

Hillsborough Design Charrette

Hillsborough, NH

May 17th and 18th, 2019



Hillsborough Design Charrette Acknowledgments

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

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The Hillsborough Team

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

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Katherine Ralph - Publicity

Jean Mogan - Venue Logistics

Mary Morehouse - Hillsborough Reborn/Hillsborough
Pride/Lion Club

Ken Matthews - Volunteer Coordinator/Hillsborough
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Susanne White - Chamber of Commerce/Planning
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James Bailey - Board of Selectmen

David Fullerton - Board of Selectmen

John Bramley - Hillsborough Reborn

Jason Kovaric

Ed Sauer

Hillsborough Reborn Volunteers

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



Special thank you to Hillsborough residents who provided lodging and to the organizations and individuals who donated food.

Who is Plan NH?

Plan New Hampshire, The Foundation for Shaping the Built Environment (Plan NH), is a 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. To achieve that vision, Plan NH's mission is to "foster excellence in planning, design, and development of New Hampshire's built environment," because we believe that what we build, where we build and how we build anything has a significant impact on that vibrancy and health.

Plan NH champions principles and ideas that balance building projects, including anything built in the public realm, such as buildings, roads, bridges, memorials, public sculpture, with:

- The needs of people, including 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 New Hampshire 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.



Why did Plan NH come to Hillsborough?



In December of 2018, the Town of Hillsborough submitted an application for a Plan NH Community Design Charrette.

The Town was seeking assistance in revitalizing its once-bustling town center. They wanted recommendations regarding:

- Improving the downtown
- Adding parking spaces
- How to make the town center more walkable

Plan NH's Charrette Committee reviewed the application, and after a visit to the Town, the application was accepted in February 2019.

Plan NH in Hillsborough, NH

May 17th and 18th, 2019



The charrette team takes a tour of the downtown



The charrette team holds listening sessions with the general public



The charrette team processes the input received during the listening sessions and tour



The charrette team works collaboratively to draft recommendations

What is a charrette?

Simply stated, a charrette is a brief, intense, brainstorming session in which 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.

Plan NH's community design charrettes take place over the course of two days: 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 process engages planning and design professionals in direct dialog and conversation

with each other and with local residents 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. 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 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.



The general public are invited back for a presentation of the charrette team's recommendations. Here is a picture of the Plan NH charrette team.

Charrettes blend the broad experience of planning and design professionals with local citizens' detailed knowledge of their own community to develop recommendations that address challenges and opportunities in the project at hand. These recommendations provide a framework within which more detailed solutions and plans of action can be developed.

Site Tour Observations



What the Plan NH team saw in downtown Hillsborough

Parking confusion is widespread

- There seems to be ample parking, however, it is not well marked
- Perception that there is not adequate parking near businesses

Vacant and run-down built environment

- Vacant buildings and many buildings in disrepair were evident in the downtown
- Several key buildings (Rumrill, white buildings on the corner) carry the look of the town, but are in danger of being removed

Empty storefronts and shadows of heyday

- Lack of businesses and lack of people
- People driving through, not stopping
- There was one cafe opening up while Plan NH was in town

That said, the team also saw a fabulous town center that many communities can only dream of:

- Architecture with “good bones”
- Amenities (Post Office, Library, Town Hall, a church) all in the town’s center – people have a reason to go there!
- A beautiful park
- A river with public space in the center
- Some thriving businesses
- Plenty of parking



What Hillsborough Told Plan NH

What Plan NH Heard from Community Leaders

After the site walk and a delicious lunch, the team met with key community leaders to learn more about Hillsborough's town center.

Absentee Landlords are a problem

- Buildings significant to the downtown feel, like the Rumrill Building
- Not investing in the community, just collecting rent
- Problems with the disrepair of the buildings

Affordable Housing and Businesses

- See a need for more quality, affordable housing in downtown
 - There is some already just outside town but not always high quality and not close enough to walk to downtown for less able-bodied residents
 - Perhaps condos and apartments

Recreation and Branding

- Riverwalk exists, but looking at expansion and connection to business areas
- Interested in attracting people from outside town
- Want to develop more events (concert series, festivals) that give the town identity
- Artist community in town is strong but hidden

Connections and Walkability

- Referenced Concord
- Strong desire to improve sidewalks and connectivity of parking with businesses and services

Old Building Debate

- Should they stay or be removed and new things built?
- Are there grounds for a Historic District?

