

EXETER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Exeter Community Design Charrette

August 7-8, 2026

PLAN NH
Visioning *for* Sustainable Communities

Exeter Community Design Charrette Acknowledgements

Thank you to the individuals who donated their time, energy, and expertise for this charrette. Extra thanks to all the community members who shared their insights about Exeter.

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Additional Thank Yous!

The Exeter Inn

Exeter Brewing Company

Me and Ollie's Bakery and Cafe

Jersey Mike's







Who is Plan NH?

Plan New Hampshire (Plan NH) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization formed in 1989. Plan NH envisions a New Hampshire that is vibrant and healthy for its people, its economy, and its environment. To advance that vision, our mission is to foster excellence in the planning, design, and development of New Hampshire's built environment. We believe that what we build, where we build, and how we build has a significant impact on the health and vibrancy of our communities.

Plan NH champions principles and ideas that balance **the built environment** – including buildings, roads, bridges, and civic spaces – with:

- **The natural environment** – preserving natural resources, protecting ecosystems, and respecting the landscape.
- **The social environment** – creating inclusive, accessible places that foster connection, belonging, and quality of life.
- **The cultural environment** – celebrating local character, history, heritage, and community identity.
- **The economic environment** – supporting economic vitality, thoughtful development, and long-term community sustainability.

Among our signature programs is the Community Design Charrette Program, a participatory process that brings professionals from our membership together with New Hampshire communities to explore design ideas and envision possibilities for important places, often village centers, neighborhoods, or other significant community assets.

Through the recommendations developed during these charrettes, Plan NH demonstrates how thoughtful planning and design principles can translate into tangible ideas and real-world opportunities for communities across New Hampshire.







What is a Charrette?

A charrette is a short, intensive, collaborative process that brings people together to explore ideas and develop potential solutions to a community's planning and design challenges. For Plan NH, this typically involves a village center, significant neighborhood, or other important community asset.

Plan NH's Community Design Charrettes take place over the course of two days: eight hours on a Friday for seeing the project area and listening to community members, and then another eight hours the next day for brainstorming, crafting recommended solutions, and presenting to the community.

The process brings planning and design professionals together in direct dialogue with one another and with local community members. These conversations help the team understand the community, identify its challenges and opportunities, and develop thoughtful, relevant recommendations.

Plan NH views this as a period of discovery: learning who a community is, what its residents value, what makes it unique, and what they envision for its future. Community input is essential to this process and fundamental to the value of its outcomes.

The results of a Plan NH Charrette are broad planning and design recommendations rather than detailed plans or specific directives. Plan NH does not dictate what a community should do, but rather offers ideas, possibilities, and a starting point for further conversation and action. The outcome is often best described as *a vision* - an expression of what a place could become, informed by what the team saw, heard, and learned.



Hampton, NH - October 2025



Nashua, NH - May 2025



Manchester, NH - April 2025



Newmarket, NH - October 2024

Charrettes combine professional expertise with local knowledge to develop community-driven recommendations, creating a foundation for future plans and action.

Why Did Plan NH Come to Exeter?

In 2010, Plan NH was invited to Exeter to begin the process of improving the area around the Exeter Train Station, particularly focused on vehicular and pedestrian safety, connectivity, infrastructure improvements, and connectivity. In January 2025, the Economic Development Department for the Town of Exeter submitted another application to Plan NH to look at the next stage of development in the area surrounding the Exeter Train Station including:

1. **Improved train station infrastructure and rider comfort** so commuters and visitors can rely on local amenities and feel confident exploring WestEx.

2. **Expanded diverse and affordable housing opportunities** to support the needs of changing demographics within the Town.

3. **Responsible economic growth** to ensure improvements to the area support local businesses and business owners.

4. **Preservation of Exeter's historic and cultural character** while aligning design and development recommendations with the community's vision.



Project Boundaries: Exeter Train Station Area, Lincoln Street between Main Street and Front Street.

Site Tour Observations







On the morning of Friday, August 7, the charrette team toured several locations around the Exeter Train Station and surrounding WestEx area to better understand the area's character, existing conditions, and opportunities.

- **Lincoln Street School:** The team began at Lincoln Street School, observing the character of Lincoln Street and the adjacent parking lot, which had previously been considered as a potential resource for train station parking.
- **Handkerchief Factory:** The team visited the Handkerchief Factory site, an important historic landmark that will likely see redevelopment in the near future as ownership changes.
- **Gerry's, the Train Station, and Railroad Corridor:** The team visited Gerry's and the new train station before walking along the tracks behind Burnham Laundromat. Observations included several local businesses, design changes influenced by the previous charrette, and new public art murals. Limited amenities available to train riders and opportunities to improve the surrounding area were noted.
- **Local Businesses and Exeter Cemetery:** Continuing through the project area, the team passed local businesses, including Dodge's Agway, before reaching Exeter Cemetery. This portion of the tour highlighted opportunities for improved pedestrian safety, roadway markings, and wayfinding.
- **Front Street:** The team returned to Lincoln Street School via Front Street, observing the road's role as a major corridor through the area and opportunities for traffic calming to improve pedestrian safety and better reflect the neighborhood's character.

Plan NH would like to thank our wonderful tour guides for our engaging and informative tour of Exeter!

What Exeter Told Plan NH

What Plan NH Heard from Community Leaders

After the tour of the area, the team met with community leaders, including town administrators, elected officials, local business owners, property owners, representatives from the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, and other key stakeholders. The team learned about the challenges and opportunities from their perspectives as those who work in and serve the Town of Exeter on a daily basis. The discussion points heard from community leaders are outlined as follows:

Train Station and Connectivity

- Making the Train Station area feel connected to the rest of Exeter is a priority, helping residents and visitors navigate the community.
- The station could become a gateway for Exeter, but visitors currently arrive with few indicators of where to go or what the area has to offer.
- A lack of defined, efficient pathways leads many people to take less safe routes for more direct travel.
- Train users need amenities such as indoor waiting areas and restrooms. The lack of amenities makes the station less welcoming and harder to market.
- Reuse or redevelopment of existing spaces around the station could create opportunities to provide for these amenities.

Mixed-Use Opportunities

- The Mixed-Use Neighborhood Development (MUND) designation was recently established to encourage affordable housing and commercial development outside of Downtown while preserving the area's local character.
- For residents and employees that cannot afford to live in the area, more affordable housing through mixed-use may be a solution.

Parking and Traffic

- Parking needs to be better managed to prevent train station users from negatively affecting local businesses.
- Traffic calming to reduce speeds and prevent crashes is needed, particularly along Main St., Lincoln St., Front St., and Epping St.
- Crossings near train tracks need more visibility, both for vehicles and pedestrians.







What Exeter Residents Told Plan NH

Two public listening sessions were held during the afternoon and evening of Friday, August 7, providing opportunities for community members to share their comments, ideas, and perspectives on the challenges and opportunities throughout the project area. Plan NH's process encouraged participation from everyone in attendance, creating space for a range of voices and ideas. Residents shared their thoughts on how to build upon the many wonderful assets already found throughout Exeter. The community's vibrancy and enthusiasm were evident to the charrette team, and the team welcomed the opportunity to explore possibilities for the area's future together.

Throughout these input sessions, community members discussed (1) community strengths, (2) concerns and challenges, and (3) desired improvements. Common themes emerged from these conversations and helped shape an overall vision for the area.

Overall Vision:

- Create amenities that support the train station area and surrounding local businesses, such as parking, a welcome center, and other rider services.
- Improve connectivity between WestEx and Downtown, providing clear, safe, and accessible routes for residents and visitors.
- Preserve WestEx's history and character while exploring opportunities expand housing affordability.







What Exeter Residents Told Plan NH

(Continued)



Current Conditions

- Lack of connectivity and wayfinding from the train station to downtown, creating unsafe walking paths by the tracks.
- Lack of train station amenities and not enough parking.
- Areas of poor traffic circulation, high speed driving, and unsafe areas for pedestrians, especially near tracks.
- A unique character that is different from downtown and should be embraced while still creating connections between other parts of town.





What Exeter Residents Told Plan NH

(Continued)

Desired Improvements

Infrastructure to Support Train Station:

- More amentities for the station, including heat, restrooms, live train information, shelter, and lighting.
- Shuttle service or other transportation connections to reach downtown.
- Parking availability that accommodates both train users and local business customers.

Pedestrian and Vehicle Safety Improvements:

- Safer pathway, sidewalks, and crossings that create more direct routes through WestEx to the downtown.
- Increased visibility in areas along tracks and traffic calming measures to reduce harmful crashes.
- Protected bike lanes and/or bike share lanes to promote alternative modes of transportation.

Coherent and Blended Development:

- Develop affordable housing that is compatible with the current look and feel of WestEx.
- Incorporate mixed-use development that supports local businesses (and artisans!) and serves community needs.





Recommendations

Drawing on insights gathered during the walking tour and stakeholder and community listening sessions, the Plan NH Charrette Team developed a series of customized recommendations to address the challenges and opportunities within the project area. The team presented its recommendations in person to the community on Saturday, August 8, and they are included in greater detail throughout this report.

The recommendations below represent potential strategies for advancing the community's vision. Each topic area was developed and presented individually, with additional details and supporting ideas provided on the following pages.

