

Economic Development

Introduction

Antrim is primarily rural in character, but there are several reasons why the town needs to carefully and thoughtfully promote economic development. For one, the lack of a diverse tax base burdens the residential taxpayer. As has already been noted, a study by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests has compared the costs of open space land, commercial development and residential development for eleven New Hampshire towns. For every tax dollar earned, these towns spent \$1.08 on residential areas, \$.52 on open space areas, and \$.39 on commercial/industrial areas. Secondly, both the surveys and the visioning sessions have clearly revealed the need and desire for more local services and businesses both for the use by our residents and for employment. Finally, the prospect of attracting economic development is currently sometimes more dependent on what neighboring towns and landowners do than on Antrim's own initiatives.

If commercial development expands in Hillsborough as is anticipated once the current economic climate improves, the spillover effects in Antrim will be substantial. The town needs to plan and prepare for this development. It is currently reviewing its zoning ordinances and districts, subdivision regulations and site plan review regulations to assist in the development of a plan that will maximize the use of the limited land area that can support commercial and industrial growth. Planning in such a fashion can help ensure that economic growth will be good for Antrim and will be done without having a major impact on the rural landscape so beloved by our residents.

Downtown

Significant economic growth will not come from the downtown area (Village Business District) with the exception of the Antrim Mills property. Originally the Goodell Mill and until 1989 the home of the Chicago Cutlery factory, the property remained vacant for most of the 1990s, until purchased by Frameworks, Inc., in late 1999. Frameworks moved its automotive lighting assembly and packing business into the expanded "Butler" (metal-frame) building at the rear of the property. The two oldest and most historic buildings remain largely vacant, with the exception of the owner's offices, several small businesses and the Antrim Teen Center. The property is once again on the market, offering a mixed-use mill complex of 62,158 square feet of space



Historic photo of the Goodell Mill Company, undated

in four buildings on 2.56 acres, with a .39 acre lot for parking across the street. The waterfront Great Brook building has a current variance for up to 28 residential units.

A number of the responses from the surveys and visioning sessions suggested further development of the Mill property. As of this writing, the future of this property is unclear.



Aerial view of Antrim Mills Property on Main Street

There is also potential to promote infill development (the use land within a built-up area for further construction) in the downtown area. Since the last master plan in 2001, several businesses have opened on Main Street, restoring Antrim's main commercial area to a bustling and lively downtown. The efforts of the committee members of Antrim's Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District have also assisted in the revitalization of downtown. In 2000 Antrim voters approved the creation of TIF with the objective of providing public facilities and infrastructure improvements that will help revitalize and beautify downtown Antrim as a commercial and cultural center. The district finances these improvements with new tax revenue from increases in property values. The first district-wide undertaking was the Facade Improvement Program. More than ten properties have taken advantage of free paint, matching grants and low-cost loans to make facade improvements. The district's next major focus was the Main Street Rehabilitation Project which brought new sidewalks, granite curbing, decorative lighting and other improvements to the downtown area. Other projects have included improvements to Memorial Park, additional parking in the downtown area, and an easement for the town to use at Touchwood Square. The TIF District expires in 2011. Voters must then decide whether to continue the district or whether to establish a new district elsewhere in town.



**Bakery 42, Allen Chiropractic and Trends of Fashion,
three of the new businesses on Main Street.**

With municipal water and sewer available, many participants in the visioning sessions thought that expanding the downtown commercial district would help recreate the mixed use village that New England towns once embodied, enabling residents to walk to jobs, shops and services. If further expansion of the downtown is to be accomplished, Antrim will need to adjust the building and land use requirements and regulations that now exist in the Village Business District such as parking requirements and set-backs.



Edmunds Hardware, a fixture on Main Street since 1962

Highway Business District

Antrim adopted a Highway Business District in its Zoning Regulations to foster the development of commercial and light manufacturing uses, public and semi-public uses and residential uses along Route 202, Route 9, and the area just north of Route 9 in the vicinity of North Branch Village. Currently, there is a mix of business and residential

uses in these relatively heavily traveled corridors. In 2005 and 2006 citizen's petitions to rezone Route 9 from commercial to residential were defeated at town meeting. Another



Tenney Farm on Route 202 was started in 1775 by the Baldwin Family.

issue has been the boundaries of the zone, currently drawn at 1000 feet from the highway, rather than by lot line. Areas of preferred development instead of the 1000 foot strips have also been discussed. It is anticipated that more and more available land will be developed for residential use, leaving less available for commercial activity. The survey responses and visioning session, while firmly desiring to maintain Antrim's rural character and against big box stores, indicated a clear need for additional goods and services to be readily available, a need for employment closer to home and a desire for a firmer commercial base to help alleviate the residents' tax burden. The recommendations below are offered to assist Antrim in achieving a more desirable mix of commercial and residential uses. Below is a sample of responses to the survey:

What type of commercial development would you like to see in Antrim?

