DRAFT

TOWN OF HARRISON, MAINE

Downtown Revitalization Action Plan

MAY 2023

WRIGHT-PIERCE
Engineering a Better Environment

Downtown Revitalization Action Plan
TOWN OF HARRISON, MAINE

May 2023

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Acknowledgements

This Downtown Revitalization Action Plan was developed for the Town of Harrison by Wright-Pierce with assistance from the Town's Economic Development Consultant Darryl Sterling. The project was supported by local funding. Key contributors to the Action plan include:

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Town of Harrison Team

- Cass Newell, Town Manager
- Denise Dumont, Executive Assistant
- Andy Ward, Public Services Director
- Harrison Board of Selectmen

Harrison Downtown Planning Committee

- Matthew Frank
- Wendy Gallant
- Traci Williams
- Brian Williams
- Patrick Bracken
- Jacqui Gray

The input from Harrison residents has proved extremely valuable in developing the Action Plan through participation in the public meetings and responding to the questionnaire. This Action Plan accurately represents the wishes and vision of the citizens of Harrison.

Section 1 Project Goals

The Town of Harrison recognizes the need to ameliorate areas of the downtown and began the process to develop a Downtown Revitalization Action Plan. This plan outlines the improvements within the downtown area over the next several years. The plan will identify a number of action items to be undertaken and assign priorities to the items. The action items will be organized into immediate items, short term, and long-term action items. Specific goals of the effort are outlined below.

1.1 Define the Downtown Area

The target area for the Downtown Revitalization Action Plan originally established the area from the Crystal Lake Park to the boat launch at Long Lake and includes the side streets from Front and School Streets extending over to High and Dawes Hill Road. At the initial public meeting the area was expanded to include the Farmer's Market at the Bear River, and Depot and Waterford Road. In addition, the area was extended to include Deertrees Road and the Deertrees Theater.

1.2 Engage the Public

Obtaining public input during the development of a downtown plan is essential to having a workable plan. A series of meetings have been established to gain the ideas of Harrison residents and present/refine the potential action items that come from the process. In addition to the public meetings held during the plan development, a questionnaire was developed and distributed to area residents over the town website and by having hard copies available at regularly visited points in the town. Distribution of the questionnaire was a great success and nearly 50 responses were received.

1.3 Program Elements

Initial meetings with Town staff identified several areas where potential improvements could be made within the downtown area. These included:

- Addressing ADA accessibility issues with existing sidewalks and handicap ramps.
- Enhancements to the public parks within the downtown area.
- Addressing parking concerns.
- Improving vehicle flow through the downtown and protecting pedestrian safety.
- Targeting the Front Street sidewalk and paving project as an initial step towards downtown improvements.
- Improving the walkability of the downtown area.
- Maintaining the village character within the downtown.
- Improve economic viability on a year-round basis.
- Improving lighting and nighttime visibility.
- Enhancing areas of the downtown to include historical elements, benches, plantings, and other features.

1.4 Snapshot of Harrison Village

1.4.1 Assets

- Friendly village atmosphere
- Large lakes accessible by downtown
- Year-round recreational opportunities
- RADR Complex
- Active recreation department
- Scenic vistas
- Public access to outdoor recreation
- Welcoming community
- Public parks with public restrooms
- Active social media sites
- Proximity to area commercial centers
- Low crime rate
- Accessibility to major transportation routes
- Quiet agricultural community
- Sidewalks present throughout the downtown

1.4.2 Weaknesses

- ADA accessibility issues with existing sidewalks and handicap ramps
- Lack of breakfast or cafes
- Lack of banking or credit unions
- Façade improvements needed
- Messy properties
- Road conditions
- Limited public utilities
- Affordable housing
- Senior housing
- Broadband service
- No pharmacy or health care business

- Need more dining options
- Public safety in park areas
- Lack of indoor recreational facilities
- Downtown amenities – benches, planters, etc.
- No public restrooms – with year-round access
- No public transportation
- Anchor employer
- Under-utilized spaces
- Way finding signage
- Community identity

1.4.3 Opportunities to Build From

Harrison has a good baseline to develop from. With Crystal and Long Lake anchoring the downtown area, there are opportunities to enhance existing parks, improve walkability in the area, enhance the historic nature of the downtown, and establish a more diverse mix of businesses in the downtown.

1.5 Final Plan

The final downtown Revitalization Plan presented to the town will not only list the various action items, but also identify potential sources of funding to implement the action items. Once the plan is approved by the State Economic Development office, the town will be able to seek Community Block Grant funds. The planning effort will also enable the town to partner with other state agencies such as the Maine Department of Transportation to plan and implement improvements.

The Downtown Revitalization Action plan is intended to be a living document that is updated on a regular basis to track progress and re-prioritize action items. Additional action items may be identified to address specific issues that may develop within the downtown area or to take advantage of funding opportunities that may arise.

Section 2 Executive Summary

The purpose of developing the Downtown Revitalization Action Plan is to serve as an instrument for identifying and prioritizing revitalization goals in a defined downtown area. Such an area within a community is defined by the State of Maine as:

"a cohesive core of commercial and mixed-use buildings, often interspersed with civic, religious, and residential buildings and public spaces, often arranged along a main street and intersecting side streets, walkable and served by public infrastructure."

Once an area has been designated and a set of publicly supported Downtown Revitalization Action plan goals are identified, the plan outlines prioritized recommendations for implementing the community's vision. There are two primary means of implementing the Downtown Revitalization Action plan. One is by capital investment to support physical improvements (utilities, parking, sidewalks, streetscape elements, park improvements, etc.). The other is promotion of the vision for the Downtown through volunteerism, establishment of a committee to advocate for the implementation of the plan after adoption, continued public outreach, and adaptation of new and/or revised local policy measures in terms of regulatory ordinances.

Both of these means are achieved in a collaborative effort between the residents of Harrison, local municipal government, and private/non-profit stakeholders.

