

AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN IS A NECESSARY COMPANION TO THE MASTER PLAN

Physical improvements are important, but without economic vitality, the underlying causes of commercial district decline may remain unaddressed. Economic Development was not included in the scope of the Master Plan. Yet, because it is an integral cornerstone of revitalization, it is both essential and critical to success, and therefore must be addressed concurrently with funding and physical improvements.

Like the companion Master Plan, the purpose of the York Economic Development Strategic Plan should be to provide a framework and reference document with the following recommended goals:

- Sustaining a year-round economy
- strengthening existing businesses – which leads to jobs
- attracting new businesses – which leads to jobs
- increasing short and longer term employment opportunities
- growing the property tax base, valuations and revenues to assist financing the implementation of the Master Plan
- describing cohesive, incremental and practical measures the Town can take to increase economic vitality in the Downtown

There is no shortcut or silver bullet to Economic Development, only sustained effort guided by a shared vision which aligns economic, political and social variables for a common purpose. The purpose of the Economic Development Strategic Plan is to “set the stage” for an economically and socially robust downtown. The Plan should offer practical recommendations that progress steadily towards prosperity, rather than radical concepts that promise to transform it.

The following topics are addressed in this chapter:

- 7.1 Leadership and the Economic Development Strategy**
- 7.2 Purpose Statement and Point of Departure for the York Economic Development Strategic Plan**
- 7.3 Pursuing an Incremental Economic Approach**
- 7.4 Crafting an Economic Development Strategic Plan**
- 7.5 Pursuing a Village tax increment financing district**
- 7.6 Pursuing Municipal Wireless Wi-Fi Network**
- 7.7 Joining the Maine Downtown Network**
- 7.8 Recommendations**

7.1 LEADERSHIP IS REQUIRED TO CREATE, IMPLEMENT AND MANAGE THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Strong clear leadership is critical while creating and managing the Economic Development Strategy. The preferred scenario is a dedicated Town staff person who is experienced, knowledgeable, and practical and who demonstrates expertise “in the office”, “on the street,” and interfacing between the office and the street. This role is typically described as a Community and *Economic Development Director*. *Ideally, this individual would provide joint leadership for both Funding and Economic Development.*

The Community and Economic Development Director would be charged to:

- **Develop the Economic Development Strategy** – Match funding sources, deadlines, and cycles for projects to create an action plan, or prioritize projects to match funding. Orchestrate multiple components into a larger whole.
- **Prepare Grant Applications** - Proactively pursue non municipal-based funding (grants and programs) as a priority.
- **Lead Municipal-based Funding** - Proactively lead municipal based tax funding, as the success of grants is unpredictable.
- **Coordinate with Design Professionals** to implement the Plan.
- **Interface with the Business Community** – Frequently interface with merchants and business leaders to understand their needs and challenges, and be an advocate to address them. Proactively pursue targeted new business potential.
- **Provide Digital Technology Leadership** - Serve as the town’s point person for a municipal wireless Wifi network, broadband and high speed internet access.

7.2 PURPOSE STATEMENT AND POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR THE YORK ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN SHOULD BE THE SAME AS THE COMPANION MASTER PLAN

The Economic Development Strategic Plan should be a roadmap to increased vitality, prosperity, and the utilization of efficient and updated technologies. As a companion to the Master Plan, its purpose statement should be the same as the Master Plan.

Establish a framework to promote the vitality and beauty of York Village as a dynamic, safe, and sustainable town center reflecting its history.

Put the “village” back in York Village

7.3 TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC VITALITY, PURSUE AN INCREMENTAL ECONOMIC APPROACH, RATHER THAN A BIG BANG

If a long-term revitalization effort is to succeed, it will require careful attention to every aspect of downtown – a process that takes time and requires leadership and local capacity building. The Main Street approach is incremental and should be seen as one of many tools that a community utilizes to generate economic and entrepreneurial growth. Both public and private sectors of the community must be involved and committed for a local Main Street program to succeed. Each sector has an important role to play and each must understand the other’s needs, strengths, and limitations so that an effective partnership can be created.

