



# VOLUME I – SOUTHBRIDGE MASTER PLAN

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The hundreds of concerned residents, business owners and Town officials,  
staff and volunteers who gave of their time and energy.

# SOUTHBRIDGE MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Southbridge 2013 Master Plan represents the culmination of an eighteen-month process and the hard work and dedication of the Master Plan Steering Committee, the Office of Economic Development and Planning, Town Department Heads and staff, the Consultant Team, AND hundreds of Southbridge residents and business owners who gave their time and shared their ideas about what and how to preserve what is best about Southbridge, and what needs to change in order to move forward together.

At the end of the day, the purpose of this Master Plan is to outline the ways to make Southbridge a better place to live, work and play. The process by which the Plan arrives at the recommendations is comprised of three main steps.

## 1. VISION AND GOALS

A vision for a better future was developed; one that is built on the past, but is focused on moving forward. Imagining what could be and figuring out how to get there, what to do to make improvements -- together -- is key to moving forward. A community that is divided cannot progress with momentum; developing a common vision and involving newcomers to the extent possible was an important part of the process. The vision, presented on page 4, represents what the town **WANTS** to be like in the future.

The Master Plan Steering Committee met with the Consultant Team a total of 12 times and held 22 public forums including ten visioning sessions and

ten roundtable discussions focused on specific topics/goals, as well as multiple interviews and meetings with Town officials, committees and commissions. A Facebook page provided an additional public forum.

The following six **GOALS** were developed to guide the Town:

- 1.0 To Promote Health, Safety and Wellness
- 2.0 To Promote Education for
- 3.0 To Improve Housing and Neighborhoods
- 4.0 To Increase Economic Development Town-wide and improve the Downtown
- 5.0 To Ensure Environmental Sustainability
- 6.0 To Increase Community Pride

## 2. INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Consultant Team documented existing resources, conducted research, reviewed relevant documents and interviewed Town department heads, committees and commissions. A preliminary assessment was made of key issues, opportunities and challenges facing the town. A summary of this inventory can be found in Chapter 4 of this report and complete documentation can be found in Volume II of the Plan. The inventory represents what the town **HAS** and where it is at this point in time.

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Consultant Team and Steering Committee met with experts, interested parties, Town department heads, and the public to develop strategies to help achieve the goals as articulated in the public process (the **HOW** to get there). The Implementation Plan (Chapter 4 of this report) is the core of the Master Plan and provides guidance in the form of specific action steps to take, identifying low cost, high impact items, priority strategies, as well as who should take the lead in carrying out the actions and likely and desirable partners to work with on implementing each of the steps.

#### UNDERLYING THEMES

The following three themes are critical to the success of the Master Plan.

**FOCUS ON YOUTH.** Young people have the capacity to absorb new information, are more flexible than adults in their ability to change behavior, and they can also teach adults “new” behavior. The Master Plan recommends involving youth in many facets of moving forward, but particularly when it comes to actions related to sustainability and improving health and wellness, as these require shifts in thinking and behavioral changes that come from newly acquired knowledge. In this way the next generation -- the future we are planning for -- can be taught to take better care of themselves, their town and the natural environment and while doing so, may bring a few of the adults along.



Ways of involving youth include working with the schools on developing health modules, including youth in community clean up, testing water quality, including them in efforts to improve food choices, etc. Also, it is critical to provide support to “at-risk” youth.

**NEED FOR INCREASED COMMUNICATION.** The need for communication was evident throughout the planning process and is important for a variety of reasons including increasing awareness of and making more accessible existing resources (ranging from opportunities for recreation to public services to healthcare). It is important that information disseminated from government to residents be continuously updated, and that communication is clear and accessible (e.g. provided in multiple modes -- internet, hard copy, etc. -- and that it be multi-lingual). Specific ways of improving communication include:

- Improve the Town’s website and create a Community Calendar,
- Recruit a Volunteer Translation Corps,
- Create a centralized list of existing resources, and
- Use Cable TV to disseminate information and increase awareness around important issues.

**FOSTER FAITH IN THE ABILITY TO MOVE FORWARD** – Together it was noted throughout the process that while there were many individuals with an optimistic outlook, there was a prevailing attitude of hopelessness and a general negativity about the town and its capacity to change in positive ways. In some cases participants in the master planning process expressed these sentiments directly themselves; more often it was a description of others in town who chose not to participate and gave this as their reason for their lack of involvement. This apathy can be seen as a defense mechanism, that is, after repeatedly becoming frustrated, people protect themselves from further disappointment by eliminating their expectations;

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they stop expecting anything, believing that the town is unable to improve. This in turn creates an obstacle to progress. Another obstacle is the existence of racism on the part of some.

Ways to address this negative energy include 1) working hard on demonstrating progress by implementing improvements that are easily achieved at relatively low cost (e.g. low hanging fruit) and 2) focusing on bridging the gap between groups living in town and providing more opportunities for interaction among these groups. The divisiveness between groups is an obstacle to moving forward. Increased contact between groups often results in decreasing racism, that is, as people get to know one another as individuals, they stop treating each other as stereotypical members of the “other” group.

#### SOUTHBRIDGE VOICES

The Plan was developed with input from hundreds of residents, business owners, town officials, staff and volunteers, collected in a number of forums; these included:

- 12 Steering Committee Meetings
- 10 Visioning Forums
- 10 Roundtable Discussions
- Interviews with Town Department Heads, Committees & Commissions
- Facebook Page (178 members)

The master planning process made an effort to include as many people with different points of view as it could. A positive outcome of this is that

the vision expressed in the Plan is a common shared view of a desired future. That is, at the end of the day, most residents want their town to be a better place to live, work and play, and they have similar ideas regarding what that would look like.

#### IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY

It is recommended that in order to increase implementation capacity the following measures be taken:

- Form partnerships to implement strategies,
- Increase communication at all levels, and
- Increase implementation capacity by:
  - Restructuring existing staff positions
  - Planning future budgets to enable hiring additional staff
  - Expanding existing efforts to attract volunteers
  - Changes to some bylaws
  - Passing the Community Preservation Act (CPA).

The first step in moving forward is the formation of a Master Plan Implementation Committee charged with overseeing the implementation of the Plan. It is also recommended that the following additional committees be formed to aid in carrying out the strategies and action steps listed in the Plan.

- Open Space and Recreation Committee,
- Multi-Cultural Committee,
- Communications Committee, and
- Downtown Events Committee.

## OVERVIEW OF PLAN'S APPROACH

It is important to emphasize that the general thrust of the Plan is two-pronged and that this dual approach must be carried out simultaneously if it is to be successful. The two distinct directions are:

1. **Preserve and enhance unique, important, beautiful and interesting features that make Southbridge special** and that have the potential to be improved and connected; these include:
  - the people of Southbridge,
  - cultural diversity,
  - industrial/manufacturing heritage,
  - beautiful open spaces, including the Westville Dam,
  - the Quinebaug River,
  - grand historic buildings in the downtown and elsewhere,
  - an underutilized airport,
  - good location - relatively good access from highways,
  - small town feeling, many people know each other,
  - large institutions providing employment and support to the community (e.g. Harrington Hospital, Center for Hope, Southbridge Hotel and Conference Center, Quinsigamond Community College, etc.),
  - existing businesses providing employment and needed goods and services (e.g. Big Y, Big Bunny, Vienna, Fins and Tails, Dark Horse, etc.),
  - brand new middle/high school and adjacent playing fields,
  - abundant and high quality water, and
  - availability of renewable energy sources.
2. **Address challenges -- some of them difficult and serious --to help restore the town and support its residents, so that they may fully participate in enjoying all that the town has to offer;** these include:
  - poor health indicators,
  - a high percentage of poverty,
  - large numbers of high school dropouts,
  - limited English proficiency in segments of the population,
  - high levels of unemployment,
  - high levels of substance abuse,
  - a school system that was designated “underperforming”,
  - racism,
  - degraded downtown,
  - large vacant mill buildings,
  - lack of cleanliness in a number of areas in town,
  - landlords and renters who do not maintain their properties,
  - increasing senior population,
  - lack of transportation options, and
  - lack of access to riverfront.



## VISION

The vision is a summary of the concerns and desires articulated by Southbridge residents, business owners and Town officials.

*IMAGINE A SOUTHBRIDGE...SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE...  
WHEN IT IS...*

... *A safe, healthy and clean town*, with plenty of wholesome activities for families and youth, including multiple *opportunities to enjoy the outdoors*, including the *River* that has been made into a major attraction, as well as *indoor recreational facilities*.

... Where an emphasis on *education for all, a strong school system, life long learning programs, relevant job training and a wide range of employment opportunities* provide a good economic base for families and for the town.

... With a beautiful and vibrant *downtown*, the streets filled with people going to the multiple *shops and restaurants* which occupy the *beautifully restored historic buildings*. A town center where it is easy, pleasant and safe to walk, park and drive.

... A town that has *updated facilities and services*; where the elderly are cared for and youth attended to, and where *clear and*

*continuous communication* between Town government and residents makes information easy for all to access. *Public transit* provides a way for all residents to get around and enjoy all the town has to offer.

... Where a *wide range of housing types* are available to people with different incomes and at varying stages in their lifecycle, and

... Where residents appreciate that they live in a town where they enjoy the small town feeling and *sense of community* they feel when they run into people they know. Residents feel proud of the well *preserved and enhanced assets* such as the Westville recreational area, Concerts on the Common, the River, historic buildings and other special features. They also *embrace the ethnic diversity* and enjoy the variety in festivals, foods, and celebrations.

... As a result of working together towards this vision and goals *the town's reputation is restored* and Southbridge receives the respect it deserves.

## IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PLAN CONCEPT

The Plan is comprehensive and touches upon many aspects of the town, both on how to preserve and enhance its assets as well as on how to approach its challenges. Among the most important elements of the Plan are the recommendations for **restoring the school system** and its reputation as well as **providing educational and job training opportunities for all**.

Simultaneously, a focused effort needs to be made to **attract new and retain existing businesses to provide employment**. The need for education, job training and employment along with **embracing cultural diversity** will be key to the future of the town.

The **health and wellness** of the town's residents is also a critical issue to address and involves increasing access to health care, raising awareness regarding making healthy life style choices (including good nutrition), and addressing environmental causes of illness. These issues affect people on an individual basis, but also have ramifications on the community as a whole (e.g. substance abuse can lead to other criminal and disruptive behaviors with negative impacts on the neighborhood). Nutrition and food production are important components of health and wellness.

**Downtown redevelopment** -- attracting new businesses and people to walk amongst the grand historic backdrop of the town's center -- will be important both for the economy as well as for creating pride of place and a living room for the community to gather. Safety and cleanliness can be worked on starting now. Connecting the downtown to the **Quinebaug River** and increasing access and providing additional recreational opportunities along the river's banks, will also be an important critical step to reclaiming the town's assets.

**Improving the neighborhoods** by holding landlords and renters accountable, increasing efforts to keep neighborhoods clean and safe, removing or upgrading housing in the poorest condition, and providing small play areas are some of the recommended strategies for improving the places where people live and children play.

Perhaps underestimated is the power of **increasing community pride**. Bridging the gap between groups, and fostering faith in the future may be the most important objectives to achieve as without these, apathy and negativity can actually block efforts to improve the town. Towards this end efforts to **re-brand the town** can help to inspire more positive thinking.

It will be critical to implementation that **partnerships** are formed to carry out the action steps recommended to achieve the goals and objectives. These partnerships include Town departments, committees and commissions, volunteers, private sector, and non-profit agencies. Some of these have begun as a result of coming together to discuss the goals at the Roundtable Discussions. It is suggested that these continue and expand as Working Groups to address their common concerns.



## SIXTEEN (16) TOP RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the top 16 recommendations made in the Plan. The order in which they are listed is of no particular significance.

**Reclaim and Repurpose the River.** Increasing access to the Quinebaug River for enjoyment of views as well as active recreation is an important way of enhancing the town's existing features. Connecting the River to the downtown, including by encouraging mixed-use development with housing on upper stories along some segments of the river's edge takes advantage of views and breathes new life into underutilized areas. Rezone some segments of the riverfront nearest to the downtown for mixed use, including housing.

**Retain existing and recruit new businesses.** This is important for a number of reasons including supplementing the tax base, providing employment, reusing currently large, vacant mill buildings and in the case of retail and restaurants, helping to stimulate the downtown and other areas by providing more places for people to go. Streamlining the permitting process and other "business-friendly" practices should be employed. Both new and existing businesses may benefit from training in developing a business plan, marketing, etc. The industrial park is an opportunity to provide significant economic growth to the town and should promote its ability to offer renewable energy sources.

**Restore the reputation of the school system.** This is related to the previous recommendation regarding restoring the town's reputation in that the two are linked. It is critical that the school district do all it can to make improvements and publicize these widely. Only then will the schools become community centers for all the town's residents and only then will the town attract residents of a higher socio-economic level.

**Improve education and job training.** Providing opportunities to all residents for a better life through education, lifelong learning and job training for all ages, including ESL and Adult Basic Education programs will be critical to supporting residents so that they are employable.

**Optimize use of the Airport.** Make use of this relatively unique resource by holding events there and otherwise maximizing its use and potential to support community gathering as well as economic development.

**Address substance abuse and childhood asthma.** Provide access to detox services (e.g. transportation needed) and research potential environmental causes of asthma.

**Restore the reputation of the town, therefore increasing pride in Southbridge.** Re-branding Southbridge, taking on a public relations campaign, publicizing good news and developing a consistent theme to upgrade gateways coming into town are some of the ways in which it is recommended that the town begin to restore its reputation. Develop a "Positive About Southbridge" campaign. Promote existing resources, encourage community-oriented behavior by giving out tickets (Police Department) rewarding good behavior. Reward landlords and tenants for cleaning and beautifying properties by giving out awards and publicizing these.

**Create a centralized list of existing resources** that is provided as part of a welcome to newcomers package to newly arrived residents as well as to new businesses. It should be continually updated and should include information ranging from school offerings, public services, health care services, recreational opportunities, etc.

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**Recruit and establish a “Latino Liaison” in Town Hall** to advocate for the Latino community and help direct people in need of services and information.

**Implement the Downtown Plan.** It is important for residents to have their community’s “living room” restored so that they may enjoy a vital and vibrant town center. It is also important for the town’s economy and potential tourism. The Town should open discussions with the State to discuss options for possible relocation of the welfare office when the time for the lease to be re-evaluated approaches. Additionally, social service agencies should be encouraged to locate on side streets, not directly onto Main Street.



**Complete the Open Space and Recreation Plan.** This will help to address important open space and recreation needs and also make the Town eligible for state funds to help meet these needs.

**Develop a Healthy Southbridge Campaign.** Working with a broad definition of health, include all residents in a communal effort to improve

individual and community health and wellness; including local food production, walking and biking, and recreation and fitness.

**Beautify, clean up and increase safety in the neighborhoods.** Housing that is in the poorest condition should be upgraded or demolished. Landlords that do not take care of their properties need to be held accountable, as do renters, and a way to provide more small play areas especially in the more densely built neighborhoods is needed. Residents can be involved in helping to beautify as well as to improve safety through neighborhood watch type programs.

**Develop unique features and promote these to make Southbridge a destination.** Recommendations range from painting a unique mural on a building in a prominent location to creating a tournament quality facility for sports to promoting eco-tourism to capitalizing on multi-ethnic heritage, industrial/manufacturing past, and/or other features by organizing events to celebrate these with the intent of attracting both residents and visitors.

**Address racism and embrace multi-ethnic heritage.** It is very difficult for a divided community to move forward together. Diversity training should be required of all Town employees. Multiple opportunities to express and experience the town’s different ethnic and cultural traditions should be encouraged and supported. Develop a “the KEY to Southbridge’s future is its diversity” campaign.

**Increase awareness regarding the need to plan for a sustainable future.** Use Cable TV programming to promote the use of existing resources, disseminate information regarding new resources and ways of accessing them. Involve youth and hold events. Promote enjoyment of natural features thus inspiring people to support measures that protect the environment.

## LIST OF “RIPE APPLES”



The Plan has identified a number of no or low-cost and relatively easy to achieve actions. It is recommended that these be implemented as soon as possible so as to foster faith in the plan, as well as to provide momentum to the implementation process.

Making improvements quickly and visibly builds credibility for the master plan and also honors the participation of those who gave their time to share their thoughts.

The action items listed below received the most support in a public forum held for the purpose of presenting the plan; they are ranked starting with those that received the most support. A complete list of "ripe apples" can be found in the Implementation Chapter of this report.

- Expedite the permitting process for new businesses or those that want to expand by supporting the use of a streamlining checklist.
- Widely advertise any and all improvements to the school system, including offerings and use multiple modes of communication.
- Assure that by-laws promote backyard food production (including hens).
- Mobilize neighborhood organizations to work on neighborhood improvement projects (e.g. parks, playgrounds, community gardens, landscaping, murals, etc.).
- Promote Library as a safe place for health, literacy and family resource.
- Do something unique, paint an unusual mural on a building in a prominent location.
- Develop a more engaging approach to increasing parental involvement in the schools.
- Publicize “good behavior” with photos of beautified properties.

- Encourage Town department heads to lead by example by attending important town-wide events.
- Hold new and more downtown events by forming a Downtown Events Committee.
- Fine landlords for excessive police calls to identified problem properties and tenants.
- Continue to identify and address improvements to safety and cleanliness by continuing the neighborhood “walk-throughs” with Town Department Heads and residents.
- Create additional fun run/walk events to encourage exercise for all ages. Promote the A.J. Petro Swimming Pool – a fantastic resource.
- Conduct a “Map Your Neighborhood” Event where residents get involved in conducting a needs assessment, including identifying vulnerable residents such as seniors living alone.
- Hold an annual Health Fair.
- Involve youth in the planning process.
- Create a Town communications website committee.
- Recruit labor (students, convicts, Boy Scouts) to help clean the downtown on a regular basis.



## PLAN CONCEPT

The map on the following page illustrates how Southbridge could be at some point in the future. It is based on existing development and zoning, but key aspects of the existing land use controls have been modified to respond to the goals, objectives, and strategies proposed in the master plan. They include:

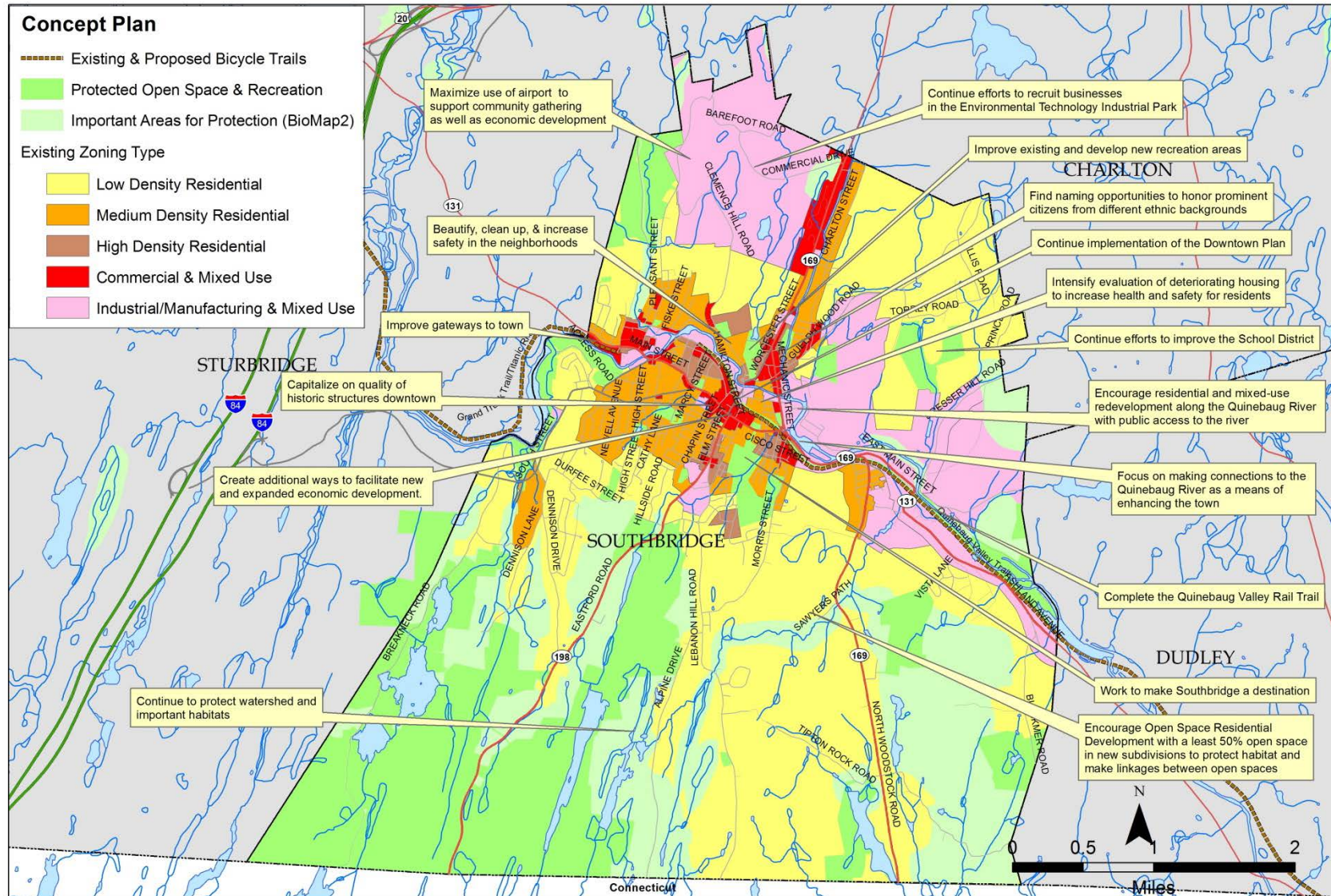
- Protecting important habitat and watershed areas and making linkages between open spaces, especially along waterways, by encouraging more use of the cluster/ PUD provisions of the zoning bylaws and giving bonuses for subdivisions that protect more than 50% of the developable area and provide public trail easements.
- Modifying existing zoning to accommodate Southbridge's traditional mixed-use development pattern especially along the River where residential development could help redevelop the riverfront and revitalize downtown.
- Greatly increased access to the Quinebaug River, making it a key feature of the town's revitalization; including the completion of the Bike Trail and increased public access along the riverfront as a condition of residential and economic redevelopment along the River.

Other features are called out on the map.



# A Master Plan for Southbridge: Moving Forward Together

A Clear Vision Forward to 2030



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## INTRODUCTION

The Town of Southbridge, Massachusetts stands at a critical juncture in its near-200 year history. Gifted with the power of the Quinebaug River, this southern Worcester County community was once as a booming hub for manufacture of textiles and cutlery, and later, optics. The waning of these industries, beginning after World War II, led to a gradual economic slow-down. As job opportunity has declined, so too did the quality of the schools and the condition of some housing. Today, a significant portion of the population suffers from the ill effects of poverty, including poor health and low educational attainment.

Despite this downward trend, Southbridge retains many assets that have potential for fueling a more prosperous community. The natural landscape, with its steep hillsides plunging to the winding Quinebaug River, is both distinctive and beautiful, and many opportunities exist to revive the River edges for recreational use. Historic architecture in the downtown and throughout the many neighborhoods, spanning the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, provides a window into Southbridge's past. The culturally diverse population, including persons of French-Canadian, Albanian, Italian, Polish, Greek, and Puerto Rican descent, has been and continues to be one of the town's richest traits.

The challenge for Southbridge in building a healthier, more economically viable community, will be to capitalize on these assets as a means of addressing the deficiencies. To accomplish this, Town officials, staff, civic leaders, business-owners and citizens have spent the past year working together to create the foregoing master plan. The plan's purpose is



*Figure 1. Downtown Southbridge retains many of its late 19<sup>th</sup> century multi-story masonry buildings, adding historic character to the town's central hub.*

threefold: (1) to establish a long-term vision for Southbridge; (2) to establish priorities for fulfilling this vision; and (3) to develop a step-by-step guide to decision-making for future development and change. The plan will qualify Southbridge for State funding, and will provide the Town with a clear direction and set of achievable goals.

## SOUTHBRIDGE, YESTERDAY AND TODAY

The ridges, valley and river of the area that would become Southbridge have drawn humans for centuries. Before the mid-1600s, Native peoples belonging to the Nipmuck tribe fished and hunted along the Quinebaug River. While the first Europeans explored the area in the 1630s, permanent settlement did not take place until the 1730s. Early settlers established farms on the hillsides above the River, and saw and grist mills



*Figure 2. The American Optical Company (AO), located in the “Lensville” section of Southbridge, was established in 1869, and grew to be Southbridge’s largest employer.*

in the river valley. By the late 1700s, the first textile-related mill, a finishing mill, had emerged.

Southbridge incorporated as a municipality in 1816, assembled from portions of Sturbridge, Charlton and Dudley. Around the same time, the first mills for the mechanical wool carding, dyeing, napping, fulling and dressing were established. In 1814/15, the Globe Manufacturing Company set up operations on the west side of town, constructing a large dam across the Quinebaug, and spawning the residential area known as “Globe Village.” In 1818, Dexter Harrington & Son, maker of cutlery set up shop. The population began to rapidly expand as demand for manufacturing workers increased.

During the middle of the 19th century, the downtown, or Centre Village, became Southbridge’s commercial and civic hub. The enclave held the Town Hall, high school, a department store, and bank buildings, all of wood frame construction. In 1863, a major fire ravaged downtown, burning most of the buildings, and the town erected blocks of masonry structures in their place. The result was a new look for Main Street, one that endures to this day. Manufacturing continued to grow and expand, with several mill complexes built at intervals along the length of the Quinebaug. In 1869, the America Optical Company (AO) arrived, building a new facility, along with housing for its workers, in what became known as the “Flats.” AO grew to become Southbridge’s most substantial mill and largest employer.

It was during this period of rapid mill expansion that immigrants flocked to Southbridge, bringing a cultural diversity to the town that continues as one of its prominent traits. The first to arrive came from French-speaking parts of Canada, and from Ireland and Germany. By the late 1800s, immigrants



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from Poland, Albania, Rumania and Greece had come, setting up their own churches.



*Figure 3. Southbridge's Greek Orthodox Church was established by the immigrants who came to work in one of the town's several manufacturing operations.*

Manufacturing continued to dominate the economy into the early 20th century and through World War II, with AO employing more than 4,500 workers in the late 1920s. The success of these operations brought revenue to the town, spurring a downtown full of shops, and allowing for upgrades to public services. In the 1920s, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Harrington financed the Harrington Hospital. Completed in 1931 and expanded in 1958, the medical facility brought a new source of employment to Southbridge. After World War II, manufacturing operations began to

diminish in size, and eventually close; although by the 1950s, Puerto Ricans began coming to work as unskilled laborers in the remaining mills, further diversifying the multi-cultural profile of Southbridge.

The closing of the mills and lack of a comparable replacement has led to a 60-year decline in the overall health of the town. Today, while the town's total population of 16,719 (2010) is nearly unchanged from the 1950s (16,825), the demographic profile has shifted. In 2010, 12.7% of residents were living at or below the poverty level, and the median household income was approximately 75% less than that of the State's. The unemployment as of May 2012 stood at 9.5%, far above the State rate of 6.0%. Twenty-five percent of children under the age of 18 were living below the poverty level, and Southbridge was ranked in the top five "at-risk" communities in the State for child health. The Southbridge Public School District was recently designated as "underperforming."

Yet as noted in the opening paragraphs of this introduction, the town retains significant natural and cultural resources, along with a distinctive historic character, that all hold promise for shaping a positive future. And as this master plan demonstrates, Southbridge's citizens have the will and the imagination to elevate their community as it moves forward into the future.

### *Moving Forward Together...*

#### PREVIOUS PLANS

Southbridge last completed a comprehensive, town-wide master plan in 1963. Within the past thirty years, several smaller plans were completed that focused on a specific issue within the town. These include:

*Community Preservation Associates, with Community Circle,  
Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC and AECOM*

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- [DOWNTOWN SOUTHBRIDGE MAIN STREET FEASIBILITY STUDY](#), 1980, a two-part study examining the feasibility of redeveloping the vacant space in downtown buildings, and proposed scenarios for implementing this redevelopment.
- [RESOURCE TEAM REPORT FOR SOUTHBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS](#), 1982, a study prepared by the National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation which recommended ways of enhancing Main Street by focusing on historic and architectural assets, diversifying the local economy and branding the town.
- [ROUTE 131 CORRIDOR WEST](#), 2002, a study that inventoried the assets of the western gateway to Southbridge and made recommendations for building, landscape and signage enhancements.
- [SOUTHBRIDGE LONG TERM PLAN](#), 2003, a participant-driven long term visioning process, establishing the town's mission as the "promotion of a balanced diversity in economic activity, housing and the pattern of development and open space."
- [TOWN OF SOUTHBRIDGE STUDY ON DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS](#), 2007, a study identifying the tools available to stimulate investment in downtown buildings.
- [HERITAGE TOURISM MASTER PLAN](#), 2008, a plan that recommended ways of promoting Southbridge's historic assets through recreation and tourism.
- [SUSTAINABLE SOUTHBRIDGE](#), 2009, a study aiming to promote urban development, maintain natural resources, and fulfill community needs, capitalizing on the town's diversity cultural profile as well as its physical amenities.
- [DOWNTOWN SOUTHBRIDGE URBAN REVITALIZATION PROJECT](#), 2010, a plan for reusing and redeveloping former industrial sites, as well as underutilized parcels and buildings in the downtown area and a market study, created for the Southbridge Redevelopment Authority.
- [DOWNTOWN CENTER DESIGN GUIDELINES, GUIDELINES FOR THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITY](#), after 2003, a study prepared during the development of the Downtown Revitalization Plan a set of design guidelines to help support redevelopment of the downtown's historic buildings.