1. Train Station and Welcome Center

2. Railroad Avenue Redevelopment

3. Connections and Wayfinding

4. Traffic Calming and Parking

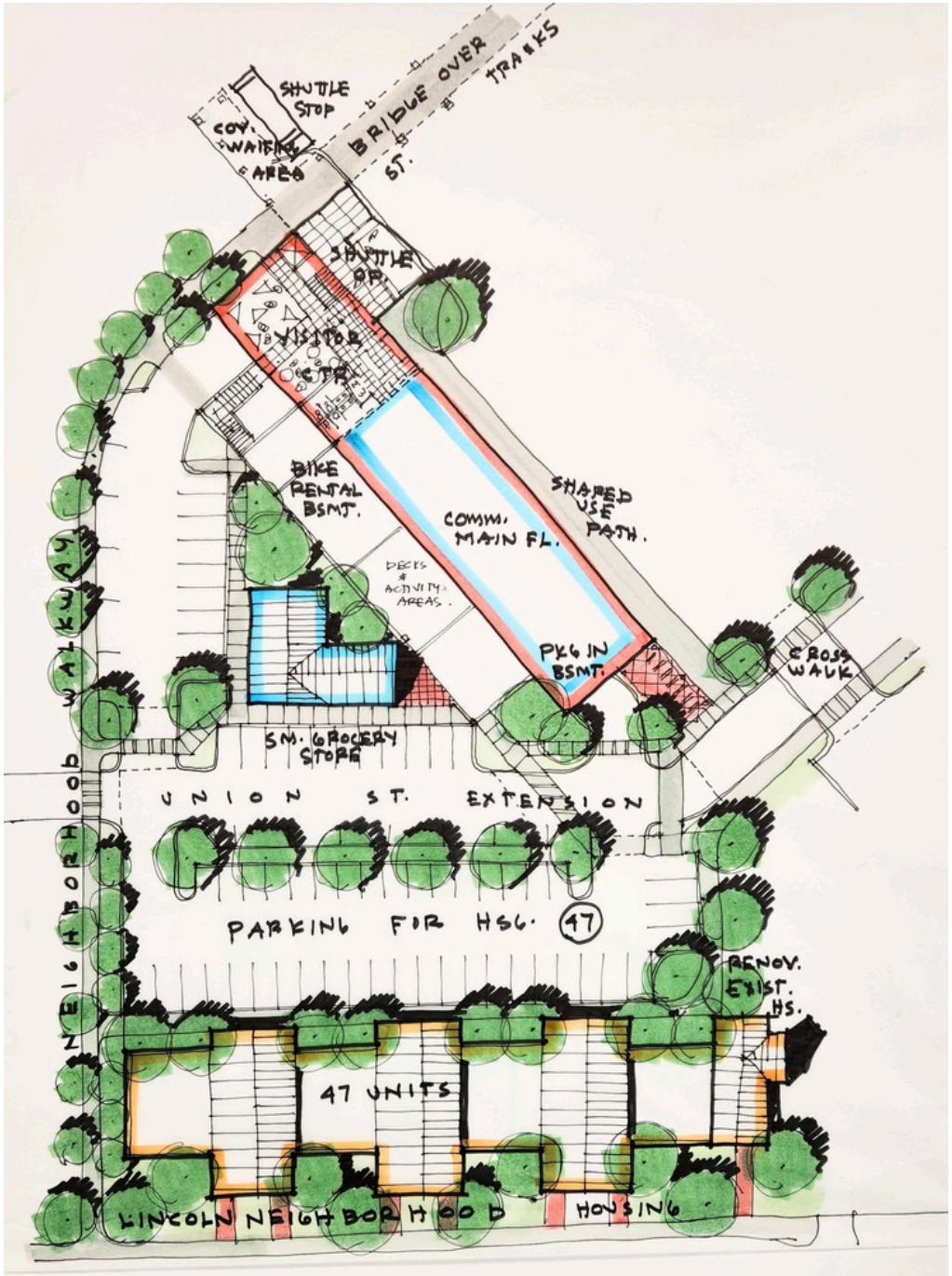
5. Housing Opportunities and Concepts

6. WestEx Welcome Center and Funding





Train Station and Welcome Center



Visitor Center Concept Located on the Handkerchief Site

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the charrette process was the community's desire for a more complete train station and welcome center. Currently, the Exeter Train Station consists of an unsheltered platform adjacent to the parking lot, with little to no amenities for commuters or visitors, such as public restrooms or an indoor, heated waiting area during the winter months.

The Handkerchief Factory site presents an opportunity to address these needs while creating a welcoming gateway to WestEx. As envisioned by the charrette team, repurposing this site could reconnect the station to the rest of Exeter, both visually through design that complements the surrounding neighborhood, and functionally by introducing uses that respond to community needs such as providing space for small businesses, housing, and improved transportation connections including crosswalks and a pedestrian bridge.

Additional ideas shared during the public input sessions included bicycle rentals, a coffee shop, a small grocery store, an indoor waiting area, a Chamber of Commerce office, community meeting space, and a shuttle connecting visitors to downtown.

Additional renderings of the proposed Welcome Center and surrounding features are included on the following pages.

Train Station and Welcome Center

Multi-Family Housing

Combining these services and activities with housing would take advantage with Exeter's Mixed-Use Neighborhood District (MUND). As part of a long-term vision, housing in this area could also be used to transition the existing industrial uses in this area to neighborhood residential characteristics. Additionally, the space could be used to expand existing artist studios and provide incubator spaces for start-ups.

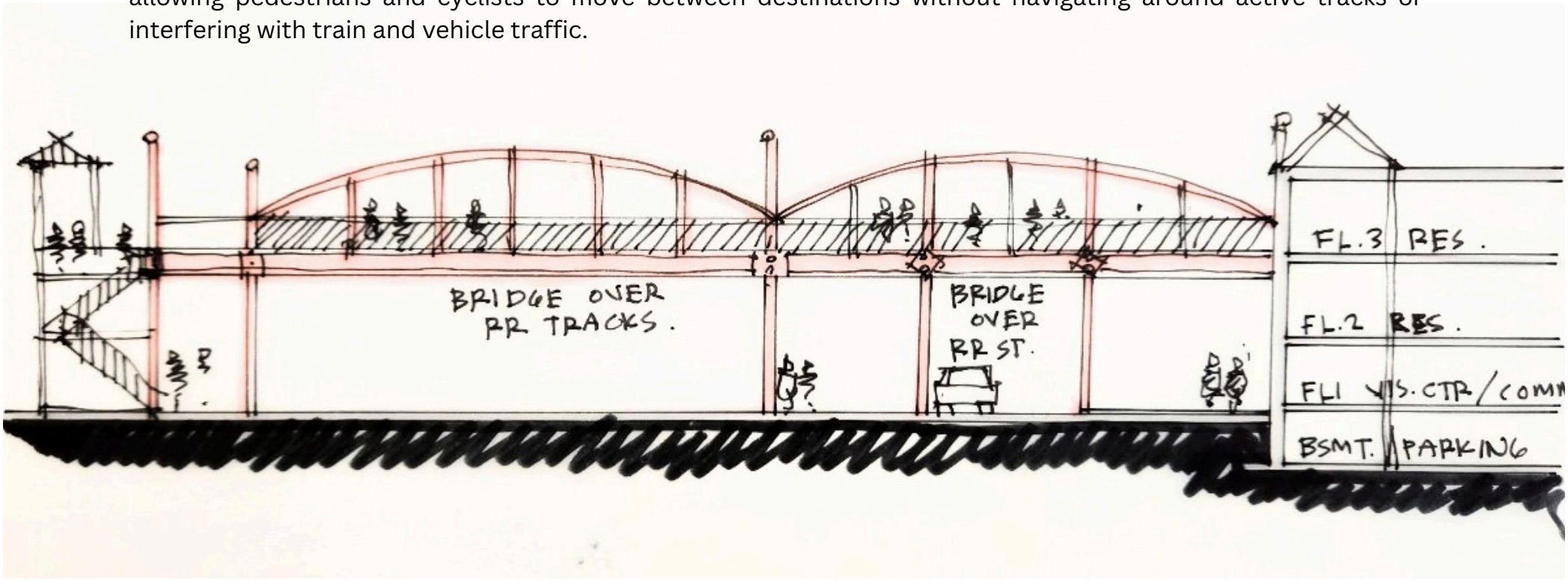


Train Station and Welcome Center

Pedestrian Bridge Concept

Many residents described WestEx as feeling “disjointed,” highlighting safety concerns associated with pedestrians taking informal shortcuts across or around the railroad tracks to reach their destinations. The tracks create a significant barrier to connectivity within the neighborhood, limiting opportunities for safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian travel between the train station and surrounding areas.

The charrette team envisioned an elevated pedestrian bridge with elevator access as one potential solution. Integrated into the neighboring buildings, the bridge could provide a safe, accessible crossing over the railroad, allowing pedestrians and cyclists to move between destinations without navigating around active tracks or interfering with train and vehicle traffic.



Train Station and Welcome Center

"The Other Side Of The Tracks"

The charrette team saw this as an opportunity to reimagine these large, light industrial parcels for new housing and some retail development. The adjacency of these parcels also lends itself well to establishing a stronger connection across the railroad tracks to the existing train station, improving access and connectivity throughout WestEx.

There are existing industrial buildings that could be demolished, while keeping the more active, and historically significant ones. The Historic "Rubber" Factory would be repurposed and could be restored through an adaptive reuse effort, potentially involving Historic Tax Credits. The team envisioned this asset being transformed for the relocated artist lofts, rotating galleries and potential start-up spaces for fledgling businesses.



