



Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities

Fitchburg, Massachusetts

(Re)Building Downtown

Report and Suggested Next Steps

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program

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Executive Summary

Pursuant to our technical assistance award with the City of Fitchburg, this Memorandum constitutes Smart Growth America's final report summarizing the recent *(Re)Building Downtown* workshop, and suggesting possible **Next Steps** the city could take to craft a vision for the future development of the downtown focus areas addressed during the workshop.

John Robert Smith and Chris Zimmerman, representing Smart Growth America (SGA), met with local leaders and residents on September 19 and 20, 2017 to provide assistance via the *(Re)Building Downtown* tool, supported by a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Sustainable Communities.

Downtown Fitchburg, after experiencing declines typical of many former manufacturing cities, today is beginning to come back to life. With vacant downtown storefronts reopening and transit-oriented development planned around the intermodal transportation facility, downtown is coming back to life. Fitchburg State University is also participating as a partner in the revitalization by purchasing the former theater block for revitalization, including several storefronts. However, there remain concerns by some in the community that downtown's distance from a major highway could stymie the redevelopment potential. For all of these reasons, the (Re)Building Downtown workshop was an ideal fit for Fitchburg at this time to help revitalize the "heart" of the community.

Following a tour and a public presentation by the SGA team, discussions at the workshop focused on four areas of downtown – Upper Common, Monument, Gateway, and Moran Square. The SGA team also presented results of a fiscal “hotspot” analysis prepared under another funding source that helped pinpoint the most valuable location for redevelopment in Fitchburg – Main Street in downtown.

Six steps described at the workshop for (re)building downtown include:

1. Repair the street wall and fill in missing teeth
2. Pay attention to building form
3. Pursue Complete Streets
4. Leverage unique assets; create great public spaces
5. Get more residents in downtown
6. Establish on-going place management

The workshop also described several demographic and economic trends impacting the built environment:

- Our nation’s demographics are changing in a way that profoundly affects the housing market in large cities and rural areas alike.
- The formula for economic growth is changing.
- People on the move are looking to relocate to places with a high quality of life. In fact, they are willing to sacrifice salary for location. High quality of life is defined more and more by the character of the city center than by the size of a front yard or square footage of a home.
- Suburban development patterns are making it more difficult for local governments to balance their budgets.

Participant discussions for each of the four focus areas in downtown resulted in the following goals and action items:

Upper Common:

Goal 1: Activate vacant spaces

Action 1.1: Fill in missing “teeth”

Action 1.2: BF Brown space

Action 1.3: Historic districts – 2 separate units (Academy / Upper Common)

Goal 2: Changing traffic patterns / pedestrian friendliness

Action 2.1: Rotary / traffic pattern improvements

Action 2.2: Safer pedestrian crosswalks / walkways

Monument District:

Goal 1: Engage private sector property owners

Action 1.1: Create Main Street champions

Action 1.2: Identify and train peer champions

Action 1.3: Create a sales pitch to generate return on investment

Action 1.4: Work to change perceptions (marketing plan and policing)

Goal 2: Create a life cycle experience

Action 2.1: Develop infrastructure for community events

Action 2.2: Engage communities of faith

Action 2.3: Activate existing public space, particularly surface parking lots

Action 2.4: Support a Main Street police ambassador

Action 2.5: Connect Boulder Drive with Main Street

Goal 3: Create a downtown management plan

Action 3.1: Create Central Business District

Action 3.2: Bring private investors to the table

Action 3.3: Engage the philanthropic community

Gateway District:

Goal 1: Safer pedestrian crossings

Action 1.1: Connect Twin Cities Rail Trail to Main Street

Action 1.2: Relocate Boulder Drive

Goal 2: Pursue additional density and parking relief to spur redevelopment

Action 2.1: Build above parking garage and first floor retail

Action 2.2: Encourage rebuilding of vacant / underused parcels

Action 2.3: Acquire riverside parking lots

Goal 3: Pursue revitalization of existing buildings in the district as required

Action 3.1: Upper floors of Main Street buildings – need to meet codes and have sprinklers

Moran Square:

Goal 1: Improved signage (both gateway / arrival and wayfinding)

Action 1.1: Defined physical arrival gateway

Action 1.2: Thematic wayfinding / directional signage (overhead)

Goal 2: Redefine street wall on both north and south sides

Action 2.1: Establish built forms where surface parking now is

Action 2.2: Utilize open or undefined space (such as the wedge at Fitchburg Plumbing building)

Action 2.3: Overall streetscape enhancement (for pedestrians and bicyclists) including sidewalk seating

Action 2.4: Traffic calming by squeezing the ROW at major intersections to ensure motorists drive more slowly, enhancing both vehicle and pedestrian safety as well as reducing ambient vehicle noise.

Action 2.5: Address curb cuts and jaywalking between intersections that create an unsafe environment for pedestrians.

Goal 3: Moran Square Diner “rescue”

Action 3.1: Relocate and situate nearby with expanded square footage

Goal 4: Expand dining options and support existing ones with outdoor seating

Following a productive discussion with various stakeholders — including residents, advocates, city and local agency representatives, business owners and elected officials — the following [Next Steps](#) are recommended:

- 1. Establish an implementation committee to move these recommendations forward.**
- 2. Develop a cohesive plan for the integrated use of legacy buildings and historic structures in downtown Fitchburg.**
- 3. Seek new development projects to fill in the “missing teeth” while paying careful attention to building and site design.**
- 4. Focus efforts on internal circulation within the city center and connections to nearby neighborhoods and take advantage of the Water Street bridge project to further these goals.**
- 5. Focus on placemaking and streetscapes in downtown to make it a destination where people want to visit and to linger.**
- 6. Engage the Nashua River as a downtown amenity.**
- 7. Create a marketing and branding campaign for downtown Fitchburg including on-going place management.**
- 8. Improve Fitchburg’s visibility within the region as a destination through monuments marketing the community to passing motorists.**
- 9. Ensure that redeveloped roadways reflect Complete Streets principles.**
- 10. Strengthen the community’s physical connection to and partnership with Fitchburg State University (FSU).**

Need for assistance

Fitchburg was an industrial center during the 19th century. Its location along the Nashua River coupled with an expansive rail network and immigrant labor enabled large mills to produce a variety of goods, particularly paper. The prosperity brought about by this industry enabled notable Victorian style architecture in the community that remains today as a reminder of this past.

However, downtown eventually experienced the type of decline typical of many manufacturing cities. As jobs and industry moved away, storefronts became vacant and infrastructure deteriorated. The advent of the automobile hastened many residents’ move to more suburban areas.

But downtown is beginning to come back to life. A \$200 million investment in commuter rail infrastructure has increased access to opportunities and reduces the travel time between downtown Fitchburg and Boston from 90 minutes to an hour.

Downtown storefronts are beginning to reopen and transit-oriented development is planned around the intermodal commuter rail station. Fitchburg State University,

located adjacent to downtown, serves as a partner by purchasing and planning for rehabilitation of a downtown theater and other storefronts. The university recognizes the need to create a vibrant downtown to attract students to campus as well as to create safe pedestrian and bicycle connections between each. In addition to the university, other outside parties have partnered with or provided grant funding to improve the city's downtown.

ReImagine North of Main is an example of one partnership in the community focusing on the North of Main neighborhood, which includes downtown. This area, with an unemployment rate of 14% at the end of 2016 combined with over 40% living below the poverty line, is one of the most distressed neighborhoods in both Fitchburg and the region. Funded by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston's Working Cities Challenge and the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, this effort is bringing together a variety of stakeholders to revitalize the area using smart growth principles.

The community recently completed a Complete Streets prioritization process and the new Community Development Director will be focusing on smart growth priorities for downtown.

Yet, despite the revitalization that has already occurred and the transit access in the community, there remain concerns among some community members that downtown – located three miles from the nearest major highway – lacks the roadway access needed to fully revitalize. Yet this need not be a roadblock to redevelopment.

For all of these reasons, the (Re)Building Downtown workshop was an ideal fit for Fitchburg at this time in its history. Through the work already happening in the community and by applying for this program, Fitchburg demonstrated that it recognizes the need to invest in its downtown to create a sustainable future for itself.

The downtown of any city can be thought of as its “heart”. Like a human heart, its condition impacts the health of the entire community. Thus, focusing on Fitchburg's heart is the right thing to do for its future.

Workshop Review

SGA's technical assistance visit began on September 19th with a driving tour of the city as well as a walking tour of the focus areas in downtown Fitchburg. The focus areas selected by the city – for the workshop's small group discussions – were:

- 1) Upper Common: Includes the northwest end of downtown, next to and surrounding Upper Common
- 2) Monument: Comprises the central section of downtown, next to Monument Park
- 3) Gateway: Consists of Main Street at the intersections of Water Street, Day Street, Blossom Street, and North Street
- 4) Moran Square: Includes the eastern end of downtown and is a new historic district designation

These localities represent important nodes in downtown and played a key role in the discussions at the workshop as well as the recommendations in this next steps memo.

The workshop occurred over two days. City leaders provided a tour to the SGA team upon their arrival in Fitchburg followed by an evening presentation during a regular scheduled city council meeting open to the general public. The second day consisted of a workshop given to participants invited by the city.

On the first evening of the workshop, the technical assistance team provided an overview of smart growth. They described the emerging national demographic and economic trends at play across the American landscape. The SGA team examined the economic impact of 20th century suburban development patterns, discussing the trend of migration by both Baby Boomers and Millennials to vibrant city and town centers. The presentation considered the emergence of the Millennial generation as the predominant driver of economic demand and the workforce sought by today's job creators, emphasizing that generation's interest in walkable, bikeable, vibrantly social towns and cities. The presentation then tied these trends back to walkability and density as determinants of development costs.

