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Capstone

Revitalization of Downtown
Durham, NH.

Introduction

Downtown Durham, New Hampshire has the potential to become a model for how small-town downtowns can thrive alongside a major university. The University of New Hampshire (UNH) located right in the heart of downtown, brings the student population within walking distance of many local shops and amenities. This revitalization plan aims to create a downtown that is economically vibrant, culturally rich, and welcoming to all which includes residents, students, faculty, and visitors.

My vision is to transform downtown Durham into a hub of innovation, culture, and connections, where “town and gown” relationships flourish (Chenoweth, 2017). By enhancing existing assets, addressing challenges that arise, and fostering new opportunities, this plan lays out the groundwork for a vibrant and sustainable future that meets the needs of our diverse community.

This plan will consist of research of similar downtowns and things that they have done to revitalize. I will also suggest what I think will work for downtown Durham. Because involving locals is important, I will be reaching out to several businesses and speaking with either the owner or management (Rapple, 2020). I will be asking them several questions to get an idea of what is working and what is not. I also would like to find out what the Town of Durham can do to make the businesses flourish, or if there is something that the town is currently doing that is not working.

Below is a list of some current strengths and opportunities that I see:

-Proximity to UNH- The university provides over 15,000 students and staff (not including families and friends that visit throughout the year). This allows for opportunities to collaborate on initiatives that benefit the broader community.

-Walkability- the downtown is a compact area and with its close proximity to the UNH campus, makes walking and biking a more viable option for transportation.

-Engaged Community - Durham residents are invested in their town, and they share a desire for a vibrant downtown. This could be beneficial for the future funding of any projects that need to be done.

-Economic Potential- Existing businesses and underutilized spaces offer opportunities for revitalization and could also for new collaborations with UNH that could benefit both the university and the community.

Overall expanding partnerships with UNH can bring in new innovative businesses and cultural programming that benefits both the campus and the town. Encouraging the growth of businesses that serve students, faculty and residents such as: coffee shops, bookstores, boutiques, restaurants, and bars, can help rejuvenate the downtown. Also, keeping the farmer's market active, bringing in some live music and art can attract more foot traffic and help with community pride.

Below are some of the weaknesses that can be addressed with a revitalization:

-Limited retail and dining options- There could be a more diverse array of businesses that not only meet the needs of the 15,000 students and staff at UNH, but to also meet the needs of residents and visitors. These businesses and restaurants/bars need to be particularly open during the evenings and weekends both during the school year and during the off season.

-Vacant/underutilized properties- The downtown area does feature several properties that are either vacant or underutilized. A Google search shows restaurant, retail, and office space currently available for lease. According to the master plan, the Town of Durham needs more mixed-use development, and they need to balance the student housing needs with the commercial activity and they need to consider the long-term viability of the retail and service businesses (Town Of Durham, NH, 2015).

-Pedestrian and Bicycle Accessibility- There is high pedestrian traffic due to the proximity to UNH. A lot of students also have access to bicycles. This traffic can conflict with the vehicular traffic on Main St. and Pettee Brook Ln. This is a common problem amongst many small-town downtowns.

-Parking- There is limited parking downtown and ensuring there is enough parking should be in the plan. Providing more parking will make Durham a Park-Once-And-Walk community (Town of Durham, NH, 2015).

-Civic and Public Spaces- The lack of civic spaces has been identified as a weakness in fostering social interaction and community cohesion outside of the university (Town of Durham, NH, 2015). The town needs to invest in public spaces and parks to support social gatherings, events, and community identity.

The strengths and weaknesses are ones that I have identified. I will be speaking with several business owners during the writing of this plan, and those owners may identify different problems that I did not foresee.

Interviews with Residents:

While waiting for businesses to reply, I joined the Durham Community Forum on Facebook to speak with residents about what they think about the downtown area and what they would like to see from the Town of Durham in the future. Speaking with people that frequent downtown often, will provide a good point of view on what it needs.

First, I spoke with Daniel D. He gave me permission to quote him, and I am leaving his last name out for his privacy. He has been a resident of Durham all his life and he is a UNH alumni. Daniel visits downtown about three to four times a week and usually drives there. When downtown he usually visits the grocery store, pharmacy and the bank, with the occasional coffee or a meal with friends. Back when Wildcat Fitness was open, Daniel would go downtown several times a week to work out.