Shown above: Transition between existing conditions and potential redesign of "The Other Side of the Tracks". This includes new parking areas, relocation of artist lofts, and new residential units.

Railroad Avenue Redevelopment

Intersection Redesign

First, the team looked at traffic calming measures at the existing five-way intersection of Railroad Ave and Columbus Ave, where they meet Winter Street. The existing intersection includes a triangular island and monument. Closing off one leg of Railroad Ave and enforcing a stop condition would discourage traffic from using it as a cut-through, creating a safer intersection and reclaiming additional green space around the monument. Any improvements to this intersection should preserve and protect the monument.

Residents expressed concern about the lack of sidewalks along Railroad Avenue, which creates challenges for safe pedestrian travel. The charrette team envisioned adding sidewalks and street trees, along with positioning proposed buildings closer to the edge of the right-of-way. Together, these improvements could create a more defined and pedestrian-friendly streetscape, improve safety, and help calm traffic along the corridor.



Railroad Avenue Redevelopment

Retail Space and Housing Opportunities

Redeveloping the Railroad Ave parcel could provide much-needed parking, housing, and retail space. The project should preserve established, viable neighborhood businesses while preserving structures that hold historic significance or have been upgraded over the years.

This parcel presents an opportunity to add approximately 7,000 square feet of retail space for small retail businesses, anchoring the neighborhood on the south and strengthening the commercial uses that exist along Front Street. The existing artists' studios could be moved to the upper floors of the historic mill along the railroad tracks, while the first-floor space could become home to startup business. A three-story addition on the north side of that building could create shared elevators and stairs while adding 12 live work studios.

The northern third of the parcel, adjacent to the railroad tracks, presents an opportunity for a looped parking area organized around a central green space. This layout would create a visual connection between Winter Street and the railroad corridor while providing approximately 70 public parking spaces for visitors. The parking area could also incorporate a pocket park, creating a welcoming public space and strengthening connections to downtown Exeter. The green space next to the tracks offers a strategic location for a future elevated pedestrian bridge due to its proximity and common elevation with the existing train platform.

Redevelopment of the Railroad Ave parcel would also provide needed affordable and entry level housing. The upper two floors of the 7,000 square foot retail space could provide an additional 16 studio apartments for emerging professionals or independent senior living.

Keeping with the scale and architecture of the surrounding Exeter neighborhoods, townhomes constructed along the street could yield approximately 18 two-bedroom units. Parking for these units would be at the rear of the building.



Connections and Wayfinding

The Ten-Minute Walk to Downtown

Throughout the public input sessions, community members consistently expressed difficulty navigating the project area. Disconnected pedestrian routes and a lack of clear signage make it challenging to find connections to other parts of town and move easily between destinations. While a comprehensive assessment of all connectivity and wayfinding challenges was beyond the scope of the charrette, the team focused on one commonly traveled route to illustrate potential improvements: **the ten-minute walk from the train station to downtown Exeter**.

The goal for this exercise was to make the entrance to WestEx and the walk into Exeter intuitive and memorable. Charrette team members walked the local area and found various highlights along the route between the train station and downtown that could be used as both landmarks and a way to communicate the character of the area to visitors. The opportunity is a two-way wayfinding system: Station → Downtown and Downtown → Station.

- The Ladd-Gilman House/American Independence Center is approximately a 10-minute walk from the Exeter train station.
- The Chamber of Commerce/Downtown Gazebo Area is approximately a 16-minute walk from the train station when using Lincoln Street and Front Street.
- At the Chamber of Commerce/Gazebo Area, there is currently no directional signage identifying how to return to the train station.
- Visitors arriving by train likewise need clear and continuous guidance from the train platform, along Lincoln Street and to downtown.
- The route can also introduce Exeter's historic buildings, Lincoln Street businesses, and riverfront along the way.



Shown above: Downtown Exeter

Connections and Wayfinding

Creating a gateway map and incorporating 'breadcrumbs' (signs and landmarks) to follow throughout the area ensures that visitors can orient themselves and feel welcome to explore, encouraging both economic development and an appreciation for the local character and history of the area. **Wayfinding is transportation infrastructure, historic interpretation and economic development in one system.**

How can all of these solutions be implemented? The charrette team has broken the process down into four key parts:

1. ROUTE AUDIT
Walk the route; confirm 10- and 16-minute benchmarks; identify decision points, barriers, and historic stories.

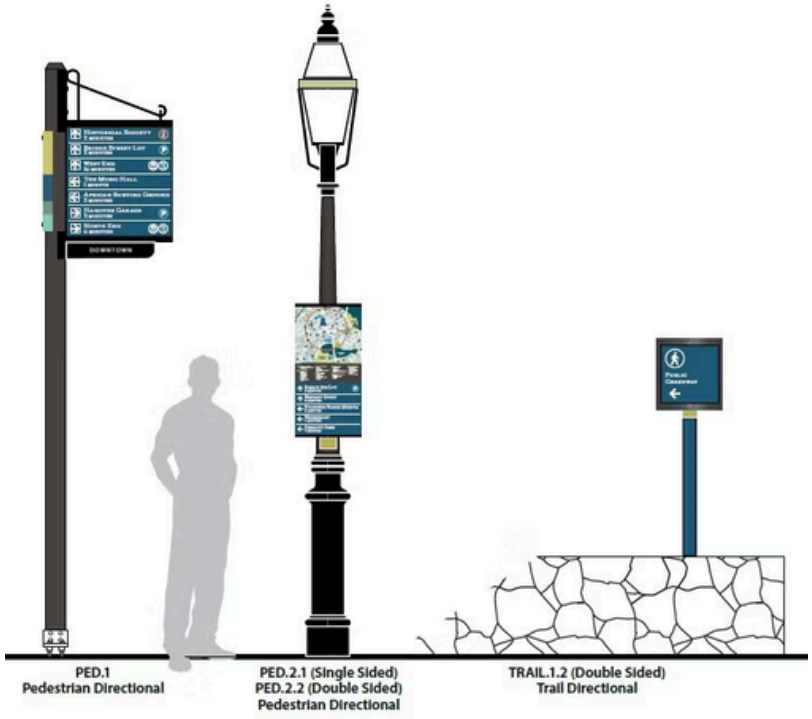
2. DESIGN FAMILY
Develop gateway, directional, interpretive and pavement-marker standards.

3. PILOT CORRIDOR
Install station gateway and core Lincoln Street-to-downtown signs and measure use.

4. EXPAND
Add interpretation, digital content, and secondary destinations as funding and partnerships allow.

What might this look like for WestEx and the Train Station area?

- Install a prominent "Welcome to Exeter" orientation map at the platform/station arrival area.
- Lead with concrete walking benchmarks: Ladd-Gilman House/ American Independence Center — 10 minutes; Chamber of Commerce/Gazebo via Lincoln Street and Front Street — 16 minutes.
- Identify Water Street, Town Hall, Swasey Parkway, Phillips Exeter Academy, the riverfront, and other key destinations.
- Include Lincoln Street businesses so the local neighborhood is part of the destination—not simply a corridor to pass through.
- Use one graphic identity and symbol that repeats throughout the route—and use it in both directions.



Shown above: Example of visuals found within a wayfinding plan for Portsmouth, NH.

