



**Town of North Hampton,
New Hampshire**
Community Design Charrette
June 14 and 15, 2013



PLAN NH
Visioning for Sustainable Communities



vibrant villages
new hampshire



North Hampton Community Design Charrette Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks go to those individuals who donated their professional and personal time to make this charrette a success.
Also, many thanks to the citizens, businesses and town officials who shared their time, services, thoughts and knowledge with us.

The Plan NH Charrette Team

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The North Hampton Team

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

Application: Mr. Paul Apple, Town Manager and the Selectmen of the Town of North Hampton, NH

Logistics: The Town of North Hampton

Meals: The Town of North Hampton

Also:

Board of Selectmen

North Hampton, Police Department

North Hampton Fire Department

North Hampton Library and Library Committee

Citizens of North Hampton, NH

Plan NH is grateful for the special support of these members:



Plan NH Comes to North Hampton, NH

June 14 and 15, 2013

Who is Plan NH?

Plan New Hampshire, The Foundation for Shaping the Built Environment (Plan NH), is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization formed in 1989.

Plan NH has a *Vision* of a New Hampshire that is vibrant and healthy for its people, its economies and the environment.

Plan NH's *role, or Mission*, in achieving that Vision is to encourage good planning and design and development because, we believe, that *what* we build, and *where* and *how* we build it has a significant impact on that vibrancy and health.

Plan NH *champions principles and ideas* that balance building projects - and this would include anything built in the public realm, such as buildings, roads, bridges, memorials, public sculpture - with

- The needs of people - where they live, how they get about, what services are necessary, what they value
- maintaining the “sense of place” of our towns, cities and villages that make them unique –
 - including preserving historic assets, open spaces, agriculture and farming
- protecting our air, water, flora and fauna

Among our signature programs is the *design charrette*, an exercise that brings professionals from our membership together with our communities to explore design ideas, usually around a town center or other significant neighborhood. Through recommendations made, Plan NH can demonstrate the role and importance of the principles and ideas noted above in concrete, real examples.

What is a *Design Charrette*?

Simply stated, a Charrette is a brief, yet intense, brainstorming session in which information and many ideas are brought together for the purpose of defining potential planning recommendations and possible design solutions for an identified need. For Plan NH, this is usually related to a town center or other significant neighborhood in a community.

The charrette is typically of a short duration – for Plan NH, eight hours on a Friday for listening and then another eight hours the next day for brainstorming, crafting recommended solutions, and presenting thoughts to the community.

The Charrette Process:

- Identify the need or opportunity
- Collect information from the community itself to understand more deeply and broadly the situation
- Analyze and evaluate what is seen and heard
- Develop conclusions and recommendation for meeting the need or addressing the challenge

Most importantly, the process engages planning and design professionals (and/or others with related areas of expertise) in direct dialog and conversation with local residents and community representatives (or *stakeholders*) to collect information needed in order to develop good and relevant recommendations about how to address a particular challenge. Plan NH sees this part of the process as a period of *discovery*: discovering who the community is, what they value, what they really want, dream and hope for. This community input is essential and critical to the value of the outcomes.

The results of a Plan NH charrette are general and overarching planning and design *recommendations*, rather than specific, “how to” construction directions. Plan NH does not dictate, but suggests. Most often, the outcome of a Plan NH charrette is described as a “vision”: an expression of how things *might be*, based on what the team saw and heard and learned through the discovery process.



Why did Plan NH come to North Hampton?

In early 2013, the town of North Hampton submitted an application for a Plan NH Community Design Charrette. The town was seeking assistance in planning the development of the governing center “campus”, to include expansion of the existing governmental, safety and community facilities at the center of town. Plan’s initial take on the application was that it was too narrowly focused on master-planning. However, with the advent of the potential community feature resulting from transferring the ownership of the B&M Railroad bed to the State, along with a need to consider pedestrian pathways at a larger scale by including the school site into the study area, the application was deemed acceptable for consideration.

