



2019

First Impressions: Derry

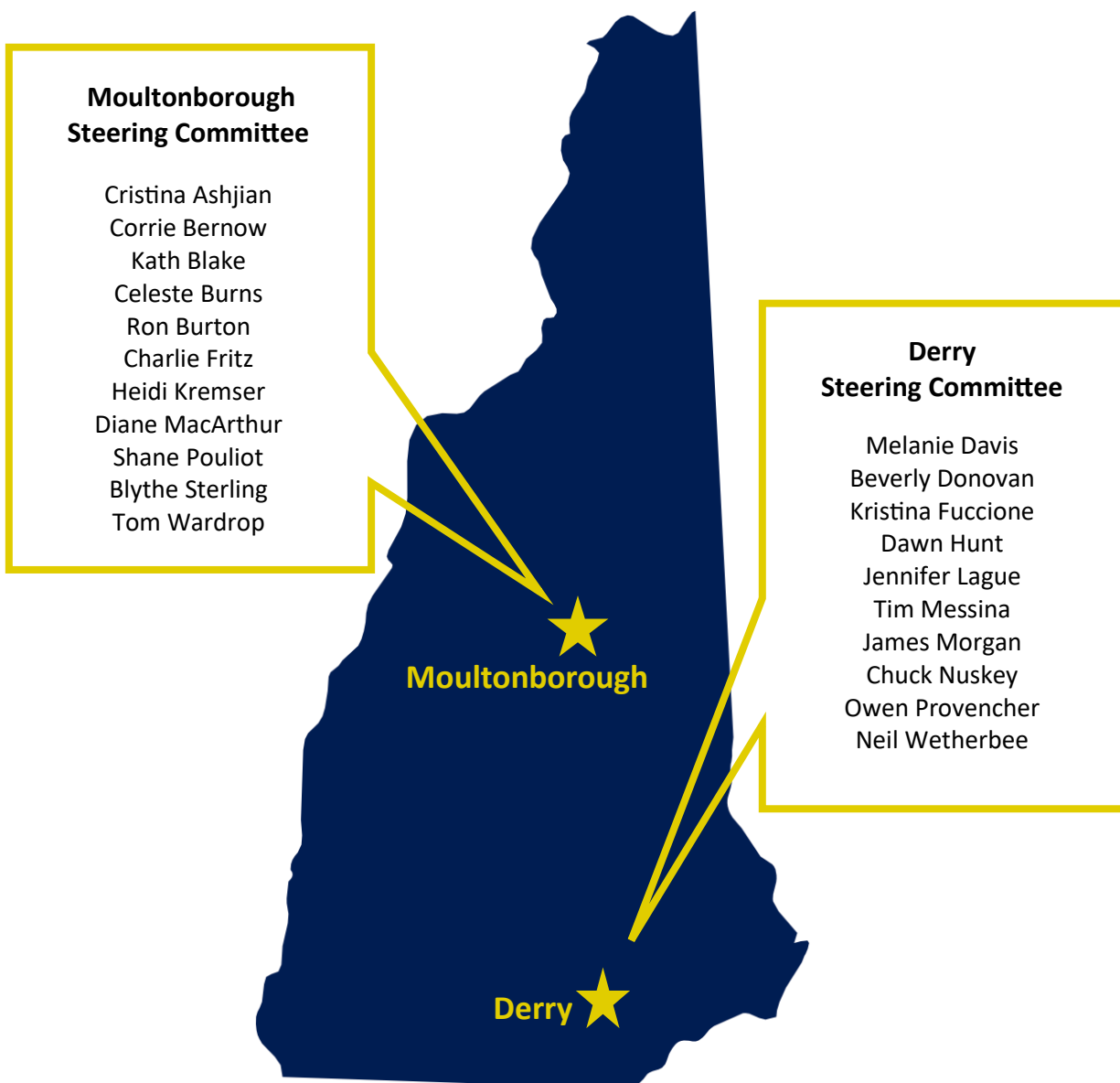


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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Derry and Moultonborough Volunteer Steering Committee members who donated their time and effort to this project.



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

Introduction

The look and feel of a downtown can influence the decisions of potential residents, visitors, and businesses. A vibrant downtown serves as a gathering place, a place for people to dine, shop, and conduct business. New Hampshire First Impressions is designed to help a community learn about their downtown's existing assets and opportunities for improvement as seen through the eyes of first time visitors. This is accomplished by matching two communities to conduct "secret shopper" assessments in the other community and report their findings. Possible outcomes include:

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

The First Impressions assessment consists of training meetings, a Pre-Visit Survey, a visit to the other community to conduct the assessment, and a Post-Visit Survey. During the visit, steering committee members are using the following characteristics to conduct the assessment.



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

About Derry

The Town of Derry is located in the Southern Tier Region, traversed by I-93, less than an one hour north of the Boston Metro Region. As of the 2017, Derry has an estimated population of 33,312, making it the fourth most populous community in New Hampshire. Derry is bordered by the communities of Londonderry, Windham, Salem, Atkinson, Hampstead, Sandown, Auburn, and Chester. Derry is part of SAU 10, The Derry Cooperative School District, with Pinkerton Academy, serving as the public high school for Derry, Chester, Hampstead, Auburn, Hooksett, and Candia.

Derry operates with a councilor-manager form of government. The town includes both a business/retail area as well as a historic downtown. The town is also known as the birthplace of astronaut Alan Shepherd and the location of attractions such as the Robert Frost Farm and the Rockingham Recreational Trail. Among the largest employers in Derry are: the Derry Cooperative School System, HCA Health Services of NH, Pinkerton Academy, the Town of Derry, Walmart, Hannaford's, Shaw's, and Fireye.

Forming the Derry First Impressions Steering Committee

Derry and Moultonborough began the process of forming diverse and representative First Impressions steering committees in late spring, 2019. Steering Committee members met with UNH Cooperative Extension staff to learn about the First Impressions process, what characteristics are important in a downtown, and how to conduct a downtown assessment. Over the summer they completed a pre-assessment survey, an assessment visit to their partner community, a post-assessment survey and debrief, and a joint community debrief. Data from these efforts were compiled and analyzed by UNH Extension staff in order to identify overarching themes in both assets and opportunities and complete a final report. This report will be shared with the community of Derry at a public forum on October 7, 2019.