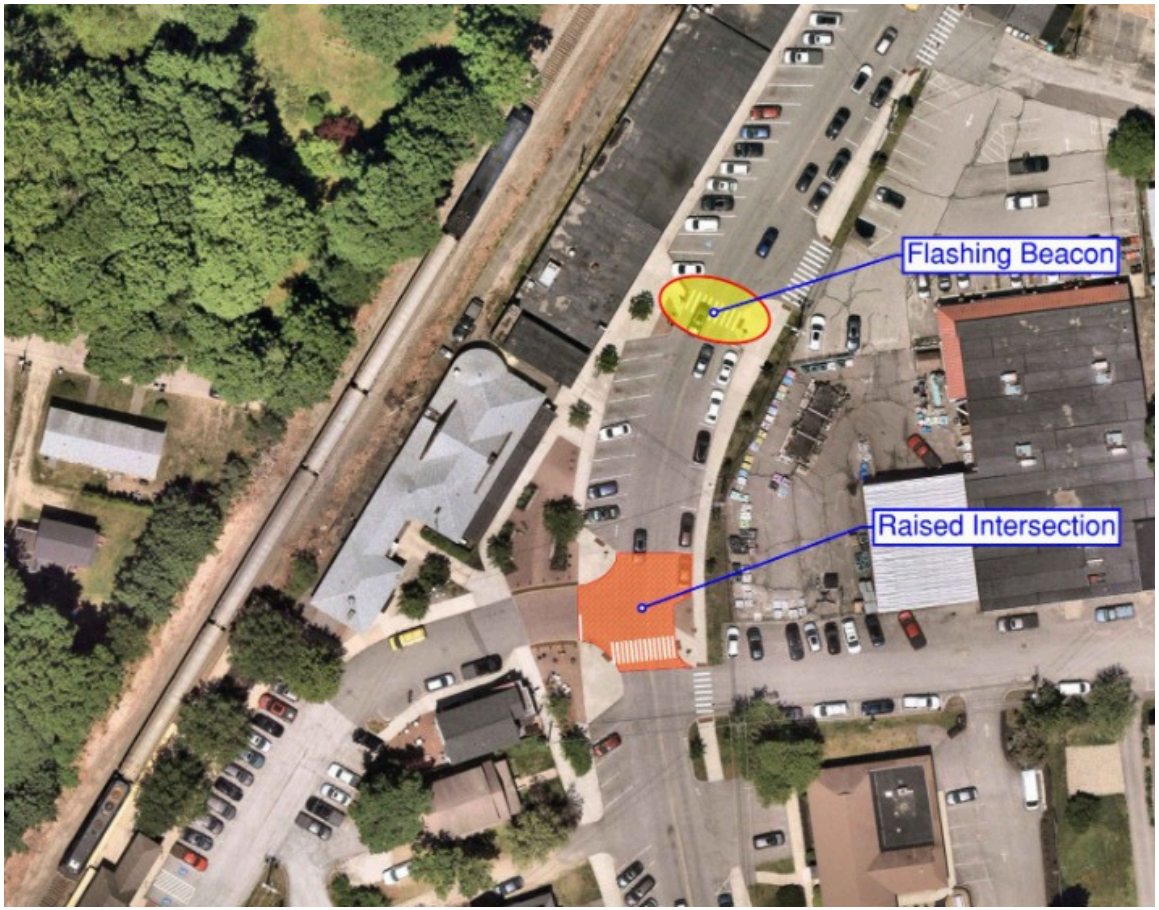
Traffic Calming and Parking

Throughout the listening process, community members frequently mentioned high vehicle speeds and traffic congestion in the Lincoln Street area. The corridor mostly functions as a vital commercial hub where residents grab coffee, shop for groceries, and run daily errands. However, the area experiences peak hour traffic spikes in the mornings and afternoons when commuters are driving to the train station and parents are dropping their kids off at school. During off-peak hours, low parking utilization leads to higher vehicle speeds, as the road “widens” without the traffic calming effect of parked vehicles narrowing the travel path.

While the curb bump-outs and raised intersection installed in front of Lincoln Street School after the previous charrette have successfully slowed traffic in targeted areas, expanding these features will create a continuous safe environment for all road users along the corridor.

Depicted in the image to the right are potential locations for a flashing beacon crosswalk and raised intersection at the train station intersection. The flashing beacon system will heighten driver awareness of pedestrian crossings and the raised intersection will calm vehicle speeds while improving pedestrian accessibility at the intersection.

The next pages define and explore further traffic calming suggestions for Lincoln Street.

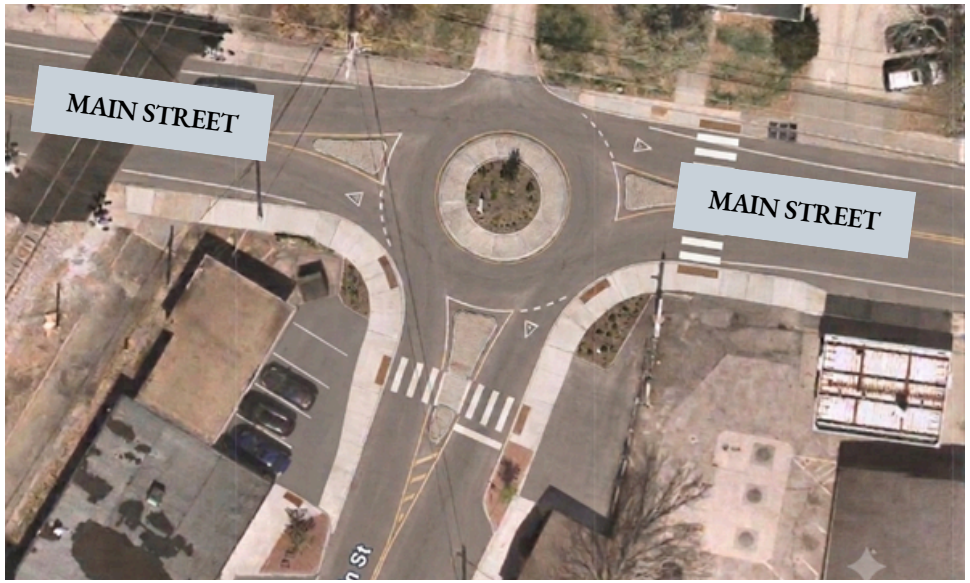


Traffic Calming and Parking

Mini-Roundabout

Morning and afternoon traffic from the school and train station currently backs up along Lincoln Street as drivers wait to turn onto Main Street. Installing a mini-roundabout would help maintain continuous, low-speed traffic flow along both corridors while eliminating the need for dedicated turn lanes.

A mini-roundabout would also improve safety by shortening pedestrian crossing distances, reducing vehicle approach speeds along Main Street, and creating a more comfortable, lower-stress environment for cyclists navigating the intersection.



Mini-Roundabout concept imagined at the intersection of Main Street and Lincoln Street.

Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon

Because on-street parking is permitted along Lincoln Street, vehicles parked close to crosswalks can limit sightlines between drivers and pedestrians. To improve visibility and safety, the charrette team proposes installing Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) at each of the raised crosswalks. These pedestrian-activated signals use flashing lights to alert approaching drivers that someone is preparing to cross, encouraging them to slow down and yield. Combined with raised crosswalks, RRFBs would provide an additional layer of pedestrian safety and traffic calming.



Example of an existing RRFB at Phillips Exeter Academy.

Traffic Calming and Parking

Raised Crosswalks

The team proposes raising the crosswalk in front of Arjay's to improve pedestrian visibility and naturally reduce vehicle speeds through this busy commercial area. A second raised crosswalk should connect the upcoming Handkerchief Factory re-development directly to the school faculty parking lot, establishing a safer and more convenient crossing for new families in the neighborhood. Together, these improvements would help prioritize pedestrian movement while encouraging drivers to slow down and remain alert.



Example of a raised crosswalk.

Raised Intersections

At the intersection of Lincoln Street and the Train Station parking lot, the team proposes a raised, textured intersection similar to the one in front of Lincoln Street School. The vertical deflection encourages drivers to slow down, while the textured surface clearly communicates a transition into a pedestrian-heavy, shared zone. This treatment would help reinforce pedestrian priority and create a safer, more comfortable environment for people walking between the station and surrounding destinations.



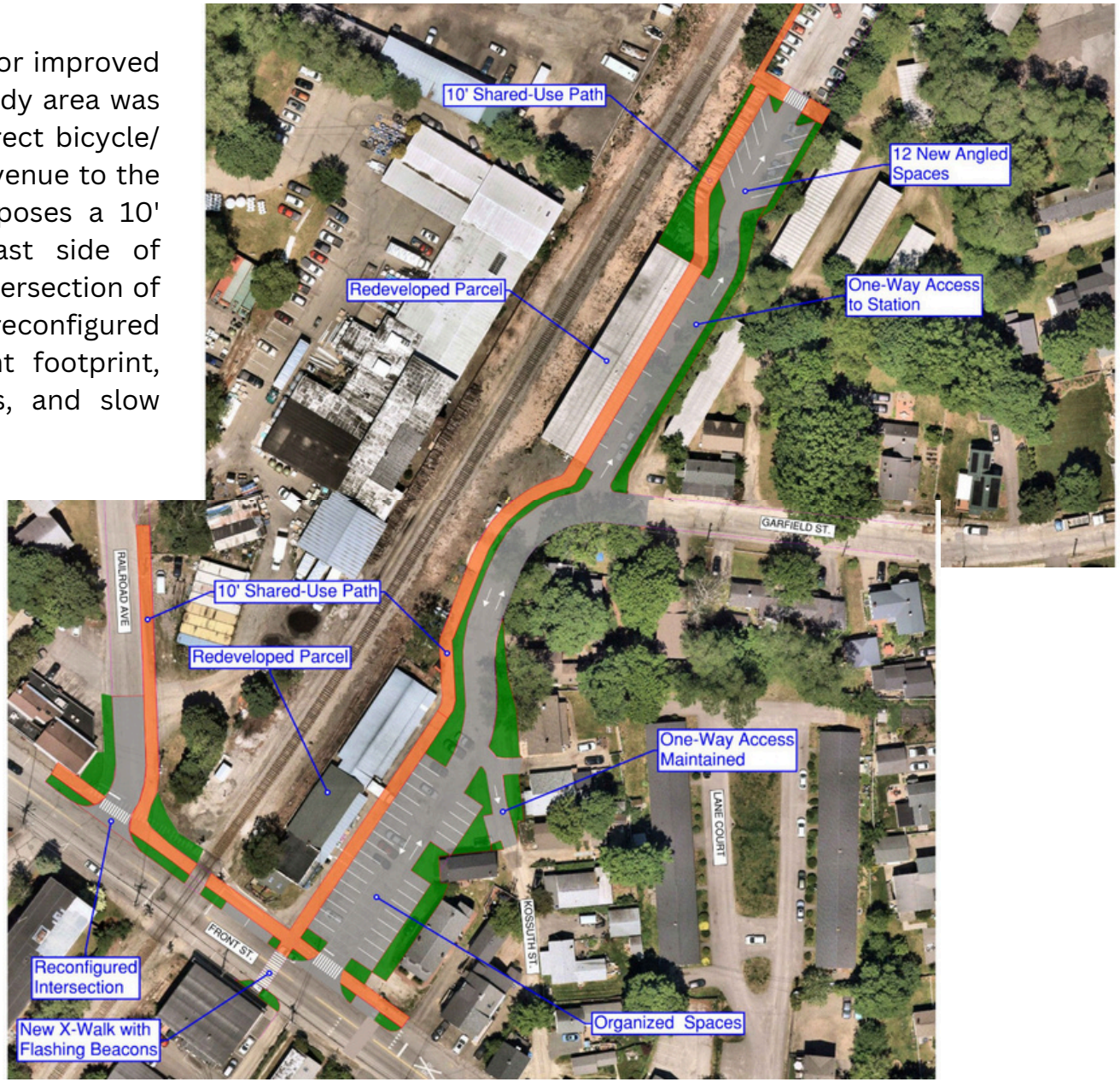
Example of a raised intersection.

