



Extension



2017

March 28th

First Impressions: Somersworth



**New Hampshire
First Impressions**

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the University of New Hampshire Planning Student Organization students who provided their time and effort to implement the First Impressions assessment in Somersworth, NH.



First Impressions was developed in 1991 by Andy Lewis, University of Wisconsin Extension Associate Professor, and James Schneider, Grant County, Wisconsin Economic Development Director. Since then, the program has been adapted by states across the US as well as in Canada. The First Impressions program has been adapted by University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension to meet the current and future needs of New Hampshire Communities.

Introduction

The look and feel of a downtown can influence the decisions of potential residents, visitors, and businesses. A vibrant downtown serves as a gathering place, a place for people to dine, shop, and conduct business. New Hampshire First Impressions is designed to help a community learn about their downtown's existing assets and opportunities for improvement as seen through the eyes of first time visitors. In this case, members of the UNH Student Planning Organization comprised the visit team and served as the visitors that assessed the community and reported their findings.

Possible outcomes include:

- Improving the visual appearance of a downtown
- Strengthening the marketing and promotion of a downtown
- Enriching the climate of a downtown for new businesses, residents, and visitors

The First Impressions assessment consists of training meetings, a Pre-Visit Survey, a visit to the community to conduct the assessment, and a Post-Visit Survey. During the visit, team members are using the following characteristics to conduct the assessment. These characteristics reflect important components of a vibrant downtown, and are adapted from the National Civic League and from First Impressions programs in other states.

	Business		Point of Interest
	Community Art		Public Facilities
	Displays & Signage		Seating
	Downtown Entrance		Sidewalks, Crosswalks & Trails
	Landscaping		Streets & Transportation
	Lighting		Waste & Recycling
	Parks		

Throughout the report, these characteristics are identified as assets and opportunities. Assets are the strengths in the downtown—where characteristics exist and are excellent and well-maintained. For example, a well-maintained trail or a bench in a nice location would be considered assets. Opportunities are those characteristics that exist or do not exist, where there is room for improvement. An example of an opportunity for improvement might be lack of bike lanes, or a broken sidewalk.

A Pilot Project

The First Impressions assessment of Somersworth is a pilot project. The program, New Hampshire First Impressions typically matches two different communities to compile a team of community volunteers to visit and assess another community and then report their findings. Many New Hampshire communities are interested in recruiting and retaining more young people in their communities, and the New Hampshire First Impressions program is one way to learn about how young people view and perceive a community's downtown. For this project, UNH Cooperative Extension partnered with the UNH Student Planning Organization to teach the students how to conduct a First Impressions assessment. The students not only participated in the assessment of Somersworth's downtown, but organized the resulting data by theme and wrote this report. The results of this First Impressions assessment will be presented at the UNH Undergraduate Research Conference in April 2017.

About the UNH Student Planning Organization

The UNH Planning Student Organization (PSO) is a group of UNH students who study planning and who believe that planning provides the tools for economic, environmental, and social well-being of communities. These students volunteer several hours a week to projects that give them experience in planning and provide a service to a community effort. The UNH Planning Student Organization is an official UNH student organization and is committed to the value of sustainability.

About Somersworth

Somersworth is a city in Strafford County, New Hampshire. Somersworth is situated on the Salmon Falls River and borders Dover, NH; Rollinsford, NH; Rochester, NH and Berwick, ME. The population was 11,766 at the 2010 census, and has slightly increased since the 2000 census. According to NH Employment Security, Somersworth's rate of unemployment was 4.2%, compared to New Hampshire's overall rate of unemployment of 3.8%.

The City of Somersworth, a traditional New Hampshire community struggling to support a downtown economy, was selected as a location to conduct the First Impressions assessment. The City of Somersworth was supportive of the project especially to better understand the interests and perspectives of young people in order to recruit more young people to live, work and visit.

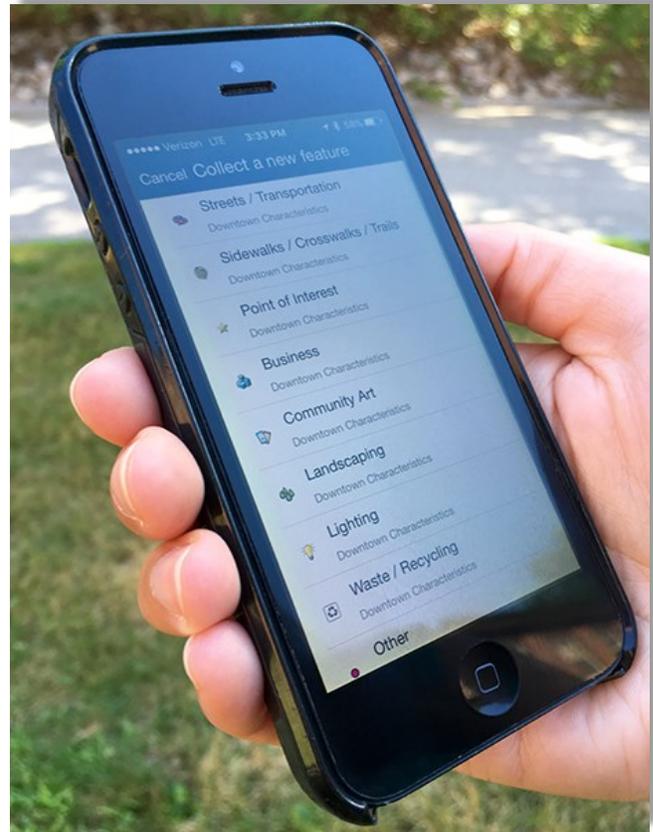


Pre-Visit Survey

The Pre-Visit Survey was completed by the visit team online prior to conducting the visit. The survey collects information about members' demographics, such as age, gender, and town of residence; and requires team members to conduct internet research on the community they will be visiting and reflect on the quality and availability of information on webpages as well as social media. Finally, the survey requires team members to reflect on any perceptions they may have about the community prior to their visit.