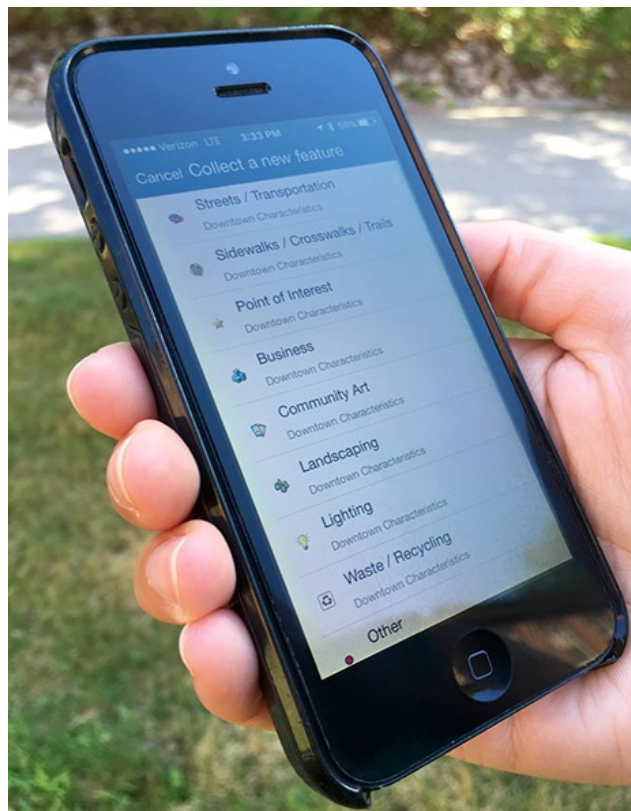


Pre-Visit Survey

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

First Impressions Assessment Visit

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



Post-Visit Survey

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

Post-Visit Steering Committee Debrief

About two weeks after the visit to Derry, the steering committee held a debrief meeting in which visitors reflected on the experience, shared their thoughts. This feedback provided additional context and background information to the Assessment data and Pre- and Post-Visit Surveys.

Joint Steering Committee Debrief Meeting

The joint debrief meeting took place on Tuesday, September 17, 2019 in Concord, NH. Members from the steering committee in Derry and Moultonborough participated, and were provided the opportunity to share their findings, network, and discuss their assets and opportunities.

Community Forum

The Town of Derry and the Town of Moultonborough will both host community forums in October 2019 to share the results of the downtown assessment with community members. A UNH Extension staff member will present the findings and then community members will break into small groups for discussion and action planning.

Key Findings

Asset

Assets are strengths in the downtown—where characteristics exist and are excellent and well-maintained.

Location. The location of Derry was a theme of the First Impressions assessment. Moultonborough steering committee members noted the proximity of Derry to I-93 and neighboring cities of Nashua, Manchester, Concord and Boston, MA.

Walkability. Moultonborough steering committee members commented on the walkability of Derry's downtown. Sidewalks and brightly colored crosswalks increased the ease of navigating the downtown area.

Businesses. Another asset highlighted in Derry's downtown were the number of locally owned businesses that were attractive and unique. Moultonborough steering committee members enjoyed visiting the various shops, eateries, a coffee shop and distillery.

Size of downtown. Derry's size both in terms of its population and the extent of its downtown are unique in New Hampshire. The large area of its downtown provides the square footage for development opportunities and a landscape to further make Derry a destination.

Parking. Moultonborough steering committee members were impressed with the ample, accessible and free parking options in Derry's downtown.

Recreation network. Another asset highlighted by Moultonborough steering committee members was the network of recreation opportunities. The downtown Rockingham Rail Trail is easily accessible, well-marked, and near free parking. The rail trail connects to other recreation amenities including Hood Park and the hockey rink.



Key Findings

Opportunities

Opportunities are those characteristics that exist or do not exist, where there is room for improvement.

Signage. While Moultonborough steering committee members commented positively about wayfinding signs in downtown Derry, there is opportunity to improve signage to welcome visitors to downtown Derry. The proximity to I-93 provides a great way to capture travelers on the highway to the downtown with signage.

Attractions. The Moultonborough steering committee identified many assets that Derry has as attractions, like the Farmers Market, Rockingham Rail Trail, Hood Park and Opera House. There is opportunity to leverage these assets to make Derry a destination through holding and promoting additional events, like concerts or a film festival.

Beyond Main Street. Moultonborough steering committee members noted that “downtown” was concentrated on Broadway Street. There is opportunity to expand the downtown area by focusing on bringing vibrancy to side streets.

Facade Improvements. Another opportunity identified by the Moultonborough steering committee was to address vacant storefronts and improve the appearance of facades. There is opportunity to think creatively about how to fill the storefronts and beautify their appearance.

Traffic. While the Moultonborough steering committee noted that they generally felt safe walking around downtown Derry, many felt that traffic on Broadway Street moved quickly and was heavy at times. There is opportunity to implement traffic calming measures to slow cars down and encourage people to stop and explore downtown.



Before the Visit

Pre-Visit Survey

The Moultonborough Steering Committee completed the Pre-Visit Survey prior to visiting Derry. The survey provided an opportunity to research Derry on the internet and social media and describe their perceptions. The results of the survey are as follows:

Number of times committee members have visited Derry, NH prior to First Impressions

The majority of the committee had never been to Derry before. Only two members of the Moultonborough Steering Committee indicated they had been to Derry once before.

General Impression

Steering committee members were asked to record their impression of Derry before completing any research. The following are their responses:

- I truly don't know a great deal about Derry because I really don't have a reason to visit for anything.
- Significantly larger population, higher household income, younger population. Closer to large population centers of Concord and Boston, and has a long term large employer to lure in town residency.
- This will be my first visit to Derry. Judging by the information found on the internet regarding the town of Derry, it is much larger than the town of Moultonborough with a larger and slightly more diverse pool of employers. Its size also lends itself to a larger school district having several private school offerings located in Derry as well. Being the birthplace of astronaut Alan Shepard and the home of Robert Frost, there is some history worth noting there. In addition, there are several other notable figures from the area.
- No impression, I just know the location, I've been to the Robert Frost Farm for an event.
- I only know that Pinkerton Academy is in Derry.
- Compact town east of Route 93. Envision it to be very populated, lots of commercial properties with little open acreage available. Pinkerton Academy is the only thing I know of town.

