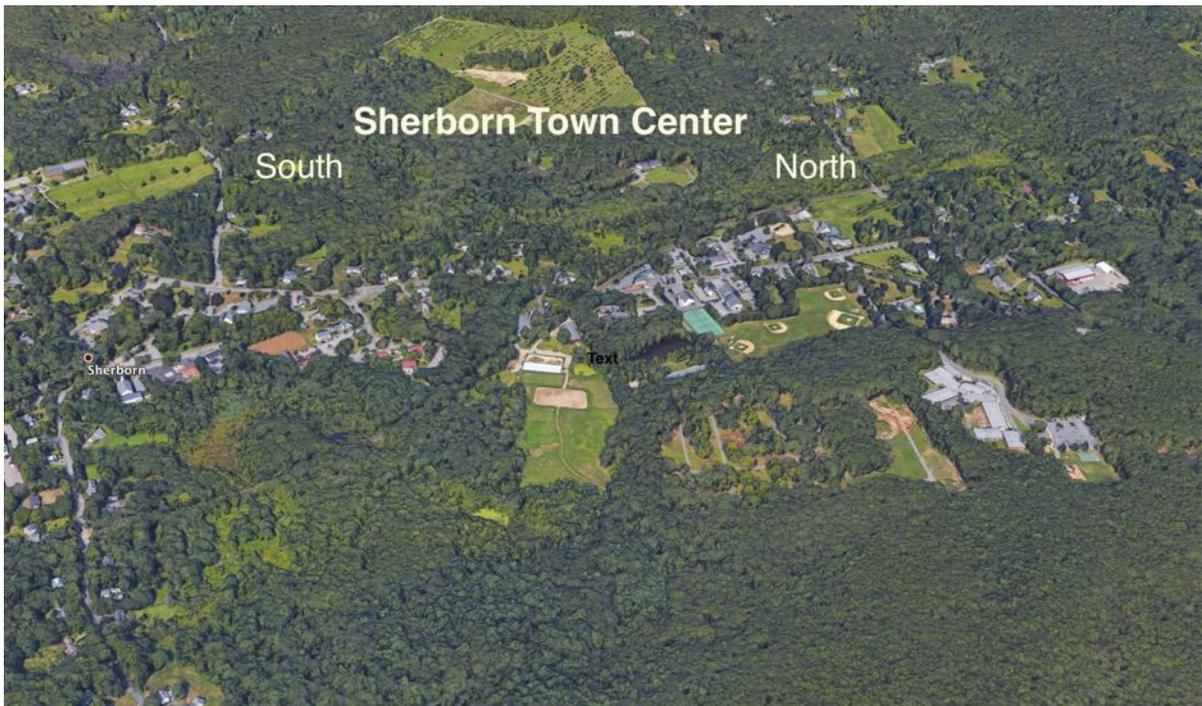




VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Sherborn Town Center will maintain its legacy as a historic rural village with inviting gathering places, safe pedestrian walkways and bicycle routes, and successful small businesses that contribute to the social vitality and fiscal stability of the town.

Town Center



GOALS

- I. Preservation of valued features
- II. Social vitality and function
- III. Opportunities within current infrastructure
- IV. Comprehensive long-term plan

Sherborn Town Center in Perspective

Sherborn Town Center in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries comprised a collection of houses, small shops, taverns, and inns along a dirt road. Through its more than 300 year history, it has continued to evolve, as it does up to the present day. In recent decades the Community Center, Town Hall, fire station, Clark House, the old library, and historic homes were restored and, in some cases, repurposed. Elderly- and affordable-housing complexes, Woodhaven and Leland Farms, the police station, Pine Hill expansion, 20 N. Main commercial building, and a few individual private homes were added. The Abbey Road age-restricted development is a recent example of positive change in the Town Center. At the same time, a small market and a sandwich shop, both valued services and meeting places, have been lost. Recognizing that change is inevitable, the goal is to guide it toward our shared vision of the future Town Center.

Today, Sherborn Town Center is an eclectic cluster of parcels that serves as the town's core of commerce, governance, and cultural institutions. It is not a single cohesive area but, rather, is bisected by busy roads and roughly divided by the railroad track into northern and southern areas. The South Village—the municipal and institutional center—includes Town Hall, the Community Center, library, religious institutions, a small business area, and three multi-unit housing complexes. The North Village is primarily commercial, with small businesses, offices, restaurants, and an inn as well as municipal components, such as the fire station, post office, and town recreation fields and playgrounds. Private residences are interspersed throughout the area and, although they are not fundamental to the Town Center's functions, many are attractive historic structures that contribute to its character. The nearby scenic roads and conservation lands also add to the village atmosphere.

