



# ASHLAND, NEW HAMPSHIRE COMMUNITY CHARRETTE REPORT

Community Charrette Program

August 19 – 20, 2011





# CONTENT:

<b>1</b>	<b>Preface</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Who is Plan NH?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>What is a “Charrette”?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Why did Plan NH come to Ashland?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>The Community Charrette Process: Ashland, NH</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Listening Session</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Summary of Community Charrette Findings</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Summary of Community Charrette Recommendations</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Action Recommendations</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Rt. 3 &amp; Rt. 132 Intersection</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Civil War Monument</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Lower Main Street</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Mill Renovation Action Recommendations</b>	<b>19</b>

## PREFACE

In early 2011, Ashland submitted an application to Plan New Hampshire for a design charrette, and was one of five towns selected by the organization as a charrette town for the 2011-12 year. The request was for Plan NH to recommend improvements in the downtown and Lower Village areas.

On August 19 and 20, the Plan New Hampshire (Plan NH) Design Charrette Team came to Ashland, meeting at the Ashland Elementary School.

Plan NH's charrette team set out to understand how Ashland's residents saw their downtown and what they believed was needed in order to return their town into a prosperous, flourishing community. In addition, the Team needed to understand the importance of the town itself, its role and place in the surrounding region.

Issues addressed included, but were not limited to vehicular and pedestrian safety, way-finding, aesthetic appearances of the streetscape and buildings, and economic opportunities. All this was against the backdrop of the mills – once a source of common purpose, pride, and direction, now silent for almost a decade.

Plan New Hampshire arrived on Friday morning – a team of *volunteer* professionals from within the building industry, each with an interest in the logistical aspects of making recommendations, and also a deep commitment to contributing to the community itself. On Friday, the Team listened to townspeople, explored the target area, learned the history of Ashland, heard about its economic, social and environmental structures, and listened to expressions of hope and pride. On Saturday, the team talked about what they heard, what they concluded, and what recommendations they would make. They then made many of these recommendations visual, and in the afternoon, made a presentation to the town.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Sincerest thanks go to the individuals and groups who donated their professional expertise and personal time to make the Ashland Community Charrette a success. Also, many thanks to the citizens, businesses and town officials who shared their time, energy, knowledge and services with us*

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## Ashland Team

*Without the support and participation of the following individuals, organizations, and businesses this charrette would not have been possible.*

**Chris Lane**

*Ashland Land Owner and Business Owner/Operator  
Member, Downtown Revitalization Committee*

**Sherry Downing**

*Ashland Business Owner/Operator  
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**Paul Branscombe**

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**Ranita Morello**

*Member, Ashland Revitalization Alliance*

**Chuck Engborg**

*Ashland resident and AARP representative*

**Mark Scarano**

*Ashland resident & Grafton County Economic Development Council, Executive Director*

## Community Charrette Supporters

*The Ashland Community Charrette is deeply grateful for the support and generosity of the following individuals and business for their donations of funds and food to the event participants.*

**Bob's Sure-fine Market**

**Dollar and More Store**

**Meredith Village Savings Bank**

**Northway Bank**

**Samyn-D'Elia Architects**

**Sippican Partners**

**The Common Man**

**Plan NH is especially grateful for the support of these members:**



Charrette report printed by:



## WHO IS PLAN NH?

Plan NH is an association of professionals working in the built environment. The organization includes architects, planners, engineers, landscape architects, builders, historic preservationists, construction managers, as well as others who concern themselves with sustainable communities and buildings. Plan NH was established to create a forum for bringing together these different professional groups and to serve as a catalyst for spurring interest in participatory community development. Part of Plan NH's mission is to make a positive contribution to New Hampshire communities. One way in which Plan NH does this is by providing planning and design assistance to communities with a demonstrated commitment and need. It was for this reason that Plan NH accepted Ashland's application and selected the community as one of the charrette sites for the 2011-12 year.



## WHAT IS A CHARRETTE?

Simply stated, a Charrette is a brief, yet intense, brainstorming session in which much information and many ideas are brought together for the purpose of defining potential planning recommendations and possible design solutions for an identified need. The charrette is typically of a short duration. And most importantly, it involves the combined efforts of planning and design professionals, and/or others with related areas of expertise, with local residents, community representatives (or "stakeholders") to collect information needed to develop conclusions about how to address a challenge.

The broad range of experience and knowledge represented in a charrette results in general and overarching planning and design recommendations, rather than specific, "how to" construction directions. Most often the outcome of a charrette is described as a "vision": an expression of how things *might be* and the features, conditions, qualities and characteristics that would need to exist in order for it to come true. What is most unique about Plan NH's charrette process is the way it involves and engages the host community's residents. Their input is both essential and critical to the ultimate success of the charrette.

The charrette provides an overall framework within which final solutions can be developed. It sets a tone and provides a direction against which future decisions may be measured.





## WHY DID PLAN NH COME TO ASHLAND?

Plan NH's mission in Ashland was to work with the community's Downtown Revitalization Committee and Ashland citizens and other stakeholders to develop recommendations for the revitalization of Ashland's downtown, with particular emphasis placed upon the renewal of an area unofficially referred to as the "lower village area".

Key issues to be addressed included, but were not limited to:

- Traffic movements
- Pedestrian circulation
- Way-finding
- Safety
- Economic development
- Use of alternative energy sources (hydro)
- Historic preservation

## THE COMMUNITY CHARRETTE PROCESS

The community charrette process is described as follows:

- Identify the need or opportunity
- Collect information to understand the need or issue
- Evaluate and analyze the information
- Synthesize conclusions and recommendation for meeting the need and fulfilling the existing opportunity



## LISTENING SESSION

A key characteristic of the Plan NH charrette process is that the team has very little knowledge ahead of time about the challenge or the community. During listening sessions, questions are framed in a way to gather information that will be necessary for making relevant and good recommendations.

In Ashland, the team met first with town stakeholders: people who work/have businesses in the town, may be employees of the town, and/or are part of town committees. Later, the team met with two different groups of community members/other stakeholders.

Here is a summary of what we heard from the very first group:



### “What do you see looking at Ashland?”

1. Need for a greater variety of businesses
2. An effort needs to be made to market local arts and culture
3. Community/downtown priorities include:
  - Visual appearance of power lines
  - Traffic issues
  - Flowers
  - Façade improvements
  - More parking
4. Motivation is a key



### “What else do you see? OR see that you need?”

1. At the public library, Ashland needs:
  - Increased parking
  - Expanded facilities
  - Additional meeting space
  - Computer access
2. At the Mill:
  - Lots of space
  - No traffic
  - Loss of connection to community
  - Seems invisible
3. In terms of traffic circulation:
  - Confusing traffic patterns at corner and around town
  - Poor signage
  - Discussion of roundabout at Upper Main Street location, including turning movements and fire safety
  - Lack of any alternative routes around downtown
  - Traffic speeds
  - Pedestrian safety
  - Roadway geometries and sight distances
  - Space for bicyclists
  - Dealing with bureaucracy of state-owned roads in town
4. In downtown:
  - Parking: “more parking needed” – weekends especially
  - Parallel parking (on Main Street) is difficult
  - Need for more off-street parking
  - Need for more control regarding tenant parking: lack of community communication
  - Town population of 2076 has 360 rental units
  - 130 municipal spaces
  - No plan shows where parking spaces are located
5. Attract capital to town.
6. Commercial zoning issues.
7. Involvement of private sector in development of community vision.
8. Parking is biggest issue.
9. Opportunities at ball fields include:
  - Other uses for ball fields
  - Discussion of new concessions stand and public restrooms
  - Relocation of bandstand
  - Identification and development of a town common: “none in town – need for identity”
  - New plans for Memorial Park
10. Signage and way-finding improvements needed.
11. Future of State-owned land in Ashland in question.



