



Extension

Leveraging Historical Assets for Community Vibrancy

Washington, New Hampshire



2018-2019 Town Center Assets and Opportunities Review

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
About the Town Vision Project	4
Town of Washington Map	5
A Town Center Evaluation	6
Town Center Aerial Map and Factors Influencing Washington’s Town Center	7
Town Center Characteristics	8
Assessment Process and Key Findings	9–11
Streetscaping	12–13
Signage and Downtown Entrance	14–15
Public Infrastructure and Parking	16–17
Community and Economic Vitality	18–19
Parks	20–21
Community & Economic Development Resources	22
Action Planning Tips	23
Options for Gathering Community Input	24
Planning for Equity and Inclusion	25

Acknowledgements



UNH Cooperative Extension acknowledges the passion and tenacity of the **Town of Washington Town Center Vision Subcommittee**, a subcommittee of the Planning Board, whose members have faithfully met, researched, sought guidance and deliberated for the preservation and enhancement of community assets and quality of life. Members include Albert Bodnar, James Crandall, Andrew Hatch, Ronald Jager, Jean Kluk, Al Krygeris (selectman), Sharon Otterson, Kevin Provencher, Nan Schwartz, and Laura-Jean Gilbert.

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About The Town Center Vision Project

Our historical Town Center is undergoing many positive developments. New residents are occupying long-vacant properties, and new businesses have opened. The Town Hall has been renovated and work is on-going to reopen the second floor as a gathering place.

The Town Center Vision committee meets monthly to discuss ways to improve the experience of our Town Center for residents and visitors alike. Minutes of meetings are posted on the Town website (access from the Planning Board page). All meetings are open to the public, and new members are welcome.

The Town of Washington's Master Plan calls for us to work toward these ideals:

- Preserving the historical sites and character of our Town Center
- Enhancing public/visitor safety and desirability of our Town Center
- Cultivating economic growth that will encourage a healthy local economy
- Ensuring a sense of community pride in our Town Center
- Increasing public awareness of Town Center historical sites

During 2018, the TCV committee met 13 times. We documented many ideas on ways the Town Center can be improved and enhanced. We spent time evaluating external resources for grant funding and assistance. As an outcome of this, we have identified architectural assistance for the Old School House. We also approached several academic institutions, and we retained the services of UNH Cooperative Extension, who have been working with us to customize their First Impressions program for the Town.

We were surprised at the level of interest in helping out. We determined several resources were not appropriate at this time but might be resources we can revisit once we have developed specific projects or programs.

We want to promote our Town as a great place to visit. We want to make sure that when people arrive, they can find their way around safely and easily and discover the many unique treasures our Town has to offer.

Washington is home to an increasing number of artists and craftspeople. The popular artisan's tours are bringing new visitors to Washington. When a new visitor arrives in Washington, we want them to have a positive, memorable experience. We have taken a look at walkability and directional signage and ways to identify places of historical importance.

We are looking for input. We are open to all kinds of ideas. You will find forms to complete at your convenience. If you would prefer to send us an email, please do so at pb@washingtongh.org

We are planning to have a Community Meeting in the early summer where ideas will be shared and possible programs will be presented.

