



PLAN NH  
*Visioning for Sustainable Communities*



# West Swanzey Charrette

November 2012





# P R E F A C E

In early 2011, Swanzey submitted an application to Plan New Hampshire for a design charrette, and was one of four towns selected by the organization as a charrette town for the 2012 year.

On November 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Plan New Hampshire came to Swanzey. Plan NH's charge focused on the vitality of the West Swanzey Village as a center of economic activity, community identity, and a town center. Plan NH's charrette team set out to understand how Swanzey's residents saw the West Swanzey Village, its place in the larger community of Swanzey, and what the community envisioned for itself.

Issues addressed included, but were not limited to: how the existing, under-utilized buildings in the Village can be repurposed to create economic vitality and community gathering places; vehicular and pedestrian safety; community open space; infrastructure improvements and aesthetic appearances of the streetscape and buildings. Additional discussions regarding pathways and trails connecting the Village to features and recreational venues in outlying portions of the town and region were also considered. Plan New Hampshire arrived on Friday noon – a team of volunteer professionals from within the building industry, each with an interest in the logistical aspects of making recommendations, and also a deep commitment to helping the community itself. On Friday, the Team listened to townspeople, explored the target area, learned the history of the community, heard about its economic, social and environmental structures, and listened to expressions of hope and pride. On Saturday, the team talked about what they heard, what they concluded, and what recommendations they would make. They then made many of these recommendations visual, and in the afternoon, made a presentation to the town.





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincerest thanks go to the individuals and groups who donated their professional expertise and personal time to make the West Swanzey Charrette a success. Also, many thanks to the citizens, businesses, and town officials who shared their time, energy, services, thoughts and knowledge with us.

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



## Meet Me On Main! Steering Committee Members -

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Mike Gomarlo  
Kathy Habiby  
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Susan Karalekas  
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## Swanzey Board of Selectmen -

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Nancy Carlson  
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## Swanzey Town Administrator - Shane O'Keefe

## Homestead Woolen Mills -

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## Swanzey Planning Board Members - Glenn Page, Scott Self, Jeff Goller, Joe Smith

## Cutler School - Joe Smith

## Swanzey Economic Development Advisory Members - Steven Bittel, Arthur Boufford & Lynn Rust

## Swanzey Police Chief - Tom DeAngelis

## Swanzey DPW - Ann Bedaw

## Swanzey Conservation Commission Members - Steve Stepenuck, Theresa DiLuzio

## Swanzey Open Space Committee Members - Jeanne Thieme, Theresa DiLuzio, Beverly Bernard, Ken Colby, Sharon Greatbatch

## Whitcomb Hall Committee Members - Nancy Carlson, Hayley Hill, Peter Johnson, Ken Sevene

## West Swanzey Village Historic District Walking Tour Brochure Committee Members - Mike Gomarlo & Richard Scaramelli

## West Swanzey Sidewalk Committee Members - Lena Whipple, Marion Bedard, Ernest Perry, Mike Gomarlo

## Swanzey Historical Committee Members - Ernest Perry, Mary Faulkner

## Additional Thank You's to:

Bridges Inn (Susan Karalekas), Gomarlo's Food & Circus (Mike Gomarlo), Cheshire TV, John Bridges, LLS - Then & Now Exhibit, John Traynor - Whitcomb Hall Painting, First Student/First Group, Dunkin' Donuts, The Keene Sentinel

## Swanzey DPW - Mike Lilly, Art Whipple, Jr.

## Food Team - Mary Anne McClouskey, Ridgely Brown, Kathy Habiby, Hayley Hill, Sara Sheehan, Beverly Therrien

## Swanzey Historical Museum

## Former Swanzey Town Administrator - Beth Fox

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## West Swanzy Charrette Team

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# B A C K G R O U N D

## Who is Plan NH?

Plan New Hampshire, The Foundation for Shaping the Built Environment (Plan NH) is an association of professionals working in the built environment. The organization includes architects, planners, engineers, landscape architects, builders, historic preservationists, construction managers, as well as others who concern themselves with sustainable communities and buildings. Plan NH was established to create a forum for bringing together these different professional groups and to serve as a catalyst for spurring interest in participatory community development. Part of Plan NH's mission is to make a positive contribution to New Hampshire communities. One way in which Plan NH does this is by providing planning and design assistance to communities with a demonstrated commitment and need. It was for this reason that Plan NH accepted Swanzey's application and selected the community of West Swanzey as one of the charrette sites for the 2012 year.

## What is a Charrette?

Simply stated, a Charrette is a brief, yet intense, brainstorming session in which much information and many ideas are brought together for the purpose of defining potential planning recommendations and possible design solutions for an identified need. The charrette is typically of a short duration. And most importantly, it involves the combined efforts of planning and design professionals, or others with related areas of expertise, with local residents, community representatives or "stakeholders" to collect information needed to develop conclusions about how to solve a problem. The broad range of experience and knowledge represented in a charrette results in general and over arching planning and design recommendations, rather than specific, "how to" construction directions. Most often the outcome of a charrette is described as a "vision": an expression of how things might be and the features, conditions, qualities and characteristics that would need to exist in order for it to come true. What is most unique about Plan NH's charrette process is the way it involves and engages the host community's residents. Their input is both essential and critical to the ultimate success of the charrette. The charrette provides an overall framework within which final solutions can be developed. It sets a tone and provides a direction against which future decisions may be measured.



## Why did Plan NH come to West Swanzey Village?

Plan NH came to West Swanzey Village as the result of an application submitted to Plan NH by concerned community representatives. (Please refer to Exhibit 1) Their application was reviewed by Plan NH representatives during a meeting in early 2012. West Swanzey Village was one of six communities chosen for a charrette in 2010 by Plan NH.

The application revealed three essential conditions:

Condition 1: The completed application identified a specific area of need and interest within the community that it was eager and ready to move ahead with.

Condition 2: The application's description of existing conditions in the community demonstrated that there was organized and committed community support already present in Swanzey.

Condition 3: Swanzey was recognized as a community that had a history of demonstrating initiative and follow through. These three conditions made Plan NH's decision to come to West Swanzey Village in 2012 one in which there was high confidence that our combined efforts would result in a significant benefit to not only West Swanzey Village, but the region as well.

## The Charrette Process

The charrette process is described as follows:

1. Identify the need or opportunity
2. Collect information to understand the need or issue
3. Evaluate and analyze the information
4. Synthesize conclusions and recommendation for meeting the need and fulfilling the existing opportunity.