I asked Daniel what he thinks the downtown area could use the most. He stated that he thinks the downtown needs more businesses that would appeal to other people besides just the UNH students. He would like to see another community gym open because it was affordable. Since Wildcat Fitness in Mill Plaza closed, the only other local option is the UNH Rec Center, but the membership is expensive, and it is not family friendly. He also expressed concern that there isn't any free parking near the UNH Rec Center. Daniel shared with me that he investigated opening his own community gym, but there were no suitable locations outside of the plaza. He stated that he did find a location that would be suitable, but that UNH currently occupies the space. He does not like the fact that UNH occupies multiple commercial spaces downtown, and he stated, "I feel like the university is slowly eating away at our town".

Daniel did not specifically state that he believed that the downtown needs more restaurants, but he did state that the town used to have Bella's Casual Dining and Ciao Italia Ristorante. Bella's closed due to Rite Aid taking over its space in the plaza and Ciao had trouble attracting their customer base because of limited parking and because a lot of people would not think to look at downtown Durham for fine Italian dining. This is the second time that Daniel has mentioned parking to be an issue.

I asked Daniel what he thinks the Town of Durham could do to make the downtown better. He stated that he thinks that Durham needs to market itself and come up with its own identity. Currently when people hear of Durham, NH they only think of UNH. People from out of town do not think of going anywhere else in town. Daniel stated that some people think that without UNH the town would not exist, but the town did exist from 1633 to 1893 before the university moved in.

One quote that I liked was “Durham largely stands in the shadows of UNH, both literally and figuratively”. He said this before stating that the high-rises of UNH (Holloway Commons, Stoke Hall, and the Paul College) dominate the skyline, while the downtown area has buildings that are short and one story tall. Daniel would like to see the downtown rezoned to allow for larger buildings that more closely resemble the university’s architecture. By doing this, it would allow for a more attractive community for the businesses and residents. He stated that many of the new buildings are vinyl and ugly and that he would like to see more brick like downtown Portsmouth, Dover, and Exeter.

The next topic that I anticipated being brought up was traffic issues. With every downtown, there are usually traffic issues. Daniel stated that Main St. gets backed up to Park Ct. because of a “pointless stop sign”. He did not state which one, but I can assume it’s the one located at Main St. and Madbury Rd.

Parking came up again when Daniel stated that he did like the free parking at Mill Plaza, but that there is vacancy in that plaza because of its uncertainty. No one wants to open a business there because they do not know if the plaza is going to remain. There is a fear that the plaza is going to close and that the area is going to be redeveloped. He stated that he is not personally a fan of the proposals that he has seen for Mill Plaza. He stated that they would benefit the university community more than the Durham community and that they would cause a parking nightmare. Daniel would like to see more affordable housing for people other than students instead of luxury student housing. He stated that it is sad that the zoning ordinance requires a minimum size for apartment units, which gives student housing developers an advantage. “Durham calls itself a welcoming community, but they don’t seem to welcome people who make under a certain amount”.

The last thing Daniel stated is that Durham needs to accept that it is not a small town anymore. UNH has grown, as well as the needs of the region. He stated that with a few improvements to downtown and changes to the zoning regulations, Durham can be made into a nice large town with that classic New England charm that everyone loves.

The next resident that I spoke with was Elizabeth B. She stated that she goes downtown one to two times a week and mainly to grocery shop, go out to eat/takeout, and just to go on a walk. When I asked her what the downtown needs, she stated that it could use another sit-down restaurant and more benches outside for people to sit on.

I asked Elizabeth what she thinks the Town of Durham could do to make the downtown better. She stated that a stop sign could be added on Main St. right before Mill Rd. She stated that when she parks on Main St., it's hard to anticipate the oncoming traffic along with the start/stop traffic from Mill Rd. when she is backing out. Elizabeth would also like to see some kind of recreation outdoor space, but she does not have any suggestions on where that could go.

Next, I spoke with Richard M. Richard stated that he goes downtown almost daily and that he travels by car. He mainly goes downtown for grocery shopping, banking, and to get takeout every couple of weeks. I asked him what the downtown needs and he stated that it was difficult to answer that. He stated that even before malls and big box stores, most people went to Dover or Portsmouth to do their shopping. He brought up the point that the downtown is overshadowed by UNH, and the student population is gone for five months out of the year. "It's almost like doing business in a resort community", Richard stated. Another thing of note that he said was "what people want versus what can survive has always been a big issue".