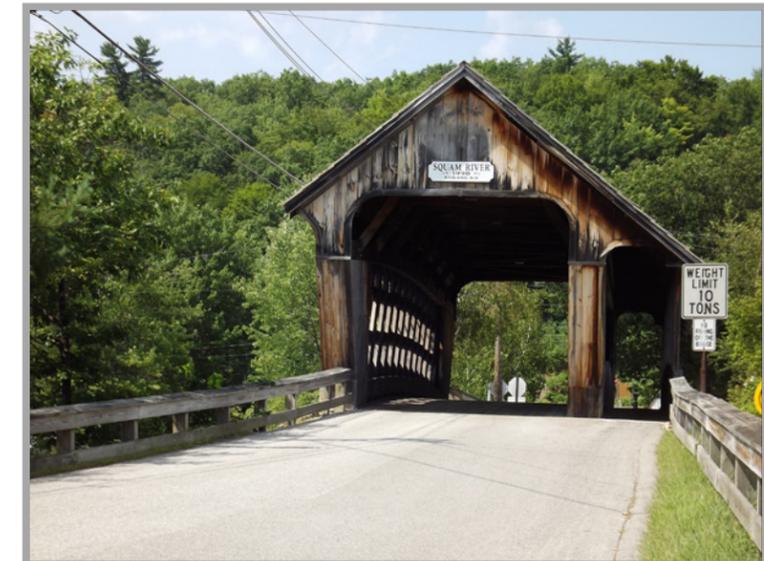
**“What is distinctive about Ashland?”**

1. The summer residents at Squam Lake: seasonal changes in demographics
2. Access to and from I-93
3. Historic Mill Town identity
4. River
5. Lake



**“Are there other issues?”**

1. Power lines on Main Street and in Village
2. Bike lanes stop outside of Village Center
3. Poor conditions of sidewalks, including alignment and construction
4. Need for new businesses, including: pharmacy, artisan supplies, internet café, medical services, public transportation and breakfast restaurant.
5. Make Town’s history more visible
6. Need for support of artist community (at Mill?)



Our listening sessions in the afternoon and evening with Ashland citizens and other stakeholders provided the following input:

### “What do you see when you look at Ashland?”

1. Friendly open and welcoming place
2. “Not going anywhere”
3. Great hometown rural character
4. Loss of industry
5. Center of state
6. Gateway to lakes
7. Strong community
8. Highway access
9. Rich town history: mill town
10. Nice neighborhoods
11. “Good bones”
12. Important geographical location
13. Compact center
14. “Little town on edge of golden ponds”
15. Small village town



### “What do you see as Ashland’s key features or strengths?”

1. History
2. Rivers
3. Lakes
4. Beautiful buildings
5. Geography
6. Mill town identity
7. Village center
8. Existing hydro capacity
9. Interstate access
10. Diverse population
11. Lots of opportunities
12. Marina
13. Common Man Restaurant
14. Public beach
15. Museum
16. July 4th fireworks
17. Small town identity
18. New Town website

### “What do you see as Ashland’s key weaknesses?”

1. Lack of communication between municipal departments
2. Town history is unknown or misunderstood
3. Lacks a reason to stop
4. Remoteness
5. Resistance to change
6. Need for business development
7. “Fear of success”
8. “New people: New visions”



### “What would you like to see?”

1. Bring in businesses
2. Renovate Mill buildings
3. Economic development
4. Parking
5. Improved traffic flow
6. Improved signage
7. Pharmacy
8. Daycare
9. Medical services
10. Light industry
11. Mill renovations with businesses as tenants
12. Cleanup litter
13. Cosmetic cleaning
14. Creating jobs
15. Increase water access
16. Incentives for businesses
17. Village theme
18. Regulatory enforcement of codes and ordinances
19. New library or expansion



**“What does the Plan NH team need to know while considering recommendations?”**

1. High tax rate
2. Resistance to change
3. Resistance to spending money
4. Desire for a sensitive treatment or re-purposing of existing historical buildings
5. Presence of an available work force
6. “We have really good fireworks on July 4th”: spectacular, easy to get to, highly visible, and privately funded.
7. Closeness to Plymouth State University; “Ashland is a suburb to Plymouth”
8. Dramatic loss of industrial jobs effected quality of community
9. Ashland seen as “bedroom community”
10. Need to rebuild community reputation
11. Recycling facility
12. New housing development
13. Small tax base
14. Out-of-town owners
15. 3 campgrounds
16. 2 farms
17. Beach
18. Strong positive reputation of town high school
19. Geo-caching at Mill
20. The entry or arrival to Ashland from I93 “sucks”

Additional information during the afternoon listening session added these more spontaneous responses and insights about Ashland:

1. Ashland has long been given the name, “Trash Land” by people in neighboring communities: a reputation as a poor town or “bad boy” town. “This has been true since our founding.”
2. A comment was made about a “fear of change” by or in the Town.  
The statement was made: “It could happen again.”  
The response to questions about what this meant resulted in two answers:
  - The loss of 2,000 jobs in 2002 was a traumatic blow to the town when the Mill closed and left.
  - The embezzlement of \$1 million by a municipal employee in 1998 became the source of resentment and distrust in the community.
3. The results have been:
  - A resistance to the “good ol’ boy” network in the community, and
  - A resistance to change.
4. Ashland’s Mill Town identity and historical roots gives it:
  - A sense of shared identity and mission,
  - A strong heritage with deep community ties of belonging and a common purpose, and
  - Unity based upon shared values.
5. Communication is key” was a repeated statement by residents.
6. In reference to the mill leaving and a general fear of success felt by the Town, one resident said, “Now that Daddy’s left, we (the town) don’t know what to do.”
7. Participating residents in the listening session recognized that this also contributes to their fear of ‘outsiders’ because there is the possibility that they may lose control and that “it could happen again”.

At the conclusion of the listening session the community members parted and the Plan NH Team gathered for a debriefing and retired for the night.



