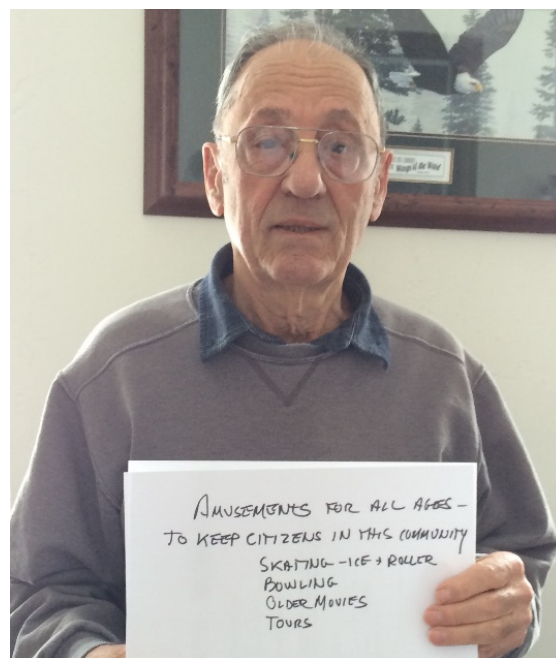
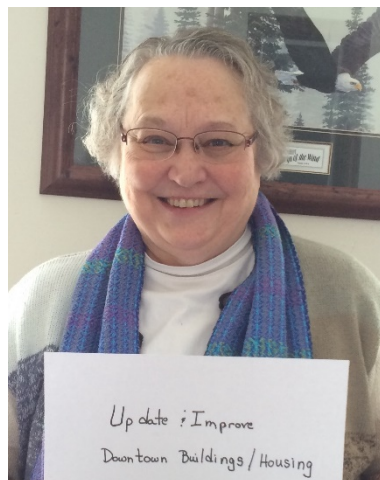
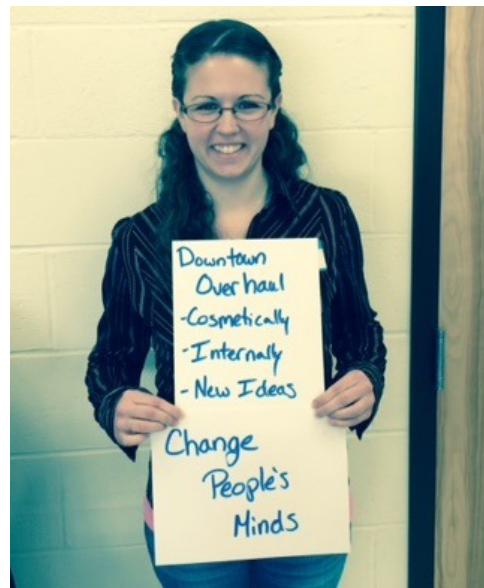
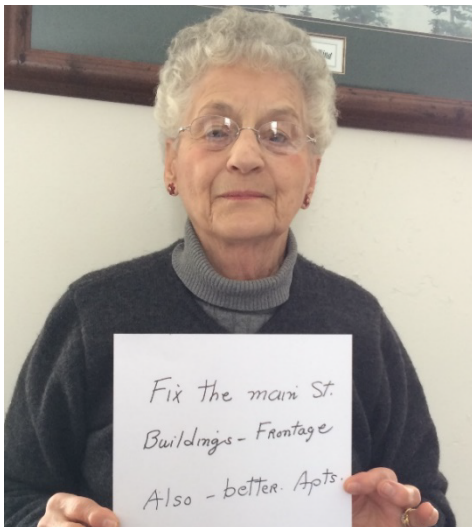


