



Extension

Strengthening Connections: Downtowns & Trails Ossipee, New Hampshire

2021/22 Final Report

By Shannon Rogers, PhD, State Specialist of Nature Based Economic Development &
Geoff Sewake, JD, MELP, Community Economic Development Field Specialist

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For any questions on the program or the findings, please contact:

Shannon Rogers, PhD
Nature Based Economic Development Specialist
Associate Extension Professor
UNH Cooperative Extension
603-862-5171
shannon.rogers@unh.edu



Introduction

The town of Ossipee, NH (pop. 4,394, [2018]) has many natural assets, and a number of built, and social assets, although not fully developed in a way that might encourage more use and enjoyment of Ossipee's many natural assets and amenities. Ossipee is comprised of several villages, including Center Ossipee and West Ossipee. A lake, mountains, and trails are all within the towns boundaries. A former rail bed connects the villages and is a focus of this program.

In the Spring of 2019, Ossipee entered into a formal partnership with UNH Extension as part of the Community & Economic Development team's Downtowns & Trails Program. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, UNH Extension has been providing a variety of modified, flexible and inclusive assistance in exploring actions that can be taken to better leverage natural assets for economic vibrancy. The first step was connecting with the Economic Development Committee's appointed lead volunteers to develop a subcommittee and begin implementation of the program. UNH Extension developed materials and worked with the committee on the following tasks:

- 1** Reviewing the importance of, and opportunities for, linking villages to trails. One meeting took place in person.
- 2** Assessing Ossipee's villages, linkage area and appropriate trails using Esri Collector for ArcGIS mobile application. Training conducted in person with committee.
- 3** Developing and training volunteers to complete interviews with businesses, residents, and community leaders on their interest in this initiative. Two hour training conducted in person.
- 4** Developing and training volunteers to administer an intercept survey for those using the trails to determine their interest and use of Ossipee's villages. Two hour training conducted in person.
- 5** Engaging the larger community to gather information and learn about the results of the assessment. Dynamic and creative outdoor two hour forum in Center Ossipee with posters, presentations, and opportunities for feedback took place in conjunction with Old Home Day.

The following report will explain these steps in more detail, share the data and analysis, provide a summary and next steps for the community. This report, in conjunction with a community meeting and summary data presentation, on June 30, 2021 are the culmination of the Downtowns & Trails Program.



Key Findings

Ossipee has many natural and built assets that can be utilized to pursue a stronger connection between its villages, natural amenities and assets and a potential rail trail. The goal of this work is to help the community better leverage its assets for economic vibrancy. The following summarizes the findings in several categories.

Infrastructure

Village Core:

- Center Ossipee is fortunate to have amenities like the school, library, recreation facilities, including the skate park and ice arena, as well as the new playground all within walking distance of the old rail bed.
- The village center has a lot of opportunity to support residents and visitors using a potential rail trail with restaurants, the Meadery, and public infrastructure.
- Some key businesses that trail users are looking for are currently missing, notably a coffee shop and public restrooms.
- Residents are moderately satisfied with the village center but would like to see more businesses and services.
- Visitors commented that there wasn't too much to keep them coming back to town.

Existing Rail Bed/Seasonal Snowmobile Trail:

- The majority of survey respondents and interviewees are excited about the idea of a potential rail trail in Ossipee, although there are some concerns about safety and maintenance.
- The location of the former rail bed makes a natural trail head.
- Many residents noted that they already use the current "trail" for some recreational activities
- While there is momentum for a rail trail, the reality of the development process means it would be a long-term process that would need to keep and maintain momentum.

Natural Assets & Amenities

- Ossipee has a number of other natural assets that could support the recreational needs of residents as well as attract visitors. These include other trails, the lake, and waterways.
- Visitors noted that they were unaware of many of these assets, though, presenting an opportunity for future marketing and communication.
- Our visitor survey found that Ossipee welcomes visitors from all over New Hampshire, New England and other parts of the country. These visitors are spending money on food, gas, and gifts but not on overnight accommodations.



The Economic Benefits of Trails & Natural Space

Trails and natural spaces provide us with many benefits and services. Some of which are quantifiable (such as spending on recreation) and others, such as water purification and flood control as well as cultural and spiritual benefits, are less easily quantified but nonetheless important. These “ecosystem services,” which are essentially benefits humans receive from nature, all contribute to community well being and quality of life. The Outdoor Industry Association (2017) reports the following economic impact of the outdoor recreation economy:

Ecosystem Services:

Ecosystem Services are benefits humans receive from nature that contribute to our quality of life and well-being.

- Accounts for \$887 billion in annual U.S. consumer spending.
- Supports nearly 7.6 million jobs across the U.S.
- Generates \$124.5 billion in annual federal, state and local tax revenue.
- Adds \$524.8 billion in active outdoor recreation trip and travel expenditures.
- According to U.S. Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the outdoor recreation economy grew 3.8 percent in 2016 in comparison to the overall U.S. economy’s 2.8 percent growth. BEA estimates that outdoor recreation accounted for 2 percent of the overall U.S. Gross Domestic Product in 2016, contributing \$373.7 billion to the economy (BEA, 2018).