### THE PLANNING PROCESS

Efforts to create this plan spanned a period of eighteen months, beginning with the appointment, by the Southbridge Town Council, of a Master Plan Steering Committee. This thirty-member group worked side-by-side Community Preservation Associates ("Consultant Team"), hired by the Planning Board to serve as consultants to the town. The MPSC also recruited citizens to join the "Friends of the Master Plan," a group of ten hard-working individuals who supported the work of the MPSC and the Consultant Team. The process is described in detail in Volume I, Section 6; in summary the process included the following:

**VISION STATEMENT.** Through meetings with the MPSC, Friends, and interviews with key Town officials and civic leaders, the Consultant Team crafted a vision for the future of Southbridge. This statement guided work on all phases of the plan.

**INVENTORY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS.** To understand and document Southbridge's existing resources (what Southbridge has), the Consultant

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Team members conducted an inventory of existing conditions of each master planning element:

- Historic and Cultural Resources,
- Natural Resources,
- Open Space and Recreation Resources,
- Housing and Neighborhood Resources,
- Economic Development Resources,
- Transportation Resources,
- Public Services and Facilities, and
- Land Use and Zoning.

Team members reviewed previously completed studies, interview key individuals, board and committees, collected Town, regional, State and Federal data and conducted field work to compile the data for the inventory, and documented findings in seven separate inventory reports (or chapters). For each element, a one-page summary sheet provided a snapshot of the findings. See Volume II, Section 2 of this plan for the complete inventory.

**OUTREACH and PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.** To understand and define the goals for Southbridge (what citizens want), the Consultant Team engaged in an extensive outreach and public participation process, attempting to reach as broad a cross-section of the town as possible. Highlights include:

- Public Forum #1. The Consultant Team conducted a town-wide visioning workshop.
- Targeted Outreach. The Consultant Team and MPSC/Friends visited selected sites, such as the senior center and high school, and asked participants to share their likes, dislikes, and wishes for Southbridge.

- Public Forum #2. The Consultant Team conducted a community-wide public forum at which a series of preliminary goals, objectives and strategies were presented, and participants were asked to affirm and/or modify the goals, and assign priorities to



*Figure 4. At the second public forum, participants were asked to review preliminary goals and objectives, suggest changes and assign priorities.*

them. The goals were refined to a final total of six.

- Roundtable Discussions. Based on the results of Public Forum #2, The Consultant Team and MPSC/Friends conducted a series of six roundtable discussions, centered on the final selection of goals.

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- **Playback Theatre.** A troupe of professional actors staged an interactive theatrical performance in order to explore “Southbridge Stories,” the experience of living in Southbridge. The performance addressed the positive and negative attitudes about the town, and shed light on difficult issues, such as racism, and how they can be addressed (e.g. through individual action, group intervention, Town policy).
- **Public Forum #3.** Consultant Team and members of the MPSC presented the final plan to the citizens of Southbridge.



**IMPLEMENTATION.** The final step involved defining a means for reaching the goals (how Southbridge gets there), including refinement of objectives and strategies, and assignment of action steps to persons/entities within the community. After reviewing the implementation plan with the MPSC,

The Consultant Team finalized the Plan and presented it at a final Public Forum (#3).

### MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

*By 2023, Southbridge will...*

- Be a safe, healthy and clean town,
- Have multiple opportunities to enjoy the Quinebaug River,
- Have indoor recreational facilities,
- Have a strong school system and life-long learning opportunities,
- Have a range of employment offerings,
- Have a vibrant downtown,
- Have updated facilities and services,
- Have clear and continuous communication between government and residents,
- Have a public transportation system,
- Embrace its ethnic diversity, and
- Have a restored reputation.



## PLAN FOUNDATION

The Southbridge Master Plan is built on a foundation that includes “Guiding Principles”, “Underlying Themes”, “Outreach: the Voices of Southbridge”, and Key Issues” to be addressed in the future.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles and underlying themes were developed with significant input from the public. Meetings were held with residents, the business community and Town officials throughout the process.

### SOUTHBRIDGE VOICES

The Plan was developed with input from hundreds of residents, business owners, town officials, staff and volunteers, collected in a number of forums; these included:

- 12 Steering Committee Meetings
- 10 Visioning Forums
- 10 Roundtable Discussions
- Interviews with Town Department Heads, Committees & Commissions
- Facebook Page (178 members)

The Guiding Principles include:

- A Vision for Southbridge’s Future,
- Planning Goals,
- Underlying Themes, and
- Understanding What Makes Southbridge Unique.



## VISION

The following vision statement embodies the community's core values. It describes the kind of community participants would like to strive towards.

*IMAGINE A SOUTHBRIDGE...SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE...  
WHEN IT IS...*

*... A safe, healthy and clean town, with plenty of wholesome activities for families and youth, including multiple **opportunities to enjoy the outdoors**, including the **River** that has been made into a major attraction, as well as **indoor recreational facilities**.*

*... Where an emphasis on **education for all, a strong school system, life long learning programs, relevant job training and a wide range of employment opportunities** provide a good economic base for families and for the town.*

*... With a beautiful and vibrant **downtown**, the streets filled with people going to the multiple **shops and restaurants** which occupy the **beautifully restored historic buildings**. A town center where it is easy, pleasant and safe to walk, park and drive.*

*... A town that **has updated facilities and services**: where the elderly are cared for and youth attended to, and where **clear and***

***continuous communication** between Town government and residents makes information easy for all to access. **Public transit** provides a way for all residents to get around and enjoy all the town has to offer.*

*... Where a **wide range of housing types** are available to people with different incomes and at varying stages in their lifecycle, and*

*... Where residents appreciate that they live in a town where they enjoy the small town feeling and **sense of community** they feel when they run into people they know. Residents feel proud of the well **preserved and enhanced assets** such as the Westville recreational area, Concerts on the Common, the River, historic buildings and other special features. They also **embrace the ethnic diversity** and enjoy the variety in festivals, foods, and celebrations.*

*... As a result of working together towards this vision and goals **the town's reputation is restored** and Southbridge receives the respect it deserves.*



## PLANNING GOALS

The following is a list of goals articulated to help chart the direction of what needs to be achieved in order to fulfill the vision articulated by participants in the process.

### 1.0 TO PROMOTE HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLNESS

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- 1.1 Improve the health of Southbridge residents.
- 1.2 Promote wellness and fitness.
- 1.3 Make Southbridge cleaner and safer.

### 2.0 TO PROMOTE EDUCATION FOR ALL

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- 2.1 Improve the reputation of the school system.
- 2.2 Improve literacy rates.
- 2.3 Promote college and job training.
- 2.4 Promote continuing education for seniors.

### 3.0 TO IMPROVE HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

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- 3.1 Expand housing options.
- 3.2 Address the problems of absentee landlords.
- 3.3 Infrastructure and other public facilities improvements in neighborhoods.

### 4.0 TO IMPROVE THE DOWNTOWN AND INCREASE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOWN-WIDE

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- 4.1 Improve / maintain downtown amenities.
- 4.2 Improve transportation downtown.
- 4.3 Promote economic development.

### 5.0 TO ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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- 5.1 Promote a sustainable future.
- 5.2 Prepare for climate change.
- 5.3 Protect watersheds.
- 5.4 Promote use of renewable energy sources.
- 5.5 Protect biodiversity.

### 6.0 TO INCREASE COMMUNITY PRIDE

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- 6.1 Improve the town's reputation.
- 6.2 Increase pride of place.
- 6.3 Bring different cultures together.

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## UNDERLYING THEMES

The following three themes are critical to the success of the Master Plan.

### FOCUS ON YOUTH

**INVOLVE YOUTH** Young people have the capacity to absorb new information, are more flexible than adults in their ability to change behavior, and they can also teach adults “new” behavior. The Master Plan recommends involving youth in many facets of moving forward, but particularly when it comes to actions related to sustainability and improving health and wellness, as these require shifts in thinking and behavioral changes that come from newly acquired knowledge. In this way the next generation -- the future we are planning for – can be taught to take better care of themselves, their town and the natural environment and while doing so, may bring a few of the adults along.

Ways of involving youth include working with the schools on developing health modules, including youth in community clean up, testing water quality, including them in efforts to improve food choices, etc.

**SUPPORT YOUTH.** In addition to restoring the reputation of the school district, absolutely critical to the future of Southbridge’s young people, it will be very important to improve and increase access and availability of recreational activities. One of the most frequently heard concerns from both adults and youth was the “lack of things to do” for young people. The need for wholesome alternatives is critical to supporting all youth, but especially those identified as being “at risk.” It is equally important to continue and expand existing successful programs that work with young people, such as Cops N’ Kids.



### NEED FOR INCREASED COMMUNICATION

The need for communication was evident throughout the planning process and is important for a variety of reasons including increasing awareness of and making more accessible existing resources (ranging from opportunities for recreation to public services to healthcare). It is important that information disseminated from government to residents be:

- continuously updated,
- clear, accessible and transparent,
- provided in multiple modes (e.g. internet, hard copy, cable TV), and
- multi-lingual.

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When meeting with residents and others it was discovered that they were often not aware of existing resources. This results in these resources being underutilized and in some cases duplicated. It also results in unnecessary negativity because people are not aware that some of what they would like, already exists/is happening.

Also, the Plan calls for raising awareness among residents with regard to a variety of topics including health and wellness and sustainability as well as good news regarding progress and improvements. It will be important to set up systems that facilitate the dissemination of such information in a number of different ways. Specific ways of improving communication include:

- Create a Community Calendar,
- Recruit a Volunteer Translation Corps,
- Improve Town website and keep it up-to-date,
- Create a centralized list of existing resources, and
- Use Cable TV to disseminate information and increase awareness around important issues.

#### FOSTER FAITH IN THE ABILITY TO MOVE FORWARD ... TOGETHER

It was noted throughout the process that while many individuals with an optimistic outlook were encountered, there was a prevailing attitude of hopelessness and a general negativity about the town and its capacity to change in positive ways. In some cases participants in the master planning process expressed these sentiments directly themselves; more often it was a description of others in town who chose not to participate and gave this as their reason for their lack of involvement. This apathy can be seen as a defense mechanism, that is, after repeatedly becoming frustrated, people protect themselves from further disappointment by eliminating their

expectations; they stop expecting anything, believing that the town is unable to improve. This in turn creates an obstacle to progress.

Ways to address this negative energy include:

- Work hard on demonstrating progress by implementing improvements that are easily achieved at relatively low cost (e.g. low hanging fruit).
- Widely publicize good news, regarding improvements to the school system, improvements to the downtown or any other area in town, as well as the achievements of Southbridge residents so as to create more positive energy regarding the town and its ability to move forward.
- Focus on bridging the gap between groups living in town and providing more opportunities for interaction among these groups. The divisiveness between groups is an obstacle to moving forward. Increased contact between groups often results in decreasing racism, that is, as people get to know one another as individuals, they stop treating each other as stereotypical members of the “other” group.



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- Improve discourse between Town Council and residents.

The master planning process made an effort to include as many people with different points of view as it could. A positive outcome of this is that the vision expressed in the Plan is a commonly shared view of the desired future. That is, at the end of the day, most residents want their town to be a better place to live, work and play, and they have similar ideas regarding what that would look like. This very fact needs to be communicated and built upon by bringing people together to work on smaller doable pieces such as community clean up, making improvements to parks and playgrounds, communal art/mural projects, or community landscaping. Having residents work on these projects together will result in multiple benefits including a cleaner, more beautiful town. Perhaps, the more important benefit of such collaboration is bringing together people who currently stay apart, thus resulting in community building.

Current efforts to bring different ethnic groups together should continue and be expanded. The town should celebrate its diversity and capitalize on it by creating a unique festival with food, music and other cultural expressions that express pride and give all an opportunity to enjoy the differences among us.

#### WHAT MAKES SOUTHBRIDGE UNIQUE?

**ONE OF** the objectives of a master plan is to identify those features that make a community special and are treasured by its residents; and to protect the particular “sense of place” that makes a community unique and distinct from other communities. It is part of the role of the Master Plan to define these themes and identify measures and means by which to preserve and enhance them. These need to be taken into account when determining how to manage growth and mitigate related impacts.

*Community Preservation Associates, with Community Circle,  
Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC and AECOM*

Residents were asked several times and in a variety of ways to identify the features that make Southbridge unique. This is some of what they said:

“Beautiful downtown”	Sense of community
Skatepark	Westville Dam Recreation Area
“the people”	Walkability
The “Res”	Cultural diversity
“Small town feeling	Memories of childhood
Rapids on the River	AO complex
Airport diner	Festival of Giving Trees
YMCA	Hospital
Big Bunny	Dave Digregorio’s Uptown Boxing
Churches	“running into people you know”
The River	Library
Historic buildings	Christmas decorations on Main St.

#### OUTREACH: SOUTHBRIDGE VOICES

##### PUBLIC FORUMS<sup>1</sup>

Between November 14th and December 5th, a total of ten (10) visioning meetings were held with the residents of Southbridge with the purpose of developing a shared vision and set of goals to guide future decision-making regarding making Southbridge a better place to live, work and play. An estimated 400 people participated. Additionally, 144 individuals

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete and detailed list of forums see Appendix 1 (Process).

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participated in a Facebook discussion where very similar themes emerged, for a total of over 500 people.

On December 12, 2012 a public forum was held to present the summary of this Community Conversation to date and to ask for response and additional input. Approximately 75 people attended.

Additionally, COMMENT BOARDS were available for written input and were located at:

- Town Hall,
- Library,
- High School,
- Community Connections,
- YMCA,
- Three local banks, and
- Arts Center.

### ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

A series of roundtable discussions were held to further address key issues addressed in the planning process. The purpose of these was to invite experts and interested parties to discuss the issues and identify specific strategies appropriate for Southbridge. The meetings were well attended, characterized by a dynamic exchange of ideas and were open to the public. The topics of these discussions were as follows:

Healthy and Safe Community

Downtown Revitalization and Economic Development Town-wide

Business Community

Education For All

School Department

Sustainability

Community Pride: interactive theatrical event

Neighborhood Improvement

Neighborhood Walk with Town Department Heads

Town Department Heads



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#### SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

The following is a brief summary of the public input compiled from the numerous forums listed above. See Volume II of this Plan for an extensive documentation of the community conversation.

#### MENTIONED BY RESIDENTS IN EVERY PUBLIC FORUM

Appreciation for the people of Southbridge, the small town “feel” and sense of community

Need for more activities for the youth

Need to improve the school system and restore its reputation

Bring different cultures together

Improve downtown

Town’s reputation/poor self image

Need for jobs

Relocate the welfare office

Town Council arguments, poor tone, lack of respect

Too many drugs

Absentee landlords

Need for public transportation

Need for more shopping/dining options

#### WHAT MOST PEOPLE APPRECIATE ABOUT SOUTHBRIDGE

The people, small town feel, sense of community, good place to raise a family

Diversity of ethnic groups/cultures

Library

YMCA

Hospital

Police and Fire

Westville Dam

Walkability of town

New middle/high school

Parks

Grocery stores (Big Bunny, Big Y)

Holiday decorations in downtown

Concerts on the Common

Downtown

Churches

Restaurants

#### WHAT MOST PEOPLE SEEM CONCERNED ABOUT

Empty storefronts in downtown

Lack of jobs

Welfare office<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Concern expressed regarding the location of the welfare office in town (once believed to be temporary) resulting in a disproportionate number of people moving in with public assistance needs



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Tone with which some Town Council and School Committee members disagreed, was perceived as disrespectful, but has been improved

Lack of public transportation

Lack of activities for youth

Divisiveness of community, lack of interaction among ethnic groups

Lack of cleanliness, including animal waste (e.g. dog feces)

Police relations with community

School district reputation

Crime

Drugs

Lack of citizen participation / “apathy” / negativity

#### FREQUENTLY LISTED SECRET WISHES<sup>3</sup>

Fewer drugs

Dog park

End racism/bring all ethnic groups together

More stores and restaurants

More activities for youth

Improved town reputation

Better housing conditions

Improved downtown

Better school system

More places to go/activities (entertainment/recreation/shopping)



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<sup>3</sup> Participants were asked to write down (anonymously) their “secret wish” for Southbridge; these were collected at the public forums and compiled. These represent the most frequently mentioned.

## SOUTHBIDGE VOICES: Residents Top Responses

Public Forum	Favorite Things about Southbridge	Least Favorite Things about Southbridge	If you could do one thing...? <sup>4</sup>
Eagles	Hospital QCC/after school programs Senior center Education library	Schools Lack of youth activities Tone with which Town officials discuss Quality/quality of housing Lack of public transport	Bring community together More jobs More youth activities Improve parks Improve police relationship with community Provide public transport
Library	Downtown, historic bldgs.. River and trails Ethnic diversity Hospital Town's location	Welfare office Poor education culture Crime/drugs/clinic Lack of aesthetics	Improve school system Relocate welfare office Expand art/cultural activity Interconnect trails
Senior Themes (senior center)	Senior center Hospital Family is here Quiet, beautiful town	Downtown: no stores Traffic lights/congestion Lack of appreciation Poor sidewalks Nothing (I like everything) Miss things that are gone	Improve downtown Clean up dog feces More to do
Teen Themes (high school seniors)	YMCA, Skateboard Park, football program Downtown People	Lack of activities Smell from sewage School system improvement Lack of cleanliness Empty stores on Main Street	More things to do More jobs Need public transportation More shopping oportnts. Improve school system Improve school lunches
West Street School	Downtown Hometown feel	High crime Lack of respect amongst Town officials	More opportunities for recreation

<sup>4</sup> Participants were asked: "If you could do one thing to improve Southbridge, what would it be?"



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Public Forum	Favorite Things about Southbridge	Least Favorite Things about Southbridge	If you could do one thing...?
Southbridge Community Connections	Community Connections Social services Library, hospital Skateboard Park	Community policing Lack of youth activities Racism Lack of public transit Condition of parks	Improve community pride Provide public transport Unity in politics Increase cleanliness More activities for youth Help with school supplies
Man/ Woman on the Street Interviews	Quiet, small, friendly Hospital Town service & infrastructure	Lack of youth activities Downtown Schools, absentee landlords Drugs, lack of public transit	More activities for youth Improve schools Improve downtown/traffic Clean up town
Focus Group/Private Home	Banks, YMCA Town common Walkability Police & Fire New school	Police/community Need Latino entertainment Poor road/sidewalk maintenance Absentee landlords Loitering Dog feces	More things to do/places to go



## OVERVIEW OF PLAN'S APPROACH

It is important to emphasize that the general thrust of the Plan is two-pronged and that this dual approach must be carried out simultaneously if it is to be successful. The two distinct directions are:

- 1 **Preserve and enhance unique, important, beautiful and interesting features that make Southbridge special** and that have the potential to be improved and connected; these include:
  - the people of Southbridge,
  - cultural diversity,
  - industrial/manufacturing heritage,
  - beautiful open spaces, including the Westville Dam,
  - the Quinebaug River,
  - grand historic buildings in the downtown and elsewhere,
  - an underutilized airport,
  - good location - relatively good access from highways,
  - small town feeling, many people know each other,
  - large institutions providing employment and support to the community (e.g. Harrington Hospital, Center for Hope, Quinsigamond Community College, Southbridge Hotel and Conference Center, etc.),
  - existing businesses providing employment and needed goods and services (e.g. Big Y, Big Bunny, Vienna, Fins & Tales, Dark Horse, etc.),
  - brand new middle/high school and adjacent playing fields,
  - abundant and high quality water, and
  - availability of renewable energy sources.
- 2 **Address challenges -- some of them difficult and serious --to help restore the town and support its residents, so that they may fully participate in enjoying all that the town has to offer;** these include:
  - poor health indicators,
  - a high percentage of poverty,
  - large numbers of high school dropouts,
  - limited English proficiency in segments of the population,
  - high levels of unemployment,
  - high levels of substance abuse,
  - a school system that was designated “underperforming,”
  - racism,
  - degraded downtown,
  - large vacant mill buildings,
  - lack of cleanliness in a number of areas in town,
  - landlords and renters who do not maintain their properties,
  - increasing senior population,
  - lack of transportation options, and
  - lack of access to river front.

## DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

A master plan needs to be based on facts about the community's assets and current situations. It is also useful to know some of the history of how current conditions were created. The existing conditions in Southbridge are described in categories useful for making decisions about future development. Opportunities and challenges in each planning category are also listed.

### POPULATION

Southbridge has been steadily and slowly losing population for the last 20 years.

- In 1990 the town had 17,816 people, up from 1980 by 1,151 people.
- By 2000 the population had dropped to 17,314 and by 2010 the population was 16,719. The loss is associated with fewer people per household (a 5% decrease between 2000 and 2010), and a net outmigration of people, especially in the young adult and family formation age categories.
- Population has been projected (by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission) to grow slightly, to 17,800 by 2030.
- There is some anecdotal evidence that suggests that the population is actually significantly higher than that documented by the Census, but this is difficult to confirm.

- Senior population expected to increase from 2,296 in 2010 to 4,380 in 2030, an increase of 91%.
- A significant portion of the town's population lives near or below the poverty level. Median **household income** in Southbridge in 2010 was \$47,234. The state level was \$62,859.
- 12.7 % of the town's population lived below the poverty level in 2010. The state level was 11.6%.

### HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Southbridge's **history** spans over three centuries, beginning with the Nipmucks (before 1675) and extending into the Modern period of the 20th Century.

- The town retains over 200 significant landscapes and buildings from this long history, with the bulk of these dating to the mid to late 19th and early 20th Centuries. The appealing historic street layout, neat building arrangement and comfortable building scale make Southbridge's downtown a highly desirable place for people to walk, gather and reside.
- There are a significant number of intact historic buildings and landscapes associated with Southbridge's development, in the 19th century, as a manufacturing center.
- Southbridge is a member of the 25-town Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor extending into Connecticut. Over 200

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individual historical properties have been inventoried throughout the town.

- There are eleven National Register Historic Districts. Despite their status on the National Register of Historic Places, many of the historic resources are threatened because of neglect and/or deterioration.

### OPPORTUNITIES

Southbridge has a wealth of **cultural resources** including:

- Heritage from a culturally and ethnically diverse population, including Puerto Ricans, French-Canadians, Albanians, Italians, Poles, and Greeks. Historically neighborhoods have been centered around mills and/or churches.
- Both the Southbridge Historical Commission and Historical Society are committed to celebrating the town's cultural traditions.
- Southbridge has a public library that has a variety of program, collections, and technological resources.
- There are at least three small performance spaces providing venues for theatrical and musical events.
- In addition there are the American Optical Museum and the Quinebaug Valley Council for the Arts & Humanities; several artists' spaces are in development.

Steps to take advantage of these opportunities include:

- Continue to value and protect historic resources.
- Center tourism and economic development on historic resources.

- Celebrate the town's cultural diversity through festivals and street fairs, employing this diversity as a means of drawing visitors from the outside.
- Leverage the Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor which provides an established vehicle through which the town can draw visitors from the outside.
- Promote the appealing historic street layout, neat building arrangement and comfortable building scale that make Southbridge's downtown a potentially desirable place for people to walk, gather and reside.



## CHALLENGES

- Despite their status on the National Register of Historic Places, many of the historic resources are threatened because of neglect and/or deterioration.
- Despite the rich variety of ethnicities residing in town, there is not a significant celebration of these and groups tend to stay separate.

## NATURAL RESOURCES, OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

Southbridge has a rich natural heritage worthy of recognition, protection, and pride.

- Twenty one percent (3,200 acres) of Southbridge is some form of protected open space.
- Forested areas and steep slopes add visual drama and have potential recreation value. There are a number of ridge lines in Southbridge which contribute to the town's character. Most of these are undisturbed by development.
- Riverfront renewal offers an opportunity for revitalizing Southbridge.
- Southbridge has protected more than 70% of state identified "Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife" & more than 25% of "Priority Habitats of Rare Species".
- About 43% of the town has soils with few restrictions for development; the remaining area has soils that increase the costs of construction.
- Southbridge was once highly agrarian. Most of the farms have disappeared, though approximately 3,000 acres of farmland remain as undeveloped land.

- Fifteen percent of the town has prime agricultural soils ideally suited to the production of food.
- More than 20% of its agricultural land has been permanently protected.

## WATER RESOURCES

Southbridge has high quality and abundant potable water in several reservoirs protected by extensive undeveloped watershed lands.

- The Town owns over two thousand acres in the southwest corner of Southbridge which includes Reservoirs 3, 4, and 5 and the Cohassee Brook Reservoir (additional watershed land is owned in Sturbridge and in Connecticut).
- There are more than 1,200 acres of wetlands in town. The Quinebaug River is within walking distance of the majority of town residents but is difficult to access for much of its route.
- While some recreational areas have been developed along the Quinebaug, there is significant further recreational potential for this river, which once powered the town's mills.

## HABITAT AND WILDLIFE

With more than 8,500 acres of woodlands, Southbridge has large areas of mixed hardwood and pine forest that produce clean air, reduce run-off and flooding, provide wildlife habitat, and moderate climatic conditions. Wetland and upland plant communities provide rich wildlife habitat, enhance passive recreation experiences, and add visual interest to the landscape.

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- One of Southbridge's most unique natural resource areas, with many large trees and spring wildflowers, is located along the eastern border of the town where the Quinebaug River flows into the Town of Dudley.
- Southbridge has several areas identified in the BioMap2 statewide conservation plan as Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape – critical areas for biodiversity. Land owned by the Water Department, combined with land in abutting towns and in Connecticut, protects a large portion of one of the BioMap2 Critical Natural Landscapes—important wildlife habitats.
- The Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program has identified six estimated rare wetland species habitat sites and one priority habitat for upland rare species in Southbridge.

#### RECREATION

The Recreation Department in conjunction with the Recreation Commission manages programs on nine sites (about 97 acres) with maintenance performed by the Department of Public Works.

- The School Department manages recreation facilities on about 82 acres (including the new high/middle school complex).
- The Army Corps of Engineers manages the Westville Recreation Area (578 acres), an important regional recreation facility partly in Sturbridge.
- Recreation facilities include;
  - 25 acres of playgrounds and playfields,
  - 12 baseball/softball fields,
  - 7 tennis courts,

- 3 soccer fields,
- 3 football fields, and
- 1 private golf course.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Completing the Open Space and Recreation Plan will provide direction in the future and qualify Southbridge for State funding.
- Promote recreational potential near the populated center and on forested areas and steep slopes.
- Renew riverfront area as an opportunity for revitalizing Southbridge.
- Increase awareness about the future of the environment; potential to involve school children and have impact on changing behaviors.
- Promote the Southbridge Technology Environmental Park and the use of renewable resources; this could be used to attract manufacturers to the industrial park.
- Increase mandatory no-build zones around critical areas.
- Increase production of locally grown food.
- Based on national standards Southbridge has nearly enough recreation facilities for its population.
- Few residences in the most densely developed part of Southbridge are more than a 15 minute walk to some kind of park or recreation area.



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#### CHALLENGES

- Complete Open Space and Recreation Plan to be eligible for state funding.
- Avoid development that would cause soil erosion or detract from the visual appeal of the ridges.
- While there are significant and plentiful recreational facilities, there is a need for small, scattered sites in denser neighborhoods, primarily those in and around the center of town for small gardens and unstructured play for small children.
- Assure that source water areas are protected from current and potential contamination.

- Protect important natural resource areas from future development.
- Southbridge has many opportunities for recreation, but many facilities are in need of renovation and improvements.
- Southbridge does have a lack of neighborhood green spaces and recreation facilities.
- Address barriers to access to existing recreation resources that may include topography, sense of not belonging, lack of awareness, etc.
- The densely developed, former mill-workers housing areas lack space for unstructured play forcing many activities into the streets.
- Given the large numbers of at-risk youth and expected increase in seniors there is a likely need for more recreation programming and outreach, especially in the densely populated, built-up area of town.

#### HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Some of Southbridge's **neighborhoods** are in poor condition, with unkempt yards, buildings needing paint and repairs, and debris scattered around.

- There were 6,866 **households** in 2010. These are projected to grow to 7,250 by 2030, about 0.3% per year.
- The number of multi-family units was reduced by 577 between 2000 and 2010, some by demolition and others by natural causes such as fires, flooding and wind.
- In the 1st half of 2012 the median home sales price was \$120,789. The state average was \$290,000. 55% of the homes on the market in the 1st half of 2012 were foreclosures.

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- The Southbridge Housing Authority owns or administers 301 housing units for individuals and families that qualify for subsidized housing.
- From 1996 to 2011 there was an annual average of 20 new housing units built per year. 99% of new units have been single-family homes.
- Almost half (47%) of Southbridge's housing was built before 1939. 53% of housing units have 5 or fewer rooms. 12% have 1 bedroom or less. 13% have 4 or more bedrooms.
- Population expected to increase by 1,000 in 2030.
- Senior population expected to increase by 91% by 2030.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Encourage more owner occupancy of multi-family residence to improve neighborhoods and make a commitment to an improved future for the town.
- Promote Southbridge's relatively low housing prices to provide an opportunity to create more homeowners, leading to more neighborhood stability and greater commitment to the town and its future.
- Improve, remodel and renew Southbridge's older housing units; reduce poor quality housing stock.
- Opportunity to develop smaller housing units to accommodate senior residents wishing to stay in town.





## A Master Plan for Southbridge: Moving Forward Together

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#### CHALLENGES

- Because housing is so affordable, it attracts absentee landlords who rent to low and moderate income households, often without doing any maintenance or repairs.
- The abundance of relatively low-cost (compared to other towns) rental housing has led to a high turnover in town population. 40% of all households moved to Southbridge in the last 7 years.
- At least half of Southbridge's housing stock can be considered affordable for sale. This is not true for rental housing because it attracts low and moderate income households that are paying, on average, 41% of their income on housing (higher than the affordability standard of 28% to 33%).

#### EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Private sector employment has continued its slow decline in Southbridge over the last 11 years. This is a continuation of a long-term trend that started when the optics industry started its decline in the 1970s.

- The major cause of the slow decline is the manufacturing sector which lost about 900 jobs since 2001.
- Other sectors that lost jobs are retail trade, information services and business and professional services.
- All other sectors grew somewhat, with health services, social assistance and accommodation and food services showing the most gains.
- Unemployment in Southbridge (9.5% in May 2012) has consistently been above statewide averages (6.0%).

- Most businesses (576 businesses in 2011) in Southbridge are small (average business size is 12 employees).
- Total private sector employment (6,091 in 2011) projected to grow to 6,590 by 2030.
- Average wage in 2011—\$42,172 (State = \$59,694).
- Southbridge has an excellent Standard & Poor's bond rating of A+.
- General Fund sources (2008) 30% from property taxes, 38% from state aid, 24% from local fees/receipts.
- Property tax-rate in 2012 is \$17.83/\$1,000.
- 78% of total municipal taxes were paid by residential properties.
- Average single-family residential tax bill was \$2,852.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Promote Southbridge's diversified economy to provide more job stability and less dependence on any single sector.
- Continue to encourage manufacturing jobs as it is still the largest sector of Southbridge's employment.
- Promote Southbridge's strong industrial heritage of buildings and sites.
- Recognize that Southbridge has a fine heritage of handsome commercial buildings downtown.
- Enhance the role of tourism in providing jobs and generating income.
- Encourage agriculture and locally grown food.



## CHALLENGES

- Almost ½ of Southbridge’s employed residents have jobs out-of-town.
- The 9.5% unemployment rate is higher than the state at 6.0% (May 2012).
- Many Southbridge residents shop out-of town for items they could potentially buy in town like food and clothing.
- The image of downtown is reportedly affected by the social service agencies located on the ground floors of buildings lining Main Street.

## TOWN FACILITIES AND SERVICES

As the town continues to develop and improve, municipal services may need to change or reflect the needs of the community. Aging facilities will need to be replaced and/or upgraded. Existing Town services will need to be adjusted and adapted to meet various codes, changes in technology, and changes in available methods for increased efficiency. New services and facilities may be needed to accommodate shifts in the town’s demographics. These changes will impact the way in which services are provided, the buildings which house them, as well as their capital needs, and therefore, the Town budget.

- An expanded Fire Station (either on site or in a different location) will be required.
- Among residents 25 years and older 77.8% (2010 census) have a high school diploma or higher as compared to the county average of 88.5%.
- 12% of residents age 25 and older have a Bachelor’s or advanced college degree (as compared to the state average of 33.2%).
- Expanding and modifying the library’s programs to meet citizen needs will be important.
- Town has an abundance of water and a state-of-the-art treatment plant.
- The increasing senior population will require additional services to serve a wide range of senior needs (both active “younger” seniors as well as for the more health challenged elders).
- About 1/3 of residents are Spanish-speaking; about 1/3 of these are considered “linguistically isolated”. Residents from a variety of backgrounds will need linguistically and culturally relevant outreach to meet their needs.

- The School District was designated as “underperforming” and although improving, is still among the lowest performing districts in the State. Continued work on improving the school district’s reputation will be important.
- The Town Hall building will need updating.
- Improving the efficiency and odor control of the Wastewater Treatment Plant will be desirable.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

A large segment of Southbridge residents suffer from a number of illnesses as well as making unhealthy lifestyle choices.

- Southbridge residents suffer from several serious health risk factors (including childhood asthma (# 1 in state), diabetes, substance abuse, obesity, binge drinking, infant mortality).
- Many of the demographic indicators depict a serious picture of a population living in poverty and suffering many of the related conditions including poor health and low educational achievement, among others.
  - Substance abuse is almost twice the State rate.
  - 25% of the children under the age of 18 are below the poverty rate.
  - Southbridge was ranked in the top five “at-risk” in the State for child health.
  - Ranked highest in the State for asthma, 5th in the State for teen pregnancy.
  - 75% of the public school children qualify for free lunch program.

- This by no means describes all of Southbridge residents – many of whom are affluent, healthy and well educated, but the percentage of residents living in poverty and related conditions is significant, and thus an effort needs to be made to identify and describe these conditions so that ways of addressing them may be found.

## COMMUNITY PRIDE AND SELF-IMAGE

Southbridge has developed the identity of a community fallen on hard times, has **inner city demographics** and related issues, and many residents feel that their community is looked down upon by surrounding wealthier towns. Some residents consider Southbridge a town without hope or pride. There is a need to **re-establish pride** and to **become more optimistic about the town’s future** -- to believe that things can be improved -- otherwise residents’ apathy and negativity will add to the inertia and actually act to block progress from occurring.

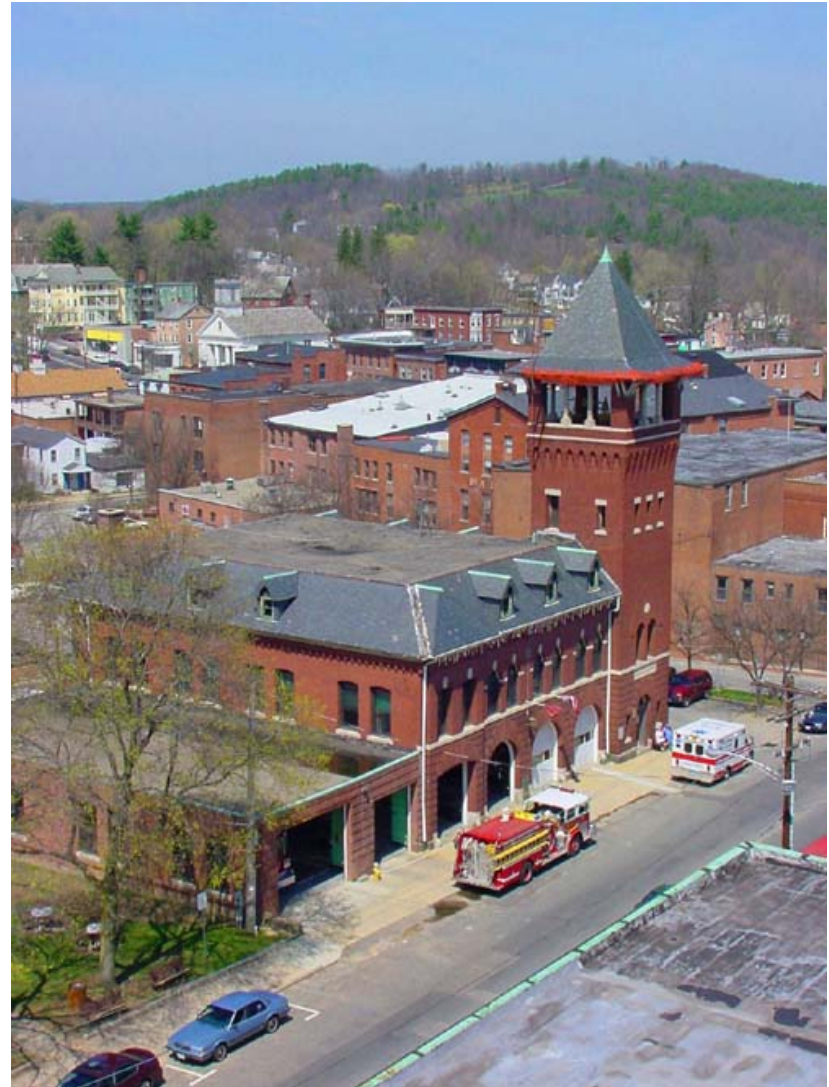
## OPPORTUNITIES

- Recognize the existence of abundant, high quality water which supports the goals of increasing economic development and attracting more residents.
- Promote education, at all levels:
  - Implement School Improvement Plan and reorganization of elementary schools back to neighborhood schools to help turn school district around.
  - Restoring the school district’s reputation and attracting residents back to public schools are very important.

- Improving literacy rates for children and adults is critical for employment.
- Support of the library as a center for literacy is also key.

## CHALLENGES

- Improving the school district's reputation will be critical to the town's future ability to attract and retain residents and to help raise the town's children.
- Poor health indicators, many related to poverty, need to be addressed; some may be related to environment (e.g. poor housing conditions) and may indicate a need for a Community Health Clinic.
- Increasing senior population means an increasing need for services including housing, medical services and opportunities for socializing and recreation.
- Large number of at-risk youth needs support and programs.
- High unemployment rates coupled with a struggling economy indicate a need for more workforce training, ESL, and adult literacy programs.
- For residents for whom English is not a first language means that there may be a need for more multi-lingual communication and other bridges (e.g. liaison, cultural/linguistic training of Town staff).
- Public facilities in need of renovation include the Fire Station and the Town Hall building. Additionally, the Wastewater Treatment facility is in need of some updating.





## TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

Southbridge's transportation system is generally adequate to accommodate the needs of residents, employees, and visitors. However, as with all communities, there are areas where improvements should be made to improve mobility and safety for now and in the future.

- Many residents (over one-third) work in town. Almost one half (47% - 3,551 workers) of employed residents work out of town with Worcester and Sturbridge employing the highest number residents.
- Overall **commuter times** for Southbridge have increased, although the times are lower than the state average.
  - The longest commute times (>30 min) have decreased between 2000 and 2006.
  - 80% of employees drive alone (state average = 74%).
  - Carpools have increased to 15% between 2006 and 2010. 4% walk or bike.
  - Very few Southbridge residents are currently enrolled in the MassDOT NuRide carpool program.
- Almost 16,000 vehicles are registered in Southbridge, average of one per person.
- 12% of households (758) do not own any vehicle and 13% of households own three or more vehicles. This coupled with the fact that there is little public transit service means many residents do not have the means to travel to jobs.

Southbridge has **no direct access to the interstate highway system**. Traffic to/from I-84 and I-90 must travel through or near the town center.

- A new pavement management system is currently being developed.
- Many roadways will require maintenance or rehabilitation in the near future.

There are no overriding critical traffic issues, but **specific areas need improvement** to increase safety and capacity.

- Route 131 carries the highest traffic volumes in Southbridge – approximately 18,000 vehicles per day.
- Traffic volumes on Route 131 and 169 have decreased in recent years by approximately 2%.
- High numbers of automobile, pedestrian, and bicycle accidents are clustered in the vicinity of the town center along Main Street and Central Street and Worcester Street north of the center.
- The intersections of Main Street/Elm Street, Main Street/Pleasant Street, Worcester Street/Mechanic Street and Central Street/Paige Hill Road experience the highest number of automobile accidents (between 7 and 9 per year).
- The number of vehicle accidents has remained constant over the last three years.

Twelve **school crossing guards** are provided at critical intersections. An Accessibility Plan for school pedestrian safety was updated in 2009. It is used as a guide and to prioritize access, sidewalks, and curb ramp improvements.

Curb ramps on most major streets are functional. Many **sidewalks** need repairs.

- There were four areas of significant concern for the safety of those with mobility limiting disabilities: Two at the Hamilton, Mill,



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and West Main Streets intersection area; Eastford Road/ Elm Street; and sidewalk on the northwesterly side of Eastford Road.

Existing **trails** in the Town of Southbridge include the Grand Trunk Trail, the Titanic Rail Trail, the Heritage Nature Trail, and the Southbridge Rail Trail.

- Additionally, there are four trails in the historic districts of Downtown Southbridge: Central Mills – Sacred Heart Trail; Central Village Trail Extension; Central Village Trail; and Connector Trail.

Elderbus provides **regional transit service for seniors**, including Southbridge.

- The WRTA now has bus service from Southbridge to Auburn, where riders may transfer to Worcester. The bus stops at the Quinsigamond Community College campus and the Jacob Edwards Library. More public transit is desired.



*Community Preservation Associates, with Community Circle,  
Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC and AECOM*

- The Transportation Committee has been viewed as a success in improving the process of identifying, evaluating, and prioritizing public transportation improvements.

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Improve congestion and accidents in the downtown area by correcting safety issues.
- Implement the Southbridge Downtown Revitalization Plan to improve safety and circulation in the downtown for all users.
- Use the New Pavement Management System to develop a long-term strategy for maintaining roadways and program budgets.
- Promote the network of trail and bike paths to provide good recreational opportunities and an alternative mode of transportation.
- Continue to utilize the recently formed Transportation Committee to identify and address issues.

### CHALLENGES

- With no direct highway access many residents drive fairly long distances to work (above state average).
- Many households (758) do not own any vehicles. With limited public transit service this means many residents do not have the means to travel to jobs (or other destinations).

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#### LAND USE AND ZONING

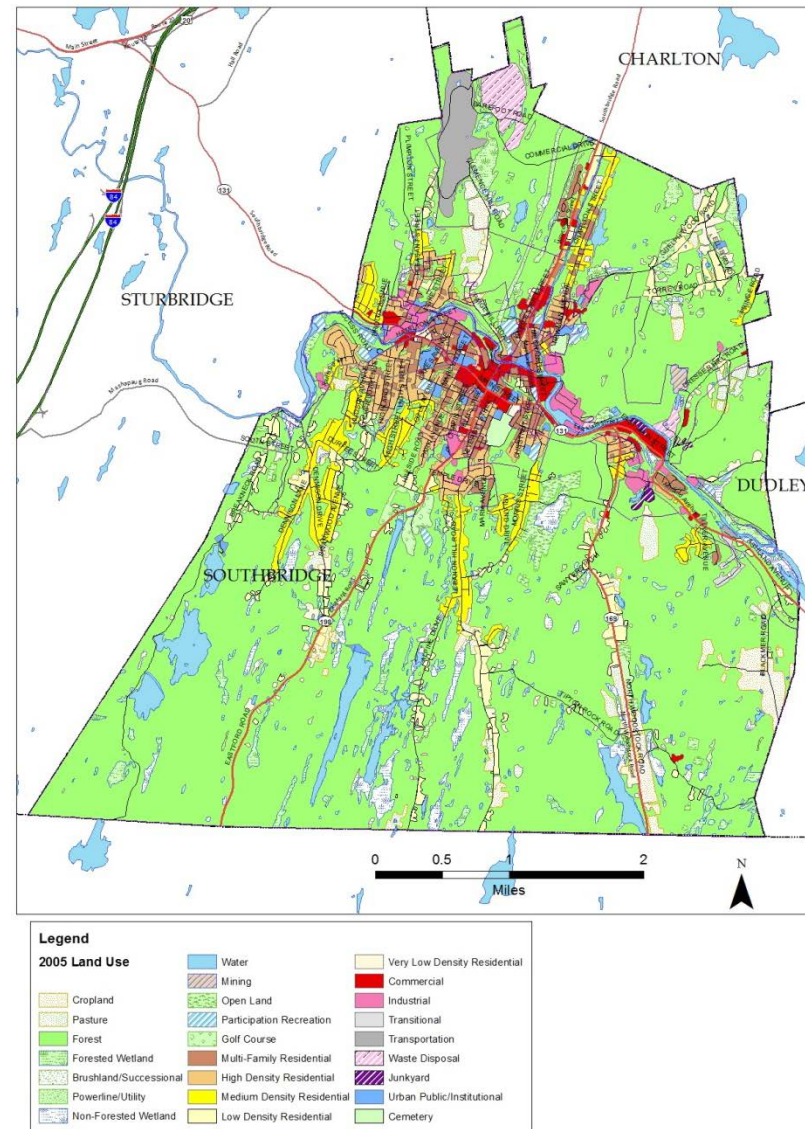
- Over 3/4 of Southbridge is forest, agriculture, open land, water or unforested wetlands, much of it permanently protected as a result of being watershed land.
- More than 80% is zoned residential.
- 2.2% zoned for business.
- 16.5% zoned for industry.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Recognize that over 3/4th of Southbridge is forest, agriculture, open land, water or unforested wetlands, much of it permanently protected as a result of being watershed land.
- Recognize that two family and multi-family districts are concentrated on either side of the Quinebaug River, creating a very walkable center.
- Implement additional design guidelines and site plan review for some districts and uses that may improve appearance and help protect Southbridge's historic resources.
- Recognize that zoning and subdivision regulations are among the Town's most important tools for controlling land use and affecting a better quality of life.
- Protect and enhance Southbridge's neighborhoods as a major town strength through zoning and public investments in schools, parks and recreation.

#### CHALLENGES

- Requiring Special Permits for Cluster or Planned Unit developments may limit use of these innovative provisions.



## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Implementation Plan represents the core of the Master Plan and is organized around the following goals:

- 1 To Promote Health, Safety and Wellness
- 2 To Promote Education For All
- 3 To Improve Housing and Neighborhoods
- 4 To Increase Economic Development Town-wide and Improve the Downtown
- 5 To Ensure Environmental Sustainability
- 6 To Increase Community Pride

Under each goal, a series of objectives provides more detail regarding aspects of the goal. For each objective a number of strategies are listed with action steps outlining the HOW to achieve each of the objectives.

Critical to the implementation of the Plan is the formation of a MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE, whose charge should be overseeing the implementation, keeping the Plan up to date and providing a “status update” in an annual “State of the Plan” address to the Town.

The Plan has more than three hundred recommended action steps. For each of these, a LEAD is identified whose responsibility includes inviting

PARTNERS (both those listed and others that may become relevant) to initiate action.

For many of the strategies listed, an entirely new planning process will need to define roles and responsibilities of the Lead and Partners. Additional Partners may be identified to help carry out the action steps. It is also recommended that each of the **Roundtable Groups** formed around the master plan goals form a WORKING GROUP and meet on a bi-annual basis or quarterly (with the Implementation Committee), depending on the topic and/or needs to monitor progress for their goal and to update the Plan along with the Implementation Committee.

There are many positive efforts currently underway in Southbridge being carried out by a dedicated staff and tireless volunteers. The Plan attempts to acknowledge these but it cannot be completely comprehensive and may have missed identifying ongoing activities working on improving Southbridge. Apologies are made in advance for this.

The Master Plan should be updated or new plan developed, before the 20-year period is over.

While the Implementation Plan is organized around the six master planning goals, each action step is also associated with one or more of the traditional **MASTER PLAN “ELEMENTS”** (e.g. housing, economic development, land use, natural resources, cultural and historic resources, public facilities and services, open space and recreation, and

transportation and circulation). A separate **matrix** is included as an appendix (Appendix 2) indicating how these goals and objectives relate to these master planning elements.

## IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORTS

Increased communication and additional implementation capacity are critical to making implementation feasible.

**INCREASE COMMUNICATION:** increasing communication at all levels and between the Town and residents, among Town departments and among residents is critical for increasing awareness regarding existing resources as well as for providing information regarding future plans, opportunities and efforts.

- Revamp Town webpage,
- Create a Community Calendar,
- Locate a Community Bulletin Board,
- Maximize use of the Local newspaper,
- Increase programming for Cable Access TV, and
- Welcome to Newcomers: Create a partnership between community college, social service agencies, health providers and send out “welcome packets” with information regarding existing resources (e.g. housing, employment, ESL classes, schools, etc.) to newly arrived residents. Send welcome to new businesses as well.

**INCREASE IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY:** There is a significant need to increase capacity in order to accomplish the goals and objectives. Some ways in which it is recommended that this be achieved include:

- Restructure the **Economic Development and Planning Department** and increase capacity.
- **Create a position for a town-wide Grant Writer** that would create an on-line centralized clearinghouse for all Town departments to provide and obtain information on available grants.
- **Restructure existing staff positions** that are currently underutilized and create tasks where professional staff work with volunteers on projects.
- **Plan future budgets** with the goal of hiring additional staff.
- **Expand existing efforts to attract volunteers.** A concerted effort needs to be made to attract more and new individuals to volunteer on various committees and in other ways to work towards making some of the desired improvements. Additionally, it is important that volunteers be recruited from all groups living in town. Specifically, reaching out to the Latino and other ethnic groups in town in welcoming ways might accomplish more than one goal (e.g. to increase the number of volunteers and to help build bridges in the community).
- **Community Education Liaison** to help to develop community education programming jointly funded and to include recreation, schools, grants, etc.
- **Latino Liaison** position be established at Town Hall. This could be a part-time position. Responsibilities would include translating key materials into Spanish for the Town’s website as well as hard copy materials, communicating what relevant existing resources exist to individuals in need of a specific service and connecting individuals and families with the resources they need. The Liaison

would also help people to navigate Town departments and other public services.

- **Cultivate public/private partnerships.**

**ADDITIONAL COMMITTEES:** As previously mentioned, the first step in moving forward the Plan is the formation of a **Master Plan Implementation Committee** charged with overseeing the implementation of the Plan. The Committee should also report progress (and/or obstacles to implementation) to the Town in the form of a “State of the Town” address at a Town Council meeting or some other such forum and keep the Plan up-to date.

It is recommended that the following additional Committees be formed to help implement the Master Plan:

- Open Space and Recreation Committee,
- Multi-Cultural Committee,
- Communications Committee, and
- Downtown Events Committee.

The purpose of these Committees is made clear in the Implementation Plan.

**CHANGES TO BYLAWS.** Changes to zoning bylaws are recommended, including:

- Modifying existing zoning to accommodate Southbridge’s traditional mixed-use development pattern especially along the River where residential development could help redevelop the riverfront and revitalize downtown.

- Protecting important habitat and watershed areas and making linkages between open spaces, especially along waterways, by encouraging more use of the cluster/ PUD provisions of the zoning bylaws and giving bonuses for subdivisions that protect more than 50% of the developable area and provide public trail easements.
- Assuring that bylaws promote backyard food production (including chickens).
- Amending zoning bylaws to require unregistered vehicles to be located out of public view.
- Amending the zoning bylaws to better regulate outdoor storage and disposal of unsightly items.
- Upgrading zoning bylaw to help guide neighborhood improvements.

These and other bylaw changes can over time help achieve the vision and goals.

**PASSING THE COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT (CPA).** Additional funding will be necessary to implement some recommendation. Passing the Community Preservation Act is a cost effective way to leverage State matching funds that can help implement housing, open space, recreation and historic preservation initiatives.

## SIXTEEN TOP KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the top 16 recommendations made in the Plan. The order in which they are listed is of no particular significance.

**Reclaim and Repurpose the River.** Increasing access to the Quinebaug River for enjoyment of views as well as active recreation is an important way of enhancing the town’s existing features. Connecting the River to the



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downtown, including by encouraging mixed-use development with housing on upper stories along some segments of the river's edge takes advantage of views and breathes new life into underutilized areas. Rezone some segments of the riverfront nearest to the downtown for mixed use, including housing.

**Retain existing and recruit new businesses.** This is important for a number of reasons including supplementing the tax base, providing employment, reusing currently large, vacant mill buildings and in the case of retail and restaurants, helping to stimulate the downtown and other areas by providing more places for people to go. Streamlining the permitting process and other "business-friendly" practices should be employed. Both new and existing businesses may benefit from training in developing a business plan, marketing, etc. The industrial park is an opportunity to provide significant economic growth to the town and should promote its ability to offer renewable energy sources.

**Restore the reputation of the school system.** This is related to the previous recommendation regarding restoring the town's reputation in that the two are linked. It is critical that the school district do all it can to make improvements and publicize these widely. Only then will the schools become community centers for all the town's residents and only then will the town attract residents of a higher socio-economic level.

**Improve education and job training.** Providing opportunities to all residents for a better life through education, lifelong learning and job training for all ages, including ESL and Adult Basic Education programs will be critical to supporting residents so that they are employable.

**Optimize use of Airport.** Make use of this relatively unique resource by holding events there and otherwise maximizing its use and potential to support community gathering as well as economic development.

**Address substance abuse and childhood asthma.** Provide access to detox services (e.g. transportation needed) and research potential environmental causes of asthma.

**Restore the reputation of the town, therefore increasing pride in Southbridge.** Re-branding Southbridge, taking on a public relations campaign, publicizing good news and developing a consistent theme to upgrade gateways coming into town are some of the ways in which it is recommended that the town begin to restore its reputation. Develop a "Positive About Southbridge" campaign. Promote existing resources, encourage community-oriented behavior by giving out tickets (Police Department) rewarding good behavior. Reward landlords and tenants for cleaning and beautifying properties by giving out awards and publicizing these.

**Create a centralized list of existing resources** that is provided as part of a welcome to newcomers package to newly arrived residents as well as to new businesses. It should be continually updated and should include information ranging from school offerings, public services, health care services, recreational opportunities, etc.

**Recruit and establish a "Latino Liaison" in Town Hall** to advocate for the Latino community and help direct people in need of services and information.

**Implement the Downtown Plan.** It is important for residents to have their community's "living room" restored so that they may enjoy a vital and vibrant town center. It is also important for the town's economy and potential tourism. The Town should open discussions with the State to discuss options for possible relocation of the welfare office when the time for the lease to be re-evaluated approaches. Additionally, social service

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agencies should be encouraged to locate on side streets, not directly onto Main Street.

**Complete the Open Space and Recreation Plan.** This will help to address important open space and recreation needs and also make the Town eligible for state funds to help meet these needs.

**Develop a Healthy Southbridge Campaign.** Working with a broad definition of health, include all residents in a communal effort to improve individual and community health and wellness; including local food production, walking and biking, and recreation and fitness.

**Beautify, clean up and increase safety in the neighborhoods.** Housing that is in the poorest condition should be upgraded or demolished. Landlords that do not take care of their properties need to be held accountable, as do renters, and a way to provide more small play areas especially in the more densely built neighborhoods is needed. Residents can be involved in helping to beautify as well as to improve safety through neighborhood watch type programs.

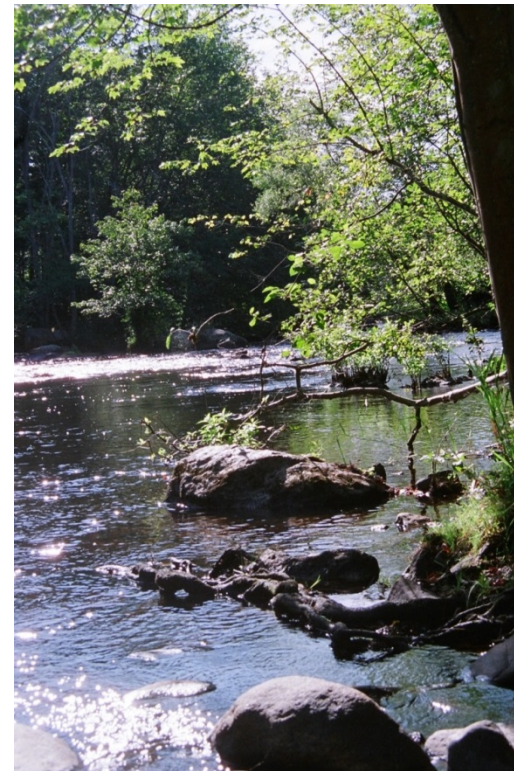
**Develop unique features and promote these to make Southbridge a destination.** Recommendations range from painting a unique mural on a building in a prominent location to creating a tournament quality facility for sports to promoting eco-tourism to capitalizing on multi-ethnic heritage, industrial/manufacturing past, and/or other features by organizing events to celebrate these with the intent of attracting both residents and visitors.

**Address racism and embrace multi-ethnic heritage.** It is very difficult for a divided community to move forward together. Diversity training should be required of all Town employees. Multiple opportunities to express and experience the town's different ethnic and cultural traditions should be

encouraged and supported. Develop a “the KEY to Southbridge’s future is its diversity” campaign.

**Increase awareness regarding the need to plan for a sustainable future.**

Use Cable TV programming to promote the use of existing resources, disseminate information regarding new resources and ways of accessing them. Involve youth and hold events. Promote enjoyment of natural features thus inspiring people to support measures that protect the environment.



## LIST OF “RIPE APPLES”



The following is a list of “ripe apples” or no or low-cost and relatively easy to implement actions. It is recommended that they be implemented as soon as possible so as to foster faith in the process as well as to provide momentum to the implementation process. Making improvements quickly and visibly builds credibility for the Master Plan and also honors the participation of those who gave their time to share their thoughts. The list is organized under each of the six master planning goals.

### HEALTH, WELLNESS AND SAFETY

- Recruit a Volunteer Translation Corps to be available on an as needed basis.
- Develop a health module at the schools and hold an annual Youth Summit.
- Conduct a “Map Your Neighborhood” Event where residents get involved in conducting a needs assessment, including identifying vulnerable residents such as seniors living alone.
- Collaborate with local newspaper to set aside a weekly Health and Wellness column.
- Hold an annual Health Fair.
- Publicize existing meditation/walk/run by Catholic Charities.
- Challenge local restaurants to create “healthy meals” and advertise widely.
- Establish Safe Routes to School Program.
- Create a “roster” of parks and other facilities (include amenities, hours of operation, etc.).
- Survey students regarding food choices at school.

- Promote Library as a safe place for health, literacy and family resource.
- Give out tickets (Police Department) rewarding good community-oriented behavior (promoting safety and cleanliness).
- More trash cans on Main Street.
- Enforce by-law requirement to light stairwells in multi-family housing.
- Continue to identify and address improvements to safety and cleanliness by continuing the neighborhood “walk-throughs” with Town Department Heads and residents.
- Create additional fun run/walk events to encourage exercise for all ages.
- Encourage production of locally grown food.

### HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

- Continue and expand the “Make Southbridge Home” program.
- Mobilize neighborhood organizations to work on neighborhood improvement projects (e.g. parks, playgrounds, community gardens, landscaping, murals, etc.).
- Fine landlords for excessive police calls to identified problem properties and tenants.
- Publicize “good behavior” with photos of beautified properties.

### IMPROVE DOWNTOWN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Hold new and more downtown events by forming a Downtown Events Committee.
- Recruit labor (students, convicts, Boy Scouts) to help clean the downtown on a regular basis.

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- Expedite the permitting process for new businesses or those that want to expand by supporting the use of a streamlining checklist.
- Strive to identify and adopt additional ways to facilitate and enable new and expanded economic development.