First Impressions Assessment Visit

During the First Impressions visit, members of the visit team had access to two tools to conduct their assessment; the use of a mobile application: Collector for ArcGIS, and paper booklets. Collector for ArcGIS is a free mobile application that allows for data collection in the field. When a team member uses Collector, they select a characteristic from a list, fill out a description, observation, choose whether the characteristic is an asset, asset/opportunity or opportunity for improvement from a drop down menu, and have the opportunity to upload a photo or video. Once submitted, the information is stored as a point on a map. In addition to the mobile app, team members are able to use a paper booklet to collect their data. The booklet replicates the data collection process of the app: team members circle a characteristic from the list, and then write the location, description, observation, and select whether the characteristic is an asset, asset/opportunity, or opportunity for improvement.



Post-Visit Survey

Following the visit, the visit team members completed a Post-Visit online survey. This survey allows team members to reflect on their visit and rate the downtown overall. Team members also reflect on their initial perceptions and whether they would like to live, visit or open a business in the community.

Post-Visit Team Debrief

About two weeks after the visit to Somersworth, the visit team held a debrief meeting in which students reflected on the experience, shared their thoughts, and brainstormed the top assets and opportunities for improvement.

Key Findings

Assets

Assets identify the strengths in the downtown. These are impressive characteristics that exist.

- **Diversity of Businesses.** The visit team continually commented on the mix of eclectic businesses in Somersworth. Funky cafés, restaurants, and quirky boutiques create a very diverse downtown.
- **Seating.** One of the most praised categories during the Somersworth assessment was seating. Visitors found an abundance of well-maintained and inviting benches throughout the study area.
- **Historic Character.** Somersworth has done a nice job preserving beautiful historic buildings on Market Street and adjacent neighborhood streets. The colorful New England style houses make for a welcoming entrance to the town and the classic brick buildings tie together wonderfully along Market and High Street.
- **Signage.** The First Impressions team made numerous comments about the signs throughout Somersworth in respect to safety, business, and wayfinding.
- **Sidewalks and Crosswalks.** There were numerous comments praising the well maintained sidewalks, crosswalks and stairs on High, Market, and Main Streets. Crosswalks were well defined and made visitors feel safe when crossing the street.

Opportunities

Opportunities identify areas of high potential for improvement.

- **Public Art.** The First Impressions Team noticed a huge potential for community art. The mural on Constitutional Way was a popular example of how the town could decorate empty buildings and retaining walls.
- **Vacant Spaces.** Apart from Market Street, emptiness was prevalent in the study area. Vacant buildings and wide-open parking lots absorbed any energy or vibrancy. All of this space could be used for new businesses, parks, and/or a community gathering space.
- **Traffic.** The day of the visit was filled with the continuous buzz of cars along Market and High Street. This flow seemed fast and dangerous at times with a lot of confusion as to why the cars were not stopping in Somersworth. The City could benefit from capturing this traffic.
- **Park/Community Gathering Space.** The First Impressions Team identified parks and a community common as some of the biggest absences in Somersworth. At the debrief, the Team emphasized the need for an outdoor place for people to join together and enjoy.
- **Excessive Parking.** There was an abundance of parking spaces in the study area. This emptiness had a negative impact on the First Impressions Team. It appeared that the space could be used for something else.

Before the Visit

Training Meetings

UNH Cooperative Extension staff met with the UNH Planning Student Organization Club students three times prior to the students conducting the First Impressions assessment of Somersworth. The Planning Club students learned about what makes a community vibrant, and reviewed the downtown characteristics that comprise a First Impressions assessment. The students were also instructed on how to complete the assessment using the mobile application and the paper booklet.

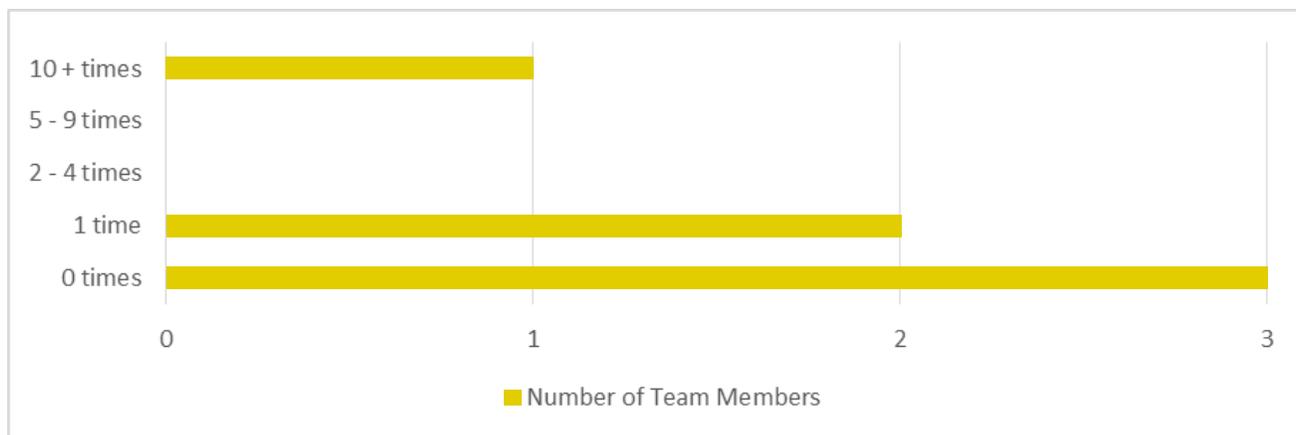
Pre-Visit Survey

The visit team completed the Pre-Visit Survey prior to visiting Somersworth. The survey provided opportunity to research Somersworth on the internet and social media and describe their perceptions. The results of the survey follow:

Demographics

The visit team was comprised of three females and three males. All members currently attend the University of New Hampshire in Durham and are between 18-24 years old.

