

**APPENDIX F:**  
**Promoting Downtown Vibrancy**

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F

# Downtown Design

## Scale and Character

As part of the Sustainability Master Planning process, community feedback pointed to a desire for a more concentrated mix of land uses in and around the downtown. As Hanover's downtown already consists of closely knit commercial buildings, predominantly of Classical Revival style and of one to three stories, this reveals opportunities for thoughtful residential and commercial intensification through updates to existing ordinances. Additional regulatory opportunities that would allow the downtown's development density to "permeate" its edges and extend into side streets should also be explored.

Hanover has been and will continue to be a notable destination for tourists and other visitors, largely due to the presence of Dartmouth College. Commercial and retail spaces should, however, meet the needs of the local population. This includes promoting uses that are active both during the day and at night.

Although there is community desire to see the downtown composed of buildings diverse in function, there is also a desire that these buildings be compatible in aesthetics and scale.

## Public Realm

### Streets and Sidewalks

Hanover's downtown street grid is well-connected and flows into the College campus. There is a desire by the community to see the downtown's buildings define its street network, uninterrupted by surface parking lots.

Streets within the downtown are shared by motorists, bicyclists, parked cars, and pedestrians. A vibrant downtown is one in which a balance has been struck, where the needs of various users are met in harmony. This is the concept of a "complete street." Hanover has explored and may continue to explore adjusting the allocation of space within the public realm to better meet the needs of all users. This may include techniques, such as lane reductions to add bicycle lanes, reorienting parking to expand sidewalk widths, or other combinations of adjustments to create a safer, more functional and inviting downtown.

### Spaces for Public Gathering

Public gathering spaces in the downtown are primarily limited to the Dartmouth College Green, which is owned by Dartmouth College, and other areas associated with private developments (e.g., the area in front of the Nugget Arcade). Community feedback indicated a desire for additional areas within the downtown dedicated to social interaction. Future development in the downtown should integrate such spaces into its development plans.

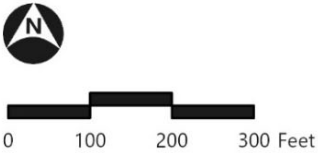
One opportunity to enhance public gathering within the downtown is through cultural programming, such as Hanover's Celebrate the Season. Festivals, arts and music events, and events that celebrate cultural and ethnic experiences have become increasingly popular economic development strategies that increase economic investment, while strengthening social ties among residents.

Creative placemaking, which leverages arts, cultural, and creative thinking to create interest in spaces, is another public gathering enhancement strategy. Such placemaking in Hanover could focus on creating immersive experiences that tell the story of Hanover's downtown through physical and/or digital means. Examples include public art (e.g., murals and sculptures), street performances, and walking tours.

Figure F-1: Hanover's Downtown Zoning Districts



- Legend**
- Downtown Zoning Districts
  - Buildings
  - Roadway Classification**
  - Minor Arterials
  - Local Roads
  - No Functional System



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Source: CAI Technologies - AxisGIS, NHDOT

## Housing Inventory

According to the 2020 Decennial Census, the population of downtown Hanover (in this case, defined as the census blocks that intersect the Downtown Center and Downtown Edge zoning districts) is 604 people. This includes 368 individuals (or 61 percent of the total) living in college/university student housing (such as dormitories), with the remaining predominantly living within mixed-use buildings with first floor retail.

There are 135 housing units within this area, with a 97 percent occupancy rate. Data on housing costs is not available for this smaller area, but it is likely somewhat higher than in other parts of the Town, due to the high occupancy rate, as well as access to the downtown amenities, access to the College campus and public transit, and its unique housing typologies.

Dartmouth College's 2020 *Planning for Possibilities: A Strategic Campus Framework* suggests opportunities for over 1,150 new undergraduate housing units and 680 new housing units for graduate students, faculty, and staff in Hanover. All of this housing is envisioned in the outskirts of the core downtown; however, such additional housing can support downtown vibrancy through increased resident activity and spending. This new housing has the potential to reduce pressure on market rental housing within and near the downtown by decreasing demand by students who desire to be close to campus.