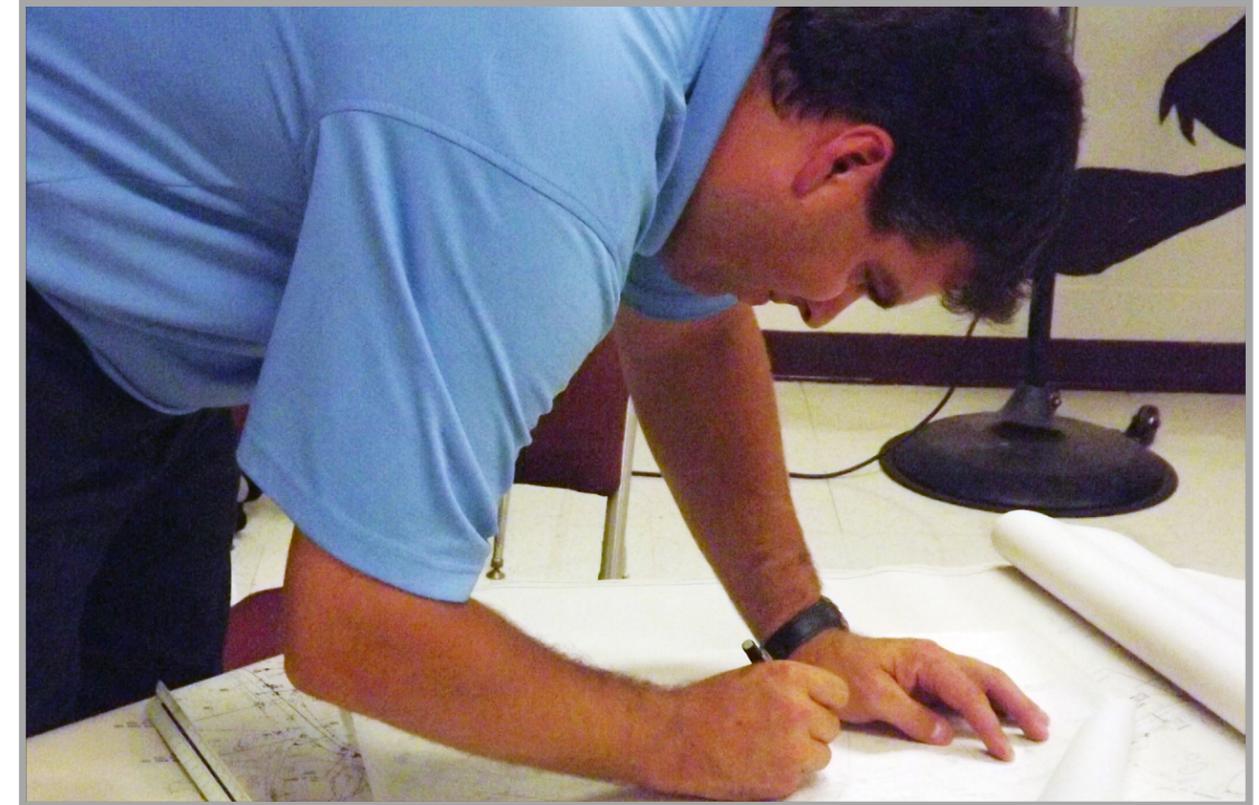
## SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY CHARRETTE FINDINGS

Ashland, at the geographical center of New Hampshire, is a unique residential and resort community that serves as a gateway center to the Squam Lakes Region with its entrance off Interstate 93. Ashland is a young town by state norms, and is small, with only 1976 residents. It is a place known as comfortable and easy to live in.

Ashland has a strong history related to water. It sits at the foot of Little Squam Lake, and the Squam River runs through town and the old mills. In the past, it has been a very vibrant community with the mill. Today, it is re-emerging as a place of renewed interest in hydro-power. There is positive opportunity for adaptive re-uses of the mill property.

Ashland has important traditions, like the 4th of July celebration which each year swells the town with some 20,000 people. The town is central in the Lakes Region and is a service center for a large number of both tourists and summer residents of the lakes. In addition, Ashland easily connects to Plymouth, a university town with an urban-like core and additional services.

Along with its strong river presence there is a quality Country Club, 3 campgrounds, 3 museums, a good marina, and a great Town beach on Little Squam Lake. As the center of the Village there is a large open-space park and playground with a gazebo which serves as the foremost common space for community gatherings and sports functions.

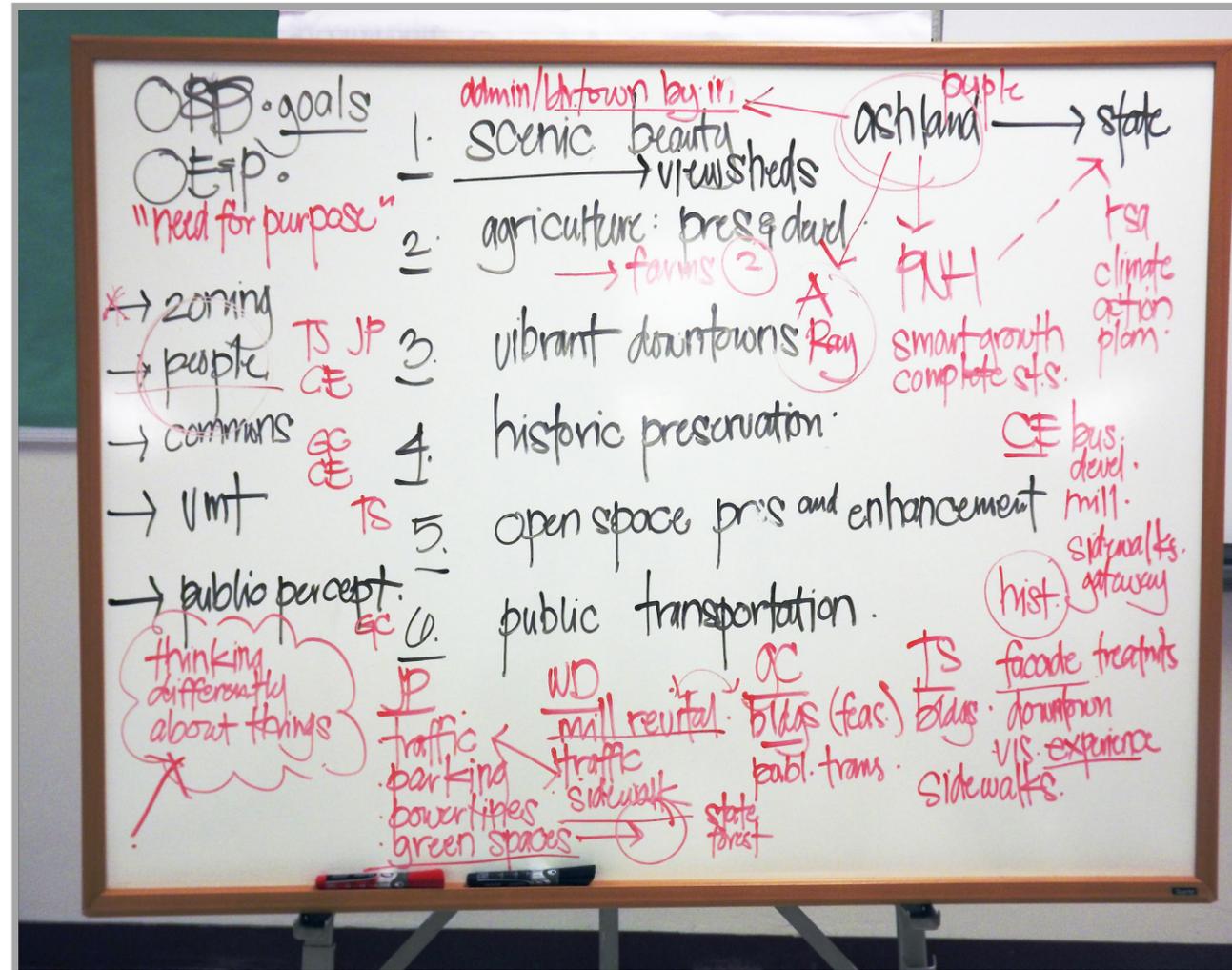


## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Between listening sessions, at the end of the day on Friday and again at the beginning of Saturday morning, the team discussed what was heard, what was discovered, what they were seeing. Through those discussions and subsequent brainstorming, they identified some important findings and subsequent recommendations, which were presented to townspeople on Saturday afternoon.

