

Durham Revitalization Plan: A Strategic Approach to Creating a Sustainable Small Town

The University of New Hampshire
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Problem Statement:

The key issue is the revitalization of Downtown Durham, ensuring it remains economically vibrant and an attractive place for both residents and students, while also supporting local businesses. Despite the presence of the University of New Hampshire and its large student population, downtown Durham struggles with balancing the needs of residents and students, attracting a diversity of businesses, and maintaining its small-town charm.

Research has been conducted with the primary stakeholder groups in mind. The primary stakeholders in this project are the Durham Town Council, the Planning Department and more specifically Michael Behrendt, the Durham Director of Planning, downtown business owners, residents of Durham, and the University of New Hampshire, which include faculty, staff, and all current, past and future students. These groups are concerned with maintaining a vibrant, sustainable downtown that balances growth with protection of the town's character, resources, and sense of community.

Literature Review:

The revitalization of small-town downtowns presents unique challenges, particularly in communities like Durham, New Hampshire, where the University of New Hampshire (UNH) significantly influences the local economy and social structure. This literature review, supplemented by interviews with local Durham businesses, explores key issues related to the revitalization of Downtown Durham, focusing on small-town governance, the dynamics of town-gown relationships, economic sustainability, and innovative planning practices. By examining scholarly sources on revitalizing downtown areas in small college towns and incorporating insights from Durham's business community, this evaluation offers a wide-ranging perspective on how Durham can preserve its small-town charm while fostering a more vibrant, inclusive, and economically sustainable future.

Downtown Durham, New Hampshire, faces the dual challenge of preserving its small-town charm while fostering economic growth, particularly due to its proximity to the University of New Hampshire (UNH), a major driver of the local economy. Founded in 1866, UNH has become not only the town's largest employer but also a central force shaping its identity and development. The university's influence has been both a blessing and a challenge for Durham: while it fosters economic activity and vitality into the town, it also creates tensions between residents, students, and local businesses. The town-gown dynamic often leads to conflicting interests, such as differing priorities for land use, traffic congestion, housing, and retail offerings. Residents may feel that the presence of students has caused rising rents and a shift in the community's character, while students may struggle with limited housing options and a lack of affordable amenities. For local businesses, the student population offers a large customer base, but the seasonal nature of student presence and lack of community engagement opportunities can create economic instability.

Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of small-town governance, the complexities of town-gown relationships, and the need for sustainable economic strategies that can balance growth with community well-being. Over the years, efforts to bridge the gap

between the university and the town have led to collaborative initiatives aimed at creating a more harmonious relationship. However, the need for continued innovation in urban planning and development remains critical. This paper blends research on small-town downtown revitalization, exploring themes such as governance dynamics, economic sustainability, town-gown cooperation, and best practices in smart revitalization. By integrating both academic research and interviews with local Durham business owners, this analysis aims to provide actionable insights for revitalizing Downtown Durham in a way that benefits both residents and the university community, ensuring a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable future for the town.

Small-Town Downtown Revitalization

Small-town downtown revitalization involves a delicate balance between preserving the unique character of a community and responding to the pressures of economic growth and development. One of the primary challenges in this process is navigating the complex governance dynamics that arise in small communities, where personal relationships between residents and decision-makers can complicate the decision-making process. Giaimis (2024) argues that the close-knit nature of small towns creates a governance environment that is both highly personal and highly complex. Policymakers and residents are often friends or long-time neighbors, and decisions made by town officials directly impact people they know personally. This can create challenges in maintaining a professional distance, which is a common practice in larger urban settings.

However, this intimacy also offers unique advantages. Giaimis (2024) emphasizes that when governance is transparent and participatory, it fosters trust within the community, making it easier to implement revitalization strategies. In a small town, residents are more likely to understand and support the rationale behind decisions when they are part of the process. This creates a sense of shared ownership over the town's development, which can be instrumental in garnering local support for revitalization initiatives. When small-town leaders can manage these personal dynamics effectively, they can not only enhance community trust but also create a more collaborative atmosphere where all stakeholders such as the town's residents, small business owners, and university students feel invested in the town's future and success alike.

Giaimis (2024) further highlights that successful small-town governance provides opportunities for personal growth and community impact. Leaders who can navigate the complexities of these intimate relationships are often better positioned to steer revitalization efforts that align with the town's values, cultural identity, and long-term goals. This suggests that the leadership style needed for effective small-town revitalization is one that is adaptive, relational, and focused on building strong community ties. Leaders who excel in these areas can effectively manage the tensions between growth and preservation, ensuring that revitalization efforts not only stimulate economic development but also honor the town's historical and cultural heritage.

In addition to effective leadership, the revitalization of small towns also requires a willingness to embrace change and innovation. Heartland Center for Leadership Development et al. (1989) assert that effective leadership is central to coping with the challenges of small-town revitalization. One of the most important qualities for leaders to possess is an entrepreneurial spirit, which allows the leader to have the ability to take risks and explore new ways of thinking and doing. Though, the complexity of this for small town leaders is to not take risks that will be

detrimental to the residents and businesses owners. With that in mind, this entrepreneurial mindset is essential for fostering economic growth and attracting a diversity of businesses. Local leaders and businesspersons must be willing to experiment with new ideas, from business models to development strategies, while also learning from both their successes and failures.

For the purposes of this research, the willingness to take risks is particularly crucial for downtown revitalization in Durham, a small town that faces its own unique set of economic challenges. Like many college towns, Durham grapples with limited resources, population fluctuations, and competition from larger surrounding cities, such as Portsmouth and Boston. The presence of the University of New Hampshire (UNH) is a double-edged sword: while the influx of students provides a steady demand for certain goods and services during the academic year, it also leaves parts of the downtown area underutilized during the summer months, when students are away. For revitalization efforts to succeed, Durham's leaders will need to think creatively about how to build a vibrant, year-round downtown that serves not only students, but also residents and visitors. This may include changes to infrastructure, and more specifically parking, adapting planning changes to promote small businesses and spending time evaluating and proposing more robust community engagement activities that drive in residents from surrounding towns. Any of these suggestions will ultimately create a diverse, sustainable downtown that can thrive throughout all seasons.