To utilize potential funding instruments like a Downtown TIF or other local, private, state and federal funding programs, the downtown plan is being strategically developed in conformance with the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development's "Downtown Plan Components" criteria which serve as the organizational format of this planning initiative and include:

- Definition of the downtown area
- Information regarding zoning ordinance effects on the downtown area, and consistency of the Downtown Revitalization Plan with the Comprehensive Plan
- Building inventory conditions assessment
- Inventory of retail / commercial space
- Employment opportunities
- Inventory of residential units
- Pedestrian / Bicycle infrastructure and accessibility
- Infrastructure – Streetscape and Utilities
- Signage
- Parking Management
- Recreation
- Capital Improvement Program
- Action Plan – Findings and Recommendations that are supportive of public involvement in development of the plan, to serve as a means for implementation of the plan going forward

Assessment of the current state of each of these plan components is expanded upon further in the following respective sections of the Downtown Revitalization Action Plan, culminating in specific recommendations for

implementing each component of the plan. The plan concludes with a prioritized action plan for downtown revitalization implementation strategies in a phased approach.

Insert figure of Harrison downtown area

Section 3 Downtown Harrison Village

3.1 Study Area

The Harrison downtown area has been defined based on input from residents and business owners, the Town's Downtown Revitalization Committee, and Town staff during development of the Downtown Revitalization Action Plan. The area serves as a strategic means to focus revitalization goals within the developed cores of the community. Harrison and the surrounding communities contribute to viability of the downtown area.

Harrison's downtown area has been defined as the area from the Crystal Lake boat launch to the Farmer's market at the Bear River along Route 117, the Waterford Road and Deport Street corridor to the Harrison Food Bank, and Front Street to School Street and over to High Street. In addition, the section of town leading to Deertrees Theater is included. Although not connected to the immediate downtown area, the RADR Sports Complex is included as part of the defined area given its importance to the community and the events that are held at the complex.

The Harrison Village area comprises a total of 263 acres and 211 parcels of property. The village is at a walkable scale with easy access to Main Street from the local parks and adjacent side streets. Total distance from the Crystal Lake boat ramp to the Bear River bridge is approximately 4,100 feet or roughly 0.8 miles. In more urban areas the distance that most Americans will consider walking versus driving is up to 0.5 miles.

The RADR athletic complex is located on a 135 acre parcel off from Route 117.The RADR complex is located to the north and is approximately 3 miles from the Crystal Lake Park. Given its location people use vehicles to attend events at the complex.

The mix of land use development within Harrison Village consists of a mix of residential, business, public parks, and civic functions. Some of the properties have not been kept up and are run down in appearance.

3.2 Community Profile and Regional Context

Harrison is a community with a base population of approximately 2,447 (2020 census) that swells in the summer months with seasonal property owners. Harrison is situated between the Oxford Hills and Lakes Regions of Maine and provides decent access to the greater Portland area. The location and quiet rural setting draws potential workforces from greater distances that are interested in Harrison's quality of place and peaceful setting. Many workers are able to work remotely from their place of dwelling with the availability of high-speed broadband service. Harrison is situated perfectly to attract available workforce with a vibrant downtown area situated between two lakes and offering walking and biking opportunities to reach the downtown businesses, food service, arts, and recreational resources.

Harrison's central location to the Oxford Hills and Lakes Region areas is a challenge to some while an attraction for others. There is a limited amount of local health care such as a pharmacy, no banks or credit unions, and lacks a local breakfast/lunch diner or café that offers sit down meals. Much of these types of services are available nearby in Norway, Bridgton, or Naples. There is high quality roadway connections to these communities via State Routes 117 and 35. Expansion of high speed broadband connectivity is a high priority for the Town to continue to attract citizens to the area and establish new business opportunities.

Of primary importance to the community is continued support of its main assets with the two lakes bookending the downtown area and supporting continued recreational access. There are a few organizations focused on protecting these resources and one of the keys to continued success will be a continued level of coordination between these entities to work together in supporting economic growth and quality of life for the community.

3.3 Community Vision of the Village

For the downtown revitalization effort to be successful, it is essential that the entire community play an active role in supporting the vision for the downtown area and implementing the recommendations. During the development of the plan there was a significant amount of public participation during the public hearings and questionnaire responses sharing input on what they see as important elements of the downtown plan. The input gathered during the public hearing and questionnaire responses have been boiled down to and formulated into a community vision and goals for the downtown revitalization action plan.

3.3.1 Vision

"*The Harrison Downtown Revitalization and Action Plan should preserve and support the Town of Harrison's friendly village character, history, and recreational opportunities on a year-round basis.*"

3.3.2 Goals

- Develop a Downtown Revitalization and Action Plan that is reflects the consensus of the community and provides specific achievable action items.

- Improve the walkability of the downtown area addressing ADA issues and establishing new sidewalk connections.
- Promote and preserve the historic character of the village area.
- Improve the appearance of the village encompassing building façade and streetscape elements.
- Support and promote a diverse economy.
- Improve vehicle and pedestrian safety throughout the downtown area.
- Create more opportunities for off street parking, and trailer parking.
- Improve features and elements of the public park spaces within the downtown.
- Improve cellular and broadband service.

These consensus community goals serve as the basis for the recommendations in the following plan sections, and prioritization of the action plan. The goals established as part of this plan is only the beginning for the Town of Harrison. Successful downtown efforts are an ongoing process with constant communication, taking advantage of development opportunities and funding sources as they arise. The plan's goals should be reviewed and adjusted/updated on a regular basis. Public, private and civic interests must continue to work together to achieve the goals of the action plan.

The findings of the public outreach efforts are included in Appendix B of the plan.

3.3.3 Findings

- Consensus for the Harrison Study Area was delineated as the area between the boat launches for Crystal Lake and Long Lake and includes the area west of the Long Lake boat launch to the Bear River.
- The Waterford Road and Depot Street area is included in the study and extends to the north to the Harrison Food bank building.
- On the south side of Main Street, the study area includes Smith, Winslow, and High Street to the School Street intersection.
- Given its importance to cultural and arts entertainment the Deertrees Road area is included to Deertrees Theater.
- While not considered a part of the downtown study area the RADR athletic complex is an important asset in the community and offers considerable recreational opportunities.
- There is a mix of residential, commercial, and civic development within the downtown area.
- The history of the Harrison Downtown area is evidenced by the older, well-kept colonial style houses.

3.3.4 Recommendations

- A study area needs to be defined in the Downtown Revitalization Action Plan for State approval and subsequently for potential financial support. The study area can be fluid and adjusted over time as the need demands.
- Continue to seek public input throughout the implementation phase of the action plan.
- Evaluate and update the Downtown Revitalization Action Plan goals on an annual or biannual basis.
- Support a diverse pattern of development and activities in the downtown area.
- Establish and invest in an active ongoing downtown organization that represents the interests of the community. Many Maine communities have been successful through collaboration with the Maine Development Foundation's Maine Downtown Center and the nationally recognized Main Street approach. Other opportunities could include coordinated efforts with the Harrison Climate Action group, the local lakes region watershed protection group, and other local organizations.

