



Extension

2017
OCTOBER 24

First Impressions: Gorham



New Hampshire
First Impressions

SEN HALL

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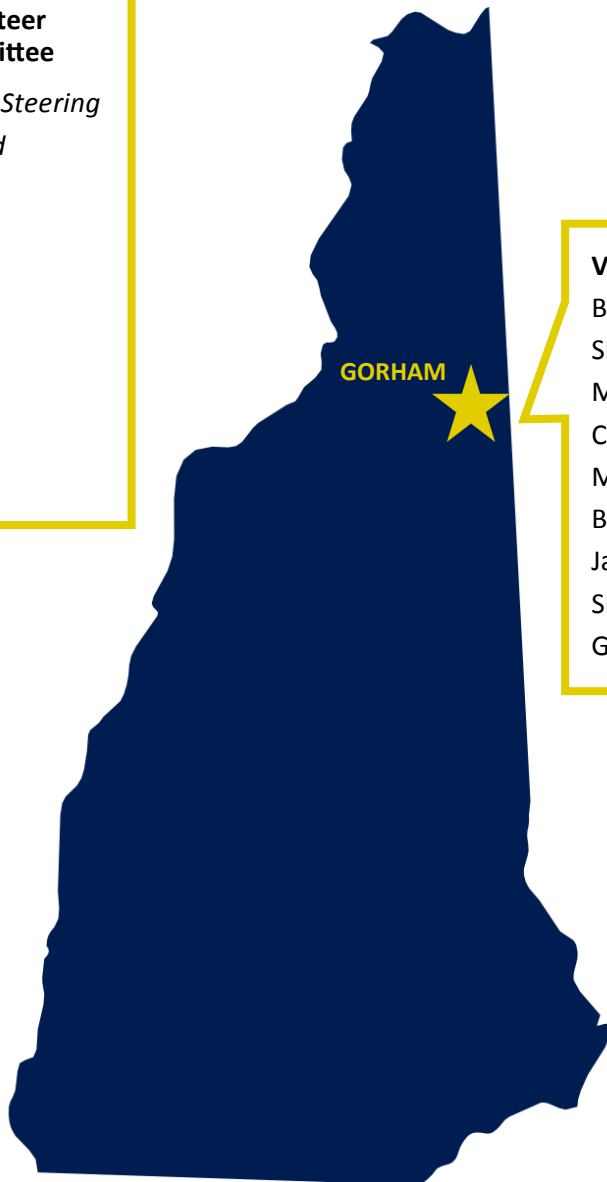
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First Impressions was developed in 1991 by Andy Lewis, University of Wisconsin Extension Associate Professor, and James Schneider, Grant County, Wisconsin Economic Development Director. Since then, the program has been adapted by states across the US, as well as in Canada. The First Impressions program has been adapted by University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension to meet the current and future needs of New Hampshire communities.

Introduction

The look and feel of a downtown can influence the decisions of potential residents, visitors, and businesses. A vibrant downtown serves as a gathering place, a place for people to dine, shop, and conduct business. New Hampshire First Impressions is designed to help a community learn about their downtown's existing assets and opportunities for improvement as seen through the eyes of first time visitors. In this case, volunteer staff members from UNH Cooperative Extension, and two partner organizations, Plymouth State University and North Country Council, comprised the visit team that assessed the community and reported their findings.

Possible outcomes include:

- Improving the visual appearance of a downtown
- Strengthening the marketing and promotion of a downtown
- Enriching the climate of a downtown for new businesses, residents, and visitors

The First Impressions assessment consists of a Pre-Visit Training, a Pre-Visit Survey, a visit to the community to conduct the assessment, and a Post-Visit Survey, and Post-Visit Debrief. During the visit, team members use the following characteristics to conduct the assessment:

	Business		Point of Interest
	Community Art		Public Facilities
	Displays & Signage		Seating
	Downtown Entrance		Sidewalks, Crosswalks &
	Landscaping		Streets & Transportation
	Lighting		Waste & Recycling
	Parks		

Throughout the report, these characteristics are identified as assets and opportunities. Assets are the strengths in the downtown—where characteristics exist and are excellent and well-maintained. For example, a well-maintained trail or a bench in a nice location would be considered assets. Opportunities are those characteristics that exist or do not exist, where there is room for improvement. An example of an opportunity for improvement might be lack of bike lanes, or a broken sidewalk.

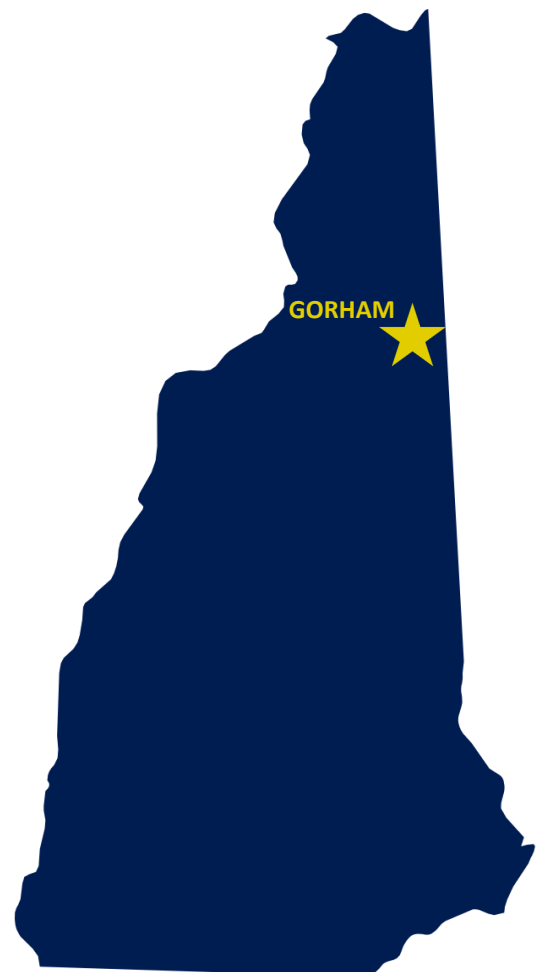
New Hampshire First Impressions & Gorham's Process

The First Impressions assessment of Gorham is a pilot project. The program, New Hampshire First Impressions typically matches two different communities to compile a team of community volunteers to visit and assess another community and then report their findings—a “community exchange”. For this project, Gorham was not paired with another community. Instead, the project solicited the assistance and volunteer time of Extension staff and two regional partner organizations, Plymouth State University, and North Country Council, to conduct the assessment. While this method of assessment lacks the co-learning and sharing of a community exchange program, it does have the benefit of a shortened timeframe, and still results in an assessment that Gorham may use to build community support and action. As an added benefit, all assessors used in this project are community development professionals with experience in rural, urban and suburban landscapes, main streets and downtowns. Their professional experience combined with their own personal background and history help add context and texture to Gorham's assessment. The results of this First Impressions assessment will be presented to the Gorham community on October 24th, 2017, at the Gorham Opera House at 6pm.

We hope this project can be viewed from the lens of an opportunity to connect new insight, data and community participation to prior held community conversations and projects. In recent memory, there have been at least two community conversations, the Gorham Master Plan community forum, by North Country Council, and the Gorham: Trails for Everyone community conversation, by North Country Listens. Some of this project may touch on, or in some way relate to, some of the themes and topics addressed in these other community conversations. If you find those previous conversations and ideas lend themselves well to these new discussions, please bring those in. That said, this is also an opportunity to have a conversation about other opportunities and challenges that have not yet had a chance at the mic.