## Commercial Inventory

Hanover's downtown includes a mix of retail and commercial services, offices, and hospitality uses. This section includes an overview of the

downtown's commercial inventory within the bounds of the Downtown Center and Downtown Edge zoning districts.

## Buildings by Commercial Use Type

According to the real estate market analytics provided by CoStar, there are 32 commercial properties in Hanover's downtown, comprising 594,284 square feet (sq. ft.) of rentable building area (RBA)<sup>1</sup>. The current downtown commercial inventory includes the following uses:

- ▶ Hospitality - 94,316 sq. ft. (or approximately 16 percent of total), including the Hanover Inn and the Six South Street Hotel.
- ▶ Office – 265,296 sq. ft. (or approximately 44 percent of total).
- ▶ Retail - 235,672 sq. ft. (or approximately 40 percent of total), comprised of freestanding and storefront retail and restaurant space.

Retail uses occur on the basement, first-floor, and second-floor levels, while office uses are concentrated on the upper floors. The existing inventory of multi-story buildings, in conjunction with mixed uses and business types, allows the downtown to maintain its scale while supporting a diverse commercial base.

Of Hanover's downtown commercial inventory, over 50 percent of its buildings were built before 2000. The oldest of these businesses, the Hanover Inn, opened in 1813. The prevalence of older buildings contributes to the historic character of the downtown. The Town can support commercial growth while maintaining this character by focusing on preserving and adaptively reusing historic structures, including the United States Postal Service Building at 50 South Main Street.

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<sup>1</sup> CoStar. (2022). Retrieved from, <https://www.costar.com/>

In the past two decades, 148,342 sq. ft. of commercial inventory was built in the downtown, including five properties shown in [Table F-1](#).

**Table F-1: Downtown Commercial Development, 2000-2022**

Address	Use Type	RBA (sq. ft.)	Year Built
7 Lebanon St	Office	43,609	2000
23 S Main St	Office	25,960	2003
2 Maple St	Office	21,586	2007
12 South St	Office	4,200	2006
6 South St	Hospitality	52,987	2010

Notes: RBA = Rentable Building Area

Source: CoStar, 2022.

Hanover’s downtown has maintained a low vacancy level, peaking at 5 percent in 2021 and decreasing by more than a half to 2 percent in 2022. The downtown’s historically low vacancy rate indicates that demand continues to be strong for commercial space in this area. These market conditions would support commercial development in the form of new development, redevelopment, or reuse of existing properties. The Town can promote a commercial inventory that addresses market demands by optimizing the limited available space in the existing commercial building inventory.

## Market Rents

According to CoStar, commercial market rental prices per square foot have steadily increased throughout the past decade in the downtown, increasing approximately 16 percent from 2012 (\$22.75/sq. ft.) to 2022 (\$26.43/sq. ft.). During public engagement for this Sustainability Master Plan, members of the Hanover community expressed concern

<sup>2</sup> New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration (NHDRA). (2022). *Completed Public Tax Rates 2022*. <https://www.revenue.nh.gov/mun-prop/municipal/documents/22-tax-rates.pdf>

regarding the high cost of commercial real estate and the low availability of rentable space. To support existing businesses and create opportunities for new small business development, the Town needs to promote economic growth while helping to manage rising rents.

## Property Taxes

In 2022, Hanover’s base tax rate (\$16.41) was slightly lower than the State of New Hampshire average (\$19.09).<sup>2</sup> Hanover’s tax rate is low in comparison with surrounding towns, including Canaan (\$27.15), Enfield (\$25.75), Lebanon (\$23.04), and Lyme (\$23.98). [Table F-2](#) presents Hanover’s tax rate history over the last five years.