Regionally, in the state of Vermont, a recent study of Mad River Valley emphasized the importance of trail tourism, specifically in terms of mountain biking (SE Group, 2014). Further, the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council (2016) examined four trail networks in the state, estimating that these networks alone generated nearly \$30 million in economic impact from out-of-state visitors. Trail tourism is particularly beneficial for economic impact when it attracts non-local visitors. Kingdom Trails, one of the four trail networks examined in the Vermont Trails and Greenways study, is a prime example of destination trail tourism. Local trail users and non-local visitors alike visit businesses including restaurants, breweries, coffee shops, ice cream shops, etc. and non-local visitors further support the economy through use of overnight accommodations.

Beyond recreation, research has shown that homes near trails also command higher property values, the presence of trails can attract new residents to move to or stay in a location, and trails also encourage physical fitness.

Trails in New Hampshire

The NH Bureau of Trails includes more than 1,200 miles of wheeled OHRV trails, over 300 miles of state owned rail trails, and over 7,000 miles of snowmobile trails (NH Trails Bureau, 2018). Further, volunteer organizations manage more than 4,000 miles of hiking trails in the state (NH State Parks, 2018). Special interest organizations also have their own estimates of certain types of trails, for example the Rails to Trails Conservancy reports that NH currently has 75 total rail trails which encompass 558 miles (Rails to Trails Conservancy, 2018).

Bicycle Trails

There are many studies that show the economic impact of cycling and cycling infrastructure, such as bike paths and rail trails, this includes the fact that:

- People who ride bikes buy other things and are more likely to make multiple or repeat trips to local stores.
- Bicycling tourism brings millions of dollars to cities and towns across the country.
- Bike accessible business districts benefit from catering to cyclists as customers (League of American Bicyclists).

Assessments

As detailed in the introduction section of this report, the pilot program involved three different types of assessments:

1

An assessment of the physical characteristics of the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail located between the villages of Center Ossipee and West Ossipee (as chosen and designated by the committee) via a mobile spatial application (ESRI's ArcGIS collector).

2

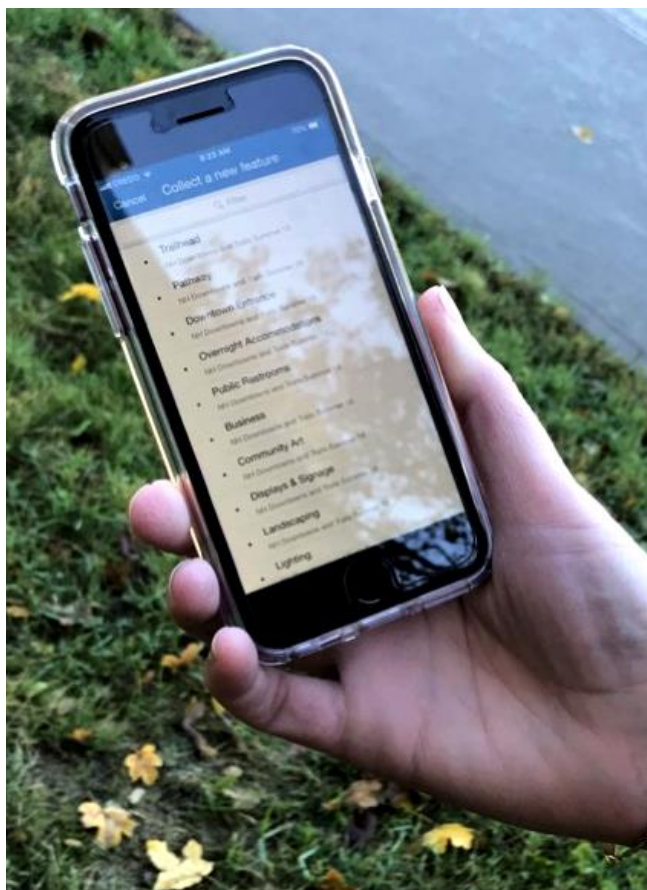
An assessment of key informants through interviews with business owners and community leaders.

3

An assessment of residents and visitors to Ossipee via a survey.

The following section will discuss the process of conducting these assessments as well as the findings and what the data means for the community and its goals of economic vibrancy through better connecting the Ossipee's villages to its abundance of natural assets and amenities, and the exiting rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail.

UNH Extension's Community and Economic Development team conducts programming to help communities learn how to assess needs, engage people, make informed decisions, develop effective strategies and take action. In the case of the Downtowns & Trails Program, we trained committee members and additional community volunteers to conduct the key informant interviews and surveys. More than 10 community members were trained during the Summer/Fall of 2019 to conduct the interviews and surveys.



Physical Characteristics of Downtowns & Trails

The characteristics used to conduct the downtowns and trails community assessments are research-based and are adapted from multiple sources. These characteristics are adapted from a list of characteristics used to conduct a general downtown assessment through the First Impressions program. The downtown characteristics have been adapted from multiple states' First Impressions programs and the National Civic League's Civic index by UNH Extension staff. The downtown characteristics are based on what makes a downtown vibrant for a resident, visitor, or business owner, and are based on the built environment.