- Promote a collaborative approach through good communications with town appointed committees, town staff, selectmen, downtown business owners, key stakeholders, and the community at large to support efforts to implement the goals of the plan.

The following is an overview of utilizing the Main Street approach which has had demonstrated success for a variety of communities throughout the State with similar revitalization goals.

Utilizing the Main Street Four-Point Approach

Many communities in Maine and other states have employed the "Main Street Approach" as a model for organization which has proven successful for downtown revitalization. In Maine, communities may formally apply to become a Main Street Maine community (as a full or "Network" member), to receive support and assistance from the Maine Downtown Center and increase their scoring on many of Maine's downtown grants. However, it is not a requirement to be a Main Street community to utilize the Main Street Approach, and many downtowns can benefit from applying this model on their own. For Harrison, there are a few key considerations under each of the Four Points that the community should keep in mind as it works to build and support a sustainable downtown.

The Main Street Four-Point Approach
(From Main Street Maine)

The four points of the Main Street approach work together to build a sustainable and complete Community revitalization effort.

- Organization involves getting everyone working toward the same goal and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a Main Street revitalization program. A governing board and standing committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of the volunteer driven program. Volunteers are coordinated and supported by a paid program director as well. This structure not only divides the workload and clearly delineates responsibilities, but also builds consensus and cooperation among the various stakeholders.
- Promotion sells a positive image of the commercial district and encourages consumers and investors to live, work, shop, play and invest in the Main Street District. By marketing a district's unique characteristics to residents, investors, business owners, and visitors, an effective promotional strategy forges a positive image through advertising, retail volunteers. These activities improve consumer and investor confidence in the district and encourage commercial activity and investment in the area.
- Design means getting Main Street into top physical condition. Capitalizing on its best assets, such as historic buildings and pedestrian orientated streets. An inviting atmosphere, created through attractive window displays, parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, streetlights, sidewalks, and landscaping conveys a positive visual message about the commercial district and what it has to offer. Design activities also include instilling good maintenance practices, enhancing the physical appearance of the district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging appropriate new construction, developing sensitive design management systems, and long-term planning.
- Economic Restructuring strengthens a community's existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying economic base. The Main Street program helps sharpen the competitiveness of existing business owners and recruits compatible new businesses and new economic uses to build a commercial district that responds to today's consumers' needs. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability of the district.

Section 4 Zoning and Ordinances/Consistency with Comprehensive Plan

4.1 Comprehensive Plan

Harrison's Comprehensive Plan was developed in 2008. The Plan contains inventories and analysis of several topics along with goal and policies and implementation sections. The comprehensive plan recognizes the importance of several natural features with the town boundaries including the Bear River Aquifer, 100-year flood zones, natural and wetland areas, scenic resources, and shorelands. The full comprehensive plan can be found on the Town's website:

https://www.harrisonmaine.org/vertical/sites/%7B32DD80B8-6129-40D9-B7AC-35A636B33571%7D/uploads/Comprehensive_Plan.pdf

An important element contained in the comprehensive plan is the Historical Resources that are present in Harrison. Several of these are located within the downtown area including Deertrees Theater, The Caswell House, and The Block Building.

Other ordinances and zoning maps can be found on the Town's website:

https://www.harrisonmaine.org/index.asp?SEC=A68E52AD-D97D-420A-BC42-E33484AC9528&Type=B_BASIC

4.2 Zoning and Ordinances

The study area for Harrison includes several defined zoning districts. These include Limited Commercial, Limited Residential, and Bear River Aquifer District A. The Stream Protection Zone is also along the shore of the Bear River at the westerly limits of the study area. Definitions for the Limited Commercial and Limited Residential Districts are contained in the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance.

Limited Commercial is defined as those areas established to provide locations for the traditional retail and service needs of the local community. The scale of development in these areas is intended to be in keeping with the existing residential rural development in these areas.

Limited Residential is defined as those areas suitable for residential and recreational development.

Allowable uses within the Limited Commercial District include:

- Single Family residences
- Grocery and general store
- Restaurants (excluding drive-in/through restaurants)
- Inns/bed and breakfast establishments
- Retail service establishments
- Professional or business offices
- Churches, schools, municipal facilities and public utilities
- Low intensity commercial uses and employing less than 12 employees.

4.3 Findings

- The Comprehensive Plan rejected by State when submitted in 2008
- The downtown area encompasses four zoning districts
- There are no stand-alone ordinances for Historic Districts or Places, and signage.
- Medical marijuana dispensaries are not allowed
- Fireworks are not permitted to be sold in the town.

4.4 Recommendations

- The Town should continue to update its ordinances pursuant to and consistent with the comprehensive plan.
- After adoption of the Downtown Revitalization Action Plan, the comprehensive plan should be updated to reference the planning initiative to support the community's vision for the downtown.
- Consider adoption of Form Based Codes to address architectural character for new, non-residential development and conversion from residential to non-residential uses within the downtown. The State of Maine's Municipal Planning Assistance Program has good reference material for how such codes may best be applied. This recommendation is supported in the Town's current Comprehensive Plan.

  http://www.maine.gov/dacf/municipalplanning/technical/form_based_codes.shtml

- Consider making mixed use development a standard for ordinance zones regulating the Harrison downtown area. Many communities in Maine have implemented such standards including the below reference to Freeport as an example. It has been demonstrated by subsequent development in these communities that the residential units required above commercial first floor space have been well occupied and have been a benefit to downtown revitalization for the community, and to the private developer alike.

  http://www.freeportmaine.com/page.php?page_id=103&title=Ordinances%20&%20Codes

- Consider ordinance standards versus guidelines when amending / developing design related regulations impacting the downtown area. There are many pros and cons to this issue regarding regulations requirements versus suggested guidelines that communities throughout Maine have considered on a variety of levels. Peer advice can often be productively received from other municipalities.
- The Town should continue to review their ordinances on an annual basis and make changes proactively to address potential new development trends that may benefit or threaten the quality of place within the villages.