About Gorham

The Town of Gorham is a historical gateway for those entering and exiting New Hampshire via US 2, exploring the White Mountain National Forest and the state's rich natural resources. Nestled at the northern end of the White Mountain National Forest, and about 11 minutes from the New Hampshire / Maine border, it abuts several communities including Berlin to the north, Randolph to the west, Shelburne to the east, and the White Mountains to the south. According to the 2010 US Census, the population of Gorham was 2,848, a slight decrease of 47 (down from 2,895) since the 2000 US Census. According to the New Hampshire Department of Business & Economic Affairs, Division of Economic Development, Gorham's median age is 49 (www.ChooseNH.com/community-profile.html). The Division of Economic Development also notes there are about 2,324 people employed in 230 business establishments in the Town of Gorham, with about 1,033 of those jobs in the Retail Industry, and 368 in Accommodation and Food Services. According to NH Employment Security, in 2016, Gorham's rate of unemployment was at 3.6%, compared to Coös County's overall rate at 3.9%, and New Hampshire's overall rate at 2.8%. According to the NH Employment Security, in 2016, Wal-Mart employed the most staff, with 234 employees, followed by Berlin City Auto Group with 225, and Gorham Paper & Tissue, LLC with 115 employees.

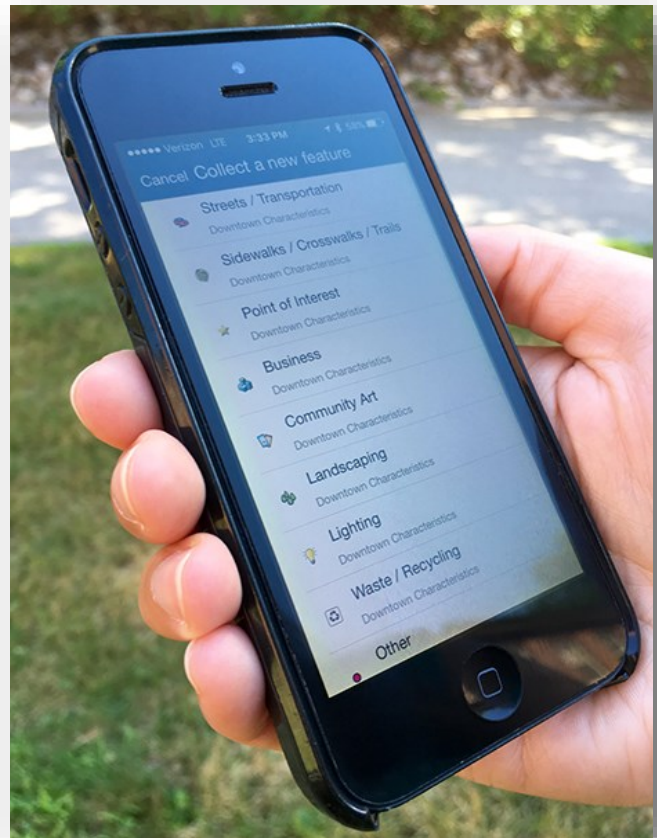


Pre-Visit Survey

The Pre-Visit Survey was completed online by the visit team prior to conducting the visit. The survey collects information about members' demographics, such as age, gender, and town of residence; and requires team members to conduct internet research on the community they will be visiting and reflect on the quality and availability of information on webpages as well as social media. Finally, the survey requires team members to reflect on any perceptions they may have about the community prior to their visit.

First Impressions Assessment Visit

During the First Impressions visit, members of the visit team had access to two tools to conduct their assessment; the use of a mobile application: Collector for ArcGIS, and paper booklets. Collector for ArcGIS is a free mobile application that allows for data collection in the field. When a team member uses Collector, they select a characteristic from a list, fill out a description, observation, choose whether the characteristic is an asset, asset/opportunity or opportunity for improvement from a drop down menu, and have the chance to upload a photo or video. Once submitted, the information is stored as a point on a map. In addition to the mobile app, team members are able to use a paper booklet to collect their data. The booklet replicates the data collection process of the app: Team members circle a characteristic from the list, and then write the location, description, observation, and select whether the characteristic is an asset, asset/opportunity, or opportunity for improvement.



Post-Visit Survey

Following the visit, the visit team members completed a Post-Visit online survey. This survey allows team members to reflect on their visit and rate the downtown overall. Team members also reflect on their initial perceptions and whether they would like to live, visit or open a business in the community.

Post-Visit Team Debrief

About two weeks after the visit to Gorham, the visit team held a debrief meeting in which visitors reflected on the experience, shared their thoughts. This feedback provided additional context and background information to the Assessment data and Pre- and Post-Visit Surveys.

Key Findings

As assessors, our time in communities is too brief, our local knowledge is too limited, and our geographic scope is too narrow to see fully the true depth and richness of a community. That said, while the assessors may have missed things, many of which residents and visitors may cherish and hold dear, their assessments are not intended to capture all, but to capture enough to start a conversation. Ultimately, the purpose of this project is to bring the community together to address the opportunities and challenges facing Gorham through community leadership and volunteerism—we hope our insights can provide that spark.

Assets identify the strengths in the downtown. The list below provides a summary of the findings and feedback from the assessors.

- **Exchange Street** Team members identified Exchange Street as a hidden gem, with wonderful landscaping and potential to be the downtown district
- **Landscaping Downtown** Areas around the Town Green were generally very nicely landscaped, and assessors took note of several wonderful planters, gardens, and trees
- **Parking Availability** Parking availability was great, however, the team felt there could be better strategic placing of parking in future redevelopment along US 2 / Route 16 to hide or remove surplus spaces
- **Parks & Recreation** Gorham has numerous recreation opportunities, from the Town Green, trails, events, the Libby Recreation Complex, tennis courts, several playgrounds, ATV access, mountain and road biking, etc.
- **Pedestrian Infrastructure** Ample sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure made traversing and walking Gorham welcome and pleasing—however, many on the team highlighted a need to repair the cracking and splitting along the walkways
- **Public Facilities** Assessors took note of a number of well cared for public facilities, such as the beautiful library and historic Opera House / Town Hall, and the conveniently located Middle School / High School
- **The River** Some team members discovered the scenic Androscoggin River and enjoyed the view, but those views were difficult to find—the team wanted additional opportunities and wayfinding (signage)
- **Variety of Businesses** There were a good variety of businesses and restaurants within the assessment area

Opportunities identify areas of high potential for improvement. The list below provides a summary of the findings and feedback from the assessors.

- **A Place for My Dog** Some team members wondered if a dog park might accommodate folks with furry friends in the downtown area; it appeared as though dogs were not allowed on the Town Green
- **Bicycle Amenities** Some of the team members noticed a number of cyclers in the area, and wondered if there could be a dedicated bike lane in town, especially along US 2 / Route 16, as well as bike racks
- **Community & Village Brand** The team, with a few exceptions, could not identify a community brand, the few that did noted a possible “Moose” brand
- **Community Art** While there were a few instances of what the team identified as community art, they felt there could be more, e.g. murals
- **Exchange Street** Exchange Street is a hidden gem—it was hard to find—the team thought wayfinding (signage) and additional retail / restaurants might enrich Exchange Street’s use and enjoyment
- **Pedestrian Infrastructure** The level of sidewalk and pedestrian infrastructure in town was great—the team felt that it was something the community could build on; many on the team took note of a growing need to repair cracking and splitting along the walkways
- **The River** The team loved the Androscoggin River, but had a hard time finding it to enjoy it fully, wayfinding (signage) could be useful
- **Traffic & Speeding** Many of the assessors felt that the traffic and speeding along US 2 / Route 16 felt unsafe, especially for pedestrians, some suggested traffic calming and landscaping as possible solutions
- **Wayfinding** Assessors desired additional wayfinding (signage) throughout town to identify Gorham’s many amenities, trails and attractions, e.g. Exchange Street, the museum, library, Opera House and river