Business Interviews

The first business owner I interviewed was Scott Letourneau who owns the Tideline Public House located at 15 Newmarket Rd. in Durham. Though the business is not directly downtown, it is about a 5-minute walk. Scott did give me permission to include his name in this report.

In general, Scott does not think that the downtown has a specific brand or identity, and he stated that he thinks that is part of the problem that it is having. He believes that the downtown has been in a slow decline. He stated that some businesses, such as Ciao and The Big Bean, have closed and now it does not seem like the downtown is doing that great. He stated the space has been left mostly empty.

Scott told me that over the years there has been a shift from independently owned businesses that catered to everyone, to more businesses that are geared strictly to college students. For this reason, there really isn't a reason for the townspeople to come downtown. This has not affected Tideline because Scott stated they cater to everyone and not just students.

Scott told me that he believes that the downtown area has a good municipal parking lot and ample parking for the area. He also believes that with the downtown so close to UNH, this brings in a lot of foot traffic to the businesses that are located close. This does not affect Tideline because he stated the 5-minute walk is too far for the students. On the negative side, the downtown has several buildings that have not been updated inside or out and look unattractive to the customer.

Tideline hires a lot of UNH students and when they are gone for the season, they must adjust to that. Scott stated that when the kids are gone it is their busiest season because they attract a lot of non-student customers. But to the contrary, during the school year, they do receive a lot of business from UNH faculty groups from various seminars that are going on. Also, with the concerts that will be going on at the Whittemore Center, should bring in more business.

For the current mixes of businesses, Scott thinks that are working ok but not great. He stated that most of the businesses are geared more towards the students, and even brought up the fact that there are three vape/convenience stores that are not at all attractive to residents. He stated that he believes that the downtown needs more restaurants, specifically a Mexican restaurant would do well. And that the downtown does not need any more vape shops.

Scott stated that he believes that the traffic system works and that he has lived in places with similar traffic patterns, and it worked there as well. As previously stated, he believes there is ample parking and the only way to improve would be a parking structure, but he doesn't know of a place where it would go. He did state that most people who come downtown are by foot from UNH or close by neighborhoods.

Scott told me that all the town infrastructure has been good at his business and that he does not have any complaints. He also told me the down services (Police, Fire, Public Works) have been excellent.

For the attractiveness of downtown, Scott told me that it is spotty. There are some good-looking buildings, but there are also ones that are old, dated, and not attractive. He stated that there is nothing else that he could change to the downtown and the stuff the town has done (lights, trashcans, etc..) are all good. He does encourage the taller buildings because that would

bring in more people and “more people allow businesses to thrive”. He just hopes that they are affordable and more middle class.

Special events do not necessarily affect Tideline because it is not downtown. But they do help the businesses right downtown. He mentioned big events like Dover’s Apple Harvest Day, where they shut down the whole downtown and bring in vendors.

The last thing that Scott shared with me was that the taxes and utility bills are too high, and they are crippling to his business.

The next interview I did was with Liz Shepard who is the general manager of University Downtown, which specializes mainly in student rentals. Liz gave me permission to use her name in this report. During our conversation, Liz stated that she doesn’t now believe that the downtown has an identity. She stated that it is quaint, and it is nice because of that, but that it does not feel vibrant and that there is not a lot of opportunity due to its small size. She stated that the downtown has potential because it is quaint, and people like that.

Liz explained that University Downtown has changed the way they operate in a way that they have added a lot more amenities to the building. They have added a rooftop deck with turf so that the residents can have green space. They have also added a gym because there isn’t one in the area, a Zen lounge, and a snack lounge.

Liz stated that there are not a lot of different businesses downtown and brought up the same topic that Scott did, there are too many convenience stores. There are not a lot of restaurants, and the downtown is lacking a good breakfast restaurant. She stated that for a business to succeed downtown, they need to have a good balance between the students and

townspeople/faculty. Liz also thinks the downtown could use a good arcade/game sort of business where people can go and play games and socialize.

The one-way traffic system works for Liz. She stated that she likes it and really does not have an issue with the way it is. She does think that the town needs to put in more crosswalks, specifically by JPs. She would also like to see those flashing lights that activate when the pedestrians walk through the area before the crosswalk (like the ones at Phillips Exeter Academy). She stated that at times the pedestrians can be hard to see, and this would help.

