories of Central Street, and it is in danger of being torn down by the neighboring Cumberland Farms for an expansion project (see Figure 44).



*Photo: Cumberland Farms is seen on the left, and Joseph's is seen on the right. View northwest from Blair Square.*

Figure 44: Joseph's Candy Store and Cumberland Farms



- Threats

One of the reasons the Cumberland Farms proposal to purchase and demolish Joseph's has not received more pushback is because people are eager to see any kind of investment in the downtown. Joseph's is vacant as it stands now, and some people feel it will be better to have the land be occupied and lose the historic building rather than let it sit and continue to degrade. It is not that

supporters of Cumberland Farms are eager to let Joseph's go; it is apparent how important it is to the community and to the character of the downtown but nostalgia may not be enough to save it.

To address the issue of Joseph's from a more objective perspective, we conducted an analysis of current and projected tax yields to determine whether or not the Town stands to gain any tax revenues from the proposed expansion. Table 8 below compares the results of the current tax revenues of Cumberland Farms and Joseph's based on various scenarios. The first scenario is the status quo – their current assessed values. The second scenario is the projected revenues if Cumberland Farms removes Joseph's and does no structural improvements to the land. The third scenario includes projected revenues if Cumberland Farms removes Joseph's and expands their current building by 1000 feet, and the last scenario includes projected revenues if Joseph's is left standing and receives moderate improvements to the structure.

Even at the highest build out scenario and the largest investment by Cumberland Farms, the tax revenues are still not as high as the combined current revenues of Joseph's and Cumberland Farms. In other words, it is not only wise to protect Joseph's for the cultural and aesthetic value it holds, but it is financially more beneficial to the Town to preserve the Joseph's property. The raw numbers may convince those interested in demolishing Joseph's to reconsider.

Table 8: Joseph's and Cumberland Farms Tax Analysis

| Column  | B                       | C                       | D                        | E                           | F                                 | G                                    |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Development Type                                    | Joseph's Current        | Joseph's Renovated      | Cumby's Current          | Cumby's Expansion Land Only | Cumby's Expansion Larger Building | Cumby's Current and Joseph's Current |
| <b>Acreage</b>                                      | .09                     | .09                     | .281                     | .371                        | .371                              | .371                                 |
| <b>Total Finished Area</b>                          | 2,768 Sq. Ft.           | 2,768 Sq. Ft            | 2,000 Sq. Ft             | 2,000 Sq. Feet              | 3,000 Sq. Feet                    | 4,768 Sq. Ft                         |
| <b>Building Assessed Value</b><br>(per square foot) | \$90,100<br>(\$32.55)   | \$98,964<br>(\$35.74)   | \$162,800<br>(\$81.40)   | \$162,800<br>(\$81.40)      | \$244,200<br>(\$81.40)            | \$252,900<br>(\$53.04)               |
| <b>Land Assessed Value</b><br>(per acre)            | \$47,000<br>(\$522,222) | \$47,000<br>(\$522,222) | \$127,100<br>(\$452,313) | \$174,100<br>(\$469,272)    | \$174,100<br>(\$469,272)          | \$174,100<br>(\$469,272)             |
| <b>Total Assessed Value</b>                         | \$137,100               | \$145,928               | \$289,900                | \$336,900                   | \$418,300                         | \$427,000                            |
| <b>Tax Rate</b>                                     | \$15.96                 | \$15.96                 | \$15.96                  | \$15.96                     | \$15.96                           | \$15.96                              |
| <b>Building Tax Yield</b><br>(per square foot)      | \$1,438<br>(\$00.52)    | \$1,579<br>(\$00.57)    | \$2,598<br>(\$1.30)      | \$2,598<br>(\$1.30)         | \$3,897<br>(\$1,30)               | \$4,036<br>(\$00.85)                 |
| <b>Land Tax Yield</b><br>(per acre)                 | \$750<br>(\$8,333)      | \$750<br>(\$8,333)      | \$2,029<br>(\$7,219)     | \$2,779<br>(\$7,490)        | \$2,779<br>(\$7,490)              | \$2,779<br>(\$7,490)                 |
| <b>Total Tax Yield</b><br>(per acre)                | \$2,188<br>(\$24,311)   | \$2,329<br>(\$25,878)   | \$4,627<br>(\$16,466)    | \$5,904<br>(\$15,913)       | \$6,676<br>(\$17,995)             | \$6,815<br>(\$18,369)                |

Column A lists the factors for each of the scenarios presented in Columns B through G. Acreage is the total acres of land for the parcel in question. Total Finished Area is the floor area of the building on the parcel, according to the property card. Building Assessed Value and Land Assessed Value are the valuations of the building and land according to the tax assessor's records. Total Assessed Value is the sum of the building and land values. Tax Rate is flat for all types of property in Winchendon. Building Tax Yield is the revenue generated by the building itself, while Land Tax Yield is the tax revenue for the land. Total Tax Yield is the sum of these two.

Column B presents the current tax revenue for Joseph's with a total Finished Area of 2,768 square feet, and a Total Assessed Value of \$137,100.

Column C indicates the assessment values and tax revenue estimates if Joseph's were renovated to the point where the building value increased by \$8,800 – a modest renovation. This renovation results in a \$140 increase in annual tax revenue for the town.

Column D shows the existing tax revenue for Cumberland Farms, with a building valuation of 2,000 square feet on .281 acres of land. Annual tax revenue for both land and building is \$4,627, or \$16,466 for a whole acre.

Column E shows the tax revenue estimates if Cumberland Farms were to buy Joseph's property, keep their existing store and remove the Joseph's building. With .371 acres and the existing building, the town's tax revenue would increase to \$5,904.

Column F illustrates the potential tax revenue for the town if Cumberland Farms were to both buy the Joseph's lot and expand their building to 3,000 square feet. In this scenario, the building value increases significantly, but the land value remains the same. The total assessed value for both renovated building and land is \$6,676 or \$17,995 per acre.

Column G provides a comparison to the scenario in Column F, but illustrating the tax revenue generated by the Cumberland Farms maintaining its existing building and property, and renovations made to the Joseph's property. In this scenario, land values for Cumberland Farms' parcel and Joseph's parcel are combined in the Land Assessed Value row and building values for both buildings are combined in the Building Assessed Value row. Under this scenario, the total assessed value for both parcels and buildings is greater than that for the Cumberland Farms expansion. It follows, then that the tax yield is higher, generating a projected \$6,815 for the town (or \$18,000-plus per acre).

