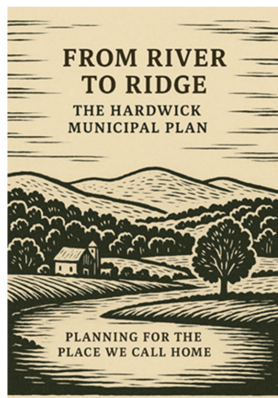


## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



### Hardwick's strengths **INTRODUCTION**

Hardwick's economy has long been shaped by its natural resources, entrepreneurial spirit, and strong sense of community. Agriculture, forestry, and granite established the foundation of the local economy and continue to influence the community's identity today. Over time, Hardwick has diversified through value-added agriculture, small businesses, manufacturing, tourism, recreation, and community-based enterprises. The Town serves as a regional center for employment, commerce, education, healthcare, and community services for residents of Hardwick and surrounding communities. Its location at the intersection of Vermont Routes 14, 15, and 16, combined with municipal infrastructure, educational resources, and a growing recreation economy, provides a strong foundation for continued investment

in Hardwick's village centers, local food economy, recreation assets, and small businesses.

Recent floods, periods of drought, and increasing heat events have reinforced the importance of building a resilient local economy.

Hardwick's prosperity depends on businesses, infrastructure, natural systems, and the community relationships that support them. Many of the factors that influence economic vitality, including housing, transportation, natural resources, public infrastructure, and resilience, are discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this Plan. This chapter focuses on how those factors contribute to a strong, diverse, and resilient local economy.

Historically, the foundation of Hardwick's economy has been from its natural resources. Agriculture, forestry, and granite all powered the local economy. Today we are less dependent on these but they still establish a base of raw materials for value-added businesses. Hardwick has experienced significant declines in agriculture and forestry. Hardwick continues to encourage innovation, diversification, and education. A solid technical center program (see education chapter) provides a young well-trained work force for careers in these areas.

### **WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE COMMUNITY**

The 2026 Municipal Plan Survey identified several priorities for Hardwick's future, including supporting small businesses and local jobs, strengthening downtown Hardwick and East Hardwick Village, expanding housing opportunities, improving resilience and infrastructure, supporting local food systems and agriculture, enhancing recreation and tourism opportunities, and improving affordability and quality of life. Residents recognized that these priorities are connected and that the community's future depends on more than any one issue alone.

From the 2026 Survey:

"Affordability. Housing. Local job

Residents expressed a desire to build upon Hardwick's existing strengths, while preserving the community character that makes the town unique.

Formatted: Font: (Default) Calibri, 12 pt

## **ECONOMIC STRENGTHS**

Hardwick possesses numerous assets that support a diverse and resilient economy. The community has a strong agricultural and value-added food economy supported by the Center for an Agricultural Economy, the Vermont Food Venture Center, Farm Connex, and the Yellow Barn Business Accelerator. Together these resources help entrepreneurs launch and grow businesses, strengthen regional food systems, and create local employment opportunities. Manufacturing and light industry continue to provide important employment opportunities and contribute to a diversified local economy. An established industrial park, municipal water and sewer systems, and Hardwick's role as a regional center for employment, commerce, education, healthcare, and community services provide a solid foundation for future growth.

The Town also maintains a revolving loan fund that supports local business development. Approximately \$149,437 in loans are currently outstanding to five local businesses, and as loans are repaid, funds are reinvested in new ventures. To date, the revolving loan fund has helped create or retain at least 75 jobs in Hardwick.

Hardwick's historic and walkable downtown and village centers, combined with a growing outdoor recreation economy centered on the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail and local trail systems, contribute to both economic vitality and quality of life. These recreation assets support local businesses, restaurants, lodging, community events, and tourism throughout the year. The community also benefits from a strong tradition of entrepreneurship, volunteerism, and community-led initiatives that have repeatedly helped Hardwick adapt to economic and environmental challenges. Small businesses and locally owned enterprises remain central to Hardwick's economy and contribute significantly to employment, community character and economic resilience.

Hardwick has the infrastructure and much of the labor force necessary for economic development already in place. Hardwick has an industrial park that is equipped with municipal water, sewer, roads and 3-phase power. The town also has a sewage treatment plant with excess capacity to handle new growth. While this park is almost full, the town has located a possible site for a second industrial park. The Village areas have broadband internet access from multiple venues. The Hardwick area shows strength when it comes to value added agricultural businesses. In 2011, the nonprofit Vermont Food Venture Center opened for business in the industrial park. This 15,000 sq. ft. multi-purpose food processing incubator, which supports about 25 small businesses a year, is managed and operated by the Center for an Agricultural Economy.