Number of times team members have visited Somersworth prior to First Impressions



General Impression

Team members were asked to record their impression of Somersworth, NH before completing any research. The following are their responses:

- I do not know anything about Somersworth.
- I visited once for a doctor's appointment. I remember a lot of traffic.
- My impression of Somersworth is that it is a slightly economically depressed town that has not fully recovered from closure of mills.
- The city is about the size of Dover and is an old mill town.
- I do have one friend at school who is from there and he does not seem too fond of it.

Internet Research

Team members were asked to use a search engine (like Google.com) to search for "Somersworth, NH" in order to record what websites are at the top of each search. Each team member recorded the first three websites. The websites recorded were: City of Somersworth Website, City of Somersworth City Clerk page, Wikipedia, Zillow, Mapquest and Somersworth High School. This review can provide Somersworth a brief insight into the effectiveness of their online materials and marketing. Some of the comments by the team members were:

City of Somersworth Website (www.somersworth.com)

- Very useful. There are links to just about everything you could be searching for (departments, events, agendas and minutes for every committee etc.)
- Useful as it has lots of information about Somersworth.
- Very good quality on up to date matters and did its job to serve as a function for its citizens as well as "market" for itself for perspective visitors, new dwellers, and developers.
- The newsfeed is easy to read and placed on the front page. There is a cycling banner at the top that advertises community events. The news and announcements found on the home page all relate to town government functions. There seem to be up-to-date links off of the main page. The numerous tabs at the top of the page drop down and make it easy to find what you are looking for. This website seems current and has a nice design.
- Good website, news on the first page and easy to navigate.

City of Somersworth City Clerk Page

(www.somersworth.com/departments-services/finance/city-clerk/)

- This page is more plain and focuses on the city clerk's mission, contact info, location, etc.
- A lot of information for contacts, very useful.



Wikipedia

- Very useful. It gave a background and history of the town
- The second website is Wikipedia so it does have lots of background information.
- I always like Wikipedia because of its emphasis on history then touching on several other categories
- Wikipedia - basic facts about Somersworth - useful to get a quick snapshot of the city.
- This is a standard Wikipedia page. It starts with useful information, such as the city population and location, at the top of the page. This page also appears to have short quality sections on Somersworth's history, geography, education, and demographics. I feel that this webpage is somewhat helpful in collecting an idea on the general statistics of Somersworth.
- Good for getting facts on Somersworth, but you never know how reliable Wikipedia is.

Zillow

- It showed houses for sale in the area so this was somewhat useful

MapQuest

- This website was very useful showing a map, location and information on the town

Social Media

Team members were also asked to use social media to search for information about Somersworth, NH. There were mixed reviews about the various Facebook pages for Somersworth. The following are comments on the quality and usefulness of information obtained:

- There are two Facebook pages about Somersworth with upcoming events and contact information. Looks to be updated regularly.
- There were a few Facebook pages for the community but they were closed so it was not very useful.
- I did not find a lot of great social media for Somersworth.
- Their Facebook page is geared towards visitors looking places to eat, drink, sleep, and sightsee.
- Not much of a presence on social media. Facebook had a page but I was confused who it was actually run by. Not useful.

General Information

The majority of team members reported that they were able to find general information about Somersworth, NH. One team member did not find general information.



Desire to Visit

Team members were asked if they would want to visit Somersworth, NH with family or friends, and to share why or why not. Two team members said that they would like to visit Somersworth with family or friends, one said that they would not, and the remainder were not sure. Comments included:

Yes

- It seems like a cool old mill town that may be a cool interesting area
- It seems like another town of interest that is near enough to Durham. I am always interested to see how mill towns have transformed.

Maybe

- I did not find anything that was a main attraction but it looks like there are restaurants and some stores that would be worth going to.
- Based on what I saw I would not be particularly drawn to Somersworth over other communities in the area like Dover or Portsmouth.
- It does look like a nice New England town but there isn't great advertising for a downtown area as a whole, which leads me to believe that it is a bit scattered.

No

- Not particularly, there is not much about things to do in Somersworth

Welcoming

Team members were also asked if Somersworth seemed welcoming to people to visit, live or open a business. Three members responded yes, one responded no, and the remainder had mixed responses.

Yes

- Based on the webpages that seem welcoming with updates on upcoming events
- The town is conveniently located near Portsmouth and Boston. It appears to have potential for development and probably encompasses a nice New England atmosphere.
- Yes. The website has a lot of information on businesses and residences.

Maybe

- They try to sell the visitors on sightseeing but it doesn't seem like there are many businesses, but as a business owner, the website was very user-friendly which would make me more inclined to inquire.