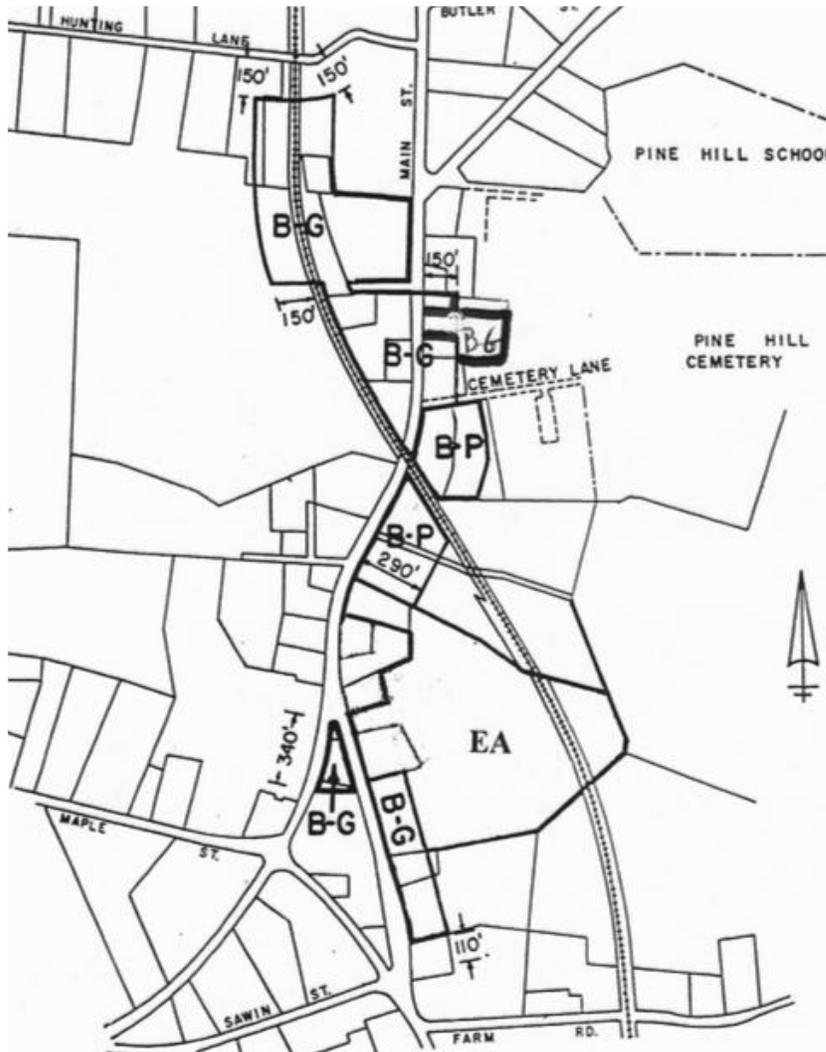


Clark House

Source: Town of Sherborn Planning Board

Town Center Zoning

The official Town Center area includes 46 parcels on an area of 7.1 acres of land. Privately owned parcels dedicated to commercial activities must be located within either the Business General (B-G) or Business Professional (B-P) zoning districts (MAP 1). While B-G zoning allows a wide variety of business and retail uses, B-P zoning allows offices and certain shops but no gas stations, drive-through windows, or restaurants. Both business zones allow single-family dwellings by right and accessory apartments by special permit. The Town Center area also includes parts of the three residential zoning districts of the town.



MAP 1 — Zoning districts, Sherborn Town Center

Source: Sherborn Town Planner

Town Center overlay districts

Under Sherborn's Planned Unit Development (PUD) by-law, mixed commercial and housing developments are allowed on the periphery of B-G or B-P districts if at least 25 percent of the land falls within a business district.

Other overlay districts within the Town Center include Elderly and Affordable (EA), and Wireless Communications Overlay District (WCOD-2; not shown).

Charting the Future

Surveys conducted over the past decade have shown broad agreement that the Town Center should remain small and retain its New England–village atmosphere. In particular, the historic homes and buildings provide an enriching link to the past and are highly valued components of the area. A majority of survey respondents also favored specific changes, however, which include safer pedestrian and bicycle access, improved aesthetic appearance, and increasing the social vitality of the Town Center by adding more places for the community to meet and interact. Many residents expressed a desire for additional amenities and resources here, but none favored large businesses. Among respondents to the 2008 Town Center survey, a clear majority favored expansion or addition of small businesses within the current business district (Town of Sherborn 2008). In the 2014

Planning Board survey, a majority rated the goods and services available in Town Center “fair” or “poor” (FIG. 1; Town of Sherborn 2014). Both included commonly cited desires of a coffee shop/cafe as an informal gathering spot, additional small restaurants, and a small grocery or general store.

