South Deerfield Center Promotion

January 2018  A project to encourage greater economic and community development activity in the center of South Deerfield.

Led by the Deerfield Selectboard with support from the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG). Funding for FRCOG support from a 2017 District Local Technical Assistance award from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development.
South Deerfield Center Promotion
January 2018

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Executive Summary

South Deerfield Center is a compact mixed use commercial and residential area with access to municipal services. However, despite an advantageous location and access to important infrastructure, the Center is not as robust a commercial center as it could be. Recent planning efforts identified key recommendations to enhance the community’s livability and vitality. The purpose of this project is to enhance economic activity in South Deerfield Center by gaining a better understanding of the Center as currently is and by pursuing strategies to build upon this previous planning work.

As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, the South Deerfield Census Designated Place (CDP) has a population of about 1,538 people. This population is slightly younger and has higher incomes in comparison to the county at large. South Deerfield CDP is home to several of the region’s largest employers as well as the Yankee Candle Company flagship store, one of the largest tourist attractions in the Commonwealth. The population density, geographic location, and access to infrastructure and utilities sets South Deerfield apart from other village centers in the region.

For the purposes of this report, a more defined Study Area is used that focuses on the 75 parcels located in the vicinity of Elm Street and the main intersection of Elm, South Main, North Main, and Sugarloaf Streets. As of August 2017, the majority of businesses served the local market, as opposed to a market focused on tourists or regional services. In addition to identifying existing businesses, the inventory identified five vacant/undeveloped properties and eight vacant spaces (including buildings or first floor storefronts) in the Study Area. The ability to redevelop or reuse these spaces vary.

The report identifies activities underway or proposed that will impact the Center, such as the relocation of the Cumberland Farms store and gas station; the proposed redevelopment at the former Oxford site; and the construction of 70 condominium units on Sugarloaf Street. As these and other proposed projects move toward development, it will result in more residents, visitors, and workers who could become additional customers for Center-based businesses.

Of the recent planning efforts conducted, the 2013 Downtown Deerfield Complete Streets and Livability Plan provided specific recommendations to enhance economic development in South Deerfield Center. The recommendations can be divided into the two categories: physical environment and business development. Through interviews and a focus group, key stakeholders were asked how some of these Livability Plan recommendations could move forward. It was noted the solution to improving the Center
involves both public and private sector partners, with the understanding that any activity involving municipal property would require review and approval by the Selectboard.

The Center’s layout lends itself to be a very walkable community; however, participants stressed the need to improve the pedestrian infrastructure. There were concerns about the appearance of the streetscape, building facades, and overall visual aesthetic or “curb appeal” of the Center were expressed. The largest undeveloped and underutilized property in the Study Area is owned by the Town of Deerfield. It is a long, narrow parcel that extends behind the buildings of Elm Street and connects to a municipal parking lot off of North Main Street. A prospective reuse of the parcel could expand public parking on the parcel, and, working with an abutting private property owner, develop pedestrian connection to Elm Street businesses.

When considering how to enhance business development in the Center, it was agreed the target customer base for businesses in the Center should be a combination of local residents, commuters/workers, and tourists. While there are exceptions, the Center primarily has a day-time economy, with most economic activity conducted around and during traditional business hours for commuters, local workers, and day-trip visitors. Common suggestions for new businesses were: more restaurant options, including a coffee shop or bakery; and to have a small market/grocery store. There were suggestions to have a gathering space for more events and entertainment; as well as to have more community events and improved promotion of community activities.

Support was expressed for developing an identity or brand for the Center that would focus on its New England character and its walkability. However, it was agreed that improvements to the physical environment would need to be accomplished before such a marketing campaign could be successful. It was discussed that in addition to physical improvements to public infrastructure and private property, the Center could benefit from other beautification measures, such as garden planters.

This report identified potential resources that can be leveraged by the Town government and the community, such as the MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program. Suggested action items include evaluating adoption of a Complete Streets Policy for the Town of Deerfield and implementing the Livability Plan recommendations. To assist with implementation, the Selectboard may want to consider forming an Advisory Committee to prioritize activities, identify the appropriate entity to take responsibility for implementation, and determine how these entities can best be supported. As there is limited capacity for municipal staff to take on additional duties, it the Advisory Committee reflect a strong public-private partnership and collaborate with regional organizations that may be supportive in its efforts.
Introduction

South Deerfield Center is a compact mixed use commercial and residential area with access to municipal services. However, despite an advantageous location and access to important infrastructure, the Center is not as robust a commercial center as it could be. Recent planning efforts have identified key recommendations to enhance the community’s livability and vitality, which included strategies focused on the Center. Some of these recommendations have moved forward, while others have not. The purpose of this project is to enhance economic activity in South Deerfield Center by gaining a better understanding of the Center as currently is and by pursuing strategies that build upon the planning recommendations previously identified.

Overview

As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, the South Deerfield Census Designated Place (CDP) has a population of about 1,538 people. From this estimate, there are 755 housing units of which 705 are occupied (also referred to as “households”). Fifty-five percent of the occupied housing units are families and the other households are people living alone or with nonfamily members.

Also according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median age of residents in the South Deerfield CDP was 43.4 years, which is lower than the town-wide (47.1 years) and county (45.4 years) median age. The following chart depicts the distribution of the total population by age group. The proportion of people under the age of 25 years is similar across the geographies of the South Deerfield CDP, the Town of Deerfield and Franklin County. However, the distribution of people age 25-44 years and age 45-64 years in the South Deerfield CDP is different. South Deerfield CDP has a larger percentage of its population in the 25-44 years age group, and a small percentage of its population in the 45-65 years age group compared to the Town and County. Businesses located in the Center or interested in locating there may be interested in the 25-44 years age group as a pool of prospective workers or as a targeted customer base.

