



University of
New Hampshire
Cooperative Extension

A scenic view of a river with a dam and buildings in the background. The river flows from the left towards the right, with a dam structure visible in the middle ground. The background features a line of trees, including evergreens and bare deciduous trees, under a clear blue sky. A large, light-colored rock ledge is visible in the foreground, partially obscuring the bottom of the image.

Strengthening Connections Downtowns & Trails Hopkinton-Contoocook, New Hampshire 2023 Program Report

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the participation and collaboration of the Town of Hopkinton, New Hampshire, and the enthusiastic volunteers who participated in trainings, preformed assessments, and conducted interviews and surveys. We are grateful to the community members and the business owners who participated in the interviews and the residents and visitors who took time to answer the survey questions.

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Town of Hopkinton, NH

Hopkinton and its business district of Contoocook Village offer small town ambiance through a blend of well-preserved history and natural beauty. In addition to working farms and the oldest covered railroad bridge in the United States, both villages host a variety of eclectic shops and services. This program was supported by the Town of Hopkinton’s Economic Development Committee and Conservation Commission, and the Contoocook Chamber of Commerce (DBA Discover Contoocook). hopkinton-nh.gov



Gazebo at Riverway Park along the Contoocook River



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Introduction

The Town of Hopkinton, Merrimack County, New Hampshire (pop. 5,914 (2020)) and its business district, Contoocook Village, provides residents and visitors with a variety of businesses, recreational opportunities, and spaces for civic engagement. The community is home to an abundance of natural beauty, rich history, and opportunities for the future.

In December 2022, the Town of Hopkinton entered into a formal partnership with UNH Extension as part of the Community & Economic Development team's Downtowns & Trails Program. During and after 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 in this partnership was to work with the economic development director to create a diverse steering committee from across the community that represented economic, conservation, recreation, fire and safety, local business, and other community interests.

1

Reviewed the importance of, and opportunities for, linking Contoocook Village to local trails. Met with community leadership.

2

Spatial data collection in person beginning on April 15, 2023, using ArcGIS Field Maps, led by Extension staff with 13 community volunteers.

3

Development and training volunteers to complete interviews with businesses, residents, and community leaders on their interest in this initiative. Virtual training conducted and materials provided to volunteers.

4

Developed a community-tailored intercept survey, and trained volunteers to administer this survey, to determine interest and use of Contoocook Village and local trails. Virtual training conducted and materials provided to volunteers.

5

Engagement of the larger community to gather feedback and communicate the results of the assessment. Presentation of preliminary data with posters, presentations, and opportunities for feedback took place on July 29, 2023 at the Contoocook Farmers Market.

The following report explains these steps in more detail, shares the data collected, subsequent analysis, and provides a summary of findings, recommendations, and next steps for the community. This report, in conjunction with community engagement and summary data presentation, are the culmination of the Downtowns & Trails Program in the Village of Contoocook in the Town of Hopkinton, New Hampshire.

Key Findings

The Village of Contoocook in the Town of Hopkinton has a number of natural and built assets, including trails (green trails), the Contoocook River (blue trail), a central community park and public space, and an existing village center with locally owned businesses and services. There is pride in the village and the central community park, called Riverway Park, which includes a gazebo and picnic tables. Residents and visitors come together to attend events like farmers markets, visit arts and cultures events such as outdoor concerts, access the river, and shop at local businesses.

In addition to the many natural and built resources in Contoocook Village, there are opportunities to improve some of the existing assets to better support residents, visitors, potential new residents, and businesses. The following are potential areas of focus to meet the community's goals around better connecting its village center to natural assets, such as its blue and green trails:

- Improving the **boat launch** was a consistent request and suggestion during the assessment process. It is currently quite steep and inaccessible for many.
- There is need for year-round **public restroom access** to support both residents and visitors alike while in public spaces. The current seasonal port-a-potties in Riverway Park are meeting some of the need, but many survey respondents want facilities that are consistently accessible to all.

- **Wayfinding and signage** additions and improvements were indicated as necessary by many assessors to better highlight the directions and ways to access trails from the village center and vice-versa. One assessor highlighted that the Little Tooky Trail is marked in places but had trouble finding and following signs that lead to the trailhead from the village center.
- There is apparent need to continue to assess and address issues of **connectivity and walkability** in Contoocook Village. Input provided highlighted challenges for pedestrians regarding crosswalk improvements, sidewalks in disrepair, and pedestrian areas that are not accessible.
- Increasing the **diversity of business offerings**, including food and dining options was mentioned throughout the data collection for this program. Opportunities may exist to develop additional strategic business expansion and recruitment efforts.

At the end of this report, recommendations and next steps are provided to promote town and civic engagement, including reviewing and developing actions and plans moving forward. These may include forming action committees to move initiatives forward and address short- and long-term goals.



Gazebo in Contoocook Riverway Park



Little Tooky Trail marker



Contoocook River boat launch at Riverway Park



The Economic Benefits of Trails and 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.

- According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the outdoor recreation economy produced a record \$862 billion in gross economic output, 4.5 million jobs, and 1.9% of the total U.S. GDP in 2021.
- Outdoor recreation gross output grew 21.7% in 2021. Outdoor recreation’s contribution to the GDP grew 18.9% compared to the overall economy that grew 5.9% in 2021 (BEA, 2021).
- In New Hampshire outdoor recreation generates \$2.7 billion and accounts for 28,000 jobs, 4.1% of all employees in the state (BEA, 2021).
- More than half (54%) of Americans ages 6 and over participated in at least one outdoor activity in 2021, and the outdoor recreation participant base grew 2.2% in 2021 to 164.2M participants according to the Outdoor Foundation.

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.

Research by the National Association of Realtors has shown that homes near trails, parks and greenways raise property values 3-5% or higher on average. Trails are a desirable amenity providing opportunities for recreation and physical fitness. These qualities can attract new residents and entice current residents to stay in a location.

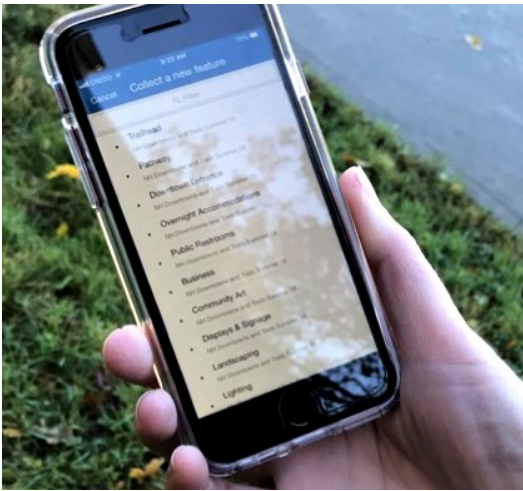
Trails in New Hampshire

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)⁷. Furthermore, 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 New Hampshire 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, include 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).