Internet Research

Steering committee members were asked to use a search engine to search for "Derry, NH" in order to record what websites are at the top of each search. Each committee member recorded the first three websites. The websites most frequently recorded were: Town of Derry website, Zillow, the Town of Derry Facebook group, Wikipedia, and TripAdvisor. This information may provide Derry a brief insight into the effectiveness of their online materials and marketing. Five members indicated the usefulness of the town website to find information about Derry, including the Citizen Action Center feature, the Discover Derry page, and the Business Resources page. Two members indicated that real estate pages provides interesting insight into their visit to Derry. All but one member indicated they were relatively easily able to find a sufficient general information about Derry to support their pre-visit planning.

Pre-Visit Survey Results

Desire to Visit

Steering committee members were asked if they would want to visit Derry with family or friends, and to share why or why not. Comments included:

Yes

- Yes because of the close proximity to Boston and amenities listed like the trail, public gym, downtown with a "cool vibe" (reference to a Facebook post), and parks for kids. It is a place I would check out on my way south to visit family.
- Yes, there are interesting historic buildings and sites, such as Pinkerton Academy and Robert Frost Farm
- Yes, I would to go to photograph Robert Frost's Home, listen to music at Tupelo Music Hall, and to tour Pinkerton Academy.

Maybe

- I would be interested in the Hot Air Ballooning and I'm sure there are other reasons to visit with additional research.
- The only thing that I found that would currently draw me to Derry would be to possibly attend a performance at the Tupelo Music Hall.
- Probably, the businesses seem to be varied and restaurants look interesting

No

- It would not be high on the list of towns or cities to visit even if only in New Hampshire. Derry lacks attractions on a scale to attract tourism

Welcoming

Steering committee members were also asked if Derry seemed welcoming to people to visit, live or open a business based on their online review. Comments included:

- I wouldn't say that Derry is a strong contender for visitors but there may be things that could entice me to make the trip
- Based on research, I'd say yes since they include information on starting a business and economic development plus the Red Oak information on housing
- Their town website seems friendly and open to visitors. After researching the town, I would definitely give it a chance. The Facebook rants over taxes and local government corruption is not so different than other places. Overall it seems they are doing a decent job on Google and Facebook. Zillow lists the elementary school at only 4/10, which would be a concern for living there. The high school ranking of 7/10 is an improvement, but I would want to know why elementary school is listed so low. Housing costs seems to be affordable but would want to know why property taxes aren't improving schools.
- It's hard to say. I could find information about where to eat in Derry. I was also able to find real estate information so I could look for houses. There wasn't an overwhelming amount of information about the town that was put out by the town itself. Not much information regarding things to do, places to visit, etc.
- Looking at the Town website, I did see that there's an economic development advisory director and committee, which appears to be active, and I saw a map of ERZ zones established in 2018
- Probably a good place to open a business. The Chamber of Commerce website is very welcoming, and appears to promote development and support of new businesses
- On paper it's hard to tell. I would not live in a place unless it was for family or work. I find southern NH too crowded so it would be a place I was drawn to.

About the Visit: Moultonborough visits Derry

The steering committee consisted of eleven volunteer assessors. The committee visited Derry on August 13, 2019. The weather was pleasant. The committee arrived mid morning, spent time exploring, shopping, and eating in downtown Derry, and departed mid afternoon.

Pre-Visit Training

Prior to the assessment date, participating steering committee members met with three UNH Cooperative Extension staff, for training on conducting a First Impressions assessment. The committee learned about what makes a community vibrant, and reviewed the downtown characteristics that comprise a First Impressions assessment. The steering committee members were also instructed on how to complete the assessment using the mobile application and/or the paper booklet.

The Derry Assessment Area

The Derry Steering Committee defined the First Impressions assessment area as shown on the map

Town of Derry First Impressions Study Area



Findings

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

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



Assets

Building Reuse:

The steering committee observed how many businesses have transformed previous buildings, such as the old rail station, which helps draw people to the downtown. Comments included:

- Example of well-presented building and business
- Reuse of historic train station for Italian restaurant, nice outdoor seating.
- Tavern in historic firehouse.
- Lovely renovated train station is now an Italian restaurant. Love the colors of the building, plantings out front draw your eye to business.
- New businesses. Shows growth but lacks quaintness. Has potential and expansion opportunities.



Mix of Business Types:

The steering committee noted that downtown Derry had several quaint, locally-owned businesses that were unique and attractive. Comments included:

- This is all I could want in a local eatery! It has great food selection, collaborations with other local businesses, even free cards to spread kindness. The atmosphere is friendly and kid-conscious. I love that they are environmentally conscious as well #haystraws. Love photography advertisements which shows diversity. This is the coolest cafe I've been to in all over New England in the last year!
- Craft distillery. Folks like places to go to do things.
- Historic and new buildings mixed use housing and business, awnings, historic Oliviero Building with signs on posts, barber shop, Italian block!
- Sporting goods store is awesome! Love that they let kids skateboard outside—keeps them out of trouble.
- I will come back to Derry for this thrift store! Love it.
- Good mix of business types: restaurants, sporting goods, convenience store, drug store, etc. Did not seem to be a lot of vacant space.
- Funeral homes—a reality. Good service to have in town and locally owned.
- Martial arts academy—good optional activities for kids.
- This is a really cool local diner that adds character to the downtown.
- Great mixed use in this town.
- What an incredible restaurant with outdoor seating right on main street.
- Nice Feed and Grain Store and green space.
- Great cafe with inviting atmosphere, great menu featuring local meats, produce, baked goods, local artists. Lots of seating, good use of space.
- Hardware and larger supply type stores one block off main street, with housing, mixed use with apartments.
- Funky diner very bright and chrome, nostalgia, unexpected in main drag.

Infrastructure:

The steering committee mentioned the amenities around businesses that contributed to feelings of vibrancy. Comments included:

- They have broadband and cable throughout town!
- Welcoming storefront and sidewalk benches, planters.
- This is such an incredible facade. Do they open these and let people out into the sidewalk?
- Signage directory.

Businesses

Opportunities

Appearances:

Many comments related to empty storefronts needing upkeep and facade improvements, as well as developing vacant lots. Comments included:

- Two vacant storefronts where businesses have gone elsewhere.
- There's more empty storefronts than I was expecting. There are so many cars driving up and down this street. It'd be great to think of creative ways that the town can start to fill some of these.
- Fair number of older vacant buildings. Consider one style code for occupancy like one color or facade.
- With the wires exposed and falling down condition it looks unsafe.
- In need of improvements.
- Nice business right on main street but it could be spruced up a bit to look more like the one across the street.
- Looks like a good opportunity to revitalize this building. So close to downtown it could bring people off the main st to stay in the area.
- Inconsistent condition, appearance of facades.
- This facade needs some improvement. Signage takes away from downtown character.
- You have some good looking buildings and others that need some facade improvements. It would really increase the attractiveness of downtown.
- Feels like the downtown is transitioning where some businesses are visually attractive and others could use façade improvements. Façade improvements would be a great investment.
- Shop which could use some updating. Flowers outside might make shop more inviting.
- Eclectic appearance but dated inside. Next to empty store leaves this block feeling wanting more.
- Key spot in downtown could use appearance upgrade.
- Generic look. Need something to bring town together... Code update?
- Building could use some updating, but good hanging plants and planters.
- This building's patio looks unsafe. Should be better marked off so people don't trip even during construction.