The County has a larger percentage of its population age 65 years and over, than the South Deerfield CDP or Town. A major development proposed in the CDP that will increase the number of residents in the older age cohorts is the proposed 70-unit

Demographic Snapshot
1,538 Residents
755 Housing Units
705 Households
385 Families
43.4 Median Age

1 Data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2016 American Community Survey (ACS), Five-Year Estimate (2012-2016).
condominium project for owners who are age 55 years and over. Again, current and future businesses may want to target their goods or services to serve this population.

Chart 1: Percent of Total Population by Age Group

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 ACS Five-year Estimate.

The U.S. Census Bureau measures incomes for families (i.e. a group of two or more related people living together) and households (i.e. an individual living alone or a group of people living together who are related or not). The median income of South Deerfield CDP households is close to the Franklin County estimate and much less than the town-wide estimate. However, the median family income for South Deerfield CDP is close to the town-wide level, which are both significantly higher than the county level.

Chart 2: Family and Household Median Incomes

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 ACS Five-year Estimate.
Map 1. CDP and Study Area Map
The advantages of South Deerfield Center include its proximity to important transportation routes, major employers, and regional attractions. South Deerfield Center is located near the convergence of Route 116 and Routes 5/10, and near exits 24 and 25 of Interstate-91. The Center is close to several of the region’s largest employers, and the Deerfield and Whately Industrial Parks. The Center is also located across from the Yankee Candle Company’s flagship store, which has been recognized as one of the largest tourist attractions in the Commonwealth.

The U.S. Census Bureau produces data that describes where people live and where people work. This data set is separate from the American Community Survey and describes a single year. According to this data set, there were 1,121 workers employed in establishments located in the South Deerfield CDP in 2015. Approximately, 6% of these workers were also residents of South Deerfield CDP, with the remaining workers coming from outside the CDP. This data point indicates that most people who worked in the CDP traveled from another area of Deerfield or another community to their job.

The top three industry sectors that employed these workers in the CDP were: manufacturing (37% of total), educational services (19%), and information services (14%). Half of all workers employed in CDP establishments were 30 to 54 years of age in 2015, which was followed by workers age 55 years and older (34% of total), and workers 29 years or younger with (12% of total).

Chart 3: Age of Workers in South Deerfield CDP


Traffic Count

In 2016, the average annual daily traffic count on Sugarloaf Street near Eastern Ave was 7,265 vehicles.
In terms of earnings, half of the workers in the South Deerfield CDP earned more than $3,333 per month (nearly $40,000 annually), which was followed by 38% of workers earning between $3,333 and $1,250 per month, and 12% of workers earning $1,250 per month or less (approximately $15,000 annually).

Chart 4: Monthly Earnings of Workers in South Deerfield CDP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earning</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1,250 per month or less</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,251 to $3,333 per month</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $3,333 per month</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In terms of fostering greater business development, the Center is served by utilities and infrastructure important to fostering a vibrant commercial center. In rural Franklin County, not all village centers have such infrastructure. The South Deerfield Water Supply District and South Deerfield Wastewater Treatment Plant provide public water and sewer service. Eversource offers electric distribution service and Berkshire Gas Company offers natural gas in the Center. Broadband access is available at the DSL level through a central office located in the Center, as well as through their Comcast cable system. The MassBroadband123 middle-mile fiber network is present and has multiple connection points located at community anchor institutions in the Center. For transit, the Center has a stop used by both the Franklin Regional Transit Authority and Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, which offers connections to Amherst, Northampton, and Greenfield.

The population density, geographic location, and access to infrastructure and utilities sets South Deerfield apart from other village centers in this rural region. How these advantages can be leveraged to increase the level of economic activity in the Center, while maintaining the character of the community, is the focus of this study.

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2 As of the writing of this report, the Berkshire Gas Company has a moratorium in effect that does not allow for new or expanded hookups of natural gas in Deerfield and surrounding communities in their Franklin and Hampshire County service area.
Study Area Inventory

The U.S. Census Bureau’s Census Designated Place (CDP) encompasses the southeast corner of the municipality. For the purposes of this report, a more defined Study Area is used to focus on the commercial center of South Deerfield.

This report’s Study Area contains 75 parcels located in the vicinity of Elm Street and the main intersection of Elm Street, South and North Main Streets, and Sugarloaf Street. An inventory of Study Area parcels was completed using municipal Assessor’s records and a field inspection conducted in August 2017. In the Study Area, fifty-eight businesses were identified through visual inspection (i.e. storefront signage). The chart below depicts the number of businesses by category. The majority of these businesses primarily serve the local market, as opposed to a market focused on tourists or regional services.

Chart 5: Study Area Businesses by Category

Source: Field inspection conducted by FRCOG staff, August 2017
The future use of undeveloped and underutilized properties is directly impacted by its zoning district. There are three zoning districts present in the Study Area. They are: Industrial (I), Commercial Small Business (C-I), and Central Village Residential (CVR). Other zoning districts adjacent to the Study Area include: Commercial (C-II) which includes the Yankee Candle Company store and Expedited Permitting District (EPD) which includes the former Oxford site.