Moreover, the entrepreneurial spirit in Durham's small-town revitalization extends beyond just business development. It will also involve cultivating a culture of innovation within the community. This can include exploring new models for local governance, embracing sustainable development practices, and actively encouraging both residents and UNH students to participate in planning and decision-making processes. The Heartland Center for Leadership Development et al. (1989) emphasize the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors, with each bringing its unique resources and expertise to the table. In Durham, for example, the town's close relationship with the University of New Hampshire offers a valuable opportunity to support student-led businesses or community initiatives that align with the town's goals. This would encourage students to later become residents and inspire the University to promote the town itself. By tapping into the creativity and liveliness of the university community, Durham could foster a dynamic, inclusive atmosphere that benefits both the town and the university, strengthening ties and driving long-term growth.

In conclusion, the revitalization of small-town downtowns, such as Durham, requires a delicate balance between preserving the town's unique character and embracing the opportunities for growth and development. Effective leadership, as highlighted by both Giannis (2024) and the Heartland Center for Leadership Development et al. (1989), is essential in navigating the complexities of small-town governance, where personal relationships and community ties can both support and challenge the decision-making process. A transparent, participatory approach to leadership fosters trust and collaboration, creating a shared sense of ownership in the town's future. In Durham, the close relationship with the University of New Hampshire provides a valuable resource to drive innovation, support entrepreneurship, and attract year-round business development. However, to overcome challenges such as seasonal fluctuations and competition from nearby cities like Portsmouth and Boston, Durham's leaders must be willing to take risks, experiment with new ideas, and create a vibrant, sustainable downtown that meets the needs of

all stakeholders, residents, students, and visitors alike. By embracing an entrepreneurial spirit, fostering collaboration, and encouraging community involvement, Durham can position itself as a model of small-town revitalization, blending growth with preservation and creating a thriving, inclusive environment for years to come.

Town-Gown Relationships

The relationship between towns and their universities, often referred to as "town-gown dynamics," plays a critical role in the revitalization of small college towns like Durham, New Hampshire. This relationship can generate both challenges and opportunities for downtown development. As Miloud and Hugo (2024) highlight, small college towns often experience seasonal economic fluctuations driven by the academic calendar. During the academic year, the influx of university students can significantly boost local businesses, but this surge in spending tends to fade when students leave for the summer months. This cyclical fluctuation creates a challenge for businesses that rely heavily on student patronage, making it difficult for them to remain viable year-round.

To address this issue, Miloud and Hugo (2024) recommend long-term economic planning strategies that go beyond short-term solutions, especially for small towns like Durham, which face competition from larger nearby cities and towns such as Rye, Portsmouth, and even Boston. These neighboring areas boast well-established cultural, historical, and economic attractions that can draw residents, visitors, and businesses away from Durham. For example, Portsmouth offers a vibrant arts scene, waterfront attractions, and a historic downtown that make it a regional hub for both tourism and commerce. Similarly, Rye's scenic coastline and affluent residential areas attract high-income residents and summer tourists. Even Boston, with its extensive infrastructure, corporate environment, and world-class cultural institutions, provides an urban experience that appeals to both businesses and talent.

In comparison, Durham is a smaller, more rural community with fewer built-in attractions to rival the economic powerhouses nearby. The town's reliance on the academic calendar and the University of New Hampshire (UNH) for economic stability limits its year-round appeal and leaves it vulnerable to fluctuations in the student population. While UNH is an invaluable asset, Durham must compete with its neighboring cities for resources, talent, and investment, often with fewer amenities and less robust infrastructure. Consequently, Durham's small businesses, tourism sector, and even residents may find themselves drawn to surrounding locations that offer a wider range of dining, shopping, and recreational activities.

To remain competitive and avoid economic stagnation, Durham needs to look beyond its traditional reliance on the university and devise a strategy that accounts for the broader regional context. Miloud and Hugo suggest that long-term economic planning should consider the evolving dynamics of neighboring communities. This could involve creating unique offerings that distinguish Durham from its competitors, such as promoting its natural resources, fostering stronger local partnerships, or developing functional markets aligned with both the town's strengths and regional consumer needs. By adopting a comprehensive strategy focused on sustainability, year-round economic growth, and a diversified business landscape, Durham can

better position itself as a competitive alternative to surrounding towns and cities, ensuring its continued relevance in a rapidly changing regional economy.

Moreover, the presence of UNH offers substantial opportunities to stimulate the growth of local retail and service industries. However, this also places Durham in direct competition with larger cities like Portsmouth and Boston, which have more established retail scenes, larger populations, and greater economic diversity. Miloud and Hugo (2024) emphasize that universities can act as powerful engines of business development, attracting not only students but also faculty, staff, visitors, and alumni, all of whom contribute to a strong consumer base. In addition, universities often foster entrepreneurial ecosystems, which can benefit local businesses, from small retailers to service providers. In Durham, this dynamic presents opportunities to grow the local economy but also requires careful planning to ensure the town differentiates itself from its more urban competitors. Based on the competitive nature of the area and Miloud and Hugo's (2024) theories, it is imperative that Durham leverage its relationship with UNH not only to support its existing businesses but also to foster new ones that can thrive despite the surrounding contest.

One way Durham could stand out is by strengthening initiatives that support student- and faculty-driven businesses. Miloud and Hugo suggest developing university-driven programs such as business incubators, mentorship opportunities, local partnerships, and student entrepreneurship initiatives. These programs could provide a strong foundation for new businesses, helping students and aspiring entrepreneurs turn ideas into viable ventures. By linking academic resources with local business development, Durham can foster a more vibrant, innovative economy, where small businesses grow alongside the university.

Furthermore, UNH can play a pivotal role in diversifying Durham's economy by offering funding, resources, and dedicated spaces for startups. By creating a supportive environment for innovation, whether through university-led grants, or access to expert mentorship, Durham could tap into new sectors and reduce its reliance on the academic calendar. Promoting student "buy-in" fosters support of the university by residents as well as support of the residents by the students. Endorsing the possibility of students also becoming residents of the town. This shift in sociological dynamics would not only make the town more resilient to market fluctuations but also allow Durham to compete more effectively with larger regional hubs like Portsmouth and Boston. Durham could foster a sustainable economy that attracts a wide range of industries, from technology and clean energy to arts and hospitality, positioning itself as a more adaptable and competitive player in the New Hampshire and New England economic landscape.