Before the Visit

Pre-Visit Training

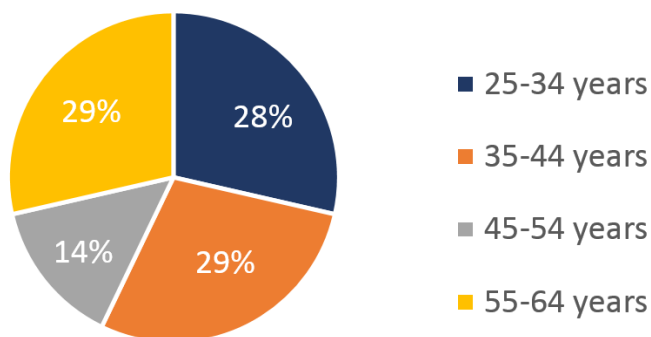
Prior to the assessment date, participating volunteers met with the two lead UNH Cooperative Extension staff, Sue Cagle and Geoffrey Sewake for an online web-based training on conducting a First Impressions assessment. The volunteers learned about what makes a community vibrant, and reviewed the downtown characteristics that comprise a First Impressions assessment. The volunteers were also instructed on how to complete the assessment using the mobile application and the paper booklet.

Pre-Visit Survey

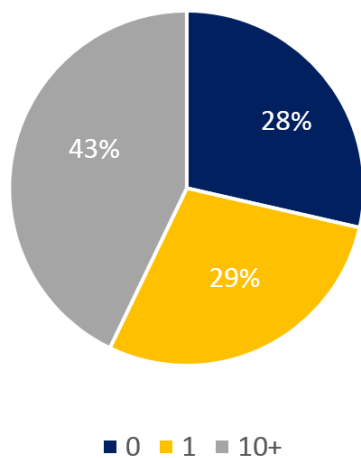
The visit team completed the Pre-Visit Survey prior to visiting Gorham. The survey provided opportunity to research Gorham on the internet and social media and describe their perceptions. Two team members were unable to respond. The results of the survey are as follows:

Demographics

The visit team was comprised of five women and four men. The age range was fairly spread out from the 25-35 age range to the 55-64 age range. See the below chart.



Number of times team members have visited Gorham, NH prior to First Impressions



General Impression

Team members were asked to record their impression of Gorham, NH before completing any research. The following are their responses:

- A pass through community, some place to stop on the way to and from somewhere else
- Gorham emphasizes its location as a "gateway" community to the recreation opportunities of the White Mountains. This happens year-round. Also, there is a connection to the industrial heritage of Berlin and a sense that the two communities have diverged somewhat with Gorham developing a greater economic emphasis on tourism/service industry
- I don't know much about Gorham, but I've heard about winter tourism, including snowmobiling.
- A small town in rural New Hampshire. They get some seasonal visitors
- Gorham has population just under 3,000. It's close to the white mountains, and has active outdoor recreation, arts/culture resources and activities
- It's the up-scale end of Berlin-Gorham, with some good shopping. Some excellent places to attract young folks like Saalt. It's home of community-controversial ATV playground, which use seems at odds with the flavor of Gorham
- A long drag on the way to Maine and the White Mountain National Forest

Internet Research

Team members were asked to use a search engine (like Google.com) to search for "Gorham, NH" in order to record what websites are at the top of each search. Each team member recorded the first three websites. The websites recorded were: Town of Gorham website, Wikipedia, and TripAdvisor. This review can provide Gorham a brief insight into the effectiveness of their online materials and marketing. Some of the comments by the team on the top three websites are provided below. It is important to note that while there may have been room for improvement online, see below, all team members were able to find a sufficient level of general information about Gorham, NH to support their pre-visit planning.

Some of the comments by the team members were:

Town of Gorham Website (www.gorhamnh.org)

- Town website is good but as a visitor does not tell me what's going on
- Information mostly for residents, not visitors. Seems up to date and thorough
- The Town website is a bit cluttered but looks similar to other town websites. There is information for visitors but it is a bit buried
- Useful for both residents and visitors. The parts for "area attractions", "recreation", etc. could use some improvement, not visually appealing
- Town of Gorham's website has a lot of information in an easily accessible format; they feature activities and events that would be of interest to visitors as well as local residents and businesses
- Good amount of information for a town website, could use some updating, found some links to be dead, like the Medallion Opera House link
- Seems current and thorough, lots of info for visitors - but webpage looks "old-fashioned"
- Town of Gorham site for visitors includes a useful list of activities and outdoor/natural resources activities listed

Wikipedia

- Wikipedia has basic information about the history and demographics of Gorham—not super helpful for a visitor
- Wikipedia was useful to get a general background on Gorham’s history, weather, population, etc.
- Standard Wikipedia entry, but Gorham has a lot of cool history!

TripAdvisor

- TripAdvisor gave me only a few things to do
- TripAdvisor had “Boilerplate”—limited listings, mostly focused on lodging
- I always use TripAdvisor when I travel and found it simple to find reviews for activities, restaurants and accommodations in Gorham
- TripAdvisor ranks the top 15 things to do in Gorham in a helpful way and is easy to navigate
- TripAdvisor lists a number of tourist/visitor accommodations in the area
- From TripAdvisor, there seems like a lot to do in Gorham, but mostly in the White Mountain National Forest. However, there seem to be a lot of user reviews

Social Media

Team members were also asked to use social media to search for information about Gorham, NH. The following are some of the comments received on the quality and usefulness of information obtained:

Facebook

- Several Facebook pages were found: Gorham NH Fire & EMS; Gorham New Hampshire; Gorham NH Police Department; Gorham Moose Tours; Gorham Bike and Ski; and Gorham House of Pizza. The Police and Fire page seems more catered to residents, however, there is good information for hikers/ATVers too. Moose Tours looks interesting. I also found it interesting that Gorham Bike and Ski is located in Portland, ME. I did not find lots of useful information about Gorham via social media
- The Gorham Facebook page is more helpful and offers some great reviews of the town
- Facebook had a real good variety of reviews and pages of retail, services and restaurants to patronize! Looks like a fun place to visit!

Instagram

- There were lots of photos tagged in Gorham, NH on Instagram

Twitter

- The top things that came up on Twitter were residents complaining about local businesses and the slow speed of the internet, which they feel they're overpaying for
- Twitter seems to have a variety of accounts based in the area including companies hiring and tourist information

Desire to Visit

Team members were asked if they would want to visit Gorham, NH with family or friends, and to share why or why not. While most team members answered in the affirmative, one team member said no, and another indicated they were unsure. Comments included:

Yes

- It seems like a nice place to visit for a moose tour or outdoor recreation
- It looks like a good place to stay with great access to the mountains and scenery of New Hampshire. From my basic online searches it looks like they have places to stay and some good restaurants. The challenge is that it is a long drive and doesn't have easy highway access
- It's close to the mountains and the town seems to reach out to tourists
- Based on the reviews on TripAdvisor and Facebook, yes! Lots of positive reviews and great pictures

Maybe

- I didn't get much of a sense of retail opportunities, or dining/restaurants. There's also a significant emphasis on outdoor recreation, which is not for everyone

No

- There weren't enough things presented for me to do

Welcoming

Team members were also asked if Gorham, NH seemed welcoming to people to visit, live or open a business based on their online review. All members indicated yes. Comments included:

- The Town website and TripAdvisor had interesting information on community events, organizations, etc.
- Yes, to visit. Seems like a nice place to experience outdoor recreation as demonstrated on Gorham's webpage and social media
- There isn't much information about residing or owning a business in Gorham that I was able to find on the internet. I'm not sure about what job opportunities there are in Gorham—however, it seems like it might be an appealing location for telecommuters due to the proximity to outdoor recreation
- The Town website seems to target more at visitors, than providing information for locating a business to Gorham, or targeting new residents
- Gorham has a good online presence, about as good of a municipal presence as any, and has a much better social media and review site presence than most communities in the region. Also Gorham has what seems to be a lot to do and eat
- Lots of good information on the Town's and other websites