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Like Keene's Colony Mill | Medical services complex |
| Small, non-polluting | Restaurants, deli |
| Intellectual, professional | Hospital |
| Light industry | Tourism, hotel |
| No national chains or flea market | Movie theater, video store |
| Financial services | Gift store |
| High tech | Gas stations |
| Temp agency, employment | Fitness facility, YMCA |
| Office park | More light manufacturing |
| Professional services, offices | Pharmacy |
| More small businesses with 5 – 10 employees | |

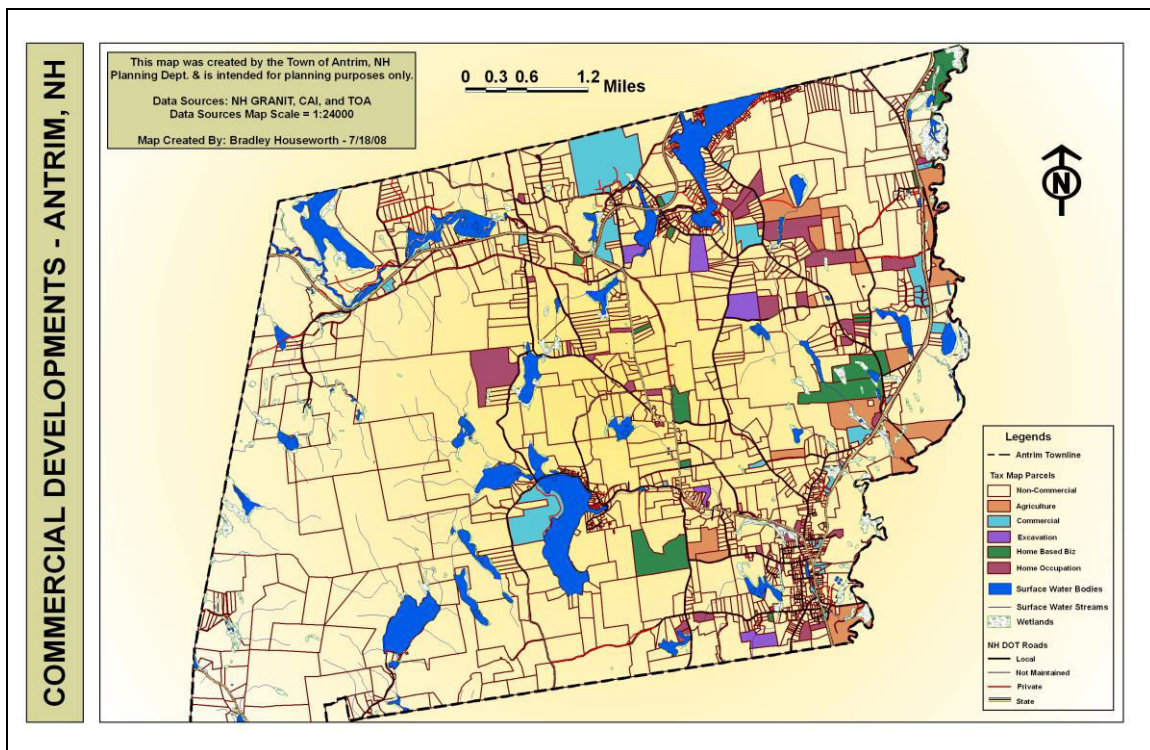
Source: Master Plan Survey Responses

Home Businesses

Another possibility for future development lies in the small business or “home business” sector as it has in the past. Today, Antrim has many small or home businesses located in the zoning districts other than the Business Districts, as detailed on Map XII-1. (See also the Directory of Antrim Businesses in the Appendix.) This Plan recognizes the importance of home occupations and home-based businesses and supports the continuation of relevant provisions for such uses in Antrim’s ordinances and regulations. In addition, all reasonable efforts to support existing businesses and attract new businesses are encouraged. Issues that residents have raised include the need for improved internet access, signage and an expedited application process.



The Wool Room, Pleasant Street



Map XII-1: Commercial Development in Antrim

The Labor Force

The New Hampshire Department of Employment Security indicates that Antrim contributes about 1,276 persons to the labor force, an increase of 1.6% over the decade from 1997 to 2007.

Annual Average	1997	2007
Civilian Labor Force	1,256	1,276
Employed	1,223	1,233
Unemployed	33	43
Unemployment Rate	2.6%	3.4%

Source: NH Employment Security

Antrim's major employers account for fewer than 25% of the jobs for Antrim's workers. Most commute out of town to work, traveling approximately 28.5 minutes to work.