In summary, the team suggested:

1. Stronger connections within the community: among citizens, leadership, and services provided, as well as strengthening connections to the Office of State Planning. It is necessary to reach out to surrounding Towns for collaborative solutions to regional issues.
2. Working with NH DOT to identify, embrace and act upon ideas to visually improve the exits/entrances area to I-93.
3. Improving:
  - Streetscape as well as pedestrian access and safety
  - Parking: both definition and access
  - The design of the intersection at the Library/Park area
  - The ballfield and gazebo area to encourage more substantial use by residents
4. Proceed to designate the Lower Village as a Historic District. This could lead to tax advantages (or even reductions for both residents and business owners) as well as open grant opportunities. In addition, the town could look to the State for assistance for determining re-use feasibility for the Mill buildings.
5. Begin to budget planning funds for various studies, and budget funding to hire assistance in implementing the recommendations listed above.
6. The Town look at the Mill spaces as positive assets for the community. With 70,000 square feet of interior space, this part of town could offer new industries to grow while providing a new tax base. A preliminary review by the Team found that adaptive re-use IS possible, but will take time, funding, patience and perseverance.
7. Tell the Ashland story! And market Ashland as an entrance and resource for the region. As successes develop, celebrate together as a community as you continue to build your town as an important Lakes Region Gateway and service center.



## ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

### In general, the Team recommends:

1. That the community and its leadership identify and define the Charrette project area as a high priority for the Town of Ashland.
2. That Town leadership accepts and acts upon the project area as a priority.
3. That community resources are designated to this priority for action.
4. That all stakeholders (local, regional, and State) learn about the opportunities identified through the Charrette, prioritize goals and engage for success.
5. That these stakeholders take action on identified priorities, inform the community at large, procure funding and other resources necessary for going forward, identify timelines and processes, develop project plans including design, permitting, and construction.
6. That the community celebrate and share each successful step along the way.



### TARGETED ITEMS:

#### 1. Create Connections:

- With surrounding towns, with NH Office of Energy and Planning, with Regional Planning Commission;
- With residents, Town offices, and with Town services
- With Smart Growth principles and the Complete Streets program.

#### 2. At the Upper Main Street, Library and Memorial Park Intersection:

- Revise road alignments to enhance visibility and access to the Library
- Re-align the intersection for pedestrian and vehicular safety and to improve the views of Memorial Park and the water
- To create a riverwalk with proper and tasteful signage, lighting, monuments, and parking.

#### 3. Lower Main Street:

- Define a town "gateway" with new tree and shrub planting at the bridge abutments.
- Review and re-design the ball field, bandstand, gazebo, and agree on the future uses of this important open space in the community.
- Coordinate with local businesses, residents and property owners to install improved streetscape elements, including sidewalks for ease of access and safety as well as proper lighting, plantings and wayfinding signage.

#### 4. Ownership Opportunities: The team felt strongly that the Town continue to capitalize on its existing resources to restore a "sense of place". Significant contributors to this identity could be:

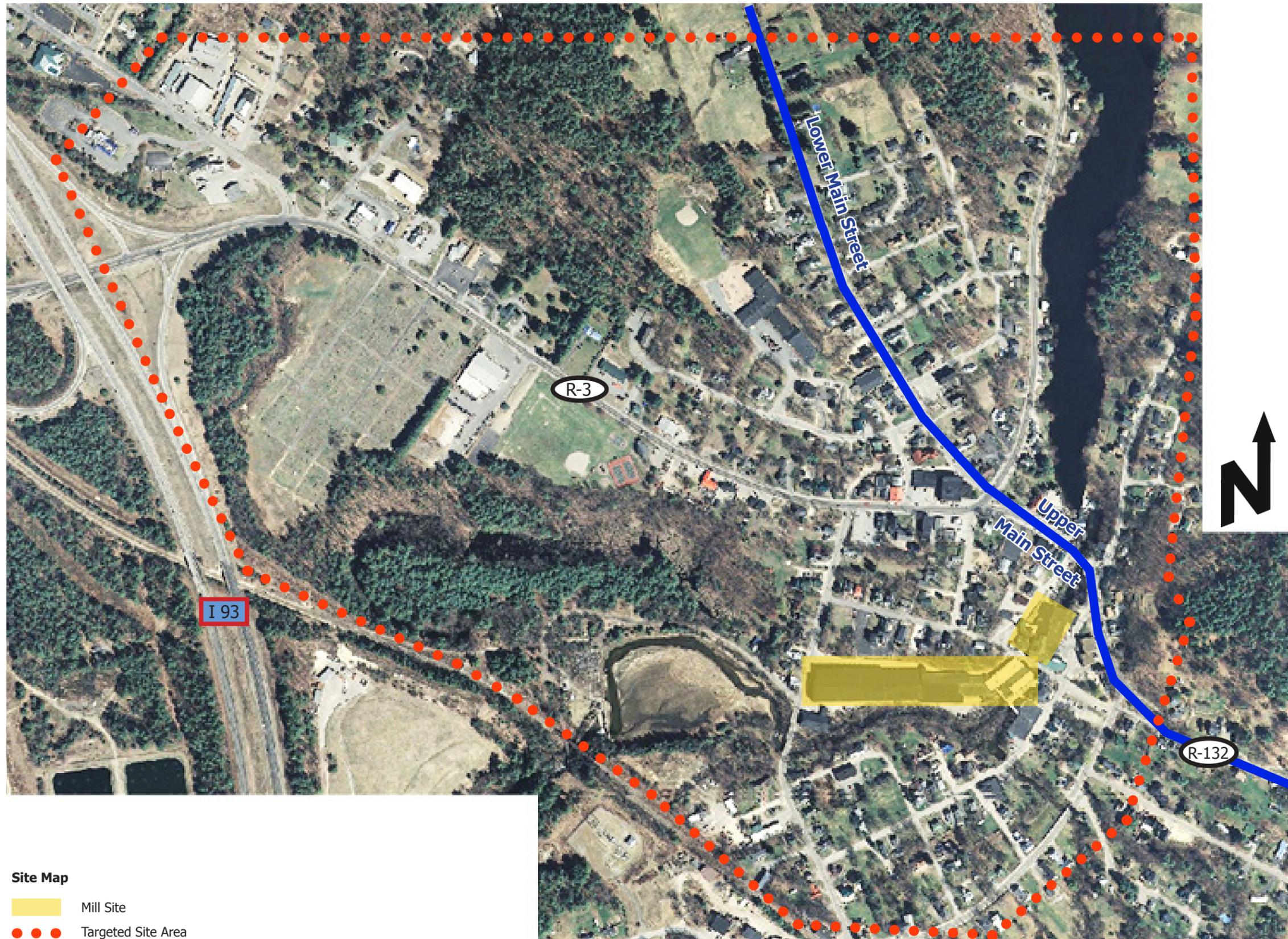
- An updated parking assessment
- Updated signage and wayfinding
- Telling the story of the community
- Creating even more events and celebrations
- A "virtual" Ashland tour.