The Parking Problem and traffic

- Need increased enforcement of rules
- Better wayfinding
- Employee parking for businesses
- Loud downtown with traffic (trucks and motorcycles)

“Hillsborough is a town with poor self-image”

- Years of neglect and miscommunication has stifled growth
- BUT there is belief that the town can be successful again
- Several attendees moved to town within the last 5 years and cited the friendly community, lots of potential, and proximity to recreation as draws
 - Also mentioned communication problems and poor reputation of the town as hurdles

Miscellaneous Ideas

- 4 level parking garage on Depot Street to connect with the river behind and below
- Community Center- possibly at Kemp Park
- Public transportation for seniors and others to Keene, Concord, and Manchester



What Hillsborough Residents Told Plan NH

Two public listening sessions were held during the afternoon and evening of Friday, May 17th. The sessions served as an opportunity for the public to share their comments and ideas about the Hillsborough Downtown. Plan NH's process encouraged participation and input from everyone in the room.

What do you see and do now in the village center?

- Parking – perception of lack
 - o Renters use public parking
- Empty/vacant lots
 - o “Crummy looking”, old (vs historic)
 - o Code violations
- Intersection Safety
 - o Speeding, traffic, loud
- Using Services
 - o Post office, restaurants/bars, banks, copy store, library, church, schools
- No destinations and no one around
 - o Drive through, not stay- No connection to bypass
 - o Feels hard to define downtown
- Absentee Landlords
 - o High commercial rents
 - o Business turnover
- No public transport
- Stagnant/nothing changes
- Spotty enforcement of parking and dog laws
- Volvo place
- Public Spaces are good
 - o Butler Park, farmer’s market, Schnitzel Fest, places for walking dog
- Strong community feel and potential to change!

What do you want to see in 10 years?

- Improved perception of the town
 - o Personality and Charm, reveal hidden features, attracts people
 - o More like downtown Peterborough/ Manchester VT
 - o Marketing
- Green, Vistas emphasized, flowers
 - o Community gardens, dog park
- More Business (variety)
 - o Some ideas included: a bowling alley, internet café, small retail, new restaurants, a general store or co-op, medical office of some kind
- Recreation
 - o Riverwalk/rail trails, kayak launch, zipline, swimming pool
- Community Spaces
 - o Multi-use buildings, function hall, dance studio, maker space/artisan space, Grange Ballroom revived, turn Depot St and/or School St into pedestrian spaces
- More events and happenings
 - o Storytelling, live music, dances, open mics
- Safer parking, parking garage
- Connectivity
 - o Signage/wayfinding, nice sidewalks for accessibility, connection to river
- Occupied/Renovated buildings
 - o Businesses and affordable housing, fix up Volvo place
 - o Public/private partnerships- nonprofits
 - o Tax Incentives

What else does Plan NH need to know?

- Absentee Landlords
- Reputation of town and school not reality
- Hillsborough needs its own identity that reflects its uniqueness
- Lack of knowledge about how to get money for projects
- Need more jobs
- Lack of decent and appropriate housing
- Strong sense of community
- Want to keep downtown unique
- Communication is needed
 - o Signs, events, between department and groups, social media, email lists
- Need an active chamber
- Hard to get things done
- All talk, no action
- Events – fluctuating
- Recent pedestrian death
- Summer population increases
- Need more for all ages



What Makes a Great Place?

WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?