Traffic Calming and Parking

Multi-Modal Connectivity

During the listening sessions, a desire for improved multi-modal connectivity within the study area was expressed. In particular, there is no direct bicycle/ pedestrian connection from Railroad Avenue to the train station. The charrette team proposes a 10' shared-use path (SUP) along the east side of Railroad Avenue to the reconfigured intersection of Railroad Avenue and Front Street. The reconfigured intersection will reduce the pavement footprint, shorten pedestrian crossing distances, and slow vehicle speeds.

The SUP will continue along Front Street and connect to a new crosswalk with RRFBs near The Fat Hen Brewing Co. From there, the SUP will continue along Garfield Street, where the existing public parking lot at Dodge's Agway will be reorganized to create a more orderly layout, with Garfield Street passing through the center of the lot. The SUP will then continue along Garfield Street and a new access road to the train station. The new access road will include additional parking spaces and provide new access opportunities to the redeveloped parcels.



Traffic Calming and Parking

This aerial image provides an overview of all the locations for potential traffic calming and parking improvements.



Traffic Calming and Parking

Parking Access and Turnover

A common theme throughout the public input sessions was parking: the need for more spaces for rail users, better enforcement of time limits, and protection of spaces for customers accessing area businesses. After observing the charrette area, the team identified 204 existing parking spaces: 120 on-street spaces and 84 in the train station parking lot. Of the on-street spaces, 44 directly support the businesses along Lincoln Street. These spaces serve a variety of users, including rail passengers, employees, customers, residents, and visitors, for varying lengths of time.

Those 44 on-street spaces represent the most valuable short-term parking resource in the area because of proximity and convenience. Existing on-street parking is generally subject to a two-hour limit; however, without regular enforcement, the restriction does not consistently achieve the intended turnover of parking spaces. Rail passengers often need parking for the duration of their commute, meaning a single vehicle may occupy a space for many hours. During that time, the same space could have served multiple customers visiting local businesses. Balancing the parking needs of commuters with the demand for convenient short-term parking is an important issue to tackle.

The goal is to resolve this tension by improving access and turnover while using parking revenue to support operations and enforcement. The Town of Exeter has previously developed a Lincoln Street Paid Parking Plan to address parking demand associated with the Lincoln Street mixed-use neighborhood and the Exeter Downeaster station. The next step is to move from planning to implementation by establishing a practical management, enforcement, and financial framework for the district.



Existing conditions in the project area.


Existing conditions in the project area.

Traffic Calming and Parking

Parking Management Plan

The team proposes a parking management plan that can be simplified into one easily communicated policy:

→ ***Park. Register your plate in the app. The first two hours are free.***

All vehicles using the managed parking area would be required to register their license plate through an app-based pay-by-plate system, including vehicles parking for less than two hours. Within the 44 business-core spaces, the two-hour limit would be an absolute maximum. Payment or a permit would not allow a vehicle to extend its stay. Within the remaining on-street spaces and the train lot, users could remain beyond the free two-hour period by paying through the app or using an authorized permit.

This creates two principal parking products:

- **Short-Term Business Parking**: 44 prime on-street spaces, first two hours free, registration required, two-hour maximum.
- **Flexible/Long-Term Parking**: Remaining on-street and off-street spaces, first two hours free, registration required, with longer stays available through app-based payment or permit.

This structure preserves free short-term parking throughout the district for locals visiting the coffee shop, grabbing lunch, or using the landromat, while directing longer-duration users toward spaces better suited to their needs.



Traffic Calming and Parking

Implementing a Parking Management Plan

Implementation would rely on an app-based pay-by-license-plate system. The program would not require parking meters or payment kiosks. The user's license plate would serve as the parking credential throughout the managed area. Upon parking, the user would register the vehicle and applicable parking zone through the designated parking application.

The app-based approach eliminates the capital and maintenance costs associated with individual meters and payment kiosks, as well as cash collection. It also provides the Town with substantially better information about parking utilization, duration and demand. Enforcement would also be license-plate based. Parking personnel could use handheld or mobile license-plate-recognition technology to determine whether a vehicle is adhering to the parking policy.

A future opportunity exists to make approximately 44 spaces at Lincoln Street Elementary School available as an additional shared parking resource. These spaces should be considered a subsequent phase rather than assumed to be part of the initial parking supply. Before incorporating them into the system, the Town should evaluate school staff parking requirements, student arrival and dismissal periods, school events, pedestrian safety, access, snow removal, and the hours during which public parking can occur without interfering with school operations.

The school spaces could be particularly appropriate for longer-duration parking and may provide additional flexibility when winter restrictions reduce the availability of on-street parking.

If all 44 spaces ultimately become available, the managed parking supply could increase from approximately 204 to 248 spaces. **The spaces could be incorporated into the same app-based registration, payment and permit system, creating a seamless parking program rather than a separate school-lot operation.**

See the following page for a visual explanation of what additional parking spaces at the Lincoln Street School would look like.

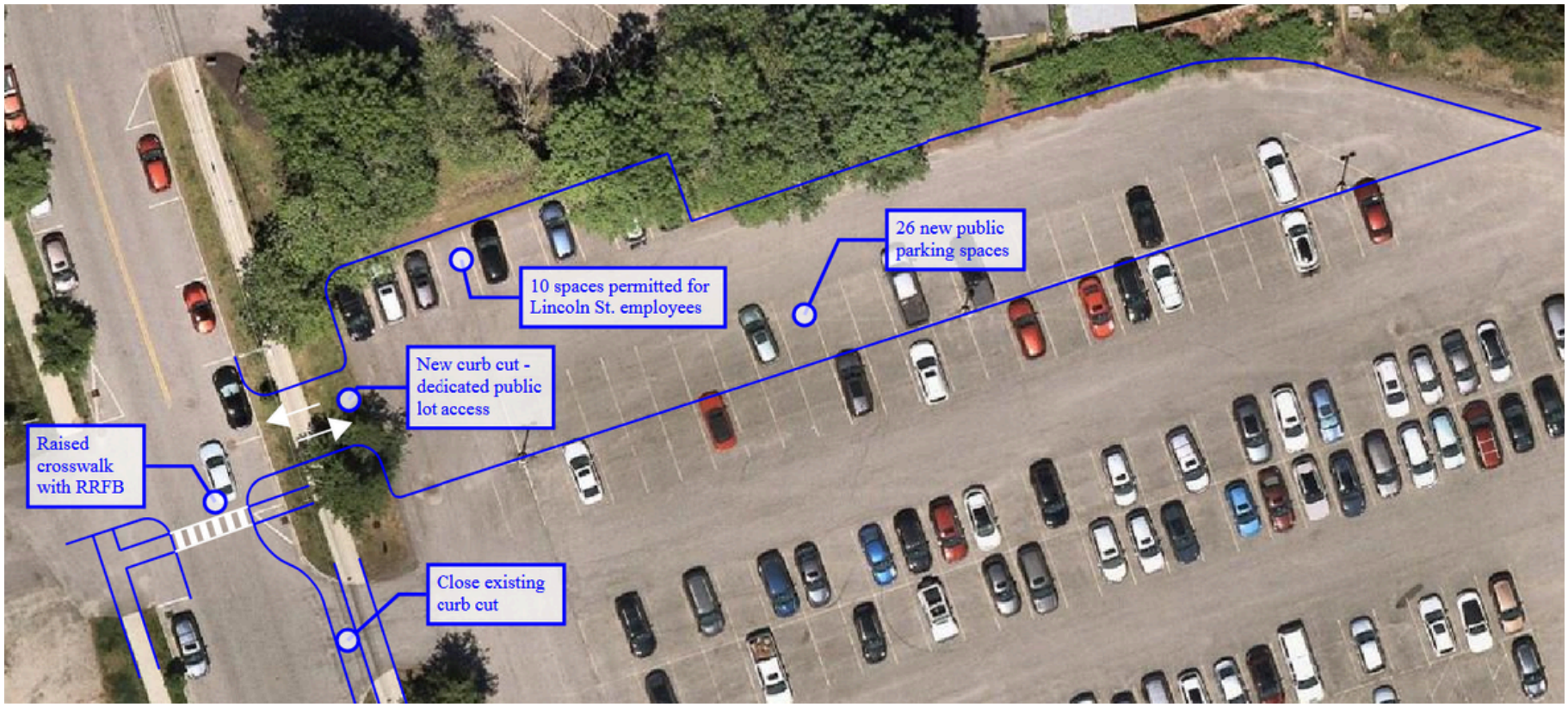


Aerial image showing existing parking locations.