Following this outline of steps, Plan NH's Charrette Team was organized to come to West Swanzey Village with the intention of focusing upon West Swanzey Village's Main Street and the opportunities of improving:

1. the vitality of the community's downtown as a center of economic activity, and community identity.
  2. the repurposing of key public and privately owned buildings within the Village.
  3. vehicular and pedestrian safety,
  4. access and availability to community open space,
  5. way-finding,
  6. infrastructure improvements and aesthetic appearances of the streetscape and buildings.
- Additional discussions regarding pathways and trails connecting downtown amenities to features and recreational venues in outlying portions of the town and region were also anticipated.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

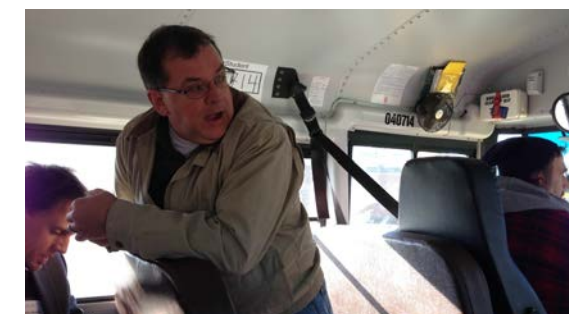
The Town of Swanzey's original charrette application identified Whitcomb Hall as the focus of the request. Although Plan NH does not focus on individual buildings, it became apparent that Whitcomb Hall could potentially become the catalyst for broader village revitalization. To determine what possibilities existed for a charrette, Plan NH Executive Director, Robin LeBlanc and Plan NH board member, Hunter Ulf met with Sara Carbonneau and two members of the Whitcomb Hall Committee to discuss a charrette that focused on Main Street in its entirety, and any additional, peripheral areas that played a key role to the Village's vitality. The Town of Swanzey revised their application based on the conclusions drawn from the meeting, and Plan NH agreed to conduct the charrette.

The Plan NH Charrette Team arrived in West Swanzey on Friday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and conducted a team meeting to coordinate roles and responsibilities. The Homestead Woolen Mills provided Meeting and workspace to the Team. Following this initial meeting, the Team met with key community stakeholders that included: members of the Whitcomb Hall Committee; the Swanzey Town Planner; the Swanzey Town Administrator; members of the



Swanzey Board of Selectmen; and some Swanzey Planning Board Members. This group reiterated the core message outlined in the application that told of a West Swanzey Village that once existed and served as the primary resource for most all community needs and socialization. We were told that Route 10 caused the relocation of much of West Swanzey's commercial activity, and the closing of the Homestead Mill deprived residents of local jobs. Whitcomb Hall, a primary Town gathering spot, had been condemned due to lack of code compliance and deferred maintenance. The Town wanted to recapture what they once had.

Many of the key stakeholders then joined the Team for a bus tour of the Town in order to put the West Swanzey Village in the context of the entire Town. Joe Smith, the Cutler School Principal, narrated the tour. The tour began at the Cutler School and covered the following areas:



- Denman Thompson Avenue past the water treatment facility
- Eaton Road to Swanzey past Mt. Caesar School and Monadnock Regional High School
- Old Homestead Highway past the TIF District, airport, and Wilson Pond
- Lake Street to Route 12 past the Cheshire Fair Grounds and Route 12 retail activity
- Flat Roof Mill Road to Swanzey Lake Road to Homestead Avenue
- Route 10 back to West Street and the Cutler School

Following the bus tour, the Team joined other community members for a walking tour of Main Street that described its architecture and history. We then took a tour of Whitcomb Hall.



The first of two listening sessions took place immediately following the walking tour. This session was well attended and five groups of Swanzey Town residents discussed what they saw as the most desirable future for West Swanzey Village. Some of the key observations and comments included:

- Retaining the historic, rural village character
- Establishing a better public amenity along the Ashuelot River
- More economic vitality within the Village Center
- Restoration/repurposing of the Homestead Woolen Mills
- Rehabilitation of Whitcomb Hall
- The reestablishment of a self-sufficient, "walkable" village





The Team enjoyed a wonderful community dinner at the Cutler School in between the listening sessions. The second listening session had about half of the attendance of the first, but provided an equal amount of insight, knowledge, and information. The two sessions allowed the Team to learn about Swanzey, its history and needs, and the consequences of a State Route bordering the Village and the loss of the Mill as its main economic driver.

Before retiring to the comfortable accommodations provided to us at the Bridges Inn, the Team concluded the day with a debriefing session to determine what was learned, identify some of the key community needs and visions, and what opportunities existed for possible solutions.

On Saturday morning the following day, the Charrette Team reconvened at the Homestead Woolen Mills to begin synthesizing what we had heard the day before and brainstorm possible recommendations that would address the needs and vision of the community. The recommendations needed to:

- Revitalize Main Street in a way that would support commercial activity
- Create public amenities that would give the community opportunities to come together
- Take full advantage of the river as a natural and recreational resource.

The Team determined that some of the key points to include in the recommendations were:

- Make existing “entry” points more identifiable into the Village center from Route 10
- Improve pedestrian and vehicular circulation by reopening the section of Winchester Street that had been closed by the construction of the Mill expansion
- Create a visually consistent extension of Main Street west, beyond the covered bridge
- Enhance public open space by providing greater access to the river
- Determine the best uses for the existing under-utilized buildings
- Identify appropriate commercial activities for the Village Center that would not compete with Route 10 businesses
- An implementation plan that could serve as the beginning of an action plan to move forward



In order to further develop these recommendations and put them in a form that could be presented to the community that afternoon, the Team decided to focus on the following five things:

1. A macro-view of the West Swanzey Village and its relationship to Route 10.
2. A streetscape/landscape plan of Main Street and the Ashuelot River access.
3. A conceptual rehabilitation plan for the Homestead Woolen Mills.
4. An analysis of the Towns current zoning ordinance and potential barriers to the desired Town vision.
5. An implementation plan with conceptual phasing strategies.

The Team broke into sub-groups and began working around 10 AM.







# WHAT WE HEARD

Its Main Street character, comprised of mixed uses and architectural styles, defines the West Swanze Village. The Village's landmarks include the Homestead Woolen Mills, the Covered Bridge, and Whitcomb Hall. In addition, there are wonderful examples of historic architecture that include the library, the church, and many stately homes.

When asked, "what do you see?", listening session participants' comments included:

- A place looking for identity
- Underutilized buildings and natural resources
- A town not supporting itself
- Historical and architectural quality

The West Swanze Village has good infrastructure already in place that includes municipal sewer, municipal water to and around the Homestead Mills, and an established pedestrian sidewalk system.

When asked, "what possibilities do you see?", listening session participants' comments included:

- Use of the river as a public amenity
- Repurposing of the underutilized buildings for mixed commercial and residential uses
- The return of Whitcomb Hall as a community gathering place
- The Homestead Mills as a premium mixed-use development that could include a senior center, doctors offices, specialty food stores, galleries, and a micro-brewery
- Sustainable economic development



The majority of Swanze's population (60%-65%) lives in the West Swanze Village, and it is felt by many that it is the only remaining, intact village in Swanze. Unfortunately, the West Swanze Village has felt the effects of Route 10 by-passing the Village and attracting most of the new commercial growth. Some of the past industrial heritage still remains and residents of the Village see themselves differently than the rest of Swanze, which has remained agricultural and/or become a bedroom community to Keene.