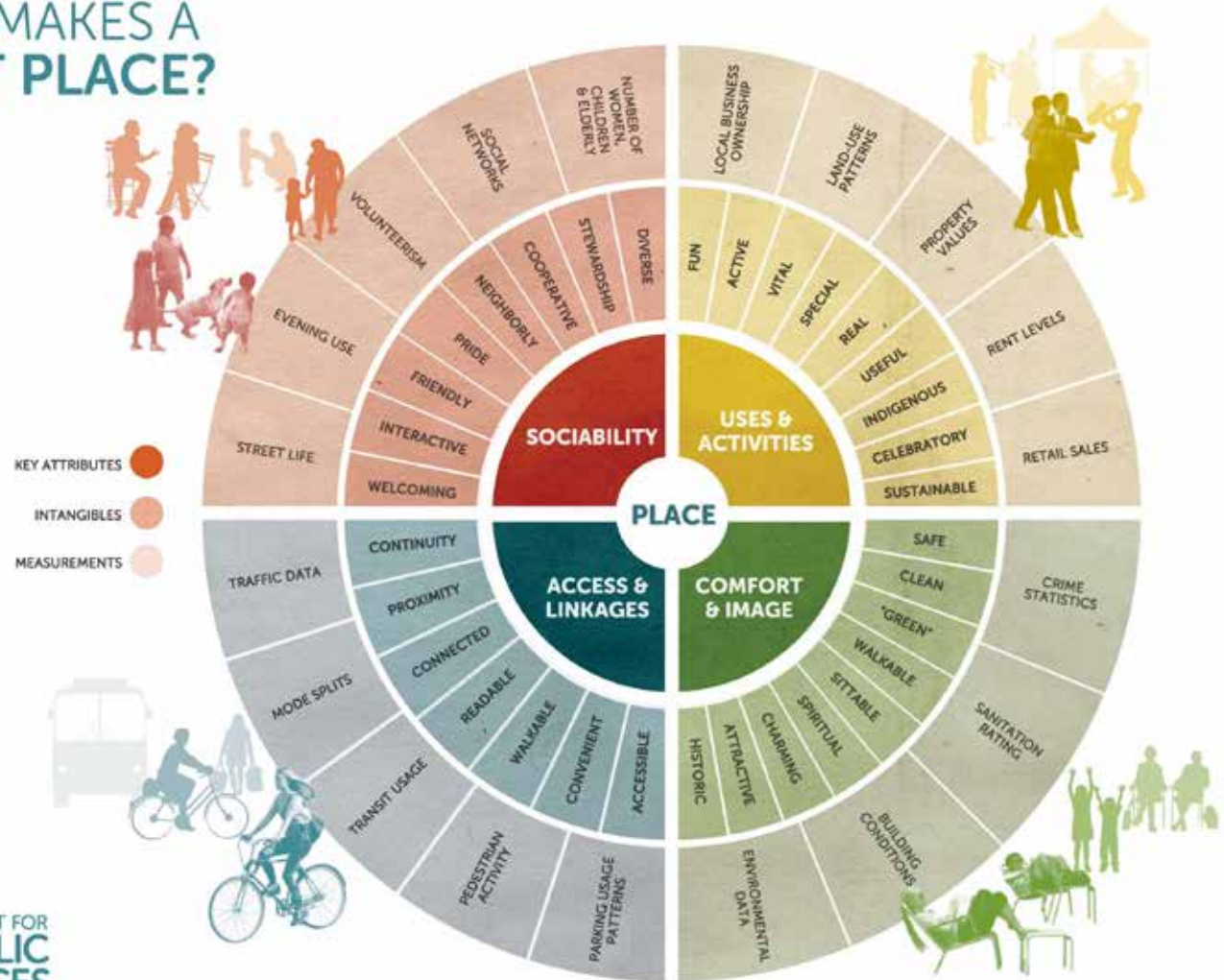
The Plan NH recommendations sought to make the Hillsborough Town Center more...

- Social
- Comfortable
- Charming and beautiful
- Accessible
- Connected

The Plan NH team considers what makes a place great when crafting our recommendations. The image on the right from the Project for Public Spaces outlines what makes a great place.

For the town center, the charrette team recommendations included:

- Green spaces and the activation of existing, vacant spaces
- Traffic calming and pedestrian centered design to secure livability and safety
- Preserving historical resources and drawing on the best of Hillsborough's history
- Starting right now with small steps to foster local businesses



Embrace Existing Assets



Hillsborough's historic downtown is an invaluable asset that contributes to the town's vibrancy and identity. While it could benefit from some improvements to its appearance and pedestrian pathways, the well-maintained parks nearby, as well as the cultural events (such as the farmers' market and outdoor music events), help activate the spaces.