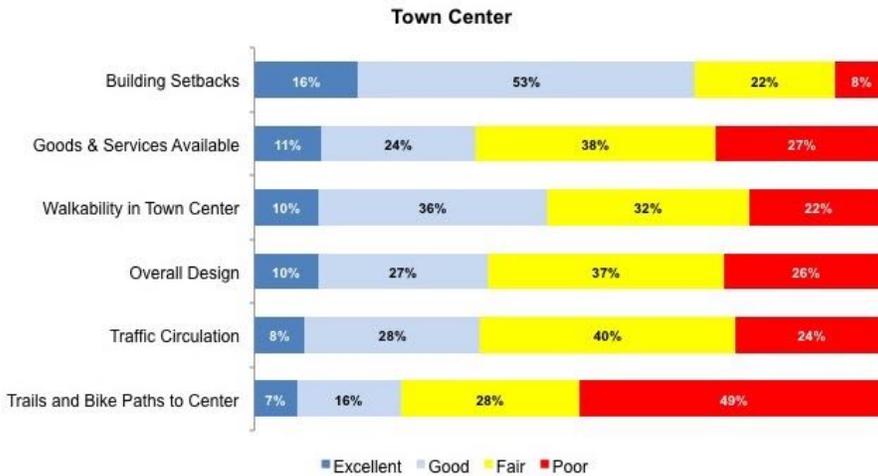


FIGURE 1—Results from the 2014 residents’ survey

Source: Town of Sherborn, Planning Board

These opinions are not new. Indeed, beginning with the 1958 Master Plan, they have driven many planning efforts aimed at improving the social and financial vitality of Sherborn Town Center. Over the years town boards and committees have repeatedly grappled with these issues, as evidenced by the 1971 Town Center Study, the 1975 Master Plan, the 1981 report of the Zoning Study Committee, the 1989 Town Center Master Plan, both the Livability Charrette and the General Plan of 2001, the 2004 Community Development Plan, and the 2007 Final Report of the Town Center Water District Workgroup. In 2011, the Planning Board produced a draft report, “Sherborn Town Center: At a Crossroads,” which analyzed in detail the constraints and possibilities for addition of businesses and housing (Town of Sherborn 2011). In 2016, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) analyzed possible options for additional housing in the Town Center. (For links to some of these documents, see reference list.)

Plans for enhancement of the Town Center repeatedly run up against now-familiar constraints. For example, the area is served by multiple wells and septic systems that are not sufficiently separated. This represents a potential health risk for existing businesses and homes and leaves little room for expansion. Despite ongoing fact-finding and analysis, the best options for assuring the safety of Town Center water supplies remain unclear. In addition, most Town Center properties are not town owned, and business owners naturally have their own priorities. Finally, no town-wide consensus exists regarding the type and extent of change desired.

The ongoing challenge is to move from long-range planning to specific, realistic actions that can be taken to materially improve our Town Center in the short, medium, and long terms. To that end, Goals I, II, and III of this section of the General Plan all follow a practical progression that begins with preservation, moves to readily feasible improvements, and then to positive changes that are possible within the present water and septic infrastructure. Finally, Goal IV seeks to establish a logical framework for evaluating and agreeing upon the more significant changes that residents

desire. A prerequisite for such change is a detailed definition of the costs and benefits of a Town Center water and/or wastewater infrastructure and to determine how to move forward. The goals and recommendations outlined below are guided by the overarching principle that any change must be consistent with our vision of a vibrant Town Center with an inviting village atmosphere.

GOAL I ► Preserve the most valued features of the existing Town Center

Historic Legacy

As one approaches Sherborn Center along the main roads, a series of well-maintained historic houses and buildings present the “face” of the town, visually communicating Sherborn’s long historic legacy and traditional semirural character. The contribution of historical buildings in the Town Center to Sherborn’s atmosphere, attractiveness, and overall property values, while hard to quantify, is intuitively understood. The Town Center’s historic buildings, monuments, and other tangible symbols of the town’s history, form an important legacy to be maintained for future generations.

Preservation requires legal protections and vigilance. The most robust protection at present is provided by the town’s Local Historic District, which is protected under Chapter 40C of Massachusetts General Law and administered by the Sherborn Historic District Commission (see Cultural Resources section). The law requires that proposed changes and additions visible from a public way must preserve the historic features of the property and maintain the district’s overall integrity and character. The Sherborn Center Local Historic District includes 25 properties (see Cultural Resources section, MAP 1).

Sherborn also has two National Register Districts—the Edward’s Plain–Dowse’s Corner Historic District, which encompasses 33 properties, and the Sherborn Center Historic District, with 35 properties. A National Register District (NRD) is part of the National Register of Historic Places, a list of individual buildings and sites that have received federal designation for the significance of their history, architecture, or archaeology. The NRD confers recognition, but very limited practical legal protections. Structures designated as historically significant are protected only if state or federal funding or licenses are sought for renovations or alterations. Given these legal limitations, historic preservation must rely on the education and awareness of Sherborn residents, business owners, and governing bodies about the vulnerability of our irreplaceable historic assets. (See also Cultural Resources section.)

Village Character

In addition to its historical assets and landmarks, Sherborn Center today has many positive features that are worth preserving and maintaining. It retains a village scale, consisting of a linear collection of public and private buildings along the road with adjacent elementary school, cemetery, playground, playing fields, and tennis courts. Town Center businesses are appropriately small and contribute to the sense of community by serving as informal meeting places. The municipal buildings are clustered in a “campus” that bustles with meetings of our many volunteer boards, committees, and self-organized community groups. The town library, long an architectural asset and the town’s primary cultural center, is currently under renovation and expansion so it will be able to provide new resources and opportunities for community activities. Heavy vehicular traffic along the main roads

has a significant impact on the village atmosphere, however, and this would be improved by more safe, pleasant pedestrian connections.

Summary of Challenges

- Most Town Center properties, including historic buildings and homes, are privately owned, and little regulation or control by the town affects them.
- Historic District designation does not apply to all historic buildings in the Town Center, and National Register designation provides only limited protection. It is difficult to decide which historical assets to protect, change, or restore.
- Heavy traffic and congestion detract from the village character of Town Center.

Recommendations

A. Actively promote the preservation of those selected historically significant private properties in the Town Center district that are important in telling Sherborn’s “story.”