When asked, "how do you see West Swanze in relation to the rest of Swanze, and to the region?", listening session participant's comments included:

- The Village has the cultural "bones" of the town
- It is a traditional village center with an industrial, blue collar past
- The Village has the greatest potential for being an economic and recreation hub for the Town and region

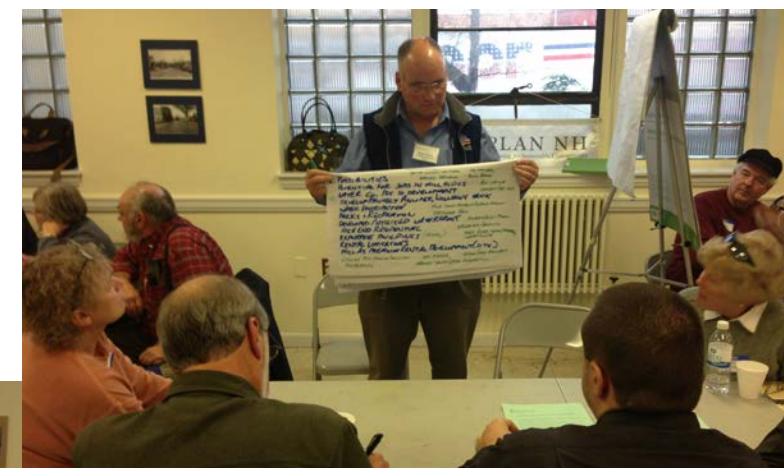
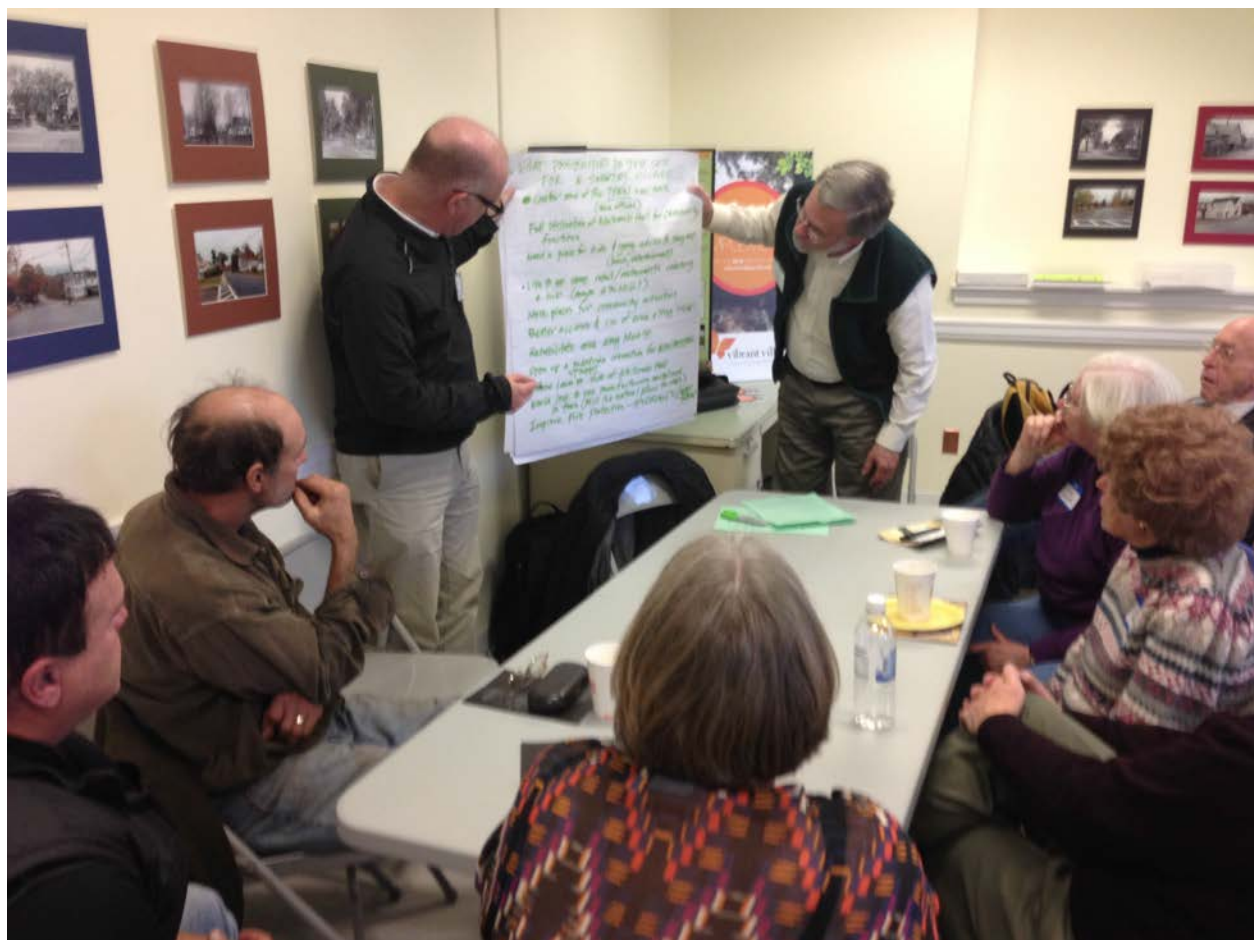


When listening session participants' were asked, "what do you value – what's important to you and to the community?", their comments include:

- A residential village with easy access to services
- A high quality of life
- A sense of community and community pride
- A natural setting with outdoor recreational opportunities
- Maintaining the Village's heritage and preserving its past

The listening sessions also asked participants to inform the Charrette Team as to things that would be helpful to know, which may not be readily apparent. Some of the comments included:

- There is some disunity between the different areas that make up the Town of Swanzey
- There is a need for appropriate and supportive zoning
- Swanzey experiences some positive impact as the host of the Keene airport
- The Village of West Swanzey lies above excellent soils and a good aquifer
- The quality of education in Swanzey is questionable
- Some of the fire hydrants on Main Street are not active