Limited Hours of Operation and Activity Types:

Members of the steering committee noted that many of the great and interesting businesses only had limited hours of services or served niche customers, making it difficult to patron. Comments included:

- Distillery exciting but very limited hours. I wanted a gin and tonic Tuesday!
- Community resource building mostly for AA groups.
Good people get help locally but seems utilized by only one group?
- There needs to be a little bit more business diversity.
There are some great coffee shops and local restaurants but maybe some local retail and other shops to bring people downtown to buy things.



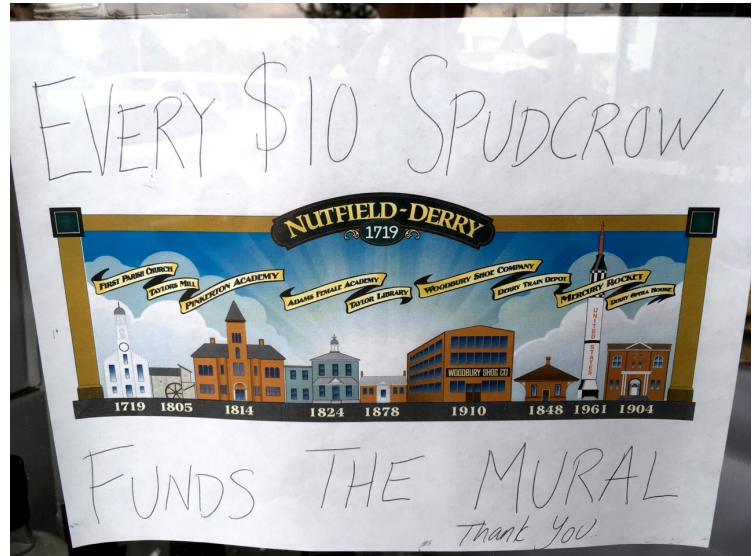


Assets

Fundraising:

Many comments responded well to using creative fundraising methods to pay for more artistic efforts downtown, such as sidewalks and murals. Comments included:

- Nice use of sidewalk area-fundraising.
- Fundraising spudcrows (potato heads on scarecrows) for mural great way to get community engagement.
- Spudcrows - a fall community decorating opportunity to help raise money for murals around town.



Vibrancy:

The steering committee observed many businesses, event venues, and public spaces were used for creative purposes that made Derry seem vibrant. Comments included:

- MacGregor Park - area for outdoor concerts etc. Nice feature of this spot is that they used some of the green space as parking spots for the concerts and events held in the pavilion.
- Music and culinary business improves community art.
- Opera house and museum.

Visual Appearance:

The steering committee notes that community art played a major role in utilizing large and blank spaces, making them more visually appealing and providing a medium to showcase town history. Comments included:

- Great use of a blank store wall. Informative as well.
- Community mural on side of wine store, restaurant and distillery with points of interest and timeline livens up alley.
- What an incredible mural to cover up the side of this building. It really improves the look of the downtown.
- So creative!!! I love murals so I think this is great!!!
- Nice, crisp painting noting important time frames in town.
- Mural adds interest.
- Side of building next to railroad trail mural.

Opportunities

Awareness:

Members of the steering committee noted the need for greater visibility and advertising of arts-related assets in the downtown. Comments included:

- It's incredible that there is an opera house right downtown. We're nearing the end of the day and I almost missed it. I wouldn't have even know it was here. It would be great to better promote this as a downtown asset.



Assets

Informative:

The steering committee found the signage within the downtown clearly promoted the rail trail and other attractions. Comments included:

- Great rail and bike trail signage that clearly delineates Broadway and shows businesses (Grind Rail Trail Café) that have sponsored it.
- Well marked rail trail! There's even a stop sign for the bike users.
- Nice signage giving credit to adopters of trail and public places.
- Derry Homegrown local market with parking, art, live music etc.
- I've seen some signs around town to encourage people to shop local and shop downtown. I like the idea of that and wonder how else it's being promoted and what the success has been.



Opportunities

Visibility:

The steering committee saw an opportunity to improve existing signage by making text bigger, delineate downtown and relocating signs to increase prominence. Comments included:

- Replace the map and move it to a more visible spot.
- No clear indication of what events happen here, opportunity for signage of events, activities.
- Scenic byway and hospital sign combo, lost at big intersection.
- Good signage but there was still some confusion about parking in the Main Street and how long you can park. The signs are small.
- Just flags could define downtown unity and borders.





Assets & Opportunities

The steering committee did not provide significant input on Derry's downtown entrance. They may have passed over this characteristic because they didn't see a clear downtown beginning or signage. One reviewer identified the intersection of Crystal Ave and Broadway as the perceived downtown entrance from the east because it is where the area became more visually appealing and had fewer chain stores. Another reviewer thought the signage on I-93 would be a great opportunity to advertise local businesses and to draw people off the highway and visit downtown businesses and attractions.





Assets

Aesthetically Pleasing:

The steering committee found that some of the landscaping was attractive and complemented the surrounding built environment. Comments included:

- Well maintained outdoor space. Inviting and clean.
- Love the rose bushes along pond.
- Tree lined streets are nice. Softens hardscapes.
- Pleasing display for a park like setting in the middle of town.
- Nice little pocket park seating, walkway, flowers.
- Planters, trees and other greenery all along the main drag. A wonderful way to accent the street.
- Hanging planters and potted plants along a local restaurant add a nice touch to the building and atmosphere.



Opportunities

Upkeep/Maintenance:

A lack of consistent standard around maintenance and upkeep was noted. Some houses, buildings, and public spaces have incredible landscaping, but it's inconsistent throughout the downtown area. Comments included:

- This could make such a great small park and bring more people around the Opera House. It takes away from this area of downtown having it overgrown like that.
- There isn't a lot of landscaping downtown. These trees are nice but it'd be nice to have some plants and small flower beds spread around.
- Could definitely use some better landscaping here that improves the visual attractiveness.
- Plants in need of water, would be an asset if they were happier, but takes away from the potential benefit.
- A dead tree, while nice to have landscaping along the main drag, the dead tree and unkempt planter is a drawback.
- Looks ignored and not really appealing.