At the end of the public presentation, the SGA team shared results of a fiscal "hotspot" analysis performed for Fitchburg under another funding source. A hot spot analysis visualizes geographically where a higher density or cluster of activity occurs. This is a way of describing the relationship a development pattern has upon the land value around it.

The morning of the workshop delved into the concepts presented at the public presentation in greater depth. The presentation centered around six steps to build on a legacy downtown like Fitchburg's to meet the market and demands of the 21st century. The six steps include:

1. Repair the street wall and fill in missing teeth: By "missing teeth", the SGA team is referring to vacant properties or underutilized properties such as surface parking which could be redeveloped into a more productive land use. This will help make downtown into a more pedestrian-friendly where people enjoy spending time.

2. Building form: Density and sidewalks alone will not bring people to downtown. The urban design plays a large role in how pleasant and safe it feels walking around downtown. Urbanity is not just height and density. Buildings must engage the street – creating an inviting ambiance for pedestrians.

3. Complete Streets: The design of the street itself is also critical to encouraging

pedestrians to walk. Generous sidewalks, narrow street lanes, on-street parking, and small block size are all factors that contribute to pedestrian comfort.

4. Leverage unique assets; create great public spaces: The quality of the public is also impacted by how legacy buildings – such as historic districts, old warehouses, and industrial structures are utilized as well as the treatment of natural features such as, in the case of Fitchburg, the river. Building on existing assets takes advantage of these features and creates an authentic experience in downtown.

5. Get more residents in downtown: Adding residential uses to commercial areas is one way to do this. People are attached to places that have social offerings, that are welcoming, and have physical beauty as well as green spaces.

6. Establish on-going place management: By maintaining safety and cleanliness, branding, and enlivening public spaces through a business improvement district, non-profit organization, or municipal agency, the community can keep downtown fun and a destination.

Meridian, Mississippi provided an ideal case study for the workshop participants. With its renovated rail station (Union Station), restoration of its existing historic city hall, as well as the renovation of an existing historic theater integrated into a walkable downtown, Meridian provides a real life example of Fitchburg's vision for its downtown. These are all landmarks that Fitchburg is working to preserve within the center of the city. We will discuss the Meridian case study in more detail below.

The remainder of the workshop was devoted to small group discussions and presentations back to the larger group. The participants broke up into four groups, each discussing one of the four focus areas within downtown. The groups each received a large paper map for their chosen area showing existing land use as well as a notepad for brainstorming.

The groups brainstormed specific land use changes, streetscaping, and other amenities that would reimagine their focus area as an inviting and walkable place that brings in new retail and customers. They also drew these changes visually on their map. A summary of the discussions is provided below.

For a list of workshop participants, refer to Appendix D.

Note: *The intent of these workshops is neither for Smart Growth America to create a plan nor bind the communities to any particular course of action, but to assist ongoing regional efforts to create a more vibrant, successful region, consistent with the goals of*

their envisioned plans.

The built environment and fiscal and economic health

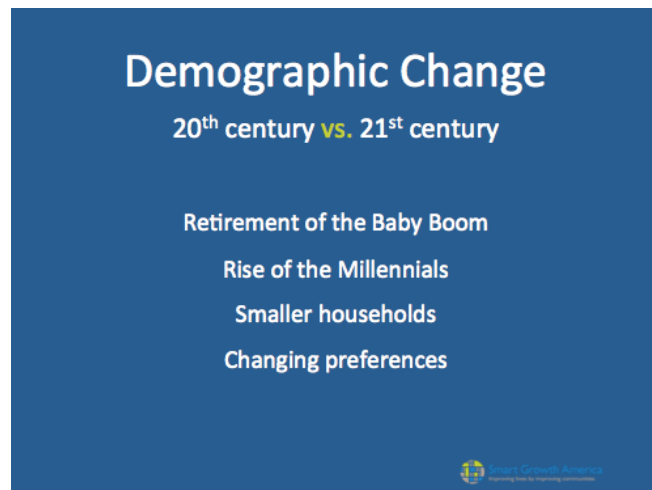
Communities around the nation are always concerned about their fiscal and economic health. This is true in large cities as well as small towns and rural areas.

Fiscal health means a local government’s bottom line: Does the life cycle cost of a project’s investment—upfront infrastructure, ongoing service provision and eventual repair and maintenance—cost more than what it produces in tax revenue?

Economic health includes the general economic well-being of the community and its region: How does new investment and development add to or detract from the creation of economic competitiveness, fiscal efficiency and sustainability, jobs, jobs access, retention of local youth, cultural identity and wealth?

In approaching these questions for Fitchburg, as in any part of the country today, it is important to bear three trends in mind:

Our nation’s demographics are changing in a way that profoundly affects the housing market in large cities and rural areas alike.



Demographic trends are moving the housing market strongly away from conventional suburban housing.¹ The two biggest demographic groups in the nation – retiring Baby Boomers and Millennials (18-30-year-olds) are both expressing a strong preference for a more walkable, urban/village lifestyle. Indeed, a growing percentage of Millennials prefer to live without cars altogether or to live a “car-lite” lifestyle. The vast majority of net new households

being formed have no children at home, and most of them are one and two-person households – which are much more likely to prefer a walking lifestyle. Furthermore, the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) has fallen below population growth, while the

¹ See; “The Changing Shape of American Cities,” Luke J. Juday, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia, March 2015.

“Demographic Reversal: Cities Thrive, Suburbs Sputter,” William H. Frey, Brookings Institution, State of Metropolitan America Series, June 29, 2012.

demand for public transportation has been rising steadily. These trends are a complete departure from those experienced for decades in the 20th century.


The formula for economic growth is changing.

The 21st Century Economy

- Creativity, knowledge, innovation
- Importance of networking, interaction
- Demand for skilled workers

"A region's most important source of competitive advantage is its workforce. . . it's the pool of talent that attract firms, particularly in the knowledge economy."

-- Ania Ania Wlecekowski,
Harvard Business Review, May 2010

 Smart Growth America
Promoting Smart Growth by Encouraging Collaboration

Business growth used to be driven by large corporations that operated in a fashion that was both private in ownership structure and linear in manufacturing and production. In the past, new research breakthroughs occurred in sealed research laboratories controlled by the companies that owned them. Manufacturing and other business processes occurred in assembly-line situations, with little interaction across

or inside industries. These conditions led to communities that featured large, sealed-off campuses and tended to be linear in their arrangements.

Today, business growth is driven by collaboration among many types of entities — private companies, research institutions, universities, and others — that must interact frequently and work together creatively. This trend requires cities and communities that encourage interaction and collaboration — the opposite of the older model described above. How communities are designed directly impacts their ability to create interactive and collaborative environments.

Most significantly, the innovation economy, as it is sometimes called, depends heavily on skilled workers. The companies that are driving innovation are pursuing highly educated talent, especially among Millennials. Increasingly, companies find it necessary to locate in places that their target workforce wants to live in. Increasingly, that means walkable communities.

People on the move are looking to relocate to places with a high quality of life. In fact, they are willing to sacrifice salary for location. High quality of life is defined more and more by the character of the city center than by the size of a front yard or square footage of a home.

Similarly, the market for retail is changing. Suburban shopping malls and retail centers that thrived for decades are struggling as a result of oversupply and a shift in shopping preferences. With online buying playing a bigger role for consumers (especially for bargain hunters), many are looking for a more authentic experience when they shop in



Boise, Idaho (Source: BoiseCentre.com)

person. Consumers are demonstrating strong preferences for shopping locally at unique establishments that offer handcrafted, regional products. They prefer this experience to be a short distance from their homes and offices and within a comfortably walkable city center. This is bringing new value to traditional walkable main streets. Fitchburg and, specifically the downtown

focus areas of this workshop are well suited to taking advantage of this shift in consumer choice.

Suburban development patterns are making it more difficult for local governments to balance their budgets.

Development patterns that sprawl outward from the city center require extensive investments in capital infrastructure and ongoing service delivery. Sprawling development requires more infrastructure to serve relatively few people and requires service providers such as firefighters and school buses to travel farther. More compact development patterns reduce both life-cycle infrastructure costs and operating costs.²

A 2013 study by Smart Growth America, *Building Better Budgets: A National Examination of the Fiscal Benefits of Smart Growth Development*³, concluded that, compared to conventional suburban development, smart growth patterns can achieve savings of one-third or more in upfront infrastructure cost, and 10% annually in ongoing operating expenses. Smart growth development patterns can generate up to

² For more information, see: <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/research/the-fiscal-implications-of-development-patterns/>

³ The full report can be downloaded at, <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/building-better-budgets>.

ten times more revenue on a per-acre basis.

More recently, SGA's *Core Values: Why American Companies are Moving Downtown*⁴ examines the characteristics, motives, and preferences of companies that have either relocated, opened new offices, or expanded into walkable downtowns between 2010 and 2015. Smart Growth America partnered with global real estate advisors Cushman & Wakefield to identify nearly 500 companies that have made such a move in the past five years. Of those, Smart Growth America interviewed representatives from more than 40 companies to gain a better understanding of this emerging trend. These companies' new locations are in areas that are dramatically more walkable than previous sites. The average Walk Score of companies' previous locations was 52; the average Walk Score of the new locations is 88. Similarly, Transit Scores grew from an average of 52 to 79 and Bike Scores bumped from an average of 66 to 78.