7.4 CRAFTING AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

Step 1 - Identify Economic Values & Goals

The first step is to review previous town, regional and state-wide economic development studies to identify supporting or relevant economic values and issues that can be enhanced or built upon, provided with meaning and given substance. The Town can then translate them into priorities, policies and strategies in order to meet long term goals of the Plan. This process involves conducting outreach with downtown business owners and residents, along with town committees and working groups.

Step 2 - Identify and Describe Economic Development Clusters

Economic Development Clusters can be derived from identified economic values, along with input from the outreach effort. Their purpose is to increase economic interest in the village and provide the village with branding options. Each economic cluster should have its own Policy Goals, Action Steps, and Funding Strategies (which can often be used to finance the implementation of two or more clusters).

Examples of economic clusters include:

- Tourism and Visitors Cluster
- New Business Growth Cluster
- Technology Cluster
- Creative Arts Cluster
- Culture and Artistic Performance Cluster
- Public Events Cluster
- Recreational Activities Cluster
- Historic and Architecture Cluster

Step 3 – Cross-Coordinate Economic Development Clusters with Relevant Physical Improvements for an Integrated Action Plan

Downtown revitalization is most powerful and successful when economic and physical initiatives are aligned to reinforce each for mutual benefit thereby enhancing their individual potential

7.5 PURSUE A DOWNTOWN TAX INCREMENT FINANCING DISTRICT

TIFs are powerful and widely used economic strategies by which increased revenues accrue to the Town for the purpose of public improvements, which in turn “sets the stage” for improved business and commercial activity. In addition, the Town can incur debt to facilitate building facilities and utility improvements and/or public infrastructure improvements through the issuance of municipal bonds. The TIF revenues are then set aside for the relief or payment of this indebtedness. The advantage is that the Town would not have to wait for sufficient TIF revenues to accrue over time before undertaking needed improvements. In turn, this means growing property tax valuations in the Downtown so that additional captured property taxes can flow to the coffers of the TIFs to assist with plan implementation.

7.6 PURSUE MUNICIPAL WIRELESS WI-FI NETWORK

Municipal wireless network (Municipal Wi-Fi, Muni Wi-Fi or Muni-Fi) is the concept of turning an entire downtown or village into a Wireless Access Zone, with the ultimate goal of making wireless access to the Internet a universal service. This is usually done by deploying a wireless mesh network to provide municipal broadband via Wi-Fi to large parts or all of a municipal area. Municipal broadband deployments are broadband Internet access services provided either fully or partially by local governments.

Overview - Such networks go far beyond the existing piggybacking opportunities available near public libraries and some coffee shops. The basic premise of carpeting an area with wireless service in built-up centers is that it is more economical to the community to provide the service as an essential utility rather than to have households and businesses pay private firms for such a service.

The typical design uses multiple routers deployed outdoors, often on telephone poles as shown here. The operator of the network acts as a wireless internet service provider. In the build-out of such networks, radio communication is used both for the Wi-Fi service and also for the "backhaul" or pathway to the Internet. This means that the nodes only need a wire for power (hence the habit of installing them on power and light utility poles). This "all radio" approach means that nodes must be within range of each other and form a contiguous pathway back to special aggregation nodes that have more traditional access to the Internet. Nodes then relay traffic, somewhat like a fire-bucket brigade.



Financing Networks – Financing the construction of such networks is a significant part of their lifetime costs. Usually, a private firm works closely with local government to construct such a network and may also operate it. Financing is usually shared by both the private firm and the municipal government. Once operational, the service may be free, supported by advertising, provided for a monthly charge per user, or some combination of these options.