Upon formal consideration, the application met three essential criteria:

1. The completed application identified a specific area of need and interest within the community, and the community was eager and ready to address it
2. The application’s description of existing conditions in the community demonstrated that there was organized and committed community support already present in North Hampton.
3. North Hampton was recognized as a community that takes initiative and was ready and willing to follow through.

Formal approval was confirmed following a meeting between Plan NH representatives and Paul Apple, Town Manager for North Hampton.

The Charrette Process & Overview

North Hampton Town Officials and residents gathered with the Plan NH Charrette team on Friday, June 14, 2013 in the Town Hall to discuss the details of the town’s proposal. Design professionals - all volunteering their time—on the team included three architects, two landscape architects, an engineer, a planner, an historical consultant and a volunteer facilitator. The critical piece that the Charrette Team lacked, which only the local residents could provide, was the intimate knowledge of the Town and the vision for its future.

Local residents are the experts on the community — what makes sense, what history has brought forth, what will pass at the local board meetings — the design team relies on resident input and knowledge to develop viable suggestions and proposals.

The initial application by North Hampton requested that the Charrette address critical planning and phasing for the development of the Town Center “campus”. The initial take by Plan NH was that the application was too narrowly focused for a charrette to be meaningful. However, two key community features - a potential rail to trail project resulting from the State receiving title to the former B&M Railroad bed and a strong potential connection between the school and the Town Center, gave the application more credence. Plan NH accepted the application with the understanding that the charrette area should be expanded to include the area between the Town Center and the School.

Plan New Hampshire arrived on June 14, eager to listen, learn and work. Importantly, the team arrived with no preconceived notions.

An introductory meeting was held with key community stakeholders, town and elected officials, and community leaders to inform the Plan NH team about the significant issues facing the study area.

North Hampton is a geographically and demographically diverse community located in the seacoast of New Hampshire. It sits between Rye to the north and Hampton to the south. Three north south arteries effectively organize the community about three general characteristics of development. Interstate 95 bypasses North Hampton—there is no direct exit in the town.

After the introductory meeting, the team took a walking tour of the project area, observing the physical layout and setting of the “campus”, its traffic, parking, land uses and buildings. Additionally, the group divided into two and toured the police and fire stations.

Two public “listening sessions” were held on Friday afternoon and evening. The purpose of these sessions was to explain the challenge that the town had set out for the charrette team and to gather input from the community regarding issues and concerns that they have about the project area, with emphasis on the Town Center. The public comments are presented on page 8 of this report serve as an important foundation for the concepts and designs that the charrette team completed on Saturday. The charrette team’s observations and findings are included on page 9. The remainder of the report presents the team’s detailed recommendations. The report concludes with sections on implementation and resources that may be useful to the Town in achieving their long term objectives.

Saturday was “roll up the sleevesday”, when the charrette team reconvened, recapped, and prepared recommendations and supporting graphics for presentation to the Community in the afternoon.

As indicated in the stakeholder meeting, significant themes of traffic, parking, pedestrian and bicycle safety emerged.

