



# FRANKLIN for a lifetime

Share • Learn • Connect  
Create a Community for All Ages



**April 9 – 11, 2015**  
**Franklin, New Hampshire**



**Citizens' Institute  
on Rural Design**



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## Acknowledgements

### **Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™ Resource Team Leaders**

Josh Bloom

Co-founder, The Community Land Use and  
Economics Group

Ted Brady

State Director, Vermont and New Hampshire,  
United States Department of Agriculture Rural  
Development

Eric J. Chinburg

President and Founder, Chinburg Properties

Susan Fox

Associate Director, Institute on Disability;  
Director, the Center on Aging and Community  
Living at the University of New Hampshire

Rick Hauser

Mayor of Perry, New York; President, In.Site:  
Architecture

Carmen Lorentz

Director, Division of Economic Development,  
New Hampshire Department of Resource and  
Economic Development

Ariana McBride

Director of Strategic Capacity Building, Ninigret  
Partners

Cynthia Nitikin

Director, Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™;  
Senior Vice President, Project for Public Spaces

Catherine O'Brian

Coordinator, Arts Education & Arts in Health  
Care Grants & Programs

Philip B. Stafford

Director, Center on Aging and Community,  
Indiana University

Jennifer Wallace-Brodeur

Strategic Advisor and Co-Lead of Livable  
Communities, AARP Education & Outreach

### **Funding and Partners**

Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™  
CommunityMatters®

The National Endowment for the Arts

USDA Rural Development

Project for Public Spaces

The Orton Family Foundation

### **Franklin Steering Committee**

Jim Aberg

Krystal Alpers

Jo Brown

Elizabeth Dragon

George Dzujna

Melissa Lee

Dick Lewis

Meg Miller

Sue Cagle, UNHCE

Sharon Cowen, UNHCE

Robin LeBlanc, Plan NH

### **UNH Cooperative Extension Staff**

Sharon Cowen

Molly Donovan

Sue Cagle

Charlie French

André Garron

Casey Hancock

Chris Keeley

Geoff Sewake

Sarah Smith

Milana Glukharev-Fleszar, UNHCE Intern

## Executive Summary

### Background: Franklin for a Lifetime

The *Franklin for a Lifetime* project aims to create a healthy and vibrant Franklin community for all residents, in support of an aging population. The workshop, April 9 – 11, 2015, was hosted by the City of Franklin in partnership with University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension and Plan New Hampshire, and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the United States Department of Agriculture, through the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™. The workshop has explored how NH communities can respond to an aging population through housing, economic development, planning and community design.

### Process: Assets and Opportunities for the Future

Franklin is a rural community with a strong cultural and historic identity and vision for its future. The historic downtown area is part of the city's legacy. As with other NH communities, Franklin is experiencing the challenges of an aging population and a struggling downtown economy.

Franklin has assets in terms of its engaged and committed citizens and businesses. Other advantages include the hospital, library, churches, arts and culture, natural resources, recreation activities, Franklin Business & Industrial Development Corporation, Choose Franklin, Bessie Rowell Community Center, past and planned civic projects and other assets. In addition, the city has TRIP Senior Center, options for assisted living and nursing home care, and a system of services for seniors and other community members. Moreover, the city has a strong and stable government.

Franklin views its senior population as an asset and a resource, a source for its volunteers and workforce. Stabilizing housing and services for the senior community is a priority.

### Community Engagement: Franklin Voices

As preparation for the April workshop, the *Franklin for a Lifetime* Steering Committee and UNH Cooperative Extension engaged 119 community members through storytelling groups, a children's artwork project, one-on-one interviews, two business focus groups, and an elder social service provider focus group to get community input about how to make Franklin a more healthy and vibrant community for all. The engagement work was called Franklin Voices.

Key themes emerged from the compiled Franklin Voices comments. These included a sense of community; civic life; economic vitality, transportation, housing, infrastructure; natural resources, cultural resources, historic sites; community and health services; and schools.

Throughout the Franklin Voices process, community participants stressed the sense of community in Franklin, the value of community members helping each other. Challenges for the city focused on downtown, including the existing housing, lack of transportation, few restaurants or stores, and a desire for revitalization. Need for more communication on issues and activities was suggested. A more detailed summary of findings can be found in the Franklin Voices report. (See Appendix for full report)

## Community Workshop: April 9-11

The two-and-half day *Franklin for a Lifetime* workshop began with an all-community supper. On Thursday night and Friday, the workshop hosted three national speakers, along with a panel of five NH experts, on aging and community economic development.

A workshop engagement activity asked participants what they and the community could do to make Franklin more welcoming for all ages. Resulting themes included: recreation for all; infrastructure, including benches, roads and transportation; business development and entrepreneurship ideas for new business; downtown improvement, including diverse businesses, downtown improvements, and fixing up the appearance; housing for all ages and income levels; volunteerism and civic life; and school improvement. Small group discussions were held on Friday to generate actionable ideas for the theme areas; discussing schools was eliminated by attendees and arts and culture discussion was added.

On Saturday, Plan NH conducted a design activity staffed by the organization's members to develop ideas for the city. The results of this design charrette can be found in the Plan NH report.

## Outcome: Action Groups

On May 26, 2015, Franklin City Council held a community meeting to host featured speaker Rick Hauser, mayor of Perry, New York; hear highlights from the *Franklin for a Lifetime* project; and form community action groups to move Franklin forward, based on learning and input from Franklin Voices and the April workshop. The Steering Committee has identified five action groups that community members can join to contribute to community projects.

Each action group will be led by a community member or Franklin staff member. UNH Cooperative Extension will provide staff support to the action groups as they organize and move forward on their action items.