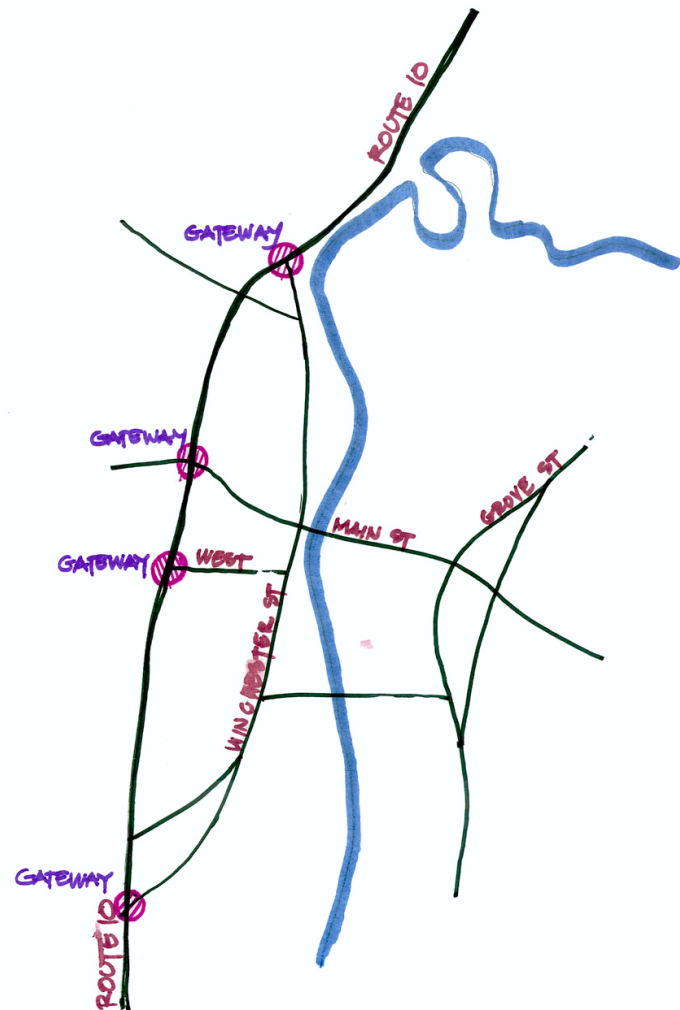




# RECOMMENDATIONS

It quickly became apparent that the future well-being of Whitcomb Hall depended more on that of the whole community and on economic activity in the village than on its own usefulness. The charrette process led to another realization: The Homestead Woolen Mills buildings and the Ashuelot River are assets with tremendous potential for the future of the West Swanzey Village and its Main Street. Effectively tapped, these resources will generate the kind of economic and community activity that could enable, among other opportunities, the rejuvenation of Whitcomb Hall. With the river as the feature and focal point of the village, the Mills can be transformed into a center of commercial activity – local, small-scale yet bustling businesses – along the river’s edge and radiating up Main Street. This is the basis for the vibrant village community the Plan NH Team heard the people of Swanzey talk about, and the basis for the following observations and recommendations.

## WEST SWANZEY MACRO CIRCULATION



## MACRO VIEW

Significant improvement to a set of three basic conditions will position the village of West Swanzey to realize this potential: accessibility to the village; circulation within the village; and connection to the river. In the late 1940’s automobile traffic was diverted away from the village on Route 10, and eventually with it went the local business activity and pedestrian traffic. Growth of the Woolen Mill severed Winchester Street further hampering the circulation and pedestrian activity down town. Now it is necessary to find a way to invite businesses and consumers back into the village. Creating pedestrian friendly circulation with sidewalks and foot/bicycle paths will draw people in, connecting these paths to the river’s edge will give them significant drawing capacity, and concentrated human activity will attract business development. Plan NH recommends the following three concepts be considered in addressing these conditions.

### 1. Accessibility to the village:

Create four “gateways” from Route 10 to West Swanzey village at both ends of the re-connected Winchester Street, California Street and West Street. The Team recommends these gateways have simple and attractive signing (“Welcome to West Swanzey Village”) with simple landscaping (Shrubs, trees, boulders, etc.) to make it attractive and set it off from the typical commercial signage on Route 10.

### 2. Circulation within the village:

Re-connect the two halves of Winchester Street by removing a section of the Homestead Mill warehouse that presently bisects Winchester Street. This change will open up access to the mills and enable them to be re-purposed and redeveloped as a West Swanzey village commercial center, creating an intimate, fine-grained urban space with a mix of commercial and residential uses, buildings in close proximity to each other and to the street.

### 3. Circulation/Connection to the river:

Celebrate and grow pedestrian/bicycle accessibility throughout West Swanzey. Create a West Swanzey River Heritage Trail along both sides of the Ashuelot River between Main Street and Denman Thompson Avenue and link it to the Ashuelot Rail Trail to the east and Route 10 to the west. Make sure that there are continuous sidewalks throughout the village between the rail trail, Main Street, the new Homestead Mill commercial core, Cutler School, Route 10 and other important pedestrian/bicycle destinations. Properly designed and highly visible pedestrian crossings of major roads and traffic calming measures are an essential part of this project and need to include crossings of Route 10. Work closely with a qualified traffic engineering consultant who is an expert in traffic calming, the SW Region Planning Commission, and NHDOT to implement these improvements.



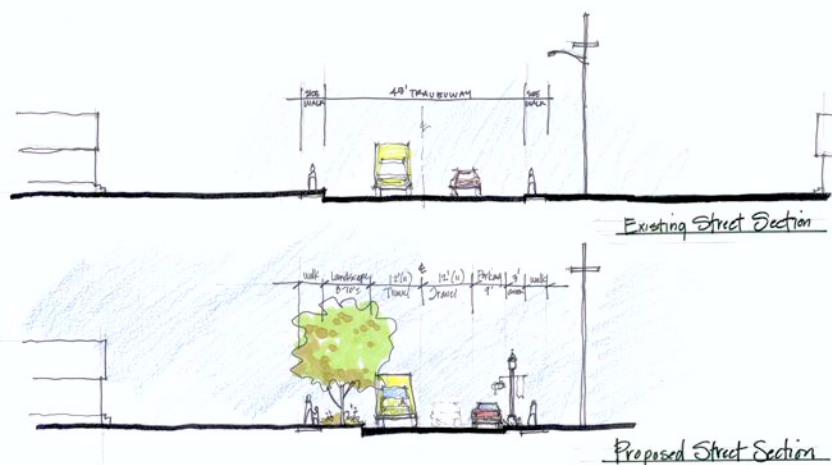
# SITE / TOWN PLAN

## West Swanzey Concept Plan Rationale

*“Vacant buildings, underutilized river, historic houses, neighborhood, walkability, lack of retail and entertainment opportunities, community”*

These were some of the comments we heard several times during our walking tour and two listening sessions on the Friday of the charrette. The people of Swanzey saw lots of potential in the West Swanzey Village but that it needed a focus, more activity and thoughtful improvements. To the east of the Thompson Covered Bridge and the Ashuelot River, the mostly residential area along Main Street has some significant landmarks, specifically Whitcomb Hall, the Stratton Free Library, the Community Church and the Bridges Inn at Whitcomb House. This area still holds its attractive traditional New England charm, albeit in a somewhat static existence. New uses for Whitcomb Hall would bring other members of the greater Swanzey community to the village while breathing a bit of evening and weekend life back into the area. West Swanzey is rightfully proud of their sidewalks, as walkability is very important to the community. Improvements to this east section of Main Street such as a landscape buffer between the sidewalk and the street (8’ with street trees on the north side and 3-4’ with grass or low plantings on the south side) and pedestrian scaled streetlights would enhance the pedestrian experience and safety. This walking network could extend to a Riverside Heritage Park potentially created on the east bank of the Ashuelot offering picnic areas and trails that might also connect to Maple Street or even the Denman Thompson Bridge. For the community to be able to physically engage with the river in these ways would add a unique and profound dimension to life in West Swanzey.