In conclusion, the last scenario (G) highlights the economic value of renovating older buildings and provides an incentive to preserve these structures that are so important to the town's history. One of the main reasons for this difference is the fact that Joseph's is a two-story building (with a larger floor area), while Cumberland Farms is a one-story building. More retail could exist on a smaller lot, and in a building with a smaller footprint, than can take place in a single-story building. Thus, retaining density in existing development further supports the town's goal for a compact, walkable downtown. Alternatively, Cumberland Farms could remodel its building on the existing lot, in addition to Joseph's renovating its building. This would likely result in an even greater tax yield for the Town.

## Literature

### Introduction

The literature below addresses topics such as business diversity, nostalgic development patterns, and conflict within historic preservation. It has provided the team with the theory and principles behind our aesthetics recommendations.

### “In building size and age, variety yields vibrancy”

In this 2014 article, McMahon re-energizes the long-established argument for historic preservation over comprehensive redevelopment projects by examining a handful of cities that have retained small, varied and historic buildings and thereby secured a vitality often lost in newer areas. New empirical research attempts to quantify the argument that Jane Jacobs put forward—that diverse, historic neighborhoods breed social, economic and cultural vitality. Demonstrated benefits that correlate with density of historic and smaller buildings include greater number of businesses owned by minorities, more jobs, more local businesses, more small businesses, greater walkability, and higher tax revenue per acre as compared to newer, larger-scale buildings and developments. In the article, McMahon further details the innovative research methods that help practitioners understand how ‘urban vitality’ differs across neighborhoods with varying built environments (2014).

This budding analysis bodes well for towns like Winchendon which are seeking to couple historic preservation with downtown revitalization efforts. Winchendon’s smaller-scale, older buildings can be viewed as an asset rather than barriers to successful revitalization. Carousel Consulting will embrace these assets and work with Winchendon to see how their smaller buildings may lend themselves better to mixed uses, vibrant and walkable street life, and a higher density of small local businesses better than new, large-scale developments on Central Street. Variety, as the McMahon says, is important; new buildings should contribute, not undermine, the unique character of the neighborhood.

### “Historical amnesia: New Urbanism and the city of tomorrow”

This article examines the role that history plays in modern design and development (Saab, 2007). Saab sees a chronic lack of historical value in New Urbanist designsm which may serve to recreate social problems. While Saab may have a point that planners cannot experience ‘amnesia’, it seems the context of Winchendon’s desire and difficulty in preserving its historical assets relates well to Taft’s analysis; history should have a grounding role in modern design and culture, but—as Taft might suggest—planners cannot become ‘stuck’ in the past either.

In the article, Saab describes the town of Baxter in Fort Mill, South Carolina as establishing a ‘shared aesthetic’ and investing in public buildings to bring the largely homogenous town population together. While some may see these investments positively, the emphasis on homogeneity could exacerbate social problems such as the tolerance of different practices or beliefs within a community.

These warnings could potentially be comparable to Winchendon’s development as it plans for revitalization. We at Carousel Consulting will use the conclusions from Saab’s article to question our own assumptions about the impacts that homogenous design and development can have, and will keep our new recommendations grounded in a relationship to the past and present conditions of the

community in order to avoid implementation of the ‘insta-downtown’ that can result from some approaches to New Urbanism.

### “Our history is not false: Perspectives from the revitalization culture”

This Anderson, South Carolina case study examines the potential conflict between historic conservationists and revitalization actors when building new structures in the style of historic buildings (Wells, 2010). The author proposes that the dominant paradigm among historic conservationists emphasizes the importance of ‘distinguishing old from new’ in order to avoid creating a ‘false history’ (Wells, 2010). During Anderson’s revitalization process, Wells conducted interviews and observed the interactions between people and their environment, whether that environment consisted of historic buildings, new buildings that were ‘of their time,’ or new buildings meant to look old. Ultimately, Wells concluded that, although new buildings that are meant to look old violate the ethic of historic conservation by creating ‘false’ history, they are supported by the ethic of revitalization by contributing to a community’s architectural harmony and sense of place (ibid, 2010).

This article clearly contributes to the debate surrounding New Urbanist techniques and ethics, especially as they relate to downtown revitalization. The article contains an interesting discussion about the “pluralistic ways of valuing the historic environment,” with the conclusion that historic conservationists are not always right to impose their values on the communities they work in (Wells, 2010, p481). New Urbanism advocates for the use of “traditional” building styles and development patterns, even in newly-built communities such as Seaside, Florida. In an old downtown going through a redevelopment process, the use of such “traditional” styles may be even more misleading as it may blend in with actual historic districts. However, perhaps even more important than the actual history of a place is residents’ perception of that history and their place in it. It seems that the author is advocating for a “revitalization ethic” that values the cultural needs of residents over the ethics of historic conservationists.

The historic district is a prominent feature of downtown Winchendon and is even listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Master Plan and zoning bylaws encourage infill development along Central Street, which may bring this conflict between true historic conservation and historic imitation to the fore. As the Central Street corridor undergoes the revitalization process, it will be important to remember the values of residents as they relate to sense of place and historic conservation. This concept may also tie into the debate surrounding the “Toy Town” moniker; using toy icons and signage in the redevelopment of Winchendon may indeed contribute to a ‘false’ history, but it may also serve to connect residents more closely with the history of their town.

## Conclusions

As stated before the literature review is intended to be a reference guide for Winchendon's future development. Nonetheless, as the town molds its vision of Winchendon Village, the town should focus on bringing in diverse businesses, identify ways to reuse its old buildings and find ways to support citizens through 3<sup>rd</sup> places. Most importantly the town needs to be aware of the challenges both in terms of maintaining its historic character as well as financial constraints.

## Precedents/Case Studies

### Introduction

To develop a revitalization strategy specifically tailored to Winchendon a series of case studies were reviewed. The precedents examine successful community development programs throughout the Northeast. In conjunction these studies will hopefully, provide town officials and local community with a guide of to prioritize future development.

### Pop Up Providence

As Winchendon continues to encourage innovative revitalization efforts as well as seeks new ways to facilitate greater public participation Winchendon town officials should look into Tactical Urbanism (TU) and Pop Up Providence as precedent studies. Mimi Zeiger defines tactical urbanism as: “[using] the city as a site of experimentation, deploying pop-up parks, vacant retail reuse, or unsanctioned street furniture as way to reprogram the urban realm” (Zeiger, 2011, online). TU success depends on public participation and employs borderline guerrilla tactics to raise awareness to community issues.