### ACTION GROUPS

- Marketing – “Champions for Franklin”
- Community Events and Recreational Opportunities
- Housing
- Arts and culture
- Volunteerism/civic life

## Background: Franklin for a Lifetime

### Why Franklin

In studying the issues of an aging population in NH communities, UNH Cooperative Extension asked Franklin to partner on the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™ award application, as Franklin had previous experience with collaborating and bringing members of the community together on issues and projects. UNH Cooperative Extension has been part of collaborations with Franklin on asset building and healthy eating, active living (HEAL) to address obesity. The mayor has initiated a number of task forces, including a drug task force and foster care task force. As such, in applying for the award to do the *Franklin for a Lifetime* project, the experience and expertise of Franklin, Plan NH and UNH Cooperative Extension presented a compelling story to the grant funders.



Franklin is a small rural community situated at the junction of the Pemigewasset and Winnepesaukee rivers that form the Merrimack River. According to New Hampshire Employment Security Economic and Development Labor Information Bureau, Franklin was first incorporated in 1828 and became a city in 1895. Economic beginnings came from manufacturing that used the rivers for power. Mill buildings remain part of the historic downtown area and the city's legacy. However, similar to other NH communities, Franklin is now experiencing an aging population and a challenging economy. Census figures show the 2010 population as 8477. Residents, age 65 and over, represent 15% of the population, which will undoubtedly increase in the future, putting pressure on available and suitable housing, transportation, services, and other infrastructure. Among community members of all ages, poverty affects about 20% of residents, compared to 8% for the state. Population growth from 2000 to 2010 was less than a 1% increase, with a small loss projected in the future. The city faces challenges.



Conversely, the city has many strong assets, including the network of engaged and committed citizens and businesses, along with the hospital, library, churches, an active arts community, Franklin Business & Industrial Development Corporation, Choose Franklin, and the Bessie Rowell Community Center. In

addition, the city has a strong and stable government. In terms of older residents, there is TRIP Senior Center and a system of support services and facilities for seniors.

Franklin has made it clear from the beginning of this project that the senior population represents an asset and a resource, a source for its volunteers and workforce. “We must keep our aging populations active and involved,” said Elizabeth Dragon, Franklin’s city manager. “One man on our city council – a beloved neighbor and very active volunteer- had to move from Franklin because he couldn’t find a suitable place to live.” Stabilizing housing and services for the senior community is now a major priority for a city working to improve itself on a number of fronts.

### Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was comprised of several passionate city officials and engaged community members representing the community of Franklin. The Steering Committee began meeting in September 2014 to work alongside UNH Cooperative Extension and Plan NH to plan and coordinate the workshop, engage the community, secure donations and market the workshop to the greater community. The Steering Committee set out the following goals:

### Short-term Goals

- Assess what Franklin looks like now, in terms of demographics, housing, transportation, local economics, businesses, arts, economic development and community resources.
- Identify why older members of the Franklin community are leaving the city.
- Determine ways in which the community can improve citizens’ own perceptions of the city and living in Franklin for all ages and stages of life.
- Determine how addressing the needs of an aging population can benefit everyone in the community.
- Use the arts to connect intergenerational community members.
- Educate community members and regional/state stakeholders about the demographic changes in the state and Franklin and why aging is an issue we need to discuss.
- Determine what, if any, local and/or state regulations, legislation, zoning, building codes, etc., present barriers to developing and implementing a community response that supports aging in place/in community.
- Engage a cross-section of Franklin community members to develop and set in motion a community response (action plan) to an aging population that reflects what residents want for a multi-generational community in the future. The community response will support aging in place/in community and may include housing, community design, transportation, the arts,

<i>Franklin for a Lifetime Steering Committee</i>	
Jim Aberg	Franklin Business & Industrial Development Corporation
Krystal Alpers	Franklin Parks and Recreation
Jo Brown	Veterans Interests, Choose Franklin
Elizabeth Dragon	Franklin City Manager
George Dzujna	Franklin City Council, Choose Franklin
Melissa Lee	LRGHealthcare
Dick Lewis	Franklin Planner
Meg Miller	Peabody Home

businesses, a revitalized downtown, health and recreation, other. The community response will benefit all ages.

- Engage citizens to sign up and commit to being part of the process of implementing the action plan developed as a result of the workshop.
- Develop resources and a model that can be used in other NH communities to respond to an aging population.

### Framing Question

**How do we make Franklin a healthy and vibrant community for all citizens in support of an aging population?"**

### Long-term Goals

- Create a community environment that encourages older community members to remain in Franklin, keeping them active and encouraging their community contributions. This may include the arts, housing options, transportation, community design, a revitalized downtown, support services, other.
- Create a healthy environment for multigenerational individuals throughout their lifespan that includes the physical, social, natural, cultural and economic environment.
- Develop community responses to aging that will also revitalize and strengthen the local economy and infrastructure of the city for everyone.

The Steering Committee worked with UNH Cooperative Extension and Plan NH to plan the workshop and engage community members and was responsible for securing the locations, food and refreshments and marketing of the *Franklin for a Lifetime* Workshop. Marketing information was posted on the City's website, sent through Constant Contact e-mail lists, and distributed through flyers at locations throughout Franklin.

### Community Engagement

Prior to the rural design workshop, UNH Cooperative Extension, and the *Franklin for a Lifetime* steering committee, working with Arianna McBride and Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™, used story-based engagement activities to support and inform the workshop. UNH Cooperative Extension and the *Franklin for a Lifetime* Steering Committee engaged 119 community members through a children's artwork project, storytelling groups, one-on-one interviews, business focus groups, and an elder social service provider focus group. The purpose of Franklin Voices was to:



- Collect information about what would make Franklin a more welcoming and supportive city for people of all ages



- Ensure that a diversity of perspectives participated in activities so that information collected was as representative of the community as possible
- Provide an opportunity for people’s voices to be heard with the intent of building their interest in ongoing community engagement and civic participation



- Key themes from Franklin Voices:
- Sense of community
  - Civic life
  - Economic vitality
  - Transportation
  - Housing
  - Infrastructure
  - Natural resources
  - Cultural resources
  - Historic sites
  - Community and health services and schools

Participants stressed that there is a great sense of community in Franklin. There are good, strong connections and the community helps one another – neighbors helping neighbors. The hospital and number of recreational activities are seen as strengths. Some in the business community referenced frustration with local government while also listing many strengths of downtown and ideas for the future. Many groups talked about the need for more communications on issues and activities. The most prevalent challenge appeared to be downtown including the existing housing, lack of transportation, restaurants, shops and an overall desire for revitalization. Looking toward the future, many participants stressed the need for change downtown and improvements in schools. (See Appendix for the full Franklin Voices 2015 report)

## Storytelling Circles

A story circle is a group of people sharing their experiences based on a theme or a prompt. Following the sharing of individual stories the group explores common themes, questions, and/or related information. Each circle is ideally 5-8 people.