This trend is visible across the country, in big cities and small ones alike and should be a factor in the economic development strategy of all communities, including Fitchburg.

Note: *Not all of these trends will be completely relevant in every situation. But it is important to bear all three in mind in considering the fiscal and economic health of any community.*

(Re)Building Downtown

*(Re)Building Downtown: A Guidebook for Revitalization*⁵ outlines a seven step process for revitalizing downtown districts:

1. Understand your community
2. Create an attractive, walkable place
3. Diversify economic uses
4. Plan for equity
5. Improve government regulations and processes
6. Finance projects
7. Establish on-going place management

⁴ The report is available for download from <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/core-values-why-american-companies-are-moving-downtown/>

⁵ To download the guidebook, visit <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/rebuilding-downtown/>

SGA prepared this guidebook as a resource for local elected officials and others seeking to reinvigorate and strengthen neighborhood centers of economy, culture, and history through a smart growth approach to development.

In addition to the next steps included below that are targeted to Fitchburg's specific needs, SGA recommends that Fitchburg refer to the *(Re)Building Downtown* guidebook for specific strategies to implement each of the seven steps.

Participant viewpoints

The following summarizes each group's discussion:

Upper Common: This park is located at the western edge of downtown around the intersection of Main Street, Mechanic Street, and Prospect Street. It includes sculptures as well as a gazebo used in the summertime for concerts, and benches for sitting. The Rollstone Boulder, a Fitchburg landmark, is located nearby the park.

The surrounding area located close to the Nashua River, includes an art gallery and the Fitchburg Art Museum, as well as other commercial and residential. Discussions at the workshop focused on ways to activate vacant spaces and improving the pedestrian friendliness through changing traffic patterns.

Goal 1: Activate vacant spaces

Action 1.1: Fill in missing "teeth"

Action 1.2: BF Brown space

Action 1.3: Historic districts – 2 separate units (Academy / Upper Common)

Goal 2: Changing traffic patterns / pedestrian friendliness

Action 2.1: Rotary / traffic pattern improvements

Action 2.2: Safer pedestrian crosswalks / walkways

Monument District: Monument Park, bounded by Main Street, Elm Street, Wallace Avenue, and Hartwell Street, includes a memorial to fallen Civil War soldiers from Fitchburg. The historic district, added to the National Register in 1978, includes a number of Fitchburg's key civic and religious buildings.

Those at the workshop discussing this district focused on ways to engage private sector owners of property, as well as ways to create a lifecycle experience for residents and visitors. They also discussed creating a downtown management plan.

Goal 1: Engage private sector property owners

Action 1.1: Create Main Street champions

Action 1.2: Identify and train peer champions

Action 1.3: Create a sales pitch to generate return on investment

Action 1.4: Work to change perceptions (marketing plan and policing)

Goal 2: Create a life cycle experience

Action 2.1: Develop infrastructure for community events

Action 2.2: Engage communities of faith

Action 2.3: Activate existing public space, particularly surface parking lots

Action 2.4: Support a Main Street police ambassador

Action 2.5: Connect Boulder Drive with Main Street

Goal 3: Create a downtown management plan

Action 3.1: Create Central Business District

Action 3.2: Bring private investors to the table

Action 3.3: Engage the philanthropic community

Gateway District: This district, centered at the intersection of Main Street and Water Street, which serves as a primary entry point into downtown from the west side of the river, is just west of the intermodal transportation station. It includes a significant amount of commercial, generating foot traffic. Workshop discussions focused on the creation of safer pedestrian crossings, the need for additional density and parking relief, and the need to revitalize existing buildings in the district.

Goal 1: Safer pedestrian crossings

Action 1.1: Connect Twin Cities Rail Trail to Main Street

Action 1.2: Relocate Boulder Drive

Goal 2: Pursue additional density and parking relief to spur redevelopment

Action 2.1: Build above parking garage and first floor retail

Action 2.2: Encourage rebuilding of vacant / underused parcels

Action 2.3: Acquire riverside parking lots

Goal 3: Pursue revitalization of existing buildings in the district as required

Action 3.1: Upper floors of Main Street buildings – need to meet codes and have sprinklers

Moran Square: This district, centered at the intersection of Main, Summer and Lunenburg Streets, is a historic part of downtown that is currently in the process of becoming a state and federally recognized historic district. As of the week prior to the workshop, the Massachusetts Historical Commission approved the nomination of the district and it has been forwarded to the National Park Service for their review and final approval. This area is important to the city's history as an industrial and commercial center. There are many well-preserved buildings from the city's early days.

An important theme among workshop participants discussing Moran Square was the lack of pedestrian safety, particularly along the north side of Main Street. Those in attendance noted that there are too many curb cuts that create a dangerous stretch for pedestrians from the Tedeschi store to Dunkin Donuts. The area has an abundance of jaywalkers -- many cross from the multimodal transportation center to Dunkin Donuts, adding to the chaos & pedestrian-vehicle conflict of the area. The intersection of Main Street and North Street is a critically important downtown intersection but is unfortunately also a MassDOT top 50 crash location in the state.

The historic Moran Square Diner, for sale at the time of the workshop, is a recognizable landmark in this area of downtown. The sale of this property, a historic Worcester Lunch Car, could result in moving it elsewhere.

The following list of goals and action items was largely brainstormed by those at the workshop, with a few additional added by the SGA team based on the content of discussions:

Goal 1: Improved signage (both gateway / arrival and wayfinding)

Action 1.1: Defined physical arrival gateway

Action 1.2: Thematic wayfinding / directional signage (overhead)

Goal 2: Redefine street wall on both north and south sides

Action 2.1: Establish built forms where surface parking now is

Action 2.2: Utilize open or undefined space (such as the wedge at Fitchburg Plumbing building)

Action 2.3: Overall streetscape enhancement (for pedestrians and bicyclists) including sidewalk seating

Action 2.4: Traffic calming by squeezing the ROW at major intersections to ensure motorists drive more slowly, enhancing both vehicle and pedestrian safety as well as reducing ambient vehicle noise.

Action 2.5: Address curb cuts and jaywalking between intersections that create an unsafe environment for pedestrians.

Goal 3: Moran Square Diner “rescue”

Action 3.1: Relocate and situate nearby with expanded square footage

Goal 4: Expand dining options and support existing ones with outdoor seating

The following summarizes the SGA team’s observations of the assets, opportunities, obstacles / disconnects, and overall actions for success.

Assets

- Nashua River flowing through downtown
- Historic building stock and other landmarks
- Existing historic district designation with additional district to be approved soon
- Riverfront Park, Monument Park, Upper Common, and the Rollstone Boulder
- Various development proposals, grassroots / local initiatives in downtown such as Reimagine North of Main
- Fitchburg State University, an active community partner, has its campus adjacent to downtown
- Fitchburg’s rail history

Opportunities

- Water Street Bridge project
- Two commuter rail stations connecting the community to Boston
- Several large redevelopable parcels / surface parking in and around downtown

Obstacles/Disconnects

- Community has aging infrastructure and hurdles for new development.
- Perception that some residents may be smart growth “doubters” and resistant to change
- Concerns that downtown is too far from the highway which will make it hard to market to new residents, business owners, and visitors
- Historical disconnect between smart growth and economic growth

Based on the SGA team’s observations from the driving and walking tour, the input received during the workshop and phone calls prior to the visit, as well as a breadth of work in other communities in similar circumstances, we offer the following recommendations and associated action steps.

Recommendations

1. Establish an implementation committee to move these recommendations forward.

The workshop hosted by Smart Growth America was a great first step towards (re)building downtown. Fitchburg should be proud of its local assets, history, and amenities. Those in the workshop were enthusiastic about the future of the community in terms of its vision and opportunities – and may form the basis for an implementation committee if a suitable body does not already exist.

However Fitchburg chooses to implement it, building local leadership capacity is vital to move these next steps forward. Smart Growth America recommends establishing an implementation committee to take responsibility for the next steps recommendations that follow. Members of the committee should come from, but not necessarily be limited to, the following sectors of the community – representing diverse downtown stakeholders:

- Local governments – City of Fitchburg, Worcester County, Montachusett

- Regional Planning Commission (both elected officials and staff)
- Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART)
 - Major employers
 - Small business owners
 - Healthcare facilities
 - Johnny Appleseed Trail Association
 - North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce
 - School districts and higher education
 - Other interested citizens

As the Master Planning process begins over the next year, SGA encourages the city's leaders to continue putting the long-term vision and goals of the city first. It is critical that the city focus on land use strategies and private sector investment opportunities that are compatible with the long-term strategic vision of the community. It is tempting to pursue short-term financial gain at the expense of the long-term vision. This must be avoided at all costs.

2. Develop a cohesive plan for the integrated use of legacy buildings and historic structures in downtown Fitchburg.

This recommendation examines several of Fitchburg's historic structures downtown. As renovations are planned, the community must not view each restoration as a standalone building. Rather, these legacy structures collectively create a framework and context for both Fitchburg's history and its future that is worthy of celebration and community pride.

B.F. Brown Middle School

A fire broke out at this former school in September 2016. At the time, NewVue Communities and the Fitchburg Art Museum planned an affordable live-work space for artists at the site.

While some in the community have expressed a desire to see this turn-of-the-century building demolished, this revitalized space could play a critical role in a larger arts and theater district, of which the theater district on Main Street is another important piece. By providing space for artists to both live and work right in downtown, the community adds to the economic base of that district. The renovated space also has the potential to bring people downtown for gallery open houses and art walks, where they also enjoy a meal or shop during their visit.