The success of the Vermont Food Venture Center created a need for expanded infrastructure to boost aggregation, distribution and storage; to grow agriculture and value-added businesses; and to attract visitors who are interested in the local food movement. The Hardwick Yellow Barn Business Accelerator and Corporate Campus (a.k.a. "Yellow Barn") is designed to meet that need. The historic yellow barn is located on Route 15 in the Highway Mixed Use District, at the gateway to the downtown area. It is immediately adjacent to the Vermont Food Venture Center. Efforts are now underway to construct the project, which consists of a new two-story building with an approximate footprint of 25,000 sq. ft., and the rehabilitation of the 4,000 sq. ft. barn into tenant space. The project currently has two anchor tenants. First floor ground space of the new building has about 3,000 square feet of space dedicated to small and emerging food producers, such as recent "graduates" of the Vermont Food Venture Center. The second floor of the new building will dedicate about 3,500 sq. ft. of office space to small and emerging businesses as well. When complete in 2021, the Town will be the owner of the Yellow Barn, and the Center for an Agricultural Economy will provide the day-to-day management. The development will have a visitor/retail component—a function that will be heightened by its location on the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.

To assist start-up ventures, the Town has a revolving loan fund with approximately \$343,918 loans currently outstanding with 9 local businesses. As businesses repay their loans, the money is loaned out to new ventures. To date this fund has helped create and/or retain at least 75 jobs in Hardwick.

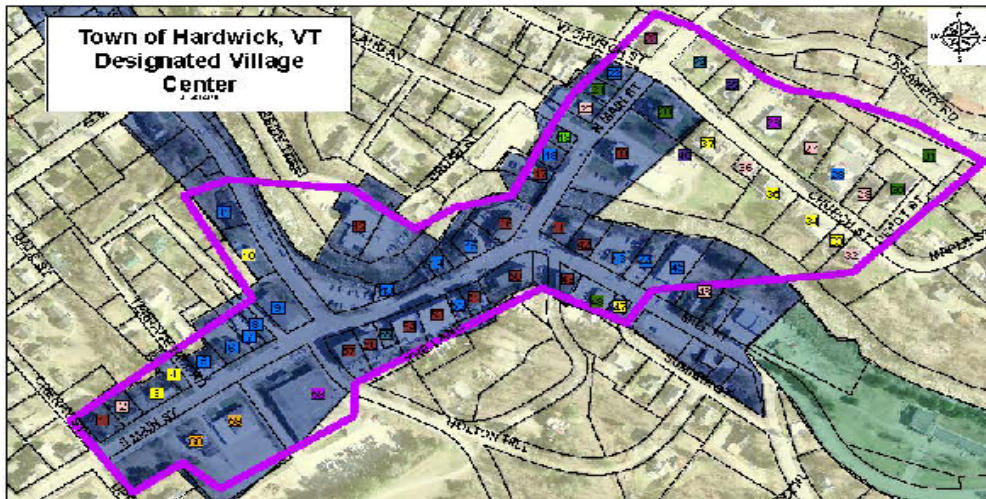
Hardwick's location at the intersection of Vermont Routes 14, 15, and 16 makes it the hub for at least seven surrounding towns. The town provides goods and services to many people beyond the borders of Hardwick.

Hardwick's Downtown is enrolled in the Village Center Designation program and is often identified as a particular strength of the community.

*"The downtown is great."*

*"I love the combination of the downtown with the environment, agriculture, and landscape."*

*Hardwick Residents from the 2018 What Places Do You Love? Survey*



#### REPLACE WITH DESIGNATED DOWNTOWN?

The Downtown currently hosts a variety of retail, restaurant, and service businesses and serves as a focal point in the community's business sector.

Hardwick has many recreational assets which can be used to support a greater tourism and hospitality sector. Local construction on the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail has begun and Hardwick currently sits between two completed sections. The Hardwick Trails is a community hike, ski and bike system for non-motorized use. Hardwick also offers hunting, fishing, biking, hiking and cross-country ski trails, and numerous intersecting snowmobile and ATV trails.