**Table F-2: Hanover Tax Rate History, 2018-2022**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
County	1.93	1.89	1.81	1.60	1.37
Town	4.26	4.34	4.44	4.00	4.15
Local School	9.27	9.97	9.97	8.95	9.62
State Education	2.32	2.32	2.25	1.72	1.27
<b>Base Rate</b>	<b>17.78</b>	<b>18.45</b>	<b>18.68</b>	<b>16.27</b>	<b>16.41</b>

Source: NHDRA, 2018-2022.

Hanover’s base tax rate has remained steady over the past 5 years and was the lowest in 2021 and 2022. As noted in the Town’s 2003 *Master Plan*, this relatively sound tax structure reflects high local property values, the socioeconomic characteristics of Hanover’s residents, and the high-quality community facilities and services. Hanover’s comparatively low tax rate can help attract investment and support economic growth. This can

be maintained through zoning and land use practices that promote quality development and sound fiscal management.

## Role of Dartmouth College

Dartmouth College is one of the largest landowners in and around the downtown. College buildings, including a mix of arts and athletics facilities, student and faculty housing, and campus infrastructure surround the downtown to the north and east.

Dartmouth's *Strategic Campus Framework* aims to "leverage Dartmouth's presence to reinforce a vibrant Downtown" as one of its planning principles.<sup>3</sup> To achieve this, the College is pursuing thoughtful integration of new and improved facilities, landscapes, and mobility infrastructure. This integration will promote walkability within the downtown, as well as foster the area's sustainability and resilience. Overall, the College's students, faculty, and staff, along with campus visitors, strengthen the local economy and market for commercial businesses and services in the downtown, as well as support cultural activities. The Town should continue to facilitate dialogue with the College in the mutual pursuit of a vibrant downtown commercial district.

## Small Business Concerns

Members of the Hanover community have noted their concern regarding the high cost of real estate and the feasibility of opening and maintaining small businesses in the downtown amid rising rents. Community members want to promote economic resilience and vibrancy in the downtown by supporting diverse business types and sizes and reinforcing a locally driven economy. In order to facilitate a diverse and resilient local economy and maintain the scale and character of the downtown, the

Town needs to adopt strategies that support and protect small businesses.

The Town can utilize zoning to support multi-story, mixed-use buildings that allow a variety of businesses to occupy them. Increasing the flexibility of zoning regulations for other types of uses that meet design standards can help foster economic growth and the mixing of uses occupying commercial space. Increasing the availability of spaces through adaptive reuse of existing structures and exploring opportunities for new development or redevelopment can maintain the scale and character of the downtown and help prevent rising market rents.

The Hanover community is also concerned with Dartmouth College and its role in supporting small businesses. First, with respect to pulling students away from locally owned businesses in the downtown with on-campus alternatives (e.g., coffee shops), and second, with not allowing student's DA\$H Discretionary Account cards to be accepted at local businesses. The Town should continue to coordinate with Dartmouth College in these regards.

Additionally, there is some thought amongst small businesses owners and property owners around the lack of definition for the downtown from a marketing perspective. The Town should consider a branding campaign that would work to define the unique strengths and attractions of the downtown, and market that definition regionally for greater visitor activity.

Lastly, the small business community would like to see the Upper Valley Business Alliance provide greater support to businesses within Hanover's downtown. Accordingly, the Town should explore redefining its relationship with this business group, including through the provision of additional funding.

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<sup>3</sup> Dartmouth College. (2020). *Planning for Possibilities: A Strategic Campus Framework*. [https://www.dartmouth.edu/masterplan/docs/20210316\\_final\\_planning\\_for\\_possibilities\\_webview.pdf](https://www.dartmouth.edu/masterplan/docs/20210316_final_planning_for_possibilities_webview.pdf)

## Role in the Region

Hanover's downtown is an anchor for employment and education in the Upper Valley. The Town has a significant concentration of commercial businesses and services within the downtown, which provides direct employment opportunities to residents throughout the region. Several large employers are located within or near the downtown, including Dartmouth College and its supporting facilities, the Hanover Inn, and Hanover High School.