In view of its key location and the potential contribution to revitalization, the SGA

team recommends that the restoration of this structure be a high priority for the community. We recommend that Fitchburg commit to seeing the project through to completion.

Main Street Theater Block

The Fitchburg Theater, opened in 1929, sat vacant along with the rest of the Theater Block until it was purchased by Fitchburg State University in 2016. The theater and the other buildings on the block can be an important gathering and entertainment space that brings people downtown – not just for a show – but also for dinner and drinks before or after. The theater block is also located a reasonable walk from the Fitchburg Art Museum. Further, the partnership with the university in (re)building downtown is an important relationship for the entire community. Fitchburg State University is using space on the block for a second story innovation center and video game design lab, the only such academic program in the country. This facility will bring students and entrepreneurs into downtown. See below for more recommendations on this partnership. There are also currently seven ground level storefronts on the theater block.

Bank of America building & historic city hall

The city prepared a feasibility study this year for the old city hall, 718 Main Street, which was originally constructed in 1853 (with an addition added in 1879). This is an important structure for Fitchburg's history and the SGA team urges as much of the original structure to be restored as possible – and not just preserved. The goal should be the creation of a functioning space. The feasibility study focuses on the return of city government to the building with the potential for some departments to move next door into the Bank of America building, 700 Main Street, which the city recently received as a donation.

It is critical for Fitchburg to view the above projects as more than just the preservation and restoration of a historic structure. It is also about restoring the original purpose and function to the historic structure itself and to the broader community. This is especially true for city hall. A stronger story of Fitchburg's continuum from past into the future is more authentically told when historic structures are once again utilized for their historic purpose. This makes the investment all the more valuable to the city.

Similarly, Meridian restored its city hall as a functioning center of government -- its historic use in downtown -- instead of another use such as a museum. Meridian's city hall was restored to match the original architectural plans for the 1915 building

as much as possible, including the construction materials used, while meeting modern building codes and improving energy efficiency. It provides a symbol of pride for the people of Meridian as well as a sense of certainty that it will continue to be a functioning center of government into the future.

Meridian's city hall also generates additional foot traffic in and around downtown, much like a retail establishment does. As people come and go, they become more integrated into the fabric of downtown -- perhaps staying in the area for lunch, dinner, or happy hour after their city hall business is complete. Any resulting increase in economic activity is clearly a boon for downtown.

One Meridian city official stated, regarding city hall, "The thing to remember is it's a significant building. It is a treasure not just to the city of Meridian, but to Mississippi and the nation ... and I think our history and culture is important. The anticipation is that it will be here a hundred years from now."⁶

When Meridian, Mississippi restored its historic opera house to the way it appeared in the 1890s, the community could have instead transformed it into another use. But restoring it to its intended function as a performing theater was of far greater value than any other use would have been.

The opera house, which reopened in 2006 as the Mississippi State University Riley Center, attracts at least 60,000 people per year to downtown Meridian for performances, meetings, and conferences. Its facilities include a 950-seat grand opera house theater, a 200-seat studio theater, and 30,000 square feet of meeting space. The facility sees a part of its mission to "facilitate personal and professional growth and social interaction within the community while serving as a catalyst for community growth and economic development."⁷

In addition to the financial and quality of life impacts of the opera house, this significant project has also garnered national recognition in the architectural, performing arts, education, and historic preservation communities. Numerous grants awarded to the opera house have stimulated additional educational opportunities in the community. This has led to an ongoing relationship with the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC where performances come to Meridian,

⁶ Ed Skipper, City Finance and Records Director, quoted in the Meridian Star (http://www.meridianstar.com/news/local_news/taj-ma-city-hall/article_3d760c1e-188d-5700-b86b-3b6238950ed4.html)

⁷ <http://www.msurileycenter.com/>

including children's shows. This partnership greatly enhances the overall quality of performances while providing educational opportunities for the children of Meridian and the surrounding areas.

The development of the Union Station Multimodal Transportation Center in Meridian, a catalyst for downtown revitalization, is estimated to have contributed to private development of \$165 million in the surrounding historic district as well as helping many historic structures receive a new life.

These investments had the best return for downtown Meridian, future generations and the city as a whole. Meridian also garnered national recognition for the fact that their restorations were not only done well – but that their historic uses were maintained or reestablished.

Attention to detail and design was critical in the redesign of each of the three structures. The decision could have been made to sacrifice detail and design to reduce cost. The fact that design and detail were not sacrificed allowed these structures the greatest ability to leverage private sector investments within downtown. In addition, property values within a three block radius of these structures increased fourfold and sales tax revenue also showed healthy growth.

Meridian also witnessed a rebirth in second and third story residential in privately owned historic structures. These were both affordable units and high-end condominium homes.

Fitchburg has a significant inventory of historic buildings with similar second and third story possibilities. The SGA team encourages Fitchburg's civic leadership to work with those property owners to incentivize this type of redevelopment. When a town has a residential population in downtown beyond 5pm, this is when they begin to experience a true vibrancy in downtown. It is the reestablishment of a downtown residential population that cities create the vibrancy within their town center that this century's economy demands.

However, in limited circumstances, such as the B.F. Brown Middle School described above, the best use of a historic structure – for economic development or community development now and into the future – may be different than its historic purpose. Besides the middle school, there is one other such structure in Fitchburg, the Old Fitchburg Superior Courthouse.

Old Fitchburg Superior Courthouse

The old Fitchburg Superior Courthouse was constructed in 1871. However, the last trial occurred in the building during the late 1970s and it has been primarily vacant since then. This building requires restoration but the SGA team recommends it be preserved. As it does not appear to have further use as a courthouse, it would instead be an ideal location for a museum of local and regional history. Since the area already has two museums, the community may wish to envision another revenue-generating use that preserves the historic structure and its history.

Moran Square Diner

The Moran Square Diner is another local landmark discussed during the workshop. The SGA team recommends that the existing diner, a historic Worcester Lunch Car that is currently for sale, remain in downtown Fitchburg as a diner – potentially expanded at its current location or incorporated into a redevelopment project at its current location or nearby.

3. Seek new development projects to fill in the “missing teeth” while paying careful attention to building and site design.

SGA’s hotspot analysis showed that the most valuable properties per acre in the city – as much as \$10 million to \$40 million per acre – are located downtown along Main Street. By contrast, low-density areas located at the edge of the city typically have a value of less than \$100,000 per acre. This analysis shows that the city is right to focus its redevelopment efforts downtown. See Appendix A for more information on the hotspot analysis.

Across Main Street from the commuter rail station, a CVS pharmacy occupies an important corner, yet the building is pushed to the back of the lot. On two sides of the building, surface parking fronts both streets of the intersection between the sidewalk and the building. This is an auto-centric approach that is common in suburban developments, but, when forced into downtowns, undermines the pedestrian orientation that is the basis for a successful Main Street. The structure could have been brought to the front of the lot, to be adjacent to the sidewalks on both intersections, and the parking placed behind the structure. This would have created a retail space with ample parking, while still contributing to a walkable downtown.

Seek incremental redevelopment of existing parking lots and vacant parcels as infill

Downtown currently suffers from an abundance of surface parking lots. SGA recommends that the city work with the private sector to redevelop existing parking

lots and other parcels suitable for mixed-use infill, pocket parks, and other amenities. The SGA team recommends that these redevelopments include pedestrian infrastructure with special emphasis on placing buildings facing the block with parking behind, underground, or in ramps with ground floor retail.

A strategic communications program for access to and circulation within downtown, perhaps run by the chamber of commerce or another business group, is a critical component to better manage Fitchburg's existing parking. Providing a website and eventually a mobile phone app for downtown can help people understand their transportation options before leaving home. This tool can call out transit options, bicycle facilities and parking, pedestrian routes from surrounding neighborhoods, as well as vehicle parking information that will help people make the best choice to meet their needs.

Conducting a survey of parking utilization rates at both peak and off-peak times throughout the year will give the city a clear sense of whether or not existing parking is truly sufficient. By examining data on parking turnover rates and availability, the city will have a better sense of what its future needs are.

Focusing on additional residential, retail, and restaurants in downtown will give the district new life as both a place to call home and as a destination for those living in other parts of Fitchburg and beyond.

But there is no need to wait for a new building in order to begin filling in the "missing teeth" downtown. Reuse of currently vacant lots may need an incremental approach. However, they could immediately be converted into an interim space for food trucks, seasonal markets, retail popups, or for pocket parks on a temporary basis while other redevelopment efforts occur in downtown.

Putnam Place

The SGA team recommends that the city and the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority give every consideration to pedestrian and bicycle access from elsewhere in downtown to this entire complex. In particular, Fitchburg State University students may access this facility on foot or bicycle. In addition, street signage and landscaping can tie this site into a continuous theme within downtown.

Riverfront Park

The park and its vicinity contain several surface parking lots that could be reused as a mixed-use development with both residential units and new dining options. A

new development takes advantage of its prime location with views of both the park and the river.

Rather than creating new parking, parking for this new development – for both residents and visitors – could be at the existing parking garage across the street. The city could work with the site’s developer to provide parking for residents in the garage.

Transit-oriented Development (TOD) at the Intermodal Transit Center

The Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MassINC) has performed research on the potential for TOD around transit stations in commuter rail. Their analysis recommends a series of strategies and tactics for implementing transformative TOD.⁸ SGA recommends developing a compact and walkable project with a mix of uses to include residential and commercial.