*"The Hardwick Trails are a peaceful place to walk, run and ski. The people there are always friendly."*

*"The trails provide great recreation space for the town, quiet space and public enrichment."*

*Hardwick Residents from the 2018 What Places Do You Love? Survey*

#### **Challenges to Hardwick's economy** ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Despite its many strengths, Hardwick faces several challenges that affect its long-term economic vitality. Limited housing availability and affordability make it difficult to attract and retain workers, families, and new businesses. Flooding, extreme heat, drought, and other climate-related hazards threaten homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure, while aging infrastructure and vulnerable utility systems create additional challenges for future growth.

The community also faces vacant and underutilized buildings, limited industrial and commercial development space, transportation constraints associated with its distance from interstate highways, and broadband limitations in some rural areas. Like many rural communities, Hardwick faces workforce shortages and an aging population, making it increasingly difficult for employers to recruit and retain employees.

The floods of 2023 and 2024 also highlighted the economic consequences of natural hazards, including business interruptions, housing losses, infrastructure damage, and increased costs for residents, businesses, and local government.

The 2026 Municipal Plan Survey highlighted concerns regarding vacant buildings, housing availability, and the need for additional activity and investment within village centers. Residents expressed interest in returning vacant storefronts and upper stories to productive use while strengthening the connections between housing, recreation, and downtown vitality.

## **ECONOMIC RESILIENCE**

Hardwick's economy depends upon healthy rivers, forests, farms, and village centers as much as it depends on businesses and infrastructure. Flooding, extreme heat, drought, severe storms, wildfire, and other natural hazards can disrupt businesses, damage infrastructure, reduce housing availability, and increase costs for residents and local government. The floods of 2023 and 2024 demonstrated that economic recovery depends not only on physical infrastructure, but also on strong community relationships, healthy natural systems, and local capacity.

## **HOUSING AND ECONOMIC VITALITY**

The availability of housing directly affects Hardwick's ability to attract and retain workers, support local businesses, and sustain community services. A sufficient supply of housing is an important component of long-term economic vitality and is discussed in greater detail in the Housing chapter.

## **DOWNTOWN AND VILLAGE CENTERS**

Downtown Hardwick and East Hardwick Village remain the economic and civic centers of the community. Residents identified opportunities to strengthen these areas through the reuse of vacant storefronts and buildings, investments in public spaces and

[From the 2026 Survey:](#)

"Empty buildings filled with vibrant businesses."

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

streetscapes, support for small businesses, improvements to walkability and accessibility, and continued reinvestment in historic buildings. Healthy village centers support local businesses, provide community gathering places, and reinforce Hardwick's identity as a regional center.

### **AGRICULTURE, FOOD SYSTEMS AND WORKING LANDS**

Agriculture remains an important component of Hardwick's economy and identity. Farming, forestry, value-added agricultural businesses, and local food production contribute to employment, tourism, and the community's rural character. Working lands continue to provide economic opportunities while contributing to the landscape and identity that residents value.

### **RECREATION AND TOURISM**

Recreation and tourism continue to grow as important components of Hardwick's economy. The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, Hardwick Trails, Buffalo Mountain Town Fores, river access, community events, and the area's historic and scenic resources attract visitors, support local businesses, and enhance quality of life for residents. Strengthening connections between recreation assets, village centers and local businesses presents opportunities for continued economic growth.

Hardwick has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to adapt to changing economic conditions while building upon its historic strengths. By continuing to invest in its people, businesses, working lands, village centers, recreation assets, and public infrastructure, the community is well positioned to support a diverse and resilient local economy for years to come

Hardwick's location at the intersection of many state highways makes it an excellent location for regional markets. However, the town lies approximately ½ hour from both Interstate 89 and Interstate 91, which can be a consideration for enterprise and tourism.

Hardwick is well established with respect to utilities such as sewer and electricity although some issues with the water system remain. Broadband access for the internet is available in the villages and some rural locations. Advances to the connectivity technology continue to occur but the rural spaces are still lacking in full coverage.

Hardwick still has a need for additional industrial space. The industrial park is nearly full. The area directly across from the park has accommodated some value added processing activity as well. The Highway Mixed Use zoning district on Route 15 has some capacity for development, although the Flood Hazard overlay area creates issues for new structures. For the short to medium term, the production area that encompasses both sides of Route 15 may be able to accommodate up to six structures, assuming that build out of the industrial area follows the typical footprint of an agricultural processor (approximately 6,000 to 10,000 sq. ft.). A typical

value-added producer needs about 1,000 to 3,000 sq. ft. of space. Storage is usually the greatest need—about three times that of production space. Additional locations outside of the Flood Hazard Overlay Area are under consideration.