Traffic Calming and Parking

Potential Future Shared Parking at Lincoln Street School

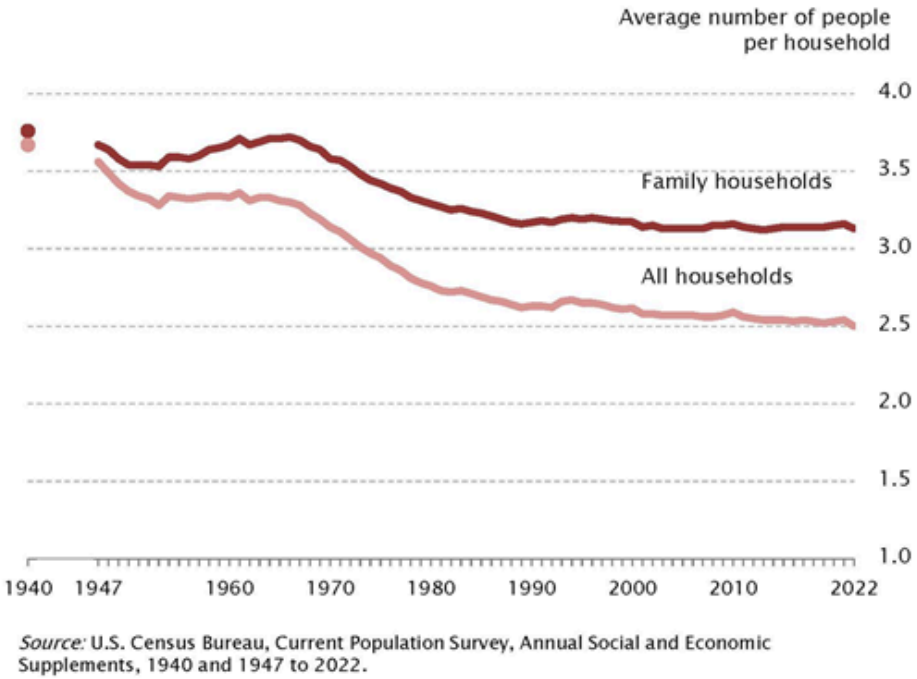
The graphic below illustrates how the Lincoln Street Elementary School parking lot could be incorporated into the broader parking management plan, providing up to 44 additional spaces and expanding parking opportunities within the district. This potential expansion would be evaluated and implemented as a future phase, following coordination with the school and consideration of its operational needs.



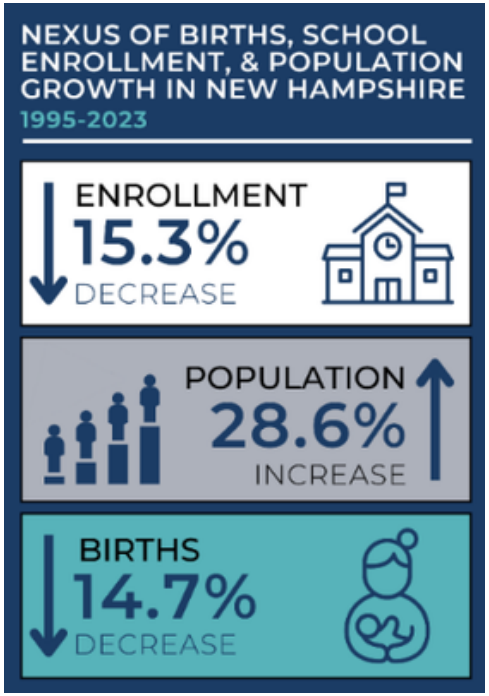
Housing Opportunities and Concepts

Changing Demographics

People are living alone at higher rates and having fewer children. Across the United States, there was an average of 3.33 people per household in 1960 – in 2022, the average was 2.5 persons per household. As a result, there is a need for smaller homes to serve smaller households. The recommendations from this charrette include incremental approaches to modestly increase supply and encourage the smaller, more affordable homes Exeter needs.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1940 and 1947 to 2022.



New Hampshire Housing's 2023 study "From Homes to Classrooms" is the third iteration of a study that explored the relationship between new housing development and school enrollment. The study looked at data between 1995 and 2023 that revealed a 15.3% decrease in school enrollment in New Hampshire and a 14.7% decline in births. Since 1990, the ratio of public school students per housing unit dropped from 0.39 students per household to 0.29. The study further found that students were more likely to live in single-family homes than in apartments. In reviewing SAU 16 school enrollment data from 2018, SAU 16 has seen a decline in the overall school population of 924 students, suggesting that additional student enrollment would largely result in an increase in marginal costs.

Housing Opportunities and Concepts

Existing Housing Solutions

The Town of Exeter is a leader in the region when it comes to housing. The Town was recently designated a “Housing Champion” by the New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs, the Town of Exeter’s Housing Advisory Committee is actively engaged in housing conversations across the community, and the Mixed-Use Neighborhood District (MUND) serves as an example of an effective and creative land use regulation for towns across the state.

Depicted to the right are examples of varied housing stock in Exeter. Duplexes and other multi-unit housing types can address the needs of changing demographics. Expanding the range of available housing options can help ensure that residents at different stages of life have opportunities to remain in the community.

Variation in house size can provide options for aging community members looking to downsize and younger folks looking for their first home but having difficulty finding the right size and price in their own hometown.









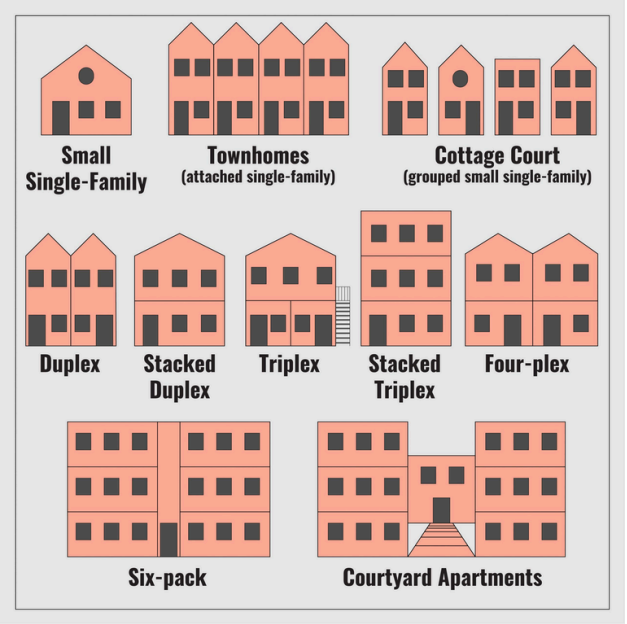
Housing Opportunities and Concepts

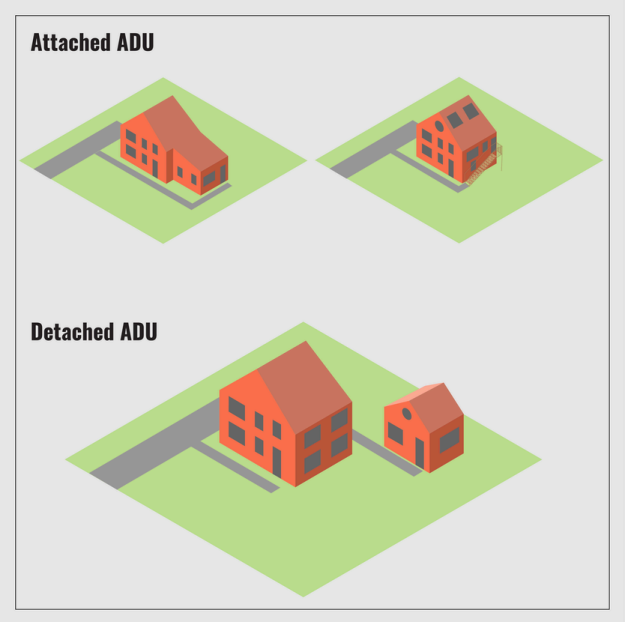
Small, Incremental Changes

In Exeter, there is certainly room for small, incremental changes. These changes would allow for modest increases in housing supply and encourage the small housing types that many people need.

- Consider changing height restrictions in the Mixed-Use Neighborhood District (MUND) from feet to stories to allow more flexibility with rooflines and design.
- Currently manufactured housing is excluded in the Rural (RU) Zone; Exeter could consider permitted manufactured housing in this Zone. Manufactured housing is the last truly affordable opportunity for many prospective homeowners.
- Conversions of existing single-family homes to up to four units are allowed in the R-1, R-2, and R-3. Consider extending this provision to the Rural Zone. Additionally, Exeter could allow new 2-, 3-, and 4-unit buildings in the R-2 and R-3 zones.
- There are several communities in New Hampshire that allow more than one accessory dwelling unit (ADU) on a single-family lot. Exeter could consider allowing one attached and one detached ADU per single-family home by right.
- There is also room to add flexibility to the size limitations of ADUs, especially for detached ADUs and conversions of existing structures, like an old barn or garage that may exceed the current 750 square foot limit.

New Hampshire Housing also offers municipal mini-grants of up to $5,000 to support regulatory development, providing a potential resource for exploring and implementing these changes.





Shown above: Examples of missing middle housing types and accessory dwelling units from NH Housing Toolbox.

Housing Opportunities and Concepts

Housing Examples and Concepts

Housing affordability in New Hampshire is a serious and growing issue needing to be addressed by all communities, but that does not mean that new housing has to deviate from the existing character of those communities. Developing more housing units can raise concerns of overdevelopment, and changing the character of a cherished neighborhood – but Exeter has already shown that new housing does not have to be disruptive to meet the needs of affordability.

So, what could incremental changes to Exeter's housing stock look like?

3-Unit House (Triplex)
1,200 sf/unit ($540,000/unit)



6-Unit Rowhouse
1,200 sf/unit ($540,000/unit)



Project Examples by Union Studio Architecture / Photos by Nat Rae

Housing prices and markets are going to need serious community investments to recover from their current state. While the prices shown above are not what may have been considered lower-cost housing years ago, they are more affordable than traditional single-family homes and fill an underserved need.