Pop Up Providence is a successful precedent study of a municipality using tactical urbanism to empower residents and promote community. In 2013 the Providence Planning Department sponsored a series of temporary projects in order to enliven community spaces within several Providence Neighborhoods (Downtown Providence, 2014). Categories ranged from play space and amenities, to art installations and pop up shops. Initially there was call for proposals adjudicated by a panel of WHO and concluding with the city granting final approval--all of which happened in the course of 4 months. Applicants were required to assume any liability during the construction phase and be in possession of a Comprehensive General Liability Insurance of \$1,000,000 and also have

worker's compensation insurance. After the construction phase is over, any liability is transferred to the property owner of the land on which the project is installed (*ibid*, 2014)<sup>39</sup>.

With a budget of \$150,000 or \$50,000 per year, the City funded up to 80 percent of the project with a maximum of \$10,000 per project. Some of the projects of note include a pop up gallery, and the installment of Adirondack chairs (Downtown Providence, 2014). Pop Up Providence was so successful it earned the City the U.S. Conference of Mayors Outstanding Achievement City Livability Award for 2014. Due to the low cost and ethereal nature, Winchendon should employ Tactical Urbanism to help make the town more of a destination while determining what residents want to see developed.

### Village of Hamburg, New York Economic Development Strategy

Under the design portion of their Economic Development Strategy, the consultants for The Village of Hamburg identified the need for design guidelines to protect the small town feeling that stakeholders identified as being important to them (Graves & Kempner, 2004). The consultants did not create a set of guidelines for the Village but suggested that Buffalo's Elmwood Village be used as an example or template. They also identified the need for business owners to properly maintain their properties in appearance, functionality, and safety, including shoveling sidewalks in the winter and creating alternate access points from Route 62 so that people would have multiple options. Lastly, the planners recommended historic preservation measures including the activation of incentives and opportunities surrounding its recently acquired "certified local government status" from the New York State Historic Preservation Office (Graves & Kempner, 2004).

Preservation and enhancement of local character has been repeatedly identified to the team by stakeholders in Winchendon as an important goal. Concerns about historic preservation of the remaining historic buildings have been raised, particularly in relation to discussions about a proposed expansion of Cumberland Farms. This expansion would result in the demolition of Joseph's Candy Store, an important local landmark and historic asset. Combining historic preservation with aesthetic design controls and enhancements would help make the downtown feel more cohesive and would augment its historic character.

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<sup>39</sup> For more Information on Pop Up Providence Project Eligibility and Criteria, See Appendix III

## Conclusions

These precedents illuminate the significance of integrating stakeholders into the aesthetic improvement process. Accomplishing all of the visual improvements that places need requires the cooperation and support of landowners and other stakeholders.

## Assessment/Recommendations

### Cohesion

#### - **Redevelopment**

We have recommended, in the *Economic Redevelopment* chapter, prime parcels for development. The new development that compliments these prime parcels should harbor a visual continuity and will be reflected in our visualizations of the proposed infill development. The benefit of this infill on aesthetics is that it will help to create a more consistently walkable downtown by mitigating some of the problems associated with large setbacks and parking lots.

In addition to new development on vacant or underutilized parcels to increase density and walkability, we also recommend that exteriors and landscaping of existing developments, vacant or otherwise, be improved to create more visual appeal and foster a sense of activity and care throughout the downtown. Improvements can include fresh paint, trash removal, flower planters, thematic decorations, and other inexpensive changes. More involved changes could take place such as façade renovations and redesign, new signage, and other structural improvements. Pop-up markets, as described in the Economic Development recommendations are another way to improve the aesthetic quality of the downtown because simply having storefronts occupied can make the area appear more inviting and attractive.

#### - **Development Design Standards**

As was discussed in the *Land Use* chapter, the Planned Development zoning district that covers the downtown is relatively forward-thinking and impressive for a small town. The problem, however, is that the zoning is not enforced exactly as it is written. Also, there are a few problematic requirements such as minimum [lot coverage] and setbacks. We recommend that the zoning be written to reflect a specific set of design standards and be enforced consistently and dependably. These design standards should include *Maximum* setbacks and *Maximum* parking, because the problem is not that buildings are not being built far enough back or with enough parking, it is that buildings are too far back and have too much parking near the roads and sidewalks.

Other important elements we recommend for inclusion in developing design standards are the following: that parking must be behind buildings; buildings must have height minimums relative to adjacent properties; buildings must have a certain percentage of their street facing façade be

windows (also known as glazing requirements); and building facades must be a certain color or made of certain materials. The goal of these requirements is to incorporate and enhance the more aesthetically pleasing elements of the historic properties into redevelopment projects and new construction. These requirements are not, however, intended to be so restrictive that they make new construction or renovation projects cost-prohibitive or to otherwise create a disincentive to invest in the downtown. (Please refer to the *Land Use* chapter for a financial argument to support these aesthetic recommendations.)

## Historic Values

Winchendon has a valuable historical legacy that should be reflected in its built environment. Places like Joseph's Candy Store have left an emotional imprint on generations of town residents. Retaining and celebrating these historic landmarks on Central Street is an essential element of cohesion. Through TYPAs analyses and recommended development parcels, we urge the town to maintain and celebrate its cultural history; these specific landmarks are essential to the downtown Winchendon revitalization efforts.

Our recommendation to retain historic landmarks and celebrate them is especially important because these properties are threatened by a lack of maintenance and an eagerness for any new investment, even at the price of losing the building. To specifically address the issue of protecting historic buildings from being torn down, in particular Joseph's Candy Store, we recommend considering the direct and indirect fiscal benefit of keeping those buildings intact. In the case of Joseph's, the tax revenues for the proposed new development do not even surpass the existing revenues, and we suspect this will be the case with other historic properties. Or, worst case scenario, the calculation of tax value of the historic properties can be used as a concrete argument for why any new development in the place of an historic building must take on a similar form in terms of size, density, and design.