#### EDUCATION

- Widely advertise any and all improvements to the school system, including offerings and use multiple modes of communication.
  - Use Cable TV to broadcast improvements to the school system, a clip that features adults speaking about the positive effects of college and support ASPIRA's efforts to create a cable TV clip showcasing Latino college graduates..
  - Create an "infomercial" of course offerings for students at the high school.
  - Publish a list of courses in local newspaper and a list of successful students that graduated from the Southbridge school system.
  - Provide information about job-training opportunities.
  - Bundle and distribute information targeted to seniors in an engaging and accessible format.
- Bring elementary school students to high school programs/performances.
- Post homework on the school system's web site.
- Engage students in caring for school grounds as a means of broadening knowledge about agriculture/horticulture.
- Develop a more engaging approach to increasing parental involvement in the schools.

- Increase opportunities for students to compete with other school districts such as debate teams and high school quiz shows.

#### SUSTAINABILITY

- Provide information on ways of protecting the natural environment including products that minimize impacts on the environment, and supporting car-pooling.
- Hold environmental awareness events such as a Sustainability /Green Technology festival.
- Hire unemployed to help with recycling.
- Assure that by-laws promote backyard food production.

#### COMMUNITY PRIDE

- Do something unique, paint an usual mural on a building in a prominent location.
- Showcase progress and build faith in process by implementing low hanging fruit in Master Plan and widely publicizing success stories.
- Encourage continued improvement of the rapport between Town Council and residents.
- Hold a contest for ideas about ways of increasing community pride.
- Involve youth in the planning process.
- Encourage Town department heads to lead by example by attending important town-wide events.
- Include multi-cultural entertainment in the Town Common concert series.

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- Collect names of prominent individuals in the ethnic communities and name a street, plaza or an intersection after them, holding a naming ceremony.

#### PLAN CONCEPT

The map on the following page illustrates how Southbridge could be at some point in the future. It is based on existing development and zoning, but key aspects of the existing land use controls have been modified to respond to the goals, objectives, and strategies proposed in the Master Plan. They include:

- Protecting important habitat and watershed areas and making linkages between open spaces, especially along waterways, by encouraging more use of the cluster/ PUD provisions of the zoning bylaws and giving bonuses for subdivisions that protect more than 50% of the developable area and provide public trail easements.
- Modifying existing zoning to accommodate Southbridge's traditional mixed-use development pattern especially along the River where residential development could help redevelop the riverfront and revitalize downtown.
- Greatly increased access to the Quinebaug River, making it a key feature of the town's revitalization; including the completion of the Bike Trail and increased public access along the riverfront as a condition of residential and economic redevelopment along the River.

Other features are called out on the map.





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## KEY TO IMPLEMENTATION PLAN TABLES

The following is a key to the notation used in the Implementation Plan tables. The Implementation Plan is organized under six goals, related objectives and a list of strategies recommended to achieve these. These are presented in table format with separate columns for:

- Strategies,
- Existing Resources,
- Actions,
- Funding Need,
- Notes,
- Lead and Partners , and
- Priority/Timing.

**Existing Resources:** identifies known relevant organizations or other resource(s)

***Italics:*** use to indicate reference to an existing document or study

**Funding Category:** capital and/or operating and maintenance cost

**Endnotes:** provided for relevant details and/or additional information or reference(s).

**Lead:** The Town department, board, committee or other entity that is considered the most appropriate as the party responsible to lead the effort. Others listed are considered relevant Partners.

## Priority/Timing

#1: Immediate: 1-5 years.

#2: Intermediate: 5-10 years.

#3: Future (re-evaluate in 10 years): 10 – 20 years.


Ongoing (continue & support action already in progress).

Sustained Effort (initiate new action step and sustain over time).

**NOTES:** indicates if the strategy requires that a new staff position/committee be created, and provides cross-reference information to other related strategies indicated by SEE ALSO.

**SEE ALSO:** used to indicate the instances where the strategy relates to more than one goal.



**Ripe Apple (**  **):** when an action step is considered to be a “low-hanging fruit”, that is, relatively low cost, low level of effort, with desirable impacts.

## GOAL 1.0: TO PROMOTE HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLNESS

### GOAL STATEMENT: TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF SOUTHBRIDGE RESIDENTS AND TO PROMOTE WELLNESS AND FITNESS OVERALL.

According to the World Health Organization, health is “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of infirmity.”<sup>5</sup> A healthy community as described by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Healthy People 2010 report is one that *“continually creates and improves both its physical and social environments, helping people to support one another in aspects of daily life and to develop to their fullest potential. Healthy places are those designed and built to improve the quality of life for all people who live, work, worship, learn, and play within their borders. They also provide easy access and connectivity to other communities – places where every person is free to make choices amid a variety of healthy, available, accessible, and affordable options.”*<sup>6</sup>

### HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLNESS TODAY – OVERVIEW OF KEY POINTS

Southbridge residents suffer from several serious **health** risk factors (including childhood asthma [# 1 in state], diabetes, substance abuse, obesity, binge drinking, infant mortality). Many demographic indicators depict a serious picture of a population living in poverty and suffering many of the related conditions including poor health and low educational achievement, among others. This by no means describes all of Southbridge residents – many of whom are affluent, healthy and well educated, but the percentage of residents living in poverty and related conditions is significant, and thus an effort needs to be made to identify and describe these conditions so that ways of addressing them may be found.

A large segment of Southbridge residents suffer from a number of illnesses as well as making unhealthy lifestyle choices; sample indicators include:

- the town is number one in the state in childhood asthma,
- very high rates of diabetes, hypertension, obesity,
- very high rates of substance abuse, and
- fifth in the state for teenage pregnancy.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/about.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/about.htm>

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In addition to the health risk factors and prevalence of poor health indicators in Southbridge, the Family Health Center of Worcester also found that<sup>7</sup>:

- Almost half (47.1%) of community members surveyed reported difficulty getting medical care because of the cost.
- The local community hospital reported 24,506 emergency department visits (FY10) with higher-than-state-average rates of Emergency Department visits per 1,000 persons and avoidable ED visits per capita indicating a need for increasing access to prevention and primary care.
- Language is a potential barrier to care (27% of Southbridge population over the age of 5 speaks a language other than English at home and 42% of the school-age population is Latino).

See Volume II for more details.

### RELEVANT DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

- Southbridge's overall population is projected to decrease (by 3.26%) by 2014. This is a continuation of a trend of slight population loss the town experienced over the last two decades and contrasted to the increase in population expected in the region (3.85% statewide). However, **the town is expected to grow slightly by 2020** with a slight continuation of this trend by 2030, with a **significant growth in the population aged 65 and over** which is projected to increase 62% from 2010 to 2020 and an additional 27% by the year 2030. This is important to consider when thinking about services that this group of individuals may

<sup>7</sup> Summary of Needs Assessment Data, Excerpted from HRSA proposal to establish a Community Health Center in Southbridge, MA, December 2010.

need (e.g. medical, transportation, public safety, opportunities for socializing).

- Southbridge has a **large and growing Latino population** (30% according to 2010 Census), a significant number of who speak Spanish at home, some of whom have limited English proficiency and are considered to be linguistically isolated.
- The regional Community Health Network Area (CHNA) has developed a series of priority areas to focus on (nutrition, physical activity and weight management for the fiscal year of 2012).

### SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**The relationship between physical activity and health is well established.** Physical activity when integrated with everyday life -- "active living"<sup>8</sup> -- has been demonstrated to be a strong preventive health measure, for both physical and mental health.

"Regular physical activity has been found to reduce the risk for developing a number of diseases (e.g. heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure), to prevent mental illness (e.g. depression, anxiety), and reduce the risk of dying prematurely. The overall aesthetics, perceived safety and convenience of the pedestrian environment, may play a role in encouraging and supporting walking on a regular basis"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Active living refers to "opportunities for incorporating physical activity into the routines of daily life as well as for sport and recreation. Examples of active living include walking or cycling with children to school; walking, cycling or catching public transportation to work or replacing short car trips to corner shops and parks by walking or cycling." (from Shaping Suburbia, the form and future of our suburbs): <http://www.shapingsuburbia.com/2-suburbia-now/being-active-and-healthy-in-suburbia>

<sup>9</sup> CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/>



## OBJECTIVES

- To improve the health of Southbridge residents,
- To promote wellness and fitness, and
- To make Southbridge cleaner and safer.

## KEY STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- Undertaking a **“healthy town initiative”** including a town-wide campaign to improve health and wellness town-wide may help to encourage healthy lifestyle choices, including good nutrition (coordination of existing resources, providing guidance and encouragement for healthy lifestyle choices).
- The Family Health Center of Worcester has proposed to establish a **Community Health Center** satellite in Southbridge.
- Investigate whether or not and to what degree **sub-standard housing conditions** (mold, pests, etc.) may be a contributing factor to the **high childhood asthma rates** in Southbridge.
- Use **bi-lingual communication** whenever possible as language is a potential barrier to accessing healthcare and also to efforts at raising awareness regarding healthy lifestyle choices.
- **Sidewalks, trails, and recreation opportunities** should be reviewed for access, especially to low income neighborhoods so as to encourage walking and physical activity and fitness in general. Providing sidewalks, trails, and recreational facilities can help to provide opportunities for physical activity and wellness.
- **Explore Safe Routes to School Program** (through MassDOT) to promote healthy lifestyles and provide a safe walking environment for school children.
- Look for opportunities to promote **bicycle travel** town-wide and in the center area. Ways to support bicycle travel include bicycle

lanes and accommodations on existing roadways, and secure bicycle parking areas.

- Promote locally grown food and support agriculture.

**Implementation Capacity:** The Healthy and Safe Southbridge Roundtable should meet on a regular basis to continue the conversation and promote and support efforts at improvements in this area.

**Communication:** Make a concerted effort to disseminate information regarding existing resources as well as information regarding healthy lifestyle choices.

***“Children don’t play outside anymore... it is hard to get them away from their electronic devices... so they don’t get any fresh air plus many live in homes that may make them sick because they are full of mold and lead paint and who knows what else...”***

***- Southbridge Health and Safety Roundtable Participant***



## REASONS TO PLAY OUTSIDE<sup>10</sup>

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“1. Learning to play – a great joy of life is the creativity of play, of making up games, stories, roles, of creating with others - and imaginations open up when you get outside. Play can also teach sustained attention, required for sustained achievement.

2. Sunlight – light is a drug that resets immunity and biological clocks, improves mood, and provides vitamin D; yes, it can cause skin cancer, but that’s what hats, sunscreen and long sleeves and pants are for.

3. Improving immunity – Playing in the dirt teaches the immune system, and farm kids get much less asthma. Handling bugs in childhood is critical to preventing many auto-immune diseases. Your body learns by doing and through experience, just as it does for intellectual activities.

4. Preventing obesity – humans are built to move. We’re walking machines. Hunter/gatherer societies walk 12-14 miles a day. Walking can help prevent many disease scourges, and walking after meals is probably a great strategy to control weight.

5. Getting into nature – Even short periods in the natural world improve mood, and nature has historically provided our ideals of paradise. If we want to preserve our planet rather than cook it, kids need to get outside and watch how things live and grow.

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<sup>10</sup> “From Why Your Kids Should Play Outside”, By Matthew Edlund, M.D., [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-edlund-md/why-you-want-your-kids-to\\_b\\_698529.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-edlund-md/why-you-want-your-kids-to_b_698529.html)

6. Making friends - you can play video games together, but it’s far better to play with others, learning to cooperate and care about them – a large part of what it means to be human.





Photo from *Why Your Kids Should Play Outside*, Matthew Edlund, MD

7. Different senses – you smell, hear, and taste inside, but you’ll sense so much more outside, teaching your nervous system while expanding your imagination.


8. Sports – you might make a living as a virtual gamer in Korea, but most of us won’t learn baseball, football, soccer, tennis, and other sports unless we get outside. We need to use our bodies the way they’re built, to move, jump, and play.”

## Goal 1.0 TO PROMOTE HEALTH AND WELLNESS

STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
OBJECTIVE 1.1. TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF SOUTHBRIDGE RESIDENTS						
<b>1.1.1. Increase access to health care</b> (see End Note #1)  SEE ALSO Strategy 2.1.7, 2.4.2.	Harrington Hospital  Southbridge Community Connections  Council on Aging  Pastor Esteban Carasco  Tradewinds  Pregnancy Counseling Service  You Inc.	<b>Establish a Community Health Clinic</b> (see End Note #2)		The Family Center of Worcester has submitted an application to establish a Community Health Clinic in Southbridge.	<b>Lead:</b> Family Center of Worcester Harrington Hospital Area agencies  <b>Partners:</b> Council on Aging YMCA Senior Center Religious Houses Police Department School Department You Inc.  Southbridge Community Connections	#1
		<b>Create a centralized list of existing resources and how to access them.</b> (see End Note #3)				
		Increase bi-lingual outreach <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Recruit for a Volunteer Translation Corps to be available on an as needed basis</li></ul>	Volunteer effort			
		Improve & expand diversity training to professionals, agencies & organizations (see End Notes #4)		New volunteer group  		
		Use innovative outreach methods (See End Note #5)				
		Increase outreach to youth <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Develop a health module at the Schools</li><li>Educate parents</li><li>Hold an annual Youth Summit (see End Note #6)</li></ul>				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.1. TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF SOUTHBRIDGE RESIDENTS (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>1.1.1. Increase access to health care</b> (see End Note #1) (Continued)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct specific outreach to Center of Hope clients</li> <li>Outreach to seniors</li> <li>Develop a list of seniors living alone and a way of checking in on them (e.g. senior advocates)</li> <li>Conduct a “Map your Neighborhood” event (see End Notes #7)</li> </ul>				
<b>1.1.2.Reduce incidence of diseases especially those with high frequencies</b> (e.g. above State average, including obesity, diabetes, asthma, teen pregnancy, behavioral health, substance abuse)  SEE ALSO Strategy 2.1.8	Diabetes Support Group, Harrington Hospital	<b>Work to reduce substance abuse</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide access to full array of services within closer proximity to Southbridge and/or provide transportation to Day Treatment programs</li> </ul>			<b>Lead:</b> Harrington Hospital (Diabetes)  You Inc. (teen pregnancy)  Behavioral Health, Harrington Hosp.  <b>Partners</b> Building Inspector Board of Health	<b>#1</b>
		Increase access and presence of relevant agencies in schools				
		Work with primary care doctors to identify families in need and reduce ER visits				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.1. TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF SOUTHBRIDGE RESIDENTS (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>1.1.2.Reduce incidence of diseases especially those with high frequencies</b> (continued)		Work to reduce obesity/diabetes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Form Spanish-speaking Diabetes support group</li> </ul>				
		Work to reduce asthma				
		Work to reduce teen pregnancy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate preventive programs with schools</li> <li>Improve access to reproductive health resources</li> </ul>				
		Work to reduce behavioral health issues				
1.1.3. Research potential environmental causes of illness  SEE ALSO Strategy 3.1.1., 5.	State and health records	Inspect housing for mold, lead paint, dust, asbestos, pests, and other toxins; consider demolition for extreme cases	Operating budget and/or seek grant funding		<b>Lead:</b> Building Inspector Board of Health DPW  <b>Partners:</b> CHNA <sup>11</sup> Area universities	#2
		Address smell from sewage treatment plant through chemical or other treatment	Capital budget			

<sup>11</sup> CHNA: A Community Health Network Area is a geographic area served by a Community Health Network, a local coalition of public, non-profit, and private sectors working together to build healthier communities in Massachusetts through community-based prevention planning and health promotion. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health established the Community Health Network Area (CHNA) effort in 1992. This initiative involves all 351 towns and cities through 27 Community Health Networks.

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
OBJECTIVE 1.1. TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF SOUTHBRIDGE RESIDENTS (CONTINUED)						
1.1.3. Research potential environmental causes of illness (continued)		Discourage use of household pesticides Inspect wells and ponds near the landfill for possible pollutants			<b>Partners:</b> (continued) Tufts Department of Public Health	
		Collect research from other towns with landfills with regard to potential toxins and ways of mitigating these.				
		Conduct more inspections of lead in dirt from manufacturing	Operating budget and/or seek grant funds			
OBJECTIVE 1.2. TO PROMOTE WELLNESS AND FITNESS						
<b>1.2.1. Increase awareness regarding health and wellness</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 2.1.7, 2.1.8	Harrington digital sign <sup>12</sup> CHNA Health Fair YMCA: Healthy Kids Day Senior Center (screenings) Head Start Farmer’s Market	<b>Develop a “Healthy Southbridge” Campaign</b> (see End Notes #8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Disseminate information</li></ul>	Operating Budget and/or seek grant funding	Increase communication	<b>Lead:</b> Harrington Hosp. CHNA  <b>Partners:</b> Center of Hope Newspaper Board of Health Community Health Center Students	#1
		Promote existing resources through regular postings mailings <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Create a pamphlet and on-line listing with existing resources (including the Town website)</li></ul>	Operating Budget	Center of Hope has offered to do the printing & delivering		

<sup>12</sup> Harrington plans to replace sign on hospital campus with a digital one






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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.2. TO PROMOTE WELLNESS AND FITNESS (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>1.2.1. Increase awareness regarding health and wellness (continued)</b>	Big Y: healthy recipes Newsletter for Brookside Terrace Community Fairs and Expositions Tradewinds Catholic Charities	Promote healthy living through classes and other activities (e.g. exercise, healthy cooking, etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare educational (bi-lingual) materials; teach regarding making healthy choices</li> <li>Coordinate healthy living sound bites so that they are repeated and consistent</li> </ul>	Operating budget		School District Wellness Committee (newly formed) School Department (including PE teachers) Town Webmaster	
		Develop a Community Calendar (with small coupons on the back from area businesses) to announce/invite residents to “Healthy Southbridge” activities (engage Big Bunny, Big Y)	Operating Budget (with possible participation from private sector)			
		Collaborate with local newspaper to set aside a weekly Health and Wellness column; also “Biggest Loser” challenge, win award	Harrington has offered to contribute one column per month			
		Improve partnership between schools, community and health organizations				
		Ensure that messages are all bi-lingual				
				Try to enlist volunteers		


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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.2. TO PROMOTE WELLNESS AND FITNESS (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>1.2.1. Increase awareness regarding health and wellness (continued)</b>		Hold an annual Health Fair; collaborate with organizations, agencies, etc.. Develop speaker series. Build on and expand existing Health Fair.				
		Publicize existing meditation walk/run by Catholic Charities.				
		Challenge local restaurants to create “healthy meals” and post “What’s Cooking This Week” on Town website (free of charge) and show on Cable Access				
<b>1.2.2. Make walking safer and more pleasant</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 2.1.10, 5.1.1	MassDOT <b>MassRIDES</b> Program	Implement <b>Downtown Plan</b> (including making sidewalk improvements, handicap ramps, crosswalks, etc.)	Capital budget		<b>Lead:</b> DPW Trail Committee Recreation Dept.  <b>Partners:</b> Recreation Commission School Department School Committee Catholic Charities Police Department	<b>#1</b>
		Complete Rail Trail	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding			
		Make sidewalk repairs in key locations & increase sense of safety with police presence	Capital budget, CDBG			


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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.2. TO PROMOTE WELLNESS AND FITNESS (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>1.2.2. Make walking safer and more pleasant</b> (continued)		Address potential conflict between wheelchair accessibility and trash collection		 Materials provided by MassRIDES		
		Establish <b><i>Safe Routes to School Program</i></b> (School Committee and Principals approve entering program)				
		Create walking loops through the downtown and promote with materials for visitors (relate to hiking, historic sites and walking trails).	Operating budget			
1.2.3. Promote Bicycling  SEE ALSO Strategy 2.1.10	<i>Town Pavement Management Plan</i>  Town roadways & trails	Improve bike access and safety (including bike lanes on major roads)	Capital Budget and/or seek grant funding		<b>Lead:</b> Town Transportation Committee DPW  <b>Partners:</b> Bicycle shop Residents	#2
		Town Transportation Committee to evaluate and develop priority list of roadways/trails to be considered for bicycle accommodations				
		Provide new bicycle racks & secure parking in center and area & public buildings	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding			

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.2. TO PROMOTE WELLNESS AND FITNESS (CONTINUED)</b>						
1.2.3. Promote Bicycling (continued)		Promote bike events; create a Bicycling Club				
<b>1.2.4. Increase access to existing recreational facilities</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 5.5.1	Cops & Kids Program  McMahon field will soon be available for walking  Variety of recreation facilities (many in need of improvement) within walking distance of most residents	Complete the <b><i>Open Space and Recreation Plan</i></b>		Updating the OSRP will make Southbridge eligible for capital funds to improve recreation facilities from the State  	<b>Lead</b> Open Space & Recreation Plan Update Task Force Recreation Commission Recreation Dept. DPW  <b>Partners:</b> Boy Scouts Center of Hope Police Department	<b>#1</b>
		Increase community awareness about existing resources (web, cable TV, bulletin boards, newspaper, school flyers)				
		Create a “roster” of parks and other facilities (include amenities, hours of operations, etc.).				
		Repair and maintain existing recreational facilities and parks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More and better playgrounds</li> <li>• Improve safety with more police presence at playgrounds (especially Skatepark, Henry Street Recreation Area)</li> <li>• Consider adding lighting to existing fields in order to increase nighttime usage.</li> </ul>	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding			

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.2. TO PROMOTE WELLNESS AND FITNESS (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>1.2.4. Increase access to existing recreational facilities (continued)</b>		Provide more wholesome activities for youth	Operating and Capital Budget	New Committee		
		Expand Cops & Kids program Expand the duties of the new Recreation Director to include more activities for adults and kids	Operating budget New Position			
		Create an Open Space Committee				
		Make scheduling of fields more efficient/effective				
1.2.5. Provide additional opportunities for recreation and fitness  SEE ALSO Strategy 5.5.1	Library	Complete the <b><i>Open Space and Recreation Plan</i></b>  Make improvements to the River so that kayaks can be used ; hold boating events  Provide more mountain biking/trail running trails  Provide fixed exercise equipment in public spaces	Capital Budget  Pass CPA to leverage State matching funds.	Updating the OSRP will make Southbridge eligible for capital funds to develop new recreation facilities from the State	<b>Lead</b> Open Space & Rec Committee Trails Committee Conservation Committee Recreation Department <b>Partner</b> YMCA	#2





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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.2. TO PROMOTE WELLNESS AND FITNESS (CONTINUED)</b>						
1.2.6. Promote healthy eating  SEE ALSO Strategy 2.1.7. and 5.2.2	Some community gardens	Improve school lunches to combat obesity			<b>Lead</b> School Department Agricultural Commission  <b>Partners</b> Sustainability Committee DPW	#2
		Promote use of Community Gardens for vegetable growing & backyard container gardening				
		Survey students regarding food choices				
		Promote locally grown food and agriculture		Left over money from tornado relief fund could be used to plant crop trees at the new school		
		Support and expand Farmer's Market				
		Develop a Farm-to-School Initiative; have kids cultivate the land, cook healthy recipes, etc.				
		Provide healthy snacks in the vending machines				



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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.3. TO MAKE SOUTHBIDGE CLEANER AND SAFER</b>						
<b>1.3.1. Address safety and perceived lack of safety</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 4.1.1	Police Department	Increase police visibility; Downtown police patrols on foot, on bicycles; also improve relations between police & pedestrians	Operating budget and/or seek grant funding		<b>Lead:</b> Police Department  <b>Partners:</b> DPW Community policing Students Library Religious Leaders	<b>#1</b>
		Promote Library as a safe place, as a place for health, literacy and family resources				
<b>1.3.2. Improve cleanliness &amp; general appearance</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 4.1.7, 3.3.1.		Apply “broken window theory,” clean up main thoroughfares <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involve students in cleaning up graffiti</li> <li>sign regulations</li> </ul>	Operating budget and/or seek grant funding		<b>Lead:</b> DPW  <b>Partners:</b> residents	<b>#1</b>  Ongoing
		Enforce code violations & Expand street sweeping efforts				
		Continue and expand community clean-up days				
		Place more trash receptacles on Main Street and empty receptacles on a regular basis				
		Expand the monitoring of dog waste in the effort to address this ongoing issue				


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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.3. TO MAKE SOUTHBRIDGE CLEANER AND SAFER (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>1.3.2. Improve cleanliness &amp; general appearance (continued)</b>		Distribute tickets (police department) rewarding good behavior (for example, if someone is observed picking up trash from a public place, they get a “ticket” for free ice cream) (see End Note 9)				
1.3.3. Improve lighting  SEE ALSO Strategy 2.1.10, 4.1.2 and 3.3.1		Address lack of lighting leading to high school	Capital		<b>Lead:</b> Police Department  <b>Partners:</b> DPW Building Inspector	#2
		Increase brightness in parks and dark streets	Operating			
		Add lights where needed (e.g. Hamilton Street)	Capital			
		Enforce by-law re: stairwells lighting in multi- family housing				
1.3.4. Explore options for accommodating facility needs for Fire Department		Explore options of relocating, expanding and/or rebuilding to accommodate a modern facility.	Capital budget		<b>Lead:</b> Fire Department	#2

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY
<b>OBJECTIVE 1.3. TO MAKE SOUTHBIDGE CLEANER AND SAFER (CONTINUED)</b>						
1.3.5. Continue Town Manager's "Neighborhood Walks"		<p>Continue to identify and address improvements to safety and cleanliness through "neighborhood walks" with Town department heads and residents</p> <p>Consider expanding these to weekends and/or afternoons to give an opportunity to residents who would like to participate</p>				Ongoing

**END NOTES**

- 1 **Barriers to Accessing Health Care** are numerous and include economic, linguistic and cultural factors as well as lack of transportation among other things, as well as a lack of awareness regarding existing resources and how to access them. In terms of accessing mental health care, there is an additional barrier related to the stigma associated with psychiatric illnesses; this is more prevalent in some cultural groups than in others.
- 2 The Family Center of Worcester has as submitted an application to establish a **Community Health Clinic** in Southbridge. This will be a walk-in clinic with a focus on the Latino community, all outpatient services and coordination of care including dental. It will provide supplemental care for the uninsured population. They are currently considering a building at 42 Edwards Street.
- 3 Create a centralized list of existing resources and how to access them. Make this list available through the "Welcome Wagon." landlords, send packet to new home buyers (add to the one that Harrington sends out currently), also need to reach renters.

"Welcome to Newcomers" – send welcome packets to new homeowners and renters to include:

- tax billing and due dates
- voting location and dates
- trash and recycling information

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- bulk waste pickups
  - lawn and leaf waste information
  - volunteer opportunities
  - park locations and hours
  - school information and contacts
- 4 **Diversity Training** for Health Care professionals, agencies and organizations. The Boston Public Health Commission has developed targeted outreach in diverse communities that is reinforced with diversity training for its staff. See: <http://www.bphc.org/programs/chec/Pages/Home.aspx>
- 5 Use **innovative outreach methods**
- Boston Public Health Commission identifies health risk and then addresses it by e.g. giving out a new vacuum cleaner with filter to prevent asthma
  - Develop a means for community health care workers to go into homes
  - Go to places where people go anyway, such as the YMCA, Senior Center, religious institutions
- 6 **Youth Summit** – bring together agencies and organizations involved in youth issues.
- Potential Sponsors (based on last year's event):
- You Inc.
  - ASPIRA
  - DA's office
  - Jacob Edwards Library
  - Pathways for Change
- Contributors
- Southbridge Police Department
  - Healthy Families
  - YMCA
  - Local businesses
- Last year the first Youth Summit was organized and was held at the Town Common, Southbridge Hotel and Conference Center and Quinsigamond Community College.
- 7 **Map your Neighborhood" event:** A way to promote emergency preparedness by getting residents involved in creating a needs assessment. The Sturbridge Police Department has completed one as part of Civilian Emergency Response efforts. As part of this, neighbors can document in which houses there are seniors living alone. It can also help to bring the community together.



- 8 **Healthy Southbridge Campaign.** Involve residents in assessing how healthy the community is and what it can do to become more healthy. This can include surveying walkability, identifying recreational needs, connectivity between desired destinations, etc.

Some examples of other communities include:

- Shape Up Somerville: <http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/health/sus>
- Healthy City Fall River: <http://www.gfrpartners.com/healthycity.htm>
- Medford Health Matters: <http://www.medfordhealthmatters.org/>
- Make Boston Healthy: (Make Boston Your Gym): <https://boston.fivi.com/publicBlogViewStory.xhtml?articleId=2702>
- Wray Health Initiative: <http://www.preventioninstitute.org/tools/focus-area-tools/communities-taking-action-profiles-of-health-equity/location/370.html>
- Northeast Center for Healthy Communities: [http://nc4hc.org/?page\\_id=1055](http://nc4hc.org/?page_id=1055)

9. Giving out “**tickets**” to reward good behavior is being done by the Brimfield Police Department. There is a quota of at least one ticket per shift for “Operation Safe Summer,” for example, children under 12 wearing a helmet while biking will be given a “ticket” for a free ice cream cone.

## GOAL 2.0: TO PROMOTE EDUCATION FOR ALL

GOAL STATEMENT: TO DEVELOP AND EXPAND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZENS OF ALL AGES, FROM PRESCHOOLERS TO SENIORS, BOTH WITHIN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND BEYOND.

*"I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place."*

Howard Gardner<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Howard Gardner is the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He also holds positions as Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Harvard University and Senior Director of Harvard Project Zero. Among numerous honors, Gardner received a MacArthur Prize Fellowship in 1981. He has received honorary degrees from twenty-nine colleges and universities, including institutions in Bulgaria, Chile, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, South Korea and Spain. In 2005 and again in 2008, he was selected by Foreign Policy and Prospect magazines as one of the 100 most influential public intellectuals in the world. Most recently, Gardner received the 2011 Prince of Asturias Award for Social Sciences. The author of twenty-eight books translated into thirty-two languages, and several hundred articles, Gardner is best known in educational circles for his theory of multiple intelligences, a critique of the notion that there exists but a single human intelligence that can be adequately assessed by standard psychometric instruments.