Section 5 Buildings Inventory and Conditions Assessment

The buildings throughout the downtown study area are predominately residential houses with a few business and commercial buildings mixed in. Civic buildings within the downtown area include the Church, Post office, Grange Hall, Library, and Town Office. Many of the houses are older style, 2-story, well-kept houses with stone or granite foundations. Granite retaining walls are present with several of the buildings giving the downtown its historic feel. In the Depot Street and Waterford Road area the housing stock is newer and primarily single-story units. Very few houses are listed for sale within the planning area.

A few of the structures are in need of clean up or façade improvements.

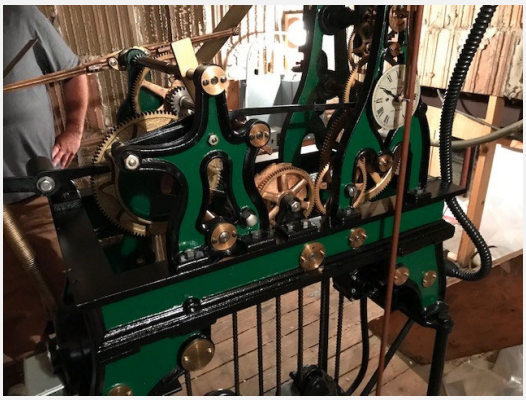
5.1 Block Building

In the heart of the downtown, the main building is the Block Building. The block building has several owners in a condominium type arrangement. Several different businesses are located in the building, primarily on the ground floor. Some of the upper floor space is utilized for private offices. As with many buildings of this vintage the stairway to the upper floors is very steep and not in compliance with current standards. A common issue with multi-story downtown buildings is the lack of adequate access to the upper floors to allow full utilization of those spaces. This is typically seen as lost opportunities for housing units in many of Maine's downtowns.

5.1.1 Town Clock

The tower section of the Block Building houses the town clock. The bell in the tower is approaching its 100-year anniversary. The clock itself is in immaculate condition given its age. Unfortunately, the bell and clock mechanism are shielded from public view and located in the confined spaces of the tower. Access for maintenance of the clock mechanism is difficult at best.

The bell was manufactured by McShane Bell Foundry in Baltimore Maryland in 1923. The McShane Foundry was established in 1856 and still produces bells to this day.



5.1.2 Grange Building

The Grange building is situated along the waterfront to Long Lake at the corner of Lincoln and Main Streets. Lakeside Grange No. 63 was founded in 1874 and the grange building constructed in 1905. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

5.2 Historic Character

Harrison's village area has numerous older colonial homes and a couple of structures on the National Historic Register. Many of the homes and businesses are constructed on stone or granite foundations. Granite curbing is located throughout the downtown and many yards have granite retaining walls. Structures on the National Historic Register include the Caswell Conservancy Building, lakeside Grange, and the Deertrees Theater. The Lakeside Grange Building was constructed in 1905 and notably survived a 1907 fire that destroyed much of the town center. The church at the School and Front Street intersection was constructed in 1830 and is now renovated into an Airbnb space.

Section 6 Inventory of Retail/Commercial Space

Harrison is unique in that much of the defined downtown study area is primarily residential with a few retail and commercial spaces mixed in. The prominent commercial space within the downtown area is the block building with its several tenants.

6.1 Findings

- The town of Harrison does not keep a database of currently available retail/commercial space in the village area.
- Public input has indicated that there is a demand for a local sit-down breakfast or café establishment, a bank or credit union, and a pharmacy or local health care store such as a CVS or Walgreens. Financial institutions and health care retail stores are located largely based on the area population. Harrison's population and proximity to the Bridgton, Naples, and Norway shopping areas would make it unlikely to attract such businesses. On-line shopping trends have changed dramatically over the past few years with a greater dependance on on-line ordering and mail order delivery.
- The block building's commercial spaces are divided up in a condominium type arrangement with several owners. The building also contains one of the town's great assets with the clock and bell which will be 100-years old in 2023.

6.2 Recommendations

- Establish, maintain and update a current database of available commercial/retail space for marketing and promotional efforts aimed at potential developers.
- Utilize available funding sources and state and federal programs to make infrastructure improvements and assist private businesses supporting Downtown Revitalization Action Plan goals. The town should consider adopting zoning ordinance guidelines/standards to ensure new development is in line with the historic and rural character of the village area.
- The Town should make infrastructure investments in terms of parking, signage, streetscape, and utility improvements in collaboration with state and federal funding opportunities, along with new development proposals.

Section 7 Employment Opportunities

With Harrison being a primarily residential community, the importance of high-speed internet is critical for creating opportunities to work remotely and take advantage of Harrison's quality of life. Many year-round homes have been established along the shores of Long Lake and Crystal Lake which offer excellent living and remote working spaces. In addition, with plenty of areas offering views of the western mountains, the opportunity to work remotely from Harrison should be promoted and increasing high speed internet throughout these areas is vitally important.

7.1 Findings

- Harrison offers a unique opportunity to take advantage of its natural environment to allow residents to connect to their workplaces remotely. This can lead to an increase in diversity of workplace opportunities on a year-round basis. With two lakes within its downtown area, the potential to offer increased recreational opportunities is significant.
- National trends note increasing opportunities to work from "anywhere" and the desire to move to downtown's where people can live, work, and play is growing.
- The camps along Long Lake offer many seasonal opportunities for seasonal employment.
- Diversification of the downtown by encouraging new antique shops, cafes, and other businesses can lead to increased employment opportunities.
- 130 approximate home-based businesses

7.2 Recommendations

- Provide financial and technical assistance and support for business development through various avenues such as a loan/grant program, marketing and branding, to assist with recruitment of additional private investment.
- TIF?
- Utilization of marketing tools such as social networking, examples of successes from other Maine communities, local community programs, Oxford Hills Chamber of Commerce to coordinate promotion of Harrison village.
- Expand on opportunities to promote diversity of professional career development at the high school level and at potential post-graduate facilities such as technology incubators for manufacturing and technology-based professions, and for emerging expanding business opportunities related outdoor recreation / eco-tourism and more global internet-based services.
- Investment in infrastructure such as high-speed broadband to support an increasing technology-based economy.
- More meaningful information regarding potential economic development ideas for unique regions such as Harrison's may best be informed by what other comparable efforts are currently taking place in Maine such as in the Moosehead Lake Region: http://mooseheadlakeedc.com/
- Another important social trend to consider is that the federal government is becoming less and less of the "Calvary" that supports all economies and that Maine as a "city state" is in similar decline of support for all local economies. It is increasingly common for towns and smaller economic regions such as the area that comprises the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG) to provide, policy, personnel resources and financial support for their own economic development initiatives.