#### 5. Mill Revitalization: The team recommends that a lead person be identified and chosen as a facilitator of the redevelopment process, which would include:

- A market feasibility study and test of demand for potential re-uses
- Designation of Ashland Village as an Historic District
- Creating a redevelopment Master Plan
- Developing and implementing a marketing campaign

#### 6. Making a Difference Together. The team believes that trust can continue to build among citizens, Town leadership and boards by collaborating on projects of common interest, such as:

- Improving the streetscape
- Reconfiguring the intersections
- Revitalizing the Park
- Enhancing Ashland's gateways
- Redeveloping the Mill
- Telling the Ashland Story



**Site Map**

-  Mill Site
-  Targeted Site Area

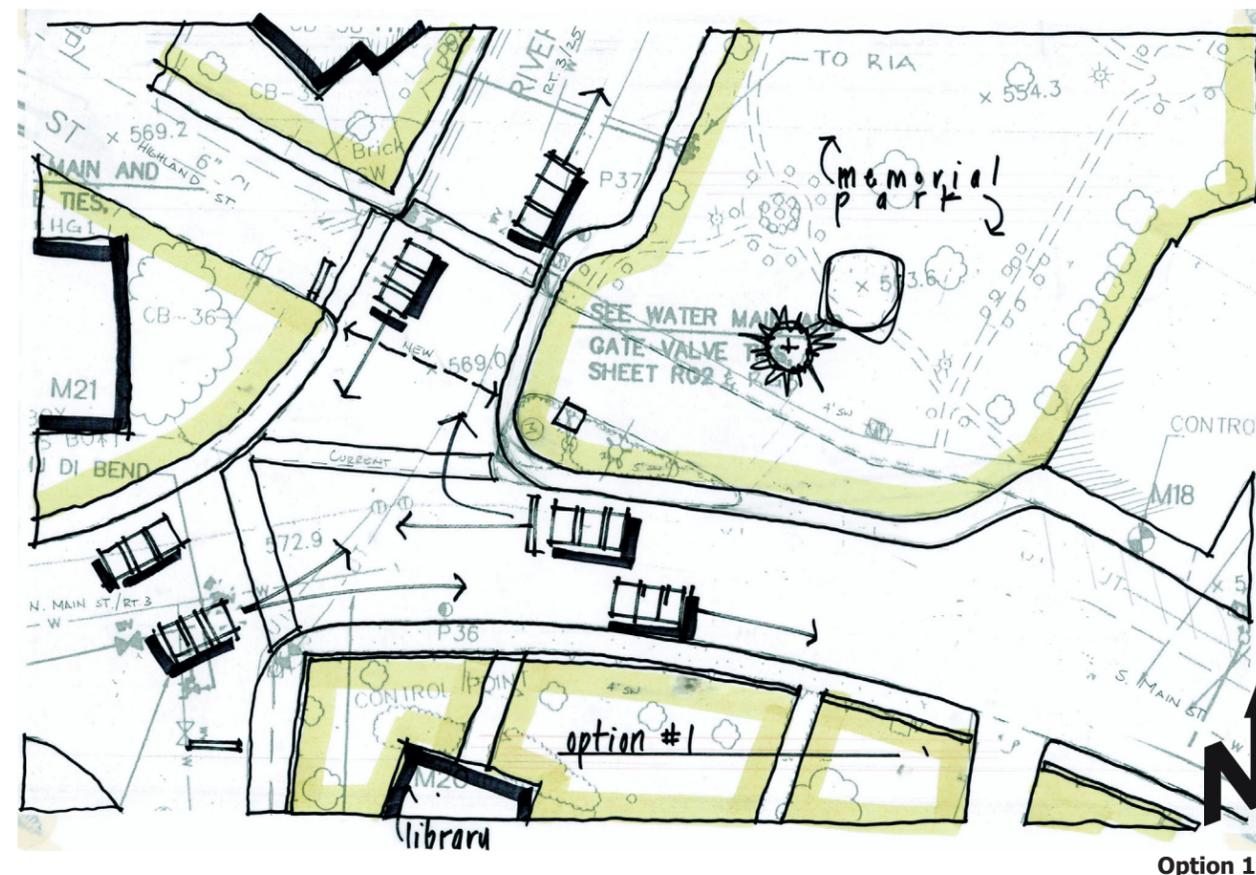
## Rt. 3 & Rt. 132 INTERSECTION

### Background:

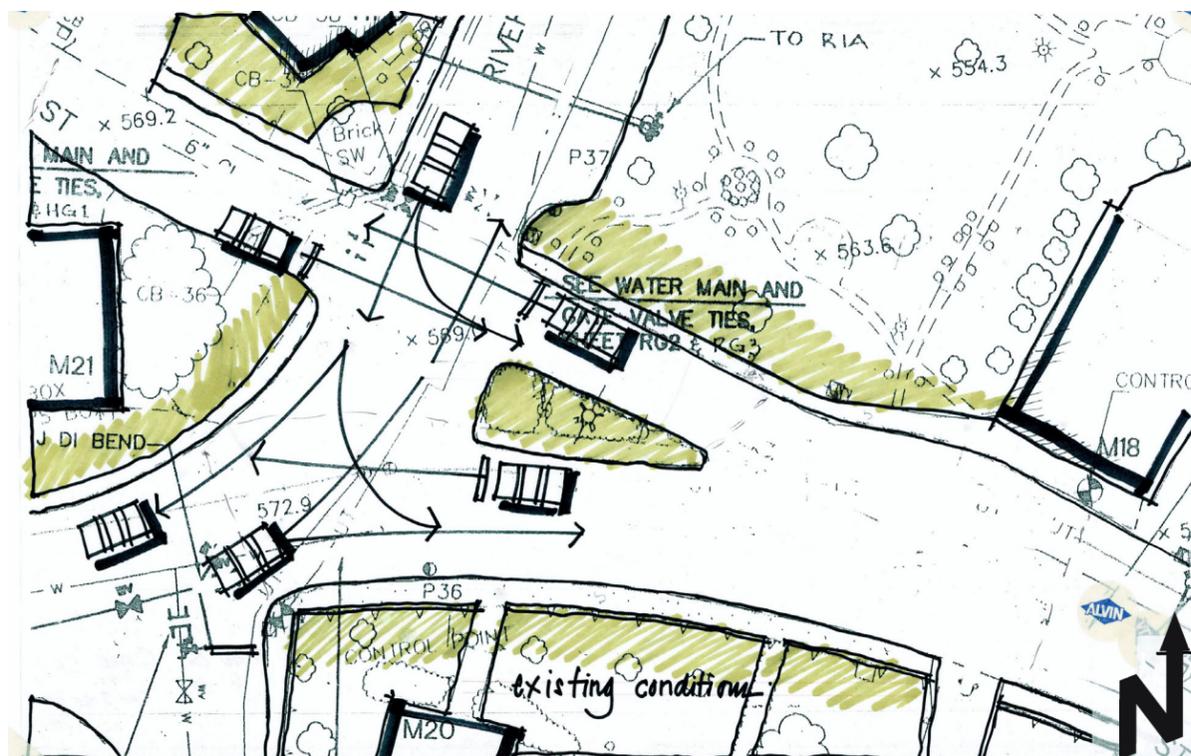
In the heart of Ashland's Historic Downtown exists the Rt. 3 (aka Rt. 25 & Main St.) and Rt. 132 (aka Depot St.) intersection which is generally recognized as the center of Town.

Rt. 3 is the main corridor through Ashland and conveys traffic from Exit 24 of Interstate 93 through Downtown and onto the Squam Lake area.

Rt. 132 enters the Town from the South and prior to Interstate 93 was the main access corridor to Ashland from the South. This intersection can be congested at times, particularly in the summer months, and the layout of the intersection is confusing and potentially hazardous. The Plan NH Team observed this intersection first hand during the walkthrough and recognized the need for improved traffic patterns and the opportunity for improving the image surrounding this intersection.