While there are many examples of transit lines that have brought robust development near stops, there are also examples of stops near transit—even high frequency rail transit—that have failed to attract and support development. Transit alone is not enough. The development policies and land use near stops is every bit as important as the transit itself.

What transit can do is help to focus development and concentrate efforts to encourage economic development and economic activity in a particular area. It can also show businesses and developers that the community is committed to the area. The more permanent and unmoving the transit appears to be, the better.

Not all development near transit is Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). TOD is characterized by a concentration of development that supports transit users and drives users to the transit system. The transit, in turn, encourages and serves the development. However, development can occur near transit that does not enhance that transit investment. For example, wide, fast roads near transit stops can make walking dangerous, discourage transit use and make the site less attractive for development.

MassDOT produces an annual report on the top 200 crash locations across the state. The intersection of Main Street and North Street, adjacent to the intermodal transportation center, was ranked as #46 statewide in the most recent survey

⁸ <https://massinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MassINC-Gateway-City-TOD-Project-One-Pager.pdf>

(2014).⁹ Workshop participants also noted that many people jaywalked across Main Street between the transportation center and the Dunkin Donuts. For TOD to flourish in this area, the city will need to address traffic calming and provide infrastructure to ensure that the area is safe for all roadway users, including pedestrians and bicyclists.

The workshop participants discussing the Moran Square district suggested that a combined site consisting of the former Harper Furniture and fire station – located adjacent to the intermodal transportation facility – would be a good initial location for TOD. The SGA team agrees with this assessment with the caveat that traffic calming will be needed in the area..

The SGA team also recommends that Fitchburg may wish to consider a TOD development on the existing Central Valley Plaza shopping center (Market Basket) site (which has a large parking lot) eventually as other TOD projects occur downtown. This site will need a safe connection for pedestrians across the railroad tracks to and from the transportation center.

Site Design

The SGA team recommends that the buildings constructed on redeveloped sites where parking is needed wrap around any parking lots or structures so that the buildings, which can be residential or commercial, face the street and the Nashua River. This will help to further screen the parking. The SGA team



Source: Flickr user La Citta Vita

recommends that parking be accessible from side streets or rear alleys to allow the major streets to remain attractive walking environments for pedestrians. This will maximize the best use of the site for those walking between various destinations.



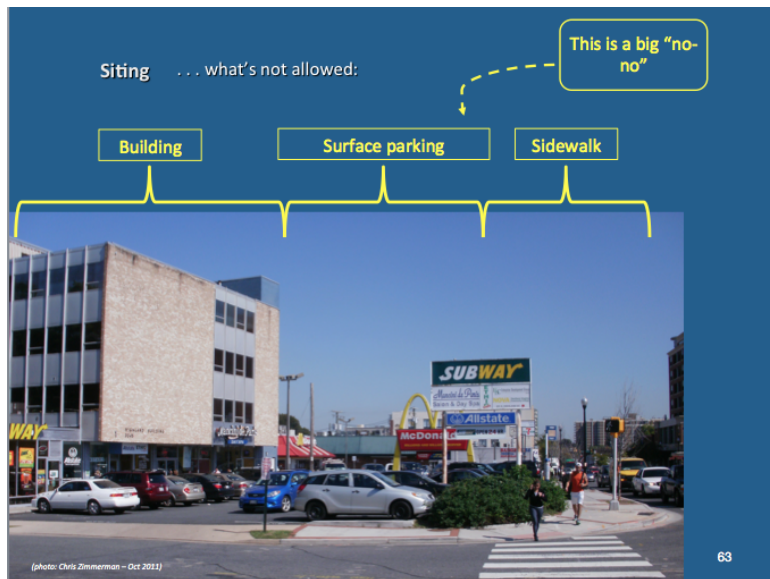
Refer to Appendix B for a diagram showing the SGA. The main point is to use buildings – active spaces, which generate people – to engage and activate the street

⁹ <https://www.massdot.state.ma.us/Portals/8/docs/traffic/CrashData/14TopCrashLocationsRpt.pdf>

space. This is done by both creating an attractive street wall and through buildings' permeability (doors and windows). These techniques promote human contact and make passersby feel comfortable. Feelings of welcoming and comfort are lost if cars are in the way. This is why parking goes behind the building -- not because we need to hide the parked cars.

Short Term Actions (3-6 months) for recommendations #2 and #3

- Designate a working group such as the existing Reimagine North of Main organization to discuss a unified redevelopment of downtown. Work towards reaching a community vision on next steps for the district including prioritization of projects.
- Consider retaining an urban design and/or historic preservation consultant with experience doing smart growth projects to help the community create this vision for the site and for downtown.



Medium-term Actions (6-12 months) for recommendations #2 and #3

- Research funding options (such as low to moderate income tax credits, TIF districts, historic tax credits and New Market Tax Credits) to pay for the redevelopment.
- Proactively begin discussions with property owners of the above privately-owned projects on the community's vision and goals for downtown
- Create a plan for reuse of each historic building that takes into account the building's historic use to the community and its best, most productive use for the future

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer) for recommendations #2 and #3

- Using available funding sources implement the community's vision for downtown.

4. Focus efforts on internal circulation within the city center and connections to nearby neighborhoods and take advantage of the Water Street bridge project to further these goals.

Main Street, in downtown Fitchburg, is currently one way in the city center with Boulder Drive going the opposite direction. In a perfect world, a two way street is preferable. However, in 2001, a carefully deliberative process concluded that a two way Main Street would be both cost- and logistically prohibitive. A one lane Complete Street was the best option. Main Street has been improved with landscaping blocking one existing lane of travel allowing the addition of a bicycle lane. This configuration slows traffic and creates a safer pedestrian environment. A one lane, one way Main Street, as currently designed, accommodating all users (a Complete Street with traffic calming) is far superior than a two lane, one way street in which traffic flows at high speeds and does not accommodate the needs of all users. It is important to bear in mind that when a community desires to engender greater retail and dining choices, higher vehicle speeds work contrary to this worthy economic goal.

Fitchburg has great potential for a fully walkable city center. To accomplish this, the SGA team recommends that Fitchburg examine its existing infrastructure with a goal of filling in any gaps in the sidewalk and pedestrian infrastructure. This will ensure that reaching destinations on foot in the city center is seamless and safe. In addition to well-maintained sidewalks throughout downtown, bicycle racks will also encourage residents to bike to downtown.

Because of the compact size of downtown and the close proximity of neighborhoods, the SGA team recommends the addition of bicycle lanes to facilitate travel between residential areas and the city center. These bicycle lanes should be extended to connect to trails such as the Twin Cities Rail Trail as well as to the Riverfront Park and other community gathering places downtown. Bicycle infrastructure is particularly important in a college town like Fitchburg.

The Water Street bridge reconstruction project represents an opportunity to ensure that the needs of all street users – cars, bicyclists, pedestrians, freight, and other users – are represented in the process and taken into account by the finished product. The city should ensure that MassDOT considers how to accommodate each as the bridge replacement moves forward.

The city has expressed an interest in increasing transit ridership as a prelude to funding future service increases. While FSU has limited shuttle service to the civic

center, intermodal center, and Main Street, FSU students offer a natural audience to market the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) service to, particularly if more students begin to live downtown. MART and the university might consider partnering to provide free or discounted transit passes to students, faculty, and staff. This service could be funded via student fees and be built in to students' existing identification cards. Providing the FSU community with discounted or free access to MART will help to fill in gaps when the shuttle service is unavailable. MART should also market itself on campus, if it doesn't already. The SGA team notes that Mount Wachusett Community College students already receive a discounted fare when riding MART.

MART might also consider providing supplemental service from other parts of the community for special events in downtown when parking may be at a premium. This will help encourage citizens to think about riding the bus at other times.

Short Term Actions (3-6 months)

- As part of the Complete Streets policy implementation described below, consider where bicycle lanes could be added to offer connections to nearby residential neighborhoods as well as to the Twin Cities Rail Trail, Riverfront Park and other community gathering places downtown
- Encourage MART to market its transit service at FSU and for the two institutions to partner to provide opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to ride for reduced or no cost
- As part of the Complete Streets policy implementation (described below), consider missing links where sidewalks and bicycle lanes could be added to offer connections to nearby residential neighborhoods, riverfront, and tourist destinations
- Paint / repaint crosswalks in the city center a required and review condition of existing sidewalks
- Create a task force of residents to represent the interests of the community to MassDOT and others throughout the Water Street bridge improvement project and encourage the Chamber of Commerce to rally downtown businesses to participate in the process.

Medium Term Actions (6-12 months)

- Begin repairing any sidewalks identified as deficient (or any incomplete pedestrian connections) and design them to be Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant.
- Seek funding to increase transit service during later in the evenings,

Saturdays, and Sundays to connect downtown with nearby neighborhoods and other residential destinations – perhaps in a schedule similar to the existing Route 4 between downtown and Fitchburg State University

Long Term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Begin discussions with Montachusett Regional Transit Authority and funding partners to expand transit service both within downtown and to nearby neighborhoods – which may include increased headways (frequency) for existing routes, longer service hours, and new routes
- Consider the application of the following features to increase pedestrian safety and visibility to drivers:
 - Raised crosswalks
 - Different pavement types or colors (at additional locations) to distinguish them from the roadway pavement
 - High-Intensity Activated crossWalk (HAWK) or Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons (RRFBs)¹⁰
- Implement bike lanes to connect the city center with neighborhoods and recreational destinations such as the Twin Cities Rail Trail as well as Riverfront Park and other community gathering places
- Add additional human-scale street lighting around sidewalks and crosswalks, as well as at important destinations, in the city center. Ensure there is sufficient lighting on connection routes to nearby neighborhoods.