No

- It does not because it is very small and old
- Not particularly welcoming. I have never felt compelled to keep coming back



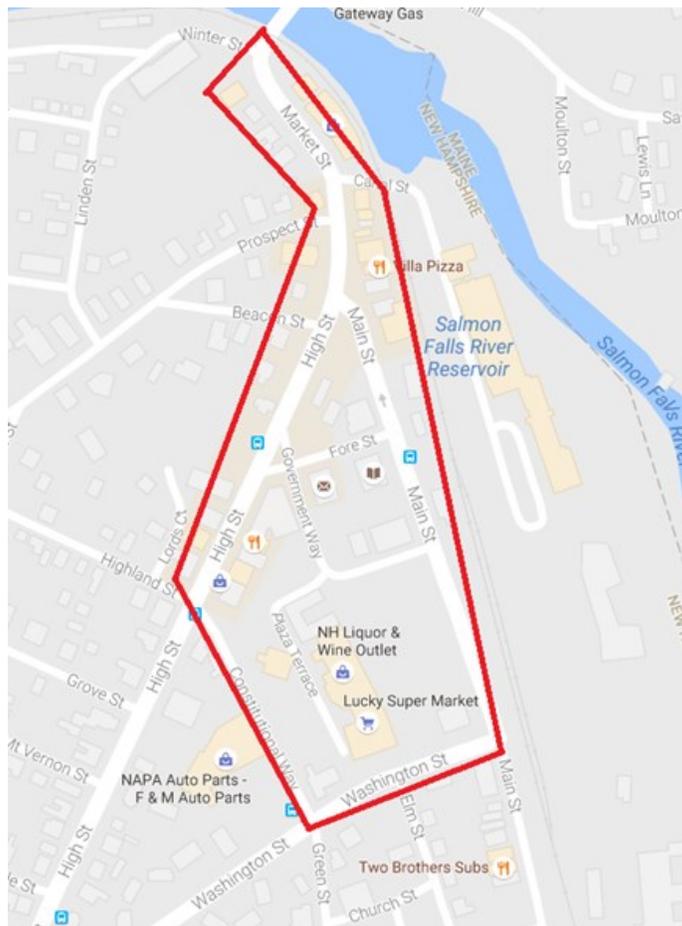
About the Visit: UNH Students Visit Somersworth

The visit team consisted of six students from the UNH Planning Student Organization. The students visited Somersworth on Saturday, November 5th. The weather was cool and cloudy. The team arrived around 10am, and spent time exploring, shopping, and eating in downtown Somersworth, and departed around 1pm.

The Assessment Area

The City of Somersworth defined the First Impressions assessment area as shown on Map 1, below.

Map 1. City of Somersworth Downtown Study Area



Findings

The following narrative is representative of data collected through Collector for ArcGIS during the visit, comments from the Post-Visit online survey, and comments during a debrief meeting with the visit team. All six team members utilized the mobile application Collector for ArcGIS.

The data is organized by the downtown characteristics team members identified, and the comments have been coded as assets and opportunities. Assets are the strengths in the downtown—where characteristics exist and are excellent and well-maintained. For example, a well-maintained trail or a bench in a nice location would be considered assets. Opportunities are those characteristics that exist or do not exist, where there is room for improvement. An example of an opportunity for improvement might be lack of bike lanes, or a broken sidewalk.



Assets

Appearance

The visit team reported a lot of positive feedback when it came to the appearance of the businesses in downtown Somersworth. Some comments included:

- The Zen Garden store looks like an interesting eclectic store then building is nice looking brick
- There was a very welcoming boutique that looked put together with nice designs on windows.
- 45 Market St. Bakery & Café is nicely colored and eye catching
- Poppy Seed Studio is a great building that meshes nicely with neighbors
- Citizens Bank had good landscaping
- Nice preservation of older architecture. These signs are consistent with each other
- Thrift store has a nice umbrella and good use of side walk space

Signage

There was a lot of good and clear signage in regards to the businesses in downtown Somersworth. Some comments the visit team reported were:

- Poppy Seed Studio has good signage with flowers and very attractive as well
- Signage was very consistent and attractive
- 45 Market St. Bakery & Café had great signage that invited people to come in

Eclectic

- Cool use of depot
- Zen Garden store is very interesting makes people want to check it out
- Funky thrift store that would cause people want to come in and look around



Businesses

Opportunities

Appearance

There were many opportunities found within the Somersworth downtown area. A lot of the feedback stems from vacant and closed businesses. Some of the comments include:

- Does not seem to fit in with the rest of the town architecture
- Does not look inviting
- Looks run down and not well kept
- Businesses are empty and closed
- Old rundown bank that has potential but is over grown and vacant
- Building with windows grated up. No signage so we are not sure what type of business it is.
- Excess space that makes some businesses stand out in an unflattering way
- A lot of prime locations in downtown have poor appearances which is wasted space

Parking

The visit team noticed that there was an excess of parking. We noticed that there was a lot of cars driving through the town while few stopping, parking and utilizing the downtown area businesses. The team's comments included:

- Parking lot was too big and seemed to be taking up space
- Strip mall has a lot of excess parking not being used
- There are tons of excess parking spaces on surrounding streets that are not used and off the beaten path
- Retail businesses in the strip mall seemed less visited and had very few cars in the parking lot in front of them



Assets

The visit team could only identify one example of community art with a mural on the strip mall wall. The mural was a great use of a blank wall that made the town seem more lively and brought some color to an otherwise dull street.

Opportunities

The visit team collectively felt that there was a lack of community art. The only identified art was the single mural on the strip mall wall on a street that was not very busy which takes away from the value. There is a huge opportunity in the area for community art with there being multiple retaining walls in the downtown area. The painting was also deteriorating due to the brick falling off taking the paint with it.





Assets

Displays and signage were a good asset to the immediate areas on High and Market Streets. This area seemed to have a cohesive idea about signage. Some specific comments included:

- Nice looking classy street sign for business.
- Flags on light poles look nice and show pride in a town so this is pleasing to the eye for visitors and leaves a good impression.



Opportunities

Opportunity certainly exists in improving the signage in all areas of downtown. This can help the area become more accessible and visitor friendly. An ordinance could be put in place to determine the types of signs allowed as well.





Assets

The downtown entrance from High Street was quite attractive with large houses and well maintained offices and beautiful streetscaping.

Specific comments include:

- Attractive historic houses fade into brick business buildings
- Well maintained sidewalks and crosswalks, and frequent light posts with downtown sign.



Opportunities

It was clear that time had been spent on the major entrance on High Street. Some opportunity exists in the future through improving some of the other entrance points to downtown.