In short, by combining UNH's intellectual and entrepreneurial resources with strategic planning and innovative support programs, Durham can become a thriving hub for year-round business growth. By investing in these initiatives, the town can ensure it stands out as a unique and attractive destination for businesses, residents, and visitors, even amidst strong competition from surrounding cities and towns.

Sungu-Eryilmaz and Greenstein (2010) further emphasize the importance of collaborative and inclusive planning in fostering successful town-gown relationships. The most effective town-gown partnerships involve all stakeholders, which include town officials, university administrators, students, faculty, residents, and business owners, in the planning process. By

working together, towns and universities can identify shared goals and jointly implement strategies that address the needs of both the academic community and the surrounding residents. This inclusive approach ensures that revitalization efforts are comprehensive, balancing the diverse interests of all involved.

In Durham, a collaborative planning process could focus on improving local infrastructure and public spaces, drawing inspiration from Jane Jacobs' (1961) ideas about vibrant, pedestrian-friendly cities. Jacobs (1961), who emphasized the importance of mixed-use spaces and walkability in fostering community interaction, argued that great cities thrive when public areas encourage social engagement. To apply this to Durham, UNH could help fund public transportation projects to reduce car dependence and make downtown more walkable, aligning with Jacobs' (1961) belief that urban environments flourish when people can easily move between residential, commercial, and recreational areas. Additionally, beautifying public spaces, would enhance the aesthetic appeal of downtown, attracting both locals and visitors. By creating spaces that invite people to linger and engage with their surroundings, Durham could foster a more dynamic, sustainable local economy and encourage students and residents to stay year-round. Through these efforts, Durham could build a stronger sense of community and position itself as a more competitive, livable town.

Sungu-Eryilmaz and Greenstein (2010) argue that universities have a broader social responsibility to improve the quality of life in the neighborhoods surrounding their campuses. Jacobs (1961) portrayed the same sentiment that vibrant communities depend on active collaboration between local institutions, businesses, and residents. According to Jacobs, universities, who define themselves as central hubs of knowledge and innovation, can play a crucial role in revitalizing their surrounding areas. When universities invest in the redevelopment of nearby communities, they not only strengthen the local economy but also enhance their own image, attracting high-quality students, faculty, and staff. A revitalized downtown, for example, would make Durham a more attractive place to live, work, and visit, creating a positive environment that benefits both the university and the broader town. This would also contribute to the recruitment and retention of talented individuals, as people are more likely to settle in communities that offer a high quality of life. Furthermore, as Jacobs argued, the success of urban spaces depends on their ability to foster civic engagement and social vibrancy. Students and faculty who enjoy living in a thriving, well-connected town are more likely to participate in local activities, volunteer their time, and contribute to the town's cultural and social life. This not only enriches the university experience but also strengthens the bond between the institution and the community, creating a dynamic, mutually beneficial relationship that supports long-term economic and social growth. In this way, universities, by prioritizing the revitalization of the surrounding area, can help create a sustainable environment that supports both academic and community well-being.

In conclusion, the relationship between Durham and the University of New Hampshire (UNH) is central to the town's revitalization efforts, offering both challenges and opportunities. As Miloud and Hugo (2024) highlight, Durham faces seasonal economic fluctuations tied to the academic calendar, which necessitate long-term planning to build a year-round economy that can compete with nearby cities like Portsmouth and Boston. By leveraging its relationship with UNH, Durham can support student-driven businesses, foster entrepreneurship, and diversify its

economy to attract investment and talent. Sungu-Eryilmaz and Greenstein (2010) emphasize the importance of inclusive, collaborative planning, aligning with Jane Jacobs' (1961) vision of vibrant, walkable spaces that foster community interaction. Improvements to infrastructure, public spaces, and transportation could make Durham a more dynamic, attractive place to live and visit, benefiting both the town and the university. Ultimately, by prioritizing the revitalization of its downtown and fostering strong town-gown collaboration, Durham can create a sustainable, thriving community that enhances the quality of life for all residents while strengthening its economic and social fabric.

Economic and Social Sustainability in Small Towns

Economic sustainability is a key concern for small towns undergoing revitalization, particularly as they seek to balance growth with the preservation of community character. Rogers (2005) underscores the importance of embracing change for small towns to survive and thrive, especially in the face of evolving economic and social landscapes. In the context of downtown revitalization, economic sustainability goes beyond attracting new businesses; it involves creating a resilient community where growth is balanced with social well-being and environmental responsibility. For towns like Durham, home to the University of New Hampshire (UNH), this means fostering community cohesion, creativity, and empowerment to ensure that economic development efforts are not only financially viable but also inclusive and equitable.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of small university towns like Durham, which depend heavily on seasonal influxes of students to drive economic activity. Angel and Blei (2021) argue that pandemics require a metropolitan response, stressing that smaller towns must adapt and collaborate regionally to navigate the economic disruptions caused by events that emulate the similar consequences of COVID-19. During the pandemic, Durham, like many other small university towns, faced significant challenges as businesses relying on student patronage could no longer operate as they once did. This underscored the need for long-term economic planning that goes beyond seasonal fluctuations and focuses on fostering year-round economic vitality. Embracing new models of community engagement and business development can help Durham build a more resilient economy that is less dependent on the academic calendar and better equipped to weather future disruptions.

Much like previously mentioned sources, Rogers (2005) also emphasizes the importance of inclusive, cooperative models for development, where all stakeholders, residents, business owners, students, and university officials, collaborate in decision-making processes. In Durham, this could include cultural programming like festivals, public art displays, and student-led community events, which not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the downtown area but also emphasizes the importance of community engagement between all stakeholders of the town. During the pandemic, social cohesion became even more vital, as communities rallied around mutual support networks to help businesses and residents cope with the crisis. Social sustainability is foundational to long-term economic health, as communities that are socially cohesive are more adaptable and better able to seize opportunities.