Building on the downtown characteristics, the purpose of the downtowns and trails characteristics are to assess the connectivity between a downtown and nearby trails and assess amenities in the downtown that are useful to trail users. The characteristics specific to downtowns and trails were adapted from multiple trail town guides, including the Trail Town Program in Pennsylvania and Michigan's Trail Town Program.



Broadly speaking, research and practice shows that there are essentially four categories that need to be in place for a successful connection between downtowns and trails. Natural, economic, built and social/leadership conditions need to be assessed when considering how to better leverage natural assets for economic vibrancy. Having a trail as well as an additional natural feature, such as rivers, lakes, beaches, and community forests enhance the connection because they provide more opportunities for residents and visitors to created and enjoy enhanced quality of life that the natural assets provide. Additionally, certain economic conditions need to be in place such as the right type of businesses that a trail user might frequent—such as bike shop/sporting goods stores, restaurants, breweries, cafes, restrooms and overnight accommodations. There are also features of the built environment, such as the layout of the central business district, the presence of bike racks/bike parking, sidewalks and benches, that are important to understand. Finally, the most successful programs, such as Pennsylvania's Trail Town program, have strong community leadership and participation that can be sustained over a long period.

Characteristics that are Critical to Assess

The following provides an explanation of characteristics that are critical to understand when connecting downtowns and trails.

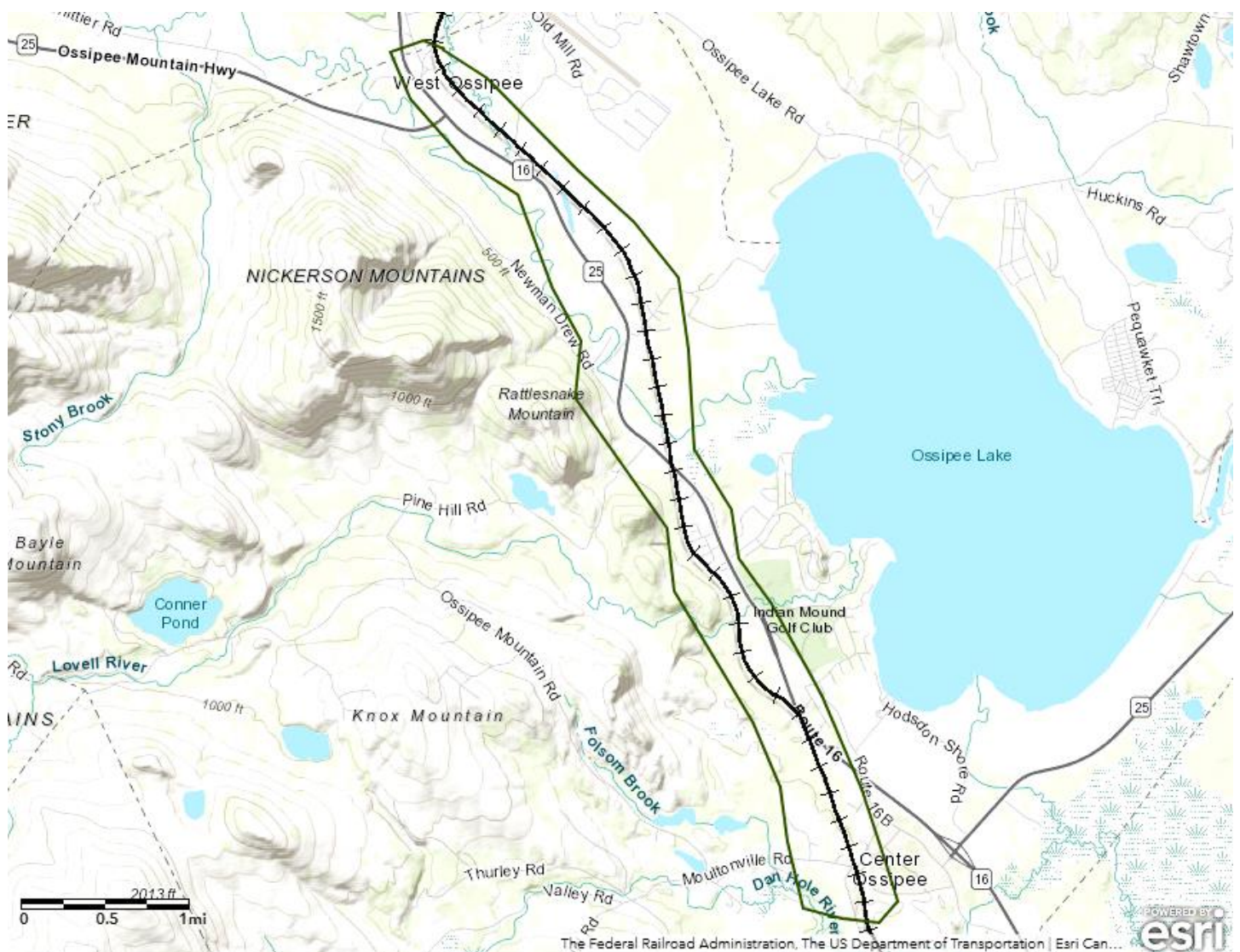
	Trailhead- Point where a trail begins. Is the trailhead well marked? Is there a kiosk, maps, community information, parking, restrooms?		Natural Feature- Rivers, lakes, community forests.
	Pathway- Path leading people from the trail to the village area.		Park- Parks, parklets, pocket parks.
	Downtown Entrance- Where people enter the village. Is it clear where the entrance is? Is the entrance attractive and welcoming?		Point of Interest- Historical homes & buildings, architecture, fountains, memorials, statues, museums, plaques.
	Overnight Accommodations- Hotels, motels, campgrounds.		Public Facility- School, library, town hall, post office.
	Public Restrooms- Availability of public restrooms near trail and around the village area.		Seating- Benches, stoops, chairs, lawns, place people gather that are not considered a park, outdoor seating, outdoor dining, benches.
	Business- Especially businesses relevant to trail users – casual restaurants, coffee shop, drugstore, bike shop, grocery store, local shops.		Sidewalks & Crosswalks- Pedestrian safety, sidewalks, crosswalks, quality, connectivity, usability for a range of abilities.
	Community Art- Murals, artwork, musicians, concerts, street performers.		Streets & Transportation- Streets, bicycle lanes, bicycle racks, shared bicycles, buses, cars, taxis, ridesharing, street parking, public and private lots, traffic lights.
	Displays & Signage- Pedestrian signs, wayfinding signs, parking signs, business signs, municipal signs.		Waste & Recycling- Availability and quality of waste and recycling receptacles.
	Landscaping- Flowers, trees, green spaces.		Other- Other characteristics you wish to capture but do not fit into any of the existing categories.
	Lighting- Availability and quality of lighting on streets, in parking lots, in parking garages.		