North Hampton's Proposal and Challenge to Plan NH

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

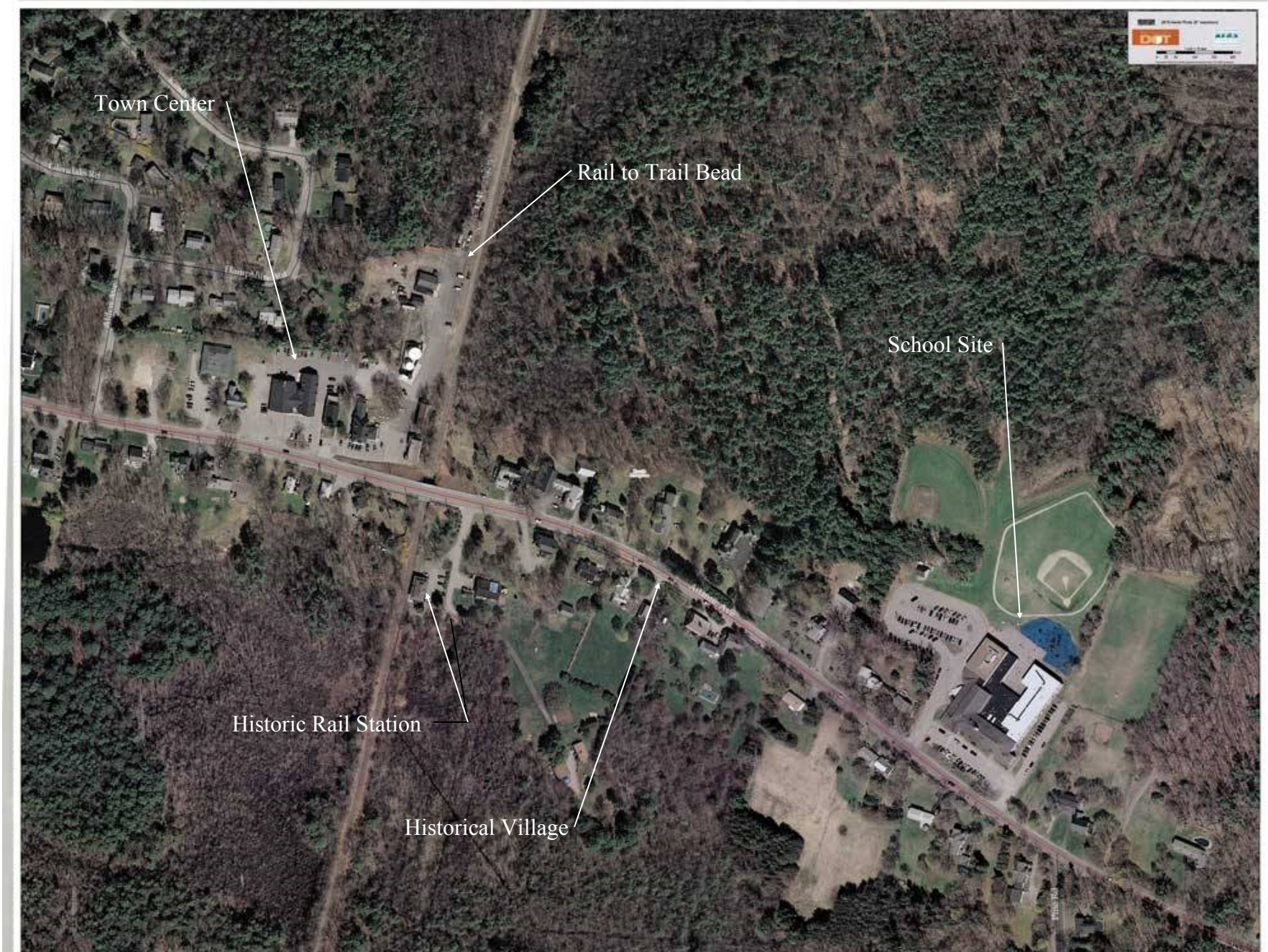
- Maintain Rural New England Character/Heritage
- Strengthen the Sense Of Community
- “Yankee Thrift”

ISSUES

- Condition of Existing Buildings/Site
- Programmatic Issues
- Public Access, Vehicular and Pedestrian

“We can begin by doing things at the local level, like planting community gardens or looking out for our neighbors. That is how change takes place in living systems, not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously.”

Grace Lee Boggs



The study area encompasses a broad area, extending from a vacant lot bordered by Alden Road to the west of the town center to the school and community fields to the east, with a primary focus centered on the historic town center, the center of which is highlighted here and which includes a mix of public and private buildings. The public buildings (Library, Town Offices and Safety Center) are all in need of updating and/or replacement. The Historic Town Hall is a primary feature and was recently listed on the National Register.

What the Town Residents Told Us

Two public listening sessions were held during the afternoon and evening of June 14.
The purpose of the sessions was for the public to share their ideas with the charrette team
about what they see and what they would like to see in the study area.