The parking situation works for anyone coming downtown to visit a business. There usually isn't a problem finding a spot. Liz stated that there is an issue with student parking for students that live downtown. She stated that the planners have made mistakes with allowing so much student housing but not taking into consideration where these students are going to park. The only thing that might help with the parking would be a parking structure, but Liz is unsure of where that would go.

Students are mostly the pedestrians that come on foot to the downtown area. The people that normally come downtown are by car, or recently, by scooters. To improve the downtown for those not coming by car, Liz suggests putting another bike rack or two or maybe scooter storage. All the town's infrastructure downtown has been good, and the town services have been great. The DPW staff was great when they were doing the work on Madbury Rd. The downtown is physically attractive in some ways, but buildings like Libby's and Scorpion Bar look dumpy and run down. Liz stated to make it look better, the town could put some planters on the sidewalks. She does not think the town should allow taller buildings because it would change the character, especially on Main St.

Town sponsored events do not benefit her business due to her business being housing, but there are some retail shops below that would benefit. She stated that she does not know about the events when they are put on. She stated that the town could do a better job letting her know when there is an event going on. She stated that a street fair, with live events, vendors, crafts, music, or a parade, would be beneficial.

For the downtown, Liz believes that the town government should be the leaders in a revitalization and that they should gather voices and listen to those voices. She stated that they need some kind of committee that can listen to the voices of the residents, businesses, and others. Liz also believes that UNH should have a voice and be involved in the revitalization.

Liz's overall vision for the downtown is one with a strong variety of retail, food, and entertainment. She would like to see a downtown with more than just bars. She would also like to see a civic space built somewhere, but she doesn't know where. I did add a question about how the taxes are and she stated, "Taxes are brutal". She stated that the owner of the building must have a higher rent for the retail businesses and that those businesses are hard to fill because the rent is cheaper in other towns, such as Dover.

The next interview I did was with Jeremy from Wildcat Pizza. Jeremy is the owner and gave me permission to use his name and business in this paper. Jeremy stated that there is not a particular brand to downtown Durham. He stated that UNH helps the downtown area, but the residents tend to stay away from downtown. Overall, the downtown is struggling with many places for sale or out of business. To avoid this, Jeremy has adjusted the hours of his business from 11am-8pm 7 days a week to closed Mondays and Tuesdays, only open for dinner on

Wednesday and Thursday and open 11am-8pm Friday-Sunday. He also cut his hours due to the UNH schedule.

Jeremy told me that the only real strength to downtown is its proximity to UNH. Other than that, there isn't really anything else he could think of. He stated that the weakness is that there aren't any events that the town puts on to draw people into the downtown. He would like to see something like a Christmas tree lighting or an event like that. He did mention that events downtown will not directly help him because his business is not directly downtown, but those events would help the businesses that are directly downtown. Specific events that he mentioned were Christmas tree lighting, something for New Years Eve, and Halloween events.

Jeremy feels that for a business to be successful downtown, they must adapt. They must realize who the clientele is and what they want. For his business, he had to change his menu for what the people wanted. He found that he was carrying too much product that was not selling. Jeremy caters to everyone but during the school year he sees mostly UNH kids, so he has to sell what they like.

The current mix of businesses downtown are not working, Jeremy stated. He brought up the topic of how there are too many convenience stores that are in such proximity to each other. I have heard this from both Scott and Liz as well. Jeremy thinks that there could be a better mix of businesses. He thinks the downtown needs a bigger grocery store (the Hannafords is too small and expensive), a kid's toy store, and more bars.

When I asked Jeremy about the traffic situation downtown, he stated that he doesn't love the one-way system and that he thinks it hurts his business, but that it could not be changed. He stated that there are too many crosswalks, and that it can be hard to get downtown. He also thinks

that there are too many scooters. Jeremy also brought up some frustration because the town does not let him put his “open” sign on because some people stated that it was distracting to drivers.

Jeremy doesn't think parking is an issue downtown. He feels that there is enough parking and that it is not an issue for his business because he has a parking lot next door. He does think that parking may be an issue downtown when there is a UNH event going on. The only thing to improve parking, would be a free lot somewhere, but he isn't sure where.

For transit and infrastructure, Jeremy states that most of the people downtown are UNH kids and they come by foot. The next biggest thing that he has seen recently is scooters. He stated that there could be more bike paths (not lanes) like those that they have in Keene. For the infrastructure, Jeremy said that other than low water pressure, everything else is good. Also, all of the other town services (police, fire, public works) are all good.