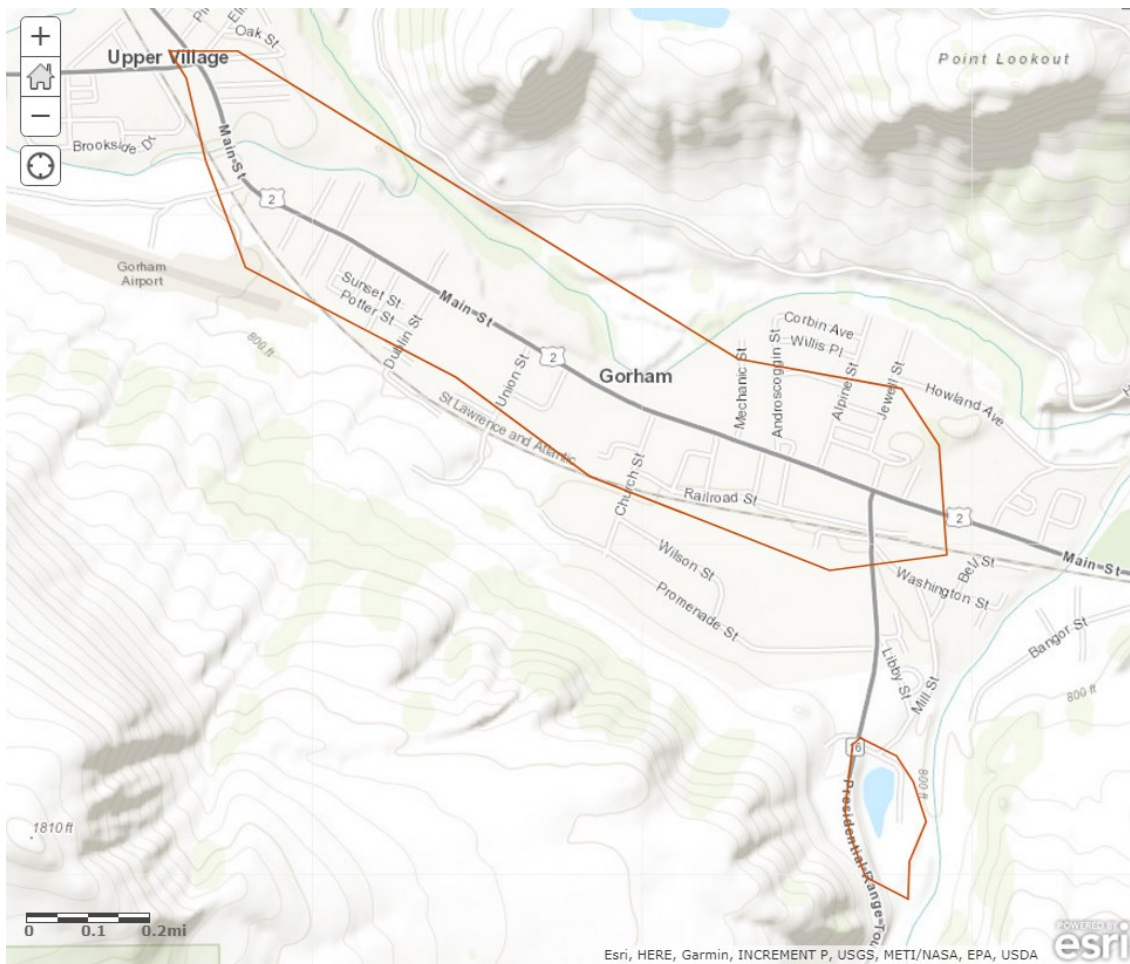
About the Visit: Team Visit of Gorham

The visit team consisted of nine volunteer assessors. The team visited Gorham, NH on August, 22nd, 2017. The weather was warm and sunny. The team arrived around 10am, and spent time exploring, shopping, and eating in downtown Gorham, and departed around 2pm.

The Assessment Area

The Town of Gorham defined the First Impressions assessment area as shown on Map 1, below.

Map 1. Town of Gorham First Impressions Study Area



Findings

The following narrative is representative of data collected through Collector for ArcGIS during the visit, comments from the Post-Visit online survey, and comments during a debrief meeting with the visit team. All nine team members utilized the mobile application Collector for ArcGIS.

The data is organized by the downtown characteristics team members identified, and the comments have been coded as assets and opportunities. Assets are the strengths in the downtown—where characteristics exist and are excellent and well-maintained. For example, a well-maintained trail or a bench in a nice location would be considered assets. Opportunities are those characteristics that exist or do not exist, where there is room for improvement. An example of an opportunity for improvement might be lack of bike lanes, or a broken sidewalk.



Assets

The visit team reported a lot of positive feedback when it came to the businesses in Gorham. Some comments included:

- Nice restrooms, patio eating/drinking outside
- Great coffee and breakfast place with cool gifts
- Restrooms!
- Great cafe with nice book and toy selection
- Nice outdoor patio
- New business in repurposed building
- Not all one sort of retail
- Cute, but needs more signage
- Friendly, inviting
- Very nice and interesting antiques, high end—quality
- Nice to have a hardware store in town. Beautiful building at the entrance to the downtown walk
- Would love to stop in for a brew!
- Cool moose statue and general store
- Appealing Lodging
- ATV friendly
- Appreciate the use of the historic building instead of a new one that is out of character for the community
- Nice decor
- Seems accommodating to thru hikers
- Great location right on river, nice course, also pool table and stuff as well
- Very friendly shop employee, shared history of building and suggestions for river access
- Beautiful outdoor seating along the river
- ATV rentals
- Scenic outdoor area next to the river
- Welcoming!
- Looks like good local restaurants
- Nice mix of businesses



Businesses

Opportunities

There were several opportunities identified within the Gorham downtown area. A lot of the opportunities identified stem from vacant and closed businesses. Some of the comments include:

- Could be a pop up shop
- Great outside gathering space potential
- Opportunity for business
- Empty building with good parking
- Vacant commercial building
- Three floors of the building are empty and manager says he's trying to think of what to do with them
- Closed but garden is awesome
- A few nice stores, but mostly service and offices, would have liked to see more amenities along the downtown area
- Seems to be hidden right on Main Street





Assets & Opportunities

The visit team could only identify a few examples of Community Art in the Gorham assessment area, most centered around the Opera House and nearby Town Green. However, while the visit team found the Opera House to be an amazing asset, they felt the lack of wayfinding (i.e. signage) made it difficult to find and a missed opportunity to engage residents and visitors.

The visit team collectively felt that there was an overall lack of Community Art. They felt that there could be room for the addition of more examples of visual art, such as murals and other displays around town.



Displays & Signage



Assets

There were a number of examples of good Displays & Signage throughout Gorham, but the visit team felt that there could have been more. Some specific comments included:

- Connections to regional branding efforts
- Great signage
- AMC shuttle schedule
- Signs and information booth
- Outside art as signage
- ATV friendly signage
- Nice wayfinding sign
- Well done & maintained!
- Sign with information and ads for local businesses

Opportunities

While there were a number of a good examples of Displays & Signage, there were also a number of opportunities to improve the wayfinding (i.e. signage) around Gorham, particularly to the Opera House and other more prominent community assets. Some comments included:

- Could use more signs to library, etc.
- Parking is clear on Main Street but not side streets
- Confusing Signage
- Can't seem to find entrance to trails
- Empty Kiosk
- Nice looking sign but why is there no information on it? Events, etc?