Option 1



Existing Conditions

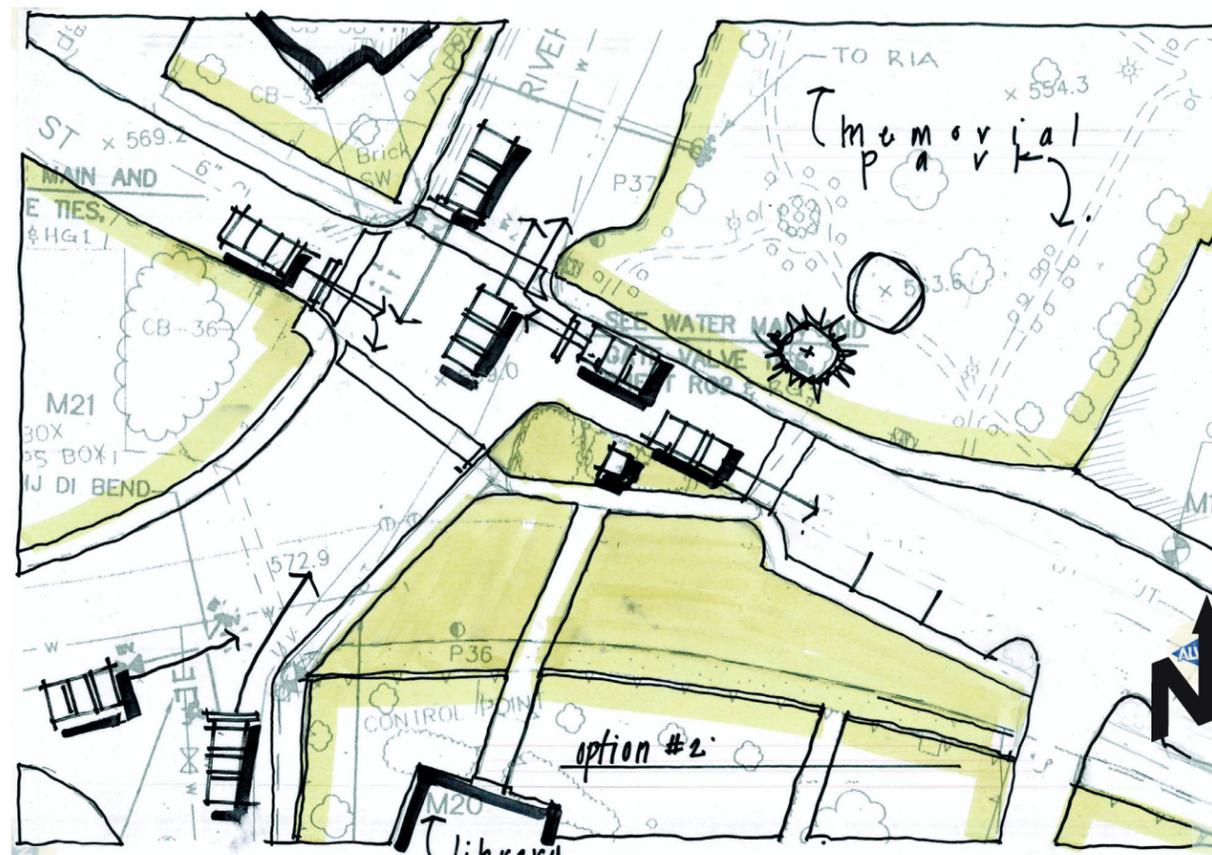
### Analysis

Route 3 (Rt. 3) is a State Highway which runs East-West through Ashland and is the primary corridor for traffic between I-93 and Squam Lake. As Rt. 3 enters the Downtown area of Ashland, there is a rise in grade cresting near the Rt. 132 intersection as well as a curve in the horizontal alignment. Within this same area of vertical and horizontal alignment changes, there are four intersections that add to the complexity of traffic patterns including:

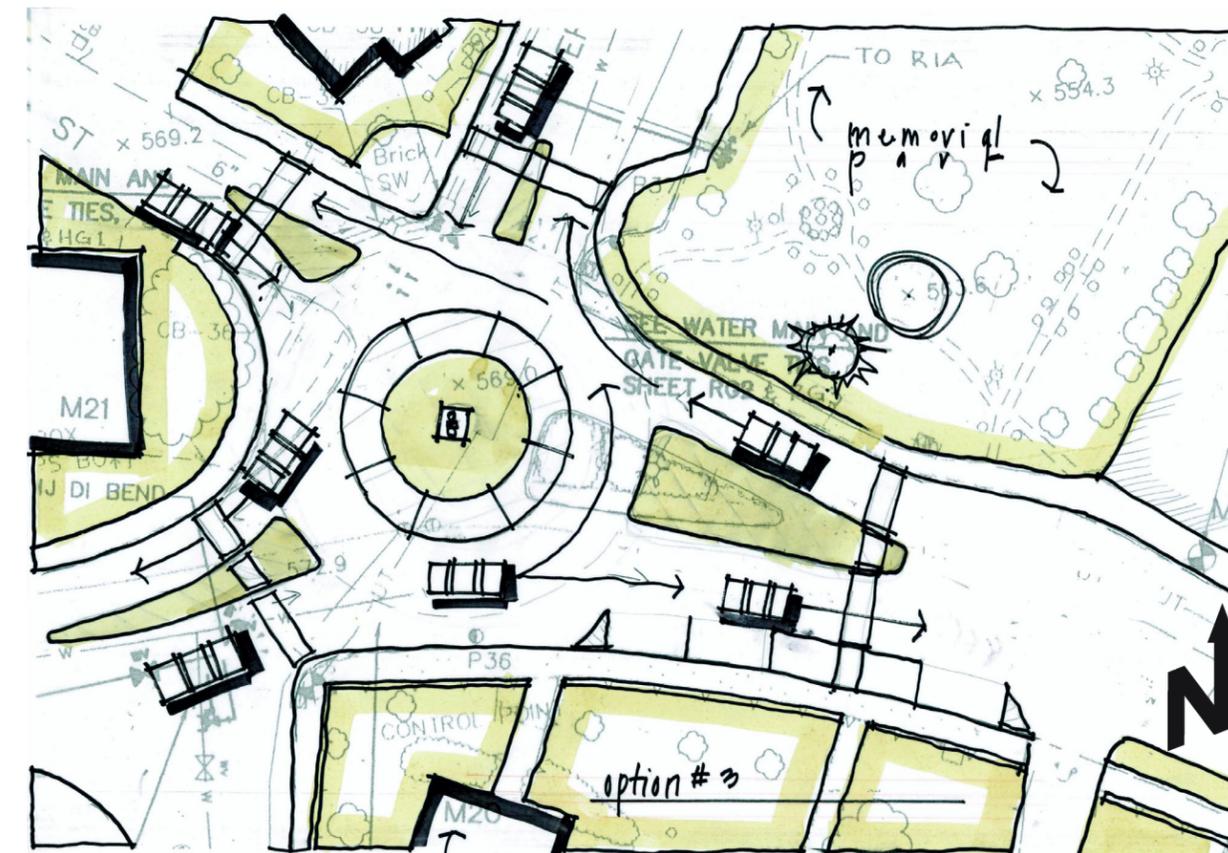
1. Rt. 132 – Rt. 132 intersects Rt. 3 from the South at a stop condition near the crest of the hill and near the midpoint of the curve in Rt. 3. A traffic control island exists at this intersection which allows vehicles to funnel to either the East or West side of the island depending on their intended destination. The island creates two intersections within close proximity to each other. Those wishing to access the Lower Village will use the Rt. 132 intersection as well.
  - Rt. 132 East Intersection – The East Intersection is directly opposite from Highland St. This intersection is primarily used by vehicles wishing to head East toward Squam Lakes when arriving in Ashland from the South
  - Rt. 132 West Intersection – The West Intersection is at the crest of hill and is primarily utilized by vehicles

- wishing to travel South or West. We anticipate this leg of the intersection to see more traffic than the East.
2. Highland St. – This street intersects Rt. 3 directly opposite the Rt. 132 East Intersection and conveys traffic from a sizeable residential neighborhood that also includes the Elementary School, Church and Town Offices.
3. Pleasant St. – This street intersects Rt. 3 west (toward I-93) from the Rt. 132 intersection. There is a busy gas station at the corner of Pleasant St. and Rt. 3 that contributes to the intersection confusion. Pleasant St. also provides access to the Lower Village and adjacent residential neighborhood.