<http://howardgardner.com/biography/>

*"The fastest growing jobs in the 21st century will require some level of postsecondary education. Consequently, moving more people through postsecondary programs aligned with the economic needs of a community or region is vital to [any community's] future competitiveness, security, and stability"<sup>14</sup>.*

U.S. Department of Education

A high-quality public school system not only provides a critical service to the community's youth, it also plays a central role in maintaining a strong community fabric, and in attracting economic growth. Businesses and families gravitate to towns with highly-reputable school systems. To achieve excellence, public school systems must strive to develop and sustain the following characteristics:

- High retention/low drop-out rate for students,
- High literacy level,
- High level of parental involvement,
- Strong support for racial, ethnic and socio-economic diversity,
- High level of support and training for teachers,
- A curriculum geared toward critical thinking and intellectual growth, job preparedness, and further education,
- Opportunities for enrichment, especially in households where poverty diminishes such opportunities, and
- A well-maintained physical plant (buildings and grounds) that supports state of the art pedagogical philosophies
- incorporates the latest technology, and

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<sup>14</sup> US Department of Education.

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/adultbe.html>

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- An efficient and safe transportation system connecting neighborhoods to schools.

As noted, a high literacy level in the public schools contributes to overall quality, as proficient reading and writing skills are crucial to academic as well as vocational and professional success. Literacy is equally important in adult populations, where the lack of reading and writing skills leads to fewer job opportunities and greater susceptibility to poverty. A community with high literacy rates typically maintains a stronger economic profile.

Education in a healthy community extends beyond children and working adults. As the senior population expands, the demand for life-long learning opportunities as well as health, fitness and nutrition (wellness) services, will grow proportionally. Additionally, because many seniors, after the death of a partner or spouse, live alone, becoming socially isolated and experiencing a decline in mental wellness. Programs and services that foster healthy senior living are a central part of promoting “education for all.”

#### EDUCATION IN SOUTHBRIDGE TODAY: OVERVIEW OF KEY POINTS

Consensus exists, on the part of the Southbridge community that education is, at all levels, critical to the town’s future. Despite this shared belief, the state of education for youth, adults and seniors is lagging. The state has labeled the South School District as “underperforming<sup>15</sup>” as a result of low school enrollments, high dropout rates, low educational attainment, and an overall poor district reputation. Large numbers of

<sup>15</sup> The “underperforming” label was assigned to the Southbridge School District (a level four district) by the State in 2003-2004.

Southbridge’s at-risk youth are involved in the use and sale of narcotics. Adult literacy rates are low, and adequate educational services are not available to the town’s increasing senior population. The town has been laboring to address this underperforming status, however much work lies ahead.

#### SCHOOL DISTRICT

- In response to the underperforming designation the Town and the School Department have embarked on several initiatives:  
Comprehensive reorganization, the hiring of a retired superintendent who has had success addressing similar issues, and the building of two new schools.
  - The town's three elementary schools were reorganized last year so that they have returned to a more neighborhood-based orientation. The goal of this reorganization is to create stronger relationships between families and schools, thereby fostering greater parental participation in children's education.
  - The School Department is implementing an "Improvement and Turnaround Plan," aimed at upgrading the underperforming status.
- A large number of residents are reportedly functionally illiterate.
- Currently, approximately 400 students are enrolled at Southbridge High School. Based on the number of school-aged children in the town, the enrollment should be double (approximately 800) this level.
- Specific challenges faced by the School District are:
  1. High numbers of students living in poverty,
  2. High percentages of students with special needs,
  3. High portion of the student body with limited English proficiency,
  4. Low literacy levels in the early grades (40% of kindergartners do not recognize letters or colors),

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5. Drop-out rates, while declining slightly in the past five years, are still high (5.5% in 2010-2011 vs. 2.7% statewide average), and
  6. 12% of students are English language learners.
- The Superintendent has identified three major needs of the Southbridge Public Schools:
    1. Enrichment Programs. Currently, students are in school only 20% of a 24-hour day. Wrap-around programs (where students use skills outside of the classroom) are needed to fill the remainder of their waking hours.
    2. Programs for Young Parents. Teens with children are in need of parenting skills and child-care facilities that will allow the teens to attend school.
    3. Programs for Recently Arrived Students. Students new to the Southbridge community suffer from a lack of orientation programs, which could be managed by a community education liaison.

#### ADULT EDUCATION AND JOB TRAINING

- Among Southbridge residents 25 years and older, 77.8% have a high school diploma (or higher) vs. 88.5% in Worcester County.
- In 2011, Southbridge's unemployment rate among all residents was 10.1% (compared with a State average of 6.3%) and among Hispanic residents was 23.7% (compared with a State average of 7.9%).

#### SENIORS

- Southbridge's senior population is projected to increase significantly over the next couple of decades, thereby expanding the need for senior services. For seniors over 65, this increase is especially

pronounced, with a 62% increase expected from 2010 to 2020, and an additional 27% expected by 2030.

- The Council on Aging runs programs out of the Senior Center that include monthly lunches, exercise programs, bingo, health screening, and others. The majority of participants are women.
- With the increasing number of seniors predicted to be residing in Southbridge, the town must consider the needs of "active" seniors, including programs and services, along with facilities to provide for them.

### STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING EDUCATION FOR ALL

#### THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

- Increase parental involvement in the schools.
- Increase enrollment in the schools, including racial and socio-economic diversity.
- Expand and improve early childhood education.
- Expand support for teachers.
- Expand enrichment programs to the schools, including arts, humanities, industrial arts.
- Upgrade and expand physical education and nutrition as a means of promoting wellness.
- Provide support to at-risk youth.
- Better prepare high school students for post-secondary studies.
- Better prepare high school students for viable alternatives to college.
- Improve/maintain school buildings and grounds.
- Improve/enhance transportation system (including bus, bicycle, and pedestrian).
- Expand opportunities for life-long learning.

### LITERACY RATES

- Provide more English as a Second Language (ESL)/English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs.
- Provide more Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs.
- Provide more General Equivalency Degree (GED) preparation and Adult Diploma Preparation (ADP) programs.
- Support/expand literacy volunteers program through the Jacob Edwards Library.

### ADULT EDUCATION AND JOB TRAINING

- Broaden opportunities for adults to attend post-secondary school (2 or 4-year colleges).
- Broaden opportunities for adults to obtain job-specific skills.

### SENIORS AND THE ELDERLY

- Expand opportunities for seniors to become involved in social and recreational activities.
- Expand seniors' access to housing, health and nutritional information.
- Expand life-long learning.

### SUMMARY OF KEY MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve the reputation of the school system.
- Improve literacy rates among children and adults.
- Provide post-secondary and job-training opportunities.
- Provide continuing educational opportunities for seniors and the elderly.


***“Schools are one of the first things people looking to move to town look at; when they find out about ours, they go elsewhere.”***

***-.Southbridge Education Roundtable Participant***







## Goal 2.0 TO PROMOTE EDUCATION FOR ALL

STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1. TO IMPROVE THE REPUTATION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM</b>						
<b>2.1.1. Increase parental involvement in schools</b>	Family Academy (ASPIRA) (see End Note #1)	Develop a coordinated and focused approach to engaging parents, including creating parent forums (acknowledging the specific needs of the demographic – linguistic, cultural, socio-economic)			<b>Lead:</b> School Department  <b>Partners:</b> ASPIRA School Committee PTA Community Connections Task Force on Education	<b>#1</b>
		Support a “Communication and Family Engagement” subcommittee of the School Committee				
		Follow the ASPIRA Family Academy model for increasing parental involvement				
		Improve bilingual communication				
		Reach out and support afterschool care providers (e.g. aunts, grandparents, babysitters)				
		Allow for voice mail communication to teachers				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1. TO IMPROVE THE REPUTATION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>2.1.2. Increase school enrollment and diversify population</b>		<p>Widely advertise any and all improvements to the school system</p> <p>Publish a list of successful students that graduated from the Southbridge school system.</p> <p>Hold public meeting at school so people will see it.</p>	Operating budget	 <p>Utilize existing advertising venues, including school department website and links through social media</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> School Department</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> Southbridge Community Television (SCTV) Local newspapers Social media (web, Facebook, etc.)</p>	<b>#1</b>
<b>2.1.3. Improve communication and transparency</b>		<p>Widely distribute information about changes, impacts, offerings, etc. using multiple modes of communication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep information “on-line”</li> </ul>		 <p>Utilize established means for distributing information</p>	<p><b>Lead:</b> School Department</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> Pioneer Press Recreation Director Local newspaper SCTV Community Connections</p>	<b>#1</b>
		Develop a school newspaper (work with Pioneer Press, Recreation Director agreed to publish)				
		Prepare a handbook of expectations for parents and children (they should receive this upon entering the school system)				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1. TO IMPROVE THE REPUTATION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>2.1.3. Improve communication and transparency (continued)</b>		Create an inventory of existing resources focused on youth and publicize them				
		Identify community organizations supporting youth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establish a quarterly meeting of all groups</li> <li>advertise accomplishments</li> </ul>				
		Create “values” list for students, teachers, parents				
<b>2.1.4. Improve early childhood education</b>	South County Community Partners (WCAC) Helping Hands ASPIRA Head Start	Institute 5-day-per-week pre-school program (currently it is only 4 days)			<b>Lead:</b> Task Force on Education Head Start  <b>Partners:</b> ASPIRA Healthy Families Kennedy Donovan	<b>#1</b>
		Include a parenting element in early childhood programs (build on the existing ASPIRA program)				
		Provide Head Start teacher training so that they develop a consistent pre-school core curriculum				
		Obtain a grant to reach out to pre-school parents				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1. TO IMPROVE THE REPUTATION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>2.1.4. Improve early childhood education (continued)</b>		Identify volunteers to conduct home visits and bring books to preschoolers		Volunteer effort		
		Increase preschool attendance rate – every child should have at least one year of preschool so they arrive in kindergarten ready to learn!				
2.1.5 Expand arts, humanities, and industrial arts programs	Quinebaug Valley Council on the Arts and Humanities (QVCAH) Gateway Players Local Cultural Council Cops & Kids Program	Allow students to leave school for programs through increased field trip options			<b>Lead:</b> Superintendent  <b>Partners:</b> School Committee Principals Teachers Library Area businesses PTS QVCAH Gateway Players Local Cultural Council Cops & Kids Program	#2
		Bring elementary school students to high school programs/ performances				
		Support and expand recently created PTA Arts Initiative at the elementary schools				
		Develop a strong wrap-around program with a wide range of programs for students both in and out of school				
		Ask SHS band to play at Southbridge events				
		Utilize space for exhibits				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1. TO IMPROVE THE REPUTATION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>2.1.6. Increase support for teachers</b>	PTA	Provide expanded support for professional development training	Operating budget		<b>Lead:</b> Superintendent  <b>PARTNERS:</b> Principals Teachers	<b>#1</b>
		Require diversity and cultural awareness training	Operating budget			
		Increase awareness regarding poverty-related issues and challenges				
		Designate a teacher advisor to School Committee				
<b>2.1.7 Upgrade/expand physical education and nutrition programs</b>  SEE ALSO Strategies 1.1.1, 1.2.1, 1.2.6, and 5.2.2	Harrington Hospital YMCA Cops & Kids Program	Expand recent improvements to school lunch program			<b>Lead:</b> Superintendent  <b>PARTNERS:</b> Harrington Hospital YMCA Cops & Kids Program	<b>#1</b>
		Re-establish a regional agricultural program at SHS or Bay Path				
		Plant crop-producing trees	Capital/ Operating/ volunteers			
		Establish/plant/tend a school garden	Capital/ Operating/ volunteers			
		Provide cooking classes				



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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1. TO IMPROVE THE REPUTATION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>2.1.7 Upgrade/ expand physical education and nutrition programs (continued)</b>		Provide nature classes/walks; gardens at all schools; utilize the vernal pool at SMHS				
		Reach out to Harrington Hospital for additional resources				
		Eliminate high fructose corn syrups				
<b>2.1.8 Provide support for at-risk youth;</b>  (Employ education as a vehicle for improving students' low self-esteem, and for providing alternatives to motherhood; prepare students for post-secondary education; prepare students for work after high school)  SEE ALSO Strategy 1.1.2. 1.2.1	ASPIRA/ Saturday Academy, Summer Academy YMCA Cops & Kids You, Inc. Bay Path Technical School Youth Center	Establish homework center(s)	Capital/ Operating		<b>Lead:</b> School Department  Police Department  <b>Partners:</b> PTA ASPIRA YMCA Cops & Kids You, Inc. Bay Path Technical Chamber of Commerce Downtown Business Association	<b>#1</b>
		Post homework on the school websites				
		Establish/ strengthen relationships between local businesses/ industries and the school system through internships, mentoring, apprenticeships, job-preparedness programs and shadowing programs				
		Establish a daycare facility within the high school, staffed in part by high school students	Capital/ Operating budgets			

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1. TO IMPROVE THE REPUTATION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>2.1.8 Provide support for at-risk youth (continued)</b>		Expand the “Cops n’ Kids” program to evolve into a youth center or a Boys and Girls Club	Private Capital/ Operating and/ or seek grant funding		<b>Partners:</b> (cont.) Community Connections Web and social media	
		Create a school spirit day				
		Establish an academic hall of fame	Operating budget			
		Develop intergenerational programs that connect youth with adults/elders				
		Expand “Project Success” and “Credit Recovery” programs				
		Support the 6th grade and freshman year academy concept				
		Re-institute truant officer and coordinate efforts between the Town and the School Department towards dropout prevention	Operating budget			
2.1.9 Continue maintenance and improvement of school buildings and grounds SEE ALSO Strategy 4.1.7	DPW School Department Cops & Kids Program	Engage students in caring for school grounds as a means of broadening knowledge about agriculture/horticulture			<b>Lead:</b> School Department  <b>Partners:</b> DPW Cops & Kids Program	<b>#2</b>  Ongoing



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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1. TO IMPROVE THE REPUTATION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM (CONTINUED)</b>						
2.1.10 Upgrade transportation system connecting to schools  SEE ALSO Strategies 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.3.3, and 4.2.1, 5.1.1	DPW Mass DOT	Pursue “Safe Routes to School” program			<b>Lead:</b> Town Manager Trail Committee  <b>Partners:</b> School Department Recreation Commission DPW	#2
		Expand bus hours	Capital/ Operating budgets			
		Improve bicycle access and safety	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding			
		Provide adequate numbers of bicycle racks at schools	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding			
		Complete Rail Trail	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding			
		Provide sidewalks so that students can walk to and from high school	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding			
		Provide lighting for students walking from high school at night	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding			
		Consider buying own school buses in the long run	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding			

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1. TO IMPROVE THE REPUTATION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM (CONTINUED)</b>						
2.1.11. Maximize use of school buildings for educational purposes	Elementary schools Middle/High School	Partner with organizations/institutions that provide educational and enrichment programs and have space needs			<b>Lead:</b> School Department <b>Partners:</b> Quinsigamond Community College (QCC) Head Start Kennedy Donovan	#2
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.2. TO IMPROVE LITERACY RATES</b>						
<b>2.2.1 Conduct a campaign to increase awareness of existing resources and the importance of education and job training</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 4.3.7	ASPIRA QCC	Support ASPIRA's efforts to create a show on SCTV showcasing Latino college graduates (incorporate into National Heritage Hispanic month of September)	Fundraising		<b>Lead:</b> ASPIRA <b>Partners::</b> School Department Area businesses QCC	#1
		List programs on the rotating banner on SCTV		Utilize existing CATV resources		
		Create an "infomercial" of course offerings at the high school				
		Increase field trip options (include area businesses and community colleges)	Operating budget			
		Leverage and/or promote free or low-cost on line services for young and old				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.2. TO IMPROVE LITERACY RATES (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>2.2.2 Provide more ESL/ESOL programs</b>	School Department You, Inc. Literacy Volunteers Parents Pediatricians “Reach Out and Read” Program ASPIRA Parent Group	Provide an ESL/ESOL/ELL program in each school	Operating budget		<b>Lead:</b> School Department  <b>Partners:</b> You, Inc. Literacy Volunteers ASPIRA Parent Group	<b>#1</b>
		Establish an “Adult Education Network”				
<b>2.2.3 Provide more Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs and GED programs</b>	You, Inc. Literacy Volunteers Worcester Community Action Council GED and Adult Basic Education	Re-establish an “Adult Education Network”			<b>Lead:</b> Literacy Volunteers  <b>Partners:</b> ASPIRA	<b>#1</b>
		Establish a GED program				
		Hold programs in the school buildings	Capital/ Operating budgets			
		Increase awareness of new GED requirements				
		Provide GED in Spanish (ASPIRA)				
		Identify and eliminate barriers to access for adult learners (child care, poverty, etc.)				





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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.2. TO IMPROVE LITERACY RATES (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>2.2.4 Support/expand literacy volunteers program</b>	Jacob Edwards Library Literacy Volunteers	Pursue additional funding (CDBG, etc.) for expanded programs			<b>Lead:</b> Literacy Volunteers  <b>Partners:</b> Jacob Edwards Library UMASS Amherst Latino Center	<b>#1</b>
		Connect to UMASS Amherst Latino Center				
<b>2.2.5. Create a Community Education Liaison</b>		Develop a community education program which includes educational, recreational, and enrichment opportunities, and pursues financial support for these		Possition should be a permanent non-voting liaison between the School Committee and Town Council	<b>Lead:</b> Town Manager  <b>Partners:</b> School Department	<b>#1</b>
2.2.6 Institute a “language swap” program that pairs individuals to teach each other their respective languages		Identify interested individuals			<b>Lead:</b> School Department  <b>Partners:</b> ASPIRA	<b>#2</b>
		Consider offering true bilingual program (English/Spanish, Spanish/English) like in Framingham and Milton				


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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.3. TO PROMOTE COLLEGE AND JOB TRAINING</b>						
<b>2.3.1 Broaden opportunities for adults to attend 2- and 4-year colleges</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 4.3.7	QCC/ASPIRA Bay Path College Clark University Worcester State Nichols College Regional Economic Development organization, “School to Career” program (See End Note 2)	Expand existing/ establish new transition-to-college programs		  Utilize existing CATV resources   	<b>Lead:</b> QCC/ASPIRA  <b>Partners:</b> CATV Bay Path College Clark University Worcester State Nichols College	<b>#1</b>
		Expand English language courses				
		Develop a program on Cable TV that features adults speaking about the positive effects of college experience				
		Provide information to adults about on-line college courses				
		Partner with local public schools				
		Provide transportation				
		Publish list of courses in local newspaper				
		Partner with local public schools and teach English in the schools				
		Provide transportation (e.g. meet at the library and take to Bay Path)				
		Promote Bay Path night school with vocational certification				


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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.3. TO PROMOTE COLLEGE AND JOB TRAINING (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>2.3.1 Broaden opportunities for adults to attend 2- and 4-year colleges (continued)</b>		Offer class for people interested in learning Spanish with a view to doing their job in Spanish (1) so as not to have to rely on translators, and (2) so that we can make a real effort to “be on same page and show more cultural awareness”				
		Seek funding for scholarships and for child care				
<b>2.3.2 Broaden opportunities for adults to obtain job-training</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 4.3.7	Bay Path Tech Work Force Central	Provide information to adults about job-training opportunities in the Southbridge area			<b>Leads:</b> Work Force Central Worcester Area Regional Transit  <b>PARTNERS:</b> Chamber of Commerce Southbridge manufacturing companies	<b>#1</b>
		Provide transportation services for adults to access institutions outside of Southbridge	Capital/ Operating budgets/Grant funding/ Fundraising			

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
OBJECTIVE 2.3. TO PROMOTE COLLEGE AND JOB TRAINING (CONTINUED)						
2.3.2 Broaden opportunities for adults to obtain job-training (continued)		Promote intensive training program and School-Work Program (run by Regional Employment Board) that connects adults to area jobs; involve Southbridge HS				
2.3.4 Develop a program for posting internship, apprenticeship, and volunteer “trials” for high school graduates	Work Force Central Jacob Edwards Library	Develop internship, apprenticeship, and volunteer trials program			Leads: Work Force Central Partners: Jacob Edwards Library Center of Hope Bay Path Ed. Foundation	#1
		Partner with area businesses				
		Offer trade training “swaps” for everything from auto repair, handyman, or sewing				
OBJECTIVE 2.4. TO PROMOTE CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR SENIORS						
2.4.1 Expand opportunities for seniors to become involved socially and recreationally	Council on Aging Senior Center	Bundle and distribute information about programs in an engaging and accessible format		  Boomers will be the new Active Seniors	Lead: Council on Aging Partners: YMCA Senior Center Tri-Valley Health Jacob Edwards Library	#1
		Provide and create opportunities for intergenerational interaction and mentoring				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.4. TO PROMOTE CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR SENIORS (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>2.4.1 Expand opportunities for seniors to become involved socially and recreationally (continued)</b>		Build mentoring programs between young and old			ASPIRA School Department	
2.4.2 Expand seniors' access to health, housing, and nutritional information  SEE ALSO Strategy 1.1.1, 5.2.2	Jacob Edwards Library	Establish "makers' spaces," places where people in the community can demonstrate and share their skills/ trades/ knowledge with others			<b>Lead:</b> Jacob Edwards Library  <b>Partners:</b> QCC Clark University Holy Cross Bay Path College Worcester State College	
		Develop a "Center for Life-long Learning" where programs are organized and promoted, in collaboration with area colleges and universities	Capital/ Operating budget			

**End Notes:**

1. ASPIRA of MA is an incorporated nonprofit organization chartered under Massachusetts laws to raise awareness about, advocate for, and pursue effective strategies to improve academic achievement for low and moderate income students, particularly of Hispanic descent. Like its parent company, the ASPIRA Association, ASPIRA of MA pursues its mission through:

- Youth leadership development;
- Academic enrichment; and
- Service to community.



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More specifically, ASPIRA of MA works with students to help them stay in school, acquire skills to enable them to enter college, and develop interpersonal and leadership skills that will serve them throughout their lifetime.

Founded in Southbridge by a dedicated group of local parents, leaders and concerned citizens in September 2009, ASPIRA of MA has pioneered a partnership with Quinsigamond Community College's Southbridge campus, through which it offers a Saturday Academy to high school students teaching them leadership skills, offering college readiness programs and paving paths for students to attend college. In addition to its Saturday Academy, ASPIRA of MA also runs a Youth Club at Southbridge High School where students hone their leadership skills and learn to serve their community. ASPIRA of MA also has a parent empowerment program called APEX, which assists parents to become informed and effective advocates for their children. Prior to forming ASPIRA of MA, for nearly three years, its founders mobilized a grassroots group devoted to educational excellence for the youth of Southbridge.

2. Regional Economic Development Organization's "School to Career" initiative was developed to address the need to fill highly technical industrial and manufacturing positions with qualified employees. It is run by the Chamber and funded through the MA Office of Business Development.

### GOAL 3.0: TO IMPROVE HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS IN SOUTHBRIDGE

#### GOAL STATEMENT: TO IMPROVE HOUSING WHERE NEEDED AND TO MAINTAIN HOUSING IN ACCEPTABLE CONDITION AND PROMOTE THE IMPROVEMENT OF NEIGHBORHOODS.

Housing is what gives communities most of their character. Housing is also where residents spend more than half of their time. More than half of developed land in cities and towns is used for housing. Housing in groups are neighborhoods. Neighborhoods have distinctive characters owing to architectural, demographic, economic, topographic, hydrologic and vegetative features. There are highly visible neighborhoods in Southbridge that have deteriorated to the point that they are visually unattractive, functionally problematic, and some of their housing provide substandard and unsafe living conditions. These are neighborhoods composed of older housing built for workers in Southbridge's factories and mills, and are generally located near the center of town, where the factory workers could walk to work. They have outlived their original economic life and many have become more difficult to maintain because of their age.

On the other hand Southbridge has many attractive neighborhoods with well-designed and maintained housing. Master Plan concern is interested in keeping these neighborhoods and their housing in good condition where they can meet the housing needs of Southbridge residents in the future. Housing needs will be changing as households continue to become smaller and the population ages. For example currently (2010) 14% of Southbridge's population is age 65 and older. By 2020 this is expected to grow to 20%, and by 2030 to 25%. Smaller housing units located near shopping and services will be needed for the growing elderly population.

There are many rental housing units in Southbridge. There are 1,759 rental units occupied by householders (heads of households) in the younger age groups (ages 15 to 44). In each of these age groups renters exceed owners. Over age 44, owners exceed renters. For the town as a whole (all age groups) renters exceed owners by 410 occupied housing units. The percentage of renter occupied housing units grew from 55.1 to 53.0 between 2000 and 2010. This is a favorable trend which should be encouraged because home ownership generally means a greater commitment to a community and greater economic stability for residents as financial equity accrues in their property.

Rental units are associated with population mobility. A measure of population mobility is the length of time residents (renters and owners) have lived in their homes.

- About 40% of residents have lived in their current housing units since 2005 (relatively short-term residents).
- Another 21% have lived in their homes since 2000 (mid-term residents).

This means that only about 40% of Southbridge's residents are long-term (more than 12 years). Relatively rapid turnover of rental housing units is one factor that has led to deteriorating neighborhood quality.

The most mobile categories are the younger age groups, from age 1 to age 44. 42 % of the age group 25 to 29 moved into Southbridge within the last year. Overall (for all age groups) 19.6% of the population moved into Southbridge within the last year. This is a large number associated with a rapid turnover of tenants in rental property. Most of the mobility is in the younger age groups. Only 7.6% of Southbridge residents over age 44

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moved into their homes since 2009. The children (age 1 to 17) who moved into town came with their families, whose adult members are counted in the young adult, family formation and family rearing age groups (ages 20 to 54).

#### RELEVANT DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSING TRENDS

The types and size of households in Southbridge have been changing somewhat over the last decade. Total households have declined by 3%, reflecting the decline in total population but offset somewhat by the 19.6% of people who moved into Southbridge. Family households have declined by 5.6%, and married couple families have declined by 14.4%.

Female headed households increased by 6.3% between 2000 and 2010, and those with children under age 18 increased by 8.2%. The decline in the number of households with children under age 18, like the aging of the population, has important implications for the need for size of housing units in Southbridge. Smaller households need smaller housing units. In 2000, 59% of owner-occupied housing units had households of one or two people. For renter-occupied housing units 66% were households of one or two people. The figures are about the same in 2010; 58% for owner occupied housing units and 65% for renter occupied housing units. The figures reflect the existence of smaller housing units and the continued need in the future for smaller units. It is anticipated that median household size will continue to decline slightly (by about 0.5%), as forecast by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC).

The market for rental housing in Southbridge is very strong. Southbridge has a rental housing stock that is priced somewhat below some surrounding towns and it attracts people from other Worcester County cities and towns. The fact that Southbridge has ample social services for lower income people and is upgrading its schools also attracts renters.

Southbridge's current vacancy rate of 8.8% means that there are many rental units available. Another attraction factor is ethnic. Hispanic/ Latino households are attracted by the existing Hispanic/ Latino people and shops and cultural support groups in Southbridge. Hispanic/ Latino tenants occupied 29% of Southbridge's rental units in 2010. This is up from the figure of 11% in 2000.

#### OVERVIEW OF KEY POINTS

Neighborhood improvement has got to come from within, by the residents who then mobilize important Town services and investments. Neighborhood residents need to form organizations that interact with each other and with organizations outside the neighborhoods. These organizations can start with social "meet, greet and enjoy" activities, but need to then take on tasks mobilizing residents to take on improvement actions.

- An important part of this strategy is to put pressure on landlords who have problem properties and tenants who cause some of the problems.
- A second major part of the strategy is to exert political pressure on Town government to do its part in providing appropriate investments and services to the neighborhoods.
- A third part of the strategy is to improve local conditions such as trash removal and overgrown vegetation through collective resident actions.

Coalitions of organizations can be effective in focusing on problems and working on their resolutions.

First, block parties could be held to increase neighbor relations and the sense of neighborhood pride. Neighborhood Walks are now done by public officials to identify problems and examine complaints. Neighbors

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along the walks need to know when they take place so they can better inform the participating Town officials. Next, monthly dinner or lunch meetings might be held at a housing complex or other suitable location to include the Hispanic community: to help understand regulations and increase tenant involvement.

Tenants could be advised to get to the Board of Health immediately when they detect a code violation. There is an anti-retaliation provision to protect tenants after a complaint is filed against a landlord. It was suggested that some sort of Clearinghouse Information Center on apartment conditions be established. Many tenants simply don't understand what resources and protections are available to them.

Cleaning up unsightly conditions in neighborhoods is very important. Youth groups could be asked to provide free community services ...e.g., scouts, young marines, church groups, National Honor Society, and the Future of Southbridge organization. They would paint, plant and clean up. In addition, the Town might do more frequent street cleaning in problem neighborhoods. Another measure would be to amend zoning bylaws to require unregistered vehicles to be located out of public view. Litter is a big problem in some areas with items like refrigerators and couches strewn about outside.

Encourage landlord association to get up-to-date information to landlords to become strong and active, perhaps even participating in a program to conduct "ready-to-be-a-landlord" classes. Another measure might be to institute a pre-rental unit check list that both the landlord and tenant go over before signing a lease. It would need to be a fairly simple document (perhaps bi-lingual) because some tenants have language problems. In might be possible to introduce "lemon law" provisions in leases.

Landlords could have the Board of Health or another department document apartment conditions with video cameras; combined with the

ability to check conditions at a later date if needed, to determine responsibility for damage. It would be a good idea to reward landlords who make needed and desirable improvements and maintain properties well.