Physical Assessment Using Mobile Data Collection

As part of the Downtowns & Trails Program in the Town of Ossipee, staff and intern assessors provided characteristic feedback through the ArcGIS Collector App. The town was assessed over the course of the Summer and Fall 2019. Assessments included walking and driving through the town, observing the characteristics, taking pictures and making notes with a mobile spatial application for cellphones.

Below is a map of the assessment area chosen by the Downtowns & Trails Subcommittee in consultation with Extension staff. The assessment area was generally bound by the villages of West Ossipee and Center Ossipee, running north to south along New Hampshire Route 25 and the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail.

Assessment Map of the Study Area



Analysis of Downtowns & Trails Characteristics

Assessors collected a total of 123 points, the most common characteristic assessed was Business (29), rounding out the top three most commonly assessed characteristic features were: Pathway (23), and Public Facility (14).

Characteristic	Count
Business	29
Displays & Signage	5
Downtown Entrance	3
Landscaping	5
Lighting	2
Natural Feature	9
Overnight Accommodations	1
Other	6
Park	6
Pathway	23
Point of Interest	6
Public Facility	14
Public Restrooms	0
Seating	0
Sidewalks & Crosswalks	3
Streets & Transportation	1
Trailhead	10
Waste & Recycling	0
Grand Total	123

Looking at the breakdown of ratings, 64 characteristics were rated Assets, 41 were rated Asset/Opportunity, and 18 were rated as an Opportunity. Assessors were looking for how the characteristic might contribute to a user's experience of a hypothetical rail trail were it to exist where the current rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail traverses the community. The following pages capture the feedback provided under each characteristic, and a sampling of the comments provided.





Assessors by in large, found the business amenities available in Ossipee to be great assets, especially when considering the development of a rail trail. From a variety of restaurants, sporting opportunities, to general shopping, there were a number of places a trail user might patronize were a rail trail to exist. Assessors noticed that at least one restaurant seemed to be attracting seasonal snowmobile traffic along the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail. In regards to potential opportunities to enrich these existing businesses or future businesses for potential trail users, assessors noted a need for bike racks, visitor/information centers near trailheads, development of trail spurs to nearby businesses, parking, and restrooms. Some comments included:

- Large restaurant and brewery to accommodate locals and visitors.
- General store/market a good place for visitors to get supplies or a quick bite. Outdoor seating.
- Coffee and quick bites. A good resource for visitors and residents alike.
- Gift store, post office, church and info booth all in one place. Could use some signage.
- Sporting goods store. Does kayak rentals. Along water with access to lake.
- Restaurant with access and a trail from the rail line - appears to already be an asset to snowmobiles.
- Driving range right off the rail line. Well groomed.
- Grocery store, bank, state liquor store, restaurant. Shopping center has a number of good amenities.
- Local Presence: An Artisan Studio, gift shop close to trail full of local artisan's work for sale.
- Very cool landmark, needs renovation, could serve as museum and or visitor center.
- West Ossipee business district which provides access to food and other services. Potential parking.
- Restaurant near end of trail in West Ossipee, owner needs to install a few bike racks.
- Farm to table market in West Ossipee near rail trail. Outside seating needs bike rack.
- All rail trails need a McDonald's and restroom stop in West Ossipee.
- Unique little store at rail trail and route crossing. Possibly fun place to stop and explore.