5. Focus on placemaking and streetscapes in downtown to make it a destination where people want to visit and to linger.

As described above, the availability of a seamless and safe pedestrian network to travel within the city center as well as design of buildings and sites influence the number of people who visit downtown Fitchburg and how long they remain there. In addition, other factors also play a role. Combined, this directly



influences the success of city center businesses.

Image source: Art New England and the Fitchburg Art Museum
http://artnewengland.com/ed_picks/can-the-arts-save-this-town/

¹⁰ For more information on this technology, see <http://www.bikewalknc.org/2015/04/understanding-pedestrian-signals/>

Additional spaces for outdoor entertainment, including music and arts, as well as for community and holiday celebrations will bring people to the city center.

Reuse of currently vacant properties would be ideal for such amenities.

Artists could also help dress up blank walls in the city center through the creation of murals that reflect the community and its residents.

Consider opening second story windows that have been blocked even if the space behind them is vacant. Dress the window exteriors to make there appear to be activity happening inside. This may include artwork and curtains.

Upper Common / Rollstone Boulder

The downtown block where this city landmark lies is well done with nice buildings on both sides. However, the park could be better integrated to both sides of the street so it can be safely and comfortably enjoyed by all. While several crosswalks exist to Upper Common, additional accessible crosswalks leading to the Rollstone Boulder would encourage safe access to this important landmark.

Other placemaking and streetscaping efforts

Fitchburg should ensure that consistently designed wayfinding signage for pedestrians, bicyclists, and others call out and point to popular destinations both within downtown and adjacent to it. This may include, but not be limited to, districts within downtown, historic features, the commuter rail station, the Fitchburg Art Museum, the Twin Cities Rail Trail, Riverfront Park, and other amenities. Additional markers describing the history of downtown, particularly of designated historic districts and buildings, will help the city recognize and celebrate its history.

A tree canopy, trash receptacles and additional seating throughout all of downtown, perhaps funded by a merchants association, tax increment financing, Community Benefits District / business improvement district, local tourism tax revenues, or another entity, will be great assets. These amenities would beautify the area and encourage people to walk through the downtown by providing comfortable places to rest during their explorations. Art is important to Fitchburg and the community should continuously seek additional locations in downtown for public art.

The result will be a far more walkable downtown that presents a better face to those who live and work in the district. Improving the health of your heart pays dividends to the health of your entire body. Similarly, focusing on the economic health and prosperity of downtown Fitchburg will have the potential to create greater economic energy throughout the city.

Short- and Medium-term Actions (6-12 months)

- Identify suitable locations for outdoor entertainment spaces and related amenities in the city center such as benches and trash receptacles.
- Clean up, paint, and repair vacant storefronts to make them attractive to visitors even though no activity may be occurring inside.
- Create a plan for public art in the city center that involves the community, both as participants in the process and as artists. As noted above, this may include artwork in vacant storefronts and second story windows, murals on otherwise blank walls, and other improvements.
- Implement benches and trash receptacles at suitable locations throughout all of downtown such as pocket parks to encourage residents and visitors to rest and linger.
- Install additional wayfinding and historical signage that allows visitors to explore and learn about the history of downtown.
- Consider temporarily repurposing one or more parking spaces as outdoor dining at one or more restaurants during warmer months.¹¹

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Transform vacant properties into outdoor entertainment spaces that bring people from the surrounding neighborhoods to the city center as well as visitors from throughout the region.
- Install benches and trash receptacles at suitable locations throughout the city center to encourage residents and visitors to rest and linger.
- While downtown already has some examples of public art such as the Inside Out Project and the Main Street Art Project, create a plan for public art in the downtown that involves the community, both as participants in the process and as artists.
- Investigate lighting design to increase pedestrian safety during evening and nighttime hours.
- Implement a tree canopy throughout downtown as funding allows.

¹¹ As an example, see <http://archive.jsonline.com/business/two-east-side-parking-spaces-replaced-by-14-outdoor-dining-tables-b9982256z1-220860751.html/>

- Add additional human-scale street lighting around sidewalks and crosswalks, as well as at important destinations, in the downtown. Ensure there is sufficient lighting on connection routes to nearby neighborhoods.

6. Engage the Nashua River as a downtown amenity.

As noted above, the Nashua River is a critical piece of Fitchburg’s history. Flowing through downtown, it played a role in the city’s industrial past and the community should celebrate its importance. Since the city’s industrial days, it has continued to play a critical role in the city’s development – and this will continue into the future.

The River Master Plan offers strategies to more completely incorporate the river into the community. While views of the river are important throughout the community, they play a very important role downtown where the community hopes to encourage people to linger.



Greenville, SC

The community should explore whether a riverwalk is feasible through downtown, perhaps between the historic districts and Riverfront Park. This will encourage people to spend time exploring throughout downtown. In addition, as buildings are renovated, they should seek opportunities to create decks or otherwise provide views of the river.

As noted by the workshop group discussing the Gateway District, connecting the Twin Cities Rail Trail to Main Street is an important goal for the community. This trail will connect the downtowns of Fitchburg and Leominster, ending near the Water Street Bridge on the Fitchburg end. Ensuring that pedestrians and bicyclists can safely connect between the trail and their final destinations downtown will be

important for the project and should be key to the Water Street bridge project.

Short-term Actions (3-6 months)

- Focus on beginning to implement recommendations in the River Master Plan that focus on downtown.

Medium-term Actions (6-12 months)

- Consider whether Riverfront Park can be furnished with additional amenities to encourage more residents and visitors to spend time there even when no there is no entertainment or other events happening

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Work with local business owners and other downtown property owners to add decks, balconies, or other features overlooking the river.

7. Create a marketing and branding campaign for downtown Fitchburg including on-going place management.

While the Johnny Appleseed Trail Association serves as a destination branding organization for the region, a branding campaign specifically for Fitchburg would help market the community and its unique identity to the outside world. This effort should include the development of a unifying logo and moniker that is used on stationery and signage in both the private and public sectors of the community. This campaign should embody the unique features Fitchburg has to offer visitors and potential new residents.

The branding campaign should market Fitchburg's proximity to nearby destinations as well as the community's easy access by transit to Boston. It is also critical for the campaign to market what specifically makes Fitchburg unique both within the region and beyond. The city, a business group, or another existing community group within Fitchburg could run the campaign.

The campaign should also include on-going place management for downtown Fitchburg that ensures downtown maintains its safety and cleanliness. This effort should continue to offer a variety of programming throughout the year – such as festivals, markets, concerts, theater, and participatory activities – that brings people downtown. These can also further create an identity for Fitchburg that draws people from beyond the city's boundaries.

Short-term Actions (within 3-6 months)

- Work with local businesses, and other partners to develop a branding and marketing campaign including a logo and moniker that unifies the community.

Medium-term Actions (within 6-12 months)

- Adopt the logo and moniker to be utilized when marketing the community.

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Ensure that the branding and marketing campaign continues to represent the community and its amenities by updating it from time to time.

8. Improve Fitchburg’s visibility within the region as a destination through monuments marketing the community to passing motorists.

Downtown Fitchburg is located a few miles off of Route 2 that travels from the New York State line across the state to Boston. While the separation from this major roadway initially may seem like an impediment to development, it does not have to be.



Monument in Parsons, Kansas.

Source: Flickr user J. Stephen Conn

for lunch or to browse downtown businesses.

The community should invest in monuments announcing the community as motorists approach downtown from both directions of Route 2. This would be an architectural piece serving as a

gateway that provides a sense of

The town’s location adjacent to Route 2 offers the community a perfect opportunity to market its amenities and attractions to those passing through the area. However, there is currently limited roadway signage directing motorists to Fitchburg and none that would provide a sense of arrival that entices them to stop there



Monument in Willits, California. Source: Flickr user Jasperdo

arrival in downtown. The monuments should highlight the uniqueness of downtown and encourage motorists to stop and explore.

As the Water Street Bridge reconstruction project moves forward (discussed elsewhere), the city could seek to incorporate the monuments into this effort. In addition, the city might partner with Fitchburg State University on these monuments to stress the importance of this community institution to both downtown and the city as a whole.



Downtown gateway signage in Troutdale, Oregon. Source: Flickr user auvet

Short-term Actions (3-6 months)

- Develop the marketing and branding campaign described above to contribute themes for these monuments that celebrate Fitchburg's local and regional identity.

Medium-term Actions (6-12 months)

- Begin discussions with Worcester County and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to utilize right of way owned by these agencies to place monuments where they will be visible by motorists.

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Place monuments along major access roadways between Route 2 and downtown.
- Ensure that this signage, once placed, has attractive landscaping that receives ongoing maintenance.

9. Ensure that redeveloped roadways reflect Complete Streets principles.

Mayor DiNatale signed a Complete Streets executive order in May 2016. Taking a Complete Streets policy from paper into practice is not easy, but providing some momentum with specific implementation steps can help. Some policies establish a task force or commission to work toward policy implementation. There are four key steps for successful implementation:

1. Restructure procedures to accommodate all users on every project;
2. Develop new design policies and guides;

3. Offer workshops and other educational opportunities to transportation professionals, community leaders, and residents; and
4. Institute better ways to measure performance and collect data on how well the streets are serving all users. Each of these steps requires agencies to think in new ways and, in order to do so they must include a wider range of stakeholders in decision-making.

Refer to Appendix C for a list of helpful Complete Streets resources online.

