



# Business Engagement and Retention Program

Northfield, NH

University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension  
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## For more information, contact:

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### About the Business Engagement and Retention Program

The Business Engagement & Retention Program assists communities to develop, maintain and grow a thriving local economy by connecting with businesses to understand and address their needs, challenges and opportunities.

Northfield participated in the Business Engagement and Retention program beginning in the summer of 2018. The Northfield Economic Development Committee worked with UNH Cooperative Extension to implement the program.

### Program Components

**Business Interviews:** Community leaders and volunteers interview entities that contribute to the economic base of a community – small business, manufacturing firms, arts, service agencies, retail, etc. to understand their needs to support their retention and growth. Meeting one-on-one with businesses gathers information and creates a strong network between the businesses and community leaders. The information learned helps community leaders identify and provide support to the business by creating linkages with municipal services; focus on location specific issues and address topics that relate to business climate and quality of life.

**Expert Review:** The task force attends a session with UNH faculty and economic development practitioners about the interview data, community characteristics and to share expertise on topic areas or themes specific to the community.

**Business Retention Resource Roundtable:** There are resource organizations for economic development, community development, funding, exporting, entrepreneurship and other topics relevant to business retention that are be presented through a roundtable discussion with other communities participating in the Business Engagement and Retention Program.

**Engagement with business and wider community:** UNH Extension staff will work with the task force to share results of economic data, interviews, expert recommendations and resources to the wider community. This will be done through distribution of the report, community meeting(s) or municipal meetings.

**Action and Further Engagement with businesses:** An action plan will be developed which addresses the needs of business, business climate and future engagement with the business community.

### Members of the North Hampton Business Engagement and Retention Task Force

Sean Chandler, Chair	Mark Hayes
Gregory Bernash	Cari Murphy
Roger Bolduc	Deb Peverly
Wayne Crowley	Greg Peverly
Stephanie Giovannucci	Deborah Tessier

## About Northfield

The Town of Northfield is located in Merrimack County and in the Franklin, NH Labor Market Area. Northfield is located about 35 miles from New Hampshire's largest city, Manchester, NH. In addition, Northfield is also located in proximity to several cities in the region: 85 miles to Boston, MA; 127 miles to Portland, ME; 236 miles to Montreal, Quebec; and 284 miles to New York City.

Northfield has a Town Administrator and a Select board. The town contains 28.6 square miles of land area and 0.3 square miles of inland water area. Population density is about 168.4 persons per square miles of land area. Adjacent communities include Franklin, Tilton, Belmont, and Canterbury.

### *Largest Businesses in Northfield (NH Employment Security)*

Largest Businesses	Product/Service	Employees	Established
Wyman Gordon	Investment castings	200	1951
Freudenberg-NOK	Manufacturing	200	1997
Tobin Tool	Manufacturing	100	1997
Eptam Plastics	Manufacturing	100	2002
Blouin Steel	Manufacturing	10	1998
Pike Industries	Asphalt	10	1998
Spaulding Youth Center	Youth programs	160	1958

Employer Information Supplied by Municipality

### *Transportation (American Community Survey 2012-2016)*

A small percentage (13.2) of Northfield residents work in Northfield. The vast majority (83.7%) commute to another New Hampshire community. The remainder (3.1%) commute to work out of state. The nearest interstate is I-93 exit 19. There is no public transportation in Northfield.

### *Population Trends (US Census Bureau & American Community Survey 2012-2016)*

According to the American Community Survey, there are approximately 4,821 people residing in Northfield (2016). The overall population trend for Northfield is slightly negative. Population is increasing in Merrimack County and in the state.

Area	Population (2010)	Population (2016)	Percent Change
Northfield	4,829	4,821	-.17%
Merrimack County	146,445	147,715	.87%
New Hampshire	1,316,470	1,327,503	.84%

### *Population by Age (American Community Survey 2012-2016)*

According to the American Community Survey, Northfield's median age is 42.2; comparable to Merrimack County's median age of 42.7 and New Hampshire's median age of 42.4. Generally, Northfield's distribution is similar to that of Merrimack County and the state, with the exception of a greater percentage of people aged 55-64 and less people aged 65+.

Area	Total	Under 5 years	5-19	20-34	35-54	55-64	65+
Northfield	4,821	6.1%	19.7%	16.5%	27.6%	18.2%	12.1%
Merrimack County	147,715	4.8%	18.2%	17.9%	27.7%	15.2%	16%
New Hampshire	1,327,503	4.9%	18.2%	18.3%	27.8%	14.9%	15.9%

### *Projected Population Growth (OEP 2016)*

The population of Northfield is expected to grow from 2015-2040. By the year 2040, Northfield is predicted to grow by 10.72%. Merrimack County is also predicted to increase their population at a similar rate, while the state of New Hampshire will also increase population yet at a slower rate.

Area	Population (2015)	Population (2020)	Population (2040)	Percent Change
Northfield	4,815	4,854	5,331	10.72%
Merrimack County	147,820	150,434	166,771	12.82%
New Hampshire	1,330,501	1,349,908	1,432,730	7.68%

### *Median Family Income (American Community Survey 2012-2016)*

According to the American Community Survey, Northfield's median family income is \$65,690. This is slightly less but comparable Merrimack County's median family income of \$67,181, the state's median family income of \$68,485.