(See Goal I in Cultural Resources section)

1. Homes
2. Former homes used as businesses
3. Churches

B. Maintain historic municipal buildings and structures to ensure the preservation of their appearance and function into the future.

1. Town Hall
2. Community Center
3. Cemetery, monuments, and memorials
4. Stone walls, historical signage
5. Shade trees throughout Town Center

C. Continue to support the integration of recreational fields, resources, and activities in Town Center.

1. Measure and improve the Town Center’s “walkability score” using the [MAPC Local Access program](#) as a source of standard criteria.
2. Keep the recreation fields integrated with the Town Center as attractions and support for food vendors, other facilities, businesses, and parking.

D. Consider roadway changes to preserve scale and feel of a rural village.

(See Circulation section)

1. Study options for vehicle turning lanes and/or bike lanes within the constraints of current pavement widths and to the extent allowed by state regulations.
2. Consider new traffic-light technology to facilitate traffic flow at critical intersections of major streets.
3. Maintain historic configuration of streets, in some cases changing intersections to increase walkability, safety, and function.
4. Add shade trees, roadside curbing, landscaping, and sidewalks to enhance small town atmosphere and encourage safe flow of pedestrians and traffic.

E. Protect Sherborn's village character by establishing design-review guidelines for renovations and new buildings and structures in the Town Center.

(Also see GOAL IV, Recommendation F)

1. The guidelines must be consistent with the town's long-term vision yet respectful of private property rights.
2. The design-review guidelines must be clear to property owners and developers so they can understand requirements for development and the guidelines must be achievable.
3. Design a process for adopting and implementing the guidelines.

GOAL II ► Enhance the social vitality and function of the existing Town Center through incremental improvements.

Moving Around the Town Center

While there is mounting evidence for the value of walking for health and prevention of obesity, our Town Center is not presently designed to make pedestrian travel easy or pleasant. The social vitality of the center would also be enhanced by increased pedestrian traffic. An integrated pedestrian walkway system throughout the entire center would increase pedestrian contact with shops and services, reduce the impetus to short distance driving. For example, presently a resident doing errands at the post office, drug store, and Town Hall is apt to drive and park three times. Ideally such a trip would involve parking once and walking to all three destinations, in the course of which the resident will be likely to run into acquaintances along the way and stop to chat in a small, pleasant "pocket park." It is important that visitors, residents, elders who live in the Town Center, and schoolchildren feel safe and comfortable as they circulate throughout this central district on foot.



Sherborn Center at rush hour. Source: Sherborn Planning Board

The merging of Routes 16 and 27 creates a bottleneck that slows vehicular traffic and has long been considered a negative feature of the Town Center. It is generally agreed, however, that widening Main Street is not a solution, as this narrow road provides a disincentive for potential increases in through-traffic and serves to maintain the village character of the area. While the town cannot control traffic congestion during rush hour, Town Center businesses could find ways to exploit it better. Businesses

might gain sales volume by offering goods and services for handy pickup to commuters on the way home. Other contributing factors include clear signage, easy access, and parking.

The safety, predictability, and flow of vehicular traffic through the Town Center are compromised by four difficult intersections that frustrate drivers and add difficulty for vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians alike. To address these problems, in 2016 the town planner submitted a successful application to the commonwealth's Complete Streets Program that resulted in formal adoption of a Complete Streets Policy by the Select Board (SB; formerly the Board of Selectmen). The policy directs decision makers to consistently plan, design, and construct streets that will accommodate all of their anticipated users including pedestrians of all ages and abilities, bicyclists, and motorists. In 2017 the town won a grant supporting a professional analysis and a draft prioritization plan for improvement of Sherborn's streets and intersections, especially those in Sherborn Center, with the goal of safety for all users. It now qualifies Sherborn to apply for significant grant funding to implement needed changes and ensure safe sharing of roads and walkability throughout the center. In 2018, the first grant applications for three pedestrian-oriented projects were approved. (Many of the recommended actions are described in this plan's Circulation section.)

Integration with Open Space Recreation

Sherborn possesses some of the most scenic country roads and trails in the Greater Boston metropolitan area. These resources attract cyclists and hikers from the entire region, who could benefit Town Center businesses if connections among byways were easy and safe. Sherborn's extensive trail system includes the regional Bay Circuit Trail that passes within a short stroll from Town Center, yet no indication of how to access this recreational connection exists in Town Center. Many Sherborn residents do not know about the town's extensive trails and conservation lands, in part because of the lack of information at Town Center sites.



Sherborn is also in the middle of a popular region for recreational bicyclists, and our scenic roads are listed in books and shown on bike club maps detailing bike routes in eastern Massachusetts. Although two bicycle shops are located in Sherborn Town Center, bicycle travel on Routes 27 and 16 into and through the area is unprotected and must compete with motor vehicle traffic. With incremental changes guided by the Complete Streets Program, the Town Center could serve as a centerpiece for these roads and trails, encouraging recreational use, enabling social gatherings, and supporting Town

Summary of Challenges

- The Town Center has few safe walkways and crosswalks linking businesses, public buildings, and residences to one another and to surrounding neighborhoods.
- The Town Center lacks attractive outdoor resting or gathering places where people can informally meet and socialize.
- No readily accessible central information sources in Town Center inform people about the historic sites, trails, or bike routes throughout the town.
- The Town Center offers no publicly accessible restrooms or drinking water sources to recreational users, visitors, and residents.
- No marked bike trails or bike lanes—either to or through Town Center—are present, and no signs advise vehicles to share the road with bikes.