Such a connection to the river might be matched on its West side with a boardwalk or deck that extends from the mill buildings as part of their revitalization. This construct would transition to public green space lining the river’s edge. These public parks along the river can be implemented in a low-cost way to be up and running in short order, then cultivated over time to grow into the greater vision for the town. A multitude of natural and historic elements could be described and celebrated in these parks. Of course anything that is developed along the river should be done in a way that is not only practical and approachable for the entire community, but is resilient to the natural behaviors of the river (i.e. when flood waters recede little is lost and life in the park goes on).



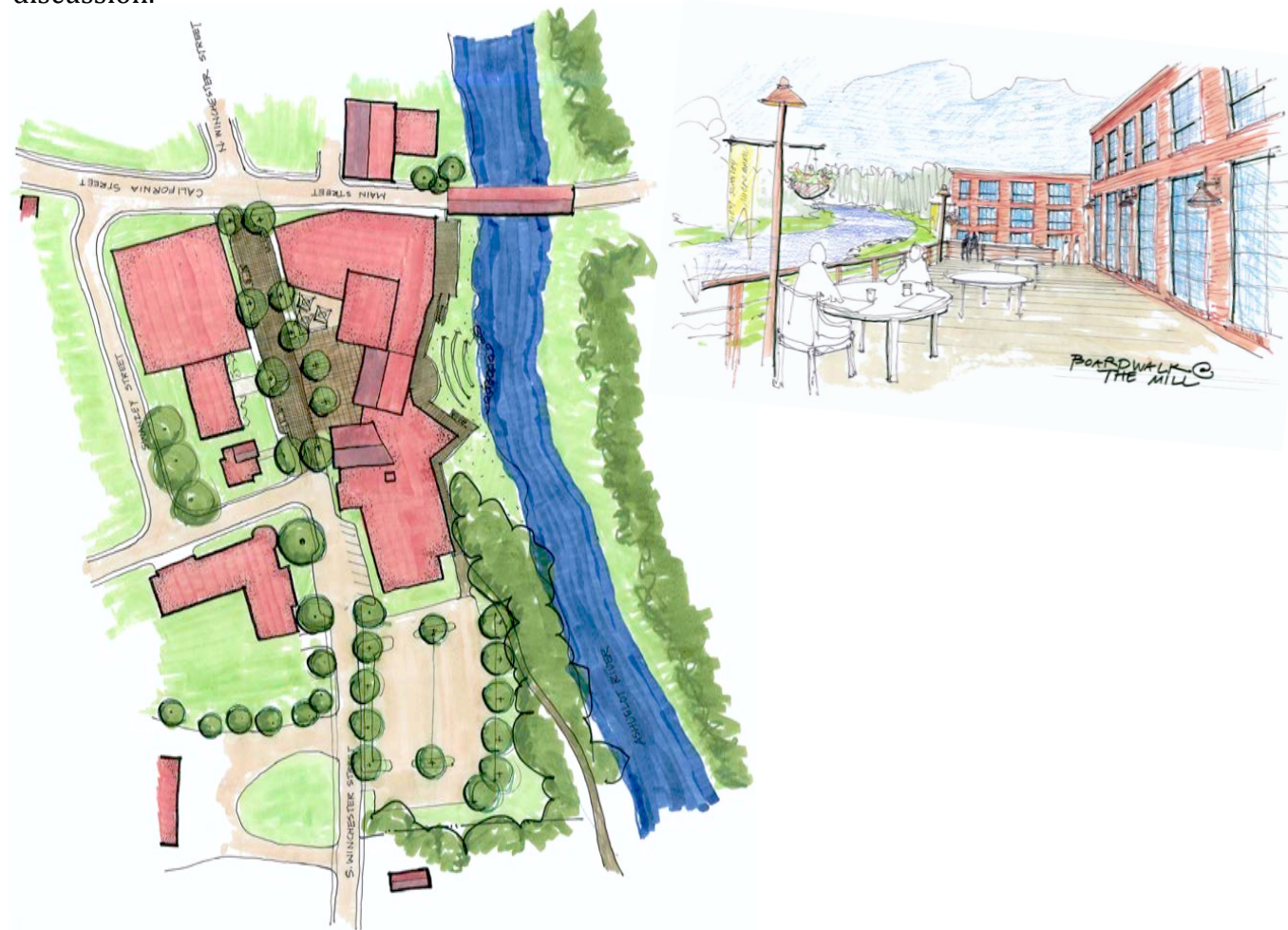
The largely inactive Homestead Woolen Mill complex represents a significant potential commercial core, especially in conjunction with the Athletic Association building at the northwest end of the covered bridge and the vacant lot on the corner of West and South Winchester Streets. As described in the “Macro View” section above, to reconnect North and South Winchester Streets by removing part of the warehouse that was added to the mill a few decades ago would bring opportunities for commercial redevelopment of the rest of the mill buildings. This would establish Winchester Street between West Street and California Street as a pedestrian scale commercial center. Further paring down of the mill building by selectively removing some of the later additions would allow for a passage to connect this commercial pod to the riverfront park and boardwalk. Prospects for retail or restaurant activity that opens onto the boardwalk conjure images of quite a vibrant scene in the village.



# BUILDING CONCEPTS

There is no irony in this process having started with a concern for Whitcomb Hall, broadened into a whole-village view toward revitalization, and refocused on the old Homestead Woolen Mill buildings as a critical part of that effort. The mill buildings with their location, charming appeal, and physical condition and usability offer great opportunity for symbiotic growth of pedestrian and economic activity. This growth will permeate the village of West Swanzey and organically spawn the rejuvenation of Whitcomb Hall.

Thus far the report has been about ways to connect the village of West Swanzey to the Woolen Mill Buildings as focal point of the village. Now the attention is turned to the question of what to do with the mill to enable it to feed energy back into the town. The Plan NH team strongly encourages the conversations that have already been occurring in West Swanzey regarding the repurposing of the old mill and would like to add the following possible strategies to the discussion.