Moreover, as Rogers (2005) points out, flexibility and adaptability are key to a town's survival. An example of this would rely on the towns ability to assess which spaces are used least

frequently. Those spaces could in turn be converted into a co-working space during the week and a venue for weekend markets, local performances, or community gatherings. These adaptable business models allow Durham to maintain a vibrant economy during off-peak times, such as the summer months when the student population diminishes, by attracting residents, visitors, and consumers from surrounding areas. Pop-up shops and temporary events also help diversify the town's economic base, reducing its dependence on the academic calendar and drawing a broader range of consumers, such as tourists. This mindset of flexibility can help Durham remain competitive with larger nearby cities while also supporting long-term economic sustainability and providing a foundation for growth even in the face of challenges like experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. By embracing innovation and adaptability, Durham can build a thriving, year-round economy that balances economic growth with community vibrancy.

It is important to recognize that economic sustainability is a key challenge for all small towns undergoing revitalization, especially as they strive to balance growth with preservation. As Rogers (2005) suggests, embracing change is essential for survival, and for towns like Durham, this means fostering resilience through inclusive planning, community empowerment, and creative economic models. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities of small university towns that depend heavily on seasonal student populations, underscoring the need for long-term strategies that ensure year-round economic vitality. Angel and Blei (2021) argue that such towns must adopt collaborative, regional approaches to navigate disruptions. In response, Durham can continue to strengthen its resilience by engaging students and residents in revitalization efforts, fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring that the town's future reflects the diverse interests of its community members. Flexibility and adaptability, as Rogers (2005) emphasizes, are also critical for maintaining vibrancy. By diversifying its economic base, Durham can reduce its reliance on the academic calendar, attracting a broader range of residents, visitors, and tourists. Ultimately, through innovation, collaboration, and strategic adaptability, Durham can build a thriving, year-round economy that supports both social cohesion and long-term sustainability.

Innovative Practices in Smart Growth

Smart growth principles provide a valuable framework for managing urban development in a way that balances growth with the preservation of a community's character, particularly in small towns like Durham. As King and Harris (1989) point out, small towns face unique planning challenges and require approaches tailored to their specific needs, unlike the dense urban development strategies applied to larger cities. In Durham, where the University of New Hampshire (UNH) plays a significant role in both the local economy and social dynamics, smart growth strategies are essential for managing development while maintaining the town's rural charm and environmental sustainability. King and Harris (1989) emphasize that rural planning must focus on flexible, innovative growth strategies that preserve the town's amenities and environmental integrity. This can include zoning regulations that encourage both commercial and residential developments that creates a vibrant, walkable downtown that accommodates growth without compromising Durham's historical character or rural aesthetics.

A critical aspect of maintaining Durham's character is preserving its infrastructure in a way that supports both growth and community cohesion. Drawing from Jane Jacobs' (1961) insights, the

importance of infrastructure in fostering resilient communities cannot be overstated. Jacobs (1961) argued that cities thrive when they are designed with an emphasis on the interactions between different kinds of spaces and the infrastructure that supports them. This includes focusing on variables such as sidewalks, small-businesses, diverse building uses, and public spaces that encourage community interaction. For small towns like Durham, this means prioritizing infrastructure that not only supports economic activity but also enhances social life and community relationships. Jacobs (1961) highlights that infrastructure should serve as the "glue" that connects different parts of a city or town therefore creating spaces that encourage people to walk, gather, and explore areas they may have never explored before. In Durham, this could mean ensuring that streets are pedestrian-friendly, parking is both accessible and non-restrictive, and local businesses are promoted and visible.

Central to maintaining Durham's character is the concept of "rural amenity," which involves preserving natural landscapes, green spaces, and a sense of place (King and Harris, 1989). Strategic land use planning in Durham should prioritize the integration of parks, walking trails, and green spaces into new developments. These spaces enhance both the aesthetic and environmental quality of the town while also providing essential recreational outlets for residents and students. Green spaces are critical to fostering community cohesion by providing venues for outdoor activities and social gatherings, helping to strengthen the sense of belonging in the town. By protecting these rural amenities, Durham can ensure its development remains both environmentally sustainable and in line with the desires of its residents, who value the town's natural beauty and small-town atmosphere.

Birkner and Máhr (2016) build on this notion by emphasizing that urban planning should be context-specific, reflecting each community's unique characteristics and strengths. For Durham, these strengths include its proximity to UNH, its vibrant mix of residents, students, and local businesses, and its natural surroundings. Birkner and Máhr (2016) argue that effective innovation in planning is not about applying a one-size-fits-all approach but rather tailoring strategies to the specific needs of the community. For Durham, this means utilizing the resources of UNH, to support sustainable local economic development. These collaborations can help Durham build a more resilient economy that balances growth with environmental and social sustainability.

The role of UNH in driving smart growth initiatives cannot be overstated. As Birkner and Máhr (2016) highlight, universities are hubs of innovation, and they can significantly contribute to the local economy by supporting sustainable practices and green technologies. UNH's research centers can collaborate with Durham's local businesses to promote sustainable development, focusing on green building practices, renewable energy, and local food systems. These partnerships could also foster knowledge exchange between students, faculty, and local entrepreneurs, driving the development of innovative business models that benefit both the economy and the environment.

Additionally, UNH can serve as a model for sustainable building practices, both through campus development and in its collaborations with the town. By incorporating green infrastructure and energy-efficient technologies in its own construction projects, UNH can set a precedent for the town's downtown revitalization efforts. The university could also help Durham implement sustainable transportation options, waste management practices, and urban farming initiatives,

which are all noted in research as critical elements of smart growth principles. These efforts would not only improve Durham's environmental sustainability but also enhance the town's appeal as a place to live, work, and visit.