Center businesses.

Recommendations

A. Create a more walkable Town Center guided by the Complete Streets Program.

1. Link all Town Center destinations by sidewalks and crosswalks.
 - a. Install sidewalks on both sides of main streets in both North and South Villages, as feasible.
 - b. In the South Town Center, install pedestrian crosswalks connecting businesses with the library, Community Center, and churches.
 - c. Install improved, safe pedestrian walkways to connect South Town Center businesses to the adjacent elder- and family-housing communities.
2. Formulate a long-term plan for incremental addition of paved bike/walking paths that link North and South Town Centers and provide alternative routes that avoid busy roads. For example:
 - a. On the east side: behind the recreational field at the end of Cemetery Lane, link Pine Hill School, the Clark House, Abbey Road, Woodhaven/Leland Farms, and Farm Road.

- b. On the west side, along the railroad line: Unpaved route from the Bay Circuit Trail to Hunting Lane; paved route from Hunting Lane to behind the buildings on the business district's west side.
3. Improve pedestrian safety and accessibility throughout the Town Center.
 - a. Incorporate Complete Streets design standards for accessible crosswalks and sidewalks.
 - b. Consider the needs of students from the Pine Hill School, seniors in South Village, and citizens with disabilities.
4. Develop safe, established linkages from the town-wide trail system to Town Center through existing and new trails, sidewalks, and paths.
 - a. Give priority to destinations that include Town Center businesses, Pine Hill School, the ball fields, and routes used by schoolchildren.
 - b. Provide alternative access routes to Pine Hill School to encourage alternative healthy physical activity and safe walking and bike routes to schools.
 - c. Use existing easements and negotiate new ones.
 - d. Insure consistency with Sherborn's Open Space and Recreation Plan.

B. *Make Sherborn Town Center truly bicycle friendly.*

1. Create well-marked bike corridors into and through the Town Center as well as on roads that connect to it.
 - a. Work with local and regional bike clubs and local businesses to arrive at ideas for improving safety and enjoyment of biking through Sherborn and its Town Center.
 - b. Avoid widening existing roads. Revise pavement lines for safer road sharing; for example, add dashed lines with bike-lane logos on both sides.
 - c. Link the Town Center to other towns and regional trails via roads and trails.
2. Improve bicycle safety in Town Center.
 - a. Place signs in Town Center and elsewhere to remind drivers to share the road with bikes.
 - b. Improve safety for cyclists by adding signage, bike lanes or bike-sharing symbols in vehicle lanes along N. Main Street to Natick to alert drivers to be on the lookout for bicycles.
 - c. Add signage that warns cyclists to obey bicycle rules of the road.
 - d. Provide road markings that show the location of bicycle travel paths at busy intersections.
3. Install paved paths that provide cyclists easy access to North and South Town Centers and Pine Hill School (see Recommendation A2, above)
 - a. Install a bike-friendly sidewalks on S. Main and N. Main between Farm Road and Eliot Street.

- b. Build a paved bike path from the gas station and Ride Headquarters to Ward Park, the tennis courts, and on to Pine Hill School.
- c. Link or extend these paths to secondary roads (Green Lane, Hunting Lane, Farm Road) to allow access to the two bike shops and other businesses, meeting places, and amenities in Town Center for cyclists riding through town.

C. *Enable social gathering in the Town Center through design and built-environment features.*

1. Create pocket parks (i.e., inviting meeting and interaction places that include seating, shade, and/or green space).
 - a. Include benches, possibly a gazebo and, where appropriate, a bike rack.
 - b. Pocket parks should be accessible to and integrated with businesses, municipal buildings, and recreational sites.
2. Link pocket parks to bike/walking paths, sidewalks, and crosswalks and, when needed, seek cooperation and assistance from Town Center property owners.
 - a. Encourage local businesses to provide outdoor seating with easy access to bike and walking paths.
 - b. Make a zoning change to include the pocket park as a requirement of PUD, and/or consider a future PUD-like overlay district that covers entire B-G and B-P districts.
3. Increase the number of benches in North Town Center.
4. Create a permanent, safe outdoor gathering place in the South Town Center on town land, or on private commercial land with the cooperation of business owners.
5. Actively support the efforts of businesses to provide meeting places and restroom facilities for customers.

D. *Improve the resources and amenities in Sherborn Center for all users.*

1. Establish or improve car parking for shoppers and users of recreational resources.
 - a. Encourage greater use of parking areas that presently are practically vacant.
 - b. Enlist business owners' cooperation to encourage cyclists and walkers to park on private commercial property, particularly where it could increase business in the Town Center area.
 - c. Encourage use of the Ward Park parking area off Cemetery Lane.
 - d. Provide signage on N. Main Street to indicate potential parking areas for recreational users.
2. Promote using Sherborn's cultural and recreational resources by installing informational kiosks at key locations in Town Center.
 - a. Use kiosks to provide maps of trails, bike routes, and historic landmark tours.