Jeremy stated that in regard to physical attractiveness, the downtown could use some work. He stated that they could use a town Christmas tree across from Clarks. He also told me that he heard the town spent seven thousand dollars on flowers from one area downtown and that he thinks that it is not a good use of funds. He said that there needs to be more lights downtown, especially during the twilight hours when it is very hard to see people that are trying to cross the street. He also thinks that the town should allow taller buildings to bring more people in.

Jeremy thinks that the town government needs to be more involved and spend more time talking to the businesses about issues. He would like the town to ask him directly how they are doing as a town and what they could do. He also stated that there are too many hoops and red flags to do anything in town. He stated that UNH should help with local businesses and not ones out of town. He mentioned the marketing class doing a project for a business in Portsmouth. He would like to see them work with local businesses to help Durham.

One major change that Jeremy would like to see is aesthetics. He said the current look is ok, but it could be better. One thing he did say is “they get money to do things, but I don’t know what they use it for”. He brought up the seven-thousand-dollar flowers again. He also brought up the high taxes which forced his rent to be higher.

The next person I spoke with did want to remain anonymous. He is the general manager of a store downtown. He stated that the overall brand of Durham is that it is known as a village. The “village” is struggling and that there are no products available for the people in the community. He stated that the downtown is not able to give what the residents want. Over the years the downtown has changed a lot. There used to be just competition from the mills. There used to be general merchandise stores downtown but that the internet and malls have killed them. He stated that his business has changed a lot in recent years. He used to sell everything, but he has changed the products that he sells to cater more to UNH.

The strengths of downtown are that it is a pleasant community, it is safe, and it is close to residential homes. The weaknesses are that stores can’t offer variety, and no residents come downtown. He stated a big weakness is that UNH takes from the downtown with their offerings. They have things on campus that the students need and therefore they do not have to come downtown. He said that there used to be a Christmas fair and that they do not have it anymore because UNH held one and all the students just went to that. As for the schedule of UNH, he said that he knows when the events are and that he must make it when school is in session so that it can carry him over until the next season. He stated that the Durham businesses association used to get him the information on events but that they do not do that anymore. Lastly, he added that

for a business to be successful downtown, they must have the products and the hours that best serve the students because they are the primary customers.

The current mix of businesses is working but it hurt when Ciao and Big Bean closed. He stated that he does not know what types of shops downtown needs more of, but he thinks that there needs to be less pizza shops. He told me that he caters more to the university students and a lot to the parents.

For the current flow of traffic, he stated that it works. He stated that there are no issues with the one-way pattern and that he does not like the stop sign at the post office. He brought up that when a vehicle is coming into town off Rt. 4, the signs direct them to 155 and bypass downtown. He stated that during large events, the traffic is pushed away from downtown, and all those people are going away. He did state that he thinks that there is enough parking and that if they were to build a town garage, they should do it at 66 Main St. or collaborate with UNH and do it at C lot.

When I asked about how people get to downtown, he stated that they mainly come by foot and recently scooters. I asked about infrastructure, and he stated that the town water is excellent, but the town sewer is iffy, and some spots are not accessible to public works. He stated that the police services were good but that there used to be a downtown foot patrol and that would be nice to see again. He stated the fire department is “the best in the world” and that the town's public works is good.

The downtown is physically attractive for the most part, and has a good mix of buildings, but the planning code zoning is restrictive in downtown and there is no theme. He stated that there isn't anything else he would do downtown and that twenty years ago it was completely torn

up and redone. He would like the town to allow taller buildings but not over 4 stories because that is practical and cheaper to build.

For promotional events, he would like to see the town do more, but he believes that UNH would “hijack” it like they did with the Christmas fair. He mentioned that the town did a spring fling and that UNH did a carnival the same day. He would like to see homecoming become a bigger event and have the town shut down Main St. He stated that the town could have a band in Mill Plaza.

When I asked about the town government’s role in downtown, he stated that the town council has opinions about downtown, but they are not the biggest consumers of downtown. He stated that their actions are not “business friendly” he told me that UNH needs to not have events when the town wants to have them and that they should partner together. He also mentioned that the West End development in the master plan will further take business away from downtown. One major change downtown would be the redevelopment of the Mill Plaza. He stated that it is old and worn. He does not have an exact vision for a highly successful downtown, but that they need more housing and that the zoning laws need to be redone.