Assets

Attractiveness:

The steering committee was impressed with the lighting that they saw in the heart of downtown, especially the style and banners accenting the structures. Comments included:

- Main street lamps with banners.
- Cute, love style of street lights.
- Period lighting is a nice feature, especially when considering the lack of such lighting in many communities.

Opportunities

Placement and Maintenance:

While steering committee members noted an abundance of light fixtures on Broadway, it became more sporadic the further from downtown.

Comments included:

- Lighting sporadic on one side in places. Use both sides with pennants possibly seasonal.
- Abundant lighting fixtures on main road; attractive but need maintenance.





Assets

Welcoming:

The steering committee found that Derry had multiple parks and green spaces in the downtown area that complemented nearby uses. Comments included:

- Clean, great signage and landscaping. Not sure there's enough trash barrels. New nets on the ball courts.
- Nice that pets in town are welcome to visit the park and encourage responsible pet ownership.
- Pocket park right next to the rail trail. Very well-tended floral garden.
- Adjacent to town library same benefactor, war memorials, green space nicely maintained by DPW.
- Multifaceted park with beautiful view and rail trail.

Infrastructure:

The steering committee found that Derry had an abundance of physical amenities with tennis courts, picnic tables, a skating facility, and an outdoor concert venue that improved the overall appeal and usability.

Comments included:

- Skating facility is set up to be utilized in the summer time as well.
- Nice use for hockey I love how it can be utilized year round.
- Fabulous outdoor venue with temporary parking. Concerts on Tuesday sounds perfect.
- Public park next to library, stage, seating, picnic tables.
- Pocket park with directional and place making signage, flag pole with memorial plaque, nice paths and benches with shade trees.
- Unique way to allow for additional parking by painting lines on the grass. Great way to keep it green.
- Wonderful clean park and beach combo. Very safe away from cars. Permanent bathrooms would be appreciated.
- Nice park beautifully landscaped.





Opportunities

Signage:

The steering committee noticed that informative signs would aid in heightening awareness of downtown events and attractions. Comments included:

- When are the concerts? A sign would be great.
- This park is amazing but these buildings are confusing. No swimming signs and also a sign talking about no roughhousing on the docks...
- Confusing signage seems people used to be able to swim? Wonder why no longer option? Feed ducks?
- Love the swinging benches but could use WD-40.
- Could use more signage on Main Street leading people toward park. Love historic info as well. Tennis courts appear somewhat rough.
- Great open space. Is there a sign on the main road directing people to it? I didn't see one.

Maintenance and Beautification:

While committee members noted positive aspects of the downtown area, members also noted the need for enhanced maintenance to activate public and private spaces. Comments included:

- This could be a great small park. It appears to be privately owned but maybe the town could work with the owner to take down the chain link fence and open it up, do some landscaping and put in some benches.
- Better care and presentation.
- One suggestion is new fencing around tennis court.
- Allowing for year round use of the hockey rink is awesome. I wish our town had this kind of surface. The pavement should be resurfaced just to avoid injuries.
- This is a nice little park but it could use some benches or something to draw people in to spend time there. So nice to have right in the middle of downtown.



Points of Interest



Assets

Historic Buildings and Architecture:

The abundance of historic spaces and notable architecture in Derry was a theme that was noted repeatedly as a point of interest. Comments included:

- Beautiful church with nice architecture.
- Very cool historical marker in front of the VFW.
- Hoist on Granary Building.
- Lovely Baptist church in excellent condition.
- Gigantic Masonic Lodge. Great location for multiple fraternal groups to gather.



Opportunities

Appearance and Maintenance:

While the steering committee noted that the historic buildings in downtown were a great asset, improving their appearance could highlight them even more and make downtown more inviting.

Comments included:

- Masonic Lodge and related service organizations, building needs work. Nice community breakfast event.
- It is unclear whether the asphalt area nearby is privately owned or part of the library.
- Good presentation of history. Maybe flowers and benches to highlight.



Public Facilities



Assets

Appearance:

The steering committee observed that Derry had multiple attractive municipal buildings. Comments included:

- Adams Memorial building has appreciation of arts with Opera House attached and history museum. Beautiful building with nice outdoor bench. Railing being painted shows good routine maintenance.
- Welcoming sign in municipal building.
- Nice Large Library. Study rooms, meeting rooms, computer area and basement floor allocated for children. Neat, a NH Room.
- Well-marked public library.
- Beautiful new municipal facility. Seating, landscaping. Really nice to have right off of the main drag.
- Expansive library. Lighting inside a little harsh. Children's room inviting and many programs.



Parking and Location:

The steering committee noted that the public facilities were located in prominent areas with good amenities and parking nearby. Comments included:

- Library gift of MacGregor as noted, adjacent to park.
- Seems to have quite a bit of free public parking which is nice. Signage advertising the parking off of the main road could be better.
- Town Hall with sufficient parking off main drag. Includes Handicap spots and electric charging stations. Noted town vehicles with Town logo.

Opportunities

Landscaping:

Members of the steering committee found that the beautiful historic buildings could use improvements on their surroundings. Comments included:

- Courthouse could improve the surroundings.
- Visitor center, chamber of commerce, arts council, housing in landmark building with opera house. Vacant lot next door seems same property.
- The Chamber of Commerce is housed in this building so it would be great if they could fix up this lot so it doesn't look abandoned.
- Rear of fire station. Opportunity for park seating.





Assets

Nearby Amenities:

The steering committee noted that there were useful amenities near seating to add to vibrancy, including parks, the rail trail, and businesses. Comments included:

- Outdoor cafe seating and parking behind.
- Great seating in the sidewalk to take a break. And a bike rack!
- Varied seating in park.

Opportunities

Quantity and Location:

The steering committee notes that seating options in downtown were limited and sporadic and more of them could be a great improvement. Comments included:

- I wish there were more places to sit along the nicely paved sidewalks around town. I only found a few places to sit.
- This end of downtown could use more seating and a more welcoming atmosphere. The other end had some great benches and is more welcoming for people to spend time.
- Long portion without seating along commercial area... Matching benches?