Community Art



With the exception of the photo below, taken of the wonderful train model located outside of the MountainView Station in Center Ossipee, the assessment team did not highlight community art in the assessment. This presents an opportunity to develop community art around town, such as murals, sculptures, etc., that can add vibrancy to the community and potential rail trail. Community art can be a powerful value-add to a user's or resident's overall experience in a community.



Displays & Signage



Assessors identified a few displays and signs around Ossipee and near the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail. However, while the existing signage was, for the most part, good, should a rail trail be developed, additional signage to direct trail users to the trail, trail spurs, restrooms, information booths, parking, no parking, food, parks, picnic grounds, camping, and other amenities would be critical. Even if the development of the rail trail were intended for residents, directing residents to a newly developed resource like the rail trail would be essential to encourage its use. Some comments provided were:

- Signage for local campground.
- Sign for Ossipee. Located in a very heavy traffic area in a tight turn, could use a better locale.
- Good existing signage for some things, but missing post office and info booth—two essential resources.
- Small bulletin board for community postings could be utilized more.
- Sign near playground, opportunity to include info about trail and town.



Downtown Entrance



West Ossipee and Center Ossipee generally lie along New Hampshire Route 16/25. While a visitor may notice the visual change in community upon entering either village—forested areas transitioning into commercial development and housing—there lacks prominent welcome signage. There exists an opportunity to improve the visual prominence of these entrances, for example, the existing information booth located in West Ossipee might have a sign co-located with the other signs for the commercial development in which it is located. This might encourage additional visitors to stop and learn about the area. Comments on Ossipee’s downtown entrances included:

- Three way intersection. High visibility. No street signs.
- Old trail station in West Ossipee near where first section could end.
- Open area for parking. Top Kayaker and Wonalancet Bee Company at entrance.



Landscaping



Assessors found a number of examples of attractive landscaping, from green lawns and flower beds, to community gardens. However, the assessors thought there could be additional infrastructure to encourage more use of these landscaped places for visitors and customers. For example, benches, and lawn chairs might encourage a customer to sit and enjoy the natural beauty surrounding the town before patronizing another shop or exploring a nearby park or rail trail. Some comments were:

- Small community green space. Quiet neighborhood.
- Large field and parking/rest area behind Hobbs Brewing. Could be a more public asset.
- Wonderful rest area behind restaurant. Would be a great public or visitor resource.
- Nice green space right next to info booth and post/gift/church center. Benches? Seating?
- Small community (?) garden that is unkempt and could be utilized more.



Lighting



Assessors identified one light structure. It should be noted, time of day can often impact an assessors ability to pick up on community lighting. That said, should Ossipee seek to develop the rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail into a rail trail, it would be advisable for the community to consider the implementation of additional lighting, as needed, for the safety of trail users. Two comments provided for Lighting were:

- New solar street lights at beginning of trail.
- Decorative. Doesn't seem to be very functional. Need more lights.



Overnight Accommodations



Assessors did not notice many places for overnight accommodation. In general, having access to overnight accommodations can encourage visitors to spend additional time and money in a community. Should Ossipee further develop the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail, encouraging the development of overnight accommodations once the trail is established, may benefit trail users and perhaps increase patronage to some local businesses.



Natural Feature



It is enough to say, Ossipee is surrounded by a wealth of natural assets and amenities, with beauty that is positively indescribable. In several instances, assessors let the natural surroundings speak for themselves through photos. The abundance of natural assets and amenities make the area offer the community an opportunity to enrich the public's interaction and general enjoyment of it through the improvement of trails, parks and viewing areas, as are mentioned throughout this assessment. Comments included:

- Natural beauty abounds in this section of railroad far removed from development as an asset.
- Fall foliage in early stages. Natural beauty of the railroad route through various forest habitats.
- Northerly view of Mount Chocorua in background with large wetland in foreground.
- Foliage and wildlife viewing opportunities within this wetland area.
- Window on the Ossipee Mountains scenic area-a gateway to Ossipee.



Park



Parks provide residents and visitors an opportunity to recreate, rest, and enjoy the outdoors. In the case of Ossipee, assessors took notice of a few parks in Center Ossipee, the skate park, newly accommodated playground and ball fields. Maintaining these resources and marking them with highly visible signage, keep these parks safe and well-used. Comments included:

- Skate park in town! Very cool.
- Community playground with updated infrastructure and bike rack.
- Downtown skate park located near school.
- Playground in village center near public parking.
- Multi season skate park, looks like it could use a little updating.
- Unkept soccer and baseball field with scoreboard and port-a-potties.



Point of Interest



Assessors noted several points of interest in Ossipee. Of particular note were: A well maintained public gazebo, the Chamber's information center, trestle bridges along the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail, and the Indian Mound Golf Club. Some comments included:

- Golf course and club house. Options for visitors to recreate.
- Well kept trestle along rail line. Likely from snowmobile club. Beautiful walk.
- Gazebo and seating in an open grassy area with well kept pathways and public trash can.
- Chamber info center, nice to have, but could not see it from the road. Found by accident.
- 1st of 2 trestle bridges good condition, need to replace boards as they are too far apart.
- Trail on right headed north from 16 entrance. Leads to powerlines and more trails.