Economic sustainability is central to smart growth, and by supporting green industries, renewable energy projects, and sustainable tourism, Durham can diversify its economy. This will make the town more resilient to economic fluctuations and less dependent on traditional sectors. Jacobs (1961) highlights the importance of functional infrastructure to promote collaboration. Similarly, Birkner and Máhr (2016) argue that fostering innovation through local partnerships is key to long-term economic success. Such initiatives would stimulate economic vitality in Durham's downtown area, create jobs, and attract residents and businesses that value sustainability. Ultimately, Durham's ability to implement smart growth principles will be instrumental in fostering a dynamic, sustainable, and resilient town that balances economic growth with the preservation of its unique character.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the revitalization of Durham's downtown hinges on creating a sustainable, resilient community that balances economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental responsibility. As a small university town, Durham faces unique challenges, particularly its dependence on seasonal student populations. To address these vulnerabilities, Durham must diversify its economic base, encourage year-round business activity, and cultivate strong community engagement. This requires fostering collaborative planning processes that include all stakeholders, ensuring that development efforts are inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the town's diverse needs. By promoting entrepreneurial initiatives, supporting student-driven businesses, and developing community programs, Durham can create a dynamic and adaptable economy capable of weathering future disruptions.

Also, Durham's revitalization must embrace the principles of smart growth to preserve its small-town charm while accommodating sustainable development. Prioritizing infrastructure that supports walkability, mixed-use spaces, and green areas will help foster a vibrant, community-oriented downtown. By leveraging its relationship with the University of New Hampshire, Durham can integrate sustainable development practices and green technologies, enhancing both its economic and environmental sustainability. Ultimately, the town's success will depend on its ability to adapt to changing economic conditions, build partnerships across all sectors, and ensure that growth enhances, the unique character and quality of life that make Durham a special place to live, work, and visit.

Methodology

This study aims to gather feedback from key stakeholders in downtown Durham, New Hampshire, to inform ongoing efforts for downtown revitalization. A qualitative approach was employed to obtain insights from business owners, property managers, religious organizations, and other relevant parties who are directly involved with or impacted by the town's economic and physical environment.

Participant Selection

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who hold ownership or managerial roles in businesses or organizations located in or associated with downtown Durham. The goal was to include a diverse range of perspectives from different sectors, including retail, property management, hospitality, and religious institutions.

Data Collection

Data were collected through direct contact via phone and email. Initial outreach was made using the contact details available for each participant, followed by follow-up emails to reinforce the request for participation. Due to varying availability, follow-up efforts included additional calls and attempts to contact via alternative methods. No further follow-up contacts were made after the final outreach attempts.

Interviews were intended to be semi-structured, with participants asked to provide insights on a variety of topics, including:

- The general condition and vitality of downtown Durham.
- The challenges and opportunities faced by businesses, particularly in relation to seasonal fluctuations, parking, traffic, and infrastructure.
- The role of the University of New Hampshire (UNH) and local government in supporting downtown development.
- Suggestions for improvements in downtown aesthetics, organization, and business mix.

Specific approved interview questions can be viewed in *Appendix B*.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved reviewing responses from interviews to identify common themes and recurring issues mentioned by stakeholders. Responses were analyzed qualitatively, focusing on the perspectives of established interviewees to assess the current state of downtown Durham and explore opportunities for revitalization.

Since follow-up outreach has been concluded, the analysis is based on the responses received to date. No further interviews will be conducted unless additional responses or contact information become available.

Limitations

The methodology has several limitations, including the reliance on voluntary participation and the potential for bias in the sample. The sampling approach, while intended to capture diverse perspectives from key stakeholders, does not ensure a representative sample of the entire downtown Durham community. As such, the findings may not fully reflect the experiences or views of all residents or business owners in the area.

Additionally, outreach efforts were affected by challenges such as email bounce-backs and unavailability of contact information. For example, attempts to contact a local church were unsuccessful, as emails bounced back, and phone calls went unanswered. Despite multiple follow-up attempts, including emails and phone calls, no response was received from several other individuals, leading to a limited number of interviews. As follow-up outreach has now concluded, the final sample size may not capture a broad spectrum of opinions and experiences within the community.

Contact information and follow up attempts made to participants are found in *Appendix A*.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were fully informed of the study's purpose and the intended use of the data for academic purposes. Efforts were made to ensure confidentiality and privacy throughout the research process. Consent was obtained for interviews, with participants informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Where applicable, participants were also informed of the use of audio recordings, and consent was requested for their use in analysis.

Participants were given the option to remain anonymous in the final report. For those who agreed to be named, clear distinctions were made between responses that were attributable to individuals and those that were anonymized. In cases where individuals declined participation or requested anonymity, their responses were not included in the study. Ethical guidelines were followed to ensure that all participants were treated with respect and that their rights were upheld throughout the research process.

Presumptive Findings

A noteworthy finding from *Appendix C* is the insufficient support for small businesses in downtown Durham, particularly in terms of collaboration between the University of New Hampshire (UNH) and the town. The interviewee highlighted a significant gap in efforts to drive foot traffic to local businesses, with small business owners expressing frustration over limited support from both UNH and the town government. However, the interviewee also emphasized a positive relationship with town employees and the town council, noting their responsiveness and willingness to engage in conversations about local issues. Despite this, the lack of a dedicated liaison between the town's public works department and businesses leaves businesses feeling like their voices go unheard. Themes of poor communication and lack of town promotion, specifically during high-traffic weekends such as orientation and parents' weekends, negatively visibility for small businesses. An interesting note is small business anxiety of obtaining larger "chain" businesses instead of encouraging more authentic options. The disconnect between UNH and downtown Durham has further compounded these difficulties, creating an environment where small businesses struggle to thrive despite their essential role in the town's identity.

More specifically, infrastructure challenges, particularly construction disruptions and inadequate parking, were also cited as significant barriers to small business success. Parking issues, such as the shortage of spaces and restrictive two-hour parking limits, deter potential customers,

especially those who rely on longer visits. Visitors are often concerned about penalties from parking restrictions, which limits their ability to explore Durham and frequent local businesses. While construction projects are understood to be necessary for long-term improvement, their execution without proper communication and signage has diminished the visibility of small businesses, particularly during peak times. The absence of a dedicated liaison between businesses and town departments further exacerbates these issues. To address these challenges, improving communication around construction projects, enhancing signage, and addressing parking shortages could help mitigate some of the barriers. Additionally, aligning business activities with major university events and fostering stronger collaborations between the town and UNH could provide a foundation for revitalizing downtown Durham and creating a more sustainable, vibrant business environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the interview and relevant literature, several key recommendations can be made to address the challenges faced by small businesses in downtown Durham, particularly regarding the insufficient collaboration between the University of New Hampshire and the town. Integrating insights from the given research can further enhance these recommendations by emphasizing the importance of people-centered development and the creation of spaces that encourage community collaboration and local economic activity.