In addition to identifying existing businesses, the inventory identified vacant properties and properties available for sale/lease. Five parcels were identified as undeveloped and underutilized. Two of these parcels are owned by the Town of Deerfield and three of these parcels are in private ownership. All five parcels are zoned Commercial Small Business (C-I), which allows a variety of commercial uses by right or by Special Permit. The largest lot is at the corner of Elm Street and Greenfield Road, and is the site for a new Cumberland Farms gas station and convenience store. The smallest lot is a narrow parcel located along the railroad tracks at the railroad crossing, and is presently used as an informal parking lot. The parcels located behind Backporch BBQ and adjacent to Leader Home Center are cleared lots that could accommodate development. The last parcel is long and relatively narrow. It is Town-owned and extends from behind the Elm Street commercial buildings to the municipal parking lot on North Main Street.

Table 1: Undeveloped and Underutilized Properties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parcel</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Owner Type</th>
<th>Zoning</th>
<th>Lot Size (acres)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>168 64</td>
<td>0 Elm Street</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>C-I</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>Lot at the corner of Elm Street and Greenfield Road. Proposed site for a new Cumberland Farms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168 117</td>
<td>Off North Main Street</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>C-I</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>Lot located behind Backporch BBQ. Presently used for parking and storage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168 118</td>
<td>0 Elm Street</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>C-I</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>Located adjacent to railroad crossing. The small lot is used for informal parking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168 121</td>
<td>14 Elm Street</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>C-I</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>Located adjacent to Leader Home Center and has the same owner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168 128</td>
<td>59 North Main Street</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>C-I</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>The parcel extends from behind the Elm Street buildings to the municipal parking lot off of North Main Street.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Town of Deerfield Assessor’s Records, and FRCOG, 2017
Map 2. Study Area Zoning Districts
Map 3. Study Area Observed Uses
Photo 1. Town-owned parcel located on Elm Street and on eastside of railroad crossing.

Photo credit: FRCOG, 2017.

Photo 2. Privately-owned parcel at 14 Elm Street.

Photo credit: FRCOG, 2017.

Photo 3. Town-owned parcel that extends from the municipal parking lot off of North Main Street and along the rear of Elm Street buildings.

Photo credit: FRCOG, 2017.
Eight spaces, including buildings or first floor storefronts, were identified as vacant in the Study Area. For this inventory, vacancy was determined by viewing the space from the public way and/or seeing signs advertising the space for sale or rent. Commercial spaces located on upper floors were not included in this inventory. As of the field inspection conducted in August 2017, four vacant buildings spaces and four vacant storefronts were identified.

Table 2: Vacant Commercial Spaces and Buildings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parcel</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Owner Type</th>
<th>Zoning</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>168 124</td>
<td>8B Elm Street</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>C-I</td>
<td>A vacant storefront space, located in the same structure as a fly-fishing supply shop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169 115</td>
<td>3 Sugarloaf Street</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>C-I</td>
<td>The vacant building is the former location of the Deerfield Arts Bank and the Bank of America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168 12</td>
<td>6A Sugarloaf Street</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>C-I</td>
<td>A vacant storefront space, located in the same structure as an insurance agency and restaurant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168 127</td>
<td>55B and 55C North Main Street</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>C-I</td>
<td>Two empty commercial spaces, including a former grocery market, are available for lease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>14 Conway Street</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>CVR</td>
<td>A building previously used by a plumbing company and is located in the Center Village Residential zoning district which allows very few commercial uses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169 11</td>
<td>71 North Main Street</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>CVR</td>
<td>A building previously used as church and is located in the Center Village Residential zoning district which allows very few commercial uses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169 37</td>
<td>68 North Main Street</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>CVR</td>
<td>A building previously used by a bookselling company and is located in the Center Village Residential zoning district which allows very few commercial uses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Town of Deerfield Assessor’s Records, and FRCOG, 2017

Three of the four vacant buildings are located in the Center Village Residential (CVR) zoning district. This zoning district significantly limits the types of commercial uses allowed by right or Special Permit. A potential commercial use allowed in the CVR zoning district by right is a daycare facility or by Special Permit is a bed & breakfast. Of these properties, one is a former church which is proposed to be acquired by the Town.
for possible reuse for community purposes (such as a new senior center). The other two buildings located in the CVR zoning district are being marketed for sale. These two properties previously had commercial activity that was ‘grandfathered’. As there has been a time period of inactivity, this status may no longer be allowed which reduces the possibility for future commercial use.

The vacant building located at 3 Sugarloaf Street and the four first-floor vacant storefront spaces are located in the Commercial-1 (C-1) zoning district, which allows a variety of commercial uses by right or by Special Permit. The vacant building is privately owned and the former location of the Deerfield Arts Bank and a Bank of America branch. Of the storefront spaces, two are located at 55 North Main Street, including former small grocery store. The other vacant commercial spaces include a traditional storefront space at 8B Elm Street and a space that could be either an office or storefront at 6A Sugarloaf Street.

Photo 4. Storefront space at 8B Elm Street.
Photo credit: FRCOG, 2017.

Photo 5. Storefront spaces at 55B and 55C North Main Street.
Photo credit: FRCOG, 2017.
It is important to note that vacant buildings and storefronts can be typically turned over quickly to the next commercial venture (as opposed to building a new structure). The purpose of this inventory is to provide a baseline for the Center’s current commercial vacancy level and to be illustrative of the types of commercial spaces available.

**Previous Planning Activities**

In recent years, the Town of Deerfield has undertaken both town-wide and South Deerfield Center focused planning efforts. To build upon the work already conducted, the following is a brief review of efforts as they relate to specifically to South Deerfield Center.