Group story helps build personal relationships among those who participate and creates a dialogue where the group can explore issues in more depth, prompted by the stories.



## Franklin for a Lifetime Workshop

### Thursday, April 9, 2015 – Summary

Thursday night began with a community supper prepared by the Franklin Regional Hospital and included 82 participants. The Steering Committee shared their experiences facilitating storytelling groups for the Franklin Voices project. Jennifer Wallace-Brodeur of AARP Livable Communities presented on the topic of age-friendly communities and discussed various components of the built and social environment that must be considered. Wallace-Brodeur's presentation also revealed the similarities in needs and preferences of older adults and millennials where both groups are interested in living in age-friendly communities.

Following Wallace-Brodeur's presentation and lively question-and-answer session with the crowd, participants were given sheets of paper printed with a light bulb and asked to answer two questions:

- **What is something you can do to make Franklin a more welcoming place for all ages to live?**
- **What is something to be addressed by the community to make Franklin welcoming for people of all ages?**

The activity elicited 50 responses and UNH Cooperative Extension staff sorted the responses into different themes. The themes included:

- Recreation for all: trails; business ideas
- Infrastructure: benches, roads, transportation
- Business development/entrepreneurship: ideas for new business
- Downtown Improvement: diverse business, improvements, fix up appearance
- Housing: Multi-generational and multi-income
- Volunteerism/Civic Life
- Schools: improvement

### Friday, April 10, 2015 - Summary

Friday, two national speakers presented and five local New Hampshire experts participated in a moderated panel discussion.

Phil Stafford, of the Center for Aging and Community, Indiana University, presented the idea of approaching aging as a community challenge rather than a personal issue.

Josh Bloom, of Clue Group in Washington, DC discussed how to create a vibrant downtown Franklin, and shared creative ideas utilized in other communities such as community activation and community capital.

Following the two presentations, the emerging themes from Friday night were presented to the participants: recreation, infrastructure, business development/entrepreneurship, downtown improvement, housing, volunteerism/civic life, and schools. Participants discussed whether these themes were comprehensive, and decided to add arts and culture.

Friday afternoon, five NH leaders participated in a panel discussion:

Carmen Lorentz, NH Division of Economic Development, shared what programs the Division of Economic Development takes part in, such as business recruitment and retention, export assistance, job training grants, and tax credits.

Sue Fox, Center on Aging and Community Living of the UNH Institute on Disability, discussed person-centered options for aging and community living where individuals are able to live and age in the community of their choice.

Ted Brady, USDA Rural Development, discussed funding possibilities through USDA Rural Development.

Catherine O'Brian, NH State Council on the Arts, discussed the important role and health benefits of the arts in the life of older adults, and shared some of the programs that integrate creative arts with older adults.

Eric Chinburg, Chinburg Properties, shared his experiences renovating old mill buildings in Newmarket, NH, and discussed what communities can do to attract developers to their town or city. Participants were most interested in hearing from Eric Chinburg about experiences with Mill redevelopment, rural downtowns and the possibilities for Franklin.

The 80 participants organized into small groups for discussion on these themes. Small group discussions were facilitated by UNH Cooperative Extension Staff. **The groups were asked to discuss key concepts from the speakers and opportunities and ideas for Franklin.** Participants were interested in discussing all of the aforementioned themes except for schools.

### Key Concepts and Ideas

The key concepts and ideas identified in the small groups are listed below from each session. These are provided as a record of the concepts and ideas generated by the community members who participated.

## Business Development/Entrepreneurship/Downtown Improvements

### Key Concepts

- The approach needs to be phased. Need to start where you are with an eye towards where you want to be.
- Keeping in mind the Amazon Model
- Determine or start with your mission statement which will become your path forward with effort and not be exclusionary
- Lack of alignment with business commerce strategy with focus on the elderly population
- Creating a community that is inviting to all generations with an inviting commerce area.
- Elderly population seem to be the focus not businesses.
- Community based vision must differentiate yourself from other communities. Narrow the general
- Two owners own 30% of businesses downtown. Picking and choosing businesses won't work if they are inconsistent with the owners' vision
- Less than friendly city

- People first, businesses are opportunistic.
- Drug store, movie house, clothing stores are potential
- Politics are an issue
- Bring back the park bench in downtown
- Three legged stool
  - Business
  - Government
  - Civic

### Ideas

- Tourism
- Culture/Arts
- Economic Feasibility
- Environmental Sustainability
- Green infrastructure
- Role of Government
- Business Development Entrepreneurialism

## Arts & Culture

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### Key Concepts

- Need basic services/retail opportunities to support downtown
- Anything downtown has to look different than a row of stores
- Franklin has amazing buildings
- Arts and culture can be an economic driver
- More arts downtown
- Heating sidewalks
- Rocking chairs in summer but what in winter?
- Walking tour with QR codes for historic buildings
- Build on existing programs
  - Storytelling guild at library
  - 3 Rivers signers
  - New downtown art gallery
  - Opera House – 1 activity per month
    - Dinner and a show packaging
  - Blues series at Elks House – acts from all over
- Programming ideas to get adults into library – adults haven't been willing to come but successful in getting kids
- Co-working space at library
- Makers space