Section 8 Inventory of Residential Units

8.1 Findings

- A majority of the housing units in the downtown area and throughout the town are single family homes with several seasonal homes along the shores of Crystal and Long Lake.
- There is limited available workforce housing (rental units and apartments)
- A number of homes are available for rent on websites such as Airbnb, and VRBO.
- There is general support for creating low income and work force housing opportunities within Harrison.
- There is a studio apartment in the upper level of block building

8.2 Recommendations

- Examine ordinance standards for mixed use development such that minimal residential unit square foot requirements are large enough to encourage alternative levels of housing to the predominant stock of current rental units.
- Involve Maine State Housing Authority, the Maine Real-Estate Development Association (MEREDA) and private housing developers that have access to New Market Tax Credits and other capital funding sources in support of workforce housing.
- Maintain a database of unoccupied housing, for advertisement by the Town or a supporting downtown organization such as a Main Street Program to new residents / seasonal work force populations interested in Harrison.
- Consider zoning ordinance updates that allow lower square footage requirements for residential units (Apartments, in-law apartments, tiny houses, Airbnb's) to encourage a greater diversity of housing opportunities for young families, seasonal work force, seniors and visitors alike.

Section 9 Pedestrian/Bicycle Infrastructure and Accessibility

The Harrison village area has the beginning of a walkable downtown that connects Crystal and Long Lake. With some extensions and new walkway connections a pedestrian friendly sidewalk system would be a major benefit to the downtown. Existing concrete sidewalks with granite curbing exist from the park at Crystal Lake to Cornshop Road. Outside of the Main Street corridor the sidewalk system becomes sparse.

9.1 Findings

- The sidewalk from the Library to School Street is in poor condition and scheduled for improvements in 2023.
- Safe pedestrian access from the Long Lake boat ramp to the businesses along the shoreline is poorly configured.
- There is support for creating new sidewalks along Lincoln Street, Depot Street and Waterford Road. The Lincoln Street sidewalk would require making Lincoln a one-way street. Sidewalk on each side of Main Street has also been mentioned.
- Many sections of the existing sidewalk are in fair to poor condition and many of the handicap ramps are not in compliance with current American Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.
- There is limited support for pedestrian safety elements within the downtown area such as rapid flashing beacons, or curbed bump outs.
- There are no dedicated bike lanes or off-road paved paths in the village area.
- A trail connection from Mill Park to Main Street is favored by many in the community.
- Improvements related to pedestrian safety were recognized as one of the highest priorities for the downtown based on public input received during this downtown revitalization planning process.

9.2 Recommendations

- Continue to implement pedestrian improvements in a phases approach that is affordable within the Town's capital improvement plan.
- Consider making Lincoln Street one-way and constructing a sidewalk that offers views of Long Lake.
- Seek funding opportunities to partner with agencies such as the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) to address pedestrian safety deficiencies with the downtown area.
- Continue to evaluate strategic pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements in association with other downtown revitalization improvements, including roadway, streetscape and utility infrastructure improvements, as well as private development projects so that bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure does not have to be reconstructed "after the fact" since these other initiatives often involve an underground infrastructure component within the sidewalk and bike lane areas.
- Examine current street and sidewalk ordinances during their update process to consider requirement of individual commercial property owners maintain sidewalks in a safe manner immediately in front of their property.
- Continue to coordinate with MDOT to ensure that bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvement projects are consistent with MDOT policies and regulations.
- Consider pedestrian and bicycle improvements in coordination with other vehicular infrastructure and streetscape elements (street trees, period lighting, benches) from a complete streets approach.
- Consider creating an historic walking map of the downtown area. The City of Sanford has developed historic walking paths for both Sanford and Springvale villages.

Section 10 Infrastructure – Streetscape and Utilities

Downtown Harrison has the basic infrastructure in place that can be enhanced to create a vibrant and scenic downtown village area. One of the big obstacles to development with the downtown district is the lack of public sewer system. Public water is available and maintained by the Harrison Water District. Sewer disposal is accomplished through private systems with a combined disposal field located on Harrison Heights.

10.1 Findings

- State Routes 117 and 35 are owned and maintained by the MDOT.
- Existing streets within the village area are able to accommodate two-way traffic.
- Street lighting is provided by cobra head style lighting mounted on existing utility poles.
- Overhead utilities are prevalent throughout the downtown area.
- The village area is served by public water and private wastewater disposal systems.
- There are opportunities to introduce period style street lighting throughout the downtown.
- There are minimal streetscape elements along Main Street and the side streets.
- The greenspace at the intersection of Route 35 and 117 offers an opportunity to provide historical elements to document Harrison's story.
- Broadband and cellular service is limited in the area. Current initiatives are being developed to improve overall broadband availability throughout the town.
- Public wifi is available at the Town Office, Crystal Lake Park, and at the Harrison Food bank.
- Front Street is scheduled for improvements to the sidewalk and road surface in the spring of 2023. This project consists of reconstructing the sidewalk to School Street and milling and paving Front Street.
- In an increasingly globally connected economy and social world, the internet is fast becoming the "brain" of civilization and those that are not connected have an increasingly difficult time developing business opportunities and being able to maintain a quality of living in remote areas in particular. Where broadband is present, the creative economy is flourishing and those that choose to live work and play, as well as those that desire to "age in place" for a longer period of time, due to availability of access to the medical field via opportunities like telemedicine services can do so with increasing flexibility.

10.2 Recommendations

- Expand broadband, cell service, and Wi-Fi service at public facilities
- Define a streetscape standard for the Harrison downtown area for items such as sidewalks, curbing, additional sidewalks, site lighting, amenities, signage and crosswalks.
- Raise capital funds for streetscape improvements and consider amending ordinances to require new development to meet these standards in both villages.
- Continue to maintain and upgrade water system in the downtown area.
- Determine the feasibility of creating a central wastewater treatment facility for the downtown and surrounding area. Not only will this enhance growth potential within the area but will help protect water quality in Crystal and Long lakes.
- Coordinate with MDOT regarding highway improvements to Routes 117 and 35 in association with MDOT's Village Partnership program.