The **Deerfield Housing Production Plan** was completed in 2014 by the Deerfield Planning Board Housing Subcommittee with support from the FRCOG. The purpose of the Plan was to identify the housing needs of the community and strategies to facilitate the development of that housing mix, including housing that is affordable. This Plan supported the creation of a diversity of housing types to provide choices and opportunities for Deerfield residents and workforce. As part of the housing goal statement, it encouraged new housing development be targeted within walking distance to the South Deerfield village center.

*Housing Goal Statement*

To preserve Deerfield’s rural character and agricultural, forest, and water resources, and to simultaneously support a vibrant, mixed use village center, new housing will largely be targeted within walking distance of the South Deerfield village center. The former Oxford Foods site presents an opportunity for a mix of commercial or office uses and affordable and market rate housing, with an emphasis on senior housing. Small single family and two-family infill development consistent with the historic character of the surrounding homes will be supported along existing village streets, as well as the possibility for new subdivisions that preserve remaining agricultural land or create a walkable, connected street network. Opportunities will be explored for reuse and rehabilitation of existing structures for housing.

Targeted mixed use development on Routes 5 and 10, through infill and adaptive reuse of existing structures, will provide new housing opportunities while avoiding commercial strip development along the route. In the rural areas of town, new subdivisions should be in the form of a conservation subdivision to preserve important resources while allowing the construction of new housing. Co-housing, a condominium development where homes are clustered together to create a community feel, is an alternative housing type that may also be appropriate in the rural areas of town. In all areas of town, accessory apartments will be supported and encouraged, particularly as a way for seniors to remain in their homes.
The **2013 Downtown Deerfield Complete Streets and Livability Plan** (referred to as the “Livability Plan”) was prepared by a team including The Cecil Group, Doucet & Associates and Nelson Nygaard and led by a Steering Committee with municipal officials, FRCOG staff, and other stakeholders participating. Funding for the Plan was from a federal H.U.D. Sustainable Communities grant awarded to the FRCOG.

As part of the information gathering process, an online survey of residents and a charrette were conducted to solicit input from the community. From the survey, it was noted that the top selection for what people did not like about walking in South Deerfield was “not enough retail shops” (70% of respondents). The charrette discussed a variety of topics. Key objectives identified by charrette participants included: traffic safety, pedestrian safety, bicycle safety, economic development, open space/recreation, and aesthetic improvements. Overall, the group wanted to see “a more active, vibrant downtown with opportunities to shop, eat, and see friends.”

Using the input from the survey and the charrette, the Plan developed recommendations to enhance economic development in South Deerfield Center. These recommendations included:

- Create linkages that better connect the Oxford site and the Center, such as pedestrian walkways and community recreation space.
- Reuse vacant and underutilized spaces, such as the Oxford Foods site and “infill” parcels.
- Encourage the location of “destination businesses” that attract customers because of the special nature of the goods or services that they offer.
• Market the Center as a desirable location for businesses by connecting to business organizations, providing information on the town website, or supporting community events or “Placemaking” activities to demonstrate the vitality of the area.

• Improve the appearance of buildings, businesses, and streetscape in the Center.

• Increase the amount of housing within walking distance to the Center.

• Consider adopting design guidelines as part of the zoning.

The Livability Plan included a chapter of short-term and long-term implementation activities. Since completion of this plan some of these activities have been accomplished. For example, Amtrak’s rail-crossing project was completed, and the public transit connection between the Whately park and ride lot on Routes 5 & 10 and South Deerfield Center has been accomplished. However, planning and funding to implement long-term streetscape improvements has not been implemented.

After acquiring the former Oxford Food site, the Town of Deerfield participated in the Commonwealth’s Chapter 43D Program, which provided grant funds to study possible redevelopment options for the site. The Oxford Foods Site Market Analysis was conducted by the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts on behalf of the Town of Deerfield in 2008.³

The study evaluated prospective market opportunities by use types. For industrial use, it found modest demand but a good opportunity for the right buyer. For residential use, it found an opportunity for 55+ age housing development. For commercial use, it found limited demand. For retail use, it found there was potential if improvements were made to a village gateway connection to Yankee Candle Company. For hospitality use, it found the hotel market saturated in the area. Building upon this work, conceptual designs for single light industrial use as well as multi-building mixed use development were created.

The Economic Development Chapter in the 2004 Town of Deerfield Community Development Plan recommended Village Center streetscape improvements. The Economic Development Chapter in the 2000 Town of Deerfield Master Plan also included Village Center streetscape improvements that better connected the Routes 5 & 10 gateway on Elm Street. The Plan also recommended a parcel level infill study for Village Center for commercial development, and an analysis of the business mix in the

³ It should be noted that this Analysis was completed early in the Great Recession, which was marked by a significant decline in the national economy and real estate market. Since the time of this Analysis the Town’s new highway garage has been constructed on the site. Approximately, two developable parcels remain.
Village Center be conducted. The Plan recommended that voluntary design guidelines be created and incorporated into the Town’s Zoning Bylaws. Another Village Center recommendation was to support business development through an agricultural “buy local” campaign that would include having a farmers’ market in the Village Center and promoting it to tourists visiting the Yankee Candle Company.

Proposed Activities

As of the time of this report, and since the completion of these planning efforts, there are several initiatives proposed or underway that will impact the Center. The Cumberland Farms store and gas station will relocate to a new facility to be constructed at the end of Elm Street at Routes 5&10. The store is currently located at the very heart of South Deerfield Center at the corner of South Main Street and Sugarloaf Street. The future reuse of this 0.21 acre parcel could greatly impact the Center.