The abovementioned additions, however, will only satisfy the interim needs for Hardwick's manufacturing cluster. What is needed is additional—preferably neighboring or nearby—land that will accommodate Hardwick's agricultural and value-added food producers. This production area must leverage the community's unique brand in order to become successful and sustainable. The existence of plentiful and affordable industrial space would be a key factor in attracting entrepreneurs.

Hardwick's Downtown Village and East Hardwick Village also have specific needs of improvement. Additional parking, pedestrian-friendly paths, community spaces, and additional tenants in store fronts have been identified as possible improvements in Hardwick Village. East Hardwick wishes to improve their crumbling sidewalks and a lack of community spaces. Both village centers have distressed buildings which are part of the street scape.

*"Invest in Village of East Hardwick to enhance walk around and possibly bring in small businesses."*

*"I think the downtown streetscape could use some help. More coordinated plantings, lights and*

*help to fix up some of the more derelict buildings."*

*"Lots of room to improve the 'look' of downtown and to make it more pedestrian-friendly."*

*"We need to work with property owners to fill empty store fronts."*

*"East Hardwick Village could use some attention as well. We look kind of shabby."*

*"Public art to brighten up the town."*

*Hardwick Residents from the 2018 What Places Would You Improve? Survey*



### Vision for the Hardwick's Future

In 2012, the Hardwick Planning Commission conducted a land-use evaluation that was largely focused on finding land that would be suitable for future industrial development. Central to this evaluation was an exploration of the kinds of businesses that were commonly deemed to be important for strengthening Hardwick's mix of businesses, while also achieving the overall goals of the town plan (i.e. recreation, hospitality, tourism, value-added processing). What resulted are some critical commonalities that could allow the community to support such a diverse array of economic opportunities:

- **Industrial development should achieve a balance with nature and complement and protect Hardwick's rural resources and rural beauty.** Large scale, intense industrial development that entails extensive impervious surface coverages (leading to run-off), traffic congestion, smoke, offensive odors, fragmentation or conversion of farmland or recreation land is not appropriate for Hardwick.
- **Siting and screening is essential in siting industrial uses.** Even though the site suitability analysis identified some areas that may be able to accommodate industrial development, siting, screening, and scale must be complementary of its surrounding uses. Commercial and light industrial enterprises near East Hardwick, for example, must complement the small village look and feel.
- **Maintaining the relationship around Hardwick's traditional centers of development is important.** Commercial and light industrial development must not be strung along roadways leading to sprawl. Rather such uses should be sited as close to development cores as is feasible. Siting such uses closer to the downtown will be advantageous to downtown residents, who may benefit from living closer to new employment opportunities.

From the  
2026 Survey:

"Recruiting  
people and  
businesses to  
establish  
. . . ."

~~• **Home Based Enterprises:** The majority of Hardwick's businesses are small, and many are likely to be located in a residence. Home-based enterprises is an important source of economic opportunity, and it may create opportunities for adaptive reuse of historic and accessory structures that would otherwise lapse into disrepair and neglect (such as old barns that are no longer part of a working farm). The Town recognizes the importance of home-based enterprises and encourages such activity as appropriate.~~

## GOALS, POLICIES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### GOAL

- ~~• For Hardwick to have a diverse and resilient economy based on agriculture, small business, and light industry that is compatible with Hardwick's scenic landscape and will raise income levels and provide employment for Hardwick residents.~~
- ~~• For Hardwick to have a diverse and resilient economy based on small businesses, agriculture, recreation, and innovation that provides employment and economic opportunity, supports vibrant village centers and housing opportunities, and preserves the community's natural resources and quality of life.~~