Pathway



As noted throughout this Report, one of the desires of the steering committee is to conduct a surface assessment of the potential value of a rail trail along the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail. With that in mind, many of the assessors walked portions of the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail between Center Ossipee and West Ossipee. The views and experiences were beautiful. While the rail bed would require additional development to support multiple uses, a potential rail trail does benefit from the seasonal use by snowmobiles—railroad trestles that cross a number of rivers and streams along the rail bed are maintained by the local snowmobile club. While the assessors made comments on 23 points, it is the photos that speak to the pathway's character. That said, below are a few of their comments:

- View northerly along railroad with tree canopy over the route providing shade and beauty.
- Railroad intact with minimal evidence of deterioration of ties and rail bed.
- View northerly along railroad. Secluded with only highway noise in background.
- Southerly view along railroad. A path through the woods.
- View northerly along the railroad with views towards the White Mountains.
- Tressell. Nice beach and swim spot.
- View southerly along railroad just north of old Rail Station. Potential parking area.



Public Facility



It is hard to overlook the many public facilities and community supported organizations when visiting Center Ossipee. From the free municipal parking area behind the Freight House, to the beautiful public library, to the historic town hall and centrally located school and post office, Center Ossipee is well accommodated and very walkable. Comments provided by assessors include:

- Municipal Parking at Freight House Town Hall Annex.
- Freight House for community meetings.
- Police station is centrally located and well marked.
- Ossipee Concerned Citizens Inc. Community center for child care and other programs. Established 1975.
- School with garden box and community programs advertised two small play areas adjacent.
- Fields by school, within walking distance to village center.
- Post office, library, town hall and school all in close proximity to one another and village center.
- Public building with meeting room space and restrooms.
- Public facility that could be opened more for restroom access and info about rail trail.
- Fire station appears to also have access to the railbed and is in better condition than the depot.



Public Restrooms



Assessors did not specifically call out public restrooms. However, they did mention restrooms located at the McDonalds in West Ossiipee, restrooms located at the Freight House and port-o-potties at the ball fields located in Center Ossiipee. Should the community develop additional trail infrastructure, such as the rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail, it may be worth considering adding, or opening up existing restroom facilities to the public.

Seating



While assessors did provide commentary on seating availability, they did not specifically comment on seating alone. In summary, assessors felt there were areas, such as parks, landscaped areas, and potential trailheads, where the addition of seating might encourage people to spend additional time in, and enjoy more of Ossiipee.



Sidewalks & Crosswalks



Assessors provided feedback on two villages in Ossipee, Center Ossipee and West Ossipee. Of the two villages, only Center Ossipee offered a layout conducive of leisurely walking through the village. In regards to Center Ossipee, assessors took note of the new sidewalks being installed in town and appreciated the future walking surface. In West Ossipee and at the rail bed crossing located on New Hampshire Route 25 between the Top Kayaker and the Pizza Barn, assessors felt unsafe when attempting to cross the road. In the event a multi-use trail is established along this rail bed, additional safety measures for users would likely be necessary.



Waste & Recycling



Assessors did not specifically take note of waste or recycling within Ossipee. However, at least one assessor noted a waste bin at a public gazebo they discovered. In general, while maintaining these bins often present a challenge to municipalities, they can help reduce litter and are useful for users of sidewalks, trails and parks around town.

Streets & Transportation



Similar to the previous section on Sidewalks & Crosswalks, safety along New Hampshire Route 25 was identified, especially when attempting to cross the road. This becomes especially challenging when considering at least one part of the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail crosses New Hampshire Route 25 between the Pizza Barn and the Top Kayaker.



Trailhead



Assessors identified three potential trailheads for a rail trail, should one be developed along the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail. The first trailhead, located at the old train depot in West Ossipee, a second trailhead located somewhere between the Pizza Barn and the Top Kayak, and a third trailhead located in Center Ossipee near the Freight House. Of particular note, Center Ossipee contains a number of existing public facilities right at the location of a potential trailhead, such as public parking, playground, the Freight House, and several businesses, including the Sap House Meadery, and the MountainView Station. Some comments included:



- Near parking and a restaurant. The journey begins.
- Trail/path off the rail line right to the local pizza place. Great opportunity right on the river.
- Trailhead. Poorly maintained. No signage northbound. Small stop sign southbound before paved road.
- The old rail depot is in decent condition and a parking lot exists, could use some clean up.
- Center of Main Street, Meadery, diner, playground, town office annex, available store frontage.
- Intersection of trail and Westwood shores easy bike ride to lake.