ArcGIS Field Maps access via mobile device



Riverway Park along the Contoocook River

Assessments

1 An assessment of spatial data via a mobile application (ArcGIS Field Maps).

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

3 An assessment of residents and visitors to Contoocook Village via a survey.

The following section will discuss the process of conducting these assessments and the findings. Additionally, an overview of what the data means for the community is included, in order to support goals increased economic vibrancy through better connecting the Village of Contoocook to its abundance of natural assets and amenities

UNH Extension's Community and Economic Development team conducts programming to help communities learn how to assess needs, engage community, 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 assessments, key informant interviews, and surveys.

Thirteen community members were trained during the Spring of 2023 to conduct the assessments.

Statistics

- 13 volunteers participated in training, surveying and assessment
- 22 different categories of characteristics were assessed
- 251 observations were made
- 52 observations were rated Asset
- 86 observations were rated Asset/Opportunity
- 77 observations were rated Opportunity
- 256 photographs of characteristics were snapped

Physical Characteristics of Downtowns & Trails

The characteristics used to conduct the Downtowns & Trails community assessments are research-based and are adapted from multiple sources. The downtown characteristics have been drawn from multiple states' First Impressions programs and the [National Civic League's Civic Index](#) by UNH Extension staff. These downtown characteristics are based on the built environment and its contribution to downtown vibrancy from the resident, visitor, or business owner perspective.

Building upon the downtown characteristics discussed above, a suite of Downtowns & Trails characteristics has been developed for this program. The cumulative purpose of these program characteristics is to assess the connectivity between a community's downtown and nearby trails and analyze amenities in the downtown or central business district that are useful to trail users. The characteristics specific to Downtowns & 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 4 categories of conditions that need to be in place for successful connections 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 trails as well as additional natural features, such as rivers, lakes, beaches, and community forests enhance the connections between downtowns and trails because natural assets provide greater opportunities for residents and visitors to create and enjoy enhanced quality of life.

Additionally, certain economic conditions need to be in place, such as specific types of businesses that a trail user might frequent, including bike shops and sporting goods stores, restaurants, breweries, cafes, and places with public restrooms and overnight accommodations.

There are also features of the built environment, such as the layout of the downtown or central business district, the presence of bike racks/bike parking, accessible 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.

- **Trails**
- **Rivers**
- **Scenic Areas**
- **Community Forests**
- **Parks**
- **Beaches**

Natural

Economic

- **Vibrant Local Economy**
- **Businesses Trail Users Would Use (i.e. restaurants, bike shops, ice cream shops, cafés, etc.)**

- **Central Business Districts**
- **Accessibility & Walkability**
- **Parking, Bike Racks, Sidewalks, Crosswalks, Signage**

Built

Social-Leadership

- **Catalyst/Someone to Lead the Process**
- **Community Support**
- **Promotion**
- **Marketing**

Characteristics that are Critical to Assess

The following is a list of community characteristics, and a brief description of each, that are critical to assess and 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?		Park - Parks, parklets, pocket parks.
	Pathway - Path leading from the trail to the downtown area.		Point of Interest - Historical homes & buildings, architecture, fountains, memorials, statues, museums, plaques.
	Downtown Entrance - Where people enter downtown. Is it clear where it is, attractive and welcoming?		Public Facility - School, library, town/city hall, post office.
	Overnight Accommodations - Hotels, motels, campgrounds, bed & breakfasts.		Seating - Bench, stoop, chair, lawn, place people gather that is not considered a park, outdoor seating or dining.
	Public Restrooms - Availability of public restrooms near trails and around the downtown area.		Sidewalks & Crosswalks - Pedestrian safety, quality, connectivity, accessible to a range of abilities.
	Business - Especially relevant to trail users – casual restaurant, coffee shop, drugstore, bike shop, grocery store, local shops.		Streets & Transportation - Streets, bicycle lanes, and racks, shared bicycles, buses, cars, taxis, ridesharing, on-street parking, public and private lots, traffic lights.
	Community Art - Murals, artwork, musicians, concerts, street performers.		Waste & Recycling - Availability and quality of waste and recycling receptacles.
	Displays & Signage - Pedestrian signs, wayfinding signs, parking signs, business signs, municipal signs.		Boat Launch – Availability and quality of boat access points to river, lake or pond.
	Landscaping - Intentionally planted flowers, trees, green spaces.		Water Quality – Quality of the conditions in the water or along the edges or shore.
	Lighting - Availability and quality of lighting on streets, in parking lots, in parking garages.		Sightline to River – Availability and quality of a scenic view of river, stream, waterfall or other water view.
	Natural Feature - Rivers, lakes, community forests.		Other - A characteristic you want to capture but, doesn't fit other categories.