Some specific comments include:

- Not a very inviting entrance and the first thing you see is duplex apartments.





Assets

Appearance

The landscaping was observed to be an asset in Somersworth. There has been an obvious effort particularly on High and Market Streets to flatten and landscape the otherwise very steep area.

Some specific comments include:

- Good placement, adds character to the downtown
- Looks like this would be a beautiful area with flowers in warmer months. Good use of some otherwise very rough terrain but valuable space.
- Landscaping looks nice and inviting with a new rock wall.



Opportunities

Appearance

Landscaping is also a major opportunity for Somersworth. Encouraging improved landscaping in areas off High and Market Streets can help the entire downtown better it's appearance. The landscaping of vacant lots and trimming of street side shrubs are an opportunity.

Specific comments included:

- Sad looking tree. Is not very welcoming. Possibly shrubs instead because they don't lose their leaves.
- How about a small park? There seems to be housing in the area and subsequent need.





Assets

The visit team appreciated the consistency, upkeep, and aesthetics of the light posts around town. Some comments included:

- Aesthetically pleasing, good signage, pretty lamppost.
- These are consistently found on Market Street. Freshly painted and good sign for historic downtown. Looks like a high quality light.
- This lamp looks nice, is solar powered and provides good light on a corner where there are not a lot of light poles.

Opportunities

The visit team made only one mention of an opportunity where a light was oddly placed and malfunctioned.





Assets/Opportunities

The park in downtown was a nice addition. It looks well maintained but the location seems uninviting next to the busy street and behind the gas station. It is mentioned that a major opportunity is to use vacant land in the downtown to create some more public space.

Specific comments included:

- Good placement but surrounding environment makes it unappealing to go to. Also hidden.
- Nice park with benches, memorial and sign for dog owners to take care of their dogs but is also located behind a gas station on a side road so the location is poor but the park area is nice.
- Could be redeveloped or at least the land. Empty space could be a small park.





Opportunities

The visit team only made comments regarding potential for future points of interest. Suggestions for points of interest revolved around vacant buildings and bare retaining walls:

- Plenty of space in the front of this possibly vacant building for some new landscaping or street side art. Lacks curb appeal.
- The big retaining walls could be used for a community mural or something of the sort instead of camouflaging it with shrubs.
- Two rundown buildings could be used for something with real potential.
- Plaza with vacant units and a small rundown grocery store. Plaza has potential but is not pleasing to the eye.





Assets

Appearance

The visit team noted several positive aspects of the public facilities with respect to appearance. The public library, city hall, and post office carried much of the praise. Some comments included:

- Post office looks official and fits nicely.
- Nice old looking post office in central location.
- The city hall has a good design mixing modern and historical brick character.
- Nice library with benches and a little garden out front.
- Library looks nice and inviting. Redone in the past.

Opportunities

The team identified an opportunity to improve the significance of the Chamber of Commerce building. The comment included:

- The Chamber of Commerce doesn't look like an official building. Walked past it earlier thinking it was a business.





Assets

Appearance

The visit team enjoyed the visually appealing and convenient seating in front of businesses in the downtown area. Specific comments include:

- Nice looking bench for public seating.
- Lawn chairs outside of the café added good décor for the business, fit the environment, cute.
- Good use of seating for people in the downtown area.
- Benches were plentiful all throughout town. Many were in great shape, but lacked shade.
- Good use of seating for people in the downtown area.

Opportunities

Placement

There were several opportunities for benches to be improved in appearance, orientation and location.

- Faces highway, not attractive.
- Bench next to parking lot: Perhaps few people would want to sit and look around in this spot.
- Random bench. Next to a dumpster with a bad view.
- Garden is not maintained and there is graffiti on the bench



Sidewalks, Crosswalks, & Trails



Assets

Safety and Maintenance

Especially in the downtown area, the visit team noticed crosswalks in key locations that provided safety for pedestrians, emphasizing that these were well maintained. Comments included:

- Safe crosswalk with a sign before it for cars.
- Stairs look new and add a good touch to the run down parts of the sidewalk.
- Crosswalk visible with white paint but could be more defined.
- Nice wide road with well-maintained sidewalks.



Opportunities

Connectivity

The visit team noticed that with some small improvements, various parts of town could be more accessible for foot traffic and improve connectivity. Comments included:

- There is a lack of crosswalk on Main Street, it seems a bit dangerous.
- The way to get into the mill building is through some brush and across train tracks.
- Wide road hard to cross without crosswalk.
- High potential to link downtown and mill housing.
- Sidewalks were a little busted up, some parts had good greenery, some did not.





Assets

The visit team appreciated that people had no problem parking anywhere in town, and also had the racks to lock their bicycle to if they biked into town. Comments included:

- Ample all day parking.
- Excessive amount of open parking, especially for a Saturday.
- There was a few low profile, nicely maintained metal bike racks along Market and High Street.

Opportunities

Parking

The visit team noticed that there many open parking spaces that could potentially be used for other purposes. Comments included:

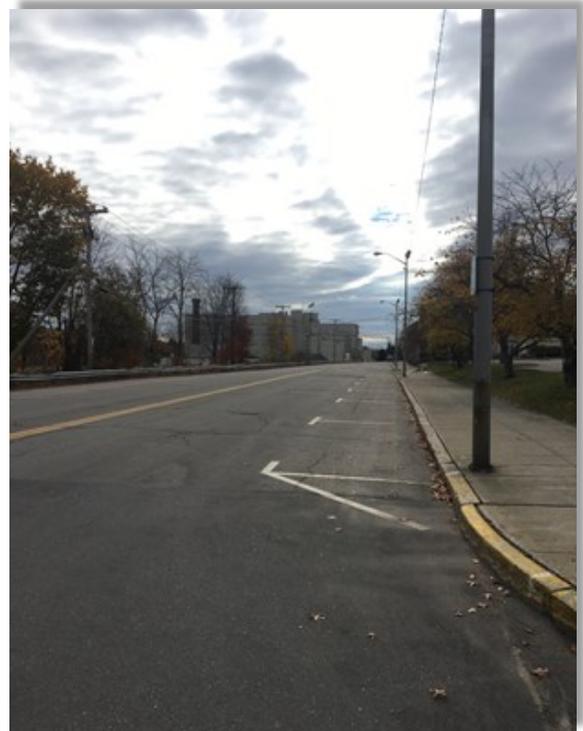
- Huge parking lot. Waste of space and too much parking when there is already street parking.
- Parking lot was too big and seemed to be taking up space.
- Strip mall has a lot of excess parking not being used.
- There are tons of excess parking spaces on surrounding streets that are not used and off the beaten path.
- So much on-street parking where it's not necessary. Could be used to bump out sidewalks and plant trees.



Alternative Transportation

Though there were many places to park, the visit team found it difficult to safely navigate all streets by bike, foot or public transportation. Comments included:

- Distinct difference of pedestrian geared infrastructure.
- Didn't see much for public transportation.
- Did not appear to be any bike lanes.
- Non-stop traffic going through the downtown but nobody was stopping.
- Not many obvious bike racks on Main, Washington or Constitutional.

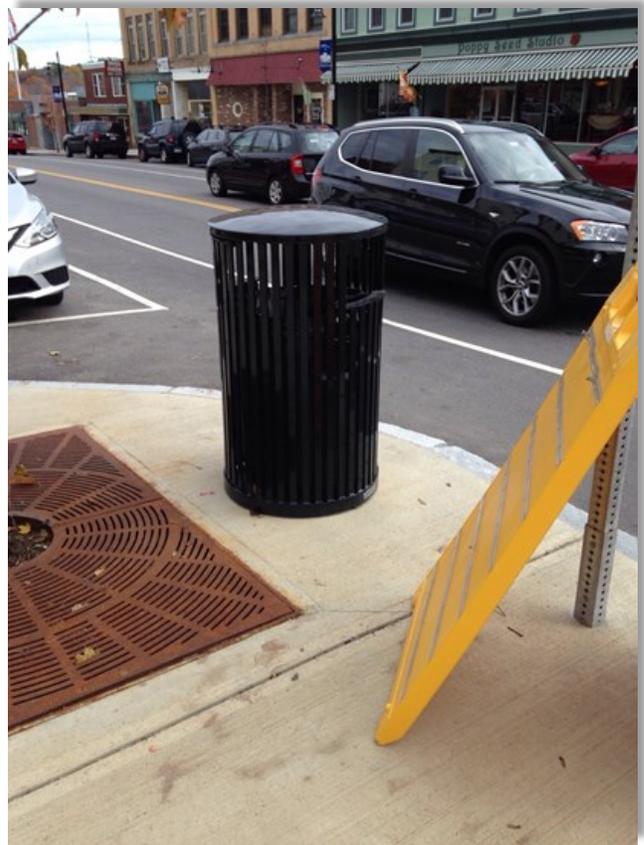


Waste & Recycling



The visit team noticed many well placed trash bins but would have liked to see recycling bins as well. They thought that some of the bins could also be more pleasing to look at. Comments included:

- Consistent on newer sidewalks but lacking on cross streets.
- Trash receptacles were abundant and in good condition along Market Street.
- Trash can located conveniently, no obvious recycling though.
- Poor location, doesn't seem like a heavily foot-trafficked area, but unique in that it is attached to the telephone pole. Could be maintained better.
- Fine looking trash can but no recycling or cigarette tray.
- No obvious public restrooms or recycling bins.



After the Visit

Post-Visit Survey

The visit team completed a Post-Visit Survey following the assessment in Somersworth. This survey gave the team the chance to reflect on the visit and give the downtown an overall rating. Additional questions asked the visitors to comment on their interest in returning to Somersworth, recommendations to friends, and whether or not they would live there. The responses of the survey follow:

Five-Minute Impression

The initial impression can greatly influence visitors' overarching opinions of a location. Below are the five-minute observations of the team:

- It is extremely hilly, has a really nice stretch and some not as pretty areas and an obvious problem with vacancy.
- There were some vacant buildings, including a gas station.
- The welcome sign was difficult to read
- There looked like a few quaint stores on the Main Street, but lots of traffic.
- There have been investments in pedestrian infrastructure on High Street that create a safe walkable area. There are two clusters of businesses and a flow of traffic through the town.
- I felt that there was no real indication of officially entering Somersworth. If it were not for a small, hard to read "Welcome to Somersworth" sign, I would not know the difference from the continuation of development between Dover and Route 16.
- I did recognize some of the nicely preserved historical buildings in the old town as we drove down High and Market Street. I also noticed the old church spire on the left when driving through town as well as the mill buildings down to the right.
- Somersworth was on the side of a hill and had many steep streets, especially to the North of Market Street. Parking didn't seem super easy to find on Market Street.
- Rundown mill town.
- It seemed sad. There weren't very many people out or anything that drew you in.



Community Amenities

Comments were collected on the quality and availability of the following amenities: bike racks, benches, shade area, community gathering spaces, drinking fountains, community art, wayfinding signs, landscaping, historical sites, wireless internet access, public restrooms, public trash containers, public recycling containers:

- There were a few low profile, nicely maintained metal bike racks along Market/High Street. I did not see any other racks on Main, Washington, or Constitutional.
- Benches were plentiful all throughout town. Many were in great shape, but lacked shade.
- It's hard to say if it is a community gathering space, but the park/bench area behind the public library may function as one. There were no other noted gathering places.
- The only community art I recognized was a mural on the side of a strip mall on Congressional Way.
- Signage along high/market streets was good and helpful. Signs elsewhere were small or nonexistent.
- Good landscaping along High/Market streets.
- Otherwise steep and unusable land. Grass, a few trees, and flowers/bushes were a nice use of space near the north end of Market Street.
- The trash receptacles were abundant and in good condition along market street. I did not notice any public restrooms or recycling bins.