A common violation is lack of exit lights. There have been few fines levied for building code violations and relatively little law enforcement on violations. One resolution is to increase demolition account funds to simply get rid of the most egregious cases. There is a need for stronger laws. There is proposed state legislation to make more code violations criminal offences with potential jail time, instead of civil offences with fines. In the meantime the Town should fine the biggest and most habitual offenders to make examples of them.

Neighborhood groups can be encouraged to maintain their own neighborhoods. Rosemeade was mentioned as an example of a development with model landlords. There are 212 units that are 27 years old and they are still in good condition. The town needs more "Good Apples" to serve as models.

Some of these "Good Apples" could be created through use historic tax credit funding in qualifying buildings. Concord Square Associates, which is examining possibilities for use of vacant downtown properties, mentioned the "New Market" 25% tax credit program. Combined with other programs (like historic tax credits) it is possible to have 50% of building improvements paid for by tax credits. The "New Market" credits require that 20% of a building be used for commercial purposes. The issue for housing and neighborhood revitalization is to have projects that are large enough to make a difference and can serve as models for building owners. There is a need for a "Big Plan" that would include not only buildings but parking and walkways and street and landscaping. Having an overall plan is one of the requirements of using "New Market" tax credits. The Town-

wide Master Plan can serve as the visioning and policy component, while an Urban Redevelopment Plan with more specific design features can serve as the guidance plan.

#### SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create and empower neighborhood organizations to monitor conditions and seek remediation/improvements.
- Identify projects that neighborhood organizations can work on, e.g., parks, community gardens, murals, streetscape improvements, events. Fix streets, sidewalks and curbing as necessary. Upgrade or demolish and replace housing that is in the worst condition..
- Publicize the desirability of successful housing developments.
- Amend the zoning bylaws to better regulate outdoor storage and disposal of unsightly items.
- Ensure that storm drainage works properly.
- Provide more street lighting in dark areas.
- Seek special designation similar to “Gateway Cities” or alternatively, work with the state to become eligible for the tax credits and loans now available to gateway cities.
- Work with developers to use the new special designation allowing for use of incentive financing.
- Work with the state to change additional legislation and regulations that present hardships for Southbridge, such as cuts in aid for local public safety to shift funds toward Homeland Security programs.
- Remove substandard units when it is not feasible or advisable to renovate the buildings in which they are located.



Multi-family housing with informal recreation space and activities

***“There is a need to advise tenants before they move in about their rights and responsibilities, for example about getting to the Board of Health immediately if there are violations.”***

***- Participant at the Roundtable on Neighborhood Improvement***

### Goal 3.0 TO IMPROVE HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS IN SOUTHBRIDGE

STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.1. TO EXPAND HOUSING OPTIONS</b>						
<b>3.1.1. Upgrade or replace housing in poorest condition</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 1.1.2	Town Inspections Department  Support proposed new state law making renting illegal (below code) housing units a criminal offense.	Identify and work with owners sub-standard housing		There will be an increase in paperwork and possible court actions.	<b>Lead:</b> Inspections Department  <b>Partners:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department	<b>#1</b>
		Employ receivership in cases where building, occupancy and health codes are violated and owners cannot be identified or are uncooperative	Increase Town appropriated funds for building demolition.	Town bylaws will govern in identifying and correcting deteriorating conditions.		
3.1.2 Publicize desirability of successful housing developments, e.g., Rosemeade and Brookside Terrace.	Cable TV, local newspaper, Town prepared pamphlets, make awards	Conduct CATV interviews with residents, write newspaper articles, use social media e.g., Facebook and Twitter, to get comments about these desirable housing developments	Small CDBG grant to use interns and volunteers to prepare and distribute information.	Could make it a project of high school or community college students studying communications.  Could create a "Friends of Southbridge Housing" group to work on improvement and communications	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> Redevelopment Authority	<b>#2</b>



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<b>OBJECTIVE 3.1. TO EXPAND HOUSING OPTIONS (CONTINUED)</b>						
3.1.3 Seek special designation from the state that allows use of increased tax credits and low interests loans.	State representative and senator.	Join with other communities seeking this designation (e.g., Gardner).	No special funding needed. Can be done in normal intergovernmental relations.	Need to focus on this and other hardships created by inflexible state regulations.	<b>Lead:</b> Town Council  <b>Partners:</b> Town Manager Motivated residents.	#2
		Prepare and submit information required for designation.				
<b>3.1.4 Use new special state designation or alternative program as an incentive for housing developers.</b>	Contacts with realtors and housing developers.	Develop a method for expediting the permitting process.	No special funding needed. Can be done in normal economic development activities.	Create public/private partnerships for projects in which needed or desirable public investments are paired with private investments in housing.	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> Realtors and developers	#1
		Publicize use of the 40V tax reduction incentives for housing development				



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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 3.1. TO EXPAND HOUSING OPTIONS (CONTINUED)</b>						
3.1.5 Create and empower neighborhood organizations to monitor conditions and seek remediation/improvements	Make Southbridge Home Initiative Existing neighborhood organizations	Create and empower neighborhood organizations where none exist.	Neighborhood groups to conduct modest fund raising events like local fairs.	Need leadership to emerge from existing organizations like churches and civic groups.  Also need a Town Government contact point where neighborhood groups can seek needed services and improvements.  Councilors may want to hold community meetings in targeted neighborhoods.	<b>Lead:</b> Faith based and public service organizations  <b>Partners:</b> All of Southbridge Town government coordinated by the Town Manager, especially using the Make Southbridge Home Initiative effort.	#2

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
OBJECTIVE 3.1. TO EXPAND HOUSING OPTIONS (CONTINUED)						
3.1.6 Identify projects that neighborhood organizations can work on, e.g., parks, playgrounds, community gardens, tree planting and landscaping, murals, streetscape improvements, events.	Existing and new neighborhood organizations.	Mobilize neighborhood organizations to work on projects. Get commitments from groups and individuals. Seek grants.		 Possible grants from philanthropic organizations	<b>Lead:</b> Existing and new neighborhood organizations. DPW  <b>Partners:</b> All of Town government coordinated by the Town Manager	#2
		Use Community Service obligations and volunteers to do periodic clean-ups of vacant neighborhood properties.	Town appropriations for public property investments and maintenance	Need a Town government contact where neighborhood groups can seek needed services and improvements		
OBJECTIVE 3.2. TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS OF NEGLIGENT ABSENTEE LANDLORDS						
3.2.1 Encourage landlords to repair and improve their properties.		Launch a newspaper editorial campaign	Can be done within existing Town departmental appropriations	  Must only use public record information to avoid law suits	<b>Lead:</b> Public and private media  <b>Partners:</b> Inspections Department Assessors Office	#2
		Utilize CATV for publicity				
		Fine landlords for excessive police calls to identified problem properties and tenants.				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
OBJECTIVE 3.2. TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS OF NEGLIGENT ABSENTEE LANDLORDS (CONTINUED)						
3.2.2 Encourage tenants to repair and improve the housing units they live in with compensation made through appropriate rent reductions.	Town Inspections Department  Local building supply dealers  Local qualified building contractors	Encourage local building supply dealers to offer discounts for building materials for qualified improvements	All private funding. The incentives are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Landlords; property improvements and increases in value.</li><li>• Building contractors and suppliers; expansion of markets.</li><li>• Tenants; improved living conditions.</li></ul>	Needs cooperation of landlords.  Work to be done only by qualified contractors.  Needs cooperation and contributions of building materials suppliers and contractors.	<b>Lead:</b> Landlord association  <b>Partners:</b> Building materials suppliers Building contractors	#2
		Encourage local building contractors to offer discounts for their services for qualified improvements				
OBJECTIVE 3.3. TO IMPROVE NEIGHBORHOODS						
<b>3.3.1. Allocation in Annual Town Budgets to Neighborhood Improvements.</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 1.3.2, 1.3.3	Regular Town Budget appropriations  Grants-in-Aid  Public/ private partnerships	Repair streets, sidewalks, curbs and storm drains as needed.  Provide more street lighting where appropriate	DPW appropriations  Possible Public Works for Economic Development (PWED) funding  Allocation in Annual Town budget and use of CBDG funds for Neighborhood improvements	Need to prioritize neighborhood improvements with a “worst-first” approach  Utilize CDBG funding where appropriate	<b>Lead:</b> Department of Public Works  <b>Partners:</b> Transportation Committee Economic Development & Planning Department	<b>#1</b>

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<b>OBJECTIVE 3.3. TO IMPROVE NEIGHBORHOODS (CONTINUED)</b>						
3.3.2. Create and enhance neighborhood scale public spaces	Town working with neighborhood groups	Use tax title and other Town-owned land to create pocket parks, playground, gardens, memorial and other public spaces to be monitored and managed by their own neighborhoods	CDBG Funds and fund raising from neighborhood groups	To be prgrammed into activites of the Southbridge Recreation Department & Commission  Require athletic teams to clean up playing fields and spectator areas after they use them	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  DPW for on-street parking  <b>Partners:</b> Redevelopment Authority for downtown area Recreation Department & Commission	#2
3.3.3 Upgrade zoning bylaw to guide neighborhood improvements		Remove special permit requirement for cluster/PUD subdivisions with more than 50% open space  Require special permit for non-cluster subdivisions over 3 acres  Reward pathway and open space linkages in new development with bonuses			<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  Planning Board  <b>Partners:</b> Developers	#2

## GOAL 4.0: TO INCREASE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOWNWIDE AND IMPROVE DOWNTOWN

### GOAL STATEMENT: TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT AND IMPROVE DOWNTOWN AMENITIES AND MAINTAIN HISTORIC BUILDINGS.

Economic development generally refers to the sustained, concerted actions of policymakers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area. Economic development can also be referred to as the quantitative and qualitative changes in the economy. Such actions can involve multiple areas including development of human capital, critical infrastructure, regional competitiveness, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, health, safety, literacy, and other initiatives. Economic development is generally undertaken to increase local employment, income and property tax base. It starts from an assessment of local economic resources, market potentials and financial means available, and includes attainable goals that a community sets for itself.

Revitalizing downtown means strengthening the social, physical and economic value of a community's traditional central business district. The primary goal of revitalization efforts is to improve the livability and quality of life in a community by expanding and attracting employment, shopping and social activities. Low cost strategies are available for downtown revitalization. These are 1) improving downtown's appearance, 2) strengthening local businesses, 3) identifying new opportunities, and 4) obtaining outside assistance. While downtown programs come in a variety of shapes and sizes, typical activities and projects include:

- Organizing people who are committed to downtown.

- Creating a vision for downtown, emphasizing retail and commercial spaces.
- Devising and implementing a plan that facilitates achieving the vision.
- Sponsoring special events that increase the number of customers and visitors downtown.

In order to successfully revitalize downtown, communities must have a long-term plan, some financial backing, and commitments from property and business owners, local government officials, and local residents. While revitalization programs require substantial amounts of individual time and effort, they offer a great chance for success.

### OVERVIEW OF KEY POINTS

Downtown revitalization requires local champions who are willing to spend the time and effort to make the program work. This commitment is crucial in the local initiatives and perhaps the most difficult to obtain. However, a clearly stated vision with a reasonable action plan can bring forth this commitment. Successful revitalization will depend on:

- Committed leadership,
- Broad based participation,
- A shared vision of the future,
- Realistic goals and plan of action,
- Effective communication,
- Management of implementation,
- Recognition of efforts, and
- Use of both internal and outside resources.



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Revitalizing downtown is a community process. It involves coordinating a complex but interrelated series of events, relying heavily on the cooperation of various community groups.

#### RELEVANT ECONOMIC TRENDS

Private sector employment has continued its slow decline in Southbridge over the last 11 years. This is a continuation of a long term trend that started when the optics industry started its decline in the 1970s. The major cause of the slow decline is the manufacturing sector which lost about 900 jobs since 2001. Other sectors that lost jobs are retail trade, information services and business and professional services. All other sectors grew somewhat, with health services, social assistance and accommodation and food services showing the most gains. Some activities such as printing and plastics disappeared by 2011 and were replaced by medical equipment and coating and engraving metals, which did not exist in 2001. The number of manufacturing companies declined from 48 in 2001 to 35 in 2011.

Business and Professional Services showed the second largest decline between 2001 and 2011. Some of the decline is due to losses in overall employment and the number of businesses in other categories. The major declines in this category were in administrative and office support services. Retail trade is the third category for which a decline is reported. Retail trade generally varies with population growth or decline. The loss in retail trade can be attributed mainly to the loss in population in Southbridge between 2000 and 2010 (a loss of 595 people). It can also partially be attributed to the fact that lower income people are moving in to Southbridge with less purchasing power than the other households, and the fact that Southbridge is becoming less of a regional shopping center than it once was.

Gains in health services can be attributed to the attraction power of Harrington Memorial Hospital and its programs and services. Most of the gain of 238 employees resulted from additional jobs created in doctor's offices. The number of doctor's offices remained almost the same between 2001 and 2011 (29 in 2001 and 28 in 2011). Southbridge is clearly a regional health services center.

Employment in social assistance grew by 161% between 2001 and 2011. The number of agencies/offices grew from 9 to 12 and employment grew from 121 to 316. This can be attributed to the influx of lower income households with fewer resources and needs for these services, in addition to the fact that Southbridge has become a regional center for such services.

Southbridge is also a regional center for financial services. The financial services activities constitute a cluster of activities that could attract other similar activities such as attorneys that specialize in real estate transactions.

Southbridge is still an important sub-regional retail center, that is, many of its stores have customer bases that extend beyond the borders of Southbridge. Prior market studies have defined Southbridge's primary trade area to include Sturbridge, Charlton, Dudley and Woodstock, CT. Primary market areas are defined by travel time, generally 10 minutes by vehicle, and the existence of competing commercial areas. Secondary market areas extend out to 20 minutes driving time. Because population and income is growing in the surrounding towns markets for retail goods in Southbridge will also grow. Projections indicate that the 5 town primary trade area will grow by about 9,800 people by 2030, from 60,171 to 70,000, a 16% increase. However Southbridge "leaks" consumer expenditures, that is, money spent by residents in out-of-town businesses. Various market studies have shown that clothing stores, miscellaneous retail stores and a bakery could succeed in Southbridge, capturing some resident consumer spending. It is likely that additional food stores, or expansion of

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existing ones, (upgrade to super-super markets) and restaurants could also succeed.

Both retail and services activities are diversified in terms of categories and sizes. Service activities have more small businesses. Businesses listed on the Town's web site, cover a fairly wide variety of types of stores, shops and offices. However, Southbridge lacks an "anchor" store that builds retail traffic and attracts other retailers.

Currently (March, 2013) unemployment in Southbridge is 10.1%, while the state is 6.4%. Both figures represent an improvement over the past year. In January, 2012 Southbridge had a 10.8% unemployment rate, while the state had a 7.7% rate. Historic data shows that a "normal" unemployment rate for Southbridge seems to be about 6 to 7%, while for the state it is 4 to 5%. The Hispanic/Latino unemployment rate in Massachusetts was 16.1 in 2011, according to the report *The Hispanic Labor Force in the Recovery – 2011* by the U. S. Department of Labor. For the U. S. the comparable rate was 12.5%.

The labor force has gradually dwindled as population has been lost. Moreover, some people drop out of the labor force when they get tired of looking for jobs. This happens more often during economic downturns. The proportion of people in various occupations has remained fairly constant between 2000 and 2010. The largest single occupational group is Production, Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (26.7% in 2010). The next largest is Management, Professional and Related Occupations (25.5% in 2010). The smallest is Farming, Fishing and Forestry Occupations, which had 7 people in 2000 and none in 2010. There are people in Southborough who currently gain income from farming, but it is not their primary occupation. Traditional "Blue Collar" occupations include Construction, Extraction and Maintenance, and Production, Transportation and Material Moving Occupations. These account for 34.7% of

Southbridge's labor force. Traditional "White Collar" occupations account for 65.3% of the labor force.

### SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Identify and pursue new avenues of support for existing businesses and industries.
- Increase efforts to be business and industry friendly.
- Promote reuse of mill buildings by working with local and regional realtors and development groups to publicize available space.
- Leverage the Airport/Technology Industrial Park to attract employers by seeking out environmentally conscious firms that would be attracted to alternative energy features.
- Provide tax incentives to businesses through the use of building investment tax credits such as those for historic restoration, and use tax increment financing for new and/or expanding businesses.
- Continue to develop partnerships/linkages between colleges and employers by working with colleges and universities to develop courses and programs to upgrade and modernize the labor force.
- Enhance the airport business potential by publicizing the expanded capacity of the airport. Also continue to improve ground access to the airport.
- Identify new or expanding markets for opportunities for regional tourist areas or service areas such as high level soccer tournaments and use of the Quinebaug River National Heritage Corridor.
- Continue to attract new businesses by publicizing the desirable features of Southbridge for business operations, e.g., center of a skilled labor force, plentiful Town water, medical service center.
- Complete the Southbridge Downtown Urban Renewal Plan.
- Improve traffic operations and reduce delay on Main Street by identifying priority areas, targeting State Chapter 90 Funds and seeking funding from CMRPC.

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- Improve walkability: sidewalks, handicap ramps, crosswalks and join the State Safe Routes to School Program.
- Improve Gateways and create a greater “Sense of Place” downtown. Improve way-finding signage.
- Improve cleanliness through street sweeping and more strategically placed and attractive trash cans. Conduct Community Clean Up Days.
- Develop active streetscape with outdoor uses and later business hours.
- Hold new and more downtown events. Create a Downtown Events Organization.
- Relocate welfare office off of Main Street by working with state and non-profit organizations to find appropriate space and lease conditions.
- There is a general need to review and amend Town bylaws that impact business unfavorably.
- Need greater show of interest (and politeness/civility) in town businesses by Town officials and law enforcement officers.
- Continue to participate in Regional Economic Development Organization and its activities.



Former large homes offer space for new businesses

***“Business people often don’t have good business plans to start or expand their businesses. There are short courses and conferences to help with this.”***

***Southbridge Economic Development Roundtable Participant***

## Goal 4.0 TO INCREASE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOWNWIDE AND IMPROVE DOWNTOWN

STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 4.1. TO IMPROVE/MAINTAIN DOWNTOWN AMENITIES</b>						
<b>4.1.1 Improve all aspects of safety downtown</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 1.3.1.	Police Department Fire Department people living and working downtown.	Increased squad car and foot patrols.  Increased vigilance of shop owners, employees, and residents.	More funding for police and fire protection and traffic and pedestrian safety facilities	Possible Homeland Security funding.	<b>Lead:</b> Police Department  <b>Partners:</b> Fire Department Department of Public Works (DPW)	<b>#1</b>
<b>4.1.2 Protect historic buildings and maximize use potential</b>	Southbridge Historical Commission National Register of Historic Places Mass. Historical Commission	Continue with implementation of Downtown Plan  Involve realtors in evaluating space and to use their contacts to find potential tenants.	Use of tax credits to reduce costs to developers.  Possible use of abandoned building tax reduction.  Cooperation from banks in financing the restorations and adaptive reuses, pending feasibility studies and due diligence financial checks of developers.	Feasibility studies including architectural and engineering analysis, estimated costs and estimated revenues will need to be done to justify projects to lenders.  Pass CPA to leverage State matching funds.	<b>Lead:</b> Historical Commission Historic District Study Committee  <b>Partners:</b> Economic Development and Planning Dept. Economic Development Committee Redevelopment Authority Southbridge Downtown Partnership Mass. Historical Commission	<b>#1</b>


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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 4.1. TO IMPROVE/MAINTAIN DOWNTOWN AMENITIES (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>4.1.3 Attract more retail stores and restaurants</b> SEE ALSO Strategy 4.1.2	Vacant stores and restaurant space The Chamber of Central Mass. South	Recruit additional stores and restaurants.		Private investment funds and business start-up funds.	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development Committee  <b>Partners:</b> Redevelopment Authority Economic Development and Planning Department Banks Quinsigamond Community College (QCC)	<b>#1</b>
		Encourage local chefs and cooks to open restaurants.				
		Provide business plan training/assistance for potential business creators who do not have this skill.				
		Work with property owners to recruit appropriate tenant for retail and professional office units				
4.1.4 Develop active streetscape with outdoor uses and later business hours.  SEE ALSO Strategy 1.3.2, 1.3.3, 3.3.2 and 4.1.2	Plan for Downtown Urban Renewal Project	Develop zoning and design guidelines to facilitate desirable development		Possible CDBG Funds  Need to prepare streetscape drawings to illustrate visual benefits of the improvements.	<b>Lead:</b> Redevelopment Authority  <b>Partners:</b> Planning Board Southbridge Downtown Partnership	<b>#2</b>

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 4.1. TO IMPROVE/MAINTAIN DOWNTOWN AMENITIES (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>4.1.5 Hold new and more downtown events</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 5.1.2	Downtown Christmas Fair Summer band concerts School reunions (separate classes and all classes together)	Form "Downtown Events Committee"		  Events will raise revenues  Need seed money to do organizational and publicity work to get started	<b>Lead:</b> Southbridge Downtown Partnership  <b>Partners:</b> Volunteer groups, for example, school reunion committees	<b>#1</b>
4.1.6 Evaluate location of the Welfare Office  SEE ALSO Strategy 4.1.1	Available vacant buildings off Main Street	Work with state and non-profit organizations to find appropriate space and lease conditions.		Need to work with state and non-profit organizations leasing schedule  State and non-profit organizations funding for leased space	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> Southbridge Downtown Partnership	<b>#3</b>



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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 4.1. TO IMPROVE/MAINTAIN DOWNTOWN AMENITIES (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>4.1.7 Improve cleanliness.</b> SEE ALSO Strategy 1.3.2, 2.1.9	DPW High school students and others, doing community service.	Increase street sweeping Hold Community Clean Up Days Strategically place more attractive trash receptacles “Brand” Clean Up Campaign	Town appropriations for public property maintenance	 Students and convicted juveniles have community service requirements. Non-profit public service organizations like the Boy Scouts do community service	<b>Lead:</b> DPW <b>Partners:</b> Schools Courts Non-profit public service organizations	<b>#1</b>
4.1.8 Enhance connections between Downtown and the River	River and mill ponds Abandoned railroad	Create pleasant walking connections Re-zone segments along the riverfront for mixed use, including housing			<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Dept. Planning Board <b>Partners:</b> DPW	<b>#2</b>

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 4.2. TO IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION DOWNTOWN</b>						
4.2.1 Improve walkability including sidewalks, handicap ramps, and crosswalks  SEE ALSO Strategy 1.2.2, 2.1.10	DPW Transportation Committee	Identify priority areas		Special appropriations for more extensive pedestrian facilities may be needed  DPW appropriations	<b>Lead:</b> Department of Public Works  <b>Partners:</b> Transportation Committee	#2
		Target State Chapter 90 Funds	Capital budget			
		Advance the Downtown Plan	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding			
		Join state <b><i>Safe Routes to School</i></b> Program				
4.2.2 Improve traffic operations, safety, and reduce delay on Main Street	DPW, Transportation Committee CMRPC Public Works for Economic Development (PWED) funding	Identify priority areas		Detailed traffic engineering study required	<b>Lead:</b> Department of Public Works  <b>Partners:</b> Transportation Committee	#2
		Target State Chapter 90 Funds		DPW appropriations		
		Advance Downtown Plan	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding	Possible PWED funding		
		Seek funding from CMRPC		Possible Congestion Management for Air Quality Program funding		

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 4.2. TO IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION DOWNTOWN (CONTINUED)</b>						
4.2.3 Provide more parking	Southbridge Redevelopment Authority	Advance Downtown Plan	Capital budget and/or seek grant funding	To be part of the next phases of the Downtown Renewal Plan  CDBG Funds and investor funds from private developers	<b>Lead:</b> Redevelopment Authority  <b>Partners:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department DPW for on-street parking	#3
4.2.4 Improve Gateways and create “Sense of Place” downtown  SEE ALSO Strategy 6.2.4	Economic Development and Planning Department	Develop gateway and way-finding signage	Capital budget	To be part of the next phases of the Downtown Renewal Plan	<b>Lead:</b> Redevelopment Authority  <b>Partners:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department DPW for wayfinding signage	#2
		Advance the Downtown Plan	Capital budget	CDBG Funds and investor funds from private developers		

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 4.3. TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</b>						
4.2.5 Explore downtown circulator bus service  SEE ALSO Strategy 5.4.2	WRTA, Economic Development and Planning Department	Identify need for shuttle and/or downtown circulator bus  Coordinate with WRTA to seek funding	Operating budget	Need Transit Feasibility Study to be done by CMRPA, the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the region  Worcester Regional Transit Authority Funds	<b>Lead:</b> Transportation Committee  Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> DPW for bus stops Sustainability Committee	#2
4.3.1 Promote reuse of mill buildings  SEE ALSO Strategy 4.1.2 and 5.1.4	Existing vacant mill buildings Mass. Historical Commission Southbridge Historical Commission Regional Economic Development Organization National Register of Historic Places	Work with local and regional realtors and development groups to publicize available space.  Encourage mixed use, including residential		Need to coordinate with regional and state economic development promotion media.  Use of historic investment tax credits for mill building rehabilitation	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> Local realtors and developers Mass. Historical Commission	#2

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 4.3. TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)</b>						
4.3.2 Leverage Southbridge Industrial Park to attract employers	Industrial Park at the Airport	Seek out environmentally conscious firms that would be attracted to alternative energy features		Need to coordinate with regional and state economic development promotion media.  Continued CDBG funding to promote industrial development	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> Southbridge Airport Commission	Ongoing
<b>4.3.3 Expand airport business potential</b>	Existing repaired airport with runway extension	Publicize expanded capacity of the airport		Credit authority of the Airport Commission and highway funds	<b>Lead:</b> Southbridge Airport Commission	<b>#1</b>
		Improve the ground access to airport	Capital budget	Coordinate with Mass. Aeronautics Commission to promote aviation	Economic Development and Planning Department	
		Promote use of airport for community events				
<b>4.3.4 Continue to provide tax incentives to businesses</b>	State and local tax programs, e.g., Mass. Community Investment Tax Credit Program, and New Markets Tax Credit Program	Pursue historic investment tax credits  Pursue tax increment financing for new and/or expanding businesses		Continued search for buildings and businesses appropriate for tax incentive use.  State and local tax reductions through credits and write-offs	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> Banks to provide financing for reduced tax project	<b>#1</b>

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<b>OBJECTIVE 4.3. TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>4.3.5 Attract new businesses</b>	Center of a skilled labor force, plentiful Town water, medical service center. Southbridge Business Center State Economic Development Fund State and local business recruitment programs	Publicize the desirable features of Southbridge for business operations.		Recruit successful businesses from nearby towns to open a branch in Southbridge.	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> Southbridge Business Center Owners of available business properties	<b>#1</b>
		Expedite the permitting process		Continue with publicity and outreach to businesses that potentially might locate in Southbridge		
		Establish a revolving loan fund from CDBG funds.				
<b>4.3.6 Retain and expand existing businesses</b>	Business owners committed to stay in Southbridge Local banks encouraging and aiding existing business expansion	Expedite the permitting process for businesses that want to expand		Some business owners need training & help in preparing business plans, possible use of Small Business Administration aid.	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> Local banks and business training centers	<b>#1</b>
		Work with banks to package loans for business operations and expansions		The Town can be more flexible in calculating expansion costs, e.g., for water, & in passing new regulations		



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<b>OBJECTIVE 4.3. TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)</b>						
4.3.7 Develop partnerships/linkages between colleges and employers  SEE ALSO Strategy 2.2.1, 2.3.1, 2.3.2	Local and regional colleges and universities	Work with colleges and universities to develop courses and programs to upgrade and modernize the labor force.		There is a need to prepare workers for high-tech, bio-tech and alternative energy jobs  Workforce development programs of the state and local educational institutions	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development Commission  <b>Partners:</b> Local educational institutions Economic Development and Planning Department	#2
4.3.8 Identify new or expanding markets for opportunities for regional tourist areas or service areas such as high level soccer tournaments and use of the Quinebaug River National Heritage Corridor.	Local and regional business and sports associations	Collaborate with business and sports organizations in developing a heritage and recreational tourism plan (See End Note #1 for further explanation.)		Detailed plans for each of the three major tourism/recreation programs would have to be prepared. The plans would include vision statements, goals objectives, existing conditions, and reasibility analysis	<b>Lead:</b> Southbridge Downtown Partnership Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> QRNH (The Last Green Valley) Competitive sports organizations Financial institutions	#2
		Explore development of a tournament quality sports arena. (See End Note #2 for further explanation.)				
		Better integrate neighborhood and downtown revitalization and visitor activities into the Quinebaug River National Heritage Corridor (QRNHC).				

#### End Notes

1. For example, a historic/tourism theme could focus on the 1920's with exterior and interior renovations and decorations, and 1920's themed activities and attire and artifacts. Also work with state tourism officials to initiate a major advertising campaign to have tourists "Visit Massachusetts in the '20's." The '20's would be 1520, a Native American Village or settlement unaffected by European colonization. It could be developed at the proposed Mashpee-Wampanoag Casino complex proposed for Taunton, or at a proposed settlement and museum of Native American History in Turners Falls. The 1620's would obviously be Plymouth Plantation in Plymouth (where there is also a Native American settlement and extensive experience with tourist visitations). The 1720's could be Salem which was an important colonial settlement then and already has an established tourism industry. The 1820's would be Sturbridge Village which has had as many as 300,000 visitors per year. And the 1920's could be Southbridge with its vintage downtown architecture, adapted to a "Roaring" 1920's theme, for example featuring life during prohibition. Creation of these tourism attractions and a coordinated tourism campaign would require close collaboration with state tourism and other officials, as well as a large well synchronized effort on the part of a Southbridge public private partnership.
2. A Tournament Quality Sports Facility for youth and adults might provide both indoor and outdoor facilities for soccer, lacrosse, tennis, basketball and badminton. There are leagues and clubs that play these sports on a well-organized basis, and they seek out conveniently located high quality facilities for their tournaments and competitions. Several communities throughout New England have already created such facilities and attracted the players and their entourages (families and friends and fans of the teams). People will travel long distances to attend the tournaments, and prefer locations near interstate highways in relatively central locations.