Physical Assessment Using Mobile Data Collection

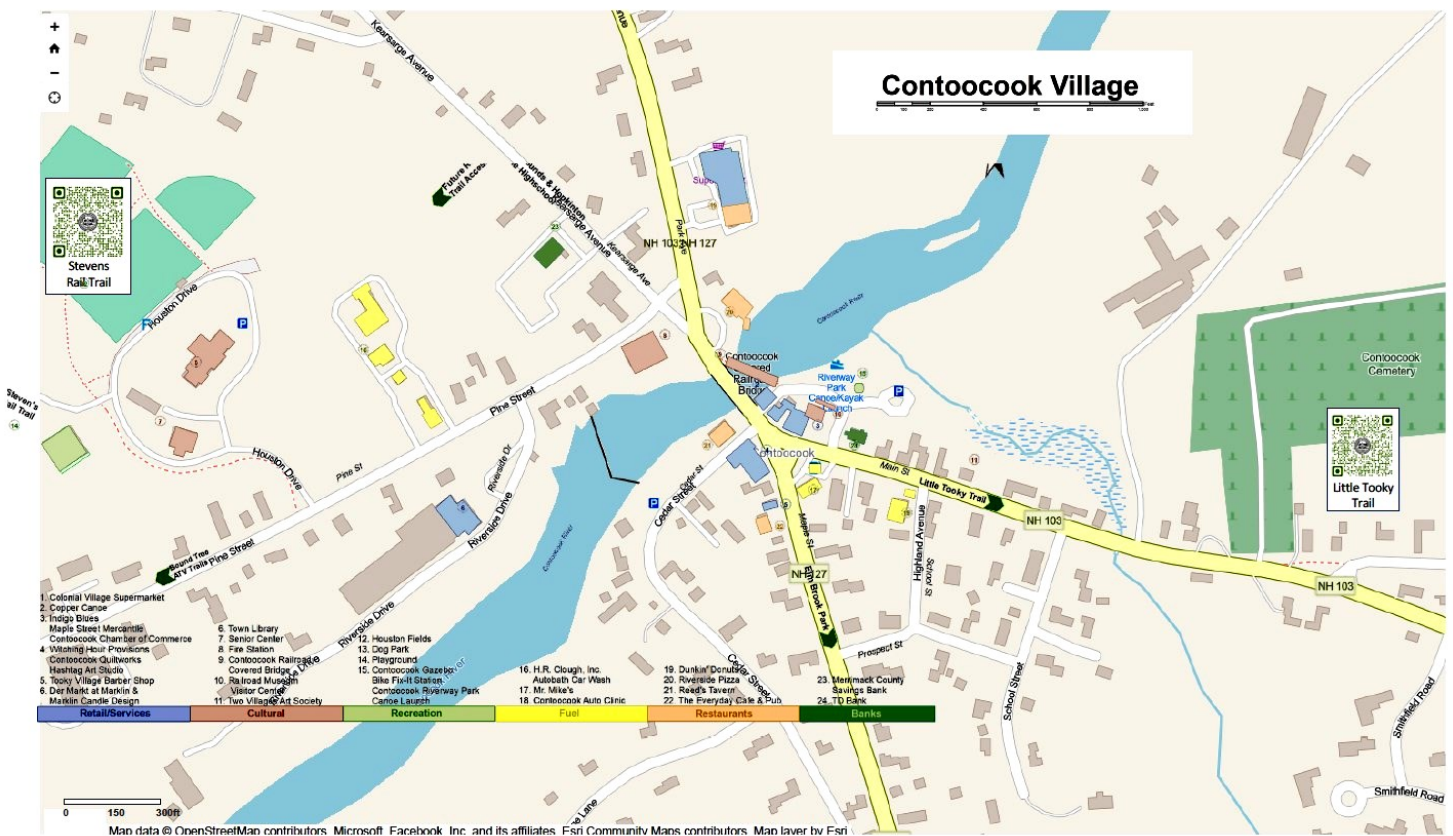
As part of the Downtowns & Trails Program in the Village of Contoocook in the Town of Hopkinton, volunteers provided characteristic feedback using a spatial data collection application for mobile devices, ArcGIS Field Maps, or by paper assessment booklet.

Assessments were completed in the spring of 2023, by walking or driving through the village, observing the defined characteristics, taking pictures and making notes within the mobile spatial data application or by

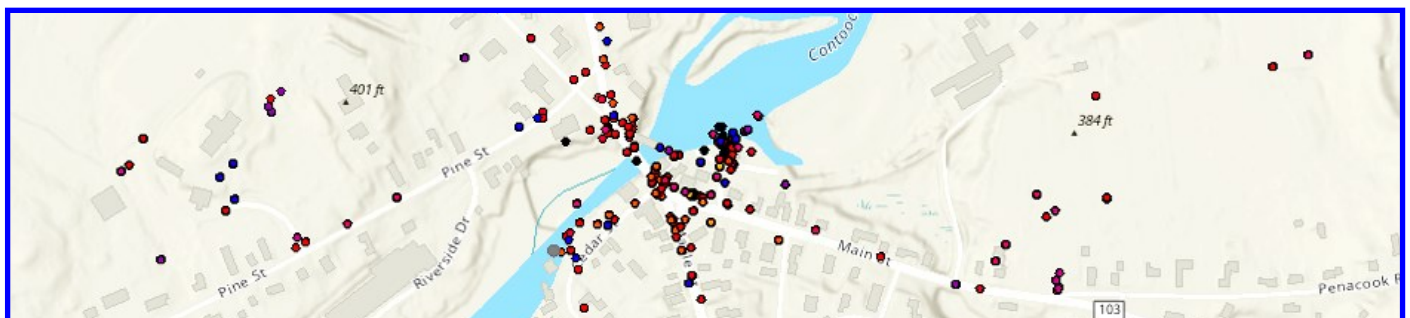
writing the information into the paper assessment booklet that was provided.

Below is a map of the assessment area chosen by the Hopkinton Downtowns & Trails subcommittee in consultation with Extension staff. The assessment area was generally the area of Contoocook Village from the Little Tooky Trailhead, through the village center, to the area behind the library and leading toward the Stevens Rail Trail.

Assessment Map of the Study Area



Interactive Assessment Map [Click the image to open the map or visit https://bit.ly/3OqWBZf](https://bit.ly/3OqWBZf)



Analysis of Characteristics

Assessors collected a total of 251 points. The most common characteristic assessed was Sidewalks & Crosswalks (48). Rounding out the top 3 most assessed characteristic features were Business (29), and Point of Interest (24).

Characteristic ratings break out to 52 characteristics rated Assets, 86 rated Asset/Opportunity, and 77 rated as Opportunity. Assessors looked for how the characteristic might contribute to a user's experience of local trails and the river.

Assessors were very thoughtful in their observations, and many of the collected insights had notable depth and consideration for the assets and opportunities in the assessment area. Many observations of characteristics intersected with other characteristics, resulting in robust data to inform this analysis.

An informal reorganization of the data captured by the assessors revealed additional underlying topics of significance - displays and signage, accessibility, walkability, and parking, which highlighted key opportunity areas in these categories.

Assessors included comments that referred to displays and signage in an additional 29 observations, mostly related to Trailhead and Pathway characteristic assessments. This highlights the importance of information, direction, and wayfinding in the assessment area.

“Unmarked trail to library”

“Sign for bikes to point to village would be nice”

Thirty observations in various characteristic categories included mentions of needed accessibility improvements. Below are observations made of the Boat Launch and Park.

“Very steep access. Ada noncompliance. Better entry from parking area would be good.”

An additional 10 remarks regarding parking were included in the assessors' observations of Other characteristics.

“No parking at beginning of rail trail”

“Public parking with unattractive signage. Poor use of prime riverfront”

The following pages provides an analysis of the feedback provided under each characteristic, and a sampling of the observations recorded.

Characteristic	Count
Boat Launch	12
Business	29
Community Art	4
Displays & Signage	17
Downtown Entrance	3
Landscaping	3
Lighting	1
Natural Feature	4
Other	21
Overnight Accommodations	0
Park	10
Pathway	16
Point of Interest	24
Public Facility	17
Public Restrooms	2
Seating	2
Sidewalks & Crosswalks	48
Sightline to River	7
Streets & Transportation	5
Trailhead	22
Waste & Recycling	2
Water Quality	2
Grand Total	251



Community volunteer conducting an assessment

Trailhead

Within the study area, there are several trails and trailheads that garner use from residents and visitors alike. The most notable are portions of the Stevens Rail Trail (a section of the Concord-Lake Sunapee Rail Trail) located in the northwestern area of Contoocook Village, and the Little Tooky Trail located in the eastern area of the village. There are 22 observations for Trailheads provided by assessors for the spatial assessment, with both assets highlighted and opportunities identified. Several comments focus on the need for more adequate signage to find trailheads, identify parking, and specify trail routes. Other comments highlight certain sections of the Little Tooky Trail were very well marked.