—Members of the Town Center Vision Subcommittee

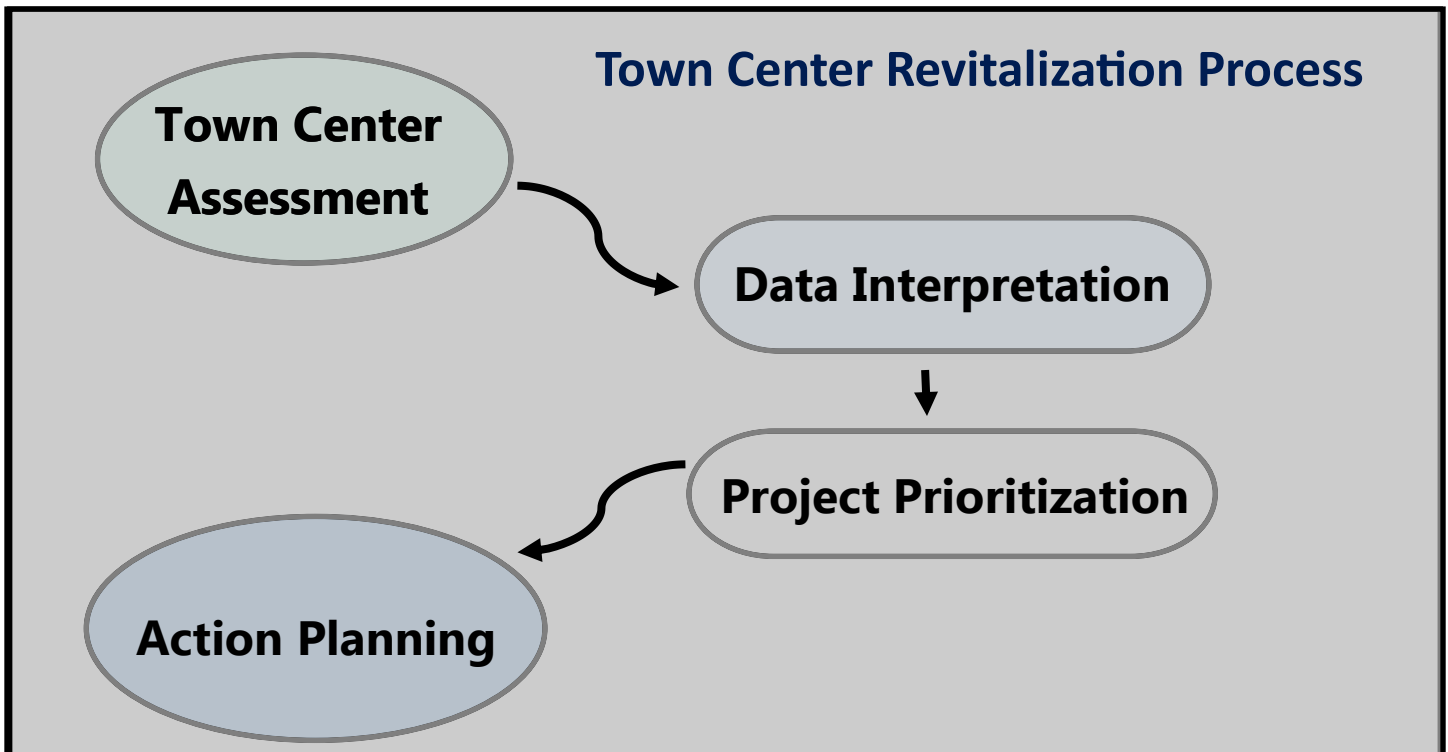
A Town Center Evaluation

Members of the **Town of Washington Town Center Vision Subcommittee** of the Planning Board reached out to UNH Cooperative Extension late summer 2018 for assistance clarifying their priorities and moving into action planning. At the initial meeting with subcommittee members, UNH Cooperative Extension Field Specialists Penny Whitman and Jared Reynolds suggested that committee members might find it beneficial to participate in a **town center characteristic evaluation** to help members define their assets, challenges and opportunities and to gather insights on where their priorities lay.

Extension specialists and committee members met in October 2018 to perform the evaluation by walking through the town center and observing aspects that could be described as one of 15 characteristics identified by UNH Cooperative Extension as key aspects of vibrant downtowns and town centers. Washington subcommittee members recorded 84 observations that included issues around pedestrian safety and signage to the condition of parks and the lack of presence of the community's artists.

UNH Cooperative Extension staff analyzed the observations and ratings to identify five themes that captured the subcommittee's concerns and priorities.

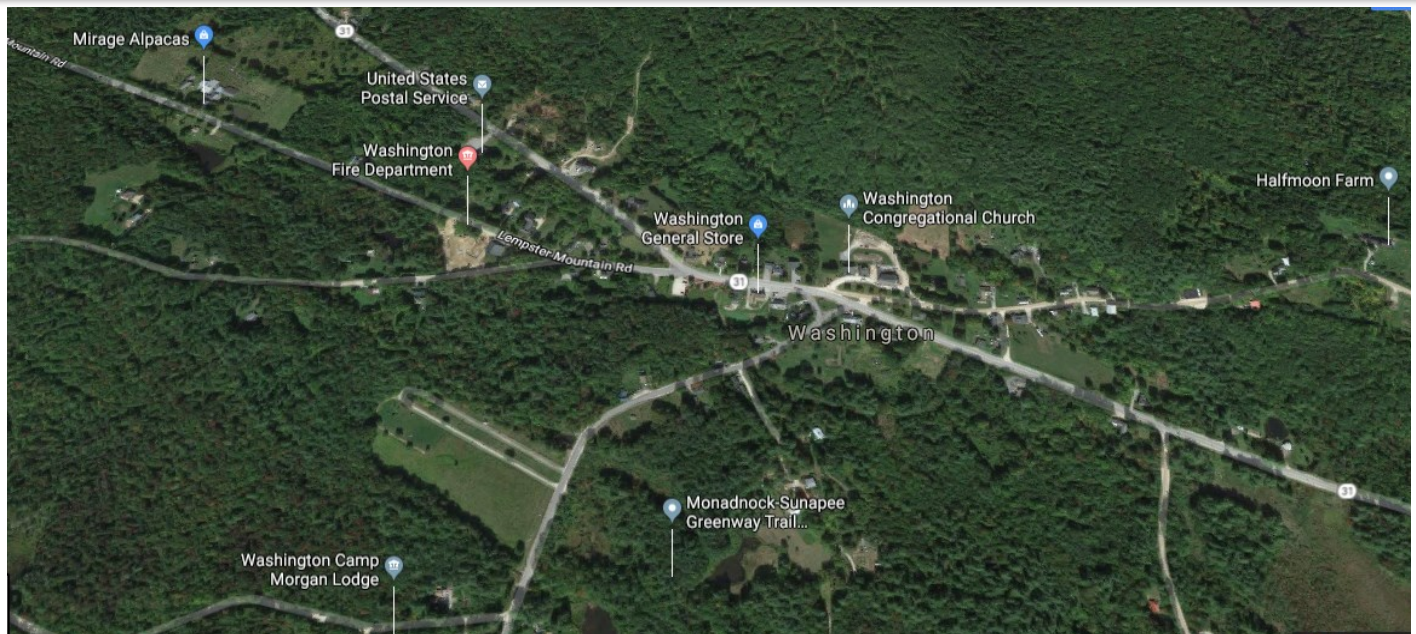
In the following pages, the importance of each theme is expanded upon, Washington's assets and opportunities as described by subcommittee members are listed, and possible actions are provided for committee members to consider.