## Organization

To address the issue of properties not being properly maintained, historic and otherwise, we recommend the development of a façade improvement group or plan to rectify this problem and stimulate interest and pride in the downtown area. There are two options for improving the street-side character of Winchendon's façades. First is the formation of a volunteer Façade Squad. This group would apply for grants or fundraise independently to improve façades along Central Street. A package on how community members could organize a Façade Squad is included in the appendix. Secondly, the Town could develop a Façade Improvement Program in which matching funds are offered (often one-half or one-third the cost of a project) to building owners to improve the façades on their own. Grants are often available to cities to fund such programs and the city would develop an application and review process for prospective buildings owners.

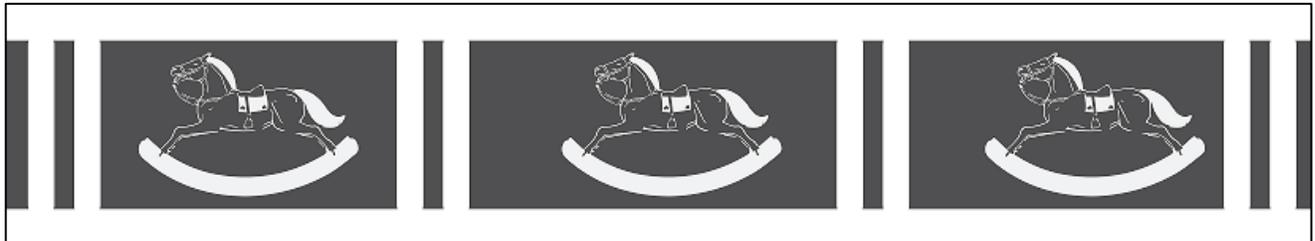
In the act of relieving some of the burden of maintaining the appearance of downtown buildings from property owners, the Façade Squad may signal to those property owners that they are part of a larger community and that they have support. Creating a sense of partnership and responsibility to the people who are helping them can motivate owners to be more engaged and be more likely to care about the contribution that their property makes to the overall area.

## Pedestrian-Scale Design

### - **New Sidewalk/Crosswalk Design**

Using the opportunity of the sidewalk redesign already in process, we recommend that the Town implement wider sidewalks with street trees, bump-outs, and other pedestrian-oriented elements. (For more detail on how these sidewalks might look, including a visual mock-up, see the Circulation Section.) As for the crosswalks, while they are currently in passable condition, they could be improved. Carousel Consulting has created a custom crosswalk design reflecting Winchendon's unique history. It features a rendering of Clyde, the Toy Town horse, and can be an easy, low-cost way to implement a new design feature in the downtown.

*Figure 45: Potential New Crosswalk Design*



### - **Signage**

Carousel Consulting recommends updating signage, especially way-finding signs, throughout the Central Street corridor. In addition to following a consistent and attractive form, new signage such as way-finding signs can enhance local and extra-local knowledge of the downtown area. One example of the need for way-finding signage is the bike path; there are currently no signs telling visitors downtown that there is a picturesque bike path less than 1/4 mile away. Other areas that might benefit from way-finding signage include the proposed Ingleside recreation area.



*Wayfinding signage for the downtown adapted from examples in other communities such as that in Northfield, Minnesota (above, right), could help orient visitors and direct them to linger in the downtown. Image from [locallygrownorthfield.org](http://locallygrownorthfield.org).*

#### - Street Lights

A common element of historic or cultural districts in other towns and cities is thematic street lighting. Faux gas lamps are an attractive and common style that is used to give the appearance of a more traditional and nostalgic downtown. These lights are designed at the pedestrian level, being lower to the ground and illuminating the sidewalk areas. In order to make the installation of these lights more economical, the Town can apply for community development grants, and/or green initiative monies by incorporating energy saving LED light bulbs.



*Human-scale lighting, such as this lamppost located in front of the Town Hall, should be installed throughout the downtown to enhance human-oriented design and create a sense of place.*

- **Public Art**

One way to foster involvement of the local residents, visitors, and stakeholders is to create street art and other forms of public art. Murals, sculptures, chalk designs and other elements created by local people can make the area more active-looking, and also more interesting. People often want to know the story behind art, and local art will spur people to take an interest in the local community. There are several locations that present prime sites for public art, including the wall behind Belletetes' building, the sidewall of the Rite Aid, and the side of JoAnn East Dance studio.



*These blank walls, located on the sides of the Rite Aid building and Belletetes building, are ideal sites to develop public art murals in collaboration with community and school groups.*

- **Public Gathering Spaces**

We recommend the exploring development of at least one "pocket-park" on Central Street to activate the street and provide a "third-space" for community members. We recommend the parking area next to the prime-development parcel at 87-91 Central Street. Although this is not necessarily the only available parcel that conforms to the requirements of a pocket park, we believe that it is in a prime location in proximity to other amenities to increase the social and aesthetic value of the Central Street Corridor.

Figure 46: Rendering of Proposed Pocket Park next to 87-91 Central Street



## Funding and Partnership Opportunities

- **Community Development Block Grants** and **MassWorks** are two funding opportunities that can be explored to help fund aesthetic improvements to the downtown. These grant programs can be targeted towards the sidewalk and other infrastructure improvements such as parking redesign, and building improvements such as façade and structural upgrades.
- **District Improvement Financing** can be used to incentivize private investment into properties by alleviating the property owner of the additional taxes generated by the increased assessment that will result from upgrading the property. This tax relief allows the Town to still generate some tax revenue from the property until the agreed upon period of abatement ends.
- **Historic Preservation Tax Credits** from both the state and federal governments can be recommended to property owners interested in using historic properties for income generating purposes. The credits can help make financing historic preservation projects more feasible, and also carry with them some restrictions on how the property can be altered, thus protecting the historic integrity of the building. These credits do not apply to private residences or other non-income producing uses.
- **Low-Interest Loan** programs are a great way to help support existing landlords and new investors in making the upgrades their properties need to be in compliance with design standards. This is a program that would need to be worked out with local banks.
- **Additional funding** and support may come from donations, fund raising, and/or volunteer time and work to get projects off the ground.

## Timeline for Implementation

Much of the team's recommendations in this chapter are based on piecemeal changes that will add up to a larger whole and stunning impact on the downtown. Regardless of their small-scale nature, these recommendations should still be implemented in phases to prevent the Town and stakeholders from taking on too much at once, and to ensure that aesthetic improvements and maintenance become a routine habit rather than be a sporadic event. The following is list of implementation phases for this chapter's recommendations:

### Six Months to a Year

- One of the few larger changes and processes recommended in this chapter is redevelopment or infill development to create more density and cohesion in the downtown. In the short-term, the Town should inventory the gaps in development along Central Street and create target areas for potential development or infill projects.