“The signs are nice in the Trailheads, but need to be bigger and more noticeable”

“Sign for trail. But so small it’s hard to see from road. Not clearly marked parking.”

“Had to cross road to get to this trail head. Signs were not clear and there were too many.”

“The Little Tooky Trail extension is very well marked.”



Trailhead rules sign (Stevens Rail Trail)



Trail map kiosk



Potential rail trail connection



Concord-Lake Sunapee Rail Trail information kiosk



Path through cemetery



Unmarked trail to Hopkinton Town Library



Path along the Contoocook River

Pathway

Assessors reviewed the Pathway characteristic via 16 observations. Pathway ratings are primarily asset/opportunity or opportunity. Observations include comments referring to lack of accessibility to all sidewalks, and inadequate or confusing pathway and Tooky Trail signage. This may indicate more work may be needed to improve identification of pathways and routes, and overall pathway accessibility in the community. Comments that outline these observations include:

“Path along river. Doesn’t go very far but opportunity to connect to rail trail in future”

“Sidewalk is broken up and is also used for parking, no ADA”

“Rail trail signage at intersection would be helpful”

“Trail leading to covered bridge. But not well marked. Poor signage”



Railroad Museum and Visitor Center sign on Main Street

Downtown Entrance

Three assessments of the Downtown Entrance characteristic were completed by the volunteers. The ratings were either asset or asset/opportunity. The green and gazebo was viewed as an asset to the community as a venue for public events and farmers market. Opportunity ratings noted the need for enlarged signage at the visitor center or suggestions to add a replica covered bridge to the island at Park and Kearsarge Avenues intersection which would increase visual appeal and promote the community’s historical assets.

The downtown entrance is an opportunity to welcome visitors and residents to the business district, promote trails and other community amenities accessible from the downtown. A downtown entrance that is well-placed, welcoming, and visually attractive is inviting to visitors and residents. Comments on the Downtown Entrance characteristic included:

“Sign indicating visitor center, could be a bit larger”

“Visually interesting. Could use replica of old covered bridge on right”

Overnight Accommodations

Our study area did not contain observations for the Overnight Accommodations characteristic. While there appear to be no traditional hotel overnight accommodations in the area, there are listings for several "Airbnb" and bed and breakfasts in the Town of Hopkinton, with as least two overnight accommodations options within Contoocook Village. These more limited options may indicate an opportunity for future planning and development if there is an interest and demand for additional accommodation for overnight visitors.

Public Restrooms

Volunteers reviewed the Public Restrooms characteristic, making 2 observations. Both observations are rated as an opportunity, noting that restroom facilities are needed in the community, specifically near the gazebo.

An additional 4 observations under different characteristic categories refer to limited public restrooms availability at the public library and fire station.

Public restrooms are a community service that may foster tourism and support local businesses. Clean, safe and accessible restrooms may make visitors and residents more likely to use community trails, visit parks, and spend time in the business district.

"No public restrooms only out-of-the-way porta potty"

"We need public restrooms near the gazebo"

"Fully accessible library, with restrooms"

"Fire station. Restrooms here"

"No public restroom facility in park or village area"



Portable toilet in bank parking lot



Public Library



Hopkinton Fire Station

Business

Most submissions in the study area rated their observations on businesses as both assets and opportunities. Many remarks commented on the quality, thriving businesses in the central area of Contoocook Village, which included clothing and apparel, housewares, cafes, a grocery store, and a new restaurant. Many of these observations included comments about opportunities for improved accessibility, more outdoor seating, improved landscaping, building improvements and the additional need for new types of stores and restaurants.

“Prime location with no outside seating”

“Difficult steps to get up to stores. Poor parking and marking for spots”

“There is excitement about a new restaurant in the village as several indicated the need for more variety of food options.”

“Local eatery, right off of adjacent trails, needs better accessibility”



Steps to access shops

Shops in the village center



Un-landscaped pathway to new restaurant



Bank in the village center



2 Villages Art Society in the village

Community Art

Four observations addressed Community Art in the village. They were evenly split among perceptions of art as an asset or an opportunity for improvement in the community. It is common to have this split. The main discussion around assets involved the fact that 2 Villages Art Society is right in the village center. 2 Villages is “a non-profit organization for artists, art lovers, art collectors, art educators and anyone else who values art as a crucial component of a vibrant, welcoming community” (www.twovillagesart.org/). It serves as a gallery, workshop and educational program space, and meet up site.

Other assets included flower boxes and mention of how they bring color and a welcoming feel to the village center. Several observations indicated opportunities to add art and landscaping to the village, including on Park Avenue and in the village center to enhance existing structures and ongoing renovations.



Flower boxes on the bridge

Displays & Signage

Volunteers evaluated Displays and Signage, providing 17 observations. The majority of observations rated displays and signs as both an asset and an asset/opportunity. Asset ratings noted the good quality and location of signage. Asset/opportunity ratings noted quality and location in addition to several comments indicating that signs are too small, obstructed by foliage, missing useful information like parking locations, bridge signage is faded as to be unreadable, historic marker signage is inappropriately placed, and that more signage is needed to indicate the downtown entrance.



Trail sign through cemetery partially obscured by large bush

Wayfinding is a critical element of connecting downtowns and trails. The observations indicate that it is widely agreed among the assessors that improvement is needed regarding displays and signage, primarily relating to size, location, and number of signs within the community. The following quotes illustrate some of the assessors’ ratings:

“Good signage, but only at entrance to library”

“Sign for trail is so small and hidden by bush”

“Bridge marked only in one direction sign is faded no signage to park, no crosswalk at Riverside”



Houston Park sign at library



Contoocook Railroad Bridge and Depot historic marker

Landscaping

Volunteers reviewed the Landscaping characteristic, providing 3 assessments. Their evaluations seem to recognize the good quality and location of landscaping through comments noting how landscaping has enhanced areas with multiple uses like picnicking, viewing nature and natural features, and relaxation. One observation queried the possibility of shared parking on Pine Street across from the Fire Station. In general, attractive, and well-placed landscaping has the capacity to enhance public spaces, provide a striking focal point to otherwise unadorned public space, and to create a welcoming setting. The observations indicate that the community has been successful in its use of landscaping. Some comments made by the assessors include:

“Area best for creating picnic/viewing/meditation area”

“Improved landscaping and seating”

“Potential for shared public parking?”