As the graphic above illustrates, subcommittee members will want to narrow their priorities from the five identified themes to two or three, and then select short, medium and long-term projects based on their impact and feasibility.

Reaching out and engaging with all Washington residents for their input and insights will be an important first step to each project's action plan.

Washington Town Center



Factors Influencing Washington's Town Center

Location:

Washington is located in southern Sullivan County and is bordered by numerous towns. The town's remote location make its town center somewhat difficult to access for potential visitors. Rte. 31/Main St. passes through Washington's town center. According to the N.H. Department of Transportation, approximately 1,700 cars traveled on Rte. 31 through Washington on an average day in 2010, traveling to either Newport or Claremont. The main transportation corridor through the area is Rte. 9, approximately 15 minutes south of Washington on Rte. 31. There are approximately 6,900 cars traveling on Rte. 9 past Rte. 31 each day.

Population Trends:

Washington has both seasonal and year-round residents and is best known for its many lakes and ponds, as well as Pillsbury State Park. The town's population grew steadily from 1980 until 2010, but growth has stagnated or declined slightly in recent years. Washington's population trends are similar to other towns in the area, which also have experienced stagnating population growth and limited new development.

Employment and Income:

The median income in Washington is \$43,125 and \$50,000 for a family, with approximately 5% of the population living below the poverty line. Washington's largest employers are Eccardt Farm (8 employees), Washington Highway Department (5 employees), and Washington General Store (5 employees). Many Sullivan County residents commute out of the region to work each day. According to the U.S. Census, 5,100 individuals commute into the county to work, 7,500 residents live and work in the county, and 11,000 residents leave Sullivan County to work each day.

*Employment data from NH Department of Employment Security; **Wage and population data from US Census Bureau

***Commuting data from NH Department of Transportation

Town Center Characteristics

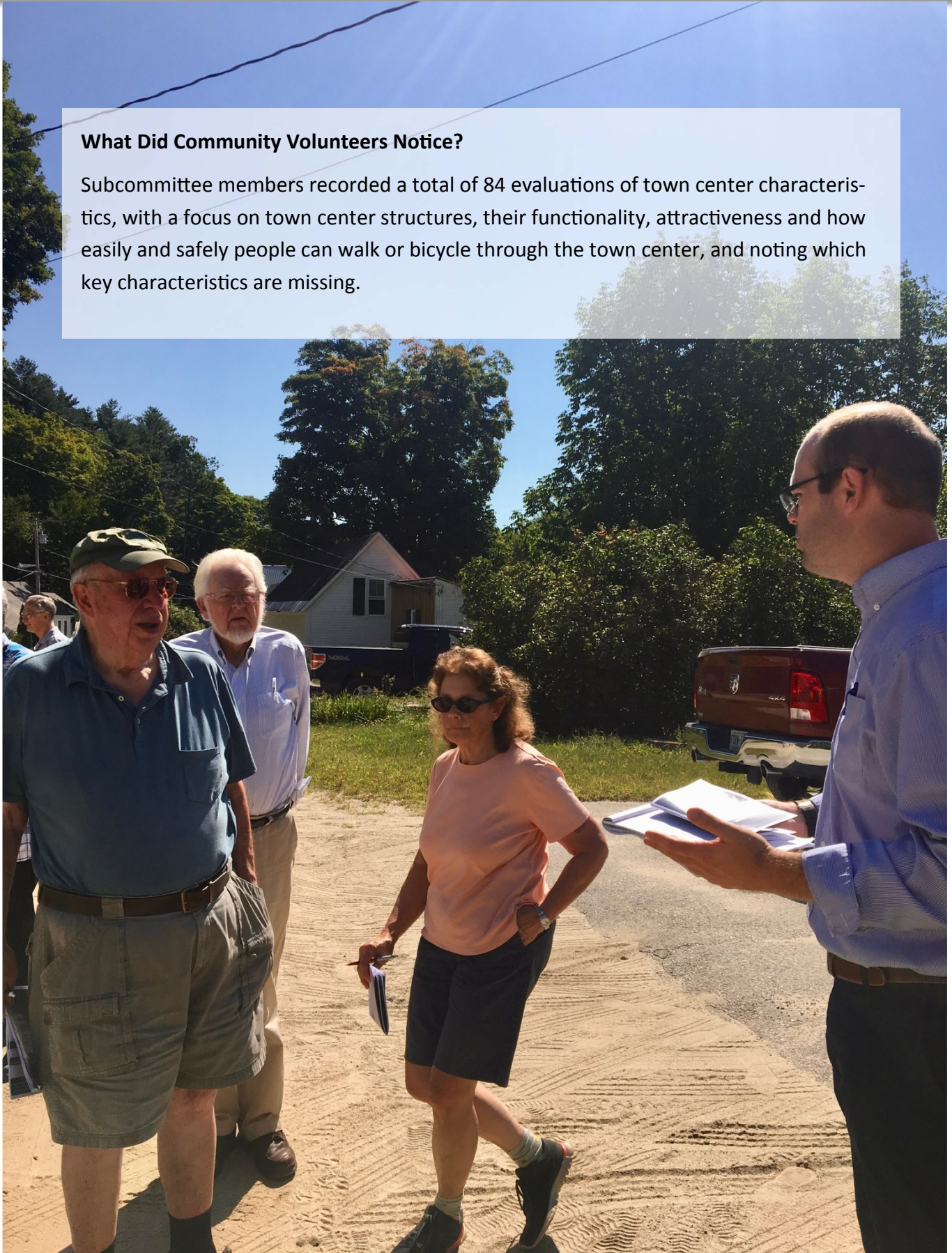
The following are characteristics that are key aspects of vibrant downtowns and town centers. Washington’s assessors reviewed the town center based on these 15 characteristics.