- Artists space
- Studio live/work building
- Enhance transportation options to get folks there
- Intergenerational programming in the afternoon for older community members who won't drive at night
  - Community gardens – example in Newport, Vermont People in the neighborhood take care of it
- Knitting to decorate trees
- Used wood pallets for chairs
- Get neighborhoods involved
- Infuse arts and culture with other areas
- Schools have had to cut back on arts and nothing has replaced it. Make community activities that involve kids
- Intergenerational arts
- Intergenerational music
- Define arts and culture broadly
- Use trails –signage pointing out history
- Build on historical society
- Arts and health – statewide arts and health network – education

## Recreation

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### Key Concepts

- Intergenerational recreation/activities for all
- Benches in parks/downtown
- Parklets
- Places for all ages to gather/socialize/hang out

### Ideas:

- Connecting trails
- Pop up businesses during events downtown—First Day
- Skating rink
- Bowling alley
- Golf course
- Indoor recreation during winter
- Ski area—working to establish mountain bike trails
- Pop up bike store/ snowshoeing
- Event for rails to trails
- Improve public perception of Rails to Trails—underutilized
- Market/ publicize recreational activities
  - No local newspaper—people don't know what's going on
  - Community List Serve
  - “Free Positive Press”

- Use sign at Regal Theatre to advertise events
- “Rolling sign” to advertise events in Franklin
- Streamlining communication—monthly newsletter from several organizations (rec center, TRIP center, library)
- Volunteers to coordinate information

## Infrastructure

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### Key Concepts

- How does it affect city services? Housing developments/ transportation
- Emergency services
- 78% covered by water/sewer
- Patch work
- Broadband—key
- Cellular service
- Poor to average roads
- Plowing
- Red listed bridges
- 100 yr flood plain in Main St area
- Senior bus service (60+ only, grant for disabled)
- Volunteer ride program (older adult only—2 trips/week)
- Winnepesaukee transit program
  - Proposal from Franklin/Boscawen corridor
  - Frequent service to additional service
  - Raise revenue
  - Taxi services (lacking)
  - Current EMT services taxed for ride to docs

### Ideas

- Emergency help business (lifting service)
  - RTrans should be a part of this solution
- Animal control—need for ratification in animal control
  - Officers already need to do this
- Clearing sidewalks
- Geography

## Housing

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### Key Concepts

- Housing not just designed for seniors, multi-generational

- Locate senior housing close to retail and services
- Walkability and accessibility and safety
- Identify assets to leverage
- 1950s to now—we had operational mills, theatre, etc.—we have the infrastructure, need to reverse the trend—incentivize redevelopment
- Integrated housing
- The location of housing can revamp downtown
- Shared common space with neighbors
- Appeal of “the front porch”
- Assessments of housing for accessibility—existing buildings

### Ideas

- Asset inventory of housing
- Use pop-up stores to show benefit of first floor, enhance housing upstairs
- Alliance between city and landowners to overcome building code barriers—change use to match the code
- Building owner relationships with FBIDC
- Multi-generational, multi-income housing in downtown—choices
- How to reconcile necessary money need on rentals with cost of renovating
- Need federal assistance programs for rebuilding
- Need to reconcile privacy/space with accessibility
- Downtown will be more affordable due to greater effectiveness with services

## Volunteerism/ Civic Life

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### Key Concepts

- Danish example—college students living for free and assisting elderly
- Knowing availability of volunteer opportunities
- Communication where volunteers are needed—match up system
- Volunteer projects to make Main Street better

### Ideas

- Matching process—system needs with volunteers
  - Choose Franklin
  - Physical place/ hub of information
  - Could be run by volunteers if you had the space
    - Community center
    - Satellite chamber office
- Foster intergenerational—not just broad
- Collaboration with schools (community service)
- Incentives for youth to volunteer

- Educating the community about what is available at all ages
  - Volunteer tasks appropriate for all ages
- Redefining volunteerism
  - Including helping elderly neighbor with lawn care, etc.
  - Helping with downtown plantings, etc.
- Service groups work together to coordinate different needs
- Adopt-a-spot
- Garden clubs
- Recognize volunteers—publicly recognize people for hours of community service
- Volunteer ride program (older adult only—2 trips/week)
- Intergenerational center
  - Community center—Tiny Twisters and Senior Center

## Saturday, April 11, 2015 – Design Charette by Plan NH

Saturday was a work session for Plan NH to develop design recommendations based on community input from the engagement activities and ideas presented by speakers during the previous workshop sessions. The Plan NH team was comprised of volunteer members of the organization, who are architects, landscape architects, engineers, planners, transportation consultants, housing experts, historic preservation experts and interns.

Plan NH presented to a group of about 30 Franklin community members. Plan NH discussed some of their discoveries:

- Needs of aging do fit with needs of livable city for all
- More housing is not really needed—but better housing and choices
- Franklin is in the middle of tourism in NH
- People of Franklin are committed to change and creating a more livable city
- Franklin has historic assets to be leveraged (heritage of Daniel Webster, mill buildings, train trestle)
- Franklin also has natural resources to be leveraged

Some of Plan NH’s recommendations included:

- Make Franklin, NH the 3<sup>rd</sup> city in the state to become a “sustainable city”
  - Explore solar options
- Make Franklin “open for business” through adjusting the attitude of city government to new development
  - Create partnerships and accomplishments
- Revitalize the downtown with a focus on Bridge to Bridge (B2B)
  - Minimize risk for property owners
  - Engage community
  - Incubator space for downtown economic development
  - Reduced fee space
  - Identify 2-3 start-up businesses
  - Improve signage