Medium and Long-term Actions (6 months and longer)

- Incorporate Complete Streets policy into roadway and intersection redesigns as they occur.

10. Strengthen the community's physical connection to and partnership with Fitchburg State University (FSU).

The university figured prominently into the workshop discussions because it is an important part of the community. The university is already heavily involved in the downtown. It has already purchased the Main Street Theater Block, with plans to create laboratory and entrepreneurial space and eventually to restore the existing theater.

The university is an important partner in the revitalization of downtown Fitchburg and should continue to be heavily involved in the process. There are a number of ways that the city and the university can continue to work together to strengthen their relationship, improve downtown, and make the university campus a seamless part of the community.

From downtown, North Street serves as a primary gateway from downtown Fitchburg to the FSU campus. That street should be seen as an opportunity for monuments welcoming you to campus. On the way back down, it should include monuments welcoming you to downtown Fitchburg. This gateway will help solidify the physical connection between downtown and campus even more so than the physical reminders of FSU already in downtown.

Short-term Actions (3-6 months)

- Create a committee of FSU students, faculty and staff as well as alumni or other interested stakeholders in the community to discuss the ongoing projects occurring in downtown as well as the creation of a physical gateway between the two districts

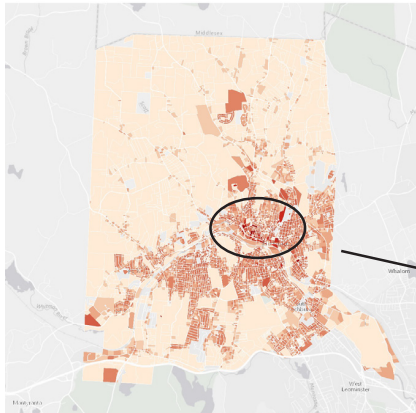
Medium- and Long-term Actions (6 months and longer)

- Involve the university in creating programming downtown such as student plays, theater, and concerts
- Implement monuments and signage along North Street

Appendix A: Hotspot Analysis

PROPERTY VALUE PATTERNS - FITCHBURG, MA

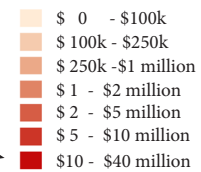
Parcel Value by Acre



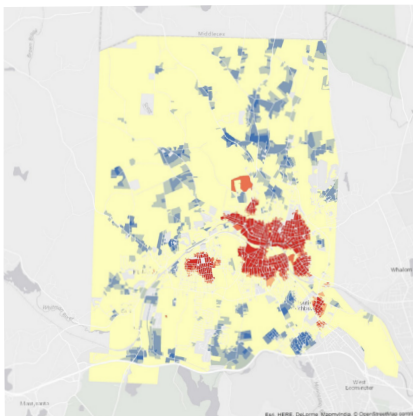
The most valuable properties (per acre) in Fitchburg are likely to be found downtown right along Main Street. Properties here are worth as much as \$10 to \$40 million per acre. By contrast, low density areas on the periphery of Fitchburg are typically worth less than \$100,000 per acre. Properties can also influence the values of the land around them as well, in both positive or negative ways. A hot spot analysis can be used to visualize this influence when present.



Parcel Value by \$ per Acre



Hot Spot Analysis



A hot spot analysis is another way of describing the relationship a development pattern has upon the land value around it. The map to the left visualizes hot and cold areas in red and blue. (Properties not showing a relationship in value to their neighbors are in yellow.)

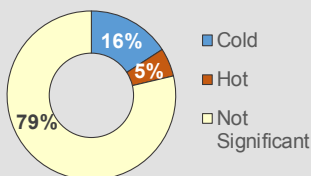
Hot and cold values indicate a statistical significance between the various development areas. In other words, these properties have a strong relationship on the values of those around them. If one area is higher in value (hot), properties around it are likely to be higher as well.

Fitchburg's downtown core along Main Street is the center for hot spot activity. Properties within the red areas are more likely to see an increase in value. By contrast, areas of low density away from the downtown are more likely to be "cooler", and properties here are more likely to see a decline in value due to the clustering of similar properties around them.

*Property Values Normalized Using Value per Acre

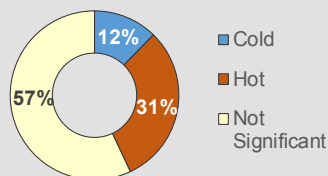


Share of Total Land Area



The hottest areas also play a large role in contributing to the overall land value in Fitchburg.

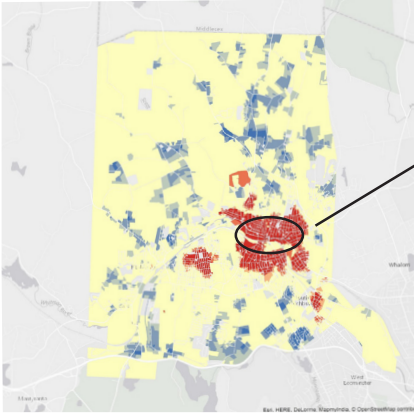
Share of Total Value per Hot Spot Category



While only 5% of the total land area lies within "hot" areas, this same 5% contributes to a total of 31% of the total land value for the town.

DEVELOPMENT EXAMPLES: MAIN STREET

Example 1



Total Value: \$194,000

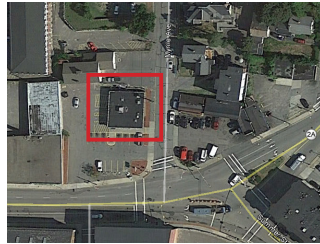
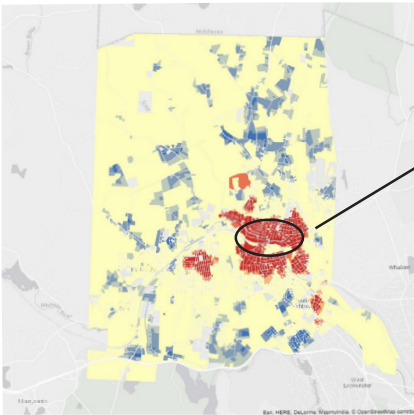
Acres: ~0.11

Value per Acre:

\$1,700,000



Example 2



Total Value: \$325,000

Acres: ~0.41

Value per Acre:

\$784,000



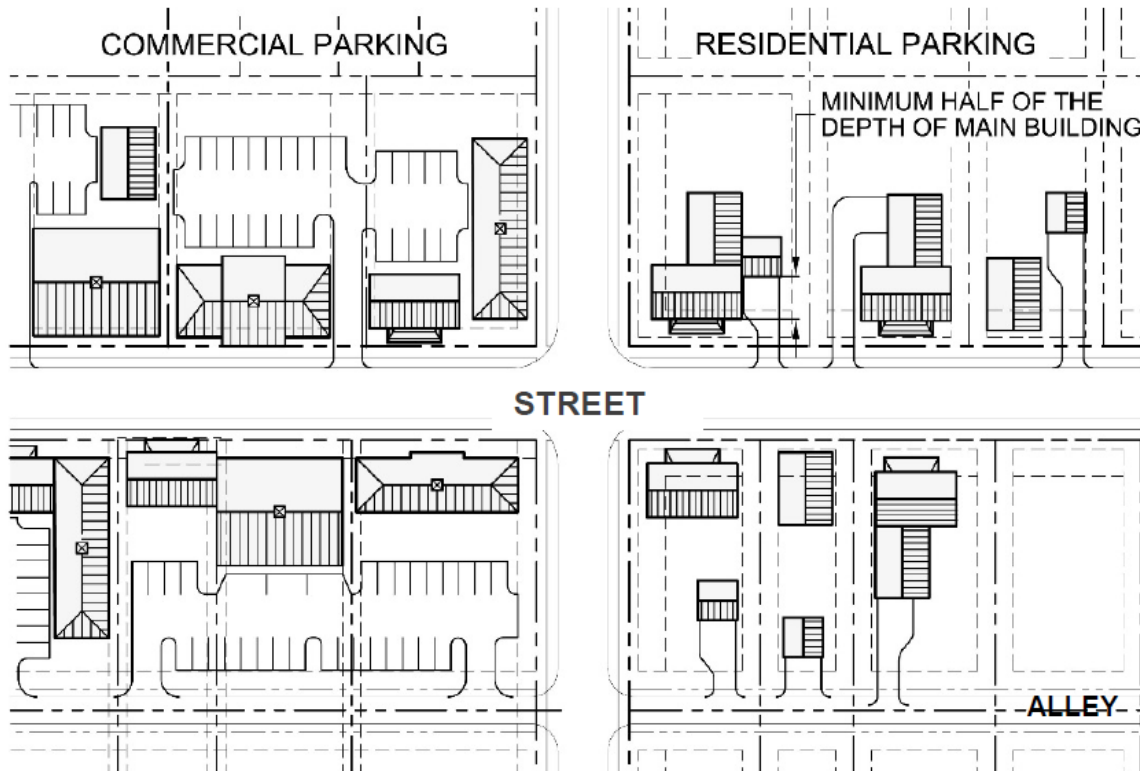
Comparing Patterns of Development

Location and density are two factors that affect property values, but equally important is the form of development. Shown above are two properties along Fitchburg's Main Street corridor. The properties are located less than a mile from each other. While the values of both properties are higher than average because they are both located in a "Hot Spot" along the downtown corridor, the first example shown above is valued far greater than the second at a dollar per acre level.