## GOAL 5.0: TO ENSURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SOUTHBRIDGE

GOAL STATEMENT: RECOGNIZE AND ACT ON THE FACT THAT OUR FUTURE WELL-BEING DEPENDS ON PROTECTING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BY LIVING AND WORKING IN WAYS THAT SUPPORT OUR LONG-TERM SURVIVAL.

### WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

Sustainability is based on a simple principle: Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on our natural environment. Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations.

Climate change and the need to reduce our reliance on nonrenewable sources of energy are challenges for the globe that will have local impacts. Some of those impacts may include:

- More frequent and severe storms,
- Increasing cost of transportation,
- Increasing costs for food due to transportation costs,
- Higher summer temperatures, and
- Increased precipitation.

### WHAT IS AN UNSUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY?

Many modern North American cities and towns were planned and built using methods that assumed abundant and cheap energy and land would be available forever. This assumption led to inefficiencies, like an increased separation of our workplaces from our homes that resulted in increased dependence on automobiles, and spurred suburban sprawl, traffic congestion, air pollution, reduced proximity to open space, and global climate change.

Although most people living in Southbridge commute to jobs out of town, Southbridge is fortunate to have been built on an earlier, more sustainable model where most people could and still might be able to walk to work if there were available jobs.

### WHAT IS A “SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY”?

- A sustainable community uses its resources to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are available for future generations.
- A sustainable community seeks a better quality of life for all its residents while maintaining nature’s ability to function over time by minimizing waste, preventing pollution, promoting efficiency and developing local resources to revitalize the local economy.
- Decision-making in a sustainable community stems from a rich civic life and shared information among community members.
- A sustainable community resembles a living system in which human natural and economic elements are interdependent and draw strength from each other.

- In short, a sustainable Southbridge will be resilient in the face of future changes, because it has taken steps to protect both its natural and social environment.<sup>16</sup>

## DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Southbridge's overall population is projected to decrease (by 3.26%) by 2014.

This is a continuation of a trend of slight population loss the town experienced over the last two decades and contrasted to the increase in population expected in the region (3.85% statewide). However;

- the town is expected to grow slightly by 2020 with a slight continuation of this trend by 2030, with a significant growth in the population aged 65 and over which is projected to increase 62% from 2010 to 2020 and an additional 27% by the year 2030;
- Southbridge has a large and growing Latino population (30% according to 2010 U. S. Census), a significant number of who speak Spanish at home, some of whom have limited English proficiency and are considered to be linguistically isolated;
- This is important when thinking about services that residents may need (e.g. medical, transportation, recreation, public safety, opportunities for socializing) in the future.

## SOUTHBIDGE TODAY

Southbridge's natural resources, protected open space, water resources, and wildlife habitats are a basis for assuring a sustainable future.

## SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS: NATURAL RESOURCES AND OPEN SPACE

- Southbridge has a rich natural heritage worthy of recognition, protection, and pride.
- Twenty one percent (3,200 acres) of Southbridge is some form of protected open space.
- Forested areas and steep slopes add visual drama and have potential recreation value.
- Some types of development have the potential to cause soil erosion or detract from the visual appeal of the ridges.
- Opportunity exists to renew the riverfront as a means of revitalizing Southbridge.
- Southbridge has protected more than 70% of state identified "Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife" and more than 25% of "Priority Habitats of Rare Species".
- More than 20% of its agricultural land has been permanently protected.

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<sup>16</sup> Adapted from: *Minnesota Sustainable Economic Development and Environmental Protection Task Force – 1995*

## WATER RESOURCES

- Excellent water quality is a priority for Southbridge.
- The Quinebaug River is within walking distance of the majority of town residents but is difficult to access for much of its route.
- There are more than 1,200 acres of wetlands.
- The Town owns over two thousand acres in the southwest corner of Southbridge which includes Reservoirs 3, 4, and 5 and the Cohassee Brook Reservoir (additional watershed land is owned in Sturbridge and in Connecticut).

## HABITAT AND WILDLIFE

- With more than 8,500 acres of woodlands, Southbridge has large areas of mixed hardwood and pine forest that produce clean air, reduce run off and flooding, provide wildlife habitat, and moderate climate.
- Wetland and upland plant communities provide rich wildlife habitat, enhance passive recreation experiences, and add visual interest to the landscape.
- One of Southbridge's most unique natural resource areas, with many large trees and spring wildflowers, is located along the eastern border of the town where the Quinebaug River flows into the Town of Dudley.
- Southbridge has several areas identified in the BioMap2 statewide conservation plan as Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape – critical areas for assuring future biodiversity.
- Land owned by the Water Department, combined with land in abutting towns and in Connecticut, protects a large portion of one of the BioMap2 Critical Natural Landscapes—important wildlife habitats.

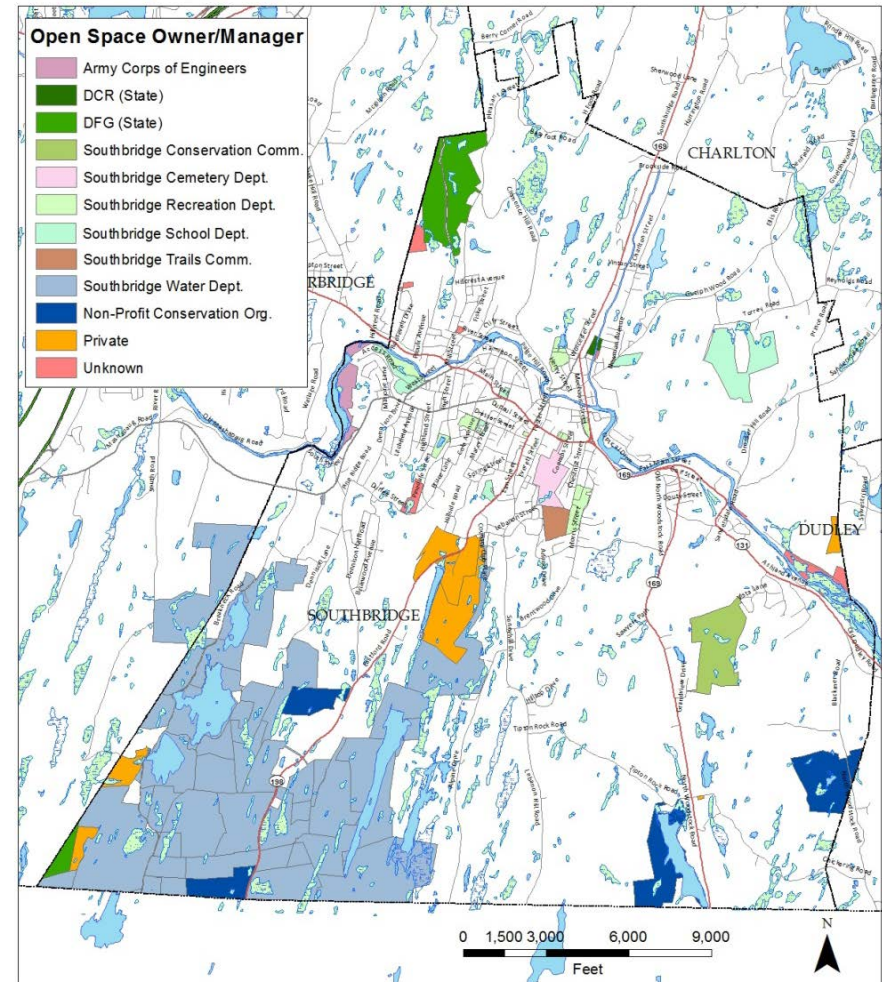


Figure 5.1 Southbridge Open Space

- The Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program has identified six estimated rare wetland species habitat sites and one priority habitat for upland rare species in Southbridge.

## STRATEGIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

There are many strategies for Southbridge to achieve a sustainable future. The following highlights some general considerations.

### SMART GROWTH INITIATIVES

Smart Growth<sup>17</sup> is based on the following principles:

- Mix Land Uses,
- Take Advantage of Compact Building Design,
- Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices,
- Create Walkable Neighborhoods,
- Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place,
- Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas,
- Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities,
- Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices,
- Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective, and
- Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration in Development Decisions.

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<sup>17</sup> smartgrowth.org

### RENEWABLE ENERGY OPTIONS

*Photovoltaic (solar electric) power:* Photovoltaic panels produce electricity that can connect to the power grid.

*Solar thermal energy:* Solar hot-water systems typically provide water for showers and baths, heating swimming pools, hot tubs, or radiant heating (space heating).

*Wind power:* Stand-alone turbines supply electricity for homes, farms, small communities. Wind farms are clusters of wind turbines generating power for the electrical grid.

*Micro-hydro:* Unlike large-scale hydroelectric projects, micro-hydro exerts minimal disturbance of waterways. Small turbines typically use springs, creeks or municipal water supply lines to generate enough electricity for a single building or an entire town.

*Biomass:* Agricultural plants or organic wastes provide fuels, such as methanol or ethanol, which can be used as an alternative for most oil or gas needs. Biomass still contributes to air pollution and greenhouse gasses. While not strictly a renewable technology, hydrogen gas is a clean, efficient technology that may soon be used in vehicles, and may be adapted for building and community heating and power generation.

The Southbridge Casella landfill is recycling waste and producing energy from landfill gas. The electricity generated is enough to power approximately 2000 homes. Casella and the Town are collaborating on locating alternative energy and other green businesses in the new industrial park next to the Airport.



## ELEMENTS OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE<sup>18</sup>

**Urban Forest:** The urban forest is an integral biological system necessary to the built environment. It is the plant and animal communities in and around human settlement areas. It encompasses a variety of trees, shrubs and understory vegetation, and includes riparian zones, parks, greenbelts and ravines.

**Greenways:** Greenways are corridors of vegetated open space that crisscross the landscape. They often follow the natural topographical features of the landscape. They may also include utility rights-of-way.

**Rain Gardens:** A rain garden or bio-retention cell is a vegetated depression in the ground designed to receive surface runoff to collect and store rainwater so that it can be filtered while slowly being absorbed into the surrounding soil.

**Bioswales:** A bioswale is similar to a rain garden, but generally refers to a vegetated channel that both drains and directs the flow of rainwater. They promote slowing, cleansing and infiltration along the runoff channel.

**Green Roofs:** “Contained” green spaces on top of built structures. Like rain gardens and bioswales, green roofs attenuate stormwater.

**Green Walls:** Sometimes called vertical gardens, green walls are vegetated wall surfaces.

**Permeable and Pervious Paving:** Pervious paving allows rainfall to percolate into the underlying ground rather than to flow off into surrounding water courses. It generally requires more periodic maintenance than standard paving.

**Community Gardens:** Any piece of land that is cultivated, planted, tended and harvested by people. Community gardens may consist of individual plots or communally shared and tended spaces. They can be on school grounds, around hospitals, in neighborhoods, or through reclamation of brownfields.

The Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) provides loans and to the states to support green infrastructure projects, including land conservation, reforestation, tree boxes, cisterns and rain barrels, downspout disconnections, wetland restoration, parks and greenways, rain gardens, biofiltration practices, permeable pavements and green roofs.<sup>19</sup>

## SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote a sustainable future.
- Prepare for climate change.
- Protect watersheds.
- Promote use of renewable energy sources.
- Protect biodiversity.


***“We really need to prepare for climate change or Southbridge will face serious environmental and social issues in the next 20 years...”***

***Southbridge Sustainability Roundtable Participant***

<sup>18</sup> Green Infrastructure Foundation


<sup>19</sup> <http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/wastewater/cwsrf.htm>

## Goal 5.0 TO ENSURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SOUTHBRIDGE

STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 5.1. TO PROMOTE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE</b>						
5.1.1 Increase awareness of the need to plan for the future of our environment  SEE ALSO Strategy 1.2.2	<b>ThinkReduce</b> Program Massachusetts Clean Energy Center - <b>MassGreen</b> MassDOT <b>NuRides</b> MassDOT <b>GreenDOT Implementation Plan</b> <b>Mass Save</b> Local cable and other media outlets Hillside signs on way into town Already existing videos from DEP and recycling industry Social media	Provide information on products that minimize impacts on the environment		  Most of these actions require little or no funding. Some may take some staff time.  Repeat showings of existing videos on cable TV  Materials available thru NuRides  Increase communication  Increase capacity	<b>Lead:</b> Sustainability Committee  <b>Partners:</b> Community College Local Businesses Motivated residents Dept. of Public Works MassDOT Residents	<b>#1</b>
		Publicize “green” steps that individuals can take at home and in the garden				
		Discourage single-occupant driving by providing information on the impacts of travel on the environment and methods to reduce those impacts				
		<b>NuRides</b> carpools				
		Consider new Park-and-Ride Lot	Operating budget			
		Form Employer Transportation Management Association	Operating in coordination with CMRPC			
		Identify ZipCar spaces	Operating budget			

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 5.1. TO PROMOTE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE (CONTINUED)</b>						
5.1.1. Increase the awareness of the need to plan for the future of our environment (continued)	Ability to send information home with school kids EPA resources for teachers Community College	Explore shared bicycle program				
		Continue to push for Rail Trail it can provide alternative routes and modes of transportation				
		Include <b>“Complete Streets”</b> Initiative design standards – bicycle/ pedestrian facilities				
		Create new programming on Cable TV to promote the use of existing resources such as the Rail Trail and the benefits of making sustainability a priority	Operating budget			
<b>5.1.2. Hold environmental awareness events</b>	Variety of potential venues Regional businesses (e.g. Saint Gobain)	Stage Sustainability/Green Technology festivals		 <p>These actions require little or no funding</p>	<b>Lead:</b> Sustainability Committee  <b>Partners:</b> Schools and Community Colleges Motivated residents Local businesses	<b>#1</b>
		Host sustainability tours				
		Provide geothermal workshops				


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<b>OBJECTIVE 5.1. TO PROMOTE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE (CONTINUED)</b>						
5.1.3 Promote recycling	<b>ThinkReduce</b> Program	Create a Zero Waste initiative to promote recycling, reduction and reuse.		New Initiative  Hire unemployed to help with recycling (even if unpaid, provides valuable training)	<b>Lead:</b> Board of Health Sustainability Committee <b>Partners:</b> Casella Department of Public Works MassDEP School Committee/ Dept. Local businesses/ restaurants Motivated residents Town Council	#2
		Plan for closure of land fill (may be an opportunity to move away from single stream recycling)	Operating budget			
		Assure that existing landfill laws are being enforced				
		Provide recycling bins in public places	Operating budget			
		Develop a commercial buildings/ restaurants recycling/ composting program	Operating budget			
		Develop recycling plan for school complex	School Dept. Operating budget			
<b>5.1.4. Encourage “green” work places</b>  SEE ALSO Strategy 4.3.1	Regional businesses  Existing mill buildings	Encourage the development of a “green office park” reusing some of the existing mill buildings to complement existing green industrial park	Operating budget  Entrepreneur efforts	Businesses that can provide jobs in the “green economy”	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development Committee  <b>Partners:</b> Local businesses	<b>#1</b>

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OBJECTIVE 5.1. TO PROMOTE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE (CONTINUED)						
5.1.5. Increase programs to teach about “green” products and practices	Ongoing, existing school programs  <b>ThinkReduce</b> program EPA resources for teachers	Encourage the schools to develop a food composting program		Getting school kids involved will multiply effort  <b>Safe Routes</b> program provides funding for street improvements	<b>LEAD</b> School Committee/ Department  <b>PARTNERS</b> Community Colleges, Senior Center Local businesses Library Motivated residents	#2  ongoing
		Join <b>MassRides Safe Routes to School</b> program	Staff time to prepare			
		Take more advantage of EPA programs				
		Organize school visits to the water treatment facility	Existing funds or PTA			
OBJECTIVE 5.2. TO PREPARE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE						
<b>5.2.1 Prepare for the effects of more frequent storms</b>	Northeast Climate Science Center (UMass)	Assure that disaster preparedness plans are adequate	Operating budget		<b>Lead:</b> Board of Health  <b>Partners:</b> Harrington Hospital Sustainability Committee Motivated residents	#1
	Climate Change Adaptation Advisory Committee (DEP)	Explore a community help/ learning network such as Skillshare.com				
5.2.2 Promote local food production capacity  SEE ALSO Strategy 1.2.6, 2.1.7	Some community gardens	Assure that bylaws promote backyard food production		  These actions require little or no funding	<b>Lead:</b> Agriculture Committee	#1
		Offer food production courses for all ages				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
OBJECTIVE 5.2. TO PREPARE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE						
5.2.2 Promote local food production capacity (continued)		Sponsor a centralized Farmers’ Market and recreate the local farm network			<b>Partners:</b> Planning Board Schools Community Colleges Motivated residents	
		Explore planting “food forests” with fruit and nut trees and bushes on public land				
OBJECTIVE 5.3. TO PROTECT WATERSHEDS						
<b>5.3.1 Assure that source water areas are protected from current and potential contamination</b>	Abundance of clean water  Much watershed land is currently owned by the Water Department.  Areas not owned are generally in low density development.	Continue watershed acquisition program	Capital	Involve school children in water monitoring activities    Southbridge has participated in Last Green Valley’s “Stream Team” surface water monitoring program.	<b>Lead:</b> Water Department  <b>Partners:</b> Town Council Conservation Commission Planning Board Motivated residents School Department	<b>#1</b>  ongoing
		Continue monitoring adjacent uses	Operating budge			
		Review watershed district bylaw to assure it is adequate				
		Review level of protection under Article 97 and consider adding Conservation Restrictions				
		Require independent monitoring of potential contaminants (Stream Team & LGV)	Lab costs/ operating budget			



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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 5.3. TO PROTECT WATERSHEDS (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>5.3.1 Assure that source water areas are protected from current and potential contamination (continued)</b>		Allow appropriate passive recreational use of watershed land while continuing to monitor uses	Operating budget			
5.3.2 Adopt green infrastructure stormwater management provisions	Little mention of landscaping in Subdivision Regulations	Create green corridors that serve multiple functions of providing recreational areas, links between areas, and assisting in management of stormwater runoff, preserving trees	Capital May involve acquisition and construction costs	Some of these actions require ongoing maintenance	<b>Lead:</b> Department of Public Works  <b>PARTNERS</b> Conservation Commission Planning Board Motivated residents Individual property owners	#2
		Limit impervious surfaces				
		Promote water conservation to discourage waste				
		Continue catch-basin stenciling program				
		Protect and maintain trees on public property and rights-of-way and plant additional trees to enhance the urban tree canopy	Operating budget			

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 5.4. TO PROMOTE USE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES</b>						
5.3.2 Adopt green infrastructure stormwater management provisions (continued)		Review landscaping regulations and require landscaping to help reduce runoff	Operating budget			
		Promote rain gardens/ swales to capture runoff for street trees	Operating budget			
5.3.3 Regulate development to minimize impacts on water resources	Existing regulations	Regulate the location and design of new development to limit and mitigate impacts on water quality	Operating budget		<b>Lead:</b> Planning Board  <b>Partners:</b> Conservation Commission Water Department	#2
5.4.1 Promote energy conservation/ transportation programs  SEE ALSO Strategy 5.1.1	<b>MassSave</b> program Trail Committee and volunteers  WRTA MassDOT <b>GreenDOT Implementation Plan</b>	Emphasize facilities for pedestrians and bicycles	Capital and Operating budgets		<b>Lead:</b> Sustainability Committee  <b>Partners:</b> Trail Committee Motivated residents DPW	#2
		Continue efforts to provide mass-transit options	Operating budget			

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 5.4. TO PROMOTE USE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES (CONTINUED)</b>						
5.4.2 Promote and expand existing efforts for conservation and producing energy with renewable sources  SEE ALSO Strategy 6.1.2	Casella landfill gas to energy program Hydropower history of Quinebaug River	Publicize existing sources of power at the industrial park and promote as green economic development.	Operating budget		<b>Lead:</b> Sustainability Committee  <b>PARTNERS</b> Casella DPW Planning Board Economic Development Committee Motivated residents	#2
		Explore developing low-head hydroelectric				
		Explore exposing old streetcar rails downtown and running a downtown trolley route partly as a green tourism draw	Capital & operating budgets for trolley			
		Explore using hydropower to charge downtown trolleys and/or residences				
		Develop a program (including tax incentives) to assist homeowners to install photovoltaic and solar hot water systems and geothermal heating systems	Operating budget			

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
OBJECTIVE 5.4. TO PROMOTE USE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES (CONTINUED)						
5.4.3 Continue and initiate new programs to use renewable energy for municipal purposes	MassSave program	Explore solar farm on municipal land	Operating budget		Lead: Town Council  PARTNERS Department of Public Works Motivated residents	#2
		Develop an energy auditing and retrofitting program for municipal facilities	Operating budget			
		Install renewable energy features on municipal buildings and land when feasible	Capital & operating budgets			
		Seek LEEDS certification for municipal buildings	Capital budgets			
OBJECTIVE 5.5. TO PROTECT BIODIVERSITY						
5.5.1 Protect important natural resource areas (BioMap areas, wetlands, floodplains, buffer zones, conservation corridors, critical habitats, etc.) from future development  SEE ALSO Strategy 1.2.4	Large areas designated by State as critical habitat for biodiversity  Many areas are already protected.	Complete Open Space and Recreation Plan Update		New Committee	Lead: Open Space and Recreation Plan Task Force  Partners: Town Manager Conservation Commission  Motivated residents	#1
		Apply for funds to implement its open space protection recommendations	Capital & operating budgets			
		Establish an Open Space and Recreation Committee				
		Continue to enforce wetlands and other natural resource protection regulations				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 5.5. TO PROTECT BIODIVERSITY (CONTINUED)</b>						
5.2.2 Encourage open space residential development in new subdivisions to protect open space and make linkages	Existing cluster /PUD development by-law	Review existing by-law			<b>Lead:</b> Planning Board  <b>Partners:</b> Conservation Commission Motivated residents	<b>#1</b>
		Remove requirement for special permit if subdivision plan permanently preserves 50% of buildable area as open space				
		Provide bonuses if open space makes a linkage to other protected land				
		Require special permit for standard subdivision of more than 3 acres				

## GOAL 6.0: TO INCREASE COMMUNITY PRIDE

### GOAL STATEMENT: TO IMPROVE THE TOWN'S REPUTATION AND INCREASE COMMUNITY PRIDE.

*"The poor self-image and illogical desire of many residents to put themselves and Syracuse down any chance they get...Like all Upstate New York cities, Syracuse suffered quite a bit from the loss of industrial jobs and good paying blue collar positions beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the late 1990s. Having lost the very institutions which provided a sense of identity and pride that came from living in a hard-working, American industrial center, many people never seem to get enough opportunities to bemoan the city's "deplorable" state and impending doom... I think ... that things aren't nearly as bad as some people would have you believe..."<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Syracuse, New York, Sperling Views, "Poor Self-Image Plagues the City of Syracuse – 7/27/2009.  
[http://www.bestplaces.net/backfence/viewcomment.aspx?id=37273C65-FD9A-4435-95DB-B6D1842DC0DC&city=Syracuse\\_NY&p=53673000](http://www.bestplaces.net/backfence/viewcomment.aspx?id=37273C65-FD9A-4435-95DB-B6D1842DC0DC&city=Syracuse_NY&p=53673000)

### COMMUNITY SELF-IMAGE

The town has developed the identity of a community fallen on hard times, has inner city demographics and related issues, and many residents feel that their community is looked down upon by surrounding, wealthier towns. Some residents consider Southbridge a town without hope or pride. There is a need to re-establish pride and to become more optimistic about the town's future -- to believe that things can be improved -- otherwise residents' apathy and negativity will add to the inertia and actually act to block progress from occurring.

There are several regional examples of other communities that suffer from a similar ailment (including Fall River, New Bedford, and other smaller area mill towns). These communities share some of the factors that contribute to the low self-image; these include large employers closing and leaving behind them large numbers of low skilled unemployed people and a degraded physical environment. An additional challenge is the existence of a diverse population with newcomers, some who have a difficult time becoming part of the community due to linguistic and cultural differences, and who experience prejudice and alienation. Concurrently the "old-timers" experience the changes the newcomers have brought to "their" town in negative ways.

Another factor contributing to the community's self-image is the reputation of the school system. Its poor reputation has led to a large number of families opting to send their children to schools located in adjacent towns through the "school choice" program.



## PAST GLORY

Southbridge was once one of the richest cities in America with a booming economy in textiles. At one time, Southbridge ranked 4th in the county in terms of the number of persons employed in a community. In large part this was due to the American Optical Company (AO). The AO shut down in 1984 and Southbridge is still struggling from the loss of these and other manufacturing jobs. The impact of what was experienced as the sudden closure of the town's major employer that occurred decades ago, still lingers in a number of ways. As a longtime resident said: "When American Optical closed, the town closed."

## RELEVANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographics of Southbridge make it more similar to a city than to a town, both in terms of the number of low-income residents as well as in terms of its ethnic diversity. Industry brought successive waves of immigrants from a number of nationalities that came in search of employment. After the Civil War, many immigrants of Irish and French Canadian descent came to work and live there (French (21.7%) and French Canadian (13.5%) make up the majority ancestry of residents); by the 1930s they had been joined by Poles, Greeks, Italians and others. New immigrants from Puerto Rico, Laos, and Vietnam began arriving in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, approximately 30% of the population is Latino, the majority coming from Puerto Rico.

The relatively high unemployment rates, lower incomes and lower educational attainment rates are associated with a rise in crimes in recent years, accompanied by an increase in substance use. Unemployment rates, lung cancer deaths, and the number of children living below the poverty level are significantly higher than the state average.

There is a significant separation of groups in town, both geographically and socially. While there is some interaction across ethnic, religious and socio-economic lines, in many ways it is a divided town.

## SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### OBJECTIVE 6.1. IMPROVE THE TOWN'S REPUTATION

Many of the residents who participated in the visioning sessions held in as part of the master planning process reported feeling very badly about the fact that they felt that surrounding towns "look down" on Southbridge and on the people who live there. Ideas regarding how to improve the town's reputation include:

- cleaning main thoroughfares,
- beautifying the gateways into town, and
- making Southbridge a destination by capitalizing on its unique features.

### OBJECTIVE 6.2. INCREASE PRIDE OF PLACE

One of the ways in which it is recommended that community's pride in itself be increased is by developing a "**Southbridge has it all**" campaign, promoting the many ways the town is more of a "complete community" than others; focusing on what it has, not on what it doesn't have; these features include:

- Beautiful downtown buildings,
- Grand historic buildings and legacy,
- Shops and services,
- Library,
- Hospital,
- Registry of Motor Vehicles,
- Police and fire, utilities,
- Abundant water supply,

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- Hotel and conference center,
- Westville Lake recreation area,
- Even an airport!!, and
- Industrial Park.

So what's missing? Often a negative attitude stems from focusing on what was and has been lost, rather than on what is and what could be.

**Increase awareness and appreciation of existing resources.** Compile lists and descriptions of existing resources and promote in a variety of media (including web, newspaper, community bulletin board, etc.).

**Focus on the good things that have come with change** and on addressing the challenges in productive ways.



Southbridge Fest, town-wide event (photo from website  
<http://bostoneventsinsider.com/bostonevents/2013/06-03/southbridge-fest.htm>

#### OBJECTIVE 6.3. BRING DIFFERENT CULTURES TOGETHER

Celebrate diversity and support ethnic pride. This can be accomplished by honoring the town's various cultural backgrounds through:

- Language,
- Naming of street/plaza,
- Symbols,
- Intercultural celebration, and
- Inclusion in "town hall".

#### Provide culturally and linguistically relevant services

#### Require diversity training


#### Provide opportunities for individuals of different backgrounds to interact.

Some of the negativity about the town can be traced to the alienation created by the divisions amongst groups of people – socio-economic, ethnic, linguistic, etc. This divide can be at least somewhat decreased by developing a greater tolerance of differences that can only be accomplished by increasing opportunities for contact and interaction between groups.