Assets

The downtown entrance from Route 16, coming north out of the White Mountain National Forest was noted by the visit team as positively exceptional. Some comments include:

- Libby Memorial Park is a gateway to the downtown. Looks like a nice community space
- Beautiful entrance into town, right on green, nice church building
- Except for the asphalt smell wafting over from the extensive paving and loud traffic, this is a great resource right in the park
- Appears to be a gateway, heavily utilized, has an Information sign going towards the downtown



Opportunities

With the exception of Route 16 north coming out of the White Mountain National Forest, the visit team could not easily identify, or were underwhelmed by the western entrance to Gorham. Some comments include:

- Hard to know if this is the downtown entrance or not—for pedestrians?
- The strip mall divides downtown and interrupts the flow
- Could use additional info, signage, maybe for the Opera house (saw none in town)





Assets

The visit team found the landscaping around the Opera House, Town Green and Exchange Street to generally be lovely and well kept. Some comments include:

- Appealing side street
- Flowers/gardens
- Nicely maintained flower baskets
- Nice shade, well kept
- Nice shade trees. Could use a few more!
- Nice display of flowers. Well maintained
- Lots of nice planters. Shows pride in community
- So nice & welcoming
- Well maintained & lovely

Opportunities

Beyond the area around the Opera House, Town Green and Exchange Street, the visit team felt that there could be more landscaping, especially along the sidewalks that abut parking lots with few, if any, trees. Specific comments included:

- Needs landscaping—consider this parking as not friendly. Put something in windows for vibrancy
- Need a lot more green space and landscaping and trees
- Felt too many parking lots, not enough green space along road, feels under utilized, especially with margins for roadside parking not being fully used or allowed
- Unkempt roadside





Assets & Opportunities

Given the time of day during the assessment (10am to 2pm), the visit team did not notice any lighting examples beyond one on Exchange Street. That example was highlighted for its appeal as period lighting, perhaps why it stood out to the assessors during the daytime.





Assets

The visit team found the parks in Gorham to be very pleasant. The lovely Town Green located next to the Opera House had many uses, from ball field, concert space, picnic area, tennis court, information center, and even a fantastic playground, the entire visit team felt the Town Green was a great asset and community gem. Some comments include:

- Open space
- Example of community branding
- Great park facility good place to stop and rest on way to and from somewhere
- Noticed that this was an area that seemed to be attracting older population
- Nice ballfield and tennis courts. Asset to community
- Great park with gazebo, ball fields and great looking tennis courts. Looks like it would be great for events and community activities
- Huge playground on town green, new, well kept, would have loved it with my kid! A must have for young families visiting and residing
- Great Tennis Court!!
- Well maintained playground. Lots of nice structures. Beautiful view of the mountains
- Has basketball court with one hoop
- Nice park with wood chips for safety
- In addition to bandstand, picnic tables, and athletic fields, there are a few nice shade trees. It would be wonderful to have more shade
- Clean, well kept



Opportunities

The visit team did identify some areas where Gorham might improve, specifically, creating a space for dogs and their owners near or on the Town Green near the Opera House, and improving/creating access to the amazing river. Some comments include:

- Park is open to busy street on back
- Picnic tables but no water foundation or rest rooms
- Kids park with playsets, poorly signed
- Great rec area, difficult to get to from Main Street, also could use more signage for out of town folks.
- River access?
- Playground...empty!
- Some seating but not much
- No signs about usage. Open to the public?
- No animals in town green area
- Opportunity to have dogs for travelers in some location
- Some sort of dog park or more friendly animal policy might attract people to downtown park

Points of Interest



Asset

The visit team discovered several cool Points of Interest while visiting Gorham, such as the moose statues around town, railroad museum and information booth. Some comments were:

- Cool moose statue
- Beautiful building and planters. Lovely stained glass windows
- Lovely school bell, historic marker and info; set in a nicely shaded and kept space in front of the high school/middle school
- Open and well marked, seating and shade. Located on the town green
- Hidden cemetery, quiet, walking paths, trees
- Very friendly woman at visitor center. Gave recommendations of restaurants, trails and antique shops, and great to have public bathrooms available
- Train Museum
- Veterans memorial in the park. Good landscaping
- Signed as information booth. Some street parking in front for people to stop



Opportunity

Similar to the comments made in the Parks category, the visit team felt the river should be better highlighted, with places to recreate (Park) or even some specific places to simply view (Point of Interest). Some comments were:

- Wish there was better access to the river
- Noticed no Quebec flag, but did see Canada, US and New Hampshire
- Need bigger/better signage
- Hidden around the corner! Needs some wayfinding signs
- Cool museum, wish it had been open. My kid would have loved this place. Needs some paint refreshing, but otherwise nice!
- Cool vintage clock, but in an empty parking lot, would like to have something enriching the spot. Historic info maybe in addition?
- Sidewalks everywhere and bridge over Moose River, but lacking amenities near all of these motels
- Nice cemetery, but no place to park
- Grand Trunk RR opportunity for daytime attractions looks closed
- River asset is way underutilized
- Let's build a river walk
- Could have trails or an arboretum type thing





Assets

From the Opera House, town offices, library, and schools, in general, the visit team was impressed with quality of the public facilities in Gorham. Some comments included:

- Beautifully restored
- Visually appealing. Nice detail
- Beautiful facility, wonderful preservation and programming
- Cool Georgian architecture library, well kept, wonderful interior and community resources. Quiet spaces and kids spaces. Love it
- Great looking historic building, good to know they have these resources and the middle and high school across the street
- Good to have schools in town, with access to sidewalks and walkable to in-town residential neighborhoods
- Nice to have the school right downtown. Looks well maintained
- Busy! Big, friendly
- Central location with access to park
- Good parking and signage
- Very attractive and within walking distance



Opportunities

There were few opportunities identified by the visit team regarding Public Facilities, with the exception of a general notation of a lack or need for additional wayfinding (i.e. signage) and some related to general aesthetics and landscaping. Some comments included:

- Not unattractive but could be much more attractive to add to downtown vibrancy
- Needs more signs
- Need more trees and fix the parking lot



Assets

The visit team enjoyed the seating around the Town Green next to the Opera House, around Exchange Street, and at various points along US 2 / Route 16. Some comments include:

- Lovely park bench under a tree and planter
- Nice bench near school. Being used!
- Places to sit and eat under shade throughout the town green area, well kept up
- Lots of nice seating in the park



Opportunities

The visit team thought there could be additional seating around Gorham and landscaping to help shade or improve the view shed of those sitting on benches along US 2 / Route 16.

- Two granite benches looking at church outside of motel parking lot. Nice to have, but would like some shade or additional greenery screening the view of the parking lot
- Lots of benches, tables w great view. Sunny - might need shade!
- Picnic tables and benches spread around park. Clean and well positioned with trash bins around. Could use more seating around tables
- Need more benches in public restrooms



Assets & Opportunities

The visit team found the walkability in Gorham to be an asset, with sidewalks that went almost everywhere from the western intersection of US 2 and Route 16 to the eastern intersection of US 2 and Route 16. However, the team generally felt that the sidewalks could use upkeep and crosswalks could be improved to create a better sense of safety. There was a general desire for more traffic calming along US 2 / Route 16 to slow down traffic. The visit team had a difficult time finding trails and thought additional wayfinding (i.e. signage) could benefit residents and visitors alike. Some comments were:

- Think about repair and upkeep before side walk becomes extremely poor
- Need attention before they become really bad—fix before rebuild is needed
- Nice to have sidewalks all along US 2 / Route 16, but need reconditioning. May be difficult with limited mobility folks. Also, huge road margins that in places limit parking (no parking)
- Crosswalks are available and freshly painted for the most part, would like to have more traffic calming to enable safer feeling for crossing