- b. Collaborate with Town Center businesses to include information regarding sources of food and drink as well as available restrooms in municipal buildings or businesses.
3. Make the maps and information described above available in digital form via multiple platforms.
 - a. Promote the updated digital version of *Sherborn Walks* on the [Sherborn Forest & Trail Association website](#).
 - b. Include easy-to-find recreational information and maps on the [Town of Sherborn website](#).
 - c. Use the QR-code system to make maps smartphone-accessible at selected trailheads.
4. Explore alternative ways of making Town Center restrooms available to the public with current water and septic infrastructure. For example:
 - a. install and maintain portable toilets as part of the Ward Park fields/playground complex;
 - b. consider alternative-technology appliances, such as composting toilets; and
 - c. encourage businesses to provide access to facilities as feasible.
5. Encourage existing and future Town Center businesses to consider Sherborn recreational users and visitors a business opportunity (e.g., bike shops, restaurants) and to accommodate recreational customers by providing restrooms.

E. *Encourage continuation and expansion of multiple usage of underused or seasonally used public properties.*

1. Support additional use of the ball fields for other recreational activities.
2. Continue to use tennis courts for skating rinks.
3. Use of Pine Hill School parking lot for non-school activities and events.
4. Pine Hill Cemetery usage for walkers and joggers to promote the cemetery as a historic site and to increase its appreciation as a park.

F. *Improve existing Town Center roadways and sidewalks.*

(See Circulation section for details)

1. Invest in traffic study to identify ways to facilitate flow of traffic:
 - a. Explore the possibility of left-turn lanes at key intersections, such as N. Main Street at C&L Frosty, N. Main northbound at Coolidge, and southbound on N. Main onto S. Main.
 - b. Reduce designated lane widths in the Town Center to reduce speeds, increase driver attention, and enable bike lanes.
2. Experiment with road design and traffic circulation changes on Sanger and Sawin Streets to increase safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
3. Improve Main Street sidewalks to accommodate bikes and wheelchairs.
 - a. Add ramps and improve intersections.

- b. Widen sidewalks in compliance with Complete Streets Program guidelines, where possible.
- c. Legalize bicycle use on sidewalks, but limit speeds to < 10 mph (or walking speed when pedestrians are present).

GOAL III ► **Support current businesses and consider new business and housing opportunities in the Town Center within existing infrastructure constraints.**

Town center appearance

The historic buildings in and around the Town Center provide aesthetic standards and models for the New England–village ambiance that we value. Newer buildings that also are integral to the Town Center display diverse styles; some harmonize well with the historic village atmosphere, and others do not, but better integration of them all could be accomplished through incremental change and attention to visual detail. For example, the inconsistency among types of signage, walkway, landscape, and frontage designs detracts from the visual harmony and sense of place that can make a village a pleasant place to be. Improvements in appearance, guided by an agreed-upon vision and coordinated among businesses and town officials, could

enhance the viability of Town Center businesses.



Town center businesses. Source: Sherborn Planning Board

Incremental design improvements should include redesign of the large spaces currently devoted to parking. Originally, the multiple parking areas in North Town Center were established piecemeal by individual properties to meet the legal parking space requirements. The resultant disconnected parking patchwork inhibits pedestrian contact with shops and services, leaves underutilized parking space, and contributes to congestion on the main roadways. Cooperative redesign could readily improve this situation, which would benefit businesses and customers alike.

Current infrastructure constraints

More significant changes, such as expansion of capacity in current businesses, addition of restrooms to accommodate customers, and establishment of new businesses are severely limited by the current well and septic-system infrastructure. Indeed, the entire Town Center is vulnerable to major disruption because of the overlapping of wells and septic fields, which do not conform to current state regulations and threaten water supplies (see MAP 2).

In 2011 the Sherborn Planning Board used data from earlier water studies to complete a detailed analysis of possible sites to host expansion of businesses and housing in Town Center with both the current infrastructure and the addition of public water and wastewater systems. ([Town of Sherborn 2011](#)). The resulting draft report concluded that, within current water and septic system constraints, only very limited additional development is possible within the current North Town Center business zone. This development could be at 18 N. Main Street (with renovation and repurposing of a barn), 6 Powderhouse Lane (along the railroad tracks), and in a potential PUD zone at 41 N. Main. Alternative

development options for the latter two properties are currently under consideration. The 2011 analysis also concluded that the existing infrastructure prohibits further development of the South Town Center. However, the town should continue to explore modest infrastructure improvements and regulation changes that allow existing businesses to accommodate customer needs better, expand capacity, and thrive.



Aerial view of North Town Center. Source: Town of Sherborn Planning Board

Summary of Challenges

- The current Town Center business district lacks a strong visual sense of place.
- Access to businesses often requires turns through heavy traffic and driving among multiple parking spots.
- Most businesses' expansion or improvement possibilities are limited by current water supply and/or septic system constraints.

Recommendations

A. Explore market opportunities and financial costs/benefits that may be achieved both under current conditions as well as after specific improvements in the Town Center.

1. Conduct a market study to determine what is commercially viable, both within current infrastructure constraints and with municipal water and sewer utilities.
2. Work with existing businesses and residents to understand their goals for expansion or improvement.
3. Estimate costs and the financial impact of the actions proposed in this plan as a return on the investment to current businesses and residents as well as the town as a whole.