Harnessing the existing vibrancy and expanding it to bring more people and events will help improve overall perceptions and attitudes. Some of the important assets in the downtown area are:

- River/Kemp Park
- Trails
- Vistas
- Butler Park
- People, Restaurants, and Walkability Potential
- Cultural Events



Communication & Economic Development: Nature and Arts Economy

Importance of Nature Economy

The Contoocook River has historically played a major role in downtown Hillsborough. Although it no longer acts as the literal engine to power industries, it can be an engine to drive the transition of Hillsborough's identity from a mill town to river town. Leveraging the power of the nature economy by connecting downtown with Hillsborough's surrounding natural capital can improve quality of life. By embracing and connecting downtown Hillsborough to the riverfront, Hillsborough can offer more amenities, activities, and embrace the beauty of its surroundings. With investment and marketing, Hillsborough can become an all-season outdoor destination to help retain and appeal to residents while also attracting visitors. By developing amenities for users of various recreation activities, people may become more likely to spend time in Hillsborough's downtown. It could also help expand a customer base for existing businesses.

Recreational Opportunities

- Water Trails
 - o Kayaking
 - o Tubing
 - o Fishing
- Land Trails
 - o Mountain Biking
 - o Hiking/Walking
 - o Snowmobile
 - o ATV

Project Highlight: Nature Center

A long term goal for Hillsborough would be to develop a nature center that could also double as a town community center which highlights and markets the unique character of the Contoocook River and the surrounding natural areas. Kemp Park's prime location is a logical location for such a center. By having this center serve many different purposes, it can showcase the town's history along the river, emphasize the unique ecosystems (such as the river trout), and be a place for local artists to promote their crafts.

Communication & Economic Development: Nature and Arts Economy

Action Steps

- Short Term
 - o Add in a boat launch
 - o Venue-grade portapotty
 - o Benches
 - o Improve digital communication: Google and Apple maps, mobile website, social media and events
- Medium Term
 - o Festival events – trout fishing, tubing challenge, kayak race
 - o Utilize snowmobile trail behind Tooky's to connect to downtown
- Long Term
 - o Construct Nature Center/ Multipurpose Center along River



Connect & Define Downtown



An example of a makerspace being used for soldering class.

Activate Space

Short term, low-cost activities are a great way to activate vacant spaces and help beautify downtown. These activities can also be used to extend the scope of the downtown to encourage people to park in different locations and walk or to connect the downtown core with Kemp Park. Working with building owners to find ways to fill spaces can be a great way to engage property owners and help develop a pipeline of potential long-term tenants. Holding events during these pop up demonstrations can also help people to visualize downtown Hillsborough's potential and attract investors. These processes can also help to identify which uses there are demands more in the downtown, such as a makerspace to connect and train local artists.

Ideas for Arts and Activities

- Pop-Up Demonstrations – allow artists, businesses to temporarily fill empty storefronts
 - o Bring in local artists to do workshops and sell wares
 - o Consider a makerspace
- Tie into transportation suggestions – allow art on sidewalks that relates to the town
- Use porches and stairways to showcase musicians – young, old, and anywhere in between
- Take advantage of existing events- farmers markets, summer concerts- to promote new initiatives
- Tie in activities at Butler Park to connect with Kemp Park
 - o Giant games – Jenga, corn hole, bowling, chess, checkers
 - o Fitness Trails



An example of an obstacle in a fitness trail



A "Porch Fest" example showing a possible event utilizing existing buildings and showcasing local talent.



A potential venue for a Porch Fest is right downtown.

Communication & Economic Development: Nature and Arts Economy

General Traffic Considerations

General Considerations

- Pedestrian and bicycle improvements
- Provide unified lighting/sidewalks extending towards off-street parking areas
- Reduce pavement footprint with reduction/removal of turn lanes pending results of a formal traffic study
- Evaluate traffic control needs. Is traffic signal warranted, are turn lanes needed?
- Does not appear that a roundabout is feasible in this location

Proposal

- The proposed concept includes removing the exclusive left-turn lanes on Main Street to free up additional width in order to provide:
 - o Parking closer to adjacent buildings
 - o A wider through lane that can accommodate shared use by bicyclists
 - o Improve safety by shortening pedestrian crossings (using bump outs at intersections with more direct alignment across roads)
 - o More sidewalk space on Main Street



Sketch of potential changes to the flow of traffic, including removing the left turn lanes in order to widen the sidewalks and shorten crossings.