***"You've heard of people who see the glass as half full? Well in Southbridge there are a lot of people who see the glass as three-quarters empty ..."***


***Southbridge resident***

## Goal 6.0 TO INCREASE COMMUNITY PRIDE

STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 6.1. TO IMPROVE THE TOWN'S REPUTATION</b>						
6.1.1. Improve the gateways coming into town  SEE ALSO: Goal 1 & Goal 3	Current area used for notices/events on Rt. 131 (north), Town ROW	Develop "Keep Southbridge Clean" campaign			<b>Lead:</b> DPW  <b>Partners:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department Police Department	<b>#1</b>
		Develop a consistent gateway theme and design and install at key roadway and trail locations (including plantings, signage, etc.)	Capital and operating budgets			
<b>6.1.2. Make Southbridge a destination</b>  SEE ALSO: Goal 3	River  Industrial heritage	Promote eco-tourism		Provide incentives and encourage private/public partnerships to accomplish some of these tasks	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  Chamber of Commerce  Economic Development Commission  <b>Partners:</b> ASPIRA Area businesses	<b>#1</b>
		Support the new Optical Museum and encourage developers to expand scope to an industrial museum.				
		Do something unique, for example, paint an unusual mural on a building in a prominent location; include youth (see End Note #1)				
		Recall past events (e.g. convince merchants to recreate Thursday night shopping in the downtown)				


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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
OBJECTIVE 6.1. TO IMPROVE THE TOWN’S REPUTATION (CONTINUED)						
6.1.2. Make Southbridge a destination (continued)		Create a unique festival (perhaps capitalizing on multi-cultural heritage)			Schools Art Center Downtown Partnership Sports organizations Financial Institutions	
		Explore development of a tournament-quality sports arena				
OBJECTIVE 6.2. TO INCREASE PRIDE OF PLACE						
6.2.1. Have more town-wide events to build community spirit		Hold community events at the Airport (See End Note #2)		Private/public partnerships  some new, some ongoing	Lead: Economic Development and Planning Department  Recreation Department  Partners: Airport Residents	#1
		Hold a community beautification contest				
		Continue summer concert series				
		Consider expanding Southbridge Fest to connect to the downtown (as it once did)				
6.2.2. Demonstrate progress  SEE ALSO: Goal 3		Identify low-hanging fruit in Master Plan and implement improvements			Lead: Economic Development and Planning Department  Master Plan Implementation Committee	#1
		Take action on absentee landlords and follow through				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 6.2. TO INCREASE PRIDE OF PLACE (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>6.2.2. Demonstrate progress</b> (continued)		Make small-scale improvements to the streetscape in the neighborhoods (e.g. planting, pocket parks, lighting, etc.)	Capital and operating budgets		<b>Partners:</b> DPW Police Department	
<b>6.2.3. Improve tone of public discourse</b>		Encourage Town Council and residents to speak to each other with more respect.			<b>Lead:</b> Town Council  <b>Partners:</b> Residents	<b>#1</b>
<b>6.2.4. Improve the downtown (the “living room” of the community)</b>		Implement the Downtown Plan	Capital budget	Private investment	<b>Lead:</b> Town Manager Economic Development and Planning Department Fire Department Redevelopment Authority  <b>Partners:</b> DPW	<b>#1</b>
		Identify interim actions that could help demonstrate improvements				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 6.2. TO INCREASE PRIDE OF PLACE (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>6.2.5. Maintain public buildings</b>		Renovate Town Hall	Capital and operating budgets		<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Dept.  Economic Development Comm.  <b>Partners:</b> Downtown Business Assoc.	<b>#1</b>
		Upgrade Fire Station	Capital and operating budgets			
<b>6.2.6. Increase awareness &amp; pride in the community's history</b>	Local Historic District Committee	Improve historical markers/ memorials		To establish a National Register District OR Local Historic District, the Historical Commission must lead, with the cooperation of MHC and property-owners.  Pass CPA to leverage State matching funds.	<b>Lead:</b> Historical Commission  Historical Society  <b>Partners:</b> Schools  Downtown Property-owners  Mass. Historical Commission	<b>#1</b>
		Memorialize the 1953 Flood and 2011 Tornado, emphasizing heroic actions taken during the events and in recovery from them	Capital budget			
		Complete process of creating a downtown local historic district				

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 6.2. TO INCREASE PRIDE OF PLACE (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>6.2.7. Develop a “Positively Southbridge” OR “Southbridge Has It All” Campaign</b>  SEE ALSO: Goal 3		Rebrand the town (See End Note #2); develop attractive promotional materials	Capital and operating budgets	Perhaps area businesses could help fund	<b>Lead:</b> Economic Development and Planning Department  <b>Partners:</b> Town’s Website Newspapers SCTV Police Department	<b>#1</b>
		Disseminate good news using various outlets (newspaper, web, SCTV)				
		Encourage community-oriented behavior by giving out “tickets” (Police Department) rewarding good behavior				
		Promote existing resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a Community Calendar and a Community Bulletin Board</li> <li>• Make improvements to the Town website</li> <li>• Advertise and promote existing resources in a variety of modes</li> </ul>				
<b>6.2.8. Continue Town Manager’s “Neighborhood Walks”</b>		Continue practice of walking through neighborhoods with department heads and inviting residents. Solicit their thoughts re: improvements.			<b>Lead:</b> Town Manager  <b>Partners:</b> Department Heads Residents	<b>#1</b>  Ongoing




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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/ TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 6.2. TO INCREASE PRIDE OF PLACE (CONTINUED)</b>						
6.2.9. Hold a contest for idea of increasing community pride		Have the Town Manager announce the contest and the winners/ winning ideas (see End Note #3)			<b>Lead:</b> Town Manager  <b>Partners:</b> Area businesses Residents	#2
6.2.10. Involve youth in the planning process		Solicit ideas from youngsters regarding increasing pride		 incorporate in school curriculum, if possible	<b>Lead:</b> School Department  Community and Economic Development Department  <b>Partners:</b> YMCA Cops & Kids	#2
6.2.11. Encourage Town Department Heads to “lead by example”		Encourage Town Department Heads and other town leaders to participate in town-wide events.			<b>Lead:</b> Town Manager  <b>Partners:</b> Town Department Heads	#2


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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 6.3. TO BRING DIFFERENT CULTURES TOGETHER</b>						
<b>6.3.1. Increase Latino representation at Town Hall</b>		Create a Latino Liaison position	Operating budget	New Position Could be part-time	<b>Lead:</b> Town Manager	<b>#1</b>
		Encourage individuals of Latino background to run for public office			<b>Partners:</b> Residents	
<b>6.3.2. Address racism</b>		Require diversity training in all public jobs	Operating budget		<b>Lead:</b> Town Manager	<b>#1</b>
		Promote tolerance in town departments (reward inclusive behavior)			<b>Partners:</b> Community Connections	
		Discuss issues of racism in local media			Town Website Newspaper Cable Access TV	
<b>6.3.3. Promote multi-cultural events</b>	ASPIRA Churches Library	Include multi-cultural entertainment in the Town Common concert series		  New Committee	<b>Lead:</b> Town Manager	<b>#1</b>
		Create a “Multi-Cultural Committee” charged with welcoming newcomers and supporting celebrations by reaching out to various ethnic			Multi-Cultural Committee  <b>Partners:</b> ASPIRA Economic Development and Planning Department	

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STRATEGY	EXISTING RESOURCES	ACTIONS	FUNDING NEED	NOTES	LEAD & PARTNERS	PRIORITY/TIMING
<b>OBJECTIVE 6.3. TO BRING DIFFERENT CULTURES TOGETHER (CONTINUED)</b>						
<b>6.3.3. Promote multi-cultural events</b> (continued)		groups and help organize public celebrations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a “KEY to Southbridge’s future is its diversity” campaign (see End Note #4)</li> <li>Add multi-cultural aspect to Southbridge Fest</li> </ul>			Community Connections Town Website Newspaper SCTV	
6.3.4. Increase opportunities for community gathering  SEE ALSO: Goal 3 and Goal 4	Library Schools Community Center Downtown	Consider enhancing programming at the Community Center				#2
		Support the Library in its efforts to conduct outreach and provide opportunities for all				
		Create more public spaces in the neighborhoods				
		Support improvements in the downtown.				
6.3.5. Name street or plaza for prominent individuals of various ethnic backgrounds		Collect names of prominent individuals in the community of different ethnic backgrounds and name a street, intersection, plaza; hold a naming ceremony			<b>Lead:</b> Town Manager  <b>Partners:</b> Latino Liaison Residents	#2

## END NOTES

1. **Do something unique** that capitalizes on the more urban nature of Southbridge in relation to its surrounding towns. Use graffiti to decorate. Paint abandoned buildings in wild colors (e.g. <http://weburbanist.com/2013/02/19/abandoned-church-becomes-brilliant-urban-art-installation/>). Use art in innovative ways.

2. **Hold events at the Airport.** Some ideas include: Fireworks, Kite Day, Car shows (use like a drag strip), remote control airplane shows, hot air balloons.

3. **Re-brand the Town.** Coming up with a re-branding strategy that develops a motto for a town can help it to “recover”. For example, the City of Fall River experienced a terrible fire sometime in the 19th century that wiped out a good portion of the city. When the Mayor was asked if the city would be able to deal with the crisis, he replied; “We’ll Try” which then became the City’s motto written on all City letterhead, buildings, and even on the sides of police cars. When working on the Master Plan the Consultants pointed out that this was actually a negative message (e.g. “not sure we will be able to do it, but we will try”). The City changed the motto to “Pride-City Wide.” That alone may not be responsible for more confidence in the residents, but it reportedly has had a positive impact on people’s attitudes.

## 4. Hold a Contest (Town Manager) to help increase community pride

**Purpose: To prove that participation means something, that things can and actually do happen in Southbridge:**

- Announce the contest
- Ideas should be submitted in writing
- Town Manager selects a small number of small, doable projects suggested by residents to do within the next 6 months (or whatever time period).
- Proposals would have to cost less than a fixed amount of money each.
- Acknowledge the “winner and winning ideas,”
- Suggestions should fulfill one or more of listed criteria, including such things as:
  - Help to bring people of different ethnic backgrounds, generations, etc.,
  - Be a physical improvement to a particular neighborhood, or
  - Make a difference in the life of children.

## 5. The “KEY” to Southbridge’s future is its diversity

- Collect list of events, each group’s festivals, gift certificates, buy one/second one free, church happenings, etc.
- Translate and make in the form of an invitation.
- Make all more aware of what other groups are doing and make them feel actually invited to join.

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- Make a “key” on the cover of the booklet.
- Goals:
  - Getting people to go more places, expanding their experience of the city.
  - Giving them the opportunity to explore some of its resources and generally start to lift the spirit.

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## APPENDIX 1: PROCESS

The eighteen-month Master Plan process was comprised of several phases (see process diagram on next page).

An INVENTORY OF the town's EXISTING resources was completed. Information was documented for each of the seven (7) Master Plan elements:

- Housing and Population,
- Economic Development,
- Public Facilities and Services,
- Transportation and Circulation,
- Natural Resources, Open Space and Recreation,
- Cultural and Historic Resources, and
- Land Use and Zoning.

These were summarized in a series of Summary Sheets. Both the summary sheets and the individual inventories are included in Volume II of the Plan.

Next, a VISION AND GOALS were created based on an extensive PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS described in the pages that follow. These describe the common values expressed by participants and describe a desired future.

OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES were identified. A series of ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS were held with experts and interested parties; the public was also invited. The purpose of these was to develop a meaningful Implementation Plan with feasible strategies.

The GOALS are the following:

- 7.0 To Promote Health, Safety and Wellness
- 8.0 To Promote Education for All
- 9.0 To Improve Housing and Neighborhoods
- 10.0 To Increase Economic Development Town-wide and Improve the Downtown
- 11.0 To Ensure Environmental Sustainability
- 12.0 To Increase Community Pride

The IMPLEMENTATION PLAN is presented in table format and is organized around the above listed goals for which objectives and strategies are listed as ways of achieving these. The tables also includes such information as existing resources, action steps, funding need, notes, lead and partners and priority/timing.



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#### LIST OF VENUES

The following is a list of meetings held as part of the master planning process.

#### STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS (12)

April 18, 2012

May 16, 2012      Planning Board

May 31, 2012      Discover Southbridge tour

June 6, 2012      Planning Board

September 25, 2012

October 9, 2012

October 23, 2012

November 8, 2012

December 4, 2012

January 29, 2013

February 26, 2013

May 28, 2013

#### MEETINGS WITH TOWN OFFICIALS

- Interviews with Town Department Heads, Committees and Commissions.
- Neighborhood Walk with Town Manager and Town Department Heads.
- Roundtable with Town Department Heads.

#### TOWN-WIDE PUBLIC FORUMS

Focus Group, Private Home      November 11, 2012

Eagles Hall\*      November 14, 2012

Jacob Edwards Library      November 15, 2012

Community Center(senior citizens)      November 16, 2012

Middle/High School (high school seniors)      November 27, 2012

Charleton Street School      November 27, 2012

West Street School      November 29, 2012

Southbridge Community Connections\*      December 5, 2012

Man/Woman on the street Interviews      December 5, 2012

Reporting Back      December 12, 2012

Presenting the Plan      June 26, 2013

\* conducted both in English and Spanish

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#### ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

A series of roundtable discussions were held to further address key issues identified in the planning process. The purpose of these was to invite experts and interested parties to discuss the issues and identify specific strategies appropriate for Southbridge.

Healthy and Safe Community	March 27, 2013
Downtown Revitalization & Economic Development -wide	March 28, 2013
Business Community	April 30, 2013
Promote Education For All	April 3, 2013
School Department	April 11, 2013
Sustainability	April 4, 2013
Community Pride: Playback Theater interactive theatrical performance	April 6, 2013
Neighborhood Improvement	April 8, 2013

Neighborhood Walk with Town  
Department Heads

April 26, 2013

Town Department Heads

April 30, 2013

Information from this was incorporated into the Implementation Plan which was subsequently reviewed by the participants of the Roundtable Discussions as well as the Town Manager and Town Department Heads.

Additionally, COMMENT BOARDS were available for written input and were located at:

- Town Hall,
- Library,
- High School,
- Community Connections,
- YMCA,
- Three local banks, and
- Arts Center.

A Facebook page provided a way for residents to provide continuous commentary as well as to be updated on the planning process. The page has one-hundred and seventy-eight (178) members.

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**APPENDIX 2 MASTER PLAN ELEMENT SUMMARY MATRIX**

	Historic and Cultural Resources	Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources	Housing and Neighborhoods	Economic Development	Transportation and Circulation	Public Services and Facilities	Land Use and Zoning
<b>GOAL 1 TO PROMOTE HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLNESS</b>							
1.1.1 Increase access to health care						<b>X</b>	
1.1.2. Reduce incidence of diseases						<b>X</b>	
1.1.3. Research potential environmental causes of illness			<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>	
1.2.1. Increase awareness of health and wellness						<b>X</b>	
1.2.2. Make walking safer and more pleasant	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
1.2.3. Promote Bicycling		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>	
1.2.4. Increase access to existing recreational facilities		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>	
1.2.5. Provide additional opportunities for recreation and fitness		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
1.2.6. Promote healthy eating		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>	
1.3.1. Address safety and perceived lack of safety		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
1.3.2. Improve cleanliness & general appearance		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
1.3.3. Improve lighting		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
1.3.4. Explore options for accommodating facility needs for Fire Department						<b>X</b>	
1.3.5. Continue Town Manager's "Neighborhood Walks"	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

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	Historic and Cultural Resources	Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources	Housing and Neighborhoods	Economic Development	Transportation and Circulation	Public Services and Facilities	Land Use and Zoning
<b>GOAL 2 TO PROMOTE EDUCATION FOR ALL</b>							
2.1.1 Increase parental involvement in schools						<b>X</b>	
2.1.2 Increase school enrollment and diversify population			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
2.1.3 Improve communication and transparency						<b>X</b>	
2.1.4 Improve early childhood education						<b>X</b>	
2.1.5 Expand arts, humanities, and industrial arts programs	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
2.1.6 Increase support for teachers						<b>X</b>	
2.1.7 Upgrade/ expand physical education and nutrition programs		<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>	
2.1.8 Provide support for at-risk youth	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
2.1.9 Maintain and improve school buildings and grounds	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>	
2.1.10 Upgrade transportation system connecting to schools			<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
2.1.11 Maximize use of school buildings for educational purposes	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
2.2.1 Increase awareness of existing resources and the importance of education and job training				<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
2.2.2 Provide more ESL/ ESOL programs	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
2.2.3 Provide more Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs and GED programs				<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	

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<b>GOAL 2 TO PROMOTE EDUCATION FOR ALL (continued)</b>							
2.2.4 Support/ expand literacy volunteers program				X		X	
2.2.5 Create Community Education Liaison	X	X				X	
2.2.6 Institute a “language swap” program	X					X	
2.3.1 Broaden opportunities for adults to attend colleges				X	X	X	
2.3.2 Broaden opportunities for adults to obtain job training				X	X	X	
2.3.4 Develop program for posting internship and volunteer “trials” for graduates				X		X	
2.4.1 Expand opportunities for seniors to become involved socially and recreationally	X	X	X		X	X	
2.4.2 Expand seniors’ access to health, housing, and nutritional information	X		X			X	
<b>GOAL 3 TO IMPROVE HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS</b>							
3.1.1 Upgrade or replace housing in poorest condition	X		X	X		X	
3.1.2 Publicize desirability of successful housing developments			X	X			
3.1.3 Seek special designation from state that allows use of increased tax credits and low interest loans	X		X	X			X
3.1.4 Use new special state designation or alternative program as an incentive for housing developers	X		X	X			X

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<b>GOAL 3 TO IMPROVE HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS</b>							
3.1.5 Create and empower neighborhood organizations to monitor conditions and seek remediation/ improvements	X	X	X			X	
3.1.6 Identify improvement projects that neighborhood organizations can work on	X	X	X			X	
3.2.1 Encourage landlords to repair and improve their properties	X		X	X		X	
3.2.2 Encourage tenants re repair and improve the housing they live in	X		X	X		X	
3.3.1 Provide allocation in annual Town Budgets to neighborhood improvements	X		X	X		X	
3.3.2 Create and enhance neighborhood-scale public spaces		X	X			X	
3.3.3 Upgrade zoning bylaw to guide neighborhood improvements	X	X	X				X
<b>GOAL 4 TO IMPROVE DOWNTOWN AND INCREASE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</b>							
4.1.1 Improve all aspects of safety downtown				X	X	X	
4.1.2 Protect historic buildings and maximize use potential	X		X	X		X	X
4.1.3 Attract more retail stores and restaurants	X			X		X	X
4.1.4 Develop active streetscape with outdoor uses and later business hours	X			X	X	X	X
4.1.5 Hold new and more downtown events	X			X		X	



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<b>GOAL 4 TO IMPROVE DOWNTOWN AND INCREASE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (continued)</b>							
4.1.6 Evaluate location of Welfare Office				X		X	
4.1.7 Improve cleanliness	X	X	X	X	X	X	
4.1.8 Enhance connections between Downtown and River	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4.2.1 Improve walkability including sidewalks, handicap ramps, and crosswalks			X	X	X	X	
4.2.2 Improve traffic operations, safety, and reduce delay on Main Street				X	X	X	
4.2.3 Provide more parking				X	X	X	X
4.2.4 Improve Gateways and create “Sense of Place” downtown	X	X		X	X	X	X
4.2.5 Explore downtown circulator bus service				X	X	X	
4.3.1 Promote reuse of mill buildings	X		X	X			X
4.3.2 Leverage Southbridge Industrial Park to attract employers				X			
4.3.3 Expand airport business potential				X	X	X	
4.3.4 Continue to provide tax incentives to businesses				X			
4.3.5 Attract new businesses				X			
4.3.6 Retain and expand existing businesses				X			
4.3.7 Develop partnerships/ linkages between colleges and employers				X			

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<b>GOAL 4 TO IMPROVE DOWNTOWN AND INCREASE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (continued)</b>							
4.3.8 Identify new or expanding markets (tourism, etc.)	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
<b>GOAL 5 TO RECOGNIZE AND ACT ON THE FACT THAT SOUTHBRIDGE'S FUTURE WELL-BEING DEPENDS ON PROTECTING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT</b>							
5.1.1 Increase awareness of the need to plan for the future of our environment		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
5.1.2 Hold environmental awareness events			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
5.1.3 Promote recycling		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	
5.1.4 Encourage "green" work places				<b>X</b>			
5.1.5 Increase programs to teach about "green" products and practices			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
5.2.1 Prepare for the effects of more frequent storms						<b>X</b>	
5.2.2 Promote local food production capacity		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
5.3.1 Assure that source water areas are protected from contamination		<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
5.3.2 Adopt green infrastructure stormwater management provisions		<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
5.3.3 Regulate development to minimize impacts on water resources		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
5.4.1 Promote energy conservation/ transportation programs		<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	

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<b>GOAL 5 TO RECOGNIZE AND ACT ON THE FACT THAT SOUTHBRIDGE’S FUTURE WELL-BEING DEPENDS ON PROTECTING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT (continued)</b>							
5.4.2 Promote/ expand efforts for conservation and producing energy with renewable sources		X				X	
5.4.3 Continue and initiate new programs to use renewable energy for municipal purposes						X	
5.5.1 Protect important natural resource areas		X					X
5.5.2 Encourage open space residential development in new subdivisions to protect open space and make linkages		X	X	X			X
<b>GOAL 6 TO INCREASE COMMUNITY PRIDE</b>							
6.1.1 Improve the gateways coming into town				X	X	X	
6.1.2 Make Southbridge a destination	X	X		X		X	
6.2.1 Have more town-wide events to build community pride	X	X		X		X	
6.2.2 Demonstrate progress	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.2.3 Improve tone of public discourse						X	
6.2.4 Improve the downtown (the “living room” of the community)	X	X		X	X	X	X
6.2.5 Maintain public buildings	X			X		X	
6.2.6 Increase awareness and pride in the community’s history	X	X	X	X		X	

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	Historic and Cultural Resources	Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources	Housing and Neighborhoods	Economic Development	Transportation and Circulation	Public Services and Facilities	Land Use and Zoning
<b>GOAL 6 TO INCREASE COMMUNITY PRIDE (continued)</b>							
6.2.7 Develop a “Positively Southbridge” OR “Southbridge Has It All” campaign	X	X	X	X		X	
6.2.8 Continue Town Manager’s “Neighborhood Walks”	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.2.9 Hold a contest for ideas for increasing community pride				X		X	
6.2.10 Involve youth in the planning process						X	
6.2.11 Encourage Town Department Head to “lead by example”						X	
6.3.1 Increase Latino representation at Town Hall						X	
6.3.2 Address racism	X					X	
6.3.3 Promote multi-cultural events	X					X	
6.3.4 Increase opportunities for community gathering	X	X	X	X		X	
6.3.5 Name street or plaza for prominent individuals of various ethnic backgrounds	X	X			X	X	

## APPENDIX 3 – REVIEW OF ZONING BYLAW

Southbridge has a modern set of Zoning Bylaws that were adopted in 1985, entirely replacing an earlier set of bylaws adopted in 1941, with amendments through 1974. The current Zoning Bylaws have amendments through 2004. The Bylaws are administered by the Planning Board and enforced by the Building Inspector, with assistance from the Department of Public Works.

### SUMMARY:

To meet objectives of the Master Plan it is recommended that some industrial land along the Quinebaug River be rezoned to residential, allowing for multi-family development, with mixed uses. It is possible to create multi-family housing in the industrial zones with a special permit now, but rezoning some choice property for residential use and allowing it by right would be a more pronounced and effective way of gaining the uses desired and allowing and encouraging greater access to the river.

Many uses in the Zoning Bylaw are subject to special permits. This puts a large burden on the Planning Board, acting as the Special Permit Granting Authority. This burden is not felt when there is slow or negative growth. However, if growth speeds up, hopefully, as a result of master plan implementation actions, the Planning Board may find itself burdened beyond its capacity to handle special permit applications. It is recommended that a review of special permit requirements be done in order to change some of them to “by-right” conditions.

Although more than 90% of the town’s development has public sewers there are some conditions where future residential and commercial development may want to use on-site septic systems. The current requirement for such development is a minimum lot size of 30,000 square

feet. This may not be enough in areas where there are slope and soil conditions that need more than 30,000 square feet. 66% of Southbridge soils have development limitations. It is recommended that more than 30,000 square feet be required as minimum lot sizes in such areas. Manchester, New Hampshire has conditions similar to Southbridge (an older mill town on a river surrounded by hills with residential and commercial development). Manchester has a zoning requirement that larger lots be required where slope and soils present problems for on-site septic systems. Their requirements are attached to this review. It is recommended that Southbridge consider using such a similar range of minimum lot sizes.

### SPECIFIC COMMENTS:

Section III, 300.45(i) The definition of “Trading in Merchandise” would be clarified by adding the phrase “except where merchandise is located on other premises and does not pass through the home base business premises.”

401.4 Add “All unregistered motor vehicles and trailers must be kept behind buildings on the lot on which they are located.”

501 Need to define “status” of the neighborhood. It is ambiguous and subject to conflicting interpretations if left undefined.

502.1 Rezone some LI and HI for residential uses along the river, preferably in places with relatively easy walking access to nearby commercial areas.

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502.4.11 Question: Can federal, state or county uses be subject to special permits?

Section XV Flood plain regulations. Just a reminder to find out when new flood plain maps for Southbridge will be issued. They have been issued for some communities.

502.4.94 Same question: Can other non-specified town uses be subject to special permits?

502.75 Yard and garage sales are not permitted in Single-Family, 2-Family and Multi-Family zones. They should be allowed by some sort of permitting process because they help build neighborhood interactions and spirit.

502.14 Under Accessory Uses “Home Based Businesses” are subject to a special permit in every zone. This is an additional somewhat unusual burden for the Planning Board, acting as the Special Permit Granting Authority. Most towns simply require home based businesses to register and obtain a certificate from the Town Clerk who reminds them in writing that they are subject to zoning regulations.

502.145 Specify that the 3 motor vehicles per dwelling unit allowed to be parked for a home based business must be parked on the lot and off the public street.

502.16 Adult uses are allowed by special permit in all commercial and industrial zones. Does the town want to be more restrictive than that? Many towns are, confining adult uses to remote parts of town in industrial zones.

703.3k Need a definition (to be placed in Section III, Definitions) of “Predominant Use” where mixed uses are permitted.

705.3C2b Spell out what dbh means.

705.3F3a(3) The phrase “by operation of law” is vague. What does it refer to?

CITY OF MANCHESTER, NH

MINIMUM LOT SIZE REQUIREMENTS FOR ON-SITE SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS

(1) When a lot for a single-family residence has more than one soil type, the lot size shall be calculated on the basis of the site loading for each soil type. However, in all cases there shall be a minimum of 23,500 contiguous square feet of soil suitable for a receiving layer. At least 4,000 square feet of this contiguous area shall be suitable for the placement of an individual sewage disposal system.

(2) To show the suitable contiguous area, the applicant shall:

- (a) Show the area on the plan with the test pit; or
- (b) Submit an acceptable individual sewage disposal system design meeting all other requirements of the

CITY OF MANCHESTER AND NH DES.

(3) When test pits indicate conditions better than those implied by the Natural Resource Conservation Service soil maps, a staff member of the Health Department shall look at test pits to determine the soil capability. When the owner reports conditions worse than those indicated by the Natural Resource Conservation Service soil maps, then the owner's data shall be used as a basis for calculating minimum lot size.

(4) Land created by filling with soil from offsite, as classified by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, shall be assessed by its own soil characteristics.

(5) Ponds, streams, perennially wet areas and very poorly drained soils shall not be included in calculating minimum lot size, even though lot boundaries might include these areas. However, Group 5 soils may fulfill up to 25% of the required minimum lot size.

(6) An interest in land conveyed by an easement or right-of-way such as for power lines, which allows the grantor to dispose of sewage within the easement or right-of-way may be counted in figuring the grantor's lot size. However, the easement or right-of-way land area shall not be counted as disposal area by the grantee.

(7) Areas of ledge outcrop shall not be counted for sewage loading.

(8) The slope of the land shall be figured in the lot size requirements. Land with slope in excess of 35% shall not be counted toward minimum lot size requirements. The lot shall have an area with a slope less than 15% suitable for the location of an effluent disposal area.

(9) The slope of the lot shall be determined by finding the average slope across the lot, measured perpendicular to the contours.

(10) For lots with peaks, gullies, or ridges, composite average slope shall be used.

MINIMUM LOT SIZES – RESIDENTIAL, 1 TO 4 BEDROOMS

The minimum lot size for single-family residences of not more than 4 bedrooms, where each lot has or is proposed to have municipal water supply and an on-site sewage disposal system shall be determined in accordance with the following:



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<b>Manchester – with municipal water in sq. ft.</b>					
Soil Group	1	2	3	4	5
Slope					
0-8% or A/B	23,500 1	26,000	32,000	32,000	NB
9-15% C	25,000	29,000	38,500	40,000	NB
16-25% D	28,200 1.2	36,660 1.56	48,880 2.08	40,655 1.73	NB
26-35% E	30,550 1.3	39,715 1.69	56,400 2.4	44,650 1.9	NB

The minimum lot size for single-family residences of not more than 4 bedrooms, where each lot has or is proposed to an on-site water supply and an on-site sewage disposal system shall be determined in accordance with the following:

<b>Manchester – with on-site water in sq. ft.</b>					
Soil Group	1	2	3	4	5
Slope					
0-8% or A/B	35,250 1	39,000	48,000	48,000	NB
9-15% C	37,500	43,500	57,750	60,000	NB
16-25% D	42,300 1.2	54,990 1.56	73,320 2.08	60,983 1.73	NB
26-35% E	45,825 1.3	59,573 1.69	84,600 2.4	66,975 1.9	NB

For purposes of determining minimum lot sizes, soil groups shall be as follows:

- (a) Group 1 soils shall be well-drained to excessively well-drained soils with rapid permeability.

- (b) Group 2 soils shall be well-drained soils with moderate permeability.

- (c) Group 3 soils shall be moderately well-drained and well-drained hardpan.

- (d) Group 4 soils shall be bedrock relatively close to the surface. Where ledge is encountered, Group 4 soils shall apply.

- (e) Group 5 soils shall be poorly-drained soils (not buildable).

- (f) Group 6 soils shall be very poorly-drained soils (not buildable).

- (g) Specific names of soils in each group are attached.

#### MINIMUM LOT SIZE REQUIREMENTS COMMERCIAL AND OTHER RESIDENTIAL LOTS:

Minimum lot sizes shown above are for single-family residences with no more than 4 bedrooms. Other uses may necessitate larger lot sizes, which shall be computed in accordance with NH DES guidelines, except that the lot sizes for a planned residential development, group residence, condominium association, or similar development shall be consistent with the following:

- (1) Development on the lot shall be such that dwelling density is consistent with lot size requirements for single family homes listed on the chart above, or
- (2) Development of the lot may be in accordance with NH DES guidelines providing that a suitable area for a replacement effluent disposal system is reserved on the lot for use in the event that a replacement effluent disposal system becomes necessary.

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The reserved area shall meet the requirement so the City of Manchester and the NH DES and shall be clearly portrayed on the development plan.