Recreation

The visit team noted that Somersworth had little to offer in the recreation category:

- I did not see any of the following on my visit
- There is one park off of Main St.
- Although I did see some potential for recreational areas, I did not see any existing parks, trails, etc. whatsoever.

Housing

The visit team was asked to comment on the apparent quality and availability of several types of housing:

- Most of the housing I saw was located up side streets from the downtown. There was an apartment complex located in an old mill surrounding the downtown as well. There were quite a few vacant buildings whose previous functions were unknown. The houses that I saw varied from very nice to run down.
- Within the area that we assessed there was apartment housing along High Street that looked like it had been updated in recent years. Just outside of the area there appeared to be single family homes all existing. I did not observe any senior assisted living or assisted living/group homes.
- It was hard to decipher between some types of housing. I noticed most housing units on Washington Street and Constitutional Way. They were acceptable, but nothing appeared to be in great condition. It was also challenging to decide if many of the units were even occupied.
- The existing, older, and new homes (if any) were seen from afar. I believe these were the homes north of High/Market Street. Much of this area seemed to maintain a historic character, but many were run down. A few lining Market Street seemed exceptional with colorful paint (only 2-3).
- I noticed vacant lots along Constitutional Way and Washington. They were overgrown and littered with trash.

An Identified Brand

Team members were not able to pick up on an identifiable brand in Somersworth.

Using Your Senses

The survey asked team members to describe Somersworth through their senses: taste (food and drink), smell (air in the downtown), and sounds (parks, roads, trains, construction, music, social gatherings).

Taste

- The cafe we visited seemed to have a very natural, 'earthy' feel to it and its food seemed all natural, which was the vibe I got while being in the town as well when visiting the thrift store and the retail store next to it that sold many handmade items and locally made products.
- I think the restaurant and cafe scene seems fairly progressive. These offered local products, interesting food, and cool interior decoration.
- There were not many places to sit down and stay. Few of the restaurants were inviting and most seemed like pick up or delivery places.
- There was a lot of potential for the downtown but only two bakeries/restaurants. Both looked inviting and good though.



Smell

- No distinct good or bad smell, we went on a fairly cold day. Much of the vegetation was dead and unkempt. Off the side streets away from the downtown garbage cans weren't covered and there was some littering evident. Did not get close enough to the old GE to see if there was an apparent smell.
- It was cold so I only remember smelling pizza places. There were a lot of cars driving through down town and I definitely picked up on the smell of exhaust a few times. There were never times of fresh/flowers/plant smells.
- The restaurants were distinct to the type of food they were selling only when you were right out in front but when you would go near the plaza or in front of regular business there was no distinct or memorable smell.
- The smell of the downtown was musty and stale. There were not much trees and flowers to help this. Fumes from traffic, because there was a lot of it.

Sounds

- Lots of traffic, busy downtown but once we left the downtown, the side streets were quiet and had a deserted feel. They were unkempt compared to the downtown and there was an obvious difference between the maintenance of the two.
- Mostly traffic because this acts as a pass through rather than a downtown.
- Somersworth was very quiet in terms of people walking and talking on the day of the visit. I heard many cars driving and also noticed louder noises coming from the car repair shops. Positive conversations were heard among shop owners and locals along Market Street.
- A lot of sounds were passing by cars or the wind blowing leaves. There was a lot of cars moving but not a lot stopping. There was not a lot of social gathering going on but some people would try and talk to you even if you were uninterested in conversation.
- There were not many noises of the downtown. A few friendly voices which were nice but the rest was mostly traffic.

Unique Attractions

Members of the visit team were asked to identify a restaurant, specialty shop, or attraction that would bring them back to Somersworth:

- The thrift shop and Teatotaler cafe that was very pleasant and had great food.
- Teatotaler the cafe was a very unique place with great food.
- Teatotaler Tea House.
- I really enjoyed going into and learning about the Gathering Place.
- The place that would bring me back is the 45 Market Street Bakery and Cafe. It was a nice place to sit, have a coffee and study or read.

Live, Work, Play

The Post-Visit survey asked team members to consider whether or not they would consider living, opening a business, or visiting Somersworth.

Would you consider living in Somersworth?

Each of the five respondents said no. Their rationale:

No

- The downtown was nice but there was not much there that would attract me to live there. I feel that if I lived there I would be traveling a lot to other places.
- I'm not sure what the job opportunities are in the area.
- Doesn't seem like a thriving scene that I am looking for. I need more people, more green, more trees, and more signs of success.
- It is not a very aesthetically pleasing town and the housing was very poor and vacant in the downtown area.
- The vibe I got from downtown Somersworth was sad and worn out, I would need somewhere with more going on.



Would you consider opening a business in downtown Somersworth?

Of the five respondents, two answers were positive, three were negative:

Yes

- There is an established downtown.
- Many, many cars travel through Somersworth. If there was a way to stop them, you could have a lot of business.

No

- There were many vacant buildings that looked like previous businesses; gave the feeling that businesses were not very successful in staying in Somersworth. There was also a lot of thru-traffic but no apparent traffic that was coming through and stopping in Somersworth
- It is not a very inviting place and by the looks of it many businesses have had little success since many of them are vacant.
- There is not a promising customer base. Feel like businesses don't do well there due to the amount of vacant store fronts.

Would you consider visiting downtown Somersworth with family or friends?