Section 11 Signage

11.1 Findings

- Signage in a downtown area serves several purposes. Signage provides a source of information for visitors in terms of wayfinding and education, for businesses for advertisement, for vehicular and pedestrian safety, and promotion of the community's historic character and civic interests.
- The tall directional sign at the center of the village is an iconic sign that provides direction to various camps and attractions in the area.
- There is a lack of informational placards in town depicting the town's history and geological features.
- One of the missing sign components associated with the downtown is the lack of gateway and wayfinding signage dedicated to the village.

11.2 Recommendations

- Consider creating a standalone sign ordinance when updating the overall zoning ordinances to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and newly adopted Downtown Revitalization Plan.
- Develop consistent Wayfinding Signage within the village that is distinct from other present regional signage programs. This should be initiated by an overall village Wayfinding Signage Master Plan and will need to be coordinated with MaineDOT for signs within their right of ways (Routes 35 and 117).
- In addition to the signs that promote the downtown at the municipal boundaries, additional gateway signage at the village borders along Routes 35 and 117 as you approach the village areas are recommended.
- Improve wayfinding signage guiding pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular visitors to village amenities, adjacent neighborhoods, regional trail systems, cultural resources.
- Coordinate with MaineDOT to implement pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements. This signage should meet the objectives of AASHTO and ADA federal safety objects and be consistently applied throughout the downtown.
- Consider promotional signage banners to improve the streetscape experience along Main Street.

Section 12 Parking

12.1 Findings

- Availability of parking along Main Street was noted frequently through the public input process. Main trouble areas identified include the diagonal parking in front of the post office, and parking impeding the vision at the Harrison Heights intersection.
- Parking for boat and snowmobile trailers is limited at the Long Lake boat launch.
- Parking for boat trailers at the Crystal Lake Boat launch is limited to just a few spaces but is likely sufficient.
- Off Street parking is available at the town office and adjacent to the Olde Mill Tavern.
- Expanded off street parking is feasible within Mill Park.
- The town zoning and site plan ordinances define parking needs for new developments. These ordinances appear adequate for the town's current needs.
- The gravel parking lot at Crystal Lake Park is inefficient in parking capacity use versus paved parking lots with clearly marked parking spaces and access aisles.
- Limited parking is available at the Farmer's market area adjacent to the Bear River.

12.2 Recommendations

- Improve directional wayfinding signage to parking areas within walking distance of the villages.
- Improve Main Street streetscape infrastructure, sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, to create a greater sense of security and aesthetic interest for pedestrian traffic traveling to and from off-street parking facilities and the surrounding village areas.
- Consider a parking study master plan as a long-term strategy for downtown revitalization after initial phased plan improvements are made, which may, along with changes in the economy and social trends, result in different parking demands then what exists currently.
- Consider developing better defined parking area within the Mill Park footprint.
- Coordinate with businesses regarding employee policies / require that employees have designated parking space beyond the "prime" spaces which are most visible and convenient for visitors to the downtown.

Section 13 Recreation/Public Spaces

Harrison is unique in having two lakes and five public spaces within its downtown footprint. These spaces offer an abundance of recreational opportunities within the downtown. With some investment in the existing public spaces these areas can become the focal points for drawing new business ventures and economic growth to Harrison.

13.1 Findings

- Recreational opportunities in Harrison are primarily outdoors with parks located at Crystal Lake, Mill Park, and Long Lake Park. In addition, there is a public swimming area adjacent to the Long Lake boat ramp and the farmer's market field next to the Bear River.
- Crystal lake Park offers an abundance of recreational activities with a public swimming area, ball fields, basketball court, playground, public restrooms, and the Gazebo. Picnic tables are also available at the park.
- Adjacent to Crystal Lake Park is Mill Park. This area focuses on the historical use of the stream between Crystal Lake and Long Lake. This area is overgrown and has private residences at the shoreline of Crystal Lake.
- Long lake park is a small public space adjacent to the Village Tie-Up. This area has several picnic tables and a gazebo with nice views of the lake.
- Boat slips are available along with moorings adjacent to the boat launch.
- Crystal lake Park is utilized for various public events
- Long Lake Park breakfast by Lions
- RADR snowmobile, concerts.

13.2 Recommendations

- Promote seasonal recreational events hosted at the park areas such as ice fishing, vintage snowmobile events, triathlons, etc.
- Improve parking and pedestrian connections at the public spaces.
- Thin vegetation and remove overgrowth at Mill Park.
- Improve the trail along the stream from Crystal Lake and add historical placards to depict the mill history of the area.
- Add an area for a designated Dog Park within the Mill Park footprint.
- Consider adding a public parking area within the Mill Park footprint.
- Promote recreational business within the downtown area to take advantage of the recreational opportunities that surround the downtown area.

Section 14 Capital Improvements Program

14.1 Findings

- The Finance Officer handles all financial aspects of the Town with direction from the Town Manager in a fiscally sound and professional manner.
- The Town regularly sets aside funds for upkeep and minor improvements to the Town's public spaces and infrastructure in its annual budget.
- The Town does not currently have a defined capital improvement program that takes a wide view of capital needs within the community.
- Capital projects scheduled for construction in 2023 include the Front Street Sidewalk project and the new Public Works Garage.

14.2 Recommendations

- Examine these capital plans on an annual basis and have the Town Selectmen prioritize both short-term (1-3 years) and long term (5-10 years) goals for capital improvement expenditures.
- In addition to funding for implementation of the revitalization projects, dedicated funding for maintenance and operations also needs to be addressed on an ongoing annual basis.
- Look at municipal bond opportunities to be issued by the Town.
- Look for opportunities to leverage local matching funds with private investment funds as well as state and federal grant programs.
- Explore opportunities to partner with the Maine DOT to leverage funds from their Village Partnership program to improve sidewalks, handicap ramps, lighting, and parking along Main Street.

Section 15 Action Plan/Funding Opportunities

The following is a summary of the prioritized improvement initiatives based on findings from each of the sections of this report and input from the public during the development of this Downtown Revitalization Action Plan.