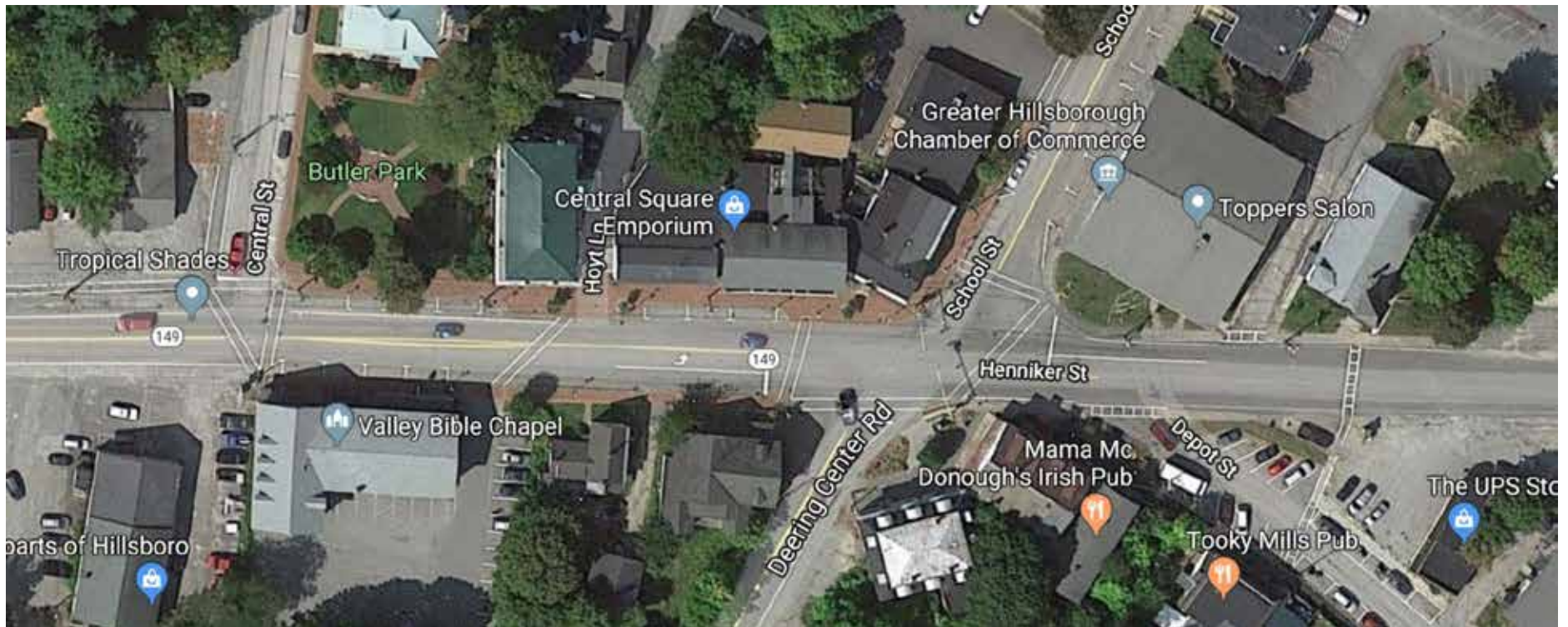
Transportation, Parking, and Safety

Current Traffic Operations and Study

Under Existing Traffic Pattern

In order to support the removal of the exclusive left-turn lane as part of the proposed concept, a preliminary traffic analysis was performed. 2018 AM and PM peak hour traffic volumes were used to approximate the operations of both the existing and proposed signalized intersection both with and without activation of the pedestrian phase. The results show that:

- Operation of the signalized intersection *with* the exclusive left-turn lanes on Main Street was good with minimal queuing
- Operation of the signalized intersection *without* the exclusive left-turn lanes on Main Street was fair with minimal queuing



Transportation, Parking, and Safety

Volvo Museum

From Confusing Parking Lot to Engaging Display

During the tour of Hillsborough, the team noticed that the Volvo Museum holds a prominent place in downtown. As it occupies such a central location there were a few suggestions offered to update the current appearance.