The Berkshire Brewing Company currently offers brewery tours and tastings on Saturdays at their facility in the Center. State legislation has been proposed to allow for breweries to offer more than sample tasting on their premises, but would allow a brewery to sell a full pour for customers to drink on the premises and/or to sell their own packaged beer retail. If this legislation is approved, the Berkshire Brewing Company could expand their taproom to accommodate this new offering, which could attract more customers to the Center.

In the summer of 2017, the former South Deerfield Congregational Church at 71 North Main Street was proposed by the congregation to be gifted to the Town of Deerfield. The historic church building is being considered for renovation as a new community and
The current South County Senior Center is located in the parcel adjacent to the church, and could then be renovated for another purpose. There are also other potential activities proposed or underway that are not in this defined Study Area, but are in South Deerfield and may impact the Center. For example, at the Yankee Candle Company’s flagship store, the on-site restaurant changed. Chandler’s Tavern closed in May 2017. Chandler’s Tavern served lunch and dinner, and also had private function rooms. In the space now is a new Au Bon Pain restaurant, which is a café and bakery serving breakfast foods, sandwiches and desserts. The restaurant is open from 7:00 am to 5:30 pm.

The former Oxford site was not included in this report’s Study Area, but is located adjacent to it. Further development of the site will directly impact the Study Area. The site has two parcels remaining that have not been developed. One parcel is under a purchase and sale agreement with a local food product manufacturer, which is seeking to expand its operation into a new building on the site. The other parcel is about three acres and available for commercial or industrial development.

A Special Permit has been approved by the Planning Board for 70 condominium units on Sugarloaf Street for unit owners age 55 and over. These units will be located less than one mile from the main intersection of the Center.

As these and other proposed projects move toward development, it will result in more residents, visitors, and workers who could become additional customers for Center-based businesses.
Community Stakeholder Feedback

To forward the recommendations of previous planning efforts, strategies need to be developed and prioritized, and opportunities to support these strategies identified. Targeted outreach was conducted to solicit the opinions of key stakeholders. Some stakeholders were interviewed individually and others participated in a focus group held on November 18, 2017.

The stakeholders were asked to focus on the 2013 Downtown Deerfield Complete Streets and Livability Plan (referred to as the “Livability Plan”) recommendations for the Center and to discuss how they could move forward. It was noted that the solution to improving the Center must involve both public sector and private sector partners. However, it was understood that any activity involving municipal property would require the review and approval of the Selectboard. Participants were also asked to think about short-term solutions as well as long-term efforts to address issues in the Center.

For the purposes of discussion these Complete Streets and Livability Plan recommendations were selected and divided into the following two categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Environment Recommendations</th>
<th>Business Development Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Promote the reuse of vacant or underutilized spaces.</td>
<td>• Market the Center as a desirable location for businesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improve appearance of buildings, businesses and streetscape in the Center.</td>
<td>• Leverage the presence of Yankee Candle Company’s flagship store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage the location of “destination businesses”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Enhancing the Physical Environment**

It was recognized that the Center’s layout lends itself to be a very walkable community; however, participants stressed that the pedestrian infrastructure is in need of improvement. Concerns were also expressed about the appearance of the streetscape, building facades, and overall visual aesthetic or “curb appeal” of the Center. There was support that before South Deerfield can effectively build a brand or market itself to attract more businesses, there needs to be improvements to the physical environment.

A particular concern expressed was the future reuse of the Cumberland Farms convenience store and gas station parcel at the corner of South Main Street and Sugarloaf Street. With the construction of the new store and gas station at the end of Elm Street at Routes 5&10, this parcel at the primary intersection of the Center will
become vacant. The parcel’s reuse could have a large impact on the Center’s visual aesthetic as well as its economy. It was acknowledged that, as the property is in private ownership, there is limited influence Town government or the greater community can have on directing its future reuse. If a project comes before the Planning Board, they can encourage site design elements to make the project more pedestrian and bicycle friendly and/or more connected to the streetscape of the Center.

The approach to the Center via Elm Street was identified as an area for improvement, and in particular the area of the railroad crossing (see Photo 1 on page 15). Maintenance of vegetation around the traffic safety structures and aesthetics of the Town-owned parcel adjacent to the railroad tracks used as informal parking were noted. As Elm Street is a gateway to the Center, this area’s appearance creates an impression for a prospective customer or entrepreneur.

The largest undeveloped and underutilized property in the Study Area owned by the Town of Deerfield is a nearly one-acre parcel located off of North Main Street. The long, narrow parcel contains a municipal parking lot accessible from North Main Street, and then extends west behind the buildings of Elm Street to the south and Conway Street abutters to the north including Berkshire Brewing Company. About a third of the parcel has a formal parking lot that is part paved and part gravel. The remaining portion of the parcel is grass. Vehicle tracks in the grass indicate that the parcel is used to access the rear parking areas behind the Elm Street buildings.

Photo 9. Pedestrian sidewalk and parking in front of businesses on north side of Elm Street.