- The Town should also conduct an inventory of historic features and buildings on Central Street that contribute to the ‘charm’ of the street and identify those which it would like to target for protection and enhancement.
- The Town should begin seeking opportunities for public art and consider public input on potential new crosswalk designs.
- To soften gaps and large expansive areas, the Town should identify locations which would benefit from more landscaping or street trees.
- With the aid of the Town, stakeholders should develop a volunteer corps to improve facades. They might seek the donation of paint or other materials from Belletetes and other local home improvement businesses in exchange for free advertising or good Samaritan status.

### Two to Three Years

- By this time, the Town and stakeholders should begin implementing public art projects and new crosswalk designs.
- Also by this time, funding sources and implementation strategies should be acquired and identified for a façade improvement program.
- The design and location of pedestrian-scale lighting should be decided upon and funding sources for implementation should be sought.
- The Town and/or stakeholders should implement a street-tree planting and landscaping program. This could involve recruiting business and/or property owners to adopt a tree or planter

### Five Plus Years

- In the long term, the Town should continue with larger-scale visual improvements, such as incentivizing redevelopment and infill development to increase density and cohesion.
- The Town should have a strategic plan for regularly updating and maintaining aesthetic improvements to the downtown such as public art, street trees, banners, and pedestrian amenities.
- A strategic plan should also be in place for addressing ways to preserve and enhance the local character, particularly the historic buildings and landmarks in the downtown.

# Conclusion

## Summary of Recommendations

### - Land Use and Zoning

1. Enforce the existing zoning more strictly and do make allowances for development elements which conflict with the Planned Development zone's goal of walkable, mixed-use development.
2. While fully enforcing the current zoning, begin to implement piecemeal changes such as dimensional regulations including maximum setbacks and parking, minimum building heights, and reduced lot size requirements.
3. Streamline zoning bylaws so that outdated or expired bylaws are not present in the public document and cannot serve to confuse developers.
4. Once demand has increased, continue streamlining zoning by enacting a Revitalization Overlay District which has specific requirements and limits on development styles so that new development matches the Town's vision as closely as possible. This should allow the Town to start the conversation on development styles to which the developer must respond, not vice versa.
5. Remove housing requirement from Mill Conservation Overlay district so as to not limit potential uses of the mills and deter investors by placing additional constraints and costs on potential projects.
6. Incentivize denser development through the use of TYPAs and have it serve as a tool for generating local support for infill and increased density.
7. Further Incentivize higher TYPAs by allowing smaller lot sizes and more than one building per parcel.
8. Target vacant or underutilized parcels for redevelopment and infill. Also target vacant or underutilized buildings for rehabilitation.
9. Consider bike path extension through downtown in conjunction with other redevelopment and infill opportunities.

### - Economic Redevelopment Strategies

1. Readopt the downtown's historic "Winchendon Village" identity to distinguish the downtown from the larger Toy Town moniker and signify its status as a distinct place and destination.
2. Use the Winchendon Village theme to begin branding and place-making efforts in the downtown, such as signage and other decorative elements.

3. Market downtown events, amenities, and businesses in a seasonal brochure to increase visibility and awareness of Winchendon Village to a wider audience.
4. Hold events in the village to draw people in and increase the visibility of more permanent attractions. Events might include an antique toy fair or a street art display.
5. Organize residents and other stakeholders into task forces or other groups to concentrate their efforts into a particular cause or project. For example, a marketing and event coordinating committee could focus specifically on organizing and promoting local events and attracts.
6. Increase partnership and coordination between local businesses through a local business owners group.
7. Increase business retention and recruitment by creating a Business Improvement District, adopting a local Main Street Program, or forming some other organization with the express purpose of economic development and business support.
8. Work towards increasing business diversity, particularly “third places” or experience based businesses, possibly using market data to incentivize particular types of businesses.
9. Address vacancies, increase vibrancy, and support business diversity in the downtown through the promotion of unique models such as free rent for pop-up markets, monthly or biweekly food truck days, and micro-restaurants.
10. Utilize local resources and amenities to generate interest and activity in the Village.
11. Support the creation of a local bed and breakfast to keep visitors and their money in town.

#### - Circulation

1. Narrow travel lanes and create a safety buffer for on street parking on Central Street.
2. Widen sidewalks and add bike lanes to Central Street and possibly Blair Square.
3. Integrate green infrastructure elements with sidewalk redesign and open space infill development.
4. Implement human-scale lighting, pedestrian amenities, street trees, and new crosswalk designs to Central Street and possibly Blair Square.
5. Amend zoning bylaws to reduce parking requirements, incentivize shared parking, and require rear setback parking behind buildings.
6. Replace underutilized parking with infill development or gathering spaces such as pocket parks.
7. Consult with professional traffic engineer about potential Blair Square improvements and solutions.

8. Commission a traffic pattern study by a professional traffic engineer for the larger downtown area.
9. Prohibit parking on Front Street near Blair Square during rush hour and morning commute, and take other measures to improve pedestrian visibility and safety around this intersection.
10. Place additional signage at entrances to the intersection, such as “yield” and “stop” signs where appropriate.