- Update the facade to reflect a retro styling like an old gas station
- Add more windows to showcase the cars and move some indoors
- Consider simple window signs for the parked cars to explain the building and lot to visitors



Existing facade of the Volvo building



Suggested updated facades that recalls the retro styling of the original building

Building Use & Design

Village Center Buildings

The all-important Village Center is the essential hub of community vitality, a vital link in the connectivity between community assets, activities, infrastructure and natural-capital assets. There have been three broad categories explored for future revitalization and optimization regarding the existing buildings:

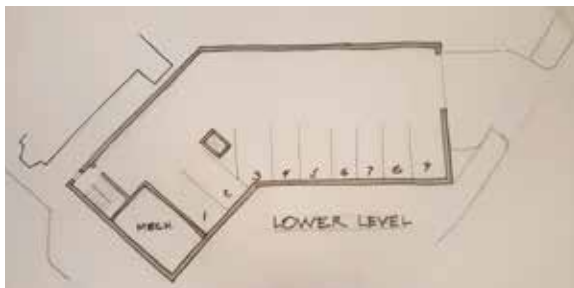
A: Existing Village Center buildings refurbished, restored remodeled, along with existing public landscape, with no change to site footprint. We believe that main streets should NOT lose their street-defining buildings (which could result in a “missing teeth” scenario.) We also recommend behind-building parking.

B: Old post office, and private Wilson buildings demolished, and new construction of joined pair of new buildings built on existing footprints at same location, with minimal change in site footprint or public space. (See below and following page)

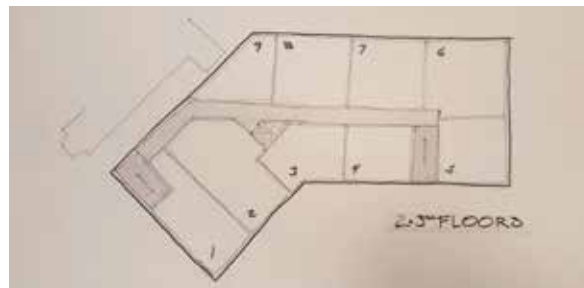
Open Vista

Both B and C options include potential to reveal the beautiful vistas behind the Village Center Buildings. In Option B, at the intersection of the buildings would be a 16 foot wide expanding open vista to the south across the river, inviting one to see directly through the building to visually connect the town center with the river and Kemp Park and the mountain views beyond. In either case, this open public space could be rented to Mama McDonough’s for their open patio seating- ideally on the south side. A stair from this open deck could lead down the hill, connecting to a path, already partially established, as less steep access to the river.

OR C: Post Office demolished, Wilson Building preserved; landscaped three tier public plaza built incorporating old post office footprint and adding public gathering and event space that enhances pedestrian accessibility, vistas and connectivity between Village Center and key natural-capital assets: Kemp Park, Grimes Field and future riverway development. (No images available to show example.)



Lower Level: The lower basement area appears to accommodate 9 parking spaces, with access on Bridge Street. Over time, an elevator could be added.



Second and Third Floors: The second and third floors could be housing, at the center of downtown. Preliminarily, there appears to be room enough in the combined building for 8 units of housing on each floor- 16 units in all.



First Floor: The first floor of two angled sides of the space maintain their traditional social roles - 1. The old Post Office continues as a functional Community space, perhaps in ways that might encourage young people to use the downtown community and 2. The 2 Bridge St. building side would continue to be a street-side business

Building Use & Design

Village Center Buildings

The urban space made by the old Post Office at 1 Bridge Street and 2 Bridge Street, owned by Jason Kovaric, at the intersection of Henniker Street and Bridge Street (NH Route 149) is the definitive physical heart of Hillsborough. It is the architectural definition of a public intersection, where a town slows down and meets each other. It is also one of the architecturally most vulnerable places in Town. The old Post Office is a condemned building slated for demolition, and 2 Bridge Street is a conundrum to its owner- possibly an albatross too expensive to rehabilitate.

In talking with Jason Kovaric, he expressed curiosity in what could happen if he bought the Old Post Office from the Town and combined the two properties. He envisioned one larger 3 story building above a full row of parking under these two buildings, with entry off Bridge street perfectly at grade with the potential lower parking level.

In discussions of how to finance such a project, it became clear the most of the financing options required a public component of the project. Combined ownership between the Town and Mr. Kovaric might be best for all. Equally, it might be time for the Town and several community members to make a financial investment in the town center to 'get the ball rolling'.