Residents were also asked to let the Plan NH team know what may not be known by the team about the study area and the community.

What Do You See?

- A Mixed bag of Un-unified Architecture
- Ignored Library
- Unwelcoming and Eclectic Collection of Decay
- A Town That Can't make Up Its Mind (YET)
- A Quaint New England Town, With Great People To Be Sustained for the Future
- Neighborhoods are Close By
- Safety Issues. Lack of Access to Complex
- Asphalt—No Delineation Between Buildings
- Traffic
- Hidden Town Offices
- No Access to Historic Society
- Lack of Parking

What Do You Want To See?

- Coherent, Inviting, Welcoming Center for the Community & Town Activities Consistent With Rural New England Seacoast Character and Heritage
- Library—A Focal point, New England Appearance on Homestead Property
- A Place for People of All Ages. A True Town Center. Respectful of Old Character and Tax Base.
- A Plan for Everything (Including the Library) With Good Maintainability and Cost.
- Police/Fire Center Not in the Middle of Everything
- Community—Municipal Complex/Neighborhood Should be Blended/Work Together
- Safe Pathways Between School and Municipal Center
- Spaces That Fit Now—Future Expansion Later
- Open Spaces—Green for Gatherings and Events
- Proper Landscaping
- Get Rid of RR Bridge
- Save RR Bridge
- State of NH Involvement With Rte 111/Atlantic Avenue

What Does Plan NH Need to Know?

- There Has Been a Lot of Work on This Before
- There are Gender Issues with Existing Facilities
- Make Sure Plan is Well Thought Out, Presented and Justified
- There is Currently No Public Access to Rail/Trail
- The Town band Stand is at Centennial Hall Because there is no Room at the Town Complex
- There are Lots of Wetlands in Town.

Charrette Team Observations and Recommendations

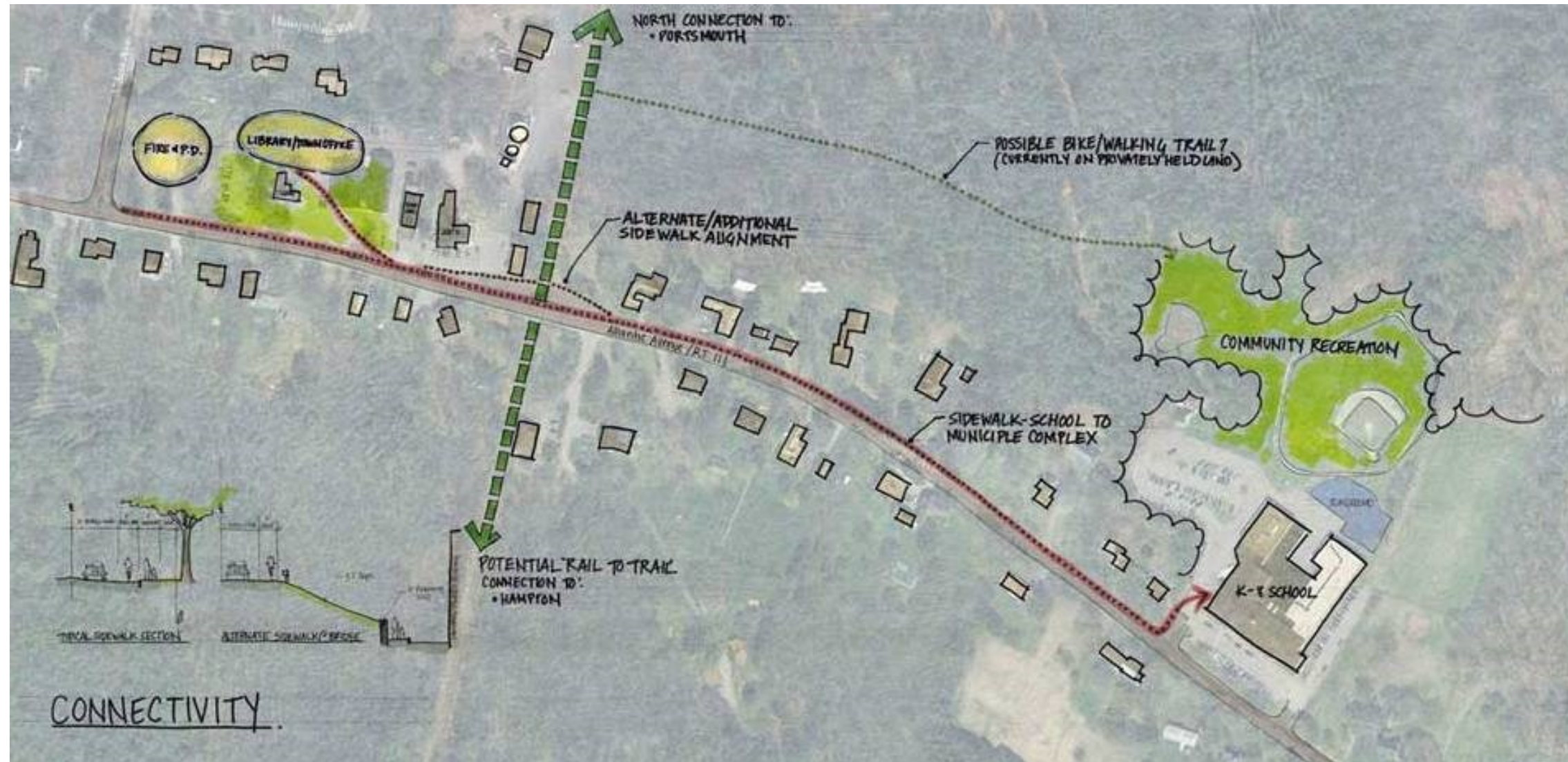
We heard the opinions and concerns of the residents. We walked, studied, and observed the physical character and working dynamics of the study area and observed the conditions that need to be addressed with a comprehensive proposal. While the entire study area was considered, the team chose to focus on a series of “vignette” solutions. Each recommendation can be treated as an incremental step toward realizing the overall vision of the community. Each step taken is forward progress and each step will build momentum for continued improvement.