These four (4) intersections with Rt. 3 are close to one another causing the potential for confusion in addition to the fact that sight distances are compromised due to the curve in alignment and vertical changes in grade at the hill. During summer months when visitor traffic to and from Squam Lake is heavy, it is understood that this intersection is congested and sometimes dangerous. The volume of traffic combined with the number of vehicle movements possible and the sub-standard sight distances makes this intersection a serious concern. The goal of our teams review was to identify options to mitigate the traffic safety concerns



Option 2



Option 3

## RECOMMENDATIONS

While reviewing the intersection near the Park and Library during the site walk, it was clear to the team that the potential for confusion and hazardous traffic movements existed primarily due to the number of intersections within close proximity to each other. Another observation clear to the team was that the traffic island at the Rt. 132 intersection seemed to be unnecessary and causing some of the confusion. The following options were identified to improve traffic patterns at this intersection with the following understanding:

- Rt. 3 maintains through access with no stop condition
- Highland St. and Pleasant St. intersections to be maintained

### Option 1:

This option includes eliminating the East intersection of Rt. 132 thereby limiting the Rt. 132 intersection into only 1 point of access. By eliminating the East intersection there is then the opportunity to incorporate the existing traffic control island and removed access into the adjacent Memorial Park. This would be an economical way to improve traffic safety while providing more green space in Memorial Park. In addition, the West Intersection of Rt. 132 is at the crest of the hill, providing the best sight distance of the two intersections. The disadvantage of this option is that the Highland St. intersection is offset and not directly opposite.

### Option 2:

This option includes eliminating the West intersection of Rt. 132 and incorporating the existing traffic island and removed access into the Library property. This would provide additional green space in front of the Library and could become the Town Common. The new green space could extend south from the intersection toward Mechanic St. While the East intersection does not provide the best sight distance it does have the advantage of being located opposite the Highland St. intersection which is desirable. As with Option #1, this would be an economical solution to improving traffic safety while providing additional green space opportunities in the Downtown.

### Option 3:

This option involves the construction of a round-about at the Rt. 132 intersection. Based on the teams review, it appears that a 100' diameter roundabout will work within the existing layout and constraints with very minor Right-of-Way impacts. Roundabouts provide safe, constant movement of traffic in all directions and have been successfully implemented in several NH communities to mitigate similar traffic concerns including nearby Plymouth, NH. Concerns noted for this option include the higher construction costs and future maintenance requirements.

Regardless of which option the Town wishes to pursue, coordination with NH Department of Transportation will be required as both Rt. 3 and Rt. 132 are State Maintained roads.

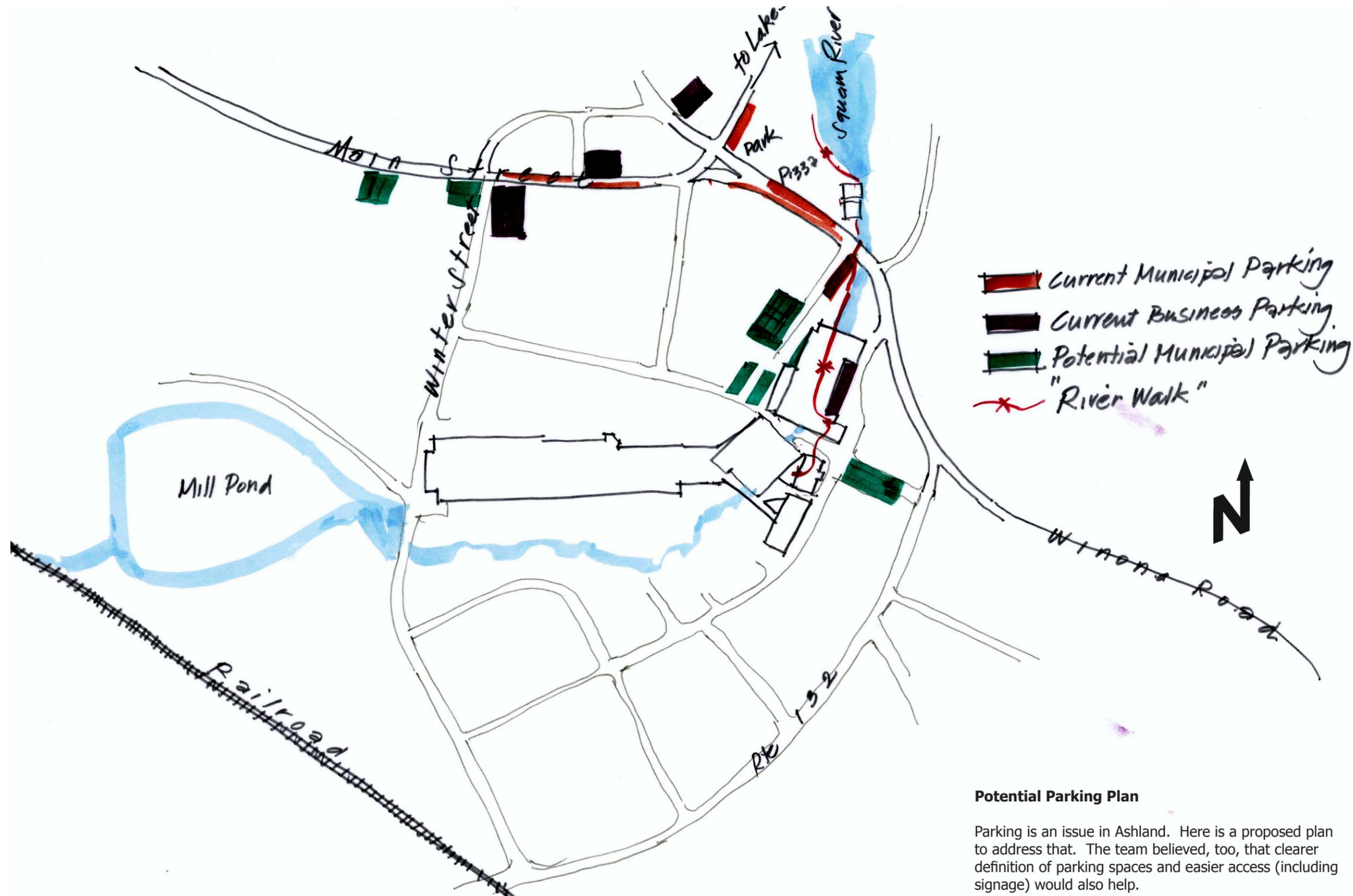
## CIVIL WAR MONUMENT

Currently this unique and large Civil War Monument is located at the intersection of Depot St. and Thompson Road. Although this monument is an impressive piece of work, the team noted a concern related to the location of the monument: Because the monument is located at a road intersection, it is unsafe to get up close and view due to the fact that traffic movements are all around the monument and there is no safe place for viewing.

The Team recommends that Town consider moving the monument from its current location to the new green space created in Options 1 & 2 noted above and possibly in the middle of the round-about noted in Option 3. Although pedestrian access is not recommended into the center of a roundabout, relocating the monument to the middle of the roundabout island would certainly provide a memorable landmark.

The Team believes that this monument would be better served and more appreciated if it were located closer to the Downtown area.





**Potential Parking Plan**

Parking is an issue in Ashland. Here is a proposed plan to address that. The team believed, too, that clearer definition of parking spaces and easier access (including signage) would also help.