15.1 Prioritized Action Plan

The action plan is organized in terms of immediate needs, near term needs within a 1 to 3 year period, midterm needs from 3 to 5 years, and longer term needs greater than 5 years. The items in the action plan should be reviewed by the community on an annual basis, given changing economic conditions, available funding local, state and federal opportunities, and any cultural and social needs. Some of these prioritized action items will be supported primarily but volunteer efforts and/or institution changes (e.g., continuation of the downtown revitalization committee, zoning ordinance amendments) at little to no costs. Other items will require significant capital expenses for implementation, operations and maintenance and should be discussed further in terms of development technical design, permitting and construction cost estimates to guide prioritization of some of the action items (gateway signage, streetscape improvements, public sewer, etc.) which are often implemented in a phased approach. These preliminary project due diligence efforts will also serve the community in terms of identifying available funding sources (TIF, Capital Reserves, State and Federal Grants, etc.) in support of the applicable action items.

15.1.1 Immediate Needs (1 Year)

Text

15.1.2 Near Term Needs (1-3 Years)

15.1.3 Mid Term Needs (3-5 Years)

15.1.4 Long Term Needs (5-10 years)

15.2 Funding

Most of the funding programs traditionally used as a significant portion of downtown revitalization capital support originate from federal sources and are administered by various state agencies. In recent years, these funding programs have been subject to similar fluctuation and budget constraints as has been seen at the state and local levels in Maine. As noted in other sections of this plan, the Town should develop a working understanding of the value of a variety of assets within your community beyond traditional capital reserve accounts to identify opportunities to either leverage state and federal funding programs with local matching resources, or to consider more consistent and often more sustainable revitalization initiatives based on a steady stream of capital support, while still being in a position to be opportunistic when specific state and federal project funding resources are available.

The information provided here on various programs is the most current available, but program details such as availability, deadlines, and requirements may change, and communities should contact the appropriate agencies to ensure they have the best information about a funding program. Development of the Downtown Revitalization

Plan and a well-defined local capital improvement program are critical steps to position the community to apply for these increasingly competitive funding sources and to be well positioned for less traditional and/or less frequent funding opportunities such as state bonds and private philanthropic groups.

15.2.1 CDBG Programs

The CDBG program is a federally funded program administered by the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). The purpose of the program is to provide grants to local communities to support economic and community development that primarily benefits low- and moderate-income persons. Federal funding to underwrite the program is provided through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The CDBG program consists of several grant programs for economic and community development. Applications and funds are available annually from the DECD.

To be eligible for additional CDBG funds, a community must have completed a comprehensive downtown strategic plan or update to an existing plan within in the past five years. Also, to be eligible for CDBG funding, projects and activities must meet one of two national program objectives. The project must achieve one of the following:

- Benefit at least 51% low-moderate persons in an area, or
- Eliminate slum and blight

For more information: http://www.meocd.org

Two of the most commonly used grants for downtown revitalization are highlighted below. The Town may wish to explore the other CDBG programs for applicability such as: Public Facilities; Business Assistance, Micro-Enterprise Assistance and Housing Assistance. These programs are updated on an annual basis and some adjustments in program availability and funding within each program should be expected.

Downtown Revitalization Grant

The Downtown Revitalization Grant (DR) Program provides funds to communities to implement comprehensive, integrated, and innovative solutions to the problems facing their downtown districts. These community revitalization projects must be part of a strategy that targets downtown service and business districts and will lead to future public and private investment. Qualified applicant communities must have a downtown district meeting the definition. Communities applying for funds must provide a direct cash match of at least 25% of the total CDBG grant award. This match may consist of non-CDBG loans, grants, endowments, etc. contributed to the project. The proposed DR activities must be in a downtown plan (completed or updated within 5 years of the application) as recommended actions necessary for downtown revitalization. Applicants will receive three bonus points if they have been designated as a Main Street Maine Community by the Maine Downtown Center or one bonus point if they have been designated as a Maine Downtown Network Community.

Eligible projects include

- Construction, acquisition, reconstruction, installation, rehabilitation, site clearance, historic preservation, and relocation assistance associated with parking, streets, curbs, gutters, sidewalks, recreational facilities, parks, removal of architectural barriers, or neighborhood revitalization.
- Site amenities (benches, lighting, trash receptacles), landscaping and pedestrian improvements.

- Eligible activities include all those eligible under the Public Facilities, Public Infrastructure, Housing Assistance or Community Enterprise programs as relevant to the revitalization of a downtown district.

Letters of Intent are typically due in January, and applications typically due in March.

Public Infrastructure Grant

The Public Infrastructure Grant (PI) Program provides gap funding for local infrastructure activities, which are part of a community development strategy leading to future public and private investments. Eligible activities in the PI Program are construction, acquisition, reconstruction, installation, relocation assistance associated with public infrastructure. A cash match of at least 25% of the total grant award is required. This match may consist of non-CDBG loans, grants, endowments, etc. contributed to the project. Regional Service Centers and Contiguous Census Designated Places and Compact Urban Areas Designated as Regional Service Centers and activities supporting the revitalization of downtown areas will be given priority.

Eligible projects include

- Water system installation/improvements, sewer system installation/ improvements, water/sewer system hookups, storm drainage, utility infrastructure (road or street reconstruction is not eligible)
- Streets and roads, parking, curbs, gutters and pedestrian safety improvements in association with roadway and storm drainage infrastructure improvements.

Letters of Intent are typically due in between December and February, and applications are typically due in between February and April. Grant awards are typically between May and July.

15.2.2 TIF Program

15.2.3 Maine Department of Transportation Programs

There are a number of ways that communities in Maine gain funding for road, pedestrian, and bicycle improvements through the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT). The most prominent pedestrian/bicycle funding, is the Quality Communities Program, described below.

Village & Municipal Partnership Programs

MaineDOT has established Village and Municipal Partnership Programs, which encompasses both Transportation Enhancements and Safe Routes to School programs as well as other improvements on State highways.

This competitive program is intended to improve community transportation related facilities through bicycle and pedestrian improvements, safety improvements, environmental improvements, scenic, historic, and other quality community improvements. The program is intended to support new pedestrian and bicycle facilities, with an emphasis on the transportation value the proposed project has for the community.

Recent changes to the program require separate applications for design and construction phases. Projects now must have their design phase complete and approved by MaineDOT before applying for construction funds.

Harrison is familiar with this program and should continue to contact the MaineDOT Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Quality Community Program Manager for questions or to coordinate a potential application.

