

Summary of Recommendations

There is no single idea or strategy that is going to turn downtown Norway into the bustling hub of economic and cultural activity that many residents and visitors would like it to become. The many forces that have conspired to make Norway what it is today are terribly complex and intertwined, and thus the solution to today's challenges are complex and intertwined also.

Rather than offer one or two ideas with a statement such as "If you just do these one or two things everything will be great;" we offer a portfolio of carefully considered ideas that rest on fundamentals. The theme of these recommendations is "back to basics." A related theme is "slow and steady wins the race."

The economy of downtown Norway has not diminished to where it is overnight, and it will not bounce back overnight. We believe that the downtown economy CAN regain considerable local market share, CAN gain a reputation that attracts visitors to come spend money, and CAN offer a sense of great pride and utility for area residents. Such a downtown economy will be built incrementally over time by putting one careful step in front of the next.

We have crafted economic development recommendations and design recommendations that go hand-in-hand with each other. We encourage these recommendations to be implemented simultaneously.

To Enhance Downtown Norway.....

- ✓ Serve the local retail market
- ✓ Become more of a cultural center
- ✓ Protect and promote historic character
- ✓ Develop downtown infrastructure via tax increment financing
- ✓ Build welcoming streetscapes
- ✓ Offer plenty of parking
- ✓ Design a cross-stream convenient downtown
- ✓ Develop great outdoor spaces
- ✓ Promote memorable historic character

Serve the local retail market

Rather than develop sophisticated attractions or niche markets for visitors, we encourage downtown Norway to first more fully cultivate the local retail market. Retail activity is typically the backbone of small downtown economies the size of Norway's and the potential of Norway's local market is huge. By taking strategic steps in recruiting specific types of retail and thoughtfully marketing to specific market segments, we believe that many more area residents can be enticed to shop in downtown Norway. Downtown Norway CAN exist very comfortably in spite of developing retail on the Route 26 strip. The trick is to distinguish the downtown shopping experience from out-of-town retail shopping and provide retail offerings not available elsewhere in the area.

Become more of a cultural center

We believe that local area residents and seasonal visitors would relish increased opportunities to see live performances and local art. We believe that there is a largely unmet appetite for evening entertainment. And as the region's most distinguished downtown, we believe downtown Norway should step up and become the unquestioned cultural center of the entire region. Downtown already has the Opera House and Grange Hall and some very active and effective arts and culture organizations. With some design enhancements, the addition of a few evening entertainment establishments, and careful promotion, we see Norway gaining such a reputation resulting in a more robust local economy and increased quality of life for area residents.

Protect and promote historic character

Norway's historic character is its "edge" over any other retail center developed in the past fifty years. Norway has irreplaceable downtown architecture unmatched not only by newer shopping centers but unmatched by many other downtowns across Maine and New England. Norway would be remiss to not fully exploit this "edge" by protecting and promoting its historic character. It is perhaps the keystone of Norway's future economic success.

Develop downtown infrastructure via tax increment financing

The time is ripe for investment in downtown Norway. Interest rates are relatively low and there are several vacant buildings begging to be developed. This is an excellent time to implement an downtown tax increment financing district that will provide incentives for development and ensure a future stream of revenue for downtown enhancements.

Build welcoming streetscapes

Thousands of travelers pass within a half a mile of beautiful downtown Norway and never know it. We encourage developing streetscapes along the entrances to downtown that let the visitor know "something is special here," and which residents can take pride in.

Plenty of parking

To address the most common complaint about downtown shopping, we recommend that Norway make sure that it is never a barrier to shopping downtown. While we don't find the current parking situation to be severe, we encourage steps be taken to make sure that it never becomes severe and that there isn't even the perception of a downtown parking shortage in Norway.

Design a cross-stream, convenient downtown

The vacant site of the former C. B. Cummings mill, just over the stream from Main Street, provides some extraordinary opportunities. While we have shied in this report from making specific recommendations about how the site should be used, we are forceful in our recommendation that whatever happens there should be connected to Main Street in a “convenient” way such as a footbridge across the stream. If a well-designed bridge existed, people could park on either side and easily access the other. Further, we advocate that however the mill site gets developed that it be done ways that compliment the economic recommendations of this report; primarily, that it serve the needs of local people and enhance Norway's reputation as a cultural and historic center.

Develop great outdoor spaces

It's hard to imagine a place thought of as a “cultural center” without imagining great outdoor spaces. All the best cultural centers have them. We see considerable potential to develop

such reputation-building outdoor spaces right at the heart of Main Street in connection with a cross-stream bridge and perhaps across the road from the Opera House. These two ideas are highly speculative and depend on private property owners, but we have provided them to show possibilities and help develop a vision for how much a new, great outdoor space could add to the cultural and historic attraction of downtown Norway.