What We Saw or Heard

Recommendations

<i>Overall View of the Study Area:</i>	Based on site walks, citizen and Town Official input, the Charrette Team has developed recommendations for the view of the study area: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>The Town Center</u>—Organize needed improvements to municipal facilities to enhance public space and prominence. Segregate safety facility to eliminate vehicular/pedestrian conflict.○ <u>The Potential Rail Trail</u>— Provide public access to potential significant community feature. Recognize historical significance of elements along the rail corridor.○ <u>Pedestrian Connections</u>— Recognize the benefit of pedestrian connections between the school, recreation areas, Rail/Trail, governmental and Library facilities○ <u>Open Recreation</u>, Not in the study area, yet proximate to this area is the current Recreation Area associated with the school site.
<i>1. Pedestrian Pathways: Establish safe pedestrian and bike way(s) connecting the school, rail/trail and town center.</i>	Celebrate the village between the bookends of the study area. Consider pathways both with and without the railroad bridge to enhance pedestrian and vehicular safety. Work with NHDOT on options for enhancement.
<i>2. Town Center: Current mix of public and private buildings, all with high activity. Town Office are hidden. Library and Safety Complex are outdated and less than ideal. Historic Town Hall and Town Library buildings are significant resources to be celebrated and retained in the final plan.</i>	Plan for proper facility organization and phasing to promote ease of access, pedestrian safety and high functionality.
<i>3. Parking: Organize site parking to provide for diversity of needs for different functions on the site. Provide clear pathways to and within the Town Center site to maximize efficiency.</i>	Arrange site to promote green space at Atlantic Avenue to set off public buildings, provide open space while still providing adequate parking on site. Site organization and segregating safety complex are key elements of site enhancement.

Pedestrian Pathways



One of the more significant, perhaps unrecognized, features of the study area is the potential energy that could better link - in a safe manner - the significant public attributes contained within this space: the school, the library, the potential rail trail, the community fields and the municipal center.