#### - Local Open Space Amenities

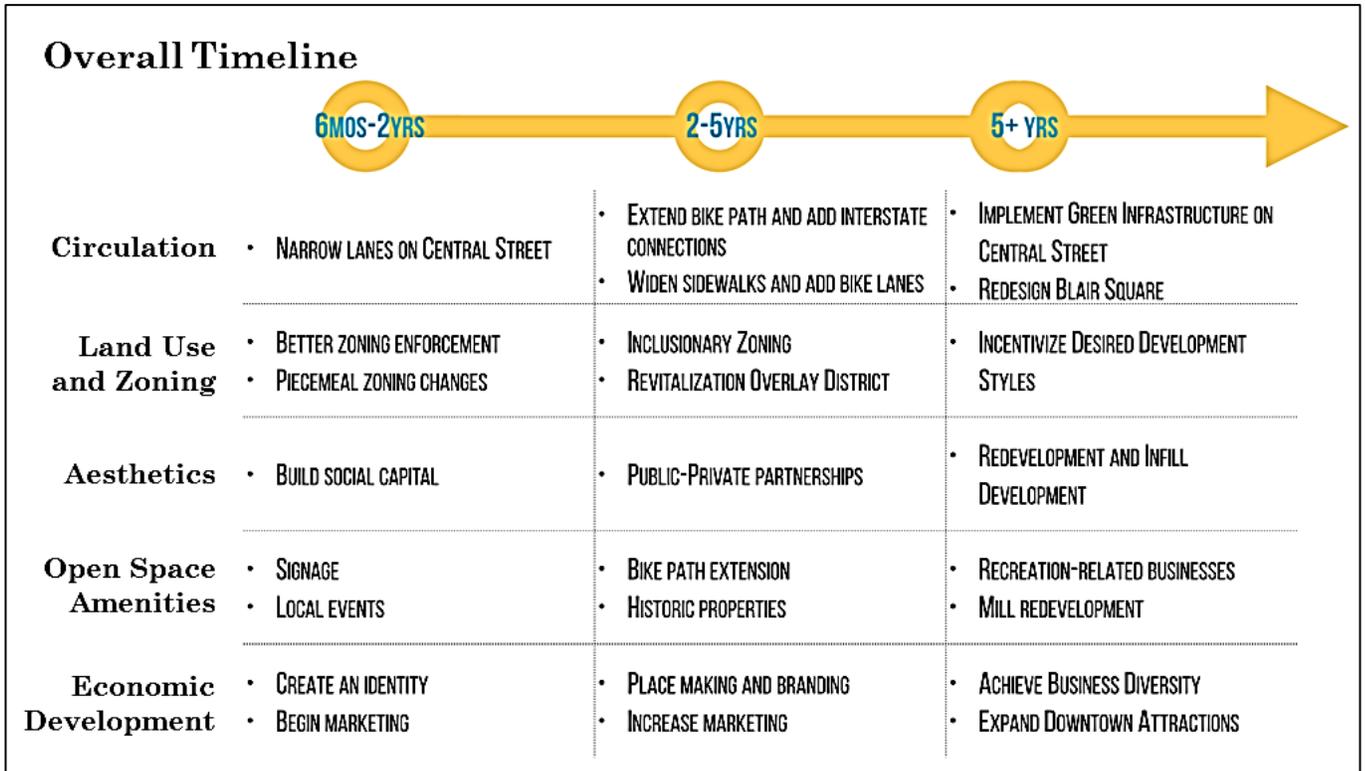
1. Create and designate parking for the bike path to make it more accessible.
2. Create way-finding signage and place around the downtown and general area to direct people to the bike path and waterfront and increase visibility and awareness of these resources.
3. Increase local retail and lodging options to cater to recreation based activity in the downtown, such as a bed and breakfast for visitors and a sporting goods store to sell and rent recreation supplies.
4. Increase marketing and connection to regional recreational opportunities such as the interstate trail network, Otter River State Forrest, Lake Dennison State Park, etc.
5. Extend bike path for better regional connection and more enjoyment. This extension should include crossing Central Street in the downtown, thus drawing more people into the commercial corridor.

#### - Aesthetics

1. Incentivize redevelopment and infill development to create a more cohesive, walkable downtown.
2. Strategically target parcels for redevelopment and infill so that the impact of new investment is concentrated and more powerful.
3. Implement specific design standards so that new construction and redevelopment projects result in buildings and land uses which match the Town’s vision of a dense, mixed-use, walkable downtown.
4. As a facet of the design standards, consider implementing a specific color scheme that enhances the local character.
5. Incorporate pedestrian-scale design elements which enhance the local character and please the eye. These might include, benches, public art, a themed crosswalk design, and decorative and way-finding signage.
6. Acquire land or create an agreement for a small piece of land in the downtown to be used as a public gathering space.

7. Preserve and enhance the historic character of the downtown by protecting important buildings and landmarks from being torn down or otherwise placed at risk.
8. Use TYPA analysis to support denser, mixed-use development to match and support the historic patterns of development in the downtown

## General Outlook



When the planning department considers all of our recommendations and their various phases, there are several key takeaways:

1. The first is that Winchendon should continue to embrace and enhance its local character, charm, and assets and use them as a catalyst to generate activity and interest in the downtown.
2. The second is that the Town should be confident and steadfast in its development requirements so that it does not continue to push achieving its goals and vision further into the future.
3. And the third and final takeaway is that the most important assets in the town are the residents and stakeholders. Their influence and contribution should be the foundation of the revitalization. It is our belief that having their personal investment in the community will prove to make the revitalization more sustainable and successful.

## Concluding Thoughts

In order to grow in a way that honors its past and creates a bright future, Winchendon needs to empower its citizens and maintain its vision of a revitalized downtown. The successful implementation of many of the projects and improvements described in this study will depend on the support of the various stakeholders. We have no doubt that they have the capacity to usher change.

As we have studied all of the problems in downtown Winchendon and what the root of those problems is, Carousel Consulting has been consistently introduced to an equally significant asset or resource that can be used to overcome those problems. We never once have swayed from the belief that Winchendon has the potential to become the destination that it should be. The problems it faces are far less than the strengths and opportunities it possesses.

If there is one take away that Carousel Consulting would like this study to present, it is that knowing what you want and having the confidence and willpower to ceaselessly go after it is the key to success. Some of our recommendations may seem more difficult or less feasible than others, but we believe that every one of them can be implemented if patience and perseverance are maintained.

Downtown Winchendon is ready for a new era and a renewed sense of strength and vitality. It is our hope that our analysis and recommendations provide the community with the tools needed to make this transition, or rather to make Winchendon Village a place realized, and not just remembered.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I: Workshop Summary

The Central Street Revitalization Workshop, hosted by the town of Winchendon and facilitated by Carousel Consulting, took place on the evening of Monday September 29, 2014. The central goal of the workshop was to engage with community members and town officials alike to reveal which parts of the study area are most highly valued, and which parts are a priority for redevelopment.

Participants were gathered around four different tables, a map of the study area at each table, and a technique called ‘dot voting’ was used to record the opinions of the participants at each table.

Participants were instructed to mark their favorite places with green dots, places needing work with orange dots, and their least favorite places with red. The discussion was recorded by student notetakers. Following this first stage of the activity, participants were instructed to use blue dots to mark those places that they considered to be a high priority for redevelopment. In this way, members of the Carousel Consulting team were able to divine patterns of opinion and begin to understand the priorities of residents and town officials.

