

### III. D O W N T O W N

#### BACKGROUND

Derry's Downtown is the economic, social, and cultural heart of the community. While Derry's outlying, more rural areas and open space provide its residents with a sense of rural country and connection with nature, the Downtown is the busy center of services, businesses, and municipal activities of the Town. Preserving the viability of the Downtown as a center of community activity has been and continues to be an important priority for the Town and its citizens.

This priority is reflected in a variety of initiatives that have targeted attention and resources to the Downtown over the last several years. During the spring of 1996, Derry undertook a Civic Profile to define the future for the Downtown desired by its citizens, business owners and consumers. Several hundred citizens and business people attended two sessions in May, 1996, brainstormed in small groups, and came up with over 250 recommended actions for making the Downtown a safer, more attractive, and more economically vital center over the next two decades. Several of the recommended strategies and actions emerging from that event already have come to pass.

A milestone in Derry's efforts to strengthen and sustain the Downtown was its successful application, in June, 1998, to become a New Hampshire Main Street Community. Since that time, the Derry Main Street Program has focused upon organizing the interests of Downtown, improving its physical design, and promoting the Downtown as a destination point. The Main Street program's accomplishments include the creation of the Derry Main Street Corporation, a community-based organization to spearhead the Main Street initiative, installation of street, sidewalk, lighting, and façade improvements, and special events such as holiday celebrations, retail events, and *Derryfest*. A third-year program initiative will involve a market analysis to guide plans for business expansion, business retention, and recruiting new businesses.

While Derry's Downtown is the economic, social and cultural heart of its community, these characteristics have been and continue to be dominated by a major physical factor – the bisection of the Downtown by Route 102, one of southern New Hampshire's major east-west connector routes and feeder highway to Interstate 93. In fact, Derry's Downtown main street – Broadway - is Route 102. Particularly at commuting hours, Broadway and Route 102 are clogged with traffic. At other times as well, through traffic from and to I-93 creates a constant stream of traffic that has substantially altered the Downtown's character as a pedestrian-oriented village center. Derry residents, shoppers, and visitors share Broadway with a "fire hose" of through traffic that influences residents and consumers' decisions to cross the street, whether to walk along Broadway, or whether to stop, park, and shop at all. Drivers passing through Derry also may make decisions about whether to stop, park, and shop at a particular establishment they may see on Broadway and Route 102. These decisions, of course, in turn affect the well-being of businesses along Broadway in the Downtown as well as the type of businesses that choose to locate or are able to remain there. This dual role of Route 102 in the Downtown – a major through traffic route and also Derry's main street – creates both problems and opportunities that must be reckoned with in any future scenario – even a scenario where another Derry I-93 exit does come to pass.

#### *Visual and Physical Features of the Downtown*

From the 1996 Downtown Civic Profile, several objectives emerged to improve and strengthen the physical design and visual appearance of the Downtown. An important priority was the creation of more open space in this Center. Ideas for how to do this ranged from creating green spaces behind stores, developing a small pocket park, developing road design standards that encourage green space, holding a downtown landscape competition, and inventorying land to look for open space possibilities. Profile participants agreed that the Downtown would benefit from a common "theme", perhaps connected with the history of the Town, with visual connection between buildings perhaps reflected through common building materials, visual façade connections, and complementary signage. To support downtown revitalization, possible zoning revisions were identified, such as revisions to encourage multi-use

buildings, combined or shared parking lots, and development of a sign ordinance.

#### *Economic Aspects of the Downtown*

The Downtown is home to the Courthouse, Town Hall, Public Library, the Opera House, as well as the banks, service and retail businesses. The 1996 Derry Downtown Profile emphasized the need to focus and expand upon this existing core of services so as to further support the Downtown as a service destination point as a strategy to restore economic health in the Downtown. Strengthening the cultural features of the Downtown, as well as improvements to the visual and physical appearance, will support economic revitalization. The importance of Downtown revitalization to the Town as a whole also is reflected in the Economic Development Element of this Plan.

#### *Cultural Features of the Downtown*

Derry's Downtown sports a wide range of cultural facilities and events. The Derry Public Library, the Opera House, the Veteran's Hall, the Fire House Historical Museum, the schools, the churches, MacGreggor Park and Bandstand, and the West Side Community Center are among the Downtown's features. Cultural events and groups that have occurred or met in the Downtown include *Derryfest*, the Interfaith Choir, the Music and Drama Company, ArtsWalk and open studios, concerts in MacGreggor Park, the Holiday Parade. Several coffee houses and stores such as Choices and More, A Wing and a Prayer, and the former Pour House and Fat Freddie's have served as gathering places and centers of cultural activities.