1. Foster Stronger Collaboration Between UNH and Local Businesses

A critical issue identified in the interviews is the lack of coordination between UNH and downtown businesses. To address this, the town and university should formalize a partnership that supports joint initiatives aimed at fostering a thriving local business ecosystem. This approach echoes the findings of Rakhimova et al. (2021), who emphasize the need for a robust economic infrastructure that integrates universities and local businesses. Rakhimova et al. suggest that collaborations between universities and small businesses can stimulate economic vitality and help businesses become more resilient to external shocks. This could include student-led business incubators, entrepreneurship programs, and local business promotions during high-traffic periods such as orientation weekends and parents' weekends. Engaging UNH students in business opportunities such as internships with local businesses or funding start-ups would build stronger ties between the university and the local economy. Similarly, Jacobs (1961) emphasized that cities thrive when they build on the strengths of their local communities, and by integrating the resources of UNH, Durham could develop strategies to bolster its small businesses. This partnership would foster a dynamic, mixed-use environment that supports innovation and the exchange of ideas, leading to a more resilient business community.

2. Enhance Town-Gown Engagement and Promote Small Business Visibility

Another key recommendation is to create a comprehensive marketing strategy that highlights the unique offerings of downtown Durham, particularly during peak times when students and visitors are present. This also aligns with Rogers' (2005) view that

building social cohesion within a community is fundamental to ensuring its resilience and long-term success. This could be as simple as ensuring that UNH suggests visits to local places instead of steering the community to visit surrounding areas like Portsmouth, NH. A more complex suggestion would include the development of a digital platform that guides residents and visitors to local businesses, cultural events, and community activities. Infrastructure improvements, such as pedestrian-friendly streets and public spaces that encourage social interaction, are also essential to fostering a vibrant downtown. Jane Jacobs' (1961) work on the importance of “eyes on the street” highlights how well-designed, walkable environments encourage spontaneous social interactions and support local businesses. By making downtown more pedestrian-friendly and promoting social engagement, Durham can cultivate a lively, active space that benefits both small businesses and the broader community. Engaging students in community-building efforts and fostering a sense of ownership in the downtown area could also be crucial for sustaining long-term economic growth, especially during the summer months when the student population decreases.

3. Support Small Businesses Through Local Government Policies

The town government can play a pivotal role in supporting small businesses by offering targeted incentives such as tax breaks or grants to attract new startups and help existing businesses remain viable. Revising zoning laws to encourage mixed-use developments would integrate commercial and residential spaces, providing a more sustainable and year-round downtown. This approach not only supports small businesses but also aligns with the principles of smart growth, which King and Harris (1989) advocate for in rural communities. They stress that zoning regulations should prioritize flexible, innovative strategies that promote both economic and environmental sustainability. By fostering mixed-use developments, Durham could create a vibrant urban fabric where businesses cater to both students and residents, ensuring that the downtown area remains dynamic year-round. In addition, the findings of Rakhimova et al. (2021) highlight the importance of sustainable policies that balance growth with environmental and social responsibility. By incorporating these principles into local government policies, Durham could ensure that its growth is both economically viable and aligned with the values of the community.

4. Improve Communication and Infrastructure During Construction and Parking Adjustments

A pressing concern identified in the interviews is the lack of communication during construction projects and the strain that parking issues place on small businesses. To address these challenges, the town should establish a dedicated liaison between businesses and the public works department to ensure clear communication about construction schedules, parking changes, and traffic disruptions. Jacobs (1961) highlights the importance of functional infrastructure in supporting urban vibrancy, arguing that effective public spaces and transportation systems are essential for fostering a thriving community. In this context, improving signage, providing advanced notice of construction projects, and creating clear pathways for pedestrian movement are crucial to maintaining business flow during disruptions. Additionally, parking issues, need to be

addressed by expanding parking capacity or implementing more flexible parking options. As Angel and Blei (2021) suggest, small towns facing economic disruptions must adopt flexible, regionally coordinated approaches. This includes rethinking parking strategies to accommodate the needs of both residents and visitors while also ensuring students abide by the parking restrictions applicable for them. By promoting alternative transportation methods while also addressing the needs of the community, parking demand and make the downtown area more accessible to all.

By implementing these recommendations, Durham can create a more supportive environment for small businesses, strengthen the relationship between the town and the University of New Hampshire, and foster a exciting, sustainable downtown. These recommendations are informed not only by the interview findings but also by established research and the work of key scholars. As Jacobs (1961) suggests, a thriving community requires interconnected infrastructure, active public spaces, and diverse local economies. The application of smart growth principles (King and Harris, 1989) and collaboration models (Rakhimova et al., 2021) will help Durham build a more resilient and innovative business ecosystem. With targeted support from the local government, improved communication strategies, and stronger partnerships between the town and the university, Durham can become a model for sustainable, community-driven revitalization.

Reactions

Based on the interview insights and the literature reviewed, I expect the reactions of key stakeholders to the recommendations for downtown Durham to vary, with both positive responses and concerns regarding feasibility, resource allocation, and potential disruptions. Each major stakeholder in this revitalization plan will likely view the proposed initiatives through different lenses, based on their respective priorities and challenges.

University of New Hampshire (UNH):

UNH is likely to respond positively to the recommendations that promote student engagement, entrepreneurship, and community service. Initiatives such as student-run business incubators or collaboration between UNH and local businesses align with the university's mission of providing real-world learning opportunities and enhancing student involvement in the local community. However, there may be concerns regarding resource allocation, as these programs would require faculty time, administrative support, and potentially financial investments. Additionally, UNH could have hesitation on how it benefits them to collaborate with the town in these efforts.

To address these concerns, the recommendations can be framed as mutually favorable, highlighting how such initiatives could bolster both UNH's academic and community outreach goals. Highlighting tangible benefits such as improved community relations, positive community collaboration and further promotion of the functionality of academic programs, the university could see the value in these proposals. Additionally, the university could be encouraged to leverage existing resources or utilizing inevitable inactive programs to create cost-effective solutions that support local business vitality and while also reducing the financial burden.