### *Poverty Rate (American Community Survey 2012-2016)*

According to the American Community Survey, 4.9% of individuals are living below the poverty level in Northfield. This percentage is much lower than in Merrimack County (8.6%) and in the state of New Hampshire (8.5%).

### *Education Levels (American Community Survey 2012-2016)*

According to the American Community Survey, 89.8% of Northfield's population aged 25 years or older is a high school graduate or higher. This rate is fairly comparable to Merrimack County (93.1%) and the state of New Hampshire (92.6%).

## **Business Interview Summary**

### **About the Businesses**

- 18 businesses were interviewed. 16 of these are for-profit businesses and 2 are non or not for profit organizations.
- Half of the businesses (9) have been located in Northfield for more than 20 years.
- About half of the businesses (8) originally started in Northfield. For the 9 businesses that relocated to Northfield, 6 moved from New Hampshire, 1 from the New England region, and 1 international.
- The majority of businesses (13) are locally owned. Others have owners located in New Hampshire, the New England region, and internationally.
- Most of the businesses (12) only have one location. Others have locations ranging from New Hampshire, to the New England region, to the US, to international.
- A wide variety of sectors were interviewed. Sectors included:
  - Accountant/bookkeeper
  - Apartments
  - Attorney
  - Contractor – 2
  - Education
  - Funeral Director
  - Graphic Designers – 2
  - Manufacturing – 2
  - Recreation
  - Residential Care
  - Retail – 4
  - Veterans' & Military Organizations

## Employees

- Businesses interviewed ranged from not having any employees to having 400 employees.
- About half of the businesses (9) have less than ten employees. 2 businesses have more than 100 employees and 2 businesses have no employees.
- 8 businesses have plans to or would like to hire more employees in the future.

### *How Employees View the Location of Business*

The majority of employees enjoy working in Northfield, and it is described as an excellent location and close to amenities and the highway. While some of the interviewees describe employees as living locally in Northfield, others commented that their employees commute due to housing challenges, namely limited rental options and the expensive cost of housing.

### *Recruitment*

8 businesses described challenges in recruiting employees. There were a number of challenges identified by the businesses. Some of the challenges include:

- Finding qualified employees that require certifications or licenses like CDL drivers and licensed nursing assistants.
- Willing to train people but hard to find reliable people with a good work ethic.
- Lack of people applying for the positions.
- Drug and alcohol issues.
- Unemployment rate of 3% in the region.
- Lack of activities for young people in Northfield.
- Matching salary and benefits of larger organizations

Businesses listed a number of ways that they market their open positions. These included advertising in local papers, craigslist, company website, indeed.com, social media, radio, and word of mouth. Some businesses discussed attending job fairs, and others commented that they have hired people they already know, and in some cases, existing customers. One business has been working in the local schools to build programs to develop employees over time.

### *Training*

Most businesses (13) with employees provide some level of training in house, some more extensive than others. Some businesses describe their employees as coming in to the business with specific training. One business describes training as a big issue because of the lack of local facilities offering HVAC training. Only one business would be interested in taking advantage of training programs.

## Quality of Life, Business Atmosphere, Community Connections

### *Conducting Business in Northfield*

The majority of businesses (15) describe their experience conducting business in Northfield as positive. Businesses enjoy the “small town atmosphere”, being active in the community, access to the highway, and proximity to amenities. Four of the businesses describe having positive experiences interacting with the town offices and community services like fire and police. One business sees Northfield as having potential for to become a destination for outdoor recreationalists in the future.

A few businesses described challenges with doing business in Northfield. One business discussed challenges with the planning board. Two businesses mentioned high taxes as a challenge in Northfield. Another business mentioned the issue of snow plowing. Two businesses discussed trash and recycling and wished that the town offered these services for commercial businesses.

### *Quality of Life Factors*

Considering the quality of life factors of transportation, education, workforce, utilities, recreation and broadband, 2 businesses reported that these do not directly impact their business. Two other businesses reported that they had no concerns with these factors.