B. Make the existing Town Center more visually appealing.

1. Design and implement a coherent signage policy that enhances the sense of place and defines the identity of Sherborn.
2. Consider additional plantings and green features along main streets.
3. Work with business owners to maximize visibility and legibility of Town Center signage.
4. Review setback requirements to maximize the Town Center's visual appeal.
5. Amend the zoning bylaws to ensure that any changes in building sizes, relationships and landscapes are consistent with a traditional New England village.

C. Maximize accessibility to all Town Center businesses and destinations while minimizing the need to drive between sites.

1. Design and implement a Town Center-wide parking plan.
2. Coordinate parking design with walkway design.
3. Work with business and property owners to negotiate a community parking solution that includes revising the town's current parking regulations.

D. Encourage and support the Board of Health in addressing current and potential water/sewer needs of individual properties in the Town Center.

1. Consider allowing composting toilets, gray-water systems, and innovative alternative septic technologies as regulated by the state.
2. Consider allowing shared septic systems and mounded systems for new construction in the Town Center.
3. Enable additional eating and meeting places within Board of Health regulations that protect the interests of the town's long-term health.

E. *To the extent allowed by current well and septic technology, enable new business and housing options in Town Center.*

1. Allow limited expansion of the Town Center footprint toward the north:
 - a. On the west side to Hunting Lane; and
 - b. On the east side to Eliot Street.
2. Revise business and PUD zoning to allow businesses that have larger footprints than currently permitted.
3. Revise zoning by-laws to enable mixed use and/or multi-dwelling housing options within business and PUD zones of Town Center.
4. Enable historic structures to be repurposed for business, housing, or mixed usage in return for preservation of exterior appearance.

F. *Examine and consider changing certain zoning restrictions as they apply to Town Center businesses.*

1. Reconsider restrictions on allowable business types and number of employees.
2. Enable more outdoor events for all businesses.
 - a. Define the range of outdoor events that would be allowed by right and those that would require special permits.
 - b. Agree upon outdoor-event sound and lighting controls in consideration of Town Center residents.
3. Reduce the number of parking spaces required per square foot of business space based on:
 - a. day and night use and total spaces available; and
 - b. a mutually agreed upon contingency plan for expansion of parking.
4. Establish and enforce signage guidelines within the signage policy defined in Recommendation A1.

GOAL IV ► *Develop a realistic, comprehensive long-term plan for the Town Center that addresses those challenges selected for action but not met by the incremental changes described in Goals I–III.*

In surveys conducted over the past decade, many residents have expressed overall dissatisfaction with the amenities and resources currently available in the Town Center. All agree that large, so-called chain stores do not belong in Sherborn, but many feel that addition of smaller businesses, such as a coffee shop/cafe, small restaurants, and shops



MAP 2— Well and septic fields, Sherborn Town Center.

Source: To come

would add to Sherborn’s vitality and attractiveness. The surveys reveal, however, a broad agreement that the Town Center should remain small and retain its New England–village atmosphere.

It is reasonable to assume that enhancement of social and commercial activity in its Town Center will support Sherborn’s overall financial health by enhancing the desirability of the town and improving property values. However, plans for enhancement run up against the fact that commercial properties are privately owned and therefore not under town control. Residents’ wishes aside, the potential viability of specific types of new businesses in Sherborn’s small Town Center is not known. Most important, current capacity and future expansion of businesses are severely limited by the lack of a safe public water supply and wastewater systems.

Water and septic issues

For many years, especially since passage of Massachusetts Title 5 regulations in 1995, it has been recognized that some properties within the Town Center (businesses, residences, public buildings, and churches), although grandfathered under Title 5, have yet to be updated to meet current state regulations for separation of wells and septic systems. As is the case in many old New England villages, locations of many Town Center wells and septic fields, which were installed many years ago before today’s stricter regulations were in place, no longer would be allowed, and they pose a potential health risk. Options for current businesses are limited as there is little room for expansion of septic capacity. Indeed, ground water supplies are currently vulnerable to contamination by existing septic systems. Map 2, below, shows that almost all the septic leaching areas (solid red) in the Town Center area lie within the “protected zones” surrounding public or shared wells (cross-hatched pink) or private wells (cross-hatched blue). Under Title 5 regulations, new wells or septic fields with such overlap are not allowed. Septic contamination of Town Center well-water is not only a potential health threat, it could threaten town finances by forcing expensive emergency infrastructure remediation that is not included in the overall Town Center plan.

At the May 2007 town election, a nonbinding question on the ballot—“Shall the town encourage the formation of a public water and/or sewer system to service the current Business District?”—passed by a 2-to-1 vote. A report proposing a Town Center Water District was compiled and submitted by the Sherborn Business Association and interested residents to the SB. The report recommended the SB consider establishment of a water district and water delivery system within the Town Center that would alleviate that area’s water quality and quantity challenges, which were posed by the private and public properties concentrated there.