Local Government:

The local government is likely to be receptive to recommendations that align with its economic development goals, such as enhancing downtown vitality and fostering stronger connections between the town and UNH. However, there may be concerns about the financial feasibility of implementing new incentives, infrastructure improvements, or marketing campaigns, especially given the town's budget constraints. Local officials may also experience anxiety regarding the potential for resistance from residents or businesses who are concerned about the preservation of their individual businesses.

To address these concerns, the town could prioritize low-cost, high-impact initiatives that require minimal financial investment, such as community events, improved signage, and collaborative marketing with UNH. Furthermore, involving local businesses in the planning process and ensuring clear communication throughout construction and parking adjustments will help ease anxieties about disruptions from the community. Implementing small, cost-effective gestures to this key group of stakeholders will allow them to adopt a more flexible mindset surrounding larger adjustments. Additionally, securing external funding sources and utilizing external resources, could help offset the costs of larger infrastructure projects like parking garages. By demonstrating the potential long-term economic benefits of these strategies and highlighting how they can be implemented incrementally, the town could mitigate concerns about financial risks.

Small Business Owners:

Small business owners are likely to appreciate the potential for increased visibility, foot traffic, and collaboration with UNH, particularly if the university becomes more involved in promoting local businesses. Many business owners will see the value in initiatives such as joint marketing efforts, student internships, and community events that attract more customers. However, some owners may express concerns about increased competition from larger businesses, the potential for zoning changes that could affect their operations, and the disruptions caused by infrastructure improvements. For example, the construction of a parking garage could create short-term inconveniences, even though it may benefit the businesses in the long run.

To address these concerns, it will be crucial to involve small business owners early in the planning and decision-making process, ensuring their voices are heard and their specific needs are addressed in a timely manner. Offering clear communication about construction timelines, as well as developing strategies to minimize short-term disruptions, such as temporary parking solutions, would help mitigate potential frustrations. Additionally, the town and university can work with business owners to develop strategies that promote collaboration rather than competition, ensuring that small, independent businesses maintain their unique identity and role in the downtown ecosystem. Providing business owners with a sense of ownership over the revitalization efforts will help build trust and foster a more cooperative atmosphere.

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Appendix A

1. New Moon (Retail Business)
 - Proprietor: Krystal Pirini
 - Contact Information: krystal@newmoonnh.com | 603-241-8240
 - Follow-up Status: Called on 12/3 and sent a follow-up email on 12/8. Interview scheduled for 12/12.
2. Pendexter Property Management, LLC (Property Management)
 - Contact Person: Mark Henderson
 - Contact Information: 603-868-5738 | www.pendexter.net
 - Follow-up Status: Called on 11/30, 12/3, and 12/8. No response received.
3. Properties Owned by Pete Murphy (Real Estate Owner)
 - Contact Person: Pete Murphy
 - Contact Information: 617-312-4112 | Petermurphy6@comcast.net
 - Follow-up Status: Called on 11/30, 12/3 and sent a follow-up email on 12/8. No response received.
4. St. George's Church (Religious Institution)
 - Contact Person: Nathan Bourne, Rector
 - Contact Information: nathan@stgeorgesdurham.com
 - Follow-up Status: Emailed on 11/30 (bounced back), called on 12/3 and left a voicemail, called and emailed again on 12/8. No response received.
5. St. Thomas More Parish (Religious Institution)
 - Contact Person: Andrew Cryans, Father
 - Contact Information: andrewstm@comcast.net
 - Follow-up Status: Emailed on 11/30, followed up on 12/3 and 12/8. Response received on 12/9 but declined participation.
6. Scorpio's (Restaurant)
 - Contact Person: Graham Camire
 - Contact Information: 603-969-7557 | graham.camire@yahoo.com
 - Follow-up Status: Called on 11/30, 12/3 and sent a follow-up email on 12/8. No response received.
7. Sweetened Memories Bakery (Bakery)
 - Contact Information: 603-868-7253 | www.sweetenedmemories.com
 - Follow-up Status: Called on 11/30, 12/3 and sent follow-up email on 12/9. Declined participation on 12/10.

Appendix B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DOWNTOWN DURHAM BUSINESSES

Introduction

Hello, my name is _____. I am an MPA student at UNH and am conducting this interview for the Durham Planning Department as part of my course of studies. The purpose of this interview is to obtain your feedback as an owner/manager of a business to foster the revitalization of downtown Durham.

This interview should take about one hour or however much time you can afford. Is it okay if I record our conversation to assist with the accuracy of my report? I am the only person who will have this recording. Thank you and let's proceed.

Confidentiality

- 1) Is it okay if we include your name on the final report or would you prefer that you remain anonymous? (If the response is anonymous, just note below the type of organization being interviewed).

Background

- 2) What is your name?
- 3) What downtown-related organization are you connected with?
- 4) What is your position/role with this organization?

Overall Condition of the Downtown and General Questions

- 5) Do you think there is a sense of place or a particular brand for Durham's downtown?
- 6) How do you think the downtown is doing now, in general?
- 7) How has the downtown changed over the years?
- 8) Have you changed your business strategy in recent years?
- 9) Overall, what are the strengths of the downtown?
- 10) Overall, what are the weaknesses of the downtown?
- 11) How do you deal with the seasonality of UNH's schedule?
- 12) What does it take for a business to be successful in downtown Durham?

Economics

- 13) How do you think the current mix of businesses in the downtown is working?

- 14) What types of businesses do we need more of?
- 15) What types of businesses do we need less of?
- 16) Do you cater more to students, residents, people outside of Durham or all of the above?
- 17) Is it difficult to find good employees?

Traffic

- 18) What do you think of the one-way traffic system downtown?
- 19) What could be done to improve the traffic situation downtown?

Parking

- 20) What do you think of the parking situation downtown?
- 21) Are there enough parking spaces?
- 22) What could be done to improve the parking situation?

Pedestrians, Bicycles, and Transit

- 23) Do you think many people come to the downtown on foot?
- 24) By bicycle?
- 25) By bus?
- 26) What could we do to make the downtown more accessible for those who do not come by car?