	<p>Businesses: Businesses that increase town center appeal such as casual restaurants, coffee shop, drugstore, and local shops.</p>		<p>Streets & Transportation: Streets, bicycle lanes, bicycle racks, bicycle shares, buses, cars, taxis, ridesharing, street parking, public and private lots, traffic lights.</p>
	<p>Landscaping: Flowers, trees, green spaces.</p>		<p>Parks: Parks, parklets, pocket parks.</p>
	<p>Downtown Entrance: Where people enter the downtown. Is it clear where the entrance is? Is the entrance attractive and welcoming?</p>		<p>Points of Interest: Historical homes & buildings, architecture, fountains, memorials, statues, museums, plaques.</p>
	<p>Community Art: Murals, artwork, musicians, concerts, street performers.</p>		<p>Public Facilities: School, library, town/city hall, post office.</p>
	<p>Displays & Signage- Pedestrian signs, wayfinding signs, parking signs, business signs, municipal signs.</p>		<p>Seating: Benches, stoops, chairs, lawns, places people gather that are not considered a park, outdoor seating, outdoor dining, benches.</p>
	<p>Lighting- Availability and quality of lighting on streets, in parking lots, in parking garages.</p>		<p>Walkways & Crosswalks: Pedestrian safety, sidewalks, crosswalks, quality, connectivity, usability for a range of abilities.</p>
	<p>Waste & Recycling- Availability and quality of waste and recycling receptacles.</p>		<p>Parking: Quantity and accessibility of parking to serve town needs.</p>
	<p>Housing – Availability, diversity, and visual appearance of housing.</p>		

Analysis of Town Center Characteristics

What Did Community Volunteers Notice?

Subcommittee members recorded a total of 84 evaluations of town center characteristics, with a focus on town center structures, their functionality, attractiveness and how easily and safely people can walk or bicycle through the town center, and noting which key characteristics are missing.



Analysis of Town Center Characteristics

Looking at Ratings: From *Does Not Exist* to *Excellent*

Assessment participants selected a rating for each characteristic from the following:
Does Not Exist, Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent.

- ⇒ 24 evaluations rated the characteristic as either Good or Excellent.
- ⇒ 47 evaluations rated a downtown characteristic either Fair or Poor.
- ⇒ 13 key characteristics of a vibrant town center were noted as not existing in Washington.

Volunteer assessors clearly see room for many improvements to maximize the assets of Washington's town center. In the chart below,

- **Green** highlights characteristics the assessors generally saw as in good or excellent condition.
- **Yellow** highlights characteristics the assessors generally saw as fair but with an opportunity for improvement.
- **Red** highlights characteristics assessors generally saw as concerning.

	Does Not Exist	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Public Facility		3	3	4	3
Park	1		1	3	
Point of Interest	1	4	6	5	2
Housing		1	2		
Parking		2	3		
Business		1	2	3	3
Streets/Transportation		2			
Walkways/Crosswalks	2	3			
Signage	3	6			
Downtown Entrance	5	1			
Landscaping		1	1		1
Waste & Recycling	1				
Seating		1	1		
Community Art		2			
Lighting		1			
Totals	13	28	19	15	9

Key Findings

Town Characteristics in RED

Streetscaping

Subcommittee members noted town aspects such as walkways and crosswalks, signage and downtown entrance as being in either poor condition or not existing. Streetscaping includes efforts to improve or put in place these aspects as well as seating, lighting, landscaping, and bins for trash and recycling.