Rockport Example - In the Town of Rockport, Maine the high speed fiber optic network is owned by the town. The installation of 1.6 miles of fiber optic cable, which cost \$75,000 to string on the utility poles, was paid for by Rockport, Maine Media College, and the University of Maine’s “Networkmaine” Program. Engineering was provided by its ISP partner, Great Works Internet (GWI). Rockport’s contribution came from a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District while the college served as the anchor network tenant allowing the project to happen.

Economic Development Advantages - Advantages of a Municipal Wireless Network to the downtown village area economy include the following:

- A network serves as an inducement and benefit for persons to visit the village area for shopping, dining or other purposes, and it provides a convenience while doing so. While in the village, visitors and customers can use their laptops or mobile devices for personal reasons or to conduct business.
- By providing an affordable method to buy, sell and advertise goods and services worldwide over the internet, local businesses gain a competitive edge which serves as an incentive or reason for locating in York Village versus another location or community.

- It enhances the desirability for entrepreneurs and creative individuals to live or do business in the village. These people desire to live in places like York with its natural beauty, quality of life - and also important today – digital access.
- The network is a public service for those who cannot afford high-price private service, thereby giving opportunities to all citizens.

7.7 JOIN THE MAINE DOWNTOWN NETWORK

No Need to Reinvent Revitalization - Like many other Maine communities and villages, York is poised to pursue unique, independent, revitalization efforts. However, there is no need for York to “reinvent revitalization.” Fortunately, there is **the Maine Downtown Center** which coordinates a well established, time-tested process for downtown and village revitalization - called the “Main Street Program.” The TDRC Project Team has worked with the Maine Downtown Center and the Main Street Program for years. We believe it is a highly appropriate and effective approach for York.

Maine Downtown Center - Established in 1999, the Maine Downtown Center’s mission is to advance preservation-based economic development in Maine downtowns. The Center and its Advisors serve as a resource for all Maine communities undertaking downtown revitalization projects or developing sustainable programs. Currently, there are 10 Main Street Program and 25 Maine Downtown Center communities, representing every county. The Maine Downtown Center serves as the state coordinator for the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s **Main Street Program**. Developed by the Trust in 1980, it has a reputation as one of the most powerful economic development tools in the nation for vibrant, healthy downtowns. The Main Street Program is currently used in 44 states and proven successful in over 1,200 communities.

The Main Street Approach is a community-driven, comprehensive and common-sense methodology to address the variety of issues and problems encountered when revitalizing older, traditional business districts. The underlying premise of the Main Street approach is to encourage economic development within the context of historic preservation that is appropriate to today's market place. This approach advocates a return to community self-reliance, empowerment, and the rebuilding of commercial districts based on its traditional assets: unique architecture, personal service, local ownership, and a sense of community.

Incremental Approach - The Main Street Approach is incremental and will not produce wholesale or immediate change. Expensive improvements often fail to address the underlying causes of commercial district decline and do not always produce the desired economic results. If a long-term revitalization effort is to succeed, it will require careful attention to every aspect of a downtown – a process that takes time and requires leadership and local capacity building. The Main Street program should be seen as one of many tools that a community utilizes to generate economic and entrepreneurial growth. Both the public and private sectors of the community must be involved and committed for a local Main Street program to succeed. Each sector has an important role to play and each must understand the other's needs, strengths, and limitations so that an effective partnership can be created.

The Maine Downtown Network (MDN) - Sponsored by the Maine Downtown Center, the MDN was launched in 2009 as a sister program to Main Street Maine using the same Four Points but at a lighter, less expensive and less rigorous pace. The MDN is ideal for communities already engaged in downtown revitalization and possibly working toward achieving "Main Street" designation.

7.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Identify a leader to develop, implement and manage economic development strategies.**
- **Use the Purpose Statement of the Master Plan as the point of departure for the York Economic Development Strategic Plan.**
- **Pursue an incremental approach, rather than a "big bang".**
- **Follow recommended steps to develop an Economic Development Strategic Plan.**
- **Pursue a Village TIF district.**
- **Pursue digital technology as a key component to economic development, and identify opportunities to fund it.**
- **Join the Maine Downtown Network.**