Hanover's downtown benefits from a robust regional economy through visitor spending, and the Town benefits overall through the availability of jobs for its residents. However, there is regional competition for labor. During the Sustainability Master Plan process, community members identified barriers to working in Hanover. These include the high cost of housing, which pushes lower income households further away from the downtown, which in turn increases the difficulty of commuting. Additionally, the community identified limiting factors of alternative transportation options and parking availability/cost.

The Hanover community is also concerned with the downtown's perceived decline in younger generation appeal or "cool factor." Community members noted the lack of creative spaces, such as smaller scale art galleries, as well as trendy restaurants and bars. Unlike neighboring Lebanon and White River Junction, the Hanover's downtown has not seen this kind of investment. To reverse this perceived decline, the Town could pursue strategies in and around the downtown that advance live-work residential and small-scale manufacturing, in conjunction with the abovementioned creative placemaking, adaptive reuse, commercial rent controls, and greater flexibility in zoning.

## Transportation and Mobility

### Transportation Infrastructure

#### Accommodations for People Walking and Bicycling

A vibrant downtown is walkable and a place that is accessible and conducive to economic exchange and social interaction. Factors that make a downtown walkable include sidewalks that are wide enough to accommodate the pedestrian demand, as well as suitable space for street furniture, trees, lights, store displays and other amenities. Sidewalks should also be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant, and crosswalks should be placed along desired lines and treated uniformly so they are identifiable to motorists and pedestrians alike. The sidewalk space should also be aesthetically welcoming and a comfortable space for people to spend their time.

Hanover's downtown already has many of these attributes. The streets are treelined and the period style streetlights complement the surrounding building architecture. In 2020, Hanover took steps to make pedestrian crosswalk treatments more consistent within the downtown by developing crosswalk treatment guidelines. These guidelines are intended to make crossings safer for pedestrians since the crosswalk locations will be more recognizable. Upgrading pedestrian signals to current standards will also enhance crossing safety and accessibility.

There is also high bicycle use in Hanover with the downtown being both a destination and a conduit to and from the College. While there are bike lanes or striped shoulders coming into the downtown, these amenities disappear to provide space for on-street parking. Travel speeds within the downtown are posted at 25 mph, which helps offset the loss of shoulders and bike lanes in the downtown.

With the roadway right-of-way widths being fixed, providing space for bicyclists would require reallocation of space within the right-of-way (called a “road diet”) as well as covered bike parking. While there may be tradeoffs in the form of lost parking or narrowed or eliminated travel lanes, the benefits include increased and potentially safer bicycle use, less dependence on motor vehicles, and lowered parking demand. It is expected that the resulting shift toward active transportation would add to the vibrancy of the downtown.

### Accommodations for Public Transit and Shared Mobility

Public transit provides a valuable, sustainable, and equitable transportation alternative to automobile use. This benefits the downtown by reducing motor vehicle congestion and parking demand. There are fixed bus routes servicing Hanover’s downtown from Lebanon, West Lebanon, Norwich and Hartford, and there are also shuttles from Dartmouth Health and Dartmouth College. Bus stops within the downtown are designated along main routes and Advance Transit provides real time bus locations via mobile app so that riders can plan when to meet the buses rather than waiting for long periods at bus stops.

Shared mobility in the form of vanpools, or app driven ride-hailing or ride-sourcing using services – such as Uber and Lyft, have a growing place in the transportation system. One advantage of these services for the downtown is that their passengers do not require parking in the downtown. Other shared mobility opportunities, including shared e-bikes, may also become popular. Opportunities to promote transit and shared mobility services may exist through curb management in the downtown, whereby the Town designates areas for pickup and drop-off.

### Roadway and Parking Network

The roadway network in the downtown is well established and there is general agreement within the community that roadways should not be expanded to add capacity, rather, alternative modes should be promoted

to reduce reliance on automobiles, and technology should be leveraged to make the existing system more efficient.