Infrastructure

- 27) How is the infrastructure in the downtown? Town water system?
- 28) Town sewer system?
- 29) Stormwater management?

Police, Fire and Town Services

- 30) Please comment on the quality of police service to the downtown
- 31) Please comment on the quality of fire service to the downtown
- 32) How are other Town services in general?

Design, Aesthetics, and Landscaping

- 33) Do you think the downtown is physically attractive?
- 34) What specific changes would you suggest to enhance the architecture, sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, handling of trash, and general aesthetics of the downtown?
- 35) Do you think that the Town should allow and encourage taller buildings? 3, 4, 5, 6-story buildings?

Promotion and Events

- 36) Do special events downtown, including those sponsored by the Town help your business?
- 37) What kinds of events or promotions would you like to see more of?

Organization

- 38) How could the various parties involved in the downtown be organized differently to better serve the downtown?
- 39) What role do you believe that Town government should play in the downtown?
- 40) What role should the University play in the downtown? What kinds of programs could the University implement to support the downtown?
- 41) If you could see just one major change in the downtown, what would it be?
- 42) What is your vision for what a highly successful downtown would look like?

Conclusion

- 43) Is there anything else related to the downtown revitalization of Durham that you would like to share that we have not covered?
- 44) Thank you very much for your time and have a wonderful holiday season!

Appendix C

Confidentiality

1. Is it okay if we include your name on the final report or would you prefer that you remain anonymous? Yes – okay to attach information to interview.

Background Information

2. What is your name?
 - Krystal Pirini
3. What downtown-related organization are you connected with? New Moon
4. What is your position/role with this organization?
 - Opened New Moon in 2022, a women's retail consignment store. Feels there is a misconception with students about the store. She is familiar with Durham and UNH, and the town's community-driven aspect appeals to her. She was prepared for slower times and was okay with that because it is opposite of traditional retail. The first year was great, but the second year was less successful due to construction. New Moon shares space with a gelato store on Madbury.

Overall Condition of Downtown and General Questions

5. Do you think there is a sense of place or a particular brand for Durham's downtown?
6. How do you think the downtown is doing now, in general?
 - 2024 was a difficult year due to construction, poor communication, and a lack of signage, which made it seem like the town didn't care. The absence of a liaison between businesses and the public works department contributed to the issue. The business missed important weekends like parents' weekend and orientations, which led to decreased sales. However, things have improved now that construction has finished.
7. How has the downtown changed over the years?
8. Have you changed your business strategy in recent years?
 - Focus on community sustainability, as Durham is a small town, and there's a desire to give back to the community.
9. Overall, what are the strengths of the downtown?
 - Feels safe and has the potential to be an amazing college town. Positive relations with the town council and office.
10. Overall, what are the weaknesses of the downtown?

11. Would like to see more support for small businesses. The town and UNH don't work together, and this causes small businesses to feel unsupported. There is also a lack of traffic directed toward local businesses.
12. Parking is a problem. It's hard to park for more than two hours without needing to move your car. This discourages people from spending a day in Durham.
13. Durham supports big businesses over small businesses, which puts smaller businesses at a disadvantage.
14. How do you deal with the seasonality of UNH's schedule?
 - Opened with seasonality in mind and appreciates the flexibility that it offers.
12. What does it take for a business to be successful in downtown Durham?

Economics

13. How do you think the current mix of businesses in the downtown is working?
14. What types of businesses do we need more of?
 - Small, sustainable businesses.
15. What types of businesses do we need less of?
 - Big businesses.
16. Do you cater more to students, residents, people outside of Durham, or all of the above?
 - Primarily residents and people from outside Durham.
17. Is it difficult to find good employees?

Traffic

18. What do you think of the one-way traffic system downtown?
19. What could be done to improve the traffic situation downtown?

Parking

20. What do you think of the parking situation downtown?
21. Are there enough parking spaces?
 - There are more parking permits issued than available spaces. Paid \$1,500 in tickets and finds the parking situation difficult. It discourages people from spending a day in town.
22. What could be done to improve the parking situation?
 - Possibly a parking garage.

Pedestrians, Bicycles, and Transit

23. Do you think many people come to the downtown on foot?

24. By bicycle?

25. By bus?

26. What could we do to make the downtown more accessible for those who do not come by car?

Infrastructure

27. How is the infrastructure in the downtown? (e.g., town water system)?

28. Town sewer system?

29. Stormwater management?

Police, Fire, and Town Services

30. Please comment on the quality of police service to the downtown.

31. Please comment on the quality of fire service to the downtown.

32. How are other town services in general?

Design, Aesthetics, and Landscaping

33. Do you think the downtown is physically attractive?

- Yes, it is physically attractive but could be prettier. The town could focus on enhancing businesses first and then work on aesthetics.

34. What specific changes would you suggest to enhance the architecture, sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, handling of trash, and general aesthetics of the downtown?

- Town should focus more on increasing business variety rather than aesthetics. If people come down more often, the town can focus on making the space more visually appealing.

35. Do you think that the Town should allow and encourage taller buildings? (3, 4, 5, or 6-story buildings)?

Promotion and Events

36. Do special events downtown, including those sponsored by the town, help your business?

37. What kinds of events or promotions would you like to see more of?

Organization

38. How could the various parties involved in the downtown be organized differently to better serve the downtown?

- Better collaboration between businesses, UNH, and the town. Doesn't understand why UNH doesn't promote the town more.

39. What role do you believe that town government should play in the downtown?

- Supporting businesses, promoting more vendors, artists, and local events. More marketing to help small businesses.

40. What role should the university play in the downtown? What kinds of programs could the University implement to support the downtown?

- UNH could support small businesses better, especially during walking visits and by promoting small businesses.

Vision for Downtown

41. If you could see just one major change in the downtown, what would it be?

- A major event like Market Square Day or Apple Harvest Day to attract people and bring more collaboration between the town and university.

42. What is your vision for what a highly successful downtown would look like?

Conclusion

43. Is there anything else related to the downtown revitalization of Durham that you would like to share that we have not covered?

- Business revitalization is key to everything else. The town needs to hold itself accountable.

44. Thank you very much for your time and have a wonderful holiday season!