Yes

- Yes, there are some great retail businesses and places to eat.
- I'd like to try other cafes, restaurants, and shops along Market Street. I also heard that there is a concert/music night sometimes....

No

- Not much there.
- There was nothing for me and my friends to enjoy in the downtown area. We would most likely go to somewhere that has more things to do for younger people or better food.
- There was not much to offer. It is not really an inviting place to hang out.

Missing Attractions

The Post-Visit survey also asked team members to consider what was missing from Somersworth's downtown. Comments:

- It could use more businesses.
- Community identity.
- People, Green Space, Public Art
- A lot of businesses are closed down and they have no standout attractions that would really make you want to go back.
- Public art was a huge thing missing. Could have given the downtown a more uplifting vibrant feel.

Change in Perception

The visit team was asked to reflect on whether their pre-visit impressions fit the impression they got during their visit to the Somersworth downtown. Some of their comments were:

Yes

- Somewhat yes. The things I have heard of Somersworth turned out to be partially true but I do think there is a huge potential for their downtown.

No

- I assessed all of Somersworth which has many strip malls and retail whereas the downtown is quite different.
- I assumed it would be thriving and quaint like other revitalized mill towns in the area like Dover and Newmarket.
- I did not think it was going to be as run down as it was.



Outstanding Feature

The survey asked about the most outstanding feature in the downtown:

- The upkeep of the downtown. It looked nice and was aesthetically pleasing.
- The river
- The historic aspect.

Top Assets

The visit team was asked to list the top three assets they observed in Somersworth:

- Quaint retail shops with locally made products
- Sidewalks and crosswalks
- Abundant parking
- Good choice of restaurants
- Town Hall, library, and public buildings
- Unique restaurants/cafes
- Parking
- Historic architecture
- Grocery store
- Signage



Top Opportunities for Improvement

The visit team was asked to list the top three opportunities for improvement in the Somersworth downtown:

- More businesses
- Better street art/aesthetics
- Through traffic
- Greenspace, parks, trees
- Food
- Crosswalks, bike lanes, and paths (especially along canal)
- Parks/recreation
- Vacancy and run-downness
- Plaza
- Landscaping/public art



First Impressions: Somersworth Assessment Map

All of the assessment data is stored on an online interactive map. To view that data, visit: <http://arcg.is/2nPE24q>

First Impressions: Somersworth

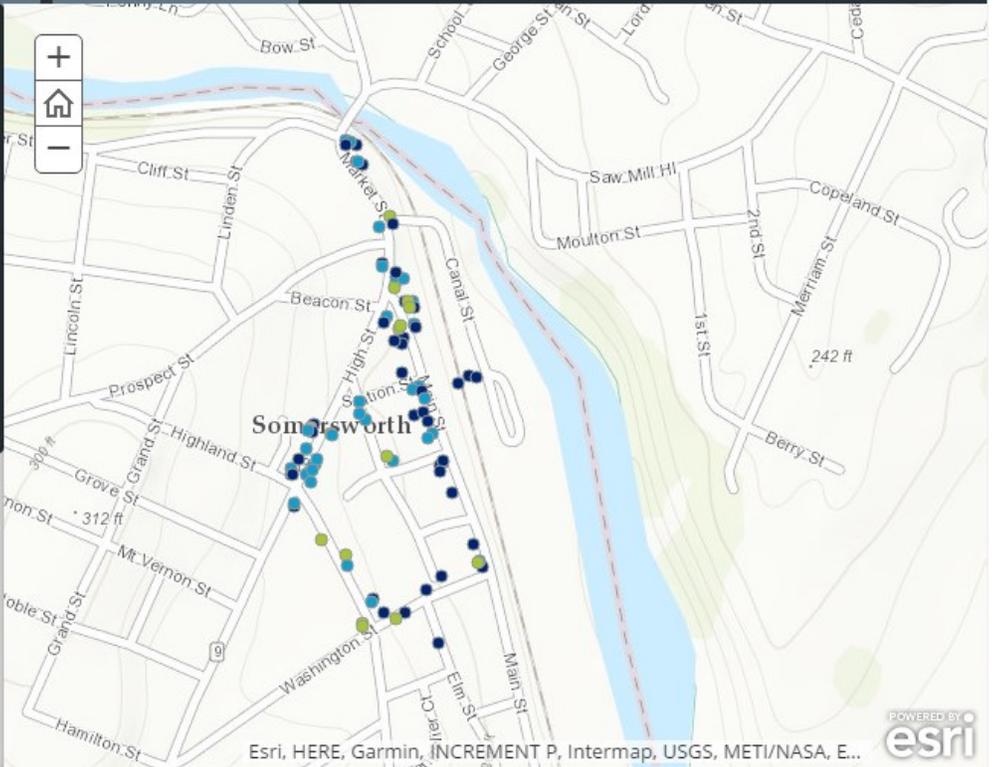
A story map     Extension

[All Points](#) [Assets](#) [Opportunities](#) [Assets/Opportunities](#)

First Impressions is an assessment program that examines a community's downtown through the eyes of potential residents, visitors, and businesses, helping communities learn about their opportunities and empowering them to take action to improve their downtown.

Six students from the UNH Planning Student Organization visited the City of Somersworth to conduct a First Impressions assessment on Saturday, November 5, 2016. The weather was cool and cloudy. The team arrived around 10am, and spent time exploring, shopping, and eating in downtown Somersworth, and departed around 1pm.

Team members were asked to assess Somersworth based on the following characteristics: businesses, community art, displays & signage, downtown entrances, landscaping, lighting, parks, points of interest, public facilities, seating, sidewalks, crosswalks & trails, streets & transportation, and waste & recycling.



Esri, HERE, Garmin, INCREMENT P, Intermap, USGS, METI/NASA, E... 

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