- “Front porches/parklets”: 2 parking spaces become a pop-up park
  - Community engagement: wall to leave comments
  - Move farmers market downtown and make very visible
- Obtain a downtown coordinator in city government to organize relationships
- Economic Development
  - Target WWW: Wisdom, Working World, people who have a “degree in wisdom from life”
  - Target YES: Young Minds, Entrepreneurs, Stay
  - Competition of people to bring in businesses with free rent for business and residence
  - Start businesses that serve community
  - Stay, work, play
- Open spaces and recreation
  - Connect trails
  - Web based recreation guide
- Infrastructure
  - Enough space on Central Street for traffic, bike lanes, and parallel parking with minimal changes
  - Create bumped out sidewalks to shorten crosswalks (easier for older and disabled to cross)
  - Create median refuge by gas station halfway across the street
- Marceau Park
  - Create a band shell/community space
  - Building next door could be developed into a restaurant and use outdoor space for seating
  - Might attract people to come downtown and participate
  - Pop-up attraction similar to skating rink at Strawberry Banke
- The future of transportation
  - Franklin based taxi service
  - Better sidewalks, complete streets
  - Better transit
  - Car-sharing, bike-sharing, ride-sharing
- Encouraging multi-aged housing
  - Allow mutli-aged (in-law) housing
  - Simplify permitting process
  - Increase housing units
- Mill building renovations
  - “Village of downtown”
  - Housing, shops, kayak rentals
  - Create front porches, areas for gathering, seating
  - Intergenerational cohabitation
  - Deck space for cafes or seating

## Outcomes

### Summary of May 26<sup>th</sup> Presentation

On May 26, 2015, Franklin City Council held a community meeting to host featured speaker Rick Hauser, mayor of Perry, New York and owner of In.Site: Architecture, a member of the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™ resource team. In addition, attendees heard highlights from the *Franklin for a Lifetime* project and formed community action groups to move Franklin forward, based on learning and input from Franklin Voices and the April workshop. Participants at the meeting included approximately 50 city council members, city officials, members of the Plan NH design team and members of the public, many of whom came to the April workshop.

Rick Hauser presented his own experiences as mayor and architect addressing the challenges of a downtown in decline, after working with his own community to revitalize buildings in his town of Perry, NY. He also discussed "Main Street, LLC," a model for downtown revitalization that uses community entrepreneurship, citizens working together and private sector rehab.

Before the meeting, the steering committee identified five action groups that community members can join to contribute time and energy to Franklin community projects. Members of the audience were asked to sign up and volunteer to work on action groups to move Franklin forward.

### Action Committees

#### Marketing – "Champions for Franklin"

Contact: Elizabeth Dragon

#### Community Events and Recreational Opportunities

Contact: Krystal Alpers

#### Housing

Contact: Dick Lewis

#### Arts and Culture

Contact: to be decided

#### Volunteerism/Civic Life

Contact: Jo Brown and George Dzujna

### Next Steps

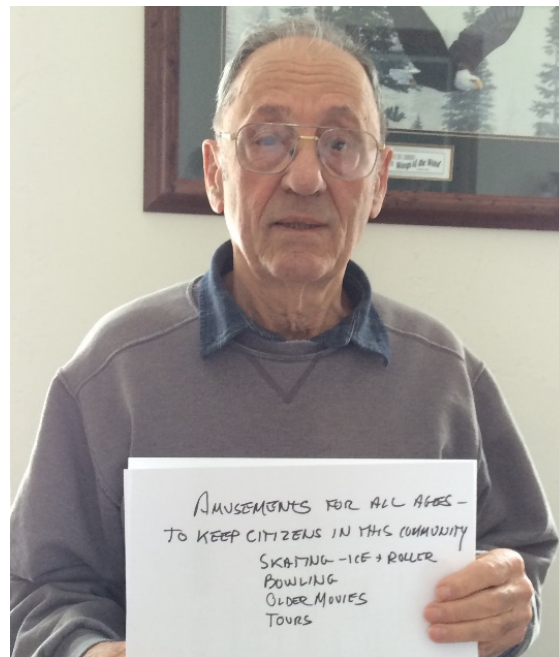
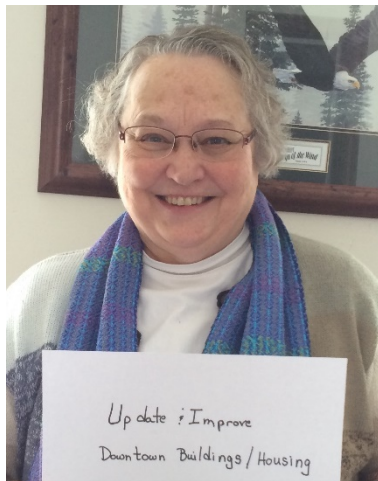
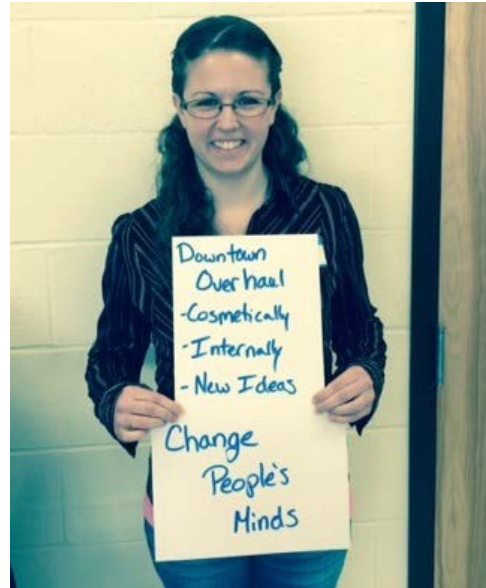
As follow up to the workshops, the steering committee will be meeting in late June 2015 to identify what the follow up to the workshop will be. Each action group is led by a community member or Franklin city staff member. UNH Cooperative Extension will provide staff support for the next 6-12 months to the action groups, as needed, as they organize and move forward on their action items.

*For more information contact:*

UNH Cooperative Extension  
Community Development  
Tel: 603-862-5046 [extension.unh.edu](mailto:extension.unh.edu)  
Email: [molly.donovan@unh.edu](mailto:molly.donovan@unh.edu)

# Franklin Voices

## 2015



## Introduction

The Franklin for a Lifetime project aims to create a healthy and vibrant Franklin community for all residents, in support of an aging population. The Franklin for a Lifetime rural design workshop is hosted by University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, The City of Franklin, and Plan NH with support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the United States Department of Agriculture, through the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™. The workshop will explore how NH communities can respond to an aging population through housing, economic development, planning and community design.