1. Reopen Winchester Street through the Mill Complex
  - Reconnect the original traffic/circulation pattern
  - Pave the street with unique pavers/pavement,
  - Create wide sidewalks and a streetscape conducive to outdoor farmer’s market, street festivals and outdoor cafes/restaurants
2. Selective Demolition of portions of the mill buildings
  - Uncover the more unique and historical sections of buildings
  - Create connection from Winchester St to the Ashuelot River
3. Adaptive Reuse of Mill Buildings and Grocery Store Site
  - Housing on Upper Levels and on River side of the mill structures
  - Market Rate Lofts
  - Work/Live spaces for artists and crafts people
  - Gallery/Arts organization in one of the street front structures
  - Retail/Restaurant/Café along Winchester Street and or Main Street
  - Possibly an outdoor sports outfitter – water sports on the river, close proximity to bike trail, walking/running along new river walk and extended trail systems
  - Microbrewery and Brew Pub – capitalize on the water system resource and the industrial heritage of the mills.
  - Senior Center – possibly on the west side of Winchester Street
  - Recreation Center – possibly on the west side of Winchester Street
  - Child Care/Senior Care centers
  - Commercial office space
4. Future Commercial Expansion on vacant mill property to south of Mill Office Building
5. Future multifamily (market rate mixed with workforce housing) along the river just south of Mill buildings.
6. Additional Consideration - Possible Housing
 

It is also possible to consider some of the mill structures for housing an expanded fire station or offices for town services. However, these seem to be well accommodated in other existing locations.
7. Additional Consideration – Possible Parking
 

While West Swanzey aspires to be a walkable community, it will still be necessary to provide adequate parking for the uses proposed in the commercial district. The Team recommends that for the immediate future the existing parking area to the south of the existing mill be improved with perimeter landscaping and some interior landscaping. Additionally, there appear to be opportunities to utilize some of the lower levels of the existing mill for indoor parking. There appears to be potential locations to access lower levels from Main Street on the north and from the existing parking area on the south. Finally the proposed redevelopment concept also envisions the creation of some on street parallel parking. The Team recommends that all attempts be made to limit parking to the amount necessary and options for sharing parking lots be explored.

These ideas and recommendations stem directly from what the Plan NH charrette team heard from the community regarding a more lively, mixed use village, strengthening the walkability and neighborhood qualities, reconnecting the village to the river and finding opportunities to focus on the rich history and sense of community in, what the locals call, “West.”



# ZONING

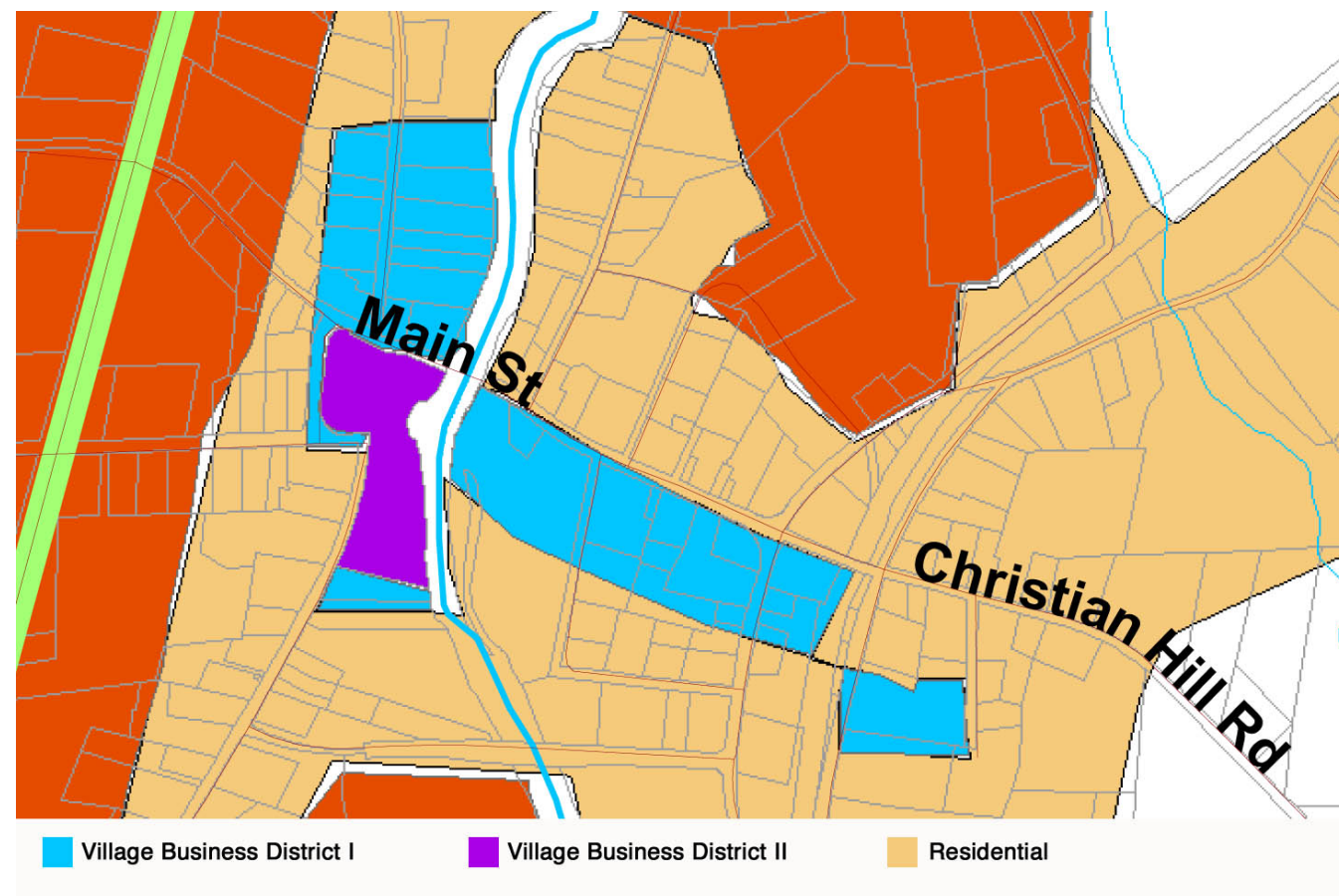
## A. Rezone Village Business Districts I and II

To encourage economic growth while retaining the feeling of a neighborhood in the Village Center of West Swanzey, the Team recommends that the Town consider geographically redefining the boundaries of Village Business Districts I and II.

Based on the existing land use patterns and community character, the Charrette Team recommends that Village Business District I be extended to include parcels North of Main Street and to extend along Main Street to meet the eastern boundary of the Business Zone on California Street. Currently, the Whitcomb House Bed and Breakfast, Whitcomb Hall, and the Stratton Library are located in the Residential Zone, which does not allow for uses other than single-family residential, customary agricultural uses, home occupation, roadside stands, and manufactured housing by right.