Sidewalks, Crosswalks, & Trails



Assets

Vibrancy:

The majority of the steering committee responded positively to the ways in which creativity and color were integrated into the sidewalk and crosswalk network. Comments included:

- Love the red sidewalk. Looks well maintained. Adds color.
- Sidewalks clearly delineated, brightly painted, clearly posted.
- Crosswalks throughout the town which make it easy and safe to navigate the town. The “stop, look, wave” message adorning the crosswalk is a nice feature as I feel it promotes kindness and goodwill.
- Crossing indicated by sidewalk treatment paving and painted lines and cautionary indicators.
- Nice sidewalks, really nice accent. Stands out!
- I really like the red sidewalks. It’s visually attractive.
- Well-marked crosswalk. Detail makes it stand out and pleasing to use.
- Safety marking on sidewalks.
- I like the idea of having these and drawing attention. But it’s not safe to cross here. Cars go really fast and don’t stop. It’d be good to have the signs in the middle of the street or slow down traffic somehow.

Functionality:

The steering committee found the placement and design of sidewalks and crosswalks to be generally effective. Comments included:

- Great sidewalks and crosswalks. Town is very walkable.
- Sidewalks almost everywhere, except at the municipal center parking lot.
- Safe crossing main street.
- Sidewalks are beautiful and extremely wide and welcoming.

Rail Trail Network:

Members of the committee noted that the Rockingham Rail Trail running through the heart of downtown was an amazing asset to draw people into Derry and encourage alternative modes of travel. Comments included:

- Nice entry for bike path with the ability to remove the posts for multiple uses.
- Access to bike trail from the town center well marked, clean, bike rack and next to free parking.
- What an incredible asset to have the rail trail go eighth through downtown. It would be great to promote it more and provide more information in this central area. Where does the trail go, what’s the distance to other destinations or where could people stop in Derry for a break?





Opportunities

Safety:

Some members of the steering committee found the street crossings to be unsafe due to curb cuts and traffic patterns. Comments included:

- Lots of curb cuts and few places to cross the street where I feel safe to do so. Would like some more crosswalks, traffic calming and markings for driveways.

Maintenance:

The steering committee found that some of Derry's sidewalks needed maintenance. Comments included:

- Sidewalks of faux brick need care. More would unify downtown area.
- Wide sidewalks through much of downtown, though some areas in need of maintenance.
- Cleaning up sidewalks would go a long way.
- Sidewalks overgrown and uneven. If you are going to have sidewalk they need to be maintained.
- There's a lot of trash on the other side of the guardrail all the way along.
- Sidewalk is disappearing.
- Overgrown grass on sidewalks. Not safe for older people to walk.
- Sidewalks are very uneven. Not safe for wheelchairs.
- Cracks in sidewalks and lack of trees where they look like they're planned to be.
- Random forgotten spots on the sidewalk. Needs plantings or to be paved over.





Assets

Accessible Parking:

The steering committee was excited by the abundance of free parking that was close by, although there were comments on improving the signage. Comments included:

- Walking around town, it feels like there's a lot of on-and off-street parking and well-marked from the street.
- Abundant free parking.
- Great lot for parking but not enough (or visually apparent) signage indicating parking.
- Great free parking lot so accessible to downtown. I like that it's hidden behind the main street. But still accessible so it's not a focal point of the downtown.
- Love lamp post signage and free parking.



Attractive State Highway:

Members of the committee noted that Derry has done a great job of managing a state road running through its downtown by having amenities for walkability. Comments included:

- Nice use of state road. Walkable and safe to cross.
- Main street with crosswalk, street trees in sidewalk, trash bins and parking, lighting
- There's an opportunity to extend downtown a bit and improve some of these really great side streets.

Opportunities

Atmosphere and Safety:

Several steering committee members commented on speed at which cars drove in the downtown. Comments included:

- Very busy street. Would like flashing lights at the crosswalks, especially if walking with kids or those mobile challenged.
- The speed and volume of traffic is intimidating.
- Very busy street.





Assets

Maintenance:

The steering committee was surprised by the upkeep of the trash can and the lack of litter downtown.

Comments included:

- A trash receptacle located on the main drag. Well-tended, no trash around the bin as is often the case.
- Another trash receptacle, also well-tended—no waste next to or around the bin, and recently emptied.

Opportunities

Appearance and Location:

Several steering committee members commented on the limited number of trash cans and also highlighted them as an opportunity for public art. Comments included:

- Some trash cans but not available throughout.
- Nice trash cans spread around downtown. Could do something cool with them to improve the character and make them more attractive.



After the Visit

Post-Visit Survey

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

Five-Minute Impression

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

- The Welcome to Derry sign could have been more inviting and have less clutter around it. More space and an attractive garden presentation would have been more noticeable.
- Derry has a 'real' downtown - it's not a village center like Moultonborough. There are lots of businesses of all kinds (restaurants, retail, services) and not just along a strip, there's density on and off the main drag, with good parking options. The commercial buildings along Broadway somewhat obscure the 'points of interest' and public facilities such as the churches and municipal buildings (including the library which was way down the road past the big chain stores). They've done a good job with signage, but you have to slow down and look for it (particularly the bike trails along the old railroad bed). The small central park across from the historic train station (now Italian restaurant) with the tall clock, landscaping, and seating had great orientation and wayfinding signage. It's a very walkable downtown area, but I wondered if people are actually walking much. It would have been interesting to attend one of the farmers market days.
- A real downtown with many opportunities. However, traffic was heavy and moving pretty fast. The primary "downtown" was the main road with little happening on offshoots
- Lots of businesses but no cohesiveness. No "welcome to downtown" or something similar - such as welcome to the place that meets all your needs and then some in our 100+ unique local shops.
- It was much more "urban" than I expected. There were lots of stores, places to eat and the residential areas were close to the center of town. It was not as quaint as I had pictured it in my mind.
- Active and vibrant community with lots to offer.
- Welcoming, convenient and well-placed signs to direct the public to where they might want to go. Off-street parking close to shops, services and municipal buildings which were in many cases woven into the wonderful walking/biking paths. Landscaping of pocket parks was nicely done with benches and places to sit in either sun or shade! I was surprised at the number of independent businesses, the diversity was wonderful, just about anything one would want was available. Very few chain stores or restaurants which was refreshing. For the most part businesses and municipal buildings were handicap accessible. Housing was a mixed bag from what we could see, the side streets were a little on the dilapidated side. The individuality of the shops and restaurants was to me the most attractive attribute, along with the ease of getting around with great signage and walkways.
- I thought it looked like a really cute town but I was unaware of how much it had to offer at first. I suppose this could be said about any town but some places seem to excel at the ability to 'advertise' their assets.