Signage and Downtown Entrance

Assessors saw the lack of both wayfinding and interpretive signage as a significant opportunity. Assessors also found there was no signage or clear entrance marking the boundary of Washington's town center.

Town Characteristics in YELLOW

Infrastructure and Parking

Committee members rated Washington's public buildings such as the Washington Town Hall, Shedd Free Library, and Washington Congregational Church from fair to excellent, but saw condition of the Police Station/Old Schoolhouse and challenging parking accessibility as opportunities to increase their functionality. Another identified opportunity is to re-envision the use of the Old School House.

Community and Economic Vitality

The town center has two popular businesses: the General Store and Gibson Pewter, but committee members expressed a desire for additional businesses to complement these and provide additional gathering and meeting spaces for residents and visitors. Another opportunity subcommittee members noted was the lack of any indication of Washington's community of artists in the town center.

Town Characteristics in GREEN

Public Facilities and Points of Interest

Washington is proud of its public facilities and points of interest and the investment the community has made to renovate and maintain them is a point of pride and a contributor to community vitality. Subcommittee members saw opportunities to leverage these assets with interpretive signage and an interpretive walking trail to highlight significant historical buildings in the town center and share Washington's stories.

Parks

Washington assessors commented that Wayside Park and the community playground have potential as community gathering spaces. Members noted that they are underutilized, that there are too few volunteers to maintain flowerbeds (at Wayside Park), and that park structures, such as seating and play equipment, are lacking or outdated.

Streetscaping

Why Streetscaping Is Important

Streetscaping can positively affect a community in many ways. Inviting, walkable streetscapes can help spur economic activity and communicate a vibrant and cohesive public realm. Inviting, walkable streetscapes can help:

- Spur economic activity
- Revitalize a downtown
- Increase private investment
- Support development of a business climate
- Attract visitors and residents to community
- Minimize traffic and congestion
- Increase safety
- Impact how people perceive and interact with their community

Plans to improve streetscape conditions can include traffic management, bike lanes, sidewalks, landscaping, street furniture, trash and recycling receptacles, improved signage and lighting.



Assets

- Washington's town center is an incredible asset with key town buildings and local businesses on Main Street. It already has many components of what could be a lively and attractive village where community members and visitors want to spend time.
- The community is investing in the preservation of its striking historical buildings, which are clearly the source of pride for many residents and an attraction for visitors.
- Although noting safety issues, some Washington residents are already moving from parking areas to town buildings, the library, and the General Store on foot, which indicates that there is a strong desire for a more walkable town center.
- The Library has outdoor seating, although it is underutilized and offers no view of historical town common.



Streetscaping

Opportunities

Walkability: pedestrian safety, Walkways, crosswalks:

- A safe crossing from Halfmoon Pond Road to the General Store.
- A safe crossing from Wayside Park to library.
- A walkway, especially from church to library.
- Drainage issues on Main Street/Rte. 31's shoulders impact their suitability as walking places.

Traffic Calming:

- Traffic from the north is too fast.

Seating:

- More accommodating and inviting seating to encourage residents to spend time in center around community assets.

Lighting:

- Evaluate quality and quantity of street lights.

Trash and Recycling Receptacles:

- Provide place to deposit trash/recyclables in town center.

Landscaping:

- Landscaping around historical town buildings could better indicate their importance to the community.

Possible Actions

Check in with the community to find out what residents would like in Washington's future streetscape. Consider posters that invite comment at key areas such as library, general store.

Develop crosswalks where needed.

Consider walkways on Main Street.

Consider walking path from Wayside Park to General Store.

Test a speed feedback electric sign at town entrance.

Consider a pop-up streetscaping event in which a temporary, streetscape exhibition is created by community members. The pop-up streetscape can be populated by protected bike lanes, crosswalks, benches, pop-up shops, food vendors, and arts spaces in order to spur interest in the area and show what it could feel like, if improved.

Involve community artists in town center beautification.



Signage and Downtown Entrance

Why Signage and Downtown Entrances Are Important

Downtown Entrance:

A downtown entrance lets people know that they are entering a significant and cherished place, where they are welcome to stop and visit. It provides an identity and a brand for your community. Communities without downtown entrances have difficulty getting people to slow down or stop as they drive through.

Signage:

Wayfinding signage directs visitors to places of interest and where they should park. The easier it is for visitors to navigate the town, the more likely they are to spend time. A coordinated signage program adds to the town's identity, helping to create a local brand.

Interpretive signage provides information and an opportunity to showcase the town's assets to residents and visitors. It encourages visitors and residents to spend more time exploring and learning about the town.



Assets

Washington is rich in historical assets and has some signage that community members can leverage to be successful in improving the town center area, but subcommittee assessors were clear that there is significant opportunity to improve town signage and create more of a downtown entrance from both the north and south into Washington's town center to slow down traffic, draw attention to the town's assets, and encourage more visitors to stop.