The following lists present a compilation of the four maps:

#### GREEN dots:

- Area around the bank, post office, YMCA, and church
- Bike trail
- Library (but not handicap accessible)
- Veteran’s Memorial Park
- People liked CVS
- ROC Religious Center on Central Street
- Belletette’s Hardware Store
- Congregational Church
- Buildings at corner of Beech St and Spring St
- Dick’s (store)
- Senior Center
- Post office
- Community Center/YMCA
- Laundromat
- Gabby’s
- Rite Aid

- Ingleside
- Bike path (3)
- Buildings at corner of Central and Summer St
- “Cats” on Central St (between RR and Grove St)
- YMCA
- Bike path
- Post textile
- Library – 3rd place beneficial
- Library – needs handicap access
- Dunkin Donuts
- Engleside area
- Boat and water access (needed)
- Paths along water (needed)

#### GREEN/YELLOW dots:

- Bowling Alley (BYOB is not a good policy)

#### YELLOW dots:

- Ingleside area: Could be more publicly accessible/Green space
- Grocery Store/Family Dollar plaza (ugly?)
- Josephs (empty)
- Empty buildings on Central St (at and across street from Walnut St)
- Empty building at Summer St
- Building behind YMCA
- Bdg at corner of Grove St
- Empty building that went up for auction
- Triangle building on Railroad St (empty)
- Gabby’s on Central St
- Buildings at north end of Central St – need more ‘happening’ (retail, right types of renters – high turnover rate)
- Waterfront area north of bike path – could do more, and improve public access in this area
- Railroad and Central
- Roof collapsed (RHI or building nearby?)

- Potential opportunity
- No parking

RED/YELLOW/PRIORITY dots:

- RHI building - owned by the bank

RED:

- bad area around the train tracks
- too much parking in front of Rite Aid
- Blair square
- Cumberland Farms
- Joseph's building
- Empty bdg on the corner of Central St and Chestnut St
- Realty building
- Tannery Square – traffic going in/out of donut and gas station
- Mill buildings (empty)
- Waterfront area
- Empty buildings on Railroad St, Maple St and Central St
- Level factory
- Water and Spring St – busy intersection, 3 lanes someone got hit
- Doesn't need a traffic signal, needs to be re-designed
- Central and Spring St intersection
- Fast traffic to Vermont
- Blind corner
- Fast traffic
- Congested

PRIORITIES (Blue) dots:

Number One Priority from one group:

- South Intersection - better housing, traffic, how to attract ppl down Central Street
  - Get drugs and slumlords OUT
  - Facade Improvement - Make it look nice
  - Traffic calming

Number Two Priority:

- RHI building and surrounding parking lots
- Need to integrate north section of Central Street into southern section
- Bike Path to extend along the railway into downtown
  - Fix up the Dam to retain water and look nicer
  - Connect to Gardner
  - Definitely a cultural asset - dog walking, etc
- Spring Street on the other side of the bridge - 'Gateway' Opportunities?
- How to Make ppl turn down Central Street? 'Cultural Epicenter of Town'
  - Signage to turn down
- Blair Square (2 dots)
- Empty building on Spring St
- Josephs
- Building on corner of Summer and Central (east side)
- Building on SW corner of Railroad and Central St
- Ingleside (2 dots)
- 2 Buildings at north end of project area (west side of road)

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Group 4:

- Front/Central/Spring intersection (problematic)
- Ingleside
- Want Cumberland Farms to move into adjacent space/buildings
- Spring St building – take it down
  - Need more retail in town (the right kind of retail)
- Need to work on a theme – what do we want people to come to town for?

- ‘Emerald Bracelet’ idea – Boston has the emerald necklace, northern Worcester Cty could have the emerald bracelet (pockets of undeveloped space for outdoor recreation, parks, open space, etc.)
- Railroad and Central – vacant building
- Central and Summer – vacant building, but could be ‘fabulous’
- Dance Studio – ‘unattractive, potential, no parking’
- Entrance to town – a priority
- Could build a boardwalk along water/improve water access from downtown in Ingleside area

**Appendix II:** Detailed table of field observations regarding Blair Square traffic flow and methodology discussion

To measure traffic volumes, traffic counts were taken for each direction of travel for five-minute periods then multiplied by twelve to generate hourly volumes. Since traffic was measured on more than one day, these numbers were averaged to yield estimated traffic volumes. In general, the averages are only slightly lower than those found by MRPC in 2004. (There may be a couple of factors that explain this difference: 1) the recession may result in fewer cars on the road and 2) trucks may bypass downtown and use GlenAllen Street (approximately 1 mile east of the study area) to travel between Route 140 and Route 202. Given the tight corner required to make a right turn from Route 12 SB to Central St, it would make sense for trucks to prefer the wider, more gently curving GlenAllen Street over Central St. During field visits in October, several tractor trailers were observed on GlenAllen St (J. Stacy)). Additionally, the Urban Land Institute Report (2004) also suggests re-routing trucks to GlenAllen St rather than navigate the narrow and hectic Blair Square intersection.

**SPRING ST/ROUTE 12 -Northbound**

| Straight thru on Route 12 |        |        |  |        |        |                           |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|--|--------|--------|---------------------------|
|                           | 20-Oct | 31-Oct |  | Per hr | Avg/hr | Hourly Count (MRPC, 2004) |
| 9:25-9:30am               | 19     |        |  | 228    | -      | 399                       |
| 4:10-4:15                 |        | 36     |  | 432    | 594    | 702                       |
| 4:45-4:50                 |        | 63     |  | 756    |        |                           |

| <b>Northbound (right turn) onto Central St</b> |        |        |  |        |        |                           |
|--|--------|--------|--|--------|--------|---------------------------|
|  | 20-Oct | 31-Oct |  | Per hr | Avg/hr | Hourly Count (MRPC, 2004) |
| 9:25-9:30am                                    | 14     |        |  | 168    | -      | -                         |
| 4:10-4:15pm                                    |        | 22     |  | 264    | 258    | 327                       |
| 4:45-4:50pm                                    |        | 21     |  | 252    |        |                           |