UNH Cooperative Extension, working with Ariana McBride and The Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™, used story based engagement activities to support the Franklin for a Lifetime rural design workshop. UNH Cooperative Extension and the Franklin for a Lifetime Steering Committee engaged 119 community members through a children's artwork project, storytelling groups, one-on-one interviews, business focus groups, and an Elder Wrap focus group. The purpose of Franklin Voices was to:

- Collect information about what would make Franklin a more welcoming and supportive city for people of all ages
- Ensure that a diversity of perspectives participate in activities so that information collected is as representative as possible
- Provide an opportunity for people's voices to be heard with the intent of building their interest in ongoing community engagement and civic participation

## Key Findings

Several key themes emerged from the Franklin Voices project. Themes were identified as a sense of community; civic life; economic vitality, transportation, housing, infrastructure; natural resources, cultural resources, historic sites; community and health services and schools. Participants stressed that there is a great sense of community in Franklin. There are good, strong connections and the community helps one another – neighbors helping neighbors. The hospital and number of recreational activities are seen as strengths. Some in the business community referenced frustration with local government while also listing many strengths of the downtown area and ideas for the future. Many groups talked about the need for more communications on issues and activities. The most prevalent challenge appeared to be the downtown including the existing housing, lack of transportation, restaurants, shops and an overall desire for revitalization. Looking toward the future, many participants stressed the need for change downtown and improvements in schools.

### Storytelling Circles

A story circle is a group of people sharing their experiences based on a theme or a prompt. Following the sharing of individual stories the group explores common themes, questions, and/or related information. Each circle is ideally 5-8 people.

Group story helps build personal relationships among those who participate and creates a dialogue where the group can explore issues in more depth, prompted by the stories.

*For more information contact:*

UNH Cooperative Extension  
Community Development  
Tel: 603-862-5439 [extension.unh.edu](mailto:extension.unh.edu)  
Email: [casey.hancock@unh.edu](mailto:casey.hancock@unh.edu)

In the spring of 2015, 72 children were asked to respond to the prompts, "What do you like about Franklin?" or "What is your favorite place in Franklin?" A first and a second grade class (ages 6-8) at Paul Smith Elementary School, and a group at the Community Center (ages 5-10) participated.

## What I like about Franklin

Congregational Church  
Franklin Opera House  
Stone Park  
My home  
Webster Lake  
Franklin Police Department  
Franklin Fire Department  
Trip Center  
Library  
Franklin Falls Dam  
The stores  
Boys and Girls Club

Odell Park  
Soccer  
My house  
Paul Smith Elementary School  
Football in Franklin  
Franklin houses  
Sports  
Franklin High School  
Basketball Courts, the skiing area  
The mountains  
Full moon sledding  
Dawson's mansion  
Second group  
I love you mom and dad

*"My favorite place in Franklin is the Franklin Fire Department. It is located on West Bow Street. I like it because it has a cool museum with old trucks. I am so glad the Franklin Fire Department is in Franklin because the firemen do cool drills, help us, and they have the best open houses in Franklin."*

Friends

Walmart  
Video games  
The school  
Dollar Tree

Grassy fields

There are lots of places to go

The flowers

The playground

*"What I like about Franklin is there is peace and harmony."*



**Odell Park was often mentioned as a place liked by children in Franklin**

# Storytelling Groups and One-on-One Interviews

In the spring of 2015, the Franklin steering committee and UNH Cooperative Extension staff conducted four storytelling groups with 23 total participants, and six one-on-one interviews. Participants were asked to think of an experience in Franklin that made them feel supported and welcome and an experience in Franklin that made them feel like it was hard to live here. Participants were invited to share an idea that could make Franklin a more healthy and vibrant community for all citizens.

## Sense of Community

### Strengths

- Welcoming sense of community
- Programs bring kids + families together
- Maintaining connections
- Togetherness
- Seniors can benefit from interactions with children
- The concept of being connected/in the absence of family the ability to connect to the community
- Friendly people
- Good neighbors
- Community events
- Positive connections – positive environment and how different organizations are in attendance during events
- Neighborhood
- Community Organizations
- St. Paul's church
- Commonality—kids
- Family
- Children
- Community support for raising families
- People and neighbors—community sticks together
- Older residents, if they're from Franklin, have roots
- Folks have their own social groups, some still have high school buddies

### Challenges

- Accepting diversity
- Feeling safe
- Churches are aging congregations
- Influx of 55+ age folks in community who don't participate in community don't vote, don't have emotional connection—concerned about “wooing elderly from out of state”

### Ideas

- Amusements for all ages – to keep citizens in the community
- Make Franklin safer and inviting
- Find a commonality between everyone and build connections
- Change people's minds
- Bring kids and seniors together
- Promote to all citizens the idea of Franklin as a lifelong place to live—“start with the cradle”
- Make Franklin a place for aging people to stay by making it a place where their children want to establish their lives— if the young want to stay, the parents/grandparents will want to stay as well and aging parents eventually come to rely on their kids to help

## Community Members

## Civic Life

### Strengths

- Opportunities to give back
- Choose Franklin
- SAU 18 publishes newspaper with events, history, school activities

### Challenges

- Poor communication
- No local newspapers
- Political atmosphere—mayor and city council are not looking at the future

### Ideas

- Better communication
- Better leadership
- More funding for drug task force enforcement

## Economic Vitality, Transportation, Housing and Infrastructure

### Strengths

- Great location
- Really good Thai Restaurant
- Donut place
- Lots of senior housing
- Close to large cities, many things to do in region