Signage and Downtown Entrance



Opportunities

Downtown Entrance:

- A large sign on the north end of town placed a bit before the curve and announcing the entrance to the town center could also have the effect of slowing motorists.
- A welcome sign at the southern entrance of town center.
- Some feature to slow down traffic and a pedestrian crosswalk north of town center.
- No clear definitions on entering the historical town center.
- Junk yard and blight on the north side of the town center provides an unwelcome entrance.

Waysfinding Signage:

- There are too many DOT and other road signs around the town center that detract from natural beauty and quaintness.
- A plan for parking and signage for Town Hall to let people know that it is there and where to go.

Interpretive Signage:

- Faxon House plaque is unreadable.
- Opportunity to create self-guided tour by adding more historic markers and linking to coordinated maps and other print or online information.
- Historical buildings should be signed and made into a walking tour.
- Trails and entrances need to be marked.
- A sign at the Town Pound that identifies and interprets the site.

Possible Actions

Inventory Signage: Determine what currently exists and where gaps are for additional signage.

Marketing Plan: develop brand and identity for Washington's town center that will make it more appealing for visitors and increase local awareness and pride. Use this brand to design consistent and coordinated wayfinding and interpretive signage throughout the town center.

Interpretive Walking Tour: Create a walking tour experience to showcase historical town center assets.

Resource Identification: Identify resources available to support the creation of additional signage. This may include talking with the town, local businesses, and exploring external funding opportunities.

Public Infrastructure and Parking

Why Public Infrastructure and Parking Are Important

Parking:

Ample and accessible parking is important to provide access to the town center. However, expanding parking eliminates that land for other uses. Parking lots have low or no assessed value and the land is not available for housing, a business, a local park, or another use. When possible, communities should think of creative ways to increase parking access while limiting land use. Additionally, communities should be conscious of the visual appeal of parking lots and their impact on the community.

Public Infrastructure:

Public infrastructure, especially that located in the center of a town, plays an important role in creating a town's identity. Historical architecture can complement local businesses and local gathering spaces serve residents.

Assets

- The library is historically rich, well maintained, a great resource, and offers community programs and enrichment.
- Our town buildings are a focal point of our town and one of the most photographed centers in New Hampshire.



Public Infrastructure and Parking

Opportunities

Parking:

- Improved parking with better access is needed for town center buildings.
- There are issues with parking for large events. Parking lot is down a steep hill from the meeting house and police station.

Old School House/ Police Station:

- The building is not ADA compliant and in need of repair.
- Needs interior and exterior painting and major repairs. The building could be used as a visitor center and upstairs for small group and club meetings.

Town Center

- The wires that cross the road near the town hall detract from the view.
- There is hope that the meeting house will return to a cultural center when the second floor is reopened.

Other:

- The Rte. 31/Main Street speed limit should be lowered from 30 mph to 20-25mph through town.

Possible Actions

Parking inventory: Inventory all existing town center parking and determine for what events and at what time of the day the parking is full and when accessibility is a challenge.

Old School House/ Police Station: Solicit community input to develop a plan for how this building can be utilized to meet community needs.

Rte. 31/Main Street Speed Limit: Contact the NH Department of Transportation to determine the feasibility of decreasing the speed limit through the center of town.



Community and Economic Vitality

Why Community and Economic Vitality is Important

Maintenance and Upkeep:

Maintenance and upkeep of buildings and housing around the town center makes it a more attractive place to visit and spend time.

Businesses:

It's important to have local businesses that serve needs of residents. When businesses also draw visitors, there is a greater chance of their sustainability, as it is challenging for small communities to adequately support small businesses. Creative visioning about businesses can also increase sustainability, such as combining as a café, brewpub, and art center in one space.



Assets

Businesses:

- General store offers community gathering place and offers lunch, dinner and take-out meals
- Lemon Tree Bakery provides delicious baked goods.
- Gibson Pewter, housed in barn and family house dating to 1820. Good visitor shop, both for the interest in the town's history and for pewter business.
- Mimi's Attic: Antique store
- Washington Farmer's Market (in season)

Town Center

- The gazebo and bandstand occasionally used for summer concerts and Christmas tree lighting and caroling.

Community and Economic Vitality

Opportunities

Public Buildings

- There is an opportunity to fix up the old school house to be an art studio, gallery, Historical Society, or visitor center.
- Bandstand could be moved so it could be used and enjoyed more fully. In its location it has no perimeter for people to gather and sit.
- Washington is rich in historical buildings, but would benefit from “something” that showcases or provides increased awareness of these assets. Maybe a visitor center or guide.
- Historical Society and Barn Museum would benefit from better landscaping, the building’s white trim washed and painted, and better signage.

Businesses

- Support existing and encourage new town center businesses.

Housing

- Instill pride in home maintenance/aesthetics around town center.

Community Art

- Community artists have no town-center presence. Opportunity to identify a location in town center
- We have a vibrant Washington Artisans group but lack live music and performance. Promote the use town hall stage or lot behind town hall for performances.