Assets

The visit team felt there was ample parking for cars and ATVs in Gorham as well as great margins for road and mountain bikes on the street. Some comments were:

- Parking available at height of tourist season
- Plenty of room for bikes
- Parking for ATVs

Opportunities

While the visit team felt there was ample parking and a good road margin for road and mountain bike use, they also felt that at least some of the parking could be made into green space and shade, and felt the speed of traffic along Route 2 to be excessive and disruptive to pedestrians using the robust sidewalk infrastructure throughout town. As noted earlier (Sidewalks, Crosswalks, & Trails), there was a general desire for more traffic calming along US 2 to slow down traffic. They also made note of possible additional infrastructure to create a specific lane for bikes using roads in town—the visit team did notice good use of roads by bikes. Some comments included:

- Road noise from trucks and traffic is substantial
- Loud road traffic due to speed. Maybe some speed signs
- More green space will mitigate excessive traffic
- Would like to have more greenery and screening of the parking lots along US 2 / Route 16
- Traffic!!!
- Crazy amount of traffic



Waste & Recycling



The visit team did not notice many trash or recycling containers beyond the Town Green located next to the Opera House. The team felt there could have been more located elsewhere, especially near sidewalks.



After the Visit

Post-Visit Survey

The visit team completed a Post-Visit Survey following the assessment in Gorham. This survey gave the team the chance to reflect on the visit and give the downtown an overall rating. Additional questions asked the visitors to comment on their interest in returning to Gorham, recommendations to friends, and whether or not they would live there. The responses of the survey follow:

Five-Minute Impression

The initial impression can greatly influence visitors' overarching opinions of a location. Below are the five-minute observations of the team:

- We entered Gorham through the Libby Recreation area, which was beautiful! Unfortunately, we were immediately stuck in a lot of traffic, and it took awhile for us to make our way to the downtown area. My first impression was a well-maintained downtown with a beautiful park and nice restaurants and businesses
- Gorham has a long main street that is disconnected around Sears. The eastern end is far more attractive because of the park but there is an opportunity here to promote more of this area and offerings
- My first impression was of the mountains. The view shed from downtown is amazing. It didn't have a specific downtown but rather several sections that felt like parts of a downtown. Additionally, I noticed the pond and swimming area on the way into town (but felt separate) and the big green space in the park
- One initial impression was that it was difficult to tell "the boundaries" of downtown. In other words, where does it start and where does it end? All of a sudden you're in the middle of it. A second impression was that there was a nice mix of retail, restaurants, and services. A third impression was that this was an area aimed at serving visitors and the tourism industry. Also, plenty of parking, high amenity (natural resource-based), and easily walkable
- The park was lovely. Lots of traffic. Unsure how the downtown was identified - what are the boundaries
- Entering from the west side of town, I didn't really get a good sense of where the main street started. There were too many parking lots fronting the street to know where I might stop and start walking to enjoy the shops or restaurants. There were amenities all along the drive, but nothing I felt in terms of clusters of amenities and attractions until I got to the Opera House area, where there was a more defined area. That said, Exchange Street, while very lovely and walkable, the most "Main Street" feel, lacked shops and seemed to be occupied mostly by services. The eastern entrance from the White Mountain National Forest was a lot nicer and I did feel like I knew I had arrived at the Gorham Main Street area
- "Pass-through-and-stop-for-supplies" community with potential to capture people
- A major highway with retail spread down it
- "Emerging" downtown



Transportation

Comments were collected on the quality and availability of Transportation. For many rural communities, this category is often limited, and for good reason—population, density, etc.—but, in the interest of a more complete assessment, the team was asked to comment on Transportation:

- I'm not sure about bus availability —although there was a sign for a shuttle stop. It was also not clear to me if the train tracks were functional. I did not see any taxis/ridesharing and I'm not sure if they are available. I did not see any shared bicycles
- I saw nothing that indicated there were any transportation services other than an AMC hiker shuttle sign
- I noticed an AMC shuttle sign but didn't see any other forms of public transportation. There does seem to be an active rail line but it didn't seem to provide public transit
- I didn't see any evidence of public transportation except for the AMC hiker shuttle
- It looks like there is one bus each day to and from Boston City/ Airport to Gorham. The bus ride is quite a bit longer than it would be to drive because it makes so many stops along the way
- With the long boulevards, flat ground, and wide shoulders, I could see an opportunity to encourage more biking with bike racks and a community bike share program for visitors and locals alike
- There was not evidence of any type of public/shared transportation other than a AMC shuttle service sign



Businesses

Comments were collected on the quality and availability of Businesses:

- There seemed to be a great deal of antique shops, as well as a great outdoor/hardware store. There were many fast food chain restaurants, along with several independently owned restaurants, however, many of these restaurants were only open for dinner. I don't remember seeing any accommodations in the downtown area
- There seemed to be plenty of opportunity for a variety of foods-however some of the more up scaled options I was unsure as to if they were open. Retail had a variety and I was intrigued to go down the street that the recreation building is on only to find that it had a number of non-retail businesses on it I found this street the most inviting however I was disappointed once I got on to the street. One fitness club and pool I did not enter into the establishment. Variety of accommodation options. There were a number of vacant store fronts that I thought could be opportunity for pop-up shops promotion of back street businesses and facilities such as Library, Recreation Center or just local art
- The downtown square area looked to have some good restaurants and retail stores. There were a number of vacancies, so room for potential growth. Recreation businesses appeared to be primarily targeted at tourists and not local population. There didn't look to be a lot of hotels around the main part of town, they were farther out
- There were plenty of shops and services in town, but there lacked a core of where to find it all. The spread out nature of the area made walking the length to patronize all of the cool shops difficult. While driving is currently the way to do it, it seems a shame with all the sidewalk and wide shoulder infrastructure
- Not a huge amount of retail but some interesting shops. Seemed to be pool, fitness center and recreation center, lots of dentist taking upon retail space on a great side street
- Some of the best eateries not open during the day



Housing

While the visit team was asked to comment on the apparent quality and availability of several types of Housing, the short time assessors had in Gorham limited the capacity of the team to do much more than a visual scan or a quick stop at a real estate office to gauge housing. A few of the assessors recognized some housing, while others did not:

- Apartments/Rental Housing there seemed to be a number of older homes that were being utilized housing. Existing Older Homes—fair condition notices some that needed some maintenance. New Homes—did not really notice any new homes. Senior Housing—did not see any. Assisted living/group homes—didn't see any. Vacant lots for new homes—didn't see any.
- It was a bit tricky to tell where the housing in the downtown was located
- Did not notice much for housing, especially assisted living, etc. Apparent rental housing seemed to be integrated into the downtown area
- There are quite a few homes available in Gorham, including right along the main road, for reasonable prices.
- It seemed like the neighborhoods I was in were well cared for. I didn't notice any apartment housing or other housing besides regular neighborhood housing stock
- Seemed to be a fair number of apartments on main street and side streets. did not see any signs of senior or assisted living housing



Infrastructure

Comments were collected on the quality and availability of Infrastructure:

- Bike lanes could be a good addition; street signage—traffic slowing signs needed; street lighting —seemed like it would be fine; crosswalks—need painting and more noticeable; sidewalks—fair but need maintenance before they deteriorate beyond maintenance and need full repair; and did not see any bus stops other than AMC hiker shuttle
- Many sidewalks are in need of repair. There appeared to be ample places to park, and cross the street
- The main street was very busy with cars and traffic, made worse because of the summer construction. It wasn't very welcoming to pedestrians. The area around the town square, library, and some shops was more walkable and welcoming and had sidewalks
- The sidewalks were all along Main Street. The wide shoulders seemed good for biking, a bike lane, or potential expansion of sidewalk infrastructure. However, the sidewalks need to be refinished as there is a lot of cracking and break up that might make it difficult for certain populations including families with small children using strollers, and those with mobility restrictions. I would have loved to see more shade on the sidewalks and by the benches along Main Street. Also, there seemed to be more parking than was needed as well as curb cuts. I found it difficult to turn left from any number of streets or driveways, especially those that did not line up with the one across the street
- Crosswalks needed painting, traffic was traveling fast maybe need signage. Sidewalk are in need of upkeep maintenance before they need complete repair. parking seemed to be ample
- There was some good signage but additional way-finding would be very helpful (especially to the library and opera house!)
- "bike lanes" were really empty on street parking. But, there was a wide lane there for bikes to go through