## LOWER MAIN STREET

### Entering Ashland from Exit 24

Historically, Ashland was accessed via the road called Route 132, which passed through the town going northward past the Civil War monument, the old gristmill, and then on down Main Street past the Ashland Hotel and on to Plymouth. Old photos showed trees on both sides of the street with globe street lights on either side, with sidewalks. The town was sustained by a woolen mill located on the Squam River near the center of town as well as a paper mill further downriver. Today, Ashland benefits from tourism like most of northern NH, and the woolen mill and paper mill are gone.

The Team took a look at what people experienced when arriving by car at Exit 24 from I-93. This is the way most people arrive in town because Exit 24 is one of the three major access routes to the Lakes Region, and primarily Squam Lake. Before 1970, when I-93 was built, this roadway would have been the access from Ashland to Plymouth. At that time, the entrance to Ashland was by way of Route 132, which comes through Main Street from the other end of town, so the current access has been in place for about 40 years. Currently, there are several commercial entities one might find next to most Interstate off-ramps.

As one proceeds toward town from the Interstate off ramp toward what is designated as Main Street, there are two open areas formed by the off and on ramps to the Interstate. Looking left, one goes by a gas station/convenience store, Dunkin' Donuts, the Post Office, Noseworthy Real Estate, Northway Bank, Village Pizza, and Mr. Chuck's Auto Shop. On the right are Green Grove Cemetery, the town ball field, Buskey's Gas Station/Auto Shop, and an apartment building.

The best known and most used parts of this picture consist of the Post Office, the ball field, and Village Pizza, all because everyone goes to these locations sooner or later.

The ball field has soccer and softball fields that are typically used by the Ashland Elementary School, which is located within walking distance of the ball field. The most significant use of the ball field occurs once a year, on the 4th of July, when no less than 20,000 people come to Ashland to see the fireworks display. There is also a parade that day that runs the length of Main Street, where everyone has the opportunity to meet and hang out with people they have not had the time to do with lately, mostly friends and families.

### Proposed Revisions

The areas bounded by the Interstate ramps could be enhanced by vegetation including trees and low shrubs. This is the west end of Main Street, or Route 3, which has experienced the most changes in the last 40 years except for the cemetery and ball field. It was expressed by some town folk that there might be a need to provide a way of letting people know they have arrived in Ashland upon leaving the off ramp. A sign! Some way of letting people know they're being welcomed to Ashland. Also, they need to know when they are leaving Ashland. This idea would replicate a previous sign that spanned across Route 132 at the other end of town up until the 1970's.

There also appears to be a need for trees along the left side of the roadway. There are trees at the cemetery on the right side of the road, and along the ball field, but the commercial development of recent years would do well to plant trees and vegetation along that side of the road. There is too much asphalt, although there is a much-used sidewalk. Although trees create maintenance issues seasonally, they also create a sense of "human scale" which tends to have a calming effect on traffic. Slower is better. Another way to enhance the historic flavor of the town is through lighting that would be similar in style to the historic multiple globe fixtures on each light pole, at least on one side of the street.

Another item that would enhance the experience upon entering town and driving or walking along Main Street would be the relocation of utility poles away from Main Street. This has been done recently in Plymouth with great success and has generated new appreciation for the revitalized look of Main Street that has been the result of moving the power lines.

Between the ball field and the Freudenberg plant, there could be a line of trees separating the properties which would improve the ball field experience by providing a defined backdrop to the bandstand as well as the ball field itself, which is surrounded by trees on two sides now. This backdrop of new trees would give the bandstand a much-needed "defined place" for concerts and larger community gatherings or events. The present surroundings at the edge of the ball field next to the Freudenberg parking lot cause a lack of identity for the location of the bandstand.

We all know that the changes mentioned above take time. They require money. They require agreement that there is a problem and that solving the problem will improve the Ashland experience. The old saying "accentuate the positive...eliminate the negative" explains the benefit of the lessons history has taught us, that we should hold on to what is good and enhances people's life experiences, and that elimination of things that may be a result of modern technology, which might be good in one way, but may cause us to do without the good frame of mind that might be held a bit longer by the presence of some calming effects like some trees, human scale lighting, more vegetation, and less pavement.



Streetscape improvements plan

## Mill Renovation Action Recommendations



The Plan New Hampshire charrette team observed that the physical heart of Ashland village is an historic mill complex where textile and paper manufacturing had occurred from about 1840 to 2002. Centered around the prominent falls of the Squam River, which had provided power for older mills since the 1770s, this small manufacturing village, originally part of the farming community of Holderness, split off in 1868 and incorporated as its own township. Since that time, Ashland's fortunes have largely risen and fallen on the changing fortunes of the mill that employed hundreds of its townspeople.

Today, the former L.W. Packard mill complex is largely vacant and underutilized. Some of its structures have become havens for pigeon colonies or vandalism targets for local kids. Still, several of its buildings, such as the Scribner Mill (c.1880) with its slate-shingled mansard roof, are architecturally striking. The consensus expressed by those community members who participated in the charrette was that the mill still anchored the village and should be revitalized in new ways to serve the community again. Toward that goal, the charrette team developed a five-step strategy for moving forward as follows:

1. Establish a nonprofit, corporation to lead and manage the revitalization of the former L.W. Packard Mill complex. This will be a multi-year process that will require ongoing leadership and initiative to breathe life and utility back to these historic brick buildings, once the economic heart of the community. It is suggested that the organization be overseen by a volunteer board of directors and a paid executive director, likely part-time during the initial start-up years. The principal role of this management team will be to carry out the four following strategic steps, the first two of which should ideally be accomplished concurrently. The secondary, but equally important role will be to serve as fundraising and marketing entity for the effort.
2. Commission a professional market feasibility study for the future of the complex; the purpose of which is to explore what present and future economic (and social) trends in the Ashland market area can provide either existing or future market demand for the buildings. Stress that all potential markets should be tested, including residential functions, such as independent retirement living, and hospitality functions, such as a hotel or restaurant, which might tap into the regional Squam Lake resort market.
3. Designate the mill, perhaps in conjunction with a larger area incorporating the former mill-worker neighborhoods surrounding the complex, as an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. Such designation would make all income-producing historic properties within the district, such as the mill buildings and any stores, shops or apartment buildings within, eligible for the 20% federal tax credit for rehabilitation. This investment tax credit can be a very attractive incentive to both developers and private

property owners for the restoration of their historic properties following rehab guidelines provided by the US Secretary of the Interior's office.

4. Commission a redevelopment master plan for the mill complex and any key adjoining commercial properties. This next step assumes, however, that the market feasibility study has demonstrated that real (or very potential) new demand would exist for the re-invented space in a village setting. If so, the master plan would serve as a general blueprint for the likely mixed-use future of the complex. The plan should include architect's renderings and conceptual site plans, illustrating specific redevelopment scenarios that could realistically be accomplished with the physical constraints and opportunities at hand. Other key elements of the plan would include order-of-magnitude costs and general timeframes for specific development scenarios. Other required data would include cash-flow projections demonstrating the minimum price points required (cost vs. revenue) to make a project feasible. Finally, where higher development risk exists, public-sector funding sources should be introduced as appropriate to help offset risk.
5. Launch a marketing campaign to promote the vision of the redevelopment vision to both the development community and the general public. Take the campaign on the road with a portable presentation package combining architect's renderings, conceptual plans, and an attractive prospectus detailing the findings of the market study, the tested redevelopment scenarios meeting the existing or potential demand, and the projected costs and revenue streams.





5 Acres of Floor Space at Mill Buildings