Possible Actions

Building Reuse: Talk with existing building and housing owners to gauge interest in pursuing business opportunity.

Establish Partnerships: Establish partnership with art and performance associations to begin music and art shows at town hall and in town center.



Parks

Why Parks Are Important

Parks are outdoor living spaces for our towns and are important for residents of all ages.

Parks are public spaces that help strengthen a sense of community and social belonging.

Good parks provide spaces for recreation, connection-building and contemplation. They speak to the community's investment in quality of life.

Strong parks increase property values of nearby homes, and attract new residents with young children.



Assets

Washington's historical town common is a beautiful, open green space lined with maple trees, which showcases the triad of historical buildings—the most photographed town center in N.H.!

Wayside Park has attractive planting and benches.

Existing playground behind the old school house, overlooking community garden, has plenty of space, a desirable location and functional play structures.



Parks

Opportunities

Wayside Park is rarely used by the community.

Wayside Park maintenance is managed by volunteers.

Playground park lacks appeal, has minimal infrastructure, and needs seating.

Community garden is looking for members.



Possible Actions

Discuss with Parks and Rec regarding the feasibility of adding to and/or improving current play equipment at the playground.

Consider a variety of seating options at playground park that will welcome residents of all ages and are conducive both to contemplation and social interaction.

Better connect the community garden to the playground portion of the park.

Consider small investments such as welcoming signage and trash/recycling bins at playground park.

Consider a path from Main Street to the park that can accommodate strollers and bicycles.

Evaluate Wayside Park's furniture and its placement to make it a more engaging place to spend time and increase its use by the community.

Consider picnic tables and benches in the area adjacent to the community garden.

Consider creating a skating rink in winter in the lower area behind Town Hall.

Focusing In on Project Priorities

Impact-Feasibility Assessment

The Impact-Feasibility Grid is a tool that can be very helpful in leading a group through a decision-making process about possible projects.

First the group brainstormed a list of possible action steps that had been identified in their Town Center Assessment and subsequent discussions.

These projects were recorded on sticky notes. Then subcommittee members decided where to place the project on the Impact-Feasibility Grid by discussing what the impact of the project would be for Washington and how possible the project is for the community to take on currently.