The charrette design team encouraged these ideas and pursued them as a possible solution. As noted the façade angles of the two buildings make excellent subtle connections to the angled approaches of School and Bridge Streets at the Post Office, with a 'bent angle' created by the facade of 2 Bridge St. relatively parallel to West Main and Henniker Streets. Both effectively create a public space from geometries specific to Hillsborough and should be retained.



Referring to the Best of the Past

The Rumrill building is one of the most distinguished buildings in Hillsborough. We are suggesting that the Rumrill facade be the idea behind the facade design of the new 2 Bridge St. portion of the building. The old Post Office portion would use the same window size and spacing pattern and have a more modern, yet not radically so, facade of horizontal sheets of cementitious board. Many from the town lamented that 'nothing changes' on our Main Street. This will respect the past and be an upscale new modern look at the center of town-establishing a new era.

An elevation of the buildings showing a unifying aesthetic that blends newer, cleaner styling with the existing brick style of the Rumrill Building.

Building Use & Design

Apollo 13 Strategy



- “Failure is not an option”
 - o Buy coffee today – and tomorrow- at the new shop
 - o Thank them and others in town and tell them you are “on it”
 - o Instagram them and ANYthing else you visit
 - o Yelp and other review sites, leave 5-star reviews now
- Next Cool Place
 - o “Permit Free” period - encourage people to do things even if they don’t have a clear plan
 - o Zero rent-cost summer (or fall or winter or spring) - incubate those small businesses
 - o Recruit new store owner(s) for store ready to transition
 - o Who do you know?
 - o Summer visitor, the “little shop they always wanted”
 - o New sites – “get in early, Come back to Give back” opportunity

Things to do NOW

- Local Arts community participation in Free Art Show gallery
- Summer visitors are the target
 - o 5 new places to visit
 - o 100 new visitors
- Free and low-cost features
 - o “Free Parking” signage
 - o Pop-up local art in Bakery
 - o Yellow Building
 - o Benches, porch chairs, trash cans
 - o Visible, quality Portapotties Free
- Banners and “eye-wash” (cleaning up how it looks) for the Volvo Garden
 - o Window stickers
 - o The Story of Volvo (“for life”) and owner
- “Rinse and Repeat”

Immediate Action Steps

Concluding Thoughts

The charrette team enjoyed their time in Hillsborough and found the residents and stakeholders engaged and ready to make changes. The people of Hillsborough were welcoming and engaged with the charrette team and demonstrated great dedication to their small town. Plan NH's team wanted to provide recommendations that help to define downtown Hillsborough and boost the personality and functionality of the area.

The Plan NH charrette team's suggestions included:

- Capitalizing on existing assets within Hillsborough's nature economy
- Taking the best of the past as inspiration for creating new facades on key buildings
- Supporting local and small business and artists with pop-up shops and a makerspace
- Building on existing walkability with raised crosswalks and narrower streets to shorten pedestrian crossings

These proposals were based on our Listening Sessions during which residents expressed their dreams for a bustling town center and connecting Hillsborough to its fantastic natural surroundings.



Concluding Thoughts

Resources



Many of the recommendations in this report might be funded with sources other than town coffers. We recommend the Town work closely with UNH Cooperative Extension on this – resources and criteria change constantly, and new sources of funding come into being at different times.

As mentioned below, we also recommend, once the Town gets many projects underway, the Town hire a part-time economic and/or community development person to coordinate projects, funding, etc.

Private Funding

- Donations/ Foundation Grants
- Crowdfunding- <https://www.oswegocounty.org/index.php>
- Bank loans as matching funds to leverage public funds

Public Funding

- Community Development Block Grant/CDIP tax credit administered by CDFA
 - o Facade Improvement, Community Facilities
 - o Up to \$500K
 - o Tax credits need corporate buy-in to purchase the credits
- Historic Tax Credit
- Housing Tax Credit
 - o Supports development of “workforce” rental housing as well as senior rental housing
- USDA-Rural Development grants for business development and coordination
- USDA-RD grants for Community Facilities (Culture, Education)

Leadership and Coordination Suggestions

- Multiple groups and people pulling in the same direction
- Coordination and prioritizing could help
- Consider engaging a consultant or part time staff to help coordinate efforts; grant funding may be available
- Town-led monthly or bimonthly meetings convened by town (Robyn) attended by
 - o Chamber of Commerce
 - o Hillsborough Reborn
 - o EDC
 - o Hillsborough Pride



Resources

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