Lighting

One observation was made relating directly to Lighting. This limited feedback may be in part because assessments were conducted during the day when outdoor lighting is not noticeable.

Comments in other sections of the assessment indicated an interest in adding lighting to the rail bridge to provide the opportunity to do art shows or other events. Assessors also indicated that lighting would help the bridge feel safer during the evening.

Adequate outdoor lighting makes wayfinding easier, enhances architectural and natural features, and gives an overall higher sense of safety to pedestrians in public spaces and while frequenting businesses in the evening.

“No lighting in the rail bridge”

“Bridge draws many visitors. With proper lights art shows can be done”

“Nice bridge; scary at night. Needs festive lighting”



Landscaping and seating area at retail center on Park Avenue



Landscaping curbside in village center



Unlit railroad bridge

Natural Feature

Assessment of the Natural Features in the community provided 4 observations. All ratings were asset/opportunity, noting the volunteers' appreciation of the natural features in the community, specifically the river, but indicated tree trimming is needed to allow clearer views of the river from the bridge and river banks. Assessors also commented that additional native plantings would enhance the boat launch area. Developing access points along Cedar Street and more developed viewing points along Park Avenue would increase use and the overall enjoyment of the river. Comments illustrating these sentiments are as follows:

"Great photo op. Needs tree trimming"

"Great view of river and dam, very underdeveloped is this public space"

"It would be great to have a park/river entry in this area"

"Perhaps engage with high school on project to grow and maintain native plants"



Tree trimming needed to enhance view of Contoocook River and dam



Underdeveloped area with view of river and dam



River viewing potential



Suggested location for native plantings



Contoocook Riverway Park at the Railroad Museum

Park

Our study area included 10 observations for Parks. These observations included several listed as either assets or opportunities, with most observations denoted as both an asset and opportunity. Many of the observations centered on areas along the Contoocook River, highlighting its important connections to the community. Many individuals highlighted views of the river, ease of access from the central village, and areas for open recreation such as picnicking, but others commented about parking improvements, the need for more picnic tables and benches, and lack of restrooms, especially at Riverway Park.

“Moderate sized park next to river. No restroom facilities. A few worn picnic benches”

“Both sides of river need aesthetic upgrading and picnic/viewing/meditation area”



Contoocook Riverway Park

Point of Interest

Assessment of the Point of Interest characteristic was completed via 24 observations. More than 80% of ratings were recorded as asset or asset/opportunity. The community gazebo, covered bridge, memorial, local museum, trails, playground, and athletic field were viewed as assets to the community. Ratings of asset/opportunity included several observations regarding the bridge – adding lighting to allow evening activities, more signage is needed to indicate access points, and the village layout was pleasing but could be improved with the addition of color and an active fountain. A sampling of the comments provided by volunteers are:

“Very nice community gazebo with parking in the village center”

“Bridge draws many visitors. With proper lights art shows can be done”

“Covered rail bridge next to river. Not great signage to mark bridge or trail”

“Pleasing village layout. Could use some spots of colors”

“Needs a much more dynamic fountain”



Contoocook River dam



Railroad bridge



Fountain in Contoocook village center

Public Facility

The assessment area included 17 observations for Public Facility. All but 3 observations were rated asset or asset/opportunity. Observations rated asset referenced the public library, fire station, public parking lot, local church, senior center, train station, and baseball field, highlighting the availability of public restrooms, and accessibility. Observations rated asset/opportunity or opportunity reference unattractive parking lot signage/poor use of riverfront, unsightly storage and blue tarp at the Section House in Riverway Park, lack of lighting and feelings of safety at the bridge, and the lack of public restrooms in the park and village area. Assessor quotes that illustrate these observations include:

“Fire station. Restrooms here”

“Fully accessible library, with restrooms”

“Public parking with unattractive signage. Poor use of prime riverfront”

“Nice bridge; scary at night. Needs festive lighting”



Public library



Slusser Senior Center



Hopkinton Fire Station



Public parking along riverfront

Seating

Observations about Seating in the study area were interspersed within observations of other characteristics. Only 2 observations were specifically addressed to seating. Observers commented that there is some shaded seating in parts of Contoocook Village, but overall, more seating is needed.

“Bench in the shade near riverside park”

“Village could use more seating”



Shaded bench in front of Visitors Center on Main Street

Sidewalks & Crosswalks

Within the study area, participants submitted a notable number of observations commenting on conditions and availability of Sidewalks and Crosswalks. Certain areas of the village were observed to have sidewalks and crosswalks in good condition, including along sections of Pine Street (connecting the village center to the library) and Kearsarge Avenue. Over three quarters of submissions noted that there were opportunities for improvement. Through the central village, there were several comments noting that where sidewalks and crosswalks exist, their condition is poor, with crumbling or uneven sections, or crosswalk lines that are faded beyond recognition. Others commented that crosswalks and sidewalks are non-existent or not accessible at all in certain areas, highlighting numerous opportunity areas. Many of these opportunity areas for

sidewalk and crosswalk improvements exist along Main Street, Maple Street, Cedar Street, and Park Avenue. Overall, there are multiple opportunity areas to improve pedestrian access throughout the study area that may improve safety and access to businesses, public facilities, and recreation opportunities including Riverway Park and the Little Tooky Trail.

“Lack of paved and marked sidewalks. Car also park on the ‘sidewalks”

“Good to have crosswalk but restriping would help with visibility”

“Sidewalk from Little Tooky trail into town ends and travel feels less safe”

“Crumbling sidewalk and too-high stairs. Not ADA.”



Faded crosswalk lines



Crumbling sidewalk intersected by steps



Crumbling and uneven bridge sidewalk



Faded pedestrian crosswalk

Streets & Transportation

There were 5 observations submitted within the study area with regard to Streets and Transportation, with a balance between both assets and opportunities for the community. Individuals commented on different forms of transportation, including biking, driving, and walking. Comments highlighted a bike repair station in the village center, but also commented on poorly marked parking spots and needed signage improvements for vehicle traffic.

“Parking spots are not marked well. Signage from Main Street is hard to see”

“Dangerously located, very faded, cars don’t stop, poor signage”

“Bike repair on trail”



Bike repair station on trail



Data point map of Sidewalks & Crosswalks and Streets & Transportation assessments



Poorly marked parking spaces



Poor signage for public parking

Waste & Recycling

Assessment of Waste and Recycling produced 2 observations. Both observations referenced the need for more trash receptacles downtown. Well-placed and well-marked waste receptacles, including receptacles and supplies for pet waste, in adequate numbers help keep streets, sidewalks and paths clean, create a more inviting environment for visitors and residents. Comments on this characteristic include:

“It would be nice to have more trash and recycling bins around town”

“The park is in need of trash cans, because we have found litter!”