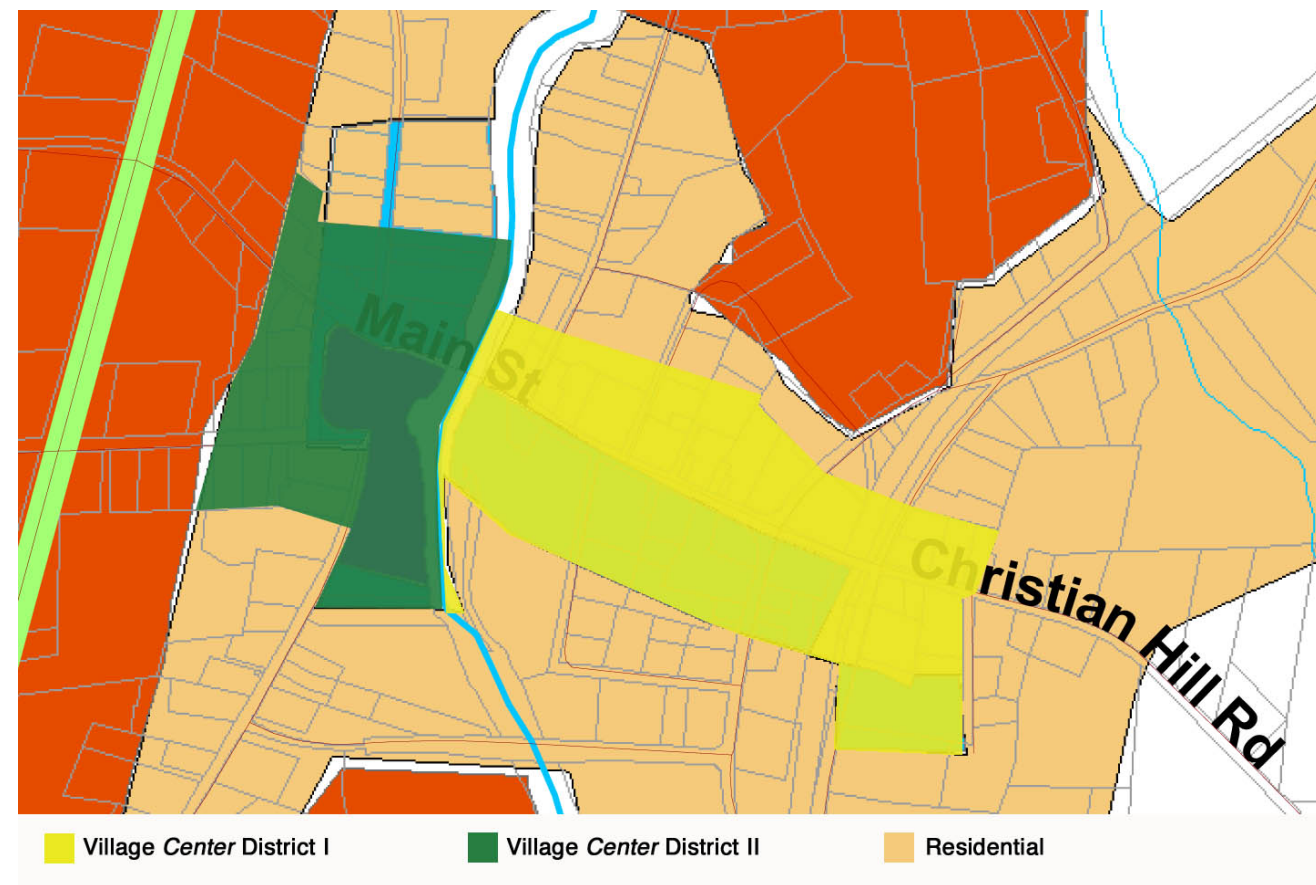
The boundary of Village Business District II is concentrated around the parcel boundary of the former Homestead Woolen Mills Complex. To expand opportunities for mixed-use and commercial development in this area of the Village Center, the Team recommends that the Town consider expanding Village Business District II to incorporate parcels to the South, West, North and Southwest of the Mill Complex.

The current and proposed (areas to be added in white) zoning is illustrated in the figures below.



## B. Rename Village Business Districts I and II

It is suggested that the rezoned districts be renamed to Village Center District I (formerly Village Business District I) and Village Center District II (formerly Village Center District II).



## C. Review Definitions Section of Zoning Ordinance for Missing Terms

Some of the terms and uses listed in the Zoning Ordinance are not defined in the Definitions Section. To ensure that readers of the Ordinance understand the meaning of certain uses, the Charrette Team recommends that a defining all of the land uses identified in each Zoning District.

The Team noted that certain uses, which appear to be very specific, could be grouped under a broader use. For instance, Telephone and Internet Sales could be grouped under General Retail Establishments. In addition, Club or Lodge could be redefined as Place of Public Assembly.



**D. Modify the Land Uses Requirements in the Village Business Districts**

The Team recommends that the Town consider expanding and modifying the land uses permitted by right and by special exception in Village Business Districts I and II. Currently, Village Business District II does not allow for any residential uses and there are no uses allowed by special exception in this District. To promote a mixture of uses in this District, the Charrette Team suggests allowing for multi-family residences on the second floor or above. Mixed use refers to some combination of housing and commercial uses, such as apartments on the second story while retail stores might be on the first floor. To encourage infill development and commercial development in and near the Mill Complex, single and two family residences would not be allowed in this District.

The uses allowed by special exception in Village Business District I, are inconsistent with the Town’s interest in preserving a pedestrian friendly village. These uses include gasoline service stations, repair garage or body shop, motor vehicle dealership, and vehicle wash facility. It is suggested that these uses be prohibited from this District. To encourage walkability and pedestrian circulation, the Team recommends that the Town consider prohibiting drive-through establishments in this District.

The proposed changes to the uses allowed in Village Business Districts I and II are listed in the table below. A “P” indicates a use is permitted and “SE” is a use allowed by Special Exception.



Uses Permitted	Village Business District 1	Village Business District II	Proposed Village Center District 1	Proposed Village Center District II
Accessory Buildings	SE		SE	SE
Accessory Uses	P	P	P	P
Banking or Financial Institution	P		P	P
Daycare Facility	SE		P	SE
Education, Government, or Religious Facility		P	P	P
Gasoline Service Stations	SE			
<b>Health Care Facility*</b>				P
Home Occupation	P		P	
Hotel/Motel/Bed and Breakfast	P		P	P
Indoor Auctions		P		SE
Manufactured Housing	P		-	
Manufacturing Facility	SE	P		P
Motor Vehicle Dealership	SE			
Multi-Family Dwelling(s)	SE			
<b>Multifamily on Second Floor or Above*</b>				P
Nursing Home	P		SE	P
Personal Service Shop or Service Establishments	P	P	P	P
Place of Public Assembly (formerly Club or Lodge)	P	P	P	P
Printing and Publishing Establishments		P		P
Professional, Business, or Corporate Offices	P	P	P	P
Recreational Facility	SE	P	P	P
Repair Garage or Body Shop	SE			
Research and Testing Labs		P		SE
Restaurant	P		P	P
Retail Business Establishments	P	P	P	P
Single-Family Dwelling(s)	P		P	
Telephone and Internet Sales		P		
Two-Family Dwelling(s)	SE		P	
Utility Generation		P		SE
Vehicle Wash Facility	SE			
Wholesale, Warehouse or Storage Facilities	SE	P		SE

\*Definitions should be developed for these uses and added to the Definitions Section of the Zoning Ordinance



**E. Modify the Dimensional Requirements in the Village Business District II**

Within Village Business District II, the setback requirements are 30 feet from the front property line and 20 feet from the side and rear property lines. However, the existing building footprints in this District do not conform to these requirements. The Mill Complex has little if any setback from Main and Swanzy Streets. If South Winchester Street were to be reopened to connect with Main Street, it would be inconsistent with the form and character of the surrounding buildings to impose front or side setbacks. For this reason, the Team recommends that the front, side, and rear setbacks be changed to 0 feet in the Village Business District II.