### POLICIES

- ~~• Industries that extract renewable resources, such as timber, should do so in a sustainable manner.~~
- ~~• The town encourages the development of recreationally based businesses to bring visitors to Hardwick.~~
- ~~• Home-based businesses shall be in scale with their surroundings and context — and as an accessory to the primary residential use. Home-based business shall not create impacts that are uncharacteristic of the areas in which they are located. The town supports initiatives which will make farming and forestry more economically viable into the future.~~
- ~~• The town supports industries which take advantage of our local resources to produce value added products.~~
- ~~• Hardwick supports the "buy local" efforts.~~
- ~~• The town supports proposals which will provide workforce training to improve opportunities for residents in new and existing businesses.~~
- ~~• Economic development at the expense of the environment is not encouraged. Businesses and industries shall not degrade or endanger air, land, and water resources.~~
- ~~• Encourage development regulations that are clear, predictable, and proportionate to the scale of a project.~~

- Support a diverse economy that builds upon Hardwick's village centers, working lands, natural resources, recreation assets, and local businesses.
- Support the retention, expansion, and diversification of existing businesses and employers.
- Encourage the reuse and adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized buildings, including upper-story spaces and historic structures.
- Support agriculture, forestry, local food systems, and value-added enterprises as important components of Hardwick's economy and identity.
- Encourage recreation, tourism, and cultural activities that strengthen local businesses and build upon the community's natural, historic, and recreational assets.
- Consider resilience and natural hazard risks in economic development, infrastructure investments, and land use decisions.
- Support investments in transportation, utility, communications, and broadband infrastructure that improve economic vitality and community resilience.
- Encourage investments that strengthen connections between housing, village centers, recreation assets, businesses, and community services.
- Support workforce development, education, and training opportunities that respond to local and regional employment needs.
- Recognize that working lands, natural resources, and environmental quality contribute to the community's economy, resilience, and quality of life.
- Work with businesses, neighboring communities, and regional organizations to advance economic opportunities, housing, infrastructure, and community resilience.

## ACTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- ~~The Town Manager, the Planning Commission, and the Select Board should investigate Downtown Designation for the village area.~~
- ~~The Town Manager and the Planning Commission should pursue funding to develop a new location for a second industrial park.~~
- ~~The Town Manager and the Planning Commission should identify appropriate locations for the continued expansion of Hardwick's agricultural and value-added food producers.~~
- ~~The Select Board should explore the feasibility of improving the appearance and the functionality of Hardwick's downtown and of East Hardwick's village center.~~
- Maintain Village Center and Downtown Designations and pursue state incentives that encourage private investment, rehabilitation, and business development.
- Review and update the Development Regulations to support reinvestment in existing neighborhoods, downtown Hardwick, East Hardwick Village, and other traditional settlement areas while reducing unnecessary barriers to appropriate development.
- Continue promoting and maintaining the Town's Revolving Loan Fund as a source of financing for new and expanding local businesses.
- Improve connections between the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, Hardwick Trails, Buffalo Mountain Town Forest, village centers and local businesses through coordinated signage, wayfinding, pedestrian improvements, bicycle facilities, and coordinated marketing.

- Continue to work with the Center for an Agricultural Economy, the Downtown Partnership, local businesses, and regional organizations to strengthen entrepreneurship, downtown revitalization, the local food economy, and economic resilience.
- Support the rehabilitation and productive reuse of vacant commercial buildings through partnerships, technical assistance, and redevelopment opportunities
- Coordinate economic development initiatives with housing, transportation, recreation, and resilience planning to ensure public investments strengthen the community's long-term economic vitality.
- Continue to partner with the Hardwick Downtown Partnership to support downtown revitalization, business recruitment, façade improvements, community events, and implementation of Downtown Designation initiatives.

## **COMMUNITY THEMES**

### **(HOUSE ICON) AFFORDABILITY**

A strong local economy, diverse housing opportunities, and a healthy tax base help keep Hardwick affordable for residents and businesses.

### **(TREE ICON) RESILIENCE**

A resilient economy depends on strong infrastructure, healthy natural systems, thriving businesses, and community preparedness.

### **(PATH ICON) WALKABILITY & CONNECTIVITY**

Residents expressed support for safer walking and biking routes, stronger trail connections and reliable broadband. These connections help residents access jobs, services, recreation, and local businesses.

### **(HEART ICON) COMMUNITY WELLNESS**

Local businesses, food systems, recreation opportunities, and community gathering spaces all contribute to quality of life. A strong economy supports both individual and community well-being.

### **(WHEAT STALK? ICON) COMMUNITY IDENTITY**

Residents identified local businesses, the food economy, historic village centers, and outdoor recreation as important community assets. Economic development should build upon and strengthen these characteristics.