Litter in the park

Water Quality

The Water Quality of rivers and streams can significantly impact enjoyment of such amenities. Water bodies that are polluted, foul smelling, or full of debris will most definitely have a negative impact on public perception and recreational use. Fortunately, the Contoocook River was rated as an asset to the community by assessors. One comment queried the water quality after heavy rains. Periodic testing of water quality and conditions, alongside public announcement of results, may be an effective means of instilling public confidence in the safety of the local waterways. Comments on this characteristic include:

“Water looks beautiful clean and refreshing”

“What is the water quality after heavy rain events at the boat launch”

Contoocook River



Boat Launch

Assessors reviewed the boat launch via 12 observations. Overall, most folks indicated that the boat launch was both an asset and an opportunity. An asset because of its prime location in the middle of town providing access to the river. However, in its present condition, the boat launch is difficult to use, very steep, and potentially dangerous, which explains its rating as an opportunity.

Some assessors indicated that they weren't aware of the boat launch prior to the assessment, so signage and wayfinding may be considered as part of any renovations or retrofits. There was consensus that efforts to improve the boat launch should be a high priority.

The following quotes summarize some of the volunteers' observations:

"Very steep access. Ada noncompliance. Better entry from parking area would be good."

"Launch is an unstable rocky steep slope that is difficult to travel down and navigate."

"Boat launch really easy to fall down. If not careful could cause real safety problems."



Boat launch signage

Unstable crushed stone surface of Boat Launch



Steep access to Boat Launch

Sightline to River

Assessment of the characteristic Sightline to River was completed, providing 7 insights. All observations recognized the value of river sightlines by their rating as an asset or asset/opportunity. More than half of the ratings were asset/opportunity noting the need for sidewalks and other improvements. The Contoocook River is widely viewed as an asset to the community. However, as noted here and under other characteristic categories, there are improvements that can be made to develop sightline locations that may enhance views of the river. The comments below highlight these observations.

“Bridge with great River sight lines”

“Nice view of river from park”

“Sightline of river from bridge by fire department”

“No sidewalks but can launch boat nearby”

“River area to improve”



View of dam from bridge



View of arched stone bridge



Underdeveloped riverfront area



View of boat launch from Riverway Park

Other

Volunteers evaluated the Other characteristic, providing 21 observations. The majority of observations rated the characteristic as an opportunity - most referring to signage that is inadequate, too small, obstructed, or unreadable due to being faded or vandalized. Other observations, rated as opportunity, refer to abandoned houses, assorted debris ruining the aesthetic, poor conditions of walking paths, and lack of parking. Asset ratings refer to potential artistic inspiration from views of the river and bridge along the riverbanks if tree-trimming is done. Some of the quotes provided by assessors are:

“Path is closed off by trip-able wire, no place to park”

“Could not see sign from a distance, branches, everywhere, old sign about property falling apart”

“Small sign for the little Tooky trail. It is unclear that the trail even starts here”

“Painting location if trees trimmed”

“All the junk here kind of ruins the park, we don’t even know why it’s here”



Potential artistic inspiration point



Abandoned house



Trail sign hidden by trees



Pathway obstructed by hazardous wire



Debris ruining park aesthetic

Key Informant Interviews

Key informants or stakeholders are individuals who play an outsized role in a community and can speak to a larger group's activities and perspectives. In addition to our other data points, this an important source of data and action ideas as the community considers the opportunities and challenges for better connecting its trails with the village center.

Steering Committee members were trained on how to conduct key informant interviews, and then volunteers conducted the interviews with their neighbors and colleagues. We analyzed the answers to the interview questions finding the following.

Interview Findings

Interviewees included individuals representing a number of groups and activities in the Town of Hopkinton and the Village of Contoocook. History, recreation, economic development, housing, trails and trail users, business and chamber activities, scouts, conservation, Rotary, planning, highway, building, and the river were activities and interests represented by the key informants interviewed.

Many spoke of the advantages of connecting the community's trails with its village center. Comments included safer passages for biking and walking with a number of individuals indicating the potential for increased walkability, safer sidewalks, in addition to heavier foot traffic for local businesses. Increased activity for businesses by both locals and visitors, was mentioned as an advantage or opportunity of better connecting the trails with the village center. Several interviewees mentioned the hope of making the village more of a "destination" for visitors and attracting more people to events by highlighting a village that is well-connected to its natural assets and trails. Many discussed an interest in better connecting trails, the village, and the Contoocook River, which is a major asset for the community and flows right through Contoocook Village. There was interest in having a common starting point for the trails with information for residents and visitors alike and having more opportunities for recreation, including ideas like a greenway around Contoocook (similar to Hopkinton Village Greenway).

While not as abundant as the advantages, some interviewees did discuss some challenges and possible



Select members of the Steering Committee

impediments to better connecting trails with the village center. These included increased vehicle traffic, possible parking challenges, litter, a lack of infrastructure such as bike parking and right of ways, trail maintenance responsibilities, and the need for larger and better maintained sidewalks.

One respondent indicated that they weren't sure that many people from outside of town would be interested in visiting and another indicated that they weren't quite sure of the advantages.

All interviewees shared that the community has many assets to build upon. When asked to name the top three assets in the community, natural assets were among the most popular including the Contoocook River, Riverway Park, and the waterfall on the river. Other assets mentioned were the concerts at the gazebo, the library, a vibrant business district in Contoocook Village, including the new restaurant being built, and the covered bridge and depot.

“Anything the town can do to “connect” the trails and the river to the village and the merchants, will have a positive effect on the entire community- additional recreation opportunities and a destination activity. Merchants will certainly benefit from added foot traffic.”

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 Hopkinton at various locations, including on trails, at businesses, and at public facilities like the public library. In addition, an online version of the survey was promoted throughout the village in businesses and public facilities. Surveys were conducted throughout the summer.

Two versions of the survey were created, one for seasonal and year-round residents of Hopkinton, and another for visitors. Both surveys had 11 questions about use and impressions of the Village of Contoocook. The visitor survey included a section on visitor spending so to provide a better understanding of people's spending patterns in the village. However, the amount of spending data collected was very limited.

The survey also collected a variety of open-ended responses, which provided opportunities for individuals to describe why they spent time in the village. Responses were detailed and diverse. They highlighted that many respondents conducted a variety of activities in the village. Responses included individuals highlighting activities they enjoy doing while in the area of the village, including visiting the library, walking on trails, biking, visiting the parks and river, and shopping at local businesses. Responses also highlighted satisfaction with the art gallery and the convenience of the grocery store in the village.