- Transportation: Transportation was discussed by many of the businesses. 4 businesses stated that transportation is not an issue, and saw it as an advantage to be near the highway despite the need for a full exit (north and south) at Exit 19 off I-93. 8 other businesses commented on challenges, which included congestion on Rt.3/11, the need for more transportation to the airport, the need for road maintenance. 3 businesses described the lack of public transportation as a challenge.
- Housing: Six businesses described the issue of housing, both in terms of supply and cost. Many stated that there are not enough rentals, and the available rentals are too high priced. One business mentioned that some of his employees had been able to find affordable housing at the Northfield Commons apartments. In addition, another business would like to see smaller homes for residents looking to downsize.
- Utilities: Three businesses mentioned the high cost of utilities as a challenge. A business stressed the importance of keeping costs down. Another business saw having water and sewer as a plus.
- Education: Two businesses discussed education as an issue. One described that people are no longer relocating to Northfield for the school system, which has an impact on rental properties. Another business referred to the lack of local training programs for employees. Two businesses saw opportunities to work with the schools to build a pipeline program for businesses and working with higher education to bring in more interns. Other businesses commented on the importance of education for their businesses.
- Workforce: There were mixed responses about workforce. 2 businesses described workforce as an issue and the need for more people to hire. 3 other businesses did not see workforce as an issue and had no complaints.
- Recreation: Two businesses saw the potential for additional recreation opportunities in Northfield. One business stated that recreation opportunities were excellent, and another commented on how the recreation opportunities add to quality of life. Another business specifically mentioned the hiking/nature trails and Old Home Day as beneficial.
- Broadband: There were also mixed feelings about broadband. 3 businesses found broadband and internet connectivity to be ok or pretty good. 2 other businesses described regular problems with internet connectivity and a desire to upgrade to fiber. One business noted that cell service has declined in recent years.

### *Customers*

Many businesses (9) describe their customers as local or regional. One business primarily sells to big companies, and another business has local, regional, national and international customers.

### *Local Business Support*

The majority of businesses (13) describe their experience with local business support in Northfield as positive. These businesses feel that the town and local community have been supportive. Others describe the town as working cooperatively, and having no issues with community services or with security permits, noting that the police are helpful and the highway department keeps the roads in good condition.

There were also challenges described by the interviewees. Services like snow removal and trash were discussed by multiple businesses. Others referenced high assessments on commercial buildings, parking, and road maintenance. There was a suggestion by one business to have more organization between land use, select board, code enforcement and building inspector.

## Changes to Business

### *Succession Plans*

Less than half of the businesses (7) interviewed have written succession plans. 3 have informal plans. 5 businesses do not have succession plans. No businesses are interested in assistance with succession planning.

### *Exporting*

Many of the businesses (13) do not export. Reasons listed include that products cannot be shipped or the business provides a service. The remaining 4 businesses do export and listed locations including New England States, the US, and international.

### *Future Changes*

8 businesses have plans to expand in the future. 8 businesses reported no changes in the future that they are aware of. One business commented that they would consider selling to an interested buyer, and another commented that they plan to modernize their business to take up less square footage and allow rental space for other businesses. One business shared that they may consider a merger or sale but nothing is on the horizon at this time.

### *Potential for Expansion*

About half of the businesses (6) considering expansion have adequate space and half (5) do not. One business has enough square footage but would like to expand the height of their building and has had challenges with the town. Another business needs more land and is considering filling in a wetland on the property to do so. Another business hopes to purchase property to expand their parking. Only one business would consider relocating to another community to acquire more space.

## Ideas about Business Retention in Northfield

Businesses were asked to share additional ideas for improving business retention in Northfield. Ideas included:

- *Infrastructure*: expanding Route 140, exit 19 converted into north/south exits, transportation system, improving traffic.
- *Promotion*: promotion of local businesses, booklet for new residents that list all businesses, add businesses to the town webpage, reface the town with a cool New Hampshire vibe, limited local advertising support.
- *Housing*: lack of affordable housing for workers, need more affordable housing, affordable housing is a concern for entry level employees.
- *Group for businesses*: a business group in town that meets periodically, challenge is isolation from other businesses.
- *Main Street area*: possibility of having a Main Street, more storefront areas.
- *Welcoming*: community needs to be more welcoming to new employees, local board's needs to be more business friendly to those looking to expand or start a business in Northfield.
- *Taxes*: would like to lower taxes, support bringing in larger businesses to help the tax base

## Appendix: Business Retention Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your business and your customers.
2. How many people do you employ? Do you expect to increase the number of employees? Why or why not?
3. How do your employees view the location of the business in this community? Is this an attractive place to work?
4. Tell me about your experience recruiting new employees.
5. Tell me about your experience training employees.
6. What is your overall opinion of North Hampton as a place to conduct business? Please explain why.
7. Tell me about the following quality of life factors as they relate to you doing business in this community:
  - Transportation
  - Education (K-12 and higher education)
  - Recreational and or cultural opportunities
  - Housing supply and cost
  - Workforce
  - Utilities such as energy availability and cost
  - Broadband and internet connectivity
8. Tell me about local business support. Do you feel the community has a positive attitude toward business? Do you have local customers? Examples?
9. Do you have a succession plan for your business? (This is a written plan to ensure the business continues operations if current ownership changes or retires.) If available, would you like assistance with this?
10. Do you export? Tell me about this or why not. If available, would you like more information on this?
11. Are you considering plans to expand, grow, downsize, close or move your business in the future?
12. If you are considering selling, merging, moving, closing can you share information with me? What would you need to keep your operations open and located here?
13. If you plan to expand or grow, do you have the space (land or buildings) to accommodate your growth? Are you considering locations outside of this community? What do you need to expand here?
14. Please share any other ideas or comments you may have about business retention in North Hampton.
15. We would like to stay in contact to share the results of the Business Engagement and Retention initiative and to make available any resources to address your ideas and concerns. May we contact you again?