**F. Consider Allowing for Shared Parking**

To encourage a walkable streetscape, improve pedestrian circulation, and utilize parking facilities more efficiently in Village Business Districts I and II, the Team recommends that the Town consider allowing Shared Parking. Shared Parking means that more than one user can share parking spaces. Parking spaces that are assigned to a particular building or business can be shared among different businesses in an area to take advantage of peak periods of use. For instance, an office complex can efficiently share parking facilities with a restaurant, since offices require maximum parking during the weekdays, while restaurants require maximum parking during the evening or weekend. There are many different strategies for allowing Shared Parking that the Town can explore to reduce the amount of parking facilities that would be needed in these Districts.

**G. Consider Adding a Gateway Overlay District Along Route 10**

A Gateway Overlay district can be used to provide more specific criteria, such as certain design guidelines, transportation improvements, landscaping, and setback and height requirements, to improve the community character of entrances to a community. This type of overlay district could be applied to the Route 10 corridor to demarcate entrances to the West Swanzy Village Center as well as to improve pedestrian safety along Route 10, and to encourage nodes of commercial development in place of strip development along the Corridor.

**H. Consider Applying for Urban Exemption from Shoreland and Water Quality Protection Act**

As the Ashuelot River is listed as a Designated River under the New Hampshire Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act (SWQPA), new development activity or alteration of landscape within 250' of the Shoreline might subject to the standards required by this Act. If and/or when the Town pursues implementation of the Charrette Team's recommendations, it is suggested that the Town consider applying for an Urban Exemption from the SWQPA.

**I. Consider Adopting RSA 79-E: Community Revitalization Tax Credit**

To provide incentive for the redevelopment of the Mill Complex and other abandoned or vacant properties in the Village Business Districts, the Team recommends that the Town consider adopting RSA 79-E, the Community Revitalization Tax Credit. RSA 79-E encourages the rehabilitation and active use of under-utilized buildings. In a town that has adopted this legislation, a property owner who wants to substantially rehabilitate a building located downtown, or in a village center, may apply to the local governing body for a period of temporary tax relief. The temporary tax relief, if granted, would consist of a finite period of time during which the property tax on the structure would not increase as a result of its substantial rehabilitation. In exchange for the relief, the property owner grants a covenant ensuring there is a public benefit to the rehabilitation. Following expiration of the finite tax relief period, the structure would be taxed at its full market value taking into account the rehabilitation. (Source: RSA 79-E, Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive: Fact Sheet 2006).

**J. Consider Expanding Tax Increment Financing District**

The Town has used a Tax Increment Financing District previously in an industrial area around the airport. The town should consider including the Village Business Districts I and II area in a second district.





# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Overview:

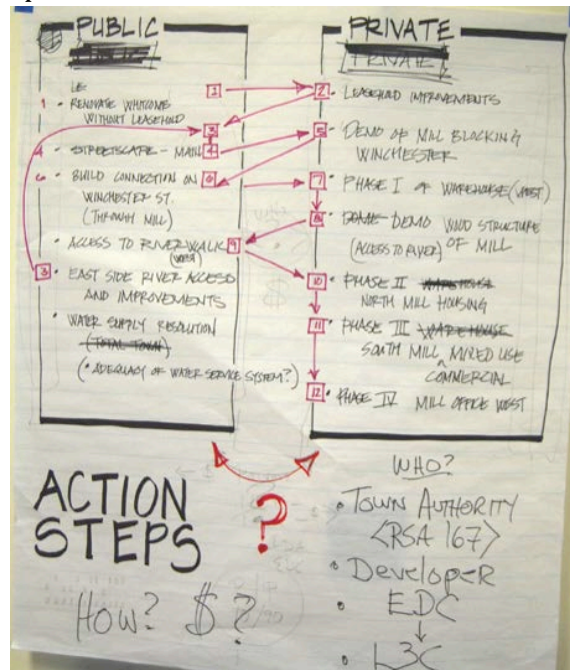
- Main Street development driven by Mill District
- Mill District buildings need transformative, new uses to generate eco activity
- Size, complexity and general limited-use of building as they stand now
- Very unlikely a private developer-owner will redevelop the buildings as is without either incentives, public participation, or both
- But potential for transformative reuse IF public-private co-development occurs

## Options to redevelop and lead the transformation:

- Public sector redeveloper can be:
  - Town via an Economic Development Director
  - Existing Community Development (ex: SWCS) or Economic Development organization (ex: MEDC)
  - New Not-for-profit : Swanzey Economic Development Corp. (there is a committee now)
  - Hybrid organization of private-public, the Low-Profit Limited Liability Corp (L3C)
- Regardless of the “agent type”, the Town must stay involved

## How to Proceed:

- Several sequential steps are identified in the Charrette
- They are sequenced over time, and can be changed or altered as on-going experience –and new opportunities – permit
- The sequential steps are a “back-and-forth” between Private owner and Town (or its Agent), as the project is too big-complex for either to do on their own.
- For this reason, a Town-owner/developer partnership is needed



## Short-term wins and long-term vision

- Town does not need to spend a lot of money, they can participate in a revitalization with grant applications, rezoning, TIF Districts, 79-e, etc., but it must participate. *Town leadership – a shared vision - is essential.*
- The Town needs to act sooner than later in the redevelopment process, to reduce uncertainty for new user/owners, and to show Town’s commitment. Also as the site sits for sale and unoccupied, it becomes more likely to be repurchased by another owner for minimal uses (cold storage, flea markets, self-storage).
- Early Town investment can result in a significant multiplier effect. An early investment can result in several times that amount from others “next”: grants and private equity investment can occur once the Town early-stage commitments are made.
- This level of activity and public-private partnership is not new to Swanzey (Airport TIF District example) but it is *a deeper, longer and more complex path.* But it is needed if the site is to be more than a low-rent hodge-podge of transient business tenants. This site is the key to West Swanzey’s redevelopment

## IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING SCHEDULE

Investment Phase	Public \$	Private \$	Investment Total	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
<b>I</b> Renovate Whitcomb Hall (Pre-Lease)	600k									
Leaseholder Improvements to Whitcomb Hall		250k	850k							
<b>II</b> East River Access/Improvements	200k				1.050M					
Main Street Streetscape Improvements	500k		1.550M							
<b>III</b> Open Winchester Street (Warehouse Demo)		100k				1.650M				
Rebuild Winchester Streetscape	350k		2M							
Renovate Warehouse West (Basic)		900k	2.9M							
<b>IV</b> Selective Mill Demo		250k					3.150M			
West River Access/Improvements	400k		3.550M							
<b>V</b> North Mill Housing and Mixed Use		7.5M						11.050M		
<b>VI</b> South Mill Housing and Mixed Use		7.5M							18.550M	
<b>VII</b> Mill Office and Warehouse Improvements		3.5M								22.050M
	<b>2.05M</b>	<b>20M</b>								







# **Plan New Hampshire**

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**West Swanzey Charrette**

November 2012