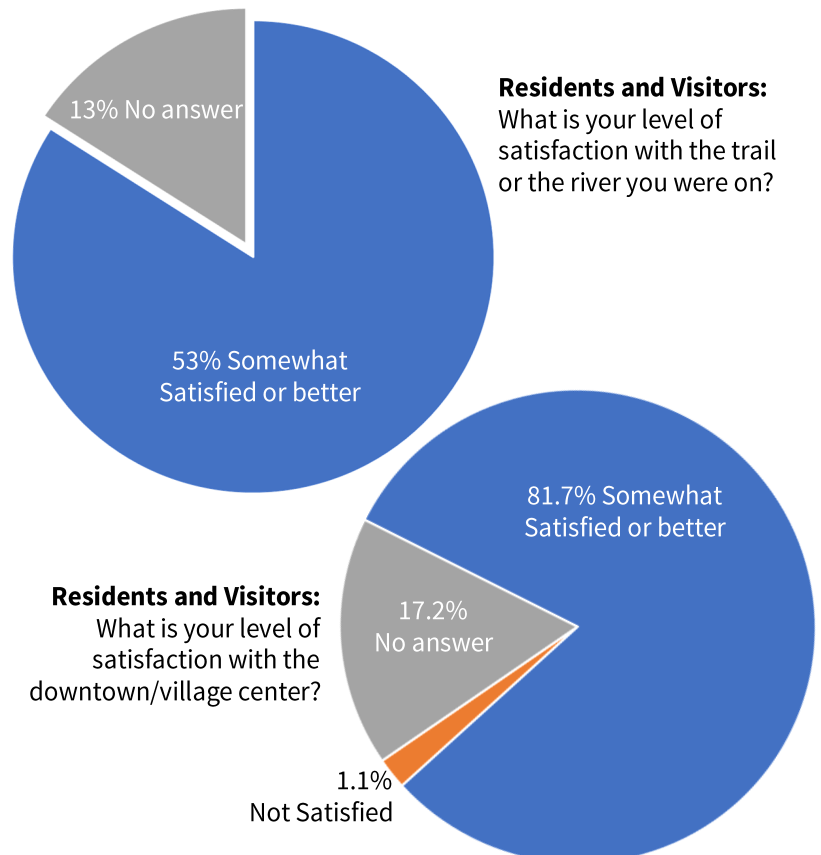
Surveys Completed	82 Residents	11 Visitors
Have you been on a trail or the river in Hopkinton or Contoocook within the last month?	Yes 74%	Yes 40%
If yes, What is your level of satisfaction with the trail or the river you were on?	85% Somewhat Satisfied or better	100% Somewhat Satisfied or better
What is your level of satisfaction with the downtown/village center?	84% Somewhat Satisfied or better	55% Somewhat Satisfied or better

Resident Impressions

Impressions from residents came from a vast cross section of individuals that call Hopkinton home. Data was provided by residents who are new to living in town to those who have been living in town for over seventy years.

Over three quarters of residents surveyed had indicated that they had been on a trail or the river in town within the past month, highlighting the use of natural and recreational assets by residents. A majority of respondents noted that they were somewhat or highly satisfied with the trail or river they visited. Resident respondents highlighted the trails they used were the Stevens Rail Trail, Hopkinton Greenway, and Hawthorne Woods. Respondents commented that many trails were easy to access, yet there were some noted maintenance, litter, and improved signage opportunities.

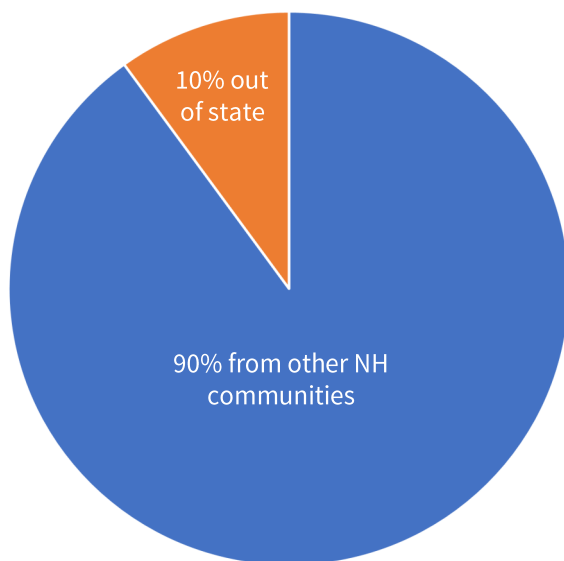
Residents also provided insights on the Village of Contoocook. Three quarters of residents indicated that they shopped at a business in the village within the last month, including spending on food, gas, and at the weekly farmer's market. Most respondents also noted that they are somewhat or highly satisfied with the village center.



Visitor Impressions

Collecting data on the perspectives of visitors tends to be more challenging than the perspectives of residents. The following points summarize the findings from the visitor survey. While not statistically significant, these data give a snapshot and some useful information to begin better understanding visitor impressions.

- 90% of visitors who responded to the question "Where are you visiting from?" are from another community in New Hampshire – with a majority coming from either Concord, Warner, or Webster.
- 10% of visitors who responded to the question "Where are you visiting from?" are from outside New Hampshire.
- Visitors reported spending between \$15 and \$40 per person on food during their visit. Comments about local dining expressed a need for more dining options in the area.
- The presence of grocery stores and gas stations in Hopkinton seems to benefit local New Hampshire visitors especially, as they were highlighted as good resources to have.
- No visitor respondents mentioned spending on overnight accommodations, suggesting room for growth of more opportunities in the future to support this portion of the economy.



Where are you visiting from?



Concord - Lake Sunapee Rail Trail Information Kiosks

It is important to note that while a majority of visitors expressed appreciation for Hopkinton's natural assets, beauty, walkability and ease of parking, there were sentiments regarding the need for more business variety, and increased walkability and accessibility that should be considered.