Percent of Working Residents	
Working in community of residence	25%
Commuting to another NH community	71%
Commuting out-of-state	4%

Source: US Census Bureau

Commuting Patterns				
	% of residents commuting out-of-town	Most common commute to	% non-residents commuting into Antrim	Most common commute from
Antrim	75.1%	Peterborough	59%	Bennington

Source: US Census Bureau

Workers 16 years and over commuting to work		
	Drove alone, car/truck/van	80.2%
	Carpooled, car/truck/van	8.4%
	Used public transportation	1.8%
	Walked	3.6%
	Other means	0.0%
	Worked at home:	6.0%
Mean Travel Time to Work		28.5 minutes

Source: US Census Bureau

Antrim's Largest Employers			
Largest Businesses	Product/Service	Employees	Established
Frameworks	Manufacturer, automotive lighting	70	1999
Brailsford	Manufacturer, electric meters	25	2002
Town of Antrim	Municipal Services	22	1777
Landsite Corporation	Construction	12	1997
Antrim Marketplace	Convenience store/Grocer	10	2003
Edmunds Hardware	Hardware	9	1955
Antrim Lumber	Lumber sales	8	1960
Maharishi Vedic School	Educational	6	1996
MCE Catalog Ventures	Internet Marketing	6	1995
Laconia Savings Bank	Banking services	6	1990

Source: NH Employment Security

As discussed in the chapter on Population and Housing, Antrim lags behind the rest of Hillsborough County and the State of New Hampshire in educational attainment and income, and has a higher poverty rate than either the county or state. Its unemployment rate is also slightly higher. Antrim can help to encourage economic growth by striving to provide a skilled and educated workforce.

Unemployment Rates in 2007	
Antrim	3.4%
Hillsborough County	3.2%
New Hampshire	3.3%

Source: NH Employment Security

The number of those employed in goods producing industries and government has greatly increased in the last decade, while fewer are employed in the service industry.

Employment & Wages			
Annual Average Covered Employment		1997	2007
Goods Producing Industries			
	Average Employment	24	65
	Average Weekly Wage	\$339	\$664
Service Producing Industries			
	Average Employment	311	308
	Average Weekly Wage	\$324	\$439
Total Private Industry			
	Average Employment	335	373
	Average Weekly Wage	\$325	\$479
Government (Federal, State and Local)			
	Average Employment	31	62
	Average Weekly Wage	\$466	\$613

	Total, Private Industry plus Government		
	Average Employment	366	435
	Average Weekly Wage	\$337	\$498

Source: NH Employment Security

Future Economic Development

The 2001 master plan highlighted past economic contributors. In this updating of the plan, we would like to emphasize the future. The town should explore the true fiscal benefits of business development and work to promote a moderate and orderly rate of economic development consistent with Antrim's small size and rural heritage, in order to diversify its tax base, to provide needed goods and services and to position itself in a proactive rather than reactive stance toward commercial and/or industrial development.

The town must continue to be active in improving its infrastructure and should assess its existing regulations to identify measures that could be taken to streamline the permitting process or create incentives to encourage appropriate economic development. Antrim also needs to involve business owners, the Chamber of Commerce, neighboring towns, and the Southwest Region Planning Commission in developing an economic niche for our community. The town should also explore public/private partnership programs to aid development and should explore ways to support the Chamber of Commerce in its efforts to promote the town through public events and marketing.

The southern tier of New Hampshire is projected to be the biggest growth area in the state over the next fifteen to twenty years. There are several reasons why we believe that some of that growth will affect Antrim. We need to be prepared for this potential growth.

- The state is improving the highways (Routes 202 and 9) that run through Antrim. These routes remain major commuter and truck routes, with increasing traffic anticipated in the coming years.
- Land for development in Antrim is still available and the "Commercial Build Out" possibilities in Antrim on Route 202 are vast, according to a study by Southwest Regional Planning District.
- There is a need for commercial businesses and services in our area for the benefit of the growing population. Antrim needs to be concerned that the town has affordable land that will attract and retain small businesses.
- Commercial/retail growth, especially in Hillsborough, is attracting new workers who want to live near their jobs. This growth will also attract new businesses who will service these stores.
- Antrim needs to be proactive in planning for its growth, and is committed to economic development that makes sense for the town. The revision of the master plan is another step toward this goal.

- Antrim is investing, and should continue to invest, in its infrastructure with the future in mind by examining our water and sewer needs, facilities and capacity, road infrastructure, telecommunications, and bridge needs.
- Antrim needs to continue to invest in creating a visual impact that will attract people to our town. This will also act as a vehicle to create more community involvement and in strengthening our community character.

The forces of growth and change continue to shape the state, the region, and our town. Our primary goal and our responsibility is to develop the blueprint of economic growth that will ensure that twenty years from now, Antrim is the town that its citizens want it to be and a town of which we all can be proud.