**SPRING ST/ROUTE 12 - Southbound**

| <b>Straight thru on Route 12</b> |        |        |  |          |        |  |             |
|----------------------------------|--------|--------|--|----------|--------|--|-------------|
|                                  | 20-Oct | 31-Oct |  | Per hour | Avg/hr |  | MRPC (2004) |
| 9:15-9:20am                      | 40     |        |  | 480      | -      |  |             |
| 4-4:05pm                         |        | 34     |  | 408      | 409    |  | 659         |
| 4:30-4:36pm                      |        | 41     |  | 410      |        |  |             |

| <b>Northbound (left turn) onto Central St (October 31, 2014)</b> |  |     |                 |        |        |                    |     |
|--|--|-----|-----------------|--------|--------|--------------------|-----|
|  |  | Car | Wait time (sec) | Per hr | Avg/hr | Average wait (sec) |     |
| 4-4:05pm   |  | 1   | 0               | 132    | 144    | 8.18               | 130 |
|  |  | 2   | 0               |        |        |                    |     |
|  |  | 3   | 0               |        |        |                    |     |
|  |  | 4   | 21              |        |        |                    |     |
|  |  | 5   | 10              |        |        |                    |     |
|  |  | 6   | 20              |        |        |                    |     |
|  |  | 7   | 15              |        |        |                    |     |
|  |  | 8   | 0               |        |        |                    |     |
|  |  | 9   | 5               |        |        |                    |     |
|  |  | 10  | 14              |        |        |                    |     |
|  |  | 11  | 5               |        |        |                    |     |
| 4:40-4:45pm  |  | 1   | 5               | 156    |        | 6.92               |     |

|  |  |    |    |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|----|----|--|--|--|--|
|  |  | 2  | 5  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 3  | 10 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 4  | 20 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 5  | 3  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 6  | 2  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 7  | 2  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 8  | 4  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 9  | 3  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 10 | 5  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 11 | 8  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 12 | 12 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 13 | 11 |  |  |  |  |

**CENTRAL ST - Southbound**

**Turn Left onto Route 12**

|             | 20-Oct | 31-Oct | Per hr | Avg/hr | Car | Wait (sec) | Avg Wait (sec) | Hourly Count (MRPC, 2004) |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-----|------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| 9:20-9:25   | 9      |        | 108    | -      | all | 5-10       |                |                           |
| 4:30-4:35pm |        | 10     | 120    | 144    | 1   | 70         | 27             | 217                       |
|             |        |        |        |        | 2   | 20         |                |                           |
|             |        |        |        |        | 3   | 45         |                |                           |
|             |        |        |        |        | 4   | 20         |                |                           |
|             |        |        |        |        | 5   | 30         |                |                           |
|             |        |        |        |        | 6   | 5          |                |                           |
|             |        |        |        |        | 7   | 20         |                |                           |
|             |        |        |        |        | 8   | 30         |                |                           |
|             |        |        |        |        | 9   | 10         |                |                           |
|             |        |        |        |        | 10  | 20         |                |                           |
| 4:55-5pm    |        | 14     | 168    |        |     | 10-60s     |                |                           |

**Turn Right onto Route 12**

|             | 20-Oct | 31-Oct | Per Hr | Avg/hr |  |  | Wait           | Avg Wait | Hourly Count (MRPC, 2004) |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--|--|----------------|----------|---------------------------|
| 9:20-9:25am | 3      |        | 36     | -      |  |  | no waiting     |          |                           |
| 4:30-4:35   |        | 10     | 120    | 162    |  |  | <5sec wait     | <5s      | 236                       |
| 4:55-5pm    |        | 17     | 204    |        |  |  | <3 sec waiting |          |                           |

**FRONT STREET - Northbound  
Hard (right) turn onto Rt 12**

|             | 20-Oct | 31-Oct | Per hour | Car | Wait time (sec) | Avg wait (sec) | Hourly Count (MRPC, 2004) |
|-------------|--------|--------|----------|-----|-----------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| 4:35-4:40pm | -      | 9      | 108      | 1   | 13              | 17.2           | 2                         |
|             |        |        |          | 2   | 10              |                |                           |
|             |        |        |          | 3   | 30              |                |                           |
|             |        |        |          | 4   | 30              |                |                           |
|             |        |        |          | 5   | 10              |                |                           |
|             |        |        |          | 6   | 10              |                |                           |

## Appendix III: Pop-Up Providence Project Eligibility and Selection Criteria<sup>40</sup>

### **ELIGIBILITY**

Any member of the public can submit an application for PopUp Providence, including individuals, arts groups, neighborhood associations, institutions, community groups/non-profits, etc. Applicants must be 18 years of age or older at the time the application is submitted. Applicants must be able to construct and install their proposed projects within three months of receiving the Notice to Proceed from the City. Applicants can choose to team with a private business or businesses as a partner organization or organizations to assist with programming, maintenance, etc. Partner organizations must be identified in the original application submitted by the applicant.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

All applicants and partner organizations (if applicable) shall assume the following responsibilities for their projects:

- Construction and installation of project.
- Maintenance of the project in a state of good repair.
- Operation of the project.
- Possession of Comprehensive General Liability insurance of \$1,000,000, and Workers' Compensation insurance during construction of the project.

### **LIABILITY**

All applicants and partner organizations (if applicable) must assume liability for themselves during construction of the project. After construction, the owner of the land on which the project is placed will assume liability of the project. For example, if installed within the public right-of-way, the City of Providence will assume liability of the project; however, if installed on private property, the property owner will assume liability of the project. A Memorandum of Agreement between the applicant, partner organization and property owner must be provided if the project will be installed on private property not owned by either the applicant or the partner organization (if applicable),

### **BUDGET**

The PRA will provide up to 80% of project costs, not to exceed \$10,000 per project.

### **SELECTION**

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<sup>40</sup> Source: Downtown Providence: Downtown Directions. (2014). Pop-up Providence year two projects. Retrieved from <http://downtownprovidence.com/5564/>.

A Selection Committee, comprised of local community, art and design representatives, has been assembled to select the projects that will be recommended to the PRA Board for funding. The PRA Board will issue the final approval of projects to receive funding. The Committee will choose the best proposals within each category and aim to distribute projects throughout the City.

## **SELECTION CRITERIA**

Projects will be selected based on the following criteria:

- Applicant's ability to create a work related to one of the five PopUp Providence project categories;
- Applicant's familiarity with Providence and the neighborhood of the proposed project location;
- Applicant's ability to cooperate with the site's property owner and City;
- Applicant's ability to construct and install project within three months of receiving Notice to Proceed;
- The quality and appropriateness of the concept;
- Durability of proposed materials, including resilience, ease of maintenance, and suitability of the project for outdoor display (if outdoors), and;
- Relationship of the project to the site and neighborhood; specifically how it will serve and reflect the community, and activate and enhance the site.

## Appendix IV: Additional Lynch Maps