Community Amenities

Comments were collected on the quality and availability of Community Amenities:

- Seating was great, i did not see any obvious bike racks. Great park/ball field and playground maybe in need of some screening especially on the Route 16 south side. Wayfinding signs needed
- While the park section over by the railroad cars was an especially nice area, many of the amenities were not evenly distributed throughout the downtown.
- There was a distinction between the area around the main square and the rest of the main street area. The main square had a lot of benches and picnic tables that were well-placed and it was well landscaped. The space in the park looked great but it was empty on our visit and it wasn't clear how it was being utilized. The rest of the main street area didn't have a lot of landscaping, benches, or other public planning
- Most of my comments are related to the park and immediate surrounding street or two as this seemed to be the pedestrian friendly part of downtown. The rest felt like a busy street and we could not evaluation on foot
- There were a lot of benches around town, however many of them were missing ample shade, something that I felt was missing along much of Main Street. While there was plenty of sidewalk infrastructure, there wasn't enough shade to make use of the sidewalks. I didn't see any community art, and there weren't very many signs showing how to get from place to place. I didn't see any Opera House signs or signs to the Libby Rec Area, or the two playgrounds I found around town or the museum. I wouldn't have known about the playground if I hadn't investigated. Same with the Opera House and the museum
- Community art would be great. They have a great park but no dogs allowed
- Public restrooms were at one end of an approximately 2-mile stretch. I only saw one bench



Recreation

Comments were collected on the quality and availability of Recreation:

- I know there were trails nearby but did not have the opportunity to visit them
- I tried to find a river trail but no luck. I know that ATV's are present in the community through the number of rental places on the north end of town however I saw no on road ATV's in the study area
- We heard about trails from the visitor center operator but didn't actually see them, so I can't evaluate them.
- Apparently ATVs are allowed on the road?
- Lots of recreation facilities that are, for the most part, well kept, even the cemeteries in town (great for walking) are in good condition and well kept. I struggled to find trails, parks and other rec facilities due to a lack of wayfinding signage and the spread out nature of the Main Street. It was nice to walk all around town, would have been nice to have something guiding me through the walk or a reason to walk the whole length, like historical markers or artwork

Identifiable Community Brand

Comments were collected on whether members of the visit team could identify a community brand for Gorham. The majority of the team did not identify a community brand, some referenced the Moose, and one assessor couldn't get beyond the traffic along US 2 / Route 16. Some of their comments were:

- Not that I encountered. The NH Grand kiosk was as close as it got
- No. It had some smaller shops and restaurants that looked targeted at visitors or tourists and the main park meant for local citizens. I didn't get a great sense of what they were targeting
- Moose?
- Gateway to the White Mountain National Forest I thought. Moose sculpture town to a lesser extent
- The moose tours seemed to be brand and I noticed that at the info center. I also think the skyline could serve as a brand.



Using Your Senses

The survey asked team members to describe Gorham through their senses: taste (food and drink), smell (air in the downtown), and sounds (parks, roads, trains, construction, music, social gatherings).

Taste

- Wish I had more time to explore and eat - had some tasty pizza and also enjoyed an iced coffee
- Pizza! Coffee. I saw three pizza restaurants in a short distance. The White Mountain Cafe also seems to be central location
- Food that would be good before/after a day of hiking - coffee shop, pizza, Chinese
Also, road food for those traveling through - fast food, etc.
- Around the park there was great potential for some local food options
- Good food, getting there. Sadly, difficult to get from one end to the next and inconsistent hours
- There was a great inviting side street on the same street as the recreation center however when i got down there it was more professional businesses than anticipated. Street sound loud. great court yard that is between two buildings one retail the other? Would make a great outdoor cafe

Smell

- I recall mostly pleasant smells with the abundant green spaces and flowers, however, near the construction, lots of asphalt
- We did smell a lot of asphalt and paving due to the construction work and warm temperatures. Upon further exploration, we located the river and I could smell water
- Cars and pavement. No food smell, per se. Air reasonably fresh, some river notes
- Although the town is so close to nature it was hard to feel like I was there. The road was so busy and the restaurants all fairly close to the main road. The park area may have been nice without the construction
- Smelled fine to me. Nothing of consequence. Perhaps a lot of exhaust from cars, which might have been combatted by additional greenery along the main drag of Main Street
- Trucks, some smells of food but nothing memorable
- Truck fumes, some flowers
- Fresh Air (away from highway)

Sounds

- Once I was able to find the river, it felt serene and clam. The Libby Rec Area was nice, sounds of families playing and the river running
- Traffic and the river
- Loud, noisy, place to play and have concerts - so potential for social gatherings
- The construction and repaving made the main square area it a bit unpleasant. I think that even absent the construction the park area would be pretty loud. The area back around the library was quieter and more relaxing
- Traffic, construction, but also places where quite can be had
- Construction vehicles and water flowing
- The predominant sounds were traffic and construction. There were a few people walking around the downtown, but I was surprised to not see anyone at the park or playground
- Constant road noise from car and truck traffic
- Very loud with car and traffic noise



Unique Attractions

Members of the visit team were asked to identify a restaurant, specialty shop, or attraction that would bring them back to Gorham. Only one member did not find a unique attraction they would want to bring back. Their comments were:

- The skyline, river, and Opera House
- Maybe the convenience store or the book store, the Opera House
- Salvage was a cool store. Coffee shop with books was good
- The Saalt Pub is something I wanted to go to, but it was closed when I was there. I've heard good things. The mini golf place was cool
- Saalt/Libby's because I want to visit but was closed while we were there
- If I was in the area, I would definitely visit the hardware/sporting goods store, as well as the antique shops. I'm also intrigued by the moose tour
- The outfitters, the motels
- Expanding some of the smaller restaurants they have around the downtown area and better taking advantage of access to the mountains, river, and nature. If I was driving through I would stop



Living, Working & Visiting in Gorham

The Post-Visit survey asked team members to consider whether or not they would consider living, opening a business, or visiting Gorham.

Would you consider living in Gorham?

The majority of the visit team said No, several noting the noise and traffic along US 2 / Route 16. Some of their comments were:

Yes

- It seemed nice, although I didn't see any grocery stores that were along Main that were walkable

No

- Unsure about availability of jobs, but there is some potential for telecommuting
- The allure of a place like Gorham would be easy and walkable access to the downtown area and main square. It was too busy, it wouldn't be a good experience living along the main road or walking along it to the main park area
- I love to visit urban places but prefer to live in quiet places
- Too much emphasis on retail and constant traffic

Would you consider opening a business in Gorham?

Five of the members of the visit team said Yes, four said no. Some of their comments were:

Yes

- Loads of traffic = Customers
- Consistent traffic—it would depend on the type of business. Something catering to hikers/recreationists or those passing through
- If there was an opportunity in along Exchange Street
- There are a lot of businesses already and they look prosperous

No

- It seems like kind of a risky place to start a business. It's a little unclear who the town is targeting
- I don't think so because there seemed to a lot of traffic and lack of a downtown center

Would you consider visiting downtown Gorham with family or friends?