Photo credit: FRCOG, 2017.
Prospective reuse use of this parcel to enhance economic opportunity in the Center was discussed by participants. There was interest in expanding public parking on the parcel and improving the pedestrian connection to Elm Street businesses. Pleasant landscaping of the parcel and pedestrian connection could make it an appealing amenity to the Center. It was recommended the Town and abutting private property owners work cooperatively to develop a parking plan to increase the amount of parking available for tenants, workers, and customers. One property owner expressed interest in negotiating with the Town to develop such a pedestrian walkway. By increasing the
amount of public parking, it would free spaces in front of businesses on Elm Street. It was also suggested that if Elm Street building owners could lease parking spots, it could allow them to expand or improve their properties. Such parking could also possibly benefit the Berkshire Brewing Company if they have events that draw a crowd.

As described in the Livability Plan, shared parking and facilities that promote a “park once” strategy can ease parking pressure in the Center and encourage more walking. Customers who are walking and experiencing a pleasant pedestrian environment (i.e. good infrastructure, lighting, signage, etc.) may be more likely to visit more than one business.

Enhancing Business Development

Stakeholders agreed that the target customer base for businesses in the Center should be a combination of local residents, commuters/workers, and tourists. There was also discussion of existing or future Center-based businesses targeting niche customer bases, such as day-trippers visiting the Yankee Candle Company store and other Deerfield-based attractions; bicyclists touring through the Center; visitors who come to the region for fly-fishing; and parents visiting students at the private independent schools.

Currently, the Center primarily has a day-time economy, with most economic activity conducted around and during traditional business hours for commuters, local workers, and day-trip visitors. There are exceptions to this, such as restaurants or other food and beverage establishments that offer dinner. Contributing to this evening economic activity is the re-opening of a vacant restaurant space on Elm Street by GianniFig’s Ristorante.

Common suggestions for new businesses in the Center were: more restaurant options, including a coffee shop or bakery; and to have a small market/grocery store. There were suggestions to have a gathering space for more events and entertainment; as well as to have more community events and improved promotion of community activities.

Support was expressed for developing an identity or brand for the Center that would focus on its New England character and its walkability. However, it was agreed that improvements to the physical environment would need to be accomplished before such a marketing campaign could be successful. Once an identity or brand is developed, improved signage could leverage the Center’s proximity to I-91 and Routes 5&10 and other area attractions to attract customers.

It was discussed that in addition to physical improvements to public infrastructure and private property, the Center could benefit from other beautification measures, such as
garden planters or decorative light-pole flags. For such an initiative to be successful a community organization would need to launch and maintain it. The South Deerfield Women’s Club was identified as such an organization. Another option would be to incorporate the initiative into a student community service project led by one or more of the public or private schools in Deerfield.

Encouraging more community events or more broadly promoting existing events were discussed by stakeholders. Groups such as the South Deerfield Women’s Club, C3 Deerfield, and the Tilton Library were identified leaders in creating community events. Enhancing the connection among these groups and regional organizations, such as the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, was identified as a way to expand the reach of existing events and possibly encourage the creation of more events.

Connecting to regional organizations and leveraging the municipal government website were identified as ways to promote existing businesses and encourage the development of new businesses. An example given was posting the Franklin Regional Council of Government’s 2017 Franklin County Business Development Resources Guide on to the Town of Deerfield website. The Guide provides an overview of the region and links to business development organizations that may be of interest to entrepreneurs preparing to expand or launch a business. One of the featured resources in the Guide is the Franklin County Community Development Corporation (FCCDC). The FCCDC is a regional business development organization that offers workshops, access to capital, and direct technical assistance to support entrepreneurs. A link to the FCCDC could also be included on the Town website to direct current or prospective business operators to this resource.

**Business Development Resource Guide**

The FRCOG published a resource guide to assist business owners and entrepreneurs in finding organizations that can assist with lending and finance, marketing and networking, real estate development, workforce training, and business technical assistance. The Guide may be downloaded in PDF format from: [https://frcog.org/publication/view/business-development-resource-guide/](https://frcog.org/publication/view/business-development-resource-guide/)
Potential Resources

There are potential resources that can be leveraged by the Town of Deerfield and the Deerfield community to forward the 2013 Downtown Deerfield Complete Streets and Livability Plan (referred to as the “Livability Plan”) recommendations and suggestions made by stakeholders. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts offers two particular programs to support improvements to public infrastructure, such as for sidewalks and parking. These programs are the Massachusetts Department of Transportation’s (MassDOT) Complete Streets Funding Program and the Commonwealth’s MassWorks Infrastructure Program.

The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program provides funding to municipalities to plan and implement Complete Streets projects. As described by MassDOT, “a Complete Street is one that provides safe and accessible options for all travel modes – walking, biking, transit, and motorized vehicles – for people of all ages and abilities.” To participate municipalities are required to have a staff person attend a Complete Streets training workshop and for the Board of Selectmen adopt a Complete Streets policy approved by MassDOT. As of the date of this report, the Town has met the requirement for having a municipal staff person attend the training, but has not adopted a Complete Streets policy. More information about the program and examples of approved policies are available from MassDOT’s Complete Streets website at www.MassCompleteStreets.com.

With the adoption of a policy, the municipality must next develop a Complete Streets Pedestrian Prioritization Plan, which identifies projects and ranks them. As part of this program, MassDOT offers grant funds to assist municipalities with creating this Plan, which can be used to hire a consulting firm or the FRCOG to help the Town. The Livability Plan had a Complete Streets component that will be very helpful in developing the Complete Streets Pedestrian Prioritization Plan. However, the Complete Streets Pedestrian Prioritization Plan must incorporate projects from throughout the Town of Deerfield and the Livability Plan only covered South Deerfield Center.