Recommendations

Recommendations for promoting Antrim's economic development fall into four broad categories:

Objective 1: Planning

- Maintain an appropriate balance between economic development and the preservation of open space, natural resources and the environment. Increase our assessed valuation of commercial property from just over 1% as it is now, to at least 5% of the total assessed valuation.
- Establish an Economic Development Committee to promote and invite businesses that practice good environmental stewardship to consider Antrim as a place to locate.
- Market Antrim. Every community has unique attributes that make it a desirable place to work and live and Antrim has attributes in abundance. Antrim is in a prime location midway between Concord and Keene. The physical setting - our mountain, hills, lakes and rivers - is stunning. Recreational opportunities abound, both in town and nearby. The local school system provides a quality education. Our residents have a positive, can-do work ethic and a spirit of volunteerism that is unparalleled. Antrim has a great quality of life that can be used to promote economic development and tourism.
- Update the ordinances and regulations in the Village Business District to adopt "smart growth" principles that will encourage private investment in the downtown area.
- Work closely with the owner of Antrim Mills to develop the property into a true "mixed use" facility that will provide a means of low cost housing and economic development for the town.

- Consider designating appropriate areas for commercial development with mixed use if feasible, within preferred development districts. Review the Route 9 and 202 corridors in Antrim to determine the best land use for these major highway locations. Develop a selective location plan for development. Focus on the small to medium size building needs (1000-25,000 square ft.). Results of the survey and visioning sessions clearly indicated that the majority of residents of Antrim do not want big box stores in town.
- The Planning Board should review the definitions and regulations for “Commercial Office/Warehouse Space”. This will assist in attracting businesses to Antrim which are small to medium in size but are growing and have a need for additional space.
- Work with current landowners or developers in locating two to three small to medium sized locations suitable for industrial parks.
- Consider tax incentives and the possible establishment of a new TIF district for those areas that would encourage new businesses to locate in Antrim. Consider whether to renew the TIF district now in effect in the downtown area which will expire in 2011.
- In reviewing existing and new regulations, consider allowing new small businesses in the Rural District and mixed uses in the other districts and consider the impact of these regulations on existing businesses in these districts.

Objective 2: Infrastructure

- Pursue infrastructure improvements, particularly for bridges, roads, water, sewer, and communications, to be sure that we are keeping up with the growth and the technology of the 21st century. Coordinate our efforts with our neighboring towns.
- Explore the use of alternative energy sources including geothermal, solar, wood pellets, wind, and water power in providing long-term improvements in a sustainable fashion.
- Seek to provide high speed, broadband internet service for all areas of town, and work to provide wireless and cable television access for the entire town. Work jointly with the surrounding towns to get the most value for these services. Continue to remain apprised of all advancements in technology that would enhance the lives of Antrim’s citizens and be at the forefront of making these advancements accessible to all.
- Encourage local businesses to have an internet presence. Offer to expand the town’s website to assist in providing the necessary support and education to achieve this. Coordinate this effort with the Antrim Chamber of Commerce.

- Develop a long-term plan for supporting wireless communication and wireless cell towers in Antrim. After the plan is developed, determine what if any changes are needed to the zoning regulations. Pursue the cooperation of cell phone carriers in executing the plan.
- Consider requiring fiber optic cable be provided underground for all new and renovated developments.
- Establish a “wireless zone” in the downtown area.
- Develop an educational program in collaboration with area schools, colleges and professionals to provide educational business programs at low or no cost to Antrim residents.

Objective 3: Downtown Improvements

- Continue to improve and maintain the downtown area to demonstrate that Antrim is economically strong and proud of its image. Continue to offer the façade and landscape improvement plans to downtown businesses through the TIF program.
- Complete Phase II of the Transportation Enhancement Grant, making improvements to Route 202 to Elm Street and up Elm Street to North Main Street. This will complete the downtown sidewalk, traffic calming projects, and beautification plans throughout the entire downtown area.
- Maintain consistent signage and directional information in the downtown area.
- Continue the maintenance of the parks, buildings, and sidewalks.
- Develop further beautification programs for the town that tie the downtown elements together.

Objective 4: Economic Diversity

- Continue to identify buildings and/or land that are/is available for commercial development and keep a current inventory of them at Town Hall, updated quarterly.
- Become proactive in assisting people through the process of establishing a business in Antrim.
- Reexamine the “Special Exception” process to determine its adequacy as the approach to proper land use management in the town.
- Clearly define Antrim’s fit into the economic climate of the region and look to develop an attractive niche for local businesses.

Identifying early the needs and most workable strategies for economic development in Antrim will save both time and money. Then, instead of having to work harder, we will learn to work smarter for the needs of the community as a whole. We will not be competing with our neighbors but rather will be supporting each other in the growth of our region.



Tyler's Small Engine on Route 202