### Challenges

- Downtown
- Lack of good jobs
- Technicians have to go outside of Franklin
- Northern pass – short sightings / opinion was wrong
- No exits close by for commute
- No good paying jobs
- Subsidized housing
- Out of state landlords
- Lack of affordable apartments for aging in place
- Vacant stores
- Handicap accessibility
- Negative perception of community
- Parking
- High taxes and tax cap
- Crime + drugs
- No restaurants, entertainment or shopping
- Transportation is a challenge for those without cars
- Building owners are not investing

### Ideas

- Diverse Jobs - growth
- Need an exit
- Attract new businesses – retail stores, restaurants
- Senior dwelling
- More responsible downtown landlords
- Downtown revitalization
- Fix main street buildings + clean main street—better apartments
- Set standards + maintain them for a cleaner downtown area
- Downtown overhaul—cosmetically/internally/new ideas
- Downtown buildings—painting facelift
- Clean main street buildings
- Downtown renewal on Central Street
- Handicap accessibility downtown—currently meets code but still not accessible

- Improve infrastructure
- Modify tax cap
- Turn Franklin into an antique alley
- Bowling alley
- Movie theatre
- Craft store
- Ice cream shop
- Sports arena

- Subsidized housing should have additional benefits for the community
- Homes for older people who are capable but don't want maintenance and care of their own homes
- Attract young people
- Economic development in downtown

## Natural Resources, Cultural Resources and Historic Sites

### Strengths

- Historical locations
- Scenic locations
- Outdoor recreation
- Odell Park
- Walking trails
- Webster Lake

- Rivers
- Veterans ski area
- Opera House
- Two beaches
- Trails for biking, hiking
- Dam

### Challenges

- Failure to maintain downtown + historical sites

### Ideas

- Develop recreation opportunities for all ages

## Community and Health Services and Schools

### Strengths

- Hospital
- Good municipal services
- Responsible Police + Fire department
- Great city service
- City government
- Recycling
- School is improving
- Bessie Rowell Community Center

- Trip Center
- Programs bring kids + families together
- Peabody Home
- Supportive senior center
- Lots of churches
- Franklin Savings Bank
- Health care services are close
- Stone- throw away from exit 20- 5 miles away from shopping

### Challenges

- Lack of doctors
- Poor school board organization
- School systems
- Perception of the school system
- Not a lot for families to do except for at the rec center

- High number of kids with special needs
- Community of Hill just pulled out of the SAU; that will cause significant loss of revenue for the schools
- Lack of maintenance on roads



# Community Members

## *Ideas*

- Improve Schools
- City/SAU + School board Cooperation
- Schools need more parental participation/communication/teach the individual
- School/teachers -> Better-paid teachers will bring better education
- Improve academics in schools
- Make Franklin a town + let people vote on issues + budget
- Collaboration between resources that already exist
- More educational opportunities for all levels (classes offered by hospital on nutrition)
- More foster care for children



# Business Focus Groups

On March 26, 2015, two business and property owner focus groups took place. The first was made up of businesses and property owners located in the “Bridge to Bride” area and engaged 9 participants; the second focused on all other businesses and property owners located outside of the “Bridge to Bride” area and engaged 2 participants. Participants were asked to consider positive and challenging experiences they have had doing business in Franklin. Participants were also asked to share ideas to make Franklin a more healthy and vibrant community in which to do business.

## Business Community

### Sense of Community

#### Strengths

- Small community – manageable
- Tight knit when something goes wrong
- Community cares for one another
- Care for children and elderly
- Know everybody; people drop by our business because they know us
- Neighbors help neighbors
- A lot going on – Christmas tree lighting, lots of community events
- Sense of community

### Civic Life

#### Strengths

- People want to see things happen – active people/engaged
- Some people have moved here to contribute
- Active service clubs – rotary, etc
- My 4 children went through the school – people really engaged.

#### Challenges

- Poor community communication – lack of traditional media (no local paper); media being used isn’t used well (i.e. city website)
- Lack of transparency – lack of trust with city
- Divide between city residents and city hall
- Lawsuits city has paid off
- Lack of creativity by city government – blame instead of engaging with new concepts to solve problems
- Stuck in planning mode – not much moves to reality
- City administration doesn’t live in Franklin; how vested are they in the community?
- Lack of interest of residents
- Negative culture with city government
- Lack of results based on accountability – no consequences for not doing job in city government

## **Ideas**

- Build trust and cooperation with city
- City government needs to accept some ownership to fix problems
- Bring back kids/people who leave – make them aware of opportunities in Franklin
- Establish residential requirements for city leaders/officials

## **Economic Vitality, Transportation, Housing and Infrastructure**

### **Strengths**

- Streetscape of Main Street – the bare bones of what’s there
- Well-defined downtown
- Potential for renewable power
- Blank slate in empty buildings
- Geographic center of state
- Downtown is ¼ - ½ mile long
- Business owners downtown can forge a relationship – 4 owners own 80% of downtown
- Locally-owned bank – local connection and identity
- Many sectors – Webster Lake, downtown, industrial park – in appropriate locations
- Downtown, mill district
- Real estate is inexpensive
- Traffic count on Main Street – 18,000-20,000 cars per day in the summer; main east/west highway
- Closeness of Merrimack County nursing home, so older folks can stay connected to the community
- Liquor store is a draw for a certain area
- Beautiful town
- Low unemployment rate
- Industrial park doing well – completely full, no vacancies
- Ten minutes to exit 17 – more access to Rt 3

### **Challenges**

- Over dependence on tourism
- Lack of parking management plan (specifically overnight parking for downtown residents)
- Affordable real estate – can’t afford to fix up homes, properties are in a state of disrepair, not a good insurance market
- Abundance of subsidized housing
- Drugs and alcohol downtown
- Key properties have environmental issues
- People don’t want to rent apartments in downtown Franklin
- Community is all perceived as the bridge to bridge part – perceived as negative because of the empty buildings and negative reputation
- High property taxes and tax cap
- Cost to restore property relative to market value of property
- Deepening divide between property owners and city government
- Limited skilled workforce to meet employer needs; mismatch of available workers and needs of jobs
- Property code enforcement; lack of enforcement for existing codes
- Downtown residents loitering
- Buildings need to be maintained
- As buildings deteriorate, tax assessment decreases for same city needs
- Negative perception/reputation of Franklin around the state
- Used to have retail in Franklin but killed off by outlets at exit 20; hard to compete
- No restaurants