Upon the Complete Streets Pedestrian Prioritization Plan completion, the municipality can apply up to $400,000 in funding to construct facility improvements. No local funding match is required for this grant. However, design and engineering services are not an eligible expense of this program. Once awarded, grant funds are distributed to the municipality similarly to Chapter 90 funds.

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4 Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Complete Streets Funding Program Guidance, January 2016. https://www.massdot.state.ma.us/Portals/8/docs/CompleteStreets/FundingProgramGuidance.pdf

5 Municipalities also have the option of submitting a letter of intent to adopt a policy within one year, so as to move forward with the Program before a formal policy adoption.
The Commonwealth’s MassWorks Infrastructure Program can fund a variety of public infrastructure projects, including: bridge and road improvements, sewer extensions, public water systems, parking facilities, and bicycle or pedestrian accommodations. It is a very competitive grant program. No local funding match is required and engineering is an allowable expense. Projects that can demonstrate they are ready for construction have a greater advantage in the application review process. The application package for the last MassWorks round was released in May 2017 with a due date of July 24, 2017 and project award announcement in October 2017. It is likely that future rounds will have a similar schedule.

There are also Commonwealth programs available to support business development, such as the recommendations identified by the Livability Plan and stakeholders. However, in addition to these programs, there is also a role for individuals and community groups. During the discussion with stakeholders, the importance of having a champion to advocate for initiatives and to partner with municipal officials to move projects forward was noted.

The Commonwealth’s Department of Housing & Community Development manages the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI), which supports downtown revitalization efforts. The MDI offers free training workshops as well as a competitive technical assistance program. Municipalities can apply for a technical assistance award in topic areas including: wayfinding/branding, design, parking management, and economics of downtown. For example, a project could be pursued to develop an identity or brand for South Deerfield Center, including an image design and plan for wayfinding signage.

It should be noted that if a municipality’s application is successful, the award is not a grant but access to expert consultant services valued up to $15,000. This award of technical assistance services alleviates the need for the municipality to conduct a public procurement process to hire a consultant. Also, no local match funding is required for the award. However, municipal officials, municipal staff and/or volunteer committee members are required to work with the consultants.

Arts and culture activities can be leveraged to beautify the Center and/or expand the offering of community events, which in turn attract more people and prospective customers to the Center. The Town of Deerfield already receives Local Cultural Council funding from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. This funding supports arts and culture activities at local schools and in the community that is determined by the Deerfield Cultural Council. As the local Council is prioritizing activities to be funded, this could be a potential resource to further expand the offering of community events or install a public art piece.
If there is a non-profit organization interested in pursuing arts and culture activities on a larger scale in the community, there are two potential resources. The Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts will offer competitive grant programs in 2018 to fund projects with an arts and culture focus or to support organizational effectiveness. ArtPlace America is a private non-profit entity that invests in efforts to support creative placemaking and community development using arts and culture. ArtPlace America was created by multiple private foundations and federal agencies for the purpose of demonstrating how arts and culture can be used to help solve community development challenges. It was also created to administer a ten-year fund that will sunset in 2020. Their National Creative Placemaking Fund is a national, competitive grant program that is expected to announce one of their last funding rounds in early 2018.

MassDevelopment has launched a placemaking initiative called Commonwealth Places with Patronicity, a new online platform that uses crowdsourcing to invest in public spaces. The Commonwealth Places program offers a grant match equal to the amount of funds raised by a community through the Patronicity platform for a particular project. Because the threshold criteria for participating in this program is income based, the Town of Deerfield does not meet the eligibility requirements. However, the lessons learned by successful projects participating in this program could be used if an organization wanted to pursue a project using another crowdsourcing platform.

Most of the potential resources identified in this report are available only to municipal governments, and so it would be the decision of the Selectboard to determine if they should be pursued or not. However, there are also potential resources that could be championed by volunteers or community groups. It is advantageous for any effort moving forward to bring together municipal officials and community volunteers, so that the most resources can be leveraged efficiently and in coordination with other efforts.

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7 ArtPlace America’s National Creative Placemaking Fund; https://www.artplaceamerica.org/our-work/national-creative-placemaking-fund/introduction
8 MassDevelopment’s Commonwealth Places; https://www.patronicity.com/commonwealthplaces#I/
Summary

South Deerfield Center has several advantageous that can contribute to making it a more economically active downtown. The Center has the layout, utilities, and density of commercial space to support a more robust business sector. With its proximity to key transportation routes and major attractions, the Center is in a good position to attract more prospective customers to Center based businesses. In addition, current and pending development projects are proposed that will bring more workers and residents within walking distance of the Center. All of these factors make the case that public and private investment in South Deerfield Center will likely result in greater economic activity.

Of the five undeveloped and underutilized properties observed in the defined Study Area: one is being prepared for development of a new Cumberland Farms store and gas station; two are in private ownership and could accommodate new construction; and two are in public ownership and could accommodate additional parking to improve where customers, workers, and residents could park to access businesses.

Past planning efforts and feedback from community stakeholders highlight the need to improve the physical environment of the Center, including public infrastructure and private property. Activities initiated by the community, such as improved sidewalks, visual appearance of the streetscape, and public parking, may encourage private owners to invest more in their properties as well. Specific public projects were proposed in the 2013 Downtown Deerfield Complete Streets and Livability Plan and supported by community stakeholders. In particular, the Town-owned parcel accessible from North Main Street and extending behind Elm Street businesses was highlighted for the potential to create additional parking and to be leveraged to facilitate a pedestrian linkage to Elm Street. Municipal leadership can explore potential resources such as MassDOT’s Complete Streets Funding Program and the Commonwealth’s MassWorks Infrastructure Program to determine funding opportunities for project implementation.