Housing Opportunities and Concepts

Housing Examples and Concepts

Utilizing the Mixed-Use Neighborhood District (MUND) and expanding rental options within Exeter may provide opportunities for both young professionals and local businesses to thrive. Smaller apartments can provide housing for more residents without taking up a signiciant footprint.

Increasing the availability of this type of housing could also strengthen the local economy of WestEx. During public input sessions, local business owners expressed concerns about retaining employees as housing costs continue to rise beyond what many workers can afford. Expanding nearby housing options could help local businesses attract and retain employees while allowing more people to live close to where they work.

Incorporating housing above commercial spaces can also increase walkability by placing more residents within easy reach of local businesses. This mixed-use approach can create additional revenue opportunities for developers and help offset development costs, potentially making projects more financially feasible.

12-Unit Apartment (Walk-ups)
840 sf/unit ($2,750/unit)



2-Unit Affordable (Duplex)
2,100 sf/unit ($1,750/unit)
Subsidized Rent



8-Unit Rentals Over Retail
720 sf/unit ($2,300/mo.)



4-Unit Live-Work Condominiums
1,180 sf/unit ($530,000/unit)



Project Examples by Union Studio Architecture / Photos by Nat Rae

Housing Opportunities and Concepts

Rubber Factory Site

The image below illustrates a conceptual redevelopment of the Rubber Factory Site, incorporating 66 housing units across a mix of mixed-use buildings, row houses, walk-up apartments, and artist lofts, with a combination of owner-occupied, rental, and mixed-use opportunities.



Legend

- Ownership
- Rental
- Mixed-Use

Unit Mix

- Mixed-Use (16)
- Row House (18)
- Walk-Up (12)
- Artist Lofts (20)

Housing Opportunities and Concepts

Handkerchief Factory Site

The image below illustrates a conceptual redevelopment of the Handkerchief Factory site, incorporating 81 housing units across rental apartments above retail spaces and walk-up apartment buildings, with a mix of rental and owner-occupied housing opportunities.



Legend

Ownership

Mixed-Use

Rental Over Retail

- 34 Rental Units

Walk-up Apartments

- 47 Apartments

WestEx Welcome Center and Funding

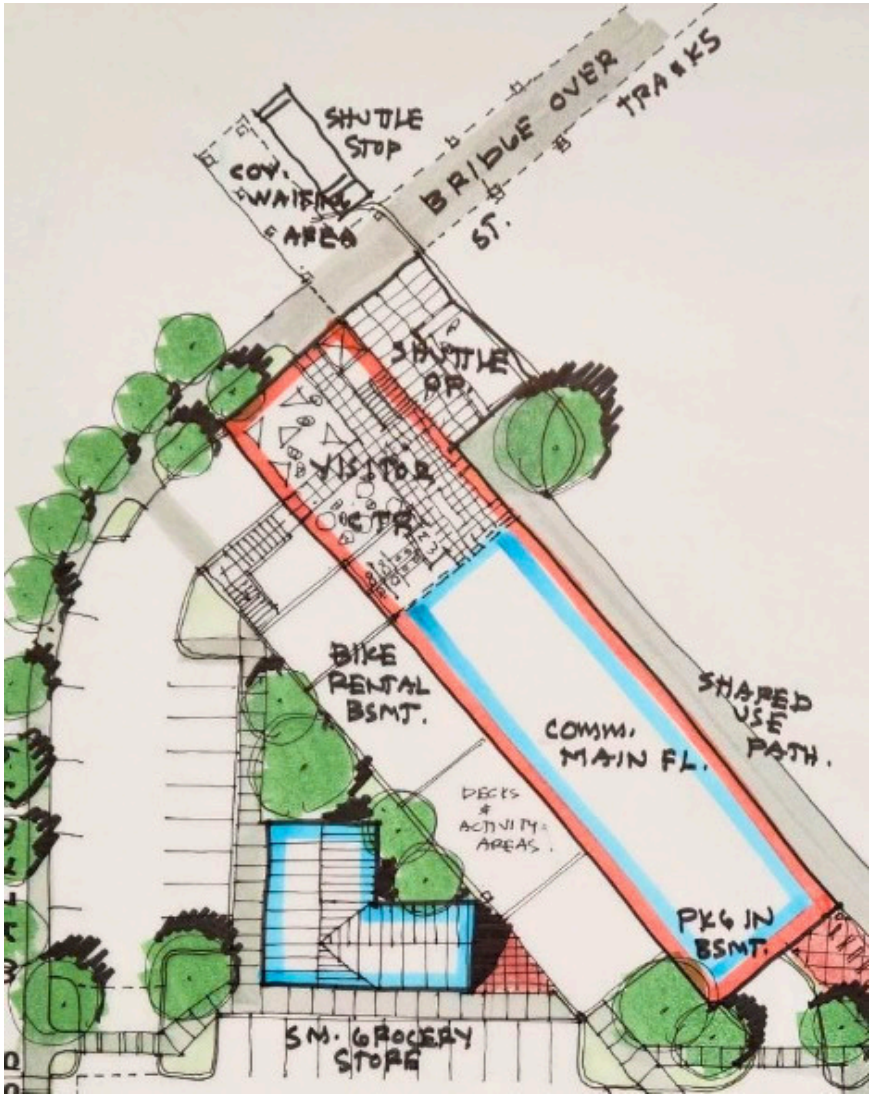
Welcome Center Concept Plan

Beyond illustrating what a Welcome Center for WestEx could look like, the charrette team further explored the concept by identifying potential uses and amenities that could serve both residents and visitors, as well as funding opportunities to help bring the vision to life.

The charrette team proposes a variety of uses within a 5,600-square-foot Welcome Center, each selected to address needs and ideas shared by the community during the public input sessions. Potential uses and amenities include:

Visitor Center, Displays, Alumni/School	700 SQ FT
Chamber Offices + Storage	750 SQ FT
Coffee Shop	1,200 SQ FT
Bicycle and E-Bike Rental Center (storage & repair)	1,200 SQ FT
Shuttle Operations Hub	400 SQ FT
Passenger Waiting Area	1,000 SQ FT
Community Meeting Space	350 SQ FT

Seasonal shuttles connecting WestEx to downtown and other destinations, along with seasonal bicycle and scooter rentals, could make it easier for residents and visitors to navigate the area. Additional rental spaces along the streetscape could accommodate a mix of public amenities and private businesses that serve both travelers and residents. A dedicated office for the Chamber of Commerce could also provide valuable support for local businesses. The upper-level spaces would be accessible by both an interior elevator and an exterior entrance. While this represents just one potential arrangement of uses, many combinations are possible to best address the needs and priorities of the WestEx community.



WestEx Welcome Center and Funding

Funding Strategies

What is all of this going to cost? There are different ways that this can be structured. The full hypothetical project buildout is estimated at $4.25 million. That includes a significant construction budget, transportation components like bicycles, scooters, and a shuttle bus, and the interior elevator for the building.

Below is one example of a possible funding package, starting with the new owners of the Handkerchief Factory to purchase/lease to the Town a certain amount of space on the main floor for the Welcome Center and other projected public uses. Exeter would then sublease individual spaces to other entities to provide services to travelers and residents using the station. A congressional appropriation or earmark of approximately $2 million could also be pursued, an amount consistent with funding levels for similar projects and established federal priorities.

Source	Amount
Congressional Appropriation	$2.0M
EDA Public Works	$2.0M
Municipal Capital Funds	$500K
CDFA Tax Credit Program	$250K
Private/Foundation Gifts	$250K
Total	$3.5M

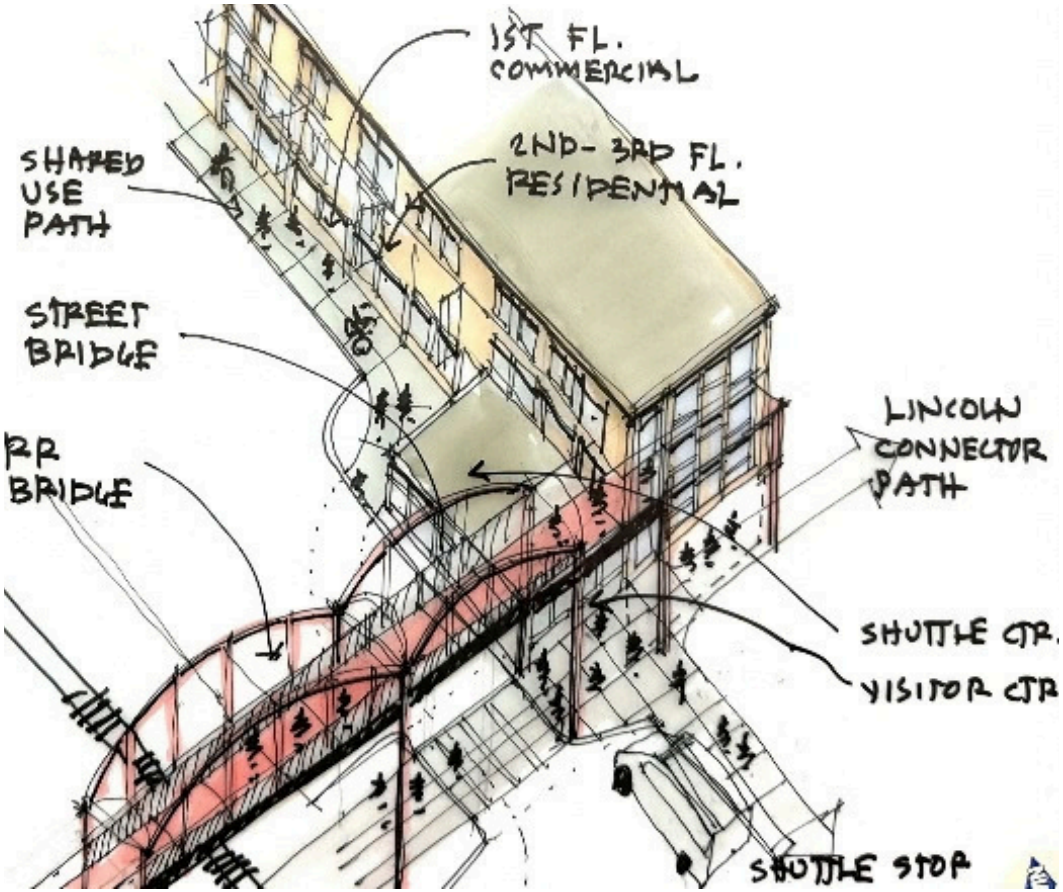
Next would be an Economic Development Administration Public Works grant – available for up to $5 million. Several other transportation and mobility programs are available for other elements of the program designed for the train station space. Some municipal capital funds, some matching funds would be expected, but in many cases these federal and state programs can be layered together to defray much of the expenses.