Ideas to expand downtown cultural activities that emerged from the 1996 Downtown Profile included developing community-generated cultural programming for teens, seniors, families, developing a concert series, facilitating more resident performing groups and touring company presentations at the Opera House, developing a pocket park next to the Adams Memorial Building, and developing trailhead facilities to complement the Pathways project.

#### *Traffic and Parking*

Additional parking facilities, alternative traffic patterns, possible re-routing of Route 28, pedestrian

safety improvements in sidewalks and crosswalks, were recommended actions for the Downtown emerging from the 1996 Downtown Civic profile. Particular lots targeted as possible parking areas included the Aubuchon lot and the Purchase lot. Improvements to existing lots, such as signage, improved lighting, pedestrian access, remain priorities as of the writing of this Plan.

A key recommendation emerging from the Downtown Civic Profile was to undertake a traffic study to examine and come up with alternative scenarios for vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles in the Downtown. While Derry has undertaken several studies and actual traffic improvement projects in certain key trouble spots, the fundamental dichotomy of the Route 102 thoroughfare also being Downtown Derry's main street - and how this dichotomy can be addressed - has yet to be really grappled with.

During the fall of 2000, The Town adopted new zoning regulations for the Downtown that allowed mixed use more widely, a broader range of permitted retail uses, and area and dimensional requirements more in keeping with the traditional downtown pattern. Also adopted was a new business overlay district whose purpose is to protect the traditional character of the older downtown area.

### **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Derry's goals for its Downtown are to:

- Continue revitalizing the Downtown, including improvements to, parking, and signs.
- Promote Derry as *New Hampshire's Place to Be*.
- Focus on the Downtown as the economic center of the Town, designing Town-wide economic development approaches to support this.
- Continue to implement the short-and long-term actions identified through the May, 1996 Derry Downtown Profile process.

Particular objectives emerged as a priority during the 1999-2000 Master Plan process. These were to:

- Strive to make the Downtown pedestrian-friendly.

- Strategically plan parking to serve Downtown businesses and services.
- Encourage the private sector to market Derry’s businesses, services, and recreational opportunities.

- Possible parallel routes to Broadway;
- Possible expansion of side streets in Downtown;
- Additional routes in and to the Town’s industrial area.  
*[also in the Economic Development Element].*

## IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

### *A Pedestrian-friendly Downtown:*

- Create more green space and public and private gathering places in the Downtown.  
*[also in Land Use Element]*
- Improve landscaping for both public and private facilities and buildings, through approaches such as:
  - Public investment in streetscape improvements;
  - Revising site plan review requirements to encourage improved landscaping;
  - Designing incentives for businesses and downtown properties to improve existing landscaping.
- Improve the amount, type, and design of municipal and informational signage in the Downtown regarding the type and location of Downtown facilities.
- Provide parking signage that guides drivers to existing parking lots.
- Encourage improvements such as size, type, and design of private signage through regulatory and incentive programs.
- Undertake a planning charrette, and/or a traffic and transportation study that examines the combined functions of Route 102 both as Derry’s Main Street and as a major east/west thoroughfare, and which proposes alternative scenarios to address the traffic, transportation and pedestrian challenges resulting from this dual role. Include in this study:

### *Strategically plan Downtown parking:*

- Create new parking opportunities in the Downtown through a combination of approaches such as:
  - Developing parking areas to serve Opera House, Town Hall, businesses;
  - Exploring acquisition of several small tracts throughout the Downtown to balance parking needs throughout the District;
  - Revise site plan review requirements and zoning regulations to encourage private parking areas that can be used by multiple businesses;
  - Exploring multi-level parking facilities if and where suitable;
  - Exploring the possibility of paying “access fees” in lieu of on-site parking provision.
- Improve existing parking lots, including:
  - Amount, type, and location of night lighting;
  - Safe location of access points in and out of parking areas;
  - Clearly delineated parking spaces;
  - Addition of trees and landscaping to provide shade and soften the visual appearance.

### *Marketing and promoting Derry:*

- Enlist private sector support in activities such as broadening Downtown entertainment opportunities, specifically:

- Recruiting an upscale movie theater to the Downtown;
- Encouraging frequent live performances and shows;
- Organizing more seasonal and special events to attract tourists from throughout New England as well as Derry residents;
- Acquiring and renovating a Downtown building to house a historical museum and cultural center.
- Developing a “live act” entertainment hall and dance hall;
- Developing a family recreation center in the Downtown, possibly including roller-skating, ice-skating bowling, games, etc.  
*[Also in the Economic Development Element]*

## **APPENDIX**

B. Downtown Working Group Report; June 19, 2000.

## **REFERENCED MATERIALS**

*The Derry Downtown Profile Report*, May, 1996.

April 2, 2001