Observed in the first example is a 3 story commercial property located on a walkable block of Main Street. The second example shows a one story business, with part of the lot devoted to provide parking on an auto-oriented site. When comparing the value of both properties, the walkable dense property in the first example is worth about 2.5 times that of the second when calculated at the per acre level. The density and character of development can play just as large of a role on property values.

Appendix B: Parking Diagram

The SGA team recommends that projects incorporate parking underground, in ramps with ground floor retail, or surface parking as shown in the diagram below.



Source: Marshall, Virginia draft form-based code

Appendix C: Complete Streets Web Resources

The following is a list of Complete Streets resources providing information from the fundamentals to advanced implementation. Click on any of the links to go to the resource.

Fundamentals

Communities just getting started with Complete Streets will find these materials most useful. They present a comprehensive overview of the benefits and basics of the Complete Streets planning and design approach. The resources listed in this section can be found at the link below or by clicking on the titles below.

<https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/policy-development/>

- [Introduction to Complete Streets](#). A comprehensive PowerPoint presentation on why we need Complete Streets, available to download for use and adaptation in your community.
- [Presentation and Fact Sheets: Benefits of Complete Streets](#). A free PowerPoint provides an overview of the research-backed benefits of safe, multimodal street planning and design. The Coalition's series of research-based fact sheets explores the many benefits of Complete Streets for various groups of users and outcomes.

Topics include: Health; Safety; Economic Revitalization; Children; People with Disabilities; Older Adults; Public Transportation; Climate Change; Gas Prices; Lower Transportation Costs; Livable Communities; Equity.

- [Other Resources](#). A variety of Complete Streets handouts, downloadable presentations, articles and reports

Changing Policy

After a community has agreed to the concept of Complete Streets, the next step is to develop a formal policy. The Coalition provides many resources to illuminate best practices, share actual policy documents from across the country, and help communities develop the best, most appropriate policies for their needs.

- [Complete Streets Local Policy Workbook](#). A comprehensive workbook for communities to follow when writing their own Complete Streets policies. For use by city and county agencies, the guide is based in national existing policy and best practices and encourages a thoughtful, inclusive process for developing locally appropriate policy

language.

- [Complete Streets in the States: A Guide to Legislative Action](#). AARP and the National Complete Streets Coalition developed a toolkit to use in a state-level Complete Streets effort. This report includes model legislation and a discussion of the various elements of an ideal law, a roadmap for legislative action, and analysis of existing state Complete Streets laws.
- [Presentation: Complete Streets: Changing Policy](#). Use this PowerPoint presentation and its comprehensive presenter's notes to lead a discussion of Complete Streets policy development in your town. The presentation covers the reasons to adopt a policy and details on the ten elements of a Complete Streets policy.
- [Complete Streets Policy Atlas](#). The Coalition compiles information on all policies adopted to date in our Policy Atlas. The Atlas includes an interactive map of all regional and local policies, and downloadable lists of known Complete Streets policies, across all jurisdictions and at the state level.
- [Best Complete Streets Policies reports](#). The Coalition also reviews all the policies adopted each year and assesses how well they fulfill the ten elements of an ideal Complete Streets policy. The annual Best Complete Streets Policies report highlights exemplary policy language and provides leaders at all levels of government with ideas for how to create strong Complete Streets policies.
- [Ten Elements of a Complete Streets Policy](#). This is a helpful document for others reviewing your draft policy.

Implementation

Once a Complete Streets policy is in place, the day-to-day decisions a transportation agency and community leaders make in funding, planning, design, maintenance, and operations should be aligned to the goals of that adopted policy document. The Coalition helps communities implement their policies by collecting and sharing best practices and examples.

- [Taking Action on Complete Streets](#). This guide describes five types of activities identified by the Coalition that are needed to reorient a transportation agency's work to fully and consistently consider the safety of all users:
 - Planning for Implementation;
 - Changing Procedure and Process;
 - Reviewing and Updating Design Guidance;
 - Offering Training and Educational Opportunities; and,
 - Measuring Performance.
- Resources, activities, and best practices from communities across the country are

[available here](#).

- [Answering the Costs Question](#). A handbook and slide presentation that helps transportation professionals, advocates, and decision-makers make the case that implementing Complete Streets won't break the bank.
- [Do Complete Streets cost more than incomplete streets?](#) Shapard, J. and Cole, M. (2013). "Do complete streets cost more than incomplete streets?" Proceedings, Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting, 2013. Paper 13-4283.
- [Implementation Resources](#). The Coalition's series of research-based fact sheets on specific elements of Complete Streets implementation is available for download.

Topics include: *Costs of Complete Streets; Change Travel Patterns; Ease Traffic Woes; Complete and Green Streets; Networks of Complete Streets; Rural Areas and Small Towns.*

Funding priority systems and programs

- [Project solicitation & evaluation: Scoring criteria](#). Mid-America Regional Council (Kansas City, MO region).
- [New Jersey Complete Streets program](#), with links to Local Assistance program
- [Atlanta Regional Commission Livable Centers Initiative](#). See case study in *The Innovative DOT*.

Street design and typology examples

- [Implementing Complete Streets: Major and Collector Street Plan](#). Nashville, TN.
- [Urban Street Design Guidelines](#). Charlotte, NC.
- [Right-of-Way Improvements Manual](#). Seattle, WA.

Road diets

- Federal Highway Administration. (2010). "[Evaluation of Lane Reduction 'Road Diet' Measures on Crashes](#)" [Summary report]. Publication Number FHWA-HRT-10-053.
- Federal Highway Administration. (n.d.). "[Proven Safety Countermeasures: 'Road Diet.'](#)" Publication Number FHWA-SA-12-013.
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center. (2013). "[Road Diet Conversions: A Synthesis of Safety Research.](#)" Reported prepared for the Federal Highway Administration DTFH61-11-H-00024.

Other general implementation resources

- [Complete Streets in the Southeast—A Toolkit](#), from the National Complete Streets Coalition and AARP, features best practices in policy development and implementation

from the Southeast United States. It also includes customizable outreach tools, such as letters to the editor and op-eds.

- [*Completing Our Streets: The Transition to Safe and Inclusive Transportation Networks*](#). Barbara McCann's book on the Complete Streets implementation process told through the stories of practitioners.

Blogs and Newsletters

For ongoing news and links to useful resources from across the web, read the [National Complete Streets Coalition blog](#) and sign up for the Coalition's monthly e-newsletter. The newsletter includes updates on federal, state, and local complete streets policies, other news from the campaign and across the country, and a summary of resources that you can use. Current and past issues and a sign-up form are [available here](#).

Appendix D: Workshop Participants

City of Fitchburg Smart Growth America Workshop Attendees

FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	TITLE	ORGANIZATION
Paul	Beauchemin	Ward 2 Councilor	City of Fitchburg
Sharon	Bernard	Director	Fitchburg Public Library
Angelo	Bisol	Ward 5 Councilor	City of Fitchburg
Mary Jo	Bohart	Director of Economic Development	City of Fitchburg
Jay	Bry	Vice President of Finance & Administration	Fitchburg State University
Nick	Capasso	Director	Fitchburg Art Museum
Nick	Capasso	Museum Director	Fitchburg Art Museum
Peter	Capodagli	Owner	Boulder Art Gallery
Paula	Caron	Planning Board Chair	City of Fitchburg
Keith	Chenot	Registered Architect; Industrial Technology Professor @FSU; Fitchburg Historical Commission member	Fitchburg State University
Dave	Clark	Councilor-At-Large	City of Fitchburg
Scott	Cullen	River Styx Brewing	
Dan	Curley	Executive Director	Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority
Ellen	DiGeronimo	Member	Fitchburg Historical Commission
Steve	DiNatale	Mayor	City of Fitchburg
Marc	Dohan	Executive Director	NewVue Communities
Tom	Donnelly	Councilor-At-Large, Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority Chair	City of Fitchburg
Glenn	Fossa	Executive Director	FATV
Matthew	Fournier	Business Owner; R.E. developer; Fitchburg Pride President	Elite Construction & Design
Amy	Green	Ward 1 Councilor	City of Fitchburg
Mary Jo	Heafy	President and CEO	Arc of Opportunity
Brian	Jansson	VP of Finance & Administration	Boutwell, Owens & Co. Inc.
Joel	Kaddy	Ward 3 Councilor	City of Fitchburg
Mohammed	Khan	Executive Director	Montachusett Area Regional Transit (MART)
Richard	Lapidus	President	Fitchburg State University
Mike	LeMay	Captain, Support Services	Fitchburg Police Dept
Michael	McLaughlin	Zoning Board of Appeals co-Chair	City of Fitchburg
William	McSheehey	President	Fitchburg Historical Society
Liz	Murphy	Director of Housing & Development	City of Fitchburg
Roy	Nascimento	President/CEO	North Central MA Chamber of Commerce
Susan	Navarre	Executive Director	Fitchburg Historical Society
Mike	O'Hara	Principal Planner	City of Fitchburg
Andy Van Hazinga	O'Kane	Property Manager; Planning Board member	Geronimo Properties
Megan	Pierce	Assistant	Rep. Stephen Hay
Patricia	Pistone	Project Director	ReImagine North of Main
Ken	Posco	CPA	Kenneth P. Posco, CPA, CFP
Tamar	Russell Brown	Owner	Gallery Sitka
Tom	Skwierawski	Executive Director of Community Development & Planning	City of Fitchburg
Paul	Tocci	President	Waverly Properties
AJ	Tourigny	Chief of Staff	City of Fitchburg
Ulisses	Zamora	Owner	Zapata Mexican Cocina

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