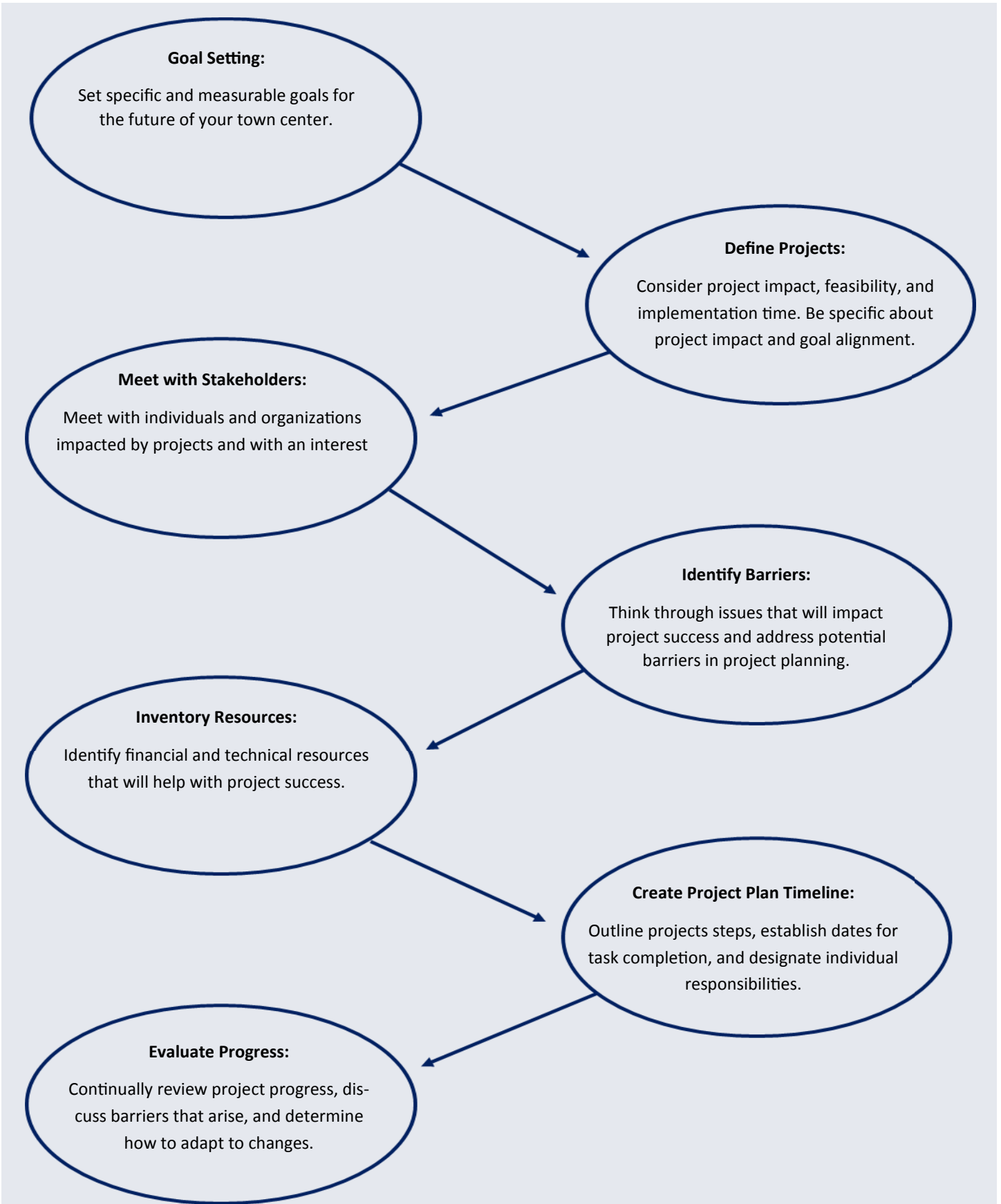
Project Priorities

Once all the project ideas had been placed on the grid, group members looked for ways to combine ideas and focus them into three areas of priority. These are:

- Explore feasibility of upgrading Rt. 31 as it goes through the town center, addressing drainage issues and adding walkways and crosswalks in partnership with Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Planning Commission and the New Hampshire Department of Transportation.
- Focus on downtown beautification, streetscaping, and access to town buildings in coordination with Washington's Parks and Recreation and Conservation commissions.
- Create a historical experience in the town center to include a walking tour and interpretive signage.



Action Planning Process



Planning for Equity and Inclusion

A key step to creating a vision and setting goals is reaching out to all town residents to gather their concerns, insights and visions for the town center. Consider which of the groups listed below are part of your community. Who is missing? Different groups require different approaches to successfully include them in community decision making.

Who are you engaging?	How do you plan to engage?
General Public	
Stakeholders	
Community Leaders	
Seniors	
Youth/Students	
College Students	
Young Adults	
Disabled Populations	
Veterans	
Minority Populations	
New Residents	
Visitors	
Homeowners	
Renters	
Business Owners	
Seasonal Residents	
Artisans	

Community & Economic Development Resources

After reviewing assessor and community member data and feedback, the committee should consider what resources for funding and technical assistance are available to help move projects forward. Below are some resources that other communities have used to help reach their community and economic development goals.



Options for Gathering Community Input

Community Visioning

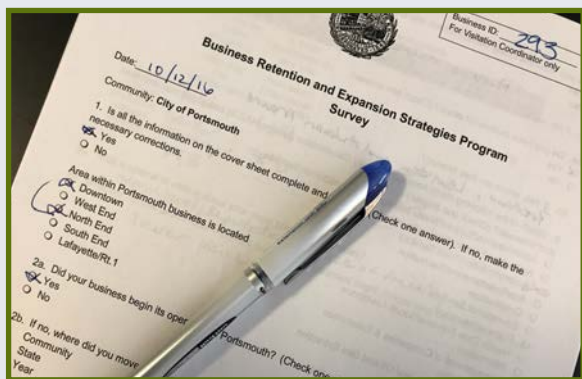
One process to help a group move from vision to action is community visioning. This process entails engaging the community to develop Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies, and Action Plans. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/strategic-planning/vmosa/main>

Community Forums

Community forums are meetings open to the public that involve residents to provide input on projects, issues, problems, and needs. http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1021.aspx

World Café

World Café is a structured conversational process in which groups of people discuss a topic at several tables, with individuals switching tables periodically and getting introduced to the previous discussion. <http://theworldcafe.com/method.html>



Community Surveys

Community surveys help one to gather info about local attitudes regarding precisely defined issues, problems or opportunities. Surveys may be open ended or multiple choice.

Focus Groups

The focus group is a way to gather the opinions/ideas from a small, targeted group of citizens. The intention of focus groups is perhaps more to build a synergy of thoughts and ideas than it is to make projections about the community. http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1018.aspx

Storytelling Circles

Storytelling Circles provide an opportunity for individuals to share their stories or ideas based on a theme or prompt in a group setting. Ideally, groups are composed so that a diversity of perspectives participate so information is as representative as possible.

Key Interviews

An interview is a conversation with a purpose, designed to help you gather information about peoples' assumptions/perceptions of community needs or activities. They are useful when looking for in-depth information on a particular topic. http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1047.aspx

Posters, Chalkboards, Suggestion Boxes

These can be posted in high traffic areas asking questions to elicit responses from community members. It is helpful if there is a volunteer present to encourage people to participate. Possible locations include the library, town hall, recreation center, coffee shops, banks, etc. Or, use mini chalkboards to invite community members to respond and take a photo holding their idea. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uebXlIrosiMT>



*Created by Molly Donovan, State Specialist, Community & Economic Development, UNHCE

Notes