Lastly, he told me that the “taxes are killer” and that they affect how the companies invest in their properties. He stated that UNH gets what it wants. He also wanted to add again that the town is not business friendly.

My next interview was with Karen Meyer from The Three Chimneys Inn. She is the general manager there and told me that I have her permission to use her name in this report. Karen could not think of a particular brand for the downtown, but she did state that her business was separated from the downtown and is often forgotten about. She told me that in general,

downtown is not doing well because businesses have been coming and going for quite some time. To keep her business doing well, she has had to change over the years. She stated that she has moved her bookings online to multiple booking websites and has started using “Open Table” for the tavern.

Karen stated that for a business to stay successful downtown, they have to maintain their posted hours, and they have to have a good relationship with UNH. As for the seasonality of UNH, Karen stated that she tries to have other events when the students are not around. She has weddings in the summer months and holiday parties in the winter. She caters to everyone that wants to stay there. She also told me that she has held parties for some of the sororities and fraternities at UNH.

The current mix of businesses downtown is not working. Karen said that if she needs to get something like paint, that she must go to another town because there isn't even a hardware store around. She stated that downtown needs a store like that or a store that sells a variety of things. She said that she doesn't even think that she could buy a ream of paper downtown if she needed it. She stated that there are too many pizza shops.

When I asked about traffic, Karen stated that the one-way system does not bother her and that it has been that way for a long time now and that she is used to it. There isn't anything that she could think of that would improve traffic. She stated that she has heard from people that the parking situation is not good, but every time she must go downtown, she never has an issue finding parking and that there are enough spots. Of course, to make it better, a parking garage would be an option, but she doesn't know where it would go.

Karen told me that there are a lot of students that walk downtown and take a bus. She also mentioned that she has some guests that have arrived by train, even though the train station

is a mile away. She stated that those rental bikes, like the ones they have in the cities, would be a nice addition to the town. She suggested having them in surrounding towns as well because then the renters can return them in other locations. As for the town infrastructure, everything is great. She stated that they have the water tested biannually and they have not had any problems.

Karen stated that both the police and fire departments are very good. She was not pleased with the public works department. She told me that she had reached out to them in May about getting permission for a tree and a plaque at Jacksons Landing in memory of her late cousin. She was told she would have to speak with them to arrange it and she emailed "Rich", but she has not heard from them at all.

The downtown is not physically attractive. She stated that it is clean, and she has seen the sidewalks being pressure washed, and the lighting is good. She told me that it would be nice to have a water feature at one of the parks, or some art from the school. She thinks that UNH could be utilized more to make it look better. She does not think that the town should allow for taller buildings. She stated that where she is there is very little she could do because she is in the historic district. If the town allowed taller buildings, then the buildings would not flow with the rest of the downtown.

Events that are put on by the town do not really help the Three Chimneys Inn. She stated that if there is something downtown, it doesn't affect her business because it is not directly downtown. She could not think of any events that she would like to see and said that Durham couldn't do events like "restaurant week" in Portsmouth because they do not have enough restaurants. She also stated that Durham used to have a business association, but no one would show up to the meetings.

Karen believes that the town government should not play a role in any specific business and should just be there to maintain the downtown streets, sidewalks, and anything else that the town is responsible for. She believes that UNH should be more active with the business community but that the businesspeople need to want to go to the school and work with them. She stated that it goes two ways and that the businesses must want to work with UNH.

Karen stated that she does not know of a major change that the town could do. She stated that so many things have come and gone. Her vision of a highly successful downtown would be something like Portsmouth or North Conway Village. Karen thinks that the town needs to somehow incorporate the downtown area with the historic district. She believes that the outskirts tend to be left out.

I was able to speak to five out of seven of the businesses I was assigned. I reached out to the other two several times and did not get a response. Part of the reason I interviewed residents was for this reason. I wanted the Town of Durham to get more than enough information about the downtown from my project.

Common Problem Found

After conducting all the interviews and looking over all the answers, I found one common problem with Downtown Durham is that there is a lack of cohesive and diverse business mix. Because of this, the downtown fails to meet the needs of both the local community, tourists, and the UNH students and staff. Some of the observations to support this are:

-Too many convenience stores- this was mentioned by multiple people, and it creates a redundancy instead of a variety

-Limited diversity in businesses- there is an absence of adequate grocery stores, breakfast restaurants, entertainment venues, and retail shops that appeal to a broader audience.