For more information:

MPI2020.pdf (maine.gov)

15.2.4 Other Funding Programs and Strategies

Leveraging Private Funds

In many communities, partnerships with private entities such as landowners/developers, banks, non-profits or other institutions can result in important funding or implementation opportunities. Communities should be strategic in identifying specific ways in which such entities could participate in revitalizing the downtown. This may include initiatives like creating a 501 3C non-profit organization that can apply for philanthropic endowment grants or growing social media outlets like crowdfunding.

Maine Arts Commission

The MAC has several competitive grant programs to help promote arts & culture, several of which have been successfully used in downtowns across the state.

http://mainearts.maine.gov/grants.aspx

Efficiency Maine / Maine Development Foundations Maine Downtown Center "Green Downtowns" Program

If there is a strong interest in promoting green and energy efficiency initiatives in the downtown, contact programs such as these to find out if they offer any appropriate opportunities.

Efficiency Maine has a number of Business Programs, Energy Audit programs, and tools and resources for Renewable Energy and improving energy efficiency.

http://www.efficiencymaine.com/at-work/tools-resources

The MDF Maine Downtown Center Green Downtowns program is geared towards supporting sustainable green initiatives for Maine's downtowns. Although their emphasis is on member communities, the Town can contact MDF to see if aspects of the program might apply to Harrison.

http://www.mdf.org/mdc_green_downtowns.php

Project Canopy Grant

Project Canopy funds could be used for street tree plantings in the downtown or at the Town's parks and public facilities. Funding and administration is through the Maine Forest Service and Growsmart Maine; the funding limit is usually $8,000. This program has typically required attendance at a training workshop.

http://www.maine.gov/doc/mfs/projectcanopy/pages/resource.htm

Historic Tax Credit Programs

Maine has several tax credit programs which can aid in revitalization efforts such as historic preservation and housing. These programs are complex, but for the right project, may serve as an important financial component. Tax Credit projects are typically a private effort with support from a municipality (public-private partnership).

http://www.maine.gov/mhpc/tax_incentives/index.html

Low Income Housing Tax Credit

The federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) provides subsidy in the form of a federal tax credit to developers of affordable rental housing. Developers using funding must reserve a portion of the rental units for lower income renters. This can include Senior Housing.

http://www.mainehousing.org/HOUSINGDEVProgramsDetail.aspx?ProgramID=51

New Market Tax Credits

The Maine New Markets Capital Investment Program provides refundable state tax credits of up to 39% to investors in qualified community development entities (CDEs) that reinvest in certain businesses in eligible low-income communities in Maine. The program is modeled after the federal New Markets Tax Credit Program, and is administered by the Finance Authority of Maine, in cooperation with Maine Revenue Services and the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development.

For more information

http://www.famemaine.com/files/Pages/business/businesses/equity_capital/Maine_New_Markets_Capital_Investment_Program.aspx

State Bonds

Although unpredictable, special state bond programs such as Communities for Maine's Future or the Riverfront Communities are sometimes funded by the legislature. Communities may be able to take advantage of such funding if appropriate to the downtown revitalization effort.

Municipal Bonds

More predictable and often misunderstood and increasingly underutilized are municipal bonds. This source of funding provides a greater level of local control and flexibility in funding projects that may not meet objectives of state and federal grant programs, while allowing local investors to put their financial resources into projects that are of particular value to the community.

Municipal bonds are used by local governments or territories, or other agencies (commonly including financial institutions and if the Town of Harrison is not familiar with this project, it is recommended that the Maine Municipal Association be contacted for peer assistance: https://memun.org/

One organization particularly focused on municipal bonds for broadband projects that the Town may be interested in contacting is Neighborly: https://neighborly.com/

Coastal Enterprises and Maine Community Foundation Partnership

The Maine Community Foundation has partnered with Wiscasset-based CEI (Coastal Enterprises Inc.) to boost downtown and fisheries-related development in rural Maine.

This partnership results in provision of $500,000 in new loan funds, which will be available for rehabilitation of downtown buildings and development of fisheries-related enterprises in the state's rural communities.

Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC)

The NBRC is an important regional coordination mechanism for the Northern Forest states as well as a potentially significant new source of investment for economic and community development in the region. The Center coordinates with NBRC stakeholders across the region, with the Commission members (a federal co-chair and the region's four governors), and with the regional congressional delegation to align the work of the Commission with regional priorities and to secure additional funding for its activities.

http://www.northernforest.org/northern_border_regional_commission_nbrc_.html

Recreational Trails Program

The program is authorized through the Federal Highway Administration and is administer by the Maine Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Parks and Lands:

https://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/grants/recreational_trails_program.shtml

Land and Water Conservation Funds

The program is authorized through the National Park Service and is administer by the Maine Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Parks and Lands:

https://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/grants/land_water_conservation_fund.html

Water & Sewer Utility Funding

Water and sewer infrastructure improvements are most often funded through USDA Rural Development or through the State Revolving Loan Funds administered by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the State Drinking Water Program. Both sources of fund offer a grant and loan packages that are often tied to existing user

rates and median household income numbers. Harrison has successfully utilized funding through Rural Development for improving its pump stations in the sewer collection system.

The link for the Rural Utilities program is provided here:

https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/water-waste-disposal-loan-grant-program/me

Information on the Maine Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund can be found here:

https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/grants/srfparag.html

The drinking water SRF program is linked below:

https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/dwp/imt/documents/DWPFundingTableSummary.pdf

Donations / Volunteers

There are often a variety of local grass roots fund raising campaigns that can successfully obtain capital donations and/or volunteer labor to implement a variety of community revitalization initiatives. Opportunities to seek out this support could be sought out a town sponsored public gathering events and public meetings (voting polls, school events, etc.), in terms of donations or sign-up opportunities for future volunteering, through online crowd funding, community meetings.

Appendix A
Maps

Downtown Study

Parcel Land Use

Transportation / Parking

Recreation

Utilities

Appendix B
Public Presentations

February 2022 Front Street Update

9/29/22 Public Workshop Attendance List

9/29/22 Public Workshop Compiled Facilitator Recording Sheets

Compiled Individual Questionnaires

12/2/22 Downtown Committee Meeting

1/23/23 Downtown Committee Meeting

3/9/23 Selectmen Meeting Update

6/6/23 Draft Plan Presentation Public Input Meeting

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