# Business Community

- Lost a big manufacturing employer in 2003 due to offshoring
- Lack of jobs for college-educated young people

## *Ideas*

- Shops, restaurants, other businesses downtown
- Look for economic model and transitional entity
- Improve perception of community
- Our business is here for the long haul; think outside the box for nontraditional solutions (retail may not work)
- Make a hip bedroom community
- Increase property values
- City work with property owners to affect/do away with tax cap
- Look at places that aren't paying taxes
- More diversity of downtown residents – age and income
- Unify/connect trail systems through downtown
- Multi-modal transportation – bikes, zipcars, bus
- More density downtown
- Enforce codes – residential and commercial

- Lack of transportation
- High unemployment rate

- Fill up store fronts
- Build private-public partnerships to overcome gaps between market value and cost of renovation of buildings; cooperative
- Add to tax base – increase business and industry without adding to services
- Northern Pass – game changer- would significantly increase tax revenue – add 45% to tax base
- Recreational type businesses – (i.e. kayaks)
- Better housing – nicer housing – convert downtown apartments for young professionals in the city.



## Natural Resources, Cultural Resources and Historic Sites

### Strengths

- Intersection of recreation opportunities
- River
- Odell Park
- Historic architecture and history
- Memorial ski area run by volunteers
- Walking trail
- Golf course
- Franklin Falls
- Great Gains Forest – largest wooded area of city
- Hunting
- Fishing
- Snowmobiling
- Area has evolved as fishing under dam; brings in folks from outside
- Opera House
- Rivers clean for fishing – has improved since I was a kid
- Webster Lake brings people into the city

### Challenges

- Storm water goes into waste treatment or catch basins and into river – need improvement– city not planning for storm water in designs
- Webster Lake polluted – every year it's closed down

## Community and Health Services and Schools

### Strengths

- Hospital
- Sports programs through the high school
- Community action – what they do for old people
- Trying to get kids' sports program started – possibly bringing back football for little kids
- Potential to expand relationships with higher education – Colby Sawyer
- One of the best fire departments in the state
- Rec center does great program in summer – in the past used Casey funding; the rec program picked up after the school program stopped.
- People who graduate from school stay connected through alumni
- Trip Center – promoting volunteerism
- Graduation day – school day parade for K-12; all town comes; only city in US that still does it
- Sports teams
- City is talking to the school about Vocational Ed program to match employer needs with skilled labor force- schools partnering with industry; building partnerships

## Challenges

- Police/fire don't let property owners know about break-ins, water breaks
- Need more crime prevention
- Overburdened police – too much going on
- Education system – businesses won't come to town because of the schools

## Ideas

- Create good ecological design systems – energy, trash

- Percent of free and reduced lunch at school
- Past school administration kicked kids out of school and they ended up on the street
- Low level of higher education
- Budget problem – Hill just pulled out of SAU
- City hasn't had a paving budget in 6 years; roads falling apart

- Catch up on deferred road maintenance
  - Extension of higher education institution (SNHU?)



# Elder Wrap Focus Group

## Community Agencies

An Elder Wrap focus group with 7 participants took place on March 6, 2015. Elder Wrap groups are comprised of public and private agencies that meet to discuss community and individual needs for seniors to ensure services are effectively delivered. Because the Franklin for a Lifetime project has a large focus on aging in community, it was important to speak with elder care providers to gain their perspective of seniors' needs. Participants were asked to report on an experience they had or heard about that indicated Franklin is a community that supports and welcomes residents of all ages, including older residents. Participants were then asked to share an experience they have had or heard about that shows it is challenging for older residents to live in Franklin. Participants were also asked to share an idea that could make Franklin a more healthy and vibrant community for all citizens, including older residents.

### Sense of Community

#### Strengths

- Friendly, Friendliness
- Caring
- Supportive
- Community day pulls everyone together
- Everyone knows each other
- Community events
- Sense of community
- Community spirit—welcoming, hometown atmosphere
- Community—sense of small town
- Community oriented

### Civic Life

#### Strengths

- Many dedicated and hard-working professionals and volunteers

#### Challenges

- Poor communication to what is available
- Many officials do not live in Franklin

### Economic Vitality, Transportation, Housing and Infrastructure

#### Strengths

- Local businesses are willing to help—just ask
- Housing is available
- Grocery Store



## **Challenges**

- Lack of available transportation
- Homebound folks
- City does not seem able to actively move projects forward
- City of grants—due to poverty levels—starter program not finished or sustainable
- Housing substandard for seniors—8%+ public subsidized
- Our aging living situation
- Businesses don't seem to want to come into town up to now
- Downtown shopping
- Reputation in downtown for drugs and poverty
- Perceived lack of safety downtown
- Downtown: closed shops, lack of shopping options
- Drug situation
- Subsidized welfare housing on Main St. with many of those residents employable and therefore at loose ends that makes the elderly not want to go downtown
- Lack of accessibility in available rentals and buildings
- Lack of housing
- Lack of things to attract young people—Franklin is more attractive to aging

## **Ideas**

- Downtown reflections
- Housing improvements
- Revitalization of downtown
- Attract businesses to revitalize downtown

## **Natural Resources and Historic Sites**

### **Strengths**

- Exercise/outdoors
- Natural resources
- Trails, lakes, mountains
- Nice park
- Safe place to walk and enjoy outdoor activities

## **Community Services and Health Services and Schools**

### **Strengths**

- Healthcare
- Support Groups
- Hospital
- Library
- Activities within community
- Resources available: grants (health, dental)

### **Challenges**

- Some older people have trouble filling out exhaustive forms required for state & federal services
- Older residents still without HS diploma
- Lack of mental health and substance abuse facilities and services
- School system
- Living difficult for lower income elders