-Focus on UNH students- Many of the businesses primarily cater to the UNH students, this drives the residents from the downtown and limits the amount of foot traffic when school is not in session.

-Lack of balance- There is a theme that the businesses that are downtown do not cater to both the students and the local community. This is a missed opportunity that could create a more vibrant and inclusive downtown.

Solution- Create an incentive program to attract diverse businesses while fostering a collaboration between the town, local businesses, and UNH.

One other problem that I heard a lot was that the taxes are high, and this limits business. The Town of Durham can develop a business incentive program where they can offer tax abatements, grants, or subsidized rent for businesses that fill gaps in the needs such as grocery stores, entertainment venues, and there could be some family friendly establishments. The town of Brunswick, ME offers a Downtown Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to encourage the investment in the underserved sectors of town (Brunswick, ME, n.d.).

The Town of Durham could also benefit from a collaboration with UNH. They need to establish partnerships where the university supports and promotes the local businesses. UNH could promote businesses to students, or they could provide marketing support via student projects. But like Karen said, the business owners are going to want to work with them. The

University of Massachusetts and the Town of Amherst, Massachusetts have formed a collaborative called the UTAC. This is made up of Amherst residents, UMass Amherst town and university officials, and UMass Amherst students. (Amherst Massachusetts, n.d.) “UTAC is an advisory council to the town manager and chancellor which provides leadership and ideas, while building support for future joint endeavors”.

The Town of Durham could benefit from forming a collaboration with UNH that is like the one that Amherst did. By doing this, it will allow the town to let the university know what their concerns are and what the interviews have revealed. I believe it would be very important to include residents as well because a big problem that I heard was that the residents do not come downtown.

Part of the collaboration with UNH could be organized events downtown that benefit the businesses. These events should appeal to both students and residents, such as street fairs, live music, and seasonal celebrations. The events should occur during peak and off-peak seasons to ensure that something is always being done, like what is done in Ithaca, NY (Festivals in Ithaca, NY | Annual Events & Seasonal Attractions, n.d.). Ithaca, NY has events year-round that bolster the traffic downtown and helps the businesses promote. An example of an event in another town is the Christmas Parade in Exeter. The town shuts the road down and the businesses stay open later to cater to the influx of residents and visitors to the area. They also do a similar thing with the Independence Day Festival.

Another thing that will help bring a mix of businesses into downtown is to allow more mixed-use zoning in the Central Business District (CBA). By doing this it will reduce restrictions on any new businesses that want to come into downtown and will allow for retail space on the ground level and resident space on the upper levels. This will increase the foot traffic downtown

which will directly impact the businesses. An example of this is how Keene, NH uses mixed-use zoning that integrates the businesses and residents.

All these things will work because having more of a mix of businesses will attract a broader customer base which will increase the economic activity, and it reduces the dependence on one demographic (the students). Having more businesses that cater to everyone and not just students will make sure that the downtown stays busy even when the students are not there. The collaboration with UNH will ensure that the town and the university are working together with the one goal of ensuring that the downtown is successful and that it is vibrant and open to all. Similar college towns have implemented these strategies, and it has resulted in thriving downtowns.

The Town of Orono, ME, home of the University of Maine, is of similar size to Durham and has the State University. Their downtown appears to be thriving. There are several restaurants and bars, barbershops and salons, and a civic space for summer concerts. (Downtown Orono, n.d.) There seems to be plenty to do for everyone and not just the college students. A big difference is that the University of Maine is not located directly downtown like UNH is. This is a large hurdle that Durham must overcome because the students are always downtown. I do think that if Durham was able to bring more businesses that cater to everyone and not just students, that would drive residents to want to come downtown and that would make for a successful revitalization.

In conclusion, The Town of Durham faces challenges that many small-town commercial hubs encounter: a lack of vibrancy, insufficient diversity of businesses, and limited engagement between all the key stakeholders. Despite these challenges, there are ample opportunities for revitalization through strategic planning and collaborations with the community and with UNH.

Durham can enhance its downtown appeal with more diverse businesses and stronger partnerships with UNH. Ultimately a shared vision between residents, business owners, the town government, and the university will be the key to fostering a downtown that serves as a thriving center for the entire community.

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