

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Hardwick's strengths

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.

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.

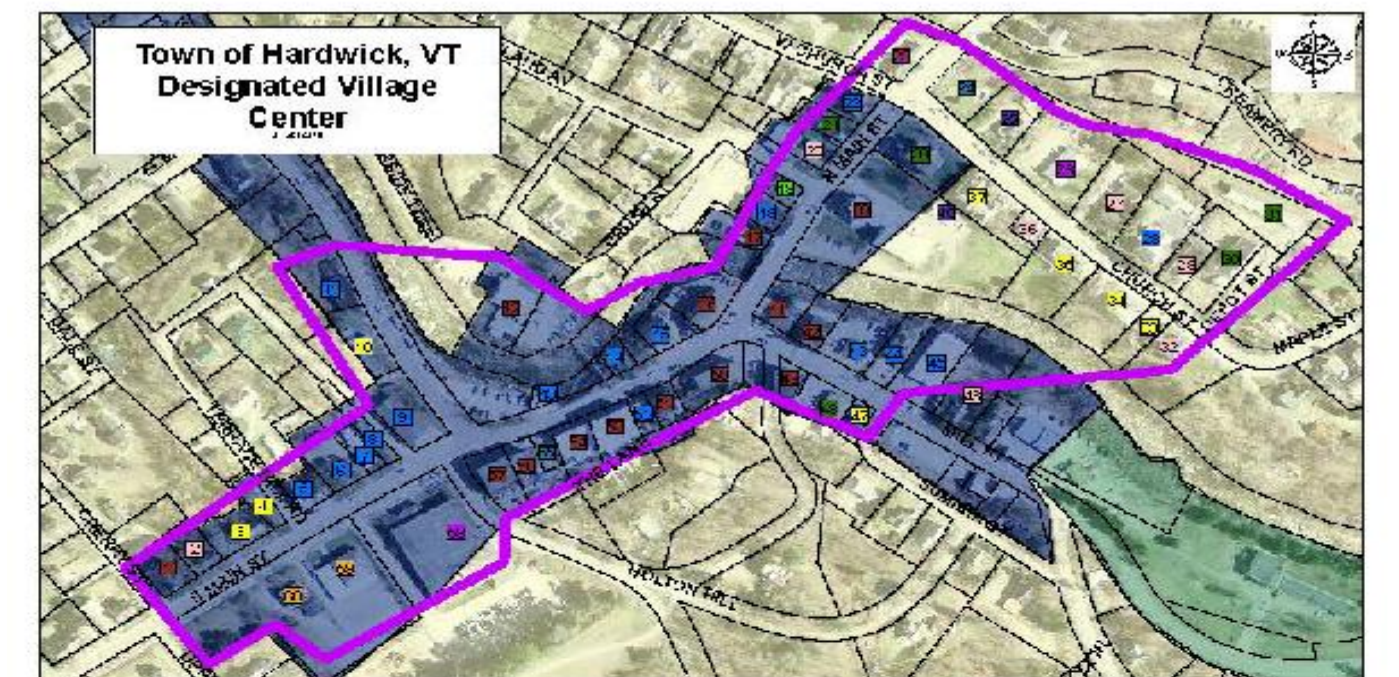
Hardwick's location at the intersection of Vermont Routes 14, 15, and 16 makes it the hub for at least seven surrounding towns. The town provides goods and services to many people beyond the borders of Hardwick.

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



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."

Challenges to Hardwick's economy

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."

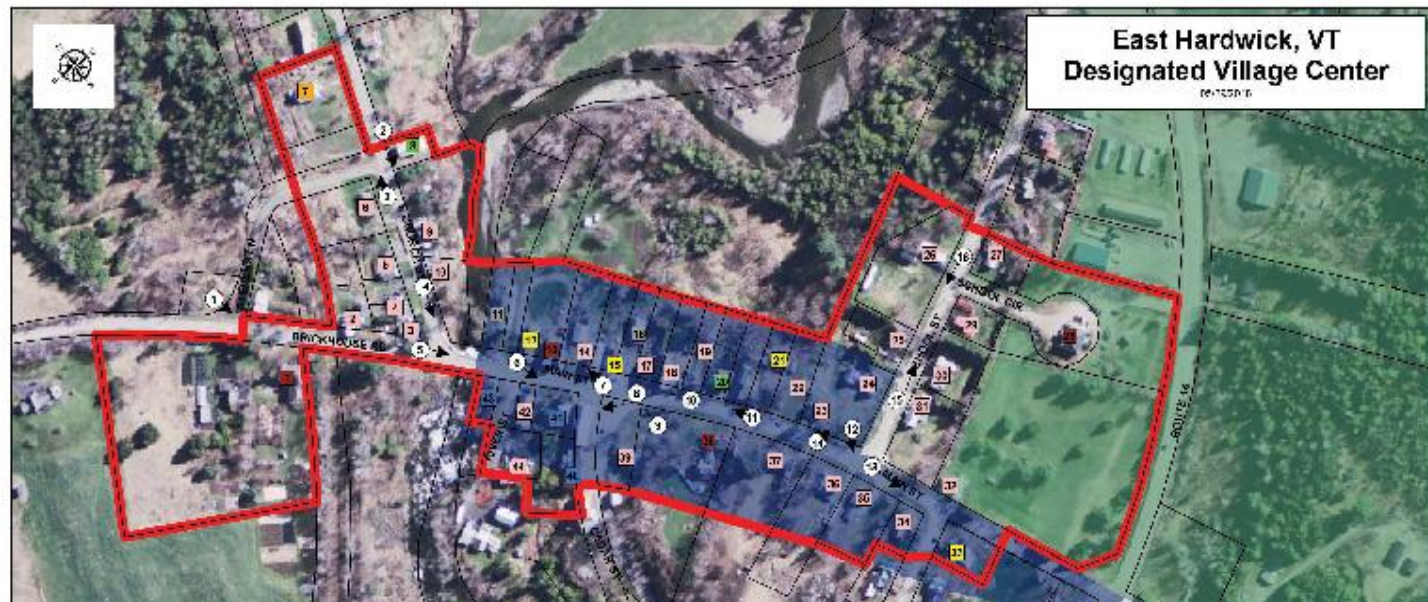
"Lots of room to improve the 'look' of downtown and to make it more pedestrian-friendly."

"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.

- **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

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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. |
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POLICIES

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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. |