Between the Town Center site and the school is a lovely tree-lined village of unique residences, evocative of the New England "rural" charm sought by the community of North Hampton. We believe that a safe walkway between the school, potential rail trail and the Town Government Center and Library would be well utilized and enhance the sense of community.

The illustration to the left identifies some of the features which would provide that safe pathway.

The Town Center



There are significant needs issues for each of the three primary elements of the public buildings on the site:

- The Library is outdated, under-sized and physically inadequate from both a public use standpoint and maintainability.
- The Safety Complex is located (in a manner to create) where there are significant pedestrian and vehicular conflict; it is outdated and too small to house the equipment and personnel that the Town needs.
- The Town Offices are well hidden from the street, and Town Office functions are split between two buildings, contrary to the philosophy of transparency in Government.

Creating a Town Center



Public Library and Governmental Buildings are set in a park-like environment with parking areas located to rear of site against the buffer to the residential neighborhood.

A new safety Building is located on the former Homestead Site.

Atlantic Avenue westbound access has extended west to improve site lines. Pedestrian access connects to rail trail.

Proposed phasing of improvements would call for construction of the new safety building first, to allow for the staging and construction of a new Library/Town Office Complex.

Key Planning Enhancements



A crucial aspect of achieving pedestrian safety is to remove the Safety Building from the center of pedestrian pathways. There are simply too many downsides to the current location—the most significant of which are emergency vehicles, which by necessity need to traverse the pedestrian desire line without notice, create an enormous safety hazard.

By locating the Safety Building on the Homestead site, the Library, Governmental and other publicly - accessed buildings can stand on their own, providing green space and connectivity to the school site and rail/trail.

Design Recommendations



This notional view of a new Library and Town Government Center shows the new Safety Complex in the foreground, while clustering the Government and Library buildings on a separate lot to the east. Buildings have been sited to create an open park, providing much-needed public space and which allows for prominence of the historic library and town hall.

Design Recommendations



An aerial view from the east features a new town green giving prominence to both historic buildings and provides for parking and access to Town Government and the Library from the north side of the lot.

Concluding Thoughts

The Town Center of North Hampton enjoys a number of significant attributes that are seen in vibrant villages. It has a healthy mix of residential, community and commercial uses along the strong corridor of Atlantic Avenue.

As one of the primary East/West axes, however, pedestrian and vehicular conflicts are substantial and require better organization and segregation to create a safe and desirable pathway within the study area, which in turn will connect the key elements of the town center.

Notwithstanding those pressures, the essential character and scale of the village remain. The new buildings have been carefully arranged to treat the village center as the cultural center of the community.

The Town Center should be celebrated through enhanced green space, controlled vehicle access, and organization to enhance a park-like center for the town offices and Library, while separating the safety complex from the center of the site.

In the end, it will be up to the people of North Hampton to make this vision a reality. It may seem daunting at first; but it is very possible. We encourage the community to approach these recommendations on an incremental basis, and to celebrate each step taken. Positive momentum will come and citizen engagement will continue to grow.



Thank you for letting us be part of your community!

And finally

Tools for Implementation

There is a wealth of sources of funding and expertise to explore. When applying for grants and foundation monies, many of the funders require plans or a detailed program to be in place as an assurance that projects will be completed in order to qualify for funds. This charrette plan is an important document that can be used to advance Plaistow's plans and funding.

Expertise:

NH Office of Energy and Planning (OEP)
NH Office of Travel & Tourism
Division of Economic Development (within DRED)
NH Department of Environmental Services (DES)
NH Division of Historical Resources
NH Council on the Arts
U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)
NH Preservation Alliance
NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT)
Rockingham Regional Planning Commission
USDA Rural Development

Funding

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
Economic Development Administration
NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT)
Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive (RSA 79-E)
Conservation License Plate Funds
Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP)
Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA)
Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
Special Assessment Districts
Town Trust Funds

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