Our assessment included a category for characteristics assessors where unable to otherwise categorize. While a second look might place these assessed “Other” points in more appropriate categories, in order to preserve the assessor’s decision, the comments were not re-categorized. These comments include feedback on the diversity of wildlife around the existing rail bed/seasonal snowmobile trail, need for improvement of parking and parking signage, and opportunities for reuse or additional use of several existing lots. Specifically, the comments include:

- Public parking lot. Has a sign but poorly located and too small.
- Information center greater Ossipee chamber again 50 yards from trail head.
- Bear scat. Use of railroad by wildlife provides viewing opportunities.
- Potential for overnight accommodations.



Key Informant Interviews

Committee members and community volunteers interviewed 7 key informants including business owners and community leaders about the potential for better connecting Ossipee's natural assets and amenities to the community. Each interview focused on answering questions on the following topics:

1. The individual's role(s) in the community
2. Advantages of connecting Ossipee's village centers to its trail system, including a potential rail trail
3. Challenges in connecting Ossipee's village centers to its trail system, including a potential rail trail
4. Top assets in town
5. Who else should be engaged in this process

Findings from the Key Informant Interviews

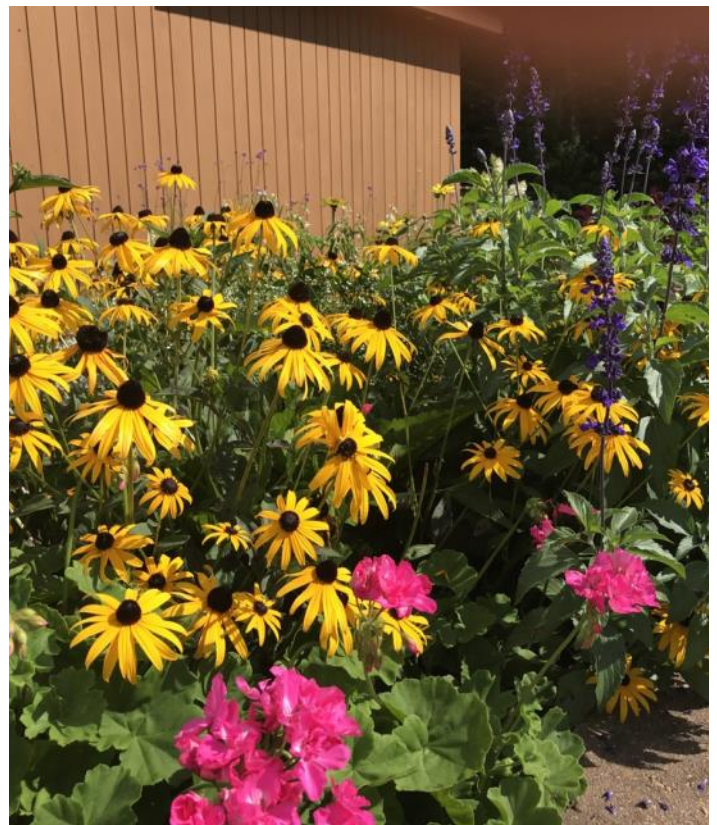
While the community was only able to connect with seven key informants, we heard the following key themes:

- Strong support for a rail trail through the town
- Excitement about potential rail connections with existing visitor attractions and infrastructure, such Indian Mound Golf Course and the Lake/trails and the potential for drawing new businesses to the area
- Interest in a rail trail for connectivity, commuting and exercise/active recreation
- While there was strong support, key informants were concerned with complications related to maintenance and safe use of the trail (e.g. cleaning up after dogs, horses, keeping dogs leashed, risk of tick-borne illness, etc.)
- Concern for costs over the long-term of creating and maintaining the trail, including signage and what the town's responsibilities will be given that it doesn't presently have the right equipment

Some illustrative quotes from key informants:

One key informant shared that the rail trail would be *"another interest to draw people to Ossipee...not expensive physical activity...good for families."*

Another shared that, *"Ossipee is spread out so it [the trail] will provide a safe commuting route."*



Intercept Surveys

Intercept Surveys are used to talk to people on the go and are meant to be brief and easy to complete. Community volunteers were trained to conduct surveys in Ossipee at various locations, including the school, local businesses, and through the rotary group. Surveys were conducted throughout the summer and fall. Two versions of the survey were created—one for residents, both seasonal and year-round residents and the other for visitors. Both surveys had questions about use and impressions of Ossipee and the potential for a rail trail. The visitor survey included a section on visitor spending so that the community could better understand how people were spending money during their visit to town.

Question	Residents	Visitors
Surveys completed	42	30
If there were an active rail trail in Ossipee, would you be using it?	YES—36% (32/42)	YES—60% (18/30)
	NO—15% (6/42)	NO—10% (3/30)
	UNSURE—9% (4/42)	UNSURE—30% (9/30)

One key question about the potential of a rail trail in Ossipee was asked of both residents and visitors. 76% of residents surveyed indicated that they would use a rail trail in Ossipee if it was available. The most popular type of use of the trail when asked for what purpose was walking. The majority of resident respondents were in town when asked to take the survey and indicated being there for the following reasons: school pick up; library, post office or playground visit; or to visit one of the local businesses.

Visitors also seemed supportive of a potential rail trail, with 14/19 or 74% of respondents indicating that they would use a rail trail if one was available. Walking is the most popular use type, with biking the second most.

