

Memorandum

To: Hardwick Selectboard
From: Heather Carrington, CCDS
Date: July 29, 2022
Re: Hardwick Downtown Designation – Project Update

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide a project update on the Hardwick Downtown Designation Project for consideration by the Hardwick Selectboard at their meeting scheduled for August 4, 2022. The Consultant will be in attendance and will present the proposed conceptual framework for the organization to the Selectboard and the public for feedback and discussion.

Key Stakeholder Interviews

As previously reported to the Downtown Commission, the interview results have been remarkably consistent. Stakeholders have universally identified the business community as the primary strength of downtown Hardwick. The businesses emerged as a strength based on the variety of business types, the combination of businesses with decades long tenure as well as newly opened businesses, and the strong network and collaboration between business owners. The business community is perceived as very committed to Hardwick and a source of strong social capital.

The stakeholders have also been consistent in identifying infrastructure and design improvements to downtown as a priority need. Every stakeholder interviewed has discussed bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements as necessary, with many specifically referencing the need to connect the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail clearly and accessibly to downtown Hardwick. The need for large outdoor gathering space in the downtown was also consistently noted.

Review of 2016 Downtown Business Survey

The results of the downtown business survey have also been reviewed and analyzed. The survey was conducted by Gary Michaels in 2016, thus it is somewhat out of date, but reveals some themes that remain consistent with the results of the key stakeholder interviews. According to the 32 business owners interviewed, there was a high level of consensus that the sense of community in Hardwick is the primary advantage to owning a business in Hardwick. The community support and connections were mentioned as assets over twice as frequently as the next most frequently listed strength (hub location). The sense of community connectedness also emerged from the stakeholder interviews, and in the “Meet the Manager” discussion held by Neighbor-to-Neighbor at Atkins Field on June 20th. This sense of small-town commitment to taking care of one’s neighbors and community has been a pervasive theme.

Hardwick's location at a crossroads as a transportation and population hub was also repeatedly referenced as a strength for the downtown. In fact, analysis shows that the average daily traffic count in Hardwick on Wolcott Street at the Granite Street intersection is 8,500 vehicles. This represents the highest traffic count within a 23 sq. mile area between Morrisville 10 miles to the west, St. Johnsbury 24 miles to the east, E. Montpelier 20 miles to the south and Newport 38 miles to the north. The combination of low competition with higher traffic and population counts relative to the overall area creates a larger customer base for businesses than in many communities in the region.



Map 1: Average Daily Traffic Counts, VT Planning Atlas

The number one challenge to business in downtown Hardwick as reported in the 2016 survey was the economic demographics of the community – specifically the perception that Hardwick is made up of a low-income population. However, the 2020 U.S. Census 5-Year American Community Survey data lists the median household income in census tract 9577, the Town of Hardwick, as \$58,726 per year, which is above the Caledonia County median income of \$52,481. The census data for the Hardwick CDP (census designated place) which more closely reflects the boundaries of the downtown area does in fact have a lower median income. This may well reflect the higher concentration of rental units and affordable housing located in this area. However, both the Hardwick CDP and the overall Town have much lower rates of poverty (7.6% and 3.8% respectively) than Caledonia (12.1%), Lamoille (12.4%), Orleans (12.3%) and Washington (10.2%) Counties overall. Since 2016, the median household income within the Hardwick downtown area has been increasing at double the rate of Caledonia County households overall (see Figure 1). Based on U.S. Census data, the median household income in Hardwick CDP increased by 23.1% between 2016 and 2020, while Caledonia County median household income increased by 11.8%. While the increasing incomes within the Hardwick CDP are a positive development for the sustainability of businesses within the downtown, the overall customer base for the Hardwick

businesses is generally a larger catchment area than strictly the downtown. The towns within a 10-mile radius from Hardwick are assumed to be the geographic area from which Hardwick businesses draw their customers.

INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS			
	Caledonia County	Hardwick CDP	Town of Hardwick
	2016	2016	2016
Total	12,098	546	1,173
Less than \$10,000	6.4%	0.0%	0.9%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	5.0%	8.4%	5.7%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	11.7%	17.9%	19.0%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	13.4%	20.0%	14.0%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	16.6%	20.7%	14.8%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	17.8%	7.1%	13.9%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	13.8%	16.8%	15.4%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	10.3%	3.3%	11.3%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2.7%	5.7%	4.9%
\$200,000 or more	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Median income (dollars)	46,931	36,389	43,375
Mean income (dollars)	60,787	53,654	59,783
	Caledonia County	Hardwick CDP	Town of Hardwick
	2020	2020	2020
Total	12,618	418	1,196
Less than \$10,000	5.1%	0.0%	0.0%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	7.2%	5.5%	2.3%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	9.6%	1.4%	6.0%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	10.7%	4.1%	12.0%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	15.3%	40.7%	22.6%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	17.5%	29.9%	25.0%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	14.2%	15.6%	15.5%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	12.5%	0.0%	9.9%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	3.9%	0.0%	1.6%
\$200,000 or more	4.0%	2.9%	5.1%
Median income (dollars)	52,481	44,787	58,726
Mean income (dollars)	71,512	60,800	71,046

Figure 1: Median Household Income Comparison, US Census American Community Survey

Downtown Designation Boundaries

The Town of Hardwick currently maintains a designated village center through the Vermont Downtown Program (see Map 2). The boundaries of the village center have been utilized as a starting point for the downtown designation boundaries.