As improvements to the physical environment proceed, there is support to develop an identity or brand for the Center that could focus on its New England character and walkability. This identity can be promoted through signage, community events, and other ways that market the Center to customers and prospective business operators who may want to locate there. Partnering with community groups and regional organizations can help leverage limited resources. State resources, such as the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, can provide expert technical assistance to move efforts forward. Business and property owners, community groups, and municipal officials working collaboratively will be important to champion successful projects.
Suggested Action Items

Based on the analysis of the Study Area, feedback from interviews and focus group participants and the potential resources identified, the following action items are suggested.

A. Evaluate Complete Streets Policy for Town of Deerfield.

The Deerfield Selectboard should evaluate whether adopting a Complete Streets policy is appropriate for the Town. If determined to be appropriate, the Town can apply for funds to hire a consultant or the FRCOG to develop a town-wide Complete Streets Pedestrian Prioritization Plan. An advisory committee consisting of property owners, residents, and municipal officials should be established to support the creation of this Plan. Upon completion, the Deerfield Selectboard should pursue MassDOT funding for implementation of prioritized project(s) and other available funding sources.

B. Implementation of Livability Plan Recommendations.

The 2013 Downtown Deerfield Complete Streets and Livability Plan (referred to as the “Livability Plan”) identified short-term and long-term implementation activities. Depending on the activity, the entities that can implement them include: the Deerfield Selectboard, the Deerfield Public Works Department, the Deerfield Planning Board, and community groups.

The Deerfield Selectboard should consider forming an Advisory Committee to move forward the implementation of Livability Plan recommendations. Participation in this group could include: South Deerfield property owners, business owners, residents, community group representatives, municipal board/committee members, and municipal staff. The Advisory Committee’s primary task should be to prioritize activities, identify the appropriate entity to take responsibility for its implementation, and determine how these entities can best be supported, and present these findings to the Selectboard for their consideration. As there is limited capacity for municipal staff to take on additional duties, it is important there be strong public-private partnership in coordinating Advisory Committee meetings, identifying achievable goals for the group to accomplish, and following through with tasks.

In addition to furthering the Livability Plan recommendations, the Advisory Committee could invite regional organizations, such as the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, the Franklin County Community Development Corporation, and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, to learn more about collaborative opportunities.
Post Script

From January through June 2018, several activities have moved forward that will foster more economic and community development in the Center. The following is a review of these activities.

In the vacant storefront spaces at 55B and 55C North Main Street, two businesses have opened: a small grocery store, Ciesluk’s Market, and The Giving Circle Thrift Shop. During interviews and past surveys, a small grocery store was frequently identified as a need for South Deerfield Center.

Another vacant building in the Center has changed ownership. The former church at 71 North Main Street was gifted to the Town.

The Cumberland Farms convenience store and gas station at the corner of Sugarloaf and South Main Streets remain in operation, but is anticipated to close soon. A new and expanded Cumberland Farms convenience store and gas station is under construction at the corner of Elm Street and Greenfield Road/Routes 5&10. Once construction is complete, the operation will vacate its Center location move to the new facility.

As noted in the Study, Berkshire Brewing Company was interested in selling a full pour of beer (as opposed to just a sample) for customers to drink on the premises and selling their own packaged beer retail at the facility. These activities were not allowed by state law. Since legislation has passed, Berkshire Brewing Company was approved a permit to allow such sales at their facility in the Center.

Noted in the Study was the appearance of the physical environment, including the streetscape. Having a network of sidewalks and crosswalks in the Center allows it to be a very walkable community. However, the appearance in some sections could be improved. A potential resource to fund pedestrian infrastructure improvements is MassDOT’s Complete Streets Funding Program. The Town submitted a letter of intent in May 2018 to participate in the program.

The Ad-Hoc Town Commons Committee has been working since 2016 to develop proposals for improvements to the South Deerfield Town Commons. They engaged a graduate student from The Conway School (formerly Conway School of Landscape Design) who prepared a report and drawings for improved access, safety, plantings, signage, green infrastructure, and other amenities. Some preliminary recommendations have been implemented, such as the reduction in unnecessary, cluttered signage and
crosswalk improvements. Their work is expected to be integrated into the Complete Streets project as the town moves forward in that process.

While not in the Study Area, recent activities nearby will directly relate to the area. The largest parcel in the former Oxford Foods site was purchased by New England Natural Bakers of Greenfield for the purpose of constructing their new manufacturing facility. The Town has a Purchase & Sale Agreement with a local manufacturing operation for the last parcel on the site. The sale of this parcel is anticipated to close in July 2018.

Approximately one mile from the Center on Sugarloaf Street, construction has begun on the 35 duplex buildings, totaling 70 condominium units. The Condominiums at Sugarloaf is a senior housing community that will make these units available for sale to people age 55 years and older. Pricing for the condominium units range from $299,900 to $379,900, according to the developer’s website9.

Each of these activities offers new opportunities that can benefit business activity in South Deerfield Center. New manufacturing operations and new residents locating near the Center, offer businesses access to new prospective customers. Customers going to Berkshire Brewing Company, Ciesluk’s Market, and The Giving Circle Thrift Shop, will generate more “foot traffic” that helps to create a more dynamic village center, which may encourage other businesses to locate there. New businesses or existing businesses seeking to relocate may be interested in these current and soon to be vacant (such as the original Cumberland Farms’ parcel) commercial spaces.