In May 2014, the SB formed the Town Center Options Committee (TCOC) to study the technical and financial options available to add water supply and/or wastewater treatment systems. The committee continues to work with technical and legal consultants to provide data to the town’s governing boards so that informed decisions can be made. On balance, the data show that the Town Center’s further development is constrained by both septic disposal capacity and water supply. Data on the technical feasibility and costs of various options are under continued analysis. The town has a successful, but small, test well located off Morse Road in the Price Woodlands Conservation Land. It will require extensive testing at the requisite flow that complies with state regulations. A water system could include that well, a water tank on Pine Hill, and the existing fire main to deliver water to a water district restricted to the Town Center. Possible alternative sewage systems range from small-scale

approaches that take the liquid from existing septic tanks to a remote shared recharge area via small plastic pipes to a wastewater treatment plant.

The successful solution will depend on the residents' ability to define and agree upon specific additions and changes that are consistent with their shared vision of the future Town Center. This vision must be tempered by realistic analyses of the short- and long-term costs of the required infrastructure, the market viability of desired new businesses and/or housing, and the overall financial impacts on the town. To this end, actions proposed below in Recommendations B, C, and D, may proceed concurrently. This goal is aimed at putting these prerequisites in place and reaching consensus on the way forward.

Summary of Challenges

- Sherborn residents hold widely differing visions of what comprises an “ideal” Town Center.
- The lack of a socially and economically vibrant Town Center diminishes Sherborn’s ability to attract buyers, who would enhance property values throughout town.
- Whether the types of additional small business that are desired are economically viable in the Town Center is not known.
- Fiscal implications for the town of adding specific business or housing options to the Town Center have not been calculated.
- Currently, insufficient data has been gathered to evaluate the potential impacts of Town Center water and/or sewer systems on the area’s development or the town’s finances.
- A fear exists about the idea that a common water supply for a limited Town Center district will not be legally defensible and will open the floodgates to unwanted and uncontrolled development.

Recommendations

A. Develop a shared vision of the “ideal” Town Center that includes the range of desired improvements and changes.

1. Conduct a public outreach campaign to gather data on citizen, business, church, and municipal service needs and preferences.
 - a. Conduct a community visioning process to reach consensus on long-term goals for the character and aesthetics of the Town Center. Define what we want to preserve and what we would like to change.
 - b. Conduct detailed surveys to assess the types of businesses the community would support.
 - c. Define the range of housing options that would be acceptable in the Town Center.
2. Prioritize the preferences expressed above for further analysis (see Recommendation B, below).

B. *Analyze how contributions of specific business types and housing options deemed desirable and viable will affect the long-term financial sustainability of the town.*

1. Invest in a professional market analysis to understand the market potential for specific types of businesses in Town Center.
 - a. Collect data from comparable small businesses in surrounding towns.
 - b. Consider future market trends in retail and restaurant usage.
 - c. Use available market analyses or consultants to predict business success.
 - d. Gather data from local and regional real estate agents on the current housing market and trends.
2. Analyze the potential impacts on taxes and property values throughout town.
3. Analyze the potential impact on town finances.
4. Identify the types, numbers, and sizes of businesses and/or housing opportunities that should be enabled and encouraged in the Town Center.

C. *Support and guide the TCOC with resources needed to complete the analysis of the technical feasibility and projected costs of installing and maintaining a public water and/or septic system within a strictly limited Town Center district.*

1. Determine technical feasibility of water and sewer systems serving the Town Center.
2. Define water and sewer districts and determine their legal defensibility.
3. Define the installation and operational costs of alternative water/sewer infrastructure options.
4. Continue to re-evaluate water and sewer options in the light of existing and new technologies.

D. *Evaluate the financing options for a public water and/or septic system within a strictly limited Town Center district.*

1. Explore funding options including state grants.
2. Evaluate the immediate and future costs of financing options.
3. Conduct cost-benefit analyses under alternative financing scenarios.
4. Determine how much the town can finance and how much must be funded through betterments or other sources.

E. *Decide whether to proceed with development of Town Center water and sewer infrastructure as part of a broad Town Center plan.*

1. Form a consortium representing multiple boards, interests, and skills to formulate a Town Center plan based on the information gathered in Recommendations A–D, above, that includes (or does not include) a public water and/or sewer system.
2. The consortium would guide the process of adoption and approval of the plan by Town Meeting.
3. If the town approves a plan, form a Town Center implementation committee and charge it with moving the process forward.

F. *Ensure that any change to the Town Center is in harmony with Sherborn's overall character and its New England–village heritage.*

1. Establish an advisory design-review board tasked with developing an architectural vision for the Town Center, establishing appropriate guidelines, and maintaining the vision over time.
 - a. Revisit previous Sherborn Town Center design proposals for inspiration and guidance.
 - b. Consult design review guidelines used in other New England towns.
2. Adopt new “character-based” zoning ordinances, where the form and scale of a development is considered in the context of place rather than just complying with land-use rules.
 - a. Consider zoning changes that provide more flexibility to Main Street property owners and potential developers.
 - b. Require any new construction or redevelopment to bring the buildings closer to the road, where appropriate, and to restrict most parking to the sides and rear of buildings.
3. Integrate Town Center design-review process and standards into Planning Board rules and regulations.
 - a. Enable implementation of design review through the permitting process.
 - b. Amend zoning by-laws and Planning Board rules and regulations to integrate design-review recommendations into the special-permit process.