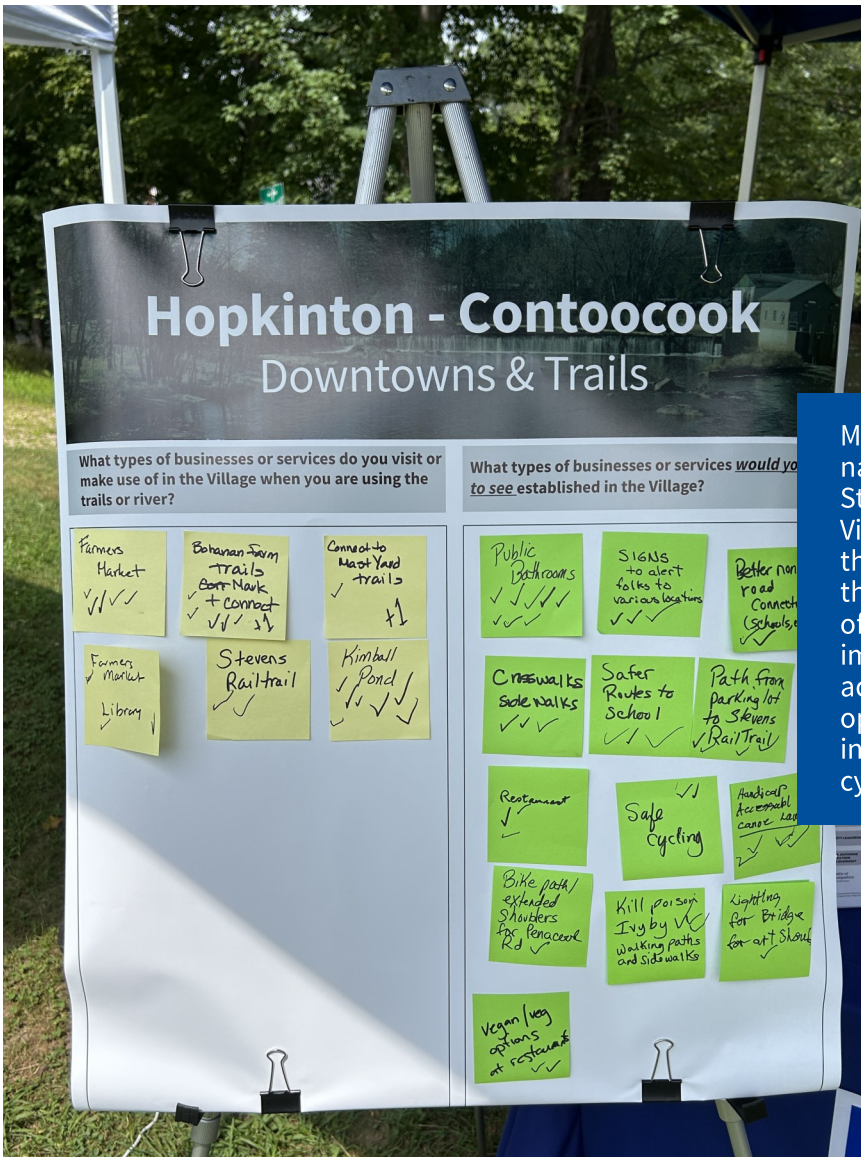


Community Outreach & Engagement

Contoocook Farmers Market

On July 29, 2023, UNH Extension staff set up a booth at the Contoocook Farmers Market to share program information and gather additional feedback from residents and visitors about the Contoocook Village, Hopkinton's trails, and the Contoocook River. Staff had meaningful conversations with over 30 visitors to the farmers market who stopped by the Extension booth. Visitors to the booth learned about the Downtowns & Trails program's goals, preliminary findings from the Hopkinton spatial assessment and intercept survey and interviews, and provided general and specific feedback on the Village of Contoocook and the trails throughout the area.

Extension staff specifically asked visitors to the farmers market about businesses, services, and natural assets they utilize in Contoocook Village, followed by the types of amenities they would like to see in the village.



Many individuals highlighted their use of key natural assets in the town, including the nearby Stevens Rail Trail, Mast Yards, and Kimball Pond. Visitors to the Extension booth also highlighted the farmers market and library as key assets in the area. Individuals shared significant areas of opportunity for the village, including the importance of public restroom availability, accessibility and sidewalk improvements, and opportunities for improved transportation including wider road shoulders and trails for cycling throughout the village and town.

In addition to important data collection, the booth at the farmers market continued to raise awareness of the work ongoing in the community and highlighted the opportunity for future involvement in actions and project implementation.

Summary

Hopkinton has a variety of highly valued natural and built amenities. Multiple trails, athletic fields, the Contoocook River with boat launch and riverside parks, and historic structures and monuments are all well-valued by residents and visitors. The community's business center, the Village of Contoocook, has charm, and new and established businesses that draw both residents and visitors. Through the assessment, surveys, and interviews, an abundance of data was collected that has informed our recommendations for the short and long term.

Recommendations

Short-Term Recommendations

Create a committee(s) or subcommittee(s) to explore and address next steps and actions resulting from this report.

Branding, Marketing, and Wayfinding:

- Continue to develop a branding strategy that features the community's natural and built assets.
- Install, enlarge, repair, or replace trail and business district/community resources signage to improve wayfinding.
- Increase promotion of the centralized trails website to the community through maps, kiosks, QR codes, social media, and the town website – hopkintonconservationland.org.
 - Include information about trail accessibility and allowable uses, along with directions from the center of Contoocook Village to the trails located nearby.
- Post information about community trails and trailside services and natural assets on Trailfinder – trailfinder.info:
 - Inform businesses and local groups of Trailfinder's free marketing opportunity for trailside services. trailfinder.info/getlisted
 - Continue partnership with UNH Extension to support conversations with businesses about the value of trails and natural assets to the local economy.

Maintenance:

- Develop a strategy to address public space and trail **maintenance**, including trash, park, and trail cleanups to reduce litter

Long-Term or Funding-Required Recommendations

Key Infrastructure, Safety, and Accessibility:

- Coordinate and foster relationships between town groups and committees, regional recreation and trail groups (e.g., the Concord-Lake Sunapee Rail Trail group), and state agencies (e.g., New Hampshire Department of Transportation) to address trail connections throughout the community, and safety and accessibility along N.H. State Routes 103 and 127 that intersect Contoocook Village.
- Install additional trash receptacles and seating throughout Contoocook Village.
- Explore the development and construction of year-round or permanent public restrooms in or near Riverway Park.
- Explore the construction of a wattle bottle filling station or public water fountains in the area of Riverway Park.
- Develop a plan to address traffic, road, and pedestrian safety and accessibility throughout Contoocook Village. Many sidewalks and crosswalks are unsafe, in disrepair, or are not accessible to individuals with disabilities or limited mobility.
- Conduct a traffic study, which addresses adding or relocating crosswalks, improving intersections, and roadway design to increase safety for cyclists and pedestrians throughout the village.

Sustain, Improve, and Create New Built Assets:

- Apply for grant-funding to support improvements to the Riverway Park boat launch. If available for another funding cycle, consider applying for the [Municipal Boat Launch Investment program](#).
- Develop a committee to explore potential expansions of public space along the waterfront and additional opportunities for public art within Contoocook Village, focusing on the areas around fire station, Pine Street, and Cedar Street.

Prioritize Grant Opportunities:

- Secure funding to support actions and improvements for walkability, accessibility, recreation and the boat launch, improved and additional public space, signage and wayfinding to better interconnect the businesses in the village to built and natural recreation assets, and continued connections of the Concord-Lake Sunapee Rail Trail through the community.