Identifiable Community Brand

Comments were collected on whether members of the steering committee could identify a community brand for Derry. The majority of the committee did not identify a community brand. They did identify the potential to build a brand around some of the key assets of the community: the rail trail, historic architecture, community art, and sidewalk art.

Unique Attractions

Members of the steering committee were asked to identify a restaurant, specialty shop, or attraction that would bring them back to Derry.

- Mary Ann's Diner Restaurant's retro diner style on the front of the building was inviting and made an impression of a clean diner-style place to eat.
- I would stop for dinner - either to try the Italian place in the former train station (since I appreciate the re-use of the train station) or to try the Cask and Vine wine store with restaurant (menu posted in window looked great). Both are only open at night, so that's the limitation. I liked that Cask and Vine was doing a local promotion for the Derry 'historic points of interest' mural on the side of their building, and if they had been open I would have bought one of the burlap scarecrow bags to support that. If for some reason, I was in Derry on a weekend, I would go to one of the Farmers Market days with music/activities. I guess it's all about eating and the local food movement! Ditto for the Grind Rail Trail Cafe, where we sampled both breakfast and lunch items, all delicious.
- The upscale coffee shop or the retro dinner
- The parks were amazing. Maybe a local concert?
- The Grind Rail Trail Cafe was wonderful. There was an Italian restaurant that looked like a train station that looked inviting. The Rail Trail itself. I wouldn't necessarily make a special trip to Derry just for these amenities as there are similar restaurants/attractions that are much closer to where I live.
- The Grind Rail Trail Café, MaryAnn's Diner, & the sports shop by the hardware store.
- The 'Grind' restaurant was exceptional, and I could see myself stopping there before hitting the Rail Trail.
- The rail trail coffee house, the rail trail itself, the upscale thrift shop, the Italian restaurant next to the distillery, the park by the pond. I would definitely make an effort to stop here during a road trip rather than a traditional rest stop. We could grab lunch and my kids could play, etc.



Living, Working in & Visiting Derry

The Post-Visit survey asked steering committee members to consider whether or not they would consider living, opening a business in or visiting Derry.

Would you consider living in Derry?

Yes

- Residents are invested in their neighborhoods and it shows
- I love the walkability and the variety of businesses. I would have loved to live in a place like this when I was younger.

No

- I prefer the rural character of Moultonborough and being close to the lakes and mountains and all they have to offer.
- I'm too old now, but if I were younger and had a job there, I could see buying and renovating something near the downtown. It seemed there were plenty of good options and a need for reinvestment in the residential areas off the main drag



Would you consider opening a business in Derry?

Yes

- There seems to be the labor force and customer base already in place and Derry seems to have the infrastructure to support it.
- With its close proximity to larger cities, Derry has many of the same things a larger urban area (like Concord or Manchester) has without the traffic or headaches of a bigger city. It still has a small town feel.
- Derry appears to have a Chamber of Commerce that promotes and supports new and existing businesses.

No

- Too much traffic.
- It just doesn't seem to be active enough for a business.

Would you consider visiting downtown Derry with family or friends?

Yes

- Now that I know it's more than gas and Wendy's off Exit 4, yes. A downtown sign would be great.
- I've been off that exit a number of times for gas but never went past the service area at the highway! Now I know there are options just 5 minutes down the road, and I'll definitely stop some time.

No

- No main attraction.

Was there anything missing from Derry's downtown?

- I felt the lack of foot traffic was noticeable. Maybe it becomes more active as the day continues.
- I was looking for an Ice-cream shop.
- Better signage for local things.
- Some sort of element to pull the eclectic mix of services and businesses together

Change in Perception

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

- Yes, I felt like it was going to have the business and infrastructure in place and it did.
- Traffic was busier than expected and it had a more thriving downtown than expected.
- I actually thought there would be more of a downtown feel already especially with a main street and a large population to support a downtown area
- I was not expecting the town to be full of so many things. It looked to be a vibrant bustling town, which was much more so than I anticipated.

Outstanding Feature

The survey asked about the most outstanding feature of Derry. Some of their comments were:

- The Rail Trail and its proximity to the town. It goes right through the center of town which I think is great for families living on the periphery of town. If I lived there I could see my family using the trail system a lot.
- Derry's Library was put together nicely. There seemed to be something for everyone there. Age areas, subject area and study rooms for more personal use.
- The beautiful flowers everywhere and the rail trail in the center of town with the old train station and other business nearby.
- The existing effort to spruce up the public spaces on 'main street' impressed me.

Top Assets

The steering committee was asked to list three positive things they noticed in Derry.

- Rail Trail
- Walkable
- Good restaurants that offer variety
- Unique historic buildings with new uses
- One main drag to focus on developing the downtown feel
- Signage
- Flowers were amazing, beautiful murals
- Pedestrian routes and trail connectivity
- Well-kept stores
- The parks
- Outdoor activity spaces
- Well-marked sidewalks
- Interesting diversity of architecture and businesses
- Promotion of 'local food movement'

Opportunities for Improvement

The steering committee was asked to identify opportunities for improvement in Derry.

- Housing reinvestment (existing stock off main drag)
- Uniformity in coding as vacant spaces are filled
- More painted entrances to the shops.
- Clean up and refurbish buildings on some of the side streets
- Sidewalks need repair
- Mowing of green space by municipal buildings
- More signage to pull people from highway into town
- Painting buildings
- More public seating along the main corridor
- Better signage showcasing stores, parks, and rail trail
- Re-open the beach at the local park, possibly offering canoe and kayak rentals if swimming is no longer an option
- Maintain or do something with the overgrown lot next to the church in town
- Try to reduce or limit vaping shops
- Additional repurposing of historic structures
- More features for children