There are different methods that Exeter can establish to take care of local expenses without having to pull from the general fund. CDFA tax credit programs are one such option – a substantial amount of tax credits that go through the CDFA could go towards this type of project. Private foundations or gifts, for example from Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter Hospital, or other majore institutions that would want to contribute to a significant community improvement project that benefits their employees, students, and parents/families. The Welcome Center could feature all donor institutions with an information and acknowledgment display.

WestEx Welcome Center and Funding

Funding Strategies (cont.)

What information is needed to apply for the funding? To make projects like this happen, an upfront, feasible funding strategy, a grant roadmap with timeline, and a reasonable implementation plan are all necessary steps. Doing a complete feasibility study will be the first place to start gathering the right information. Some of this information is currently readily available, and some is not. This data is necessary to make a strong case of why Exeter should be apportioned or granted this funding.



Additional perspective of potential Welcome Center design.

The town will need to know more about the existing conditions and the site assessment, in addition to a detailed train ridership and passenger analysis.

Where are people going to? Where are they coming from? How long are they staying?

A market demand analysis will assess the local businesses and what might be missing in a gap analysis.

Are people leaving town for certain things and spending their money elsewhere?

To address last mile mobility, this would focus on what is currently within the last mile of that train station and/or what needs to be there.

An economic impact assessment will estimate how much revenue and how much value in overall economic terms the train station and welcome center will bring to Exeter.

WestEx Welcome Center and Funding

Developing a District Identity

What other things can be done in preparation to create the development district itself?

- Make and adopt a development plan for the district and identify the geographic boundaries.
- Evaluate the district's development potential and create a financial plan.
- Create a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district as one method to help pay year after year.
- Review the zoning and design guidelines.

Is what's happening on Main Street the same or different than what you want to see here? The WestEx community made it clear that it wants to stay a unique neighborhood. So, what does that look like and how do you protect and encourage that?

Lastly, the city should establish a Parking Enterprise Fund as part of the future parking management program. Initiating this process requires a parking study, a financial analysis, and a readily implementable management plan that preserves critical safety improvements.





Above are AI-generated renderings of Welcome Center and Shuttle Concept.

Visioning for the Future

It's Up to You!

Exeter is a wonderful town with community members that are passionate about finding ways to reimagine the Train Station area and highlight the best of what WestEx has to offer an evolving, diverse community. How you choose to do that is up to you!

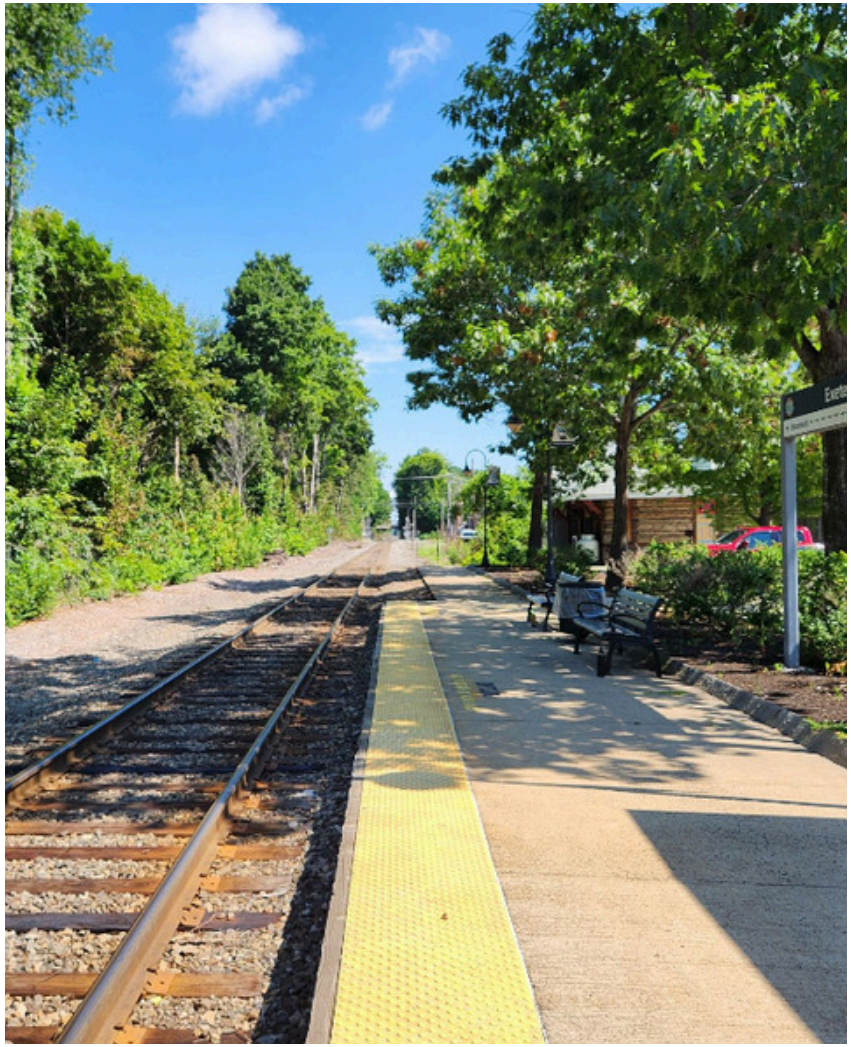
This report provides ideas and recommendations, not mandates. These are practical concepts for the community to explore, evaluate, and adapt as needed. Ultimately, the future of Exeter belongs in the hands of the people who live and work here.

We encourage you to share this report widely so the community can gather, review these concepts, and decide on next steps together. As the ideas from this charrette move forward, keeping the process open and welcoming will be vital for both planning and implementation.

Exeter already has the collaborative spirit needed to bring these ideas to life. We wish you the best of luck!

Many thanks,

The Plan NH Charrette Team, Exeter 2026



What's next for Exeter? Instead of focusing on challenges, think about possibilities!

Resources & Funding

Community Design & Placemaking:

- Creative Placemaking Public Resources Guide
- National Endowment for the Arts, Our Town
- New Hampshire State Council on the Arts Grants
- UNH Cooperative Extension, Characteristics of a Vibrant Downtown
- New Hampshire Preservation Alliance Historic Preservation Grants

Economic Development:

- UNH Cooperative Extension
- Regional Economic Development Center
- New Hampshire Community Development Finance Authority

Housing, Planning, & Zoning:

- Plan NH Community Design Charrette Program
- New Hampshire Housing From Homes to Classrooms One-Pager (2024)
- New Hampshire Housing Grant Program
- New Hampshire Housing Toolbox
- Housing Champions Program
- New Hampshire Community Development Finance Authority Planning Grants
- New Hampshire Preservation Alliance Planning Grants

Transportation, Traffic Calming, Parking:

- NH Department of Transportation Transportation Alternatives Program
- Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission
- DOT Navigator

Other Resources/Funding Opportunities

- AARP Livable Communities Resources & Grants
- New Hampshire Charitable Foundation Community Grants Program



Funding Acknowledgement

InvestNH

As part of Governor Sununu's $100 million InvestNH initiative, a total of $7.9 million was allocated to the Municipal Planning and Zoning Grants Program to increase opportunities for housing development. The NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs contracted with New Hampshire Housing to administer this program.

HOP Grant

The Housing Opportunity Planning (HOP) grant program was launched in August 2022 as a partnership of New Hampshire Housing, UNH Cooperative Extension, and Plan NH. The HOP grant program provided funding to municipalities to study zoning or other regulatory barriers to affordable housing, identify potential changes to local land use regulations, and update those regulations based on their findings. In total, 104 HOP grants were awarded to 73 communities.

In 2025, New Hampshire Housing and Plan NH strategized to leverage Plan NH's signature community design Charrette program to further support communities tackling the housing crisis. The Plymouth Community Design Charrette is one of six no-cost Charrettes available to grantee communities as part of the HOP Grant Program.



PLAN NH
Visioning *for* Sustainable Communities

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