Memorable Historic Character

We believe this notion is so important it finds itself among the economic recommendations AND design recommendations. Preserving and promoting the historic architecture of downtown Norway will make it memorable in the minds of visitors, and they will come back, and they tell others to visit. Norway has a number of historically significant buildings. We encourage steps to use these to economic advantage by preserving and promoting them.

Introduction

Goals of this Plan and How Developed

The goal of this plan has been to:

Create and area-wide strategy for how to enhance Main Street with particular emphasis on economic development and design improvements.

Specifically, we were asked to update a Strategy to Enhance Main Street that was prepared for the Town in 1995 by Market Decisions, Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments, and Kent Associates.

Methodology

The Town of Norway engaged Craig Freshley of Policy Development, Inc. and Brian Kent of Kent Associates to implement the above-stated goal. Freshley and Kent were awarded the contract as a result of a competitive bid process and the project has been funded in part by a planning grant from the state Department of Economic and Community Development making use of federal funds available under the Community Development Block Grant Program.

Craig Freshley started the Maine Downtown Center and served as its first coordinator for two years during which time Norway applied for and achieved Main Street Maine designation. He has conducted training for Norway Downtown Revitalization

and served on the Resource Team that visited downtown Norway in June, 2003.

Brian Kent has developed plans for many downtowns across Maine and was a key partner in shaping the 1995 downtown Enhancement Strategy for Norway.

At the outset we met with key town staff, interviewed various stakeholders and the downtown manger, and held an informational meeting with the Board of Selectmen. A tour of the downtown was also conducted and a photo record made.

At the same time important, relevant reports, plans and documents were reviewed. These included:

- the 1995 Downtown Plan;
- the Resource Team report (2003);
- the Sidewalk Study and Improvement Plan (2002);
- the Town “Site Plan Review Ordinance” (1996);
- sections of the draft 2004 Comprehensive Plan;
- the Traffic and Parking Ordinance;
- the Mainland Development survey of the Cummings site;
- the Turner Group’s assessment of buildings on the Cummings property;
- the Turner Group’s architectural plans for the Odd Fellows buildings; and
- the Town’s 2004 CDBG proposals to the department of Economic and Community Development.

Next, we worked with the Economic Restructuring Committee of Norway Downtown Revitalization, a non-profit focused on downtown revitalization in line with the Main Street Approach, to develop and implement surveys of Main Street customers and business owners. While the group had already done considerable work to learn survey techniques of other Main Street communities, we offered suggestions for improvements. See Appendices A and B to learn about these surveys.

We also performed an analysis of how building space on Main Street is currently being used by reviewing tax records building-by-building. And we performed a trade area analysis using techniques and tools available from ESRI Business Information Solutions (see Appendix D for specific methodology).

As the potential benefits of a tax increment financing district became apparent, we arranged a presentation on the topic to the Board of Selectmen. Jim Nimon of the state Department of Economic and Community Development explained to the selectmen how a TIF works and answered their questions.

As potential strategies began to emerge from our preliminary findings, we held a public “Downtown Norway Planning Workshop” on May 27 to gather public input. We presented our initial ideas and gained feedback via a written Public Workshop Survey and the verbal comments of participants. See Appendix C for a copy of the survey.

On the next two pages are maps of the Downtown Study Area.

In addition to providing a hard copy of this report, we have also provided the Town with a Compact Disk containing an

electronic version of this report and the data and statistical analysis of the customer and business owner surveys and the downtown space utilization inventory.