# Franklin Voices

## 2015



## Introduction

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

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

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

## Key Findings

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

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## Storytelling Circles

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

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

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

## What I like about Franklin

Congregational Church

Franklin Opera House

Stone Park

My home

Webster Lake

Franklin Police Department

Franklin Fire Department

Trip Center

Library

Franklin Falls Dam

The stores

Boys and Girls Club

Odell Park

Soccer

My house

Paul Smith Elementary School

Football in Franklin

Franklin houses

Sports

Franklin High School

Basketball Courts, the skiing area

The mountains

Full moon sledding

Dawson's mansion

Second group

I love you mom and dad

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

Friends

Walmart

Video games

The school

Dollar Tree

Grassy fields

There are lots of places to go

The flowers

The playground

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



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

# Storytelling Groups and One-on-One Interviews

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

## Sense of Community

### Strengths

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

### Challenges

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

### Ideas

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



## Civic Life

### Strengths

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

### Challenges

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

### Ideas

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

## Economic Vitality, Transportation, Housing and Infrastructure

### Strengths

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

### Challenges

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

### Ideas

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

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

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

## Natural Resources, Cultural Resources and Historic Sites

### Strengths

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

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

### Challenges

- Failure to maintain downtown + historical sites

### Ideas

- Develop recreation opportunities for all ages

## Community and Health Services and Schools

### Strengths

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

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

### Challenges

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

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

# Community Members

## *Ideas*

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



# Business Focus Groups

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

## Business Community

### Sense of Community

#### Strengths

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

### Civic Life

#### Strengths

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

#### Challenges

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



## ***Ideas***

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

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

### ***Strengths***

- Streetscape of Main Street – the bare bones of what's there
- Well-defined downtown
- Potential for renewable power
- Blank slate in empty buildings
- Geographic center of state
- Downtown is  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile long
- Business owners downtown can forge a relationship – 4 owners own 80% of downtown
- Locally-owned bank – local connection and identity
- Many sectors – Webster Lake, downtown, industrial park – in appropriate locations
- Downtown, mill district
- Real estate is inexpensive
- Traffic count on Main Street – 18,000-20,000 cars per day in the summer; main east/west highway
- Closeness of Merrimack County nursing home, so older folks can stay connected to the community
- Liquor store is a draw for a certain area
- Beautiful town
- Low unemployment rate
- Industrial park doing well – completely full, no vacancies
- Ten minutes to exit 17 – more access to Rt 3

### ***Challenges***

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

# Business Community

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

## *Ideas*

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

- Lack of transportation
- High unemployment rate

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



## Natural Resources, Cultural Resources and Historic Sites

### **Strengths**

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

### **Challenges**

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

## Community and Health Services and Schools

### **Strengths**

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

## Challenges

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

## Ideas

- Create good ecological design systems – energy, trash

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

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



# Elder Wrap Focus Group

## Community Agencies

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

### Sense of Community

#### Strengths

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

### Civic Life

#### Strengths

- Many dedicated and hard-working professionals and volunteers

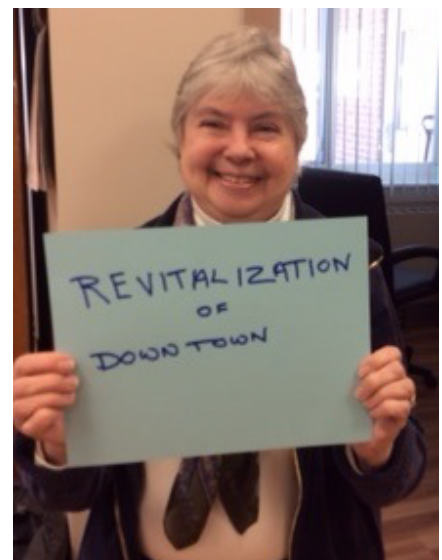
#### Challenges

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

### Economic Vitality, Transportation, Housing and Infrastructure

#### Strengths

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





## Challenges

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

## Ideas

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

## Natural Resources and Historic Sites

### Strengths

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

## Community Services and Health Services and Schools

### Strengths

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

### Challenges

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