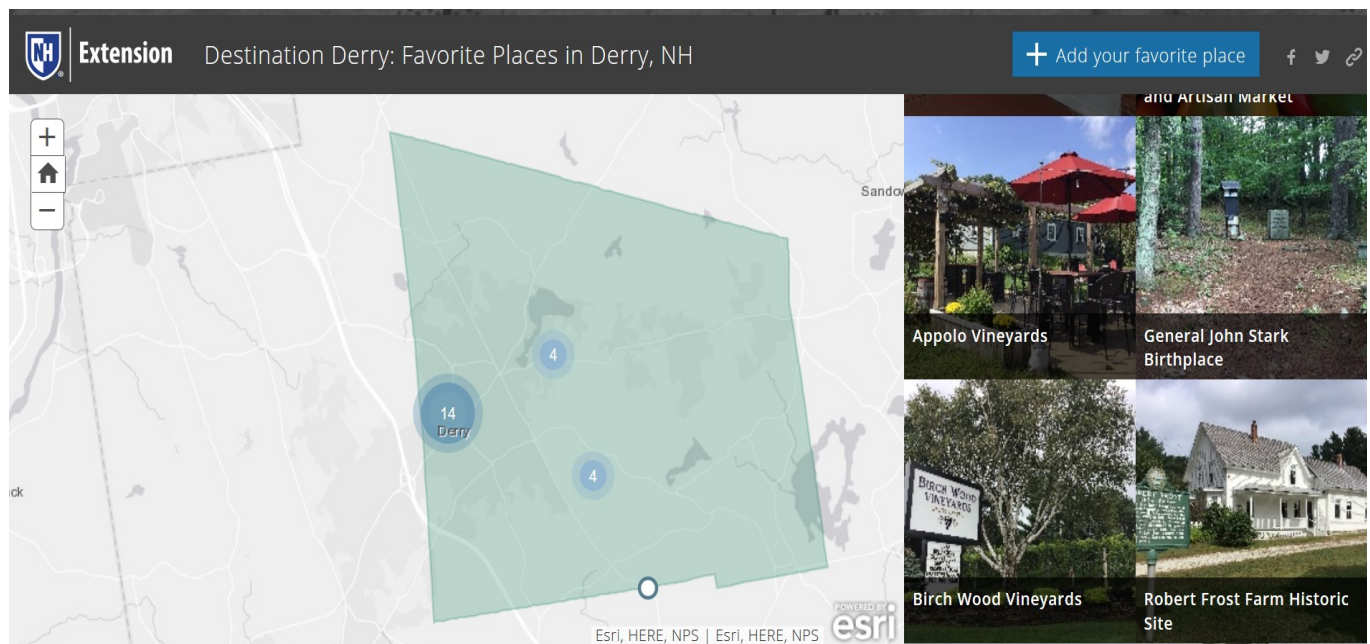
Additional Community Engagement

In addition to their work on the First Impressions assessment, the Derry Steering Committee sought feedback and ideas from community members through a Story Map, which was marketed in a variety of ways. The Story Map allows anyone to add an image and write a brief description. People can take a photo using a smartphone or a regular camera and then upload the picture to the website and add the description.

Additional instructions are provided on the website: bit.ly/DestinationDerry

Community Members were asked to share their favorite place in Derry. Some of the locations added include:

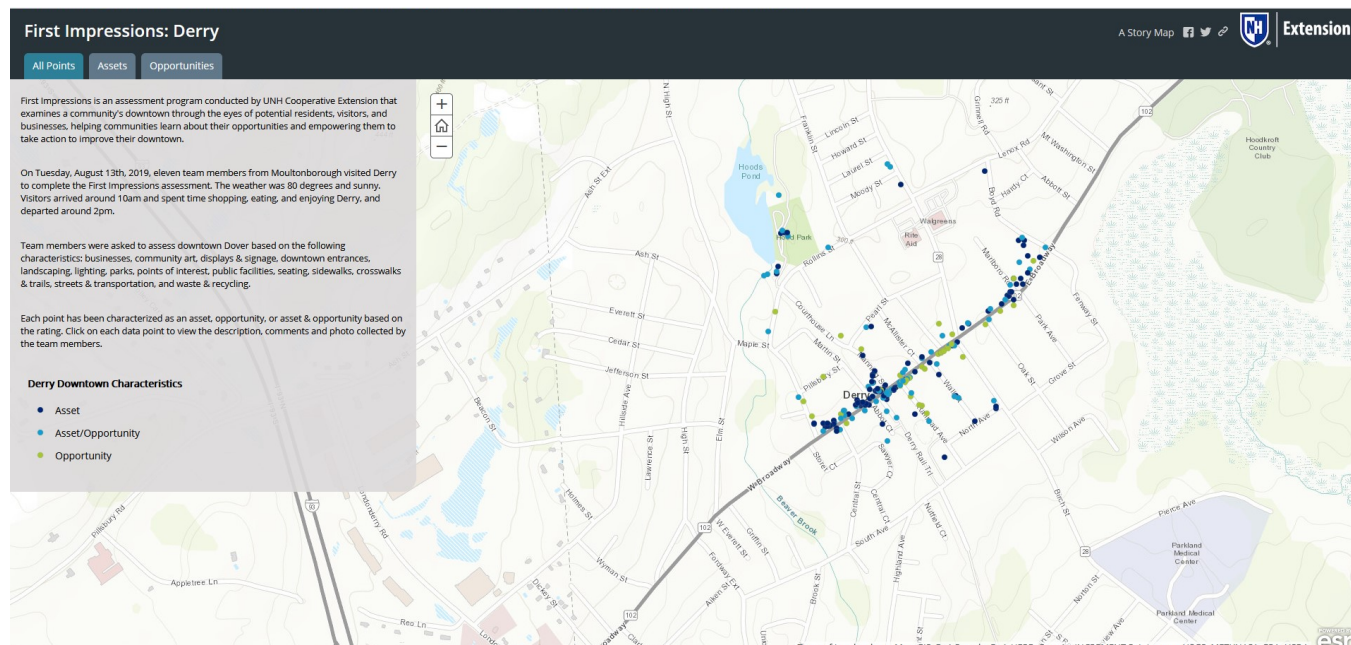
- The Grind Rail Trail Café
- Tupelo Musical Hall
- Derry Museum of History
- Studio Lab
- Casa Java Café
- Forest Hill Cemetery
- First Parish Church
- Taylor Library
- Rig A' Tony's
- The Derry Opera House
- The Halligan Tavern
- Robert Frost Farm Historic Site
- Birch Wood Vineyards
- General John Stark Birthplace
- Appolo Vineyards
- Derry Homegrown Farm and Artisan Market
- Derry Depot Antiques
- Benson Ski & Sport
- Beaver Lake
- Derry Rail Trail
- Zoo Health Club
- Dunkin' Donuts
- Springlook Farm Garden Center Nursery & Florist
- East Derry Tavern



First Impressions: Derry Assessment Map

All of the assessment data is stored in an online interactive map. To view the data, visit:

bit.ly/firstimpressionsderry



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