Parking plays an important role in downtown vibrancy because people that drive to the downtown as a destination require parking, but parking spaces take up valuable space. The recommendations in Hanover’s 2019 *Downtown Parking Plan* focused on optimizing the utilization, pricing, and enforcement of the public parking supply in Hanover’s downtown. The plan proposed specific short-, mid- and long-term parking management strategies to address current and future parking demand. Most of the parking management solutions are aimed at maximizing utilization of the parking spaces that already exist. Some solutions, like improving the quality of pedestrian connections to outlying parking lots, would not require adding spaces. However, the plan does predict a long-term shortage of downtown parking and it identified structured parking as the solution. The recommendations of the plan support a vibrant downtown. Updates to this plan should include covered parking for bicycles and other micro-mobility devices.

### Regional Accessibility

Hanover’s downtown is well situated from a regional connectivity perspective since it is only minutes from Interstates 89 and 91. It is also only 65 miles to Concord; 96 miles to Burlington, Vermont; and 125 miles to Boston, Massachusetts. There is regional bus service from downtown to Boston South Station; Logan International Airport; New York City; and Burlington, Vermont. The Lebanon Municipal Airport is located about 6 driving miles from the downtown and the Amtrak station in White River Junction is about 4 miles away.

### Sustainable and Resilient Design

If planned correctly, further development of Hanover’s downtown can be used to mitigate climate change, improve connectivity, and encourage



human physical activity. Encouraging intensified development downtown, as opposed to allowing development to sprawl into other areas of the Town, is key to maintaining the downtown’s walkability and vibrancy. Sustainable forms of transportation, such as walking, biking, and transit, can be more easily deployed in downtown areas, and are more widely used. People are able to live close to where they work and play, and often do not have to rely on private vehicles to get around, thereby increasing transportation safety and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Concentrating development downtown also supports the Town’s efforts to conserve its natural land, which is critical for climate resilience, carbon sequestration, air quality, wildlife habitat, and recreation.

As new development and redevelopment within the downtown takes shape, there are opportunities to implement neighborhood-scale sustainability measures. One example includes enacting construction performance standards for development within the downtown – perhaps, based on green rating systems (e.g., U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED rating systems). This could also include establishing minimum energy performance standards, as well as performance-based approaches to onsite renewable energy production and electric vehicle charging equipment. Other resource management opportunities exist, and the benefits of such opportunities are augmented when leveraging a group of buildings in contrast to property-by-property implementation.

## Land Use Considerations

As previously noted, Hanover’s downtown core is enabled by the Downtown Center and Downtown Edge mixed-use zoning districts. These districts cover 26 acres, or about 0.15 percent of developable land in Hanover. The zoning facilitates a mix of local retail and service uses, offices, civic uses, and some mixed-use residential buildings. Density bonuses are available for affordable housing creation in this area.

The historical character and scale of the buildings in the downtown also lends to numerous small retail spaces in the basement, first, and second floor spaces. This creates an enjoyable streetscape and opportunities for local businesses.

In May 2022, the Town held a Development Solutions Workshop to gauge where the community believes new development should be created. With respect to commercial development, there was general consensus that attached two to five story commercial loft or neo-traditional buildings and mixed-use with ground floor retail and office or residential above is appropriate for the downtown. With respect to residential development, there was general agreement that the downtown could support greater housing densities and varieties. The community voiced support for mixed-use developments with ground floor retail, low-rise apartments, and townhomes.

Since most of the land in the downtown is developed, adding housing to the downtown would require revising parking minimums or incentivizing shared parking strategies to free up potential development space, or rezoning suitable areas in proximity to the downtown to allow for more dense housing types or a mix of uses. Furthermore, allowing for residential additions or retrofits to buildings within acceptable design guidelines can add density while maintaining downtown character.

The Downtown Center and Downtown Edge zoning districts are surrounded by Single Residence (1 and 2) and General Residence (1 and 2) zoning districts, as well as Institutional districts. The Single and General Residence districts only permit one- or two-family dwellings. This results in a quick transition from zones that permit medium density to low density zones. A more gradual transition in density would mean allowing more dense development in these residence districts. This can help to foster a more vibrant downtown by allowing more residents to live in close proximity.

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