Resident Impressions of a potential rail trail:

- Many residents were supportive of a potential rail trail as they indicated they would like more things to do in the village, including recreational facilities and especially for kids and teenagers.
- Several respondents suggested that a rail trail might be a way to “get people off of Rt. 16 and into the village.”
- Some indicated that they might use a rail trail for transportation purposes to visit friends and family.
- Others a potential rail trail as a way to “increase interest” in the area.
- There was also valid concern about potential safety issues on a rail trail, including ticks and tick borne illnesses.



Intercept Surveys Continued

Resident Impressions of the villages of Ossipee:

When asked to rank the general infrastructure and services offered in the village center, rankings ranged from low to high with the majority landing on “medium” levels of satisfaction.

- Respondents also indicated that they would like to see more stores, businesses, and facilities (such as restrooms) in the village.
- The need to maintain and improve the quality of some of the buildings was mentioned.
- Several respondents were pleased with the recent improvements in the village, including the playground and sidewalks
- Several indicated a need to keep folks engaged in the town and several others offered to volunteer to help a rail trail process



Results from Visitor Surveys







Many towns do not know about their visitors. The following infographic summarizes the findings from the visitor spending profile. While not statistically representative, this does give a snap shot and some useful information to begin better understanding this component of the economy. Many visitors are spending money on food and gas.

Of 30 spending profiles, we have visitors from NH, MA, ME, NY, VT and FL.

14 of the 30 are visiting from somewhere else in NH.

16 of the 30 are visiting from outside of NH.

Total spending from those:

 Food:	\$1,936
 Gas:	\$433
 Overnight Accommodations:	\$0
 Gifts:	\$167
 Alcohol:	\$432
 Recreation:	\$70

In addition to the spending patterns, it is useful to also note that while some people may be visiting for a day trip from other parts of New Hampshire, there were out of State visitors. The presence of grocery stores and gas stations in Ossipee seems to benefit local New Hampshire visitors especially. No one mentioned spending on overnight accommodations, this may be an untapped opportunity for growth. The majority of visitors surveyed are coming from Massachusetts. It is important to note that while a majority of visitors were supportive of a rail trail in town, a good portion (30%) were unsure whether they would use a rail trail if one was available.

A number of visitors noted that they were not aware the villages of Ossipee existed aside from the Rt. 16 businesses.

Community Forum

On the evening of June 30th, 2021, the Ossipee Economic Development Committee, Friends of the Ossipee Rail Trail and UNH Cooperative Extension hosted an outdoor Downtowns & Trails Community Forum. This event was held in conjunction with Old Home Week and saw approximately 50 people in attendance. Participants ate ice cream and walked between three locations in Center Ossipee—the Gazebo, the playground, and the entrance to the rail bed near the tailor shop. At each of the locations we had tables with materials about the findings of the Downtowns & Trails Program, interactive posters to share feedback, activities for kids and families, and a sign-up sheet to join the Friends of Ossipee Rail Trail group. One station also played a slide show of photos of other rail trails across the country so participants could get a sense of what they looked like.

Since trail related businesses will be key to connecting a potential rail trail with economic development goals in Ossipee, one of the posters asked participants to indicate what businesses they would like to see in the villages of Ossipee. These posters were also left in Ossipee for about a month so residents could add to them. Participants indicated the following on the posters:



Imagine using a Rail Trail in Ossipee:

What businesses would you like to see in the villages of Ossipee?

Some of the responses to this question included:

- An ice cream/sandwich shop
- Coffee shop with Wi-Fi
- Sports/bike shop
- Bar
- More restaurants
- Local artisans with demonstrations
- Train service

Additionally, we asked how people would use a potential rail trail. The following summarizes those answers:

- Walking, Biking, Pushing a stroller, Rail cars
- Winter sports
- Observing nature



Summary, Recommendations & Next Steps

The path toward a rail trail and a more vibrant downtown

Ossipee has some of the assets for connecting a potential rail trail with its village centers. Efforts made, particularly in Center Ossipee, such as the playground, sidewalks, and lighting improvements will benefit the community's economy regardless of whether a rail trail can be established. There is support by both residents and visitors for a rail trail but with the recognition that it will take a good deal of long-term planning and coordination.

Recommendations the committee and other volunteers could address in the short term:

- After community forum, establish action committees in the areas of interest deemed most popular. Committee formed the FORT (Friends of Ossipee Rail Trail).
- The community may consider promoting their existing trails on Trailfinder: <https://www.trailfinder.info/> Businesses can promote their "trailside services" for free.
- Address signage in the community, particularly indicating the services and attractions that are available off of Rt. 16 and in the villages.
- Continued collaboration with the Cotton Valley Rail Trail.
- Consider applying for a Recreational Trails Program Grant.
- Advertise and grow the "Friends of Ossipee Rail Trail" group that was unveiled at the community forum

Recommendations that may require funding/longer term

- Long-term partnership with NHDOT and other partners to determine options for establishing a formal trail.
- Business attraction for trail friendly businesses, such as a coffee shop, ice cream shop, additional restaurant, and overnight accommodations .