The majority of the visit team said Yes, with two members indicating No:

Yes

- Gorham is just a bit further than other White Mountain destinations. The town has a cute downtown area with a variety of shops and restaurants along with access to lots of recreation opportunities
- I might visit on the way home from hiking or kayaking
- It has great access to the White Mountains and good outdoor activities. It would be a good place to spend the night if I was hiking, wanted a nice hotel and a restaurant or bar to go to before or after hiking
- I would definitely stop for a few hours to use the playground and eat a nice lunch or dinner before heading out to Maine or the White Mountain National Forest
- It is attractive with variety of shops and a nice park to hang in as a staging place for other activities
- Only if going through and needed to stop
- ... But only to stop to get food or gear



No

- Maybe a quick drive through
- There's nothing unique to attract me

Missing Attractions

The Post-Visit survey also asked team members to consider what was missing from Gorham. Comments were:

- I wondered about a grocery store
- We did visit on a Tuesday morning and it seemed that many people weren't out and about but there was a lot of construction and traffic. Vibrancy did seem to be missing (i.e. there weren't a lot of people out and about), however, this could be due to the time and weather
- The downtown seemed to be divided into two sections, with a gap in the middle. Also, some sort of "boundary" signage letting folks know where the downtown "district" starts and ends
- They had a few nice small restaurants around the main park area but it didn't come off as a good place to hang out. It needed a coffee shop with outside seating or a more welcoming restaurant to grab a snack and draw people in
- More restaurants and shops. The shops were all spread out along the entire Main Street strip. It would be hard to convince me to walk or stop at a place I didn't know about and would have preferred to patron as I casually walk by the place
- More recreation—there's a river there. More benches, more crosswalks, more shade—more attractive as a walkable community
- Continuity with surrounding areas and ease of access to those areas. Something to tell me why I should return for a concert in the park or street fair or farmer's market on weekends or evenings
- Gorham to me is a place to stop on the way to and from somewhere. There are those places that you stop at on way to somewhere else the places that you plan travel around stopping for lunch, dinner, run around the park or a great shop but Gorham is lacking in this area the park is great yet I'm not sure I would plan my trip around it

Change in Perception

The visit team was asked to reflect on whether their pre-visit impressions fit the impression they got during their visit to the Gorham downtown. While the majority of the team found Gorham to exceed expectations, one member did not, and another was surprised by the heavy commuter traffic along US 2 / Route 16. Some of their comments were:

- I was surprised to find more restaurants, shops, and a gorgeous park and pond. There was much more to do in town than I expected
- There's a lot to do in the town, it's just so spread out
- Surprised at the potential on the east end of main street
- Emphasis on visitation/tourism

Outstanding Feature

The survey asked about the most outstanding feature of Gorham. Some of their comments were:

- The skyline!
- The natural surroundings
- The river - I wish there was an access point downtown or more outdoor seating near the river
- The area around the library and the small street running from the main road up to it. The library is an amazing building and there are some great shops and a small restaurant along the main street
- The park, municipal buildings, one street with small commercial, the library, RR Museum. They should capitalize on this area and treat it as the downtown
- Park space
- Staging place for AMC outings



Top Assets

The visit team was asked to list the top three assets visitors observed in Gorham, here are the assets they identified:

- Parks & Recreation
- Variety of Businesses & Restaurants
- Sidewalks & Walkability
- Public Facilities
- River & Views
- Landscaping
- Exchange Street
- Young People
- Parking
- Variety of Housing



Opportunities for Improvement

The visit team was asked to identify opportunities for improvement in Gorham, here are the opportunities they identified:




- Better Connect the Upper Village to the Downtown
- Traffic & Speeding
- River
- Build on the Walkability
- Branding
- Pedestrian Safety & Infrastructure Upkeep
- Build on Retail, Restaurants & Services in Assessment Area and Exchange Street / Town Green
- Gorham House's 2nd & 3rd Floor Currently Unoccupied
- Bike Safety & Infrastructure
- Balanced ATV Use
- Balancing Local and Visitor Needs
- Landscaping along US 2 / Route 16
- Increasing Parks & Green Space
- Allow for Dogs at a Park
- Restaurant Hours that Accommodate Daytime Shoppers


First Impressions: Gorham Assessment Map

All of the assessment data is stored on an online interactive map. To view that data, visit: <https://arcg.is/WjfHC>

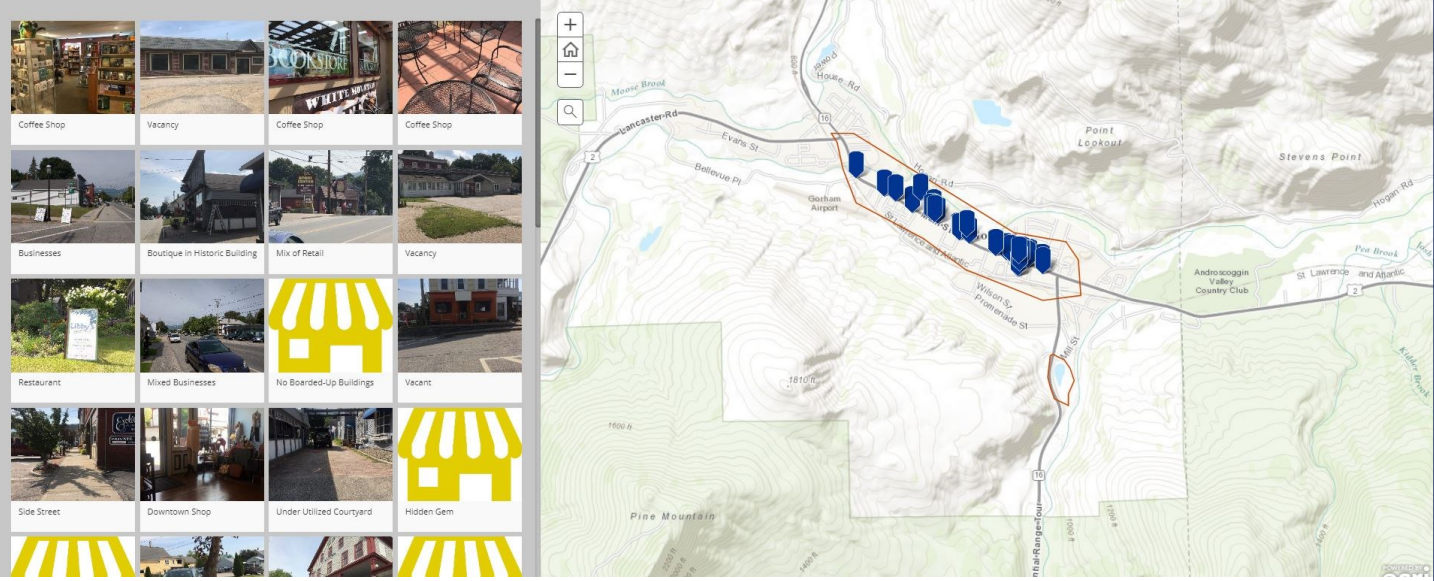
First Impressions Gorham Assessment Map

New Hampshire First Impressions Program helps a community learn about their downtown's existing strengths and opportunities as seen through the eyes of first time visitors through a "secret shopper" assessment. In this case, volunteer staff members from UNH Cooperative Extension, and two partner organizations, Plymouth State University and North Country Council, comprised the visit team that assessed the community and reported their findings. Possible outcomes include:
- Improving the visual appearance of a downtown - Strengthening the marketing and promotion of a downtown - Enriching the climate of your downtown for new businesses, residents and visitors.

A story map   

 **Extension**

Businesses | Community Art | Displays / Signage | Downtown Entrance | Landscaping | Lighting | Parks | Point of Interest | Public Facilities | Seating



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