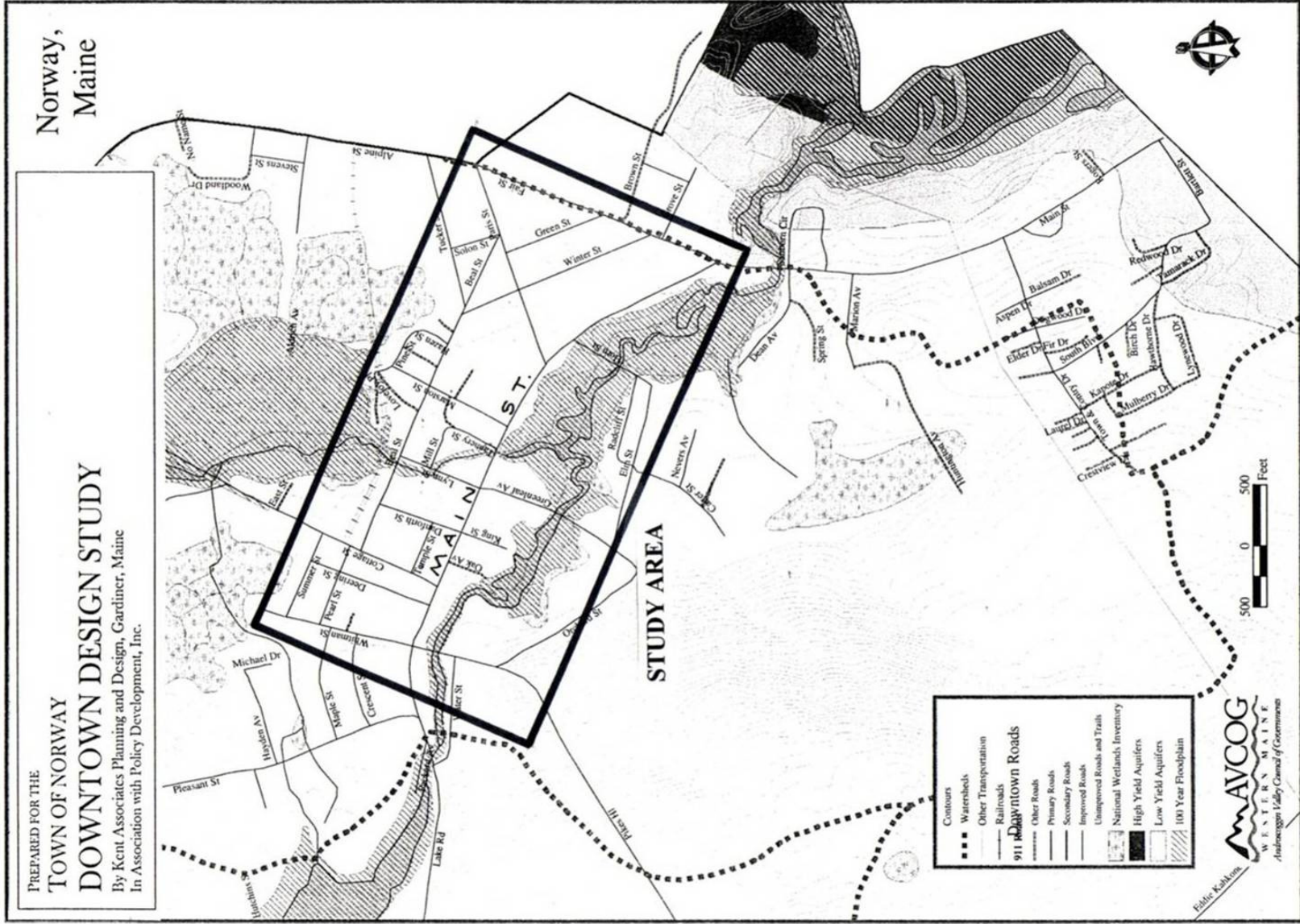
Acknowledgements

Many people helped craft this plan. We are grateful to the people of Norway for their input and cooperation with our surveys. We are particularly grateful to the Town staff who were unfailingly available to help us in every way possible, particularly David Holt, and Jodi Keniston. We are also grateful to the staff and volunteers of Norway Downtown Revitalization, particularly Anne Campbell, Ken Morse, and all those who conducted surveys as volunteers.

Craig Freshley of Policy Development served as project supervisor. Amy Scott assisted with survey data entry and analysis, and as a volunteer Sean Gambrel was very helpful with helping us design the survey data entry system and he got us started on data entry and analysis. Jeremy Doxsee of the Muskie School served as a graduate intern on the project.

Brian Kent of Kent Associates served as lead on all design issues and was assisted by Anne Doiron and Amanda Walker.

We are also grateful to the staff of Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments for their advice and assistance and also to the staff of the Growth Council of Oxford Hills, particularly Brett Doney. We are grateful to Mark Eyerman of Planning Decisions for providing detailed data and analysis from the 1995 study that he conducted.





Previous Recommendations and Progress

Below and on the next page is a summary of Recommendations made by the design team in 1995 and an overview of what has been achieved. To Norway's credit, many of those recommendations have been implemented.

Also worth noting are the findings and recommendations of the 2003 Resource Tea visit organized by the Maine Downtown Center as part of Norway's participation in the Main Street Maine program. While it would be redundant to repeat those recommendations here, we would like to emphasize the relevance of those findings and point out that we concur with the recommendations made at that time.

1995 Downtown Plan Design Recommendations: A 2004 Review of Progress (numbers refer to the map on the next page)			
Action	Comment	Action	Comment
1. Consolidate parking	Two new lots constructed	11/13/19 Erect new signs	Accomplished but siting needs improvement
2. Erect bus shelters	Accomplished	12. Work with hospital	Continue to cooperate
3. Improve rear of buildings	Private incentives needed	14. Extend sidewalks both sides	Planned
4. Arrange for more parking	Not needed at present	15. Explore options for trail	Effort now underway
5. Increase visibility of Municipal Bldg.	Initial property purchase made and building removed	16. Consider utility line options	Not done
6. Add gazebo or trolley	Premature, can happen later	17. Work to find tenants for the Opera House and Odd Fellows building	Both buildings need continued renovation
7. Improve Memorial Park	Some effort begun	18. Corridor stream-side trail	Not done
8. Renovate the Trolley Barn	Now a restaurant	20. Add avenue of trees	Not done
9. Build mid-block trail	Sidewalks improved (?)	21. Add sign/logo	Done
10. Create rail trail	Not done		

